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# A TRAVELER GUIDE TO UNDERSTAND THE EX-YUGOSLAVIAN AREA

## Chapter 1.

19th century | 1918

# THE BIRTH OF YUGOSLAVIA



The bridge where a Serb from Bosnia&Herzegovina assassinated the Archduke of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, starting world war 1  
*Sarajevo, Bosnia&Herzegovina, 2020*

# THE «NATIONS» IN EUROPE



• **End of 18th century** Occidental philosophers create the contemporary concept of «nation»: the grounds of a nation that lead to creating a State are the language, the common history and culture and/or the will to live together. It puts the population at the center of the process of making a country, and leads to the Revolutions and the establishment of new democracies with Parliaments. It opposes to the system of Empires where many minorities coabitate.

• **19th century** The concept leads Western Europeans countries to search for expansion by using military forces, new military technologies and by creating short-term diplomatic alliances.

• The Empires (Austro-Hungarian Empire, Ottoman Empire and Russian Empire) also aim to extend. The Balkans are mostly under the domination of the Ottoman Empire (the Balkan area of the Ottoman Empire is called «Rumelia») and Croatia is part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

• Balkans are located in Central Europe where the Empires meet together and where they also meet with the Western nations. The area is of high military interest, as the alliances can prevent some countries to extend or help to have an influence in this strategic area.

# THE BALKANS AND THE EMPIRES



• **Beginning of 19th century** The Western philosophers' ideas have spread all over Europe. Croatian intellectuals base themselves on the German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte's concept of nation, centered around a common language. Croats have a wide population over the Balkans and nationalist wishes start to oppose the domination of the Austro-Hungarian. Serbs already have an autonomous principality within the Ottoman Empire and wish to have their own country and gather all Serbs from the Balkan.

• Croats, Serbs and Slovenes create the «Illyrian» movement, named after a former territory that spreaded in the Eastern Balkans. The aim is to enhance a common culture and language to gather the South Slavic communities and obtain their independence. Aside of it, Slovenian intellectuals also insist on preserving the Slovenian language.

- The Croat Ljudevit Gaj and the Serb Vuk Karadžić, both linguists, lead works in order to simplify Croatian and Serbian using the grammar rules of Shtokavian, a dialect used by the two countries. This process will later serve as a base for the Serbo-Croatian language, a common language still spoken in today's Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia&Herzegovina (BiH) and Montenegro.

- **Mid 19th century** The movement becomes political and «Yugoslavia» is used for the first time in Croatia by the Catholic bishop Josip Strossmayer.

The yugoslavian project can actually have two goals:

- (1) Creating a South Slavic country where Zagreb and Belgrade will concentrate powers.

- (2) Filling the personal nationalist projects of each country by creating a State with a majority of Croats or Serbs (a Greater Croatia or a Greater Serbia), although both identities may come into conflict for power.

These major tensions will impact Yugoslavia. Find what refers to them with the circle colors and the lines along the text.



Hostility from Croats toward Serbia



Frustration of Serbia regarding their territory



Rivalry between Serbs, Croats and Muslims for BiH



Rivalry between Serbs and Bulgarians (and Greeks and Albanians) for Macedonia



Rivalry between Serbs and Albanian Kosovars for the independence of Kosovo

- The Western concept of nation opposes to the millets of the Ottoman Empire. Millets protect the religious minorities in the Ottoman Empire, but they also have to pay for an extra tax. Populations in the Balkans are mostly Christian, but a part of the population in BiH, mostly poor, converts to Islam to not pay the extra tax.

- BiH becomes a territory with a big proportion of Croats, Serbs and Muslims. It is a coveted territory for both Croatian and Serbian nationalists.

- **Russo-Turkish war, 1877-1878** Under the motive of consolidating a Pan-Slavic coalition and protecting Christians in the Balkans, the Russian Empire allies with Serbia, Montenegro and Romania to attack the Ottomans.

- **San Stefano Treaty, 1878** The war first concludes in the Treaty of San Stefano negotiated between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire. The main measures are:

- (1) Independence of the Kingdom of Serbia and the Kingdom of Montenegro.

- (2) Creation of a Principality of Bulgaria filling the claims of the Bulgarian nationalists (including Macedonia).

- (3) BiH is occupied by the Austro-Hungarian Empire to prevent an uprising from the Serbs from BiH to join the Kingdom of Serbia.

- **Berlin Treaty, 1878** The Kingdom of Serbia is unsatisfied with Macedonia being given to Bulgaria, and the United Kingdom and the Austro-Hungarian Empire fear the influence of the Russian Empire in Central Europe through Bulgaria. The Berlin Treaty renegotiates the territories after the Russo-Turkish war with the powerful Western nations, the three Empires and the Kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro. The Western nations and the Empires want to parcel the territories in the Balkans in order to limit each others' power in the area. It results in a part of Bulgaria becoming part of the Ottoman Empire again, including Macedonia.

- **First Balkan War, 1912** Serbia and Bulgaria associates under the pressure of the Russian Empire although the two countries both have ambitions toward Macedonia. The League of the Balkans (Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro) associates with the Russian Empire in order to fight against the Ottoman Empire. At the end of the first Balkan war, the Treaty of London is negotiated by the Balkan League, the Russian Empire, the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Again, the negotiation aims to annex the European Ottoman territories but also to keep the Balkans divided:

- (1) Serbia wins Macedonia (formerly Ottoman).

- (2) Kosovo is won by Serbia, and a small part goes to Montenegro.

- (3) The independant State of Albania is created to limit Serbia's sea access.

- (4) The Ottoman Empire disappears from Europe.

- Montenegro integrates the Albanian-Kosovars. In Serbia, Kosovo is a key territory in the national narrative:

- (1) Religious symbol: several major Orthodox monasteries are located there.

- (2) Cultural symbol: the battle of Kosovo Polje represents the strenght and the virility that still define Serbian identity today. In 1389, Serbs fought against the Ottomans and lost the war, which allowed the Empire to conquer the Balkans. Serbia starts an hostile «colonization» (name given by Serbia and Montenegro to the programme aiming to decrease the Albanian population in their territories) toward Albanian-Kosovars by offering a part of their lands to the Serb-Kosovars.

- **Second Balkan War, 1913** The Principalty of Bulgaria contests Macedonia as part of Serbia and attacks the Kingdom, but looses the war. Macedonia remains Serbian. Greece, who took part to the war to support Serbia, gets its current Macedonian region. These decisions will influence Bulgaria's diplomatic position in the Balkans and in Europe.

# WORLD WAR I AND THE NEW BORDERS



- **Gravrilo Princip assassinates the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, BiH, 1914** The Serb from BiH Gavrilo Princip belongs to the nationalist group Young Bosnia (a pro-Yougoslavian group). BiH is under the domination of the Austro-Hungarian Empire with a multicultural Serbian, Croatian and Muslim population and strong nationalist movements. The Archduke of the Austro-Hungarian Empire Franz Ferdinand is killed when he visits Sarajevo.
- **First Serbian campaign, 1914** As a reaction the Austro-Hungarian Empire attempts to invade Serbia to prevent any nationalist uprising, but fails. This event is major in the beginning of world war I as it causes military alliances all over Europe with the Austro-Hungarian Empire or with Serbia.
- **Second Serbian campaign, 1915-1916** The Austro-Hungarian Empire associates with the German Empire and Bulgaria to invade Serbia, both for territory purposes. Russia backs up Serbia to keep its influence in the area. As a Russian ally, France fights alongside with Serbia.
- **1916** Serbia, Russia and France loose the war and Serbia is dismantled: the north goes to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Kosovo and Macedonia go to Bulgaria. Bulgaria gains Macedonia, which was its goal.
- France's help to Serbia during world war I is an important argument in the current Serbian nationalist rhetoric: the NATO bombings of Belgrade in 1999 during the Kosovo war are experienced as a betrayal from France and an injustice. In reality, France actually will use the military alliance with Serbia to shape Yugoslavia according to its own interests after world war I, neglecting the specificities of this country (the multiple cultural and religious identities).

- **1916** Montenegro fights for Serbia but is invaded by the Austro-Hungarian army. It surrenders and is occupied by the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the end of the war in 1918.



*Gavrilo Princip's grave in a cemetery in Sarajevo, BiH*



*A statue of Gavrilo Princip in Belgrade, Serbia*

- Croatia is still divided in several Kingdoms inside the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Although Gavrilo Princip isn't perceived as a hero, several nationalist political movements arise: some want an Austro-Slavic coalition between Zagreb, Vienna and Budapest, some want a Yugoslavian coalition with Belgrade (the Croat-Serb Coalition), and some want a total independence.
- The Croat-Serb Coalition also gains the support of some Serbian deputies of BiH (an Austro-Hungarian territory). The opponents to the Coalition are the Catholics Croats from BiH who want to spread their religion and the two other nationalist movements. The Croatian politician Stjepan Radić is known for his position in favor of an Austro-Slavic coalition.
- **1915** A Yugoslavian Committee is created by Ante Trumbić, the leader of the Coalition in the Kingdom of Dalmatia (a Croatian Kingdom in Austro-Hungaria). One of the goal is to convince the powerful nations fighting against the Austro-Hungarian Empire (the Triple Entente: France, UK, Belgium...) to support the Yugoslavian project.
- The Prime Minister of Serbia Nikola Pašić didn't support the Yugoslavian Committee, as he was interested in gathering Serbs instead of South-Slavics. But two elements force him to discuss with the Yugoslavian Committee:
  - (1) **1916** Serbia is annexed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire.
  - (2) **1915, Treaty of London** The Triple Entente nations turn down the Yugoslavian project. They prefer to weaken but maintain the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The secret treaty plans to give a part of the

Croatian territories (Trieste, Trento, Bolzano parts of Istria and Dalmatia) to Italy and allows its protectorate over Albania, in exchange of its support during the war. Serbia (and Croatia) identify Italy as a potential threat.

- **Corfu Declaration, 1917** Nikola Pašić and Ante Trumbić sign the first text organizing Yugoslavia. It plans a democratic State ruled by the Serbian Karadorđević dynasty. Trumbić fails in imposing a federal State that would allow Croatia to have its own institutions instead of being under Belgrade's influence.

- **Treaty of Versailles, 1918** The war is over and the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires are dismantled. The treaty is signed by the winning Western nations and acknowledges the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. These nations used to be opposed to a strong nation in the Balkans for two reasons:

- (1) Avoiding creating a strong State in this strategic area, and parcelling it instead.

- (2) Preferably dealing with a potentially weak Austro-Hungarian Empire.

But a Yugoslavian State now has several interests:

- (1) Preventing the Empires to reassemble.

- (2) Serving as a cordon sanitaire to prevent the spread of communism. Indeed, after the Russian socialist revolution of 1917, Lenin leads Russia. The country leaves the war to build and spread socialism across Europe.

- (3) Since Serbia has had major human loss during world war I, Yugoslavia can fulfil Serbia's will to build a pan-Serbian country and prevent uprisings.

- (4) Observing the principle of self-determination (people's sovereignty over their territory and political regime) exposed by the US President Woodrow Wilson in its «Fourteen Points» statement to try to guarantee the peace.

Two other aspects of the creation of this new State are:

- **Treaty of Neuilly, 1919** Another consequence of the war is Bulgaria losing Macedonia, which becomes part of Yugoslavia.

- **National Council of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs, 1918** Ante Trumbić and Pašić's right-hand man Svetozar Pribičević create a council to imagine the political institutions of the future Yugoslavian State. Pribičević reinforces the power of Belgrade. Croatia is also weakened by the threat of Italy, claiming the territories promised by the Treaty of London. There are several oppositions:

- (1) The Croat Radić still oppose the centralized regime decided in 1917.

- (2) The King of Montenegro opposes the union but is not invited to the council as Montenegro surrendered in 1916.

- (3) Macedonia and Albanians living in Kosovo are not invited.

- **Creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, December 1st, 1918** The country becomes the «Kingdom of Yugoslavia» in 1929.



- The powerful nations of Europe, Serbia and Croatia build this State to guarantee their own interests but they ignored some internal divisions: the nationalist claims of the Croats especially toward Belgrade, the interests of Croats and Serbs for BiH, and the frustration of Bulgaria toward Macedonia...

