Otto von Habsburg

The Battle of Königgrätz not only meant the end of the Holy Roman Empire, but it also destroyed the balance of power in Europe.

The areas of German settlement had no natural frontiers. For this reason the function of a central power fell to the German nation. The alliance between it and the Danube Empire was of vital importance for both. Without German support the Danube countries could never have withstood the various attacks from the east, whereas on the other hand the countries of the Danube area covered Germany's south-eastern flank. Through the alliance of the Austrian Empire with the German Confederation a truly Great Power existed in the heart of Europe before Königgrätz, at the same time a bridge between East and West. Austria's expulsion from the German Confederation by Prussia deprived the Danube Empire of western support at the very moment when signs of a fresh attack from the east were immanent.

For the Germans in the Danube area the Battle of Königgrätz was the prelude to tragedy. The triumph of nationalism in Germany through Prussia was followed by the rise of nationalism in Bohemia and the Carpathian countries, so that the German speaking population soon found themselves a

minority with no rights. A straight line can be drawn from Königgrätz to Potsdam. But it was the inhabitants of Prussia who suffered most after Königgrätz, for as a result of Bismarck's ‚kleindeutsch' policy many of them, like the Sudeten Germans, lost not only their homeland but also their liberty.

Today we find ourselves — on a different level, of course — facing a situation very similar to that before the Battle of Königgrätz. A century ago there was a Western Europe and an Eastern Europe, with Central Europe between them, weakened by conflict between the Great Powers. Viewed from the world standpoint, Europe is today the centre between the two world powers. The decisive problem is whether Europe is to survive as an independent and therefore balancing central unit, which can only be achieved by a united Europe.