

The Nationalities Question in the Habsburg Monarchy: Reflections on the Historical Record

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In the concluding paragraph of her book, [The Habsburg Empire in European Affairs, 1814-1918](#) (Chicago 1969), Barbara Jelavich, the distinguished historian of Habsburg and Balkan affairs, writes (p. 176): "It is now impossible to imagine . . . a resurrection of Austria-Hungary. A real 'Habsburg' nationalism does not exist." That seems like a safe, even unassailable prediction, but, given the startling and completely unforeseen developments of the last five years in East Central Europe, it might be unwise for a historian who deals with past realities to rule out any future possibility however remote. Be that as it may, events since 1989 have led to a surprising nostalgia for the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and Emperor Franz Joseph in the lands of the former Habsburg empire. In 1989, the current head of the former ruling dynasty, Otto von Habsburg, was enthusiastically, even tearfully, cheered when, after the fall of the Communist regime, he returned to Budapest to meet members of the Hungarian parliament. Politicians and journalists in Europe and America now compare the old Habsburg monarchy to the disoriented East Central Europe of today and hold up the former as a positive model for supranational organization.

The current wave of nostalgia has been helped along by some recent historical works which contain generous assessments of the monarchy's positive qualities. For example, István Deák, in his highly acclaimed book [Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848-1918](#) (New York, 1990), strongly recommends (p. 9) that the "Habsburg experiment" in supranational organization be reexamined because "I am convinced that we can find here a positive lesson while the post-1918 history of the central and east central European nation-states can only show us what to avoid." Alan Sked, of the London School of Economics, in his distinctly

unnostalgic book, The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire, 1815-1918 (London, 1989), which nevertheless is sympathetically inclined toward the monarchy, maintains (p. 3) that "the European idea [of unity] . . . recalls the Austrian one, the so-called 'österreichisches Staatsidee'" and that European statesmen would do well to ponder the history of the multinational empire for guidance on the problems involved "in ruling large numbers of people of disparate and often mutually hostile culture, in finding some bond of loyalty between them, and in retaining that loyalty in a world full of internal and external challenges." Similar positive assessments can be found in two other recently published works: Barbara Jelavich, Modern Austria: Empire & Republic, 1800-1986 (New York, 1987) and The Habsburg Monarchy Among the Great Powers, 1815-1918 (New York, 1990).

The implication of these historians' arguments is that if East Central Europe is not simply to revert to its pre World War II structure of hostile and competing states, then some substitute for Austria-Hungary in Central Europe must be created which would embody the empire's positive lessons. This assumes that there is a legacy of positive lessons which the Habsburg monarchy bequeathed to Europe. Some observers, such as Alan Sked, do point out that Europeans today also might learn from the mistakes and imperfections of the monarchy.⁽¹⁾ That message, however, is muted by the retrospective general celebration of the Habsburg monarchy as "an experimental station for world survival" and not, as viewed earlier, "an experimental station for world decline," to use Karl Kraus' mordant quip. Historians now generally agree that earlier, harshly negative judgments, of the Habsburg monarchy as a *Völkerkerker* (prison of peoples) greatly exaggerated its bad features and overlooked its positive aspects. But the new interpretations run the risk of distorting historical reality in the opposite direction by emphasizing the monarchy's positive qualities and glossing over its negative aspects in the nationalities question. This has the effect of blurring continuities in nationality policies in the Habsburg empire and in the new states of East Central Europe after the First World War.⁽²⁾

The current historiographical and political situations invite a reexamination of the Habsburg monarchy's record in the nationalities question and as a model for supranational organization. The following reflections propose such a reexamination.⁽³⁾ They are offered without finality; their aim is to raise questions and open up discussion. Specifically, they address three questions: (1) What, if any, are the positive lessons of the Habsburg monarchy? (2) Was the nationalities problem the major cause of its disintegration? (3) What was the role of the dynasty and the imperial structure in the empire's collapse?

Before proceeding further, I should like to make two remarks in order to avoid being misunderstood. First, my own views might strike some as aligned with the harsh assessments of the Habsburg monarchy alluded to above. However, my views are primarily a critique of the imperial political structure and its effect on nationality policies and practices. They are not a critique of everything that transpired in the late Habsburg empire. I readily acknowledge that there were many progressive, creative and humane achievements in the sphere of civil society. Moreover, the works of recent economic

historians such as David Good,⁽⁴⁾ John Komlos,⁽⁵⁾ and Richard Rudolph,⁽⁶⁾ among others, show that far from being a hopelessly economically backward state, the monarchy by 1914 had made impressive strides in terms of economic growth, even if the growth was uneven and intensified nationalism and nationality conflicts. The point here is that positive economic and social achievements are not always synonymous with political success. Indeed, one of the chief conclusions drawn from my ruminations is that the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy was, more than anything else, the result of the political failure of its imperial structure.

The second remark concerns the idea of the nation-state. My line of argument would seem to cast me as an unalloyed advocate of the nation-state as the only legitimate basis for a modern polity. That is not the case. However, I think it is fair to say that since the eighteenth century the nation-state, whatever one may think of it, has been accorded primacy over other forms of state organization and has been seen as a form of political organization providing psychological, social and economic benefits to members of the nation. The nation-state as we know it is a modern contrivance and it will not last forever. Indeed developments in Western Europe would seem to herald its decline, but those in East Central Europe and elsewhere point to its continued existence for some time yet.

At the outset of my reflections, I should like to question briefly five arguments that are usually made in favor of a positive image of the Habsburg monarchy. The arguments are found in, among many others, the books of Sked, Deák, Bridge, and Jelavich, and I have used them as a basis for my observations.

The first argument is a rather new one and runs as follows. Rather than undergoing a long process of decline leading inevitably to its dissolution, the monarchy, after having nearly fallen apart in the revolution of 1848, rebounded and rose. On the eve of the First World War, the monarchy was, according to Sked's account, more stable and prosperous than at any time in its modern history, "and the nationality problem seemed to be abating."⁽⁷⁾ This sanguine picture relies heavily on the positive assessments of Habsburg economic growth mentioned earlier. Yet one wonders if the monarchy in 1914 can be described as politically stable and the nationality problem as attenuated, if, as Sked himself informs us, the constitutions of Croatia and Bohemia were suspended in 1912 and 1913 respectively, and the imperial parliament (*Reichsrat*) was sent packing in March 1914?⁽⁸⁾ A second argument maintains that, with the exception of some small radical groups, the leaders and programs of all the nationalities counted on the continued existence of the Habsburg monarchy as the foundation of their political activity. This is true, but it overlooks two things. The first was the existence of a strong Germany committed to the political status quo in the dual monarchy and the preservation of Austria-Hungary as a Great Power. As Hans Mommsen writes: "Without some impulse from without, that is, without some change in the European power constellation which set aside the foreign policy compulsion to preserve the dualistic state, no resolution of the nationalities problem was possible."⁽⁹⁾ The second thing was the readiness of the emperor and his advisers to use military force to put down challenges to the existing imperial structure. Both of these conditions together made the fulfillment of national aspirations outside, as well as inside, the Habsburg monarchy unrealistic before 1914. Counting on the

continued existence of the Habsburg empire, therefore, could be seen as adaptation to political and diplomatic realities rather than as acceptance of the empire as such.

A number of historians, like Sked, point to the fact that, by 1914, the leaders of the various nationalities concentrated more on improving the positions of their ethnic groups within the existing state structure than on achieving autonomy. This observation confuses short-range strategies for long range goals. In 1914, the Czechs considered themselves a European nation politically equal to any other, comparable at least to the Hungarians within the Habsburg empire. The Czechs sought independent national representation among other European nations. They succeeded in obtaining such representation in three areas: The Second International, the Olympic games and other international sports organizations, and in professional organizations of scholars and scientists.⁽¹⁰⁾ The Czech Olympic team in 1908 marched in alphabetical order in the opening procession between Belgium and Brazil under the name of Bohemia and behind their own flag, the red-white banner of the Bohemian crownland with "Bohemia" (*Bohême*) written on it.⁽¹¹⁾ The Croats, Slovenes and Poles exhibited similar inclinations in the area of independent national representation. Those were not the actions of nationalities which have given up the hope of some form of autonomous national existence.

A third argument adduced to demonstrate that the Habsburg monarchy commanded the loyalty of the majority of its inhabitants is the enthusiastic popular response to the war and the fact that the mobilization of the army in 1914 transpired without notable anti-war demonstrations or resistance to conscription. But this lack of resistance may have been due in part to harsh emergency measures enacted by the Austrian government. As Joseph Redlich, the Austrian historian, legal scholar and politician, points out in his study, Austrian War Government, those measures were the most draconian of any other belligerent state.⁽¹²⁾ Leaving that aside, Redlich's diary⁽¹³⁾ and the work of the Italian historian, Leo Valiani,⁽¹⁴⁾ among others, suggest that enthusiasm for the war was less than homogeneous across the monarchy. True, the war was greeted with demonstrations of popular enthusiasm in Vienna. We have Stefan Zweig's⁽¹⁵⁾ and Leon Trotsky's⁽¹⁶⁾ acknowledgment in their memoirs as evidence. Popular enthusiasm was also visible in Budapest and among the Magyars in general. Two weeks after the beginning of the war, the enthusiasm of the Magyars was still vociferous according to entries in the diary of Joseph Redlich, who traveled through Hungary in mid-August 1914.⁽¹⁷⁾

However, the picture is different in other parts of the monarchy. Massive pro-war demonstrations took place in Zagreb and Prague, but these demonstrations have to be differentiated. The demonstrations in Croatia were fed by the traditional anti-Serbian feeling.⁽¹⁸⁾ Count Heinrich Clam-Martinić, the prominent Bohemian political figure and Austrian cabinet minister, admitted to Joseph Redlich that the Prague demonstrations of August 7/8, 1914, in which both Germans and Czechs took part, were organized by the authorities and cannot be taken as conclusive evidence of Czech loyalty.⁽¹⁹⁾ One hundred twenty-one Czechs were arrested for pro-Russian demonstrations in the fall of 1914; eighteen of them were sentenced to death.⁽²⁰⁾ During the first weeks of the war, Thomas Masaryk had noted that Czech conscripts had no desire to spill their blood fighting their

fellow Slavs.⁽²¹⁾ Several battalions of Czech soldiers had left Prague singing "I've got to fight the Russians, but I don't know why."⁽²²⁾

Numerous signs of sympathy with Austria-Hungary's enemies appeared in the frontier zones of Southern Hungary, Galicia, Bukovina and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Whole towns in Bosnia and Herzegovina displayed their sympathy for the enemy. Redlich reports that Serbs in all of the areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina adjoining the Kingdom of Serbia, had in fact rebelled and that suppression of the rebellion had caused the Austro-Hungarian command a great deal of trouble. The pro-Serbian movement in southern Hungary and Croatia was put down only thanks to many thousands of arrests and many hundreds of summary executions.⁽²³⁾ A large number of arrests took place among the Slovaks in northwestern Hungary.⁽²⁴⁾

The responses of the Poles and Ruthenians were very disappointing to the Austrian authorities. Poles and Ruthenians dutifully obeyed the call to arms, but only a minority of those nationalities showed any enthusiasm in the cause of the Central Powers.⁽²⁵⁾ Many Poles accepted the war not primarily because of loyalty to Austria, although there was no doubt some of that, but because the war was almost immediately seen as an event that would, in some indefinable way, bring the Poles freedom, including freedom from Habsburg rule.⁽²⁶⁾

The response of the Ruthenians came as somewhat of a shock to Austrian authorities. The Redlich diary reports that Ruthenian peasants, who fared much better than their co-nationals in Russia, listened readily to Russian promises, until the harsh Russification measures and the persecution of the Uniat church by the Russian occupation forces in large areas of Galicia and Bukovina put an end to that.⁽²⁷⁾ The upshot of the foregoing observations is that a much more differentiated examination of the response to the war in Austria-Hungary is needed before the generalization that the peoples of Austria-Hungary responded overwhelmingly to the war can be cited as evidence of positive identification with the monarchy.⁽²⁸⁾

Fourth, the performance of the Habsburg army is often cited as proof of the monarchy's cohesiveness and the loyalty to it of the different nationalities. Alan Sked lauds the Habsburg army as "a praiseworthy and effective fighting machine"⁽²⁹⁾ only to tell us in the next breath that "practically every battle fought unaided by the Germans was lost."⁽³⁰⁾ F. R. Bridge, writes that the great victories against the Russians on the Austro-Russian front in the spring of 1916 "Had been achieved by German, rather than by Austro-Hungarian efforts"⁽³¹⁾ and that the Austro-Hungarian army on the Russian front was saved from complete collapse in September 1916 "only . . . when German troops came to the rescue."⁽³²⁾ Even István Deák, an admirer of the multinational Habsburg army, notes "That throughout the war, whenever the Germans were willing and able to turn their attention away from the stationary Western front, great victories could be achieved in the east and southeast."⁽³³⁾ My point is not to demean the honor and courage of Habsburg soldiers, but simply to point out that assumptions about loyalty to the monarchy based on the effectiveness of the army in a long war needs closer examination.

The Fifth argument holds that the Habsburg monarchy fell because it lost a major war. As Sked states: "Had the Central Powers won the war the Habsburg empire would have survived intact and probably expanded."⁽³⁴⁾ The implication is that if the empire had survived, it would have renewed itself and realized its presumed mission as guarantor of the free development of the small nationalities in the Danubian region. But Sked also tells us "that a victory of the Central Powers would have meant Austria-Hungary's reduction to a military and economic appendage of Germany, with little future as an independent state."⁽³⁵⁾ Similarly, F. Roy Bridge informs us that during the course of the war, Germany reduced the monarchy to the position of "a helpless satellite"⁽³⁶⁾ for which a German victory would have meant the end of its existence "as an independent Great Power."⁽³⁷⁾ Survival in that situation would have had a very restrictive meaning at best. And what would have happened to the monarchy's Slavic peoples in an Austria-Hungary that was part of German dominated *Mitteleuropa*? That was made clear in an imperious memorandum from the German government in November 1915, setting forth its *Mitteleuropa* program. The memorandum states in part:

A further strengthening of the non-German elements in Austria would appear to contradict the basis of our alliance and the foreign interests of both signatories. . . . It urgently submits to the consideration of the imperial-royal government that it devise whatever measures seem appropriate which will impede the progressive slavization of Austria and return to the Germanic element the leading role which it deserves in the interest of Austria as the German Ostmark.⁽³⁸⁾

It is hard to imagine the Slavic nationalities developing freely in the "German Ostmark."

Now to the question of the legacy of the Habsburg empire in the nationalities question. There are indeed lessons to be learned from the experience of the Habsburg monarchy, but to sort them out one has to distinguish between two different kinds of legacies. The first is that of the Habsburg dynasty itself: its ideology, institutions, goals and methods as these were embodied in the dynastic empire over which it ruled. The second legacy is that of the multifarious activities of the inhabitants of the Habsburg empire as individuals and as members of social classes and nationalities, members of what is called civil society. Among those activities were the efforts of some nationalities' leaders to ground the utility and necessity of Austria as a just and fair multinational state in institutions and laws that accorded with modern times. The two legacies are of course interconnected, but when one talks about the positive qualities of the Habsburg monarchy one has to be careful not to attribute to conscious Habsburg policy fundamental changes that were the products of general European social development.

The distinction between the dynastic legacy and that created by the peoples of the monarchy becomes clearly visible in the sphere of state building. Helmut Rumpler states that by the nineteenth century "the political strength (*Kraft*) which the Habsburgs, in their most outstanding representatives, displayed in adjusting the structure of their state to the changing circumstances of the time appears to have been almost entirely exhausted."⁽³⁹⁾ A striking example of that political exhaustion is the fact that it was not a member of the House of Habsburg or any of its representatives who provided a strong justification for

Austria as a State; it was the Czech historian and nationalist leader Francis Palácky. It was he who gave the clearest and most lasting shape to what might be called the dream of the Habsburg monarchy. He did that in his famous letter of reply in April 1848 to the invitation from the organizers of the German national assembly in Frankfurt to join the constitutive committee preparing for the meeting of that body. It was in that letter that he referred to Austria as a "European necessity" and enunciated the idea of Austro-Slavism, that is, that the small Slavic nations should seek to fulfill their national aspirations within the boundaries of the Habsburg empire. Given the frequency with which Palácky's affirmation of Austria is cited as justification for the Habsburg empire's existence, it is worth dwelling for a while on what he said. The small states of the Danubian region, Palácky said, could only be secure against Russia in an association of nations. It was Austria's mission to become such an association of nations: "If the Austrian imperial state had not existed for ages, it would be necessary to create such a state in the interests of Europe and of humanity in general."⁽⁴⁰⁾

The kind of state Palácky had in mind was outlined in general form in the Manifesto of the Slavonic Congress that met in Prague in May 1848. Palácky was the president of the congress and the Manifesto endorsed his ideas. It demanded a reconstruction of the Austrian state upon new foundations:

We have proposed to the Austrian emperor under whose constitutional rule the majority of us live, that the imperial state be converted into a federation of nations all enjoying equal rights, whereby regard would be paid not less to the different needs of these nations than to those of the united monarchy. We see in such a federal union not only our own salvation but also liberty, enlightenment and humanity generally. . . . In any case we are determined to ensure for our nationality in Austria, by all means available to us, a full recognition of the same rights in the State as the Germans and Magyar nations already enjoy.⁽⁴¹⁾

Palácky's idea of a federal state based on nationality was incorporated into the Kremsier (Kromí) constitution of March 1849, which combined both the ethnic-linguistic principle and the idea of historical-political territorial units.⁽⁴²⁾ That constitution, the "only free agreement of the peoples" arrived at before the end of the Habsburg empire in 1918,⁽⁴³⁾ was, of course, stillborn, a victim of the counterrevolution. Many historians argue that, despite many difficult problems that would have remained to be solved, if the constitution had been tried, it might well have offered the empire a basis for peaceful progress.⁽⁴⁴⁾

What is important to keep in mind about Palácky's conception of Austro-Slavism is that it was no unconditional affirmation of the Habsburg monarchy. It was conditioned on the Habsburg monarchy being remade into a federal state "which would be equally just for all under its jurisdiction."⁽⁴⁵⁾ The failure to achieve that would be regrettable, Palácky said in 1865, but not the end of the world for the Slavs. He confidently predicted: "We were in existence before Austria and we will still be here after she is gone."⁽⁴⁶⁾ By the 1860s, Palácky's conditional affirmation of the Habsburg empire characterized the positions of all of the Slavic national leaders.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Even before the conclusion of the

Compromise of 1867, Palácky warned of the destructive consequences of subordinating the Slavs to the Magyars and the Germans.⁽⁴⁸⁾

Why did Palácky's "dream" of a nationally just multinational federal state never become a reality? The commonly held view is that its realization was prevented by conflicts among the nationalities, and that it was the inability of the monarchy to contain the conflicts that brought about its collapse. In that view, the monarchy's multinational character was its most basic structural feature and nationalism was the destabilizing element in the monarchy's structure. But are both of the foregoing assumptions true? I think not. As I see it, it was the monarchy's dynastic imperial structure that was its most basic feature; its multinationalism was inherent in that structure. Empires are formed by subordinating "distinct societies with autonomous institutions and regional elites . . . into politically subordinate civil societies."⁽⁴⁹⁾ The distinctiveness of the subordinated societies continues to exist, but their political sovereignty has been extinguished or sharply reduced.⁽⁵⁰⁾ The relationship between the imperial center--in the Habsburg case the Hereditary Lands with their seat in Vienna--and the peripheral territories is one of power and the object of that relationship is the extraction of resources necessary to sustain the maintain the military capacity necessary to support the imperial ambitions of the emperor and his advisers.⁽⁵¹⁾

What Alan Sked and A. J. P. Taylor say about the Habsburg empire is true of dynastic empires in general. The inability of the Habsburgs to come to terms with the challenge posed by nationalism was a consequence of the very nature of the monarchy itself. "The Habsburg empire," Sked writes, "was first and foremost a dynastic power, a *Hausmacht*. Its *raison d'être* was to provide a power base for the political ambitions of whichever Habsburg Emperor inherited it."⁽⁵²⁾ To Sked's view may be added that of Taylor's for whom the Habsburg monarchy was a political and territorial vehicle which enabled the Habsburgs to pursue their quest for power and prestige and not "a device for enabling a number of nationalities to live together."⁽⁵³⁾ It was the efforts of the Habsburg emperors from 1815 until 1914 to preserve that structure in the face of forces eroding their hegemonial rule over territories and nations under their control that was the primary dysfunctional force.

Finding a solution to the nationality problem that even vaguely approached Palácky's vision was never, and never could have been, a priority of the Habsburgs. Indeed, apart from support for imperial ambitions and maintaining the military capacity needed to survive in the international arena, there was no coherent *Staatsidee* binding the disparate Habsburg territories. This was confirmed by no less a person than Foreign Minister Count Gustave Kálnoky (1881-1895), who opined in a memorandum written in the mid-1880s:

Since the time when the Habsburg territorial possessions were first united, the Monarchy has developed more in the sense of a power (*Macht*) than in the sense of a state (*Staat*). Power and purpose in external matters were more recognizable than its internal purpose as a state.⁽⁵⁴⁾

As Otto Brunner pointed out in a penetrating essay, "Das Haus Österreich und die Donaumonarchie," the transformation of the imperial structure into a federal union of

autonomous national societies would have spelled the end of the Habsburg empire and the imperial concept no less than if they had been destroyed by war and revolution. Neither Franz Joseph nor Franz Ferdinand could have sponsored such a reorganization, even if they possessed the freedom to do so.⁽⁵⁵⁾

Much is made of the supranational ideology of the Habsburgs and of their empire. True, the imperial ideology of the Habsburg empire was explicitly supranational, but it was rooted more in feudal and dynastic concepts than in modern ideas of international organization based on the recognition of independent national political units. The Habsburgs, as Helmut Rumpler notes, legitimized their rule in terms of their family's historical role as the holders of the crown of the Holy Roman Empire, and as the protectors of Christendom. In fact Emperor Franz Joseph saw his empire as in many respects like the Holy Roman Empire and his position like that of the Roman-German emperor.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Therefore, despite the universalist basis of their dynastic ideal, the Habsburgs considered themselves German princes and the imperial ideology betrayed a particularist slant for the Germans. The political ideal of Emperor Franz Joseph, which overlapped with the *österreichische Staatsidee* in the nineteenth century, was, as Sked and others have pointed out, that of "a centralized, unified, and Germanized monarchy"⁽⁵⁷⁾ "however much in practice the Habsburg emperors were forced to modify that ideal in the course of the nineteenth century in order to hold on to Habsburg possessions. Germanization in this context was chiefly a matter of bureaucratic organization and efficiency, but as Brigitte Hamann has shown from the unpublished diaries of Archduchess Marie Valerie, Emperor Franz Joseph's youngest daughter, some of the Habsburgs felt a strong attachment to the German cultural world and suffered a sense of loss at being excluded from "the German Fatherland."⁽⁵⁸⁾ Hamann concludes that "the identity crisis of the German Austrians after 1866, and the conflict between imperial, state and national consciousness, which they felt more intensively than the other nations, did not stop with the supranational Habsburg family."⁽⁵⁹⁾ After 1867, the Habsburgs and the court increasingly appeared German and there was little that they could do to justify their ostensibly supranational rule vis-à-vis national elites and masses.

The same feeling of being German, in the Austrian sense to be sure, was true of many members of the Habsburg imperial elite. An extreme example of this outlook surfaced in the First World War. Commenting on Count Ottakar Czernin's policy as foreign minister, F. R. Bridge writes:

Czernin's negative attitude toward reform and his immobility was rooted in his own German-Austrian Weltanschauung. No slave of Germany, he wanted to use the German alliance to strengthen the monarchy . . . but in the last resort he was unwilling to contemplate changes at home that might have been detrimental to German-Austrian interests.⁽⁶⁰⁾

In short, the supranational ideology of the Habsburg dynasty offers very little for the development of an idea of unity that could have coordinated particular national loyalties with loyalty to a supranational political entity. To the extent that it existed, loyalty to

Emperor Franz Joseph was to him personally and not part of a larger loyalty to a Habsburg or Austrian state.

In the final analysis, whatever the Habsburgs did with regard to acknowledging the force of nationalism was the bare minimum necessary to preserve their control over their territories and maintain the status of their empire as a great power. For over a hundred years, from 1740 until 1848, the Habsburgs vigorously pursued a policy of centralized royal absolutism as they strove to build a modern autocratic state. After the revolutions of 1848, the failure of absolutism, and the lost wars of the 1860s, the Habsburgs reversed course. Their rule had become overextended, and holding on to their possessions now compelled them to decentralize their power. It is in that sense that they acknowledged nationalism in a limited sense, but even in that limited sense, decentralization led to the formation of constituencies among the nationalities that vied with the imperial center in Vienna for power. The most obvious example, of course, is the Compromise of 1867, which the emperor concluded with the Magyar oligarchy. The Compromise gave the empire a deceptive stability for 50 years, but at the price of alienating most of the Slavs as foreseen by Palácky.

By 1914, Vienna was declining as an imperial city in the sense that the policies of the Emperor and his advisors no longer represented the whole empire or even the Austrian half of it. Power had shifted to the peripheries of the empire, to new nationalist political forces in the new power centers of Prague, Cracow, Zagreb and Lvov which were pulling away from the center--Vienna and the Habsburg Hereditary Lands. We have already seen, for example, the tendencies of the Croats and the Czechs to act on their own in the international arena. The emperor and the court became more and more unable to relate to the important conflicting forces, the dynastic state became an abstraction, and the emperor's strength more symbolic than real.⁽⁶¹⁾ The relative economic backwardness compared to the other Great Powers and the organizational inefficiency of the imperial structure diminished the military capacity of the Habsburg empire and threatened its prestige as a Great Power. Playing the role of a Great Power was the sole justification for the Habsburg dynasty's existence even though it lacked the requisite political and economic conditions. Any other policy, such as withdrawal or disengagement, was rejected because such moves would be a sign of weakness and convey the wrong signal to all of the domains under the center's control and encourage their separation. It was the insistence of the emperor and his advisors on maintaining the imperial structure and the empire's prestige as a Great Power that motivated them to choose war in 1914, as they had in 1859 and 1866. In that regard, the legacy of the dynasty as a stabilizing force is negative.

Finally, we come to the question of how the nationalities problem actually was handled. Essentially, three different strategies to deal with the nationality problem were tried in the monarchy. None them was exclusive to the Habsburg monarchy, and none of then was successful. The three strategies were, to use Dennison Rusinow's typology:⁽⁶²⁾ (1) The Austro-Hungarian; (2) the Hungarian; and (3) the Austrian.

The point of departure for the Austro-Hungarian strategy was the Compromise of 1867. The latter was tantamount to a federation, some would say a confederation. It failed because the idea of federation or confederation carried the implicit assumption that the political boundaries of the federated or confederated states would correspond at least roughly to national boundaries. This was not the case in Austria or Hungary. The lesson here is that confederation is feasible only when the units to be confederated are, like the members of the European Community, already reasonably homogeneous national, as well as political- territorial, communities. Near the end of his life, the highly respected Robert Kann, who certainly was sympathetic to the Habsburg empire, recognized that requirement. In his contribution to the third volume of the series Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918, on the peoples of the empire, Kann wrote that the Habsburg monarchy was "composed mainly of torsos of nations" and he concluded by saying that whatever federation or confederation of nation-states may arise in the Danubian area in the future will be unlike the Habsburg monarchy; "at the very least it will include whole nations."⁽⁶³⁾

The Hungarian strategy failed because the Magyar leaders conceived of Hungary as a unitary nation-state in the Western sense composed of a single Hungarian nation, when in fact it was a multinational state with a non-Magyar majority. The Magyar ruling elite attempted, with the tacit approval of the emperor, to preserve its supremacy through oppressive policies of domination, exclusion and Magyarization. The latter was often coerced. To be sure, the Hungarian constitution contained a law which accorded to all Hungarian citizens "of a separate mother tongue" equal civil rights and unrestricted use of their native language in local administration and in elementary and secondary schools, but the law was honored neither in its letter nor its spirit.⁽⁶⁴⁾ By the Compromise, the Habsburgs left Croats, Slovaks, and Romanians to the not so tender mercy of the Magyars. In the end, Magyar policies only served to intensify the nationalism of the non-Magyar peoples. The lesson here is obvious; a unitary nation-state is not possible where there exist ethnic groups which possess a strong sense of cohesion as communities and have achieved some degree of national self-consciousness. Habsburg Hungary's ill treatment of its minorities left a baleful legacy to some of the successor states whose leaders did to their minorities what had been done to them. Only one case in point was the callous Romanian treatment of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania, designated as "Romanians of another tongue."

The Austrian strategy was quite different. There was a Slavic majority in Austria that was opposed to the tradition of German overlordship and to the German tradition of the court, but there was no unity among the Slavs. This diversity allowed for several different methods. These included: limited federalism for Galicia, ad hoc compromises on the local and provincial level, and simply playing the nationalities off against each other. All of these methods were deficient in one way or another.⁽⁶⁵⁾

The approach to the nationalities question in Austria was tied to the famous Article 19 of the Austrian constitution which assured the inviolable right of each ethnic group to the preservation and cultivation of its nationality and language in education, administration and public life. The forerunner of Article 19 was Article 21 of the Kremsier Constitution,

but the latter differed from the former in one important respect. Article 21 anchored nationality rights in the structure of the Austrian state itself, while Article 19 was included in the section of the Austrian constitution dealing with the rights of individual citizens.⁽⁶⁶⁾ Nationalities as such were not considered legal entities, although the application of decisions in individual cases to autonomous local government units had the effect of indirectly recognizing nationalities as such. Gerald Stourzh maintains, "no state went as far as Cisleithanian Austria in pursuing the principle of national equality."⁽⁶⁷⁾ Even if one agrees with that slightly exaggerated conclusion, one could still accept Robert Kann's conclusion that, while the principle of national equality as an individual right is not to be treated lightly, the territorially narrowly circumscribed results of Article 19 was no answer to the long-run desires of the nationalities.⁽⁶⁸⁾ Quite apart from that shortcoming, the many decisions under Article 19 had unintended, deleterious effects. They alienated the nationalities from one another and from the idea of the unified state. They also had the effect of ethnicizing Austrian politics, a consequence that carried over into the political life of the Successor states.⁽⁶⁹⁾

The limited federalism established by the Habsburg "Compromise" with the Polish aristocracy in 1869 reproduced on a smaller scale the repressive characteristics of the 1867 Compromise with the Hungarian oligarchy. The compromise gave the Polish elite complete control of Galicia and domination over Ruthenians and Jews who together constituted the majority in the province (43.7% and 11.8% respectively). As in Hungary, the Polish establishment maintained its domination and that of the Polish language-- Article 19 meant little in Galicia--through corrupt electoral practices and restrictive cultural policies. All of that transpired with the tacit approval of Habsburg authorities in return for Polish support of the government in the Austrian *Reichsrat*.⁽⁷⁰⁾ Ad hoc compromises such as those between the Czechs and Germans in Moravia in 1905 and between five nationalities--none of which possessed a majority--in Bukovina in 1910, were, as Robert Luft has shown for the Moravian Compromise, the products of conditions unique to the two provinces and not applicable in Bohemia or elsewhere in Austria.⁽⁷¹⁾ Apart from its limited utility as a model for resolving nationality conflicts, the much heralded and apparently reasonable Moravian Compromise, had some very negative features. For one thing, the establishment of Czech and German national registries (*Kataster*) necessary to implement the compromise, not only required all inhabitants to choose one or the other nationality, but ethnic membership was determined by imperial authorities on the basis of "objective" criteria gathered through official investigation.⁽⁷²⁾ That practice had terrible consequences, especially for Jews, in post-1918 Austria and East Central Europe.⁽⁷³⁾ Another negative feature was the undemocratic character of the Moravian Compromise. It consolidated the positions and privileges of the Moravian aristocracy and the German minority (27%) by giving both of them a disproportionate share of political power and a virtual veto over any changes in the agreement.⁽⁷⁴⁾

The last method, at which the emperor and his advisers became masters, was the game of playing off one nationality against another, otherwise known as divide and rule. The aim of the game was "to maintain a more-or-less balanced and equitable distribution of dissatisfaction among the more important nationalities"⁽⁷⁵⁾--Germans, Czechs and Poles--

in favor of preserving the power of the crown and the government ministers, as well as maintaining the internal tranquillity necessary for sustaining the Habsburg territories as a Great Power. The drawback to that game, apart from the fact that it strengthened national elites and stoked the fires of national rivalry, was that all those playing it knew that it was a non-solution.

In the end there are not, in my view, many positive lessons that can be learned from the Habsburg empire with regard to managing ethnic conflicts or constructing a supranational state. In fact, contrary to István Deák's words quoted at the beginning of my paper, the experience of the Habsburg monarchy offers more "don't"s than "do"s. Some historians profess to see a virtue in the late Habsburg penchant for "muddling through" (*Fortwursteln*), a process characterized by the search for modest compromises.⁽⁷⁶⁾ Dennis Rusinow, a political scientist who otherwise does not see many positive lessons in the Habsburg experience, agrees. He sees the Austrian strategy of "muddling through" as "a flexible and logical nonsolution for an unsolvable national question." It could not assure the survival of the Habsburg empire but it "could someday and somewhere . . . provide a sufficient, if never satisfactory, answer" to conflicting nationalisms. He prudently adds: "All things not being equal."⁽⁷⁷⁾ I find Rusinow's argument somewhat bemusing, but even if "muddling through" has its virtues, it does not strike me as a strong recommendation of the Habsburg monarchy as a model for a multinational state. In any event, the very notion of empire precludes any possibility of realizing Palácky's idea of "a federation of nations all enjoying equal rights." The question of how to purge East Central European nationalism of its aggressive and destructive tendencies and create a multinational confederation is still open. The search for a solution must be directed, not toward the past, but toward the present and the future.

Endnotes

1. Sked, *The Decline & Fall of the Habsburg Empire*, p. 3.
2. For some observations on the continuities see Steven Beller's *Reinventing Central Europe*, Working Paper in Austrian Studies 92-5, Center for Austrian Studies, University of Minnesota, 1991, pp. 14, 17-18.
3. Steven Beller's paper cited in note 2 above, although differently focused than the present paper, contains a few suggestive statements pertinent to a reexamination.
4. David Good, *The Economic Rise of the Habsburg Empire 1750-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
5. John Komlos, *The Habsburg Empire as a Customs Union: Economic Development in Austria-Hungary in the Nineteenth-Century*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

6. Richard Rudolph, Banking and Industrialization in Austria-Hungary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).
7. Sked, The Decline & Fall of the Habsburg Empire, p. 264.
8. Ibid., 217, 223.
9. Hans Mommsen, "Die Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland und Österreich: Eine Vergleichende Betrachtung," in Robert A. Kann and Friedrich E. Prinz, eds., Deutschland und Österreich. Ein bilaterales Geschichtsbuch (Vienna/Munich: Jugend und Volk, 1980), p. 437.
10. Jiří Koalka, Tschechen im Habsburgerreich und in Europa 1815-1914: Sozialgeschichtliche Zusammenhänge der neuzeitlichen Nationsbildung und der Nationalitätenfrage in den böhmischen Ländern (Vienna/Munich: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik/R. Oldenbourg Verlag), pp. 280-291.
11. Ibid. p. 291. The Austrian government successfully put pressure on the International Olympic Committee to disallow the participation of a separate Bohemian team in the 1912 Olympics. However, Czech members of the 1912 Austrian Olympic team were identified as Austrians followed by their nationality in parentheses: *Autrice* (Tchèque). At the awards ceremonies for Czech medalists, the Bohemian flag flew under the Austrian imperial flag (ibid.).
12. Joseph Redlich, Austrian War Government (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929), pp. 62-63, 77-84. See also Christoph Führ, Das K.u.K. Armeeoberkommando und die Innenpolitik in Österreich 1914-1917 (Vienna/Graz: Hermann Böhlau, 1958), 17-24.
13. Josef Redlich, Schicksalsjahre Österreich 1908-1919. Das politische Tagebuch Josef Redlichs, ed. Fritz Fellner, 2 vols. (Vienna/Graz: Hermann Böhlau, 1953-1954).
14. Leo Valiani, The End of Austria-Hungary (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973).
15. Stefan Zweig, The World of Yesterday (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), pp. 222-224.
16. Leon Trotsky, My Life (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1930), pp. 233-234.
17. Redlich, Schicksalsjahre Österreich, I, p. 247
18. Valiani, The End of Austria-Hungary, p. 75.
19. Redlich, Schicksalsjahre Österreich, I, p. 255.
20. Valiani, The End of Austria-Hungary, p. 76.

21. Ibid., p. 93.
22. Ibid.
23. Redlich, Schicksalsjahre Österreich, I, pp. 285, 289.
24. Valiani, The End of Austria-Hungary, p. 76.
25. Ibid., p. 77.
26. Piotr. S. Wandycz, The Lands of Partitioned Poland, 1795-1918 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), pp. 329-330. See also Valiani, The End of Austria-Hungary, pp. 77-78.
27. Redlich, Schicksalsjahre Österreich, I, pp. 254, 265. See also Valiani, The End of Austria-Hungary, pp. 80-81 and Z. A. B. Zeman, The Break-Up of the Habsburg Empire 1914-1918 (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 5-13.
28. For some suggestive observations in that regard see Lancelot L. Farrar, Jr., "Reluctant Warriors: Public Opinion on War during the July Crisis 1914," East European Quarterly, 16 (Winter 1982): 417-445 (see sections on Austria-Hungary). See also Solomon Wank, "The Austrian Peace Movement and the Habsburg Ruling Elite, 1906-1914," in Charles Chatfield and Peter van den Dungen, eds., Peace Movements and Political Cultures (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), pp. 54-55.
29. Sked, The Decline & Fall of the Habsburg Empire, p. 262.
30. Ibid., p. 263.
31. Bridge, The Habsburg Monarchy Among the Great Powers, p. 345.
32. Ibid., p. 356.
33. Deák, Beyond Nationalism, p. 192.
34. Sked, The Decline & Fall of the Habsburg Empire, p. 187.
35. Ibid., p. 259.
36. Bridge, The Habsburg Monarchy Among the Great Powers, p. 341.
37. Ibid., p. 380.
38. The memorandum may be found in Stephan Verosta, "The German Concept of Mitteleuropa, 1916-1918 and Its Contemporary Critics," in Robert A. Kann, et. al., eds., The Habsburg Empire in World War I: Essays on the Intellectual, Military, Political, and

Economic Aspects of the Habsburg War Effort (Boulder, CO: East European Quarterly Monographs, 1977), pp. 205-220, here p. 210.

39. Helmut Rumpler, "Die Rolle der Dynastie im Vielvölkerstaat des 19. Jahrhunderts," in Herwig Wolfram and Walter Pohl, ed., Probleme der Geschichte Österreichs und Ihrer Darstellung (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1991), pp. 165-175, here p. 168.

40. Palácky's letter is printed in Charles and Barbara Jelavich, eds., The Habsburg Monarchy: Toward a Multinational Empire or National States? (New York: Rinehart & Company, 1959), pp. 18-22. On Palácky's attitude toward Austria as a multinational state see, Koalka, Tschechen im Habsburgerreich und in Europa, pp. 175-200. See also Robert A. Kann, The Multinational Empire: Nationalism and National Reform in the Habsburg Monarchy 1848-1918 2 vols., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), I, pp. 175-178.

41. The Manifesto is printed in Jelavich, eds., The Multinational Empire, pp. 22-23.

42. On the Kremsier parliament and constitution see Kann, The Multinational Empire, II, pp. 21-39. See also Koalka, Tschechen im Habsburgerreich und Europa, pp. 139-143, 191-192.

43. Josef Redlich, Das Österreichische Staats- und Reichsproblem, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Der Neue Geist Verlag, 1920, 1926), I, pt. 1, p. 320.

44. See, for example, Sked, The Decline & Fall of the Habsburg Empire, p. 144.

45. The quoted words are from a small book, The Idea of the Austrian State, which Palácky published in 1865. The English translation is in S. Harrison Thomson, Czechoslovakia in European History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 215.

46. The quotation is from Palácky's book cited in note 45 above. The English translation is in Thomson, Czechoslovakia in European History, p. 215.

47. This was true even of Slovak and Slovene political leaders. See the chapter on the two nationalities in Adam Wandruszka and Peter Urbanitsch, eds., Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918. Vol. III, pt. 2, Die Völker des Reiches (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1980). See especially p. 779 of the chapter on the Slovaks and p. 804 of that on the Slovenes. My review essay on the entire volume contains observations relevant to the present paper. See Solomon Wank, "The Growth of Nationalism in the Habsburg Monarchy 1848-1918," East Central Europe, 10, pts 1-2 (1983): 165-179, esp. pp. 173-174.

48. See Koalka, Tschechen im Habsburgerreich und in Europa, pp. 195-196.

49. Alexander Motyl, "From Imperial Decay to Imperial Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Empire in Comparative Perspective," in Richard L. Rudolph and David F. Good, eds., Nationalism and Empire: The Habsburg Monarchy and the Soviet Union (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), pp. 15-43, here p. 18. On the theory of empire as a specific form of political structure see, in addition to Moytl's essay, Michael W. Doyle, Empires (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 19-47, 123-138.

50. Moytl, "From Imperial Decay to Imperial Collapse," pp. 18-19.

51. Ibid., pp. 17-19.

52. Sked, The Decline & Fall of the Habsburg Empire, pp. 264-265.

53. A. J. P. Taylor, "The Failure of the Habsburg Monarchy, in Taylor, ed., Europe: Grandeur and Decline (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 132. The essay is a review of Robert A. Kann, The Multinational Empire (see note 40 above).

54. Gustav Graf Kálnoky, Memorandum. Die Nationalitätenfrage in Oesterreich-Ungarn in ihrer Rückwirkung auf die aeussere Politik der Monarchie. The memorandum is printed in two places: Barbara Jelavich, "Foreign Policy and the National Question in the Habsburg Empire: A Memorandum of Kálnoky," Austrian History Yearbook, 6-7 (1970-1971): 147-159, and Ernst Rutkowski, ed., Briefe und Dokumente zur Geschichte der österreichisch-ungarischen Monarchie, pt. 1 (Munich/Vienna: R. Oldenbourg, 1983), pp. 490-500. The memorandum is discussed in Solomon Wank, "Foreign Policy and the Nationality Problem in Austria-Hungary, 1867-1914." Austrian History Yearbook, 3, pt. 3 (1967): 38-41, 45.

55. Otto Brunner, "Das Haus Österreich und die Donaumonarchie," Südost-Forschungen, 14 (1955): 123-124, 126-127, 140-144.

56. Rumpler, "Die Rolle der Dynastie im Vielvölkerstaat," p. 174. See also Brunner, "Das Haus Österreich und die Donaumonarchie," pp. 132-134.

57. Sked, The Decline & Fall of the Habsburg Empire, p. 266.

58. Brigitte Hamann, "Die Habsburger und die deutsche Frage im 19. Jahrhundert," in Heinrich Lutz und Helmut Rumpler, eds., Österreich und die deutsche Frage im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1982), p. 230.

59. Ibid.

60. Bridge, The Habsburg Monarchy Among the Great Powers, pp. 360-361.

61. In this regard see the penetrating observations of Hermann Broch in Broch, Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time: The European Imagination 1860-1920, ed. and trans., Michael Steinberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 71-81. See also Carl

E. Schorske, "Die Geburt des Möglichkeitsmenschen: Wien als Nährboden der Moderne in der Auflösung des Alten Reiches," Die Presse, Sonderausgaben, Sarajewo-Ursachen, Folgen und Lehren, Vienna June 27/28, 1964, p. XIV.

62. Dennison Rusinow, "Ethnic Politics in the Habsburg Monarchy and Successor States: Three Answers to the National Question," in Rudolph and Good, eds., Nationalism and Empire, pp. 243-267, esp. 249-256.

63. Vol. III, pt. 2, "Die Völker des Reiches," p. 1338 (see note 47 above).

64. On Hungarian nationality policy see Zoltán Szász, "Die Ziele und Möglichkeiten der Ungarischen Regierungen in der Nationalitätenpolitik im 19. Jahrhundert," in Ferenc Glatz und Ralph Melville, eds., Gesellschaft, Politik und Verwaltung in der Habsburgermonarchie 1830-1918 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1987), pp. 327-341. See also, Kann, The Multinational Empire, II, pp. 131-141.

65. On nationality law and policies in Austria see Gerald Stourzh, "Die Gleichberechtigung der Volksstämme als Verfassungsprinzip 1848-1918," in Wandruszka and Urbanitsch, eds., Die Völker des Reiches (see note 47 above), pp. 975-1206. A revised and enlarged version of the latter has been published under the title, Die Gleichberechtigung der Nationalitäten in der Verfassung und Verwaltung Österreichs 1848-1918 (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1985).

66. On Article 19 see, Stourzh, "Die Gleichberechtigung der Volksstämme," pp. 1011-1016. On Article 21 of the Kremsier constitution see *ibid.*, pp. 983-986, esp. 985.

67. Stourzh, "Die Gleichberechtigung die Volksstämme," p. 1206.

68. Robert A. Kann, "Zur Problematik der Nationalitätenfrage in der Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918," Die Völker des Reiches (see note 47 above), p. 1309.

69. Stourzh, "Die Gleichberechtigung der Volkstämme," p. 1203 and Kann, "zur Problematik der Nationalitätenfrage," p. 1331. See also Stourzh's remarks in his 1989 Kann Lecture, "The Multinational Empire Revisited: Reflections on Late Imperial Austria," Austrian History Yearbook, 23 (1992): 19-20.

70. Wandycz, The Lands of Partitioned Poland, pp. 219-228; Kann, The Multinational Empire, II, pp. 231-232.

71. Robert R. Luft, "Die Mittelpartei des mährischen Grossgrundbesites 1879-1918," in Ferdinand Seibt, ed., Die Chance der Verständigung. Absichten und Ansätze zu Übernationale Zusammenarbeit in den böhmischen Ländern 1848-1918 (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1987), pp. 218, 236. On the Moravian compromise see *ibid.*, pp. 215-221; Kann, The Multinational Empire, pp. 207-209; Stourzh, Die Gleichberechtigung der Nationalitäten, pp. 213-229; and Koalka, Tschechen im Habsburgerreich und in Europa, pp. 159-164.

72. Stourzh, "The Multinational Empire Revisited," p. 20.
73. Ibid.
74. Luft, "Die Mittelpartei des mährischen Grossgrundbesitz," pp. 218-221.
75. Rusinow, "Ethnic Politics in the Habsburg Monarchy and Successor States," p. 254.
76. Rumpler, "Die Rolle der Dynastie im Vielvölkerstaat," p. 173.
77. Rusinow, "Ethnic Politics in the Habsburg Monarchy and Successor States," 256.