

Historical background

Compiled by G.Z. Földvály

There is a half-million strong Hungarian minority in northern Yugoslavia. They have been there for over a thousand years, from the time when the Magyars (Hungarians) migrated to and populated the Carpathian Basin in c.900 A.D. The Magyars assimilated the local, ethnically related populations, the Avars, moved south as far as the Sava-Danube line, opposite Belgrade, and settled there, providing the Hungarian name of *Nándorfehérvár* to that city. Belgrade, itself, was in Hungarian hands for centuries and often defended by them (for instance, in their famous repulse of the Ottoman Turks in 1456 in the *Battle of Nándorfehérvár*) right up to its eventual fall to the Turks in 1521. The Serbians first reached Belgrade from the south and started using it as their capital in the 14th century.



The beginnings (1028) of the Hungarian Kingdom during the rule of St. Stephen (1000—1038), the first king of Hungary; the geographic position of the Croats and Serbs is also shown.

[After McEvedy, 1961. Penguin Atlas of Medieval History]

This southern limit of Hungarian settlement includes:

1. **Syrmia**, the area between the Danube and Sava Rivers, south of Novi Sad (*Újvidék*), now referred to as Eastern Slavonia. This is the *Sirmium* of the Roman era, disputed for some time between Hungary and the Byzantine Empire but finally conquered and incorporated into Hungary as *Szerémség* (Srem Region), in the Middle Ages. From that period it had been an integral part of Hungary until the unjust provisions of the Treaty of Trianon after World War I cut it out of the mother country;
2. the **Backa** (*Bácska*) area between the Danube and Tisza Rivers north of Novi Sad;
3. the **Banat** (*Bánát*) region north of Belgrade and the Lower Danube; (Regions 2 and 3 are together known as *Voivodina*).

4. smaller pockets of Hungarian-populated areas in:

- (a) the so-called **Baranya Triangle** subtended by the confluence of the Danube and Drava Rivers,
- (b) **Muraköz** (Medjumurje and Prekomurje) the Drava-Mura confluence area,
- (c) small pockets in the Drava-Sava Interfluve area.

According to the last Hungarian census, conducted in 1910, the ethnic composition of these former Hungarian territories, ceded to Yugoslavia by the Peace Treaty of Trianon (1920), was as follows

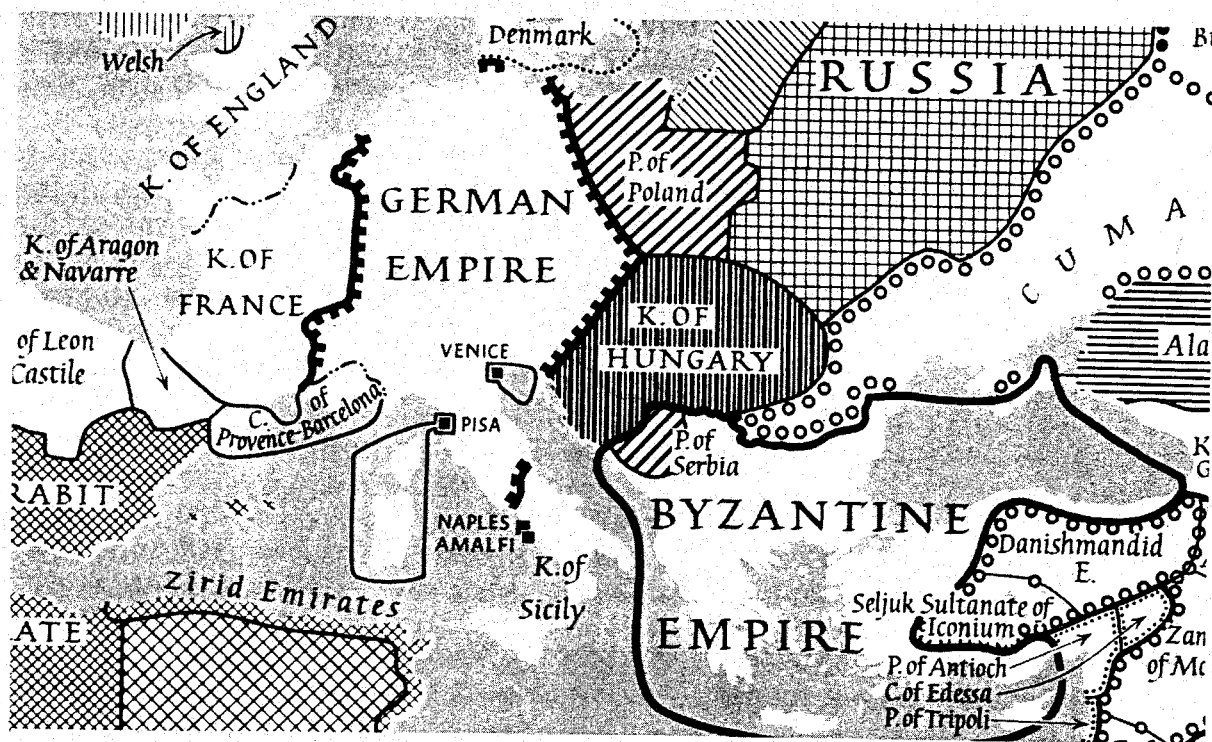
Hungarians	458,252	30.2%
Germans	303,583	20.0%
Serbs	382,149	25.2%
Croats	91,571	6.1%
Socacs	15,847	1.1%
Wends, Slovenes	66,880	4.4%
Slovaks	46,378	3.1%
Ruthenians	10,777	0.7%
Roumanians	76,780	5.1%
Others	13,920	0.9%
<u>Total</u>	<u>1,514,999</u>	<u>100.0%</u>

I. History of Croatia

The Croats first appeared in the Drava-Sava Interfluve area towards the end of the three hundred-year long Avar era in the Carpathian Basin, about 800 A.D. After the collapse of the Avar State, the remaining Avar population joined the Croats in their rebellion against the Franks, following the death of Charlemagne in 814. The Croats are considered to be a fusion of the various earlier settlers in this area, for instance the Illyrians and Avars, and the later Slavic (Croatian) settlers, coming from the north, from the Galician area of present Poland, the original home of the Slavic peoples. Somewhat later Dalmatia also became part of Croatia and the indigenous Croatian ruling dynasty was founded in 910 A.D. by Tomislav (910-928) during a period when Byzantium could not concentrate on Croatia and Dalmatia because it was occupied with the newly evolving Bulgarian Empire. Thereafter, Croatia experienced her first period of flourishing and internal consolidation, right up to 945 A.D. This period was followed by dynastic and civil wars until the year 1000. During King Goyslav's (1000-1019) and Kreshmir III's (1000-1030) reigns it happened that King Stephen of Hungary (St. Stephen) gave his sister in marriage to Otto, son of Peter Orseolo, thus forming the first dynastic contact between a Croatian ruling dynasty and the native Hungarian dynasty, the House of Árpád.

A period of political decline then followed in Croatia. Zvonimir (1076-1089) was murdered, while Stjepan II (1089-1090) simply disappeared without a trace, leaving no successor. This led to anarchy in the country and the problem of succession. The Estates of Croatia and the Dalmatian towns approached László I, King of Hungary (1077-1085) to take over as head of state, as King of Croatia. St. László responded favourably, occupied the Croatian lands as far as the Kulpa River in 1091 and founded the Bishopric of Zagreb. Soon afterwards, King Kálmán of Hungary (1095-1116) led a campaign in which he defeated the Croatian forces and advanced to the Adriatic coast. In the fighting, the last native king of Croatia, Peter II, who until then ruled over the area west of the Kulpa River, was killed, too.

After Kálmán gave certain assurances to the Croatian nobility, recognizing Croatia's rights, he was elected King of Croatia (1102-1116). Thus, the issue of Croatian succession was settled in 1102 with the **Pacta Conventa** agreement, „by which the Croats recognized the Hungarian king as the legitimate heir to the Croatian throne and in return the king agreed to honour and maintain all rights, laws and privileges of the Croatian Kingdom. One of the conditions of the pact was that the king would have a separate coronation with the Croatian crown as a sign of Croatian sovereignty. There was also a provision that a separate Croatian Diet (*Sabor*) would meet in all matters concerning national interests” (Cuvalo A. et al. eds., 1991).



The Kingdom of Hungary and Croatia (The nations of the Hungarian Crown) in 1130.

[After McEvedy, 1961. Penguin Atlas of Medieval History]

During the rule of all the subsequent kings of the Árpád Dynasty it was the practice for the Crown Prince to govern the Croatian lands, the power of the king being represented by the Bans (banus or governor). In the 13th century, social conditions began to change and local rule passed into the hands of an oligarchy. During King Béla IV's reign, in 1260 the homogeneous Croatian territory was divided by him into two areas: (1) Croatia-Dalmatia, and (2) Slavonia. The eastern part of Slavonia [east of Virovitica (*Verőce*) and all of Sirmium (*Srem*)] he incorporated into Hungary proper, something that had been previously attempted by Béla III (1172-1196).

Both Croatia and Hungary lost their Árpád Dynasty rulers, when King Andrew III died in 1301 without leaving a male descendant. Six years of dissension and feuds followed. Eventually, the House of Angevins (1301-1409) was recognized by both countries, though not without considerable internal dissension in the case of Hungary, as the rightful rulers of both Hungary and Croatia. Thus Charles Robert became the king (1301-1342) of both countries. He proved to be a talented and powerful monarch. During the reign of his son, Louis the Great, (1342-1382) the Kingdom of Hungary, from 1370, comprised, in addition to Croatia also Poland as a component part of the Hungarian Crown. This multi-national kingdom stretched from the lower Vistula on the Baltic

Sea to Kotor (*Cattaro*) on the Adriatic. Five difficult years ensued after the death of this powerful monarch. In quick succession, his elder daughter Maria (1382-85), then Charles of Durazzo of the Court of Naples (1385-86), then Maria again occupied the throne of Hungary and Croatia. Finally, the Hungarian Estates elected Sigismund of Luxemburg, Emperor of Germany (Holy Roman Empire), as King of Hungary and Croatia.

Sigismund was increasingly alarmed by the conquests up the Balkan Peninsula of the Ottoman Turks under their Sultan Bayazid. The Turks, already besieging Constantinople, the inner sanctum of Byzantium, defeated the Serbs at Kossovo in 1389 and made their first incursion into Hungarian territory in 1391. Sigismund attempted to curb the Turkish advance towards Europe by launching a campaign with an army of 40,000 men, but suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of Bayazid's superior army at Nicopolis on 25th September, 1396. This victory by the Turks, however, led only to the consolidation of Ottoman power in the Balkans for the next 500 years. King Matthias Corvinus (1458-1490), the powerful Renaissance monarch of Hungary, with his standing (mercenary) army, successfully kept the Turks at bay with victories at Sabac in 1476, at Vrbas (or Verbász) in the Backa area in 1479, and at Kenyérmező on the banks of the Maros River in County Hunyad in 1479.

Unfortunately, the talent and power of this great ruler could not be matched after his death. Two weak kings came to the throne of Hungary and Croatia: Ulászló (1490-1516) and Louis II (1516-1526). Although Croatia's army remained intact, the disastrous *Battle of Mohács* on 29th August, 1526 saw the decisive defeat of the Hungarian forces and opened the road for the Ottoman Turks to advance through Croatia and Hungary into the heart of Europe. Louis II fell in the battle, whereupon both countries split into two factions: one wanting Ferdinand of Habsburg as their king, the other János Zápolya of Transylvania. Their dissension only helped the Turks.

In 1527 the succession issue was settled between the Croatians and the Habsburgs by a union similar to the *Pacta Conventa* of 1102 between Croatia and Hungary. This union of Croatia with the Habsburgs lasted until the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918.

The Hungarian Estates, meanwhile, had continued their split into two camps, resulting in Hungary's being partitioned into three regions for the next 150 years: (1) Habsburg Hungary, a narrow western strip of land, (2) the large central area under Turkish occupation and (3) Transylvanian Hungary in the east.

For 150 years the Hungarians and the Croatians fought a rear-guard struggle, holding up the expansion of the Ottoman Empire along a line of fortified castles running roughly SW-NE through Zagreb, along Lake Balaton, through Buda (the present *Budapest*) and Kosice (*Kassa*), mostly even beyond. During these dark times of their history, Croatians and Hungarians lived in close comradeship, their friendly relationship being well demonstrated by widespread intermarriages, even amongst the aristocracy.

Both countries were liberated from the Ottoman Turkish occupation early in the 18th century, with the concluding of the Peace of Karlovac (*Károlyváros*, *Karlowitz*) in 1699 and the Peace of Pozharevac (Passarowitz) in 1718, when the Turks finally evacuated even the *Vilayet of Temesvár* (the *Bánát*), the last of their possessions in the Kingdom of Hungary. Until 1778, however, this area was kept separate by the Austrian emperors as „Military Frontier” zones and were mainly colonized by Serbians during the 18th century but also by various other ethnic groups in small numbers.

II. History of Serbia

The Serbians, who form the axial nation (republic) in Yugoslavia, arrived in the Balkans somewhat south of the Sava-Danube line from their ancestral Slavic home in Galicia, the eastern part of present-day Poland some time during the 7th century. They are first mentioned as *Serbian*s in 822. Soon afterwards, they converted to Christianity. Their state was founded and developed by other nations ruling over them from time to time. Mostly they recognized the suzerainty of the Byzantine emperor at Constantinople. The Serbian state was first formed in the area of present-day South East Bosnia and North East Hercegovina, from where it spread eastwards during the middle ages. By the middle of the 12th century, while the centre of their state was already the Raska River, they still had not reached the Sava-Danube line in their migrations towards the north. Their settlements were in the valleys of the Lim, Ibar, Upper Drina and Morava Rivers. In the 13th century, it was Hungarian rule which extended to the lower courses of the Bosna, Drina, Kolubara and Morava Rivers.

Stephan Nemanja, as Zhupan, founded a dynasty (the Nemanja Dynasty), which ruled over Serbia for two centuries. His son and successor, St. Sava assumed the title of King of Serbia in 1217. For a whole century the Serbian Kingdom was suppressed by the spectacular rise and expansion of the Bulgarian Empire, begun under Ivan II (Ivan Asen). In the next century, under Stephen Dushan (Dusan) (1308-1355) as king (1331-46) and then tsar (1346-55), Serbia reached its greatest extent, having the Sava-Danube line as its northern border and including in its territory Albania and parts of Greece and Bulgaria. However, this conglomeration of different lands of diverse historic and cultural background lacked unity and after his death it disintegrated.

In fact, Serbia collapsed under the sheer force of the Ottoman Empire's expansion into the Balkans. The Serbs were defeated at the Marica River in 1371 and then again in the battle of Kossovo Field in 1389. As a result, Serbia became a province of the Ottoman Empire for 500 years. Nándorfehérvár, (*Belgrad*) then still held by Hungary, did not fall to the Turks until as late as 1521 when the Serbian nobility was annihilated while the peasants were reduced to little more than a community of slaves.



The Kingdom of Hungary and Croatia in 1478 during the rule of King Matthias Corvinus.

[After McEvedy, 1961. Penguin Atlas of Medieval History]

In several waves over the next centuries, many Serbs fled to Hungary and Croatia across the Danube and Sava Rivers.

1. During the reign of the great Renaissance King of Hungary, Matthias Corvinus, in 1481, 50,000 Serbs settled in the Hungarian counties of *Szerém* (Syrmia), *Verőce* (Virovitica) and *Pozsega* (Pozega). One of these early settlers on Hungarian territory was the famous outlaw Ivan Czerni, featured in a Serbian memorandum of 1471. During the 16th century, as a result of Serbian immigration, the above three Hungarian counties became increasingly Slavized. Despite this trend, the 1910 census (some four centuries later) still shows 6.2% as Hungarians in County Pozsega, 14.1% in County Verőce, and 6.9% in County Szerém.

2. In a Diploma of 1694 the Habsburg, Emperor Leopold II, as King of Hungary, allowed some 37,000 families of Serbian immigrants to settle temporarily, as guests, until the Ottoman Turks would be driven out from the ancestral land of the Serbs. After a lapse of time, when that could not be achieved because the Ottoman Turks were still occupying Serbia, they were settled permanently, not in one block as they wanted it, but dispersed in such Hungarian counties as Bács-Bodrog, Csongrád, Csanád and Arad.

3. During the 18th century, when the Kingdom of Hungary was free from the Ottoman Empire, and especially after 1718, large numbers of Serbs settled in the *Bánát* region to escape from Turkish rule. Between 1718 and 1738 the Serbs were able to enjoy a respite from the Turkish rule, only to be subjugated again.

4. In 1791, Emperor Joseph II, as part of his centralizing and Germanizing policy, established the southern district of *Voivodina*, where there was already a substantial Serbian population and an increasing number of German settlers, as a military border area. This territory had been an integral part of the Kingdom of Hungary since about 900 A.D. Clearly, Emperor Joseph's intention in this act of high-handed absolutism was to stifle the developing nationalist aspirations of the Hungarians. It is on this quite unconstitutional act that the Serbs today base their territorial claims. The Serbs in the southern parts of Hungary were immigrants, not conquerors or re-conquerors. During their time of darkness under the Ottoman Turkish rule, 400,000 Serbs settled in southern Hungary (*Voivodina* and *Croatia*). Almost the entire Serbian population shifted from the original Serbian territory in the Balkans, leaving it practically deserted, and moved into these lands north of the Sava-Danube line.

From 1804 to 1813 Serbia was in revolt, with the result that many of her leaders were beheaded by the Turks. In 1829, after Russia forced the Sultan to grant autonomy to Serbia in the Treaty of Adrianople Serbia was a virtually free nation. Her autonomy was complete after the peaceful evacuation of the last Turkish troops in 1867. Serbia, somewhat prematurely, declared war on the Ottoman Turks in 1867, but the Serbian forces were routed by the Turks, who constituted a stronger force than anticipated. Russia then rushed to Serbia's defence, which resulted in the Russo-Turkish Wars of 1877. Finally, the *Congress of Berlin* (1878) declared Serbia fully independent but, much to her chagrin, curbed her appetite for aggrandizement by entrusting the administration of Bosnia and Hercegovina to Austria-Hungary, which fully annexed these two provinces in 1908, thus increasing the tension with Serbia in the period prior to World War I.

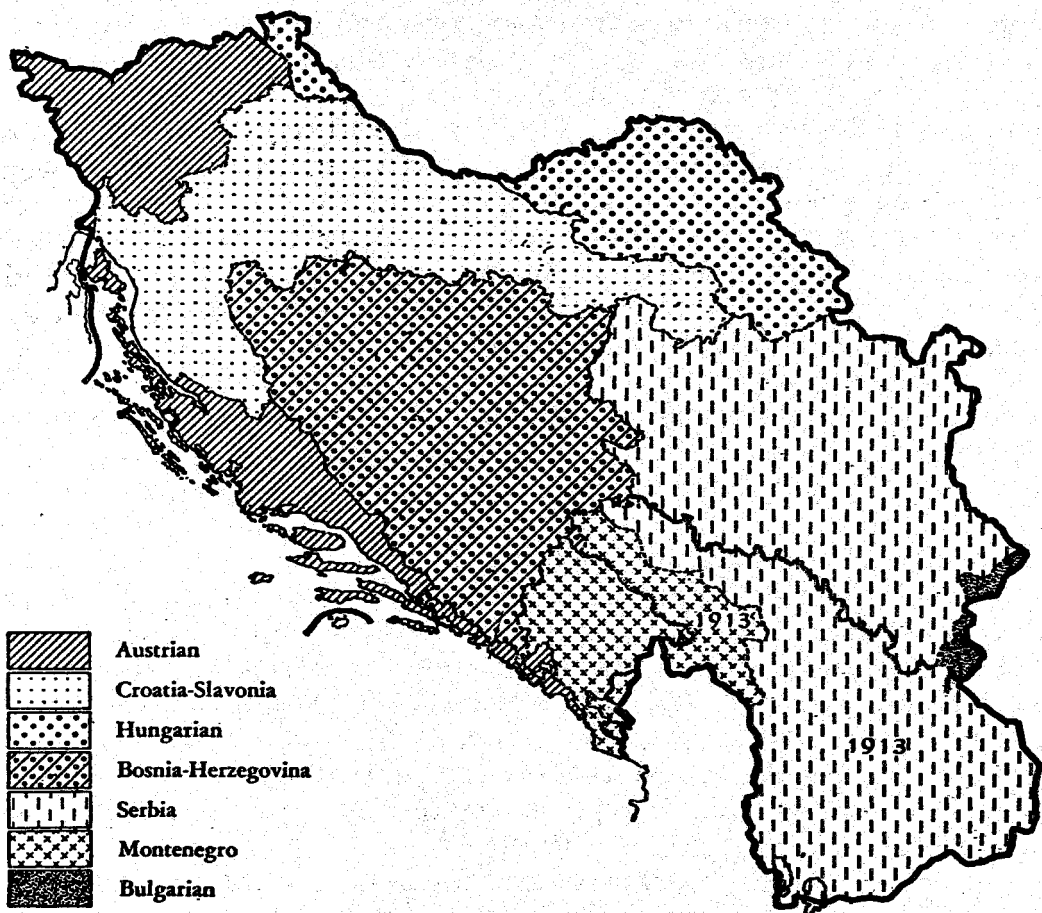
In 1882 Milan proclaimed himself king. From then on, Serbia assumed the role of champion of *Pan-Slavism* in the Balkans. It was her policy in this matter which led to bitter rivalry with Bulgaria and Austria-Hungary. Peter I, who acceded the throne in 1903, appointed as prime minister Nikola Pashitch

(*Pasic*), leader of the strongly nationalistic and pro-Russian Radical Party. Pashitch's fanatic but cunningly diplomatic policy dominated the Serbian scene for 20 years. By the beginning of World War I, Serbia had become the leading Slavic power in the Balkans and was largely the force behind the establishment of a South-Slavic kingdom, which became the newly created Yugoslavia after World War I. Unfortunately, Yugoslavia, made up of the „republics“ of Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Hercegovina, Macedonia and Montenegro, in actual fact, proved to be an artificially created federation of quite disparate nations and ethnic groups, of incompatible historical and cultural backgrounds.

The close linguistic relationship between Croats and Serbs has almost always mattered to them much less than their religious, historical and cultural differences. They are closely akin in demographic origin and even settled in the Balkans side by side. But, ever since, their ways have diverged with Croatia looking to the west, Serbia to the east. Little wonder, then, that Croatia always gravitated to non-Slavic Hungary rather than towards Slavic-speaking Serbia. Serbs are *Greek-Orthodox* by religion, write with a Cyrillic script and are racially *Mediterranean* in physical characteristics. The Croats and Slovenians, on the other hand, are *Roman Catholic*, write with a Latin script and are racially *Dinaric* and *Alpidic*. Even within the framework of Yugoslavia, between the two World Wars, the Croatian and Serbian nationalistic antagonism was referred to as the *Serbo-Croat imbroglio*. Even then, there were surprisingly few sincere believers in the Yugoslav ideal of a homogeneous south-Slavic nation state. The genuine patriots were either Slovenian, Croatian or Serbian all along. Croats, for example, were Croats first and foremost. King Alaxander of Yugoslavia made a serious attempt to defuse this fanatic nationalism but he finished up being murdered himself.

The nationalistic, irredentist fervour to unite and form the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes under the Karageorgevic Dynasty which swept the southern Slavs late last century and in the earlier decades of the 20th century must have been a surface phenomenon. The kingdom did not survive for even two decades. It first broke up into its component parts during World War II, while under German occupation. During those war years even Syrmia belonged to the newly established, independent Croatia. After the war, with Yugoslavia re-established under President Tito's hard-line communist rule, the fire of southern Slavic irredentism was strongly suppressed. Nevertheless, it must have been present in the form of glowing embers, like a dormant volcano, ready to erupt at any time, precisely as it has been doing incessantly in the current war between Croats and Serbs within the former Yugoslavia. What is more, during the fighting, the fanatic Serbian military leadership decided to flagrantly *alter the ethnic composition* of the contested areas inside historic Croatia, where there are Croatian and Hungarian populations, by forcibly dislodging these ethnic groups, leaving nothing but Serbian populations there. The sheer brutality and unspeakable atrocities being perpetrated by the Serbs in the areas at present momentarily occupied by them in historic Croatian territory can only be compared with the brutal massacre of 40,000 innocent, unarmed Hungarian civilians carried out by the Serbians in the Backa (*Bácska*) area in late 1944, towards the end of World War II.

In the prophetic words which the late Professor C. A. Macartney penned in 1937, „*The 'Yugoslav problem' will not be solved for many a year to come, but there can be no doubt that it will be solved in the end*“ We would but add: it is high time it were solved, in the interests not only of the combatants and other innocently suffering ethnic populations but of the whole of Europe.



The Yugoslav State—Status of Its Territories Before 1918