



THE MEMORY OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN THE FORMER LANDS OF AUSTRIA- HUNGARY

El recuerdo de la Primera Guerra Mundial en los antiguos territorios del imperio austrohúngaro

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FIRMA INVITADA

In Austria-Hungary a collective experience of the Great War inevitably emerged. However, the sudden break-up of the Habsburg Empire and the immediate hostility between its successor states meant that no collective memory was ever established and cultivated. For each country, the war and its outcome took on their own distinct meanings: independence in the case of Poland and Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic and Slovakia); union with fellow South Slavs and ultimate independence for Slovenia; bitterness and resentment for Hungary; and betrayal and confusion for Austria. Most of these countries have now come to terms with the war and its consequences (and some with their role in the Habsburg Empire) but others, most notably Hungary, still harbour grudges as fresh as they were when their millennial kingdom was broken up (now ninety-five years ago). The vicissitudes of the twentieth century (not least the apocalyptic Second World War and the decades of Communism) long held back sober and critical analyses of the First World War. But although there will never be a collective consciousness of the conflict among the peoples who made up the Habsburg Empire, the increasing quality of the recent historiography on the conflict, together with the fading away of territorial feuds and national tensions, will eventually help to reconstitute the collective experience of a remarkably tenacious Austro-Hungarian war effort, the imperial forces of which displayed their unity and determination on many a gruesome wartime battlefield.



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En el imperio austrohúngaro inevitablemente emergió una experiencia colectiva de la Gran Guerra. Sin embargo, la disolución repentina del imperio de los Habsburgo y las hostilidades inmediatas entre sus estados sucesores implicaron que nunca se llegó a establecer y cultivar una memoria colectiva. Para cada país, la guerra y sus consecuencias adquirieron sus propias interpretaciones: independencia en el caso de Polonia y Checoslovaquia (ahora la República Checa y Eslovaquia); unión con los compañeros eslavos del Sur para Eslovenia; amargura y resentimiento para Hungría; y traición y confusión para Austria. La mayor parte de estos países se ha reconciliado con la guerra y sus consecuencias (y algunos con su papel en el imperio de los Habsburgo) pero otros, sobre todo Hungría, todavía albergan un rencor tan vivo como era cuando su reinado milenario se fracturó (ya hace noventaicinco años). Las vicisitudes del siglo veinte (junto a la apocalíptica Segunda Guerra Mundial y las décadas de Comunismo) refrenaron durante mucho tiempo un análisis serio y crítico de la Primera Guerra Mundial. Pero aunque nunca habrá una conciencia colectiva del conflicto entre las gentes que constituyeron el imperio de los Habsburgo, la calidad en aumento de la reciente historiografía sobre el conflicto junto al desvanecimiento de las disputas territoriales y las tensiones nacionales, con tiempo ayudarán a reconstituir la experiencia colectiva del esfuerzo bélico notablemente tenaz del imperio austrohúngaro, del que sus fuerzas imperiales mostraron su unidad y determinación en varios campos de batalla espantosos.



The chief difficulty in assessing the memory of the First World War from the Austro-Hungarian perspective is simple: the Empire ceased to exist when the conflict itself ceased. The immediate successor states which took its place are unlikely to be entirely familiar to the layman: the Republic of German-Austria, the Hungarian Democratic Republic, the First Czechoslovak Republic, the West Ukrainian People's Republic, the Second Polish Republic, the Kingdom of Romania, the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, and the Kingdom of Italy. A little later, the Kingdom of Hungary appeared (albeit without a king), as did the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Many of these states continued to morph throughout the twentieth century, disappearing either temporarily (Austria's *Anschluss* with Germany or Ukraine's incorporation into the Soviet Union, for instance) or permanently (the break-up of Czechoslovakia and the disintegration of Yugoslavia most notably), or having their borders drastically altered (as in the case of Poland after Stalin shunted it 200 kilometres to the west). As a result, Great War narratives often evolved to match new political and territorial realities. More lastingly, the imposition of Communism on the majority of the successor states after 1945 dictated an official version of events for almost forty years which was less concerned with memory, legacy and historical truth than with the ideological purpose which the war could serve.

Today, thirteen countries – Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine – make up the former Habsburg Empire. In some cases (such as Italy or Serbia) only small areas of the current state were part of Austria-Hungary; in others, for example Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary, their entire territory stood within the confines of the Empire. Therefore, not only is a collective memory inexistent (or virtually impossible to piece together), but some nations' experiences of the war as part of the Habsburg Empire remain understandably under-studied. For these reasons, and for issues of space, this essay will restrict itself to five countries selected on the basis of their significance during the imperial era, the availability

of sources, and the author's linguistic limitations and acquaintance with the lands in question. These are Austria, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia.

1. Austria

Austria is the logical starting point for this study. After all, the decision to go to war was taken in Vienna. Regardless of the German "blank cheque", the Austrian foreign minister, Count Leopold Berchtold, though no war-monger, had already made up his mind to commence hostilities on 30 June 1914 (possibly on the day itself), only two days after the events of Sarajevo and twenty-eight days before the actual declaration of war on Serbia (Williamson, 2002, p. 38). The Austrian political and military establishment were at one with him. The Emperor, Franz Joseph, eventually went along with the plan and only the original reticence of the Hungarian prime minister, Count István Tisza, had to be overcome (which was, in the end, fairly easily done). Of course, everything rapidly went wrong. The expected localised war became global, the predicted victories turned into embarrassing routs, the initial enthusiasm waned, the country's organisation and preparedness were found wanting at most levels and, by the end of 1914, the conflict had, in the words of the future Chief of General staff, "done the army out of the largest part of active officers, of men and of well-trained reservists" (Freiherr Arz von Straußenburg, 1924, pp. 141-142).¹ Indeed, according to Kontler (2002, p. 320) after the first stages of the war on the Galician and Serbian fronts over half of the 1.8 million initial fighting force of the Empire was dead, wounded or in captivity. Four years later, the Empire collapsed with a whimper, ending 646 years of Habsburg rule.

The revulsion of the post-war First Republic towards all things monarchic – almost reminiscent of the French Revolution in its dogmatism – marked a spectacular break in Austrian history. In the inter-war years, the idea of restoration never gained any serious support, or even a whiff of plausibility. Anti-Habsburg sentiment was fierce and widespread (even the formerly monarchist Christian Social Party was quiet and ambiguous on the subject). Such a small, impoverished country could not afford to entertain ideas of revanchism either (let alone accept war guilt). Unlike in Hungary, where the memory of the peace treaty of Trianon remained a burning issue, the treaty which tore Austria apart (that of Saint-Germain-en-Laye) was soon forgotten. Only the issue of the South Tyrol (ceded somewhat dubiously to Italy) occasionally resurfaced, along with some linguistic issues in Carinthia (now divided between Austria and Slovenia). In addition, the near unanimous desire for an *Anschluss* with Germany – across the political spectrum, throughout the country and irrespective of social class – increased the detachment from the pre-1918 era and eventually precipitated Austria into German arms, with disastrous consequences (of course, support for the *Anschluss* in the 1920s was understandable and had nothing to do with Nazism; after 1933, the issue became pricklier). By 1943, as the tide began to turn against Hitler's Reich, leading Austrian patriots (or turncoats) were glad to obtain an Allied endorsement – the Moscow declaration of 30 October 1943 – which annulled the *Anschluss*, promised the post-war restoration of the country's independence and conceded, somewhat controversially, that Austria had in fact been the first free country to fall victim to Nazism (though it included the token proviso that she had a responsibility for having fought

1 This included 14,520 officers and 562,378 men dead; and 18,726 officers and 1,342,697 men missing or made prisoner. Of the 3.3 million men wounded or ill, 200,000 died and one million remained unable to fight.

alongside Hitlerite Germany which would be taken into account).² Ten years of Allied occupation followed liberation in 1945.

The Second Austrian Republic, built on shaky foundations, nevertheless had to invent a suitable narrative to present itself as a peaceful, untarnished, neutral victim, and distance itself from the two World Wars (both started by Austrians). This was achieved masterfully, and provides an impressive example of history being written by the loser, as the historian Hannes Leidinger has pointed out in the interview “Historiker: ‘Österreich erklärt sich für unzurechnungsfähig’” (2014, June 3). The Austrians were largely supportive of the *Anschluss* and many of them stayed loyal to the Nazi regime until 1945.³ Furthermore, despite over-representation in almost all branches of the Nazi machinery, whether military or administrative, and in the execution of the Holocaust (as demonstrated by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre – though their over-representation in the resistance should not be overlooked), Austria remained, for most, the land of *The Sound of Music*, Mozartkugeln, Sissi, the Vienna Philharmonic, fiacres and Old World cafés. Austria even received more money per capita from the Marshall Plan than any other country. The “Victim Myth” proved enduring.⁴

Understandably, in the post-1945 years the Second World War was scarcely taught in schools; its predecessor, on the other hand, represented a more important part of the curriculum, though highly politicised. The basic analysis of the First World War was that Austria-Hungary had lost unfairly, and the successor states were viewed either as traitors or beneficiaries of the dissolution of the monarchy (a kind of Austrian *Dolchstoßlegende*).⁵ Yet although royalist nostalgia persisted in large segments of the population, enmity towards the Habsburg dynasty remained an occasional political pillar to prop up the fledgling republic. Meanwhile, the historiography of the conflict remained dominated by the work of former imperial officers such as Edmund Glaise von Horstenau who, among other significant works, oversaw the writing of the colossal *Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg 1914-1918* (1930-1938), a seven-volume history commissioned by the War Ministry. Only in the 1960s did the first generation of civil histories written by Austrian scholars appear. These included works by Ludwig Jedlicka, Fritz Fellner, and Hugo Hantsch. Austrian and Hungarian scholars living abroad, such as Robert A. Kann and Gábor Vermes, also began to take an interest in the conflict. Yet the Fischer controversy over the outbreak of the war – so explosive in Germany – was barely discussed in Austria. Much work remained to be done. Indeed, from the 1970s foreign authors were at the forefront of debates: F. Roy Bridge, John Leslie, Samuel R. Williamson, Jr., Norman Stone, Paul W. Schroeder and, later, Alan Sked and Mark Cornwall. By now Austrians were largely aware of Vienna’s responsibility for starting the war, of the country’s economic and military dependence on Germany, of Emperor Karl’s attempts at peace, and of (the much-belated, cowardly and unworkable) plans to federalise the country.

2 See “Moscow Conference” (1943, October).

3 See Buckex (1989, pp. 151-154).

4 See Utgaard (2003, pp. 100, 90-91) and “Austria remembers its Nazi past” (1998, May 5). Simon Wiesenthal estimated that three quarters of concentration camp guards were Austrians (whereas they represented just over 10 % of the Reich’s population). Moreover, there were roughly the same number of Austrian and German Nazi party members.

5 Thanks to Dr. David Schriff, a pupil during those years, for this information.

What, in fact, was there to celebrate since 1914? The First Republic, despite the mythology surrounding it and its fêted heroes – Karl Renner, Victor Adler, Otto Bauer, Karl Seitz, Ferdinand Hanusch, Jakob Reumann – could only be praised half-heartedly considering the dismal economic, social and geographic position in which Austria found herself after 1918, and in light of the fierce political fighting between Left and Right which never abated. Furthermore, the First Republic lasted only fifteen years and, by 1934, a Clerical-Fascist regime was firmly in place. This regime, in turn, cultivated a (certain) nostalgia for the old monarchy, though a restoration was still out of the question. This left a mere decade and a half to celebrate, marked with violence, political tension, street fighting, civil war and ultimately a collapse into totalitarianism. Nowadays, women's right to vote, universal suffrage in all elections, and the abolition of the nobility remain the proud achievements of the short-lived "Republic without Republicans".

Public memory of the period 1914-1945 remained relatively static for decades until, in 1985, the Waldheim Affair exploded. Kurt Waldheim had been Secretary-General of the United Nations from 1972 to 1981, but during his subsequent campaign for the Austrian presidency his service as a Wehrmacht intelligence officer in the Balkans during the Second World War instigated an international controversy. This prompted Austrians to start looking at their past more critically (though Waldheim still won the election). Until then, Austria's Nazi past had been almost wholly ignored and largely considered a foreign, German affair. By then of course almost seventy years had passed since the Great War and personal memories of the conflict were rapidly fading. Inevitably, the Waldheim controversy served to push the events of 1914-1918 even further back in public consciousness.

Yet this growing sense of distance and detachment allowed a form of reconciliation with the Habsburgs. Ex-Empress Zita, the wife of Karl who had fled into exile with her husband in 1919, was permitted to return to Austria in 1982 (thanks to the efforts of Socialist Chancellor Bruno Kreisky) and was buried in full pomp in the Imperial Crypt seven years later, despite vehement political opposition from the Conservative Party, the ÖVP – an opportunity to mark their difference with the Socialists and affirm their Republican credentials. Crown Prince Otto, the eldest son of Karl and Zita, had been granted the privilege to return in 1966 (with the ÖVP in power), after years of controversy, legal wrangling and, conversely, Socialist opposition, on condition that he renounce all claims to the Austrian throne and proclaim himself "a loyal citizen of the republic" – a statement he later bitterly regretted. When he died in 2011 (aged ninety-eight), his funeral in the *Kapuzinergruft* displayed unabashed pageantry and ceremony, and looked – to this author at least – quasi-official. The sight of government ministers watching on as the old imperial anthem was bellowed by the crowds in Saint Stephen's Cathedral, on the streets, and before the Capuchin Church, created an uncomfortable dichotomy for the Republic.

For the younger generation of Austrians memorials of the Great War continue to remind them of the conflict. Although there is, understandably, no annual commemorative day, local memorials to the fallen feature in towns and villages across the country (often with the names of the dead from the Second World War added subsequently) and there are further notable memorials at the *Zentralfriedhof* and the *Äußeres Burgtor* in Vienna (where Hitler laid a wreath in 1938). Some reminders, however, are less agreeable than others. In Graz, for instance, moves are afoot to rename the Conrad-von-Hötzendorf-Straße, christened after the controversial and bellicose – but ultimately incompetent – Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, Chief of General Staff of the Austro-Hungarian forces during most of the First World War, who was long considered the country's foremost military genius (Grabe, 2013).

Commemorations of the outbreak of the conflict were everywhere in 2014 – they could hardly be ducked in the country of its origin. That year witnessed a huge output on the subject: books, articles, press coverage, talks, films, exhibitions, memorials, almost to the point of overload. But the fighting on the Western Front still attracted most attention: the Serbian, Romanian, Russian and Italian Fronts, where the Austro-Hungarian army mainly fought, remained in the shadows, although the battles of Caporetto and Brusilov ring a bell even with the most uninterested of students. This, in turn, signifies that the slaughter endured by the Habsburg army received far less attention than it should have and, as a consequence, still barely registers in the Austrian collective memory. Unsurprisingly, the monstrosity of the Second World War brushed it away. Other important lacunae exist in Habsburg First World War historiography. For example, with some notable exceptions, there is still much work to be done on Austro-Hungarian war crimes against the civilian populations in Galicia and Serbia.⁶ In addition, biographical material is still lacking on Conrad,⁷ Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne,⁸ Emperor Franz Joseph,⁹ Emperor Karl¹⁰, and most prime ministers and cabinet members of the era.

On a related note, Christopher Clark's recent volume, *The Sleepwalkers*, which refused to point the finger of blame for the war, especially at Germany, was well-received in Austria (though not on the German scale, where it had sold 200,000 copies by May 2014) (Cammann, 2014). Dismissed by left-wing historians, and by those who felt it let Berlin off the hook, it nevertheless received good reviews. Moreover, Clark was invited to give the opening speech¹¹ at the prestigious Salzburg Festival, still perhaps the most important social and cultural event in Austria, though very German in its outlook, funding and attendance (however, not a few Austrian academics were vexed by his presence, with one eminent historian complaining about the presence of "this Prussian rabble").¹² Understandably, Clark's argument was music to certain Austrian ears. Indeed, much like the Germans, the Austrians were glad to hear that they were not responsible for the outbreak of the conflict and that the death of Franz Ferdinand, a harmless pacifist, was exploited by the war-mongering military, leaving Austria no alternative to war in July 1914. Yet unlike in Germany (where the Fischer controversy was revived), the matter was taken at face value in Austria and not debated (just as it had been avoided in the 1960s).

It must be observed, however, that the most widely read books on the Great War have been written by non-historians. Such masterpieces as Joseph Roth's novel, *The Radetzky March* (1932) (and to a lesser extent his *The Emperor's Tomb*, 1938), Robert Musil's unfinished novel, *The Man Without Qualities* (1930-1943), and Stefan Zweig's autobiographical *The World of Yesterday* (1942), have become classics of world literature. And one cannot omit to mention of Karl Kraus's play, *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* (1922), despite its complexity and infrequent performances. More recent novelists have added to the canon of high-quality literature on the

6 References have been made to these atrocities in the following works: Jer ábek (1991); Gumz (2014); Scheer (2009); Leidinger, Moritz & Moser (2014).

7 With the exception of Dornik's *Des Kaisers Falke. Wirken und Nach-Wirken von Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf*, which received poor reviews.

8 Aside from Hannig (2013) and Bled (2012).

9 The exception being Höbelt (2009).

10 Although this author is preparing a biography of the Emperor Karl for 2016.

11 Speech available at Festspielkiebitz (2014).

12 Thanks to Richard Bassett for this anecdote.

subject. These include Hans von Trotha's *Czernin oder wie ich lernte, den Ersten Weltkrieg zu verstehen* (2013); Hannes Stein's *Der Komet: Roman* (2013); Elena Messner's *Das lange Echo* (2014); Ludwig Winder's *Der Thronfolger: Ein Franz-Ferdinand-Roman* (2014) (the book was banned in Austria and Germany in 1937 and published in Switzerland, but upon its recent re-issue it received rave reviews); and Janko Ferik's *Der Kaiser schickt Soldaten aus: Ein Sarajevo-Roman* (2014).

The Austrian commemorative exhibitions of 2014 proved a mixed bag.¹³ First, a certain predictability was in evidence: all contained similar wartime proclamations, placards, maps, battle scenes and photographs. Second, no unity linked these exhibitions; rather, they seemed at times to be in competition with one another (Zöchling, 2014). In Vienna, the display in the splendid *Prunksaal* of the National Library – curated by the distinguished First World War historian Manfred Rauchensteiner – included war loan placards, medals, postcards, diary pages and children's drawings. Unfortunately, the artefacts were overshadowed by the beauty of the venue (Zöchling, 2014). In contrast, the *Heeresgeschichtliches Museum* presented an overbearingly militaristic exhibition, with Franz Ferdinand's car and blood-stained tunic as the *pièce de résistance*. The exhibition on the *Kriegspressequartier* in Vienna's Palais Porcia, curated by Wolfgang Maderthaner, promised much. The visitor could but gasp at the list of Austrian literati who submitted to the propaganda and censorship of the time, and the shocking images of bodies torn apart, of the appalling treatment of prisoners of war, and of executions of civilians, which were – most unusually – shown in their full horror. But this thought-provoking exhibition lacked both adequate funding and space, and left the impression of a “missed opportunity” (Zöchling, 2014). The exhibition at Castle Schallaburg (some 85 km from Vienna, linked by a regular coach service), curated by Georg Clam-Martinic, a descendant of the Austrian prime minister in 1916-1917, was possibly the grandest of all, welcoming busloads of families and schoolchildren to its twenty-four rooms housing 1,000 artefacts. Under the title “Glory and Gloom – living with the Great War 1914-1918”, virtually everything about the Austrian experience of the conflict was related and shown (even a copy of Franz Ferdinand blood-soaked quilt on his death sofa). Unfortunately, the venue quickly became overcrowded and the visitor was left with the impression of being on a conveyor belt: in and out (Zöchling, 2014). Such exhibitions generated a great degree of public interest and revealed a sense of relevance for the present (Zöchling, 2014). But, as in some other former combatant countries, it has to be doubted whether the period holds much resonance for current generations. Furthermore, Austria's ethnic makeup has changed greatly in recent years – half the primary school pupils in Vienna do not have German as a mother tongue – and for many new arrivals, the war has no relevance whatsoever.

It must be added that several glaring omissions marred the centennial exhibitions. There was, as mentioned previously, a singular lack of coverage of the Austro-Hungarian war crimes in Galicia and Serbia. Moreover, the brutalities of the Habsburgs were directed not only against their external enemies but also against their own populations – Ruthenes and Slovenes, for instance – and dissenting individuals such as the *Reichsrat* deputy, Cesare Battisti, who had defected to Italy and whose death was gruesomely and gleefully photographed. These abuses were overlooked, as was the use of poison gas on the battlefield (Zöchling, 2014). And the reasons for the war itself were never properly identified. Indeed, it was often presented as an apocalyptic

13 The author acknowledges his debt here to the following article: Zöchling (2014).

event that emerged out of the blue. In every exhibition, the war seemed to begin solely with the assassination of Franz Ferdinand. The deeper origins, and the background to the assassination, were consistently ignored (Zöchling, 2014).

The government itself engaged actively with the centenary, producing a “Summary report prepared by Austrian researchers on the occasion of the centennial commemoration of the outbreak of World War I” (2014). Instigated by the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, the report was commissioned by the aforementioned ministry, the Austrian Federal Chancellery, the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the Federal Ministry of Defence and Sports, the Federal Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture, and the Federal Ministry of Science and Research. Its aim was to provide Austria’s diplomatic representatives, as well as the staff of the individual ministries, with concise information on key issues explored in recent research on the First World War. Much of the document is illuminating, notably the blunt introduction by Manfred Rauchensteiner who boldly (and correctly) stated that: “The Emperor [Franz Joseph] wanted the war and avoided any discussions on an armistice or a separate peace until his death” (Ibid., p. 9). He also conceded Austria’s humiliating submission to Germany. Other topics included were “Reflections on the question of war guilt” and “Front experience” by Helmut Conrad, who admitted that “It is an unchallenged fact that this responsibility [for the outbreak of the war] has to be assumed particularly by the Central Powers” (Ibid., p. 14). Heidmarie Uhl contributed a further piece on “World War I in the memory of Austria and (central) Europe – Traditions of remembrance from a (trans) national perspective”. She rightly pointed out the minor role the war plays in Austrian (and German) collective consciousness compared to France or Great Britain: “World War I is not one of Austria’s key sites of memory”. Furthermore, she observed, remembrance of it is wholly uncontroversial, unlike the Second World War (Ibid., p. 33). Uhl pleaded for an examination of the different national perceptions of 1914-1918 not to create a common narrative, but rather to “develop a reflective perception of national memory cultures”. Thus, differing or contradictory national views of the conflict could become a productive source for a “European experience”, transnational and pan-European. Ambitiously, she even suggested common history textbooks (“Summary report prepared by Austrian researchers on the occasion of the centennial commemoration of the outbreak of World War I”, 2014, p. 35). Overall, her views are representative of Austria’s attempt to position herself as a level-headed mediator of the memory of the Great War. This was certainly the government line.

In March 2014, in an interview with the *Tiroler Tageszeitung* and the *Vorarlberger Nachrichten* the Federal President of Austria, Heinz Fischer, declared himself to be, 100 years after the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war on Serbia, a “supportive partner” of Serbia’s path into the European Union (Huber & Sprenger, 2014). When the journalists present remarked that the Austrian public was far better informed about the Second World War than the First, Fischer conceded this likelihood, but pointed to the numerous books and texts published on the occasion of the centenary, adding that they confirmed that few had seriously expected a world war to emerge from the shots fired in Sarajevo. He went on to explain that the scenes of enthusiasm in Austria which accompanied the declaration of war in 1914 were representative of a time when nationalism was a widespread philosophy of life and added that “In my opinion, there are no longer any archenemies, nor should there be” (Huber & Sprenger, 2014). Fischer then announced his plans for the anniversary of the outbreak of war: visits to Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro; and the reception of the Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian presidents in Austria. As for the 28 June anniversary itself, he intended to be in Sarajevo and expressed the hope that the

Serbian President would also be present “since today there were no more ancestral enmities”. Later that same month he intended to attend an Austrian memorial service in Vienna on the theme of “Peace and War” and he further accepted an invitation from the King of Belgium for a commemoration ceremony in Liège, which the presidents of Germany and France were also due to attend. He concluded platitudinously: “We in Austria will therefore be very consciously mindful of the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War, with the intention of learning from history and with the conviction that war cannot be a political expedient” (Huber & Sprenger, 2014). Remarkably, despite Fischer’s gravitas and rectitude, Austria’s guilt in starting the war which killed and injured tens of millions was not even hinted at.

In the end, the Serbian President, Aleksandar Vučić, and his Bosnian Serb counterpart, Milorad Dodik, stayed away from the commemorations in Sarajevo on 28 June. Most Serbs, whether from Serbia or Bosnia, followed the lead of their politicians and did not attend. Instead, on the previous day, in eastern Sarajevo, several hundred Bosnian Serbs unveiled a colossal two-metre bronze statue of Gavrilo Princip, the killer of Franz Ferdinand and his wife, who, through his action, “triggered” the outbreak of hostilities. Dodik, the President of Republika Srpska (the Serb part of Bosnia) called Princip a “freedom fighter” and denounced the Austro-Hungarian Empire as an “occupier”. So much for Fischer’s conciliatory words. The Mayor of Sarajevo, Ivo Komši, commented ominously that those who had refused to attend the official commemoration had “demonstrated not their attitude toward the past but toward the future of this region” (“WWI centennial event without Serbs”, 2014).

Austria commemorated the outbreak of the war with great fanfare, but failed to examine seriously her own war guilt and crimes. As Hannes Leidinger points out, however, there is a tendency on the part of certain countries to go easier on Austria than she deserves since, from the days of the Congress of Vienna in 1814-1815, Austria has come to be seen internationally as a peaceful arbitrator. In his view, there is an Austrian cultural tendency to minimise all things unsavoury and promote a Habsburg myth, both of which might go down well internationally, but make us forget why there is a “Radetzky March” in the first place (daStandard.at, 2014). In this, he has a point.

2. Hungary

The next obvious port of call is Hungary, the official other half of the Empire from 1867 onwards. There, to this day, all memories of the First World War and its consequences can be condensed into one word: Trianon. In this palace of the domain of Versailles (technically, *Le Grand Trianon*), on 4 June 1920 the Hungarian delegation was forced to sign punitive peace terms which deprived the country of roughly two-thirds of its territory and half of its population – it was, in the words of Cartledge, “the most severe reverse sustained by the Hungarian nation since the Battle of Mohács in 1526” (2011, pp. 319, 326-327). No less than 3,425,000 Magyars (ethnic Hungarians) were left living outside the new Hungarian state (Frucht, 2005, pp. 359-360). The impossibility of ever accepting this punishment was summarised in the slogan *Nem, Nem, Soha* (“No, No, Never”). As a result, the relationship of Hungary to her past has since been marked by negativity and resentment. As an independent country, it often appears revanchist and nationalistic, particularly concerning neighbouring Czechoslovakia (the chief bugbear of the inter-war years), Ukraine, Croatia and Romania (to whom the cession of Transylvania is still an open wound). Concurrently, the discrediting of the Habsburgs, their frequent

insistence on greater rights for the non-Magyar nationalities living in Hungary (often in the form of blackmail), their perceived German bias, their crushing of the 1848 Revolution, and Karl's two grotesque attempts at recovering power in 1921, prevent any sincere royal nostalgia. For a nation that has endured many a catastrophe – in the twentieth century alone, Trianon, the Nazi invasion and Stalinism – and has long cultivated its status as a victim, Trianon represents the apex of injustice and suffering. It is therefore the essence of the Hungarian perception of the First World War, on top of being a major component of Hungarian national identity. More so than in virtually any other nation, the emotion and passion caused by the outcome of conflict is topical, deep-rooted and widespread, ever-present in both public consciousness and political debate.

The war itself took a terrible toll on Hungarians. Of the 9 million soldiers sent to fight by the monarchy, over one third were Hungarian. Of these, 1.4 million were wounded, over 500,000 killed, and over 1 million made captive (Kontler, 2002, pp. 321-322). The conflict was soon memorialised (although it must be remembered that only a fraction of all the bodies of Hungarian soldiers were returned to the rump of Hungary). After the end of hostilities, in many Hungarian towns and villages the local community erected compulsory monuments bearing the names of the fallen (Harlov, 2014b, pp. 47, 50).¹⁴ These were simultaneously private in tone and patriotic in representation. Many of them incorporated features from Hungary's mythological past – the Turul bird, a lion to symbolise freedom, the patriarchal cross, Hungaria (Hungary's symbolic female figure), the soil of the motherland – as well as Prince Csaba, one of the country's earliest rulers, or Attila's sword. Furthermore, many sought to evoke the 1848 Revolution with flags and horns rarely present during 1914-1918. Often, they depicted soldiers (ancient or modern, standing tall ready to fight, grieving, wounded or mortally injured), equestrian statues, or mothers (sometimes with children) (Harlov, 2014a, pp. 48, 49, 64). This mix elevated the Great War to almost mythical status (Szabó, 1991). Meanwhile, as early as 1915 a "National Committee for Keeping Alive the Memory of the Heroes" had been created and in 1924 a national holiday, termed Heroes' Day, was decreed, to be held on the last Sunday in May (this holiday was also followed in towns now outside Hungary). A year later the Ministry of the Interior stated that these commemorations should include speeches, wreath-laying and masses. These events were of course frequently used as pretexts to express Hungarian designs on their lost territories (Harlov, 2014b, pp. 47, 49-50). Furthermore, in 1929 the Millennium Monument on Heroes' Square (so named in 1932) in Budapest was chosen as the central venue to honour the Hungarian soldiers buried outside the country: "in the Carpathian Mountains, in Galicia, in the Polish lowlands or in the Rumanian forests" (*Újság*, 4 October 1925, pp. 4-5, quoted in Harlov, 2014a). It thus also served as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. This National Heroes' Monument consisted of a simple limestone monolith in the shape of a coffin with the dates of the First World War on one side and a dedication "to the thousand-year-old national boundaries" on the other. Commemorations were subsequently held there each year (Harlov, 2014b, pp. 51-54).

Throughout the troubled inter-war years, Hungarians never lost sight of their vanished territories and were ultimately willing to ally with Hitler in order to recover them. This paid off at the First Vienna Award in November 1938, when, at the expense of an already broken Czechoslovakia, Hungary retrieved land in present-day Slovakia and Ukraine of which Trianon had

14 See also Harlov (2014a).

deprived her. Carpathian Ruthenia was then occupied militarily in 1939. Further, the Second Vienna Award in August 1940 – with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy again playing the dishonest brokers – reassigned Northern Transylvania from Romania to Hungary. Finally, in 1941, Hungary annexed Bačka, Prekmurje and Međimurje from Yugoslavia. The stain of Trianon was partly wiped off, but at what price?

Predictably, the alliance with Germany eventually wreaked catastrophic destruction on Hungary which, after the war, lost all the territories pilfered since 1938. As in many other countries, the names of the victims of the Second World War were added to the First World War memorials – in this case by law. But, from 1945, under the orders of the occupying Soviets, neither the commemoration of Heroes' Day nor the maintenance or erection of new war memorials were permitted. Further, the 1929 National Heroes' Monument on Heroes' Square, damaged during the fighting, was removed and replaced by a general memorial with no reference to the Great War (but with an implicit celebration of the USSR and her liberation of Hungary: "For the memory of those heroes, who sacrificed their lives for the Hungarians' independence and freedom"). In time, it simply became a general place of remembrance (Harlov, 2014b, pp. 50-51, 54-55).¹⁵ Meanwhile, schoolchildren were far more likely to learn about the Russian cruiser *Aurora* (an episode in the October Revolution) than to hear about the exploits, sacrifices and appalling losses of the Royal Hungarian *Honvéd*. In this regard, Hungary was no different from the other countries that fell under the Communist yoke.

With the collapse of Communism in Hungary in 1989, Heroes' Day was once again celebrated. Only in 2001, however, did the government re-establish it officially, with the broader aim of remembering "all those who sacrificed their life or who were injured for Hungary" (for instance, the victims of the 1956 Soviet invasion). This further erased the uniqueness of the First World War fallen on the memorials. In fact, the regulations for the commemoration of Heroes' Day specify that the day itself should not be limited to the victims of 1914-1918 (Harlov, 2014b, p. 51). The inscription on the National Heroes' Monument was also changed and now simply reads: "For the memory of our heroes" (Harlov, 2014b, p. 59). In addition, a new law in 2011 re-categorised memorials which had the effect of dramatically lowering the number of those dedicated solely to the Great War (Ibid.).

Yet the conflict, and especially Trianon, are far from forgotten. Even the return of democracy in the 1990s did not prevent it from remaining an issue. Hopes of a revision of the treaty were, in the words of historian László Kontler, "harboured by a sizeable minority", although most political parties did not persistently pursue the matter as part of their policy. In 1992, Prime Minister József Antall made a speech in which he expressed his wish to be prime minister "in spirit" for 15 million Hungarians (a figure which included those living in the territories surrendered after Trianon). Meanwhile, President Árpád Göncz had made similar statements at the start of his presidency in 1990, expressing strong support for ethnic Hungarians abroad (Duplain, 1996). However, between 1992 and 1996, Hungary signed treaties with Ukraine, Romania, Croatia, Slovenia and Slovakia to ensure the inviolability of their borders and the rights of their minorities (Ganczer, 2014). But to many Hungarian politicians (not least future prime minister Viktor Orbán), these were merely convenient expedients to hurry Hungary's accession to the European Union (Kontler, 2002, pp. 480-481). And when Orbán returned for a second term as

15 The date of the inauguration of the monument was telling: 4 April 1956, the 14th anniversary of the Soviet liberation.

prime minister in 2010, he was quick to upset the applecart. Borrowing policies from populist and far-right movements (and thereby capturing much of their electorate), he avowedly aimed to restore the nation's lost pride (i.e. undo Trianon). In particular, in early 2011 his *Fidesz* government granted ethnic Hungarians in neighbouring countries (living on land lost at Trianon) Hungarian citizenship and the right to vote in Hungarian elections, to the fury of the countries concerned, mostly Ukraine, Serbia and Romania. Slovakia promptly banned such dual citizenship, but the Hungarians circumvented this by refusing to disclose the names of their new citizens. This has created over 675,000 new Hungarian citizens who need only meet two criteria: a direct ancestor who was a Hungarian citizen and a basic knowledge of the language (Thorpe 2013; Harris, 2014). Hungarian nationality is particularly valuable for Ukrainian or Serbian citizens (numbering around 100,000), who now have EU passports and enjoy freedom of movement throughout the Union. Yet the canny Orbán – routinely described as populist, revisionist and authoritarian in the Western press¹⁶ – stopped short of making claims on the lost territories, arguing that he was only demanding the respect which Europe denied his country after the First World War. Still, it was an obvious and legal way in which to recreate the mental map of a Greater Hungary, and to help undo the affront of Trianon.

In light of the festering resentment since the conclusion of the First World War, the centenary commemorations were rather low-key. Nevertheless, Trianon still featured strongly in political discourse. László Kövér, the Speaker of the National Assembly, declared during a speech at the Opera House to mark the hundred years since the outbreak of conflict that “[t]he War has come to an end in a military sense but not in the mental one. It will not end as long as human dignity and fair treatment of communities – lost a hundred years ago – are not restored”. He added that “[t]he current injustices and unfair practices ethnic Hungarians abroad are exposed to remind us that there are still Hungarian wounds to be healed” (MTI, 2014). Elsewhere, the Deputy Prime Minister, Zsolt Semjén, declared that the Hungarian nation could be proud of having survived Trianon; that 4 June (now known as “The Day of National Unity”) was a day of mourning and remembrance, as well as a historical lesson. But he pointed out that Trianon was the nation's greatest tragedy since the division of historical Hungary in 1541 and he praised the Hungarians living on the other side of the border as “heroes” who “have remained true Hungarians under all circumstances”. Indeed, in order to cultivate closer ties with Magyars living outside Hungary, the government has generously funded a “Without Borders” programme which organises visits by Hungarian students to their counterparts in neighbouring countries and *vice versa* (Prime Minister's Office, 2014). The aim of such projects is transparent: the recreation of pre-Trianon Hungary within the existing legal framework and without any territorial claims.

Outside the political sphere, the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the war was widely covered by the print media and the internet. All the largest online news portals, for instance, reported on it. *Index.hu*, *hvg.hu*, as well as *www.origo.hu*, set up dedicated blogs on the Great War.¹⁷ A Facebook page curated by historians was also created,¹⁸ as was a “Calendar of Heroes”

16 See La Bruyère (2013).

17 The three respective blogs are available here: <http://index.hu/tudomany/tortenelem/anagyhaboru>, http://hvg.hu/cimke/I._vil%C3%A1gh%C3%A1bor%C3%BA and <http://www.origo.hu/tudomany/tortenelem/20140702-az-i-vilaghaboru-kitorese-a-merenylettol-a-haduzenetekig.html>, all accessed on 5 May 2015.

18 The Facebook page is available here: https://www.facebook.com/ElsoVilaghaboruA100EvesEvsfordulosPage/timeline?ref=page_internal, accessed on 15 May 2015.

website on which one can discover a different Hungarian First World War hero by clicking on each day of the year (“Hősök Naptára”, n. d.). One of the best publications on the subject was *Rubicon* (a popular history magazine) which featured a formidable line-up of writers. These included John Lukacs, János Gyurgyák, Béla Tomka, Ferenc Pollmann, Balázs Polgár, Gábor Margittai, Ignác Romsics, György Szücs, Enikő Róka, Gábor Gyáni, Gergely Bödök, Ferenc Erős, Emőke Tomsics, and Ágnes Pogány. Other history magazines, such as *História*, also released special editions. Furthermore, a historical conference marking the centenary was organised in the Parliament Building and included eleven speakers under the title “The First World War and its consequences in Hungary and in Europe” (“Első világháború: tévedések tragédiája”, 2014). It is, however, noticeable that specifically Hungarian considerations are never forgotten and that the war is rarely presented as a global conflict: the scars of Trianon still run too deep.

Orbán, having succeeded in implementing his new Nationality Law, could afford not to make repeated references to Trianon on the occasion of the centenary of the outbreak of war – a sensible move in light of his increasing isolation among neighbouring countries and condemnation from the international community. But he was well aware that the feeling towards the treaty runs deep and runs far, domestically and abroad. It is no surprise to discover, for example, an American Hungarian Federation whose website has been brimming with allusions to Trianon for the last ten years.¹⁹ Nor is it a shock to learn that in the town of Beregszász, the hub of Hungarian culture in Ukraine (where it is known as Berehove), with its bilingual street signs and numerous red, white and green flags, a conference entitled “The First World Conflagration” was organised in October 2014 by the Hungarian Transcarpathian Institute, in association with the Hungarian Cultural Association of Transcarpathia, during which visitors could view an exhibition of (Hungarian) “Forgotten Heroes” among the many photographs of Great War memorials and contemporary publications (“History”, p. 8). When one considers that Orbán (an avowed friend of Vladimir Putin) has long called for the autonomy of Ukraine’s 156,000 ethnic Hungarians, that the far-right Hungarian party, *Jobbik*, considers the current Ukrainian crisis an opportunity “finally to resolve the situation of Transcarpathian Hungarians”, and that the aforementioned cultural association had expressed its sympathy for Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine, tensions between Hungary and her neighbours are understandable (“Long live Ruthenia”, 2015).

Hungary is certainly the country of the former Habsburg Empire which has had the greatest difficulty in hauling itself out of the quagmire of the First World War and accepting its consequences. It is also a country where the appalling loss of life seems to matter less than the loss of millennial Hungary. More worryingly for the future, historian Paul Lendvai has remarked that “[i]t seems that after the 20-year democratic intermezzo the current ruling elite of the country, temporarily still supported by a relative (though by no means a two-thirds) majority in society, sees the salvation of the nation in once again pursuing the path of clerical neo-conservatism and ethnic nationalism which followed in the wake of Trianon” (Lendvai, 2012, p. 231).

19 See “The treaty of Trianon: a Hungarian tragedy - June 4, 1920” - various articles on the anniversary of Trianon since 2005.

3. Poland

Put simply, the Polish-inhabited part of Austria-Hungary was known as Galicia (technically as the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria) and although it contained a majority of Poles it was also home to non-negligible numbers of Ruthenes (modern-day Ukrainians), Germans and Jews. The remaining Polish population of historic Poland was divided between the German and Russian Empires, the final partition and thus disappearance of the country having taken place in 1795. The First World War restored Poland's long-lost independence and, to most Poles, naturally, this remains the decisive – and virtually exclusive – significance of the conflict.

Yet unlike other former combatant countries, where First World War memorials abound, Poland is comparatively bereft of such commemorative monuments (Walton, 2007, p. 7). This is all the more surprising at first glance, for Polish territory witnessed some of the fiercest and most significant fighting of the entire conflict (Walton, 2007, p. 7), for instance at the battles of Limanowa and Tannenberg (both 1914), the siege of Przemyśl (1914-1915), and during the Gorlice–Tarnów offensive (1915). But, according to Keegan (1998, p. 451), the nature of the fighting (in which comparatively few soldiers got a proper burial and where wartime “decencies” were rarely observed), the shifting battlefields, the turbulent inter-war years, the apocalyptic Second World War, the redrawing of the map of Poland thereafter, and the Communist attitude to the conflict, all help to explain the small number of monuments, or indeed cemeteries, in remembrance of 1914-1918. Furthermore, the few cemeteries of the Carpathian region of Poland – formerly Austro-Hungarian territory – suffered from particular neglect (Walton, 2013, p. 7).

The difficulties for Poles to commemorate the First World War are easily comprehensible in at least two ways. First, the conflict did not involve an independent Poland or a national Polish army, but foreign powers merely fighting on Polish soil. Second, it inevitably pitted Poles against Poles (Walton, 2013, p. 9). (It is also hard to imagine a concerted effort by the jingoistic and reactionary inter-war Polish government to honour fallen Austrian, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian or Ukrainian comrades-in-arms considering Poland's tense relations and territorial squabbles with its new neighbours.) As a result, it has been easier for Poles to commemorate and memorialise indisputably Polish battles, especially those of the country's mediaeval past such as Legnica (1241) and the original Tannenberg (1410) (Walton, 2013, pp. 4-6).

It is a justified commonplace, of course, that the Eastern Front has received less scholarly and popular attention than its Western counterpart. And, despite worthy historiographical improvements in recent years, it remains understudied. The year 2014 witnessed a host of Polish commemorations to mark the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War. As part of this, hundreds of articles in the press, books, new editions of memoirs, exhibitions, conferences and educational projects came to light, proving that the remembrance of the Great War in Poland is, at least now, on the occasion of the centenary, alive. A Galician specificity, however, is hard to distinguish. Although the Poles of Austria-Hungary had been loyal subjects of the Habsburgs (Prantner, 2014, pp. 168-169) – on the one hand relieved not to suffer the discriminations and indignities of their brethren in Germany and Russia, and on the other hand glad to be allowed by the authorities in Vienna to lord it over their Ukrainian neighbours in near complete autonomy and impunity – they, like the nation as a whole, ultimately dreamed of independence.

But despite commemorations comparable to those in most other European countries, Polish historians have tended to emphasise the differences in perception of the war between Eastern and Western Europe (Krzemiński, 2014a, pp. 143-145). The Germans, French and British

recall above all the appalling bloodshed in the trenches and the millions of lives lost in vain. Yet in a country such as Poland, where independence was finally regained after 123 years, the painful recollections of the survivors, the sacrifices of the dead, the destruction of cities and countryside, and the brutal occupation by enemy forces, gave way, for a time, to a more emphatic and uninhibited sense of success and liberation. Furthermore, for Poland, the war arguably continued until 1921, when it finally conquered the eastern borders it desired from the Soviets. In other words, memories of what had been lost were eventually superseded by memories of what had been won (Traba, 2014). In the public sphere, the spotlight was shone firmly on those soldiers who had borne arms for the cause of independence in Polish national regiments, as opposed to the millions who fought for foreign imperial armies (Szlanta, 2014). Incidentally, it would be wrong to suppose that these latter Poles all fought against their will, as mobilisation had in fact proceeded smoothly in the three lands of partitioned Poland: Austrian Poles relished the opportunity to fight Russia, Prussian Poles voted for the war budget and did not shirk their military obligations, while Russian Poles were even seen to cheer on the fearsome Cossack regiments (Prażmowska, 2004, p. 158; Wandycz, 1993, p. 335).

As a result of these fundamental differences with Western perceptions, traditional debates on the causes of the war and blame for its outbreak, as well as for the subsequent slaughter, are of secondary importance in Poland. Christopher Clark's *The Sleepwalkers* which, as has been seen, questioned Germany's responsibility for starting the conflict, was met with some surprise by Polish historians, who pointed out that such arguments had been known for years and were far from groundbreaking (Krzemiński, 2014b, pp. 51-53; Traba, 2014, pp. 10-21). In other respects, the Polish historical memory of the Great War is not so straightforward. As previously mentioned, huge numbers of Poles, since they did not have their own country, fought for Germany, Russia and Austria-Hungary (and of the millions drafted by the three powers, 450,000 died and 900,000 were wounded) (Zamoyski, 2009, p. 289). Yet from the beginning of the conflict, few failed to see that the disintegration of those three Empires would potentially signify freedom and independence – even though this was in many ways a distant fantasy dependent on a multitude of factors, which would necessarily involve Poles fighting fellow countrymen (Krzemiński, 2014b, pp. 51-53; Wandycz, 1993, p. 331). As it turned out, the memory of the First World War in Poland became overwhelmingly dominated by the idea of independence.

The years immediately after the war inevitably witnessed wrangling over the narrative to adopt – who, for instance, was to be credited for Poland's rebirth? Roman Dmowski, for one, had left Polish territory in late 1915 (after having initially supported cooperation with Tsarist Russian plans for the future of Poland) (Wandycz, 1993, pp. 335-336) and had promoted the Polish cause in Britain and France, while the pianist and composer Ignacy Jan Paderewski did the same in the United States, to great effect (Zamoyski, 2009, pp. 290-291). The latter's action is chiefly credited for Woodrow Wilson's statement to the Senate in January 1917 that "Statesmen everywhere agree that there should be a united, independent, autonomous Poland" (Zamoyski, 2009, p. 291). The former's work, in the meantime, had been instrumental – alongside the Russian Revolution and its consequences – in obtaining France's sanction for the formation of an allied Polish army on French soil in June 1917. And in September of that year, France (followed by Britain, Italy and the United States) recognised Dmowski's National Committee in Paris as the Provisional Government of the future Poland (Zamoyski, 2009, p. 291). In the end, on 7 November 1918, the Socialist Ignacy Daszyński (a member of the Austrian Parliament in Vienna) proclaimed the Polish People's Republic in Lublin (Zamoyski, 2009, p. 291).

However, by the 1930s, the cult of Marshal Józef Piłsudski and of his Legions had virtually eclipsed all else in collective memory. Although they had fought for the Central Powers – the Austrians had organised them in two Polish Legions with their own uniforms and colours under the command of Austrian army officers of Polish nationality – Piłsudski was careful to emphasise that they were not Austrian troops, nor even allies of the Central Powers (Zamoyski, 2009, p. 286). These units grew to 20,000 men and quickly acquired legendary status in the battles against the Russians. Meanwhile, on 5 November 1916, Franz Joseph and Wilhelm II proclaimed the creation of an independent Kingdom of Poland from occupied Russian territories. But their motivations were purely tactical: they needed Polish soldiers. In 1917, Piłsudski, sensing that the Allies would win the war, and now opposed to his Poles being used as German colonial forces, resigned and was eventually arrested, while most of the Polish units were disbanded for refusing to swear an oath of allegiance to the German Emperor (Zamoyski, 2009, p. 290).²⁰ Nevertheless, several thousand of them continued to fight for Germany and Austria-Hungary, chiefly on the Italian front. Yet despite these complicated loyalties the Legionaries remained Poland's most prominent wartime heroes and became the backbone of the post-war Polish army. As a result, other significant events of the war involving Polish soldiers or civilians, such as the dramatic battles at Gorlice and Przemyśl, or the bombing and destruction of Kalisz, were forced into the background. It must also be added that independence had inevitably proved a disappointment to most Poles, since it failed to live up to the romantic notions constructed over a century (Prażmowska, 2004, p. 163). The history of inter-war Poland is a particularly depressing tale.

Inevitably, the unprecedented horror of the Second World War ended up overshadowing the previous conflict. Even the memories of glorious individual battles and war heroes, as well as the ultimate conquest of freedom, were undermined. By 1945, almost six million Poles had been killed, which amounted to one in five of the population (Prażmowska, 2004, p. 338). In addition, the war left half a million disabled and a million children orphaned. Much of the political and military elite had been wiped out, while the brightest writers and artists had mostly emigrated (Prażmowska, 2004, p. 338). 2.7 million Polish Jews had been slaughtered (Prażmowska, 2004, p. 318). To add to this, the Soviet Union helped itself to 47 % of the country's pre-war territory – all this for a country technically on the victorious side (Prażmowska, 2004, pp. 338-339). The First World War seemed a long way away.

Furthermore, from the mid-1940s, the Communist authorities imposed their authorised view of the conflict and of Polish independence (Purchla, 2014). Now, the population was told that it owed its freedom to the Russian Revolution (Holzer, 2014, pp. 170-172). Everything connected to the myth of Piłsudski was extinguished: Poland's Independence Day, celebrated on 11 November, was abolished, monuments were removed and streets renamed. During the Communist era, any remembrance of the war which focused on independence and its traditional heroes had to be concealed. From the beginning of the 1960s, however, more objective voices started to appear among historians. Authors such as Jerzy Holzer and Jan Molenda in their work *Polska w pierwszej wojnie światowej* (Poland in World War I), published in 1963, sought to discredit strict dogmatic perspectives (Holzer, 2014, pp. 170-172).

20 Many men from the disbanded units joined the Polish Military Organisation (PMO), "an underground network set up across the entire area of the Commonwealth by Piłsudski in the two previous years, a silent army which awaited his signal".

Since 1989 and the return of democracy, debates surrounding Polish involvement in the First World War, the attainment of independence and its most significant contributors have not been rancorous (Holzer, 2014, pp. 170-172). Both Józef Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski now have monuments, although the former and his Legions still retain hero-like status among many Polish citizens and politicians, while Dmowski and his *Endecja* party have had to make do with second place: “In Polish historical memory”, it has been argued, “military action for the homeland alongside the sacrifice of its victims is far more glorified than organic work and diplomacy” (Holzer, 2014, pp. 170-172). Moreover, Independence Day has been officially reinstated. The anniversary has, however, changed its character over time to become more universal: an occasion to commemorate not only Polish independence but also to honour all those who lost their lives in all the nation’s wars.

Another observable phenomenon in modern-day Poland is the refurbishment of memorial sites and their transformation into tourist attractions (Purchla, 2014). In 2009, eight counties established a joint project: “The First World War Eastern Front Trail”. Aside from being a huge tourist draw, this project aimed to help rekindle the significance of the much-overlooked Eastern Front in popular imagination. In the Lesser Poland (*małopolskie*) and Subcarpathian (*podkarpacie*) Voivodeships – the regions of the former province of Galicia – the trail encompasses areas which, in 1914 and 1915, were a key theatre of military operations between the Central Powers and the Russian army. Travelling along this path, one sees monuments to the war and museums, along with military cemeteries designed by eminent post-war artists. The route also includes former military buildings, such as barracks, army headquarters, and military hospitals. Some locations feature the vestiges of entrenchments and other battlefield fortifications.²¹

Galicia is in fact studded with First World War cemeteries, but for decades they were ignored and eventually fell into disrepair and oblivion. Only now have they begun to reclaim their rightful place in history. As a result of efforts by local authorities and assistance from local communities (often with financial support from the European Union), many cemeteries have been tidied up and renovated, and the memory of thousands of soldiers (of different nationalities) is now suitably honoured. In 2014, the Provincial Governor of Lesser Poland assigned around €300,000 to this end (“Cmentarze z I wojny światowej odzyskują pierwotny wygląd”, 2014). Local amateur historians have also contributed to the rehabilitation of the burial sites. Roman Frodyma – a private initiator of the restoration of Galician cemeteries and the author of several guidebooks to the memorial sites of that region – has played a particularly prominent role.²²

As for today’s young Poles, the conflict is still overwhelmingly associated with the return of Polish independence and linked to the heroism of Piłsudski’s Legionaries (or the Polish army in France who fought on the Western Front, a force which grew to around 70,000 by 1919).²³ In spite of this, it is frequently regarded as an event of prehistory, largely obscured by the remainder of the twentieth century. It is not, to their minds, a relevant, life-affecting matter, nor something which they feel duty-bound to remember, honour or to learn from. In most instances, this generation did not hear oral accounts of the period from their ancestors, nor were they brought up in families which celebrated or mourned any aspect of the war. When added

21 See “Szlak Frontu Wschodniego I Wojny Światowej w Małopolsce” for more information.

22 In particular, Frodyma authored the three-volume *Galicyskie Cmentarze Wojenne* [Galician War Cemeteries] (1995; 1997; 1998).

23 See Geremek & Stremiecki, (2014; 2012). They were commonly known as The Blue Army or Haller’s Army.

to the often insufficient and inadequate coverage and transmission of the subject in school, this attitude is inevitable.

Thankfully, in the last few years, various schemes have been undertaken to fill this gap. In south-east Poland (again the former Galicia), educational projects, conferences, film reviews and photographic competitions were organised to mark the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of hostilities.²⁴ Many of these projects were specifically directed at a young audience. The intention was not only to engage the young with the Great War as a global conflict and to familiarise them with a crucial episode of Poland's past, but also to spark a rediscovery of their own region's history. They were encouraged to look for physical traces of the war in their local area and to attempt to learn about the impact of the conflict on the lives of their families. Several international conferences and youth gatherings also took place in Lesser Poland. One of these gatherings, held in August 2014 in the town of Wapienne, enabled students from across Europe to participate in lectures, discussions and workshops on the subjects of national identity, memory and patriotism ("W 100-lecie wybuchu I wojny Międzynarodowy Zlot Młodzieży", 2014).

Yet many aspects of the war continue to be overlooked. The sheer number of Poles who were conscripted into the armies of the three partitioning powers – three million in total, of which approximately one in six died for a foreign cause, is one such dimension. More often than not, the sheer scale of the destruction of Polish territories is also forgotten. According to historian Andrzej Chwalba, Poles, in the main, do not realise that the damage sustained during this conflict was far greater than in the Second World War, and the reconstruction of Poland in 1918 had to start from scratch (Geremek and Stremecki, 2014). Indeed, while the Russians evacuated entire factories and companies eastwards to avoid their destruction and exploitation at German hands, the Germans deliberately destroyed certain branches of industry in parts of Russian Poland they had conquered in order to avoid post-war competition with their own. They also plundered about 70 % of the land's raw material (and considerably deforested it), appropriated machinery and dismantled factories (Prażmowska, 2004, pp. 159-160; Wandycz, 1993, pp. 340-341). Moreover, the Second World War continues to "swallow up" the First and no Pole is unaware that it cost Poland a greater proportion of its population than any other country. For all its blood and horror, the earlier conflict was outdone, and the fact that certain historians have conflated it with 1939-1945 into a single conflict has further eroded its specificity and uniqueness (Leiserowitz, 2014, pp. 152-154).

4. The Czech Republic

To Czech minds, as to Polish ones, the First World War symbolises independence above all, although, unlike Poland, no Czech state had existed in recent history – the Lands of the Bohemian Crown (Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and, briefly, Lusatia), established in 1348, had been a Habsburg possession since 1526. Virtually no Czech soldier setting off to war in the summer of 1914 was doing so to fight for independence, let alone for unification with the Slovaks. These thoughts developed during the war, chiefly thanks to skilful and intensive émigré propaganda, whose influence on the future peacemakers ensured that Czechoslovakia arose with almost all the wishes of its leaders fulfilled. The nascent country had no shortage of heroes to honour (from the Czech point of view, at least). These included, above all, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk

24 See "100-lecie I wojny światowej" (n. d.).

and Edvard Beneš, founders of the Czechoslovak National Council, who had worked tirelessly in Paris, London and Washington to gain acceptance for their ambitious vision of a large, strong, independent, democratic, Central European ally of the Entente and buffer state between Germany and Russia. Yet there was a long list of others: the secret *Maffie*, the organisation which had represented Masaryk and Beneš domestically and engaged in subversive activities on the home front; the foreign statesmen who had supported their claims, most notably the American President Woodrow Wilson; anti-Habsburg, Slavophile academics, publicists, journalists and authors such as the Britons R.W. Seton-Watson and Henry Wickham Steed, or the Frenchman Ernest Denis; “martyrs” such as the politicians Karel Kramář and Alois Rašín who were sentenced to death for high treason in 1915 by the Austrian military authorities before being granted amnesty by Karl two years later; the 222 Czech authors, led by the much-loved historian, Alois Jirásek, who all but declared for an independent Czechoslovakia in May 1917 in their famous Writers’ Manifesto; the parliamentary deputies, who, when the Vienna *Reichsrat* reopened shortly after the appearance of the manifesto, spoke out almost unanimously for the full autonomy of the historical lands of the Bohemian Crown and for the attachment of Slovakia (though by then most of them were probably tinkering with the idea of outright independence); the much-vaunted mutinous Czech units in the Austria-Hungarian army who went over to the Russians; the legendary and seemingly invincible Czechoslovak Legion, which fought for the Entente and ended up involved in the Russian Civil War before returning home in 1920; and perhaps, finally, the *Good Soldier Švejk* (1921-1923), the central character of Jaroslav Hašek’s humorous satire of wartime Austria-Hungary and its institutions, in which the simple-minded, blundering yet sympathetic Švejk almost single-handedly thwarts the monarchy’s war effort through his sheer incompetence and idiocy.

But the First Czechoslovak Republic – an exemplary democratic and liberal state by Central European standards, and indeed by most measures – had bitten off more than it could chew. Despite its promise of a Swiss-style federal state and its official commitment to the protection of minorities, it never found a solution to accommodate or integrate its restless German population of 3.5 million (the infamous Sudeten), its Hungarians, its Poles, or even fully to satisfy its Slovaks. Nor did it remain immune to the global economic crash in the 1930s, or find the close, reliable and powerful allies to protect it against surrounding totalitarianisms. By the time of the Munich conference in late September 1938, the laudable experiment was over – the result of Nazi aggression, Italian complicity, Allied cowardice, neighbouring rivalries and worldwide indifference. Within months, Hitler had entered Prague and Czechoslovakia no longer existed.

When the country re-emerged, comparatively unscathed, from the Second World War (physically at least), it had little time to enjoy its freedom. The 1948 Communist coup imposed over forty years of rigid ideology – despite irrepressible Czech tendencies to dissent and rebel: the Czechoslovak New Wave, the Prague Spring, Charter 77 – until its collapse during the Velvet Revolution of 1989. During those mostly dreary, stagnant decades, the standard Communist vision of the First World War – with the Russian Revolution at its core – was imposed, as elsewhere in the Eastern Bloc. Schoolbooks were rewritten, streets renamed, heroes knocked off their pedestals, battles and wartime politics reinterpreted. The “bourgeois” First Republic was purged, not to mention the unspeakable Habsburg Empire. Impressively, a handful of worthy history books did appear,²⁵ but in schools the First World War was represented as a non-Czech,

25 For example, see Paulová (1968); or Galandauer’s works such as *Bohumír Šmeral 1914-1941* (1986).

imperialist war, only redeemed by the Russian Revolution. The units who allegedly went over to the Russian side were lionised, particularly those involved in the Battle of Zborów (1917).

In the immediate years after the fall of the Iron Curtain little was done to re-examine and reassess the First World War, save for the systematic and uncritical rehabilitation, glorification and mythologising of the First Republic and of the wartime independence fighters at home and abroad. Schools taught nothing beyond the absolute basics of the conflict.²⁶ Indeed, uncomfortable truths were glossed over: the failure of Slovak inclusion (which finally resulted in a formal separation on 1 January 1993); the wholesale, indiscriminate and sometimes brutal expulsion of the German minority after the Second World War as a result of the Beneš decrees; the failure to take up arms against Nazi Germany, whereas many Czechs had fought and lost their lives fighting – often willingly and loyally – for the Habsburg Empire during the First World War; and, moreover, the fact that the Czechs had fared very well in the Austrian half of the Empire – politically, educationally, linguistically, culturally and artistically – and that the monarchy's continued existence would have avoided much of the post-1918 trauma and likely preserved the Czechs' hard-earned place in the sun.

But, appositely for a country whose motto is *Pravda vítězí* ("Truth Prevails"), a serious review of the Czech role in the Great War has emerged in recent years. For instance, the legend of the deserting units – the 28th Infantry Regiment (Prague) in the battle at Stebnicka Huta on 3 April 1915, as well as the 35th Infantry Regiment (Pilsen), and the 75th (Jindřichův Hradec) in the Battle of Zborów on 1 and 2 July 1917 – has been comprehensively debunked (Lein, 2011). Further scholarship – chiefly, but not exclusively, foreign – has looked beyond the usual narrative of long-time oppression and eventual liberation, and revealed proof of Czech loyalty to the Habsburgs, of Czech integration in the Empire, of Czech bravery in the Austro-Hungarian Army, of Czech indifference (or indeed opposition) to ideas of independence until at last 1917,²⁷ and of the flexibility and complexity of national identity in the Bohemia lands.²⁸ Although these facts do not necessarily sit well with the Czech *roman national* propagated since 1918, they have begun to reconcile the Czechs with their imperial past. In fact, a monarchist party, *Koruna Česká* (or Czech Crown) was founded in 1991. More significant were the exhibitions in Prague in 2004, entitled "Habsburg Century 1791-1914: Prague and the Czech lands in the Danube Monarchy",²⁹ and another in 2012-2013, at the National Museum, simply termed "Monarchy".³⁰ Furthermore, it now seems likely that the statue of Field Marshal Joseph Radetzky – a Czech nobleman but also a symbol of Habsburg militarism, who helped defeat Napoleon but also put down the Italian independence movement in 1848 – will return to the Lesser Town Square in Prague, whence it was removed in 1919 (Jaroševský, 2015). Even more surprisingly, the Marian Column, which was toppled in November 1918 by an excited mob who regarded it as a symbol of Habsburg oppression (and in particular of the dynasty's brutal

26 This was confirmed by friends of the author who attended school in Czechoslovakia / the Czech Republic in the 1980s and 1990s.

27 See Křen (2000); Urban (1994); Šedivý (1999; 2001); Mommsen, Kováč, Malíř & Marek (2001). The publication of Z. V. Tobolka's wartime diary (2008) is also of prime importance.

28 See King (2002); Glassheim (2005); Judson & Rozenblit (2005); Judson (2006); Wingfield (2003); Wingfield (2007); Zahra (2008).

29 Exhibition at the Clam-Gallas Palace, "Habsburské století 1791-1914: Praha a České země v dunajské monarchii", June-September 2004.

30 Exhibition at the National Museum, "Monarchie", December 2012-September 2013.

Counter-Reformation in the Czech lands carried out after the disastrous Battle of the White Mountain in 1620), might return to its original spot on the capital's Old Town Square (Volynsky, 2013). For the time being, however, both monuments are waiting in the city's lapidarium and their re-erection will not occur without controversy.

Yet just as the commemoration of the imperial past remains problematic in parts, so does that of the First World War. As in the case of Poland, the conflict did not involve an independent Czech country; however, unlike Poland, it did not involve Czechs fighting other Czechs. Indeed, aside from the Legionaries, all Czechs fought – long and hard, at that – for the subsequently reviled Habsburg Empire. Furthermore, no fighting took place on Czech lands (although from late July 1914, the Army High Command took over the powers of civil administration in a very broadly defined hinterland behind the Eastern Front, which included much of Silesia and several districts in Moravia – although it never succeeded in extending it to Bohemia). In addition, the Czech civilian population endured consistent – and often arbitrary – persecution from the paranoid, anti-Slav military authorities, strict censorship, loss of civil liberties, and later starvation and appalling material want. Social unrest and ethnic tensions completed this bleak picture.

The sheer number of dead is, however, the most tangible reminder of the war's devastation in the Czech lands. Barely a village lacks a cemetery or memorial to the fallen, with their names inscribed. The dedications are varied, either to those who died "for the nation", "so the nation could live", "for freedom", or "to the victims of World War One", "to our fallen heroes", "to fallen soldiers". A few have a religious connotation and many are adorned with Czech symbols such as the lion. Some simply display: "Never forget". Not uncommonly, the names of victims of 1939-1945 – though Czechoslovakia did not fight – have been added to the monuments.³¹ The grandest of all is the National Monument in Vitkov, situated on a hill in Prague and visible from almost anywhere in the city. It was originally designed to celebrate the Legionnaires, but also contains the remains of the unknown soldier, and has rather come to honour all Czechoslovak resistance during 1914-1918. Unsurprisingly, the memorials in formerly German-speaking areas have distinct consecrations, with the notion of heroism, sacrifice, loyalty and *Heimat* (homeland) often present and, obviously, no mention of freedom or liberation. These are, unfortunately, often in a parlous state, having been wilfully desecrated or left to rot.³² It is hard to imagine where the initiative or the money will come from to restore these wrecks.

Despite the complexities of Czech involvement in the First World War, the Czechs did not shirk the centenary celebrations – on the contrary. As the official website for the commemorations of the war stated: "This conflict had a key importance for our country because independent Czechoslovakia was born at its end" ("The cycle of exhibitions about the Great War 1914-1918"). The whole commemorative project was simply termed "The Great War" and utilised eight major venues: the National Technical Museum in Prague, the Military History Institute in Prague, the Postal Museum in Prague, the Museum of the City of Brno, the Technical Museum in Brno, the Moravian Museum, the Moravian Gallery and, of course, Franz Ferdinand's château in Konopiště ("The cycle of exhibitions about the Great War 1914-1918"). Exhibitions, lectures and other events took place on these premises, funded by state and private sponsors, but chiefly by the Ministry of Culture. Thus one could visit "In the trenches of the First World

31 Many photos of these monuments are available at "Spolek pro vojenská pietní místa" (n. d.).

32 An example, among many, can be seen here at "Horní Tašovice - pomník obětem 1. světové války" (n. d.).

War”, “Our sea ... the Austro-Hungarian Navy”, “The Post Office during the Great War”, “The First World War or how it started in Sarajevo”, “Home during the Great War”, “Have mercy on the fate of war widows and orphans”, “Cubism during the war” and “United in life and death” (in Konopiště) (“The cycle of exhibitions about the Great War 1914-1918”). Notwithstanding an understandable interest in specifically Czech matters, many of the exhibitions presented the war in a global context and looked far beyond the confines of the Bohemian lands. In addition, new books (many following the individual fates of soldiers, whether Legionnaires or Austro-Hungarian),³³ television documentaries, historical debates and homages abounded. *český rozhlas*, the public radio broadcaster in the Czech Republic, ran a day-by-day account of the events of the war on its social networks and compiled an archive of wireless programmes dedicated to the conflict. Symbolically, in Brno, at 6:00 pm on 28 July 2014, church bells rang for five minutes in remembrance of the outbreak of war. Yet, as everywhere, such bold pedagogical, cultural and historical undertakings cannot hope to reach all, and no doubt a number of Czechs remained blissfully indifferent to the proceedings.

Nevertheless, the First World War is a matter which the Czechs take seriously and it remains a compulsory topic for all lower and upper secondary school students. The school curriculum has now evolved beyond the Western Front, the Russian Revolution, and the American declaration of war, to encompass the Italian, Balkan and Eastern Fronts, and to show not only wartime military life but also everyday civilian life with the help of a variety of materials, including diaries, cartoons, maps and pictures. Wartime literature and art feature too. Crucially, the war is not taught parochially, but within a global historical context, ranging from the pre-war arms race and formation of alliances to the Treaty of Versailles.³⁴ Of course, the heroes of independence, Masaryk, Beneš and Milan Rastislav Štefánik (their dashing Slovak collaborator) remain central to the narrative; the Legion a little less so (although a revival of their memory is apparently planned;³⁵ and the continued existence of a “Community of Czechoslovak Legionnaires” is proof of their enduring popularity³⁶). Few, however, pretend that an independent Czechoslovakia was an early war aim, opposition to its creation is acknowledged and the mythology of the First Republic is partially deconstructed.

This is generally representative of the integrity of modern Czech attitudes towards the war. Jingoism, historical distortions, myths and legends are not the norm, though they do exist. The approach to the conflict in education, in the media, in historiography, in cultural events and commemorations is sound. The issue of the former German minority – fellow comrades of the majority of Czechs during 1914-1918 – is prickly, and some sacred cows remain hard to dislodge. But, as with many other events in their past, the Czechs have made great strides in coming to terms with their participation in the First World War.

33 See Vácha (2015); Lenderová, Halířová & Jiránek (2015); Stuchl (2014); Šlechta (2014); Emmert (2014); Englund (2014); Bolom-Kotari, Hlavačka & Šimon (2014); Kovářik (2014); Dolejš & Neprašová (2014); Dobrý (2014); Rajlich (2014); Černý (2014).

34 This information was provided to the author by an upper secondary school teacher in Prague, who nevertheless admitted that not every school in the country was perhaps so ambitious.

35 The author wishes to thank Richard Bassett for this information.

36 Including the website *Československá obec legionářská*.

5. Slovenia

Of the five countries incorporated in this study, Slovenia is the only one which did not emerge from the war as an independent state. The majority of Slovenes fought loyally in the Austro-Hungarian army (with particular determination against the hated Italians), experiencing some of the bloodiest battles (on their own national territory) and suffering some of the heaviest proportional casualties. Meanwhile, the civilian population endured much material misery, inflation, displacement, food shortages and persecution from the authorities (frequently directed at the Catholic clergy).³⁷ A minority of Slovenes, however, elected to serve in the Serbian army; their losses were considerable too and the survivors of their battles against the Central Powers quickly had to retreat to Greece. In 1917, more Slovene volunteers joined the Serbian war effort, having been recruited when POWs in Russia (Luthar, 2008, p. 372).

Despite their partial presence on the victorious side, the Slovenes lost out in the final carve-up of the Habsburg Empire. Many found themselves in lands ruled by neighbouring – and hostile – states: Italy, Austria and Hungary. There, they were subjected to brutal policies of assimilation. Most notably, the 300,000 Slovenes – a quarter of the whole population – who found themselves in Italy became the victims of a particularly repressive treatment, especially after the rise of Fascism. Slovene lands not under foreign rule entered the new entity of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (later to become the eponymous Kingdom), which of course included the former enemy Serbia (and Croatia, which had been part of Hungary, while the lands of Slovenia had been in Austria). In this new country, Slovene political influence was, unsurprisingly, limited (Luthar, 2008, p. 392). The inter-war years were, as elsewhere in the Balkans, tumultuous, as exemplified by the 1929 introduction of a dictatorship by King Alexander I – a time during which, for instance, school authorities sought to remove from Slovenian textbooks matters paramount to their national identity (Luthar, 2008, p. 391) – and his assassination in 1934 in Marseilles, organised by the Croatian Fascist Ustaša.

The Second World War marked the nadir of Slovene history as the region was wiped off the map and carved up between Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Hungary. The subsequent “recovery” was a Stalinist interlude, before Tito finally imposed himself in 1948. Slovenia was again a part of federal Yugoslavia, now in a Communist incarnation. Only in 1991, after a referendum and a swift and surprising victory over the Yugoslav army, did Slovenes declare independence and become masters of their own destiny for the first time.

With such a turbulent history since the end of the Great War, it is no surprise that Slovene attitudes to the conflict fluctuated considerably during the twentieth century. Immediately after the conflict, in the new artificial construction which was to become Yugoslavia, the Slovenes – (largely) loyal Austro-Hungarian subjects until (almost) the end despite the arbitrary brutality and distrust of the military authorities they had endured during the war – had little choice but to follow the classic narrative of South Slav emancipation from the repressive Habsburg monarchy, the “Prison of the Peoples”. This belied the fact that they had enjoyed significant cultural and economic development and fair parliamentary representation in Cisleithania, as well as the fact that they were generally considered dependable and trustworthy by the authorities (before the war at least) and harboured considerable affection for Franz Joseph. Nor could their sacrifices for Empire and Crown be highlighted during the Communist era, although an analysis

37 See Bobič (2012, pp. 243-244); Moll (2007, chapters XI-XIII).

of history textbooks from that time has revealed that each component nation of Yugoslavia did retain its own individual narrative of the war – Communist- and Yugoslav-compliant, of course (Koren, 2014). In any case, all historical events played second fiddle to the glorification of the Communist Revolution. In fact, acquaintances of the author who were at school in Slovenia in the 1980s recall virtually no teaching of the Great War at all. In the 1990s, the already divergent narratives were adjusted further by the newly independent nations of ex-Yugoslavia for their own political purposes (Koren, 2014). In each country, the teaching of history now focussed far more on the nation itself, and Slovenia was no exception (Repe, 2014).

In the first half of 1992, Slovenia was recognised by the European Union and joined the United Nations. At the time, the Slovenian village of Kobarid – better known by its Italian name of Caporetto, where in October and November 1917 an Austro-German force inflicted a catastrophic defeat on the Italian Army during the Twelfth Battle of the Isonzo (Soča in Slovene) – already had a small museum dedicated to the First World War which had been set up by locals in 1990.³⁸ Those living in the region continued to bring their finds, mementos and memories to the museum which in 1993 won the Council of Europe Museum Prize. This, alongside increased media attention, helped popularise the museum, which began to welcome school parties throughout the autumn months. Recently, the newly-modernised museum won the European Museum of the Year prize, which again boosted its number of visitors, especially from Italy. In 2014, the museum welcomed 61,000 visitors, of which two-thirds were Slovene. In the summer, it organises guided tours across the onetime battlefields of the Isonzo Front. Four different excursions take in the areas which witnessed some of the most violent battles on the high-mountain karst and include visits to the many tunnels, caves and fortified trenches built in this most inhospitable of terrains. Also visible is the restored Church of the Holy Spirit in Javorca, overlooking the valley of the Tolminka, which was erected by Austro-Hungarian soldiers in 1916 (in the Vienna Secession style) to the memory of their fallen comrades.

However, despite the optimism of the museum's curator and the obvious (and well-deserved) success of the museum, it is difficult to gauge whether young Slovenes, as opposed to the older generation, really feel any connection to the war. Leo Šešerko, a former Deputy Prime Minister of Slovenia in the 1990s, told this author that today's youth knew little about the conflict and cared even less.³⁹ According to him, they see the Great War as remote, read few books on the subject and rarely follow the news. Such pessimism is not unusual throughout Eastern Europe. On the other hand, some older people still vividly recall the fate of their loved ones and the horror of the combat on Slovene soil. In many cases, their memories continue to be influenced by Titoist sentiment. A British friend of the author who was visiting a private museum passed an old Slovene man who, upon hearing English being spoken, asked a bilingual bystander to "tell him that all these people were killed because of England!"

In June 2007, the most prominent remains and memorials of the Isonzo Front in the Upper Soča region were connected together to inaugurate the "Walk of Peace" (*Pot Miru* in Slovene), which runs from the Julian Alps to the Adriatic. It is dedicated to the memory of all those who suffered during the First World War and acts as a warning against future conflicts, while promoting the value of peace. In addition to this, in order to commemorate the centenary of the

38 All the information concerning the museum in Kobarid was kindly provided to the author by the curator in March 2015.

39 E-mail correspondence with Leo Šešerko, March 2015.

conflict the Slovenian National Museum of Contemporary History in Ljubljana organised an impressive exhibition, entitled “We Never Imagined Such a War”, which ran between 22 June 2014 and 15 May 2015. The narrative of the exhibition was based on testimonies of civilians and mobilised soldiers from 1914-1918 and, according to the museum’s staff, the exhibition was popular with Slovenian history teachers and students.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, Slovenian Television produced a five-part series about the war, filmed in Vienna, as well as other former Austro-Hungarian towns, with included archival material from the former imperial capital’s impressive Museum of Military History (the *Heeresgeschichtliches Museum*); and the museum itself posted a film about the period on YouTube entitled “World War I and the Slovenians”. Moreover, a database with the photographs and geographic locations of virtually all the Great War memorials in Slovenia has been put online (*Arzenal*).

Due to the economic crisis which Slovenia is currently experiencing, no money was made available for national commemorations in 2014, although funds had been requested. It seems unlikely that any will be forthcoming in 2015. In contrast, an impressive number of books about the war have been published in recent years or are about to be published (in Slovenian) in 2014-2015.⁴¹ Admittedly, most of them deal with local history, specific military units or individual wartime figures, and not with the conflict as a whole. Yet they represent a considerable contribution to the Slovenian historiography of the subject and, on a larger scale, a volume of collected papers on the outbreak of the First World War was published in 2014, entitled *Velika vojna in mali ljudje* (The Great War and Small People), based on an international symposium held at the local library in Šentjur (a small Styrian town) and sponsored by the municipality.⁴²

The First World War was, with hindsight, largely disadvantageous to Slovenia. It resulted in the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in which the Slovenes were well-integrated and well-represented; the loss of Slovene-speaking territories to brutal neighbouring regimes; the repression of those “unredeemed” Slovenes who found themselves the wrong side of the border; and the attachment of the remaining rump to an imbalanced and overwrought South Slav union which did not fulfil its promises and finally imploded violently in the 1990s. In addition, the ferocity of the fighting on Slovene soil, the appalling number of casualties, and the lack of emblematic heroes have ensured the conflict is not mythologised, unlike elsewhere. Admittedly, in a most roundabout way, the First World War ultimately brought Slovenia independence and national homogeneity (forever removing the danger of Germanisation of their territory which they so feared during the imperial era). But the human cost was such between 1918 and 1991 that even some supporters of independence could legitimately regret the outbreak of the war and the collapse of the Habsburg Empire. This awareness has allowed the Slovenes to approach the conflict with sensitivity and comparative objectivity, eschewing grand overblown national myths and narratives in favour of the portrayal of war for what it essentially was: needless carnage and human suffering.

40 The information from the National Museum of Contemporary History was generously provided to the author by one of the curators in April 2015.

41 These include: Lipušček (2012); Matičič (2006); Nečak (2010); Simčič (2011); Budkovič (2009; 2010; 2004); Grdina (2009); Fortunat-Černilogar (2005; 2007); Drekonja & Jankovič Potočnik (2009); Simič (2005); Robida (2008); Schubert (2001); Klavara (2004; 2007; 2014; 2013); Šimac (2015); Sedmak (2003); Heindl (2003); Triska (2004).

42 See Grdina (Ed.) (2014). Thanks to Dr Pavlina Bobič for this information.

To conclude, a common Austro-Hungarian experience of the First World War certainly existed, but no collective memory survived of it in any form. After 1918, the conflict was discussed almost exclusively from the point of the view of the new individual countries.⁴³ In fact, from the collapse of the Habsburg Empire until that of Communism in 1989, dispassionate assessments and apolitical commemorations of the war were so rare as to be non-existent. Only in the last twenty-five years has serious research on the conflict been undertaken, have constructive commemorative projects seen the light of day, have (some) painful truths been admitted, and have border disputes been abandoned. In short, the controversial consequences of Austria-Hungary's war have almost been put to rest.

As of 2014, all countries presented in this study are functioning democracies and members of the European Union which should, in theory at least, have little problem investigating their past and commemorating it accordingly. As has been seen, this is not always an easy task and more time, more funds, and more research are still required even after 100 years to present a complete and true picture of the First World War in each of these states. Yet as time passes, the conflict necessarily becomes increasingly irrelevant to the younger generations. Of course, it will never be forgotten in the countries examined here (nor in those omitted) – after all, it was started by Austria, it brought about the birth (directly or indirectly) of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Slovenia, and it has shaped Hungarian national consciousness ever since. The Great War will forever play a part in the narratives of these nations. But the reconstruction of a collective Austro-Hungarian memory is virtually impossible. It would have been hard enough to imagine in the 1920s. Who would have commissioned a book or organised a conference on the subject? Who would have brought estranged former comrades together to discuss their experiences? Where would such a colloquium have been held? Today, the passing of the war generation has made such an exercise unlikely, barring a Herculean effort from disinterested historians with a decade to spare. The reality is that Austria-Hungary, as a warring entity, has largely been forgotten, save for three main events: the Sarajevo assassinations, the ultimatum to Serbia and the Empire's collapse.

Franz Künstler (a Banat Swabian), the last surviving Austro-Hungarian veteran of the First World War, died in 2008, aged 107. He was buried in Germany (in Baden-Württemberg), where he had lived since the end of the Second World War. Neither Austria nor Hungary bothered to claim him (though, admittedly, he considered himself German). A glaring example of Austria-Hungary's disappearance from collective memory is the conciliatory plaque erected in the city of Avranches in Lower Normandy commemorating the last opposing combatants of the war: Lazare Ponticelli for France (who also died in 2008) and Franz Künstler for Germany (sic). That Künstler had only obtained German citizenship in 1946 was enough. The monument still stands, flanked either side by a French and a German flag.

It is a sad end for an army which fought doggedly and bravely despite being poorly led, poorly equipped, poorly supplied, and poorly prepared, and which endured catastrophic losses yet remained a united fighting force until the bitter end, in spite of the national strife which had often appeared to tear the country apart in the pre-war years. As István Deák famously pointed out, when the Habsburg troops finally surrendered to the Italians on 11 November 1918, of

43 With perhaps the exception of the volumes commissioned by the Austrian War Ministry in the 1930s, which were nevertheless descriptive, dry, and focused on the military events, and by no means sought to promote a joint transnational recollection of the conflict.

the 350,000 to 400,000 men who lay down their arms, one third were Austrian-Germans but the remainder included 83,000 Czechs and Slovaks, 61,000 South Slavs, 40,000 Poles, 32,000 Ruthenes, 25,000 Romanians and even 7,000 Italians (Deák, 1985).

Few conflicts evoke such sentiments of futility and pointless carnage as do the First World War. And few efforts were as hopeless, destructive and ultimately forgotten as those of Austria-Hungary. Who still recalls the Habsburg army's major triumphs at Valjevo, Gorlice, Doberdo, the Strypa and on the Tagliamento, or their equally major defeats at Čer, Sztropkó, the Dukla Pass, Łuck and on the Piave? (Schindler, 1994, p. 270). The fact that Austria-Hungary started the war, and the fact that thirteen states owe their existence – for better or for worse – to its collapse, long ensured that it has gone unmourned. And the gruesome, depressing remainder of the twentieth century does not exactly speak in favour of its disappearance. Yet the catastrophic consequences of aggressive nationalism and Communism in the twentieth century have forced a reappraisal of the role of Austria-Hungary, which was not on its last legs in 1914 (Sked, 2001). It is not unlikely that the commemoration of the First World War will help rediscover this remarkably resilient and culturally sparkling multinational hotchpotch of an Empire from which, undoubtedly, much can still be learnt.

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