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FIREARMS POLICY IN HABSBURG BOSNIA DURING THE CRISIS (1912–1918)

The Austro-Hungarian administration in Bosnia and Herzegovina maintained a strict policy of civilian firearms control to ensure the stability of the established order. Although significant for understanding the security landscape, the specific dynamics of this policy during the turbulent period from the beginning of the Balkan Wars to the dissolution of the Monarchy remain under-examined. This paper examines how Austro-Hungarian authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina managed civilian possession of firearms in the period, revealing how the firearms policy became increasingly repressive, but failed to mitigate the rising insecurity. Through an analysis of scholarly literature and unpublished archival materials, the study demonstrates that the tightening of measures during the crisis led, for the first time, to the differentiated treatment of the population — in terms of firearms policy — along confessional lines, albeit temporarily, then to a complete prohibition on civilian firearms possession, followed by more extensive control of illegal activities, illustrating both successes and failures. These findings underscore how firearms control served as an indicator of the Monarchy's declining authority in the South Slavic lands during the First World War.

Keywords: Austria-Hungary; Bosnia and Herzegovina; firearms policy; Balkan Wars; First World War

The 1878 Congress of Berlin transferred the administration of Bosnia and Herzegovina from the Ottoman Empire to Austria-Hungary, thus ending the centuries-old rule of the former in these lands. The year marked a considerable shift in the historical development of Bosnia and Herzegovina, introducing modernity to the “Sleeping beauty” (Ruthner 2021). The new authorities wasted no time in establishing a system which would best fit their intentions and ways of governance. In principle, what was useful from the old system was kept, while changes were introduced where the old ways were no longer suitable. In this quest of the new authorities to settle the affairs in their newly acquired possessions, certain customs, traditions, or habits stood in the way. One of them was a tradition of possessing and carrying weapons, both bladed and firearms. This tradition, clearly noticeable in many accounts before 1878 (Creagh 1876; Harrison 1876; Jukić 1953; Jukić 1973; Mažuranić 1842; Giljferding, 1972; Popovic, 1878; Roskiewicz; 1868; Skene 1853; Spencer 1851), and vividly sung in the epic poetry (Buturović 1976, 1990; Frndić 1969; Jukić & Martić 1958; Marjanović 1864; Vrčević 1890), found itself challenged by the new, modern system of rule.

The significance of this clash lies not only in the technicalities of disarmament but in what it reveals about the nature of imperial stability. For the Austro-Hungarian administration, the regulation of firearms was a significant pillar of its security architecture — a tool intended to transform a frontier society into a pacified, modern province. However, as the Monarchy moved toward the tumultuous years of the early 20th century, this policy became a litmus test for the state’s authority. In the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, analysing the firearms policy is important for understanding how a modern state responded to security threats and how it eventually transitioned into a militarised regime under the pressure of the First World War.

While the Austro-Hungarian period in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1878–1918) remains one of the most thoroughly examined eras in the country’s history, the specific dynamics of firearms policy toward the civilian population have remained on the periphery of historical inquiry. Extensive scholarly work has been dedicated to the Monarchy’s administrative reforms, economic modernisation, and the complex web of national and political movements that defined the period. Similarly, the broader themes of the Balkan and July Crises, the military operations of the First World War, and the eventual dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy have been analysed from diverse perspectives — ranging from diplomatic and political history to social and cultural studies. While many studies touch upon the general security measures, they rarely focus on the regulation, possession, and control of firearms as a primary subject of research. This specific aspect of state control has

largely failed to attract the sustained attention of historians, often being overshadowed by other topics. Consequently, the transition from a regulated system of firearm permits to a repressive state during the 1912–1918 crisis remains a gap in the existing literature.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to contribute to filling the gap by examining the evolution of Austro-Hungarian firearms control in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the critical period of 1912–1918. By analysing the shift from the 1912 Balkan Crisis to the 1918 turmoil, this research seeks to demonstrate how a policy originally designed for stabilisation became increasingly repressive, yet ultimately failed to mitigate rising insecurity, and — within a broader range of causes and effects — the eventual downfall of the Monarchy.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIREARM POLICY

The establishment of the Austro-Hungarian rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina was forged in a military action. The 1878 campaign was simultaneously an occupation and a pacification. Areas taken by the Imperial and Royal Army immediately went through the pacification process. No gaps of resistance could be left behind. An integral, indeed important, segment of this pacification process was disarmament of the population. The idea of disarmament was not a one-way street; it developed gradually and depended on the circumstances (Gjurgjević 1910; Gavranović 1956).¹ These turned out to be violent and dangerous to the Imperial and Royal soldiers, and thus, the disarmament was eventually decided to be general and complete.² The conquered could not be left with weapons in their hands, which could threaten the peace and security in the newly acquired possessions of the Monarchy. Therefore, the disarmament action immediately followed, and in some cases even preceded, the establishment of Austro-Hungarian control over areas.

Therefore, as the troops marched, they disarmed the areas they occupied, regardless of whether they had surrendered peacefully or offered armed resistance. On 21 August, General Philippovich, the chief commander of the occupying force, issued the first official decree on general disarmament, setting a remarkably tight deadline

1 OeStA/KA AhOB MKSM SR 28, Karton 28/3b, Sepp. Fasc. 70/59 (2), *Instruction für den Felzeugmeister Josef Freiherrn von Philippovic, als Kommandanten der für Bosnien, die Herzegovina und die angrenzenden Gebiethstheile bestimmten Occupations-Truppen.*

2 OeStA/KA FA AFA HR Akten 2427, fas. 8-1, *Allerhöchstes Befehlsschreiben an F. Z. M. Josef Fr. v. Philippović betreffend Aufstellung der II. Armee und Operationsplan.*

— effectively expiring at 2 AM the following day due to retroactive counting — for the population to voluntarily surrender their arms under the threat of the Court Martial (*Standgericht*).³ Many towns and villages complied by surrendering their weapons upon the first demand. In other areas, the process involved rigorous house searches, including mosques and the private female quarters (*harems*), where significant quantities of hidden weaponry were discovered (*Die Occupation Bosniens und der Hercegovina durch k. k. Truppen im Jahre 1878*, 1879).

A prominent example of compliance among the local notables was Ali Pasha Čengić in Sarajevo, who loaded the whole car of his arms and surrendered it to the authorities (Kreševljaković 1991), illustrating that the landed nobility immediately felt the pressure of the new administration's determination. As the initial results were deemed unsatisfactory, a second proclamation was issued on 14 January, 1879, following the suppression of organised resistance, which set a longer deadline until the end of February to encourage surrender without the fear of immediate punishment. This new phase engaged local civilian officials, such as kaymakams and mukhtars, to influence their communities, while still maintaining the threat of the Court Martial for those who persisted in hiding weapons.⁴

While the administration was often uncompromising — destroying vast amounts of “bright arms” or transporting them to military depots — it occasionally displayed pragmatic flexibility, such as in Bileća, where Orthodox insurgents were permitted to keep their weapons upon being incorporated into the ranks of the *pandur* corps (Gjurgjević 1910). Despite the cultural and symbolic importance of weaponry to the local population, particularly the Muslim elite who viewed it as a mark of status, the Austro-Hungarian administration ultimately mostly succeeded in disarming the lands.

On the other hand, the repeated calls clearly meant two important things: not all people surrendered their weapons, as some of them — we could not possibly specify the extent of this — decided to hide their precious tools; and the authorities were aware of it, otherwise there would be no need to repeat calls for surrender. However, the tone of the calls gradually became softer, the penalties less severe — certainly the death penalty was dropped — and over time it was all settled.⁵ Seemingly, the authorities resigned themselves to only the almost-complete disarmament of the population. This question, over time, was left behind, as the authorities accepted the reality that

3 Circularerlass des k. k. Generalcommandos in Sarajevo vom 21. August 1878, *Sammlung der für Bosnien und die Hercegovina erlassenen Gesetze, Verordnungen und Normalweisungen* (hereinafter: *Sammlung*), I. Band, Wien 1880, 379.

4 Circularerlass des Generalcommandos in Sarajevo vom 14. Jänner 1879, Nr. 53 Praes., *Sammlung I*, 388–390.

5 Circularerlass der Landesregierung in Sarajevo vom 26. April 1879, Nr. 5794 pol., *Sammlung I*, 394.

some civilians would keep their arms and these would be handled on a case-by-case basis. At the same time, they were satisfied that the quantity of weapons still possessed by the civilians was nowhere near the level of being dangerous to the authorities. The 1882 Uprising⁶ revealed all these assumptions, and the very lenient response from the authorities after it was suppressed clearly illustrated that they were pretty calm about the question of illegally held firearms. To put it simply, the authorities have arguably seen more benefits in giving up the idea of a complete disarmament and handling the unauthorised possession of firearms on a case-by-case basis than in pursuing what was costly, demanding, and plausibly unachievable.

In the meantime, the authorities have been developing the legal framework of civilian possession of firearms. By the mid-1880s, this process was largely finished, and the system got its main attributes. The firearms policy⁷ which the Austro-Hungarian administration introduced to Bosnia and Herzegovina was a license-based one grounded in the “shall-not-issue-unless” principle. This meant that everyone who intended to possess a firearm had to have a permit issued by the relevant authorities. These permits were issued conditionally, as certain criteria had to be met. An applicant had to prove that it was absolutely necessary for him to possess a firearm. His reputation, political reliability in particular, had to be assessed positively by the authorities, and last but not least, there had to be a free space for issuing a permit, because each district had a maximum number of permits to be issued determined in advance. If the last criterion, *numerus clausus*, as the authorities called it, was not met, then an application would be turned down. Therefore, the principle which the authorities strictly adhered to was to not issue a permit unless there were compelling reasons for it.⁸

For the context, at the same time in the rest of the Monarchy, the principle was precisely the opposite – the authorities would issue a permit unless there were com-

6 The uprising in Herzegovina and the adjacent Bay of Kotor lasted from late 1881 through late 1882, though its most intense phase occurred between January and April 1882. It emerged as a result of multiple factors related to the local population’s dissent regarding inherited issues, such as agrarian relations and ethno-political upheavals. The primary catalyst for the uprising was the introduction of the Military Law of 1881, which mandated conscription into the Austro-Hungarian army. See more: Kapidžić (1958), Ekmečić (1982), Čemerlić (1983), *Der Aufstand in der Hercegovina, Süd-Bosnien und Süd-Dalmatien* (1883).

7 In this paper, firearm policy refers to the regulatory framework established by the Austro-Hungarian administration in Bosnia and Herzegovina to control the acquisition, possession, and use of weapons, which functioned as a security doctrine aimed at consolidating peace and order. It encompassed the systematic disarmament of politically unreliable populations, the mandatory registration of civilian weapons, and the strict prohibition of military-grade weaponry to prevent organised insurgencies.

8 ABH, ZVS, Opšta grada, 1905, Box 18, 19-472/10, Kreis Office Bihać to the Land Government, Bihać, 16 June 1905; ABH, ZVS, Opšta grada, 1906, Box 55, 19-512, Circular order of the Land Governor to all offices, Sarajevo, 15 October 1892; ABH, ZVS, Opšta grada, 1912, Box 80, 23-10/11, Land Government to the Austro-Hungarian Consulate in Milan, 29 August 1912.

elling reasons not to do it (Lind 2024). Further research is necessary to answer the question of why Bosnia and Herzegovina was treated so drastically differently from the rest of the Monarchy regarding civilian firearms possession. Some possible, indeed likely, reasons could be found in the following. First, Bosnia and Herzegovina was a newly occupied area, and the authorities preferred to take no risks in maintaining security there. In order to prevent any open dissent, they had to disarm the population. Even if they trusted one confessional group more than other, they had to disarm them all in order to demonstrate their intent to maintain the equal treatment of the entire population, as the official military report suggests (*Die Occupation Bosniens und der Hercegovina durch k. k. Truppen im Jahre 1878, 1879*). Secondly, the people living in the two lands were perceived as culturally inferior, and hence not accustomed to the standards of a higher civilisation. This colonialist discourse might have prevented decision-makers from leaving Bosnians and Herzegovinians with the weapons they previously possessed. Yet, these and other possible factors must be further researched to make stronger assessments.

Nevertheless, this contrast, somewhat resembling the colonial policies of the age, in terms of the imperial centre and colony being legally separate entities (Ruthner 2021), remained largely intact until the very end of the Habsburg rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The subsequent supplements were mostly revisions, adaptations, or adjustments, rather than structural changes to the essence of the framework. It is worth mentioning that at no point in this evolutionary development of the framework did the authorities prioritise members of one confessional group over other. Published regulations and internal correspondence contain not a single indication of preferable approach to any confessional group.

IMPACT OF THE 1912/13 BALKAN CRISIS

However, things were different in times of crisis. The Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 vividly illustrated this. The emergency state apparently left its mark on the firearms policy, as this question was particularly sensitive during such periods. Naturally, the questions quickly gained attention after the war broke out in October 1912 between the Balkan allies and the Ottoman Empire, which seriously impacted Austria-Hungary, particularly their lands in the south.⁹ As the firearms policy was closely con-

⁹ More on the impact of the Balkan Wars on Bosnia and Herzegovina: Kapidžić (1963), Madžar (1984), Juzbašić (2002). On the effects of the Balkan Wars on the societies in southern lands of Austria-Hungary summarised, among others see my text presented at the State Doctoral Examination, expanded and published as an article Krpić (2023).

nected to the issue of security, and security proved to be endangered, the authorities demonstrated its sensitiveness in this regard once more. Namely, being informed of a shooting at a train station in the town of Doboj on 24 November, the Land Governor, Oskar Potiorek at that moment — though acknowledging it might have been only a minor incident — ordered the investigation, the termination of all firearms and hunting permits, and the confiscation of all firearms in the entire district, in order to set a cautionary example. Similar happened later in Blažuj and Semizovac later. Despite knowing that no live ammunition was used, the Governor insisted on disarming the whole districts where the incidents occurred (Juzbašić & Šehić 2015).

Just a couple of months into the crisis, the Bosnian authorities took a step that contradicted a significant element of their firearms policy in *normal* times. Namely, in early December 1912, at the time when applications for firearm permits were generally being submitted, the Governor instructed the lower authorities – generally entrusted to handle the process – to issue firearm permits “only to the reliable persons of Islamic and Roman Catholic faith”, leaving just some free space to issue them to the reliable individuals among the Serb Orthodox.¹⁰ This was a significant shift from everything the authorities had done in the previous decades with regard to firearms policy. Reasons are self-evident, as the crisis clearly demonstrated the sympathies which Bosnian Serbs on a general level had towards the Kingdom of Serbia, particularly emboldened after the latter’s victories at Kumanovo and Bregalnitsa (October 1912, July 1913, respectively), which, as the Governor was informed, “have overwhelmed Bosnian Serbs up to the point from which they could not return to the status of loyal subjects” (Duranović 2013). Thus, following trends in the adjacent kingdoms of Croatia-Slavonia and especially Dalmatia, the Bosnian authorities were increasingly suspicious of the Serb Orthodox population in the land, and hence the order to cease issuing them firearm permits.

This turned out to be temporary, indeed very short-lived, as the practical obstacles quickly appeared with long-term implications and consequences threatening to be more damaging than beneficial. These concerns were explicitly expressed in reports from the authorities in Travnik and Mostar,¹¹ leading the Government to reconsider its position. On 26 December, the central authorities, acknowledging the concerns received, revoked the decision and instructed the subordinate authorities to reinstate

10 ABH, ZVS, Präs., 1912, Box 57, Nr. 5692, Land Governor to all *Kreisleiter*; Sarajevo, 10 December 1912.

11 ABH, ZVS, Präs., 1912, Box 60, Nr. 6077, District Office Mostar to the Kreis office, 16 December 1912, and Kreis office Travnik to the Presidium of the Land Government, 17 December 1912.

the principle of issuing permits to persons of all confessions, conditioning it on political reliability and other criteria as before the crisis.¹²

Although lasting for just a couple of weeks, this policy – primarily of Oskar Potiorek – illustrated how sensitive and cautious the authorities were with regard to firearms, particularly in the period of turmoil. In fact, this action was consistent with the Governor's strategy of social engineering, which aimed to fracture the public into distinct confessional categories (Kapidžić 1963). On the other hand, it was unusual for the Austrian principles of governing. The only similar case we managed to discover in this regard was the one with the Lipovan community,¹³ when temporarily in 1906, members of this group in Klimoutz and Fontina Alba (today Climăuți and Bila Krynytsia in Moldova and Ukraine, respectively) were prevented from obtaining firearm permits for security reasons.¹⁴

Sensitiveness of the authorities during the crisis was illustrated in the case of *Schreck-/Spielpistolen* as well. These were not real firearms, which could cause damage, but they were frequently used by Muslims for firing during the month of Ramadan. With tensions increased, the noise, which was similar to that made by the revolvers, was not acceptable, and thus, for the purpose of maintaining order, in January 1913, the authorities temporarily banned even these “toy-weapons”.¹⁵

The spring of 1913 saw the peak of the crisis,¹⁶ and the emergency measures were introduced on 1 May. Among the measures were those concerning firearms (Kapidžić 1963). On 2 May, the Government proclaimed the cessation of all firearm permits, and the next day, the holders had to surrender their permits and firearms (*ibid.*). It was done in an orderly manner, although there were concerns from security reasons, as expressed by the Muslim population in the district of Prijedor, particularly those living close to the mainly Serb villages.¹⁷

After the state of emergency was lifted, handling of the applications for firearm permits was also reinstated to the pre-crisis ways. Again, the criteria of political reliability, necessity of possession, and *numerus clausus* had to be the decisive factors

12 ABH, ZVS, Präs., 1912, Box 60, Nr. 6077, Land Government to all *Kreis* offices, 26. December 1912.

13 More on this community: Bihl (1980).

14 OeStA/AVA Inneres MdI Allgemein Teil 2 A 2154, 20/5c, N. 55195/06, Vienna, 18 January 1907.

15 ABH, ZVS, Opšta grada, 1914, Box 59, 23-23/48, Land Government to all offices, Sarajevo, 11 January 1913.

16 For a brief overview of the Scutari Crisis, see: Kasmi, 2018.

17 ABH, ZVS, Präs., 1913, Box 23, Nr. 2645/2, District Office Prijedor to the *Kreis* Office Banja Luka, 5 May 1913.

in this process.¹⁸ However, it did not last long, as another crisis broke out in the following year.

THE OUTBREAK OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE NEW STATE OF EMERGENCY

As Austria-Hungary was directly involved this time, nothing short of the 1913 May measures could possibly be acceptable to the authorities. Therefore, on 26 July 1914, when the emergency measures were reimposed (Šehić 2007), the May 1913 order was reinstated in virtually the same form. Permits were no longer valid, and firearms connected with them had to be surrendered again, just as it was ordered in the adjacent Kingdom of Dalmatia.¹⁹

With these restrictive measures began the Austro-Hungarian administration's wartime firearms policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Due to security reasons, especially in the first year of the war, when Bosnia and Herzegovina was practically a war-affected area (Šehić 2007), the authorities were in this regard primarily concerned with measures of control. Searches for hidden weapons were conducted, although with limited success. However, two cases stood as exceptions. In August 1914, unspecified but large quantities of firearms were discovered in the Western Bosnian villages of Čelebić and Grkovci. While the locals complained against the Gendarmerie for using what they considered excessive force, the authorities on all levels praised the action, asking the Gendarmerie throughout the land to take this as a role model. The action brought some 200 people to the courts, implying that the number of weapons could have been considerable.²⁰

Apart from the discoveries of firearms hidden *en masse*, there were individual cases as well. Only in the Banja Luka *Kreis*,²¹ the authorities managed to find illegally held firearms by Filip Subotić, Đorđo Panić, Vaso and Nikola Šmitran, Pejo Šinik,

18 ABH, ZVS, Präs., 1913, Box 26, Nr. 3043, Land Government to all *Kreis* offices, Sarajevo, 17 May 1913.

19 Naredba zemaljske vlade za Bosnu i Hercegovinu od 26. jula 1914., br. 7118/prez., Glasnik 1914, 309–310; Naredba ukupnoga ministarstva od 25. Jula 1914., *List državnih zakona za kraljevine i zemlje zastupane u carevinskom vijeću* 1914/LXXV, Beč 1914, 829–830.

20 ABH, ZVS, Präs., 1914, Box 65, Nr. 10621, Land Government to all *Kreis* offices, Sarajevo, 4 September 1914.

21 The *Kreis* (*okrug* or *okružje*) was the highest administrative unit in Habsburg Bosnia and Herzegovina, comprising of districts (*Bezirke*; *kotari*). Since there is no direct English equivalent, the original German term is used throughout this paper.

and Tomo Jungić, all of them being Serb Orthodox.²² These occasions were not rare, as control measures directed at combating unauthorised possession of firearms were particularly frequent in the first months of the war. According to the incomplete data provided by the archive documents, between July 1914 and September 1915, there were 1,201 items considered as weapons willingly surrendered to the authorities, and 3,884 confiscated ones – taken by the authorities after being discovered as illegally possessed. A huge majority of both surrendered (90.67%) and confiscated (88.93%) weapons came from only two *Kreise* combined – Bihać and Banja Luka.²³

It might be worth pointing out that August 1914 also saw the return of the prohibition on the previously mentioned *Schreck-/Spielpistolen*, for the same reasons as in January 1913, making firing noise during Ramadan and thus disturbing the public order.²⁴

The beginning of the war brought other measures of control as well. While firearms were generally taken from the population, they were given to specific persons. Namely, the authorities have founded the auxiliary units of the Gendarmerie and the civil guard (*Schutzkorps* and *Bürgerwehr*, respectively) (Šehić 2007). Comprised of local Catholics and Muslims and foreign-originated colonists, as the name registers reveal, they were armed by *Werndl* rifles and Carbines from the depots of the local political or military authorities.²⁵

THE CLIMATE OF ANTI-SERB SENTIMENT

All of these had something in common. Although we have not managed to find direct proof of intentional targeting of one specific confessional group – Serb Orthodox –

22 ARS, KBBL, 1914, Box 2, 298 (Nr. 813, 816, 833, 834, 842), District Office Bos. Gradiška to the *Kreis* Office Banja Luka, 20 August 1914; ARS, KBBL, 1914, Box 3, 350 (Nr. 850), District Office Bos. Gradiška to the *Kreis* Office Banja Luka, 20 August 1914.

23 ABH, ZVS, Opšta građa, 1915, Box 59, 23-20, multiple reports of the *Kreis* offices sent to the Land Government.

24 ABH, ZVS, Opšta građa, 1914, Box 59, 23-23/48, Land Government to all offices, Sarajevo, 8 August 1914; ABH, ZMF, 1914, Box 11, Nr. 1925, Land Government to all offices, Sarajevo, 11 January 1913; ARS, KBBL, 1914, Box 2, 289/1914 (Z. 186016/1-2), Land Government to all offices, Sarajevo, 9 August 1914.

25 For instance, the *Bürgerwehr* list in the town of Bosanski Novi was comprised of the following: Osman Čejvan, Salko Huskić, Pano Perić, Viktor Takreč (?), Heinrich Mann, Nikola Mann, Mustafa Softić, Meho Kotorčić, Michale Hartmann, Halid Softić, Tomo Vicković, Šaćir Bajramović, Jan Janča, Ramiz Mujkić, Mujo Mešić, Osman Kotorčić, Ago Maruš, Tasim Balčinović, Mustafa Tešnjak, Meho Bibić, Mehmed Dervić, Abaz Maruš, Ibri Avdić, Januš Suhaj, Avdo Đodić, Luka Bezik, Franjo Kurjaković, Rašid Pandža, Mujo Čepić, Josef Welke, Osman Vugdalić, Jakob Pomare, Smajo Imamović, Ibri Maruš, Mujo Mujaković, Stefan Molnar, Smajl Mujkić, Junuz Maruš. ARS, KBBL, 1914, Box 3, 418, *Iskaz vrhu podijeljenih Werndl Karabiner pušaka*, District Office Bos. Novi to the *Kreis* Office Banja Luka, October 1914.

the outcomes could point out to it. In other words, it is more likely that the authorities simply directed their actions at maintaining the security and order, but in conducting it, they seem to have targeted the Serb Orthodox disproportionately more than the other groups. Of the two villages previously mentioned, one was virtually exclusively Serb Orthodox, while the other was divided between them and the Roman Catholics almost evenly (*Die Ergebnisse der Volkszählung in Bosnien und der Hercegovina vom 10. Oktober 1910.*, 1912). Confiscations of weapons we previously mentioned were predominantly focused on the two *Kreise* most densely populated by this confessional group.²⁶ Furthermore, a few preserved records containing names of the persons who had their weapons confiscated, those from September 1914 for the districts of Tešanj and Banja Luka Countryside, reveal a huge disproportion of the members of this confessional group.²⁷ While the 1910 census data for these two districts show 49.19% of the Serb Orthodox in the population of the district of Tešanj and 70.96% in the Rural district of Banja Luka, members of this group comprised 93.3% of those who had their weapons confiscated in the former, and 83.8% in the latter case.

Why was this the case is difficult to reliably claim. Government policies exclusively targeting one group, such as the one from December 1912, are lacking. In the absence of evidence, we might only speculate whether the authorities indeed intentionally targeted the Serb Orthodox population, whether they conducted their actions against this group more rigorously, or whether these outcomes simply came from the real situation on the ground. If there was really no intention from the authorities' side to target the Serb Orthodox population more than the others, then a question arises as to why the members of this group were more engaged in illegal possession of firearms? Have they expected something to happen? Have they been afraid of, for instance, *Schutzkorps* or *Bürgerwehr*, so a natural survival instinct whispered to them to hide their weapons, are all speculative questions. After all, there might be something from all of it, and the questions are not mutually exclusive. Additionally, we must keep in mind the similar cases in other parts of the Monarchy, where authorities were particularly suspicious of Russophile elements in Galicia or Czech nationalists in Bohemia, and therefore put them under special treatments (Healy, Bronson, & Jemal 2015; Choliy 2020).

General political trends in this regard, well-known in scholarly literature

26 Out of the entire Serb Orthodox population in the land, 43.8% lived in these two *Kreise* alone. Out of the total population of these two *Kreise*, the Serb Orthodox comprised 57.15%, more than in any other *Kreis* and considerably above the land average (43.5%). *Die Ergebnisse*, 1912, 4–5.

27 ARS, KBBL, 1914, Box 4, no archive signatures, documents with numbers 11225 (Tešanj, 8 October 1914) and 12686 (Banja Luka, 28 October 1914).

(Djordjević 1980; Šljivo 1987; Milošević 2020; Šehić 2007; Dedijer 1973), inevitably affected firearms policy during wartime. Serb Orthodox were under particular surveillance, and even minor incidents were considered serious by the authorities. Anticipating it, the ecclesiastical authorities in northern Bosnia – the metropolitan bishops of Zvornik-Tuzla and Bihać-Banja Luka – at the end of July urged their flock to be loyal to the authorities and, among other appropriate conduct, to keep their churches clean, so they would not be used as places for hiding weapons.²⁸ In the post-assassination period, comments on the tragic event in Sarajevo on 28 June deemed inappropriate could brought serious reactions from the security forces (Milošević 2016). In August, several individual cases, which could be considered as minor incidents, illustrated this sensitive socio-political climate. For instance, certain Todor Andrijašević was detained and remanded to the Garrison court for his comments concerning the war between Austria-Hungary and Serbia.²⁹ Vaso Babić was also detained for comments regarding the war, where he claimed that Serbia is going to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina, and we find it illustrative that the report has not failed to underline him as someone “who has distinguished himself by great Serbdom on every occasion”.³⁰ Two other men were also detained for disturbing the public order by shouting “Long live Serbia”.³¹ Three Serb Orthodox teachers in Banja Luka were suspected of pro-Serbian activities, and preliminary investigations against them were underway already in September.³² Unadvised comments could bring the authorities’ attention even when their own officials spoke them. Thus, for instance, one Đorđo Knežić in Banja Luka was investigated for comments on where Bosnia and Herzegovina belong.³³ In September, another official in Tešanj, Nikola Matijević, was put

28 ABH, ZVS, Präs., 1914, Box 52, Nr. 7615/2, *Okružnica svima prečasnim parhoijskim zvanjima i manastirskim uprava te slavnim crkvenim i crkveno-školskim opštinama zvorničko-tuzlanske Mitropolije*, Tuzla, 26 July 1914; ABH, ZVS, Präs., 1914, Box 54, Nr. 8156, Metropolitan Bishop of Banja Luka and Bihać to the Land Governor, Banja Luka, 29 July 1914.

29 To certain Muho Klipić he said: “I am returning from Banja Luka because they are not allowing to work, for *Švabo* has been scared of Serbia (...) Serbia has willingly let him in Belgrade to stuck him with bombs (...). *Švabo* has made a mistake, his state will collapse.” To Meho Huskić he said: “*Švabo* is afraid of fight with Serbia; this has been given to King Peter three years ago (...)” ARS, KBBL, 1914, Box 2, 267 (Z. 541/präs.), Rural District Office Banja Luka to the Kreis Office Banja Luka, 6 August 1914.

30 ARS, KBBL, 1914, Box 4, 537 (Nr. 1360), Gendarmerie Post to the District Office Bos. Gradiška, 5 October 1914.

31 ARS, KBBL, 1914, Box 2, 295, *Prepis prijave c. i k. oružničke postaje u bos. Kostajnici od 8. Augusta o. g. Broj 582, na kotarsku ispostavu u bos. Kostajnici*, 9 August 1914.

32 ARS, KBBL, 1914, Box 3, 446, (Z. 667 praes.), Urban District Office Banja Luka to the Kreis Office Banja Luka, 11 September 1914.

33 In a conversation with Michael Mack about the lack of state’s assistance to the people, on the latter’s complaint that the craftsmen “will collapse if it goes on like this for another ten years”, Knežić said: „Ah, what ten years?”

under police surveillance for comments on the war against Serbia.³⁴ Therefore, cases like these, even being minors at first sight, caught the attention of highly sensitive and cautious Austro-Hungarian authorities. It should not be omitted that this was the period when hundreds of people were brought to the court for security reasons (Šehić 2007). Fear of the uprising and joining forces with the Serbian and Montenegrin armies, particularly in these opening stages of the war, led the authorities to ban the “Ovamo, ‘vamo” poem for its “provocative and subversive content”.³⁵ Following its prohibition in the adjacent Dalmatia, the Bosnian administration took proactive measures to curtail the proliferation of the printed versions of the song within its own borders.³⁶ What must be kept in mind, in particular, is that all of this happened during the early stages of the war when the Bosnian Governor was Oskar Potiorek. His known anti-Serbian stances, easily readable in his report (Šehić 2007) shortly before being replaced at the position, have to at least to some extent fuelled the actions which brought such outcomes as described above.

LOOSENING OF MEASURES AND TALKS OF POLICY CHANGES AT THE STATE LEVEL

The decree of 26 July 1914 was in force in Bosnia and Herzegovina for most of World War. As legal possession of firearms was not possible, security forces were focused on combat against unauthorised possession, smuggling, and other illegal activities. With the defeat of Serbia in late 1915 and Montenegro in early 1916, Bosnia and

Before three of four years pass, all of this will be Serbian.“ ARS, KBBL, 1914, Box 3, 325 (Z. 1234), Gendarmerie Post to the Rural District Office Banja Luka, 14 August 1914.

- 34 In a conversation with Alija Begović and Stefan Müller, Matijević reportedly said „we must admire the Belgians“ (referencing to what was previously being said about Belgians shooting at German medics and wounded soldiers), then that „Austrian army commit barbaric atrocities in Serbia, killing and plundering and destroying everything“, that „the Serbian army fights bravely, men, women, and children, it is justified war, and that is why Austrian army advances slowly, because the entire people is against us.“ ARS, KBBL, 1914, Box 4, 594 (Z. 1562 praes.), Gendarmerie Post to the District Office Tešanj, 3 September 1914.
- 35 ARS, KBBL, 1914, Box 2, 300 (Nr. 8356 präs.), Land Government to all offices, Sarajevo, 11 August 1914. *Ovamo*, ‘vamo was a popular liberation and unification poem written by the Serbs and other advocates of the common South Slavic state. It was their version of the original *Onamo*, ‘namo poem, written by Prince Nicholas of Montenegro in the mid-19th century, calling for the liberation of the land inhabited by the Serbs, but still ruled by the Ottomans. *Ovamo*, ‘vamo was the voice of those living under the Austro-Hungarian rule who wanted Serbia to arrive and liberate them. (Ćorović 1933; Seton-Watson 1915; Djukanović 2023).
- 36 “Since it cannot be ruled out that such anti-state poems may also be distributed in this region, Your Excellency is requested to search for these poems, if possible, seize them, and forward them to the competent public prosecutor’s office for further action.” ARS, KBBL, 1914, Box 2, 300 (Nr. 8356 präs.), Land Government to all offices, Sarajevo, 11 August 1914.

Herzegovina lost direct contact with the frontlines, and security in the land was improved. By the first quarter of 1917, circumstances were ostensibly different from those in 1914. Both external and internal trends led the high authorities to make concessions, including the reconvening of the Parliament in Austria, thus marking a rebirth of political life.³⁷ Loosening of the emergency measures in the Monarchy was followed by the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Due to a perceived shift in the regional security climate, the Bosnian-Herzegovinian land administration consented to proposals discussed by the Ministry of War and the Supreme Army Command, and opted to repeal the July 1914 emergency decrees. This policy reversal was justified by the prolonged absence of security threats and the assessment that the original conditions necessitating such exceptional orders no longer persisted. It was agreed between the relevant authorities, and eventually, on 8 January 1918, the regulation was approved with immediate effect.³⁸

The wartime saw a discussion on the changes to the *Waffenpatent*, the 1852 imperial law which regulated the firearms issues in the Monarchy.³⁹ It was subsequently amended several times, although without compromising its essence.⁴⁰ With the development of technology in manufacturing weapons, certain aspects of the law have seemingly become outdated, and as the crime reportedly kept increasing, a question of further changes to the law emerged. Following the spirit of that time, when mainly weapons which could be concealed were considered troublesome — hence the label of treacherous weapons (Lind 2024) — discussions were brought to the political level.

Thus, on 15 December 1917, at the 25th meeting of the 22nd session of the House of Lords of the Austrian Parliament, a group of representatives submitted a proposal to further amend the Weapons Law. These, led by Professor Eiselsberg,⁴¹ belonged

37 More on it: Boyer (2019), Redlich (1925).

38 ABH, ZMF, 1918, Box 3, Nr. 587, Joint Finance Ministry to the Land Government, 8 January 1918.

39 Lind (2024: 62–63); Cesarski patent od 24. Listopada 1852, *Sveobći dèržavno-zakonski i vladni list za cesarevinu Austriansku*, 1852, 999–1008; Kaiserliches patent vom 24. October 1852, *Reichs-Gesetz- und Regierungsblatt für das Kaiserthum Oesterreich*, 1852, 999–1008.

40 Verordnung der Ministerien des Innern und der Justiz und der obersten Polizeibehörde vom 20. August 1857, *Reichs-Gesetz-Blatt für das Kaiserthum Oesterreich*, 1857, 463–465; Verordnung der Ministerien des Innern, der Justiz, der Finanzen und der Polizei vom 11. Februar 1860, *Reichs-Gesetz-Blatt für das Kaiserthum Oesterreich*, 1860, 76–77. Also: Naredba ministarstvih unutarnjih djelah pravosudja financijah i redarstva od 11. veljače 1860, *Sbornik zakonah i naredabah valjanih za kraljevinu Hrvatsku i Slavoniju*, 1863, 55–56; OeStA/AVA Inneres Mdi Allgemein Teil 2 A 2154, Nr. 40532/09, Vienna, 24 December 1909; OeStA/AVA Inneres Mdi Allgemein Teil 2 A 2154, Nr. 2410/12, 20 January 1912.

41 Baron Anton von Eiselsberg was an Austrian surgeon, university professor in Vienna, among many other positions, the director of the First Surgical University Clinic in Vienna, and a physician of the Admiral's staff. He was active in political life as well, being a member of the House of Lords of the Austrian Parliament (*Herrenhaus des Reichsrates*) in the group of the Constitutional Party (*Verfassungspartei*), the German liberals of

to the Constitutionalist faction (*Verfassungspartei*)⁴² in the House, joined by one representative belonging to the *Reichspartei* faction (Baron Ignaz Ruber).⁴³ The proposal focused on three issues: extension of the amended Weapons Law to the County of Tyrol, reconsideration of handguns shorter than 18 centimetres, and an increase in penalties for violations of the law. The apparent rationale for the first one was to unify the legal regulations in all Austrian lands.⁴⁴ More attention was dedicated to the handguns below 18 centimetres, including the stock and barrel, primarily revolvers. The problem lied in the fact that these were a product of technology which appeared after the original regulation was written. Easily concealed and more deadly than handguns before, they caught attention from the public, and hence the request to consider them as prohibited firearms. Eiselsberg's proposal was not a new one, however, as a similar one was discussed earlier in the Austrian Parliament, as presented in the explanation of this proposal. What was new was rephrasing Section 2 of the Weapons Law with regard to the *terzerole* handguns, then the prohibition of the purchase and sale of prohibited firearms without a permit, and an increase in penalties for violations of the law.⁴⁵

These proposals have not gained too much attention in the press, as there were more important issues in the Parliament and politics in general, but also as the course of war reached a critical moment with the armistice between the Central Powers and the Russian Empire. The authorities, however, kept an eye on it, and the internal correspondence went on for a couple of months with all interested sides. The Ministry of Justice gave its remarks in the last days of 1917, suggesting certain changes in

the age. Schönbauer, Leopold. "Eiselsberg, Anton Freiherr von" in: *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 4 (1959), 410–411 [online version]; <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd116426357.html#ndbcontent> (Accessed: February 11, 2026); *Stenographische Protokolle über die Sitzungen des Herrenhauses des Reichsrates. 1917 bis 1918. XXII. Session. Anhang II. Mitglieder des Herrenhauses des Reichsrates*, 1918, 141.

42 More on this parliamentary political faction: (Sutter, 1980); (Kann, 1992).

43 "Stenographisches Protokoll. Herrenhaus. XXII. Session, 25. Sitzung, Samstag den 15. Dezember 1917", *Stenographische Protokolle über die Sitzungen des Herrenhauses des Reichsrates. 1917 bis 1918. XXII. Session*. [Hereinafter: *Stenographische Protokolle*], 1918, 635; „Antrag des Herrenhausmitgliedes Professors Freiherrn von Eiselsberg und Genossen“, *Stenographische Protokolle*, 1918, Beilage 86, 1–3; *Stenographische Protokolle. Anhang II. Mitglieder des Herrenhauses des Reichsrates*, 1918, pp. 141, 144;

44 The County of Tyrol was excluded from the jurisdiction of the 1852 Weapons Law, as it already had its own weapons regulations as of January 1818. See: *Kaiserliches Patent vom 18. Jänner 1818 für Südtirol, Taschenausgabe der österreichischen Gesetze IV*, 1877, 274–277. Originally, the Kingdom of Lombardia-Venetia and the Military Frontier were also excluded from the jurisdiction of the Weapons Law, as they also had their own regulations in this regard. Namely, the 1852 *Patent* was an extension of the regulations from these Italian lands of the Empire to the rest of it (Lind, 2024).

45 „Antrag des Herrenhausmitgliedes Professors Freiherrn von Eiselsberg und Genossen“, *Stenographische Protokolle*, 1918, Beilage 86, 1–3; Begründung, *Stenographische Protokolle*, 1918, 5–6. Also: OeStA/AVA Inneres MdI Allgemein Teil 2 A 2155, Nr. 16242/18, Vienna, 11 March 1918.

phrasing the text.⁴⁶ In March, the Ministry of Interior accepted the extension of the Weapons Law to Tyrol, but only its predominantly Italian part in the south, around Trento and Rovereto, but not in northern, German parts, as “there [was] no reason to undermine this ancient privilege of the German-speaking Tyroleans and Vorarlbergers. Its abolition would undoubtedly provoke justified dissent in all *Kreise* involved.”⁴⁷

Eventually, in March 1918, for the purpose of public security interests, the Parliament accepted the proposal of Minister Toggenburg to amend the Weapons Law in a way that sale and purchase of weapons, during the wartime, could be legal only for the persons who had a permit issued by the relevant authorities, including penalties for both a buyer and a seller in case of violation, and leaving possibilities for further restrictions in the future.⁴⁸

As Bosnia and Herzegovina was not subjected to the Austrian regulations in this regard, we could only speculate whether and to what extent these changes would affect the firearms regulations in this part of the Monarchy. Firearm possession was already completely prohibited in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war, but we must keep in mind that these changes in Austrian lands were discussed regardless of the war – in fact, they began before the war – and thus it might have been interesting to see whether these new regulations would have prompted the new limitations to the already highly restricted regulations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, as the military and political trends from the Spring of 1918 on began significantly changing at the detriment of the Monarchy, focus in firearms policy was again directed to combat the illegal activities.

NEW-OLD CONTROL MEASURES ON THE EVE OF THE DISSOLUTION

While the emergency measures in Bosnia and Herzegovina were finally lifted in January 1918, the expectations were soon met with new harsh realities. Both Austria and Hungary had strikes and demonstrations as of January (Krizman 1977). Euphoria for the military victory against Russia had not lasted for long, as military events began turning against the Central Powers. At the same time, renewal of political life inside the Monarchy brought considerable political upheavals, which, combined with the

46 OeStA/AVA Inneres MdI Allgemein Teil 2 A 2155, Nr. 78938 (Z. 45598), Vienna, 29 December 1917.

47 OeStA/AVA Inneres MdI Allgemein Teil 2 A 2155, Nr. 16242/18, Vienna, 11 March 1918.

48 *Wiener Abendpost: Beilage zur Wiener Zeitung* 1918/67, 22. 3. 1918, p. 3–4; *Sarajevski list* XLI/64, 23. 3. 1918, p. 2.

course of war events, threatened the very foundations of the country (Šehić 2007). Multiple reports spoke of a worsening internal security situation. A primary contributor to this were the Green Cadres, groups of deserters and radicalised peasants which sporadically emerged throughout the Monarchy in 1917 and intensified their activities in the summer and autumn of 1918 (Beneš 2017), prompting the authorities to use the urban civilian militia for maintaining order (Morelon 2020).

Responding to the increase in internal insecurity, as of January 1918, certain restrictions in sale of weapons in Prague and Pilsen were imposed.⁴⁹ Difficulties with handling the whole situation could be seen in the way decisions are made. For instance, it quickly turned out, as the relevant court decided, that authorities in Prague had issued the order against the legal procedures. However, the military authorities asked for the orders to remain, while the ministerial commission at the Ministry of War agreed with the court's decision, but also considered the ways of imposing the restrictive measures valid for all Austrian lands, in line with the requests of the military authorities.⁵⁰

In late February 1918, the Supreme Army Command issued an order covering the issue of the proliferation of firearms from the frontlines to civilian areas. These were smuggled by soldiers on leave and were used in internal clashes with the security forces. The Command thus ordered all military personnel on leave to surrender their primary firearms and ammunition, while retaining only authorised sidearms. The order required rigorous inspections and detailed documentation of issued equipment to ensure accountability. Furthermore, medical facilities and military police were tasked with the systematic confiscation and redirection of both service-issued and captured weaponry to army depots to prevent the unauthorised transfer of materiel out of the combat zone into the unwanted hands.⁵¹

The effectiveness was questionable, as the Ministry of War complained in early April to the Supreme Command, which in turn issued another order asking for stricter implementation of the previous one, because firearms from the fronts kept reaching the troublesome elements in non-combat zones.⁵²

49 OeStA/AVA Inneres Mdl Allgemein Teil 2 A 2155, Nr. 3252/18 (Nro. 35493 ai 1917), Presidium of the Land Government to the Ministry of Interior, Prague, 10 January 1918.

50 OeStA/AVA Inneres Mdl Allgemein Teil 2 A 2155, Nr. 15.179/18 (Z. 13458/E-MK.KM), Vienna, 12 April 1918.

51 OeStA/AVA Inneres Mdl Allgemein Teil 2 A 2155, Nr. 34540, Copy of the Order of the Supreme Army Command of 27 February 1918 (Op. Nr. 80.976).

52 OeStA/AVA Inneres Mdl Allgemein Teil 2 A 2155, Nr. 34540, Copy of the Order of the Supreme Army Command of 7 April 1918 (Op. No. 85.302).

By late May, the Command had to order a comprehensive disarmament of the civilian population to prevent “bloody excesses” and civil unrest. Citing an alarming prevalence of illicit firearms among “problematic elements” despite existing regulations, the Command mandated the rigorous confiscation of all weaponry not essential for hunting or immediate self-defence. This directive prioritised the preservation of public order and the “general legal order” above all other civil interests, viewing the proliferation of weapons as a direct threat to state security and necessitating strict oversight of the weapons trade and military supply chains.⁵³

As of May 11, the Ministry of War requested all other authorities to conduct measures suitable for “restricting, as far as possible, the unauthorised possession of weapons not intended for self-defence or hunting, particularly military firearms and ammunition, since the possibility of their use in the event of major disturbances cannot be dismissed.” In the Hungarian half of the Monarchy, it has already been intervened, while the Bosnian authorities used the Ministry’s note to issue further strict directives in this direction. This was repeated in August, when the Ministry of Interior was specifically reminded to do its part in preventing the illegal activities regarding weapons, for the purpose of maintaining order, especially considering the “increasing public insecurity, the formation of armed groups, and so forth”.⁵⁴

This reached an escalation point in September, when reports from military authorities in Prague were used as a justification for requesting the “confiscation of weapons simultaneously, as soon as possible, with all due force and without surprise, at least in those areas of Bohemia and Galicia known as hotbeds of subversive activities, as well as in the southern part of Moravia, where desertion has become rampant.” The Ministry of War requested this in a secret note to the Ministry of Interior. The action was to be conducted in agreement with military commands in Prague, Leitmeritz, Krakow, Przemyśl, and Lemberg, or Vienna. A chance was left to postpone the confiscation, but the Ministry reserved its right to return to this matter, justifying its request on legal grounds regarding the Weapons Law: “If public safety so requires, the powers granted under this patent to possess or bear weapons may, by order of the Governor, be temporarily, locally, or even with respect to individual persons, be subjected to restrictions or completely withdrawn, according to the recognised necessity.”⁵⁵

53 OeStA/AVA Inneres MdI Allgemein Teil 2 A 2155, Nr. 34540, Minister President to the Ministry of Interior, Vienna, 10 June 1918.

54 OeStA/AVA Inneres MdI Allgemein Teil 2 A 2155, Nr. 54170, Copy of the Order of the Supreme Army Command of 26 May 1918 to the Minister President (50275/18).

55 OeStA/AVA Inneres MdI Allgemein Teil 2 A 2155, Nr. 54170, Ministry of War to the Ministry of Interior, Vienna, 13 September 1918 (Nr. 30145/7).

Conditions in Bosnia and Herzegovina did not differ much from those in the rest of the Monarchy. War exhaustion, including widespread hunger in 1917 (Užičanin 2024), reached a critical point by 1918. Lifting of state of emergency in January was soon met by first open unrest in February (Šehić 2007), followed by different expressions of dissent throughout the year, including desertion from the frontlines, avoidance of military service, extensions of leave, establishment of armed groups threatening security at the home front, labour strikes and demonstrations and alike (ibid.).

A significant factor in this situation was the emergence of the Green Cadres in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As early as February 1918, soldiers from this area stationed in Budapest were already commonly using the term. Despite the Austro-Hungarian authorities declaring martial law across numerous South Slavic districts early that year, the measures proved largely ineffective in curbing the tide of desertion. To combat this internal collapse, the Monarchy was forced to deploy seven full infantry divisions — roughly 41,000 troops — to the hinterlands in a desperate attempt to stem the flow of men fleeing the front lines. The operational geography of the Green Cadres was largely dictated by the administrative and military grip of the state. Bosnian deserters frequently found it more advantageous to operate within the civil administration of Croatia-Slavonia rather than in Bosnia and Herzegovina itself, which remained under significantly tighter military oversight. A conservative estimate suggests that by September 1918, the movement comprised approximately 50,000 members across the South Slavic lands. Reports from the Supreme Command for Bosnia and Herzegovina noted, however, that these bands often lacked a cohesive Bolshevik or Yugoslav ideological framework; instead, they were primarily characterised by local violence, looting, and a fundamental rejection of the imperial war effort (Beneš 2017, 2025).

As living conditions worsened, insecurity and crime increased significantly compared to the previous years, and despite being primarily of social character, they were soon accompanied by the generally negative trends in development of military and political affairs for the Central Powers. Bolshevik propaganda, news on the revolutionary activities in Budapest and clashes in Prague (Morelon 2024), reached Bosnia and Herzegovina, only adding to the weakening of the war spirit. In the constantly deteriorating situation, as in the case of the Czech lands, firearms were also smuggled from the frontlines to the background, where they were used for clashes with the Gendarmerie, with some groups even being armed with machine guns (Šehić 2007). In these circumstances, issuing firearm permits was not acceptable in any case, as the

authorities repeated in July 1918, responding to the question of the possibility of allowing firearm possession for protection against the wolves, despite these reportedly causing damage of 322.995 K during the winter of 1917/18 in the districts of Mostar and Nevesinje.⁵⁶

As of August 1918, the military situation for the Central Powers began critically worsening, and the defeat was on the horizon, eventually leading to total collapse in the Autumn. From early September, court martial was introduced to certain areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina where the security situation was particularly troubling. The Gendarmerie arrested thousands of people for violating military duties. However, maintaining security and firearms among civilians was of secondary importance, as the Monarchy was disintegrating from within. By mid-October, the measures were significantly eased (Šehić 2007). Nevertheless, the control of firearms in civilian possession was still there, although with varying degrees of success. For instance, in the area of the Tuzla *Kreis*, nine firearms were confiscated from the people, while the Banja Luka *Kreis* had thousands of them.⁵⁷

The second half of the month saw the eventual breakup. The final process of the South Slavic lands leaving the Monarchy began on 17 October, and on 29 October the State of the Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs was proclaimed in Zagreb, while the representative of Austro-Hungarian authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, General Sarkotić, handed over power to the newly established National Council of the Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs for Bosnia and Herzegovina, officially marking the end of the Austro-Hungarian rule in the land on 1 November 1918 (Hamzić 2023; Krizman 1977).

The management of firearms became the responsibility of the new authorities, which soon encountered it. In the first months after the regime change, they began the process of disarmament of the population, all licenses for the sale of firearms, gunpowder, and explosives issued by the old authorities were no longer valid, and granting firearm permits was allowed only to individuals trusted by the new authorities.⁵⁸ After the turmoil ended, the Yugoslav state authorities began determining a new

56 ABH, ZVS2, Opšti spisi, 1919, Box 13, 23-11/86, Land Government to the *Kreis* Office Mostar, 11 July 1918; ABH, ZVS2, Opšti spisi, 1919, Box 13, Br. 1811, *Kreis* Office Mostar to the Land Government, 9 March 1919.

57 In this *Kreis* area, 3,153 firearms, 7,366 rounds of ammunition, and 1,512 bladed weapons were confiscated, while 439 firearms, 268 rounds of ammunition and one bladed weapon were temporarily taken. ABH, ZVS2, Opšti spisi, 1919, Box 13, 23-20 (*Kreis* Office Tuzla to the People's Government, 16 February 1919) and 23-20/8 (*Kreis* Office Banja Luka to the Land Government, 1 May 1919).

58 ABH, ZVS2, Opšti spisi, 1919, Box 13, 23-11/125, Land Government to the *Kreis* Office Mostar, Sarajevo, 29 March 1919.

firearms policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and further research would reveal how it differed from the Austro-Hungarian one.

CONCLUSION

The firearms policy of the Austro-Hungarian administration in Bosnia and Herzegovina was an interesting element of its broader policy and ways of rule, as it revealed or added to historiographical knowledge on its general attitudes towards the local population. It spoke of the authorities' lack of trust in Bosnian and Herzegovinian subjects. Restrictive as it was in peacetime, it reached the levels of complete prohibition of firearms possession during the period of crisis. The Balkan Wars of 1912/13, causing considerable impact on Austria-Hungary, marked a turning point in managing the firearms in the hands of civilians in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For the first time in managing the firearm permit applications, the Austro-Hungarian authorities made a distinction along the confessional lines. Although it proved challenging to implement and did not last long, it illustrated their general tendencies, revealing another field in which they expressed distrust toward the population at large and one confessional group in particular. Emergency measures imposed at the peak of the crisis in May 1913 brought general disarmament once again, and for the first time since 1882. With the July Crisis of 1914, firearm possession in Bosnia and Herzegovina was criminalised again, remaining so until the very end of Austro-Hungarian rule in this land. Control measures were intensified from the beginning of the war, being focused on illegal possession, smuggling, and misconduct of firearms. To the authorities, it was important to combat these as they were deemed threatening to the general security, especially in the later phases of the war. Illegally possessing firearms, combined with social or national-political unrest, was completely unacceptable to the authorities. However, that is precisely what marked the last year of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, following the trends in the rest of the Monarchy, news of which reached the south. The authorities, in Bosnia and Herzegovina and beyond, tried seemingly all they could to combat smuggling, illegal possession of firearms, and their use in increasing the instability and insecurity at the home front, but the measures had little impact and were eventually overwhelmed by the development of the military and political situation on a broader scale.

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POLITIKA PREMA CIVILNOM VATRENOM ORUŽJU U HABSBURŠKOJ BOSNI TOKOM KRIZE (1912–1918)

Sažetak:

Austrougarska vlast u Bosni i Hercegovini provodila je strogu politiku kontrole civilnog posjedovanja vatrenog oružja kako bi osigurala stabilnost uspostavljenog poretka. Iako značajna za razumijevanje sigurnosnog okruženja, specifična dinamika ove politike tokom turbulentnog perioda od početka Balkanskih ratova do raspada Monarhije ostaje nedovoljno istražena. Ovaj rad pokazuje kako su austrougarske vlasti u Bosni i Hercegovini upravljale pitanjem civilnog posjedovanja vatrenog oružja u naznačenom periodu, otkrivajući kako je politika prema oružju postajala sve represivnija, ali ipak nije uspjela spriječiti porast nesigurnosti. Kroz analizu stručne literature i neobjavljenih arhivskih izvora, rad pokazuje da je pooštavanje mjera tokom krize dovelo, po prvi put, do diferenciranog odnosa prema stanovništvu – u pogledu posjedovanja oružja – duž konfensionalnih linija, iako privremeno, zatim do potpune zabrane posjedovanja oružja, praćene opsežnijom kontrolom ilegalnih aktivnosti, otkrivajući pritom i uspjehe i neuspjehe. Rezultati pokazuju kako je kontrola vatrenog oružja služila kao pokazatelj opadanja autoriteta Monarhije u južnoslavenskim zemljama tokom Prvog svjetskog rata.

Ključne riječi: Austro-Ugarska; Bosna i Hercegovina; vatreno oružje; Balkanski ratovi; Prvi svjetski rat

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