



Peter I and United Europe: The Confrontation in The Baltic Region at The Beginning of The 18th Century

Mikhail V. Zherebkin¹, Igor M. Esip², Snezhana P. Shendrikova³, Alexandra A. Yudina⁴

¹Doctor of Political Sciences, Professor

²Candidate of Historical Sciences, Associate Professor

³Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor

⁴postgraduate student

Humanitarian and Pedagogical Academy(branch) in Yalta, V. I. Vernadsky Crimean Federal University

ABSTRACT

In political talk shows, one can sometimes hear that sanctions against Russia are the result of the «Crimean Spring» in 2014 and the Crimea's return to its native Russian harbor, and if this had not happened, the relations between Russia and the West would be extremely good-neighborly, mutually beneficial and friendly... The counterargument runs as follows: the confrontation between Russia and the West has lasted for many centuries. It was in the past, remains nowadays and will continue in the future ...The purpose of the article is to analyze the confrontation between Russia and the West at the beginning of the 18th century, which was not only the continuation of the centuries-long confrontation between the parties to the conflict, but also revealed new motives of their rivalry. Earlier, the attack of the Swedish and German knights in the first half of the 13th century, Ivan IV's war against the Swedes, Livonians, Lithuanians and Poles in the second half of the 16th century and the struggle of the Tsardom of Muscovy against the Poles at the beginning of the 17th century took place during the periods of the Russian state's weakness. However, the confrontation between Peter I and united Europe in the Baltic region at the beginning of the 18th century unfolded at the time of Russia's strengthening, when it succeeded in regaining «grandfathers' and fathers'» lands and became a strong state in that geopolitically important region. The study is novel in that it considers this perspective to the problem. The relevance of the study is proved not only by the current state of relations between Russia and the West, in which unprecedented pressure on our country prevails in practically all spheres of the Russian state and society, but also by the fact that the struggle against modern Russia started when it rose from its knees and, overcoming the consequences of the USSR's collapse and the 1990's, declared an independent policy on the international stage. Drawing a parallel between the events taking place in Russian history 300 years ago and nowadays, the West's main and unchanging goal may be determined. This goal is slowing down the development of Russia and limiting its influence on international affairs. The authors conclude that both 300 years ago and now Russia can rely only on itself, its strong economy, powerful armed forces and the unity of the government and the people.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received February 23 2020, Accepted March 17,2020
Published August 3, 2020

KEYWORDS

Great Northern War, Peter I, Charles XII, the Baltic coast, Sweden, «northern settlement» plan, Åland Congress, Anglo-Swedish treaty, Nystadt Peace.

Contact Mikhail V. Zherebkin V. I. Vernadsky Crimean Federal University

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INTRODUCTION

It is hardly possible to accurately determine the starting point of the confrontation between the Russian state and the West. According to several scholars, it started when the Swedish and German knights, inspired by the blessing of Pope Gregory IX, attempted to seize the northwestern lands of Novgorod Republic when the fragmented Old Russian state was finally destroyed as the result of the Mongol-Tatar invasion. Then the knights' onslaught was repelled by Prince Alexander Nevsky. The prince's struggle with the knights and the significance of his historic choice were reflected in research works by N. M. Nikulin, N. M. Pronin, S. G. Lozinsky, M. A. Zaborov, I. P. Shaskolsky, S. M. Solovyov, N. I. Kostomarov, G.V. Vernadsky and M.V. Zherebkin.

Other researchers consider the Livonian War to be the starting point of the confrontation, when Ivan IV tried to regain the «grandfathers' and fathers'» lands on the Baltic coast, which had belonged to Russia earlier. Then he faced the Western countries' superior forces and even lost what he had possessed before the conflict. A. I. Filyushkin, Y. N. Denisov, G.F. Karpov, T.V. Chernikova and V.V. Novodvorsky treated the topic in their research works.

The confrontation was also crucial during the period of the great Time of Troubles in Russia, when Novgorod the Great, the birthplace of Russian statehood, was captured by the Swedes, and Kiev, the first capital of the Old Russian state, and Moscow, the first capital of the Moscow tsardom, were under the Polish rule. In this regard, the works by L. E. Morozova, O. A. Kurbatov, S. N. Berdyshev, N. I. Kostomarov, R. G. Skrynnikov and others are worth mentioning.

In a varying degree, this period can be considered the starting point of the confrontation between Russia and the West, since it is characterized by Russia's confrontation with the forces of several Western states. However, in our opinion, the centuries-old confrontation between the Russian state and the allied forces of the Western world began at the final stage of the Northern War (in 1719–1720), when England united the biggest number of Western countries against our country. But the number of countries is not the only decisive factor in our assessment of the situation. There is another reason, which is of no less importance, and maybe even more compelling one. Unlike the earlier periods, when the Western countries had attacked Russia taking advantage of its weakness, this period witnessed the obvious growth of the Russian state's power. It was this circumstance that triggered the unification of the Western countries against Russia. They sought to prevent the Russian state's strengthening process and slow down our progress. This is important because these very goals — at least, to restrain the development of the country or to bend it to submission, or, at most, to destroy the

Russian state – have been decisive since that time to the present day.

The novelty of the article is the authors' view on the events dating back to the beginning of the 18th century as just a link, albeit a very important and initial one, in the long chain of conflicts between Russia and the allied forces of the Western countries, in which our opponents tried to push the Russian state away from Europe regarding both its borders and influence in this geopolitically important region.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the relationship between the Russian state and the Western countries in the first quarter of the 18th century and the reasons of the European states' unification against Russia.

The relevance of the topic is determined by the current state of relations between Russia and the Western nations, the main characteristic feature of which is the unprecedented sanction pressure on our country, aimed at slowing down its economic development and limiting its influence on international affairs.

For Russia, the 18th century began with the war against Sweden, the purpose of which, as had been the case in Ivan IV's Livonian War, was to regain the old Russian lands on the Baltic coast, get an access to the sea to protect its northern borders and win a chance to trade with Europe directly. In this war, called the Great Northern War, there were both the Embarrassment at Narva (the Battle of Narva) and the Victory at Poltava (the Battle of Poltava), when the Swedish army was defeated causing great surprise in Europe. But while the victory of Peter the Great at Poltava was considered by many people in Europe as a dangerous incident in the war, and they were sure that Charles XII would regain its superiority over Russia, then the first victories in the Baltic region, primarily the victory at Gangut in 1714 caused the assessment of the situation to change gradually.

It is interesting to note that after the Russians had taken control of the entire Neva region with the fortresses of Nöteborg and Nyenschantz and gained access to the Baltic Sea, Peter I was determined to end the conflict peacefully. The main goal was achieved and its significance was very succinctly defined by the historian S. M. Solovyov: «In the 9th century A. D., the mouth of the Neva marked the beginning of the trade route from the Varangians to the Greeks; this route marked the beginning of Russia itself in the middle of that century. For 850 years, it constantly spread eastwards, reached the Eastern Ocean, but finally it yearned for its birthplace by the Western Sea, and again came to it hoping to revitalize» [8, P. 855].

When the means for achieving the above-mentioned goal were at his disposal, the Russian

tsar no longer thought of continuing the war. He considered peace and trade as the necessary conditions for economic development. Arguing that no great nation could either exist or develop successfully at such a distance from the sea, or put up with the fact that the mouths of its rivers were torn away from it and it could not make use of them, Karl Marx emphasized that Peter I «captured only what was absolutely necessary for the natural development of his country». [2]

Peter I made arrangements for a peace treaty no later than at the beginning of 1707, offering the Danish and Prussian kings to make mediation attempts, and dangled favorable terms of trade before London for helping to make peace with Sweden. But no one supported the Russian Tsar's proposals. Everyone in Europe was afraid of Charles XII and wanted to continue the war in order to exhaust Russia. The conditions on which a peace treaty could be signed explicitly showed the Swedes' arrogance towards the Russians: «The king will reconcile with Russia only when he arrives in Moscow, casts the tsar from the throne, divides the tsar's state into small principalities, convenes boyars and grants them the tsardom's parts as offices of voivodes» [3, P. 120].

Certainly, Moscow could not agree to such prospects. It raised the stakes demanding not only the access to the sea, but also the Baltic Sea itself and Sweden's peace enforcement. Before fighting for the Baltic Sea, Peter I increased his influence in the Baltic region. In March, 1710, the siege of Vyborg began from the sea and from onshore, resulting in the garrison's surrender in June. The seizure of Riga, which was the largest fortress in the Baltic region, proved to be a more difficult undertaking. The siege began in October, 1709, and the surrender document was signed on July 4, 1710. The Russian army got over 600 pieces of artillery. After Riga's surrender, the other Baltic cities, including Revel, followed suit. It resulted in Livonia and Estonia coming under the complete control of Russia. In order to honor these victories, cannons saluted and bells rang in St. Petersburg for three days.

The young Russian fleet's first naval victory was won at Cape Gangut on July 27, 1714. The battle was small-scale, the Swedish frigate and nine more ships becoming the Russian sailors' war trophy after two hours of fighting, but the effect was huge: Peter I joyfully called this first naval victory «the second Poltava», and the Swedish royal court even fled the capital in their fear of the Russian fleet. Europe was also impressed as it witnessed the birth of a new maritime state in the Baltic region.

The recognition of Russia's new status occurred in 1716. This event is rarely recollected, perhaps due to its little military importance, but its political significance was enormous. At that time the

situation in the Baltic region allowed the Russian Tsar Peter I commanding the allied fleet of four maritime states (Russia, England, Holland and Denmark). Peter I proposed to pool efforts and attack the main Swedish naval base of Karlskrona, thus compelling Sweden to make peace. However, the Allies did not fulfill their obligations to prepare for the landing, procrastinating and thereby giving the Swedes an opportunity to strengthen the alleged landing sites of the Allied forces. As the result, the attack of the Allied squadron consisting of 83 ships which could put an end to the war did not take place. Peter I wrote to F. M. Apraksin in disappointment: «God knows that we are taking trouble over them; they miss the most appropriate time as if doing someone else's business» [1].

In fact, the Russian Tsar was not far from the truth. For his temporary allies, it was partially «someone else's business». Each country had its own goals and sought to achieve them. To gain a foothold on the shores of the Baltic Sea, Russia had to defeat Sweden, force it to sign a peace treaty and recognize Russia's conquests. That is, despite the victories, the Russian state did not reach its goal in this war yet. For Denmark, Holland and a number of other countries, such as Saxony, Hannover, Poland and Prussia, the assigned mission of weakening Sweden's power in Europe but not defeating the country was completed. Moreover, «the growth of Russia's power, the success of its weapons and the rapid development of the Baltic Fleet — all this began to cause hostility on the part of England, Hannover and Denmark. The British diplomacy was able to split the Northern Union. In 1717, Denmark and Hanover refused to assist Russia in its military operations against Sweden. England also refused to take part in joint military actions» [4].

The European states' foreign policy steps at that time were complex and confusing. Understanding the inconsistency of the international alignment of forces, Peter I went to France in 1717 to establish a closer alliance with it, hoping in this way to prevent its rapprochement with England. The result of these diplomatic efforts was the signing of a formal alliance treaty with France and Prussia in August, 1717. At the same time, Charles XII's adviser, Georg von Hertz, put forward the idea of a separate peace with Russia in order to depose the king of England with its help. But Peter I was not seduced by such a prospect, which threatened to draw Russia into the pan-European conflict.

The British diplomatic activity was predictable at that time. J. Jefferis, the English envoy to St. Petersburg, suggested that his government should withdraw ship masters from Russia in order to slow down the construction of ships in Russian shipyards. «If we do not take this... measure against the development of the tsar's navy, we will have to repent... The tsar has recently expressed in public

that his fleet and the British fleet are the two best fleets in the world; if he now puts his fleet above the fleets of France and Holland, why not assume that in a few years he will recognize his fleet equal to or even better than ours? In brief, ship-building here is as good as anywhere else in Europe, ...the tsar takes all possible measures to study marine science and make real sailors out of his subjects» [4].

However, Peter I strengthened not only the power of his fleet, but also the relations with the European courts by all possible means, including alliances by marriage. As far back as 1710, he gave his niece Anna Ioannovna in marriage to the Duke of Courland. Then he married off his son Alexei to a relative of the emperor of Austria, and gave another niece of his in marriage to the Duke of Mecklenburg. It is obvious that the Russian tsar's intentions relating to the European countries were predominantly peaceful. However, at that time dynastic marriages were closely connected to military and political unions. In this respect, Peter I considered the marriage of his daughter Anna to Carlos, the infante of Spain. Anyway, the Russian Tsar's goal of gaining access to the shores of the Baltic Sea was trading, not fighting. However, he was forced to continue fighting because Europe did not welcome either Russian soldiers or Russian merchants.

This situation forced Charles XII to start direct negotiations with Russia in May, 1718. The Åland Congress lasted until October, 1719. A. I. Osterman and Y. V. Bruce, the Russian ambassadors, received the so-called «General Conditions for Peace» from the tsar, according to which Russia would be granted the eternal possession of Ingria, Karelia, Estonia, Livonia, Riga, Revel and Vyborg. Russia promised Sweden to return Finland, where Russian troops were at that time.

The negotiations were difficult, as the Swedish negotiator Hertz often interrupted them, left to ask his king's advice, constantly changing the conditions of the peace treaty and at the same time blackmailing Russia with allegedly attractive offers made by England. When the parties approached a compromise version of the peace treaty in December, 1718, Charles XII was mysteriously killed during an attack on one of the fortresses in Norway. The negotiations paused.

Ulrika Eleanora, Charles XII's sister, whose party was for the continuation of the war against Russia and rapprochement with England, came to power in Sweden. But no matter how strong were the Anglophile and Anti-Russian sentiments at the Swedish court, Sweden could no longer fight against Russia. In February, 1719, Ulrika Eleanora was forced to propose Russia to continue peace negotiations. Meanwhile, Europe witnessed the old alliances against Russia collapsing and the new ones appearing. «And with each passing year Peter I realized more and

more clearly that France, England, and (more covertly) Prussia did everything possible to damage the Russian interests in the Baltic region without a direct declaration of war on the Baltic Sea» [9, P. 612]. These tendencies manifested themselves most clearly in early 1719, when the Vienna Agreement on Mutual Military Assistance was signed by the Elector of Hannover George I (aka the King of England), Archduke of Austria Charles VI (aka King of Hungary and the Holy Roman Emperor) and the Elector of Saxony August II (aka the Polish king). This was not just the anti-Russian discourse of European rulers. According to the English «Northern Settlement» plan, the Russian tsar was to cede Livonia, Estonia and Finland. If he refused to do that, military operations could be started, the goal of which was to confine Russia to the borders existing before the beginning of the Northern War. The implementation of this plan would annul all Peter I's victories in the Baltic region. Russia also had to return Kiev and Smolensk to Poland. It was nothing but direct aggression encouraged by England. Thus the newly formed European Union, perhaps the first one in history, was directed exclusively against the strengthening of Russia. Among the united European states there were Peter I's former allies who easily betrayed the Russian tsar under the English king's pressure.

But the newly formed «European Union» could no longer intimidate Russia, which at that time had not only mighty land-forces, but also a powerful fleet. Meanwhile, the military action went on. It was a period of guns and diplomats being equally influential. Actually, as it often happens, the path to peace went through military challenges. In June, 1719, an English squadron of 14 ships, including two ships armed with 80 guns, two ships armed with 70 guns and three ships armed with 60 guns entered the Baltic Sea under the command of Admiral D. Norris. The declared goal was to protect freedom of trade, although in fact Admiral Norris was given the secret instructions in which J. Stanhope, the state secretary of the English Cabinet of Ministers, ordered the British and Swedish squadrons to join the military forces and do everything possible to destroy the Russian fleet.

John Carteret, the English ambassador to Sweden, in his letter to Admiral Norris explicitly urged him to start military operations against Russia: «God bless you, John Norris. Every Englishman will be obliged to you if you can destroy the tsar's fleet, which, I have no doubt, you will do» [1]. To better understand the meaning of the English diplomat's appeals, it should be clarified that at that time Russia and England were not at war against each other and there were diplomatic relations between the countries.

The Swedes perceived the Åland Congress as a shield hiding the preparations for a new military campaign against Russia. From the autumn of 1719

to the summer of 1720, Sweden consistently concluded peace treaties with its former adversaries — Hannover, Prussia and Denmark. England played an active role in these negotiations, and reconciliation was inevitably achieved through territorial concessions on the part of Sweden. England played a difficult diplomatic game against Russia. On the one hand, it united the European states under its patronage, and on the other, it reconciled Sweden with these European states, pursuing one main goal: to form powerful pan-European allied forces capable of withstanding the strength of Peter I. The pinnacle of the English diplomacy was the signing of the Anglo-Swedish alliance treaty in early 1720, according to which England provided Sweden with a squadron and allocated financial assistance to the Swedish state. The last major naval battle took place on July 27, 1720, near the island of Granhamn. Interestingly, the first major naval battle in the Baltic Sea took place at Cape Gangut on the same day six years earlier. The battle at the island of Granhamn lasted for four hours and resulted in the Russian fleet's complete victory. The Swedish squadron commanded by Admiral Erik Carlsson Sjöblad was completely defeated. Four Swedish frigates and over 400 officers and sailors were captured by the Russians. The success was facilitated by the fact that the commander of the Russian fleet, General M. M. Golitsyn, managed to lure the enemy into a trap in shallow waters where several heavy Swedish frigates ran aground, which in turn prevented the other Swedish ships from maneuvering. During this fierce battle, the Russians boarded the ships, captured them and forced the Swedes to surrender. At that time, the English squadron commanded by Admiral Norris was just observing the Russian fleet's maneuvers. The obvious fact of particular importance is that Europe realized the following: the Russians beat the Swedes, and England was not able to help the latter. George I's attempted to make use of the allied forces of the European states in order to restrain Russia and push it off the Baltic coast, but all in vain.

This victory significantly affected the power balance in the Baltic region and prompted the Swedes to return to peace talks. Fredrik I, Ulrika Eleanora's husband, became the king of Sweden. «Sweden finally realized that no one would help it against Peter I, started peace talks afresh, which resulted in a peace treaty concluded in Nystad on August 30, 1721, according to which the Swedish state ceded Livonia, Estonia, Ingria and a part of Karelia with the Fief of Viborg, conquered by the Tsar's weapons to the Tsar's Majesty and his successors granting their full, unalienable and eternal right to possession and property, jurisdiction and incomes» [8, P. 606].

The difficult war lasting for 21 years finally came to its end. The victory was long-awaited, hard-fought and hard-won, as well as achieved through shedding much blood. Peter I quite reasonably believed that Russia had never concluded such a profitable peace-treaty. He commented on this issue as follows: «I offered my brother Charles to conclude a peace-treaty twice: first out of need, and then out of generosity; but he refused both times. Now let the Swedes make peace with me under duress, which is shameful for them» [5].

During the victory's celebration, the senators of Russia, in agreement with the Holy Synod and following the example of the Roman Senate, as was said in the appeal, bestowed the title of Peter the Great, Father of the Fatherland and Emperor of All Russia on the Russian tsar. So the tsar became the emperor, and Russia turned into an empire. Addressing Peter I, Chancellor Count Golovkin said: «With your vigorous labors and guidance, we, your faithful subjects, have come out of the darkness of ignorance into the world theater of glory and, thus being converted from non-existence to existence, we have been added to the community of political nations» [6]. And this was the main result of the victorious war for the Russian state.

CONCLUSION

First, let us pay attention to the goals of Sweden and Russia, the two warring states. For Peter I, it was a war for the purpose of returning the old Russian lands, lost by the country during the period of weakness; without these lands it could not successfully develop further. But for Sweden, the strongest state in Europe at that time, it was important to maintain and expand its greatness. At the first glance, both parties to the conflict had a strong motivation to seek victory. But actually it was not so. The Swedish king's goals to conquer and divide a large country could become just a short-term motivation both for the elite and ordinary soldiers, who had little understanding of the matter. As the war dragged on, the number of deaths increased as did the burden of war, so the declared goals faded and ceased to motivate the participants and allies. For Russia, regaining «grandfathers' and fathers'» lands meant not only the restoration of historical justice, but also ensuring the right to independent life and sovereign existence, the right to the future of the state and people.

Secondly, we should admit that the numerical superiority of soldiers and weapons does not always guarantee a victory in a battle. Of paramount importance is the spirit of the army based on the goals and objectives set for both a single battle and the war as a whole. Before the decisive battle at Poltava, the Swedish king encouraged his officers and soldiers with the prospect of having lunch in Russian tents. The Russian Tsar declared to his

army that he was ready to sacrifice his life, if only Russia would live in glory. The grandeur and significance of the battle proclaimed by the two sovereigns and commanders are incomparable. Therefore, the one who advocated for great and vital goals finally won in the confrontation.

Thirdly, for several centuries, the development and expansion of the Russian state went eastwards for one single reason: the westward movement was blocked by the states which were warlike and hostile towards the Russian World and attacked Russia, constantly forcing it to take self-defense measures. More specifically, Russia's interests were threatened not only from the western direction (the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth), but also from the north-west (Sweden), the south-west and the south (the Ottoman Empire and the Crimean Khanate). Peter I tore this unfriendly and even hostile semicircle, helped Russia to establish on the Baltic shores and open up the European horizons. Since then, Sweden has never regained its status of a great European state. On the other hand, Russia gained this status and has never lost it.

Fourthly, Russia's access to the Baltic Sea and the construction of a new state capital at the mouth of the Neva simultaneously with the creation of a powerful fleet caused a negative reaction on the part of the European countries' rulers. England's anti-Russian activity was especially noticeable, since Russia's becoming a maritime state threatened England's global interests and the status of the Queen of the Seas. It was England that formed the coalition of European states whose goal was to oppose Russia. The English «northern settlement» plan implied the Russian state's being deprived of not only an access to the Baltic Sea, but also the centuries-old Russian cities of Kiev and Smolensk. These cities would be handed over to Poland. Peter I's energy, the Russian fleet's might and the Russian state's strength did not allow these British plans to come true. According to the Nystad peace-treaty, Russia secured its place on the Baltic shores and its right for free navigation in the Baltic Sea.

Fifthly, the experience of the Northern War convincingly showed Peter I his allies' unreliability and led him to the understanding of the following crucial prerequisites for winning a victory: diplomacy, the strong state, army and navy, as well as the people supporting their sovereign ruler. The next decades confirmed the validity of these

conclusions made by the great Transformer of Russia, who managed to resist the aggressive plans of united Europe.

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