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Slovenian Hopes and Plans in the Last Days of the Habsburg Monarchy

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Abstract

The article analyzes Slovenian perspectives on the possible formations of a state of South Slavs from the final stages of World War I until when the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians (SCS) was established in 1918. In this period, the most influential Slovenian People's Party (SLS) gradually abandoned the concept of the May Declaration and accepted the idea of unification with Serbia. Despite Slovenian parties seeming to be in harmony on this issue, significant ideological differences separated them, as reflected in the geopolitical parameters of imagined Yugoslav state ideas they envisioned. Further, dissidents from the main parties also developed alternative visions of their own. This article looks at a few of the most prominent alternatives, while determining what distinguishes them from the requirements of the May Declaration, and examines the crucial factors in Slovenians' decision to join the state of South Slavs with Serbia and to be outside the Habsburg monarchy.

Keywords: World War I; Slovenians; Yugoslavism; Slovenian People's Party; liberals

At the end of World War I, Slovenians faced the very real possibility of being divided among different states. On the one hand, a victory of the Central Powers would have entailed a great deal of pressure to join the Austrian Germans. On the other hand, the policies of the Entente threatened the implementation of the London Pact, a 1915 agreement that, in exchange for its participation in the war, promised Italy significant territorial expansion—including a considerable amount of Habsburg territory inhabited by Slovenians. Caught between the geopolitical aspirations of their larger, more powerful neighbors, Slovenian conservatives and liberals attempted to consolidate their position by encouraging the joint consideration of the broadest possible spectrum of South Slavic political options. One result was the 1917 May Declaration.¹ Composed by Anton Korošec, president of the Slovene People's Party (SLS), and signed by the South Slavic delegates within the Austrian parliament, a group known as the Yugoslav Club, the Declaration comprised a list of political demands that, among other things, called for the unification of the lands inhabited by South Slavs under the auspices of the Habsburg state framework. Later that year, the Declaration also received formal support from the Yugoslav Social Democratic Party (JSDS).

To view such agreements as evidence that the most influential Slovenian political parties were relatively cohesive, however, would lead—and indeed often has led—to the erroneous conclusion that Slovenian political leaders were united on their own state-legal future.² Overshadowed in a historiography much more attentive to Croatian-Serbian disputes, Slovenians are often seen as a relatively monolithic political entity that accepted the idea of Yugoslavism before 1 December

¹The declaration was read in the Austrian parliament, an entity that represented the stance of the Yugoslav Club, where Slovenian politicians played a prominent role. “On the basis of the national principle and the Croatian right to statehood,” it stated, the signatories demand “the unification of all areas of the Monarchy under the scepter of the Habsburg-Lorraine dynasty inhabited by Slovenians, Croats, and Serbs into an independent state body that will be free from any government of foreigners and be built on democratic foundations. . . . With this reservation, the signatories will participate in the work of the parliament.” J. Prunk, C. Toplak, and M. Hočevar, *Parlamentarna izkušnja Slovencev 1848–2004* (Ljubljana, 2006), 72.

²Pleterski, *Prva odločitev Slovencev za Jugoslavijo*.

1918.³ Moreover, the concept of Yugoslavism in this existing literature is often oversimplified, neglecting the broad range of ideas regarding a South Slavic political entity—ideas that varied in terms of territorial scope, degree of political integration, and the location of its political-administrative center. Accordingly, Slovenian conservatives and liberals approached the end of World War I with contrasting ideological stances, particularly with respect to their perspectives on the Yugoslav issue.

The purpose of this article, therefore, is to shed light on the dynamism of the Slovenian political space regarding the development of state ideas. Through the analysis of archival magazines and the speeches and writings of Slovenian leaders, it explores the alternatives circulating among Slovenian politicians in the last phase of World War I. Foremost, the article questions the thesis that the idea of Yugoslavism manifested in the realized Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians (Kingdom of SCS) reflected the desire of the majority of the kingdom's population, with the exception of the Kosovar Albanians.⁴ The ambition here is not only to show that Slovenian politicians held different visions of their future state in the final phase of World War I, but also that, despite the overall perception that Italy's hunger for territory constituted the biggest threat, the majority of the Slovenian political elite did not perceive the Kingdom of Serbia as their savior, while the creators of the alternatives based their visions on (con)federation projects that they assumed would be aligned with the macro-geopolitical desires of the main Entente powers. Moreover, since reforms in the direction of at least partly meeting the Declaration's requirements were unforeseeable, not only did alternative visions emerge among party dissidents but the creators of the May Declaration were also forced to adjust their political strategies.⁵ Accordingly, the article also identifies factors that decisively influenced Slovenian parties' decision to eventually join the state of South Slavs with Serbia, outside the Habsburg monarchy.

The Slovenian Political Landscape up to 1918

"Slovenians . . . do not like Greater Serbia, but in the interest of their national existence and their cultural progress they would rather choose a great Austria in which all Croats and Slovenians would be united as a solid border between West and East."⁶ This is not a statement from some marginal Slovenian politician but rather lines from the front page of the most widely circulated and read Slovenian political journal, *Slovenec*, from late June 1914. *Slovenec* was published by the most influential Slovenian political party, the conservative Slovenian People's Party (Slovenska ljudska stranka [SLS]). The party enjoyed its strongest support in rural areas and among the Catholic clergy, who frequently participated in the party's political activities.⁷ Furthermore, Ivan Šusteršič, the most influential figure in early twentieth-century Slovenian politics, attained his prominent role within the party by backing Anton Bonaventura Jeglič, the bishop of Ljubljana. Šusteršič's leadership in the SLS was also bolstered by his political connections within the Habsburg monarchy's highest echelons, often holding significant state and provincial positions. Prior to the outbreak of World War I, conservatives endorsed the trialist concept, advocating for the unification of South Slavic regions from Trieste to the Drina River.⁸ This strategy depended heavily on forming alliances with Croatian parties in Istria and Dalmatia, as the latter sought to unify Croatian territories through the revision of the Croatian-Hungarian Settlement of 1868.⁹ Consequently, the SLS had to embrace the idea of Croatian statehood, a pivotal legal concept for connecting Croatian lands, and aimed to encompass as much territory inhabited by Slovenians as possible under its umbrella. Nevertheless, the

³D. Djokić, *Nedostižni kompromis: Srpsko-hrvatsko pitanje u međuratnoj Jugoslaviji* (Belgrade, 2010); D. Djokić, *Pašić and Trumbić: The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes* (Chicago, 2010); M. Ekmečić, *Ratni ciljevi Srbije 1914* (Belgrade, 1973); B. Glorigorjević, *Parlament i političke stranke u Jugoslaviji, 1919–1929* (Belgrade, 1979).

⁴J. R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2002), 101.

⁵J. Perovšek, *Slovenska osamosvojitve v letu 1918* (Ljubljana, 1998), 13.

⁶"Ob rakvah," *Slovenec*, 30 June 1914.

⁷F. Erjavec, *Zgodovina katoliškega gibanja na Slovenskem* (Ljubljana, 1928), 29–31.

⁸I. Ivašković, "Trijalistička reforma Austro-Ugarske u časopisima slovenskih liberala iz Trsta i Gorice," *Povijesni prilozi* 40, no. 60 (2021): 293–316.

⁹L. Heka, "Hrvatsko-ugarska nagodba u zrcalu tiska," *Zbornik Pravnog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Rijeci* 28, no. 2 (2007): 931–71.

commitment to the notion of a unified Slovene-Croatian nation, the amalgamation of Croatian and Slovenian lands,¹⁰ and the pursuit of support among the Croats were largely tactical maneuvers employed as part of a defensive strategy against perceived German and Italian political and cultural pressures.¹¹

The fundamental ideological pillar of the SLS political agenda, in addition to advocating for the cultural and political autonomy of Slovenians vis-à-vis the Austrian Germans, was Catholicism. This alignment with Catholicism coincided with the political objective of establishing a Habsburg state unit encompassing both Croatian and Slovenian Habsburg lands where Catholics would constitute the majority. Simultaneously, this concept ruled out the possibility of forging connections with Orthodox Slavs, placing the SLS's ideology in alignment with the members of the Habsburg dynasty, especially the heir to the throne, Franz Ferdinand.¹² Because of his assassination, the SLS entered World War I with distinctly anti-Serbian and pro-Austrian positions.

The second most influential Slovenian political party, the National Progressive Party (Narodna napredna stranka [NNS]), held a significantly stronger position than the conservatives in urban areas, particularly in prominent cities like Ljubljana, Trieste, and Gorizia. This urban standing and a robust presence in the strategically significant Trieste provided party members with more opportunities for higher education and engagement in the state bureaucracy, offering greater potential for involvement in national-level politics.¹³ At the beginning of the twentieth century, the most notable figure within the NNS was Ivan Hribar, who had served as the mayor of Ljubljana from 1896 to 1910. He was also a member of the Carniola Provincial Assembly and the Imperial Council in Vienna. In 1906, he formally assumed leadership of the party, which was fundamentally rooted in liberalism, anticlericalism, and the promotion of South Slavic unity as a platform for safeguarding Slovenian interests in the face of Italian and German imperial ambitions.¹⁴ While the SLS prioritized the establishment of a Habsburg Slovenian-Croatian entity rooted in the historical right to statehood for Croatia, the Slovenian liberals had, since the conclusion of the Balkan conflicts in 1913, regarded Serbia as the driving force behind the Yugoslav cause.¹⁵

The ongoing political struggle between the Slovenian conservatives and liberals was occasionally influenced by the third Slovenian party, the Yugoslav Social Democratic Party (Jugoslovanska socialdemokratska stranka [JSDS]). Despite their efforts, JSDS members were unable to secure seats in the Austrian parliament. Consequently, during World War I, the Slovenian political landscape was predominantly shaped by the actions of SLS and NNS.¹⁶ Furthermore, the central political conflict within the Slovenian political sphere primarily played out within the SLS itself (between Korošec and Šusteršič), which in turn influenced interactions between Slovenian conservatives and liberals.

¹⁰Slovenian political parties primarily regarded the Slovenian lands at that time as encompassing Carniola, where Slovenes constituted the absolute majority, followed by southern Styria, (southern) Carinthia, and a part of the Austrian Littoral, including the cities of Gorizia and Trieste. In these urban areas, Slovenes did not have a majority, but there was a strong Slovenian rural hinterland.

¹¹As Anton Korošec, Šusteršič's main rival within the party, acknowledged after the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy: "Throughout the trialist idea's prominence, the Slovenians feared that they would not be incorporated into the South Slavic entity. That's why we Slovenian politicians, perhaps more than strictly necessary from a political perspective, aligned ourselves closely with the Croats . . . In our overall policy, we consistently upheld the idea that we are one nation with the Croats and that we must share the same destiny." See S. Kranjec, "Koroščevo predavanje o postanku Jugoslavije," *Zgodovinski časopis* 16, no. 1 (1962): 218–29, here 220.

¹²I. Ivašković, "How Littoral Slovenians Viewed the Idea of a South Slavic Unit in the Habsburg Monarchy," *Journal of Modern European History* 21, no. 1 (2023): 52–70.

¹³J. Kocka, "Bürgertum und bürgerliche Gesellschaft im 19. Jahrhundert Europäischen Entwicklungen und deutsche Eigenarten," in *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert: Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich. Band 1*, ed. J. Kocka (Munich, 1988), 11–87.

¹⁴S. Matković, *Premili Ivane: korespondencija Ivana Hribara s hrvatskom elitom* (Zagreb, 2016), 10.

¹⁵Ivašković, "How Littoral Slovenians Viewed the Idea of a South Slavic Unit," 52–70.

¹⁶J. Perovšek, *Politika in moderna: idejnopolični razvoj, delovanje in zarezje v slovenski politiki od konca 19. stoletja do druge svetovne vojne* (Ljubljana, 2022), 8.

May Declaration Frustrations

Apart from igniting Slovenian political life¹⁷ and managing to make the three biggest Slovenian parties agree on a set of elements,¹⁸ the May Declaration did not bring much change. Emperor Charles I remained passive and, even though he initially seemed not to hold a negative view of the Declaration, was unable to introduce meaningful changes. His oath on the Hungarian Constitution during his coronation as king of Hungary on 30 December 1916 implied the immutability of Hungary's borders. At the same time, he tried to push the problem of the South Slavs on to the government, which sought to appease them with minor concessions like giving up one seat in the government for Slovenians or Croats and an amnesty for their political prisoners. The ultimate possibility in these circumstances was a kind of autonomy that, however, could not considerably encroach on the dualistic Austria–Hungary arrangement. Vienna's weak political position was felt by the Slovenians, especially the liberals, whose demands became increasingly harsh. Gregor Žerjav emerged as a key figure, becoming a vital link between the liberals and Anton Korošec, the leader of the conservatives. Under Žerjav's influence, Korošec moved away from the conservatives' prewar Slovenian starting points and began leaning toward anti-Habsburg positions. Žerjav also published a brochure about national demarcation in Styria and Carinthia that, in the eyes of the Austrian Germans, was so provocative that it called for a formal response. They exerted pressure on Charles I, who on 12 May 1918 prohibited all public gatherings in support of the May Declaration. On 25 May, the emperor promised German representatives that territories inhabited by Slovenians would not be separated from the rest of Austria.¹⁹

From the perspective of Budapest and Vienna, the last nail in the coffin of the May Declaration came on 30 May 1918, when the joint Austro-Hungarian government met solely for the purpose of discussing the South Slavic question. The Hungarians proposed the idea of an expanded “subdualism,” whereby Croatia-Slavonia would be expanded with Dalmatia, while Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) would be directly attached to Hungary, remaining outside of the Croatian subunit. The Austrian prime minister, in contrast, proposed a tripartite model with Croatia-Slavonia, Dalmatia, and BiH as a separate entity, or the third Habsburg unit. No proposal, therefore, intended to merge the Slovenians with the Croats.²⁰ These unchanged positions even pushed loyal Slovenian conservatives away from believing that the survival of the monarchy would mean considerable progress for the Slovenians. Moreover, the positive outcome of the war (for the Habsburg monarchy) would only add to the internal strength of the Germans and Hungarians at the expense of smaller nations. After 30 May, even conservatives accepted Korošec's vision, which had been influenced by Žerjav and the Czech liberals,²¹ and envisioned the current state's possible disintegration.

Support for Korošec among the SLS and the liberals grew. On 1 June 1918, the National Council for Slovenian Areas, intended to be subordinate to the National Council in Zagreb, was founded.²² Its influence in urban areas allowed the liberals to play a crucial role in organizing large events with the aim of showing Slovenian and Slavic unity. In August, “Slavic Days” were held in Ljubljana, attended by representatives of the Habsburg South Slavs along with Czech and Polish politicians. Srđan Budisavljević, a member of the largest party from Croatia-Slavonia, the Croatian-Serbian Coalition (Hrvatsko-srpska koalicija [HSK]) stated: “we do not want to be slaves of the Hungarians, we do not want any Greater Serbia, we want to have our Yugoslav unified state within the monarchy to which all Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians will belong . . . Zagreb will be the center of Yugoslavs.”²³

¹⁷Prunk, Toplak, and Hočevar, *Parlamentarna izkušnja Slovencev*, 73.

¹⁸“Deklaracija, Jugoslovanski klub in S.L.S.,” *Slovenec*, 1 February 1918; “Tržaško jugoslovansko ženstvo za deklaracijo,” *Edinost*, 3 February 1918; “Deklaracija, Jugoslovanski klub in S. L. S.,” *Slovenec*, 4 February 1918; A. B. Jeglič, *Jegličev dnevnik* (Ljubljana, 2015), 730.

¹⁹Pleterski, *Prva odločitev Slovencev za Jugoslavijo*, 177.

²⁰Pleterski, *Prva odločitev Slovencev za Jugoslavijo*, 243.

²¹I. Hribar, *Moji spomini II. del (My memories part II)*, (Ljubljana, 1928), 270.

²²Representatives of JSDS were also invited to that meeting and agreed to participate in the founding, but not to be members of the Council. See “Dnevne beleške” (Daily Notes), *Naprej*, 6 June 1918.

²³Pleterski, *Prva odločitev Slovencev za Jugoslavijo*, 249.

Accordingly, the May Declaration remained the only tool for communication with state and provincial authorities, in spite of a significant share of Slovenian liberals who dreamed of a wider Yugoslavia. However, these events were also important for emphasizing the right to self-determination and, by extension, the fact that the Entente would be violating its own fundamental principles should Italy annex part of the Slovenian and Croatian territories. As such, these gatherings sought to destabilize the Italian position within the Entente.

Agreeing to the May Declaration meant the Slovenian liberals had partly moved to accepting a concept that was still closer to the prewar starting points of the Slovenian conservatives.²⁴ On 23 July 1918, Korošec demanded from the new prime minister, Max Hussarek, immediate guarantees for the formation of the South Slavic unit. Hussarek did not have a mandate for serious negotiations, only mentioning the possibility of attaching Dalmatia to Croatia-Slavonia, while BiH did not have a representative who could approve its accession to the Triune Croatian Kingdom. On that occasion, Hussarek emphasized that Trieste, Pula, and some other towns along the Adriatic should not belong to the South Slavic unit, whereas Korošec demanded that Trieste should be in the state of “Yugoslavia.” The meeting was also attended by another member of the Yugoslav Club, the Croat Vjekoslav Spinčić, who added that Istria and Gorizia should be attached to Trieste, while the Germans had no right to claim Kočevje, Ptuj, Celje, and Maribor. Hussarek defended his position by stating that no such reform was possible based on the existing system, in response to which Spinčić asserted that the current system was outdated and the Habsburg monarchy had been formed for the purpose of defending against the Turks, not for German and Hungarian rule over the Croats.²⁵

Hussarek’s government obviously hoped to break the South Slavic alliance by partially appeasing the Croats, which would cut them off from the Slovenians. This led the prime minister to try to soften the Slovenian demands by sending a warning letter directly to the bishop of Ljubljana, Anton Bonaventura Jeglič. Writing about this event in his diary on 29 September 1918, the bishop felt he had been accused of activity hostile toward both Austria and the Germans due to a letter he had sent to Slovenian priests in support of the May Declaration. His response to Hussarek emphasized that “the people are still loyal to Austria and the monarchy based on the May Declaration, but that in more intelligent circles, especially in Croatia, a new direction has started to develop that no longer emphasizes Austria.” Jeglič blamed the central authorities in Vienna and Budapest for the emergence of these directions, believing that the authorities were “cultivating irredentism, Russo- and Serbophilism” and “pushing Yugoslavs away because they don’t heed their calls for justice.” Jeglič added that Slovenians were against German policy precisely because of their love for Austria, not out of hostility toward the Germans, since German policy “wants Austria to become completely dependent on it.” Finally, the bishop also urged Hussarek to ensure complete justice “so that Austria will emerge from these turbulences as a powerful federal state of contented nations.”²⁶

At the end of September 1918, Jeglič was still acting based on positions outlined in the May Declaration, whereas in his view Korošec was prepared for two options: both for Austria’s survival and for its division by the Entente—“which seems more likely now,” he added.²⁷

The journal *Slovenec* indicated that Korošec had bet on the latter option.²⁸ On 30 September, it published an article predicting the defeat of Austria–Hungary and placed the new Yugoslavia outside of the Habsburg monarchy.²⁹ Although the government at the time understandably censored part of this article, it testifies to Korošec’s agreement to publicly opt for the Yugoslav concept that had already been called for by the Slovenian liberals, whose main journal, *Slovenski narod*, had explicitly mentioned the dissolution of the Habsburg monarchy at the beginning of September.³⁰

²⁴M. Zečević, *Slovenska ljudska stranka pred stvaranje Kraljevine SHS 1917–1918*, (Belgrade, 1968), 342, 365.

²⁵Pleterski, *Prva odločitev Slovencev za Jugoslavijo*, 310.

²⁶Jeglič, *Jegličev dnevnik*, 760.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 759.

²⁸Hribar, *Moji spomini*, 268–73.

²⁹“Kaj pa je?,” *Slovenec*, 30 September 1918.

³⁰“Pravna vsebina majniške deklaracije,” *Slovenski narod*, 7 September 1918.

The Idea of a Danubian Confederation

Anton Korošec's biggest rival among the conservatives was Ivan Šusteršič. With his loyal attitude to the Habsburg dynasty and belief that the Slovenians should, together with the Croats, look for a way to present themselves to Vienna as the protector of Austrian interests in the Balkans, he was one of the loudest advocates for the trialist Habsburg concept. According to that idea, a Catholic South Slavic unit should be formed based on the Croats' historical right to statehood as a barrier against Italian irredentism on one side and against the idea of Greater Serbia on the other, thereby also reducing the strength of Hungary.³¹ The war removed some of Šusteršič's influence when conservatives started to realize that Austria could find itself on the side of the defeated. By the second half of 1918, Korošec had already completely isolated Šusteršič from influencing the Slovenian and Croatian representatives in the Austrian parliament.³² *Slovenec*, once under Šusteršič's control, began to publish articles clearly directed against the former party leader.³³ Šusteršič thereby found himself in a paradoxical situation where he was nominally the first man of Carniola and the person with access to the highest positions in the Habsburg dynasty, yet no longer held any power in his own party. As long as the Habsburg monarchy still existed, however, this did not mean the former party leader was an irrelevant political factor.

The May Declaration, despite being based on Croatia's right to statehood and the Habsburg crown, was never fully accepted by Šusteršič. When the Provincial Assembly of Carniola, in which Šusteršič still exercised a considerable influence, condemned the actions of Ante Trumbić³⁴ and the Yugoslav Committee as illegitimate representatives of the Slovenians, it did so because the Assembly did not accept the liberals' proposal to incorporate the provisions of the May Declaration.³⁵ Šusteršič believed that issuing such an ultimatum to the Austrian authorities would distance the Slovenians from their only potential partners. Even though deeply loyal to Austria, he was not uncritical of the Austrian government, especially Vienna's inability to see that the Slovenians and Croats were the pillars of "true Austrian statehood."³⁶ He viewed the government's attitude as helping Great Serbia propaganda direct the South Slavic issue in the direction of creating an expanded Serbian state. He was also critical of Austria's historical mistakes, above all regarding the formation of the Austrian Littoral in 1849 as a separate unit, which distanced Trieste, Istria, and Gorizia from Carniola and further empowered the Italian irredentists.³⁷ Šusteršič tried to present his viewpoints (albeit in a diplomatic tone) to Emperor Charles I on 11 January 1918, when he repeated his thoughts on the kinship of the Slovenians and Croats but hesitated to include all Serbs in the South Slavic unit. If broader Illyria was to become a reality, he believed, Catholics should have the majority. If this was impossible due to Hungarian resistance, he proposed establishing a Slovenian-Croatian administrative unit within the Austrian part of the monarchy with its headquarters in Ljubljana. Such an "Illyria" would include the areas of Carniola, Gorizia, Istria, Trieste, Dalmatia, southern Styria, and southern Carinthia, noticeably deviating from the requirements of the May Declaration. This was a new type of subdualistic solution with a special subunit of South Slavs within Austria. Šusteršič also highlighted the need to resolve the Serbian issue within the Habsburg monarchy because "as long as there is an independent Serbia next to Bulgaria, there will be no peace."³⁸ Among all South Slavs, only the Bulgarians should remain outside the monarchy in their own state: Greater Bulgaria.

³¹Ivašković, "Trijalistička reforma," 293–316.

³²A. Rahten, "Zadnji slovenski avstrijakant: Prispevek k politični biografiji dr. Ivana Šusteršiča," *Zgodovinski časopis* 53, no. 2 (1999): 195–208.

³³"Deželna ustava, deželno gospodarstvo in dr. Šusteršič," *Slovenec*, 2 September 1918.

³⁴Trumbić indeed negotiated with the Serbian prime minister Nikola Pašić about a broader Yugoslavia as a constitutional monarchy under the rule of the Serbian royal Karadorđević dynasty, which eventually resulted in the Corfu Declaration in July 1917.

³⁵Pleterski, *Prva odločitev Slovencev za Jugoslavijo*, 178.

³⁶I. Šusteršič, *Moj odgovor. Žlindra v državnem* (Ljubljana, 1996), 97–98.

³⁷Rahten, "Zadnji slovenski avstrijakant," 202.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 203.

Just twelve days after Šusteršič had met with the Emperor Charles I, then prime minister Ernst Seidler offered to Korošec the merging of Slovenian and Croatian territories within Austria, although not those (Croatia-Slavonia) in Hungary. What Šusteršič would almost certainly have accepted, at least as a first step toward unification of the Slovenian and Croatian territories, Korošec and other Slovenian conservatives within the Yugoslav Club rejected. They were also unimpressed by the emperor's manifesto of 16 October 1918 that predicted the federalization of the Austrian half of the monarchy. What later proved to be the final break in communication between Vienna and the relatively united Slovenian political elite did not discourage Šusteršič. He continued to present his own vision of the South Slavic state in his journals *Novice* (News) and *Resnica* (Truth). After the rejection of Charles I's manifesto he presented a new idea of the Yugoslav state as one of the Danubian United States, an idea that would include all those nation-states arising from the current Habsburg monarchy. Šusteršič based his idea on the long tradition of federation projects in Central Europe³⁹ and the existence of strong economic connections and centuries of mutual life within the Habsburg monarchy. Yugoslavia should, in his vision, mainly be the coastal state in the Danubian group, while other states would form the hinterland, giving Yugoslavia a significant strategic position. He continued:

It is clear, however, that this development is only possible if the Yugoslav state is completely independent and sovereign. Therefore, first it is necessary that this sovereignty and independence are fully established and the Yugoslav people should then freely decide on their permanent contacts with the neighboring national states that will grow on the soil of today's Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.⁴⁰

Obviously believing that Austria–Hungary's disintegration was inevitable, Šusteršič advocated for the right to self-determination of smaller nations, which would allow the Slovenians and Croats to establish a Catholic Yugoslavia within the broader alliance of Danubian states.

Šusteršič explained in more detail in subsequent issues of *Novice* that the Danubian confederation should be a kind of economic, customs, and monetary union with a common currency. In addition, he foresaw a common foreign policy; yet at the same time, individual member states should have their own diplomatic institutions.⁴¹ Each member state should have its own army and choose its own form of government. The confederal character was obvious from the idea that each member should retain the right to leave the union. According to Šusteršič, the Danubian United States would include Yugoslavia, German Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Ukraine, Romania, and Hungary. They should first be established as independent and sovereign states, and then each should choose its own government and form of state—either republican or monarchical. Thereafter, he believed they should comprise a loose state union as the “United States” for the sake of security. Common affairs would be managed by a Federal Council made up of representatives of the federal states. These would primarily be of an economic nature so that the proposed confederation—similar to Switzerland or America—would outwardly form a single economic territory with a common customs border and a common currency.

Šusteršič's Danubian Confederation was to have the specific geopolitical function of providing an alternative state structure for Austrian Germans. If they remained isolated, he theorized, sooner or later Austrian Germans “will have to go to Germany because they can't go anywhere else.” Conversely, by binding themselves to the interests of the neighboring Slavic countries, Austrian Germans would end up like those Germans in Switzerland: “happy and satisfied that they do not belong to Germany.”⁴² Such a role of the Danubian Confederation was, stated Šusteršič, to be attractive to the main powers of the Entente, and principally to the United Kingdom, because the confederation—along with Switzerland—would limit the potential strength of Germany. And with his explanation

³⁹A. L. Lakatos, “Federation projects in Central Europe, 1848–1918,” *History of European Ideas* 41, no. 1 (2016): 22–38.

⁴⁰“Izolirana Jugoslavija ali Zedinjene države,” *Novice*, 24 October 1918.

⁴¹“Podunavske Zedinjene države,” *Novice*, 26 October 1918.

⁴²*Ibid.*

that the confederation should be headed by a member of the Habsburg dynasty, he identified the primary geopolitical mission of the Habsburg monarchy: preventing Germany's domination of Europe.

Šusteršič therefore foresaw some kind of transformation of the Habsburg monarchy in the direction he had been promoting for practically his entire political career. The Danubian Confederation should act as a barrier against German nationalism and provide a buffer zone between Germany and Russia in line with Britain's desires for Central and Eastern Europe.⁴³ This vision of a Danubian state, headed by a Habsburg, as a bulwark against Germany, was in many ways Austria–Hungary with a new name and different constitutional structures.

At the same time, Yugoslavia, which should not include Serbia, was from Šusteršič's perspective chiefly a maritime power that would gain the support of the Danubian hinterland states for the protection of its maritime interests against Italy. "A powerful neighbor on the same coast, three times stronger in terms of population and disproportionately strong in the fields of culture, finance, and trade,"⁴⁴ he states, Italy's territorial aspirations were a great threat to both the future Yugoslavia in the Danubian Confederation and Slovenians' particular interests.

In the context of the South Slavs, however, Šusteršič viewed Serbian aspirations as the biggest danger for Yugoslavia:

Pašić showed decisive circles in London a new promissory note, which was signed by Serbian troops with their own blood, and demands that this promissory note be paid for by growing Greater Serbia out of the Bulgarian ruins! So, not Yugoslavia, not the rounded Yugoslav territory in the sense of the May Declaration, but only Greater Serbia.⁴⁵

While he was aware that British diplomacy was ready to hand BiH over to Serbia as a reward for its war efforts, he also feared that the lobbying of the Yugoslav Committee would bring the whole of Croatia, Dalmatia, and (perhaps) the Slovenian territories under nominally Yugoslav but de facto Serbian rule.⁴⁶ This in turn led him to warn of the dangers of this alternative while also criticizing the Slovenian policy, especially under Korošec, who had agreed to cooperate with the Serbs.

According to Šusteršič, Korošec had abused the Yugoslav feelings among Slovenians. Playing on their resistance to German absolutism, he had pushed them into the embrace of the Great Serbian idea. In contrast, Šusteršič believed that Yugoslavia was only possible within the framework of the Habsburg monarchy because there was never any other desire on the Serbian side than Greater Serbia:

And there is a big difference between Yugoslavia and Greater Serbia! Yugoslavia, as it is understood by the May Declaration, does not deny the monarchy, but expressly requests that we remain under our old ruler. Yugoslavia further demands that we slowly give up the former name. . . . Greater Serbia, however, is something completely different . . . if Greater Serbia arises, 'Yugoslavia' is dead.⁴⁷

In the union with Serbia, Šusteršič did not see the possibility of establishing Yugoslavia, but rather an inevitable emergence of Greater Serbia:

Serbs . . . would not come as "saviors" and brothers . . . , but as victorious conquerors. . . . They would really "save" us from Germans, we admit that. . . . Every conqueror feels like a lord. Serbs will feel the same way. . . . Just as we once envied the German for taking our better jobs, we will also hate the Serb in a while, because he will rule and dominate, and we will serve.⁴⁸

⁴³G. Jeszenszky, "Peace and Security in Central Europe: Its British Programme During World War I," *Etudes historiques hongroises* (Budapest, 1985): 457–82.

⁴⁴"Dinastično vprašanje," *Novice*, 23 October 1918.

⁴⁵"Pred odločitvijo," *Resnica*, 5 October 1918.

⁴⁶Jeszenszky, "Peace and Security in Central Europe."

⁴⁷"Pred odločitvijo," *Resnica*, 5 October 1918.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

Šusteršič also contrasted the vision of the predominantly liberal Yugoslav unitarians and the Serbian idea of Yugoslavism, which he believed would comprise nothing other than Serbian hegemony and attempts at the systematic assimilation of the Slovenians and Croats in a state whose political center was in Belgrade. “No concordat will prevent the Orthodox Church from being the state church in Greater Serbia,” he stated. “Serbs will try in every way to turn Slovenians and Croats into Serbs. The most common tools for that are schools and churches. The Serbian language will dominate the schools and offices, and the church will have the task of speeding up that process.”⁴⁹ Accordingly, by calling for the concept of a Danubian confederation he tried to support those English political circles, foremost Leo Amery (an associate of Lloyd George), who believed that the Czechs and Slovaks as well as the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians were too different to be united in single states, and hence proposed a wider confederation.⁵⁰

The idea of a Yugoslavia encompassing the territories from Trieste to the Drina and ruled by a representative of the Habsburg dynasty was sincerely advocated by Šusteršič. In the last issue of *Resnica* on 26 October 1918, he wrote: “The dynastic issue has not yet been resolved. . . . We do not hide that we see a vital national interest in resolving this issue in agreement with the Habsburg-Lorraine dynasty. . . . We . . . maintain our loyalty to the dynasty and only an act of the crown or a valid international act can untie us from it. If the latter happens, we will transfer our loyalty to the new government.”⁵¹ He evidently could not completely distance himself from the reality of late 1918 and was considering the option of forming Yugoslavia under another crown. He discussed this possibility in an article titled “The Dynastic Question,” in which he wrote:

Do we want to be completely independent in the future or one of independent and sovereign states that should form the Habsburg-Lorraine’s United States? Complete independence can be considered to be once again under a dynasty, for example in the spirit of the Corfu program under the Karađorđević dynasty, or to become a republic. By the way, it should be said that in this case we would be in favor of the republic. We see no reasonable reason to replace one dynasty with another, if we are already parting with it.⁵²

In the end, Šusteršič accepted that the Habsburg monarchy would cease to exist, and yet he still believed there was no reason that the newly formed states should not join the new confederation—as sovereign units that would also have the right to leave the alliance, of course. While he considered complete independence to be very tempting, he also warned that Italy “will be stronger in the army than ever before.”⁵³

Šusteršič was not alone in calling for a Danubian confederation. The president of the Croatian Peasant Party (Hrvatska seljačka stranka [HSS]), Stjepan Radić, had the same vision. Like Šusteršič, he was opposed to a direct merger with Serbia⁵⁴ and, following the example of the United States of America, proposed the creation of a state based on the Croats’ right to statehood and the principle of self-determination.⁵⁵ As a possible alternative, when it became clear that the Habsburg monarchy would not survive, he also discussed a Danubian Federation that would be a French or US protectorate for a certain period.

In a similar fashion, Aleš Ušeničnik, a Catholic priest, theologian, and philosopher who had a strong influence in shaping the fundamental tenets of the SLS political program, confirmed the unwavering loyalty of the Slovenians to the Habsburg dynasty even in August 1918, when it was already clear that the Central Powers could not win the war. Ušeničnik argued that Charles I could use the

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Jeszszenszky, “Peace and Security in Central Europe.”

⁵¹“Deželni glavar dr. Ivan Šusteršič o položaju. Wilsonov odgovor in sklep “Narodnega Vjeća,” *Resnica*, 26 October 1918.

⁵²“Dinastično vprašanje,” *Resnica*, 26 October 1918.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴S. Radić, *Politički spisi: Autobiografija, članci, govori, rasprave* (Zagreb, 1971), 334.

⁵⁵I. Ivašković, “The Vidovdan Constitution and the Alternative Constitutional Strategies,” *Zbornik Pravnog fakulteta u Zagrebu* 68, no. 3–4 (2018): 525–51.

May Declaration within the framework of Wilson's principle of self-determination, and with reference to that document, the Entente powers, foremost the US, could reject the requests of the Serbian king Peter to annex the Habsburg South Slavic territories to Serbia.⁵⁶

Like Ušeničnik, Henrik Tuma, a former Slovenian liberal who later became a social democrat, also proposed the formation of a Central European alliance of free nation-states. As he wrote in February 1918:

According to its internal ethnographic composition and its historical development, Austria-Hungary should be seen as the core and model of the European Union of States. The leadership and formation of the European alliance of republics is not ascribed to Germany in advance, but to the Austro-Hungarian-Slavic Adriatic, Danube, Sudeten, and Carpathian states. . . . Only the liberation of all the nations between the Baltic and the Adriatic, between the Aegean and the Black Sea would create the basis of a free sovereign European Union of States. . . . Only the establishment of a true Central Europe of Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, Romanians, and South Slavs will limit Germany, Russia, and Italy to their geographical and ethnographic borders, and thus such organically connected European states will become not only possible, but necessary. . . . This is the liberation of Europe.⁵⁷

Tuma had, similarly to Šusteršič, assumed that complete international independence was not the best option for the small Central European nations because that would make them vulnerable to the larger powers. The disintegration of the monarchy should therefore enable small nations to connect as a new entity, while the crucial connective tissue of the union would be the fear of the larger and stronger neighbors and their territorial aspirations. Like Šusteršič, Tuma saw Italy as the greatest threat for the Slovenians.

Unlike Lajos Kossuth's concept of a Danubian Federation, Šusteršič's idea was not anti-Habsburg. Rather, it was quite similar to the concept advocated by Aurel C. Popovici, a Romanian associate of Francis Ferdinand, in the first decade of the twentieth century. Popovici used the concept of the United States of America as an analogy for the "United States of Greater Austria."⁵⁸ Contrary to Šusteršič, however, Popovici saw this as a means of survival for a larger Central European state in which individual nations, especially the Slavs, would not have a chance for complete emancipation. Indeed, he explicitly confirmed that the function of the proposed reorganization was precisely to prevent the Slavic people from dominating Central Europe.⁵⁹ The chief similarity between the two was the proposal to maintain the Habsburg dynasty at the head of this state formation and the belief that the reorganization of Austria-Hungary had to be achieved without the use of force, which would only create hatred toward the new authorities and destabilize the federation.⁶⁰ In principle, Šusteršič's idea of the Danubian Confederation was conceived as a true confederation, whereas Popovici's United States of Greater Austria was a copy of the German federal model applied to a multinational entity built around German Austria.

Šusteršič's idea was closer to the concept of the Hungarian Oscar Jászi, who in 1918, as the Minister of Nationalities, proposed a Danubian Federation composed of five units: Hungary, Austria, Poland, the Czech state, and the South Slavs.⁶¹ They would have a common defense, foreign policy, and a supreme court. In this context, Jászi, and probably also Šusteršič, knew that certain Entente circles had been counting on the formation of a Danubian (Con)federation that would replace Austria-

⁵⁶A. Ušeničnik, *Um die Jugoslavija. Eine Apologie* (Ljubljana, 1918), 58–59.

⁵⁷A. Rahten, *Slovenska ljudska stranka v beograjski skupščini. Jugoslovanski klub v parlamentarnem življenju Kraljevine SHS 1919–1929* (Ljubljana, 2002), 108.

⁵⁸A. C. Popovici, *Ehemal. Mitglied des zentralen Vollzugausschusses der rumänischen Nationalpartei in Ungarn und Siebenbürgen. Die Vereinigten Staaten von Gross Oesterreich. Politische Studien zur Loesung der nationalen Fragen und Staatsrechtlichen Krisen in Oesterreich-Ungarn* (Leipzig, 1906).

⁵⁹Popovici, *Ehemal. Mitglied*, 348–50.

⁶⁰L. Karpowitz-Toševa, "Program Velikoavstrijske federacije Aurela C. Popovicija," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 26, no. 1 (1994): 65–80.

⁶¹N. Bakisian, "Oscar Jászi in Exile: Danubian Europe Reconsidered," *Hungarian Studies* 9, no. 1–2 (1994): 151–59.

Hungary. Similar to Šusteršič's and Thomas Masaryk's thinking,⁶² Jászi believed the individual nations of Danubian and Balkan Europe were too small to establish separate states and, to protect them from their more powerful neighbors, urged them to form a common federation.⁶³ However, in 1918, Jászi was still talking about a federation; it was only after the war, while working as a university professor in the US that he wrote about the possibility of creating a confederation.⁶⁴ Šusteršič's idea, in contrast, was already wholly based on confederal starting points by 1918.

An Integral South Slavic Alternative

Despite not having its own representatives on the highest Austrian parliamentary level, several different ideas of the South Slavic state were simultaneously developed in the JSDS. One of these was Tuma's previously mentioned idea, while the other branch of the social democrats, which would eventually form a communist political grouping, was represented by Dragotin Gustinčič. He joined the JSDS in 1910 (namely, after Tuma) but rose to prominence in the South Slavic context with the start of World War I. Before Italy entered the war in 1915 Gustinčič had emigrated to Serbia, where he tried to connect with the Serbian government to gain its support for the issue of Slovenian-Italian demarcation, especially concerning Trieste. Gustinčič then went to Switzerland, where he obtained a job at an information bureau organized by the Serbian government, though he soon came into conflict with the Greater Serbian views it promoted.⁶⁵ As a result, he left the bureau and lost Serbian financial support. He then turned to the Montenegrin government for assistance and promoted Montenegrin independence. He continued his battle with Serbian journals in Zurich in 1917 and 1918 while writing for the *La Yougoslavie* magazine, in which he called for a decentralized, federal Yugoslav state.⁶⁶ The primary argument for federalism according to Gustinčič was the different degrees of social development amongst the South Slavs from economic and intellectual perspectives. He also expressly stated that a centralist arrangement would lead to the suffocation of the more economically and culturally advanced parts of the imagined Yugoslavia. The federalism advocated for in *La Yougoslavie* would not be built on the national principle. However, the journal emphasized that Yugoslavs indeed formed a single nation; yet because the provinces were in different stages of development they needed as much autonomy as possible. In this respect, the federalist arrangement could reduce conflicts that would inevitably arise in the future state.

Unlike Serbian journals, *La Yougoslavie* envisioned an integral Yugoslavia that would also include the Bulgarians. Bulgaria would not exist as a single administrative unit, but Gustinčič believed it should be divided into three or even up to five provinces. In this context, the editors of *La Yougoslavie* added Istria to the Slovenian provinces, while breaking Croatia up into several parts to prevent the rise of "provincialism."⁶⁷ Interestingly, they later gave up on drawing borders and defended the idea of setting internal borders by self-determination. Provincial administrative units should, according to this idea, hold powers in the fields of finance, the economy, education, judiciary, and religious matters, while the centralized administration would be responsible for international affairs, defense, railways, postal services, international trade, and international finance.

Similar to Šusteršič, Gustinčič saw the greatest danger in the Greater Serbia ideology. From his perspective, the latter offered much less to the Croats and Slovenians than they previously had in the Habsburg monarchy, and he thus warned that many of them could choose Austria over centralized Yugoslavia, especially after the London Pact. At first, Gustinčič perceived the Corfu Declaration as a

⁶²F. Gross, "Peace Planning for Central and Eastern Europe," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 232 (1944): 169–76.

⁶³O. Jászi, "Dismembered Hungary and Peace in Central Europe," *Foreign Affairs* 2, no. 2 (1923): 281.

⁶⁴O. Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Hungary* (New York, 1969).

⁶⁵Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 1546, *Zbirka biografij vidnejših komunistov in drugih javnih osebnosti – Življenjepis Dragotina Gustinčiča*, 1546, kutija 15, Ljubljana.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷A. Vovko, "Politični profil La Yougoslavie, revije jugoslovanske politične emigracije v Švici 1917–1918," *Prispevki za zgodovino delavskega gibanja* 13 (1973), 117–31, here 119.

deviation from the Greater Serbian aspirations but soon labelled it a mere tactical diversion aimed at covering Serbia's internal crisis. He came into conflict with Ante Trumbić and the Yugoslav Committee,⁶⁸ which he saw as an organ without legitimacy. Moreover, for *La Yougoslavie* the Serbian government was also an illegitimate organ that harmed the interests of the Montenegrins, Slovenians, and Croats with its aspirations for Greater Serbia and its traitorous agreement with Italy. As expressed in the journal, Pašić was an ideal interlocutor from Rome's point of view because he was ready to give up a large part of the Adriatic coast. For his part, Gustinčić saw the solution in an exchange of populations between Italy and Yugoslavia, which would enable permanent state borders.⁶⁹ Because that solution was unlikely, Gustinčić offered an alternative possibility. In the case of a "smart compromise" Trieste should be left to Italy, while the Slovenians in Gorizia and Friuli would form their own republic that would be in a confederation with Italy. The same would be offered to the Italians in Istria.⁷⁰ *La Yougoslavie* presented that idea in its last issue in November 1918, where it expressed great hopes for the Yugoslav constitutional assembly, which it believed would have the legitimacy to represent all "Yugoslavs."

Gustinčić and Nikola Smolaka⁷¹ predicted that Yugoslavia would long depend on the aid and investments of European countries and that to attract them it would have to establish a stable federal democracy modeled on the Swiss system. *La Yougoslavie* thus stood up for the federal unit of Montenegro, an unsurprising position given that Gustinčić had received financial support from the Montenegrin authorities, but it also advocated for special units in Macedonia and Vojvodina.⁷² When it became obvious that Bulgaria would not become part of the Yugoslav state, Gustinčić argued that the new internal organization must be based on provinces to enable the formation of a new consciousness—"Yugoslavism." This would prevent the rift created by the "historical chauvinist Serbism and Croatism" and the state center's exploitation of the periphery.⁷³ *La Yougoslavie* emphasized that Serbian, Croat, or Slovenian identities were undesirable, even harmful for the Yugoslav nation, which should instead develop through social reform. Gustinčić thus envisioned a federal system with extensive provincial autonomy, and yet simultaneously with a sense of national Yugoslav unity. Any other state would be a model of a new social (anti-capitalist) order, and hence the establishment of the State of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians was regarded as the ambition of the bourgeoisie to retain its privileges. Interestingly, the journal did not write negatively about the May Declaration and welcomed the later formation of the National Council in Zagreb as a predecessor to the Yugoslav constitutional assembly.⁷⁴ Yet, like Šusteršič, the journal (as well as the majority of the JSDS membership) remained on the margins of the political spectrum with relatively little influence over how events unfolded. Since the Yugoslav Committee and the Serbian government enjoyed significantly greater prestige and consequential support among Western European countries, some Slovenian social democrats turned toward even more pronounced support for Bolshevik ideas, while others tried to redirect themselves toward US policy.

Turning their Back on Austria

In contrast to Šusteršič and Gustinčić, who promoted ideologies with clear determinants, the center of the Slovenian political stage was occupied by Korošec, who took a much more pragmatic approach to politics. Bishop Jeglič, who had almost identical views to Šusteršič before the war, initially described

⁶⁸Trumbić categorically rejected the possibility of Gustinčić's appearing at the congress of the oppressed nations of Austria-Hungary held in Rome in April 1918. Gustinčić unsuccessfully lobbied the organizers of the congress and his protest letter was published by only one Italian magazine.

⁶⁹Vovko, "Politični profil La Yougoslavie," 124.

⁷⁰"Jadransko vprašanje," *La Yougoslavie* (Nov. 1918), 284.

⁷¹Originally from Dalmatia, Nikola Smolaka was a doctor who considered himself a Yugoslav and a Serb (*Ibid.*, 117).

⁷²Slovenian social democrats, and later communists, considered the Macedonians to be a special nation (neither Serbs nor Bulgarians). Such a position was advocated by Henrik Tuma before World War I, and by Gustinčić in the later discussion of the Yugoslav communists in 1923. See J. Perovšek, "Slovenski komunisti in vprašanje makedonskega naroda leta 1923," *Prispevki za zgodovino delavsekega gibanja* 18–19, no. 1–2 (1978–79): 17–44.

⁷³Vovko, "Politični profil La Yougoslavie," 119–23.

⁷⁴"Dr. Anton Korošec," *La Yougoslavie* (Nov. 1918), 301.

Korošec as “spiritually weak”⁷⁵ but then changed his attitude due to Korošec’s political talent of collaborating with both Slovenian liberals and Serbs. While he knew that the Croats were overwhelmingly in favor of the republic,⁷⁶ he was open to the possibility of the Habsburg South Slavs joining Serbia and accepting a monarchy under Karađorđević. However, the bishop’s diary entries show that by the end of October 1918, the majority of Slovenian conservatives were still in favor of a republic, while the liberals, especially Korošec’s right-hand man, Gregor Žerjav, advocated for a state formation centered in Serbia.⁷⁷ Simultaneously, the key figures among the Slovenian social democrats, from the bishop’s point of view, were also not inclined to support a monarchy. Ivan Cankar, for example, allegedly did not even believe that Yugoslavia could survive under a Serbian king and thought the Serbs would overthrow the monarch and establish a republic themselves.⁷⁸ This indicates the relatively poor knowledge of the Serbian situation then held by Slovenians.⁷⁹

After Hussarek’s failure to break the Slovenian May Declaration movement and separate it from Croatian aspirations to unify Croatian territories within a single political and legal body, some Austrian politicians began to consider other options. It was in this context that the idea of an autonomous Slovenia emerged, one that would remain apart from the Croatian unit and would instead stay within Austria.⁸⁰ This would be a kind of subtrialism (if the Croats succeeded in separating Croatia, Slavonia, and Dalmatia from Hungary and Austria) or dual subdualism (if Croatia-Slavonia and Dalmatia formed a Croatian Triune kingdom as a special unit within Hungary). With such an outcome, Slovenia would hold a similar status as Croatia-Slavonia within Hungary. Yet, Slovenian politicians ignored these proposals because they had already consolidated their positions on the establishment of the National Council in Ljubljana and the recognition of the National Council under Zagreb’s authority. On 6 October, Slovenian social democrats also agreed to support the work of the National Council together with other Slovenian, Croatian, and Serbian parties, provided it would not contradict socialist principles. The formation of the umbrella organization in Zagreb was delayed, however, causing Korošec to apply pressure through his media by stating that “Slovenians, who have the largest and most threatened border, cannot wait so long for the situation in Banovina to be cleared up and remain passive in the meantime. Anyone who knows at least a bit about the battles in Maribor, Carinthia, Gorizia, Trieste, and western Istria,” he continued, “will admit that steel must be forged immediately.”⁸¹

Following the capitulation of Bulgaria, the pressure of the Slovenian representatives became even stronger once it became clear that victory on the Soča River would not significantly alter the wider geopolitical situation. This made it necessary to gain the sympathy of the Entente, and in this respect, the primary motive was to form an alliance at least with the Habsburg Serbs. The entry of the HSK to the National Council on 8 October thus brought great relief for Korošec and Bishop Jeglič, who believed that the unity of the Habsburg South Slavs would force the main Entente powers to prevent Italy from annexing the Habsburg territories inhabited by Slovenians.⁸²

On 19 October, the National Council in Zagreb took power over the entire South Slavic area of the Habsburg monarchy and rejected Charles I’s Manifesto as well as any future proposal that sought to partly solve the issue of the South Slavs in the territory of the monarchy.⁸³ Both liberal and conservative journals applauded the move.⁸⁴ Ten days later, the State of Slovenians, Croats, and Serbs (State

⁷⁵Jeglič, *Jegličev dnevnik*, 580.

⁷⁶Ibid., 765.

⁷⁷Ibid., 763, 765.

⁷⁸Ibid., 769.

⁷⁹A. Rahten, *Avstrijski in jugoslovanski državni problem. Tri razprave Janka Brejca iz prelomnega obdobja narodne zgodovine* (Ljubljana, 2002), 101.

⁸⁰Pleterski, *Prva odločitev Slovencev za Jugoslavijo*, 255.

⁸¹B. Krizman, “Prevrat” u Zagrebu i stvaranje ‘Države Slovenaca, Hrvata i Srba’ u listopadu 1918. god’,” *Zbornik Historijskog Instituta Slavonije* 6 (1968): 173–243, here 174–75.

⁸²Jeglič, *Jegličev dnevnik*, 770.

⁸³Lj. Boban, “Kada je i kako nastala Država Slovenaca, Hrvata i Srba,” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 24, no. 3 (1992): 45–60.

⁸⁴The liberal *Slovenski narod* wrote: “The Slavic people mocked the Manifesto of Charles I as a document that should throw ‘sand in Wilson’s eyes,’ offering the South Slavs a substitute for Yugoslavia in the form of Illyria, in which the Slovenians would

of SCS)⁸⁵ was proclaimed in the Croatian Parliament, thereby pre-empting attempts at establishing Soviet republics following the Bolshevik model.⁸⁶ On the same day, a large gathering of people was organized in Ljubljana in support of the decision. Mihajlo Rostohar renounced his loyalty to Austria as a military lieutenant there, while Ivan Hribar declared that Slovenians, Croats, and Serbs are “a nation of the same language and of the same blood.”⁸⁷ The Slovenians, therefore, indirectly broke ties with the Habsburg monarchy through the National Council in Ljubljana, which was formally subordinated to the National Council in Zagreb.⁸⁸

Slovenian Positions on Unification with Serbia

The celebration on 29 October did not end the uncertainty among Slovenian politicians. Members of the National Council were subject to pressure from external factors, and the main Entente allies did not want states to be formed without their supervision. British diplomacy had already in 1915 sponsored the London Pact, while France was looking for an ally that would curb Italy’s expansion and at the same time counter German interests on the other side of the Alps.⁸⁹ Unsurprisingly, British and French diplomats encouraged talks between representatives of the State of SCS and Nikola Pašić, which on 9 November ended in the Geneva Declaration. It stipulated the establishment of a Yugoslav state and empowered the future constitutional assembly to decide on fundamental issues of state organization. The agreement provided the federative foundations of the state that was supposed to be created following the merger of the State of SCS and the Kingdom of Serbia. The Serbian prime minister not only recognized the legitimacy of the National Council as a representative of the State of SCS but the equality of the two states as well.⁹⁰ Pašić admitted this in his statement immediately before the conference, stating that

Serbs do not want to take a hegemonic position in the future Kingdom of SCS. I solemnly declare that Serbia considers the liberation of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians as a national duty. Those freed will have the right to self-determination and the right to declare whether they want to join Serbia in the sense of the Corfu Declaration or whether they want to form independent states. We do not allow the right of self-determination of Croats and Slovenians to be restricted in any way. We will not even insist on the Corfu Declaration, if it is not in accordance with their wishes.⁹¹

Pašić could not ignore this principle of self-determination—one of US diplomacy’s most important contributions to international relations—in his speeches, but he was also aware of Serbia’s better starting position compared to the Croats and Slovenians. He always emphasized that any potential independent state of Slovenians and Croats would be left without the territories claimed by Italy and Serbia under the London Pact. This implied that the remnants of the Slovenian and Croatian territories would have no chance of survival as an independent entity.

Under these circumstances, the Geneva Declaration was a considerable political achievement for Trumbić and Korošec, who had managed to obtain Pašić’s consent for the settlement that was supposed to provide the basis for the dual Yugoslav state.⁹² The agreement contained both federal and

have to give up their territories in Carinthia and Littoral.” See “Pred proklamacijom – ‘Ilirije,’” *Slovenski narod*, 17 October 1918. See also “Jugoslovani ne odnehajo od svojih zahtev” in the conservative *Slovenec*, 17 October 1918.

⁸⁵H. Sirotković, “O nastanku, organizaciji, državnopravnim pitanjima i sukcesiji Države SHS nastale u jesen 1918,” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 24, no. 3 (1992): 61–74.

⁸⁶I. Banac, “Emperor Karl Has Become a Comitadji: The Croatian Disturbances of Autumn 1918,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 70, no. 2 (1992): 284–305, here 301.

⁸⁷“Manifestacijski sprevod v Ljubljani,” *Slovenski narod*, 30 October 1918.

⁸⁸Rahten, *Avstrijski in jugoslovanski državni problem*, 118.

⁸⁹M. Kovač, “Raspadanje Austro-Ugarske i ranjanje Kraljevine SHS u svjetlu francuske politike (od listopada do prosinca 1918),” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 35, no. 1 (2003): 141–72.

⁹⁰J. Perovšek, “Jugoslovanska združitev,” in *Slovenska novejša zgodovina 1848–1992: od programa Zedinjena Slovenija do mednarodnega priznanja Republike Slovenije*, eds. Zdenko Čepič, Neven Borak, and Jasna Fisher (Ljubljana, 2005), 200–01.

⁹¹A. Prepeluh, *Pripombe k naši prevratni dobi* (Trieste, 1987), 130–31.

⁹²Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 111.

confederal elements. The new state would be led by a twelve-member government; half the ministers would be elected by the Serbian government and would take an oath to the Serbian king, while the other half would be proposed by the National Council of SCS and would swear allegiance to the Council's president.⁹³ Unlike the Corfu Declaration, the Geneva Declaration denied the transfer of power to the Karađorđević dynasty with respect to the entire territory of the future state because, at least until a constitution was adopted, the National Council would have the role of supreme authority in the territory of the State of SCS. This was the main basis for the Serbian government not confirming the agreement in the end.⁹⁴ Moreover, on 13 November Lieutenant Colonel Dušan Simović arrived in Zagreb as a delegate of the Kingdom of Serbia to the National Council and confronted the Croatian side with Serbian territorial claims, which included the whole of BiH, a large part of Dalmatia (up to Cape Ploča/Planka), and half of Slavonia.⁹⁵

The Slovenian side was already aware of the inevitability of connecting with Serbia. Otherwise, the Entente would not recognize Yugoslavia,⁹⁶ and Serbia would take a large swathe of the State of SCS anyway. As a result, Italy could further extend its aspirations to the east, whereas the outbreak of a Bolshevik revolution still threatened in certain Croatian and Slovenian regions.⁹⁷ In this setting, Bishop Jeglič expressed fears for the life of Catholics in a state under an Orthodox king and wrote that the presence of the Serbian army in Slovenian territory would prevent a free constitutional process from developing in the new state.⁹⁸ Nonetheless, Jeglič later (after the formation of the Kingdom of SCS on 1 December 1918) concluded that "joining Serbia was still the most appropriate solution."⁹⁹ This attitude among Slovenian conservatives was partly influenced by the fact that forces under the Serbian major Stevan Švabić, an ex-prisoner of war, had helped to halt the march of the Italians toward Ljubljana.¹⁰⁰ Accepting Serbia as part of their vision of Yugoslavia was therefore tactical in nature because it gave them a better starting point for securing Slovenian interests.

The liberals were, unlike the conservatives, always in support of including Serbs in Yugoslavia because "Yugoslavia without the best, the most politically mature, and after the war the most influential South Slavic nation . . . , the Serbs, would be only a political monster, similar to the crippled states that emerged after the Congress of Berlin."¹⁰¹ Such a view meant the concentration of power in Serbia should have eased the position of the Habsburg Slavs, with liberal advocates writing that "If we have Serbian statehood by our side, nothing can happen to us anymore."¹⁰² There was nothing new about liberal journals glorifying Serbia. However, at the end of the war, they also warned about how events could unfold if the Slovenians did not willingly accept the Serbian version of the Yugoslav state:

If . . . those republicans and federalists would decide for us—then . . . Serbia will then demand from the Entente everything that considers Serbian: Bosnia, Banat, and the connection via Slavonia, southern Dalmatia, and both of its kingdoms: Serbia and Montenegro. The Entente

⁹³Rahten, *Slovenska ljudska stranka*, 26.

⁹⁴N. Engelsfeld, *Povijest hrvatske države i prava – razdoblje od 18. do 20* (Zagreb, 2002), 277; Perovšek, "Jugoslavanska združitev," 201.

⁹⁵B. Krizman, *Hrvatska u prvom svjetskom ratu: hrvatsko-srpski politički odnosi* (Zagreb, 1989), 337.

⁹⁶Jeglič, *Jegličev dnevnik*, 770.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 768.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 767.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 771.

¹⁰⁰According to Janko Brejc, Švabić sent a warning letter to the Italian command in Logatec that the units of the Serbian army (although in reality then still far away) were already in Ljubljana and that further penetration of Italian troops could lead to a conflict between the allies. Rahten, *Avstrijski in jugoslavanski državni problem*, 27–28.

¹⁰¹"V. Jugoslaviji," *Slovenski narod*, 19 October 1918.

¹⁰²"Serbs will know how to organize a common state not only for themselves, but also for the Croats and Slovenians, without imposing Serbism on us. . . . Do you think that a proud, free Serb, who suffered more for freedom than anyone else, will allow those whom it itself saved and created an irreversible opportunity to create a strong and free nation to create ridiculous difficulties for him at the end of the day? . . . Believe me, Serbia doesn't need us, we need Serbia!" See "Biti ali ne biti!," *Slovenski narod*, 25 November 1918.

will give Serbia what it wants. We will remain a sad corpse without a head, arms, and legs. . . . We will no longer be able to create our own state.¹⁰³

With the aim of avoiding unwanted consequences, the editorial board of *Slovenski narod* was ready to completely renounce the cultural specifics of Slovenians, going so far as to proclaim that “Whoever resists the fact that Serbia leads us and has the first and last word about us and for us is a traitor of Yugoslavia, but he is also an executioner and a traitor of the Slovenians and Croats.”¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, in the eyes of the liberals, Serbia was a savior that could quickly turn into a greedy enemy in the event of a lack of Slovenian gratitude—and that would make it impossible for other Slovenians and Croats to create an independent state.

Other liberal journals also wrote about Greater Serbia as a fact and stressed that any opposition to Serbia would be disastrous for the Slovenians. In this context, the journal *Domovina* (Homeland) published clear guidelines for Slovenian politics:

When we needed Serbia’s help the most, we suddenly started a disastrous debate about whether we should have a republic or a monarchy. This became extremely dangerous because it gave our external enemies a reason to interfere in our affairs, and on the other hand threatened to create a deep gap between us and Serbia. Italian journals began to write about disunity among Yugoslavs, about the possibility that instead of one strong and unified Yugoslav state with Serbia as the leader, three independent states would be created: Greater Serbia, small Croatia, and an even smaller Slovenia.¹⁰⁵

Not only did the dispute with Serbia imply a worse foreign policy position according to *Domovina*, the Slovenians also did not earn the right to participate in deciding on the form of the state to the extent that they could impose any conditions on Serbia. The journal also pointed out that regardless of the possible opposition of Slovenians and Croats, Serbia was still going to get what it wanted, because it was the winner in the war:

Serbia’s territories inhabited by Serbs, namely Bačka and Banat in Hungary, then Slavonia, BiH, and a large part of Dalmatia, had already been guaranteed by special treaties with the Entente countries. Greater Serbia was already established when our soldiers were still shedding blood for the Austrian emperor and his ally William.¹⁰⁶

Finally, the journal warned of consequences should Slovenians not play along with plans proposed by Serbian diplomacy. A significant number of Slovenian liberals also saw unification with Serbia as a tool for eliminating Bolshevism. From this point of view, even Serbian occupation was more desirable because it would not only protect Slovenian borders but also prevent anarchy and the possible rise of communism. At the same time, however, some liberals were much less enthusiastic about the prospect of a Serbian occupation and incorporation into Greater Serbia.

While some Slovenian liberals did not deny the differences between Slovenians, Croats, and Serbs, the vast majority advocated the unitarist idea of the Yugoslav nation, one that had been divided by historical circumstances in the past.¹⁰⁷ However, they were not entirely in line with the Serbian Yugoslav idea, because when calling for unification with all Serbs and Croats, the Slovenian liberals always mentioned Bulgarians. This was evident even in the most pronounced period of liberal journals glorifying Serbia: “We want to become one inseparable state with the Kingdom of Serbia We want

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴“One final time” the editors concluded: “the path of Slavic freedom leads through Serbia, there is no other way!” Ibid.

¹⁰⁵“Ujedinjenje s Srbijo,” *Domovina*, 29 November 1918.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷J. Perovšek, *Liberalizem in vprašanje slovenstva* (Ljubljana, 1996), 44.

to be a whole from Ljubljana to Thessaloniki.¹⁰⁸ The liberals therefore supported a territorially integral Yugoslavia but broke with the Serbian Yugoslav ideology by including Bulgaria.

Conclusion

Despite some attempts to paint a different picture during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia¹⁰⁹ and the communist Yugoslavia¹¹⁰ periods, the majority of the Slovenian political elite did not decide to leave the Habsburg monarchy until the final days of World War I. In 1918, the leading option for the biggest Slovenian political party was a South Slavic state within the Habsburg monarchy according to the May Declaration. Yet, the unwillingness of Vienna's political elites to satisfy the Croatian¹¹¹—and in that framework also the Slovenian—ambitions for political emancipation, combined with defeats of the Austro-Hungarian army and the information that the Entente powers would allow the Habsburg monarchy's dissolution, encouraged Slovenian political representatives to sever all state ties with Austria–Hungary in October 1918.¹¹² However, this did not imply a connection with Orthodox Serbia because the majority of Slovenian political leaders at the time had Catholic clerical leanings.¹¹³ Further, the idea of the Danubian (con)federation was still alive, while its advocates, foremost Ivan Šusteršič, hoped it would prevail as the winning option in British and consequently Entente politics. In addition, despite their apparently united actions, especially between SLS and NNS, the three Slovenian parties remained separated by significant ideological differences, even if these differences were transmitted only by media with a relatively small reach. We can agree with the thesis that the leaders of SLS did not then hold a realistic understanding of the Serbian political tradition¹¹⁴—and neither did the Slovenian liberals. Still, this offers only a partial explanation for the fact that, apart from the intimate fears recorded in private notes and diaries, no strong opposition to unification with Serbia was shown by the official representatives of the two strongest parties. The key reason seems to be that at the time neither party could imagine a better option for Slovenians, even though, at least for Slovenian conservatives, unification with Serbia was far from ideal.

Besides the Italian danger and the insufficient knowledge of the Greater Serbian ideology, the fact that Vojvodina had already joined Serbia during the negotiations between the State SCS and the Serbian government, and the fact that King Nikola Petrović had been overthrown in Montenegro, pushed the Slovenian political parties closer to unconditional acceptance of unification with Serbia. At the same time, a political group led by Svetozar Pribičević prevailed in Croatia that tried to achieve unification with Serbia as soon as possible without prior international recognition of the State of SCS. The Croatian opposition, like Šusteršič in the Slovenian political sphere, did not have the political capital to enable the realization of alternative ideas. Their impotence was shown by the fact that the State of SCS was not given more than one month to negotiate on a more equal footing about the (con)federal connection with Serbia. In addition, many Croatian politicians, similar to the Slovenian liberals, even claimed that the State of SCS and the Kingdom of Serbia should accept roles fitting their status as losers and winners of the war, implying an inequality of the two entities in a future state.¹¹⁵ Therefore, even if they had wanted to, the Slovenian political elite had no serious support in the political groups among other South Slavs to attempt different solutions. Serbian diplomacy skilfully prevented the return of Korošec and Trumbić from Geneva, in turn enabling Pribičević to become the

¹⁰⁸“Srbija na pomoč,” *Slovenski narod*, 9 November 1918.

¹⁰⁹E.g., J. Lavrič, J. Mal, F. Stele, *Spominski zbornik Slovenije* (Ljubljana, 1939).

¹¹⁰Pleterski, *Prva odločitev Slovencev za Jugoslavijo*.

¹¹¹D. Čepulo, L. Margertić, I. Beuc, *Hrvatska pravna povijest u europskom kontekstu (Croatian legal history in the European context)*, (Zagreb, 2006), 113–22.

¹¹²V. Stavbar, *Majniška deklaracija in deklaracijsko gibanje* (Maribor, 2017), 55–60.

¹¹³R.W. Seton-Watson, “Austria-Hungary and the Southern Slavs,” in *The War and Democracy*, ed. R.W. Seton-Watson et al. (London, 1914), 139.

¹¹⁴A. Rahten, *Avstrijski in jugoslovanski državni problem. Tri razprave Janka Brejca iz prelomnega obdobja narodne zgodovine* (Ljubljana, 2012), 101.

¹¹⁵F. Šišić, *Dokumenti o postanku Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca, 1914–1919 (Documents on the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, 1914–1919)*, (Zagreb, 1920), 277.

most important representative of the State of SCS. He took advantage of the conservatives' absence by replacing them with liberals inclined to centralism, which sped up the transfer of power to Aleksandar Karađorđević on 1 December 1918.¹¹⁶

It may, therefore, be concluded that the formation of the Kingdom of SCS was not only the victory of the Yugoslav idea but the triumph of a specific form of Yugoslavism at the expense of several alternative state ideas. Chief among these were ideas of smaller independent states connected in a Danubian (con)federation, the idea of a republican Yugoslavia, and the idea of a broader federal South Slavic state. This study of Slovenian alternatives reminds that the South Slavic problem should not be simplified, and it undermines the prominent thesis that the Kingdom of SCS was desired by the majority of the political elites except for the Kosovar Albanians.¹¹⁷ At the same time, the dichotomy of Yugoslav ideas as either Habsburg or anti-Habsburg is an oversimplification, as later indicated by the fragmentation and consequent mismatch of opposition streams in the upcoming elections for the constituent assembly in 1920.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶Perovšek, *Liberalizem*, 93–103.

¹¹⁷Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 101.

¹¹⁸Ivašković, "The Vidovdan Constitution," 525–51.