

Occupation during and after the War (South East Europe)

By [Milan Ristović](#)

Summary

The occupation of South East Europe 1915-1918 had a complex structure reflecting different and often conflicting territorial claims and goals. In the fall of 1915 Serbia was divided into Austro-Hungarian, Bulgarian and German occupation zones. The civilian population was exposed to various measures of repression, including mass internment, forced labor, and a de-nationalization policy, which sparked a Serbian uprising in early 1917. In Romania, the military occupation administration was also organized to exploit the economic resources of the country. Albania, although spared from major military operations, was divided into Austro-Hungarian, Italian and French-Greek occupation zones.

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Introduction

In the summer of 1914, [Serbia's](#) fate was one of the key issues in discussions of the [Dual Monarchy's war aims](#). Contrary to the prevailing attitude in political and military circles in Vienna, a possible annexation of Serbia was strongly opposed in Budapest, as it was viewed

as a threat to the Hungarian position within the Dual Monarchy.¹ Budapest was much more inclined towards a maximum reduction of Serbia and the division of its territory among neighboring countries. "Reduced" Serbia would retain quasi-independence and be placed under Austro-Hungarian control.² The Joint Ministerial Council at the end of June insisted on "isolation" and "reduction", "but not...complete destruction."³ The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count [Leopold Berchtold \(1863-1942\)](#) was of the opinion that Serbia should be reduced as much as possible in favor of its neighbors. Minister of War [Alexander Krobatin \(1849-1933\)](#) and Chief of the General Staff, [Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf \(1852-1925\)](#), insisted on the permanent [occupation](#) of the area of Mačva and Belgrade. However, permanent occupation was tabled as an option in discussions at the end of July. The idea of mollifying the neighboring countries with promises of Serbian territory was considered, on the condition that they enter the war on the Austro-Hungarian side or remain [neutral](#).⁴

In Vienna the future of [Montenegro](#) was seen as part of the Serbian question and the organization of the occupation was left solely to [Austria-Hungary](#).⁵ In 1914, despite a secret alliance with the Central Powers, [Romania](#) decided to remain neutral. However, the combination of Entente pressure and the promise of French and Russian support for the fulfillment of territorial claims towards [Bulgaria](#) and Austria-Hungary (which was not willing to make concessions in Transylvania) brought Romania into the war in 1916 on the Allied side. The system established after its military collapse was mostly the result of improvisation, impelled by the fact that its territory was economically important to the Central Powers.⁶ [Albania](#), although spared from large-scale military activities, was occupied and divided between the warring factions.⁷

The first occupation of Serbian territories in 1914

In 1914 Austro-Hungarian troops unsuccessfully raided Serbia three times, leading to great losses on both sides. In temporarily occupied zones, Austro-Hungarian troops committed a number of [atrocities](#) against the civilian population, especially in the area of Mačva. Belgrade fell to the 3rd Austro-Hungarian Army in December 1914, and preparations for the establishment of an occupation regime began. General [Stjepan Sarkotić \(1858-1939\)](#) was appointed Governor-General.⁸ The defeat of Austro-Hungarian troops in the battle of Kolubara led to their expulsion from Serbia and Belgrade, which was liberated by Serbian troops on 16 December.⁹

The second occupation of Serbia 1915-1918

Austro-Hungarian Military General Governorate (MGG) 1915-1918

The Serbian defense collapsed at the end of 1915. However, the Austro-Hungarian occupation policy was plagued by differences and ambiguities. During the visit of the German Emperor to Vienna, the Austro-Hungarian monarch, [Francis Joseph I, Emperor of Austria \(1830-1916\)](#), expressed his approval for a radical solution, namely annexation. Similarly, [Ferdinand I, Tsar of Bulgaria \(1861-1948\)](#) and his Prime Minister [Vasil Radoslavov \(1854-1929\)](#) rejected the idea of a possible restoration of Serbian independence.¹⁰ In late November 1915, the Austro-Hungarian Chief of the General Staff, Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, in his four memos and conversations with the Emperor and Minister of Foreign Affairs, [Istvan Burian von Rajecz \(1851-1922\)](#), also sought the annexation of Serbia, with the exception of territory promised to Bulgaria. He suggested annexing Montenegro and partitioning Albania with [Greece](#), or alternatively leaving Albania under the sole protection of Austro-Hungary. He proposed that the occupation and annexation of Serbia be interpreted as “punishment” for “causing the World War.”¹¹ Montenegrins were to be pushed into the mountains.¹² On 4 December 1915, the Hungarian Prime Minister, Count [Istvan Tisza \(1861-1918\)](#), proposed the demarcation of territory along the Sava and Danube rivers in a memorandum presented to the emperor. The remaining territory would be reduced to a mountainous area, economically, politically and militarily subordinate to the [empire](#). Only after a long period, and with the colonization of Hungarians and Germans in Srem, Banat and Bačka, was this area to be included in the boundaries of the empire.¹³

Berlin also proposed two solutions, suggesting either the total cessation of Serbia and Montenegro to Austro-Hungary, or their continued existence with significantly reduced territory, united and subordinated to Austro-Hungary. The consistent German attitude was to support Bulgarian expansion at the expense of Serbia, within the limits agreed upon by the treaty of alliance from 6 September 1915, but with the possibility for further expansion.¹⁴ Internal disagreements over policy toward occupied Serbia impacted the organization of the Austro-Hungarian Military General Governorate (*Militärgeneralgouvernement*, or MGG). The first Governor-General, [Johann Graf Salis-Seewis \(1862-1940\)](#), was appointed by the Emperor in late 1915 and took office in early January 1916, acting as the highest authority on all military, administrative and economic issues. [Otto Gellinek \(1876-1919\)](#) became his chief of staff. Tisza succeeded in reinforcing the Hungarian position by including a civilian commissar appointed by the Hungarian government as the deputy to the Military Governor-General. The first civilian commissar, sent to Belgrade on 17 January, was the Hungarian historian [Ludwig](#)

[Thalloczy \(1857-1916\)](#).¹⁵

This division of power quickly proved dysfunctional and led to a sharp clash between the military and civilian as well as between Austrian and Hungarian authorities. The steps taken under Salis-Seewis's command were interpreted in Budapest as preparation for full annexation, and Tisza submitted a complaint to the Emperor and Archduke [Friedrich, Duke of Teschen \(1856-1936\)](#). His argument prevailed and Salis-Seewis and Gellinek were replaced. At the end of July 1916 General [Adolf Baron von Remen \(1855-1932\)](#) and Colonel [Hugo Kerchnawe \(1872-1949\)](#) were appointed Governor and Chief of Staff respectively and remained in office until the end of the war. In November 1916 Thalloczy died in a train crash. In January 1917 Teodor Kussevich, a high official in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian provincial government, was appointed as his successor.¹⁶

The MGG, however, was under the prevailing influence of the army, and its structures were directly subordinated to the Austro-Hungarian Supreme Command, which represented the MGG before the Hungarian and Austrian governments as well as German and Bulgarian authorities. The territory was divided into twelve districts and Belgrade, each headed by district commanders but controlled by repressive gendarmerie, military and intelligence agencies, and courts. About 70,000 troops were stationed in the MGG, with 50,000 of them available for military operations. Additionally, sixteen special tracking squads of [infantry](#) were organized and attached to the gendarmerie. In March 1917, the "S" gendarmerie Battalion was formed with 1,000 soldiers and was supported by the Bosnia-Herzegovina gendarmerie battalion. Following Thalloczy's support for Albanian and Muslim leaders, over 8,000 volunteers, mostly Albanians, enlisted. They were either attached to the Bosnian gendarmerie or included in the 14th Ottoman Army Corps, which fought in Galicia. In 1917, in [Novi Pazar](#) a volunteer battalion was organized, and in Kosovska Mitrovica Albanian volunteers also formed their own companies.¹⁷ Bulgarian occupation authorities also used the Albanian gendarmerie and irregular troops. On the Morava valley railway German units were also deployed to access the front in [Macedonia](#), while in Vranje a training camp was set up for the 11th German army.¹⁸

The German occupation zone

In December 1915 [Germany](#) obtained control of railways, mines and agricultural resources in the area east of Velika Morava, Južna Morava in Kosovo and the Vardar valley in return for its support of Bulgaria. In these territories, formally part of the Bulgarian occupation zone, a German occupation zone was established. This territory was under the command of the

11th *Etappen-Inspection* based in Niš. Beginning in fall 1916 the German 7th Military Railway Direction controlled the railway to the Greek border and the railway line Niš-Sofia.¹⁹ German headquarters and command were placed in Skopje. The command of German operational groups on the Thessaloniki front was based in Prilep and regional commands were located in Leskovac, Predejane, Vranje, Bukovac, Kumanovo, Katlanovo, and Veles.²⁰

Friction over the division of territory in Serbia 1915-1916

A secret agreement guaranteed the territorial expansion of Bulgaria in Macedonia and territories east of the Morava River. Of the 87,000 square kilometers comprising Serbia's territory, Bulgaria was promised 59 percent or 51,425 square kilometers, with 2,664,168 inhabitants (55.6 percent of Serbia's population).²¹ Approximately 2,139,030 inhabitants lived in Serbia's remaining 37,875 square kilometers in 1914. The Serbian territory was reduced to 32,287 square kilometers with 1,741,390 inhabitants – without the territory of Šabac county (249,000 inhabitants) and Belgrade (157,000 inhabitants). Plans to annex Kosovo and Sandjak and cede them to Greater Albania were also discussed.²² In late 1915 the Bulgarians penetrated deep into Kosovo and to Elbasan in Albania with the intention of retaining these territories. In February 1916 they set up a civil administration in Prizren and entered Djakovica, which sparked an Austro-Hungarian protest. Chief of German High Command General [Erich von Falkenhayn \(1861-1922\)](#) feared that this dispute could escalate into open warfare, with major consequences for the position of the Central Powers. In its subsequent mediation Germany had more “understanding” for the Bulgarian demands. On 1 April 1916 the Austro-Hungarian Supreme Command accepted a compromise agreement which defined a “temporary” demarcation line, ceded control over communication, and consented to the evacuation of its troops, including from Prizren and Priština, as well as the evacuation of Bulgarian troops and civil authorities west of this line, including from Djakovica and Elbasan. The question of how to divide Kosovo was again raised during the meeting between Burian von Rajecz, King Ferdinand, and Radoslavov in Vienna on 5 December 1916.²³

Policy toward the Population

Directives for the political administration in Serbia and the MGG statute were the juridical basis for the Austro-Hungarian military administration in Serbia.²⁴ Courts, police, education, and tax authorities were completely in the hands of the occupying administration. District commanders appointed civil administration in towns and villages, led by the “elders” (mayors), mostly from the ranks of the local population. A draconian system of punishments included fines, collective responsibility, corporal punishments, hard labor, imprisonment and

internment. The death penalty, usually by hanging, was carried out numerous times in late 1915 following the invasion, peaking in 1916 after Romania had entered the war.²⁵ Economic exploitation included a wide range of measures, from the devaluation of the Serbian dinar, to the control of factories, workshops and mills, and the seizure of valuables and money from private owners. The MGG authorities carried out mass deforestation, exploited mines, requisitioned housing, food, clothing, tools, and livestock, confiscated non-ferrous metals (from church bells, sculptures, and metal dishes), and requisitioned agricultural produce.²⁶ The population was brought to the brink of starvation, which, accompanied by an outbreak of disease, resulted in a high mortality rate, especially among children and the elderly. The MGG administration's attempts to improve the situation were insufficient.²⁷

The occupation authorities abolished all Serbian institutions of national administration, as well as cultural institutions and associations. During the occupation Belgrade University was closed. The use of Cyrillic was officially banned and replaced by the Latin alphabet.²⁸ Art and cultural artifacts from museums, libraries, church treasuries and archives were confiscated. The MGG authorities removed books of "suspicious content" from public and private libraries; school curricula were similarly purged of any independent Serbian content. For the "re-education" of Serbian children during Salis-Seewis' time in office, teachers were recruited almost exclusively from the ranks of Austro-Hungarian noncommissioned officers; later, school staff was brought from the Monarchy (with the increased participation of local teachers). Their task was to instill "loyalty to the Emperor" in the minds of Serbian [children and youth](#).²⁹ Commonplace assertions about the goals of Austro-Hungarian policy in Serbia and Montenegro were that it was a "civilizing mission". As a part of this "mission" improvised schools for Serbian boys in internment camps in Austrian Braunau (about 800 students) and in Hungarian Neszider (with seventy-five students) were opened.³⁰ The occupation authorities had little confidence in the small group of local "Austrophile" collaborators, and their role remained marginal.³¹

Austro-Hungarian military circles were obsessed with the dangers of guerrilla action ("*Komitagjis*") in Serbia. This was seen as a product of the "Balkan mentality", an "inclination" to non-regular warfare that needed to be suppressed through severe force.³² The deportation of civilians, which started in 1914, snowballed in 1916 upon Romania's entry into the war and after the outbreak of the Toplica uprising in 1917. Between 150,000 and 200,000 Serbian civilians of both sexes and all age groups were sent to internment camps in Austro-Hungary and Bulgaria. At first, these measures targeted intellectuals, clergy, and those who had been politically active before the war or were members of national organizations.³³

German authorities deported some internees to the territory of the Reich and to the [Ottoman Empire](#), including to Constantinople, Anatolia and Mesopotamia, where they worked as forced laborers to construct the Baghdad Railway.³⁴ A high rate of mortality from disease and starvation in tandem with disastrous [war losses](#) and a declining birth rate caused severe depopulation in the occupied territories.³⁵

The Bulgarian occupation zone

The territories under Bulgarian occupation were divided into two military general governorates; one for Eastern Serbia with its command in Niš (Military Inspectorate of Morava); the second in Južna Morava, and Serbian (Vardar) Macedonia, with its center in Skopje. In the military inspectorate of Morava, the Bulgarian authorities' occupation administration was considered temporary because the ultimate intention was annexing these territories permanently. The decisive role of the military was emphasized through the subordination of all civilian authorities to the military governor. The military inspectorate of Morava was divided into six districts and the Pirot area. Municipalities in the country set up by civil authorities were responsible to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Health but were controlled by the local military commander. The bureaucratic apparatus (with the exception of rural municipalities) was imported from Bulgaria. The areas of Kosovo were under Bulgarian administration according to the agreement with Austro-Hungary. These areas were ruled by the military but with the aim of eventually changing to a civilian administration.³⁶

Repression and Policy of Bulgarization

The Bulgarian government declared the occupation zone in Serbia "Bulgarian national territory," as a majority Bulgarian population lived there. Serbian laws were suspended, but the Bulgarian juridical system was not introduced, leading to lawlessness and repression. One Austro-Hungarian report from the end of February 1916 stated that "the work of the Bulgarianization is characterized by two main directions: the destruction of the upper and middle class (intelligentsia) and the forcible introduction of the Bulgarian language."³⁷ The memorandum of the Serbian Socialist Party at the beginning of 1917 underlined the tremendous insecurity of the population: "The personal liberty of every Serbian citizen, and his life, are dependent on the goodwill of every police agent, every Bulgarian gendarme...In the Austro-Hungarian area there at least exists some form of public order..."³⁸ The Bulgarian language was introduced into official use, the use of the Serbian Cyrillic alphabet was banned in schools, and cultural institutions were abolished. Simultaneously, economic resources and

private property were requisitioned and exploited,³⁹ while representatives of the Serbian elites were deported and killed. The Serbian orthodox clergy were also arrested and deported; adult males were sent to labor companies or forced to join the Bulgarian Army.⁴⁰ In the governorate of Macedonia the ruling administration tried to gain support for this policy from the pro-Bulgarian part of the population. Clerks, teachers and priests were brought to Macedonia from Bulgaria. They organized [propaganda](#), opened Bulgarian schools, held public lectures, expanded the number of different Bulgarian associations, and printed publications – all in tandem with the use of coercive measures. These policies were also used on Albanians and Turks in Kosovo and Macedonia.⁴¹

In addition to engaging military forces and police, the [Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization](#) (IMRO)⁴² companies under the command of Colonel [Alexander Protogerov \(1867-1928\)](#) were widely used as an excuse for repression.⁴³ The occupation in the Bulgarian (but also the Austro-Hungarian) zone led to the emergence of guerrilla and armed resistance, which culminated in a mass uprising in Toplica in early 1917. The uprising was crushed after two months with huge civilian casualties; according to an international commission's survey around 25,000 people were killed.⁴⁴

The Austro-Hungarian occupation of Montenegro

A month after the occupation, the domestic “rump government” of Montenegro was abolished.⁴⁵ Around the same time, on 1 March, the Military General Government of Montenegro was established in accordance with the model applied to Serbia.⁴⁶ General [Viktor Weber Edler von Webenau \(1861-1932\)](#), who had extensive authority in military and civilian matters, headed the MGG until July 1917. After the reorganisation of the occupation administration, he was succeeded in this position by reserve General [Heinrich Graf Clam-Martinic \(1863-1932\)](#). Otto Gellinek, the former Austro-Hungarian envoy in Cetinje, was the first civilian commissioner to be appointed, but he was soon relieved of his duties and appointed as a delegate to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the General Governorship, with [Paul Baron von Sternbach \(1869-1948\)](#) replacing him. The occupation administration consisted of the Department for Military Affairs and the Department for Civilian Affairs.⁴⁷ Very few domestic civil servants were included in the higher structure of the occupation administration, as most of them were interned.⁴⁸ Domestic civil courts remained in operation, but occupation military courts were introduced to try offences against the interests of Austria-Hungary, such as the trial of the former minister [Jovan Matanović \(18-1917\)](#), who died

in internment and the metropolitan [Gavrilo Dožić \(1881-1950\)](#).⁴⁹ Annexation as a measure for “neutralising” threats to the Monarchy and the only “rational solution” was advocated by the Austro-Hungarian Supreme Command, particularly the Chief of Staff Conrad von Hötzendorf.⁵⁰ Official Austro-Hungarian propaganda interpreted the occupation of Montenegro as a “civilising mission”, much like in the case of Serbia.⁵¹ The diminishing chances for a Central Power victory prompted proposals in 1917 and 1918 concerning the future status of Serbia and Montenegro (as reduced statelets dependent on the Monarchy), including their merger into a single unit under an Austro-Hungarian archduke.⁵²

Montenegro, with a population of 436,000 in 1917 was not of particular economic significance for Austria-Hungary. Tax collection, which increased by between 100 percent and 200 percent during the occupation, was irregular due to the poverty of the population, but still caused discontent among both the Montenegrin and Albanian populations. Famine became widespread among the civilian population. As early as March 1916 the occupation authorities had to approve deliveries of [food](#). Soup kitchens for the poor were opened, while those of better financial standing had to buy food at high prices. The occupation authorities introduced compulsory work in agriculture and cultivation,⁵³ and used domestic labor as well as [prisoners of war](#) to construct roads, a railroad and military facilities.⁵⁴ Trade in cereals was prohibited, while the operation of mills, bread production and operation of all enterprises involved in the processing and selling of food was supervised. This encouraged fraud and enabled the emergence of a black market. Livestock, food, kitchenware, church bells and other metal objects were requisitioned. Moreover, the population was afflicted by epidemics of typhus, “[Spanish flu](#)”, tuberculosis, malaria, and syphilis.⁵⁵ According to the General Governorship’s Chief of Staff, [Gustav Hubka von Czernitz \(1873-1962\)](#), famine made the population apathetic to politics.⁵⁶

As a result of military operations, schools in Montenegro ceased to open in the fall of 1915. Some elementary schools were re-opened in March 1916, but regular activity did not start until October 1916. Some teachers were interned and some school buildings were converted into military barracks. None of the six secondary schools nor the teachers’ and theological school operated during the occupation.⁵⁷ A big obstacle for regular school attendance was widespread famine, which particularly affected children. Curricula were adjusted to those used in Croatia and were purged of any content relating to Serbia and Serbian history. In addition, the Latin script was introduced in schools and for public use, while cyrillic was banned.⁵⁸ Some of the teaching staff resigned in protest against these measures and as a consequence were sentenced to imprisonment and internment. A number of schools were

also forced to suspend classes due to an outbreak of typhus in spring 1918. Occupation authorities awarded a modest number of scholarships for education in the territory of the Monarchy in secondary schools and universities (seventy-one scholarships were awarded in 1918). However, many boys, aged fourteen to seventeen, were also interned.⁵⁹

During the occupation of Montenegro there were attempts to organize armed uprisings, primarily by former ministers and officers of the Montenegrin Army. The passivity of the population, the population's cooperation with the authorities, the confiscation of arms, denunciations, a general lack of organization, and reprisals by the occupation authorities prevented these attempts. A widespread form of armed resistance, particularly during 1917 and 1918, were actions by guerrilla companies who attacked military posts, gendarmerie stations, and communications.⁶⁰ The number of active *comitaji* (guerrilla forces) was estimated at between 1,000 and 1,100. Several prominent leaders of the Toplica uprising in early 1917 were officers of the Montenegrin Army. In reprisal the occupation forces executed 489 people in just four counties. Representatives of the Orthodox Church and high government officials who had not been interned also condemned the *comitaji* action. The reduced intensity of resistance was the result of a mixture of reprisals and amnesty. The most prominent leaders of the resistance, General [Radomir Vešović \(1871-1938\)](#) and former minister [Milosav Raičević \(1875\)](#), surrendered to Austro-Hungarian authorities in January 1918. Towards the end of occupation the authorities started to arm loyal populations and use them as auxiliary forces in the fight against *comitaji*.⁶¹ The *comitaji* units, in joint action with the Serbian army, liberated Montenegro in late October/ early November 1918.⁶²

Romania: Between Occupation and Collaboration

The occupation system in Romania differed from the regimes established in other parts of South-Eastern Europe, as it was purely military. This was due to the fact that there was a shortage of civilian personnel; even filling the posts of the military-occupation personnel was a continuous problem. Its late establishment also influenced its formation. The economic situation called for a more pragmatic attitude toward both representatives of the local political and business elite and the general population. In addition, the degree of repression was comparably lower than in the surrounding occupied regions.

The occupied area (about two-thirds of the territory of Romania) was placed under the administration of *Oberkommando Mackensen* (OKM) headed by General Field Marshal [August von Mackensen \(1849-1945\)](#) and General [Robert von Kosch \(1856-1942\)](#) as *Generalquartiermeister*. Its first seat was in Alexandria and then from late 1916 on in Bucharest. It was subdivided into a military administration area; a stage area (*Etappengebiet*)

of the 9th Army; an operational area of the 9th Army; an operational Area of the 3rd Bulgarian Army; and a German stage administration (*Etappenverwaltung*) in Dobruja. Bulgaria annexed the area of Southern Dobruja, which remained outside the OKM occupation system.⁶³

The military administration area encompassed the city of Bucharest with fourteen districts.⁶⁴ This area of 65,064 square kilometers represented half of the territory of the Romanian state. Eleven districts were administered by German commands (*Distriktkommandanturen*), while three districts were under the Austro-Hungarian military administration. Districts were divided into German *Etappenkommandanturen*, Austro-Hungarian *Etappenstationskommandos* and local commands (*Ortskommandantur*). This network of the military occupation system held the domestic administrative structure under its control. The interests of the Bulgarian, Turkish and Austro-Hungarian allies in this territory were represented by envoys and consular representatives. Six departments were subordinated to the Military General Governor; however, the Economic Headquarters (*Wirtschaftsstab*), the most important department and the central occupation institution, remained independent. The exploitation of oil and agricultural resources, which Germany and Austria-Hungary competed over, was of particular interest.⁶⁵

The stage area of the 9th Army (districts of Braila, Buzaui Ramnicul-Sarat) was accountable to the OKM, as well as to the 9th Army. The occupation administration's central task was to control the local economy. The German Stage Administration area in Dobruja (7,700 square kilometers) was established in late October 1916 and was in operation until 7 May 1918, when the peace treaty was signed in Bucharest. In the south it bordered the area of Dobruja that had been annexed by Bulgaria, and in the north it bordered the operational area of the Bulgarian 3rd Army. Bulgaria also hoped to annex this territory where, against the will of its allies, it had appointed local administrators from autumn 1916 until the end of that year. At the beginning of 1917 an agreement was reached under which Bulgarian prefectures and police administration could operate in this area.

The occupation authorities had to relinquish many of the tasks at various levels of government to representatives of the local political elite. Here, the Romanian elite saw an opportunity to preserve its position, thus creating a symbiotic relationship with the occupation authorities. Politicians from the pro-German Conservative Party, such as [Petre Carp \(1837-1919\)](#), [Alexandru Marghiloman \(1854-1925\)](#) and [Titu Maiorescu \(1840-1917\)](#) were a separate group, cooperating with occupation authorities and helping to run the occupation system.⁶⁶ In 1917 "acting officials", who replaced state secretaries, were appointed to

influential positions in Romanian ministries in occupied territories. While preserving their control, the military-occupation authorities left the management to the local administration in the judiciary, education, internal affairs, and in the regulation of the local economy.⁶⁷ However, the Romanian elite who refused to collaborate were branded as “politically suspicious” and were interned, deported to prison camps in Bulgaria, or taken hostage, to be exchanged for interned citizens of the Central Powers.⁶⁸

The Romanian army was reactivated in July 1917 and fought against German troops until early 1918. Negotiations in Brest-Litovsk for [Russia's](#) withdrawal from the war left Romania without Allied support and assistance, forcing the Romanian government to conclude an armistice and start peace negotiations. After the resignation of General [Alexandru Averescu \(1859-1938\)](#) government the new pro-German government of Alexandru Marghiloman signed the Peace Treaty of Bucharest in May. According to this treaty, Romania had to disband the majority of its armed forces, leave Dobruja and hand over control of strategic crossings in the Carpathians.⁶⁹

After the elections held under occupation, which were boycotted by the liberals, Marghiloman's government gained power and ratified the agreement with the Central Powers. The Romanian King, however, refused to sign the agreement.⁷⁰ Despite the establishment of the Romanian government, actual power remained in the hands of the OKM. The number of occupation troops was reduced, as was part of the occupation administration, while the country remained divided in two: the area that until then had remained unoccupied with the addition of Russian Bessarabia was left to the control of the Romanian government, while occupied territory remained under the control of the occupation administration.⁷¹ Meanwhile, economic exploitation of Romanian resources intensified.⁷²

Economic circumstances deteriorated due to further devaluation of the Romanian currency, a poor harvest, the continuous practice of requisition, and the export of grains, livestock and other foodstuffs by Germany and Austria-Hungarian. Moreover, a German company was awarded the right to the oil in the region for a period of thirty years, a German-Austro-Hungarian company had a monopoly on the export of wood, and Austria-Hungary took over the shipyard in Turnu-Severin. The National Bank and public finances were also placed under the control of German commissioners. Until the Treaty of Bucharest was signed, in addition to six military divisions, the Central Powers maintained special units for the economic exploitation of the Romanian economy. As a measure to help alleviate the great shortage of food and to control social unrest, in May 1918 the Romanian government enacted a law that introduced compulsory work in agriculture and the cultivation of all arable land. In the spring

of 1918 the German command requested that the Romanian government send food from Moldavia to alleviate shortages.⁷³

After Allied forces penetrated from the southern Balkans in September 1918, Bulgaria capitulated on 27 September. Marghiloman's government crumbled, leading King Ferdinand to establish the generals' cabinet. After Serbian and French troops crossed the Danube on 10 November, Romania re-entered the war. German troops retreated from Romanian territory, while the King returned to Bucharest on 1 December 1918. On the same day, the Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia proclaimed the unification of Romanians from the territories of Austria-Hungary with Romania.⁷⁴

Albania: Besetztes Freundesland

[Essad Pasha Toptani \(1863-1920\)](#) conquered Durres (Durazzo) with the intention of gaining recognition as the President of the Albanian interim government and commander of its armed forces. With the entry of the Ottoman Empire into the war, Esad-Pasha found himself besieged in Durres until Serbian troops arrived in the summer 1915, placing northern Albania under Serbian control. In the fall of 1914, the Italians occupied the island of Sasseno, Valona, and the whole of southern Albania. Montenegro occupied Skadar (Shkoder) and part of northern Albania in summer 1915.

In January 1916 Austro-Hungarian troops occupied the territory from Valona to Lake Ohrid. Albania was considered a *Besetztes Freundesland* (Friendly Occupied Country).⁷⁵ Military occupation was based in Skadar (Shkoder) and the occupation authorities worked together with a local administrative council. Local administration was left to the Albanians; an Albanian gendarmerie was formed and Albanian schools opened. The occupying authorities built roads and other infrastructure, carried out geological, archaeological and ethnographic researches, and organized the first population census.⁷⁶ Dissatisfaction with the regime's intention to confiscate [weapons](#) and the worsening economic situation in 1917 were calmed by promises of full autonomy under Austro-Hungarian protection.

After the withdrawal of the Greek troops at the end of 1915, [Italy](#) controlled Valona and southern Albania. The Bolshevik's publication of the Treaty of London, making Italy's territorial claims in Albania public, caused discontent among the Albanians. In response the Italian authorities issued a declaration "of independence and unification of the whole of Albania," allowing the establishment of local administration troops and courts. In the fall of 1916 French troops occupied the area of Korca but left control to the Greek government. Due to the resistance of local Albanian leaders and the threat of rebellion against the Greek

authorities, the French General [Maurice Sarrail \(1856-1929\)](#) sent his troops into Korca. The French also set up a local administration and a gendarmerie, opened Albanian schools, and issued local currency and postage stamps. This “autonomy of Korca” lasted until Greece’s entry into the conflict, but the area remained under direct French military administration until the end of the war.⁷⁷

Conclusion

In September and October 1918 the occupation system of the Central Powers in the Balkans collapsed under the offensive of the Entente forces and its Balkan allies, almost three years after its formation. Serbian troops entered Skopje on 24 September and Niš on the 11 October. Belgrade was liberated on 1 November. On the same day, the Romanian King Ferdinand returned to Bucharest to receive the French troops. For the civilian population, demographically and economically crippled and almost completely destroyed in Serbia, this was the end of a long agony brought about by war and occupation. The situation was similar in Montenegro. The negative effects of the occupation regimes on Serbia and Montenegro were visible for a long time after the creation of the new [Yugoslav state](#) and remained profoundly embedded in collective memory, in turn impacting the political relations with the countries that were occupying powers. This also deeply influenced the collective behavior during the new occupation in the Second World War. The negative effects of occupation, especially on the economy, were also visible in Romania for a long time.

Milan Ristović, University of Belgrade

Notes

1. Mitrović, Andrej: *Prodor na Balkan I Srbija 1908-1918. Srbija u planovima Austro-Ugarske I Nemačke 1908-1918* [Breakthrough in the Balkans and Serbia 1908 to 1918. Serbia in the Plans of the Austro-Hungary and Germany 1908-1918], Belgrade 1981, pp. 62-85. ↑
2. Mitrović, Andrej: *Srbija u Prvom svetskom ratu* [Serbia in First World War], Belgrade 1984, pp. 59-63. (English edition: Mitrović, Andrej: *Serbia’s Great War 1914-1918*, London 2007). Henceforth I will cite the Serbian edition of Mitrović’s *Serbia’s Great War*, though I have used the English translation of the title for ease of reading. ↑
3. Mitrović, *Serbia’s Great War*, p. 59. ↑
4. Mitrović, *Breakthrough in the Balkans*, pp. 191-203. ↑
5. Rakočević, Novica: *Montenegro in the First World War 1914-1918*, Cetinje 1969, pp. 19-21; 42-46. ↑
6. Pavlowitch, Stevan K: *The Balkans 1804-1945*, London and New York 1999, p. 213;

- Mayerhofer, Lisa: Zwischen Freund und Feind – Deutsche Besatzung in Rumänien 1916-1918, Munich 2010, pp. 30-31. [↑](#)
7. Pavlowitch, The Balkans, pp. 211-212. [↑](#)
 8. During the first invasion between 3,500 and 4,000 civilians were killed. Between 1,500 and 2,000 civilians were deported alone from the city of Šabac to the internment camps in Hungary. See Stojančević, Vladimir: Serbia and the Serbian people during the war and occupation of 1914-1918), Leskovac 1988, pp. 6-7. [↑](#)
 9. Pavlowitch, Stevan K.: Serbia: The History Behind the Name, Belgrade 2004, p. 122. [↑](#)
 10. Mitrović, Breakthrough in the Balkans, pp. 187-190; 316. [↑](#)
 11. Mitrović, Breakthrough in the Balkans, pp. 312 -313; 328-331; see also Mitrović, Serbia in First World War; Scheer, Tamara: “Forces and Force: Austria-Hungary’s Occupation Regime in Serbia during the First World War”, in: Prvi svetski rat i Balkan – 90 godina kasnije. Tematski zbornik radova [World War I and the Balkans – 90 Years Later], Belgrade 2011, pp. 161-178. [↑](#)
 12. Protokoll, Wien, 7. 1, 1916, in: Komjati, Miklos: Protokolle des Gemeinsamen Ministerrates des Österreichisch-Ungarische Monarchie (1914-1918), in: Publikationen des ungarischen Staatsarchivs, II. Quellenpublikationen, Vol. 10, Budapest 1966; Mitrović, Breakthrough in the Balkans, p. 316-317; Scheer, Tamara: Zwischen Front und Heimat, Vienna 2009, pp. 29-30. [↑](#)
 13. Mitrović, Prodor na Balkan [Breakthrough in the Balkans], pp. 316-317; Mitrović, Serbia in First World War, pp. 330-335. [↑](#)
 14. Avramovski, Živko: Bugarska i Centralne Sile 1914-1918 [Bulgaria and Central Powers 1914-1918], Belgrade 1985, p. 173-212; Mitrović, Serbia, pp. 333-337. [↑](#)
 15. Mitrović, Andrej: Uprising fightings in Serbia 1916-1918, Belgrade 1987, pp. 41, 42. [↑](#)
 16. Mitrović, Serbia in First World War, pp. 337-343; Đorđević, Dimitrije: “The Austro-Hungarian occupation regime in Serbia and its collapse in 1918,” in: Scientific Conference on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the creation of the Yugoslav state), Zagreb 1969, pp. 205-226. On this problem see also: Gumz, Jonathan E: The Resurrection and Collapse of Empire in Habsburg Serbia, 1914-1918, Cambridge 2009, pp. 3-6; Scheer, Zwischen Front und Heimat, pp. 32-33; Scheer, Forces and Force. pp.161-178. [↑](#)
 17. Mitrović, Serbia in First World War, pp. p. 392-393. [↑](#)
 18. Mitrović, Uprising fightings in Serbia, p. 45. [↑](#)
 19. Mitrović, Andrej: “The Central Powers and strategic communications in the Balkans in 1915” in: Serbia 1915, Belgrade 1986, pp. 183-203. [↑](#)
 20. Mitrović, Andrej: “The creation of the German occupation zones and the Austro-Hungarian occupation administration in Serbia: Fall 1915-Spring 1916” in: Istorijски glasnik, vol. 1-2 (1977), pp. 7-37; Mitrović, Serbia, pp. 336, 346-357. [↑](#)

21. Avramovski, Živko: Bugarska i Centralne Sile 1914-1918 [Bulgaria and Central Powers 1914-1918], pp. 150-171. ↑
22. Mitrović, Andrej: "Tajni ugovor između Centralnih sila i Bugarske od 6. Septembra 1915. godine" ["A secret agreement between the Central Powers and Bulgaria on 6 September in 1915 Year."] in: Međunarodni problem, vol. 3-4 (1978), pp. 47-65; Mitrović, Uprising fightings in Serbia, pp. 28-29. ↑
23. Avramovski, Živko: "Austrougarsko-bugarske suprotnosti oko deobe Srbije" [The Austro-Hungarian-Bulgarian contradiction about the division of Serbia] in: Serbia 1916. Naučni skup [Serbia 1916. Scientific Conference], Belgrade 1987, pp. 65-82; Avramovski, "Bugarske pretenzije na aneksiju delova Kosova u Prvom svetskom ratu (1915-1916) [Bulgaria's claims on the annexation of parts of Kosovo in the First World War (1915-1916]" in: Jugoslovensko-bugarski odnosi u XX veku [Yugoslav-Bulgarian relations in the twentieth century] Belgrade 1982, 110-151; Mitrović, Prodor na Balkan [Breakthrough in the Balkans], pp. 318-323; Mitrović, Serbia in the First World War, pp. 342-344. ↑
24. Scheer, Zwischen Front und Heimat, pp. 85, 86; Mladenović, Božica: Porodica u Srbiji u Šrvom svetskom ratu [Family in Serbia during First World War] Belgrade 2006, p. 22. ↑
25. Stojančević, Serbia and Serbian People during the War and Occupation, p. 35. ↑
26. Milić, Danica: "Privreda pod okupacionim režimom" [The economy of the occupation regime] in: Serbia 1918. Godine i stvaranje jugoslovenske države, [Serbia 1918 and the creation of the Yugoslav state], Belgrade 1989, pp. 9-17. ↑
27. Stojančević, Serbia and Serbian People during the War and Occupation, pp. 35, 36; Mitrović Uprising fightings in Serbia, pp. 49-61. ↑
28. This order was withdrawn as it could not be implemented in practice. See Scheer, Zwischen Front und Heimat, pp.194-195. ↑
29. Scheer, Zwischen Front und Heimat, p. 90. ↑
30. Popović, Ljubodrag: "Osnovno školstvo u Srbiji pod okupacijom" [Primary education under occupation] in: Serbia 1918. godine i stvaranje jugoslovenske države [Serbia 1918 and the creation of the Yugoslav state], Belgrade 1989, pp. 35-41. ↑
31. Mitrović, Serbia in the First World War, pp. 381, 382, 385, 386; Mladenović, Porodica u Srbiji u Šrvom svetskom ratu [Family in Serbia during First World War], pp. 114-119. ↑
32. Scheer, Zwischen Front und Heimat, pp. 113-119; See Gumz, The Resurrection, pp. 21-26; and further. ↑
33. According to Ministry of Education data collected in 1918, seventy priests were taken to Bulgaria and fifty-six to Austria-Hungary for internment. Sladjana Bojković, Miloje Pršić (ed.): The suffering of the Serbian people in Serbia 1914-1918. Documents, List of interned priests from Serbia, Belgrade, 2000, pp. 384-387. ↑
34. Stojančević, Serbia and Serbian People during the War and Occupation, pp. 36, 37, 51;

- Popović, Ljubodrag: "Serbian internees in camps Austro-Hungarian" in: Serbia 1916, Belgrade 1987, pp. 309-320. ↑
35. Mitrović, Uprising fightings in Serbia, pp. 51-58; Stojančević, Serbia and Serbian People during the War and Occupation, p. 37. ↑
36. Avramovski, Austrougarsko-bugarske suprotnosti oko deobe Srbije" [The Austro-Hungarian-Bulgarian contradiction about the division of Serbia], p. 82. ↑
37. Bianchi, Bruna: Crimini di guerra e contro l'umanità. Le violenze ai civili sul fronte orientale (1914-1919), Milano 2012, pp. 163-186; Stojančević, Serbia and Serbian People during the War and Occupation, pp. 49, 50. ↑
38. Stojančević, Serbia and Serbian People during the War and Occupation, pp. 59 and 60. ↑
39. Andrejević, Sevdelin: "The economic plundering of Serbia during the Bulgarian occupation." in: Serbia 1918 and the creation of a Yugoslav state, pp. 19-32. ↑
40. Ibid. ↑
41. Mitrović, Serbia in First World War, p. 379. ↑
42. IMRO was organized in 1893 as a pro-Bulgarian and anti-Ottoman movement with the goal to gain autonomy for Macedonia. The armed clashes with the Ottoman army started in 1896, and later also occurred with the rival Serbian and Greek armed groups. For more information, see: Troebst, Stefan: Mussolini, Makedonien und die Mächte, 1922-1930, Innere Mazedonische Orevolutinäre Organization in der Südosteuropapolitik des faschistischen Italien, Cologne/Vienna 1987; Frusetta, James, "Common Heroes, Divided Claims: IMRO Between Macedonia and Bulgaria," in: Lampe, John/Mazower, Mark: Ideologies and national Identities. The case of twentieth-century South Eastern Europe, Budapest 2004; Tasić, Dmtar: "Vojno-politička akcija "makedonstvujuših" u Kraljevini SHS-Jugoslaviji 1919-1934" [Military political action of "Makedonstvujušči" in Kingdom of SHS/Yugoslavia 1919-1934]. In: Arhiv, 3, 2002. ↑
43. Stojančević, Serbia and Serbian People during the War and Occupation, pp. 57-64; Pisarri, Milovan: "Bulgarian Atrocities in Serbia and Macedonia during the First World War". Balcanica 2011; Pisarri, "The suppression of Toplica uprising led by VMRO repression" in Vojno-istorijski glasnik, vol. 1-2 (2011), pp. 28-48. ↑
44. Mitrović, Uprising fightings in Serbia 1916-1918, Belgrade 1987. ↑
45. Nikola I, King of Montenegro (1841-1922) left Podgorica on 19 January 1916, and was transferred to Italy by an Italian ship. See: Rakočević, Novica: Montenegro in the First World War 1914-1918, p. 184. ↑
46. Within the borders established after the First Balkan War, including the regions of Metohija and Sanjak. ↑
47. Rakočević, Montenegro, pp. 235-236. ↑
48. Scheer, Zwischen Front und Heimat, p. 37. ↑

49. Rakočević, Montenegro, p. 242. During the occupation changes were undertaken in the domestic judiciary system and in the method for appointment of judges. See Scheer, *Zwischen Front und Heimat*, pp. 35-36. ↑
50. Rakočević, Montenegro, pp. 199-200. ↑
51. Scheer, *Zwischen Front und Heimat*, pp. 180-181. ↑
52. The Emperor's brother, Maximilian von Habsburg (1832-1867), was also considered. ↑
53. Scheer, *Zwischen Front und Heimat*, pp. 152, 153, 158 ↑
54. Rakočević, Montenegro, pp. 280-284. ↑
55. The death rate in 1918 was up to three times the birth rate. Thus, in February 1918 there were 400 births and 1,200 deaths; in April 558 births and 1,335 deaths. See Rakočević, Montenegro, p. 293. ↑
56. *Ibid*, p. 266. ↑
57. In 1916/17 a total of 163 Serbian and nine Albanian elementary schools were opened. See Rakočević, Montenegro, p. 250. ↑
58. Scheer, *Zwischen Front und Heimat*, p. 190. ↑
59. Scheer, pp. 251-252. In 1918 there were around 10,000 people from Montenegro in prison camps in Austria-Hungary. See *Ibid*, p. 327. ↑
60. Scheer, *Zwischen Front und Heimat*, p. 37. ↑
61. *Ibid*, pp. 113-118. ↑
62. Rakočević, Montenegro, p. 414. ↑
63. Mayerhofer, *Zwischen Freund und Feind*, pp. 48-49. ↑
64. Bucharest was placed under the command of the Imperial Government of the Bucharest Fortress (Kaiserliches Gouvernement der Festung Bukarest). *Ibid*, p. 54. ↑
65. Mayerhofer, pp. 115-156. These headquarters had eighteen departments with 108 groups and sub-groups in 1917. See also: Scheer, *Zwischen Front und Heimat*, p. 43; Ocetea, Andrei (ed.): *The History of the Romanian people*, Novi Sad 1979, p. 285. ↑
66. Mayerhofer, *Zwischen Freund und Feind*, pp. 66-70. ↑
67. *Ibid*, pp. 289-345. ↑
68. *Ibid*, pp. 92-106. ↑
69. Pavlowitch, *A History of the Balkans 1804-1945*, pp. 217, 218. ↑
70. *Ibid*, p. 219. ↑
71. Mayerhofer, *Zwischen Freund und Feind*, p. 349. ↑
72. *Ibid*, 345-361. ↑
73. *Ibid*, 355-361; Ocetea, *The History of the Romanian People*, pp. 290, 291. ↑
74. Pavlowitch, *A History of the Balkans*, p. 221. The accession of Bessarabia was proclaimed on 28 November 1918; *ibid*, 324; Ocetea, *The History of the Romanian people*, pp. 290-296. ↑

75. Scheer, Zwischen Front und Heimat, pp. 38-42; 59. ↑
 76. Ibid, pp. 199, 203. ↑
 77. Bartl, Peter: Albanians, Belgrade 2001, pp. 170-178. ↑

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