

Introductory talk

## *EUROPEAN AND NORTH AMERICAN ENCYCLOPEDIA CONFERENCE*

Distinguished guests, respected participants, ladies and gentlemen!

It is a great honour for the Miroslav Krleža Institute of Lexicography and also a great privilege for me, to host the second European and North American Encyclopedia Conference.

In spite of the coronavirus disease, and the still visible impact of the 2020 earthquakes, I hope Your stay in the city of Zagreb, the Croatian capital, will be pleasant and relaxing. Equally, I hope the conference activities, both official and unofficial, will be fruitful concerning the planned topics, and that, at least during these short three days, we will hear no more grim news from embattled Ukraine.

This year, the Republic of Croatia is celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its international recognition. However, the recognition itself did not stop the fighting, which ended only in 1995. The five years of conflict were also characterised by moments of misunderstanding on the side of countries that are now Croatia's partners and friends, including the arms embargo that seriously hindered defence against the well-equipped attackers.

Although the aggressors were eventually repulsed, the traces of war are still present, in landscapes and buildings, in the economy, and—probably the most important—in people's hearts.

Although the guns have long gone silent, cultural wars of a sort, those concerning competing interpretations of recent history, are still raging. Moreover, the interpretations fight over modern and medieval history as well, and often tend to blur the line towards what is an established fact, and what is not. Somebody might think this is a new, postmodern development, but that's not the case. Such disputes, including also matters of state organisation, language, and religion, i. e. of cultural and national identity, were recorded within the Croatian context already in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and even before that.

Naturally, encyclopedias, both domestic and foreign, belong to this kind of cultural or information battlefield, and that's what many of their founding fathers had in mind.

Unsurprisingly, even if we have in mind only the recent, professional, entirely benevolent encyclopedia editing, free of bias and prejudice, it is practically impossible to escape relying on some false statements.

Therefore, in my opinion, the value of the European and North American Encyclopedia conference initiative is not only in tackling the questions of how to make the encyclopedic content more findable, usable or influential, but also of how to make it more trustworthy, because of the inherent truth-value of both its factual statements and interpretations.

Obviously, apart from recruiting renowned, dedicated contributors, which is often not an easy task, a kind of further trans-national coordination between editorial boards of various encyclopedias could be established, concerning the exchange of texts or even advisory peer-reviewing of selected topics, of global, regional, or national scope.

For instance, thirty years ago my senior colleagues were frustrated by inadequate information on Croatia in some of the world's most influential encyclopedias. In that vein, a project was instigated in order to analyse such deficiencies, and to propose amendments. With the advance of the internet, and with other improvements in the circulation of knowledge, things started to improve, and are generally much better now, albeit further work could and should be done. Among other things, the Institute's periodical, *Studia lexicographica*, may serve for covering the themes of common interest, such as theory and history of particular encyclopedic projects, in English and other commonly used languages.

Fortunately, contrary to the distorted picture of Croatia as a Balkan nation invented in the 1990s, most accounts now point to the variety of cultural influences, including the Central-European and Mediterranean as more important ones. Similarly, the well-attested medieval Croatian Kingdom is seldom overlooked, and it is mostly recognised that, in spite of all the entanglements, its core elements at least continued to exist within the Croatian-Hungarian Union and within the complex framework of the Habsburg Monarchy all the way until 1918 and, although on different grounds, were also incorporated to a degree in both the monarchist and the communist Yugoslavia.

Of course, more and more adequate attention has also been given to the geography and natural heritage of Croatia, its economic and cultural life, prominent people etc.

Be it as it may, standing before You today, we are also standing on the shoulders of our predecessors, energetic men and women that confronted many obstacles.

The first Croatian printed vocabulary dictionaries originated in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and were intended for improving understanding between Adriatic seafarers, and among the intellectual elite of the Habsburg Monarchy. Biographical dictionaries soon followed.

Despite being reduced by Ottoman invasions to the »reliquiae reliquiarum«, or »remnants of the remnants«, the Croatian lands during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, under supreme Habsburg and Venetian rule, harboured notable individuals dedicated to the early modern ideas of nation building, such as common history and literature and standard language, but—contrary to development trends in Western and Northern Europe—no general encyclopedias had been printed.

Following the fall of Venice in 1797 and the brief episode of Napoleon, Croatia and Slavonia and Dalmatia and Istria were brought together under Habsburg rule only in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Starting in the 1830s, and the beginning of the broader cultural-political activity of national integration, newspapers, journals, civil associations and state-owned or state-sponsored institutions dedicated to culture and science started to flourish.

However, in spite of rather well-established subscriber circles and individual patronage, and not counting several biographical dictionaries, the first multi-volume general encyclopedia in the Croatian language appeared only in the 1880s, launched by two high school professors in the city of Osijek. Despite their enthusiasm, and probably also due to political obstructions, they gathered only a small circle of associates, quitting the project at letter G.

The first Croatian national encyclopedic volume, published in Hungarian and German in 1901 and 1902 as part of the famous series *Die Österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie in Wort und Bild*, had somewhat more success, but was almost completely forgotten after 1918. Edited by the renowned Iso Kršnjavi, former Croatian minister of education and culture, the volume was entitled *Croatia and Slavonia*, which were implied to be of equal rank to the Kingdom of Hungary.

The scope significantly changed in the new Yugoslav state, and four volumes of the *National Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Encyclopedia* were published in Zagreb in the 1920s. Edited by renowned Serbian historian Stanoje Stanojević, this was another private edition, and many topics were left for a never-published supplement. Also, the Croatian material was covered with uneven quality, and some of the controversial articles were written exclusively by Serbian authors.

Thus, when the first single-volume general lexicons appeared in the mid-1930s, they were published independently in Zagreb and Belgrade, and they too were private editions.

Towards the end of the 1930s, work on a new, multi-volume general *Croatian Encyclopedia* was launched by high school professor and Catholic intellectual Mate Ujević. Having developed an unparalleled promotional activity, the initiative was soon supported by the Banate of Croatia, and later by the Independent State of Croatia. The Encyclopedia was largely unaffected by wartime propaganda and distanced itself from the values of the new European order, so some hoped that work on it may continue even after letter E, but the post-war communist authorities dissolved Ujević's Institute.

Finally, our Institute of Lexicography was established by a Yugoslav government decree in October 1950 as the sole federal institution based in Zagreb. Only in 1972 was the Institute taken under the wing of the Republic of Croatia. Its founder and first director, the erudite writer Miroslav Krleža, remained at the Institute's helm until his death in 1981, balancing between his personal and national strivings and the changing political circumstances.

Established primarily in order to publish a more successful *Encyclopedia of Yugoslavia* than Stanojević's, the Institute completed its first edition in the early 1970s, but the completion of the second edition, carefully elaborated according to the largely decentralised federal Constitution of 1974, was prevented by differences between the republican and the provincial editorial boards, and eventually the collapse of the Yugoslav state.

Adherence to similar constraints, especially a Marxist approach to social sciences and a part of the humanities, was a necessary condition for many of the Institute's publications, including the three editions of multi-volume general encyclopedia, but this influence was only marginally apparent in the enormous specialised programme.

Furthermore, under Krleža's protection, some of the otherwise politically proscribed experts continued their careers in the Institute. The most prominent among them, the mentioned polymath Ujević, even became the Institute's chief organiser. Among other things, he managed to complete an almost comprehensive bibliography of texts published in Yugoslav periodicals until 1945, with over two million units, and the first edition of the *Maritime Encyclopedia*.

After Krleža's death, the Institute was severely criticised by the regime for its *Croatian Biographical Dictionary* not being Marxist enough, for bourgeois nostalgia, etc. Some of its intellectuals were temporarily silenced, but nevertheless continued their internal discussions toward pluralistic liberalisation. For instance, since 1990, three members of Croatian Parliament originated from the Institute's 60 lexicographers, one of them even serving as a speaker of the House of the Representatives, and another as a minister of culture.

All in all, the state independence and democratisation of the 1990s brought new possibilities and new challenges to Croatian encyclopedistics. Entering the Institute of Lexicography at the turn of the century, my generation was happy enough to be spared many political and social upheavals, but the world is constantly changing in so many ways that, of course, demand finding new solutions. Deeply believing that this conference will also serve such a purpose, ladies and gentlemen, I bid You a good start!

*FILIP HAMERŠAK*



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