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## Austria–Hungary and Peace Talks with Ukraine in 1918

Peace negotiations, which took part between the Quadruple Alliance and Ukraine, stand out as a major event of the First World War's (WWI) last year, seen in the context of historical development of Central and Eastern Europe in the 20th century. Most importantly, they indicated an important step towards the confirmation of Ukrainian statehood — or even nationhood — at the international forum.

From this point of view, the importance of the peace talks, in spite of the imminent destruction of an independent Ukraine by Bolsheviks and the Quadruple Alliance's loss in the war, transcended the dimension of WWI. Similarly, negotiations with independent Ukraine largely and for a long time affected the situation in Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, they greatly contributed to the destabilization of Austria–Hungary and to the rift between Galician Poles and Vienna.

Austria–Hungary, Germany's weaker partner in the block of the Central Powers, was very much aware of the importance of concluding peace in Eastern Europe. Regardless of a victory over Italy in the 12th battle of the Isonzo in November 1917, the inhabitants of the Danubian monarchy had become weary of the war and the monarchy was facing a serious internal political crisis. Strikes in Vienna and other cities of the monarchy in January 1918 served as a memento. The fear of the impending crisis strongly influenced the line of reasoning of the majority of Austro–Hungarian politicians, with the Emperor Charles I and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Ottokar Czernin in the vanguard.

Consequently, separate peace in the East had been ardently desired both by the public and politicians. It was hoped the peace would bring about the return of prisoners of war and renewed food supplies. The governmental and army circles expected to transfer operational troops to the western and Italian fronts, thus achieving a decisive turnaround in the war and a victorious general peace<sup>1</sup>. As the

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<sup>1</sup> Czernin hoped peace with Russia would allow the Germans to transfer their troops from the Eastern to the Western front and to conquer Paris. O. Czernin, *Im Weltkrieg*, Berlin–Wien 1919, p. 299.

article will indicate later, Austro–Hungarian leading officials were ready to risk the loss of support of Polish politicians for the peace between Ukraine and Russia.

Vienna's government circles immediately reacted to the news of the revolution in Petrograd during the night from November 7 to November 8, 1917<sup>2</sup>. On November 9, The Emperor Charles asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs what his opinion was. The Emperor believed the time was suitable to conclude a separate peace<sup>3</sup>. The Minister's response reveals he also thought the development in Petrograd positive: „A new turnaround in Russia” — wrote the message he sent via the legacy secretary August Count von Demblin to the Emperor — „must be used as wisely as possible”, e.g. used to conclude a separate peace with Russia<sup>4</sup>.

At first, Germany hesitated, since the appeal known as „Decree on Peace” issued by the Bolsheviks was targeted merely to the British, French and Germany proletariats and not to the governments of these countries<sup>5</sup>. However, Austria–Hungary insisted on a speedy launch of negotiations on an armistice with Russia. The monarchy was, in fact, afraid that the new, mainly Bolshevik government would fall, and attempted to prevent this happening<sup>6</sup>. At the same time Vienna demonstrated that it was impossible to keep the appeal of the Bolsheviks secret. Czernin claimed the news on the Russian proposal would have spread in spite of all protective measures, and would have „caused widespread turmoil”. That was why he recommended making the Decree on Peace public and respond to it by offering regular peace talks<sup>7</sup>.

It was not until November 21, 1917 that the discussions were terminated by Russia's offer to initiate negotiations on an armistice. Although formally addressed to all warring parties, it was in fact a step towards the conclusion of a separate peace<sup>8</sup>. Minister Czernin immediately drafted the Austro–Hungarian proposal for

<sup>2</sup> Oct 25/26, 1917 according to the then–valid Julian calendar in Russia. The author provides all dates according to the Gregorian calendar, unless stated otherwise.

<sup>3</sup> Demblin to Czernin, No. 5, Nov 9, 1917, Haus–, Hof– und Staatsarchiv Wien [hereafter: HHStA], Politisches Archiv [hereafter: PA], box [hereafter: Box] 263 P. A. XL, Interna, Telegr. von Demblin 1917–1918 [hereafter: 263 P. A. XL]. August Count von Demblin marquis de Ville, legacy secretary of first category, a representative of the Foreign Minister at the Emperor's court.

<sup>4</sup> Czernin to Demblin, No. 6, Nov 10, 1917, HHSt, PA, Box 262 P. A. XL, Interna, Telegr. an Demblin [hereafter: 262 P. A. XL].

<sup>5</sup> Hertling to Czernin, No. 4, Nov 4, 1917, [in:] *Quellen zur Geschichte des Parlamentarismus und der politischen Parteien. Der Friede von Brest–Litowsk*, ed. W. H a h l w e g, Düsseldorf 1971, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Czernin to Hertling, No 2, Nov 10, 1917, *Quellen zur Geschichte*, p. 16–19. The socialists organised a peace demonstration in Vienna as early as Nov 11.

<sup>7</sup> Czernin to Demblin, No. 41, Nov 18, 1917, HHStA, PA, Box 262 P. A. XL.

<sup>8</sup> Arz to the Emperor, No. 47.604, Nov 21, 1917, HHStA, PA, Box 263 P. A. XL; Arthur, baron Arz von Straussenburg, General, as of March 2, 1917 Chief of General Staff to the Austro–Hungarian Army [Armeekorpskommando, hereafter: AOK]. Regarding the circumstances of the Russian offer cf. J. B u n y a n, H. H. F i s h e r, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917–1918. Documents and Materials*, Stanford 1965, p. 267–268; V. I. L e n i n, *Vojenská korespondence 1917–1920*, Prague 1958, p. 14–16.

negotiations. The proposal was clearly in line with Czernin's strategy, which he pursued in the subsequent meetings. His main concern was to conclude a peace agreement as quickly as possible, without complicating negotiations with excessive territorial and other requirements *vis-à-vis* Russia. Although Czernin acknowledged the right of self-determination to the nations of Russia, granted by the Bolshevik government, he claimed the Austro-Hungarian government was entitled to handle this subject at their discretion. Strictly speaking, not only did Czernin not consider it a legitimate claim but rather a voluntary concession of local authorities<sup>9</sup>.

On November 26, three Russian emissaries crossed the front and offered to start negotiations immediately<sup>10</sup>. To Austria's relief, Germans agreed<sup>11</sup>. On November 28, Lenin and Trotsky issued an appeal „To the nations of the warring countries”. It repeatedly called for concluding „a democratic peace without annexations and contributions, that would guarantee nations their right for self-determination”<sup>12</sup>. The war press headquarters Kriegsspressequartier published only a part of the Russian proclamation, which raised protest of the Slovenian, Czech and Ukrainian deputies in the Imperial Council<sup>13</sup>.

The Quadruple–Alliance started off peace talks with Russia in Brest–Litovsk on December 3, 1917. The debate became rather involved owing to Russia's claim on Germany to abandon their position in three islands in the Gulf of Riga<sup>14</sup>. Berlin, to Vienna's great displeasure, intended to react by appealing to Russia to withdraw their troops from Livonia and Estonia<sup>15</sup>.

However, it is not the objective of the present article to examine these discussions. In spite of the above-mentioned obstacles, the armistice was concluded on December 15, 1917. What is crucial is that the negotiations at Brest–Litovsk once again revealed the interest of Austria–Hungary in a speedy termination of war

<sup>9</sup> Czernin to Demblin, No. 1 bis, Nov 21, 1917, HHStA, PA, Box 1052 P. A. I, Liasse Krieg 69, 70/1 Friedensverhandlungen [hereafter: 1052 P. A. I].

<sup>10</sup> A telegram from the headquarters of Chief of General Staff of the Russian army on the occasion of armistice talks with the German OHL, No. 3, Nov 13 (26) 11, 1917, *Deutsch–sowjetische Beziehungen von den Verhandlungen in Brest–Litowsk bis zum Abschluss des Rapallovertrages, Dokumentensammlung*, vol. I: 1917–1918, p. 30–31 [hereafter: *Von Brest–Litowsk bis Rapallo*].

<sup>11</sup> An announcement of the Russian delegation on armistice talks with the German OHL, No. 5, Nov 14 (27), 1917[in:] *ibidem*, p. 33.

<sup>12</sup> An appeal of the Council of the People's Commissars to the nations of the warring countries to join armistice talks, Nov 28, 1917, *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy*, ed. J. Degras, vol. I, London–New York–Toronto 1951, p. 11–12 [hereafter: Degras].

<sup>13</sup> Stenographische Protokolle über die Sitzungen des Hauses der Abgeordneten des österreichischen Reichsrates im Jahre 1917 und 1918A, XII. Session, vol. II., p. 215–216.

<sup>14</sup> A Russian proposal, No. missing, date missing, HHStA, PA, Box 1080 Brester Kanzlei 1917–1918.

<sup>15</sup> Czernin to Mérey, No. 17, Dec 12, 1917, HHStA, PA, Box 957 P. A. I Liasse Krieg 25 t–x, Friedensverhandlungen [hereafter: 957 P. A. I]. Vienna's pressure eventually made the Germans drop their intention.

on the Eastern front. At a meeting with members of the Austrian and Hungarian government, Czernin admitted so, openly citing as reason the fears of „a nervous feeling in the hinterlands”. Despite the disagreement of the Hungarian Prime Minister Alexander (Sándor) Wekerle and other officials, he said he could envisage peace without Germany<sup>16</sup>. It was the hopeless situation of army supplies that drove Austria–Hungary to conclude peace in the East at almost any rate.

This tendency towards peace was clearly noticeable already during the preparatory stages of the peace negotiations, which were to follow the armistice. In November 1917, during negotiations with Germans Czernin spoke up for concluding peace without annexations and contributions, notwithstanding the army’s and government’s claims for the review of borders for the benefit of the monarchy.

The problem, in fact, was of a comprehensive character. The Supreme Command claimed the swap of the territory located south–east of the town Brody in eastern Galicia, with about 60,000 inhabitants of mainly Ukrainian nationality, for a mixed–nationality territory around the Ukrainian city of Khotyn with a population of about 82,000. The army was of the opinion the territory surrounding Khotyn was necessary to preserve the security of Czernowitz, the capital of an Austro–Hungarian „crown–land” Bukovina. Furthermore, Hungarian officials proposed shifting the Hungarian border up north in case eastern Galicia was conceded to Ukraine<sup>17</sup>.

Beyond any doubt, the subject of Galicia’s split–up was often under discussion in Austria’s government circles in late 1917. Its precursor emerged shortly after Charles I ascended the throne in November 1916<sup>18</sup>. The Emperor considered this option in view of a dragging–on debate concerning Vienna’s future relations with Poland, he held the debate with Austro–Hungarian governor general of Lublin, Count Stanislaw Szeptycki, who had allegedly viewed the split–up as „indispensable”<sup>19</sup>.

Surprising as it may seem, in spite of various plans regarding the future of those parts of the Austro–Hungarian Empire inhabited by Ukrainian population, the empire had not formed a clear policy for Ukraine by 1917. It in fact put effort into supporting anti–Russian organisations of Ukrainian émigrés who had fled

<sup>16</sup> A summary of a Ministerial meeting at the Foreign Ministry, No. missing, Dec 7, 1917, HHStA, PA, Box 504 Liasse XLVII 3/17–22 [hereafter: 504 P. A. I].

<sup>17</sup> AOK to Foreign Ministry, No. Op. Geh. 541, Dec 16, 1917, HHStA, PA, Box 1053 P. A. I. Liasse Krieg 70/1 [hereafter: 1053 P. A. I].

<sup>18</sup> W. B i h l, *Die Ukraine–Politik Österreich–Ungarns im Ersten Weltkrieg*, [in:] *Die Besetzung der Ukraine 1918. Historischer Kontext — Forschungsstand — wirtschaftliche und soziale Folgen*, ed. W. D o r n i k, S. K a r n e r, Graz–Wien–Klagenfurt 2008, p. 54.

<sup>19</sup> Demblin to Czernin, No. 24, Dec 9, 1917, HHStA, PA, Box 504 P. A. I. Simultaneously, the Emperor was critical to new German terms of the Austro–Polish solution which Berlin had presented in early November 1917. Cf. J. Ž u p a n i č, *Rakousko–Uhersko a polská otázka*, Prague 2006, p. 120–121.

from Russia. In this regard, let us mention the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine (Sojuz Vyzvolennja Ukrainy)<sup>20</sup>, which had been established as early as in 1914.

It was Archduke Wilhelm, supported by new Austrian Emperor Charles I, who had become fascinated with Ukraine. Wilhelm's father, Charles Stephan of Habsburg, was one of the candidates to the Polish throne. Wilhelm advised splitting Galicia into the western — Polish part and eastern — Ukrainian one. Eastern Galicia was to be joined to Bukovina, creating a new crown's land. Following the defeat of the House of Romanov in Russia, Wilhelm's ambition was to become Prince of Ukraine and after 1915 he in fact served as commander of Ukrainian troops on the eastern front and learnt to speak fluent Ukrainian<sup>21</sup>.

Although in early December 1917 Czernin was not opposed to the idea of Galicia's split-up, he insisted on keeping this plan secret, the reason being that he feared the reaction of the Polish members of the Delegation (a body consisting of deputies of the Austrian and Hungarian Parliament, which in Austria–Hungary dealt with what was known as „common issues”)<sup>22</sup>.

This helps to explain why the issues of Poland and Ukraine were in fact a complicated system of problems with no way out. Vienna's solution, which consisted of establishing an Austro–Polish personal union, gave rise to strong antagonism of both Berlin and its own army command. At a Dec 18, 1917 meeting at the army command's headquarters, German Emperor Wilhelm II aligned with the army's command standpoint, affirming the Austrian counter-proposal for the positioning of the Polish–German border was unacceptable. (Czernin had refused to concede nearly one third of Congress Poland and instead proposed to seal by contract Germany's rights in the border regions)<sup>23</sup>. Not even was the Austro–Hungarian Supreme Command (Armeeoberkommando, AOK) in favour of a personal union with Poland, with its Colonel General, Arthur Arz von Straussenburg, claiming it might weaken the Austro–Hungarian Empire<sup>24</sup>.

For his part, Czernin was convinced the Austro–Polish solution was the most suitable for Poland in the current military and political situation, given Germany's annexation claims and the weakness of the Entente. The majority of Germany's territorial claims, with minor exceptions, were to be rejected<sup>25</sup>. Germany's pressing territorial claims in Russia offered Czernin an alternative solution. With regard to large territorial gains on the horizon that Germany hoped to acquire in Courland

<sup>20</sup> W. B i h l, op.cit., p. 55.

<sup>21</sup> T. S n y d e r, *Rudý kníže. Utajený život habsburského arcivévodý*, Prague 2010, p. 71–82.

<sup>22</sup> Czernin to Demblin, No. 11, Dec 10, 1917, HHStA, PA, Box 262 P. A. I.

<sup>23</sup> Czernin to Hohenlohe, No. missing, Nov 18, 1917, HHStA, PA, Box 504 P. A. I.

<sup>24</sup> Arz to Czernin, No. missing, Dec 13, 1917, HHStA, PA, Box 504 P. A. I.

<sup>25</sup> An instruction to our representatives in Poland, No. missing, Dec 16, 1917, HHStA, PA, Box 504 P. A. I.

and Livonia, Czernin could further insist on the Austro–Polish solution in order to achieve parity<sup>26</sup>.

Nevertheless, the Foreign Minister's willingness to pursue the Austro–Polish solution did not indicate he was unconditionally in favour of Poland. To great distress of the Polish Council of Regency he was not opposed to Ukraine taking part in Brest–Litovsk peace negotiations<sup>27</sup>.

The defeat of the tsarist regime in March 1917 triggered principal interior political changes in Ukraine. March saw the establishment of the Central Council of Ukraine, a mixed political body claiming legislative power over Ukraine until the All Russian Constituent Assembly was held. The Ukrainian Central Council sought to achieve autonomy within the revived Russia until the Bolshevik *coup d'état*. However, after the Bolsheviks took power in Petrograd, the council issued a resolution known as the Third Universal, declaring a Ukrainian People's Republic, though still considered as part of the future democratic Russia, and refused to acknowledge the Bolshevik–controlled Council of People's Commissars as a legitimate Russian government<sup>28</sup>.

Not long after this, on December 16, three delegates from Ukraine arrived in Brest to learn about the terms of the armistice and to consult with the Russian delegation. Later on, one of them told German Envoy Rosenberg that a „maximalist” (*i.e.* Bolshevik — author's note) government might be authorised to speak for „ancient Russia”, namely for Petrograd and Moscow, however, it was not entitled to represent the All–Russian Empire<sup>29</sup>. Czernin sympathized with the involvement of the Ukrainian delegates for they were likely to weaken the negotiating position of the Russian delegation. In case Bolsheviks had opposed the participation of the Ukrainian delegates, the Foreign Minister was ready to reject their stance stating the right for self–determination had already been granted to all Russian nations<sup>30</sup>.

Needless to say, Czernin considered the upcoming negotiations at Brest as extremely important and together with his counterpart, German Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Richard von Kühlmann, they decided to participate in them personally<sup>31</sup>. The instructions he had given to then deputy of the Foreign Ministry in Brest, Ambassador Kajetan Méréy von Kaposméré reveal his principal objective was not only the termination of the war on the Eastern front, but also securing sup-

<sup>26</sup> Czernin to Demblin, No. 7, Dec 24, 1917, HHStA, PA, Box 504 P. A. I.

<sup>27</sup> Ugron to Czernin, No. 64, Dec 21, 1917, HHStA, PA, Box 1080 Brester Kanzlei.

<sup>28</sup> W. Dornik, *Die Besatzung der Ukraine 1918 durch österreichisch–ungarische Truppen*, [in:] *Die Besatzung der Ukraine*, p. 144.

<sup>29</sup> Rosenberg to the Foreign Department, No. 83, Dec 16, 1917, *Quellen zur Geschichte*, p. 119.

<sup>30</sup> Czernin to Mérey, No. 40, Dec 17, 1917, HHStA, PA, Box 1080 Brester Kanzlei.

<sup>31</sup> Hohenlohe to Czernin, No. 799, Dec 15, 1917, HHStA, PA, Box 1052 P. A. I. Soon after that Mérey reported that Trotsky would not be taking part in the talks; Mérey to Czernin, No. 59, Dec 16, 1917, HHStA, PA, Box 1052 P. A. I.



plies of food and material from Russia<sup>32</sup>. Or, as Austrian historian R. Lorenz put it, „Austria–Hungary’s primary task was to achieve a once and for all recovery of their own catastrophic supply situation”<sup>33</sup>.

The issue of Ukraine gained importance only two days after the launch of peace negotiations. The General Secretariat of the People’s Republic of Ukraine, *i.e.* the Ukrainian government, on December 24, 1917 issued a proclamation to all „warring and neutral powers”. The document, based on the Third Universal of the Central Council of Ukraine, rejected the right of the Russian Council of People’s Commissars to conclude peace on Ukraine’s behalf. Volodymyr Vynnychenko, President of the General Secretariat, and Oleksandr Shulhyn, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, required the participation of Ukraine in peace talks<sup>34</sup>.

Ukraine’s claim was in fact based on a realistic assessment of the situation, at which the country arrived after the armistice had been concluded. If the Central Council had rejected it, Kiev might have faced an attack of the troops of Central Powers. On the other hand, if not, it was under threat of a French intervention<sup>35</sup>. Furthermore, on December 19, 1917 Bolsheviks gave a silent consent to an unofficial participation of Ukrainian delegates (formally as members of the Russian delegation)<sup>36</sup> in Russo–German talks on prisoners of war, although merely two days before, on December 17 in Kiev, they had given an ultimatum to Ukraine, calling for, among other things, a halt to any assistance to the rebellious Russian general Kaledin, threatening Ukraine with war<sup>37</sup>. Ukraine gave their response to the ultimatum of the Council of People’s Commissars on December 19, rejecting it entirely<sup>38</sup>.

Vienna, too, was under the pressure from Ukraine. Deputies of the Imperial Council Petrushevich and Levyckyj issued a proclamation on behalf of the Ukrainian Deputies and the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine. In the document, they touched upon a problem, which caused unease among the monarchy’s top

<sup>32</sup> Czernin to Mérey, No. missing, Dec 14, 1917, HHStA, PA, Box 1052 P. A. I.

<sup>33</sup> R. Lorenz, *Kaiser Karls Friedensbestrebungen*, „Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift”, Sonderheft I, 1967, p. 53.

<sup>34</sup> A statement of the General Secretariat of the Ukrainian Republic, No. 101, 24. 12. 1917, *Quellen zur Geschichte*, p. 139–141.

<sup>35</sup> H. Beyer, *Die Mittelmächte und die Ukraine 1918*, „Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas”, Beiheft 2, 1956.

<sup>36</sup> *Brest–Litowsk. Reden, Aufrufe und Manifeste der russischen Volkskommissäre Trotzki, Lenin, Joffé, Radek u. a. m. anlässlich der russisch–deutschen Friedensverhandlungen im Winter 1917/1918*, ed. E. Drahn, Berlin 1920, p. 6 [hereafter: Drahn].

<sup>37</sup> O. H. Fedyshyn, *Germany’s Drive to the East and the Ukrainian Revolution 1917–1918*, New Brunswick 1971, p. 61–63. Alexey Maximovich Kaledin, a Russian General and Cossack Ataman, at the turn of 1917–1918 led the resistance movement against Bolsheviks at the lower reaches of the Don. He committed suicide after his defeat by Bolsheviks. Cf. E. Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, Boston 1987, p. 18–20.

<sup>38</sup> A response of the Council, Dec 19, 1917, J. Bunyan, H.H. Fischer, *op. cit.*, p. 440–441.

circles for many more months. Ukrainians had protested against the alleged inclusion of the region of Volhynia and the Chelm guberniya into the Polish Kingdom, asking for their integration with Ukraine. It was namely this requirement that complicated the negotiations with Ukraine in Brest until the beginning of February 1918<sup>39</sup>. On no account was this claim unexpected.

It was in fact as early as in late October 1914 that the National Council of Ukraine had declared the regions of Podlasie and Chelm guberniya ancient Ukrainian settlements<sup>40</sup>. Needless to say, this move provoked controversy of the Polish party. According to the Russian population census from 1910, a total of 60 per cent of the Chelm region had declared a Ukrainian nationality, compared with 20 per cent declaring a Polish one, while 14 per cent said they were of Jewish nationality and the rest declared either German or Russian nationality. At a congress in Vienna in 1815, this part of the Polish Kingdom had been attached to Russia and included in what is known as the „Congress Poland”. Later, in 1912, the tsarist authorities decided to remove it, Russify it and join it directly to Russia. The region of Chelm became part of Poland following the re-establishment of the Polish Kingdom by the Central Powers on November 5, 1916<sup>41</sup>.

On December 26, 1917 the Quadruple alliance gave the green light to the Ukrainian’s participation in the peace conference. On December 28, the General Secretariat issued a statement announcing a concluded armistice and confirmed having posted Ukraine’s own delegates to Brest<sup>42</sup>. Within days, they arrived in Brest and their presence allowed Austria–Hungary and Germany to exert pressure on Russia, which during the end-of-year break (Dec 28, 1917 — Jan 4, 1918) demanded that peace talks be relocated to Stockholm<sup>43</sup>. For that reason, Austria–Hungary and Germany were determined to negotiate solely with Ukraine should the Russians refrain from attending the discussion, the aim being to force them to return to the negotiating table<sup>44</sup>. This move in fact provoked the Bolsheviks’ speedy comeback on January 7, 1918.

The fact remains that Vienna did believe it could side with Ukraine and with its help put pressure on Russia’s People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs Leon Trotsky, who was to take over the reins of the Russian delegation from Adolf A. Joffe. In his memoirs, German secretary for State Affairs Richard von Kühlmann writes Czernin had put forward this idea to him yet before the end-of-year break in the talks. The New Year’s Day 1918 saw the arrival of four Ukrainian delegates to

<sup>39</sup> Müller to Czernin, No. 91, Dec 24, 1917, HHStA, PA, Box 1080 Brester Kanzlei.

<sup>40</sup> H. Beyer, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Ch. Kosnetter, *Ministerpräsident Dr. Ernst Ritter v. Seidler*, Wien 1963, p. 123–124.

<sup>42</sup> P. Horban, *Die Mittelmächte und die Ukraine im Ersten Weltkrieg*, diss. Heidelberg 1958, p. 50. The delegates were the following: Industry and Trade Minister V. Holubovych (chairman) and then M. Levycky, M. Lubynsky, M. Polos and O. Sevrjuk.

<sup>43</sup> Gautsch to Czernin, No. 5, Jan 3, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 1077 Brester Kanzlei.

<sup>44</sup> Hohenlohe to Czernin, No. 6, Jan 3, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 1053 P. A. I.



Brest. „He introduced a delegation to me”, he remembered, „consisting without exception of very young gentlemen, or ‘lads’, as he called them with little respect”<sup>45</sup>. Similarly, Trotsky didn’t hesitate to use harsh words: „Those democratic airheads felt all excited and beside themselves when they saw the distinguished families of the Hohenzollern and Habsburg were taking them seriously”, he wrote about the Ukrainian delegation in his memoirs<sup>46</sup>. However, it did not take long for the delegates from Kiev to find their feet and they quickly became worthy opponents of Trotsky and Czernin.

Berlin, too, backed Ukraine’s participation in the negotiations. Namely General Max Hoffmann, chief of staff on the Eastern front (Oberost), along with General Erich Ludendorff, *éminence grise* of the German Supreme Command (Oberste Heeresleitung, OHL) viewed the recently established state of Ukraine as a counter balance to a reborn Poland and a bastion against bolshevism<sup>47</sup>.

In the same way, the Austro–Hungarian position at the peace negotiations remained unchanged, with Czernin’s primary objective being the conclusion of peace. In view of this, at a meeting with Germans on January 8, 1918 he repeatedly warned them he would negotiate a separate peace with Petrograd should they oppose this objective. However, he was clearly aware of the fact that fulfilling this threat was not the least realistic. He had written to the Emperor, saying „we will not be able to conclude peace with Russia on our own since the delegation from Petrograd is only little interested in us [underlined by author] and the Ukrainian gentlemen might demand we cease eastern Galicia and Bukovina for peace with Ukraine, which is of course absolutely out of the question”<sup>48</sup>.

Presumably, Count Czernin was left with a single option, which was to conclude peace with German assistance because as eastern policy was concerned, Austria–Hungary was a weak partner both for Petrograd and Kiev. For that matter, it is curious he ruled–out surrendering eastern Galicia although he had not opposed this plan previously. It would appear that he had been driven by an effort to conceal this plan of his from Poland.

Shortly after they started, the peace negotiations were interrupted by a dispute over the participation of delegates from the occupied areas. Trotsky demanded the participation of delegates from Poland, Courland and Lithuania. Strangely enough, the Quadruple Alliance accepted<sup>49</sup>. Later, when Russians attempted to question Trotsky’s statement (affirming the participation of non elected representatives of

<sup>45</sup> R. von Kühlmann, *Erinnerungen*, Heidelberg 1948, p. 531. Chairman of the delegation, Industry and Trade Minister Vsevolod Holubovych arrived on Jan 7, 1918. K. Neisser, *Politische Chronik der österreichisch–ungarischen Monarchie*, Wien 1918, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> L. Trotsky, *Moje Paměti. Pokus o vlastní životopis*, Prague 1930, p. 475.

<sup>47</sup> E. Ludendorff, *Meine Kriegserinnerungen 1914–1918*, Berlin 1919, p. 444.

<sup>48</sup> Czernin to Demblin, No. missing, Jan 9, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 262 P. A. XL.

<sup>49</sup> Czernin to Demblin, No. 9, Jan 11, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 262 P. A. XL.

these areas was not possible) and requested that their adversaries abandon their positions, General Hoffmann's harsh language made them aware of the fact they had been defeated<sup>50</sup>.

Czernin considered Hoffmann's statement as rather unfortunate because it contributed to the feared radicalised sentiment in the hinterlands<sup>51</sup>. With the talks dragging on, he suspected the Russian delegation had acted deliberately<sup>52</sup>. The speech also provoked severe criticism at the meetings of socialists in Vienna and other places in the monarchy<sup>53</sup>.

As a matter of fact, Czernin's apprehension was justified. In late December 1917, Lenin asked the delegates of the All-Army Congress whether „it was necessary, in view of the state of the army, to attempt to procrastinate peace talks”, or whether to halt peace negotiations immediately and prepare the ground for a possible revolutionary war<sup>54</sup>. Later, he opted for the first variant: „Should the negotiations drag on, there must be someone to hinder them”, he reportedly told Trotsky and sent him to Brest<sup>55</sup>.

Trotsky changed his strategy and began negotiations with the Entente's agents on their assistance in case the peace talks in Brest failed. The Council of People's Commissars demanded to increase the agitation against Germany's annexionism and to continue peace talks and prevent their speeding up by Germans. Moreover, the Council called for introducing speedy measures regarding the re-organisation of the army, which were to consist in reducing its headcount while increasing defensibility<sup>56</sup>.

In mid-January 1918, Vienna and other cities of the monarchy were hit by a series of strikes whose main cause was the critical state of food supplies. Czernin urged Emperor Charles to personally ask for German help. He also suggested potential cereal supplies from Ukraine might be obtained. However, the supplies would not reach Vienna before spring and its volume was unlikely to suffice for the empire<sup>57</sup>. Besides the food crisis, it was the unsatisfactory course of the peace talks that triggered the strikes. General Arz pointed out Hoffmann's speech which had acted as catalyst<sup>58</sup>. Later, the Emperor sent a letter to Czernin telling him „the

<sup>50</sup> A meeting of a commission for political and territorial matters, No. 187, Jan 12, 1918, *Quellen zur Geschichte*, p. 294–301.

<sup>51</sup> O. Czernin, op. cit., p. 322.

<sup>52</sup> Czernin to Foreign Ministry, No. 98, Jan 13, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 1053 P. A. I.

<sup>53</sup> I. Meckling, *Die Aussenpolitik des Grafen Czernin*, München 1969, p. 273–274.

<sup>54</sup> Questions to delegates of the all-army congress on the army's demobilization, V. I. Lenin, op. cit., p. 25–26.

<sup>55</sup> L. Trotsky, op. cit, p. 458.

<sup>56</sup> A draft resolution of the Council of People's Commissars, Dec 18 (31), 1917, [in:] V. I. Lenin, *Spisy*, vol. XXVI, Prague 1956, p. 383. The resolution was adopted on the same day.

<sup>57</sup> Czernin to Demblin, No. 8, Jan 15, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 262 P. A. XL.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted according to *Quellen zur Geschichte*, footnote 1, p. 364.

fate of the monarchy and the dynasty depends on a speedy conclusion of peace in Brest–Litovsk<sup>59</sup>.

The series of strikes confirmed that Czernin had been right in urging a speedy conclusion of peace at any cost, in spite of his opponents. However, the troubled situation weakened the monarchy's negotiating position. In order to reduce the tension in Vienna, Czernin assured the social–democratic leaders he was determined to conclude peace with Russia. He affirmed the German claims would not prevent concluding peace with Petrograd and Ukraine. Nevertheless, he believed the unrest weakened the monarchy's position and hindered any action he might take<sup>60</sup>.

On the other hand, the leaders of the Austrian left wing required at least some symbolic success in the talks with Bolsheviks. Baron Flotow, a chief of section at the Austro–Hungarian Foreign Ministry, was quoted as saying: „Though they were really interested in the report on Ukraine, its role as a watchword was much less important than if it were for Russia and Trotsky”<sup>61</sup>. The situation calmed down thanks to Austrian Prime Minister, Ritter (Knight) Ernst Seidler von Feuchtenegg, who made it clear that the monarchy had no territorial claims *vis-à-vis* Russia and was determined to conclude peace with Ukraine as soon as possible<sup>62</sup>.

In the meantime, unofficial negotiations with Ukraine were under way. The talks were led, with Czernin's consent, by General Hoffmann with Austro–Hungarian Envoy Wiesner taking part<sup>63</sup>. At a plenary meeting of the peace conference on January 10, 1918, the leader of the Ukrainian delegation Holubovych demanded a full representation at meetings. He also said Ukraine did not recognise Russia's Bolshevik government and asserted the right to ratify any agreements concluded between them and the enemy<sup>64</sup>.

On January 12, 1918, the Quadruple Alliance recognised the Ukrainian delegation as an independent and authorised representation of the Ukrainian People's Republic<sup>65</sup>. Later Trotsky affirmed that „the Russian delegation sees no obstacles to an independent participation of the delegation of the General Secretariat in peace

<sup>59</sup> Demblin to Czernin, No. missing, Jan 17, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 263 P. A. XL.

<sup>60</sup> Czernin to Flotow, No. 129, Jan 17, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 818 P. A. I Liasse Krieg 1 o–p 1914–1918 [hereafter: 818 P. A. I]. Dr. Wilhelm Ellenbogen, since 1901 Deputy of the Imperial Council, Dr. Karl Renner, since 1907 Deputy of the Imperial Council, 1918–1920 Austrian Chancellor, 1945–1950 Austrian Federal President, Karl Seitz, since 1901 Deputy of the Imperial Council, 1919 chairman of Austrian National Assembly.

<sup>61</sup> Flotow to Czernin, No. 87, Jan 18, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 818 P. A. I.

<sup>62</sup> A statement of the Austrian Prime Minister, No. missing, Jan 20, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 818 P. A. I.

<sup>63</sup> *Die Aufzeichnungen des Generalmajors Max Hoffmann*, Herausgegeben von Karl F. Nowak, Berlin 1929, p. 210, W. B i h l, op. cit., p. 78.

<sup>64</sup> A statement of the Ukrainian delegation, Jan 10, 1918, J. B u n y a n, H. H. F i s c h e r, op. cit., p. 491–492.

<sup>65</sup> Drahn, p. 40.

talks<sup>66</sup>. An expert on early Soviet Foreign policy, Canadian historian R. K. Debo is right to state that Trotsky had no choice. According to Debo, if he had refused to acknowledge the Council as a Ukraine's representative, he would have ridiculed the Declaration of Nations' rights<sup>67</sup>. On the other hand, the Soviet policy *vis-à-vis* Kiev, based on armed solutions of disputes and operating under a puppet government, went against its declared noble principles.

The beginning of concrete talks on individual points of a peace treaty with Ukraine launched on January 15, 1918, was marked by cautious messages to Vienna. However, the Austro-Hungarian delegation saw them as a chance to score genuine success. What is more, Czernin considered negotiations with Ukraine even more important than talks with Russia, because „unlike the Petrogradians, they are able to help us out with cereals”.

Nevertheless, serious obstacles stood in the way to successful conclusion of the treaty. Kiev made clear its eagerness to sign immediate peace with Germany, however, it claimed from Austria-Hungary „certain concessions in eastern Galicia”. Czernin refused them and hoped Ukraine would be satisfied to hear that „we will treat our Ukrainians nicely”. Czernin was willing to unofficially make such a statement, on condition that peace be concluded immediately<sup>68</sup>.

Furthermore, negotiations with Ukrainians were accompanied by unrest in the hinterlands. Czernin complained the Austrian authorities had attacked from the rear because during the strikes they had not prevented the publication of revolutionary cries in the press. Yet the need to come to an agreement with Kiev was now far more pressing than before as „there are cereals in Ukraine which we could obtain already in the spring”<sup>69</sup>.

Efforts to conceal the dramatic events at home from Bolsheviks and Ukrainians were vain. Ukraine's delegates Sevrjuk and Levyckyj could allegedly read „the degree of our [Austro-Hungarian — author's note] problems with supplies from this unrest just like from a thermometer”<sup>70</sup>. Czernin put all his efforts into negotiations with Kiev. „While those in Petrograd can't export anything but revolution”, he wrote to the Emperor, „Ukrainians have a great deal of cereals which they are willing to supply us with”.

Needless to say, peace with Ukraine was far more important than that with Russia. The monarchy had the possibility of making peace with Russia separately,

<sup>66</sup> Plenary session of the peace conference, Jan 12, 1918 (Dec 30, 1917), *Mirnyje peregovory v Brest-Litovske. S 22/9 dĕkabrja 1917 g. Po 3 marta (18 fevralja) 1918 g.*, vol. I: *Plenarynye zasedanija, zasedanija političeskoj komissii*, Moskva 1920, p. 88.

<sup>67</sup> R. K. Debo, *Revolution and Survival. The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 1917-1918*, Toronto-Buffalo 1979, p. 66.

<sup>68</sup> Müller to Demblin, No. 10, Jan 16, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 262 P. A. XL.

<sup>69</sup> Czernin to Müller, No. 11, Jan 17, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 262 P. A. XL.

<sup>70</sup> O. Czernin, op. cit., p. 326.

but Czernin had ruled out this solution pointing out Germany would in that case conclude separate peace with Ukraine<sup>71</sup>.

It was becoming increasingly obvious that Czernin's threats with independent action *vis-à-vis* Russia had been a merely an instrument in a diplomatic game. Peace with Ukraine without German diplomatic support would have been much less advantageous than the agreement appearing on the horizon. For instance Kühlmann strictly rejected Kiev's claims for Austro–Hungarian territories inhabited by Ukrainians<sup>72</sup>. While a separate peace with Russia would please the public at home, its drawbacks prevailed.

Disputes between Germans and the Bolsheviks went on, so Lenin and Stalin advised Trotsky to return to the capital<sup>73</sup>. On January 18, 1918 the leader of the Russian delegation announced a ten–day break in the peace talks and his return to Petrograd for the purpose of a consultation<sup>74</sup>. The official cause of Trotsky's sudden decision was the persisting dispute over the issue of annexations or abandoning occupied territories<sup>75</sup>.

The controversy began when General Hoffmann at a meeting of a commission for political and territorial issues presented a map with the projected new Russian border. A dispute flared up regarding the territory south of Brest whose nationality had not been determined. While Hoffmann claimed this matter needed to be discussed with the Ukrainian delegation, Trotsky in turn required his delegation be present at these talks, taking back his previous consent to Ukraine's independent participation at the peace conference. Although Czernin usually stayed in the background during discussions about territories occupied by Germans, he became involved when it came to debating about territories occupied by Austria–Hungary. Sadly, his attempt to cast doubt on Trotsky's standpoint did not bear fruit<sup>76</sup>.

In the meantime, the talks with Ukraine, which were of crucial importance for Vienna, were just treading water<sup>77</sup>. Ukrainians kept presenting their claims regarding the interior structure of the monarchy. Given the fact that Czernin suspected: „their rejection might provoke the wrecking of the negotiations”, he asked the Emperor to call the Crown Council which was to decided on this subject<sup>78</sup>.

<sup>71</sup> Czernin to Müller, No. missing, Jan 18, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 262 P. A. XL.

<sup>72</sup> W. B i h l, op. cit., p. 80.

<sup>73</sup> A. A. A c h t a m s j a n, *O Brest–Litovskich peregovorach 1918 goda*, „Voprosy istorii”, 1966, No. 11, p. 34.

<sup>74</sup> Czernin to Demblin, No. 167, Jan 19, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 262 P. A. XL. Cf. S. M. M a j o r o v, *Borba sovsckoj Rossii za vychod iz imperialističeskoj vojny*, Moskva 1959, p. 192.

<sup>75</sup> Meeting of the Russian, German and Austro–Hungarian delegation. (Political commission). Jan 18/5, 1918, *Mirnyje peregovory*, p. 130–131.

<sup>76</sup> Meeting of the Russian, German and Austro–Hungarian delegation. (Political commission). Jan 18/5, 1918, *ibidem*, p. 123–129.

<sup>77</sup> O. C z e r n i n, op. cit., p. 325.

<sup>78</sup> Czernin to Demblin, No. 167, Jan 19, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 262 P. A. XL.

The requirements that Kiev presented were considerable. „Ukrainians are not negotiating any more, they are dictating!“ reads an entry in the Minister’s diary<sup>79</sup>. Above all, Ukrainian delegates insisted on the establishment of their own „crown’s land” which would include eastern Galicia and all or part of Bukovina. In a report Czernin sent to the Emperor he admitted it could concern a part of Hungary, too. However, he ruled out any direct annexation of Austro–Hungarian territory by Ukraine adding he firmly rejected such a proposal in the talks<sup>80</sup>.

The letter to the Emperor made no mention of yet another claim by Ukraine. The delegation from Kiev strictly claimed the territory neighbouring the city of Chelm formerly belonging to the Russian part of Poland. Czernin decided to „take over the responsibility. I cannot watch hundreds of thousand [of people] starve just so that I do not lose Poland’s support”<sup>81</sup>.

On January 22, the Emperor inaugurated the meeting of the Crown Council. At first, Czernin summarized the situation. He pointed out problems that occurred during the talks with Bolsheviks, attributing them to the „annexation appetite” of the German OHL. It was peace with Ukraine that he labelled as far more important. He summed up Kiev’s claims and made it clear that abandoning Chelm would seriously hinder the implementation of the Austro–Polish solution. On the other hand, he outlined, a positive attitude to the Ukrainian claims would allow them to quickly sign business contracts and secure supplies of cereals.

Austrian Prime Minister Seidler, whose government had the competence to propose the establishment of an independent Ukrainians „crown’s land” shared Czernin’s view. However, he pointed out it would be difficult to obtain the necessary two–thirds majority of votes in the Imperial Council.

On the other hand, Hungarian Prime Minister Wekerle affirmed that the issue of Ukraine was in fact non–existing in Hungary, for Rusyns [*i.e.* Ukrainians] had no intellectual elite and the economy in the territories inhabited by them was in the hands of non–Rusyns. He expressed his doubts over the establishment of the Ukrainian Crown’s land, calling it a dangerous precedent. He also questioned Ukraine’s exports abilities mentioned earlier by Czernin, pointing out to problems with transport. According to him, Ukraine’s assistance with food supplies to the Empire was merely a theoretical option. Finally, he invited those present to be extremely cautious or „we might end up selling the autonomy of eastern Galicia dirt cheap”<sup>82</sup>.

Czernin and Seidler then in turn repeated their arguments using different words and the Minister assured those present that he would see to it that the Ukrainians would fulfil their pledges. Wekerle retorted he doubted the food crisis

<sup>79</sup> O. Czernin, op. cit., p. 326.

<sup>80</sup> Czernin to Demblin, No. 29, Jan 21, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 262 P. A. XL.

<sup>81</sup> O. Czernin, op. cit., p. 326.

<sup>82</sup> Later development confirmed Wekerle’s fears.



was serious enough to allow for such drastic steps. General Arz objected that peace with Trotsky had „no practical value” and warned against a rift with Germany. Similarly to Wekerle, he questioned the importance of Ukrainian stocks of cereals and recommended not risking a dispute with the Poles. Czernin countered that the Austro–Polish solution would be possible even after withdrawal from Poland, but only if Germany wanted it and he again inveighed against the German Supreme Command OHL.

It was the Emperor who summed up the stormy debate. He said: „The Foreign Minister is entitled 1) in case no other solution is possible, to conclude a separate peace with Russian maximalists in the form he proposes, 2) in case the food crisis in the monarchy hinders the continuation of war [...], to begin negotiations with Ukraine regarding the split up of Galicia, 3) although regrettable, to put aside the Austro–Polish solution”. At the end of the discussion, common Finance Minister Baron Stephan (István) Burián said a word, proposing that the pledge to establish a new crown’s land was not directly included in the peace treaty with Ukraine but was adopted in the form of a secret appendix. Upon that, the Emperor ended the debate<sup>83</sup>.

The following day Count Czernin saw some influential MPs — delegates, namely former Austrian Prime Minister Max Wladimir Baron von Beck, former Austrian Minister without portfolio and member of the House of Lords Joseph Maria Baernreither, former common Finance Minister Leon Ritter von Biliński, and Ukrainian leader Mykola Ritter von Vasylko. The meeting was held on the eve of the meeting of the Foreign Committee of the Austrian delegation and Czernin wanted to pass on to its members some important information about the peace talks. However, the information had been „adapted” and often, in fact, Czernin contradicted what he had said at the Crown Council.

The Minister spoke of Petrograd as of *quantité négligeable* and underlined the importance of negotiations with Ukraine, which, according to him, „is a powerful empire warring with Petrograd, owns an army and has the supplies we need”. He also said that due to the unrest in Vienna and other places, Ukrainians negotiated from the position of strength, but provided no other details regarding their standpoint. Czernin then reminded others of problems which arose after Trotsky withdrew his acknowledgement of the Ukrainian delegation of the Central Council as a body representing Ukraine, instead inviting representatives of the Soviet Ukraine to the talks<sup>84</sup>. By the same token, Trotsky gave a red light to the invitation of a rep-

<sup>83</sup> Meeting of the Crown Council, No. missing, Jan 22, 1918, HHSStA, PA, Box 315 P. A. XL, Interna, Gemeinsamen Ministerrats Protokolle. Minutes of the meeting were published in: *Protokolle des Gemeinsamen Ministerrates der Österreichisch–Ungarischen Monarchie (1914–1918)*, ed. M. Komjáthy, Budapest 1966.

<sup>84</sup> The Minister was informed about this fact from Brest by Count Csáky.

representative of the Polish government, which Czernin and Kühlmann had allegedly proposed.

After the Minister's introduction, a discussion erupted during which the participants expressed their confidence in the Minister and brought up some controversial topics. Namely Biliński stressed the importance of a strong Poland to counter-balance Russia and to provide protection against it. Moreover, the topic of Poland's participation in the talks came up, which was compared to Ukraine's participation.

At the end of the discussion, Czernin summed up the situation. Contrary to the reality, he told Biliński that „the matter of Polo–Ukrainian borders is not at least topical today”, but he classified German territorial claims to Warsaw as more serious. As for the participation of Poles in Brest, he noted that Trotsky had proposed inviting the representatives of Courland, Estonia and Livonia, but only as private individuals. Czernin said Trotsky proposed the same for Poland, but the Central Powers believed it unacceptable. Czernin backed Ukraine's participation explaining that the country was in war with the Quadruple Alliance, which was not the case of Poland, and moreover, Trotsky had rejected Poland's participation in the conference in Brest<sup>85</sup>.

On January 24, 1918 Foreign Minister Czernin gave a long speech to the foreign committee of the Austrian delegation. To begin with, he presented general reflections about peace and pointed out that never in the history had peace talks been carried out without complication. As on similar previous occasions, Czernin highlighted the fragmented character of the former Russian empire and emphasized the extraordinary importance of peace with Ukraine for the Austro–Hungarian monarchy, with special regard to restoring business relations between the two countries. He dealt in detail with the Bolsheviks' disputes with the Central Council and with the request of Soviet Ukraine to be present at the negotiations. These problems, he remarked, could be removed since nothing was more important than peace, which „the Polish issue must not and will not endanger”. Once more, he declared that peace with Russia was less vital than the termination of hostilities with Ukraine<sup>86</sup>.

Petrograd, like Vienna, was the scene of similar discussions. On January 24, 1918 a key meeting of the central committee of the Bolshevik's party was held. After an animated debate during which a majority of participants rejected Lenin's proposal to conclude peace immediately, they decided to spin out the negotiations, or — as Trotsky proposed — if needed, to resort to a unilateral termination of war<sup>87</sup>.

<sup>85</sup> Draft meeting agenda of the Austro–Hungarian Foreign Ministry, No. missing, Jan 23, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 583 Delegationsakten 1917–1918.

<sup>86</sup> Foreign committee of delegations, No. missing, Jan 24, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 583 Delegationsakten 1917–1918.

<sup>87</sup> Meeting of the Central Committee, No. 37, Jan 11/24, 1918, Protokoly CK , p. 167–173.

Yet two other factors interfered with Czernin's strategy, namely the mounting self-confidence of the Russian leaders and negotiations with Austria–Hungary's crucial business partner — Ukraine. Czernin had spoken of these problems in the above-mentioned speech to the foreign committee of the Austrian delegation. It transpired that on January 22, the Bolshevik-controlled — though formally independent — Ukrainian People's Republic appealed through the Russian delegation for participation in the peace negotiations, citing as the reason the nations' right for self-determination. Austro–Hungarian negotiators, who were at that time in Petrograd regarding the issue of prisoners of war, were notified by Bolsheviks that the Red Army was proceeding far into the Ukrainian territory and the Central Council was losing power<sup>88</sup>. Eventually, Czernin consented with the participation of Ukrainian Bolsheviks. He was driven by Germans, which had recommended the move, and, more importantly, he believed he could exert greater pressure on the delegation of the General Secretariat<sup>89</sup>.

It was this atmosphere that provided the setting for the renewed peace conference on January 30. Czernin was of the opinion that given the growing hopes of Russian Bolsheviks for a revolution in Central Europe, any agreement with them was nearly excluded<sup>90</sup>. Trotsky withdrew his recognition of the Central Council and insisted all agreements made with Ukraine needed to be approved by the „People's Secretariat”, which was in fact the Bolshevik-controlled Ukrainian government based in Kharkiv. On January 22, 1918 Ukraine's Central Council issued the Fourth Universal in which it declared Ukraine an independent and sovereign state, however, this document little affected Trotsky's claims<sup>91</sup>.

Surprising as it may seem, Czernin regarded the conflict among Bolsheviks and Ukrainians positively for it gave the monarchy a strong negotiating position. In a report destined solely for the Emperor, he asks a rhetorical question „whether, in view of the current modified situation, it would not be better to change strategy and whether it would be suitable to wage a war on Petrograd together with the Ukrainian troops”. He believed it was the only way to get to the cereals in Ukraine and to conquer the international Bolshevik revolution<sup>92</sup>.

At a Jan 31, 1918 meeting of a commission for political and territorial issues Trotsky repeatedly protested „against the claim of the delegation from Kiev to resolve territorial issues independently and unilaterally”. Czernin immediately reacted by proposing to call a plenary session where this matter would be dis-

<sup>88</sup> Hempel to Czernin, No. 38, Jan 24, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 818 P. A. I.

<sup>89</sup> Hohenlohe to Czernin, No. missing, Jan 22, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 1053 P. A. I. and Csáky to Czernin, No. 183, Jan 22, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 1053 P. A. I.

<sup>90</sup> O. Czernin, op. cit., p. 332.

<sup>91</sup> Fourth Universal of the Ukrainian Central Council, Jan 22, 1918, [in:] J. Bunyan, H. H. Fisher, op. cit., p. 444–448.

<sup>92</sup> Czernin to Demblin, No. 16, Jan 30, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 262 P. A. XL.

cussed. Trotsky then announced that part of the Kiev garrison had defected to the Bolsheviks and the meeting was terminated<sup>93</sup>.

It was the new leader of the Ukrainian delegation Sevrjuk (Holubovych had become Prime Minister — Chairman of the General Secretariat) who presented the Ukrainian response to the Bolsheviks at a plenary session on February 1, 1918. He pointed out Trotsky's statement from January 10, 1918 when he said he had „no objections against the participation of the Ukrainian delegation in the peace talks” without limits. Trotsky, on the other hand, affirmed the disputes of the Council of People's Commissars and the Central Council in no way limited the Ukrainian right for self-determination. He noted that the Ukrainian state would continue to exist even if the government changed and that Bolsheviks agreed with the participation of the Council's delegation only because the process of the establishment of a Soviet Ukraine had not been accomplished at that time.

The debate between Ukrainians and Russian delegates was summed up by the Council's representative Levyckyj, who said harshly: „Loud proclamations of the Bolsheviks about the total freedom of Russian nations is mere demagoguery [...] In order to prevent the implementation of this principle [i.e. the nations' right for self-determination — author's note], they have resorted not only to gangs of mercenaries of the Red Guards, but they have instituted much more drastic and inadmissible measures: they stifle the press, they scatter political gatherings, they arrest and shoot politicians [...] There cannot be any doubt that [the Kharkiv government — author's note] not only fails to represent the Ukrainian People's Republic, but it can hardly be considered as a representative of the city of Kharkiv”.

Upon that, Czernin, in the name of the Quadruple Alliance, confirmed the recognition of Kiev's delegation and recognized the Ukrainian People's Republic as an independent state, which was entitled to conclude international treaties<sup>94</sup>. „Vulgarity, which the Ukrainian representatives today threw at the Petrogradians, were utterly grotesque and confirm how big a gap there is between these governments”, wrote the Minister in his diary<sup>95</sup>. The fact that Trotsky had withdrawn his consent with the independent participation of the Central Council's delegation in Brest would serve Czernin as an excuse to discredit the Bolshevik government in that it drags out the peace negotiations<sup>96</sup>.

As for the Germans, with the exception of Hoffmann, they stood aside when it came to establishing a new the relationship between Vienna and Kiev. Kühlmann

<sup>93</sup> Meeting of the Russian, German and Austro-Hungarian delegation. (Political commission). Jan 31/18, 1918, *Mirnyje peregovory*, p. 142–144.

<sup>94</sup> Meeting of the peace conference, No. 275, Feb 1, 1918, *Quellen zur Geschichte*, p. 462–475.

<sup>95</sup> O. Czernin, op. cit., p. 332.

<sup>96</sup> Czernin to Demblin, No. 17, Feb 1, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 262 P. A. XL. During the talks, Czernin responded to Trotsky's complaints regarding the contents of Austro-Hungarian press articles that the government was in no way influencing the contents of the press articles. Cf. *Mirnyje peregovory*, p. 141.

later explained the German Reich Chancellor Georg von Hertling that „the solution of the Ukrainian problem involves significant sacrifice from Austria and I believe”, he explained to him, „that we should try avoiding any sign of insistence [...] the more powerful words of the Austro–Hungarian representative in fact have a positive effect on the public opinion of the Danubian monarchy”<sup>97</sup>.

In spite of a growing pressure of the Bolsheviks on the Central Council, negotiations with the Ukrainians only advanced minimally. On February 1, 1918, Czernin and Hoffmann proposed to Kiev’s delegation a peace conclusion under the following terms:

1. Both parties declare the state of war as terminated and enter in diplomatic relationships.
2. Ukraine pledges to supply one million tonnes of cereals.
3. All other matters will be dealt with at later meetings.

On February 2, Ukraine rejected this proposal (or in fact an ultimatum) and insisted on their original requirements:

- Recognition of the Ukrainian People’s Republic
- Definition of its borders (the territory of Chelm would be attached to Ukraine)
- Ukraine will supply 100,000 freight cars of cereals by the end of June 1918
- Secret treaty concerning Galicia<sup>98</sup>.

A day later, on February 3, at the end of a session of the commission for political and territorial matters, Kühlmann announced to the Russian delegation the Quadruple Alliance’s decision to halt peace negotiations until February 7. On Czernin’s proposal, they both travelled to Berlin to discuss their next steps with military and governmental leaders<sup>99</sup>.

The meetings in Berlin began with the presence of Reich Chancellor von Hertling and General Ludendorff on the morning of February 5, 1918. To start with, Czernin spoke about difficulties which had emerged in the negotiations with Ukraine and stressed that the abandoning of Chelm, as well as the establishment of an independent Ukrainian crown’s land would extremely complicate the monarchy’s interior situation. However, he said, this step was unavoidable, because „the Central Powers cannot do without external help until new crops”. He followed by explaining the Bolshevik military campaign against the Kiev’s Council and pointed out that a possible defeat would destabilise the benefits that peace in the East would bring about. Kühlmann objected that the attachment of Chelm to Ukraine would adversely affect the German positions in Poland. The establishment of an independent crown’s land in eastern Galicia would still require the Austro–Polish

<sup>97</sup> Kühlmann to the Ministry, No. 276, Feb 2, 1918, *Quellen zur Geschichte*, p. 476.

<sup>98</sup> O.H. Fedushyn, op. cit., p. 74.

<sup>99</sup> Czernin to the Ministry, No. 246, Feb 2, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 1053 P. A I.

solution, he added. Ludendorff shared his view, noting he was in favour of providing the Central Council with armed forces, but only if Ukraine requested so.

Czernin, in the same vein with his previous statements, responded that establishing an independent Ukrainian crown's land was problematic because it was forced out by an external power. A chief of section at the Foreign Ministry, dr. Gustav Gratz presented an additional report about the current state of negotiations with Ukraine. Above all, he highlighted Vienna's effort to conclude a deal on prompt cereal supplies<sup>100</sup>.

Besides of the Ukrainian issue, several other problems linked to peace negotiations and the progress of war were touched upon. As for the Polish issue, no agreement was reached, although the Austro-Hungarian delegation had attempted to swap its consent with establishing a Ukrainian crown's land for an alleviation of German claims *vis-à-vis* Poland in case the Austro-Polish decision had been opted for. Finally, the debates in Berlin produced a solution regarding Ukraine. General consensus was that peace should be secured as fast as possible owing to the food crisis. The region of Chelm was to be attached to Ukraine and a Ukrainian crown's land was to be established in Eastern Galicia<sup>101</sup>.

Meanwhile, key discussions with Ukraine had advanced. On February 5, 1918 a leading Ukrainian politician in Austria, Mykola Ritter Vasylko arrived in Brest accompanied by Envoy von Wiesner to negotiate with Kiev's representatives. Little though did he contribute to the results, for he allegedly showed a „much more chauvinistic” conduct than he did in Vienna, apparently under the impression of his self-confident colleagues from Kiev<sup>102</sup>.

On February 7, a meeting took place of the Austro-Hungarian and Ukrainian commission whose goal was to draft a collective peace agreement among Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, Turkey as one party and Ukraine as the other party. At the meeting, Envoy Wiesner and Ukrainian negotiator Lubynskyi signed a protocol on cereal supplies according to which Ukraine pledged to supply at least one million tonnes before July 31, 1918. After the protocol was signed, Wiesner officially affirmed that the ratification of the peace treaty by the Quadruple Alliance would depend on the fulfilment of the present pledge. Ukrainians declared being aware of his statement<sup>103</sup>.

On February 8, a breakthrough agreement was reached — the establishment of a Ukrainian crown's land, which was to be attached to Bukovina. Kiev's claim to

<sup>100</sup> Protocol on negotiations in Berlin, No. missing, Feb 5, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 504 P. A. I, Liasse XLVII 3/17–22 (hereafter 504 P. A. I).

<sup>101</sup> Summary notes on negotiations in Berlin, No. missing, Feb 6, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 504 P. A. I.

<sup>102</sup> O. Czernin, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

<sup>103</sup> Protocol, No. missing, Jan 7, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 523 P. A. I. On April 8, 1918 an agreement was signed between Ukraine and the Central Powers, which further specified the pledge. W. Dornik, *op. cit.*, p. 147–148.



include this point directly in the peace treaty had by then diminished and the delegates eventually agreed with the form of a secret amendment. Austria–Hungary took into account that Ukraine had already adopted laws for the protection of its minorities. Prime Minister Seidler and Czernin then promised, on behalf of the Austrian government, that the relevant draft law would be presented by July 20, 1918. Due to the character of the pledge, the secret protocol was signed also by Seidler, most likely a short time afterwards in Vienna<sup>104</sup>.

What is more, Ukrainians also eased their claim regarding the inclusion of the Chelm region in Ukraine. Although the Peace Treaty signed between the Quadruple Alliance and Ukraine on February 9, 1918 at 2:00 a.m. stipulated that this region would be part of Ukraine, article II, par. 2 detailed the statement adding that „individual aspects of this border [*i.e.* between Ukraine and Poland — author’s note] will be determined by a joint commission according to ethnographic conditions and under the supervision of the inhabitants”. The hard–fought victory over this amendment was to soften the painful impact of the concession Vienna made regarding its (no longer realistic) Austro–Polish ambitions and above all it was to prevent further damage on the local political scene, which still counted on Galician Poles<sup>105</sup>.

Immense was the damage in Poland and on the local political scene. Seidler’s instigation that the publication of terms of the treaty with Kiev be postponed was well–grounded although quite naive<sup>106</sup>. The news about the terms of the treaty with Ukraine raised a backlash amongst the Poles. Governor General Count Stanislaw Szeptycki resigned and a large number of subordinate officials conveyed their criticism. In addition to protests from official circles, Poland was also the scene of popular protests, an example being the public setting on fire of the Emperor’s portrait in Lublin on February 12, 1918<sup>107</sup>. In a letter to the Emperor, the Polish Regency Council described the peace as „a hostile act to Poland, which was brought to life by the Foreign Minister of Your Majesty”<sup>108</sup>.

<sup>104</sup> Burián to Hohenlohe, No. 501, July 1, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 523 P. A. I, Liasse XLVII 11–12 g Krieg (hereafter 523 P. A. I). Burián especially reminded Hohenlohe of Seidler’s signature.

<sup>105</sup> Peace treaty with Ukraine, No. missing, Feb 9, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 523 P. A. I. After the ratification of the contract, the occupied territories were to be immediately abandoned and diplomatic and consular relationships created (art. IV. and V.). The issue of prisoners of war was to be dealt with in an individual contract (art. V. and VIII.). The majority of the contract dealt with the terms of mutual trade, Ukrainians pledged to send delegates to a commission, which was to determine the amount of food that Ukraine had pledged to export by July 31, 1918 (art. VII.). However, the amount of cereals for Austria–Hungary had already been defined by a protocol from Feb 7, 1918.

<sup>106</sup> Müller to Czernin, No. 307, Feb 10, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 1080 Brester Kanzlei.

<sup>107</sup> Hoening to Czernin, No. 53, Feb 13, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 1040 P. A. I, Liasse Krieg 56/32a–37, Polen (hereafter 1040 P. A. I).

<sup>108</sup> General Secretariat of the Regency Council to Ugron, No. 200, Feb 16, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 1040 P. A. I.

Clearly, Czernin's interpretation of the treaty was dissimilar. The Minister particularly stressed that the monarchy's borders were not changing and no final decision about Poland's borders had yet been made. He noted that „the western part of the Chelm territory, which is predominantly Polish, will stay in Poland”. He also noted that the actual abandoning of this territory would take place much later, as in fact a special commission would need to be established to oversee the process. „This provision gives us the opportunity to postpone the withdrawal for as long as we might want”. Besides the supplies of cereals, which he considered the main advantage of the peace treaty, he also touched upon the situation of war prisoners, which was to be dealt with by an amended agreement that had already been worded but not yet signed. The most sensitive point, according to the Minister, was the bilateral agreement regarding the establishment of an independent Ukrainian crown's land, which, as Czernin noted, was linked to the supplies of cereals. Accordingly, he insisted on strict confidentiality of this document<sup>109</sup>.

Trotsky was yet another critic of the peace treaty with Ukraine. Apart from Germany's plans to annex Estonia and Livonia, the peace agreement was one of the reasons why he on February 10 issued a unilateral statement that Russia was withdrawing from the war. Immediately after that he and the Russian delegation left Brest<sup>110</sup>. Although the Austro–Hungarian delegation was in favour of preserving the armistice, Czernin could not rule out an intervention in Ukraine<sup>111</sup>. On February 18, 1918, Germans launched operations against the Bolsheviks.

Simultaneously to the Russian delegation's departure from Brest, the power of the Ukrainian Central Council shrivelled with the Bolshevik troops' attack. On February 15, 1918, at a meeting with German and Austro–Hungarian representatives in Brody, Ukrainian officers admitted not knowing the whereabouts of the members of the Central Council, and affirmed the majority of Ukraine's cities including Kiev were occupied by Bolsheviks. Ukrainian delegates were convinced that only foreign troops had the ability to rid Ukraine of the red guards<sup>112</sup>.

Ukraine's current state of affairs opened the way to Czernin, who was determined to negotiate more advantageous peace conditions with Ukraine. In an instruction he sent to Envoy Wiesner, who was then in charge of leading more talks with Sevrjuk, the Count agreed to provide help for Ukraine but insisted that the Ukrainian government in return make concessions regarding the borders of the Chelm guberniya in order to remove Poland's complaints. The AOK was to consult with OHL about the principles of common operations in Ukraine and it was

<sup>109</sup> Czernin to the Ministry, No. 286, Feb 9, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 523 P. A. I.

<sup>110</sup> Meeting of the Russian, German and Austro–Hungarian delegation. (Political commission). Feb 10, (Jan 28) 1918, *Mirnyje peregovory*, p. 205–210.

<sup>111</sup> Czernin to Demblin, No. 23, Feb 11, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 1053 P. A. I.

<sup>112</sup> Arz to Czernin, No. 1044, Feb 16, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 836 P. A. I, Liasse Krieg 3f, Russland 1918, 3g–k, Russland 1917–1918 [hereafter: 836 P. A. I].

decided that the military operation would not be carried out before the negotiations with the Ukrainian delegation were terminated<sup>113</sup>.

On the other hand, the Emperor Charles was against military action in Ukraine and he intervened via General Arz at the OHL<sup>114</sup>. It was only after a long hesitation that the Emperor gave in to Czernin's requests.

Meanwhile, Envoy Wiesner achieved an amendment of article II of the peace treaty with Ukraine. According to it, the problematic territory to the East of Bilhoraj (Bilgoraj) was to remain in Poland<sup>115</sup>. The agreement brought about the long-awaited (but only temporary) quiescence of stormy feelings among the Poles<sup>116</sup>. Nonetheless, the Emperor and General Arz continued to reject the participation of Austria–Hungary in any military action in Ukraine. The General backed this decision by citing troubled affairs in Romania and other unspecified reasons<sup>117</sup>.

In this tense atmosphere, the rather awkward news that the terms of the peace treaty with Ukraine had been leaked created a furore among the Austrian Poles<sup>118</sup>. Czernin asserted that the Central Council had failed to keep secret the confidential protocol dated February 8, 1918, whose content had already been circling among the deputies of the Imperial Council. In consequence, Minister Czernin discussed this most serious matter with his German counterpart Kühlmann on their way to Bucharest where they were to attend peace negotiations with Romania. Not surprisingly, Czernin took advantage of the fragility of the Central Council, which was relying on German assistance, and with Germany's co-operation, exerted remorseless pressure on Ukraine.

The German Secretary of State backed Czernin's request that the confidential protocol be handed over to Germany for safekeeping. The copy in question was that signed by Prime Minister Seidler<sup>119</sup>. In spite of the efforts of Vienna's diplomacy to limit the damage caused by the disclosure of the confidential protocol, the Austrian Prime Minister found himself in an extremely delicate situation. The first reason was that the Ukrainians had once more acted as very determined partners

<sup>113</sup> Czernin to Wiesner, No. 72, Feb 16, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 836 P. A. I. Already on Feb 17, 1918 Ukrainians promised to hand over the original of the confidential amendment to the peace treaty (although the final treaty was not concluded until March 4, 1918) and agreed with the members of the territorial commission, whose composition was not advantageous for them; *Österreich–Ungarns letzter Krieg*, vol. VII: *Das Kriegsjahr 1918*, Wien 1938, p. 113.

<sup>114</sup> Arz to Hindenburg, Op. Geh. No. 1040, Feb 17, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 836 P. A. I.

<sup>115</sup> Protocol, No. missing, Feb 18, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 523.

<sup>116</sup> Hoenning to Czernin, No. 31, Feb 19, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 1040 P. A. I. However, Ludendorff refused territorial changes to the benefit of Poland in the Chelm region. O. H. F e d y s h y n, op. cit., p. 98.

<sup>117</sup> Czernin to Hohenlohe, No. 76, Feb 18, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 836 P. A. I.

<sup>118</sup> Discretion was breached by Sevrjuk during his stay in Vienna. H. B a t o w s k i, *Rozpad Austro–Węgier 1914–1918*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1965, p. 149.

<sup>119</sup> Czernin to Wiesner, No. 1, Feb 22, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 523.

and it was not until the start of March that they agreed to hand over the protocol<sup>120</sup>. Secondly, the Premier feared a possible parliamentary question and subsequent debate. „Silence is easy, but telling the untruth is hard”, he wrote to Czernin<sup>121</sup>.

Germans were to hand over the protocol to the representatives of Vienna’s Foreign Ministry for destruction in case the agreed „measures for protecting Ukrainian inhabitants in Austria” were adopted by July 20, 1918. If not, the protocol was to be handed over to Ukraine.

However, Czernin was not entirely satisfied with this arrangement. For this reason, he instructed the Ambassador to Berlin, Prince Gottfried zu Hohenlohe–Schillingsfürst, to insist on receiving the document at the Foreign Office even if Ukraine failed to supply the agreed upon cereals. Germans were to confirm in writing their willingness to hand over the document should this be the case<sup>122</sup>.

Germany’s fast progress into Russia’s interior led to Ballhausplatz’s intensification of pressure on the Emperor regarding the co–participation of Austro–Hungarian troops in Ukraine’s occupation. It was expected that Bolsheviks would soon be forced, as Lenin and Trotsky were suggesting in a telegram from February 19, 1918<sup>123</sup>, to ask Germans to cease fighting<sup>124</sup>. Czernin supported his arguments by telling the Emperor news from Berlin where negotiations were under way about the organisation of commodity exchange with Ukraine. He said Germany had given a clear message they were not ready to share the spoils with anyone. The new cast doubt on the planned cereals supplies from Ukraine. Consequently, Count Czernin recommended that Austria–Hungary quickly join the Germans in Ukraine before a peace treaty was signed with Russia. He also said the extent of the Austro–Hungarian military action was of minor importance<sup>125</sup>.

Eventually, General Arz and later the Emperor gave in<sup>126</sup>. Although Wolfram Dornik had questioned the Emperor’s consent regarding military action, claiming it had been ordered by AOK’s chief, General Arz, at his own risk<sup>127</sup>, in the General’s statement to Foreign Ministry, the Emperor had indeed given his permission to

<sup>120</sup> Protocol, No. missing, March 4, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 523. Germans were authorized to hand over the protocol for destruction to the representatives of the Austro–Hungarian Foreign Ministry in case they would be by July 20, 1918 the agreed „measures regarding the protection of Ukrainian inhabitants in Austria”. If this did not happen, the protocol was to be handed over to the Ukrainians.

<sup>121</sup> Seidler to Czernin, No. missing, Feb 25, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 523. Müller sent Seidler’s letter to Czernin to Bucharest under the number 42.

<sup>122</sup> Hohenlohe to Czernin, No. 149, March 11, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 523.

<sup>123</sup> Arz to Czernin, No. Op. Geh. 1054, Feb 19, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 1053 P. A. I.

<sup>124</sup> It was especially Envoy Hohenlohe, who tried to warn the Emperor about the economic consequences of non–action. Hohenlohe to Czernin, No. 112, Feb 21, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 836 P. A. I.

<sup>125</sup> Czernin to Demblin, No. 2, Feb 24, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 262 P. A. XL.

<sup>126</sup> Demblin to Czernin, No. 70, Feb 25, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 836 P. A. I.

<sup>127</sup> W. D o r n i k, op. cit., p. 150–151.

the action<sup>128</sup>. With his consent, it was decided to begin a march along the line Podvolochisk — Odessa<sup>129</sup>. Furthermore, the army's supreme command envisaged the occupation of the city of Hotyn (Chocim) and its environs, which had already at the start of the peace talks been labelled as essential for the protection of Bukovina's Tchernovitz<sup>130</sup>. The expedition to Odessa was, among other reasons, driven by fear that the Germans would gain their own access to the Balkans should they occupy the whole territory of Ukraine.

With the Central Powers' troops proceeding quickly into the interior of Russia, the Council of People's Commissars on February 23, following animated debates in the Bolshevik administration, issued a resolution on the basis of which a delegation was to be sent to Brest<sup>131</sup>. The peace delegation departed for Brest on the evening of the same day<sup>132</sup>.

Although left at the mercy of the Central Powers, Russian leaders tried manoeuvring. On February 27, 1918 Lenin sent a telegram to Kühlmann, Hoffman and to the leader of the Russian peace delegation Grigorij Sokolnikov, announcing that the four members of „the delegation of the People's Secretariat of the Ukrainian People's Republic [...] are on their way from Kiev to Brest–Litovsk to sign a peace agreement concluded with the former Kiev Council”<sup>133</sup>.

Ambassador Mérey described Lenin's telegram as „the last manoeuvre by the Bolshevik party, whose aim was to hamper the peace dialogues and especially to inhibit the arrangement of relationships between Ukraine and Russia”. The leader of the Austro–Hungarian delegation (neither Czernin, nor Kühlmann took part in the last stage of the talks) also informed Vienna about the intention of his and his colleagues from the other delegations to refer the pro–Moscow Ukrainians to the agreement with the present representatives of the Central Council. „Their participation in the co–signing of the peace treaty with Ukraine is on no account to be considered”<sup>134</sup>. However, the members of the „Ukrainian” delegation were for several days detained in Pskov by Germans<sup>135</sup>. Hence, the Bolshevik–controlled Ukraine missed the conference.

<sup>128</sup> Storck to Czernin, No. 27.246, Feb 27, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 836 P. A. I. Cf. A. Krauss, F. Klingenbrunner, *Die Besetzung der Ukraine 1918*, [in:] H. Kerchnawe [and others], *Die Militärverwaltung in den von den österreichisch–ungarischen Truppen besetzten Gebieten*, Wien 1928, p. 364.

<sup>129</sup> A. Krauss, F. Klingenbrunner, op. cit.

<sup>130</sup> *Österreich–Ungarns letzter Krieg*, p. 117.

<sup>131</sup> Resolution of the Council of People's Commissars on the adoption of German peace terms, No. 73, Feb 23, 1918 (wrong date), DVP, p. 112. Cf. Degras, p. 46.

<sup>132</sup> R. K. Debo, op. cit., p. 149.

<sup>133</sup> Evidenzbureau, No. 1323/R. H., 27. 2. 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 1053 P. A. I.

<sup>134</sup> Mérey to the Ministry, No. 332, Feb 27, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 1053 P. A. I.

<sup>135</sup> Radiogram to the peace delegation of the Soviet Ukraine to all Soviets, Berlin, London, Paris, all, No. 76, March 3, 1918, DVP, p. 116.

## EPILOGUE

The ratification of peace agreements with Russia and Ukraine became a lengthy political issue in Austria–Hungary and its examination lasted through the spring months of 1918. What most of all complicated matters was the necessity to discuss the peace agreements in Austria’s Imperial Council. Consequently, the interior political situation „became more than difficult due to the Polish issue”, Seidler informed Czernin on March 4<sup>136</sup>.

Vienna’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs began the ratification process soon after the conclusion of the Peace Treaty. According to the Minister, the ratification was to be settled first by the Emperor and only after that by the two Parliaments. Czernin explained that this unusual procedure was necessary, in order to allow the two Parliaments to discuss the treaty both with Russia and Ukraine. However, the confirmation of the treaty by the Ukrainian party depended on the obtained cereal supplies and on the appeasement of protests in Poland and therefore was not on the agenda<sup>137</sup>.

While Hungarian Prime Minister Wekerle backed the proposal<sup>138</sup>, Seidler rejected it as he feared protests in the Imperial Council. He recommended that the treaty with Russia first be presented to the Austrian Parliament. He said that a delayed ratification of the treaty with Ukraine might easily be explained by the disorder in Ukraine and by waiting for cereal supplies<sup>139</sup>.

Meanwhile, the military action of the German and Austro–Hungarian armies in Ukraine continued, although the Russian delegation in Brest expressed their willingness to launch peace negotiations with Ukraine<sup>140</sup>. Both armies advanced very rapidly and Kiev was occupied on March 2, 1918. Nevertheless, the fact that local inhabitants accepted the Austro–Hungarian troops indicated their lack of trust in the Council. The relevant supreme command (AOK 2) reported that „the moods in the areas which had not been occupied and in the areas invaded by our troops signal that only the intellectual *élites* are in our favour [...] Inhabitants of cities and farmers are not showing fondness to us in these conditions. In the case of the farmers it is because they are afraid we will abolish the land reform promised earlier by the Bolsheviks and already effectuated to a certain degree”<sup>141</sup>.

<sup>136</sup> Seidler to Czernin, No. missing, March 4, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 583 Delegationsakten.

<sup>137</sup> Czernin to Müller and Flotow, No. 206, March 15, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 1053 P. A. I.

<sup>138</sup> Wekerle to Czernin, No. 2741/res, March 30, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 1053 P. A. I.

<sup>139</sup> Seidler to Czernin, No. 3.480/M. P., April 13, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 1053 P. A. I. Eventually, Seidler gave in and agreed with the ratification of the treaty with Russia by the Emperor. Seidler to Burián, No. 4305/M. P., April 28, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 1053 P. A. I.

<sup>140</sup> Mérey to Czernin, No. 344, March 2, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 154 P. A. X.

<sup>141</sup> Halbmonatsbericht, appendix 12, Feb 16–28, 1918, HHStA, Kriegsarchiv, Box AOK 3677.



In this respect, fears over cereals imports from Ukraine were not unfounded. On March 1, 1918 Czernin wrote to the Ambassador Adam Count Tarnowski that „the supplies of cereals, on which the entire Ukrainian contract is based, have been going so badly that I am very much worried about the monarchy’s future food situation”<sup>142</sup>. That is why Czernin insisted that Ukraine make further concessions. First of all, he requested that the confidential protocol on the establishment of Ukrainian’s crown’s land be handed over even if Ukraine did not supply the promised amount of cereals. The Germans, who had by then received the document, were to confirm in writing their willingness to deliver the document<sup>143</sup>. Eventually, the protocol was burnt on July 16, 1918 in Berlin<sup>144</sup>.

In consequence, the Ukrainian Central Council ceased to be a partner for negotiations for Austria–Hungary. This fact was not even changed by the *coup d’état* with Pavlo Skoropadskyi assuming the office of Hetman of Ukraine in May 1918. The monarchy’s representative in Kiev, Count Johann Forgách, was of the opinion that the new government „cannot be taken seriously from the political and economic aspects”<sup>145</sup>. In spite of previous disagreements, in the spring of 1918 Austria–Hungary was acting in harmony with Germany, driven by an effort to secure their economic interests by exerting pressure on Ukraine’s government<sup>146</sup>. Unfortunately, these moves brought the monarchy little success and in spite of the promised one million tonnes of cereals, Ukraine had exported only 133,000 tonnes to Austria–Hungary by November 1918<sup>147</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

The „Ukrainian issue” became a useful tool for Austria–Hungary to conclude the long–awaited peace in the East, generate food supplies, appease the public and thus alleviate the food crisis which developed in the spring of 1918. After a period of hesitation, Czernin was prepared to sacrifice the monarchy’s good relationships with the Polish representation in Austria. These relations were extremely important as Cisleithania’s stability depended on their quality. Among Czernin’s major achievements was the invitation of Ukrainians to the Brest peace conference where,

<sup>142</sup> Czernin to Tarnowski, No. 47, March 1, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 1040 P. A. I.

<sup>143</sup> Hohenlohe to Czernin, No. 149, March 11, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 523.

<sup>144</sup> Hohenlohe to Burián, No. 468, July 16, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 523.

<sup>145</sup> Demblin to Czernin, No. 70, March 24, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 263 P. A. XL.

<sup>146</sup> Forgách to Burián, No. 502, June 1, 1918, HHStA, PA, Box 154 P. A. X. Forgách affirmed that together with German Ambassador Philipp Alfons Freiherr Mumm von Schwarzenstein they told the Ukrainian government to „follow our advice” when negotiating the economic conditions of the armistice with Russia (the talks were currently under way in Kiev).

<sup>147</sup> W. B i h l, op. cit., p. 65.

with German support, they concluded a peace treaty with Ukraine, on February 9, 1918.

However, the political costs of the „bread peace” (*Brotfrieden* in German) were very high. In addition to border transformations which benefited Ukraine, they especially included the approval of the establishment of Ukraine’s crown’s lands in Eastern Galicia and Bukovina. These pledges caused the alienation of the Polish political representation. Firstly, Czernin believed that Kiev’s Central Council could serve as a guarantor of the cereal supplies, but his hopes evaporated when Bolshevik troops invaded Ukraine and the Central Council’s power collapsed. Unfortunately, the subsequent occupation of the country by the armed forces of the Central Powers provided only minimal help.

In the end, Austria–Hungary did not ratify the peace contract, mainly due to the weakness of the Ukrainian government and its lack of willingness to stir Austria–Hungary’s internal political situation by debating about a peace agreement with Ukraine. Consequently, Austria–Hungary did not fulfil its pledge to establish an independent crown’s land and it never received the promised food support. Kiev’s originally strong negotiating position faded after the Bolshevik invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent occupation by the Central Powers. The government in Kiev was entirely dependent on Berlin’s and Vienna’s strategies. It follows that the internal policy sacrifice, which Czernin had accepted in order to preserve a „bread peace” with Ukraine, was fruitless.