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The role of Slovaks in the development of Sokolism in Stara Pazova: unity under the Slavic banner

Abstract: The author underlines the role which members of the *Slovak Sokol* from Stara Pazova had in the development of Sokolism, and accordingly in strengthening Serbian-Slovak ties in Srem and Vojvodina. *The Slovak Sokol* was the first organisation of this kind established on the territory of Austria-Hungary.

To this end, the author presents an overview of activities both of the *Slovak Sokol* organisation as well as Slovaks, members of the *Stara Pazova Sokol Society*, thereby particularly focusing mainly on joint Serbian-Slovak work on establishing this society and then on what soon followed, i.e., them joining the Yugoslav Sokol organisation and ultimately their building and development efforts which eventually resulted in constructing the Sokol House, a magnificent monument to the Serbs and Slovaks, volunteer soldiers in the Great War, and mounting a memorial plaque in honour of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and King Alexander Karađorđević.

In this connection, the author also notes some potentially prospective directions for developing Serbian-Slovak cooperation through renewing if not the Sokol movement on its former foundation, then through reviving the spirit of mutual unity and personal endeavours for the greater good of community.

Keywords: Serbs, Slovaks, Srem, Sokols, Masaryk, freedom, unity

1. Introduction: cultural and social struggle for political rights

A national awakening during the 19th century which, combined with an increasingly stronger national

awareness, started fundamentally changing the life view of broader social classes within the Slavic part of Austria-Hungary, which resulted in the establishment of multiple societies, cultural (such as reading rooms), choral (such as church, agricultural, and

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craftsmen's groups), charity organisations (such as women's charity cooperatives, which evolved into other such societies), and finally sports societies, among which the leading ones were the Sokol societies that were established on an "individual" basis, which is to say personal willingness and endeavour (Popov, 2010, p. 493).

Their almost sudden emergence and relatively swift spreading were the main feature of social life in Srem, especially during the last two decades of the 19th century. Since this situation was not limited solely to Srem, or solely Serbs either, it is necessary to identify the main factors that had an impact on it. In our view, there are three main reasons for this: 1) industrialisation and coming onto the political stage of lower social classes due to a general rise of liberalism and nationalism,^[2] which, unlike conservatism, was in a wider European area more open for lower classes participating in various political bodies and social life in general, and also stronger interest of the higher classes, tradesmen, craftsmen, and the intelligentsia in this form of activism either due to personal/group interest, or out of one's own altruism; 2) the fact that the Slavs, and consequently Serbs and Slovaks, lived in Austria-Hungary, a country which they did not perceive as their own, nor did they perceive it as free, required a form of self-organisation, which was first reflected in the political sphere through the establishment of different par-

ties and movements whose goals gradually shifted from the struggle for preserving identity to a full national emancipation, which then spread to a whole range of different societies, which through the concept of "private" engagement, seen as an expression of one's personal willingness, personal effort, eagerness and commitment, were organised vis-à-vis the state and its institutions, with entirely specific, parallel methods of operation, not only in social-cultural terms, but also in political terms, which was reflected in the need to accomplish a full political emancipation for those who needed it vitally. With this, it was, on the one hand, possible to be of assistance to one's "Slav fellowmen", and on the other, it ensured the preservation of independence vis-à-vis "alien" authorities, and thus the expression of national self-importance and ability to self-sustain; 3) as a Srem-specific reason, which gave rise to the emergence of these societies, the abolishment of the Military Frontier (1873) and the development of civilian authorities, which fundamentally changed not only the urban appearance of cities along the Frontier but also their inhabitants' habits, which in the last decades of the 19th century also involved competing with those communal communities in Srem (and the monarchy alike) that had already existed as the free royal cities.

In the second half of the 19th century, it is precisely these three factors that combined in Stara

[2] More accurately, "mass" nationalism, which Milorad Ekmečić acknowledges as the fundamental value that emerged at the turn of the century. This nationalism does not represent only the expansion of the idea of a shared history and strivings, but it also had people enter the social political stage, people, with their language, their literature (be it written or verbal), and ultimately with customs and traditions, which became an integral part of various ideologies, that is, social-cultural striving. For more details see: Ekmečić, 2021.

Pazova, where Serbs and Slovaks invested tremendous effort towards awakening national awareness by becoming increasingly active primarily in the field of culture. The first cultural institution which the Serbs and Slovaks from Stara Pazova jointly created was the *Citizens' Reading Rooms*. When they were established (12th July 1878), their head became Vladimír Hurban, a Slovak, who was to be succeeded two years later by a Serb, Nikola Petrović (Janko, 1991, p. 45).

Not long thereafter, owing to joint Serb-Slovak efforts, in 1891 another joint society was established in Stara Pazova – a *Volunteer Fire Department* (Janko, 1991, p. 47). Ten years later, in January 1902, Slovaks organised their first party in the Slovak language, and it was only a year later that they staged the first play in the Slovak language. In 1905, as a result of pressures from authorities, Slovaks established their own separate reading rooms, which closed three years later, only for them to resume activities once the Great War ended (Janko, 1991, p. 46).

The *Serbian Women's Charity Cooperative* was established in 1904. (Janko, 1991, p. 47), and two years later, a branch of *The Serbian Sokol* was opened in Stara Pazova, which laid foundation for subsequent establishment of a Slovak counterpart. The fact that the most prominent figures of Slovak social, national and cultural life in Stara Pazova took part in its establishment, as well as the fact that these figures delineated the direction of operation and defined its goals, resulted in Sokolism becoming the most significant expression of Slovak striving both for national emancipation within Austria-Hungary and for all-Slavic unity, Pan-Slavism.

2. Sokolism: In pursuit of a “complete man”

The Sokols stand for a Slavic cultural and national-liberation liberal organisation with anticlerical orientation. The movement was first established in Czechia in 1862, and at its helm was its ideological leader Miroslav Tyrš (Žutić, 2005, p. 155).

“In an effort to rally around all Slavic peoples, the Sokols, with their membership comprising various religions and social classes, invoked the French Revolution liberal mottos. Due to the impossibility to assemble Slavic military formations (national guards) in Austria-Hungary, the Sokol leaders set themselves the goal of connecting Slavic peoples (the Sokol idea of Pan-Slavism), in order to prepare them to fight for the accomplishment of ‘territorial and spiritual freedom’. From Czechia, the Sokol movement spread fast throughout Slavic regions in Austria-Hungary (Žutić, 2005, p. 155).

Because of its clear chivalrous commitment and readiness to work actively in the cultural and social fields, Sokolism soon became a major “revolutionary driving force of national energy”, and a sort of a “birthplace of freedom and independence”, from which originated many generations who were aware that there was no future for Slavic peoples unless they freed themselves of the Austrian-Hungarian rule (which was perceived as a starting point, rather than the ultimate goal) and unless this freedom was built into Pan-Slavic unity (Brozović, 1935, p. 9).

By naming itself *Soko(l)* (Serbian for falcon), this organisation, inspired by Serbian epic poetry,

made it clear what direction they were moving in was. An additional indication of this essentially revolutionary direction was also the Garibaldian red shirts worn by society members, which illustrated a straightforward national orientation. The rest of the uniform, which consisted of a red-black cap similar to that worn in the South Slavs' mountainous regions (decorated by a falcon feather) and a jacket, which contained the elements of national motifs, explicitly demonstrated the Slavic idea of this movement, which at the turn of the century was to play one of the leading roles in Slavic national revival (Brozović, 1935, pp. 155–158).

In political terms, Sokolism was guided by two fundamental principles: nationalism and democracy, while in social and cultural matters, it demanded that its members be fully committed to the community and deplore personal gain and glory. In spiritual terms, the Sokols strived for creating a “complete man”, as sort of a new, ethical man, that arose from a combination of spiritual and physical beauty, of which the former is built through moral improvement, and the latter is built through gymnastics, thereby becoming it to the Sokols much more than just physical exercise:

“Tyrš's Sokolism is a harmonious balance and concord of our endeavour to improve morally and physically: improving morally brings riches to our inner universe, whose visual manifestations are the shape, motion, and movement of a healthy body, whereby physical improve-

ment gives to our soul boldness, self-awareness, determination, mirth, and purpose to enjoy all the fruits of science and art, instils it with indelible traits of significance and primarily clothes it in a shiny and impenetrable shield of national and fatherland's freedom (Brozović, 1935, p. 10).

Among Slavs in Austria-Hungary, Sokol societies first emerged in 1863, first with Slovenes. Not long after them, with Croats, in 1874, and only four years thereafter, as an expression of joint efforts to preserve Slavic identity, *The Croatian-Slovene Sokol Association* was established. The Sokol movement first emerged among the Serbs in the Kingdom of Serbia, in the late 19th century, but as an organised movement, with a clear Sokol identifier, it was established in 1904–1905 in Srem, i.e., in Sremski Karlovci,^[3] where doctor Laza Popović quite soon also established the Fruška Gora Branch, from which not long after stemmed the Krajina Branch, which was intended for those movement members that gathered in various societies from the regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serb ethnic regions in the West (Slavonija, Banija, Kordun, Lika, Dalmacija) (Dimić, 2016, p. 14).

As a Pan-Slavic movement, Sokolism had its general principles, which were then for practical use purposes adjusted to individual national societies, in accordance with circumstances in which they operated and cultural patterns that shaped it. To all of them, the general goal was not national and social liberation but the creation of a “complete

[3] *The Serbian Falcon* was established in 1904 in Sremski Karlovci, at the joint initiative of doctor Laza Popović and Milan Teodorović presented a year earlier at the assembly meeting of the Serbian Academic Youth.

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The leadership of the Stara Pazova Sokol Society in front of the monument to the volunteers and heroes of the Great War, late 1920s

Photo: Private archive of the author

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man”. This mission, as noted in the document *Instructions to new members and generations*, issued by *The Belgrade 1 Sokol Society*, was superior to all other tasks and endeavours, which were deemed a necessary prerequisite for the accomplishment of this, much higher goal:

“Sokolism turns a person into a Sokol, which means a real man. Being truly a Soko means being better than a good person that is not a Soko, always being a role model and leader to people, being healthy, strong, honest, handsome, virtuous, industrious, selfless, disciplined, friendly, kind to his kins, in short, handsome and clean everywhere and in all places...

...Sokolism gives you the opportunity to grow in all directions, as required by a young body. Strive to develop the Sokol time in you as well and as safely as possible because the better the individuals are, the better the social community is.

An individual is nothing, the whole is everything, the Sokol flag reads. It is only the complex and organised environment that is capable of delivering the deeds of valour. A harmony of the wholes stands for the harmony of a person, building one’s own stable character that will develop (*Instructions to new members and generations*, 1932, pp. 4–5).

To accomplish these objectives, to build one's own character and a sense of unity, first in the circumstances of living in the "alien" state, then in one's own state, during the first half of the 20th century, Slovaks also worked hard, first as the members of Slovak, then Serbian-Slovak, and eventually the Yugoslav Sokol Organisation in Stara Pazova.

3. Serbian-Slovak Sokol ties in Stara Pazova

3.1. From establishing to uniting with the Serbian society

The Serbian Soko was established in Stara Pazova on 15th August 1906, thanks to the efforts of doctor Jovan Barać, county GP, and Jovan Vučković, accountant at the Stara Pazova Savings Bank. The first administration of the Stara Pazova society was appointed on 3rd December 1906 when doctor Barać was appointed head of the Society (*Stara Pazova Sokol Society Memorial 1906–1931*, 1931, p. 9).

Six years later, following suit of Serbs who in the meantime had established their Fruška Gora and Krajina Branches, the process of establishing their own society was initiated by Slovaks from a wider Vojvodina area. And so, apart from Slovaks in Stara Pazova, there was substantial effort on the part of Slovaks from Bački Petrovac to establish a Sokol organisation. They, as noted by Ján Babiak, submitted a request for the approval of rules immediately after Stara Pazova Slovaks (1912) but, due to restrictive Hungarian policies applied to the Slovaks, competent authorities dismissed the request

as being unacceptable and as posing a danger to Hungarian interests (Babiak, 2021, pp. 23–24).

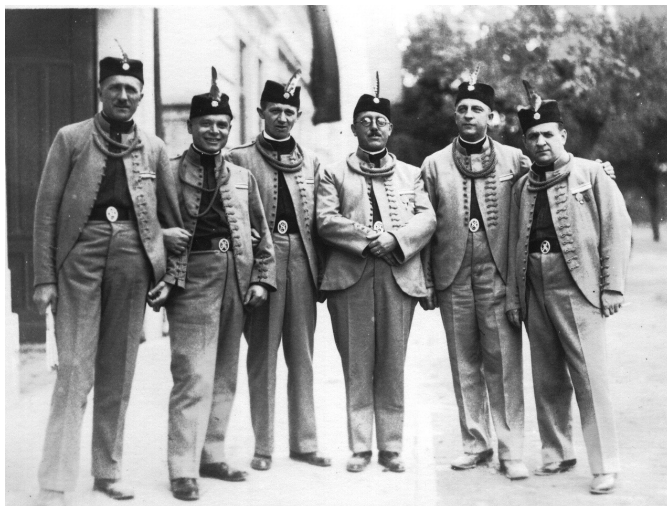
The situation in which Kisač and Bački Petrovac Slovaks were put in was just a reflection of Hungarian policies vis-à-vis Slovak striving for national emancipation. These policies were in place in the entire Hungarian part of the Dual Monarchy. Namely, the first attempt at setting up the Sokols in the "upper regions", which is today's Slovakia, occurred in 1863, only a year after the Czech Sokol Society had been established in Prague, when the first Slovak Sokol community was established in Turčiansky Svätý Martin (today's Martin). Still, what Czechs were allowed to do (possibly due to a different perception the German element had of them) did not apply to Slovaks as well, and so upon Hungarians' wishes, the society was disbanded.

"Due to tyrannical persecution, its leaders were forced to move to the United States of America and so in Chicago, in the free country, having found their fellow compatriots, they re-established the Slovak Sokol Society, from which many Slovak Sokol societies, with military branches, stemmed throughout America (*Stara Pazova Sokol Society Memorial 1906–1931*, 1931, p. 12).

Slovaks made a second attempt at finding their place in the Sokol community on the Austrian-Hungarian territory in 1896, after the Czech Moravia and Silesia society had been established, when what had until then been called the *Czech Sokol Municipality* was renamed to *Czechoslovak*. Unfortunately, this attempt was not long-lived either since the

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The leadership of the Sokol Society Stara Pazova during the consecration of the society's flag

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proposal, after it having been deliberated upon for several years, was eventually rejected, and so with the start of the 20th century, the original name was used, despite a substantial number of Slovaks, in addition to Czechs, being active and working out as well. (Brozović, 1935, p. 165–166).

What Slovaks had not succeeded in doing in Hungary, they fellow compatriots in Slovakia did because the Kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia had less restrictive policies in this relation, especially when it came to the possibility of setting up Slavs'

cultural, social, and sporting associations.^[4] The first meetings of Stara Pazova Slovaks, the purpose of these meetings being to establish *The Slovak Sokol*, were held in early 1910 and were chaired by the teacher “headmaster of the Boljevci State school taught in Slovak” Pavel Zloch. On this occasion, Stara Pazova Slovaks drafted a letter and sent it to Chicago in order to notify the society there that the first Slovak Sokol society in Austria-Hungary was soon going to be established, which, eventually took place two years later in May:

[4] There are multiple reasons for this. First of all, Croats themselves were targeted by Hungarians, so resistance against hungarisation also called for a “looser” policies to their “fellows” – Slavs. On the other hand, in some parts of Srem, as was the case with Ruma, Slavs, but mainly Croats (thanks to the fact that they were both Roman Catholics), were exposed to strong pressures from Germans, which required collaboration (as a result of which, for example, a magnificent *Croatian House* was erected in the first decade of the 20th century. This was a home to *The Ruma Croatian Sokol*, and it was deliberately built in a predominantly German part of the town. Finally, in the years leading to the Great War, such policies were significantly influenced both by the activities of Josip Juraj Štrosmajer and overall activities of the Croatian-Serbian coalition alike.

“In May of 1912, a founding meeting was convened at the inn owned by Žarko Ilić’s brother. The meeting was attended by approximately fifty Slovaks from Stara Pazova, and so, through mediation of Jaroslav Galanta’s brother, a committee was elected, which consisted of: brother Jaroslav Galanta, head; Vladimír K. Hurban, secretary, Evangelical chaplain, treasurer; schoolteacher Miloslav Kamenar, brother Pavel Zloch, chief, and committee members: municipal treasurer Janko Čmelík, sales clerk Samko Mengyan, farmer Martin Vereš, tailor Jozef Forgáč, machinist Pavel Mengyan, and industrialist Jozef Spišský-Šaghy” (*Stara Pazova Sokol Society Memorial 1906–1931*, 1931, p. 12).

After administration had been elected and operating rules confirmed at the assembly meeting, Slovak Sokols from Stara Pazova again sent a letter to Chicago, and top administration accepted it and included this Sokol society in the Chicago Branch. As a token of respect and good faith, the management of this branch sent to Stara Pazova Slovaks aid in the form of a donation of 1,000 dollars, which was a very substantial amount at the time (*Stara Pazova Sokol Society Memorial 1906–1931*, 1931, p. 13).

However, in addition to this financial aid, close relations with the Serbian Sokol society were equally important to the Stara Pazova Slovak society. Joint sessions of physical exercise and cultural cooperation ensured that the organisation grew rapidly and thus, with assistance from Chicago, not long before the Great War, the Sokol organisation even considered purchasing “a special building as

the Sokol House”, which would have been carried through had history not taken an entirely different course (*Stara Pazova Sokol Society Memorial 1906–1931*, 1931, p. 13).

Shots fired by Gavrilo Princip marked the beginning of WW1, at whose very outset the Stara Pazova Sokol societies, both the Serbian and the Slovak one, were first disbanded and eventually banned. Initially, authorities confiscated horses, cattle, and feed but soon after that, in the summer of 1914, they started conscription (Janko, 1991, p. 59).

Serbs and Slovaks, Sokols, were at first sent to the Eastern Front, then to the Serbian front and eventually to the Italian front, where, whenever circumstances allowed it, they surrendered and joined the Allies, mainly the Russian and the Serbian armies, only for them eventually also to establish a Czech volunteer legion, in whose establishment Ferdinand Klačík, a citizen of Stara Pazova, took part. This legion was later to become the foundation of establishment of a liberated and united Czechoslovakia’s army (Janko, 1991, p. 59).

“Pre-war activities of both Sokol societies bore fruit since young men active in the Sokol societies, brought up to have Sokol values, fought during the world war as volunteers and legionaries, and died in the military forces of their Slavic brothers in Dobruja, Thessaloniki, and on the French front (*Stara Pazova Sokol Society Memorial 1906–1931*, 1931, p. 13).

Unlike their fellow compatriots on the front, Serbs and Slovaks in Stara Pazova, who spent war days in the flatlands of Srem, lived through those days with trepidation. They were slightly embold-

ened and had more faith in Serbian victory in September 1914 when the army of the Kingdom of Serbia penetrated into the Stara Pazova territory during the Srem offensive:

“The battle between Austrian-Hungarian and Serbian armies in the fields of Stara Pazova started on 10th September. The stronger Austrian-Hungarian army managed to push back the Serbian army, only for it to retreat towards the Sava River on the morning of 13th...” (Janko, 1991, p. 59).

The people of Stara Pazova had to wait as long as until November 1918 for the Serbian army to set foot in the territory of Srem again. It was then that, in parallel with this process, they resumed the activities of the Sokol societies, both the Serbian and the Slovak one, which early this month got its first post-war administration:

“Head of the Slovak Sokol society became Konštantín Hurban, director of Slovak Bank, Vladimír K. Hurban, Evangelical priest, secretary; Miloslav Kamenar, treasurer; school teacher Karlo Dolinaj, chief, and Committee members: schoolteacher Pavel Zloch, industrialist Jozef Spišský-Šaghy, tradesman Samko Mengyan, tailor Jozef Forgáč, tradesman Jozef Ďurica, municipal notary Janko Čmelík, cashier Patko Brtka, and solicitor Samko Bábik” (*Stara Pazova Sokol Society Memorial 1906–1931*, 1931, p. 14).

Stara Pazova Serbs and Slovaks also confirmed their unanimity by establishing joint committees, the People’s Council, whose goal was to organise a welcome gathering for the Serbian army, in which the members of both Sokol societies participated. So, on 7th November 1918, after the Serbian soldiers had entered Stara Pazova, among other speakers on the street of the town, Vladimír Hurban, priest and secretary of the *Slovak Sokol*, also delivered a speech referring to Pan-Slavic unity as the greatest of all bequests of the victory of Serbian weapons (*Stara Pazova Sokol Society Memorial 1906–1931*, 1931, p. 15).

Slovak Sokols played an active role in all national events and together with Serbian Sokols, they had commemorative prayers on the occasions of birthdays of King Peter, Prince Regent and King Alexander, as well as the Crown Prince, and then the birthday of King Peter II, as well as other important dates from Slavic history (it was particularly important to mark Saint Sava’s Day, Saint Vitus’ Day, and Saints Cyril and Methodius Day) in the Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant churches.

However, the strongest Slavic awareness and sentiment was demonstrated by Stara Pazova Serbs and Slovaks, members of the two Sokol societies, in 1919, when the idea of merging the societies of “fellow Slavs” in a single, Yugoslav Sokol organisation was already extensively discussed. Unlike Croat Sokol societies, which did not care much for joining with Serbian societies,^[5] the Stara Pazova Slovak Sokol society carried out this process with wide open arms and without any difficulty.

[5] For more details see: Lapčević, 2023b; Lapčević, 2023a, Lapčević, 2025 (ed.).



Members of the Sokol Society Stara Pazova with female members dressed in Slovak folk costume

Photo: Private archive of the author

Namely, after a decision had been rendered at the Saint Vitus Sokol Assembly, held in Novi Sad in 1919, that the Sokol organisations would merge (Lapčević, 2025, p. 97, 104), discussions on how this idea should be implemented (so, not whether it was necessary or possible, but the manner in which this could be done as soon as possible) were held in Stara Pazova between head of the Slovak Sokol society Karlo Dolinay and Slavko Ivković, chief of *The Serbian Sokol*.

The entire process of joining the two societies was practically completed within two weeks^[6] since it was as early as Saint Peter's Day, on 12th July 1919, that Serbs and Slovaks paraded the streets of Stara Pazova as one and the same organisation (*Stara Pazova Sokol Society Memorial 1906–1931*, 1931, p. 16), which was for a while called the *Serbian-Slovak*, and then the *Yugoslav Sokol*, i.e., *The Stara Pazova Sokol Society*, which once territorial rearrangement of social branches had been completed, became a part of the Belgrade Branch.

[6] Unlike “joining” of the Croat and Serbian Sokol societies in Ruma and Sremska Mitrovica, where this process was never fully implemented, since the Croat Sokol societies in these towns, instead of declaring the merging of societies, as was the case with the Serbian Sokol societies, the Croat societies declared “liquidation”, based on which only a part of these organisations joined the newly-established Yugoslav Sokol organisation, while a part of their membership participated in renewal of Croat Sokolism in the mid-1920s.

3.2. Years of Yugoslav Sokolism

Following the end of the Great War, not long after Slovaks from Bački Petrovac and Kisač finally succeeded in establishing their Sokol societies, the Stara Pazova society established relations with them, and maintained close ties even after their fellow compatriots, as was done by themselves, became a part of the single Yugoslav Sokol organisation that belonged to the Svetozar Miletić Branch. Furthermore, Slovaks from Stara Pazova were duly appointed as members of administration of the single Sokol society, and so in 1921, head of the society was Slavko Ivković, while Karlo Dolinay was his deputy, who remained in this position in 1922 as well (*Stara Pazova Sokol Society Memorial 1906–1931*, 1931, p. 17–18). This trend continued in the years that followed, and so after Živojin Mihajlović was elected head of the society, his deputy became Samko Bábik, and chief was Šimko Kiš (*Stara Pazova Sokol Society Memorial 1906–1931*, 1931, p. 26).

A major success for Sokol athletes-gymnasts from Stara Pazova was in 1928 when as head of the society was elected the ambitious and very fit athlete from the former *Slovak Sokol* Jozef Šerkézi, whose special focus was setting up the events of public physical exercise when Stara Pazova Sokols demonstrated how fit they were on the one hand, and on the other, this was a good opportunity to grow membership:

“In the month of July, our society will organise a public session of physical exercise in the towns of Vojka, Stari Banovci, Krčedin, Stari Slankamen, Belegiš, Novi Karlovci and will be

present at public sessions of physical exercise of the Sokol Society in Kisač, Petrovac, and Batajnica. Success was notable in all the towns, especially in Novi Karlovci, where our event had the biggest turnout of all the mentioned towns...” (*Stara Pazova Sokol Society Memorial 1906–1931*, 1931, p. 31).

To celebrate the tenth anniversary of liberation and unification, and also to mark Serbian-Slovak Sokol unity, the people of Stara Pazova launched an initiative whose ultimate objective was to build a Sokol house, as a permanent community building. At an extraordinary assembly meeting of the Society, which was held on 11th November 1928, a decision was rendered that the Sokols of Stara Pazova should borrow 200,000 dinars and a special “development committee” was set up, with an equal number of Serbian and Slovak committee members.

Stara Pazova political authorities provided financial assistance for this major endeavour by contributing 30,000 dinars, and this same amount was contributed by Petrovaradin Assets Office (Sremska Mitrovica Branch), while special credit for obtaining development permit on a location situated in the heart of town goes to Viktor Rup, lawyer and member of the Society. Substantial amounts of funds were provided by the Belgrade Branch, Public Health Institute in Novi Sad and many other organisations, institutions, private individuals, public servants that wanted to take part in this endeavour which was to show not only how developed the Society was, how strong it was but also the value of Serbian-Slovak unity (*Stara Pazova Sokol Society Memorial 1906–1931*, 1931, p. 33, 335).

Architectural design for the building was the work of Momir Korunović, a renowned architect and a Sokol himself. His design was a gift to the society, while the ceremony of consecration of the foundation took place in 1930. Construction works were finally completed the following year, in 1931, and the Sokol house was named after King Peter the First (*Stara Pazova Sokol Society Memorial 1906–1931*, 1931, p. 36, 41, 48).

In parallel with this activity, the Stara Pazova Serbian and Slovak Sokols initiated constructing a monument to honour Slovak and Serbian volunteer soldiers who fought in the Great War, both those soldiers who fought in the army of the Kingdom of Serbia and members of the *Czechoslovak Legion*.

The monument which, in addition to the monument to soldiers of the Timok Division who fought in the battle on the Leget field near Sremska Mitrovica (erected in 1923), is the only monument in Srem that commemorates the heritage of Sokols. It has the shape of an obelisk, with four urns around a decorative wall. Plaques are attached to the monument and have an inscription on them that is both in the Serbian and Slovak languages, which reads: “To the heroes fallen for national liberation and unity: 1914–1918. The Stara Pazova Sokol Society”. The monument is additionally decorated with chains, the coat of arms of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, with a stone falcon atop, as a symbol of the movement that erected the monument.

The monument, a lasting pledge of unity and remembrance of the fallen for South Slavic and Pan-Slavic unity, built of stone that was especially delivered from Kaymakchalan, was consecrated on the occasion of the first assembly meeting of the Belgrade Branch, in mid-February of 1929:

“The ceremony of consecrating the monument was very dignified, and was served by priests belonging to all three religions, and a speech appropriate for the occasion was delivered on behalf of heads of the society. The ceremony was attended by envoys of the Presidency of Ministers, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of the Army and Navy, Ministry of Education, then delegates of all local authorities and corporations, as well as many citizens.

After the monument was consecrated and branch meetings were held, they all had a formal lunch at noon, and in the evening, there was a gala event with a big turnout, so it was a major success in every way. This day was a day of genuine Sokol festivities in our town” (*Stara Pazova Sokol Society Memorial 1906–1931*, 1931, p. 37).

It was as early as the following year, with a joint effort of Serbs and Slovaks gathered in the *Stara Pazova Sokol Society*, that on 8th March 1930 they celebrated the eightieth birthday of Tomáš Masaryk:

“This celebration consisted of a gala event that fully demonstrated the love and unity between our and Czechoslovak people, as well as a huge thank you to our brother president for his work in the best interests of both our peoples.

During the event, a very successful lecture was given by brother Vladimir Vereš, MD, followed by inspired speeches in the spirit of Slavic mutuality, brotherhood, and love, which were delivered by delegates from all local societies, Serbian-Orthodox Church Municipality, the Circle of Serbian Sisters, Serbian craftsmen’s

reading room, Serbian husbandmen's reading room, Serbian farmers' reading room, *The Gusle* Serbian choral society, Red Cross, Volunteer Soldiers' Association and the reading club.

At the end of the gala event, both Yugoslav and Czechoslovak national anthems were sung by the local *Gusle* Serbian choral society (*Stara Pazova Sokol Society Memorial 1906–1931*, 1931, p. 39–40).

“Just a year following this, more precisely on 3rd May 1931, as a present of the Ministry of Education of Czechoslovakia, and as the final decoration in the marking of the tenth anniversary of liberation and unification, a memorial plaque in honour King Alexander Karadorđević and the President of Czechoslovakia Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk was mounted. This plaque, made of white marble, showed the faces of these two statesmen and had the following inscription: ‘In memory of liberation of the Yugoslav and Czechoslovak peoples 1918–1928’” (*Memorial plaque for Alexander the First and Masaryk*, 9th May 2013).

Between 1935 and 1939, Stara Pazova Sokolism continued to fulfil its Slavic mission with equal commitment. Close ties between the two nations were not compromised during the occupation either, when many members of *The Stara*

Pazova Sokol Society took up arms and joined the resistance movement.

Conclusion

The occupation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in April 1941, and Ustasha authorities taking control of Srem, resulted in a new ban of the activities of the *Sokol Society* in Stara Pazova. Only this time the ban was to last for good since after 1945 new authorities did not show any willingness to renew its activities.^[7]

Immediately after they entered Stara Pazova, the German occupation forces damaged the memorial plaque that was on the theatre building, only for the plaque to be entirely removed later. Until 1990, it was kept in the basement of the *Slovak House*^[8] but after the restoration and conservation of this building was completed, it was mounted again in May 2013, only this time in the *Slovak House*.

The Sokol House King Peter the First was first claimed for the needs of the German occupation forces, and then for the needs of new, Bolshevik authorities. The monument erected in honour of Serbian-Slovak volunteer soldiers, for the occasion of commemorating the tenth anniversary of liberation and unification, suffered substantial wear and tear of time, and is still awaiting restoration and conservation.

[7] Instead of the Sokol Society, with similar objectives a PE society called Society for Physical Education *Partizan* was established, which ceased to exist towards the end of the 20th century. A particularly interesting fact is that it was not possible to renew the activities of other societies either, such as The Circle of Serbian Sisters and similar organisations. During the occupation, various prohibitions were introduced, followed by the confiscation of property, which continued after “liberation” as well, in which, in a rather diabolical manner, one can see a continuity of Ustasha-Nazi and Bolshevik authorities.

[8] At this point, it is imperative that we once again contemplate the continuity of Ustasha-Nazi and Bolshevik authorities, and the similarities between their ideas, at least regarding the need for history revisionism and an overall social awareness.

The fact that in slightly over two years it will be this monument's centenary is perhaps the best motivation to initiate its reconstruction, which would

give both Serbs and Slovaks the possibility to reaffirm, after one century, their close ties in Stara Pazova, the ties which have never been compromised.

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Memorial plaque to Alexander I and Masaryk (9th May 2013)

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