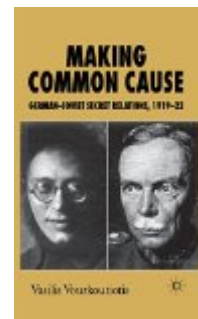


Vasilis Vourkoutiotis. *Making Common Cause: German-Soviet Secret Relations, 1919-1922.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. vi + 200 pp. \$69.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-230-00644-7.



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Eighty-five years ago, in the small Italian resort of Rapallo, Germany and Soviet Russia agreed to establish diplomatic relations and renounce all mutual territorial and financial claims following World War I. Although harmless in its contents, the Rapallo treaty has become a symbol of an anti-western alliance with the potential to undermine the peace. To use a contemporary metaphor, at Rapallo the two pariah states of the postwar period were suspected of having formed an "axis of evil." This perception is still alive today. At the sixtieth anniversary of the German surrender in World War II, the late Stanislaw Lem called the German-Russian venture to construct a new gas pipeline through the Baltic sea (thus bypassing Poland and other East European countries) a "new Rapallo".[1]

What fuels the Rapallo myth is the fact that in the 1920s, Germany and Soviet Russia secretly cooperated in military affairs. By the terms of the Versailles treaty, the Reichswehr had been radically reduced to an army of 100,000 soldiers and strongly restricted in its development of military technology and hardware. As a way to circumvent

the treaty, German leaders found Soviet territory a useful place to train military staff and develop armament projects. German companies constructed military aircrafts as well as tanks and produced all kinds of materiel, including chemical weapons. In return, the Red Army supported the German military and shared technological know-how. This cooperation has been well examined over the past decades, and our knowledge of events has been expanded with documents from the opened Russian archives.[2] In his new book, Vasilis Vourkoutiotis aims to explore the establishment of this secret Russian-German cooperation and the ways it accorded with official political relations between the two nations. In his five-chapter work, Vourkoutiotis examines the stages of the establishment of the relations during the period 1919-22, tracing them from the first exploratory talks held under rather adventurous circumstances to the launch of secret military cooperation "under the umbrella of Rapallo" (p. 137).

In the first chapter, Vourkoutiotis depicts the chaotic situation in eastern Europe following the breakdown of the Russian and German monar-

chies, which led to some unusual coalitions between the various parties to the conflict. One could easily get the impression that almost everyone was somehow at war with everyone else. It is, therefore, not surprising that both defeated Germany and the political outcast Soviet Russia found it useful to identify common interests and see what could be done about them. Vourkoutiotis describes in detail the various attempts of both sides to initiate contact. He describes Karl Radek's famous "political salon" in his cell at Berlin-Moabit prison, which later blossomed when he lived more comfortably under house arrest, where he received high-ranking visitors to discuss the possibilities of political, economic, and military cooperation. Behind the plans for the latter stood General Hans von Seeckt, the most influential military leader in the first years of the Weimar Republic. Seeckt hoped to forge a common military front against Poland along with a collaboration in armament affairs.

Vourkoutiotis explains that Soviet intentions were ambiguous. From the standpoint of Russian *raison d'état*, cooperation with Germany was considered useful, but in terms of ideology, the Bolsheviks continued to support their German brother revolutionaries. Seeckt, however, pursued his plans and sent Enver Pasha, the Ottoman Empire's former minister of war, as his emissary to Moscow. Enver, who had also visited Radek in his "salon," was hiding in Berlin at the time, as he was wanted by the Entente for "war crimes" (as Vourkoutiotis puts it [p. 36]). It would have been worth mentioning that Enver, a member of the Young Turk government, was one of the persons responsible for the Armenian Genocide. Enver was, however, not the only channel of communication. In November 1919, Viktor Kopp, an old companion of Leon Trotsky, arrived illegally in Berlin. Only a few months later, he became the Soviets' authorized representative to negotiate the problem of POWs. This appointment provided Kopp with the necessary cover to conduct all kinds of activities: heat up the revolution, discuss trade matters with

the Foreign Office, and make important contacts with the military. On the other side, General von Seeckt made his own arrangements, and established a task group "Russia" (Sondergruppe R), led by Oskar von Niedermayer, "the German Lawrence of Arabia," who, in the summer of 1921, traveled to Moscow.[4]

Vourkoutiotis emphasizes the tensions between and within the two countries. He points out that in Soviet Russia, Georgii Chicherin, the People's Commissar of External Affairs, was in charge of the secret negotiations, while the People's Commissar of War, Leon Trotsky, and Vladimir Lenin had less involvement. In Germany, in contrast, the moving parties behind the cooperation were General Seeckt and the Reichswehr, while the German Foreign Office did not grasp for a long time what was going on. In light of this state of affairs, Vourkoutiotis concludes that the Rapallo treaty "provided the necessary diplomatic camouflage" for secret military collaboration. Both Germany and Russia, he is convinced, made "common cause against the West, with implications to be felt in the decades to come" (pp. 172-173).

The main strength of the book is Vourkoutiotis's examination of both Russian and German archival sources. For this reason, he is able to analyze how interest in constructing mutual relations grew on both sides. The book also benefits from the author's consistent focus on contemporaneous developments in general trends in international relations. Thus, his study possesses a depth that contributes to a proper understanding of the underlying reasons for Soviet-German secret relations of the time. Vourkoutiotis employs a promising, productive approach, and readers will learn some interesting details from this study.

However, it must be said that the book has substantial shortcomings. Spelling mistakes, annoying as they are, occur in every book and they may not be noteworthy even if such a distinguished historical figure as Aristide Briand (not Briande, pp. 130, 196) is concerned; and it may be

nitpicking to note that Vourkoutiotis confuses Foreign Minister Walter Simons with State Secretary Ernst von Simson (pp. 161-162) and that he conflates in the index Hugo Haase, the leader of the Independent Social Democratic Party (and for a short time a member of the Council of People's Deputies) with Colonel Otto Hasse, a member of Sondergruppe R (and from 1923-25 chief of the Truppenamt, as the General Staff was called at that time [p. 197]). Still, one cannot avoid raising an eyebrow when reading that Simons "proposed sending an emissary (a Second State Secretary named Ausamt)" to Moscow (p. 108), drawing upon a Russian source. "Ausamt," however, is not the name of a person, but rather a Russian acronym for "Auswärtiges Amt" (Foreign Office). The source likely refers to Gustav Behrendt, head of the Eastern division in the Foreign Office. It is remarkable that Behrendt is mentioned only once throughout the entire book, and then referred to as only "another member of the foreign ministry" (p. 131). A closer look at this diplomat would have been illuminating, since he had a rather reserved attitude toward Soviet Russia. Behrendt had a contentious relationship with his subordinate Ago von Maltzan, who was in charge of the Russian unit. When Reich Chancellor Joseph Wirth headed the Foreign Office briefly in 1921, he sacked Behrendt and replaced him with Maltzan. This move was quite certainly politically motivated. It was Wirth who, with the assistance of Maltzan, pushed Walther Rathenau to sign the Rapallo treaty.

The sum of such flaws--only some have been listed--makes one question the author's familiarity with central actors in his research. He also appears less well read in the current secondary literature on the topic than might be desirable. Vourkoutiotis might have concluded his manuscript before Eva Ingeborg Fleischhauer's contentious article on Rathenau and the Rapallo treaty appeared[3] and before Niels Joeres's dissertation on Ago von Maltzan was made available on the Internet.[4] But it is simply unfortunate that he did not

consider J. David Cameron's intriguing argument that by furthering cooperation with Soviet Russia, German foreign policy aimed at transforming an aggressive Bolshevik regime into a more moderate one.[5] A number of standard references are omitted, in particular: Vasili Chernoperov's studies on Viktor Kopp,[6] Hans-Jürgen Steidt's book on Oskar von Niedermayer,[7] and the biography of Walther Rathenau by Christian Schoelzel, one of the first researchers to explore the papers of the assassinated foreign minister held in the Military Archives in Moscow.[8]

In his work, Schoelzel convincingly demonstrates that Rathenau, then Minister of Recovery, had been informed by Wirth about the secret military relations as early as the summer of 1921.[9] Vourkoutiotis alleges nevertheless, without referring to a source, that Seeckt informed the Foreign Minister "immediately upon the signing of Rapallo" (p. 143). It has also been established that the Foreign Office (Maltzan) had been briefed on military contacts that summer, before Niedermayer's first trip to Moscow, but Maltzan likely had obtained such knowledge from informants much earlier. For this reason, Chicherin advised Lenin in August 1921 that "the most influential persons up to the Chancellor were won to the project." [10] Thus, Vourkoutiotis's claim that the Foreign Office was unaware of the military plans must be modified. It is rather likely that leading diplomats condoned the activities but, with respect to the tense relations to the Entente, preferred not to get involved. Likewise, Vourkoutiotis's assessment that neither Lenin nor Trotsky played a significant role in these arrangements turns out to be untenable. True, Chicherin's diplomats were in charge of the negotiations, but as Sergei Gorlov demonstrates, almost every detail of them was discussed and approved by the Politburo. The entire ruling class of Soviet Russia, Gorlov concludes, supported military cooperation with Germany and regarded it as "important, if not as the most important course of Soviet policy at that time." [11]

Given this attitude among the Soviet leadership, we must also reconsider the general political implications of the German-Soviet collaboration. At first glance, the parallels between "Rapallo" and the Hitler-Stalin pact seem striking. Vourkoutiotis cautiously alludes to them (pp. 4, 169). Fleischhauer argues similarly, but more directly. According to Fleischhauer, from the very beginning, the Rapallo treaty had an offensive purpose that could be deployed at any time.[12] No doubt, Weimar-era foreign policy was generally revisionist, even the *Erfüllungspolitik* (fulfillment policy), and so too the underlying intentions of the Rapallo treaty. First of all, this revisionist mood was applied to Article 116 of the Versailles treaty, which entitled Russia to demand reparations from Germany. Building diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia gave Germany the opportunity to shape foreign policy actively, also with respect to the Entente. But there no agreement was reached whatsoever upon a joint military action against Poland like that concluded in the secret protocol of 1939. Moreover, for Hitler, the pact with Stalin was a tactical move, for he never had given up his plan to attack the Soviet Union in the short term, turn it into a German *Lebensraum*, and kill or enslave the local population. In contrast, the collaboration in trade and military affairs during the 1920s was a strategic partnership with long term, primarily economic prospects. Another aspect of the partnership was, as Cameron suggests, to "evolutionize" communist rule. For Soviet Russia, on the other hand, the main goal was to prevent the constitution of a united western front that might reinforce Soviet international isolation and, in the worst case, organize an overthrow of the regime. Military cooperation with Germany and the ongoing rumors about it were a kind of guarantee that tensions between Germany and the Entente would persist. Germany, however, did not assume a specific Russian orientation or a specific anti-western orientation. Instead, leaders resumed their efforts to settle disputes with the Entente, which eventually led to the Locarno agreement in

1925. On June 11th of that year, Gustav Stresemann, the German Foreign Minister, wrote in his diary: "To celebrate a marriage with communist Russia would mean to go to bed with the killer of one's own fatherland." [13] This does not exactly sound like "making common cause."

Notes

[1]. Stanislaw Lem, "Gaz i Rapallo," in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, May 8, 2005, <http://tygodnik.onet.pl/0,1227663,druk.html>.

[2]. S. A. Gorlov, *Sovershenno sekretno: Al'ians Moskva-Berlin, 1920-1933. Voenno-politicheskie otnosheniia SSSR-Germaniia* (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2001); and Manfred Zeidler, *Reichswehr und Rote Armee, 1920-1933. Wege einer ungewöhnlichen Zusammenarbeit* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1993).

[3]. Eva Ingeborg Fleischhauer, "Rathenau in Rapallo. Eine notwendige Korrektur des Forschungsstandes," *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 54 (2006): 365-415.

[4]. Niels Joeres, *Der Architekt von Rapallo. Der deutsche Diplomat Ago von Maltzan im Kaiserreich und in der frühen Weimarer Republik* (PhD diss., University of Heidelberg, 2005), available at <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/volltexte/2006/6751/pdf/Pflichtveroeffentlichung.pdf>.

[5]. J. David Cameron, "To Transform the Revolution into an Evolution: Underlying Assumptions of German Foreign Policy toward Soviet Russia, 1919-27," *Journal of Contemporary History* 40 (2005): 7-24.

[6]. V. L. Chernoperev, "Deiatel'nost' sovetskogo diplomata V. L. Koppa po vozvrashcheniiu na rodinu rossiiskikh voennoplennykh (1919-1920 gg.)," *Pervaiia mirovaia voina: poiski podkhodov k issledovaniu, priglashenie k dialogu. Doklady akademii nauk (voennaia istoriia)* 5 (2006): 188-198, at <http://www.sgu.ru/faculties/historical/departments/oinp/avn2/docs/23.pdf>; V. L. Chernoperev, "Sovetsko-germanskoe otnosheniia

vesnoi-letom 1920 g. (K voprosu o prioritete gosudarstvennykh ili klassovykh interesov v sovetskoj vneshnoi politike," *Voina i mir v istoricheskom protsesse (X-XX vv)* (Volgograd: Peremena, 2003), Chast' 1, at <http://www.rusgermhist.ru/RusRaboti/RusChernoperov/chernoperov-01-01.htm>; V. L. Chernoperev, "Neudachi vneshnetorgovoi deiatel'nosti missii V. L. Koppa v Germanii (1919-1920 gg)," *Vestnik Nizhegorodskogo universiteta im. N. I. Lobachevskii. Seriya Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, politologiia, regiovedenie* 1, no. 2 (2004): 112-122, at http://www.unn.ru/?file=vestniki_journals&anum=1232.

[7]. Hans-Ulrich Steidt, *Berlin, Kabul, Moskau. Oskar von Niedermayer und Deutschlands Geopolitik* (Munich: Universitas, 2002).

[8]. Christian Schoelzel, *Walther Rathenau. Eine Biographie* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2006).

[9]. Schoelzel, *Walther Rathenau*, 365f.

[10]. Gorlov, *Sovershenno*, 55.

[11]. Ibid., 44.

[12]. Fleischhauer, "Rathenau in Rapallo," 414.

[13]. Quoted from Hans W. Gatzke, "Von Rapallo nach Berlin. Stresemann und die deutsche Rußlandpolitik," *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 4 (1956): 1-29, at 12.

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