

Czech Historiography on Bosnia and Herzegovina (2000–2018)

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Abstract: This paper provides a synopsis and characterization of the most important historiographically, politologically, and ethnologically oriented works published in the Czech Republic between 2000 and 2018 on the history and current evolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Czech works on the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina can be divided into two main groups. The first group includes monographs by historians who were familiar with the reality of Bosnian multiethnicity in the period before the breakup of Yugoslavia and in that context, therefore, continue in their books to support the idea of preserving Bosnia within its existing borders and in the form of a multinational state. The second group comprises books by Czech authors who primarily focus on analysing political events in the contemporary, so-called post-Dayton Bosnia, of which they are highly critical and as a result also highly skeptical when it comes to the prospect of continued coexistence between the nations of Bosnia. During the period in question, several works were published in the Czech Republic dedicated to the history of Czech-Bosnian relations and the synthetical treatment of the history of the Czech national minority living in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Key words: History of Bosnia and Herzegovina, so-called post-Dayton Bosnia, Czech-Bosnian relations, Czechs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo assassination

A strong wave of interest among Czechs in events taking place in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including interest in learning more about the country's remarkably complicated history, arose in the Czech Republic as early as the beginning of the 1990s during the dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation and outbreak of a number of bloody conflicts in the post-Yugoslav territory. From 1992 to 1995, Czechs followed the war in Bosnia closely and sympathized with its inhabitants, which was evidenced in the significant material and medical aid they provided to the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina (of all nationalities) as well as the care they offered to the hundreds of Bosnian refugees who fled to the Czech Republic during the war. The Czech solidarity of the time with the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina bore a reflection

of the traditionally positive relationship of the Czechs with the South Slavic nations and, among other things, the fact that at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries Czechs had spent forty years living together with the inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina under one and the same Austro-Hungarian regime, and at the time several thousand Czechs of all manner of profession and social standing were moving to Bosnia and would go on to play a important role in the development of the local economy and culture. Albeit in far smaller numbers, some 500 individuals, their descendants live in Bosnia and Herzegovina to this day.

In the 1990s, Czech historians were, together with journalists and humanitarian workers, among the first in the Czech Republic to attempt to explain to the general public the political and historical roots of the unfolding Yugoslav crisis and at the same time tried to shed some light on the confessional and cultural differences between the individual South Slavic nations. It was during this time that there were also a great many articles, synoptic brochures, and books on the history and culture of Bosnia and Herzegovina published in the Czech Republic. I gave a talk on Czech works dealing with Bosnian history that were published in the course of the 1980s and 1990s at a conference called *The Historiography on Bosnia and Herzegovina: 1980–1998*, which was held in Sarajevo in the first part of November 1999.¹

It was, therefore, with great pleasure that I accepted an invitation to the conference entitled *The Historiography on Bosnia and Herzegovina (2001–2017)*, which took place in Sarajevo in June of 2019. It gave me a sense of satisfaction to announce that the wave of interest in the past and present of Bosnia and Herzegovina that had risen in the Czech Republic in the beginning of the 1990s has continued to large degree into the first part of the 21st century. In the Czech Republic, there is currently a group (albeit not a big one) of historians, political scientists, ethnologists, and cultural anthropologists who have chosen the history and culture of Bosnia and Herzegovina as their primary research topic, or at least one of their primary research topics. With this paper, I would like to give a brief overview of the scholarly output of these researchers, looking, above all, at their most important monographs published in the Czech Republic between 2000 and 2018.

Czech works examining the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina that came out during the period in question can be divided into two main groups. The first group includes monographs by historians who were familiar with

¹ Hladký, 2000: 275-280.

the reality of Bosnian multiethnicity in the prewar period and in that context, therefore, continue in their books to support the idea of preserving Bosnia and Herzegovina as historically territorial and constitutional individualities. It is in this category that I include my monograph entitled *Bosenská otázka v 19. a 20. století* [The Bosnian Question in the 19th and 20th Centuries], which was published in 2005 in Brno by the publishing house of Masaryk University.² The book presented a comprehensive picture of the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina from the Early Middle Ages to the beginning of the third millennium. Its main focal point were the characteristics of the relationships between the Bosnian Muslims (Bosniacs), Serbs, and Croats in the 19th and 20th centuries, their frequently dissimilar attitudes towards the question of territorial integrity, political independence, and from the end of the 20th century the national independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as the role of external (Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, Yugoslav, or even broader international – European) factors in Bosnian history. The conclusion of the work expresses the conviction that despite all of the political and economic problems facing contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are also still foreign policy and internal reasons (the closeness between the languages of the three constitutive nations, the tradition of coexistence) to preserve Bosnia as an independent, multinational, and territorially integral country. Only a multinational Bosnia and Herzegovina can fulfil the role of an important stabilizing and interconnecting entity in the Balkans. In this respect there can be no alternative – the breakup of Bosnia and Herzegovina would once again cast the entire region into chaos and conflict.

It was in a similar tone, i.e. one of respecting Bosnia and Herzegovina as an important historical and political-administrative entity in the Balkans, that a book by the young historian and Slavist Petr Stehlík entitled *Bosna v chorvatských národně-integračních ideologiích 19. století* [Bosnia in the Croatian National-Integration Ideologies of the 19th Century] was published roughly five years ago in Brno.³ On the basis of analysis of primary historical sources and opinion journalism of the time, the monograph evaluates the position and role of Bosnia within the most momentous Croatian national programmes of the 19th century (specifically in the approach taken by the Illyrian movement, in the ideology of South Slavism advocated by Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer, and in the political opinions of the leader of the Croatian Party of Rights Ante Starčević). The book was well received by scholars for its

² *Ibid.*, 2005.

³ Stehlík, 2013.

balanced and unbiased standpoint and was published in the Croatian language in Zagreb in 2015 by the publishing house Srednja Europa.⁴

The works of some members of the Bosniak diaspora in the Czech Republic, who seek to enlighten the Czech reader – and to some extent even themselves – about history and culture of their homeland, can be ranked alongside the Czech historiographical output based on primary analysis of historical sources. Specifically, we should mention a book by a young graduate of the arts faculty in Prague named Mihad Mujanović, who recently published a monograph entitled *Muslimové, a ne mohamedáni!: ke kořenům bosňáckého národního hnutí v letech 1878–1918* [Muslims And Not Mohammedans!: To the Roots of the Bosniak National Movement from 1878 to 1918].⁵ In the book, the author describes the modernization rebirth of the community of Bosnian Muslims, who under the Austro-Hungarian administration of Bosnia and Herzegovina underwent a transformation from the original confessional society to a society in which features of ethnic nationalism began to crystallize.

The second group of contemporary Czech books on Bosnia represents the work of scholars whose primary focus is analysis of the political development in the so-called post-Dayton years of Bosnia and Herzegovina. These authors typically belong to a younger generation of Czech historians and political scientists, and in their work, they make use of modern methodological and, often-times, multidisciplinary approaches. On the basis of analysis of the Bosnian domestic political events of the last quarter century, however, they tend to be highly skeptical when it comes to the possibility of further cohabitation between the nations within Bosnia and Herzegovina. This category includes, for example, a book by a young Prague historian and demographer, Ondřej Žíla, entitled *Jedna si jedina moja domovina?: etno-demografické proměny Bosny a Hercegoviny v letech 1945–2013* [Are you my One and Only Homeland?: ethnic-demographic transformations in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1945 to 2013].⁶ In the book, the author uses demographical methods to provide a highly detailed interpretation of the different population development of the three constitutive nations of Bosnia and Herzegovina – the Bosniaks, the Serbs, and the Croats – in the time of so-called Tito's Yugoslavia and also characterizes changes in their distribution within the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina resulting from the events of the war in the first half of the 1990s. The book also offers a detailed analysis of and commentary on the successes

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2015.

⁵ Mujanović, 2018.

⁶ Žíla 2014.

as well as failures of the international community, which following the war in Bosnia made efforts to return hundreds of thousands of Bosnian refugees to their original homes.

This same author also conducted a relatively expansive study on the political development of Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1990 and 2015, which was published in a monograph compiled by multiple authors led by Prague historian Jan Pelikán entitled *Státy západního Balkánu v uplynulém čtvrtstoletí a perspektivy jejich vývoje* [The Countries of the Western Balkans in the Past Quarter Century and Perspectives on their Development].⁷ Likewise in this book, Ondřej Žíla calls the current political division of state in Bosnia and Herzegovina very complicated and nearly nonfunctional.

In general, it may be said that the work of young Czech historians and political scientists is of factographic value and often applies innovative methods. However, in examining the recent war in Bosnia and assessing the current political situation in the country, young authors should strive not only for a “factographic balance” in the events being described but should be more emphatic in taking into account ethical principles in order to prevent their readers from drawing simplified conclusions, such as laying the blame for the outbreak of the recent Bosnian conflict firmly on the unstable development of the local peoples (specifically in consequence of the fear of the local Serbs and Croats of the disproportionate growth in the Muslim population) and that all the current problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina have arisen from bad policies of “western superpowers”.

During the period in question, there were also synoptic works published in the Czech Republic addressing the history of Czech-Bosnian relations. In Prague in 2010, a group of authors headed by Ladislav Hladký published a synthesis titled *Vztahy Čechů s národy a zeměmi jihovýchodní Evropy* [Czech Relations with the Nations and Countries of Southeastern Europe].⁸ Among other things, the publication contains a separate chapter on the history of Czech-Bosnian relations, in the full extent of their duration from the Middle Ages to the present day.⁹ A high-quality, richly illustrated book examining the important role played by Czech architect Karel Pařík in the radical architectural transformation of the Sarajevo city centre at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries was published in Prague in 2012 by a team of authors formed at the initiative of historian and archivist Jiří Kuděla, who from 2005

⁷ *Ibid.*, 2016: 73–135.

⁸ Hladký, 2010.

⁹ Hladký & Ljuca & Kuděla, 2010: 73–96.

to 2009 held the post of Czech ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The authors titled the book *Karel Pařík: architekt evropského Sarajeva* [Karel Pařík: Architect of European Sarajevo].¹⁰

In the Czech Republic, Adin Ljuca, a Bosniak writer, librarian, and translator who has worked and lived in Prague for several decades, publishes interesting studies and articles about the history of Czech-Bosnia relations at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries on such topics, for instance, as the Czech perspective on Bosnian Muslims between 1878 and 1918, the role played by Czechs in the emergence of organized tourism in Bosnia, and the laudatory references in the Austrian and Czech press about one of Bosnia's rarities – an easy-keeping yet very stout and hard-working breed of “Bosnian horse”.¹¹

The history of the Czech ethnic minorities living in Bosnia and Herzegovina were also examined in the timeframe discussed herein thanks to leading Czech ethnologist and cultural anthropologist Zdeněk Uherek, who conducted several years of field research among the local Czechs. He compiled the results of his research in a monograph entitled *Češi v Bosně a Hercegovině: antropologické pohledy na společenský život české menšiny v zahraničí* [Czechs in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Anthropological Perspectives on the Social Life of the Czech Minority Abroad].¹² The publication mapped the life of the Czech minority in Bosnia and Herzegovina, members of which have lived and continue to live to this day not only in large cities but also in several villages around Prijedor and Banja Luka throughout the past nearly 150 years. In the book, the author takes a close look at, among other things, the history of Czech civic associations in Bosnia and important figures of Czech descent, who in the past made considerable positive contributions to the economic, cultural, and educational edification of Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹³

In connection with the 100th anniversary of the Great War from 1914 to 1918, several books were published that aimed to shed light on the circumstances of the assassination in Sarajevo as well as on certain Czechs commonly associated with the incident. Here, we should mention, for example, a travelogue compiled by journalists Martin Ježek and Pavel Trojan, who, one hundred

¹⁰ Boněk & Kuděla & Dimitrijević, 2012. The first book about architect Karel Pařík was published in 2007 in Sarajevo thanks to the efforts of Jiří Kuděla. It was published by the Czech embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Kuděla, Dimitrijević, and Vacík, 2007.

¹¹ Ljuca, 2006a; 2006b; 2015.

¹² Uherek, 2011.

¹³ The monograph by Zdeněk Uherek was supplemented with findings published in recent years by Bosnian historians on the history of Bosnian Czechs and their contribution to the development of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Kurto, 2002; Krzyk, 2015; Stojković, 2016.

years later, journeyed through all of the places that to this day remind us of the event that would lead to the outbreak of World War I. They titled their book *Tak nám zabili Ferdinanda* [So They've Killed our Ferdinand], which is a line by the famous literary figure from the novel by Jaroslav Hašek – *The Good Soldier Švejk* – who utters these words in reaction to news of the unexpected event in Sarajevo.¹⁴ Very interesting facts related to the Sarajevo assassination in 1914 were collected by archivist Jiří Skoupý, who in Prague recently published a biographically oriented book, the main character of which is the Czech chauffeur Leopold Lojka, who on the fateful day in Sarajevo was driving the automobile of the successor to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Francis Ferdinand. The monograph is entitled *Šofér, který změnil dějiny: za volantem vstříc atentátu na arcivévodu Františka Ferdinanda d'Este* [The Chauffeur who Changed History: At the Wheel in the Assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand d'Este].¹⁵

My coworker at the Institute of History of the Czech Academy of Sciences František Šístek wrote a paper for this publication examining in greater detail the shifts in Czech views and interpretations of the Sarajevo assassination and its main participants (Archduke Francis Ferdinand, assassin Gavrilo Princip, and others).

Conclusion

This paper shows that the wave of interest in the history and present political development of Bosnia and Herzegovina that arose in the Czech Republic in the 1990s in relation to the military conflict in Bosnia continued in large part into the beginning of the 21st century. Between 2000 and 2018, the Czech Republic saw the publication not only of the comprehensive analysis of the most important historical stages of development in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the relationships between the Bosnian peoples (Ladislav Hladký, *Bosenská otázka v 19. a 20. století*. Brno 2005) but also the monograph rich in factographical material on the demographic and political development in Bosnia from the end of World War II to the present day (Ondřej Žíla, “*Jedna si jedina moja domovina?*”: *etno-demografické proměny Bosny a Hercegoviny v letech 1945–2013*. Praha 2014). During the period under examination herein, there was also a comprehensive work on the history of Czech-Bosnian relations (Ladislav Hladký et al., *Vztahy Čechů s národy a zeměmi jihovýchodní Evropy*. Praha 2010) as well as the history of the Czech minority living for nearly 150 years in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Zdeněk Uherek, *Češi v Bosně a Hercegovině: antropologické pohledy na společenský život české menšiny v zahraničí*. Praha 2011).

¹⁴ Ježek & Trojan, 2014.

¹⁵ Skoupý, 2017.

Češka historiografija o Bosni i Hercegovini (2000.–2018.)

Zaključak

Ovaj rad pokazuje da se val zanimanja za historiju i sadašnji politički razvoj Bosne i Hercegovine koji je nastao u Češkoj 1990-ih, u vezi sa vojnim sukobom u Bosni, velikim dijelom nastavio i početkom 21. vijeka. U periodu od 2000. do 2018. u Republici Češkoj objavljena je ne samo sveobuhvatna analiza najvažnijih historijskih faza razvoja u Bosni i Hercegovini i odnosa između bosanskih naroda (Ladislav Hladký, *Bosenská otázka v 19. a 20. století*, Brno 2005.), već i monografija bogata faktografskim materijalima o demografskom i političkom razvoju u Bosni i Hercegovini od kraja Drugog svjetskog rata do danas (Ondřej Žíla, “*Jedna si jedina moja domovina?*”: *etno-demografské proměny Bosny a Hercegoviny v letech 1945–2013*. Prag 2014.). U razdoblju koje se istražuje u ovom radu, postojao je i opsežan rad o historiji češko-bosanskih odnosa (Ladislav Hladký i dr., *Vztahy Čechů s národy a zeměmi jihovýchodní Evropy*. Prag 2010.), kao i gotovo 150 godina dugoj historiji života češke manjine na području Bosne i Hercegovine (Zdeněk Uherek, *Češi v Bosně a Hercegovině: antropologické pohledy na společenský život české menšiny v zahraničí*. Prag 2011.).

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