

IN MEMORIAM



Dušan T. Bataković
(1957–2017)

Dušan T. Bataković was a historian and a diplomat with a wide range of interests; from rock and roll – he played in a rock band in his youth, to modern painting – he made his residence as Serbia’s ambassador in Paris into something of a gallery, to journalism – he used to be the editor of various Belgrade journals and reviews in the 1980s. But first and foremost, he was a man of firm convictions and they had decided his life’s path. Throughout our many conversations and discussions over the thirty odd years since we first met at the Historical Institute where we both started our careers as historians, he maintained that one should choose profession in accordance with one’s profound inner beliefs as that is the only way in which one’s work can attain its full meaning. His most profound inner belief was his patriotism, a term and concept which nowadays, in the era of globalisation, tends to have a negative connotation. Dušan sincerely and deeply loved his native country and its people. He believed that Serbia which he loved and for which he worked all his life both as a historian and as a diplomat should be a democracy based on the legacy of the Golden Age of the Serbian parliamentary system (1903–1914) and an integral part of Europe of sovereign nations.

His patriotism led him to state his views on politics and history clearly and publicly, laying aside all consideration for the established views on the political scene and in historiography. He considered it to be his duty to speak up against erroneous political decisions and to point out the inconvenient truths and inconsistencies in the national narrative. His judgements and opinions were always based on scrupulous respect for the methodology of historical research.

Following the path traced by his professors Dimitrije Djordjević and Radovan Samardžić, Dušan chose the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century history of Kosovo as the main subject of research, one of the most challenging topics in Serbian history. In the course of this research the concern for the Serbian population and Serbia's medieval cultural heritage in Kosovo became a genuine calling for Dušan. His books, *The Dečani Question* and *Kosovo and Metohija in the History of Serbia*, published in the 1980s, offered a new and well-documented history of the Southern Serbian province. While preparing his doctoral thesis at the Sorbonne in Paris in the 1990s, he published *Kosovo. La spirale de la haine* (1993) and *L'histoire de la Yougoslavie* (1995), trying courageously to challenge the predominant narrative which presented Serbia and Serbs as the only culprits for the bloody breakup of Yugoslavia.

His research on the nineteenth-century history of Serbia led him to conclude that Serbia, in its search for a model to look up to, had turned to France. In doing so he followed the logic that had been the basis for the famous "Nacher-tanie", the programme of Serbian national policy analysed in one of his books. It had been said there that Serbia should look for models beyond the surrounding absolutist empires, i.e. the Austrian, Ottoman and Russian empires. His work on the Serbian youths who pursued their higher education in Paris and, upon returning to Serbia, became opinion-makers as government ministers and university professors popularly known as "Parisians" at the time, as well as his articles on bilateral relations acquired their full importance in his PhD thesis on the French sources of parliamentary democracy in Serbia, which was subsequently published by the CNRS.

I remember a conversation we had in Paris after he had received his PhD. He told me that he had no doubts about what he should do next. The opportunity to teach at French universities that he was offered had no real appeal to him. His mind was made up: he was going to return to Serbia where his research could have its full importance. Once back in Serbia in the late 1990s, he immediately joined the ranks of opposition to Milošević's regime, putting in practice his beliefs that Serbia should be a true democracy based on European models.

Dušan wrote his papers with the same passion with which he fought the communist power holders in Serbia. He wrote for long hours, mostly at night, convinced that he should do all that was in his power to rectify the unfounded but dominant narrative which made Milošević the personification of contemporary Serbian history. His relentless efforts took a toll on his health. Even so,

after the fall of Milošević and the democratic turn in the country, he accepted to serve as Serbia's ambassador first in Athens, and then in Ottawa and Paris. As a historian he had spent years reading diplomatic correspondence. Now he found himself in a position to write it himself, only to conclude that it necessarily revealed only an incomplete picture of reality. He wrote his correspondence with the utmost attention of a historian fully aware that it would not be read only by his superiors but also by the generations of historians to come, fully aware that the most important information cannot and must not be committed to writing. Dušan's encounter with the diplomatic world was a source of disillusionment for him; he found out that bureaucratic complacency was more common than personal initiative. A man of Dušan's temperament and convictions could not have felt at ease in such an environment, but his ambassadorship at Athens, Ottawa and Paris was considered a success both by his hosts and the Ministry in Belgrade.

As Serbia's ambassador in Paris (2009–2012) Dušan was able to continue and crown his research on relations between the two countries and on the French influences in Serbia, while trying to foster closer cooperation between two societies. It was through his effort that Serbia was given a prominent place in the museum dedicated to the memory of the Great War in France. He organised, since his predecessors could not or would not, a commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the assassination of King Alexander of Yugoslavia in Marseilles. Dušan as ambassador in Paris, with the authority of an expert on Kosovo, defended the territorial integrity of Serbia.

At the end of his diplomatic career, Dušan re-joined the Institute for Balkan Studies where he spent most of his scholarly career and which he led as director from 2005 to 2007 and again from 2012 until his death. Dušan's firm conviction that Serbia is a part of Europe and that, consequently, its history is an integral part of European heritage, inspired him to do his best to demonstrate it by putting in place, from 2005 onwards, a publication policy of the Institute aimed at enhancing its and the nation's visibility in the academic world by publishing in French and English. The Institute's journal *Balkanica* has been published in English and French since 2006. Until 2017, during the period when he was editor-in-chief, even while he served as ambassador, the Institute for Balkan Studies published fifteen collections of conference papers in English and French. He considered it necessary to acquaint the international audience with the work that was being done in the Serbian humanities since it was largely unknown due to its publications being almost exclusively in Serbian. In the same period the Institute under his guidance published thirty-four books in Serbian.

On his initiative the Institute has begun the process of developing international cooperation on the regional and European level. During his term in office, the Institute took part in four international projects, concluded ten cooperation agreements with related institutions from France, Russia and Italy,

and organised four international conferences. He was also vice-president of the International Association for South-Eastern European Studies (AIESEE).

Even though he may have seemed to be a strict, at times quick-tempered person who would not refrain from stating harsh truths regardless of the effect it may have on his interlocutor, Dušan was a warm person who had a profound empathy for his colleagues and friends. He tried his best to help whoever he could and put much effort into helping the younger colleagues at the Institute to find their way in their research.

Dušan was convinced that a life has a meaning only if lived to the full. He devoted his life to the well-being of Serbia as he understood it. Serbia that cherishes its Orthodox roots and is respectful of its history. Serbia that upholds its democratic traditions and takes care of the well-being of its citizens both at home and in the diaspora. As a historian, he did his best in his lectures, papers and books in order for the present generations not to lose national consciousness. As a diplomat, he fought as hard as he could to prevent Serbia from losing parts of territory and, above all, to prevent it from losing its self-esteem.

The enormous and generous efforts Dušan put into accomplishing his various scholarly and patriotic objectives, the fights he fought in defence of the integrity of the historian and history, and those he fought as a historian in politics took a serious and irreparable toll on his health. His departure has left an immense and irreplaceable void for his family, friends, colleagues, and for all those who respect his life's work. He left leaving us richer for the moments we had the privilege to share with him. The Institute for Balkan Studies will dedicate the following issue of the *Balcanica* to the memory of Dušan T. Bataković.

Vojislav G. Pavlović