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## The Austro-Hungarian Occupation of Serbia as a "Civilizing Mission" (1915–1918)

**Abstract:** This paper analyses the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Serbia during the First World War and the activity of the occupation administration of the Military Governorate in the context of its "civilizing mission". It points to the aspects of the occupation that reveal the Austro-Hungarians' self-perception as bringers of culture and civilization as conducive to creating an ideological basis for a war against Serbia. The paper also presents their outlook on the world in the age of empires and their idea of establishing what they saw as a more acceptable cultural basis of Serbian national identity shaped primarily by loyalty to the Austro-Hungarian Emperor and King and the ideals of order and discipline. The process is studied through analysing the occupation policies aimed at depoliticizing the public sphere by closing the pre-war institutions of culture and education and introducing educational patterns primarily based on the Austro-Hungarian experience in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**Keywords:** Serbia in the First World War, Austro-Hungarian occupation 1915–1918, Imperial and Royal Military Governorate, civilizing mission, cultural and educational policies in the First World War

After the ultimately abortive Austro-Hungarian invasions of 1914 and early 1915, the exhausted Serbian forces were unable to resist the new attack by the Central Powers, this time joined by Bulgaria. In the late autumn of 1915, the Serbian armies started to retreat across Montenegro and Albania.<sup>1</sup> In the months following the occupation of the Kingdom of Serbia, most of its terri-

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<sup>1</sup> The decision to withdraw across Albania was made between 25 November and 1 December, see D. T. Bataković, *Srbija i Balkan. Albanija, Bugarska i Grčka 1914–1918* (Novi Sad: Prometej, and Belgrade: RTS, 2016), 58–60; M. Ković, *Jedini put: Sile Antante i odbrana Srbije 1915. godine* (Belgrade: Filip Višnjić, 2016), 218–229; A. Mitrović, *Srbija u I svetskom ratu* (Belgrade: Stubovi kulture, 2004), 208–216; M. Radojević and Lj. Dimić, *Srbija u Velikom ratu 1914–1918: kratka istorija* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga and Beogradski forum za svet ravnopravnih, 2014), 183–185. For a detailed overview of military operations see Živko G. Pavlović, *Rat Srbije sa Austro-Ugarskom, Nemačkom i Bugarskom 1915. godine* (Belgrade: Naučno delo, 1968).

tory was, after strenuous negotiations, divided between Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria, while Germany took control over some strategic points and resources, keeping it throughout the war.<sup>2</sup>

The future fate of defeated Serbia was yet to be determined. During the war the political and military elites of Austria-Hungary, Germany and Bulgaria considered various solutions, ranging from the abolition of its status of a sovereign state and partition to partial annexations to the unification of smaller, landlocked, mountainous parts of Serbia and Montenegro into a petty kingdom ruled by the Archduke Maximilian of Habsburg, brother of the Emperor and King Karl.<sup>3</sup>

Common to all this political and strategic planning was the destruction of Serbia's ability to pursue an independent foreign policy after the war. For example, in the spring of 1917, the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister, István Burián, summed up the aims of the occupation: to establish a harsh regime which would break "Serbentum" (Serbdom) and thwart its aspirations for as long as possible. The Austro-Hungarian Joint Ministerial Council with Burián presiding found that the main trouble with the Serbian question was its "nationalpolitische" (national-political) nature because of the strong influence of "grosserbischen Agitation" (Greater Serbian agitation) among the people.<sup>4</sup>

In practice, the Austro-Hungarian occupation zone encompassing the northern, western and most of the central pre-war Kingdom of Serbia, consisted of eleven counties, including the capital, Belgrade, and the other larger towns except Niš and Skoplje. The "k. und k. Militär-Generalgouvernement in Serbien" (Imperial und Royal Military Governorate General in Serbia), which was its official name, separated the military and civil administrations with the principal aim to establish control over the population and ensure material resources for the war effort of the Danube Monarchy.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> M. B. Fried, *Austro-Hungarian War Aims in the Balkans during World War I* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 111–118; A. Mitrović, *Prodor na Balkan i Srbija 1908–1918* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2011<sup>2</sup>), 470–478.

<sup>3</sup> Mitrović, *Srbija*, 273–280.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 317; *Protokolle des Gemeinsamen Ministerrates der Österreichisch-Ungarischen Monarchie (1914–1918)*, prefaced and compiled by M. Komjáthy (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1966), doc. 15, 355–356. The occupiers approached it by "eradicating national politics" using the establishment of "discipline and order", J. E. Gumz, *The Resurrection and Collapse of Empire in Habsburg Serbia, 1914–1918* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 62.

<sup>5</sup> D. Djordjević, "The Austro-Hungarian Occupation Regime in Serbia and Its Break-down in 1918", *Balcanica XLVI* (2015), 110–111, originally published as „Austro-ugarski okupacioni režim u Srbiji i njegov slom 1918. godine, in *Naučni skup u povodu 50-godišnjice raspada Austro-ugarske monarhije i stvaranja jugoslavenske države* (Zagreb: Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 1968), 205–226; M. Ristović, "Occupation during and after the war (South East Europe)", in *1914–1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World*

The first military governor, from late 1915, officially from the beginning of January 1916, was Johann Ulrich Count of Salis-Seewis (1862–1940), while the first civilian commissioner, from 17 January, was Lajos Thallóczy. After July 1916, Salis-Seewis was succeeded by Adolf Baron von Remen. The administrative division of the occupied zone was based on pre-war Serbia’s counties and the administrative structure had four chief departments: military, political, economic and judicial.<sup>6</sup> As has been noted, the main objective of the occupiers was economic exploitation. The Austro-Hungarians found it to be successful since even in a largely depopulated Serbia subjected to draconian measures they obtained a food surplus which contributed not just to the Austro-Hungarian war effort but also to the starving home front.<sup>7</sup>

Upon arriving in Serbia, Governor Salis-Seewis described the Austro-Hungarian soldiers as pioneers of Central European culture which was being opened to Serbia by their victories.<sup>8</sup> Apart from pursuing material interests from the beginning of the occupation, the Austro-Hungarian administration’s self-labelled “civilizing mission” was designed to denationalize the population by closing the institutions of education and culture and by suppressing the intellectuals. It should be underlined that the definition of an intellectual was a very broad one. In an official document of the Governorate, the targeted persons ranged from railway clerks to members of the Royal Serbian Academy.<sup>9</sup> So, why can the Austro-Hungarian occupation be defined as a civilizing mission in the context of the Age of Imperialism? First, as pointed out by Edward Said in his book *Culture and Imperialism*, the culture of imperialism was never secret; it was

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War, eds. U. Daniel et al. (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2014–10–08. DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10481), 3–4.

<sup>6</sup> Djordjević, “Austro-Hungarian Occupation Regime”, 111.

<sup>7</sup> Mitrović, *Srbija*, 273; M. Rauchensteiner, *The First World War and the End of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Vienna–Cologne–Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2014), 732–733. Although the “brutal terror” abated by the spring of 1916, fierce measures were never ceased and deportations of people were constant, Mitrović, *Srbija*, 313.

<sup>8</sup> *Beogradske novine/Belgrader Nachrichten* (*Belegade Newspaper*, hereafter *BN*) no. 4, 9 January 1916. Serbia was also considered as a country which had barely passed from an uncultured age to a “so-so” civilization in the nineteenth century, *BN* no. 10, 23 January 1916.

<sup>9</sup> Arhiv Srbije [Archives of Serbia], Belgrade, Vojno-generalni guvernman [Military-General Governorate; hereafter *VGG*], VIII/1168, Statistische Daten über die Serbische Intelligenz im Bereiches Militargeneralgouvernement in Serbien. Also *VGG*, VIII/647, Statistische Daten über die Intelligenz, Nr. 7042, 22 August 1916. The collected data included every person’s workplace, age, religion, marital status, role in political life, material situation and knowledge of foreign languages. See also B. Mladenović, “Srpska elita u Prvom svetskom ratu”, *Istorijski časopis XLIX* (2002), 249.

public and open about its goals.<sup>10</sup> It had a space in public discourse shaped by the concepts such as “inferior and conquered races”, “dependence” and “submission of peoples”.<sup>11</sup>

It was definitively so in the case of occupied Serbia, while the analogous policies of, for example, Bulgaria can be characterized as forced Bulgarianization.<sup>12</sup> The Austro-Hungarian occupiers openly described themselves as bringers of culture (“Kulturträgers”) and European civilization.<sup>13</sup> In European context, Serbia was part of “internal colonialism”, which can also be traced in the regions such as Ireland, Brittany, the Balkans or southern Italy.<sup>14</sup>

If we look at the other occupation regimes in Europe, we can see that the German occupation of Belgium, for example, was marked by a strong insistence on Belgian culture being inferior to German “Kultur”.<sup>15</sup> The same status was reserved for the Slav populations of Eastern Europe, Polish, Ukrainian and Belarusian, which were subjected to an authoritarian colonial-style occupation and racial stereotyping. The German occupation strategy promoted the concepts of “Ordnung” (order) and “Bildung” (best understood as “proper” education) in order to establish “Kultur” (German-shaped national identities). So, in the German “Ober Ost” the civilizing role of the German Empire in Eastern Europe was to shape local cultures through new educational institutions. Such cultural policies also sought to instil a sense of mission in German soldiers.<sup>16</sup> In a similar manner, the Italian authorities had a patronizing attitude towards the Slovenians based on the notion of a presumed superiority of Italian culture.<sup>17</sup> I would

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<sup>10</sup> “Imperialism’s culture was not invisible, nor did it conceal its worldly affiliations and interests. There is a sufficient clarity in the culture’s major lines for us to remark the often scrupulous notations recorded there, and also to remark how they have not been paid much attention”, E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage books, 1994), xxi.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>12</sup> Bataković, *Srbija i Balkan*, 308–310; D. R. Živojinović, “Serbia and Montenegro: The Home Front, 1914–1918”, in *East Central European Society in World War I*, eds. B. K. Kiraly and N. F. Dreisziger (New York: East European Monographs, 1985), 251; Ristović: “Occupation during and after the War”, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Mitrović, *Srbija*, 318.

<sup>14</sup> A. Porter, *European Imperialism, 1860–1914* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994) 7.

<sup>15</sup> G. Corni, “Occupation during the War”, in: *1914–1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, eds. U. Daniel et al. (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2014–10–08. DOI: 6.10.15463/ie1418.10119), 6.

<sup>16</sup> V. G. Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 113–115.

<sup>17</sup> P. Svoljšak and B. Godeša, “Italian interwar administration of Slovenian ethnic territory: Italian ethnic policy”, in *Frontwechsel: Österreich-Ungarn “Großer Krieg” im Vergleich*, eds. W. Dornik, J. Wallezek and S. Wedrac (Vienna–Cologne–Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2014), 304–305.

argue that the Austro-Hungarian occupation had similar goals. This was clearly outlined in the *Beogradske novine/Belgrader Nachrichten* (Belgrade Newspaper), the official gazette of the occupying force.<sup>18</sup> The mission was fed on Austro-Hungarian elites’ pre-1914 beliefs about Serbia as a nation of “king slayers”, a semi-Oriental country ranking below Central-European cultural standards.

Among the Governorate’s first measures taken in the field of cultural and educational policies was the prompt closure of the University of Belgrade. At the same time, the central national institutions such as the Royal Serbian Academy, the National Museum and the National Library were robbed of historical artefacts and art collections in their possession. These were transferred to Governorate administration buildings or shipped out of the country.<sup>19</sup> The aftermath of the closure was marked by a dispute between the military authorities, which wanted the seized artefacts to be sent to Vienna, and the civil authorities, especially those in Budapest, Zagreb and Sarajevo, which wanted a share for themselves in order to be able to compete for the position of a new South-Slav cultural centre.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the existing elementary and high schools were to be shut down and replaced with new ones which would operate with different curricula.<sup>21</sup>

Besides the formal dissolution of all Serbian cultural institutions and various public associations, the method of the civilizing mission included a ban on the use of the Cyrillic alphabet and its replacement by the Latin alphabet.<sup>22</sup> The Cyrillic alphabet was labelled as “staatsgefährlich” (dangerous to

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<sup>18</sup> In 1918, for example, the newspaper had a circulation of 120,000 copies in Serbian and 30,000 in German, T. Scheer, “Manifestation österreichisch-ungarischer Besatzungsmacht in Belgrad (1916–1918)”, in *Der Erste Weltkrieg auf dem Balkan. Perspektiven der Forschung*, ed. J. Angelow (Berlin: be.bra wissenschaft verlag, 2011), 302.

<sup>19</sup> VGG VIII/1759, 8 November – 10 December 1915, letters exchanged between the president of the Hungarian government and the High Command on setting up a commission tasked with searching for and classifying museum artefacts; Scheer, “Manifestation österreichisch-ungarischer Besatzungsmacht”, 299; V. Stojančević, *Srbija i srpski narod u ratu i okupaciji 1914–1918. godine* (Belgrade: Gutenbergova galaksija, 2016), 95; Mitrović, *Srbija*, 322.

<sup>20</sup> C. Marcheti, “Zwischen Denkmalpflege und ethnographischem Interesse. Die Erforschung von Kunstdenkmälern in den besetzten Balkangebieten durch österreichisch-ungarische Wissenschaftler während des Ersten Weltkriegs”, in *Apologeten der Vernichtung oder “Kunstschützer”? Kunsthistoriker der Mittelmächte im Ersten Weltkrieg*, eds. von R. Born and B. Störckuh (Cologne–Weimar–Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2017), 255–269; Ristović, “Occupation during and after the War”, 5.

<sup>21</sup> VGG VIII, no. 64, 17 March 1916, on a plan to establish elementary schools with the request to local commands to determine the number of schools and teachers.

<sup>22</sup> VGG VIII, no. 597, 2 June 1916. The official ban was to be put in force as of 1 January 1917, B. Trifunović, *Život pod okupacijom: čačanski okrug 1915–1918* (Čačak: Međuopštinski

the state).<sup>23</sup> All books that were designated as suspicious were removed from bookstores and not only from public but from private libraries.<sup>24</sup> The reading material perceived as questionable dealt with subjects from Serbian history or Austro-Serbian relations. Moreover, the number of bookstores in pre-war Serbia was described as too numerous in proportion to the economic strength and cultural level of Serbian society.<sup>25</sup> Secret agents were sent out in search of prohibited volumes and a possible underground book market.<sup>26</sup> Schoolbooks and books in French, English, Russian and Italian were also banned. Also, all printing presses in Belgrade were confiscated and transferred to the premises of the *Beogradske novine*, and Cyrillic printing press type letters were systematically destroyed.<sup>27</sup> The decision to replace the Julian calendar, in force in pre-war Serbia, by the Gregorian one was described by the *Beogradske novine* as an act of ushering the Serbian people in the civilized world, in contrast with their previous “cultural backwardness”.<sup>28</sup>

As part of the campaign against the political consciousness of Serbian citizens, all Belgrade streets named after the persons perceived as significant for national identity were given new neutral names such as Lower, Narrow or Garden Street.<sup>29</sup> All street names containing toponyms located in Austro-Hungarian lands, Montenegro and Albania were also to be changed and so were those named after members of the Karadjordjević dynasty and their supporters, especially those who had fought in the first phase of the Serbian revolution against the Ottomans led by Karadjordje Petrović, the founder of the ruling Serbian

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istorijski arhiv, 2010), 44–45; B. Mladenović, *Grad u austrougarskoj okupacionoj zoni u Srbiji od 1916. do 1918. Godine* (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2000), 111.

<sup>23</sup> Djordjević, “Austro-Hungarian Occupation Regime”, 118–119.

<sup>24</sup> E.g., the Orthodox Prayer book, which among other things contained a song dedicated to Saint Sava of Serbia and mentioned some territories of Austria-Hungary, was banned being seen as a part of “Greater Serbian propaganda”, VGG VIII, no. 2696, 1 March 1916; Mladenović, *Grad*, 151.

<sup>25</sup> Such a large number of bookstores was explained away as an instrument of Serbian expansionist plans, Mladenović, *Grad*, 152; D. Milikić, “Beograd pod okupacijom u Prvom svetskom ratu”, *Godišnjak grada Beograda V* (1958), 306.

<sup>26</sup> L. Lazarević, *Beleške iz okupiranog Beograda 1915–1918* (Belgrade: Jasen, 2010<sup>2</sup>), 74; Mladenović, *Grad*, 153.

<sup>27</sup> Predrag Marković, “Razaranja Beograda u Prvom svetskom ratu”, in *Srbija 1918. godine i stvaranje jugoslovenske države*, ed. Ljiljana Aleksić-Pejković (Belgrade: Istorijski institut, 1989), 49–50.

<sup>28</sup> BN no. 22, 20 February 1916.

<sup>29</sup> VGG VIII/1757, Polizeikommando, no. 1309, Verzeichnis sämtlicher Strassen, Gassen und Plätze Belgrads mit der Deutung der Namen derselben und beanragten Neubenennung; B. Mladenović, “Promena naziva ulica u Vojno-generalnom Guvernamanu”, *Istorijski časopis XLV–XLVI* (2000); Mladenović, *Grad*, 53; Milikić, “Beograd pod okupacijom”, 304.

dynasty.<sup>30</sup> The purpose of removing the aforementioned toponyms was to fragment the mental framework of Serbian national identity, reducing it to the area under occupation. The other set of changes was focused on dismantling the dynastic allegiances of Serbian citizens.

The main role of the “civilizing mission” was the education of the Serbian youth that was to be instilled with loyalty to the Emperor and appreciation for the greatness and might of the Monarchy.<sup>31</sup> The opening of the first new school in Belgrade was announced in a *Beogradske novine* article which described it as bringing “real knowledge” and “real culture” in Belgrade for the first time – a “lesson that Serbian society did not understand during the reign of Peter Karadjordjević”.<sup>32</sup> In the last year of the occupation there were eight grammar and 135 elementary schools in the Governorate.<sup>33</sup> As governor Salis-Seewis put it, the main goal was to enforce the spirit of hard discipline rather than scholarly knowledge.<sup>34</sup>

The teachers had previously attended a pedagogical course held in Belgrade in 1916 under the tutelage of Lajos Thallóczy, the civil commissioner of the Governorate and a well-known historian.<sup>35</sup> Following the course, Thallóczy put together a book providing guidelines for the future educators of the Serbian youth. The leitmotif of the book was that the central problem in Balkan politics was the “Greater Serbian idea” with its aspirations for annexing the Serb-inhabited areas of the Monarchy to Serbia.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, Austria-Hungary’s Balkan policy was presented as having no territorial expansionist agenda, quite unlike Serbia which, as a result of its “unhealthy internal development”, nur-

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<sup>30</sup> Belittling the Karadjordjević dynasty was common in the occupation press. On the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the Austrian conquest of Belgrade of 17 August 1717, the armies of Eugene of Savoy were likened to the k. und k. troops of 1915, whereas King Peter and the Serbian defenders of the city were equated with the Ottoman Sultan Ahmed III and his army depicted as backward occupiers of Europe which the Habsburg dynasty had defended then as it did now, *BN* no. 225, 17 August 1917.

<sup>31</sup> T. Scheer, *Zwischen Front und Heimat. Österreich-Ungarns Militärverwaltungen im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang 2009), 90; Ristović, “Occupation during and after the War”, 6. The chief aim of this policy was the “denationalization” of the Serbian youth, Gumz, *Resurrection and Collapse*, 74.

<sup>32</sup> *BN* no. 19, 13 February 1916; Djordjević, “Austro-Hungarian Occupation Regime”, 118.

<sup>33</sup> Djordjević, “Austro-Hungarian Occupation Regime”, 130.

<sup>34</sup> *VGG VIII*, no. 64, 14 February 1916.

<sup>35</sup> Mladenović, *Grad*, 121.

<sup>36</sup> L. v. Thalloczy, *Oesterreich-Ungarn und die Balkanländer mit besonderer Rücksicht auf das okkupierte Serbien. Historisch-politische Vorlesung gehalten an dem ersten k. u. k. militärischen Verwaltungskurse in Belgrad* (Belgrade: k.u.k. Gouvernement-Druckerei in Belgrad, 1916), 3.



tured the Greater Serbian idea.<sup>37</sup> Thallóczy also pointed out that the House of Habsburg had ever since the sixteenth century pursued the “welthistorischen Mission” of protecting not just Central Europe but Europe as a whole against the Ottoman invaders.<sup>38</sup> Thallóczy described the Slavs, the Serbs included, as a community lacking any state-building potential,<sup>39</sup> and he also claimed that during the existence of the Habsburg Kingdom of Serbia (1718–1739) nothing had been done to tie the “Bosnian, Serbian or Wallachian” elements to the Danube Monarchy. The administration had been focused solely on fiscal policy and material gains, which, in Thallóczy’s opinion, had been a mistake that should not be made again. As a result, he believed, the Serbs (and the rest of the Balkan Christians) had not been exposed to the influence of Western Europe from which they were even more remote than their Turkish masters.<sup>40</sup> Such a development gave rise to the aforementioned “unhealthy” Serbia. Finally, the ongoing conflict, Thallóczy concluded, was set off by “ungrateful” Serbia which owed its culture to the Monarchy and whose very foundation and sovereignty was the product of the benevolence of the Danube Monarchy.<sup>41</sup> These views were to be the basis of education and of the creation of a new political and cultural model for a Habsburg Serbia. The Danube Monarchy was portrayed as a benevolent power, the protector of Europe and its civilization which made Serbia indebted to it throughout history and would now succeed in bringing Serbia in the imagined circle of European culture.

Teachers were recruited almost exclusively from the ranks of Austro-Hungarian non-commissioned officers; later on, teaching staff was brought from the Monarchy. History was banished from the curriculum and the name Serbia was not mentioned at all.<sup>42</sup> The importance that the occupiers attached to their educational policy can be seen from the fact that Serbian personnel were not hired even amidst the most drastic shortage of teachers.<sup>43</sup> The only exception were religion classes: they were taught by Serbian Orthodox priests

<sup>37</sup> For a short summary see V. Stojančević, “Lajos–Ludwig von Thallóczy as Head of Pedagogical Course in the Occupied Belgrade”, in *The Serbs and the First World War 1914–1918*, ed. Dragoljub R. Živojinović (Belgrade: SASA, 2015), 337–340.

<sup>38</sup> Thallóczy, *Oestereich-Ungarn und die Balkanländer*, 60. There was also his “companion book” with the relevant literature: *Zur Geschichte Serbiens. Anhang zu den Vorlesungen des k. u. k. Verwaltungskurses vom 1. August – 25. November* (Budapest: Magyar Királyi Állami Nyodda, 1916).

<sup>39</sup> Thallóczy, *Oestereich-Ungarn und die Balkanländer*, 20.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 83.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 107–108.

<sup>42</sup> Mladenović, *Grad*, 147; Gumz, *Resurrection and Collapse*, 76.

<sup>43</sup> In some cases a Serbian teacher could teach a class but only in the presence of a “Croatian-speaking” officer, VGG VIII, no. 242, 3 February 1916; Gumz, *Resurrection and Collapse*, 76.

but in the mandatory presence and under the supervision of Austro-Hungarian army chaplains; moreover, the language of instruction was not Serbian but Old Slavonic. At first schoolbooks were brought from Croatia and Slavonia, and then from the province of Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>44</sup> High school students were often described as poisoned by state and dynastic sentiment that had to be suppressed. The overall conclusion was that the ideal educational model for Serbia would be the one used in the province of Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>45</sup>

What were the limitations of the civilizing mission? The harsh occupation regime, from drastic deportations to the seizure of artworks and rare books, gave little assurance that the Governorate cared about the “cultural level” of the population. Understaffed schools were not efficient enough, and some of the teaching personnel, such as Slovak officers or Croat female teachers, often focused merely on formal teaching instead of on instilling loyalty, which, overall, undermined the official educational policy. Moreover, 105,000 children could not attend school at all because of a lack of space.<sup>46</sup> One of the most striking measures, the ban on the use of the Cyrillic alphabet, was most efficiently implemented in Belgrade as a result of the presence of the central occupation institutions in comparison with the rest of the occupied territories.<sup>47</sup>

In conclusion, what makes the Austro-Hungarian “civilizing mission” in Serbia during the First World War an important research topic is the fact that it opens up the possibility of understanding the premeditated motivations of the occupation administration. In this paper it has been looked at in the broader European context of wartime cultural policies and as part of the discourse repertoire of European imperialism.

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<sup>44</sup> In the meantime, textbooks produced in Serbia were to be stripped of all political, historical or dynastic content, VGG VIII, no. 78, 27 January 1916. For the use of textbooks from Bosnia see VGG, VIII, no. 337, 19 February 1916; VGG VIII, no. 360, a letter to the government in Sarajevo requesting elementary and high school textbooks in the Latin alphabet; Lj. Popović, “Osnovno školstvo pod okupacijom”, in *Srbija 1918. godine i stvaranje jugoslovenske države*, ed. Lj. Aleksić Pejčević (Belgrade: Istorijski institut, 1991), 39.

<sup>45</sup> VGG VIII/1409, no. 1428, 26 July 1916; R. Okey, *Taming Balkan Nationalism. The Habsburg “Civilizing Mission” in Bosnia, 1878–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 252–255.

<sup>46</sup> D. Djordjević, “The Austro-Hungarian Occupation Regime in Serbia”, 130.

<sup>47</sup> The ban was eventually lifted for practical reasons – the need to communicate with the population more efficiently – even though the occupiers lacked sufficient personnel proficient in reading the Cyrillic alphabet, T. Scheer, “The perfect opportunity to shape national symbols? Austro-Hungarian occupation regimes during the First World War in the Adriatic and the Balkans”, *Acta Histriae* 22/3 (2014); Milikić, “Beograd pod okupacijom”, 304.

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