



Empire *to* Republic

For the 100th anniversary of the demise of the Habsburg Empire and the forming of new states and territories in its place, we are embarking on a year-long reporting project

by **Benjamin Wolf**

In autumn 1918, after four years of a grinding, devastating war, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was dissolved. What had once been one of the great powers of Europe was taken apart into eight new nation states. The age of empire gave way to the birth of young independent countries that needed to find their own way. For the peoples of Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, many of whom wanted to build societies based on a shared language, culture and nationality, a new era had begun. Austrians tend to look back on these events with nostalgia, with a melancholy longing for lost greatness. Rare is the Austrian schoolchild who does not

look on the old maps with a certain awe, asking: “This all once belonged to us?” Small wonder, for they might as well have discovered on their recent family holiday on the beach at Lignano Sabbiadoro that, indeed, Austria once even had access to the sea. In truth, of course, all this never belonged to “us.” It belonged to the people who lived there, whose homes and lands spread all across this region, which in German is so aptly called *Mitteleuropa* (the middle of Europe). And it still does.

We shared it then and we share it now once again, as people, ideas and goods circulate freely and borders melt away – on the Brenner Pass to Italy, at Spielfeld/Sentili to

Slovenia, Nickelsdorf/Hegyeshalom to Hungary, Marchegg/Bratislava to Slovakia or Nickelsdorf/Mikulov to Czechia. The fortunes of all these young countries founded a century ago, some with wild enthusiasm and some with sober realism, diverged wildly over the last century. In 2018, a hundred years onwards, we want to tell their story. Even more, we want them to tell us. This year, each issue of *Metropole* will feature a chapter of “Empire > Republic”, probing the past and portraying the present and picturing the future of a country in the region. We want to show that *Mitteleuropa* is alive and kicking – and we are proud and happy to be a part of it.





SLOVAKIA

Finally we
Slovaks' half-pragm
Vienna and Prague
Bratislava is coming
success story in the auto
VW and more. Slovaks also
Central Europe's most euromin
of the euro and ready for further

AUSTRIA

The First Republic's difficult birth out of the debris of a lost war left a deep trauma on the young country that ultimately led to a civil war in 1934, Austrofascism and annexation by Nazi Germany, regrettably welcomed by despairing Austrians. Re-established in 1945, the Second Republic went on to become a model social democracy and a beacon of freedom and prosperity in Central Europe. Now reunited with their cousins next door, Austrians rediscover the ties that have joined them for centuries.

SLOVENIA
a small

The Alps, the Mediterranean and the Adriatic Sea form a linchpin between Europe for a long time. From 1918 onwards, the newly founded Kingdom of Yugoslavia that evolved into the Republic of Yugoslavia broke apart in the 1990s. Slovenia was the first country to successfully establish its own state in 1991 and the first to adopt the euro in 2007.

CROATIA

Split into the crown lands of the Austrian Littoral, Dalmatia and Croatia in the times of the monarchy, Croatia became part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia after 1918. Croatia had a fraught history during World War II, when the Fascist Ustasha regime brutally persecuted minorities that had lived there for centuries. As Yugoslavia crumbled in the 1990s, it had to fight for its independence. Since then, this beautiful country has reinvented itself as a holiday paradise.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Bosnia and Herzegovina fell under Austro-Hungarian rule in 1878, making the monarchy the first European country to recognize Islam in 1912. Following World War I, it was part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and later of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia. Bosnia and Herzegovina's declaration of independence in 1991 triggered the Bosnian War that ended with the 1995 Dayton accords. Many Bosnians fled to Austria. Today, their home country is in line to join the EU.

CZECHIA

Founded as Czechoslovakia in 1918, the new republic comprised the lands of Bohemia, Moravia, parts of Silesia and Slovakia. After two thriving decades under President Masaryk, the country was invaded by Nazi Germany. After brief independence, a communist coup in 1948 augured the brutal crackdown of the Prague Spring of 1968, finally overcome in 1989. Today, Czechia and its capital Prague are thriving, firmly back among the European family.

POLAND

Partitioned for centuries between Germany, Russia and Austria, the 2nd Polish Republic was established in 1918, including the Habsburg territory of Galicia. World War II ravaged the country, decimating and displacing the population. The grip of the post-war communist People's Republic was loosened by Lech Walesa's Solidarność in the '80s, before a democracy emerged in 1990. As the Polish anthem has it, "Poland is not yet lost" – in fact, quite the opposite.

UKRAINE

dom of Galicia and western reaches of today's Ukraine, came under Habsburg rule in 1772. After 1918, it became the Western Ukrainian People's Republic, which was rocked by civil war when its eastern territories were overrun by the Soviet Union. Ukraine's independence and sovereignty is still under pressure today, with Russia's annexation of Crimea and continuing interference on the country's eastern fringes.

ROMANIA

Modern Romania was formed in 1859 through a union of the Danubian Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia and gained independence from the Ottomans in 1866. Today's Transylvania and Banat in the west were, however, part of Austria-Hungary before joining the Kingdom of Romania in 1918. After a 1989 revolution expelled the oppressive Ceaușescu regime, Romania transitioned to a democratic republic, finally joining the European Union in 2007.

HUNGARY

A pivotal part of the the Empire since 1526, the country gained equal footing, with the creation of Austro-Hungary in 1867. After the Great War, it became a (nominal) kingdom, until Hitler, and after WWII, a Soviet satellite for 40 years, when its bid for independence was crushed in 1956. The border with Austria became the first crack in the Iron Curtain in 1989. Since then, Hungary has largely worked to integrate with the West, joining NATO and the EU,

Danubian Drift

Plenty of water has flowed down the Danube since the days of Emperor Franz Joseph. But all his people are still there

A GREAT POWER AND ITS MANY GREAT GRANDCHILDREN

In 1910, the Habsburg Monarchy covered a surface area of 676,615 km² (more than today's France) and had a population of 51 million people (at the time the third largest in Europe). Eight successor states were formed, in part or entirely, across this area in 1918, a number that has grown to a total of 12 independent countries today. After a tumultuous history, they have now all become republics.

THE STORIES THEY TELL

As the region grows together once more and opens up to the world, English has become the de facto lingua franca for many people crisscrossing the roads, plains and rivers of Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe. In every country that we will cover, we will be partnering with local media outlets and local journalists, so that they can describe their world as they see it and tell us their stories.