The idea for the formation of a South Slav or Yugoslav Union, of a Balkan or Danubian Federation or Confederation, occupied an important place in the thinking and activity of a number of Bulgarian intellectuals and statesmen. Moreover, this idea was one of the aims toward which the organized Bulgarian national liberation movement strove. This essay endeavors to trace and to analyze the history of the Yugoslav Idea among the Bulgarians during the nineteenth century.

The most important facts in the history of the interrelationships between the South Slavic peoples in the modern period relate to their efforts to preserve and develop their national consciousness and culture from assimilation, to free themselves from foreign domination, and to form independent states. It was in the process of the struggle for liberation that an awareness of the necessity for unity of the South Slavs arose and common practical steps were taken toward this end.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, foreign domination and time itself had, in great measure, obliterated the old ethnic enmities and rivalries which existed among the South Slavs during medieval times. The common fate and ordeal of these peoples for more than four hundred years contributed to the appearance of feelings of mutual sympathy and help among them. Until the end of the eighteenth century, the Bulgarian and Serbian peoples believed that liberation from the Ottomans could be achieved only with foreign help. At the same time we find the beginning of a number of attempts among them to unite in a common struggle for liberation.1

In the Serbian struggle for national liberation, not only Bulgarians living in Serbian lands but also a great number of volunteers from Bulgaria actively participated in the struggle against the common enemy. The Bulgarians fighting on the side of the Serbs expected that the liberation of Serbia would lead to improvement of their own lot, and would thus constitute an important achievement toward the realization of their dreams for a free Bulgaria. The creation of a free autonomous Serbian state in 1815 gave the Bulgarians encouragement. A number of Bulgarians entered the Serbian state service and Serbia became a second home for many others.

The writings and activities of many Bulgarian, Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian intellectuals, revolutionaries and statesmen are filled with concern for the present and future of their peoples. Thus, when discussing the Bulgarian views and attitudes toward the Yugoslav Idea, it should always be remembered that the interrelationships between the South Slavs during the nineteenth century manifested themselves in varying degrees and forms in all fields of life and influenced their political ideals and strivings.

The roots of the idea of a Slavic identity and of the necessity for the unification of the

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Slavic peoples in modern times goes back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. An awareness of being a Bulgarian, a Croat, a Serb or a Slovenian and at the same time a Slav is either explicitly or implicitly found in the writings of Mavro Orbini, Juraj Križanić, Paisii Hilendarski, Hristofor Žefarović, Jovan Rajić and others.

The Serbs were able to free part of their lands and create a national state several decades before the Bulgarians and a century before the Croats and Slovenians. They were, therefore, in a better position to formulate plans for the liberation of their fellow countrymen and, if possible, the other South Slavs. One such plan was that of Ilija Garašanin (1812-1874). He set forth his ideas of the long range aims of Serbian foreign policy in his Načertanije. Garasanin believed that the “roots and foundation” for the building of a strong Serbian state were to be found in the medieval empire of Tsar Dušan the Great, which was destroyed by the Ottomans in the fourteenth century.

In the early 1840’s Garašanin saw that the weakening of Ottoman power in the Balkans represented an opportunity for the new Serbian state to reconstruct on the “solid and durable historical foundation” of the Serbian Medieval Empire “a new edifice.” Therefore, “the Serbian idea and its national mission and existence will stand under the sacred law of history.” Garašanin believed that if one considered “the rebirth of the Serbian kingdom from these standpoints, then other will easily understand the South Slav idea and accept it with joy; for probably in no single European country is the memory of the historical past so vivid as among the Slavs of Turkey, for whom the recollection of the celebrated events of their history is especially cherished and fondly remembered. Therefore, it may be counted as certain that this enterprise will be readily accepted, making unnecessary ten years of activity among the people, in order to prepare them to understand its utility and value.”

The application of this policy was to be carried out in what Garašanin regarded as Serbian lands such as Bosnia and Hercegovina, Montenegro, as well as Northern Albania. Moreover, he attempted to define Serbia’s relationship to Bulgaria as well. By inviting Bulgarians to study in Serbian schools, by training young Bulgarians in theology in order to replace Greek control of the Bulgarian church, by printing Bulgarian books in Serbia, and by sending to Bulgaria reliable and capable Serbs “who would draw the attention of the Bulgarian people to Serbia, and awaken in it feelings of friendship toward Serbia and the Serbian government, as well as hopes that Serbia will aid their liberation and work for their welfare,” Garašanin hoped to eliminate Russian influence, and thus replace it with Serbian influence and eventual control of the country.

In order to carry out these policies in the Serbian as well as in the other Slavic lands a secret society was organized in Belgrade led by Matija Ban from Dubrovnik. Several Bulgarians, including Neofit Bozveli, Ilarion Makariopolski, and Konstantin Rainov collaborated with the society. Bozveli and Makariopolski were the leaders of the Bulgarian struggle for the establishment of a Bulgarian National Church. Although the

3. Ibid., p. 195.
4. Ibid., pp. 195-196.
5. Ibid., p. 205.