The crime of treason (Hochverrat) was regularly investigated and prosecuted in the late Habsburg empire, not only during the 1848 revolutions and the First World War, but also in peacetime when there was relative domestic stability. This lecture explores why this was the case, and where the ‘traitors’ were most prevalent during the dualist era of the Habsburg Monarchy. It argues that the authorities’ obsession with Hochverräte can be explained in terms of the evolving security threats to the regime; but it also reflected the mindset of those who governed different regions, as well as the character of the penal codes and legal structures, much of which was inherited from the neo-absolutist decade. The talk illustrates these points with official crime statistics from both Austria and Hungary. It also supplies some vivid case studies from Vienna and Croatia to show how treason law was manipulated for political ends with very harmful results. In short, this processing of traitors challenges our understanding of the late Habsburg empire as a Rechtsstaat.

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