

Germany and the Ultimatum: Heinrich von Tschirschky and Bögendorff (Vienna) to Gottlieb von Jagow (July 10, 1914)

Abstract

This memorandum from Heinrich von Tschirschky and Bögendorff (1858–1916), the German ambassador in Vienna, to his superior in Berlin, Foreign Minister Gottlieb von Jagow (1863–1935), illustrates the hesitancy of the Austrian government in presenting the ultimatum to Serbia. Wilhelm's marginalia suggests his rash and desultory approach to decision-making. By inserting a quotation from Frederick the Great at the end of the memorandum, he indicates his aversion to diplomatic consultations as well as his frustration regarding Germany's options.

Source

Tel. no. 85

Vienna, July 10, 1914

Top secret!

*Since H.M.'s pro memoria is about fourteen days old, this has been going on quite some time! It was only drawn up to illustrate the reasons for the decision!
And how!
Unambiguous ones too! They've certainly had enough time for this All!
Hartwig is dead! Clear the sanjak! That'll cause a row! Austria must get it back immediately in order to prevent reconciliation between Serbia and Montenegro and to keep Serbia from reaching the sea!
Against murderers after all that has happened! Nonsense!
Childish!*

Count Berchtold provided me with the following details of his discussion in Ischle yesterday with His Majesty Emperor Franz Joseph:
His Majesty the Emperor discussed the circumstances with great equanimity. He first expressed his heartfelt thanks for the comments made by our Majesty and the imperial government, and he said that he entirely agreed with us—a *decision* had to be reached *immediately* in order to put an end to the intolerable situation involving Serbia. Count Berchtold added that H.M. was fully aware of the consequences of such a decision.
The minister then told the emperor about two possible modalities concerning additional steps against Serbia. H.M. believed that they could possibly be united, but all told, H.M. generally believed that *concrete demands* had to be made of *Serbia*. The minister said he did not wish to deny the advantages of such an approach. It would eliminate the odium that would otherwise fall upon the monarchy if it surprised Serbia, and it would place Serbia in the position of blame. This approach would also make it a lot easier for Romania and England to adopt a neutral stance. A main concern here currently lies in formulating suitable demands against Serbia, and Count Berchtold said he was eager to know the prevailing view in Berlin. He believed that one demand could be for an agency of the Austro-Hungarian government to be installed in Belgrade to monitor the activities of Greater Serbia from there. Another possible demand could be the dissolution of societies and the dismissal of *a few of the compromised officers*. Serbia should be given a very short period to respond, probably 48 hours. Of course, Belgrade would still have time enough to obtain instructions from Petersburg. If the Serbs accept all the demands, that solution would be "very disagreeable" to him, and he is considering *making demands* that would be *entirely impossible* for the *Serbs* to accept.
Finally, the minister once again complained about the stance of Count Tisza, who is making it difficult for him to deal with Serbia in a resolute fashion. Count Tisza claims that one must *proceed in a "gentleman-like"* manner, but this is *hardly suitable* in view of such important state interests and *especially in the case of an opponent like Serbia*.
The minister would gladly follow the imperial government's suggestion that the press be used to sway public opinion in England against Serbia—Count Szögyény sent a telegram concerning this matter. But in his opinion this must be done carefully so as not to alarm Serbia prematurely.
The war minister will be *going on holiday* tomorrow, and Baron Conrad von Hötzendorf will also be leaving Vienna for a time. As Count Berchtold confided in me, they are doing so deliberately in order to *avoid causing any alarm*.
Similar to the Silesian wars!
"I am against councils of war and counseling, especially since the more timid party always gains the upper hand."
Frederick the Great

Source: Heinrich von Tschirschky and Bögenderff (Vienna) to Gottlieb von Jagow (July 10, 1914), in Walther Schücking and Max Montgelas, eds., *Die Deutschen Dokumente zum Kriegsausbruch*. 5 vols., Berlin, 1922, vol. 5, p. 29; reprinted with marginalia in Imanuel Geiss, *Julikrise und Kriegsausbruch 1914*. 2 vols., Hannover, 1963–64, vol. 1, pp. 144–45.

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