The three excellent articles presented here have appraised the value of the Dual Alliance for the major national groups in the empire—the Germans, Hungarians, and Slavs. They have discussed not so much the diplomatic aspects of the question as the effect of the alignment on the domestic situation in the state. The first and third authors have presented a generally negative judgment; the second has seen the alliance as the only practical and acceptable choice for the Hungarian leaders. In the commentary I will emphasize the international ramifications and will argue that the alliance was the single possible alternative for the monarchy given the world situation at the time and the dual structure of the state. Because of limitations of space I will not refer in detail to the arguments presented in the three articles; in general, I disagree with the negative judgment given in the first article, and with some of the details of the third article, but not with many of its conclusions. I agree with the presentation of the problem in the second article.

Before discussing the alliance in detail, I would first like to emphasize that alliances are no more than contracts or statements that the parties involved will act together under certain circumstances. Treaties alone do not affect national sentiments. Whether the Dual Alliance had been signed or not, Germans in the monarchy would have been attracted to Berlin; the Hungarian leaders would have seen Germany as a logical ally; the Slavic nationalities would have divided according to their own interests. The Dual Alliance of 1879 contained no assumptions of eternal friendship or undying loyalty between the treaty partners; it was simply a defensive alliance directed against a Russian attack. Although it had a limit of five years, it was repeatedly renewed. The pact was the second choice of Bismarck and his government, which would have preferred a revival of the Three Emperors Alliance. The signature of the document, no more than that of any other similar treaty, did not imply that the two partners have had, or should have had, similar internal policies or that they should always act in unison in the international field. Certainly, the participants in the Franco-Russian agreements of the 1890s were far more separated in these respects than Vienna and Berlin were in 1879.

Such an agreement also did not mean that the two members were obligated to support each other’s economic interests, as Professor Wank seems to imply. Alliance members have usually retained an attitude of commercial rivalry. The products of the European Common Market and the United States are in competition around the world although these nations form part of
NATO. At the time of this writing, Japanese small cars are causing real problems for the American automotive industry, although close ties exist between the two countries in foreign relations. Nor is the support of imperial enterprises guaranteed within an alliance system. The United States played a major role in the disintegration of the British and French empires after 1945 despite the diplomatic connections of the governments.

The Dual Alliance should also be considered not as a single document, but as forming part of an alliance system which was of immense advantage to the monarchy, in particular in the first decade after its signature. The partnership with Berlin was certainly not a new policy; it formed a continuation of the very effective combination of the Holy Alliance of the years after 1815 and the Three Emperors Alliance of the 1870s. This alignment, in particular the link with Germany, protected the monarchy in the Balkan crisis of 1875-78, when Bismarck resolutely refused to repay the debt of 1870 and back Russia against the Habsburg Empire. It was the attitude of Berlin which finally compelled the Russian government to abandon the terms of the Treaty of San Stefano and accept a settlement of major advantage to Vienna. The partnership with Germany was also the basis of the network of agreements which the monarchy established in the next years. In 1881, it will be remembered, the Three Emperors Alliance was renewed; in 1882 the Triple Alliance, including Italy, was signed. In addition, in 1881 an agreement was concluded with Serbia which reduced that state to a vassal position; a pact was made with Romania in 1883 which was favorable to Vienna. These alliances gave the monarchy an excellent defensive position. With possible Italian, Romanian, and Serbian opposition contained, and with secure boundaries, the state should have been able to concentrate on the solution of its domestic problems. Without the German connection and the apparent backing of German military power, it is difficult to conceive that these secondary combinations could have been so easily concluded. Romania and Italy, for instance, much preferred to ally with Germany alone.

The agreement also provided advantages for the Habsburg offensive designs in the Balkans. Bismarck did indeed back Vienna’s policy in Bulgaria by assisting in the conclusion of the Mediterranean agreements of 1887. The period of cooperation between the empire and Russia from 1897 to 1908 similarly resulted from the firm position which the alliance system gave Vienna. Without this backing the Russian government would have had fewer fears about its position in the Balkans. Later strong German support was given to the Habsburg annexation of Bosnia-Hercegovina and their Albanian policies.

Equally important to these considerations, however, was the fact that the Habsburg government had in reality no alternative to an agreement with Germany. The monarchy was not an island like England; it could not follow a policy of “free hands” and remain outside of all alliance systems. A pact