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**Dimitrije Djordjević**

*Professor Emeritus  
University of California  
Santa Barbara*

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## **The Austro-Hungarian Occupation Regime in Serbia and Its Break-Down in 1918**

**Abstract:** This paper discusses the occupation of Serbia during the First World War by Austro-Hungarian forces. The first partial occupation was short-lived as the Serbian army repelled the aggressors after the Battle of Kolubara in late 1914, but the second one lasted from fall 1915 until the end of the Great War. The Austro-Hungarian occupation zone in Serbia covered the largest share of Serbia's territory and it was organised in the shape of the Military Governorate on the pattern of Austro-Hungarian occupation of part of Poland. The invaders did not reach a clear decision as to what to do with Serbian territory in post-war period and that gave rise to considerable frictions between Austro-Hungarian and German interests in the Balkans, then between Austrian and Hungarian interests and, finally, between military and civilian authorities within Military Governorate. Throughout the occupation Serbia was exposed to ruthless economic exploitation and her population suffered much both from devastation and from large-scale repression (including deportations, internments and denationalisation) on the part of the occupation regime.

**Keywords:** Serbia, Austria-Hungary, occupation of Serbia 1915–1918, Military Governorate, Great War

**T**he Austro-Hungarian attack on Serbia in 1914 was perhaps the most convincing confirmation of the truism that war is but a continuation of peacetime politics by extraordinary means. The declaration of war on Serbia was an attempt to resolve the precarious internal, national and social issues of the Habsburg Empire by violence. However, these issues would remain open during the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Serbia in the First World War.

The Austro-Serbian conflict in 1914 was an expression of deep-rooted contradictions in the recent historical development of the Balkans and Central Europe. The Balkan states of the nineteenth century were born in national and agrarian revolutions resulting from the application of the nationality principle which was increasingly predominant in modern Europe. By contrast, the Habsburg Empire was founded on the principle of historical legitimacy and it of necessity had to come into conflict, sooner or later, with the developments on its own soil and in the Balkans. The formation of Serbia and Montenegro in the nineteenth century turned into an external and internal threat to Habsburg legitimacy: externally, because it hindered aggressive tendencies towards the south; internally, because it benefited the process of emancipation of the peoples under the Habsburg crown. There-

fore, Serbia and Montenegro were not such a danger for the vast thousand-year-long Central European Empire in themselves, but rather as part of that broad and general movement for social and economic emancipation of the nations in Central and South-Eastern Europe. This was all the more so as the aggressive tendencies of the Habsburg Empire themselves foundered on the dilemma between demands for quelling these movements and impossibility to do so. Unresolved nationality issues within the Empire prevented the accretion of additional Slav population which, in turn, did not allow for a radical solution of the Balkan question. On the other hand, at the stage of European imperialism reached at the turn of the century the Balkan question was increasingly becoming part of European high politics. Blocked from within by resistance of the ruling circles of “historic nations” to the trialist solution for the internal structure of the Empire, suppressed from outside by rivalry on the part of Russia and western democracies opposed to German *Drang*, Austria-Hungary was forced to conduct *status quo* policy in the Balkans which manifested itself in stifling local development, suppressing Russia and attempting economic penetration in competition with stronger opponents. Such static and basically negative policy was bound to come into conflict with dynamical development of the new national states in South-Eastern Europe. The consequence of such policy was an attempt to resolve not just the Serbian but also the Yugoslav and Balkan question by violence, by declaring war in 1914. In the conditions of international tension and struggle for redistribution of world power, the Austro-Hungarian attack on Serbia was as good excuse as any for the outbreak of the First World War.<sup>1</sup>

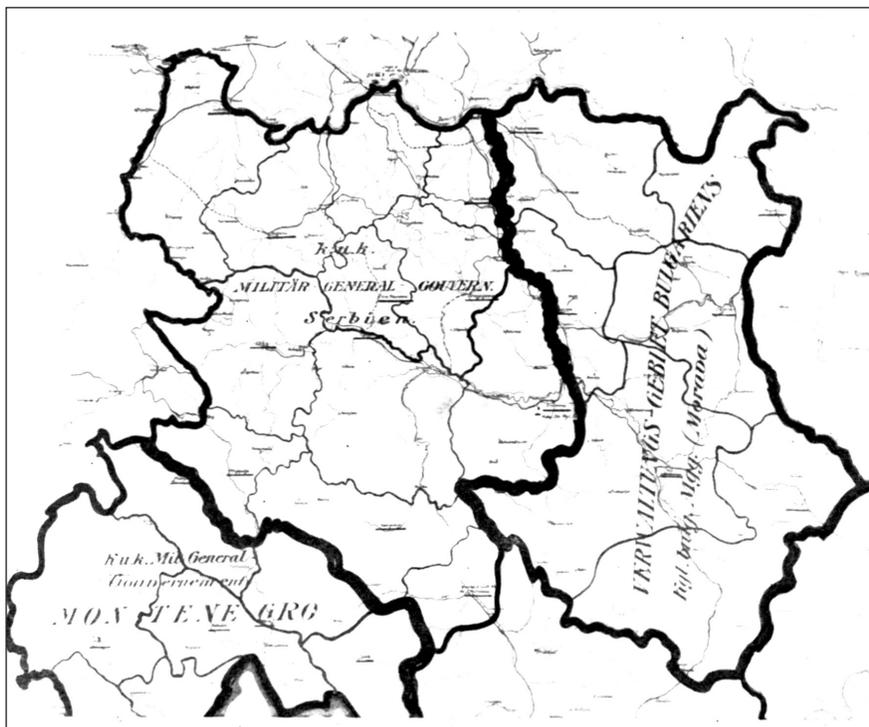
This short introduction is necessary for understanding Austria-Hungary’s occupation policy in Serbia in 1915–18 because it reflected the same unresolved difficulties which had burdened the Habsburg Empire in the pre-war period. The war and the occupation of Serbia perhaps just highlighted those difficulties more clearly.

## I

Entering into war against Serbia in 1914 Austria-Hungary had only one clearly defined goal – military annihilation of Serbia. There was an utter confusion as to what policy should be pursued further and what the Empire’s permanent objectives in Serbia were. There were three different conceptions regarding the future of Serbia. The military, in particular the Chief of General Staff Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, advocated a long-lasting military occupation of Serbia with pronounced annexationist ambitions and

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<sup>1</sup> D. Djordjević, “The Serbs as an integrating and disintegrating factor”, *Austrian History Yearbook* 3/2 (Houston 1967), 48–82. See more in D. Djordjević, *Révolutions nationales des peuples balkaniques, 1804–1914*. Belgrade: Institut d’histoire, 1965.



Austro-Hungarian occupation zones

intention to permanently secure the possession of the strategically important Morava-Vardar valley and eliminate any potential influence of Serbia on her co-nationals in the Monarchy. The Hungarian ruling circles headed by Prime Minister, István Tisza, set their faces against it refusing to have the Slav population of Austria-Hungary increased and seeing it as a threat of trialism. Rejecting the annexation of the entire country, Budapest envisaged annexing a smaller part of north-western Serbia to Hungary (the so-called bridgehead at Šabac and Belgrade). The Foreign Ministry in Vienna was in favour of a free hand policy towards Serbia refusing to prejudge her ultimate fate given the uncertain outcome of the war and peace negotiations and not excluding the existence of a rump weakened Serbia closely attached to the Empire through economic and political agreements.

Divergence of views and interests in relation to the future position of Serbia came to the fore and found its expression in the conclusions of the joint Ministerial Council's sessions held on 19 July 1914 and 7 January 1916. They contained the following provisions: 1) Serbia would not be annexed to the Monarchy; 2) a prospective peace settlement could provide for a rump independent Serbia; 3) the territories to be annexed in the south

would be annexed to Hungary, but their position would be determined by the legislative bodies of both constituent parts of the Monarchy.<sup>2</sup> Lack of clarity and incompleteness of these provisions, and especially the contradiction of interests from which they emerged caused considerable friction within the occupation authority and influenced, to a large degree, direction and extent of its operation.

## II

The organisation of administration over certain occupied regions of Serbia was carried out in November 1914 when the Serbian Army was retreating to Mt Suvobor in preparation for the decisive Battle of the Kolubara. The entry into abandoned Belgrade on 2 December was declared a great victory by the Austro-Hungarian Supreme Command.<sup>3</sup> Penetrating into the interior of Serbia, however, the invader found desolate land because population was retreating along with the army which made it difficult to establish new authorities.<sup>4</sup> The conquered area was divided into five county commands (*Etappenbezirkskommando*) headed by Military Governorate in Belgrade. Field-Marshal Stjepan Sarkotić was appointed Governor by imperial decree. Administrative staff was supposed to be recruited from civil servants from Austria, Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>5</sup> But they did not have enough time to make it to Serbia and take up their duties because the Serbian army's counteroffensive at the Kolubara River resulted in the liberation of the whole country on 15 December.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> N. Petrović, "Zajednički austro-ugarski kabinet i Jugoslovensko pitanje 1912–1918", in *Jugoslovenski narodi pred prvi svatski rat*, Department of Social Sciences series vol. 61 (Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 1967), 733–739.

<sup>3</sup> D. Milikić, "Beograd pod okupacijom u prvom svetskom ratu", *Godišnjak grada Beograda V* (1958), 263; see also Haus- Hof- und Staatsarchiv Wien (HHSTAW) Polit. Archiv Liasse Krieg 2a (1914–1916), Telegramm von Masirevich, Koviljača 2. XII. 1914.

<sup>4</sup> HHSTAW, P. A., K. 973, Krieg 32a, Masirevich an den k. u. k. Minister des Aeussern Grafen Berchtold, Koviljača 26. XI. 1914 – "Part of the country from the Drina to Valjevo," Masirević wrote, "is completely deserted and without population." County commands were located in Loznica, Šabac, Valjevo, Užice and Belgrade.

<sup>5</sup> HHSTAW, P. A., K. 973, Krieg 32a, Abschrift eines Telegrammes des Feldzeugmeisters Potiorek vom 25. November 1914 an den Herrn k. u. k. Ministerpräsidenten; *ibid.* Der Vertreter des k. u. k. Ministeriums des Äussern in der Nachrichten Abteilung des Operationsoberkommando B Gruppe, Koviljača 6. XII. 1914; *ibid.* Militär Kanzlei Sr. Majestät No 3637, 24. XI. 1914.

<sup>6</sup> D. Djordjevic, "Vojvoda Putnik. The Serbian High Command and Strategy in 1914", in Béla K. Király & Nandor Dreisziger, eds., *East Central European Society in the First World War*, Boulder: East European Monographs, 1985, 569–589.

The second occupation of Serbia lasted much longer – from fall 1915 to fall 1918. The Austro-Hungarian occupation area stretched up to the Morava River (from Smederevo to Stalać) and the line descending on Mt Jastrebac and, partly, Mt Kopaonik to the south-east of Kosovska Mitrovica and above Prizren to the Albanian border. Regions in the east and south including Serbian Macedonia were ceded to Bulgaria. The establishing of occupation zones in Serbia, Montenegro and Albania was informed by the frontiers established in Bucharest in 1913.<sup>7</sup> The new administration was gradually formed in step with development of military operations through the so-called *Ettapen* system of county commands. Finally, the Military General Governorate for Serbia was formed on 1 January 1916 on the model of Austro-Hungarian occupation of the Russian part of Poland.<sup>8</sup> It was under jurisdiction of the Supreme Command and headed by General-Governor with the rank of a corps commander appointed by the Emperor. A civilian commissary and chief of staff were added as auxiliary organs. Under General-Governor in Belgrade were the Command of the City of Belgrade, county commands and municipalities. The prior Serbian administrative division into counties was maintained for the sake of efficiency with certain modifications in the counties bordering on the territory ceded to Bulgaria.<sup>9</sup> The Governorate encompassed four administrative departments: military, political, economic and judicial. The military one was under the command of the chief of staff and consisted of presidial, transportation, gendarmerie and supply sections; the political department headed by a staff officer had its intelligence and political-police sections (with offices for educational, cultural, police and medical matters); the economic department had economic and financial sections: the former had offices for trade, agriculture, forestry, mining and military production plants; the latter had offices for direct and indirect taxes. Finally, the judicial department had sections for criminal and civil law matters. County commands had executive and judicial authority in their respective counties. At the bottom of this ladder were municipalities with their mayors, elected from the ranks of reliable local people, and municipal court.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> HHSTAW, P. A. I, K. 975, Krieg 32g, Evidenzbureau des k. u k. Generalstabes, Hauptmann Julius Ledineg an das k. u k. Armeeeoberkommando.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Armeeeoberkommando, General-Oberst Conrad an den Militär Generalgouverneur im Belgrad 1. I. 1916. A similar General Military Governorate was also established in Montenegro. See V. N. Rakočević, “Crna Gora pod austrougarskom okupacijom 1916–1918” (unpublished doctoral dissertation, p. 355ff).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Der Vertreter des k. u k. Ministeriums des Äussern an den Minister des Äussern Baron Burián, Belgrad den 5. November 1915.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. P. A., K. 973, Krieg 32a, B. Behörden – Organisation und allgemeine Grundsätze für Ihren Wirkungskreis. Besides the Command of the City of Belgrade, there were

In such organisation of the occupation administration the army played a dominant role which was understandable in view of wartime circumstances. But because of the conflict of interests and aspirations in the conquered area frictions soon emerged in interpretation of the basic aims and tasks of the occupation. Those frictions came to pass first between Austro-Hungarian and German interests in the Balkans, then between Austrian and Hungarian interests and, finally, between military and civilian authorities.

### III

Military operations carried out from 1914 onwards demonstrated Austria-Hungary's increasing dependence on its German ally. This caused among the ruling circles of the Habsburg Empire not just a sense of dwindling prestige, but also a fear that Germany would impose solutions which exclusively suited her own interests. On two occasions such fear was not unfounded: during German attempts to conclude a separate peace with Serbia and thus shake off the burden of the Balkan front and during German economic exploitation of the conquered Serbian land.

1) The failure of a rapid war operation on the Western front, the need to engage ever increasing number of troops against Russia and the siding of Italy with the Entente Powers made the Central Powers in May 1915 consider the possibility of a separate peace on the less important Serbian battlefield. The German plan was quite a large-scale one: to regroup the Balkan forces and form another Balkan alliance under the aegis of Germany for the purpose of pressurising Romania, relieving the forces on the Italian front and blocking the Entente's Balkan plans. These objectives could be achieved through a separate peace with Serbia which would obtain an outlet to the sea across northern Albania, unify with Montenegro and establish close ties with the Monarchy. Serbia would, in return, cede Serbian Macedonia to Bulgaria while Greece would receive southern Albania.<sup>11</sup> Doubting that it was possible to settle scores both with Italy and Serbia at the same time Viennese diplomacy was inclined to such solution as it believed that the Monarchy's prestige would not suffer following the success of the Central Powers on the Eastern front and preferring the entrenchment in Albania of a small Serbia to that of Italy.<sup>12</sup> Although in agreement with those com-

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12 counties: Belgrade, Kragujevac, Gornji Milanovac, Novi Pazar, Šabac, Užice, Čačak, Kruševac, Mitrovica, Prijepolje, Smederevo, Valjevo.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. P. A., K. 952, Krieg 25g, Auszug aus Aufzeichnung über die 24. V. 1915. erfolgte Unterredung in Pless; Ibid. Gesantschaft in Stockholm, Bericht n° 43 A-C/P, 18. VI. 1915.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Krieg 25g, Promemoria des Grafen Hoyos über die Möglichkeit eines Separatfriedens mit Serbien 22. Mai 1915.

binations Vienna was rather suspicious of German feelers cast through the intermediary of the Greek king and, even more so, German agents in the Balkans.<sup>13</sup> In fall 1915, on the eve of the offensive against Serbia, Vienna and Budapest opposed the renewed German attempts to pre-empt military operation with negotiations. The Hungarian Prime Minister Tisza accused Germany of “intriguing” in Serbia behind the back of Austria-Hungary.<sup>14</sup> Prince Hohenlohe openly requested from the German Foreign Minister, Gottlieb von Jagow, in Berlin that “German agents in the Balkans stop with this practice”.<sup>15</sup> On the contrary, German diplomacy was dismayed by the lack of Austria-Hungary’s concrete plans for Serbia. When von Jagow instructed his Ambassador Tschirschky to sound out Vienna’s stance if Serbia in the last moment, facing annihilation, sought for a peaceful solution, the Foreign Minister, Count Burián, simply replied that he was against half-measures that would harm the Monarchy’s prestige.<sup>16</sup> Vienna wanted an offensive, destruction of Serbia and occupation of her entire territory.<sup>17</sup> After another German insistence, in October 1915, Vienna again evaded giving a specific reply.<sup>18</sup> That was hardly surprising as Vienna did not have a clear idea as to her Balkan intentions. In early November, when General Falkenhayn urgently asked for conditions to be put forward before expected Serbian parliamentarians, von Jagow reproached Prince Hohenlohe stressing that “we must be clear in our mind as to what we want”. The only answer he received was a repetition of general request for “complete military capitulation of Serbia”.<sup>19</sup> Informing Prince Hohenlohe in November 1915 that the fate of Serbia, Montenegro and Albania would be discussed at a forth-

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Telegramm Silaschi, Athenes 28. September 1915; Hohenlohe an Burián, Berlin 3. VIII. 1915; Ibid. 6. X. 1915; Burián an Czernin und Tarnowski, Wien 16. VIII. 1915.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Krieg b-I, Tisza an Burián 2. X. 1915. Tisza threatened that German attempts to negotiate behind the back and on behalf of Austria-Hungary militate against the Monarchy’s favourable attitude towards Serbia. He requested that the two allied countries determine their objectives in the Balkans.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.. P. A. I., Krieg 25g, K. 952, Note des k. u k. Ministeriums des Äussern an Graf Tisza in Budapest.

<sup>16</sup> Chiffre-Telegramm ddtto Berlin 27 September 1915, Prinz Hohenlohe an das k. u k. Ministerium des Äussern (Streng geheim). Hohenlohe was sceptical about ‘prestige’ since the subjugation of Serbia could only be carried out with Germany’s intervention.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Telegramm in Ziffern des Ministers des Äussern Baron Burián an Prinzen Hohenlohe in Berlin, ddtto Wien 28. September 1915, Geheim.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Telegramm in Ziffern an Gottfried Prinzen Hohenlohe in Berlin, ddtto Wien 30. Oktober 1915, Geheim! Ibid. Chiffre Telegramm des Prinzen Hohenlohe ddtto Berlin 31. Oktober 1915.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Prinz Hohenlohe an Minister Baron Burián, Geheim – Berlin 3. November 1915.

coming meeting in Berlin, Burián limited his instructions to opposition to unification of these countries and demand for continuation of military operations.<sup>20</sup> Fearing that Germany might act on her own, the Ministry in Vienna demanded to have a representative in Field-Marshal August von Mackensen's army with the view to taking part in the acceptance of Serbian capitulation.<sup>21</sup> However, contrary to expectations of the Central Powers, the Serbian government and Supreme Command did not offer capitulation but rather proceeded to retreat across Albania. The eagerly expected Serbian parliamentarians did not turn up at all.<sup>22</sup>

2) The conquest of Serbia posed other problems before the Austro-German allies, particularly in the matters of administration, division of war spoils and economic exploitation of the occupied area. The Hungarian Prime Minister Tisza was the first one to be alarmed having heard that German military administration would be introduced in Serbia. On 7 November 1915, he vehemently protested in the Supreme Command requesting from Conrad von Hötzendorf to explain to the Germans that Serbia was in the Hungarian sphere of interest.<sup>23</sup> In a conversation held on 8 November with Conrad von Hötzendorf in Pless, General Falkenheyn accepted an Austro-Hungarian occupation administration in Serbia, but he refused to commit himself in written on 12 November using the on-going military operations as an excuse.<sup>24</sup> Besides, Germany did not intend to dispute Austria-Hungary's right to Serbia; she just wanted to buy some time in order to extract as much loot as possible and secure economic advantages in the occupation regime. Burián was, however, very suspicious; he insisted in Berlin on 18 November that, given its "immediate interests and contiguous position" Serbia belonged to the Monarchy which would introduce its own administration there in accordance with Falkenheyn's statement of 8 November.<sup>25</sup> Austro-Hungarian reports from this period were rife with bitter accusations on account of German ruthless exploitation of Poland and Serbia. According to those reports, the Germans had devastated forests, taken all food, coal, petroleum, introduced unrealistic exchange rate for ruble, damaged industry and deprived it of raw materials, transported field workers to Germany and imposed high railway and custom

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Notiz: I. Herrn von Tschirschky; II. Prinz Hohenlohe, Burián Wien 5. XI. 1915.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Baron Mussulin an Graven Thurn, Armeoberkommando, Wien 28. X. 1915.

<sup>22</sup> News of two Serbian parliamentarians coming to negotiate on 11 November caused a great stir, but it turned out to be false.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. K. 973, Krieg 23a, Abschrift – Note an Grafen Thurn, Wien 7. XI. 1915.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Der Vertreter des k. u. k. Ministeriums des Aeussern beim k. u. k. Armeoberkommando, Teschen 15. November 1915 (Wiesner an Burián).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Abschrift eines streng vertraulichen Erlasses an Prinzen Gottfried Hohenlohe, Wien 18. November 1915; Ibid. Telegramm Hohenlohe, Berlin 21. XI. 1915.

tariffs as well as tax rates. The Germans behaved the same way in Serbia and appropriated all resources, commandeered all wheat, flour, wine, cattle, salt, petroleum etc. The reports predicted that famine and permanent impoverishment of the population would reach such level that it would not just threaten the current situation but also cause infinite consequences in the future.<sup>26</sup> It would be Austria-Hungary that would suffer worst because of that as she counted on this area in post-war period. The reports of Austro-Hungarian occupation authorities reflected struggle between the allies over the loot in Serbia. To bring that conflict to an end Conrad von Hötzendorf stated to General Falkenheyn on 20 December 1915 that the Austro-Hungarian military administration in Serbia was an accomplished fact warning the German Command at the same time to moderate requisitions of Serbian supplies.<sup>27</sup> The German Command was prepared to cede Serbia to Austria-Hungary if the latter fulfilled certain conditions: 1) free and uninterrupted German transit for civilian and military purposes; 2) opening of the Serbian economic area to Germany for the purpose of supplying with foodstuff and raw materials; 3) equality of customs conditions in case a separate customs zone was created in Serbia; 4) the Smederevo-Niš-Skoplje railway and Kragujevac and its railway network remained in German hands; 5) German right to exploit copper in the mine of Bor.<sup>28</sup> The request for economic exploitation, particularly that of mines and railway, was a major concern for Vienna.<sup>29</sup> Ballhausplatz accused the Germans of deliberate procrastination with their temporary military administration in Serbia with the view to keeping railways and mines in their possession for as long as possible.<sup>30</sup> In order to back their mining requests, the Austrians invoked the pre-war rights of their StEG company (*Österreichisch-ungarische Staatseisenbahngesellschaft*)<sup>31</sup> and fought tooth and nail in the Su-

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. On the economic exploitation of "Russian" Poland in Serbia on the part of the German army – a copy of a strictly confidential report to Prince Gottfried Hohenlohe, Wien 27. XII. 1915.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. General Oberst Conrad an den Chef des Generalstabes des Feldheeres Herrn Erich von Falkenheyn, Standort des AOK, 20. XII 1915.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. Notiz auf die Notizen vom 21. November, 24. November, 1. December und 12. December d. J. – Berlin 28. XII. 1915. The civilian and military views in Germany diverged. Civilians wanted Bor for Germany and were willing to cede Majdanpek to Austria-Hungary and Plakatnica to Bulgaria. The military insisted on maintaining control over Majdanpek mine. Germany granted to Austria-Hungary a third of copper from mine of Bor.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Thurn an den Minister des Äussern Baron Burián, Teschen 10. Jänner 1916.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Baron Burián an Grafen Thurn – Telegramm, Wien 11. XII. 1915.

<sup>31</sup> StEG had signed contracts with the Serbian government in 1912 for exploration of the mining basin of Krajina in eastern Serbia, with the Belgian Company for explora-

preme Command to secure exploitation of Majdanpek mine for themselves.<sup>32</sup> As for the railways, an agreement was reached in January 1916 which left the railway from Smederevo to the Greek border in German hands as long as German troops were engaged on the Balkan front.

The Bulgarian ally was not fully trusted either. Although the Foreign Ministry in Vienna did not oppose forced Bulgarisation of eastern and southern Serbia in principle, and even condoned it,<sup>33</sup> a number of documents in the Vienna archives point out the great extent to and suspicion with which Bulgarian propaganda in the provinces of Kosovo, Metohija and Serbian Macedonia populated by Albanians was followed.<sup>34</sup>

#### IV

Just as the Hungarians feared in 1915 that Germany might present them with an accomplished fact, the Austrians suspected Hungarians of doing the same. Alarm was caused by *Korrespondenzbureau* on 10 November 1914, confirmed by the *Magyarország* nine days later, that the authorities in the occupied region of Mačva were of Hungarian character with a Hungarian commander, gendarmerie and clerks.<sup>35</sup> On 19 November, the Austrian Prime Minister, Baron Stürgkh, filed an energetic protest with the Foreign Ministry, the Budapest government and the southern front command describing such action as “a flagrant infringement on Austria’s rights” and warning that he would “deny his consent to any solution which would not be unequivocal about the fact that the conquered land was administered on behalf of the Monarchy through its plenipotentiaries and delegates”.<sup>36</sup> Facing resistance Tisza tried in early December to achieve his goal in a roundabout way. Complaining about bulkiness and inefficiency of the administrative apparatus consisting of clerks from Austria, Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina he suggested to Count Berchtold some sort of internal division of spheres of interest: Hungarian clerks in Serbia, Aus-

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tion of Majdanpek as well as with the Majdanpek company. See *ibid.* The exploitation of mines in Serbia.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* Von Falkenheyn an Gen. Oberst Conrad, Teschen 28. XII 1915; Der Vertreter des Ministeriums des Äussern beim Armeeeberkommando Wiesner an Baron Burián, Teschen 29. XII 1915,

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* K. 975, Krieg 32, Vize-Consul in Nisch an Grafen Czernin, 20. III. 1918.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* K. 975, Krieg 32-i.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* K. 973, Krieg 32a, Telegramm des Korrespondenzbureau 10. XI. 1914.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* Note des k. u. k. Ministerpräsidenten Baron Stürgkh an den Minister des Äussern Grafen Berchtold, Wien 19. November 1914. Berchtold instantly admonished the commander of the southern front, General Potiorek – Note des Ministers des Äussern an den Ministerpräsidenten in Wien, Str. Vertraulich, Wien 20. November 1914.

trian in the so-called “Russian” Poland.<sup>37</sup> The proposal was rejected in Vienna.<sup>38</sup> In winter 1915/16, conflict broke out between military and civilian authorities in General Military Governorate in Serbia. The reasons for this conflict were twofold. First, Austro-Hungarian rivalry; then, annexationist plans of the military command in Serbia – all resulting from the divergence of views in respect of general policy towards Serbia i.e. the aims and tasks of occupation. Imposing an occupation regime, the Supreme Command unequivocally started introducing a regime of long-lasting military administration with annexationist objectives. The Hungarian government set their faces against it as it preferred – and it was backed by the joint Foreign Ministry – to keep the Serbian question open until the end of the war. That is how that dispute turned into the conflict between military and civilian authorities over the jurisdiction of civilians within military administration, educational policy in the Governorate and, in general, the regime in the occupied area.

Above all, soldiers took a dim view of civilian interference with what they considered exclusively military matters. In mid-October 1915, the Foreign Ministry in Vienna appointed its delegate with the Intelligence Department of the Third Army Command to represent its “administrative and political interests”. In early 1916, General Consul, Ladislaus Györgyey, replaced Von Storck and the latter was succeeded by Plenipotentiary Minister, Ludwig Graf Szechenyi, in February.<sup>39</sup> The statute of the Military Governorate envisaged the position of a civilian commissary and that duty was taken up by historian Thalloczy. It should be noted that these posts were filled by Hungarians alone. However, militaries systematically sabotaged the work of civilians, particularly that of the Foreign Ministry restraining its activities in Belgrade at every step. The Foreign Ministry complained to the Supreme Command on several occasions that its representative was blocked at every turn and that he had carried out his orders by constantly pleading with military authorities which censured his reports.<sup>40</sup> Typical of this kind of relations was the dispute over the Serbian state archives that arose in

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. Note des ungarischen Ministerpräsidenten Grafen Tisza an den Minister des Äussern Grafen Berchtold, Vertraulich, Budapest 2. XII. 1914. Tisza proposed the same to Potiorek.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. Tisza an Erherzog Friedrich, Budapest 26. Mai 1916.

<sup>39</sup> Kriegsarchiv, Wien, Operationsabteilung des Armeeeoberkommando, No 19867, Jänner 1916; *ibid.* Berichte Wiesner, Teschen 3. I. 1916; *ibid.* Akt des Armeeeoberkommando (No 21540), 13. II. 1916.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. Operationsabteilung des AOK, No 21302, Graf Thurn ddto Teschen, 5. II. 1916; HHSTAW, P. A. I, K. 973, Krieg 32a, Abschrift eines Erlasses an Grafen Thurn, ddto Wien 18. IV. 1916. The censure of those reports did not stop before 25 May 1916. –

late November and early December 1915. Since the military opposed the transfer of the archives to Vienna as it intended to look into their content in Belgrade, Von Storck had cases full of archival material secretly, under the cover of night, transported to Zemun and thence to Austria.<sup>41</sup>

Annexationist policy of the Military Governorate in Serbia caused a sharp conflict. The most prominent participants were Tisza, Burián, Szechenyi and Thalloczy. When Governor Salis-Seewis and the War Minister Krobotin referred to Serbia as “an area annexed to the Monarchy”,<sup>42</sup> Count Tisza seized on that opportunity with vigour to point out to the War Ministry the inaccuracy of such a statement and invoke the conclusions reached by the joint Ministerial Council.<sup>43</sup>

Educational projects of the Military Governorate provided another reason for intervention. In mid-January 1916, the occupation authorities produced a plan for opening elementary and secondary schools in Serbia. The exposition of this plan stressed that it was “the main task of elementary schools to educate children for civic life and create useful members of human society, then general education and the strengthening of character, an emphasis being on maintaining discipline, cleanliness and upbringing in terms of orderly conduct”.<sup>44</sup> The plan encompassed a broad education programme and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) were appointed as school staff. The Supreme Command approved the plan on 27 January<sup>45</sup> and the first of the envisaged schools was ceremoniously opened in Bitoljska Street in Belgrade as early as 10 February.<sup>46</sup>

School curriculum banned the use of Cyrillic alphabet. In a memorandum produced by the army which Count Thurn forwarded to Baron

Kriegsarchiv, Operationsabteilung des AOK, No 25388, Armeeoberkommando an das Militärgouvernement Serbien 25. V. 1916.

<sup>41</sup> HHSTAW, P. A. K. 822, Krieg 2 (1914–18), Privatschreiben. Von Storck, Wien 4. XII. 1915.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. P. A. I, Krieg 32 b, d, e, k. u. k. Militärgouvernement in Serbien an das Armeeoberkommando, 16. I. 1916.

<sup>43</sup> Tisza spoke against “showering good deeds [sic] on the fanatical hatred of the Serbian people which is guilty of this war”. – Ibid. P. A. I, Krieg 32 b, d, c, K. 974, Tisza an den Feldzeugmeister und Kriegsminister Alexander Freiherrn Krobotin, Budapest 13. II. 1916.

<sup>44</sup> AS, MGG/S, box 1/48 Plt. 48, Die Grundsätze für die Errichtung der Normal und Mittelschulen in Serbien. Ibid. MGG/S an das AOK, Belgrad 14. I. 1916.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. MGG/S, box 1/48 Plt, Armeeoberkommando, Standort des AOK, 27. I. 1916.

<sup>46</sup> HHSTAW, P. A. K. 974, Krieg 32 a-f, Vertreter des Ministeriums des Äussern Graf Szechenyi, Belgrad 10. II. 1916. – The representative of the Foreign Ministry was not invited to take part in this ceremony. For more detail about the opening of schools see AS, Plt box 2/205, 20. IV. 1916.

Burián, Cyrillic alphabet was termed *staatsgefährlich* [dangerous to the state] because under the aegis of Serbian ecclesiastical and school autonomy in Vojvodina it had served as an instrument of agitation for the Serb cause, it provided a link between the Vojvodina Serbs with Serbia and, in general, contributed to preservation of national individuality of Serbs in the Habsburg Empire. By banning Cyrillic alphabet and advancing the educational programme the army openly demonstrated its intention to annex Serbia on the grounds of “general benefit for Austria-Hungary and not particular interests of one of her nations”, a clear allusion to Hungarians.<sup>47</sup>

The action of military circles met with resistance in Budapest and Vienna. The civil commissary in Belgrade Thalloczy warned Governor Salis-Seewis that this measure would draw Serbs closer to Bulgarians.<sup>48</sup> Stürgkh, Burián and Tisza each made strong protest to the Supreme Command. These protests underscored principled importance of that matter and the army was warned not to prejudice the future status of Serbia by measures which were not in keeping with the temporary character of military occupation. Burián used the opportunity to point out the existing divergence between military and civilian authorities in Serbia.<sup>49</sup> Tisza was even harsher: repeating Burián’s arguments, he disputed educational competence of soldiers, accused the army of eschewing deliberately Hungarian teachers and demanded the implementation of a “strict regime in Serbia” because “the Serbs must feel the consequences of their offences” in order to “break down the power of Serbdom and build a strong bulwark against it”.<sup>50</sup>

Exposed to such criticism, Conrad von Hötzendorf found himself in an unexpected position to defend the army from reproaches for its “kind treatment of Serbia”. In a reply to Tisza, he fully agreed with the policy of harsh rule in that country: “At the beginning of the offensive against Serbia,” Conrad von Hötzendorf wrote on 15 March 1916, “the Supreme Command ordered ruthless exploitation of the area. The Military Governorate is now carrying out disarmament of population and securing the area by employing draconic measures while material resources of Serbia would be utilised to maximum extent regardless of population.” He explained the educational policy of the Governorate as resulting from aspiration to pre-

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<sup>47</sup> HHSTAW, Krieg 32 b, d, e, Graf Thurn an den Minister des Äussern Grafen Burián, Teschen 11. IV. 1916.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. Graf Szechenyi an Baron Burián, Belgrad den 24. II. 1916.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. K. 973, Krieg 32a, Abschrift eines streng vertraulichen Erlasses: 1. An den Vertreter des k. u k. Ministerium des Äussern in Belgrad; 2. An den Vertreter des k. u k. Ministerium des Äussern bei dem k. u k. Armeeeoberkommando, Wien 18. III. 1916.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. K. 974, Krieg 32e, Kon. Ung. Ministerpräsident an das k. u k. Armeeeoberkommando, Budapest 3. III. 1916.

vent passive resistance and enable the full use of local economic resources. He regarded the use of NCOs as teaching staff in accordance with education of “Serbian children in the spirit of discipline and order”. As for banning Cyrillic alphabet, it had already been prohibited in Bosnia and Herzegovina by the imperial decree of 15 October 1915 just like it had been similarly removed from schools in Dalmatia.<sup>51</sup> In a directive issued on the same day, Hötzenndorf did not conceal annexationist intentions: Serbia had to be ruled with firm hand and economically exploited as much as possible, but it had to be taken into account that she was necessary to the Monarchy as an economic area in the future. Serbian intelligentsia should be dealt with severely whereas peasants and commercial circles should be won over. In the matter of schools it was necessary to limit them to elementary, and possibly vocational, schools, but Serbian teachers must be completely excluded “for they are imbued with hatred of us”.<sup>52</sup> Such policy of the Supreme Command and Governorate in Serbia only deepened the conflict with the Hungarians and civilian authorities.<sup>53</sup>

Tendencies of military authorities in Serbia to transfer responsibility for some local administration to native people caused further suspiciousness. Some members of conservative Serbian circles were employed in occupation administration. Claiming that such measures were devoid of political inspiration, Governor Salis-Seewis argued that local population could not be completely excluded from internal administration if full economic exploitation of the land was to be effected. They were “carefully selected persons” which “did not discredit themselves politically in the past with outbursts against the Monarchy”.<sup>54</sup>

The municipal committee in Belgrade formed immediately after the conquest of the city on 10 October 1915, and reorganised into two bodies (*Uprava* and *Odbor*) in February 1916, was enlarged, following the resignation of Dr. Stevan Leway, with a number of well-known Serbian politicians from the pre-war period. Along with the president, Vojislav Veljković, formerly finance minister and one of the leaders of the Popular Party, the committee was joined by Mihailo Popović, also a former finance minister and prominent Radical, Vasilije Antičić, formerly foreign minister and

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. Krieg 32 b, d, e, Conrad von Hötzenndorf an Grafen Tisza, Standort des AOK, 15. III. 1916.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. Conrad von Hötzenndorf an das k. u. k. Militärgouvernement in Belgrad, Standort des AOK, 15. III. 1916.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Abschrift eines Erlasses an Grafen Thurn, 28. III. 1916.

<sup>54</sup> Milikić, “Beograd pod okupacijom”, 280, 298–299. Szechenyi took a favourable view of the previous work of all members of the committee – HHSTAW, K. 973, Krieg 32a, Graf Szechenyi an Minister Baron Burián, Belgrad 18. März 1916.

well-known Independent Radical, Živojin Perić, Progressivist and university professor, Pavle Denić, formerly construction minister, and others.<sup>55</sup> The *Zentralwoltätigkeits-Komitée* was then formed for the purpose of collecting and distributing aid for population; it consisted of “prominent citizens who are generally trusted, politically are beyond reproach and assessed as reliable”. The committee started forming its subcommittees in the interior attached to the county commands.<sup>56</sup> Of course, these bodies were under strict control of the occupation authorities. Attached to the Belgrade Committee were a civilian commissary and a military advisor; the same went for the Relief Committee. The members of the committee were elected on the basis of their personal activities rather than party affiliation.<sup>57</sup> They were restricted to the bounds of their competencies. In January 1916, the former Serbian prime minister, Liberal Jovan Avakumović, suggested to Count Salis-Seeuwis a joint proclamation to the population. The Governor was so angry with Avakumović because of his impertinent idea of attaching his signature next

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. Berichte des MGG/S, März 1916.

<sup>56</sup> Dr. Vojislav Veljković, the chairman of the committee, tried in May 1915 through the agency of the journalist Lončarević, who was assisting the representative of the Foreign Ministry, to initiate a general discussion between the Austro-Hungarian occupation authorities and the representatives of Serbian political parties who remained in the country. He reminded of the example of the Russian Legation in Belgrade that had gathered together the Serbian opposition at the time of the last rulers of the Obrenović dynasty and proposed a similar action of the occupiers in gathering the opponents of the Karađordjević dynasty and Radicals. According to Veljković and Lončarević, it was up to the Austro-Hungarian Legation in Belgrade to attract those parties which had not been ill-disposed to the Monarchy in the past. This discussion would have resulted in an agreement concerning the future political relations softening at the same time the unnecessary strictness of military authorities. (HHSTAW, P. A. I, K. 977, Krieg 32k Aufzeichnung eines Privatgespräches des Endesgefertigten, Belgrad 13. Mai 1916). Živojin Perić expounded similar ideas at the end of September 1916 reproaching military administration for neglecting the supporters of the Serbian Conservative Party founded in 1914 with an anti-Russian and pro-Austrian political programme. Perić complained that the authorities were interning Austrophiles as much as Radicals. (Ibid., Krieg 32k-o, Note by Živojin Perić and Professor Jovanović, Belgrade, late September 1916). In spring 1918, Perić proposed the formation of a “constituent [assembly]” in Serbia which would explicitly separate the Serbian cause from the Entente Powers (ibid. Report by Major Safranek, Belgrade, 11 March 1918). It is interesting to note that the renowned Austrophile Vukašin Petrović did not play a major role under the Austro-Hungarian occupation, although he did offer his services to Vienna (K. 952, Krieg 25, Burián to Thurn, private, 17 December 1915). The Military Governorate entrusted Petrović with collecting harvest and cattle from the Bulgarian occupation zone (ibid., K. 977, Krieg 32 k-o, Kuhn to Czernin, Belgrade, 23 March 1918).

<sup>57</sup> HHSTAW, K. 973, Krieg 32a, Generalkonsul Györgyey an Ministar Burián, Streng Vertraulich, Belgrad am 18. Jänner 1916.

to that of Salis-Seewis himself that he ordered his arrest and internment.<sup>58</sup> The affair reached even the Emperor's office which required further information.<sup>59</sup> A statement of Vojislav Veljković to the effect that the "Belgrade Committee, *supported* [emphasis mine] by military authorities, will do a useful job" also gave cause for grievance. Szechenyi complained that this statement suggested that the Committee had priority over military authorities.<sup>60</sup> When, at a meeting, Milivoje Spasojević, a member of the Relief Committee, started to criticise the occupation authorities the civilian commissary interrupted him and asked the Governor to have him interned.<sup>61</sup>

Recruiting local people to committees, the public celebration of "County Day" (*Kreistag*) in Gornji Milanovac, propaganda conducted by the *Beogradske novine* (Belgrade Newspaper) to the effect that the Serbian people would have a better future within the framework of the new state, public opening of schools made Hungarian ruling circles suspect that the army not just carried out an annexationist policy in Serbia but also prepared political actions with the view to establishing some kind of domestic authorities under occupation. It was the fear of the Yugoslav question that accounted for such Hungarian attitude. The administration of Governorate recruited mostly clerks of Yugoslav origin due to their language skills. Szechenyi went so far as to accuse Count Salis-Seewis of having special sympathies for the "Yugoslav race" because of his mother's Croat origin. A breeze starting from the top, from the Governor, Szechenyi complained, was turning into a storm among clerks at the bottom causing frictions and awakening unjustified hopes among the Serbs contrary to ambitions of the occupation authorities.<sup>62</sup> Tisza saw the Yugoslav civil servants and the Serbian Belgrade Committee as an embryo of something of a Serbo-Croat authority that smacked of Yugoslavism and trialism.<sup>63</sup> "All this indicates the formation of a permanent authority," Tisza wrote to the Supreme Command on 3 March 1916, "in a finally conquered country, with a specific [political] programme."<sup>64</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. Copia pro actis ad Einsichtsstück der Militärkanzlei Seiner Majestät vom 25. Jänner 1916. (betreffend den gewesenen serbischen Ministerpräsidenten Avakumović).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. K. 977, Krieg 32a, Graf Szechenyi an Baron Burián, Belgrad den 18. März 1918.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. K. 973, Graf Szechenyi an Baron Burián, Belgrad 4. IV. 1916.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, same as note 59.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. Tisza an Erherzog Friedrich, Budapest 26. V. 1916.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. K. 974, Krieg 32e, Kön. ung. Ministerpräsident an das k. u k. Armeeeoberkommando, Budapest 3. III. 1916.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. K. 973, Krieg 32a, Abschrift eines Str. Vertr. Erlasses 1. an den Vertreter des k. u k. Ministerium des Äussern bei dem Armeeeoberkommando, Wien 18. III. 1916.

In mid-March 1916, the Foreign Ministry in Vienna and the Hungarian government filed their protests with the Supreme Command and Governorate pointing to the stepping over the bounds of powers and to the political consequences of such actions. Count Szechenyi was instructed from Vienna to personally inform Count Salis-Seewis<sup>65</sup> but, as the representative of the Foreign Ministry expected, the Governor took shelter behind the Supreme Command referring to specific orders he had received and which he had to carry out as a soldier.<sup>66</sup> The Supreme Command was also uncompromising: Conrad von Hötzendorf defended himself that the writing of the occupation press could not be taken as a proof because that press was read abroad as well and “we have no interest in provoking foreign public opinion or presenting ourselves in an unfavourable light by describing our draconic repressive measures in Serbia”.<sup>67</sup>

In order to find out what the real state of affairs was, Tisza himself undertook an inspection tour in north-west Serbia in early May 1916 including a visit to the General Governor in Belgrade. On that occasion he visited Šabac, Koviljača, Zatrežje, Valjevo and Lazarevac.<sup>68</sup> Upon his return, Tisza decided to finally settle the question. First in a written communication,<sup>69</sup> then in a conversation with Erzherzog Friedrich and Conrad von Hötzendorf at the end of May in Teschen, the seat of the Supreme Command, he requested a thorough reorganisation of the Military Governorate, the removal of Governor and condemnation of annexationist policy in Serbia. Since Hötzendorf again refused to accept Tisza’s reasons defending the army, the Hungarian Prime Minister addressed Baron Burián on 3 June with the plea to have the Emperor’s verdict in this dispute invoking the decisions of the joint Ministerial Council of 19 July 1914 and 7 January 1916. “The Hungarian government will not assume responsibility for events on the southern frontier and their impact on the hinterland,” Tisza concluded, “if the Military Governorate continues with its activities that run contrary to vital interests of the Hungarian state.”<sup>70</sup> That was an ultimatum on the part of Hungary and Burián understood it as such. In his note to the

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. Graf Szechenyi an den Herrn Minister des k. u. k. Hauses und des Äussern Baron Burián, Belgrad 24. III. 1916. – Governor Salis-Seewis complained that Burián was ill-informed openly alluding to his interlocutor Szechenyi as a source of inaccurate information.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. K. 974, Krieg 32 b, d, e, Conrad von Hötzendorf an Grafen Tisza, Standort des AOK, 15. III. 1916.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. K. 973, Krieg 32a, Szechenyi an Baron Burián, Belgrad 17. Mai 1916.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. Graf Tisza an Erzherzog Friedrich, Budapest 26. V. 1916.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. Graf Tisza an Baron Burián, Budapest 3. Juni 1916.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. Abschrift eines alleruntertänigsten Immediatvortrages ddo Wien, 9. Juni 1916.

Emperor on 9 June he reminded of the decisions of the joint Ministerial Council in respect of Serbia, repeated all the accusations against the policy of Military Governorate and used the opportunity to demand extension of authority given to the representative of civilian authorities.<sup>71</sup> Both proposals were accepted: by the Emperor's decision of 6 July 1916 Count Salis-Seewis and his chief of staff, Colonel Gelinek, were recalled and replaced by General Adolf von Rhemen and Colonel Hugo Kerchnawe.<sup>72</sup> The removal of Salis-Seewis was received in Belgrade, in the words of Szechenyi, as a "thunder from a clear sky". The Governor was angry and he instantly left Belgrade in a car. A protest addressed to the Supreme Command failed. Ironically referring to certain parts of Salis-Seewis's farewell order mentioning a "peaceful and content population", Szechenyi pointed out that a plot had just been discovered in Serbia involving 50 persons of which 12 had been hanged.<sup>73</sup>

The Emperor's decision of 6 July authorised Baron Burián to submit the necessary proposals to the Supreme Command for the purpose of extending authority of a civilian commissary. He did it promptly on 10 July disputing the qualifications, previous knowledge and practical experience of military men in the matters of a political-administrative nature. The Statute of the General Military Governorate in Serbia considerably extended the power of civilian authorities. Civilian commissary was, just like Governor, appointed by the Emperor; he was charged with all matters of civilian administration, appointing, replacing and rewarding clerks; the entire political, economic, financial, and legal service of the Governorate, completely separated from military functions, was under him. Civilian officials headed all non-military departments.<sup>74</sup> The entry of Romania into war in August 1916 temporarily postponed coming into force of these changes – that finally took place on 15 October 1916.<sup>75</sup>

The conflict of military and civilian authorities in occupied Serbia ended in the defeat of the Supreme Command's conceptions in summer 1916. In keeping with the interests of Hungarian ruling circles her fate

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. Emperor's decision of 8 July 1916.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. Streng vertrauliches Privatschreiben des Grafen Szechenyi ddtto Belgrad, 12. Juli 1916.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. Abschrift eines geheimen Erlasses an Grafen Thurn, Armeeeoberkommando, ddtto Wien. 10. VII. 1916 – The suggested changes were attached.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. Telegramm an Grafen Thurn 20. IX. 1916; F. Kinsky an Baron Burián, Teschen 10. X. 1916.

<sup>75</sup> Kriegsarchiv, Operationsabteilung AOK, No 28818/I, Armeeeoberkommando an das Militergeneralgouvernement in Serbien 29. VIII. 1916; *ibid.* No 30219, 15. IX. 1916; *ibid.* No 30473, 13. IX. 1916 and No 30185, 9. IX. 1916.

remained uncertain in anticipation of the outcome of the war that was still in full swing. In the meantime, Serbia was going to be ruled with the iron fist of military occupation.

## V

The occupation authorities in Serbia in 1915–1918 had three basic tasks: to secure peace and order, to conduct economic exploitation of the country and to create the necessary conditions for the life of population.

1) The shifting of the war theatre towards the south (the Salonica front), military operations on the Italian front, the increasing demands from the main theatres of war in the west and east of Europe constantly diminished military effectives stationed in Serbia. In mid-October 1915, the Command of the Belgrade Bridgehead (*Brückenkopfkommando*) was formed for the purpose of fortifying a defence line towards the south. The Command of the City of Belgrade was added to it later, but technical works of the Belgrade Bridgehead Command were ceased as early as spring 1916, a large number of men was withdrawn and the command itself was dissolved in August 1917. Romania's entry into war against the Central Powers in August 1916 brought the Serbian land to the vicinity of battlefield for a brief time. A strategic reserve was then formed in the Kragujevac-Palanka-Arandjlovac area which was also prepared to suppress hostile movements of the population. Mines were laid in the river. However, a rapid success on the Romanian front pushed again the Serbian land deeper into the background of military operations. The occupation forces adhered to the ratio of keeping 30,000 soldiers to control 50,000 civilians of military age.<sup>76</sup> However, this ratio could not be maintained: in summer 1917, the General Military Governorate had just 16,000 troops at its disposal many of whom were not of particular fighting capabilities.<sup>77</sup> Their duty was mostly reduced to securing the railway, harvest, occasional searching for guerrilla groups, particularly guarding against the crossing of such groups from the Bulgarian occupation zone during and after the well-known Toplica insurgency in spring 1917.<sup>78</sup> The stationed troops were increasingly ill-fed and ill-kept in

<sup>76</sup> HHSTAW, P. A. I, K. 977, Krieg 32a, Materieller Monatsbericht des MGG/S pro Monat August 1917.

<sup>77</sup> Kriegsarchiv, Operationsabteilung AOK, No 51692, Chef des Ersatzwesens für die gesamte bewafnete Macht, Wien 1. Juni 1917; HHSTAW, P. A. I, K. 977, Krieg 32k, Halbmonatsbericht für die Zeit vom 1. bis 15. Juli 1917.

<sup>78</sup> According to a table of food rationing, Austro-Hungarian soldiers daily received 280g of bread as opposed to 750g allotted to German soldiers. – HHSTAW, P. A. I, Krieg 32k, Monatsbericht MGG/S pro Jänner 1918.

comparison to German units.<sup>79</sup> Prolongation of war, military defeats, news of the revolution in Russia diminished the morale of the occupation troops, especially common soldiers and NCOs. At the beginning of June 1918 the *Ersatzbataillon* of the 71st infantry regiment in Kragujevac with 700 soldiers revolted. They were quelled with the use of artillery.<sup>80</sup>

In order to keep subdued 1,375,000 people estimated to populate the Austro-Hungarian occupation zone in Serbia with the relatively small and weak contingent of occupation troops, severe preventive measures were undertaken against civilians: deportation (internment), disarmament and hostage-taking.

Deportations were carried out on several occasions: in late 1915, during the advancing of the Central Powers' armies in Serbia, then upon Romania's entry into war in 1916 and finally, during the Toplica uprising in spring 1917, and in late 1918.<sup>81</sup> The largest-scale deportations were those undertaken from mid-August to the end of October 1916 in connection with Romania's declaration of war. On 31 August, the Governorate issued the following order to the county commands: "Die Ruhe und Sicherheit sind, wenn nötig, mit den schärfsten Massnahmen (Geiseln, Dezimieren, Niederbrennung etc.) unbedingt aufrechtzuerhalten" [Peace and security must be maintained if necessary with the most severe measures (deportations, annihilations, burning down, etc.)].<sup>82</sup> On that occasion 16,500 people were interned in Serbia and then deported to camps in Hungary and Austria (Vacz, Czegled, Nezsider, Naymeguer, Arad, Aschach, Heinrichsbrün, Braunau). This action was systematically executed: the remnants of the Serbian army (soldiers, NCOs, officers) that had remained in the country and avoided being taken to prisoner camps were first interned; then intelligentsia was arrested, especially those which had been hostile to the Monarchy before the war or participated in the work of political, national, cultural and even sport societies;<sup>83</sup> then other

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. K. 977, Krieg 32 k-o, Berichte Kuhn, Belgrad 5. VI. 1918. – According to Kuhn, 4 soldiers were killed and 12 wounded on that occasion.

<sup>80</sup> J. A. Pisarev, "Okkupatsiia Serbii Avstro-Vengrii i bor'ba serbskogo naroda za svoje osvobozhdenie v 1916–1918 gg", *Sovetskoe slavianovedenie* 4 (1965), 33.

<sup>81</sup> Kriegsarchiv, Operationsabteilung AOK No 30185, MGG/S an das Kreiskommando, Belgrad 31. VIII. 1916.

<sup>82</sup> The Serbian societies were listed: the Black Hand [sic], National Defence, Yugoslav Club, League of Volunteers, Marksmen Society, Dušan the Mighty, *Obilić*, *Kolo jabača*, *Pobratimstvo* Football Club [sic], *Kolo srpske braće*, members of masonic lodges, male members of *Kolo srpskih sestara*, members of the editorial boards of all Serbian journals including the humoristic ones (*Brka*, *Spadalo*, *Djavo*).

<sup>83</sup> HHSTAW, P. A. I, K. 975, Krieg 32g, Telegramm in Ziffern an Baron Kuhn, Wien 15. IV. 1917.

people between 17 and 50 years of age who were capable of military service. The remaining peasants were organised in *Internierten-Arbeiterabteilungen* to work in the fields. Elderly persons with material resources were allowed to be confined in Austria-Hungary rather than interned.<sup>84</sup> In May 1917, around 40,000 Serb civilians were in the camps of Austria-Hungary.<sup>85</sup> These mass deportations caused alarm beyond Serbia's borders: even the Vatican intervened in April 1917 through the papal nuncio in Vienna against the internment of children.<sup>86</sup> Imprisonment in camps cut both ways and it considerably hampered agricultural production. That is why some of the interned peasants were sent back in 1917.<sup>87</sup>

Disarmament of population was undertaken for the purpose of pacification. It took place on several occasions under threat of death penalty for hiding arms.<sup>88</sup> There were a lot of weapons remaining among the people: in March 1917, thirty persons were executed and 288 indicted for hiding arms in the Kragujevac County alone.<sup>89</sup> Upon the proclamation of amnesty, on 28 June 1917, 1230 rifles, 474 pistols, 54 hand grenades and other military material were turned in.<sup>90</sup> That large quantities of arms remained hidden despite all this would become obvious at the end of the war.

Taking of hostages was a similar security measure and it was increasingly applied as the war was drawing to an end and the resistance of the population was turning into armed struggle. Hostages were taken to secure harvest, threshers and railway or in the case of anonymous threats to senior officials of the occupation apparatus.<sup>91</sup> The intelligence department, state police and gendarmerie, as well as financial organs within the General Governorate did their best to establish a wide intelligence network for gauging public opinion, espionage and counterespionage. The instructions prepared

<sup>84</sup> Pisarev, "Okkupatsiia Serbii", 33.

<sup>85</sup> HHSTAW, P. A. I, K. 975, Krieg 32g, Telegramm in Ziffern an Baron Kuhn, Wien 15. IV. 1917.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. K. 977, Krieg 32k, Halbmonatsbericht für die Zeit vom 15. bis 31. Mai 1917. After this protest some 10,000 people were returned to Serbia to join working battalions.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. Verordnung des AOK und des MGG/S betreffend den Besitz von Waffen, Munitionsgegenständen und Sprengstoffen im hiesigen Okkupationsgebiete, Belgrad 21. Oktober 1916.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. Situationsbericht pro Monat März 1917.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. Halbmonatsbericht für die Zeit vom 1. bis 15. Juli 1917, Belgrad 16. VII. 1917.

<sup>90</sup> E.g., an anonymous threat of an Austro-Hungarian intelligence officer was sent to the General-Governor in June 1917: *ibid.* Gesandte Kuhn an Grafen Burián, Str. Vertr. Belgrad 24. VI. 1917.

<sup>91</sup> AS, MGG/S, Intelligence Department, box 1/3/42/45, Circular from the Intelligence Department and practical instructions.

by the intelligence service in Serbia emphasised the need for creating a network of trusted persons among the people for the purpose of gathering information on the general mood, deportations, intelligentsia's activities – especially that which was anti-Habsburg – anti-occupation movements, spreading of alarming news and texts, smuggling, arms hiding, abuse by officials etc.<sup>92</sup> Monthly reports preserved in the archives of the Intelligence Department of Military Governorate reflect the vigilance with which the occupation authorities kept tabs on what was going on in Serbia. Denunciations demonstrate a specific psychological pressure exerted on population by means of accusations that were largely based on statements given in a state of agitation and anger.

2) Economic exploitation of Serbia was based on confiscations, requisitions, use of economic resources and labour. In June 1916, the property belonging to all persons considered associated with the Sarajevo assassination was confiscated.<sup>93</sup> In the wake of the entry of occupation troops in Serbia in 1915, large-scale requisitions of wool, copper, brass, nickel, zinc and its alloys, foodstuff and leather ensued. Special units for conducting searches, the so-called *Suchdetachment*, were formed; each consisted of an NCO, corporal, scribe, locksmith (for breaking in) and four or five soldiers. The requisitioned material was sent to *Materialsammelstelle* in Belgrade and then transported to Austria-Hungary.<sup>94</sup>

At the end of 1915, a central administrative body was formed in Vienna for exporting raw materials from Serbia, Montenegro, Serbian Macedonia, Albania and Poland. In summer 1916, the *K. u k. Waren-Verkehrs Zentrale* was established in Belgrade as an agency of Governorate with the view to “mediating and furthering trading traffic between the occupation area in Serbia and Montenegro, on the one side, and Austria-Hungary, on the other”.<sup>95</sup> Under this new scheme, all companies abandoned by Serbian owners when retreating from the country became receivership. An artificial exchange rate of Serbian dinar to ruble was imposed and Serbian paper money was stamped over. It is interesting to note that this currency reform dismally failed: out of 150 million dinars estimated to circulate in the Austro-Hungarian occupation zone only 38 million were stamped over

<sup>92</sup> HHSTAW, K. 975, Krieg 32g, Szechenyi an Baron Burián, Belgrad 9. VII. 1916.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. K. 973, Krieg 32g, An das k. u k. Armee-Etappenkommando – Expositur Belgrad, Feldpost 211, 10. XII. 1915; *ibid.* Bestimmungen für die Suchdetachements; *ibid.* Organische Bestimmungen und Dienstvorschriften für die Materialsammelstelle.

<sup>94</sup> Kriegsarchiv, Operationsabteilung AOK, No 28418, Provisorische Bestimmungen für k. u k. Waren-Verkehrs Zentrale in Belgrad, Standort des AOK, 2. VIII. 1916.

<sup>95</sup> HHSTAW, K. 975, Krieg 32g, Vertrauliche Privatschreiben des Grafen Szechenyi ddtto Belgrad an Baron Mussulin, 16. VIII. 1916.

and the old dinar retained in Serbia greater value than the Austrian krone (100:102).<sup>96</sup> The occupiers opened branches of their banks, particularly from Budapest (Andrejević & Co). Fortnightly and monthly reports from Military Governorate preserved in Serbian and Austrian archives are rife with information on economic exploitation of the country, export of agricultural raw materials, use of forests and mines and penetration of Austro-Hungarian companies in Serbia. The wealth and diversity of this source material requires a special study on the economic policy of the occupation power in Serbia in 1915–1918.

3) All Austro-Hungarian reports on the conquest of Serbia in 1915 noted a desperate state of population and famine threatening the occupation zone. The return of refugees exacerbated shortage of food: the population of Belgrade rose from 15,000 in January 1916 to 50,000 in July 1917. Such situation created a twofold danger for the occupation power: local resources could not satisfy the needs of the occupation troops; destitution and desperation were not conducive to a peaceful rear.<sup>97</sup> Foreign propaganda caused much damage with its claims that Serbian population was dying of hunger.<sup>98</sup> Reports from Serbia in late 1915 spoke of the necessity of receiving urgent relief from Austria-Hungary to avoid disaster. The Austrian Prime Minister, Baron Stürgkh, was willing to respond to such appeals, but Conrad von Hötzendorf and Tisza were opposed. The Supreme Command suggested organising an international aid, but such action would take too long.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, it did not start to function, in limited conditions, before spring 1916; The International Red Cross, Swiss and Swedish humanitarian organisations embarked on transferring Romanian wheat to Serbia.<sup>100</sup> Meanwhile, the Governorate had to make do with the rational use of the existing supplies; some 1,000 wagonloads of crops were imported for the spring sowing in 1916 and then 600 wagonloads of flour and grains. Pensions of clerks were recognised in early February 1916.<sup>101</sup> Foodstuff was

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. K. 974, Krieg 32 a-f, K. u k. Armeeoberkommando an das Ministerium des Äussern, Standort des AOK, 7. XII. 1915; *ibid.* Krieg 32 b, d, e, Militärgeneralgouvernement in Serbien Präz 576, an das Armeeoberkommando, 16. Jänner 1916.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. K. 974, Krieg 32a-f, Baron Wiesner an Baron Burián 4. I. 1916.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. Der Vertreter des k. u k. Ministeriums des Äussern beim k. u k. Armeeoberkommando, Teschen 20. XI. 1915; *ibid.* Conrad von Hötzendorf an das Ministerium des Äussern, Standort des AOK am 18. XI. 1915; *ibid.* Krieg 32b, Der Vertreter des Ministeriums des Äussern beim AOK, Teschen 6. I. 1916.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. Krieg 32 a-f, Berichte des schweizerischen Gesandten in Wien, 11. II. 1916, 8. II. 1916.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. Krieg 32b, Draft for feeding civilian population in the occupied parts of Serbia.

<sup>101</sup> AS, MGG/S, Military Department, box 1, Belgrade, 28 January 1918, Table of food.

rationed and increasingly reduced: in January 1918, children from five to thirteen years received 320 g of meat and 120 g of lard a week; adults were entitled to a weekly ration of 480 g of meat and 240 g of lard. In July 1918, the amount of meat was cut down to 200 g and 300 g respectively.<sup>102</sup>

In order to fully control the youth and re-educate it in “the spirit of discipline and order”, the Governorate continued with its educational policy. During the last school year under occupation (1917/18) eight grammar schools with 4,000 in- and 3,000 out-school pupils, and 135 elementary schools (1916–17) with 24,000 pupils were operating in Serbia. Some 105,000 children could not attend school due to the lack of space.<sup>103</sup> Because of the ban on the use of Cyrillic alphabet there was not enough textbooks – even Serbian textbooks from Vojvodina which were printed in Cyrillic and approved in the Habsburg Monarchy were not allowed in Serbia. The University of Belgrade was closed down throughout the occupation.<sup>104</sup> The religion question also caused difficulties for the occupation regime as the highest-ranking clergy of the Serbian Orthodox Church had left the country with the Serbian army. The bishops of Niš and Šabac were interned in Bulgaria and some 200 priests were incarcerated in camps in Austria-Hungary. Illegitimate marriages were growing in number. Court Spiritual did not function and the Church as an organised institution did not exist. The canon law of the Serbian Church did not allow bringing bishops from Austria-Hungary to elect the new metropolitan.<sup>105</sup> In October 1918, the Bulgarians were requested to release the imprisoned bishops and return them in their dioceses, but this was a belated measure as the occupation was fast approaching its end.<sup>106</sup>

## VI

Despite physical and psychological pressure exerted on the population during the occupation in 1915–1918, the spirit of the Serbian people was not broken. Numerous reports of military and civilian occupation authorities are a testament to that. In one of those reports written in March 1917 it is

<sup>102</sup> Out of 125 elementary schools, 95 were Serbian, the rest were Albanian and Muslim – HHSTAW, K. 977, Krieg 32k, Halbmonatsbericht für die Zeit vom 1. bis 15. Juli 1917; Ibid. Situationsbericht pro Monat März 1917; Ibid. Der Vertreter des Ministeriums des Äusseren, Belgrad 13. III. 1918 and 13. II. 1918.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. Krieg 32e, Militärgeneralgouvernement in Serbien, Einführung der cyrillischen Schulbücher in die Mittelschulen des MGG/S Bereiches, Belgrad 24. VIII. 1918.

<sup>104</sup> *Sto godina Filozofskog fakulteta* (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1963), 88–89.

<sup>105</sup> HHSTAW, K. 977, Krieg 32 k-o, MGG/S an das AOK, Ibid. Kuhn an Burián, Belgrad 28. VII. 1918.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. Weisung an Otto Czernin in Sofia, Wien 1. X. 1918.

said: “Im grössten Teile der Bevölkerung lebt noch immer die fantastische Hoffnung auf ein selbständiges Serbien” [Most of the population still maintains the fantastic hope of an independent Serbia].<sup>107</sup> News from the fronts and development of military operations received special attention; there was talk of the impending end of the war. “The Serbs hope for a better future and all that is displeasing to us is pleasing to them”, an intelligence report read.<sup>108</sup>

Although there was armed resistance in the Austro-Hungarian occupation zone, it did not reflect the true intensity of popular feeling. Much of the male population had left the country when the Serbian army had broken through Albania to the sea; part of the army ended as POWs; large-scale deportations and interments, particularly in 1916, thwarted, to a large extent, the growth of the resistance movement. According to the Austro-Hungarians, these deportations were the main reason that prevented the spread of the Toplica uprising (*Toplički ustanak*) from the Bulgarian occupation zone to Šumadija. From fall 1916 onwards, reports of the occupation authorities more frequently mentioned “bands” operating in Serbia.<sup>109</sup> Three attempts at organising wider resistance in the country were discovered in 1916; in spring and fall 1917, similar attempts were suppressed in Brus, then in the vicinity of Kragujevac and Kruševac.<sup>110</sup> The Toplica uprising encompassed the area around the Zapadna (West) Morava river spreading across Mali Jastrebac and Mt Kopaonik.<sup>111</sup> In the part of Serbia under Austro-Hungarian occupation, however, there were no mass movements like those in the Bulgarian zone. Units operating in this area and relying on a wide network of local people consisted of four to twenty men; they avoided fighting against occupation forces and were concerned with eliminating traitors (mostly the heads of rural municipalities). Regular fortnightly and monthly reports of the occupation authorities abounded with details about the activities of such groups. They emerged all across Serbia but operated locally.<sup>112</sup> Sabotages, particularly

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. Krieg 32k, Situationsberichte pro Monat März 1917.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. Major Safranek an das AOK, Belgrad 28. I. 1918; see also: Kriegsarchiv, Operationsabteilung AOK No 37388, Nachrichtenabteilung des MGG/S, Belgrad 15. XII. 1916; HHSTAW, P. A. I. K. 977, Krieg 32 k-o, Kuhn an Czernin, Belgrad 25. IV. 1917; ibid. Nachrichtenabteilung des AOK und Evidenzbureau des Generalstabes, Belgrad 1. VI. 1917; ibid. Monatsbericht vom 1. bis 31. März 1918, Belgrad 1. IV. 1918.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. Der Vertreter des Ministeriums des Äussern, Belgrad 17. I. 1917.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. K. 975, Krieg 32g, General von Rhemen an den Vertreter des Ministeriums des Äussern, Belgrad 10. VI. 1917.

<sup>111</sup> M. Perović, *Toplički ustanak* (Belgrade, 1959), 148.

<sup>112</sup> HHSTAW, K. 977, Krieg 32 k-o, Kuhn an Czernin, Belgrad 9. XI. 1917.

burning of harvest, also took place. The authorities did not have enough troops to undertake wider and stronger measures against the bands and thus reacted with repression against civilian population in an attempt to isolate the bands from the masses. Any person caught in an act of sabotage was shot on the spot. Municipalities to which a perpetrator belonged were also punished: grain and cattle was confiscated, pecuniary penalties were imposed, men between 16 and 60 years of age were occasionally interned, houses were set on fire etc.<sup>113</sup> The Russian Revolution, the revolt of Austro-Hungarian troops in Kragujevac in June 1918 and the increasing devastation of land as the war drew closer to an end facilitated armed resistance. In July 1918, 32 attacks were recorded in the Kragujevac County alone; 105 took place in August 1918 in Serbia.<sup>114</sup> Along with local population, deserters from military units and fugitives from camps also committed such attacks. The authorities suspected the existence of an organised network which operated in coordination with the operations of the Serbian army on the Salonica front.<sup>115</sup> From September to mid-October the occupation forces tried to cleanse the ground from guerrilla groups. Not much was accomplished: 100 deserters and only one *komita* were captured. It was reported on 22 October that unrest among the people reached such proportions as to make access to the frontline extremely difficult.<sup>116</sup> B. Hrabak's study amply documented the participation of Serbian population in driving the occupation forces out of the country in October 1918.<sup>117</sup>

Under the pressure from outside and inside the occupation system in Serbia was in full demise in October 1918. An attempt to take out food and material resources from the country and transport them to Austria-Hungary was the last spasm of the occupation regime. After the capitulation of Bulgaria on 29 September, the Serbian army and Allied forces were liberating the country with great rapidity. The last report of Baron Kuhn, the representative of the Foreign Ministry, was sent from Belgrade on 27 October. The next day he left Belgrade, along with General-Governor von Rhemen and his staff, and went to Subotica.<sup>118</sup> Three days later, on 1 No-

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. Kuhn an Czernin, Belgrad 31. VII. 1918, declaration is attached.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. MGG/S – Monatsbericht für Monat Juni 1918; Ibid. General-Oberst Rhemen an den Vertreter des Ministeriums des Äussern in Belgrad, 2. VIII. 1918 and 23. IX. 1918.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. Kuhn an Czernin, Belgrad 7. VIII. 1918. and 25. IX. 1918. Kuhn considered these movements "a general uprising".

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. Kuhn an Czernin 22. X. 1918.

<sup>117</sup> B. Hrabak, "Učešće stanovništva Srbije u proterivanju okupatora oktobra 1918", *Istorijski glasnik* 3-4 (1958), 25-50.

<sup>118</sup> HHSTAW, K. 973, Krieg 32a, Baron Kuhn – Berichte, Belgrad 27. X. 1918.

vember, Belgrade was liberated. This brought to an end the tragic history of Serbia under the Austro-Hungarian occupation regime from 1915 to 1918.

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