



National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia

History and cultural heritage of the National Assembly





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A photograph of the National Assembly building in Belgrade, Serbia, at night. The building is illuminated with warm lights, highlighting its grand architecture, including a large central dome and several smaller domes. A Serbian flag is visible on a tall pole to the right. The sky is a deep blue. A vertical white bar is on the left side of the image.

National Assembly

History

The present building of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia was constructed in the vicinity of the place where the Great Serbian National Assembly met on November 30, 1830 to proclaim the sultan's hattisherif (imperial command) on the rights of Serbs, and Miloš Obrenović was recognised as hereditary reigning prince.

The construction of the parliamentary edifice to a design by the architect Jovan Ilkić from 1901, commenced in 1907, when the foundation stone of the future House of National Representatives was laid by the Serbian King Petar Karadjordjević I. The construction of the building was completed in 1936, and the first sitting in the new building was held on 20 October of the same year. In that

time it was the seat of the National Assembly of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

During the Second World War the Assembly building was used as the headquarters of the occupying forces' civil administration for Serbia.

The third session of the AVNOJ was held in this building in 1945, followed by the establishment of the Provisional Peoples Assembly of the Democratic Federative Yugoslavia. It was transformed into the Constituent Assembly, which proclaimed the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia on 29 November of the same year. The People's Assembly of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia adopted the new Constitution in January 1946.

The Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia was proclaimed by the Constitution in 1963, as a federal and social democratic state. The Assembly was the highest body of government and an authority of social self management, comprised of one general political council and several working community councils on: economy, education and culture, social and healthcare issues, and organisation and policy.

The Constitution of Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) was adopted in 1974, and Yugoslavia was defined as a federative republic of equal nations and nationalities, freely united in accordance with the principle of brotherhood and unity, with a guaranteed right of nations to self-determination and secession. The Assembly of SFRY was a social self-management body and the supreme body of government within the framework of rights and duties of the Federation and was comprised of two chambers – Federal Council and the Council of Republics and Provinces.

After the break up of SFR Yugoslavia, the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Montenegro decided to form one state and to establish the Federal Assembly of the FRY (comprising the delegates from both Serbia and Montenegro). The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was proclaimed in the edifice of the Assembly on April 27, 1992. The Federal Assembly was made up of two chambers – the Chamber of Citizens and the Chamber of Republics.

The relations between the two Republics were restructured first with the Belgrade Agreement in 2002, and afterwards with the adoption of the Constitutional Charter on 4 February 2003, when FR Yugoslavia was transformed into the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. The stately edifice housed the unicameral Assembly of Serbia and Montenegro. After Montenegro became an independent state in 2006, the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro ceased to exist.

Serbia restored its independence on June 5, 2006. Thus, one century after the construction started, the monumental building located in Nikola

Pasic Square, regained its initial purpose and became the House of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia.

Architecture

The construction of the present building of the National Assembly, initially the House of National Representatives, commenced in 1907, as a representational edifice of the Kingdom of Serbia.

The task of design and project preparation for the construction of the House of National Representatives was assigned to the architect Konstantin A. Jovanović who lived and worked in Vienna. The parliamentary edifice was designed by architect Jovanović in the style of academic architecture of monumental public buildings. Unfortunately, at the time the state of Serbia did not have the financial means for such a project.

In 1901 the Constitution was amended and the Assembly became bicameral. The project needed to be entirely changed or adjusted. Development of a whole new project was considered to be more suitable and therefore, in August 1901, the bids were invited for the construction of the House of the National Representatives. The architect Jovan Ilkić was awarded the first prize.

Even though the Constitutional changes took place in 1903, the ruling Dynasty changed and the Assembly became unicameral, the work on the design of a bicameral Assembly building was continued.

The foundation stone was laid on 27 August 1907, by the Serbian King Petar Karadjordjević I in the presence of the respectable guests.

Due to the lack of financial means, caused by the Balkan and First World War, by the time the new state the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was established, construction the Assembly building had only reached the first floor.

Since a new considerably larger state was formed, the Assembly session halls envisaged by the ini-

tial design were not adequate, the halls needed to be reconstructed. In the year 1920, decision was reached to resume construction on the Assembly building and to assign the project to the architect Pavle Ilkić, the son and associate of Jovan Ilkić who had died in 1917.

On the basis of the renewed design the construction of the Assembly building continued until the 1926, when the construction works were suspended. The next phase in the construction started after the death of the King Aleksandar in 1934.

The Architectural Department of the Ministry of Constructions has become the contractor of all works and the architect Nikola Krasnov.

The construction of the building of the National Assembly was completed and the edifice was consecrated on October 18, 1936, almost three decades after the foundation stone was laid.

The building of the Assembly represents a monumental academic edifice. The dome rises above the central part of the building dominated by the portico, side wings extend to the left and to the right, ending with rizalits and triangular tympanums.





Diplomatic lounge

The lower level of the building was made of green stone from Ripanj, in a rustic manner. The ground floor and the first floor were reinvigorated with the roof cornice surmounted by the balustrade. All the facades are covered with manufactured stone.

The interior design and all details were done by the architect Nikola Krasnov.

The vestibule particularly stands out for its importance, the successful fusion of architecture, sculpture and craft works as well as for the richness of materials used.

The central lobby is simply and gracefully adorned, by repetition of portal elements with Ionian pillars in the lower area and loggias in the upper area, joined with pilasters decorated with Corinthian capitals. The coffered ceiling with glass prisms placed in the centre is well-decorated.

The large hall used for plenary sessions with the lower part and the gallery, is of particular importance. The walls are partly covered with wooden panels and with marble. The illumination in the

large hall is natural and comes through the glass semicircular ceiling.

Representative offices facing the Kosovska Street and the King Aleksandar's Boulevard, differ from other rooms by the manner the wall and floors were made. The walls are covered with oak or walnut panelling and floors with inlaid parquet. The office furniture was specially designed.

The halls at the ground floor, positioned on the right and left from the central lobby are specific for its massive columns with Corinthian capitals, the ceilings decorated with stucco mouldings and specially carved doors.

Lavishly decorated diplomatic salon, with silk wall-papered walls, richly decorated ceiling and a central rosette, white wooden panelling and carved wooden doors has been furnished with corresponding furniture.

Because of its function, connection with historical events, architectural and artistic values, the building of the Assembly was proclaimed cultural monument in 1984.

Interior

Concurrently with the final works on the exterior and interior architectural elements, the architect Nikola Krasnov embarked on developing the preliminary design for interior furnishing of the Assembly building. The project design consisted of furniture design, lighting fixtures, carpets and draperies, an exhaustive text description, as well as the layout of the exact arrangement of the furniture. Each room, irrespective of its importance and purpose, was precisely defined by this design, so that nowadays it provides for the authentic reconstruction of these premises within the assembly monumental building.

There are three groups of furniture in the edifice of the National Assembly. The first group consists of the furniture made according to the design of the architect Nikola Krasnov during the mid forties of the twentieth century which makes a unique sty-

listic unity with other interior elements. The second group consists of the furniture that gradually replaced the original pieces during the course of the second half of the twentieth century and today it makes the dominant part of the National Assembly furnishings. The third group consists of the furniture brought in the National Assembly after the 5th October 2000. The original furniture pieces are fragmentarily strewn around the entire edifice.

On the basis of the preserved mobile furniture pieces, made between 1935 and 1938, it can be concluded that the tremendous attention was given to the materials used. The furniture was made of the first class Slavonian oak and walnut of the best quality and it is upholstered by the meticulously chosen leather of red, green, blue and brown. Carpentry and upholstery works were performed by the best craftsmen of the era between the two wars.

The furniture is in alignment with the significance and the representative role of the building. Depending on the importance of the space it was designed for, it changes the extent of the decorative elements used while the quality of the performance remains well-balanced. The wood-carving is the main decoration technique applied in furniture adorning. Various elements of historical styles are freely used and combined, starting from the renaissance, through baroque and rococo up to the empire, although the influence of art deco style, which was the dominating style at the time, can be observed in the design of particular objects.

The main hall, diplomatic salon and the library are the sole premises of the National Assembly building where the original arrangement of furniture, according to the project design of the architect Nikola Krasnov, is entirely preserved. In the Large and the Small Plenary Hall the original MPs benches and tables are preserved. Mobile furniture pieces for the Speaker's office as well as for the accompanying services represent one of the most beautiful stylistic unities, which to a large extent follow the original display.

The furniture dating from the second half of the twentieth century is heterogeneous in style.

The lighting fixtures designed by the architect Nikola Krasnov. They were fitted in 1936, with the exception of a few, and up to the present day over 600 pieces of the original lamps, that can be classified into four groups: chandeliers, ceiling lamps, wall lighting (appliqué) and candelabras. All are made of bronze or brass, with the corresponding glass parts.

The most representative, among the lighting fixture, is the chandelier in the diplomatic salon, which belongs to the gold-plated brass 36-candle-chandeliers group. The two presidential cabinet offices are also fitted with the same kind of the luxurious chandelier implying the significance of these premises.

Painting

There are twenty frescoes on the walls of the National Assembly, made in 1937 by decorative painting masters and prominent artists who were able to come to grips with the large formats and who had been selected at the open competition called the year before. By advice of those in charge of edifice construction oversight, the works of art are carefully thematically suited to their purpose and stylistically associated with the architecture and renaissance models, and not with Byzantine heritage, cubism or expressionism.

The Great Allegory of Labor in the Small Plenary Hall, most monumental in its size, was painted by Mate Menegelo Rodić, famous for his work on or-





Mate Menegelo Rodić, *The Great Allegory of Labour*, 1937

naming temples and the interiors of the public buildings. Kristijan Kreković made six female and male portraits respectively, by caricaturing the faces, on twelve pendetives of the same room, dressed in the peasant costumes of the Yugoslav nations of the date.

The frescoes on the basement café-club walls are slightly smaller in size and are visually closer to the demands of the time. *On the Shore* and *In the Hills* reflect the best characteristics of the B. Filakovac's poetics, a distinguished Croatian artist and professor of the Belgrade and Zagreb Fine Arts Academies, as well as *Gospodsvetsko Field* by R. Slapernik, whose historical scenes adorn the public buildings in Ljubljana.

On the lower floor, in the restaurant, the paintings entitled *Harlequin* and *Feast* painted by the same, well known Slovenian painter, in the spirit of the contemporary tendencies of poetic realism and modern ideas, and the less known P. Petrović Suhačev, one of the pleiad of the forgotten Russian emigrants in Serbia, painted *Meal* and *Fisherman*, represent a bit anachronous, illustrative pieces, accepting also the experiences of

Lucca Signorelli as was suggested by the members of the Construction Board.

Easel paintings, as well as a small number of drawings and graphic works of art can be found on the less accessible premises, since they are the most representative ones (cabinet offices and the conference halls), with wood-panelled walls and other decorative details. The core of this particular segment of the National Assembly collection today consists of twenty two pieces, and the collection began to develop with the portraits of the Speakers of the National Assembly. The first was commissioned from I. Tišov by the middle of the thirties, and the remaining seven between 1935 and 1939 from Uroš Predić and in the end D. Stojkov. According to the time the paintings were made, the works of the following artist were probably acquired in the same years and those include S. Aralica, D. Glišić, P. Dobrovića, I. Job, M. Petrov, Z. Petrović, B. Pomorišč, K. Hakman and S. Šumanović, painters belonging to the mainstream currents of Serbian and Yugoslav art, but it is not excluded that the works could have been obtained even after the Second World War.



During the fifties and sixties the works of the leading artists from all over the then our common state were placed under the roof of the Assembly building, and those include the works of the following: Đ. Andrejević Kun, D. Antić, J. Bijelić, J. Bifel, S. Bogojević, L. Vujaklija, V. Dimitrijević, B. Ilić, V. Jordan, D. Kondovski, M. Konjović, M. Kujačić, M. Kurnik, L. Ličenoski, P. Lubarda, P. Mazev, M. B. Kiar, P. Milosavljević, M. Milunović, P. Omčikus, S. Pejović, O. Petlevski, Đ. Popović, M. B. Protić, I. Radović, F. Filipović, S. Hodžić, I. Šeremet, F. Šimunović i S. Šohaj.

The collection consisted of one hundred fifty six works of art out of which sixty was stolen or completely destroyed by fire on October 5, 2000, among which were the precious pieces made by our famous doyens: S. Aralica, B. Dogan, P. Dobrović, M. Kečić, M. Konjović, P. Lubarda, M. Makanec, P. Milosavljević, M. Milunović, Z. Petrović, Đ. Popović, Z. Prica, M. B. Protić, V. Svečnjak, B. Stevanović, I. Tabaković, M. Todorović, V. Filakovc, M. Čelebonović, B. Šotra, M. Šušтариć, Šumanović etc. Although the loss is irretrievable, the Serbian Ministry of Culture has soon after presented the Assembly with thirty nine paintings, three sculp-

tures and a tapestry made by contemporary artists. Thus, the collection continued to grow and due to its artistic value it is of crucial importance for the proper understanding of creative achievements in Serbia and the countries of the former Yugoslavia.

Sculpture

According to the design for the National Assembly building and during the work on its interior decoration, it was decided that sculptures would represent the significant part of the decoration, uniting artistic values with the visual manifestation of the national, spiritual and political identity According



Kristijan Kreković, A Serbian woman and a Serbian man, 1927



Sava Šumanović, A View of St. Petka's Chapel, 1938



Milan Konjović, The Farm, 1952



Petar Palavičini, Maritime Affairs, 1937

to the main idea of the architect Ilkić, the sculpture works that would, by its symbolic character refer to the function of the very institution and the importance of its representation, should have been placed on the pediments above the both entrances and along the upper edge of the lateral wings of the building already during the twenties of the past century. Even though the original idea was not realized in practice, it was decided that the chosen plaster pieces, originating from 1925 and 1926, should be placed inside the building.

By the end of the thirties, when the building was completed, the works that were placed in niches inside the building have shaped a much more balanced whole. The four monumental figures cut in Prilep marble, placed in the vestibule, the four solid, stable forms, mildly stylized, with reduced surfaces, represent the characters that symbolize the historical development of all the three constituent people, and the founder of the royal dynasty. These are Tzar Dušan by D. Filipović, King Tomislav by V. Radauš, Prince Kocelj by T. Kos, and Karađorđe by F. Kršinić. The sculptures in the main hall, according to the conceptual programme denote the economic activities, and they are expressed and embodied in the female figures representing the attributes that define particular branches of economy. The figures Craftsmanship and Navy work by Palavičini, and Agriculture and Industry by F. Gorše, are also made of marble. The similarly are the two pieces of art by F. Kršinić cast in bronze, personifications of Justice and Education. The mentioned pieces of art are developed according to the moulds that won first prizes in a pub-

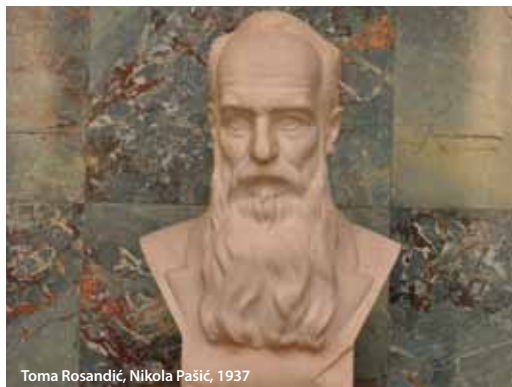
lic competition where most of Yugoslav's famous sculptors of the time participated.

While two dynamic compositions titled Playful black horse, positioned in front of the building in 1938., were directly commissioned from T. Rosandić, whose creative and educational work left a significant mark on both Serbian and Yugoslav plastic art. The portraits that testify to the existence of particular personalities, but also to different époques when they were active, occupy an important part of the pictorial and political process of shaping the art collection of the National Assembly edifice. First to arrive to the collection was the portrait of King Peter I, when this work of art, made by R. Valdec, was cast in several copies to be placed in all important governmental institutions, in 1920.

In 1937, while the interior decorating process, was underway, the bust of the king Alexander, Nikola Pašić and Stjepan Radić were commissioned from R. Stijović, T. Rosandić and S. Stojanović respectively.

In the course of the post war period, starting from 1947, the bust pieces of the President Josip Broz Tito were made, works of A. Augustinčić and B. Kalin, as well as the ones of the National Assembly Speakers, Moša Pijade, dr. Ivan Ribar, Milentije Popović and Edvard Kardelj, works of art by A. Augustinčić, B. Kalin and Z. Kalin, N. Jankovic.

The sculptures in the building of the National Assembly are the works of the most imminent authors from the territory of the former Yugoslavia. With regards to their artistic value, they are among the highest achievements in Yugoslav sculpture, especially those sculptures produced in the period between two World Wars. Regarding the designing concept, they make a harmonious and thoughtful entirety which reflects the historical, spiritual and material development of the state.





The National Assembly building in Kralja Milana Street

History

The National Assembly building in Kralja Milana Street, is adjacent to the building that once housed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, situated on the corner of Kralja Milana and Dobrinjska street.

In between 1945 and 1954 the Serbian Assembly held its sessions in the building of the National Assembly on Nikola Pasic Square. Construction work of the building which would house the Assembly in Kralja Milana street commenced according to a blueprint developed by architect Isak Azriel, who was the signatory of the commissioned work on behalf of the Design Institute

of the NR Serbia. The construction works on the building of the Assembly of the NRS started on May 4, 1949 and were completed on March 31, 1954. Initially it was planned to be the office building of the Government of the NRS. Interior construction work on the assembly hall and meeting rooms ran from April 1, 1954 until January 31 1955. The first session in the new building was held on April 20, 1954.

The author of the interior decoration project, encompassing representative decoration of the halls and vestibule, marble staircase and floor, was Milan Minić.

Location and Interior

The building of the National Assembly was designed as a four storey office building, with strong geometric lines of windows dominating the exterior. According to the design of the architect Minić, the facade was to be covered in manufactured stone and in line with the height of the façade of the adjacent Ministry of Foreign Affairs building. The building was built as a ferroconcrete skeleton structure filled with brick masonry. The building interior is divided into nine levels, three of which are subterranean levels. First floor premises are intended for the Speaker's Office and the Secretary General's Office. The remaining floors accommodate the four committee halls and the premises used by MPs and the parliamentary staff.

The imaginative solution of the ground floor with monumental pillars and a retracted main volume of the building, with balconies on the last floor

and a flat roof terrace, rank this building among the most recognisable examples of contemporary Belgrade architecture.

The building of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia is one of the first public buildings constructed after the Second World War for the needs of the public administration. Soon after the construction works on the building were completed, the edifice hosted the first regular session of the Assembly of Serbia on March 20 1954, and since then the building has maintained its original purpose. The building of the National Assembly, being a place where MPs regularly meet and important decisions concerning the future of the country and its people are made, testifies to the parliamentary progress and stormy developments on the political scene of Serbia over the past fifty years.





Ivan Tišov, Address on Unification, 1926

Art Collection

The parliamentary art collection of the National Assembly with two hundred and twenty nine works of art of more than 142 artists from all over the former SFRY, dating mostly from the seventies of the twentieth century add particular value to the building interior.

A masterpiece of Anastas Bocarić "On the ruins of the Serbian Empire" (A rally around gusle – player) from 1899, the National Assembly is particularly proud of. The piece was exhibited at the World Exposition in Paris in 1990 along with the works of world's greatest impressionists and postimpressionists of the time. A significant number of national authors has found its place under the roof of the parliament, starting from Milan Milovanović and his impressionist paintings from 1912, followed

by, Djordje Andrejević Kun, Stojan Aralica, Nikola Bešević, Slavo Bogojević, Marko Čelebonović, Dragutin Cigarčić, Vojteh Bratus, Marjan Detoni, Dragomir Glisić, Vinko Grdan, Oskar Herman, Boza Ilić, Vasilije Jordan, Pivo Karamatijević, Ilija Kolarević, Jovan Kratohvil, Aleksander Kumrić, Majda Kurnik, Petar Lubarda, Pedja Milosavljević, Zoran Petrović, Vasa Pomorišac, Djordje Popović, Ivana Radović, Bogić Risimović Risim, Svetozar Samurović, Bora Stevanović, Sreten Stojanović, Djurdje Teodorovića, Aleksandar Tomašević and Pasko Vučetić. The collection consists of the works of a number of renowned authors who have been at the top of the Serbian art scene for quite some time, such as Ljubica-Cuca Sokić, Miodrag B. Protić, Aleksandar Luković Lukijan, Vera Božičković-Popović, Nikola-Koko Janković, Bogomil Karlavaris, Milun Mitrović, Boza Prodanović etc.



Ivan Tišov, Return from the war, 1926



Anastas Bocarić, Ruins of the Serbian Empire, 1899



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Particularly valuable part of the parliamentary collection are the award winning works of “July 7th” laureates, who were the corypheus of our art scene and it includes the works of S. Aralica, M. Čelebonović, I. Kolarevića, P. Lubarde, A. Luković, P. Milosavljević, Z. Petrović, M. B. Protić, I. Radović, B. Stevanović, Lj. Sokić etc.

In April 2005, a monumental painting painted by Ivan Tišov, that had been hidden from the public eye for whole 50 years, was officially uncovered in “Nikola Pašić” hall of the National Assembly. The painting depicts doctor Ante Pavelić-Zubar reading the “Address on Unification” to the King Aleksandar Karađorđević at the presence of the leading politicians of the era. The painting dates from 1926, and is accompanied by a painting of the same author entitled “The Return of the king Aleksandar” .This painting is also approximately

dated 1926, since it depicts the flags that were officially banned in 1929.

Both paintings did not fit into the communist ideology and were hidden for decades, first by draperies and curtains and later by a plaster wall.

What is more, Tišov was a representative of academic monumentalism and he adorned the world of the bourgeoisie. Since the painting was commissioned from the Croatian artist by the king himself, it testifies of a number of political concessions made in those days, since the relations within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, were already burdened by tensions.



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Ivan Tišov, The Government Cabinet Office, 1922 (National Museum in Belgrade)

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