

*Stjepan Radić, Aleksandur Stamboliiski, and the Nemesis of Peasant Politics in Interwar*

*Central and Southeastern Europe*

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My lecture will look at how the First World War's divisive - and violent - political legacy was reflected in two states in East-Central and Southeastern Europe: the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (Yugoslavia), and the interwar kingdom of Bulgaria. Both countries experienced a rise of agrarian political populism in the last months of the war and in the years thereafter. This new surge was embodied by two charismatic agrarian leaders: in Yugoslavia, Stjepan Radić, post-war leader of the Croatian Peasant Party (*Hrvatska seljačka stranka*, or HSS), and in Bulgaria, Aleksandur Stamboliiski, leader of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (*Bulgarski zemedelski naroden suyuz*, or BANU). Both leaders and the programmes of the parties they led put the experience of war in the countryside at the centre of their political agenda in the years after the First World War. They claimed to speak and act on behalf of their peasant constituencies, which they presented as a mobilized majority who had suffered in the war years, but who through suffering had learnt valuable lessons in national and civic life. Their programmes and their post-war careers bring into sharp relief the divisive qualities of the war and its legacies in national politics. As much as Radić and Stamboliiski's support surged in their peasant constituencies in the aftermath of the war, they also antagonised powerful political and military forces in their respective countries, an antagonism that proved fatal for both men. The lecture will show how political leaders from two very different backgrounds and operating in two very different states nevertheless drew similar messages about the meaning of the war years, and drew similar enemies on account of that message.