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FRANZ M.

**WRITINGS OF THE RUSSIAN AGENT FROM
ITALY (1914-1918)**

War actions during every war require huge effort of not only officers and soldiers of the front line but also the whole back-up of working for the front. It also refers to the staff, governments as well as industry that has to deliver a proper amount of weapon, supplies and ammunition to the front line. It was kind of a second front line of the waged war, very often not less important than the one on the joint of two hostile armies. It refers especially to the history of world wars in the 20th century during which the economy was getting more and more significant [1]. During the First World War, the effort of economies of countries of the world was enormous, incomparable to any other military conflict in the history of the world till that time. It may be said that this war like no other one had to be won in factories, with power and possibilities of the economy.

For this economy, its own possibilities were as important as external contacts, access to resources, materials and also contracts for armament with allied countries. Very often without such a support, winning the war in face of its technicisation would not be possible. Not only did countries compete in the field of economy creating more and more modern technological back – up for their armed forces but they also cooperated realizing that such a competition would have been hard to win. It especially referred to countries that did not belong to those having the strongest economy.

Мацій Франц, доктор габілітований, Університет імені Адама Міцкевича, м. Познань, Республіка Польща.

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The example in this case may be the Russian Empire that passed the first half of the 19th century and after the failure of the Crimean war [2], in frameworks of the so called «post – Sevastopol thaw» [3], it began to build its industrial complex. The coal area in the Donets Basin started to develop, the oil area will be created in the Caucasia and in the basin of the Caspian Sea, and the role of industry in big cities like Moscow and St Petersburg will be growing. In Russia, development of other industrial areas was strongly connected with needs of the army or the war fleet. As I have written before:

The issue of controlling waters of the Caspian Sea became growing from the beginning of the 20th century. On the one hand, the oil discovered here and slowly creating, spreading oil fields in the area of Baku was becoming more and more significant and on the other hand a process of weakening the Russian Empire was in progress. Despite increasing problems in Romanov’s country, it was noticed how significant for this country the oil from the area of Baku can be. Not only ships of a Caspian flotilla but also the Black Sea Fleet was involved in its exploration, protection and transport [4]. An outbreak and a course of WWI also did not change this situation [5].

The situation can be easily referred to every single one of the Russian industrial complexes. However, even their clear connection with the needs of the army has not fulfilled its all needs. Especially that before the outbreak of WWI Russia has not been one of the most industrialized countries and military actions forced the country to further, very intense effort in this matter.

Average monthly production of iron and steel and coal mining in some countries fighting in years 1913 and 1918 (in thousands of tones) [6].

Contry	1913			1917		
	Iron	Steel	Coal	Iron	Steel	Coal
Russia	363	350	283	250	283	260

As it is visible, the Russian state had to accept limitation of its industrial possibilities rather than their increase. At

the same time, the army needed more and more modern military equipment. In face of limitations of their own industry, the Russians were looking for possibilities to purchase the armament abroad [7]. After the war in Japan in 1904-1905, no one in Europe had any doubts that the Russian state is in a deep crisis and it is not the superpower that it used to be [8]. More than ever, it was necessary to look for not only allies but also deliverers of modern armament. While the ally with France has been real since 1894, negotiations with Great Britain have been going slowly and without certainty of a success. It was the involvement of the French diplomacy that led to signing a proper treaty in 1908. However, because of this the Russian state could not count on bigger deliveries of modern armament. In 1915 in Great Britain, under a direct control of military authorities and Admiralty Board, there were 2026 factories and a year later there were supposed to be twice more – 4052, however their main task was to guarantee proper supplies for the British and next the French army. Especially that not only did it have to stop the German offensive but also from the beginning of the war it was in a difficult situation. At the end of September 1914, general J. Joffre issued a directive in which he wrote: I have decided to limit the fire unit for 75 centimeter cannon to 300 shots per each cannon... the army will not receive additional missiles before 20 October and it should confine on stopping the opponent's attacks within limits of the front they won and strengthening fortifications [9]. In such a situation Russia had to look for supplies somewhere else.

Everyday military expenses of Russia during WWI (in millions od rubles) [10]

years	Russia
1914	16,3
1915	26,2
1916	22.4
1917	55,6
1918	–

The natural ally for the Russian Empire in development of its own army, especially its technical equipment, was the Italian state. Both sides from the beginning of the war tried to use their mutual experiences. Especially that the Italian Kingdom finally united in 1814, was a new country looking for its place in the world, with a huge delay joining a rivalry on colonies in the world.

For realization of such aims, it was necessary to develop the war fleet equipped in modern, huge artillery ships and also creating and filling with weapons the strong land army. To make it possible, on the one hand it was necessary to use Italian industrial possibilities concentrated especially in the northern part of the Apennine Peninsula. There was the biggest part of Italian armament factories and shipyards which had to meet the increasing orders of the army. Thanks to this, the Italian war fleet has been systematically developed and at the beginning of the 20th century, it was ready to take up the goals connected with next conflicts of a colonial character. This is what happened in 1911. Then, after rejecting by the Turkey the earlier prepared ultimatum of the Italian government of 28 September 1911, military actions became a real fact a day later.

The Italian fleet in this war was given a task to destroy naval forces of Turkey, to protect its convoy to Tripolitania and at the same time in a longer perspective to protect its own communication trials in the basin of the Mediterranean Sea, to support landing operations and also to block and isolate the area of actions from all the influences of the Turkish army [11]. At the moment of outbreak of the war, the Italian fleet was being seriously modernized, on slipways of shipyards, there were first big ships of the line which obviously caused that war actions could not be carried too actively. Even a ship of the line «Dante Alighieri» [12] as well as three – ships series «Conte di Cavour» [13] were in a process of building. In time, these units were to become foundation of modern naval forces of Italy.

Despite that, at the moment of outbreak of the war the Italian fleet had a considerable advantage over the Turkish fleet and as a result, without bigger problems, it could accomplish its all goals in this war [14]. The success strengthened a will of development of the navy in the Italian Peninsula especially that the events of the First World War were getting closer and closer [15].

In a similar way, the Italian land forces, including the artillery have been developing. It was not unnoticed by the Russian side which was looking for a solid deliverer of equipment for its army, especially that despite earlier allies of Italy with the German Empire and the Austro – Hungarian Empire, it did not join the war in 1914 choosing formal neutrality. Thus, production possibilities of the Italian arm complex became even more attractive. Also for this reason, Russian agents who were supposed to get a possibly wide knowledge about real possibilities of the Italian arm industry, were sent to the territory of Italy. The truth is that appropriate military authorities in Russia were aware that the trade during the war was not officially and legally possible but except of things that are visible during the day, there is always this part of politics, diplomacy and trade contacts that has always been realized in the shadow.

It was the so called London treaty signed on 26 April 1915 and accepted by the king, Victor Emmanuel III, that decided on joining the war by Italy together with the Triple Entente, not the central countries. According to the treaty, Italy was supposed to get the South Tirol, Istria together with Trieste and Dalmatia. In exchange, Italy was supposed to join the war against all enemies of the Triple Entente. Military actions covered two parts of the front: the east one at the river Isonzo and the north one in the Carnic Alps and the Dolomites. At the same time, the Russian country could decide on official negotiations on military orders from Italian factories, especially that in that time it had a lot valuable information making all negotiations on the price, deliveries and time of realization of orders easier.

This activity of the Russian military and economic intelligence has not been widely discussed in a historiography, especially that a considerable part of sources referring to those issues was classified as confidential and was not available for historians. Luckily, the situation is slowly changing and a part of the materials that were saved by a miracle in a storm of the 20th century, is becoming for us, for historians a signal how significant this secret war waged during WWI was.

The correspondence presented below, correspondence of the Russian agent who was working in Italy during the First World War concerns the issue of orders for armament, especially orders for artillery batteries from Ansaldo factories with ammunition to equip all Russian units with modern Italian weapons. It was found during the archives query in archives of the Military-Historical Museum of Artillery, Engineering and Communications Forces in Sankt Peterburg in October 2013. So far the documents have not been used by Polish historians and a card of archive's stock lacks information on anyone going through these documents. They are maintained as information from engine order telegraph, in a form of a copy made for one of the services which had access to these information. They are of a bilateral character where next to the main text, the report, on the reverse, there is information on who the reports got to, there survived some names and the exact dates of the correspondence. The whole document is of course in Russian. For this publication, it has been translated to English with an appropriate diligence to keep its exact content. There was no interference in contents and all doubts have been marked with square brackets.

Correspondence of the Russian Agent from Rome during the First World War concerning arm orders.

Font 13, description No. 87/1 copy No 216 card 1, 1v, 2, 2v, 3 and 3v.

Denunciation of the agent in Italy, copy from 4/5 October 1916 from Rome

DPWMVI 198 GAU 1 45 1 57

A. Hacialwo contract concerns [refers to] only 31 artillery batteries of 42 light cannons /125 in sale/. In January 10

batteries, February March 3 batteries each month, April May and June 5 batteries each month. The price of packed [complete] batteries for now is 1.448.600 liras, hopefully 1.400.000 for each grouped 3 batteries in scope of price and time /a new price for the Italian government cannon 1.200.000/ in advance 50 % with guaranty of the bank, price for delay, technical conditions of Italian representatives, advised possible derogation. Reception of the Italian Commission signing the contract stops [delays] first shortage [absence, lack] my response 203 to you on license to Pułkowski second one also in a telegram of Swialerski September 11 on admission or box for assembled [illegible word] / the rest of boxes for unitary [homogeneous] way of delivery would start two months later/ the third unfinished agreement [settlement]. Cannons are being produced but the contract needs to be signed as soon as possible. In six-part negotiation the Italian Government showed again the attitude towards signing the contract on 42-line missiles [?] also (my 853) hope for agreement for their bringing [delivery] in the second half of 1917. It all depends on development of institution 255 Wolkonskij. Hirsz on the reverse of the letter there is information:

letter sent – 6 October 1916 to the Main Artillery Office, Office of Ministry of War, Units and Military Forces

2. To the Russian War Agent in Rome - copy

Rome 20 September 1916

Cable on how far the factory Ansaldo (the order) 42 light cannons and 6 1- inch howitzers of missiles 1 45 1 57

Pietrowskij. Okuniew. Passed to telegraph on 22 September 1916

Signature: Somkin

3. The letter of the war agent in Italy

From Rome 8/9 November 1916

In a few days rafalowicz will sign with the bank DiSkonto agreement on saving from [illegible word] for order [commission] from Ansaldo for 31 batteries of 42 light cannons, the due

with the bill 48 million liras for expenses. Please give immediately (on time) the number for the bill and following the end of the order it will be necessary to sign the contract.

Wolkonskij
Hisz

It was sent with a Number 4326 on 10 November 1916 to the Head of the Main Artillery Office, Representative of the Commission on distribution of the foreign currency. Special Department of the Office of Ministry of War, Heads of departments of offices and military services were notified.

4. From the war agent in Italy

From Rome 20/21 November 1916

1) Ansaldo insists on the price 1.448.000 liras for a battery and it is for the whole order – 44.906.600. this is why taking [accepting] transport information (?) me on my 315 asked with hesitation (?) give number for 48 million. It may be possible to bargain a little but together with signing a contract. Till that time I cannot give the final sum. Signing the contract is expected this week. 2) Negotiations are not finished. My information [certificate] – 853, 255 and 298. The price is not established. Unless the main contract is signed conversations about missiles [ammunition] with Ansaldo as well as the Italian Government will lead nowhere. Theoretically the price from the beginning [origin] is maintained. Wolkonskij.

On the reverse:

the copy sent with a letter No. 4426 – 22 November 1916
Head of the Committee of the Artillery Office
Representative of the Foreign Currencies

5. To the Russian War Agent in Rome

315 Cable fast strictly [exactly] a value [cost, price?] of batteries and the whole order except this [over] value [cost] of entity, separately shrapnels and bombs 181923 Petrowskij. Okunew. Telegraph passed on 17 November 1916.

Praporszczik...

1. See further: *Ekonomia a wojna. Studia i szkice*, ed. Maciej Franz, Toruń 2011.

2. The example of a good and brief description of the conflict is H.B. Скрицкий, *Крымская Война 1853-1856 годы*, Москва 2006.

3. It was a complex of reforms carried with acceptance of the tsar Alexander II in frameworks of which the political system in Russia became easier and economic reforms of Minister I. Wiszniogrodzki and his successors were possible.

4. A. Alijew, M.A. Mirzozew, *Interesy potęg światowych w regionie kaukasko-kaspijskim*, s. 5, http://www.rurociagi.com/spis_art/2005_1/interesy.html. All source materials gathered for needs of this study were archived in March-April 2012 and are in the Author's collection.

5. M. Franz, *Is Asia Threatened by Another war, this Time in a Basin of the Caspian Sea?*, [w:] *Dilemmas of Contemporary Asia. Deliberations on Economy and Security*, edited by Joanna Marszałek-Kawa, Toruń 2013, s. 144.

6. J. Ciepiewski, I. Kostrowicka, Z. Landau, J. Tomaszewski, *Historia gospodarcza świata XIX i XX wieku*, Warszawa 1971, s. 307.

7. At the end of 1916 in Russia, among 2 million and 445 thousand of workers employed in industry, as much as 86 % worked for needs of the army. However, it was a situation resulting from the fact that the whole country has been switched to war needs. The production did not mean guarantee of a proper amount of means of the advanced military technology for the army.

8. One of the best studies on the war in the Polish historiography, although it refers mostly to naval issues is P. Olender, *Wojna rosyjsko-japońska 1904-1905. Działania na morzu*, Kraków 2010.

9. A. Łagowski, *Strategia i ekonomika*, Warszawa 1964 s. 49-50.

10. J. Ciepiewski, I. Kostrowicka, Z. Landau, J. Tomaszewski, *Historia gospodarcza świata XIX i XX wieku...*, s. 320.

11. J. Gozdawa-Gołębiowski, *Od wojny krymskiej do bałkańskiej. Działania flot wojennych na morzach i oceanach w latach 1853-1914*, Gdańsk 1985, s. 429.

12. The ship was being built in a shipyard *Il cantiere navale di Castellammare di Stabia*, located in the south part of the Gulf of Naples. Naples was and still is one of the most significant shipyard industry centre in Italy.

13. The unit was built in a shipyard *Arsenale di La Spezia*, located near one of the most important Italian bases of the navy.

14. *Gozdawa-Gołębiowski*, *Od wojny krymskiej do wojny bałkańskiej...*, s. 428-442; P. Olender, *Wojny morskie 1883-1914*, Warszawa 2005, s. 595-610.

15. The Italians were trying to get as much knowledge and information from countries which were on a similar way to constructing a modern war fleet not so long before them as possible, *Sprawozdania z wizyt na poligonach morskich w 1913 roku*, *Архив Военно-Исторического Музея Артиллерии, Инженерных Войск и Войск Связи Санкт Петербург*, f. 4, file 20969, many charts.

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