

Illusion and disappointment: mutual perception of each other's support in Russia and France during the First World War. – ANDREY PAVLOV

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Russian Empire and France became allies in 1892 and by the outbreak of the Great War they'd had a considerable experience of interaction. The General Staffs of both sides have elaborated plans of mutual military support and the two societies have developed their expectations concerning the ally's role in an eventual war. The Russians were thinking about the French economic resources, the French were imagining the Russian steamroller crushing German armies on its way to Berlin. This image originally seemed correct, when the Russian invasion in Western Prussia has helped the French to win the crucial battle at Marne. But just at the end of 1914, only several months after the beginning of the war, both allies for the first time expressed some dissatisfaction about the partner's military achievements.

The fading hope of rapid victory strengthened this dissatisfaction and disappointment. The same time, growing interconnection of the Western and the Eastern fronts became absolutely evident. In various periods of 1915-1916 the opinion that one ally was trying to shift the major burden of war away from his front, making the other's burden heavier, was widespread both in Russia and in France. During the "Great retreat" of the Russian army in 1915 the Russian newspapers openly stated that the French allies of Russia have abandoned the Russian army. Later the French Commander-in-Chief General Joffre said to the Russian military representative in France in a temper: "It seems that we are fighting alone! The others just ask us for help!" Although during some periods of temporary military success mutual perception was ameliorating, by 1917, when Russia abandoned the Entente, both sides had already lost their confidence in the partner's sincere willingness to help. That attitude seriously affected the relations between Russia and the West after the War.

The paper examines the origins, causes, effects and evolution of mutual perception of the Russian and the French armies and societies during the First World War.