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## **CROATIAN AND EUROPEAN CHALLENGES FROM THE 1860S TO THE END OF THE GREAT WAR (1918)**

From the 1860s to the end of the Great War, Europe was only a metaphor. Behind the European appellation was found either the meritorious idea of a united civilisation that carries the highest level of culture and the spirit of freedom, or a geographical designation. Constantly manifest in it were codes of common values, but the reality emphasised differences. Seen from the perspective of politics, there was no place for a united idea. Europe as a political concept did not exist. Compared to those that ruled at the time, only a few dreamed of co-operation that would encompass the entire Old Continent and redirect its energy in different directions. Only after the first confrontations in the Great War will there appear a more mature and detailed idea of pan-European integration.

I am of the opinion that we have to move from the known view that great powers dominated the political life of Europe. Six large states - mainly monarchies - determined the principal movements on the continent. Therefore, we can conclude that the concept of Europe was most often tied to the interpretation of the foreign policies of the great powers. Congruent with that, there comes a second characteristic from the end of the nineteenth century, and that is the predominance of the model of imperialism, which sought to enlarge the power and hegemony of some great power by subjugating territorial regions or through the indirect supervision of the political and economic life of a specific area. The peak of expansion was outside of Europe, and it enabled the European Concert to gain hegemony in the world. At the same time, however, this did not bring about the desired balance, that key concept of international relations, and with which a lasting peace could be secured. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the movement of colonial expansion almost reached an end. On the other hand, for a great number of European peoples this period was still a time of pursuing the constitution of nation states on the model of the Western European area, so that nations, alongside an inevitable topology, were the key factors for understanding the architecture of the Old Continent.

It is an incontrovertible fact that, in the second half of the nineteenth century, there began a process of adjusting to accelerated technological development, to the mechanics of an integrated market and European legal norms. This process of creating a modern capitalist system was far from straight-forward, for it implied the breakdown of traditional social structures and a higher level of international interdependence. The great transformation towards an industrial, market-oriented society provoked a specific demolition of existing threads in the social fabric. The division of peasant communes animated a deep wound, which provoked emigration and change in proprietary structures over land possessions. On the other hand, these processes were seen as unavoidable. The intensification of the establishment and the application of various standards

from modern organised lands in the areas of law, economics, education and science were necessarily imposed on the political decision makers, if they desired to reach the contemporary achievements of developed societies.

The problem of European development remained in the political sphere, and when it is a question of the Croatian case, then the dominant factor was the national question or, as has been ingrained in our writing of historiography, the question of national integration. Though the decisive place has been attributed to economic and industrial-financial measures, the fact is that these measures were closely connected to the public sentiments of individual nations, which gave priority to their national interests. In particular parts of Europe, especially at the end of the century in its Central and Eastern regions, there lived peoples without their own states, and which felt the need for confirming their individuality. In the Croatian case, the main sources of the retarded development of the economy and finance sector were thought to be decisions made outside of Croatia. The internal arrangement of the Habsburg Monarchy did not allow Croatian national interests to be satisfied in the way that was wanted and desired by the majority, which held that too much authority was handed over to others, and which, in spite of the declaration of common aims, did not bring mutual satisfaction. That is why greater autonomy or national independence was demanded, depending on the times in which these demands were stressed.

Croatian historical experience is directly tied to the existence of one of the great European powers, which retained some of the characteristics of an empire, comprising a great part of Central Europe and seeking to undertake an active policy in South-Eastern Europe. Such a landscape allowed every member of that community to feel greatness. But during the second half of the nineteenth century, the Habsburg Monarchy entered its last phase of development. The organisation of the dual system showed itself to be an unsuccessful conception of exiting permanent crises in the internal organisation of the Monarchy, as well as a constant animator of centrifugal aspirations.

In spite of the strength of the imperial idea - interwoven with the contents of constitutionalism, parliamentarism and the long traditions of dynastic rule - the national conception still carried the decisive power. Habsburg rulers had, according to many historians, a problem in ruling because they could not create a nation state. Attempts to introduce the logic of supra-nationality, and with it the affiliated centralisation, did not succeed. Concern for the maintenance and development of national identity and the aspiration for the attainment of a higher level of sovereignty remained as priorities. Nevertheless, the leaders of individual nations were not in an unconditional collision with the conceptions of multi-national integrations. The fear of losing national acquisitions encouraged them to consider the creation of communities of interest, so that precisely among members of the so-called non-hegemonic peoples - Czechs, Slovaks, Romanians, Slovenes, Croats and others - the idea of the viability of the Danubian Monarchy was encouraged for a long time.

How did Croatian politicians, as the interpreters of the collective will, look upon Europe and all the political challenges that appeared in it? The leaders of the National Revival and the first Croatian political parties had already construed an image in their public appearances of the interlacement of Europe and the Croats. Ljudevit Gaj emphasised the notion, which could be

freely written, that it had the dominant position, and this was frequently repeated in public discussions, irrespective of party affiliations. The Croats are an integral part of Europe and, what is more, they have “voluntarily spilt their blood throughout the centuries on the European cordon for Europe,” and the consequence of this was their backwardness in the fields of progress and prosperity.<sup>1</sup> Bishop Strossmayer said that there is

... hardly a nation under the sky which, with its sacrifice and martyrdom, so to speak, has indebted so many of its neighbouring peoples, if not the entire empire, and indeed the whole of Europe, as has our nation; I therefore estimate that it is the sacred duty of neighbouring peoples, the sacred duty of the empire and the whole of Europe, to repay our nation in its aspiration, so that it actively and sincerely, according to possibilities, heals old and new wounds of the state body, and returns it to its old strength and worth.<sup>2</sup>

This was, for the period, a typical understanding of the struggle “of our ancestors for the honourable Cross and golden freedom,” which in turn should receive more attention and favour from the European public. On the other hand, in the area of international propaganda there was an unfavourable resonance owing to the behaviour of Croatian soldiers towards other peoples during the course of the revolutionary year of 1848, when liberal Europe saw in the Croats ‘barbarian villains’ and the ‘blind weapons of reactionaries’. These appellations are indicative of the quest to have the Croats bestowed with respect and a reward for merit, which never eventuated.

What remained was the attempt to draw the interest of the world towards the Croats, in which Eugen Kvaternik was especially prominent, endeavouring to change the conviction of ‘hated Croatianism’ by writing articles in many European languages and visiting various capitals. At the same time, local politicians gathered around the then chancellor Mažuranić and, without excitement, argued that “all of liberal Europe knows that the Croats in the year 1848 had to think that way, precisely from love for general freedom and out of enthusiastic devotion to their nationality, to their homeland and to their ancient rights.”<sup>3</sup>

As a group in continual ascent, the *pravaši* (members of the Croatian Party of Right) held that their program of freedom and independence for the Croatian people was complete harmony with the content of European politics, which supports “every idea of freedom for individual nations.”<sup>4</sup> They sought their inspiration in the French Revolution which, by its example, served to promote the principle of national sovereignty in opposition to the principle of the arbitrary rule of the ruler. The main aspiration of the *pravaši* was to interpret what the Croatian nation and its statehood

1 | Ljudevit Gaj, ‘Proglaš i pravac našega teženja’, *Novine horvatsko-slavonske-dalmatinske*, br. 100. tečaj XI, Zagreb, 13 December 1845, pp. 417-418.

2 | Josip Juraj Strossmayer and Franjo Rački, *Politički spisi*, (ed.) Vladimir Košak (Zagreb: 1971), p. 91.

3 | ‘Naše stanje i naša zadaća. Program Samostalne narodne stranke’, *Domobran*, (ed.) Gjuro Deželić, tečaj 1, br. 1, Zagreb, 14 May 1864.

4 | Alongside this, Kvaternik wrote: “The politics of the Croatian Party of Right is healthy, because it is possible and can be carried out and is in agreement with Europe; it is useful, as it leads the nation to happiness with the least number of victims...”, *Hrvatska* (Zagreb: 1869), p. 43.

is in a period when many national movements were considered democratic and progressive, and which enjoyed the support of a portion of the liberal intelligentsia of Western Europe.

One more focal point of the second half of the nineteenth century - among the *pravaši* there appeared a critique of pan-Slavism, which was understood as an anti-European movement, that is, as a conception that did not agree with Western European culture, in contrast to the Croatian *narodnjaci* (members of the Croatian National Party) among whom prevailed a different point of view. According to the latter, Europe was comprehensible only in the triad of large groups, such as the Teutons, Latins and Slavs, which led them to the conclusion that, in relation to measuring strength, one had to stand by the Slavic side, led by the great Russian nation, which also had the role of extending its power in Asiatic, Eastern expanses.

In connection with this, should we emphasise one more question in the context of Croatian ties with high European politics? This concerns the Eastern question. The most important Croatian intellectuals devoted a lot of attention to the problem of the slow breakdown of the Ottoman Empire in Europe. This is not unusual, considering that it concerned an area which, on its western rim, included the Croats or which, in the consciousness of the majority of interpreters of historical right, belonged within the framework of Croatian statehood. The ideologues of Yugoslavism, led by Franjo Rački, openly stressed the impossibility of the 'Europeanisation' of Turkey through reforms owing to its Muslim character, while Strossmayer sharply concluded: "The survival of the Turks in Europe is a real cankered wound and gangrene that should be cut off from the remaining body of Europe as soon as possible."<sup>5</sup> Thus he came to the same conclusion as his friend, the British statesman Gladstone, about the need to expel the Turks from Europe, even though Turkey had been accepted, in conformity with the decrees of peace agreements, among European states. Generally speaking, the prominent *narodnjaci* often based their European idea on the tradition of Christianity. For them, Christian Europe was the bearer of great ideas, and thus also the idea of national unity, that were meant to tie the Christian peoples on the southern side of Slavdom. In contrast, the *pravaši* developed the theory of a multi-confessional nation, which programmatically allowed a different vision of development and, with that, the integration of the Muslims into the Croatian national idea.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the aspiration of acquiring a legitimacy of capability and compatibility with other European nations continued. The pronounced influences of science, education and culture highlighted the need to apply international principles. In the *Sabor* (the Croatian parliament), systematically discussed were the postulates of civil rights and constitutionalism, appealing to the experience of the Western world, and the frequent aspiration of reforming electoral rights followed European trends. At the same time, echoes of the larger European political ideologies had an influence in Croatia: liberalism, conservatism, Christian democracy and social democracy brought new dimensions to political development, but local specificities further determined the historical path.

At the beginning of the twentieth century new ideational trends affirmed themselves in Croatia. Among them the brothers Radić occupied a prominent place. As a result of their later importance

5 | Mirjana Gross and Agneza Szabo, *Prema hrvatskome građanskom društvu: društveni razvoj u civilnoj Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji, šezdesetih i sedamdesetih godina 19. stoljeća* (Zagreb: 1992), pp. 185; J. J. Strossmayer and F. Rački, p. 216.

in the new formulation of the Croatian national movement, it is worthwhile directing our attention to their point of view. The older Antun raised a corresponding question: “What and who is this Europe?”<sup>66</sup> In his case, there appeared Euro-scepticism. Europe is “an empty word and idea,” and the meaning of its gathering is to be found only in “fatal defence or in plunder.” This explanation, which comes from the imperialist organisation of the great powers, dictated his indifferent stance to European principles.

However, early on his agile brother Stjepan saw the importance of the European component, which was the consequence of his education in Paris. If we focus on his book *Savremena Evropa ili karakteristika evropskih država i naroda* (*Contemporary Europe or the Characteristics of European States and Peoples*: Zagreb, 1905), as well as other works in which he interprets the European problem, then for him the Habsburg Monarchy was a ‘little Europe’, and even an ideal model of a multi-national community in which “all its nations were more or less states in the cultural sense, that is, they are high cultured, socially ordered and economically strong, so that it is not possible to push any of them from their positions, least of all to denationalise them.”<sup>77</sup> Indeed, Radić reinvented the viewpoints of 1848, which stemmed from the fact that

... Austria serves as a measure of our thoughts. With its existence, it represents Europe for us. In it the main nations of Europe, through its tribes, are represented... What is discussed in it is of worth to the whole of Europe. Its freedom liberates Europe: its enslavement enslaves Europe.<sup>88</sup>

Compared to these views, there appeared politicians who saw the great international problems in Europe and the Croatian position in an altogether different way. One of the leaders of the New Course, Ante Trumbić, expounded in a parliamentary speech from 1903 the need for alignment: “If we follow the modern political literature in the whole of Europe, we will find everywhere in every nation great minds; who know how to judge international relations objectively and thoroughly, and show that Germany threatens, with its expansionist policies from the North, the whole of the European South.” Hence Trumbić concluded:

Along with the help of other nations, with the testimony of cultured Europe, that our struggle is justified, that our demands are sacred, that they are humane, because they originate from the love of existence and life, we will force injustice, which today rules the fate of this monarchy, to fulfil the rights and demands of this nation, which in this monarchy has always only suffered from the first beginnings to the present day. The monarchy, which was supposed to be a junction and a shelter for small nations in Central Europe under the powerful sceptre of a great dynasty, has shown itself unreliable in its first tasks. Instead of being a home of freedom for nations, cultivating

6 | ‘Nek Evropa znade naše jade!...’ *Sabrana djela Antuna Radića*, sv. IV (Zagreb: 1937) (from *Dom*, 13 November 1902), pp. 321-324.

7 | Bogdan Krizman, *Korespondencija Stjepana Radića*, knj. 1 (Zagreb: 1972), p. 50.

8 | Compare Radić’s writings with the views of *Slavenski Jug* from 1848 in Vaso Bogdanov, *Historija političkih stranka u Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb: 1958), p. 388.

nations in their development and progression, in this monarchy they are only slaves, and enslaving them it thereby enables this situation to continue, creating intrigue between the nations, instead of teaching them an exchange of love and respect, creating the erroneous needs of uniform administrations, which are uniformly administered against the happiness of all peoples!<sup>99</sup>

Thus an image of an idealised Danubian Monarchy was replaced by a completely different vision based on the pressing need to dismantle the Habsburg Monarchy. Events showed that one did not have to wait long for polarisation and conflict. The door was opened in Europe to revolutions and their legitimisation.

The First World War brought to the agenda military-political calculations and economic rivalry in which the subject of European unity had no place. Differences in aims led to an accentuated distancing between nations. The human losses of eight million and the huge material damage bore witness to the consequences of deep antagonisms. Nor did the attained peace allow for the overcoming of past intolerances, but rather only pushed them into short-term antagonistic tendencies. Like the majority of other peoples in Europe, what remained to the Croats was the task of accommodating themselves to the challenges of war and the post-war period. The feeling of common interest with the Monarchy was awoken in the moments of recruitment and the filling up of the trenches. At the same time, the political émigré community began to organise itself and sought a solution by aligning itself with the Entente. Before the end of the Great War, there appeared in Croatia new viewpoints that more openly led to the disintegration of the still existing state. In the Croatian parliament, lines of thought in harmony with external trends were emphasised, leaning this time on an American, extra-European initiative:

The self-determination of nations is the basic idea of every nation which, during the course of the world war, has been stressed and underlined more than ever. Starting from this position [Starčević's Party of Right] considers the only worthy peace that which will, in a just way, guarantee all nations of the European cultural community a free and independent development, and which will enable a noble competition in the areas of prosperity and human civilisation.<sup>1010</sup>

Later the American secretary of state, Robert Lansing, admitted that President Wilson should not have come out with the idea of self-determination because it roused hopes that could not be fulfilled.<sup>111</sup> But the Habsburgs showed themselves to be powerless in reforming the Monarchy, and thereby drove the most fanatical champions of 'Habsburg patriotism' to transform themselves into supporters of their removal.

At the end of 1918, the Croats were one of the peoples that left the large Monarchy, and thereby entered a new community - the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia. This complex

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9 | Ante Trumbić, 'Riječka rezolucija: o tridesetgodišnjici njena opstanka 1905. – 3. X. – 1935. Iz mojih političkih uspomena', in: *Obzor spomen-knjiga 1860-1935* (Zagreb: 1936), pp. 28-39.

10 | *Adresa Starčeviće stranke prava od 1.3.1917. kao protupredlog odborovoj adresi predložen u hrv. Saboru dne. 1. ožujka*, Zagreb 1917.

11 | Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919. Six Months that changed the World* (New York: 2003), p. 11.

did not show that it could be a form of life that would permanently satisfy them because marginalisation and stagnation still predominated. The entire development of Europe rested on porous foundations, so it was precisely during the inter-war period that ideas which sought to overcome the crisis began to sprout. Among them were conceptions of continental associations, which the smaller nations especially had to contemplate on account of guaranteeing them an adequate place in the mosaic of a developed Europe. But that which predominated were other forms of action and the challenges of new imperialisms, which brought little good. Moreover, events got out of control to the detriment of most Europeans.

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## **Hrvatska i europski izazovi od 1860-ih do svršetka Velikog rata 1918.**

Autor u izlaganju prati kako su hrvatski političari reagirali na ključna kretanja u europskoj politici te percipirali pojam Europe i procese „europeizacije”. U kontekstu zadanih odnosa ravnoteže među velesilama i kompleksnog položaja unutar Habsburške Monarhije ističu se razni pristupi hrvatske političke i intelektualne elite.

Europa je za većinu metafora demokracije i mnogih civilizacijskih vrijednosti, ali i odraz različitih tipova kulture koji su zbog elemenata protuslovlja povremeno izvori napetih odnosa među narodima Staroga kontinenta. Svijest hrvatskih političara obilježavaju usredotočenosti na rješavanje nacionalnog pitanja u kojemu je prepoznata srž vlastitog i europskog problema tijekom toga razdoblja. Unatoč svim konfrontacijama, povijesno iskustvo (su)života u velikoj srednjoeuropskoj državi bilo je prigoda za stjecanje znanja i vještina koje su bile na visokoj razini.