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 Székefly 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.

These proposals would have complemented the earlier arrange-
ments 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 pow-
erful 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 eth-
nic groups, particularly the Slovaks of northern Hungary, increas-
ingly viewed by Czech leaders as forming part of a Czechoslovak
nation. Thus the Hungarian government put up strenuous resis-
tance 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 presti-
gious leader of the Czech national movement who, in 1848–49,
had enthusiastically advocated an Austro-Slav project for the fed-
eralization 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 writ-
ten 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.”

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. Aus-
trian legislation was careful not to single out the Germans as a
privileged nation; instead, it declared, in article nineteen of the so-

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 objec-
tive 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 ten-
dencies spread among the younger generations of Czechs who ral-
lied as the Young Czechs, National Socialists, or so-called pro-
gressives. Some of their leaders, including Karel Kramař and
Václav Klofáč, 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 Kramař, who was to become the first prime min-
ister 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 popu-
lation 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 Puszta [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


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 (Maramureș) 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 Šušteršić, 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 Radič, 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 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

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, multiethnic 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

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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, Istra, 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 Schönnerer 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 particularism 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 Serbs 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