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## COMMEMORATION OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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*Abstract:* This paper discusses about different events organised in Bosnia and Herzegovina during 2014 concerning the commemoration of the First World War: academic conferences, ‘mega-spectacles’ - A Century of Peace After the Century of Wars, The Rebel Angels, the concert of the Vienna Philharmonic, the role of the the Embassy of France in Sarajevo and a Foundation called “Sarajevo Heart of Europe” and different exhibits in museums in Sarajevo.

One hundred years after the beginning of the First World War, the most prominent event in popular memory of the war was the assassination of the Habsburg Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie in Sarajevo on June 29, 1914. Most public manifestations commemorated that single event. Amid an atmosphere of political tensions and deep divisions, the focus of war memories on the assassination enhanced tensions and deepened differences in society, defying organizers’ hopes of sending messages of peace and integration. During 2013 and in the first half of 2014, conflicts over the manner of commemoration intensified as different groups, driven by political and financial motives, sought to impose their concepts on the planning of events. In the end, several separate commemorations were held. Some were supported by the European Union; others were supported by the neighboring Republic of Serbia and the authorities of entity of Republika Srpska; and still others were organized independently of outside sponsorship or with minimum support from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The fragmented character of the commemo-

rative events attests to social divisions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and its weak central state more than to the anniversary itself. The fragmentation of memorial events is the result of the weakening of the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina in recent years as well as some processes that have taken place over a much longer period. Understanding this fragmentation requires a brief history of commemorations since the assassination of 1914.

No significant commemorations were organized in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, since the Sarajevo assassination was perceived as the trigger of that war. However, after Gavrilo Princip's mortal remains were relocated from Czechoslovakia to Sarajevo in 1920, conditions gradually developed for public events memorializing the war. No commemorations or public fanfare attended the reburial of Princip's remains in the Old Orthodox Cemetery in Sarajevo in 1920. Not until early 1930 was a bronze commemorative plaque installed at the assassination site, again without public fanfare. The inscription on the plaque, written in the Cyrillic alphabet, read, "*On this historic site Gavrilo Princip proclaimed freedom on St. Vitus Day 15/28 1914.*" Likewise, when a chapel was built in 1939 and the remains of the Martyrs of St. Vitus Day were reburied in a common grave within it, no public commemoration was held, since the Second World War was to break out shortly thereafter.

When the German Army marched into Sarajevo in 1941, its soldiers removed the plaque that had been placed there in 1930 and sent it to Hitler as a gift on his birthday. In reaction, Tito's Partisans commemorated Princip when they entered Sarajevo in 1945. The Partisans identified their own struggle against Hitler with Princip's resistance to the Habsburg Monarchy, which they considered a German entity and an occupying force. In May 1945, the 'the youth of Sarajevo' replaced the plaque that had been sent to Hitler with a new one expressing gratitude to Princip and his comrades for their struggle «against German conquerors». On the new plaque, Princip was proclaimed 'the great national hero, martyr and the fighter for the freedom and brotherhood of all the peoples of Yugoslavia'.

Thus began the construction of the myth of Princip as a Yugoslav hero. In 1954, on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of both the assassination and beginning of the First World War, surviving members of Young Bosnia expressed their intent to depict Princip and their own organisation as expressly Yugoslav in orientation. Their plans were greeted with criticism from official quarters. In the Executive Board of Central Committee of the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cvijetin Mijatović stated that some surviving members of Young Bosnia wished to publicize the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary by 'exaggerating some of its elements and misinterpreting events'. Mijatović suggested that the commemoration be organised in a 'more modest manner'.

He noted that Borivoje Jeftić had already written a script for a film about Young Bosnia and the assassination, but Mijatović urged that it be rejected. He further urged rejection of the proposed publication of the letters of Vladimir Gaćinović, since ‘those letters were prepared only from copies and from selected segments, in contrast to the original letters, which might lead to inaccurate portrayals of Gaćinović and his role. Finally, Mijatović urged rejection of a planned bibliography of works about Young Bosnia and the assassination. Avdo Humo, another member of Executive Board, supported Mijatović and asserted, „the commemoration should be done very modestly, because the place and role of Young Bosnia have not been adequately researched nor yet presented in the correct light. We should not permit a commemoration based on citizens’ misconceptions of the role of surviving participants based on exaggerations and misinterpretations. If we attach great significance to this commemoration, it will turn into a glorification of the assassination, something undesirable for our struggle and for the outside world based on the revival of old questions and disagreements. We should publish a collection of relevant articles and mark the anniversary by an appropriate event and a lecture given at the National University’.

Indeed, the 1954 commemoration was modest, but ten years later, things were done in a much more spectacular way. In the meantime there had been a change of views in the highest political circles in ways that facilitated the beginning of Young Bosnia’s glorification. The bibliography that could not be published in 1954 was published in 1964, and more importantly Vladimir Dedijer’s book *Sarajevo, 1914* was published. Dedijer’s work presented the officially-sanctioned memory of Young Bosnia, Princip, the assassination in Sarajevo, and the beginning of the First World War.

In 1974, attendees at a round table organized by the Institute for History in Sarajevo began cautiously debunking the myths of Princip and Young Bosnia as fighters for Yugoslav unification. Mustafa Imamović argued that members of Young Bosnia acted under the influence of Greater Serbian propaganda spread by the nationalist organizations *Unification or Death* (Ujedinjenje ili smrt) and *National Defence* (Narodna odbrana). Those organizations, he noted, propagated the view that Bosnia and Herzegovina was Serb land, even though “some individuals or groups within it embraced Yugoslavism and sought to overcome ethnic and religious conflict” in their land. Although it was only the first salvo in questioning Young Bosnia’s Yugoslavism and initially remained an undeveloped thesis, Imamović’s presentation opened a new chapter in the interpretation of Young Bosnia’s role.

Things changed during the Sarajevo siege of the 1990s. Sarajevo residents readily associated the Army of Republika Srpska, which was besieging, assaulting, and destroying their city, with Princip and Young Bosnia. One shelling attack during the siege destroyed the footprints of Princip inlaid in the pavement where he had carri-

ed out the assassination. Despite rumours that soldiers of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina destroyed both the footprints and the commemorative plaque, in truth the plaque and the footprints were casualties of shrapnel from shells fired at Sarajevo by the Army of Republic Srpska. Mosaics and paintings in the Museum of Young Bosnia (at the assassination site) were also destroyed in the shelling. Undamaged exhibits were then relocated to the safety of the nearby Jewish Museum. With these events, Princip underwent “Serbianization.” Commanders of the besieging Serb forces valorized his deed to raise the morale of their troops. The Army of the Republika Srpska fashioned a new medal and named after Princip, thereby transforming Princip into an expressly Serb figure. The medal symbolically abolished Princip’s association with Yugoslavism, whether real or imagined, at the time that Yugoslavia itself was collapsing.

Even though Young Bosnia and Princip were rarely thought to be Bosnian-Herzegovinian heroes after 1992, there was no euphoria against enhancing memories of Princip. In the beginning of 2003, the debate about Princip and the memory of the assassination was renewed, with special focus on the issue of whether to re-implant ‘Gavrilo Princip’s footprints’, a work of art by Vojo Dimitrijević that had been embedded in pavement at the assassination site from 1954 to 1992. Media coverage a tense atmosphere, since the city authorities intended to reinsert the footprints where they had previously been, while veterans of the 1992-1995 war opposed such a move. At the same time, a new commemorative plaque was installed bearing the rather neutral inscription: ‘It was from this place that on 28 June 1914, Gavrilo Princip committed the assassination of the heir to Austro-Hungarian throne, Franz Ferdinand, and his wife Sophie’.

The footprints, which were again cast in concrete pavement, for which the City Administration allocated 60,000 KM (about 30,000 Euros) were not place back. Given that there was no official decision to place the commemorative plaque, it disappeared in the same way as it had been placed (rather mysteriously), while the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination went without any major debate. The Institute for History organised a round table at the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, yet it did not receive any financial support from authorities and without any significant media attention. What has remained of the round table are a dozen of scientific papers published in the periodical *Prilozi* issued by the Institute. It is revealing, for example, that the Embassy of Austria to Bosnia and Herzegovina gave no financial support to this academic conference; neither did the administration of the City of Sarajevo. Thus, they demonstrated their determination not to support a scholarly approach to the research of these events.

Something similar happened ten years later, when the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of First World War in Bosnia and Herzegovina gave rise to further debates about the character of Young Bosnia, the historical role of Princip, the assassination in Sarajevo, and the First World War in general. In this context, different events were organised in Sarajevo, while a particularly active role was played by the Embassy of France in Sarajevo in conceptualizing the commemoration. In 2011, the government of the French President Nicolas Sarkozy planned to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the First World War. The plan envisioned convening a gathering of major European political leaders to send a message of peace to the rest of the world. They later abandoned those plans, but the Embassy of France in Sarajevo persevered in insisting that a peace message to be sent from Sarajevo to remind the world of the horrors of war. In cooperation with the City of Sarajevo and East Sarajevo (a part of a pre-war suburb of Sarajevo, which became part of Republika Srpska in 1995, after the recent war), the Embassy of France established a Foundation called *Sarajevo Heart of Europe*, which received significant funds to organize various events. From its inception, this good idea bore the seeds of failure, since it failed to take into account the specific features of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Instead of having the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a partner, the organisers' attention was focused on Sarajevo, which raised the possibility of several separate, contending events that might further deepen existing divisions in the fragile society of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Besides, the anniversary of the beginning of the Great War was limited to commemorating the assassination in Sarajevo, which is viewed differently by different groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Other aspects of the First World War remained neglected.

Both academic and performative events took place as part of the commemoration of the First World War in 2014 in Sarajevo. Academically, the Institute for History in Sarajevo, together with institutes from Germany, Austria, Hungary, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Macedonia, organized a conference devoted not to the assassination, but to the origins of the First World War. Other organizers, particularly from France and Serbia, disparaged the Institutes plans and saw in them an effort to shift guilt for starting the war away from Germany and the Habsburg Monarchy. We, the Institute organizers, sought in vain to explain that we had no intention of seeking to attribute the war to any given side but rather wanted to initiate a dialogue about all aspects of the conflict. We hoped to identify unexplored or as yet insufficiently explored research areas, such as everyday life, the role of women, problems with food shortages, the role of propaganda, and other topics. Despite our protests, the critics insisted the conference threatened to shift guilt for starting the war from Germany and the Habsburg Monarchy to Serbia, France, and indirectly to Russia.

The French engaged Professor Robert Frank from the Sorbonne to organize a rival conference in Sarajevo with the support of the *Sarajevo - the Heart of Europe* Foundation. Organizers proposed a conference in Sarajevo that would bring together Serb, Croat and Bosniak historians as well as others from New Zealand, Africa, China, and Japan with a message of peace to the world. We historians from Sarajevo Institute for History agreed that messages of peace are desirable, but we felt that academic conferences served a different purpose in facilitating critical dialogue rather than political compromises. Because we insisted on an academic conference that encouraged critical dialogue, we historians from the Institute were denied financial support from official sources. However, thanks to extensive cooperation with academic institutions from seven European countries, they won support to organize a conference entitled *The Great War: Regional Approaches and Global Contexts*.

Professor Mark Mazower, a distinguished historian from Columbia University, was the keynote speaker at the conference, which was held from June 18 to 21. The closing paper was presented by Professor Marie Janine Calic from Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich. Seeking to marginalise the conference, the French historian Frank attacked the proposed program as having a “pro-Habsburg orientation and lacking perspectives from Serbia, Russia, and elsewhere.” The same criticism was echoed in later coverage of the conference by media from Serbia and some political circles in the entity of Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

While the conference was being organized, it came under attack from Slobodan Šoja, the ‘academic coordinator’ for the French, who disparaged it as ‘a conference that invited only participants from countries that had lost the war’. Milorad Dodik, the President of Republika Srpska, offered much the same criticism, noting that the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Republika Srpska had determined that the conference would be pro-Habsburg and anti-Serb. In fact, Frank had first voiced those accusations, and he relied on information from Šoja. France’s Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with officials from the *Sarajevo Heart of Europe* Foundation, frequently spoke out in support of such criticisms. But in the end, the Foundation and Frank gave up their plans for a separate academic conference after failing to attract the participation of a single serious historian from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The *Sarajevo – Heart of Europe* Foundation shifted its support to another conference to be called *The Long Shots of Sarajevo, 1914-2014*, which was backed by the Austrian Embassy and the European Commission’s Delegation in Sarajevo. The Long Shots conference failed to offer meaningful historical insights into the war’s beginning but instead dwelt upon cultural aspects of the war. It nonetheless received prominent media coverage, primarily because it was held on June 26-28, 2014, simultaneously with other events on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination.

Two events known as called ‘mega-spectacles’ received much greater media attention than the academic conferences. The first, a spectacular outdoor display of music and drama, was directed by Haris Pašović under the title, *A Century of Peace After the Century of Wars* and included 300 participants from several different European countries. Although the event itself was largely devoid of ideological content, its aesthetics and location were problematic. It was staged on the Latin Bridge, near the site of the 1914 assassination, where observers could hear songs sung by Serbian folk singer Šaban Šaulić and Bosnian-Herzegovinian pop/rock singer Dino Merlin.

A second mega-spectacle was held in Višegrad. Directed by filmmaker Emir Kusturica and entitled *The Rebel Angels*, it was arranged in three acts as a reconstruction of the Sarajevo assassination. Charged with nationalism by such ideologues as Matija Bećković, it symbolised existing divisions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and had little artistic merit. Strongly supported by Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik and Republic of Serbia Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić, both of whom attended the event. The mega-cle marked the official inauguration of Andrićgrad, the construction engineering enterprise undertaken by Kusturica, who also directed the drama. The very presence of two prominent Serb politicians broadcast a clear political message from the event. The two megaspectacles involved massive expenditures; insofar as I could determine, the European Commission spent 250,000 Euros on the “*Century of Peace After the Century of Wars*” event, while the amount spent on the mega-spectacle directed by Kusturica will likely remain unknown.

In addition, the Vienna Philharmonic performed in concert on June 28, 2014 in the recently reconstructed Sarajevo Vijećnica (City Hall). Austrian President Heinz Fischer served as the official host of this important concert. Guests of honor at the event included Croatian President Ivo Josipović, Montenegrin President Filip Vujačić, Macedonian President Đorđe Ivanov, and some politicians from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Broadcast live by the Public Broadcasting services of Germany, Austria, and France, the concert opened with the national anthem of Bosnian and Herzegovina and concluded with the European Union anthem. In between, the orchestra performed selected works of famous European composers. The President of the Vienna Philharmonic, Prof. Dr. Clemens Hellsberg, stated that this was a look back, through history.

“We have decided to offer a look back, through history, but also a look to the future, after the catastrophes that happened in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, starting with the First World War. We hope that we have finally achieved coexistence in Europe that holds the promise of a peaceful future. This concert sends the message that, for us, Europe is not complete wit-

hout Bosnia and Herzegovina. It also sends a strong political message that from the inception of this ideal, we have had the support of the European Union and great cooperation with the team from Bosnia and Herzegovina.”

Many other activities took place in the shadow of these grand events. The French Embassy sponsored the *Sarajevo Grand Prix*, a cycling event held under the auspices of *Tour de France*. Special exhibitions were displayed in the museums and galleries of Sarajevo. The Sarajevo City Museum of 1878 – 1918 (called the Museum of Young Bosnia until 1992), featured a special exhibit about Sarajevo’s history under Austro-Hungarian rule, with special attention to the assassination. The exhibit included the footprints of Gavrilo Princip, statues of Francis Ferdinand and Sophie, and the original indictment against the assassins. A replica of the car that bore Francis Ferdinand and Sophie to their deaths was placed on the street in front of the museum. Two information boards were placed there to identify the location where Princip’s footprints had once been embedded and the site of Habsburg-era monument in honor of the assassination victims.

The Historical Museum, in partnership with London Imperial Museum, prepared a special exhibit called “*And then in Sarajevo the Shot was Fired*,” consisting of documents, archival and newspaper material, photographs and other objects related to Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Europe in the period from 1914 to 1918. The Archive of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina prepared a special exhibition that went on display on the street in front of Sarajevo’s Catholic Cathedral. Three European cities – Vienna, Sarajevo, and Brno – jointly underwrote an exhibit in the National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina called *The Dignity of Man*, a name taken Friedrich Schiller’s poem *The Artists* (1789). The National Gallery exhibit marked not only the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the First World War, but also the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War and the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of Berlin Wall.

Unfortunately, all these major events were planned and held at the local level. Not a single pan-Bosnian event was organized, and the national institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina refused to become involved. Therefore, the messages sent by these events differed from the outcomes and served to deepen and widen the divisions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The commemorations reinforced the divisions among memories of the assassination and war; they exacerbated political differences; and they gave voice to the nationalist rhetoric most stridently expressed in the Republika Srpska. The European Union did not directly support construction of a surreally grandiose monument to Princip in the Serb suburb of Sarajevo, but it



was apparently unprepared to respond to the nationalistic rhetoric expressed at that monument's dedication and only reinforced the impression that it was unclear about its own perception and vision of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Serb-dominated East Sarajevo was treated as equal to the city of Sarajevo in European political circles. References to Andrićgrad, Kusturica's construction enterprise, typically failed to mention Višegrad, the true name of the town in which the edifice was located, resulting in further validation of the divisions in Bosnia and Herzegovina rather than messages of peace and a better future.

Paradoxically, while East Sarajevo was a cosponsor of the Vienna Philharmonic performance in Sarajevo, it separately organized a rival event labelled "*The 21<sup>st</sup> Assembly of Gusle Players of Republika Srpska.*" That municipality's dual role indicates that deep divisions remain in the society and that some Bosnians are seeking to deepen them further. Meanwhile, Europe observes and does nothing. Perhaps the most apt commentary may be found in the verses of Friedrich Schiller's poem *The Artists*: 'The dignity of Man into your hands is given,/Protector be!/It sinks with you! With you it is arisen'!