

STUDIES

FRIENDS AND FOES CZECHS/SLOVAKS AND SERBIA DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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TASIĆ, Dmitar. Friends and foes: Czechs/Slovaks and Serbia during the First World War. *Historický časopis*, 2020, 68, 5, pp. 797–814, Bratislava. By presenting the most recent scholarship on the intense, although not turbulent, relations between Serbia on one side and Czechs and Slovaks on the other, this article aims to show how the unique experience of being on opposite sides during the First World War did not necessarily lead toward creation of animosities and controversies. On the contrary, it not only resulted in support, understanding and cooperation but also led to the creation of new and deepening of existing liaisons in the decades that followed the first global conflict.

Key words: Great War. Serbia. Czechs. Slovaks. Naturalization. Volunteers. Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. Milan Rastislav Štefánik. Kragujevac mutiny.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/histcaso.2020.68.5.2>

Introduction

Connections between Serbs and Czechs and Slovaks before the First World War were intensive and numerous. They were equally intense on the cultural as well as on the economic level. We only have to mention the names of Konstantin Jireček, Pavel Jozef Šafárik and his nephew Janko Šafárik, all of whom during the 19th century left deep marks in the history of not only Serbs but also other Balkan Slavs.¹ At the same time, many Czechs in particular were attracted by the possibilities to develop their businesses in the Principality of Serbia, at that time a small country still under Ottoman rule, but with a considerable level of autonomy. Many of them came and settled there, so already in 1869 a Czech cultural association *Česká beseda* was founded in Serbia. The majority of Czechs and Slovaks lived ordinary life as small entrepreneurs, lecturers, engineers, physicians, musicians, miners or civil servants.

1 SELENIĆ, Slobodan. *Jugoslovensko – čehoslovački odnosi (1945–1955)*. (Yugoslav – Czechoslovak relations 1945–1955). Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2010, p. 26. ISBN - 978-86-7005-082-2.

This article aims to cover the extremely troublesome period of mutual history when Serbs and Czechs/Slovaks found themselves on opposite sides in the first global conflict. It happened that many Czechs and Slovaks remained in Serbia fighting for their new homeland while their compatriots filled the ranks of Austro-Hungarian invading forces. The initial battles during August 1914 in western Serbia and their consequences lead to the creation of a myth of supposed Czech unreliability as imperial soldiers. By the end of 1914 those who became Serbian captives shared Serbian misfortunes during the epidemic of typhoid fever and later withdrawal across the Albanian mountains.

Other Czechs and Slovaks, however, in particular those who in the course of fighting on the Eastern front, ended up in Russian captivity, decided to join the Serbian army as volunteers. In 1916 hundreds of them fought in the ranks of the Serbian Volunteer Division during operations in Romanian Dobruja, and this experience became their commitment for life and in many cases influenced their future actions. Serbia was also a place where many Czechs and Slovaks served in the Austro-Hungarian occupation apparatus and where in 1918 an anti-war mutiny broke out resulting in bloody showdown with the mutineers whose sacrifice was later used in the context of the inter-war Yugoslav-Czechoslovak alliance within the Little Entente.

On the eve of the First World War relations between Czechs/Slovaks and Serbs became very intense thanks to the engagement of leader of the Czechoslovak national movement Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. Masaryk enjoyed great popularity among Serbs both in Austria-Hungary and the Kingdom of Serbia. His public engagement and involvement as the representative of accused Serbs in several staged trials organized by the Habsburg state targeting representatives of the Serbian elite were well known facts. Masaryk also visited Serbia several times. In exile during the Great War, Masaryk had numerous encounters with representatives of Serbian government and Yugoslav movement such as the Prince Regent Alexander, Prime Minister Nikola Pašić, Ante Trumbić, Frano Supilo and others. He used every possible opportunity to express his support for the program of Yugoslav unification.² During his activities in exile Masaryk enjoyed the support of the Serbian government in practical ways. Among others he was issued no less than three Serbian passports,³ which eased his work considerably because technically he became a citizen of an allied country.

2 RADOJEVIĆ, Mira. Srpsko-česka saradnja u Prvom svetskom ratu. (Serbian – Czech cooperation in First World War). In *Studia Balcanica Bohemo – Slovaca VI. Svazek 1*. Brno: Matice moravska, 2006, pp. 280–291. ISBN 80-86488-32-2.

3 HLADKÝ, Ladislav. Srbské pasy T. G. Masaryka z doby první světové války. In ŠTĚPANEK Vaclav – HLADKÝ Ladislav (eds.). *Od Moravy k Moravě III, Z historie česko-srbských vztahů*. Brno: Matice moravská; Maticé srbská, 2017, pp. 13–27. ISBN 9788087709191.

Naturalization

When war broke out on 28 July 1914 war a certain number of foreign, in this case enemy subjects already lived in Serbia. The most numerous were subjects of Austria-Hungary. However, their overall number was not very high and most of them were of Serbian origin or Slavic origin in general (Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Croats, Bosnian Muslims and Slovenes). According to the 1910 census out of 2,911,701 people living in Serbia at that moment 12,123 were subjects of Austria-Hungary.⁴ After the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 situation was slightly different, primarily because out of almost 1.5 million new subjects' from the "newly associated regions", namely former territories of the Ottoman Empire, a considerable number of whom, besides Slavic speaking Muslims, were ethnic Turks and Albanians.

The Civil Code from 1844 regulated Serbian legislature regarding citizenship. According to its Article 44, Serbian citizenship automatically belonged to all inhabitants of Serbia and it could be acquired by birth and by naturalization.⁵ In general, the code was very liberal concerning aliens who expressed a desire to live and work in Serbia. Apart from private entrepreneurship, foreigners could pursue their careers in various occupations in demand. They were also allowed to enter state service and work as teachers and even army officers. After seven years of law abiding behaviour foreigners could apply for Serbian citizenship on grounds of naturalization under the condition that they acquired dismissal from their original citizenship. Before the period of seven years only the sovereign, with the consent of the government, could grant citizenship to potential aspirants.⁶

However, unlike other European states where the process of naturalization was placed under a moratorium,⁷ in late 1914 (second half of November – first half of December) Serbia witnessed a wave of naturalization that was, later in

4 *Prethodni rezultati popisa stanovništva i domaće stoke u Kraljevini Srbiji 31. decembra 1910*, knj. 5, Izdanje uprave državne statistike, Beograd 1911 / *Résultats préliminaires du dénombrement de la population et des animaux de fermes dans le Royaume de Serbie le 31 décembre 1910*, Tome cinquième, Publié par la direction de la statistique d'état, Belgrade 1911, p. 5.

5 *Gradanski zakonik Kneževine Srbije (1844) sa kasnijim izmenama*, Član 44. (Serbian civil code from 1844 with later amendments, Article 44) <http://www.overa.rs/gradanski-zakonik-kraljevine-srbije-1844-god-sa-kasnijim-izmenama.html> [cit on 27 November 2018].

6 *Idem*.

7 For more on this see: CAGLIOTI Daniela L. Subjects, Citizens and Aliens in a Time of Upheaval: Naturalizing and Denaturalizing in Europe during the First World War. In *The Journal of Modern History* 89, No. 3 (September 2017), pp. 495–530; ISSN: 0022-2801. Also see: GULLACE, Nicoletta F. Citizenship (Great Britain). In *1914–1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*. Ed. by DANIEL, Ute et al. Issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08. DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10783.

December, officially announced in the Serbian State Gazette (*Srpske novine*). During that period the Serbian State Gazette announced the naturalization of 1096 foreign subjects in total.⁸

Who were these people and what was their composition?

The overwhelming majority were subjects of Austria-Hungary, that is, the Austrian Empire and Kingdom of Hungary as stated in each individual example. Ethnic Serbs were the most numerous; 596 out of the total of 1096. They consisted of 80 individuals and 136 families (45 as couples and 91 as families with between one and eight children).

The second most numerous group were Czechs and Slovaks; among 194 there were 32 families with between one and six children, nine couples and 37 individuals. Interestingly, Czechs and Slovaks outnumbered Croats and Slovenes by two to one. The rest were Croats, Germans, Slovenians, ethnic Hungarians, Bosnian Muslims, Italians, Romanians, Poles, Roma and Montenegrins. Their occupations were: miners, electricians, steam engine operators, teachers, high school lecturers, banking accountants, engineers, clerks; there were also farmers, simple labourers, merchants, waiters, shop owners, stone masons, brick layers, mechanics, blacksmiths, barbers etc. Czechs in particular were presented among different types of engineers, such as mechanical or civil – Czechs were very often appointed as so called chief county engineers (responsible for technical control and development on the local level); as well as physicians, high school lecturers, land surveyors but also miners, steam engine operators, electricians. Their education, and especially technical knowledge, qualified them for numerous occupations in demand for which Serbia didn't have appropriate cadres.

What could have been the motives and intentions of people awarded Serbian citizenship as well as the motives of the Serbian state to perform such an act in the midst of war?

It is very difficult to answer these questions primarily because we don't know anything about each individual case. Beside patriotic reasons, at least in the case of ethnic Serbs who came from Austria-Hungary, one could think of many practical reasons, for example, in this way former Austro-Hungarian army officers could avoid being tried and sentenced for high treason if they ended up as prisoners of war. The same applied to civilians who otherwise would not have bothered because of the liberal concept of Serbian citizenship. Many of them had lived in Serbia for ages, were married to Serbs, had offspring (often with clearly

8 *Srpske novine*, no. 309 from 17 December 1914; no. 310 from 18 December 1914; no. 311 from 19 December 1914; no. 312 from 20 December 1914; no. 313 from 21 December 1914 and no. 314 from 23 December 1914.

Serbian personal names) and in a way the war became a perfect opportunity for them to disassociate from the country of their birth. There were several reasonable motives for the Serbian state to naturalize so many foreign subjects in one instance; first could go along the line of need for new fighting forces because the initial battles, although victorious for Serbia, had caused serious losses in human lives; and, in a way, it represented a reward for loyal service or lawful and obedient behaviour during previous years. Finally, naturalization of so many Austro-Hungarian subjects could be an effective propaganda tool as well.

Czechs as an “unreliable element”

Even today in conversations on the margins of different military history conferences one can hear how Czechs and their unreliability contributed to the Austro-Hungarian defeats during the First World War. In time these unsubstantiated claims evolved into a myth which has been successfully deconstructed by recent research.⁹ The beginnings of these claims are connected with the first Austro-Hungarian invasion of Serbia and subsequent Serbian counter offensive and first Allied victory in the Battle of Mount Cer in mid August 1914.¹⁰

Although the main idea behind the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war in 1914 was a final showdown with Serbia, which was considered the main threat to the integrity of the Habsburg Empire, it soon turned out that Austria-Hungary was not able to commit enough forces for a successful campaign against Serbia (and Montenegro who sided with Serbia almost instantly). Since in the course of July 1914 events made clear that Russia did not want to stand aside in this matter, the Austro-Hungarian military leadership had to activate a plan that envisaged engagement of minimal strength against Serbia. These forces were planned to quickly overrun Serbia and then be transferred to the Russian front where the beginning of fighting was expected later because of the slow pace of Russian mobilization.¹¹ Out of seven corps designated to the Balkan front two came from the Czech lands or Bohemia: VIII from Prague and IX from Leitmeritz (Litoměřice). Austro-Hungarian military leadership was concerned how the mobilization of the Czech units would go, because during two previous preventive mobilizations (1908–1909 and 1912–1913) there were numerous incidents when Czech

9 SCHINDLER, John R. Disaster on the Drina: The Austro-Hungarian Army in Serbia 1914. In *War in History*, 2002, 9 (2), pp. 159–195. ISSN 0968-3445.

10 ORTNER, Mario Kristijan. Rat protiv Srbije 1914. i 1915 (Pogled iz Austrije). (War against Serbia 1914 and 1915, View from Austria). In *Vojnoistorijski glasnik*, 1/2010, pp. 111–132. ISSN 0042-8442.

11 TASIĆ, Dmitar. Pre-war Military Planning (South East Europe). In *1914–1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*. Ed. by DANIEL, Ute et al. Issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08. DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10234.

reservists refused to board the trains. However, in 1914 this did not happen, like all other imperial subjects, the Czechs demonstrated loyalty after the Sarajevo assassination and death of Archduke Franz Ferdinand.¹²

However, the first Austro-Hungarian offensive on Serbia, that started in mid-August, demonstrated numerous shortcomings of the army whose last major battle happened in 1866 and whose military leadership was arrogant and overconfident despite the fact that their opponents had just experienced two wars, were battle hardened, highly motivated and armed with state-of-the art weapons. It happened that the first Serbian/Allied victory in the Great War, Battle of Mt. Cer was achieved against the 21st Landwehr division of the above-mentioned VIII corps, which consisted of German and Czech reservists from Western Bohemia. The division had four infantry regiments: 6th from Eger (97% German), the 7th from Plzeň (60% Czech and 40% German), the 8th from Prague (nearly 100% Czech) and the 28th from Pisek (80% Czech and 20% German). The German – Czech ratio was similar in divisional artillery and logistic units.¹³

After it had crossed the river Drina, the 21st division continued to march forward towards Mt. Cer. High temperatures, heavy kit, mountainous terrain, lack of supplies, and sniper fire by Serbian irregulars made their advance extremely strenuous. When its units reached the summit they encamped unaware of the approaching Serbian 2nd army units which immediately initiated a night attack inflicting heavy casualties to surprised soldiers of the 21st division.¹⁴ By 25 August, using their experience and stratagems, Serbian troops managed to push the Austro-Hungarian forces back into Bosnia. Austro-Hungarian casualties were extremely high: 7,000 dead and 30,000 wounded. However, Serbian victory came with a price of 16,000 to 18,000 dead and wounded.¹⁵

The follow up of the Battle of Mt. Cer had serious repercussions on the cohesion of Austro-Hungarian army. In his wish to divert responsibility for this failure from himself as well as to find a scapegoat, Austro-Hungarian supreme commander in the Balkans, General Oscar von Potiorek, decided to conduct an investigation of the poor performance of the 21st Landwehr division. Instead of blaming inadequate and insufficient training of the mostly reservist divisional rank-and-files; inappropriate equipment for mountainous warfare, inexperienced officer and NCO corps, omissions in command, such as the non-existence of reconnaissance, Potiorek decided to attribute failings “*not to military shortcomings but to ethnic disloyalty*”. He solely blamed mainly Czech units and their officers for

12 SCHINDLER, ref. 9, p. 162.

13 SCHINDLER, ref. 9, p. 168.

14 SCHINDLER, ref. 9, pp. 172–173.

15 ORTNER, ref. 10, p. 118.

the failure, that is, 7th, 8th and 28th regiment while simultaneously stating that the 6th regiment – the only mainly German unit – had performed its duty. Once released such an accusation created a widespread notion of Czechs as cowards or even traitors.¹⁶ The fact that other Czech units, such as 9th division, performed well during the Battle of Mt. Cer, was deliberately neglected.

Ironically, at the end of August the war's first awards for valour were bestowed on two members of the 21st division: Sergeant Rudolf Kulhánek and Corporal Franz Říha. Both men were Czech.¹⁷

Czechs and Slovaks as prisoners of war in Serbia

Serbian victories on the field of battle during 1914 resulted in a huge number of Austro-Hungarian soldiers being taken as prisoners of war (POW). According to the records of the Serbian Prisoner's Command after the successful end of the Battle of Kolubara (the last of three Austro-Hungarian consecutive offensives) in December 1914 there were 60,000 POW's under Serbian custody.¹⁸

For obvious reasons they were sent to the central and southern parts of Serbia, but they all had to pass through Prisoner's Command main facility in the town of Niš. There they were divided in three large groups:

1. South Slavs: Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.
2. Northern Slavs: Czechs, Slovaks, Ukrainians and Poles.
3. Non-Slavs: Germans and Hungarians.

The majority of the POWs filled the ranks of ten prisoner detachments used as labour in agriculture and on reconstruction of roads and railways. The more skilful were employed in hospitals; mechanics were sent to private and state owned factories while miners were sent to mines. POWs were also used as administrative personal in various military commands and institutions.

Officers (around 800 of them) were separated from the soldiers and non-commissioned officers (NCO's) and placed in one of the barracks in Niš. Compared to their soldiers, officers enjoyed better living conditions. In the same manner as soldiers, they were divided according to their nationalities. Every ethnic group had its own premises and kitchen. They enjoyed plenty of outdoor space, electric lightning, they had joint canteen and post office and money orders and mail were regular (for example, nearly half of the total correspondence belonged to Czech

16 SCHINDLER. ref. 9, pp. 175–176.

17 SCHINDLER. ref. 9, p. 177.

18 ĐUKIĆ, Slobodan. *Austrougarski ratni zarobljenici u Srbiji 1914–1915. godine* (Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war in Serbia 1914–1915). In TERZIĆ Milan (ed.). *Prvi svetski rat i Balkan – 90 godina kasnije*. Beograd: Institut za strategijska istraživanja, 2011, pp. 142–7, here 143. ISBN 978-86-81121-06-1.

officers). Jan Laška, one of Czech officers, calls these days “*our El Dorado*” and the barracks as a “dear place”, bearing in mind the circumstances.¹⁹

The Germans and Hungarians founded a theatre company which was dissolved after they collectively attempted to escape. The Czechs on the other hand had a very good choir, but they were disappointed because they didn't get their national dish – dumplings (*knedlički*).²⁰

However, just after the end of combat, in winter 1914/1915 Serbia was faced with the outbreak of an epidemic of typhoid fever. The total number of human losses was never precisely determined. It is estimated that from a total of 400,000 infected, around 100,000 civilians and 35,000 soldiers died.²¹ This epidemic severely affected the POWs as well. Around 20,000 POWs died, so when the epidemic was finally over, in summer 1915 the Prisoner's Command had 714 officers and 37,056 soldiers and NCOs present. Serbia, in general, was not prepared for this sort of development; there was also the problem of an insufficient number of medical personal, which was partly compensated by foreign medical missions and individuals. Conditions in barracks given to the Prisoner's Command, such as low level of hygiene and presence of a large number of people in a small space were extremely favourable for spreading of typhoid fever. That is why the death toll among soldier POWs, compared to officers, was so high. At one moment even the Austro-Hungarian Red Cross offered to help and started sending necessary provisions. With the arrival of spring, the situation improved and hygiene issues, such as the fight against lice as the main disease carriers, were addressed properly.²²

However, the ordeal of Austro-Hungarian POW's didn't end with the typhoid fever epidemic. In October 1915 began Central Power's large military operation aimed at taking Serbia and Montenegro out of the war and creating a land connection with Ottoman Turkey which, already for a year, was fighting in isolation and at that time was faced with the Allied landing operation at Gallipoli. One of the most important goals was attracting Bulgaria onto their side, which bearing in mind promised territorial expansion at Serbia's expense and the previous defeat Bulgaria has suffered during the Second Balkan War was achieved relatively easily. That made Serbia's and Montenegro's position extremely difficult. So when German and Austro-Hungarian forces attacked from the north and Bulgaria from east cutting the only connection Serbia had with its Western allies through the

19 LAŠKA, Jan. *Pochod hladu Albanii (z Nišem do Valony)*. (March of hunger, from Nish to Valona). Praha 1920, pp. 7–8.

20 ĐUKIĆ, ref. 18, p. 144.

21 MITROVIĆ Andrej. *Serbia's Great War 1914–1918*. London: Hurst&Company, 2007, p. 111. ISBN 9781557534774.

22 ĐUKIĆ, ref. 18, p. 145.

port of Salonika, Serbian troops were forced to slowly withdraw towards the south-west. Austro-Hungarian POWs were part of the retreating columns because it was considered mandatory to continue custody over POWs because if they were freed, they would automatically rejoin the ranks of the Austro-Hungarian army thus increasing its numbers and strength. On this journey, which the above-mentioned participant and witness, Jan Laška called the March of hunger,²³ Austro-Hungarian POWs unwillingly suffered the same ordeal, which in Serbian collective memory is known as Golgotha or Calvary. Since Serbia refused to surrender, the only way was across the Albanian and Montenegrin mountains towards the Adriatic coast where they hoped Allies would provide relief and organize evacuation. During this March of hunger around 11,000 Austro-Hungarian POWs died as victims of malnutrition, extreme weather conditions, dysentery, and physical strain. Finally, the Serbian Prisoner's Command handed over to the Italians 638 officers and 22,820 soldiers and NCO's. At the same time, some 2,500 POWs were left in Serbia for various reasons.

Mission of Milan Rastislav Štefánik

Milan Rastislav Štefánik was born on 21 July 1880 in Košariská near Brezová. When the war broke out he was already a recognized scientist, working as an astronomer at the astronomical observatory in Meudon near Paris. For his achievements in the field of science he was granted French citizenship in 1912. As a French citizen he was mobilized when the war broke out. Although initially he was assigned to the infantry due to his poor health he was relieved from front line duties. Thanks to his connections he managed to transfer to the air force where he trained to become a pilot. In spring of 1915 he finished his training and started flying combat missions. Besides flying, he promoted the use of meteorology for the purposes of the air force, and he can be considered as the founder and promoter of the French military weather and meteorology service. Privately, he was a strong advocate of achieving independence for his Slovak compatriots. Thanks to his combat achievements, and thanks to his pioneering work in the field of military meteorology, Štefánik was offered the post of commander with the meteorological service of the French Army. However, he declined the offer and he requested to be redeployed to Serbia where, as he considered, he would have greater chances to influence soldiers of Slav origin in the Austro-Hungarian

23 LAŠKA, ref. 19, pp. 31–136; Another testimony of these events was written by Mile Budak, reserve officer and one of the later high officials of the Nazi satellite state – Independent State of Croatia, see BUDAK, Mile. *Ratno roblje. Albanski križni put zarobljenih austrougarskih časnika, knj. 1* (Slaves of war. Albanian Calvary of captured Austro-Hungarian officers). Zagreb 1941.

army. Thanks to his connections as well as influential benefactors such as General Ferdinand Foch he was able to achieve this.²⁴

Captain Milan Rastislav Štefánik came to Serbia in summer of 1915 as a member of the French air squadron that was sent to Serbia in order to strengthen its position in the event of another Austro-Hungarian offensive. Beside the fact that he came as an active French officer and at his personal request, Štefánik had his own agenda. He wanted to create another squadron consisting exclusively of Slovaks as well as to investigate possibilities to agitate among the numerous POWs in Serbia – ethnic Czechs and Slovaks – and try to mobilize them into a Czechoslovak Legion.²⁵

Between his flight sorties (twenty-one in total) he tried to put his plans into motion. His squadron, MS – 99, consisted of mixed French and Serbian staff and it was mainly performing air-reconnaissance missions. However, its pilots were often faced with German and Austro-Hungarian fighter planes. In these pioneering days of air forces and in order to defend themselves members of the French squadron had to improvise. In one such situations Štefánik's plane was attacked and hit by machinegun fire but thanks to his Serbian co-pilot, a cavalry officer who had brought his carbine on board, they managed to chase opponents away. However, inflicted damage was serious and they had to go through a crash landing.

While his flight missions were successful because they discovered massing of Austro-Hungarian and German forces and their preparation for an offensive, his personal mission of mobilizing Czech and Slovak POWs proved to be less successful. First of all, he did not manage to meet with Serbian top officials, such as Prime Minister Nikola Pašić, in order to present the idea to them and to get their permission and support. He did have several conversations with low ranking Serbian officials, but because he did not have any kind of official authorization or support for this kind of initiative his ideas were not taken seriously. Even the French ambassador to Serbia advised Štefánik to concentrate on his military duties instead of chasing this idea. Serbian authorities in general were not in favour of such actions primarily because according to the Hague Conventions it was forbidden to mobilize POWs to fight against their country of origin. However, that was something on which Serbia very soon changed its opinion.

Faced with the advance of the technically and numerically superior German, Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian forces, the French squadron and Štefánik con-

24 MEŠKO, Marek. "The Mission of Rastislav Štefánik in Serbia". In TERZIĆ, Milan (ed.). *Prvi svetski rat i Balkan – 90 godina kasnije*. Beograd: Institut za strategijska istraživanja, 2011, pp. 54–80, here 54–57. ISBN 978-86-81121-06-1.

25 MEŠKO, ref. 24, p. 57.

tinued to withdraw together with the rest of the Serbian army. At one moment Štefánik was evacuated because his health started to deteriorate.

In general, we do not know much about his stay and activities in Serbia. The main reason was that the records of the French squadron were lost during the withdrawal. A second reason was Štefánik's premature death that came immediately after the war, which prevented him writing his memoirs or presenting testimonies of his war record in any other form. What we have on him from the time of his stay in Serbia is his diary, however, with the first entry from 3rd November when retreat was already on the way. Also, there are fragments from memoirs and recollections of his French and Serbian colleagues – other pilots and mechanics in the Franco-Serbian squadron.²⁶ What we can conclude is that despite his poor health Štefánik demonstrated enormous energy and readiness to fully participate in the war effort and even “walk an extra mile” in his struggle. He was ready to fully take advantage his reputation and his status as a French officer, no matter how low ranking it was, to achieve establishment of the post-war Czechoslovak state.

Czech and Slovak volunteers in the Serbian army

The case of Czech and Slovak volunteers in the Serbian army during the First World War, although not directly connected with the territory of Serbia, represents an important part of the very complex issue of volunteers – in this particular case, volunteers from the ranks of Austro-Hungarian POWs in Russian captivity. The Serbian case or the volunteers question was also related to the subsequent creation of Czechoslovak legions.

Although Serbian officials were against the idea to start recruiting volunteers among the Austro-Hungarian POWs (despite the fact that a huge portion of Habsburg armies consisted of Slavic elements, including Serbs) under the pretext of respecting international obligations, such as the Hague Conventions, the huge casualties that Serbia suffered during 1914 and especially during the retreat in winter 1915/1916 forced them to somewhat change their mind. Another reason was connected with Serbian war aims, namely the liberation and unification of “*all our brothers Serbs, Croats and Slovenes who are not free*”.²⁷ Being a

26 MEŠKO, ref. 24, p. 60.

27 On December 7 1914 during a session in Serbian war capital Niš, parliament passed a short official declaration stating Serbia's war aim, see: MITROVIĆ, ref. 21, p. 96. Later on, in June 1917, during their stay in Corfu, the Serbian government had passed a joint declaration with the Yugoslav Committee (a group of South Slav dissident politicians from Austria-Hungary) stating that the future state will be named the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and that it would be a “*constitutional, democratic and parliamentary monarchy*”, see: MITROVIĆ, ref. 21, p. 293. The Niš and Corfu declarations represent two key documents that preceded

Russian ally Serbia could turn its attention to a vast pool of potential volunteers, that is, the huge number of Austro-Hungarian POWs of South Slav origin in Russian captivity. South Slavs formed around 10 per cent of the population of the Habsburg monarchy and if we use this approximation there were around 200,000 South Slavs among the 2,000,000 Austro-Hungarian POWs in Russia.

During 1916, while the Serbian army was recovering in Greece, Serbia launched action among the Austro-Hungarian POWs in Russia. Its success was limited but visible because there were nearly 20,000 who volunteered and agreed to become members of the Serbian Volunteer's Division (Srpska dobrovoljačka divizija). During this process it turned out that a certain number of Czechs and Slovaks also volunteered. Their motives ranged from the idea of Slavic solidarity to a clear wish to be part of the action. An additional factor was the fact that the Russian authorities were sceptical and opposed to the creation of similar Czechoslovak formations, but nevertheless allowed Czechs and Slovaks to join the Serbian Volunteer Division.²⁸ Thus, around 600 Czechs and Slovaks, of whom 128 were officers had joined its ranks creating a fighting force of nearly 18,000.²⁹ The fact that there were so many Czech officers significantly helped the creation of the division because there were not enough Serbian officers in the first place.

Some of the Czech and Slovak volunteers were students and intellectuals who had been reserve officers, for example: Václav Kopal, professor from Brno who became a Lieutenant in the Serbian Volunteer Division, physician Vladimír Hobza, Pavel Varsik, bank clerk by occupation and Slovak by nation, Jiří Čermák doctor of philosophy who became a second lieutenant, etc.³⁰ Among them was physician Bohuslav Bouček who as a Russian captive came from Siberia to join the Serbian army as a volunteer already in 1915. He witnessed the Serbian withdrawal across Albania to the island of Corfu from where he went to Italy and France and back to Russia to join the Serbian Volunteer Division.³¹

Yugoslav unification.

28 VÁCHA, Dalibor. Po bochu srbských bratří. Čechoslováci v srbské dobrovolnické divizi v Dobrudži v první světové války: sonda do každodennosti jejich života. (By the side of the Serbian brothers. Czechoslovaks in the Serbian Volunteer Division in Dobruja in the First World War: a look into their everyday life). In ŠTĚPANEK Vaclav – HLADKÝ Ladislav (eds.). *Od Moravy k Moravě III, Z historie česko-srbských vztahů*. Brno: Maticе moravská; Maticе srbská, 2017, pp. 49–81, here 51–53. ISBN 9788087709191

29 On 6 September 1916 the division had 16,568 men: 6,225 from Srem, Banat, Bačka and Baranja; 6,177 from Bosnia and Herzegovina; 3,269 from Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia, Istria and Slovenia; 542 from Bohemia, Slovakia and Galicia; and 355 from Serbia. See: MICIĆ, Milan. *Nezapamčena bitka. Srpski dobrovoljci u Rusiji 1914–1918*. (A memorable battle. Serbian volunteers in Russia 1914–1918). Novo Miloševo: Banatski kulturni centar, 2016, p. 101. ISBN 978-86-6029-273-7.

30 MICIĆ, ref. 29, p. 77.

31 VÁCHA, ref. 28, p. 55.

From the very beginning, creation of the Serbian Volunteer Division was accompanied by numerous difficulties, such as: Russian mistrust towards the former Austro-Hungarian officers and soldiers, poor state of the equipment and armament issued to the units (mostly captured and worn out Austro-Hungarian equipment), differences between its former Austro-Hungarian soldiers and Serbian officers in terms of mentality, practices, training approaches and military doctrine in general. For example occasional beating of soldiers by the officers during the drill, like slaps on the face, were usual practice in Serbian army.³² Also, unlike in the Austro-Hungarian army where NCOs performed most of the work with the soldiers, in the Serbian army it was mostly done by the officers, that is, their presence was much more visible and they were much closer to the soldiers. Additionally, Serbian doctrine was distinctively offensive following the Prussian model rather than that of the Austro-Hungarian military. All of these differences applied to the Czech and Slovak officers and soldiers with one additional distinction – language. Unlike other members of the Serbian Volunteer Division (whose majority consisted of Serbs and smaller numbers of Croats and Slovenes) who despite above-mentioned differences did not have problems with language, in the case of Czechs and Slovaks, the language issue could cause serious problem during combat.³³

However, despite these problems, the division was formed and sent to the newly opened front in the south. In 1916 Romania entered the war on the side of the Entente and after initial successes it was faced with combined attack from Germany, Austria-Hungary Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire. In order to prevent the fall of the newly acquired ally, the Russian supreme command sent its troops to the rescue. Among them was the Serbian Volunteer Division and during the thirty-four days of combat in September–October 1916 on the Dobruja section of the front it fought valiantly but suffered enormous casualties. The division's overall losses were 53% – 722 killed, 6,147 wounded and 1823 missing in action.³⁴ The volunteers' valour led to them gaining an almost mythical status among their Romanian allies. However, their bravery was not enough, and they, together with other Russian and Romanian units were forced to retreat from Dobruja and return to Russia. The number of 733 Serbian, 1,675 Russian and 889 Romanian decorations awarded to the volunteers clearly speaks of their worth.³⁵

32 MICIĆ, ref. 29, p. 92.

33 MICIĆ, ref. 29, p. 90.

34 MICIĆ, Milan. *Srpsko dobrovoljačko pitanje u Velikom ratu (1914–1918)*. (The Serbian volunteer question in the Great War 1914–1918). Novo Miloševo: Banatski kulturni centar, Radio-televizija Srbije, Beograd 2014, p. 107. ISBN 978-86-6029-204-1.

35 MICIĆ, ref. 34, p. 107.

Among the Czechs and Slovaks eleven officers and fifty-two soldiers lost their lives, while eighty-six officers and an undetermined number of soldiers were wounded.³⁶ Upon their return to Russia, the Czech and Slovak volunteers witnessed a near collapse of the whole Serbian volunteer project. Internal strife between different groups such as Serbs from Serbia and Serbs from Austria-Hungary as well as between Serbs in general and Croats and Slovenes almost paralysed the whole endeavour. The Czechs and Slovaks grew even stronger in their desire for Czechoslovak units.³⁷ In following months the majority of them joined the newly founded Czechoslovak Legion. Some 268 Czechs and Slovaks, however, remained in the Serbian army. They participated in fighting on the Macedonian front and by the end of war they joined the Czechoslovak Legion in France.³⁸ However, after the Dobruja campaign both the Serbian and Czechoslovak volunteer movements became involved in Russian turmoil. Those legionaries with experience from the Serbian Volunteer Division demonstrated high motivation, reached high positions within the Czechoslovak Legion and maintained a specific *esprit de corps* even after their return to the newly founded Czechoslovak Republic. Throughout the inter-war period they were known as Srbaci and among them were individuals such as Rudolf Viest (the only Slovak general in the inter-war period), Emanuel Moravec, František Moravec, Sergej Ingr, Karel Janoušek, František Slunečko,³⁹ and Radola Gajda, one of the most controversial figures during the period of the first republic.⁴⁰

Anti-war mutiny in Kragujevac in summer 1918

By the end of the war all belligerent countries experienced various sorts of military mutinies – various by cause as well as by scale. However, two causes clearly stood out – war fatigue and echoes of the Russian revolutions.

After the signing of the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty in March of 1918,⁴¹ enormous numbers of Austro-Hungarian soldiers in Russian captivity started to return to their country. It is said that during the Great War there were 2,104,146 Austro-Hungarians out of a total of 2,333,328 POWs in imperial Russia.⁴² By

36 VÁCHA, ref. 28, p. 68.

37 VÁCHA, ref. 28, pp. 69–71.

38 VÁCHA, ref. 28, p. 73.

39 VÁCHA, ref. 28, pp. 77–78.

40 VYKOUPIĚL, Libor. *Radola Gajda ve válkách na Balkáně 1912–1918*. (Radola Gajda in the wars in the Balkans 1912–1918). In ŠTĚPANEK Vaclav – HLADKÝ Ladislav (eds.). *Od Moravy k Moravě III, Z historie česko-srbských vztahů*. Brno: Maticе moravská; Maticе srbska, 2017, pp. 83–105. ISBN 9788087709191

41 GERWARTH, Robert. *The Vanquished. Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917–1923*. London: Allen Lane, 2016, pp. 37–40. ISBN 978-1-846-14811-8.

42 MILORADOVIĆ, Goran. *Karantin za ideje; Logori za izolaciju “sumnjivih elemenata” u*

June some 600,000 ex POW's returned, and while the state wanted to see them back in the ranks and back in the fight, most of them were extremely reluctant to once more experience trenches and death. So after spending some time visiting their families, instead of returning to their units some of them decided to desert. For example, in the South Slav lands of the Habsburg Empire, after 1916 some 60.000 soldiers deserted and joined groups of so-called "Green Cadre".⁴³ These groups consisted of deserters, returnees from Russia and local peasants. In the Croatian lands, for example, they significantly contributed to the insecurity in rural areas by attacking large landowners, tax collectors and other state officials.⁴⁴ In order to prevent occurrences of desertions *en masse*, the Austro-Hungarian military authorities decided to deploy units consisting of returnees from Russia to remote parts of the empire. The main goal was to isolate soldiers, thus preventing them "fraternizing" with the locals, introduce them to their experiences from Russia and eventually spreading communist political ideas. This was done with 65% of such units.⁴⁵

However, in spite of this, a series of soldier's mutinies occurred both in the Austro-Hungarian army and navy.⁴⁶ So, following the above-mentioned logic within the 71st infantry regiment stationed in occupied Serbia, more precisely in the central Serbian town of Kragujevac, a special battalion was formed, consisting mainly of soldiers of Slovak nationality (from the region around the town of Trenčín) who had returned from Russian captivity. There, they started to share their Russian experiences with other soldiers, automatically spreading some of the basic ideas of the Russian revolution – most importantly the idea of peace. When they heard rumours that parts of the regiment would be sent to the Italian

Kraljevini Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1919–1922. (Quarantine for ideas; Camps for isolation of "suspicious elements" in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes 1919–1922). Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2004, p. 165. ISBN 978-8674030813. The rest were 167,082 Germans, 50,000 Ottomans, and 200 Bulgarians.

- 43 STANKOVIĆ, Đorđe. Kako je Jugoslavija počela. (How did Yugoslavia start). In TERZIĆ, Milan (ed.). *Prvi svetski rat i Balkan – 90 godina kasnije*. Beograd: Institut za strategijska istraživanja, 2011, pp. 232–247, here 237. ISBN 978-86-81121-06-1.
- 44 NEWMAN, John Paul. *Yugoslavia in the Shadow of War. Veterans and the Limits of State Building 1903–1945*. Cambridge University Press 2015, p. 42. ISBN 978-1107070769.
- 45 DENDA, Dalibor. Antiratna pobuna austrougarskih vojnika u Kragujevcu juna 1918 i njena kasnija propagandna upotreba (The anti-war mutiny of the Austro-Hungarian soldiers in Kragujevac in June 1918 and its later propaganda usage). In TERZIĆ, Milan (ed.). *Prvi svetski rat i Balkan – 90 godina kasnije*. Beograd: Institut za strategijska istraživanja, 2011, pp. 180–187, here 182. ISBN 978-86-81121-06-1.
- 46 DENDA, ref. 45, p. 182. A series of smaller and larger mutinies began in January 1918 in the naval base at Pula, than followed Boka Kotorska in February, Judenburg, Murau, Radgona, and Pecs in May. The participants belonged to all nations and the majority were returnees from Russian captivity.

front some 700 soldiers objected and started a mutiny. Their leader was sergeant Viktor Kobilik. The mutineers armed themselves and soon they left the barracks. However, they did not have any kind of plan for future actions so additional units that were brought in, managed to successfully crush the mutiny. Some 300 mutineers were apprehended. On 21 June, out of eighty-one who were court martialled forty-nine mutineers were sentenced (forty-four to death and five to prison sentences). From those who were sentenced only three were not returnees from Russia. The soldiers sentenced to death were taken out of the town and shot the same day. Compared to another mutiny earlier that year at the Austro-Hungarian naval base in Boka Kotorska, sentences executed in Kragujevac may look draconian because out of forty mutineers court martialled in Boka Kotorska only four were sentenced to death and shot.⁴⁷

After the war on the same field where mutineers were executed a monument was consecrated in their honour and it assumed an important role in building allied relations between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia within the Little Entente. The monument was consecrated on 24 September 1924 in the presence of, for that time, an enormous crowd of 20,000 people. Beside representatives of the Organizational board, local army and civil authorities there were emissaries from the Czechoslovak army, Trenčín region, Sokol organization as well as the Czechoslovak diplomatic representative in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. This monument is known as the first monument to the First World War consecrated in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.⁴⁸

A specific closure of the story of Czechs and Slovaks in Serbia during the First World War happened on 28 June or Vidovdan 1928 (anniversary of the Kosovo battle of 1389) when a high Czechoslovak delegation came to Serbia, now part of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, to participate in the solemn event on Cer mountain, place of the first Serbian and Allied victory in the First World War. The occasion was the consecration of another monument – a memorial ossuary. The Czechoslovak delegation, headed by the Chief of Staff General Jan Syrový, paid their respects to the fallen in this battle of whom many were Czechs. In his speech, General Syrový spoke of how the Czech soldiers, who fought in the battle of Cer in August 1914, rather believed in the final victory of Serbia than that of Austria-Hungary and that within their souls they carried Slavic consciousness and faith in the final victory of justice.⁴⁹ Czechoslovak government financially helped building of this monument, and it happened that here remains of Serbian and Austro-Hungarian soldiers, mostly of Czech origin, were buried together.

47 DENDA, ref. 45, p. 185.

48 DENDA, ref. 45, p. 185.

49 *Politika*, 29 June 1928, p. 2.

Finally, a new chapter in relations between the Serbs on one side, and the Czechs and Slovaks on the other, was opened with the creation of the Yugoslav state. A considerable number of Slovaks, and to a lesser extent Czechs, who lived in the Vojvodina region, became Yugoslav citizens. By preserving their language and traditions and being loyal subjects of the new state, they became a living connection between the two nations, and they continued to be that throughout the turbulent 20th century and up to the present day.

* Work on this paper was supported by the Visiting Professorship provided by the Institute of History, Philosophical Faculty of the University of Hradec Králové in the winter of 2018.

FREUNDE UND FEINDE TSCHECHEN / SLOWAKEN UND SERBIEN WÄHREND DES ERSTEN WELTKRIEGES

DMITAR TASIĆ

Während des „langen 19. Jahrhunderts“ intensivierten sich allmählich die Beziehungen zwischen Serbien und der Tschechen und in geringerem Maße den Slowaken, nicht nur auf kultureller, sondern auch auf wirtschaftlicher Ebene. Das Fachwissen und die technischen Fähigkeiten vieler Tschechen wurden in Serbien hoch geschätzt und sie haben den Prozess des Aufbaus des Staates und der Nation in Serbien tief geprägt. Die Zahl der Tschechen und Slowaken, die beschlossen, sich dauerhaft in Serbien niederzulassen, war beispielsweise größer als die Zahl der Kroaten und Slowenen. Die Beziehungen zwischen Serben, Tschechen und Slowaken während des Ersten Weltkriegs haben gezeigt, wie zwischenethnische Beziehungen unterschiedliche Komplexitätsstufen erreichen können. Obwohl die meisten Tschechen und Slowaken während des Ersten Weltkriegs die Loyalität gegenüber der Habsburgermonarchie gezeigt haben und obwohl viele von ihnen während der Feldzüge 1914 und 1915 gegen Serbien gekämpft haben, gab es eine kleine, aber bedeutende Anzahl ihrer Landsleute, die den Überlebenskampf von Serbien unterstützt haben, indem sie der serbischen Armee als Freiwillige beigetreten haben, womit sie in besonderer Weise zur Schaffung der tschechoslowakischen Freiwilligenbewegung sowie der Streitkräfte der künftigen tschechoslowakischen Republik beigetragen haben. Der serbische Staat hingegen unterstützte die Bemühungen von Tomáš Masaryk, die die Schaffung des unabhängigen tschechoslowakischen Staates zum Ziel hatten. Die oben genannten Beispiele sowie einige andere, wie die Mission von Milan Rastislav Štefánik im Jahr 1915 oder der Antikriegsaufstand slowakischer Rekruten in Kragujevac im Jahr 1918, spielten ebenfalls eine wichtige Rolle bei der Stärkung der alliierten Beziehungen zwischen Jugoslawien und der Tschechoslowakei in der Zeit zwischen zwei Weltkriegen.

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