

## World War I

On June 28, 1914, Franz Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria—heir presumptive to his uncle the Emperor Franz Josef I of Austria (Franz Josef's only son had died under still-mysterious circumstances—visited the Bosnian capital Sarajevo. The Crown Prince Ferdinand, supporter of greater autonomy for Serbs and other ethnic minorities within the Empire, became a target of Bosnian Serb militants and the nationalist group The Black Hand [assassinated](#) him and his wife.

The Empire thus very reasonably sought to punish [Serbia](#) for at minimum providing the rhetoric that inspired the assassins, and more likely (and, in reality) directly aiding them. Had the negotiations been held in good faith, it is likely that a compromise would have been reached. For example: Serbia agreed to halt all support for dissidents within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and punish the guilty. They were not being held in good faith. Germany had thus given the Empire a "carte blanche" to impose whatever ultimatum it wanted, with the assurance that Germany would back it up. The Empire decided to crush Serbia once and for all, and absorb it into their empire.

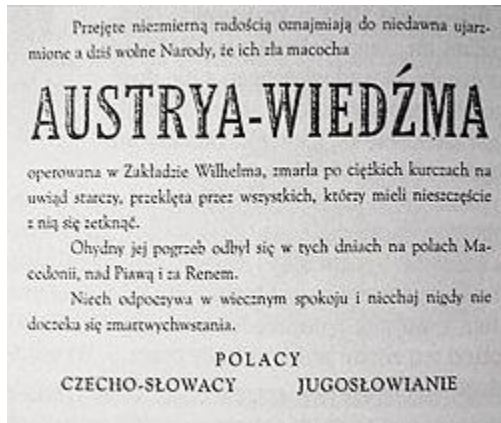
[Russia](#), in turn, reacted in its tradition role of protector of the Slavic people (which included the Serbs), so when Serbia turned to Russia for military support, Russia agreed, in part fearing the "loss of face" if it let its small ally down.

France and Russia were allies. The German military had one, and only one, plan for fighting a major war, the Schlieffen Plan, which involved the immediate invasion of France via [Belgium](#) and [Luxembourg](#), in an all-out bid to defeat France in 40 days. Thus, when countries started to mobilize, the Kaiser gave the go-ahead to the Schlieffen plan, and the war was on. This action of the German government contrasted with that of the French, who, despite the protests of the Army, ordered all troops to pull back 10 kilometers from the border in the days before war was declared, in order to prevent any sort of incident from accidentally sparking a war.

Austro-Hungarian troops initially crushed Serbia, defended the routes into Hungary and repulsed Italian advances in Gorizia. The Austro-Hungarian Army suffered very serious casualties throughout the war, especially in 1914. However, they had considerable successes (albeit with German aid and direction) even advancing into enemy territory following German-led victories in Galicia (May 1915) and at Caporetto on the Italian front (October 1917). Throughout the war, the Austro-Hungarian war effort had become more and more subordinate to the direction of German planners. Supply shortages, low morale, and the high casualty rate began to seriously affect the operational abilities of the army by the last years of the war. Eventually, the defeat for the Austro-Hungarian armies on the battlefields of the [First World War](#) and mutinies and rebellions at home caused the Austro-Hungarian Empire to a sudden and a dramatic break-up.

***Discussion Question #1: What was the role of Austria-Hungary in WWI?***

## Dissolution of the Empire



A humorous "obituary" of the Austrian Empire, published in Kraków in late 1918. It says: "Overwhelmed with joy, until recently enslaved and now free Nations announce that their wicked step-mother, AUSTRIA the WITCH operated in William's Clinic, died from senility after severe spasms, cursed by all those who had the infelicity of having to do with her. Her dreadful funeral took place during these days in the fields of Macedonia, on the Piave River and across the Rhine. Let her rest in eternal peace and may she never raise from the dead."

After the failure of the Spring Offensive the tide of war turned decisively against the Central Powers. Although the leadership of the national minorities in the Empire had remained loyal to the Habsburgs throughout the war, worsening fortunes forced them to reconsider their options. As it became apparent that the Allies would win, it became politically expedient for nationalists to renounce ties to the old state and to embrace the nationalist ideology of the victorious powers. On top of that, the Empire could no longer provide an incentive for the nationalities to work together. Other groups also lost faith in the Empire. Prosperity had disappeared, disillusioning business interests, [socialists](#) became upset by the loss of the liberal policies that had characterized the pre-war Cisleithanian government. Under those conditions radical nationalists found it easy to rally support to their cause, and a rash of declarations of independence followed in September – October 1918. The war officially concluded for Austria-Hungary when it entered an armistice with the Allies on November 3, 1918.

### *Did you know?*

*The Austro-Hungarian Empire lasted 51 years from its creation in 1867 until it was dissolved in 1918 at the end of the [First World War](#)*

The end of the war marked the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It became politically expedient for the allied victors to break the conglomeration up into various national components in accordance with [Woodrow Wilson's](#) Fourteen Points. The allied powers by no means saw the break-up of the empire as a war aim: they seriously

entertained the idea only towards the end of the war. In fact, it is now known that T.G. Masaryk, future president of the Czechoslovakia, wanted and promoted a sort of "Swiss cantonal" political arrangement among the national minorities (vying for independent states), only to be "badgered" by Wilson to accept the complete independent statehood for everybody.

Contrary to expectations at the time, the break-up of the empire did not alleviate national problems in the area, and made the area more politically unstable than under Habsburg rule.

First to formalize the new circumstances, the Czechs and the Slovaks proclaimed independence on October 28, 1918. Hungary followed suit on October 31, although [Transylvania](#)'s majority joined [Romania](#), taking with them a large Hungarian minority. The South Slavs had formed the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs on 29 October, soon united (December 1, 1918) with Serbia and Montenegro as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later [Yugoslavia](#)).

After the war the victors reorganized the borders in the area, radically changing political alignments. Different treaties affected the area, including the Treaty of Trianon (1920).

Both [Austria](#) and [Hungary](#) became republics, [exiling](#) the Habsburg family in perpetuity. A pro-monarchist revival in Hungary after the communist revolution and the Romanian intervention of 1919 led to the country's formal reversion to a kingdom (March 1920), but with the throne vacant. Attempts by the last Emperor, Charles I, to regain power in Budapest (March, October 1921) ended in his deportation to Madeira, [Portugal](#), where he died the following year. In the absence of a king, Hungary fell under the control of a regency, headed by the naval hero Miklós Horthy.



Austria-Hungary and new states that emerged in 1918 (names and borders in red)

The following new states formed themselves (in part or in full) out of the former Habsburg lands:

- [Austria](#)
- [Czechoslovakia](#)
- [Hungary](#)
- State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (joined with the Kingdom of [Serbia](#) on 1 December 1918 to form the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later [Yugoslavia](#))
- [Poland](#)

In addition, some Austro-Hungarian territory went to [Romania](#) and [Italy](#). [Liechtenstein](#), which had formerly looked to Vienna for protection, formed a customs and defence union with [Switzerland](#), and adopted the Swiss currency instead of the Austrian. In April 1919 Vorarlberg, the westernmost province of Austria, voted by a large majority to join Switzerland; however both the Swiss and the Allies ignored the vote.

***Discussion Question #2: a) What dissolved the Austro-Hungarian Empire? b) What political instability did the new nation-states face after the fall of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire?***

## Historiography

Historical views of Austro-Hungarian Empire have varied throughout the 20th century:

Historians in the early part of the century tended to have emotional and/or personal involvement with the issues surrounding Austria-Hungary. Nationalist historians tended to view the Habsburg polity as despotic and obsolete. Other scholars, usually associated with the old government, became apologists for the traditional leadership and tried to explain their policies.

- Major writers from the early period who remain influential include: Oskar Jászi and Josef Redlich.

Subsequent experience of the region's inter-war "Balkanization], of Nazi occupation, and then of Soviet domination, led to a more sympathetic interpretation of the Empire, based primarily in a large exiled community in the United States. Marxist historians still tended to judge the Empire in a negative way. One way or the other, the legal system (inclusive of basic liberties) introduced after 1867 has to this day become the envy of every single developing country and many a developed.

One controversy among historians remains: whether the Empire faced inevitable collapse as the result of a decades-long decline; or whether it would have survived in some form in the absence of military defeat in World War I.

- Alan Sked (2001) says that no inevitable demise can be argued; rather, the Empire fell because it lost a war.
- David F. Good supports Sked's view.

***Discussion Question #3: Do you agree with any historian's interpretations of the study of the Austro-Hungarian Empire? Or do you believe something different could have happened to the Austro-Hungarian Empire?***

## Territorial legacy

The current countries whose entire territory were located inside Austria-Hungary by the time of the dissolution of the empire are:

- [Austria](#)
- [Hungary](#)
- [Czech Republic](#)
- [Croatia](#)
- [Slovakia](#)
- [Bosnia and Hercegovina](#)
- [Slovenia](#)

The current countries whose part of their territory were located inside Austria-Hungary by the time of the dissolution of the empire are:

- [Poland](#) (voivodships of Silesia, Lesser Poland and Subcarpathia)
- [Ukraine](#) (oblasts of Zakarpattia, Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Ternopil and Chernivtsi)
- [Romania](#) (region of [Transylvania](#) and the county of Suceava)
- Serbia and Montenegro (autonomous province of Vojvodina in [Serbia](#) and the city of Kotor in [Montenegro](#))
- [Italy](#) (autonomous regions of Trentino-Alto Adige and Friuli-Venezia Giulia)

## See also

[Austro-Prussian War](#)

## Notes

1. ↑ Citype - Internet - Portal Betriebsges.m.b.H. [Austro-Hungarian Empire 1867 - 1918](#). Wien-vienna.com. Retrieved November 22, 2011.
2. ↑ Volkszählung vom 31. Dezember 1910, veröffentlicht in: *Geographischer Atlas zur Vaterlandskunde an der österreichischen Mittelschulen*. K. u. k. Hof-Kartographische Anstalt G. Freytag & Berndt, Wien 1911.
3. ↑ [Ethnographic map of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, 1910](#). Thomasgraz.net. Retrieved November 22, 2011.

## References

- Good, David F. *The Economic Rise of the Habsburg Empire: 1750-1914*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984. [ISBN 0520050940](#)
- Lieven, Dominic. *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002. [ISBN 0300097263](#)
- Sked, Alan. *The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire, 1815-1918*. New York, NY: Longman, 2001. [ISBN 0582356660](#)

## External links

All links retrieved May 2, 2016.

- ["Distribution of Races in Austria-Hungary" from the \*Historical Atlas\* by William R. Shepherd, 1911](#)
- [Maps of Austria-Hungary](#)

- The Austro-Hungarian Military