main tasks were to protect the dynasty, the institutions of the state, and the three crucial values of quiet, order, and security (Ruhe, Ordnung und Sicherheit). These concepts were defined in the 1850 decrees establishing the competency of the police in the Cisleithanian or Austrian half of the monarchy (Vorschriften über den Wirkungskreis der k.k. Polizeibehörden).22

The state police investigated and tracked persons who belonged to non-German, non-Hungarian nationalities who allegedly wanted to break away from the empire or sympathised with enemy states fighting the empire. The targeting of particular nationalities generally occurred in stages as the war progressed, with particular events triggering the police and military to view these groups as suspicious or traitorous. Serbs with a “Greater Serbian” orientation had already been under suspicion since 1908, when Austria-Hungary formally annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina, but this suspicion became acute after the Young Bosnians killed Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir apparent to the Habsburg throne, and the Austro-Hungarian military believed that Serbia’s volunteer defence organisation, Narodna Odbrana, formed an underground network of Serbs inside the empire.23 Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia were also targeted if they had left the country to join the Serbian army.24 Czechs were targeted for distributing the Russian Czar’s proclamation “To the Slavs” and other anti-Habsburg texts; scrutiny increased after Czech regiments fighting for Austria-Hungary were taken prisoner by the Russian army and some of them switched sides in December 1914.25 Poles in Eastern Galicia who exhibited a pro-Russian orientation or favoured Polish independence were targeted following the dissolution of a Polish Legion in Eastern Galicia in 1914. The persecution of Polish nationalists in the Polish National Democratic Party continued in 1917/1918, because Minister President Ignaz von Seidler wanted to eliminate parliamentary opposition to the military budget.26 Ruthenians had already been targeted in espionage trials in Galicia and Hungary prior to the war; this continued with the outbreak of the war on the grounds that they were pro-Russian, and even when treason and other charges were dropped in 1916, Ruthenians involved in cultural activities and politics were interned at a camp in Thalerhof.27 In Vienna, the police targeted radical socialists at the end of worker strikes in

22 Wetz, Geschichte der Wiener Polizei-Direktion vom Jahre 1945, 18-19.


24 See the cases of Petar Dobrić and Milutin Basrak in HR-HDA-79, UOZV-SDDS, Kut. 5714 (28). 4282/1916. Dobrić was from Croatian Karlovac and was allegedly a military deserter who then joined the Serbian army. Basrak, a teacher’s assistant in Bosnian Gradiška, fought as a Serbian komitadji (guerrilla) against the Austro-Hungarian army. He was captured in 1917 and sentenced by a district court in Zagreb for crimes against the military power and treason.


27 Thirteen Ruthenes from Galicia were arrested in 1914 for supposedly spreading nationalist propaganda and working with the Russians. After the Habsburg military prosecutor dropped the treason case against them in 1916, he still ordered that they remain in detention. LPDW, 1915, Scha. St-13, 9593/914/15/K. Z. A 295/14, 13 April 1916.