

## SPECIAL POSITION OF SRIJEM IN GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT ON THE EVE OF AND DURING WORLD WAR ONE

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It is affirmed in historiography that Srijem area had special military-strategic and social significance. Precisely in this part of Triune Kingdom, more intensive disputes between Austria-Hungary and Kingdom of Serbia had become evident. Serbian Government succeeded in multiple manners, in this period, in influencing on political, social and security conditions of Srijem. Regarding their objectives, between Monarchy and Croatia, there is an equivalent sign, therefore Serbs and Serbians regarded the war as a beginning of final battle with both subjects. The objective was destruction of Monarchy and expansion to Croatia. Exposed to such aggressive acts, Austria-Hungary started to analyze the mode of protecting itself. In this, having in mind complexity of relations within the Monarchy, defectiveness was evident. Francis Ferdinand, an heir to the throne and main headquarters of the army, in difference to other relevant persons and institutions in Monarchy, considered it as a serious problem and contemplated possible answer to face Serbian activities. They started planning offensive actions from Croatian territory, within which Srijem held special significance for the reason that only offensive actions should be conducted in border area. Differences in interests were unique, henceforth events during first months of war were intensive. About these events, works of present historiography and publicists are incomplete and even when being written about the subject, political, military, demographic and geographic context had been ignored. Evaluations were one-sided, usual for stance of Yugoslav historiography toward topics regarding Croatia at the beginning of World War One. As every war in history by itself is mutual, historian in evaluation of the same is supposed to take all relevant factors in consideration, which is fundamental purpose of this work.

**Key words:** Srijem, World War One, Austria-Hungary, Triune Kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia, Kingdom of Serbia.

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## Introduction

This article presents good opportunity for paying attention to the fact that in 2014, commemorating 100-year anniversary of outbreak of the Great War, many national historiographies intensified their approach to analyze World War One. They have tried to explain how events of the war influenced their ethnic and national territory, as well as it's aftermath (multiple context: political, social and demographic). Considerably, one part of Croatian historians decided to explore World War One.

Scientific interest abovementioned is immanent to the fact of general and local knowledge of the area, significant for it's military-strategic importance during World War One. This evaluations refer to Srijem in particular. Regarding military-strategic significance, complexity of events and nationalities of population exposed to propaganda, armed conflict actions and their consequences, topic attracted interest of both Croatian and Serbian historiography. This fact is also clear recently. A year ago, we were able to listen to exposition of Aleksandar Ljutić from Institute of newer history of Serbia at scientific assembly "River Sava in Croatian History" and read the article titled "Serbian-Austro-Hungarian fighting on lower Sava in 1914" respectively.<sup>1</sup> Although intention is not writing a review of dr. Lukić's article, it would be preferable to take the fact in consideration that the word is about the author who wrote the text on military activities in Srijem, therefore it is the topic of this article too. In difference to dr. Lukić, I intended to offer integral view of events in Srijem during World War One, not disregarding causes and effects, specially from the beginning of war. In difference to dr. Lukić, I made effort to consult archive material of Croatian, Austro-Hungarian and Serbian origin and apply comparative historiographic method. Analysis of dr. Lukić article motivated me exactly in applying methodic approach beforementioned, due to the fact it is written on Serbian archive material exclusively, thus representing modern interpretation immanent to scientific and publicist works from 1918 until 1990. In that context, I would like to emphasize even tendentious claims such as "Austria-Hungary used Sarajevo Assassination to attack Serbia."<sup>2</sup> from which is clear that, even significant time distance from events herein mentioned had lapsed, ideologic and political burden remains. Since it is already like that, it is essential to answer and remind the author with counter question suggesting foresight regarding notorious fact that Sarajevo Assassination was executed by the hands of Serbs along with the support of High Command of Serbian Army. Accordingly, reflecting the causes and effects context, I fail to comprehend

<sup>1</sup> Aleksandar Lukić, "Srpsko-austroougarske borbe na donjoj Savi 1914. godine" ["Serbian-Austro-Hungarian fightings on Lower Sava 1914"], *Rijeka Sava u povijesti. Zbornik radova znanstvenog skupa [River Sava in History Collection of papers from scientific assembly]*, (Slavonski Brod, 2015), pp. 451- 478.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 451.

the manner in which Austria-Hungary took advantage of attack on Serbia? In general, Lukić interpretation missed the historic method. The armed combats in Srijem were not analyzed within geopolitical, social, religious and demographic factors accordingly. Nevertheless, armed combats in Srijem are of priority interest, yet too, represented one-sidedly, again on the ground of serbian archive material or literature. Methodological comparative approach had been left out completely. Therefore, in my opinion this work represents just collection of information from various authors, published in one place. "Nothing new" so to speak. Just another repetition of known interpretations about events in Srijem in World War One, identical to many texts from inter-war period written on account of actual historiographic interest for World War One events.

Analysis of Srijem events indicate to more complex relations as every war has causes and effects which are visible in smaller territorial units. These events justify this claim.

Because of evaluation of aforementioned events, I am in a position to come to the conclusion that significant time difference and accessibility of archive material offers contemporary, modern and un-bias approach. Furthermore, the starting point is the fact that historiography did not explore it or explored it just in context of political and ideologic expectation of time. Efforts to correct unilateral argumentation had been left out, so my task is to point out the pointlessness of continuing by the same pattern.

Croatian and Yugoslav historiography did not deal with World War One in general. More attention was paid to last year of war, for the reason of Croatia adjoining the state community with Serbia. Meanwhile, the historic research of pre-war years and first year of war were left out. Why? Answerig this question is logical: this is a starting-point period. Contacts had been established with official Serbia, multiple aid received from the same state while political programs were formed finally. Influence of these factors is visible right away after the Sarajevo Assasination, especially in first months of war, altogether resulting in events from the end of the year 1918. At that moment, union with Kingdom of Serbia was proclaimed, in which Croatia never shared state community with Serbia before. That way, Croatia left the Central-European political circle and became part of Balkan geopolitical context for the first time in history.

During this period many events took place in Srijem, many persons and institutions participated and notable Srijemese gave their accounts. Having in mind chronological flow and character, I shall structure my analysis as follows. Considering pre-war period I shall endeavour to point out geopolitical position of Srijem reflecting on premanent intelligence control from Serbian Government of the area and reaction to it from Vienna military and political decision-makers respectively. Attention shall be focused on pre-war activities of political bodies who minorized the possible danger on Eastern borders of

Monarchy contrary to military headquarters paying more attention to tactical and startegical aspects of Srijem area. Since the outbreak of war had determined military-strategic context of Srijem furthermore, my intention is to emphasize the most important events such as: military combats, population's view on war, Austro-Hungarian measures, Serbian Army breakthrough in Srijem, evacuation of population and their return.

### **Pre-war period**

In the beginning, it is essential to define foreign and domestic policy frame. Multiple events in Croatia and neighbouring countries, specially Kingdom of Serbia, put year 1903 as a staging-point in particular. Popular people's movement occured in Croatia, Khuen Hedervary left the office, while in Serbia Obrenić Dynasty was dethroned. Succeding Dynasty Karađorđević, altered foreign policy objectives fundamentally, especially regarding Austria-Hungary. Monarchy became an obstacle to their first foreign policy objective: expansion to the West, to southern slavs lands of Habsburg Monarchy. From that moment onwards, Main headquarters of Astria-Hungarian Army, familiar with numerous propaganda and intelligence activities initiated from Serbian political leadership, started detailed planning and articulating possible attack on Serbia from Srijem area.

Essentially, by the outbreak of Balkan wars grand-serbian propaganda spread throughout southern-slavs lands of Monarchy. Afterwards, it was unnecessary to chanellize it due to the fact that course and aftermath of the Blakan wars intensified the impression in Serbia's favour. Propaganda activities spread to many levels of social life. Many writers and artists supported the idea of Yugoslav union and therefore propaganda influence in culture and literature had been made possible. For that reason, Antun Gustav Matoš minuted that for Serbs, even literature is used as a powerful tool of propaganda.<sup>3</sup>

Although the period from annexation of Bosnia-Hercegovina is considered as the beginning of more aggressive Serbian stance to Austria-Hungary, one can find archive material of intelligence character which states clearly Operative Department of Serbian High Command of the Army organized gathering of information in the year of 1906 already. In one of the reports, captain Emilo Belić describes performed activities in details.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, during annexation crisis, in March 1909 precisely, Serbian Ministry of War had informed foreign minister Milovan Milovanić of intelligence

<sup>3</sup> Antun Gustav Matoš, *Bilježnice* [Collected works], Vol.2, (Zagreb, 1973), pp. 118-119.

<sup>4</sup> Hrvatski državni arhiv [Croatian State Archive, Zagreb] (furhter: HR-HDA) - 79, Osobni odjel Zemaljske vlade – Središnja izvještajna služba [Internal department of Land Government–Central defensive intelligence Service] (further: IDLG-CDIS), Box 28, Nr. 4097/403, 3655-1915.

information at their disposal, considering mobilisation of 13th military district and cannon placement in Nova Pazova, 24 km from Belgrade.<sup>5</sup>

Even after the annexation crisis had ended, Serbian Headquarters has been organizing network of associates who dealt with secret investigation of Srijem area. They have intensified their activities during Balkan wars, when Austria-Hungarian intervention was expected to take place. Major Dimitrije Pavlović had informed Headquarters about Austro-Hungarian counter measures for preventing transport of *Komites* and weapons. It is written in the report: “to keep the Serbian border element in fear because relevant circles of neighbouring Monarchy created belief we are preparing a revolution in Serbian territories”.<sup>6</sup> It is clear Serbian army after annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina had organized collecting of intelligence information on Austro-Hungarian Army and information on public opinion of population and their readiness for war in favour of Serbia respectively. Serbian intelligence activities were performed until the outbreak of war. Few months before the war, Croatian Government had received the report on situation in Srijem describing how “entire Srijem is overfilled with various pictures and calendars (...) pictures of King Peter and several Serbian Generals (...) leading to preparation of people in Srijem and Southern Hungary to strive for Serbia.”<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, their activities are permanent. In archive material it is traceable to the beginning of war. Only on the eve of war, minister for war Alexander von Krobatin had warned Croatian ban Ivan Skerlec that Serbian society “National defense” had conducted preparations in case of war. They have secured 100.000 pieces of light weapons and large quantity of ammunition for Serbian population and intended to transport it illegally to territories designated for rebellion. They intended to transport weapons from Požarevac warehouse to Bačka and Banat and from Belgrade warehouse through Mitrovica to Srijem. The report warned that “National defense” prepared 1.700 komites for fighting in Bosnia and Slavonia.<sup>8</sup> Credibility of Austro-Hungarian intelligence sources was confirmed after the capture of Belgrade. Documents had been found proving recorded payments to numerous Serbian agents for collecting information about Austro-Hungarian Army.<sup>9</sup> “National defense” reports to Serbian minister of war relating estimate of strength for XV military district, reports on gunnery in Bosnia-Herzegovina and preparations of Austro-Hungarian Army in Croatia, Slavonia and Srijem had been found also.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> HR-HDA-79, IDLG-CDIS, Box 28, Nr. 560/244.

<sup>6</sup> HR-HDA-79, IDLG-CDIS, Box 28, Nr. 412/4097-1916.

<sup>7</sup> HR-HDA-78, Predsjedništvo Zemaljske vlade [Presidency of Land Government] (further: PLG), Box 829, File Nr. 471/1914, Mitrovica, 1/24/1914.

<sup>8</sup> HR-HDA-833, Osobni fond [Personal Fund] (further: PF) Đuro Šurmin, Box 27, File Nr. 12.662, Budapest, 7/29/1914; Graf Stefan Tisza, *Briefe (1914-1918.)*, “FZM. Alexander von Krobatin, öst.-ung. Kriegsminister an Graf Stefan Tisza”, Vienna, 7/14/1914, (Berlin, 1928), p. 41.

<sup>9</sup> HR-HDA-79, IDLG-CDIS, Box 27, Nr. 3805-1916/626-64, Užice, 3/31/1913.

<sup>10</sup> HR-HDA-79, IDLG-CDIS, Box 27, Nr. 3805-1916/206-47, Belgrade, 3/1/1913.

For that reason, Commander in Ruma, general Schön made county official aware of the condition estimate among local population and their possible attack from the rear during Sava crossing. He suggested punishment for every single person in possession of weapons.<sup>11</sup>

Events followed indicate to what extent army authorities estimated the situation correctly and within cause-effect context warned how political mood of Srijem inhabitants might have had significant consequences regarding expected hostilities.

However, Austro-Hungarian dualities between Austria and Hungary until the Settlement of 1867 and dualities from Settlement until the outbreak of war respectively, continued after Sarajevo assassination. During war period, Hungarian insistence on high level of autonomy for Hungary, have been opposed by Headquarters of the Austro-Hungarian Army. This body represented continuity of politics of murdered heir Francis Ferdinand. Situation further complicated Emperors' insistence on literal implementation of dualistic principles. These principles had not been abandoned during war, even though endangering the fighting ability of the army on battlefield on many occasions. It happened that exactly the high level of political unity had been left out due to inherited political differences. Numerous examples prove the statement. One of them is Srijem situation. Eminent officers of the army pointed these problems out after the war. General Alfred Kraus in his book *The Causes of our defeat* amid other insufficiencies pointed out problems deriving from Austro-Hungarian Settlement. From certain time distance he noticed how unresolved political relations damaged fighting ability of the army. Regarding the fact he was an extraordinary military strategist, Austro-Hungarian Army managed to control Srijem and Banat only after his takeover of command, I believe it is necessary to point out Hungarian favourite blackmail: disapproval for army's requirements. The fact that Hungary refused the request to increase the number of newly mobilised soldiers, necessary for formation of new artillery regiments, is in direct link to diminution of combat readiness, which eventually put Hungarian troops in difficult position during first fightings on Isonzo river.<sup>12</sup>

## Disunion in application of war laws

Istvan Tisza, Hungarian Minister-President, initiated by Sarajevo assassination, in his parliamentary speech on July 18, 1914, was the first politician

<sup>11</sup> HR-HDA-78, PLG, Box 815, Nr. 257-7223.

<sup>12</sup> Alfred Kraus, *Uzroci našeg poraza* [*The Causes of Our Defeat*], (Belgrade, 1938), p. 79; Author is general of Austro-Hungarian army. Took part in all important battles against Serbia in the year of 1914 and commanded Austro-Hungarian troops on Russian and Italian battlefronts later in the war. After ascending the throne, Emperor Charles had offered him the post of Chief of General staff in headquarters of the army, which Kraus had refused.

in Monarchy who had offered clarification of military-security situation in Croatia and Slavonia. In his response to parliamentary interpellation in joint Parliament in Budapest, he stressed that toward great-serbian propaganda in Croatia, not enough energetic measures were being taken. Considering the importance of the subject, press conference was summoned and Croatian ban Ivan Skerlec attended together with Minister-President Tisza. Tisza's instructions and observations had started implementing immediately.<sup>13</sup>

More intensive acts of governing bodies of the Monarchy were visible in the moment Monarchy decided to go to war. Preparations were made for proclamation and application of priority composed legal articles adjusted to war situation. According to this development of events, it was necessary to finish all mobilization affairs in short notice: from drafting to implementing legal articles.

Bearing in mind that mobilization represents new orientation in internal relations of all social groups completely, making effort to minimize estimates of public opinion on the size of conflict in the same time, Ministry of War sent circular letter on July 20, 1914 to all relevant political bodies, presidents of governments in both parts of Monarchy, all important ministries and Croatian ban Skerlec.

Content of this letter emphasized that extraordinary political situation required haste reaction: it was demanded from Croatian ban Skerlec and other representatives to, within the scope of their authorities, prevent publishing information about military preparations in daily press. That way it was intended to remove every possible panic reaction of population and guide public opinion to positions suitable for authorities. The urgency required suggestion to perform the procedure by telegram.<sup>14</sup> It was about the command designed to secure formation and execution of priority prepared measures as effective as possible during war relating to: emergency measures for the state of war, martial law and military tribunal with civil and military censorship. Legal frame for introduction of exceptional measures represented *Law Article LVIII for exceptional measures in case of war*, proclaimed by joint Hungarian-Croatian Parliament on December 21, 1912. However, entire elements of this law, specially orders about affairs of the press, were not valid for Croatia and Slavonia for the reason that certain sections of these orders applied to affairs within the scope of autonomous affairs, not applicable in Triune Kingdom, unless being ratified by Croatian Parliament. Therefore, Emperor Francis Joseph, within his constitutional authorities, had delegated the power for Law Article LVIII to Croatian ban Skerlec on July 22, 1914.<sup>15</sup> That way on July 27, Croatian ban Skerlec

<sup>13</sup> *Narodno jedinstvo* [National Unity], Nr. 29, July 18, 1914, 1-3.

<sup>14</sup> HR-HDA-78, PLG, Box 72, Nr. 9650, July 20, 1914, 1.

<sup>15</sup> "Izvanredne mjere u slučaju rata" ["Exceptional measures in case of war"], *Narodne novine* [National Gazette], Nr. 170, July 27, 1914, 1-7.

had been granted full power to trigger *Exceptional measures in case of war* as a legal basis for 18 Ban's executive orders.<sup>16</sup> Observing all announcements and proclamations in total, it is clear that on territory of Triune Kingdom entire system of laws had been established, commonly defined as "*war laws*".

Dealing with numerous problems across Croatia required adequate number of people with special powers. For that matter, Skerlec had used one more possibility on the ground of application of special measures: appointing government commissioners. These measures were executed in consensus with Hungarian government and proclaimed the same day as Exceptional measures. Change revealed itself within authorities coordinated with war situation. Tisza had made Croatian Government familiar with it in his memorandum stating: "... in case of military preparation for certain headquarters, civil commissioners are appointed. Their task is (...) to support military bodies with advice in knowing circumstances and local affairs, mediation between military headquarters and administrative authorities (...) and eventually to take part in governing occupied territory of the enemy".<sup>17</sup>

Government commissioners had duties to act accordingly to military command plans. Area of activity of appointed commissioner could have been more counties or cities, depending on military formation deployment.<sup>18</sup>

Adjusting the territory of Triune Kingdom to war situation, official Budapest had influenced the process through "War surveillance commission in Budapest". It was the same institution established just before the war in Vienna under the name of "Office for war surveillance" (Kriegs-überwachungsamt-KÜA).<sup>19</sup> By rejecting competence of this office, Tisza had emphasized Hungarian autonomy within the Monarchy frame. Commission for war surveillance in Budapest, in consent with Hungarian Government, but not Office for war surveillance in Vienna, had appointed the special government commissioner for command area of Southern army, therefore for those troops designated for offensive action against Serbia.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> HR-HDA-78, PLG, Box 865, Nr. 79-4096, File Nr. 520, Pr – 1914.

<sup>18</sup> HR-HDA-78, PLG, Box 872, Nr. 4333. Pr. – 1914, Zagreb, July 22, 1914.

<sup>19</sup> 27th of July 1914, deputies of most important ministries in Vienna had declared commencement of official operations of "Office for war surveillance" (*Kriegs-überwachungsamt-KÜA*). Created upon Agreement between Ministry of War, Main Headquarters and Ministry Council. Represented central state body for exceptional measures coordination. Legally under command of Ministry of War. Organitionally consisted of: political group, censorship group, export-import group, machine evidence group and special activities. Most important representatives of state ministries were represented in it. They had duties, depending on extent of works, to delegate part of state activities from basic ministries into Office. By determined procedure, Office had been charged with implementation of all criminal measures committed against state legal order during the war. See: Gustav Spann, *Zensur in Österreich während des I. Weltkriegs 1914-1918*, (Vienna, 1972), pp. 57-59.

<sup>20</sup> HR-HDA-78, PLG, Box 871, Nr. 4233-4283 File Nr. 4278, July 25, 1914.

Institute of government commissioner amid military consisted of civil component too. Former Grand Mayors have been renamed in government commissioners, representing, together with Ban, civil component assigned to execute exceptional measures and war laws among population not involved in combat fightings actively. That way, they represented the link between city council and Government as quarantees for execution of all measures Government had put before them. For Srijem County and city of Zemun with seat in Vukovar, noble Imbro Hideghwety had been appointed.<sup>21</sup>

The extent to which Srijem territory had important geopolitical position witness the fact related to dual appointment of government commissioners. Among Imbro Hideghwety, government commissioner responsible to Croatian Ban, Hungarian Government had interveened and appointed Bela Talian, former Grand Mayor of Novi Sad and a member of Hungarian House of Magnates. He was appointed as commissioner of Hungarian Government at Southern Military Command.<sup>22</sup>

From aforementioned, a few facts are evident. First of all, it is clear military and political headquarters had estimated Srijem, Bačka and Banat being of extreme geostrategic importance. On the other hand, as example beforementioned showed points to certain level of mistrust between political and military headquarters. Relations which followed soonafter ie. different perception of events, foreshadows to the fact that military and civil representatives had acted regarded these authorities and events differently.

Above mentioned fact is clear in analysis of the relationship between Hungarian Government and Main Headquarters of the Army, as well as between Hungarian military commissioner and Croatian Government commissioner.

## **Period from Sarajevo assasination until proclamation of state of war**

In numerous accounts from great-Serbian propaganda court cases it is notable that Sarajevo assasination gave incentive to Serbian population. Confidence of Serbian population augmented in Triune Kingdom and it had openly stressed their political opinions without doubting the outcome of war without restraints. Remarkably, their reflections are not directed to one objective: bringing down the Monarchy. By analyzing numerous court cases nationwide Croatia, a certain constant is notable ie. statements of identical political character, expressed regardless of place or part of Croatia.

Many conclusions are evident in analyzing these scriptures, all summarized in fundamental conclusion that Serbian population in Croatia had considered Monarchy and Croatia as the same nuisance. In relation to their

<sup>21</sup> "The Order", *Narodne novine* [*National Gazette*], Nr. 170, July 27, 1914, 6.

<sup>22</sup> HR-HDA-78, PLG, Box 871, Nr. 4233-4283, File Nr. 4278, July 25, 1914.

objectives, between Monarchy and Croatia there is an equivalent sign and they regarded assassination and war as a beginning of final fight with both of them. Objective was to topple the Monarchy and expand to Croatia. For example, from the report of County district Đakovo, threats were not only verbal. It is written that on July 27, 1914 a group of 100 people of Serbian nationality had attacked inhabitants of Croatian nationality in neighboring town while they were heading to sign up for the army.<sup>23</sup>

Ivan Peršić, member of Croatian Parliament and representative of Starčević Party of Right had testified about events preceding immediate outbreak of war. He wrote that in Croatia only few days after the assassination: "...only Ban Škrlec, military commander Rhemen, dr. Aleksandar Horvat and dr. Ivica Frank knew war with Serbia is entirely certain, no matter she responds to even the most humiliating demands of Austria-Hungary"<sup>24</sup>

In analyzing the events of first two weeks of war, we are able to complete Peršić's testimony. By Skerlecz's stance in Parliament, especially his small participation in arguments, it can be concluded that in first two weeks after the assassination he wasn't informed regularly about actual decisions being made. Archive material and daily press do not show information that Skerlecz, apart from calming down protests and demonstrations, had more active role in daily events. First two weeks he did not communicate with Vienna and Budapest. However, as decision for entering the war became more apparent, Skerlecz took over more obligations. Council of Ministers met more often and made decisions for which execution they included Croatian Ban. From Zagreb Government they demanded additional information on anti-monarchy activity. Minister-President Tisza and minister of foreign affairs Leopold von Berhtold insisted on these reports, and they were among Francis Joseph, most important statesmen in Monarchy. Besides that, Tisza took advantage of his formally superior position over Croatian Ban, thus formulating request in a different content. He addressed Skerlecz: "Dear friend! I inform you completely confidentially that we collect that concrete information that shed light on those machinations directed from Serbia against us and which confirm acts or omissions of Serbian official circles against us. I beg You most dearly, please be kind and compose material at Your disposal, discreetly and possibly as fast as You can, and send it to me in short manner. The issue is very urgent and it is unconditionally wishful nothing come to public. You would obligate me much, if You inform me right upon reception of my letter, whether You will be able to send me information consisting facts of heavy nature. From the heart I am sending you my greetings, Your's trully loyal Tisza"<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> HR-HDA-78, PLG, Box 871, Nr. 4233-4283, File Nr. 4605, Đakovo, July 28, 1914.

<sup>24</sup> HR-HDA-849, Personal fund Ivan Peršić, Annex to part two of file "From Croatian politics half a century ago", 1914-1939, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Dr. Đuro Šurmin had discovered hereinmentioned Tisza's letter to Croatian Ban Skerlecz. He interpreted it in newspapers article "Responsibility for World War-Graf Tisza and Graf

Remarkably, Tisza did not send abovementioned letter in official way but as a private shipment, therefore he had been expecting the answer in the same way. Therefore, the fact: "I beg You most dearly, please be kind and compose material at Your disposal, discreetly and if possible, as fast as You can send it to me in short notice." From the stated suggestion it is clear Tisza intended to surpass the influence of Main Headquarters of the Army and other statesmen. Unusual for pre-war situation. Unusual for the fact he is addressing to the head of Croatian Government assigned to the area designated for offensive actions on Serbia.

Already on July 12, 1914 Skerlec had informed Tisza and Berchtold of sending them collected material. Skerlec received these materials from three different sources collected in three different locations in Croatia: reports from Zemun constabulary, reports of Zagreb constabulary and report from the director of Central Defensive Intelligence Service, Žiga Maravić. All described beginning and development of great-Serbian propaganda on Croatian territory from annexation of Bosnia-Hercegovina until Sarajevo assassination.

Commander of Zemun constabulary had divided the development of great-Serbian propaganda into two periods: from Annexion in the year of 1908 until 1911, and from the year of 1911 until 1914 ie. beginning of war. From voluminous report, I extract the part regarding border area. During 1914, border constabulary had recorded more frequent crossings of Croatian students to Serbia. It wasn't unknown to them that Živko Bertić<sup>26</sup>, member of Croatian Parliament and representative of Croatian-Serbian coalition, aided Luka Jukić and Rudolf Hercigonja financially to cross over to Serbia and further to Belgrade from Srijem area.<sup>27</sup>

Helping these young men would not represent anti-state activity unless they haven't gone to Belgrade in order to conduct an assassination on territory of the Monarchy, which Jukić had done eventually by attempting the life of Slavko Cuvaj with fatal consequences for two mortally wounded persons in the centre of Zagreb. Hercigonja's case is not negligible either. With Bertić's support, he had travelled to Serbia to demand aid for release of the attacker

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Berchtold ask Ban Skerlec for documents". Šurmin's conclusions can be accepted according to circumstances Hungarian Minister-President had found himself in these days.

<sup>26</sup> Živko Bertić (Kukujevi, Srijem, 1875 - Zemun 1938) was a Croatian writer, essayist, satirist, comedian, writer of short stories, lawyer and a politician. As a University student, he participated in burning of the Hungarian flag in 1895, and after serving his prison sentence, he had continued his studies in Prague. Doctorate in Law he achieved in Zagreb and continued his apprenticeship in Zemun in 1906. He was a Member of Parliament and member of Croatian-Serbian coalition. During World War One he was imprisoned, interned and as a degraded officer of the army sent to Italian battlefield afterwards. After the war he was member of Temporary National Representation. He joined Croatian community later. Last years of his life he did not participate in political life. In political texts, social satires and short stories he worked for many journals: *Prosvjeta, Hrvatski narod, Novo Doba, Obzor, Vienac, Nada, Pokret*.

<sup>27</sup> HR-HDA-79, IDLG-CDIS, Box 10, File Nr. 1716-1996, 772-1915, July 5, 1915.

on King's Commesar Skerlec. He managed to cross over to Serbia with a colleague Marijan Jakšić with help from representatives of Croatian-Serbian Coalition Većeslav Wilder and dr. Živko Bertić. The same as for Luka Jukić, meetings in "National defense", offices of „Unity or death“ organization and "Slavic South" newspapers redaction had been organized for Hercigonja. Also, Hercigonja made effort to organize release of Luka Jukić from prison. In difference to Jukić's assassination attempt, this action failed. Investigation revealed that he had demanded from representative of Croatian-Serbian Coalition Wilder to intervene at Count Tisza for Jukić's release. All in all, Wilder supported them financially and suggested dr. Bertić to help them with release form for crossing to Serbia in the end. He gave them 100 Kruna for the trip. State Attorney office stated Wilder had paid financial contribution to "National defense" in 1911.

Even tough aforementioned claims were sufficient enough to open criminal investigation against Wilder, he was protected by Immunity of Croatian Parliament and Joint Parliament in Budapest. State bodies limited themselves in following him while dr. Živan Bertić was taken into detention in 1915, under suspicion of committing a criminal offense of high treason. Criminal process has been pending in 1915, until Land Government in Zagreb suggested suspension of investigation against Wilder and Bertić. Contextualization of Bertić's activities enables cognition of complexity of social-political processes in the last years of Austria-Hungary. In applying comparative methodology, it is particularly interesting to regard Živko Bertić's beliefs before and after the war, experiencing life in a new state: Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. His pre-war belief in so called national unity is revealed in acts and events he had participated in along with the consequences he bare as a result of it. His post-war transformation was not affected by shere displeasure of his personal status. It is clear Bertić acted according to his beliefs all of his life based on events that took place. For that reason, I shall cite part of his text published in Srijemese Croatian Journal in 1926. Knowledge about the new state character had been confirmed by then. Bertić had convinced himself upon it and wrote: "Without a doubt we have come across Great Serbia with National unity idea, whereas we or our ancestors Croats did not wish to go, now having nothing left over but to return to Croatian state right viewpoint. The idea of national unity in this form had been executed dishonestly and unfairly, at the expense of Croats and Slovenes, and cannot be corrected in this form. As long as our centralized Government represents extended Serbia, we cannot speak of state politics in the spirit of Yugoslav idea or spirit of national unity or equality of all our national and state politics factors, but state politics will be led in the spirit and traditions of great-serbianism alone. It is an axiom needless to argue about today. Idea of national unity is a weapon of our enemies today who dispute us, therefore for that simple reason, it cannot be ours any longer."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Zlata Gvozdić-Filjak, Juraj Lončarević, Srijemska kalvarija Hrvata [*Srijem Calvary of Croats*], (Zagreb, 1995), pp. 112-113.

The text herein mentioned is interesting for the fact that by analyzing it, we are in a position to comprehend idea concept of national unity from genesis, a genesis which influenced Bertić's pre-war beliefs and actions up to complete cognition.

For that it is convenient to remind, that it is not about the evaluation of the idea but how much it's application in total, had suitable character in certain period and in relation to certain national groups and areas where it has been applied to.

Therefore it is possible to understand beliefs of one part of Croatian political and social elites in pre-war period. It is clear how their expectations contradicted the character of new state, which they had helped to build. They have been in illusion for years. They have supported this idea concept by acts, and in that manner influenced Croatian state forming future and territories upon which they had to take consideration as people's representatives, especially security context of pre-war and war state of affairs. They acted exactly the opposite way ie. with their public and secret activity, they weakened not only security situation in Austria-Hungary but also Croatian stateforming thought respectively.

National deputy Živko Bertić from Srijem acted identically. Therefore, based on his experince and ideological thesis he represented, which he had abandoned and returned to repeatedly, it is possible to comprehend complexity of period reflected most in unfathomableness of political processes in which individual, even being member of parlimanet, was not in a condition to judge them in a right way. On the contrary, exactly behind the scenes, policy and complex process of internal and foreign affairs, led advocates of Croatian state right to opposite conceptions. Furhtermore, it made them instrument for implementation of opposite interests, interests they will comprehend themselves couple of years later too.

## Caotic outbreak of war

Notwithstanding the fact mobilisation required time, up to 16 days by Conrad von Hötzendorf (Chief of General staff of Austro-Huungarian army), minister of foreign affairs Leopold Berhtold insisted upon offensive attack on Serbia immediatelly upon receiving results of investigation of Sarajevo assasination. 27th of July 1914, had been set as a first day of alert and July 28, as a first day of partial mobilization.<sup>29</sup> Actual mobilization had started on July 24,

<sup>29</sup> Željko Pleskalt (ed.), *Ratni dnevnik C. K. Varaždinske pješačke pukovnije br. 16*, translated by Danijela Marjanić [*War diary of Varaždin infantry regiment Central Command Nr. 16, 26th of July 1914 - 29th of January 1915*], (Bjelovar, 2004); HR-HDA-78, PLG, Box 867, Nr. 4551-6404, Nr. 4286, Annex, July 25, 1914, Telegram to Land Government in Zagreb from Hungarian land defense minister.

1914. On that day, minister of defense sent mobilization drafts, which were delivered to military conscripts on 25th and 26th of July 1914.<sup>30</sup> 8 military districts were mobilized and divided in 6 armies of unequal strenght. Archduke Friedrich was Supreme commander of operative forces while Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf was chief of general staff of the army.<sup>31</sup> All actions had been finished thus allowing minister Berchtold to, on the ground of Imperial authorization, co-sing declaration of war on July 28, 1914 which was proclaimed to all nations of the Monarchy the same day.<sup>32</sup> Conrad's estimates about time needed for mobilization proven to be correct, although war was declared on July 28, 1914 and Serbian Army blew up a bridge between Zemun and Belgrade on July 29 already, it took more time to commence hostilities.

Relating outbreak of war in Croatia, omissions of pre-war period, in the terms of repelling activities inspired from many Serbian military, political and social circles, had to be removed in very short notice. Furthermore, question of responsibility of Croatian Ban and Minister-President Tisza had occured. However, it was just an acute question. Events unfolded in great speed, alongside the process of gaining infulence on Monarchy level. Croatian Ban Ivan Skerlec, who had influence as much as his political mentor Count Tisza could provide one, had been disorientated in the first days of war only until the moment Tisza acquired maximum confidence of Emperor Francis Joseph. Although Tisza managed to fight himself through for this infulence in very short notice so he could protect Skerlec, the fact remains Skerlec was left by himself during period from Sarajevo assasination until first days of war. Not even Tisza could provide him support for which he needed to fight for from the Emperor personally. If we analyse this fact in the context of complex daily events: demonstrations, parliamnetary debates, adjustment of peace time conditions to the state of war, it is evident to what extent politically undercapable Skerlec, left to himself, have had panic reactions. Although he permamntly claimed Serbian population was loyal, he requested military aid at the same time. Revelation about loyalty of Serbian population in Triune Kingdom, specially referred to Srijem population.<sup>33</sup>

The presence of the army understandably created sense of security in this period. County officials requested intervention from Ban on many occasions at military headquarters because of military presence in their areas. For example, the head of County for Nova Gradiška had elaborated his request for military aid in the fact that area of his authority consisted of 40% Serbian population

<sup>30</sup> Đuro Šurmin, "Preparations for war with Serbia", *Novosti [Novelties]*, Nr. 84, March 23, 1927, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Slavko Pavičić, *Hrvatska vojna i ratna poviest i Prvi svjetski rat [Croatian warfare and military history and World War One]*, (Zagreb, 1943), pp. 247-250.

<sup>32</sup> Josip Horvat, *Prvi svjetski rat. Panorama zbivanja 1914-1918. [World War One]*, (Zagreb, 1967), p. 127.

<sup>33</sup> Isidor (Iso) Kršnjavi, *Zapisci. Iza kulisa hrvatske politike [Writtings - behind the scenes of Croatian politics]*, vol. II, (Zagreb, 1986), p. 735.

and by relocating other interned persons from border territory would present probable cause of further destabilization of situation.<sup>34</sup>

Sense of security or, rather, insecurity, influenced Ban Skerlec. In a meeting at Zagreb military headquarters held right after the defeat in the battle of Cer<sup>35</sup>, Skerlec had warned about possible rebellion of Serbian population in areas where they have formed majority. For that reason, he requested troops from military command. Zagreb military command representative rejected the request with a warning that in case of a riot, military will not only suppress it but take over administration of entire country as well.<sup>36</sup>

So, military protection had a price. Ban Skerlec had been invited to meetings with joint Zagreb military commander Eugen Scheuer, handling joint tasks during first months of war. Although this cooperation put him in a subordinate position, he gave his consent expecting aid and avoiding conflicts with the army. On self-consciousness of military authorities record shows that Zagreb military commander issued a warrant on August 7, 1914 for taking all necessary measures for the purpose of restoring order among population. It is mentioned that even in the case of minimal offense, they should act with "unscrupulous energy" ("mit der rücksichtslosesten Energie") for which he got all means necessary and help from supreme command of the army.<sup>37</sup>

Skerlec demanded from Zagreb military command reinforcement of constabulary stations, especially in border areas. In the same time, they had informed him that minister of war instructed Hungarian Minister-President to secure reinforcement of border guards to protect railroads, bridges and other important objects. The order referred to guarding bridges over Danube, Petrovaradin tunnel, bridge over Sava near Zemun, all bridges at Zagreb, Brod, Jasenovac, bridge over Kupa near Sisak with the ones near Varaždin and Osijek respectively. Special warning was issued for arms smuggling and control of Serbian fugitive's crossings. It is determined that constabulary needs assistance from troops.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> HR-HDA-78, PLG, Box 867, Nr. 4551-6404, File Nr. 280, September 25, 1914.

<sup>35</sup> In battle of Cer, Austro-Hungarian and Serbian army engaged in combat for the first time. In armed conflict which lasted from 16th until 19th of August 1914, Austro-Hungarian army suffered failure and retreated to staging points on west bank of Drina river. That way, Serbian forces prevented Austro-Hungarian army to occupy Serbia at the beginning of war, according to Central Powers military strategists intentions, to be able to strike Russia afterwards. Austro-Hungarian army under Potiorek leadership counted 200 000 soldiers against 180 000 Serbian soldiers under command of Stepa Stepanović. XIII corps participated in the battle also. See: S. Pavičić, *Hrvatska vojna i ratna poviest*, pp. 278-284, Milan Zelenika, *Prvi svjetski rat 1914*. [*World War One 1914*], (Belgrade, 1962), pp. 443-452.

<sup>36</sup> I. Kršnjavi, *Zapisci (...)*, vol. II, p. 735.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 735.

<sup>38</sup> HR-HDA-833, PF Đuro Šurmin, Box 24, File Nr. 2745, July 20, 1914.

From the above stated, it is evident that commencement of hostilities found Ban Skerlec unready. Notwithstanding the fact he had political support of Hungarian Government, first days of war and period followed immediately after Sarajevo assassination, Skerlec did not have political influence to resolve issues personally. In this period, military commander had greatest influence in Croatia. Ban had requested for help from him, confident army may secure restoring order more efficiently.<sup>39</sup>

Thus apparent weakness of civil authority in Croatia made main headquarters of the army consider as opportunity to take over administration of the country, not paying attention to laws and civil representatives. We should definitely add to this fact certain unexperienced of civil authorities, who did not know the true value of laws in war conditions and whether circumstances will allow them their application in reality. On the other hand, army might have confidence in their man at the top of civil administration alone. They intended to do so by replacing Ivan Skerlec and appointing general Adolf Rhemen as King's Commissioner for Croatia.<sup>40</sup>

However, events that took place unfolded in civil authorities' favor. Let us remember that powers Croatian Ban had received from Francis Joseph, enabled him in taking over execution of exceptional measures for the case of war. According to plain regulations, Ban Skerlec substituted the King for their execution, thus making vertical chain of command set up differently, especially after Tisza gained influence on Monarchy level. From herein mentioned, it is clear that the power of military authorities diminished in very short notice.

Not much time was also needed to set up different regulations for the territory of Triune Kingdom. The source of political power with its reflecting effect on military issues laid in jurisdiction of Hungarian Government who sent orders to Land Government in Zagreb constantly and Land Government in Zagreb had put them through forward to government commissioners in counties, districts, constabularies and regimental outposts respectively.<sup>41</sup>

Within this established relationship, Skerlec had a task of executing Hungarian Government's policy. Few months later when he had become familiar with the situation more closely and when support from Hungary had become more guaranteed, he showed more audacity in confronting military demands. Notwithstanding war and unstable political and security situation, soon after

<sup>39</sup> HR-HDA-78, PLG, 78, Box 867, Nr. 4551-6404, File Nr. 5217, Annex 1914, August 11, 1914.

<sup>40</sup> Most of Croatian population in military terms had been organized in XIII military corps which consisted of 36th and 7th infantry division and 42nd landwehr division. Headquarters was in Zagreb and Adolf Rhemen was commanding general.

<sup>41</sup> HR-HDA-77, Kraljevski ministar hrvatsko-slavonsko-dalmatinski u Budimpešti [King's Croatian-Slavonian-Dalmatian Minister, Presidium], Box 49, File Nr. 279, 442-1914, Budapest, August 10, 1914. Due to safer communication of Land Government and Hungarian Government in Budapest, department counsellor Emil Grabarić took over from state secretary in Croatian Ministry in Budapest Dragutina Unkelhäussera keys for coding and decoding of official telegraphs.

it was clear that political stability of Government and position of Skerlec were not endangered. It did not take long for Skerlec political opponents to witness the fact. They were members of Party of right, followers of Josip Frank policy.

However, they didn't quit and considered that war situation offers opportunity for political change with a help from main headquarters of the army and leading Austro-Hungarian generals. Evidently, this support had not been sufficient to remove Ban Skerlec from office.

Aforementioned relationship between Skerlec and Zagreb military command lasted until the moment Hungarian Minister-President Tisza estimated he had enough influence to oppose main headquarters of the army. The turning point had presented the meeting in Budapest on August 13, 1914. Among other leading politicians and Skerlec, representatives of Southern Command of the army also participated. They had agreed upon the following: "Pre-emptive imprisonment Hungarian laws do not allow, but in state of emergency, extraordinary measures may be applied for the security of the state. If concrete cases of doubt are needed to be brought up, government commissioners must determine detention. Still, if military commanders, except for most urgent matters, would be forced to detain individuals without consensus of civil authorities, they have to take care of everything and take all responsibility on themselves as well as all costs of transport. With detained persons must be treated with accord 1) who misbehaved military laws, to hand over to military tribunals, 2) who misbehaved in that matter to hand them over to civil courts, to hand over to attorney general, 3) for whom there is only a doubt, but no concrete evidence, place of internment to determine from case to case."<sup>42</sup>

In that meeting certain independency for Land Government in Zagreb was secured, so from then forward, Skerlec had obliged less and less to military command, especially in the matter of difficult cases. He intended to undermine their requests and act upon his judgements and Hungarian Government commands. All the same, military command had "overloaded" him with various reports for high treason based on informant's testimonies. Moreover, Scheure had summoned Ban to act "most rigorously to unreliable and anti-state elements from Pakrac surroundings" what Skerlec declined with explanation that all these requests were unjustified so there is no reason to act accordingly. Scheure did not satisfy himself with that answer so he wrote to Ban repeatedly, moreover demanding: "that for the sake of loyal citizens, unreliable officials need to be transferred (...) For that reason I plead to take in consideration seriously whether Government Commissioner, who does not enjoy confidence of the loyal people, is match for his duty. I must for the sake of security of this area of command, be able to rely unconditionally on all government bodies as well"<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> HR-HDA-833, PF Đuro Šurmin, Box 27, File Nr. 5346, August 17, 1914.

<sup>43</sup> HR-HDA-833, PF Đuro Šurmin, Box 24, File Nr. 764, August 19, 1914.

Events, i.e. the character of armed combat that followed soon after in Srijem area, confirmed judgements of Austro-Hungarian generals and their desire to prevent what will truly take place: multiple support from Serbian population of Srijem to Serbian Army and exceptionally aggressive acts toward Austro-Hungarian soldiers.

## War in Srijem

In the plans of Main Headquarters of Austro-Hungarian Army regarding attack on Serbia, only offensive actions from Croatian territory, needed to be taken from border area, were from Srijem. For that reason, military commands from Srijem and Slavonia took extensive preparations to secure military actions on Serbia which started on August 12, 1914 with crossing of the 5th Army over Drina and 2nd Army over Sava respectively.<sup>44</sup> Regarding geostrategic importance of Srijem, military authorities, just before the declaration of war, intended to secure help from civil administration, elaborated in the text above. Zagreb military command with consensus of the Land Government issued a memorandum on July 20, 1914 about surveillance of suspicious individuals and all Serbian societies from Zemun, Mitrovica and Brod.<sup>45</sup> They acted upon intelligence information. Constabulary in Srijemski Karlovci had been ordered to, with help from military, perform raid of suspicious persons regardless of their status afterwards. Surveillance of all Serbian societies from Srijem had been conducted accordingly. Action was executed on July 26, 1914. The next day already, military command in Petrovaradin on the ground of Article 481 of Military criminal offenders Law, had proclaimed martial law for Petrovaradin fortress and places: Majur, Ljudevitovdol, Rokovdol, Bukovac, Karlovci, Kamenica i Fruška Gora. Until that day, all activities were coordinated with commands from Land Government and on July 28, 1914 already Command in Petrovaradin ordered to constabulary detention of suspicious individuals by telephone.<sup>46</sup> The arrests had been carried out with help from constabulary and Land Government had been informed about it that 43 persons had been arrested.<sup>47</sup> Among them, there had been members of Parliament Giga Jović, Anatolij Janković and Nikola Petrović.<sup>48</sup>

Since the arrests were carried out without Government consent, Skerlec was left to protest that arrested persons did not belong under jurisdiction of military criminal responsibility and that military commands should have contacted civil authorities in these cases. He had interceded in behalf of arrested

<sup>44</sup> S. Pavičić, *Hrvatska vojna i ratna poviest (...)*, p. 281.

<sup>45</sup> HR-HDA-833, PF Đuro Šurmin, Box 24, File Nr. 2740, August 20, 1914.

<sup>46</sup> HR-HDA-833, OF. Đuro Šurmin, Box 27, File Nr. 63-1914, Srijemski Karlovci, July 31, 1914.

<sup>47</sup> HR-HDA-78, PLG, Box 867, Nr. 4551-6404, File Nr. 63, Srijemski Karlovci, July 28, 1914.

<sup>48</sup> HR-HDA-833, PF Đuro Šurmin, Box 27, article "Hostages in Srijem in the year of 1914", 2-3.

members of Parliament with Tisza, demanding their release.<sup>49</sup> He failed to acquire release so question of their detention became actual. Confident that their stay in Croatia might have led to further damage due to communication with their like-minders and relatives, Skerlecz contacted Hungarian Government. They arranged the relocation of prisoners on Hungarian territory.<sup>50</sup> By analyzing the aforementioned case, it is clear Ban had agreed to enforce military commands only declaratory, while intending to alleviate their negative effects simultaneously. Skerlecz had indulged military requests but in a special manner. He didn't remove the suspects but relocated them. He was finding numerous ways to avoid literal application of everyday military requests. Contrary to military authority's projections about necessary protection for mobilized troops, Skerlecz was deciding independently using the institute of civil authority, often opposite to military command plans. Of course, his interventions in military affairs had disrupted tactic and strategic plans of Main Headquarters.

What orders Ban was receiving from military commands in general? Two examples are sufficient: One relates to Oscar Potiorek request from August 12, 1914. Potiorek was holding a duty of commander of 6th Army which had been the integral part of the Balkan Army. He introduced Ban about un-loyal Serbian stance in Srijem and demanded disband of principality councils, discharge of Serbians from post offices, railroads and tax offices, evacuation of suspicious persons, securing of hostages for railroad, post offices and military armory, limitation of movement and transfer for police officers of Serbian nationality.<sup>51</sup> Skerlecz attitude toward credibility of these reports or, rather, his doubts about military judgements, can be evident from the fact that he have sent Francis Haladi, altogether with great Mayor Hideghety, to Srijem with a task to review the situation. In case these notices turn out to be true, he would have concurred with resolutions suggested by *Armeekommande*.<sup>52</sup>

Another example is the case with local commander in Zemun, Colonel Gustav Globočnik who

Was instated by the Ban to replace constables of Serbian nationality with members of Zagreb constabulary during the war with Serbia.<sup>53</sup>

From archive material it is evident to what extent Hungarian Minister-President Istvan Tisza had possessed more political talent, pragmatism and resoluteness in context of political acting. Tisza did not minorize the influence of Serbian population from Srijem area which is evident from his appeal to orthodox priesthood charged to use their influence among Serbian population

<sup>49</sup> HR-HDA-78, PLG, Box 815, Nr. 257-7223, Ruma, August 13, 1914.

<sup>50</sup> Bogdan Krizman, *Hrvatska u Prvom svjetskom ratu. Hrvatsko-srpski odnosi [Croatia in World War One. Croatian-Serbian political relations]*, (Zagreb, 1989), p. 100.

<sup>51</sup> HR-HDA-833, PF Đuro Šurmin, Box 27, File Nr. 6514, September 21, 1914.

<sup>52</sup> HR-HDA-833, PF Đuro Šurmin, Box 27, File Nr. 6514, September 21, 1914.

<sup>53</sup> HR-HDA-78, PLG, 78, Box 831, 234/1914, Zemun, October 22, 1914.

on Tisza incentive. Tisza had resented episcopate's Miron Nikolić Serbian stance "who live here for 200 years already", yet still displeased with their status. He had suggested Church can influence attitudes and tempers of Serbian population.<sup>54</sup>

## Serbian Army breakthrough into Srijem

Not much time passed away to comprehend what Austro-Hungarian command had in mind suggesting the beforementioned measures. During the end of August and beginning of September, after first combats and defeat of Austro-Hungarian Army in the battle of Cer, first regrouping of forces and reorganization of units had taken place. Oskar Potiorek had decided to organize new corps in Srijem under command of general Alfred Krauss whom he had appointed as commander of 29th infantry division as a part of Army Group Petrovaradin and 5th Army. Precisely this division had a task to protect Sava. Although Krauss have had an opinion that Serbian Army crossing over Sava should not been expected, it nonetheless happened.<sup>55</sup> Serbian gunnery commenced bombardment of Mitrovica on 26th of August 1914 and on the 28th August already, First and Second Serbian Army had crossed Sava.<sup>56</sup> Crossing of Serbian Army into Srijem was experienced with great excitement in Serbia. In introduction of *Piemont* had been written: "Great are the days we had experienced. The dream became a reality. Plain Srijem and once upon a time Serbian Vojvodina become part of Great Serbia. Whole leadership from Timok to Adriatic consider this day as the beginning of creation of Great Serbia. August 28. This is a great date in our history. This is the day Serbian troops occupied wonderful Srijem plain along all of river Sava"<sup>57</sup> Serbian Army kept possession of Srijem until Spetember 13, when general Radomir Putnik<sup>58</sup>, after the battles of Kraljevica and Batajnica, had decided to retreat.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>54</sup> HR-HDA-833, PF Đuro Šurmin, Box 27, File Nr. 5139/1914, August 31, 1914.

<sup>55</sup> Alfred Kraus, *Uzroci našeg poraza (...)*, pp. 157-160.

<sup>56</sup> HR-HDA-78, PLG, Box 865, Nr. 79-4096, File Nr. 361, Annex – 1914.

<sup>57</sup> "Belgrade and Zemun", *Piemont* (Belgrade), Nr. 215, August 29, 1914, 1.

<sup>58</sup> Radomir Putnik (Kragujevac, 24th of January 1847 – 17th of May 1917) chief of staff in Headquarters of Serbian army in World War One. Military education acquired at Artillery School in Belgrade. Chief of staff of the army since 1903. Together with Živojin Mišić, prepared all military plans for Balkan wars and armed combat fightings during World War One. In period between 1912 until 1916, he was Quartermaster General. After the battle of Kumanovo, he became first Serbian Archduke (Vojvoda). In 1916 he left island of Krf and went on medical treatment in Nice where he died next year. He dealt with theory of warfare and wrote books *Služba generalštaba I and II*, *Služba u mirno doba* and *Služba u ratno doba* [*Headquarters service I and II*, *Service in peace time* and *Service in war time*]. See: Dimitrije Đorđević, *Portaits from newer Serbian history*, Beograd, 1997; Svetozar Pribičević, *Diktatura kralja Aleksandra* [*Dictatorship of King Alexander*], (Belgrade, 1952).

<sup>59</sup> M. Zelenika, *Prvi svjetski rat*, pp. 633-635; HR-HDA-78, PLG, Box 865, Nr. 79-4096, File Nr. 361, Annex – 1914.

Herein mentioned breakthrough of Serbian army is described in State Attorney reports in Zagreb. Oscar Potiorek had informed Skerlec about events in Srijem. He reminded him of declaration while taking over the command of the area and Ban's obligation to provide aid to the army. About the extent of Serbian breakthrough into Srijem and Serbian population's attitude toward this event, Potiorek found out only after sending headquarters major Bartl in inspection who, after his survey, had filled a report describing how: "Serbian-orthodox population is hostile to our army. In Serbian villages, they have been shooting on our troops and Serbian soldiers have been hiding in their homes and redress in civilian clothes. Local population destroyed telegraph, telephone and railway lines. They gave signals to the enemy by night. In some places, they have received Serbian army ceremoniously, marking Serbian houses with Cyrillic letter and green wreaths to spare their houses from Serbian army while houses of Catholics were burned down even by local population". On the ground of that report, Potiorek consistently demanded from main headquarters of the army and Croatian Ban removal of unreliable persons from counties, municipality offices, post-offices, telegraph, railroad, tax and forest offices along with evacuation of all orthodox monasteries and removal of water guards.<sup>60</sup>

Military report had been confirmed by State Attorney based upon information of county commissioners. The most detailed report composed county commissioner from Vukovar. He had described the event: "The retreat of our army, local Serbs follow with mocking smile and prepare special delegation right away, to salute Serbian army ceremoniously in front of the village. Delegations are someplace smaller someplace bigger, the biggest in Dobanovci, whereas half of inhabitant Serbs depart to meet Serbian army. In Deč and Kupinovo, local pharoses and notaries are in delegations. On local houses they hang Serbian flags and on themselves they put Serbian cockades. While the army is entering, all bells ring. Home Serbs accept Serbian army overjoyed, cheer to the army and King Peter, throw flowers and decorate it with wreaths. In Deč, Dobanovci and Kupinovo ceremonial services to God take place and prays for the glory for victory of Serbian arms (...) Home Serbs treat and provide hospitality for Serbian army overjoyed, to their benefit in everything: showing roads to neighboring villages and paths where our army retreated and tipping off about every movement of our army. Home Serbs kill our soldiers who were left behind: in Bečmen commander of the company and seven soldiers, in Ašanja, Deč and Ugrinovci by one soldier and in Kupinovo they point a hideout to Serbian army, where 250 of our soldiers hid and who were made prisoners of war upon it (...) Home Serbs give over to Serbian army distinguishable non-Serbs and demand from them to kill them. And army does kill in Boljevci six men, in Dobanovci thirteen (...) Home Serbs under leadership of municipal

<sup>60</sup> HR-HDA-833, PF Đuro Šurmin, Box 24, File Nr. 494, September 18, 1914; HR-HDA-78, PLG, Box 865, Nr. 79-4096, File Nr. 457 -1914, Annex - 1914, September 17, 1914.

officials and servicemen perform requisition of non-Serbs for Serbian army. Mostly alone, but exceptionally accompanied by few Serbian soldiers, home Serbs break into their own and neighboring villages – in Batajnica furthermore under leadership of municipal official – in houses of non-Serbs thus plundering them and burn them afterwards.” Countermeasures of Austro-Hungarian army are described in the report after their return: „In village, soldiers who were left over, our army had captured and under martial law main quillties and ring leaders sentenced to death and others released. Against many the procedure is still pending. One was shot in Ažanja, 11 in Batajnica, 3 in Bečmen, 1 in Bežanija, 5 in Boljevci, 4 in Progar, 2 in Deč, 10 in Dobanovci, 6 in Jakov, 17 in Karlovčić, 1 in Petrovčić, 5 in Kupinovo, 11 in Obreža, 1 in Pečinci, 9 in Popinci, 2 in Prhova, 10 in Surčin, 5 in Šimanovci and 2 in Ugrinovci.”<sup>61</sup>

Against persons who had helped Serbian army in any way during their brief breakthrough, criminal proceedings were being initiated, depending on criminal act they have committed. That way against ones who committed burglary, arson, and public violence against the state, and those were 350, criminal procedures were initiated for indemnities to the state and repaying damages to private persons.<sup>62</sup> In other group there had been 595 persons accused of high treason. Criminal procedure had been initiated against many officials too. For example, in possession of county official in Ruma, Kangrga –mobilization plans had been found. Upon all accused of high treason, sentence of shooting was executed. Those were the consequences of Serbian breakthrough into Srijem.

Regarding activities of local Serbian population during Serbian army “breakthrough”, military commander Scheure in Zagreb had summoned Ban Skerlec. He sent him a notice with following content: “As I know from Your Excellency, Srijem valued as loyal and some officials not without objection at all have been in favour of mobilization right away. But, what happened with this reliability, sad facts have shown (...) And that all of that had been in Srijem, which You considered reliable, how would it look like in those counties during invasion, which have been stigmatized as friendly to Serbs or unsecure? Excellency, our duty is to be together at work. Politics are strange to me, but this is not a question of politics, we stand before villains’ attacks on our country”<sup>63</sup> Skerlec had persisted notwithstanding non-confidence regarding situation from his first associate, under-Ban Aurel Fodroczy, person in charge of Interior section of Land Government, therefore in charge of constabulary as well and security situation in the country accordingly. Zagreb military command had warned Skerlec on Fodroczy statement that civil authorities release suspects from prison because they don’t have proof material for criminal prosecution and according to procedure they should have handed them over to court

<sup>61</sup> HR-HDA-79, IDLG-CDIS, Box 28, Nr. 483/Annex-1916.

<sup>62</sup> HR-HDA-833, PF Đuro Šurmin, Box 27, File Nr. 87, Annex 1914, Spetember 6, 1914.

<sup>63</sup> HR-HDA-833, PF Đuro Šurmin, Box 24, File Nr.1764, September 26, 1914.

martial. In the report composed on the basis of anonymous tip, it was stated: „Yet in Zagreb will come to these occasions as it did in Srijem (...) that soldiers are not allowed to tell anything about the army and their comrades, while Serb vice Ban Fodroczy is allowed to express himself openly like this: “Everything is doomed, we are beaten on all lines! There are many Serbs in Zagreb. If, God forsake, Serbs would arrive in Zagreb, they would have been greeted the same way as they had been in Srijem, especially few days before the have been in Zemun”. The ending of memorandum is remarkable: “Be mindful esteemed one and put coalition under more tight guard. Loyal to Dinasty.”<sup>64</sup>

How did public opinion accept unfavorable news from Srijem we got insight from Zagreb Archbishop Bauer’s diary: “We hear about Serbian breakthroughs on Srijem soil near Mitrovica, Kupinovo and Zemun. Not to mention how much these issues touch us deep and in the bottom of our soul. Nobody has the will for the job, everyone grab newspapers in which nothing is there, just phrases, to hide upheavals as better as possible and in all those official news the only comfort is – hope for the better.” From the same reading we comprehend how certain informations notwithstanding military censorship, could have come to public. Archbishop’s secretary mentions that they have found out about the armed combats in Srijem from Italian Press *Osservatore Romano* ie. the newspaper censorship had left through due to the election of new Pope.<sup>65</sup>

## Evacuation of population

Familiar with aforementioned events we are in condition to comprehend discontent of officers who had demanded more complete cooperation to be taken with civil authorities. Previously, I have exposed the concept of multiple disunity on political and social level. Disunity and non-coordination had been expressed to such measure, that Tisza’s close associates disagreed in estimates and actions. I mentioned appointment of Baron Tallian as Commissioner of Hungarian Government for South Tyrol military command. Skerlec was Tisza’s confident too, so it was logical to assume at least two commissioners would implement similar procedures. However, in this case also it had been the opposite way. Consensus had been left out.

Herein stated claim I explain on the ground of discord between Skerlec and Tallian after Serbian army retreat. Events have showed them it is not possible to avoid implementation of measures which military authorities priority demanded from civil bodies such as evacuation of population, suspension of bureaucrats or taking of hostages. Then Tallian, although he did not have the

<sup>64</sup> HR-HDA-833, PF Đuro Šurmin, Box 24, File Nr. 1711, September 22, 1914.

<sup>65</sup> Nadbiskupijski arhiv u Zagrebu (hereinafter: NAZ) [Archbishopry Archive in Zagreb], Legacy of Archbishop Antun Bauer, Dnevnik [Diary], Vol. II, September 6 – 8, 1914.

mandate for determining hostages, had started to implement exactly these measures without knowledge and consent of Croatian Land Government. His command for suspension of certain number of officials Skerlec had opposed with a warning that such decisions under war laws, lay in jurisdiction of King's commissioner and his lawful representatives, therefore in this field and about this decision prerogative holds Mayor Hideghéthy.<sup>66</sup> Ban could have really relied on commissioner Hideghethy. He had delivered him information about Srijem at all times such as number of arrested, interned and people exempted as hostages. Most intensive and, by content of the conversation, most disputable relationships between civil and military authorities had been on the question of hostages. For that reason, representatives of Land Government and Hungarian Minister-President Tisza had participated in a meeting with representatives of Potiorek military command in Brčko on October 5, 1914. Government representatives had emphasized that taking of hostages is illegal and demanded that army, since conducting it already, financially support the evacuation of population. General Alfred Kraus had suggested establishment of contribution as a guaranty the damage will be repaid actually. Tisza had rejected Krauss' suggestion with explanation that in his country contribution will not be enforced, because contribution is due to be implemented in enemy country only. He had opposed Krauss suggestion with a legal norm under which for compensation of damage, only convicted perpetrator of a criminal offence is sufficient.<sup>67</sup> Meanwhile, he had warned that activities of Croatian Land Government in relation to military obligations, should reduce to help in combat, security of army transport and supply. Furthermore, he had explained how military commands have jurisdiction over individuals in any relation with military obligation only, thus belonging under jurisdiction of military tribunal. In other cases, army had not had the right to intervene. At the same time he had reminded army acts exceeded determined frames and in future should the same be executed by civil administration only i.e. legally elected Government.<sup>68</sup>

Although Tisza's suggestions had goal to resolve the relationship between civil and military authorities, irregularities happened even afterwards. It had made army more resilient in enforcing plans. These days, Skerlec had received telegrams from his confidants in which they have informed him about numerous arrests and evacuations from Srijem.<sup>69</sup>

In memorandum from Požega commissioner it is mentioned that "around 2000 members of Greek-Eastern religion, banished as a dangerous element from Srijem" arrive in Požega. Government commissioner finds large number

<sup>66</sup> HR-HDA-833, PF Đuro Šurmin, Box 27, File Nr. 1141, February 8, 1915.

<sup>67</sup> HR-HDA-833, PF Đuro Šurmin, Box 24, File Nr. 7697, October 18, 1914.

<sup>68</sup> HR-HDA-833, PF Đuro Šurmin, Box 24, File Nr. 7697, October 18, 1914.

<sup>69</sup> HR-HDA-78, PLG, Box 877, Nr. 7.789, telegrams to Presidency of Land Government from Batajnica, Osijek and Požega.

of inhabitants of Serbian nationality in villages of Požega county as a security problem too. Due to a large increase in number of Serbian population, Mayor had requested from Ban establishment of Constabulary Commission in Požega.<sup>70</sup>

County district in Osijek had informed Presidency of Land Government in Zagreb on November 26, 1914 about relocation of 7856 Serbs from Srijem to Virovitica area too.

They had been accommodated in homes of local Serbian population. Although being accepted benevolent, in time, their numericity had created problem, especially regarding food shortages and other necessities.<sup>71</sup> Besides that, large number of persons had been lived in one household, so there have been danger of development of pandemonium. All of these circumstances caused discontent with local and evacuated population, so authorities had estimated that rebellion might broke out in the County. Therefore, in the Land Government they had suggested formation of „joint camps of evacuated persons and plunder of funds for nutrition for in that way all would carry the burdens“<sup>72</sup>

In conclusion of discussion about evacuation of Serbian population from Srijem area it is necessary to pay attention to few facts. Most of all, it is evident how Croatian Government had accommodated population herein mentioned in other parts of Croatia and taken care of their nutrition and life conditions. Interned persons have not been accommodated in camps but in private persons lodgings and farms across Croatia. For example, for one part of interned persons, Zagreb county district have taken care and accommodated them on dr. Bogdan Medaković estate.<sup>73</sup> Other interned persons had been accommodated in Krapina, Ivanac, Ludbreg, Koprivnica, Samobor etc.<sup>74</sup>

Purpose of internship had revealed itself in protection of combat activity, so it lasted according to estimates about endangerment of military units. When the danger ceased to exist for Austro-Hungarian army, Land Government had started implementation of return for interned persons.<sup>75</sup>

Possible intentions of Main headquarters of the army are evident from archive material, after experienced gained from connected events, more precisely analysis regarding relocation of Serbian population from Srijem. We are not in position to confirm the herein mentioned statement because I had acquired information about it indirectly. Namely, Mayor of Osijek dr. Pinterović, handed over Osijek military command plans to Zagreb Archbishop Antun

<sup>70</sup> HR-HDA-78, PLG, Box 831, 409/1914, Požega, September 26, 1914.

<sup>71</sup> HR-HDA-833, PF Đuro Šurmin, Box 27, File Nr. 35, September 26, 1914.

<sup>72</sup> HR-HDA-833, PF, Đuro Šurmin, Box 27, File Nr. 35, November 26, 1914.

<sup>73</sup> HR-HDA-78, PLG, Box 870, Nr. 6328, Zagreb, July 14, 1915.

<sup>74</sup> HR-HDA-78, PLG, Box 870, Nr. 4872, Samobor, July 24, 1915.

<sup>75</sup> HR-HDA-78, PLG, Box 887, Nr. 3287/1-1915, January 18, 1916.

Bauer secretary dr. Svetozar Rittig<sup>76</sup> that in border area with Serbia “under any circumstances Slavic peoples must not live together, either Croats nor Slovaks”. Rittig had concluded: “This shows direction upon which colonization of Srijem will take place”.<sup>77</sup>

However, tendentious debates had started in daily press about interments already. *Croatian defense* from Osijek had published a minute book of a meeting on which it had been decided about interments from south Srijem. As *Pokret, Hrvatska, Hrvat* and *Bosnische Post* had quoted the article, Grand Mayor Hideghethy warned Ban about omissions that took place during censorship with a remark: “Maybe polemic as well as censorship is in the hands of some coalitionist”.<sup>78</sup> Intention of publicist works had been accusation of Austro-Hungarian army witnessed in titles of newspaper articles like “Horrors in Srijem in the year 1914”<sup>79</sup>, “Hostages in Srijem”<sup>80</sup> and “Pogroms in Croatia”<sup>81</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Svetozar Rittig (Brod na Savi, 1873 – Zagreb, 21st of July 1961), priest, historian and politician. Studied theology in Sarajevo, Đakovo, Vienna and Rom. Ordained for priest in 1895. For some time he was Archbishop Strossmayer’s secretary accepting his political ideas. He lectured Church history in Đakovo and at Theology Faculty in Zagreb. He was the editor of *Catholic journal*. In 1902 he received Doctorate degree in Vienna. Close associate of Zagreb Archbishop Antun Bauer and his personal secretary respectively. Appointed Mayor of Saint Blaise Parish in 1915, and from 1917 until 1941 Mayor of St. Mark’s Parish. With help of Ivan Meštrović and Jozo Kljaković artistically reconstruct church of St. Mark on Mark Square in Zagreb. As a follower of Strossmayer’s idea, he spoke in favour of union of southern slav peoples on federalist principles. Enters politics in 1905 as a member of Croatian Party of Right in Croatian-Serbian coalition. From 1908 until 1918, he was representative for Đakovo County in Croatian Parliament. In the year of 1917, he travelled to Switzerland to make contacts with Yugoslav board. In 1918, he was a member of National Council of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. After establishment of Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, he joined Croatian Community. He constantly aspired after Croatian-Serbian conciliation and making compromise with the Court. After Ante Pavelić’s departure, he publicly accused his activities in emigration. During World War Two he joined partisan movement and participated with report in Second ZAVNOH meeting in Plaški on October 12, 1943. After the war he was appointed to several political duties and posts. In the year of 1947, he became permanent member of YASA (JAZU). In Zagreb, he started foundation of Old-Slavic Academy which became Old-Slavic institute in 1952. Specially aimed for conclusion of Treaty between SFRY and Vatican, which took place only in 1966, after his death. See: Ćiril Petešić, *Katoličko svećenstvo u NOB 1941-45* [*The Catholic Priesthood in NOB 1941-1945*], (Zagreb, 1982), pp. 130-154; Josip Bratulić, “Svetozar Rittig – ličnost i djelovanje” [“*Svetozar Rittig – personality and work*”], *Slovo*, Vol. 44-46, Old-Slavic Academy and its meaning, (Zagreb, 1996), pp. 323-324; Miroslav Akmadža, “Svetozar Rittig – ministar svećenik u komunističkoj vladi” [“*Svetozar Rittig – Minister Priest in Communist Government*” ], *VDG Jahrbuch*, Vol. 15, Osijek, 2008, 101-116.

<sup>77</sup> NAZ, Legacy of Archbishop Antun Bauer, Dnevnik, Vol. II, February 24, 1915.

<sup>78</sup> HR-HDA-78, PLG, Box 877, Nr. 8, 694, Vukovar, November 28, 1914.

<sup>79</sup> Đuro Šurmin, “In First year of War – Atrocities in Srijem in the year of 1914”, *Novosti* [*Novelties*], June 17, 1927, 1.

<sup>80</sup> HR-HDA-833, PF Đuro Šurmin, Box 24.

<sup>81</sup> Dr. Srđan Budisavljević, *Stvaranje Države Srba, Hrvata I Slovenaca: povodom četrdesetogodišnjice jugoslovenskog ujedinjenja* [*Making of State of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. On occasion of fortieth anniversary of Yugoslav unification*] (Zagreb: Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 1958): 15-18.

Discussions have been continued after the war i.e. during the whole inter-war period.

## **Conclusion**

On military-security and social problematic imminent to and during World War One on Srijem territory written accounts in non-fiction exist so far while scientists paid more attention recently. Political, military, demographic, security and geographical context was priority neglected and evaluations made according to one-sided argumentation based on consequences faced by Serbian population of Srijem. In the context of scientific analysis, quality of scientific work reduces analysis of combat for certainly, not taking causes and effects in consideration, presenting combat from one-sided perspective. On the contrary, if we present the problematic completely, information showing Serbian population after Sarajevo assassination and in the first months of war expressed extreme desire and act in order to accomplish grand-Serbian political interests on the territory of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and Croatia are not to be ignored. As every war is by itself mutual so does historian need to take in consideration all factors, in chronological order naturally. In the case as mentioned before, Austro-Hungarian Army at first insisted upon removing officials and temporarily transport of unreliable population, in order to be successful based on information of intelligence character confirmed in the end. The fact civil authority led by Ban Ivan Skerlec and supported by Minister-President Istvan Tisza, did not oblige their demands, not only considerably influenced the outcome of fighting but fate of non-Serb and Serb population of Srijem respectively. Military suggestions were rejected, Serbian counter attack took place and in that particular moment, Serbian population priority warned upon as unreliable, not only accepted the Serbian army overjoyed but express their loyalty by demolishing and burning Croatian houses and other possessions and finally in combat activity.

## **Zusammenfassung**

### **Besondere Stellung Syrmiens im geopolitischen Kontext vor und während des Ersten Weltkriegs**

Eine allgemein akzeptierte Meinung in der Geschichtsschreibung ist, dass Syrmien eine besondere militärisch-strategische und soziale Stellung hatte.

Uneinigkeiten zwischen Österreich-Ungarn und dem Königreich Serbien wurden immer intensiver, besonders in diesem Teile des Dreieinigen Königreiches. Der serbischen Regierung gelang es in dieser Zeit mehrmals, Einfluss auf politische, soziale und Sicherheitsbedingungen in Syrmien auszuüben. Im Einklang mit ihren Interessen bestand zwischen der Österreichisch-Ungarischen Monarchie und Kroatien eine Einheit, und deswegen betrachteten die Serben den Krieg als Beginn der letzten Schlacht gegen diese zwei Subjekte. Das Ziel der Serben war es, die Monarchie zu vernichten und das Königreich Serbien auf Kosten Kroatiens zu vergrößern. Solchen gewaltsamen Akten ausgesetzt, begann Österreich-Ungarn nach Modalitäten des Selbstschutzes zu suchen.

Historiographische und publizistische Werke zu diesem Thema sind unvollständig, weil sie politischen, militärischen, demographischen und geographischen Kontext nicht berücksichtigen. Die bisherigen Interpretationen waren einseitig, geschrieben meistens aus der Perspektive der jugoslawischen Geschichtsschreibung hinsichtlich Themen, die mit Kroatien am Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges verbunden waren. Wie jeder Krieg in der Geschichte war auch dieser Krieg zweiseitig. Bei Darstellung dessen sollte ein Geschichtsschreiber alle wichtigen Faktoren in Betracht ziehen, was das grundlegende Ziel dieser Arbeit ist.

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