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## The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes

The European geopolitical landscape saw rapid and often hectic changes during the first half of the 20th century. The extent of influence of many European powers changed as the first world war came to a stop in November of 1918. Numerous new states were founded as a result of the partial or complete collapse of the states' occupying power. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later recognized as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, was officially formed on December 1st 1918. This paper aims to reflect on the birth of this nation as well as its inevitable demise. And how Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points relate to this specific state.

President Wilson's Fourteen Points were a list of ideals and principles that aimed to maintain global peace. The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were affected by a good portion of these points. In his analysis of the involvement of the United States in the formation of a Yugoslav nation, Vošnjak Bogumil (1949) claims that the 9th, 10th and 11th points specifically expressed support for nations' right to self determination and the explicit call for an independent Slovenian state. However, President Wilson was initially hesitant to support the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian empire as he believed in its right for self determination.

After receiving independence from the Ottoman empire in 1878, Serbia and Montenegro were later occupied by the Austro-Hungarian empire during World War 1. The Serbian and Montenegrin governments fled their newly sovereign states to allied nations. It was there and then that these governments and numerous other south slavic government officials met to discuss the formation of a new nation called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. And while the region's recent history was occupied by foreign powers, the majority of the population identified with the Slavic ethnicity. The Slavs recognized themselves as their own people with their own cultural identity and history. *“Nations that found themselves in it in 1918 – having lived in different empires and civilizations – were strangers to each other... it was only in the common state that they were to confront their interests and harmonize their goals.”* (Perović, 2015, p. 3). And the concept of an independent state that unified south slavic peoples was brewing long before the nation's eventual establishment. This desire for self-determination along with the allied powers' support for the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian empire paved the way for the nation's establishment in 1918 when the regions of Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Vojvodina joined together to form the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes ruled by the Serbian Karadjordjević dynasty. The following two years consisted of efforts to establish the state's official constitution.

On June 28th 1921, the kingdom adopted the Vidovdan Constitution. Article 1 of this constitution asserts *“The state of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes is a constitutional, parliamentary, and hereditary monarchy.”* This political system entails a government emerging from the parliamentary majority. On paper, this constitution called for the split rule between the king and

the National Assembly. However, it seemed that the king had the upper hand. *“When it comes to the position of the government, Article 91 stipulates that ministers are accountable to the King and the National Assembly. However, although the National Assembly had the opportunity to vote no confidence in the government, during the validity of this Constitution, the survival of the government really depended on the will of the king.”* (Savić, 2021, p. 22) Legislative power weighed heavily in the king’s hand, as the procedure of adoption of laws required the king’s approval as the last step. The king also had the right to pardon and amnesty. So while the constitution points to a split rule between the king and the National Assembly, for the following 8 years, the state was run as a covert dictatorship. And after the adoption of the 1931 constitution, following the assassination of the National assembly, The state then became a constitutional hereditary monarchy following the adoption of the 1931 constitution (Savić, 2021, p. 26). This assassination was justified by the king as he had the kingdom’s highest interest in mind.

As mentioned above, the peoples of what would later on become the Kingdom of Yugoslavia had the shared identity of the Yugoslav which translates to South Slav. However, it was clear that the different regions of this nation distanced themselves from each other. Over the course of its short-lived existence, the Yugoslavian state underwent many geographical, political and economical changes. These changes were often a result of the difference in ethnic identities all the Yugoslav people had between one another. These ethnic backgrounds included the Serbs which were the majority, Croats, Slovenes, Bosnians as well as other minorities such as Albanians, Hungarians and Bulgarians. Each of these groups had their own languages, religions and cultural backgrounds. *“I am the leader of one country which has two alphabets, three*

*languages, four religions, five nationalities, six republics, surrounded by seven neighbours.”* said the former leader of the Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia (Van Son, 2011). This diversity led to the inevitable distribution of power and a decentralized system of governance that characterized the nation’s political structure during the latter half of the 20th century.

In conclusion, the State of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was one of the numerous newly established states following the dissolution of many great European powers in the aftermath of World War I. It realized its desires for self-determination and aligned with President Wilson’s vision of the global geopolitical landscape. However, its eventual collapse seemed inevitable, considering the sheer diversity of its peoples. Economic turmoil exposed the so-called unity of this state as each region sought to satisfy its own ethnic portion of the nation. As Dr. Bunce explains, *“Simply put, the Serbs were angry at not getting what they saw as their due, and Serbian leaders had significant institutional resources at their disposal to give a clear voice to these resentments. This encouraged the development of a nationalism in Serbia that was expansionist and anti-liberal, both of which placed Serbia on a collision path with Slovenia (and later with the other republics).”* (Bunce, 1997). Slowly but surely, over the course of the 20th century, each region of the state gained autonomy, and by 1992, Yugoslavia officially ceased to exist as a unified nation, with each region declaring independence. Despite being central to the trigger of the First World War, this nation’s war and short-lived history has found a place in the European historical afterthought.

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