

# Europe from the Great War to the new hope for a better future in Democracy<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract:

**Purpose and originality:** The purpose of this study is to highlight possible risks for the future of democracy in Europe by focusing on certain important causes of the rise of World War I as well as on some important reasons why the post-war hope for a better future in Democracy could not be fulfilled.

**Method:** In the study historical descriptive, analytical and comparative method is used. I also tried to combine chronological and thematic approaches.

**Results:** Based on the political and historical research of important causes which influenced the direction of Europe to World War I. as well as of some important reasons which influenced that the post-war development of democracy, I came to the conclusion that the future of Europe is particularly threatened by the crisis of elites, the underestimation of the solution to social problems, growing tension, poor communication between political representatives of different democratic parties, and the reluctance to assume political responsibility for the development of the country.

**Society:** The results should raise awareness about risks that not only in the past but still threaten peace and democracy.

**Limitations/ further research:** Research will continue with a focus on the inter-war period and, in particular, the multi-causality of the causes of the onset of totalitarian regimes, which will require wider teamwork at the international level.

**Keywords:** Europe, war, democracy, politics, expansion, illusion, sleepwalkers, crisis.

## 1 Introduction

The time we live since the end of World War II is quite unique from a historical perspective. And when the Communist Party's monopoly ended in the countries of Central, Eastern and Southern Europe, new opportunities for representative democracy were opened. Contemporary representative democracy is, in the main, the answer to the request from more than 100 years ago that "*the people*" vote for their representatives, who have the competence to make decisions on important questions. But the 20th century was a period of two world wars, and a frequent failure of democracy. Today, the critics of the representative democracy again declare that the period in which standard political parties compete with one another in

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an effort to gain large numbers of voters to show support of the quality and authority their political decisions is failing. In such an environment a citizen starts to become accustomed to taking a view that constantly puts him in the position of disappointment from the real conducting of politics. In public opinion surveys it is always more frequently emphasized that political elites in fact do not represent the “*voice of the people*” and political decision-making in nearly all European states “*generally takes place outside the influence of citizens and even without their knowledge*” (Verhulst & Nijeboer, 2015, pp. 8-9). In view of the current and anticipated problems recently confronted by the European Union, which originated “*from the ashes of two World Wars*”, the risk still exists that seemingly simple solutions offered by centrifugal political forces will address a dissatisfied public and divert the attention of European political strategists from growing populism to other less serious issues. Surely there is a lot of truth in the fact that those who do not know history's mistakes are doomed to repeat them. Of course, history cannot be repeated as it was before or after World War I. But we can learn from it. The purpose of this study is to highlight possible risks for the future of democracy in Europe by focusing on certain important causes of the rise of World War I as well as on some important reasons why the post-war hope for a better future in Democracy could not be fulfilled.

## **2 Theoretical framework**

This article seeks to contribute, through the knowledge of our recent past, to the development of critical thinking in the coming generation, which is growing in a complicated world of huge possibilities as well as threats. As the sources I rely on my research are predominantly books, studies, articles and journals. Based on the sources I will try to provide a reliable view of important causes, which influenced the direction of Europe to World War I. as well as some important reasons that influenced the post-war development of democracy. In the research of political development in this period, I chose a combination of chronological and problematic approach.

## **3 Europe before the Great War**

After the unification of Italy and Germany it was necessary to find a new balance in Europe. Among the priorities of the government budgets of European states, strengthening the military was on the top of the list and growing more important still. After the Franco- Prussian war, conscription was introduced in nearly all European states, which is related to the increase of finances allocated to the army and to the growing influence generals had in decision-making concerning not only serious matters of international policy, but home-affairs as well (Tkadlečková, 1994: 7 – 8). Trying to find balance in Europe, various problems occurred, because this period was characterized by a multipolar power system, in which “a plurality of forces and interests balance each other in precarious equilibrium. Britain and France were rivals in Africa and South Asia; Britain confronted Russia in Persia and Central Asia. France was determined to reverse the verdict of the German victory of 1870. Conflicting interests in the Balkans gave rise to tensions between Russia and Austria-Hungary. Italy and Austria were rivals in the Adriatic and quarrelled intermittently over the status of Italophone communities

within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, while there were tensions between Italy and France over the latter's policy in northern Africa. All these pressures were held in check by the patchwork of the 1887 system" (Clark, 2013: 121).

The historian Christopher Clark, whose book *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* deals with the period that lead up to the Great War, stressed that the German Chancellor Bismarck "adopted a double-edged policy that aimed on the one hand, to avoid direct confrontations between Germany and other major powers and, on the other to exploit the discord among the other powers wherever possible for Germany's advantage" (Clark, 2013: 125). Despite the demands that Germany – which had rapidly become a major industrial country – pursue expansionist policy, Bismarck tried to counter the immediate threat of war on the European continent; Europe at the time was struck by an economic crisis that was continually disrupting the fragile social balance and increasing the stakes of war.

When there was a danger that the international crisis would result in a war conflict, Bismarck urged an international congress to meet in Berlin in 1878. The Congress of Berlin dealt mainly with the problems arising from the diminishing influence of the Ottoman Empire in Eastern Europe. The Great Powers in essence decided to support the independence of various nations and their governments at the expense of the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. In spite of the smaller armed conflicts on the Balkans, The Congress of Berlin – a monumental success of Bismarck's policy – managed to eliminate the immediate threat of war for more than three decades. This period of relative peace enabled the development of international cooperation and the exchange of commodities and capital in an extent incomparable to anything that was before. The fact that regions were interconnected made the growth of infrastructure faster and thus helped the industrial and agricultural labour market become more international. Between 1870 and 1913 the world grew faster than in any period before and the result of this process was seen in a whole set of complex social and economic changes. The historian Niall Ferguson writes: "It is inconceivable, however, that such high levels of international economic integration would have come about in the absence of empires. We should bear in mind that, taken together, the possessions of all the European empires – the Austrian, Belgian, British, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Russian – covered more than half of the world's land surface and governed roughly the same proportion of its population" (Ferguson, 2006: 16).

The Great Powers, however, began to negotiate secret agreements of alliance in order to support their expansionist policies or in defence against the expansion of other powers. In Europe two opposing military alliances were created – the Triple Alliance (Germany, the Austria-Hungary, and Italy) and the Triple Entente (Britain, France, and Russia). Italy was a member of the Triple Alliance with Austria-Hungary and Germany since May 1882 and later renewed its membership three times. Still, public sentiment on the question of an alliance with Austria was deeply divided. That of course, was related among other things to the fact that

Italy had territorial claims, especially in the North Adriatic with the city of Trieste, the province of Trento, alongside with South Tyrol.

As far as France was concerned, being defeated by Germany and having lost Alsace-Lorraine, they undoubtedly hoped for revenge, but knew it had to wait, considering the military and economic power Germany had in those years. For this reason, the French were looking for powerful allies and grew closer with the Russians and the British; the latter, on their part sought to reduce the threat which could arise from the traditional Anglo-French rivalry. The president of France during the World War I Raymond Poincaré was born in Lorraine and having experienced the German occupation of Lorraine, he was known for his anti-German sentiment. His visit of Russia prior to the outbreak of war was an affirmation of the Franco-Russian alliance which manifested their determination to prevent further German aggression in Europe, but at that point neither France nor Russia were prepared to get into an armed conflict with Germany (Kováč, 2014: 33).

The law of war in general is a product of modern humanistic conceptions, while in an era when legal positivism was a dominant school of thought, the right of the states to engage in war was essentially without limits. On Hague Conferences in 1899 and 1907 certain conventions were ratified, which, however, do not actually deal with the question as to when is a nation entitled to engage in war; the major subject matter were restraints on the use of certain kinds of weapons and warfare. The Hague Convention relative to the Opening of Hostilities stated that opening hostilities was formally forbidden prior to an official declaration of war. In spite of this, however, even a war started by opening hostilities without a previous declaration of war is considered war in terms of international law (Bakerová-Draguňová - Katuninec, 2007: 142 – 143).

The Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente presented themselves as defensive, but the military preferred the strategy that attack is the best defence. Alfred von Schlieffen, the Chief of the German General Staff who was particularly involved in preparing and planning for future combat, especially against the French Third Republic, stressed that long wars “are impossible at a time when the existence of a nation is founded upon the uninterrupted progress of commerce and industry” (Schlieffen in Beatty, 2012: 249). This attitude led the military strategists to plan “blitzkriegs.” I consider it important also to mention the speech of the Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke, or, better to say, Moltke the Elder, to the Reichstag on the 14th May 1890; it was a speech in which he voiced his concerns over a possible unforeseen war that would drag on for years: “Should a war break out now, its duration and end cannot be foreseen. The largest powers of Europe armed as never before would take the field. None could be so completely defeated in one or two campaigns that it would declare itself vanquished and that it would have to accept the hard peace conditions imposed upon it. None would promise not to rise up again, even if only after years to renew the struggle. Such a war could easily become a war of seven years` or a thirty years` duration. Woe to him who applies

the torch to Europe, who is the first to throw the match into the powder cask” (see Hughes, 1993: 29; Förster, 1999: 347).

#### **4 The Great Illusion**

The economic development of Europe encouraged optimistic beliefs that the future of the developed industrialized countries would be peaceful. Such beliefs were expressed, for example, by Norman Angell, a British writer and politician who was one of the principal founders of the Union of Democratic Control. In his pamphlet *Europe's Optical Illusion* published at his own expense in 1909 and a year later elaborated and published as a book titled *The Great Illusion*, Angell tried to address the question why war even exists and why European countries in particular are being involved in military conflicts.

Angell also discusses at length the rivalry between Germany and Great Britain, the latter being concerned about weakening its position as the major colonial power. Britain, at the time, was the greatest colonial empire, which covered around one fifth of the world's surface with about a quarter of the world's population. Colonies were considered a fundamental aspect of a modern great power not only by Great Britain, but by other European countries as well. At the aforementioned Congress of Berlin, Bismarck tried to ease the tension in Europe caused by the colonial expansion of European powers. This was possible to accomplish via international treaties for a certain amount of time, but at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, tensions ran high and the issue of colonial rivalry played an essential role in the escalating conflicts.

The tension between Great Britain and Germany began escalating because of the hazardous policy Germany adopted after the young ambitious Kaiser Wilhelm II succeeded to the throne and dismissed Bismarck from the post of the Chancellor of Germany. The Kaiser's liking for the army and the uniform affected nearly all social life in Germany; civilians too, alongside the soldiers, donned uniform. When a decision about building a German fleet was taken in 1898, the threat of an approaching war was looming over Europe. The negotiations between Germany and Great Britain failed and no agreement on counterbalancing naval forces was reached. Still, in spite of this, British foreign policy continued to seek ways to avert the danger of a potential armed conflict, as Britain's chief concern was to retain their own powerful position as a colonial Empire.

One must also realize that Germany's strategic interests lay mainly within Europe; they wished to extend their influence over all of Central Europe. Opinions on the geopolitical significance of this region and on its further development varied among German politicians and political theorists. Bismarck's policy of heading towards centralism met with disapproval on the part of Constantin Frantz, one of the foremost theorists of federalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whose vision would combine German and European federalism. The liberal politician Friedrich Naumann (1860-1919) should also be mentioned; he, too, addresses these issues in his book *Mittleuropa* shortly after the outbreak of war. His vision of the Central European

region in the years to come was not based on the disruption of the existing political and administrative order, but he rather tried to illustrate means of gradually establishing peaceful coexistence of the smaller Central European nations within a multinational federation lead by Austria and Germany. Naumann's concept of a common Central European identity might have seemed naïve, but at the same time, the book presented a relatively clear vision of the Central European geopolitical unit, which "will have a German nucleus and will voluntarily use the German language which is known throughout the world." Naumann at the same time, however, talked about "toleration and flexibility in regard to all the languages neighbouring that are associated with it. For only so can that fundamental harmony grow up which is essential for a Great State, pressed and threatened from all sides" (Naumann: 1917: 108). Naumann assumed that in spite of the national problems, the war will give birth to solidarity and a Central European spirit ("*Schöpfer einer mitteleuropäischen Seele*"). According to him, "no Central European nationality, not even the German, is in itself big enough to create a world-group economic State. That is the result of the capitalist system of interchange" (Naumann: 1917: 272).

Besides this notion of federalism, more radical, militant and Pan-Germanic notions began to appear in the pre-war papers. These thoughts were mainly supported by the Pan-German League (*Alldeutscher Verband*) who promoted the popular motto "*Drang nach Osten*" (Drive toward the East), but among the voices advocating these thoughts were also entrepreneurs were looking for ways to gain control of Eastern Europe with all the resources the region had to offer. The construction of the Baghdad Railway raised concerns about the German expansion, as the railway was funded by Germany, which spread their influence further East via the railroad; this was worrying mainly to Britain and Russia because the Middle East was traditionally considered their sphere of influence.

Europe was on the brink of the Great War as early as 1905 after the First Moroccan Crisis arose and the situation was worsened still by the Bosnian Crisis of 1908. From 1911, with the Second Moroccan Crisis (the Adagir Crisis) and the outbreak of the Italo-Turkish War, one can clearly speak of an outright pre-war tension in various European countries, in spite of certain claims that a war in Europe was quite unexpected and came like a bolt out of the blue.

Norman Angell's stance to the possibility of a military conflict between the Great Powers was rather negative; he refused the opinion that war would lead to yet greater wealth and he claimed that no nation would derive economic benefit from destroying the assets of another. Angell was convinced that "the economic cost of war was so great that no one could possibly hope to gain by starting the war of what would be so disastrous (Joll, 1992: 202). According to his theory, the counterbalance to war was economic cooperation of all modern economically developed countries and he did not see any ideological background in the struggles between nations, as the nations themselves had often common interests and the modern state was beginning to be open to religious as well as political plurality. "The fight for ideals can no longer take the form of fight between nations, because the lines of division on

moral questions are within the nations themselves and intersect the political frontiers. There is no modern State which is completely Catholic or Protestant, or liberal or autocratic, or aristocratic or democratic, or socialist or individualist; the moral and spiritual struggles of the modern world go on between citizens of the same State in unconscious intellectual cooperation with corresponding groups in other states, not between the public powers of rival States.” Men did not any longer feel the urge to kill for religion or ideology and war “has no longer the justification that it makes for the survival of the fittest; it involves the survival of the less fit. The idea that the struggle between nations is a part of the evolutionary law of man's advance involves a profound misreading of the biological analogy.” As for the industrial countries, they lost the will to fight on the battlefield (see Angell, 2010: X; Gilbert, 2005: 129).

Angell's effort to prove that war is economically destructive even for the winning side, met with various reactions shortly after his novel was published. Several well known personages questioned his attitude, asking whether a state does not have the right to protect its borders or the people protect their freedom, just because after war they would be poorer. Angell's opinion was backed by the attitude of the European powers to the Balkan Wars; the great powers seemed appalled at the sight of formerly allied nations slaughtering one another. The British historian Martin Gilbert claims that many people had hoped that the Balkan Wars could serve as an example not to be repeated. (Gilbert, 2005: 190). To learn from the situation on the Balkans, would, however, require a more diplomatic attitude and tolerance which would transcend the borders of national prejudice. Some of the European monarchs were kinsmen, which gave Europe a spark of hope for peace, but in the end they did not learn from the recent events and between 1914 and 1918 Europe was in the midst of the Great War that started the process of Europe's decline from its prominent position in the world.

## **5 The Sleepwalkers**

After the Austro-Prussian War, Austria-Hungary turned its attention to the Balkans. In 1908, the Austro-Hungarian Empire resolved to annex Bosnia and Herzegovina, to which Great Britain and France reacted only by formal protests. Serbia, however, which had won independence from the Ottoman Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and which was closely geographically and ethnically related to Bosnia and Herzegovina, reacted sharply to this annexation. Apart from Serbia, several other countries reacted adversely, among which was Italy; at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century “the Italians made it increasingly clear that they viewed Austro-Hungarian policy in the Balkans as impinging on their interests in the area” (Clark, 2013: 92-93). The Italian government and King Victor Emmanuel III broke ranks with the Triple Alliance to sign secret agreements with France and Tsar Nicholas II. The Balkan Wars deprived the Ottoman empire of most of its European possessions and destroyed Austria's security position on the Balkan Peninsula and created a bigger and stronger Serbia. The First Balkan War resulted in a momentous victory of the Balkan allies over the Ottoman forces. After the Second Balkan War, the tension between Austria-Hungary and Serbia grew

and their increased mutual distrust further poisoned relations between Vienna and Belgrade. (Clark, 2013:93-99).

The Australian historian Christopher Clark who is quoted above, no doubt, chose the title for his book (*The Sleepwalkers*) in order to raise challenging questions. However, the Slovak historian Dušan Kováč stresses that Clark's oversimplifications which attribute the responsibility for the war to all the countries involved display an attitude which is, "morally questionable, as it places the aggressor and the victim on the same level. Therefore, assaulted Serbia and the aggressor Austria-Hungary would both be 'sleepwalkers'" (Kováč, 2014: 31). Clark explains the use of this word towards the conclusion of his book. He speaks of Antoine Depage, the president of the Belgian Red Cross who was in charge of a Belgian field hospital in the Balkan Wars (1912-13). Having experienced modern warfare in this war, Depage proposed an international embargo on the use of modern weapons. The journalist writing of it in the French newspaper *Le Figaro* acknowledged that they "understand the generosity of his motivation," yet at the same time added: "but if we must expect to be outnumbered one day on the field of battle, than it is as well that our enemies know that we have such weapons to defend ourselves with, weapons that are to be feared..." (Horace Blanchon (pseud.) in Clark 2013: 562) In relation to this comment, Christopher Clark points out that "we can find such glib reflections wherever we look in pre-war Europe. In this sense, the protagonists of 1914 were sleepwalkers, watchful but unseeing, haunted by dreams, yet blind to the reality of the horror they were about to bring into the world" (Clark, 2013: 562).

It would be absurd of course to seduce the reader into believing that all of Europe had a share of blame for causing the war; still, when seeking to answer the question of war guilt, it is not enough to point solely at the German Empire as being the only initiator of the war and to present the Allied Powers as mere victims who had no other choice but to react to the situation. A boarder view of this issue is discussed in various scholarly publications, for example the book *The War That Ended Peace: The Road to 1914*, written by the Canadian historian Margaret MacMillan. World War I and the post-war peace negotiations have been among her scholarly interests for years. Professor MacMillan does not lay the blame exclusively on Berlin or Vienna, but distributes the responsibility and also criticizes the representatives of other powers who dragged their countries into this devastating military disaster (see MacMillan, 2013). However, in regard to the July Crisis she points out that the German politicians consciously chose to risk war. During this crisis, European monarchs and political leaders were surrounded by people who preferred confrontation; war hawks in particular tried to exploit the situation and sought to influence public opinion, which was becoming increasingly militant. Swayed by their influence, the European powers chose to solve Europe's problems by military action, which was the least human way to do so (Tóth, 2014).

After the suicide of the Emperor's son Rudolph, his nephew Archduke Franz Ferdinand became heir apparent to the Habsburg throne. Franz Ferdinand tried to consolidate the empire,



but he was not a war hawk and he favoured policy of diplomacy. At his residence in Vienna, the archduke held meetings with various non-Magyar members of the elite. This group which formed around him – the so called “Beldevere circle” – discussed, among other things, the issue of the possible federalization of the Empire. However, Günther Kronenbitter, emphasizes that “it is wrong to think of Franz Ferdinand as a protector of the Slavs and an ardent federalist who would have rescued Austro-Hungary by implementing a wide-ranging constitutional reform” (Kronenbitter, 2006: 82).

It is not the historian’s task to deliberate upon the question whether World War I could have been prevented, if Archduke Franz Ferdinand had survived the assassin’s bullet, but nevertheless, I favour the view that the Archduke would have been the strongest spokesman for peace. He believed that a war with Russia would lead to the downfall of some monarchies, and thus to the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian empire. The assassination of Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo resulted in Austria-Hungary’s declaration of war against the Kingdom of Serbia, which was Russia's ally.

People in Europe as well as many European politicians were occupied with their local problems. They did not take the impact of previous conflicts, series of limited wars, and crises particularly seriously and badly underestimated the possible emergence of a major armed conflict. The days preceding the war bear testimony to the power – and danger in this case – of the influence of individual persons on political decision-making. According of some historians, Helmuth von Moltke, or better to say Moltke the Younger, the Chief of the German General Staff, prone to believe in the short-war illusion, looked for an opportunity to carry out the strategic plans of the general staff and forced the German government ‘to press the button’, figuratively speaking. The German leadership made the decision to support its ally and at the beginning of the war, in his speech to the Reichstag Deputies, Kaiser Wilhelm II declared: “Gentlemen ... I no longer know any parties. I know only Germans. And in order to testify that you are firmly resolved without distinction of party to stand by my side through danger and death, I call upon the leaders of the different parties in this House to come forward and lay their hands in mine as a pledge” (Wilhelm II: August 6, 1914).

Countries which engaged in war had leaders who claimed that their position was determined by God’s will. This book has followed the relationship of ethics and politics through various life stories of monarchs, many of whom were men with moral values, skilled and honourable rulers. Sometimes, of course, we witnessed drastic stories describing dynasties and rulers whose road to the throne room was paved the way with false allegiances, betrayals, brutality, and murders. The stories of the European monarchs in the pre-war era, however, do not abound in chaos, opacity, or tyranny. The power of these rulers, compared to the Middle Ages, was considerably restricted. Still, they yet possessed an authority which could influence a broad spectrum of the population. They did not, however, use this authority to try to maintain peace, but driven perhaps by the belief of their own grandeur or the desire to secure

their position, they encouraged a conflict that, in many countries, shattered the myth of a ruler destined by God's will.

Pope Pius X warned the leaders of Europe in his apostolic exhortation *Dum Europa*, which was presented shortly before his death (he died 18 days later) only a few days after the outbreak of the war. Being one of the most distinguished testaments to peace, the apostolic exhortation claims that "Europe being dragged into the storm of an extremely gruesome war, of which no one can foresee the dangers, the massacres, and the consequences without feeling oppressed by the sorrow and by the horror" (Pius X: August 2, 1914). These words, however, were left unheeded, as they were outbellowed by the nationalistic calls and appeals fuelled by the expectations of military success.

The inhabitants of the Central Powers on one side and the Allied Powers on the other generally welcomed the outbreak of war with fervour. The new Pope Benedict XV, however, urged on December 7, 1914 the leaders of all warring governments to negotiate and he begged them to agree to an official cease-fire so that "the guns may fall silent at least upon the night the angels sang". Although his request for a twenty-four hour ceasefire on Christmas Day was ignored, many soldiers in the trenches alongside the Western Front declared their own unofficial truce, taking things into their own hands on Christmas Eve. Their letters home contain a moving description of the one-day truce; one of the letters reads: "Christmas day was very misty and out came these Germans to wish us 'a happy day'; we went out told them we were at war with them and that really they must play the game and pretend to fight; they went back but again attempted to come towards us so we fired over their heads; they fired a shot back to show they understood and the rest of the day passed quietly in this part of the line, but in others a deal of fraternising went on. So there you are; all this talk of hate, all this firing at each other that has raged since the beginning of the war quelled and stayed by the magic of Christmas. Indeed one German said 'But you are of the same religion as us and today is the day of peace! It is really a great triumph for the church. It is a great hope for future peace when two great nations hating each other as foes have seldom hated, one side vowing eternal hate and vengeance and setting their venom to music, should on Christmas day and for all that the word implies, lay down their arms, exchange smokes and wish each other happiness'" (The Carlisle Journal January 8, 1915).

The truce, however, did not last long. After it came to an end, officers of both parties threatened to employ disciplinary measures in case the soldiers quit fighting and thus Christmas meetings of the like when soldiers of opposing armies would fraternize did not occur again during World War I. By that time, the war which broke out on the European continent became a truly world war, as the participating parties dragged in their colonies and eventually even originally neutral states decided to join in. It became a total war and peace was to be insured only by the capitulation of the enemy. A man drawn into the tumult of war loses the understanding of a person's value, trust in institutions, faith in inherited religion, and

finally, when morals are confronted with crude force, he loses even his moral values (Zálešák, 2014: 119-120).

When the Great War finished, Europe and the rest of the world finally established peace, but Europe's dominant position in world politics was considerably weakened. Later the term Great War was changed to World War I, as it was not the greatest war in history; but still, it shattered the ideal of rationalistic Eurocentrism, which used to give the "Europeans" assurance that their culture most certainly was a natural model for all the other "primitive" cultures. Having this in mind, it is not an overstatement to say that Europe suffered wounds from which she never recovered.

Unlike after Napoleon's defeat, when the Congress of Vienna convened by the victors of the war decided to renew the legitimacy of the pre-revolutionary era, after 1918 this idea had no chance of being put to practise. The Great War led to extensive changes on the European map at the expense of Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman empires. The old regime in Europe became a matter of past never to return. On the shambles of great monarchies in decay, new nation states were emerging. Their founders were all pointing out a nation's right to self-determination, but their understanding of these concepts differed.

National diversity made establishing new borders particularly difficult in Central and Eastern Europe; various young states got involved in armed conflicts, which did not make determining the borders any easier. Peace treaties contained clauses valid for the following five years, which enabled the successor states to maintain a common economic space, but the practical implementation of this temporary economic and customs union failed and the new states asserted bilateral cooperation, striving to develop their own markets.

## **6 Democracies without democrats?**

The peace conference after World War I aspired to bring about permanent peace and make international relationships more democratic. In the early 1930s, during the first wave of democratization, over thirty countries established at least some democratic institutions, which fostered hope for a new approach to politics. To ensure that war would never break out again, the League of Nations was founded. It was through this idealistic and morally motivated organization that the leaders of governments were to be inspired to promote international cooperation. The League of Nations "sought to reinstate the fundamental principle that underpins just-war strategies," which is, according to Stephen Neff, "the notion that the normal state of international relations is one of peace, with war permitted only as an exceptional act requiring affirmative justification" (Neff, 2005: 279). A system in which the rights of ethnic, racial, religious, and linguistic minorities would be protected under international law was meant to be an adequate guarantee of stability. The League of Nations had the authority to oversee whether the principles of protection were followed in individual countries.

The man who is considered to have stood behind the creation of the League of Nations is the American President Woodrow Wilson. According to various scholars, this devoted Presbyterian considered honesty to be a principle of utmost importance and he strove to incorporate a deep sense of morality into international. Nowadays Wilson may be seen as a naive politician, but he was one of the few post-war politicians who raised hopes for a better future. He openly warned against potential horrors, should there be a next war: "I do not hesitate to say that the war we have just been through, though it was shot through with terror of every kind, is not to be compared with the war we would have to face next time. There were destructive gases, there were methods of explosive destruction unheard of even during this war, which were just ready for use when the war ended great projectiles that guided themselves and shot into the heavens went for a hundred miles and more and then burst tons of explosives upon helpless cities, something to which the guns with which the Germans bombarded Paris from a distance were not comparable. What the Germans used were toys as compared with what would be used in the next war. Ask any soldier if he wants to go through a hell like that again. The soldiers know what the next war would be. They know what the inventions were that were just about to be used for the absolute destruction of mankind. I am for any kind of insurance against a barbaric reversal of civilization." Wilson tried to make American politicians endorse his vision, persuading them to see his *truth*: "...we are going to be led by it, and it is going to lead us, and through us the world, out into pastures of quietness and peace such as the world never dreamed of before" (Wilson, September 25, 1919; Naveh, 1990: 134).

Wilson was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1919 for his merits in the creation of the League of Nations. However, in the same year he had a series of debilitating strokes, which incapacitated him to the extent he was no longer fit to lead his country as a president. Despite the fact that the League of Nations was Wilson's most important objective, in the USA he did not gain support for it and one can easily agree that the absence of the United States in the League was "fatal blow to the League of Nations".

On the peace conference in Paris in 1919 the International Labour Organization was founded, being an agency of the League of Nations whose aim was to support social justice and help maintain lasting general peace. The experiences Europe had with democracy so far brought about many positive changes. After a short post-war economic crisis which hit various European countries, middle class began continuously growing. This provided hopes of boosting social cohesion and reinforcing democratic society. In 1918 Woodrow Wilson declared with optimism: "Democracy seems about universally to prevail ... The spread of democratic institutions ... promise[s] to reduce politics to a single form ... by reducing all forms of government to Democracy" (see Ferguson, 2006: 227) After the end of the Great War, liberal democracy seemed to be developing dynamically, but only two decades later most European countries spoke of democracy as of a form of government whose place is the ash heap of history.

Many discussions are lead about the crisis of democracy in the interwar period. What usually is not mentioned though is that various influential politicians leading democratic parties acted with certain arrogance even when the situation became critical, as if nothing could have gone wrong. The state and its citizens often became only tools in the power struggles, and means of encouraging particracy and the political career of individual politicians. Most of the parliamentary systems in Europe seemed to be ‘democracies without democrats’ and politicians upholding democracy alongside with lawyers, diplomats, and government officials held on to the naive belief that “good constitutions could overcome bad political and social conditions.” Devoid of honest democratic politicians, even the best and most democratic of constitutions upholding a wide range of fundamental rights were prone to be misused in the constant polarization of everyday life, leading to a gradual rise of anti-democratic powers. This fact was as if ignored, which, according to the political theorist John Keane, could have been one of the many causes “of the death of representative democracy” (Keane, 2010: 568).

## 7 Conclusion

After World War I, most of the new constitutions were emphasizing their democratic, national, and republican character. Various politicians and thinkers, however, warned the world to beware of unreasonable expectations and were well aware of the dangers that the young and fragile democracy had to face. To mention but one of them, the first President of Czechoslovakia Thomas Garrigue Masaryk stated that Europe was “a laboratory built over the graveyard of the World War, a laboratory that needs the work of all” (Masaryk - Čapek, 1935: 299). Masaryk warned the democracy of about its lack in political experience and cautioned against vague political slogans and manifestos which easily gain public support. He was aware of the fact that freedom of mind was hard to acquire after war by people who had been downtrodden and oppressed.

Several countries distanced themselves from liberal democracy not long after the war, moving towards authoritarianism. Communism, Fascism, and National Socialism all rivalled democracy. The struggle of democracy and totalitarian regimes was often influenced by the paralysis caused by economic and social problems. The events of the interwar period demonstrate that social and economic stability is a major precondition to the existence of a true democracy. The ideological rivals of democracy strove to tackle the problems of mass politics, industrialization, and social order. After 1918 there were few countries whose governments outlived a year and “such governments naturally found it difficult to push through the socio-economic reforms which were promised in their constitutions and party programmes” (Mazower, 1999: 18).

What young democracies failed at in particular, was their attitude to solving social issues. In the eyes of most of the voters, democracy was discredited by mass unemployment and failed expectations in the economic and social sphere. Growing tension, poor communication between political representatives of different democratic parties, and the reluctance to assume

political responsibility for the development of the country, all of this played in favour of totalitarian systems. Many European countries were going through an elite crisis; this can be seen once realized that basic values of a society are defined by the ruling elite, that is, those members of the society who, through their positions, take on responsibility. This is true of democracies as well as of other systems. Democracies today are again exposed to many risks, which are associated with the growth of political illiteracy and uncritical work with information; therefore, no wonder that in the battle with extremism in which prevention is underestimated, open discussions about the failures of society and political power. Therefore, especially in times of crisis, democracy needs genuine democrats to be in charge. A peaceful and democratic Europe is dependent on citizens who are not subject to the naive illusion of the triumphant path of liberal democracy, citizens who are not indifferent to the growing dissatisfaction of the public with the political practice of democratic countries and the strengthening ambitions of extremism, citizens who do not remain passive observers of social change, citizens, who are willing to protect and develop peaceful and democratic ideas, who do not underestimate the importance of democratic institutions, who freely engage in public affairs and social interests.

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## **Povzetek:**

### **Evropa od velike vojne do novega upanja za boljšo prihodnost v demokraciji**

**Namen in izvirnost:** Namen študije je osvetliti potencialne nevarnosti za demokracijo v Evropi v prihodnosti skozi perspektivo pomembnih vzrokov, ki so pripeljali do prve svetovne vojne kot tudi razlogov zakaj povojno upanje ni prineslo želenih rezultatov.

**Metoda:** Uporabljene metode so bile zgodovinska deskripcija, analitična in primerjalna metoda, avtor pa je uporabil tudi kombinacijo časovnega in tematskega pristopa.

**Rezultati:** Na osnovi politološke in zgodovinske analize pomembnih vzrokov prve svetovne vojne v Evropi kot tudi drugih pomembnih vzrokov, ki so vplivali na povojni razvoj demokracije, prihajamo do zaključka, da je Evropa prihodnosti ogrožena s strani krize elit, podcenjevanja pomena reševanja družbenih problemov, naraščajočih trenj, slabe komunikacije med političnimi predstavniki različnih političnih strank ter nepripravljenosti sprejemanja politične odgovornosti za razvoj države.

**Družba:** Rezultati naj bi prispevali k zavedanju tveganj, ki niso zgolj del preteklosti temveč še vedno ogrožajo mir in demokracijo.

**Omejitve / nadaljne raziskovanje:** Raziskava se bo v prihodnje osredotočala na medvojno obdobje ter več-vzročnost pojava totalitarnih režimov, kar bo zahtevalo širše sodelovanje na mednarodnem nivoju.

**Ključne besede:** Evropa, vojna, demokracija, politika, ekspanzija, iluzija.

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