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# THE STRUGGLE FOR COMMEMORATING THE WORLD WAR I CENTENARY AS AN ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE OF THE ATTITUDES TOWARDS THAT WAR IN CROATIA

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The commemoration of the World War I Centenary (2014–2018) was the most important social event in the last decade in the developed countries of Western Europe, especially Britain and France, and in the former British dominions, Canada and Australia. In contrast to these victorious countries, the countries defeated in the war (primarily Germany and Austria) had a significantly more modest and different approach to the commemoration. The emphasis was on all war victims, soldiers and civilians, regardless of which side of the war they had fought on. Since Croatia, as a former part of Austria-Hungary, found itself in a completely new state union after it was united with the Kingdom of Serbia after the war, veterans were ill-advised to mention their participation in the war on the wrong side. It was no better after the end of World War II, when one victor's narrative replaced another, and made the mentioning of formerly existing monarchies completely unacceptable. All these facts influenced attitudes towards World War I, which was almost completely forgotten in Croatia over time.

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Important anniversaries, such as the World War I Centenary, should be moments of reflection for countries and their peoples because they offer an opportunity for the reflection of existing narratives about a past event, through which their meanings to individual or collective identities, as well as their importance to political and social relations in these societies, are confirmed or changed (McCartney & Morgan-Owen, 2017, p. 235). Of course, this presumes that these narratives exist, which is quite questionable in Croatia's case.

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In contrast to these victorious countries, the countries defeated in the war (primarily Germany and Austria) had a significantly more modest and different approach to the commemoration. The emphasis was on all war victims, soldiers and civilians, regardless of which side of the war they had fought on. Since Croatia, as a former part of Austria-Hungary, found itself in a completely new state union after it was united with the Kingdom of Serbia after the war, veterans were ill-advised to mention their participation in the war on the wrong side. It was no better after the end of World War II, when one victor's narrative replaced another, and made the mentioning of formerly existing monarchies completely unacceptable. All these facts influenced attitudes towards World War I, which was almost completely forgotten in Croatia over time. The researchers of this period of history in Croatia sometimes get the impression that the country has not yet heard Jay Winter's sentence, 'Memory is always about the future.' (Winter, 2017, p. 239).

Anniversaries of important historical events are ideal opportunities for historians to open new topics or research new areas within the existing ones, including opening completely new perspectives on the recent or distant past, and calling attention to their influence in today's public arena. Different views of the same event present a lesser problem to them because the pluralism of thought and perspectives is an integral part of history as a discipline (in contrast to certain other humanities and social sciences). Unlike historians, Croatian politicians are significantly more careful in commemorating events linked to the war, the only exception being the Homeland War, despite the fact that wars had a decisive influence on the history of humanity in general, and the 20th century in particular (Winter & Sivan, 1999, pp. 19–29; Winter 2006, pp. 17–20). Or, perhaps, precisely because of this.

The main goal of this article is to shed light on several fundamental questions regarding the commemoration of the

World War I Centenary (2014–2018) in Croatia such as: when the preparations began, which public and political institutions were the main coordinators and organisers of the commemorations, and what was considered the most suitable way of marking the beginning and ending of the First World War. Newspaper reports published at the time in various papers proved to be an invaluable source of information as well as pictures, especially in their still accessible online editions. Publicly available archives of the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Ministry of Culture have facilitated access to data in the organisational and financial part of the centennial commemoration, although all documents have not been made available yet.

The teaching of the most basic facts regarding the root and proximate causes and flow of World War I on all the fronts, and not only on the Western one (as is the case in some European countries), was an integral part of the history curricula in primary and secondary schools in the period after World War II. As an example, I will mention the secondary school textbook from the late 1980s, which was used by most of today's politicians in Croatia, and whose text was written by Dragutin Pavličević and Nikša Stančić. In it, one can find brief but correct information on the flow of the war, including the occupation of Serbia and the retreat of the Serbian army through Albania, but without any mention of Croats within the Austro-Hungarian military forces (Bilandžić et al., 1987, pp. 101–126). A Croatian component was added after Croatia achieved independence, but, despite a partial change in the narrative, the emphasis remained on the political history, mostly the activities of the Yugoslav Committee and the creation of a new state union after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

Other components of the war shyly broke through to the public during the 2000s, when they were first published in two issues of *Hrvatska revija*, on the 90th anniversary of the beginning of the war, which was explicitly stated in the editorial (Tema broja, 2004, p. 15). This was followed by the exhibition *Dadoh zlato za željezo – Hrvatska u Prvom svjetskom ratu (I Gave Gold for Iron: Croatia in World War I)* in the Croatian History Museum in Zagreb, and a comprehensive catalogue was published in 2011. At the same time, an exhibition about Svetozar Boroević was staged in the Croatian State Archives and an international colloquium was held in his birthplace, Mečenčani (published as conference proceedings in 2011). Since two conferences were held on the 90th anniversary of the end of World War I in late 2008, the first in the Matica Hrvatska and the second in the Croatian Institute of History (both resulted in conference proceedings, published in 2012 and 2010), it appeared

that the preconditions for a successful World War I Centenary commemoration in Croatia were slowly being fulfilled (Herman Kaurić, 2020, pp. 347–392).

Preparations for the Centenary commemorations, first of the outbreak, then of the end of the war and the signing of the peace treaties, and finally the commemoration itself occupied the public arenas of developed countries throughout the past decade. In developed countries, preparations began years before the official beginning, with the United Kingdom and its former dominions taking a leading role, using the distinctive Poppy of Remembrance as its symbol, which all public persons wore on their lapels at public appearances (Noakes; Mullen, 2015; Winter, 2014, pp. 168–170; McCartney, 2017, pp. 289–303). In Germany and the former countries of Austria-Hungary, preparations began only after they had already gained momentum among the former western Entente countries, with each country approaching the commemoration differently because the burden of guilt still lay with Germany, and they had fought on the defeated side (Mombauer, 2017, pp. 276–288; Brennan, 2015, pp. 139–170). The importance of the Centenary for each individual country can be easily read from the budget it assigned for this purpose. Thus, the UK had a budget of 50 million pounds, Australia around 552 million dollars, and Germany around 3.5 million euros, while France set aside 20 million euros for its 800 or so projects (Winter 2014, p. 167; Mombauer 2017, p. 279).

Russia and Ukraine (formerly part of the Russian Empire) had a specific relationship towards this event because of the revolutionary events that removed Russia from the winning side near the end of the war and were followed by civil war and the victory of communism, which drastically influenced the relationship towards the tsarist heritage, and thus World War I, making it a 'forgotten war' (Bazhenova, 2021, pp. 368–383). Something similar happened in Croatia, a former part of Austria-Hungary, which, soon after the ceasefire was signed, entered a new state union with the Kingdom of Serbia, a country on the winning side. This was followed by several schizophrenic decades for veterans of the war that hailed from the former countries of the Monarchy, during which they were ill-advised to mention their participation in the war, especially in the campaign against Serbia, while the victories of the Serbian army were glorified (Manojlović Pintar, 2014, pp. 134–142). It was no better after World War II, when the state policy of the 'brotherhood and unity of the peoples and ethnicities of Yugoslavia' determined a selection of acceptable topics that were supposed to contribute to the creation of a new social order. Although World War I was potentially a very problematic topic, it could not be circumvented due to its great importance for

the following periods, so an acceptable narrative was created using strictly filtered data.

As time went by, news about the plans of other countries for the World War I Centenary commemoration began to arrive in Croatia, but there was no response. One of the first calls for participation in an international project came to the Croatian Institute of History via the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport in early September 2012. It was the call of a Canadian non-profit organisation for participation in the video projection entitled *The World Remembers*, which was forwarded to Croatia via the Croatian Embassy in Canada. Attached to the invitation was a description of a complex project that was to be conducted from 2014 to 2018, and its most publicly visible component would have been a display of the names of fallen soldiers on public buildings. Agreement to participate needed to be given by 31 November 2012, with the Canadians pledging to provide logistic and technical support, though each country was to bear the costs of the project's implementation on its own territory (Udruga 1914–1918, Document No. 1). It later turned out that this project had been realised on a significantly lower scale than expected precisely due to a lack of funding in the participating countries, though some of them, such as Slovenia, incorporated their fallen into the online version of the project (Svoljšak). However, even if there had been a will for cooperation, Croatia would have had a significantly greater problem than that because it did not have a registry of fallen soldiers then, just like it lacks one now.

In conversation with the heads of other public institutions, it became apparent that they too had been asked to participate in similar Centenary commemoration projects by other ministries. However, in time, it also became increasingly apparent that no institution in Croatia was planning to participate in a foreign project or conduct something similar on the territory of Croatia. This was a signal for the few Croatian World War I researchers scattered among various institutions to gather in a joint initiative dubbed The Initiative Committee for Commemorating the World War I Centenary, established in November 2012 at the Croatian Institute of History in Zagreb. They attempted to point out the importance of World War I and the need to commemorate the Centenary by sending letters to all relevant institutions: the President of Croatia; the Prime Minister; the Parliament Speaker; the ministries of culture, defence, foreign affairs, and science; the Croatian History Museum; the Croatian State Archives; the Zagreb city government; etc. They contacted anyone they considered would be willing to help and whom they believed needed to participate in this, but most offers were turned down, with the explanation that the institution in question does not believe itself

responsible and that they should contact a different one. Aversion to political/war topics is not a specificity of Croatia but is significantly more pronounced there than in developed democracies that experienced two world wars in the 20th century. In contrast, Croatia experienced three bloody wars, of which only the latest was not a global conflict but was relatively recent. This defensive war for the independence and territorial integrity of the country was fought from 1991 to 1995 and is usually called the Homeland War in Croatia itself, though no consensus on the name or its many consequences has been reached. Since all World War I researchers agree that remembrance of 'their' war has been completely overshadowed by the experience of World War II (Winter, 2010, p. 321; Beaumont, 2015, p. 530), it is easy, through simple analogy, to understand the reasons behind the mentioned reactions of Croatian state institutions when the need to commemorate the Centenary of the outbreak of World War I was pointed out to them.

A step forward was made in mid-April 2013, when the Croatian Government adopted the Decision on the Founding of the Commission for Coordinating the World War I Centenary Commemoration, with the goal of drawing up and monitoring a Centenary commemoration programme, 'which particularly includes: the creation of a digital list of the fallen, the marking of places where Croatian soldiers fell and their cemeteries outside the borders of the Republic of Croatia, the organising of modern historiographical and political-science discussions about the significance of World War I, and the making of an analysis of cultural, museological, and literary segments on the topic of World War I.' Funding for the Commission's work was supposed to be secured 'from the national budget of the Republic of Croatia at the position of the Ministry of Culture', and Committee members were not given the right to any allowance or compensation. The Committee consisted of 13 representatives of 12 different institutions, led by the president of the Committee, the then minister of culture, Andrea Zlatar Violić. All the members' names were stated in full in the Decision, together with their full academic titles and names of their parent institutions (Ministarstvo kulture, 2013c). The very next day, the portal Obris generally welcomed the Government's decision, but also pointed out the brevity of time for such a voluminous amount of work, highlighting the creation of a list of the fallen as a priority. The author of the text considered the lack of a representative of the History Department of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb problematic, while Filip Hameršak was described as the 'weakest link of the newly-formed body' for no visible reason (Knežević, 2013). Especially, since the Commission included people with lower academic qualifica-

tions than him. If the problem is in the institution from which he comes, it should be said that the First World War is not the focus of research at any institution in Croatia.

The Commission met a total of five times: the first time with the goal of drawing up a programme draft for the Centenary commemoration (27 June 2013), the second for the creation of a preliminary list of programmes/projects and a projection of costs (24 July), the third in order to review and evaluate the proposed projects (7 April 2014), the fourth to get acquainted with the formal commemoration ceremony proposal (24 April), and the fifth to establish the commemoration programme (14 May) (Udruga 1914–1918, Document No. 2–5). Unless my personal archive and my memory deceive me, the Commission did not meet after that, though it was never formally abolished. Furthermore, at the 87th session of the Croatian Government, held on 29 March 2018, the Decision on the Amendment of the Decision on the Founding of the Commission for Coordinating the World War I Centenary Commemoration was adopted, through which new Committee members were appointed, I assume for the commemoration of the end of World War I. The decision was prompted by the 'passage of time since the founding and appointment of the members [...] in order to secure the functioning and implementation of the decisions and duties of the Commission'. The names of most representatives and institutions were changed, but the greatest change was that the still active minister of culture, Nina Obuljen Koržinek, was listed as president (Vlada RH, 2018a; Vlada RH, 2018b). It is interesting that the original list of members is still found on the official website of the Ministry of Culture, but this amended one is not; the members were neither informed about their appointment, nor did they ever meet.

By the time the Commission had had its first meeting in the Ministry of Culture, the Initiative Committee for the World War I Centenary Commemoration had drawn up an Action Plan for the commemoration, entitled 'Croatia and World War I 1914–1918 / 2014–2018', which encompassed a programme of public, cultural, and scholarly activities through all four years (Herman Kaurić, 2013), and later added a proposal for a commemoration at Mirogoj. Both proposals were presented to the Commission and other institutions but proved too ambitious for the then-existing level of consciousness about the need for a commemoration. Commission members often sent substitutes, as a rule completely uninformed, and it appeared that nobody present had any authority to do anything, and that everything needed to be addressed to some higher authority. Soon, only one thing became clear: there would be no separate budget for the Centenary commemoration, so that anything

that was planned had to be done within the existing budgets of the ministries involved in the Commission's work, with particular emphasis on the budget of the Ministry of Culture. The only thing that the Ministry of Culture could do in such a short timespan was to prompt museums and galleries to register projects about World War I within existing competitions that are traditionally published every year, with the indication that said projects are linked to the Centenary commemoration, which was done on 2 August (Udruga 1914–1918, Document No. 6). Since the application deadline was 15 September 2013, I suppose that the documentation was sent only by those who already had their projects prepared or who had improvised them with exceptional skill (Ministarstvo kulture, 2013b). The original list of 115, mostly one-year, programmes related to the Centenary commemoration grew to 132 projects by March 2015, and included multi-year computerisation and digitisation programmes. Traditional book fairs in Leipzig and the *Sa(n)jam knjige* book fair in Pula were highlighted as the spearhead events, together with a substantial number of real and virtual exhibitions, lectures, concerts, book translations, and other cultural events (Ministarstvo kulture, 2013a). The focus of the registered programmes in the museum-gallery field was on war events in the broader or narrower local community. Essentially, an attempt was made to brand everything that had been planned for that year as relevant to the Centenary commemoration and place it on the official list.

The decision of the Ministry immediately caused controversy regarding the fairness of the 2014 competition, and questions arose about how much Committee members were influencing the selection of the programmes/projects, and especially the distribution of funding. The Ministry's regular method of functioning proved an excellent basis for speculation because the publicly available list of projects/programmes about World War I does not contain any data about the amount of allocated funds, and this is despite the fact that this information is available on the list of all approved programmes for that year according to field of activity, individually by institution, and by programme. However, the official numbers are different from those in analyses of individual programmes, likely partly because it is not exactly defined which entry refers to what. Visible data show that, as part of its archival and museum-gallery activities, the Ministry of Culture spent just over 720,000 kuna, i.e. just under 100,000 euro, on the World War I Centenary (Ministarstvo kulture, 2014, *Muzejsko-galerijska djelatnost*, pp. 2–24; *Ministarstvo kulture*, 2014, *Arhivska djelatnost*, pp. 2–6). Although most of these activities were exhibitions, this does not mean that the figure includes the publishing of exhibition catalogues, because pub-

lishing activities could have been funded via other competitions. In addition, the figure does not include various other programmes, such as book translations or setting up digital platforms, whose funding is currently impossible to determine, and some of which were certainly significantly financially more demanding than those we have found. However, it seems to me that funding was significantly lower than what the public perceived in 2014, especially when compared to the overall funds spent for these activities and the budget of the Ministry of Culture as a whole (Ministarstvo kulture, 2015, p. 37).

As regards the commemoration, the prevalent opinion at first was that the international conference organised by the EUNIC (European Union National Institutes for Culture) and funded by the Ministry of Culture, *Commemorating 1914 – Exploring the War's Legacy*, held on 5–6 May 2014, would be enough (Ministarstvo kulture, 2014b; Ministarstvo kulture, 2014c; HINA/MK, 2014). Even though 23 lectures by top scholars were held then, the absolute star was Christopher Clark with his introductory lecture, 'The Sleepwalkers – How Europe Went to War in 1914'. On that occasion, the translation of the identically-named book (Clark, 2018) into Croatian was arranged, and was published several years later, by which time the pomp had died down considerably. Public interest was substantial, which is not surprising since his book had brewed up a storm among historians throughout the world, and especially in Serbia (Ponoš, 2014; Šarenac, 2013, pp. 267–280; Vukotić, 2013; Bjelajac, 2014). Disagreements about the events that led to the war spread to the sphere of politics, so the central European commemoration of the Centenary that had been planned for a few years under the name *Sarajevo, srce Evrope* (Sarajevo, Heart of Europe) saw some changes (Jelin-Dizdar 2013; Ambassade de France, 2008–2016; Delegation of the EU, 2014; HINA, 2014). One of the most obvious was the split in the great historians' 'conciliation' conference of 28 June 2014, which was supposed to have gathered experts from 26 countries in Europe and further abroad, and which the Serbian side boycotted at the last moment, after it had been announced that Christopher Clark and like-minded individuals would attend (Winter, 2017, pp. 242–243) in Sarajevo.

However, for some reason, in late April, talks started about a commemoration ceremony and central observance of the Centenary in Croatia, including a laying of wreaths near the grand *Pietà* of Vanja Radauš and Jozo Turkalj at the central Zagreb cemetery, Mirogoj. Although the base of the monument bears the inscription PALIM HRVATSKIM VOJNICIMA U PRVOM SVJETSKOM RATU ('TO THE FALLEN CRO-

ATIAN SOLDIERS OF WORLD WAR I'), on the eve of the Centenary, thanks to the research of Boris Kukić, it was established that this is not true because the memorial ossuary contains the remains of 3,300 participants of the war, of which only approximately one-third are Croats (Rašović, 2014). It turned out that the inaccurate inscription was put up in 1994 by the association *Hrvatski domobran* (Croatian Home Guard), without consulting the relevant authorities and without permission or, there is no record of this, which surprised the competent institutions (Kukić, 2015, p. 124). The information that some 450 Hungarians had been laid to rest in the ossuary caught the attention of the Hungarian military attaché, so the Ministry of Culture and the Republic of Croatia found themselves in a delicate position, faced with a problem that they could not ignore. Instead of launching an urgent procedure to remove the inscription, the Ministry ordered a brief study from Kukić, an abstract of which was then printed in Croatian and English on a panel set at the foot of the ossuary, until a way to resolve the problem is found. This temporary solution has remained in place to this day, except that, after seven years, it is in an embarrassing state; the inscription is cracked and difficult to read, though at least someone has made sure that it no longer falls over in strong winds.

The Ministry of Culture chose the international conference *Prvi svjetski rat i avangardna umjetnost: dekonstrukcija – konstrukcija* (The First World War and Avant-Garde Art: Deconstruction – Construction) as the cornerstone of the Centenary commemoration. It was held in the Museum of Contemporary Art on 28 and 29 June and organised by the Institute for the Research of the Avant-Garde and the Marinko Sudac Collection, under the high sponsorship of the Ministry. The Centenary commemoration supposedly began with an opening ceremony of the accompanying exhibition on the evening of 26 June and ended the next evening with a cocktail party marking the beginning of the conference (Ministarstvo kulture, 2014a; MK/HINA, 2014). The conference was attended by 24 theorists of contemporary art from six countries, but I did not manage to find any material regarding the events, not even in the Museum of Contemporary Art, except for the official communication published in the press (Franceschi, 2014; Moj Zagreb 2014; Glas Istre, 2014). The Ministry of Culture generously supported both events, setting aside 90,000 kuna for the needs of the conference and the exhibition (Ministarstvo kulture, 2014, *Vizualne umjetnosti*, pp. 2-23). The central national World War I commemoration took place between these two bizarre events.

At 9 o'clock on the morning of 27 June 2014, a common wreath was laid down by Zlatko Garelić, defence advisor

and representative of the Croatian President Ivo Josipović; Goran Beus Richembergh, representative of the Croatian Parliament Speaker; Predrag Matić, veterans' minister and representative of the Croatian Prime Minister Zoran Milanović; and Berislav Šipuš, deputy minister of culture. It is interesting that the event announcement did not mention a representative of the Parliament, who obviously attended, so one can assume that he joined the ceremony later (Ministarstvo kulture, 2014a; *Ministarstvo branitelja*, 2014). However, the inscription on the wreath's ribbon claims that it was brought by three central Croatian institutions, without the Ministry of Culture, which was perhaps omitted simply due to lack of space and laid down 'In remembrance of the victims of World War I'. The dreary impression of the entire commemoration was highlighted by the two empty stands that had been set up by employees of the City Cemeteries, who had likely thought that there would be three delegations with three wreaths.

This was followed by ceremonial speeches in the Croatian State Archives at 10 o'clock, accompanied by an artistic programme conducted by the Croatian Radiotelevision Choir led by Maestro Tonči Bilić. A considerable number of representatives of the institutions gathered there, especially those from the higher diplomatic and political milieu, including Prime Minister Zoran Milanović, had already left to participate at the central Centenary commemoration in Sarajevo. I must, however, stress that the commemoration was attended by Croatian President Ivo Josipović, who had promised to do so at the preparation meeting with members of the Initiative Committee, and only left for Sarajevo afterwards. Apart from him, speeches were held by the Prime Minister's representative, Predrag Matić; the Parliament Speaker's representative, Goran Beus Richembergh; Andrea Zlatar Viočić as the president of the Commission for Coordinating the World War I Centenary Commemoration; and Vlatka Lemić, director of the Croatian State Archives (Puhovski & Filipović, 2014). In his speech, President Josipović recalled his grandfather, a soldier in the Austro-Hungarian army who had fought on the Isonzo and, unlike many others, returned home safely from the war, but also highlighted the complexity of the perceptions of the war in Croatia because some Croats had volunteered to serve in the Serbian army as well. In this context, he said: 'It is difficult to forget wars. Wars, unfortunately, do not seem to die and their consequences are felt through generations. But it is our duty, the duty of all those involved in politics, in society, to not allow new wars to begin. And for us who sit in various institutions, not only in Croatia, but in all countries throughout the world, there is no duty more important than preventing another war among us.' (Zebić, 2014).

At 12 o'clock, a solemn mass for all those who fell in World War I began in St Mark's Church in Zagreb's Upper Town, led by Military Ordinary Juraj Jezerinac in concelebration with the head of the Office for Cultural Property of the Archdiocese of Zagreb, Juraj Kolarić, and the local parish priest, Franjo Prstec. The mass was attended by representatives of the Croatian President and Parliament Speaker, the Ministry of Culture and the Commission for Coordinating the World War I Centenary Commemoration, the Zagreb City Veterans' Office, and the Austrian ambassador, Andrea Ikić-Böhm. Apart from those mentioned, the mass was attended by a very small number of curious individuals, and the bishop finished his inspired homily with the words: 'We have gathered here in mutual love, without ideological, religious, national, or political flavour, for we know that all are equal in death. Each victim, regardless of which side they fought on, regardless of faith or nationality, or any other affiliation, deserves our respect, for we all are children of our heavenly Father. To separate them after death is not good. All need to be shown equal respect. This is why the whole world is gathering these days in a joint prayer for the repose of their souls. When we remember the World War I centenary today, let these regrettable events prompt us to think about what we are to do if a similar event afflicts us in the future. May the world never again see war as a way of life. Let this anniversary prompt us to deeper thinking about our lives and bring us to our God Christ, who is our only and true source of peace.' (IKA, 2014).

Not a word was written about the commemoration in the most widely distributed Croatian newspapers like *Jutarnji list* or *Večernji list*, and many citizens only realised the importance of the Centenary in the following years, when numerous projects conducted by local institutions and enthusiasts were presented to the public. Prompted by what they saw, a considerable number of people began to research their family histories and find participants of the war among their ancestors. The Initiative Committee continued to appeal to the Ministry of Culture, striving to prompt a commemoration of the opening of the Isonzo Front in 2015, but they were completely ignored, with the verbal explanation that the Ministry is working on removing bureaucratic obstacles that had arisen from the decisions of the previous Government. In the meantime, there was a change of government and people at the heads of all institutions, including the Ministry of Culture. In the end, they gave up and devoted themselves to their projects, which they realised thanks to private connections and acquaintances, and their private funds (Archive of the 1914–1918 Association).

In the meantime, the Hungarian military attaché managed to secure all the permits necessary for putting up a memorial plaque to fallen Hungarians, which had at first seemed impossible. The plaque was ceremoniously unveiled on 3 April 2018, with full military honours, attended by members of Croatian and Hungarian honorary battalions, defence ministers Damir Krstičević and István Simicskó, and numerous dignitaries (M. M., 2018). This example clearly shows that, when there is a will, there is a way, and what such events should look like, as the mentioned commemoration looked genuinely solemn and dignified.

The World War I commemoration in Croatia was mostly prompted by the activities of foreign institutions or countries, and the same applied to the commemoration of the end of World War I, which, in western countries, is traditionally held at 11 o'clock on 11 November, the date when the armistice on the Western Front was signed. On that day in 2018, Josip Kuhtić, the rector of the Cathedral of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saints Stephen and Ladislaus in Zagreb, held a solemn mass to mark the end of the war, and in his sermon, he emphasised reverence towards all the victims of the war. He stressed that building peace requires an unconditionally strong will to respect other people and nations and their dignity. The mass was attended by Prime Minister Andrej Plenković; Parliament Speaker Željko Reiner; Mate Granić, representative of the Croatian President; ambassadors and military attachés of numerous countries including the USA and Canada; representatives of religious communities; and numerous other invitees. Foreign officials mostly emphasised the need for cooperation in preserving the peace, which should never be taken for granted and requires constant work. They especially highlighted the fact that former enemies are now allies, and that it is possible to reconcile through earnest work. In contrast to this, in addition to expressing reverence towards all victims, Prime Minister Plenković stated that the war had changed the map of Europe and the future of the world (GS, 2018; DD/H 2018; HRT, 2018). I do not know, and perhaps I err, but I have the impression that Croatian politicians were only present because Europe and the rest of the world were commemorating the end of the war, so something of the kind had to be done in Croatia as well. At the same time, the central commemoration of the end of World War I took place in France and was attended by Croatian President Kolinda Grabar Kitarović (HINA/GS, 2018).

In addition to Mirogoj, wreaths were laid at the former military cemetery in Varaždin and next to the memorial plaque

put up in 2014 on the so-called Rudolf's Barracks in Zagreb, in honour of Croatian soldiers fallen on battlefields throughout Europe from 1914 to 1918. The exhibition *1918: A Pivotal Year in Croatia* was held at the Croatian History Museum, and resulted in a catalogue of the same name (Smetko, 2018), while a reprint of Ivo Pilar's book *The South Slavic Question and World War I* was launched at the Croatian State Archives (Pilar, 2018), in honour of the centenary of the annexation of Međimurje to Croatia (GS, 2018).

In the end, I must mention a lasting memorial to the end of World War I, a coin of 92.5 percent pure silver with a nominal value of 150 kuna, issued by the Croatian National Bank and designed by the Croatian Monetary Institute Ltd. The coin, of which no more than 2,000 were minted, became available for purchase on 31 October 2018, and the total production cost was limited to 300,000 kuna. The silver coin is 37 mm in diameter, weighs 24 g, and was designed by sculptor Ana Divković. It can be purchased for 407.5 kuna (HNB, 2018a; HNB, 2021, p. 1).

The commemorative coin's obverse depicts the representatives of the belligerent sides in World War I, witnesses and signatories of the armistice that ended the war, in front of the railway carriage in Compiègne in which it was signed. The inscription '1918–2018' is found on the left side of the depiction, and the inscriptions 'COMPIÈGNE' and '11. 11. 1918.' on the right side. Above the depiction of the signatories and witnesses of the armistice and the railway carriage, a semicircular inscription, '100. OBLJETNICA' (100th ANNIVERSARY), is written along the top edge of the coin, and is continued in a semicircle below the depiction, along the bottom edge: 'ZAVRŠETKA PRVOGA SVJETSKOG RATA' (OF THE END OF WORLD WAR I). The coin's reverse bears a depiction of the battleship *Viribus Unitis* in its centre, shown anchored in the port of Pula on 31 October 1918, when Austria-Hungary handed the ship and its entire remaining fleet over to the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, so the ship is flying a Croatian flag. Above the depiction of the battleship stands the inscription 'REPUBLIKA HRVATSKA' (REPUBLIC OF CROATIA), while the Croatian coat of arms is depicted in the upper-right part of the coin. The coin's denomination, '150', is shown below the depiction of the battleship, along with the name of the monetary unit: 'KUNA' (HNB, 2018b).

## CONCLUSION

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In 2014, developed countries honoured their citizens who had participated in the war, soldiers and civilians, in various ways, expressing sorrow for the victims and gratitude to all. Reverence was also shown for the enemy side, constantly high-

lighting the fact that war is a great evil for all, regardless of on whose side our ancestors fought. From the Croatian perspective, the attempts of other countries seemed very meaningful and unanimous, which is not entirely true, but the scant news that reached Croatia left a different impression and fed the frustrations of the Initiative Committee. Croatia eventually organised its own commemoration ceremonies on the centenaries of the beginning and end of World War I, however reluctantly and only after European institutions and civil society organisations had started their own projects, which 'leaked into' Croatia due to geostrategic conditions. Were it not for this, Croatia would have met the Centenary in silence, save for a few lonely voices here and there.

In hindsight, it was a difficult trench war between Initiative Committee and state institutions on all levels, in which the greatest obstacle was the lack of understanding of the importance of World War I for Croatia today.

Some things have changed substantially since the anniversary years, but the basic problem regarding senior institutions is, frustratingly, the same. It appears that the World War I commemoration in Croatia should be considered ancient history, because an unfortunate set of circumstances has made the war seem even further off, even more ancient, in the consciousness of ordinary people than was the case in 2014, or even 2018, when there was considerable discussion of the Centenary in the Croatian public arena. Since then, central Croatia has suffered two major earthquakes, a global pandemic, and a series of local natural disasters, and this has made discussions of some old war seem pointless, at least for the time being.

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## Bitka za komemoriranje stogodišnjice Prvoga svjetskoga rata kao ogledni primjer odnosa prema tom ratu u Hrvatskoj

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Obilježavanje stogodišnjice od izbijanja i završetka Prvoga svjetskoga rata (2014. – 2018.) bio je najvažniji društveni događaj u proteklom desetljeću u zemljama Zapadne Europe, posebice u Britaniji i Francuskoj, te u britanskim dominionima Kanadi i Australiji. Za razliku od tih zemalja pobjednica, poražene sudionice rata (prije svega Njemačka i Austrija) znatno su skromnije obilježile obljetnicu, ujedno joj pristupajući na posve drugačiji način. Naglasak je bio na svim žrtvama rata, vojnicima i civilima, bez obzira na kojoj su se strani borili. S obzirom na to da se Hrvatska kao bivša zemlja Austro-Ugarske Monarhije nakon rata našla u posve novoj državnoj zajednici ujedinjena s Kraljevinom Srbijom, sudionicima rata nije bilo uputno spominjati svoje ratovanje na krivoj strani. Ništa bolje nije bilo ni nakon Drugoga svjetskog rata, kada je jedan pobjednički narativ zamijenio drugi, u kojemu je spominjanje ranijih monarhija bilo nadasve neprihvatljivo. Sve to utjecalo je na odnos prema Prvome svjetskom ratu, koji je protokom vremena u Hrvatskoj umalo postao posve zaboravljen.

Ključne riječi: stogodišnjica, Prvi svjetski rat, Hrvatska, komemoracije



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