

UDC 930.85(4-12)

ISSN 0350-7653  
eISSN 2406-0801

SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS  
INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

# BALCANICA

## XLVIII

ANNUAL OF THE INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

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BELGRADE  
2017



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<https://doi.org/10.2298/BALC1748191B>

UDC 94(497.11)"1914/1918"

321.727:929 Карађорђевић А. I

*Original scholarly work*

<http://www.balcanica.rs>

## Regent Alexander Karadjordjević in the First World War

**Abstract:** This paper analyses the role played by Regent Alexander Karadjordjević in Serbia's politics and military effort during the First World War. He assumed the position of an heir-apparent somewhat suddenly in 1909, and then regency, after a political crisis that made his father King Peter I transfer his royal powers to Prince Alexander just days before the outbreak of the war. At the age of twenty-six, Alexander was going to lead his people and army through unprecedented horrors. The young Regent proved to be a proper soldier, who suffered personally, along with his troops, the agonising retreat through Albania in late 1915 and early 1916, and spared no effort to ensure the supplies for the exhausted rank and file of the army. He also proved to be a ruler of great personal ambitions and lack of regard for constitutional boundaries of his position. Alexander tried to be not just a formal commander-in-chief of his army, but also to take over operational command; he would eventually manage to appoint officers to his liking to the positions of the Chief of Staff and Army Minister. He also wanted to remove Nikola Pašić from premiership and facilitate the formation of a cabinet amenable to his wishes, but he did not proceed with this, as the Entente Powers supported the Prime Minister. Instead, Alexander joined forces with Pašić to eliminate the Black Hand organization, a group of officers hostile both to him and the Prime Minister, in the well-known show trial in Salonika in 1917. The victories of the Serbian army in 1918 at the Salonika front led to the liberation of Serbia and the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia), while Alexander emerged as the most powerful political factor in the new state.

**Keywords:** Regent Alexander Karadjordjević, Serbia, First World War

General works on Serbia in the First World War naturally bring plenty of material concerning the attitude and activities of Prince Regent Alexander Karadjordjević (King of Yugoslavia after 1921),<sup>1</sup> but there is a lack of studies that attempt to examine this subject in its own right. The exception is the first volume of Branislav Gligorijević's biography of Alexander that covers the time of the Great War, but this three-volume work must be read with an eye to its somewhat hagiographic nature.<sup>2</sup> For that reason, this paper seeks to focus on the

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Andrej Mitrović, *Srbija u Prvom svetskom ratu* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1984); for a shortened English edition of this book see *Serbia's Great War, 1914–1918* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2007); also Mihailo Vojvodić and Dragoljub Živojinović, eds., *Veliki rat Srbije* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1970); Dušan Bataković, *Srbija i Balkan: Albanija, Bugarska i Grčka 1914–1918* (Novi Sad: Prometej, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Branislav Gligorijević, *Kralj Aleksandar Karadjordjević*, 2nd ed., 3 vols (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2010), vol. I: *U ratovima za nacionalno oslobođenje*; see also from the same author

Regent and offer an assessment of his contribution and role within the Serbian government during the most trying period in the history of Serbia. In order to do so, it is necessary to look back at the circumstances in which Alexander rose to the position of Regent because that was not his birthright and because these circumstances had a lasting effect on the power structure in war-torn Serbia. In mid-1903, a group of officers carried out a coup d'état in Serbia that saw the assassination of King Alexander and Queen Draga, the last rulers of the Obrenović dynasty. Following the so-called May overthrow, Prince Peter Kardjordjević, the grandson of Karadjordje, the leader of the First Serbian Uprising against the Ottoman Turks in 1804, was elected a new king. This was the end of a century-long rivalry between the supporters of the Obrenović and Karadjordjević dynasties. It was also the outset of a new era in Serbia's internal political life and foreign affairs. Domestically, parliamentary democracy was firmly established and Nikola Pašić and his People's Radical Party emerged as a leading political force in the country. The new regime also pursued a more assertive foreign policy, the main object of which was to secure the liberation of the historic Serbian provinces in the south, and Bosnia-Herzegovina with the relative majority of Serb population in the west, both under the yoke of the Ottoman Empire. The annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina on the part of Austria-Hungary in 1908 was a marked setback which the Serbian government had to accept under duress. The shadow of the military conspiracy of 1903, however, remained cast over Serbia throughout the following decade not just on account of her tarnished reputation, but also because the plotters assumed control of the army and interfered with the political establishment. In time, Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijević-Apis emerged as the moving spirit of the conspirators through the sheer strength of his charismatic personality and extraordinary energy. King Peter was indebted to this group of officers for his crown and susceptible to their influence, although he otherwise respected the bounds of parliamentary monarchy in the exercise of his royal duties. He had three children who survived infancy, daughter Helen (Jelena), who later married the Russian Grand Duke Ivan Konstantinovich, and sons George (Djordje) and Alexander (Aleksandar). The eldest son George was thus the heir apparent, but he was mentally unstable and responsible for a series of incidents that scandalized public opinion. Alexander was sent to St. Petersburg, where he attended the prestigious Page Corps under the protection of the Russian Emperor Nicholas II Romanov. But following a particularly nasty incident committed by his older brother in which his servant passed away, there was a wave of public fury and Prince George had to relinquish his right to the throne. The fate thus brought Alexander out of the shadow and placed him at the centre

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"King Alexander I Karadjordjević", in Peter Radan and Aleksandar Pavković, eds., *The Serbs and their Leaders in the Twentieth Century* (Hants: Ashgate, 1997), 140–157.

stage of political life in Serbia as he became Crown Prince in 1909 at the age of twenty-one and without having completed his education.

Alexander was sympathetic to the patriotic zeal of his officers and shared their national aspirations. The most determined among them, who belonged to the group of Apis's plotters, founded in 1911 the secret organization "Unification or Death", much better known under the name of Black Hand, for the purpose of pan-Serb unification through revolutionary means as opposed to Prime Minister – and also Foreign Minister – Pašić's cautious policy.<sup>3</sup> Initially, Alexander established cordial relations with the Black Handers and even contributed a substantial sum of money to their newspaper *Pijemont* (Piedmont).<sup>4</sup> With this in view, it was not surprising that Apis and his supporters backed Alexander's replacing George in line of succession; they believed he had the makings of a fine sovereign. It was at Apis's instigation that Alexander was appointed Inspector General of the army to bring him in closer touch with the armed forces.<sup>5</sup> Crown Prince proved to be ambitious and surrounded himself with a group of officers, most notably Major Petar Živković of the Royal Guards and Captain Josif Kostić, his adjutant, whose loyalty to him was absolute. These were not respected in the army and their connection with Alexander had an air of personal favouritism and protectionism about it. A bitter clash soon erupted in the officer corps, involving the Crown Prince and affecting future developments in Serbia. At their instigation, Alexander took fright of the conspiratorial officers's organization with considerable political ambitions which could easily turn against himself and the entire dynasty. Živković organized his supporters into the so-called White Hand formed for the sole purpose of counteracting the influence of Black Handers under the banner of dynastic loyalty. Apis was, however, more influential with the War Ministry and his opponents were transferred away from Belgrade. In March 1912, Alexander met with ten senior military commanders and they agreed to put an end to internal conflicts in the army and fully commit to realizing national goals.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For more on Apis and his followers see Mitrović, *Srbija u Prvom svetskom ratu*, 306–321; Vladimir Dedijer, *The Road to Sarajevo* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966); David Mackenzie, *Apis the Congenial Conspirator: the Life of Colonel Dragutin T. Dimitrijević* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Dragoljub Živojinović, *Kralj Petar I Karadjordjević, život i delo*, 3 vols. (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1990), II, 315–340; and Vasa Kazimirović, *Crna ruka: ličnosti i događaji u Srbiji od Majskog prevrata 1903. do Solunskog procesa 1917. godine* (Novi Sad: Prometej, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Mackenzie, *Apis the Congenial Conspirator*, 74.

<sup>5</sup> Antonije Antić, *Beleške*, eds. Bora Dimitrijević and Jelica Ilić (Zaječar: Zadužbina "Nikola Pašić"), 240–244; Mackenzie, *Apis*, 78–79.

<sup>6</sup> Mackenzie, *Apis*, 85–86.

This agreement allowed the Serbian army to consolidate on the eve of the outstanding challenges that it would face during two successive Balkan Wars in 1912–1913. The first one saw the coalition of Balkan states nearly drive the Ottoman Empire out of Europe and the second broke out because of the division of spoils between Bulgaria and her allies, Serbia and Greece. Prince Alexander took command of the First Serbian Army and won laurels for the great victory against the Turks at Kumanovo and the capture of the town of Bitolj. The First Army also took the brunt of the fighting in defeating the Bulgarians in the Bregalnica battle. Alexander's prestige received a boost due to his exemplary agility and personal courage during military operations. Following the victorious Balkan Wars, in May 1914 the Black Hand came into conflict with civilian government in the newly-acquired Macedonia. The officers refused to acknowledge the priority of civil authority decreed by the Pašić Cabinet. The Black Hand became involved in a power struggle in which the opposition Independent Radical Party backed the army for the self-serving purposes – to remove Pašić's Radicals from office. The army's influence prevailed over King Peter and he was willing to dismiss Pašić, but the latter received decided support from the influential Nikolai Hartwig, Russian Minister in Belgrade, who made it clear that St. Petersburg wanted to see the Prime Minister remain in office. King Peter was placed in an unenviable position and decided to renounce his role in politics; on 24 June he transferred his royal powers to Prince Alexander, although he remained nominally King. The dispute between the Cabinet and the Black Hand was laid to rest as the Pašić Cabinet withdrew the priority decree, but the central issue concerning the troubled civil-military relations was unresolved.<sup>7</sup>

Just four days after Alexander had assumed royal powers, on 28 June 1914, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo. This fateful event set in motion diplomatic events that would culminate in the outbreak of the First World War. Austria-Hungary blamed Serbia for the actions of certain Serbian citizens, members of the Black Hand – albeit the organization was not mentioned – for their role in the conspiracy to assassinate Franz Ferdinand. These persons were indeed involved in the preparations of Gavrilo Princip and his comrades from the Young Bosnia organization, but they did so behind the back and against the intentions of the government. On 23 July, Vienna delivered

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<sup>7</sup> Dušan Bataković, "Sukob vojnih i civilnih vlasti u Srbiji u proleće 1914", *Istorijski časopis XXIX–XXX* (1982–1983), 477–492; and Mile Bjelajac, *Vojska Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca, 1918–1921* (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1988), 39–45. The troubled relations between civilian and military authorities are also discussed in Bataković's following articles: "La Main Noire (1911–1917): l'armée serbe entre démocratie et autoritarisme", *Revue d'histoire diplomatique* 2 (1998), 95–144; "Nikola Pašić, les radicaux de et la 'Main noire': Les défis à la démocratie parlementaire serbe (1903–1917)", *Balcanica XXXVII* (2006), 143–169; and "Storm over Serbia: the Rivalry between Civilian and Military Authorities (1911–1914)", *Balcanica XLIV* (2013), 307–356.

an ultimatum to Belgrade, advancing a series of humiliating demands in relation to the Sarajevo assassination. As Pašić was in the south of Serbia, campaigning for the general election, Alexander presided over the Cabinet meeting which adopted emergency measures, including the mobilization of the army. "Crown Prince rushed nervously from the Court to the Cabinet Presidency, the Army Ministry and the Danube Division. Chaos everywhere. It was clear that a new war was likely, and what a war at that," Lieutenant-Colonel Panta Draškić, Alexander's adjutant later recalled.<sup>8</sup> Facing mortal danger, Serbia was willing to make the utmost concessions compatible with her sovereignty and placed all her hopes in Imperial Russia to protect her from the Austro-Hungarian invasion. Late in the evening that day, Prince Alexander himself went to the Russian Legation in Belgrade to inquire of Russia's attitude and consult as to Serbia's response to the ultimatum. Basil Strandman, Chargé d'Affaires who acted in place of the suddenly deceased Hartwig, advised that the Regent rather than King Peter should personally appeal to Nicholas II for help, since the Emperor was fond of young Alexander.<sup>9</sup> The exchange of telegrams that followed had an immense importance for Serbia, although preparations for defence against the threatened Austro-Hungarian attack had already been underway. "In these agonizing moments, I express the feelings of My People which begs Your Majesty to take interest in the fate of the Kingdom of Serbia," read a dramatic plea to St. Petersburg. Nicholas II insisted that he would spare no effort to prevent bloodshed as long as there was the slightest chance to succeed. "If we do not succeed despite our most earnest wish, Your Majesty can be assured that even in that case Russia will not abandon Serbia."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Russia did not leave Serbia in the lurch when, after having brushed away Belgrade's humble reply to the ultimatum, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on 28 July. The chain of events led to a European conflict within a week. It was only on 28 July that the Regent left Belgrade, which was subjected to bombardment from across the Sava and Danube rivers, and joined Pašić's Cabinet which had evacuated three days earlier to the town of Niš, the wartime capital of Serbia. Thence he proceeded to Kragujevac to take up his place in the military headquarters in his capacity as commander-in-chief of the Serbian army.

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<sup>8</sup> Panta Draškić, *Moji memoari*, ed. Dušan Bataković (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1990), 81.

<sup>9</sup> Vasilij Štrandman, *Balkanske uspomene*, transl. and ed. Jovan Kačaki (Belgrade: Žagor, 2009), 299–303.

<sup>10</sup> *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici Srbije*, vol. 7/2: 1/14. maj – 22. jul/4. avgust 1914, eds. Vladimir Dedijer and Života Antić (Belgrade: SANU, 1980), doc. 505, Regent Alexander to Emperor Nicholas II, 11/24 July 1914, 637, and doc. 604, Emperor Nicholas II to Regent Alexander, 14/27 July 1914, conf. no. 3675/a, 691.

The outbreak of war necessitated formulating Serbia's war aims. Besides defending her own existence, official Serbia was increasingly embracing Yugoslavism, the unification of Serbia, Montenegro and the South Slavs (Yugoslavs) living under Habsburg rule – the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs – into a single state, an ideal that had gained momentum over the last few years, especially with the Serbian victories in the Balkan Wars. However, it was not possible to proclaim instantly such a far-reaching objective that implied the disintegration of Austria-Hungary, while the Entente Powers still hoped to prevent the escalation of the conflict between Serbia and the Habsburg Monarchy. Regent Alexander hinted at the sufferings of Serbs and Croats at the hands of Vienna in his manifest to the people of 29 July and six days later, in his first order to the army, he again referred to the brethren from Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Banat, Bačka, Croatia, Slavonia, Srem and Dalmatia.<sup>11</sup> But the Austro-Hungarian invasion left little time to reflect on political issues. In mid-August, the Serbs decisively defeated the Habsburg troops at Mountain Cer and expelled them from Serbian soil – this was the first victory of the Entente Powers and their smaller allies in the Great War. The Austro-Hungarians mounted a second offensive in the autumn of 1914 which brought the Serbian army to the brink of catastrophe due to its inferiority in the number of troops and, in particular, the lack of artillery ammunition. The situation was so serious that the Chief of Staff of the Army, Field-Marshal Radomir Putnik, became despondent and thought of a separate peace with Austro-Hungary.<sup>12</sup> Despair also overwhelmed the old and ailing King Peter, who was determined to die on the battlefield. Alexander exchanged a number of telegrams with his father to dissuade him from his fatalistic decision and point out the dangers of such an action.<sup>13</sup> King Peter eventually made an appearance in the trenches of the Second Army, which had an electrifying moral effect on his soldiers. On 10 November Alexander turned to the Russian Emperor, imploring for an urgent delivery of artillery ammunition without which military resistance would collapse.<sup>14</sup> This appeal did not fall on deaf ears and cannon shells from Russia and France arrived in time to make a dramatic turnabout on the Serbian front possible. In a vigorous counteroffensive in early December, the Serbian First Army under the command of General Živojin Mišić once more put the Austro-Hungarian forces to flight at the battle of Kolubara. In late 1914, there was not a single enemy soldier on Serbian soil. The critical military situation before the Serbian counteroffensive had brought about important political developments. At the height of the battle of Kolubara, Pašić

<sup>11</sup> Milorad Ekmečić, *Ratni ciljevi Srbije 1914*, 2nd ed. (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1990), 84.

<sup>12</sup> Gligorijević, *Kralj Aleksandar Karađorđević*, I, 137–140; Savo Skoko, *Vojvoda Radomir Putnik*, 2 vols (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1984), II, 143.

<sup>13</sup> Živojinović, *Kralj Petar I Karađorđević*, III, 32–34.

<sup>14</sup> Gligorijević, *Kralj Aleksandar Karađorđević*, I, 141–142.

formed a coalition Cabinet composed of his Radicals, two most prominent Independent Radicals, Ljubomir Davidović and Milorad Drašković, and the leader of Progressives Vojislav Marinković. On its second day in office, 7 December, the new Cabinet issued the so-called Niš declaration that announced that Serbia's war aim was the liberation and unification of all Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.<sup>15</sup>

In the triumphant atmosphere in early 1915, during a lull in the war, Alexander insisted upon taking over from Field-Marshal Putnik direct, instead of just formal, command over the army – in the same strain, Emperor Nicholas II would assume the role of commander-in-chief of the Russian army in September 1915. Unlike the Russian Emperor, however, Alexander did not have his way. To his chagrin, Putnik rightly refused his request as being unconstitutional, since the person of a monarch could not assume such responsibility.<sup>16</sup> The request was also unreasonable from the point of view of the Regent's lack of qualification, as he had never completed the military academy and had never had operational command, but it was instructive of his great ambitions. Another conflict arose in March 1915, when relations between the Regent and Apis deteriorated markedly. It is difficult to say what exactly the reason for this resurgence of mutual antipathy was and who was more responsible. The Black Handers showed signs of impatience with the Regent, while the latter, due to constant denunciations, became intolerant of Apis to the point of having him removed from his vicinity. Apis was transferred from the military headquarters in Kragujevac to the position of the chief of staff of the Užice Army.

Although two splendid victories in 1914 relieved Serbia of Austro-Hungarian military pressure for much of the following year, Regent Alexander and his government suffered major diplomatic difficulties at the hands of their Allies. They resisted the Russian pressure to undertake an offensive across the Drina river to support Italy's military operations – after the latter's entry into the war on 23 May 1915 – in the direction of Ljubljana, in accordance with the Russo-Italian military convention concluded two days earlier. Instead, the Serbian army intervened in Albania to back pro-Serbian Essad Pasha Toptani in his fight against the supporters of Austria-Hungary. To assist Essad Pasha and secure its southern flank in future operations against the Habsburg army, the Serbs captured Elbasan and reached Tirana. This campaign was frowned upon among the Allies, especially the Russians and French, who were dissatisfied with any diversion of Serbian forces from the Austrian front. In fact, the Allies requested a Serbian attack on Austria-Hungary with the aim of tying

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<sup>15</sup> Dragoslav Janković, *Srbija i jugoslovensko pitanje 1914–1915. godine* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1973), 329, 468–470.

<sup>16</sup> Milan Živanović, "O evakuaciji srpske vojske iz Albanije i njenoj reorganizaciji na Krfu (1915–1916) prema francuskim dokumentima", *Istorijski časopis XIV–XV* (1965), 258–259, 297–298.



down as much enemy forces as possible so that they could not be engaged elsewhere.<sup>17</sup> Whereas Pašić was inclined to meet the demands of the Allies on political grounds, Alexander strongly backed the view of the military that an offensive against Austria-Hungary could not be launched while there was a danger of Bulgaria's attack in the rear.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, the attitude of Bulgaria towards Serbia and her potential entry into the war had been of paramount importance in the Balkan theatre since the outbreak of war in 1914. The Entente Powers had pressured the Serbian government to grant territorial concessions to Sofia in Macedonia, namely to cede those regions that had been a matter of dispute in 1913 and that Serbia had secured by force of arms in the Balkan Wars. The Allies laboured under the illusion that Bulgaria could be bought off at Serbia's expense, but the reality was that they could not outbid the Central Powers in that respect. Alexander openly professed to Professor Robert William Seton-Watson, British expert on South-Eastern Europe, that he would rather lose Bosnia than abandon Macedonia to Bulgaria.<sup>19</sup> Another diplomatic misfortune for the Serbian government stemmed from the efforts of the Entente Powers to induce Italy to side with them. During the negotiations in London, Rome extracted generous territorial concessions in Istria and Dalmatia in a blatant disregard for the nationality principle. These concessions were granted at the expense of the Slovene and Croat population and thus made difficult the realization of a Yugoslav unification and embittered both the prominent anti-Austrian Yugoslav émigrés and Pašić's Cabinet. Alexander was at the forefront of Serbian opposition to Italy's imperialist designs in the Adriatic. At his own initiative, he proposed to the Russian Minister, Grigorii Nikolaevich Trubetskoi, to arrange for Pašić's visit to Russia for the purpose of presenting Serbia's views and preventing the passing of the Yugoslav people in Austria to Italian domain – the proposed visit never took place.<sup>20</sup> The pressure of military considerations was overwhelming for the Allies and Italy's demands were satisfied in the notorious Treaty of London signed on 26 April 1915. In a conversation with Trubetskoi, Alexander voiced his bitterness on account of the cynical manner in which the Allies treated Serbia and, to further stress his point, spoke of Pašić's desire to resign.<sup>21</sup> Italian encroachment on the Yugoslav-populated territories and the prospects for Yugoslav unifica-

<sup>17</sup> Nikola Popović, *Odnosi Srbije i Rusije u Prvom svetskom ratu* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1977), 70–72.

<sup>18</sup> Živko Pavlović, *Rat Srbije sa Austro-Ugarskom, Nemačkom i Bugarskom 1915* (Belgrade: SANU, 1968), 22–23; Savo Skoko, *Vojvoda Radomir Putnik*, II, 220–221.

<sup>19</sup> Ubavka Ostojić-Fejić, "Robert Vilijam Siton-Votson i Džordž Makoli Trelveljan u Srbiji 1914–1915", *Istorijski časopis XXIX–XXX* (1983), 496.

<sup>20</sup> Popović, *Odnosi Srbije i Rusije*, 200.

<sup>21</sup> Gligorijević, *Kralj Aleksandar Karadjordjević*, I, 370.

tion intensified the activities of the Yugoslav Committee, a body composed of exiled Yugoslav politicians from Austria-Hungary set up under the aegis of the Serbian government. The leading figures of this committee were Ante Trumbić and Frano Supilo, both Croats from Dalmatia – the former was its president and the latter died in 1917.

In the autumn of 1915, Serbia faced a daunting situation of a two-front war against the joint German and Austro-Hungarian forces in the north and the Bulgarian army in the east. The Serbian military even entertained the possibility of a preventive attack on Sofia to disrupt Bulgarian mobilization, but the Allies set their face against it. Bulgaria's entry into the war, however, proved decisive in October 1915: coordinated with the attack of the Central Powers on Belgrade, the Bulgarian troops cut off the retreat route of the Serbian army along the Vardar river in the direction of the Greek port of Salonika (Thessaloniki) where Franco-British troops disembarked despite the neutrality of Greece. Hoping that Allied forces would come to Serbia's aid at this belated hour, Alexander asked for immediate assistance from the Russian Commander-in-Chief, General Mikhail Alekseev. He also requested from General Joseph Joffre, Commander-in-Chief of the French forces on the Western front, to send Anglo-French troops from Salonika to support the Serbian army with a view to preventing the Austro-Germans from joining hands with Bulgarians and securing direct contact with Constantinople.<sup>22</sup> However, there was no possibility, or even political will in France, to send an expeditionary corps to prevent the downfall of Serbia. In the dramatic circumstances, Regent Alexander presided over the Cabinet meetings held in Kruševac and Raška on 29 October and 2 November respectively. Despite the looming disaster, the Regent, the ministers and Field-Marshal Putnik all agreed to continue resistance and remain loyal to the Entente Powers even if the army and the government were forced to withdraw from their country.<sup>23</sup> This is exactly what followed. In a unique example in the history of warfare, the Serbian King, Prince Regent, Cabinet and army, along with some 5,000 civilian refugees, left their country and retreated over the mountains of Albania to continue the fighting on foreign soil, placing all their hopes in the assistance of the Entente Powers.

Alexander and his entourage moved fairly quickly and were the first to reach the town of Scutari (Shkodra) in northern Albania on 1 December, ahead of Pašić's Cabinet and the army's Supreme Command. After the ministers assembled in Scutari, Alexander attended the first Cabinet meeting in exile and heard about the measures undertaken to organize the distribution of food to

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 175–176; Popović, *Odnosi Srbije i Rusije*, 92.

<sup>23</sup> *Zapisnici sednica Ministarskog saveta Srbije 1915–1918*, eds. Dragoslav Janković and Bogumil Hrabak (Belgrade: Arhiv Srbije, 1976), 187–194.

his starving and exhausted soldiers who were arriving on a daily basis.<sup>24</sup> It is difficult to overstate the gravity of the situation in which the remnants of the Serbian army found themselves on the Albanian coast and the anxiety of the Commander-in-Chief to ensure supplies for his troops and their evacuation. Alexander urged the French Minister to Serbia, Auguste Boppe, and General Joffre to save the Serbs from disaster.<sup>25</sup> Just as he had done in the critical moments of July 1914, Alexander sought salvation in St. Petersburg, believing that Russia alone would provide an unreserved support for his troops. On 16 December, he once more appealed to Emperor Nicholas II to spur his hesitant Allies into action. Alexander stressed the urgency of sending Allied ships to transport the Serbian troops from the Albanian port of San Giovanni di Medua (Shëngjin) "to some safe place, not far from Serbia's border (preferably the surroundings of Salonika), because the hungry and exhausted army, unprotected against the enemy, cannot make it on land, on a goat path, from Scutari to Valona where the Allied Supreme Commands intend to direct it."<sup>26</sup> The Regent also personally appealed to the Italian King, Victor Emanuel III, to provide the necessary assistance to the Serbs.<sup>27</sup> His hopes were not disappointed: it was the energetic insistence of the Russian Emperor with the British King, George V, and the French President, Raymond Poincaré, which did not stop short of hinting at Russia's withdrawal from the war, that led to the last-minute evacuation of the Serbs.<sup>28</sup> Finally, the Serbian troops were embarked on Allied ships at the ports of San Giovanni di Medua, Durres and Valona and transported to the Greek island of Corfu, a destination chosen at Alexander's personal request. The Regent himself endured considerable physical suffering during this last stage of what the Serbs later called the "Albanian Golgotha". In early January 1916, he was struck by an inflammation of the testicle, which caused him immense pain and he had to undergo an operation in a building in Scutari. He was then transported on a simple horse-cart to San Giovanni di Medua from where he was supposed to sail to Durres. However, when he realized that the commander of an Italian ship intended to take him to Brindisi in southern Italy, he refused angrily to go on board and continued his trip to Durres.<sup>29</sup> In early February, the Regent joined his soldiers and ministers in Corfu, the seat of an exiled Serbia which main-

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 210–211.

<sup>25</sup> Živanović, "O evakuaciji srpske vojske", 231–307.

<sup>26</sup> See the introductory study of Dragoslav Janković, "O radu srpske vlade za vreme Prvog svetskog rata", in *Zapisnici sednica Ministarskog saveta*, 31.

<sup>27</sup> Živojinović, *Kralj Petar I Karađorđević*, III, 145, n. 18.

<sup>28</sup> Gligorijević, *Kralj Aleksandar Karađorđević*, I, 190–191.

<sup>29</sup> Draškić, *Moji memoari*, 137–143.

tained her war effort despite the odds, although the rank and file of the army needed some time to recuperate before it could take the field again.

Together with Pašić, Alexander left Corfu on 15 March and visited Paris, London and Rome – the latter capital without his Prime Minister – where he met with all the Allied heads of state and leading politicians and received recognition for the heroic struggle of Serbia and promises of assistance for the Serbian army.<sup>30</sup> Upon their return, the Serbian troops were relocated in the vicinity of Salonika and re-equipped by the Allies; they took their place alongside the Anglo-Franco-Italo-Russian forces prepared to engage the enemy and make their way to the homeland. There was, however, a thorny issue of command over the Allied forces on the Salonika (Macedonian) front that caused much difficulty in Franco-Serbian relations and took four months to resolve. The crux of the problem was to reconcile the special position of Regent Alexander as Commander-in-Chief of the Serbian army and, more importantly, as sovereign of an Allied country, with the joint command of the Eastern Allied army, which was entrusted to French General Maurice Sarrail. Alexander and the Serbian government believed that he was supposed to be in command of all the Allied forces as Regent of Serbia; otherwise, they considered the Serbian army would be effectively reduced to the role of mercenaries. Eventually, the French government agreed that General Sarrail command the joint Allied troops in the name of Regent Alexander and that the Serbs maintain their special status and be employed as a whole on a particular section of the front.<sup>31</sup> In September 1916, the Serbian army was engaged in repulsing the Bulgarian attack in the direction of Salonika at the battle of Gorničevo; it then counterattacked and, after a great but costly victory, took the mountain top Kajmakčalan that dominated the entire front. The Serbs then drove the Bulgarians out of Bitolj, the southernmost town in Serbia, and thus liberated a small part of their homeland. Despite these military successes, the Allies, especially the British, had doubts as to the real potential of the Salonika front and entertained the possibility of withdrawing some troops to redeploy them elsewhere. It was only with the active support of Russia that the Regent and Pašić's Cabinet managed to forestall such plans and lobbied for additional Entente troops to be sent to Greece.<sup>32</sup>

Apart from military operations, this phase of the war was marked by internal tensions within the Serbian government and the army, which culminated in a power struggle between Alexander, Pašić's Cabinet and the Black Handers, bringing to an end the conflict that had been smouldering from before 1914. In the unhealthy atmosphere in Corfu in the wake of the "Albanian Golgotha" in which the exiled Serbs reflected on the reasons for the tragedy that befell Ser-

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<sup>30</sup> Gligorijević, *Kralj Aleksandar Karadjordjević*, I, 212–213.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 214–225.

<sup>32</sup> *Zapisnici sednica Ministarskog saveta*, 412–415; Popović, *Odnosi Srbije i Rusije*, 273–278.

bia, the Regent, Pašić and the Black Handers blamed each other. These three centres of power were increasingly mutually hostile and anxious to pin the responsibility for the disaster on their antagonists. It was against this background of despondence and recriminations that an underground, internal strife took place. As early as mid-December, while he and the Cabinet were still in Scutari, Alexander pushed through major changes at the highest level of the army, which implied the Supreme Command's responsibility for the breakdown of late 1915. Field-Marshal Putnik had long been unfit for his duty due to his ailing health and he was replaced by General Petar Bojović, while Colonel Božidar Terzić was appointed the new Army Minister instead of Radomir Bojović. Having removed Putnik, an immensely popular and authoritative commander, and a number of his closest associates, the Regent established firm control over the Supreme Command and the army as a whole. At the same time, these changes cut the ground from under the feet of the Black Hand, since pliable officers, completely loyal to the Regent replaced those who were in sympathy with and protective of Apis and his comrades. Alexander was also dissatisfied with Pašić. After imposing his authority on the Supreme Command, to which Pašić had consented, Alexander suggested to his Prime Minister to resign. Pašić was not willing to do so and the Regent did not press it any further. Nevertheless, the latter caused a crisis when he requested from Pašić to accept Colonel Alimpije Marjanović, Regent's confidant, as War Minister in his Cabinet. The Prime Minister resolutely refused such crude interference of the Crown in Cabinet affairs and offered his resignation in the face of Alexander's persistence. He presented his leaving office as a departure from the unswerving policy of solidarity with the Entente Powers and thus detrimental to Serbia's interests.<sup>33</sup> But the resignation was not accepted and Pašić remained at the head of government. An observing historian has commented that the inexperienced Regent did not yet know how to bring about a ministerial crisis.<sup>34</sup>

In Corfu, Alexander was equally anxious to see Pašić out of power. At the initiative of Svetolik Jakšić, a journalist and an implacable opponent of the Radicals, the Regent considered a dismissal of Pašić on the grounds that the Constitution, the Cabinet and the National Assembly were invalid after the state territory had been lost, which left the Crown alone to represent Serbia. Alexander would thus assume all legislative and executive powers, and effectively establish a personal regime. He would appoint a new non-political Cabinet with Field-Marshal Mišić, the hero of the Kolubara battle, as prime minister. The support of Black Handers was also required to ensure successful realization of such combination, and their hostility to Pašić might have secured their consent. Jakšić

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<sup>33</sup> Živojinović, *Kralj Petar I Karadjordjević*, III, 135.

<sup>34</sup> Slobodan Jovanović, *Moji savremenici: VIII Uroš Petrović, IX Jovan Skerlić, X Apis* (Vindor: Avala, 1962), 46–47.

sounded out Apis, but the latter was not enthusiastic about his proposal; Apis claimed that he was willing to reconcile with Alexander, but their understanding was not sincere. An experienced and adroit politician, Pašić sensed what was going on and tried to deter the Regent from carrying out his plan. Pašić offered Alexander an addition of 150,000 French francs to his civil list in something of a not too subtle attempt to bribe him, but the Regent declined. More importantly, Pašić revived the sessions of the National Assembly in Corfu in July 1916 – he had hitherto not been eager to work with the parliament and, for that reason, many MPs, even from the ranks of his Radicals, had voiced their dissatisfaction – which clearly ran against the Prince Regent's intentions to do away with parliamentary democracy altogether.<sup>35</sup>

Alexander's plans for the change in government were evident during his visit to the Allied capitals in March 1915, together with Pašić and his assistant in the Foreign Ministry, Jovan Jovanović-Pižon, a friend of the Regent's. Alexander insisted on Pižon's presence in Paris and London with a view to acquainting him with Allied statesmen for he was a likely new foreign minister in Field-Marshal Mišić's Cabinet. Jovanović-Pižon later confided to Boppe that the Crown Prince had grown tired of corruption and partisan bias of his government, and that "he might get sick and tired of the Cabinet and seek for another. He must not return to the country without some programme and better prospects than those provided by these present partisans."<sup>36</sup> He advanced similar arguments to his colleague diplomat Mihailo Gavrilović and significantly added that it was "crazy to blame the Crown Prince for wanting to abolish the Constitution and carry out [Yugoslav] unification with a coup d'état."<sup>37</sup> A reference to the future unification was especially important as Alexander appears to have contemplated to take a lead in this matter by forming a Cabinet which would make its Yugoslav programme a cardinal point of its policy. This was not necessarily his own idea. The key pro-Yugoslav public figures in London, Seton-Watson and the foreign policy editor of *The Times*, Henry Wickham Steed, handed him a memorandum, urging Serbia to renew her struggle for the national unity of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.<sup>38</sup> No doubt, Jovanović-Pižon, a firm believer in Yugoslavism, who had Alexander's ear, also influenced him in this direction. The Regent certainly

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<sup>35</sup> Vojislav Vučković, "Unutrašnje krize Srbije i Prvi svetski rat", *Istorijski časopis* XIV–XV (1965), 204–209. Gligorijević's claim in *Kralj Aleksandar Karadjordjević*, I, 259–260, that Alexander had nothing to do with the idea of toppling Pašić and that the initiative actually originated with Apis is entirely unconvincing.

<sup>36</sup> Jovan M. Jovanović Pižon, *Dnevnik (1898–1920)*, eds. Radoš Ljušić and Miladin Milošević (Novi Sad: Prometej, 2015), entry of 30 Aug. 1916, 155–156.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* entry of 7 Nov. 1916, 195–196.

<sup>38</sup> Vojislav Vučković, "Iz odnosa Srbije i Jugoslovenskog odbora. Pitanje o ulasku predstavnička Odbora u Srpsku vladu", *Istorijski časopis* XII–XIII (1963), 362–366.

advocated the unity of Yugoslavs in London with sufficient ardour as to impress his British interlocutors.<sup>39</sup> After their conversations, Steed lauded Alexander's broad-minded appreciation of the Yugoslav question as opposed to Pašić's short-sightedness.<sup>40</sup> In fact, it is difficult to assess Alexander's intimate views on the problem of Yugoslav unification and the formation of a single state. Perhaps his views were not quite clear-cut and definite and wavered between the primary objective of unifying the Serbdom and the creation of a wider Yugoslav union. Such impression can be derived from Alexander's proclamation to his troops made upon his return to Corfu in which he pointed out that the Allies were prepared to lend their support "to make Serbia great so that she encompasses all Serbs and Yugoslavs, to make her [Serbia] a powerful and mighty Yugoslavia, which will justify the sacrifices offered so far and respond to the demands of a new era that will come into being after the end of this great and bloody European war".<sup>41</sup> After all, many Serbs saw these two objectives as being complementary rather than constituting alternative solutions to their national problem, and understood the Yugoslav ideal in such terms. But the distrust between the Regent and his Prime Minister was grounded in power struggle, and not in their differing national and political conceptions. Pašić decided to proceed alone from Western Europe to Russia where he no doubt expected, in view of his previous relations with that country, to be given strong support for his continued tenure of premiership. Alexander saw through this manoeuvre and forced him to take Jovanović-Pižon along despite the Prime Minister's protest. Eventually, nothing came out of these tentative combinations and Pašić remained at the head of government. For all his impatience with Pašić and desire for personal affirmation, Alexander did not dare make a move against him for two reasons: both France and Russia placed their trust in Pašić and his determination to stick with the Allies, and it was not opportune to enter into confrontation with his Prime Minister while the influence of Black Handers in the army posed a grave danger.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, the Regent's distaste for Pašić was unabated. After his return to Corfu from Paris and London, he told Professor Slobodan Jovanović, who dealt with propaganda in the military headquarters, point-blank that he would like to topple Pašić. "[When] speaking of Pašić, he would get very angry and pace around the room as if chasing flies."<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Dragovan Šepić, *Italija, saveznici i jugoslovensko pitanje* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1970), 158.

<sup>40</sup> Henry Wickham Steed, *Through Thirty Years 1892–1922*, 2 vols. (London 1924), II, 166, 175.

<sup>41</sup> Ferdo Šišić, *Dokumeti o postanku Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1914.–1919.* (Zagreb: Naklada "Matice Hrvatske", 1920), doc. 40, Regent Alexander to the Serbian Army, Corfu, 20/7 Apr. 1916, 62–64.

<sup>42</sup> Janković, "O radu srpske vlade", 50–52.

<sup>43</sup> Jovanović, *Moji savremenici*, 47.

To a certain extent, Alexander's inclination to assert his influence in the formulation and execution of policy was a natural corollary of the extraordinary circumstances in which the Serbian government operated. In an unparalleled situation in which it found itself exiled on a small Greek island, and in which military requirements constituted the core of foreign policy, the role of the sovereign, who was also the supreme military commander, was inevitably weighty. In addition, the authority of a monarch was a rather useful asset in dealing with the Allies with a view to securing necessities for the army and protecting vital Serbian interests. It was only natural that Alexander routinely granted audiences to notable visitors in Corfu and had important political conversations with them. Lieutenant-Colonel Draškić recorded the Regent's entire correspondence and he believed, on the basis of the records he kept, that Alexander handled foreign policy largely by himself, especially the issues concerning the Salonika front and the supplying of the Serbian army. "For all more important matters he addressed telegrams and letters directly to the Russian Emperor Nicholas II, Poincaré, Briand, Lloyd George etc."<sup>44</sup> This was certainly an exaggeration as the Cabinet was very much involved with the affairs pertaining to the Salonika front with which Alexander's adjutant was not familiar.<sup>45</sup> Draškić also observed that the "Crown Prince did not much respect or care for Pašić, and he showed even then a strong inclination to authoritarian rule over the country." As an example of Alexander's ignoring the Cabinet, Draškić pointed out that he maintained contact with the Russian Emperor through the agency of the Military Attaché in St. Petersburg, Colonel Branimir Lontkijević, rather than through the Minister, Miroslav Spaljković.<sup>46</sup> This statement requires qualification: Spaljković was loyal to Pašić, but he was also the Regent's trusted person; it must have seemed more straightforward to Alexander to communicate with Nicholas II through a military officer directly subordinated to him as commander-in-chief. Nevertheless, Draškić's impressions tally with the evidence that suggests that the Regent was keen to remove Pašić from policy-making and impose himself as a decisive, if not the only, factor in the Serbian government. In military matters, in particular, Alexander went to great lengths to stress his absolute authority in the army. In a striking example, he discussed with General Joffre the position of the Serbian army in relation to the French command of the Eastern Army without the Chief of Staff, or any other representative, of his Supreme Command.<sup>47</sup>

But Alexander's control over the army could have never been complete while the influence of Black Handers still existed and caused him much concern.

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<sup>44</sup> Draškić, *Moji memoari*, 182–183.

<sup>45</sup> Petar Opačić, *Srbija i Solunski front* (Belgrade: Književne novine, 1984), 48–54.

<sup>46</sup> Draškić, *Moji memoari*, 183–184.

<sup>47</sup> Živanović, "O evakuaciji srpske vojske", 296–297; Janković, "O radu srpske vlade", 41.



As he confided to Professor Slobodan Jovanović, he thought that Apis was at the root of the troubled state of the army and that an agreement with him could not be trusted.<sup>48</sup> To be sure, the officers-plotters provided much reason for the Regent's fears with their high-handed and arrogant demeanour and bitter accusations against Alexander and the Radicals for Serbia's defeat. A prominent Black Hander, Colonel Vladimir Tucović, encapsulated such frustrations in the threat that the officers would make everyone pass through a "gate of sabres" and allow only those who they deemed worthy to return to Serbia. It is not surprising that Alexander did not take lightly the threats coming from the officers who had already assassinated one king and had been exerting considerable influence in affairs of state ever since. He decided to strike first. The first indication of the Regent's intentions was his proposal for the introduction of a court-martial for officers that even denied the accused the right to defence, which he submitted to the Cabinet together with the information that there had been an attempt on his life behind the front lines in September 1916. The connection between the proposed court-martial, which the Cabinet rejected, and the alleged failed assassination was too obvious to escape anyone's notice. The latter incident was but a fabrication conjured for the purpose of eliminating Apis and his supporters. Pašić's Cabinet was initially reluctant to prosecute the Black Handers and preferred to undertake "administrative measures", that is to say to remove them from the army and retire. Intent on destroying his opponents, Alexander was, however, adamant in his request for instituting judicial proceedings and he prevailed over his government.<sup>49</sup> What followed was a show trial in Salonika in which Apis and his two closest associates, Major Ljubomir Vulović and Rade Malobabić, were sentenced to death in August 1917, while a number of other Black Handers received lengthy prison sentences.<sup>50</sup> It was in the course of this trial that the information on Apis's involvement in the Sarajevo assassination was revealed, although his written statement remains controversial, especially in view of the situation in which it was given. In the political sphere, Alexander's refusal to pardon Apis and his comrades led the Independent Radicals and Progressives to leave the coalition Cabinet. The Regent then entrusted Pašić to form

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<sup>48</sup> Jovanović, *Moji savremenici*, 49–50.

<sup>49</sup> Vučković, "Unutrašnje krize", 216–218.

<sup>50</sup> The Salonika trial is covered in Borivoje Nešković, *Istina o solunskom procesu* (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1953); Milan Živanović, *Pukovnik Apis: solunski proces hiljadu devetsto sedamnaeste: prilog za proučavanje političke istorije Srbije od 1903. do 1918. godine* (Belgrade: Kultura, 1955); David Mackenzie, *The "Black Hand" on Trial: Salonika, 1917* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); and Dušan Bataković, "The Salonika Trial 1917. Black Hand vs. Democracy (The Serbian Army between Internal Strife and Military Success)", in *The Salonika Theatre of Operations and the Outcome of the Great War: Proceedings of the International Conference organised by the Institute for Balkan Studies and the National Research Foundation "Eleftherios K. Venizelos"* (Thessaloniki 2005), 273–293.

a Radical Cabinet which was amenable in the matter of the sentenced Black Handers. In order to eliminate Apis, Alexander needed Pašić's cooperation and, for that reason, he was prepared to give his premiership a new lease of life despite his own earlier desire to have the leader of Radicals removed from office. Although reluctant to have the blood of Apis and the others on his hands, Pašić eventually accepted such an arrangement and remained in power.<sup>51</sup>

The entry of the United States of America into the war in the spring of 1917 and the collapse of the imperial regime in Russia, Serbia's staunchest ally in the Entente camp – which withdrew from the war after the Bolshevik revolution – were momentous events that necessitated affirmation of the Serbian war aims. Furthermore, relations between Pašić and his Cabinet, on the one hand, and Trumbić and the Yugoslav Committee, on the other, grew increasingly strained due to their differing conceptions of Yugoslav unification. Whereas Pašić insisted on the leading role of Serbia as the Piedmont of Yugoslavs and his own direction of political affairs, Trumbić and his supporters laboured to constitute themselves as representatives of all Yugoslavs from the Habsburg Empire and an equal partner with the Serbian government.<sup>52</sup> In these conditions, an important conference took place in Corfu between representatives of the Serbian government, Serbian opposition parties and the Yugoslav Committee in June-July 1917. Although differences between Pašić's and Trumbić's outlook on Yugoslav unification clearly emerged from the discussions, the well-known Corfu declaration was issued, embodying the essentials on which all the participants agreed. These concerned the principles on which a future Yugoslav state would be founded: a constitutional parliamentary democracy, national and religious equality of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and a monarchical form of government with the Karadjordjević dynasty.<sup>53</sup> Alexander's role in the run-up to and during the deliberations in Corfu remains, to a large extent, obscure as he did not take part in the conference sessions. He made the point of coming to Corfu from the Salonika front; he also granted an audience twice to the Yugoslav delegation as a whole and had several private conversations with Trumbić and other members of the committee. Therefore, it seems highly likely that his role was more conspicuous than the silence of the records suggests. There was one instance in which Alexander had a direct impact on the ongoing discussions: he agreed not to have a provision regarding the Orthodox Christian faith of the monarch, unpalatable to Roman Catholics among the Yugoslavs, included in the

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<sup>51</sup> Vučković, "Unutrašnje krize", 222–223.

<sup>52</sup> Djordje Stanković, *Nikola Pašić i jugoslovensko pitanje*, 2 vols. (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1985), II, 111–150.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 151–183; Dragoslav Janković, *Jugoslovensko pitanje i Krfska deklaracija 1917. godine* (Belgrade: Savremena administracija, 1967).

declaration.<sup>54</sup> In doing so, he made a concession to Trumbić and brushed aside Pašić's view – the matter concerned his own person and he wanted to be conciliatory. It can be assumed that after the Corfu conference Alexander's standing in the eyes of the "Yugoslavs" was left intact, if not enhanced, regardless, or perhaps because, of their clashes with Pašić. Before he left Corfu, Trumbić asked and received from the Regent two letters of recommendation for Prime Minister Lloyd George and Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour for the purpose of lobbying the two leading British statesmen for the Yugoslav cause.<sup>55</sup>

In the aftermath of the Corfu declaration, Regent Alexander left the handling of Yugoslav policy entirely in the hands of Pašić's Cabinet. He steadfastly supported his Prime Minister and declined all attempts of the Yugoslav Committee to enlist him as an arbiter and thus overcome Pašić's opposition to its views. The dispute between the "Yugoslavs" and the Serbian government emerged after the January 1918 statements of Lloyd George and American President Woodrow Wilson, which suggested the survival of Austria-Hungary and, by implication, denied the creation of a Yugoslav state. The Yugoslav Committee took initiative to promote the Yugoslav programme: it proposed the organization of a large congress that would consist of the Serbian National Assembly, the Yugoslav Committee, the Montenegrin Committee for National Unification and distinguished individuals and émigrés for the purpose of manifesting national unity and solidarity. Pašić rejected this proposal as being in contravention with the Serbian Constitution, effectively seeing it as another manoeuvre to push his government into the background. Trumbić then appealed to Alexander in order to marginalize Pašić, but the young Prince ignored his approach; he approved Pašić's reply before it was sent to the Yugoslav Committee.<sup>56</sup> The increasing divergence between the Serbian government and the Yugoslav Committee intersected with the interparty strife that had been going on in Corfu since the break-up of the coalition Cabinet due to the execution of Apis and his friends. After Pašić's ministry had lost a majority in the National Assembly and resigned in February 1918, the opposition parties joined in a single bloc. In March 1918, Pašić started his negotiations with the opposition which soon reached a deadlock. The opposition requested that Pašić be excluded from premiership and foreign policy portfolio in a coalition Cabinet on the grounds that he had not been effective in affirming the policy embodied in the Corfu declaration. He and his Radicals refuted this charge and remained inflexible in the matter of Pašić's place

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<sup>54</sup> Janković, *Jugoslovensko pitanje*, 253–254.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 379, 458.

<sup>56</sup> *Gradja o stvaranju jugoslovenske države (1.I–20.XII 1918)*, 2 vols., eds. Dragoslav Janković and Bogdan Krizman (Belgrade: Institut društvenih nauka, 1964), I, doc. 50, Pašić to the Yugoslav Committee, Corfu, 30 Jan. 1918, 62–64; Nikola Stojanović, *Mladost jednog pokolenja (uspomene 1880–1920)*, ed. Mile Stanić (Belgrade: Istorijski institut, 1915), 200.

in the government. Their position was reinforced when Alexander offered the leader of Radicals a mandate to form either a coalition Cabinet, if possible, or a Radical one, if not. Alexander's favourable attitude towards Pašić also stemmed from the fact that the opposition demanded an investigation into the manner in which the Salonika trial had been conducted. The opposition then made a concession and agreed to Pašić's premiership, but insisted that the foreign minister must be appointed from their own ranks. Pašić refused this arrangement as well and formed a Radical Cabinet, after which Alexander left Corfu and returned to Salonika. Clearly, it was the Regent's support that allowed Pašić to overcome a most difficult situation and keep his firm grip on power – the former ignored a memorandum submitted to him by the opposition, demanding the formation of a coalition Cabinet.<sup>57</sup>

Alexander also continued to back his Prime Minister in his trial of strength with Trumbić. The Croat politician started to pressure Pašić to recognize the Yugoslav Committee as an official representative of all the Yugoslavs from the Habsburg provinces. This would be a precondition for the formal recognition on the part of the Entente Powers and the committee would become a legal government of the Habsburg Yugoslavs on the pattern set by the Czechoslovak Committee of Jan Masaryk and Edvard Beneš. To achieve this objective, Seton-Watson and Steed, who were Trumbić's main supporters and bitter opponents of Pašić, urged Alexander to take the matters in his own hands. The Regent eluded their pleas by downplaying the differences regarding the Yugoslav question, which he reduced to the level of "tactical details".<sup>58</sup> Jovanović-Pižon, now Serbian Minister in London, also attempted to bring about the Regent's intervention and smooth over the feud between Pašić's Cabinet and the Yugoslav Committee, but his efforts too ended in failure. Alexander let him know through his confidant Živojin Balugdžić that, in his view, the dispute was a matter of personal differences between Pašić and Trumbić, and he "did not see how he could intervene there".<sup>59</sup> Incidentally, Alexander's attitude in 1918 suggests that he was not a devout supporter of Yugoslavism in the mould of Jovanović and others among the Serbian opposition, mostly Independent Radicals. In this light, his flirtation with the Yugoslav programme as a basis for a neutral, non-political Cabinet during his visit to London two years earlier seems to have also been a

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<sup>57</sup> Milan Živanović, "Jugoslovensko pitanje u svetlosti pregovora za obrazovanje koalicionne vlade Srbije u proleće 1918 na Krfu", *Rad JAZU* 9/321 (1960), 211–213; Dragoslav Janković, "Narodna skupština Srbije za vreme Prvog svetskog rata i pitanje njenog kvoruma", *Anali Pravnog fakulteta u Beogradu* 3–4 (1966), 340–347.

<sup>58</sup> *Gradja o stvaranju jugoslovenske države*, I, doc. 196, Steed and Watson to Crown Prince Alexander, London, 9 Aug./27 July 1918, and doc. 197, Crown Prince Alexander to Steed and Watson, Salonika (?), 10 Aug./28 July 1918, 246–247.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* II, doc. 303, Balugdžić to Jovanović, Salonika, 18/5 Oct. 1918, 371.

tactical device to dispose of Pašić and not just a reflection of his personal conviction. In the changed circumstances following the Salonika trial, at the time when his relations with Pašić were better, he showed no inclination whatsoever to placate the sensitivities of the “Yugoslavs” at the expense of his Prime Minister. In this respect, he was not affected even by public criticism in Britain to which Seton-Watson subjected him in the pages of the influential *New Europe* journal.<sup>60</sup>

In September 1918, the Serbian army, together with other Allied troops on the Salonika front, launched an offensive that would prove decisive for the outcome of the Great War. The Serbs broke through Bulgarian lines and quickly pushed towards the Danube. Bulgaria signed capitulation on 29 September and the military position of Austria-Hungary was becoming increasingly critical. On 1 November, Serbian forces entered their plundered capital Belgrade and continued their advancement across the Danube, Sava and Drina rivers into the Habsburg territory. Their supreme commander reached Belgrade nine days later. A renowned Serbian writer, Isidora Sekulić, described the scene of the Regent’s return to Belgrade at the head of his soldiers: “Before everyone, standing by himself, a young and not a young officer, alone. His overcoat, heavy, unironed, does not fit his body, the boots rough, the cap old; his hands gloveless; on his face, a darkened pretty face, the expression of an exhausted and excited man, a man with strained nerves.”<sup>61</sup> It was as if the appearance of the Regent bore witness to an epic struggle that he had to endure, together with his army and his people, to see the long-awaited day of victory and liberation, a struggle that took a heavy toll – Serbia lost a quarter of her population. With the crumbling of Austria-Hungary and the rapid advance of Serbian forces into its provinces, the final stage of Yugoslav unification was taking place. It was determined by the situation on the ground that created an accomplished fact. Through his contacts with the Commander of the Eastern Army, French General Franchet d’Esperey, Alexander secured the support of France for the entrance of Serbian troops into Montenegro and Dalmatia with a view to preventing Italian intrigues against the Serbs in these parts.<sup>62</sup> In such circumstances, the prolonged dispute between Pašić and the Yugoslav Committee was not substantial for the creation of a Yugoslav state. Nevertheless, the “Yugoslavs” were persistent, with the strong backing of Seton-Watson and Steed, in the efforts to exert their influence on the Regent and shape the course of events. Alexander resented their meddling in what he considered internal affairs of Serbia, especially the suggestions that Pašić was

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid. I, doc. 208, Jovanović to Pašić, London, 22/9 Aug. 1918, 258–264.

<sup>61</sup> Milorad Ekmečić, *Stvaranje Jugoslavije 1790–1918*, 2 vols. (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1989), II, 810.

<sup>62</sup> *Gradja o stvaranju jugoslovenske države*, I, doc. 272, Balugdžić to Pašić, Salonika, 8 Oct./25 Sept. 1918.

preparing him to become an autocratic ruler.<sup>63</sup> As for his views on the union of the Habsburg Yugoslavs with Serbia, Alexander was diplomatically subtle in his letter to Steed, stating that they would be free to join Yugoslavia in any form they liked, and even in a federal state, without being pressured from Serbia. This pronouncement did not preclude an integral unification of Serbs, however, and the British Admiral Ernest Trowbridge, who was a link of communication between the Regent and Steed, thought it meant a "Greater Serbia" to which other Yugoslavs could opt to join.<sup>64</sup>

The clash between Trumbić and Pašić reached its climax at the conference held in Geneva on 6–9 November 1918 which was convened to close ranks before the preliminary peace conference. Apart from the Serbian Prime Minister and the Yugoslav Committee's delegates, the conference was also attended by the leaders of Serbian opposition parties and three delegates of the newly-formed National Council from Zagreb, the government of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes from the Habsburg Empire. Pašić doggedly defended Serbia's leading role in the process of national unification, but he was confronted with a joint demand of all other participants to the effect that a union should be carried out by two equal and independent partners – Serbia and the State of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs carved out from the Habsburg Monarchy. Alone and isolated, Pašić gave way in order to prevent a breakdown in relations, but his ministerial colleagues in Corfu rejected the decisions reached at Geneva and brought about the resignation of Pašić's Cabinet.<sup>65</sup> Alexander's attitude in this matter remains a somewhat moot point. It has been claimed that Pašić shifted the responsibility for the rejection of the Geneva agreement onto the shoulders of the Regent.<sup>66</sup> Pašić himself reported to his deputy, Stojan Protić, that he had informed Anton Korošec and Melko Čingrija of the National Council and Trumbić that the Regent's opinion was not clear from the telegram he had received from Corfu,

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<sup>63</sup> Dragoljub Živojinović, "Dnevnik Admirala Ernesta Trubridža kao izvor za srpsko-britanske odnose u 1918. godini", in *Srbija 1918. godine i stvaranje jugoslovenske države* (Belgrade: Istorijski institut, 1989), 147–148.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 146.

<sup>65</sup> Bogdan Krizman, "Ženevska konferencija o ujedinjenju 1918. godine", *Istorijski glasnik* 1–2 (1958), 3–32; Dragoslav Janković, "Ženevska konferencija o stvaranju jugoslovenske zajednice 1918. godine", *Istorija XX veka* 5 (1963), 225–262, and from the same author "Još o Ženevskoj konferenciji o stvaranju jugoslovenske zajednice 1918. godine", *Zbornik radova Pravnog fakulteta u Novom Sadu* 3–4 (1966), 247–264; Mirjana Stefanovski, "Nikola Pašić na Ženevskoj konferenciji 1918. godine", in *Nikola Pašić: život i delo* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 1997), 331–354; Stanković, *Nikola Pašić i jugoslovensko pitanje*, II, 199–209.

<sup>66</sup> Gligorijević, *Kralj Aleksandar Karadjordjević*, I, 406.

which was perfectly accurate information.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, Pašić expected that Alexander might arrive in Paris in a few days to meet him and the delegates of the National Council and the Yugoslav Committee to clear the ground, so it seems doubtful that he would have misinterpreted the Regent's stance in such a blatant manner. But Alexander found it difficult to leave his troops in the midst of their successful military operations, although he went to Salonika for four days (11–14 November) to be informed about what was going on. "Politics already started to do its thing," Ješa Damjanović, Draškić's successor as Regent's adjutant, recorded. "Our various committees in Europe started to differ in their views. Fortunately, military considerations prevailed and the Supreme Commander had to decide to return to His victorious armies."<sup>68</sup>

The Regent sent his trusted Balugdžić to Paris to establish the facts. The latter found the leaders of the Serbian opposition highly dissatisfied with the Regent, as Pašić had presented him as the main opponent of the Geneva agreement.<sup>69</sup> This seems to confirm that the Prime Minister had no qualms about manipulating both the Serbian opposition and the "Yugoslavs" and abusing the authority of the Crown. But Balugdžić, apparently, did not take these accusations too seriously. He reported to Alexander that a new coalition government for the entire Yugoslav territory would be formed in Serbia, putting an end to "this not serious business of certain committees, clubs and certain individuals, which usurped the right to decide on such substantial questions."<sup>70</sup> Balugdžić appears, to say the least, not to have attributed the blame for misunderstandings at Geneva to Pašić alone. But the question of a Yugoslav union was largely settled on the battlefield. The Entente's Eastern Army concluded an armistice with Austria-Hungary on 13 November 1918 in Belgrade. According to the terms of the Belgrade armistice, the Serbian troops were authorized to occupy the provinces of the Banat, Bačka and Srem, a part of Slavonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and a part of Dalmatia up to the cape Planka north of the town of Split. In the rapidly changing situation, the Yugoslav Committee was completely side-tracked, whereas the Serbian army and the National Council emerged as key partners in the creation of a Yugoslav state. The provisional government in Zagreb was, however, in a precarious position because of the internal disorder generated by Austria-Hungary's collapse and the fact that the Entente Powers regarded the Yugoslav provinces as an enemy territory. In addition, there was a

<sup>67</sup> *Gradja o stvaranju jugoslovenske države*, II, doc. 494, Pašić to Protić, Paris, 14/1 Nov. 1918, 574.

<sup>68</sup> Ješa Damjanović, *Iz moga ratnoga dnevnika (zabeleške iz ratova 1912.–1918.)* (Osijek: Štamparski zavod Krbavac i Pavlović, 1929), 75.

<sup>69</sup> Gligorijević, *Kralj Aleksandar Karadjordjević*, I, 408.

<sup>70</sup> *Gradja o stvaranju jugoslovenske države*, II, doc. 574, Balugdžić to Crown Prince Alexander, Paris, 28 Nov. 1918, 661.

strong pressure from below in favour of an immediate unification among the Serb population in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Srem, the Banat and Bačka, and the Croat population in Dalmatia which faced Italian occupation of much of its province, as well as in Montenegro. In the prevailing conditions, the Supreme Command of the Serbian army and, by implication, its Commander-in-Chief, Regent Alexander, emerged as the crucial actors in the formation of a new state, capable of maintaining order and restraining Italian expansion into the Slovene and Croat lands.<sup>71</sup> Such development was further reinforced by Pašić's prolonged absence from the liberated country – he stayed in Paris after the Geneva conference – and the slow gathering of his ministers in Belgrade. Deputy Prime Minister Protić and most of his colleagues were still in Greece during the final military operations. Momčilo Ninčić, Construction Minister, was the only Cabinet member who accompanied the Regent immediately after his return to Belgrade, later to be joined by Ljubomir Jovanović, Interior Minister. The final act of the long-drawn-out Yugoslav imbroglio occurred in Belgrade on 1 December when the delegation of the National Council addressed Regent Alexander and he proclaimed "the unification of Serbia with the lands of the independent state of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs in a single kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes".<sup>72</sup>

In conclusion, it can be said that Prince Alexander came to the fore of the political arena in a somewhat sudden manner following King Peter's decision to step down in a difficult political situation both for him and the country. Just as he assumed royal powers, the young Regent was thrown into the whirl of one of the most infamous political crisis to which his tiny Serbia was central, leading to the First World War. He fully embraced his duties and responsibilities in the forthcoming Armageddon and emerged as a key political factor, besides being the Commander-in-Chief of the Serbian army. The rise of the Regent's personal influence on the conduct of policy partly stemmed from the exigencies of wartime strategy and diplomacy, especially in view of an unprecedented situation in which the Serbian government was placed in the latter part of the war. With Pašić's Cabinet exiled in Corfu and the army entrenched at the Salonika front, the importance of Prince Alexander both as head of state and military commander was amplified. In part, Alexander's predominance over the government resulted from his great personal ambitions and the lack of regard for con-

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<sup>71</sup> Bogdan Krizman, "Srpska Vrhovna komanda u danima raspada Austro-Ugarske 1918", *Historijski zbornik XIV* (1961), 167–216.

<sup>72</sup> *Gradja o stvaranju jugoslovenske države*, II, doc. 589, Address of the Delegation of the SCS National Council to Crown Prince Alexander and his Reply, Belgrade, 1 Dec./18 Nov. 1918, 673–676.



stitutional boundaries of his position.<sup>73</sup> Unlike King Peter, he was not willing to tolerate other informal centres of power in the army, just as he was determined not to give a largely free hand to the Pašić Cabinet in the shaping and execution of policy.

Alexander established his hold on the Supreme Command of the army after the downfall of Serbia in late 1915. He also wanted to step out of the shadow of the old and experienced Pašić, and made plans to remove him from office, but that did not materialize during the war. Pašić's ouster was not an easy matter, since the Entente Powers viewed his premiership as a guarantee of Serbia's continued perseverance in the war effort. The power struggle within the civil and military government also included the Black Hand and the resolution of conflict in the Regent-Pašić-Apis triangle held the key to the distribution of power. The Salonika show trial was a brutal denouement: Alexander joined forces with Pašić to annihilate the Black Hand in the midst of war and without much scruple for the methods used. The Salonika affair tarnished the hitherto impeccable reputation of the Regent but it damaged even more the position of Pašić – his coalition partners in the Cabinet resigned and he formed a new, exclusively Radical Cabinet without sufficiently broad support in the parliament. The balance of power between Alexander and the Pašić Cabinet was thus tipped in favour of the former. But the elimination of Apis forged the bond between the Regent and his Prime Minister, which allowed the latter to maintain his position in the face of growing challenges from the united Serbian opposition and the Yugoslav Committee. Eventually, it was the bravery and the tremendous success of the Serbian army at the Salonika front that not just vindicated Alexander's and Pašić's leadership, but also achieved the national unification of Yugoslavs under the terms favoured by the Serbian government.

In the way of epilogue, Alexander asserted his authority over Pašić immediately after the war when he declined to appoint him Prime Minister in the first Cabinet of the newly-minted Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia after 1929) formed on 7 December 1918. Although all political parties from pre-war Serbia and the former Habsburg lands proposed the grand old man for premiership in recognition of his services, Alexander was unbending on account of his bitterness because of Pašić's attitude at Geneva.<sup>74</sup> As has been noted,

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<sup>73</sup> "He wants to be a ruler and does not agree to be ruled," Colonel Milan Gr. Milovanović Pilac, a close friend of Apis, noted Alexander's words at the height of tensions between the government and Black Handers in 1914. Likewise, in 1915, Alexander stressed to another Black Hander, Velimir Vemić, that he "does not want to be a tool in the hands of others, he wants his freedom and [free] will, even if it gets him killed." See Gligorijević, *Kralj Aleksandar Karađordjević*, I, 62–63, 248.

<sup>74</sup> Jovan M. Jovanović Pižon, *Dnevnik*, entry of 10 May 1919, 583, and of 19 May 1919, 586; Branislav Gligorijević, "Kralj Aleksandar Karađordjević i Nikola Pašić", in *Nikola Pašić: život i delo*, 428.

Pašić's abuse of the Regent's authority at Geneva was, at least, open to suspicion. In his draft letter of resignation, Pašić mentioned his failure to include Ninčić in his ministry as a primary reason for Alexander's wrath.<sup>75</sup> Be that as it may, the Regent seems to have exploited the differences during the Geneva conference as a convenient excuse to get rid of Pašić rather than nurtured a genuine grievance. The timing was essential: Alexander was intent on strengthening his grip on the government and, for that reason alone, Pašić's well-nigh legendary place in Serbian politics was a hindrance. His dismissal of Pašić, despite the rules of parliamentary democracy, was something of a coup d'état and it was a harbinger of Regent's autocratic ambitions that would become manifest in the Yugoslav state. The ordeals of the Great War and the manner in which he dealt with difficulties constituted a formative experience for the young Prince Alexander that made him into the ruler of Yugoslavia he would be during the next fifteen years until his tragic death in 1934.

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<sup>75</sup> Živanović, "Jugoslovensko pitanje u svetlosti pregovora", 218, n. 36.

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This paper results from the project of the Institute for Balkan Studies *History of political ideas and institutions in the Balkans in the 19th and 20th centuries* (no. 177011) funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

