

The Serbian Response to Austro-Hungarian Ultimatum

25 July, 1914:

The Royal Government has received the communication of the Imperial and Royal Government of the 23rd inst. and is convinced that its reply will dissipate any misunderstanding that threatens to destroy the friendly and neighborly relations between the Austrian monarchy and the kingdom of Serbia.

The Royal Government is conscious that nowhere there have been renewed protests against the great neighborly monarchy like those which at one time were expressed in the Skuptschina, as well as in the declaration and actions of the responsible representatives of the state at that time, and which were terminated by the Serbian declaration of March 31st, 1909; furthermore that since that time neither the different corporations of the kingdom, nor the officials have made an attempt to alter the political and judicial condition created in Bosnia and the Herzegovina. The Royal Government states that the I. and R. [Imperial and Royal] Government has made no protestation in this sense excepting in the case of a textbook, in regard to which the I. and R. Government has received an entirely satisfactory explanation. Serbia has given during the time of the Balkan crisis in numerous cases evidence of her pacific and moderate policy, and it is only owing to Serbia and the sacrifices which she has brought in the interest of the peace of Europe that this peace has been preserved.

The Royal Government cannot be made responsible for expressions of a private character, as for instance newspaper articles and the peaceable work of societies, expressions which are of very common appearance in other countries, and which ordinarily are not under the control of the state. This, all the less, as the Royal Government has shown great courtesy in the solution of a whole series of questions which have arisen between Serbia and Austria-Hungary, whereby it has succeeded to solve the greater number thereof, in favor of the progress of both countries.

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.

According to the wishes of the I. and R. Government, the Royal Government is prepared to surrender to the court, without regard to position and rank, every Serbian citizen for whose participation in the crime of Sarajevo it should have received proof. It binds itself particularly on the first page of the official organ of the 26th of July to publish the following enunciation:

The Royal Serbian Government condemns every propaganda that should be directed against Austria-Hungary, i.e., the entirety of such activities as aim towards the separation of certain territories from the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and it regrets sincerely the lamentable consequences of these criminal machinations....

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 there fore 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.

It binds itself in view of the coming revision of the constitution to embody an amendment into Art. 22 of the constitutional law that permits the confiscation of such publications as is at present impossible according to the clear definition of Art. 12 of the constitution.

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 that 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 improving 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.