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A HOLIDAY ACCEPTABLE TO A UNITED EUROPE AND THE WORLD: SRETENJE – A NEW STATE HOLIDAY IN SERBIA AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Summary: This paper deals with the basic ideas originating from the members of a committee appointed by the government of the Republic of Serbia to put together a proposal for a new state holiday at the beginning of the new millennium when political changes took place in Serbia. One of these ideas was that the holiday should be acceptable to a united Europe. This paper presents part of the research into the reception of Sretenje – Statehood Day: what we have shown to Europe and the world by celebrating Statehood Day, based on a representative sample of respondents from 2004, 2007, then 2008 –2011 and finally 2018 –2020.

The paper contains an analysis of the ways in which the citizens of Serbia were congratulated on the occasion of Statehood Day by Google from 2012 to 2020, as well as the reception of Google Doodle greetings in public discourse.

Key words: Sretenje – Statehood Day, public discourse, holiday reception, Europe, Google Doodle greetings

New traditions – Jelena Đorđević wrote – acquire their legitimacy through repetition and an array of recognisable symbols and messages (Đorđević 1997, 126). Following the parliamentary elections of the year 2000 and the political changes that took place in Serbia, the new holiday calendar for the year 2001 came into being as the result of a proposal by a committee, headed by historian Prof. Radoš Ljušić, which had been appointed by the government of the Republic of Serbia (Kovač 2011, 9–14). The proposal of this committee, which comprised eminent historians, as well as professors from other fields of study,

was presented for debate in the Serbian Parliament, after which the National Assembly – on 10 July, 2001 – adopted the *Law on State and Other Holidays in the Republic of Serbia*.¹ This was when the new state holiday, Sretenje – Statehood Day, was introduced.

The basic idea on which the committee members had agreed was that the holiday should not be connected with an event from the Middle Ages because no country in Europe celebrates a holiday inspired by an event from that period. The 20th century was excluded due to its ideological rifts which would have rendered the holiday acceptable to some but unacceptable to others. Two important 19th century events were selected, which both took place on Sretenje²: the beginning of the First Serbian Uprising in Orašac in 1804 and the adoption of the Sretenje Constitution in Kragujevac in 1835. According to Radoš Ljušić, “it is an excellent proposal, since the important events from the historical and cultural past of Serbia – an uprising and a constitution – were led by both the Karađorđević and the Obrenović dynasties, which lends Sretenje an air of specific symbolism. This was the day when the First Serbian Uprising began, the first Serbian revolution, and it was also the day when the Sretenje Constitution was adopted. This could justify us before Europe, because we did not choose a date that was tied exclusively to our national war history, but also to a day of constitutionalism which is in a way a day of statehood.”³

Up to 2011, Sretenje was celebrated on a single day, 15 February,⁴ but with the *Amendments and Supplements to the Law on State and Other Holidays in the Republic of Serbia* from 2011⁵ another day of celebration was introduced – 16 February. Rasim Ljajić, the then Minister of Labour and Social Policy, stated that “it has been proposed that Sretenje – Statehood Day should be celebrated for two days, on the 15 and 16 February, instead of one day as has been the practice up to this point” and added that “in that way, this important holiday will gain momentum and contribute to raising the citizens’ awareness of Statehood Day”.⁶

1 *Закон о државним и дружим празницима у Републици Србији* [*Law on State and Other Holidays in the Republic of Serbia*], *Службени гласник РС* [*Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*], no. 43, dated 17 July, 2001.

2 The Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, celebrated by the Serbian Orthodox Church on 15 February (on 2 February, according to the Julian Calendar).

3 An interview with Professor Ljušić, 13 December 2002 (Kovač 2011, 13)

4 From 2007 to 2011, 15 February was also Serbian Armed Forces Day. Since the *Amendments and Supplements to the Law on State and Other Holidays in the Republic of Serbia* in 2011, Serbian Armed Forces Day has been celebrated on the 23 April, to commemorate the day when the Second Serbian Uprising began in 1815.

5 *Измене и дојуне Закона о државним и дружим празницима у Републици Србији* [*Amendments and Supplements to the Law on State and Other Holidays in the Republic of Serbia*], *Службени гласник РС* [*Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*], no. 43/2001, 101/2007, no. 92/2011. Available at: <http://www.propisi.com/zakon-o-drzavnim-i-drugim-praznicima-u-republici-srbiji.html>.

6 PTC. 2011. “Poslanici o državnim praznicima [Members of Parliament on State Holidays]” 23 November, 2011. Available at: <https://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/9/politika/995936/poslanici-o-%20%E2%80%A8drzavnim-praznicima.html>

On the occasion of the proposal that Sretenje become a new state holiday, the proposers took into account two important historic events from Serbia's past: the beginning of the First Serbian Uprising in 1804 and the adoption of the Sretenje Constitution in 1835. From 2007 to 2011 the date of 15 February was also celebrated as the Serbian Armed Forces Day. The new state holiday was constructed as such.

According to Eric Hobsbawm, 'invented tradition' refers to a number of actions, ritual or symbolic in nature, which are usually governed by "overtly or tacitly accepted rules" and "which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past." Hobsbawm goes on to specify that invented traditions usually strive towards establishing continuity with the appropriate historical past (Hobsbawm 2000, 1).⁷

Hobsbawm's opinion that what is interesting for the researcher is "the use of ancient materials to construct invented traditions of a novel type for quite novel purposes" (Hobsbawm 2000, 6) is shared by the author of this study. The most exhaustive analysis on the *return to tradition*, or *retraditionalisation* in Serbia from the perspective of political anthropology has been given by Slobodan Naumović (Naumović 2009).

Various channels of communication were used to establish contact with the historical realities symbolised by the new Sretenje – Statehood Day holiday. Messages were also sent by the annual celebrations of Statehood Day in Orašac. According to Jelena Đorđević, "political festivities are 'metaphors' that contain symbolically condensed political messages. In them, it is possible to 'read' socio-political reality, the basic principles and postulates of ideology, the constellation of the government and its worldview" (Đorđević 1997, 126).

Research was conducted into views of the historical past through public discourse and the celebrations of Sretenje – Statehood Day at the *place of memory* in Orašac (Kovač 2011; Kovač 2014; Kovač 2018).

Holidays, Todor Kuljić wrote, "serve to reinforce the remembrance of socially significant events" (Kuljić, 2004, 137). When writing about remembrance, Kuljić states that the issue at hand is making remembered content current and that remembrance is "reaching into the past from a present that is always new" (Kuljić 2004, 127). The political events in the first two decades of the 21st century influenced the shaping of the political attitudes and behaviour of some of the Statehood Day participants in Orašac (Kovač 2011).

Regarding the reception of the new state holiday, the research conducted has shown that it was initially slow to be recognised as a holiday. Research into its reception was conducted in the years 2004 and 2007 and then in the 2008 – 2011 period on a representative sample of respondents. In the second decade since the holiday's inception, from the year 2012, political changes have taken place in Serbia – the coalition around the Serbian Progressive Party

7 For the Serbian translation of this introduction, please see Hobsbaum 2002.

came into power. During this research period, the political messages sent to the communication collective – the public – via different communication channels from the *place of memory* in Orašac on the occasion of celebrations were again followed from 2018 to 2020. In the course of this period, research into the reception of Statehood Day was conducted at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade among students of *ethnology and anthropology* and *history*. From a wider scope of research dealing with the importance of Sretenje – Statehood Day in the shaping of the cultural identity of the population of Serbia, this study singles out the responses to the question: *What have we shown the world by celebrating Sretenje – Statehood Day?*

What have we shown the world by celebrating Statehood Day?

1 Research in 2004 and 2007

Research into the new Sretenje – Statehood Day holiday has shown that the public figures who took part in shaping the proposal for the new state holiday in Serbia in 2001 sent the following messages to the public using a variety of communication channels:

- to the communication collective (the public) in Europe and around the world: *the holiday that we are proposing is acceptable to a united Europe.*
- to the communication collective (the public) in Serbia: *the holiday that we are proposing is acceptable to a considerable part of the population because it is a holiday that does not provoke ideological rifts* (Kovač 2005, 114; Kovač 2011, 27).

Research into the reception of Sretenje – Statehood Day⁸ was conducted in the year of the grand anniversary – 200 years since the beginning of the First Serbian Uprising – in 2004, and again in 2007 – the year when that day started to be celebrated as Serbian Armed Forces Day as well (Kovač 2007, 244–257; Kovač 2011, 39).

In 2004, the students of ethnology and anthropology mostly responded to the question “What have we shown the world by choosing this holiday?” with “nothing”, and one student wrote “I do not know what their thoughts regarding this issue are. I believe that our government wanted to emphasise the beginning

8 The reception of Statehood Day was investigated among a total sample of 150 students of *ethnology and anthropology* and *medicine*, aged 19–37 from Belgrade, Sremska Mitrovica, Smederevo, Aleksinac, Kruševac and Užice and 50 examiners of different gender and profession from Belgrade, Vrnjačka Banja, Kruševac and Čičevac. This group of respondent-researchers comprised individuals between the ages of 28 and 75.

of the struggle for an independent state, which is supposed to be modern, since we are lagging behind, there are still tendencies for this to be a late 19th or early 20th century ‘modern’ state, and not a modern parliamentary democracy”. Another student responded: “I think that what we have shown the world is irrelevant, one must not forget that this is a religious holiday and that it must not lose its purpose as such, and it is especially important that it is not abused” (Kovač 2011, 43–45).

The students of *medicine* mostly did not respond to this question. Several students answered with “nothing”, adding “what world?” A student wrote: “we have shown the world the establishment of the rule of law” (Kovač 2011, 44).

The respondents in the *control group* stated that by choosing this holiday we have shown the world that “the Serbian people has a past worthy of respect”. Some respondents replied with “nothing special”, “we are too small a country for our holidays to have influence on the world”; and one 65-year-old respondent wrote that “the Serbian people have their own past that is worthy of respect, although the world could not care less about this, because for this world we are a sphere of secondary interest” (Kovač 2011, 44).

In 2007 the students of *ethnology and anthropology* responded to the question “*What have we shown the world by celebrating Sretenje – Statehood Day?*” that by celebrating this holiday “we uphold tradition”; we have shown that “we are familiar with our history (some of us are)”; “we value independence”; “we show that Serbia had its own constitution as early as the 19th century”; “that we are celestial people”; “the idea was probably to include Serbia in the group of so-called modern European civic states that obtained their modern constitutions in the course of the 19th century”. Some of the respondents “do not believe that we have shown the world anything”; or “that anything was supposed to be shown”; one said “probably nothing special, I think that the world is not interested in such things, especially not in Serbia... but let’s say that it is Serbia’s attempt to show that it has something to celebrate and something to be proud of” (Kovač 2011, 44–45).

In the first period of research people were slow to recognise Sretenje as a state holiday. More than 50% of the respondents returned the questionnaire without having answered the questions.

Opinions are divided as to what we have shown the world by choosing this particular holiday. In some statements, *the respondents believe that we have not shown anything to the world* and that *the world is not interested in the holiday*. In the remaining answers given by the students, as well as the control group, the respondents highlight the importance of the holiday, the constitution, and respecting tradition. They emphasise that Serbia has “a past worthy of respect”; and that “we were already following the European course at that time”.

2 Research from 2008 to 2011⁹

2008

In answer to the question “*What have we shown the world by choosing this holiday?*” the students of *ethnology and anthropology* responded: “that we value tradition and history, that we respect our ancestors”; “that we care about our tradition and that we wish to maintain and increase our national consciousness”; “that we are a people with great tradition and roots”; “how faithful we are to tradition”; “perhaps a little bit of tradition and history although a little late”; “that we are a state that upholds tradition”; “probably the sovereignty of the state, the ability to adopt the most supreme legal documents on our own, which implies that we are in a position to regulate our own country”; “we were the ones to adopt the first Serbian constitution”; “that we divide our history into one that is ‘forgotten’ and one that is contemporary”; “we have shown that we are the only people in the world that celebrates a Patron Saint’s Day (Slava)”; “that we are a people with tradition, that we have built a state, but to them this is unimportant”; “that this holiday represents in Serbia what 4th July represents in the United States of America”. One student wrote “that we love to celebrate holidays (sit back and relax) and that this makes us proud” (Kovač 2011, 76).

2009

Ten students of *ethnology and anthropology* did not respond to the question “*What have we shown the world by choosing this holiday?*” in 2009. The remaining students answered: “that Serbia is an independent and constitutional country and that it is ready to become a modern state”; “respect for and preservation of national history, that we pay tribute to the defining moments in Serbian history”; “Serbian history”; “that we value our history and tradition”; “that we respect history”; “that we are Serbs” (Kovač 2011, 79).

2010

In 2010, the question “*What have we shown the world by choosing this holiday?*”, received the following responses from the students of *ethnology and anthropology*: “that we are a people that will overcome any obstacles that may come our way, regardless of the policies that are pursued in the state”; “individuality, Orthodox Christianity, statehood, a constitution”; “the continuity of the statehood of a new Serbia with the old tradition of Serbian statehood”; “belonging to the Christian tradition of European peoples”; “a break with the social-communist epithets which Serbia used to be characterised by”; “I suppose that the wish was to show a ‘freedom-loving tradition’ (in connection with the beginning of the

9 The research included first-year students of *ethnology and anthropology* from the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade (141 students) from Belgrade, Zemun, Novi Sad, Zrenjanin, Žabari, Pančevo, Šabac, Mladenovac, Topola, Kragujevac, Lapovo, Jagodina and Sokobanja. The second group of respondents in the 2011 research comprised 70 respondents of different gender, age and profession from Belgrade, Lazarevac, Kruševac, Stalać and Šid.

uprising) and a ‘constitution-making tradition’. History textbooks emphasise the fact that the Sretenje Constitution was adopted at a time when Austria, Turkey and Russia did not have their own”; “that Serbia cannot be subdued”.¹⁰ One answer included the comment: “the question is what we have not shown. It is true that this holiday commemorates the liberation of the country from the Turks, but the excessive emphasis on the Serbian ethnos (...) will have no effect on Serbia transforming itself into a nation (...)”. Three respondents answered that they did not know, one respondent replied: “nothing special”, while another student wrote “?” in the space intended for the answer. A total of 21 students of *ethnology and anthropology* did not respond to this question (Kovač 2011, 82–83).

2011

In their answers to the question “*What have we shown the world by choosing this holiday?*”, the students of *ethnology and anthropology* (13 of them) responded: “that constitutionality is extremely important for national history”; “sovereignty, the importance of tradition”; “that we wish to establish continuity with the Serbia of the first half of the 19th century”; “that we are a nation (I am not a nationalist) that we are Serbs”; “perhaps the unity and strength of the Serbian people”; “shared remembrance of times long past”; “perhaps we have shown them that our country has a long tradition and that in times of difficulty it strived towards independence and the improvement of its status”; “that Serbia has broken with its socialist past, the values and state holidays that used to characterise this period and that it has taken a step back – towards tradition, religion, nationalism... ”; “that we are a conservative society because we have connected a state holiday with a religious one and that the state is promoting only one specific faith”; “I have a feeling that this holiday does not hold its former significance and value. On a global plane, I do not believe that anyone is familiar with Serbian culture and customs.”; “I do not believe the world is really that much interested in that”; “I do not know whether we have shown anything”; “I do not know”. One respondent wrote “?” as an answer to this question. That year, 21 students of *ethnology and anthropology* did not respond to this question (Kovač 2011, 87–88).

A comparison of how the students of *ethnology and anthropology* responded to the question: “*What have we shown the world by choosing this holiday?*” year on year would reveal that in 2008 and 2009 they wrote that we have shown the world our *tradition, history, constitutionality and sovereignty*. In the years 2009, 2010 and 2011 more than 50% did not respond to this question. Among those who did express their opinion, the greatest number underscore *constitutionality, statehood, tradition*, as well as *a break with socialist attributes*, “a step backwards” and “turning to tradition, religion and nationalism” (in 2011). The students wrote that “this holiday does not hold its former significance and value”; “that, on a global plane, nobody is familiar with Serbian culture and customs”; and that “they do not believe the world is really that much interested in that” (Kovač 2011, 100–101).

10 This last quote is a reference to a famous Serbian epic poem – the “Battle of Mišar” (“Boj na Mišaru”).

Research in the control group in 2011¹¹

In answer to the question “*What have we shown the world by choosing this holiday?*” 32 of the respondents in the control group in 2011 responded: “that Serbia had a constitution before many developed countries did”; “that we had our Constitution as far back as in 1835” (2 replies); “that we are continuing a centuries-long tradition and commemorating our statehood by observing this day both as a religious holiday and Statehood Day”; “that we are a constitution-making state”; “how long we have been a legally and constitutionally regulated state”; “in this manner the relations with other countries are regulated”; “that we are a regulated and constitution-making state”; “that we are a country that had its constitution when many did not and that Serbia had a democracy when many other countries did not”; “that we are believers and that I think we are capable of taking care of our country on our own”; “with this choice we have shown that we are Orthodox Christians and that we are capable of governing this long-suffering country of ours on our own”; “that we have respect for ourselves”; “that freedom is our greatest value”; “that we are a constitution-making state, we have established our relations with other peoples”; “that we are a country that has built its own state”; “that we respect old tradition”; “that we have managed to make a decision that is right for our country on the basis of the past we have inherited”; “that we value our own history”; “we have shown the world that we are a people with a great tradition and that we made very important decisions for the country of Serbia with regards to religious holidays”; “that we make important decisions in our country”; “that we are a people that respects tradition”; “the unity of the north and the south, the point where diversity comes together”; “a constitution among the first in the world”; “we have shown that we are a democratic country”; “that as far back as 1835 we had introduced our own constitution”; “tradition”; “that we are not savages”; “that we are a democratic country, with our own constitution and law”; “that we are returning to capitalism”; “I am not sure that the world is even acquainted with our history, so I do not know what we have shown by this”; “I am not a connoisseur of the history of the Serbs, but I think that there are perhaps other dates which could be used to commemorate the statehood of Serbia”; “I do not believe that the point of this holiday is for it to be shown to the world, the date which has been selected is significant for the history of the Serbian people, and perhaps for showing and proving identity”.

To this question some of the respondents responded with: “nothing” (7); “nothing special” (2); “I do not know” (5); “I have no opinion about this” (1); and 23 respondents provided no answer (Kovač 2011, 93 – 94).

In summary, the 2011 control group responded that we had shown: *constitutionality, a regulated state, regulated relations with other countries and the existence of a constitution when other countries did not have one*. In the selection of this holiday some of the respondents see: *respecting tradition; oneself; the faith*

11 This research included 70 respondents of different gender, age and profession from Belgrade, Lazarevac, Šid, Kruševac and Stalać.

(*Orthodox Christianity*); showing identity and that we are a democratic country. A total of 32% of the respondents did not respond to this question (Kovač 2011, 104).

The reception of Sretenje – Statehood Day: a discussion with the Radoš Ljušić 2011

Professor Radoš Ljušić was interviewed in October 2011.¹² From the wider scope of the interview, the answer to the question that refers to the proposal of Sretenje as a new state holiday has been singled out. He was reminded by the author of their conversation from 2002 when he had said that the two basic ideas behind proposing this holiday were that *the holiday should be acceptable to a united Europe* and that *the holiday will not provoke ideological rifts*. In 2011 he was asked: *After nine years of celebrating, are you satisfied with this proposal?*

“To my mind, the proposal is satisfactory and I still think it is the best option. The dissatisfaction that is present exists because of policies that Serbia did not know how to articulate after 1999. Serbia’s wayward foreign policy also has some connection, sometimes indirect and sometimes direct, with the orientation that such a holiday is supposed to express”. Professor Ljušić continued: “Serbia had been in need of a holiday that would symbolise it as a state. Nothing better symbolises statehood than the moment a country was restored or born. As the Middle Ages, when Serbia was born, was not chosen, the 19th century – when the country rose from the ashes – then became the most appropriate moment to choose as an event to be commemorated by a state holiday” (Kovač 2011, 108 – 114).

3 Research from 2018 to 2020

2018

The research in 2018 included 61 first-year students of the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade,¹³ from the departments of *history* (37)¹⁴ and *ethnology and anthropology* (24).¹⁵

12 The interview was conducted on 5 October 2011 and published in the same year (Kovač 2011, 108 – 114).

13 I am grateful to the students of the Faculty of Philosophy who took part in this research, as well as to colleagues from the Faculty of Philosophy: Professor Jelena Mrgić from the Department of History and Assistant Professor Danijela Velimirović from the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology for enabling me to conduct my research immediately after the holiday on 18 and 21 February 2018.

14 The students of *history* who responded to the question about their place of residence were from: Belgrade, Zemun, Pančevo, Gornja Trepča, Novi Sad, Subotica, Sombor, Zaječar, Bijeljina, Batajnica, Omoljica, Vitkovo (Aleksandrovac), Srbinje, Loznica and Prijepolje.

15 The students of *ethnology and anthropology* who responded to the question about their place of residence were from: Belgrade, Novi Sad, Sremski Karlovci, Pančevo, Subotica, Valjevo, Ruma, Paraćin, Požarevac, Vršac, Ivanjica, Kragujevac and Smederevska Palanka.

Twenty-four of the students of *history* wrote: “by choosing this holiday we have shown the world that we preserve cultural values and different achievements from the past which were a foundation for today’s development and state of being”; “that we respect our tradition and what we have inherited from our ancestors and that we remember the heroic past and all those who have laid down their lives for their country, for the honour and the glory of their past and for their future”; “our country and the struggle for independence and the adoption of a constitution that was the most valuable one of all at the time”; “that we are an autonomous and independent state”; “we have shown the world that we too are a country on the European continent and that we are no longer anyone’s vassal”; “that we know how to respect the sacrifices of our ancestors and that we are taking a road that is the best option for our future”; “our tradition and the fact that, at least in the military sense, we have won our own freedom”; “that we are ready to fight for our freedom and that we will destroy anyone who stands against our national interests”; “that Serbia has a tradition which it honours and which will last for many years to come. It also shows respect towards times past and the people who gave their lives to defend their homeland”; “that we are a people that has built our own country and this with regards to two important aspects: it happened on the basis of striving towards freedom (the First Serbian Uprising) and of striving towards a regulated state of affairs (the first Serbian Constitution)”; “that we have historical memory, that when we want to we can be among the best”; “that Serbia is a sovereign state and that it respects its history”; “the commemoration of this date shows that Serbia values its statehood and the years-long fight for freedom which has yielded results”; “we have shown the world that Serbia has deep roots when it comes to its independence and that it continuously fought for this independence and bled surrounded by people in power who were blind to the interests of small peoples. We also show liberality and progressiveness because the Constitution of 1835 represents a modern and contemporary codification of the law of that time”; “that in this manner we pay our respects and express gratitude towards those people who were willing to fight for independence and the people who worked towards Serbia becoming a state of enlightenment in which the ruler is not the centre of political life following the adoption of a Constitution”; “that we were familiar with a constitution and democracy long before some who present us in a negative light. That we are a battle-ready, bold people that loves freedom, not slavery”; “that we nurture remembrance and remember the dates which are important for our country”; “we have shown that we value the beginning of the rule of law in our country and that we strive towards being a well ordered country”; “our long tradition and the glorious history of our people and state”; “resistance towards the policies of Miloš Obrenović”; “that we are a secular republic”; “that we wish for continuity between this time and modern– day Serbia”: “I doubt that our holiday interests the world much. The world is mainly interested in the holidays of culturally hegemonic states and influential peoples”; “that is irrelevant, because we do not commemorate this date for the sake of others, but for our own sake”. Two students responded with: “the world could not care less”; “honestly ... I have no idea”. Two students wrote: “nothing”. Nine questionnaires did not contain an answer to this question.

Of the students of *ethnology and anthropology*, 16 believe that, by having chosen this holiday, we have shown the world: “that we know how to choose a Statehood Day that is supposed to symbolise unity, independence and integrity”: “the sovereignty of the state of Serbia”; “the day of statehood of the Republic of Serbia”; “that we care for our history and that we try to preserve what it has bestowed upon us”; “that we value our freedom and that we celebrate it. That we celebrate our independence”; “that we too have a state holiday (...)”; “that Serbia is a well ordered country too, one that possesses the most supreme legal document – that is, a constitution – and that it is proud of that fact”; “that we are a sovereign state”; “the first Serbian Constitution was adopted on 15th February, 1835, so the choice of this date for Statehood Day shows remembrance with regards to the building of the state”; “that Sretenje is important for national identity”; “that decisions in connection with the future of the state can be made independently. That tradition is being preserved”; “that our country has a certain level of the rule of law, as well as an awareness of important events from its history”; “that it has its history and tradition”; “we have shown that we, allegedly, care for the constitutionality of our country”. One student wrote: “I have never given thought to either this holiday or its meaning, and this survey has just reminded me about it”, and two students said: “I think that other countries in the world are not affected by our holiday”; “I have no opinion”. Eight students of *ethnology and anthropology* did not respond to this question.

In 2018, the students of *history* evaluated the heroic and democratic achievements of their ancestors in a positive manner. They emphasised that by choosing this holiday *we show Serbia’s constitutionality and independence*. In a few answers they expressed doubt and a critical attitude with regards to *how much people know about this holiday*. The students of *ethnology and anthropology* point out the symbolism of Statehood Day, that *Serbia is a well ordered state which at that time had its constitution and that it is proud of that fact*, and that *the holiday is significant for national identity*. In this group of respondents as well there were those who had not given thought to the holiday or had no opinion about it.

2019

The research in 2019 included 76 students from the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, first-year students¹⁶ of *history* (43)¹⁷ and *ethnology and anthropology* (33).¹⁸

16 I am grateful to the students of the Faculty of Philosophy who took part in this research, as well as to my colleague, Professor Jelena Mrgić from the Department of History. I conducted the research among students of *ethnology and anthropology* on 20th February 2019.

17 The students of *history* who responded to the question about their place of residence were from: Belgrade, Barajevo, Obrenovac, Leštane, Pančevo, Arandelovac, Smederevo, Smederevska Palanka, Velika Plana, Jagodina, Stopanja, Arilje, Bosanska Gradiška, Grabovac, Banja Koviljača, Priboj, Banatski Karlovac, Novi Pazar and Čevo.

18 The students of *ethnology and anthropology* who responded to the question about their place of residence were from: Belgrade, Požarevac, Smederevo, Leštane, Sremska Mitrovica, Vršac, Vrnjačka Banja, Čačak, Rudnik, Ivanjica and Vranje.

The students of *history* wrote that by choosing this holiday: “we have shown the world that we have laid down the foundations of our statehood. We were given a new Constitution and we slowly started to become a modern European state”; “that we are not a people that surrenders easily and that we believe in the democratic achievements of the French revolution”; “that we have won our freedom and our rights”; “that we respect our ancestors, our history, that we safeguard our tradition and our culture”; “that we value and respect the constitutionality of the country we live in”; “we have shown what day (date) we consider to be of crucial importance for the country of Serbia”; “we have shown the will to celebrate our freedom and we are not afraid to show it and to fight for that freedom”; we have shown that “it is important in a cultural, political and historical sense. It has been celebrated since 2002”; “that we hold a certain amount of dignity and that we know how to value our past”; “that we value freedom”; “that we are a state that cares for the historical turning points of its past and commemorates them with due respect”; we have shown “the importance of legislative functions”; “we have shown that it was a battle of insurgents that freed Serbia from Ottoman rule and laid down the foundations for the creation of the modern state of Serbia”; “that we preserve a tradition that we have maintained for centuries and have not forgotten”, and also that “we have not forgotten those ancestors who freed this country and started the modern history of the Serbs”; “that we respect the values of freedom and democracy”; “that we respect our past, whatever it may have been. Even though Serbia’s freedom was not won with this Serbian constitution, it inspired future generations to make the final step”; “that we are ingenious”.

In several answers, the students of *history* stated their opinions: “that with this choice we have shown the world that freedom is the most important thing for us”; “that we are a united people”; “that we preserve the remembrance of our ancestors (...)”; that we show “respect towards our history and tradition and that we recognise the people who fought for freedom”; then that “in our history there is a continuity of fighting for freedom and statehood”; “that we are a sovereign state that has a high regard for its history”; “we have shown how much our home country means to us and paid our respects to those who died fighting for Serbia”; “we have shown that Serbia values the quality of possessing a fighting spirit and considers it one of the bases of national identity”; “Serbian (...) identity”; that this date is “the anniversary of liberation from centuries-long slavery to the Turks, as well as the creation of a state and the adoption of the Constitution”. Elaborating on the social and historical context of the adoption of the Sretenje constitution in 1835, in his response a student of *history* wrote that “the Serbian elite of the 19th century, consisting mainly of individuals ‘from outside Serbia Proper’, imbued with the spirit of enlightenment and liberalism put together one of the rare freedom-promoting constitutions in Europe and the world”.

One student of *history* wrote that with our choice of Statehood Day “we have expressed a desire for freedom and a country of our own”, but he also emphasised the fact that there is an “unstable identity”, and that “overnight, Sretenje has replaced what used to be Republic Day” (the end of this reply is incoherent). In another reply, a student wrote that Statehood Day “has no meaning in foreign policy” and that “they should have chosen another date. We are rich in tradition. We have several important dates which could have been chosen as Statehood Day”.

Other student replies included: “my honest opinion is that they are not interested in it, just as we are not interested in their holidays”; “I am not sure”; “since we have chosen Sretenje as our Statehood Day, due to a Constitution that did not last for even a month, we are showing that we do not consider any date more important than a day commemorating a failed Constitution”. A total of 10 questionnaires did not contain an answer to this question.

The students of *ethnology and anthropology* responded with: “we have shown that we respect our history and two important events which were a turning point in our history”; “we have shown that we base our statehood on democratic foundations and a tradition from the 19th century”; “that we are proud of our statehood and our freedom-loving spirit”; “in a formal, that is political, sense we show that we have a Statehood Day, while with the holiday’s background, which is the reasons for choosing that date, we send out a reminder about certain moments in our glorious history”; “that we are a people that has built its own country”; “that we commemorate events that are important for this country”; “nothing new, which is not already known, at least in academic circles”; “a unification”. Two students wrote: “we have shown that we are a predominantly Orthodox Christian country and that we respect our faith”; “that we believe in the Lord and His salvation”. Two students wrote: “I do not have enough information, so I cannot form an opinion”; “nothing”. A total of 12 questionnaires did not contain an answer to this question.

In 2019, the students of *history* pointed out in their answers the significance of the Sretenje Constitution which, as they wrote, *was one of the freedom-promoting Constitutions in Europe and the world*. They expressed respect towards their ancestors, their history, their tradition and culture, as well as the values of freedom and democracy. In this group of respondents too there were critical strands with regard to what we have shown the world by choosing this holiday.

The students of *ethnology and anthropology* wrote that by having chosen this holiday we have shown *pride concerning our statehood and freedom-loving spirit, certain moments of our glorious history*, and that we respect two important events which *were a turning point in our history*. Thirteen students did not respond to this question.

2020

The research in 2020 included 56 first-year students of the Faculty of Philosophy¹⁹ from the departments of *history* (32)²⁰ and *ethnology and anthropology* (24).²¹

The students of *history* responded: “we have shown the world that we respect and preserve remembrance of our history”; “that we are a people with a long democratic tradition because, at the moment of its adoption, the Sretenje Constitution was one of the most modern in Europe. We have also shown that we cherish freedom, because we rose against centuries-long occupation”; “symbolism, the Sretenje Constitution was the most liberal constitution in the Europe of that time, after the French one, of course”; “our fight for freedom from being slaves, be it to the Turks or anyone else, and the fight for an independent Serbian state”; “that a small country also has a great and rich history”; “with this holiday we have shown that Serbia too is a nation state, just like other states”; “the legitimacy of the striving of the Serbian people to create a nation state”; “that we are independent”; “we have shown our cultural and historical consciousness, as well as respect for history”; “our ties to tradition”; “by choosing Sretenje as Statehood Day we present to the world the day when Serbs took part in an uprising against Turkish rule indicating their desire for independence (the final part of the response is illegible)”; “that we are a freedom-loving people”; “we have shown the world that we are an independent state and that we make the decisions about what happens in our country ourselves”; “we have shown the basis for the national identity of the autonomous independent Republic of Serbia”; “that Serbs are nationalists and that they foster national consciousness”; “that we preserve and foster remembrance of gaining independence and liberation”; “we have shown the world that Serbia can depart from its interests and history”.

A student wrote that even though, when compared to the world, Serbs are a small people, they have “a great spirit and they value their country and freedom”. In a few answers the students wrote that by choosing this holiday “we have shown that we foster our national identity and respect the preservation of tradition”; “that we respect history”; “statehood, history and longevity”; “we have shown how much toil and blood was needed for the creation of our own

19 I am grateful to the students of the Faculty of Philosophy who took part in this research, as well as to Professor Jelena Mrgić from the Department of History who enabled me to conduct research among students of *history*. I conducted the research among students of *ethnology and anthropology* on 19 February 2020.

20 The students of *history* who responded to the question about their place of residence were from: Belgrade, Pančevo, Batajnica, Pridvorica, Jabučje, Jagodina, Šabac, Ogar (Pećinci), Jakovo, Lipovica, Stepoevac, Valjevo, Smederevska Palanka, Majdanpek and Zubin Potok.

21 The students of *ethnology and anthropology* who responded to the question about their place of residence were from: Belgrade, Lazarevac, Pančevo, Topolovnik (Veliko Gradište), Petrovgrad, Smederevska Palanka, Čuprija, Užice and Šabac.

country”; “a strong connection between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the statehood of Serbia”; “when compared to other Balkan states, absolutely nothing”; “that we know how to use a calendar”. A total of seven questionnaires did not contain an answer to this question (22%).

The students of *ethnology and anthropology* responded: “by choosing this holiday Serbia has shown the world that it has existed for several centuries, and it has drawn attention to itself as a state that has always been a part of Europe, and that it aspires towards it”; “that, as an independent and sovereign state we deserve to be members of the EU”; that we have shown “how much we love our people, our country; how devoted we are to our people, our country; and how much we love one another”; “turning to a different national history in the course of the period of transition. The long history of parliamentarianism important for EU integration”; “we have shown that we care about our national identity and our cultural-historical heritage”; “with this choice we want to present ourselves to the world as a sturdy country that has built its own state and one whose independence is indisputable”; “the ability to govern a country independently. The fact of how proud we are of the way Serbia has gained its statehood and independence”; “that we are the best people in the world. The bravest, and also the most enduring, which is clearly visible through history”; “that we will fight for our sovereignty”; “that we respect our history and that our country is important to us”; we have shown “strength and resilience”; “we have shown the world that we love our country precisely by choosing this holiday, and in addition to that we have shown the importance Serbian history has for the present”; “that we primarily care for the fact of obtaining statehood itself, i.e. that we attach importance to the political, cultural and historical significance of the state itself”; “our Serbian identity”; “we have shown that although we are a small people, we fight for our own and all that belongs to us. We fight to the last drop of blood (...). We take pride in our ancestors and we are thankful for everything they have done for us and our state, we also want to show how our people consists of great individuals”; “that the Serbian Orthodox Church is not as secularised as it appears and that the Serbian national identity is deeply rooted in religion”. One student wrote: “nothing”. A total of seven questionnaires did not contain an answer to this question (20%).

In 2020, in their responses the students of *history* pointed out *statehood, history, longevity*, the importance of the Sretenje Constitution and the preservation of remembrance with regards to “our history and love of freedom”. The students of *ethnology and anthropology* believe that by choosing this holiday *we have shown the world that we care about our national identity and cultural-historical heritage*. They pointed out that Serbia is a state that *has always been a part of Europe and that it gravitates towards* being an independent and sovereign state deserving to be a member of the European Union”.

Google congratulates Serbia on the occasion of Statehood Day: 2012–2020

Google Doodle is “a specialised logo intended to pleasantly surprise users, make them laugh and entertain them.”²² The text titled “Google: Its 20th birthday and ten things you need to know”, explains that the first *Google Doodle* came into being as a graphic message designed by two Google employees. In 1998 they used a graphic design to indicate that they were out of the office and therefore unable to provide technical support to users, as they were attending a festival. From that first graphic message, the *Doodle* came into being and “became a part of Google tradition, marking important days or personalities with specially commissioned works of art”.²³

On the occasion of Statehood Day, on 15 February, 2012, Google uploaded a motif from the Sretenje Constitution of 1835 on its Serbian home page. The greeting read: *Happy Statehood Day!* Following a click on the greeting, Google opened a page with news and information about Sretenje – Serbia’s Statehood Day.²⁴

The comments on this piece of news²⁵ included positive views expressed with regard to this greeting written in Cyrillic script, as well as the different viewpoints of forum participants who could see the message from their domains in Serbia and across the world. In a reply to the comment that “the people at Google do not even know where Serbia is, let alone what Sretenje is”, participants in this forum wrote that “Google does know where the Republic of Serbia is, because young professionals from Serbia work in its graphic design department”.

The following year, the Statehood Day greeting was particularly eye-catching – next to the Google logo, painted in the colours of the Serbian flag, the Google Doodle presented two motifs: Serbian traditional peasant shoes (*opanci*) and plums. Following a click on the greeting, Google presented websites connected with Statehood Day.²⁶ “Google got all dressed up for Sretenje” was one of the comments on this Google Doodle greeting from 2013.²⁷

22 Lepa&Srećna. 2013. Available at: <https://lepaisrećna.rs/Lifestyle/Vesti/a6264/Gugl-cestita-Dan-drzavnosti-Srbije.html>

23 BBC. 2018. “Gugl: 20. rođendan i deset stvari koje morate da znate [Google: Its 20th Birthday and Ten Things You Need To Know]”. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/srbija-45665413>

24 RTS. 2012. “Gugl čestita Dan državnosti [Google Wishes a Happy Statehood Day]”. Available at: <https://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/125/drustvo/1045478/gugl-cestita-dan-drzavnosti.html>
Vreme. 2012. Čestitke. [Greetings] Available at: <https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1035613>

25 RTS. 2012. “Gugl čestita Dan državnosti [Google Wishes a Happy Statehood Day]”. Available at: <https://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/125/drustvo/1045478/gugl-cestita-dan-drzavnosti.html>

26 Blic. 2013. “‘Gugl’ uz šljivovicu i opanke čestitao Srbiji Dan državnosti [‘Google’ Wishes Serbia a Happy Statehood Day with Šljivovic and Opanci]”. Available at: <https://www.blic.rs/it/gugl-uz-sljivovicu-i-opanke-cestitao-srbiji-dan-drzavnosti/f9whcb4>

27 “Gugl se sredio za Sretenje [Google Got All Dressed Up for Sretenje]”, 2013. Available at: <https://net.hr/danas/gugl-se-sredio-za-sretenje/>

Comments related to the news²⁸ that Google had congratulated Serbia on its 2013 Statehood Day “with plums and opanci”, expressed gratitude and support to Google, as well as pride and the hope “that we ourselves will contribute to promoting and presenting our country in the best possible way. Our respect goes out to those who are doing it now and who did so in the past”. In the comments, there is a reminder that the greeting is only visible from the Serbian domain. Other participants in this forum announced that “Google has congratulated Serbia on the occasion of its Statehood Day on its official world-wide website too (google.com)”. “Of course it has our domain” – one comment said – “the greeting is, in fact, meant for Serbia and its citizens – since it is a Serbian holiday, and not a world-wide one”. Another message said: “Serbia is well-known and respected in the world! May Statehood Day be merry.”

The Google Doodle greeting that marked Statehood Day in 2014 contained an image of the statue of Pobednik (The Victor), a historical landmark in the state’s capital, Belgrade, with the flag of the Republic of Serbia draped across the plinth. On entering the site, the message “Happy Serbian Statehood Day” appeared in Cyrillic script.²⁹ The comments³⁰ pertaining to this Doodle greeting contained a positive attitude towards the greeting’s design, in connection with which the forum participants wrote that its author was a successful Serbian woman “who has a very good job in Google”. Others, however, stated that the greeting was created by “Serbian people who are in charge of Google Serbia”. Positive comments predominated, especially because it had been written in Cyrillic script.

On Statehood Day 2015, the Google logo displayed on its homepage was surrounded by fireworks in the colours of the Serbian flag.³¹ One comment was: “What have we done to deserve this honour?”³²

Google and Facebook³³ marked Statehood Day in 2016 with greetings and a reminder of the holiday respectively. On the home page of its Serbian

28 RTS. 2013. “Dan државности Србије на Гуглу! [Serbia’s Statehood Day on Google]”. Available at: <https://www.rts.rs/page/magazine/ci/story/501/zanimljivosti/1267184/dan-drzavnosti-srbije-na-guglu.html>

29 Kurir. 2014. “Gugl Srbiji čestitao Dan државности [Google Wishes Serbia a Happy Statehood Day]”. Available at: <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/drustvo/1230991/gugl-srbiji-cestitao-dan-drzavnosti>

30 Kurir. 2014. “Gugl Srbiji čestitao Dan државности [Google Wishes Serbia a Happy Statehood Day]”. Available at: <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/drustvo/1230991/gugl-srbiji-cestitao-dan-drzavnosti-komentari>

31 Kurir. 2015. “U BOJAMA TROBOJKE: Gugl vatrometom obeležio Dan државности Србије [IN THE COLOURS OF THE TRICOLOUR: Google Marks Serbia’s Statehood Day with Fireworks]”. Available at: <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/drustvo/1683075/u-bojama-trobojke-gugl-vatrometom-obelezio-dan-drzavnosti-srbije>

32 Ibid.

33 Blic. 2016. “Ovakو su Gugl i Fejsbuk čestitali Srbiji Dan државности [This Was How Google and Facebook Wished Serbia a Happy Statehood Day]”. Available at: <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/ovako-su-gugl-i-fejsbuk-cestitali-srbiji-dan-drzavnosti/jhh7t48>

Kurir. 2016. “LEPE ŽELJE ZA PRAZNIK: Fejsbuk i Gugl nam čestitali Sretenje” [BEST WISHES FOR THE HOLIDAY: Google and Facebook Wish Us A Happy Sretenje]. Available at: <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/drustvo/2135867/lepe-zelje-za-praznik-fejsbuk-i-gugl-nam-cestitali-sretenje>

domain, Google presented a drawing of *Đavolja Varoš* (*Devil's Town*) across a Serbian flag. As was the case in previous years, clicking on the greeting revealed information about the Sretenje holiday.

In addition to Google, in 2016 Facebook also reminded its users in Serbia: "It's Statehood Day!" adding that they should let their friends know if they were celebrating.³⁴

In 2017, Google featured a drawing of the Serbian traditional folk dance, the kolo, on the homepage of the Serbian domain.³⁵ The media reported that that year "Google congratulated the citizens on the occasion of their holiday in the best possible manner. The predominant motif on the greeting is four young women and men in traditional Serbian folk costumes and footwear (opanci), engaged in the traditional Serbian folk dance (kolo)!";³⁶ another outlet commented "Original, no doubt about it!"³⁷

The flag of the Republic of Serbia featured prominently in the Google Doodle Statehood Day greetings for 2018,³⁸ 2019,³⁹ and 2020,⁴⁰ and by

Telegraf. 2016. "Kako Google proslavlja srpski Dan državnosti? Možete li da prepoznate koji deo Srbije su stavili na naslovnu stranu?" [How Does Google Celebrate Serbia's Statehood Day? Can You Recognise the Part of Serbia Featured on the Home Page?]. Available at: <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/1999648-kako-google-proslavlja-srpski-dan-drzavnosti-mozete-li-da-prepoznate-koji-deo-srbije-su-stavili-na-naslovnu-stranu>

34 Telegraf. 2016. "NE ČESTITA SAMO GUGL: Ovako Fejsbuk obeležava Dan državnosti Srbije! [GOOGLE NOT THE ONLY ONE TO CONGRATULATE: This Is How Facebook Marks Serbia's Statehood Day!]. Available at: <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/1999582-ne-cestita-samo-gugl-ovako-fejsbuk-obelezava-dan-drzavnosti-srbije>

35 Kurir. 2017. "GUGL SRBIJI ČESTITAO SRETENJE: Srpsko kolo vije se na stranici globalnog internet pretraživača [GOOGLE WISHES SERBIA A HAPPY SRETENJE: Serbian Traditional Folk Dance Takes the Stage on the Home Page of the Global Search Engine]!". Available at: <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/drustvo/2684895/gugl-srbiji-cestitao-sretenje-srpsko-kolo-vije-se-na-stranici-globalnog-internet-pretrazivaca>

36 Informer. 2017. "GUGL ČESTITAO SRBIJI! Narodna NOŠNJA i OPANCI na naslovnici svetskog pretraživača! [GOOGLE CONGRATULATES SERBIA! Traditional SERBIAN FOLK COSTUME and FOOTWEAR (OPANCI) on the Home Page of the World-Wide Search Engine]". Available at: <http://informer.rs/vesti/srbija/316081/gugl-cestitao-srbiji-narodna-nosnja-opanci-naslovnici-svetskog-pretrazivaca>

37 Telegraf. 2017. "Gugl čestitao Srbiji Sretenje: Originalno, nema šta! (FOTO) [Google Wishes Serbia a Happy Sretenje: Original, no Doubt about It! (PHOTO)]". Available at: <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/2619276-gugl-cestitao-srbiji-sretenje-originalno-nema-sta-foto>

38 Kurir. 2018. "SRBIJO, SREĆAN TI DAN DRŽAVNOSTI: Ovako nam je čestitao Gugl, na pretraživaču se vijori srpska zastava! [SERBIA, HAPPY STATEHOOD DAY: This Was How Google Congratulated Us on the Occasion, A Serbian Flag Is Waving on the Search Engine's Home Page]". Available at: <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/drustvo/2995697/srbijo-srecan-ti-dan-drzavnosti-ovako-nam-je-cestitao-gugl-na-pretrazivacu-se-vijori-srpska-zastava>

39 Kurir. 2019. "GUGL U BOJAMA SRBIJE: Internet pretraživač čestita nam Dan državnosti." [GOOGLE IN THE COLOURS OF SERBIA: The Search Engine Wishes Us a Happy Statehood Day]". Available at: <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/drustvo/3206091/gugl-u-bojama-srbije-internet-pretrazivac-cestita-nam-dan-drzavnosti>

40 Вечерње новости. 2020. "'Gugl' u znaku Dana državnosti Srbije" ['Google' Marking Serbia's Statehood Day]. Available at: <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/tehnologije/aktuelno.236.html:847598-Gugl-u-znaku-Dana-drzavnosti-Srbije>

clicking on the image, a list of sites on the topic of Statehood Day became available. The comments on the 2020 Google Doodle greeting⁴¹ emphasise its importance, and opinions were expressed with regard to the visibility of the greeting on different domains, with a comment that “just like every year, this 15 February Google Serbia once again congratulated the citizens of Serbia on the occasion of their Statehood Day with a specially prepared image, the famous ‘Doodle’”.

In the second decade of celebrating Statehood Day, from 2012 – 2020, the Google Doodle greetings, sent within Google’s global chain of communication processes, and directed at both the communication collective in Serbia and individuals around the world became an important conveyor of cultural remembrance with regard to Sretenje – Statehood Day, and the events it commemorates.

Sretenje – Statehood Day in Brussels

A news item caused a lot of interest in Serbia’s public discourse when it was reported that on 15 February, 2020:

“On the occasion of observing Serbia’s Statehood Day, the symbol of the city of Brussels, the ‘Manneken-Pis’ put on traditional Serbian folk costume. Since 2011, on Serbia’s Statehood Day, the symbol of Brussels, the statue of the urinating boy, has been dressed in the traditional Serbian folk costume of the Šumadija region. Every 15 February, the Serbian Embassy in Belgium, in cooperation with the Brussels’ city authorities and the Belgian ‘Order of the Friends of Manneken-Pis’ organise the observance of Serbia’s Statehood Day by merging the symbol of Brussels with recognisable elements of Serbian folklore. Traditionally, on Serbia’s national day, the national anthem ‘God of Justice’ (Bože pravde) can be heard in the centre of Belgium and the headquarters of the EU, while guests are served with traditional Serbian bread (pogača), the customary salt and Serbian brandy (rakija).”⁴²

The public observation of Statehood Day in Brussels, along with the symbol of the city of Brussels being dressed in traditional Serbian folk costume, shows that with this traditional commemoration of 15 February, Serbia’s Statehood Day, is symbolically present in Brussels – the headquarters of the European Union.

41 021.rs. 2020. “Trobojka Srbije na ‘Guglu’ [Serbia’s Tricolour on ‘Google’]”. Available at: <https://www.021.rs/story/Info/Srbija/234554/Trobojka-Srbije-na-Guglu.html>

42 Informer. 2020. “(FOTO) SRBIJI U ČAST ZA DAN DRŽAVNOSTI! Simbol Brisela u šumadijskoj narodnoj nošnji!” [(PHOTO) HONOURING SERBIA FOR STATEHOOD DAY! The Symbol of Brussels in a Traditional Serbian Folk Costume from the Region of Šumadija!]. Available at: <https://informer.rs/svet/vesti/493428/foto-srbiji-cast-dan-drzavnosti-simbol-brisela-sumadijskoj-narodnoj-nosnji>

1. Statehood Day 2020: Niagara Falls in the colours of the Serbian flag

A few days before Statehood Day in 2020, it was announced in the news that “Serbs in Canada are preparing to celebrate Serbia’s Statehood Day in a magnificent manner. On the initiative of the Serbian Ambassador, Mihailo Papazoglu, and in cooperation with the mayor of Niagara Falls, on 15 February, 2020, the cascading waters next to the monument to Nikola Tesla will be illuminated in red, blue and white.”⁴³ In this news item it was stated that this was “the first such occasion of paying tribute to a foreign state and its people in Canada”.

The news report stated that in the world, in Canada, where Serbs dwell in large numbers, Sretenje – Statehood Day had become important in the country both in the sense of connecting the towns of Kraljevo and Niagara Falls, and the people of these two countries.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the 21st century, the proposers of the new state holiday, Sretenje – Statehood Day, took into account two important historic events from Serbia’s past: the date of the First Serbian Uprising in 1804 and the adoption of the Sretenje Constitution in 1835. They believed that the new holiday would be acceptable to a united Europe and that it would not provoke ideological rifts within Serbia.

Various channels of communication were used to establish contact with the historical realities symbolised by the new Sretenje – Statehood Day holiday.

From the wider perspective of research on the reception of the new state holiday on a representative sample of 604 respondents, this paper has analysed responses to the question: *What have we shown the world by celebrating Statehood Day?* In the first period of research, in 2004 and 2007, the respondents were slow to recognise Sretenje as a state holiday. At the time, more than 50% of the respondents returned the questionnaire without having answered the questions. Opinions were divided as to what we had shown the world by choosing this particular holiday. The respondents wrote that they *do not believe that we have shown anything to the world* and that *the world is not interested in the holiday*. A few answers pointed out the importance of this holiday, the Constitution and respecting tradition, and also that Serbia has “a past worthy of respect” and that “already at that time, we were following the European course”.

43 “VELIKA ČAST ZA SRBIJU: NIJAGARINI VODOPADI U BOJAMA SRPSKE TROBOJKE [A GREAT HONOUR FOR SERBIA: NIAGARA FALLS IN THE COLOURS OF THE SERBIAN TRICOLOUR]”. Available at: <https://stajerska.eu/2020/02/02/nijagarini-vodopadi-u-bojama-srpske-trobojke/>

In the second research period, in 2008 and 2009, the respondents wrote that by celebrating this holiday we had shown the world *our tradition, history, constitutionality and sovereignty*. In the years 2009, 2010 and 2011 the respondents similarly stated that we had shown the world *our constitutionality, statehood, tradition*, but also a *break with socialist attributes*, “a step backwards” and *turning to tradition, religion and nationalism* (in 2011).

Answers from the students of *ethnology and anthropology* included “this holiday does not hold its former significance and value”; “that, on a global plane, nobody is familiar with Serbian culture and customs”, and that “they do not believe the world is really that much interested in that”.

In the control group, in 2011, the respondents responded that we had shown the world: *constitutionality, a well ordered state, regulated relations with other countries and the existence of a constitution when other countries did not have one*. In the selection of this holiday some of the respondents saw: *respecting tradition; oneself; the faith (Orthodox Christian); showing identity* and “that we are a democratic country”.

Research into the reception of Sretenje – Statehood Day was conducted from 2018 to 2020 at the Faculty of Philosophy among students of *history and ethnology and anthropology*.

In their answers in 2018, the students of *history* evaluated the heroic and democratic achievements of their ancestors in a positive manner. They emphasised that by choosing this holiday we had shown *Serbia’s constitutionality and independence*. In a few answers they expressed doubt and a critical attitude with regard to *how much people know about this holiday*. Students of *ethnology and anthropology* pointed out the symbolism of Statehood Day, that *Serbia is a well ordered state which at the time had its Constitution and is proud of that fact*, and that *the holiday is significant for national identity*. In this group of respondents as well there were those who had no opinion about Sretenje – Statehood Day.

In 2019, the students of *history* pointed out the significance of the Sretenje Constitution which, as they wrote, *was one of the most freedom-promoting constitutions in Europe and the world*. They expressed respect *towards their ancestors, their history, their tradition and culture*, as well as for the values of freedom and democracy. In this group of respondents too there were critical strands with regard to what we had shown the world by choosing this holiday.

The students of *ethnology and anthropology* state that by choosing this holiday we have shown the world *pride concerning our statehood and freedom-loving spirit, certain moments in our glorious history*, and that we respect two important events which *were turning points in our history*. A number of students did not respond to this question.

In 2020, the students of *history* pointed out *statehood, history, longevity*, the importance of the Sretenje Constitution and preservation of remembrance with regards to “our history and love of freedom”. The students of *ethnology and*

anthropology believe that by choosing this holiday *we have shown the world that we care about our national identity and cultural-historical heritage*. They point out that Serbia is a state that *has always been a part of Europe and that it aspires towards it*, and also that “as an independent and sovereign state we deserve to be members of the European Union”.

In the second decade of celebrating Statehood Day in Serbia, an analysis was performed of the greetings sent by Google to the communication collective – the public in Serbia, as well as of the reception of these messages in electronic sources from 2012 to 2020. Sent within Google’s chain of global communication processes, and directed at both the communication collective in Serbia and individuals around the world, they shape and convey knowledge concerning the events that Sretenje – Statehood Day represents. In addition to other electronic messages regarding Sretenje – Statehood Day, Google Doodle greetings have become intermediaries in the public culture of remembrance.

Serbia’s cultural heritage is promoted abroad by representatives of the diplomatic corps of the Republic of Serbia engaging in symbolic public events on Serbia’s Statehood Day, in Brussels – the headquarters of the European Union – since 2011, and also in Canada in 2020.

One of the ideas leading the proposers in their choice of Sretenje – Statehood Day as the new state holiday was that the holiday should be acceptable to a United Europe. In the second decade of the 21st century, this idea has achieved its desired effect.

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