



37 Days: Countdown to World War One

5 July: Germany promises to back Austria-Hungary

Prof Margaret MacMillan:

Over lunch at the Potsdam Palace the Austrian ambassador gives the letter from Vienna to the Kaiser. At first Wilhelm is non-committal. The Ambassador later writes:

Austrian Ambassador:

The Kaiser answered he could give no definite answer before having taken council with the Imperial chancellor.

Margaret Macmillan:

Coffee is served and the Ambassador tries again:

Austrian Ambassador:

When I again called attention to the seriousness of the situation, the Kaiser authorized me to inform our gracious majesty that we might in this case, as in all others, rely upon Germany's full support.

Margaret Macmillan:

This promise will later come to be known as the Blank Cheque. Whatever Austria-Hungary does, Germany will back it up, even if it comes to a war with Russia. The Kaiser explains his thinking:

Kaiser:

Russia's attitude will no doubt be hostile, but I have been prepared for this for years. Should a war between Austria-Hungary and Russia be unavoidable, Austria-Hungary can rest assured that Germany, your old faithful ally, will stand at your side.