

Yugoslavia

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Summary

The idea for the unification of the Southern Slavs emerged in the 19th century and the strength of its appeal varied over the course of its development. During the First World War, unification became the main war aim of the government of the Kingdom of Serbia as well as the Yugoslav Committee. In different ways, these two groups advocated for Yugoslav unification, resulting in the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes at the end of the war.

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Introduction

The origins of Yugoslavism, or the idea of the cultural and political unification of the Southern Slavs ("jug", i.e. *Yug* means "south") can be traced back to the 1830s and the emergence of the Illyrian movement. At that time, a group of Croatian intellectuals, in order to resist the Magyarisation and Germanisation carried out by the Habsburg Monarchy, developed a program which aimed, on the one hand, to unify Croats and, on the other hand, to gather Southern Slavs into a single cultural and ethnic entity.

During the 19th century, Southern Slavs lived in the large, multinational [Habsburg](#) and [Ottoman](#) empires as well as in [Serbia](#) and [Montenegro](#), which had emerged as small, independent nation-states by 1878. Croats envisioned their unification either within the Habsburg Monarchy as the Triune Croatian Kingdom or within the framework of an independent Southern Slav state; the Slovenes took a similar position. Serbia, on the other

hand, initially sought to unite all Serbs. However, its intellectuals were increasingly also pro-Yugoslav and in the early stages of the First World War Yugoslavism became the official program of the Serbian government, which worked together with the exiled Habsburg Croat, Serb and Slovene politicians and intellectuals gathered around the Yugoslav Committee formed in [Italy](#) and based in London.

Early ideas about the Unification of Southern Slavs

The Illyrian movement was one of earliest strands of Southern Slav unification. The name stemmed from the belief that Southern Slavs were the successors of the Illyrians and from the name, which had been given to the territory during [Napoleon I, Emperor of the French's \(1769-1821\)](#) brief occupation (the "Illyrian provinces," 1809-1813). The Illyrian movement's main thesis was that Southern Slavs, with different dialects, used the same language that they belonged to the same or similar people, giving them the right to unification. The founder of this movement [Ljudevit Gaj \(1808-1872\)](#) held the then-valid belief that language is the main characteristic of a nation. The Illyrians managed to introduce a standardized common language in the territory of Croatia by adopting the *shtokavian* dialect spoken by the majority of Croats and Serbs within the Habsburg Monarchy and also by the population of Bosnia, Herzegovina and Serbia.

At this time, members of the elite in these territories had developed a sense of national self-awareness. Although the entire Southern Slavic space was rural, with a majority illiterate population and an underdeveloped economy, educated Serbs, Croats and Slovenes attempted to standardize their languages in order to create the means of communication within their ethnic group. The Slovenian language in the Slovenian parts of the Habsburg Monarchy was threatened by the compulsory use of German and Italian. Thus, the main goal of Slovenian revivalists was to preserve the folk language, to adopt it as a literary one and to introduce it into schools. Among Serbs, the initial core of [nationalists](#) was composed of Serbs from the Habsburg Monarchy inspired by the Enlightenment. In later years, [Vuk Stefanović Karadžić \(1787-1864\)](#) expanded the idea of language as the main characteristic of a nation through his linguistic research. The agreement that the language is the foundation of mutual understanding was the first concrete agreement of Croats, Slovenes and Serbs, who in 1850 in Vienna signed the agreement to adopt a common Serbo-Croatian language.¹

In Serbia, the process of creation of the nation unfolded in parallel with the creation of the state, beginning with the First Serbian Uprising (1804). This was a simultaneous national and social emancipation movement directed at strengthening and expanding the state and at liberation and unification with compatriots within the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires. Although the leaders of the Illyrians had contacts with some prominent Serbian intellectuals,

this movement did not have a large influence in Serbia. "In Belgrade there were little need for the Illyrian-Yugoslav vision, and a reluctance to give up a name upheld by Serbia's raising statehood."² Illyrism, like the Slovenian and Serbian national movements, was undoubtedly influenced by [Panslavism](#). [František Zach \(1807-1892\)](#) created the Plan of Slavic Policy accepted by Serbian politician [Ilija Garašanin \(1812-1874\)](#). The document known as Načertanije (1844), published only in 1906, became the platform of Serbian interior and foreign policy because it envisaged the liberation and unification of Serbs and other Southern Slavs with Serbia in the territories of Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, Srem, Bačka, Banat and northern [Albania](#). There are still disputes about this text as to whether it was a program for a Greater Serbia or a Yugoslavia.

A few decades later, Serbia saw that the solution of the Serbian national issue was only possible through a general liberation of Balkan peoples. Prince [Mihailo Obrenović \(1823-1868\)](#) in cooperation with some Croats and Bosnians prepared a general uprising and concluded the Balkan Alliance, first with Montenegro and then with Bulgarian emigrants in Bucharest. With the same goal an agreement was made with [Greece](#) in 1867, but Obrenović's assassination in 1868 halted the agreements. Obrenović's followers believed that the future state should be a federation; this same idea was followed by the organization of the United Serbian Youth, modelled on [Giuseppe Mazzini's \(1805-1972\)](#) Young Italy (*La giovine Italia*).

Triune Croatian Kingdom

During the revolution of 1848/49 Slovenes formulated the program of United Slovenes, the Serbs in Hungary got the autonomous province of Vojvodina, and the Croats requested the unification of all Croats, an independent Croatian government and federalization of the Habsburg Monarchy. Two decades later, with the Compromise (*Ausgleich*) between Austria and Hungary in 1867 and the Croatian-Hungarian Settlement (*Nagodba*) the next year, it became clear that Croats would not manage to become a constituent unit within the Habsburg Monarchy. The Kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia became part of Hungary, while Dalmatia and Istria remained part of the Habsburg monarchy. Hungary recognized Croatia as a state entity which had its own parliament (the *Sabor*), but its sovereignty was limited by Hungarian hegemony. The partition of the Croatian national body became the basis of a program to unite all Croats and the claim that these three historical regions (as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina) become the Triune Kingdom, which would be the third constituent part of the Habsburg confederacy. This would entail a reorganization of the Monarchy itself in which all Southern Slavs would exist as one entity.

In these circumstances, the 1860s saw the renewal of the idea of connecting the Southern Slavic peoples, the main advocates of which were Croats: the bishop [Josip Juraj Strossmayer](#)

([1815-1905](#)) and the historian [Franjo Rački \(1828-1894\)](#). Their attitude was reinforced by scientific evidence that Croats and Serbs are one people with two names and the postulate that cultural connection is a prerequisite for political unification. Strossmayer and Rački deserve most of the credit for the establishment of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts in 1866 (known as the Croatian Academy since 1991), the first president of which was Rački himself. On the other side of the debate, [Ante Starčević's \(1823-1896\)](#) Party of Rights was strongly opposed to every form of cooperation with Serbs and advocated for a pure Croatian state within the Habsburg Monarchy. Serbs within the Habsburg Monarchy reacted by creating Serbian national parties in Dalmatia, Srem and Vojvodina.

Both ideas on how to unite the Southern Slavs became part of political life in Croatia at the end of century. The concept of [trialism](#) was strengthened when Bosnia and Herzegovina were annexed as all Croats found themselves in the same Habsburg state. At the time, trialism had more supporters than Yugoslavism and was also supported by some at the Vienna Court, including [Franz Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria-Este \(1863-1914\)](#).³

On the Eve of War

The last decades of the 19th century were marked by partial distancing of the Southern Slavic peoples and thus the concept of Yugoslavism went into temporary decline. All three then constituted Yugoslav nations already had developed separate national ideologies and national plans based thereupon. With Croats increasingly turning to trialism, Serbia reduced its unification plans to a program of unification of Serbs. The Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878 stopped westward expansion and all attention was turned towards the suppression of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans and the territories of Kosovo and [Macedonia](#).

Croats and Slovenes started to link the fight for the preservation of their national identity with strengthening their connection within the Dual Monarchy and with the requests for its re-composition. Although the Yugoslav idea was often present in their national programs, distinct national parties strengthened in all three peoples as elites put the interests of their own national group to the fore.

The revival of an interest in Yugoslavism was to occur only in the early 20th century, mostly under the influence of the Czech political philosopher and advocate of Czech-Slovak unification [Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk's \(1850-1937\)](#) ideas, which had been disseminated in youth and intellectual circles and accepted during the extreme political and economic crisis of the Habsburg Monarchy. The Croatian and Serbian MPs in the Dalmatian Assembly (the Kingdom of Dalmatia was part of the Habsburg Monarchy) began in 1903 to coalesce around

the idea that the solution of the status of Croatia and Dalmatia was a request for unification within the Croatian space. This politics of the “New Course” resulted in declarations in Rijeka and Zadar (1905), by which both Croatian and Serbian MPs in the Dalmatian and Royal Council requested independent political, cultural and economic development of their peoples. This was supported by the majority of liberal Croatian and Serbian political parties and the next year they created the Croatian-Serbian coalition which from the 1906 elections to the end of the World War I dominated both in the Dalmatian and Croatian Assembly. The coalition relied on cooperation with Serbia and advocated for the right to self-determination of the Slavic nations of the Monarchy. Its most prominent representatives, [Ante Trumbić \(1864-1938\)](#) and [Frano Supilo \(1870-1917\)](#), during the war were the most important members of the Yugoslav Committee.

The coalition was to establish close relations with politicians from Serbia who, after 1903, developed a strong movement for connecting Southern Slavs. Students, academics and writers established numerous pro-Yugoslav associations and, from one year to the next, grew the number of those who recognised that the solution of the Serbian national question, considering the dispersion of Serbs within the Balkans, was possible only within a union of Southern Slavs. There was no common vision here. Dennison Rusinow draws attention to this: “The Serbians possessed a widespread but not yet ubiquitous national consciousness armed with a clear and fundamentally irrendentist national program in two substantively identical variants: Greater Serbianism and Yugoslavism in which a concept of Yugoslavia was hardly distinguishable from the first variant’s vision of Greater Serbia.”⁴ The Slovenes themselves, within their struggle for first cultural and then political identity within the Habsburg Monarchy, did not accept early Yugoslavism in fear that the Serbo-Croatian language would be imposed. Thus, the majority of Slovenian political forces chose Austro-Slavism in the hope that the Monarchy would be reorganised into a tripartite community and that, with the Croats, they would constitute the third (Southern Slavic) part. The only movement with a clear pro-Yugoslav profile was the youth association Preporod (established in 1912) which, with a journal of the same name, significantly contributed to the expansion of Yugoslavism in the western Balkans.

The idea of the unity of Southern Slavs also involved the Bulgarians as one of the Southern Slavic peoples. They were mentioned in the majority of plans about gathering of Southern Slavs, beginning with the foreign political program of Prince Mihajlo Obrenović to the program presented on the eve of the World War I. In the second half of the 19th century, when the majority of the Balkan states was formed, connecting with Bulgarians was most frequently reduced to plans for a Balkan federation/confederation which would help Balkan peoples to maintain independence when threatened by larger European states. Only the conflict over

Macedonia during the [Second Balkan War](#) finally excluded Bulgarians from these plans.

All ideas about the connection of the Balkans came under the framework of Southern Slavic unity and were at first based on ethnic similarity. Although national specificities were emphasized, it was assumed that they would decrease over time. Montenegro was not particularly mentioned because it was self-evident that it would join Serbia considering earlier bilateral agreements and the then Serbian national affiliation of Montenegrins. Macedonia was involved only as territory and not as ethnic group or people, as the distinctiveness of Macedonians was not recognised by any Balkan state. Bosnian Muslims were understood as Islamised Slavs who would naturally join the Serbo-Croatian majority since only religion divided them.

The Balkan Wars enhanced the respect of Serbia among Southern Slavs. In the Austro-Hungarian provinces, supporters of unity celebrated the expansion of Serbia's territory. This gave hope to supporters of unification, even those who previously had not endorsed the idea, that with help of Serbia they could liberate themselves and enter the Southern Slav community.

Unity as a War Aim: 1914-1918

In the summer of 1914 Serbia was not ready for war. After the Second Balkan War a year prior, by annexing Kosovo and Macedonia it almost doubled its state territory (from 48,300 km² to 87,780 km²) and the population increased by one-third. The previous wars severely exhausted the country in terms of casualties and finances and the newly incorporated territories, which were far more underdeveloped than Serbia itself, required the organization of state administration, solution of infrastructure problems, education, health and the incorporation of a population of various religions and nations into the new state framework.

The ruling Radical Party was on the peak of new electoral campaign in the summer of 1914 when on 28 July a telegram arrived from Vienna declaring war on Serbia. Caught by surprise, the government did not have war goals with which it could mobilize and inform the citizens about its aspirations apart from those which had already been publically stated. The liberation of "brothers" was one previously established aim which Regent [Alexander Karadjordjević \(1888-1934\)](#) mentioned in his address to the army on 4 August 1914, stating also the provinces in which these "brothers" lived: Banat, Bačka, Srem, Croatia, Slavonia, Bosnia. Whether liberation meant annexation, unification or federation was unclear. However, from the term used, it could be anticipated that Serbian officials meant Southern Slavs as "brother" had been used in recent decades to prove Southern Slav kinship. That unification was intended was proven by the data that, on the second day after the declaration of war,

the geographer [Jovan Cvijić \(1865-1827\)](#) showed to the Regent and Prime Minister [Nikola Pašić \(1845-1926\)](#) which illustrated where the “Yugoslavs” lived. Neither Pašić nor Alexander Karadjordjević had been supporters of the unification of the Southern Slavs because the idea had remained in intellectual and youth circles and was hardly present in the ruling structures.

The war opened the possibility for distant future plans to become the primary goal, though none could predict its end. The Serbian government immediately started to prepare a [war program](#); already in August, a group of academics and politicians was formed with the task of elaborating by scientific arguments Serbia’s war goals to be communicated to the world at large. A note addressed to Serbian envoys in the Entente states on 4 September stated that the facts should show the need for the creation of a single state composed of “Serbia with Bosnia, Herzegovina, Vojvodina, Dalmatia, Croatia, Istria and Slovenia.”⁵ In the autumn the group prepared their material and, in the coming months, booklets started to appear. Already in late 1914 Jovan Cvijić made the first geographic maps of the desired state. One was submitted to the Russian envoy in Serbia and the other was published in Cvijić’s brochure *Jedinstvo Jugoslovena (Unity of Yugoslavs)*.⁶ The maps included almost all the regions which later became part of the newly founded state, although they did not entirely precisely mark the western border with Italy and the one in Banat out of respect for Italy and [Romania](#) which still had not declared their allegiance in the war. Cvijić’s booklet was among the first to explain the need for the unification of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, i.e. Yugoslavs, as he called them, after the already common name for the Southern Slavs of the Habsburg Monarchy. Beginning with the geographic wholeness of the Southern Slav space, Cvijić elaborated on the natural geographic and economic links and ethnic kinship, which he separated into several ethno-psychological groups of Yugoslavs with Serbia as a link between the eastern and western parts of the Balkan peninsula. Historian, diplomat and politician [Stojan Novaković \(1842-1915\)](#), the then president of the Serbian Royal Academy of Sciences, published in early 1915 his contribution *Problèmes Yougo-Slaves* and historian [Stanoje Stanojević \(1874-1937\)](#) published a booklet *Šta hoće Srbija*.⁷ Dozens of books by Slovenian and Croatian authors also appeared. All of them explained the “unity of Yugoslavs” using phrases such as brothers, the same people with three names, three-name people, and the like. Despite its public presence, the contents of Yugoslavism were not yet clear to everybody.

The Serbian army’s first victories at the end of 1914 provided the right moment to present Serbia’s war program. At the session of the National Assembly in Niš on 7 December 1914 the war coalition government presented the Nish Declaration in which Serbia stated its war goal. In addition to the desire to end the war successfully, it emphasized that the war “also became a struggle for the liberation and unification of all our brother Serbs, Croats and

Slovenes who are not free.”⁸ The Declaration was submitted to Serbia’s allies and became the basis of the further political action.

The Declaration was not only the unilateral pronouncement of Serbia. At the outbreak of hostilities, politicians and intellectuals from Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina left the Habsburg Monarchy and gathered in Italy in opposition. Before the publication of its program, the Serbian government wanted to learn the aspirations of Yugoslav-oriented political emigrants. In late October 1914 it sent two Bosnian Serbs to Italy, [Dušan Vasiljević \(1871-1950\)](#) and [Nikola Stojanović \(1880-1964\)](#) and later [Pavle Popović \(1868-1939\)](#), a professor at Belgrade University. They met with Ante Trumbić and agreed to gather prominent emigrants and create a body which would promote the unification of Southern Slavs. The Yugoslav Committee was formally founded in Paris on 30 April 1915; on 7 May it moved its seat to London. It was presided over by Ante Trumbić, while its members were Austro-Hungarian Croats, Slovenes and Serbs such as Frano Supilo, sculptor [Ivan Meštrović \(1883-1962\)](#) and [Franko Potočnjak \(1862-1932\)](#).

The formal creation of the Committee accelerated the Entente’s negotiations with Italy about entering the war. On 26 April a secret Treaty of London was signed according to which, in case of an Entente victory, Istria and a larger part of Dalmatia would be ceded to Italy. This homogenized the mind-set of the Committee members and very soon they published a Southern Slav program emphasizing the aspirations of Southern Slavs to unite in an independent sovereign state with Serbia. “For the Yugoslav Committee, it was imperative for the Allies to support the unification of the South Slav provinces of Austro-Hungary with Serbia because by joining Serbia, the South Slav of Austro-Hungary would no longer be part of the enemy state but instead would be considered ‘allies’ in the war against Austro-Hungary.”⁹ The role models for the Yugoslav Committee were the Czechoslovakian and Polish organizations for independence. Similarly, they chose to influence the political and intellectual circles of the European capitals to support Yugoslavism and help Serbia in its war effort. Committee members were distributed throughout its allies’ capitals and in the [USA](#), where their propaganda influenced numerous Yugoslav emigrés through gatherings, lectures, printed material. They also gathered war volunteers in North and South America and in [Russia](#).

In Serbia, which after its victories over the Austrians in 1914 was under a series of typhus epidemics, there were about 20,000 Southern Slavs [prisoners of war](#), many of whom expressed the desire to volunteer in the Serbian Army. Some entered the Yugoslav Committee in Niš led by Stanoje Stanojević. Their activity was short-lived but left behind a series of publications about Trieste, Croatia, Dalmatian islands, etc.¹⁰ The Serbian

government was sure that prominent scientists would be achieved a bigger propaganda success in the allied and [neutral](#) states. Near the end of 1914, it sent several missions to the European capitals, hoping that the scientists would, through their connections in intellectual and professional circles, manage to convince the public and politicians to support the creation of the single Yugoslav state. Around the end of 1914 the ethnologist [Niko Županić \(1876-1961\)](#), a Slovene who had worked in Serbia since 1907 and who is believed to have personally managed to introduce Slovenes into the Nish Declaration, went to Rome and then to the USA to cooperate with the Yugoslav Committee and convince Slovene emigrants of the need for unification. Soon the literary historians, brothers Pavle Popović and [Bogdan Popović \(1864-1944\)](#), went to Rome and to London, the President of Serbian Royal Academy [Jovan Žujović \(1856-1936\)](#) to Paris, professors Aleksandar Belić and [Ljubomir Stojanović \(1860-1930\)](#) to St. Petersburg and Jovan Cvijić to London. With numerous publications, lectures and discussions, they managed to inform the influential circles of the respective countries about who the Southern Slavs were and what they wanted. Part of their arguments was accepted, but the politicians made the final decisions.¹¹

In spring and summer 1915, the Yugoslav Committee and the Serbian government were faced with two particular questions which threatened to jeopardize the Yugoslav program. One was the secret Treaty of London (which became known through Frano Supilo) and the other was the negotiations with Bulgaria about entering the war. Bulgarian aspirations to acquire Macedonia, about which it had disputes with Serbia and Greece, were a good lure by which the Triple Alliance exercised pressure on Serbia to cede at least a part. Serbia did not accept and finally the Central Powers promised the desired territory to [Bulgaria](#) with agreement in Sofia on 6 September 1915. This was the first point of difference between the Yugoslav Committee and the Serbian government because the priority for the Committee was to confront Italy for the sake of the defence of Istria and Dalmatia, while for the Serbian representatives the Macedonian territory was of a larger interest. Both parties started to have suspicions about the sincerity of the other and the differences remained more or less present until the end of the war.

The attack of the joint German, Austrian-Hungarian and Bulgarian army in October 1915 led to [occupation](#) of Serbia and Montenegro and the withdrawal of the Serbian government, assembly and army. Although both the Yugoslavs and the Serbian government still supported the same program, the new situation apparently decreased the initial enthusiasm and faith in creating the Yugoslav state. The Habsburg Monarchy, in spite of the increasingly obvious crisis, had not yet shown signs of collapse while the Entente countries were not yet been ready to negotiate its possible dissolution, although after the death of [Francis Joseph, Emperor of Austria \(1830-1916\)](#), his heir, [Charles I, Emperor of Austria \(1887-1922\)](#) considered a separate peace. The situation was bound to change during 1916 when the

recovered Serbian army took the positions at the Macedonian front, entered Bitola in November 1916 and thus regained at least a small part of lost territory.

The spring of 1917 marked a turning point for both warring parties. The [February revolution in Russia](#) put pressure on the Central Powers and the situation in army and state was deteriorating from one day to the next. Serbia lost the hitherto stable Russian support. On the other side of the ocean, the USA joined the Triple Alliance, which enhanced the hopes of the Slavic peoples of the Habsburg Monarchy in gaining support for creation of their own national states. At the [Western](#) and [Italian](#) front, trench warfare was already in its third year, which weakened the human and material position of the two middle-European empires as decreasing numbers of citizens gave their support to their respective governments.

Yugoslav and Serbian émigrés, dispersed across [France](#), [Britain](#), Italy, Greece, Russia, the USA and South America, were still making efforts to win over as many political factions as possible and public support for the unification of the Yugoslavs. The members of the Committee themselves were not in permanent contact nor did they have a common opinion as to what state they wanted to see created. The first to dissent was Frano Supilo who was afraid that Croats would be suppressed in the future community. He advocated for the need for the new state to be a federation. Remaining in the minority, in the summer of 1916 Supilo left the Yugoslav Committee. In addition, communication with the government of Serbia, which financed largest portion of the Committee's activity, was sporadic and it mostly unfolded through Serbian representatives, namely Pavle Popović, since 1917 and [Stojan Protić \(1857-1923\)](#). The changed situation encouraged both the Committee and Serbian officials to make a more concrete agreement about the future. They met on Corfu, which was the war seat of the government of Serbia, from 16 June to 27 July 1917, and made an agreement (the Corfu Declaration) on 20 July about the future state. They agreed that the future state be a constitutional, parliamentary and democratic monarchy under the name of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as it would be the state of "Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, known also under the name of Southern Slavs or Yugoslavs."¹² It would have had a single territory and citizenship, coat of arms, flag and crown, composed of the separate emblems of all three peoples. Further emphasized was that all three peoples' names were completely equal, as well as both scripts (Latin and Cyrillic) and all three religions (Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim). The state territory "encompasses all the territory inhabited by our three-named nation in a compact and uninterrupted mass."¹³ This short statement showed that the state would be centralized and with the Karadjordjević dynasty in power. It was signed by Ante Trumbić in the name of the Yugoslav Committee and Nikola Pašić representing the Kingdom of Serbia's government. The Montenegrin government in exile was not included in the negotiations.

In the southern Slavic countries of the Dual Monarchy, the war brought many challenges. Soldiers were mobilized across the entire territory, opponents of the regime were interned, the press was [censored](#) and political acting were prohibited in the first year of war, acts of revenge were carried out, mostly against the Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia, particularly during 1914. In the combat zones (Soča/Isonzo, Drina) the population emigrated, while the war effort of the Monarchy impoverished citizens, food was lacking and the economy slowed down. Request for better status for Croats and Slovenes within the Monarchy was still on the agenda, although, just as before the war, there were different visions of possible unification. The Croatian Pure Party of Rights (*Frankovci*), named after the leader [Josip Frank \(1844-1911\)](#) was for the creation of a Great Croatia, with Dalmatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and within the Monarchy. That state would be without Serbs, whom they did not recognize. On the other hand, Starčević's wing of the same party recognized Serbs provided that they were loyal citizens of the Croatian state. The Croatian People's Peasant Party of [Stjepan Radić \(1871-1928\)](#) also believed that Croatia should be a separate subject in the union. For others, including those in the Catholic movements, the idea of Slovene-Croatian unification was still active. In Rijeka in March 1915, the Croatian Catholic movement of Bishop [Anton Mahnič \(1859-1920\)](#) passed a declaration in that vein.¹⁴ The Slovene clerical *Vseslovenska ljudska stranka* (Pan-Slovene People's Party) under the leadership of [Anton Korošec \(1872-1940\)](#) advocated for the reorganization of the Monarchy and had the largest number of supporters, while only the Preporod members were still for unification beyond the framework of the Monarchy.

Emperor Charles I in early 1917 reopened the Imperial Council (*Reichsrat*), giving an opportunity to Slovene, Croatian and Serbian MPs to gather into a Yugoslav club and present their requests. On 30 May 1917, Anton Korošec, in what is known as the May Declaration, stated in the name of thirty-three MPs that they advocated for the unification of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs in an independent state entity under Habsburg rule. The expression of unity met the support of the majority of the political factions of Southern Slavs and, since it became obvious that Vienna would not take measures for the reorganization of the Monarchy, the so-called Declaration movement began to develop. The leading Slovene politicians (except the social democrats) also accepted the May Declaration and the Yugoslav club. They organized meetings throughout the country and supporters signed petitions requiring recognition of the requests presented in the Declaration; by March 1918 about 200,000 citizens had affixed their signatures.¹⁵ These signatures showed the desire of Slovenes to obtain a national state still within the monarchy. Vienna reacted with the prohibition of further support for the Declaration. The Slovenes then established the National Council in Ljubljana on 17/18 August 1918 which represented all Slovene provinces. Support to the Declaration came from Istria, from the Serbian Peoples' Party in Vojvodina, and from

Bosnian politicians of Croatian and Serbian nationality.

Croats fell under Hungary and they, within their Assembly, started to discuss the redesign of the state after the war. On 5 June 1917, the MP of the Party of Rights [Ante Pavelić \(1869-1938\)](#) gave a statement that his party supports the unification of Croats, Slovenes and Serbs. The biggest party, the Croatian-Serbian Coalition, hesitated to make a declaration out of fear that the Hungarians could use this statement to later incorporate the Southern Slavic area. Others separated into a group, which requested unification beyond the framework of the Monarchy. Different opinions notwithstanding, more and more people chose unification. The exhausting war, natural catastrophes and lack of freedom, together with principles of the October Revolution and [Woodrow Wilson's \(1856-1924\) Fourteen Points](#) statement about the right of the peoples of Austria-Hungary to free development, drove an increasing number of citizens to support unification.

Beginning in the summer of 1918 it was clear that [the Dual Monarchy was approaching its end](#). The forests were full of military deserters, the state did not function, and the Serbian army with its allies broke the Macedonian front, liberated Serbia and on 1 November entered Belgrade. This accelerated the organisation of provincial bodies on the field. In Zagreb, on 5 October, the National Council of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs was created upon the initiative of the Starčević's Party of Rights. It gathered opposition politicians and later also the leading Croatian-Serbian Coalition. Observing the principles of peoples' right to self-determination, it requested unification outside the Habsburg Monarchy. A day later, on 6 October, the Slovene National Council joined the National Council in Zagreb. Frank's Pure Party of Rights made its last attempt in Vienna and Budapest on 21/22 October 1918 to realize the trialist concept, but it was too late.

The obvious collapse of the Dual Monarchy and the fear that the Croatian countries could be divided between Italy and Serbia forced quick action. On 29 October the Croatian Assembly abolished the Habsburg power and proclaimed the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (SCS). Its head was the Slovene Anton Korošec, while the vice-presidents were one Serb and one Croat: [Svetozar Pribičević \(1875-1936\)](#) and Ante Pavelić. Between 6-9 November their representatives met in Geneva with representatives of the Serbian government and the Yugoslav Committee and decided to form a union (an indivisible new state) between the just-created and still-unrecognised State of the SCS and the Kingdom of Serbia. It was envisaged that, until the final constitutional solution, state affairs would be led by the joint government. It also offered Montenegro an entry into the community (Montenegro made the decision to join the Kingdom of Serbia at the assembly in Podgorica on 26 November 1918). The agreement was delayed due to events in the field and the supremacy of the Serbian state due to its success in battle and armed forces. Other provinces were deciding about

unification as well: the Bosnian National Council decided to unite with Serbia on 30 October; Srem on 24 November; the same decision was made by the Great National Assembly in Novi Sad for Bačka, Baranya and Banat a day later. In less than a month decisions on unification were made in the entire territory, while the fear of an [Italian occupation](#) of Dalmatia and Slovenia, whose army had already started to occupy the territory promised by the Treaty of London, accelerated the decision of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs to offer unification with Serbia. This was done on 1 December 1918 in Belgrade.

Montenegrin and Yugoslav Unity

On 6 August 1914, Montenegro proclaimed that it stood beside Serbia and accused the Habsburg Monarchy of obstructing Serb and Yugoslav national development. Most Montenegrins declared themselves a part of “Serbdom” and called themselves Serbs, underlining that they were “united with Serbia by strong links of one and the same blood.”¹⁶ The unification movement was strong amongst the common people and the better part of politicians. When the Serbian government in December 1914 proclaimed unity of Southern Slavs as war goal, [Nikola I, King of Montenegro \(1840-1921\)](#) was faced with the possibility of loss of state and rule. He tried to secure a special position for Montenegro in the future united state and thus consolidate the position of his dynasty. Such an idea was put forward in a number of variants in the course of 1915.¹⁷ One of them was the trialist concept of a Yugoslav state, with Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia forming three separate units. The enemy offensives in 1914 and 1915 practically linked the Serbian and Montenegrin armies, led by Serbian officers, in the war campaign. The Serbian government was not at that moment considering the question of unification with its small neighbor.

After defeat of Montenegro by Austrian troops and an arms surrender in January 1916, King Nikola and his followers journeyed through Italy to France, first to Bordeaux, then, at the end of May 1916, to Neuilly where the Montenegrin government made its headquarters. They continued to represent their state on the side of the Allies, but they did not have armed forces and they stayed in diplomatic isolation among the Entente powers. Montenegrins were divided amongst themselves; some of them were for unification with Serbia, other against it. In May 1916, [Andrija Radović \(1872-1947\)](#) formed a new government. On 18 August 1916, Radović sought that King Nikola immediately unify with Serbia by abdicating in favor of the Prince of Serbia, Alexander Karadjordjević. He proposed that the eldest male members of the Petrović and Karadjordjević dynasties should take the throne of the unified state on an alternating basis.¹⁸ Still, King Nikola continued with his demands on Serbia’s government and played a waiting game. Prime Minister Radović resigned in January 1917 and, with his supporters, organized the Montenegrin Committee for National Unification. It owed its

acceptance to political, diplomatic and financial assistance from the Serbian government. This Committee achieved good results and it was acknowledged by a broad circle of the emigrants from Montenegro. They edited the newspaper *Ujedinjenje* (Unity) and on 15 April 1917 they published a declaration stating that Montenegro should “unite with Serbia and other Serb, Croat and Slovene countries into one independent state.”¹⁹

After the adoption of the [Corfu Declaration](#), Montenegro did not officially stand behind that program but the Montenegrin Committee for National Unification did (they offered their support on 11 August 1917). They announced that Montenegro would end its role as a separate Serb state. By the end of the war, they remained dedicated to unification, despite King Nikola’s attempts to stop them. The Committee’s broad acceptance also enabled changes of the policies of the Great Powers towards Yugoslav unity in 1918.

In the fall of 1918, Montenegro was liberated by spontaneous Montenegrin guerrilla [warfare](#) and Serb troops together with units of the Yugoslav division. The Great National Assembly proclaimed unification with Serbia in Podgorica on 26 November 1918. This meant the expulsion of the Petrović dynasty from the throne and the disappearance of the independent state of Montenegro.

Conclusion

The Yugoslav movement thus ceased to be only an idea and program and began to be realized in the state which was created: the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (KSCS). The state was created on the field in the chaotic days of the end of the war with the declaration of certain ad hoc and not-quite-representative political bodies. It had no support from any side. Some of the Allies denied its existence and occupied the parts of its proclaimed territory still without fixed borders, part of which was defended by local forces composed of former soldiers, deserters and the Serbian army. No big power hurried to recognize it and therefore at the [Peace Conference in Paris](#) it was announced under the name of the Kingdom of Serbia, which was opposed by the KSCS Delegation.²⁰ The first big power to recognise it was the USA on 7 February 1919, while the UK and France did so only upon facing the problem that this state should also sign the [Treaty of Versailles](#).²¹

The unexpected outbreak of World War I surprised all those who had thought about unification earlier and particularly those to whom Yugoslavism was not the primary political goal. The Croats, Serbs and Slovenes had their own national programs and their marked “national” territories based on ethnic and on (problematic) historical right. These territories partly overlapped (particularly in Bosnia), so that more reasonable ideologists of Yugoslavism understood that there were no pure ethnic borders, that these peoples were mixed and that

only unification could gather together an overall national body. The decision for unification was bolstered by the defence principle, the 19th century myth of a large state, which is strong enough to confront the threatening appetites of its neighboring states. Essentially, this was an integrative idea similar to those already implemented in Italy and Germany. During the war the issue of its organization remained a question, namely whether it would be a centralist or a (con)federal state. The most disputed was the dualistic concept, due to experiences from the Habsburg Empire. The most open (and maybe the most realistic) was the Jovan Cvijić's idea of the United States of Yugoslavia; however, the first concept won.

Yugoslavism was a hybrid idea, which attempted to resolve the national issue of Southern Slavs. It rested on the theory of linguistic and cultural closeness derived from common Slavic origin. The majority agreed on the common Slavic root (one people with three names), that they spoke the same or similar language, that their future was endangered because they were inside or surrounded by states that were not fond of them. It was optimistically believed that a common fate would make the Southern Slavs even closer, disregarding the fact that the majority of citizens and political factions knew only their local space and stuck to their separate national program. The state that was created on the Yugoslav idea fell short of many expectations, however also showing that it was not only a political dream. It nevertheless lasted for seven decades and then disappeared in blood.

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Notes

1. The language was called Serbo-Croatian or Croatian-Serbian. Today it is divided into Bosnian, Montenegrin, Croatian and Serbian. [↑](#)
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3. Suppan, Arnold: Die Kroaten, in: Die Habsburger Monarchie 1848-1918, Vol. III, Vienna 1980, p. 731. [↑](#)
4. Russinow, Dennison: The Yugoslav Idea before Yugoslavia, in: Djokić, Dejan (ed.), Yugoslavism 2003, p. 24. [↑](#)
5. Trgovčević, Ljubinka: Naučnici Srbije i stvaranje jugoslovenske države, 1914-1920 [Serbian Scholars and the Creation of the Yugoslav State, 1914-1920], Belgrade 1986, p. 29. [↑](#)
6. Dinaricus: Jedinstvo Jugoslovena. Prva polovina (sa jednom kartom) [Yugoslav unity. First part with map], Niš 1915. [↑](#)
7. Novakovitch, S.: Problèmes Yougo-Slaves, in: La Revue de Paris (1915); Stanojević,

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 9. Robinson, Connie: Yugoslavism in the Early Twentieth Century. The Politics of the Yugoslav Committee, in: Djokić, Dejan and Ker-Lindsay, James (eds.): New Perspectives on Yugoslavia. Key Issues and Controversies, London/New York 2011, p. 16 ↑
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 11. Trgovčević, Naučnici Srbije [Serbian Scholars] 1986, pp. 33-54. ↑
 12. Mitrović, Serbia's Great War 2007, p. 293. ↑
 13. Ibid, p. 294. ↑
 14. Corwall, Mark: The Great War and the Yugoslav Grassroots. Popular Mobilization in the Habsburg Monarchy, in: Djokić and Ker-Lindsay (eds.), New Perspectives 2011, p. 31. ↑
 15. Štih, Peter/Simonuti, Vasko/Vodopivec, Peter: A Slovene History. Society-Politics-Culture, p.347, online.
www.sistory.si/publikacije/pdf/zgodovina/Slovenska-zgodovina-ENG.pdf (retrieved: 20 July 2015). ↑
 16. Mitrović, Serbia's Great War 2007, p. 55. ↑
 17. Ibid., pp. 138-139. ↑
 18. The Karadjordjevic and Petrovic dynasties were related. The wife of the Serbian king Peter Karadjordjevic was the daughter of King Nikola I Petrovic. ↑
 19. Vujovic, Dimitrije-Dimo: Ujedinjenje Crne Gore i Srbije [The Unification of Montenegro and Serbia], Titograd 1962, pp. 173-176. Mitrović, Serbia's Great War 2007, p. 283. ↑
 20. Mitrović, Andrej: The Yugoslav Question, the First World War and the Peace Conference, 1914-20, in: Djokić, Yugoslavism 2003, pp. 42-56, p. 45 ↑
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