

Drago Roksanđić

On the Event and the *Longue Durée*: 1918 in Multiple Perspectives

The editorial board of the first thematic issue of the journal *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest*, publishing an international collection of papers “1918: The Beginning and the End. Transition, Emotions, Memories”, has kindly asked me to contribute an introduction for the selection. They have given me the freedom to be as critical as I find fit, as well as affording me the right to reflect on this very demanding topic. No one concerned with modern and contemporary history is indifferent towards 1918. The year has a global connotation. Its remnants are visible everywhere, regardless of the culture of professional thought, research approaches, relationship towards the traditions of contemporary history, personal worldviews, the culture of remembrance, etc. It is recognizable both micro- and macro-historically, in the history from the “bottom up” and the “top down”, on a scale from local to global history and in all spatial/temporal turns. The editorial board had skilfully crafted a call for papers which was quite inclusive when it comes to the topic, but also innovative at the same time. It defines 1918 not only in a periodization-deterministic fashion, but as a “beginning and end”, not in a linear fashion of an “end and a beginning”. The entanglement of continuities and discontinuities in 1918, as well as in the ensuing and preceding years, are much more recognizable from a centenary point of view than in 1918, notwithstanding the political aims with which one came into the fray, on an aspirational scale restoration – revolution.

The year 1918 is one of the years in which the themes of Croatian history must necessarily be seen on a plane far removed from the horizons of the contemporary Croatian historical agenda, in its spatial and temporal determinants. The experience of questionable self-determination in an era of limited sovereignties, the condensed and catastrophic effects of “total war” in a time of mutually exclusive illusions of what came “tomorrow”, “the day after”, etc., is common to many peoples from the Baltic to the Adriatic, to the Aegean, the Black Sea, and the Levant. In none of these areas, apart from, let us say, Belgium, was the Armistice the first step towards peace, but a respite towards new conflicts with limited goals or an introduction to short- or long-term political violence. (When one mentions the Czechoslovak example as an exception, one must keep in mind the fact that in 1918 the German minority had no chance to put forward opposing viewpoints,

as was the case with Slovaks in Hungary.) I have recently written on the Yugoslav case and would like to emphasize the fact that alongside the Croatian-Serbian/Serbian-Croatian and other dynamics within the new Yugoslav state, there were numerous other dynamics which were, and still remain, common in the midst of the *Phantomgrenzen*.¹ Their “ends” and “beginnings” seem interchangeable.

The virtue of this selection is the fact that it is polyphonous from various viewpoints, including generationally. The editorial board has succeeded in motivating Croatian historians, as well as historians from many parts of the world, established and globally renowned, as well as younger historians, professionally deeply involved in the issues of 1918. The ensuing remarks have been sorted according to the sequence of publication previously arranged by the editorial board.

Alan Sked, *professor emeritus* at the London School of Economics, formerly a doctoral student of A.J.P. Taylor, has written the article “Re-Imagining Empire: The Persistence of the Austrian Idea in the Historical Work of Heinrich Ritter von Srbik”, which will greatly interest all those who are basically familiar with the “grand themes” of German history. Heinrich Ritter von Srbik is generally known in overviews of historical science as one of the great Austro-German historians who allowed their work to be instrumentalized for the purposes of Nazi cultural policies, and who were willing collaborators in the Nazification of German culture. While not repressing von Srbik’s Nazi (auto)instrumentalization – and critically examining the trends of *kleindeutsch* and *grossdeutsch* schools of historiography from the mid-19th to the mid-20th centuries and the genesis of von Srbik’s *gesamtdeutsche Idee* in interpreting German history, he reinterprets the basis of von Srbik’s reading of the history of the Holy Roman Empire, especially its reforms since the 15th century up to its dissolution as (dis)continuous moments in forming the German *Volk*, notwithstanding the political boundaries within and without the Empire. He disassembles his *grossdeutsch* and *kleindeutsch* approaches to the German question in the wider Central European framework as key aspects of modern European and world history in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. According to von Srbik, *deutsche Einheit* is not primarily a question of creating a centralized national state, but of (con)federal structures – comparable with the legacy of the Holy Roman Empire – which would bring about German unity as a *Volk*, and ensure its essential status in *Mitteleuropa*, and in Europe as well. *Mitteleuropa* is defined as the space from the Rhineland in the west, to the Riga – Odessa line in the east and is dually distinguished by a vertical line from Danzig to Trieste, that being the originally German *Mitteleuropa*, as well as the one formed by German colonizing efforts in a multinational environment. Von Srbik gradually formed his approaches, mostly after the Austro-Hungarian and German defeats in the First World War, putting the *Anschluss* question in a longer-term perspective, as well as German future in a world in which the Allied powers had failed to solve any of the questions opened by the delegitimization of popular aspirations which

was the key of European history both in the East and West. Von Srbik's belief that German political hegemony was not a necessary precondition for the realization of Germany's legitimate aspirations in Europe, or the belief that Germans might seek the fulfilment of their interests in (con)federal structures – according to Sked – is shared today by many historians, who often do not quote von Srbik, but are dedicated to the key questions of the future of the European Union (e.g. Whaley, Langewiesche).

Filip Šimetin Šegvić's article "What is Left of the Double-Headed Eagle? Continuities and Discontinuities Discussed" is a historiographical manifesto for Croatian "Habsburg Studies". Its chief virtue is primarily the fact that it bases the key points for the foundation of these studies in the economic, intellectual, cultural and political issues of a Braudelian *longue durée* and its cycles of *conjoncture* which relativize and question the notion of 1918 as a critical turning point, or caesura. In other words, from a post-Habsburg perspective, the author reinterprets the processes and phenomena which are unfathomable if one omits the issue of temporal/spatial frameworks formed by the realities of the Habsburg Monarchy. Referencing the work of David Good, the author correctly posits that Austria-Hungary did not fail because it had not been industrialized or modernized. Quite the contrary, Good had proved the opposite in his reconstructions of long-term development trends, namely, that Austria-Hungary had been developing more rapidly during the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, in a time when its legitimizing credibility had been brought into question, among the Austrian Germany and Hungarians, as well as among other peoples of the Monarchy. The key basis for this development was the internal market, which was beneficial for all despite its limitations. The best proof for this is the fact that it had revitalized in the politically and legally different conditions after 1918.

The bourgeois and political culture, defined in the widest sense, reflected crisis agendas and had common long-term sources – influences from Vienna, Budapest, Prague or Krakow – be they from systems of education, bureaucratic institutions, procedures or practices, mentalities or cultures of everyday life, etc. etc. The works of Ivan Meštrović or Miroslav Krleža, as contrarian as they were, remain unfathomable and incomprehensible outside of that legacy. After 1918, no matter how powerful the distancing was from Central European points of reference, they found ways of revitalization, from local contexts onward. Indeed, all Croatian Yugoslav aspirations before 1918 were bred in multi-confessional Habsburg contexts, from Slavic variations on the *Volksgeist* theme, the *Gesamtstaatsidee*,

¹ See: Drago ROKSANDIĆ, „Jugoslavenstvo prije stvaranja Jugoslavije“, in: Latinka PEROVIĆ, Drago ROKSANDIĆ, Mitja VELIKONJA *et al.*, *Jugoslavija u istorijskoj perspektivi*, Belgrade 2017, 27–54; Béatrice von HIRSCHHAUSEN, Hannes GRANDITS, Claudia KRAFT *et al.*, *Phantomgrenzen. Räume und Akteure in der Zeit neu denken*, Göttingen 2015.

Austro-Slavism and Yugoslavism from 1848/1849, from cultural Yugoslavism and Yugoslav nationalism at the century's end, to Supilo's Yugoslav federalism and the Yugoslav republican confederalism of Stjepan Radić after 1918. This rich and fertile essay points to the fact that the experience of debates on the First World War in Croatian historiography has reached beyond reconstructing a more-or-less forgotten or taboo past, and towards accepting the global academic challenges of "Habsburg Studies".

Clifford F. Wargelin, a professor at Georgetown College, has written an intellectually provocative and meticulous essay, "Habsburg Paradox: Decision in Austria-Hungary, January-March 1918", in which he goes back to the basic problem of the dissolution of Austria-Hungary and reminds us that its future up to the end of 1917 and the first months of 1918, could not be questionable, from the outside, as a state leading a war on multiple fronts, and from within, as a complex society connecting various disparate interests and aspirations. Notwithstanding its inferior military status in its alliance with the German Reich, Austria-Hungary regularly had opposing viewpoints in all key diplomatic and military matters to those of its senior partner in arms. Emperor Charles utilized several diplomatic initiatives for internal political reform and adaptation to the wartime realities of Europe – as much as they were vague – to try and revitalize the Habsburg Monarchy on a new footing, which was surely unavoidable, notwithstanding the outcomes of the war. Although the author makes no clear link between the issues, he does not exclude the hypothesis that the internal reform implications of the Emperor's policies could have resulted in a new wave of Hungarian maximalist demands for a separate Hungarian army in January 1918. We would add that the Hungarian perceptions of Austria-Hungary's war aims were opposite to the dynastic and Austro-German aims. However, the matter at hand was the question of continuing the war for both parts of the Monarchy, in particular when it came to the question of supply and food for the army and population at large. Food rationing was not carried out by a common policy, but changed during the course of the war, to the detriment of the peoples of Cisleithania. After the first and second Russian Revolutions, and the peace talks with Bolshevik Russia – notwithstanding the improved state of the battlefields – the great social changes promised by revolutionary Russia had internal implications for the Monarchy. In parallel, the war policy principles of the United States of America had gained in strength and significance. Although the author did not delve more deeply into these aspects, he noticed the influence of the returnees from prisoner-of-war camps in Russia, who were fed up with the war and who were transformed into a new internal army of the rebelled, the "green cadres". The author's conclusion is explicit: "...while the Monarchy in early 1918 arguably had options still available in military matters, in peace initiatives, and even in potential constitutional reform, the pressing and immediate need for food ultimately dictated policies at the expense of all other considerations. The

crisis simply could not be ignored, and a government that could not feed its people could no longer claim legitimacy.”

The article by **Ibolya Murber** “System Change in Austria and Hungary 1918-1919. Comparison of the Political Aspects of the Austrian and Hungarian Crisis Management” is the only comparative appraisal of the changes that had happened in “German Austria” and “Hungary” from the autumn of 1918 to the autumn of 1919, that is, in the territory of the reduced Cisleithania and reduced Transleithania. The author has opened the question of “system change”, utilizing her substantial familiarity with the reference works in both case studies. Although it is not uniformly defined, the key aspects have been successfully elaborated. She reconstructs the processes and phenomena of power transfers in both cases as preconditions for the realization of internationally supervised gradual construction of liberal parliamentary democracies. The effects of the “total crisis” brought on by the defeat, the strain of war and the breakdown of the wartime economy are reconstructed, as well as the effects of the coming peace treaties and their one-sided results. The author points to great differences in the political cultures between the Austrian and Hungarian examples, but she did not delve into the issue of social differences, mainly focusing on political aspects. Bureaucratic structures on both sides eased the transition, but the variations in social structure and differing electoral laws from the pre-war era disabled the reaching of sustainable social and political agreements. The violence ensuing after the transfer of power was much greater in the Hungarian example than in the Austrian one. While the disintegration of Cisleithania strengthened the German consciousness of the Austrians and thereby facilitated the acceptance of the defeat, the disintegration of Transleithania, the breakdown of the “Hungarian political nation” concept, blocked the formation of Hungary as a state with clearly defined borders, citizens and state power. While the Austrian social democrats, politically experienced and numerous, had a key role in the transition period, Hungary’s social democrats were much weaker and the transient regime had no strong footing in society. The side-effect was the broad strengthening of the communist movement in Hungary, and the much weaker expansion of communists in Austria, which served the purpose of distancing the two countries, thereby hindering the possibilities of stabilization in the new European order.

In her article “Despised Elite. Nobility in Croatia and Slavonia After 1918”, **Iskra Iveljić** opens the insufficiently explored question of the history of the Croatian-Slavonian nobility after 1918. She performs this by pointing out changes in the land-owning, legal, political and economic state of the nobility in the Habsburg Monarchy after 1848/1849, which was quite distinguished during the creation of modern Croatian bourgeois society. In spite of these changes, it kept its social prestige, and the estates more or less successfully adapted to the imperatives of capitalist economy, etc. The Croatian bourgeois elite was stocked with members of the nobility. On the other hand, the tendency for ennoblement never lost its

attractiveness. Taking social status into account, a significant change occurred after 1 December 1918, as the legal system of the Kingdom of Serbia – which did not recognize noble status – was enacted throughout the whole territory of the new state. This was a powerful blow to the nobility, as it had many consequences which the author explores in various points and contexts, reminding her readership that the law did not forbid the use of titles in personal names. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, was formed in a time when there was a continental, often violent, pressure by the impoverished and hungry peasantry, often decimated by the war and epidemics from the Baltic to the Adriatic, from the Elbe to the Urals, to solve the agrarian question with agrarian reform. There was no peasant, farmer or agrarian political party that did not base its credibility on a policy of agrarian reform. The *conjoncture* of the 1920s deepened the inequality between parts of the nobility as it impoverished some, while enriching others. These transfers of power and wealth were followed in lockstep with corruption scandals, which further compromised the state. It remains to be seen how much noble traditions were important in the construction of national-ideological narratives, both those compatible with Yugoslav ideologies and those negating these ideologies.

The article “The Last Hundred Years: Some Observations on Historiography of Austria-Hungary”, written by **Adam Kozuchowski**, gives historiographical observations on the history of Austria-Hungary, or the Habsburg Monarchy, in a centennial perspective since the year 1918. One can concur with the author that the interwar debates on its heritage were mostly led in Austro-German historiography. Historians in the territorially reduced Austria, questioned the universalizing traditions of ancient and Christian Rome, or the connections of the Roman Empire with the Holy Roman Empire. Some interpreted the fall of Habsburg Vienna as a latter-day fall of imperial Rome. Rome had been an urban synthesis of the Roman and Greco/Byzantine world in various imaginaries, and in a history “from the bottom up”, in everyday Germanized and Slavicized Vienna, this pointed to continuities, rather than to discontinuities. Some saw it as Athens. They had all faced the question of saving Austria-Hungary and the question of responsibility for its dissolution. Alongside the debates that had recycled those of Austro-Hungarian times, the “non-national character” of the Monarchy, the missing “animating idea” (von Srbik) – was critical when the nation-state came forward as an alternative to the Central European *ancien régime*. These debates were consecutive with the historiographical approaches in the successor-states which attempted to base their national narratives on an exclusion of the Austro-Hungarian heritage, or scorn in literature and non-fiction (Trotsky, Hašek).

The author rightly argues that Habsburg studies experienced a renaissance in the United States, and Great Britain to some degree, after 1945. This came in the form of outstanding works, based on different approaches, founded on the basis of the historical evidence, etc. The author is correct in reminding us of George

Kennan's proposal when delving into the common source of Anglo-American historiography on Austria-Hungary: "The Austro-Hungarian Empire still looks better as a solution to the tangled problems in that part of the world than anything that has succeeded it." One might think that after the experience of nationalist inspirations in the Second World War, and the failure of nation-states to be more successful than the Habsburg Monarchy. A new interest in Habsburg legacy was furthered by the development of empire studies, as well as a global historical interest in multinational communities. The recent global questioning of the status of nations in globalizing processes has not been a hindrance. We would add, that one of the keys for revitalizing the interest in Habsburg legacy was influenced by cultural and intellectual history. Vienna, Budapest, Trieste, Chernivtsi, Krakow, Zagreb, etc., were focal points of cultural and intellectual creativity without precedent in their own histories, but also when seen in comparison with other centres in contemporary Europe. In comparison with 1918, the status of the Habsburg legacy in European history has been fundamentally altered. Its centres are recognized as "laboratories of modernity" on a global scale. After 1989, in the new wave of revitalizing the nation-state, the Habsburg legacy gained a legitimizing status in Central European ideologemes. We can find new research everywhere, and their common denominator is basically the same – to quote the author: "Its main achievement – and probably also its most problematic aspect – is the combination of deconstruction, petrification, and perhaps reanimation of the Habsburg sentimentalism, incessantly expanding into all branches of popular culture, from cinema to cuisine, and into the most remote corners of the old Monarchy. Moreover, memory studies have greatly improved our awareness of the *longue durée* of the monarchy after its collapse: in institutions, mentalities, legal codifications, cultural patterns, and memories proper."

"The Forgotten General Nikola pl. Ištvanović", written by **Vlatka Dugački** and **Krešimir Regan**, is a record of the life of one of Austria-Hungary's Croatian generals, a self-made, competent and experienced army officer from 1878 to 1921. Ennobled on merits in 1910, prior to the First World War, he was appointed to command the 83rd Brigade in the 42nd Infantry ("Devil's") Division as a major general, after 35 years of service. His brigade, along with the XIII Corps – with the Croatian Home Army core – attacked Serbia in August 1914. Ištvanović was one of the more competent and braver generals among the commanding corps. The fighting had decimated the attacking force, as well as the Serbian defence force, delaying the occupation of Serbia until autumn of 1915, with the help of German and Bulgarian troops. He was involved in the fighting on the Adriatic front from the beginning of 1915 to autumn of 1918, as the commanding office of the V Naval Corps, securing the rear of the Soča battlefield and ensuring the food supply for the population within his military jurisdiction. His successes propelled him to the rank of field marshal lieutenant in 1917. In October and November

of 1918 – in the chaos of a disappearing Austria-Hungary, the Italian offensive and the formation of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs – vice-marshal pl. Ištvanović secured control of several situations which were in danger of becoming tragedies, he gained the favour of the leading men in the National Council of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, and entered into the leading military circles who were set to form this state's new army. The question remains why this was not accomplished. With the proclamation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, this process was halted and field marshal lieutenant pl. Išanović was first retired, and then called back into service for another two years, until 1921 when he finally retired, aged 64. He spent most of his career in troops with Croatian majorities, serving mostly in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Slovenia. It is understandable that he appreciated the changes in the Croatian and Southern Slav situation brought on by the World War. Still, this was not enough to ensure his adequate status in the leadership of the newly formed Monarchy. His son Alexander became a colonel in the Yugoslav Royal Army.

The ambivalent relationship of Croatian society towards 1918 is seen in the public activity of Miho Jerinić (Ston, 26 June 1872 – Šibenik, 4 October 1955), the first trained dentist in Šibenik (1913 – 1945), described by **Željko Holjevac** in the article “‘Eternal Slave’ in the Habsburg and Yugoslav Monarchies, or on the Transitional Experience of Miho Jerinić”. He was active from his Viennese student days, up to the time of the breakdown of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Independent State of Croatia. He mixed his professional work with political activism and literary work in service of this activism. Jerinić had been formed in the Croatian popular political culture, entangling the frustrations of a young educated man in his formative years, aware of the provincial marginalization of Croatia in Austria-Hungary and the national segmentation in Cisleithania and Transleithania. He was one of those who believed that all the open social and cultural issues came from the unsolved national question, especially in the question of statehood. His public political activity – focused on public opinion, without firm party strongholds – was in essence that of a popular tribune. He often wrote about his opinions, in prose or verse, publishing them personally, in literary or journalistic forms and genres, appealing to his politically (un)educated recipients. After 1918 all the key questions of modern Croatian politics remained unsolved, notwithstanding the initial democratic moves in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. After 1928 the issues were radically sharpened. Jerinić's Croatian public activity became more fierce and bitter, politically lonelier, radicalizing after 1929, and then gradually ebbing away. This is evidenced by his activity after 6 January 1929. According to this article, Jerinić had been silenced long before he had passed away. Miho Jerinić is a model for the member of the popular intelligentsia, facing key questions of national policy, trying to convert them into a popular register and initiating changes in the political culture, without greater

effect in articulating them in accordance with recognizable party affiliations. In this sense, Miho Jerinić is indeed a micro-historical representation of the ambivalent transitional aspirations within the realities of complex traditional communities with Croatian attributes and the imperative of modern Croatian aspirations in the complex Habsburg Monarchy, and the smaller, but more complex Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, or Yugoslavia.

The article “Soldiers of Peace: the Transnational Activism of Romanian Great War Veterans, 1920–1939” by **Blasco Sciarrino** reconstructs in detail the international initiatives of Romanian war veterans with the thesis that their activities were more influenced by the shifting status of Romania’s place in Europe and the imperatives of internal stability, than by their war experiences and traumas. One should take note of the shift in relations with war veterans of the vanquished countries which was influenced by international relations after 1929, or 1933. Inasmuch as the initiatives were based on the existential interests of the veterans, their context was always politically instrumental and was thus boxed in when the international status of Romania changed in 1940 along with its borders, which brought forward the same questions the country had faced during the First World War.

We shall concur with **Tomislav Brandolica** that the historiography of the First World War had experienced a “historiographical revival in the 1914 to 1918 centenary: This revival was evident in a growing historical, popular and public interest in all aspects of the time of 1914 to 1918, which curiously united the elements of a powerfully revitalized, narratively based political history, sociohistorical and culture-historical approaches, the history of everyday life, the recapitulation of the lives of great men, the war as a ‘place of memory’ and memorialization through the methods of public history.” The author has referenced a representative selection of historians in Europe and the world, who have spent the last ten to twenty years giving innovative viewpoints of the First World War. He has singled out the theory of the “long ending of the First World War”, focusing on the work of Robert Gerwarth and others, including the recently announced new book by Charles Emmerson, *Crucible: The Long End of the Great War and the Birth of the New World, 1917 – 1924*. It points to the fact that in modern societies it is easier to enter a war, than it is to end it. Secondly, it is clear that wars coincide with processes of transition in modernity, and the factors of transition – within a state/society in war, in the relations between warring states/societies – cannot be momentarily stopped, neither diplomatically, nor militarily. The logic of total war as a very complex process, implies not only complex wartime phenomena between the belligerents, but also within each of the belligerent parties. Their length is an open question, and the warring sides in the First World War had difficulty in coping with them. These were the most serious challenges in the multinational empires with great differences in social, economic, cultural regards, which were experiencing drastic shifts in power/powerlessness and wealth/poverty. The Armistice

of November 1918, as well as the peace treaties, had controversial impacts across Europe and failed to completely stop the war. The effects were paradoxical when it came to the dissolution of multinational empires. The stabilization of the new order in a political and military point of view, preferred legal, institutional and other continuities in relation to imperial legacies, taking into account everyday life, and the same stabilization implied radical changes when it came to political will, symbolic capital, changes of ownership, etc., within the same society, or the (newly created) state. Not delving into other aspects of this paper, we shall conclude these remarks by concentrating on the aspects which are relevant, we feel, for the other articles in this selection.

Commemorating the centenary of the First World War, Oxford University Press initiated a book series *The Greater War, 1912–23*, edited by Robert Gerwarth. The savvier scholar of South-Eastern European and Mediterranean history will be quick to react to the name of the series – where is the war between the Kingdom of Italy and the Ottoman Empire, waged from 29 September 1911 to 18 October 1912 and which preceded the First Balkan War, waged from 8 October 1912 to 30 May 1913, etc.? It is open for debate whether Italy would have initiated this Mediterranean excursion had Austria-Hungary not annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908 and had started to lead an active Albanian policy. The retrospective networking of everything that had happened on all sides of Europe and seeking a *casus belli*, leads us to the Eastern Crisis (1875 – 1878), closing the “age of empires” (E. Hobsbawm) and further back in history, up to the series of wars for Italian and German unification, the Crimean War, the years 1848/1849, etc.

Donald Bloxham and Robert Gerwarth had published the edited volume *Political Violence in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2011) before the centennial, locating the source of the common denominators of European history in the “short twentieth century”, in Hobsbawm’s “age of extremes” – in political violence (wars, revolutions, counter-revolutions, genocides, ethnic cleansing, terrorism, state repression, etc.).

Another book edited by Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, *Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War* (Oxford University Press, 2012), “lengthens” the First World War until 1923, recognizing various intensities and forms in different parts of Europe, which points to the fact how difficult it is to put a stop to war and violence in European terms and changes, continuities and discontinuities. Finally, we would like to recall the same author’s book *Twisted Paths: Europe 1914–1945*. (Oxford University Press, 2007), which revitalized the thesis of a thirty years’ war in Europe.

One might put variations on similar themes that have been put forward by European and other historians of the First World War in the last ten, twenty years. We have chosen Gerwarth, not because he is the best among them – and there are

many outstanding – but because his work has been analysed in one of the articles (T. Brandolica) and because he is exemplary as a way of understanding the shift in approaching the legacy of the First World War in the last fifteen years and the dilemmas of European 20th century history. The dilemmas are apparent when one asks what had ended and what had begun with the First World War. We find the “short twentieth century”, or Hobsbawm’s “age of extremes” to be apt. On the other hand, this would mean that the entire epoch from the end of the 18th to the beginning of the 21st century, in a *longue durée*, could be named an “age of failed expectations”.

The liberal paradigm which was the constituting force behind France in 1789, not only as a nation-state, but also as a nation-society, swiftly failed in France, but remained a general orientation for all European, a global aspiration – independently of its affirmation or right or left negation, from conservatism to socialism and the current fundamentalisms. After the Russian Revolution in February/March 1917, the First World War became a war of the north Atlantic, European and American liberal parliamentary democracies for a free and more just society and nation-states in Europe. Few countries in Europe after 1918 developed as a stable, functional democracy, and fewer still were capable of solving the many social, economic and cultural issues of facing the expectations of mass societies constructed during the period of industrialization and the traumatic experience of the First World War as a “total war”.

Finally, the failed expectations of Europe in 1989, a multitude of continental and global phenomena which are disturbing for Europeans and the world are the main source for the professional and other manifold ways of facing the legacy of the First World War, a “total war”, as such wars necessarily are, and a now completely destructive nuclear war.

The First World War was mostly forgotten in Croatian culture and historiography, or the topic was reduced to a limited number of themes. After 1990/1991 – in contrast with all that had happened after 1 December 1918, manifesting itself as historical oblivion or reinterpretation, sometimes revision or forgery – the anniversaries of the First World War were observed in accordance with the culture of memory and public history. All the relevant historical occurrences, experiences, memories, appropriations, were researched within these frameworks in, more or less, all historical disciplines, both those traditional and those which had an innovative streak. This distinguished Croatian historiography from other European historiographies, as well as those of the former Yugoslavia, especially the Serbian example, in which the legacy of the War was always a notable subject of attention and research.

One should only read the work of the historians referred to by the author of the article: Antoine Prost and Jay Winter – we have the French edition of *Penser la Grande Guerre. Un essai h’historioigraphe* (Éditions du Seuil, Histoire, 2004) –

to see that the historiography of the First World War has, since its inception, been connected to the *Kriegsschuldfrage*, with a bias towards diplomatic and military aspects. As the years went by, the scholarship had been constantly modernizing and following new trends in research, as well as new approaches, areas and methods (*history from below* through the experience of trench warfare reflected in soldiers' letters, etc.). According to Prost and Winter, the *Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine*, in Nanterre, had 50 000 publications connected with the First World War in 2004. This legacy is, in itself, a generator of new values, interests, themes, approaches, etc.

In the Croatian case – following the research logic such as the one held by Filip Šimetin Šegvić – it is less important to try and “catch up” with European historiography, and more important to access problems of the First World War in a context which allows us to productively follow many themes that can sustain themselves in the long-term horizon of Croatian history.

Translated from Croatian by Tomislav Brandolica

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