On 5 July 1914, Alexander Hoyos (1876-1937), a leading hawk in the Austrian Foreign Ministry, and Count Ladislaus von Szögyény (1841-1916), the Habsburg ambassador to Berlin, met Wilhelm II, German Emperor (1859-1941) and Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg (1856-1921), the German chancellor. Later that day, Bethmann Hollweg assured Szögyény that Germany would support her ally, whatever measures the Austro-Hungarian leaders decided to take against Serbia.

Germany’s Faulty Assumptions

In issuing the blank cheque, German leaders made a number of faulty assumptions. They believed that Austria-Hungary was ready to initiate war against Serbia immediately and that a rapid strike would present Europe with a *fait accompli*. They reckoned that the Tsarist regime was not militarily
ready to risk a general European war. Moreover, they thought that monarchical solidarity would trump pan-Slav sentiment, that the Tsar would not support a state that had allegedly harboured the assassins of the heir to the Habsburg throne. In other words, the "blank cheque" was designed first and foremost to secure a triumph, either political or military, for the Central Powers in the Balkans. The "blank cheque" was vital in bolstering Austro-Hungarian leaders in their decision to embark on war against Serbia.

**Attempted Withdrawal**

Bethmann Hollweg had also built into his calculations the risk of a general European war and in supporting Austria-Hungary he believed that were a European war to happen, better that it happen in 1914 than several years later. This scenario, however, was not considered a probability on 5 July. When that prospect became a probability in late July, Bethmann Hollweg and Wilhelm II sought, but failed, to amend the cheque.

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**Selected Bibliography**


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