

THE SERBIAN QUESTION IN CROATIAN POLITICS, 1848-1918

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The author analyzes the significance of the Serbian question and the status of the Serbian ethnic minority in Croatian politics from the revolution of 1848 to the fall of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1918. The most distinguished Croatian political theorists and activists during this period – Bogoslav Šulek, Ivan Kukuljević, Josip J. Strossmayer, Franjo Rački, Mihovil Pavlinović, Ante Starčević, Eugen Kvaternik, Frano Supilo, Stjepan and Antun Radić and others – advocated different variants of a Croatocentric ideology within which the South Slav or Slavic framework was sometimes entirely rejected (in Starčević's case), but more often accepted. Starčević and some of his followers denied the existence of the Serbian minority, believing that all South Slavs, except the Bulgarians, were Croats. However, the vast majority of Croatian politicians and national activists acknowledged the existence of the Serbs and the Serbian minority in Croatia. They adhered to the concept of the "Croatian political nation," which encompassed all citizens of the Triune Kingdom (Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia) regardless of ethnic origin. Most Serbian politicians, accepting the identification of speakers of the Shtokavian dialect as Serbs, believed that the Serbs in the Triune Kingdom were a separate nation, which had to be bearer of statehood. Over the long term, they expected that considerable portions of the Triune Kingdom – Slavonia, the Military Frontier and Dalmatia – would become part of an enlarged Serbian state after the collapse of Austria-Hungary. Croatian-Serbian relations from 1848 to 1918 passed through periods of cooperation, particularly when confronted by pressure from the seats of government in Vienna and Budapest, but also conflict due to irreconcilable pretensions to the same territories.

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I. Croatian politics and the Serbs in Croatia, 1848-1918¹

In the 1830s and 1840s, the Croatian national renewal (the Illyrian Movement) actualized the need for ties between the Croats and other South Slav peoples. Slavic solidarity was actually what Hungarian nationalists feared the most, for they were aware of their relatively small numbers and the fact that they were surrounded by hostile peoples. The essence of “Illyrianism” was the literary and cultural integration of the South Slavs, primarily within the Habsburg Monarchy, but also outside of it. Confronting the threat of Hungarian hegemony, Illyrianism emphasized the belonging of the Croats to the broader South Slav and Slavic world. Also put forward in this regard was the theory on the Illyrian roots of the South Slav peoples, which had even then already been somewhat discarded in historical research. The threat of Magyarization was so imminent that this was done at the cost of the significant suppression – but not abandonment – of the Croatian name. The Illyrians often stressed that they did not wish to abolish the separate national names – Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian and Bulgarian – rather they just wanted to incorporate them into a broader whole. The ideas of the German philosopher Herder on the grand future of the Slavic “tribes” and their “peace-loving nature” in contrast to the “bellicosity” of the Germans and Hungarians were quite popular. However, Illyrianism was primarily a literary concept, which scarcely moved beyond the bounds of wishful thinking. The Slovenes and the vast majority of the Serbs living in the Hungarian lands rejected Illyrianism, the latter

¹ For more details on the Serbian question in Croatia and Croatian-Serbian relations from 1840s to 1918, see: Košta Milutinović, *Štrosmajer i jugoslavensko pitanje* (Novi Sad: Institut za izučavanje istorije Vojvodine, 1976); Dragoslav Janković, *Jugoslovensko pitanje i Krfska deklaracija 1917. godine* (Beograd: Savremena administracija, 1967); Viktor Novak, *Vuk i Hrvati* (Belgrade: Naučno delo, 1967); Ivan Mužić, *Hrvatska politika i jugoslavenska ideja* (Split, 1969); Jaroslav Šidak, *Studije iz hrvatske povijesti XIX stoljeća* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1973); Ibid., *Studije iz hrvatske povijesti za revolucije 1848-49.* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1979); Nikša Stančić, *Hrvatska nacionalna ideologija preporodnog pokreta u Dalmaciji* (Zagreb: Institut za hrvatsku povijest, 1980); Ibid., *Hrvatska nacija i nacionalizam u 19. i 20. stoljeću* (Zagreb: Barbat, 2002); Petar Korunić, *Jugoslavenska ideologija u hrvatskoj i slovenskoj politici* (Zagreb: Globus, 1986); Ibid., *Jugoslavizam i federalizam u hrvatskom nacionalnom preporodu* (Zagreb: Globus, 1989); Milorad Ekmečić, *Stvaranje Jugoslavije 1-11* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1989); Vasilije Krestić, *Srpsko-hrvatski odnosi i jugoslovensko ideja u drugoj polovini XIX veka* (Belgrade: Nova knjiga, 1988); Ibid., *Biskup Štrosmajer* (Jagodina: Gambit, 2006); Dragutin Roksandić, *Srbi u Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb: Vjesnik, 1991); Ibid., *Etnos, konfesija, tolerancija* (Zagreb: SKD Prosvjeta, 2004); Mirjana Gross - Agneza Szabo, *Prema hrvatskome građanskom društvu* (Zagreb: Globus, 1992); M. Gross, *Vijek i djelovanje Franje Račkog* (Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2004); Franjo Tuđman, *Hrvatska u monarhističkoj Jugoslaviji 1918-1914. 1* (Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, 1993); Jure Krišto, *Prešućena povijest: Katolička crkva u hrvatskoj politici 1850.-1918.* (Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, 1994); Ivo Banac, *Nacionalno pitanje u Jugoslaviji* (Zagreb: Durieux, 1995); Čedomir Popov, *Velika Srbija - stvarnost i mit* (Sremski Karlovci: Knjižara Zorana Stojanovića, 2008). This article is an excerpt from my manuscript “Solidarity and Conflict of Interest in the Slavic South: South Slavs in Croatian Political Thought, 1844-1918,” in which I cite the relevant historical sources and additional literature.

under the conviction that all speakers of the Shtokavian dialect were Serbs and that Serbs could not reject a living national name in favor of a dead one. Hungarian propaganda constantly accused the Illyrians before the Viennese court of advocating the creation of some sort of “South Slav empire” or of wanting to join the Russian empire, while in Hungary itself it claimed that the Illyrian Movement was a component of the Austrian reaction. However, all the Illyrian Movement actually advocated was South Slav solidarity as a means to more easily achieve the basic Croatian political aims, which at the time were largely defensive, i.e., protection against Hungarian hegemonist policies. Most of the Serbian intelligentsia in Croatia supported the Illyrian Movement and actively participated in the affirmation of the national language (the Ijekavian variant of the Shtokavian dialect) and other forms of social modernization. During the 1830s and 1840s, most Serbian nationalists in Hungary (where the main centers of the Serbian civic elite in the Monarchy were located in the nineteenth century) and in Serbia itself responded with indifference or hostility to the Illyrian concepts of cultural cooperation among the South Slavs. The “Illyrian” or “Yugoslav” names were seen by most Serbs as a case of needless disregard for their national name in the best case, or an underhanded tendency to Croate the Serbs in the worst case. The emphasis on a neutral name, like Illyrian or Yugoslav, was often interpreted in Serbian circles as neglect for their own national name among the Croats and an indicator that they could be Serbianized at some point in the future.

Croatian-Serbian relations became significant for the first time during the revolution of 1848-1849.² Already in the spring of 1848, some Croatian nationalists, such as Šulek and Kukuljević, called for the Croats to form ties with the Serbian movement in southern Hungary as an ally against the Hungarian government. At the May Assembly of 1848, the Hungarian Serbs proclaimed the creation of Vojvodina together with Srijem, and expressed the wish to form an alliance with the Triune Kingdom. This was accepted by the Croatian territorial parliament, or Sabor, in June 1848 (Art. XI), but the matter did not proceed farther than these vague formulations. At the Sabor, deliberations were also held on the authority of Croatia’s viceroy, or ban, and the duke (*vojvoda*, at the head of Vojvodina, or ‘Duchy’), and on the question of control over Srijem. These debates in the Sabor made it clear that most of its delegates were prepared to cede Srijem to Vojvodina under the condition that the latter would join some form of ambiguous “alliance” with the Triune Kingdom. Some of the delegates believed that the duke should be subordinate to the ban, while some, generally those of Serbian ethnicity, thought that the ban and duke should

² On the revolutionary period in 1848-1849 and the Serbian question in Croatian politics, cf.: Slavko Gavrilović, *Srem u revoluciji 1848-1849*. (Belgrade: Naučno delo, 1963); J. Šidak, *Studije iz hrvatske povijesti za revolucije 1848-49*; P. Korunić, *Jugoslavenska ideologija u hrvatskoj i slovenskoj politici* (Zagreb: Globus, 1986); Tomislav Markus, *Hrvatski politički pokret 1848-1849. godine* (Zagreb: Dom i svijet, 2000); Vlasta Švogel, *Zagrebačko liberalno novinstvo 148-1852. i stvaranje moderne Hrvatske* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2007).

have equal status. However, none of this was discussed in greater detail due to the difficult political and military circumstances. In subsequent phases of the revolution, there were several more cases of tensions in Croatian-Serbian relations, such as the harsh criticism of Josip Jelačić (the ban) and the Croats carried in a part of the Serbian press due to hesitation in joining the war against the Hungarians in the summer of 1848. In autumn 1849, polemics arose in some of the Serbian and Croatian press over the relationship between Croatia and Vojvodina, which was supposed to be created by imperial decree. However, on the whole, relations between the Croats and Serbs were generally good, for both sides had a common adversary in Hungarian separatism. A position paper on the territorial army compiled by a parliamentary committee in spring 1849 speaks of the need to bring together the South Slavs in the Monarchy as an active factor in resolving the Eastern Question. An address drafted during that same period and submitted to the king by a Croatian delegation in April 1849 sought the implementation of the Croatian Sabor's conclusions, including political links between the Triune Kingdom and Serbian Vojvodina. In autumn 1849, some of the Zagreb press – particularly the newspapers *Slavenski Jug* and *Südslawische Zeitung* – advocated the merger of Vojvodina into the Triune Kingdom, but most of the Serbian political elite in Hungary wanted Vojvodina to remain a separate political unit.

Ljudevit Gaj and his Illyrians did not, prior to 1848, dwell on certain concepts – such as the identification of all Shtokavian speakers as Serbs – which were advocated by distinguished Slavic scholars in the first half of the nineteenth century, like Pavel Šafarik and Jernej Kopitar.³ The identification of Shtokavian speakers as Serbs was in some cases endorsed by the Austrian government, as in individual surveys conducted in the 1850s. This practice was very widespread among Serbian national circles in the 1830s, where Vuk Karadžić played a major role. It was on this basis that Serbian nationalists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries backed their claim that Slavonia, the Military Frontier, Dalmatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro were all Serbian lands. Only some Serbian nationalists who had lived in Croatian areas for extended periods, such as Mihajlo Polit-Desančić and Đuro Daničić, were later prepared to back down from the unqualified identification of Shtokavian speakers as Serbs. Individual Croats, among whom Imbro Ignjatijević Tkalac and Andrija Torkvat Brlić were the most notable, accepted these assertions and believed that the Serbs were entitled to the leading role in solving the Eastern Question and that most of the other South Slav ethnic groups would be gradually melded into Serbs. Their orientation was largely the result of their disappointment over the outcome of the revolution in 1848-1849 and the imposition of an absolutist regime in Croatia and the Habsburg Monarchy in the 1850s. However, the vast majority of Croatian writers and political activists,

³ On this, and the national disputes in the 1850s, see M. Gross, *Počeci moderne Hrvatske* (Zagreb: Globus, 1985); *Ibid.*, *Vijek i djelovanje Franje Račkoga*.

following the Illyrian tradition, promoted the belief that the Croatian nation consisted of speakers of the Shtokavian, Kajkavian and Chakavian dialects.

Some former Illyrians, such as Eugen Kvaternik and Ante Starčević, embarked upon the path of stressing the Croatian national idea as the only relevant one. Already in the 1850s, Starčević attempted to extend the Croatian name to cover almost the entire South Slav territories, believing that only the Croatian nation lived from the Alps to Macedonia. Until the end of his life, Starčević considered all South Slavs, except the Bulgarians, Croats, and that Croatia was *de jure* an independent state, which was being illegally ruled by the Habsburgs. His opinion never gained much ground among Croatian nationalists, and only a few, like Kvaternik – in the last years of his life – accepted them.⁴ In the 1850s, Bogoslav Šulek, Ivan Kukuljević, Franjo Rački and other Croatian national leaders criticized the assertion that Shtokavian speakers were Serbian, but neither did they accept Starčević's extreme views. During the 1850s, polemics broke out between individual Croatian and Serbian nationalists over the question of distribution of individual national names and the ethnicity of Shtokavian speakers. By the end of the 1840s, most Croatian national activists began to discard the term "Illyrian" in favor of "Yugoslav" as a designation for the ethnic and linguistic bonds between all South Slavs. The basic intent was the same: cultural and literary ties, particularly among the Croats, Serbs and Slovenes, with increasing emphasis on the need to develop a unified literary standard language for all South Slavs. During the 1850s, this was possible only through cultural/literary cooperation, without political objectives.

After restoration of the constitutional life in 1860 and afterward, relations between the Croats and Serbs assumed different aspects.⁵ After the dismantling of the Military Frontier at the end of the 1860s, two districts in Srijem were returned to Croatia, which provoked dissatisfaction on the Serbian side. Later, during the 1860s, the County of Srijem, in which most administrative bodies were dominated by Serbs, exhibited an occasional tendency to present itself as some sort of separate "Serbian autonomous district," which should be incorporated into Vojvodina if ever the latter was restored. In 1861, the Croatian Sabor adopted a conclusion which acknowledged that the "Serbian nation" also lives in the Triune Kingdom, and that the Croats and Serbs must preserve their national unity. But this did not mean, in contrast to the desires of some Serbian delegates, that the Croatian Serbs has the status of a diplomatic or political nation. Minor deliberations were also held on the name of the language, which the Sabor decided to call "Yugoslav," while in Vienna Ivan

⁴ For more details thereon, see: P. Korunić, *Jugoslavenska ideologija*; M. Gross, A. Szabo, *Prema hrvatskom građanskom društvu*; M. Gross, *Vijek i djelovanje Franje Račkoga*; V. Krestić, *Srpsko-hrvatski odnosi*.

⁵ For different interpretations of the South Slav question, cf.: P. Korunić, *Jugoslavenska ideologija*; V. Krestić, *Srpsko-hrvatski odnosi*; William Tomljanovich, *Biskup Josip Juraj Strossmayer* (Zagreb: Dom i svijet, 2001).

Mažuranić, initially the president of the Royal Court Dicastery, later the chancellor of the Royal Court Chancellery for Croatia and Slavonia, registered the “Croatian language,” and this is how it was later entered in the Hungarian-Croatian Compromise of 1868. In later years and decades, the Croatian name, and not just language, extended increasingly, while the term “Yugoslav” only remained in certain cases established earlier, such as the Academy of Arts and Science.

Strossmayer, Rački, Kukuljević and other Croatian ‘Nationals’ (*narodnjaci* in Croatian, those associated with the original National, or Narodna, Party) believed that the Austro-Slav and federalist reorganization of the Monarchy could serve as an attractive focal point for the South Slav regions in the Ottoman Empire, while a dualist Monarchy would have a repellent effect. They believed that Croatia must be the cultural hub for all South Slavs, and this is why the Academy (est. 1867) and the University (est. 1874) were given the name “Yugoslav,” even though from the onset they were primarily Croatian national institutions, the central institutions of high culture in Croatian society. However, they always counted on the survival of the Monarchy and did not foresee the creation of the type of independent South Slav state that would exist after 1918. An accepted view in historiography is that the Croatian ‘Nationals’ around Bishop Strossmayer briefly accepted, at least around the years 1866-67, the possibility of creating an independent South Slav state after the potential dissolution of the Monarchy. However, the document on this – a draft agreement between representatives of the Serbian government and Croatia’s National Party, not actual a formalized accord – only mentioned the fomentation of an uprising in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the possible creation of a separate South Slav state in the territory of the Ottoman Empire of that time. The formal commitment to an independent South Slav state should have left numerous written sources which simply do not exist. This is a case of an erroneous interpretation, as construed by historians in Yugoslavia *after* 1918 in order to create the impression that the Yugoslav state was the ultimate aim of generations of intellectuals, and even the broader masses, among individual South Slav peoples (in this case the Croats). The example of Starčević showed that someone could advocate even radical anti-Austrian positions and still live more-or-less normally, but without the possibility of bringing them to fruition. Many individuals, such as Starčević, could advocate, as a “lofty principle,” the unification of *all* South Slavs outside of the Monarchy – only under the “Yugoslav” but not Croatian name – and still leave peacefully within the framework of the Monarchy. However, there was not one such individual among the Croats, with the possible exception of I. I. Tkalac – nor among any other South Slav people in the nineteenth century who would advocate something like this. Such notions would only become more notable at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the crisis in the Dual Monarchy deepened considerably and faith was lost in a solution to the Croatian national question within the Habsburg framework. A Yugoslav state built on the *ruins of the Habsburg*

Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire, the kind that emerged in 1918, did not exist as a coherent political concept prior to the First World War. It is possible that some individuals during the nineteenth century harbored such ideas, but the sources provide no such data.⁶

Despite the occasional polemics that proceeded in the Croatian and Serbian press – generally concerning the ethnicity of Shtokavian speakers and individual regions, such as Slavonia and Dalmatia – relations between the Croats and Serbs remained relatively good until the 1860s. A portion of the Serbs backed the Unionist Party, which participated in the creation of the Hungarian-Croatian Compromise in 1868, although most belonged to the National Party. In 1867, the Croatian Sabor adopted an unambiguous conclusion on the “equivalency” and “equality” of the Serbian and Croatian people in the Triune Kingdom. This, however, like the similar Sabor conclusion of 1861, did not mean the recognition of the Serbian ethnic group as a holder of sovereignty. During the reign of Ivan Mažuranić as ban (1873-1880), the Serbs in Civil Croatia and Slavonia supported the pro-regime National Party. As opposed to Hungary – in which the domination of the Hungarians meant brutality against the members of other peoples, particularly in the imposition of the (to them foreign) Hungarian language – in Croatia the members of the Serbian minority could freely use their language which, through the process of linguistic standardization (Ijekavian Shtokavian), was identical to Croatian. In areas with large Serbian populations, municipalities freely used the Cyrillic script in official documents, including in correspondence with higher instances, even though all literate Serbs could easily use the Latin alphabet as well. Serbs often assumed distinguished posts in state administration from the 1860s onward, such as speaker of the Croatian Sabor or deputy ban. The attempt to suppress Cyrillic, as in Srijem during the reign of Ban Levin Rauch, were sporadic and of short duration. However, Mažuranić’s reforms, especially the introduction of mass public schooling and the abolishment of Serbian educational autonomy, led to an increase in Croatian-Serbian tensions, for many Serbs saw in religious-educational autonomy a guarantee that the Serbian national identity would be safeguarded. Some Serbian nationalists believed that these reforms reflected an anti-Serb tendency, for they significantly curtailed Serbian religious-educational autonomy. However, Mažuranić’s reforms complied entirely with the civic reforms being implemented in all European states of the time, and they are often mentioned as examples of “progressiveness.” Religious-educational autonomy could hardly be squared with the regular public schooling which the new civil society required. These reforms were not directed against the Serbian minority: the Catholic Church equally opposed the secularization of schooling, just like the Orthodox Church. Rather, they were part of a process civic modernization and secularization of public life, typical of most of

⁶ For different interpretations of the South Slav question, cf.: P. Korunić, *Jugoslavenska ideologija*; V. Krestić, *Srpsko-hrvatski odnosi*; William Tomljanovich, *Biskup Josip Juraj Strossmayer* (Zagreb: Dom i svijet, 2001).

the European countries at the time. Croatian-Serbian disputes were sparked in particular by the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Uprising of 1875-1878, for both sides believed that they were entitled, based on both historical and natural rights, to Bosnia-Herzegovina, even though a minority of Croatian politicians accepted the possibility of its incorporation into Serbia. At the end of the 1870s, an open conflict emerged between the Croatian and Serbian political elites in Dalmatia as well. At the time, the Serbs became a part of the opposition in the Dalmatian territorial diet (Sabor) and together with the Italian autonomists they opposed the incorporation of Dalmatia, which remained in the Austrian half of the Monarchy under the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, to Croatia.

After the 1860s, the Serbs in Croatia insisted that unity be expressed by the explicit emphasis on the two names, e.g., the Croato-Serbian language and so forth, but not by a neutral name like "Yugoslav." Serbian political parties, cultural associations, banks and other institutions established in the territory of the Triune Kingdom after 1870 bore an explicitly Serbian designation. They may have cooperated with similar Croatian institutions, but always with insistence on the special status of the Serbs, not in the sense of an ethnic minority, but rather as an ethnic unit with equal status, which aspired to the status of constituent nation or holder of sovereignty (to use the more modern terms). Therefore, the South Slav idea – which always primarily meant literary and, considerably more rarely, political cooperation among the South Slavs – could only make headway among the Serbs in the most limited sense. Among them there were also individuals with broader outlooks, who were aware of the necessity of cooperation among the small South Slav peoples, but the exclusive Serbian orientation was eminently dominant, with the long-term objective of a unified Serbian state in those territories the Serbs thought their own. This objective was not just anti-Ottoman, but also anti-Habsburg, for a considerable portion of the Serbian people lived in the Monarchy's territory, even a majority after 1878, when Bosnia-Herzegovina became a *de facto* part of the Empire. This anti-Habsburg orientation – heightened also by the traditional image of it as a Catholic empire – could hardly be aligned with the pro-Habsburg orientation that was characteristic of a vast majority of Croatian politicians and writers up to the beginning of the twentieth century, and even later, all up until 1918.

Count Károly Khuen-Hédervary, a Hungarian magnate originally from Slavonia, was given the task of "pacifying" Croatia during his reign as ban (1883-1903), and this meant preventing the Croatian question from becoming the driving force behind large fissures in the then still stable dualist system, and to eliminate as much as possible the already limited Croatian autonomy in the interests of a centralized Hungarian state. Khuen, although actually independent of it, formally depended on the National Party – by then already a group of bureaucrats who obediently backed any governmental proposal – in which the majority were Croats, but which included all Serbian parliamentary

delegates (“Khuen’s Serbs”), who supported his policies in exchange for minor concessions.⁷ During Khuen’s time, the political and cultural hub of the Serbs in the Habsburg Monarchy moved from southern Hungary and Novi Sad to Croatia and Zagreb, which also indicated the favorable status of the Serbian minority. Khuen stepped down in 1903 when dualism was experiencing ever greater crises, while a new generation of Croatian and Serbian youths (“the progressive youth”), educated in Prague, Vienna and Paris, attempted to overcome the old divisions in the traditional civic parties. At the onset of the twentieth century, some Dalmatian politicians, led by Frano Supilo and Ante Trumbić, inaugurated the so-called political new course.⁸ Its basic feature was the rejection of the old policies of courting favor with Vienna and the sterile addresses by “subjects” in exchange for negligible concessions. Instead, the new policies constituted an attempt to exploit the deepening crisis of the dual order, particularly in the conflicts between the king and the Hungarian opposition, and to once more spark the Eastern Question after the revolt in Macedonia and the accession of the anti-Habsburg Karađorđević dynasty to the throne in Serbia. Particular emphasis was placed on resistance to Vienna-based centralism and Germanization, under the assumption that the pan-German *Drang nach Osten* was the greatest threat to the South Slav and other Balkan peoples. The ‘new course’ policies were not formally anti-Habsburg, for up to the First World War the continued existence of the Monarchy was not called into question, but they still constituted a major divergence from the traditional Croatian policies of dependence, or seeking dependence, on Vienna (*aula est pro nobis*). These policies were an indicator of increasingly intense anti-Austrian tendencies among a considerable portion of the Croatian political and cultural elite at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Croatian politicians who initiated the new course also extended the hand of cooperation to Serbian parties based on the postulate of “national unity,” i.e. the Croats and Serbs as one nation with two names. For them, this did not mean unitarist Yugoslavism, which erased “tribal” differences, but rather the negation of Serbian exclusivism and the attempt to have the Serbs recognized as a separate political individuality, which would have pretensions to a separate territory. For the politics of the new course, the Croats, Serbs and the South Slavs in general had to cooperate,

⁷ On the Serbs in Croatia during Khuen’s reign, cf.: V. Krestić, *Srpsko-hrvatski odnosi*; Mato Artuković, *Ideologija srpsko-hrvatskih sporova* (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1991); Ibid., *Srbi u Hrvatskoj: Khuenovo doba* (Slavonski Brod: Hrvatski institut za povijest - Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, 2001); Nives Rumenjak, *Politička i društvena elita Srba potkraj 19. stoljeća* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2005)

⁸ For more on the new course policies and Croatian-Serbian relations, cf.: Rene Lovrenčić, *Geneza politike “novog kursa”* (Zagreb: Zavod za hrvatsku povijest, 1972); Tereza Ganza-Aras, *Politika “novog kursa” dalmatinskih pravaša oko Supila i Trumbića* (Split: Matica hrvatska, 1992); Marijan Diklić, *Pravaštvo u Dalmaciji do kraja Prvog svjetskog rata* (Zadar: Matica hrvatska, 1998); Ivo Petrinović, “Politički život i nazoni Frana Supila” (Frano Supilo, *Izabrani politički spisi*, Zagreb: Golden marketing 2000, 9-60); Ranka Gašić, “Novi kurs” Srba u Hrvatskoj (Zagreb: SKD Prosvjeta, 2001)

for they were all equally threatened by the German incursion into eastern and southeastern Europe (*Drang nach Osten*).

The Rijeka Resolution of October 1905 – which was signed by the Croatian delegates in the Reichsrat (Imperial Council) and the Dalmatian Sabor, and the Rightist delegates from the Istrian and Croatian Sabors – proclaimed the abandonment of the previous policy of seeking Vienna's backing and support for the efforts of the Hungarian opposition to depose the dualist order in exchange for Hungarian support of unification of the Croatian lands and the abolishment of the pro-Hungarian ('Magyarone') regime in Croatia. They believed that the German push to the East and the growing influence of Germany were the biggest threats to the small nations of Southeastern Europe. The Serbian delegates in Dalmatia supported the Rijeka Resolution in the so-called Zadar Resolution, which nonetheless included insistence on special Serbian national rights. However, by 1907 the new course policies experienced failure as a result of a pact between Vienna and the Hungarian opposition, while Dalmatia remained politically and administratively separate from Civil Croatia until the Monarchy's demise, and only cooperation between most of the Croatian and Serbian citizenry survived based on the intentionally ambiguous concepts of "national unity," which both sides could interpret however they pleased. What the Croatian politicians meant by this was unity of political nationhood in the Triune Kingdom, in which there was no room for a separate Serbian nation with separate political and territorial pretensions. What the Serbs meant by this was that the Triune Kingdom was not a Croatian state, but rather that the Serbs and Croats, although apparently a single nation, were somehow "equal" and that the Serbs, under more favorable future circumstances, could exercise the right to specific territories. It was on this basis that the Croato-Serbian Coalition was established, generally consisting of the Croatian Progressive Party and the Serbian Independent Party. This thereby quelled Croatian-Serbian conflicts, which, spurred by an anti-Croatian article in the Zagreb-based Serbian newspaper *Srbobran*, led to mass anti-Serb demonstrations in 1902. However, Croatian-Serbian discord persisted latently, which particularly came to the fore with the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908, and in the operations of individual small parties with an explicitly anti-Serbian bent, such as the Pure Party of the Right led by Josip Frank.

In the elections of 1906, the pro-regime National party disappeared entirely, and the lead role was assumed by the Croato-Serbian coalition, which had advocated the introduction of a constitutional order and the integrity of the Croatian lands within the framework of the Dual Monarchy. This was the old and minimalist platform of all Croatian parties since the 1840s. From 1906 to 1918, the Coalition received the most votes in elections in Croatia and Slavonia, but it was not always the governing party, for dualist circles in Vienna and Budapest occasionally employed absolutist methods of governance. After Supilo's departure from the Coalition in 1909, it was largely dominated by op-

portunist policies to be “close to power.” The most important role in the latter regard was played by Svetozar Pribićević, who coordinated his activities based on instructions from the Serbian government, for he was counting on a future war between Austria-Hungary and Serbia and the need to safeguard the Serbian population in Croatia. The Coalition had to formally uphold the dualist order, but it no longer maintained the former Austro-Slav and federalist concepts. Only a minor portion of Croatia’s citizenry leaned toward a trialist reorganization of the Monarchy up to 1918, i.e. the unification of the South Slav lands into a separate political unit with status equal to Austria and Hungary.

The South Slav idea in Croatian political theory and practice of the nineteenth century generally signified efforts aimed at literary and, depending on circumstances, political cooperation between the Croats and neighboring South Slavs, the Slovenes and Serbs, primarily within the framework of the Habsburg Monarchy. At the time it did not have – as opposed to the situation just before and during the First World War – an anti-Austrian character, and sometimes it even entailed the tendency of expanding the reformed Monarchy to integrate neighboring South Slav lands. This was entirely unacceptable to Serbian nationalists, for they saw these territories as part of a future (greater) Serbian state. During the twentieth century, a new generation of Serbian politicians in Croatia, led by Pribićević, accepted the new course policies and “national unity,” interpreting it in the sense of the long-term demolition of the Habsburg Monarchy. These Serbian politicians maintained close ties with Belgrade, often working under the instructions of Serbian governmental agents, and after the change in ruling dynasties in 1903, began to see Serbia as the Piedmont that would liberate the Serbs and unite all lands that they considered Serbian around itself. However, they did not become involved in direct anti-Austrian political action and thus no “high treason” charges against them could be proven in several trials in 1908 and 1909. Pribićević and other Serbian nationalists rejected all concepts put forward by Croatian politicians, from trialism to federalism, which were aimed at preserving and stabilizing the Habsburg Monarchy. Even so, some younger Serbian politicians in Croatia called for an even broader South Slav orientation, which was almost entirely absent among the Serbian intelligentsia in Serbia.

An idea which gained increasing credence in youth activist circles in the years prior to the First World War was “integral Yugoslavism,” which promoted a “Yugoslav nation” and alluded to the possibility of the Monarchy’s fall and the creation of a Yugoslav state. The nationalist youth expounded increasingly straightforward anti-Austrian positions, albeit not from the former Starčevićist pan-Croatian standpoint, but rather from the Yugoslav standpoint, looking to Serbia as the Piedmont of the South Slavs. These youth groups advocated the creation of a unified Yugoslav culture; they established many newspapers with a pro-Yugoslav orientation (*Ujedinjenje, Jug, Zastava, Novi život, Nova riječ, Narodno jedinstvo, etc.*) while they participated in interna-

tional exhibitions in the Serbian pavilions. The best known among this group was certainly the sculptor Ivan Meštrović and his “Kosovo cycle.” The Balkan Wars and the collapse of Ottoman authority in the Balkans only strengthened the pro-Yugoslav orientation in many sectors of the Croatian citizenry. Most of the Croatian citizenry had long since discarded the former stance on the Monarchy as the focus for the Balkan peoples and accepted the principle that the Balkans should belong to the Balkan peoples. The Yugoslav orientation was also formally advocated by many influential Serbian politicians in Croatia, Svetozar Pribičević in particular, who after 1918 would uphold Serbian domination. The spread of the Yugoslav orientation in the early years of the twentieth century testified to the more rapid spread of anti-Austrian feeling among a part of the Croatian intelligentsia, a phenomenon unknown in the nineteenth century. A pro-Austrian orientation was retained by the brothers Antun and Stjepan Radić, who in 1904 established the Croatian Peasant Party, which would remain relatively insignificant until 1918, but then grow into a mass Croatian national movement. Until 1918, the Radić brothers called for cooperation among the South Slavs with the objective of the federal reorganization of the Habsburg Monarchy.⁹

Immediately prior to the outbreak of World War I, several distinguished Croatian politicians – Frano Supilo, Ante Trumbić, Franko Potočnjak, Hinko Hinković and others – emigrated, and while abroad they later established the Yugoslav Committee, which would generally push for the creation of a unified state of all Slovenes, Croats and Serbs.¹⁰ In the Monarchy’s South Slav lands, political and social radicalization burgeoned as the war neared its end. The South Slav delegates of the Monarchy’s western provinces, gathered in the Reichsrat, issued a declaration in May 1917 in which they sought the unification of the Slovenian, Croatian and Serbian regions into a single state body under the Habsburg dynasty. The Yugoslav Committee never even counted on the survival of the Monarchy, and in the summer of 1917 it concluded an accord with the Serbian government, the so-called Declaration of Corfu, which foresaw the creation of a centralized Yugoslav kingdom ruled by the Karađorđević dynasty. In Serbia before and during the First World War, the South Slav question was generally limited to the Serbian question, i.e. the liberation and annexation of “Serbian regions” to Serbia, and this was the minimum program of all Ser-

⁹ For more on the Radić brothers, with emphasis on Stjepan Radić and his views of Croatian-Serbian relations, cf.: Branka Boban, *Demokratski nacionalizam Stjepana Radića* (Zagreb: Zavod za hrvatsku povijest FF-a Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 1998); Mark Biondich, *Stjepan Radić and the Croat Peasant Party* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Darko Gavrilović, *Stjepan Radić i Srbi* (Split: Marjan tisak, 2002); Ibid., *U vrtlogu nacionalizma* (Novi Sad: Stylos, 2007); Ivo Perić, *Antun Radić 1868.-1919.* (Zagreb: Dom i svijet, 2002); Ibid., *Stjepan Radić 1871.-1928.* (Zagreb: Dom i svijet, 2003).

¹⁰ On Croatia and Croatian-Serbian relations during the First World War, see: Bogdan Krizman, *Raspad Austro-Ugarske i stvaranje jugoslavenske države* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1977); Ibid., *Hrvatska u Prvom svjetskom ratu* (Zagreb: Globus, 1989); I. Banac, *Nacionalno pitanje.*

bian governments. After the Salonika Front was broken in the late summer of 1918, the Dual Monarchy quickly disintegrated. The National Council of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs was established in Zagreb in October 1918 as the representative body of the South Slav regions of the already almost former Monarchy. On October 29, 1918, the Croatian Sabor passed the decision to sever all constitutional ties between Croatia and Austria and Hungary, and accede to the newly-formed State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs. The latter united with Serbia into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in early December 1918. Unification was largely conducted according to the dictates of Serbian Prime Minister Nikola Pašić and the majority of the Serbian political elite, for a monarchic (under the Karađorđević dynasty) and centralist state order was immediately imposed that would remain in place until the country's collapse in 1941. Pribićević in particular contributed to unification in his manner, as he aligned his activities with those of the Serbian government. This crude unification, the complete elimination of Croatian autonomy in the new state and the centralist regime under Belgrade's domination provoked immense dissatisfaction among the broad Croatian masses, which in the coming years would be reflected in the transformation of Radić's Peasant Party into a mass national movement.

II. The Serbian question in Croatian politics up to 1918: general considerations

The Croatian politicians gathered around the National Party ('Nationals') in the nineteenth century, and a vast majority of Croatian politicians in general until 1918, agreed that the Triune Kingdom was a Croatian state in the sense that the Croats, as the majority people, were the holder of sovereignty. They did not, however, negate the existence of the Serbian minority, like Ante Starčević and some of the small number of his followers. In this they not only cited the historical and statehood right – under which the Croats in the Habsburg Monarchy had the status of one of the “historical nations,” who once had their own state – but also on the contemporary natural right of nations to live in their own state. The “Croatian political nation” signified all citizens of the Triune Kingdom regardless of ethnicity, and it did not exclude the existence of ethnic minorities. However, as opposed to Hungary, which truly consisted of many peoples, the Croats were very much the majority in the Triune Kingdom with over 80% of the total population (counting Dalmatia and the Military Frontier). Serbian nationalists saw the concepts of the Hungarian and Croatian political nations as the same, believing that both implied national chauvinism and denial of the rights of Serbs and other peoples.¹¹ They

¹¹ Some more recent Serbian historians do the same, citing the Serbian political writings of the time, particularly Vasilije Krestić, who thoroughly studied the Serbian national minority in Croatia during the latter half of the nineteenth century: V. Krestić, *Srpsko-hrvatski odnosi*; *Ibid.*, *Biskup Štrosmajer*.

believed that the Serbs in the Triune Kingdom were a separate nation, which had to be a holder of sovereignty together with the Croats. Over the long term, they counted on the possibility that most territories of the Triune Kingdom – especially Slavonia, the Military Frontier (decommissioned and dissolved in the early 1880s) and Dalmatia, as well as Bosnia-Herzegovina – would become a part of some Greater Serbia. The concept of the Croatian political nation did not have to mean, and generally did not mean, the negation of Serbs in the sense of a specific ethnic unit, nationality or, to use contemporary terminology, a national or ethnic minority. There were essential differences between the two concepts of political nations. In Hungary there truly was a diversity of peoples who, as compact ethnic units, lived in specific territories for centuries. The Hungarians had a relative numerical majority, and they secured a predominant position under a set of circumstances favorable to them, such as the Hungarian character of the landed nobility. Hungarian domination was negatively reflected in the sphere of language in particular, for it meant the imposition of Hungarian, a rather unique language, on other peoples, who could not hold any public office, certainly not in state institutions, without knowing it. The Hungarian language, as a member of the Ural-Altaic group, differed considerably from all other languages spoken in the Hungarian kingdom, and as opposed to German it did not even have the character of a general means of communication. The elites among the non-Hungarian ethnic groups (Slovaks, Romanians, Serbs and Ukrainians) saw the imposition of the Hungarian language as an expression of Hungarian domination, and they voiced demands for cultural and political autonomy in various forms.

The situation in Croatia differed considerably. Croats were the obviously dominant ethnic group in the Triune Kingdom, and the only minority, the Serbs, with approximately 20-26% of the population depending on the territory under consideration,¹² spoke the same language as the Croats, i.e., the Ijekavian Shtokavian dialect that had been undergoing a process of standardization as the literary language since the 1830s. The Orthodox population was not strictly Serbian in terms of ethnicity, for they were largely Vlachs who were only gradually incorporated in the process of Serbian national integration. However, even when this Orthodox population massively expressed Serbian nationality, as at the onset of the twentieth century, it still remained an obvious minority, considerably more numerous than, say, the Czechs or Germans, but

¹² According to the census of 1910, Croatia and Slavonia had a population of 2,621,954, of which 63% were Croats and roughly 26% were Serbs. In previous censuses, this relationship was roughly the same, but the number of Serbs in the provinces prior to the decommissioning of the Military Frontier in 1881 was considerably smaller. However, Serbian nationalists rejected the concept of the Croatian political nation already in the 1860s and 1870s, when they were a very small minority in Civil Croatia with approximately 10% of the population. This means that they were unconcerned with the share of the Serbs in the total population, for they had to be a constituent or sovereign nation. If Dalmatia is included, – and it was *de iure* a part of the Triune Kingdom – in which the percentage of Croats was always over 80%, the character of the Serbs as an ethnic minority becomes even clearer.

a minority nonetheless. This Orthodox population, whether Vlach or Serbian, was compact only in very small areas, such as eastern Srijem, southern Banija or eastern Lika, and generally intermixed with Croats. From the mid-nineteenth century to 1918, the Triune Kingdom was a classic example of a country dominated by a single ethnic unit, which rightfully had pretensions to be the sole holder of sovereignty. In Croatia there were no linguistic disputes, which were the principal feature of national antagonisms in Austria and Hungary from the mid-nineteenth century to 1918. There was a difference in scripts – the literate Serbs of the time generally used Cyrillic – but educated individuals were familiar with both scripts and no problems arose if a central state body responded in Latin script to correspondence from a district body written in Cyrillic. For a literate and educated Serb who aspired to some type of career in the civil service or a self-employed profession, active and passive knowledge of Latin script was only natural and not deemed a matter of imposition. Serbian minority rights in Croatia were observed during the entire period up to 1918: there was religious-educational autonomy, Cyrillic was freely used in public affairs, Serbs were appointed to governmental posts in proportion to their share of the population, and sometimes even more so, while language-related disputes could not even exist, for the Croats and Serbs were already by that time using identically standardized literary languages. The favorable position of the Serbs could be seen in the fact that the hub of their national life in the Monarchy by the end of the nineteenth century moved from southern Hungary to Croatia. The dispute over two ideas of statehood remained.

One of the functions of the South Slav idea was to facilitate the integration of the Serbian minority in to the Croatian political nation, i.e., the recognition of the Triune Kingdom as a Croatian state. However, such efforts were generally met with hostility among the Serbian national elite, which saw the Triune Kingdom as a Serbo-Croatian state and reserved considerable portions of its territory for the future greater Serbian state. Until 1918, this could not be discussed openly, but stressing that the Serbs in Croatia were a nation and subjects of statehood implied the right to specific territory as well. Demands were territorial autonomy for the Serbs were often aired in the Serbian press of the time, but the Serbian political elite never officially sought this. Their fundamental argument was the identification of Shtokavian speakers as Serbs, whereby the Triune Kingdom was essentially a Serbian state with a Croatian (Kajkavian and Chakavian speaking) minority, which was in any case disappearing with the spread of linguistic standardization on a Shtokavian basis. Excesses on the Croatian side, from theoretical denial that any Serbs even existed in Croatia to sporadic physical confrontations (such as the demonstrations of 1902), largely resulted from the refusal of Serbs to be loyal to Croatia and their support for all forms of foreign domination and influence which opposed Croatian statehood. The insistence of the Serbian political elite on the sovereign ('state-building') character of the Serbian ethnic community in Croatia aroused among the Croats suspicions of concealed separatist tendencies.

A particularly negative impression was created by the cooperation of Serbian nationalists with the Magyarone administration in Civil Croatia from 1883 to 1903, and with the Italian autonomists in Dalmatia from the late 1870s to the early twentieth century.¹³ Based on such “pacts with foreigners,” many Croats believed that the Serbs were prepared to do anything to undermine even that limited autonomy which Croatia had under the Dual Monarchy. The only argument used by the Serbian nationalists to oppose the integration of the Serbs into the Croatian political nation was the identification of all Shtokavian speakers as Serbs, i.e., an entirely erroneous assertion, which at the beginning of the twentieth century, with the gradual finalization of the processes of Croatian and Serbian national integration, was much more rarely employed.

To understand the Serbian question in Croatia, it is necessary to say something about the Serbian state until 1914. The Serbian state was created temporarily during the First (1804-1813) and then on a long-term basis in the Second Serbian Uprising (1815), first as an autonomous principality, and later, after 1878, as an internationally recognized state. Already in the 1840s and later, the Serbian government began conducting active policies in many South Slav territories, particularly in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Dalmatia, Kosovo and elsewhere through a network of undercover agents. Some of them, such as Matija Ban and Ante Orešković, were Croats, but they were enlisted in the service of the Serbian government, whose goal was territorial expansion and enlargement of the Serbian state’s size. During this time, Serbia, then still an autonomous principality in the Ottoman Empire, began to undertake intense political action in individual South Slav regions, especially Dalmatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slavonia and the Military Frontier. In 1844, the Serbian foreign minister, Ilija Garašanin, formulated a secret foreign policy program called the *Načertanije* (‘Outlines’), which only became known to the wider public in the early twentieth century.¹⁴ In it, he called for the gradual expansion of Serbia through the incorporation of surrounding territories: Bosnia-Herzegovina, the southern Morava River basin, Raška, Kosovo and Macedonia, all of which were deemed Serbian, and he invoked the heritage of the medieval Serbian state, especially

¹³ Vasilije Krestić and certain other contemporary Serbian historians now reiterate those same claims of Serbian political commentary at that time, which justified this collaboration as a necessity, i.e., as compelled by the “failure to recognize” the Serbs in Croatia. However, it has been shown that Serbian nationalists never, neither during Khuen’s reign nor later, formally demanded “recognition” of the “Serbian political nation” in Croatia nor territorial autonomy for districts with Serb majority populations. The existence of the Serbian minority in Croatia was never denied by the main Croatian political groups in the country. Therefore, their collaboration with Magyarone or Italianist groups had other motivations, which were rooted in the conflict between the two ideas of statehood.

¹⁴ On Serbia’s expansionist policies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see: M. Ekmečić, *Stvaranje Jugoslavije*; Damir Agičić, *Tajna politika Srbije u XIX. stoljeću* (Zagreb: AGM, 1994); Č. Popov, *Velika Srbija*. On the Eastern Question: Dragutin Pavličević, *Hrvati i istočno pitanje* (Zagreb: Golden marketing/Tehnička knjiga, 2007); Č. Popov, *Istočno pitanje i srpska revolucija 1804-1918*. (Beograd: Srpska književna zadruga, 2008).

the empire of the Serbian ruler Dušan. Regardless of the *Načertanije*, many actions taken by the Serbian government – the networks of secret operatives, national propaganda, negotiations and compacts with individual Christian governments (the Montenegrin and Greek), etc. – demonstrated that the ultimate aim was to create a greater Serbian state, i.e., to renew Dušan's empire between the Slovenian and Greek ethnic territories. This type of policy was actually customary among the new Christian states in the Balkans, as they attempted to expand at the expense of the enfeebled Ottoman Empire and solve the Eastern Question to their own benefit. Greece thus attempted to restore the Byzantine Empire, while Bulgaria was preoccupied with the restoration of Tsar Simeon's empire. This Serbian policy was both anti-Austrian and anti-Ottoman, and it sought allies among certain great powers, usually Russia, whose policies suited it. A broad network of operatives working for the Serbian government and disseminating Serbian propaganda already existed in the South Slav lands. The Serbian Orthodox clergy, educated in Sremski Karlovci, was particularly active in this regard, as was the local populace in individual areas. The Serbian press in southern Hungary was very influential during and after the abolishment of Vojvodina, and here the claim was often made, especially after the newspaper *Zastava* was launched in 1866, that the territories inhabited by Shtokavian speakers – Slavonia, Banija, Lika, Dalmatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina – were Serbian lands. All of these contributed to the spread of the Serbian name among the Orthodox populations of Slavonia, the Military Frontier, Dalmatia and Bosnia, where previously it was only rarely used, and then generally as a confessional designation.

Serbia secured significant territorial gains in 1877 and then in the First Balkan war in 1912, when it occupied today's Kosovo and Macedonia. The Serbian state's independence, and its subsequent expansion, exerted a strong impact on the Serbs in the Habsburg Monarchy, who saw in it the core of the future unification of the Serbs. This future Serbia had to include those lands which the Serbs considered theirs: Dalmatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slavonia, Lika, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia and southern Hungary. Until 1914, it was impossible to speak openly of lands in the Habsburg Monarchy, but many documents show that this was the ultimate objective of several generations of Serbian nationalists. The basic criteria applied by Serbian nationalists to claim these territories as Serbian was, largely, linguistic, i.e., the conviction that the Shtokavian language was Serbian and that all Shtokavian speakers were Serbs. However, there was simultaneously another powerful tendency to narrowly tie Serbian identity with Orthodoxy due to the great influence and reputation of the Serbian Orthodox Church. This church played a crucial role in incorporating the Orthodox masses, largely of Vlach origin, in the territories of Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina into the process of Serbian national integration from the mid-nineteenth century onward. Many Serbian politicians in Croatia could simultaneously closely tie Serbian identity with Orthodoxy, seeing the Serbian Orthodox Church as a Serbian national insti-

tution, but also retain the old identification of Shtokavian speakers as Serbs. These differing criteria – the historical right, faith and language – could be used simultaneously to “prove” that a given territory was Serbian. Individual Serbian emissaries and politicians occasionally also employed the “Piedmont argument,” i.e., the position that in the unification of the South Slav lands Serbia had a role similar to Piedmont in the Italian lands. This position was particularly frequent prior to and during the First World War – but the basic objective was always the expansion of Serbia, and not the creation of a South Slav state. Such a policy was not predicated upon some sort of moral “obtusity” or nationalist short-sightedness, but rather by the specific status of the Serbian nation which, as a result of major ethnic migrations in the (anti-)Ottoman wars from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, became dispersed over a wide territory. This territory, from Slavonia and Lika in the northwest to Kosovo and Macedonia in the southeast, was small enough to allow for attempts to unite all components of the Serbian nation into a single political unit, but again sufficiently large for the Serbs to be intermingled with other nations – Croats, Albanians, Bosniak Muslims, Hungarians and others – who had considerably different national programs and objectives and who necessarily viewed the Serbian national program as hegemonist, i.e., Greater Serbian. In these territories, the Serbs were a numerical minority in relation to the overall populations, accounting for 12-35%. Thus, the political expansion of the Serbian state from the 1860s onward was Greater Serbian and not just Serbian in nature.¹⁵

At the onset of the twentieth century, radical Serbian groups occasionally sought territorial autonomy in areas – generally parts of the former Military Frontier and the future ‘Serbian autonomous districts’ of the 1990s – where the Orthodox population formed a majority. Most Serbian politicians in Croatia did not openly express territorial pretensions, but they also insisted that the Serbs were a separate nation and not a minority. This always left open the possibility that in the future, under altered geopolitical circumstances, they could express territorial pretensions to individual parts of Croatia. This Serbian exclusivism was motivated by the refusal to recognize the Triune Kingdom as a Croatian state and to accept loyalty to Croatia. In the Serbian press from the 1870s until 1914, threats appeared occasionally, usually under conditions of poorer Croatian-Serbian relations, on the possibility of the Serbs seeking some kind of territorial autonomy, as they had sought in Hungary. Nobody on the Croatian side was willing to accede to something like this, not even those who most extolled the need for Yugoslav reciprocity. For Serbian nationalists, who generally assumed the identification of Shtokavian speakers as Serbs, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slavonia, Dalmatia, Like and Banija were Serbian lands. In their view, these lands were populated solely by Serbs, who had the right to unification in a single state. From the Croatian point of view, this was a Greater

¹⁵ This fact is still not acknowledged by some of the most distinguished contemporary Serbian historians, who continue to insist that this was an exclusively “Serbian policy,” as though no other peoples lived in these territories (Č. Popov, *Velika Srbija*).

Serbian concept, which unjustifiably sought to extend the Serbian name to other ethnic groups. Although this expression was not used, it is apparent in the analyses of many Croatian nationalists of the latter half of the nineteenth century that they saw before them the concept of Greater Serbia in the sense of a specific hegemonist and imperialist concept. This alone, together with other facts, sufficiently confirms that the vision of Greater Serbia in non-Serbian theories went back considerably farther than the early twentieth century.¹⁶

In earlier historiography, it was often stated that the adherents of the “Yugoslav ideology” (Strossmayer, Rački and others) recognized the Serbs in Croatia, while the “Rightists” denied this. The latter assertion only applied to a handful of individuals, such as Starčević, Kvaternik and a few others. Even Starčević, however, was prepared to accept different names, i.e., he thought that what someone called him-/herself or the faith to which they were baptized was not crucial, as long as that someone worked to the benefit of Croatia as a common homeland. The vast majority of the membership of the various Rightist parties at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had nothing against recognizing that Serbs existed in Croatia, provided that they form, to use a later term, an ethnic minority, and that they recognize Croatia as their homeland.

Here there were no essential differences between a Croat who was Yugoslav-oriented and a Croat who wanted to be “just a Croat.” The occasional refusal to acknowledge the existence of Serbs ensued from the fear that this could be interpreted in the sense of a holder of sovereignty, i.e., either there are no Serbs at all or they are a ‘state-forming’ nation. A vast majority of Croatian politicians from the 1860s to 1918 acknowledged that Serbs existed in Croatia, but as a national minority. Since most of them had a positive stance on the idea of Yugoslav solidarity, this also indicates that the “Yugoslav idea” was not a front for anti-Serbian tendencies, certainly not in the sense of some kind of attempts to Croatize the Serbs.¹⁷ Starčević’s theory that only Croats and Bulgarians existed in the Slavic south was rarely present even in the Rightist press in Civil Croatia and Slavonia, and entirely non-existent in Dalmatia.

¹⁶ Even in the most recent Serbian historiography and political theory, the assertion still appears that this concept was the product of early twentieth-century Austro-Hungarian propaganda, which came to the forefront with the “high treason” trials, of which the best known was the Friedjung trial in Vienna in 1909 (Č. Popov, *Velika Srbija*). However, already in 1872, the Serbian theorist Svetozar Marković, in his work *Srbija na istoku* (Serbia in the East), first used the term “Greater Serbia” in the negative context to designate the imperialist and chauvinist Serbian state and the conquest of non-Serbian territories. The Serbian historian Vaso Čubrilović long ago showed that Greater Serbian concepts dominated among the Serbian political elite all up until 1941, V. Čubrilović, *Morija političke misli u Srbiji XIX veka* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1958).

¹⁷ There were also opposing assessments of the South Slav idea – among Starčević and his followers, and later Ivo Pilar, and among some contemporary Croatian historians – as a “betrayal” of Croatian interests and unwitting service of (Greater) Serbian interests. In my aforementioned book in manuscript (see note 1), I attempt to show that both interpretations are incorrect.

The declarations frequently made in the Rightist press that no Serbs existed in Croatia were rooted in the fear that recognition of the Serbian name would automatically mean recognition of the Serbian nation as a holder of sovereignty. Symptomatically, the diehard Rightists who equated the ethnic and political nation in Croatia were obstinate opponents of the "South Slav idea," which they interpreted as a betrayal of Croatian national interests. In the Croatia of the time there were also other ethnic groups, such as Czechs and Slovaks, but there was no antipathy directed against them, for they accepted the Croatia as their homeland and did not conduct any manner of separatist policy.

The South Slav orientation did not mean a tendency to Croatize the Serbs in Croatia, but it did seek that they recognize Croatia as their homeland and refrain from any separate Serbian policies. All Croatian political theorists advocated the concept of a Croatian political nation whereby all citizens of the Triune Kingdom would be political Croats and Croatian citizens, regardless of ethnicity. This view was expounded in the same measure by those who affirmative as well as negative positions on the idea of Yugoslav solidarity. Some of them, like Starčević and Kvaternik, and some of their followers, equated political and ethnic nationhood and denied the existence of a Serbian minority in Croatia, but this was a minority view. The most numerous national minority, the Serbs, rejected the concept of the Croatian political nation and often cooperated with those, such as the Hungarians and Dalmatian 'Italianists,' who were equally hostile to the Croats. Serbian nationalists, based on their identification of Shtokavian speakers as Serbs, saw the Triune Kingdom as more a Serbian than Croatian state, and they suspected the South Slav idea as being an anti-Serbian tendency. Cooperation between Croatian and Serbian politicians was only possible within the framework of unclear concepts, such as "national unity" in the politics of the new course, which each side could interpret as it suited them.

All of this leads to the conclusion that the "South Slav idea" in Croatian political thought from Illyrianism onward did not conceal any Greater Croatian intentions, nor was its aim to Croatize the Serbs, as alleged by Krestić and some other Serbian historians. If this was the concealed objective, then it would mean that Croatian nationalists intended, due to the connections between the South Slav and general Slav framework, to Croatize not only all South Slavs, but all Slavs in general. If the South Slav idea was first and foremost supposed to serve specific fundamental Croatian national aims, such as the acquisition of state autonomy and the territorial integrity of Croatia, then this was never concealed. In this there were certainly some excesses, such as the oft-stated faith in some sort of "*kulturträger* mission" of the Croats, or obvious errors that were the fruit of the times and overriding circumstances. This includes, for example, the Uniate ideas of Strossmayer and, to a lesser extent, Rački and Pavlinović, but they certainly were not present among the Croatian secular intelligentsia among whom the religious orientation had relatively little significance (with

a diminishing tendency from generation to generation). The proclamation of individual territories, such as Bosnia-Herzegovina after 1878, as Croatian may be designated as a "Greater Croatian" perspective. This can certainly be said of the positions of Starčević and, to a lesser extent, Kvaternik on the Croatian character of most of the South Slav zone, as well as the frequent tendency in Rightist circles to deny the existence of a Serbian national minority in Croatia, but this was a minority position. Austro-Slav federalism ultimately proved to be a failed political option, but it did, particularly in specific periods – 1848/49 or 1861-1866 – make a certain degree of sense, and later it retained its attraction among some in the Croatian political elite for easily understandable reasons. It certainly was not an expression of some innate Croatian "reactionary nature" or "feudal heritage" as interpreted by some Serbian nationalists of the time and some Western political commentators. The Croats, as opposed to the Austro-Hungarian Serbs, did not have their independent state outside of the Monarchy and the idea of its demise could only very slowly take root among them. Starčević did not become popular due to his anti-Austrian positions, but rather because of his consistent emphasis on Croatian statehood, which, as some of his adherents interpreted, could be aligned within the Austrian framework. The anti-Austrian tendency in the politics of the new course, which could have gathered the Serbian and a considerable portion of the Croatian political elite, was essentially a negative program, which would only solidify in the direction of creating a Yugoslav state during the First World War. However, it showed that a considerable portion of the Croatian political elite could quickly abandon its traditional Austrophile orientation if they assessed that it (no longer) suited Croatian national interests. The preference for Austria was never based on some quasi-feudal mentality or "Mameluke" fealty to the Habsburgs.

The frequent emphasis on the statehood and historical right among a vast majority of Croatian groups and political parties prior to 1918 was also not a result of a "feudal/conservative" orientation, but rather the specific historical circumstances. The Habsburg Monarchy was a rigidly legalistic state in which only the historical right was recognized and in which the Croats were acknowledged as one of the "historical nations," i.e., those who one had their own independent state. Even the nationalists of those nations who were not recognized as "historical" took every opportunity to interpret certain historical phenomena in the sense of historical rights. The Hungarian Serbs cited the imperial privileges of the seventeenth century as the alleged recognition of an autonomous Serbian political district, while claims of ties to "Dušan's empire," were generally accepted among Serbian nationalists. All Croatian nationalists also underscored, in addition to the historical and statehood right, modern natural rights, and they generally accorded it the priority, particularly in opposition to Austrian centralism and Hungarian hegemony. After 1918, the historical argument diminished considerably to the benefit of the natural right of the

(Croatian) people to self-determination, and it was increasingly mentioned in order to emphasize how much the Croats lost upon joining the Yugoslav state.

More recent Serbian historiography even includes claims of the “Greater Croatianism” of Bishop Strossmayer and other Catholic clergy in Croatia, which manifested itself, among other ways, in the attempts to expand communion with Orthodox Slavs.¹⁸ As a Catholic bishop, Strossmayer certainly did favor communion, which at a minimum meant that the Orthodox, as well as Protestant, churches would recognize the pope as their supreme leader. Communion did not have to mean conversion to Catholicism, for the other churches would retain their separate liturgies and other features that distinguished them from the Catholic Church. Strossmayer and Rački were great supporters of the Slavic liturgy, and they actively propagated the cult of Sts. Cyril and Methodius while condemning the excessive centralism within the Catholic Church itself. For them, communion would have exclusively been a matter of accord and voluntary acceptance of papal primacy among the Orthodox churches, which would retain their internal autonomy. However, this had no specific ties to any national or political orientation. Strossmayer’s Uniate concepts were also endorsed by other dignitaries of the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century, regardless of nationality or the country to which they belonged. Communion could not have as its objective, as Krestić claimed, Croatization, for this would mean that all Orthodox peoples would have to be Croatized. For Strossmayer, the key role in the process of accepting communion had to be played by Russia as a great power and the state of the largest Slavic nation, and this had little to do with his South Slav positions.

Generally, in the case of Strossmayer, Rački, Pavlinović and other Catholic clergymen in Croatia, it is difficult to speak of a direct tie between their national/political (Croatian) and religious (Christian/Catholic) orientations. The latter was a matter of their personal convictions, but they could not link this to their national orientation, which ensued not from clerical circles, but rather from the modern civic intelligentsia, which was in the main secularly oriented. As Croats, they worked together with their co-nationals, members of the secular intelligentsia, on the achievement of fundamental national – Croatian to be sure – objectives, but the members of this intelligentsia, with a few rare exceptions (Kvaternik, Kosto Vojnović), were not overly preoccupied with

¹⁸ V. Krestić, *Biskup Štrossmajer*. These claims as well were assumed from the occasional standpoints of Serbian political commentary and, particularly, from religious circles of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The clerical and religious question in Croatia prior to 1918 was covered in more detail, with differing interpretations, by J. Krišto, *Prešućena povijest*; Zoran Grijak, *Politička djelatnost vrhbosanskog nadbiskupa Josipa Stadlera* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2001); Mario Strecha, *Katoličko hrvatstvo* (Zagreb: Barbat, 1997); Ibid., “Geneza hrvatskog političkog katolicizma i njegova temeljna obilježja,” in: M. Strecha, “*Mi smo Hrvati i katolici*”; *prvi hrvatski katolički kongres 1900*. (Zagreb: FF Press-Zavod za hrvatsku povijest FF-a Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2008); Zlatko Matijević, *U sjeni dvaju orlova* (Zagreb: Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga, 2005).

Christian and Catholic values. They were not, given that it was the nineteenth century, atheists, but neither did they exhibit any religious fervor – something lamented by Strossmayer and other clergymen in their correspondence. Rački, for example, wanted the Yugoslav Academy to have a “Christian disposition,” but he could not even prevent the dissemination of materialist and naturalist theories in the works of individual academy members. In Dalmatia, Pavlinović formally advocated “Croatianism and Catholicism,” but the latter had not particular significance in his public activism. They advocated so-called liberal Catholicism, wherein the Catholic Church played a considerable role in social and national (Croatian) development, although Catholicism was neither the sole nor fundamental feature of the Croatian nation. For Strossmayer, the Catholic-Uniate orientation had some significance in his relations with Serbia and Montenegro, but it was a component of his general religious, rather than specific South Slav orientation, which was a component of his Croato-centric politics. Some attempts to create Catholic policies in Croatia only appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century, with the appearance of Croatian political Catholicism – basically, the conviction that the Croats were a Catholic nation and that the Catholic faith was the basic features of Croatian nationality – but its significance was marginal. In Croatian politics and political thought, Catholicism never had very great significance, or even, among the secular intelligentsia, no significance at all. The great majority of the Croatian political elite prior to 1918 was more or less secular in its orientation and it underlined historical and natural rights, language, the tradition of statehood, civic culture and so forth as the basic features of Croatian nationality. It was very rare for a civic party in Croatia to express sympathy for political Catholicism, such as the Josip Frank’s Pure Party of the Right at the beginning of the twentieth century. Potential calls for “Christian values” were very general and vague, most often in the sense of general moral norms, which were not specifically Christian, and even less Catholic. In their fundamental national positions – the state autonomy and territorial integrity of the Triune Kingdom as the Croatian state – there were no essential differences between the liberal and Catholic-oriented Croatian intelligentsia.

Die serbische Frage in kroatischer Politik von 1848 bis 1918

Zusammenfassung

Der Autor analysiert die Bedeutung der serbischen Frage und die Lage der serbischen ethnischen Minderheit in kroatischer Politik von der 1848-er Revolution bis zum Zerfall der Habsburgermonarchie im Jahre 1918. Die hervorragendsten kroatischen politischen Theoretiker und Aktivisten – Bogoslav Šulek, Ivan Kukuljević, Josip. J. Strossmayer, Franjo Rački, Mihovil Pavlinović, Ante Starčević, Eugen Kvaternik, Frano Supilo, Stjepan und Antun Radić und andere – befürworteten verschiedene Varianten der kroatozentrischen Ideologie, innerhalb welcher der südslawische oder der slawische Rahmen manchmal vollkommen abgelehnt wurde (beispielsweise bei Starčević), aber öfter wurde dieser Rahmen akzeptiert. Starčević und einige seiner Anhänger verneinten das Bestehen der serbischen Minderheit und waren der Meinung, dass alle Südslawen, außer Bulgaren, Kroaten waren. Die entscheidende Mehrheit kroatischer Politiker und nationaler Aktivisten akzeptierte aber das Existieren von Serben und serbischer Minderheit in Kroatien. Sie nahmen die Konzeption der „kroatischen politischen Nation“ an, welche alle Bürger des Dreieinigigen Königreiches (Kroatien, Slawonien und Dalmatien) umfasste, ohne Rücksicht auf ihre ethnische Herkunft. Indem sie die Sprecher des shtokawischen Dialektes mit Serben identifizieren, glaubten die meisten serbischen Politiker, dass die im Dreieinigigen Königreich lebenden Serben eine besondere Nation bilden, welche auch Träger der Staatlichkeit in diesem Staate werden sollten. Sie erwarteten langfristig, dass beträchtliche Territorien des Dreieinigigen Königreiches – Slawonien, Militärgrenze und Dalmatien – nach dem Zerfall der Habsburgermonarchie zu Teilen des vergrößerten serbischen Staates sein werden. Die kroatisch-serbischen Verhältnisse gingen zwischen 1848 und 1918 durch Perioden der Zusammenarbeit, besonders wenn sie dem Druck der Regierungszentren in Wien und Budapest ausgesetzt waren, aber auch durch Konfliktzeiten als Folge von unversöhnlichen Präntentionen auf dieselben Territorien.