



Background Guide

Crisis 2: European Council for Continental Stability

1 | Addressing tensions from the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand to prevent the escalation of regional disputes into a broader European war

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Committee Introduction	3
Agenda Introduction	4
Letter from the Chairs	5
Key Terms	6
Historical Background	7
Current State of Affairs	9
Stances of Parties	10
Portfolio Powers	10
Austria-Hungary	10
German Empire	11
Russian Empire	11
France	12
United Kingdom	12
Serbia	12
Italy	13
Ottoman Empire	13
Romania	13
Bulgaria	13
Greece	14
Possible Solutions	15
Questions to Consider	17
Bibliography	18

Committee Introduction

Welcome to the Continental Council for European Stability, a specialized Crisis Committee at GECMUN XII.

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand has sent ripples through Europe, and the continent stands precariously on the brink of total war. In this Crisis Committee, delegates representing major and minor European powers—Germany, Russia, France, Austria-Hungary, the United Kingdom, and others—have gathered under the pretense of continental peace. However, beneath the surface lies a far more dangerous reality: growing nationalism, long-standing alliances, and imperial ambitions threaten to unravel any hope for diplomacy.

Unlike traditional General Assembly committees, this Crisis Committee operates under Crisis Rules of Procedure (ROP). Delegates do not draft resolutions; instead, they wield real-time influence through directives, both private and public. Your decisions will shape history on an hour-by-hour basis. Private directives allow for covert diplomacy, espionage, military maneuvers, or internal policymaking, while public directives affect the committee's shared narrative.

A unique feature of this committee is that delegates from the same nation may collaborate to write joint private directives, allowing them to coordinate their state's policy and decide their country's official stance. However, because there are no kings, presidents, or emperors in the room, any attempt to persuade or represent national leaders may not succeed. Delegates must instead rely on their influence, alliances, and political maneuvering to push their agenda forward.

This committee diverges from conventional Crisis in one major way: while it is unified under one chamber, it is divided ideologically between war hawks—who view conflict as a tool for national greatness—and doves—who champion diplomacy to avoid another continental catastrophe. Delegates must navigate alliances, secrets, and rapidly changing developments while pushing their national agenda and ensuring their survival.

As the dominoes of July 1914 begin to fall, this committee offers you the opportunity to answer one of the 20th century's greatest questions: was war inevitable?

Agenda Introduction

On June 28th, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary was assassinated in Sarajevo by a Serbian nationalist. This single act, born of nationalist fury, has thrust Europe into a moment of dangerous uncertainty. The fragile peace that has held since the Congress of Berlin is unraveling. The continent is now caught in a tangled web of alliances, military mobilizations, and diplomatic ultimatums. This is the beginning of what history may remember as the **July Crisis**.

The significance of this moment cannot be overstated. Decisions made in the coming days could determine whether Europe secures its fragile peace—or plunges into a war that could involve millions. Tensions between Austria-Hungary and Serbia threaten to ignite wider conflict as Germany backs its ally, Russia mobilizes in defense of the Slavs, and France and Britain are drawn in by treaty and honor. Meanwhile, smaller powers such as Italy, Romania, Greece, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria must consider whether neutrality, diplomacy, or opportunism will best serve their national interest.

The issue at hand is not just the fate of Serbia or Austria-Hungary. It is the fate of Europe itself. The potential consequences—loss of life, economic ruin, and political upheaval—could reverberate across continents and generations. Yet for others, the moment offers opportunity: to assert dominance, to reclaim territory, or to settle old scores.

This agenda demands that delegates consider:

- How to manage alliances and rivalries without escalating into full-scale war
- The role of military mobilization and whether deterrence is possible
- The risks of diplomatic isolation in a time of heightened paranoia
- The consequences of appeasement, neutrality, or aggression

Above all, delegates must grapple with the impossible question: can war still be prevented—or has the continent already passed the point of no return?

Letter from the Chairs

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to GECMUN XII, and to the Crisis Committee on the July Crisis. We are thrilled to have you join us for what promises to be a thrilling and intellectually demanding experience.

My name is Jihoo Kim, and I will be serving as your Crisis Director. Alongside me, your chairs are Angela Moon and Aerin Jeon. Together, we have worked to craft a dynamic and historically grounded simulation that will challenge your critical thinking, diplomacy, and strategic decision-making.

In the aftermath of Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination, Europe teeters on the edge of catastrophe. This committee is your opportunity to reshape that moment—whether through diplomacy, bold leadership, or calculated ambition. Our goal is to provide a space where delegates are empowered to take initiative, react to real-time developments, and engage in both collaboration and confrontation as the situation unfolds.

Our team comes from diverse backgrounds with a shared passion for MUN and historical simulations. We've each taken part in multiple conferences—both as delegates and organizers—and we understand what makes a committee not just informative, but memorable. At GECMUN, we strive to provide an experience where every delegate feels both challenged and included, and where creative, well-researched ideas shine.

We hope that throughout the conference, you'll leave your comfort zone, embrace the fast pace of Crisis, and immerse yourself in the high-stakes political theater of pre-war Europe. Whether you leave the committee as a war hawk, a peace-seeker, or something in between, we hope this weekend sharpens your skills and deepens your understanding of diplomacy, leadership, and history.

Should you have any questions or need guidance before or during the conference, please do not hesitate to reach out. We are here to support your experience, and we cannot wait to see the depth, strategy, and personality each of you brings to the committee room.

Warm regards,

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Key Terms

July Crisis

A series of diplomatic and military escalations following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on June 28, 1914. The crisis lasted until early August 1914, culminating in the outbreak of World War I.

Ultimatum

A final demand or statement of terms, the rejection of which will result in retaliation or a breakdown in relations, which would most likely lead to war.

Mobilization

The process of assembling and preparing a nation's military forces for war. In the July Crisis, Russian mobilization triggered reciprocal mobilizations from Germany and other powers, escalating tensions irreversibly.

Triple Alliance / Triple Entente

Two major alliance systems in pre-war Europe. The Triple Alliance included Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy; the Triple Entente included France, Russia, and the United Kingdom. These alliances turned regional tensions into a continental crisis.

Pan-Slavism

A nationalist ideology advocating the unity and independence of Slavic peoples. It was a key motivator for Russian support of Serbia and was viewed by Austria-Hungary as a direct threat to its integrity.

Balance of Power

A foundational concept in 19th and early 20th-century diplomacy, where nations, especially Great Britain, acted to prevent any one country from becoming too dominant. The July Crisis disrupted this balance and forced nations to choose between war and losing geopolitical influence.

Diplomatic Telegrams

Coded communications between foreign ministries and embassies that played a critical role during the crisis. Misinterpretations, delays, or leaked messages often heightened tensions and misled decision-makers.

Historical Background

By 1914, Europe was a continent held together by fragile diplomacy and torn apart by deep-rooted rivalries. The Great Powers had spent decades expanding empires, modernizing armies, and forging complicated alliance systems. While peace had technically been maintained since 1871, beneath the surface simmered tensions that made war not just possible—but likely.

Austria-Hungary, a crumbling multi-ethnic empire, was particularly vulnerable. Slavic nationalism, fueled by the recent Balkan Wars and Serbia's growing regional influence, threatened to fracture the empire from within. Serbia, confident after territorial expansion and victories over the Ottomans and Bulgarians, now sought to unite South Slavs under a "Greater Serbia." This was seen in Vienna not just as defiance, but as existential provocation. Austria-Hungary's leadership, aging and insecure, viewed war as a necessary measure to preserve imperial unity.

Russia, seeking to reassert its influence in the Balkans and portray itself as the guardian of the Slavic world, supported Serbia both ideologically and militarily. For St. Petersburg, backing Serbia was not just about pan-Slavism—it was also a calculated move to gain regional dominance and secure access to strategic waterways like the Dardanelles. This ambition put it on a collision course with Austria-Hungary and its powerful ally, Germany.

Germany, at the center of Europe, was driven by fears of encirclement and a desire for continental preeminence. Sandwiched between a rising Russia in the east and a hostile France in the west, the German Empire had prepared for war as a form of defense and opportunity. Its alliance with Austria-Hungary was a tool to project strength and deter Russian expansion. Yet at the same time, Germany's rapid militarization and naval buildup alarmed Britain and France, driving them into closer cooperation.

France, still stung by its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71, viewed Germany as a permanent threat. It solidified its alliance with Russia and modernized its military, preparing for a future reckoning. The United Kingdom, although not formally bound to France and Russia, grew increasingly wary of Germany's imperial ambitions and naval arms race. Though its foreign policy favored balance and disengagement, Britain was unlikely to stand idle if Belgium or France were threatened.

Smaller powers such as Italy, the Ottoman Empire, Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece also had stakes in the unfolding situation. Their loyalties were fluid, often driven more by opportunism and territorial aspirations than by ideology. The Balkans in particular had become a volatile region where old empires clashed with rising nationalisms, and where even a minor border dispute could spiral into wider conflict.

Though this web of alliances had prevented large-scale war for decades, it also meant that any localized conflict risked rapid escalation. The Concert of Europe, designed to maintain the continental status quo after the Napoleonic Wars, had largely collapsed by the early 20th century due to rising nationalism and imperial competition. Attempts at coordinated diplomacy—such as the Congress of Berlin (1878)—often favored Great Power interests at the expense of smaller nations, breeding long-term resentment. By 1914, the system lacked both trust and flexibility. Rather than deterring war, alliances now acted as triggers.

Thus, when Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, the question was not whether there would be a response—but whether it would spiral beyond control. What followed would not be merely a regional affair, but a test of every alliance, ambition, and fear that had been building for decades.

Current State of Affairs

“They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.” - Hosea 8:7 (KJV)

It is the first days of July, 1914, in Geneva, Switzerland. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo has shaken Europe to its core, leaving the continent in a precarious and uncertain state. Austria-Hungary, enraged by the attack, debates how far it should go in punishing Serbia, while Serbia braces for what it fears will be a humiliating demand for concessions. The empire’s leaders weigh diplomacy against the temptation to use this moment as a final strike to crush Serbian nationalism.

Across the continent, the great powers watch carefully. Russia declares its solidarity with Serbia and considers how best to protect its Slavic ally without plunging the empire into premature mobilization. Germany, bound by its alliance with Austria-Hungary, weighs the risks of provoking France and questions whether Britain would stand aside if war spreads west. France, long tied to Russia, prepares to uphold its obligations while grappling with domestic debates between hawks and doves. Britain, for the moment, clings to cautious ambiguity, uncertain whether its interests require intervention or restraint.

The assassination has not yet become an ultimatum, but already the balance of Europe trembles. Nationalist movements stir the streets, governments calculate the risks of confrontation, and diplomats struggle to contain an escalating crisis. The delegates of the Continental Council must confront three immediate challenges: preventing Austria-Hungary’s demands from becoming irreconcilable, containing Russia’s pressure to mobilize, and shaping public perception before it drags leaders into irrevocable action.

The central danger of this moment lies in the spiral of mistrust and mobilization. If Austria-Hungary overreaches, Serbia will resist; if Russia mobilizes too soon, Germany will follow; and if diplomacy collapses, alliances will transform a regional incident into a continental war. The council has a narrow window of opportunity to intervene—adjusting rhetoric, slowing mobilization, and containing nationalist fervor—before events pass beyond the reach of diplomacy.

Stances of Parties

Portfolio Powers

Foreign Ministers & Ambassadors

Hold authority over foreign relations. They may initiate or respond to diplomatic missions, negotiate treaties, propose alliances, or attempt to influence neutral powers.

Chiefs of Staff & Military Leaders

Control military planning and mobilization. They may order maneuvers, mobilize troops, strengthen defenses, or escalate offensives within their nation's capabilities.

Prime Ministers, Chancellors, and Civilian Leaders

Direct domestic governance and political consensus. They can determine a nation's overall stance, allocate resources, and balance military or diplomatic initiatives.

Public Figures & Influential Politicians

Possess leverage over public opinion and the press. They may mobilize popular support for war, calm unrest, or rally resistance against militarist policies, shaping the domestic climate in which decisions are made.

Joint Directives

Delegates from the same nation may collaborate to issue joint private directives to determine their state's official stance. However, without kings, emperors, or presidents present, persuading absent national leaders may not always succeed, requiring strategic coordination between delegates.

Sidenote: While these are the listed portfolio powers, delegates are **not strictly bound** by them. You may attempt to overstep the traditional authority of your position if you deem it necessary. However, such actions may become controversial if discovered.

Austria-Hungary

Leopold von Berchtold

As Joint Foreign Minister of Austria-Hungary, Berchtold supports a firm and uncompromising stance toward Serbia following the assassination. He views Serbia as a destabilizing force and believes that military action is necessary to preserve the empire's authority and deter further nationalist threats.

Conrad von Hötzendorf

Hötzendorf, the Chief of the General Staff, consistently calls for war with Serbia and sees the assassination as the perfect justification. He believes that only a swift military strike can restore Austria-Hungary's influence in the Balkans and prevent the empire from disintegrating under nationalist pressure.

István Tisza

As Prime Minister of Hungary, Tisza urges restraint. He fears that an attack on Serbia will provoke Russian intervention and plunge the empire into a disastrous war. Though he does not dismiss the need for action, he insists that any response must be legally and diplomatically justified.

German Empire

Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg

The German Imperial Chancellor seeks to uphold the alliance with Austria-Hungary while avoiding a full-scale European war. He supports issuing an ultimatum to Serbia but prefers that military action be a last resort. His position balances deterrence with diplomacy.

Helmuth von Moltke the Younger

As Chief of the General Staff, Moltke believes war is inevitable and that Germany must act decisively. He argues that early mobilization and support for Austria's military plans are essential to maintaining Germany's strategic advantage against both France and Russia.

Karl Max, Prince Lichnowsky

Germany's ambassador in London advocates for restraint and diplomacy. He warns Berlin that Britain is unlikely to remain neutral if war breaks out and urges a peaceful solution to avoid international isolation. He remains committed to preserving Anglo-German relations, and his personal ties in British political circles give him unusual credibility in gauging Britain's likely response—making him one of the few German voices who can shape London's perception of Berlin.

Russian Empire

Sergey Sazonov

Russia's Foreign Minister expresses deep concern over Austria-Hungary's intentions toward Serbia. While he does not immediately call for war, he insists that Russia cannot allow Serbia to be humiliated. Sazonov supports mediation and mobilization only as a last resort.

Vladimir Sukhomlinov

As Minister of War, Sukhomlinov pushes for military readiness and favors a firm response to any Austro-Hungarian aggression. He supports Serbia as a Slavic ally and believes that Russia must show strength to deter Vienna and Berlin.

Alexander Krivoshein

Krivoshein, Minister of Agriculture, represents the more moderate wing of the Russian government. He warns against the economic and social costs of war and urges a cautious diplomatic approach. He prioritizes domestic stability over foreign entanglements, and his popularity gives him notable influence over Russian public opinion, making him a voice that hawks and mediators alike cannot easily ignore.

France

Théophile Delcassé

As Foreign Minister, Delcassé is wary of Germany and firmly committed to the Franco-Russian alliance. While he prefers diplomacy, he is prepared for war if it becomes necessary to check German aggression. He strengthens France's alignment with Russia in anticipation of escalating tensions.

Joseph Joffre

France's Chief of the General Staff focuses on military preparedness and believes in rapid mobilization in the face of a German threat. He supports a strong offensive posture and sees war as a strategic opportunity to reclaim influence and restore national pride.

Jean Jaurès

Leader of the French Socialist Party, Jaurès vocally opposes war. Enormously popular among the French left, and one of the most famous and influential politicians in France, he believes that the working class should not be sacrificed for imperial rivalries and calls for peaceful resolution through international solidarity and anti-militarist advocacy.

United Kingdom

Sir Edward Grey

The British Foreign Secretary maintains a policy of ambiguity, hoping to mediate between the powers and prevent war. He supports France diplomatically but is reluctant to commit Britain to military involvement without a clear casus belli.

Winston Churchill

As First Lord of the Admiralty, Churchill prepares the Royal Navy for possible mobilization and believes that Britain must be ready to act. He sees German militarism as a rising threat and favors a strong show of force to deter further aggression.

John Morley

Morley, a senior cabinet minister, strongly opposes Britain's entry into a continental war. He supports non-intervention and cautions against being drawn into a conflict that he believes serves no vital British interest.

Serbia

Dragutin Dimitrijević "Apis"

Known as "Apis," the head of Serbian military intelligence supports violent unification of South Slavs through war. He leads a secret nationalist network, which is one of the reasons behind being suspected of being responsible for the assassination of Franz Ferdinand. He views Austria-Hungary as an existential enemy, seeing conflict as the path to Serbian greatness.

Radomir Putnik

As Chief of the General Staff, Putnik prepares Serbia's military for war and believes the country must resist Austrian pressure. He sees the assassination as a flashpoint that will force Serbia to defend its sovereignty.

Nikola Pašić

The Serbian Prime Minister favors caution and diplomacy. Though a nationalist at heart, Pašić fears the consequences of war and seeks to avoid escalation through negotiation, even as he maneuvers to protect Serbian independence.

Italy

Antonio Salandra

Salandra, Italy's Prime Minister, adopts a position of calculated neutrality. He monitors the crisis carefully, weighing whether to honor the Triple Alliance or pursue opportunities elsewhere. He favors diplomacy until Italy's interests are more clearly served.

Sidney Sonnino

As Foreign Minister, Sonnino shares Salandra's cautious stance. He is skeptical of Austria-Hungary and Germany but avoids confrontation for now. Sonnino prefers to wait, negotiate, and align Italy with whichever side offers greater rewards.

Ottoman Empire

Enver Pasha

As Minister of War and a dominant figure in Ottoman military leadership, Enver Pasha favors militarization and strategic alignment with Germany. He sees the European crisis as a potential chance to regain prestige and territory lost in prior conflicts.

Said Halim Pasha

The Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire, Said Halim Pasha advocates for neutrality and internal reform. He fears that entering a European war would threaten Ottoman stability and prefers a cautious, diplomatic course.

Romania

Ion I.C. Brătianu

Romania's Prime Minister seeks to maintain flexibility. He is aligned with the Central Powers on paper but sympathizes with the Entente. He avoids commitments and uses diplomacy to keep Romania's options open.

Bulgaria

Vasil Radoslavov

As Prime Minister of Bulgaria, Radoslavov leans toward Austria-Hungary but hesitates to act

prematurely. He waits to see which side offers the best chance to reclaim lost territories due to the Second Balkan War.

Greece

Eleftherios Venizelos

The Greek Prime Minister is a pragmatic leader who focuses on national interest. Though wary of conflict, he is prepared to act if Greek security or influence in the Balkans is threatened. For now, he advocates for diplomatic caution.

Possible Solutions

With the continuation of rising tensions and pressures across Europe, delegates must find ways to diminish the crisis while protecting their national interests. While the given solutions are not the only way to resolve the given agenda, they are starting points for delegates to begin exploring the problem at hand. Solutions are encouraged to be directed from various perspectives and through a multi-faceted lens.

1. Calling for a Neutral Summit

Delegates can propose holding a peace conference organized by a neutral nation such as Switzerland or the Netherlands. Such a conference can give Austria-Hungary and Serbia a chance to converse without directly losing face. Delegates will, nevertheless, need to convince great powers to agree to a pause in military build-up to create space for negotiation. The success of such negotiations will be reliant upon delegates being ready to take diplomatic means despite pressures from nationalism.

2. Proposing a Crafted Ultimatum

At stake is Austria-Hungary's ultimatum to Serbia. Delegates may possibly negotiate to restructure terms, to adjust demands, timetables, or enforcement clauses, to allow leeway for accommodation by Serbia without sparking war. Such an ultimatum will need to be skillfully negotiated and struck, and delegates will need to make efforts to locate wording that achieves political ends while providing leeway for accommodation.

3. Pursuing Private Backchannel Negotiations

When public diplomacy becomes overly stiff, delegates will sometimes opt for sidelining informal channels of communication, through trusted go-betweens or backdoor negotiations, to feel out compromises and exchange intentions discreetly. The tactic can spare time or ease strains, but is vulnerable to miscommunication or being ostracized. Backchannel negotiation works only to the extent that delegates can balance trust and keep exchanges constructive.

4. Using Limited Military Mobilization as a Signal

Military actions are forceful signals. Delegates can consider partial or late mobilizations as means to display force without declaring all-out war. Such an act could preempt aggression or create space for diplomacy to act, but risk stoking up further tension if interpreted otherwise. Delegates will have to use military signaling with restraint and caution.

5. Containing the Conflict in the Balkan Region

Delegates can potentially work to create the situation as a regional affair between only Austria-Hungary and Serbia, hoping to exclude other powers from the equation. This could

be through diplomatic arrangements or neutrality treaties brokered within the committee. Whether this containment can be achieved is dependent upon delegates being able to convince their own allies to hold back and prioritize regional stability rather than engaging themselves fully.

Questions to Consider

1. To what extent should your nation treat its alliances as binding obligations versus strategic tools, and is there a point at which honoring them becomes more dangerous than breaking them?
2. If your country chooses neutrality, how will you ensure it remains politically relevant and not marginalized or threatened by stronger powers seeking advantage?
3. In weighing war against peace, which matters more for your nation—short-term survival or long-term influence in Europe, and how does this calculation shape your strategy?
4. How do nationalist movements, internal unrest, or economic fragility within your borders constrain your diplomatic flexibility in this crisis, and can you afford to ignore domestic opinion?
5. Is your country better served by leading escalation, acting as a broker of peace, or waiting opportunistically for others to move first, and what risks accompany that choice?
6. If your nation defies alliance commitments or refuses to mobilize alongside allies, how will you defend against the risk of being diplomatically isolated or even targeted by both sides?
7. If war becomes unavoidable, what are your nation's absolute non-negotiables, territory, prestige, security guarantees, that you are willing to fight for, even at existential cost?

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