



Michael Hochedlinger. *Krise und Wiederherstellung: Österreichische Großmachtpolitik zwischen Türkenkrieg und "Zweiter Diplomatischer Revolution" 1787-1791.* Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2000. 520 S. DM 168,00 (gebunden), ISBN 978-3-428-10023-1.

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Austria's Strategic Dilemma on the Eve of the French Revolution

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In this monograph, Michael Hochedlinger attempts to trace the outlines of Austrian foreign policy at a particularly crucial historical moment. Caught between war in the east and a hostile grouping of powers in the west, facing unrest in Hungary and Belgium, Austria managed to avoid complete disaster and even secured peace with its bitter rival, Prussia. Hochedlinger covers the intricate diplomatic maneuverings step by step, and concludes that Leopold II's accession, and the resultant dismantling of Kaunitz's system of alliances, led to a "second diplomatic revolution" that ultimately saved Austria from destruction.

In the twilight years of the Ancien Regime, Austria's position in the European international system seemed secure. It had survived an imposing array of enemies in the 1740s and had constructed a broad coalition in 1756 that almost defeated the military machine of Frederick the Great. Furthermore, by the 1780s Austria had military alliances with both France and Russia, thus safeguarding its position in its ongoing "cold war" with Prussia. But Austria's security, in fact, was extremely precarious; due to its location in the center of the continent and its bewildering variety of commitments throughout Europe, any crisis posed a potential threat to Austria's fragile situation. Such a crisis, or rather constellation of crises, occurred in the late 1780s, and Hochedlinger follows Aus-

trian diplomacy from this crisis (*Krise*) that occupied the last years of Joseph II's reign to the restoration (*Wiederherstellung*) of its position under Leopold II.

Under Joseph II (reigned 1780-90), Austrian foreign policy was still guided by Anton Wenzel von Kaunitz, the venerable architect of the 1756 "diplomatic revolution." Kaunitz, in turn, was guided by an inextinguishable spirit of revanchism against Prussia, a foe which he regarded as Austria's most implacable and dangerous enemy (pp. 110-12). As a result, Austria held firm to its alliance with France as a means of containing Prussia, and entered into a secret alliance with Russia in 1781 as a means of isolating it. The Russian alliance, however, inevitably involved Vienna in the aggressive policies of Catherine the Great, especially her plans of expansion at the expense of the Turks. Although Vienna preferred to maintain the Ottoman Empire as a "good and certain" neighbor, it needed friendly relations with Russia even more (p. 108).

Russia's relations with the Porte, never very cordial anyway, were particularly tense as a result of Russia's annexation of the Crimea in 1783. Constantinople had been restrained from war at that time by Great Britain and France, but never reconciled itself to this humiliation. The Russians, for their part, engaged in acts deliberately intended to provoke the Turks. Joseph, who travelled to the newly acquired province to meet with Catherine in the spring of 1787, was unable to deter the Tsarina from her belligerent course. It was, however, the Porte that

declared war on Russia in August, in “one of those long-awaited events which took everyone by surprise.” [1]

The Ottoman declaration of war could not have come at a worse time for Vienna. Earlier in 1787, domestic turmoil in the Netherlands had raised tensions between France and Prussia. The latter’s subsequent military intervention had been a serious blow to French prestige, and posed a threat to Austria’s Belgian territories, which were beset with significant internal unrest as well. Furthermore, the Dutch crisis had brought Prussia and Great Britain together, a combination that had grave implications for Austria’s security in the west (pp. 158-160). With France itself in the early stages of events that would eventually lead to open revolution, Vienna came to the conclusion that the “system of 1756” could no longer serve as the guiding principle of Austrian foreign policy: “Das neue Axiom der internationalen Politik war jetzt nicht mehr die bestimmende Achse Versailles-Wien, sondern die machtpolitische Bedeutungslosigkeit der Bourbonen” (p. 165).

Faced with threats in the west, Austria was obliged to wage war in the east. The Turkish declaration of war constituted a *casus foederis* under the terms of the Russian alliance; in 1788, Vienna reluctantly fulfilled its obligations by attacking Belgrade. From the beginning, Austria concentrated less on capturing Ottoman land than on preventing Prussia from gaining territory by means of compensations (p. 197). Predictably, Prussian claims emerged almost immediately following the outbreak of the war. Ewald von Hertzberg, the Prussian chief minister, outlined his plan at the beginning of 1788: in part, Poland would be compensated for Austrian gains in the Balkans with Galicia (lost to Austria in 1772), while Prussia would gain Danzig and Thorn from Poland (p. 203). Vienna, not an eager belligerent in any event, was not about to fight a costly war so that it could trade a valuable province like Galicia for relatively worthless lands in the Balkans, all for the benefit of its rival Prussia. Yet, under the rules of eighteenth-century diplomacy, one power’s gains were to be counterbalanced with gains by the other interested powers. Vienna’s task, therefore, was twofold: appease the Russians while preventing the total defeat of the Turks, and forestall the Prussians without help from the French. This would be the challenge of Austrian diplomacy during the next three years.

This task was not made any easier when, in July 1788, Sweden took the opportunity to declare war on a distracted Russia. Sweden’s declaration widened the scope of the eastern crisis into the Baltic (Denmark, as

an ally of Russia, declared war on Sweden in August), which made it more likely that Prussia and Great Britain would become actively involved. More immediately, it forced Russia to direct significant military resources to the north, and Austria found itself bearing a larger portion of the war effort against the Turks than it had anticipated. At the same time, Vienna had to make preparations for a possible two-front war. Joseph and Kaunitz believed that Prussia would use Austria’s preoccupation with the Turkish war as an opportunity to attack, but Austria could not extricate itself from the war by means of a separate peace with Constantinople, as that would most likely destroy the Austro-Russian alliance (p. 221).

By late 1788 and into 1789, Vienna attempted to negotiate a comprehensive peace with the Turks through the good offices of the French ambassador at the Golden Horn. The Russians, however, were largely uninterested, and the accession, in April 1789, of the bellicose Selim III as sultan effectively ended any hopes of peace (p. 241). By this point, the allies were, in effect, waging separate wars and pursuing different objectives. As Joseph remarked: “wir nach ihrem [der Russen] Beyspiel, ohne uns um sie zu bekümmern, blos auf uns denken muessen” (p. 240).

Meanwhile, events in the Low Countries reached a crisis stage. To an incipient revolt in Belgium was added a real revolt in the archbishopric of Liege. Prussia offered to march troops into Liege to preserve imperial authority, but Vienna rightly suspected that Berlin would use the opportunity to extract territorial concessions in the west, or use its military might to cow the French into abandoning their alliance with Austria. Reacting to this possibility, Vienna made some tentative approaches to London, without, however, achieving any results.

The real breakthrough occurred in early 1790 with the death of Joseph. His successor, Leopold II, proved ready to accommodate the important factions both at home and in the *Reich* that had been alienated by Joseph’s policies of “enlightened despotism,” and he was equally willing to reach an accommodation with Prussia. Leopold managed to pacify the Belgians, and he encouraged British efforts to mediate a peace with the Turks that would restore the *status quo ante bellum*. Berlin, responding to Leopold’s approaches, offered two options: either the British peace plan, or Hertzberg’s “general arrangement” of territorial exchanges (p. 342). Vienna was quite happy to be “forced” into peace, and the Reichenbach Convention (27 July 1790) between the two states pledged Austria to a peace without territorial gains; a settlement on these

terms was reached the following year. Parallel with the peace negotiations, Austria negotiated an alliance with Prussia, thus completing the “second diplomatic revolution.” For Leopold, the increasingly unstable French situation posed a greater threat than Prussia, and mandated the abandonment of Kaunitz’s anti-Prussian diplomacy and a reorientation of Austrian diplomacy (p. 453).

This book is based on the author’s doctoral dissertation, and it bears all of the good and bad attributes of that particular genre. On one hand, Hochedlinger’s use of the primary sources is extensive, rigorous, and thorough, a result, no doubt, of his ready access to the Viennese archives. On the other hand, he spends an inordinate amount of space on background matters: fully one-fourth of the text is devoted to a discussion of the relevant historiography, the workings of the Austrian state machinery, and the outlines of European diplomacy in the eighteenth century. All of this material, it should be added, is solid and informative, and would serve any casual student of diplomatic history as a useful introduction to the subject, but for the specialist much of this covers familiar territory.

More importantly, Hochedlinger seems unclear on his focus. At first, it appears that he is ready to engage in a systemic analysis of Austria’s international position, and at times he suggests that the Austro-Prussian rapprochement of 1790 constituted a “system change” along the lines of the 1756 diplomatic revolution. Yet Hochedlinger never really commits himself to this thesis, and specifically denies that there was a “Leopoldine” system created in 1790 (and this only in a footnote; see p. 38, n. 44). This statement, however, stands in contrast to his oft-repeated claim that the events of 1790 marked a diplomatic revolution, which would suggest that something more than a simple shift in alliances took place. Indeed, his discussion of system change shows less fa-

miliarity with the topic than one would hope to see, and his bibliography is similarly light on books that focus on systems analysis. For instance, he gives some indication that his account is inspired by the work of Paul Schroeder (see, e.g., pp. 17, 25), but, in the end, he merely touches upon any kind of Schroederian analysis without either explicitly endorsing or rejecting it.

In the end, it is difficult to discern exactly what Hochedlinger’s conclusion is. After discussing the Austro-Prussian alliance negotiations, he adds that the French Revolution changed not only the old order in France but also altered the international system (pp. 460-61). And that’s all. That hardly startling remark is the extent of Hochedlinger’s concluding analysis. Without more, the reader is left to conjecture as to the author’s thesis, which makes the book’s title something more of a riddle than a revelation. If indeed Austria went from “crisis” to “restoration,” to what was it restored? Great power status? Security? Peace? The answer is nowhere revealed, and given that the author argues that the Austro-Prussian alliance marked a diplomatic revolution, it is difficult to see the result as a “restoration” of any kind. Hochedlinger, it seems, wants to have his “restoration” and his “revolution” too, but he never explains how both could take place simultaneously. In sum, Hochedlinger covers the facts of this complicated period with skill and care, but he is less successful in distilling those facts into an analytical synthesis.

Notes:

[1]. Jerzy Lukowski, *The Partitions of Poland: 1772, 1793, 1795* (London et.al.: Longman, 1999), p. 122.

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