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CONGRESSES OF THE SLAVIC GEOGRAPHERS AND ETHNOGRAPHERS—CHRONOLOGICAL RETROSPECTION

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Abstract: The end of the First World War brought changes in international relations and new socio-economic and social challenges. A specific segment was the organization of scientific work. Geographical science and the related disciplines were also looking for their place. A significant qualitative change to the research was brought by the gatherings of the Slavic geographers and ethnographers. At the initiative of Jovan Cvijić, the First Congress was organized in Prague in 1924. In the interwar period, three more congresses were held—in Poland (1927), in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1930), and in the Kingdom of Bulgaria (1936). The aim of this paper is an overview of the subjects and outcomes of those events in the social circumstances of that time. The work of the Congresses was divided into several thematic areas, with the dominance of physical geographic, cartographic, and ethnographic research. The importance of the congresses is proven by the fact that the governance structures wholeheartedly supported them. Even though they had a strong impact, the Congresses of the Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers did not provide answers to numerous questions that "troubled" the post-war societies in the second half of the 1920s and 1930s. The results undoubtedly pointed to the symbolic representation of anthropogeographic, demographic, geo(political), and socio-economic subjects. The data on the demographic losses in the Great War were omitted. There were no projections of future trends in the Slavic countries, especially in the context of the new conflict and its consequences.

Keywords: Slavs; geographers and ethnographers; congresses; 20th century; interwar period

1. Introduction

Knowledge of the historical processes represents a starting point for understanding the same processes in the future. Among the numerous historical events, the First World War or the Great War (1914–1918) was the milestone in the creation of the new political map of Europe. The result of this conflict, besides the enormous human casualties and material destruction, was the disappearance of the four empires: Russian, Austrian-Hungarian, German, and Ottoman. At the same time, new countries were created: Poland, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (SCS), Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Hungary (Kitchen, 2006).

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It should be noted that the Kingdom of SCS was the most complex creation of the newly established countries because it consisted of ethnic groups with sharp polarity (different political aims, socio-cultural differences, poor internal mobility, etc.). The opinion of Jovan Cvijić on this subject is very interesting. Namely, as Jiří Daneš (1927) recorded, he expanded his Serbian understanding (originally exclusive) to Yugoslav. With the disappearance of political borders of European countries, Cvijić was among the first influential Serbian people who advocated the future politics of the Yugoslav state.

Thus, in the new circumstances overshadowed by the huge sufferings of the Slavic peoples, the internal divisions, unsolved territorial, and other issues with the neighbors, the uniting element was the organized scientific connection of the Slavic peoples. In that respect, the Congress of the Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers had a great significance for all the Slavic peoples, especially for the Yugoslav geographical science, since Cvijić was one of the Congress initiators. Here it should be noted that he thought that all the Slavic peoples, “with their spirit and in the original way, can be expressed in the organization of the state, in the economic and social work, especially in science and art. Thus, their civilizations would not be copies of the existing types of European culture. Still, they could organically grow from the national spirit based on their most original and most prolific characteristics. Only by developing the independent and specific civilization can the general culture be impregnated by the results” (Cvijić, 1923, pp. 111–112). It is essential to point out that the creation of the Slavic civilization is not connected with the concept of political Pan-Slavism because the heterogeneity of political ideas would undermine the thesis of the unique civilization.

2. Social circumstances after the First World War and the work organization of the Slavic geographers and ethnographers

In the early 20s of the 20th century, there were several active conflicts on the European continent. Some of the most significant ones were the so-called Seven-day Polish–Czechoslovakian War (1919), the war for independence of the Baltic states (1918–1920), Russian Civil War (1917–1923), Polish–Soviet war (February 1919 – October 1921), the war between Hungary and Romania (March–August 1919), Silesian conflict between Poland and Germany (1921), and the battle for Ukrainian independence in the period 1918–1921 (Kasyanov & Ther, 2009). Also, numerous incidents were recorded on the territory of Albania, Kvarner (today’s Croatia), at the border of Yugoslavia and Albania, in the conflicts between Poland and Lithuania, Bulgaria and Greece, and Greece and Albania over Corfu. In the same period, totalitarian movements appeared, such as fascism in Italy, which became more powerful with Benito Mussolini’s coming to power in October 1922 (Kitchen, 2006). On the other side, this was the beginning of the period of socio-economic, technological, and cultural prosperity known as the “turbulent, gold, and crazy” 20s.

However, the development phase and post-war progress on the global level were interrupted by economic challenges. Firstly, the First World War left immeasurable financial problems (decrease in foreign-currency inflow and the income from goods export, fall of national income, increase of domestic and foreign debts, etc.). Also, there were severe consequences of the World Agrarian Crisis (1926), as the introduction of the Great Depression (1929), which was spreading very quickly. Since 1921, the conditions in the world trade have been stimulating the rise of capitalist economies (gold standard). However, contrary to the economic model until then, it was accompanied by a protectionist trade policy (rise of customs, quotas, and foreign-currency control) with the aim of reducing the consumption of imported goods

(Kovačević, 2015). Having started in the USA, this crisis, with its effects, soon spread to the European and Latin American countries, as well as to Japan, where it resulted in the economic crash, rise of prices, and inflation (Kitchen, 2006). This crisis most strongly affected agriculture and industry, as well as domestic and foreign trade, which consequently led to a tremendous rise in unemployment and the rapid fall of the population's life standard. This process primarily reflected on the peasantry and working class (the industrial proletariat), but it did not spare bank and factory owners or merchants and the middle class. Certain wealth was only achieved by market profiteers, including those involved in corruptive affairs (Dimitrijević, 1961; Đurović, 2018).

2.1. Congress in the Republic of Czechoslovakia (1924)

In the opus of numerous national and international scientific congresses, only the Slavs did not have their gatherings. As Pavle Vujević (1924) pointed out, there were two reasons for it: on the one hand, most of the Slavs were not politically free, and on the other hand, the governments of those countries did not want the Slavs to get together in one place, even for scientific purposes. Truthfully, such initiatives had existed before when Cvijić suggested the organization of the Slavic Geographical Congress at the Congress of the Czech Naturalists and Geographers in 1914. However, foreign rule in certain Slavic countries (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Poland, Czechia, and Slovakia), the outbreak of the First World War, and the events that followed it, prevented the realization of this venture (Vasović, 2001). The circumstances totally changed after 1918, when the striving rose for a closer contact of pan-Slavic geographers.

Cvijić presented the idea of the organization of a joint congress at one of the meetings with the scientific representatives from Czechoslovakia during his medical treatment in Karlovy Vary (Vujević, 1924). Namely, as Daneš (1927) stated, a more intense collaboration started in 1902, when Cvijić was invited to be a professor at the Faculty of Philosophy at the Department of Geography. He did not accept the invitation due to multiple projects in the Serbian Academy of Sciences and the work on the cartographic collection in the Geographical Institute of the University of Belgrade. However, he always had friendly relations with Czech scientists and was always willing to advise and provide them with opportunities to participate in his scientific travels. Consequently, as a result of Cvijić's scientific collaboration with his colleagues from Czechoslovakia, as well as of the official support of their Government, Prague was proposed as the venue of the first Congress of the Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers, where all the questions of studying the Earth and peoples would be discussed (Válka, 2020).

In the invitation for The First Congress of the Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers, held from the 4th to 8th June, 1924 in Prague, it was stated that the main aim was the overview of the achievements in the Slavic geography and ethnography, as well as its position and further activities in that field. Through international collaboration, this organization could participate in discussions about all the questions on the international level. With that aim, the participants of the Congress decided to establish the Permanent Committee for the collaboration of the Slavic geographers and ethnographers.

The work of the first Congress started with the festive opening on 4th June in the National Museum, with the participation of 400 delegates and representatives of the Czechoslovakian government. A large number of scientists was registered, but some of them could not travel for objective reasons (mainly those from the Soviet Russia). Thus, besides the domestic participants, there were participants from Poland (55 delegates), the Kingdom of SCS (22 delegates), Bulgaria (13 delegates), Russia (two delegates), as well as scientists who emigrated from this country

(Vujević, 1924). It was organized under the patronage of Tomáš Masaryk, the president of the Republic of Czechoslovakia (Radičević, 2021). At the festive opening, the minister of education, I. Markovič, pointed out the opportunity of a free discussion, emphasizing the importance of geography and ethnography as the basic disciplines for the communication between nations. As the honorary president, Cvijić emphasized the mutual interests of the Slavic peoples besides the existence of certain misapprehensions. Also, he expressed a wish that the Congress should become a permanent organization. On behalf of the Polish Geographical Society, Prof. Eugeniusz Romer reminded the participants of the role of the Slavs in the development of science, especially taking into account their slavery. Thus, it is their duty to use science (geography) as the most powerful weapon to defend their homelands and countries. Similar attitudes were expressed by the Bulgarian and Russian representatives, as well as by the hosts, who stressed the importance of the birth of the Slavic unification despite the cultural differences, with the aim to conquer the scientific truth (Šalomon & Švambara, 1926).

There were 240 registered lectures. The lack of time due to the significant number of registered speeches caused certain sections to be divided into branches (Vujević, 1924). Seven sections were singled out: I—with the geodetic–geophysical and hydrographic–meteorological–climatological branches; II—with the geological and geomorphological branches; III—phytogeography; IV—anthropogeography and economic geography; V—with the anthropological and ethnographic–sociological branches; VI—regional geography and statistics; and VII—school geography. Besides the scientific work at numerous sessions, about 20 resolutions were made. Among the most important ones were the following: 1) printing of the addresses of all the Slavic scientific institutions, professional associations, geographers, and ethnographers; 2) establishment of the Slavic geographical-ethnographical review for printing the entire scientific papers in these disciplines; 3) creation of a comparative glossary of geographical-ethnographical terminology, as well as the creation of the basis for the standard nomenclature and signs on geographic maps; 4) the foundation of the Slavic ethnographic museum in Prague (“Šafárik”), which would unify the scientific literature and the phonogram archive; 5) the exchange of university teachers of geography and ethnography, geographic maps, and publications, as well as the organization of inter-university excursions around the Slavic countries; 6) the proposal for the foundation of Oceanographic institutes (the countries which had access to the sea); and 7) connection of the statistic institutions for scientific purposes; and 8) foundation of ethnological offices in national museums (Vujević, 1924).

The Congress was organized on a high level, with the great engagement of the hosts, even though there were political disputes between Poland and Czechoslovakia, as well as between the Yugoslav delegation and Bulgaria over the “Macedonian question”. Besides the external factors, there were numerous internal obstacles (participants’ accommodation, excursion organization, etc.) which were successfully overcome. At the same time, all the delegates were honored by the festive dinner in Hradčany at the president of the Republic of Czechoslovakia. The qualitative contribution of the Congress was the organization of numerous excursions and professional travels for scientific research and getting to know Czechoslovakia. Especially significant ones were the geological excursion to the Bohemian Forest and Šumava (Jovanović, 1924) and the visits to various places on the way from Prague down the Vltava, which had an anthropogeographic character (B. Milojević, 1924). Although the Czechoslovakians were in charge of the organization (creation of the Statute), in the end, it was agreed that all the delegations should have an equal number of members and that the Congress should be held every third year in another Slavic country.

2.2. Congress in Poland (1927)

Three years later, in Poland, from the 2nd to 12th June, 1927, The Second Congress of the Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers was held. The preparation for such an event required different logistic skills. Over 50 associates were engaged, and Prof. Ludomir Sawicki was exempt from lecturing in the second semester of the academic year 1926/1927 because of the obligations in organizing the event (Bukowska-Marczak, 2022). The work was performed on several locations and in several phases: Katowice (2nd June), Poznań (3rd June), excursion to the Polish littoral (4th June), Warsaw (5–6th June), Vilnius/Vilna (7th June), Lviv (9th June), excursion to Boryslav, the Tatra Mountains, and Zakopane, the valley of the Bistra, Kuznice (10–11th June), and Krakow—the closing of the Congress on 12th June (Sawicki, 1929). According to the words of the organizers, a concept like this one had the aim to introduce foreign participants with the research of the Polish geography (Bukowska-Marczak, 2022). As Prof. Václav Švambera from Prague pointed out, that novelty, including various locations of the lectures (sections), provided a qualitative contribution to this event in comparison with the previous one (Vujević, 1933).

At this Congress there were around 200 delegates from all the Slavic countries, the Poles being the most numerous (approximately 100 participants). From the Kingdom of SCS, there were 12 delegates. At the very beginning, in the welcome speech, the chairman of the organization committee, Prof. Romer, “paid tribute to the late Cvijić, the creator of the idea of the Congress of the Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers” (S. Milojević, 1927, p. 269). Of the 278 reports in total, the dominating ones were those of the participants from Poland (193), Czechoslovakia (59), Yugoslavia (8), USSR (7), and Bulgaria (3). Besides the participants from the Slavic countries, there were also those from other countries who showed their interest and joined the activities, the most prominent ones being Emmanuel de Martonne and Pierre Defontaine (France), John Bartholomew (United Kingdom), Giuseppe Caraci and Riccardo Riccardi (Italy), and Clarence Augustus Manning (USA; Sawicki, 1929, 1930). In Warsaw, Vilna (Vilnius), Lviv, and Krakow, about 300 lectures were held within eight scientific sections: I—cartography, geophysics, geodesy, meteorology, climatology, and hydrography; II—geomorphology and geology; III—phytogeography; IV—zoogeography; V—anthropogeography and economic geography; VI—anthropology, demography, ethnology, and sociology; VII—regional geography; and VIII—historical geography, the history of geography, and the school geography. In the plenary part, five papers were presented (Sawicki, 1929): Nature parks in the Polish-Czechoslovakian border area (Walery Goetel, Krakow); The curve of the agricultural work as the means for studying the way of life (Pierre Defontaine, Lille); Towns in Yugoslavia – criteria for their determination (Lazar M. Kostić, Belgrade); The idea and the work of sightseeing (Aleksander Janowski, Warsaw); as well as Common characteristics in the Slavic countries (Viktor Dvorsky, Prague) and On the need for the creation of the unique Slavic geographical terminology (Václav Dedina, Prague), which are actual even today.

As a result of the work of sections, numerous conclusions (resolutions) were accepted, the most important of which are the following: 1) the foundation of the office for the collaboration in all the Slavic countries; 2) establishment of the adequate position of the Slavic languages in the field of scientific bibliography; 3) formation of the body for geological research of the following territories: a) Czechoslovakia–Poland–Russia and b) Yugoslavia–Bulgaria; 4) providing material help for the needs of the national meteorological institutes; 5) starting a zoogeographical journal; 6) inclusion of geographers into the research studies in the Carpathians; 6) organizing ethnographical work (archives, museums,

creation of prose and popular poems collection); 7) exchange of geographical literature dedicated to the Slavic countries (glossaries, textbooks, methodological papers); 8) formation of geography departments at all the Slavic universities; 9) establishment of didactical sections in the national geographical societies; and 10) connecting the youth (students) and organizing joint travels (excursions) to the Slavic countries (Sawicki, 1929).

The specificity of the Congress lied in the fact that all the participants were accommodated in sleeping cars (wagon-lits) during the entire stay. Except for the working activities, part of their free time was dedicated to professional excursions with the aim of presenting scientific results and getting to know Poland. Thus, the participants learned about the geological structure, mining, economy, and population of the areas of Katowice and Poznan, the museum exhibitions in Warsaw and Lviv, as well as about the oil fields in Boryslav, glaciations of the Tatra Mountains, and the region of Zakopane (S. Milojević, 1927).

In their final words, the representatives of numerous delegations expressed their opinions about the extraordinary organization of the Congress. Some of them were Jiří Horák from Czechoslovakia, Yuly Mikhailovich Shokalsky from the USSR, Georges Blondel from France, John Bartholomew from the UK, Giuseppe Caraci from Italy, as well as Stevan P. Bošković from Yugoslavia. According to Bošković, this Congress was the true manifestation of fraternal solidarity and cooperation, pointing to the high level of geographical and ethnographical science among the Slavs. "Although every beginning is hard, this event is the proof that the Slavic peoples do not belong to some inferior race, as our enemies would like to present. On the contrary, that is a young, vital race, capable of advancing with gigantic steps in the fields of science and culture. In that name, I cry: "Long live Slavic brothers and farewell until we meet again!" (Sawicki, 1929, p. 61). The event was finished by the adoption of the resolution on the organization of the Congress in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1930.

3. Social circumstances in the 30s of the 20th century and the work organization of the Slavic geographers and ethnographers

After the death of the founder of Serbian geography, the management of the Geographical Society started the preparations in 1928 for the next Congress by inviting all the geographical and ethnographical institutions throughout the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (B. Milojević, 1928). Based on those above, in 1929, the preparation board was formed. For the participants, a book entitled *The Kingdom of Yugoslavia: Geographical and Ethnographical Review* was prepared (Vujević, 1930a), which presented the country-organizer. Two more books were also written with the descriptions of the journeys (excursions) during the Congress: *Description of the Journey of the 3rd Congress of Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia: 1930. Belgrade–Sarajevo* (Vujević, 1930b) and *Description of the Journey of the 3rd Congress of Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia: 1930. Sarajevo–Zagreb* (Vujević, 1930c), as well as the following publications: *Yugoslav Folk Costumes* (Drobnjaković, 1930), *Split and its Surroundings* (Rubić, 1930), *Adriatic Studies: Published on the Occasion of the 3rd Congress of Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers* (Gušić & Tkalčić, 1930), *Ethnographical Museum in Zagreb 1919–1929* (Tkalčić, 1929), and the issues of the *Geografski vestnik* 1929–1930 (Melik, 1930) and *Ethnologist* (Županić, 1930/1931). Also, the Collections of photographs (cartographic material) from the edition *Atlases of the Geographical Society, dedicated to the Dinaric Karst: On the Occasion of the 3rd Congress of Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers* (Cvijić, 1929), the

Dinaric Coast (B. Milojević, 1930b), the *Relief of South Serbia* (Jovanović, 1930), and *Rural Settlements in South Serbia* (Radovanović, 1930) were published as well.

The idea of Yugoslav unity dominantly led the leading intellectual and political circles in the interwar period. However, the relations in the multi-ethnic Yugoslavia were complicated by the harsh political and ideological divisions, and the differences between the two leading nations—Serbs and Croats. Namely, nationalism was becoming stronger in relation to the “Croatian question”, as the acute political and state issue, especially after the assassination in the Assembly in 1928 and the Sixth-of-January dictatorship (1929) of King Aleksandar I. It was articulated in the political circles in Zagreb through the work of Stjepan Radić’s Croatian (Republican) Peasants’ Party. Also, similar aspirations existed in the work of VMRO in Vardar Macedonia, among the Albanian nationalists on Kosovo and Metohija, and the Montenegrin Federalists led by Sekula Drljević. Such circumstances worsened after the assassination of King Aleksandar I in Marseilles (France) in 1934 through the collaboration of the Ustaša movement and the VMRO organization (Gaćinović, 2017). Except for the political disputes, the organization of the upcoming Congress was additionally hindered by economic problems caused by the effects of the Great War, and then by the crisis on the global level. In the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the problems were aggravated by the tradition of import-substitutive industrialization and unrealized agrarian reform (Đurović, 2018).

3.1. Congress in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1930)

Despite the mentioned turbulent political-economic and social circumstances, in the period between the 4th and 17th May 1930, under the patronage of King Aleksandar I, The Third Congress of the Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers was held in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Besides the participants from Yugoslavia, there were representatives from Poland, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, and Belgium. The Congress was festively opened in the presence of the King’s representatives, Colonel Sarić, Božidar Maksimović, the Minister of Education, Slobodan Jovanović, the president of the Serbian Royal Academy, delegates and other guests, as well as the president of the Preparation Committee, General Stevan Bošković, the head of the Military Geographical Institute. He made the welcome speech and proposed Prof. Romer from the University in Lviv (Poland) as the chairman of the Congress. When accepting the position, he especially emphasized the significance of Cvijić. He said that “without his value, authority, scientific and organizational abilities, this meeting, as well as the previous one, would not be easily held” (Vujević, 1933, p. 368). Also, he pointed to the importance of the fraternal relations of the Slavic peoples, with the Polish particular interest of good relations between Poland and Yugoslavia (Vujević, 1933).

It should be noted that the Yugoslav Minister of Education, in his welcome speech, stressed that geography and ethnography were among the “most important objects of scientific research” (Vujević, 1933, p. 368). Since the hard and unjust circumstances under which most of the Slavic peoples lived have almost been eliminated, especially after the World War, there is a natural tendency for getting closer, because they not only shared the same, evil destiny, but they are also related by blood, language, and feelings. After the hard casualties they have suffered, conditions have been made that ethnical circumstances should be taken as the base for the creation of their states (Vujević, 1933). Similar attitudes were also expressed by the academician Vladimir K. Petković, and PhD Čedomilj Mitrović, the Rector of the University of Belgrade, who pointed to the importance of these scientific disciplines.

Besides the establishment of more vital interconnections, the aim was to reach the scientific truth through joint work, knowledge exchange, and personal observation (Vujević, 1933).

In regards to the program of the Congress, as at the previous one in Poland, besides the plenary session, the work was divided into eight thematic sections. After the festive opening, in the plenary part, the following lectures were held (Vujević, 1933): Foundation of the Slavic committee for the improvement of the Slavic regional geography (Václav Dedina, Prague); On the organization of the anthropogeographical section (Aleksandar Stebut, Belgrade); Belgrade and the genesis of Yugoslavia from the macroplastic of its nature (Jože Rus, Ljubljana); The future of the congresses of the Slavic geographers and ethnographers (Václav Švampera, Prague); Actual state of the work on the anthropological map of Europe (Jan Czekanowski, Lviv); Euro-Asian concept of the Russian geography (Peter Nikolaevich Sawicki, Prague); Ethnographical method for the application in social culture (Adam Fischer, Lviv); An example of population changes in Czechia in 1850–1921 (Jos Pohl, Prague); Morphology of ethnographical borders in relation to their genesis (Jerzy Smoleński, Krakow); Anthropogeographical bases in the development of Zagreb (Branimir Gušić, Zagreb), and Problems of anthropogeographical research of South Serbia (Vojislav S. Radovanović, Skopje). Special attention was made to the lecture of Prof. Švampera about the future of this kind of congresses and the attitude that they should be continued at any price and that nobody was authorized to avoid the next Congress in one of the countries. "If the national congresses can survive in other European nations (Germans and Italians), the members of at least three of the Slavic countries with the population of 60 million inhabitants have to be able to organize them" (Vujević, 1933, p. 10).

Around 300 participants attended this event. Except for Yugoslav hosts, most were from Czechoslovakia and Poland. The representatives from the Soviet Union were not present. Namely, the Russians and the Ukrainians were represented by the eminent people from their emigration (Tkalčić, 1930). The representative of former Imperial Russia was the immigrant Evgeniy Vasilyevich Spektorsky, a former professor at the University of Kyiv. As a delegate of the Russian scientists in emigration, Prof. Spektorsky greeted the Congress on behalf of the Russian scientific institution and academic organization in Yugoslavia (author's note: White Russians). He emphasized the significance of Cvijić's role, who he described as a "living example of a wide synthesis of geographical and ethnographical knowledge, who proved, not only in words, that he was a Slav and that nothing Slavic was foreign to him" (Vujević, 1933, p. 371). Spektorsky expressed his regret about the absence of the representatives of scholars from his homeland, who were persecuted for their free speech, but who were still trying to support the "glorious tradition of the Russian science with the hope that everything would pass and that only the truth would remain" (Vujević, 1933, p. 371). Accordingly, he believed that in free Moscow, this greeting would be heard again: "We are sending our love, dear brothers, from all our heart. We are sending our love to all of you, without exception" (Vujević, 1933, p. 371).

There were no representatives from Bulgaria either due to the disturbed Serbian–Bulgarian relations since the 70s of the 19th century about the territory of the Old (South) Serbia. The main challenge was the so-called "Macedonian question", not only in terms of territory, but also as the minority issue in the Serbian part of Macedonia (Ristić, 2017). It was proclaimed after the Eastern Crisis (1875–1878) and the Berlin Congress (1878) where Serbia got its independence, and Bulgaria got its autonomy. Bearing in mind that all the Balkan countries (Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece) had their visions of the borders and the origin of the population, great powers also got involved in diplomatic activities, primarily Austria–Hungary, Russia, and Turkey. In the same

period, political movements were getting more assertive on the territories of Macedonia and Bulgaria (Supreme Macedonian Movement) with the aim of causing unrest and fights for the liberation from Turkey and merging with Bulgaria. The strengthening of Komita troops and VMRO resulted in the greater involvement of Serbia in that issue (Ristić, 2017).

The work of the sections was much more fruitful during the excursions than at the sessions. A journey was organized through the Iron Gates, and then along the valley of the Timok River, via Niš to Skopje and Kosovo. It was continued via Užice, Sarajevo, and Mostar toward the littoral (from Kotor to Split), and finished with the activities in Ljubljana and Zagreb (B. Milojević, 1930a; Vujević, 1930b, 1930c). It is worth mentioning that the route was planned based on the Congress held in Poland in 1927.

As a result of the work, at the closing session, the chairman, Prof. Romer proposed the adoption of several resolutions. Among them, the most significant were the following (Vujević, 1933): 1) the need for the participation in international research of the polar regions for 1932 and 1933; 2) formation of geobotanical committees for the research and mapping of vegetation for scientific, economic (agricultural), and forestry needs; 3) foundation of zoophenological stations on the territories of the Slavic countries and the creation of the program of phonological research; 4) appointment of the Committee for the research of Ohrid Lake and the creation of the programs of zoogeographical and limnological studies; 5) publication of monographs dedicated to the research of shepherds' life in the Carpathians and the Balkan Peninsula; 6) publishing of geographical glossaries; 7) passing the Law on the Protection of Ethnographical Antiquities; 8) implementation of the anthropological surveys and foundation/completion of the university departments of ethnology and anthropology; 9) formation of Committees for the creation of ethnographical atlases; 10) establishment of national parks in the border part of Poland and Czechoslovakia, in the mountainous part of Triglav, as well as in the region of Plitvice Lakes, and on the banks of the Danube; 11) formation of the sections dedicated to the research of the Carpathian regions; 12) creation of historical maps of certain Slavic countries; 13) publishing of original and hard-accessing old maps of the Slavic countries and shores; 14) creation of the oldest descriptions of the Slavic countries all until the end of the 16th century; 15) foundation of the section of agrarian geography for the next Congress bearing in mind the dominant agricultural activity in the Slavic countries; 16) preparation of the material for the general Slavic encyclopedic journal and the publication of multilingual edition of national guidebooks; and 17) exchange of university professors of geology, geography, ethnology, and anthropology as the additional value of understanding Slavic countries and peoples.

In the end, Prof. Romer proposed that the date of the next Congress should be agreed in collaboration with the National Geographical Committee of the Slavic countries. In case there was no such body, the Academy of Sciences or Geographical Associations would delegate their representative. Also, in his opinion, the Congress could be held in four or five years in order to avoid the monotony and fatigue in research.

3.2. Congress in the Kingdom of Bulgaria (1936)

Political circumstances and relations between the great powers (Great Britain, France, Germany, and Italy) were becoming more and more unfavorable. The League of Nations failed to solve the increasing conflicts. Inside the countries, the unemployment of broad layers of the population caused social unrests and strengthened social democracy and communism, as well as the right-wing and fascist movement (Đurović, 2018). At the very beginning of 1931,

the German government, led by political goals, started the economic offensive in Eastern Europe. With the coming of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialism to power (1933), the trade was in the service of strengthening the war machinery. The economic crash and huge military reparations of Germany toward France were favorable for all types of extremism. The influence of anti-Semitic parties was rising as a consequence of economic factors, social inequalities, election systems, and institutional heritage (de Bromhead et al., 2013). Totalitarianism united with the wish for territorial expansion, destroyed democratic principles and international systems established after the Great War (Klapsis, 2014).

In the circumstances of the disturbed bilateral relations and the tensions on the international scene, under the patronage of Tsar Boris III, the last interwar Congress, The Fourth Congress of the Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers was held between the 16th and 29th August, 1936 in Sofia (the Kingdom of Bulgaria). The honorary president was Anastas Ishirkov; the sections were presided by Mihailo Arnaudov, with Ivan Batakliiev as the secretary-general. From the Yugoslav side, Artur Gavazzi from Zagreb was chosen for the honorary presidency. That was a sign of great honor to the youngest Bulgarian geographical association, founded on 9th November 1918 by Prof. Ishirkov and Prof. Batakliiev (Nikolova et al., 2020). Regarding the organization, in accordance with the previous practice, the entire work of the Congress was structured in the same way. After the hosts' welcome speeches, the speeches were made by Prof. Václav Švambera, the president of the Czechoslovakian National Committee for Geography, Artur Gavazzi, the Academy of Sciences in Zagreb, Vladislav Semkovič, the Polish Academy of Sciences, Vadim Sherbakivsky, the Ukrainian Scientific Society from Lviv, Stanislav Pavlovsky, National Committee of the Polish Geographers, and Borivoje Milojevič, Geographical Societies of Yugoslavia. All of them pointed to the importance of the continuous organization of the Congress and the readiness of Bulgaria to follow the good practices established in Prague, which continued in Poland and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Batakliiev, 1938).

At the Congress, there were 412 registered participants from 10 countries, five Slavic (the USSR, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Kingdom of Bulgaria) and five non-Slavic. In the number of participants (a total of 325), the majority were Bulgarians (125), Poles and Ukrainians (84), Czechs and Slovaks (53), Yugoslavs (51), and others—10 (Frenchmen, Germans, Finns, and Romanians). After the festive opening of the event and the plenary at the University in Sofia (16th August), on the 17th, 18th, and 20th August, the work in sections was organized (eight sections). There were 161 registered reports, and 130 were presented (94 geographical and 36 ethnographical; Roglić, 1936). With the difference from the Congress in Belgrade, there were no Bulgarian scientists. The reunion in Sofia was held in the presence of the highest-ranking group of Yugoslav geographers and ethnographers. In his speech, Prof. Milojevič emphasized that for Yugoslavs, this Congress had a special importance because the "improvement of the geographical science in Bulgaria simultaneously meant the improvement of the geographical science in Yugoslavia" (Batakliiev, 1938, p. 27). This opinion was shared by Prof. Vujevič who said that the Congress met the expectations and provided inspiration for the joint work on the improvement of knowledge about the countries and peoples of the Balkan Peninsula (Batakliiev, 1938). Such a state was most certainly related to the relaxation of the relations between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria after the meeting of Aleksandar I of Yugoslavia and Boris III of Bulgaria in 1933 (Belgrade) and 1934 (Sofia). Additionally, the good relations were temporarily established by the signing of the Agreement of Eternal Friendship between the two countries in Belgrade in January 1937 (Petrovič, 2013).

With the plenary session and the adoption of several resolutions, the official work of the Congress was finished on 21st August. Among the most essential resolutions were the following (Batakliiev, 1938): 1) request to the Hydrographic Institute in Split to carry out the depth measuring of the southern part of the Adriatic; 2) formation of Goebotanical Union of the Carpathians and the Balkans bearing in mind the connection of flora of these two regions; 3) transfer of management authorities over the Committee for the research of the shepherds' life from Polish to Bulgarian department; 4) introduction of the Slavic ethnology as part of high-school education programs in all the Slavic countries; 5) formation of the departments of ethnology at all the Slavic universities; 6) foundation of the Union of Slavic Museums under the patronage of the Slavic institute in Prague; 7) creation of the detailed index (list) of publications that are related to the folklore of all the Slavic peoples; 8) proposition for starting the section for the methodology of ethnography and ethnology for the next Congress; 9) establishment of the Committee with the aim to define the correct transcription and pronunciation of the Slavic geographical and ethnographical names in schools and other public institutions; 10) strengthening of geography as a subject in elementary and secondary (high) schools; and 11) exchange of scientists, professors, students, as well as books in all the Slavic languages. Of the individual requests, a suggestion was also adopted to found the Balkan Geological Union and the Association of the Yugoslav Geographical Societies. A decision was also made about the next Congress to be held in the USSR, i.e., in Moscow or Kyiv. In case the officials refused the proposition, the meeting would be held in Czechoslovakia (Batakliiev, 1938; Roglič, 1936).

In the unofficial part, apart from the six one-day excursions on the 19th August (four geographical and two ethnographical), from the 22nd August, numerous multi-day excursions were organized. The aim was to get to know Bulgaria (southern, southeastern, central, and northern parts, i.e., Rila, the Rhodope Mountains, the Maritsa Plain, Sub-Balkan mountains, Varna, Burgas, Strandzha, etc.). A unique impression was the one from the journey of geologists along the Yugoslav–Bulgarian border. Based on those above, besides its scientific significance, this meeting was a manifestation of the Slavic fraternity, which was also acknowledged by the participants' positive impressions (Roglić, 1936). As the result of the established institutional cooperation, at the end of August and during September of the same year, a group of 18 Polish students from the University of Vilnius stayed in Yugoslavia. Additionally, a group of 25 Belgian geographers visited karst (the fields of Sinj, Popovo, and Cetinje, and their surroundings), littoral regions (the regions around Split and Dubrovnik, and the Bay of Kotor), as well as Mostar and Sarajevo (B. Milojević, 1936).

4. The state of geographical science after the Second World War

The end of the Second World War in May 1945, besides the enormous casualties, both human and economic, caused numerous changes on the geopolitical map of the European continent. The winning powers (the USA, the USSR, Great Britain, and France) established their zones of influence according to the new political relations. Many monarchies were abolished, and in the countries-participants of the Congresses of the Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers, a new, socialist (communist) system was established. A complete change in the previous patterns appeared, both in the political and legal systems and in the socio-economic relations. In the newly-created circumstances, it was a real challenge to organize a scientific meeting in the previous format. Among other things, a different organization of the work of national geographical societies was created, which adjusted to the system and the state apparatus.

In 1947, from the Bulletin of the Serbian Geographical Society, we find out that the management of the Society contacted the All-union Geographical Society in Leningrad on 14th October, 1945, regarding the organization of The Fifth Congress of the Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers. Geographical Societies in Warsaw, Prague, Ljubljana, Zagreb, and Sofia had previously been informed in connection with the same question and they had been asked for support and similar actions. All the societies, with the exception of the Bulgarian one, sent similar inquiries. In that regard, based on the Act of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of Serbia (No. 4381/1946, cited in B. Milojević, 1947, p. 152), the Geographical Institute of the University was informed that the Geographical Institute at the Academy of Sciences of the USSR would take all the measures for the next Congress to be held on the territory of the Soviet Union (B. Milojević, 1947). However, this Congress was never realized.

Undoubtedly, the reasons for that were the bad Soviet–Yugoslav relations at the end of 1947, when there was a notion that the Yugoslav policy was ideologically turning toward the West and rejecting the ideas of Marxism. It was contributed by the idea of creating the so-called Balkan Federation of the Communist Parties of Yugoslavia (CPY) and Bulgaria, as well as by the connections of Yugoslavia and Albania, and the potential creation of Eastern European Federation (Bulgaria, Romania, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Greece; Petranović, 1988). The crisis reached its climax with passing the Resolution of Cominform on 28th June 1948. As a response to the accusations from the Resolution, at the Fifth Congress of CPY (21–28 July), a full support was given to the actual policy and the governance with Josip Broz Tito at its head. The commitment to Marxism–Leninism was stressed, without criticism of the Soviet Union, but with solving the issues with dissenters within the Party. Also, the international and internal policy did not suffer significant changes even though the pressures from the USSR and other communist countries (Petranović, 1988).

In those years, the members from the USSR and other “people’s” democracies under the influence of the Soviet Union did not take part, even at the International Geographical Congresses in Lisbon, Portugal (1949) and Washington, DC, USA (1952). For the first time, the participants from the USSR were present at the 28th International Geographical Congress held from 9th to 18th August 1956 in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). That was contributed by the Cold War block division between East and West by forming the North Atlantic Treaty Organization—NATO Alliance (1949) and Warsaw Pact (1955). On the other hand, although the change in the Party leadership in the USSR caused significant changes in the relations, guardianship attitude toward other socialist countries (primarily toward Yugoslavia), the revival of organizing Congresses of the Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers in the new format was never again a part of the agenda.

5. Discussion and conclusion

In the period after the Great War, some tectonic changes happened in Europe. Many countries suffered dramatic demographic as well as economic losses, accompanied by social segregation. The form of the governing system changed in numerous European countries—some of them regained independence, while others entered the process of creating unique, more complex forms (the Kingdom of SCS). It was necessary to set priorities in the future period. One of the priorities was to revive scientific work and realize the activities that would contribute to the development of post-war societies. Besides the national work, the cooperation started on spreading the “pan-Slavic” idea. It was necessary to provide the answers to numerous questions regarding the existing and future development.

The gathering of the Slavic geographers and ethnographers was a unique meeting of such a format in the interwar period. By reviewing the material, it is evident that those events had significant support from the governments. Four congresses were held in total (Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria). They presented a different way of work organization in new circumstances. This type of event comprised various thematic aspects. The dominating ones were physical-geographical researches (geomorphological, climatological, hydrological, and biogeographical), cartographical, ethnographical (and anthropological), historical-geographical, as well as the studies of settlements (geography of settlements). However, some of them were utterly neglected, such as research in political geography, economic geography, demography, and anthropogeography, which Cvijić and his students had carried out for a long time.

In the analysis of the documents from the Congresses (presented reports and adopted resolutions), the absence of specific topics is apparent. Among those numerous topics were the analyses of the losses in the First World War, the role of certain countries, national issues, specificities, etc. Namely, besides the direct military and civilian casualties, this epoch-making conflict also left long-lasting consequences visible in many fields. According to some assessments (Héran, 2014), during this conflict, over 74 million men were mobilized (48 million by ally forces and 26 million by the Central forces). The total number of civilian and military casualties of the ally forces exceeded 40 million. Of that number, around 10 million civilians and 9.7 million soldiers lost their lives. In absolute numbers, the greatest losses were recorded in the Russian Empire (3.3 million), France (1.7 million), the Kingdom of Italy (1.2 million), the United Kingdom (994,000), the Kingdom of Serbia (725,000), and the Kingdom of Romania (680,000). However, the largest percentage of the killed in relation to the total population was recorded in the Kingdom of Serbia (16.1%) and in the Kingdom of Romania (9.1%; Nadège, 2011; Willcox, 1923). The data from Princeton University point to the worse demographic picture, according to which Serbia and Montenegro lost 31.3% and Romania 9.3% of the pre-war population (Radivojević & Penev, 2014). There are assessments that Serbia faced the end of the war with 1.2 million fewer inhabitants than it had in the middle of 1914 (4.5 million), and the cumulative losses reached 1.9 million people (Radivojević & Penev, 2014). It is essential to emphasize that the largest percentage of the killed and missing soldiers on both sides (> 20%) was in Serbia (37%), Ottoman Empire (26%), Romania (25%), and Bulgaria (22%; Héran, 2014). However, a severe problem for a comprehensive analysis is the inconsistent data about the war losses (Grčić, 2007; Radivojević & Penev, 2014).

At the same time, the problem of the impact of war on the migration movements was also neglected. Forced migrations during the war conflict got a new dimension in the period of peace. Namely, they significantly affected the size and composition of the population of certain territories. The borders were often redefined, which resulted in numerous demographic and other socio-economic conflicts. Finally, the impact of the natural change (lack of births) and migration components has long-lasting consequences that could not be perceived beforehand.

On the other hand, the held Congresses did not provide an overview of the actual socio-political moment and the upcoming danger of the Second World War. Although certain contours and problems were visible, they were not the focus of research of the Slavic geographers and ethnographers. The consequences of the absence of proactive perceptions and activities in that field became visible in the following winds of war. Namely, according to some assessments, 70–85 million people (about 3% of the world population of that time) died during the Second World War (O'Neill, 2022). That was especially contributed by horrific crimes made in death camps, the killing of entire ethnic communities, as well as deportation and forced labor. However, the picture is

darker if we take into account the casualties in certain countries. Data show that the Slavic region suffered enormous losses. In absolute numbers, the Soviet Union had the most tremendous losses (18–27 million or 10% of the population; Ellman & Maksudov, 1994). Expressed in percentage, the most notable ones are Poland (about 20% or 5.8 million inhabitants) and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (about 11% or 1.1–1.7 million inhabitants; Savezni zavod za statistiku, 1966; Hughes & Royde-Smith, 2023). A special problem was the incomplete analysis of the nationalities of the victims, especially in the territories of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. That challenge has not been overcome adequately even today.

The presented retrospection of the Congresses of the Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers represents a qualitative contribution in the analysis of the preoccupations and thoughts of scientific workers at that time. A new shadow was cast on the image of the research in those days, which opened some further questions. During the turbulent 20th century, the sufferings in the Great War, and the creation of a totally different system, the gathering of such a size was undoubtedly necessary. The particular value lies in the fact that it was the first, unique gathering of scientific representatives of the Slavic peoples. However, from today's perspective, did the Congress fulfill its goals? Although the synergy was achieved for many natural and socio-humanistic disciplines, the focus of the Congresses was not directed toward the problems of societies that had just come out of the war. The difficulties of determined borders, national issues and the issues of international relations, demographic challenges, and many others were not included in the agenda of the mentioned Congresses. We believe that, according to the presented above, these gatherings did not provide solutions for numerous dilemmas. A lot of questions remained open, which the geographers (including Cvijić) had been dealing with until 1914. It leaves the impression that they did not fully understand or predict the upcoming events.

There remains a question why the Congresses of the Slavic Geographers and Ethnographers as the gathering places of wise people, did not provide answers to the mentioned questions. There is no doubt that they had a prominent scientific character led by the idea of a unique Slavic scientific brotherhood after the ages of terror, slavery, and the influence of foreign factors. Even though the basis was scientific collaboration, the support of the official government shows that the events were also burdened by ideology and politics to a certain point. The unity of the Slavic world was also shaken many times by bad bilateral relations between certain countries, such as Poland and Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. At the same time, the opinions until then were softened and revised thanks to the victory in the Great War. Such a state should be observed in the context of the Versailles concept of Europe in which anti-Germanism and anti-Bolshevism dominated. In our opinion, with the omission of the debate, the Congress lost its role of analyzing and anticipating the events in various fields and defining further policies of the country members. Nevertheless, taking into account all the shortcomings, the Congresses did fulfill one of the main goals by getting closer the Slavic scientists and the realization of joint research and projects.

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