

Book Review

Čedomir Popov, *Greater Serbia. Reality and Myth*

Sremski Karlovci/Novi Sad 2007, 347 pages.

The author of this book is one of the most distinguished Serbian historians. He is a full professor emeritus in the General History of the Modern Age at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, and a member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU). For the purposes of the so-called "Hague Tribunal for criminal prosecution of persons who conducted serious violations of international humanitarian law in the former Yugoslavia", he wrote a study refuting the false claims of certain western historians and authors on "Greater Serbia", and also defended this 50-page work in the Hague in 2004, which was an inspiration for him to write this book. The book is intended for both scientists and experts, it contains significant literature list made up of the work of Serbian and Croatian politicians and historians, and also for any other historically informed reader. For this reason, and also for exquisite current relevance of the topic it deals with, the book can also be considered a very serious publishing endeavour.

The book has a Foreword and twelve chapters: 1. On Nation and Nationalism; 2. Serbian National Integration in 18th Century; 3. Serbian National Programs in 19th Century; 4. National Programs of European Nations in 19th Century; 5. Transitory Dreams of Greater Serbia; 6. Commitment to the Yugoslav Program; 7. From "Nis Declaration" to 1 December 1918; 8. In the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes; 9. Deterioration of the Crisis; 10. The Rise and Collapse of the Greater-Serbian Idea; 11. Serbian Historical Paradox; 12. There Was No Greater Serbia.

Yet, the book clusters around three thematic axes: the Serbian national program and the national programs of other European nations, especially those Serbs are in direct contact with; the ideology and practice of the Yugoslav idea; and the collapse of Yugoslavia and Serbia.

However, let us start from the main point of this research by academician Popov, claiming that "Greater Serbia" has neither ever existed, nor ever been an official national program of the Serbian state since its renewal in 1804-1813. Rather, this idea seems to be "a preconceived, malicious myth constructed and transferred from one supporter to another, whose goal was to conceal their own subjugating, imperialistic, or plainly overambitious national desires and tendencies to take up geopolitical transversals of the complex and always turbulent Balkans". Rightly so, academician Popov points out that today, just like in 19th century, the nation state is the "most reliable means of protecting the nation as a peculiar natural, historical and cultural legacy in which individuals with the same language, same sources of historical consciousness and same cultural patterns become related". And there could be no nation as a form of conscious existence without a national program. Whenever a nation was originating, one way or the other, its national program was proclaimed, as its specific identity card.

As for Serbian national programs, in 1806 already, duke Karadjordje and his Ruling Council¹ planned to "unite the three Serbian lands – Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina". And the much-quoted "Nacertanije" ("Program"), which Ilija Garasanin completed in late 1844, discussed the future Serbian state, which, based on "historical rights" would encompass, primarily, the Princedom of Serbia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Old Serbia, i.e. Serbian lands at the time under the Turkish reign. In his Foreword, academician Popov insists that "Serbian national and state program and policy of implementing them were among the most benign and the least expansive". In order to prove this, academician Popov provides numerous comparisons. For instance, in the book "Hopes of Italy" (*Le Speranze d'Italia*), of 1884, Cesare Balbo made the "most complete and harmonic philosophical system that circumscribed all that the Catholic movement in Europe by that time could provide to the political ideology." Another coryphaeus of the science of history, Milorad Ekmečić, describes this book as a "Catholic program against the unification of south Slavs under Serbian leadership". This book states the position that "a new Greek (i.e. Orthodox) empire would be a threat to the universal interest of Christianity", and that "Italian, but also purely Christian interest is to expand Austria", naturally, at the expense of the Orthodox Balkans. Roman Catholic Austria, i.e. Austro-Hungary, and Croats as its extended hand, were indeed the major impetus to the deionization of Serbs and Serbia and aggression against them on the pretext of the alleged "Greater Serbian" policy, which Popov also describes in detail. That never-vanishing anti-Serbian, megalomaniac national programs do not bother anyone in the West can be seen from a series of maps published in the book "Greater Serbia". Thus, we see an "ethnic map" of Bulgaria of 2001, where ethnic Bulgarian areas include the whole of eastern Serbia, the Republic of Macedonia, parts of Albania and northern Greece; or the ethnographic map of Croatia of 1933, which takes as parts of Croatia a part of Backa, Srem, Bosnia, Herzegovina, and most of the Montenegrin coast; or "the Greater Albania", claimed by the so-called "League of Prizren", which includes parts of northern Greece, most of the Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo, Metohija, eastern Montenegro with Podgorica, Bar, and Ulcinj, Raska, and the valley of Presevo.

The turning point occurred on 7 December 1914, when the Serbian National Assembly made public its commitment to creating the Yugoslav state, in the so-called "Nis Declaration". "With this", claims academician Popov, "Serbia made the first, but decisive, step in exchanging its full-fledged state for an uncertain Yugoslav gamble". Our contemporary can do nothing but wonder in disbelief how come the Serbian Government at the time refused to create a true "greater" Serbia, according to the London Treaty of 26 April 1915, and consecutive promises of the Entente Powers of 16 August 1915, for Serbia would then include Backa, Slavonia with Srem, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and significant parts of Dalmatia and north Albania (the map with these extensions is also available in the book "Greater Serbia"). Academician Popov does not delve into this decision to 'mistake cash for a loan'; he just shortly notices that the leading Serbian statesman of the time, Prime Minister Nikola Pašić, had tacitly accepted "the Yugoslav program" even before World War One. However, two well-known contemporary historians, Dimitrije Dimo Vujović, in the book "French Freemasons and the Yugoslav Issue 1914-1918", which came out in 1994, and Ivan Muzić, in the book "Masonry in Croats (Masons and Yugoslavia)", whose 4th issue came out in 1989,

¹ Orig. Praviteljstvujusci Soviet: the earliest form of Serbian Government, initiated during the uprising against the Turks (translator's remark).

stress the role of the international Freemasonry in the creation of the Yugoslav state, where two Czech statesmen, Masaryk and Benesch, made an important contribution. Freemasons wished the destruction of Austro-Hungary as a Roman-Catholic power, and the Czechs wanted this because otherwise they would not have stood a chance of getting an independent state for themselves. However, without the creation of the Yugoslav state, these plans would have remained mere ungrounded desires. In this respect, one should by no means forget that the destruction of Austro-Hungary, an old and reputable major power, was a revolution, no weaker than the October Revolution in Russia in 1917. This is why the Serbs, like the Czechs, ended up despised by all counterrevolutionary forces in the West. In Volume 7 of his "A Study of History", the well-known English philosopher of history, A.J. Toynbee, talks of "ghosts" and "vampires" of universal states, which the Danube Hapsburg Monarchy was, in his view. From today's perspective, it turns out that Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia fell victim to the "vampires" of this monarchy. For the first time – temporarily – Czechoslovakia was dissolved in 1938-1939. It was finally crushed after the collapse of the communist regime in 1992, where the tendency is that the Czech Republic could again become a German semi-colony. In relation to this, my opinion is that Serbs actually do not carry the association of "Greater Serbia" for, if they had indeed wanted a "Greater Serbia", they would have been granted one, with the consent of major powers in global politics. However, it seems the Serbs wanted to be associated with an irrational revolutionarity, expressed in the Yugoslav idea.

The book "Greater Serbia" also deals with two present-day literary events. Thus, the author polemicizes with the positions of the Croatian-born American historian Ivo Banac, presented in the book: I. Banac, *The national question in Yugoslavia. Origins, History, Politics*, 1984. He shows how pointless is Banac's fundamental difference between historically justified and aggressive nationalism, where Croatian nationalism is 'justified', because Croatian national consciousness is based on "historical right and right to a state", while Serbian nationalism is unjustified, because it has religious (Orthodox) foundations. Thus, in Banac's words, Serbian nationalism is assimilative, while Croats assimilated no one: the author is obviously turning facts upside down, deliberately offering such an explanation to the uninitiated American reader. Furthermore, academician Popov reports on the fate of the "Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts", the work on which commenced in 1986, and which was, incomplete and unauthorized by the bodies of the Academy, inexplicably made public. It is suggestive that the "Memorandum" was originally attacked only by the Serbian-Titoist leadership, while party leaders of other republics showed little interest in its contents. Only when the new leadership of the Serbian Communist Alliance in 1988/1989 began to request measures for improving the position of their Republic in the Yugoslav federation and point at the separatist urges and actions in other areas of Yugoslavia, did the anti-memorandum propaganda begin, and its purpose was to present the destroyers of Yugoslavia as victims, and Serbs as aggressors and occupiers. It turned out this propaganda would be perfectly harmonized with a broader anti-Serb propaganda of globalist forces and their means of coercion – embodied in the NATO executive and Hague Criminal Tribunal judiciary.

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