



World War I and National Self-Determination

1914–1922

There was a great disparity between the motives and aims of the initial belligerent powers in World War I and the principles and objectives embodied in the various peace settlements after the war. When the war broke out at the beginning of August 1914, the Entente Powers of France, Russia, and England pursued traditional objectives. They sought to defend themselves against “German aggression” and wished to defeat the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary resolutely enough to prevent a recurrence thereof in the future, but they had no clearly articulated set of joint aims. The fact that Britain and France, the foremost representatives of Western Europe’s parliamentary and republican traditions, had allied themselves with Russia, the most despotic power in Europe, did not prevent the Western powers from maintaining that they also were fighting for freedom and democracy, but these appeals to political principle were not especially convincing. The German violation of Belgian neutrality, part of the Schlieffen Plan for the invasion of France, provided Britain with a plausible moral justification for entering the conflict, but Britain had a number of other scores to settle with German *Weltpolitik*.

Aside from weakening Germany and breaking up the German–Austro-Hungarian alliance, the Entente Powers had no grand designs for a new Europe. Certainly some borders would have to be rectified after the war. Russia had vaguely formulated as an objective the liberation of Ukrainian minorities in the eastern realms of Austria-Hungary, and the czar had other traditional imperial Russian ambitions such as dominating the Balkans or gaining control of the Dardanelles Strait. France wanted to recover the province of Alsace-Lorraine, which it had lost to Germany in 1871. The Entente Powers promised neutral countries like Italy and Romania substantial territorial gains in Austria-Hungary in order to draw them into the conflict as allies. Although by the fall of 1915, most of Serbia had been occupied, its armies continued to operate from Greece on the southern front. The future status of a Serbian state, which Russia wanted to see substantially enlarged after the war, was for Britain and France a subordinate point on the agenda. At the beginning of World War I, Entente generals and politicians still envisioned

the future postwar order of Europe in terms of its traditional pentarchy of powers: Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia.

Although Austria-Hungary would be required to make territorial sacrifices, the importance of the Habsburgs’ Dual Monarchy in the European balance of power was unquestioned at the beginning of the war, and neither Britain nor France considered reestablishing an independent Polish state to be one of their war aims. On the contrary, in the midst of the conflict there was no point in making proposals that would either aggravate or weaken their Russian ally. Two sets of events in 1917 radically changed the ideological complexion of the war: Russia’s “democratic” and Bolshevik revolutions in February and October, respectively, and the United States’ entry into the conflict as an associated power in April.

For the first time in history, the United States intervened in European affairs on a grand scale, and although Russia subsequently withdrew from European affairs for almost two decades, the Bolshevik Revolution radically changed the nature of Europe’s largest power. Woodrow Wilson and Vladimir Lenin, two leaders with completely different visions of a new European and a new global order, made substantial contributions to ending the war and articulating the conditions of peace. Although Wilson, as an apostle of American democracy, and Lenin, as a Bolshevik revolutionary, had very little in common, each of them in his own way helped reformulate the objectives of the war, and if there was one term their otherwise disparate political vocabularies had in common, it was national self-determination.

AUSTRIA-HUNGARY:

THE “PRISON OF NATIONS,” 1914–1918

The assassinations of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian imperial throne, and his wife, by Serbian nationalists in Sarajevo, the capital of the province Bosnia-Herzegovina, on June 28, 1914, was not one of the more important causes of World War I, but it provided an occasion for it to begin. Francis Ferdinand was the victim of an irreconcilable conflict between Serbian nationalism and Austro-Hungarian imperial policy. The deterioration of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century, a process that the Great Powers alternately promoted and prolonged, had allowed those nations that had been Ottoman vassals or clients for more than four centuries—Greeks, Serbs, Montenegrins, Romanians, and Bulgarians—eventually to emancipate themselves from the proverbial Turkish yoke. But the various struggles against the Turks for national independence, alternating conflicts over territorial claims among the new states themselves, and the interests of the major powers—Austria-Hungary and Russia on the Balkans, Italy in the Adriatic, and Britain in the Mediterranean—made the region inherently unstable.

Bosnia-Herzegovina was the most recent addition to the Habsburg Empire. A European congress held in Berlin in 1878, the diplomatic denouement of a series of indigenous uprisings against the Turks, sanctioned the Austro-Hungarian occupation and administration of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a protectorate. Because Austria-Hungary had traditionally supported the aspirations of the Serbs against the Turks, Serbia, a small state of 4.5 million, initially viewed the Austro-Hungarian

protectorate of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a benevolent custodianship that would eventually make way for the unification of the Serbian nation into one state.

Austro-Hungarian relations with Serbia became increasingly acrimonious, however, as Serbian nationalism grew more ambitious, and Austria-Hungary violated several international agreements in 1908 by unilaterally annexing Bosnia-Herzegovina. Furthermore, Francis Ferdinand and his advisers had discussed some kind of federal reorganization of Austria-Hungary that would accommodate the aspirations of its substantial Slavic populations. Among them was the conversion, however unrealistic, of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy into some kind of Austrian-Hungarian-southern Slav "Triple Monarchy" as one means of politically integrating the substantial southern Slav minorities into the empire.

The annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, combined with this type of imperial scenario, turned Serbia, initially a protégé and client state of Austria-Hungary, into one of its mortal enemies because it categorically frustrated Serbian aspirations for national unification, and the Serbs found an accommodating new patron in the czar.

Serbia also represented an existential threat to Austria-Hungary insofar as smaller states in the past had led campaigns for national unification that had ended with the expulsion of the Habsburgs from traditional spheres of influence. In the 1860s, Piedmont had initiated the drive for Italian unification that led to the expulsion of the Habsburgs from northern Italy,¹ and Prussia had ousted Austria from the sphere of German politics. With its Greater Serbian version of southern Slav unification, Serbia jeopardized Austria-Hungary's only remaining sphere of influence. The idea of forfeiting Vojvodina, a southern province of the kingdom of Hungary that was inhabited predominantly by Serbs, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, or portions of it, for the sake of southern Slav unity or a Greater Serbian national state did not occur to Austro-Hungarian imperial advisers. On the contrary, the militarists among them considered a preventive war, the conclusion of which might include the incorporation of Serbia into the empire itself, as one means of resolving the conflict. Then the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, gave Austria-Hungary a reason for settling matters with Serbia once and for all.

The events that led to the beginning of World War I are well known. Diplomatic bullying and blundering preceded the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war on Serbia, which started a fatal chain reaction. Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, and Russia mobilized to back Serbia. Germany declared war on Russia, which brought France and eventually England into the conflict. The failure of Germany and Austria-Hungary to achieve their initial military objectives of quickly knocking France and Serbia out of the war led to a worst-case scenario: a war on three fronts.

Before and during the war, one of Austria-Hungary's largest domestic problems was the status and claims of its national minorities. Before the war, there were a number of congenial plans for converting the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary into some kind of "federal union" or federation of national states, and during the war, these reform schemes enjoyed great currency. The Czech historian and father of Austro-Slavism, František Palacký, may be regarded as one of the

most important originators of various federal programs. Different versions of the idea of a "United States of Greater Austria," incidentally the title of a book by a Romanian, Aurel Popovici,² who sympathized with Archduke Francis Ferdinand's reform plans, were popular both before and during the war, and most of these proposals had two common denominators.

One denominator was the formulation of a supranational "Austrian ideology," which defined imperial Austria as a historically necessary and organically grown community of small nations that needed to live together in order to protect themselves from German and Russian imperialism, and the other was plans for a reorganization of the empire that would satisfy the demands of each of its eleven ethnic groups by creating a series of semiautonomous "national states" associated in a federal union. The concept of dynastic loyalty, with the Habsburgs as the consolidating element for the parts of the whole, played an important part in many proposals, but others dispensed with the dynasty.

Although Popovici's proposal did not overcome the problems of regions with great ethnic heterogeneity or smaller "linguistic islands," he suggested, for example, the creation of fifteen "national states" whose borders had an uncanny similarity to the various international frontiers that existed in the region between 1918 and 1945 or have been created by the deterioration of Yugoslavia and the division of Czechoslovakia since 1989.³ Oszkár Jászai, one of the leading figures in the Hungarian liberal reform movement before the war, published a lengthy study in Budapest in 1912, *The Formation of the National States and the Minority Question*, in which he proposed a "United States on the Danube" or a "Switzerland in the East" whose ethnic "states" or "cantons" would be united in a democratic federation. In a similar vein, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, an Austrian poet, playwright, and essayist, praised the multinational function of the Habsburg Empire. As late as 1917, in an essay, *The Austrian Idea*, he declared: "The intellectual and spiritual amplitude of this idea surpasses everything the national or economic ideologies of our day can produce." Hofmannsthal concluded that the Austrian idea could provide the basis for a "new supra-national European politics which would fully grasp and integrate the nationality problem... This Europe, which wants to reform itself, needs an Austria."⁴

Federal schemes also abounded among Austrian socialists, and the empire's Austrian Social Democratic Workers' Party produced two major theoreticians who wrote extensively on the nationalities question before the war, Karl Renner and Otto Bauer.⁵ These socialist democrats already had a supranational or international ideology (a reform-oriented strain of Marxism), and their party existed in a multinational empire. Therefore, they envisioned a democratic transformation of the empire—an empire without an emperor, so to speak—based on the federal reorganization of the monarchy into democratic states that would provide for "national-cultural autonomy." Furthermore, special guarantees for the protection of minorities' rights for those individuals who lived outside their respective "national states" was part of the scheme. The peculiar twist in this socialist conception was that it rejected national separatism as a "bourgeois ideology" and posited the supranational state as an advanced stage of social and political development: a regional realization of the global objective of "Workers of the world unite!"⁶

These examples illustrate that there was no paucity of proposals for dealing with the nationalities question. Even though most historians agree that the Habsburgs' multinational empire was an anachronism in the age of nationalism and portray its demise in terms of the centrifugal forces of nationalism that tore it apart, the Entente Powers initially based their policy toward Austria-Hungary on the maintenance of an imperial status quo, because the empire historically had fulfilled the important function of deterring German and Russian imperial expansion on the Continent. One of the major problems that Britain and France faced in regard to their war objectives was finding a means to weaken Germany and to defeat Austria-Hungary without substantially increasing the power of czarist Russia. But the tactics they employed to draw Italy into the war in 1915 and Romania in 1916, the entry of the United States into the conflict in 1917—as well as Russia's dual revolution in the same year—helped shift the Entente's foreign policy toward Austria-Hungary, and they dramatically changed the climate of opinion among the various national minorities in the Dual Monarchy.

At the beginning of the war, Austria-Hungary was confronted with Pan-Slavic imperialism on one front and the irredentism of border states on three others. The czar had declared the "liberation" of the Ukrainian minorities inhabiting the eastern portion of the Austrian imperial province of Galicia, the Austrian portion of partitioned Poland, to be one of Russia's objectives. But the ruthless manner in which Austro-Hungarian authorities, both civilian and military, conducted themselves in this region as the front moved back and forth across it during the first three years of the war hardly engendered among its population feelings of loyalty toward the Habsburg dynasty.

At the beginning of the war, Serbia clearly stated as its goal the unification of all Serbs into one state, and although the Entente Powers did not endorse this objective, it appeared to give the Serbs living in Austria-Hungary a choice between dynastic loyalty and national liberation. Acrid anti-Serb propaganda, the war against Serbia, and the demeanor of imperial officials, who occasionally treated the empire's indigenous Serbian minorities with a combination of suspicion and contempt alienated many Serbs, who, under circumstances similar to those of the Ukrainians, were among the first to dissociate themselves psychologically from the empire. Despite these two negative examples, however, Austria-Hungary's various national minorities demonstrated substantial dynastic loyalty and multinational patriotism well into the war, which was being fought for the sake of imperial unity or, as the oath went, *Für Gott, Kaiser, und Vaterland*, "For God, the Emperor, and the Fatherland."⁷ The situation on the empire's "domestic front" did not begin to deteriorate noticeably until 1917.

Nevertheless, the empire's Italian and Romanian minorities became points of contention and foreign policy deficits during the war. Although Germany and Austria-Hungary, allied since 1879, had signed a treaty with Italy in 1882, which provided for mutual assistance if Italy were attacked by France but otherwise obligated each signatory power to remain neutral in conflicts with other powers, the Austro-Hungarian alliance with Italy was contrived. They were traditional enemies with conflicting interests in the Adriatic, and the Habsburg Empire contained large Italian minorities. Although Italy reconfirmed and observed its commitment

to neutrality once the war began, it also used its neutrality as diplomatic leverage in an attempt to compel Austria-Hungary into ceding those territories of the empire that housed Italian minorities. Even though Germany pressured Austria-Hungary to compromise, the imperial authorities wanted to postpone as long as possible making any commitments or establishing any precedents.

This example merely indicates how disparate the objectives of Germany and Austria-Hungary were. Austria-Hungary's primary goal was to win the war on the Balkans and to hold the front in the east in order to ensure its territorial integrity. Germany viewed Austria-Hungary as an auxiliary in its conflict with France and Russia and did not want its ally to become embroiled in conflicts that would draw Austro-Hungarian men or matériel away from the Russian front.

Italy, dissatisfied by the Austro-Hungarian lack of preparedness to make immediate concessions, soon turned to the Entente Powers to see what they had to offer. In exchange for the guarantee of substantial territorial gains not only on the Dalmatian coast and the Istrian Peninsula but also in the German-speaking South Tyrol, Italy signed a secret treaty with the Entente Powers in London on May 3, 1915, and declared war on Austria-Hungary three weeks later. Italy wanted to gain control of Trieste, the empire's vital port, and the strategically important Brenner Pass in the Alps, even if it meant incorporating into Italy more than 200,000 German-speaking Tyrolese. (U.S. President Woodrow Wilson was unaware of this secret Italian—Entente agreement when he formulated the ninth of his "Fourteen Points," which stated that a "readjustment of the frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of nationality." To fulfill previous Entente commitments and in direct violation of Wilson's principle of ethnic borders, the Brenner Pass frontier was granted to Italy after World War I.)

Both Romania's relationship with Austria-Hungary and its national interests were similar to those of Italy. Romania had declared its neutrality at the beginning of the war. But it also wanted to incorporate into an expanded Romanian national state the Transylvanian part of the kingdom of Hungary, which was inhabited predominantly by Romanians but had sizable Hungarian and German minorities living in relatively large and cohesive enclaves. Since it was clear to all parties involved that the Hungarians would never sacrifice the sanctity or the territorial integrity of the historical kingdom of Hungary in order to procure Romanian neutrality, Romania waited for a militarily opportune moment to cast its lot with the Entente.

During August 1916, when Austria-Hungary was heavily engaged on the Russian and Italian fronts, Romania negotiated secretly with the Entente Powers, and they made generous territorial guarantees—including all of Transylvania, eastern Hungary up to the Tisza River, "Austrian" Bukovina northeast of Hungary, and the Banat in the Danube Valley—in order to draw Romania into the Entente alliance. With hopes of doubling its size by halving Hungary, Romania declared war on Austria-Hungary on August 27, 1916. Then, however, the collapse of Russia's military offensive in 1916 and the revolutionary collapse of Russia altogether in 1917 isolated Romania on the eastern front, and it sued for a separate peace in 1918.

Although it would be imprudent to label as peripheral the Russian, Serbian, Italian, and Romanian claims, their realization did depend on the outcome of the war, and they did leave intact the ethnic and territorial core of the monarchy: Croats



In Treue Fest (In Unwavering Allegiance), a photo montage of Germany's emperor Wilhelm II and Austria-Hungary's Francis Joseph I, emperor of Austria and king of Hungary, on a propaganda postcard at the beginning of World War I. The mass distribution of material of this kind was supposed to mobilize domestic support for the war effort. (Österreichische Gesellschaft für Zeitgeschichte, Austrian National Library, Picture Archive)

and Slovenes in the south; German-Austrians and Magyars in the middle; and Czechs, Slovaks, and Poles in the north. However, leading representatives of the empire's non-German and non-Hungarian minorities emigrated to the west shortly after the beginning of the war and began agitating for national independence. The reputations of Thomas Masaryk and Eduard Beneš, the founding fathers of the Czecho-Slovak⁸ National Committee in Paris and consequently the Czechoslovak Republic, tend to outshine those of their lesser-known southern Slav compatriots like Ante Trumbić and Frano Supilo, two Croats who founded the Yugoslav National Committee in London. (The intricacies of the Polish situation, which was exceptional because the Poles had to contend with three empires instead of one, will be addressed separately.)

Masaryk and Beneš were instrumental in laying the foundations for a Czech and Slovak state, and they helped pave the way for their southern Slav companions. Masaryk had a very cordial personal relationship with Woodrow Wilson, and the United States' entry into the war gave the Czechoslovak cause a powerful advocate. Beneš organized "Czechoslovak legions" by recruiting Czech and Slovak immigrants as well as prisoners of war and deserters from the Austro-Hungarian imperial army to serve under the Entente's banner. Austrian and Hungarian historians who use the imperial army as an example of one multinational institution that functioned well despite the empire's nationalities problem emphasize that the majority of Czechs and Slovaks served respectably, although there were a few notorious (or praiseworthy) exceptions like the Twenty-eighth Division of Prague, which deserted as a closed formation on the Russian front in 1915. Nonetheless, relatively few Slavic prisoners of war from the Austro-Hungarian army actually responded to the call to fight—around 10 percent—and the Czechoslovak legions, important as they were politically, never numbered more than 60,000 men.⁹

Czech and Slovak legionnaires saw action on three fronts, in France, Italy, and in Russia. The contingents of the Czechoslovak legions in Russia swelled after the February Revolution of 1917 nominally turned Russia into a democracy, but after the Bolshevik Revolution in October, they withdrew from the front and took the long way back to the west, via Siberia to Vladivostok. They did not reach home until 1920 because they became embroiled in a number of conflicts with the Bolshevik forces and assumed the role of a surrogate Allied expeditionary force against the Bolsheviks. (One of the most curious conflicts during the Russian civil war was related to the fact that the Bolsheviks released Hungarian prisoners of war in Siberia when they came to power, and the Czechoslovak legions had occupied portions of the Trans-Siberian Railway. The Hungarian prisoners of war, who wanted to get home and needed the railway to do so, allied themselves with the Red Army in battles against the Czechoslovak legions. More than 100,000 Hungarians fought in the Red Army during the Russian civil war. In many cases, they just wanted to get home, but later Communist historians turned these homesick Hungarian POWs into insurgents with a commitment to world revolution and proletarian internationalism.)

There also were national activists who remained at home—for example, the representatives of the Slavic nations who had been elected to the Reichsrat, the imperial parliament for the Austrian half of the monarchy—and they pursued the same objectives by attempting to use their respective mandates to promote the idea of creating autonomous Czecho-Slovak and southern Slav—Slovene, Croat, and Serb—states within the empire. For example, Czechs from across the political spectrum founded the "Czech Union" in November 1916. Although the Reichsrat was suspended at the beginning of the war, it was reconvened in 1917, and on May 29, 1917, Czech members of the Austrian imperial parliament passed a motion demanding that the historical lands of the Bohemian crown and Slovakia be made into one state and that the monarchy be reconstituted into equal federal states. On the following day, Slovene, Croat, and Serb delegates submitted the same program for a southern Slav state. Both these proposals insisted on ending Austro-Hungarian dualism, and they were constitutionally problematic because

they involved territories in the kingdom of Hungary (Slovakia and Croatia) that technically were outside the legislative jurisdiction of the Austrian Reichsrat.

It is important to distinguish in this context between autonomy, a negotiable amount of national self-determination within a federally reorganized empire, and national independence, the creation of individual states at the expense of the empire. Well into the war, the Entente Powers and many of the representatives of the individual national groups within the empire assumed that some kind of democratic and federal, multinational, state would take the place of Austria-Hungary.

In November 1916, the death of Emperor Francis Joseph after sixty-eight years on the throne and the succession of his grandnephew Charles—Charles I as Emperor of Austria and Charles IV as King of Hungary—appeared to give Austria-Hungary one last chance. Charles recognized that he needed to get Austria-Hungary out of the war and simultaneously reorganize the empire to placate the respective demands of its minorities for more national autonomy. But he was neither strong enough to abandon the alliance with Germany, in which Austria-Hungary played an increasingly subordinate role, nor innovative enough to restructure the empire. The February Revolution of 1917 in Russia, which disposed of the czar; the United States' declaration of war on Germany on April 2, 1917 and on Austria-Hungary on December 3, 1917, which turned the conflict into a crusade for democracy; and the Bolsheviks' October Revolution, which threw Russia into a state of revolutionary civil war, created new ideological and strategic circumstances that had far-reaching implications for the future of Austria-Hungary.

When the czar disappeared as an Entente ally, the scepter of imperial Russian autocracy and a Pan-Slavic threat vanished with him. The disposal of the czar lessened somewhat the western and southern Slavs' traditional apprehensions about Russia. It also deprived Austria-Hungary of its historical mission of preventing czarist expansion and made much more plausible the Entente Powers' assertion that they were fighting for freedom and democracy—and against German and Austro-Hungarian imperial aggression and tyranny. Furthermore, in the American declaration of war Woodrow Wilson underscored the United States' commitment to freedom, liberty, democracy, and the rule of law, which explicitly included protecting and realizing the rights of small nations. Because of shifts in Entente policy and propaganda, Austria-Hungary became what its detractors had claimed it was: a "prison of nations."¹⁰

Lenin also championed the idea of the rights of smaller nations before and after the Bolshevik Revolution, although in a completely different way. For example, in a 1914 tract, *The Rights of Nations to National Self-Determination*, he advocated the idea of the rights of minority nations in multinational empires to secession and the formation of independent national states as a means of promoting the deterioration of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires from within. For Lenin, the idea of national self-determination was a vehicle for social revolution. In 1918, Lenin's propagation of peace; social reform; "complete equality of rights for all nations; the right of nations to self-determination; the unity of the workers of all nations,"¹¹ and the Bolsheviks' recognition of Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia made a profound impression on the national minorities in Austria-Hungary.

Although the Bolsheviks recognized these national states in the name of national self-determination, there were less altruistic motives at work, too. In the negotiations preceding the Central Powers' conclusion, on March 3, 1918, of a separate peace with Bolshevik Russia on the eastern front, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Central Powers demanded that Bolshevik Russia recognize and evacuate Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine as well as unconditionally forfeit western Belarus and Poland, which were to fall under German and Austro-Hungarian sovereignty.

This condition was part of an imperial German *Mitteleuropa* strategy. As late as August 1918 strategic planners produced plans for carving up Russia into client states and "colonizing" the east. Russia was to become a "German India" in the Kaiserreich's new empire. Confronted with a foreign war he needed to end and a civil war he had to win, Lenin had to consolidate Bolshevik military and political resources for domestic use. He did so by accepting the unfavorable terms the Germans dictated at Brest-Litovsk and jettisoned those newly formed national states revolutionary Russia could not retain for the time being. He could afford to be generous because he had every intention of getting them back later.

According to the theory of Marxism-Leninism and its practice under Lenin and Stalin, national self-determination did not include the right to reactionary politics. During the civil war between the Reds and the Whites, a disjointed coalition of democrats, nationalists, and czarists, the Bolsheviks reclaimed Ukraine, along with other "republics" that had been established on the periphery of the Bolshevik Russia, like Georgia and Armenia, and they almost repossessed Poland. Nevertheless, Lenin's theoretical appeals to national self-determination before 1917 and his political practice thereof during the initial phase of the Bolshevik Revolution, regardless of his motives, threw a completely different light on the *raison d'être* of the Habsburgs' multinational empire for its Slavic inhabitants as well as the Entente Powers. Russia's multinational empire appeared to be breaking up into a collection of independent Slavic national states. The old czarist threat had been replaced by a new Communist one, whose containment was to become one of the primary goals of the democratic reorganization of Central Europe.

Wilson's perspectives on national self-determination were, of course, radically different from Lenin's. The famous "Fourteen Points" he outlined on January 18, 1918, to describe the United States' objectives in the war were partly a result of the Entente Powers' inability to articulate their joint war aims. In an attempt to keep Bolshevik Russia in the war, which was in the process of negotiating a separate peace at Brest-Litovsk, Wilson called for the "evacuation of all Russian territory" and the "independent determination of her [Russia's] own political development and national policy." Along with the evacuation and restoration of Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro, he demanded a "readjustment of the borders of Italy... along clearly recognizable lines of nationality," and as a novelty in Entente policy, he explicitly put the reestablishment of Poland on the postwar agenda: "An independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured free and secure access to the sea." His formulation regarding "the peoples of Austria-Hungary" was sufficiently

vague: They "should be accorded the freest opportunity of autonomous development" However, in the spring and summer, the Entente Powers abandoned the idea of an "autonomous development" for "the peoples of Austria-Hungary" within the empire and adopted the form of national self-determination that émigré politicians from Austria-Hungary had propagated: the creation of independent national states at the expense of the empire.

Austria-Hungary's apparently unwavering commitment to its alliance with Germany, an increasing amount of discontent within the empire itself, and the "Congress of Oppressed Races of Austria-Hungary," which leading émigré politicians attended in Rome in April 1918, all helped convince the Entente Powers that maintaining Austria-Hungary was neither desirable nor feasible. In Rome, the Czecho-Slovak and Jugo-Slav delegations declared that they no longer wanted to live under the auspices of the empire. Czech and Slovak émigrés then proceeded to hammer out an outline for a joint program in Pittsburgh in May 1918. Within the empire itself, social unrest due to the hardships of the war and unfulfilled demands for autonomy unleashed centrifugal political and national forces.

From the Entente's strategic perspective of weakening Germany, replacing Austria-Hungary with a series of smaller, democratic, national states had the concomitant benefit of depriving Germany of its hitherto most reliable ally. During World War I, Entente policy toward Austria-Hungary shifted from accommodation to vacillation before becoming decisive late in the day. The recognition of the Czecho-Slovak National Committee in Paris as an associated belligerent power by France, Britain, and the United States between the end of June and the beginning of September 1918 was a death warrant for Austria-Hungary.

In mid-October Emperor Charles finally issued a manifesto declaring the federal reorganization of the empire along the lines of autonomous national states, but this proclamation was as futile as it was late. The Czechoslovak National Committee in Paris already had appointed a government, with Masaryk as president and Beneš as foreign minister. Seeing that the monarchy was falling apart, the German members of the Austrian imperial parliament convened on October 21, 1918, to form the Provisional National Assembly of German-Austria, in an attempt to exercise national self-determination for German-speaking Austrians, too. This body wanted to erect a state for *all* the monarchy's German-speaking inhabitants, and it expressed its desire to enter into a confederation with the other emerging national states. (None of German-Austria's new neighbors took this offer seriously.)

Before the end of the month, the kingdom of Hungary dissolved its association with Austria and proclaimed complete independence, thus ending the Dual Monarchy; nationalists proclaimed the Czechoslovak Republic in Prague; and the "National Council of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs" constituted itself in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, to start forming a southern Slav state in conjunction with the émigrés of the Yugoslav National Committee and representatives of the Serbian government in exile. By November 12, the Entente had signed armistices with Germany and Austria-Hungary; Emperor Wilhelm II and Emperor Charles had abdicated; and the republics of Germany and German-Austria had been proclaimed. The emperors and the empires were gone, but no one knew what the frontiers of the so-called successor states were.

THE RESURRECTION OF POLAND, 1918-1922

One of the few things the Entente Powers' decision to dismember Austria-Hungary had in common with their declaration to reestablish an independent Poland was that both came late in the war. Woodrow Wilson—who emphasized the importance of a "united, independent, and autonomous Poland"¹² in January 1917, three months before the United States entered the war—was the only Western leader to take seriously the issue of Polish independence as a matter of principle from the very start, and the United States' entry into the war put it on the Entente agenda. The Western European members of the Entente, who felt that raising this issue would alienate their Russian ally, showed little interest in an independent Poland and instead preferred to tinker behind the scenes with various autonomy schemes which included at one point a Polish kingdom dissociated from Russia and Germany but under Habsburg patronage.¹³

But then, the disappearance of the czar as an Entente ally, Bolshevik Revolution, the declaration of Polish independence as an objective of the United States in Wilson's "Fourteen Points," and the Bolsheviks' abandonment of the Entente alliance all helped make the reestablishment of Poland a politically and tactically desirable alternative for the Western European members of the Entente, which initially were disinclined to consider the issue. On June 3, 1918, France, Britain, and Italy formally endorsed Poland's independence as a war aim at a meeting of the Entente's Supreme War Council in Versailles. It would be a mistake, however, to say that the Entente Powers "created" Poland; Poles took things into their own hands, and Poland emerged from the vacuum created by the collapse of the Russian, German, and Austro-Hungarian empires at the end of the war.

Czechoslovak and Yugoslav protagonists for national independence had it easier in that they had to contend with only one empire, Austria-Hungary, whereas the Polish situation was complicated by the late-eighteenth-century partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Republic, on the one hand, and the World War I alliance systems, on the other. Poles had to cope with three empires: Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary. Russia was a member of the Entente, whereas Germany and Austria-Hungary formed the backbone of the Central Powers. Russia occupied approximately three-fifths of the old Polish-Lithuanian Republic, and Prussia and Habsburg Austria had split the remaining two-fifths between themselves. Almost 2 million Poles served as soldiers in the German, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian armies during the war, and the Poles on the offensive side of the line were "liberating" Poland to the same extent that those on the defensive side were "defending" it for one of the emperors or empires. Under these circumstances, the Poles' choice of allies could not have been easy: for autocratic, czarist Russia and the Entente democracies, or vice versa, the Entente democracies which supported autocratic, czarist Russia against Germany and Austria-Hungary; for imperial Germany against imperial Russia; or, perhaps the most desirable alternative, for *Gott, Kaiser, und Vaterland*, the preservation of the relative liberality that prevailed in the imperial Austrian province of Galicia.

The two most famous agitators for Polish independence, Roman Dmowski (1864-1939), a conservative, and Józef Piłsudski (1867-1935), a socialist, held nearly

diametrically opposed opinions of how Poland was to be restored. Dmowski, born and raised in the Russian partition, was a representative of the so-called realist school. He thought that Poland could be restored under the auspices of the Romanov dynasty and that the war could facilitate this. However, his proposals fell on deaf ears at the czar's court, and after the Central Powers occupied all of the ethnic Poland, he emigrated to the West, where he agitated for Polish independence (and was seconded by a famous concert pianist, Ignacy Jan Paderewski).

In addition to mobilizing public support among Western European and North American Polish immigrants and their descendants, Dmowski recruited Polish émigrés and immigrants for a small "autonomous Polish army," a unit that fought under the French high command. In August 1917 he convened the Polish National Committee in Paris, which the Western Entente allies recognized as the legitimate representative of the Polish people without committing themselves to reestablishing an independent Polish state. One of the Western Entente's foremost concerns was not to antagonize the Russian governments—be they czarist, democratic provisional, or Bolshevik—with the Polish issue, because it was of supreme tactical importance to keep Russia in the alliance and in the war. The eastern front tied down German men and matériel that otherwise could be deployed on the western front.

In this context, it is important to recall that the German government and high command actively supported the Bolsheviks, based on the assumption that domestic unrest in Russia would detract from the Russian war effort so as to free German forces from the eastern front for deployment in the west. German authorities facilitated the return of Lenin, who was isolated in Swiss exile, and thirty other revolutionaries to Russia via Germany in April 1917, and the Bolshevik Revolution subsequently produced the results the Germans desired: a collapse of Russian resistance on the eastern front. But this happened too late in the war to affect Germany's prospects in the west.

The Bolshevik Revolution and revolutionary Russia's ensuing abandonment of the Entente strengthened Dmowski's position, and he argued that a reestablished Polish state would fulfill the dual function of preventing German and Bolshevik expansion in the future. Dmowski's personal adversary in the politics of Polish reestablishment was Józef Piłsudski, an insurrectionary, romantic, socialist, and passionate nationalist who was convinced that Russia was Poland's primary and natural enemy. Born and raised in a patriotic Polish family in Vilnius, Piłsudski, an innocent bystander to an anticzarist conspiracy in his youth, spent five years in penal exile in eastern Siberia as a young man, an experience that was one source of his anti-Russian sentiments. Piłsudski was above all a military man who saw the war as a vehicle for destroying the partitioning powers, and his role was to prepare for the aftermath. His means of doing so was not to collaborate with Germany but to cooperate with Austria-Hungary against Russia in public in the short run and to conspire for Polish independence in the long run.

At the beginning of the war, Piłsudski commanded with distinction one of the three brigades of the "Polish legion" that the Austrian imperial authorities had formed, a military unit whose fame in Polish history is considerably larger than any of its actual achievements. But he soon recognized that neither Germany nor

Austria-Hungary was remotely inclined to promote Polish national interests; on the contrary, they were in the process of dividing up those portions of the Russian partition they had conquered as part of a cooperative *Mitteleuropa* scheme. Therefore, he dedicated himself to conspiratorial work, resigned his commission, and, after publicly encouraging Polish troops not to swear an oath of allegiance to the Central Powers, ended up in 1917 in a German jail as a Polish national hero.

By the end of the summer of 1918, it was clear to the members of the German high command that the war could not be won, and in order to prepare for the coming period of transition, they established the so-called Regency Council, composed of a group of Polish representatives, which was theoretically autonomous but actually dependent on the military governor of occupied Poland. On November 10, 1918, one day before Germany signed an armistice with the Entente, Piłsudski was released from prison and returned to Warsaw as a national hero. The Regency Council folded and turned over the affairs of state to Piłsudski, who declared himself the provisional head of state and commander in chief of the yet to be constituted Polish army. The manner in which Piłsudski seized the initiative created a peculiar situation, as neither Dmowski and the Polish National Committee in Paris, which the Entente Powers had recognized as the legitimate representatives of the Polish people, nor the Entente Powers themselves were involved.

The advent of peace in Western Europe coincided with the beginning of war, or a series of wars, for Poland. Piłsudski's feat accomplished reestablished Poland, although no one knew where the frontiers of this new state were. Polish elections in January 1919, the joint appointment of Paderewski as both prime minister and foreign minister, the designation of Dmowski as the head of the Polish peace delegation at Versailles, and Piłsudski's position as commander in chief consolidated the domestic political situation in Poland. However, despite the division of powers and offices, Piłsudski assumed the most authority in the immediate postwar years. The Allied Supreme Council in Versailles, made up of representatives of France, Britain, Italy, and the United States, presided over the negotiation of Poland's western and southwestern frontiers with Germany and Czechoslovakia. But, the situation in the east was wide open.

The withdrawal of German and Austro-Hungarian troops from Belarus, Ukraine, and Poland created a power vacuum that both Poland and Russia wanted to fill. Bolshevik Russia, whose withdrawal from the Entente after the separate peace of Brest-Litovsk had ruptured Russian relationships with the West, was in the midst of a civil war and a series of conflicts with nations striving for national self-determination, whose interests alternately coincided and conflicted with those of the White Russians, and it had to combat simultaneously allied expeditionary forces that had been dispatched to punish the Bolsheviks for breaching the alliance. Poland's eastern frontier was thus not negotiated by diplomats; it was established by military force. Consequently, it assumed more the character of a cease-fire line, a perimeter sanctioned after the cessation of hostilities, than a diplomatically arbitrated international border.

The application of the principle of national self-determination to the new states emerging in east Central Europe proved to be a futile task. One of its guiding

principles was to create states that were ethnically homogeneous, but the intricate patchwork of peoples made this virtually impossible. Historical frontiers and arguments, topography or “natural” borders as a means of ensuring national security by establishing dependable frontiers, and whether the respective states in question had been allies or enemies of the Entente also had to be taken into account. Furthermore, all these variables had to be calculated into the larger framework of the respective national interests of the victorious powers in the region.

There were two Polish positions on its future frontiers. Dmowski and a series of conservatives favored a straightforward application of the principle of historical national self-determination—a reestablishment of the borders of the Polish–Lithuanian Republic of 1772, which included Lithuania and parts of Latvia, Belarus, and western Ukraine—whereas Piłsudski wanted a federation of countries, in which Poland would undoubtedly play a leading role, roughly coextensive in size with the old Polish–Lithuanian Republic. These aspirations conflicted with the Entente Powers’ emphasis on ethnic borders, or, as Wilson envisioned the frontiers of Poland in his Fourteen Points: “territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations.” The application of the ethnic principle to Poland’s western frontiers was difficult. It functioned well enough in the Versailles negotiations, in which the Entente Powers had direct influence. But it did not satisfy the parties involved, because ethnically mixed German–Polish regions and hence minorities could not be avoided on both sides of the border. The establishment of the Polish–German frontier—the Danzig corridor, which gave Poland the “free and secure access to the sea” that Wilson had promised, the free city of Danzig, and the large part of Silesia that Germany forfeited—became a constant source of German–Polish tensions. A commission of Entente experts recognized that the application of the ethnic principle would be even more problematic on Poland’s eastern frontier, and because of the Russian civil war, there were no official representatives of Russia at Versailles with whom an agreement could have been negotiated.

Piłsudski was a patriot and a man of action, not a diplomat. His vision of Poland and the force of circumstances compelled him to act on his own before and after the process of peacemaking began in Versailles. As a military man he was convinced that the most important decisions would be made on the battlefield, not at the conference table. The end of the Great War marked the beginning of a series of armed conflicts for Poland, the largest being the Polish–Ukrainian war and the Polish–Bolshevik war. When Austria-Hungary broke apart in 1918, Ukrainian regiments occupied Eastern Galicia, the part of the Austrian partition of historical Poland that had a predominantly Ukrainian population, and proclaimed the short-lived Western Ukrainian People’s Republic. Piłsudski then organized an offensive that by June 1919 drove them back to the old Austrian imperial frontier and contributed to the collapse of the Western Ukrainian Republic the following month. In February 1919 an unplanned clash between Polish and Bolshevik troops in western Belarus escalated into a full-fledged conflict that lasted for well over two years.

Piłsudski’s vision of Poland was based on plans to drive Russia off the territory of the Polish–Lithuanian Republic of 1772, and he was prepared to do everything in his power to achieve this objective. He also encouraged Lithuanian, Belarussian, and Ukrainian aspirations for national independence insofar as they corresponded

CENTRAL EUROPEAN STATES AFTER WORLD WAR I



- Borders of the German, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian empires in 1914
- International frontiers after World War I peace settlements
- Territories lost by the German Empire
- Territories lost by Russia
- Territories lost by Austria-Hungary

Map 9.1

At the end of the Polish-Bolshevik war, Piłsudski also put the finishing touch on Poland's frontiers by occupying the Vilnius region, which had long been a source of conflict between Poland and Lithuania. Both Poles and Lithuanians had strong attachments to Vilnius. It was the historical capital of the grand duchy of Lithuania, but it had also become a predominantly Polish city and a center of Polish culture (in addition to being Piłsudski's birthplace and hometown). The region's ethnic composition was intricate, and all Piłsudski's attempts to cajole the Lithuanians into some type of federation failed. The occupation of the Vilnius region and its subsequent incorporation into Poland in 1922 was Piłsudski's last accomplishment. The promethean achievements of founding the Polish Republic and defeating the Russians made Piłsudski one of Poland's greatest contemporary national heroes.

Like its remote predecessor, the Polish-Lithuanian Republic, which was half Polish and half Roman Catholic, the Republic of Poland was a multinational and multid denominational state, which was approximately two-thirds Polish and two-thirds Roman Catholic. However, unlike its historical forerunner, the Polish Republic had the ideology of a national state, which made its ethnic and religious minorities a domestic problem or, conversely, made Poland a greater problem for its minorities: 5 million Ukrainians, 3 million Jews, 2 million Belarussians; and 1 million Germans. Furthermore, neither Poland nor its neighbors were satisfied with the Polish frontiers. From the Polish viewpoint, they fell short of the historical frontiers of 1772. From the Entente perspective, they violated the principle of ethnic borders. For the Germans, they were part of the humiliating Treaty of Versailles, whose revision became an objective of German foreign policy after 1919.

The Entente also ceded part of Teschen, a small border duchy to which Poland and Czechoslovakia mutually had laid claims, to Czechoslovakia at the peak of the Polish-Bolshevik war in June 1920, which the Poles considered a stab in the back, and this decision spoiled Polish-Czechoslovak bilateral relations from the start.¹⁵ Bolshevik Russia, reconstituted as the Soviet Union in 1923, viewed the frontiers of Poland as tentative and negotiable, as Stalin was to demonstrate amply in the future.

Dictating Peace and Drawing Borders: The Treaties of Versailles, St. Germain, and Trianon, 1919-1920

Historians with different national and methodological dispositions have defended or criticized the Versailles peace settlements ever since they were concluded. Versailles refers both to the treaty concluded with Germany on June 28, 1919, and to the various settlements with the former allies of Germany that also were negotiated in the suburbs of Paris: the Treaty of St. Germain with Austria on September 10, 1919; the Treaty of Neuilly with Bulgaria on November 27, 1919; the Treaty of Trianon with Hungary on June 4, 1920; and the Treaty of Sévres with Turkey on August 20, 1920. There are differing opinions about how good or bad the Versailles peace settlements actually were and to what extent they helped to lay

the foundations for the next world war. However, it is indisputable that the German reception of the Treaty of Versailles was almost unanimously negative. Versailles was a national humiliation.

Germany was not the biggest loser in World War I. Austria-Hungary was, and the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy created a power vacuum that Germany was to fill. Since Germany was the biggest *intact* loser of World War I, more attention naturally has been paid to the consequences of the Treaty of Versailles with Germany than to the repercussions of the Treaty of St. Germain with Austria or the Treaty of Trianon with Hungary. Immediately after the war, Austrians and Hungarians felt the same way about St. Germain and Trianon as the Germans felt about Versailles, but as small states, their national discontent did not have the same political import as did Germany's dissatisfaction.

The Entente Powers did not negotiate the peace treaties with the delegations from the Central Powers. The representatives of Germany, Austria, and Hungary, although they functioned as observers and occasionally were allowed to testify, were not partners in the negotiations with the Entente Powers; on the contrary, the defeated states were objects of negotiation among the victors. In this respect, the designation "dictated peace" is an accurate description of the so-called negotiation process, and the various Entente Allies also attempted to realize divergent objectives through the negotiations.

The fact that the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles were harsh is well known, and they poisoned Germany's relations with the victorious powers. Germany had to assume responsibility for the war and to pay reparations, which retarded its postwar economic development. It lost territories in the east to Poland and in the west to France, along with its colonies overseas. The German armed forces were drastically reduced and limited in the future. The French premier Georges Clemenceau was the driving force behind the vindictive treatment of Germany, which included the exploitation of German natural resources and the demilitarization of the Rhineland, because he was convinced that the security of France would increase proportionately with the diminishment of Germany's potential. He even advanced the idea of a revised French-German frontier—the Rhine River—that would have the advantage of being a "natural" and strategic border (and incidentally coincided with the historical frontiers of Napoleonic France), but this proposal was rejected by the other Allies as too radical. Nonetheless, Versailles helped undermine the chances the Weimar Republic had as a democracy, because the national humiliation that accompanied it fueled a conservative-reactionary backlash.

According to Woodrow Wilson, national self-determination was to be one of the guiding principles in the establishment of the new European order. But the manner in which it was applied created a legacy of discontent among Germans, Austrians, and Hungarians, because they saw it repeatedly violated to their disadvantage. The various commissions that the Entente employed to arbitrate the numerous conflicting border claims after World War I were more expert than their later reputations, but they were confronted with insoluble problems created by ethnically mixed regions. The Entente organized plebiscites in some border regions to allow their inhabitants to decide for themselves which state they would prefer to

inhabit, but in most cases these plebiscites resulted in the predictable dissatisfaction of the ethnic minority and neighboring state that lost them.

In addition, previous commitments had been made to powers that had fought with the Entente, such as Italy and Romania, and they had to be honored. Associate powers like Czechoslovakia also had a status that had to be recognized. Historical arguments, as well, carried a certain amount of weight if they could be supported by economic and strategic arguments. Therefore, the application of the principle of national self-determination was complex and destined to foster discontent. The negotiation of the Austrian, Czechoslovak, and Hungarian borders provides a number of examples of how inconsistently these criteria were applied.

Unlike the other national groups in the Habsburgs' multinational empire, German-speaking Austrians had virtually no tradition of striving for national independence. Based on the idea of the German nation as a historical, linguistic, and cultural community, German-speaking Austrians considered themselves Germans: not Prussians but Germans, just as the inhabitants of Bavaria or Hamburg were Germans and not Prussians. The foundation of a *kleindeutsch* or "smaller German" Kaiserreich in 1871 without Habsburg Austria had created a political monopoly on the idea of being German as well as an asymmetry between the Habsburg variant of Austrian-German culture and the Prussian imperial concept of "German-German" culture. Furthermore, after 1871, "imperial Germans" began to treat their smaller German-Austrian neighbors and their polyglot empire with a certain amount of condescension. Still, despite the obvious differences in traditions and mentalities, Austrian-Germans nonetheless considered themselves Germans.

By the time the Republic of German-Austria had been proclaimed on November 12, 1918, it was clear that none of its neighboring states was interested in a confederation of democracies that somehow could assume the place of the old empire, and the only viable economic and political alternative the founding fathers of the republic saw was an *Anschluss*: a unification of German-Austria with a democratic Germany. As Germans, the representatives of German-Austria saw an *Anschluss* with a democratic Germany as a perfectly legitimate expression of Austrian national self-determination, and the proclamation of the republic included an *Anschluss* declaration: German-Austria was to be part of Germany.

At the St. Germain peace conference, however, the name of German-Austria was not only unilaterally abbreviated to Austria; the Entente Powers also forbade an *Anschluss* because it would enlarge the territory of Germany and surround Czech Bohemia and Moravia with Germans. It also would give Germany, one malcontent, a common border with Hungary (which, as we will see, had every reason for being another malcontent) and would create German national frontiers with Italy and Yugoslavia. Consequently, Austria became an independent state against its own will, a "state no one wanted."¹⁶

Based on previous Entente commitments and strategic considerations, Italy was granted the Brenner Pass frontier and a Tyrolean minority of 220,000 at the expense of Austria. Troops from the Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs, which had been proclaimed on December 1, 1918, invaded parts of southern Austria inhabited by Slovene minorities in an attempt to claim territory by force, but they

met the resistance of a hastily organized "national guard." This border conflict eventually was arbitrated with Entente intervention. (Yugoslavia did not become the official name of the country until 1929 when an authoritarian coup dispensed with the constitutional monarchy proclaimed in 1920. For the sake of convenience, we will call it the kingdom of Yugoslavia.)

More than 3 million German-Austrians lived along the southern, western, and northern frontiers of Czech Bohemia and Moravia. They were German-Austrians, not Germans, as they had been inhabitants of the Austrian empire since 1526 when the Habsburgs first assumed the Bohemian crown. Although the Austrian officials themselves recognized that they would have to abandon the German-Austrians in western Bohemia and northern Bohemia and Moravia (who had expressed their desire to be incorporated as Germans into Germany), Austria used an ethnic argument to acquire those regions along its northern frontier, which were almost exclusively German speaking but historically Bohemia. However, the Czechoslovak Republic claimed and was granted the historical borders of the kingdom of Bohemia, along with its large German minority. The frontier of the historical kingdom of Bohemia also ran along the rim of the Bohemian Basin and mountainous border areas, which also gave Czechoslovakia a natural, and hence defensible, frontier.

Given these various concerns, the Czechs viewed the German minority as the least of all potential evils, and during the peace negotiations one old solution to the problem of multinational empires resurfaced under the new circumstances of smaller, multiethnic, democratic states. Beneš spoke of "accepting as a basis of national rights the principles applied in the constitution of the Swiss Republic, that is, to make the Czecho-Slovak Republic a sort of Switzerland, taking into consideration, of course, the special conditions of Bohemia."¹⁷ Although the Germans in Bohemia and Moravia were perhaps the best-treated minority in Central Europe during the interwar period, the Czechoslovak Republic did not succeed in becoming "a sort of Switzerland," and the status of Germans in Czechoslovakia became a primary point of domestic and foreign policy contention for the new state.

Using the ethnic argument once again, Austria demanded territories in western Hungary because they had German-speaking majorities; however, Hungary did not feel constrained to cede them to Austria because they historically were part of the kingdom of Hungary. The contested area between Austria and Hungary also had relatively small Slovak and Croat minorities of 3 and 10 percent, respectively, and at the peace conference, Czechoslovak representatives proposed granting the area to neither Austria nor Hungary but suggested creating a "Slavic corridor" between the Czechoslovak Republic and the kingdom of Yugoslavia that would separate the feuding parties. This proposal would have had the dual benefit of giving both Slavic states a territorial bridge or avenue of secure passage between their traditional enemies and would compensate the western and southern Slavs for the fact that protoimperialistic Germans and Magyars had separated these Slavic nations from each other in the Middle Ages.¹⁸ However, this plan was dropped, and Allied mediation came up with a compromise that more or less solved the problem to the dissatisfaction of both Austria and Hungary. The parts of western Hungary that

...incorporated became a new Austrian province, Burgenland, but Hungary did not cede to Austria all the territories earmarked for Austrian acquisition.

The kingdom of Hungary wanted to use its historical frontiers as an argument for maintaining them after the war. However, immediately after the war Hungary slid into a state of domestic chaos that made it unable to assert or defend its national interests. The democratic republic proclaimed in November 1918 folded in March 1919 when Béla Kun, an admirer and protégé of Lenin, proclaimed a "Soviet Republic" which ruled radically for 133 days. The counterrevolution and reactionary politics that followed led to the establishment of a new kingdom of Hungary, which did not have a king but elected a "regent," the last commander in chief of the Austro-Hungarian imperial navy, Admiral Miklós Horthy, to manage the affairs of state until a king was elected. (Hungary incidentally remained a kingdom without a king until 1945, although Horthy developed regal pretensions.)

All of Hungary's neighbors had border claims, and they used the general post-war chaos to realize them. The application of the ethnic principle of national self-determination literally dismembered the historical kingdom of Hungary, which lost two-thirds of its territories and shrank in population from a multinational 18.2 million to a relatively homogeneous 7.6 million. After the Treaty of Trianon, roughly 3.3 million, or one-third, of the Magyars from the historical kingdom of Hungary ended up as "new minorities" outside the frontiers of Hungary.

The Entente Powers had promised Romania large territorial gains in the eastern and southern parts of the kingdom—Transylvania, eastern Hungary, and the Banat—and they honored their commitments to a considerable extent at the conference table. More than 2 million Magyars became Romanian citizens in the process. In addition, as a component part of the kingdom of Yugoslavia, Croatia claimed the historical borders of the medieval kingdom of Croatia, and the Yugoslavs also annexed the western Banat region: a province whose population was predominantly Serbian but included a Hungarian minority of around 500,000. Then the Yugoslavs exchanged blows with Romania over the adjoining eastern half of the Banat until the Entente intervened. The Czechoslovak Republic, which had argued for the establishment of the historical frontiers of Bohemia and Moravia against Austria's ethnic claims, used ethnic and strategic arguments against Hungary to define its Slovak frontier. It not only demanded the areas inhabited by Slovaks and the Carpathian Ukraine,¹⁹ but also pressed for a frontier along the Danube River as a "natural border" with Hungary. Czechoslovakia was granted both, and it acquired the fertile lowlands south of ethnic Slovakia and a minority of nearly 1 million Magyars in the process.

The kingdom of Hungary had formed a cohesive political unit for more than one thousand years, and for Hungarians, the loss of 60 percent of its inhabitants along with two-thirds of its territory represented the destruction of an organic whole. Furthermore, Hungarian nationalists viewed the frontiers of the kingdom of St. Stephen as a divine entitlement. From the Hungarian national perspective, the violation of the territorial integrity of the kingdom of Hungary was nothing less than sacrilegious. During the interwar period every Hungarian schoolchild was raised with the slogan "Hungary truncated is not a country, Hungary intact is the Divine Will." A popular prayer composed after the Treaty of Trianon was

the so-called National Credo: "I believe in one God, one Fatherland, and the Resurrection of Hungary."²⁰

Austria and Hungary were the only two states created by the Versailles settlements that could claim that they were "national states" in the ethnic sense of the word because they had, compared with other states in the region, small minority populations. Karl Renner, an Austro-Marxist theoretician of the nationalities problem, the first chancellor of the provisional Republic of German-Austria, and the president of the Austrian peace delegation at St. Germain, summed up his criticism of the peace settlements in Central Europe:

The former [Habsburg] Empire never pretended to be a national state, but the new succession states were falsely proclaimed as such, and a large part of the domestic difficulties which beset them is due to this pretense. The peace treaties did not solve the problem of multi-national states but transferred it from each of the big powers to several small states.²¹

The peace settlements not only subdivided the old imperial nationalities problems but also inverted them. Former imperial "lords"—Germans and Magyars—became national minorities in the new national states ruled by their previous "subjects."

The creation of new minorities was just one of the problems facing the new states of Central Europe. There also was a wide structural disparity between "Western and Eastern" regions in many of these states, and the frontiers of these structural regions frequently corresponded to ethnic and former imperial frontiers. "Special problems were created in provinces which had been ruled by 'Western' methods and, owing to the territorial settlement of 1918, came under 'Eastern' administration, or vice versa. Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, and Poland were states of mixed 'Western' and 'Eastern' provinces."²² The general levels of literacy and education, economic development and urbanization, and the quality and institutions of public administration were higher in "Western regions" that had been part of Germany, Austria, or Hungary. The structurally "Western" regions of the (formerly Hungarian) Banat or Croatia and (formerly Austrian) Slovenia became parts of Yugoslavia, and (Hungarian) Transylvania and (Austrian) Bukovina were incorporated into Romania. Yugoslavia and Romania were not only structurally "Eastern" but also were dominated by Eastern Orthodox ethnic majorities. Poland fell into three West-East zones: "a Western, semi-Western, and a completely Eastern area" inhabited predominantly by Belarussians and Ukrainians. In Czechoslovakia the "Western Czechs" in (formerly Austrian) Bohemia and Moravia dominated the "Eastern Slovaks" in (formerly Hungarian) Slovakia. The structural differences between these regions exacerbated cultural and ethnic conflicts in these states in the future.

Last of all, national self-determination created two forms of irredentism in Central Europe. The smaller of the two was Hungarian. The Magyar tradition of "historical imperialism"²³ made the revision of Hungary's Trianon frontiers an issue that led to poor relations with all its new neighbors and destabilized the entire region during the interwar period. Although Hungarian irredentism was loud, it never really became menacing. The larger form of irredentism was German. After 1918, there were 7 million Germans in Austria (or German-Austrians who wanted

to be German citizens), more than 3 million Germans in Czechoslovakia, and more than 1 million Germans in Poland, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of Germans in the "linguistic islands" scattered throughout Romania and northern Yugoslavia. German irredentism was much more dangerous because it relied on a belated application of the very principle that the Entente Powers had used to establish Central European frontiers in the first place.

The accusation that the Versailles settlements did not take into account the German people's right to national self-determination appealed to political principle, and it addressed a precept that the representatives of Western democracy could hardly disavow. A revision of the Treaty of Versailles was a constant goal of German foreign policy from the establishment of the Weimar Republic until the beginning of World War II. Adolf Hitler inherited this objective from the Weimar Republic, and it proved to be an enormous domestic political asset for him, because his democratic opponents could not credibly renounce the primary goal of Nazi foreign policy because it previously had been their own.



Spheres of Influence I

Germany and the Soviet Union

The states that were carved out of the Russian, German, and Austro-Hungarian empires after World War I—Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, and Yugoslavia—initially were conceived as modern democratic nation-states. Along with Romania, they were to have the dual function of collectively containing the expansion of Germany and preventing the spread to the West of the Soviet Union's breed of Communism. The idea of a *cordon sanitaire* that stretched from the Arctic Circle to the Adriatic Sea or the Black Sea was inspired by the Western powers' experience with German *Weltpolitik* and reinforced by the Communist threat of "world revolution."

This idea correlated with a new Central European conception of Central Europe. For example, when Thomas Masaryk returned to Prague in December 1918, he spoke of the "victory of small nations" and the necessity of "close friendship with our neighbors to the East and Southeast." Masaryk envisioned regional cooperation—"an amicable group of states from the Baltic to the Adriatic"—as the alternative to a "Pan-German *Mitteleuropa*."¹ Masaryk's vision and the victorious allies' idea of a *cordon sanitaire* were based upon the assumption that these smaller democracies would be collectively strong enough to prevent future German or Soviet imperial transgressions. (As former allies of Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Bulgaria were initially regarded as weak links in this democratic chain.) However, neither democracy at home nor cooperation abroad was an enduring characteristic of the domestic and foreign policies pursued by the states in this region during the interwar period.

Between the Arctic and the Adriatic, Europe added eleven new states to its prewar community of twenty-six, and each had new currencies and customs barriers. National economies had to be created where none had existed previously, and none of the countries east of Germany's frontiers had economies that could be called modern in terms of their commercial and industrial structures. Czech Bohemia and a few urban-industrial regions in Austria, Hungary, and Poland were exceptions to the predominantly agrarian structures prevailing in the region. After a period of postwar disorientation and consolidation, Central Europe's fledgling