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THE 1888 BJELOVAR AFFAIR: THE THEORY BEHIND THE (YUGO)SLAVIC IDEA AND THE UNIFICATION OF CHURCHES

Introduction¹

The literature about the Bishop from Djakovo, Josip J. Strossmayer and his fifty-year-long political and cultural work in Croatia and Europe exceeds more than 3,000 bibliographical units today.² However, Croatian historiography still has not produced an expert monographic edition about the work of Bishop Strossmayer in Croatian society. Many parts of Bishop Strossmayer's vast correspondence remain poorly explored to this day.³ As

1. This article was originally published in Croatian as "Bjelovarska afera' 1888. – pozadina (jugo)slavenske ideje i ujedinjenje crkava," *Povijest u nastavi*, 1, no. 9 (2007), pp. 15-25. The current translation is the author's own – Ed.

2. The main literature lists and sources about J. J. Strossmayer and his political work can be found in the following books: Vladimir Koščak, *Josip J. Strossmayer i Franjo Rački politički spisi: rasprave/članci/govori/memorandumi* [Josip J. Strossmayer-Franjo Rački Political Files: Discussions, Articles, Speeches, Memos] (Zagreb: Znanje, 1971), pp. 318-23; Vladimir Koščak, *Josip Juraj Strossmayer – političar i mecena* [Josip J. Strossmayer: The Politician and Patron] (Osijek: Revija, 1990), pp. 257-90; Mirjana Gross and Agneza Szabo, *Prema hrvatskome građanskom društvu: društveni razvoj u civilnoj Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji šezdesetih i sedamdesetih godina 19. stoljeća* [According to the Croatian Civil Society: The Growth of Croatia and Slavonic Civil Society in the 1860s and 1870s] (Zagreb: Globus, 1992); Vera Ciliga, *Slom politike Narodne stranke (1865-1880)* [The Break of Politics of People's Party (1865-1880)] (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1970); Jaroslav Šidak, "Hrvatsko pitanje u Habsburškoj monarhiji" ["Croatian Question in Hapsburg Monarchy"], *Historijski pregled*, 2/3 (1965). We should add to this the newer editions: William Brooks Tomljanovich, *Biskup Josip Juraj Strossmayer: nacionalizam i moderni katolicizam u Hrvatskoj* [Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer: Nationalism and Modern Catholicism in Croatia] (Zagreb: Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti (HAZU): Dom i svijet, 2001); Ivo Padovan, ed., *Zbornik radova o Josipu Jurju Strossmayeru* [The Collected Works about Josip Juraj Strossmayer] (Zagreb: HAZU, 1997); Nikša Stančić, *Hrvatska nacija i nacionalizam u 19. i 20. stoljeću* [The Croatian Nation and Nationalism in the 19th and 20th Centuries] (Zagreb: Barbat, 2002); and *Korespondencija Josip Juraj Strossmayer-Serafin Vannutelli 1881-1887* [The Correspondence Strossmayer – Vannutelli (1881-1887)] (Zagreb: Monumenta Vaticana Croatica, 1999).

3. The most comprehensive overview of Strossmayer's legacy was presented by Vladimir Koščak, "Strossmayerova ostavština u Arhivu JAZU" ["Strossmayer's Legacy in Yugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti (JAZU) Archive"], *Historijski zbornik XI – XII* (1958-1959), pp. 351-75; *Historijski zbornik XIII* (1960), pp. 263-75; *Historijski zbornik*

a result, it would require exhaustive research to fully appreciate the personality of J. J. Strossmayer, his political and cultural work for more than 50 years, and his influence on Croatian society today. This paper primarily aims to show the political background of the Bjelovar Affair, that is, the verbal political confrontation between Bishop Strossmayer and Austrian emperor Franz Joseph I in Bjelovar in 1888, regarding Strossmayer's telegram to Kiev celebrating the 900th anniversary of the Christianisation of Russia and his ideas of pan-Slavism and the unification of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, which were opposed to the political reality of the then dualist Austro-Hungary. Franko Mirošević⁴ wrote about the reactions in the contemporary European press to the Bjelovar Affair. The only somewhat-complete account of the Bjelovar Affair and the reactions to it was produced by Kosta Milutinović in his work "Strossmayer and Yugoslav question,"⁵ in which he mostly shows the reactions of the European, and in particular the Vienna and Pest press to that event, while Ivan Očak wrote a short overview of the connections that J. J. Strossmayer kept with people from Russian political and cultural life, which gives a clearer picture of the whole affair.⁶ Mirjana Gross's recent book on Franjo Rački is partly dedicated to the Bjelovar Affair, although she mostly uses sources known from the well-known Šišić' collection of correspondence between Rački and Strossmayer, and the reactions from the populist newspaper *Obzor*, which defended Strossmayer.⁷ Antun Čečatka in his work *J. J. Strossmayer's Vision of Church* looks at the religious work of Bishop Strossmayer and its political implications.⁸

J. J. Strossmayer dedicated his whole life to three ideas: the struggle for achieving Croatian political independence, which had been suffocated under the dualism of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, by redirecting the Catholic Church toward the unification of churches, or reconciliation with the Orthodox Church, mainly with Orthodox Slavic peoples, which he found in Catholic universalism and the Yugoslav idea. All three of these

XIV (1961), pp. 329-52. Of about 15,000 documents, the correspondence occupies 80 percent of Strossmayer's legacy.

4. Franko Mirošević, "Sukobi J. J. Strossmayera s carem Franjom Josipom" ["Conflicts between J.J. Strossmayer with Emperor Franz Joseph,"] *Nastava povijesti*, 3/4 (1980), pp. 218-29.

5. Kosta Milutinović, "Štrosmajer i jugoslovensko pitanje" ["Strossmayer and the Yugoslav Question"], *Novi Sad*, 1976.

6. Ivan Očak, *Hrvatsko-ruske veze* [Croatian-Russian Connections] (Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, 1993), pp. 67-84.

7. Mirjana Gross, *Vijek i djelovanje Franje Račkoga* [The Life and Work of Franjo Rački] (Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2004).

8. Antun Čečatka, *Viđenje crkve J. J. Strossmayera (1815.-1905)* [J. J. Strossmayer's Vision of Church (1815-1905)] (Djakovo: Teologija u Djakovu, 2001).

ideas are intertwined in his work and mutually determined, so actually his concept of (Yugo)Slavism is strongly connected with his ideas at the confessional level, with the unification of the Eastern and Western churches, and all of these have their political connotations in form of creating one, more just, federal Austria and establishing south Slavic unity.

The idea of Slavic unity established through culture and education should have been a way toward a full emancipation of all south Slavic peoples, not only those in the Habsburg Monarchy. Bishop Strossmayer gained support for his goals through his numerous connections and relationships with the representatives of Slavism in Austro-Hungary, as well as with Slavs outside the Monarchy, especially Russians. He stayed loyal to his concept of (Yugo)Slavism throughout his life, even though he experienced harsh attacks for his beliefs, especially from the Serbian side, as well as enduring misunderstanding both from the Vatican diplomacy, as well as from people in Croatia itself.

I

J.J. Strossmayer formally withdrew from the political scene of the Triune Kingdom after the failure of the People's party in the revision of the Croatian–Hungarian settlement, devoting his time to cultural and educational activities. However, his interest in politics remained. His interest was piqued during the crisis over the “Eastern question” following the uprising in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1875. After Austro-Hungary occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878, Strossmayer's concepts of yugoslavism were shattered. He became melancholic and found his only escape in his religious work at the church level, to which he especially dedicated his time in the 1880s. This activity would, in time, return Strossmayer to the political scene of the contemporary Austro-Hungary with the Bjelovar Affair, which revealed the resistance toward the political stagnation in Croatia at that time, which “moaned” under the strict leadership of Ban Carlo Khuen-Hedervary.

Late-July, 1888, saw the celebrations of the 900th anniversary of the Christianisation of Russia, which took place under the leadership of great Duke of Kiev, Vladimir Svajtoslavič. The main celebration was held in Kiev. Complimentary telegrams were coming from all parts of the world, especially from Orthodox Slavic peoples and countries. A few days beforehand Franjo Rački had reminded Strossmayer in his letter not “to forget to send a telegram on the 27th of this month to Kiev showing your joy for the celebration of the 900th anniversary of the Christianisation of the Russian people. Send the telegram in French to the celebration committee or to the

rector of the St. Vladimir University.”⁹ A few days later Strossmayer replies to Rački: “I will send a telegram to Kiev, but I think in our language. They understand it there very well...”¹⁰ It was this telegram that Strossmayer sent on 27 July, 1888, in Kiev to the rector of St. Vladimir University that became the international sensation. The telegram reads:

To the famous rector of St. Vladimir University, Kiev, Russia. It is my honour and utmost joy to join your present celebration. The heritage of St. Vladimir, the holy faith, was and is resurrection and life, the light and the glory to the Russian people. God bless Russia and give it, through living faith, exemplary life, the help from above and Christian heroism, with all its other duties, that great of all worldly duties, destined by God’s providence to be fulfilled with fortune, salvation and triumph. These are the most honest wishes of my heart. Please, convey these feelings to the other brothers, who are warmly greeted and fatherly blessed. Bishop Strossmayer.¹¹

Strossmayer was aware that his telegram would cause negative reactions in certain circles, so he wrote immediately to Rački: “Some will be mad at it in Zagreb and in Pest and in Vienna, and possibly some short-minded and short-sighted in Rome as well, but that is all in vain.”¹² Strossmayer did not, however, predict the fervour of the attacks which would struck him. The only region where the telegram was received with zeal was Russia, where Strossmayer, until that point, had a rather negative reputation. As *Obzor* reported from the Russian press, “devotion to the Slavic thought of the honoured Bishop is seen in the constant, stable and energetically exemplary activity which has been for so long insulting Hungarian and German eyes... because they wrongly included him among the antagonists of Russia and wrongly created the logical conclusion that all the works of a good Slavic shepherd, since based on hostility toward Orthodoxy and Russia, is a building built on sand.”¹³ The famous Russian Slavist and ethnographer, Vladimir Ivanovič Lamanski, described Strossmayer as a Slavic patriot, and advocated that Russia had to find a common language with people of his kind.¹⁴ Immediately after returning to Djakovo from his vacation, Strossmayer, writing to Rački, recounted receiving a telegram from Cardi-

9. Ferdo Šišić, *Korespodencija Rački-Strossmayer* [Correspondence Rački-Strossmayer] (Zagreb: JAZU, 1930): Book IV, July 22, 1888, letter 1022, p. 3.

10. *Ibid.*, July 25, 1888, letter 1023, p. 4.

11. *Ibid.*, July 27, 1888, letter 1024, p. 5.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Obzor*, Aug. 21, 1888, p. 1.

14. Milutinović, “Štrosmajer i jugoslovensko pitanje,” p. 184.

nal Rampolle in which the Cardinal informed Strossmayer that his telegram to Kiev “very unpleasantly touched the Holy Father because the telegram of the Canterbury Bishop mentions the union, while in my [Strossmayer’s] telegram there is no mention of it.”¹⁵ In the same letter, Strossmayer admitted his fear for what might take place at the Tsar’s reception at Bjelovar, writing: “As far as Bjelovar is concerned, I truly tell you, that I am in some kind of disruption. If I come, some obvious accident may happen to me, which I would not like; if I don’t come, it is an accident already.”¹⁶ Four days later, again in a letter to Rački, Strossmayer confirms his arrival in Bjelovar, but is afraid “that some impudence might happen. I am prepared for everything and totally calm.”¹⁷ Rački replied by writing that “the behaviour of the ruler in Bjelovar towards your persona will be a measure of high politics in the monarchy.”¹⁸

The direct cause for the Bjelovar Affair were the autumn military manoeuvres the Austro-Hungarian army was performing in the area of Bjelovar and Daruvar, at the foot of the south-east mountains of Bilogora, on 13-14 September, 1888. The Tsar himself was usually present at the military manoeuvres, together with the highest State ranking personnel and their guests (Austrian Crown Prince Rudolf, English Crown Prince of Wales, Hungarian minister Bela Orezy, Croatian Ban Count Dragutin Khuen-Hedervary). The Tsar arrived at Bjelovar in a carriage from Križevci station on September 12., 1888, and stayed in the apartment of the great county ruler of Bjelovar, noble Buda Budisavljević Priedorski.¹⁹ After a short break, Franz Joseph I started welcoming deputations in the city hall, amongst whom were representatives of high Croatian aristocracy, royal worldly government and great county rulers. Among the representatives of clergy, who were led by the Archbishop of Zagreb Josip Mihalović, was the Bosnian and Syrmian Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer. When the turn for the church deputation came, the Archbishop gave the Tsar “his great respect and dedication.”²⁰

After having briefly talked with Archbishop Mihalović, the Tsar came to Bishop Strossmayer and started talking to him in German, which, being conducted in loud tones, soon became an affair. Strossmayer himself recounted that conversation in a letter to Rački, written in Križevci on 13

15. Šišić, *Korespodencija*, Aug. 20, 1888, letter 1026, p. 6.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

19. *Obzor*, no. 209, Sept. 12, 1888.

20. Mladen Medar, “‘Bjelovarska afera’ 1888. godine u svjetlu lokalnih izvora” [“The ‘Bjelovar Affair’ of 1888 in the Light of Local Sources”], *Bjelovarski zbornik*, 4/5 (1994), p. 35.

September, 1888. According to Strossmayer, the conversation went like this:

The Tsar and the King to me: “You did something again, based on which I have to think that you were really ill when you did it. You must have been seriously ill when you sent your telegram to Kiev.”

Me: “No, your majesty, I sent the telegram to Kiev fully conscious, my conscience is clear and totally calm.”

The Tsar: “No, I truly believe you had to be ill.”

Me: “I repeat, Majesty, my conscience is totally calm, and I have already spoken my mind to the Holy Father. And if I am allowed to calmly talk to Your Majesty about it, I hope, I will succeed in totally calming Your Majesty.”

The Tsar and the King: “The work of the Kiev gathering is the work of the worst revolutionaries, and there gathered a true collection of revolutionary elements. It conspired against the Catholic Church and the Pope. It was all an opposition (or demonstration) against the Russian and Austrian governments.”

Then me: “No, Majesty, I cannot believe that.”

As I uttered these words, the Cardinal touched me with his hat, sort of like warning me not to speak any further and oppose His Majesty. To my words, the Tsar and the King said in a very firm voice: “But I can conclude that.” Having said this, we went to the Bishops Posilović and Hranilović, and spoke briefly with each of them.²¹

The Tsar’s words encouraged Bishop Strossmayer’s opponents even more. The Vienna and Pest newspapers, according to their political orientation, attacked the Bishop the most. What mostly bothered them was Strossmayer’s views about the role of Russia worldwide and they asked the

21. Šišić, *Korespodencija*, Book IV, Zagreb: JAZU, pp. 21-22, letter 1033. The conversation between the Tsar and Strossmayer took place in German, and it is given here in translation. Milko Cepelić, a long-time bishop’s secretary, gives a somewhat different version in the margins of his writings, which was published as a writing under the title Milko Cepelić and Marija Pavić, *Josip Juraj Strossmayer biskup bosansko-djakovački i sriemski. God. 1850.-1900.* [Josip Juraj Strossmayer, the Bosnian-Djakovo and Syrmian Bishop. 1850-1900], Zagreb, 1900-1904. The writings in the margins were never published. The conversation according to Cepelić goes like this: “The Tsar: You have become a traitor, not only of your country but the church as well. Strossmayer: Your Majesty, my conscience is clear. The Tsar: Don’t you know that, as III Tsar division informs me, there was an uprising in Kiev? Strossmayer: Your Majesty, I cannot believe in that.” Everything about Cepelić’s writings in the margins in Stanislav Marijanović, “Strossmayer, Hrvatska i Evropa 19. Stoljeća” [“Strossmayer, Croatia and Europe in the Nineteenth Century”], in Padovan, ed., *Zbornik radova o Josipu Jurju Strossmayeru* (Zagreb: HAZU, 1997), pp. 97-111.

institutions to take further administrative steps against the Bishop. The Nemet of Pest writes: “No state can ignore without certain punishment what Strossmayer had said.... That telegram shows that he is not a true Croatian patriot, nor a Bishop of the Roman Catholic Church or a true and faithful son of his country.”²² Strossmayer and his supporters accused one another of treason of the Habsburg dynasty and Austro-Hungary, and even of the Catholic Church. These attacks in the Pest and Vienna press were not targeted, however, only toward the person of Bishop Strossmayer, but also at all the followers of his ideas. The newspaper articles had only one goal, which was to discredit anyone who supported changes to the monarchy, that is, that program which, based on the principles of federalism, seeks a community in which all south Slavs would possess equal rights as one another. The opponents of the dual system were openly attacked in order to be eliminated from the political life of the monarchy. This is how *Obzor* quoted the Pest paper *Pesti Hirlapa*: “The whole world knows that the Croatian opposition only vegetates under the influence of Strossmayer and his money.... Thanks to the King for putting his foot on the head of that pan-Slavic hydra, for stigmatising this treasonable act of Strossmayer on Croatian ground.”²³ Strossmayer’s opinion of these attacks on his reputation in the press, as is evident in some of his letters, is somewhat surprising. He writes that this hunt was organised by Jews and Freemasons, who hate the Christian idea, and thus hate Slavs who are its bearers.²⁴ These opinions are, of course, entirely subject, but might have been dictated by Strossmayer’s doubts about some of the chief editors of the Pest newspapers, who were Jewish. It should be pointed out, moreover, that the main agitators and organisers of the attacks on Strossmayer and his supporters were from Austro-Hungarian circles, members of the Vienna and Pest political elite, who did not want the strengthening of Slavic reciprocity nor the Slav’s demand of the monarchy for more equal relationships, because such a demand demolished their political and economic interests, that is, their political hegemony.

22. Milutinović, “Štrosmajer i jugoslovensko pitanje,” p. 184.

23. *Obzor*, Zagreb, no. 212, Sept. 15, 1888, p. 2.

24. About the attitude of the Catholic Church and bishop Strossmayer towards Jews, see Mato Artuković, “Glasnik Biskupije Bosanske i Srijemske o Židovima i judaizmu” [“Glasnik of Bosnian and Syrmian Diocese about Jews and Judaism”], in *Zbornik Mira Kolar-Dimitrijević* (Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, Odsjek za povijest, 2003); Mario Strecha, “‘To je na svaki način pravi škandal’: Prilog pitanju ravnopravnosti židova u banskoj Hrvatskoj u drugoj polovici 19. Stoljeća” [“‘That is in every way a true scandal’: The Addition to the Question of Equality of Jews in Civil Croatia in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century”], in I. Goldstein, N. Stančić and M. Strecha, eds., *Zbornik Mirjane Gross* (Zagreb: Zavod za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskog fakulteta, 1999); Čečatka, *Videnje crkve J. J. Strossmayera*.

Although Strossmayer did not know what kind of response his telegram would produce, it still testifies to the continuity of Strossmayer's efforts that church unity, which he promoted in his specific way, while simultaneously strengthening the political unity of Croatian people and Slavs in Austria. Strossmayer's telegram thus gained international significance inasmuch as it focused the attention of the international public on the unsettled situation in his country. Even before these events, Bishop Strossmayer believed that the Croatian people were facing great tasks, writing in a letter to the British statesman W. Gladstone, "We Croats can truly say that in this small group of Slavic brothers we represent the 'Tuscan element'. . . . We are in a short period of time able to build [those] institutions, which give us the right to lead others toward cultural advances and great ideas. We have great tasks. We are aware of our role in these parts."²⁵

With his demand for the convergence of Catholicism and Orthodoxy, which he promoted using his international reputation, Strossmayer troubled those who were resistant to any kind of change in Austro-Hungary generally, and in the Balkans in particular, since every strengthening of Croat and Slavic self-consciousness in Austria would obstruct German long-term strategic penetration to the East, weaken the position of Austro-Hungary in the Balkan region and disable Khuen's politics of violence in Croatia. Any move that would strengthen Russian political influence in the Balkans thus had to be nipped in the bud. Strossmayer's telegram to Kiev and the subsequent events in Bjelovar illustrate his support for Russia taking its place in the European theatre of great powers, not only in order to fulfil its religious mission but also to contribute to solving the question of the status of the Slavic peoples in Europe, especially in Austro-Hungary. That can be best seen in Strossmayer's letter to Princess Trubetzkolkova, lady-in-waiting of Russian empress Maria Sergejevna, in which he writes: "Russia cannot only be the guest at the party, a participant, but should take the bull by the horns, and fight with those horns." Only a strong Russia, Strossmayer argues, can promote the interests of Slavism across Europe.²⁶

25. Milutinović, "Štrossmajer i jugoslovensko pitanje," p. 220. Strossmayer's letters to Gladstone were published as *Die sudslavishe Frage im Habsburger Reiche* (Berlin: R. W. Seton-Watson, 1913). Strossmayer carefully watched Gladstone's attempts as British Prime Minister to ensure the autonomy to Ireland, since he compared the fight of the Irishmen for the national equality in the United Kingdom to the same kind of fight of the Croatian people in Austro-Hungary.

26. HAZU archive, *Korespondencija J. J. Strossmayera, "Bjelovarska afera"* [Correspondence of J.J. Strossmayer – "The Bjelovar Affair"], XI, A, 4/II, 21, letter to the princess Trubetzkolkova, 21 September, 1888. Elizabeta Trubetzkolkova (1840-1908), princess and duchess, was lady-in-waiting of the empress Maria Sergejevna. She was close to the Russian court and a supporter of Strossmayer's attempts to unite the Catholic and Orthodox churches.

II

In order to understand Strossmayer's opinion of the press attacks on him, it is important to look at his correspondence of the period, in which it is clear who supported him in his work, and how he explained his behaviour to friends and the politically like-minded. In a letter to Imbro (Emerik) Tkalac in Rome,²⁷ Strossmayer implores Tkalac to never forget "to keep only one thing in mind, and that is that the Austrian task was, in conspiracy with Germany, to destroy Slavism around the world, or at least to castrate it."²⁸ Continuing, Strossmayer complains to Tkalac of a lack of understanding of his role and his wishes. "Is there anywhere in the world today," he laments, "'a legion' which knows every Christian thought and intent, especially if that one understands that it should enrich the Slavs, exalt them and sanctify and point them to higher and more glorious purposes?"²⁹ Writing to Count Julije Janković,³⁰ Strossmayer recognises that the destiny appointed Slavs is a sacred and noble mission, and that the Bjelovar Affair is only one small contribution to that mission.³¹

The reaction of Mihajlo Polit-Desančić,³² a Serbian politician from Vojvodina, to the Bjelovar Affair is interesting insofar as he professed his

27. Imbro (Emerik) Ignatijević Tkalac (1824-1912), the publicist and politician, born in Karlovac, died in Rome. As a secretary of the trade and craft chamber he fought for the economic development of Croatian people. In Vienna he started his newspaper, *Ost und West*, in which he advocated Croatian secession from Austro-Hungary, for which he was imprisoned, spending the rest of his life in emigration. In his political work, he counted on imperial Russia and Principality of Serbia, which he predicted to be the crucial factors in creating a united south Slavic State. See Dragutin Pavličević, "Imbro Ignatijević Tkalac i njegova stajališta o Istočnom pitanju" ["Imbro Ignatijević Tkalac and His Standpoints on the Eastern Question"] in Goldstein, Stančić and Strecha, eds., *Zbornik of Mira Kolar-Dimitrijević*, pp. 189-98.

28. HAZU archive, *Korespondencija J. J. Strossmayera*, XI A, 4/II, 15. The response to Imbro (Emerik) Tkalac in Rome, Sept. 30, 1888.

29. *Ibid.*

30. Count Julije Janković (1820-1904) was patron of many Croatian institutions, and supporter of the unionist option, as well as a long-time governor of Požeška County and the representative of that county in the Croatian Parliament.

31. HAZU archive, *Korespondencija J. J. Strossmayera*, XI A, 4/II, 5. The letter to count Julije Janković, Sept. 28, 1888.

32. Mihajlo Polit Desančić (1833-1920), Ph.D of law and publicist, born in Novi Sad in Vojvodina. For a short time he was a representative in the Croatian Parliament from Sirmian County. In his later work he supported the unification of Serbs and Croats into one country. More about the work of Mihajlo Polit Desančić in Tomislav Markus, "Mihajlo-Polit Desančić i srpski nacionalizam 1861. Godine" ["Mihajlo Polit-Desančić and Serbian Nationalism in 1861"], *ČSP*, 26, no. 3 (1994), pp. 487-500.

support for Strossmayer,³³ even though Serbian politics in general did not share his vision of Yugoslavism. Likewise, in the newspaper *Novi Sad Polit-Desančić* defended Strossmayer's view of the world-historical role of Russia, writing that people such as Strossmayer are able to see a bit further than the "normal eye," whose view is "blocked with hatred and tribal passion."³⁴ The *Novi Sad* article especially points out the mission of Russia that lies ahead of it, and calls for Russian help in pushing the Turks out of Europe. On the other hand, Strossmayer received a letter from his friend Kosta Vojnović, in which Vojnović warns him that in such matters as the question of the union, Strossmayer should act more prudently, because his enemies can hardly wait for him to misstep [*pogrešan korak*].³⁵

Strossmayer's work for the unification of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches did not exceed the borders of the Slavic world. Recognising that the Slavic people are not to be blamed for the church schism, nor is the schism a matter of faith, but specifically "the Greek act," Strossmayer believed that Slavs themselves should make the first step towards the churches' unification. That role, given by God's providence, he saw not only in Croatian people but in Russians as well. Believing that only Russian people are truly free, Strossmayer saw that he alone was the one appointed to fulfil the religious mission of the church unification. In order to fulfil its mission, Russia had to be politically strong and influential in the political theatre of superpowers. Only such a Russia, Strossmayer believed, could successfully fulfil its unique church mission.

Although the telegrams that came in from all Christian countries in celebration of the 900th anniversary of the Christianisation of Russia contained similar content to Strossmayer's, nonetheless Strossmayer's telegram was received entirely differently, largely because it sided with Russian influence in the Balkans against Austro-Hungarian interests in the region. Serbia had concluded a secret convention with Austro-Hungary some time before (1881), while Romania joined this trilateral union in 1883. In 1887, Austrian Count Ferdinand Saksen-Koburški came to the Bulgarian throne and introduced pro-Austrian politics to Bulgaria, while German influence prevailed in Istanbul. Confronted with such a situation, Russian Tsar Aleksandar II sarcastically raised his glass among his friends and toasted to "the only faithful friend of Russia – the Montenegrin Count Pe-

33. HAZU archive, *Korespondencija J. J. Strossmayera*, XI A, 4/II, 13. Novi Sad, Sept. 28 1888, the letter from Mihajlo Polit-Desančić.

34. Mihajlo Polit-Desančić, "Branik," *Novi Sad*, Aug. 21, 1888.

35. HAZU archive, *Korespondencija J. J. Strossmayera*, XI A, 272, the letter from Kosta Vojnović.

tar.”³⁶ In this context it is not surprising that Russian public opinion welcomed Strossmayer’s telegram. Their disapproval of the press attacks on Bishop Strossmayer was reflected in the Russian press. Petersburg’s daily *Novoe Vremja* published an excerpt of one of Strossmayer’s speech, in which he elaborated his idea of Slavism and his work “on fulfilling that mission, which was determined among brothers by providence.”³⁷

Strossmayer, as with many other Slavists, maintained romantic illusions about Russia, although he always distinguished the official Russian diplomacy from the Russian people. Although he was aware of its backwardness compared to the West and its backwardness for modern movements, Strossmayer nevertheless believed Russia to be of great benefit for the Slavs in Austro-Hungary, and its reputation for harbouring great Slavic power could create better mutual relationships and a brighter future for the “small” Slavic people of the Austrian monarchy. Strossmayer, whose work was otherwise founded on a pragmatic appreciation of the world, nonetheless saw in Russia more than it realistically was at the time: the illusion that Russia could help free small Slavic nations from non-Slavic hegemonies. However, the idea of Slavic solidarity mediated by Russia *did not* have, nor objectively *could* have had, any realistic foundation.

Strossmayer also faced opposition in Polish Catholic circles, especially from Cardinal Ladochowski, who opposed the exploitation of the question of church union to promote Strossmayer’s political agenda against Austro-Hungary, which the Cardinal saw to counterbalance Russian interest in the Balkans.³⁸ Cardinal Ladochowski supported Austrian politics in the Balkans, and expressed his aversion toward Russia by trying to obstruct their agreements with the Vatican on the question of union. In his notes Strossmayer expressed his disbelief toward such attitudes, writing that “all Jewish and Freemason newspapers hoot and roar because of the telegram, and it is not peculiar at all since Christianity and Slavism are a thorn in their flesh, they would drown both of them, but I cannot comprehend how my Polish brothers can accept all that roar since both Christianity and Slavism

36. Sava Živanov, *Rusija na prelomu vekova* [Russia between Centuries] (Belgrade, 2002), p. 367n290. About Russian foreign politics in the second half of the nineteenth century, see V. V. Zaitsev, “Rusija i Balkanski savez: javno mnijenje i diplomacija (1878.-1897.)” [“Russia and the Balkan Union: Public Opinion and Diplomacy (1878-1897)”], *ČSP*, 31, no. 1 (1999), pp. 73-93; V. P. Potemkin, *Historija diplomacije* [The History of Diplomacy] (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1951); and P. N. Miljukov, *Istorija Rusije* [The History of Russia] (Belgrade, 1939).

37. *Obzor*, no. 191, Aug. 21, 1888, p. 1.

38. Piotr Žurek, “Razlozi ostavke biskupa J. J. Strossmayera s položaja apostolskog administratora Katoličke crkve u Srbiji” [“Reasons of the Bishop J. J. Strossmayer’s Resignation from the Position of the Apostle Administrator of the Catholic Church in Serbia”], *ČSP*, 34, no. 3 (2002).

should be close to their hearts. What do brother Poles think to gain with it?"³⁹ In his letter to the noblewoman Sanguszka, however, Strossmayer expressed an abstract appreciation for the "unjust division" that confronted the Polish people, and their position towards Russia.⁴⁰

Strossmayer was similarly shocked by the political disqualification of his "enemy" Ante Starčević, published in the paper *Croatia* in mid-September, 1888. Although he did not want to cause a public controversy with Starčević, in a letter to his friend Erazmo Barčić⁴¹ Strossmayer writes that he has taken note of that attack as well. "Besides his merits are hardly worth anything any more," Strossmayer writes. "Tacit, who thinks the most profound thoughts of ancient history, would be old now, and this event here in Bjelovar is a simulation, 'Macchiavelian', and a true comedy, and all this while the demons of our people struck me in order to destroy and ruin me, and may God forgive me, that belongs to Stenjevac."⁴²

Of all the leaders of the Slavic people in the Habsburg Monarchy, Strossmayer most frequently corresponded with F. L. Reiger, the leader of the Czech liberals (*staročehi*), to whom Strossmayer presents his unfaltering attitude. "I experienced the consequences of the Bjelovar event in many ways," he writes, "but my conscience did not allow me to control myself, yet it set me free."⁴³

Conclusion

The telegram of the Bishop of Djakovo J. J. Strossmayer to Kiev for the 900th anniversary of the Russian Christianisation raised a storm on the political scene of the Habsburg Monarchy. The work of Bishop Strossmayer, which had its political and religious dimension in the form of strengthening the Slavic (Croatian) peoples within the monarchy, and his work on the unification of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, did not suit the monarchy leadership and Hungarian political leaders because it weakened their efforts to maintain the dualist system, that is, to strengthen their domination in the country. The verbal conflict between Bishop Strossmayer and Tsar

39. HAZU archive, *Korespondencija J. J. Strossmayera*, XI A, 4/III, 2: concepts and notes of Bishop Strossmayer.

40. *Ibid.*, XI A, 4/II-14: the letter to princess Sanguszka dated Oct. 11, 1888.

41. Erazmo Barčić (1830-1913), a lawyer and politician. An attorney from Rijaka, and leader of the right-wing party from Istria, he later supported progressives and accepted the Yugoslav idea. Later a member of Croatian-Serbian coalition.

42. HAZU archive, *Korespondencija J. J. Strossmayera*, XI A, 4/II, I. The response to Erazmo Barčić, Sept. 21, 1888. Stenjevac was an old Zagreb hospital and mental institution. It was destroyed in 1931.

43. *Ibid.*, XI A, 4/II, 7. The letter to Dr. Rieger in Prague, Sept. 25, 1888. F.L. Rieger (1818-1903), the leader of Czech liberals (*staročehi*), shared with Strossmayer views regarding the need for a new civil structure of Austro-Hungary and the role of Slavs in it.

Franz Joseph I in Bjelovar in 1888 constitutes the background of the Bjelovar Affair, in which the political disagreement of Tsar Franz Joseph I with Strossmayer's concepts of the religious and political development of Slavic peoples, and the necessity of the unification of churches, was subsequently used by the Pest and Vienna press to their attempts to remove Strossmayer from the Croatian political scene. Despite these unscrupulous attacks, Bishop Strossmayer did not abandon his position. On the other hand, Strossmayer's long-term efforts in aid of the unification of Christian churches was not sympathetically received either by the Vatican, nor with Orthodox people. Bishop Strossmayer found himself at the same time under the attack of Catholic and Orthodox prelates, who dismissed his ideas, each from their own position and standpoint. Strossmayer's vision for the "united Christianity" seemed more and more like empty words and an illusion. Consequently, his dream for "the divine reconciliation" of the East and the West went unfulfilled.

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