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Anschluss of Austria and the position of the Great Powers: the path to disaster. Based on little-known archival documents

Abstract

The annexation of the Austria by Nazi Germany in 1938 is an important element in the crisis of the Versailles system of international relations, which ended with the outbreak of World War II in Europe. The particular historical and political importance of this event consisted in the fact, that it was the first aggressive action of the Third Reich that led to the disappearance of a sovereign state from the map of Europe. However, despite the significance of this tragedy, it seems to be insufficiently studied in scientific literature. It should be pointed out that the First Austrian republic is often regarded in the Russian as well as foreign historiography as a subject of international relations completely dependent on Germany, fully following in the wake of the foreign policy of its large German-speaking neighbor. It should be pointed out that, with regard to the Soviet foreign policy, many foreign and Russian historians draw the conclusion that Austria played an insignificant role in the foreign policy planning of the Soviet Union. The little-known documents derived from the Foreign Policy Archive of the Russian Federation, the Russian State Military Archive, Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, as well as the Central Archive of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation suggest otherwise. Special attention is paid to the economic side of the Anschluss, which is rarely touched upon in modern historiography. The methodological basis of the research presented below constitute historical-genetic and historical-systemic methods that are used to trace the evolution of the European system of international relations of that period. In this way, a multidimensional approach to the issues considered in the article allows us to recreate a holistic picture of the events of that time, as well as to restore the true cause-and-effect relationships between them. This circumstance is of particular importance in the context of the increasingly frequent attempts to rewrite the history of the Second World War and belittle the efforts of the Soviet Union to prevent it. The authors conclude that based on the new archival documents, it is possible to draw an unambiguous conclusion that the Anschluss became one of the key moments in European history, which made the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe inevitable. It consolidated the main foreign policy line of Western democracies to appease the aggressors, eliminated the last serious obstacles to the union of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy and demonstrated the impossibility of implementing in practice a collective security strategy based on the proposals of the Soviet Union on a united anti-German front.

Key words: Anschluss, Austria, Germany, USSR, Great Britain, France, Versailles system, World War II, collective security, appeasement of the aggressor.

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