

## Storm over Serbia The Rivalry between Civilian and Military Authorities (1911–1914)

**Abstract:** As a new force on the political scene of Serbia after the 1903 Coup which brought the Karadjordjević dynasty back to the throne and restored democratic order, the Serbian army, led by a group of conspiring officers, perceived itself as the main guardian of the country's sovereignty and the principal executor of the sacred mission of national unification of the Serbs, a goal which had been abandoned after the 1878 Berlin Treaty. During the "Golden Age" decade (1903–1914) in the reign of King Peter I, Serbia emerged as a point of strong attraction to the Serbs and other South Slavs in the neighbouring empires and as their potential protector. In 1912–13, Serbia demonstrated her strength by liberating the Serbs in the "unredeemed provinces" of the Ottoman Empire. The main threat to Serbia's very existence was multinational Austria-Hungary, which thwarted Belgrade's aspirations at every turn. The Tariff War (1906–1911), the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (1908), and the coercing of Serbia to cede her territorial gains in northern Albania (1912–1913) were but episodes of this fixed policy. In 1911, the Serbian army officers, frustrated by what they considered as weak reaction from domestic political forces and the growing external challenges to Serbia's independence, formed the secret patriotic organisation "Unification or Death" (*Black Hand*). Serbian victories in the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) enhanced the prestige of the military but also boosted political ambitions of Lt.-Colonel Dragutin T. Dimitrijević Apis and other founding members of the Black Hand anxious to bring about the change of government. However, the idea of a military putsch limited to Serbian Macedonia proposed in May 1914 was rejected by prominent members of the Black Hand, defunct since 1913. This was a clear indication that Apis and a few others could not find support for their meddling in politics. The government of Nikola P. Pašić, supported by the Regent, Crown Prince Alexander, called for new elections to verify its victory against those military factions that acted as an "irresponsible factor" with "praetorian ambitions" in Serbian politics. This trial of strength brings new and valuable insights into the controversial relationship between the Young Bosnians and the Black Hand prior to the Sarajevo assassination in June 1914.

**Keywords:** Serbia, internal strife, King Peter I Karadjordjević, army, Austria-Hungary, Black Hand, Balkan Wars, Nikola P. Pašić, Dragutin T. Dimitrijević Apis, Bosnia

*The restoration of democracy and Serbia's Piedmont role among South Slavs*

In her "Golden Age" (1903–1914) during the reign of King Peter I Karadjordjević, Serbia was capable of resisting manifold internal and external crises due to her functioning democracy and internal consensus on both foreign policy orientation and wider national goals. The external challenges were mostly resolved by spectacular victories in the Balkan Wars, while the internal strife, marked by military-civilian rivalries, mirrored the intensive

regrouping of the social forces struggling to further the democratic system, recover the country's crippled economy and redefine the position of Serbia as a developing country.

During the reign of the two last sovereigns of the House of Obrenović, from 1881 to 1903, Serbia was under the predominant influence of Austria-Hungary.<sup>1</sup> After the 1903 Coup and the change on the throne, Serbia pursued an independent foreign policy which was manifested in her orientation towards Russia and France. With the new regime recognised and the main protagonists of the 1903 regicide sent into retirement by 1906, Serbia gradually came to rely politically and economically on the Franco-Russian Alliance, which eventually evolved into the Triple Entente.<sup>2</sup>

In 1903 the Kingdom of Serbia had an area of 48,500 sq. km and a population of 2,922,058 inhabitants. Immigration from the neighbouring Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires grew steadily. There were roughly two million Serbs in the Dual Monarchy and one million in Turkey-in-Europe (Old Serbia and Slavic Macedonia). The Serbs, scattered in various provinces of the two empires, were deprived of their basic human and collective rights. Throughout Turkey-in-Europe, and particularly in Old Serbia (Vilayet of Kosovo), they were subjected to continuous terror by Albanian *kaçaks* and blackened by Austro-Hungarian propaganda since Viennese diplomacy openly supported Albanian claims in the whole area. The Christian Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina struggled to preserve their national and cultural identity denied by the imposed pan-Bosnian policy of the Austro-Hungarian governor, Benjamin von Kállay (1883–1903), and those in the region of Vojvodina (Banat, Bačka, Baranja) opposed the assimilation policy of the Hungarian government. Not surprisingly, all of them were looking to Serbia as their potential protector. Serbia's sister state, tiny Montenegro, with roughly 317,000 valiant highlanders, was the only reliable ally in the region, although the rivalry between the Montenegrin Prince, Nicho-

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<sup>1</sup> Independent since 1878, Serbia became a client state of the Dual Monarchy under the stipulations of the 1881 Secret Convention that was renewed in 1889. Although she was proclaimed Kingdom in March 1882, Serbia was obliged to conform her foreign policy to Austria-Hungary's requirements, including the disavowal of any aspiration towards Bosnia-Herzegovina occupied by the Dual Monarchy in 1878. In return, Vienna was expected to facilitate Serbia's expansion in the south towards the Skoplje area in Old Serbia. English translation of the 1881 Secret Convention is published in Alfred Francis Pribram, *The Secret Treaties of Austria-Hungary 1879–1914*, vol. I (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), 51–63. Grégoire Yakchitch [Grgur Jakšić], *Le Traité secret austro-serbe du 28 janvier 1881 et du 9 février 1889* (Paris: R. Pellerin, 1938).

<sup>2</sup> Dimitrije Djordjević, "The Serbs as an integrating and disintegrating factor", *Austrian History Yearbook*, vol. 3, Pt. 2 (1967), 72–82.

las Petrović Njegoš (King from 1910), and his son-in-law, King Peter I Karadjordjević, often made this collaboration difficult.<sup>3</sup>

The social and political situation in post-1903 Serbia was quite appealing to the Serb compatriots abroad: roughly seventy percent of Serbia's male population enjoyed voting rights as opposed to less than twenty percent in the Serb- and South Slav-inhabited provinces of Austria-Hungary. Furthermore, Serbian peasants (roughly eighty-seven percent of the population) were owners of their small and medium-size land holdings, whereas most of their compatriots in Bosnia, Herzegovina and Turkey-in-Europe were feudal serfs of Muslim beys. Freedom of the press and the development of democratic institutions in Serbia amplified her cultural impact on the Serbs living in the neighbouring empires. Out of 218 Serbian dailies in 1911, more than a half were published in Serbia (125). In 1912, out of 302 Serbian newspapers and journals, 199 were published in Serbia, of which 126 in Belgrade alone (24 dailies, 20 periodicals which mostly published literary texts and scholarly articles, and 82 publications devoted to commercial, business, agrarian and other topics).<sup>4</sup>

King Peter I Karadjordjević, who had published his own Serbian translation of John Stuart Mill's essay "On Liberty" in 1867, was a French-educated liberal genuinely committed to the rules of constitutional monarchy. He was the grandson of Kara George (Karadjordje Petrović), the leader of the 1804 Serbian Revolution, and the son of Prince Alexander Karadjordjević (1842–1858), the ruler of Serbia in her initial phase of modernisation and Europeanisation. A graduate of the French Saint-Cyr military academy, Peter I excelled in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 and became widely known as a guerrilla leader of the Bosnian Serbs in their insurrection against the Ottoman Empire (1876–1878), during which he became known under the *nom de guerre* Petar Mrkonjić. Unlike the last Obrenović monarchs, King Peter I was not an authoritarian ruler, which was often interpreted as his weakness and lack of resolve. During his four decades in exile, Peter I had experienced the real values of parliamentary democracy and political liberties, and he understood their advantage for a developing country such as Serbia was at the beginning of the twentieth century. In spite of the initial diplomatic boycott

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<sup>3</sup> D. Djordjević, "Srbija i Balkan na početku XX veka (1903–1908)", in *Jugoslovenski narodi pred Prvi svetski rat*, Monographies de l'Academie serbe des Sciences et des Arts, vol. CDXVI, Classe des sciences sociales, No. 61 (Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 1967), 207–230.

<sup>4</sup> Jovan Skerlić, *Istorija nove srpske književnosti* (Belgrade: Izdavačka knjižara S. K. Cvijanovića, 1914), quoted from the reprinted edition (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1967), 436. Cf. also Jovan Skerlić, *Istorijski pregled srpske štampe 1791–1911* (Belgrade: Izdavačka knjižara S. K. Cvijanovića, 1912).

he had to endure (1903–1906) – due to the unfulfilled demands for the punishment of the main organisers of the 1903 Coup – King Peter I soon became a symbol of democracy and national freedom. Praised as the future king of Yugoslavia by the liberal youth in Vienna in 1903, Peter I epitomised an appealing mixture of pan-Serbian and pan-Yugoslav expectations.<sup>5</sup>

Two dominant post-1903 political parties – Old Radicals led by Nikola P. Pašić and Independent Radicals headed by Ljubomir Stojanović – successfully combined the doctrine of French Radicalism with the domestic traditions of local self-government, and pursued a highly popular Russophile course in foreign policy. Pašić's Old Radicals, however, proved to be more successful: in eight years they formed eight homogeneous cabinets and victoriously ended the Balkan Wars (1912–1913). The Independent Radicals were able to form just one short-lived homogeneous cabinet (1905–1906). There were also several coalition cabinets consisting of the two rival Radical factions – such cabinets were favoured by the King.<sup>6</sup>

The political programmes of both Radical factions advocated the unification of all Serbs in the Balkans into a single state. The Independent Radicals emphasised the need to foster “Yugoslav cooperation” in their 1905 programme.<sup>7</sup> South Slavic cooperation and the Yugoslav idea, in particular, based on cultural and linguistic kinship and common national interests, were an enlightened alternative to centuries-long foreign domination with the attendant discrimination against and repression of the South Slavs. Both Radical parties were, however, aware of the importance of Serbia's democratic transformation for the unification of Serbs. Democracy revived hopes that both Serbian and Yugoslav unification were possible within the liberal and democratic framework. In his programmatic speech at an Old Radical rally in November 1911, Pašić laid emphasis on democracy as a main pillar of national unification: “It is earnestly expected that a Serbia with constitutional and parliamentary order could become the Piedmont of Serbs; only an open-minded Serbia can attract Serbs, and only by being armed and well prepared can she fulfil her Piedmont-like pledge.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Stead, “King Peter I of Serbia”, *Review of Reviews* (September 1906), 245–250; Alex N. Dragnich, “King Peter I. Culmination of Serbia's Struggle for Parliamentary Government”, *East European Quarterly*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1970).

<sup>6</sup> D. Djordjević, “Parlamentarna kriza u Srbiji 1905. godine”, *Istorijski časopis*, vol. XIV–XV (1963–1965), 157–172.

<sup>7</sup> See the programmes of the political parties in Serbia in Vasilije Krestić and Radoš Ljušić, *Programi i statuti srpskih političkih stranaka do 1918. godine* (Belgrade: Književne novine, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> *Spomenica Nikole P. Pašića, 1845–1925* (Belgrade: Pavlović & Co., 1926), 175. For more on Pašić see *Nikola Pašić. Život i delo. Zbornik radova sa naučnog skupa u Srpskoj akademiji nauka i umetnosti 1995*. (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 1997).

The policy of Croat-Serbian cooperation (1905–1906) in the Hungarian province of Croatia-Slavonia and in the Austrian province of Dalmatia – both provinces with a high percentage of Serb population – was warmly welcomed in Serbia, in particular among the pro-Yugoslav Independent Radicals. Their leader, Ljubomir Stojanović, met with the leader of the Dalmatian Croats, Frano Supilo, in the town of Rijeka. The latter visited Belgrade in 1905 and, with Prime Minister Pašić and some prominent Independent Radicals, discussed the possibilities of intensifying cooperation.<sup>9</sup>

The coronation of King Peter I in Belgrade in 1904, along with the celebration of the centennial of the First Serbian Insurrection under Kara George (1804), was attended by many representatives of the intellectual and political elites from all the Serb-inhabited and Yugoslav lands.<sup>10</sup> The King himself received various delegations, including that of the pro-Yugoslav youth from Croatia-Slavonia and Dalmatia, expressing lively interest in Serbo-Croat rapprochement. Belgrade emerged as an ambitious cultural hub and meeting place for various liberal, pro-Yugoslav gatherings: in September 1904, the Serbian capital hosted the first congress of the Yugoslav youth and the first congress of Yugoslav writers and journalists (with representatives of the Serbian, Bulgarian, Croatian and Slovenian societies). Various Yugoslav-inspired conferences and artistic meetings were organised in Belgrade, Niš and other Serbian towns, attracting numerous intellectuals, from teachers and painters to journalists and writers.<sup>11</sup> As early as 1904, a group of young intellectuals and students founded a Belgrade-based association, the “Slavic South” (*Slovenski jug*), which advocated the unification of all Yugoslavs (the heading of their journal contained two mottos: “Southern Slavs unite!” and “A revolution in the unredeemed lands!”). Special Yugoslav evenings were regularly held on the promenade of the fortress of Belgrade. The goal of the “Slavic South” was to “spread the Yugoslav idea and cooperation in the Balkans”. The impact of this intensified interaction between Serbia and the Yugoslav movement in Austria-Hungary raised additional concern in Vienna.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> More in Mirjana Gross, *Vladavina hrvatsko-srpske koalicije 1906–1907* (Belgrade: Institut za društvene nauke, 1960).

<sup>10</sup> The term Yugoslav lands refers to the provinces in Austria-Hungary inhabited by the Serbs and other South Slavs (Croats, Slovenes and Bosnian Muslims).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Jovan Skerlić, “Omladinski kongresi”, *Srpski književni glasnik*, vol. IX (1904), 123–127.

<sup>12</sup> Dragoslav Janković, “Jugoslovenstvo u Srbiji 1903–1912”, *Anali Pravnog fakulteta u Beogradu*, vol. XVII (1969), 523–535.

Belgrade assumed the leading role in a movement for wider understanding between Serbia and the other Yugoslav nations. The most eminent Serbian scholars, such as geographer Jovan Cvijić, historians Stojan Novaković and Slobodan Jovanović, literary historians Jovan Skerlić and Bogdan Popović, and linguist Alexander Belić, were fairly successful in explaining to the public, in a convincing and politically reasonable manner, that the wider Yugoslav framework would be the best basis for a permanent solution of the Serbian question, i.e. pan-Serbian unification.<sup>13</sup> The scholarly basis for the Yugoslav idea was formulated by Jovan Cvijić: he expounded the theory that the Dinaric Alps in the Balkans constituted a distinctive geopolitical unit with an almost uniform ethnic composition formed through countless historical migrations. Professor Cvijić identified several related cultural and civilisation patterns (“cultural belts”), among which the strongest was that of patriarchal culture in the vast area of the Dinaric Alps stretching through most of Montenegro, Herzegovina, Bosnia, Dalmatia and the Croatian littoral.<sup>14</sup>

A number of French-educated Serbian intellectuals were ardent promoters of civil liberties, universal suffrage, and French-inspired doctrines of the sovereign rights of every single South Slav nation, contrary to the notion of Habsburg-inspired historic privileges.<sup>15</sup> Through their activities, the national model for resolving the Serbian question slowly started to develop into a new, cultural, model: as the basis for national unification, Skerlić suggested the adoption of the Serbian ekavian (*ekavski*) dialect and Latin (instead of Cyrillic) script in order to overcome the differences between several dialects of the common Serbo-Croat language.<sup>16</sup> The model of a unified Yugoslav nation fitted well into the historical experience of the Serbs, for whom the state and the nation were one and the same thing.<sup>17</sup> Serbian intellectuals combined

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<sup>13</sup> Probably the most famous text is Stojan Novaković’s prediction on the common future of Yugoslavs in the century to come: “Nakon sto godina. Beograd, 15. maj 2011”, in *Hrvatsko-srpski almanah* (Zagreb-Belgrade 1911), 9–19; cf. more in Dimitrije Djordjević, “Stojan Novaković: Historian, Politician, Diplomat”, *Serbian Studies*, vol. 3, nos. 3–4 (1985), 39–67.

<sup>14</sup> Jovan Cvijić, *Antropogeografski problemi Balkanskog poluostrva* (Belgrade: chez l’auteur 1902); Émile Haumant, *Le pays dinarique et les types Serbes d’après Mr. Jovan Cvijić* (Paris: Librairie A. Colin, 1915).

<sup>15</sup> D. T. Bataković, *Les sources françaises de la démocratie serbe, 1804–1914* (Paris: CNRS, 2013), 357–383.

<sup>16</sup> On Skerlić see Midhat Begić, *Jovan Skerlić et la critique littéraire en Serbie* (Paris: Institut d’Études slaves, 1963).

<sup>17</sup> The one-sided portrayal of post-1903 Serbia in Christopher Clark’s *The Sleepwalkers. How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Books, 2012), in particular the chapter “Serbian Ghosts” (a reference to Kaplan’s “Balkan Ghosts”),

the usual pan-Serbian programme, which was popular in the army ranks and among most of the urban and rural population, with the Yugoslav programme, by explaining that the unification of Serbs would at the same time bring about a union with “our brothers” from the mixed South Slav areas.

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is biased and often misleading. Viewing Serbia’s political ambitions as extremely nationalistic, Clark entirely neglects Serbia’s role as an attractive model of democratic development, the offspring of liberal ideas, the main cultural hub and a meeting point of all liberal-minded intellectuals among the South Slavs, including, in many cases, Bulgarians. Equally disappointing, and even more inaccurate, in depicting Serbia’s role in the Balkans prior to the Great War is Margaret MacMillan, *The War that Ended Peace. How Europe Abandoned Peace for the First World War* (London: Profile Books, 2013), 511–539. Her comparison, for instance, of post-1904 Serbian guerilla in Macedonia with present-day Iran and the smuggling of arms to Hezbollah in Lebanon is out of any rational historical context (p. 514). Sean McMeekin, *July 1914: Countdown to War* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 48–52, 172–175, also shows little, if any, understanding of Serbia’s position. Lacking the knowledge of the Serbian language, political mentality and relevant historiography concerning the Western Balkans in general, and Serbia in particular, these authors embrace age-old stereotypes as a genuine historical framework. A scholarly analysis of Serbia’s impact as a democratic model and cultural hub can be found in Michael Boro Petrovich, *History of Modern Serbia 1804–1918*, vol. II (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 534–604; Dušan T. Bataković, ed., *Histoire du peuple serbe* (Lausanne: L’Age d’Homme, 2005), 185–200; cf. also Andrej Mitrović, *Serbia’s Great War* (London: Hurst & Co., 2007). At least a dozen books and many articles written mostly by French intellectuals, scholars, travel writers and journalists who visited Serbia between 1903 and 1914, show how they were pleasantly surprised by the intensity of intellectual life, the level of education among the political elite and the military as well as by the democratic spirit of Serbia’s population at large. See e.g. Joseph Mallat, *La Serbie contemporaine*, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie orientale et américaine J. Maissonneuve, 1902); André Chéradame, *L’Europe et la question d’Autriche au seuil du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1903); Louis Leger, *Souvenirs d’un slavophile (1863–1897)* (Paris: Librairie Hachette 1905); Gabriel Louis Jaray, *Chez les Serbes, Notes de voyage* (Paris: Bureau des Questions diplomatiques et coloniales, 1906); Alphonse Muzet, *Aux pays balkaniques. Monténégro, Serbie, Bulgarie* (Paris: Pierre Roget et Cie, 1912); Louis Leger, *Serbes Croates et Bulgares. Études historiques, politiques et littéraires* (Paris: Maissonneuve, 1913); Gaston Gravier, “L’émancipation économique de la Serbie”, *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie commerciale de Paris*, vol. 33, no. 6 (June 1911), 417–431; Gaston Gravier, “Le développement économique de la Serbie”, *Annales de Géographie*, vol. 21, no. 115 (1912), 50–56; idem, “La nouvelle Serbie”, *Revue de Paris*, 15 novembre 1913; Henry Barby, *Les victoires serbes* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1913); Jean Pélissier, *Dix mois de guerre dans les Balkans* (Paris: Perrin, 1914); Pierre De Lanux, *La Yougoslavie. La France et les Serbes* (Paris: Payot et Cie, 1916). An analysis in Elisabet Joël, “Les intellectuels françaises et la Serbie à la veille de la Première Guerre mondiale”, in *La France et la Serbie de Congrès de Berlin à la crise de juillet 1914*. Actes du Colloque franco-serbe de Strasbourg (Decembre 1996), *Revue d’Europe Centrale*, vol. VII, no. 1 (Strasbourg 1999), 115–126.

The growing cultural prestige of Belgrade was reflected in the leading literary journal in the Slavic South, *Serbian Literary Herald* (*Srpski književni glasnik*) founded in 1901 by a group of younger, Western-educated intellectuals. Under the prevailing influence of the Independent Radicals and the leftist faction of the Liberals (Ljubomir Stojanović, Jovan Skerlić, Bogdan Popović, Vojislav Veljković), *Serbian Literary Herald* – based on liberal and democratic convictions, in an open dialogue with European values and various cultural models – was a sophisticated promoter of Serbian culture and scholarship as well as the Serbian democracy and South Slav cooperation.<sup>18</sup> The Belgrade literary style, inspired by the elegant and clear French style, soon set the standard for South Slav intellectuals.<sup>19</sup> The University of Belgrade, with 1,600 students in 1910 and its internationally renowned professors (including mathematicians Mihailo Petrović and Milutin Milanković, geologist Jovan M. Žujović, archaeologist Miloje Vasić, chemist Sima Lozanić), attracted many students from Bosnia, Dalmatia and Bulgaria. Furthermore, various publications of the Serbian Royal Academy (including multi-volume monographs by Jovan Cvijić and other prominent geographers, anthropologists, historians, art historians etc.), along with the work of Serbian-American scientists, such as inventor Nikola Tesla and Mihailo Pupin, professor at the Columbia University, were an encouragement for the Serbian academic community and enhanced their prestige on a broader Balkan scale.<sup>20</sup>

On the political level, however, the open pro-Yugoslav orientation meant the worsening of the conflict with the Dual Monarchy. The Serbian Foreign Minister, Milovan Dj. Milovanović, concluded that “Austria-Hungary is right when she accuses Serbia of pursuing Yugoslav policy; but she is forgetting that she [Dual Monarchy] has channelled Serbia, that she in fact has forced Serbia onto this path.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Miloš Ković, “Politička uloga *Srpskog književnog glasnika* (1901–1914)”, in *Sto godina Srpskog književnog glasnika*, eds. Staniša Tutnjević and Marko Nedić (Belgrade: Matica srpska & Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2003), 363–378.

<sup>19</sup> Radovan Samardžić, “La langue littéraire serbe et l’influence française à la fin du XIXème et au début du XXème siècle”, in *Relations franco-yougoslaves. À l’occasion des 150 ans de l’ouverture du premier consulat français en Serbie* (Belgrade: Institut d’histoire, 1990), 85–90.

<sup>20</sup> Petrovich, *History of Modern Serbia*, vol. 2, 576–592; *University of Belgrade 1838–2005. The Centennial of the first Serbian University* [1905], ed. Dejan Popović (Belgrade: University of Belgrade, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Dimitrije Djordjević, *Milovan Milovanović* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1962), 72.



*The Serbian military in pursuit of political and national goals, 1903–1908*

In Serbia, a predominantly agricultural country with egalitarian traditions, the army was founded later than other state institutions. The professional army founded in the 1880s had not yet turned into a self-sufficient caste like elsewhere in Central Europe, where the officer corps consisted mostly of aristocrats, landed gentry and lesser nobility. In Serbia, army officers were something of a substitute for the middle class. With the growing number of cadets coming from the modest rural and urban areas in the late 1890s, the younger generations of the officer corps were, in general, sympathetic to democracy and gradually became the privileged layer of Serbian society.<sup>22</sup>

As a new force on the political scene of Serbia after the 1903 Coup that brought the Karadjordjević dynasty back to the throne and restored democratic order, the Serbian army led by a group of conspiring officers considered itself as the main guardian of the country's sovereignty and the principal executor of the sacred mission of national unification of the Serbs, a goal which had been abandoned after the conclusion of the 1878 Berlin Treaty. By re-introducing the full-fledged parliamentary system, the military conspirators, often sympathisers of the Liberal Party, showed their commitment to constitutional monarchy and democratic form of government, which were highly popular among the electorate. Breaking away from the unpopular patronage of Austria-Hungary, Serbia sought the support of Tsarist Russia in pursuit of her national cause i.e. the unification of all the Serbs in the Balkans. An obvious challenge to Austro-Hungarian domination in the Balkans, the unification of Serbs was viewed in Vienna not just as the creation of a "Greater Serbia", but also as a first step towards Yugoslav unification at some point in the future.<sup>23</sup>

Foreign observers, under the spell of the highly negative image of Serbia after the 1903 regicide and relentless anti-Serbian propaganda emanating from Austria-Hungary, were often doubtful about the real capacity of

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<sup>22</sup> D. T. Bataković, "Nikola Pašić, les radicaux et la 'Main noire'. Les défis à la démocratie parlementaire serbe 1903–1917", *Balkanica* XXXVII (2006), 146–149. For more on the proceedings and promulgated laws of the National Assembly of Serbia see Georges Pavlovitch, "Serbie. Notice générale sur les travaux de l'Assemblée nationale en 1905", *Annuaire de législation étrangère* (Paris: Librairie générale de droit et de jurisprudence, 1906); idem, "Serbie. Notice générale sur les travaux de la Skoupchtina et les lois promulguées en 1907", *Annuaire de législation étrangère* (Paris: Librairie de droit et de jurisprudence 1908); "Serbie. Notice générale sur les travaux de la Skoupchtina et les lois promulguées en 1908", *Annuaire de législation étrangère* (Paris: Librairie de droit et de jurisprudence 1909).

<sup>23</sup> D. T. Bataković, "The Balkan Piedmont. Serbia and the Yugoslav Question", *Dialogue* no. 10 (1994), 25–73; idem, *Yougoslavie. Nations, religions, idéologies* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1994), 91–99.

“rural democracy” in Serbia.<sup>24</sup> Unsympathetic Viennese Balkan correspondents were convinced that the insufficient level of political culture among the rural electorate as well as heated partisan politics were an impediment to a proper democratic order, but the post-1903 parliamentary system in Serbia was functioning surprisingly well. Parliamentary democracy in Serbia was fully restored by the 1903 Constitution which was a slightly revised version of the very liberal Constitution of 1888.<sup>25</sup> Within such constitutional framework, governments were formed from the parliamentary majority resulting from quite free and fair elections. At the same time, the military groups involved in the 1903 Coup increasingly interfered in politics. Once an important prop of the personal regimes of the last Obrenović rulers, the former conspirators within the officer corps were now praised as the restorers of democracy, and they sought to exploit this favourable situation by carving out their own share of influence, beyond the control of the freely elected members of parliament and cabinet ministers.<sup>26</sup>

After having been absent from Serbia from 1858 and without wider support in Serbian society despite his family background, Peter I, the new sovereign of Serbia, was dependent on the army as the mainstay of his rule. The conspirators who had taken control over the Serbian army in 1903 banked on the prestige derived from their role in the change of dynasty and the restoration of constitutional order: they were officially praised by

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<sup>24</sup> A major reason for virulent anti-Serbian propaganda in Austria-Hungary was the change in Serbia's foreign policy. Formerly a client state of the Dual Monarchy, Serbia turned to St. Petersburg and Paris: “C'est pourquoi Vienne résolut de noircir ce pays, de le charger de crimes, d'en détacher progressivement ses amis et d'en faire une sorte de paria. Laborieuse campagne d'accusation, d'insinuation, de calomnies comme on n'en vit jamais, malaisée à mener, mais qu'entreprind avec une adroite obstination le *Correspondenzbureau* de Vienne, à la solde du ministère des Affaires étrangères. Nul n'était mieux qualifié pour distiller le poison. On sait comment elles s'arrondissent et sont artificiellement gonflées. Celle-ci furent soufflées au point qu'elles crevèrent tôt après qu'elles eussent été lancées vers les foules curieuses, comme des bulles de savon trop grosses. Des hommes de bon sens, cependant, ont entendu cette voix perfide qui venait sur un rythme cajoleur de valse, porter la calomnie jusqu'au fond de l'Europe.” Quoted from Rene Chambry, *Pierre I<sup>er</sup>. Roi de Serbie* (Paris-Barcelone: Bloud et Gay, 1917), 16–17.

<sup>25</sup> Dimitrije Djordjevic, “Serbian Society, 1903–1914”, in Bela A. Kiraly & Dimitrije Djordjevic, eds., *East Central European Society in the Balkan Wars* (Boulder & New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 227–239; cf. also: D. T. Bataković, “O parlamentarnoj demokratiji u Srbiji, 1903–1914. Stranke, izbori, političke slobode”, *GLAS*, vol. CDXX de l'Académie serbe des Sciences et des Arts, Classe des sciences historiques, no. 16 (Belgrade: Académie serbe des Sciences, 2012), 391–408.

<sup>26</sup> For a more detailed analysis see Wayne S. Vucinich, *Serbia between East and West. The Events of 1903–1908* (Stanford: Stanford University Publications, 1954), 61–87.

the National Assembly on two occasions for having put an end to an autocratic regime. Not surprisingly, they soon became increasingly involved in domestic politics.<sup>27</sup> The older conspirators were quick to install their own supporters to key positions in the army. The King's aides-de-camp, chiefs of the General Staff, commandants of military schools and other military institutions, brigade and division commanders, were exclusively recruited from the military personnel loyal to the conspirators regardless of their rank, experience and skills. Operative duties were performed by an echelon of younger conspirators, with Dragutin T. Dimitrijević Apis, Velimir Vemić, Antonije Antić, Božin Simić, Vladimir Tucović, Milan Gr. Milovanović, Peter Živković and Josif Kostić constituting the core of the group.<sup>28</sup>

Some eighty active officers did not conceal their ambition to take full control over the main army posts and then exert their behind-the-scenes influence on the political decision-making process in matters concerning not just the armed forces but also vital national interests. While the conspirators promoted their own supporters, the King was mostly relying on highly respected senior officers with impeccable careers and no connection with the 1903 conspiracy. His favourites were Radomir Putnik, the first officer promoted to the rank of general under King Peter I, and Colonel Stepa Stepanović, who became commander of the Šumadija Division (*Šumadijska divizija*) and was promoted to the rank of general in 1907. Their military qualities were considered exceptional. In the years to come, they were, Putnik in particular, considered to be close to the ruling Old Radicals, but still protective of the conspirators and strongly against any pro-Obrenović (i.e. pro-Austrian) stream in the officer corps. Yet another outstanding officer was Colonel Živojin Mišić, an open critic of the conspirators' role in the army: having been retired, he was reactivated through the mediation of the Old Radicals' leader Nikola Pašić in 1907.<sup>29</sup>

Under the post-1903 Radical governments, the Serbian army, despite all praises and the influence it exerted on public opinion, was profoundly dissatisfied with its funding and equipment. The purchase of modern can-

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<sup>27</sup> Dragiša Vasić, *Devetstotreća. Majski prevrat* (Belgrade: Štamparija "Tucović", 1928), 183–193; Ljiljana Aleksić Pejčković, *Odnosi Srbije s Francuskom i Engleskom 1903–1914* (Belgrade: Istorijski institut, 1965), chapters I–IV; Vladimir Dedijer, *Sarajevo 1914* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1978), vol. II, chapters XVII–XVIII; Dimitrije Djordjević, "The Role of the Military in the Balkans in the Nineteenth Century", in Ralph Melville & Hans-Jürgen Schroeder, eds., *Der Berliner Kongress von 1878* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1982), 317–347; D. T. Bataković, "Sukob vojnih i civilnih vlasti u Srbiji u proleće 1914", *Istorijski časopis XXIX–XXX* (1982–1983), 477–492.

<sup>28</sup> Vucinich, *Serbia between East and West*, 102–112; Dragoljub R. Živojinović, *Kralj Peter I Karadjordjević*, vol. II *U Otadžbini 1903–1914* (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1990), 237–243.

<sup>29</sup> Živojin Mišić, *Moje uspomene* (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1978), 239–240.

nons from the French company *Schneider-Creusot*, a first phase of rearmament, was perceived as an important step towards political independence from the Dual Monarchy. The contract with *Schneider-Creusot* was signed on 7 November 1906, and five days later, a loan agreement for ninety-five million francs at the interest rate of 4.5 percent was concluded in Geneva with a financial group dominated by French banks. This agreement meant that Serbia was emancipating herself from Austria-Hungary not just politically, but also financially, which was one of the army's priorities. The Old Radical cabinet's decision to purchase cannons in France was supported by the patriotic wing of younger conspirators, while only few of the older conspirators (Colonels Damnjan Popović and Peter Mišić), who still hoped to obstruct the Old Radical government and prevent their own retirement, insisted on the purchase of military equipment from the Austrian *Škoda*.<sup>30</sup> The temporary alliance between the Old Radical government and the younger conspirators proved to be beneficial: it facilitated the retirement of six senior officers involved in the 1903 regicide – a gesture required by the British King – which ended the three years' long “diplomatic strike” against Serbia. The older conspirators identified by Sir Edward Grey were: General Jovan Atanacković, Head of the Bureau of Decorations; Colonel Damnjan Popović, Commander of the Danube Division; Colonel Peter Mišić, a tutor to the Crown Prince; Aleksandar Mašin, Acting Chief of Staff; Colonel Luka Lazarević, Commander of the Belgrade Garrison; Colonel Leonida Solarević, Head of the Military Academy; Major Ljubomir Kostić, Commander of the Palace. Apart from Solarević, they were all retired and “with a fine appreciation for historic dates, diplomatic relations between Great Britain and Serbia were renewed on June 11, 1906, the third anniversary of King Alexander's assassination”.<sup>31</sup>

The military elite's sense of the national mission that was to be carried out – taken as a self-evident patriotic duty after the 1903 regicide – did not reflect the general political climate in Serbia. Suddenly caught in the vortex of day-to-day politics, the military in general, and the former conspirators in particular, had little understanding for the frequent compromises that politicians were willing to make in order to gain the trust and sympathy of the vacillating electorate, public opinion and the Crown. Influential military circles believed that the change of dynasty, carried out at the cost of many officers' lives, would only be justified if the struggle for

<sup>30</sup> Aleksić-Pejković, *Odnosi Srbije*, 110–113. For more detail see Dimitrije Djordjević, *Carinski rat između Austro-Ugarske i Srbije 1906–1911* (Belgrade: Istorijски institut, 1962).

<sup>31</sup> Petrovich, *History of Modern Serbia*, vol. II, 541. See also Aleksić-Pejković, *Odnosi Srbije*, 184–185; Živojinović, *Kralj Peter I Karadjordjević*, vol. II, 280–281.

the national cause (i.e. national unification) began soon. The foreign policy orientation towards Russia was welcomed by the common people and the military alike. Given the division of Great Powers in two rivalling blocs, the reliance on St. Petersburg was supposed to counterbalance the mounting pressures and threats from Vienna during the Tariff War (1906–1911), which saw the embargo on Serbian exports to Austro-Hungarian markets. Moreover, with the political situation in the Balkans gradually aggravating – from the Great Powers’ failed reforms in Turkey-in-Europe (Old Serbia and Macedonia, 1903–1908) through the Annexation Crisis (1908–1909) to the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) – the role of the Serbian army as the guarantor of the country’s independence grew in importance.

*Counter-conspiracies: Opposition to the active role of the military in political life*

The officer corps was increasingly disgruntled with the behaviour of the leading figures among the former conspirators. Many Serbian officers who had not been involved in the 1903 conspiracy justified their act believing that the motives behind it had been profoundly patriotic, but they also believed that the military had to remain strictly within the limits defined by the constitution – an armed force that recognised the political institutions of a parliamentary democracy and was subject to civil control. On the other hand, the opponents of the conspirators, whose number was not insignificant, argued that the conspirators had broken the oath of allegiance to the Crown and disgraced the entire officer corps. They believed that the military had no place in politics: the conspirators should be expelled from the army in order to prevent legitimisation of a dangerous precedent which would pave the way for further meddling in politics on the part of the army. Favouritism towards the conspirators in the promotion through army ranks added to the embitterment of the officers who disapproved of the 1903 regicide either for dynastic reasons or in principle.

The rift over the role of the military in politics was growing, but there was never a danger of the militarisation of the entire Serbian society, which on the whole remained committed to its hard-won democracy and generally satisfied with the level of political freedoms. As reported by the British Minister at Belgrade in 1906 “[...] the spirit of the nation, once it had attained self-government was, and remains, distinctly democratic. When King Peter came to the throne, therefore, it was evidently considered the wisest course to appease the outraged sentiments of the great majority of the nation, who had no part in the [1903] conspiracy, by reverting to the most liberal constitution, that of 1889 [22 December 1888, Old Style], which had been granted by the previous dynasty. Under the Constitution

the monarchy is strictly limited, and the Skupshtina is carried on by Ministers who are responsible to the National Assembly (Skupshtina), which consists of a single Chamber.”<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, political liberties created the atmosphere which encouraged the growing dissatisfaction of the military personnel who had not been involved in the 1903 Coup with the former conspirators’ privileged status in the army. This led to a conflict between the supporters of the conspirators and their opponents, known as the “contras” (*kontraći*). The internal division in the army led to a revolt in the second largest garrison, in Niš, as early as 1903. Another anti-conspirators movement arose among the non-commissioned officers and the reserve force in the Kragujevac Garrison in 1906. Both movements were severely suppressed by military authorities and their ringleaders were heavily sentenced. Nevertheless, these anti-conspirators movements revealed the unwillingness of the majority of the officer corps to engage in politics. The frequency and scale of these revolts revealed that most officers were convinced that the army should not overstep the limits of its constitutional role. The opponents of the conspirators (“contras”), who included some of the finest officers (e.g. Vojin Maksimović, Milivoje Nikolajević, Uzun-Mirković), were led by Captain Milan Novaković, a brave, strong-willed officer, who had returned from his training in France a month after the 1903 Coup. Unrest in the army and the conspirators’ ambition to control the entire officer corps caused Novaković to draw up a public manifesto “Greatcoats down, us or them!” (*Mundire dole, mi ili oni!*), condemning the officers who had been involved in the regicide. His manifesto denounced sixty-eight conspirators for violence, self-interest and anarchy and demanded their dishonourable discharge in the interest of the King, the country and the army. In mid-August 1903, Novaković began to collect signatures among the discontented officers of his own Niš Garrison. Frequent rumours to the effect that King intended to send the conspirators away from Belgrade helped Novaković in his effort to sway more officers to sign the manifesto. According to the initial reports, there were about three hundred discontented officers. It was expected that they would demand that the King remove or punish at least 1,590 protégés of the conspirators, and threaten with mass resignation if their demand was not met.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> The National Archives, London, Foreign Office Records, General Correspondence [hereafter TNA, FO], General Report on the Kingdom of Serbia [Serbia] for the year 1906, no. 2. Confidential, Belgrade, April 11, 1907.

<sup>33</sup> Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris [hereafter M.A.E.], Nouvelle Serie [N.S.], Serbie, vol. 3 (1903), no. 76, Belgrade, 13 August 1903; no. 88, Belgrade, 5 September 1903; see also Vucinich, *Serbia between East and West*, 71–73.

The anti-conspirators movement was not anti-dynastic, as its participants claimed before the military court, but aimed solely against the 1903 plotters. Although most of its participants supported the overthrown Obrenović dynasty, there was little prospect of success given the fact that there was no rightful heir to the throne from the House of Obrenović.<sup>34</sup> The action of Captain Novaković and his comrades mostly remained limited to the Niš Garrison. The exact number of dissatisfied officers in other regiments was a matter of speculation. Captain Novaković spoke before the court about 250 of them, and according to other unverified sources there were as many as 800 disgruntled officers. Two articles in the London *Times* offered differing estimates. The first one drew on the official report which gauged that 800 out of 1,300 officers had joined the revolt against the conspirators, while the second one, published a few weeks later, estimated that 1,000 out of 1,500 officers had been involved. However, other similar actions, such as that in the Kragujevac Garrison in 1906, assembled a rather small group of followers.<sup>35</sup>

It was not until the five highest-ranking participants of the 1903 Coup were retired by the Pašić government in May 1906 – in order to appease Great Britain which had suspended diplomatic relations with Serbia after the assassination of King Alexander – that the interference of the conspirators and their supporters in politics was curtailed, at least for some time. Although he remained close to the army until the outbreak of the war in 1914, the King alienated some of the conspirators from the Palace on account of his resolve not to overstep his constitutional powers.<sup>36</sup>

*The 1908 Annexation Crisis: A trigger for the formation of National Defence and Black Hand*

Due to the increasing importance of the Yugoslav movement in the South Slav provinces of Austria-Hungary after 1903, with Serbia as its potential Piedmont, the Viennese government started planning for the future war

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<sup>34</sup> A subsequent attempt of some officers from the Niš Garrison to make contact with the ex-King Milan's illegitimate son, Djordje, failed and the mass distribution of his pictures in 1904 was not favourably received among common people.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted from Slobodan G. Markovich, *The British Perception of Serbia and the Balkans, 1903–1906* (Paris: Dialogue, 2000), 104–106. Cf. also André Barre, *La tragédie serbe* (Paris: Louis Michaud, 1904), 140–148.

<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, there were some doubts regarding the death of Captain Milan Novaković, the convicted leader of the anti-conspirators movement in the army. After his daily *Za Otadžbinu* (For Fatherland) had been confiscated by the police, Novaković was arrested and killed during an attempt to escape from prison, along with another gendarmerie officer, on 27 January 1907. Vucinich, *Serbia between East and West*, 70–74.

against Serbia as early as 1907. In the summer of 1908, a military plan was drawn up envisaging complete dismemberment of Serbia and the partitioning of her territory between the Dual Monarchy and Bulgaria. The abolishment of Serbia's independence was meant to be a kind of internal "cleansing" for Austria-Hungary, seen as a prerequisite for the Monarchy's future consolidation. In Vienna, the future war was referred to as the "sweeping" of Serbia with "a steel brush". Conrad von Hötzendorf, Chief of the General Staff of the Austro-Hungarian army, was obsessed with the idea of a preventive war against Serbia: "Conrad first advocated preventive war against Serbia in 1906, and did so again in 1908–1909, in 1912–13, in October 1913, and May 1914: between January 1913 and 1 January 1914 he proposed Serbian war twenty-five times."<sup>37</sup> Later plans of Austria-Hungary for the partitioning of Serbia envisaged the division of her territory between Bulgaria and Romania, and after the 1912 Balkan War some regions of Serbia were supposed to be granted to newly-created Albania, another Austro-Hungarian client state.<sup>38</sup>

In October 1908, Austria-Hungary proclaimed the annexation of the occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a gift to Emperor Francis Joseph I for the fifty years of his reign. This move was designed to eliminate what had long been condemned in Vienna as "a Greater Serbian danger". In the strategic planning of Austria-Hungary, the annexation was but a transitional measure until the final abolishment of Serbia's independence and the permanent liquidation of the Yugoslav question.<sup>39</sup> Count Aehrenthal, the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, explained to the German government in the autumn of 1908 the rationale behind Vienna's Balkan policy:

With [the Ottoman] Turkey growing weaker and being pushed back to Asia, the process of state reorganisation on our south-eastern borders has once again been initiated. We have to take a stand in this matter. Thirty years ago this was resolved by occupation [of Bosnia-Herzegovina] and this time by annexation. Both acts meant dispelling the dreams about the creation of a Greater Serbian state between the Danube, the Sava and the Adriatic. There is no need for me to point out that this new factor, if created, would receive instructions from the outside, from the north-east and the West, so that it would not be an element contributing to a peace-

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<sup>37</sup> Hew Strachan, *The Outbreak of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 86–87.

<sup>38</sup> Andrej Mitrović, *Prodor na Balkan: Srbija u planovima Austro-Ugarske i Nemačke 1908–1918* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1981), 72–88.

<sup>39</sup> *La Bosnie-Herzégovine à la Skoupchtina nationale du Royaume de Serbie. Discours des députés prononcés aux séances du 2 octobre et 2 et 3 janvier 1909* (Belgrade: Imprimerie de l'État, 1909); Jovan Cvijić, *L'Annexion de la Bosne et la question serbe*, avec une préface d'Albert Malet (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie 1909).



ful course of events in central Europe. In such a crucial phase of our state reorganisation which, from our point of view, is better to be called 'the development of the Reich', one must, when nothing else helps, think about applying the *ultima ratio* in the life of a nation.<sup>40</sup>

Aehrenthal, as many other Austro-Hungarian policy-makers, believed that Serbia, once conquered and divided, would become another obedient province under Habsburg rule, another colonial entity just as Bosnia-Herzegovina had been since 1878.<sup>41</sup> Bosnia-Herzegovina was indeed the key to Austro-Hungarian domination in the Balkans. In 1876, the insurgent Serbs in Herzegovina had proclaimed unification with the tiny Serbian Principality of Montenegro, while the Serb insurgents in Bosnia proclaimed, on more than one occasion (on St. Vitus Day, 28 June 1876 and in 1877), unification with Serbia. The Serb representatives across Bosnia-Herzegovina demanded in their petitions to the Great Powers at the Congress of Berlin to be eventually united with Serbia. The expansion of the two Serbian principalities into Bosnia-Herzegovina was halted by Austrian military occupation, authorised by the Berlin Treaty of 1878. The Austro-Hungarian occupation and, in particular, the policy of Benjamin von Kállay, the governor of the occupied provinces, caused strong opposition among the Bosnian Serbs. Kállay proclaimed the existence of a single Bosnian nation and adopted the Croat dialect as the "state language". This policy was eventually abandoned after Kállay's death in 1903.<sup>42</sup> The annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, with its relative Serb majority, shattered all hopes that this province would unite with Serbia.<sup>43</sup> Under the combined pressure of Vienna and Berlin,

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in *Österreich-Ungarns Aussenpolitik von der bosnischen Krise 1908 bis zum Kriegsausbruch 1914* [hereafter ÖUA] (Vienna & Leipzig 1930), vol. I, 2–3. More in Vladimir Ćorović, *Odnosi Srbije i Austro-Ugarske u XX veku* (Belgrade: Biblioteka grada Beograda, 1992), 206–212, 357–366.

<sup>41</sup> Olof Hoiyer, *Le comte d'Aehrenthal et la politique de violence* (Paris: Plon 1922), 161–164.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. D. T. Bataković, "Prelude to Sarajevo. The Serbian Question in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1878–1914", *Balkanica* XXVII (1986), 122–136, and his, *The Serbs of Bosnia & Herzegovina. History and Politics* (Paris: Dialogue, 1996), 64–78. In Serbian language, an excellent in-depth analysis is offered by Tomislav Kraljačić, *Kalajev režim u Bosni i Hercegovini 1882–1903* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1987).

<sup>43</sup> In 1910, according to the official Austro-Hungarian census, the Christian Orthodox Serbs were the largest national group within the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Out of 1,898,044 inhabitants, 825,918 or 43.49 percent were Serbs, in spite of the fact that some 40,000 Serbs emigrated from 1908 to 1914. There were 612,137 (32.25%) Bosnian Muslims and 434,061 (22.87%) Roman Catholics, mostly Croats. However, due to the high birth rate, and with the large agrarian population which amounted to 87.92 percent, the Serbs had the highest population growth. The Bosnian Muslim

without Russia's support and the backing of France and Great Britain, the Serbian government was compelled to recognise the annexation in March 1909 and thus officially renounce any political aspirations towards Bosnia-Herzegovina. Through the newly-founded patriotic organisation *Narodna Odbrana* (National Defence), Serbia fostered cross-border educational and propaganda activities. However, the National Defence was soon reduced to maintaining a network of agents who remained in constant contact with both civil and military intelligence in Belgrade.

In the aftermath of the Annexation Crisis, a group of political activists and some of the younger officers who had participated in the 1903 coup, all of whom had gained experience in guerrilla warfare in Ottoman Macedonia after 1904, began to discuss the founding of a new patriotic organisation which would play a more active role in the pursuit of national policy in both Bosnia-Herzegovina and Turkey-in-Europe. The intensive post-annexation national propaganda in Bosnia died out in March 1909. In parallel, national activity in Old Serbia and Macedonia was halted after the Young Turks had seized power in 1908: the Serbian government disbanded all guerrilla units and turned its efforts to political struggle in the Ottoman parliament.

The *spiritus movens* of the more active national policy was the journalist Ljubomir S. Jovanović Čupa, one of the editors of the *Slavic South* (*Slovenski jug*). Apart from him, who used his masonic connections to promote Serbian and, subsequently, Yugoslav unification, an important role was played by Bogdan Radenković, a Serb native of Kosovo and the main organiser of Serbian political action in both Kosovo and Slavic Macedonia. When the Serbian government rejected his demand for the renewal of guerrilla activities in Old Serbia, Radenković, another free mason with excellent connections in the region, turned to military officers. Together with Lj. S. Jovanović and several officers, Radenković devised a plan for the creation of a new organisation, "a club with a revolutionary orientation", which would coordinate all secret activities in the Serb-inhabited provinces under foreign rule. This organisation was officially founded on 22 May 1911 under the name "Unification or Death", but the public soon dubbed it the Black Hand (*Crna Ruka*) after a popular conspiracy novel. Besides Jovanović and Radenković, the founding

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population was diminished due to growing emigration (140,000 from 1908 to 1914) while the Roman Catholic Croats as well as other Roman Catholics (Czechs, Poles, Germans) from various areas of the Austro-Hungarian Empire were systematically settled in Bosnia-Herzegovina – roughly 230,000 by 1914. Cf. Bataković, "Prelude to Sarajevo", 121.

document was signed by five officers, including the undisputed leader of the younger conspirators, Major Dragutin T. Dimitrijević Apis.<sup>44</sup>

The statute and the programme of the organisation were drawn up by Jovanović on the pattern of the nineteenth-century Italian Carbonari, similar German societies and some ideas of Russian nihilists. The initiation ceremony for new members was largely modelled on masonic initiation rituals. The initial programme was focused on foreign policy. Intelligence operations were to be carried out on the soil of the two neighbouring empires – Austria-Hungarian and Ottoman – for the purpose of shaping a long-term political strategy to which military rather than political factors were essential. The ultimate objective was the unification of the Serbs into a single state with Serbia, but there were also certain Yugoslav overtones.<sup>45</sup> When in 1912 Major Milan Vasić became secretary of the *Narodna Odbrana*, the “Black Hand made an attempt to become its unofficial revolutionary wing”.<sup>46</sup> The pro-Yugoslav youth was controlled through the agency of Ljubomir Jovanović Čupa, and the Serbian *comitadjis* (former guerrilla fighters in Macedonia) were dealt with by Major Vojislav Tankosić. The well-informed British Minister at Belgrade noted such tendencies and he was quick to anticipate an imminent armed confrontation with the Dual Monarchy.<sup>47</sup> Yet, it seems safe to assume that ninety-five percent of the Black Hand membership were attracted to the organisation by its patriotic goals, and that just a small faction, roughly five percent, including the founders themselves, was inclined to interfere in domestic political affairs.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup> David MacKenzie, *Apis. The Congenial Conspirator. The Life of Colonel Dragutin T. Dimitrijević Apis* (Boulder: Columbia University Press, 1989), 60–65.

<sup>45</sup> David MacKenzie, “The ‘Black Hand’ and its Statutes”, *East European Quarterly*, vol. XXV, no. 2 (June 1991), 179–206.

<sup>46</sup> The two organisations were quite similar in their social composition; their members came from the urban and rural middle class which, to a certain extent, accounts for the similarity in their views on the protection of national interests. Č. A. Popović, “Rad organizacije ‘Ujedinjenje ili smrt’: pripremanje za balkanski rat”, *Nova Evropa* XVI/10 (26 November 1927), 314.

<sup>47</sup> TNA, FO, 371/328, no. 74, Belgrade, 3 October 1907, and no. 16, Belgrade, 5 March 1908; Bataković, “Sukob vojnih i civilnih vlasti”, 478–479; Oskar Tartaglia, *Veleizdajnik. Moje uspomene iz borbe protiv crno-žutog orla: u dva dijela*, with a preface by Niko Bartulović and Ante Tresić-Pavičić (Zagreb–Split: C. Albrecht, 1928), 26–28.

<sup>48</sup> The clandestine organisation was also inclined towards Yugoslavism: the complex relations between its members (Ljubomir Jovanović-Čupa, Milan Vasić, Vladimir Gaćinović, etc.) and the pro-Yugoslav youth from the Habsburg Monarchy and the organisation and the journal *Slavic South*, remained rather strong before the death of Lj. S. Jovanović and M. Vasić. From 1913, the remaining faction of the Black Hand preferred Greater Serbia to Yugoslavia. See Dragoslav Ljubibratić, *Mlada Bosna i Sarajevski atentat* (Sarajevo: Muzej Grada Sarajeva, 1964), 34–38.

Although it endeavoured to attract a wider circle of young patriots, intellectuals and even some members of parliament, the Black Hand remained a military organisation largely consisting of senior officers, the most prominent of whom was Major Dragutin T. Dimitrijević Apis. The organisation favoured revolutionary over cultural action without regard for the consequences. The essential prerequisite for successful national policy, the Black Hand members believed, was a centralised government and a strong army. The proclaimed goal was “to create a united Yugoslav [South-Slav] kingdom through a war with Austria-Hungary”.<sup>49</sup> However, the initial analyses of Austro-Hungarian informers and diplomats focused on its role in Serbia’s internal policy:

Indeed, the greatest danger for Pašić and Radicalism in general are the officers’ society [the former conspirators], which under the name Black Hand increasingly gains ground, and all the discontented elements including those who favour the removal of King and his replacement by the Crown Prince, join in it.<sup>50</sup>

The purpose of the daily *Pijemont* (Piedmont), published since 1911 with the support of the highest military circles and the Crown Prince Alexander himself (who made a considerable financial contribution), was to propagate the secret organisation’s ideas, stress the necessity for coherent national action and prepare the political framework for pan-Serbian unification. These highly popular goals were seen by many as a supplement to day-to-day politics and a new manifestation of solidarity among various factions of the Serb population in Serbia and abroad.<sup>51</sup>

The ideological matrix of the Black Hand, which comprised army officers, free masons, ardent patriots and pro-Yugoslav youth, was rather incoherent: it ranged from fostering internal solidarity for national issues and expounding highly patriotic goals in the field of foreign policy to authoritarian militarism that questioned parliamentary democracy as a political system. The articles published in the *Pijemont*, whose several editors (Lj. S. Jovanović Čupa, Kosta Luković and Branko Božović) and some of the contributors were free masons, offered a broad spectrum of different views on various political issues. Among its frequent contributors the *Pijemont*

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<sup>49</sup> *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1896–1914* [hereafter: B.D.], eds. G. P. Gooch & Harold Temperley, vol. X/1 (London: His Majesty Stationery Office, 1933), Doc. 326, Crackenthorpe to Grey, 17 January 1914; Č. A. Popović, “Organizacija ‘Ujedinjenje ili smrt’”, *Nova Evropa* XVI/12 (Zagreb, 11 June 1927).

<sup>50</sup> Barbara Jelavich, “What the Habsburg Government Knew about the Black Hand”, *Austrian History Yearbook* XXII (1991), 136.

<sup>51</sup> Ljubibratić, *Mlada Bosna i Sarajevski atentat*, 40; Vojislav J. Vučković, “Unutrašnje krize Srbije i Prvi svetski rat”, *Istorijski časopis* XIV-XV (1965), 179.

had several Serbian, Croat and Jewish journalists of both pan-Serbian and Yugoslav persuasion, the two being, after all, considered as compatible political objectives.<sup>52</sup>

An analysis of the editorials and front-page articles often reveals open hostility towards the institutions of parliamentary democracy. From the very first issue, released on 16 September 1911, all political parties in Serbia were denounced as allegedly “immoral, uncultured and unpatriotic”. The *Pijemont* pointed out that the “state administration is not good. The reputation of state officials, the monarch, the government, the National Assembly, has declined [...] few are doing their duty. We need to start to cultivate a cult of the state. Without such a cult, Serbia cannot feel like a proper state [...] On the whole, until the people become educated enough, the principle of statism should be abided by, and centralism given precedence to decentralisation in all matters.” Also, according to the *Pijemont*, “the parliamentary system is not the last word of political wisdom. It has been shown that not even in this system are the masses the source and issue of power. Demagogy has discredited and abused political freedoms. To let it do that any further means to prepare a political reaction; for disorder, laxity and insecurity cannot be considered the signs of freedom and democracy. When it comes to political freedoms, they should be rather moderate, which will match our level of general culture and civilisation; only then will political strife cease.”<sup>53</sup>

Rumours about the existence of the Black Hand, a Serbian version of the Young Turk Organisation, crossed the borders of Serbia and became a matter of discussion throughout Europe, which feared further trouble in the volatile Balkans. The rumours were detrimental to King Peter I's standing because he was considered to be unwilling or unable to put an end to the dissent within the army. The authority of the King and the Karadjordjević dynasty was much strengthened by the King's official visit to the Russian Court in March 1910. Pašić won a solid parliamentary majority in the 1910 elections, concluded a new loan agreement in Paris for military purposes, and sought Russia's support for establishing closer ties between Serbia and the Triple Entente. The royal visit to St. Petersburg was arranged through the mediation of Pašić himself, who believed that the King's strengthened

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<sup>52</sup> Arhiv Srpske Akademije nauka i umetnosti, Belgrade [hereafter ASANU], no. 14.434/6, Velimir Vemić, “Dnevnik”, 2–5. See also Ivan Mužić, *Masonstvo u Hrvata* (Split: Crkva u svijetu, 1983), 77–89. D. MacKenzie, *Serbs and Russians* (Boulder & New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 111–131. Some of the contributors to *Pijemont*, like Moša Pijade, became senior communist officials in Tito's Yugoslavia. Božin Simić, another Black Hand officer, became a close collaborator of the Titoist government in 1945–46.

<sup>53</sup> *Pijemont*, 23 August (3 September N. S.) 1911.

authority would enhance the prestige of the parliamentary system. The warm welcome and respect showed to the King, along with indications that Russia would provide a substantial financial aid to Serbia, did much to stabilise the position of the Karadjordjević dynasty. The openly expressed political support of the Russian Emperor was particularly helpful in this respect. On the occasion of King Peter I's second visit to Russia in August 1911, Emperor Nicholas II expressed his concerns over the rumours about the existence of "praetorians" in the Serbian army. It was suspected that those who had eliminated the Obrenović dynasty in 1903 might resort to the same methods again. The Russian Emperor was also anxious about the republicans among the conspirators. He feared that they might apply in Serbia the same strategy as the Young Turks had in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>54</sup>

"Unification or Death" was a clandestine organisation, but some information about it reached the public, especially on occasions when the wilful behaviour of some of its members caused an open confrontation with civilian authorities.<sup>55</sup> Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1911, Milovan Dj. Milovanović, resisted their pressure to "activate" Serbia's foreign policy in the direction they saw fit. Flexible and skilful, Milovanović managed to tie the Black Hand to himself and to channel their energy into the revived guerrilla fighting in Old Serbia and Macedonia, where the showdown with the Ottoman Empire was approaching fast.<sup>56</sup> There was some information to the effect that Apis encouraged Milovanović to enter into negotiations for the conclusion of an alliance between Serbia and Bulgaria in order to prepare their common action in Turkey-in-Europe. On the whole, the common goal of national liberation kept peace between the Milovanović cabinet and the clandestine organisation.

When the leader of the Old Radicals, Nikola Pašić, resumed premiership after the sudden death of Milovanović in July 1912, he became the main target of Black Hand's political attacks. The memoirs written by persons sympathetic to the Black Hand clearly show the organisation's hostile attitude towards the political views and methods of Pašić who, along with Stojan M. Protić, the Interior Minister, was singled out as a personification of all aberrations of parliamentary democracy which were so passionately

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<sup>54</sup> Juri A. Pisarev, *Obrazovanje jugoslovenskago gosudarstva* (Moscow: Nauka, 1975), 52; MacKenzie, *Serbs and Russians*, 177.

<sup>55</sup> Arhiv Srbije, Ministarstvo inostranih dela, Beograd [Archives of Serbia, Belgrade, Ministry of Foreign Affairs], str. pov. no. 498, Belgrade, 23 August 1912, M. S. Djuričin to Jovan M. Jovanović.

<sup>56</sup> Additional information in the unpublished notes of Č. Tucović, a close friend of Apis; ASANU, no. 14434/7, Čedomir Tucović, "Beleške"; Vučković, "Unutrašnje krize Srbije", 179-182

reviled on the pages of *Pijemont*.<sup>57</sup> The discrepancy between the modest equipment of the army and the ambitious national goals aggravated the tension between the military and Pašić's cabinet. This tension stemmed from the reluctance of the Old Radicals to increase the military budget up to the level requested by the senior officers and justified by the needs of the 28,000-strong standing army.<sup>58</sup>

A serious conflict within the officer corps took place in January 1912 following the reassignment of some officers from Belgrade to less attractive posts in the country. The reassigned officers, who were close to the Crown Prince, were transferred after having been suspected of spreading rumours about the Black Hand, which caused tensions in the Belgrade Garrison. The reassignment was ordered by the War Minister, General Stepa Stepanović, at the suggestion of General Miloš Božanović, the influential commander of the Belgrade Garrison known for his close connections with the Black Hand. It was carried out in the teeth of Crown Prince Alexander's opposition. The Crown Prince was ambiguous about supporting the Black Hand despite the fact that Apis tried to persuade – in vain – the ailing King Peter I to abdicate in favour of his son. He seems to have considered Apis's group, often critical of the Karadjordjevićs, too independent and self-willed to be fully trusted.<sup>59</sup>

The young Crown Prince – who took after his maternal grandfather Nicholas I of Montenegro rather than his prudent and moderate father – relied on the support of the officers who pledged their allegiance to him personally. This group of officers, which included some of the former conspirators (Colonel Peter Mišić, Majors Peter Živković and Josif Kostić), constituted the core of the military clique that would later become known as the “White Hand” (*Bela ruka*). Alexander requested the War Minister, General Stepanović, one of the main protectors of the Black Hand, to reverse his decision. King Peter I, on the other hand, signed the reassignment order and, on Apis's advice, asked his son to apologise to Stepanović. In an attempt to reconcile the two rival groups of officers, Prince Alexander convened a meeting, but the leaders of Black Hand refused reconciliation and warned the Crown Prince that he was dealing with a group of intriguers which was trying to turn him against a genuinely patriotic organisation.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, the friendly farewell for the reassigned officers in which some fifty fellow officers took part made it obvious that many garrison officers

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<sup>57</sup> D. T. Bataković, “La Main noire (1911–1917): l'armée serbe entre démocratie et autoritarisme”, *Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, no. 2 (Paris 1998), 94–144 (esp. 127–136).

<sup>58</sup> Vojislav I. Gojković, “Radikali i vojska”, *Nova Evropa* XVIII/10–11 (1928), 324.

<sup>59</sup> Bataković, “Sukob vojnih i civilnih vlasti”, 480

<sup>60</sup> Živojinović, *Kralj Peter I Karadjordjević*, vol. II, 332–333.

were openly hostile to the Black Hand.<sup>61</sup> The outbreak of the First Balkan War in October 1912 postponed the final showdown between the government and the Black Hand. The rift reappeared in 1913, during the Serbo-Bulgarian dispute over Macedonia, and again in the spring of 1914.

*The Balkan Wars: From bravery to open rivalry*

The Balkan Wars boosted the self-confidence of the Serbian military. The heroism and bravery of the members and open supporters of Black Hand, who bore the brunt of planning and carrying out military operations, dispelled the suspicions that political dissension within the officer corps might be fatal for military efficiency. As evidenced by their high casualty rate, the former conspirators, despite being high-ranking officers (majors, lieutenant-colonels and colonels), had fought bravely and self-effacingly, which earned them considerable moral prestige in the Serbian army as a whole. For his brilliant strategy during the wars, General Putnik was promoted to the rank of field-marshal (*vojvoda*), the first in the Serbian army. The Pašić cabinet, for its part, sought to capitalise upon the military success for the purpose of promoting the interests of the Old Radical Party. The Old Radicals filled most administrative posts in the newly-acquired territories.<sup>62</sup>

Within the officer corps, however, there soon emerged dissatisfaction at the government's inability to ensure diplomatic recognition of the spectacular military victories over the Ottomans in the battles of Kumanovo (in Old Serbia or the *vilayet* of Kosovo) and Monastir (modern Bitolj, in Slavic Macedonia or the *vilayet* of Monastir). The Pašić cabinet was also expected to verify further military triumphs in northern and central Albania, which would have been the realisation of another war aim – Serbia's territorial access to the Adriatic Sea, a major precondition for her political and economic independence from the Dual Monarchy. Instead, the Pašić cabinet yielded to the combined pressure of Great Powers and agreed to withdraw troops from the areas conquered at such an enormous cost in human life: the strategic ports and cities on the Albanian coast and its hinterland (San Giovanni di Medua, Durazzo, Alessio, Tirana etc.), as well as the Scutari fortress, seized by allied Montenegrin troops at the cost of heavy losses. From March 1913, the Dual Monarchy, the protector of newly-created Albania, had been demanding the withdrawal of Serbian troops from the Adriatic coast in northern Albania. Serbian troops eventually withdrew across the Crni Drim (Black Drin) river in early October 1913. Some 15,000 Albanians

<sup>61</sup> Vučković, "Unutrašnje krize Srbije", 180; Bataković, "Sukob vojnih i civilnih vlasti", 480–481.

<sup>62</sup> Bataković, "Sukob vojnih i civilnih vlasti", 481.



then raided into Serbian territory, instigating local Albanians to rebellion in the towns of Ohrid, Struga, Gostivar and Debar (Dibra). The Serbian army was again forced to act and, in doing so, crossed into Albanian territory, which caused another diplomatic dispute with Austria-Hungary.<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore, the prospect of losing most of Slavic Macedonia to Bulgaria through Russian arbitration ("the contested zone") caused an outrage among the Serbian officer corps. They looked at the situation in simple military terms: what was won by the sword (the disputed area of Macedonia) must not be relinquished. Thus, some formerly covert disagreements between the military and the government came into the open.<sup>64</sup>

In June 1913, on the eve of the Second Balkan War, initiated by Bulgaria on account of the disputed region in Macedonia, the Serbian government acted with particular caution, fearing Austria-Hungary's intervention at the moment when Serbian troops were concentrated deep in the south, leaving Serbia's northern border on the Sava, Danube and Drina rivers virtually undefended. On the other hand, Pašić's cabinet could not ignore Russia's insistence on a peaceful solution to the dispute with Bulgaria. Contrary to the will of St. Petersburg, the General Staff and the Black Hand officers were resolutely in favour of military action that would forestall Bulgaria's attack and ensure Serbia's full control over the newly-acquired region of Slavic Macedonia.<sup>65</sup>

The *Pijemont* openly threatened the government, should it cede some of the disputed territory to Bulgaria, with treason charges, while the owner of the Black Hand daily allegedly threatened to kill Prime Minister Pašić on the spot.<sup>66</sup> During June 1913, Pašić submitted his resignation twice over disagreements with cabinet ministers and military circles with regard to the Russian Emperor's arbitration in the dispute. When the Serbian army repulsed the Bulgarian attack in July 1913 and won the Second Balkan War, its prestige, propelled by the overwhelming national euphoria, reached its zenith.

The King's praise for the amazing efforts of the Serbian army was perceived by the Black Hand leadership as a strong sign of political support. This somewhat resembled the event that had taken place a year before: the Secretary-General of the Paris-based *Office Central des Nationalités*, Jean

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<sup>63</sup> D. T. Bataković, "La Serbie et son accès à l'Adriatique (1912-1913)", *Etudes Danubiennes*, vol. 29, no. 1-2 (2013), 1-15.

<sup>64</sup> More in Dimitrije Popović, *Balkanski ratovi*, ed. D. T. Bataković (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1994).

<sup>65</sup> Jurij V. Vishnyakov, *Voennij faktor i gosudarstvennoe razvitie Serbii nachala XX veka* (Moscow: MGIMO-Universitet, 2012).

<sup>66</sup> Jovan M. Žujović, *Dnevnik* (Belgrade: Arhiv Srbije, 1986), vol. II, 32.

Pélissier, had visited Belgrade and met with both Prime Minister Milovan Dj. Milovanović and Apis.<sup>67</sup> The Black Hand leaders interpreted these contacts as France's direct support not just for the Serbian cause in general but also for their assertive approach as well. Serbian war aims, after the outbreak of the war against the Ottoman Empire, were supported by many foreign journalists (such as Henry Barby), who were impressed with Serbia's military successes and, in particular, the exceptional qualities of army commanders.<sup>68</sup>

However, the Black Hand turned out to be collateral damage of the Balkan Wars. Since its founder and main ideologist Ljubomir Jovanović Čupa, its president, General Ilija Radivojević, and Major Milan Vasić, the secretary of National Defence, perished during and after the military operations, it ceased to exist as a coherent and functional organisation. Apis was absent from political and military life for more than a year, fighting off the Maltese fever he had contracted in Kosovo during the negotiations with the local Albanian chieftain Isa Boletini. Many valiant Black Hand officers had been killed in action. Most of those who survived believed that their generation had won the laurels of "avengers of Kosovo" and fulfilled the national mission by liberating the medieval Serbian capitals, Prizren, Skoplje and Prilep.

In spite of the fact that the Black Hand – with several hundred members prior to the Balkan Wars – ceased to exist as a functional organisation with organised membership, some of the officers of the former organisation remained politically active and were still perceived as influential. His health restored, Apis – the leader of the remnants of the Black Hand (an informal group of around 20 to 25 officers) – was appointed Head of the General Staff Intelligence Department in 1913. This made it possible for a group of some twenty officers around him to maintain their influence in the army and continue their activities in neighbouring Austria-Hungary. An admirer of Apis and his efficiency, executive skills, loyalty and utter dedication to the interests of the army, Field-Marshal Radomir Putnik, Chief of the General Staff, considered him a great patriot and a top counterintelligence officer. For that reason, Apis felt himself protected and free to pursue his own political and national agenda, often contrary to the prevailing opinion within the army. Besides, there was a sense of solidarity among army officers in the matters of internal policy, regardless of their sympathy for or disapproval of

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<sup>67</sup> Georges-Henri Soutou, "Jean Pélissier et l'Office des Nationalités, 1911–1918: un agent du gouvernement français auprès des Nationalités", *Recherche sur la France et le problème des Nationalités pendant la Première Guerre mondiale* (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 1995), 16–17.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. e.g. Henri Barby, *Les victoires serbes* (Paris: Grasset, 1913).

the Black Hand, and it was manifested on every occasion when there was a conflict with Pašić's Old Radical cabinet. Since the army had been instrumental in adding 39,000 sq. km to the Kingdom of Serbia's 48,500 sq. km and 1,290,000 new inhabitants to its population of roughly three million, senior officers were increasingly aware of their social importance – even those who had no close relations with the Black Hand.<sup>69</sup> The argument between military leaders and cabinet ministers over funding of the army and the policy to be pursued in the New Territories acquired in the Balkan Wars escalated after the Interior Minister Stojan M. Protić replied arrogantly to Field-Marshal Putnik, the main architect of the military victories: "You are just a government clerk!"<sup>70</sup>

The prestige of Serbia after the spectacular victories in the Balkan Wars had a resounding echo in the Yugoslav provinces of the Dual Monarchy, notably among the Serbs in Bosnia, Herzegovina, Dalmatia and Croatia-Slavonia, and among the liberal and pro-Yugoslav Croat youth. Austria-Hungary's Balkan policy – encouraging Albanians to confront Serbian troops in Kosovo (e.g. the Prochaska Affair in Prizren in 1912), promoting Albanian maximalist territorial demands at the London Conference of Ambassadors (1912–1913) and, finally, threatening with military intervention in order to force the Serbian army to withdraw from the Albanian littoral in October 1913 – was utterly hostile to Serbia and her political and national aspirations. In the opinion of Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, Leopold von Berchtold, expressed in August 1913, the antagonism between the Dual Monarchy and Serbia was irremediable (*unüberbruckbar*) and it would, he predicted, soon lead to a war.<sup>71</sup> Viennese policy aroused the Serbian officer corps' profound dislike for Austria-Hungary, which was perceived as the main threat to Serbia's independence and survival as a sovereign state in the Balkans. As the military attaché of Austria-Hungary in Belgrade observed, this stance of the Serbian military was, in turn, perceived as a serious threat to the Dual Monarchy's interests in the Balkans.<sup>72</sup>

### *The New Territories under scrutiny*

The central political issue in the territorially enlarged post-Balkan wars Serbia – the form and organisation of government in the liberated, newly-

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<sup>69</sup> Panta M. Draškić, *Moji memoari*, ed. D. T. Bataković (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1990), 45–67.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in MacKenzie, *Serbs and Russians*, 146.

<sup>71</sup> F. R. Bridge, *The Habsburg Monarchy among the Great Powers, 1815–1918* (New York, Oxford & Munich: Berg, 1990), 326.

<sup>72</sup> Mitrović, *Prodor na Balkan*, 97.

incorporated areas – became a bone of contention between the military and the government. In the areas of Old Serbia (the former *vilayet* of Kosovo with Skoplje as its seat) and Serbian Macedonia, the government decided to act in the same manner as it had been done with the regions liberated from the Ottomans in the past – the six districts (*nahiyes*) integrated into Serbia in 1833 and the four districts of the former *sanjak* of Niš in 1878: in both cases, Serbia's Constitution was implemented in stages.<sup>73</sup> Military circles, on the other hand, insisted on military rule in the unsettled border areas for reasons of national security until their definitive integration into the state system was possible. Field-Marshal Radomir Putnik and General Živojin Mišić proposed a five-year military administration. Unlike the majority of the Opposition (Independent Radicals, Progressives, Socialists), only the former Liberal Party argued for placing the newly-liberated areas under a strict military regime.<sup>74</sup>

The Old Radical cabinet of Nikola Pašić also capitalised on the military successes in the Balkan Wars and, sharing the glory with the army, was intent on exploiting the fruits of victory for the benefit of the governing party. The Old Radicals considered the new southern areas as a sphere of their own influence and a new source of their political and economic power. Their leadership, feeling somewhat threatened by the Independent Radicals in pre-war Serbia, saw the newly-liberated areas as “fresh dough for the big Radical bread loaf”.<sup>75</sup> As a result, the Pašić government established a special civilian administration in the newly-acquired areas. But the need for frequent military actions, due to constant incursions of armed brigands (*kaçak*) from Albania, sponsored and armed by both the Austro-Hungarian and Young Turk governments, led to overlapping of responsibilities between civilian and military authorities. Furthermore, the civil servants' proclivity to bribery and the poor selection of local officials often resulted in abuse of power and corruption.<sup>76</sup> The army officers, committed to securing the borders and providing peace and security for the population in the New Territories, were determined to suppress corruption and abuses for both private and political reasons.

<sup>73</sup> Vasa Čubrilović, *Istorija političke misli u Srbiji u XIX veku* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1958), 413.

<sup>74</sup> Vučković, “Unutrašnje krize Srbije”, 182–183.

<sup>75</sup> Vojni Arhiv Srbije, Belgrade [Military Archives of Serbia; hereafter VAS], XVI-46-1, Dragutin K. Mičić, “Srpski oficiri, njihova uloga i značaj u političkom životu Srbije do ujedinjenja” [Serbian officers, their role and importance in the political life of Serbia until the unification], Zagreb 1939, manuscript.

<sup>76</sup> Dedijer, *Sarajevo 1914*, vol. II, 101.

In parallel with growing discontent with military-civilian relations in the southern areas, another commotion in the ranks of the officer corps was caused by the conflict between the War Minister, General Miloš Božanović, and the Pašić cabinet, which ended in the Minister's resignation. The government rejected his military budget and refused to grant pardon to Major Velimir Vemić, a well-known Black Hand member, charged with the murder of a disobedient soldier during the 1912 war campaign. At the request of the remaining Black Hand members, Božanović included his name into the pardon candidates list. Since Major Vemić's pardon met with the approval of the officer corps, the whole affair was made public by the Old Radical press, which also announced a firm attitude of the Pašić cabinet towards the military.<sup>77</sup> The British Minister at Belgrade saw this as the government's first palpable attempt to thwart the influence of the Black Hand.<sup>78</sup>

Following General Božanović's resignation, the government intended to appoint a civilian to the office. According to a reliable source, Miloš Božanović was to be replaced by Stojan M. Protić, a staunch opponent of the conspirators, but open threats made by the Black Hand leaders, Major Vojin Popović (aka *Vojvoda Vuk*) and Voja Tankosić, prevented the government from appointing Protić. More than thirty senior officers were then approached, all of whom laid out their conditions for accepting the post. Finally, it was the Military Attaché in Romania, Colonel Dušan Stefanović, who became War Minister. He had agreed to carry out all government's plans without regard for the attitude of the military.<sup>79</sup>

It was in such an atmosphere that the interpellation regarding the retirement of General Mišić, who was held responsible for the inadequate reaction to Albanian incursions in the autumn of 1913 and the pardoning of Major Vemić, occasioned a heated parliamentary debate. The statement of Stojan M. Protić, Interior Minister, to the Old Radical daily *Samouprava* (Self-government) that "there are impermissible praetorian ambitions in our Army", drew a fierce response from the Opposition. The leader of the Independent Radicals, Milorad Drašković, accused the Old Radical cabinet of instigating divisions in the Army and rebuked it for focusing on the Vemić case even though, according to him, there were some fifty or sixty similar cases. Minister Protić replied by reproaching the Opposition for attacking the government in the *Pijemont* and thus encouraging the frustrated

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<sup>77</sup> B.D., vol. X/1, no. 326, Crackenthorpe to Grey, 17 January 1914; ÖUA, vol. VII, no. 9260, Hoflehner to Giesl, Niš, 28 January 1914.

<sup>78</sup> B.D., vol. X/1, no. 326, Crackenthorpe to Grey, Belgrade, 17 Jan. 1914.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.; VAS, XVI-46-1, Mičić, "Srpski oficiri, njihova uloga i značaj".

military officers' disobedience to the government.<sup>80</sup> A series of government actions, undertaken with the aim of exposing the unlawful activities of Apis and the remaining faction of the Black Hand, curbing their influence on political developments and forestalling their further anti-government activity, were also intended to discredit those military circles that were unwilling to accept the administration introduced in the newly-incorporated areas.<sup>81</sup> The sharp tone of the conflict was set by Protić's polemical style; he called upon the public to stand up in defence of the constitutional order from "irresponsible military factors".

The Old Radical organ *Samouprava* brought a series of articles by the Interior Minister Protić openly accusing the Black Hand of harbouring "praetorian ambitions" incompatible with the constitutional order. In the National Assembly, Protić claimed that a "handful of officers who have their own newspaper [*Pijemont*] wants to keep in check not only the entire officer corps but also to put a bridle on the government and the legislature".<sup>82</sup> Warning about the "influential and powerful officers who want the state to dance to their tune", the *Samouprava* admitted that the Old Radical cabinet was under pressure by Black Hand officers and stressed that there were moments in this struggle "when it was at risk of succumbing and letting the praetorians rule the roost". The Opposition (notably the Independent Radicals) was accused of actively collaborating with "irresponsible factors in the country" in their opposition to the government's decisions.<sup>83</sup>

#### *The Priority Decree and a failed plan for a military coup, May–June 1914*

The relationship between the legislative, executive and military authorities in the newly-incorporated areas was not clearly defined because of the tension caused by sporadic expressions of discontent among the Albanian minority and the incursions of paramilitary groups from Albania and Bulgaria. Moreover, the local administrative system, continually supplemented with new laws and decrees, gave the Pašić cabinet free rein to pursue the interests

<sup>80</sup> *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine Kraljevine Srbije*, XXXVIII red. sastanak, 14 January 1915; Vučković, "Unutrašnje krize Srbije", 184–185.

<sup>81</sup> The discovery of an embezzlement of Officers Cooperative funds (*Oficirska zadruga*) in May 1914 coincided with a flare-up of the tension between the military and civilian authorities over the implementation of the "Priority Decree" in the liberated areas and thus came in handy for the Radical press to blow up the affair out of proportion, cf. Vučković, "Unutrašnje krize Srbije", 185.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in *Pijemont*, 15 (28) February 1914.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Vučković, "Unutrašnje krize Srbije i Prvi svetski rat", 184–185.

of the governing party to the exclusion of the Opposition and the Army from decision-making process.

Foreign diplomatic reports indicated that the friction between civilian and military authorities in the New Territories threatened to escalate into an open confrontation. The rivalry took a turn for the worse after the incident in Skoplje between General Damnjan Popović, the army officer in charge of the New Territories, and District Governor Novaković, over the order of precedence at a church celebration.<sup>84</sup> This incident was connected with Protić's *Decree on Celebrating National Holidays and Popular Festivals* (known as "Priority Decree") released on 21 March 1914 which gave precedence to civilian officials as opposed to an earlier decree favouring military officials. The purpose of the Decree was to demonstrate the government's resolve to thwart the attempts of the Black Hand and the entire officer corps to rise above civilian authority. However, the Decree had the opposite effect. Dissatisfied with the Old Radical administration of the liberated areas and the status of the military there, the officer corps aligned with the Black Hand. General Damnjan Popović, one of the most influential among the former Black Hand members, seized the first opportunity to violate the Priority Decree, and was promptly retired in consequence. A somewhat provocative retirement celebration that the officers in Skoplje organised for their otherwise little-loved commander was a telling sign of the rising discontent in their ranks, which had been simmering since the retirement of General Živojin Mišić for his allegedly inadequate dealing with the incursions from Albania in September 1913. Due to the influence of Black Hand, Popović was promptly and defiantly elected President of the Management Board of the Officers Cooperative (*Oficirska zadruga*). Popović's arrival in Belgrade, and Field-Marshal Putnik's election for President of the Supervisory Board of the Cooperative, further encouraged the dissent within army ranks in general, and among Black Hand supporters in particular.<sup>85</sup> The officer corps' strongly expressed unanimity on the "Priority Decree" softened up their cautious attitude towards the remnants of Black Hand and their meddling in domestic politics. Since the Priority Decree crisis, the actions of the officers corps undertaken "in defence of the honour of the Army" were quite synchronised.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.; Bataković, "Sukob vojnih i civilnih vlasti", 483.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Mičić, "Srpski oficiri, njihova uloga i značaj"; M.A.E., N.S., Serbie, nos. 139 and 147, Descos to Doumergue, Belgrade, 4 and 14 May 1914 respectively; TNA, FO, vol. 371/2099, Peckham to Crackenthorpe, Skoplje, 5 May 1914; ÖUA, vol. VIII, no. 9649, Giesl to Berchtold, Belgrade, 8 May 1914.

<sup>86</sup> An act of disobedience occurred in Valjevo, where the commander of the Drina Division refused to greet Minister of the Economy Velizar Janković. Several leading senior

The Opposition got involved in the Pašić cabinet's conflict with the Black Hand and the Army with a view to bringing down the former. By establishing ties with the Black Hand, the Opposition bloc, dominated by the Independent Radicals, deepened the crisis and fuelled it further by siding openly with the Army and by embarking on parliamentary obstruction.<sup>87</sup> Although the Old Radical majority in the National Assembly was a narrow one, dependent on two Social Democratic votes, it left Pašić some room for manoeuvring. He seized the favourable moment to split up the Opposition bloc.<sup>88</sup> The Opposition nonetheless succeeded in obstructing the passage of some already prepared bills. In the view of the French Minister at Belgrade, the crisis caused such a public stir that even foreign policy issues such as that of Durazzo (an important maritime port in Albania still under Serbian control) were temporarily pushed into the background.<sup>89</sup>

All political parties expected King Peter I to resolve the crisis but, as observed by the Austro-Hungarian Minister at Belgrade, neither "the King's well-known sympathies for the conspirators nor those of the Crown Prince prevail at the moment, because the downfall of Pašić's cabinet would entail a serious internal crisis".<sup>90</sup> The King tried to find an acceptable solution in consultation with Old Radical leaders and military commanders. Peter I was pressuring Pašić to revoke the controversial Priority Decree, while promising him in return the mandate to conduct new elections. Pašić seems to have favoured this solution, but his Interior Minister was inflexible in the matter of the Priority Decree. Dissatisfied with the stubborn position of the Old Radical cabinet, King Peter I decided to side with the army and even

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officers were embittered to the point of being ready to resign. The Pašić government had the most disgruntled officers transferred from Belgrade, but the King refused to sign retirement decrees for D. T. Dimitrijević Apis, V. Tankosić and some other Black Hand members. Cf. M.A.E., N.S., Serbie, no. 139; Dedijer, *Sarajevo 1914*, vol. II, 101.

<sup>87</sup> ÖUA, vol. VIII, no. 9702, Giesl to Berchtold, Belgrade, 21 May 1914; Vučković, "Unutrašnje krize Srbije", 187.

<sup>88</sup> TNA FO, vol. 371/2098, Crackenthorpe to Grey, Belgrade, 26 May 1914. The friction provoked by the Priority Decree led the government to ask its Minister at Berlin to report on the German order of precedence on formal occasions involving both civilian and military officials. The Serbian Minister in Berlin Bogičević reported that the military had precedence in most cases (the commander of a corps with the rank of general had precedence over a district governor), but if a civilian and a military official had the same rank, precedence was given to the one appointed first. Cf. *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Srbije 1903–1914*, vol. VII/1, eds. V. Dedijer and Ž. Anić (Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 1980), doc. nos. 646, 802 and 803.

<sup>89</sup> M.A.E., N.S., Serbie, no. 180, Descos to Doumergue, Belgrade, 26 May 1914.

<sup>90</sup> ÖUA, vol. VIII, no. 9702, Giesl to Berchtold, Belgrade, 8 May 1914.



promised Field-Marshal Putnik to get rid of Pašić.<sup>91</sup> The Russian Minister at Belgrade reported that the King had demanded that Field-Marshal Putnik and War Minister Stefanović take vigorous steps against the activity of the Black Hand. On the other hand, the Pašić cabinet, with the assistance of the War Minister, sought to sow dissent among its opponents in the army.<sup>92</sup>

Leaders of the former Black Hand also sought support against the government. Apis was consulting the Opposition leaders in May 1914 and he did not exclude a military coup as the last resort solution to the crisis.<sup>93</sup> Some leaders of the Independent Radicals, including Milorad Drašković, seem to have consented to a coup that would be limited to the New Territories – and hopefully cause the fall of Pašić's cabinet.<sup>94</sup> It was because of these consultations that Apis instructed his trusted officers in Skoplje and other cities in Serbian Macedonia "to drive out a couple of district governors [appointed] in the New Territories and send them to Belgrade complete with their suitcases, and here in Belgrade it will be our [Black Hand's and Independent Radicals'] concern to smooth things over".<sup>95</sup> Slobodan Jovanović, a legal historian and a witness of this conflict, believed that Apis had probably counted on the support of the local population in Serbian Macedonia.<sup>96</sup> However, the senior officers to whom the instruction was dispatched in

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<sup>91</sup> Vučković, "Unutrašnje krize Srbije 1", 188; Dedijer, *Sarajevo 1914*, vol. II, 101.

<sup>92</sup> A group of officers from the Belgrade Garrison (mostly consisting of Old Radicals supporters), expressed to the War Minister Stefanović their disapproval of the conduct of their fellow officers (Black Hand supporters). Among the officers serving outside Belgrade, their protest was supported by only two officers from the Ohrid Garrison. After that, a few senior officers serving at the Ministry of War and military schools were retired, among them Field-Marshal Putnik's son-in-law, Commandant of the Non-Commissioned Officer School. Putnik himself was sent out of Belgrade on an assignment, and the distribution of the *Pijemont* and *Zvono* (Bell) in the *Nove Oblasti* (New Territories) in the south was banned. At that point *Pijemont* had roughly 14,000 subscribers in the New Territories. Cf. M.A.E, no. 203, Descos to Doumergue, 26 May 1914; Marco [Božin Simić], "Državna kriza juna 1914 i juna 1928", *Nova Evropa* XVIII/9 (11 September 1928), 266).

<sup>93</sup> Borivoje Nešković, *Istina o Solunskom procesu* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1953), 158–160.

<sup>94</sup> Drašković's denial at the Salonika Trial in 1917 that he had consented to the coup is understandable, but he did not deny that he had discussed with Apis the issue of potential overthrow of the Pašić government. Cf. Vučković, "Unutrašnje krize Srbije", 181.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.; see also Milan Ž. Živanović, *Solunski proces 1917. Prilog za proučavanje političke istorije Srbije od 1903. do 1918. godine* (Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 1955), 219.

<sup>96</sup> Slobodan Jovanović, *Moji savremenici* (Windsor, Canada: Avala Printing and Publishing Company Ltd., 1962), 406 and 433.

May 1914 (among others, Colonel Milutin Lazarević, Chief of Staff in the Troops in the New Territories, and Colonel Dušan Plazina, Commander of the Non-Commissioned Officer School at Skoplje), were not in favour of such a drastic move, having assessed that most officers and soldiers were less than enthusiastic about the possible coup, even if restricted to the New Territories.<sup>97</sup> Apis and a group of his closest supporters were clearly rejected by their fellow officers. It was not only a major setback to the remnants of the Black Hand and Apis himself, but also a clear indication that senior army officers, including the former Black Hand members, firmly rejected Apis' authority to issue orders that ran against the army's constitutional role. The courageous "no" to Apis in fact proved that loyalty to the democratic system and constitutional order had prevailed among the top military officers.

Although this was not the end of the whole affair, it was certainly not a coincidence that the *Pijemont* wrote that King was informed that an outbreak of "bloody clashes between the army and the police can be expected any minute". It therefore seems highly likely that the planned exemption of the New Territories from civil authority was supposed to be a testing ground for the eventual overthrow of Pašić.<sup>98</sup> The dramatic appeal of the newly-appointed Commander of the New Territories, General Peter Bojović, addressed to the Minister of War on 3 June 1914, immediately after the resignation of Pašić's cabinet, confirmed concerns about the attitude of some officers. They were "tending to give vent to their discontent with the inappropriate conduct of police officials towards them both in formal and informal situations, and with the writing of some newspapers against the officers which is aimed at stirring up divisions among them."<sup>99</sup>

On behalf of the Kosovo Division, General Bojović demanded that the "Priority Decree" be revoked or amended, but he also stressed that the army would continue "to serve only the King and the Fatherland, and by no means particular political parties". He ordered the division commanders to ensure the strict implementation of the officers' code of conduct in both spirit and letter and demanded their reports on the condition of the troops.<sup>100</sup> Field Marshal Putnik and General Damnjan Popović put pressure on the King, on account of unrest in the officers' corps and General Bojović's request. According to the Austro-Hungarian Minister at Belgrade, Baron Giesl, the two high-ranking officers, supported by the Crown Prince, as-

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> *Pijemont*, no. 129, 10 May 1914.

<sup>99</sup> VAS, V-483-1-1, Bojović to Stefanović, Skoplje, 3 June 1914; cf. Nešković, *Istina o Solunskom procesu*, 25–26; Dragoslav Janković, *Srbija i jugoslovensko pitanje 1914–1915* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1973), 88–89.

<sup>100</sup> Janković, *Srbija i jugoslovensko pitanje*, 89.

sured the King that there would be unrest in the army “unless the rights it claims are recognised”.<sup>101</sup> A few weeks earlier, some officers from Monastir County (*Bitoljski okrug*), dissatisfied with the government’s policies and the weak response to incursions from Albania and Bulgaria, had been willing to resort to guerrilla warfare.<sup>102</sup>

However, Prime Minister Pašić remained adamant as regards the “Priority Decree” and on 2 June 1914 his cabinet resigned. The Independent Radicals, having failed to put together a coalition government, offered the King a homogenous cabinet in which the King’s personal friend, Živojin Balugdžić, the Serbian Minister at Athens, would become Foreign Minister. At that point, the Black Hand stepped in, nominating Jovan M. Jovanović, the Serbian Minister at Vienna, for the office.<sup>103</sup> This move made plain the Black Hand’s intention to place yet another area of public affairs under their control. Its alliance with the Independent Radicals was based on common dissatisfaction with the Old Radicals in the office and, in particular with Pašić’s dovish foreign policy. The *Samouprava*, on the other hand, warned the Crown that inviting the opposition minority to form a government would be a violation of the Constitution.<sup>104</sup> When King Peter I appeared to have finally decided to invite the Independent Radicals to form a new cabinet, the Russian Minister at Belgrade, Nikolai Hartwig, interfered at the suggestion of Pašić.

Hartwig exerted considerable influence on Serbia’s national policy. Foreign diplomats in Belgrade, the Austro-Hungarian and French Ministers in particular, believed that he was the architect of Serbia’s foreign policy and more powerful than both the King and Premier Pašić. An adamant Austrophobe, and strongly backed by St. Petersburg’s conservative and pan-Slav circles, Hartwig acted according to his own lights, often opposing his superior, Foreign Minister Sergei Sazonov. Hartwig considered Sazonov as indecisive and too conciliatory when it was necessary to hold firm in the face of Austria-Hungary’s aggressive stance. In the diplomatic corps in Belgrade, Hartwig was nicknamed “Viceroy of Serbia” for taking the side of Serbia on all occasions. His role in Serbia’s domestic crisis in the spring of 1914 was considerable.<sup>105</sup>

As for Pašić, French diplomatic reports suggest that his visit to St. Petersburg in early 1914 had solidified his status in the eyes of the Russian

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<sup>101</sup> ÖUA, vol. VIII, no. 9819, Giesl to Berchtold, Belgrade, 6 June 1914.

<sup>102</sup> TNA, FO, vol. 371/2009, Craig to Crackenthorpe, Monastir, 24 April 1914.

<sup>103</sup> M.A.E., N.S., Serbie, no. 203; Vučković, “Unutrašnje krize Srbije”, 188.

<sup>104</sup> *Samouprava*, 12 June 1914.

<sup>105</sup> M.A.E., N.S., Serbie, no. 201; cf. Jovanović, *Moji savremenici*, 200; Marco [Božin Simić], “Nikola Hartwig”, *Nova Evropa* XVII (26 April 1928), 256–278.

government. Tsarist Russia counted on Pašić as her faithful ally and a moderate politician loyal to wider Slavic interests. Since any shift in Serbia's foreign policy was likely to pose a serious threat to Russia's interests in the Balkans, Hartwig began to pursue a vigorous policy of negotiations with a view to supporting the Old Radicals.<sup>106</sup> Using the compelling authority of Russia in order to curb the Opposition's demands and criticising the Independent Radicals for their close ties with the Black Hand, Hartwig practically forced the King to invite Pašić to form cabinet again.<sup>107</sup> The dominance of Premier Pašić, backed by Hartwig, over the ailing King Peter I was best reflected in the unchanged composition of his cabinet. Moreover, Pašić's coming into office on 11 June gave the Old Radicals a good chance for remaining in power by winning the elections scheduled for August 1914. The only concession to the monarch by the Old Radical cabinet was an amendment to Article 5 of the Priority Decree, which gave precedence to military over civilian authorities except in cases when civilian officials acted on behalf of the government.<sup>108</sup>

By extending Pašić's term as Prime Minister and endorsing the government's action against the remnants of the Black Hand, King Peter I suffered a serious political defeat. Old, almost deaf and quite weak after a minor stroke, the King lacked the strength and authority needed to resolve the crisis. Indebted to the army in general and some of the former conspirators in particular, Peter I became a liability both to Pašić and to Hartwig.<sup>109</sup> His decision to reassign his royal prerogatives to his son, Crown Prince Alexander, was therefore perceived by the French Minister at Belgrade as a "last-minute one, made under Russian pressure".<sup>110</sup> The King's withdrawal, in fact a tacit abdication, as it was described in the Russian press, became clear in the light of Crown Prince Alexander's role in the crisis.

<sup>106</sup> M.A.E., N.S., Serbie, no. 203.

<sup>107</sup> ÖUA, vol. VIII, no. 9734, Giesl to Berchtold, Belgrade, 24 May 1914; *Mezhdunarodnie otnoshenia v epohu imperializma. Dokumenti iz arhivov tsarskogo i vremennogo pravitel'stv 1878–1917. gg.*, Moskva 1938. Series III, vol. VIII, no. 283, Hartwig to Sazonov, Belgrade, 16 June 1914.

<sup>108</sup> Vučković, "Unutrašnje krize Srbije", 189. Despite the amendment, however, district governors in Macedonia kept reporting that the military authorities were using every public occasion to take precedence over the civilian authorities; the governors ignored such incidents in order to avoid any trouble. Cf. *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Srbije*, VII/2, doc. nos. 437 and 438.

<sup>109</sup> ÖUA, vol. VIII, no. 9922, Stork to General Staff, Belgrade, 26 June 1914.

<sup>110</sup> M.A.E., N.S., Serbie, no. 228, Descos to Viviani, Belgrade, 28 June 1914. The Radical press (*Samouprava*, 14 June 1914) claimed that one of the reasons for the King's withdrawal was to avoid signing retirement decrees for a few generals, including Božanović and Stepanović.

Alexander's neutral stance at the early stage of the crisis was rather tactical, and stemmed from his relationship with Pašić and the Black Hand. Crown Prince had been at odds with the latter since the transfer of several officers loyal to him – the group known as the White Hand – from Belgrade in early 1912. Alexander was still careful enough not to sever his formally good relations with the most influential members of the Black Hand. His financial contribution to the *Pijemont*, personal concern to secure good medical care for Apis at the beginning of the First Balkan War, approval of the Officers Cooperative's disbursements to the Black Hand, made him look good in the eyes of the clandestine organisation. This image became even better when Alexander joined military circles, including the Black Hand, in their pressure on Prime Minister Pašić to refuse the cession of any of the territories liberated in the First Balkan War to Bulgaria.<sup>111</sup> In the view of foreign diplomats in Serbia, Crown Prince's sympathies during the Priority Decree crisis lay with the army rather than with Pašić, despite some reservations about the Black Hand; thus, his departure for a spa for medical treatment during that crisis was interpreted as an attempt to avoid taking sides publicly.<sup>112</sup>

Crown Prince's attitude towards Pašić was likely influenced by his frustration with Pašić's policy of compromise pursued during the Balkan Wars. Alexander obviously sought for his place at the top of political power between Pašić, on one side, and the Black Hand, on the other. His ties with the small group of officers loyal to him (White Hand) were supposed to be a stepping stone for the rise of his personal influence. Reports of foreign diplomats in Belgrade described Alexander as being sympathetic not only to the army but also to some members of the former Black Hand: at the early stages of the Priority Decree crisis, prior to Hartwig's involvement, Crown Prince had supported the bid to protect the supremacy of military over civil authorities.<sup>113</sup> His long discussions with Hartwig, who dangled before him the prospect of regency, and even of marriage to a Russian princess, swayed the ambitious Crown Prince towards Premier Pašić.<sup>114</sup> Pašić

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<sup>111</sup> Jovanović, *Moji savremenici*, 404; Vučković, "Unutrašnje krize Srbije i Prvi svetski rat", 182.

<sup>112</sup> ÖUA, vol. VIII, doc. no. 9819, Giesl to Berchtold, Belgrade, 6 June 1914;

<sup>113</sup> M.A.E., N.S., Serbie, no. 228.

<sup>114</sup> M.A.E., N.S., Serbie, no. 219, Descos to Viviani, Belgrade, 24 June 1914. Something of the sort is suggested by Hartwig's report, according to which Alexander, prone to criticise Pašić's indecisiveness, now realised his mistake and fully embraced Hartwig's policy (ÖUA, vol. VIII, no. 9922). According to Jovan M. Jovanović's note, Alexander decided to turn against the Black Hand because of the insults suffered by his trusted man, Živojin Balugdžić, while acting, at the King's demand, as a mediator in the crisis, cf.

and the Russian Minister skilfully manoeuvred in order to present Alexander's regency as a concession to the army, which, in turn, secured the continuation of Pašić's premiership. Austro-Hungarian diplomats believed that the Black Hand was so powerful that neither Pašić nor the Crown Prince could confront it "as long as the whole affair can be settled peacefully".<sup>115</sup> At the early stages of the election campaign, all the Opposition parties joined forces for the first time and submitted a joint electoral list, which, judging by the articles published in the *Pijemont*, enjoyed the support of Apis and his followers. The elections, however, did not take place because of the outbreak of the Great War.

Serbia's remarkable victories in the Balkan Wars created an atmosphere of high expectations among the Serbs in the Dual Monarchy; they suddenly became impatient to accomplish their national unification with Serbia. The Austro-Hungarian Minister at Belgrade assessed that the Serbian army, "imbued with chauvinism and hatred for Austria-Hungary would try to push every Serbian government in the direction of national chauvinism and Austrophobia".<sup>116</sup> Other foreign diplomats, on the contrary, looked at the conflict in the light of Serbia's quest for full sovereignty and stressed the continuity of her cautious foreign policy. In contrast to Russian Minister Hartwig, whose reports played down the role of the military faction around Apis, probably for tactical reasons, Western diplomats underlined the still tangible influence of Black Hand's remnants, and largely saw Russia's involvement in the solution of the Priority Decree crisis as yet another proof of Serbia's reliance on this Great Power.

Nevertheless, the high expectations for national unification were pitted against Serbia's massive war losses, which dictated a different policy: it was necessary to organise the state that nearly doubled in size and had numerous problems with hostile minorities and porous borders.<sup>117</sup> It was also obvious that Russia's influence prevailed over the temporary alliance between the Independent Radicals-led opposition and Apis-controlled

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Vučković, "Unutrašnje krize Srbije", 189. The Austro-Hungarian Minister at Belgrade believed that it was in the Crown Prince's best interest to ensure greater independence from the conspirators than it had been possible for his father, "tied to the conspirators by [spilt] blood". Cf. ÖUA, vol. VIII, doc. no. 9922.

<sup>115</sup> Vučković, "Unutrašnje krize Srbije", 189.

<sup>116</sup> ÖUA, vol. VIII, doc. no. 9819.

<sup>117</sup> The war operations of 1912 cost Serbia 21,000 lives. The mobilisation of nearly 550,000 men (about 200,000 combatants and 350,000 non-combatant military personnel) placed an enormous strain on her predominantly agrarian economy. Cf. more in Frédéric le Moal, *La Serbie, du martyre à la victoire, 1914-1918* (Saint Cloud: 14-18 Editions, 2008), 23-31.

military faction formed against Pašić's Old Radical cabinet. Pursuing her own interests, Russia backed Pašić and thus helped civil authorities in their ongoing conflict with the military. The fact that the helm of the country remained in the hands of Pašić's pro-Russian cabinet suited Austria-Hungary as well, partly because of Pašić's conciliatory attitude towards Vienna, and partly because of the ongoing negotiations concerning the Eastern railways. Of utmost importance for Viennese diplomacy was the assessment that the Old Radicals would, at least for a while, "suppress the army's influence on the political leadership of the country". The influence of the "irresponsible factors" within the Army in post-1903 Serbia clearly indicated the fragility of her democracy and state institutions. Nevertheless, it was democracy that prevailed, as evidenced by the outcome of the Priority Decree crisis, and Pašić was looking forward to securing his victory over Lt.-Colonel Apis and the remnants of the Black Hand.

### *The Black Hand and Young Bosnia*

In spite of the victory of democratic forces over military clique in the spring of 1914, Serbia's international position was far from being secured. The frequent incursions from Albania, supported by Austria-Hungary, were still not efficiently prevented, while the pending project of a real union with Montenegro, which included joint institutions for defence, finance and foreign policy, was at the forefront of Pašić's mind. There were also alarming developments in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the Serbs became again the main target of various punitive actions. The Young Bosnia organisation emerged in opposition to the colonial rule of the Dual Monarchy in a European province only 600 kilometres away from Vienna. Such mistreatment, and particularly discrimination against the Bosnian Serbs, inevitably led to various forms of turmoil.

Young Bosnia was founded in 1910–1911 by the second generation of the Serbian youth which grew up under Austro-Hungarian occupation, deprived of political freedoms, basic social and national rights. Created on the pattern of Mazzini's Young Italy, it was an ardently patriotic anti-Habsburg organisation, Serb-led but open to all religious and ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Young Bosnians were committed to their struggle against the Dual Monarchy's increasingly discriminatory rule and willing to make any personal sacrifice. On the day of the opening of the Bosnian Diet (*Bosanski Sabor*), in June 1910, one of the Young Bosnia's leaders, Bogdan Žerajić, committed suicide after having failed to assassinate the Austro-Hungarian governor and set an example of heroic self-sacrifice for the sacred cause of national freedom. Several assassination attempts made in defiance of the last colonial rule in civilised Europe caused

a growing tension in the relationship between the Bosnian Serbs and their Austro-Hungarian masters. In 1912, when the vast majority of the Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina celebrated the victories of Serbia and Montenegro in the Balkan Wars as their own, the state-sponsored oppression targeted all Serb organisations.<sup>118</sup>

Further discriminatory measures undertaken by Austro-Hungarian administration aggravated internal tension. The abolition of the post of civil *adlatus* in 1912 was a prelude to introducing “emergency measures”, with all the powers concentrated in the hands of the military and civil governor (*landeschef*). General Oskar Potiorek was not responsible to the Finance Ministry, which had hitherto administered Bosnia-Herzegovina, but to the War Ministry in Vienna.<sup>119</sup> Between the introduction of emergency measures in May 1913 (in response to the Scutari crisis and Austria-Hungary’s war threats to Serbia and Montenegro) and the Sarajevo assassination in June 1914, General Potiorek orchestrated a series of show trials for high treason against Bosnian Serbs in the towns of Bijeljina, Foča and Banjaluka. Various associations, from choral and gymnastic (*Sokol*) to religious and educational, were outlawed by the Bosnian governor.<sup>120</sup> For that reason, one of the Young Bosnians deemed the assassination of Franz Ferdinand a logical response to “emergency measures”.<sup>121</sup>

The Young Bosnians, a mixture of patriots, anarchists and social revolutionaries, were influenced by the teachings of Kropotkin, Bakounin, Nietzsche and Masaryk. They embraced a pro-Serbian and pro-Yugoslav policy in order to overthrow the detested Austrian rule which, after the 1908 annexation, was considered both illegal and immoral.<sup>122</sup> The controversial relationship between the Black Hand and Young Bosnia is difficult to understand unless all the elements, including the local political culture

<sup>118</sup> Milorad Ekmečić, “Impact of the Balkan Wars on the Society in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, in Kiraly & Djordjevic, eds., *East Central European Society in the Balkan Wars*, 266–285.

<sup>119</sup> When the rule of law was practically suspended, the most moderate group of Serbs, headed by Gligorije Jeftanović (father-in-law of the Serbian diplomat Miroslav Spalajković), left the Bosnian Diet, a non-representative body with limited powers. Their place was taken by the so-called “loyal Serbs” of Danilo Dimović. With little or no support of the Serb electorate, they were necessary to Austro-Hungarian authorities to keep up appearances.

<sup>120</sup> Most of 710 societies and associations suspected of being completely or partially controlled by the Bosnian Serbs were banned (in total, 296 Serbian and 230 mixed societies). Cf. Vojislav Bogičević, “Iznimne mjere u Bosni i Hercegovini u maju 1913”, *Godišnjak istorijskog društva Bosne i Hercegovine* (Sarajevo 1955), 209–218).

<sup>121</sup> Bataković, *The Serbs of Bosnia & Herzegovina*, 84.

<sup>122</sup> V. Dedijer, *Road to Sarajevo* (London: The MacGibbon & Kee Ltd., 1967), 238–250.



and mentality, are taken into account. A group of Young Bosnians came to Belgrade to seek assistance for assassination of various Austro-Hungarian governors and senior state officials, including Burian, Biliński and General Potiorek. However, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the General Inspector of the Army, became the primary target after the announcement of his presence at military manoeuvres.

The forthcoming visit of Austro-Hungarian heir to the throne to Sarajevo, along with his inspection of military manoeuvres on the border with Serbia, was scheduled for St. Vitus Day (*Vidovdan*), the hallowed anniversary of the 1389 Battle of Kosovo. This timing was considered as another humiliating provocation against the Serbs as a whole, and particularly against Bosnian Serbs who, unlike their compatriots in the liberated areas of Turkey-in-Europe, remained under foreign colonial rule.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, the reports submitted to Lt.-Colonel Apis by his informers from Bosnia and Croatia suggested that Austro-Hungarian military manoeuvres were not just another provocation but rather a portent of the forthcoming aggression against Serbia. In contrast, the Pašić government, conciliatory towards Austria-Hungary after the settlement of the Albanian affair, was preoccupied with domestic matters and the election campaign, and it did not consider the Archduke's visit to Sarajevo as a potential treat to Serbia.<sup>124</sup>

It was not before Lt.-Colonel Apis' agents organised the crossing of a few Young Bosnians into Bosnia that the civilian border authorities informed the Interior Ministry of the suspicious actions of military intelligence. The police failed to prevent some armed members of Young Bosnia to cross the Drina in the night of 1/2 June. The latter acted under protection of certain border officers close to Lt.-Colonel Apis and the remnants of the Black Hand.<sup>125</sup> This information, presented at the cabinet meeting by Inte-

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<sup>123</sup> D. Djordjević, "Tradition of Kosovo in Formation of Serbian Statehood in the Nineteenth Century", in *Kosovo. The Legacy of a Medieval Battle*, eds. Thomas Emmert and Wayne S. Vucinich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1991), 309–330. Cf. the latest biography of Franz Ferdinand by Jean-Paul Bled, *François-Ferdinand d'Autriche* (Paris: Tallandier, 2012).

<sup>124</sup> There is no substantial evidence for the Russian Military Attaché in Belgrade Colonel Artamanov's involvement in the Sarajevo assassination, apart from his frequent contacts with Apis. See Viktor Artamanov, "Erinnerungen an meine Militärattachezeit in Belgrade", *Berliner Monatshefte* (July and August 1938), 583–602; some new insights can be found in the memoirs, recently translated from Russian (Balkan Reminiscences) of the Russian Chargé d'Affaires in Belgrade, Basil de Strandman, who took office after the sudden death of Nikolai Hartwig in July 1914: Vasilij Štrandman, *Balkanske uspomene*, vol. I, part 1–2 (Belgrade: Žagor, 2009), 258–272.

<sup>125</sup> Popović, "Rad organizacije "Ujedinjenje ili smrt"; Ljubibratić, *Mlada Bosna i Sarajevski atentat*, 42; for more detail, see Dedijer, *Sarajevo 1914*, vol. II, 111–112.

rior Minister Protić, alarmed the Pašić cabinet. Prime Minister knew that Apis was willing to undertake any adventurous and highly risky enterprise. Pašić also believed that Serbia needed at least two decades of continuous peace to fully absorb the areas acquired in 1912–1913. In June 1914, his main concern was to win the elections again, despite the fact that the Opposition was supported by his fierce opponent Apis and his followers. The illegal transfer of unknown foreign individuals from Serbia into Habsburg-held Bosnia led to Pašić's energetic request for investigation into military intelligence operations carried out by Apis. Unaware of Apis's secret plans and chronically dissatisfied with the government's attitude towards the army, the ailing Field-Marshal Putnik firmly rejected Pašić's demand but promised an internal military inquiry.<sup>126</sup>

Prime Minister Pašić, still concerned about Apis's hidden agenda and determined to avoid any complications that might arise because of Bosnia, instructed his reliable diplomat, Jovan M. Jovanović, the Serbian Minister in Vienna, to alert Leon von Biliński, who had been Minister of Finance and the governor of Bosnia since 1912, to the possibility of unrest during the Archduke's visit to Sarajevo and to advise its postponement. Lacking any reliable information on the plans of the group of Bosnian Serbs smuggled into Bosnia across the Drina, Jovanović conveyed the message to Biliński in a delicate diplomatic manner. However, Biliński seems to have not realised the importance of this friendly warning, and he did not pass it on to the Emperor and the cabinet in Vienna. This misunderstanding eventually led to the Sarajevo tragedy.<sup>127</sup>

The relationship between Apis and the Young Bosnians during their stay in Belgrade has remained unclear. Apis seems to have never met the future assassins, and his support for their plans was probably more theoretical than practical. Had Apis really wanted them to proceed with the assassination, he would have probably given them the necessary instructions himself. Despite having been urged by Apis's emissaries to abort their mission, the Young Bosnians, true to their revolutionary outlook, remained determined to murder the Archduke in order to demonstrate their opposition to the colonial rule of Austria-Hungary in Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>126</sup> Dedijer, *Road to Sarajevo*, 388–392.

<sup>127</sup> Dedijer, *Sarajevo 1914*, vol. II, 123–130.

<sup>128</sup> According to the later testimony of the Black Hand supporter Čedomir A. Popović, Apis and Tankosić initially approved the departure of three Young Bosnians, Gavrilo Princip, Trifko Grabež and Nedeljko Čabrinović, for Sarajevo. Due to opposition from the former Black Hand, they later tried to stop them but failed to prevent the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. According to some less reliable sources, Apis and Tankosić seem to have believed that removing Franz Ferdinand, whom they saw

The fateful Sarajevo assassination provoked mass persecutions of Bosnian Serbs throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina, while the Serbian government condemned it immediately.<sup>129</sup>

Apis later confided, with considerable discomfort, to his close friend, Antonije Antić, that he had been unaware of the Young Bosnians' determination to carry out the assassination and explained that he had only wanted them to frighten the Archduke.<sup>130</sup> The controversy, however, continues. To a great extent, it is the murky role of other officials, former members of the defunct Black Hand, whose assistance to the Young Bosnians was instrumental, that accounts for the controversy. In contrast to Apis, his right-hand associate Vojislav Tankosić stated after his arrest that the assassination had been carried out as an act "against Pašić", which firmly places the whole issue into the context of military-civilian rivalry in Serbia.<sup>131</sup> Austria-Hungary's reaction which eventually led to the Great War was a prelude to the long-planned war against Serbia.

When the Belgrade government was presented with the ultimatum in July 1914 the Prime Minister Pašić was amidst the election campaign in southern Serbia, while the ailing Chief of the General Staff, Field-Marshal Putnik, was undergoing medical treatment in an Austrian spa. Unprepared for war, militarily and financially exhausted by the successive Balkan Wars (the Serbian army lacked 120,000 rifles as well as other war material) and with the New Territories still far from being integrated, the Serbian government spared no effort to prevent the outbreak of war. In all European cabinets, Serbia's response to the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum was considered diplomatically impeccable: the only demands that were rejected were those incompatible with the independence of the country – it was impossible to allow the Austro-Hungarian police to search for potential aides to the perpetrators of the Sarajevo assassination on Serbia's sovereign soil. At the same time, the Belgrade government expressed, through British representatives in Serbia, its readiness to fulfil, with minor rectifications, all other

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as the main champion of Austria-Hungary's policy of bringing Serbia to heel, would mean removing the main obstacle to Serbian unification. Cf. Č. A. Popović, "Sarajevski atentat i org. 'Ujedinjenje ili Smrt'", *Nova Evropa* (26 June 1932), 407–408; Dedijer, *Sarajevo 1914*, vol. II, 120–122.

<sup>129</sup> Štrandman, *Balkanske uspomene*, 260–265.

<sup>130</sup> Antonije Antić, *Beleške*, eds. Bora Dimitrijević & Jelica Ilić (Zaječar: Zadužbina "Nikola Pašić", 2010), 338–339.

<sup>131</sup> Vladimir Dedijer, "Sarajevo. Fifty Years After", *Foreign Affairs* (July 1964); Dedijer, *Sarajevo 1914*, vol. II, 124.

demands set out in the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum.<sup>132</sup> The military-civil rivalry, resolved temporarily in June 1914, would resurface in a later phase of the Great War. The final showdown with Colonel Apis and his Black Hand comrades would take place during the show trial in Salonika in 1917.<sup>133</sup>

In conclusion, there is almost a consensus among serious scholars that it was the Annexation Crisis of 1908, and not Serbia's attitude in 1914, that led to the Great War. Thus, in the view of "pre-1914 European international politics, the Bosnian crisis is considered to be a decisive step toward the First World War". There were remarkable structural similarities in Germany's role in the course of the Annexation Crisis in 1908–1909 and in July Crisis in 1914: "In both cases Austria was acting against Serbia. Serbia was backed by Russia while Austria was unconditionally backed by Germany. In 1909 Russia backed down, however. In 1914 both sides remained stubborn and the crisis escalated into the European war."<sup>134</sup>

UDC 94:323](497.11)"1911/1914"  
327(497.11:436/439)  
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<sup>132</sup> Cf. more in Andrej Mitrović, *Serbia's Great War 1914–1918* (London: Hurst, 2007), 38–52; cf. also Mark Cornwall, "Serbia", in Keith Wilson, ed., *Decisions for War, 1914* (London: Routledge, 1995), 55–95. A selection of documents in Imanuel Geiss, ed., *July 1914. The Outbreak of the First World War. Selected Documents* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967); *War 1914: Punishing the Serbs* [Uncovered editions] (London: The Stationary Office 1999 [first published in 1915]; Annika Mombauer, ed., *The Origins of the First World War. Diplomatic and Military Documents* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

<sup>133</sup> D. T. Bataković, "The Salonica Trial 1917. Black Hand vs. Democracy (The Serbian Army between Internal Strife and Military Success)", in *The Salonica Theatre of Operations and the Outcome of the Great War* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 2005), 273–293.

<sup>134</sup> Holger Afflerbach, "Nibelungentreue? Germany and the Bosnian Annexation Crisis", in 1908, *l'annexion de la Bosnie-Herzégovine cent ans après*, ed. Catherine Horel (Brussels: P. I. E. Peter Lang, 2011), 67.

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