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## **The role of Big Five Winners in the settling of state borders in Prekmurje after the First World War**

*In Slovenia there are many scientific and popular literature written on the settling of the northern boundary Carinthia and western boundaries Primorske, after World War I. About regulation of national borders in eastern boundaries Prekmurje was not written much. This is probably due to the fact that the Yugoslavian and Slovenian delegation at the peace conference in Paris was more committed to Carinthia and Primorsko, while the Prekmurje and Styria belonged to Slovenia and then the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, thanks to some excellent diplomatic negotiator and strong military interventions that have supported the diplomatic efforts. When connecting the Prekmurje to the Motherland contributed a positive or at least neutral stance of the then superpowers and the winners of the Great War the United States, Britain, France, Japan and Italy. The majority of winning powers also sent their diplomats to the border area between Slovenia and Hungary and Slovenia and Austria, so that they are also oversee the settling of the borders.*

### **1. Introduction**

Several different disciplines took part in the settling of the borders after the First World War, especially when we look at the composition of all the commissions that participated in the Paris Peace Conference. In my article I will focus on diplomatic efforts, although I will have to deal with the other mentioned professions due to the interlacing of political, military, geographical and ethnographic elements into diplomatic efforts.

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februar 12, 2019

The Paris Peace Conference officially began on January 18, 1919, when delegates from thirty countries gathered. On July 9, 1919 Paris Peace conference decided that Prekmurje belongs to Slovenia (at that time the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes).

There were 110 members of the Yugoslav delegation, of which some 20 Slovenians. In addition to diplomatic negotiators, they also had auxiliary staff, such as secretaries and even office servants. The seven most important delegates were able to decide on all matters at the meetings. The four had the status of authorized delegates, and consequently they were authorized to sign contracts on behalf of the state. These were Nikola Pašić, President of the Serbian Government, Head of Delegation, Dr. Ante Trumbić, a Croat who led the Yugoslav club in London, Milenko Vesnić, Serb, who was the first foreign minister in the Union, and dr. Ivan Žogler, a Slovene who was the only Slovene to reach the post of minister in the Austrian Empire of the Monarchy.

Three government delegates were former Serbian deputy in London Mato Bošković, a former Slovenian deputy in the Vienna Parliament, dr. Otokar Rybar and head of the Dalmatian People's Party dr. Josip Smodlaka.

## **2.1 The role of Slovenian diplomatic representatives important in diplomatic negotiations**

First we will present the role of individual Slovenians who seems to be important in diplomatic negotiations on south eastern borders of Slovenia. At home in Slovenia, the work was monitored by dr. Anton Korošec and dr. Jožef Krek and Jožef Godina and Ivan Jerič , all four Catholic priests. In the Ethnographic Commission at the Paris Peace Conference, Prof. dr. Mitja Slavič, as an expert on Prekmurje and prof. dr. Franc Kovačič, an expert on Styria, both professors of Theology.

Prof. dr. Matija Slavič wrote two booklets for the presentation of Prekmurje, with two additions and an ethnographic map in which he described the colors of ethnic composition of Prekmurje up to 5 percent. The titles of these publications that he wrote in French are: *La Prekmurje* and *De la Statistique de Prekmurje*. Slovene, Croatian and Serbian experts and



februar 12, 2019

delegates who, according to Slavic, said that they thoroughly and with great eagerness championed Prekmurje (Slavič: 47) were given thorough and comprehensive explanations to the French, English, American, Italian and Japanese experts. According to the principle of the then multilateral diplomacy, these were lectures with various experts and delegates of the great powers, prom-memoir's and letters.

Prof. dr. Franc Kovačič was an expert on Styria. He studied in Zagreb and Rome and became a professor of philosophy and theology. He was a longtime president of the Historical Society of Maribor. The Ethnographic section of the Yugoslav delegation in Paris published his paper *La Styria: the Question of Prekmurje, de la Styria and de la Carinthia*. Only when the representatives of the "big" were given reliable and professional information material on the problems of the borders in Prekmurje and Styria, prepared by dr. Slavič and dr. Kovačič, in the language of the Paris Peace Conference, showed more understanding for Slovenian interests (Vrbnjak: 329).

## **2.2. The role of diplomats of individual countries and diplomatic representatives**

### **2.2.1 The role of the United States of America**

The passage over the Mura river was extremely difficult for the great powers. The first step was made by the United States (House: 7). At the beginning of May 1919, he was amassed enough by American Major Douglas W. Johnson, who was a civilian university professor at Columbia University in New York, that on the basis of Prekmurje statistics and ethnographic chart he created a state border beyond Mura (Jerič: 88). He plotted it as a border between the rivers Mura and Raba. In part, he took into account the ethnic composition of the population, but he did not plan to set up a Slovenian border in Porabje or the corridor between Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia (Keršič-Svetel: 239).

For the Prekmurje borders, Serbian scientist Mihajlo Pupin, who was then a university professor at the same Columbia University as Johnson (Slavič: 215), also tried hard.



februar 12, 2019

In Prekmurje, the boundary determined by Johnson was determined, so in 1935 Dr. Slavič wrote: "... that he has the most merit to come with the state border across the Mura. That's why this American professor deserves to be given a decent monument in our Slovenian land." (Slavič: 217).

### 2.2.2 The role of the United Kingdom

Great Britain was not particularly interested in regulating the border in Prekmurje. A handbook on Slovenia (Petrič: 67-256) was found and published in the documents prepared by the UK Foreign Ministry in 193 pages, where only the issue of the Primorska region and Carinthia and central Slovenia was drawn up. Prekmurje is only indicated on the map of the new Kingdom of Serbs of Croats and Slovenes, Slovenia (Petrič: 257). Gorazd Bajc, who wrote a comprehensive study of the functioning of the United Kingdom in the emergence of the Yugoslav state, notes from British sources that "on June 28, Žogler handed over to the Foreign Office a memorandum of some representatives of Slovenes in Prekmurje (Jožef Klekla, Josip Godina and Ivan Jerič with whom they expressed the desire to have the following places connected to Yugoslavia ... "(Bajec: 129) It was a village in Porablje, inhabited by the Slovene-speaking population. The memorandum emphasized that the inhabitants did not join the Hungarian Bolsheviks.

It is also interesting to find a document from the UK Foreign Ministry that says "... that the British side reserved for a proposal to exclude Yugoslavia a priori from the discussion on Klagenfurt and Prekmurje, which the American side preferred to give Hungary". (Bajec: 143). Slavič also confirms this thesis. "At the time, Hungarian politicians and diplomats were still a strong awareness of their superiority. They had good connections and acquaintances with English politicians and diplomats. That is precisely why the head of the Hungarian delegation at the peace conference, Count Albert Apponyi, who had good relations with England. "(Jerič: 53).

The President of the Prekmurje Delimitation Commission was British Major Cree. Prior to this work he was in a demarcation commission in Poland. The commission went to the border on September 19, 1921. Jerič concludes that "...Cree has compiled a report on the union of



februar 12, 2019

nations in which he proposed that 27 municipalities should be separated from Yugoslavia and be reintegrated to Hungary ... Finally, the Association of Nations thanks to the French Diplomats rejected the Cree report ... "(Jerič: 93).

### **2.2.3 The role of France**

The role of France was important. The Territorial Commission chaired Tardieu, for whom dr. Slavič claims that he was inclined to join Prekmurje in the home country, as well as other French delegates, Count Bergouen, publicist A. Cheradaume, E. Denis, A. Chervin.

Also for Andre Tardieu dr. Slavič suggested that a monument in Maribor (Hozjan: 11) be set up for his favor in the negotiations. He later became Prime Minister of France for three times. The French representative with the delimitation commission was Lieutenant Colonel Marminia. As a French officer, he was on the Thessaloniki front and reached Banat. In this front he learned so much Serbian that he could also communicate with the locals in Prekmurje directly and without translator.

### **2.2.4 The role of Italy**

Italy has struggled in every way to expand its borders in Slovenian Istria and the Slovenian coast, and to the Adriatic and Herzegovina. The possible arrangement of the border in Prekmurje was also viewed through its interests on the Western border of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

The Italian representative in the delimitation commission was Colonel Valvasori, who had his only state-owned Italian state car and did not need to use either Yugoslav or Hungarian vehicles as other delegations.

### **2.2.5 The role of Japan**

It is least researched. Although it seemed to behave in a neutral manner, the Japanese delegation took into account the arguments it received. Its experts and diplomats actively participated in all phases of the negotiation process as well as the establishment of the border



februar 12, 2019

on the ground. Japan had the status of a superpower during and after the First World War. At the Paris Peace Conference, tensions and contradictions between Japan and the US were detected. Japan was primarily seeking to gain dominance in China, and consequently all of the former German colonies in Manchuria. It also increased its influence in Soviet Union (Russia) who was not represented at the conference. Other issues of bordering in Europe were less of interest. In the framework of the Paris conference, however, Japan participated in the commission for Poland, in order to be able to closely monitor the events in Bolshevik Russia.

The head of the Japanese delegation in Paris was a diplomat and one of the last oligarchs Prince Saionji Kimochi. He was already Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister. He knew Europe well, since he was studying at Sorbonne. He was accompanied by Count Makino Nobuaki, an experienced diplomat and also a former Minister of Foreign Affairs. He knew the affairs of the Balkans well, for serving before the First World War for seven years at the Embassy of Japan in Vienna, and prior to that three years in Rome. From the other Japanese delegation, Baron Sutemi Chindo was the ambassador of Japan in UK, who spoke excellent English and was unassailable in his views on China (Bartalanič: 165).

The Yugoslav delegation did not find a direct contact with Japan, which was in close contact with the Italians. However, according to some sources, the Czech delegate Beneš promised to give a good word to the Japanese for Prekmurje. The Czechoslovakians still wanted a Slavic belt that would connect Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, and in particular separated the direct contact between Austria and Hungary (Masaryk: 33).

In the field, Major Nagamochi worked in the Commission for the border between Austria and Yugoslavia. The Commission had its seat in Maribor and started its work in the second half of 1921. In the Commission for the Border to Hungary, the Japanese representative was Lieutenant Colonel Yanagawa. Slavič describes him as a polite man who honorably represented his strong state (Slavič: 256). His Japanese secretary copied all the discussions from English into Japanese and sent everything to his homeland. Most probably this copies are in the Japanese archive more precisely than in the Yugoslavian archives.



februar 12, 2019

The Commission for the Border between Yugoslavia and Hungary started its work in August 1921 and ended it in November 1921. Before that, the entire border was also mirrored in the field. From Lendava to Srebrenik, to the border between Slovenia, Hungary and Austria. It was not until July 8, 1924 that the demarcation was signed in Zagreb, where the Japanese delegate Yanagawa was already elevated to the colonel rank.

When the demarcation was complete, the Vatican finally decided to change also church borders and the bishop of Maribor, dr. Andrej Karlin was appointed as Apostolic Administrator for Prekmurje on December 1, 1923 (Jerič: 105).

### **3. Conclusions**

The connection of Prekmurje to the home country was one of the greatest successes of Slovenian diplomacy, which we can rightly compare only with the re-incorporation of Primorska into Yugoslavia after the Second World War. A more important event in the history of Slovenia was its independence. It is therefore right that we celebrate such a great event with special state holidays.

The installation of the monument to Mihailo Pupin in Bled for his merit of joining Bled to Slovenia after the First World War was further emphasized by the ceremonial discovery and the presence of both Presidents Pahor and Serbian President Nikolič (Rant, 2015). It is time that in Prekmurje, on the occasion of the forthcoming 100th anniversary of the events, we begin to set up memorials and organize meetings that would thoroughly scientifically study the events from the historical, diplomatic, military, ethnographic, geographic, economic, transport and other fields. A monument has been set up, only dr. Matija Slavič in Križevci in Prlekija.

Diplomats of the United States, the UK, France, Italy and Japan (Bartalanič: 168) keep quite a few official archives and private notes of diplomats and other experts who participated in the Paris Peace Conference and on the field marking the border in Prekmurje. Major Johnson also lectured much about his work at the peace conference in Paris (Johnson: 236). Considering the presence of all five World War I winners with their embassies in Slovenia and the good relations that we are having with these countries, it is right that we are involved in the



februar 12, 2019

discovery of this already overwhelming past on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the events and open archives of that time.

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februar 12, 2019

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