

1889-1893 Regency in Serbia as the Russian Society Saw It

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Abstract

The research is devoted to determining conditions of Serbian development in the period of regency in 1889-1893 and the Russian society reaction to these events. Milan Obrenovich's renunciation of throne and the transition of power into the hands of radical party led by N. Pashich marked approach of a new stage in the Serbian kingdom foreign policy. In particular, in the speech read by Pashich at the meeting of Skupstina it was said that "new precious acquisitions" in the field of diplomatic relations, and the reciprocal address of Skupstina directly indicated renewal of friendship with Russia.

In general, "peaceful coup d'etat" in Serbia, contrary to approvals of the Russian patriotic editions, which were laying great hopes on radicals, did not mean that the "younger of all of the European kingdoms" would turn towards Russia, and did not cause any sharp changes in position of Serbia, though in the Serbian-Russian relations a certain "thaw" was observed. Numerous Austro-Hungarian statements of respect for the independence of the Balkan states concerning Serbia almost immediately gave way to the traditional pressure applied in two directions: intervention into Serbian internal affairs and foreign policy.

Keywords: Serbia, Russia, Austro-Hungary, Obrenovich, Skupstina, guardianship.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays there is a limited number of researches devoted to the problem of internal [1; 2] and foreign political [3] groups struggle to influence the Serbian monarch and Skupstina on the verge of the 19-20th centuries. In this regard opposition of Vienna and St. Petersburg for the Balkan Peninsula influence spheres presents itself important. Even today the subject does not lose relevance in the light of the West and the East countries opposition, and leaves a question of the executive authority and legislature influence responsibility degree on the state and society open. The purpose of the current research was to track dynamics of the Russian social thought reflecting political life in Serbia during the Regency period (1889-1893).

In this event the Russian public saw the sign of important changes in foreign political position of Serbia in sense of its release from the Austro-Hungary excessive "guardianship". The revolution peacefully held in Serbia could not be left without "important consequences", not only concerning the fate of the "younger of the European kingdoms" (i.e. Serbia), but also for destinies of other Balkan Peninsula states [7].

However, in assessment of the bilateral relations future development views differed. The conservative part of the Russian society representatives believed that the "true narodolyubets (people-carers)", "advocates of political and civil identity of the fatherland" who came to power, would manage to appreciate "the blessings rendered by great Russia to its Balkan brothers in faith" [8] and would give the Belgrade foreign policy the corresponding "original" direction based on "a close, blood and spiritual bond of Serbians and Russians", on "the firm ground of mutual state interests" [7]. More rational representatives of the Russian society were skeptical, believing that it "would be hasty to conclude that Serbia, being exempted from one guardianship, would thereby seek to replace it with another".

Perhaps, most drastic changes in relationships system with Austro-Hungary took place, the Balkan Peninsula policy and establishment of the new government in Serbia delivered a serious blow to these relationships. Skupstina, assembled at the beginning of October, 1890 consisted mainly of radicals, who acted as resolute opponents to Austro-filiacy and foreign diplomatic guardianship of any kind. Therefore became obvious that unilateral domination of the Austrian influence had to stop on its own.

The results demonstrating influence of the political, cultural and mental processes taking place in Serbia on the verge of the 19-20th centuries directed to eliminate the most serious obstacles on the way of normal state development are an important research subject and, thus, are presented in the article [4].

The most important milestones of the Balkans political life at the end of the XIX century are reflected in the article. Article data can be useful in researches of the Eastern Europe institutional history, as well as in modern public discussions about extent of political influence on institutes of power, development and dynamics of the young states political life.

METHODS

The key method to researching this problem is the history-and-system method on the basis of historical sources allowing understanding laws of Serbian social and political system functioning against influence of regents who served as a peculiar counterbalance to the radicals relying on the majority in Skupstina. It allows to reveal groups of influence on the Serbian monarch and to respectively define further development of political and social system of the state.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

On February 22, 1889 the king of Serbia Milan Obrenovich abdicated in favor of his 12-year-old son Alexander Obrenovich [5]. Until his coming into age the power had to belong to the Regent council led by Y.Ristich, with participation of generals Protich and Belimarkovich. After this the Serbian radical party led by N. Pashich won a convincing victory in parliamentary elections that caused foreign policy reorientation of Serbia towards Russia.

The solemnity and celebration scale of the Kosovo field battle 500-year anniversary for which Alexander Obrenovich's crowning was dated (June 28, 1889) showed the new direction in the foreign policy [9].

In Serbia influence of Austro-Hungary was carried out by means of regents who served as a peculiar counterbalance to the radicals relying on the Skupstina majority and braked their efforts "to bring the young Kingdom on the way of independence" [10]. It was also greatly promoted by the subsequently appointed Austro-Hungarian envoy to the Serbian court, general Temmes, who urged to reconstruct the party devoted to the Gabsburg monarchy.

In the speech at the opening of the Austrian and Hungarian parliaments delegations meeting the emperor Franz Joseph, having mentioned the formal assurance of friendship observance with Austro-Hungary received from regents, let know that "non-compliance with this promise threatens Serbia with serious danger" [11]. However, the Austro-Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs count G. Kalnoki had other point of view, believing that "abolition of barriers constraining them (political passions) and strains" cannot be regarded as an occasion to immediate implementation of "the certain fantastic ideas and dreams emerged on the surface" [10] and suggested to wait whether regents would fulfill liability to keep the system of relations with the two-uniform monarchy installed by the King M. Obrenovich assumed by them in the invariance.

Belgrade realized importance of "material prosperity" without which it was impossible to come to fuller political independence from Vienna. Therefore the government of radicals led by S. Gruich with assistance of Skupstina [6] held a number of means concerning the internal political relations, economy, finance, education, army and church affairs. They were directed to eliminate the most serious obstacles on the way to normal state development of Serbia, first of all, on achieving financial and economic independence of the country from the foreign investments. In this context it is necessary to consider actions of the Serbian government which rigidly arrived with the French railway company – it simply nationalized the road, having compensated financial claims of "the interested investments" [14]. The same scenario was applied to salt monopoly of the Anglo-Austrian bank, despite the signed 8-year contract and fuss made by the Austrian press about it. As well as in the first case, business had to end with several million payment to the bank, according to an initial government proposal. As it was emphasized in the Russian press "development of Serbia's internal peace is no longer delayed by the aimless and ruinous game of "the high policy", the constant political intrigues absorbing king Milan; the country is little by little freed from the financial fetters imposed on it" [12].

On the foreign policy arena in the period of Regency Serbia maintained equal relations with all European states, expansion in "the ethnographic direction" remained business of the uncertain future. Nevertheless, Belgrade got strong "disgrace" "from all Balkan states", from Germany and Austro-Hungary [14]. The vigorous actions of the Serbian government creating certain economic "isolation" of the country which developed finally into open fight against Austro-Hungary were one of the reasons for it, according to contemporaries.

The two-uniform monarchy applied a proven means – the economic pressure expressed in "a pork question". After the angry threat of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Kalnoki about applying

"vigorous measures" to Serbia, the order of the Hungarian minister of agriculture about prohibition of pigs transportation from Serbia to Hungary under the pretext of epidemic which burst out there, followed. The purpose of this economic war which had "purely political lining" was clear: export of cattle, mainly pigs, through the Hungarian border was a principal object of the Serbian export and brought to the Serbian treasury, according to contemporaries, about 15 million rubles silver that made a third of the total annual income. The ban of evacuation of pigs caused Serbia the enormous loss close to ruin, and had to incline it to concessions.

However this time the Serbian government showed hardness and answered with return of many Austrian and Hungarian goods. When the ban of export touched the Serbian skin and bread, the Serbian businessmen stopped any relations with Austro-Hungarian manufacturers and directed export of bread bypassing the two-uniform monarchy, through Thessaloniki. Thus, radical measures were planned to be taken also for permission of "a pork question": near Belgrade construction of slaughterhouses and a plant for pickling and smoking of 300 thousand pigs a year which was supposed to be delivered to Europe through Thessaloniki, was planned. This extremely favorable project also interested other European countries, Italy in particular.

Active repulse from Serbia, as well as protests from the Austrian and German manufacturers sustaining losses compelled the Austro-Hungarian government, without lifting the official ban, to make some concessions. At the same time it was included into the agreement with the baron Girsh to sell the railroad to Thessaloniki belonging to him, to make the Serbian export there impossible. Belgrade also took measures and entered negotiations with certain "rich salonikets" of Hamdi-bei: the last undertook large-scale works on regulation of the river on all extent as the acquired Austria of the railroad going on the coast of this river Vardar. Thus, Serbia, by means of considerable subsidies investment intended to accelerate works on establishing the new and more convenient way to Thessaloniki bypassing the Austrian railroad.

According to messages of the Russian contemporaries, if Serbia "continues to work with present energy and reasonable patriotism", then its undertakings would terminate in probable good luck, especially as Germany disapprovingly treated a new phase of Austro-Hungarian policy for Serbia [15].

Contemporaries noted that "business will not do without fight" which "will decide dispute between the historical and national course and efforts of Central European diplomacy to include Serbia in the sphere of power of the Austro-Magyar empire" [16].

The ex-king Milan Obrenovich whose uncertain status and unresolved family affairs made considerable part of "the Serbian question" remained the conductor of the Austrian influence. Most distinctly influence of "the Austro-German intrigue" was shown during family crisis in the Serbian ruling dynasty which deification fell on the Regency period. The persistent fight of the queen Natalia for the right of education and primary influence on the young king Alexander interfaced with her need to return to Serbia became a subject of foreign policy manipulations. It caused counteraction from Milan Obrenovich and the Regent council in the person Y. Ristich. As a result, after the short period of return, Natalia Obrenovich, according to the decision of Skupstina, was deprived of the right to enter Serbia until Alexander's coming of age and forced to leave the country.

This conflict which directly involving Austro-Hungary and Germany, and indirectly – the European public, did not affect Russia in practice. First, the Reykhshtadt agreement of 1876 and the Budapest convention of 1877 between Russia and Austro-Hungary according to which this part of the Balkans was considered as the sphere of Vienna primary interests remained in force. Second, internal political changes in Serbia coincided with revaluation of the role of Russia by the Russian

society in this region towards its further "concentration" and the appeal to own economic and economic needs. The policy on the Balkans with its traditional aspiration to Passages and protection the orthodox people did not answer time any more and was perceived by many as a historical anachronism.

In this regard, despite general sympathy for the queen Natalia, the Russian public and political circles stood on position of non-interference into internal affairs of the Serbian kingdom and the most correct decision considered "to let them (Serbians) manage how they want", believing that it would rouse Serbia to "sympathy and gratitude for Russia for our freedom of inaction". "Since we ceased to strive on Serbians, their friendship returned little by little", - the Russian contemporaries noted [17].

This self-elimination of Russia, according to the opinion of contemporaries, was promoted by several factors in no small measure. Readiness of the Russian diplomacy "to remove their heat (Europe) by Russian hands" caused bewilderment and direct charges with "availability to foreign influences" even from conservative editions [11].

Lack of the firm foreign policy line led to existing in the Russian society of outdated Slavophiliac model of Serbia's perception on an equal basis with other states of the Balkan Peninsula as "younger brothers", without any changes happening. Orientation to Russia was perceived as "free and natural development of Serbia", "awakening of national consciousness" [11] to which Austro-Hungary encroached.

On the other hand, the unpleasant deposit was left by ambiguous policy of the Regent Head Y.Ristich who in working hours of the Berlin congress dexterous maneuvered between Austro-Hungary and Russia. "Nobody knows better than him that Serbia is obliged by everything to Russia alone, - wrote the Russian Review magazine, - and nobody can assure the Vienna diplomats better than him that Serbia will never forget blessings of Austria" [18].

Political "balancing act" of Y.Ristich and his ugly role in the conflict of the king Milan and the queen Natalia when he sided with the first "and did not spare efforts to humiliate, offend the second", aroused mistrust of Russia and rather negative reaction from the Russian society in the opinion of which all sovereigns of the Balkan Peninsula, except for the Montenegro prince Nikolay, were included in the category of "false friends" and "double-faced allies", "the ill-wishers who are only covered with a friendship mask" [11].

This point of view, obviously, was also shared by the Russian government; on a military holiday in Peterhof Alexander II publicly declared Prince Nikolay Chernogorsky "the only sincere and loyal friend of Russia". These royal words "do not comprise threat, below the slightest expression of censure or displeasure", on the contrary, "they only establish the undoubted historic fact confirmed by century historical experience" [19].

In 1891 big European tour of the king Alexander during which he visited St. Petersburg, Moscow and Kiev, and then Vienna and Ishl took place. The "German" party at the St. Petersburg court was dissatisfied with the Serbian king Alexander visit to Russia, [20] and Austro-Hungary brought down a stream of manuals and morals to Serbia. "Neue Freie Presse" in sharp and categorical expressions wrote that Serbians "have to be careful of any aspirations to national association and not forget that Zemlin is close to Belgrade", and that the small Kingdom is in complete dependence from the Gabsburg empire [21].

The official Serbian newspaper "Odjek" placed the answer to these insinuations. "We do not see any difference between national independent policy and dream of the great Serbian kingdom". Addressing the association of Italy and Germany, the newspaper wrote that "the logic and history specify that all national states were formed in such a way. That is why it is impossible to demand

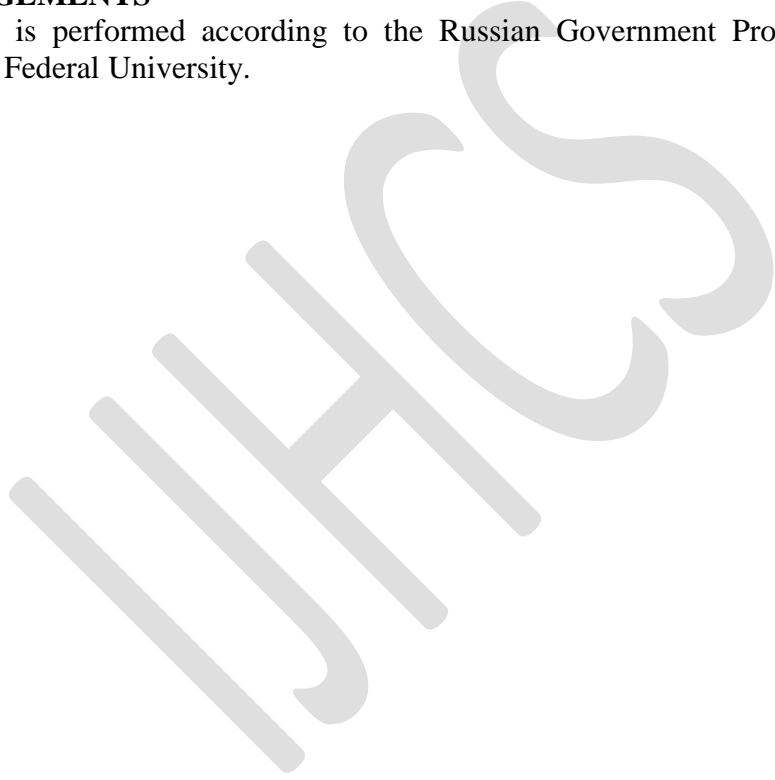
from Serbians that they considered dreams of the great Serbian kingdom as utopia ... The Serbian people deserve it for centuries-old battle for civilization, for the fact that they served so long as a bulwark of peace and cultures in Europe" [21].

Arguing on the future of the Balkan Peninsula and about its destiny of "separate breeding units" the Russian publicists believed that its wellbeing depended not so much on the result of rivalry for "influence" on their future of the European states, but on internal unity.

On April 1, 1893 the young king Alexander made revolution, having declared himself full age. "The Serbian revolution" as the Russian contemporaries christened it, caused ambiguous reaction of the European states: from complacent (Russia and France) to malicious grumbling (Great Britain and Germany). Almost total absence of reliable information made April revolution in the opinion of the European and Russian public "the Belgrade riddle".

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