

New Book –

Serbia in the Great War 1914 – 1918

A review by Milos Rastovic

"In commemorating the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, humanity will, hopefully, 'kneel down' to millions of victims of the largest war in world history until that time. It is another matter whether, in what way and at which point in time they will reflect upon the historical context in which these sacrifices were made! Historians focused on the subject matters of the 20th century will definitely have to do that." – Dr. Mira Radojevic and Dr. Ljubodrag Dimic

With these words, authors Dr. Mira Radojevic and Dr. Ljubodrag Dimic preface their book Serbia in the Great War 1914 – 1918: A Short History. Drs. Radojevic and Dimic are professors of History at University of Belgrade while Dr. Dimic is also an Associate Member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU).

The results of World War I impacted the political, economic, and military structure of the 20th century as well as today's world. The authors re-examined the historical causes of the Great War and Serbia's role in the events of 1914 – 1918 by following the methods of historical science. In order to explain the causes of political and economic circumstances in Europe with arguments and facts, the authors used both Serbian and European historiography about this subject. An attractive language style, clearly written and readable for either experts or the general public, the book engrosses readers into the deep turmoil, national hardship, and tragic events of World War I.

The book leads readers chronologically through the causes of World War I, military goals, influences of the Great Powers, political and economic circumstances before and during the war, sacrifices of Serbian troops and the whole nation, and the battles and victims of war.

The first chapter of the book outlines circumstances in Serbia and Europe from the Berlin Congress in 1878 to the beginning of World War I in 1914. This chapter draws a picture of a rising Serbian Kingdom building its institutions in every field: politics, economy, military, culture, and education. It also illustrates the political and geostrategic position of Serbia in the Balkans between Austro-Hungary and Germany, including their imperial ambition in the Balkans.

At the end of 19th century, Serbia had a political and economic relationship with Austro-Hungary. However, at the beginning of 20th century, the relationship was broken because of Austro-Hungary's ambition to be a major European power in the Balkans. In 1908, the political situation in the Balkans worsened after Austro-Hungary annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina. Dr. Radojevic and Dr. Dimic mark out how Austro-Hungary and Germany prepared the war in order to expand their influence on the East. In other words, according to authors, the assassination of Prince Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914 was only a "pretext for the war; however, its origins were much more complex."

In the second chapter, the authors recount the beginning of World War I followed by the Sarajevo assassination in June 1914, the July crisis, the Serbian and European battles and victories in the first year of war, coalitions with allies, and Serbia's State Program. According to the authors, no one knew at the moment Young Bosnia member Gavrilo Princip shot Prince Archduke Franz Ferdinand that it would change the European geostrategic structure. Nothing suggested that the Serbian Government knew or was involved in the Sarajevo assassination. The subsequent court trial showed that an "entire national liberation movement stood behind the assassination." The authors describe Serbian unpreparedness for the war and the making of coalitions with allies in

order to defend the country. In this chapter, you can also read Archibald Reiss' October 2 – 4, 1914 note proving how Austro-Hungarian troops completely destroyed the University of Belgrade, Serbian National Museum, the main state hospital, and private properties.

The book goes on to illustrate the course of the war during 1915 and 1916 as Serbian troops and civilians retreated through Albania to the island of Corfu, Greece where many died and a lucky few recovered. These chapters also described military operations, ordinary life in occupied Serbia, the Salonika Front, and State-Legal continuity of Serbia. It contains a complete analysis and statistical information about the war and explains how most important decisions were made by statesmen, politicians, or generals. For this comprehensive investigation, the authors relied on historical facts and arguments.

In its conclusion, the book examines the process of Yugoslav unification. In 1918, Nikola Pasic, Prime Minister of the Serbian Government, sent a Memorandum to the United States Government in which he asked the U.S. consent for the state unification program (Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes) as conceived by Serbia. On May 28, 1918, the U.S. Government issued the Declaration expressing "true sympathies" for the unification of Yugoslavs. At the Paris Peace Conference, Serbian sacrifices in the war were internationally recognized by the Special Allied Commission "that the responsibility for the war lies entirely with the Central Powers which declared war in line with their policy of aggression, and it's covering up gives the causes of this war the character of a sinister conspiracy against peace in Europe. This responsibility primarily lies with Germany and Austria, and then also with Turkey and Bulgaria. The responsibility is even more serious because of the violation of the neutrality of Belgium and Luxemburg by Germany and Austria, which guaranteed that neutrality. With regard to France and Serbia, their responsibility is even greater because their borders had been violated even before the declaration of war."

The authors conclude that despite the fact that Serbia was unprepared for war, Serbia was "ready to make the greatest leap." As a result, Serbia heroically defended its independence which was instrumental in an Allied victory and secured its place in European and World history. The book designates an importance to preserve this historical heritage for future generations:

"Will the sounds of drums and trumpets, so characteristic of the start of war, disturb those who rest in peace or awaken the understanding of new generations?"

Note: This book is published in Serbian, English, German, and Russian by Srpska knjizevna zadruga and Belgrade Forum for the World of Equals in 2014; 320 pages, hard bound. For more information about the book, you can find at <http://www.beoforum.rs/en/> or Amazon.com.



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