

MEMOARI VUKAŠINA J. PETROVIĆA [MEMOIRS OF VUKAŠIN J. PETROVIĆ]. BELGRADE:
SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS, 2009, pp. 240.

Reviewed by Aleksandra Kolaković*

The Department of Historical Sciences of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, presided by Vasilije Krestić, published the memoirs of Vukašin J. Petrović (1847–1924), a distinguished Serbian statesman and finance expert of Jewish origin. His contemporaries never questioned his expertise, but thought of him as being an “Austrian man”.¹ Close to King Milan (Prince 1872–1882, King 1882–1889) who pursued an Austrophile policy, and well-received in Vienna and Berlin after the First World War, Petrović was tried for treason and acquitted. The main body of the book consists of two parts: “Memoirs of Vukašin J. Petrović”, and “Supplements to the memoirs of Vukašin J. Petrović”. An informative text by Slobodan Turlakov, who prepared the manuscript for publication, is added at the end of the book, as well as a very useful index of personal names.

Having graduated from Belgrade’s Great School, Vukašin Petrović continued his education in Vienna, Berlin and Heidelberg.² While in Germany, he be-

came close to Jovan Ristić,³ and it was through this acquaintance that he began a career in the civil service. In 1870 he was appointed to a clerical post in the Ministry of Interior. He was also the editor of the newspaper *Jedinstvo* (Unity).⁴ He

340–341; *Enciklopedija srpskog naroda* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2008), 827.

³ Jovan Ristić (1831–1899), a statesman, historian and member of the Royal Serbian Academy; founding member and leader of the Liberal Party. Under Prince Michael (Mihailo) Obrenović, he was appointed secretary of the government delegation to Constantinople (1860). As Serbia’s representative to the Ottoman Porte (1861–67), he negotiated the withdrawal of the last six Ottoman garrisons from Serbia in 1867. He influenced the adoption of the Constitution of 1869. During the Serbian-Ottoman wars (1876–78) he served as minister of foreign affairs, and in their wake, took part in the Congress of Berlin in 1878 under the provisions of which Serbia was internationally recognized as a sovereign state. He served as regent for two minor kings, Milan Obrenović (1868–72) and Alexander Obrenović (1889–93), and four times as prime minister (1867, 1873, 1878–80 and 1887). He was a moderate Liberal and an advocate of individual ministerial responsibility, judicial independence, freedom of the press, a strong government, and a well-organized legislature. For his equilibristic foreign policy he was considered both an Austrophile and a Russophile. He wrote a three-volume book on Serbia’s foreign policy and a two-volume diplomatic history of Serbia during her wars of independence (1875–78). For general information, see *Enciklopedija srpskog naroda*, 954.

⁴ *Jedinstvo*, a semi-official daily of the Serbian government (1868–73); published articles on foreign policy and reports from Serb-inhabited areas outside Serbia. It

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¹ According to the notes of the prominent Serbian intellectual and politician Jovan Žujović (1856–1936), kept in the Archives of Serbia (JŽ-91, Audience with King Alexander Obrenović, 13 Dec. 1893), Žujović described Petrović as a brilliant parliamentary orator, but unacceptable on account of being an “Austrian man”. He corroborated his view by ex-King Milan’s alleged claim that Petrović was not simply an Austrophile, but “considered to be a paid Austrian servant”.

² S. Stanojević, *Narodna enciklopedija srpsko-hrvatsko-slovenačka*, vol. 3 (Zagreb 1928),

entered the circles close to King Milan quite early and after the 1885 war with Bulgaria became some sort of his advisor, and purportedly his “trusted confidant and an ardent Austrophile”. Even though closer to the Progressives from the 1880s, he collaborated with Jovan Ristić for over a decade. Widely esteemed by his contemporaries as Serbia’s greatest finance expert, he served as finance minister in the governments of Milutin Garašanin (1885–87),⁵ Svetomir Nikolajević (1894),⁶ Nikola Hristić (1894–95)⁷ and Vladan Djordjević (1898–1900).⁸ During his terms as minister, he drew up several financial laws (on direct taxation, on tobacco monopoly, on fiscal administration, on fiscal committees), and sat on

stood out for a very good literary column, but also for Vladan Djordjević’s attacks on the socialist Svetozar Marković. For general information, see *Enciklopedija srpskog naroda*, 445.

⁵ Milutin Garašanin (1843–1898), a politician, founder and leader of the Popular Party, a contributor to the magazine *Videlo* (Beacon); served as Serbia’s minister to Austria-Hungary (1883), minister of foreign affairs and prime minister (1884–86), minister of interior (1886–87); towards the end of his life, served as head of the Serbian diplomatic mission in Paris (1894–95), and as president of the National Assembly of the Kingdom of Serbia.

⁶ Svetomir Nikolajević (1844–1922), a writer, Great School professor, member of the Royal Serbian Academy; served as interior minister and prime minister (1894).

⁷ Nikola Hristić (1818–1911), a politician; served as interior minister (1860), and prime minister (1860–61, 1883–84, 1888–89, 1894–95).

⁸ Vladan Djordjević (1844–1930), a surgeon, army colonel and founder of the Serbian medical corps; served as minister of the economy (1888–89), prime minister (1897–1900), and head of the Serbian legations in Constantinople and Athens.

the committee in charge of preparing the law on agricultural cooperatives (1898). He served as acting prime minister at the time of the failed assassination of ex-King Milan (1899), and the engagement of King Alexander Obrenović to Draga Mašin (1900). After King Alexander’s engagement, he resigned along with the entire cabinet of Vladan Djordjević. In 1906 there were attempts to return him to politics so that he might form a government that would be capable of settling the difficult issues in Serbia’s relations with Austria. Together with his brother Nikola, he published the *Source Materials for the History of the Kingdom of Serbia* in two volumes (1882), and he left behind the manuscript of his memoirs, which is kept in the Archives of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

The first part of the book, “Memoirs of Vukašin J. Petrović”, comprises eleven chapters. His account combines personal observations, events from his private life and events relating to Serbia’s political life in the last decades of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. He begins by recollecting his student days in Germany, his first encounter and subsequent collaboration with Jovan Ristić. The account of his activity relating to the newspaper *Jedinstvo* is followed by a description of his situation after the fall of Ristić’s government in 1873 and his resignation from the civil service. With Ristić as the most influential member of the cabinet formed in 1875 by Stevča Mihailović, Petrović was appointed to a clerical post in the Police Department of the Ministry of Interior. His closeness to Ristić meant an opportunity for him to take part in state affairs during Serbia’s wars of independence, when he was awarded the Order of the Takovo Cross 4th Class. Formally, Petrović was not a member of a political party. However, he claims that he demanded that his name be removed from the list of the Liberal Party after his clash with Jovan Ristić, who called

him a total zero. From then on he began collaboration with the Progressive Party without becoming a member, and served as finance minister in Milutin Garašanin's cabinet in 1885. As finance minister in the cabinets of Nikolajević, Hristić and Djordjević, and as the acting prime minister at the time of the failed assassination of former King Milan in 1899, he was in a position to witness or influence the course of some of the most important events in the history of Serbia. His memoirs offer his observations, as well as his views on some issues of relevance to Serbia's finances, such as the crash of Bontoux's Union Générale in 1882.⁹

Apart from financial issues, Petrović's memoirs provide his portrayal of character traits of a number of politicians, and abound in information concerning their private life. Especially interesting are the sections describing his encounters with the Austrian politician Benjamin von Kalláy¹⁰ and the German chancellor Bismarck. He also presents what information he had on the conspiracy that ended in the assassination of King Alexander and Queen Draga in 1903 and the accession of King Peter I Karadjordjević to the throne of Serbia. Quite interesting is his brief description of how he met some of the conspirators in Vienna, including their

leader, Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis. He also recollects the failed attempt, made at the insistence of King Peter, to form a government that would find a way to ease tensions between Serbia and Austria-Hungary over the so-called "cannon affair". The last chapters are devoted to an account of his situation in occupied Serbia during the First World War, and to the trial he was put on for treason and collaboration with the occupying force.

The second part of the book, "Supplements to the memoirs of Vukašin J. Petrović", subtitled "My defences (1886–87, 1896 and 1920)", is organized into thirteen wholes containing Petrović's perspective on the most important events in his personal life and career, and his reminiscences about prominent figures of Serbian politics and his own relationship with them. Accounts of the attacks in parliament and in court in 1886 and 1887, his resignation as minister in 1895, his recollections of the relationship, in the course of 1897, between King Alexander and prime minister Djordjević, Petrović's friend since their student days, and of Djordjević's cabinet, are an invaluable source for the history of political life in Serbia under the last Obrenovići. Petrović takes a look at the failed assassination of ex-King Milan in 1899, and at the ensuing persecution of the Radicals.

Two parts of the Supplements concern the issue of King Alexander's prospective marriage to Draga Mašin. In 1900, at the time the King was setting the stage for announcing his engagement, Petrović was the acting prime minister, and therefore in communication with the King, as can be seen from his account of the conversations he had with the King. He also left behind his correspondence with the prime minister (Djordjević), who was out of the country at the time. Petrović pays particular attention to his relationship with Nikola Pašić, a prominent politician and leader of the Radical

⁹ The cabinet of Milan Piroćanac concluded in 1881 a contract with Bontoux's investment bank concerning the construction and exploitation of the Belgrade–Vranje railway. The bank's bankruptcy a year later caused one of the greatest scandals in Serbia's modern history and threatened the country's finances.

¹⁰ Benjamin von Kalláy (1839–1903), consul-general of Austria-Hungary in Belgrade (1868–75), subsequently the administrator of Bosnia-Herzegovina (1882–1903), known for promoting the creation of a Bosniak nation; wrote a history of the Serbs (1877), but forbade its distribution in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Party. In the sections titled “Relationship with Pašić 1904” and “Pašić and I (26 Oct. to 22 Nov. 1912)”, he accounts their conversations, and brings his correspondence with Djordje Genčić and a few quotations from the Serbian and German press.

Now available to the general public, the memoirs of Vukašin Petrović are an invaluable contribution to the publication of the sources for the history of the reigns of two last Obrenovićs, King Milan and his son, King Alexander. Of course, historians need to be cautious when dealing with memoirs, and for more than one reason. The inevitable issue of the authors’ objectivity set aside, their frequently frag-

mentary narrative tends to paint an incomplete picture of events and persons. In this particular case, the supplements contribute to a greater clarity and completeness of the body text. The relevance of Vukašin Petrović’s career as a statesman and his acquaintance and collaboration with the most prominent political figures of Serbia and Austria-Hungary make such drawbacks appear less important. The memoirs of Vukašin Petrović should be considered an unavoidable source for the history of political and social life of the Kingdom of Serbia in the last decades of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

PHILIPPE GELEZ, *SAFVET-BEG BAŠAGIĆ (1870–1934). AUX RACINES INTELLECTUELLES DE LA PENSÉE NATIONALE CHEZ LES MUSULMANS DE BOSNIE-HERZÉGOVINE*. ATHENS: ÉCOLE FRANÇAISE D’ATHÈNES, MONDES MÉDITERRANÉENS ET BALKANIQUES, 2010, pp. 807.

Reviewed by Veljko Stanić*

The book presented here originates from a doctoral thesis defended at Paris Sorbonne University (Paris IV) in 2006. Its author, Philippe Gelez, a former fellow of the French School in Athens, has been assistant professor at the Paris Sorbonne University Department for Slavic Studies since 2010. His main area of interest is the past of Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially its Islamic component. With the biography of Safvet-bey Bašagić, he joined the ranks of modern French Balkan studies scholars.

Safvet-bey Bašagić (1870–1934) belongs to the circle of Muslim intellectuals of Bosnia-Herzegovina of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries championing a Bosniak nation. A poet, translator, literary historian and Oriental studies scholar, Bašagić is also a politician whose activity coincides with the last years of the Austro-Hungarian administration of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Moreover, Bašagić sees Austria-Hungary as an unavoidable patron of the Bosnian Muslims in the process of modernization, opening to Europe and an understanding between East and West. Not fully accepted in Bašagić’s lifetime, his work has seen an exuberant revival in the last few decades, and notably so since 1992.

Gelez offers an exhaustive biographical account applying the classical chronological approach. Despite its extensiveness, it is systematically and readably structured, and very well written. The book is organized into three large parts: *Aux origines de la pensée de Bašagić: racines familiales et formation intellectuelle (1596–1890)*; *Nationalisme et orientalisme chez Safvet-beg Bašagić (1890–1906)*; *Kultur et politique chez Safvet-beg Bašagić (1907–1934)*, each comprising several chapters. Apart from

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