

Chapter 1

THE AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN MONARCHY BEFORE 1914: NATIONS AND ETHNIC CONFLICTS

Geographically speaking, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was at the heart of the continent, in Central and South-eastern Europe. With an area of 676,000 square kilometers, it was the largest state in Europe, discounting the Russian Empire. Over 1,200 kilometers wide at its widest, the distance between its southernmost and northernmost points was 1,046 kilometers. It was flanked by Switzerland to the west, Germany to the northwest, Russia to the north and east, Romania to the southeast, Serbia to the south, Italy to the southwest.

According to the census of 1910, the Monarchy had a population of 51.3 million, placing it second among the countries of Europe, after Germany (once again discounting Russia). This population was divided into seven groups by religious affiliation, and twelve major demographic groups by language and ethnicity. The Roman Catholic religion, accounting for 66% of the population, assumed a privileged role; it was followed, in order of magnitude, by the Greek Catholics (10.6%), the Eastern Orthodox (8.7%), the Calvinists (5.3%), Jews (4.3%), Evangelicals (3.4%) and Moslems (1.1%).

No linguistic or ethnic group enjoyed an absolute majority. The German-speakers numbered twelve million, no more than 24% of the population. Most lived in the Austrian hereditary provinces,

that is in Lower and Upper Austria, Tyrol, Styria, Carinthia and Krajina, where their ancestors had settled in the early Middle Ages. Moreover, German-speakers could be found in Bohemia and Moravia, Silesia, Hungary, and in almost every urban center of the empire. The latter were either descendants of earlier settlers, or civil servants of the imperial government.

The Hungarians, next to the Germans in population with about ten million (20%), formed a more compact mass; although there were Hungarian enclaves in Bukovina, Moldova, and Vienna itself, most lived within the confines of the historical Kingdom of Hungary. They were more divided as regards religion. While the overwhelming majority of the Austro-Germans were Roman Catholic, only 58% of the Hungarians were. One fourth (26%) of the Hungarians were Calvinists.

The almost exclusively Catholic Czechs (13% of the population of the empire), lived primarily in Bohemia and Moravia, but also in Silesia and Vienna. Five million (10%) Poles, whose country was partitioned three times in the late eighteenth century until it ceased to exist, lived within the empire, mainly in western Galicia, to a lesser extent in Silesia, eastern Galicia and Bukovina; they too were Roman Catholic. Next came the Ukrainians or Ruthenians (8%) who were Uniates (Greek Catholic) and inhabited eastern Galicia, Bukovina and the northeastern corner of Hungary. The ratio of Romanians was 6.5%, inhabiting primarily Transylvania and the Partium (Parts) attached to Transylvania, and Bukovina and the Banat; two-thirds were Orthodox, one third Uniate. The Roman Catholic Croatians (5%) lived on both sides of the Sava River, in Croatia and Slavonia. The Orthodox Serbians (3 to 4%) inhabited southern Hungary, particularly the province of Bácska and the Banat, as well as Bosnia-Herzegovina. The counties of northern Hungary were inhabited by Slovaks (4%), three quarters of whom were Roman Catholic, one quarter Evangelical. The Catholic Slovenians (2.5%) inhabited Styria, Carinthia, Krajina and the coastal region.

In addition to the above, there were Italians and Bosnians. The Italians (1.6%) were concentrated in southern Tyrol, and along the

Adriatic—in Istria, Trieste and Fiume—mixed with Croatians, Slovenians and Serbians. The Bosnians (1%) were identified not by their ethnicity but by their Moslem religion. The same category applied to the two and a half million Jews. Like the Germans, the Jews could be found in every corner of the empire, primarily in urban centers, but with a greater concentration in Galicia, Bukovina and eastern Hungary.

According to the terms of the Compromise of 1867, the Habsburg empire was composed of two states, the Austrian Empire and the Kingdom of Hungary. The Austrian Empire, more commonly referred to as Austria at the beginning of the twentieth century, was formed by seventeen hereditary provinces organized into fourteen administrative units. These provinces arched over the Kingdom of Hungary, crescent-like, on the northern side. Hungary itself was constitutionally divided into Hungary proper and Croatia. While the population of the Austrian Empire was 35.6% German, that of the Kingdom of Hungary was 48% Hungarian-speaking. Hungarians constituted the majority in only thirty of the sixty-three counties that made up the kingdom, mostly in the central region and in the Székely counties. In the northern provinces the Slovaks were in the majority, as were the Ruthenians in the northeast, the Romanians or Transylvanian Saxons in the east, Serbians, Germans, Romanians and Croatians in the south and southeast, Germans in the west. The eight counties of Croatia-Slavonia were in majority Croatian, sometimes Croatian and Serbian mixed.

Although both states of the empire had their own legislature, government and administration, neither was completely sovereign. As regards foreign affairs, military affairs and the pertinent budgets, the Habsburg empire remained centralized. Thus, in addition to the person of the ruler, who was Austrian emperor and king of Hungary at the same time, the empire was connected by common ministries. These cabinet posts were held by ministers who belonged neither to the Austrian nor to the Hungarian cabinet. In theory, these joint ministers were accountable to the so-called delegations, special committees delegated by the two legislative bodies. Moreover, the customs, banking and financial system were

also in common, regulated by a special agreement, renewed every ten years.

The Compromise of 1867 was complemented by further agreements between Hungary and Croatia, and Austria with the Poles. According to the *Nagodba* (Compromise) of 1868, Croatia-Slavonia had extensive autonomy within the Kingdom of Hungary: Croatia “enjoys its own laws and autonomous administration as regards internal affairs.” The Croatian legislative body was called the Sabor, the head of the executive was the ban. Moreover, Croatia’s special status was also evident in that it sent forty representatives to the lower house of the Hungarian Parliament and two to the upper house, all of whom were entitled to intervene in their mother tongue. The Hungarian cabinet included a minister in charge of Croatian-Slavonian and Dalmatian affairs.

The Poles of Galicia enjoyed a somewhat more limited autonomy; the provincial assembly of Galicia, dominated by the Polish nobility, was essentially independent in internal affairs. Although the Poles formed but 58% of the population, Polish became the official language of Galicia in 1869. The teachers in the primary and secondary schools were almost exclusively Poles. In 1870–71 the university of Lwow (Lemberg)—second after the old and more prestigious university of Cracow—was Polonized. From 1871 the ruler appointed a minister without portfolio in charge of Polish affairs every time a new cabinet was formed. Moreover, the Poles were well represented in the government of the empire. They sent a number of delegates to the parliament in Vienna. Count Alfred Potocki was Austrian prime minister in 1871–72, Count Casimir Badeni in 1895–97, and the younger Count Agenor Goluchowski was minister of joint foreign affairs from 1895 to 1906—Polish aristocrats all three.

In 1908 the administration of the empire was modified: Bosnia-Herzegovina, occupied by Austro-Hungarian forces since 1878, was declared an integral part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy by Emperor Francis Joseph. This measure was designed to counteract the growing irredentism of the Serbian population and to strengthen the Dual Monarchy’s position in the

Balkans. Bosnia-Herzegovina belonged to neither side of the empire; it came under the jurisdiction of the joint minister of finance.

Thus the constitutional arrangements of 1867–69 created or recognized two constitutionally privileged nations—the German and the Hungarian—and two political nations endowed with extensive autonomy—the Croatian and the Polish. In addition, the Italians of South Tyrol enjoyed cultural and local administrative autonomy. Although the administrative structure was more in harmony with the ethnic composition of the empire than any heretofore, it was not appreciated by those nations who were not privileged.

The Czechs were the ones who felt greatest resentment; clinging to their vision from 1848–49, they yearned for a federal arrangement within the empire. Although they demanded equal status primarily for themselves (trialism as opposed to dualism), occasionally the Czechs argued in favor of equal rights for Croatia and for a Polish Galicia-Bukovina. The agreements of 1867–69 negated these federative visions. There were attempts, however, to endow the Czechs with extensive autonomous rights in order to ensure their loyalty to the empire. The agreement proposed by the Austrian government in 1871 declared that “All affairs pertaining to the Kingdom of Bohemia which will not be declared common among all the kingdoms and countries of the empire belong, in principle, to the legislation of the Bohemian Diet and will be administered by the Bohemian authorities.”¹ At the same time a law on nationalities was drafted, giving equal rights to the Czechs and Germans within Bohemia. All officials and judges appointed in the region would have to be well versed in both languages, while the national assembly was to be divided into Czech and German sections.

¹ Quoted in Oscar Jászi, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 113.

These proposals would have complemented the earlier arrangements in a constructive fashion, leading to structural reforms on the Swiss model, with a multiethnic and democratic federation based on the consensus of nations. The leaders of the most powerful nations within the empire, the Germans and the Hungarians, felt threatened by such a prospect. The Germans of Bohemia felt that bilingual administration was a thinly veiled attack directed at them and described the proposal as a set of “destructive articles.” The Hungarians feared that a recognition of Czech autonomy and language rights would create a dangerous precedent for other ethnic groups, particularly the Slovaks of northern Hungary, increasingly viewed by Czech leaders as forming part of a Czechoslovak nation. Thus the Hungarian government put up strenuous resistance to the proposal.

Hence the “Czech compromise” was taken off the agenda and the Czechs became the most embittered opponents of the Dualist system. In 1867 the historian František Palacký, the most prestigious leader of the Czech national movement who, in 1848–49, had enthusiastically advocated an Austro-Slav project for the federalization of the empire, now accepted the invitation of the Pan-Slavists of Russia to a congress in Moscow. There he described the letter he had addressed to the Frankfurt Parliament in 1848 as the greatest mistake of his life: the Habsburg empire, he had written at that time, “if it did not exist...would have to be created as soon as possible in the interest of Europe and of humankind.”²

Nevertheless, the Austrian half of the empire never turned back to the concept of a centralized and homogenized model of state administration. Although German remained the official language of the state, the structure of the administration was much more that of a federalized system rather than a centralized nation-state. Austrian legislation was careful not to single out the Germans as a privileged nation; instead, it declared, in article nineteen of the so-

² Franz Palacký, *Österreichs Staatsidee* (Vienna: Geyer, 1974), pp. 79–86.

called Cisleithanian constitution of 1867, that specific national groups had equal status in the use of local languages.

Finally, in 1897, in order to pacify the Czechs, it was declared that every official in Bohemia and Moravia had to know Czech and German which, given the circumstances and previous practice, created a disadvantage for the German-speakers. The same objective was served by the division of Moravia into districts in 1905 and the introduction of universal male suffrage in 1907, putting an end to the domination of the wealthier and better educated German-speaking minority.

All these measures, however, did not suffice. Pro-Russian tendencies spread among the younger generations of Czechs who rallied as the Young Czechs, National Socialists, or so-called progressives. Some of their leaders, including Karel Kramář and Václav Klobučák, were thinking in terms of a Slavic confederation, along old Pan-Slavic lines, orchestrated by Saint Petersburg, to replace the Dual Monarchy.

Early in 1914 Kramář, who was to become the first prime minister of Czechoslovakia in 1918, elaborated a plan and sent a copy to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Sazonov. The "Slav Empire," according to this plan, would be composed of the Russian Empire, the Tsardom of Poland, the Tsardom of the Czechs, the Bulgarian Tsardom, the Serbian Kingdom and the Kingdom of Montenegro. The Tsardom of the Czechs would have incorporated, in addition to Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, the "Slovak areas of northern Hungary from Pozsony to Visegrád and to the foothills of the Carpathians." Ruthenia, eastern Galicia and northern Bukovina would have been attached directly to the Russian Empire. The Kingdom of Serbia in the south would have been awarded all South-Slavs lands up to Trieste and Carinthia, and perhaps western Hungary as well, considering the remnants of the Croatian population reaching to the Danube, "where Serbia might meet up with Bohemia." The Austrian Empire would thus be limited to the strictly Austro-German provinces, whereas Hungary would have been reduced to the "part-Jewish Budapest, its German suburbs, and the purely Hungarian parts of the Pusztá [Great Plains]," total-

ing five or six million people. Hungary would become temporarily independent but, “eventually, due to circumstances,” would acquire the status of a vassal state to the empire, along with Romania and Greece.³

In addition to the overt or covert separatist movements, projects of a federative Austro-Slav state continued to surface at the beginning of the twentieth century. One of these was elaborated in 1908 by a yet unknown young professor, Edvard Beneš, in his doctoral dissertation published in France. In the spirit of Palacký’s plans from 1848–49 Beneš, combining the nationality and historical principles, figured on seven or eight states. Bohemia and Moravia would form a single unit with Slovakia, while another state or two would be formed by the South Slavs. Moreover, the Germans, Hungarians, Poles, Romanians and Italians would also form states within this federation.⁴

Relations between the Polish elite and the leadership of the empire were cordial throughout the period of the Dual Monarchy; nevertheless, national unification and independence were also advocated by some Poles of Galicia. Among the Poles in Russian Poland, the National Democratic Party led by Roman Dmowski, represented a moderate movement for autonomy. The Socialists led by Józef Piłsudski, however, were openly for independence and the reunification of all Polish lands. Because of his increasingly radical nationalist views and his activism Piłsudski was confronted by the internationalist wing of the Polish socialists at the beginning of the twentieth century. Therefore, after the failure of the Russian revolution of 1905, Piłsudski and several of his companions found refuge in Galicia, which they strove to convert into a sort of Polish Piedmont, the home base of independence. In Lemberg (Lwow), in 1908, he agreed to become the leader of the independentist League of Military Action; with the backing of the

³ Jan Galandauer, *Vznik Československé republiky, 1918: programy, projekty, perspektivy* (Prague: Nakladatelství Svoboda, 1988), pp. 243–250.

⁴ Edvard Beneš, *Le problème autrichien et la question tchèque* (Paris: Giard et E. Brière, 1908), pp. 299–301.

government in Vienna, he founded several rifle associations, with patriotic overtones.

The Ukrainians were among the least advanced and, by the same token, most loyal subjects of the Habsburgs. Nevertheless, certain tendencies evolved in the 1880s and 1890s, confronting the political movements led by the clergy and advocating the union of the Ukrainians of Galicia and of Russia; other groups, likewise pro-Russian, counted on the backing of the tsar. At the same time, the Orthodox church became more active among the Uniate Ukrainians; attempts to convert were often accompanied by Pan-Slavic or Pan-Russian propaganda. On the one hand, these attempts elicited some trials on the charge of treason, notably in the county of Sáros at the end of the nineteenth century, and again in Máramaros (Maramureş) and Lemberg early in 1914. On the other hand, they resulted in the Act of 8 July 1914, issued by the Austrian government, described as the “Galician Compromise,” which ensured a representation of 26% for the Ukrainians in the provincial assembly and introduced the nationality principle in other government bodies as well.

Among the South Slavs, the Slovenes had always been most loyal to the empire, since they could boast of no tradition of independence. Although there were manifestations of anti-Habsburg sentiment among them immediately before the outbreak of World War I, the majority of the local leaders would have liked to see a trialist solution raising the South Slavs on a footing of equality with the Germans and Hungarians. This goal was advocated, among others, by Ivan Šušteršič, a member of the circle around the Habsburg heir, Archduke Francis Ferdinand. Others, such as Anton Korošec, were thinking in terms of a solution outside the confines of the empire.

In spite of the privileged position of Croatia, Croatian-Hungarian relations had always been tense. In addition to the “Magyarone” parties which accepted the Compromise of 1868, there were movements to sever ties with Hungary by the turn of the twentieth century; joining Dalmatia and Fiume, they would have liked to establish a Croatian-Slavonian kingdom with status equal to that of

Hungary. In its program from 1894, the platform of the constitutional opposition until 1918, the so-called Party of Rights, had declared that the party

will resort to all legal means to secure the unification of the Croatian people, whether in Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia, Fiume and vicinity, the Muraköz [Medjumurje], Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Istria. These would unite under a single state within the framework of the Habsburg empire, and strive with all their might to assist the Slovenian people in their endeavor to join such a state.⁵

The leader of the newly formed Croatian Peasant Party, Stepan Radić, also represented this point of view. In his pamphlet of 1902 he advocated a federation of five states, to include three Slavic states—Bohemia, Galicia and Croatia-Slavonia—a German state and Hungary, which would continue to be multiethnic.

Within the Croatian political spectrum the age-old concept of Illyria, was resurrected. It proposed to unite all South Slavs, including the Serbians of Serbia (but not the Bulgarians), within the framework of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The best known representatives of this movement were the mayor of Spalato (Split), Ante Trumbić, and the journalist Frano Supilo. These separatist tendencies became stronger after 1908, with the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by the empire.

The federalist movements, particularly among the Czechs and the Croatians, exerted increasing influence on the imperial leadership and on the German parties within the Austrian state. It became increasingly obvious that the dualist solution was not appropriate for the operation of a multiethnic and multireligious state. At the top level the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, along with his think tank, the so-called Belvedere circle, was thinking in terms

⁵ Gábor G. Kemény, ed., *Iratok a nemzetiségi kérdés történetéhez Magyarországon a dualizmus korában*, vol. 2, (1892–1900) (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1956), p. 288.

of a thorough structural reorganization. Francis Ferdinand, however, was more intent on centralization—that is, a state in which the various ethnic regions would depend on decisions coming directly from the ruler. It is understandable, therefore, that the Hungarians were the ones who feared his accession to the throne most.

Among the Austrian parties it was primarily the Social Democrats and the Christian Socialists who advocated federalization. The Brünn Program of the Social Democratic Party adopted in 1899 listed in first place that “Austria has to be transformed into a democratic, multi-ethnic federalized state. Instead of the historical provinces of the Crown, let there be autonomous states with ethnic boundaries.”⁶ The platform of the Christian Socialist Party drafted at Eggenburg in 1905 was even clearer in its intent to transform the state on the Swiss or American model. This federation would consist of the following nation-states: 1. German Austria, 2. German Bohemia, 3. German Moravia and Silesia, 4. Bohemia, 5. Hungary, 6. Transylvania, 7. Croatia, 8. Polish Western Galicia, 9. Ukrainian Eastern Galicia, 10. Slovakia, 11. Krajina (Slovenia), 12. Voivodina (Austrian-Serbia), 13. Székely Counties, 14. Trento (Trent), 15. Trieste.

The Social Democrat Karl Renner, who was to become the first chancellor of the Austrian Republic after the war, elaborated his own version of structural reform; it would have made a distinction between the ethnic principle and the administrative one. He, therefore, favored a dual administrative structure. One would have competence in language and cultural matters, whereas the other would have had jurisdiction in all other matters. From the language point of view the Austrian side—Renner did not deal with the Hungarian side—would have included eight nations, to wit the German, Czech, Polish, Ruthenian, Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian, Italian, and Romanian federal states. These states would have had sovereign rights, each with its own assembly and government, not on a territorial basis, but more on the model of religious denominations. Other matters would become the task partly of the central

⁶ Alexander Sixtus von Reden, *Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia. Történelmi dokumentumok a századfordulótól 1914-ig* (Budapest: Széchenyi Kiadó, 1989), p. 63.

government, partly of districts based on geographical features and economic factors. Instead of the existing seventeen historical provinces, Renner was aiming for eight and, if possible, as few as four such administrative districts. The region of the Alps would form Austria; Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia would become the Sudetenland; Galicia and Bukovina would form the Carpathian region; finally Dalmatia, Istria, and Görz the coastal region. While the assemblies and governments of the eight nations would have met in Vienna, the administrations of the four districts would have met in Vienna, Prague, Lemberg and Trieste respectively. He expected that Hungary would follow the Austrian example.⁷

The key element in Renner's project—autonomy based on the citizen rather than on territory, which seemed particularly applicable to nationalities living dispersed in a diaspora—was successfully applied in the case of Moravia in the “compromise” of 1905 and in Bukovina in 1910. Nevertheless, Renner's contemporaries were highly critical. Among them Beneš and the Hungarian Oszkár Jászi reproached him for his “two-dimensional structure” which, according to them, was nothing but German centralism in a democratic disguise; moreover, all those rights suggested for the resolution of ethnic problems could be secured equally well by setting up autonomous territorial governments.

Even in Austria separatist tendencies emerged alongside the projects of federalization. In the 1880s Georg von Schönerer and his followers revived the age-old arguments of the Pan-Germans. In their so-called Linz Program, drafted in 1882, they still advocated transforming the empire into a personal union under the ruler. After 1897, however, they came out unequivocally in favor of the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy and the union of its Austrian regions with Germany as their long-term objective.⁸

Unlike the Austrian Empire, which made allowance for the par-

⁷ Arthur J. May, *The Hapsburg Monarchy 1867–1914* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1968), pp. 480–481.

⁸ Robert A. Kahn, *A History of the Habsburg Empire 1526–1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 433–434.

ticularism of each province, the Kingdom of Hungary was unified until the sixteenth century, and became once again a unified state as a result of the Compromise of 1867. Consequently, while the Nationalities Act of 1868 gave equal rights to all citizens regardless of race, language or religion, and even ensured a degree of cultural autonomy for the nationalities in the realms of religion and education, it failed to recognize them as political nations; in other words, the nationalities were not recognized as equal partners in forming the state. The Hungarian government consistently rejected all demands for territorial autonomy—an issue raised already in 1848–49. Moreover, Hungarian became the almost exclusive language not only of legislation and government, but even of local administration.

The Hungarian leaders were adamant about preserving the fiction of a single political nation. Furthermore, after 1868, tolerance for languages and cultures other than the Hungarian was gradually whittled away. The network of schools for the nationalities became increasingly sparse after 1880. Between 1880 and 1910, the ratio of Hungarians in Hungary, excluding Croatia, rose from 45% to 54%. Those who adopted Hungarian as their new language were primarily Jews and Germans, to a lesser extent Slovaks. The trend affected Romanians and Serbs much less, since their groups were separated not only by language but also by religion. The potential of the Romanian and Serbian national movements was also enhanced by the fact that a Romanian nation-state had come into being in 1859 with the union of the two principalities, Moldavia and Walachia, and Serbia had achieved complete independence as well. The two states were in direct contact with the Serbians and Romanians of Hungary.

During their respective congresses of 1895 the Serbian, Romanian, and Slovak ethnic leaders openly voiced that

Hungary could not be considered a nation-state, because the distinctive feature of Hungary as a state is the totality of nationalities which compose the state. The nature of the Hungarian state does not allow that one nation, which is not

even the majority of the population, should arrogate the right to constitute a state for itself. Only the totality of nations of Hungary has the right to identify itself with the state....

Therefore, they demanded,

that the non-Hungarian nations of Hungary be awarded complete freedom on the basis of the territory where the language is spoken, and in such a way that the autonomous territories (counties, municipalities, communities) be granted their national character by allowing the administrative authorities and the courts to use the local language.⁹

The more radical national leaders went beyond autonomy in their demands: like the Czechs and the Croats, they wanted federalization for the entire empire, including the Hungarian side. The best known project along these lines, similar to the one advocated somewhat earlier by the Austrian Christian Socialists, was elaborated by the Romanian leader Aurel Popovici in 1907. He divided the empire into fifteen federal units. Some nations might form more than one political unit, depending on their location: e.g., three for the Germans, two each for the Italians and the Hungarians. The Slovak leader Milan Hodža, a member of the circle around Francis Ferdinand, had a similar vision.

The concept of autonomy for the ethnic groups, not to mention the notion of federalism, was unequivocally rejected by all Hungarian political parties. In 1881, the Minister of Religion and Education Ágoston Trefort described all “multilingual aspirations” as “political inanities.” Albert Apponyi who headed the same ministry some years later felt such aspirations were in direct conflict “with the foundation and national policy” of Hungary. Dezső Bánffy, prime minister at the turn of the century, commented in his

⁹ Quoted in Gábor G. Kemény, *A magyar nemzetiségi kérdés története*, part 1 (Budapest: Gergely, 1948), p. 145.

book, published in 1902, that if Hungary “aims to survive...it has to become uniformly Hungarian and the trend to magyarize must head off all overt or covert aspirations, presented in the guise of demands for nationality rights, designed to derail the formation of a uniform nation.”¹⁰

The concept of a Hungarian nation-state was fraught with all kinds of illusions and misleading projections. In 1902 Jenő Rákosi, the editor in chief of *Budapesti Hírlap*, a daily with a large circulation, announced the “program” of thirty million Hungarians—an empire to include, in addition to the Danube Basin, a big chunk of the Balkans. “All we need here is thirty million Hungarians, and we will play the most important role in the history of Europe in this place, on this land, and the eastern side of Europe becomes ours!”¹¹ Gusztáv Beksics, the leader and ideologue of the Liberal Party, predicted no more than twenty-four million Hungarians (only 65% of whom would be ethnically Hungarian) for the middle of the twentieth century; he also predicted the status of Hungary as a “leading power” in the mid-Danube region and the Balkans, on the grounds of “geographical determinism.” In his book entitled *Greater Hungary*, published in 1902, Pál Hoitsy assumed that the Hungarian state will soon draw within its sphere of influence the nations to the east and south: the Romanians, Serbians, Bulgarians and, of course, the South Slavs of Bosnia and Dalmatia.

The dreams of great power status included placing Austro-Hungarian relations on a new footing, more exactly, transforming the dual structure of the empire into a centralized state. In Dezső Bánffy's work, he “modestly” assumed that “the Hungarian state, solidified in its power and its national unity...sooner or later will naturally and rightfully claim, and certainly achieve, that the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy is replaced by the Hungaro-Austrian Monarchy.”¹² Pál Hoitsy on the other hand, would be satisfied with nothing less than

¹⁰ Dezső Bánffy, *A magyar nemzetiségi politika* (Budapest: Károly Grill, 1902), p. 2.

¹¹ Quoted in László Szarka, *Duna-táji dilemmák* (Budapest: Ister, 1998), p. 264.

for Hungary to regain complete independence, its king residing permanently in Budapest, and visiting the Austrian capital far less frequently than he now visits Hungary from there. This is where the ambassadors of the Great Powers will reside and this is where the joint ministries will have their headquarters.¹³

Such pipedreams spread rapidly, became quite popular and clouded the vision of hundreds of thousands.

Although there were some, such as Lajos Mocsáry and Oszkár Jászi, who continued to think along humanistic and tolerant lines, denouncing all manifestations of repression, objecting to the restrictive laws of the Hungarian nation-state, and challenging the unfounded projections, even the demands they set forth were rather modest when it came to the expansion of rights for the nationalities. In his book from 1912 Jászi himself felt that “national peace” could be achieved merely by guaranteeing linguistic and cultural rights (“good schools, good administration, good courts in the language of the people”).¹⁴ In reality, the ideological gap between the ethnic parties and the Hungarian parties had become so huge that, under the existing conditions and power relations, it became unbridgeable. This became quite clear during the negotiations between Prime Minister István Tisza and the Romanian leaders in 1912–14. Tisza offered concessions in four areas: 1. to mitigate Hungarian administration by hiring or appointing ethnic officials; 2. to establish electoral districts with ethnic majorities; 3. to recognize political parties representing ethnic groups; 4. to revisit and moderate the policy of magyarization in education. These initiatives came to naught. The Romanian ethnic leaders felt these concessions were woefully inadequate and insisted on

¹² Dezső Bánffy, *A magyar nemzetiségi politika*, p. 52.

¹³ Pál Hoitsy, *Nagymagyarország. A magyar történet jövő századai* (Budapest: Lampel Róbert, 1902), pp. 62–63.

¹⁴ Oszkár Jászi, *A nemzeti államok kialakulása és a nemzetiségi kérdés* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1986), p. 245.

territorial and political autonomy, whereas the Hungarian nationalists assessed the proposals as “treason committed *in petto*.”

At the beginning of the twentieth century, in addition to the continued and occasionally enhanced tension between the privileged communities—i.e. those recognized as nations—and the peoples considered mere “nationalities,” contradictions surfaced between the Kingdom of Hungary and the Austrian Empire. These were due to the conflicts of interest between Hungarian leaders in favor of the Compromise and those critical of the joint institutions. The Liberal Party, in power since 1875, embodied the Compromise and backed the plans regarding the expansion of the joint army, accepting the economic division of labor between the two sides, and advocating the industrialization of Hungary based on its own resources. The opposition, primarily the Party of Independence and 1848, was critical of the mercantilistic government policies and the customs union with Austria. Although it did not object to building up the joint army, it set a price consisting of various nationalistic concessions. Furthermore, many of them, espousing the illusions regarding Hungary as a great power, would have liked Hungary to become the center of the empire. This conflict led to a complete paralysis of Parliament in 1904 and to an anti-Habsburg and anti-empire atmosphere comparable to what had prevailed immediately after the defeat of the revolution of 1848–49.

...the world we knew was moving towards its end,...One could even believe that this ancient Habsburg Monarchy, in its thousand years of rule, had learned the arts of nations to co-exist in peace. Was it possible, then, that such a model of social adjustment had lost its meaning as a result of social progress?...Nationalist politicians demanded the natural the national resources of their countries for exploitation, at the expense of the community as a whole. The intellectual *élite* of various nationalities started smashing windows, and the internationalist workers built barricades of paving-stones.

...Vociferously, the politicians defended their own ideas: Pan

Germans wanted to join the German Reich, the various interest groups wanted a united Italy or a Greater Serbia. A group of Pan-Slavs hoped for a union with the empire of the Tsars. Each believed in his own future state....

It was the world-famous Viennese artist Oscar Kokoschka who uttered these words on a tape recorded in the 1960s.¹⁵ We could quote dozens of similar pronouncements from the recollections of contemporaries. Undoubtedly, however, it would be just as easy to quote those emphasizing the Dual Monarchy's chances of survival. In his memoirs published in 1932, Rudolf Sieghart, an influential banker in Vienna, recognized only the problem of the South Slavs and denied the potentially explosive nature of the multiethnic empire: "Old Austria was not at all a police state, but rather a multiethnic state blessed with an efficient administration."¹⁶

We do not feel that the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was a "police state," nor was it the "prison of nations"; yet it should be obvious to the reader by now that Kokoschka's hindsight, stressing the centrifugal forces, was more realistic than Sieghart's rather utopistic perception. In other words, the empire was subjected to centrifugal forces propelled by nationalism which neither the Austrian nor the Hungarian leadership could counteract effectively. It cannot be ascertained that the federalist solution, advocated by many of the contemporaries, would have been an effective counteraction. It is for certain, however, that the dualist solution, although it did point in the direction of federalism, was not the right one, or rather, was becoming increasingly inadequate.

The internal problems were enhanced by foreign policy contradictions. The relations between Serbia and the Dual Monarchy became hopelessly poisoned after 1908. The annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina not only set obstacles to the realization of a Greater

¹⁵ Oskar Kokoschka, *My life* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 23–24.

¹⁶ Rudolf Sieghart, *Die letzten Jahrzehnte eines Grossmachts* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1932), pp. 6 and 437.

Serbia, but isolated Serbia from access to the sea and frustrated Serbian leaders. Setting all other concerns aside, the government of Serbia strove to destabilize the region in order to realize its national objectives. In the Balkan Wars of 1912–13 it acquired the province of Kosovo and the region around Lake Okhrida, inhabited by an overwhelming majority of Albanians. Nikola Pašić, the Serbian prime minister, declared thereafter that “The first round is won, now we must prepare for the second, against Austria.”¹⁷

Russia also resented the annexation of 1908; the tsarist empire gave diplomatic support not only to Serbia, but established closer ties with the pro-Russian Czech parties and agitated among the Ukrainians of Galicia. While by 1907 the Entente Cordiale included Great Britain, France and Russia, the Habsburg empire could count on the backing of the German Empire, with which it was allied since 1879. When Italy joined in 1882 it became the Triple Alliance, although there were good reasons to doubt the reliability of the new ally. Italian diplomacy did moderate its irredentist propaganda, but never gave up entirely on the desire to acquire the Italian-populated lands of the Dual Monarchy. The attitude of Romania, which had joined the Triple Alliance “in secret,” was even less reliable, should war break out. Fearing the backlash of public opinion the king of Romania refrained from revealing the alliance, even to his own cabinet. The union of the three “ancient” Romanian provinces—the Regat, Bessarabia and Transylvania—remained the gist of its national aspirations, even though it was not aired officially. These aspirations could hardly be realized short of a clash with Hungary, that is, with the Monarchy. Thus Romanian adherence to the Triple Alliance in 1883, to be renewed every ten years, was even more an unknown quantity than the alliance with Italy.

All these factors account for the increasingly unfavorable perception of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in the West. The

¹⁷ Quoted in Carlile A. Macartney and Alan W. Palmer, *Independent Eastern Europe* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 33.

assumption that the existence of the Habsburg monarchy was an essential element of the European balance, which had saved the Habsburgs in 1849, became the object of skepticism at the turn of the century, in England and in France. Among the British most critical of the Monarchy we find Scotus Viator, the pen-name of Robert W. Seton-Watson, the scion of a wealthy and anglicized Scottish family. Seton-Watson visited Vienna and Budapest, for the first time, in 1905. He came with the still current British notion that the Habsburg monarchy was the most valuable element of peace and balance in Europe. After a few months in Hungary his opinion changed drastically. In one of his best known works, published in 1908, which was to become a manual for the British peace delegation in 1919, he wrote:

Many weeks' subsequent travel in Hungary, during which I conversed with men of all shades of opinion, revealed to me the depth of Chauvinism into which Hungary had fallen, and incidentally undermined my enthusiasm for the [Hungarian] Independent cause. I returned home disillusioned and less certain than before of the political talent and foresight of the Magyars....For months I studied the question at home, equally removed from Austrian and Hungarian influences, and thus by the time I next visited Hungary the romance had worn off and I was no longer inclined to believe all the political fairy tales with which that country is so liberally endowed.¹⁸

Wickham Steed, the Viennese correspondent of the *London Times* for years, went through a similar transformation. The solution he proposed was general democratization, strict observance of the laws on nationalities, and the conversion of the dualist system into a tripartite one by giving the South Slavs equal rights, leading to federalism.

¹⁸ Scotus Viator, *Racial problems in Hungary* (London: Archibald Constable, 1908), p. xii.