



The First World War and the Paris Peace Conference with a Special Focus on the 'Republic of Austria' – On the Shards of its Empire

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Abstract: The world recently celebrated the centenary of the peace treaties after World War I (1919) as a promising start for a new more peaceful world. 2021 became an underestimated anniversary of the eastern federal state of Burgenland; having become part of Austria in 1921–the complete borders of the young state were not established until 1922. Though, Europe and its society were struggling with many circumstances in the aftermath of the war. Not only the war and further conflicts had claimed many victims. The Spanish flu was devastating for the already weakened population – to a lesser extent, and though economic, social and political challenges reminding on the pandemic situation we are currently facing. Economy and supply lay fallow. And yet the countries were at least politically stabilized. The once mighty Austro-Hungarian Empire was split into many new nations due to the Fourteen-Points-Treaty; decisions that had deeper consequences than they were entitled to. The symbol of Austria-Hungary, the emperor, had gone into exile. Despite a promising start, stability in the young republic stumbled, ultimately sowing seeds for the National Socialism. It might have been the absence of the Habsburg Empire that opened the doors to the annexation of Austria and its steps into World War II with all its consequences. The paper reflects the start and the consequences of the First World War.

Keywords: Habsburg, Austria-Hungary, Sarajevo, Germany, Peace Treaty of Versailles, Fourteen Points, League of Nations.

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INTRODUCTION

The eastern federal state of Burgenland is celebrating 100 years of membership in Austria this year. The state has completed its present form when the Leitha River ran as the border between two losers - Austria and Hungary. In 1919 German West Hungary was added to St. Germain and in 1920 to Trianon Austria. Mainly responsible for this was a US major, a geographer in the service of the reorganization committee of the US diplomat Archibald Cary Coolidge. With his report Wilson was able to enforce the self-determination of this part in the Paris peace negotiations. But like so many of the peace negotiations, this decision was made partly over the heads of others. Up until the signing of the Trianon Peace Treaty on June 4, 1920 or its ratification by Hungary in July 1921, intense haggling over Burgenland began, as in the Treaty of Saint Germain in September 1919 the Allies

awarded Austria parts of the predominantly German-speaking counties of western Hungary. There were ongoing direct, but not always official, talks between the two states, in which Hungary tried several times to persuade Austria to renounce at least parts of German West Hungary, including Ödenburg. The focus was not so much on national or ethnic reasons, but on the question of economic ties. Hungary also negotiated with France about possible support in revision issues. Despite the same prohibition of any form of agitation in the Venice Protocols, a real propaganda battle broke out on both sides in the run-up to the conflicts. When the referendum finally took place - held on December 14, 1921 in Ödenburg and on December 16, 1921 in eight prudent towns by secret ballot, the region's majority decided to stay with Hungary. With Sopron, Burgenland had lost its natural capital; while Sopron lost its hinterland, but it saved that deep bitterness

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that poisoned life elsewhere well into the Second Republic. Other former Austria-Hungary regions such as South Bohemia and Moravia, Lower Styria and especially South Tyrol became part of their own newly formed states, contrary to US President Woodrow Wilson's will.

Thus, The Habsburg Empire ended. Its significance in world politics might sometimes be overestimated, though; an incident in Sarajevo made it the power that pulled the trigger...

At the spark of conflict

Apart from the tensions among their conquered regions, the Austro-Hungarian Empire participated only indirectly in the European power game around the world. Europe had reached its zenith at the end of the nineteenth century. In the winter months of 1884/85, the so-called Berlin conference or Congo conference had taken place in Berlin. In spite of the name, all European powers were sharing 'their' continent Africa [i]. Another Western power on the other side of the Atlantic took part, the United States of America that should rule the 20th century economically, technologically and militarily. At this time, the USA gave up their isolating tendencies, and intervened more in world politics. Tensions about Cuba had already led to war between the USA and Spain in 1898. At both world wars the States became a crucial factor then.

Moreover, there was another problem that only could lead into conflict: All the Great Powers at the time were engaged in an intense competition of expansion. Thus, Austria-Hungary also had to expand. But because it was hemmed in by geography to the west and by Germany to the north, it had to expand to the south and to the east, and specifically into the Balkans. However, this automatically put it into conflict with Russia, which was also expanding into that region, too. This in turn, Austria-Hungary had to ally and to stay allied with Germany.

Decades under Emperor Franz Joseph's rule (1848-1916) had been peaceful. In 1889, the Crown Prince of Austria and his mistress were found dead as a result of suicide (Mayerling incident). It was one among many rolling stones that caused further destabilization of the monarchy and contributed to the beginnings of what would become World War I. Next in line for the succession became Franz Ferdinand.

In the eve of war

From 1908 onwards, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was already more and more involved in the conflicts in the Balkans. After several decades it became apparent that the 'Compromise of 1867' had not brought about a completely satisfying solution

for the Habsburg Monarchy's problems. The demands of the altogether eleven bigger nationalities of the Habsburg Monarchy, on which special stress had been put, could obviously only be met by means of a completely new and radical restructuring of the Empire. Hopes that this goal might be achieved were, above all, placed in the heir apparent to the throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Emperor Franz Joseph had, however, not assigned significant political responsibilities to his nephew restricting him to a merely military role which included supreme command of the armed forces in case of war. In the Dalmatian areas (later before the civil war in the end of the 20th century called Yugoslavia), the people wanted to get independent. They felt as Slavs suppressed, particularly by the Hungarians being part of the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy, where Franz Joseph ruled. Austria-Hungary, an empire of 50 million people, and tsarist Russia had for decades pursued a policy of confrontation over influence in eastern Europe, leading already to the First Balkan War (1912-13) that anticipated the larger conflict [ii]. Having concluded peace with the Italians it found itself engulfed in war with no fewer than four small nations over the possession of Balkan territories: Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria and later Montenegro [iii]. The intervention by the larger European powers brought about an end to this First Balkan War. It is crucial to look at the actors and decision-makers who were at work during the conflict between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, the two states involved in the original Sarajevo crisis that led to the war. The numerous small nations that had found themselves under Turkish or Austro-Hungarian rule for many years stirred themselves in nationalistic fervor [iv].

Those tensions, the hatred and the nationalistic tendency made a visit by Franz Ferdinand rather risky. There had been some knowledge of an actual plot, but instead of a proper warning, the Serbian ambassador spoke in terms of a hypothetical assassination attempt and suggested that a state visit by Franz Ferdinand on the day of Kosovo (June 28th) was too provocative. On that date, on a Sunday, while visiting Sarajevo, Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie von Hohenberg were assassinated by a Serbian nationalist, which had a far-reaching impact on world history [v]. The Bosnian Gavrilo Princip belonged to a group of men who wanted Bosnia to become part of Serbia [vi]. That is the irony of history. When the heir presumptive, Archduke Franz Ferdinand visited Sarajevo with the intention to suggest a federalization to balance certain injustice among the peoples in that huge empire, he and his wife were assassinated, precipitating Austria-Hungary's declaration of war against Serbia. Even

Franz Josef had already announced his intention of granting a form of self-government to Austria's Slav population. However, he was frustrated in this by German and Magyar politicians who effectively ran the empire, and who adamantly opposed any extension of power-sharing to include the Slavs. Both their failures to enact change led to increased dissatisfaction among Austrian Czechs and Serbs, as well as causing a further straining of relations with Russia, the natural champion of the Slav peoples.

After the assassination, Austria-Hungary issued Serbia with a series of demands which would force them to investigate the killing and crack down on anti-Austrian propaganda, demands that were mostly accepted by Serbia. From the Austro-

Hungarian perspective it was Serbia in particular that bore the political responsibility for the assassination of the heir of the Austrian throne in Sarajevo. A diplomatic-political solution to the conflict with Serbia did not seem possible anymore for the Habsburg monarchy following that incident.

A sticker book with the title "Der Weltkrieg" ("The World War"), published by a cigarette company without publication date and inherited by the main author's grandfather Franz Forsthuber, reveals by the title that another global conflict had not been expected. The pictures – colored photographs – still make the optimism obvious at war's beginning (fig. 1).



Fig-1: 1. Arrest of the murderer in Sarajevo, 2. The French head of state visits Russia, 3. "Impending danger of war" - mobilization, 4. Recruitment office in France, 5. March of the field army, 6. Military transport

The Austro-Hungarian Chief of Staff and Commander-in-Chief, General Franz Baron Conrad von Hötzendorf, wanted a military response from the beginning. Conrad had previously argued that the Monarchy was surrounded by enemies who needed to be defeated individually, before they could combine. In other words, he wanted a war against the Serbs and Russians, followed later by a confrontation with Italy. The Foreign Minister Leopold Count von Berchtold, the Habsburg foreign minister, generally agreed with Conrad's analysis. Berchtold took no strong position in the crisis [vii]. He was apparently convinced by Conrad, and his only hesitation involved the need to prepare public opinion for war. The only real opposition to a policy of confrontation and war came from the Hungarian Prime Minister, Count István Tisza. Tisza

was personally opposed to militarism and took the risks of war more seriously than Conrad [viii]. Also, as a Magyar, Tisza realized that a Habsburg victory would be a domestic defeat for Hungarians, too: If Austria annexed Serbia, the delicate ethnic balance in the Dual Monarchy would be lost. When the Austrian Council of Ministers met again on the 7th of July, the majority favored war. To satisfy Tisza, the council agreed to present demands to Serbia, rather than declare war at once. Tisza tried later to increase the prestige of the monarchy and to get parity with Germany but also to negotiate peace [ix]. In the belief that a diplomatic victory alone would not be enough to destroy Serbia as a threat, the demands were deliberately to be written in such extreme terms that Serbia could not accept them. Vienna first sought the reaction of the German ally. The Austrian

ambassador in Berlin found that the Germans, especially Emperor Wilhelm II, supported a war to punish Serbia and offered their full support. Wilhelm II had offered the 'carte blanche' to Austria-Hungary on the 6th of July: Austria-Hungary was promised unconditional support from Germany regardless whatever action the Habsburg Empire decided to take in punishing Serbia. This was in clear contrast to events during the Balkan War of 1912, when Berlin refused to back Vienna in any intervention. Like the Austrians, the Germans feared a future war with Russia. Franz Josef who left the conduct of the war strictly to his military officials, accepted the advice of his foreign minister, Leopold von Berchtold in first issuing an unacceptable ultimatum to Serbia, and then declaring war after Serbia quibbled with one of Austria-Hungary's demands [x].

As early as at the beginning of July, the decision in favor of a war with Serbia had been made in Vienna. The Serbs in turn failed to do their utmost to defuse the crisis. When Serbia first received the ultimatum, Prime Minister Pasic indicated that he could accept its terms, with a few reservations and requests for clarification. While a long reply was written and sent, Serbia rejected the key points about Austrian interference in domestic judicial and police work. Pasic knew this meant war, and the Serbian army began to mobilize even before the reply was complete. The ultimatum of the 23rd of July 1914 could and would not be fulfilled entirely by the Serbian government; consequently, Austro-Hungary declared war on Serbia on the 28th of July. Therefore, not in an irresistible outburst of popular anger after the assassination, but in a calculated manner. Both sides, Austria-Hungary as well as Serbia, believed that they were in a strong position to win if war came. The Austrians had German backing; the Serbs had promises from Russia. Neither side considered the chance that the war would spread across Europe. As there was too little fear of war. After the Greco-Turk war of 1897, the ethnic fighting in Macedonia, the two Balkan Wars, and the Italian war with Turkey in 1911, confrontation in the Balkans was not unusual. Some warfare had become commonplace, a normal aspect of foreign relations. No one foresaw the outbreak of a worldwide war.

Owing to the political alliances, this local conflict became initially a European war with numerous fronts [xi]. One thing led to another, mainly by the alliance system and the already existing tensions between the powers, as there had been already a Franco-Russian Military Convention [xii], despite a Reinsurance Treaty from Bismarck's time with Russia. Both Germany and Russia mobilized their armies in haste, because each one feared defeat

if delayed. Germany and Russia also rashly committed themselves to support Balkan clients (Austria-Hungary and Serbia, respectively) because Berlin and St. Petersburg feared that failing to do so would cost them the trust of important allies and leave them isolated. Austria's relationship with Russia was irreparably damaged anyway, as a consequence of its withholding of support during the Anglo-Russian Crimean War of 1853-56, another factor in the July Crisis of 1914 [xiii]. Germany not only declared war on Russia, but also opened a western front: France was the object of a German invasion. England in turn entered the war due to a successful German attack on France and Belgium would have made Germany too powerful [xiv].

Ultimately Russia could hope for French assistance should Russia find itself at war with either Germany or Austria-Hungary, by a Convention of 1892. Britain was bound to aid France (Entente Cordiale). Russia ranged against Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy, feeling no lingering loyalty to Austria-Hungary. Thus, the Central powers (Austro-Hungary, the German and Ottoman Empires [as of October 1914]) faced off against the Entente states (Russian Empire, Great Britain, France and Serbia). So, with Austria-Hungary's declaration of war the war started. It is too easy seeing it as the initial shot, having triggered a chain reaction. There had already been too many tensions.

Many factors played a role leading to that war: The Austro-Hungarian determination to impose its will upon the Balkans; a German desire for greater power and international influence, which sparked a naval arms race with Britain, who responded by building new and greater warships; a French desire for revenge against Germany following the disastrous defeat in 1871 (see above); Russia's anxiety to restore some semblance of national prestige after almost a decade of civil strife and a battering at the hands of the Japanese military in 1905. When Russia mobilized in support of its ally Serbia, Germany declared war on Russia, and then France. Ever since Germany had inflicted defeat upon France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, the major nations of Europe had busied themselves with plans for the next war, seen by many as inevitable given the conflicting ambitions of the major powers; which, in the case of France, included the repossession of Alsace and Lorraine, both lost to Germany as a consequence of the Franco-Prussian War (Plan XVII) [xv].

With the inevitable advance of the Schlieffen Plan (called after its architect who modified his strategy in assumption of a war on two fronts, against France in the west and Russia in the east, with the Russians being slower in mobilization, thus

he devised a strategy for knocking France out within six weeks), the French were thrown very much on the defensive. The weakness of the Schlieffen Plan lay less in the rigidity of the timescale; for the German army very nearly succeeded in capturing Paris within the time allotted, but in its underestimation of the difficulties of supply and communication in forces so far advanced from command and supply lines [xvi]. In spite of the commitment between France and Great Britain, the British government knew they would need better reasons to enter a war. That opportunity came by the German invasion of Belgium en route for France, as the passage through the rather flat Flanders plains would offer the fastest route, after their demand to pass being officially rejected by the Belgian king. Britain's guarantee to maintain Belgian neutrality, agreed at the 1839 Treaty of London served that cause. When Germany did not withdraw from Belgium, Britain officially declared war on Germany on 4 August [xvii]. With Britain's entry into the war, the colonies and dominions abroad had to offer military and financial assistance, including Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand and the Union of South Africa, the main reason to have become a so-called World War. Moreover, honoring a military agreement with Britain, Japan declared on the 23rd of August 1914 war on Germany. Two days later Austria-Hungary had to respond the same way against Japan due to the alliance.

Beside many unfortunate events, the ultimatum took place during the month of July, a holiday month when politicians and diplomats were away from their desks, the only ones who under circumstances would have been able to stop the avalanche at the brink. Astonishingly, the European population was overwhelmingly enthusiastic to be at war that had been expected to be finished by Christmas. Austria-Hungary assumed that the coming war would be limited to Serbia (the so-called Plan B [Balkan], with a revised Plan R [Russia], allowing for a greater volume of troops to guard against Russian assistance for the Serbs in the south). But as mentioned above, a number of other countries entered into the war during the following years, until all world powers had been involved by different alliances, and due to their colonies, turned the European war literally into a world war (with a total of 36 warring states). Initially, the USA had no plans for war, reflecting U.S. popular opinion and played no initial part in the conflict (a situation that found its parallels in WW II). Germany's continued submarine policy seriously threatening America's commercial shipping (which was in any event almost entirely directed towards the Allies led by Britain and France), ultimately brought the decision to the Congress on the 2nd of April 1917 for war, being officially declared on the 6th of April. Besides,

the Zimmerman Telegram, a German communique to Mexican officials, had been intercepted by British intelligence officers. In the telegram, Germany tried to entice Mexico into attacking the U.S., offering Texas and other states in return. After its revelation, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson broke off diplomatic relations with Germany, soon after the States officially entered World War I [xviii]. Once in the war, Wilson proposed a plan having become known as the 'Fourteen points'. It was not a war strategy but a plan to be put in place once peace had set in, only promising by theory, as will be discussed later. Initially, all countries provided plenty of volunteers to fight for their cause or their country.

This war that was supposed to be the one to end all wars but formed in fact the beginning of all modern conflicts, brought up many things for the first time, as the conscription, war technology, among them the tank (British armored tanks had been used the first time at the battle of Somme, submarine, aerial bombardment, toxic gas (first been used during the second battle of Ypres in April 1915 by the Germans. Soon both sides were engaged in chemical warfare, using chlorine, mustard, and phosgene) as well as barbed wires to hold troops back in the trenches, and filmed propaganda [xix]. An important and saving life discovery was made in 1914: Blood could be prevented from clotting if mixed with sodium citrate, plus the benefits of refrigeration were huge breakthroughs that paved the way for blood banking. Desperately looking for positive sides of a war, it is also worth to mention that women achieved the most important political rights in certain countries as they accomplished a high number of largely masculine roles during the war. Though, the feminization of work continued to be limited and depended on the sector. Women were still denied certain rights, as in France they only won the right to vote in 1944. In Germany they could vote as of 1919, in Great Britain from the age of 30 in 1918, and from the age of 21, like men, in 1928. The forms of emancipation of traditional roles were often socially and quantitatively restrictive.

Concerning society there had been two new impacts as well: For a long time, workers in large industries were not only exempted from recruitment into the army, but also enjoyed favorable food and wage conditions in return for the banning of strike action. They had been in particular skilled workers, crucial for the production of machinery and armaments necessary to feed the monstrous battle of materials at the front. But as the war destroyed lives and resources, living and working conditions for factory workers gradually declined, too. Socialist minorities began to agitate for a peaceful settlement of the conflict; the Russian year of revolution in 1917 turned the political calculus upside down,

reviving radical political parties and trade unions in all the belligerent countries. One of the few things left standing at the end of the war in 1918 was an aggressive, organized, determined European trade union movement about to embark on its heyday.

But Austria-Hungary placed mainly the focus of its military operations in 1914 on both the Balkans and against the Russian Empire in Galicia. In turn, the German Empire tried to defeat France in the West and thus to reach an overall decision. Austria-Hungary was given the task of repelling the Russians in the East. Giving way to the superior material strength, large areas in the east of the Monarchy had to be vacated. The losses were catastrophic. Tensions only eased after the successful offensive at Gorlice-Tarnow in May 1915. In the same month Italy declared war on the Habsburg Monarchy, thus forming a new front in the southwest of the Empire. Although allied to Germany and Austria-Hungary, Italy was committed to defend Germany and Austria-Hungary only in the event of a 'defensive' war; arguing that their actions were 'offensive' Italy had declared instead a policy of neutrality. But now, with the war declaration, a front to the south was opened. The ensuing fights were not only concentrated in the mountain massifs of the Dolomite Alps and Tyrol. The Italians were defeated

in eleven costly battles of attrition (until the end of 1917) at the Isonzo. An Austro-Hungarian offensive in Southern Tyrol was also defeated in 1916. Jointly with Bulgaria and the German Empire the Imperial forces succeeded in occupying Serbia in the autumn of 1915 and to establish an overland route to the Ottoman Empire. Russian offensives in 1916 (Brussilov) and 1917 (Kerensky) as well as Romania's entry into the war did not lead to a decisive result. In fact, the Habsburg Empire was almost since the beginning about to lose the war anyway. Shortages with food came up. Circumstances were never promising for Austria-Hungary. Opposed to some positive military developments, serious domestic political and economic problems in Austria-Hungary. On the one hand the food crisis reached cataclysmic proportions in the last war year and led to wide-ranging strikes; on the other hand, the nationalist problems already existing before 1914 intensified. Emperor Franz Josef, the last significant Habsburg monarch, remaining popular to the end of his life despite his decision, died on the 21st of November 1916 after reigning for 66 years. His grand-nephew, Karl I, assumed the throne until 1918 as the last Habsburg monarch, already inheriting a crumbling almost defeated Empire (fig. 2).



Fig-2: Emperor Karl (left side) with Colonel General von Seeckt

Reform plans of Emperor Karl I, the successor of Franz Joseph, also remained as unsuccessful as his efforts to reach a fast peace agreement. Karl I attempted to make a deal with France where he would give the country practically anything they wanted in order to not have his

Austro-Hungarian Empire split up after the war. The French Prime Minister George Clemenceau did not even respond (fig. 3). Instead, he published the offer publicly, in effect putting out the last flames of Karl's empire [xx].



Fig-3: "Clemenceau at the front". The book of the interwar years expressly stated that during the war the French Prime Ministers suppressed "all efforts aimed at peace and understanding ... His irreconcilable spirit is reflected in the Versailles Treaty." On the one hand the one-sided report of a defeated people was emphasized, on the other hand it reveals the hostility that has existed since the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/1871.

Another monarchic system broke down already before: Russian military setbacks led at the end to Russia's withdrawal, combined with economic instability and the scarcity of food and other essentials, led to increasing discontent among Russia's population. The hostility was directed toward the regime under Czar Nikolai II and his German-born wife Alexandra and led to the October Revolution erupting in 1917, with the result of a ceasefire agreement and subsequently the Peace of Brest-Litovsk between Russia and the Middle European powers. The revolution was mainly spearheaded by Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov alias Lenin and the Bolsheviks, which ended czarist rule and brought a halt to Russian participation in World War I. Germany can be made co-responsible for the revolution, as the government agreed to permit thirty-two Russian citizens (among them Lenin) to

travel through their territory, knowing that these dissidents would cause problems for their Russian enemies [xxi]. The eastern continental front was solved, and Germany was able to reinforce the western front, but instead the US-Americans had entered the war. The attempt of the High Command of the German Armed Forces to resolve the war before the US military intervention by several offensives in the West failed as did an Austro-Hungarian offensive at the Piave, which had started on the 15th of June 1918. In autumn the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy could no longer be held off, since the collapse of the Army was accelerated by a successful Italian offensive in Northern Italy. And though, the united forces set back the German and Austro-Hungarian forces. On the 9th of November, German Kaiser Wilhelm II exiled to Holland, where he formally abdicated on the 28th of November. Facing

dwindling resources on the battlefield, discontent on the home front and the surrender of its allies, Germany was finally forced to seek ceasefire and signed two days later the armistice at Compiègne, France, commemorated in the U.S. first as Armistice Day, and nowadays as Veterans Day. Worth to mention is that at the time of the armistice, no Allied force had crossed the German frontier, and the German armies had retreated from the battlefield in good order. These factors enabled Hindenburg and others to spread the story that their armies had not really been defeated. This resulted in the stab-in-the-back legend which attributed Germany's defeat not to its inability to continue fighting, but to the public's failure to respond to its 'patriotic calling' and the supposed intentional sabotage of the war effort, particularly by Jews, Socialists, and Bolsheviks [xxii]. That opinion influenced the society for the following decades. That result can also be seen in the book about the 'World War' still emphasizing the enmities among countries before the second World War.

Negotiations and Peace Treaties

In September 1918, the Austro-Hungarian Empire already had tried to contact western powers to ask for a ceasefire. The US, by then the most powerful country in the world and untouched by the war, replied that its stance had been presented by President Woodrow Wilson in January of that year in his Fourteen Points proposal as the principles for a peace settlement, though watered-down by the French at the Treaty of Versailles signed on the 28th of June 1919, where Germany had been forced to demilitarize and to cede territory to France and Poland and pay billions in reparations. The French and British Prime Ministers Georges Clemenceau and David Lloyd George argued that punishing Germany adequately and ensuring its weakness was the only way to justify the immense costs of the war. The historian Hagen Schulze said the Treaty placed Germany 'under legal sanctions, deprived of military power, economically ruined, and politically humiliated' [xxiii]. Representatives from Germany were excluded from the peace conference until May, when they arrived in Paris and were presented with a draft of the Versailles Treaty. Beside territory loss and paying immense sums for reparations, even worse was Article 231 forcing Germany to accept sole blame for the war [xxiv]. All those harsh penalties imposed on Germany, gave rise to radical political movements in that nation later on when Hitler's National Socialist (Nazi) Party could capitalize on these emotions [xxv]. Similar penalties were also imposed on Austria-Hungary in separate negotiations at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, signed on the 10th of September 1919. Hungary signed the peace agreement in the separate treaty of Trianon.

Another treaty among that series was the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920 and marked the beginning of the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire, and its dismemberment. The terms of the treaty also stirred in that case hostility and nationalist feeling amongst Turks. The signatories of the treaty were stripped of their citizenship and the Turkish War of Independence started. Victorious, a new treaty was signed in 1923 in Lausanne, preserving Turkish sovereignty through the establishment of the Republic of Turkey under Atatürk [xxvi].

Those so-called Paris Peace Conferences were considered to serve building a post-war world that would safeguard itself against future conflicts of such devastating scale, involving 32 countries, the creation of the League of Nations, and five peace treaties (among them the two mentioned above). Some hopeful participants had even begun calling World War I 'the War to End All Wars'. They terribly proved wrong. Leaders of the victorious Allied powers made most of the crucial decisions in Paris over the next six months. The Peace Treaty of Versailles was signed on the 28th of June 1919, five years to the day after a Serbian nationalist's bullet ended the life of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and sparked the beginning of that war.

Though, among the Fourteen Points clauses were renouncing secret peace treaties; guaranteeing the neutrality of the seas outside territorial borders; calling for the removal of international trade barriers and for a reduction of arms; Polish independence; and for arbitration of colonial disputes. Wilson also called for the establishment of the League of Nations designed to secure ongoing peace [xxvii]. Ironically, as the author of the Fourteen Points, Wilson was unable to persuade the new isolationist U.S. Congress to ratify his own document, preferring to embrace a policy of isolationism. Apart from his postulates of transparent international agreements, unfettered access to the seas and the lifting of trade barriers, Wilson had talked about new borders in Europe based on ethnicity and had also mentioned the rebirth of Poland [xxviii]. Point ten called for 'limited self-government for the peoples of Austria-Hungary'. A month later, he expanded this into full 'self-determination', which meant the actual dissolution of the Habsburg Empire. As it would later turn out at the Versailles conference in 1919, his postulate of 'borders based on ethnicity' would prove to be not only utopian, but also the precursor to many conflicts. Wilson saw himself as representing the most advanced liberal and progressive opinion of the time. Wilson had been leader of the Progressive reform movement and he called his domestic

program 'The New Freedom', a confirmed isolationist at the beginning of the war. He was re-elected in 1916 campaigning with the slogan 'he kept us out of war', from 1917 on having become an ardent champion of internationalism [xxix]. Like other liberals and progressives, then and now, Wilson rejected hierarchy and tradition in general and the Roman Catholic Church and old Europe in particular. The Habsburg Empire was the very embodiment of what he despised. Like other liberals and progressives (or so-called conservatives as the Bush-administration), then and now, Wilson believed that any old order of hierarchy and tradition could easily be replaced by a new order of freedom and universal rights. As all along their involvements it turned very wrong.

Austria-Hungary, dissolving from within due to growing nationalist movements among its diverse population, was seeking an end to the war, and asked for an armistice on November 3. Terms were arranged and the armistice with Austria-Hungary was signed in Villa Giusti near Padua that day, taking effect on the 4th of November 1919 [xxx]. By this time several successor nation-states had formed, which were to give Europe a new appearance, radically reshaping the map of central and Eastern Europe. It was the era of triumphant nationalism. Wilson's obsession with self-determination drew its ideological justification and political support from the liberal and progressive movement and thus torpedoed any possibility of a separate peace with Austria-Hungary. He also greatly encouraged the national movements in the Empire to push for full independence. Wilson consequently was the most important figure in bringing about the Habsburg Empire's dissolution and death. Although it had been allied with Germany since 1879, the Habsburg Empire in many respects had served as a buffer state between the German Empire and the Russian Empire. Austria-Hungary's various nationalities decided against one common Empire. Thus, also the German-speaking representatives of the monarchy proclaimed a state of their own. The diverse nationalities that composed the Habsburg Empire and the independent successor states which followed it were too small and too hostile toward each other to fill the vast power vacuum that was created when the Empire collapsed. In central Europe, nations often lived side by side with each other and claimed ownership of the same territories. With respect to their internal politics, most of the new countries quickly adopted conservative authoritarian regime successively, Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia, Romania, and Austria under

Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss. And despite Wilson's so-called principle of 'self-determination', which had been used to legitimize the dismemberment of the Habsburg Empire in 1918, most of the successor states contained large national minorities, which were treated as badly (or worse) by their new rulers as they had been by the Habsburg. The conditions, however, were dictated by the victorious powers. The last emperor, Karl I, was sent into exile together with his family. Demands of the Austrian political parties to unite with Germany were turned down by the allies. The struggle for securing the country's new borders was carried out with diplomatic means as well as with weapons. The southern border of the province of Carinthia and the Burgenland were heavily disputed. And the Hungarians even organized resistance against Austria. After the military battles for Burgenland, Czechoslovakia and Italy offered themselves as mediators. The state declaration on the extent, borders and relations of the national territory of German Austria of November 22, 1918 raised Austria's claim to German West Hungary after a referendum to be held. Some parts became part of Austria, others of Hungary. Yet the process of the referendums was controversial [xxxii].

The creation of a solid economic basis was extremely difficult. Karl only ruled two years as emperor of the Habsburg Empire, as it disintegrated after World War I, but that could not stop him from pursuing his dreams [xxxiii]. The last reigning monarch of the Austro-Hungarian Empire spent his remaining life attempting to restore his monarchy. He died 1922 in his exile in Madeira where his remains stayed until today.

Aftermath and consequences after the War

The potential collapse of Austria-Hungary was important not only for the Vienna government, but for Austria's German ally, for the other Great Powers, and for the balance of the power system. The clash with Serbia in 1914 affected an issue of such magnitude, and it is not surprising that all the Powers soon became involved: all of them had interests at stake. The specific steps to the World War, and the division into two sides, reflected local considerations from Poland to Belgium. Though, the risk of world war, and not just war, entered the equation because of the ethnic issues behind the Sarajevo crisis of 1914. This assumed local conflict led to a war, causing eleven million military personnel and seven million civilians' casualties in the conflict, not counted one of the world's deadliest global pandemics that spread by that global war:

The Spanish flu epidemic of 1918, which killed another estimated 20 to 50 million people^[xxxiii].

After their defeat in World War I, the successor state of German Austria exiled all remaining Habsburgs. The so-called Habsburg law would be repealed in 1935, only to be reintroduced in 1938 by the Nazis. For decades the Habsburg family was watched with suspicion, as for example, members of the Habsburg family were forbidden by law from running for the Austrian presidency until 2011, though it is considered obsolete. Until some decades ago, members of the Habsburg family were not even allowed to enter Austria. But their heritage is visible all along Middle Europe, not only in Vienna, but also in the former Crownlands as Hungary, Slovakia and Czech Republic. Today, these buildings continue to be impressive, not only for their architectural excellence but as enduring monuments to the incomparable dignity and grandeur of a vanished Empire.

Competition for political ideologies of modernity came already up in the late nineteenth century. The most important 'European' monarchies had already declined (Austria-Hungary, Germany, Ottoman Empire, Tsarist Russia), and the political disruption surrounding World War I contributed to the fall of those imperial dynasties, together with their ancillary aristocracies, the Habsburgs, the Hohenzollerns, the Romanovs and the Ottomans. But other European monarchies were inter-related with them, too. With the First World War and the fall of the bourgeois Europe, the time of aggressive nationalism and the political mobilization of the masses arose. The twentieth century became the age of extremes. Fighting the system, society, thinking, and media had been an opportunity to educate, but also for polemic and brainwashing. One reason was doubtless the decline of aristocracy, either forbidden as in Habsburg's Austria, or there as well as in other countries members of the upper classes had been killed and this meant that in the immediate postwar, those apprentices who were expected in the natural order of things to become leaders, particularly in politics and business, were no longer existing.

CONCLUSION

The war of 1914-1918 was the consequence of interactions between pluralities of powers, each of which was willing to resort to violence in support of its interests. Moreover, a common attitude is the passive nature of Great Power policy: Leaders reacted to events instead of proactively managing the crisis. And yet the war also produced the League of Nations, the world's first proper attempt at an international peace-keeping organization. Its successes and existence were short-lived, and it took

another world war for the second iteration, the United Nations, to be born.

Doubtless, the collapse and dismemberment of the Habsburg Empire in November 1918 at the end of that war initiated the chain of events, leading to most of the Central-European catastrophes and horrors which were to come. The creation of state borders created bad blood and was the core of further unresolved conflicts. In the core country, votes were held throughout Austria: in Vorarlberg, as early as 1919, 80% of voters called for negotiations on a merger with Switzerland in a referendum. However, the decision on the state border rested with the Paris Peace Conference. For parts of southern Carinthia, a referendum would first be ordered, as specified in the State Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye. In 1920 the majority of the population in the voting zone (with a large proportion of the population speaking Slovene) voted to remain with Austria. Nevertheless, the relationship was tense and fraught with conflict because of the different expectations. In 1921 a referendum in Tyrol and Salzburg showed that many voters were in favor of joining Germany.

According to the Treaty of Trianon (1920), German West Hungary should belong to the new Republic of Austria. But only after fierce fighting against Hungarian guerrillas and the referendum in Ödenburg, Burgenland was secured as part of the Austrian territory in 1921. Another decision was made when the Separation Act came into force at the beginning of 1922: Vienna was separated from Lower Austria and became an independent federal state. Thus the creation of the 1st Republic was completed. The allocation of the Burgenland, for example, also arose from weighing up various, only rudimentary congruent decisions, because in this case, too, one can hardly speak of a consistent ethnic awareness of the population. The question of state affiliation was derived by small farmers, citizens and aristocratic large landowners alike from the possible political and economic alternatives: to hold land and estates together, to secure sales and markets. The political atmosphere in Austria was becoming ever more hostile. The end of wars rarely leads to complete peace. Political violence was the order of the day. The National Socialists also had their formations. They outnumbered by far the regular Austrian Federal Army composed of professional soldiers built in accordance with the conditions of the Peace Treaty of St. Germain. Nazi-Germany annexed Austria 1938. It might have been the Habsburg Empire's absence that opened the doors to the Nazi dominion in Austria, but it is obsolete to consider alternative history. Austria became deeply involved in the political and military structures of the German Reich, experienced war, the liberation

by the Allies and the capitulation of the *Wehrmacht* on its own territory from March until May 1945. In mid-April Karl Renner succeeded in forming a new Austrian government, proclaiming the country's independence and making a new start.

Some historians argue the Habsburg empire's multi-ethnic central European policy had become outdated and was doomed for failure. And though, the EU can be seen as the continuation of the old idea of a super-national empire by other means. That is what Otto von Habsburg (1912–2011), a descendent of the long ruling dynasty (and if the empire would not have ended to exist, the rightful emperor-king from 1922) and a Member of the European Parliament (and former President of the International Paneuropean Union, the oldest European unification movement), saw in Europe. The circumstances have changed, but Europe is (still) working on the idea of a super-national legal structure and a subsidiarity principle, avoiding another conflict as the 20th century had to experience twice to a worldwide extent.

ENDNOTES

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