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Celebrating the National Unity in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes

Obchody narodowego zjednoczenia w Królestwie Serbów, Chorwatów i Słoweńców

Summary: According to Gabriella Elgenius, the societal significance of holidays lies in the preservation of collective memory. Annually repeated shared rituals reinforce the memory of those events and personalities that are expected to be familiar to all the members of the community, in effect pushing all other ones into the shadow of collective forgetting. What is more, the emotionally charged commemorations remind members of the community about their social ties and shared history, reinforcing their national identity. The same process occurred in the newly-formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, where the key players exploited national ceremony to implement their (re)interpretations of the past (as the dark age of national dispersion and slavery to foreign masters) and their new agenda for the future. The Unification Day, celebrated on 1 December, as well as the other state holidays, were supposed to contribute to the formation and reinforcement of the narrative image of a community that defined itself as Us and feels like One. The purpose of the Unification Day was to stage national unity and collectively express the will to belong to a firm and lasting community, in order to make sense of the death of past martyrs who gave their lives for Vidovdan ideals.

A nation-state cannot exist without national unity. Regretfully, the ruling elites in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes failed, for various reasons, to nationalise the collective memory of the past and construct an efficient, internalised nationalist ideology. Thus, the Kingdom entered history as the single nation-state without its own nationalism, which meant it was missing the greatest mobilisation force, one that in the modern period has proved itself stronger than geography or religion and more stable than political and economic interests. Even though at the end of the war the citizens of the newly established kingdom were all rooting for Yugoslavia, the new nation-state failed to create the Yugoslavians as a people. It would seem that up until King Alexander's declaration of dictatorship it had channelled its powers, and even its violence, mostly into the creation of the Serbs.

Key words: Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, nationalism, the politics of commemoration, Unification Day, Vidovdan Constitution

Translated by Author

Streszczenie: Według analizy Gabrielli Elgenius społeczne znaczenie świąt polega na utrwalaniu pamięci zbiorowej. Coroczne, wspólne rytuały wzmacniają pamięć tych postaci i wydarzeń, które mają być znane wszystkim członkom społeczności, w efekcie spychając wszystkie inne postacie i wydarzenia w otchłań zbiorowej niepamięci. Co więcej, niosące duży ładunek emocjonalny obchody przypominają członkom społeczności o łączących ich więzach społecznych i wspólnej historii, wzmacniając tym samym poczucie tożsamości narodowej. Proces ten miał miejsce także w nowo powstałym Królestwie Serbów, Chorwatów i Słoweńców, gdzie czołowi gracze polityczni wykorzystywali ceremonie państwowe, aby szerzyć swoje własne (re)interpretacje przeszłości (jako mrocznych czasów podziałów narodowych i niewolniczej podległości obcym panom) oraz plany na przyszłość. Zadaniem obchodzonego 1 grudnia Dnia Zjednoczenia, a także innych świąt państwowych, było tworzyć i utwierdzać narracyjny obraz wspólnoty, która definiowała się jako „My" i czuła, że jest Jednością. Dzień Zjednoczenia miał obrazować jedność narodową i wyrażać zbiorową wolę przynależenia do silnej i trwałej społeczności, aby w ten sposób nadać sens śmierci męczenników, którzy oddali życie za ideały konstytucji widowdańskiej.
Państwo narodowe nie może istnieć bez jedności narodowej. Niestety, elity rządzące Królestwa Serbów, Chorwatów i Słoweńców z różnych powodów nie zdołały znacjonalizować zbiorowej pamięci o przeszłości ani zbudować skutecznej, zinternalizowanej narodowej ideologii. Dlatego też Królestwo rozpoczęło swoje istnienie jako jedyne państwo narodowe pozbawione własnego nacjonalizmu, co oznaczało, że brak mu było siły mobilizującej, która współcześnie okazała się potężniejsza niż geografia czy religia oraz stabilniejsza niż interesy polityczne i gospodarcze. Pod koniec wojny wszyscy obywatele nowo powstałego królestwa popierali Jugosławię, lecz nowe państwo narodowe nie zdołało stworzyć narodu jugosłowiańskiego. Wydaje się, że aż do chwili ogłoszenia dyktatury przez króla Aleksandra wszelkie wysiłki podejmowane przez państwo – nawet przemoc w majestacie prawa – koncentrowały się na tworzeniu narodu serbskiego.

Słowa klucze: Królestwo Serbów, Chorwatów i Słoweńców, nacjonalizm, polityka pamięci, Dzień Zjednoczenia, konstytucja widowdańska

Tłumaczenie: Klaudyna Michałowicz

The societal significance of holidays lies in the preservation of collective memory. Annually repeating shared rituals reinforces the memory of those events and personalities expected to be familiar to all the members of the community; pushing in effect all others into the shadow of collective forgetting. What's more, the emotionally charged commemorations remind members of the community about their social ties and shared history, reinforcing their national identity (Elgenius 2011: 18). The same occurred in the newly-formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, where the key players exploited national ceremony to implement their (re)interpretations of the past (as the dark age of national dispersion and slavery to foreign masters) and their new agenda for the future (see e.g. Leskovec 1918: 1–2). Foreign enemies, it was stated, had once laboured to prevent the unification of the nation's limbs, but those times were finally overcome, and in the new reality the nation has come together to form a "great, healthy and sturdy national body" (Bošnjak 1918: 6).

Every nation knows those paramount days, landmarks in its history that "illuminate the past and present," wrote the author of the festival-day introduction in the magazine

"Triglav" (Anon. 1933: 1). "Those days are the bright beacons of past ages, monuments to the nation's great advancements and boundary stones along its road leading into the future." According to "Triglav's" editorial, the history of the Yugoslav nation was especially well represented by two such holidays: *Vidovdan* (St. Vitus Day) and 1 December (Unity Day). If the former, a national and religious holiday, represented the triumph of spirit over matter, idea over force, the latter stood as the marker of the conclusion of a great historical struggle, a development "whose course was preordained, immutably, in the bitter infancy of our nation." Thus, 1 December was the "practical realisation of the holy spirit of *Vidovdan*" (Anon. 1933: 1).

Passionate enthusiasm accompanying the unification–at last!–of the nation of three names and all its members into one great circle bound by a single shared ideal, as well as the ensuing Babylonian confusion of languages, caused many vital issues to remain obscured, left lingering in the sphere of the unaddressed. Among other major issues, the independent and sovereign Kingdom of Montenegro disappeared off the map in the process (Laffan 1929: 15).On the calendar of the unified state of the nation of three names, 1 December went down as the Great Sunday, a day dedicated to the memory of the people's "rise and unification" (Anon. 1919c: 1), a "decisive milestone" (Anon. 1920: 1) which "divided the life of our nation in two great parts, a past age of a thousand-year servitude, and a future glorious age of independent, united history" (Dimnik 1924: 101). The holiday of national liberation and unification brought members of the nation of three names together, spreading encouragement for work to the benefit of the nation, promoting the memory of a shared historical struggle and all the blood spilled throughout the past by South Slavs for their liberation and unity. The daily newspaper "Slovenec" poetically enthused, the morning before the unification's first celebration, how that fortunate day allowed "three tribes of kinsmen, the Slovene, the Serb and the Croat, for centuries held apart by foreign powers, to come together, at long last, after an age of yearning" (Anon. 1918c: 1). With the solemn proclamation of unification, what came to fruition were "the deepest wishes of the best men of our nation of three names, dreams held by our ancestors for centuries upon centuries while suffering under foreign bondage" (Anon. 1919c: 1). For most of the contemporaries, these holidays were days when "hearts of Yugoslavians were beating joyfully in unison" and "brother embraced brother" (–ž. 1933: 1), while "the song of freedom rang from Triglav to Kaimaktsalan" (Anon. 1939: 1).

Ever since its inception, festive speakers and authors of commemorative articles aggrandised the memory of the day of the nation of three names' unification to a level of state religion. With all the pomp in the air, the bishops of Yugoslavia, naturally, could not remain silent. At their session, they proclaimed the historical day as the work of divine

providence, which on 1 December 1918 apparently decided it was finally time for the "South Slavic nation of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs," after long years of suffering "to emerge into the light of divine blessing" (Jugoslovanski škofi 1919: 1).

In addition to their formalised appearance, the celebrations of Unification Day also shared a formalised content, aimed at the mobilisation of nationalist sentiment in the service of common political goals. Authors of festive editorials in the daily press and speakers at special occasions would stress, all the way up until the start of the Second World War, the great significance of this day in the history of the nation of three names, enumerating successful achievements following the unification and ever advising to keep 1 December in mind, encouraging citizens to "work for the benefit of the nation and state" and help develop and raise "the people, so we can build a strong and unbreakable Yugoslavia" (Anon. 1939: 1).

"Slovene, Serb, Croat, forever one another's brother!"

The array of national holidays, especially National Day, represents the official self-image of the state as propagated by the ruling elites and imprinted into the citizens. Special days on the calendar are marked with special importance for the formation of a national community, as breakpoints in the history of a nation. National holidays, thus, are days when citizens celebrate "who they are" and "how they came to be." As such, they are powerful tools for the reinforcement of national identity.

The National Council in Zagreb on 3 December 1918 decided to proclaim 1 December a national holiday "in memory and celebration of the unification of all the South Slavic people"; ordering that for the running year, "due to traffic complications," festivities be held on Saturday and Sunday, 14 and 15 December. On Saturday, celebrations were organised in schools, where teachers prepared lectures on the "glory and fortune of national unification into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes." In the evening, military bands made celebration rounds around the cities. On Sunday, the historical event was then celebrated in churches, with prayers, hymns and public readings of the address of the National Council and the official reply of Prince-Regent Alexander. Government representatives as well as schoolchildren were present at the religious festivities, with the military conducting parades as bells were ringing, firing 101 salvoes at various seats of office. It was decreed for Serbian, Slovene and Croatian flags to be hung in all public places, and citizens were encouraged to do so at their homes as well. The chair of the National Council recommended regional authorities to dispatch circular letters by telegraph, with a brief biography of the Karađorđević dynasty and its merit for the unification

of the nation, as well as the roles played by the most active and deserving Yugoslav patriots in the "birth of our nation" (Predsedniško Narodnega veča 1918: 1).

One year later, a decree from the Minister of Internal Affairs on 15 November 1919 ordered that 1 December shall be celebrated as the Unification Day of the Nation of Three Names (Anon. 1919d: 444). Classes were dismissed on the day, so that pupils and teachers could attend a special group mass. Following worship, celebrations were held in school gyms, where children were explained, together or class-by-class based on age as appropriate, the meaning of the festivities, being enthusiastically narrated the background of the "historical event of the nation of three names' unification." Authorities issued another recommendation that youth be taught about the history of the Karađorđević lineage and encouraged to take pride in it (Anon. 1918i: 241; Dimnik 1924: 124–25).

In 1929, King Alexander signed and put into force the Act on National Holidays for Government Officials. Within, there were only two holidays: the birthday of His Royal Majesty and the Unification Day; on *Vidovdan* churches would additionally hold the same service as normally reserved for commemorating fallen soldiers. On these two days, state flags were mandated on official buildings, on all public and self-governance as well as judicial offices, town halls and squares (Anon. 1929: 2).

Since the very beginning, thus, Unification Day was conceived as a mnemonic tool for the shaping and reinforcement of the sentiment of belonging to the new national community, of loyalty to the ruling dynasty. Commemorative rituals organised on the occasion were meant to elevate the public consciousness of a new national community of brothers, one that ought to be identified with "as One" and internalised, presented as a legitimate and permanent realisation of the nation's historical dream, albeit in a nation of three names under the leadership of the Karađorđević dynasty. 1 December celebrations thus enforced a particular ideology and interpretation of the past, according to which on that historical day of freedom, the long lost "three brotherly tribes, Slovene, Serb and Croat, who had for so long been divided and searching for one another, finally came together" (Anon. 1918c: 1).

The motifs of "suffering a thousand years of servitude" and "the joys of the birth of the nation of three names" were popular subjects of holiday speakers and contributors of various newspaper articles. The central message of the festive remembrance of the day of unification was that "the kingdom of the nation with three names ranks among the most contemporary of states, as it is based on the sovereignty of the nation as opposed to the Austrian Empire, where only the will of the emperor and aristocracy mattered whereas the people were forced into silent submission" (Anon. 1921a: 1). Exaggeration in the description of the faults and injustices of the Dual Monarchy served as a mirror

in which the contemporaries of the revolutionary age could see themselves as the fortunate citizens of a new, righteous state. The Slovene press, particularly during the initial years of the new nation-state's existence, in its holiday editorials diligently informed the readership how "small, rustic Serbia" was in all aspects more just and humane as the decrepit old Austria-Hungary. Audience of the journal "Domovina", for example, was able to read in the holiday issue of 1918 how the "dead state by the Danube" was a bastion for all kinds of aristocrats, whereas in Serbia, "the honest peasant man is heard loud and clear, represented by elected leaders and learned men whose own fathers once made soft-soled shoes and ploughed the fertile ground." If the Dual Monarchy was supposedly raising such officials and rulers that shamed the peasant and mistreated him, Serbia allowed men of base birth to reach the highest offices "as surely as they can set foot in their own house," and treated them with due respect by the authorities, both high and low. Likewise, in the schools of Austria-Hungary, fame belonged only to German and Hungarian heroes, the history of the Slavic people never presented with pride, quite often even ridiculed by German teachers. Serbia, to the contrary, presented its splendid history appropriately, so that every Serbian boy could be proud of his people and its name. Furthermore, everyone was not equal before the law in Austria-Hungary, there being twice two sets of laws, one for the poor and the worker as opposed to the rich and the gentry, another for the Germans and Hungarians as opposed to the second-rate Slavic peoples. Again, little Serbia was here extolled as indifferent to birth, wealth, position... Its law treated everyone equally, it was said, and since Serbian laws protected the peasant, the Serbian peasant likewise defended his homeland like a lion. Naturally, the staggering discrepancies between the maligned image of the fallen Austria-Hungary and the brilliant romanticising of "small Serbia" could have only a single conclusion: "Yugoslavia will be a just country, a country of our own laws, laws that we uphold ourselves" (Anon. 1918e: 4).

The expected justice of the new state, built on solid national foundations, was the core source of its legitimacy. The most widely read Ljubljana daily, in its editorial at the fifth anniversary of the unification, established that no one has "as of yet disputed its legality." It then proclaimed that the five-year-past event in Belgrade was "an interminable fact of history," though several Croatian political parties, along with the most populous Slovene one, wished to erase 1 December from history. The editorial of "Jutro" furthermore described the decree of 1 December as a source of "the immeasurable joy of national freedom." The author raised the spirit of unity to a pedestal, frowning in disdain at "those small characters who, for one selfish reason or another, turn their wrath against 1 December 1918, which so sensibly underscores the Yugoslav constitution." To these "blinded kinsmen," which were "stumbling into the predicament of statist-legalist

autonomism," it urged they should abandon the ignorant arrogance of the clergy "which should not aspire to rule over another, but instead be one among equals, with equal influence," since: "The banners of Roman clericalism must burn if Slovenes are to play a constructive role in the state, fulfilling their grateful mission within the Yugoslav spirit" (Anon. 1923d: 1).

The will of King Svatopluk

When the London-based Yugoslav Committee began its work in 1915, its members appeared like madmen asking for the moon (Laffan 1929: 12). And yet, the Great War demolished the ancient empires controlling Central and Eastern Europe and ushered in an age of national self-determination. Contemporaries then believed that the birth of nation-states, including the common state of the South Slavs, was the single good borne out of the atrocities of the war (see e.g. Hauptmann 1938: 532). However, the nation-state of the South Slavs was not only a child of fervent nationalism, but also the step-child of the victorious Entente, which calculatingly placed in its cradle the Herculean task of holding back German imperialism in its potential renewed march eastward (see e.g. Vošnjak 1917; Kerner 1918: 95).

In order for the young Kingdom of national trinity to possess sufficient strength for such colossal duty, it was announced as "a historical miracle." The reasoning was that for a nation which in the 7th century settled in the Balkans, finding a new home there, then spent twelve centuries divided by geography, politics, faith, language, economy and social order, once again somehow finding unity and finally rising to an illustrious demand for political unification was a tremendous historical feat (Kerner 1918: 81–2). "In unity, strength; in division, weakness" was a popular chorus of Slavic nationalism ever since 1848. The secret to its wondrous power, indeed, had been revealed already by Svatopluk, the legendary Slavic king of Great Moravia, who, lying on his deathbed, summoned his sons, passing each one a bundle of twigs to snap in his own two hands if they might. Each son tried, yet none could break the bundle. But as he passed each one a single twig, they could easily break them all one by one. And so, the king advised:

> Behold, my precious sons! None of you possess the might to break these twigs when fast together, yet all of you can easily break them separate, and all, at that; and so it is with the people – as long as they have unity no foe is able to assail them, but should your people become scattered and divided, woe betide you all! You shall diminish, and your enemies shall grow in their might! (Anon. 1848: 53)

Every upheaval in the existing social and political order starts a need for the reinterpretation of the past, as befits the recent social change. Such periods are characterised by

a search for new cultural forms to replace old traditions and legitimise the new social and political order. Political elites like to invoke myths, since these allow them to make sense out of chaotic historical experiences and offer answers to the moral dilemmas of the given circumstances. Myths are employed as instruments in the dissemination of a particular interpretation of the *past* and *present* of a nation, and a particular vision for the *future* (Brunnbauer 2007: 83). Their success is in greatest measure dependent on whether they are able to offer the public a plausible-enough perspective of the past. Accordingly, images of the past that turn out to be most effective are those that can be painted with an aura of traditionalism, of independent history as opposed to a constructed cultural interpretation (Zerubavel 1994: 104–5).

Massive shifts on the European geopolitical map effected a need with the newly formed nations to create new origin myths explaining why the particular nation-state was born, and why the citizens should identify with it as their own. This necessity was especially acute in the South Slavs, who had never enjoyed the privilege of a nation-state before. Many commentators and academics stated the blood relations between Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as the ideological foundation of the South Slavic national community. Journalist and politician Đurdje Jelenić, for example, suggested that "the ancient ancestors of all of today's Yugoslavs" came into their new homeland "from the other side of the Carpathian Mountains" already in the age of the great migration of nations, the volatile era between the fourth and seventh century A.D. "after which the ethnical individuality of all the European nations, in fact, formed" (Jelenić 1923: 1). Ethnologist Jovan Erdeljanović likewise stated that in "ancient times" all the Slavs lived together "as a single nation" in the region north of the Carpathian range, between the great rivers Dnieper to the east and Odra to the west (Erdeljanović 1928: I, 9). This theory was supported by foreign scholars as well, for example historian Robert Joseph Kerner, who wrote that the Yugo-Slavs, when first settling in the western part of the Balkan Peninsula, were "a single people in their language, social custom and ancestry, divided by individual tribes" (Kerner 1918: 82). Politicians were more than happy to support this myth, with King Alexander I moulding it into the fundamental truth of the nation-state of the South Slavs:

> For ages scattered yet not distant, torn apart by the might and trickery of the great empires of Rome and Byzantium, Vienna and Istanbul, but never broken in spirit. Ever long have we faithfully guarded our ancestral heritage, toiling in hardship under various powers for centuries (…) always remembering, always knowing that we were brethren... that we were ONE (Stepanović 1936: 13).

The claimed reason for the South Slavs' initial inability to form their own state in a new homeland was "the meddling and treachery of foreign powers," who, supposedly, divided the South Slavic national body and exploited their lands. Scholars claimed that in spite

of unfavourable geographical and political circumstances, the "Yugoslav people never lost their awareness of belonging to a single people and a single language" (Kranjec 1928: 10). Perseverance in the pursuit of life in a common state was the "unquenchable desire of the whole nation," passing from one generation to another, "as it is clearly proven by the attempts of King Samo and his union of Slavic tribes, of Ljudevit of Pannonia, of King Tvrtko, of Karadjordje." South Slavic unification therefore wasn't "a spontaneous occurrence but the fruit of centuries of labour," lectured the "Učiteljski Tovariš". Indeed, much sacrifice was required and many long centuries for the historical dreams of the nation to finally come true, by the hand of Prince-Regent Alexander who, in 1918, declared the *ujedinjenje* (unification) of the Yugo-Slav people. The historical dream thus grew from "soil drenched in the blood of our martyrs and heroes," and its happy future rested on "the work and earnest contribution of each and every individual, of us all" (–ž 1934: 1).

Accordingly, it was an unconditional duty of "any true Yugoslav," on the one hand, to seek out means and ways to strengthen the unity with word and deed, and, on the other, to resist all things that could destabilise the unity or imperil it. The mission of the school, the church and the home was to sow and nourish in the hearts of youth a love for the king and the common nation. Whosoever spoke out against *ujedinjenje*, attempting to turn Slovene or Croat against Serb was conducting "the fratricidal and, indeed, infernal work of damnation." To all those who objected to the development of a tighter internal unification, the Maribor magazine "Tabor" offered, in warning, the final stanza of the great poet Anton Aškerc's ballad:

> They cast aside the will
> of great King Svatopluk – their kin's,
> their grandsons' servitude
> shall long be penance for this sin! (Anon. 1923c: 3)

God, too, becomes a Yugo-Slav

Celebrating national day is, then, an attempt at permanently impressing into the consciousness of the populace the importance of the nation's myth of foundation. These days symbolise and preserve the memory of the struggle of the forefathers–be it armed, political or religious–and encourage contemplations of the significance of the past in the present (McCrone, McPherson 2009: 215). This was the aim behind the celebration of the Unification Day and other state holidays in the Kingdom of the nation of three names, which served to revive the spirit of the past, real or imaginary, and integrate it with the present.

The Minister of Internal Affairs of the newly established tri-named Kingdom in early December 1919 proclaimed three new state holidays: 1 December as the Day of Unification; the Petrovdan of 12 July as the birthday of King Peter; and the Vidovdan, 28 June, as the Day of Memory on the Fallen for Faith and Homeland. In accordance with the minister's decree, the holidays were free of work and school (Anon. 1919b: 444). Their festive character was marked by mass public gatherings, the waving of national flags, performances of military bands and army parades. With the celebration of the origin myth, of the national heroes and great men and women, of victories and sacrifices, the festive calendar of commemorations and remembrance rituals assumed the guise of a state-civic religion. It served to reinforce patriotic sentiment, loyalty and solidarity, whereas a romanticised presentation of the country's great past "the masses were given a feeling of political participation" (Mosse 1993: 3).

"Politics is the art of unification, from the many it makes one" – theorised Michal Walzer. "The state is invisible; it must be personified before it can be seen, symbolised before it can be loved, imagined before it can be conceived" (Walzer 1967: 194). The holiday of the "political unification of the Slovene nation with the heroic Serbs" (Anon. 1918c: 1) was thus celebrated by Ljubljana in December of 1918 with a festive torchlight procession through the city. Representatives of the local government spoke to assembled crowds and military officers in front of the country seat, while ovations were held for the bishop before the diocese palace. From the town hall, Mayor Tavčar held a speech on behalf of the municipality, with a large painting of King Peter adorning the balcony instead of the discarded Austrian eagle of old (Anon. 1918g: 3).

At the session of the municipal council of the Slovene capital, the mayor said, the assembled "gathered to celebrate the memory of 1 December," the day when the "mighty foundation was set for a strong, stout and stalwart Yugoslavia." With this act, "the dark fog creeping about the land in its birth hour was dispersed," meaning here the circumstances that were already making some worry the nation's future was like those twigs in King Svatopluk's bundle, since dissent and quarrel among the tribes was already emerging. Fortunately, the South Slavs were "infused with the spirit of unification," said Tavčar, "just as it infused the Apennine Peninsula when General Garibaldi vanquished South-Italian separatism" (Anon. 1918f: 3).

The scenography of the festive celebrations was strongly centred on unity and the strength of a common will, which for the first time in twelve centuries allowed the "hitherto divided and disrespected nation" to come together under one shared ideal. Reporters described enthusiasm "unseen in our history, as three brothers scattered across the land under centuries of foreign rule finally embraced one another," while their enemies (Germans,

Hungarians, Turks), "lie defeated in the dirt," alongside their "conniving toadies the Bulgarians," which they called "the Judas of the Slavic people" (Anon. 1918d: 1; 1921b: 1). The liberation and unification of the nation of three names for a while brought widespread joy:

> Let us be joyous, earnestly and proudly: every Yugoslav can today feel self-respect. The Serbs have proven themselves great heroes, and we are honoured to be as one with them: one nation, one king, one country! Let us not be tentative, with resolution and excitement let us raise our tricolour, now identical as the Serbian. What they represent in the south, us Slovenes shall represent in the north, and no enemy will subjugate us henceforth. Croats in the middle, Slovenes on the left flank and Serbs on the right – our mighty new Yugoslav armada, firm as rock, sharp as bone, faithfully guarding its homeland that was secured at such terrible cost. Let us be merry, the Slavic Christmas is near! (Anon. 1918d: 1)

The air of celebration also enveloped smaller cities, with two-day festivities being prepared across many of these in 1918, in order to publicly and festively announce "the dawning of a new age" (Anon. 1921b: 1), into which "Slovenes entered alongside brethren of the same blood and language" (Majcen 1918: 201). The set of the celebrations was the same as in Ljubljana and Maribor. On Sunday, a common mass was held, where the assembled pupils, students and teachers were read the manifesto of the National Council and the reply of Prince-Regent Alexander.

Quite different altogether, of course, was the reaction of the members of the former ruling nations. At the first celebration of Unification Day in Maribor, for example, the town hall wore no flag and was not even lit up. Likewise, the German schools in town did not participate in the holiday. The Trieste journal "Edinost" on 24 December 1918 reprinted an article published in Maribor, where the reporter states the festive celebrations of 14 and 15 December also revealed "who can be counted among us, and who cannot." One of the latter, supposedly, was Bishop Napotnik, for whom it was said that: "His *nomen* indeed became *omen*!" It would appear that the bishop refused to illuminate the diocese or hang up the Kingdom's flag on 15 December, although express instructions to do so were sent out by the National Council (Anon. 1918h: 1).

This was the standard blueprint of the Day of Unification's celebration all the way up to the Second World War. According to commentary from the contemporary Slovene press, 1 December, the "national holiday of the unification of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes" was actually gaining popularity among the townspeople of Ljubljana year after year. Factories, shops, schools and offices paused their work to focus on the celebration (Anon. 1926b: 3).

The first and second Noah's ark

The birth of a single South Slavic nation of three names, "whose parts came together into one body that rose into freedom and independence, in equal stature to the

other nations," brought considerable liberties to the people as well as new responsibilities towards the Yugoslav nation, warned Gustav Omahen. The historical moment of the new nation's emergence made a clean break with the past, offering a brand new reality. The free nation was given reign over its own future, and with it the duty to pass the heritage, strong and successful, to the following generations (Omahen 1919/20: 2). The slave mentality tainting the spirit of the old generations "must make way for the independent Yugoslav mindset," as Omahen stressed at a delegate assembly in Celje, since that was the only road to "harmony of thought and action" (Omahen 1919/20: 3).

Of essential importance to individual and group identity is the experience of same-ness across time and space, reinforced through collective memory. What we forget and what we remember, who is the carrier of action and in whose interest always depend on the historical context. That is why John Gillis says memory has its own politics, as does identity (Gillis 1994: 3). In the new Kingdom of the nation of three names, "public instruction" was an essential instrument of modernisation on the one hand, and national cohesion on the other. Forces of nationalism gladly took up Rousseau's idea about the importance of indoctrinating the nation's youth for its future political struggles (see e.g. Kerner 1918: 87).

The Maribor newspaper "Tabor" published contemplations on the "global flood washing over Europe." It described how its waters carried "the Noah's Ark – the old, antediluvian generation." According to the author's words, the pre-war generations were desperate to get much of their baggage across the historical deluge; precisely all that which had already summoned the wrath of Jehovah! The author saw this Noah's Ark wherever he cast his glance: in politics, in social life, in the economy, in culture compelling him to conclude that the people were not yet ready for the arduous tasks put before them by history. On the waves of the ignorance of the nation of three names' citizens, who were barely familiar with the simplest concepts of civics and the state, the Noah's Ark made it safely into the new age; now, that same Noah who had been slaving before the great flood tried performing his rituals on the banks of the new world, too. Thus, the author believed, the future of Yugoslavia was firmly in the hands of generations born and growing up on the new banks, once the Noah's Ark is left stuck on a mountain ridge, finally shattering. Then, a young, fresh lineage with brand new ambitions can flesh out a new common state and its national organism from the ground up, sweeping aside all the junk brought over by the antediluvians. But since the old world had irrevocably been sunk, hard work is the sole activity what can save the new man on his new shore, "(…) here, alas, Jehovah no longer gives away any miracles" (I– 1921: 1).

The nation-state of three names expected its teachers to work diligently in the service of the spiritual and ideological integration of new generations, so that they would perceive

themselves "as one" with the other representatives of the nation of three names, so that they would be dedicated and loyal, ready and willing to make sacrifices for the common good. This was the underlying purpose of classes, and the school celebrations organised on important dates from the nation's past formed "the fundamental part of that great educational mission, the sole focus of our liberated national schools" (Majcen 1918: 202). The lofty goal could not always be met, of course, especially by those pedagogues who weren't really trying. At the fifth anniversary of the unification, the district school supervisor Makso Hočevar established, at the district teachers' conference, that unification was, generally, only achieved "on the outside." He assessed that it was not yet "proper and lasting," since "spiritual unification" has not yet penetrated the souls of all the citizens from Triglav to Vardar. Such a "conversion," he elaborated, was difficult to achieve in the older generations, since they had "lived out their entire lives in slavery and servitude," and, in his mind, thus, the nation should focus on its youth and acquaint them with the "heroic history of our brothers, the Serbs and Croats, who for centuries upon centuries defended us from the incursions of bloodthirsty Ottoman Turks." "Knowing these great feats of courage," he alleged, would in the youth inspire "an example of true, selfless love for the homeland" (Hočevar 1923: 4).

The politics of the great day of salvation

Calendars, by themselves, do not hold a particular political dimension, but those days marked in red as occasions of national importance are always to some degree politically charged. The aspect is reflected in the choice of the dates themselves, as well as their name and background, which makes them open to political conflict and politicising. In general, any day can be assigned as the holiday that "celebrates the nation." The choice is left to the ruling elites and their motives, and invented traditions in this manner are not always popular with the people (Nyyssönen 2009: 138). David McCrone and Gayle McPherson argue that National Days are key markers of national narratives which employ political actors. That is why such days are the subject of struggles and disagreements, interpretations and reinterpretations, remembering and forgetting. The illumination of one event and the obscuration of another is the result of the engagement of political actors. Superficially enigmatic discussions on which day to appoint as the holiday, and what rituals should be employed to celebrate it, are in fact thinly veiled efforts to place a particular story into the central focus of public attention, thus legitimising the interests of particular groups (see McCrone, McPherson 2009: 215).

In the general confusion at the end of the Great War, it was clear neither when, exactly, old Austria was put in its coffin, nor when the exact birthday of the nation of three

names occurred. The Unification Day, along with the other state holidays, was supposed to contribute to the formation and reinforcement of the narrative image of a community that defines itself as *Us* and feels like *One*. Several dates were in fact considered, and the selection of 1 December served to reinforce a certain narrative, a certain interpretation of the past, a certain ideology. Some believed that the three-named child of the Great War should be celebrated on 11 November, when the treaty that ended the war was concluded; certain veterans and proponents of international brotherhood were vying for this day as a "the holiday of harmony, tolerance and peace between all humanity" (Smolej-Borovec 1935: 2). It was on that day notably, also, that Emperor Karl announced he shall be "ceding his involvement in government out of a boundless love for his nations" (Šarabon 1919: 85).

Others proposed 28 October, since on that day Austria officially confirmed it was accepting President Wilson's views regarding the autonomy of the Czechoslovaks and Yugoslavs. They were thus convinced that "our true national holiday was 28 October" as opposed to 1 December (Anon. 1922c: 1).

Others still, whose numbers increased as the years passed, favoured 29 October. The day after Count Gyula Andrassy, the last minister of the Dual Monarchy, confirmed with his diplomatic note the acceptance of President Wilson's conditions on behalf of Austria-Hungary, masses gathered in Ljubljana to loudly welcome the "great day of salvation." Houses were adorned with flags, now suddenly flying exclusively Yugoslav and Slovene colours, and the atmosphere was bursting with joy and triumph. "Slovenec" enthusiastically chirped of the "army of King Matjaž sleeping under the mountain." On this mountain lay an immense boulder, too heavy even for the titans and giants of national will. The soldiers thus slept, waiting for their great day of salvation. "And now that day has come, with the assistance of the American president, and the nation's enduring faith in freedom burst forth with tremendous force" (Anon. 1918a: 1). Thousands of revellers filled the Kongresni Trg Square, with proverbially not a soul staying home, cheering the fall of old Austria and saluting the birth of young Yugoslavia. The first to speak from the balcony of the country seat, addressing the citizens of "free Yugoslavia" was headmaster Ivan Hribar. After him, Mayor Ivan Tavčar, speaking on behalf of the Ljubljana municipality, offered a picturesque account of the celebration's significance:

> What we ought to remember most fondly on this day is our young, beloved Yugoslavia! Like the goddess of victory, it leapt from the forehead of decaying Austria to stand before us in splendour, fully armed, invincible though it had barely been born! We have claimed our own nation, our own state where the Yugoslav people can be united, bound by ties of blood impervious to infernal forces. An independent, united, democratic Yugoslavia built on foundations of freedom and harmony, rising from solidarity and justice, is here! We bow to it and swear our love and loyalty (Anon. 1918b: 2).

Based on the account of Principal Jakob Dimnik, 29 October 1918 in Ljubljana saw "the most beautiful manifestation the ancient city had ever witnessed" (Dimnik 1924: 93). In his eyes 29 October 1918 and later on 1 December represented the apex of the nation's joy. It was as if "the blindfolds fell from our eyes, the shackles from our wrists, our darkness illuminated, our souls afire with understanding." Slaves no longer, having received the ultimate gift from the merciful and unfathomable grace, a gift they had once known only as myth: Freedom (Dimnik 1924: 93).

Celebration of the Unification Day and reminiscence of the historical journey of delegates of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs to the capital of the Kingdom of Serbia on 1 December 1918 pushed the other relevant dates connected with the remembrance of national formation and statehood into oblivion. Four years after the anniversary of the "liberation of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs from the Austro-Hungarian hegemony," the newspaper "Slovenec" lamented that neither the central government in Belgrade nor the provincial governments in Ljubljana, Zagreb, Sarajevo and Split felt any need to celebrate 29 October. The paper expressed regret over this fact, saying it was unwise statesmanship since "the nations are not so blind as to be ignorant of the reasoning behind this." Due to the government's silence, the author called upon the nation to "quietly and modestly remember that day, which holds an immense importance in our history" (Anon. 1922b: 3).

The political dimension of such "quiet and modest" remembrance of that historical event of 1918 exploded, on its fifth anniversary, with the pamphlet of the Association of Slovene Autonomists. An anonymous university student addressed severe criticism against the Slovene newspapers, "constructed by our official intelligentsia," stating its members preferred to back the celebration "of a day when our nation merely found another master, since the burden of its own freedom, placed on the shoulders of the elites on 29 October 1918, proved too heavy to carry." Yes, "perhaps the common state of the three Slavic nations could be reason for the celebration of Slovenes and all the Slavs," he further extrapolated his disagreement, "if 1 December 1918 wasn't so sickeningly characterised by the manner and background of what had transpired, and the true reasons behind it: an internal immaturity and timidity of three separate nations, and especially among them, the Slovenes" (Visokošolec 1923: 3).

Marching separate, striking as one

In the autonomists' pamphlets, which increasingly drummed up the idea that the Kingdom of the nation of three names was actually just three separate nations, clamouring for autonomy, readers were being urged to remember the "true liberation" with a cup of wine and a loving word. They claimed 29 October 1918 "remains forever recorded as

the greatest day in the history of the Slovene nation, though those sons ashamed of being born from the Slovene mother, of being brought up by the Slovene father, plot day after day to erase all memory of the self-governing days of their own, Slovene nation" (Anon. 1926a: 2).

This anniversary of "national liberation" was brought to attention at its 40th jubilee by the National Committee for Slovenia in Washington. Its president, Miha Krek, and vice-president, Bogumil Vošnjak, wrote that liberty lasted merely twenty-two years before it was "annihilated" by the Second World War. "But as we all know," they reminded the readership, "the regimes and the people who construct them come and go, emerge and disappear, but the nation will outlast all and live on" (Narodni odbor za Slovenijo 1957: 2).

The Gorizia-based "Katoliški glas" used the seventieth anniversary of the Ljubljana event to counter the historian A.J.P. Taylor, who writes that in late October 1918 the Slovenes "went to bed as the subjects of Karl Habsburg and woke up as the subjects of Peter Karadjordjević." The journal defied these claims, stating that "Slovenes gained independence from Austria already on 29 October 1918, whereas they agreed to unite with Serbia more than a month later, on 1 December of that year" (J.K. 1988: 1).

Similar views as were held regarding 29 October among a share of Slovene politicians also found their place on the pages of the Croatian press. Their "Obzor" complained that the post-war state has neglected the importance of 29 October, leading the writer to conclusions of "Belgrade hegemony." The daily "Hrvat", for example, dedicated its entire front page to the ten-year anniversary of 29 October, comparing the position of Croatia as of 1918 (own territory and government, etc.) with that observed ten years later (purportedly chaos; disorder; with the Croat government, army, diplomatic cadre and police force "in the hands of the Serbs" (Newman 2015: 178). Even more radical were the Josip Frank followers (*frankovci*),[1] who chose their own holidays: 29 October, 1 December and 5 December (uprising of soldiers in Zagreb, on the Ban Jelačić Square) as well as All Hallows' Day as dedicated occasions on which a small crowd of supporters gathered in memory of the betrayal and violence suffered by the Croats during the final moments of the Great War, believing that the Croats were, in the events that followed, robbed of their historical rights (Newman 2015: 170).

According to historian Ferdo Čulinović, the ruling circles in Serbia during the war championed a dynastic liberation policy, which revolved significantly around their own interests. They were concerned with the Yugo-Slav national question not because of its national liberation character, which was the interest of those Slavs dispersed across the

[1] Croatian nationalists, members of the Pure Party of Rights.

Habsburg lands, but primarily to serve as a "territorial expansion of their own state" (Čulinović 1962: 25). Such policies were especially supported by Nikola Pašić, then prime minister of the government of the Kingdom of Serbia, and his Radical Party. The "radicals," in contrast to the idea of unification (*ujedinjenje*) as represented by the Yugoslav Committee in London, operated with the idea of annexation (*prisajedinjenje*) of the newly liberated South Slavic lands to the Kingdom of Serbia, as it had been accomplished before in times of Prince Miloš with the annexation of six Ottoman *nahiyas*, in 1878, and also with the annexation of Old Serbia and South Serbia following the Balkan Wars in 1912 (Trumbić 1923: 6–7; Obradović 1928: 186; Meštrović 1955: 422; 1961: 100; Čulinović 1962: 25; see also Banac 1984: 117–19; Czerwiński 2015: 141, 153).

The positions of the Serbian government and the Yugoslav Committee were brought closer with the Corfu Declaration, when on 20 July 1917 the idea of a national consolidation of Yugoslav countries into a common nation-state was first accepted in the form of a state legislation act. But soon after the signing of the declaration, the Pašić government returned to its old "Greater Serbian" outlook. In this they appealed to "pragmatism," as they put it, since the forces of the Entente did not make solid decisions on the fate of Austria-Hungary until the very end of the war. In the given "reality," they argued, the government of the Kingdom of Serbia was considering a plan B, namely the possibility to annex Bosnia-Herzegovina. Whether this plan was a response to the emerging situation or perhaps a reflection of old politics is difficult to ascertain. Be as it may, the assessment that such "fluid" politics were anti-Yugoslav in essence and had a damaging effect on the unification of the nation of three names cannot be disputed (Trumbić 1923: 10–1; Čulinović 1962: 24–5). After the war, the concept of annexation disappeared from the official narrative, but the spirit of ruling politics was nevertheless left tainted with the idea (Trumbić 1923: 7).

Four decades after the Corfu conference, Bogumil Vošnjak, one of the participants and a member of the Yugoslav Committee, still remembered that declaration of 1917 in a positive light, saying: "If Rousseau claimed that the state is a social contract, it is correct to assert this is exactly what happened in our case. There was no invasion, no annexation or arm-twisting forced upon the weaker by the stronger" (Vošnjak 1959: 160). According to Vošnjak's memory, conflicts were at the time not yet expressed or were easily managed, and they only swelled into pernicious political games after the common state's establishment. The leading politicians, those who assumed the responsibility of executing the provisions of the Corfu Declaration following unification into a single kingdom, failed to deliver on their task during the decisive period of the first two years, squandering brotherly unity by emotionally pointing fingers and needlessly rehashing old subjects.

Unification – is it spelled *ujedinjenje, uedinjenje* or *zedinjenje*?

Conflicting views on the unification grew in magnitude. Its fifth anniversary, for example, was in some parts of the Kingdom of three names still celebrated with sparkling festivities while other parts showed cold indifference "in simmering opposition to the Yugoslav statehood, that inner yearning for freedom at the essence of Vidovdan." In Zagreb, reportedly, not a single flag was hung to celebrate the unification. A similar atmosphere apparently enveloped most Bosnian cities, then ruled by the political party of Mehmed Spaho. Slovenia, too, being accused of tendencies "clerical and backward," did not appear in the author's words to show sufficient excitement for the fifth anniversary (Anon. 1923a: 1).

The autonomy-promoting journal "Avtonomist" explained waning Slovene enthusiasm with "our nation's realisation that our brothers," under the guise of lofty unification, liberation and such, had in mind simply "a despicable exploitation of Slovenes, Croats and other second-class citizens." It claimed that Slovenes, in fact, at first sincerely believed in the great Yugoslav idea, ready to place upon its altar "any necessary gift in our power." But as soon as the Belgrade elite "returned from the French Riviera, hopping back into the safety of their saddle, it began to reveal its oathbreaking, insidious and thoroughly materialistic core." Then, they supposedly, no longer saw Yugoslavs from the other side of the Sava river (the so-called *prečani*) as "their freed and united brethren," but as internal competitors that might "in its West European, earnestly democratic mentality" in the new state "oust them from the role of the bigwigs they had ever enjoyed in small Serbia." Since then, it went on, their activities and efforts were aimed at "squeezing the rich and prosperous lands beyond old Serbia to the marrow, enthralling them politically and economically, and lining their gluttonous pockets at the expense of our provinces' labour." "Avtonomist" ascertained that a policy was being conducted of "shameless extraction and looting unrivalled across whole Europe," evident "even to the blind." The author was incensed by the "lying phrases of joyful unification, liberation, the great Yugoslav nation and so on, and so on," for having felt on the Slovenes' own skin that "these empty platitudes merely disguise the predatory instincts of the Belgrade oligarchy," which resulted in the draining and exhaustion of the local agriculture, crafts and industry which were disowned, step by step, of those rights they had won for themselves already in Austria. In short, the article was mighty wroth over the perceived process of thorough "Balkanisation" (Anon. 1923e: 1).

On the Slovene side of the new national building, the first visible cracks appeared with contemplations whether the term *ujedinjenje*, employed officially by the Serbo-Croat-Slovene language to mark the historical event of 1 December 1918 and its political

consequences, was even a proper Slovene word to begin with. From the March Revolution onwards, the Slovene political vocabulary employed the word *zedinjenje*, notably part of the crucial Zedinjena Slovenia programme. Wolf's Dictionary listed four related forms of this term, namely *zedinjenje, zjedinjenje, ujedinjenje* and *uedinjenje*. Pleteršnik translated *zediniti* with *zu einem Einzigen machen*; *concentrieren*; conversely *zjediniti* with *vereinen, vereinigen* (Pleteršnik 1895: 911); and *uediniti* or *ujediniti* with *vereinigen, unificieren* (Pleteršnik 1895: 711, 716).

That said, the specific term *ujedinjenje* appeared to have sounded foreign to many Slovene speakers, whilst their own *zedinjenje* did not appear to precisely capture the meaning of the historical event and its significance. To solve this predicament, some chose to employ the more Slovene-sounding *uedinjenje*. The writers for the daily "Slovenski Narod" employed *uedinjenje* synonymously with *zedinjenje*, in the apparent intention to slide closer to the Yugoslav or more precisely Serbian *ujedinjenje*. In time some people came to conclude that "these words are in fact not identical in meaning, and their very difference of form points to their intrinsic semantic discrepancies." Josip Wilfan, for example, writing in the publication *Plamen* explained his view that "it is apparent that to *zediniti* brings together that which is found to be apart, and to *uedinjati* that which is found to be essentially different," meaning that *zedinjenje* creates singularity through integration and interconnection, and *uedinjenje* accomplishes this through coalescence and assimilation. In the first instance, he argues, the result is a union or an external sameness of form, and in the other unification, or an internal sameness of content. He supported the argument with a popular proverb saying it was prudent to "march separate and strike as one." Passing from being separate to being together was to him thus *zedinjenje* and not *uedinjenje*, and the nation of three names could become *zedinjen* inasmuch Serbia, Montenegro and parts of the former Dual Monarchy connected among each other and formed unanimous and mutually beneficial ties, and it became *uedinjen* inasmuch these became equal and balanced in representation in various fundamental matters of state, legislation, governance and jurisprudence; a range of more or less important details of the state apparatus and its operation (Wilfan 1921: 5).

In practice, usage varied between *ujedinjenje, uedinjenje* and *zedinjenje*. In a single issue of the same daily newspaper, for example, it was possible to find all three forms. Upon the holiday of 1 December, the daily "Jutro" in its editorial wrote of *ujedinjenje* and King Ujedinitelj (Anon. 1934b: 1), then on the third page of *uedinjenje* and King Uedinitelj (Anon. 1934c: 3), and then on the fifth reported that teachers from the Drava Banate will bow to the grave of the Uedinitelj and bring with them 180,000 student signatures and a commemoration note for the knightly King Zedinitelj (Anon. 1934d: 5).

Two days following the assassination in Marseilles on 9 October 1934, the senate and the National Assembly of Yugoslavia issued a decree that "His Royal Highness King Alexander shall officially be named the Knightly King Alexander I the Unifier." The Serbo-Croat title *Ujedinitelj* was by the Slovene press initially Slovenised into *Zedinitelj,* and then again appeared in several versions. Those who employed the title of *Uedinitelj* in Slovene letters were criticised, in the newspaper "Slovenec", by Aristides arguing that the Slovene language and ear were not familiar with the sound [*ue*], and chided those who borrowed the *Uedinitelj* that such a construct was "equally separatist in character, and besides un-Slovene in etymology." It lectured the Slovenes to either copy the Serbo-Croat *ujedinjenje* verbatim or preferably use their own *zedinjenje* wherein, furthermore, the prefix (*z-*) denotes as usually in the Slovene grammar a verb in nature constructive (as in the Slovene *zbrati, spisati, zgnati, zvezati, sešiti*), whereas the prefix (*u-*) denotes, to the contrary, a destructive verb (as in the Slovene *ušteti se* ("fool oneself"), *urezati se* ("make a mistake") as opposed to the active *vrezati* ("carve"), and similarly *ugnati* as opposed to *vgnati* and so forth). He further gave supportive examples saying the Serbo-Croat *ugovor* means "contract," whereas in Slovene the exact same spelling means the opposite: "protest." On these assertions, he rejected the "harmful introduction of *uedinjenje*" by arguing that those who meant to find such middle ground instead *urezali* ("make a mistake") and *ušteli* ("fooled") themselves: in the Slovene language, he argued, *uediniti* "might even be argued to signify dis-uniting" (Aristides 1934: 4). Aristides' dubious manoeuvring with the semantic and linguistic deeper meanings of the late king's official title was, of course, motivated sooner by political rather than linguistic interests. If it were not, he might have at least quoted some contemporary dictionaries.

Quick to ignite, quicker to burn down

When the tempest of war, which had been ravaging the world for four years, awakened from its slumber the nation of three names, that nation voiced a unanimous demand for statehood, sovereignty and self-determination, its own roof overhead, its own Yugoslavia. In the birth of their own nation-state, proponents saw the realisation of the people's greatest and most noble wishes; indeed, celebrations of its birthday ran across a major part of the Kingdom with uncorrupted joy. People were delighted by their new statehood, like a child is with an unexpected toy. In the enthusiasm of those gilded days not many believed the nations would ever again be eager to replace the Yugoslav tricolour for another, but mostly expected a general order and peace to arise from the excitement in some few months, so that suddenly all would be well and good. Forgotten were pragmatic issues concerning the ability of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs to coexist under common rule,

nations that had been separated by a millennium of history, divided in their religion, for centuries left without much contact or trade, even made to fight against one another (Šuklje 1918: 1). A leap of faith was simply committed that a New Order – the final enthronement of the idea of a Slavic nation-state – would in the Central European space usher in a Golden Age of freedom, progress and mutual tolerance (cf. Birkhill 1923: ix).

The air of cheerful expectation was too intoxicating for many to consider the actual difficulties of whipping even a small economy into shape, let alone a whole new heterogeneous state (Šarabon 1919: 87). Sooner or later, though, the feast was bound to be over, the work bound to start, and that on the ruins left behind by the Great War. The people were faced with the difficult mission of building a new and functional state apparatus. Certainly, this was not a task of frivolous merrymaking, such as the happy days of the national jollification. Once it was time to roll up the sleeves, the realisation of centuries-old dreams proved to be a task more arduous and lengthy than foreseen by even the most modest of expectations. Workers were insufficient, especially those skilled and dedicated; in fact, there were quite many of those who preferred to idly stand by or even make hassle. No wonder, then, that many motivated individuals became disillusioned or apathetic when they saw their toil was not producing much immediate result (Anon. 1921b: 1). Some were watching in horror as the initial fair weather of Yugoslavia became "detestable"[2] (Šarabon 1919: 91). The further the state moved from 1 December 1918, the stronger grew the centrifugal forces plotting to dissolve the act of unification (Tomić 1921: 3).

During the Great War, the idea of national unity was flourishing among the Slovenes, a belief that "the bonds they shared with Croats and Serbs were not just those of tribal kinship and ancestral language, but also the inescapable commandment of history, a common fate and, on the grounds of these undeniable facts, the emerging elementary solidarity of the national sentiment." When the collapse of the Dual Monarchy offered the chance to "decide for themselves," the Slovenes and Croats "met the victorious Serbian army halfway, embracing it as the national armada of a new common state." With this deed, the Yugoslav nation entered history as the ultimate manifestation of the national idea – statehood. In the victorious moments following the disintegration of the ancient Austrian Empire and the end of the Great War, people were convinced that the state, if built upon the healthy foundations of nationalism, would surely be permanent and lasting (Anon. 1922a: 1).

The Vienna "Reichspost" on 6 March 1919 presented an editorial titled "The Future of Yugoslavia," signed by "a German from Bosnia." The article's author was hinting at the

[2] "I am not, here, speaking out against the state as such," suggests the article, "but that old Serbian system of scheming, conniving and chasing after ministerial seats has infected the new state and, alas, consumed its vital core" (Šarabon 1919: 91).

possibility that the Slovene and Croat parts of the united South Slavic kingdom will, once they awaken from their "chauvinist-nationalist dreams into matter-of-fact reality," change their minds and once again seek a connection with the West and with German culture (Deutsche aus Bosnien 1919: 2). The daily "Slovenec" made extensive report of that "blasphemous" article, ridiculing the author for wearing "German-tinted glasses" and wrapping up by jabbing: "Ignorant kraut, you couldn't be more wrong!" (Anon. 1919a: 5).

At the celebration of the fifth anniversary of national unification, though, "Jutro" published thoughts on the superficial and shallow nature of the Yugoslav movement of 1917 and 1918. The newspaper described it as a rudimentary current, likening it to straw which kindles quickly and burns down even quicker. It claimed the idea was indeed close to Slovenes and littoral Croats, but that the expatriate Serbs were in their mind fighting only for Greater Serbia. Thus, the Slovenes and Croats would have had to show great patriotism, love and effort in all spheres of spiritual life, so as to animate the Serbian part of the nation for the cause of "Yugo-Slavism, the superstructure of our pre-war national mentalities, as well as for equality and harmony among the three tribes." Instead, incompetence and immaturity, as well as the "yet unsubdued beast of Austrian influence" appeared to have, in Croats and Slovenes, torn down the "ideal concept of Yugoslavia" before it had even begun to emerge into reality. Instead of a proper Yugoslavia, in the end, what they got was Greater Serbia, "for which Radić and Dr. Korošec are most heavily to blame" (Anon. 1923b: 1).

In 1923, especially in Croatia, several sides already publically expressed doubt over the very legitimacy of the 1 December event. The National Council in Zagreb, went the argument, was merely a collection of representatives of various political parties. Among them were some former members of parliament, true, but their mandates have already expired. In addition, there were also many agents of various parties that were not elected representatives of the people at all. From this it could be concluded that the unification was not a direct act of the will of the people, but the intervention of a group of individuals who were not democratically authorised to accept such profoundly far-reaching decisions. The state structure of the nation of three names was thus being "constructed by its fathers starting with the roof, without the solid foundations of the people's unanimous accord." Those decisive steps were seen "merely as representations of the nebulous and hopeful wishes of the national intelligentsia, and not the actual inertia of history, which is the reason for the crumbling condition of the national structure already five years after its inception" (Anon. 1923e: 1).

In 1924, the "Slovenski Narod" reported that Unification Day was being celebrated festively in Belgrade. The same was true in Sarajevo, Skopje and Dubrovnik, where the

national day was honoured by the unveiling of a monument to King Peter the Liberator. In Zagreb, the picture was altogether different. There, the national day was celebrated exclusively by "official channels, whereas the townspeople, thoroughly pervaded by a republican spirit, were entirely apathetic towards it." Flags were only displayed on public and official buildings, the street of Zagreb looked like any other day and were rather empty at that. In the garden in front of the university, there was even a protest gathering. As the army marched past, republicans and communists began shouting: "Long live the republic! Down with the army!" Across, nationalist students were, to the contrary, cheering and yelling "Long live the king! Long live the army!" (Anon. 1924: 1).

Disagreements escalated from one anniversary to another, and in Zagreb, the 10th anniversary of the unification was unambiguously used to express public dissatisfaction with the position of Croatia in the common state and opposition to Belgrade. Ante Pavelić at that occasion even described 1 December 1918 as "the darkest day in Croatian history" (Newman 2015: 178). Official celebrations in the Zagreb cathedral were spoiled by unknown vandals who draped the church in three massive black flags. These displayed, in white paint, on the central the image of the Croatian coat of arms, on the left the date "1 December 1918" and on the right the date "20 June 1928"[3] (Anon. 1928a: 1; 1928b: 4). Black flags were also displayed on the windows of the editorial of the newspaper "Hrvatski List" and several other buildings around the city, especially in the Vlaška Ulica street (Anon. 1928b: 4).

Four people were killed in violent clashes between protestors and the police, which the contemporary press blamed on Croatian republicans and communists. The Belgrade government was consternated by the assaults on the honour and reputation of the state. Calls were being made "to use any and all available means to completely shut down future demonstrations" (Anon. 1928e: 1). The Croatian newspapers "Riječ" and "Narodni Val" shifted blame for the holiday demonstrations onto the army. They reported that soldiers carrying torches through Zagreb streets were "provoking the population," since torchlight processions were to be conducted on the evening before the holiday only, as is customary all over the world[4] (Anon. 1928c: 1). The Peasant-Democrat Coalition expressed solidarity with the Zagreb demonstrators, which contributed to the triumph of extremists in Zagreb. The consequence of this was a reciprocal strengthening of the Belgrade extremists, who answered the hardline uncompromising of Zagreb in kind, expressing extreme disdain. The statements of the leaders of the Peasant-Democrat Coalition saying they do not recognise the validity of anything "smelling of Belgrade" were

[3] On 20 June 1928, Montenegrin Puniša Račić, a member of the Radical Party, shot and mortally wounded Stjepan Radić during a session of the National Assembly.

[4] "Which is not entirely true" chimed in the editor of "Slovenec" (Anon. 1928b: 1).

answered by Belgrade extremists saying that "such recognition will simply be forced upon the coalition" (Anon. 1928d: 1; 1928e: 1). Ten years after the formation of the Kingdom of the nation of three names, the vessel of national unity was already leaking.

Attempts by King Alexander to institute dictatorship on 6 January 1929 and enforce somehow the factual "unity of South Slavs, Serbs, Croats and Slovenes into a singular national-political whole and state" (Anon. 1934a: 1; see also Grisogono 1938: 94) arrived, much like Prince Marko to the Battle of Kosovo – too late. Ultimately, national-political unity was irrevocably buried by the shots fired in Marseilles on 9 October 1934.

A state without its own nationalism

In their victorious conviction that it was precisely the excellence of the social order of the pre-war Kingdom of Serbia which contributed decisively to the Serbian army's victory on the field of battle (and the resulting formation of a common state), the leading Serbian politicians with Nikola Pašić at the helm were not willing to compromise on a two-thirds majority in the adoption of the Vidovdan Constitution. The ratification of the Constitution with a simple (Serbian) majority shaped an image of Serbia and the Serbian nation as the carrier of the statehood idea of the three-named-nation and its unification. A unitarist Constitution was presented as ensuring the stability of the state, but in reality simply allowed manoeuvring room for Serbian political supremacy, which had a damaging effect on the internal cohesion of the state. The outvoted (Croat and Slovene) parties then, increasingly, with every new election stressed an orientation "against the Serbs and hegemonic Serbia!" (Stanojević 1920: 1; see also Birkhill 1923: 113). Their programmes drew from theories stating that Slovenes were a nation all of its own, as well as the Croats, and the Serbs a third one. Naturally, this meant that there was no room for Bosniaks, Macedonians and Montenegrins, who were all considered Serbs, and it was a negation of the Yugoslav idea in its core (Anon. 1922a: 1). Abroad, several years after the unification, British diplomacy noted the gradual "Balkanisation" of the Kingdom of SCS's people (Evans 2008: 217).

The purpose of the Unification Day was the staging of national unity and group expression of will to belong to a firm and lasting community, so that the death of past martyrs who gave their lives for Vidovdan ideals could be made sense of. All this, supposedly, served to strengthen the foundations of the nation-state of three names. Therefore, discussing the many linguistic, historical, cultural, legal, ethnic and other practical issues did not serve the overarching goal but, to the contrary, created spreading cracks in the concrete. The stubborn and frustrating debates[5] and negotiations among the leading

[5] Prvislav Grisogono in this context even uses the term "discutomania" (Grisogono 1938: 76).

representatives of the nation of three names made many people feel like the state, which was conceived in the Rousseauesque spirit of the social contract, lacked that true internal cohesion that only comes from factual unity.

Without national unity, a nation-state simply cannot exist. This was also well known by the opponents of the tri-name Kingdom, internal as well as external, who did their best to erode its foundations. In 1918, many believed such sabotage could only fail, since the foundations appeared solid, bound together by blood and tears (Bošnjak 1918: 5–6). Regretfully though, the ruling elites, for various reasons, failed to nationalise the collective memory of the past and construct an efficient, internalised nationalist ideology. The Kingdom of the nation of three names entered history as the single nation-state without its own nationalism, meaning it was missing the greatest mobilisation force, which in the modern day proved itself stronger than geography and religion, more stable than political and economic interests. Even though at the end of the war, the citizens of the newly born kingdom were all rooting for Yugoslavia, the new nation-state failed to create *Yugoslavians* as a people. It would seem that, up until the king's declaration of dictatorship, it had channelled its powers, even violence, mostly into the creation of the Serbs (see e.g. Jezernik 2011: 214).

Stressing the cultural differences between Serbs, supposedly belonging to the East, and Croats and Slovenes, supposedly part of the West- and Central European cultural orbit (Birkhill 1923: 110), based on the rationale that in the nation-state of three names, the Slovenes and Croats were being "systematically Balkanised" (Anon. 1923e: 1), became a self-fulfilling prophecy regardless that the concrete cultural differences between the Serbian, Croatian and Slovene peasant masses were relatively fictitious and non-essential (see e.g. Tomić 1921: 253–54; Birkhill 1923: 112). After centuries of struggling for unity and two years of communal life, the orchestrators of the nation-state without its own nationalism managed, by stirring up needless political storms so they could fish in muddy waters, to open wide the gates for particular nationalisms. The spirit of national unity, supposed to express and maintain its immortality also through various state holidays, withered as the procedures shaping the Vidovdan Constitution and the ensuing election battles ran their course – despite exhortations to the contrary. Day after day, the story of the wondrous power of the Yugoslav national idea appeared less and less like *God, too, becomes a Yugoslav*, and increasingly more like *The Tale of the Three Quarrelsome Brothers.*

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