

*Vladislav B. Sotirovic**

THE 1917 CORFU DECLARATION AND ITS IMPORTANCE FOR THE CREATION OF THE KINGDOM OF SERBS, CROATS AND SLOVENES IN 1918

Summary

The aim of this research article is to give answers to the following four scientific research problems about the 1917 Corfu Declaration: 1. the reasons for convocation of the Corfu Conference as a conference which should finally resolve the main political problems between the Royal Serbian Government and the Yugoslav Committee, i.e. between two the most important negotiating representatives of the South Slavs during the process of the Yugoslav unification at the time of the First World War; 2. a nature of the opposite political conceptions and attitudes towards a process of unification and internal organisation of a new Yugoslav state between the negotiating parties as the most important question to be solved before the proclamation of the single South Slavic state; 3. an interpretation of the text of the 1917 Corfu Declaration as a legal act of the agreement between the Yugoslav Committee and the Royal Serbian Government pretending to be a final political settlement upon the political form, internal organization and functioning of the new state; and 4. an importance of the 1917 Corfu Declaration for the further process of unification of the South Slavs. In order to realize our research

aims we will deal with the relevant historical sources followed by relevant historiographical literature on the topic. However, the most significant stress in this article is put on the text of the Corfu Declaration itself as the basic historical document with regard to the creation of the common South Slavic state in the fall of 1918.

Keywords: Corfu Declaration, Yugoslavia, Yugoslavs, Balkans, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Yugoslav Committee.

1. Introduction

The most important consequence of the First World War (the Great War)¹ concerning the Balkan Peninsula were a dissolution of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy (the Dual Monarchy) and a creation of the new Balkan state - the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (the KSCS)² proclaimed in Zagreb on November 23rd, 1918 and confirmed as a new political reality in Belgrade on December 1st, of the same year.³ However, in the Balkan, Yugoslav and even international historiography there is still a false interpretation of the historical sources and political events based on them upon the question when and where the KSCS was proclaimed as it is interpreted to be in Belgrade on December 1st, 1918.⁴ However, the sources and facts are clearly telling that a common Yugoslav state was in fact proclaimed in Zagreb (Croatia) on November 23rd, 1918 but not in Belgrade (Serbia). In the capital of the Kingdom of Serbia on December 1st, 1918 it was only confirmed already proclaimed a common state of all Serbs, Croats and Slo-

1 On the Great War, see: H. Strachan, *The First World War*, New York: Viking Penguin, 2004; P. Hart, *The Great War, 1914–1918*, London: Profile Books Ltd, 2013; G. Wawro, *A Mad Catastrophe: The Outbreak of World War I and the Collapse of the Habsburg Empire*, Basic Books, 2014; W. Philpott, *War of Attrition: Fighting the First World War*, Overlook, 2014.

2 Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca (Kraljevina SHS).

3 S. Trifunovska (ed.), *Yugoslavia Through Documents: From its creation to its dissolution*, Dordrecht–Boston–London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1994, pp. 151–160.

4 For instance: B. Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918–1988*, Vol. 1, Beograd: NO-LIT, 1988, p. 26; B. Ђоровић, *Наше победе*, Beograd: Култура, 1990, p. 141; B. Petranović, M. Zečević, *Agonija dve Jugoslavije*, Beograd–Šabac: Zaslou, 1991, p. 14; K. Елан, *Живот и смрт Александра I краља Југославије*, Beograd: Ново дело, 1988, p. 27.

venes by a Montenegrin regent Alexander Karadorđević on the throne of the Kingdom of Serbia.⁵ The new state was composed by three pre-war territorial parts: the territories of the Kingdom of Serbia, Kingdom of Montenegro and the Dual Monarchy populated by the South Slavs. The last (third) territory gave around 50% of the new state. Nevertheless, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes became after December 1918 the biggest country at the Balkans and one of the bigger states in Europe from the territorial point of view.⁶ The country was in fact created, proclaimed and recognized as such just by the politicians in Zagreb and Belgrade but not by any kind of the people's referenda or plebiscite either on the territory of the Kingdom of Serbia or the South Slavic lands of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy.

During the process of political-state's unification of the South Slavs into their own single national and independent state during the First World War several important documents were issued by the representative institutions of them with regard to the creation and internal political and administrative organisation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Without any doubt, the 1917 Corfu Declaration is the most significant and crucial document among all of them. It was signed on July 20th, 1917 between the government of the Kingdom of Serbia and the representatives of the Yugoslav Committee – a political organisation established in 1915 in London and representing the South Slavs from the Dual Monarchy. The Corfu Declaration became a basis for further process of unification and, what is even more important, a basis for the conception of the internal political organisation of the new state. However, the conclusions of this document were changed in the Geneva Declaration signed on November 9th, 1918 by the representatives of the government of the Kingdom of

5 According to the French writer and good friend of Alexander I, Claude Eylan, the King of Yugoslavia identified himself as a Montenegrin (К. Елан, *Живот и смрт Александра I краља Југославије*, Београд: Ново дело, 1988, р. 27). For the matter of fact, he was born in the capital of Montenegro - Cetinje in 1888 at the court of the Prince of Montenegro. From the mother side (Zorka), his origin was coming from the ruling dynasty of Montenegro as his mother was a daughter of the Prince of Montenegro - Nicholas I. About the life and death of Alexander I of Yugoslavia, see: C. Eylan, *La Vie et la Mort D'Alexandre Ier Roi de Yugoslavie*, Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1935.

6 Before December 1st, 1918, Serbia was already united with Montenegro, Vojvodina (a southern region of ex-Hungary) and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Б. Глигоријевић, *Краљ Александар Карађорђевић*, 1, Београд: БИГЗ, 1996, р. 441).

Serbia, the National Council in Zagreb, the Yugoslav Committee and the parliamentary groups. Nevertheless, the proclamation of the new state in Zagreb on November 23rd, 1918 was officially accepted and verified in Belgrade by Serbia's side on December 1st, 1918 mainly on the basis of the Corfu Declaration but not on the Geneva one.

The aim of this research article is to give answers to the following four scientific research problems about the 1917 Corfu Declaration:

1. The *reasons for convocation of the Corfu Conference* as a conference which should finally resolve the main political problems between the Royal Serbian Government and the Yugoslav Committee, i.e. between two the most important negotiating representatives of the South Slavs during the process of the Yugoslav unification at the time of the First World War.
2. A nature of the *opposite political conceptions and attitudes towards a process of unification and internal organisation of a new Yugoslav state between the negotiating parties* as the most important question to be solved before the proclamation of the single South Slavic state.
3. An interpretation of the text of *the 1917 Corfu Declaration as a legal act of the agreement between the Yugoslav Committee and the Royal Serbian Government* pretending to be a final political settlement upon the political form, internal organization and functioning of the new state.
4. An *importance of the 1917 Corfu Declaration for the further process of unification of the South Slavs*.

In order to realize our research aims we will deal with the relevant historical sources followed by relevant historiographical literature on the topic. However, the most significant stress in this article is put on the text of the Corfu Declaration itself as the basic historical document with regard to the creation of the common South Slavic state in the fall of 1918.

2. *The reasons for convocation of the CORFU conference in june–july 1917*

the preparations for the 1917 Corfu Conference can be traced from the moment when the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Serbia Nikola Pašić (1845–1926) sent an invitation to the President of the Yugoslav Committee in London, a Croat from Dalmatian city of Split – Dr. Ante Trumbić, at the beginning of May 1917. Dr. Trumbić was invited in fact to come to the Corfu island in Greece with other four members of the Yugoslav Committee in order to make an agreement with the Government of Serbia with regard to the most urgent and important questions about the creation of the new Serbo-Croat-Slovene state.⁷ Therefore, the most significant question which needs appropriate answer is: Why did Nikola Pašić decide to negotiate with the Yugoslav Committee at that time and at such a way to recognise it *de facto* (but not and *de iure*) as equal political side to the Royal Serbian Government upon the process of unification which is representing all South Slavs from the Dual Monarchy?

In order to give answer to this question we have to take into consideration N. Pašić's opinion about the functions of the Yugoslav Committee from the time of its very foundation. The Yugoslav Committee was established on April 30th, 1915 in Paris by the South Slavs who were exiled from the territory of the Dual Monarchy during the first months of the war. The reason for its establishment was of the very practical political nature: it was the answer to the secret Treaty of London, signed between Italy and the Entente states of the United Kingdom, France and Russia. It was signed on April 26th, 1915 at the expense of Austria-Hungary but primarily of the South Slavic territories in the Dual Monarchy claimed by the Croats and Slovenes (Istria, Dalmatia and the Adriatic Islands). Therefore, the creation of the Yugoslav Committee was in fact an act of protection of national interests and rights

7 M. Zečević, M. Milošević (eds.), *Diplomatska prepiska srpske vlade 1917 (Dokumenti)*, Beograd: Narodno delo–Arhiv Jugoslavije, without year, p. 321. However, according to Đ. Đ. Stanković, the Prime Minister of Serbia invited Dr. A. Trumbić to come to the Corfu island not with four but with five members of the Yugoslav Committee (Ђ. Ђ. Станковић, *Никола Пашић и југословенско питање*, vol. II, Београд: БИГЗ, 1985, p. 160).

of the South Slavs from the Dual Monarchy,⁸ i.e., of the Austro-Hungarian Croats and Slovenes but not of the Austro-Hungarian Serbs or Serbia. The member-politicians of the Yugoslav Committee (established in Paris but soon moved to London because of diplomatic reasons) claimed to represent all South Slavs from the Dual Monarchy to the Entente powers in order to protect their national interest and ethno-historical rights for the time after the end of the First World War at the peace conference.⁹ It means that the Yugoslav Committee was pretending to represent the peoples from the following South-Slavic ethno-historical regions: Istria, Dalmatia, Međumurje, Prekomurje, Kranjska, the Southern Štajerska, the South-West Koruška, Croatia, Slavonia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Kotor Bay, Baranja, Srem Banat and Bačka. At that time, as the South Slavs, in these regions have been recognized as the separate ethnolinguistic nationalities: the Slovenes (Kranjci), Croats and Serbs.¹⁰

In regard to the question of N. Pašić's attitude towards the existence of the Yugoslav Committee and its function during the war, the most important problem was the fact that the Yugoslav Committee understood itself as the only competent political representative organisation of all South Slavs from the Dual Monarchy, what means including and the Austrian-Hungarian Serbs. On the other hand, Serbia's Prime Minister did not want to accept the Yugoslav Committee as the legal political-national representative organisation of the South Slavs from the Dual Monarchy but only as the patriotic organisation with the only aim to fight for the Yugoslav (the South Slavic from the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary) national interests, and to inform the public opi-

8 According to J. Woodward and C. Woodward, by this treaty the Entente in return for Italy's entrance to the war on their side assigned to Rome the following territories: Gorizia/Gradisca, Trieste, Carniola, Istria and part of Dalmatia with most of its islands; with the exception of the city of Trieste (J. Woodward, C. Woodward, *Italy and the Yugoslavs*, Boston, 1920, pp. 317–320).

9 On the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, see: M. MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World*, Random House, 2007; D. A. Andelman, *A Shattered Peace: Versailles 1919 and the Price We Pay Today*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008; N. A. Graebner, Edward M. Bennett, *The Versailles Treaty and Its Legacy: The Failure of the Wilsonian Vision*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

10 After the Second World War a new Communist Government of the Socialist and federal Yugoslavia proclaimed additional three South Slavic ethnolinguistic nationalities: The Macedonians, Muslims and Montenegrins. For that reason, the country was re-arranged into the six Socialist republics. See: J. B. Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

nion in the United Kingdom (where it was located) and Europe about the Yugoslav question in Austria-Hungary.¹¹ According to Vojislav Vučković, N. Pašić was in opinion that the political role of the Yugoslav Committee was just “to inform the Allies about the sufferings of the South Slav lands under the Austrian-Hungarian rule and to present their national intentions”.¹² These were the crucial reasons for N. Pašić that he never before the Corfu Conference recognised in practice the Yugoslav Committee as *de facto* the equal political-representative institution to the Royal Serbia’s Government upon the process of the Serbo-Croat-Slovenian state’s unification. However, in May 1917 he decided to negotiate with the Yugoslav Committee as a representative institution of the South Slavs from the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary and at such a way to recognize it as one of the legal subjects in the process of unification. Moreover, thus, he *de facto* recognized the Yugoslav Committee even as the equal negotiating-representative subject with Serbia’s Royal Government. Nevertheless, up to that time he claimed only for Serbia exclusive rights to represent all South Slavs before the Entente contracting powers and only for the Kingdom of Serbia to work on their unification into a single national state. Therefore, the most significant question in regard to the mentioned above is: What was the main reason for N. Pašić to drastically change in May 1917 his opinion towards the role and function of the Yugoslav Committee?

The answers to the above questions are coming from the very fact that the Imperial Russia was the only supporter of Serbia’s plan to create the united national state of all ethnolinguistic Serbs in the South-East Europe after the war on the ruins of Austria-Hungary. On the other side, Serbia’s Government was aware that both the country and the national interest of the Serbs can be protected only by the Imperial Russia. N. Pašić was convinced even in 1912, just before the Balkan Wars started, that only Russia can save Serbia from the aggression by the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary.¹³ It is known that the Balkan 19th cen-

11 A. N. Dragnich, *Serbia, Nikola Pašić and Yugoslavia*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1974, pp. 112–113; M. Екмечић, *Ратни циљеви Србије 1914*, Београд: Просвета, 1990, pp. 354–355.

12 В. Вучковић, „Из односа Србије и Југословенског Одбора“, *Историјски часопис*, vol. XII–XIII, Београд, 1963, pp. 345–350.

13 А. Н. Драгнић, *Србија, Никола Пашић и Југославија*, Београд: Народна радијална странка, 1994, p. 112.

ture policy of Russia was led by the main idea that the Russian influence in this region should be realized by supporting Bulgaria and Serbia.¹⁴ It was the main reason for the Imperial Russia to create either a Greater Bulgaria (like according to the San Stefano Peace Treaty with the Ottoman Empire on March 3rd, 1878)¹⁵ or a Greater Serbia (during the First World War in 1915–1917). Because of the very fact that in the First World War Bulgaria from October 1915 was fighting on the opposite side (together with Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire) the crucial pivot in the Russian Balkan policy became from October 1915 the Kingdom of Serbia.¹⁶ Probably as the best example of the Russian attitude about the Balkan affairs can be seen in proposal given by the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergei D. Sazonov (1860–1927), in September 1914 to Serbia's ambassador to Russia: regardless to the fact that Sazonov understood well that the purpose of Serbo-Croat-Slovenian common state in the future is to be a counterbalance against Italy, Hungary and Romania but, however, he did not advise Serbia to create a common state with the Roman Catholic Croats and Slovenes as they will be in such state all the time just an instrument used by the Vatican in its policy of destroying the Orthodoxy in Eastern Europe.¹⁷ The Russian authority, therefore, preferred creation of a strong Orthodox united national state of the Serbs in a form of a Greater Serbia at the Balkans.¹⁸

Nevertheless, the basic and ultimate aim by N. Pašić and his war time Government of Serbia during the entire Great War was

14 J. M. Јовановић, *Стварање заједничке државе СХС*, Vol. III, Београд: 1928, p. 47.

15 See, for instance: A. Von Bulmerincq, *Le Passe De La Russie: Depuis Les Temps Les Plus Recules Jusqu'a La Paix De San Stefano 1878*, Kessinger Publishing, 2010.

16 On the Bulgarian war aims during the Great War, see: Ž. Avramovski, *Ratni ciljevi Bugarske i Centralne sile 1914–1918*, Београд: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1985.

17 On the Russian policy and diplomacy at the Balkans in 1914–1917, see the memoirs of the Russian ambassador to Serbia – Count Grigorie Nikolaevich Trubecki: Кнез Г. Н. Трубецки, *Рат на Балкану 1914–1917. и руска дипломатија*, Београд: Просвета, 1994.

18 About the truth, blunders and abuses upon the Greater Serbia, see: В. Ђ. Крестић, М. Недић (eds.), *Велика Србија: Истине, заблуде, злоупотребе. Зборник радова са Међународног научног скупа одржаног у Српској академији наука и уметности у Београду од 24–26. октобра 2002. године*, Београд: Српска књижевна задруга, 2003.

firstly to resolve the Serbian question if possible by creation of a single and united common state of all Serbs in the Balkans (a Greater Serbia). A prospect for creation of such state after the war in the case of the Entente military victory was given by the Entente powers to Serbia's Government during the secret negotiations in London in April 1915 that was over by signing of the London Treaty on April 26th. In order to realize this offer by the Entente, Serbia had to cede to Bulgaria her portion of Macedonia gained after the Second Balkan War in 1913 (the so-called Vardar Macedonia). Nevertheless, the main guarantee to Serbia upon realization of this offer was the Russian Empire. However, the Government of Serbia rejected to cede the Vardar Macedonia to Bulgaria in 1915 hoping to create a Greater Serbia after the war including into the united national state of all Serbs and her portion of Macedonia that was called by the Serbian academicians and politicians as the Southern Serbia.

The "Yugoslav" option for the Government of Serbia was only the second one, or better to say – an unhappy alternative, just in the case that the option of united national state can not be realized in the practice after the war for any reason. It means that any kind of Yugoslavia (centralized, federal, etc.), as a common state of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, for Serbia was also part of her war aims: to solve the Serbian national question just in this case the Serbs have to live together with the Croats and Slovenes in a single state. N. Pašić himself was a strong supporter of creation of a Greater Serbia (first and prime option) instead of the common South Slavic state (second and only alternative option) until the spring 1917 when he decided to negotiate with the Yugoslav Committee on the equal political level for the sake of creation of Yugoslavia instead of united national state just of the Serbs in a form of a Greater Serbia. Therefore, the crucial question is: What was the real reason for N. Pašić to finally opt for creation of Yugoslavia but not for a Greater Serbia in the spring 1917?

On the other hand, the "Yugoslav" option was and for the Yugoslav Committee only the alternative one, but not the main political aim to be realized after the Great War. We have to keep in mind that the top leadership of the Yugoslav Committee was composed by the ethnic Croats (like the Communist Party of Yugoslavia during the Second World War) and it was led primarily by two Croat politicians from Dalmatian seaport of Split: the

President Dr. Ante Trumbić (1864–1938) and Dr. Josip Smolka (1869–1956). After them, the most influential committee members have been also the Croats: Ivan Meštrović, Hinko Hinković, the brothers Gazzari and others. Even the original name of the Yugoslav Committee was the Croatian Committee, established in Rome but the name was changed very soon for the political reasons. Nevertheless, it was obvious, and for N. Pašić and for the rest of his Government, that the Yugoslav Committee was fighting exclusively for the Croat national interest and that the „Yugoslav“ name was chosen just to hide the Croat nationalism under the quasi-Yugoslavism.¹⁹ What is the most important to say about the Yugoslav Committee is that this in fact Croat national organisation was deeply imbued by the political ideology of the ultra-nationalistic Croatian Party of Rights, established by Ante Starčević in 1861. According to the party ideology, all South Slavs have been ethnolinguistic Croats. Therefore, the Slovenians were nothing else than „Alpine“ or „White“ Croats, Montenegro was „Red Croatia“ and all Serbs were understood just as the Orthodox Croats. The President of the Yugoslav Committee Dr. A. Trumbić was a member of this party till 1905 and Dr. Frano Supilo was in his youth a fellow of the party. The main political aim of the Croatian Party of Rights was to establish ethnically pure Greater Croatia including all provinces of the Dual Monarchy populated by the South Slavs what was at the same time and the crucial political aim of the Yugoslav Committee to be achieved after the war.²⁰ However, the “Yugoslav” option was for the leadership of the Yugoslav Committee, like for N. Pašić in the case of Serbia, just the alternative one if the crucial political aim (a Greater Croatia) was not to be realized for some reason.

With regard to the convocation of the Corfu Conference in 1917, according to Dr. A. Trumbić, the main reasons and tasks of the conference were:

- 1/. The 1917 February/March Revolution in Russia followed by the U.S. entering the war in April of the same

19 On relations between N. Pašić and A. Trumbić, see: D. Djokic, *Pašić and Trumbić: The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes*, London: Haus Publishing, 2010. On N. Pašić's relations with the Croat politicians in 1918–1923, see: Ђ. Ђ. Станковић, *Никола Пашић и Хрвати, 1918–1923*, Београд: БИГЗ, 1995.

20 About the political ideology of the Croatian Party of Rights, see: M. Gross, A. Szabo, *Prema hrvatskome građanskom društvu*, Zagreb, 1992, pp. 257–265.

year created a new war circumstances and international atmosphere favourable for direct and ultimate negotiations between the Government of Serbia and the Yugoslav Committee upon the future of the South Slavs after the Great War.

2. Therefore, from the spring 1917 it was impossible any more to keep Serbia's Government's principles of the unification.
3. It was necessary to formulate officially one and common programme of the unification of the South Slavs.
4. It was necessary to agree with the Royal Government of Serbia on "territorial unification and internal organisation of the common state..."²¹

It is a true fact that after the 1917 February/March Revolution in Russia all hopes by N. Pašić and his Government with a possibility to create a Greater Serbia after the war disappeared for the very reason that a new Russian Government in St Petersburg (Petrograd) did not give support for creation of united national state of all Serbs. At such a way, after March 1917 and dethronement of the Russian Emperor Nicholas II an idea of a Greater Serbia was not supported by any of Great Powers during the war.²² In the other words, historically and naturally, only Imperial Orthodox Russia was interested in creation and existence of a Greater Serbia – a state to be under the Russian protectorate.²³ N. Pašić's main war-time task of the Kingdom of Serbia, based on a support by the Imperial Russia, disappeared when the new Russian Provisional Government declared on March 24th, 1917 that Russia

21 A. Trumbić, "Nekoliko riječi o Krfskoj deklaraciji", *Bulletin Yougoslave*, No. 26, November 1st, 1917, *Jugoslavenski Odbor u Londonu*, Zagreb: JAZU, 1966, p. 167.

22 The main figure in the 1917 February/March Revolution in Russia was Alexander Fyodorovich Kerensky (1881–1970). He was a member of a moderate Socialist party – Trudoviks. In the new Russian Provisional Government he became a Minister of Justice and later a Minister of War. He was born in Ulyanovsk like Vladimir Ilich Lenin and was of the same ethnicity as Lenin was. Beyond the 1917 February/March Revolution in Russia was the British diplomacy, while beyond the 1917 October/November Revolution, led by Lenin, was Germany.

23 About the first serious Serbian plan to call Russia to become the protector of united national state of the Serbs, see: Vladislav B. Sotirović, "The Memorandum (1804) by the Karlovci Metropolitan Stevan Stratimirović", *Serbian Studies: Journal of the North American Society for Serbian Studies*, vol. 24, № 1–2, Bloomington, 2010, pp. 27–48.

wants to create around Serbia one “strongly organised Yugoslavia - as a barrier against the German aspirations”²⁴, but not a Greater Serbia with the same function as Yugoslavia. In one word, the Imperial Orthodox Russia, as the only supporter of the idea of a Greater Serbia, did not exist anymore, and for that real fact the Prime Minister of Serbia had to adapt his post-war political plans to the new political reality in Europe after the 1917 Russian February/March Revolution.²⁵ It means that the alternative “Yugoslav” option of solving the Serbian national question after the war became optimal reality for the Government of Serbia in the spring 1917, likewise for the Yugoslav Committee as well.

In the case of N. Pašić, it is obvious that the 1917 February/March Russian Revolution was the crucial reason to change an attitude about Serbia’s war aims as he finally gave up idea to create a Greater Serbia and therefore accepted idea of creation of a common South Slavic state. However, in order to fulfil this new goal he had to directly negotiate with the representatives of the Yugoslav Committee, i.e., with the Croats. Nevertheless, it was only one out of three real reasons to bring together in the Corfu island in June–July 1917 around the table of negotiations the Government of Serbia and the Yugoslav Committee. The second reason, or better to say a danger, became the possibility to preserve the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary after the war in some rearranged inner-administrative political form. The point was that for both Serbia and the Yugoslav Committee any kind of preservation of Austria-Hungary after the war was unacceptable political solution. The problem was that this idea from the side of the South Slavs in the Dual Monarchy emerged again on May 30th, 1917 when the “Yugoslav” deputies in the Austro-Hungarian Parliament (the “Yugoslav Club”) demanded reconstruction of the post-war Dual Monarchy on the bases that all Austria-Hungary’s provinces populated by the South Slavs (the “Yugoslavs”) should form a separate federal part of the Dual Monarchy “under the sceptre of the Habsburg dynasty”.²⁶ From this point of view, the Corfu Conference and its Declaration were the answer to the May

24 A. Mandić, *Fragments za historiju ujedinjenja*, Zagreb, 1956, p. 77.

25 *Jugoslavenski Odbor u Londonu*, Zagreb: JAZU, 1966, p. 173.

26 F. Šišić, *Dokumenti o postanku Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca, 1914–1919*, Zagreb 1920, p. 94; B. Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918–1988*, Vol. 1, Beograd: NOLIT, 1988, p. 18.

Declaration by the South Slavic deputies in the Austria-Hungary's Parliament. The third reason for convocation of the Corfu Conference was diplomatic mission to the Entente powers and its allies by Sixte de Bourbon, a brother-in-law of the last Austro-Hungarian ruler (Emperor Charles I of Austria and King Charles IV of Hungary, 1916–1918), with regard to the possibility of signing a separate peace treaty with the Entente by the Dual Monarchy and at such a way to preserve territorial integrity of the Dual Monarchy after the war. Therefore, the Corfu Declaration was political demonstration by the Government of Serbia and the Yugoslav Committee against any diplomatic attempt to preserve the Dual Monarchy after the war with the South Slavic provinces. However, in order to succeed in their anti-Austro-Hungarian plans, Serbia and the Yugoslav Committee had to achieve bilateral agreement for the sake to have a common political platform before the Entente powers.²⁷

The Italian diplomatic and military campaign in Albania and Epirus in the spring of 1917 was the last reason for convocation of the Corfu Conference, which resulted in signing of the Corfu Declaration. At that time, both Serbia and the Yugoslav Committee were under the menace by the Italian territorial aspirations in the Western Balkans. As it was noticed earlier, the Yugoslav Committee was established in 1915 in order to protect one part of the Yugoslav (Croat and Slovenian) lands from the Italian territorial demands. However, at that time the territory of the Kingdom of Serbia was not in danger either from the Italian territorial aspirations or the Italian diplomatic and military influence in the Central-Southern Balkans. That was one of the reasons why Serbia was not in a hurry to make a final agreement concerning the creation of Yugoslavia with the Yugoslav Committee. Nevertheless, in the spring of 1917, alongside with the Yugoslav Committee, the Royal Government of Serbia was as well as under strong Italian threat as the Italian diplomatic and military activities in Albania and Epirus – the territories in the neighbourhood of the Kingdom of Serbia. It means that the state's territory and the borders of Serbia were in a question for the time after the war.

27 А. Н. Драгнић, *Србија, Никола Пашић и Југославија*, Београд: Народна радикална странка, 1994, р. 128.

The first statement about the Italian political activities in Albania and Epirus, as a threat for Serbia, was sent to Serbia's Regent A. Karađorđević, by Serbian vice-consul in Salonika, Nikola Jovanović, on March 3rd, 1917. According to him, the Italian plan was to unify Albania according to the Albanian claims on their ethnic rights. At that moment some Albanian ethnic lands (claimed by the Albanian propaganda to be only Albanian) have been under the Italian military occupation, and under political protectorate of Rome. In fact, according to the report, a newly post-war Albania was to be in fact a Greater Albania, enlarged at least with Kosovo-Metohia and the Western Macedonia (and most probably with the Greek Southern Epirus), i.e., with the territories included into Serbia and Montenegro after the Balkan Wars 1912–1913. The Serbian vice-consul thought that Italy wants to create a Greater Albania as the basis for the Italian political-economic post-war influence at the area of the Southern Balkans (basically as the Italian colony as a substitution for the lost Ethiopia in 1896). The Serbian authorities have been in strong opinion that a Greater Albania under the Italian protectorate would be a totally hostile towards Serbia. In addition, the north-western Greek province of the Southern Epirus was for the Italians only the “question of the Great Powers, but not the question of Greece”.²⁸ Only five days later, N. Pašić sent a telegram to the Regent Alexander with information that one Italian general gave an anti-Serbian speech in Albanian town of Argirocastro criticising Esad-Pasha's pro-Serbian policy.²⁹ At that moment Esad-Pasha was only Albanian leader who co-operated with the Serbian Government among all Albanian political leaders. The Serbian ambassador in Athens, Živojin Balugdžić, informed his Government on April 8th, 1917 that an agreement upon Albania between Italy and France was achieved in Paris. According to this agreement, Italy would get territorial concessions in the Southern Albania and Epirus in return for the Italian support of the Entente policy towards Greece.³⁰

That Italy was making a serious threat for Serbia in relation to Albania and Epirus in the first half of 1917 was finally

28 *Архив Југославије*, Београд, Канцеларија Њ. В. Краља, Ф-2.

29 *Архив Југославије*, Београд, Збирка Јована Јовановића Пиждона, 80-9-44. Esad-Pasha was an Albanian feudal lord and politician who sided on the Serbian side during the First World War.

30 *Архив Југославије*, Београд, Канцеларија Њ. В. Краља, Ф-2.

approved on June 3rd, 1917 when the Italian general Ferraro, under instructions given by his government, proclaimed the Italian protectorate over Albania. According to N. Pašić's circular note sent to France, United Kingdom, Russia and the U.S.A., this proclamation was against the axioms adopted by the Entente states that this war was fought against the German imperialism and militarism for the principle of the self-determination of the nations. N. Pašić noticed that this Italian proclamation was against the "vital interests of the Serbian people" for their future, but also and against the "vital interests of the Serbian state".³¹ In fact, he was afraid that Italy could close Serbia's exit to the sea via the Morava-Varadar valley. At the end of June 1917, during the Corfu Conference, N. Pašić confirmed that Italy was working against Esad-Pasha, Serbia and Greece by making two Albanian governments – the northern and the southern ones.³² For the Government of Serbia it was totally clear that the Italian diplomacy was working against the interests of the South Slavs in July 1917, what was again confirmed in December 1917. Taking into account the information given by Serbia's ambassador in London, Jovan M. Jovanović, to the Regent Alexander I, only Italy was against the South Slavic unification among all Entente members. It has to be noticed that the Italians had three crucial principles of their Balkan policy: 1) *Sacro egoismo Italiano*; 2) not to allow a total dismemberment of Austria-Hungary under the principle of the self-determination of the nations; and 3) not to allow a creation of a single South Slavic state.³³ According to the information given by J. M. Jovanović from December 1917, the Italian politicians around the Italian Premier Vittorio Emanuele Orlando (1860–1952) in the Italian government wanted to occupy Dalmatia for Italy,³⁴ to create a small Serbia, and to thwart the South Slavic unification. This Orlando's political orientation was pro-Germanic and naturally anti-Serbian.³⁵

31 *Архив Србије*, Београд, МИД КС, Политичко одељење, "Наша нота поводом прокламације италијанског протектората над Албанијом" – Никола Пашић, 30. мај 1917. г. (old style), p. 182.

32 *Архив Југославије*, Београд, Збирка Јована Јовановића Пижона, 80-9-44.

33 *Архив Југославије*, Београд, Канцеларија Њ. В. Краља, Ф-2.

34 The Italian claims on both Istria and Dalmatia were strongly based on Italian historic and ethnic rights. On this issue, see: L. Monzali, *The Italians of Dalmatia: From Italian Unification to World War I*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.

35 *Архив Југославије*, Београд, Канцеларија Њ. В. Краља, Ф-2.

The Italian territorial aspirations as well as its diplomatic and military threat at the Balkan Peninsula was for both Serbia's Government and the Yugoslav Committee one of the most important reasons to convoke the Corfu Conference. Both of them wanted to make publicly known that one single and vigorous South Slavic state would be created on the central and western parts of the Balkans which could defend itself from the Italian pressure. Consequently, the Yugoslav Committee would preserve the South Slavic Adriatic littoral, while Serbia's Government would be in position to preserve the South Slavic territories of the Western Macedonia and Kosovo-Metohia. It is interesting to notice that the Corfu island, as a conference meeting place, was located just between Albania and Epirus – two territories under a strongest Italian political-military pressure at that time.

3. Opposite conceptions about the process of the Yugoslav unification and the internal political organisation of the new state

Before his coming to the Corfu island for the negotiations with the Government of Serbia A. Trumbić met in Nice Stojan Protić, the former Minister in the Government of Serbia and at that time a representative of this Government in the Yugoslav Committee. Their consultations ended by making the mutual draft about the basic subjects for the coming discussions in the Corfu island. However, they did not make any final conclusion about the subjects of the future negotiations as they have not been authorised to do it. That was a reason that they in Nice only agreed about the main questions to be discussed at the Corfu island where the Government of Serbia was exiled after the military collapse of Serbia in the autumn 1915.

The Government of Serbia on its session on June 14th, 1917 decided to officially negotiate with the Yugoslav Committee. However, according to the Royal Government of Serbia, fundamental questions about the final type of the internal political organisation of the future South Slavic state had to be agreed after the war but not during the Corfu Conference. Therefore, the Government of Serbia decided to recognise the Yugoslav Committee as an important factor in a process of creation of Yugoslavia but not as a representative-political institution of the South-Slavic people

from the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary.³⁶ During the Corfu Conference a President of the Yugoslav Committee A. Trumbić demanded that this organisation should be recognised by Serbia as an official representative Government of all South-Slavs in the Dual Monarchy but this demand was rejected by N. Pašić.³⁷ During the Corfu negotiations an intention by the Government of Serbia was to present the “Yugoslav question” as the international problem as well as.³⁸

It is very important to notice that during the Corfu Conference the opposite conceptions about solving of the “Yugoslav question” did not exist. Namely, there is an opinion at the Yugoslav historiography that during the Corfu Conference one conception was advocated by N. Pašić’s in a form of a Greater Serbia, i.e., Yugoslavia without Slovenes and Croats while the opposite conception was advocated by the Yugoslav Committee as the unification of all Yugoslav lands into a single state. However, Serbia’s Prime Minister concluded already before the Corfu Conference that a liberation and unification of all Yugoslav people and their lands into a single state should be realized at the end of the war but not a Greater Serbia. He finally accepted the idea of Yugoslavia instead of a Greater Serbia under both the new international circumstances after the 1917 February/March Russian Revolution and the pressure by Serbia’s parliamentary opposition. Therefore, the unification of the South Slavic people into a single state and political form of such state were the topics on the agenda of the Corfu Conference.

One of the basic problems during the Corfu negotiations between the Yugoslav Committee and the Government of Serbia was a question about the name of a new state of the South-Slavs. The final agreement upon this question was to be the state of the “Serbs, Croats and Slovenes”,³⁹ but not “Yugoslavia” for

36 The Government of Serbia was in fact treating the Yugoslav Committee as its own propaganda agency in Europe for the very reason that the committee was mainly financially supported by Serbia.

37 Ђ. Ђ. Станковић, *Никола Пашић и југословенско питање*, vol. II, Београд: БИГЗ, 1985, p. 181.

38 Д. Јанковић, *Југословенско питање и Крфска декларација*, Београд, 1967, p. 197.

39 The state’s cultural policy between 1918 and 1941 was put within such identity frame (see: Љ. Димић, *Културна политика у Краљевини Југославији 1918–1941*, vol. I–III, Београд: Стубови културе, 1997).

two reasons. Firstly, such name of the state was an expression of a commonly accepted theses by both negotiating sides, but mainly for political reason, that the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes are the “three-names nation” (the same nation just with three different names). Secondly, N. Pašić was extremely reserved towards the terms “Yugoslavia”, “Yugoslavs” and “Yugoslav” as it was originally the ethno-name for the South Slavs of the Dual Monarchy used by the Austro-Hungarian authorities, but also and a propaganda terminology misused by Vienna and Budapest as a synonym for a Greater Serbia to be established at the ruins of the Dual Monarchy.⁴⁰ N. Pašić himself did not insist on the concept of national pluralism, as an opposite to the national unitary state favoured by the Yugoslav Committee as he wanted to preserve Serbian national name as a part of the name of the new state. He did not want to replace a name of the Serbs by some “artificial” one like the South Slavs, Yugoslavia or the Yugoslavs. A fact was that only the Serbs had at that time in independent states (Serbia and Montenegro)⁴¹ among all Yugoslavs and exactly the Serbs have been the most historic nation among all of those who had to create Yugoslavia after the war. Up to that time (and later as well as) Serbia as the country mostly suffered during the First World War among all states involved in the conflict taking into consideration material damage and the loss of population in per cents. For these reasons, N. Pašić was in strong opinion that Serbia and the Serbs deserved to preserve their own national name within the official name of the new state after the war taking into consideration and the fact that Serbia had the crucial political role in the process of unification as the “Yugoslav Piedmont”.

The Government of Serbia and the Yugoslav Committee had opposite attitudes and about much more important question that was of the internal political form and organisation of the new

40 B. Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918–1988*, Vol. 1, Beograd: NOLIT, 1988, p. 17. The Croatian historians Dragutin Pavličević and Ivo Perić claim that all Serbia’s governments during the last hundred years (with N. Pašić’s war-time government on the first place) had for their ultimate national goal a creation of a Greater Serbia (D. Pavličević, *Povijest Hrvatske. Drugo, izmijenjeno i prošireno izdanje*, Zagreb, 2000, p. 307; I. Perić, *Povijest Hrvata*, Zagreb, 1997, pp. 209–232).

41 At that time overwhelming majority of the citizens of Montenegro were declaring themselves as etnolinguistic Serbs. About the ethnic and national identity of the Montenegrins, see: M. Glomazić, *Etničko i nacionalno biće Crnogoraca*, Beograd: Panpublik, 1988.

state as the Yugoslav Committee was in favour of the republic and federation, while N. Pašić insisted on the monarchy with the Karađorđević dynasty and centralized internal political administration of the state. Without any doubt, the question about republic or monarchy and federalization or centralization of the future state of the Yugoslavs was the crucial problem to be solved not only during the negotiations between the Yugoslav Committee and the Royal Serbian Government in Corfu in 1917 but even during the first years of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. With regard to this problem it is important to present a letter written by Giulio Gazzari, a member of the Yugoslav Committee, to the President of the Yugoslav Committee, on April 20th, 1917. In the letter G. Gazzari emphasised that some Serbian politicians, like Protić, Nešić and Jovanović, have opinion that the federal principle was the best political form for the future Yugoslav state. According to the letter, even N. Pašić himself was more and more inclining to the idea of the federal form of the common state instead of the centralized one, but the heir to the throne (regent Alexander I) under the influence of the court's camarilla preferred the centralization of the state. G. Gazzari wrote that it was the crucial reason for the heir to the throne to support the centralized form of the state during the Corfu negotiations.⁴² Therefore, it comes that the strongest opponent to the federal concept of the future common Yugoslav state was a regent of Serbia, Alexander I, but not her Prime Minister.⁴³

F. Supilo was among all members of the Yugoslav Committee the strongest supporter of the idea that Croatia should have a special autonomous status within the new state. On the other hand, he was in a strong opinion that the Yugoslav state should be organised as a federal or confederate state. In contrast to the Pri-

42 Arhiv JAZU, Zagreb, *Fond Jugoslavenskog Odbora*, fasc. 30, doc. No. 29.

43 However, for the federal form of the new state did not exist a great interest even among many members of the Yugoslav Committee for the very reason to avoid the clash between two opposite concepts of Yugoslavia's federalization: a Greater Croatia vs. a Greater Serbia. Therefore, according to A. Trumbić's biographer, Ante Smith-Pavelitch, even A. Trumbić was not so ardent advocate of the federalization of the Yugoslav state during the war-time for the very reason that N. Pašić could use this idea in order to promote and finally create a Greater Serbia as one and the biggest federal unit (out of three) of Yugoslavia. Subsequently, a Greater Serbia, as one of three federal units of Yugoslavia, would be a dominant political factor in the country (Ђ. Ђ. Станковић, *Никола Пашић и југословенско питање*, vol. I, Београд: БИГЗ, 1985, p. 213).

me Minister of Serbia, who was a strong supporter of the centralist internal organisation of the new state arguing that any kind of the inner (con)federal arrangement would finally lead to destabilisation of the state structure.⁴⁴ F. Supilo became a main supporter of the idea of federalization of the country after the unification. His idea of federalism was anticipated by historical provincialism that he used as a basis for the creation of the following five federal units within the new state: 1) Serbia with Macedonia and Vojvodina; 2) Croatia with Slavonia and Dalmatia; 3) Slovenia; 4) Bosnia and Herzegovina; and 5) Montenegro. Consequently, Yugoslavia would have the inner administrative organisation similar to the Dual Monarchy of Austria–Hungary after the *Aussgleich* (settlement between Austrians and Hungarians) in 1867, with the leading role in Yugoslav politics played by the Serbs and Croats.⁴⁵

The Yugoslav Committee's standpoint on the process of unification had as the crucial aim to protect the Croatian national interest, as well as the interests of Croatia as a historical land with autonomous rights. F. Supilo was the most important "defender" of the Croatian national interests during the process of unification. His main political conception was a "unity of the Croats", or as he was saying the "western part of our people" (i.e. the South Slavs), what means that all South Slavic lands eastward from the Alps and westward from the River of Drina have to be the parts of Croatia. For that reason F. Supilo requested a plebiscite about unification with Serbia and Montenegro not only in Croatia but in all Austro–Hungarian Yugoslav provinces for "particular and political reasons".⁴⁶ He was sure that only Bačka and the Southern Banat would opt for Serbia, while the rest of the Yugoslav lands within the Dual Monarchy (Bosnia, Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, Slavonia, Istria, Dalmatia) would choose Croatia. The Yugo-

44 "Белешке са седнице Крфске конференције", *Нови живот*, vol. IV, 5. јун 1917. г., Београд, 1921.

45 Difference between F. Supilo's and J. B. Tito's arrangement of the inner administrative structure of the country was that the Communist leader (of the Croat and Slovene Roman Catholic origin) created additional sixth federal unit – Macedonia, according to the general attitude concerning the national identities at the Balkans by the Comintern.

46 D. Šepić, *Italija, saveznici i jugoslovensko pitanje 1914–1918*, Zagreb, 1970, pp. 141–142, 170–171; Dr. N. Stojanović, *Jugoslovenski Odbor. Članci i Dokumenti*, Zagreb, 1927, pp. 15, 43. F. Supilo was in strong opinion that Serbia required Croatian and Slovenian territories as a compensation for her lost territories to Bulgaria in 1915 (the Vardar Macedonia, part of Kosovo and the Eastern Serbia).

slav Committee, in contrast to the Royal Government of Serbia, supported an idea of plebiscite as one of the most legitimate, justifiable and proper ways for unification of the South Slavs into a common state. It means that the Yugoslav people had to be asked to decide upon their own fate after the war.⁴⁷ For F. Supilo, an agreement about Croatian confederate status within the future common state with Serbia and Montenegro was a starting point in the process of creation of Yugoslavia.⁴⁸ He divided political subjects concerning the unification on two parts: 1) Croatia and 2) Serbia with Montenegro. According to him, Croatia had to have a leading political role among the Austro-Hungarian South Slavs, while Serbia had to have the same role among the Yugoslavs outside the Dual Monarchy. His demand, which became as well as the main demand by the most of the Yugoslav Committee's members, was that the unification had to be accomplished on the equal level between Serbia's Government and the Yugoslav Committee, because any other way would be a domination of "Serbo-Orthodox exclusivity".⁴⁹ The President of the Yugoslav Committee, Dr. A. Trumbić, summarised the whole issue of the process (the way) of unification into two points: the unification could be realised either with a liberation of the Yugoslav lands in Austria-Hungary and their incorporation into Serbia, or it could be done with the union of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes on the equal level. The Yugoslav Committee chose the second option. However, in both options the South Slavic lands within Austria-Hungary had to be liberated by great help of Serbian army.

However, from Serbia's point of view, the main lack of such approach by the Yugoslav Committee was the fact that either the Committee or the Montenegrin Royal Government in exile (in Rome) did not have a single soldier of their own to fight for the unification in comparison to Serbia's 150,000 soldiers at Salonika (Macedonian) Front. In the other words, the Yugoslav Committee required for itself an equal political position in the unification process but only Serbia had to spill over the blood of her soldiers

47 H. Hanak, *The Government, the Foreign office and Austria-Hungary 1914-1918*, New York, 1979, pp. 165-166.

48 See more in: H. Baerlein, *The Birth of Yugoslavia*, vol. 1-2, London: Leonard Parsons Ltd., 1922.

49 D. Šepić, *Italija, saveznici i jugoslovensko pitanje 1914-1918*, Zagreb, 1970, pp. 106-107.

(and civilians in occupied Serbia) for creation of a single Yugoslav state. Serbia even succeeded finally to beat back the Croatian requirement for the federal type of Yugoslavia by nominally accepting this idea during the negotiations at Corfu but only under the condition that united Serbian federal unit within Yugoslavia would be created, what means that the Croatian federal-territorial part is going to be composed by only one-third of the required lands by the Croats, who at any case have been well informed that Italy is willing to make a deal with Serbia about the territorial division of Dalmatia between Rome and Belgrade.

The standpoint towards the way of union of the Royal Government of Serbia was different to the Yugoslav Committee's one. Serbia never officially recognised the Yugoslav Committee as a representative institution of the South Slavs from Austria-Hungary. Therefore, Serbia played a role of only representative side of all Serbs, Croats and Slovenes before the Entente states. Moreover, especially for N. Pašić, the Yugoslav Committee could not be an equal partner with Serbia's Government in the process of unification for political, moral and military reasons. The crucial request by the members of the Yugoslav Committee that a plebiscite about the unification and state's inner organisation had to be organized was rejected by Serbia likewise the internal federalist state organisation favoured by the Yugoslav Committee. Particularly, F. Supilo's idea of federal Croat province within Yugoslavia was never accepted by N. Pašić who always was in the opinion that such Croatia would be constantly a *corpus separatum* and "state within the state". The crucial aspect of N. Pašić's policy about the process of unification was that Serbia's politicians should be natural representatives of all Yugoslavs before the Entente powers until the Peace Conference. He justified this requirement by three facts: 1) Serbia had legal Government, 2) Serbia was internationally recognized state, and 3) Serbia was allied member of the Entente block.

The attitude of Serbia was that if Yugoslavia was to be created, territorial borders had to be clearly defined between Serbia,

Croatia and Slovenia⁵⁰ as N. Pašić wanted firstly to unify “all Serbian lands and people” within one political unit and after that to unify such territory with other Yugoslav lands into a single state. It is likely that the Government of Serbia was not in principle against the federal organisation of the new state but for Serbia it was unacceptable that if Yugoslavia was to be federation, the Serbian population would be divided into several federal units. In the other words, only a federal Yugoslavia with three federal units was possible: Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia. The Serbian federal unit had to embrace all “Serbian people and lands”.⁵¹ Nevertheless, at the Corfu Conference the federal organisation based on this principle was given up, taking into account the fact that “...when we started to make borders we understood that it was impossible”, as N. Pašić explained to the Parliament of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1923.⁵² Even A. Trumbić understood that in the case of the federal organisation of the new state on the national basis, a Greater Serbia (composed by all Serbs and Serbian lands) would dominate the country that became finally the crucial reason for him to reject the federal project of Yugoslavia during the Corfu Conference.

4. The CORFU declaration (july 20th, 1917) as a political com-promise

The Corfu Conference was held from June 15th to July 20th, 1917 what means for more than a month. It shows both how much the conference was important and how much political solutions proposed by the both sides have been different. From the side of the Yugoslav Committee as the negotiators came A. Trumbić, D. Vasilje-vić, B. Bošnjak, H. Hinković, F. Potočnjak and D. Trinajestić. The Kingdom of Serbia was represented by

50 Serbia had during the whole war much clear picture about the borders of united Serbia towards the Hungarians than towards the Croats. Thus, new Serbian-Hungarian post-war border should run northern from the line of Timisoara-Subotica-Margos-Ваја-Пес (Д. Калафатовић, “Наша примирја у 1918”, *Српски књижевни гласник*, vol. X, № 7, 1. XII 1923, pp. 511–525).

51 Д. Живојиновић, *Дневник адмирала Ернеста Трубрица*, Београд, 1989, p. 143. On the British policy with regards to the creation of Yugoslavia, see: J. Evans, *Great Britain and the Creation of Yugoslavia: Negotiating Balkan Nationality and Identity*, New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008.

52 *Споменица Николе Пашића 1845–1926*, Београд, 1926, p. 110.

N. Pašić, M. Ninčić, A. Nikolić, Lj. Davidović, S. Protić, V. Marinković, M. Đuričić and M. Drašković.⁵³ The basis for discussion under the official title Provisional State Until Constitutional Organization was prepared by the Close Board of five members who worked out drafts about the basic problems upon creation and organisation of the future state to be solved.

After very laborious negotiations of more than a month both sides signed a common declaration in a form of the basic agreement upon a political form of a new state to be proclaimed at the very end of the war. The joint Corfu Declaration is the most significant legal document about the creation of a single Yugoslav state, signed on July 20th, 1917 by two representatives of the Royal Serbian Government and the Yugoslav Committee: Nikola Pašić and Ante Trumbić.⁵⁴ The declaration was composed by twelve points based on two principles: 1) the principle of national unity of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and 2) the principle of self-determination of the people. Nevertheless, the Corfu Declaration did not have constitutional character as it just re-gulated some of the most important questions of the future state. It was only “the joint statement (declaration) of the representatives of Serbia and the Yugoslav Committee with regard to the foundations of the common state and about some of its fundamental principles”.⁵⁵

In regard to the question of the internal political-administrative organisation of the future state the most important point was that the state of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes will be a constitutional, democratic and parliamentary monarchy under the Karađorđević dynasty, “which has always shared the feelings of the nation and has placed the national will above all else”.⁵⁶ This point of the declaration was a great political victory of

53 The national structure of the conference on its second session, when it had the greatest number of the participants was: the Serbs 11, the Croats 4 and 1 Slovene (Д. Јанковић, *Југословенско питање и Крфска декларација*, Београд, 1967, pp. 201–206).

54 According to the Croatian historian Ferdo Šišić, N. Pašić signed the document as „Serbian Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs“, while A. Trumbić did the same as „President of the Southern Slav Committee“ (F. Šisic, *Abridged Political History of Rijeka*, Fiume, 1919, Appendix, p. LXXV).

55 Д. Јанковић, *Југословенско питање и Крфска декларација*, Београд, 1967, pp. 228–292.

56 S. Trifunovska (ed.), *Yugoslavia Through Documents: From its creation to its dissolution*, Dordrecht–Boston–London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1994, p. 141.

the Government of Serbia as the idea of republic was rejected. There-fore, the Yugoslav Committee accepted the new state as a monarchy. In stead of fe-deralization of the country, the local autonomies were guaranteed and based on natu-ral, social and economic conditions but not on historical or ethnic principles. The two alphabets, Cyrillic and Latin, have been proclaimed as an equal in public use in the whole country likewise the Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Muslim creeds were proc-laimed to be equal and will have the same rights in regard to the state. It was proclaimed as well that “The territory of the Kingdom will include all territory in which our people forms the continuous population, and cannot be mutilated without endangering the vital interests of the community. Our nation demands nothing that belongs to ot-hers, but only what is its own. It desires freedom and unity. Therefore it consciously and firmly refuses all partial solutions of the propositions of the deliverance from Austro-Hungarian domination, and its union with Serbia and Montenegro in one sole State forming an indivisible whole” (the 8th point).⁵⁷ Obviously, this point of the dec-laration was in fact a great victory of the Yugoslav Committee and pointed out aga-ainst the articles of the secret London Treaty signed on April 26th, 1915. Presumably, the army of Serbia at the end of the war had to protect the South Slavic (i.e., Croat and Slovene) lands in Dalmatia and Istria against the Italian territorial aspirations. Fi-nally, the deputies to the national Parliament of the new state will be elected by universal, direct and secret suffrage. The Constituent Assembly would accept a Constitu-tion with numerically qualified majority. The Constitution of the Yugoslav state shall be established after the conclusion of the peace treaty and it will come into force after receiving the Royal sanction. “The nation thus unified will form a State of some 12,000,000 inhabitants, which will be a powerful bulwark against German aggression and an inseparable ally of all civilised States and peoples” (the 12th point).⁵⁸

The most important victory of the Yugoslav Committee (i.e., the Croat and Slovene politicians as the representatives of the South Slavs from the Dual Monarchy) against the Government of Serbia at the Corfu Conference was the fact that Serbia did

57 *Ibid.*, pp. 141–142.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 142.

not get any privileged position or the veto rights in the new state as it was, for in-stance, the case with Prussia in united Germany after 1871. The Kingdom of Serbia even, for the sake of creation of a single Yugoslav state, cancelled its own internationally recognized independence, denied her democratic Constitution, national flag and other national symbols.⁵⁹ N. Pašić denied “liberating” role of Serbia during the war and succeeded only to impose the monarchical type of the state under the Karađorđević’s dynasty,⁶⁰ i.e., under the realm of the Regent-King Alexander I from Montene-gro.

It is false interpretation of the Corfu Declaration by some Yugoslav and international historiographers that by this declaration Serbia received rights to annex Austro-Hungarian territories settled by the South Slavs (Yugoslavs): Slavonia, Banat, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia, Herzegovina and Dalmatia.⁶¹ However, according to the text of the Corfu Declaration, the ethnic Serbs from the Dual Monarchy were de facto left to be united with Serbia and Montenegro into a single Yugoslav state by Zagreb as a political centre of the Yugoslav lands from the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary. Therefore, on October 29th, 1918 it was proclaimed in Zagreb the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs pretending to have a legal competence over all Yugoslav lands from the Dual Monarchy. This state was proclaimed de facto as a Greater Croatia with a Croat national and historic flag as the state’s one (red-white-blue horizontal tricolour). However, the ethnic Serbs were a simple majority in the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs with the capital in Zagreb – a state declared to exist on the Croat ethnic and historic rights formulated by the Croatian Party of Rights in the mid-19th century. Ne-vertheless, the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs were internationally recognized only by the Kingdom of Serbia in the spirit of the Corfu Declaration when Serbia’s Regent Alexander I read in Belgrade on December 1st, 1918 a letter of answer to the official delegation which came from Zagreb to the act of Proclamation by the Natio-nal Council

59 *Jugoslavenski Odbor u Londonu*, Zagreb: JAZU, 1966, p. 129.

60 Ђ. Ђ. Станковић, *Никола Пашић и југословенско питање*, vol. II, Београд: БИГЗ, 1985, p. 182; А. Писарев, *Образование Југославскогo государства*, Москва, 1975, pp. 198, 206–208.

61 For instance: К. Елан, *Живот и смрт Александра I краља Југославије*, Београд: Ново дело, 1988, p. 27.

in Zagreb of the unification of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs with “the Kingdom of Serbia and Montenegro”.⁶²

Finally, the Corfu Declaration accepted the idea of “compromised national unitary state of three-names nation: the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes”.⁶³ It was the main reason why the name of Yugoslavia was rejected and instead of it the official name of the new state was proclaimed to be the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.⁶⁴

5. Conclusions

1. The 1917 Corfu Declaration was a joint pact between the Government of Serbia and the Yugoslav Committee for the sake of creation of a single Yugoslav national state under the name of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The Corfu Declaration was a basis for proclamation of such state at the end of the First World War and for its first Constitution in 1921.
2. The crucial problems in relation to the internal state’s organisation have not been solved by the Corfu Declaration. They were left to be finally solved for the time after the war, by the Constituent Assembly, which should be elected by the universal suffrage.
3. All Constituent Assembly’s decisions should get the royal sanction in order to be verified. This meant that the monarch had the right of the veto.
4. For both the Yugoslav Committee and the Government of Serbia the most urgent aim was to issue a common

62 S. Trifunovska (ed.), *Yugoslavia Through Documents: From its creation to its dissolution*, Dordrecht–Boston–London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1994, pp. 147–160. The general attitude of Croatian historiography is that Belgrade was carrying on an anti-Croat politics during the whole period of the modern history for the sake to establish the Serbian Orthodox dominance over the region and to exploit both the “Roman-Catholic” and “Muslim” Croats (for instance: J. Jareb, *Pola stoljeća hrvatske politike, 1895–1945*, Zagreb, 1995). However, contrary to the idea of a “Greater Serbia” the Croatian dream during the last two centuries was nothing else than a creation of a “Greater Croatia” (M. Marjanović, *Hrvatski Pokret. Opažanja i misli na pragu novoga narodnoga preporoda g. 1903*, Dubrovnik, vol. I, 1903, p. 48.].

63 *Jugoslavenski Odbor u Londonu*, Zagreb: JAZU, 1966, pp. 178–179.

64 Nevertheless, the official name of the state became from January 6th, 1929 the *Kingdom of Yugoslavia*.

declaration concerning the creation of a single (united) South Slavic state, in order to try to protect the Yugoslav lands from the Italian territorial aspirations. Therefore, some of the most significant questions with regards to the internal state organisation could wait to be resolved after the war and especially during the Peace Conference when the state borders would be finally established.

5. The Italian territorial aspirations at the Balkans during the First World War were the most important reason for a convocation of the Corfu Conference. It can be seen from the telegram sent by J. M. Jovanović to the Regent Alexander I just after the publishing of the Declaration, in which Jovanović noticed that the time for its issuing was chosen accurately – when the Italians came to the conferences convoked in Paris and London.⁶⁵

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65 *Архив Југославије*, Београд, Канцеларија Њ. В. Краља, Ф-2.

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Владислав Б. Сотировић

КРФСКА ДЕКЛАРАЦИЈА 1917. И ЊЕН
ЗНАЧАЈ ЗА СТВАРАЊЕ КРАЉЕВИНЕ СРБА,
ХРВАТА И СЛОВЕНАЦА 1918.

Резиме

Циљ овог истраживања је да да одговоре на следећа четири научно-истраживачка проблема у вези са Крфском декларацијом 1917: 1. разлози за сазивање Крфске конференције као конференције која би требало да коначно реши главне политичке проблеме између Владе Краљевине Србије и Југословенског одбора, односно између два најзначајнија представника у преговорима између јужних Словена током процеса уједињења Југославије у време Првог светског рата; 2. природа супротних политичких концепција и ставова преговарачких страна у односу на процес уједињења и унутрашњу организацију нове југословенске државе, као најважнијег питања које треба решити пре проглашења јединствене јужнословенске државе; 3. тумачење текста Крфске декларације 1917. као правног акта који представља споразум између Југословенског одбора и Владе Краљевине Србије који је требало да буде коначно политичко решење облика владавине, унутрашње организације и функционисања нове државе; и 4. значај Крфске декларације 1917 за даљи процес уједињења јужних Словена. Ради реализације циљева истраживања користили смо релевантне историјске изворе, као и релевантну историографску литературу. Највише пажње у овом чланку биће посвећено самом тексту Крфске декларације, као основном историјском документу о стварању заједничке јужнословенске државе у јесен 1918.

Кључне речи: Крфска декларација, Југославија, Југословени, Балкан, Срби, Хрвати, Словенци, Југословенски одбор.

Appendices



Figure No. 1: The London Treaty of April 26th, 1915 and the new Italian borders after the war

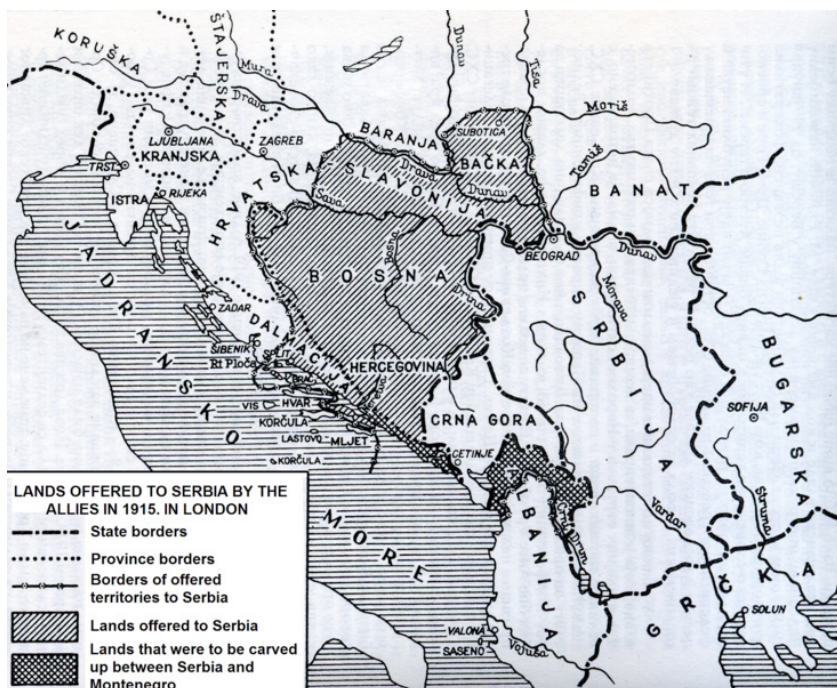


Figure No 2: Lands offered to the Kingdom of Serbia and the Kingdom of Montenegro by the Entente powers according to the London Treaty of April 26th, 1915. At the exchange, Serbia had to cede the Vardar Macedonia to Bulgaria

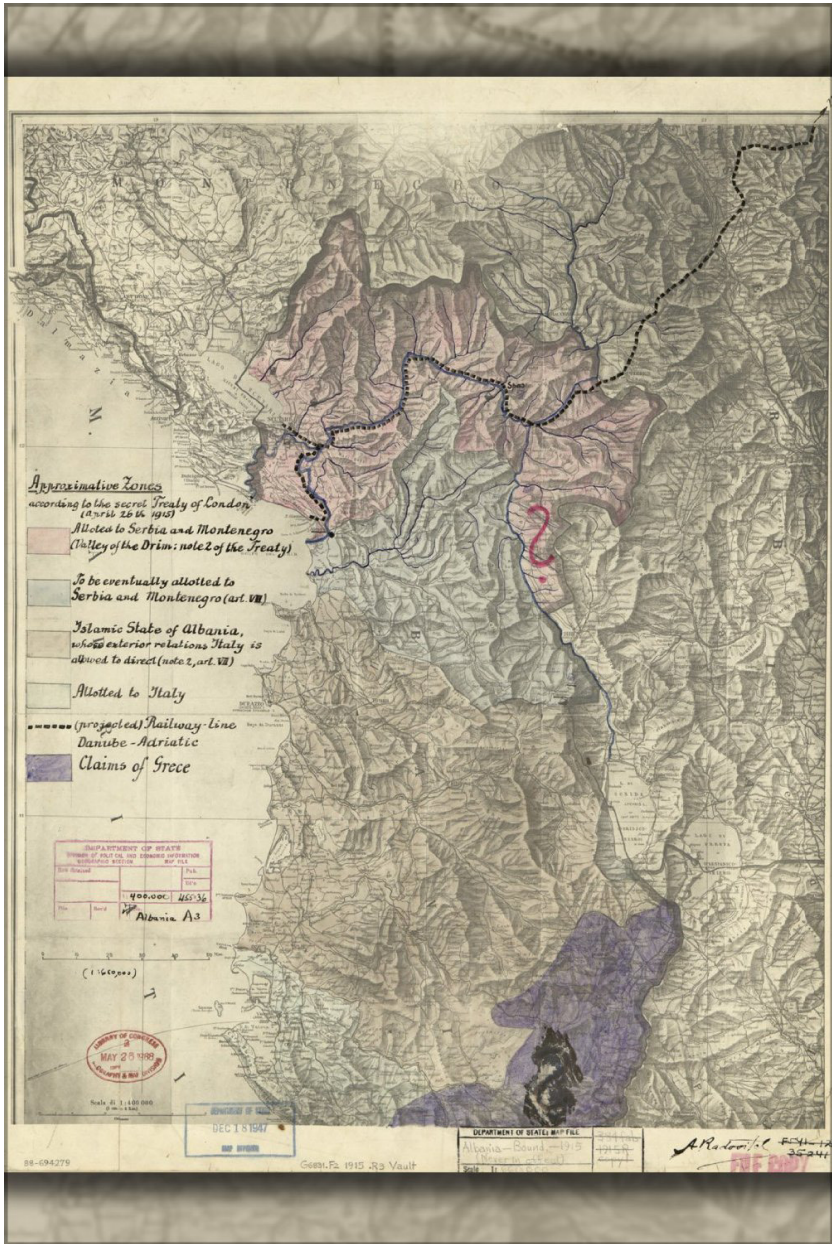


Figure No. 3: The Albanian question and the London Treaty of April 26th, 1915



Figure No 4: The ethnographic map of the “Yugoslavs” submitted to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 by the representatives of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes

Овај рад је примљен 10. јуна 2014. године а прихваћен за штампу на састанку Редакције 18. јула 2014. године.