

Self determination: austria-hungary



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In 1867 a dualist structure of Austro-Hungary came into existence in substitution with the former sole Austrian Empire (1804-67). This was the time when Austria came weak in strength and lost power, as it had gone through wars against Italian Peninsula (1859) and the states of German Confederation (1866). Besides these wars some other factors were also the cause such as constitutional changes which was causing continuous Hungarian frustration with rule from Vienna on growing national awareness in the other nationalities of the Austrian Empire. This frustration with Austrian rule had increased with time within Hungary which also caused Hungarian liberal revolution (1848-49). In the late 1850s, a huge quantity of Hungarians who joined their hands in the revolution agreed to accept the Habsburg monarchy. This took it as it will deliver the full right of internal independence to Hungary with common rights of defence and foreign affairs to both Austria and Hungary. At the time the Emperor Franz Joseph commenced comprising efforts with the Hungarian upper class and gained their support. Further the Hungarian leaders claimed Emperor's coronation as King of Hungary and a separate parliament at Budapest with authorities to endorse rules and regulations. (H. Kohn, 1961)

The creation of semi-independent Hungary caused the ascending a forceful ethnic Hungarian Magyar identity within the Kingdom of Hungary. At that stage the other minorities the Romanian and Slav began to dislike the government support to the Magyars. The same situation happened in the Empire of Austria as well as a stress was widely spread amongst the ethnic German and Czech citizens. Furthermore, ethnic issues got increased in new independent Romania and Serbia due to awareness of national identity

By the beginning of the 20th century the problem of disaffected ethnic groups had dominated the political situation in central and Eastern Europe for some 50 years. Upon the outbreak of the World War I in 1914, many of the smaller ethnic groups began to press for self-determination. These groups sought to capitalize on and dislocation of the war in order to attain independence. As a result the question of self-determination became an important issue during the war and in the subsequent peace conference. In this regard various promises of the allies and the central power to disaffected ethnic groups are considered. (Musgrave, T. D. 1997)

Ethnic groups frequently claim to have a right to self-determination on the basis that they are 'peoples', and are therefore entitled to determine their own political status. This notion of self-determination originated in central and Eastern Europe and grew out of the phenomenon of nationalities. The unification Germany and Italy in the 19th century and the creation of nation-states such as Poland and Czechoslovakia after the World War I constituted acts of self-determination consistent with this understanding of the principle. (Musgrave, T. D. 1997)

The allies also felt that a settlement of racial problem of South Eastern Europe on the basis of that the various nationalities therein contained should be as far as possible grouped in autonomous units with securities for religious and language rights of minorities to be an essential of lasting peace. As to the relations who exist between these national entities they have no fixed ideas, provided they are not brought under the political and military domination of Berlin. (Calder, K. J. 1976)

Apart from the ethnic groups, another major problem was regarding the setting up of a language which could be considered as customary. The Germans urged to consider their language as to be considered as a traditional language in the entire Empire. As the Italian language was also treated equally by the Germans they also claim their language to be used for this purpose. On the other hand the Slavic were demanding theirs. However, in upcoming times in multiple laws beginning from 1867, many languages were used as official language in the Austro-Hungarian Empire

Initially the Croatian language was given equal rights against Italian in Dalmatia. Due to increasing Slovene majority in Carniola and the capital their language was replaced by German in 1882. In 1869 in Galicia Polish was set as a government language. The Ukrainian language was not granted with this status as they always remained in minority. The language argument was aggressively fought by the Czechs in Bohemia, Prague and Pilsen against the German in 1880

Selection of official language became the most difficult task in the Austro-Hungarian politics. All the governments faced huge conflicts in considering any language for official use and educational purpose. Minorities always urged up to maximum extent to regard their language for education against the dominating Hungarian and German languages. The Austria-Hungarian Empire contained different people with different languages including 24% German, 20% Hungarian, 13% Czech, 10% Polish, 08% Ruthenian, 06% Romanian, 05% Croat, 04% Slovak, 04% Serb, 03% Slovene and 03% Italian.

There were many parts of Europe which had been part of the Habsburg monarchy at some stage and left it even before its dissolution in 1918. These parts comprised Lombardy, Veneto (Italy), Silesia (Poland), a large portion of Belgium and Serbia, and some parts of northern Switzerland and south-western Germany

Following in the footsteps of Germany, the Empire of Austro-Hungary implemented economical policies and practices. Industries starting growing in the early stage, people were leading a good living with exceptional facilities and large homes. Further foreign investment was sought for further development. Besides of these betterments the ethnic German groups felt that their position was weakening and they started opposing the leadership. In this regard they made an alliance with the ethnic groups related to Slavic and Taafee to oppose and weaken the liberals. Further they imposed Czech language to be as the official and educational language to decline the German speakers' hold on offices. As the Czechs got the benefit other ethnic groups also started claimed for their rights. The government tried its best to play a prominent role in holding together the competing interest groups in an era of rapid change. Still there was a huge influence of the powerful Slavic. On the other hand the Balkan nationalists also claimed independence from the Ottoman Empire which was also facing declination. After that in 1876 the Slavs of Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina came against Turkish rule and killed Ottoman officials. Further two other small Balkan states, Serbia and Montenegro, also revolted against the Sultan. All these rebels were greatly supported by Russians and ultimately in 1877 Russia declared war against Turkey and defeated the Ottomans with the help of Romania and Greece. At

this occasion a treaty was formed and a large Pro-Russian Bulgaria was formed. This enlarged Bulgaria became a threat to the Austro-Hungary and Britain as it may become a Russian satellite and dominate the Balkans. Due to this fear British warships were move towards the Russian border to restrict Russia not to advance in the eastern Mediterranean as the Suez Canallet to Britain. The Britain started propaganda and tried to spread this issue worldwide. However, the other big powers were absolutely against the happening of war in Europe and played their part to stop or slow down the increasing tension in these areas. In 1878

The Congress of Berlin rolled back the Russian victory as the large Bulgarian state which Russia conquered from Ottoman territory was dissolved into partitions.

Austria conquered Bosnia and Herzegovina as a way of obtaining influence in the Balkans. Montenegro and Serbia claimed and won full independency

Nevertheless the Balkans lingered as a site of political turbulence, teeming objective for independence and great power rivalry

Viewing the success of the Congress of Berlin the European powers started focusing to guarantee stability vide a multifaceted series of alliances and treaties. In 1879 keeping in mind the apparent Balkan instability and the aggressiveness of Russia Austro-Hungary made an alliance with the Germans. The main target was to create protection against Russia who had great potential to incite Slav rebellions. Italy also joined hands with them in 1882 against its imperial rivalries with France

Stress continued increasing between Russia and Austro-Hungary so a replacement was made as the Three Emperors League was substituted with Reinsurance Treaty with Russia. This was done to safe from war against Russia

There were three main elements of the ruling Empire of Austro-Hungary, the Hungarian government, the "Austrian" government and Common foreign and military policy

Separate parliaments were maintained in the Empire and ruled by its own prime minister. The coordinated monarch was theoretically strong but lacked strength in practice. The Empire had to cover all regions such as army, navy, foreign policy etc

Within Austria and Hungary some territories, like Galicia and Croatia gained special status with their own exclusive governmental structures

The common government was ruled by a common Ministerial Council which comprised three ministers to handle the joint responsibilities of finance, military, and foreign policy. There were two prime ministers, one from each side. There were two delegations containing 120 members, 60 from each side the Austrian and Hungarian parliaments

All the decisions were made through voting system to Common Ministerial Council. However, the ministers ultimately answered only to the monarch, and he had the final decision on matters of foreign and military policy

With the passage of time overlapping of responsibilities started amongst ministers and the ministries of both sides which led to huge conflicts and

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army became the major target of these conflicts. Both sides increased the use of their powers to gain dominancy and prominence in military and non-military affairs. Each half of the Dual Monarchy proved quite prepared to disrupt common operations to advance its own interests

Beginning from 1867 both halves maintained their relations for about fifty years now started facing enormous and repeated disputes to the share of each half in financial contribution and usage of resources. As the Austrian side contained approx 57% of the monarchy had more population and consumed greater resources. To conclude these problems Austro-Hungarian Empire renegotiated an agreement every ten years

On June 28, 1914 the heir of the Austro-Hungarian throne, Francis Ferdinand, during his visit to Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, was assassinated by Serbian militant group Black Hand. Gavrilo Principe was the person who killed him. (Shepard B. 1984)

The Austro-Hungary getting favoured by the Germans got determined to stop the Serbian military as there was a chance of revolution in the empire. In this regard they gave the Serbians an Ultimatum which was based on ten demands and considered that they will never accept these demands, yet again the Serbians accepted nine of them and a partial disagreement was on the tenth one, the Austro-Hungarian empire declared war. All these events occurred during the course of July and August 1914, which was the beginning of the Great War. (Horne C. F. 1923)

Russia heavily supported Serbia in this war with the continuous mobilization of its army.

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Italy who had an alliance with Austro-Hungary remained neutral in the beginning but in the year 1915 it showed its participation against the Austro-Hungary just to gain more territory from its ally but the Austro-Hungarians fought well at this side and held back the huge Italian army. This fight lasted for three and half years. (Horne C. F. 1923)

The Austro-Hungary army fought in parts with Serbia and Russia, the lesser part was sent to the Serbian border while the wider strength was fighting against the Russian army. This step taken by the Austria-Hungary ended up in a disasters way as it lost 227, 000 men from its army which comprised of 450, 000 in the beginning and also was unable to gain any territory.

In the summer of 1915 a combined attack by Austro-Hungarian, German and Bulgarian armies Serbia was conquered. Again in the year 1916, the Russians continued attack on Brusilov which contained very less strength of Austro-Hungarian soldiers and made them suffer to lose 1 million men

Due to the war, loss of men, shortages in supply, declined morale and uncountable casualties the Austro-Hungarian Empire became weak and sought support from the Germans. Further as it comprised of multiple ethnicity, with different peoples, languages, and customs caused further differences in the army and political leaders. At this stage the Austro-Hungarian Empire was completely dependent on the German support and caused a further increase in the ethnic groups of Austro-Hungary

At this stage the Germans were facing problems as they had expended their reservoir of manpower that would supply fresh recruits from the Homeland to the front. They lost reserves to replenish any losses they had to face

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during the war. They also faced problems from the Americans as they strengthened the Allies with an additional four million troops. (New York Times, September, 1918; John, K. 1999)

In 1914 the British government was not interested in national self determination in Eastern Europe. By Nov-1918 it was deeply involved with various eastern European subject nationalities and was omitted by implication to their independence. The government was not formally committed to national self determination, but it could not have abandoned the subject nationalities without being subjected to accusation of bad faith against which it would have had the greatest difficulty defending itself. This paper attempts to explain that evolution in policy by analyzing the British reaction to national problems in Eastern Europe and to the desire of the subject nationalities for self determination. It concentrates on policy during the war, not on the origins of any future policy. It is based primarily on the official records of the British government which have been supplemented with correspondence from private collections. It concentrates on the evolution of the government's relations with the Poles, Czechoslovaks and Yugoslavs because they were the only eastern European nationalities to conduct, throughout the war, an extensive campaign in Britain for national self determination. Amongst the émigrés they alone had meaningful relations with the government. (Calder, K. J. 1976)

When war first broke out between the allies and the central power, the allies had not thought of destroying Austro-Hungary. Even as the war progressed and centrifugal nationalities pressure on Austro-Hungary increased in intensity the allies were not prepared to seek its dismemberment. As late as <https://assignbuster.com/self-determination-austria-hungary/>

January-1918 Lloyd George was insisting that the destruction of Austro-Hungary was not one of the war aims of the UK. This was in line with statements made by Wilson at the time. France also favoured the continued existence of Austro-Hungary that its German speaking areas could otherwise seek to unite with Germany. (Louis Leger, A. B. Hill. 1889)

When the Central powers collapsed, events moved so quickly that the government did not have time to alter its relations with the subject nationalities to suit those aims it wished to pursue at the peace conference. In fact, on the subject of national self-determination, the government had not decided exactly what aims it wished to pursue. (Calder, K. J. 1976)

The collapse of the enemy cut short the war-time relations between the government and the émigrés before they could be developed to their logical conclusion. Throughout the war, even while it sought a separate peace, the government gradually least limited support for their aspirations, in this situation the government might have been forced to make a formal decision on the fate of Austria-Hungary by giving a general endorsement to the idea of national self-determination. Such developments would have carried the pattern of British relations with the subject nationalities during the war to its ultimate, logical and extreme conclusion but the collapse of the Central powers, premature in terms of British military, cut short this development and left the government in a position which was, to say the least, confused. By 11 November-1918, it had not formally endorsed the general application of the idea of national self-determination and had not decided, or accepted a commitment, to destroy Austria-Hungary

Austro-Hungarian Empire can be blamed itself, for its defeat in World War I as all the suffering was caused just to confront the Serbians. The whole idea was turned down due to participation of Russians and further by the discreet act of Italians

After the war Austria-Hungary could not continue much as the Hungarian part became less supportive. Beginning from the later stage of 1916 till early 1917 food supply became very irregular for the Hungarian side and the government had to seek settlement against its enemies, but all the attempts were failed

This was the time when it became clear that the war winners will be the Allied powers of the British Empire, France, Italy and the United States. At this stage nationalist movements which had previously been calling for a greater degree of autonomy for various areas started pressing for full independence. Further the liberal movements and the politicians amongst the Austrians and Hungarians majority also supported the separatism of ethnic minorities in their areas. This began in October of 1918 when Austria was distributed into four portions German, Czech, South Slav and Ukrainian. The Polish State came into existence with rights of full independence. Czechoslovak joined their hands with the South Slave which were already united with Serbia. These happenings came in series as Czecho-Slovakia declared independence on October 28, the Slovaks in Martin on October 30, and on October 29, the southern Slav areas declared the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs. Finally on October 31, 1918 the government of Hungary terminated its union with Austria and the Austro-Hungarian Empire was officially dissolved. Then

in November separate republics were declared in Austria and Hungary and new border of territories were brought to the world map.

The war ended when the peace agreement took effect on November 11, 1918. In the result of the war the political, cultural, and social order of the world was radically changed, even in those areas which were not directly involved in the war. Many new countries were formed, while many were abolished.

After a thorough study of all the events, incidents and scenarios it may be concluded that the coalition of Austria and Hungary and development of Austro-Hungry Empire was a negative decision. The residents, besides being different in communities with different cultural and linguistic values, all of them tried to be together and support the government at one stage but later they were confront to go for the independence due to the conquering approach of both parts of the government, the Austria and Hungary, which finally ended in the dissolution after a huge loss in the shape of territory as well as manpower in the World War I.

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