

Commentary. Serbian Geopolitical Thought Through its Epitome: Jovan Cvijić and his Geopolitical Ideas

Mihajlo Kopanja

Assistant Professor, Faculty of Security Studies, University of Belgrade, Serbia
e-mail: mihajlo.kopanja@fb.bg.ac.rs
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3564-619X>

Nebojša Vuković

Research Fellow Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade, Serbia
e-mail: nebojsa@diplomacy.bg.ac.rs
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9692-9062>

<https://doi.org/10.5209/geop.109937>

Received: 06/05/2026 • Accepted: 20/05/2026

Abstract. This paper examines Serbian geopolitical thought through the work of Jovan Cvijić (1865–1927), an early 20th century geographer widely regarded as the epitome of the Serbian geopolitical tradition. Departing from the Western-centric bias that dominates the discipline, the study argues that an exclusive focus on great power geopolitical traditions overlooks intellectually significant contributions from smaller states. The paper pursues three interrelated objectives. First is to provide a systematic overview of five phases in the evolution of Serbian geopolitical thought from the early 19th century to 2020. Second is systematizing Cvijić’s geopolitical ideas into four principal focal areas—the physical geography of the Balkans, the imperative of sea access, questions of ethnicity, language and religion, and the dynamics of great power relations. And finally, the third objective of the paper is to give a commentary of arguably his most epitomizing paper «The Geographical and Cultural Position of Serbia», through which the utility of his geopolitical ideas scattered throughout his writings. The analysis demonstrates that Cvijić’s thought, developed in parallel with the major classical geopolitical authors of his era, was distinguished by its small-state perspective—one that necessarily incorporated great power calculations into its strategic reasoning. His concepts of the Central Area and the Balkan Core, his sustained advocacy for Serbian access to the Adriatic Sea, and his nuanced treatment of ethno-linguistic boundaries constitute meaningful contributions to geopolitical theory. The paper concludes that Serbian geopolitical thought, and Cvijić’s intellectual legacy in particular, warrants broader attention within the global study of geopolitics.

Keywords. geopolitics; geopolitical thought; Serbia; Balkans; Jovan Cvijić.

ES Comentario. El pensamiento geopolítico serbio a través de su epitome: Jovan Cvijić y sus ideas geopolíticas

Resumen. Este artículo examina el pensamiento geopolítico serbio a través de la obra de Jovan Cvijić (1865–1927), geógrafo de principios del siglo xx, ampliamente considerado como el epitome de la tradición geopolítica serbia. Alejándose del sesgo eurocéntrico que predomina en la disciplina, el estudio argumenta que centrarse exclusivamente en las tradiciones geopolíticas de

las grandes potencias pasa por alto contribuciones intelectualmente significativas de Estados más pequeños. El artículo persigue tres objetivos interrelacionados. El primero es proporcionar una visión general sistemática de cinco fases en la evolución del pensamiento geopolítico serbio desde principios del siglo XIX hasta 2020. El segundo es sistematizar las ideas geopolíticas de Cvijić en cuatro áreas principales: la geografía física de los Balcanes, la necesidad imperiosa del acceso al mar, las cuestiones de etnicidad, lengua y religión, y la dinámica de las relaciones entre las grandes potencias. Finalmente, el tercer objetivo del artículo es comentar el que probablemente sea su artículo más representativo, «La posición geográfica y cultural de Serbia», a través del cual se manifiesta la utilidad de sus ideas geopolíticas presentes en toda su obra. El análisis demuestra que el pensamiento de Cvijić, desarrollado en paralelo con los principales autores geopolíticos clásicos de su época, se distinguió por su perspectiva de pequeño Estado, que necesariamente incorporaba cálculos de grandes potencias en su razonamiento estratégico. Sus conceptos de Área Central y Núcleo Balcánico, su defensa constante del acceso serbio al mar Adriático y su tratamiento matizado de las fronteras etnolingüísticas constituyen contribuciones significativas a la teoría geopolítica. El artículo concluye que el pensamiento geopolítico serbio, y el legado intelectual de Cvijić en particular, merece una mayor atención dentro del estudio global de la geopolítica.

Palabras clave. geopolítica; pensamiento geopolítico; Serbia; Balcanes; Jovan Cvijić.

PT Comentário.

O pensamento geopolítico sérvio na sua essência: Jovan Cvijić e as suas ideias geopolíticas

Resumo. Este artigo examina o pensamento geopolítico sérvio através da obra de Jovan Cvijić (1865-1927), geógrafo do início do século xx amplamente considerado o epítome da tradição geopolítica sérvia. Afastando-se da perspectiva eurocêntrica que domina a disciplina, o estudo defende que um foco exclusivo nas tradições geopolíticas das grandes potências negligencia contribuições intelectualmente significativas de Estados mais pequenos. O artigo procura três objetivos inter-relacionados. O primeiro é fornecer uma visão sistemática de cinco fases na evolução do pensamento geopolítico sérvio desde o início do século xix até 2020. O segundo é sistematizar as ideias geopolíticas de Cvijić em quatro áreas principais: a geografia física dos Balcãs, o imperativo do acesso ao mar, as questões de etnia, língua e religião, e a dinâmica das relações entre as grandes potências. E, finalmente, o terceiro objectivo do artigo é comentar aquele que é, possivelmente, o seu artigo mais representativo, «A Posição Geográfica e Cultural da Sérvia», através do qual se evidencia a utilidade das suas ideias geopolíticas dispersas nos seus escritos. A análise demonstra que o pensamento de Cvijić, desenvolvido em paralelo com os principais autores geopolíticos clássicos do seu tempo, se distinguiu pela sua perspectiva de pequeno Estado – uma perspectiva que incorporava necessariamente cálculos de grandes potências no seu raciocínio estratégico. Os seus conceitos de Área Central e Núcleo Balcânico, a sua defesa constante do acesso da Sérvia ao Mar Adriático e o seu tratamento matizado das fronteiras etnolingüísticas constituem contributos significativos para a teoria geopolítica. O artigo conclui que o pensamento geopolítico sérvio, e o legado intelectual de Cvijić em particular, merece uma maior atenção no âmbito dos estudos globais de geopolítica.

Palavras-chave. geopolítica; pensamento geopolítico; Sérvia; Balcãs; Jovan Cvijić.

Outline. Introduction. 1. Serbian Geopolitical Thought: A Brief Overview. 2. Geopolitical Thought of Jovan Cvijić. 2.1. Physical geography of the Balkans and its impact. 2.2. Access to the Sea. 2.3. Ethnicity, Language and Religion. 3. «The Geographical and Cultural Position of Serbia» – The Essence of Jovan Cvijić's Political-Geographical Thought. Conclusion. References.

How to cite. Kopanja, M., & Vuković, N. (2025). Commentary. Serbian Geopolitical Thought Through its Epitome: Jovan Cvijić and his Geopolitical Ideas. *Geopolítica(s). Revista de Estudios sobre Espacio y Poder*, 17(1), 229-248

Introduction

Open any geopolitics textbook. There, you will undoubtedly come across the story of how geopolitical ideas formed and spread. What does this story tell? Well, the story tells about Great Powers and their worldviews. Virtually all geopolitical papers, books and textbooks talk about the inception of geopolitics through the works of British, German, French and American authors. This is no different from International Relations and its Western-centric perspective. But we must be honest with ourselves. There are plenty of reasons for that. It would be dishonest to say that authors like Halford Mackinder, Friedrich Ratzel, Rudolf Kjellen, Nicholas Spykman, Paul Vidal de la Blache, did not give us any useful concepts and ideas to understand international affairs. Or that their ideas are for great powers alone. The real truth is simple. Grandeur—real or perceived—leads to visibility, which in turn leads to prominence. Some of these ideas were grand and useful, whereas in some cases authors of critical geopolitics are completely in the right by stating that it was just their geopolitical discourse intended for imperialism.

But this paper begins from a frequently overlooked starting point in more mainstream discussions of geopolitical thought—geopolitical knowledge produced by smaller states. By focusing solely on geopolitical ideas of great powers, we might miss good and useful ideas that other nations, regional powers and small states alike, have established. In terms of both general and regionally focused geopolitical ideas, there are undoubtedly great ideas we tend to overlook simply because of not only visibility, but also the disciplinary mythology of geopolitics that talks about great powers and their ideas. Moreover, there is a third element to the equation—language barrier that impacts accessibility of these ideas.

This is the premise in which this paper is grounded. Understanding the geopolitical thought of Serbia through the work of its epitome—Jovan Cvijić. It is interesting how Serbia, and the Balkans more generally, represent a frequent example used in papers of all major schools of classical geopolitical thought from the early to mid-20th century. Mackinder wrote about the importance of Morava-Maritza and Morava-Vardar corridor (Mackinder, [1919] 1996, p. 34). Spykman not only uses the example of Serbian Tsardom under Stefan Dušan as an example of a state with good geographical position but also uses the Balkans as an example of a region whose topography prevents the establishment of great countries (Spykman, 1938, p. 214, 215, 222). Kjellen likewise uses the example of Serbia in this book *The State as a Living Organism*, as a country that ceased to exist (1916), which it did at the time of his writing (Kjellen, [1916] 1943). With French geopolitical authors the situation was even more close as Jovan Cvijić was not only quoted in Paul Vidal de la Blache's most influential publication *The Principles of Human Geography*, but Cvijić's most prominent book *Balkan Peninsula and South Slav Lands* was written following his guest lectures in Paris on the invitation of Paul Vidal de la Blache (Vidal de la Blache, 1927). However, outside of Serbia, their geopolitical ideas have seldom been explored.

The principal driver of this paper is precisely that, to explore and introduce Serbian geopolitical tradition through Cvijić's geopolitical thought. Work done by Jovan Cvijić is not chosen at random. First, his work established the systematic study of geography, *en general*, in Serbia. Second, his major prominence and influence within Serbian academic community impacted the generations of authors that followed. Third, he is a contemporary of most prominent authors of classical geopolitics like Mackinder, Ratzel, Mahan, Kjellen, Vidal de la Blache, and others. Finally, majority of his geopolitical work has been done in specific time of Serbian history when it was faced with a geopolitical game of survival and consolidation, as well as the chaos that was the First World War.

To be more precise, the main goal of this paper is threefold. Firstly, it is to provide an overview of Serbian Geopolitical Thought. We observe the gradual evolution of geopolitical ideas in Serbia from the proto-geopolitical ideas of the early 19th century until today. Secondly, is to provide an overview of Geopolitical thought of Jovan Cvijić who was, and we would argue still is, an epitome of Serbian Geopolitical Thought. Instead of providing a historical narrative of his work, we systematize his geopolitical writings into four major focal areas: (a) physical geography of the Balkans and its impact on Balkan geopolitics; (b) questions of ethnicity, religion and language; (c) relations with great powers; (d) landpower vs seapower. Finally, the third goal is to provide an in-depth assessment of one of Cvijić's most prominent works, the article «The Geographical and Cultural Position of Serbia», to show his approach in geopolitical analysis through the usage of formerly identified ideas.

1. Serbian Geopolitical Thought: A Brief Overview

One man's writings are not a tradition of geopolitical thought. It is a legacy of countless people that pondered, considered, thought, and wrote throughout decades and sometimes centuries. These ideas are never static, nor do they emerge in isolation from other nations. Serbian geopolitical thought emerged similarly, through decades of built upon work. Geopolitical ideas of Jovan Cvijić stand somewhere in the middle of the two centuries long process of evolution of Serbian geopolitical thought. An overview of Serbian geopolitical thought has so far eluded more elaborate exploration in non-Serbian papers (for a good overview in Serbian see Stepić and Budimir, 2019). Thus, in order to better frame geopolitical thought of Jovan Cvijić, as the epitome of Serbian geopolitical thought, a brief overview of how Serbian thinking on geopolitics evolved is needed. As Table 1 shows, the evolution of Serbian Geopolitical thought can be systematized through five specific phases, from early 1800s until 2020. Each phase is assessed through six specific features: a) period—timeframe in which authors thought and wrote their geopolitical ideas; b) explicitness in use of the term geopolitics; c) Driver—the main motive driving authors geopolitical though; d) state-of-the-art—in terms of the relations of Serbian geopolitical thought to the global geopolitical knowledge and approaches; e) most prominent author of each phase; f) scientific discipline from which most prominent geopolitical works emerged.

Table 1. Systematization of the Evolution of Serbian Geopolitical Thought

Feature	Phases in the development of Serbian geopolitical thought				
	I	II	III	IV	V
Period	1800-1890	1890-1920	1920-1941	1945-1990	1990-2020
Explicitness	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Driver	Practical	Practical	Scientific	Scientific	Scientific
State-Of- The-Art	n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Prominent Author	Ilija Garašanin	Jovan Cvijić	Andrija Ristić	Radovan Pavić	Milomir Stepić
Scientific Discipline of the Author	Elite	Geography	Law	Political Science	Political Science

Source: The authors.

The main reason for identifying the First Phase lies not in the fecundity of geopolitical ideas but in setting the agenda of research which has essentially been reproduced throughout the evolution of Serbian geopolitical thought. This is the period of Serbian history when Serbia slowly reemerged following centuries of Ottoman dominance. It took a better part of the 19th century for Serbia to achieve full independence, and through this struggle geopolitical ideas emerged in parallel. It mainly revolved around three main issues. First, how to delineate between Serbs and other South Slavs in the Balkans (see Karadžić, 2014). Secondly, around understanding what constitutes Serbia itself, and how far does it geographically spread (Dragašević, 1873; Karić, 1887; Gopčević, 1890). And finally, how to understand great power relations which were seen as critical in achieving national independence (Garašanin, 2009). There were no clear disciplinary positions of these authors for the majority of the Phase I, which is why they are collectively observed as members of the elite which thought and wrote in the hopes of achieving independent Serbia.

Undoubtedly the most prominent work from this epoch was not an academic paper, but a policy brief called *The Draft* [Načertanije] from 1844 outlying what Serbia should do in order to secure its independence. Nominally, it was written by a Serbian statesman Ilija Garašanin. However, in reality, it was the product of a Czech officer František Zah and Polish nobleman Adam Czartoryski (Stranjaković, 1939). It is important to highlight that this document is more what can be considered a 19th century Serbian grand strategy than a geopolitical publication. Majority of the text is focused on concrete policies Serbia should pursue in order to expand its territory and influence in the Balkans and through that achieve sustained independence. However, first chapter is an unambiguous geopolitical analysis. *Načertanije* starts from hind-sightedly obvious observation

that the Ottoman Empire is irreversibly collapsing and that Austro-Hungary and Russia strive to fill that space. In this context Garašanin presents two options: either the Balkans will be divided between the two powers, or a strong Slavic country will emerge in the Balkans. He saw Serbia as being that state. Geopolitical undertones are clearly visible, most notably in the following sentence:

Geographical position of the land, land area, richness of natural resources and the fighting spirit of its people, furthermore high and fiery character of nationhood, equal origin, one language—all that points to its permanence and great future (Garašanin, 2009, p. 29).

While *Načertanije* cannot be considered a geopolitical writing in a strict, academic sense, it undoubtedly shows clear spatial logic in understanding state relations and building upon that prescribes policy outcomes.

The Second Phase in the evolution of Serbian geopolitical thought is the most important from the perspective of this paper as Jovan Cvijić is the most prominent author from this period. It covers the timeframe from the late 19th century until the end of the First World War. Given that the works by Cvijić and his geopolitical ideas we will not explore in detail here, but in next chapter. Although not explicitly geopolitical, due to the fact that the name geopolitics was still emerging, it was considerably state-of-the-art compared to major powers of the time especially in Cvijić's work. However, there are two key points that need to be addressed. First is actually shared with some work from Phase I, and that is the use of a pseudo-scientific approach to justify imperial ambitions. This is most notably visible in the work titled *Albanian problem and Serbia and Austro-Hungary* [Albanski problem i Srbija i Austro-Ugarska] written under the pseudonym Balcanicus, but it was subsequently revealed that it was written by Serbian statesman Stojan Protić, although it is much more prominent in Spiridon Gopčević's publication from the previous Phase (Gopčević, 1890; Balkanicus, 1913). The pseudo-scientific approach usually followed something akin to dialectic approach, but where thesis was significantly more argued than the antithesis, making the synthesis essentially the same as the desired thesis. On the other hand, another interesting point is the emergence of a form of proto-critical geopolitics most notably in the work of social-democratic politician Dimitrije Tucović in his book *Serbs and Albanians* [Srbi i Arbanasi].

Perhaps the most interesting out of all phases of Serbian geopolitical thought might be Phase III. There are at least five main reasons for that. Firstly, geopolitics became explicit. Since 1920s there has been a steady emergence in research that explicitly labels itself geopolitical. This is a significant break from previous phases although it is not that different from the broader, global study of geopolitics. Secondly, the primary driver of geopolitical research became fully scientific. Of course, practical dimension was somewhat present. But main authors from this Phase were primarily driven by scientific motives in their work. Thirdly, the study of geopolitics was (or better yet remained) fully in line with state-of-the-art knowledge on geopolitics. When reading Serbian geopolitical papers from the time, it is interesting to what extent did they engage with most prominent works in geopolitics. Not only that, but geopolitical works also began being translated to Serbian like Kjellen's or Otto Maull's books (Kjellen, 1943; Maull, 1941).¹ Another interesting notion is the fact that German and French authors were more prominent than British or American ones. Fourth, there is an emergence of fully theoretical papers in geopolitics which rests in stark contrast to other phases. Final one is undoubtedly the most practical and relevant for non-Serbian researchers—it is significantly more difficult for foreign researchers to engage with geopolitical works from this Phase, than with works from the subsequent Phases. Therefore, more thorough consideration of this Phase will be made compared to those before and after.

While this is a matter of preference, we would argue that the key author of this phase was Andrija Ristić, whose work fully echoes the geographical foundation of geopolitical reasoning. Through two major works—*Danube: A Geopolitical Study* [Dunav: geopolitička studija] and *Geopolitical Powers in the Mediterranean Sea* [Geopolitičke sile na sredozemnom moru]—Ristić provided

1. It is important to note that Kjellen's book was translated to Serbian firstly in 1923. The quoted edition was translated to Croatian and published in Croatian in 1943, just as Otto Maull's book was translated to Croatian and published in 1941. But given that this was done during the times of Kingdom of Yugoslavia, we have included these works here.

two rigorous, thorough, and methodical geopolitical analyses pertaining to two key areas of interest for the newly formed Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Ristić, 1937; 1939). Among the two *Danube: A Geopolitical Study* is more methodically rigorous given that in the study he begins with both the physical geographic analysis and the anthropogeographical analysis of the Danube river basin. Building upon that Ristić assesses the geopolitical importance of the Danube, mainly through its importance in transport for many Central European countries. If the first three points establish the context, the fourth point highlights different states' actions along the Danube basin and how they (in) tend to utilize the geopolitical importance of the Danube. Ristić especially focuses on Germany which is not surprising given that his paper is from the 1930s. Finally, his paper focuses on the impact and importance of the Danube for Yugoslavia based upon his geopolitical analysis (Ristic, 1939).

On the other hand, his paper on the «Geopolitical Powers in the Mediterranean Sea» has a relatively similar starting point in the geographic assessment of the Mediterranean and its Hinterland but differs in three key aspects. Firstly, it includes a historical assessment of the evolution of relations within the Mediterranean stretching centuries in the past. Secondly, it provides a categorization of geopolitical actors in the Mediterranean, dividing them into: (a) purely Mediterranean (Italy, Spain, Greece), (b) mixed (Yugoslavia), (c) colonial powers (Great Britain, France), and (d) great powers that do not have a Mediterranean access (Germany, Russia). Finally, this paper provides an overview and analysis of how different geopolitical actors' interests overlap and clash in the Mediterranean (Ristic, 1994). Something similar but reduced to the Adriatic Sea is done by Mihajlo Radovanović in his paper «Adriatic Sea and its Geopolitical Importance» [Jadransko more i njegov geopolitički značaj]. While this paper is not as methodical as his *Danube: A Geopolitical Study*, it is more in line with what classical geopolitical works from the Interbellum period looked like. It also especially highlights one key aspect that differentiates geopolitical thought of great powers from geopolitical thought of small states—the need to incorporate great power interests and relations into the equation in order to provide a geopolitical assessment for small states.

On the other hand, we feel pertinent to briefly explore two purely conceptual and theoretical papers written by Miloš Mladenović «What is geopolitics?» [Šta je geopolitika?] and Siniša Stanković «Living Space» [Životni prostor] as the nature of these papers is atypical from the more empirical and practical papers in the entire Serbian geopolitical thought (Mladenović, 1994; Stanković, n.d.²). In essence Mladenović's paper is a review article on German geopolitical thought in the quest to define geopolitics. His main point in this endeavor is to provide a differentiation between what is political geography and what is geopolitics. His conclusion, the key point of differentiation lies in applicability which is essentially what makes geopolitics different from political geography (Mladenović, 1994). On the other hand, Siniša Stanković's paper is arguably more interesting from a purely theoretical perspective as he focuses on the more ontological differences existing in geopolitics. Being primarily a biologist by vocation, Stanković was more trained to tackle with the biologicistic foundation upon which Friedrich Ratzel build his geopolitical ideas. What Stanković's paper explores is essentially a determinism-possibilism debate on the nature of geographic influences upon human/political behavior, in which Stanković sides with the French and their possibilist position (Stanković, n.d.).

Akin to geopolitics on the global level, the study of geopolitics in Serbia, now socialist Yugoslavia, declined sharply. Thus, the lack in research done in Serbian/Yugoslav geopolitical thought was not an isolated phenomenon, but a part of a global trend. And in line with that there were few, if any explicit geopolitics in academia. Similarly to what Leslie Hepple notices about geopolitics on the global level during the Cold War, geopolitics was practically done but under the cover of strategic or regional studies (Hepple, 1986). There is a sharp correlation with the global role of geopolitics and the role of geopolitics in Serbia/Yugoslavia as they mirror almost perfectly in three ways. First, the impact of geography on politics was primarily done through strategic studies, as visible through two papers and a book. Petar Tomac wrote in early 1950s two papers titled «Strategy and Geography I & II» [Strategija i Geografija I i II] which essentially explores the impact of

2. Stanković's publication is not dated, however, given the fact that this publication is numbered as 37/38 volume, and the volume 39 is dated on 1940, it is safe to say that it was published between 1939 (Ristić's paper on Danube was published in the same edition as volume 28 in 1939) and 1940.

geography on strategy (Tomas, 1953a; 1953b). Applied to a concrete case study of Indochina, this is very similar to what Petar Knežević done in his book *The Special War3 in Indochina* [Specijalni rat u Indokini] (Knežević, 1978). Secondly, what was explored previously remained to be explored even if geopolitics was «sidelined». In Serbian/Yugoslav geopolitical thought two major points from the previous phase have continued to be relevant—the question of the Mediterranean Sea and the importance of the Danube. Petar Božić and Dimitrije Šešerinac both written on the Mediterranean Sea, with a difference that Božić made an explicit (and rare) reference to geopolitics in the title of his paper (Božić, 1952). On the other hand, Dane Rajčević focused on the Danube, again through the perspective of communication potential (Rajčević, 1958). Finally, just as Saul Cohen was a mayor exception to this rule in the United States, so was Radovan Pavić in Yugoslavia. His geopolitical work will not be explored here, as he was a Croat. The reason for his inclusion here is not intended to be observed through the prism of some nationalist endeavor. On the contrary. Authors of this paper want to explicitly highlight that within socialist Yugoslavia, work done by Radovan Pavić did much in preserving the tradition of geopolitical thought alive and is still relevant, representative, and used even after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. In that regard, given that Serbia was a part of Yugoslavia, and we argue that Radovan Pavić work was the most prominent and impactful on Serbian geopolitical thought, even if he was a Croat. On the extent of his geopolitical thought, we refer to Marta Zorko's paper on political geography, geopolitics and geostrategy in the Croatian Political Science Review from 1963 until 2013 (Zorko, 2014).

Phase V emerged as Yugoslavia began to collapse. The predominance of Croatian authors we identified in the previous phase began to fade away with the joint Yugoslav state. This made way to the reemergence of the study of geopolitics in Serbia. There are three things worth noting from this phase. Firstly, the attention of the authors was mainly focused on geopolitical issues facing the collapsing Yugoslavia and later on complete dissolution of the Yugoslav state from early 1990s until 2008's unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo and Metohija. In a sense, throughout this timeframe, geopolitical authors were mostly focused on the practical geopolitical issues facing Serbia leading to a mass influx of papers. This leads us to the second point, not only does geopolitics return to Serbia, but it also rises massively in the volume of published works. It is understandable why since a) geopolitics in general started reemerging in the mid-1980s (Hepple, 1986), b) there were now significantly more academic researchers compared to the Interbellum period. Therefore, the enumeration of all works done during this period would go significantly beyond the framework of this paper, and they are mostly openly accessible online, complete with English abstracts for researchers to find themselves. Most prominent and relevant authors which still contributes heavily to the study of geopolitics in Serbia is Milomir Stepić. Finally, the third main characteristic of this phase is that there has been a massive discrepancy between then contemporary global trends in the study of geopolitics (see Mamadouh, 1998) and the study of geopolitics in Serbia. In simple terms, geopolitics in Serbia remained fully entrenched in the classical geopolitical prism, completely deprived of virtually any critical geopolitical work—therefore, for the first time not being in line with the state-of-the-art of geopolitics.

While this systematization of Serbian Geopolitical Thought ends in 2020, this is not because of lack of data. Phase VI is slowly starting to emerge in Serbian Geopolitical Thought. As in the previous phase, there is of course an evident rise in available publications whose complete enumeration here would be a) unpractical, but also b) relatively easily available for other researchers to find and identify themselves. What are two most important features that distinguish emerging Phase VI from the previous Phase V are strides towards rapprochement of Serbian geopolitical thought with the state-of-the-art research in geopolitics on the global level, as well as the expansion of the theoretical framework to go beyond classical geopolitics. Two special issues of the journal *Međunarodni problemi* [International Problems] are key to mention—the 2020 issue «Why is it important to be geopolitical in the 21st century», edited by Vladimir Ajzenhamer, and the 2021

3. The concept of «Special war» deserves some additional attention here because it represents a precursor to the notions of hybrid warfare, cognitive warfare, and gray-zone conflict which are now quite prominent. In Yugoslav military literature during the Cold War, the idea of special war emerged as a way to tackle the questions of actions below the threshold of open war and numerous manipulative and subversive activities being done to advance state interests. While this is relatively well known to authors from former Yugoslavia, these «proto-works» haven't received much outside attention.

issue «Astropolitics» edited by Srđan Korać (Ajzenhamer, 2020; Korać, 2021). Both of these issues made it explicit that further strides need to be made by expanding the theoretical ideas as well as expanding the *problematique* of study in Serbian geopolitics.

2. Geopolitical Thought of Jovan Cvijić

Cvijić's geopolitical writings were made in one of the most turbulent periods of Serbian history, shortly after it achieved independence and during and prior to periods of largest struggles and territorial expansions. It is therefore no wonder that most of his writings were driven by practical issues Serbia faced in the late 19th and early 20th century. And this context is needed in order to understand geopolitical thought of Jovan Cvijić. Most of his writings are directly related to Serbia from the perspective of challenges and opportunities it faced. But that does not mean that his work is not more widely applicable or generalizable to other cases or regions.

There are essentially two ways in which we can approach geopolitical thought of Jovan Cvijić. We could either: a) provide a chronological overview of his writings, or b) systematize his writings into distinct areas of focus. We opted for the latter given the fact that presenting his core propositions established throughout the years gives better understanding of Cvijić's geopolitical thought. Given that understanding Serbian geopolitical thought through Cvijić as its epitome represents the central goal of this paper, second option is more favorable. While it misses the gradual evolution, refinement and the impact that empirical events had on his conceptual ideas, it allows us to systematically present four key areas which not only dominate in Cvijić's geopolitical thought, but Serbian geopolitical thought in general. These areas are: (1) Physical geography of the Balkans. (2) Need for sea access. (3) Questions of ethnicity, language and religion. (4) Relations with great powers.

2.1. Physical geography of the Balkans and its impact

Cvijić is without doubt the most prominent author in the sense of influences of physical geographic factors upon political processes within Balkan Peninsula. These ideas formed from his assessment of the geographical position of Serbia and the changes Serbia went through between 1815 and 1918, namely territory of Serbia significantly expanded, and thus physical space of Serbia had different features. Cvijić argued that Principality of Serbia formed «on one very important and difficult geographic position» (Cvijić, 2000a, p. 164). Within Cvijić's geopolitical ideas, arguably the most useful to a broader reader audience are his assessments of the physical geography of the Balkans, namely through the ideas of the Central Area and Balkan Core. Essentially, Cvijić views these land areas as places in the Balkans where key land lines of communication intersect, and which are key to the control of the entire Balkan Peninsula.

Therefore, to understand the notion of physical space we must observe it not through Serbia's physical geography alone but in a broader sense of the Balkan Peninsula. Relativity of importance of certain geographical features of terrain of a state can be observed only if comparing them to the broader region. This is especially the case regarding mobility. Jovan Cvijić noted that the «value and influence of geographical moments aren't absolute, but depend both on position in which centers of culture evolve and on a general cultural type of a certain era, especially on the level of its communication technique» (Cvijić, 2000b, p. 96). In a true Mackinderian sense, he stated that «marine communication is [becoming] of peripheral relevance, transcontinental, railway is increasingly becoming that (communication important)» (Cvijić, 2000b, p. 103). Thus, Balkan Peninsula was a transit point between Central European (Vienna, Berlin) and «Oriental» (Istanbul, Thessaloniki) cultural centers, and within a cultural type of the beginning of the supremacy of railroad communication⁴.

His observations of Balkan Peninsula divide it implicitly into three distinct regions. Eastern parts of the Peninsula—Trace, Macedonia and Greece, are directed towards Thessaloniki, Piraeus

4. This particular article of Jovan Cvijić was written in 1904, the same year Mackinder wrote his famous article «The Geographical Pivot of History» (Mackinder, 1904).

and Istanbul (Cvijić, 1995, p. 34). Region around the Adriatic Sea, which he calls Italian and Austro-Hungarian Sea (Cvijić, 1995, p. 37), he deems dependent from Italy since it is easily controlled via the Strait of Otranto which can be closed (Cvijić, 1995, pp. 36–37). Unlike this region, Greece and Peloponnesus have independent coastline, but it is isolated on the northern parts of the Peninsula by mountains which in turn make them badly connected to the main Balkan communication lines (Cvijić, 1995, p. 37). The northern part of Balkan Peninsula with its decline from south to north directs these parts of the Balkans more towards Central Europe (Cvijić, 1995, p. 38).

According to Cvjić's geographical observations, he isolated several key longitudinal and lateral communications within the Balkan Peninsula which serve as the most parsimonious communication routes of mobility (Cvijić, 2000b, pp. 93–101). His emphasis lies in two communication routes: Morava-Vardar route and Morava-Maritza route connecting Belgrade as the point where Balkans and Central Europe meet and Thessaloniki and Istanbul. The point where these two routes divide lies on the city of Niš. Although both routes are important Cvjić argues that the Niš-Thessaloniki (Morava-Vardar) route is more important because «it is the shortest line which goes over the middle of the Balkan Peninsula and it is the shortest link between Central Europe and East Asian Countries» (Cvijić, 2000b, p. 101). This is primarily because he observes the Turkish Straits as of secondary importance (Cvijić, 2000b, p. 103)⁵ and the more favorable geographical positions of Thessaloniki and the Morava-Vardar route will lead to larger usage.⁶ Even though Cvjić's writings are more focused on the Morava-Vardar route, he sees the importance of both Morava-Vardar and Morava-Maritza routes as well as the rest longitudinal and lateral routes of communication for mobility within the Balkan Peninsula.

Thus, he argues that within the Balkan Peninsula you can observe, what he calls, a Central Area where all the communication routes pass through. This is the area «from Taor gorge, which in the south closes the Skopje basin, up to Niš in the north; in the east it covers Ovče Pole and Sofia, and on the west Kosovo⁷ until Mitrovica» (Cvijić, 2000b, p. 112). In the center of it lays, what he calls, a Balkan Core, central and the most important part of Central Area (Cvijić, 2000b, p. 112). Balkan Core includes Skopje and Preševo valleys which are an area that connects Morava and Vardar river basins, connecting south and north parts of the Central Area of the Balkan Peninsula.

Cvijić argues that this Area can serve as a geographical and political core for the creation of a big/great⁸ state because: it has central position within the Peninsula; it has easy communication connections with the rest of the Peninsula; and it must be economically developed (Cvijić, 2000b, p. 112), but another notion he implicitly stated previous to these observations are: that value of geographical position of Central Area is dependent and connected with the geographical position of Serbia (Cvijić, 2000b, p. 111), because than they control the most important communication route, the Morava-Vardar route. These views can, to a large degree, be connected with Anglo-Saxon authors but only if we generalize their views. Similarly to Mahan and Mackinder, Cvjić identifies certain area, which is crucial in terms of mobility, to the control of certain space. But the major difference lays in coverage of space, where Cvjić's thoughts were concentrated only to the Balkans.

2.2. Access to the Sea

Regardless of the fact that Cvjić highlighted the relative rise in importance of railways compared to sea transport, he did not negate the value of sea access. On the contrary, he was one of the strongest advocates of Serbia's need for sea access. In 1833; 1878 and 1913 Serbia expanded to the south (Cvijić, 2000c, p. 148; Cvjić, 2000d, p. 345) becoming, what Cvjić calls, a Moravian-Vardar state (Cvijić, 2000d, p. 345) from what used to be a «more Danube» state (Cvijić, 2000a, p. 164)—both of which were landlocked. Even when after the Paris Conference newly created King-

5. It is interesting that Cvjić argues that because Russia built the Trans-Siberian railway it no longer needs control of the Turkish Straits which Western European states, especially England tried to prevent (Cvijić, 2000b).

6. Repeated several times in his works (Cvijić, 2000b, pp. 102, 105).

7. Note that this refers to Kosovo as a geographical region and not currently disputed territory in the Balkans which is consisted of geographical Kosovo as well as the region of Metohija.

8. The word used can translate to English in both ways.

dom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes got sea access Cvijić argued that it is not a maritime state because of poorly developed communications between seaside and mainland, on the one side, and good land communications on the other (Cvijić, 2000d, p. 345). In this we can clearly see, although stated implicitly, correlations with Haushofer's Land Power/Sea Power dichotomy as well as Mackinder's views. Cvijić's views went far beyond analyzing physical geography and its impact on political processes but also analyzing human geography as well (which we will show in the following section)⁹ adding creating a somewhat different view on geographical influences on political processes from the classical geopolitical authors.

Landlocked position of Serbia during the observed timeframe impacted significantly its economy and thus independence. At that point of time, Serbia was the only Balkan state which was landlocked (Cvijić, 2000g, p. 212).¹⁰ The lack of sea access made a need for Serbia to export and import their products from either Austro-Hungary (See Cvijić, 2000g, p. 212; Tucović, 1950, p. 191) or Turkey. Cvijić's augmented statement on Serbia's closed position and economic dependence on Austro-Hungary and Turkey focused his thoughts on the analysis of alternative routes for economic communications.

In correlation with his work on the importance of Central Area of the Balkan Peninsula, we spoke about previously, Jovan Cvijić when analyzing lateral routes argues that coastline from the confluence of Neretva river to Durres is «closest to the Central Area...and that's why along them is the most suitable ports» (Cvijić, 2000b, p. 95). In addition to that, Cvijić insists that «this is the coastline from which main lateral communication routes of the Balkan Peninsula must go» (Cvijić, 2000b, p. 95).

The cornerstone for economic independence according to Cvijić was the Danube-Adriatic railway (Cvijić, 2000g, p. 213), connecting Morava-Vardar route with either Bar or San Giovanni di Medua in order to achieve economic independence (Cvijić, 2000g, p. 213). For the creation of this railway the most important geographic features are the valleys of Drim and Maća rivers (Cvijić, 2000g, p. 214). The most parsimonious route would surely lead to the port of Thessaloniki, on which Cvijić talks about «if she (Serbia) could expand its territory that much towards south» (Cvijić, 2000g, p. 213). The focus of his writings was on Northern Albanian Coast isn't mentioned explicitly but his implicit statements that areas around Drim and Maća «make a natural unit with Kosovo and Metohija and geographically are complete opposite to areas of Middle and South Albania» (Cvijić, 2000g, p. 213), and how Northern Albania «historically was frequently and closely linked with it (Old Serbia¹¹)» (Cvijić, 2000g, p. 215).

2.3. Ethnicity, Language and Religion

The questions of ethnicity, language and religion have had special significance in the broader Serbian geopolitical thought given the relative uniqueness of the Balkan Peninsula and its history. Within the works of Serbian authors, the principle of ethnography and ethnographic borders are always directly connected to other key areas of focus. This relationship is sufficient enough that ethnicity, language, religion—the trifecta that makes the social foundation of nations, in principle should be the main guiding force. Jovan Cvijić explicitly states this by saying that if you have to „choose between principle of natural and ethnographic borders, then you should sacrifice first in favor of the second« (Cvijić, 2000d, p. 342). This author focuses greatly on issues of ethnography within the Balkan Peninsula (Cvijić, 2000f, pp. 200-222), always stressing the importance of ethnographic borders¹² even to an extent that he states regarding Austro-Hungary that if it would separate parts that are of different ethnic groups that it would have better cultural and economic development (Cvijić, 2000a, p. 182).

9. Cvijić's works contain an extensive number of papers and books dedicated not only on ethnography which we already mentioned but also on anthropogeography similarly to Ratzel but also on Paul Vidal de la Blache. Compare: Ratzel (1909); Vidal de la Blache (1927); Cvijić (1996); Cvijić (2000e); Cvijić (2000f).

10. It is interesting how Cvijić sees this obstacle calling Serbia a «besieged land and us (Serbs) have become an arrested people» (Cvijić, 2000a, p. 165).

11. Old Serbia was a name used in this timeframe to mark territory of Sanjak of Novi Pazar, Kosovo, Metohija, lands south from Šar mountain and area around Shkoder, Alessio and Durres (Cvijić, 1996, p. 255).

12. It is important to mention that within the works of Jovan Cvijić there were thoughts that violated this principle.

However, this is not always possible, not in the sense of difficult ethnic borders, but also that it is even possible to create a clear line between two groups of people. Even during the late 19th and early 20th century, Cvijić argued that creating a clear line between two peoples is very difficult in «so-called *transitional areas*,¹³ on the border between two peoples, in which they mutually influenced one another and merged» (Cvijić, 2000d, p. 342). For him this was the most evident in the region of Macedonia where Serbia and Bulgaria constantly quarreled over the nature of the region's ethnic composition. While the official position of Serbia was that Serbs inhabited Macedonia, for Bulgaria it was the Bulgarians. For Cvijić, Macedonia represented precisely that transitional area between Serbs and Bulgarians that started to become neither Serbs nor Bulgarians but something on their own (Cvijić, 2000f, p. 243).

Another key point was language. Jovan Cvijić rightfully noticed that language exists as the most important marking of a nation (Cvijić, 2000h, p. 251). He divides South Slavs to two groups Western (Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) and Eastern (Bulgarians) (Cvijić, 2000e, p. 331). Implicitly, he states that Montenegrins and Serbs are one ethnic group (Cvijić, 1996, p. 255) while Serbs and Croats «speak one national language» (Cvijić, 2000h, p. 250) whose dialect differences are smaller than between northern and southern dialects of Germany, France or Italy (Cvijić, 2000h, p. 251). Dialect differences in Serbo-Croatian are usually made on the bases of the word *what*. This differentiates between those who say it *što* (thus *štokavski* dialect), those say *ča* (thus *čakavski* dialect)¹⁴, and those that say *kaj* (thus *kajkavski* dialect) (Cvijić, 2000e, p.331)¹⁵. In both countries, under the reform by Vuk Karadžić (Serbia) and Ljudevit Gaj (Croatia) *štokavian* dialect was chosen as a literary language in early nineteenth century (Cvijić, 2000e, pp. 332-333).

Bosnia and Herzegovina according to Cvijić has a «central position within the ethnographic mass of Serbo-Croatian nation» (Cvijić, 2000a, p. 171) thus he implicitly states that Serbo-Croatians live in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Regarding Slovenia, Cvijić only states that Slovenes and Serbo-Croatians have linguistic similarity (Cvijić, 2000e, p. 332) but Slovenia was rarely mentioned and only when discussing a Yugoslav state.¹⁶ Contrary to the previous, when discussing Bulgaria Cvijić states that there are «more significant language and ethnic differences» (Cvijić, 2000e, p. 334).

It was precisely in Macedonia, the transitional area between Serbs and Bulgarians were language issues were used and abused when discussing ethnographic questions Cvijić states that language alone can't solve Macedonian ethnographic question because, on the one side, language of Macedonian Slavs has linguistic characteristics of both Serbian and Bulgarian and, more importantly, people living in Macedonia do not have either Serbian or Bulgarian national consciousness but can be, through propaganda, converted to either Serbs or Bulgarians (Cvijić, 1995, pp. 441-443).

Parallel to language, religion as well played an important part in determining ethnicity and national consciousness. For Cvijić, Austro-Hungary was as the main propagator of fueling religious hate between Serbo-Croatians in order to «alienate to parts of the same nation» (Cvijić, 2000a, p. 181). Regarding Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Cvijić states their administration had only worsen the relations between different religions in order to use them against each other (Cvijić, 2000a, pp. 172-173). Regarding Macedonia, religion again plays an important role but this time in propaganda to create national consciousness of a certain ethnic group. Analyzing these issues Cvijić gives the advantage to Bulgarians precisely because of better organization in regards of the existence of Bulgarian churches, priest, and bishops in Macedonia

For Cvijić, ethnicity, language and religion play central importance through forming national consciousness which is a factor that differentiates between legitimate and illegitimate expansion, but also a factor that heavily impacts more general geostrategic calculus. However, in his writings

13. Regarding transitional areas Cvijić stated that within these areas national questions can only be solved according to the will of the people living in them (Cvijić, 2000d, p. 343).

14. Cvijić states that *čakavski* dialect was even at that time on the level of local dialect because today is even less used in Croatia (Cvijić, 2000e, p. 331).

15. Vuk Karadžić observed long before Cvijić these matters and stated that these areas where *kaj* is used by Croatians are a transitional area between *Kranj* language (Slovenian) and Serbian (Karadžić, 1849, p. 7).

16. According to Cvijić, Yugoslav views are more theoretically made in Croatia and Slavonia by their authors, therefore we will not mention them to a greater extent (Cvijić, 2000d, p. 345). as well as the importance of Croatians adopting Karadžić's reform of the Serbo-Croatian language for unification in what is to be Yugoslavia (Cvijić, 2000i, p. 356).

we can find his own divergence from the centrality of this point in geopolitical thought. The call for «mastering» of Northern Albanian space, for the purposes of sea access needed to satisfy economic needs contradicted the principle of ethnographic borders, which Cvijić was a proponent. He explicitly states that the population of this territory was «almost exclusively Albanian» (Cvijić, 2000g, p. 218), and thus he calls this an *anti-ethnographic necessity* because «Serbia must, for its economic independence get an access to Adriatic Sea» (Cvijić, 2000g, p. 218). Even though this contradicts the previous discussion of the value of sea access, it shows the importance of the hierarchy and taking ethnographic principles into consideration unlike German authors.

2.4. Relations with Great Powers

Final point of note is the importance of relations *with* and *of* Great powers. This point tends to elude other more well-known schools of classical geopolitics because those were schools of geopolitical thought *of* great powers. Therefore, they did not have to factor in great power relations as a separate point in geopolitical thought as there were no powers greater than them. But from the perspective of Serbia and Serbian geopolitical thought, relations between great powers, and relations of great powers with small states were a frequent and more times than not a key factor in their geopolitical considerations. In other words, unlike German, French or Anglo-Saxon authors, Serbia was never a Great Power therefore Serbian thought had to take into account interest of Great Powers in a sense of Serbia's independence and survival¹⁷. Thus, Serbian authors emphasized the importance of finding common interest with Great Powers as a means of achieving geopolitical interests. But on the other hand, general views of Serbian authors regarding Great Powers were mostly fearful, because of interventionism of Great Powers (Cvijić, 1996, p. 259). Therefore, Cvijić argues that Serbia must have a strong and well prepared army or it won't survive (Cvijić, 2000a, p. 182; 2000j, p. 68).

For Serbia, most of the 19th century was a constant struggle between a declining Ottoman Empire and Austria's and Russia's desire to take Balkan lands from the declining Ottomans. Although this fright was present even before Cvijić, he also shared the same observation (Cvijić, 2000e, p. 112). On the other side, Britain and France were seen as allies because of their objections to both Russian and Austrian expansion¹⁸. This line of alignment continued as the tensions between the Central Powers and Triple Entente began to rise. Cvijić argued that Serbia can find common interest with the Western Powers in order to counter Central European States' pretensions to the Balkans (Cvijić, 2000j, p. 60). Cvijić noticed that, because of the unification of Germany and Italy, the only foreign policy course for Austria was to the south to the «area of the Serbian nation» (Cvijić, 2000a, p. 180). On the other hand, Russia's pan-Slavic ideas were seen as a «tool for achieving their (Russian) goals» (Tucović, 1950, p. 150), not that directly by Cvijić but by others, and this was showcased by disregarding Serbian interests when signing the Treaty of San-Stefano as well as by Russia's acceptance of the Austrian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Tucović, 1950, p. 150).

If the following lines showcase fears of total subjugation of a small state by great powers, this is just the most extreme variant – the question of survival. However, in Serbian geopolitical thought, and the works of Cvijić, great power interventionism is also discussed. A good example in Cvijić's writings is an entire chapter of the quoted article to the assessment of various interests (Cvijić, 2000g, pp. 219-2020), where he analyzes the benefits that other countries (namely Great Powers) could get with Serbian control of Northern Albanian coast. He discusses interest of naval trading countries which could get an access to «central parts of Balkan Peninsula» (Cvijić, 2000g, p. 219) as well as interests of Austro-Hungary (Cvijić, 2000g, p. 219-2020).

17. Most of geopolitical thinkers that were from Great Powers never needed to think about these matters. Their focus was mostly on how to increase their own power to rival and overpower other Great Powers. Example (Kjellen, 1943, p. 73).

18. This is a point shared with Garašanin. According to Garašanin's opinion Britain and France will not only object to this but also try to create a Christian state in order to fill the vacuum after Ottoman's demise. From his perspective this is an opportunity for Serbia because Serbia could in them find allies to support Serbia's independence as well as support against Austria and Russia (Garašanin, 2009, pp. 119, 122).

This is also evident in his considerations of the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austro-Hungary because according to Cvijić, this act caused both economic political dangers (Cvijić, 2000a, p. 167). For Cvijić, Bosnia and Herzegovina was needed for Serbia because of getting «a territorial zone within the area of Serbian people with which it would have access to the Adriatic sea» (Cvijić, 2000a, p. 167). When accounting all the previous areas—physical geography of the Balkans, need for sea access, but also ethnic, linguistic and religious considerations, Bosnia and Herzegovina was key for Serbia's political and economic independence, security and prosperity (Cvijić, 2000a, p. 171). Although these ideas have, even among Serbian authors, been criticized for being imperialistic (Marković, 1973, p. 154)¹⁹, they tend to show how in Cvijić's, and Serbian geopolitical thought more generally, great powers and relations play a central role. Geopolitical dynamics might be shaped by the underlying geographic and demographic spatial factors, however without factoring in the global state of affairs, and particular interests of great power players, it is impossible to reach a satisfactory conclusion.

3. «The Geographical and Cultural Position of Serbia» – The Essence of Jovan Cvijić's Political-Geographical Thought

At the outset, for a better understanding of the content of Cvijić's article, it is necessary to point out the time and historical context in which it was published. The article was published in April 1914, a few months before the outbreak of the First World War, and after the First and Second Balkan Wars, from which Serbia emerged victorious. In the First Balkan War (1912-1913), Serbia, together with Bulgaria, Greece and Montenegro, defeated the Ottoman Empire and, along with its allies, partitioned almost all Turkish territories on European soil (effectively liberating numerous Christians). In the Second Balkan War (1913), Serbia, together with Greece, Romania, Turkey, and Montenegro, defeated its former ally, Bulgaria, which, dissatisfied with the division of the territories liberated from Turkish rule, launched the war. The first months of 1914 thus represent, in modern Serbian history, a «golden moment» for Serbia—a brief period following the victorious Balkan Wars and preceding the immense suffering endured by the Serbian population and state during the First World War. That specific historical moment—a period of significant political and military successes of Serbia—can also be felt by the reader of Cvijić's text. Cvijić's exaltation is best expressed in his (semi-) sentence declaring that Serbia is a «land of mission.» By this expression—mission—Cvijić referred to the liberation of Serbs and other South Slavs from foreign rule, both to the south and to the west/north of Serbia. And while the task of liberating the enslaved compatriots in the south had been practically accomplished with the Balkan Wars, the liberation of those living west and north of Serbia still lay ahead in the Great War (which Cvijić, of course, could not have accurately foreseen).

Given that there is a full translation of Cvijić's article in this issue, it would be pointless to summarize its content. Therefore, this text will highlight several circumstances whose understanding may help provide a deeper insight into the meaning of Cvijić's views.

Although Serbia significantly expanded its territory after the First and Second Balkan Wars (from 48,300 km² to 87,800 km²) and greatly improved its geopolitical position (acquiring a shared border with Montenegro and Greece), it did not achieve all of its political and geostrategic objectives in these wars. Namely, it remained, primarily due to the opposition of Austria-Hungary (supported by Germany, as well as Italy), without access to the sea (today corresponding to the coast of Albania). Apart from Switzerland, Serbia was the only landlocked country in Europe at that time. The inaccessibility of the sea to Serbia, and the adverse political and economic consequences of this fact (blackmail and economic blockade by Austria-Hungary), are the subject of a couple of Cvijić's works (Vuković, 2016, p. 815). He himself wrote that «the maritime position of states is the most convenient one» (Cvijić 1969). The late 19th and early 20th centuries were a period when

19. This author, instead on an attempt to add those regions to Serbia, insists on creating «an alliance of municipalities, counties and states», an idea reminding us of a Balkan Federation. On the other hand, Cvijić saw this not as an imperialistic quest but as a «national work» of the entirety of Serbo-Croatians in their goal of achieving their freedom in a single state the «aspiration for righteousness and justness» (Cvijić, 2000j, pp. 57-68).

theories of Sea Power and the benefits it brought were in fashion. It is not known whether Cvijić was familiar with the works of Alfred Thayer Mahan—it is more likely that he was not, although Cvijić knew English, in addition to German and French—, but it is not excluded that he read the well-known study by German geographer Friedrich Ratzel, *Das Meer Als Quelle Der Völkergrösse. Eine Politisch Geographische Studie* from 1900. Ratzel—also a moderate advocate of the concept of Sea Power—emphasized in his work that all seas and oceans are interconnected, and that even a small stretch of coastline allows the state that possesses it to communicate and trade with all other states, and to be part of the vast global network of maritime routes, that is to exploit the freedom of the oceans (Ratzel [1900] 2024, p. 22).

Serbia, whose southward expansion across the territories of the Ottoman Empire carried, in addition to its liberating character, the dimension of gradually approaching the Adriatic coast, remained deprived of sea access even after its major victories in the two Balkan Wars. The consolation prize came with the disappearance of the Sanjak of Novi Pazar (the westernmost part of the Ottoman Empire before the First Balkan War)—as Cvijić puts it—«the political isthmus» that separated Serbia from Montenegro. With its dissolution, Serbia and Montenegro (which possessed a narrow outlet to the Adriatic Sea) acquired a common border. Given that Montenegro was regarded, both in the scholarship of that period and amongst its own population, intelligentsia, and ruling dynasty, as a Serbian state, and Montenegrins as Serbs (Chotch, 1916, p. 2; Laffan, 1918), it could be said that Serbia had indirectly gained access to the sea, and Cvijić himself notes this by stating that «through the territory of the Serbian people» it would be possible to lay «our own continuous railway line.» Interestingly, the Belgrade–Bar railway (a port in Montenegro) was only completed some sixty years later, in what was then socialist Yugoslavia!

Another point to keep in mind when reading Cvijić's article is his emphasis on Serbia's expansion to the south, along the Morava–Vardar valley, which, by the end of the Balkan Wars, secured for it, as he stresses, a central position on the Balkan Peninsula. This represents an exceptionally important geostrategic fact, since control over the basins of the Great Morava and the Vardar, as well as over the routes connecting Belgrade with Thessaloniki and Belgrade with Istanbul, simultaneously means control over the shortest and most efficient link between Europe and the Asia Minor. A few years after Cvijić, the renowned British historian R.G.D. Laffan would write about this topic, entitling his book dedicated to the Serbs and Serbian history *The Serbs: The Guardians of the Gate*. As Laffan himself explains, he borrowed the expression «the Guardians of the Gate» for the Serbs from several authors, giving special mention to David Lloyd George, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1916 to 1922. Regarding the importance of Serbia's geographical/geopolitical position in the European/global context, Laffan states:

But across it (The Balkan peninsula, authors remark) run at least two great trade routes, from Belgrade to Salonika and from Belgrade to Constantinople, connecting Central Europe with the Aegean Sea and the East [...] Now, athwart those lines of communication and commanding the north-western portions of both, lies Serbia. Invading armies moving west from Asia or east from Central Europe must pass over Serbian territory. The little country stands in a position of world importance (Laffan 1918, pp. 18-19).

In the context of the First World War and the German Empire's desire to penetrate the Middle East, Laffan emphasized why Serbia was so crucial for Great Britain and why its elimination was of great importance to Germany:

A glance at the map of the world will show how the chain of States stretched from Berlin to Baghdad. The German Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Bulgaria, Turkey. One little strip of territory alone blocked the way and prevented the two ends of the chain from being linked together. That little strip was Serbia [...] Little though we knew or cared in England, Serbia was really the first line of defence of our eastern possessions (Laffan 1918, p. 164).

As the reader may notice—and this would be the third key point—Cvijić's text does not contain solely geographical or, more precisely, political-geographical content. This is not surprising, because:

Apart from the geographical research of the Balkan Peninsula, Cvijić carried out the ethnological study of the Balkan population, migration, settlements, economic activities, and made an attempt to determine the cultural belts and psychological types and varieties of Southern Slavs, all of which make an important part of his scientific work (Bašić, 2016, p. 664).

Cvijić's article, in addition to containing material from geography (both physical and social), also encompasses content from ethnology/ethnography/cultural anthropology (depending on how one defines these disciplines), ethnopsychology, characterology, sociology, and cultural studies. In this paper, Cvijić not only analyses Serbia's newly established political-geographical/geopolitical position but also examines the characteristics of the Serbian people and society as a whole, which contributed to overcoming the political and military challenges of the time and achieving ultimate success. Which characteristics does Cvijić identify as key? Referring to the uprising for liberation at the beginning of the 19th century, Cvijić notes that the Serbian people are distinguished by their initiative, endurance, and organisational abilities, as they managed to establish their own state without foreign assistance. Speaking of Serbia's already-mentioned mission, Cvijić describes it as «an unconsciously powerful idea and the will of the entire nation.» This sense within the Serbian people was formed, according to Cvijić, from tradition and historical heritage, which have deep roots. In addition to these traits, Cvijić wrote that, ever since Serbia gained its freedom, it differed from other Serbian lands in that its people were cheerful, lively, and witty. Speaking about the Serbian peasant, Cvijić notes that he is enduring, accustomed to fatigue, hardship, and patience—qualities that make him well-suited for military duty (Cvijić, 1991). When it comes to social structure, Cvijić believed that the Serbian people (the vast majority of whom were peasants) were destined toward democratic aspirations, as there were no major social differences or pronounced class divisions among them. Being both ethnically and socially homogeneous, and relying on their historical heritage, they were thus able to embark on the realisation of great political and military objectives at the beginning of the 20th century. Many readers might think that Cvijić was biased because he was himself a Serb. However, foreign authors of the time largely shared Cvijić's views. Herbert Vivian, an English journalist and author, observed the following traits among the Serbs in his book published ten years before Cvijić's article. According to him,

The favourite topic of their songs is some episode in the history of their old Empire: either the prowess of Marko Kraljević (king's son), or a narrative of the great battle of Kosovo, where their last Tsar was defeated by the Turks. History is their one passion and replaces the interest in politics [...] To sum up the Serbian peasant, who after all is the backbone of the nation: he is sturdy, good-looking, brave, healthy, hospitable and merry, devoted to the traditions of his race but careless of modern politics (Vivian, 1904, pp. 250, 252).

Ernest Denis, a renowned French history professor at the Sorbonne, published the book *La Grande Serbie* in 1915, at a time when the First World War was already raging at full force and Serbia was suffering immense human and material losses. Denis writes:

The rare and bold travelers who have visited Serbia in recent months have been struck by the serene energy with which the inhabitants have endured sufferings that seemed capable of crushing human strength [...] The Pan-Serbe program was not born from the ambitious fantasy of a handful of dreamers. It was dictated to politicians by history and ethnography; it emerged from the consciousness of peoples who, for several centuries, had been striving, through a continuous and unanimous effort, to merge their destinies (Denis, 1915, p. 298).

A handful of such or similar observations about the characteristics of the Serbian nation at that time could be found in abundance. Although, in some instances, the views of observers do not entirely coincide, their assessments do not call into question Cvijić's basic theses concerning the psychology and character (essential traits) of the Serbian people at that time. In present times, there are researchers who reproach Cvijić for subjectivity, bias, and nationalism, as well as for his

condescending attitude toward certain peoples (primarily Albanians). However, Cvijić's research results of an ethnological/ethnographic and ethnopsychology nature should primarily be viewed from the context of that time. And Cvijić's work, it seems, was entirely consistent with the scientific achievements of that time:

Cvijić's understanding of psychology was to a certain degree in accordance with Wilhelm Wundt's ideas of the psychology of peoples [...] In observing historical and cultural relativity and the variability of psychological characteristics, as well as the meaning of folklore for psychological exploration, Cvijić's opinions were quite consistent with those of Franz Boas [...] (Bašić, 2016, pp. 671, 672).

Finally, it is worth pointing out one element in Cvijić's article—the notion of *Kairos* (καιρός)—, when he speaks about the position and achievements of Serbia in April 1914. *Kairos* can be understood as a moment of opportune action or the right time, although this ancient Greek word carries several meanings. Cvijić does not mention it explicitly, but its presence in the text can be inferred. He states that during the events of 1912 and 1913, Serbia enjoyed favourable international circumstances, the most favourable since its very inception. On the other hand, when analysing the cultural position of the Serbian people, Cvijić observes that the Serbs, as a nation, had at that time entered a stage of development most suitable for warfare—the middle period between high cultures of western nations and the primitive stage in which, for example, the Albanians still found themselves (Cvijić 1991). What does this imply? For the political and strategic successes of small nations (and this rule is equally important for larger ones), external conditions (the international situation) and internal conditions (the nation's readiness—both moral and physical—for sacrifice and great deeds) must coincide; in other words, what is required is *Kairos*. The Serbian political and military elites recognized *Kairos* during 1912 and 1913 and consciously entered both Balkan Wars. Success was inevitable. An even greater feat was accomplished during the First World War—the kingdom, which at the beginning of 1912 had a territory of less than 50,000 km², by the end of 1918 controlled about 250,000 km² of land inhabited by peoples of diverse ethnicities, religions (Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Islam), languages, and dialects (the future Yugoslavia). However, the price paid in human lives and material destruction was staggering. The impression remains that Serbian society has never fully recovered from this traumatic experience, despite having subsequently endured the Second World War, a socialist revolution, a series of interethnic wars in the 1990s, and the NATO aggression in 1999.

Conclusion

This paper set out to accomplish three interrelated objectives: to map the evolution of Serbian geopolitical thought across its principal historical phases; to systematize the geopolitical ideas of Jovan Cvijić, as its most prominent representative; and to situate those ideas within the concrete political-geographical moment captured in his 1914 article «The Geographical and Cultural Position of Serbia.» Taken together, these objectives reflect a broader ambition, to recover a tradition of geopolitical reasoning that has been marginalized not by its intellectual inadequacy, but by the focus and language barriers of a discipline long preoccupied with the worldviews of great powers.

The overview of Serbian geopolitical thought reveals a tradition that is neither derivative nor static. Across five identifiable phases spanning two centuries, Serbian authors consistently engaged with the central geopolitical questions of their time, often at the frontier of the discipline's global development. From the proto-geopolitical strategic vision of Ilija Garašanin's *Načertanije*, through the scientifically rigorous Interbellum works of Andrija Ristić, to the contextually complex Phase V, Serbian geopolitical tradition displays intellectual continuity and adaptability. The most significant departure from global trends occurred in Phase V, when Serbian geopolitical thought remained anchored in classical frameworks at the very moment when critical geopolitics was reshaping the discipline internationally. The emerging Phase VI, characterized by renewed theoretic

cal ambition and growing engagement with contemporary global scholarship, suggests that this divergence may prove temporary.

At the center of this tradition stands Jovan Cvijić, whose geopolitical thought this paper has systematized into four thematic areas. His analysis of the physical geography of the Balkans, particularly his identification of the Central Area and the Balkan Core as the strategic pivot of the peninsula, anticipates, and in some respects parallels, the conceptual moves of Mackinder and Mahan, while remaining firmly grounded in the particular realities of the Balkan space. His persistent advocacy for Serbian access to the Adriatic reflects not mere expansionism (although some might argue on that front as well), but a reasoned reading of the relationship between territorial geography and economic sovereignty. A relationship he was willing, on at least one occasion, to prioritize above his own principled commitment to ethnographic borders, an intellectual tension he acknowledged as an «anti-ethnographic necessity.» His treatment of ethnicity, language, and religion as constitutive forces in geopolitical analysis anticipates dimensions of the discipline that Western classical geopolitics largely neglected. And his sustained attention to great power relations as a structural constraint on small state strategy represents perhaps the most distinctive contribution of the Serbian tradition – perspective that emerges not from theoretical abstraction, but from the lived geopolitical vulnerability of a small state navigating imperial rivalries. Something we suppose is present in geopolitical traditions of other small states.

Cvijić's 1914 article distills these intellectual threads into a single, historically charged text. Written at what he himself recognized as a moment of exceptional opportunity. A moment of Kairos shaped by the victories of the Balkan Wars and the favourable international alignment of the moment. This article combines geographical analysis, ethno-linguistic observation, and strategic assessment, and read in its full context, it stands as a remarkable document of small-state geopolitical self-consciousness, and a testament to the analytical richness that is possible when geography is brought into serious dialogue with history, culture, and political circumstance.

The broader implication of this study is epistemological as much as substantive. A discipline that restricts its canon to the geopolitical thought of great powers does not merely overlook interesting regional cases; it systematically misrepresents the intellectual history of geopolitics and forecloses potentially generative theoretical perspectives. The conditions faced by small states which are characterized by constrained agency, structural vulnerability, and the necessity of factoring great power interests into every strategic calculation, generates a distinct set of geopolitical questions that the classical tradition, focused on the projection of power rather than its management under constraint, was ill-equipped to address. Serbian geopolitical thought, and Cvijić's work in particular, offers one example for how those questions might be approached.

References

- Ajzenhamer, V. (2020). Zašto je u 21. veku važno biti geopolitičan? *Međunarodni problemi*, 72(1), 1-300.
- Balkanicus. (1913). *Albanski problem i Srbija i Austro-Ugarska*. Belgrade: Štamparija – „Dositije Obradović«
- Bašić, S. I. (2016). Jovan Cvijić's psychological characteristics of Southern Slavs and «ethnopsychology» in Serbia. In J. Vidojko & A. M. Petrović (Eds.), *150th Anniversary of Jovan Cvijić's Birth: Proceedings of the International Conference held at the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, October 12-14, 2015* (pp. 663-679). Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts.
- Božić, I. (1952). Sredozemlje (kratak istorijski i geopolitički opis). *Vojno delo*, 4(3), 52-64.
- Chotch, P. (1916). *Du Nationalisme Serbe*. PhD thesis, Faculte des lettres, Universite de Dijon, France.
- Cvijić, J. (1969). *Opšta geografija antropogeografija*, Belgrade: Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika.
- Cvijić, J. (1991). Geografski i kulturni položaj Srbije. In *Govori i članci*, knj. 3, tom 1, Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, NIRO Književne novine.

- Cvijić, J. (1995). *Osnove za geografiju i geologiju Stare Srbije i Makedonije*. Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti.
- Cvijić, J. (1996). *Antropogeografski i etnografski spisi II*. Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti.
- Cvijić, J. (2000a). Aneksija Bosne i Hercegovine i srpsko pitanje. In J. Cvijić. *Govori i članci* (pp. 164-182). Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti.
- Cvijić, J. (2000b). Glavne osobine centralnih oblasti balkanskoga poluostrva. In J. Cvijić. *Govori i članci* (pp. 87-119). Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti.
- Cvijić, J. (2000c). Geografske osnove makedonskog pitanja. In J. Cvijić. *Govori i članci* (pp. 145-149). Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti.
- Cvijić, J. (2000d). Granice i sklop naše zemlje. In J. Cvijić. *Govori i članci* (pp. 339-351). Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti.
- Cvijić, J. (2000e). *Balkansko poluostrvo*. Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti.
- Cvijić, J. (2000f). *Antropogeografski i etnografski spisi*. Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti.
- Cvijić, J. (2000g). Izlazak Srbije na Jadransko More. In J. Cvijić. *Govori i članci* (pp. 211-220). Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti.
- Cvijić, J. (2000h). Jedinstvo i psihički tipovi dinarskih Južnih Slovena. In J. Cvijić. *Govori i članci* (pp. 241-293). Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti.
- Cvijić, J. (2000i). O našoj državi. In J. Cvijić. *Govori i članci* (pp. 355-358). Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti.
- Cvijić, J. (2000j). O nacionalnom radu. In J. Cvijić. *Govori i članci* (pp. 57-68). Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti.
- Denis, E. (1915). *La Grande Serbie*. Paris: Librairie Delagrave.
- Dragašević, J. (1873). Prinos za geografiju Srbije. *Glasnik Srpskog učenog društva*, XXXVI, 1
- Garašanin, I. (2009). *Nacertanije*. Belgrade: Udruženje srpskih izdavača.
- Gopčević, S. (1890). *Stara Srbija i Makedonija*. Belgrade: Carna štamparija Dim. Dimitrijevića.
- Hepple, L. W. (1986). The Revival of Geopolitics. *Political Geography Quarterly*, 5(4), S21-S36.
- Karadžić, V. (1849). *Kovčezić za istoriju, jezik i običaje Srba sva tri zakona*. Beč: Štamparija Jermenskoga manastira.
- Karadžić, V. (2014). *Srbi svi i svuda*. Andrićgrad: Andrićev institut.
- Karić, V. (1887). *Opis zemlje, naroda i države*. Belgrade: Kraljevska državna štamparija
- Kjellen, R. ([1916] 1943). *Država kao oblik života*. Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska.
- Knežević, P. (1978). *Specijalni rat u Indokini*. Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački zavod.
- Korać, S. (2021). „Astropolitika«. *Međunarodni problemi*, 73(3), 397-609.
- Laffan, R. G. D. (1918). *The Guardians of the Gate: Historical Lectures on the Serbs*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Mackinder, H. J. (1904). The Geographical Pivot of History. *The Geographical Journal*, 23(4), 421-437.
- Mackinder, H. J. ([1919] 1996). *Democratic Ideals and Reality*. Washington: National Defence University Press
- Mamadouh, V. D. (1998). Geopolitics in the nineties: one flag, many meanings. *GeoJournal*, 46(4), 237-253.
- Marković, S. (1973). *Srpske obmane – Srbija na istoku*. Belgrade: BIGZ.
- Mladenović, M. (1994). Šta je geopolitika? In V. Maksimović (Ed.), *Dve Srpske geopolitičke studije* (pp. 1-12). Belgrade: Velvet.
- Rajčević, D. (1958). Dunav kao međunarodna vodena komunikacija. *Vojno delo*, 10(9), 685-693
- Ratzel, F. ([1900] 2024). *Il mare come fonte della grandezza dei popoli. Uno studio politico-geografico*. Cavriago: Anteo Edizioni.
- Ratzel, F. (1909). *Anthropogeographie*. Stuttgart: Verlag Von J. Engelhorn
- Ristić, A. (1939). Dunav: Geopolitička studija. *Biblioteka politika i društvo*, 28.
- Ristić, A. (1994). Geopolitičke sile na Sredozemnom moru. In V. Maksimović (Ed.), *Dve Srpske geopolitičke studije* (pp. 13-34). Belgrade: Velvet.
- Spykman, N. J. (1938). Geography and Foreign Policy II. *The American Political Science Review*, 32(2), 213-236.

- Stanković, S. (n.d.). Životni proctor. *Biblioteka politika i društvo*, 37-38.
- Stranjaković, D. (1939). Kako je postalo Garašaninovo Načertanije. *Spomenik Srpske kraljevske akademije*, 70(2), 1-53.
- Šešerinac, D. (1968). Sredozemlje danas. *Vojno delo*, 20(2), 116-127.
- Tomac, P. (1953a). Strategija i geografija I. *Vojno delo*, 5(4), 1-17.
- Tomac, P. (1953b). Strategija i geografija II. *Vojno delo*, 5(5), 2-16.
- Tucović, D. (1950). *Izabrani spisi II*. Belgrade: Prosveta.
- Vidal de la Blache, P. (1927). *Principles of Human Geography*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Vivian, H. (1904). *The Servian Tragedy with Some Impressions of Macedonia*. London: Grant Richards.
- Vuković, N. (2016). Jovan Cvijić as a geopolitician. In J. Vidojko Jović & A. M. Petrović (Eds.), *150th Anniversary of Jovan Cvijić's Birth: Proceedings of the International Conference held at the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, October 12-14, 2015* (pp. 809-820). Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts.
- Zorko, M. (2014). Politička geografija, geopolitika i geostrategija u Političkoj misli od 1964. Do 2013. Godine. *Politička misao*, 51(1), 109-132.

