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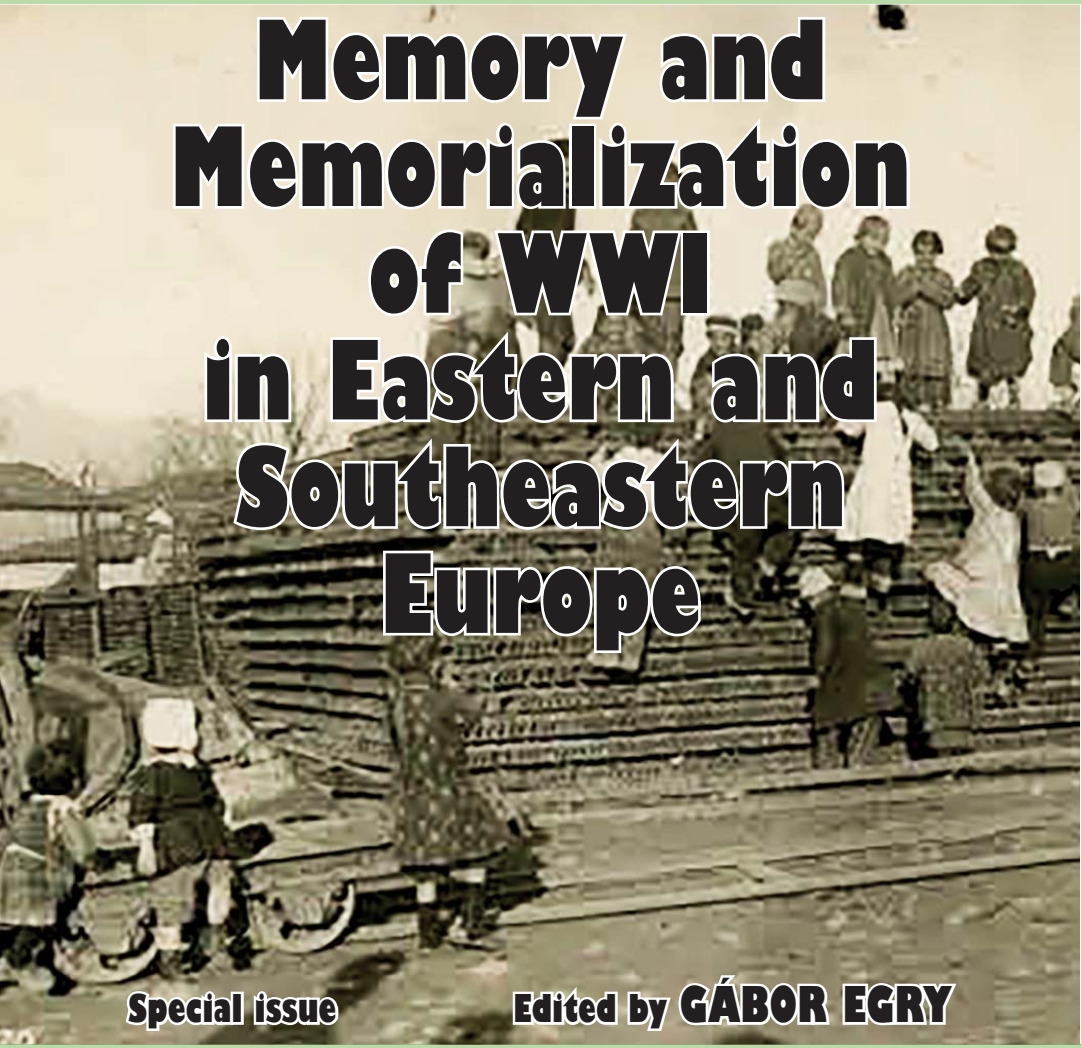
Memory and Memorialization of WWI in Eastern and Southeastern Europe



Special issue

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The front page:

Albanian and Turkish children play „storming the Lovcen muontain" in Scutari, 1916.
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The Institute of Political History, an NGO and independent, not-for-profit research institute in Hungary, started a four-year project last year, with funding from the Citizens for Europe – European Active Memory program of the European Commission, in order to help develop, facilitate and strengthen the memory of WWI. The project is composed of a website (www.elsov.hu, www.elsovh.hu/english) and a series of events aimed at the larger public and the scholarly community. The intention of the institute is also to foster contacts and cooperation across Europe among organisations engaged in similar activities. The aim is to learn more about these processes in Europe, to facilitate discussion on topics of historiography and, first and foremost, on issues of memory, reflecting upon each other's experiences with remembrance and social memory. Beyond a mere overview and classification of the commemorations, we hope to collect and help to distribute good practices, innovative methods, enable the building of a network of institutions with compatible aims and projects, to develop a pool of committed organizations that can draw upon each other and build consortia for common projects and, last but not least, to help transmit new methods and knowledge into education. As a first step, we would like to ask you, as an expert in the field [...], to reflect upon three large topics: the commemorations on the 100th anniversary, the current historiography of WWI, and the methods to influence social memory of the war, with the help of a series of orientating

questions. We intend to publish the answers on our website and an evaluation of the answers in an issue of our journal Múltunk, and to use it to foster further cooperation.

Commemorations on the 100th anniversary

Few people would contest that WWI was a crucial event in the history of the modern world. After the long period of stability in Europe, it was the beginning of a new era and as such the starting point of social and political processes that are still reshaping Europe and the world. But the meaning and understanding of the war has changed in many senses since it ended, and societies today look at it differently than people did even a few decades ago. These changes not only give a taste of how our societies changed since WWI, but they also reproduce to a certain extent how social memory and the politics of memory have changed in Europe. Once a founding myth for a whole "New Europe" and the largest traumatic event in European history, WWI is overshadowed by later events which had a more lasting impact on European memory. Therefore, even if the anniversary brought attention to WWI, its role and place of the Great War in national and European memories is uncertain. It is not easy to see what it offers for societies nowadays in terms of identification, cohesion and mobilizing power.

How would you typologise the commemorations on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of WWI in your country and in Europe? How are official and unofficial practices related to each other and shaping the memory of WWI? What was novel in the commemorations and what remained solidly on the traditional ground? How much interest did the anniversary generate among the public? How was it manifested, what appealed the most to the public? How much did these commemorations bring transnational aspects of WWI and its memory to the fore? What could be the place of WWI in European memory?

Historiography

Since Jay Winter and Antoine Prost famously identified three generations of historians and historiography of the Great War, it has been common to situate scholarship in this framework. One of the most common observations is how national historiographies in Eastern Europe lagged behind the West in terms of the emergence of these generations, and after 1989 how easily they returned to interpretations which were already part of the national imagery of these states right after WWI. Nevertheless, the 100th anniversary not only brought about a new wave of interest in the events between 1914 and the early twenties, but it also contributed to the emergence of new trends and approaches to the war which are not necessarily easy to frame with the model of generations, and which show not only an interest in a more detailed understanding of how the war affected societies and people, but also in repositioning it in global history. The new focus on the Eastern front, the integration of the fate of empires into post-colonial histories, the growing attention to the non-state-organized violence as a determining feature of the post-WWI social and political landscape in Eastern Europe are only a few notable ones among these new approaches. Meanwhile, one can also speak of a revival of old tropes and interpretations, most notably in the discussion around responsibility and in the attempts to challenge what is seen as de-heroisation in national historiography.

What are the most important debates on the anniversary? How did discussions of international salience affect debates in your country? What are the significant new trends in research on WWI? What should the broader public expect in terms of new interpretations or new perspectives on the war? Do you think WWI needs a reconceptualization? If yes, in what sense? How would you position the actual national historiography in the history of a global WWI? What do you think would be desirable in this respect? Do you think there is a specific Eastern European

history of the war? How should we relate the Eastern part of the continent to Europe as a whole or the World in historiography?

Methods of dissemination, best practices, cooperation

Historians have enjoyed for a long time a quasi-monopoly of historical knowledge in the form of power over determining national historical canons. But other actors' contribution to the development of social memory, a genre usually summed up as public history, has gained traction and nowadays it is hard to underestimate its influence on the historical consciousness of European societies. Historiography, not the least due to its changing self-understanding following a series of epistemological revelations, is only one of many actors trying to influence the public. In this competition, traditional genres of historical writing have disadvantages, and to reach the public, even historians try to revert to new methods. However, our understanding of how social memory comes into being has changed profoundly, too. Alongside the generation of grand narratives, practicians of memory (who actively engage in discovering, preserving and mobilizing memory) are keen to integrate individual, family, local and regional memories into broader social memory in a way that reflects the past and present diversity of societies. These processes are also part of what is usually referred to as European memory which was mainly based on the memory of the Holocaust, but since the accession of the Eastern European countries, it has also been a contested field. So far, it has mainly been the deviating memory of the Communist past which had to be integrated into European memory, but the anniversary of WWI can pose another challenge.

What are the most important books published recently in your country concerning WWI? What were the most notable scientific venues? What do you consider the best methods to reach the larger public with results of scholarly research on WWI? What topics are people the most interested in? How could

a more nuanced view of WWI be developed? What is the role of less traditional means of dissemination? In what respect do you think transnational cooperation is possible regarding the memory of WWI? How could you and/or your institution contribute to such an endeavour?

Dr. sc. Filip Hameršak
Miroslav Krleža Lexicographic Institute (Zagreb, Croatia)

ANSWER: *Speaking in terms of politics of memory, the Croatian case is – I dare say – among the more complex ones. Therefore, as very few contributions on the subject are available to the non-Croatian-speaking readers, I have taken the liberty to answer the questionnaire at large, in a single, continuous text.*

Not surprisingly, the events of WWII and its aftermath both marked not only by intense fighting and destruction on the territory of today's Croatia, but also by mass killings of civilians and surrendered combatants as well, have to a significant degree overshadowed the experiences of the more distant 1914-1918 conflict. Suppressed for decades by the ideological hegemony of the Communist Party lead by Josip Broz Tito (of ethnic Croat father and Slovene mother, which will reveal to be of some importance later in the text), the scholarly and public debate on these topics started only in the late 1980s, resulting in a whole new range of research in the 1990s and 2000s. Although it can be said that the area of common scholarly opinion on WWII is slowly but steadily broadening, as far as public discourse is concerned, it still remains a heated, omnipresent theme, significantly interwoven with contemporary left-right divisions of the political spectrum.

In that aspect, I think, several analogies could be drawn between Croatia and a number of Central or East European countries, but there is also a notable distinction stemming

from the fact that the rule of the Communist Party in the former Yugoslavia was to a higher degree of domestic origin, comparatively enjoying more legitimacy, and somewhat less dependent on direct repression, at least since the 1960s. As a result, neither its chequered legacy, nor its proponents were systematically subjected to lustration-like practices, and have therefore remained present in various fields of public activity.

Yet another important distinction is the impact of the 1991-1995 Croatian War of Independence. First of all, because of the »national reconciliation« policy, even those debates on WWII »crime and punishment« have been practically frozen until it was over. Secondly, as far as opposed views are concerned, discussions on some of its aspects tend to equal – if not surpass – those on the 1941-1945 period.

Within that context, it can hardly be a surprise that WWI has generally been getting only scratches of scholarly and media attention. But to get a wider picture of the politics of memory in Croatia, one should start the story all the way back in 1914.

Expectedly, at that time the vast majority of the Croatian political elite was not satisfied with the organization of the Habsburg Monarchy. In spite of the Triune Kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia being proclaimed on several occasions, it was a kind of virtual non-entity, as in reality no closer administrative ties existed between the Transleithanian Kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia, and the Cisleithanian Kingdom of Dalmatia. Also, ethnic Croats did form the majority of population in Istria (belonging to Cisleithania) and a significant proportion of that in Bosnia and Herzegovina (under a dualistic condominium) which had been occupied in 1878 but annexed to the Monarchy only in 1908. Although among them the Kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia enjoyed the highest degree of autonomy, in the final instance, all of these lands were governed from Vienna or Budapest without serious possibility of their representatives to influence crucial decisions. However, the dominant approach of the Croatian political elite was that of gradual reform »within the confines of the law« which entailed

cooperation with one of the interest groups within the Monarchy against the other.

The outright idea that the South Slav parts of the Monarchy should – and really could – depose the Habsburgs, secede (violently, if needed) and join the Kingdom of Serbia under the rule of the Karađorđević dynasty either just enlarging it, or forming a new state of Yugoslavia, was gaining more serious momentum only on the eve of WWI. Overtly or secretly sponsored by the official organs of Serbia, it was increasingly popular among younger intellectuals, but not evenly distributed according to particular land or ethnic groups; the Habsburg Serbs, especially those in Southern Hungary and Bosnia and Herzegovina, percentually being more inclined to the simple enlargement of their already independent nation state.

Therefore, romantic ideas of unconditional South Slav unity, realistic concerns about the possible domination of Serbia, and loyalist perceptions of high treason were present simultaneously in Croatian-Slavonian-Dalmatian-Istrian-Bosnian-Herzegovinian societies of the day, interwoven either with some sort of modern nationalism, or a kind of traditional unquestioned allegiance to the King and Emperor.

Interethnic relations additionally deteriorated with the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand by the Bosnian Serb Gavrilo Princip, as he –if anybody – was perceived to be the figure that could restructure the Monarchy along the so-called trialistic lines, more favourable to a significant part of the Croatian political elite. In fact, contrary to the position of other »non-dualistic« peoples, since 1868 the autonomy of the Kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia has already been to a degree reflected in the armed forces, namely in the status of a singular Domobranstvo (Honvédség, i.e. Home Guard) district coinciding with their territory. Although the uniform name of Royal Hungarian Home Guard had prevailed over the combined Hungarian-Croatian or even singular Croatian attribute, apart from Croatian being its official and command language, it had a different flag, a customized oath, and its commander was

prescribed to be of Croatian-Slavonian domicile. Although not much, this was more than pure symbolism, and was rather effectively used to corroborate the claims that serving in the army supports the Croatian national goals, bringing closer the reward of trialisation.

All in all, among the South Slav population of the Monarchy, the declaration of war on Serbia was seen as a just crusade as well as a brutal aggression against brotherly people. Be it either way (and other motives like strict discipline or personal sense of honour are also not to be underestimated), during Potiorek's campaigns of 1914, the core of his Balkan Army, consisting of South Slav soldiers (that is, the 13th, 15th and 16th corps, seated in Zagreb, Sarajevo and Dubrovnik, respectively), fought loyally. Of course, there were defections – its rate among ethnic Serbs was larger when compared to that among Croats – but not on a drastic scale. Impregnated with both real and fabricated stories of »barbarous« ways of waging war in the Balkans, on a number of occasions, the soldiers of Franz Joseph behaved in analogous manner, showing no mercy either to the surrendered enemy or to the civilians, which left a deep imprint on the memory of the Serbian population.

Initially, it seems, the South Slav soldiers of Austria-Hungary were not an exception, but after several weeks of closer contact, the instances of such brutal behaviour were reduced in number. Anyway, in the first half of 1915, the majority of South Slav units were transferred to the Russian or Italian front, and their participation in the 1915-1918 occupation of Serbia was of lesser consequence apart from that of several officers whose language skills and cultural versatility were needed by the military government.

Generally speaking, because of the »irredenta« and the language barrier, soldiers from today's territory of Croatia were more intensely and more durably motivated to fight on the Italian than on the Russian front. In fact, similarly to the Czech legion, thousands of South Slav prisoners of war joined the volunteers' units, formed as part of the Serbian army on the

territory of Russia. But there was also a difference – the majority of anti-Habsburg émigré South Slav politicians, since 1915 organized in a London-seated Yugoslav Committee, envisaged the end of the war to bring a creation of a new, possibly federal Yugoslav state, not just an enlargement of the Kingdom of Serbia. As a result, their relations with the Serbian government were strained, coming through several ups and downs until an uneasy compromise was reached in 1917. Up to that time, because of a perceived inequality, a large number of volunteers, mainly ethnic Croats and Slovenes, did resign, preferring to join the Russian army or even to return to the POW camps.

On the other hand, the Serbian army proper did also start several offensives in 1914, aimed at the Eastern regions of Slavonia and Bosnia. Although part of the ethnic Serbian population welcomed this as national liberation, a general uprising which was hoped for did not happen, and these exploits were soon repulsed. In fact, although large regions in the South Eastern part of the Habsburg Monarchy were considered to be »ancient Serb lands« by the pre-war Serbian textbooks, it was left rather unclear which ethnicities inhabit those lands, even more so in the light of their zealous fighting in the »Swabian army« of 1914 and after.

On that basis, the Yugoslav unification of 1918 – a conflict-laden process in itself, reaching a partial and short-term stabilization only in 1939 when Banovina Hrvatska was organized as an autonomous Croatian unit – had been mirrored by a highly dissonant politics of memory.

First of all, the official view promoted mostly by the King and the armed forces tended to look at WWI through the eyes of the old Kingdom of Serbia. Not surprisingly, practically all the regulations, titles, symbols and decorations were taken over from the Serbian army, including the calendar of historic battles. True, several thousand active or reserve South Slav Habsburg officers were admitted, but only up to the rank of major, those of higher ranks being strictly selected (the situation in the navy was somewhat different as pre-1918 Serbia was a

landlocked country). The blending was not a success, many of them quitting after a few years or at least feeling continuously neglected.

In that scope, as it seems, apart from several minor instances, during the 1918-1941 period no public memorial attention was given to those fallen in the ranks of Austria-Hungary, be it on the Serbian, Russian or Italian front. One of the exceptions concerns the activity of the war veteran's union Udruženje rezervnih oficira i ratnika. Including also a number of former Habsburg officers, it had taken part in the building of at least two ossuaries containing thousands of earthly remains of those killed on both sides, the one on the Gučevo mountain in the 1920s, and the other in the Zagreb Mirogoj cemetery in the 1930s. Furthermore, several local or religious communities on today's territory of Croatia did erect memorial plaques listing their fallen members in a politically neutral manner.

As far as private popular press and memoir literature is concerned, there was a significant production in the former Habsburg parts of the pre-1941 Yugoslavia. However, within the Croatian cultural circle, the WWI memoirs of anti-Habsburg agents as well as those of former Serbian (since 1917, Serbian, Croatian and Slovene) volunteers were overrepresented. Book-length apolitical or even implicitly Habsburg-loyalist memoirs did start to appear only in the 1930s, confining their recollections to the internally not so sensitive Russian or Italian front. The first implicitly loyalist account of a short-term personal experience on the Serbian front was published within a book in 1939 in Belgrade, not Zagreb. Although it did not enter into the question of war guilt and condemned the Austro-Hungarian treatment of Serbian civilians, its author Pero Blašković was severely attacked in the Serbian press. Most promisingly, several former anti-Habsburg ethnic Serb and Croat intellectuals had risen in his defence, stating it was high time to hear the other side representing hundreds of thousands of common people that had willingly or forcibly been fighting for the Central Powers.

WWI was treated in Croatian works of fiction along these lines, but in an even less polyphonic manner. There the domination of the renowned Miroslav Krleža was already established in the early 1920s. Belonging to the younger, radical pro-Yugoslav generation and owing much to his personal wartime experience (quitting the Ludoviceum military academy in 1913, it is still a dubious point if he had ever been to the trenches), in his novellas and dramas, Austria-Hungary was presented as an irreformable »prison of nations«, requiring the absurd human sacrifice of Croatian intellectuals, workers and peasants alike. Interestingly, Krleža's narrative dealt mainly with distant battlefields in the Carpathians, Galicia and Bukowina, but not with those of the Drina, Kolubara, Isonzo or Piave where it was easier to find rational motivation, at least for some time, and for part of the Croatian political spectrum.

To conclude, the public politics of the WWI memory of the first Yugoslavia did not (sufficiently) reflect the experiences of more than a half of its population, and the early signs of possible change were interrupted by the outbreak of WWII hostilities in 1941.

In 1941, the Axis-allied Independent State of Croatia was founded, naming its regular army Domobranstvo after the one founded in 1868. Apart from re-introducing its regulations, titles and symbols (not entirely, to be clear), the core of the new army consisted of former Habsburg officers, including those that were found inappropriate for or had declined service in the Yugoslav army (some of them would soon get into conflict with more radical members of the Ustasha militia). As a more symbolic gesture of continuity, the WWI decorations of Austria-Hungary were once again proclaimed suitable to be worn. Before the demise of that short-lived state, the special Croatian military museum and archive was founded, retrieving a great deal of WWI-related artefacts which have survived until our days, albeit within other institutions. Also, Slavko Pavičić, an amateur military historian, managed to publish two volumes treating the 1914-1918 Croatian units under Habsburg command

(because of the WWII alliance, the Italian front was bypassed in the 1943 volume), and Vili Bačić, a naval officer, the one on the Adriatic sea skirmishes. Finally, the 1941 memoirs of Mile Budak combined his opinion of Greater Serbian imperialism bearing a lion's share of the responsibility for the outbreak of the war with a sort of sympathy towards a common Serbian soldier.

The 1945 renewal of Yugoslavia turned the clock back in many aspects concerning WWI. First of all, a number of Domobranstvo officers were either summarily executed or imprisoned. Because of the aforementioned elements of continuity, the negative aura of the WWII-era Independent State of Croatia was extended to the WWI Domobranstvo, making it an additionally undesirable theme, always prone to be associated with real or putative Croatian nationalism. Secondly, doing military history in general was assigned to the Belgrade-seated Institute of Military History and the adjoined Military Press Institute, both under direct auspices of the federal Yugoslav army. WWII and the Communist-led »national liberation struggle« have been set as its research priorities, but a significant amount of energy was also dedicated to the WWI exploits of the Serbian army. The history of the Habsburg army, including its Southern Slav component, was treated mainly in the general-type reference works and overviews published by these institutions, e.g. the multivolume Military Encyclopaedia and Petar Tomac's The First World War. Although containing a rather limited amount of information, apart from unavoidable political one-sidedness, these texts, some of them commendable even today, were frequently more accurate than those published by the Zagreb-seated Lexicographic Institute founded and led by none other than Krleža. Interestingly, several among the most notable contributors of the Institute of Military History were also former Habsburg and WWII Domobranstvo officers, ethnic Croats as well as Serbs.

Otherwise, post-1945 Croatian academic historians did not practice standard military history of the WWI, focusing

instead on deserters, rebellions, anti-Habsburg politicians, the dubious 1918 Yugoslav unification, and the painful post-war delimitation with Italy (such themes had already been opened in the 1920s by Ferdo Šišić and Milada Paulová). Consequently, the experience of the Serbian army continued to be the central point of the WWI politics of memory in post-WWII Yugoslavia, duly appropriated by the new federal army; but it was again obvious that the Western parts of the country – as ever, fearing the unitaristic tendencies – did not share that view.

Within that scope, while several high-budget movies were filmed about WWI from the Serbian perspective, not even the Isonzo battles – generally judged to have been the righteous defence of ethnic Slovene and Croatian territory – were given adequate treatment. All in all, they were addressed by several independent Slovene and just one Croatian publicist (within a general WWI overview). Even the Croatian war memoir production was more narrow than before, producing only one apolitical (de facto loyalist) book of recollections written by a Catholic clergyman and edited by his fellow priest, in a low-key circulation. To clear things out, it seems that even as of today, directly pro-Habsburg or at least initially loyalist memoirs and diaries constitute the majority among the yet unpublished manuscripts.

As a result, contrary to the persistent Serbian victorious heroism, and similarly to the influence of Jaroslav Hašek's novel The Good Soldier Švejk, the representations of WWI in the Yugoslav Republic of Croatia were once again predominantly characterized by the seemingly unproblematic exploitation of Krleža's work, depicting the imposed futility of fighting over distant lands and for »foreign interests«. To my knowledge, there was just one minor exception, a popular article published in 1970, during the short-lived Croatian Spring reform movement; focusing on the 1868-1918 Domobranstvo, it reminded the readers about its use of the Croatian language, symbols, and the peacetime service near one's domicile, and was obviously meant as a critique of contemporary Yugoslav army practice.

Incidentally, collecting the whole catalogue of other charges, including espionage, the author, otherwise a historian, was soon sentenced to four years imprisonment.

In a way, contrary to Slovenia where gradually more differentiated attention started to be given to the WWI phase of national history, the sort-of Croatian silence continued during the 1970s and well into the 1980s. For instance, in a national history reference book published in 1980 in Zagreb, only the WWII Domobranstvo was given an entry, while WWI military history was treated mainly on the global scale, certainly even less »nationally« than in the aforementioned Belgrade-published Military Encyclopaedia.

In fact, the next turn will come from a part of the Serbian public in which the dismantling of Josip Broz Tito's personality cult (associated with the disputed 1974 constitutional framework) started soon after his death in 1980. Namely, Tito's official biographer Vladimir Dedijer admitted he had been advised years before not to mention Tito's fighting on the Serbian front in 1914, in order to evade evoking the aforementioned negative popular memories; and that Tito, while in Russian captivity, declined to join the Serbian volunteers. On that basis, as the years passed by, several radical Serbian authors devised a whole narrative about the centuries-long Croatian genocide against the Serbs, former Domobranstvo NCO Tito being allegedly one of its agents already in 1914, conveniently under the command of Major Stanzer, a future WWII Domobranstvo general, sentenced to death in 1945.

Among other late 1980s and early 1990s allegations, and through the ensuing armed conflict, the ones concerning Tito and WWI in general were not judged to be the most important ones by Croatian historians. However, after the introduction of political pluralism in 1990, a more pluralistic picture of the past started to be devised, switching the focus of attention to the loyal, pro-Habsburg, anti-Yugoslav and clerical ideological options. Notwithstanding the co-operative phases of Serbo-Croat relations, it was also noted that the contemporary conflict had

traits of historic continuity from the pre-1914 period. According to that, the prevailing 1918-1941 view that the WWI Entente Powers (with the exception of Italy) were good guys, while the Central Powers were bad guys (without any exception), which was only partially relativised by the post-1945 Marxist-Leninist introduction of »opposed imperialistic aims« (with the exception of Serbia), started to be more openly questioned, especially in the light of the territorial ambitions of the Kingdom of Serbia.

In a way, the traditional post-colonial type of view on the Habsburg Monarchy, with the Kingdom of Serbia and the Yugoslav Committee competing for the title of the most deserving national liberator (and for the optimal internal organisation of Yugoslavia), has by now been supplemented by a double one, regarding the results of the 1918 unification even more as a kind of colonization. Comparing their relative impact on the Croatian national identity, rule of law, economic growth, etc., historians have reached a variety of conclusions (some of them qualifying as Habsburg nostalgia), reaching consensus anywhere near only on the topic that in the chaotic circumstances of the downfall of Austria-Hungary, there was probably no other choice but to join Serbia on the best terms possible.

However, these new approaches were seldom expressed in rounded, groundbreaking monographs, opting instead for collected papers, scientific magazines, popular press and television. An analogous limited, yet more superficial revival of interest was shown in the WWI Domobranstvo and the Habsburg Common Army as well as the Navy, resulting primarily in a re-discovery of Pavičić's work, and only gradually in that of the Österreich-Ungarns letzter Krieg 1914-1918 series; meanwhile, the aforementioned Belgrade-published sources have for some time been cited less than they had deserved. In spite of the given context, no large-scale research has been undertaken in the Vienna and Budapest archives. Probably also as a consequence of the 1991-1995 wartime, the popular press and TV documentaries did accentuate the »fighting prowess« complex, albeit never completely abandoning Krleža's notion of

»Kanonenfuter«; there was also a tendency to overestimate the role of the WWI Domobranstvo.

More rounded accounts began to appear around 2000. In addition to the WWI diplomatic history by Livia Kardum, Professor of Political Science, the highly dedicated Zagreb-based amateur historian Lovro Galić has co-authored several books on the Isonzo front, but being published in Slovenia, these are still impossible to get in Croatian stores and libraries.

In comparison, during the decade prior to 2014, apart from several rather general-type collected papers and manuscript memoirs, probably the greatest breakthrough was made concerning local history, with a handful of PhD's on the everyday life, charity, healthcare, suspects and internees on the city and town level, followed by an even smaller number of PhD□s on several Habsburg-loyalist personalities, and one on the memoirs and diaries of Croatian WWI military participants, using a »history from below« type of approach (some of these PhD's have later been converted to books). Also, already on the occasion of the 90th anniversary, some museums and archives presented their WWI artefacts, the most representative result being the Zagreb-seated Croatian History Museum's exhibition catalogue.

Out of local communities, it seems that the legacy of WWI has for a decade or so been rather well, if not entirely satisfactorily, publicly presented in the city of Pula, a former seat of the Habsburg admiralty and battle fleet, including the renowned naval cemetery, coastal fortresses and the von Trapp villa (named after Georg, the submarine ace and the Sound of Music head of family). Another case to be mentioned is the town of Karlovac which has held annual commemorations at one of the cemeteries on the Isonzo front for years, and even erected a memorial plaque on the spot in 2013.

On the other hand, until recently even the estimates of the WWI military death toll from today's territory of Croatia varied from 50 000 to twice or even three times as much, Wilhelm Winkler's initial statistics being for all intents and purposes

forgotten. At the moment, the conservative estimate revolves around 80 000 killed or otherwise deceased soldiers, but additional research is needed. Although duly protocolled during the war, the whereabouts of their final resting place were largely forgotten, even the easily accessible Isonzo front being a sort of terra incognita. Similarly, not even the dedicated WWI scholars knew about the aforementioned multinational Mirogoj ossuary, presuming it was solely a symbolic monument erected to the memory of the fallen soldiers of the Croatian-Slavonian domicile.

So, the stage in Croatia was set for the 100th anniversary roughly in that manner. Because as of late 2012 no information has been published on the plans concerning official state activities, a dozen or so of the WWI-related researchers, archivists, museologists, schoolteachers and freelance publicists began to meet informally but regularly in the Zagreb-seated Institute of Croatian History, initiating a much wider mailing list, coordinating their activities and trying to promote a general change of attitude towards WWI (http://1914-1918.com.hr/cilj_odbora/). Besides individual achievements and fruitful discussions, the group – presided by Vijoleta Herman Kaurić – published a 22-page anniversary draft-action plan; successfully initiated the printing of a memorial postage stamp; and made crucial contributions to an international conference, a 4-hour TV-documentary, a dedicated teachers' handbook and a national-level teachers' education seminary on WWI. In 2015, the group organized a pioneering 3-day minibus excursion to the Isonzo front, taking several hundred photographs to be presented in the popular press, websites and lectures. Following legal registration as The 1914-1918 Association, it planned to widen the range of its activities.

Obviously fostered by the common European Union policy, the first-ever Croatian State Committee for the Coordination of the WWI Anniversary Activities was founded in April 2013 under auspices of the Ministry of Culture (the incumbent minister of a centre-left-liberal government was Andrea Zlatar-Violić, well-educated in Krleža's writings), soon to incorporate

three members of the 2012 informal group. Devoid of finances and authority, the Committee served according to its title, sometimes being asked for expert advice on selected issues (no session has been held since early 2015).

Out of singular events, the most intense media coverage was given to the Zagreb-held May 2014 EU National Institutes of Culture (EUNIC)-organized conference titled Commemorating 1914 – Exploring the War's Legacy, hosting Christopher Clark and Frédéric Rousseau, among others. As the 1965 translation of the 1948 edition of Pierre Renouvin□s La crise européenne et la Première guerre mondiale has been the latest standard general work available in Croatian (also as a 2008 reissue), Clark's approach to the question of war guilt resonated particularly well with the media's need to further deconstruct the aforementioned dominant view of Central Powers-only warmongering politics (as informed, The Sleepwalkers are currently in the process of being translated to Croatian).

In fact, probably reflecting the reactions in the Bosnian and Serbian press, the most frequently posed question by Croatian news reporters in 2013 and 2014 was the one whether Gavrilo Princip had been a hero or a terrorist. To my knowledge, contrary to the pre-1990s schoolbook lessons, no interviewed Croatian historian answered simply that he was a hero, although some did try to historically contextualize these two notions. Perhaps this is both the crudest and the most obvious signal of the radical changes that went down in the sphere of public memory in the last twenty years.

An even more important event, although seemingly not so well publicized, was the first-ever Croatian central state commemoration of WWI. Starting in the early morning of 27 June, 2014 with laying wreaths at the most properly selected Mirogoj ossuary, it continued with a meeting at the Croatian State Archives building. In presence of a small ceremonial guard, the wreaths were laid down by the Minister of Defence and other dignitaries or their envoys. The President of the Republic, Ivo Josipović, had personally attended the meeting,

delivering a written speech. Predominantly of abstract humanist nature, the speach provoked almost no public reaction apart from negative comments in several right and centre-right wing media, saying it was improper of him to state that Alojzije Stepinac, the future Croatian Archbishop, had been fighting as a volunteer on the side of Serbia (strictly speaking, after falling into Italian captivity as a dutiful Habsburg officer, Stepinac did, incited by the members of the Yugoslav Committee, join the Serbian, Croatian and Slovene volunteers, as they were styled only in 1917, but too late to see the fighting).

Supposedly, the curious date of 27 June was chosen for the anniversary primarily in order not to collide with the Croatian President attending the 28 June finale of the Sarajevo Heart of Europe festivity, sponsored by Austria, Belgium, Great Britain, Italy, Germany, France and Spain. The festivity was officially described as »the European entry point in the WWI commemorations«, hoping also that »the message of peace coming from the heart of Europe will underline the intellectual and cultural importance and strength of the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the context of peace and reconstruction in Europe« (http://www.sarajevosrceeurope.org/about.html).

As rumoured behind the scenes, divergences surpass the scope of this contribution; suffice to say that, paradoxically, in such a way of scheduling, an international manifestation abroad was symbolically prioritized over the first-ever national and domestic one. Surely, the Sarajevo assassination could reasonably be singled out as one of the most important events leading to the outbreak of hostilities, but WWI did not start until over a month later, and the initial goal was – as I understood – to commemorate its anniversary, not that of the assassinations.

Of course, the exact starting date is largely a matter of convention, depending on the number of great powers we need to have in either a formal or a factual state of war. Taking into account the proclaimed Pan-European stress on the suffering of ordinary people, my personal suggestion was therefore to allow more logical adjustments on the national level, parallel to the

common European date, if it existed at all. For instance, citizens of the Triune Kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia were certainly much more affected by the partial mobilization of Habsburg armed forces, by the declaration of war on Serbia, and – finally – by the first shots fired in anger. Alas, some of my more cautious colleagues warned me that deciding on any of these three dates would have a great chance of being interpreted as a rejoicing over the attack on Serbia. Be it true or not, the 2018 anniversary of armistice is due to pose similar questions, as 11 November meant little to the soldiers of Austria-Hungary stopping the fight a week before , or to the Croatian Parliament declaring secession already on the 29 October, 1918.

On the other hand, the Croatian Prime Minister Zoran Milanović attended only the 26 June, 2014 Ypres commemoration, organized on the margins of the regular European Council meeting. However, his earlier laconic comment on the founding of the Croatian State Committee for the Coordination of the WWI Anniversary Activities, stating that WWI was »one of these ancient wars we don□t know if we had won or lost«, did get significant, albeit somewhat satirical media attention.

Obviously, even the commonly promoted de-heroized, victim-centred and future-oriented pacifist approach isn't completely devoid of conflict-prone political connotations, as even the selection of a particular date or place can hardly be considered trivial. In fact, the existence of this type of consensus is questionable, concerning the just cause and victory-related public manifestations in some of the former Entente countries. Perhaps a sustainable common European view could more easily be reached by promoting the bottom-up tolerance of different perspectives, not by insisting top-down on some kind of colourless peace-loving unity?

Illustratively, in Croatia, manifestations on the local community level appear to be less distanced, probably as a result of stronger grassroots-type cohesion elements and the more centre-right oriented authorities. Apart from that, the more intense participation of local 1991-1995 war

veterans' organizations attested to the existence of a kind of transgenerational solidarity, an element the state-level commemorations mainly lacked, presumably deciding not to have recourse to the narrative of the relative continuity of the Croatian statehood (or national identity and interests alike), including the pre-1918 autonomy of the Kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia.

Within the field, the most notable efforts were made by the city of Zagreb anniversary committee, presided by the former Minister of Croatian Defenders (i. e. War of Independence Veterans) Ivica Pančić. Apart from sponsoring various activities, a memorial plaque was erected at the place of former Habsburg barracks, and initial but well-publicized visits were paid even to several cemeteries in Ukraine and France, where members of Zagreb-seated Habsburg units had been buried, some of the adjacent memorials still having the original Croatian transcriptions.

At the moment, as far as I know, no Croatian WWI-specialist is contributing to a major international research endeavour, and the majority of related projects are not financed by the Croatian Science Foundation but by the Croatian Ministry of Culture which has also devised an exhaustive list of events and media coverage (http://www.min-kulture.hr/default.aspx?id=10197). Consequently, in 2014-2015, there was practically no museum or archive that did not stage an exhibition (usually with a lavishly illustrated catalogue) on some aspect of WWI. Some archives have also sent dedicated »fishing expeditions« in order to finally get a clearer picture of 1914-1918-related funds stored in neighbouring countries, or ventured into the publication of manuscript war diaries. Because of their rarity, even some of the printed materials have been critically reissued; namely, several of the most interesting 1917-1939 war memoirs and a 1916 Domobranstvo-affiliated propaganda booklet, while both the Croatian State Archives and the National and University Library have offered a selection of digitalized wartime newspapers. The Ministry has also sponsored the Croatian branch of the Europeana 1914-1918 project, being well-received by the public.

Out of foreign scholarly works, the recent Croatian translations of Catherine Horel's Soldaten zwischen nationalen Fronten – Die Auflösung der Militärgrenze und die Entwicklung der königlich-ungarischen Landwehr (Honvéd) in Kroatien-Slawonien 1868-1914, Annika Mombauer's The Origins of the First World War: Controversies and Consensus, and David Stevenson's 1914-1918: the History of the First World War are to be mentioned, expected to be soon followed by Manfried Rauchensteiner's Der Tod des Doppeladlers (Clark's Sleepwalkers was mentioned above). Among the current translations of works of art and ego-documents, probably those of Karl Kraus and Henry Barbusse are the best known.

In the field of more popular approach, the Croatian Military History magazine has been covering the most important events of WWI almost on a monthly basis, publishing also Zvonimir Freivogel's book on the 1914-1918 armed forces of Austria-Hungary, the first-ever book on the subject in the Croatian language. Also, in 2016, a conceptually interesting WWI lexicon is to be published, containing parallel views on the same topics by Croatian and Serbian historians.

To conclude, in my opinion, as far as the Croatian case was concerned, it was a good call to organize the anniversary primarily around the fact that tens of thousands of soldiers were killed, and around the tenet that they deserve much more memorial and scholarly attention. But the next step should take us towards a more systematic reconstruction of the 1914-1918 period in order to better understand both the initial motivation and the actual decision-making of various agents, from politicians or generals to ordinary soldiers and civilians, from the pre-war crisis to the post-war echoes. In that way, the putatively homogenous Croatian perspective will be further sub-divided into a variety of branches, sometimes even to the individual level, resulting in more realistic and less teleological pictures than those presented during the 20th century.

Analogously, the synthetic European perspective and its dynastical, national, ethnic or class-defined sub-perspectives

should also be a result of historians' work, not that of politicians' projections. Simply promoting victimization instead of heroization may well be just another sort of reductionism with similarly questionable results.

To achieve this distant, somewhat utopian goal, the transnational cooperation should to a degree follow the historic footsteps. Obviously, notwithstanding the location of cemeteries along the former frontlines, more raw materials on the Croatian perspective could be found in the archives of Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Rome, Moscow, Ljubljana or Sarajevo than in those of Dublin, Oslo or Madrid. On the other hand, many decisions made in London, Paris or Washington did have a far-reaching effect. Vice versa, being Habsburg subjects, thousands of émigré ethnic Croatians have been detained in various internment camps from Canada to Australia. Also, in spite of all the different trajectories, weapons, tactics and a number of other cultural or technological achievements did possess a sort of global uniformity, making e.g. the literature of the rising German Expressionism relevant to Croatian literary historians.

Another important way of cooperation concerns contemporary methodological tendencies. Ironically, the years of Croatian silence concerning WWI research could have a beneficial side-effect, as the pioneering military, social or cultural historians may easily skip decades of painful evolution in a particular field, modelling their approach on some of the widely acclaimed British, French or German groundworks. On the other hand, neither the standard high politics, strategy and diplomacy-centred research should be neglected because of the decades of one-sided or even biased presentations.

All in all, while as of now no singular all-round Croatian history groundwork has been produced within the scope of the 100th anniversary of WWI, the solid foundations have been laid. One cannot surely say whether the public interest will soon peter out, but I dare hope that at least the trend of its memorial marginalization has finally been reversed, to bring more substantial results in the following years.