

## THROUGH GENOCIDE TO A GREATER CROATIA

This book is the result of several years of research into the history of the Serbs in Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia and the Serbo-Croatian relations. Its objective is to explain a century and a half long policy of the Croats towards the Serbs, on the ground of reliable primary sources, and from all possible standpoints. The book also offers answers to the questions which so far have remained unexplained and even obscured in historical science.

I have also tried to explain the roots of hatred towards the Serbs, the ways in which it was disseminated among the Croats and what were the objectives of constantly instigating it until it developed into a bloody conflict with the innocent Serbian-Orthodox population.

The reliable facts quoted in this book prove that the question of the “Croatian state and historical right” lies at the root of all misunderstandings between the Croats and the Serbs. It is exactly on the ground of these two rights that from the revolution of 1848/49 to this day the Croatian politicians have constantly endeavored to establish an ethnically pure and a Catholic Croatian state. On the other hand, since the Serbs were not willing to renounce their ethnic individuality and their Serbian Orthodox religion, they became the main target of constant and concerted attacks of the Croatian political parties and outstanding individuals who grounded their Croatian national idea on the so-called state and historical right. The reader will notice that the extermination of the Serbs through genocide and the establishment of an ethnically pure and exclusively Catholic state as an idea has outlived all their state frames and all their political and social systems, and as a common red thread has been fostered from Ante Starčević, Eugen Kvaternik, Mihovil Pavlinović, Josip Frank, Frane Supilo, Stjepan Radić, Ante Pavelić, up to Franjo Tuđman and the present days.

In this book I have tried to explain the idea of genocide against the Serbs in Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia grounded on the historical, geo-

political, religious, sociological, psychological and other reasons. Thanks to abundant primary source material now accessible to researchers, I was in a position to provide a deep insight into the problem of genocide against the Serbs and the strivings of the Croats to establish a Greater Croatia, which makes this book a seminal project in this field.

In view of rich available documentation, this book could have been much more voluminous, but in that case more difficult and less attractive for reading. Actually I did not want the reading this book to require a greater intellectual effort, so as to attract as many readers as possible. My intention was not to incite passionate antagonism, but only to bring out the facts supported by evidence, to unmask falsehood and open the eyes of all individuals who are only partially or not correctly informed, and sober them up. On the ground of irrefutable and scientifically proved evidence I also wanted to prevent new blunders regarding the relations with the Croats and Croatia, so as to prevent new sufferings and bloodshed. I feel duty-bound to say it because I do not see any encouraging sign, or any significant change in this regard in the current Croatian policy. On the contrary, this policy is exactly the same as it was a century ago, based on the Croatian “state and historical right”, striving to achieve the recognition of the Croatian as a “political” (constitutional) people, in view of establishing a greater, in the ethnical and religious (Catholic) sense pure Croatia. As long as they foster such ideas, the Croats will remain imbued with the idea of genocide and will continue to use their best efforts to expand their territories at the expense of the neighboring ethnic and national territories in order to improve their not so fortunate geopolitical position.

I am aware that the readers will not enjoy reading this gloomy book, but I believe that it will help them to understand better the meaning of the idea of brotherhood and unity, harmony, common life, coexistence and Yugoslavism. As its author, I do not pretend to persuade the readers to change overnight their deeply rooted prejudices and overcome the effects of persistent brainwashing, but as a scholar and writer I simply could not resist writing this book, deeply convinced that it was my duty of a historian to disclose facts no matter how painful or ugly they may be, and not to conceal them. I was trying to establish the truth without resentment, inspired only by the noble feeling that evil should be stigmatized in order to prevent and uproot it.

Belgrade, October 1997

*Vasilije Dj. Krestić*

## RELATIONS BETWEEN THE SERBS AND THE CROATS BEFORE THE 1848/49 REVOLUTION

How was such a crime at all possible and why it was committed, is one of the crucial questions raised in conducting research on genocide against the Serbs in Pavelić's Independent State of Croatia. This question cannot be answered only on the ground of research into the recent historical facts on the relations between the Serbs and the Croats, which is usually the case, but it must be analyzed in parallel sequences and over several past centuries, from the very moment when the Serbs found themselves in the same state with the Croats. Moreover, the phenomenon of genocide against the Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia cannot be explained properly if analyzed on the ground of the developments in recent past only, because in that case we would blame either one or the other ethnic group, one or the other regime, religious community or some eminent personalities. Like in the past, some are still now trying to explain that the genocide the Ustashi committed against the Serbs was connected with the ethnic features of the Croats, or that it was the response to the brutality of the ruling regime of the so-called Greater Serbian hegemony and the 6<sup>th</sup> of January dictatorship, committed against the Croats between the First and the Second War (1918-1941). Some even attempted to justify and scale down the magnitude of Ustashi crimes for the sake of peace at home, and establish some kind of a balance of guilt between the executioners and their victims.

Deeply convinced that in science there must be no taboo subject, that the interpretations which are not based on research can only be harmful, whereas a scientific interpretation of all phenomena can only help in shedding light on the past and contribute to a better understanding of the present, I decided to write about this subject without the intention of fully exhausting it, nor do I foster

the illusion that some of my judgments will remain sacrosanct. On the contrary, my judgments stand to be amended and challenged. Moreover, submitting my summary approach to the problem to the attention of the readers, I welcome all more competent experts in the history of the Serbs and the Croats to provide a different, more competent, acceptable, logical and more convincing explanation of the genesis of genocide against the Serbs in Croatia.

To date, no serious article based on research has been written about genocide against the Serbs in Croatia. On the eve of the Second World War, in the first issue of the journal *Izraz (Expression)*, Vaso Bogdanov published his article entitled: *The Roots of Misunderstanding Between the Croats and the Serbs (Začeci nesporazuma između Srba i Hrvata)* which was reprinted after the war<sup>1</sup>. In this article Bogdanov, as a politically committed writer rather than an objective historian, only raised, but did not clarify this problem, because his biased approach to this question was based on the views of Ante Starčević, and not on the critical evaluation of facts. He belonged to the left-oriented intelligentsia at that time fighting against the centralist government and the 6<sup>th</sup> of January dictatorship. For this "...rapidly increasing conflict" between the Serbs and the Croats Bogdanov wrongly blamed the 6<sup>th</sup> of January regime and indirectly the Serbs. According to him, "as of the beginning of 1929 no one in this country was allowed to say a word against the Serbs or against the representatives of the 6<sup>th</sup> of January regime, either in the press which was heavily censored or banned, or at the political rallies, in schools, in the theater, nowhere..."<sup>2</sup>. In his article, Bogdanov's approach was hostile to the Serbs. In this book we do not intend to discuss his mistakes, but only deem it necessary to emphasize that, although regarded as a Marxist, Bogdanov's identifying the interests of the Croatian people with Croatian class interests was absolutely non-Marxian, because he was unaware of the fact that the Serbs living on Croatian territory were in conflict with Croatian secular and ecclesiastical feudal lords, and not with the Croatian people.

<sup>1</sup> Vaso Bogdanov, *Živa prošlost (The Living Past)*, Zagreb 1957, pp. 9-17.

<sup>2</sup> Idem.

Dušan Popović, a former active politician and prominent member of the Croatian-Serbian Coalition, tried to identify the roots of genocide in distant past, which is not acceptable either. In his book: *Contribution to the Reading and Understanding Old Manuscripts (Prilozi čitanju i razumevanju raznih starina)*, (Belgrade, 1957), grounding his approach on the quotations from Constantine Porphyrogenet, Fredegar, Theophanos, Nicephoros and Paul the Deacon, Popović attempted to prove that the Croats were not pure Slavs, that during the migrations in the 7<sup>th</sup> century they intermingled with a tribe from Asia<sup>3</sup> and that it is due to their Asiatic blood that they were inclined to committing unbelievable crimes, including the ones they committed during the war on the territory of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH)<sup>4</sup>. His was actually a racial approach to the problem of genocide which had nothing to do with science, and as such does not deserve our attention any more. However, this explanation is interesting as a substitute for the lack of reliable scientific explanation of the causes of genocide against the Serbs in Pavelić's NDH.

Thirst for truth on the current issue of such crucial importance, on the one hand, and scarce knowledge about our past, on the other, are actually responsible for erroneous judgments which only added fuel to the flames, instead of extinguishing the fire with the results of unbiased research work and critical assessments of the common Croatian and Serbian history, in which the answers to concealed truth about genocide can be found. It is our duty to answer these questions out of respect for the victims, in the first place, but also out of responsibility to the future generations who should be faced with the lesson of that past, in order to avoid its repetition, because ignorance of this truth could have serious negative consequences.

So far, *Magnum Crimen* by Viktor Novak is unfortunately the first and the only book written on the ground of an all-embracing research work into the causes of genocide in the Independent State

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<sup>3</sup> For more detail consult the book Porphyrogenit (Sloveni – Slavs), pp. 973-1226.

<sup>4</sup> I am quoting this datum thanks to the kindness of professor Fedor Nikić to whom D. Popović entrusted his true motivation for research into the origin of the Croats.

of Croatia. As indicated in its title, this book is devoted to “half a century of clericalism in Croatia.” In it Victor Novak revealed openly and unequivocally the genesis of the idea of genocide and its crucial causes, particularly in the advanced and final stage of its implementation. The following text reveals how this final stage culminated.

There is no doubt that the genesis of the idea of genocide against the Serbs in Croatia goes back to the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the so-called Orthodox Vlachs, i.e. the Serbs, fleeing from Turkish pressure started settling on Croatian lands. The arrival of “Orthodox schismatics” in Croatia raised many religious, social and economic questions. Settled on the land owned by Croatian feudal secular and ecclesiastical lords, the Serbs were exposed to a twofold pressure: to be turned into serfs and to be converted into religious uniates. Since they endeavored, at all cost, to preserve their status of free peasants and free soldiers-frontiersmen, they vehemently refused to accept serfdom and resisted religious uniating, both of which would have totally changed their social status.

Notorious for their religious intolerance, characteristic of the whole of feudal Europe of that time, at their Convention of 1608, Croatian feudal lords adopted a special law which granted public rights on the Croatian state territory only to the Catholics, which was in line with the well-known slogan: *whose land, his religion*. The bishops of Zagreb and other feudal lords in Croatia particularly insisted on this slogan, which was fully in line with their position in the feudal society, not only for religious, but also for economic reasons. Namely, unlike the Catholics, the Serbs were not due to pay various contributions to the Catholic church and its clergymen. In Croatia, thanks to their status of free peasants and their military status of frontiersmen, the overwhelming majority of Serbs were not turned into serfs. Again, thanks to their status of free men, they were not due to pay numerous feudal contributions. In order to subdue them into serfdom, the Croatian feudal lords used all available means, even brutal physical force, against the “intractable and tough” “Orthodox schismatics”. Historical documents reveal numerous cases of drastic pressure on Serbian Orthodox population in Croatia, but the most indicative is the report by Ambroz Kuzmić, supervisor of Zagreb bishopric property, of November 13, 1970, in which he



**ПАТРИАРХЪ И ПРИВРЕМЕННЫЙ УПРАВЛЯТЕЛЬ НАРОДА,**

народу Србскомъ православно цркве у Србской Войводини.

Опечалило се срце Моє, кадъ самъ разумѣю, да се синови православне цркве са браћомъ своимъ, кои римской цркви припадаю, свајаю, раздиру, и протерую. Опечалило се срце Моє, ерѣ ано изда, то е занста садъ оно време, кадъ сва браћа едне крви, едного языка треба тако да мысле, тако да говоре, тако да раде, као да су едно тѣло, и као да у свима една душа живи, а да никомъ ни на умъ не падне запытати брата, у кою вѣкъ цркву иде. Свакій треба свою прилу изъ свега срца да любви, као најинше добро да цѣни, и изъ свою сила да брани: али зато на брата свога врзати, на нѣга викати и насртати, што онъ у другу цркву иде, што се ономъ истомъ единомъ Богу другимъ начиномъ моли, то нити е лѣпо, нити христѣински, нити е людно, нити Богу угодно! И зато се опечалило срце Моє, кадъ самъ разумѣю, да су се гдѣкои између Мои православны нашли, кои су Богу, цару и мени мрже дѣло учинили, и на браћу свою западне цркве поспричинимъ рѣчма насртали! Спаситель нашъ и искупитель любію е едаво люде, на коѣ вѣре они были; Спаситель нашъ влжео намъ светимъ своимъ рѣчма, да любимо и мы люде, на коѣ они вѣре были: па заръ неже мы противъ свете нѣгове науке и заповѣсти врзати, и нападати на рођену браћу збога нѣвоѣ вѣре, збогъ нѣвоѣ цркве? Не, чо несѣтъ быти ни одъ Бога, ни одъ людемъ. Чо же, као Патриархъ и као Управитель народа, настрѣвие забраномъ свѣко насртанъ на браћу нашу римске цркве, было то рѣчма, было дѣломъ, и заповѣдамъ као отаць и власть свима, да браћу исту у любви предурѣтате, да съ нима у миру и слоги живите. Та не ли обштыѣ душманинъ предъ вратма куће ваше? Не грози ли онъ и единомъ и другомъ пропашћу и убійствомъ? Саоднити треба сило, да га изпредъ куће одгонимо, а не раздирати; а ако се мы између себе цѣпамо, олакшавамо нѣму посао, и даемо му ножъ у руке, да насъ обе стране у срце пробѣде. Тежко нама и нашоѣ дѣци, ако са ислого зло по насъ буде; кости оны несрећника, кои раздоръ сѣю, неже ни у гробу мира нмѣта, были они синови православне, были римокатоличке цркве, кадъ иѣ дѣца и унуца клеѣти стану, уздишуни у окови бѣсногъ душманина, кои имъ найсветіе благо, милу народность ногама гази, и спомену се нѣвоѣ праотца руга! Зато, чада, послушайте Мене, любите браћу, а не нападайте на нѣя, тако не васъ Богъ благословити, тако не васъ срећнымъ успѣхомъ свете наше войне награди-ти, кою за свободу, срећу и благостанъ наше и наши правнука водимо!

У Земуну 24. Августа 1848.

Горе споменутый смиреный Патриархъ

**І О С И Ф Ъ.**

*Appeal of Patriarch J. Rajačić to the Serbs to abate their antagonism towards the Croats on religious grounds*

said that “it would be better to slaughter all Vlachs, rather than allow them to settle here”<sup>5</sup>. Of course, they should be slaughtered because they were not serfs, they were not Catholics and they refused submissiveness to the feudal lords and payment of their fees and taxes.

Elaborating on his proposal Ambroz Kuzmić explained that the “Vlachs” were “more of a nuisance to the noble state enlightened by the Emperor, rather than an advantage, because “neither His Imperial Majesty, nor the noble state will ever be at peace with them.”<sup>6</sup> This means that, according to historical proofs, already at the very beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, feudal circles in Croatia, out of religious and class antagonism, were ready to commit genocide against the Serbian Orthodox population settled on their land, but under special conditions and against their will, thus violating their feudal rights.

Judging by the conflicts between the Serbian settlers in Croatia and the Croatian feudal lords it was clear that already at this time the Serbs were uninvited guests in Croatia and were treated as intruders in all regions where they had settled. This antagonism towards the Serbs-frontiersmen, in the first place because they were Orthodox, was transmitted from one generation to the next and has remained unchanged to this day. The role of Croatian and Slavonian secular and ecclesiastical feudal lords was crucial in this regard. After 1848 and the collapse of feudalism, their influence remained undiminished in the bourgeois capitalist society, to which they transferred all their views and prejudices from the former historical periods. Therefore, unfortunately, the old antagonisms not only persisted, but became part of the new social and political system and continued to poison and undermine it.

In his letter to Bishop Jerotej Mutibarić of March 22, 1848, Đorđe Nikolajević, Orthodox parish priest in Dubrovnik described best the antagonism of the Croats towards the Serbs, even in Dalmatia where mutual relations were fairly good as compared to the situation in Croatia and Slavonia. This is what he said: “I take this

<sup>5</sup> Vojin. S. Dabić, Banska Krajina 1688-1751 (The Banska Region 1688-1751), Beograd-Zagreb 1984, p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> Idem.

opportunity to inform you that since the adoption of the Constitution, here in Dubrovnik, instead of being happy we are very frightened, because we were explicitly and publicly threatened in the face that we would be cut into pieces. It is true that since last night and today the tension has slightly abated, but just one spark could put us in a tight squeeze.” Fortunately, when the Serbs from Kotor heard about these threats, the Serbs in Dubrovnik were saved, which Nikolajević mentioned in his letter: “When this alarming news reached the Orthodox Serbs in Kotor where they were the majority population, they warned Dubrovnik that if they touched one of their brothers not a single Catholic in Kotor would survive. Even this threat had no effect on the infuriated Dubrovnik Catholics. They calmed down only when they heard that ten thousand Montenegrins had boarded a ship for Dubrovnik to pay them a visit and ask them what they intended to do with the Serbs, which if it were true would have been no joke”<sup>7</sup>. In 1848 the Serbs in Zagreb were seriously jeopardized. According to Anastas Popović, an eminent and well-established merchant and Chairman of the Serbian Orthodox Church Community, the situation for the Serbs in Zagreb became particularly dangerous when it was discovered that at the May Assembly in Sremski Karlovci they had elected their Voivoda (leader). Zagreb was “infuriated to the point that they wanted to slaughter all Serbs”. Serbian deputies who found themselves in Zagreb after the May Assembly were threatened with the same punishment.” This is what Konstantin Peičić reported about this case: “I managed to calm down the policemen – all of them Ikavian Catholics who were preparing a Bartholomean night for Serbian deputies, in order to prevent their schismatic patriarch to install Ban Jelačić and turn him into a Serb.”<sup>8</sup> Antagonism between the Serbs-frontiersmen and the Croatian ecclesiastical and secular feudal lords persisted as long as the feudal society lasted, only with time changing its forms and aspects. The attitude of high military circles in Vienna and Graz towards the relations between the Serbs and the Croats and their antagonism with seminal genocidal inclination in it, was of crucial

<sup>7</sup> The Historical Archives in Zadar, Manuscripts on the Orthodox Dalmatian Parish, file 50, No. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Mihovil Tomandl, *Život i rad Konstantina Peičića (Life and Work of Constantine Peičić)*, Novi Sad 1966, p. 54.

importance, because they always had in mind primarily the interests of the state and the dynasty, and therefore in some situations supported the frontiersmen against the Croatian feudal lords, and sometimes the feudal lords against the frontiersmen. Anyway, the policy of Austrian high military circles was to a high extent responsible for the antagonistic relations between the Serbs-frontiersmen and the Croatian feudal lords.

In the situation when the antagonisms between the Croatian feudal lords and the Serbs-frontiersmen were brought to the boiling point, the relations between the Orthodox and Catholic frontiersmen were, as a rule, correct. It should be emphasized that the favorable political and even economic status of the Serbs-frontiersmen had a positive effect on some categories of Catholic serfs. Under the burden of numerous fees and taxes they started to protest, thus trying to win for themselves the social status enjoyed by the frontiersmen. In many cases the Catholics and the Orthodox manifested solidarity in their protests against feudal taxes by fighting side by side for the same objective. Anyway, in the feudal society the antagonisms prevailing in the upper social strata of the so-called Croatian political people did not spill over to the subjugated segment of the Croatian people deprived of their rights. This very important fact should be taken into consideration in the approach to the development of the idea of genocide against the Serbs in Croatia.

Examining the impact of the elapsed times and past events on later developments, the historians simply must not lose sight of certain analogies in the social and political development of the Croatian people and their attitude towards the Serbs, particularly the ones in Dalmatia, Croatia and Slavonia, but also towards the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is a well-known fact that many Habsburgs, and particularly Maria Theresa and Joseph II, had invested enormous energy to, by hook or by crook, transform a multi-lingual, multi-national and a multi-state community into a great and unified Austrian state ruled by the Germans, and in which the entire population would speak German.

All non-Germans vehemently opposed such attempts of the Habsburgs and the Germans, particularly the well-organized and nationally aware Hungarians. They even organized a movement for the promotion of clearly defined national and political ideas and

СВИМ ДУХОВНИМ И СВѢТСКИМ ПОГЛАВАРОМ И ЧАСТНИКОМ КАО  
И СВЕМУ ОСТАЛОМЕ НАРОДУ ПО ХРВАТСКОЙ И СЛАВОНИИ.

Част народа мога захтѣва необходимо, да се я на нѣков вѣрме из домовине мое одалым; захтѣва, да народу моме оно мачем прибавим, што он лѣпим начиним и мирним путем, премда нѣ ништа него праведна искао, нипошто добити могао нѣ, и то зато, ер се в тому противила господуюћа у Угарской странка Маѣарах; она иста, коя се усуди насртати на част и на вѣрност мою прама краљу, премда сам милостиви краљ наш превишњим своим дописом од 4. Септембра о. г. вѣрност мою призна и све кораке мое одобри.

За вѣрме док љу се я на корист домовине и свега великог царства нашега бавити изван граница краљевинах ових, учинио сам сходне наредбе, да мужевн познати народу по својој мудрости, ревности и домољубю све послове мое оправљаю. Прама овима мужевима дочим вам сву љубав и покорност као прама истому себи препоручам, налажем вама заедно, да у одсуству моме ред, мир и слогу крѣско и стално уздржите; ер то в домовини нашој најбоље потрѣбито, ако хоѣмо докучити жељни циљ наш.

Особиту скрб препоручам вама свештеници адне и друге цркве! Ваша се власт протеже на срца и на душе, ви имате равнати пук и подучавати га: равнајте га на корист домовине, уништујте у њему братску мржњу поради разног вѣрозакона и подучавајте га о потрѣбама вѣремена овога.

За свештеничтвом имате ви частниці жупаниах и градовах најлѣпшу задаћу, највећи круг дѣловања у домовини нашој; препоручам вама као и свима поглаваром и частником осталих областих државних, да у бурно ово вѣрме подвостручите приашњу марљивост своју, да имате увѣк пред очима поштенење свое, сигурност обѣнску и правду закониту. Я љу позорно гледати на вас и строго казнити оне, кои званју своје неодговараю.

Особито пако вам препоручам ради уздржања речене сигурности обѣнске, да пазите на такове стране и домаће људе, кои би покушали пореметити мир и ред обстојни, прама таким поступайте са свом строгосћу, како то озбиљност вѣремена захтѣва.

Ви равнители и учители младежи! водите ову наду будућности наше путем праве просвѣте к познанию праве човѣчности и праве слободе а понайбоље к изображенју срца.

Ти пако сав остали народе мой милн, по градовима и селима, имај пред очима оне благодати, коє си добио већ досада; обављај мирно и уредно послове свое и чекај стрпљиво повратак свог бана и свог войске; па се тако тврдо надај, да ће прие него се я к теби опет вратим, испуњена бити сва праведна по сабору државном изречена захтѣвања твоја. Бог поживи нашега цара и краља Фердинанда! Бог поживи тебе народе мой драги!

У Загребу дана 7. Септембра 1848.

С. Ј. Ј. Бан, в. р.

*Ban Jelačić's appeal to the population to abate mutual  
antagonism on religious grounds*

their own idea of statehood. Resisting Germanization and refusing to be submerged into a unified German empire, the Hungarians set as their primary objective the establishment of their own, unified Hungarian state on the territory extending from the Carpathian Mountains to the Adriatic Sea. Thus, the intentions of the Habsburgs and Germans in Austria to enforce Germanization only provoked the launching of the Hungarian Movement with the objective of serving the interest of Hungary by enforcing Hungarianization.

With regard to German-Hungarian relations I would like to emphasize that they were part of a long and continuous process, actually going on for over two centuries. Even when as an issue they formally disappeared from the political scene, their ideas remained unchanged and in one way or another were transplanted into the new political streams. This fact should be emphasized, because the process of compulsory Germanization was only replaced by compulsory Hungarianization, according to the same methods and in view of the same objectives. The Croats stood up against Hungarianization just as the Hungarians did against Germanization, by launching their Illyrian Movement which was essentially the struggle for Croatian political and national interests. After the defeat of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848/49 the Croatian resistance was over, but the process which had started with compulsory Germanization, and was continued through compulsory Hungarianization, at the beginning of the sixties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was replaced by compulsory Croatization of the Serbs, which with its ups and downs is going on to this day.

## THE STATE AND THE HISTORICAL RIGHT OF CROATIA – AT THE ROOT OF THE CONFLICTS WITH THE SERBS

The state and the historical right of Croatia was one of the crucial issues which seriously affected the relations between the Serbs and the Croats not only in the past, but still have a strong impact on current developments. Unfortunately, due to a superficial and biased approach to these relations, particularly idealized and embellished after the First and the Second World War to serve the requirements of current policies, the issue of the state and the historical right of Croatia, basically at the root of all differences and conflicts between the Serbs and the Croats, which culminated in genocide against the Serbs and the war between them in 1991, has never been tackled, or discussed on the ground of scientifically established historical facts. Since it is not possible to understand and properly evaluate the nature of the relations between the Serbs and the Croats in the past and nowadays, particularly the extent of their impact on the life of the Serbs in Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia, I will try to provide a brief insight into this issue.

The entire history of the Croats who lived under the Hungarian rule after 1102, and under the Austrian rule after 1527 is fraught with endless arguments over the legal status of Croatia and its status as a state, and to emphasize and prove that in spite of being incorporated into the framework of Hungary and Austria, Croatia never lost its individuality as a state. The smaller and narrower Croatian statehood was getting in political and real life, the louder the Croats were in insisting on these rights and in their efforts to assert them. After centuries of experience in waging legal struggles against the Hungarians, the Croats had become experts in litigation. Even when their statehood was reduced to a thin thread, and later broken and Croatia degraded to a Hungarian province, Croatian politicians con-

tinued their endeavors to prove with admirable persistency that a distinction should be made between their factual and their legal status. They were actually using their very best endeavors to prove the impossible, namely that Croatian statehood had never been discontinued.

During such centuries-long controversies with the Hungarians, Croatian history and politics had always been deeply permeated with the state right issue and historicism. This burden remained even after Croatia broke off from Austro-Hungary and became part of the first and the second Yugoslavia. Oddly enough, even today, as if time had stopped and as if nothing had changed in our country and in the world, Croatian leaders still operate with the same arguments used by their predecessors in the feudal period, long ago gone with the wind.

In the feudal period, Croatian policy, obsessed and totally imbued with the idea of the state right and historicism, until the 1848/49 Revolution in Hungary and Austria had been defensive. After this Revolution the nature of this policy did not change, but was only growing increasingly aggressive from one year to the next, with expansionist objectives in view. In this way, the policy the Croats had been practicing for centuries in the struggle against Hungary and Austria for the recognition of their state right became identical to the Hungarian aggressive and expansionist policy. Actually, in their aggressiveness the Croats followed in the wake of the Hungarians and their centuries-long policy in this regard, but were only more cruel and ruthless in attacking the Serbs. In view of defending their "historical right" and reviving "the Croatian state right", with the objective of establishing a greater and independent state of Croatia, the Croats launched the ideology of their Croatian exclusiveness and fostered their uncompromising, Croatian nationalism, and from the distant past to this day had most often and most vehemently directed the dagger of their antagonism against the Serbs. Following in the wake of the Hungarian feudal policy adopted at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, summarized in the slogan that on the Hungarian territory there was only one people – the Hungarian, most Croatian politicians at that time, also adopted this view, which they still maintain, that on the territory of Croatia there was

only one “diplomatic”, or rather “political”, in modern terms “constitutional” people – the Croats.

The question of the Croatian “political” or “diplomatic” people in Croatia requires an additional explanation, because numerous former and current disagreements between the Croats and the Serbs actually stem from the Croatian nationalist political ideology based on the concept that all Croats constitute only one “political” Croatian people. The struggle for and against the concept of the Croatian as a “political” or a “diplomatic” people and the differences between the Serbs and the Croats in the approach to this concept should be more elaborately explained, because these differences have remained unbridgeable to this day. They were the cause of continuous bitter confrontations and antagonisms which in some bourgeois and petit bourgeois circles developed into genocidal anti-Serb trends. According to numerous reliable data, the crisis in the relations between the Serbs and the Croats on the eve of the break-up of the second Yugoslavia was provoked by the political parties and politicians, promoters of the nationalist political ideology based on the concept of the Croatian state territory inhabited by only one “constitutional”, Croatian people.

In the sixties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the idea of the Croatian as a “political” people attracted a great number of supporters, Imbro Ignjatijević Tkalac as a sincere and devoted Yugoslav, resolutely stood up against this idea. Aware of how destructive and harmful it (this idea) might be, he wrote:

*“The idea of political and national unification of all Southern Slavs is quite good and positive. On the other hand, the obsolete idea based on moldy manuscripts and quasi-historical concoctions on the ground of which the Croats and the Roman Catholic church pretend to establish hegemony over all Southern Slavs – cannot be an expression of fervent patriotism, but only a proof of vanity and ignorance of the mentality of these people. As such, this idea was not as successful as expected. On the contrary, it has only widened the gap between the two most progressive and vital Yugoslav peoples: the Croats and the Serbs, and developed the differences between them almost to point of national hostility (Italics – V.K.)*

Further on Tkalac said: “Neither the future nor the state can be built on old papers and “virtual” territorial claims, no matter how

justified and irrefutable these claims might be, but only on the strong determination, vitality and efficiency of the people living on these territories and their will and capability to build their own state, and this way fulfill their national task. Had the Serbs now living in their Princedom, rebelling against the Turks decided to refer themselves to the Empire of Dušan and Lazar, their old documents and all of their other historical rights, they would have remained under Turkish occupation as Turkish slaves (raja), as is the case today with the people in Bosnia and Herzegovina.”<sup>9</sup>



Imbro Ignjatijević Tkalac

<sup>9</sup> I. Ignjatijević Tkalac, *Pitanje Austrijsko, kome i kada valja rešiti ga? (The Austrian Question, for Whom and When it should be Solved)*, Paris, 1866, pp. 77-78.