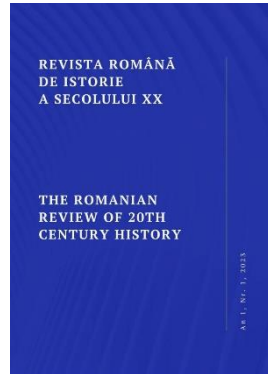


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The Corfu Declaration (1917)

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On December 1, 1918, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was proclaimed in Belgrade, marking the end of what seemed to be a century-long process. The dream of the Slavic peoples of the Balkan Peninsula to live together with their brothers and sisters in a free and independent southern Slav state, rather than under the rule of foreign nations, seemed to have been realised. However, the road to this goal was not only extremely long, but also very rugged, with the Corfu Declaration of July 20, 1917 being a significant stop on the way. This document was the result of more than a month of tough negotiations in which the political forces representing the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes seeking unification agreed on the most important aspects of the future unified South Slav state, except for one (perhaps the most important) issue.

Before going into the details of the agreement itself, and the circumstances in which it came into being, it is important to briefly summarise the path that the Yugoslav nation thread on to reach the gateway to the formalisation of the idea.

The need and desire for all South Slavs to live in one state was present in the minds of some South Slavic thinkers - mainly Croats - as early as the 17th century, but the idea did not find widespread support, rather being an individual utopia until the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. However, in the first half of the 19th century, in the spirit of national revival and with the rise of nationalism, the idea that the South Slav peoples were part of a single nation became more widespread and, in this context, different ideas on their unification emerged.

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Initially, the Croatian national movement - as a response to the Magyarisation efforts - created the concept of Illyrianism, based on the romantic Croatian (South Slavic)-Illyrian identity, which was initially welcomed in Vienna, precisely because of its anti-Hungarian character. The Illyrian movement primarily promoted the cultural-linguistic unity of the South Slavic peoples, but also had political aims. One of the prominent figures of the movement, Count Janko Drašković, invoked Croatian state law to unite the Croatian provinces (Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia, the Military Frontier Region, Bosnia) and most of the Slovene-inhabited areas within the Monarchy as "Greater Illiria", on the basis of linguistic similarities. The 1848/49 revolution seemed to offer the possibility of realising, if not Count Drašković's "Greater Illiria", at least, as the Croatian Sabor demanded in its petition, the unification of the Croatian territories (the Triune Kingdom) with the Slovene provinces and Vojvodina into a federal entity within the Monarchy¹.

In 1848/49, however, some Croatian politicians had more ambitious plans that went far beyond the Austro-Slavism of the Sabor. A leading figure in the Illyrian movement, Ljudevit Gaj, had plans for the establishment of complete southern Slavic unity, which would have included the Serbs, Macedonians, and Bulgarians. In May 1848, Gaj contacted the Serbian Minister of the Interior, Ilija Garašanin, through his confidants, in an attempt to convince him about his goal to unite all the South Slavs in an empire centred in Serbia². This idea, however, although later materialized to a certain extent in the struggle against the Hungarians, proved to be premature. At that time, Serbia was still thinking only of uniting the southern Slavic territories of the Ottoman Empire - a Greater Serbia based on the medieval empire of Tsar Dušan -

¹ Count Janko Drašković's Greater Illiria in his 1832 pamphlet (*Disertatija iliti Razgovor*). Drašković did not really want the break-up of the existing union with Hungary, and he did not envisage Croatia as a monarchy, but primarily as a result of the federalization of Hungary, with an independent Croatian government and its own (Croatian) official language. Jaroslav Šidak, "Hrvatski preporodni pokret i grof Janko Drašković", in *Studije iz hrvatske povijesti XIX stoljeća*. Zagreb, 1973, p. 186-187.

² Petar Korunić, *Jugoslovenska ideologija u hrvatskoj i slovenskoj politici. Hrvatsko-slovenski politički odnosi 1848-1870*, Globus/ Zagreb, 1986, p. 146.

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and rejected the idea of a state uniting all the southern Slavs³. Just as Gaj's plan failed, so did the Croatian Sabor's attempt to federate the Monarchy. The Habsburgs had no intention of reorganising the Empire on a federal basis, but instead, after the suppression of the Revolution, they introduced absolutism throughout the Habsburg Empire, which sealed the fate of the Illyrian movement. In truth, the movement was popular only among Croats and never enjoyed universal success among Slovenes and Serbs, as neither Slovenes nor Serbs wished to give up their national identity and merge into an old-new invented Illyrian nation⁴. By the second half of the century, Illyrianism in the Croatian national movement had gradually died out, giving way to new trends that had already come into play in 1848, namely Austro-Slavism and Yugoslavism.

In Serbia, as part of the Ottoman Empire, the national movement was initially - unlike in Croatia - primarily religion-based. Serbian nationalism was driven by the Christian-Muslim feudal antagonism (oppressed-oppressor), a common religion and a shared history⁵, and this was reflected in the Serbian uprisings of the early 19th century. Although the aims of the Serbian uprisings were territorial rather than national⁶, there were nevertheless attempts to unite Serb and Serb-majority areas even at the dawn of the Serbian national movement, during the first

³ Garašanin did not openly reject Gaj's proposal, but the unification of the Croats and especially the Slovenes was not in his plans, even in the distant future. In his letter to Stratimirovic, he wrote of the proposal: "I have approved this idea for the time being... because these people should not be spoken to in any other way, especially now that we may have problems with the Obrenović". Andrija Radonić, "Az 1848-1849-es szerb mozgalom alapkérdései", in *Szerbek és magyarok a Duna-mentén. Tanulmányok a szerb-magyar kapcsolatok történetéből (1848-1849)*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1983, p. 128.

⁴ According to some historians, the name 'Illyrian', which seemed to bridge the linguistic and other differences between the territories inhabited by southern Slavs, was used by Croats primarily as a synonym for the political unity of territories considered Croatian or with Croatian ethnicity.

⁵ Dimitrije Đorđević, "Uloga nacionalnog činioca na Balkanu u devetnaestom veku", in *Ogledi iz novije Balkanske istorije*, Beograd, 1989, p. 25.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 26-29.

Serbian uprising⁷, With the development of nationalism in Serbia from the middle of the 19th century, there were also ideas for the creation of southern Slavic unity, but for most of them the primary goal was the creation of Greater Serbia. The earliest and most significant idea was Ilija Garašanin's "Načertanije" of 1844, written in the spirit of Serbian nationalism⁸. The Načertanije is important not only because Garašanin was one of the most important Serbian statesmen of his time, but also because the idea of Greater Serbia, which he first defined, has deeply influenced Serbian political thought. The Serbian national interests and goals defined in it can be traced like a red thread in Serbian foreign policy until the Second World War, - and in the SHS Kingdom in domestic policy as well - and even in the last decades of the 20th century

⁷ Although they were motivated more by compulsion than by a desire to unite. In 1809, after the Serbian uprising against the Turks had gone badly, Karađorđe proposed an alliance to Napoleon against Austria, in which he expected the uprising of his "brothers under Hungarian yoke" in Slavonia, Syrmia and the Banat. In return, he asked Napoleon to make Serbia independent and to take the title of "Protector of Serbia". Karađorđe would have ruled in his name. He explained his request by saying that they wished to link their destinies with those of the Illyrian Province, "where there is the same religion, the same faith and the same people". Ferdo Šišić, *Biskup Štrosmajer i Jugoslovenska misao*, I. Srpska Književna zadruga, Kolo. XXIV, Br. 162, Beograd, 1922, p. 87. The value of these statements about solidarity with the people of the Illyrian Provinces and the liberation of their brothers and sisters suffering under Hungarian rule is diminished by the fact that Karađorđe, at the same time as he made his proposal to Napoleon, asked Austria to invade Serbia. Mihailo Gavrilović, "Spoljašnja politika Srbije", in *Iz nove srpske istorije*, Srpska književna zadruga, Kolo. XXIX, Br. 193, Beograd, 1926, p. 18.

⁸ The "Načertanije" (Outline) was a secret document, which became known to the Serbian public only after its publication in 1906. However, it was known abroad even earlier. Austria had already obtained a copy of it in 1883, which was made available to the Hungarians in 1886. In Hungarian, it was published by József Thim in 1930. (*A magyarországi 1848-49-iki szerb fölkelés története II*, 1930, p. 1-26). Vasa Čubrilović, *Istorija političke misli u Srbiji XIX veka*, Beograd, Prosveta, 1958, p. 161.

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it served (still serves) as an ideological basis for Serbian nationalism⁹.

Garašanin envisioned a great South Slavic state in the Balkans not by uniting the South Slavic peoples and territories, but by annexing them to Serbia, creating a Greater Serbia¹⁰. His premise was that Serbia, as a small state surrounded by empires, should seek to increase its territory at the expense of the Ottoman Empire¹¹. Naturally, he wanted to acquire the territories gradually, above all by annexing Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and northern Albania to Serbia, so that the resulting Serbia, comprising the territories of the medieval Serbian Empire (Tsar Dušan), would replace the then collapsing Ottoman Empire in the Balkans¹². He was aware that such a large state could not be established in the Balkans in opposition to the surrounding empires without relying on the Serbs and other southern Slavs living outside Serbia¹³, and he considered of importance to convince them that Serbia was the natural protector of the Slavs of the Ottoman Empire, to whom they could turn for help and protection at any time¹⁴. It was clear to him that, in the event of the

⁹ To study "Načertanije" a Croatian publication was used. Bože Čović, Miroslav Brandt (eds.), *Izvori velikosrpske agresije. Rasprave/dokumenti/kartografski prikazi*, Zagreb, 1991, p. 65-77, which published Garašanin's opus through the work of D. Stranjaković, *Kako je postalo Garašaninovo »Načertanije«*. Spomenik SKA, XCI, Beograd, 1939, p. 76-102.

¹⁰ For his "Outline" of Serbia's foreign policy, Garašanin relied heavily on Adam Czartoryski's 'Advice (Saveti) and František Zach's "Plan", which was practically a detailed version of Prince Czartoryski's abovementioned 1843 work. It is important to note, however, that he ignored their proposals for cooperation with the Croats. Vasa Čubrilović, *op. cit.*, p. 159-177.

¹¹ At this time, Serbia was still an autonomous principality within the Ottoman Empire.

¹² "Serbia must endeavour to build a new, great Serbian state on the foundations of the old Serbian empire, from the bricks taken out of the building of the Ottoman Empire". Bože Čović, Miroslav Brandt, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

¹³ He was thinking primarily of the South Slavs living in the Turkish Empire, but he also considered it necessary to know the exact situation in the areas of the Monarchy inhabited by South Slavs. *Ibidem*, p. 68.

¹⁴ He had a detailed plan to win them over, which included all the elements of a modern propaganda campaign, from sending secret agents to assess the terrain and public mood, to religious and cultural influence (church and

collapse of the Ottoman Empire, both Austria and Russia would seek to increase their own territory and influence, and would not look kindly on the establishment of a strong, independent Christian Slavic empire on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire. However, while he saw a settlement with Russia as conceivable and desirable¹⁵, he regarded Austria as the main obstacle to the realisation of Greater Serbia and considered it inevitable that sooner or later confrontation would take place¹⁶. To counter Austrian and Russian ambitions in the Balkans, he counted on the support of the Western countries: France and England, "who were most interested in seeing a new independent Christian state fill the void left by the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in order to preserve the balance of power in Europe"¹⁷.

During the revolutions of 1848/49, Serbia sought to take advantage of the revolution and the international situation - Britain and France's interest in maintaining the Ottoman Empire and fear of increased Russian political influence in the Balkans - to strengthen its position. Serbia, of course, also saw a chance for South Slavic (Serb) unification, but it saw the creation of Serb unity not so much in the unification of the Serbs of the *Délvidék* (Backa and Banat), but rather in the unification of the Serbs of the Ottoman Empire with Serbia¹⁸. This

secular education, publishing, press), and winning over the South Slavic leaders of the territories concerned. *Ibidem*, p. 72-77.

¹⁵ He would have preferred an agreement with Russia but saw no chance of it until Russia accepted Serbia's conditions, which would guarantee Serbia's future in the broadest sense. The likelihood of this, however, was, in his view, very small as long as Russia chose Austria as its natural ally instead of Serbia. *Ibidem*, p. 71.

¹⁶ Who is aware that an enlarged Serbia would pose a potential threat to the areas inhabited by southern Slavs. *Ibidem*, p. 66.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 66-67. England had opened a consulate in Serbia as early as 1837, with the primary task of monitoring all actions of the Russian consul aimed at strengthening Russian political influence in Serbia and in neighbouring countries. Mihail Gavrilović, „Počeci diplomatskih odnosa Velike Britanije i Srbije”, in *Iz nove srpske istorije*. Srpska književna zadruga, Kolo XXIX, Br. 193, Beograd, 1926, p. 113.

¹⁸ Although he was tempted to do so, Serbia did not see the time as ripe for the

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goal was to be achieved by a reorganization of the Ottoman Empire - supported by Britain and France - in which the status of an enlarged Serbia would be secured internationally, and which would serve as the basis for a future, complete South Slavic (Serb) unification¹⁹.

However, the revolutions of 1848-49 passed without Serbia having succeeded in strengthening its position to any significant extent. The transformation of the Ottoman Empire, and consequently the unification of Serbs around the Principality of Serbia, failed, and Serbia was forced to seek other means to achieve Serbian unity.

After Habsburg absolutism following the defeat of the revolutions, Austro-Slavism remained the most accepted view among Croats for the creation of Croatian, and later South Slavic, unity, but there were already opinions, especially after the defeat of Austria at Königgrätz²⁰. In the 1860s, the Croatian nationalists (the Independent National Party with Ivan Mažuranić and the National Liberal Party with Josip Juraj Strossmayer as its leader) were in favour of restructuring the Monarchy on the basis of 'federalism of nations', as opposed to the 'historical federalism' accepted by the majority of the peoples of the Monarchy, as the only way to base their demand for the unification of

unification of the southern Slavs of the Austrian Empire, and thus of the southern part of the region, mainly for foreign policy reasons. Its intervention in the fighting in the South was also motivated more by domestic political reasons than by the need to unify the Serbs in the South with Serbia (although it undoubtedly supported the creation of Serbian Voivodeship, which it saw as a precondition for future unification). His fear of the House of Obrenovic was influential. There were significant numbers of Obrenović sympathisers in the high council of the Serbs in the *Délvidék*, and there were fears in Serbia that the Obrenoviés might use them to invade Serbia, just as there were voices calling for Miloš Obrenović or his son Mihailo to be put in charge of the province. Andrija Radonić, *op. cit.*, p. 127-128.

¹⁹ There were two ideas. One called for a Serbian "second kingdom" that would have included the Bulgarians, while another imagined an enlarged Serbia within the Ottoman Empire without the Bulgarians. Milorad Ekmečić, „Garašanin, Czartoryski köre és a magyarok 1848-1849-ben”, in *Szerbek és magyarok a Duna mentén. II. Tanulmányok a szerb-magyar kapcsolatok köréből (1848-1867)*, Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1987, p. 57.

²⁰ Imbro Ignjatević Tkalac.

the Triune Kingdom, Slovenia and Vojvodina within the Monarchy. Furthermore, they did not give up on the realisation of complete South Slavic unity, but, aware of the political, economic and social differences among the South Slavic peoples, they wanted to achieve it gradually²¹. The first step would have been to unite the South Slavs of the Monarchy, with Zagreb as the centre, of course, with those living outside the Monarchy around Serbia, followed by unification of the two South Slav states in an independent federal South Slav entity²². Their vision was not far from Serbia's, which in the 1860s was working towards a Balkan federation.

The wars for Italian and German unification, and the question of the reorganisation of the Habsburg Monarchy, brought the Balkans into the European mainstream, and Western European ideas, especially liberalism, brought along the idea of federalism to the Balkans²³. From 1860, Serbia was again ruled by Mihailo Obrenović, who during his exile gained more insight into the great politics than any of his predecessors. Even before Mihailo Obrenović and Garašanin, the need for cooperation between the Balkan and the peoples along the Danube had become apparent, so that the Balkan states could solve the Eastern question on the basis of their own strength, on the basis of a kind of "Balkans for the Balkan" principle, in order to avoid interference by the great powers²⁴. The Serbian government believed that the defeat of Austria – and the anti-Turkish uprising in Crete in September – was a good opportunity to attempt to resolve the Eastern question. To do this, in addition to the favourable foreign policy situation and the non-intervention of the great powers – while expecting the Austro-Prussian war to continue – they needed the support of the Balkan nations, not only those in the Ottoman Empire but also the Croats of the Habsburg Empire. It was in the spirit of this idea that, during the reign of Mihailo Obrenović, more serious

²¹ Petar Korunić, *op. cit.*, p. 402.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ Dimitrije Đorđević, „Projekti za stvaranje federacija u jugoistočnoj Evropi šezdesetih i sedamdesetih godina devetnaestog veka“, in *Ogledi iz novije Balkanske istorije*, Beograd, 1989, p. 153.

²⁴ Mihailo Obrenovic negotiated with Kossuth in London in 1859 about the federation of the Balkan and Danubian peoples, and later was in contact with him as well through Klapka and Türr.

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attempts were made to create a Balkan alliance²⁵. Garašanin, who by the 1860s had largely moved away from his 1844 position and was willing to entertain the idea of Serb-Croat cooperation, appealed to Croatian national politicians after the Battle of Königgrätz to decide on and prepare for accession to Serbia²⁶. In July, Croatian politicians had not yet responded to Garašanin's initiative, confident that Austria's defeat would contribute to the federal transformation of the Monarchy, with the unification of the Croatian and Slovenian territories and the Serbian Voivodeship. At the end of 1866, however, when it was clear that the dualist system in Austria would prevail over the federal transformation, they decided to contact the Serbian government. Bishop Strossmayer²⁷, the leader of the Peoples' Party, which was formed in December 1866 by the merger of the Independent Party and the People's Liberal Party, accepted the Serbian proposal for Serbo-Croat cooperation for the gradual creation of a South Slav state independent of both Austria and the Ottoman Empire, and in favour of a settlement of the South Slav question outside the Habsburg Monarchy. The Croats acknowledged Serbia's role as "South Slavic Piedmont", and Strossmayer offered to openly assist the Serbian prince as his minister in the ultimate establishment of an independent South Slav state²⁸. The negotiations resulted in a programme of joint Serb-Croat cooperation in the spring of 1867, which defined the liberation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its unification with Serbia as the first step towards South Slavic unification. In a gesture towards Serbia, the Croatian Sabor adopted a resolution in

²⁵ Serbia and Greece signed a treaty of mutual assistance against the Ottoman Empire in 1867. Negotiations were also held with Romania, but only a treaty of friendship was signed in 1868. Ostensibly a step towards South Slavic unification, Serbia signed a treaty with Montenegro in 1866, but in reality, it was intended to unite the Serbian nation and form Greater Serbia. Barbara Jelavich, *A Balkán története a 18. és 19. században*, Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, 1996, p. 295.

²⁶ Petar Korunić, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

²⁷ Bishop Strossmayer was appointed Apostolic Vicar of Serbia by the Pope in 1851. The bishop visited Serbia with several delegations and knew the prince personally.

²⁸ Petar Korunić, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

May 1867 recognising the identity and equal rights of Serbs living in the territory of the Triune Kingdom with Croats.

However, the international political situation did not turn out as expected in Serbia. In the absence of a new Austro-Prussian war, and with Austria emerging stronger from its crisis, Serbia gave up on the idea of unifying South Slavs by force of arms. In August 1867, Mihailo Obrenović agreed in a pact with Andrassy to renounce the armed liberation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and instead to seek the provinces through diplomatic means, with the support of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy²⁹. The political shift in Serbia, which had already taken place at the end of Mihailo's reign, was further accentuated when Mihailo was succeeded on the throne by his minor son Milan. Jovan Ristić, the president of the regency council that governed on Milan's behalf and Serbia's foreign minister, was a pragmatist who did not overestimate Serbia's military power and political weight. He abandoned Mihailo's dream of creating a Balkan alliance and, returning to the Greater Serbia programme, sought instead to consolidate Serbia's positions. Faced with the facts and left to their own devices, the Croats were left with no choice but to look again within the Monarchy for a solution to the problem of southern Slav unity. Serbian-Croatian cooperation relations, which had barely begun, gradually faded, and even developed in a negative direction. First the opposition of the Serbs to the annexation of Dalmatia to Croatia, then the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878, and finally the unification of the predominantly Serb-populated Military Frontier Region with civil Croatia in 1881, completely soured relations between the Croats and the Serbians of the Monarchy – and indirectly Serbia³⁰. King Milan's openly pro-Monarchy policy after the Berlin Congress also did not favour the strengthening of Yugoslavism. In 1881, Serbia entered into a secret treaty in which, among

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 337.

³⁰ The occupation has raised the question of Bosnia and Herzegovina's status. The Croats were pushing for the Catholicisation of Bosnia (Archbishop Josip Štadler of Sarajevo) and its annexation to Croatia, thus seeking to achieve a federal entity of South Slavs within the Monarchy, with the then increased number of Croats supporting their demand.

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other things, it pledged not to allow any kind of organisation on its territory in the interests of Serbs living in the Monarchy, including Bosnia and Herzegovina³¹. The idea of Yugoslavism was then side-lined, only for it to reappear almost a quarter of a century later as a possible solution for the political unification of the southern Slavic nations.

The Spread of The Yugoslav Idea

By the turn of the 19th century, the southern Slavic nations of the Austro-Hungarian Empire had undergone significant social, economic, and cultural changes. Many young Croats and Serbs, voluntarily or under duress, studied in Prague, where they were influenced by Masaryk's views of Slavic unity. On their return to Croatia, these young people rejected the application of Croatian state law and instead advocated the national unity of Croats, Serbs and Slovenes on the basis of natural law³². At the University of Zagreb, they had already founded in the 1890s the Progressive Youth³³, the basis of the Serb-Croat coalition that was to be formed at the beginning of 20th century. By the turn of the century, the shock of the formation of the Serbian party, which had become actively involved in Croatian political life after the unification of the Military Frontier with Croatia and which had always supported Ban Héderváry against the Croatian opposition, had passed. By 1903, Khuen Héderváry's pro-Serb government had come to an end, and by then the Serbs in Croatia had also revised their policies. The majority of them wanted to unite with Greater Serbia, but they had to admit that, living furthest away from Serbia, they could not afford to pursue a 'narrow-Serbian' policy like the Serbs in Serbia or Vojvodina. They had to realise that if they wished to join Serbia, they could only do so by uniting on a broader basis. Thanks to this realisation, Serbs living in the areas beyond the Drina, mixed with Croats, had been trying to influence Serbian national policy towards Yugoslavism since the end of the 19th

³¹ Vladimir Ćorović, *Istorija Jugoslavije*, Prosveta-Beograd, Reprint, 1989, p. 533.

³² Jaroslav Šidak, „Jugoslavenska ideja u hrvatskoj politici do I svijetskog rata“, in *Studije iz hrvatske povijesti XIX stoljeća*. Zagreb, 1973, p. 82.

³³ Vasa Čubrilović, *op. cit.*, p. 425.

century³⁴, something they had little chance of doing while the pro-Monarchy Obrenovic dynasty ruled Serbia. However, in 1903, after the assassination of Aleksandar Obrenović, the situation changed. In Serbia, the Karađorđević dynasty came to power again, and King Peter, breaking with the pro-Monarchy policy, returned to the traditional pro-Russian and pro-French Serbian foreign policy. The reversal of foreign policy in Serbia, in addition to the above-mentioned changes in Croatian politics, allowed for greater cooperation between Serbs and Croats in the Monarchy, a cooperation which increasingly saw the solution to the Southern Slavic question in the form of a common South Slavic unity on a broad basis, in Yugoslavism.

In 1905 in Croatia, as per the so-called “Rijeka Resolution”, Croatian opposition politicians from Croatia, Dalmatia, and Istria, in the spirit of the new course³⁵, argued that the Croatian question should be resolved within a South Slavic framework. To this end, they were willing to work with the Hungarian opposition coalition to achieve full Hungarian independence, in return, of course, for their support. Soon afterwards, in the so-called 'Zadar Resolution', Serbian politicians in Dalmatia and Croatia joined the Croatian opposition and in December 1905 the first lasting Serb-Croat political organisation was formed, the Serb-Croat Coalition, which remained the leading Croatian political organisation until the end of the First World War. Serbia's military successes in the Balkan Wars, which helped Serbia to recover from the 1875-1878 Turkish-Serb war, contributed greatly to the further strengthening of Yugoslavism, which was gaining momentum among the southern Slavs of the monarchy, and proved its ability to play the role of “South Slavic Piedmont”, despite the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia, the Bulgarian-Serbian War of 1885 and the annexation of Bosnia.

The outbreak of the First World War offered the first real opportunity for the creation of an independent South Slav state. Three

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 479.

³⁵ The “New Course” is named after the Dalmatian newspaper “Novi Kurs”, edited by Frano Supilo, which argues for the unification of the opposition in Croatia.

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factors, in order of importance, played a role in its creation after the end of the world war: the Entente powers, the Serbian government and the South Slav emigration.

For Serbia, the outbreak of the war also meant that the time had come for a showdown with Austria, what Garašanin had already predicted in *Načertanije*. Largely economically independent of the Monarchy (1906-1911 tariff war), Serbia, having gained territory in the Balkan wars, with a battle-hardened army equipped with French weapons and the support of the Entente (although the Entente did not recognise Serbia as an ally until the end of the war), had incomparably better chances than ever before of creating a Yugoslav state, or at least a Greater Serbian state.

Sharing the generally held view that the war would not last long, Serbia had already in the autumn of 1914 sought to formulate its territorial claims, primarily against the Monarchy, and Hungary in particular³⁶. At the end of August, the government convened a group of scholars to academically define Serbia's war aims for the formation of a unified South Slav state³⁷. It outlined the territories claimed by the new state (Bosnia, Herzegovina, Vojvodina, Dalmatia, Croatia, Istria and Slovenia), but left the precise delineation of the borders to Serbian academics³⁸. On September 4, 1914, in response to the Entente's proposal for the renewal of the Balkan alliance, Pašić presented Serbia's war aims and territorial claims to the north to the Allied powers in a circular telegram³⁹. On December 7, the Serbian royal government in Niš

³⁶ Serbia's ambassador to France, Milenko Vesnić, took the initiative to collect data to support their claims at the upcoming peace conference. Ljubinka Trgovčević, *Naučnici Srbije i stvaranje Jugoslovenske države 1914-1920*, Narodna knjiga, Beograd, Srpska književna zadruga, 1986, p. 286.

³⁷ Milorad Ekmečić, *Ratni ciljevi Srbije 1914*, Beograd, 1973, p. 87.

³⁸ Ljubinka Trgovčević, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

³⁹ The border stretched from the Danube above Orşova, along the mountain range north to the Maros (leaving Arad, Lugoj and Lipova to Romania), following the Maros to its mouth, then towards the Drava (leaving Subotica and Baja to Serbia), and along the Mura to Leibniz. Pašić's circular telegram to the embassies from Niš 04.09.1914. Nikola Popović, "Ideja ujedinjenja Južnih slovena kao vid samoobrane", in *Stvaranje jugoslovenske države 1918*,

announced to the Skupstina that the royal government considered its sole and most important task to be the successful conclusion of the war "...which from the beginning had been one with the liberation and unification of their oppressed Serb, Croat and Slovene brothers"⁴⁰. With this declaration, the Serbian government had made it clear to the world and to those concerned that it intended to achieve a unified South Slav state. However, the ways and means by which this would be achieved were not publicly mentioned at the time.

While Serbia was formulating its war aims and making the realisation of South Slavic unity an official policy, many politicians had to emigrate from Croatia after the outbreak of the world war. The politicians who had emigrated, many of whom were among the founders of the Serb-Croat coalition, formed the Yugoslav Committee in Paris in early May 1915. Its chairman was the Zagreb lawyer Ante Trumbić, but its real leader was the Dalmatian Croat politician Franjo Supilo. The Yugoslav Committee was actually established in Florence in October 1914, but it did not officially start operating until May 1, 1915 in Paris. It is important to note, however, that its formation was in line with the Serbian government's firm intention⁴¹. Serbian Prime Minister Nikola

(Zbornik radova podnetih na naučnom skupu u Iloku od 16. do 19. maja 1979), Beograd, ISI, 1983, p. 41.

⁴⁰ Ferdo Šišić (ed.), *Dokumenti o postanku Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1914-1919 Sabrao*, Zagreb, 1920, p. 10.

⁴¹ This is proved by the order issued by Nikola Pašić in October 1914. The Commission intended to promote the liberation and unification of the South Slavic nations, primarily through propaganda work with the governments of the Entente countries, as well as the political representation of the South Slavs of the Monarchy. The latter intention, however, put it at odds with the Serbian government, and as a result, cooperation between the Serbian government and the Commission was fraught with tensions from the outset: The goal: the creation of a unified South Slavic, possibly Serb-Croat state; without separate state institutions and preserving the national characteristics of each tribe. Method of implementation: with negotiations on real union (military, foreign policy, trade and transport, finance) already underway with Montenegro, the unity of the Serbian tribe is assured. The Croats may be granted concessions which do not undermine the unity of the state and do not prevent the crystallisation of national unity, such as: a) the name of the

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Pašić wanted the Allies to recognise Serbia alone as the official representative of all the South Slavs, and he was most strongly opposed to the Commission acting as the political body of the South Slavs living in the territory of the Monarchy⁴². Pašić intended the Commission to have only propaganda functions, and that too under Serbian control⁴³. The debate about the role and powers of the Commission recurred throughout the war, but the most prominent disagreement between the Serbian government and the Commission was over the question of the method of unification.

state should include Croatia, if necessary coronation with the Croatian Crown; b) symbols should reflect the historical identity of Croatia, the coat of arms and the naval flag; c) religious equality, which may be reflected in the rank of ecclesiastical dignitaries if necessary; d) equality of scripts; e) full civil equality. The constitution will be immediately extended to all territories. The election of representatives will first take place in the Grand National Assembly, which will adopt a new constitution. Until the constitution is drawn up, the existing laws will remain in force, provided they do not impede the achievement of the objectives of the unitary state. Capable and honest officials will be guaranteed their acquired rights. The new territories will also be represented when dealing with the main authorities. Ultimately, negotiations could begin on a separate Croatian regional entity. Similar concessions might be made for Slovenes, with special provision for the use of their language. Dr Trumbić, Hinković and Supilo must be allowed to decide on the handful of people they wish to include in the Commission from Croatia and Slovenia. All members of the Commission will be provided with a decent allowance even in case of failure. Efforts should be made to establish contacts with the Southern Slavs living in America. The Commission should be made up of people who are convinced of the need for a unitary state and who are committed to contributing to its creation. The President of the Commission need not be a Serb. The Commission shall maintain contact with the Royal Serbian Government through the Serbian envoys but shall otherwise be free to conduct its internal affairs. It shall function as an independent and autonomous body towards the public, conducting propaganda activities in order to achieve the above-mentioned objective. Branko Petranović-Momčilo Zečević (ed.), *Jugoslovenski federalizam. Ideje i Stvoarnost. Tematska zbirka dokumenata. I. 1914-1943*, Prosveta-Beograd, 1987, p. 23-24.

⁴² Vasa Čubrilović, *op. cit.*, p. 511-512.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

Frano Supilo, who was a leading figure and ideological leader of the Commission, wanted a federal unification of the new state. In the first year of the war, he envisaged a new state at first on a dualist basis: the Triune Kingdom with Slovenia and Serbia on the basis of full equality⁴⁴, and later as a union of the federal entities of the historical territories - Serbia with Vojvodina, Slovenia, the Three Kingdoms, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro in 1913⁴⁵. Supilo's views on unification, however, which were shared by most members of the Yugoslav Committee, were far from coinciding with those of Serbian Prime Minister Pašić, who shared the Greater Serbian vision of Ilija Garašanin. Pašić wanted to avoid weakening Serbia's position in a broad-based South Slavic unity, and therefore wanted the South Slavic territories of the Monarchy to be annexed to Serbia, rather than united with Serbia⁴⁶. In contrast to Supilo, he wanted the new state's political system to be based on the centralist principle⁴⁷. Federalism was only conceivable if it did not harm Serbia's interests and if the centralist path proved to be impossible. He saw the protection of Serbian interests in a federalist state as being ensured if the territories beyond the Drina and the Sava, which belonged to Serbia because of either historical rights or the Serbian ethnic majority, were directly part of Serbia⁴⁸. In his vision, the Serbian Voivodeship of 1913, Bosnia and Herzegovina, southern Dalmatia and a united Montenegro, would form a Greater Serbia, which would be the strongest in terms of both territory and population among the three constituent entities (Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia) within the federation of three entities⁴⁹.

⁴⁴ Which was not even supported by the majority of the Commission. Frano Supilo, *Politički spisi. Članci/govori/pisma/memorandum*, Priredio: Dragovan Šepić, Znanje Zagreb, 1970, p. 72.

⁴⁵ Vasa Čubrilović, *op. cit.*, p. 501.

⁴⁶ In order to achieve this, he stressed Serbia's mission of liberation, because he hoped that by citing Serbia's war achievements the Croats and Slovenes would not make demands for unification. *Ibidem*, p. 464.

⁴⁷ His reasoning was that, since it had already been tried and tested in Serbia, it would also be suitable for the Serbia, which had been enlarged to include the Southern Slavic territories of the Monarchy. *Ibidem*, p. 465.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 465.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 465-467.

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The conflict between the Yugoslav Commission and the Serbian government, which had existed from the beginning, deepened when Supilo argued that if Serbia refused to revise its views on unification in the South Slavic spirit and on the basis of full equality, they would have no choice but to initiate the creation of an independent Croatia, with all the territories that would decide in favour of it through a referendum⁵⁰. The proposal almost led to a split within the Commission. The Serbian and Slovenian members opposed Supilo's radical proposal, while the majority of Croatian members were sympathetic to Supilo's views⁵¹. Nevertheless, Supilo's proposal to create an independent Croatian Commission was not supported even by the Croatian members⁵². Shortly afterwards, Supilo also abandoned this plan and, in order to avoid a split in the Yugoslav Commission, resigned his membership. After his departure, Ante Trumbić effectively became the dominant figure in the Commission and did not raise the delicate issue of how to achieve unification until the negotiations in Corfu⁵³. Although the Yugoslav Commission is generally perceived as an advocate of a federal state, this was not entirely straightforward. The various levels and degrees of ideas of federation were linked to particular members of the Commission and there was not even a single position to find an agreement. There were several reasons for this: the fate of the Commission was uncertain without the support of the Serbian government; the South Slavic policy had to be presented as unified to the allies; and many members of the Commission were not convinced which of the centralist or federalist

⁵⁰ Frano Supilo, *op. cit.*, p. 75. In his letter to Supilo at the beginning of the war, Trumbić shared this view "If Slovenia is separated from us, the majority of Croats will not want to be under the rule of the Serbian king and will ask for a separate state". Cited by: Dragoslav Janković, "Oko unitarnog ili federativnog uređenja prve zajedničke Jugoslovenske Države", in *Stvaranje jugoslovenske države 1918*, (Zbornik radova podnetih na naučnom skupu u Iloku od 16. do 19. maja 1979.), Beograd, ISI, 1983, p. 384. However, unlike Supilo, an idealist rather than a practical politician, Trumbić was more tactical than risking a complete break with Serbia.

⁵¹ Frano Supilo, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

⁵² Trumbić's note from 1916. Cited by: Dragovan Šepić, *Politički spisi*, p. 81.

⁵³ Trumbić has chaired the Commission since its creation.

configurations was the most appropriate for the future South Slavic state⁵⁴. It is worth noting that the Macedonian socialists were also in favour of a federal form of unification, but their demands were consistently ignored by both the Yugoslav Commission and the Serbian government. The Macedonian question, like the Montenegrin and Kosovar questions, was treated by the Serbian government as an exclusively Serbian internal affair, and the Yugoslav Commission accepted this⁵⁵.

The relations between the Commission and the Serbian government subsequently normalised, but an improvement in relations – beyond Supilo's departure – was crucially dependent upon changes in the war and the international landscape.

The evolution of relations between the Serbian government and the Yugoslav Commission had been influenced throughout the period by the prevailing international balance of power. Serbia's "dominant position" vis-à-vis the Commission was maintained throughout, but the changes in the international political and war situation had a positive impact on the Commission's position vis-à-vis the Serbian government. The process of balancing the forces had already begun at the end of 1915, with the military collapse of Serbia and the invasion of the country, and the flight of the Serbian government to Corfu. The fall of the tsarist regime in the February Revolution had a direct and negative impact on Serbia's political situation⁵⁶. The entry of the United States into war and the emergence of the principle of national self-determination, and finally the October Revolution, which meant the loss of Serbia's main supporter, all contributed, albeit not equally, to the Commission's confidence growing in proportion to the Serbian government's decline in power⁵⁷. In 1917, Pašić was willing to suspend his earlier views and, although he still

⁵⁴ Branko Petranović-Momčilo Zečević, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ Although Russian Foreign Minister Miliukov reassured the Serbian government that the changed political regime does not mean a change in Russia's relations with Serbia. *Diplomatska prepiska srpske vlade 1917. godine. Zbirka dokumenata*. Priredili: Miodrag Zečević i Miladin Milošević, Beograd, 1989, p. 84.

⁵⁷ Dragoslav Janković, *op. cit.*, p. 385-386.

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did not recognise the Commission as an equal partner, he was at least prepared to enter into discussions with it.

In keeping a conciliatory tone, the Serbian government invited the Yugoslav Commission to Corfu to agree on the political structure and form of government of the future state. Five weeks of discussions began, from June 15 to July 20, 1917, in which, unsurprisingly, the sharpest disagreement arose over the political structure of the new state. The Serbian unitarist/centralist position opposed to the federalist position taken by the Croats. The positions are rooted in the different historical developments and traditions of the parties, which, almost unchanged from the background outlined in the first part of this essay, have determined their attitudes towards the way of unification and the new state's structure. Trumbić, skilfully, while acknowledging in his statements the need for a unitary, unitarist/centralist structure, clearly moved towards federalism in his concrete proposals during the negotiations. There were tactics and manoeuvring on both sides, which at times threatened a serious split. In one of them, after Pašić raised the possibility of the Serbs creating a Greater Serbia on their own, to which Trumbić responded by raising the possibility of creating an independent Croatia, both sides agreed that the decision on this issue should be left to the Constituent Assembly⁵⁸. Indeed, this is what happened. The outcome of discussions was published in a joint declaration on July 20, 1917, the so-called "Corfu Declaration", which stated, among other things, that the future unified South Slavic state with the Karađorđević dynasty at its head should be the constitutional, democratic and parliamentary Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, in which the three nations and all citizens and religions would enjoy full equality⁵⁹. Although the

⁵⁸ Branko Petranović-Momčilo Zečević, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁵⁹ Ferdo Šišić, *op. cit.*, p. 98-99. Members of the former coalition and current governments of the Kingdom of Serbia, as well as representatives of the London-based Yugoslav Commission (who have been working concurrently), in the presence and cooperation of the President of the National Assembly, exchanged views on all issues related to the future common life of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

We are pleased to note that, once again, there was full agreement among the members of the conference on all aspects of the future common life of the state.

Above all, the representatives of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes reiterated in the strongest terms that our three peoples form a single people, both by blood, by spoken and written language, by the consciousness of unity, by the continuity and unity of the territory they inhabit, and by the common interests of their national, moral, and material life.

The idea of national unity has always remained alive in our people, although all the physical and spiritual forces of the enemies of the nation have been directed against the unity, freedom, and national existence of our people. It was fragmented in several states, and in Austria-Hungary itself it was not divided into three tribes but was divided into eleven provincial administrative units and subject to thirteen jurisdictions. It was the sense of national unity and the desire for freedom and independence that kept our people alive through centuries of struggle against the Turks in the east and the Germans and Hungarians in the west. (...)

Our nation bearing three names, which has suffered the most from gross violence and injustice, which has made the greatest sacrifices for the right of free self-determination, has enthusiastically adopted this noble idea as the goal of the terrible struggle in which the entire world has been plunged by the disregard of the right of peoples to self-determination.

Concluding that the only demand of our people, which it cannot renounce and which it bases on the principle of the right of self-determination of the people, is the demand that the people be freed from all foreign bondage and united in a free and independent national state, the elected representatives of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes agreed that this common state should be based on the following modern and democratic principles: 1. The state of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, known as the Southern Slavs or Yugoslavs, shall be a free, independent kingdom with a unitary territory and citizenship. It will be a constitutional, democratic, and parliamentary monarchy, with the Karađorđević dynasty at its head, which has shown that it is not separated from the people in spirit and sentiment, and that it places the freedom and will of the people above all else. 2. The name of the state will be: Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and the title of the monarch will be "King of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes". 3. It shall have a state coat of arms, a state flag, and a crown. These state emblems shall be composed of the current separate emblems. The unity of the state shall be represented by the state coat of arms

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and the state flag. The state flag, as a symbol of unity, shall be displayed in all offices of the kingdom. 4. The separate national flags of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia enjoy equal rights and may be displayed and freely used at all times. 5. The names of all three peoples - Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes - enjoy equal rights throughout the kingdom. In public life and before the authorities, everyone is always free to use them. 6. Both alphabets, Cyrillic and Latin, are also completely equal, and their use is permitted throughout the kingdom. It is the duty and the right of all public and municipal authorities to use both alphabets, according to the wishes of the citizens. 7. All established denominations are free to practice their religion in public. The Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Muslim denominations, which have the largest number of followers among our people, are equal in the eyes of the State and enjoy equal rights. On the basis of these principles, the legislature will strive to preserve and maintain inter-confessional peace, which is in keeping with the spirit and history of our people as a whole. 8. The calendar should be unified as soon as possible. 9. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes includes all the territories in which our three peoples live in compact and coherent masses, and this territory cannot be mutilated without infringing the vital interests of the whole people.

Our people do not ask for anything that is not theirs: they ask only for their own, and wish that the whole people, as a united whole, be liberated and united. Therefore, it consciously and firmly excludes any solution which would only partially solve the problem of the liberation and unification of the people. Our people raise the problem of liberation from the rule of Austria-Hungary and of unification with Serbia and Montenegro in one state as inseparable questions.

On the basis of the principle of free self-determination of nations, no part of the country has the right to secede and unite with any other state without the consent of the people themselves. 10. For the freedom and equality of all peoples, the Adriatic Sea shall be free and open to all. 11. All citizens are equal and enjoy equal rights before the State and the law in the entire territory of the State. 12. The right to vote for the election of the people's delegates to the people's assemblies and for the election of the heads of communes and other administrative units shall be equal and universal and shall be exercised by direct and secret ballot in each commune. 13. The Constitution will be the basis of the whole life of the State and will be drawn up after the peace treaty by a National Constituent Assembly elected by universal and equal, direct, and secret suffrage. It will be the source and

declaration undoubtedly contained important theoretical principles regarding the name of the new state, its form of government and the equality of its nations, it did not address the most crucial question of whether the new state would be centralist or federal. The question was to be settled by a constitution to be adopted after the peace treaty, which would have to be adopted in its entirety by a two-thirds majority in the National Constituent Assembly, which would then be formed⁶⁰.

Reception and Impact of The Corfu Declaration

Despite the shortcomings of the Corfu Declaration mentioned above, it was generally well received by the Southern Slavs. The Montenegrin Committee, as well as the majority of the Serb and Croat population of Bosnia and Herzegovina (except for the Croat clerics), accepted and supported it without reservation⁶¹. Three weeks after the declaration, Montenegro's National Unification Committee in Paris

foundation of all power and law, and the government of the life of the State will be based on it.

The constitution will enable the people to express their own energies in entities of self-government defined by the natural, social, and economic environment.

The constitution must be adopted in its entirety by supermajority vote in the Constituent National Assembly. The Constitution and other laws made by the Constituent Assembly come into force when they are approved by the King.

A united Serb, Croat and Slovene people would thus form a state with around twelve million citizens. This state would guarantee the independence and diverse cultural development of these peoples, would be a strong bulwark against Germanic expansionism, and would be an inseparable ally of all cultural peoples and states that embrace the principles of the rights and freedom of the people and international justice, and a worthy member of the new international community. Enikő Sajti (ed.), *Jugoszlávia 1918-1941. Dokumentumok*, Társadalomtudományi Kör, Szeged, 1989, p. 34-39.

⁶⁰ It should be noted that it was not easy to agree on how to adopt the constitution. The Croatian idea was that it should be approved by a majority of the tribes, as this would prevent the Serbs, as the most numerous part of their people, from abusing their dominance. However, the Serbian negotiator stubbornly refused to do so.

⁶¹ Ferdo Šišić, *op. cit.*, p. 103-104.

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unconditionally accepted the Corfu Declaration, announcing in a resolution its intention to unite under the Serbian ruling dynasty, stating that with this war, Montenegro had completed its mission as an independent state⁶². Needless to say, this declaration was far from being endorsed by the Montenegrin monarch⁶³.

In Croatian and Slovenian political life (within the Monarchy), the declaration was partly ignored and partly rejected. At the same time, the Starčević's Party of Rights and other parliamentary groupings in the Sabor informed the Commission that they were fundamentally in favour of the declaration, their criticisms referring to the part of the declaration that dealt with the internal organisation of the new state, noting that the Croats, in view of their historical state history, should at least in the first period preserve their own Croatian state in this confederation. Therefore, it was considered that the Croatian nation should be united first, creating a Croatian state which could then unite with Serbia and Slovenia in the closest real union.

However, it was far from clear among the South Slavs that unification was bound to happen, and that the creation of a common South Slav state was the only viable path for Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. This is underlined by a letter to Charles IV, adopted in March 1917 by the majority of the representatives of the Sabor, in which they expressed their belief in the Monarchy and saw the unification of the South Slavs as desirable, primarily through the unification of the Croatian lands extending to the Adriatic and including Bosnia-Herzegovina, and essentially through the trialistic transformation of the Monarchy. A further manifestation of this was the declaration of May 1917 by Croatian and Slovenian deputies in the so-called Yugoslav Club, which was active in the joint parliament of the Habsburg Empire in Vienna, which also called for the unification of the territories inhabited by the southern Slavs

⁶² Enikő Sajti, *op. cit.*, p. 39-40.

⁶³ Back in 1915, the Crown Prince of Montenegro proposed a compromise for a Montenegrin-Serbian union. He proposed a union of states based on the German model, with Serbia as Prussia and Montenegro as Bavaria. The Serbian government, however, considered only a centralist-style unification of the two Serbian states under the Karađorđević dynasty to be acceptable.

of the Monarchy into “an independent state, free from the domination of any people, established on democratic foundations, under the leadership of the House of Habsburg-Lorraine”⁶⁴.

The international response was less positive. Rather, it was noted but not taken on board by the major powers, as the creation of a unified South Slav state was not yet on their official agenda when the declaration was published. Unlike Serbia, the great powers - Britain and France - did not have detailed war aims at the beginning of the war. Especially not for the Balkans, and Serbia in particular. Their views on the unification of Southern Slavs were influenced by the changes in the international political and wartime situation, the post-war role of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and, after 1915, their obligations to Italy under the London Treaty. Their efforts in the first two years of the war were directed towards bringing Italy, Romania, and Bulgaria into the war on their side. Accordingly, together with Russia, they rejected the Niš Declaration on the creation of a Yugoslav state as an objective and instead, raising the possibility of creating a Greater Serbia, urged Serbia to renew the Balkan alliance. After Bulgaria had entered the war on the side of the Central Powers rather than the Entente, the Entente powers abandoned the plan to renew the Balkan Alliance⁶⁵, but their position on the unification of southern Slavs remained unchanged. In keeping with its traditional foreign policy, Britain made it a priority to prevent any major change in

⁶⁴ Enikő Sajti, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁶⁵ In order to satisfy his national claims, he wanted to cede certain territories to Serbia in exchange for relinquishing Macedonia, which was considered ethnically Bulgarian in England. On 13 August 1915, they submitted a proposal to Pašić, in which, in the event of an Allied victory, Serbia would receive Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slavonia, the Serbian lands of Zimon, Bačka, significant coastal areas almost as far as Dubrovnik, and several islands to the north (Šolta, Brač, etc.). He wanted the Serbian territories in southern Banat to be settled at the peace conference, provided Romania did not enter the war on the Allied side. In exchange, Serbia would have had to give up part of Macedonia in favour of Bulgaria, but a common Greek-Serbian border would have been possible. Dragoljub R. Živojinović, „Velika Srbija ili Jugoslavija? Velika Britanija i jugoslovensko ujedinjenje 1914-1918. godine”, in *Stvaranje jugoslovenske države...*, p. 156-160.

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the European balance. The basic premise of this policy was that the Monarchy must survive, albeit territorially reduced⁶⁶. It was essentially this foreign policy doctrine which determined the attitude of the British government, which was rather indifferent to the efforts and activities of the Yugoslav Commission, and which invariably rejected its requests. As long as there was any hope of a successful outcome to the peace negotiations which had been going on since 1917, with some interruptions and others, England did not wish to jeopardise the success of the peace negotiations on the separation of the Monarchy from Germany by promising to transfer to another state the important territories which were integrally part of Austria-Hungary. After the failure of the negotiations, however, it began to embrace the idea of a unified southern Slav state in the Balkans, but it was not until July 1918 that it formally declared among its war aims the creation of a Serb-Croat-Slovenian state.

Although France's position on the Southern Slavic question was similar to that of Britain, French foreign policy began to seriously consider the possibility of a Yugoslav state as early as 1917. The events of 1917 increasingly called into question the need for the Monarchy's post-war survival⁶⁷, and France seriously considered the possibility of the break-up of the Monarchy and the reorganisation of the Balkans. It saw a large Southern Slavic state as a way of countering Italian ambitions in the Balkans and maintaining the balance of power in the Mediterranean, but also as a way of bringing the whole Balkans and the Danube region under its political and economic influence through a Yugoslav state that was part of its political clientele⁶⁸. Despite this, France did not want to formally deal with the unification of South Slavs

⁶⁶ This was openly communicated to the Serbian ambassador in the Foreign Office. *Ibidem*, p. 158.

⁶⁷ The February Revolution in Russia diminished the role of the Monarchy as a counterweight to Russia and amplified the threat it posed as an outpost of German influence in Southeastern Europe. This only intensified after the October Revolution.

⁶⁸ Ljiljana Aleksić-Pejić, „Francuska diplomatija i stvaranje Jugoslavije“, in *Stvaranje jugoslovenske države...*, p. 175.

until the spring of 1918, when the peace negotiations failed⁶⁹. The turning point came in the spring and summer of 1918, when it became clear that the Monarchy could not be separated from Germany, and that it had weakened to such an extent that it would not be able to play its role of balance against Russia. The process was accelerated by the Congress of the Slavic peoples of the Monarchy held in Rome in April 1918, at which they passed a resolution demanding state independence. Their demand was now well received by the great powers, who in June added to their war aims the creation of first Poland, then Czechoslovakia and finally the new South Slav state.

While the Yugoslav Committee was trying to gain recognition in international politics as the political body of the southern Slavic peoples of the Monarchy, for which it had no *de jure* authority, and was working to break up the Monarchy by discussing with Serbia how to create Southern Slavic unity, the Croatian and Slovenian politicians that remained at home continued to pursue the federalist transformation of the Monarchy. The "Yugoslav Club" - Croatian and Slovenian representatives of the Imperial Council - in its so-called "May Declaration" of May 30, 1917, still called for the unification of the southern Slavic territories of the Monarchy under the "House of Habsburg-Lorraine" on the basis of the national principle and Croatian state law, which was supported by Starčević's Party of Rights⁷⁰. However, as a result of the new international political circumstances, the major political parties, with the exception of Frank's Law Party and Radić's party, had already set themselves the goal of the joining of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs to a democratic state on the basis of national self-determination and national unity on March 3, 1918. They adopted a decision to coordinate their activities, which was joined in April by Radić's Peasant Party, breaking with Frank's Law Party⁷¹. The first concrete result of the declaration of cooperation was the establishment on October 6, 1918 of a joint political body of the Southern Slavs living in the Monarchy, the Slovenian-Croatian-Serbian National Council (hereafter, for the sake of

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 175-177.

⁷⁰ Ferdo Šišić, *op. cit.*, p. 94-96.

⁷¹ Dragoslav Janković, Bogdan Krizman (eds.), *Grada o stvaranju Jugoslovenske države 1. I-20. XII 1918*. Beograd, 1964, p. 113-114.

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simplicity, the National Council), which in its declaration of October 19, 1918, on the basis of the parties' mandate, named itself as the only legitimate leader of national politics. Soon afterwards, Gyula Andrásy, in a memorandum requesting a separate peace, recognised the right of the Czecho-Slovak and South Slav peoples to independence, and on October 29 the council established the State of Slovenes-Croats-Serbs and declared their secession from the Monarchy. This marked the emergence of a new player in the struggle for South Slav unification, who wished to make his voice heard and strike the balance in the debate between the Commission and Pašić.

The relationship between the Commission and the Serbian government, which could be considered balanced after the agreement in Corfu, grew increasingly apart from the beginning of 1918 and threatened to break down again in the autumn. The new war aims of the Great Powers and the recognition of the Czechoslovak National Council as a belligerent party, a de facto government, had a stimulating effect on the political activity of the Yugoslav Committee. It wanted the Allies to recognise its status as a party similar to that of the Czechoslovak National Council, and the status of the South Slav volunteers fighting on the Balkan front and in Siberia as co-belligerents. Although it renounced the idea of being recognised as a government, it nonetheless continued to ask to be considered the political representative of the South Slavs in the Monarchy⁷². The Serbian government, as before, has now opposed this, arguing that the South Slavs, unlike the Czechs and Poles, have their own state which can represent all South Slavs⁷³. As the debate escalated, Trumbić turned to the Slovenian President of the Slovenian-Croatian-Serbian state, Anton Korošec, which was formed in Zagreb at the end of October, for support and to use his authority to win recognition from the allies⁷⁴. Korošec agreed to allow the Slovene-Croatian-Serbian state to be represented by the Yugoslav Commission to the Allies, but at the same time invited Trumbić and Pašić to Geneva to

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 234.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 269-270.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 427.

create a common front regarding the unification issue⁷⁵. He urged agreement and joint action by all those interested in unification in the face of the arrival of Italian troops on the territory of the Slovenian-Croatian-Serbian state, which threatened to lose the territories promised to Italy in the London Treaty to the South Slav state⁷⁶. At the same time, it was in the interests of the great powers to bring the parties to the negotiating table as soon as possible, as they wanted to use the early creation of the South Slav state as a means of settling their relations with Italy.⁷⁷ Under these circumstances, and with the instigation of the great powers, the so-called 'Geneva Conference' was held in Geneva from November 6 to 9, 1918, with the participation of the Yugoslav Committee, the Serbian government, the Slovene-Croatian-Serb National Council and the Serbian opposition.

In Geneva, for the first time since its creation, the Commission finally felt that it had the upper hand over the Serbian government. Indeed, Pašić was forced to concede on almost every issue. He recognised the National Council as the legitimate government of the Southern Slavs living in the former monarchy. In his telegram, he asked the Allies to do the same, and asked them to recognise the South Slavic volunteer troops as co-belligerents (he personally did not recognise them). He also agreed that, until a joint organisation for diplomatic tasks was established, the Yugoslav Committee should represent the Slovene-Croatian-Serbian state before the Allied powers, as Korošec had already authorised Trumbić to do⁷⁸. To declare their unification, they agreed to establish a joint ministry (government) to deal with common affairs⁷⁹, but also that until the Constituent Assembly met, each government would manage its own affairs under its own laws⁸⁰, which

⁷⁵ He also informed the Allies of this in a note on 3 November. Ferdo Šišić, *op. cit.*, p. 225-226.

⁷⁶ The Italian troops began their advance, authorised, besides the Treaty of London, by the signature of the Armistice of Padua.

⁷⁷ Dragoslav Janković, „Ženevska konferencija o stvaranju jugoslovenske zajednice 1918. Godine“, in *Istorija XX veka. Zbornik radova V*, p. 229.

⁷⁸ Dragoslav Janković, Bogdan Krizman, *op. cit.*, p. 513-514.

⁷⁹ The most important are foreign affairs, defence, and finance.

⁸⁰ Dragoslav Janković, Bogdan Krizman, *op. cit.*, p. 527.

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meant that the new state would be a confederation, even if only temporarily⁸¹. This completed the defeat of Pašić and the Greater Serbia idea at the Geneva Conference⁸².

However, the victory of the federalist forces proved short-lived. In Serbia, Pašić once again formed a government that was new only in its composition but remained the same in its approach and refused to hear of the agreement at the Geneva Conference. The change in the balance of power in Zagreb played an important role in the Serbian government's policy of intransigence. While Korošec was negotiating in Switzerland, the Serb-Croat Coalition, which refused to cooperate with the Yugoslav Commission and in mid-November openly demanded its dissolution, became the most important political force in Zagreb⁸³. The Serbian government was in constant contact with its leader, the Serb Svetozar Pribičević, who advocated for unconditional unification with Serbia. The role and importance of the Yugoslav Committee diminished after the Geneva talks. Its place was taken by the National Council led by Korošec, which, however, was also not recognised by the major powers, out of

⁸¹ Trumbić recalls that after Pašić suddenly announced that he was leaving Geneva, they quickly put the conference resolutions on paper to have him sign them, otherwise there would have been no written record of their agreement. Thus, Pašić could not avoid signing it, but immediately expressed doubts that Gavrilović would accept it. Ferdo Čulinović, *Jugoslavija između dva rata*, I, Zagreb, 1961, p. 87.

⁸² Pašić made excuses to the Serbian government. He referred to the need to unite against the forces that did not want Yugoslavia to form itself (Italy), and to the fact that England and especially France had put great pressure on the participants in the conference, especially Pašić, to reach an agreement. (Poincaré, through the Serbian ambassador in Paris, Vesnić, informed Pašić that he was determined that an agreement should be reached as soon as possible.) Dragoslav Janković, Bogdan Krizman, *op. cit.*, p. 528. Finally, he used as an excuse the behaviour of the Serbian opposition, which had cooperated with the Yugoslav Committee and was thus left completely alone. "Many Serbs also sided with Trumbić, preferring <Yugoslavia> to Serbia for various incomprehensible reasons", *Ibidem*, p. 566.

⁸³ Dragoslav Janković, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

consideration for Serbia⁸⁴. Shortly after the agreement in Geneva, the Serbian opposition also decided to negotiate with Pašić and joined the reconstituted government, still led by Pašić. This led to a weakening of the positions of the forces that wanted a federation. This was exacerbated by the threat of an Italian invasion – Italian troops were already at Ljubljana – and by internal social tensions and the activities of the ‘green cadres’. On November 24, the National Council passed a resolution proclaiming the unification of the “contiguous” Southern Slavic territories of the Monarchy and the Kingdom of Serbia. It decided to send a delegation of twenty-eight to Belgrade to discuss the specific terms of unification with the Serbian government. An eleven-point “road map” was drawn up for the negotiating delegation to follow in their negotiations. The “road map”, which was adopted by all but two votes (one of which was cast by the leader of the Peasants’ Party, Stjepan Radić), stipulated that the form of the state would be determined by the Constituent Assembly, which would meet six months after the peace agreement, as well as the form of government and political system. Until its convening, the King would exercise executive power, while the State Council would exercise legislative power⁸⁵. A delegation from the National Council arrived in Belgrade on the 28th without Radić, where they (the Serbian government) did not expect a negotiating partner. Serbia, victorious in the war, politically strengthened by the accession

⁸⁴ When Trumbić and Korošec asked Pichon for recognition of the Slovenian-Croatian-Serbian state (12 November), they were told that the Serbian government had resigned, and that the Geneva Agreement was therefore invalid. Čulinović. p. 86. Pašić himself had suggested to the Crown Prince that he should abrogate the Geneva Agreement by demanding the resignation of the government. *Ibidem*, p. 250.

⁸⁵ The State Council would have consisted of the National Council, five members of the Yugoslav Commission and a proportional number of representatives of Serbia, and Montenegro. Everything except foreign affairs, military affairs, naval affairs, finances, and postal services would have been under the autonomous jurisdiction of the national or provincial governments. Ferdo Šišić, *op. cit.*, p. 275-276.

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resolutions of Vojvodina, Montenegro, and Bosnia⁸⁶, refused to negotiate with and accept conditions from a state not recognised by the great powers, which, had Serbian army units not appeared on its territory, would have been occupied by Italian troops long ago.

The delegation of the National Council, having seen no signs of willingness to negotiate in Belgrade and being aware of its unfavourable international and domestic political situation, i.e., that it needs Serbia more than Serbia needs it, was forced to accept the Serbian government's conditions on the way of unification, deviating from the "road map" on several points. In Regent Alexander's proclamation on the formation of the new state, there was no longer any mention of the Constituent Assembly deciding on the form and the political structure of the new state. The proclamation of December 1, which *de facto* ended the unification of the South Slavs, redefined the new state as *the United Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes*⁸⁷. Ending a long debate on the political structure of the new state, the proclamation marked the triumph of centralism over federalism, but at the same time it fundamentally undermined the internal political stability of the Yugoslav state.

The Corfu Declaration

(Abstract)

The current study focuses on the contents and the context of the Corfu Declaration of 1917, which represented a pivotal mark in the South Slavs' long pursuit of living together in a free and independent southern Slav state, free from the rule of foreign nations. Both local and the international reception are set under scope, while also assessing the impact of the declaration. The text explores the ways in which the Yugoslav idea had previously spread but also shows how the outbreak of the First World War brought the first real opportunity for the creation of such a state. Three factors, in order of importance, played a role in its creation after the end of the world war: the Entente powers, the Serbian government and the South Slav emigration.

Keywords: Illyrianism, Yugoslavism, Ante Trumbić, Anton Korošec, Nikola Pašić

⁸⁶ Vojvodina decided to join Serbia on 25 November, Montenegro on 26 November and Bosnia (Banja Luka National Council) on 27 November.

⁸⁷ Previously known as *The Kingdom of Serbia and the independent State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs*.