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**A Balkan-Style French Revolution?  
The 1804 Serbian Uprising in European Perspective<sup>1</sup>**

*Enlightenment vs. Ottomanism*

It was not a coincidence that the first Balkan revolution at the beginning of the age of nationalism took place in Serbia. In this northern province of the Ottoman Empire bordering with the Habsburg Empire along the Danube and Sava rivers, the central authority was weaker and foreign influences stronger than elsewhere in the Ottoman provinces in Europe. Compared to Bosnia and Herzegovina, where local Muslim beys firmly safeguarded the conservative Ottoman system despite the fact that two-thirds of the population were Christian (Orthodox and Roman Catholic), Serbia was predominantly Christian Orthodox and maintained more dynamic and more profound contacts with the Western world. Frequent wars, forced migrations and resettlements in the shifting borderland between the two empires intensified contacts among the Christian Orthodox Serbs, despite their different social and political status under two different empires.<sup>2</sup>

It was in the reign of Maria Theresa and Joseph II that the enlightened reforms in the Habsburg Empire brought the Christian Orthodox Serbs, dispersed in southern Hungary, the Military Frontier (*Militärgrenze*), Dalmatia and Croatia-Slavonia, under a stronger influence of Western civilization. The Serbian Orthodox bishop of Temesvar (modern Timișoara, Romania) was an admirer of Voltaire and had 384 books of French rationalists in his 910-book library, while the personal 5,246-book library of Count Sava Tekelija, the leading member of the Serbian aristocracy in southern

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the conference *The First Serbian Uprising: Political, Social and Cultural Legacies*, held at Harriman Institute, Columbia University, New York, in November 2004.

<sup>2</sup> V. Ćorović, "Die Entstehung der unabhängigen Balkanstaaten", *Revue internationale des études balkaniques* II (Belgrade, 1935), 159-160.

Hungary, included the entire *Grande encyclopédie*. Moreover, besides them, there were dozens of influential Habsburg Serbs that cherished the legacies of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.<sup>3</sup>

Strongly impressed by the liberal ideas spreading across Europe in the wake of the French Revolution, the Serbian elite raised the issue of national rights and territorial autonomy as early as 1790, at the ecclesiastical-national diet held in Temesvar and attended by 75 representatives of the aristocracy, high clergy and officer corps. In doing so, they were fully aware of the fact that the Serbs (named by the synonymous term Illyrians, as they had for centuries been officially labelled by the imperial government in Vienna) were yet to become a modern nation. In their petition *Gravamina und postulata*, the Serbs relied on Montesquieu for emphasizing that a people could not be a distinct nation (*corps de nation*) without their territory or territorial autonomy.<sup>4</sup> A variety of possible solutions to the Serbian question produced by Austrian Serbs prior to 1804 reveal a mixture of historicism, drawing on the medieval tradition of the Nemanjić dynasty, and the modern principles of natural rights and popular sovereignty.

In parallel with the rising of national awareness among the south-Hungarian Serbs, their fellow nationals in the troubled province of Serbia raised demands for local autonomy encouraged both by the practice established during the short-lived Habsburg occupation (1718–39) and by the weakening of Ottoman power after the last war with the Habsburgs. Only five of thirty-three petitions the Serbs from the *pashalik* of Belgrade submitted to the Ottoman sultan between 1793 and 1806 refer to agrarian problems, the rest being related to the extent of their local autonomy.<sup>5</sup> Their growing discontent with local administrators, who were significantly reducing the autonomy obtained from Sultan Selim III, eventually triggered yet another uprising, which turned into both a social and national revolution after 1804.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> M. Kostić, "Nekoliko idejnih odraza francuske revolucije u našem društvu krajem XVIII i početkom XIX veka," *Zbornik Matice srpske. Serija društvenih nauka* 3 (Novi Sad, 1952), 1–16; N. Radojičić, "Sava Tekelija," *Istorijski časopis XII–XIII* (Belgrade, 1963), 7–9; N. Gavrilović, "Velika Francuska revolucija i Srbi u južnoj Ugarskoj," *Zbornik Matice srpske. Serija društvenih nauka* 26 (Novi Sad, 1960), 18–39.

<sup>4</sup> N. Petrović, *Temišvarski sabor 1790* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1972), 599–627. Cf. also "Mémoire d'un Serbe de Vienne sur la situation des Serbes de la Hongrie," *Le monde slave* (April), (Paris, 1933), 124–127.

<sup>5</sup> D. Pтелиć, *Beogradski pašaluk pred prvi srpski ustanak (1794–1804)*, Posebna izdanja CXLVI (Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka, 1949).

<sup>6</sup> For comprehensive accounts of various aspects of the Serbian revolution, see W. Vucinich, ed., *The First Serbian Uprising 1804–1813* (Boulder & New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

Although initially a peasant rebellion against local janissaries, from 1805 on the Serbian uprising was increasingly national in character. The insurgents took up the medieval coat of arms of the Nemanjić dynasty, and in 1805 the *Praviteljstvujušči sovjet* (Governing Council) held its sessions in Smederevo – “the capital of our despots and emperors” – under the portrait of Emperor Stefan Dušan (1331–55). Karageorge’s official letters and acts sent to local insurgent commanders, his proclamations and correspondence with representatives of the great powers (including his letter to Francis I), bear his signature as “Serbian commander”. In the letter of 1806 authorizing an official Serbian delegation to meet both the Habsburg and Russian emperors, Karageorge describes them as potential “saviours of our nation”, and authorizes them to act in the name of the “Serbian nation”. “In the name of the whole Serbian nation”, the letter is signed by “Karageorge Petrović, supreme commander in Serbia”.<sup>7</sup>

In their petition to the Russian emperor in 1806, the insurgents – encouraged by a series of victories over the regular Ottoman troops (at Ivankovac in 1805; at Mišar and Deligrad in 1806), including the capture of Belgrade, the regional strategic stronghold – claim that, should Russia decide to send its troops to the Balkans, “all Serbs from Serbia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, Dalmatia and Albania would joyfully unite and, in a short space of time, create a new 200,000-strong army”.<sup>8</sup>

As a matter of fact, such political claims reflected the reality of continuous cooperation with similar anti-Ottoman revolts staged by Serbian clans in Herzegovina and Montenegro. From the very beginning, the insurgents organized their military operations in coordination with the ruler of Montenegro, Prince-Bishop Petar I Petrović-Njegoš, who considered his people “a branch of one Serbian nation”.<sup>9</sup> After Montenegrin tribes defeated the Ottoman army in 1796 (the battles of Krusi and Martinići), their semi-independent status was additionally strengthened, paving the way for their more significant role in the subsequent anti-Ottoman movements. As early as January 1804 Prince-Bishop Petar I informed the head of the Serbian monastery of Dečani in Kosovo that both Montenegrins and Serbs were making plans to rise up against the Ottomans.<sup>10</sup>

Although tiny Montenegro remained inactive in the early stage of the insurrection in Serbia, mostly due to Russian interference, a series of lo-

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<sup>7</sup> R. Perović, *Prvi srpski ustanak. Akta i pisma na srpskom jeziku (1804–1808)*, (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1978), vol. 1, 124, 125, 149.

<sup>8</sup> M. Djordjević, *Oslobodilački rat srpskih ustanika 1804–1806* (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1967).

<sup>9</sup> J. M. Milović, “Titule vladike Petrovića,” *Istorijski zapisi* LX/1 (Titograd, 1987), 57.

<sup>10</sup> S. Ristić, *Dečanski spomenici* (Belgrade, 1864), 23–24.

cal rebellions broke out in the *sanjak* of Novi Pazar, a small district between the *pashalik* of Belgrade and the mountainous regions of Montenegro; the neighbouring Serb clans in Herzegovina (Drobnjaci, Nikšići, Bjelopavlići and Moračani) also took up arms, while other Serb clans of Montenegro (Kući and Piperi), as well as Albanian highlanders (Klimenti or Kelmendi tribe), rebelled for greater autonomy.<sup>11</sup> In Kosovo, under the iron-hand rule of local Albanian pashas, unrest was recorded among the Serbs and some of them eventually managed to join Karageorge's rebel forces.<sup>12</sup>

The Herzegovina-based Drobnjaci clan began to launch attacks against Ottoman-held Podgorica as early as 1804, and 1805 saw the outbreak of their year-long rebellion against the local Ottoman authorities, pacified only after members of their families had been taken hostage.<sup>13</sup> In 1806 Karageorge issued a proclamation to the rebelling clans of Herzegovina calling them to join the battle against the Ottomans, "for our holy churches and monasteries, for the freedom of our fatherland"; in his letter to Petar I Petrović-Njegoš, he called upon the Montenegrins to build a common Serbian state founded on the same Orthodox faith and the same Serbian blood, and "to become one body, one heart, one soul and loving fellow citizens".<sup>14</sup>

In response, the Montenegrins launched several assaults on the neighbouring Ottoman forts in Herzegovina, particularly in the Nikšić area. However, the intended unification of Montenegrin and Serbian forces during Karageorge's incursion into the *sanjak* of Novi Pazar in 1809 was thwarted by a sudden Ottoman offensive on the southern front which forced the Serbs to withdraw.

Although a mixture of modern national and romantic historic rights, the Serbian insurgents' political claims were dominated by the ambition for restoring the medieval Serbian state, weakened by the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 and eventually lost to the Ottomans. Dušan's empire, although its core had been far to the south (in the area of Kosovo and Skopje), was an ideal cherished by the leading representative of Serbian monastic historicism, Jovan Rajić (1726–1801), whose four-volume *History of Various Slavic Nations, Notably Bulgars, Croats and Serbs*, published in Vienna in 1794/5, became the mainstay of Serbian national ideology in the early nineteenth century. An Ottoman official, held in imprisonment in Serbia during 1806,

<sup>11</sup> P. Šobajić, "Udeo dinarskih plemena u Prvom srpskom ustanku", *Glasnik Etnografskog instituta Srpske akademije nauka* II-III (Belgrade, 1957), 81-96.

<sup>12</sup> D. T. Bataković, *The Kosovo Chronicles* (Belgrade: Plato, 1992), 75-77.

<sup>13</sup> A. Aličić, "Ustanak u Drobnjacima 1805. godine", *Godišnjak društva istoričara BiH* XIX (Sarajevo, 1973), 51-54.

<sup>14</sup> Perović, *Prvi srpski ustanak*, 75-177.

reported about the insurgents' plans: "As King [Prince] Lazar once went to Kosovo [in 1389 to confront Ottomans] so they will all come to Kosovo again. They always have at hand the history books [*History* by Jovan Rajić] on the aforesaid King [Prince Lazar], and it is he that puts them in mind of rebellion."<sup>15</sup>

*Restoration of Serbia: medieval inspiration, modern demands*

The lack of a strong intellectual leadership among the peasant rebels, whose chief ideologist was Matija Nenadović, a priest who drew upon medieval Serbian traditions (*Krmčija* of Saint Sava),<sup>16</sup> was compensated for by political support extended by the enlightened Serbian elite from the neighbouring Habsburg provinces. Following the Temesvar diet of 1790, they came to see themselves as destined to provide political and intellectual leadership for the entire national movement. Enthusiasm for the insurrection both among urban and rural Serbs in southern Hungary (present-day Vojvodina) was so strong that it gave serious cause for concern to the local Austrian authorities. Secret relations were established between prosperous Serbian merchants and church dignitaries in the neighbouring Habsburg provinces and the insurgents, and purchase of arms and ammunition was discussed. As stressed by local Habsburg officials, the Serbs of southern Hungary not only welcomed the insurrection but began to associate their own future with the prospect of a sovereign Serbian state.<sup>17</sup> Gavriilo Kovačević, a Serb intellectual from Zemun (Semlin), dedicated a solemn poem to the insurrection, linking it with the 1389 Battle of Kosovo, while the leading Serbian intellectual, Dositej Obradović, wrote an ode which in time became the ideological hymn of the insurgents: "Rise up Serbia / our dear mother / to become again what you once were. / For you the Serbian children cry / and bravely they're fighting for you."<sup>18</sup> The ode made it clear that the insurrection had revived hopes for the liberation of Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro and other neighbouring lands, seas and islands.

Though referring to the restoration of the short-lived medieval Serbian empire of Stefan Dušan, which in the middle of the fourteenth century stretched from Belgrade to the Peloponnesus, Serbian intellectuals drafted

<sup>15</sup> R. Tričković, "Pismo travničkog vezira iz 1806. godine", *Politika*, Belgrade, 21 February 1965.

<sup>16</sup> For more, see *The Memoirs of Protos Matija Nenadović*, ed. and trans. Lovett F. Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

<sup>17</sup> A. Ivić, *Spisi bečkih arhiva o Prvom srpskom ustanku* (Belgrade: Srpska Kraljevska Akademija, 1937), vol. III, 349.

<sup>18</sup> J. D. Mitrović, *Istorija Srba* (Belgrade: Curo, 1993), 308.

territorial claims that were based on the modern concept of national identity defined by a common language, culture, religion and historical traditions.<sup>19</sup>

Considering language as central to the modern definition of national identity transcending religious affiliations, Dositej Obradović stressed that “the part of the world in which the Serbian language is employed is no smaller than the French or the English territory, if we disregard very small differences that occur in the pronunciation – and similar differences are found in all other languages ... When I write of peoples who live in these kingdoms and provinces, I mean the members both of the Greek [Eastern Orthodox] and of the Latin [Roman Catholic] Church and do not exclude even the Turks of Bosnia and Herzegovina [Bosnian Muslims], inasmuch as religion and faith can be changed, but race and language can never be.”<sup>20</sup>

The leading historians and linguists of Central Europe generally considered the Serbs, often labelled Illyrians or Slavo-Serbs, as the largest South Slavic group spread over most of the former Roman province of Illyricum in the central and western Balkans. Johann Christian von Engel, a leading authority from the turn of the century, described Serbs as a nation distributed from Istria and Dalmatia to Slavonia, including Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and even some parts of present-day Bulgaria, and sharing the same language, and hence, the same ethnic affiliation. Considering *kaikavian* to be the only genuinely Croatian dialect, von Engel quoted Dobrowski (1774) in order to point that some Renaissance writers had confused the Serbian language of Dalmatia with Croatian due to political ties.<sup>21</sup>

Relying on such assumptions, Count Sava Tekelija (1761–1842), the wealthiest Serbian notable in Hungary, printed a 2,000-copy edition of the *Geographic Map of Serbia, Bosnia, Dubrovnik, Montenegro and Neighbouring Regions* in Vienna (1805), in order to define the potential national claims of the Serbs. The first 500 copies were sent to the insurgent leadership in Serbia. Another Habsburg Serb, Georgije Mihaljević, edited the 1808 issue of the widely read *Almanac for every Serb* giving Karageorge's portrait the place of honour. A baroque portrait of the medieval Serbian Emperor Stefan Dušan, printed somewhere in Hungary, was distributed all over Ser-

<sup>19</sup> For the overall influence of Habsburg Serbs, see I. Banac, “The Role of Vojvodina in Karadjordje's Revolution,” *Südost-Forschungen* XL (Munich 1981), 31–61.

<sup>20</sup> D. Obradović, “Letter to Haralampije”, in *The Life and Adventures of Dimitrije Obradovic*, ed. and trans. G. R. Noyes (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1953), 135.

<sup>21</sup> J. C. von Engel, “Geschichte von Serwien und Bosnien”, *Geschichte des Ungarischen Reiches and sein Nebenländer* III (Halle, 1801), 144–145; M. Ekmečić, *Stvaranje Jugoslavije 1790–1918* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1989), vol. I, 48–49.

bia, southern Hungary and the Austrian Military Frontier (*Militärgrenze*). A former *Grenzer* officer, Nikola Stamatović, reproduced medieval Serbian coats of arms, including those of Serbia, Bosnia, Zeta (Montenegro), Herzegovina and Dalmatia, from Hristifor Žefarović's *Stemmatography* (1741), and distributed the prints.<sup>22</sup>

Although Russia was traditionally considered the main Serbian ally, some influential Habsburg Serbs, such as Count Sava Tekelija, turned to the French and Austrian rulers for their support for the restoration of Serbia, a state that would be the core of a larger political entity. Tekelija's memorandum of June 1804 to the newly-crowned Emperor Napoleon I proposed the creation of a vast Illyrian kingdom, i.e. of a large South Slavic state that would, under the auspices of France, encompass most of the Serb- and Slav-inhabited Balkan regions. A year later, a slightly revised version of the proposal was submitted to the Habsburg Emperor Francis I.<sup>23</sup>

According to Tekelija, the Illyrian kingdom, mostly comprising Serbs as the largest Slavic nation in the Balkans, would be a major contribution to the long-term stability of the region. Stretching from the Adriatic to the Black Sea, the kingdom would be a solid barrier to both Russia and Austria. For that reason, Europe should guarantee "a distinguished position and flourishing continuity" to the nation capable of providing that kind of stability: "Right now," Tekelija stressed in his memorandum to Napoleon I, "such a nation is rising its head and throwing off the yoke never to accept it again for any other domestic or foreign influence. It is the Serbian nation, or Serbians, if we take into account only those living in Serbia ... When, supported by Europe, they unite into a large Illyrian kingdom joining Bosnia, Bulgaria, Dalmatia, Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania, Dubrovnik, the Serb-inhabited areas of Hungary and Serbia, that kingdom will be a powerful barrier against those powers, namely Austria and Russia, that might attempt to establish their domination in the Balkans." In his memorandum to Francis I a year later (1805), however, Count Tekelija mentioned only Russia as a potential threat to the Balkans.<sup>24</sup>

The main obstacle to merging all these provinces into a single state, as argued by Count Tekelija in his memorandum to Napoleon I, would be religious differences and the backwardness of the population. But to Tekelija, the Revolutionary French example of surmounting religious barriers was a

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<sup>22</sup> H. Žefarović & T. Mesmer, *Stematografija. Izobraženije oružij Iliričeskib* (1741), ed. D. Davidov (Novi Sad: Galerija Matice srpske, 1972).

<sup>23</sup> S. Tekelija, *Opisanije života* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1966), 171-187, 379-396. Cf. also D. J. Popović, "Sava Tekelija prema Prvom srpskom ustanku", *Zbornik Matice srpske* 7 (Novi Sad, 1954), 118-125.

<sup>24</sup> S. Gavrilović, *Vojvodina i Srbija u vreme Prvog ustanka* (Novi Sad, 1974), 20-24.

ray of hope that “nationalism might foster the unification of the Serbs and abate religious fanaticism, excluding religious questions and highlighting only nationalism and fatherland”.<sup>25</sup>

In defining national identity, Count Tekelija followed the same pattern as Dositej Obradović. Summing up the eighteenth-century scholarly tradition of equating language with nationality, transcending religious affiliation, Obradović stressed: “Serbs from different kingdoms and provinces bear different names: they are Serbians in Serbia, Bosnians in Bosnia, Dalmatians in Dalmatia, Herzegovinians in Herzegovina and Montenegrins in Montenegro. Everywhere they speak the same [language], understand each other perfectly and easily, except for slight dialectal differences ... Even the simplest Serb from the Banat or Bačka [in present-day Vojvodina], when in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and in particular in Croatia, Slavonia or in Srem, finds himself in his own maternal language and nation, whether being of Eastern or Roman [Christian] rite.”<sup>26</sup>

Following the same pattern, Count Tekelija considered all the Serbian-speaking Slavic population of the Balkans as Serbs. His inclusion of the neighbouring provinces of Bulgaria and Albania was probably based on ethnic similarities in the case of Bulgaria, or on the assumption that some parts of northern Albania were inhabited by clans of mixed Serbian-Albanian origin.

While the enlightened Serbs from southern Hungary advocated a modern approach to the question of nation, based primarily on common culture and linguistic kinship, the Serbian church hierarchy, both in the Ottoman and Habsburg empires, had a narrower religious approach to the definition of national identity. Disillusioned with the Habsburgs, especially after the Treaty of Küçük-Kaynarca (1774), their obvious choice for an ally was imperial Russia. Although evoking medieval traditions, their projects for the restoration of a Serbian empire hinged on the vast territory in both the Ottoman and Habsburg empires that had been under the spiritual jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Peć until 1776 rather than on the boundaries of Stefan Dušan’s empire.

Various plans for the restoration of the Serbian state were designed throughout the eighteenth century. Under the circumstances, they sought support either from the Habsburg or the Russian empire. The earliest project is dated 1736/7: Patriarch Arsenije IV Jovanović Šakabenta envisaged “Illyria” as a large autonomous state within the Habsburg realm comprising Serbia, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Herzegovina and Albania. Its political status was

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> D. Obradović, *Prvenac* (Belgrade, 1811).

to be similar to that of Hungary, with its own government, army, nobility, churches and schools. The “Illyrian-Rascian nation” (i.e. Serbs) would be governed by a patriarch as “supreme ruler”, while ecclesiastical affairs would remain under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate at Constantinople.<sup>27</sup>

Of several projects elaborated in Montenegro, an ambitious one, designed by Prince-Bishop Vasilije Petrović Njegoš in 1782, envisaged the restoration of the medieval Serbian state comprising Bosnia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Upper Albania, Dalmatia, Banat and Slavonia. In 1798 the envoy of Montenegrin Prince-Bishop Petar I Savo Ljubiša went to Russia to present a similar project for a “kingdom of Old Rascia”, large enough to supply as many as 200,000 soldiers. Based on a seventeenth-century plan of Count George Branković, the project, as described by Ljubiša, was further elaborated with some Greek prelates.<sup>28</sup> Yet another proposal for creating a large “Slavic-Serb empire” that would be under Russian protection and ruled by a Russian prince was submitted to the Russian court in 1803 by the Archimandrite of the Monastery of Morača in Herzegovina (today in Montenegro), Arsenije Gagović, most likely following his consultations with Stefan Stratimirović, Serbian Metropolitan of Sremski Karlovci (Carlowitz).<sup>29</sup>

Metropolitan Stratimirović’s confidential memorandum of June 1804 sent to Russian Emperor Alexander I formulated an ambitious plan for re-establishing a large Serbian state that, in addition to the Ottoman-held provinces (Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Herzegovina), would also encompass the Austrian-held territories: Srem, the Gulf of Cattaro (*Boka Kotorska*) and much of Dalmatia up to the city of Šibenik. The newly-established Serbian state would be an independent monarchy ruled by a member of the Russian imperial family. In 1804 the Serbian Bishop of Bačka, Jovan Jovanović, had on his own initiative sent a petition to the Russian Metropolitan, stressing that the Serbs, an Orthodox nation with traditions of their own, were suffering and expecting help from their Orthodox brethren.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> S. Gavrilović, “Srpski nacionalni program patrijarha Arsenija IV Jovanovića Šakabente iz 1736/7. godine”, *Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju* 44 (Novi Sad, 1991), 39–48.

<sup>28</sup> D. Vuksan, *Petar I Petrović Njegoš i njegovo doba* (Cetinje, 1951), 85–87; S. Gavrilović, *Gradnja bečkih arhiva o Prvom srpskom ustanku (1804–1810)*, (Belgrade: SANU, 1985), vol. I, 45.

<sup>29</sup> D. Pantelić, *Beogradski pašaluk pred Prvi srpski ustanak (1794–1804)*, (Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka, 1949), 367–388.

<sup>30</sup> D. Djordjević, *Révolutions nationales des peuples balkaniques 1804–1914* (Belgrade: Institut d’histoire, 1965), 18–19. For more details, see St. Dimitrijević, *Stevana Stratimirovića mitropolita karlovačkog plan za oslobodjenje srpskog naroda* (Belgrade, 1926).

*The Habsburg Serbs' response to the Serbian Revolution*

Although highly unrealistic, such political claims were not merely artificial projects with strong historic references. They were soon justified by political upheaval among Serbs in both the Ottoman and Habsburg empires. According to French reports, as early as 1805 songs about Karageorge as *héros libérateur* could be heard in Dalmatia, where the very notion of freedom was associated with his name. The Serbian uprising strongly echoed throughout the Balkans, far beyond the borders of the *pashalik* of Belgrade. A significant stir was observed in the Habsburg Empire – among the Serbs in the Srem and Banat regions of southern Hungary and the Serb soldiers from the Military Frontier surrounding the European Ottoman possessions as a belt stretching along the Sava River, around Bosnia and Dalmatia.

The Austrian authorities registered that south-Hungarian Serbs – from peasants and army officers to priests, teachers and lawyers – were massively crossing into Serbia to join the insurgents. From their ranks the leadership of the uprising got not only capable and highly motivated volunteers, but also its first diplomats, ministers and school teachers. The first Minister of Education of insurgent Serbia was Dositej Obradović, the central figure of the Serbian Enlightenment. During the initial phase of the insurrection, with tacit approval of the local authorities, Serbian traders from the southernmost region of the Habsburg Empire (Srem, Banat, Bačka) supplied the insurgents with arms and ammunition. The chief coordinator of all the efforts to provide financial support and military supplies for Karageorge's troops, the supreme leader (*vrhovni vožd*) of the Serbian revolution, was Metropolitan Stevan Stratimirović, the spiritual leader of Christian Orthodox Serbs in the Habsburg Monarchy. After the first victories of the insurgents, a significant number of experienced Serbian officers and soldiers arrived in Serbia as volunteers from predominantly Serb-inhabited regions of the Austrian Military Frontier (Slavonia-Srem military district).

As early as April 1807, the Habsburg military commander of Zagreb was very upset about the fact that Orthodox Christians (i.e. Serbs) were spreading the news of Karageorge's great victories across all of the Military Frontier, and reported that the entire population was enthusiastic about the idea of freedom won by the insurgents in Serbia.<sup>31</sup> The number of volunteers from the Military Frontier joining Serbian troops rose to 515 in 1807, including 188 coming from regular Habsburg regiments. Many

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<sup>31</sup> F. Šišić, "Karadjordje, Južni Sloveni i Napoleonova Ilirija," in P. S. Petrović, *Karadjordje. Život i delo* (Belgrade: Narodno delo, 1923), 55-56.

others, as reported by worried Austrian officials, came to Serbia even from Dalmatia.<sup>32</sup>

The first direct effect of the Serbian uprising were two short-lived rebellions of Serbian peasants in what is today Vojvodina (1807 in Srem, and 1808 in the Banat), both striving for national and social liberation. In a memorandum sent to the Russian Emperor prior to the revolt, the Serbs of Srem stressed the intention, shared by their compatriots in the Banat, to liberate themselves “from the German [Habsburg] yoke”. Count Sava Tekelija’s map in their headquarters showed the lands that should be liberated and united with Serbia. The local Austrian commanders had no doubts that the Serbs, should they obtain their own dynasty, would do everything it takes to restore Stefan Dušan’s empire. During the short-lived uprising in Banat, its leader, the priest Dimitrije Georgijević, repeated to his followers that the main goal is the restoration of Stefan Dušan’s empire. The commander of Serbian border troops on the opposite side of the Danube, Petar Dobrnjac, invited the Banat Wallachians to rise and join the Serbs, appealing to religious solidarity against foreign (Habsburg) rule, as harsh as that of the Ottomans. The obvious coordination of military efforts of Serbian insurgents in Serbia and the Banat compelled Austrian officials to ban, at least for a while, the distribution of Serbian books in the Habsburg areas bordering with Serbia.<sup>33</sup>

Struggling for the restoration of their own privileges within the Ottoman system in the early stage of the uprising in Serbia (1804–1806), the insurgents issued modest political demands. Claiming limited autonomy from Sultan Selim III, they also offered that Serbia be placed under the protection of Austria and Russia. During the second phase of the insurrection (late 1806 – early 1807), Serbian insurgents, encouraged by the Russians whose army reached the Serbian border on the Danube after they had entered into a new war against Ottomans, openly proclaimed their demand for independence. It was in 1807 that, ordered to supply troops for the Sultan’s war against Russia, *knez* Sima Marković, president of the *Praviteljstvujušči Sovjet*, declared: “Serbia considers herself as an independent state, she does not accept to pay any tribute nor will she raise arms against her brothers in faith and allies.”<sup>34</sup> It was in 1807 that Karageorge invited all the Christians from Albania, Rumelia and Bulgaria to rise to arms and join the Serbians.

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Ž. Sečanski, *Gradja o Ticanovoj buni u Sremu 1807. godine* (Belgrade, 1952); S. Gavrilović, “Dokumenta Karlovačkog arhiva o Krušičkoj buni 1808”, *Zbornik Matice Srpske. Serija društvenih nauka* (Novi Sad, 1956), 76–87; Gavrilović, *Vojvodina i Srbija*, 63–115, 130–133.

<sup>34</sup> M. Vukićević, *Karadžordje* (Belgrade, 1912), vol. II, 476.

The Serbian leader sent, in addition to his proclamation to these provinces, a standard for each of them.<sup>35</sup> Encouraged by military successes, the leaders of the Serbian Revolution were seeking wider Balkan support for their struggle against Ottoman domination.

Bitterly disappointed by both Austrian hesitations and Russia's attempts to take full control of the Serbian insurrection in pursuit of her own ends, Karageorge pinned all his hopes on a possible alliance with France. Having taken Dalmatia and established the Illyrian provinces stretching from Ljubljana in the Slovene Alps all the way down to the coastal town of Dubrovnik, the French considered Bosnia as the key Ottoman province for transport of their goods towards Anatolia during the continental blockade, while Serbia, under Russian influence, was considered a possible threat to their global interests. It was in 1809, however, following heavy defeats on several fronts, that Karageorge offered Napoleon to take Šabac, a strategic Serbian town on the border with Bosnia, and help the insurgents to negotiate a new status for Serbia with the Sublime Porte.<sup>36</sup>

In 1810, through his special envoy to Paris, Captain Rade Vučinić from the Military Frontier town of Karlovac (Karlstadt), Karageorge proposed to Napoleon the unification into a large French-protected state of Serbia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, the Illyrian provinces stretching from Ljubljana to Dubrovnik (including Dalmatia with Dubrovnik, portions of present-day Croatia and Slovenia) and the Serb-inhabited lands under Habsburg rule (Banat, Srem, Slavonia), including, if possible, the kindred Bulgarian people. Napoleon could not accept his offer as it would have endangered the territorial integrity of his ally, the Ottoman Empire, but suggested to the French consul in Bucharest to cooperate with the Serbs. This proposal, although not viable, clearly showed that Karageorge saw French support as the only way out of both the Russian and Austrian orbits. However, it cannot be ruled out that Napoleon reorganized the French possessions in Dalmatia, Krajina and Slovenia into the Illyrian provinces (1809–14) in order to counterbalance the Serbian insurrection, seen in Paris as an important instrument of Russian influence in the Balkans.<sup>37</sup>

Disappointed with French reluctance to support the insurrection, the Serbs had to turn to Russia once again. Karageorge's other option, an alliance with the Habsburgs, became impracticable with Serbia, mostly for

<sup>35</sup> M. Gavrilović, *Ispisi iz Pariskih arhiva* (Belgrade: Srpska Kraljevska Akademija, 1904), 143.

<sup>36</sup> For more details, see D. T. Bataković, "La France et la Serbie 1804–1813", *Balcanica* XXIX (Belgrade, 1998), 117–157.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. D. Roksandić, *Vojna Hrvatska. La Croatie militaire. Krajiško društvo u Francuskom carstvu (1809–1813)*, (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1988), vol. I, 151–153.

military reasons, remaining attached to Russia's Balkan campaigns. Abandoned by Russia after the 1812 Treaty of Bucharest, the Serbs, while expressing readiness to accept a semi-independent status similar to that of the Danubian Principalities (Wallachia and Moldavia), rejected the proposal of more limited autonomy: "We do not recognize clauses of the [Ottoman] treaty with Russia [in Bucharest]. We demand our independent state and we do not accept any other solution."<sup>38</sup>

Lacking external support, the Serbian revolution was brutally crushed by regular Ottoman troops in the autumn of 1813. Some 100,000 Serbs, including Karageorge and most other insurgent leaders, crossed the Sava and the Danube to seek refuge in the Habsburg Monarchy.

### *The impact on Bosnia, Bulgaria and Greece*

The Serbian uprising also had a strong impact on the Christian Orthodox Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina. According to some statistics, the population of Christian Orthodox Serbs there was probably even larger than in rebelled Serbia itself.<sup>39</sup> As early as 1803, secret talks were conducted in Sarajevo on a possible joint uprising by the Serbs in Bosnia, Herzegovina and Serbia. In the summer of 1804, songs were sung in Bosnia about Karageorge's heroic deeds and numerous volunteers kept crossing into Serbia.<sup>40</sup>

The resounding victory of 12,000 Serbians over the powerful 20,000-strong army of Bosnian beys at the Battle of Mišar in 1806 raised hopes among Serbian peasants in Bosnia that Ottoman rule might be replaced by that of Karageorge's Serbia. The victory at Mišar was perceived as the first major victory of the Serbian *raya* over Ottoman troops. A Serbian Orthodox priest from Prijedor wrote the following: "I was patiently bearing the Turkish yoke, as all other Orthodox Christians, hoping that Karageorge will liberate us and put us under his protection."<sup>41</sup> As observed by a French traveller, the Serbian insurrection was the main reason for resolute and more effective defence of Serbian peasants from Muslim violence.<sup>42</sup> A Serbian

<sup>38</sup> S. Hadzihuseinović-Muvvekit, *Tarih-i Bosna*, quoted in Ekmečić, *Stvaranje Jugoslavije*, 157.

<sup>39</sup> Ekmečić (*Stvaranje Jugoslavije*, 77) quotes a statistics estimating the overall population of Bosnia and Herzegovina as high as 1,3 million inhabitants.

<sup>40</sup> D. T. Bataković, *The Serbs of Bosnia & Herzegovina. History and Politics* (Paris: Dialogue, 1996), 42-43.

<sup>41</sup> J. Tošković, *Odnosi između Bosne i Srbije 1804-1806 i boj na Mišaru* (Subotica, 1927), 72.

<sup>42</sup> M. Šamić, *Francuski putnici u Bosni i Hercegovini na pragu XIX stoljeća i njihovi utisci o njoj* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1966), 206.

bard from eastern Bosnia, Filip Višnjić, in a contemporary epic song on the insurrection summed up the expectations of the Bosnian Serbs: “Drina water, thou noble boundary / betwixt Bosnia, betwixt Serbia / soon the time will come / when I shall cross thee and into Bosnia come.”<sup>43</sup>

Two Serbian revolts broke out in Bosnia, both eventually crushed by the regular Ottoman army and Bosnian Muslim forces. The first broke out in 1807, after the Serbian insurgents crossed the Drina border into eastern Bosnia, while the second, of a larger scope, took place in the northwest of the Bosnian Krajina in 1809, led by Jovan Jančić, a gunsmith from Sarajevo, who had for three years smuggled arms from the Military Frontier in order to arm all Serb-inhabited districts between the Una and Bosna rivers. Supported by Bishop Benedikt Kraljević, Jančić had negotiated about the revolt successively with Serbia, Russia and the French in Dalmatia, but an incident in Banja Luka precipitated its beginning. The revolt soon failed due to the lack of coordination between insurgent units.<sup>44</sup>

Deprived of external military support after the Treaty of Pressburg, Serbian leaders assembled at Smederevo and decided to invite not only Serbs, but other Balkan Christians as well to join them in their struggle against the Ottomans. There was a significant stir in different regions of Slavic Macedonia, while in Bulgaria, particularly in the area of Vidin and Belogradčik, bordering with Serbia along the Danube, Serbian proposals incited movements and occasional revolts of the otherwise passive peasant population. In 1805, a Greek *armatol* leader Nikotsaras prepared his units to support Karageorge, crossing almost the whole of the Balkans from Mount Olympus in mainland Greece to Danube,<sup>45</sup> while in Salonika, already in 1806, a French consul has reported to Paris that, due to the Serbian revolution, many Slav peasants and Greek merchants were arrested under the suspicion of supporting Serbian insurgents.<sup>46</sup> From 1806 the Greek *klephtes* in northern Macedonia and *armatoloi* in central and eastern parts of present-day Greece were encouraged by both the Serbian insurrection and Russian actions in the Aegean in their renewed efforts to organize systematic resistance to the Ottomans.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Bataković, *The Serbs of Bosnia & Herzegovina*, 45.

<sup>44</sup> V. Čubrilović, *Prvi srpski ustanak i bosanski Srbi* (Belgrade: Geca Kon, 1939), 115-125.

<sup>45</sup> M. Lascaris, “Le rôle des Grecs dans l’insurrection serbe sous le Karageorge,” in *Les Balkans* (Paris, 1933), 11-12.

<sup>46</sup> C. A. Vacalopoulos, *La Macédoine vue en début du XIX siècle par les consuls européens de Thessalonique* (Thessaloniki, 1980), 65.

<sup>47</sup> D. Djordjevic, “The Impact of the First Serbian Uprising on the Balkan Peoples”, in W. Vucinich, ed., *The First Serbian Uprising 1804-1813*, 368-369.

In parallel, in the course of 1806 the Serbian supreme leader armed 5,000 Bulgarians willing to join the struggle against the Ottomans. In 1807, 800 of the 4,000 Bulgarians that came to Serbia immediately joined the Serbian troops.<sup>48</sup> The rebel forces also included a number of Greeks, Bulgarians, Wallachians and Tzintzars (Hellenized Vlachs), most of whom had fought in the ranks of the Russian army during the Russo-Ottoman War. On several occasions Bulgarian envoys from Wallachia requested Serbian assistance for their plans against the Ottomans, while the Serbian example inspired future Greek insurgents in many ways. The first historian of the Serbian revolution was a Greek, Triantafillos Doukas, whose *History of Slavo-Serbs* was published in Budapest as early as 1807. Poetic expression of the Balkan-wide impact of the Serbian Revolution was highlighted in the following verses: “In the army of the Serbian people / Many had joined who did not know each other / For from all parts they gathered / Bulgars as many, Vlachs and Greeks...”<sup>49</sup>

After the initial victories of the Serbian insurgents in 1804, Prince Constantine Ypsilanti of Wallachia, encouraged by the Russian foreign minister Count Adam Czartoryski, developed some federalist ideas about the creation of a large Balkan Christian state that would be ruled by his family. In support of Karageorge, he sent arms, supplies and even a small military unit to Serbia, while most of the Romanian boyars openly expressed their expectations of Serbia’s secession “from the Ottoman Empire”.<sup>50</sup>

The historical importance of the 1804–13 Serbian revolution – which, overshadowed by the Napoleonic wars, attracted little attention in Europe – was manifold. For the Balkan nations it was a French revolution adapted to local conditions: the principle of popular sovereignty was opposed to the principle of legitimism; a new society was created in which, due to the lack of the aristocracy and well-established middle classes, agrarian egalitarianism was combined with the emerging aspirations of a modern nation.

The legacy of the Serbian Revolution had a far-reaching effect: after 1813 and throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Belgrade remained an undisputed Piedmont-type political centre, and not only for the Serbs, dispersed in the neighbouring provinces of the Ottoman and Habsburg empires, but also for most South Slavic ethnic groups. Having in

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<sup>48</sup> V. Stojančević, “Prvi srpski ustanak prema Bugarskoj i Bugarima”, *Istorijski glasnik* 1-2 (Belgrade, 1954), 121–145.

<sup>49</sup> Djordjevic, “The Impact”, 381.

<sup>50</sup> V. Georgescu, *Political Ideas and the Enlightenment in the Romanian Principalities (1750–1831)*, (Boulder East European Monographs, 1971), 170.

mind its long-term effects on the political and social landscape of the whole region, the eminent German historian Leopold von Ranke described the 1804–13 Serbian insurrection, by analogy with the French example, as the *Serbian Revolution*.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> L. von Ranke, *History of Servia and the Servian Revolution* (London: Benn, 1848).