

**GREAT WAR
(1914-1918) -
AUSTRIA'S ULTIMATUM
TO SERBIA 1914**



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Description

Through an analysis of primary and secondary sources, including a full text reading of the Austrian Ultimatum to Serbia 1914 and the official Serbian response, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the main provisions of the Austrian ultimatum, the major points of Serbia's response, and how Austria's hardline stance against Serbia during the July Crisis of 1914 set in motion the series of events that led to the opening of the Great War.

Subjects

World History, European History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- Schonbrunn Palace, Vienna
- Austrian National Library, Vienna
- Hofburg Palace, Vienna
- Museum of Military History, Vienna
- Imperial Crypt, Vienna

Essential Questions

- What was the Austrian Ultimatum of 1914? What were its provisions? Why was it issued?
- Why was the Austrian monarchy confident in issuing the ultimatum? Did the empire have backup?
- How did Serbia respond to the ultimatum? Did the Serbians have backup?
- Why is the Austrian ultimatum considered to be the spark that set off Europe's powderkeg in 1914?

Academic Summary

Primary Sources

Excerpts from Austria's Ultimatum to Serbia, 23 Jul 1914

The results brought out by the inquiry no longer permit the Imperial and Royal Government to maintain the attitude of patient tolerance which it has observed for years toward those agitations which center at Belgrade and are spread thence into the territories of the Monarchy. Instead, these results impose upon the Imperial and Royal Government the obligation to put an end to those intrigues, which constitute a standing menace to the peace of the Monarchy.

In order to attain this end, the Imperial and Royal Government finds itself compelled to demand that the Serbian Government give official assurance that it will condemn the propaganda directed against Austria-Hungary, that is to say, the whole body of the efforts whose ultimate object it is to separate from the Monarchy territories that belong to it; and that it will obligate itself to suppress with all the means at its command this criminal and terroristic propaganda ...

The Royal Serbian Government will furthermore pledge itself:

1. to suppress every publication which shall incite to hatred and contempt of the Monarchy, and the general tendency of which shall be directed against the territorial integrity of the latter;
2. to proceed at once to the dissolution of the Narodna Odbrana to confiscate all of its means of propaganda, and in the same manner to proceed against the other unions and associations in Serbia which occupy themselves with propaganda against Austria-Hungary; the Royal Government will take such measures as are necessary to make sure that the dissolved associations may not continue their activities under other names or in other forms;
3. to eliminate without delay from public instruction in Serbia, everything, whether connected with the teaching corps or with the methods of teaching, that serves or may serve to nourish the propaganda against Austria-Hungary;
4. to remove from the military and administrative service in general all officers and officials who have been guilty of carrying on the propaganda against Austria-Hungary, whose names the Imperial and Royal Government reserves the right to make known to the Royal Government when communicating the material evidence now in its possession;
5. to agree to the cooperation in Serbia of the organs of the Imperial and Royal Government in the suppression of the subversive movement directed against the integrity of the Monarchy;
6. to institute a judicial inquiry against every participant in the conspiracy of the twenty-

eighth of June who may be found in Serbian territory; the organs of the Imperial and Royal Government delegated for this purpose will take part in the proceedings held for this purpose;

7. to undertake with all haste the arrest of Major Voislav Tankosic and of one Milan Ciganovitch, a Serbian official, who have been compromised by the results of the inquiry;

8. by efficient measures to prevent the participation of Serbian authorities in the smuggling of weapons and explosives across the frontier; to dismiss from the service and to punish severely those members of the Frontier Service at Schabats and Losnitza who assisted the authors of the crime of Sarajevo to cross the frontier;

9. to make explanations to the Imperial and Royal Government concerning the unjustifiable utterances of high Serbian functionaries in Serbia and abroad, who, without regard for their official position, have not hesitated to express themselves in a manner hostile toward Austria-Hungary since the assassination of the twenty-eighth of June;

10. to inform the Imperial and Royal Government without delay of the execution of the measures comprised in the foregoing points.

The Imperial and Royal Government awaits the reply of the Royal Government by Saturday, the twenty-fifth instant, at 6 p.m., at the latest.

Excerpts from Serbia's Reply to Austria's Ultimatum, 25 July 1914

... The Royal Government was therefore painfully surprised by the assertions that citizens of Serbia had participated in the preparations of the outrage in Sarajevo. The Government expected to be invited to cooperate in the investigation of the crime, and it was ready, in order to prove its complete correctness, to proceed against all persons in regard to whom it would receive information.

... The Royal Government regrets that according to a communication of the I. and R. Government certain Serbian officers and functionaries have participated in the propaganda just referred to, and that these have therefore endangered the amicable relations for the observation of which the Royal Government had solemnly obliged itself through the declaration of March 31st, 1909....

The Royal Government binds itself further:

1. During the next regular meeting of the Skuptschina to embody in the press laws a clause, to wit, that the incitement to hatred of, and contempt for, the Monarchy is to be most severely punished, as well as every publication whose general tendency is directed against the territorial integrity of Austria-Hungary.

2. The Government possesses no proofs and the note of the I. and R. Government does not submit them that the society Narodna Odbrana and other similar societies have committed, up to the present, any criminal actions of this manner through any one of

their members. Notwithstanding this, the Royal Government will accept the demand of the I. and R. Government and dissolve the society Narodna Odbrana, as well as every society which should set against Austria-Hungary.

3. The Royal Serbian Government binds itself without delay to eliminate from the public instruction in Serbia anything which might further the propaganda directed against Austria-Hungary provided the I. and R. Government furnishes actual proofs of this propaganda.

4. The Royal Government is also ready to dismiss those officers and officials from the military and civil services in regard to whom it has been proved by judicial investigation that they have been guilty of actions against the territorial integrity of the Monarchy; it expects that the I. and R. Government communicate to it for the purpose of starting the investigation the names of these officers and officials, and the facts with which they have been charged.

5. The Royal Government confesses that it is not clear about the sense and the scope of that demand of the I. and R. Government which concerns the obligation on the part of the Royal Serbian Government to permit the cooperation of officials of the I. and R. Government on Serbian territory, but it declares that it is willing to accept every cooperation which does not run counter to international law and criminal law, as well as to the friendly and neighborly relations.

6. The Royal Government considers it its duty as a matter of course to begin an investigation against all those persons who have participated in the outrage of June 28th and who are in its territory. As far as the cooperation in this investigation of specially delegated officials of the I. and R. Government is concerned, this cannot be accepted, as this is a violation of the constitution and of criminal procedure. Yet in some cases the result of the investigation might be communicated to the Austro-Hungarian officials.

7. The Royal Government has ordered on the evening of the day on which the note was received the arrest of Major Voislav Tankosic. However, as far as Milan Ciganovitch is concerned, who is a citizen of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and who has been employed till June 28th with the Railroad Department, it has as yet been impossible to locate him, wherefore a warrant has been issued against him.

The I. and R. Government is asked to make known, as soon as possible for the purpose of conducting the investigation, the existing grounds for suspicion and the proofs of guilt, obtained in the investigation at Sarajevo.

8. The Serbian Government will amplify and render more severe the existing measures against the suppression of smuggling of arms and explosives.

It is a matter of course that it will proceed at once against, and punish severely, those officials of the frontier service on the line Shabatz-Loznica who violated their duty and who have permitted the perpetrators of the crime to cross the frontier.

9. The Royal Government is ready to give explanations about the expressions which its officials in Serbia and abroad have made in interviews after the outrage and which, according to the assertion of the I. and R. Government, were hostile to the Monarchy. As soon as the I. and R. Government points out in detail where those expressions were made and succeeds in proving that those expressions have actually been made by the functionaries concerned, the Royal Government itself will take care that the necessary

evidences and proofs are collected.

10. The Royal Government will notify the I. and R. Government, so far as this has not been already done by the present note, of the execution of the measures in question as soon as one of those measures has been ordered and put into execution.

The Royal Serbian Government believes it to be to the common interest not to rush the solution of this affair and it is therefore, in case the I. and R. Government should not consider itself satisfied with this answer, ready, as ever, to accept a peaceable solution, be it by referring the decision of this question to the International Court at The Hague or by leaving it to the decision of the Great Powers who have participated in the working out of the declaration given by the Serbian Government on March 18/31st, 1909.

Telegram from Count Leopold von Berchtold (Austrian Foreign Minister) to M.N. Pashitch (Serbian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister), 28 Jul 1914

Vienna

28 July 1914, 11.10 am

The Royal Serbian Government not having answered in a satisfactory manner the note of July 23, 1914, presented by the Austro-Hungarian Minister at Belgrade, the Imperial and Royal Government are themselves compelled to see to the safeguarding of their rights and interests, and, with this object, to have recourse to force of arms.

Austria-Hungary consequently considers herself henceforward in state of war with Serbia.

Count Berchtold

Secondary Summary

At first light on the morning of 29 July 1914, Austro-Hungarian field howitzers and artillery pieces opened up a barrage of shells headed towards Belgrade, Serbia. As those first shots of war screamed into the Serbian capital, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, Serbia's ally, mobilized a portion of his army in preparation for war with Austria. Over the next few days, Germany, Austria's ally, responded to the Tsar's moves by mobilizing its troops against Russia. France in turn mobilized against Germany. In what would seem amazing just four years later, people across Europe spontaneously began dancing with joy in the streets when the moves were announced. War, seen then through the eyes of intense hyper-nationalism, had finally come. Within a week, Britain would join the fray in defense of Belgium. Later, the war would bring in Italy, the Ottoman Empire and (eventually) the United States. What had started as a local conflict between Austria and Serbia in a tiny corner of Southeastern Europe would soon engulf the world in bloodshed and destruction.

When it ended four years later, people were no longer dancing. Millions lay dead, victims of the horrors of a war whose images had become ingrained on a collective international consciousness: trench warfare, mustard and chlorine gas, and new weapons such as machine guns and tanks. A generation of Europeans, even ones who had never seen action at the front, would forever be scarred. After it finally ended,

people across the globe searched for answers as to why it had happened, and there was plenty of blame to go around. It was easy to point at Germany. She received universal condemnation and a hefty reparations bill in the Treaty of Versailles. Blaming Germany's ally, however, was more difficult. By the end of the war, Austria-Hungary, once the greatest empire in Europe, lay in ruins, rocked by starvation, loss and death. In the weeks before the cease-fire, the empire had disintegrated into revolution. At the end of the war, even the victors had to ask whether each of its fragmented separate pieces was responsible for the entire Empire's decisions during that fateful summer four years earlier, a summer where madness and a fanatical drive towards war seemed to rule the continent.

Many pointed to the so-called "Austrian Ultimatum" as the spark that lit the fuse to war. On 28 Jun 1914, while on an official state visit to Sarajevo, capital of the Austro-Hungarian province of Bosnia, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, nephew to Emperor Franz Joseph and heir to the imperial throne, had been assassinated along with his wife Sophie by Gavrilo Princip, a young 19-year-old Slavic revolutionary with ties to Serbia. Immediately arrested by Bosnia police, Princip was "vigorously" interrogated by imperial authorities. During questioning, he revealed that the assassination had been a carefully orchestrated plot, one that stretched into the highest offices of the Serbian government (it is suspected that Princip embellished his story). The imperial government in Vienna, determined once and for all to put an end to Serbia's troublesome measures in the Balkans, decided to take a hard stance against Belgrade. On 05 July, barely a week after the assassination, Emperor Franz Joseph dispatched an envoy to Berlin asking for German backing in its dealings with Serbia. In what later was seen as a fateful decision, Kaiser William II told the envoy that he would support whatever moves Austria took against Serbia. This pledge, later known as the "blank check", gave Franz Joseph and his ministers the confidence to draft a harshly worded ultimatum to Belgrade just days later. In it, the Austrians demanded that Serbia cooperate fully in the investigation into the Archduke's death, including allowing Austrian investigators to take over the investigation in Serbia itself. Serbia was also directed to suppress all anti-Austrian propaganda and state-supported terrorist organizations.

As word of the ultimatum was leaked to the press, William realized what he had done. Germany had expected Austria to keep the situation in Bosnia localized, but the ultimatum was so harsh that Serbia would essentially have to give up its independence if it was accepted. Russia, Serbia's Slavic "big brother" would never allow such a move. Kaiser William was caught in a bad situation. Tsar Nicholas II in St. Petersburg was his cousin (Queen Victoria of England had been their grandmother). The Kaiser knew that war between Austria and Serbia would bring the Russians, Serbia's ally, into the fray. That would necessitate Germany, Austria's ally, entering the war against Russia, which would in turn bring France into the conflict. Germany would be caught in a two-front war, and yet the Kaiser also realized that his support for Austria was necessary in order to maintain the Dual Alliance between the two Germanic empires. William's decision to support Austrian moves in the Balkans was later cited as a determining factor for assigning blame and reparations in the Treaty of Versailles. The Serbian response, delivered to the Austrians on 25 Jul 1914, was hardly unexpected. While trying to be as conciliatory as possible to Vienna, the Serbians

refused to allow their independence to be subjected to Austria's dictates. The Serbians then offered to submit the entire matter to the International Court at The Hague.

Austria-Hungary would have none of it. Three days later, on 28 Jul 1914, the imperial government in Vienna telegraphed their Serbian counterpart, saying there was a state of war between the two (this was the first declaration of war ever sent by telegram).

The next day, Austrian troops began lobbing shells across the border. On August 12, almost 300,000 Austrian soldiers crossed the Drina River and began the invasion of Serbia. The Great War had begun.

Through an analysis of primary and secondary sources, including a full text reading of the Austrian Ultimatum to Serbia 1914 and the official Serbian response, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the main provisions of the Austrian ultimatum, the major points of Serbia's response, and how Austria's hardline stance against Serbia during the July Crisis of 1914 set in motion the series of events that led to the opening of the Great War.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the provisions of the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia in July 1914.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the main points of Serbia's response to the Austrian ultimatum of July 1914.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how Austria's hardline stance against Serbia during the July Crisis of 1914 set in motion the series of events that led to the opening of the Great War.

Procedure

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: Who was ultimately responsible for the opening of the Great War? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of documents and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – July Crisis of 1914 and Austria’s ultimatum to Serbia (20 min)
- Video – Causes of the First World War – The July Crisis 1914 (10 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources on the July Crisis of 1914 and the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia, taking notes as appropriate. (20 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles and sources for homework.
- Suggestion: AP / Advanced students should focus on full text readings of the primary sources.
- Group Activity – Socratic Seminar: Discussion on the July Crisis and the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia. Did the issuance of this document ultimately lay blame for the opening of the war at the feet of Emperor Franz Joseph? What else might the Austrians have done? What responsibility did Germany have for issuing the “blank check” in support of their ally? What about the Serbians who supported Princip? Who was to blame? In the end, did it matter? (20 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay: Explain in detail the main provisions of the Austrian ultimatum, the major points of Serbia’s response, and how Austria’s hardline stance against Serbia during the July Crisis of 1914 set in motion the series of events that led to the opening of the Great War.

Extension

On tour: Museum of Military History, Vienna

While on tour, students in Vienna can visit the Museum of Military History where they can see for themselves a collection of items related to the July Crisis of 1914, including the Archduke's car (shown in the picture above), along with the uniform he was wearing when he and his beloved Sophie were shot in Sarajevo. Also included in the collection is the chaise lounge on which he died. There is a section of the museum dedicated to Emperor Franz Joseph, who reigned over the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Court from 1848 to 1916. His son, Archduke Rudolph, was originally the heir to the throne, but he committed suicide in January 1889 with his 17-year-old mistress, leaving his cousin Franz Ferdinand as the new heir. Franz Joseph would reign until his death at age 86. Admission to the museum is €6,00. Guided tours are an additional €4,00.

On tour: Artstetten Castle, Austria

While on tour, students in Austria can visit the Artstetten Castle, where they can see for themselves the resting place of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie. Sophie and her family were members of the lower nobility in the empire, so her marriage to the Archduke was a problem. She was never granted the title of Princess, but was instead a "duchess." If Franz Ferdinand had not been shot, he would have become Emperor in 1916 when Franz Joseph died, but she would never have been empress. When they died, since she could not be buried in the Imperial Crypt in Vienna, they were buried instead at her family castle. The castle now houses the Archduke Franz Ferdinand Museum. At the end of WWI, the royal family lost its holdings around the empire, and the Archduke's three children came to live at the castle as well. The castle remains the property of the Hohenberg family (Sophie's family).

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- [http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_Austro-Hungarian_Ultimatum_to_Serbia_\(English_translation\)](http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_Austro-Hungarian_Ultimatum_to_Serbia_(English_translation))
Austrian Ultimatum to Serbia 23 July 1914 (primary source) – full text from the WWI Archive at BYU. Highly recommended for AP/Advanced students.
- http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_Serbian_Response_to_the_Austro-Hungarian_Ultimatum_%28English_Translation%29
Serbian Response to the Austro-Hungarian Ultimatum (primary source) – full text from the WWI Archive at BYU. Highly recommended for AP/Advanced students.
- www.firstworldwar.com/source/austrianreport.htm
Austrian Report on Archduke's Assassination in June 1914 (primary source)
- www.firstworldwar.com/source/autrohungariandeclarationofwar_serbia.htm
Austria-Hungary's Declaration of War with Serbia, 28 July 1914 (primary source)
- www.firstworldwar.com/source/julycrisis_kaiserscomments.htm
Kaiser William on Austria's Ultimatum, July 1914 (primary source). This is a series of telegrams between Baron Tschirschky, German ambassador to Vienna, and Kaiser William II regarding the July Crisis of 1914.
- www.firstworldwar.com/source/austrianultimatum_letter.htm
Explanatory Letter from Austria-Hungary regarding the Ultimatum, 23 July 1914 (primary source)
- www.pbs.org/greatwar/resources/casdeath_pop.html
WWI Casualty and Death Tables – PBS
- <http://seanmunger.com/2013/07/23/the-austrian-ultimatum-the-telegram-that-blew-up-the-world-99-years-ago-today/>
The Austrian Ultimatum (website)
- <http://cnparm.home.texas.net/Wars/JulyCrisis/JulyCrisis03.htm>
The July Crisis: Timeline (website)
- www.history.com/this-day-in-history/austria-hungary-issues-ultimatum-to-serbia
This Day in History: Austrian Ultimatum (website) – from the History Channel
- www.bastabalkana.com/2013/01/the-assassination-of-the-grand-duke-of-austria-and-ultimatum-to-serbia/
The Assassination of the Grand Duke and Serbia Ultimatum (website)
- http://knightclasses.weebly.com/uploads/4/9/8/5/4985187/the_road_to_world_war_1_-_advanced.ppt
The Road to World War I (PowerPoint)
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=qY3Sb8xiQ_c
The First World War – Part 1: Race to Arms (video). From the BBC, this 50-minute video, part of the First World War series, is probably too long for most

classes, but is highly recommended for all students studying the period covered in this lesson.

- www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRtdSoeYQYk
The Great War: Episode 1 - Explosion (video). From the Imperial War Museum, this 50-minute video, part of the Great War series, is probably too long for most classes, but is highly recommended for all students studying the period covered in this lesson.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=b4wZNS5l1wl
Causes of the First World War – The July Crisis 1914 (video). This 10-minute video, an excerpt from the BBC's Great War series, is appropriate for all classes.

Background Information

- www.hgm.or.at/index.html?&L=1
Museum of Military History, Vienna (website)
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austria-Hungary
Austria-Hungary – Wikipedia article
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/July_Crisis
July Crisis of 1914 – Wikipedia article
- [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Front_\(World_War_I\)](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Front_(World_War_I))
Eastern Front (World War I) – Wikipedia article
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narodna_Odbrana
Narodna Odbrana – Wikipedia article
- [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Hand_\(Serbia\)](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Hand_(Serbia))
Black Hand (Serbia) – Wikipedia article

Other Relevant Lesson Plans from Passports Educational Travel

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/austria/great-war-austrian-ultimatum-to-serbia
Great War – Serbian Front: Austrian Ultimatum of 1914
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/england-and-the-great-war-causes-of-the-war-1914
Great War – Lights Going Out in 1914
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/england-and-the-great-war-wilfred-owen
England and the Great War – Wilfred Owen: Dulce et Decorum Est
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/england-and-the-great-war-armistice-day-1918
England and the Great War – Armistice Day 1918
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/great-war-clemenceau-views-at-versailles
Great War – France: Clemenceau's Aims at Versailles
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/great-war-battle-of-the-somme
Great War – Battle of the Somme 1916
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/battle-of-verdun-1916
Great War – Battle of Verdun
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/great-war-first-battle-of-the-

marne-1914

Great War – First Battle of the Marne 1914

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/great-war-schlieffen-plan
Great War – Germany: The Schlieffen Plan
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/russia/great-war-eastern-front-treaty-of-brest-litovsk-1918
Great War – Eastern Front: Treaty of Brest-Litovsk 1918

Key Terms

- Archduke Franz Ferdinand
- Austria-Hungary
- Bosnia
- Gavrilo Princip
- July Crisis
- Mobilization
- Serbia
- Ultimatum

