

Austria's Ultimatum to Serbia

The Austro-Hungarian government waited three weeks following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand - heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne - before issuing its formal response. Seizing the opportunity presented by Ferdinand's assassination, the Austro-Hungarian government decided to settle a long-standing score with near-neighbor Serbia. Austria-Hungary's response on 7 July, - its ultimatum - comprised a lengthy list of demands intended to be followed by the Serbian government. It took as its basis an assumption that the Serbian government was implicated in events at Sarajevo. The ultimatum was presented by the Austrian government on Thursday 23 July 1914. A response was demanded within two days, by 25 July. The text of the ultimatum follows, as does the Serbian response, which virtually conceded all demands made by the Austro-Hungarians except one or two minor clauses. Nonetheless, war was declared by Austria-Hungary shortly afterwards.

Austria-Hungary's Ultimatum to Serbia

The Royal Serbian Government shall undertake:

- (1) To suppress any publication which incites to hatred and contempt of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy;
- (2) To dissolve immediately the group named "Narodna Odbrana," to confiscate all its means of propaganda, and to proceed in the same manner against other societies and their branches in Serbia which engage in propaganda against the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.
- (3) To eliminate without delay from public instruction in Serbia propaganda against Austria-Hungary;
- (4) To remove from the military service all officers guilty of propaganda against the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy;
- (5) To accept the collaboration in Serbia of representatives of the Austro-Hungarian Government for the suppression of the subversive movement directed against the territorial integrity of the Monarchy;
- (6) To take judicial proceedings against accessories to the plot of the 28th of June who are on Serbian territory; delegates of the Austro-Hungarian Government will take part in the investigation relating thereto;
- (7) To proceed without delay to the arrest of Major Voija Tankositch and of the individual named Milan Ciganovitch, a Serbian State employee, who have been compromised by the results of the magisterial inquiry at Serajevo;
- (8) To prevent by effective measures the cooperation of the Serbian authorities in the illicit traffic in arms and explosives across the frontier;
- (9) To furnish the Imperial and Royal Government with explanations regarding the unjustifiable utterances of high Serbian officials, both in Serbia and abroad, who, notwithstanding their official position, have not hesitated since the crime of the 28th of June to express themselves in interviews in terms of hostility to the Austro-Hungarian Government; and, finally,
- (10) To notify the Imperial and Royal Government without delay of the execution of the measures comprised under the preceding heads.

The Austro-Hungarian Government expect the reply of the Royal Government at the latest by 5 o'clock on Saturday evening the 25th of July.

The Serbian Reply

(Preamble) ...[Serbia] cannot be held responsible for manifestations of a private character, such as articles in the press and the peaceable work of societies ... [The Serbian government] have been pained and surprised at the statements, according to which members of the Kingdom of Serbia are supposed to have participated in the preparations of the crime...

[However, Serbia is] prepared to hand over for trial any Serbian subject . .of whose complicity in the crime of Sarajevo proofs are forthcoming [as well as officially condemn all propaganda against A-H].

[Serbia will] introduce ... a provision into the press law providing for the most severe punishment of incitement to hatred and contempt of the [A-H] Monarchy...

[The Serbian govt.] possesses no proof ... that the Narodna Odbrana and other similar societies have committed up to the present any criminal act of this nature ... Nevertheless, [Serbia] will ... dissolve the Narodna Obrana and every other society which...

[Serbia will] eliminate without delay from public instruction ... everything that serves or might serve to foment the propaganda against [A-H], whenever [Austria] furnish them with facts and proofs...

[Serbia] also agree to remove from the military service all such persons as the judicial inquiry may have proved to be guilty of acts directed against the integrity of the territory of [A-H], and they expect [Austria] to communicate ... the names and acts of these officers for the purpose of the proceedings which are to be taken against them.

[The Serbian govt. does] not clearly grasp the meaning or the scope of the demand ... that Serbia shall undertake to accept the collaboration of the representatives of [A-H], but they declare that they will admit such collaboration as agrees with the principle of international law, with criminal procedure, and with good neighborly relations.

...As regards the participation in this inquiry [which Serbia intends to hold] of Austro-Hungarian agents... [Serbia] cannot accept such an arrangement, as it would be a violation of the Constitution...

[States it has not yet been possible to arrest one of the persons named; request proofs of guilt from Austria]

[agrees to reinforce measures against illegal trafficking of arms and explosives across the frontier with Bosnia-Herzegovina]

[offers explanations of anti-Austrian comments by Serb officials if Austria sends examples of their actually having been made]

[Serbia will duly notify the measures taken, but if Austria is not satisfied with the reply] the Serbian government . . are ready . . to accept a pacific understanding, either by referring this question to the decision of the International Tribunal of the Hague [i.e., the World Court], or to the Great Powers...