CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ‘REBIRTH OF GREATER GERMANY’:
THE AUSTRO-GERMAN ALLIANCE AND THE
OUTBREAK OF WAR*

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In a lecture given in the spring of 1916, Hugo Preuß, then Professor of Politics and Constitutional Law at the now defunct Business College (Handelshochschule) of Berlin, drew attention to the war’s repercussions on German social and intellectual life: ‘In the sufferings and sacrifices it imposes, in the outrage it provokes, in the prospects it opens, so much has become uncertain which had seemed to most concluded and decided once and for all.’ Preuß’s assertion of a ‘new intellectual orientation,’ based upon the observation of changes in certain thought patterns and role models caused by the war, did not hint at a general condemnation of Imperial Germany’s authoritarian system. Nor did it signify an end to the confidence the majority of Germans placed in their political and military leaders—such considerations were far too premature in the spring of 1916. Rather Preuß, who would later become one of the founding fathers of the Weimar Republic, was referring to national identity, to the way in which Reich Germans perceived themselves as a distinct political and cultural community. He was trying to describe the redefinition of Austro-German relations on a popular level, the supposed beginning of the end of the Lesser German paradigm of 1866/71 and the re-emergence of a Greater German sentiment, instigated by a novel solidarity between the German Reich and the Habsburg Empire.¹

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¹ Hugo Preuß, ‘Großdeutsch, Kleindeutsch und die Idee des nationalen Staates,’ in idem, Obrigkeitstaat und großdeutscher Gedanke. Zwei Vorträge (Jena: 1916), pp. 29–57 (pp. 30–1). For Austro-German relations more generally see Katzenstein (1976), Kann
My research aims to delve into this very process and to analyze the implications of First World War comradeship-in-arms with Austria-Hungary for German national identity. Taking into account the fact that the First World War was a clash of alliances rather than a struggle between isolated states, several studies have already dealt with the complicated and often tense relationship between the two allies. So far, however, they have concentrated on political and diplomatic aspects, economic issues or matters of military cooperation. They have shown how over the course of the war and after various arguments concerning issues such as joint warfare and strategic planning, the Polish question, or the *Mitteleuropa* project—to name but a few—the Danube Monarchy gradually slipped into the position of a dependent vassal of Germany.\(^2\)

Unsurprisingly, conflicts between the allies materialized mainly in the secret sphere of diplomats and generals. Pejorative remarks such as Ludendorff’s complaint about the ‘wretchedness of Austria’ or Falkenhayn’s reference to the Habsburg ally as ‘a carcass’ and its troops as ‘flabby’ and ‘dopey’ were not meant for the general public, which had to form its own image of the war’s course and of Germany’s relationship with its allies.\(^3\) My doctoral thesis seeks to deal with such questions of perception and interpretation, relating the Austro-German discourse to the broader debate about German war ideology and nationalism, the mobilization of intellectuals, and the impact of war on German society and culture.\(^4\)

It is not my intention in this chapter to give a comprehensive analysis of the ‘brotherhood of arms’ and its implications, which would have to take into account issues such as the role and perception of Hungary (and the Hungarian Germans), competing historiographical concepts,