

Štiks, Igor. "Brothers United: The Making of Yugoslavs." *Nations and Citizens in Yugoslavia and the Post-Yugoslav States: One Hundred Years of Citizenship*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. 25–36. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 29 Jan. 2018. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474221559.ch-002>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 29 January 2018, 16:32 UTC.

Copyright © Igor Štiks 2015. You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher.

Brothers United: The Making of Yugoslavs

The revolver came from Serbia, but the finger that pulled the trigger that would kill Franz Ferdinand and thus announce the end of one world and the birth of another acted upon two strong beliefs. If one can judge from his statement, underage Gavrilo Princip, like so many of his peers, was foremost convinced that South Slavs should be liberated from a foreign yoke and unite in their own state; this belief was strongly though not articulately mixed with another conviction that the world about to come must be the world of profound social transformation. Two motives with which our story of 'one hundred years of citizenship' begins will be repeated in many different forms during this century: should South Slavs have their own common state? Or form separate ones? And, regardless of the answer, should political transformations entail more social equality or only a change of the rulers at the top of the existing hierarchy? Every idea often has deep roots and various historic materializations. One of the two ideas that materialized in that finger that eventually pulled the trigger on 28 June 1914 had started its long voyage to Sarajevo almost a century before.

Brothers as aliens: From Yugoslavism to Yugoslavia

In contrast to the separate national projects that aspired, as did almost every nationalist movement, to the maximum degree of congruence between their (ethno)national groups and their respective states (Gellner 1983), i.e. movements that were both nation-building and state-building projects, Yugoslavism was ambivalent on this point from the very outset. Could Yugoslavism be described as a classical nationalist movement aiming at the creation of a distinct Yugoslav nation ideally living in its own sovereign state? If so, in this sense, it was not different from separate ethnic nationalisms but merely had a broader ethnic basis encompassing almost all South Slavs. Or, was it just a political project of South

Slavs which aimed at achieving the separate national and political emancipation of each group within a common and, therefore, more *viable* state?

It used to be easy to know when you were in Eastern Europe, as Andrew Wachtel pointedly reminds us in his original definition of this region without clear borders, because 'Eastern Europe is that part of the world where serious literature and those who produce it have traditionally been overvalued' (Wachtel 2006: 4). Wachtel refers here to the traditional societal position held by writers across Eastern Europe. Their engagement was of paramount importance during the nation-building period ('fathers of the nation'),¹ in sharp contrast to the West (although sub-state nations there, such as Scotland, defy the rule) where the dominant civic type of nationalism propelled mostly political figures to the forefront of the nation-building process (though the role of the intelligentsia was always crucial). The South-Slavic lands were no exception to the general rule in Eastern Europe: modern nations were first imagined in the minds of small groups of writers, linguists and intellectuals against the trend of actual political conditions and, for these times, against all odds. As mentioned earlier, South Slavs were loyal to different masters and often distant capitals. Moreover, they were linguistically fragmented into a number of South-Slavic dialects; their respective bourgeoisies were thin and illiteracy was very high. Within such a politically dormant population, a number of regional intellectuals of Croat, Slovene and Serb origins, such as Ljudevit Gaj, Janko Drašković, Vuk Karadžić, Petar Preradović and Stanko Vraz, influenced by national movements in Germany, Italy and elsewhere in Eastern Europe, set in motion the 'Illyrian awakening' in the 1830s.

The guiding idea of the 'Illyrianists' who falsely believed that South Slavs were the descendants of an eponymous ancient Balkan people – that idea was also present earlier in Napoleon's short-lived *Provinces Illyriennes* – was in harmony with the unquestioned principle of ethnic and linguistic nationalism: various groups speaking the same language and which manifested similar ethnic characteristics most probably constitute *a* people that should be united, culturally and politically, and, eventually, govern itself. However, the first task was precisely to create the common standard language that would then displace the web of dialects, some of which (e.g. the Croatian kajkavian, štokavian and čakavian dialects as well as Slovenian) had already developed rich literary traditions. Croatian writer Ljudevit Gaj and Serbian linguist Vuk Karadžić agreed on the necessity of one standard language for all South Slavs, the unavoidable loss of local richness notwithstanding, the basis for which they had found in the widespread štokavian dialect.

Although this decision corresponded to the dialect spoken by the majority of future Yugoslavs, the question of common language has remained a sensitive issue to this day. It revolves around the issue of whether it is the single language with regional varieties (the view held by all serious linguists), or actually every constituted nation speaks a similar but *different* language (the position held by nationalist linguists; on these disputes see Kapović 2010: 127–156; Kordić 2010). One can easily guess that today's nationalists still inhabit exactly the same nineteenth century mental trap as the 'Illyrians'. For them also, peoples/nations are divided by separate languages and, consequently, separate nations must speak separate languages even if this requires introducing artificial differences. The others more or less subscribe to Croatian writer Miroslav Krleža's ironic statement that Serbs and Croats are two peoples divided by one language and one God. In other words, political reality should be separated from the question of language that should develop freely and in mutual interaction of its different varieties.

Back in the 1830s, the above-mentioned intellectuals had a gigantic task. They were a tiny minority of the literate population with no political or institutional power. Imposing a new standard language without an army or an administration seemed the fruit of the pretentious imagination of overly ambitious intellectuals coming from deep, underdeveloped provinces of large empires. Nonetheless, the first serious consequence of imposing the standard language was the unbridgeable divide between Slovenes on the one hand (who with a few exceptions notwithstanding, generally opposed giving up the literary use of their own language) and Serbs and Croats on the other. They later accepted the štokavian standard, albeit bifurcated into the *ijekavian* (Croatia, Bosnia, Montenegro) and *ekavian* (Serbia) versions, and were often reluctant to give up the particularities of their local vocabularies and syntax. It is important to note that the 'awakeners' had enormous difficulties in naming the newly created standard language; a perennial problem for all subsequent generations. In the nineteenth century, in order to avoid using either a Serbian or Croatian name, and lacking alternatives that would satisfy everyone, they often called the language *narodni jezik* (people's language), or *naški* or *naš jezik* ('our' language). In subsequent periods it was named 'Serbo-Croatian' – christened as such in 1824 by a German linguist Jacob Grimm and accepted by Illyrians in the 1830s and later (Kordić 2010: 127) – and 'Croato-Serbian', 'Serbian and Croatian' and 'Croatian or Serbian', until the 1990s when Yugoslavia's successor states decided to name the language spoken on their territories solely by the name of their countries or their ethnic majorities; therefore, Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian and,

more recently, Montenegrin. International institutions today refer to these languages, for practical purposes, as BCS or BCMS and former Yugoslavs when speaking among themselves refer to it as *naš jezik*, like the people who 'imagined' them almost two centuries ago.

Today one is tempted to conclude that Yugoslavism never enjoyed even an initial advantage over the various South-Slavic nationalisms. Over the course of the nineteenth century Serbia constituted itself as autonomous and was in 1878, together with Montenegro, recognized as an independent state. This, coupled with growing Slovenian and Croatian nationalist movements in the Habsburg lands and the Ottoman presence in most of the Balkans, proved to be an insurmountable obstacle to South-Slavic *national* unification. In Croatia in the second half of the nineteenth century, however, some of the most important cultural, political and literary figures such as the poet and politician Ivan Mažuranić, and even clerical leaders such as Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer and Father Franjo Rački, continued to work on the Yugoslav project. Strossmayer, for instance, was the founder or initiator of the *Yugoslav* Academy of Arts and Sciences, established in 1866 in Zagreb, and the University of Zagreb, established in 1874, as well as the generous benefactor of other South-Slavic intellectuals. He saw Zagreb as the cultural capital of South Slavs, regardless of possible political outcomes. Nevertheless, Croatian Yugoslavs had to face the emergence of the concurrent Croatian nationalism embodied in the powerful Party of the Rights.² This Party, led by influential Ante Starčević and Eugen Kvaternik, rejected any future unification of Croats with other South Slavs and based their programme solely on Croatian nation and state building. Separate Croatian nationalism had long-lasting partners in the Catholic Church – in spite of some notable exceptions such as Strossmayer and Rački – the Croatian petty-bourgeoisie and among peasants. Although intellectually and culturally strong, the pro-Yugoslav group remained largely isolated from the wider masses. It experienced a second wind with a new generation of young Croatian politicians such as Ante Supilo, Ante Trumbić and Josip Smodlaka, who perceived political unification with Serbs as a means of preserving Croatian statehood and securing its national independence in the context of Hungarian and German dominance.

The decisive moment for the Yugoslav idea thus seemed to be its appropriation by competing nationalist programmes (Rusinow 2003: 13). Nevertheless, this moment was significantly delayed in independent Serbia and arrived only just prior to the First World War. The exception to this was the short-lived cooperation between the Serbian politician Ilija Garašanin and Strossmayer.³ It has been reported that Garašanin, mostly known as the author of the secret Serbian

expansionist programme 'Načertanije' [The Draft], suggested to Strossmayer the liberation of the South Slavs from the Turkish yoke and 'unification of all South Slavs in one federal state' (Prpa-Jovanović 1997: 46). If Garašanin was ready to make such an opening towards Habsburg South Slavs, Serbian politicians after him almost completely ignored Yugoslavism as a political project, or considered it only as a means of creating a larger and stronger Serbian state. Serbian Yugoslavism had to confront 'Greater Serbianism', the project of unifying the štokavian regions under Serbian rule (and excluding the kajkavian regions of Croatia and Slovenia).

At the turn of the century, in the decisive years preceding the First World War, several mutually exclusive conceptions of South-Slavic unity were thus proposed simultaneously. In the Habsburg West, there were demands for cultural and linguistic rights, political unification of the Habsburg South Slavs with or without Serbia, as well as some support for Austro-Marxist ideas. In the East, in Serbia, two orientations confronted one another: an 'eastern' one advocating the unification of Serbs and Bulgarians (adopted by Garašanin as well) and a 'western' one demanding either a Greater Serbia or a large South-Slavic State with Serbia as its dominant region or Piedmont (Rajaković 1992).

It remains, nonetheless, questionable as to whether Yugoslavism really competed with other separate national projects or whether it was just their temporary *complement* under existing historical and political circumstances. Rusinow (2003) argues that Yugoslavism never truly passed through all three main stages of the classic nation-building process in Eastern Europe as defined by Czech historian Miroslav Hroch. The first stage of the model proposed by Hroch is marked by the appearance of a handful of intellectuals and writers; the second stage is characterized by the transmission and propagation of the national idea by 'patriots' who form movements and political parties; and, finally, in the third and final stage, the national programme acquires mass support. Against this scheme, the First World War and the subsequent fall of the great empires opened an unprecedented window of opportunity for the Yugoslav programme to come into being without requiring a preceding mass support. Without mass movements, the question that needed to be answered was the following: under what political form should this nation- and state-building programme, that suddenly had a chance to be realized, be implemented? In 1917, the Corfu Declaration on the creation of a parliamentary constitutional monarchy of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was signed by, on one side, the Yugoslav Committee composed of mostly prominent Croatian artists and politicians such as Trumbić and sculptor Ivan Meštrović, and, on the other,

the Serbian government in exile presided over by Nikola Pašić. By that time, and especially a year later with the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in December 1918, two types of Yugoslavism – *unitarist* and *federalist* – had already opposed one another and would continue to plague political relations in the inter-war Kingdom to the point of almost totally defeating, after merely two decades, the idea of Yugoslavia as state.

Brothers as citizens: The belated birth of Yugoslav citizenship

Advocates of an ‘integral’ Yugoslavism, backed up by Serbia, established a clear agenda. Yugoslavia was envisioned as a centralized state engaged in an integral Yugoslav nation-building process that could come in two forms: either smaller Yugoslav ‘tribes’ would join the larger Serbian nation or a new national identity should be created and, eventually, supersede all earlier ‘tribal’ identities. With regard to the latter version of the process, we must mention the efforts made to create a ‘synthetic’ Yugoslav culture based on recognizable but complementary elements of each separate culture. This approach is most famously represented in the works of Ivan Meštrović (for a detailed analysis see Wachtel 1998: 67–128). On the other hand, a vision of a decentralized and multinational Yugoslav state that would naturally take the form of a federation of distinct nations was opposed to any form of *integralism*. The former Habsburg subjects, for whom the end of the Austria–Hungarian Empire presented a historic opportunity to regain national independence in union with other South Slavs, were unsurprisingly in favour of the federalist Yugoslavism. After all, they had some experience in federalist politics and in limited autonomy and were not keen on transferring all their powers to the new centre. It is often said that Yugoslavia was a child of Croatian ideas and Serbian military power. As in other similar coalitions, the actual number of military divisions was the determining factor.

The first moments of disillusionment with the political and economic life in the common state dominated by the Serbian monarchy soon developed into a permanent crisis.⁴ The first Constitution of 1921, also known as the St. Vitus’ Day Constitution (*Vidovdanski Ustav*), essentially consolidated Belgrade’s dominance. It was adopted by a simple majority and was rejected by, among others, Croat parties and Communists. The Croatian grievances with Yugoslavia were channelled into massive support for Stjepan Radić’s Peasant Party that



Figure 1.1 The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes 1920–1922
(Source: Wikimedia Commons).

vacillated from ‘the Peasant International’ to which Radić subscribed in Moscow in 1924 to a conservative-nationalist party. Since its birth, Yugoslavia had been under heavy pressure from its internal economic and political imbalances. It seems that ‘Croats and Slovenes expected their economic position to win them political authority, while the Serbs expected their political authority to strengthen their economic position, mainly through the power of taxation’ (Prpa-Jovanović 1997: 54). The assassination of Radić by a Montenegrin deputy in the Yugoslav Parliament in 1928 only aggravated the already soaring tensions over the national question in Yugoslavia. Dejan Djokić warns, however, that it would be a mistake to view Yugoslavia’s problems only through the prism of the conflict between Serbs and Croats. These difficulties were equally a result of the clash between centralist and anti-centralist visions of Yugoslavism, and were a consequence not only of inter-tribal but also of *intra*-tribal political conflicts (2003: 139, 145; also Djokić 2007). One should also add that these events in Yugoslavia were also taking place in the context of a collision between

the growing Communist movement and conservative and increasingly fascist regimes in Europe.

The overall political crisis in inter-war Yugoslavia gave an opportunity to King Alexander to proclaim royal dictatorship on 6 January 1929 as a last-ditch attempt to consolidate Yugoslavia as nation-state and to balance and supersede embittered inter-ethnic relations. He officially renamed the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as 'The Kingdom of Yugoslavia' (the name had already been widely used), reorganized the country into nine provinces based on geographic and not ethnic criteria and adopted the programme of integralist Yugoslavism. The King knew something else as well: no programme of national integration can succeed without the consolidation of a unified modern citizenship regime. For almost a decade, citizenship in Yugoslavia was undefined and citizens were still governed by the citizenship regimes left in place by now obsolete polities. To understand the situation, we have to step back in history to the first attempts by ailing Empires and newly autonomous principalities to construct a modern citizenship in this region.

The patchwork of different citizenship regimes, based on numerous citizenship laws and acts, many of which dated back to the mid-nineteenth century, regulated the citizenship status of inhabitants of the lands that would form the 'first' Yugoslavia in 1918. The 1879 Hungarian law on citizenship (Article 'L' (50)) was applied in Croatia, Slavonia, Vojvodina, Medjimurje and Prekmurje and Rijeka, whereas the Austrian laws on citizenship (Articles 28–32) from the 1811 (1867) Austrian Civil Code were in force in Dalmatia, Austrian Littoral, including Istria, and Slovene lands. In Serbia, citizenship was defined and regulated by the 1844 Civil code of the Kingdom of Serbia (the articles 44, 45 and 48) and by the 1844 'Regulation on Serbian Naturalization and Release of the Serbs from their Fatherland [*otačastvo*]' (Tepić and Bašić 1969: xxxvii). Curiously, Montenegro did not have a proper citizenship law; only a regulation on exceptional naturalization of foreigners was legally codified in the Constitution of The Principality of Montenegro. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, during the last decades of the Ottoman rule, the *Tanzimat* reforms brought the first taste of modern citizenship with the adoption of the Nationality Law in 1869 (Sarajlić 2010: 2–3). After the Austrian occupation and annexation, articles 3 and 4 of the 1910 Land Statute for Bosnia-Herzegovina regulated the question of 'Bosnian-Herzegovinian belonging'. After the Balkan wars, the Ottoman subjects in Kosovo, Sandžak and Macedonia came under either Montenegrin or Serbian rule. It is difficult to speculate about their formal status during these wars and in the First World War. The region was overrun by the Axis powers in 1915 – the

Serbian army retreated through Albania to Corfu – and was a theatre of some of the bloodiest war operations.

Following the founding of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918, the citizenship issues that arose due to the dismemberment of Austria–Hungary and the subsequent creation of new states were mostly settled by the peace treaties and inter-state treaties concluded by the Kingdom with its neighbouring countries.⁵ Peace treaties with Austria and Hungary established that a person who had the ‘homeland right’ or domicile (*Heimatrecht* in German; *zavičajno pravo* or *zavičajnost*⁶), which signified permanent municipal residence and a legal link between the individual and municipality or county where he or she lived – on former Austrian–Hungarian territory should have citizenship of the country currently exercising its authority on that very territory (Čepulo 1999: 797–806; Jovanović 1977: 11–12, 15). The treaties also established the right of option for adult persons and, more important after the dissolution of the multiethnic empires and during consolidation of new nation-states, the right of option for members of ethnic minorities to live in their kin-state, i.e. basically to *emigrate* to their kin-states. The peace treaty with Bulgaria specified that Yugoslav citizens would become permanent residents of the territories that were incorporated into Yugoslavia and would also be offered the right of option. Following the Rapallo Treaty with Italy, ethnic Italians from Dalmatia acquired the right of option for Italian citizenship without obligation to emigrate.

The above-mentioned laws and regulations on citizenship – enacted by the defunct Habsburg Empire and the post-Ottoman kingdoms in the making – remained in force in the Yugoslav lands for a decade after unification. On 21 September 1928, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes finally enacted its own citizenship law that established a single Yugoslav citizenship (article 1).⁷ The law had retroactive application. Its intention was to determine who had actually acquired and who had lost Yugoslav citizenship between 1 December 1918 and 31 October 1928 (article 53). Yugoslav citizens consisted of all persons who on the day of unification had citizenship in the Kingdom of Serbia, the Kingdom of Montenegro, the Kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia and all others whose citizenship had been regulated by the Peace Treaties. Individuals in Kosovo, Sandžak and Macedonia became Yugoslav citizens if they lived in these territories until 1918. The municipal belonging or *zavičajnost* was the crucial instrument to establish Yugoslav citizenship for Slovenia, Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia and Vojvodina, and the land belonging was required in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The law also provided that ‘every citizen must have *zavičajnost*

in one of the Kingdom's municipalities.' Proof of *zavičajnost* was a necessary requirement for the Kingdom's authorities to issue a certificate of Yugoslav citizenship (article 4). Interestingly, *zavičajnost* remained an important legal device up until 1947–1948. It constituted the basis for the determination of individuals' republican citizenships in federal Yugoslavia.

Precarious birth, fragile existence and the brutal death of the first Yugoslavia

The King's dictatorship managed to construct a single citizenship regime as well as to administratively unify the country, but along the way the unification project acquired a lot of enemies. The King's efforts were, eventually, a failure. Ten years of negative political experiences under the Serbian crown led to the King's dictatorship being almost automatically associated with Serbian hegemony. It betrayed Croatian hopes for more autonomy and provoked complaints by Serbs whose democratic institutions had been suspended. In short, it was too little, too late. It was too little for Slovenians and Croats whose strong national consciousness required urgent political recognition; it was too late, because the prospects for an effective cultural and political Yugoslav unity had already faded. King Alexander's assassination in Marseille in 1934, perpetrated by Croatian and Macedonian right-wing extremists, brought an abrupt end to his autocratic rule. In the years preceding the Second World War the leading politicians – with the Serb and Croat political elites in the driving seat – would engage in a number of attempts at reforming and preserving the state (see Djokić 2007: 171–268).

However, the national question did not disappear from the agenda; it remained and threatened, under the pressure of Nazism and Fascism, the very existence of Yugoslavia itself. In August 1939, on the eve of the Second World War, the Yugoslav government, led by Dragiša Cvetković, and leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, Vlatko Maček, signed the Agreement (*Sporazum*), the purpose of which was the satisfaction of Croatian demands for greater autonomy. It established a semi-independent Croatian *Banovina*. If this spelled the end of integral Yugoslavism and the beginning of the 'federalization' of Yugoslavia, as argued by Djokić (2003: 153), it failed to properly address the Slovenian and Macedonian questions, nor did the *Sporazum* offer any comprehensive plan for restructuring Yugoslavia. It was, again, an insufficient solution delivered too late.

The first Yugoslavia disappeared during eleven days in April 1941, swept away by yet another *blitzkrieg* by the Axis powers. Yugoslavia was divided between the occupying powers (Germany, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria) that on the remaining territory established the puppet fascist Independent State of Croatia (NDH), together with a collaborationist regime in Serbia, and attached Kosovo to the Italian-occupied Kingdom of Albania. It did not seem plausible at the time that Yugoslavia would ever again be resurrected. However, and against considerable odds, two years later the Resistance movement led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) offered, amidst bloody inter-ethnic conflicts perpetuated at a massive scale by Croat fascists against Serbs, Jews and Roma, and followed by a series of massacres by different factions of Serb collaborationists, extremists and royalists against Muslims, Croats and Jews, a new federalist formula for a future (preferably socialist) re-unification of liberated Yugoslavia.

However, as I show in the following chapter, the road between the 1919 founding congress of the CPY and its pivotal wartime role in re-establishing Yugoslavia was far from straight. It is crucial to unearth this ideological and political development to explain how it was at all possible to resurrect Yugoslavia as political project after the initial failure. Without this ideological and political background, that has been often neglected by scholars of Yugoslavia, the idea behind federal Yugoslavia and its federalized citizenship, the evolution of its federal institutions over next four decades as well as the dynamic of its disintegration, cannot be properly understood.

