

**The Kingdom of Serbians,
Croats and Slovenians
(1918–1929) /
the Kingdom of Yugoslavia
(1929–1941): Emergence, Duration
and End**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Between the two world wars, the historiography usually interpreted the constitution of the Yugoslav state as the achievement of centennial aspiration of the people of same or similar ethnic origin. After the WWII the historiography saw the 1918-41 Yugoslavia as a state of failed hopes eventually fulfilled in its renewal in 1945 – in a new form (republic) and in a new type (federation). However, the true history of the Yugoslav state in both of its cycles (1918-41 and 1945-91) was equally contradictory and dramatic.

The end of the WWI radically changed Europe's political map. Four empires disappeared: Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, German and Russian. A number of independent nation-states emerged: Poland, Finland, Baltic States – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary and the Kingdom of Serbians, Croats and Slovenians. The later was the most complex of all these newly founded states. Nations that found themselves in it in 1918 – having lived in different empires and civilizations – were strangers to each other (internal migration has been insignificant, while the migration beyond the region almost non-existent) and it was only in the common state that they were to confront their interests and harmonize their goals. Formulated by their political representatives prior to the establishment of the common state, these goals – at least in the case of Serbians, Croats and Slovenians – had reflected particularistic interests lasting throughout the history of the Yugoslav state.¹

¹ To what he wrote in the document "Serbian-Croatian Understanding" while in years-long emigration (1883-89) Serbian political leader Nikola P. Pašić stuck all his life:

"As things stand now, Serbians and Croats are not that close as it seems, although they speak the same language and have the same literature – for they have taken different courses towards what is crucial for a state's power. Their courses towards Serbian-Croatian unification are in such discord that would soon destroy that state in the times calling for mutual understanding should these two nations already be unified. Mindsets, breeding and natures of almost all the Croats whom I have met and are still in touch with are somehow opposite to the mindsets, breeding and nature of the Serbian nation. Probably – and we believe that would be so – that years of education by the same method would bring about the same mindset and nature of these two nations. But this can be accomplished only once this generation acknowledges that educating the youth in the spirit and tradition of the West is wrong and should be replaced by Slavic morality and principles, which are solely Slavic and so different from the West...

"Slavic civilization calls for re-education of the Croatian intelligentsia, in wants it to act in the spirit of concord, in the spirit that suits Eastern Orthodoxy or at least refrains from undermining it, it wants it to shake hands with the

Two principles clashed in the emergence and history of the Yugoslav state: that of power and that of rights. The conflict undermined the sense of people's belonging together. Besides, in the final struggle for Yugoslav unification some decisions that strengthened Serbia's position sowed the seeds of lasting rifts.² In its short life – hardly over two decades – the Yugoslav state went through several phases. Analyzing the characteristics of those phases this chapter aims at reconstructing the process that determined the fate of the Kingdom of Serbians, Croats and Slovenians. That process, perceived from the angle of Yugoslavia's disintegration at the end of the 20th century, makes a historian question not only the interests resulting in a common state but also the assumptions of its sustainability that remained contrasted till the very end.

THE IDEA OF A COMMON STATE IN THE WWI: CONCEPTS AND THEIR PROMOTERS

The idea of unification Serbia proclaimed its war goal in 1914 was deep-rooted not only among Serbian political and intellectual elites but masses as well. And it was so long before the outbreak of WWI. Leader of the People's Radical Party Nikola Pašić took (1894) that "cut off from other Serbian countries Serbia has no reason whatsoever to exist."³ The army became more influential after the establishment of the revolutionary organization *Unification or Death*, known as *Black Hand*, and ensuing assassination of the last ruler from the Obrenović dynasty, King Alexander (May 29, 1903). Under the auspices of Russia, Serbia became the center of the South Slav movement. Annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (1908) strongly boosted Serbian nationalism. Historians have been referring to a genuine "war psychosis." Everything was in the sign of preparations for a liberation war and unification: the Church, education, the press and literature. And Serbian scientist Jovan Cvijić argued categorically, "The Serbian problem must be solved by force."⁴

Serbian nation that has proved to be a pillar of the Slavic trait the powerful brother in the North is looking for." *Pisma, članci i govori (1872–1891)*. edited by Latinka Perović and Andrej Šemjakin, Belgrade, 1995, p. 301 and 302.

"In the wake of the Balkan Wars, Croatian politician and writer Frano Supilo saw Serbia as a power that should assist in the liberation of other South Slavic nations from Austria-Hungary. For him the outbreak of the WWI was the opportunity these nations should seize to set themselves free and unite with Serbia and Montenegro. However he soon became suspicious of the Serbian government's stands on the character of a future Yugoslav state as too exclusive and threatening with Serbia's domination. He foresaw that this particularism could hinder the liberation of South Slavic nations from Austria-Hungary, peace in Europe and the characteristics of Croats they would like to safeguard in a Yugoslav state. These issues will make up the major dispute between the government of the Kingdom of Serbia and the Yugoslav Committee in London, but also stand for the main cause of Supilo's disagreement with Croats sitting on the Yugoslav Committee." Latinka Perović, *Od centralizma do federalizma*, Zagreb, 1984, p. 140.

And in 1913 in Slovenia, Ivan Cankar wrote referring to the Slovenian people's strategy in Yugoslavia, "The main task that rests on us, Slovenians, in the resolution of the Yugoslav question, is to strengthen our sense of belonging to Yugoslavia by learning by heart the old Serbian-Croatian saying 'If you would be well served, serve yourself'...If ever Yugoslav nations unite politically – and it is not only my wish but also my strong belief that this unification would become true – this can only be accomplished through unification of equal and equally hardworking people." *Ibid*, p. 186.

² On November 25, 1918 in Novi Sad the Great People's Assembly of Serbians, Croats and other Slovenes adopted a resolution on Vojvodina's union with Serbia. And only a day later, the Great People's Assembly in Podgorica decided to dethrone King Nikola I Petrović Njegoš and his dynasty, unite Montenegro and Serbia under the rule of the Karađorđević dynasty, and join the common state of "three, though one people – Serbians, Croats and Slovenians."

³ *Ibid*, p. 61.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 77.

After the Balkan Wars (1912-13) Serbia considerably enlarged its territory and population. This, coupled with more sympathies for it from South Slavic nations, boosted its self-confidence.

The WWI broke out at bad times for Serbia, exhausted by Balkan Wars. But Serbia could not miss the chance it has been waiting for, for so long. The government of the Kingdom of Serbia, and then the People's Assembly in Nis (December 7/November 24, 1914), adopted a declaration on Serbia's war goals, quoting, "Confident in the resoluteness of the entire Serbian nation to persist in the holy struggle for the defense of its hearth and freedom, *the Government of the Kingdom of Serbia takes that, in this hour of decision, its main and only duty is to ensure a successful outcome of the warfare that became, from the very beginning, also a struggle for liberation and unification of all our oppressed brothers, Serbians, Croats and Slovenians. The triumphs that must crown this warfare will fully compensate for bloody sacrifices Serbia's generations of today sustains.*"⁵ (Italics, L.P.).

Adopted at the beginning of the WWI, the Nis Declaration equalized Serbia's struggle for independence and the struggle for liberation and unification of all Serbians, Croats and Slovenians. At the initiative of the government of the Kingdom of Serbia, and with its financial support, the Yugoslav Committee, as the second pillar of the idea of the common state, was established in London, and formally in Paris (October 1, 1915).⁶ Though dedicated to the same idea, the two bodies were at odds, from the very start, about the state's arrangement; in other words, about how to actually make it a common one. The differences, mostly between political and intellectual elites of the two biggest nations, Serbians and Croats, were growing deeper and deeper, and eventually turned insurmountable.

As said above, the two promoters of a common state – the government of the Kingdom of Serbia and the Yugoslav Committee – held different views. The government of the Kingdom had an eye on Serbia's supremacy counting on the following prerogatives: the existing nation-state, the sympathies of the Entente, material losses and the heavy toll in human lives the country paid in the WWI.⁷ Historians observed long ago that a new state had been seen as an "award" for Serbia's own liberation war or, to put it colloquially, as "spoils of war."⁸ A centralized and unitary state guaranteed Serbia's domination.

The Yugoslav Committee was inconsequential in Austria-Hungary. It had no armed forces. And it was itself was split between supporters of and opponents to a centralized and unitary state. Croats were advocating a federation. As for Frano Supilo, he stood for the establishment of a Croatian state first and only then its unification with Serbia. Opposing a centralized and unitary state, representatives of Croatian intellectual and political elites argued for Croatia's right to statehood and national identity. Unlike other non-Serbian peoples Croats will be more and more playing the role of "an admiral ship," as historian Ivo Banac put it.

⁵ The Nis Declaration (p. 22), as well as other documents referred to in this chapter are quoted from Branko Petranović, Momčilo Zečević, *Jugoslavija 1918–1984*, Belgrade, 1985.

⁶ The declaration on the establishment of the Yugoslav Committee, *Ibid*, p. 46–47.

⁷ Serbia lost 1.2 million people in the WWI; 53% of male population 18-55 years of age were killed; 264,000 people survived the war as invalids. .

⁸ Mari Žanin Čalić, *Istorija Jugoslavije u 20. Veku*, p. 95.

The federal concept has been advocated for in various forms. Before the Entente decided to wipe off Austria-Hungary of the map, 33 MPs of the Yugoslav caucus in the Vienna Parliament had called for unification of South Slavs within the dual monarchy. And on October 6, 1918 in Zagreb the People's Committee of Slovenians, Croats and Serbs was formed with a view to take over the reins at the moment of Austria-Hungary's disintegration. The Committee stood for unification of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians provided that a constitutional assembly decides on the type of government (republic or monarchy) by a two-third majority vote, and two governments are formed in the interregnum: the governments of the Kingdom of Serbia and of the People's Committee of Slovenians, Croats and Serbs.

Two causes of the collapse of the 1918-41 Yugoslav state have been pinpointed in the historiography: the failed economic unity and the undemocratic rule. Here the historiography has overlooked the fact that in the aftermath of the WWI the Yugoslav state as a whole was among most underdeveloped European countries, with regions largely differing from each other in terms of economic development. It has also lost sight of another fact: undemocratic regimes have been a response to nations' calls for freedom and equality, to nations' refusals to have a subordination replaced by another one. Hence, the key problem of the 1918-41 Yugoslavia was above all political: the type of governance and the system that would have met the needs of each and every nation rather than of just the one with biggest population or of a supra-national bureaucracy.

Neither at the beginning nor during the WWI the idea of a common state would have been sustainable was it not for a compromise between the advocates of different concepts (the Corfu Declaration). When the war ended and Austria-Hungary was a threat to all no more, the compromise was broken and all decisions were made on the grounds of the balance of power established during the war. The People's Council of Slovenians, Croats and Serbs had represented eight million South Slavs in Austria-Hungary. It had never questioned the unification with Serbia and Montenegro. But what it had thought vital were conditions for the unification: the type and the character of a common state.

Two factors made it easier to abandon the compromise: the threat of Italy's territorial aspirations and the presence of the Serbian army in the territory of the State of Slovenians, Croats and Serbs, the People's Council took upon itself to represent. The policy of compromise put away and decisions on vital issues made on the grounds of the balance of power emerging from the war (predetermining the type of the state and declaring its first constitution with a simple majority vote in the Constitutional Assembly) resulted in lasting distrust, especially in the relationship between Serbs and Croats; and turned the 1914-41 Yugoslavia – definitely not an “artificial creation” of big powers – into a state without legitimacy.

THE ACT OF UNIFICATION: PREDETERMINATION OF THE TYPE OF STATE DECISIVE ROLE OF THE SERBIANS OUTSIDE SERBIA: SVETOZAR PRIBIĆEVIĆ'S LATE SELF-REPROACH

A circle from the Serbian-Croatian Coalition led by Svetozar Pribićević advocated a centralistic state, a monarchy and unconditional unification. On the other hand, representatives of the Croatian People's Peasant Party – HPSS (established in 1905) and their leader Stjepan Radić was arguing for step-by-step negotiations with Serbia, unification

with it provided the safeguard of Croatia's historical and legal continuity as a state, for a republic and a federation.

Having bypassed the People's Council and the Croatian Assembly alike, Svetozar Pribićević's circle decided to send a delegation of the Council to Belgrade. Invoking people's right to self-determination Stjepan Radić was strongly against the action. Even the People's Assembly of the Kingdom of Serbia was ignored in the crucial decision-making on unification.

The delegation of the People's Council arrived in Belgrade with the Directive on conditions of unification: a general people's assembly of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians should decide on the type of the state by a qualified, two-third majority vote, as agreed under the Corfu Declaration; the assembly would be convened within the period of six months following on the armistice; in the meantime the King would hold the executive power, whereas the legislative power would be invested with a state council – made of members of the People's Council and the Yugoslav Committee, and with proportional representation of Serbs and Montenegrins; and, the state council would call and conduct the elections for the constitutional assembly.

Once in Belgrade, the delegation of the People's Council departed from the letter of the Directive. But the predetermined decision was nothing unexpected. Italy's occupation of the coastal areas, the fear of social turmoil and, above all, the action taken by Svetozar Pribićević's coalition on the one hand, and the Regent eager to enlarge Serbia's territory through unification as soon as possible, and figure as a unifier independently from Nikola Pašić on the other, sped up the unification act of December 1.

The Regent proclaimed "unification of Serbia and the countries of the independent state of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians in the unified Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians."⁹ The manner in which the establishment of the Yugoslav state was decided on not only predetermined relations between Yugoslav nations – it also predetermined the nature of its regime. Thus created state was more than an enlarged Serbia – it was an authoritarian monarchy with all powers vested in the monarch. Absolutism was mirrored in centralism at the level of the state, and in unitary, integrative yugoslavianism at the national level.

On the eve of the People's Council's delegation departure for Belgrade, Stjepan Radić warned, "*Do not rush headlong like geese into the fog.*" For him, that was "an act of conspiracy against people, against Croatia and Croats above all."¹⁰ Much later, in exile at the time of King Alexander's dictatorship, Svetozar Pribićević, the inspirer of the People's Council delegation's visit to Belgrade and a major actor of the predetermined unification, wrote, "The delegation of the People's Council erred politically and constitutionally having decided on unification in Belgrade through an agreement with Serbian governmental and party officials rather than discussing it beforehand at a plenary session of the People's Council in Zagreb, which was solely authorized to sanction it. I honestly confess the part I played in this fatal error."¹¹

⁹ The delegation of the People's Council's address to Crown Prince Alexander and the latter's response, Branko Petranović, Momčilo Zečević, *Ibid.*, p. 121–124.

¹⁰ Latinka Perović, *Od centralizma do federalizma*, *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹¹ Svetozar Pribićević, *Diktatura kralja Aleksandra*, Belgrade, 1952, p. 35.

PROVISIONAL SOLUTION TO AND HETEROGENEITY OF THE STATE: ARGUMENTS FOR CENTRALISM AND ABSOLUTISM

At the Paris Peace Conference (January 1919) the delegation led by Nikola Pašić found itself in a difficult situation. Everything was *provisional*: the substance of the state – the “old” though enlarged Kingdom of Serbia or a new state; the name for the state (Serbians would not have their name melted in some other); the conflict between centralists and federalists; the borders – especially with Italy and Hungary. The state of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians was internationally recognized under the Versailles Treaty (June 18, 1919). Ensured was the continuity of the Kingdom of Serbia’s foreign policy in wartime. Together with Great Britain and Italy, France, as Europe’s most powerful country, was the main warrant of the Versailles order meant to prevent restoration of the Habsburg monarchy and Germany’s another encroachment on Middle Europe and the Balkans. In addition to curbing “the red danger” of Russia, the alliance of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, Czechoslovakia and Rumania (1920-21) – the so-called sanitary cordon – shared this goal.

What marked the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians – apart from the above-mentioned provisional solution – was extreme heterogeneity. The state with population of 11,984,919 – according to the 1921 census – was deeply divided, and not only along ethnic and religious lines. Its subjects have experienced different forms of government with different institutions throughout history. They differed from one another dramatically in economic and cultural development, in literacy in particular. Further on, they had been adjusted to different agrarian, legal and educational systems. And above all, there were scars of the war in which they had been on opposite sides, suffering unequal losses – especially in human lives. This generated frustration of many actors and fear of anarchy. Against such a backdrop – actually or with purpose – centralism and absolutism emerged as the only alternative. Hence the Decree and the January 6 Dictatorship met no resistance. Things were the same in other European countries experiencing dictatorships in the aftermath of the WWI. And yet, there was a distinctive feature to the January 6 Dictatorship: in the midst of the crisis it was a response to was the conflict between the two biggest nations – Serbs and Croats. A state concept some intellectual and political elites of South Slavic countries had aspired to – the concept for a composite state – was turned down without any prior consideration in favor of a centralized and unitary state concept of the government of the Kingdom of Serbia. And the former was overmastered by the highest governmental act and by the principle of the end justifying the means. “Acting in tandem in the Constitutional Assembly, the Democrats and the Radicals managed to ensure the support of a part of the Farmers’ Alliance and of a non-Serbian party, the Yugoslav Muslim Party, thus enlarging the bloc ready to approve the government’s draft constitution. Representatives of this non-Serbian party were remunerated and given benefits in educational and religious autonomy, judiciary and governmental offices. To win them over for the Constitution nothing was refrained from – from pressure through bribery to purchase of votes,” historians have already observed.¹²

¹² Branko Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918 – 1978*, Belgrade, 1980, p. 53.

THE FIRST CONSTITUTION OF THE KINGDOM OF SERBS, CROATS AND SLOVENIANS: STRONG POLARIZATION OVER TWO CONCEPTS FOR THE STATE

Several constitutional drafts have mirrored the rift between supporters of the centralistic and unitary state, and advocates for a fundamentally composite one (autonomies, federation or confederation). However, only the government's draft, backed by the alliance between the Radicals, the Democrats and the King, stood a chance. No effort was spared to ensure it an upper hand. The vote on it (simple rather than qualified majority) was so planned as to avoid any risk. It was adopted in a tight vote: evidently, the alliance had been on guard for good reason. And the centralistic and unitary bloc had known too well that the opportunity arising once in the history should not be missed. As the 19th century man to whom pan-Serbian liberation and unification was a historical fixation, Nikola Pašić, the leader of the People's Radical Party, demonstrated this awareness to an inch. He opposed the constitutional draft put forth by the Radicals' founding-father, Stojan M. Protić. Himself also advocating a unified state, but a more rational and modern constitution, Protić's differently saw the unity. "The nature is also unique but diverse at the same time. And the state can be one and only too, but not only needs not but should not clothe all citizens in one and only waistcoat. The nature recognizes just unity in diversity. Whatever applies to the world of living things applies to a human being and human society," he said.¹³ Or, as he put it in other words, "The policy of breaking Croats with a tutorial, bureaucratic and gendarme governance the St. Vitus's Day Constitution is after investing with legality, instead of policies based on mutual agreement, is turning into the policy of breaking our very Kingdom. This is the policy that makes the Kingdom's ribs and the ribs of the entire state crack. It takes the Kingdom towards bankruptcy and political collapse."¹⁴

Protić saw the bigger picture. For him, agreement and compromise denied, threatened the unity of the state. Pašić took that the wartime winnings, especially the heavy toll Serbia paid in human lives, should be ultimately manifested in the form of government and the system. This implied *superiors* and *inferiors*, and by no means equality. Referring to Stojan M. Protić and the unity of the Radical Party the latter was much concerned with, Pašić was crystal-clear when saying, "While we were working on the Constitution, some of our people demanded a kind of independence for Croats. Serbia, having sacrificed so much for liberation and unification, could not accept it. We didn't want them to be servants but we had to let them know that is had been us, Serbians, who had won the battle for liberation and made unification possible."¹⁵

But since Croats, speedily integrating in the 1920s, would not have some new Austria-Hungary, let alone something less, force against their aspirations had to be resorted to. Some were even suggesting "amputation" of Croatia. And all this dispelled any delusion about the St. Vitus's Day Constitution as a democratic one.

¹³ Latinka Perović, „Kosta Novaković u radničkom pokretu Srbije i Jugoslavije“. Scholarly Conference, Čačak, 1989, p. 216.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 211.

The St. Vitus's Day Constitution defined the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians as "a constitutional, parliamentary and hereditary monarchy." However, under all provisions the King had the position of power and control over the people's representation. He was the one to convene the People's Assembly and empowered to dissolve it. He sanctioned all the laws. He was the Commander in Chief of Armed Forces. He represented the state abroad. Verdicts were pronounced in his name. He appointed ministers who were accountable to him and to the People's Assembly. And yet, notwithstanding all these powers vested in him, the Army was his *ultima ratio*: the Army within which the *White Hand*, a secret organization close to him, operated. Parliamentarianism was nothing but a stage set. The King himself had a penchant for dictatorship, but the dictatorship was also immanent in the country's state of affairs.

Considering the manner in which the St. Vitus's Day Constitution was declared and its contents the situation was not pacified. On the contrary, more and more manifestations following on the declaration of the Constitution – scarcely analyzed in the historiography – testify that solutions were searched for along some other avenues. Among those manifestations were: the Conference of Public Figures in Ilidza (June 28-29, 1922) perceived at the time as "a starting point for an entire public opinion movement for Serbian-Croatian rapprochement;" the Congress of Public Figures in Zagreb (December 10, 1922) attended by one thousand outstanding figures from all over the country, also seen as the event "inspiring relations between Serbs and Croats with the spirit of reconciliation and good will;" the debate on the pages of the *Serbian Literary Gazette* motivated by the wish to "have our state community arranged by free agreement between and by equal will of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians."

In his contribution to the above-mentioned debate Democrat Milan Grol wrote, "The adjustment on the old Croatia has been made with so much impatience and haste that Croats saw it as a tendency contrary to the one that made them join the community. Trust was lost. And that is why Croats are demanding more guarantees for their self-government." And slavist Toma Maretić argued, "Whoever knows Jesuits knows too well that they would spare no effort to make our young state repugnant to Croats, to destroy it with the helping hand from our enemies, as Jesuits would team up with the Devil just to spite Serbs as much as possible...I think that an agreement would most efficiently knock them out of action and incapacitate them in full."¹⁶

For Serbia's Republicans, Jaša Prodanović and Ljuba Stojanović, a federation was a solution to the problem.¹⁷

A debate on the national issue within the Independent Workers' Party – under the auspices of which the banned Communist Party of Yugoslavia was operating - was a major event in the post-constitutional crisis.¹⁸ However, the ironclad proof of the growing opposition to centralism was the outcome of the 1923 elections winning the Croatian Republican Farmers' Party 70 parliamentary seats in comparison to 50 it gained in the elections

¹⁶ Latinka Perović, „Kosta Novaković u radničkom pokretu Srbije i Jugoslavije,“ p. 212.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 213.

¹⁸ Latinka Perović, „Debata o nacionalnom pitanju u Nezavisnoj radničkoj partiji Jugoslavije“ published in *Od centralizma do federalizma*, p. 251–351.

for the Constitutional Assembly. The St. Vitus's Day Constitution did not solve the crisis. On the contrary, it deepened it. Since the Constitution was on the verge of legitimacy because of the manner in which it had been declared – by simple rather than qualified majority vote (223 out of 419 MPs or 53 percent of the total number of parliamentarians) – the rulers of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians had to count on concealed force as *modus operandi*. In mid-1928 the clash with the growing opposition reached a critical point that marked the end of the era of parliamentarianism.

PSEUDO – PARLIAMENTARIANISM: MASKED DICTATORSHIP PRELUDES OVERT ABSOLUTISM

By the letter of the St. Vitus's Day Constitution the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians was a parliamentary monarchy. Modeling on a liberal democracy, it provided that the People's Assembly, as a supreme and sovereign representative body, shall reflect voters' free will and that a parliamentary majority shall form a government. However, the practice in the Kingdom was diametrically opposite to its constitutional role model. First, the King was above all other constitutional factors and, second, there were hardly any prerequisites for parliamentarianism, as a legacy of Europe's liberalism.

The Constitution provided not that the King should appoint ministers from the ranks of the parliamentary majority: so, governments were formed in the court rather than in the People's Assembly. The King was empowered to convene and dismiss the parliament, and call elections. Courts of law were proclaiming verdicts in his name. As the Commander in Chief of Armed Forces and in hookup with the clandestine organization, the *White Hand*, under the command of General Petar Živković – to be appointed the Prime Minister later on – the King actually had limitless authority, accurately described in the historiography. "The King's specific position in the constitutional order and his superiority over other constitutional factors – along with political clashes in the backward society shaken by social turmoil and ethnic divides – fueled the concentration of power in his hands since other decision-makers – under or regardless of constitutional provisions - were deprived of their rights."¹⁹

Under such circumstances the People's Assembly could not have been capacitated for coping with economic and social problems of the country that was among the most underdeveloped in Europe, the country of disparities and in ruins in the aftermath of the war. Not guided by ideas, social or national, as Slobodan Jovanović noted, it was nothing but a rostrum of virulent political skirmishes over denied rights but for a "portion" of power as well. Frequent debates on scandals shaking the country – failing to reveal perpetrators and bring them to justice – only added to the resignation of the feeble public opinion: the press was actually a mouthpiece of the political culture reflected in parliamentary debates. With the exception of the post-1903 Serbia, the state had no tradition in parliamentarianism: no one was psychologically prepared for dialogue, compromise or agreement. Political parties were many, the same as nationalistic and mostly para-military organizations that were major actors of political violence. Parliamentarianism was com-

¹⁹ Branko Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918 – 1978*, Belgrade, 1983, p. 77.

promised. This state of mind culminated on June 20, 1928 when the People's Assembly became the scene of bloodshed. In the midst of the parliament the Radical Party MP **Puniša Račić** shot at Croatian political representatives. He killed Pavle Radić and Đuro Basariček, and badly wounded Ivan Pernar, Ivan Grandža and Stjepan Radić, the latter the indisputable Croatian leader who succumbed several days later. A week before he died Stjepan Radić signed the Resolution of the Farmers-Democratic Coalition - voted in after a debate in Zagreb – stressing nations' political and statehood singularities and calling for the annulment of the existing political system and the establishment of the one ensuring equality of all these singularities.

The King unhesitatingly moved from screened dictatorship to overt absolutism. Shocked with the assassination in the parliament, the public in Croatia was protesting.²⁰ Anyway had Serbs and Croats been at odds: while the Serbian side was giving thought to Croatia's "amputation," the Croatian side was boycotting the People's Assembly and seeking to internationalize "the Croatian question." With the assassination of Croatian political leaders Serbia-Croatia tensions reached a climax. Violence had been given a final say rather than dialogue, compromise or agreement. Apart from the shock it caused the effects of the murder were far-reaching: they deepened mutual distrust and doubts about sustainability of the Serbian-Croatian state, as a modern and democratic one. As an answer to the opposition to centralized and unitary state, dictatorship has always been latent: masked at first (1921), it turned into an open one (1929) and eventually resumed its mask (1931).

The assassination of Croatian representatives in the parliament scarred political relations in the Kingdom till the outbreak of the WWII. Shot down Đuro Basariček (1884–1928) was in the membership of the Croatian Farmers' Party from its very beginning and a MP from 1922 till 1928. He knew full well the history of Serbia's statehood and policies, he wrote about the progenitor of socialism in Serbia, Svetozar Marković, and was on friendly terms with leftist farmers. At the parliamentary session of February 26, 1927 he warned about "dark forces" plotting dictatorship, and on June 20, 1928 he tried to stop red-handed Puniša Račić.

Pavle Radić (1886–1928) stepped onto the political arena together with his uncle, Stjepan Radić, who had entrusted him with major tasks in the party. He was the one to announce the Croatian Farmers' Party's consent to the monarchy (1925) and its readiness to participate in the government. He moved to Belgrade with his wife and eight children. He was a strong supporter of a Yugoslav state. If people like him were to be assassinated in the highest common representative body, what could have been the fate of the state?²¹

²⁰ About 30,000 workers rallied in Zagreb (in 1900 Zagreb had the population of 50,690). See, Ivo and Slavko Goldstein, *Tito*, Zagreb, 2015, p. 62.

²¹ Apart from shocking Croatia the assassination disturbed all democratically-minded people in Serbia. Dragoljub Jovanović, the University professor and leader of leftist farmers, aspiring at having in Serbia a farmers' party like Radić's Croatian Farmers' Party, wrote, "What happened in the People's Assembly was not an ordinary crime committed by a mentally deranged and brainwashed man. That was a collective crime not only because so many people were killed at the time but also because there were much more accomplices than anyone would acknowledge..."

"We are reminding of those who had thrown mud on and exiting hate for Stjepan Radić for years. We cannot forget that the first and most outstanding of them all was no one but Svetozar Pribičević, the expert in the developments in Croatia and among Serbs outside Serbia. He had second thoughts later on, but the satanic seed he had sowed burgeoned

JANUARY 6, 1929: KING ALEXANDER'S OVERT ABSOLUTISM

Dictatorships were not uncommon in Europe in the aftermath of the WWI (Poland, Southeast European countries, etc.). What set apart the January 6 dictatorship in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians was the conflict between two nations – Serbs and Croats – in the People's Assembly. Deepened beyond remedy, let alone marked by bloodshed, that conflict made the groundwork of King Alexander's Proclamation of the January 6 dictatorship.

For the King, parliamentarianism was the main reason why intermediaries between him and the people should be banned: even the form of parliamentarianism that was far from its true meaning, and was just a screen for his supremacy over other constitutional factors.

"Instead of strengthening the spirit of people's trust and unity of the state, parliamentarianism, as it is, begins leading towards disintegration of the state and dissociation of its people," states the King in the Proclamation. This "evil" (the evil of parliamentarianism) cannot be defeated by "old methods" (elections and forming governments) on which "we have already wasted several years." "We must search for new methods and open up new avenues" instead. In saying this, the King actually referred to his "sacred duty" to safeguard "people's unity and the state as a whole" "resolutely" and "by fair means or foul."²²

Dictatorship imposed new restrictions on the country's anyway underdeveloped political life. All parties and associations with tribal insignia were banned. These attributes were taken off the country's very name: on October 3, 1929 the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians was renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The press was placed under strong control. Liberally-minded politicians were being arrested. Communists were subjected to biggest terror: they were standing political trials, sent to jail and murdered. However, the policy of the January 6 regime brought about neither peace nor stability. Instead, as historians in the first Yugoslavia put it, it opened "new fronts."

The Kingdom faced the consequences of the big global depression with delay. Socially and economically, the poor country, exhausted in wars, was in dire straits: more than 400,000 people were on the breadline. Having to cope with domestic difficulties and pressures from abroad, the regime simply had to search for a way out of the crisis.

and grew up. We are accusing all the newspapers publishing just those excerpts from Radić's speeches that presented him to the public as a critic and enemy of Serbians. Nobody ever bothered to say how much he had worked for Serbian-Croatian understanding. Nobody was willing to understand that he - an ardent Yugoslav, a Slav and a cosmopolitan - was simply forced to defend Croatia from mistakes made right here...

"His enemies would now want to see him alive. Those who had stoned him and flung mud at him are now frightened by what they had done. Gunned down was Pavle Radić, who had spared no effort on the agreement with Serbians. Killed was Dr. Đuro Basariček, closest and dearest to us, a passionate advocate of farming and Yugoslavia, the first Croatian to come to Belgrade, back at the time of the Constitutional Assembly. Probably this was not what vultures had been after, but one never gets just what he wants to by committing a crime." Dragoljub Jovanović, "Stjepan Radić", *Učitelji energije*, Belgrade, 1940. Quoted from Dragoljub Jovanović, *Sloboda od straha*, Belgrade, 1991, p. 197, 198.

²² Proclamation by King Alexander, January 6, 1929, *Jugoslavija 1918 – 1984* – Collection of Documents, p. 262.

The King tried to safeguard his overt absolutism by other means. In a proclamation of March 3, 1931 glorifying the results of the January 9 regime he stated, “I have decided to replace the incumbent policy with the large one of direct cooperation with people.”²³ The Decretive or September Constitution (March 3, 1931) that should have testified of the King’s promise nothing but screened his absolutism. The state remained centralized and unitary, while the King himself untouchable. The Article 116 of the Decretive Constitution – also known as “the small constitution” – provided that the King “in emergencies shall have the right to act beyond constitutional and legal provisions, and subsequently ask the People’s Representation to give its consent to the steps taken.”²⁴ Further on, the King had the right to, formally and actually, mobilize armed troops, the administration and police forces. And his right to appoint prime ministers and ministers decisively shaped the political scene.

In his inaugural address after the declaration of the Decretive Constitution (January 18, 1932), brimming with despotic self-confidence, the King claimed, “At long last, the ethnic truth of the Yugoslav thought broke through all the obstacles, artificially raised for centuries, and in the final stage of our martyr-like and bloody national revolution and the World War culminated in a *single* and indivisible Yugoslav kingdom, *a nation-state*.” And then he concluded categorically, “*People’s unity and the wholeness of the state can never be bargained with*, they must always be more important than everyday life and all particularistic interests.”²⁵ The opposition promptly decoded this metaphysics: under-the-table absolutism.

In November 1932 in Zagreb the Committee of the Farmers’ Democratic Coalition adopted a document known as the Zagreb Points. The document claimed that the people – actually farmers – made the foundation of sovereignty; it condemned Serbia’s hegemony as destructive; and calling for reversion of the state of affairs in 1918, it denied the predominance of one nation over others. Not only the Zagreb Points but the echo they found in Vojvodina, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina testified of the collapse of the ideology of “integral yugoslavianism” the Decretive Constitution could not have whitewashed.

The regime had to seek new supporters of the policy of centralism and integrality. And it found a supporter in a state-run party, the Yugoslav Radical Farmers’ Democracy / JRSD/ renamed the Yugoslav National Party in 1933, the forerunner of the Yugoslav Radical Community. Aspiring at overcoming all regional divisions and extending his influence on the entire state, King Alexander backed up this *state-run party*, without actual voters, till the end of his life.

In reaction to the regime’s rigid centralism and the “integral yugoslavianism” ideology, separatism grew stronger in Croatia, Macedonia and Montenegro, and in Kosovo – irredentism. The first Ustashi camp was established in 1931 in Italy; in 1932 the Croatian Revolutionary Organization declared the constitution of its own, and in 1933 publicized the Tenets of the Ustashi Movement: an independent Croatian state, liberation by revolutionary means, reversal to the situation in 1918, and the Drina River as the border between the East and the West. The paragraph of the Tenets exemplifying the sum and substance

²³ Ibid, p. 105–106.

²⁴ See, Branko Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918 – 1978*, p. 105–106.

²⁵ Inaugural address by King Alexander, *Jugoslavija 1918–1984, Collection of Documents*, p. 274.

of the Movement's ideology ran as follows, "No one without hereditary or blood ties with the Croatian people shall have a say in Croatia's public affairs, nor shall any foreign nation or state decide on the future of the Croatian nation and the State of Croatia."²⁶

The Allied Combatant Labor Organization (known as Zbor) emerged in Serbia in 1934-35. Its leader was the King's friend, lawyer Dimitrije Ljotić. Himself an anti-communist and anti-Semite, Ljotić was propagating "integral yugoslavianism" and a corporative state, while finding his role model in Germany's National Socialism.

Hitler's electoral triumph in Germany in 1933 was a major factor King Alexander began counting on. Neutral on the surface, he was turning from traditional friendship with France (the Salonika Front, Serbian youth educated in France during the WWI, France as a warrant of the Versailles Treaty, etc.) towards Germany on account of economic compatibility of the two countries and anti-communist alliance with Hitler. That trend did not change even after King Alexander's assassination by Macedonian and Croatian separatists on October 1934 in Marseille.

REGENCY: CONTINUITY OF FOREIGN POLICY AND OF NECESSITY COMPROMISE ON DOMESTIC POLICY

In his will King Alexander's enthroned his cousin, Prince Paul Karađorđević, the regent in place of the minor crown prince. Prince Paul formed the cabinet of Milan Stojadinović (1935–1939) who appeared as a modernist unlike King Alexander who had been seen as a conservative: backed by the state-run party, the Yugoslav Radical Community, the King had been a forerunner of the policy of rigid centralism and "integral yugoslavianism." At the time of regency, that policy was also in clash with the realities: the already formed nations or those in process of identity-building were against the seeming supranational integration. They were more and more disappointed in "yugoslavianism" in no matter what form. Stojadinović's attempt to bring about an agreement between Vatican and the Serbian Orthodox Church failed. In the elections in 1938 the governmental list won a razor-thin majority of vote.

Prince Paul was concerned that with Nazi Germany's assistance the independence of Slovakia's could influence Croatia where aspiration for autonomy had given birth to a strong national movement – ignoring of which threatened with nailing up to the utmost an entire nation. Therefore, Prince Paul overthrew the Milan Stojadinović cabinet and entrusted the premiership to the little-known politician, Dragiša Cvetković, whose main task was to draw an agreement with Croats.

The agreement between Dragiša Cvetković and the Croatian political leader, Vlatko Maček, was reached in almost no time, but the time for its implementation was also running out. It was signed on August 26, 1939, just a couple of days before the outbreak of the WWII. The first autonomous administration within Yugoslavia, seated in Zagreb, had been established under the agreement. The course it would have taken were it not for the WWII could only be presumed. But the course it took in the war and at its end is in the domain of empirical evidence.

²⁶ Tenets of the Croatian Ustashi Movement, *Jugoslavija 1918–1984, Collection of Documents*, p. 267–268.

Be it as it may, the Cvetković – Maček agreement opened the floodgates to a chain reaction: Serbia, Slovenia and Bosnian Muslims were demanding the same autonomy for themselves. The Serbia-begotten Cultural Club assembled Serbia's intellectual and political elite. It was helmed by the legal theoretician and historian, Slobodan Jovanović, one of the most authoritative Serbian intellectuals and, later on, the Prime Minister of the government in exile. The Club was standing for a banovina (a region ruled by a ban, governorship) of "Serbian territories" (Bosnia, Montenegro and Macedonia), close to the historical notion about the "Greater Serbia." Historians have concluded overconfidently that 1939 pulled the plug on centralism and even that the majority of Serbs had been in favor of federalism at the time. However, as it may turn up later on, the ideas replaced by other ideas under the pressure of some circumstances, had been abandoned just for the sake of appearance.

THE END OF THE ALLEGED NEUTRALITY: THE KINGDOM OF YUGOSLAVIA JOINS THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE AND THE ENSUING COUPE D'ÉTAT

Forced to make concessions in domestic policy, including the agreement with Croats made for the sake of territorial integrity, Prince Paul, guided by the same idea, made a foreign policy choice that put an end to the alleged neutrality of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In this he actually continued the policy of his predecessor. Though an Anglophile himself, Prince Paul believed that the Kingdom's choice of Berlin could shield the Yugoslav state from the war. Hitler, preoccupied with preparations for the attack against the USSR, combined tolerance and pressure in his attitude towards the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. And eventually, on March 25, 1941 in Vienna Dragiša Cvetković and Aleksandar Cincar Marković put their signatures under the Tripartite Pact.

On the very same day, the riots broke out in Belgrade spreading speedily all over Serbia. Behind the riots were communists and anti-Fascist activists, while the masses in protest, recalling the WWI, revived their anti-German feelings. The masses' 'no' to the alliance with the Reich was evident in the slogans protesters were shouting - "Down with the Government, long live an alliance with the Soviet Union!" "Better the grave than a slave!" and "Better the war and the pact!"

In the night of March 26-27, 1941 Generals of the Air Force Borivoje Mirković and Dušan Simović carried out a coup d'état. The King proclaimed himself of age. General Dušan Simović was appointed the Prime Minister, and Vlatko Maček the Vice-Premier. Both sides reacted at the coup d'état. The Allies responded with enthusiasm: for Winston Churchill the coup d'état testified that the Kingdom of Yugoslavia "found its soul." The Reich saw it as a brazen challenge in the midst of its preparations for the war against the USSR. In his proclamation to the German nation of April 6, 1941, Hitler said among other things, "The Government (Cvetković – Maček – L.P.) that had stood for peace with Germany was ousted on the explicit pretext that it was necessary because of its attitude towards Germany...As of this morning the German people are at war with the usurpers in Belgrade and at war against all those forces the Great Britain found in the Balkans to turn against peace in Europe."²⁷

²⁷ Hitler's proclamation to Germans, *Jugoslavija 1918 – 1984, Collection of Documents*, p. 397.

MILITARY CATASTROPHE

By bombing Belgrade on April 6, 1941 Germans attacked the Kingdom of Yugoslavia without a declaration of war. Powerful enemy troops were storming in from Germany (Austria), Italy, Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria. Having vacillated in its foreign policy, the Kingdom was left without allies. Its military was inferior. It had 600,000 troops under arms and no modern weapons (airplanes, mechanized infantry, heavy artillery, military industry, etc.). A multitude of fifth-columnists were spreading defeatism and disseminating anti-war propaganda. But the High Command failed to control the situation from the very start. Even Hitler was surprised at the feeble resistance met with. And the April War was nothing but a scene of chaos and breakdown.

Germans marched into Zagreb on April 10, 1941. After Vlatko Maček refused the premiership under German protectorate, the Independent State of Croatia was declared and the Ustashi brought to power. "People's sovereignty" was brutally misused. The state was ruled by militia, army, secret police and the system of concentration camps – there were twenty of them. The Ustashi principles for an ethnically pure state, proclaimed back in 1933, governed the country. German sources in mid-1941 warned that the indifference of the poor strata would grow into resistance. And in 1942 these sources argued that the bestiality of the Ustashi regime was inciting hatred not only among Eastern Orthodox population (Serbs) but Croats as well.

Germans marched into Belgrade on April 13, 1941. In August General Milan Nedić was appointed the Prime Minister of the so-called government of national salvation. His quisling administration differed from Petain's in France. In Serbia, Germans kept all major levers of power in their hands. The system of concentration camps was established in Serbia too. They were there to do away with Jews: out of 75,000 Jews according to the census in 1940, 6,500 survived the war. Concentration camps were also death houses for Roma, communists and anti-fascists.

The "Government of National Salvation's" large-scale communication with Germany rested on the belief that the victory of the Reich would make it possible for it to establish a farmers' state in Serbia. And to that end, this government relied on followers of Dimitrije Ljotić's "Zbor" and Kosta Pećanac's Chetniks.

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia ceased to exist on April 17, 1941 when its army, having fought for eleven days, capitulated. The question of who was to blame has been being raised ever since: after the April War Slobodan Jovanović blamed Croats and so did General Velimir Terzić after the WWII. Historians argued that the defeat of April 1941 was a "military defeat" rather than that of the state. In other words, the reasons behind the collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, according to historians, were not "intrinsic contradictions" but a "foreign aggression." No doubt that in military terms the powers were absolutely unequal, but it had been domestic conflicts that made the Kingdom into a worn out state: the state without cohesion that was badly needed for an organized, although unequal, resistance.

REVOLUTIONARY WORKERS' PARTY: FROM PERSECUTION THROUGH INNER CONFLICTS TO RESISTANCE TO OCCUPATION AND DISINTEGRATION OF THE STATE

The defeat of the Central Powers, the October Revolution, the collapse of the Second International's strategy, Bolsheviks' strategy for a global revolution and the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians – these were all historically unprecedented challenges to social democracy in Yugoslav countries. Social democratic parties of Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina initiated unification of all social democratic parties in the Kingdom. Leftist factions of social democratic parties of Croatia and Slavonia, and social democratic groups and organizations in Dalmatia, Vojvodina, Macedonia and Montenegro joined the union. The Unification Congress was held in Belgrade on April 22-23, 1919: 432 delegates voted for the establishment of the Socialist Workers' Party of Yugoslavia (Communist) – SRPJ(k). Everything was in the sign of commotion and compromise over the social-democratic strategy for gradual reforms and parliamentary struggle, and against “historical skipping” of developmental stages on the one hand, and the communist or bolshevik strategy resting on an organized and unified party. Known in Russia's revolutionary tradition, the latter model of party, which, under favorable circumstances such as a world war, takes power by storm, was contrary, by definition, to social democracy. Hence, it was not that easy for Yugoslavia's social democratic parties to make a U-turn. The main document of the Unification Congress (Foundations for Unification) was brimming with elements of social democracy. At the same time, however, SRPJ(k) joined the Third Communist International – the Comintern – convened in March 1919 in Moscow. The organization, unique in the history of mankind, assembled sixty communist parties from all over the world, and stood for the headquarters of global revolution and a major instrument of the new Soviet state's policy.

Circumstances were playing into the hands of the revolutionary trend within SRPJ(k). The dichotomy of the party's program soon proved to be unsustainable. Anyway, the Comintern – actually the Soviet Union – was after destroying social democracy as an arch enemy of a global revolution on Russian model.

In the state such as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians was in the aftermath of the WWI, the “spirit of the time” spoke for the revolutionary trend within SRPJ(k). Frustrated by the heavy loss in human lives and war destruction, and disappointed by the post-war chaos, SRPJ(k) was staging protests that found an echo among apathetic masses. Such were the protests against international intervention in the Soviet Union and Hungary (July 21-22, 1919) and the railroaders' strike (April 1919) with participation of 50,000 strikers to which the regime responded by militarizing the railroads.

Besides, communists triumphed in the 1920 municipal elections in Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia, and then in Montenegro, Kosovo and Serbia. And when the communist list won in Belgrade, the municipal administration was suspended so as to prevent communist councilmen from taking office.

On the eve of its Second Congress (on June 20-25, 1920 in Vukovar) SRPJ(k) had 65,000 members. At the Congress the party was renamed the Communist Party of Yugoslavia – KPJ. Although the Congress made a clear break with social democracy, differences

between the two currents persisted for a time: till the Manifest of the Opposition in October 1920.

Under its new name, the party won almost 200,000 votes in the elections for the Constitutional Assembly thus becoming the third biggest party in the country, after the Yugoslav and the People's Radical Party.

The regime and King Alexander in particular saw the Communist Party of Yugoslavia as a branch office of bolshevism that had destroyed the Russian Empire, the pivot of Eastern Orthodox Slavs and the historical ally of the Serbian nation. The rise of Communists following on their electoral victory that enlarged the anti-monarchical bloc of federalists and republicans had to be curbed. The Decree /Obznana/ banning communist propaganda, communist organizations and publications was issued in December 1920. In response to "white terror" younger communists went in for "red terror:" assassinations of governmental officials. The Law on the Protection of Public Security and Order came as a new link in the chain of violence. Under the Law, the People's Assembly suspended communist MPs: the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was outlawed and remained such till late 1941. New circumstances in which it found itself led to splits over the party strategy and, hence, two leaderships: one embodied in the Deputy Executive Committee seated in the country, and the other in the Cross-Border Committee in Vienna.

The Communist Party of Yugoslavia was facing hard times of fierce factionalism the many causes of which have never been thoroughly explored. Factions threatened the very survival of the small and weak party. The Comintern always intervened in these conflicts: and always in line with its strategy that unconditionally obliged every section, including the CPY, to discipline regardless of the realities. The Fifth Congress of the Comintern (June 1924) adopted the Resolution on the National Question in Yugoslavia. In line with the strategy for a global revolution – the "class against class" struggle – the Congress voted for the ouster of the regime in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians and for peoples' right to self-determination, including secession.

In its Open Letter (May 1928) the Comintern demanded Yugoslav communists to put an end to factions: the CPY is not a "debate club," it said, but a revolutionary party with a mission of going "deeper in the masses." The Fourth Congress of the CPY (Dresden, September 5, 1928) adopted the Open Letter with one accord, including its stance that independent nation-states should be established in the territory of the Kingdom faced with a bourgeois-democratic revolution.

Even after the January 6 dictatorship was proclaimed, the CPY – sticking to the Comintern's stance about the crisis of capitalism generating "a new revolutionary situation" – continued calling for "an armed struggle and ouster of absolutism." The fact that the CPY all but vanished testifies of how much its appeal had nothing to do with the realities: out of 3,000 members in 1928, its membership spiraled to 300-500 people. Tens of its members killed, including CPY Secretary Đuro Đaković, was the price of the "armed resistance" policy.

Hitler's rise to power (1933) influenced the Comintern's strategy. The Seventh Congress of the Comintern (February-March 1935 with participation of 500 delegates from 65 countries) shifted its focus on social-democracy, as an arch enemy of a global revolution, to fascism. Ideological "cleansing" – bolshevization of communist parties – began in parallel with the policy of the People's Front. It was triggered off by the murder of Kirov, seen as Stalin's

potential heir, on January 1, 1934. The brief ebb after the Seventh Congress was replaced by a high tide of political processes from 1936 till 1939. Moscow processes and the murder of Trotsky in Mexico (1940) put to death all of Lenin's associates. And then Hitler and Stalin signed a non-aggression pact. And what was the effect of these developments on CPY?

The purges swept away five secretaries of CPY. The process of the party's bolshevization was completed at the same time. Historians have ascribed the fact that the above-mentioned havoc in the communist movement had left the latter speechless, to its fanaticism and preoccupation with the revolutionary goal and establishment of a revolutionary organization as means to attain it. In this context, "instinctive" revolutionaries emerging from socioeconomic and political realities of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, for whom the power of the working class rested on its revolutionary organization, were new to CPY, predominantly helmed by intellectuals – which, according to usual interpretations, was the reason behind its factionalism. At the same time the party was seeking a new support from abroad. When in 1937 in Vienna he took over "party duties" unaware – according to the research of his latest biographers, Ivo and Slavko Goldštajn – that the previous secretary of CPY, Milan Gorkić, had been shot in Moscow, Josip Broz Tito was already an experienced pragmatist who had never sided either with the leftist or rightist faction, a party and trade union executive, an inmate of Lepoglava, Maribor and Ogulin prisons for five years, and a worker for the Comintern, where, according to available sources, he had been more of an observer than a decision-maker. And he himself had been "under observation" while waiting for long to have his mandate confirmed. He was not the only one never to comment on the Moscow processes: supposedly, he discussed them only with writer Miroslav Krleža. But with all of their "incredible accusations and ever more incredible confessions" the Moscow processes are still the phenomena that not even a historian can explain. There is no doubt, however, that Tito finalized the process of the party's bolshevization. Both his writings and his deeds testify to this. As for the former, this is probably best illustrated in the article "For Bolshevization and Purity of the Party" he penned for the "Proletarian" magazine in 1940. And as for the latter, this was manifest in the party itself as it was in wake of the April War in on the eve of the uprising.

The key dilemma Tito earmarked in the above-mentioned articles was about "who fights against whom;" anyone without clear understanding of it actually sides with the "other party." And the usual phrase about CPY not being "a debate club but a revolutionary party." And, in summation, "The Party is ready to smash all the stumbling blocks in way of its development."

Sticking to the Comintern strategy, CPY took all the steps possible: it transferred the leadership in exile back to the country, ensured its financial independence, installed younger cadres, and began preparing the defense of the country and its restoration as a federation. All in all, the struggle against the aggressor side by side with USSR under the slogan "There is No Going Back!"

Historians have seen CPY as a modern party.²⁸ But the way they described it is quite opposite to a modern party that implies "debate," which CPY had to deny for the sake of its survival. "The Party developed a strict code of values and conduct implying ideological

²⁸ Mari Žanin Čalić, *Istorija Jugoslavije u 20. Veku*, p. 158.

commitment, military readiness for sacrifice and inter-party solidarity, as well as Spartan discipline and self-imposed fanaticism. At the end of the decade (1930s – *L.P.*), CPY was well-regulated, authoritarian party oriented towards Yugoslav unity.”

The party’s orderliness was a product of the Russian revolutionary tradition and an answer to the question “What is to be done?” – posed by Russian revolutionaries from Chernyshevsky, through Tkachov and Nechayev, to Lenin, as well as the Comintern as the instrument of the policy resulting from the Russian Revolution. It was a combination of a religious order and a military organization. A genuine debate, before and after the Revolution, was seen as leading towards uncertainty. As the time went by, separation of parts from the whole was gaining significance from a military-political point of view rather than ideological: the ideological sum and substance of communist parties has never been questioned. Therefore, the history had to complete the circle till the ideological origin, the Soviet Union, collapsed under the weight of ideological archaism.

IN CONCLUSION

The history of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians from 1918 till 1929 and of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia from 1929 till 1941 was a short one: only twenty-three years.

The idea about unification of South Slav nations was born in the 19th century expressing the aspiration of some for liberation from the Ottoman Empire and of others’ from the Habsburg Monarchy. At the beginning of the WWI the government of the Kingdom of Serbia proclaimed the unification its war goal. Soon was formed the Yugoslav Committee in London and then the People’s Council of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians living in the Habsburg Monarchy.

Dissonant views about the type and form of the state (monarchy or republic; unitary, centralized state or federation) emerged during the war and in its aftermath.

According to the compromise (the Corfu Declaration) reached in the wartime, both the type and form of the state were to be decided by the two-third majority vote of a constitutional assembly. However, King Alexander prejudged the decision on the type of the state: on December 1, 1918 he proclaimed a monarchy ruled by a Serbian king. And on June 28, 1921 the Constitutional Assembly voted in the first constitution, the St. Vitus’s Day Constitution, by a simple rather than a two-third majority of vote. The action sowed the seeds of discord. Ever since, the two biggest nations, Serbs and Croats, had been confronted. Parliamentarianism, as a way towards reaching mutual understanding, had no tradition. Besides, the King turned it into tokenism: it became “a false parliamentarianism.”

Serbia’s political and intellectual elites – inseparable in this context – believed they were entitled to hegemony considering Serbia’s heavy loss in human lives in the WWI. The Croatian bloc, named “the admiral ship” of other non-Serbian nations, demanded autonomy to safeguard national identity and equal participation in governance. Having gone through dramatic stages, the conflict culminated in the bloodshed in the parliament on June 20, 1928 when Serbian MPs gunned down their Croatian counterparts. The shooting accounted for a state of emergency and then, on January 6, 1929, for dictatorship. The Decretive Constitution of September 1932 just seemingly abated the dictatorship: the King was still entitled to make all the crucial decisions the people’s representation was approving subsequently.

Actually, the Decretive or September Constitution testified that a country, the peoples of which have just begun identifying their interests, cannot be maintained by force alone, kept on a tight rein by representatives of the majority nation. In reaction to dictatorship separatist movements grew stronger: VMRO in Macedonia and the Ustashi in Croatia. They masterminded the assassination of King Alexander on October 9, 1934 in Marseille.

Since his eldest son, Crown Prince Peter, was underage, King Alexander bequeathed the throne to his cousin, Prince Paul Karađorđević.

Even at the time of King Alexander the Kingdom's neutral foreign policy was just seemingly such. After Hitler's election victory in 1933 the Kingdom was more and more distancing itself from France, its traditional ally, and turning towards Germany. To avoid the scenario of Slovakia's independence under the Reich, Prince Paul opted for the Agreement between the cabinet of Dragiša Cvetković and the Croatian political leader, Dr. Vlatko Maček. Signed only two days before the outbreak of the WWII the Agreement could not have been implemented. But it caused a chain reaction: Serbia, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina were demanding the status of regions ruled by bans (*banovine*). The Serbian Cultural Club, established in Serbia, assembled representatives of Serbia's political and cultural elite. At its helm was theoretician of law and historian Slobodan Jovanović, later the Prime Minister of the Royal Government in exile. Apart from Serbia, the Club was after Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro: the territories falling under the notion of the Greater Serbia.

Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović's slogan was "Neither war nor pact." But the war was unavoidable without a pact. On March 25, 1941 the Kingdom of Yugoslavia joined the Tripartite Pact. In response to this "act of high treason" generals overthrew the government in the night of March 26-27. Streets in Belgrade and other towns were swarming with thousands of people demonstrating their support to the coup d'état. Furious because he had to postpone the attack at the Soviet Union, Hitler ordered bombardment of Belgrade on April 6, 1941 without declaration of war. The April War lasted eleven days only; Hitler himself was surprised with the poor resistance his troops met with. On April 10, Germans marched into Zagreb. The Independent State of Croatia was proclaimed. The Ustashi reign of terror generated disappointment in sovereignty looked forward to for so long. In August 1941 in Serbia, Milan Nedić, an extreme nationalist, was appointed the Prime Minister.

The virus of the October Revolution spread over the Kingdom too. Communists rose in the early 1920s. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia was among the first communist parties to become a branch of the Third International. It followed its "class against class" and armed resistance to absolutism strategy till 1935. It was banned from 1921 till 1941. In this closed circle it was bolshevized through elimination of factions and their promoters. By denying any debate whatsoever, it grew into a strong revolutionary organization prepared, with its membership of 12,000, for an armed struggle against the aggressor together with the USSR but also for establishment of the Soviet model at home: "there shall be no way back." It worked its way up on this paradigm; but this paradigm first had to become worn out in its very origin, the Soviet Union, before it historically exhausted the party. But this is the subject matter other chapters will be dealing with.

2. DOCUMENTS

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4. Composition and the Code of Practice of the People's Council of Slovenians, Croats and Serbians, Zagreb, October 5-6 and 8, 1918.
5. Addresses by the People's Council's delegation to the Crown Prince and his answer, Belgrade, December 1/November 18, 1918.
6. Dissolution of the organization "People's Council," Zagreb, December 26, 1918.
7. Proclamation by the cabinet of M. Vesnić, Belgrade, November 29, 1920.
8. Memorandum of the "Voice of Croats" /"Hrvatski Glas"/, Zagreb, August-September 1921.
9. The Law on the Protection of Public Security and Order, Belgrade, August 2, 1921.
10. The Third Domiciliary Conference of CPY, the Resolution on the National Question, December 1923.
11. Proclamation by King Alexander, January 6, 1929.
12. Principles of the Croatian Ustashi Movement, June 1, 1933
13. The Decree on the Banovina of Croatia, August 26, 1939.
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4. CASE STUDIES