

THE BALKAN PIEDMONT SERBIA AND THE YUGOSLAV QUESTION

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TOTAL WAR: REPRESSION AND MASSACRES

The way in which the war against Serbia was waged and, at the same time, the persecution of the Serbs in the Dual Monarchy, clearly showed that this was an attempt at totally crushing Serbian resistance and definitely closing the Serbian question in the Balkans. The repression against the civilian population during the short-lived Austro-Hungarian occupation of Serbian territory at the end of 1914, included the perpetration of serious war crimes: the most active perpetrators were soldiers of Hungarian and Croatian nationality under the command of Austrian officers. On the pretext that they were preparing and offering resistance, large numbers of Serbian civilians were executed or brutally killed in cold blood, regardless of their age: the victims were women, old people and children alike; authorized officers warned the Serbian Chief of Staff about the large number of mutilated bodies of women and children, and a complete documentation was collected in the field by Dr. Rudolf A. Reiss, a Swiss scholar of German descent, in his capacity of an independent researcher. (84)

One internal and confidential instruction written in German and signed by general Horstein for his troops, found on a wounded Austro-Hungarian soldier, showed, in a way, the general army policy towards the Serbian civilian population: "Brother soldiers, we will soon enter into a country with people who are worse than the most terrible barbarians; if you unfortunately fall into their hands the most shameful thing will happen, they will cut off your ears and noses, put out your eyes, poison the water and food. Therefore I command you not to treat these bandits with humanity but to destroy everything of Serbian origin, and every person speaking the Serbian language is to be shot without mercy. After entering the Serbian cities and villages all the prominent persons including clerks, priests and teachers should be arrested, and in the presence of the local population three persons from each group should be hanged." (85) The names of the officers who committed the most brutal executions and war crimes and who came from the 21st, 25th, 26th, 29th, 37th and 79th infantry divisions of the Austro-Hungarian army were afterwards published in a book by Clara Sturzeneger.(86)

2000
Within Austria-Hungary all the Serbs in Bosnia and Srem who had welcomed the Serbian and Montenegrin troops as liberators during their joint offensive in eastern Bosnia and the region around Sarajevo in summer 1914 were arrested or interned. Over a hundred Serbian civilians were executed or bayoneted in the region between Sarajevo and the Drina river in the first wave of retaliation. The governor of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Oskar Potiorek made plans during 1914 to repatriate all the Serbian Orthodox population from Eastern Bosnia. Afraid of a potential Serbian insurrection Potiorek planned to use domestic Muslims as armed volunteers ("Burgwehr" and "Schutzwehr") against unreliable Orthodox Serbs in Bosnia. Potiorek's successor Stjepan Sarkotic in order to limit expression of Serbian national identity in Bosnia, wanted to submit the Serbian Orthodox Church to the military authorities, as was the practice in the Military Frontier ("Vojna Krajina") centuries before.(87)

Anand Menon

History Scanning

European divisions

The build-up to the war in Iraq revealed increasingly apparent and bitter divisions between the European states. At the heart of these disputes were opposing conceptions of the appropriate relationship for Europe to maintain with the United States. French leaders, for their part, were increasingly vociferous in their calls for a structural shift in the nature of international relations. Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin spoke of the need for a new world order, which he characterized in multipolar terms:

To be truly stable, this new world must be based on a number of regional poles, structured to face current threats. These poles should not compete against one another, but complete each other. They are the cornerstones of an international community built on solidarity and unity in the face of new challenges. The determination of European countries to develop a common foreign and security policy must reflect that. This determination shows our will to bring about a true European identity.²⁶

In contrast, Tony Blair was uncompromising in his defence of unipolarity: 'Some want a so-called multi-polar world where you have different centres of power ... others believe, and this is my notion, that we need one polar power which encompasses a strategic partnership between Europe and America.'²⁷

The establishment of an apparent foreign policy alliance between France and Germany opposing the US strategy in the run-up to war was symbolized in comments made at the 40th anniversary celebrations of the Elysée Treaty on 22 January. Both Chirac and Schröder emphasized that the UN must be pre-eminent in dealing with Iraq and that they were opposed to precipitate military action. In response, an open letter signed by eight European leaders appeared on 30 January, providing further evidence of the deepening splits among European states.²⁸ The importance of the letter did not lie in its contents. There was, after all, little in it to which the 'anti-war' camp could not have subscribed.²⁹ Rather, its divisive impact stemmed from bitterness about the process that had spawned its appearance. Not only had the Greek presidency and 'anti-war' states been deliberately kept out of the loop by the signatories (thereby totally undermining any pretence at EU unity), but anger among the non-signatories was further fuelled by the fact that the scheme had first been dreamed up by the pro-war *Wall Street Journal Europe*.³⁰ Whatever their origins, the two letters served to crystallize publicly the divisions between member states.

²⁶ Dominique de Villepin, 'Law, force and justice', speech delivered at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 27 March 2003.

²⁷ Interview in *Financial Times*, 28 April 2003.

²⁸ *The Times*, 30 Jan. 2003. The signatories were: Tony Blair (UK); Jose-Maria Aznar (Spain); Jose Manuel

20
1200