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ITALY AND KING ALEKSANDAR OBRENOVIĆ (1889–1894)

Abstract: This paper follows the Italian attitude towards king Aleksandar Obrenović and Serbia, from the abdication of King Milan (1889) to May 21st, 1894, when king Aleksandar with a coup d’état suspended the Constitution of 1888. It was observed through the reports of Italian diplomatic representatives, mostly its minister plenipotentiary in Belgrade, Francesco Galvagna. He was a precise and attentive witness to the important transitional events in domestic politics and foreign affairs of the regime of King Aleksandar. The article is based on unpublished materials, published documents and available literature.

Keywords: Italy, Aleksandar Obrenović, Serbia, Francesco Galvagna, Milan Obrenović.

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Introduction. The abdication of King Milan IV and the clashes of the royal couple

The political change that took place in Serbia in 1889 was thus communicated by the Italian minister plenipotentiary in Belgrade, Francesco Galvagna: King Milan IV Obrenović had informed the cabinets in Vienna and Berlin that he was prepared “to renounce abdication on the condition that he could proceed to a coup d’état with suspension of the constitution”; however, he had added that abdication was far preferable so as not to create complications with Russia.¹ In the pages that follow, Galvagna will be a precise and attentive witness to the

¹ *Documenti Diplomatici Italiani* (=DDI), Serie II, 1870–1896, Vol. XXII, Roma, 1994, N. 513, Galvagna to Crispi, Belgrade, March 7th, 1889.

important transitional events in domestic politics that led to the consolidation of the regime of King Aleksandar, the last member of the Obrenović dynasty.²

The abdication of King Milan IV created no small stir within the chancelleries of the European powers of the day. In London, the event was greeted with deep regret, although, according to the British Prime Minister, Marquis Robert Gascoyne-Cecil of Salisbury, “that act was to be ascribed to the King’s lack of wisdom, and not to a new political reason”, and it was hoped, among London’s political leaders, that a minimum of public order would be maintained in Belgrade, so that an intervention – military, of course – by Austria-Hungary, and consequently by Russia, would not be provoked, “with the terrible consequences foreseen by all”.³

The Italian Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Francesco Crispi, had given Galvagna, through Costantino Nigra, ambassador in Vienna, precise instructions, already the previous year, 1888, for the reconciliation of King Milan IV with Queen Natalija (of the Bessarabian house of Kešco), and this was an indication of the importance Italy attached to the political stability of the small Kingdom of Serbia,⁴ even though the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister, Count Gustáv Kálnoky, had announced that Viennese diplomacy would not intervene in Serbian internal affairs until order and above all legality had been fully established in Belgrade. The Russian counterpart, Nikolaj Karlovič Girs, who was so distrustful of Serbia that he in turn refrained from any intervention, and recognised the Regency, with which he would have the same relations as with the previous regime, said the same thing.⁵ It is also apparently curious to note that both Italy and Austria-Hungary, at the time of the abdication, wished for the realisation of a military federation project between Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria: the government in Rome, presided over by a convinced triplicist such as Francesco Crispi, intent on stemming the irredentist thrusts in the eastern Adriatic and on collaboration with Austria-Hungary, precisely in 1889, the year of the Treaty of Uccialli, had asked Austria-Hungary for naval support in the event

2 See the fundamental biography С. Рајић, *Александар Обреновић – владар на прелазу векова. Сукобљени светови*. Београд, 2014. See also: М. Војводић, *Србија у међународним односима крајем XIX и XX почетком века*, Београд, 1988; About the Serbian Radical party: М. Ст. Протић, *Радикали у Србији. Идеје и покрет, 1881–1903*, Београд, 1990; Никола Пашић, *живот и дело. Зборник радова са научног скупа у Српској академији наука и уметности, Београд, 16. и 17. октобар 1995. године и Задужбини Николе Пашића у Зајечару, 19. октобар 1995. године*, ред. В. Крестић, Београд, 1997. See also the important monography J. Ivetić, *Le relazioni diplomatiche tra Serbia e Italia dal Congresso di Berlino all’annessione della Bosnia e Erzegovina (1878–1908)*, Novi Sad, 2019.

3 DDI, Series II, 1870–1896, Vol. XXII, N. 519, Catalani to Crispi, London, March 9th, 1889.

4 *Ibidem*, N. 159, Crispi to Nigra, Rome, July 17th, 1888.

5 *Ibidem*, N. 515, Nigra to Crispi, Vienna, March 8th, 1889.

of a French attack in the Mediterranean, provided Italy did not impinge on the security of the Ottoman Empire, thus encouraging Russia to expand its influence outside Bulgaria, namely in Serbia.⁶ This federation project, therefore, was to be understood as having an anti-Russian function, so that 'when hostilities break out, their forces [i.e. those of Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria] will depend on one leader and proceed with one plan'. Such a plan might have pleased the Serbian government and also King Charles of Romania.⁷

The abdication of King Milan IV marked an important moment in Serbian international relations: from then on, Austria-Hungary gradually lost its influence over the government in Belgrade. Galvagna, in this respect, made a fundamental statement to Crispi in a dispatch dated June 16th, 1889:

"If the policy of the Vienna cabinet could not, in spite of the effective support of King Milan and the progressive party, take firm root in this country, it is because the friendship of Austria-Hungary was, is and always will be contrary to the national feeling of the Serbs. The occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, towards which the aspirations of the Serbian nation preferentially turn, would alone suffice to explain the aversion felt here against the neighbouring empire. During the long period of time when Serbia remained an open field for the actions of Austria-Hungary, the Vienna Cabinet had the grievous wrong to do nothing to mitigate the effects of this aversion. Aiming only at its own interests, it always treated Serbia as a vassal, and in return for an unfaithful friendship demanded the sacrifice of national sentiment and economic welfare. Given this state of affairs, it is easy to understand how the abdication of King Milan and the defeat of the Austrian policy that followed were greeted with jubilation by the entire Serbian nation; it is easy to understand the sentiment that now drives the Serbs to gradually destroy everything that the ceased regime had done out of servility to Austria-Hungary."⁸

Then, on June 28th, 1889, the 500th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo Polje was celebrated in Belgrade, and this caused a great deal of concern in Con-

6 In general, see: L. Albertini, *Le origini della guerra del 1914*, 3 voll., Milano, 1942–1943, 76–87; A. J. P. Taylor, *L'Europa delle grandi potenze. Da Metternich a Lenin*, Bari, 1961, 451–453; A. J. May, *La monarchia asburgica 1867–1914*, Bologna, 1991, 413–415; G. Volpe, *La Triplice Alleanza (1882–1915)*, Milano, 1939; L. Salvatorelli, *La Triplice Alleanza (1877–1912)*, Milano, 1939; R. Sciarrone, *L'Italia nella Triplice Alleanza. Politica e sistema militare*, Roma, 2014; R. Petriagnani, *Neutralità e alleanza. Le scelte di politica estera dell'Italia dopo l'Unità*, Bologna, 1987.

7 DDI, Series II, 1870–1896, Vol. XXII, N. 560, Crispi to Nigra, Rome, April 20th, 1889.

8 *Ibidem*, N. 605, Galvagna to Crispi, Belgrade, June 16th, 1889.

stantinople as well, where the chargé d'affaires Salvatore Tugini, on that very day, remarked that if order had been restored in Novi Pazar up to that point, it was due to the Triple Alliance, to which the Ottoman Empire felt a deep debt for "service rendered".⁹

The new Serbian government, chaired for the second time by General Sava Grujić from February 23rd, 1889, did everything in its power not to offend the sensibilities of Austria-Hungary by holding celebrations, which took place at the monastery of Žiča: Vienna's main fear at that time was the possibility of the Serbs of Vojvodina seceding to reunite with the Kingdom of Serbia, just as the Serbs of Kosovo, Sandžak and Macedonia, although delegates from the occupied Serbian territories did not participate in the Vidovdan celebrations; Galvagna, for his part, did everything to reassure his government that the seditious anti-Austrian rumours coming from Belgrade were unfounded. In the Žiča Monastery, on 2 July 1889, the future King Aleksandar was anointed - the first anointed king of liberated Serbia - under the office of Metropolitan Mihajlo, and for all the rest, in order to prove that Serbia was not celebrating Vidovdan for insurgent purposes, he took the following measures it did not allow the presence of delegates of Serbian Ottoman subjects at the celebrations, while Austria-Hungary prevented the anointed Serbs from returning to Serbia, and did not invite any diplomatic representatives so as not to provoke clashes with the Ottoman Empire; as well, the only diplomatic delegate who participated in the celebration was the Russian one, Aleksandar Ivanovič Persijani.

Yet, another crisis was in sight, and it concerned the divorce of the former royal couple. Developments in the matter were more than excellently dealt with by Suzana Rajić, King Aleksandar's biographer, and Jovana Ivetić, in what relates to the Italian perspective of the problem. In June 1889, Queen Natalija, an exile in Russia, expressed her wish to see her son, Aleksandar, again. The former King Milan IV was extremely worried about this, because this eventuality could have favoured Russia in exerting its influence, in turn, over Serbia, something he discussed with Galvagna in a private audience at the end of July 1889. In Russia, Queen Natalija was discouraged in her efforts, but she still wanted to go to Belgrade, only to find the doors of the konak closed and her son forbidden to see her. This only aggravated the confrontation, which ended with an agreement, made thanks to the three Regents, Jovan Ristić, Konstantin Protić and Jovan Belimarković, that the Queen could see her son every fortnight, on the condition that she would leave Serbia for two months of the year. All that led to the last clash, which took place during 1890. On this occasion, Queen Natalija tried to challenge the handling of the divorce, trying to convince Metropolitan Mihajlo to urge the Synod to make it possible for the divorce to be annulled, but after a compulsory examination of the documents

9 *Ibidem*, N. 622, Tugini to Crispi, Constantinople, June 28th, 1889.

in the monastery archives in Žiča, it was found that the divorce was illegal. The king was informed of this and in retaliation ordered the former consort to see her son permanently. The queen felt that she had been denied her mother's right, so she addressed a memorandum to the National Assembly in early December, but King Aleksandar was prompted to reply with a letter reprimanding his mother for behaving in an undignified manner, and warning her to break off all relations with him if she continued her attitude.¹⁰

During this long and troubled period, two major events had occurred at the international level: Prince Otto von Bismarck had resigned from the Imperial Chancellery on March 20th, 1890, which did not allow the renewal of the Treaty of Counter-assurance of June 18th, 1887,¹¹ and the consequent diplomatic rapprochement of Russia with France, while, in Rome, the second Crispi¹² government had fallen on January 31st, 1891, which was followed by the formation of the first government headed by Marquis Antonio Starabba Di Rudinì, on the following February 6th; the latter, while caused a profound change of intentions in Italian foreign policy towards Africa, in nothing changed the respective objectives in Mediterranean and Balkan policy. Rather, they were considerably consolidated.¹³

The beginning of the sympathies for Russia

In February 1891, Galvagna denied the existence of a purely pro-Russian sentiment in Serbia, saying that “the Serbs caress Russia, a little out of affinity of race, a little out of animosity against Austria-Hungary, a little out of calculation of possible, though uncertain, benefits; but at the bottom of their souls they do not keep friendship with Russia, because they do not believe in a sincere friendship with Russia”; indeed, it is worth remembering that, with the peace preliminaries of San Stefano (March 3rd, 1878), Russia had ended up favouring Bulgaria for its own calculations, i.e. to create a road that would lead it to Constantinople. Again, according to Galvagna, Russia could, for reasons of expediency, have “momentarily granted its support to Serbia”. The president of the Serbian Council, General Sava Grujić, in spite of his Russophilia, confessed “that he himself was subjected, as a necessity, to the Serbian government's deference to the advice and wishes of the

10 J. Ivetić, *Le relazioni diplomatiche tra Serbia e Italia*, 135–136; C. Рајић, *Александар Обреновић*, 48–51.

11 For the German text of this important treaty: E. R. Huber, (hrsg.), *Dokumente zur Deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte*, 3. bearb. Aufl., 1851–1900. Stuttgart, 1986, 2 Bd, II, 498–500.

12 About Crispi: R. Mori, *La politica estera di Francesco Crispi (1887–1891)*, Roma, 2011. See also: F. Crispi, *Politica estera. Memorie e documenti*, Milano, 1912; T. Palamenghi-Crispi, *Francesco Crispi. Questioni internazionali. Diario e documenti*, Milano, 1913.

13 See: I. Bonomi, *La politica italiana da Porta Pia a Vittorio Veneto*, Torino, 1944, 82–92.

Petersburg cabinet», while Jovan Ristić, as a pure pro-Russian, had at one point begun to turn his attentions more towards Austria-Hungary. Galvagna explains this in a rather detached way: since King Milan had made it a condition for the establishment of the Regency, which was to watch over his son Aleksandar until he came of age, that he maintain a loyal friendship with Austria-Hungary; “and to those who know Mr Ristitch’s inordinate ambition and greed for profit”, Galvagna continues, “it is no wonder that he was able to sacrifice his political sentiments to the dazzling prospect of a long Regency and a lavish allowance.”¹⁴

Meanwhile, on February 20th, 1891, the first government headed by General Grujić fell. Galvagna commented that the general “had, first of all, the sin of origin, that is, he was not a pure radical, but an old liberal converted to radicalism only three years ago”, and he also had the “wrongness of professing too moderate principles, and being too conciliatory towards the Regency”. The radicals, in this way, favoured the coming to power of Nikola Pašić, for the first time, on February 23rd, 1891. He had the stature of “the only man capable of leading that undisciplined mass of street politicians and rural deputies who, under the name of the radical club, have been dictating the law to the government and controlling its actions for two years”.¹⁵ Although the new government had in mind the maintenance of order within national borders and the preservation of peace in international relations, Galvagna comments on the character of the new Prime Minister: “Passitch [*sic*] has neither the conciliatory spirit nor the moderate ideas of his predecessor. He is a sectarian, of very dubious monarchical faith, in direct contact with the Slavophile committees in Petersburg and Moscow. It cannot be predicted at the moment what use he will make of the power he is invested with”.¹⁶ This did not detract from the fact that Marquis Di Rudini responded to Pašić’s wish for foreign peace “in full and cordial reciprocity”.¹⁷

Galvagna then gave news of an imminent trip of the abdicated King Milan to Belgrade, with the pretended intention of re-embracing his son, King Aleksandar, but with the real intention of “trying to renew with the Pasitch Cabinet the secret agreements already established with the Grouitch Ministry”.¹⁸ including the “very essential” question of the appanage for King Milan, which he could have settled

14 Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (=ASMAE), Affari Politici P, 1891–1916, folder 192, N. 60/39, Galvagna to Di Rudini, Belgrade, February 18th, 1891.

15 *Ibidem*, N. 68/42, Galvagna to Di Rudini, Belgrade, February 21st, 1891.

16 *Ibidem*, N. 64/43, Galvagna to Di Rudini, Belgrade, February 23rd, 1891; See also: DDI, XXIV, Serbia, N. 350, Galvagna to Di Rudini, Belgrade, February 27th, 1891.

17 DDI, XXIV, Serbia, N. 351, Di Rudini to Galvagna, Rome, March 8th, 1891.

18 ASMAE, Affari Politici P, 1891–1916, folder 192, N. 83/52, Galvagna to Di Rudini, Belgrade, March 5th, 1891.

either by intimidation or by seduction and conciliation. On 6 March 1891, King Milan was solemnly welcomed to Belgrade, also on the occasion of the second anniversary of King Aleksandar's accession to the throne. With the new government, the former King Milan settled his personal situation definitively, not only in what pertained to his state-guaranteed allowance of 300,000 francs per year, but also: "2nd) formal recognition of the divorce by the Ecclesiastical Authority and the Government; 3rd) definitive removal of Queen Natalia from Serbia; 4th) King Milan's solemn undertaking not to set foot in Serbia again during King Aleksandar's minority; 5th) consent of the Regency and the Government for the young sovereign to visit his father abroad from time to time". It goes without saying that Galvagna, in this situation, explained the profound reason why the Radical Party wished to keep the removal of King Milan and Queen Natalia from Serbia current: they considered the presence of King Milan harmful to the country, especially to its Austrophilia.¹⁹ At the same time, the new Serbian government had also tried to adapt Berdan rifles, purchased in 1890 in Russia, from the Steyr Factory in Austria: nothing came of it, and this contributed, according to Galvagna, to "calm the belligerent intentions of this government".²⁰

The conflict between the Serbs and Bulgarians over the much-troubled Macedonian question also continued during these times. The danger of a warlike conflagration between the two countries was admittedly remote, but it was there nonetheless. Only when Serbs and Bulgarians had finally agreed on the spheres of influence to be exercised in Macedonia could this danger be averted, although Galvagna believed that Serbia itself did not want to "lend itself to an understanding with Bulgaria out of deference to Russia, which has an interest in the discord that exists between the two nationalities". In fact, the main reason for the Serbian-Bulgarian disagreement was that "Russian influence in Belgrade and Austrian influence in Sofia are endeavouring to prevent the two countries from loyally extending their hand, while at the same time avoiding pushing them into at least premature acts of hostility", which had already happened in 1885.²¹ To all this it must be added that Galvagna was highly suspicious of Austria-Hungary's actions in connection with the unrest in Albania at the time. Avarna considered the accusations made by the royal minister in Belgrade to be very serious and asked Di Rudinì to clarify the matter and to "obtain reliable information by all possible means, so that he could form an

19 *Ibidem*, N. 87/55, Galvagna to Di Rudinì, Belgrade, March 6th, 1891.

20 *Ibidem*, N. 106/68, Belgrado, 24 marzo 1891. See also: DDI, XXIV, Serbia, N. 353, Galvagna to Di Rudinì, Belgrade, April 14th, 1891; N. 354, Galvagna to Di Rudinì, Belgrade, April 15th, 1891.

21 ASMAE, Affari Politici P, 1891-1916, folder 192, N. 95/61, Galvagna to Di Rudinì, Belgrade, March 16th, 1891; DDI, XXIV, Serbia, N. 355, Galvagna to Di Rudinì, Belgrade May 20th, 1891.

exact criterion of the state of affairs”.²² Di Rudinì, for his part, declared Galvagna’s suppositions “incompatible with a prudent appreciation of the general interests of the Monarchy, and with the open and formal declarations of Count Kalnoky”, and, in addition to this, gave Cucchi Boasso, at the beginning of June in Rome, the instruction, on which Galvagna asked for clarification, to support, in what pertained to Serbia, “indirectly and without ostentation the policy of *inorientation* of Austria-Hungary”. *Inorientation* policy meant, according to the Marquis Di Rudinì’s instructions, that “the possible aspirations of the Vienna cabinet in the Balkan peninsula could not, therefore, a priori be considered contrary to the direction of Italian policy”, as it was understood by the Italian government in the expression found in the Triple Alliance.²³

In June 1891, the distinguished Greek politician Charilaos Trikoùpis paid a visit to Belgrade, in whose honour the Society of St. Sava had organised a banquet. The real purpose of Trikoùpis’ trip was to exchange with the leading Serbian and Bulgarian political figures some important views on the current state of affairs in the Balkan countries, as he was convinced that the future of the peninsula depended solely on a possible understanding between the various nationalities inhabiting it. The concept of a Balkan confederation, Galvagna reported, was certainly too broad and vague, and the Serbian, Bulgarian and Greek nationalities each had to be willing to sacrifice their individuality for the sake of the common homeland. Rather, secret intelligences between the three nationalities were desirable, which in time could have led to closer agreements and, if necessary, even to a defensive alliance, without the principles of autonomy of each of the contracting states being affected in any way.²⁴ After all, Russia had some extra interest in putting its control over Serbia: in April 1891, in fact, the procedure for the conversion of Serbian public debt was underway: the Serbian Minister of Finance had, in fact, momentarily renounced travelling to Berlin, and had left for Petersburg, as he would have liked to have had the support of the Russian government “to decide the French capitalists to take part in that financial operation”; at the same time, the Serbian Minister Plenipotentiary in Petersburg, Vujić, would in turn have travelled to Berlin to negotiate with the *Handels-Gesellschaft* and then to Paris.²⁵

22 DDI, XXIV, Serbia, N. 356, Avarna to Di Rudinì, Vienna, May 28th, 1891.

23 *Ibidem*, N. 358, Di Rudinì to Avarna, Rome, June 3rd, 1891; DDI, XXIV, Serbia, N. 365, Di Rudinì to Galvagna, Rome, July 12th, 1891.

24 ASMAE, Affari Politici P, 1891–1916, folder 192, N. 222/134, Galvagna to Di Rudinì, Belgrado, 15 giugno 1891, also in DDI, XXIV, Serbia, N. 361, Galvagna to Di Rudinì, Belgrade, June 15th, 1891; N. 364, Galvagna to Di Rudinì, Belgrade, June 24th, 1891.

25 ASMAE, Affari Politici P, 1891–1916, folder 192, N. 146/95, Galvagna to Di Rudinì, Belgrade, April 27th, 1891.

Unfortunately, even in June 1891 there were rather excited rumours of a possible government crisis, due to the usual serious disagreements between Cabinet members, especially between the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and between the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Trade - there was even talk of personal animosity between these ministers. Some of the press also claimed that the crisis could have erupted immediately after the return of King Aleksandar and Pašić from his trip to Paris, Vienna and St. Petersburg, or even, more simply, after the opening of Skupština, given the seething discontent of many members of the Assembly who intended to fight the Cabinet over the affair concerning the expulsion of Queen.²⁶ According to Fausto Cucchi Boasso, who was secretary of the Italian Legation in Belgrade at the time: "The bonds of sympathy with the Russian people, no doubt, are strengthened: the Serbs know or imagine that at receptions in Kiev and Moscow, the Russian people expressed their lively sympathy for the small Slavic kingdom of the Balkan peninsula. Less excited are they about the reception given by the Tsar and the political circles in the capital to King Aleksandar".²⁷

However, the visit made to the Tsar by the King of Serbia was, in essence, passed over in silence. Tsar Alexander III, who a few days earlier had received Prince Peter Karađorđević at court, had limited his welcome to the young king, who had turned 15 on August 14th, to what was strictly necessary, although he did not go below a certain "minimum": while King Aleksandar was in St. Petersburg, the Tsar had left for a review of troops in Finland, nor had King Aleksandar been treated to the grand lunch that the Tsar usually offers to sovereigns who come to St. Petersburg. The trip had been, more than anything else, a timely manoeuvre by Jovan Ristić aimed at regaining the prestige at the Russian court compromised by the Queen Natalia affair.²⁸ However, in September 1891, the Italian ambassador in St. Petersburg, Baron Maurizio Marochetti, added that it would be erroneous to believe that the 'sustained' reception given in Russia to the young King Aleksandar was due to less friendly relations between the two countries: in the eyes of the Tsar, that state dominated as it was geographically and economically by Austria did not constitute for Russia a factor whose importance should be exaggerated; that government felt secure for the moment in the friendship of the Serbian Reggenets, and did not despise that friendship in the Balkans on the borders of Bulgaria, where Prince Ferdinand reigned. On the other hand, it was obvious that France, under the impression made on its team

26 *Ibidem*, N. 296/179, Cucchi Boasso to Di Rudinì, Belgrade, August 4th, 1891.

27 *Ibidem*, N. 313/183, Cucchi Boasso to Di Rudinì, Belgrade, August 14th, 1891.

28 *Ibidem*, N. 406/195, Marochetti to Di Rudinì, Petersburg, August 15th, 1891.

in Kronstadt, believed that it was doing Russia a kind thing by accentuating the courtesy of its welcome to the Young King of Serbia.²⁹

In any case, Cucchi Boasso, as early as August, had already envisaged certain consequences of that trip by the King of Serbia that also deserve to be taken into consideration. In a very confidential dispatch, he wrote that the trip to Paris had indeed been decided long ago, i.e., since King Milan had expressly requested to see his son. The Regency agreed, as long as King Aleksandar did not arrive in Paris after first passing through St. Petersburg and then Vienna. Initially it was to be a “strictly private” trip, later changed to a “semi-official” one. The central argument of this dispatch is as follows:

“Might it not be supposed that Serbia, in its animosity towards Austria-Hungary, perhaps in order to gain some advantage for Petersburg and Paris, had offered its services on this occasion should Russia and France attack the Triple Alliance? Or might not France, in view of its sympathy for Russia, have conceived of using this state to lure it too to take an active part against one of its enemies, Austria-Hungary, the day war broke out?”³⁰

For his part, the Russian Foreign Minister, Nikolaj Karlovič Girs, stated that, despite the concentration of troops on the Serbian border, the Serbs would never take the initiative, betting their heads, of any hostile act against the Bulgarians. The possibility of any agreement between Russia and Serbia in the event of France and Russia attacking the Triple Alliance was then considered remote, as Russia had not requested it, and Serbia itself was too cautious to risk its existence if the fate of arms did not smile upon Russia.³¹ Moreover, now the Treaty of the Triple Alliance, renewed on May 6th of that year in Berlin, contained a fundamental novelty: Article VII, concerning reciprocal compensation in the event of an alteration of the status quo, which reproduced Article I of the Italo-Austrian pact enclosed with the first renewal of the Treaty of February 20th, 1887 and which would create very serious disagreements of interpretation between Italy and Austria-Hungary in 1908 and 1914.³²

29 *Ibidem*.

30 ASMAE, Affari Politici P, 1891–1916, folder 192, N. 325/192, Cucchi Boasso to Di Rudini, Belgrade, August 22th, 1891, See also DDI, XXIV, Serbia, N. 367, Cucchi Boasso to Di Rudini, Belgrade, August 20th, 1891; N. 371, Rudini to Menabrea, Marochetti and Nigra, Rome, August 30th, 1891.

31 ASMAE, Affari Politici P, 1891–1916, folder 192; N. 462/226, Marochetti a Di Rudini, Pietroburgo, 12 settembre 1891.

32 This article states that: “L’Autriche-Hongrie et l’Italie, n’ayant en vue que le maintien, autant que possible, du statu quo territorial en Orient, s’engagent à user de leur influence

The Austrian-Hungarian Foreign Minister, Count Gustav Kálnoky, intervened to balance things up a little with his statements about his satisfaction with the meetings he had with Regent Ristić and Pašić himself. These statements, which the Austro-Hungarian minister made in Bad Ischl, were certainly full of warnings and advice, and in them one could almost catch a glimpse of threats that certainly could not have been pleasing to Serbian ears.³³ After the lively controversy in the Serbian press, especially in the radical daily *Odjek*, had partially subsided, Giuseppe Avarna di Gualtieri, at the time an Italian chargé d'affaires in Vienna, wrote on September 20th, 1891 that "the sympathies of the men who were now in power, like those of the majority of the population, were directed towards Russia. If there were still people in Serbia who had friendly feelings for Austria-Hungary, it was necessary to look for them among those who had once formed the progressive party".³⁴

It was also in those days that news broke concerning an important political meeting in Zaječar held by members of the Radical Party. Although it took place in an orderly manner, it was nevertheless characterised by a series of very serious disagreements and quarrels between the respective delegates. Fears ensued about a subsequent change of ministry, with Vujić, the current Minister of Finance, becoming president of the Council, and Pašić becoming minister plenipotentiary in St Petersburg.³⁵ In fact, in the end, there were only a few very slight changes of ministry: on November 4th, a reshuffle gave the Finance portfolio to Pašić, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Trade to Velimirović, formerly at Public Works. It was understood, given the disastrous state of Serbian finances, that Pašić would

pour prévenir toute modification territoriale qui porterait dommage à l'une ou à l'autre des puissances signataires du présent traité. Elles se communiqueront, à cet effet, tous les renseignements de nature à s'éclairer mutuellement sur leurs propres dispositions, ainsi que sur celles d'autres puissances. Toutefois dans le cas, où, par suite des événements, le maintien du statu quo dans les régions des Balkans ou des côtes et îles ottomanes dans l'Adriatique et dans la mer Egée deviendrait impossible, et que soit en conséquence de l'action d'une puissance tierce soit autrement, l'Autriche-Hongrie ou l'Italie se verraient dans la nécessité de le modifier par une occupation temporaire ou permanente de leur part, cette occupation n'aura lieu qu'après un accord préalable entre les deux puissances, basé sur le principe d'une compensation réciproque pour tout avantage, territorial ou autre que chacune d'elles obtiendrait en sus du statu quo actuel, et donnant satisfaction aux intérêts et aux prétentions bien fondées des deux parties".

33 ASMAE, Affari Politici P, 1891–1916, folder 192; N. 335/220, Cucchi Boasso to Di Rudini, Belgrade, September 1st, 1891; DDI, XXIV, Serbia, N. 377, Avarna to Di Rudini, Vienna, September 20th, 1891.

34 ASMAE, Affari Politici P, 1891–1916, folder 192; N. 2125/815, Avarna to Di Rudini, Vienna, September 20th, 1891.

35 *Ibidem*, N. 369/217, Cucchi Boasso to Di Rudini, Belgrade, September 20th, 1891.

not hold the Finance Ministry for long, and that the portfolio would be entrusted to the Director General of the Monopolies, Lazar Paču, after he had completed his mission to Vienna as the Serbian delegate for the negotiations of the Trade Treaty.³⁶

Even at the end of 1891, Count Kálnoky's speeches about the Balkan Peninsula were still being discussed within Belgrade public opinion. Austria-Hungary, not content with having seized Bosnia-Herzegovina and become a "Balkan state",³⁷ was fomenting unrest in Old Serbia, and this accusatory stance emerged, one imagines, from no less a progressive newspaper closer to the pro-Austrian political current, *Videlo*. Galvagna, after warning of the inconvenience of attaching too much importance to the lucubration of one or the other of the contending parties, noted that Serbia was not a dangerous, but a troublesome neighbour for Austria-Hungary, and that, conversely, Austria-Hungary did nothing "to appease the Serbs", and was doing everything "both with the almost daily remonstrances of this representative and with the attacks and threats in the newspapers, to increase the antagonism between Serbia and Austria-Hungary and to throw this nation more and more under the influence of Russia".³⁸ Kálnoky, in fact, had some time earlier simply expressed, in some of his speeches before the Delegations, his greater preference for Bulgaria than for Serbia, and had expressed the opinion that Serbia itself would do anything to beat a path of breaking international treaties.³⁹

In those very days, Galvagna began briefing his government on the engagement of the young king. Initially, none other than Princess Helena, sixth daughter of Prince Nicholas of Montenegro, had been thought of, with the aim of putting an end to the ongoing conflict between the Obrenović and Petrović-Njegoš families. Galvagna conjectured, at this juncture, the possibility of an intervention by the Tsar.⁴⁰

Towards King Aleksandar's seizure of power

At the opening of the Narodna Skupština on January 10th, 1892, Galvagna immediately became aware of some parliamentary defections made by deputies of the Radical Party, which he considered to be "a first symptom of the disintegration

36 *Ibidem*, N. 399/230, Galvagna to Di Rudinì, Belgrade, November 4th, 1891.

37 Galvagna complained about these facts in DDI, XXIV, Serbia, N. 364, Galvagna to Di Rudinì, Belgrade, June 24th, 1891.

38 ASMAE, Affari Politici P, 1891–1916, folder 192, N. 431/242, Belgrade, December 12th, 1891.

39 *Ibidem*, N. 417/238, Belgrado, November 26th, 1891; DDI, XXIV, Serbia, N. 380, Galvagna to Di Rudinì, Belgrade, November 26th, 1891.

40 ASMAE, Affari Politici P, 1891–1916, folder 192, N. 370/218, Galvagna to Di Rudinì, Belgrade, November 28th, 1891.

to which the great Radical Party is fatally heading”, In fact, it was too numerous to remain united and was destined, due to the disparate opinions that were beginning to manifest themselves within it, to break up into a fringe, the most numerous, which would remain loyal to the men in government at the time, and into another, more extreme, which would go on to form a new opposition party. The prestige that Nikola Pašić wielded over his party had, in the meantime, waned considerably, and “where he used to see his word received with deference, he is now forced to fight to make his government ideas prevail”. This situation, according to Galvagna, had to be ascribed to several causes, not least of which was the disorder introduced into every branch of the administration, the expulsion of Queen Natalija and the critical financial condition of the small Kingdom of Serbia,⁴¹ distressed by a deficit, in the budget for the year 1892, of no less than 6,300,000 francs, with 500,000 francs more than last year for the debt incurred in 1891 with the Handels-Gesellschaft in Berlin, to the tune of some 9 million francs.

There were two ways to make up that deficit, namely by increasing the land tax further - and most of the deputies of the Narodna Skupština belonged to the rural class: the rest were of consequence - or by raising the prices of tobacco.⁴² The radical deputies, therefore, began to create unrest by, among other things, holding an interpellation concerning the legality of Queen Natalija’s expulsion. The interpellation gave rise to long and acrimonious debates that lasted for three sittings. The result was the approval of the agenda concerning the government’s actions in this matter by both branches of the radical party, but also by a large part of the opposition - “a very valuable acquisition for the dissident radical group”.⁴³

Thus, in May 1892, while in Italy, on the 15th, Giovanni Giolitti came to power in his first term, King Milan renounced the throne of Serbia once and for all, not after securing a loan of 2 million francs on the basis of King Aleksandar’s assets. It would later come to light that this loan had been issued by the Russian government directly.⁴⁴ In this, however, King Aleksandar would have had to, “in the very act in which he concluded the loan, renounce all rights and privileges granted to him by the constitution not only, but also Serbian subservience, and undertake never to set foot in Serbia again”. Galvagna provided the Italian Foreign Ministry with a French translation of this decision.⁴⁵

41 *Ibidem*, N. 15/6, Galvagna to Di Rudini, Belgrade, January 19th, 1892.

42 *Ibidem*, N. 32/14, Galvagna to Di Rudini, Belgrade, February 3rd, 1892.

43 *Ibidem*, N. 39/18, Galvagna to Di Rudini, Belgrade, February 11th, 1892.

44 *Ibidem*, N. 202/96, Belgrade, Cucchi Boasso to Di Rudini, June 14th, 1892; DDI, XXV, Serbia, N. 381, Cucchi Boasso to Di Rudini, Belgrade, August 16th, 1892.

45 ASMAE, Affari Politici P, 1891–1916, folder 192, N. 42/21, Galvagna to Di Rudini, Belgrade, February 18th, 1892.

The consequences of King Milan's departure from Belgrade were seen quite clearly after the death of the regent Konstantin Protić: he was to be replaced in November 1892 by a new colleague by a vote within the Narodna Skupština, and this was to mark a shift in Serbian domestic politics. The deceased regent was not considered to be an outstanding figure by Galvagna, as he would not have been able to aspire to the ranks of the Regency "if in the last years of King Milan's scandalous reign he had not given his body and soul to his master in the hateful and unfriendly struggle between the King and Queen Natalia".⁴⁶ The election of the third regent took place in July 1892, and the event was most widely publicised in Russia. The candidates were to be General Grujić, at the time Minister Plenipotentiary in Constantinople, and the President of the Council Pašić, or at least a member of the Radical Party, although one had to take into account "and not a little, the attitude of the present Regents, both "liberals", who will not want a personal enemy or a determined opponent for a colleague".⁴⁷ Then, in June, there was a revival of the activities of the Liberal Party, to which the Regents Ristić and Belimarković belonged, encouraged by the decline in popularity of the Radical Party, related to the poor financial situation in Serbia. This gathering, as we shall see, will give considerable results to the respective party in the elections. On June 12th, more specifically, a large gathering of the Liberal Party was held, attended by 5,000 people, where "the financial administration of the Radicals was sharply criticised and it was declared that the Radical Party would have a mission to restore the finances", as well as respect and sympathy for the sacrifices made by the Tsar for the freedom of Serbia.⁴⁸ This rally, as we shall see, would give the respective party considerable results in the elections.

After a government crisis, Nikola Pašić decided to complete the composition of his cabinet, which had been reduced, due to his resignation, to just five ministers: Svetozar Milosavljević as Interior Minister, Mihailo Kr. Đorđević as Justice Minister, Andra Nikolić as Ecclesiastical Affairs Minister, General Dimitrije Đurić and Pera Velimirović as Public Works Minister, while Pašić kept the Foreign Ministry for himself. The difficulties arose above all from the difficulty of finding individuals within the Radical Party capable of discharging public functions, and who could at the same time enjoy the confidence of the Regents.⁴⁹ However, yet another government crisis, which had some resonance throughout the country, brought the Radicals back to power, with the creation of the liberal-majority

46 *Ibidem*, N. 141/68, Cucchi Boasso to Brin, Belgrade, June 14th, 1892.

47 *Ibidem*, N. 167/79, Cucchi Boasso to Brin, Belgrade, July 7th, 1892.

48 *Ibidem*, N. 42/21, Galvagna to Di Rudini, Belgrade, February 18th, 1892.

49 *Ibidem*, N. 85/36, Galvagna to Di Rudini, Belgrade, April 3rd, 1892.

government led by Jovan Avakumović on August 9th, 1892.⁵⁰ Cucchi Boasso stated about this event that

“Neither the choice of Regent III, for which it seemed until recently that any possible friction between the Regency and the radical government would be eliminated, nor the conclusion of the Trade Treaty with Austria-Hungary, which, on the whole, being the maximum of concessions that the neighbouring Monarchy could make represents a success achieved by the government, would ever support were causes of a crisis as important as the one that, still latent today, may any day break out.”⁵¹

From Vienna, on the other hand, Avarna stated that people in Vienna were quite aware of Jovan Avakumović’s dispositions towards the Powers - i.e., tending towards friendly relations - but that it was not unknown for the Liberal Party to be as ‘enfeebled’ with Russian ideas as the Radical Party was.⁵²

Meanwhile, the loan for national armament in Serbia was being negotiated. The Narodna Skupština, for this purpose, had convened two secret sessions at the end of April 1892. That loan was to lead to the creation of a 10% land surtax, although a first 6% surtax had been voted two years earlier: the proceeds of that new levy were to secure a 20-million-franc loan that the government was to vote on. The first necessary military expenses were to be the purchase of 100,000 rapid-firing rifles and their ammunition, six batteries of Bange cannons and the purchase of 40 position cannons to arm the Pirot and Zaječar strongholds, with the purchase also of 1,000 horses for the artillery itself. Galvagna knew that these expenses were unlikely to be sustained:

“Assuming that the 20 million will be reduced [at the probable rate of 70% issuance] to an actual 14 million, it is evident that the sum will not suffice to cover the budgeted expenditure. Moreover, I have heard that the government does not intend to devote more than a part of the sum coming from the loan [5 or 6 million at most] to the national armament, while the remainder will be used to pay off the Treasury bonds currently in circulation in the amount of approximately 5 million francs, and to cover other liabilities of the General Administration.”

50 *Ibidem*, Incoming telegram, N. 1901, Cucchi Boasso to Brin, Belgrade, August 21st, 1892. See also: DD, XXII, Serbia, N. 383, Cucchi Boasso to Di Rudini, Belgrade, August 22nd, 1892.

51 *Ibidem*, N. 106/50, Galvagna to Di Rudini, Belgrade, April 24th, 1892.

52 DDI, XXV, Serbia, N. 383, Avarna to Brin, Vienna, September 18th, 1892.

The situation was also rather difficult, as the Krupp company had warned that it would only sell its parts when the new trade treaty between Serbia and Austria-Hungary had been concluded.⁵³

After its dissolution, the elections to the Narodna Skupština, held on February 25th / March 8th, 1893, took place: the Liberals managed to gain a remarkable rise in seats, gaining 64 ones, exactly as many as the Radicals, while the Progressive Party gained only four, a sign that, at the very least, the pro-Austrian Serbian political force had been placed in a narrow minority. However, the radicals were largely dissatisfied with the result, and for the situation to change, there was only one solution: the proclamation of the young King Aleksandar's majority. In the midst of the turmoil that arose following the vote count, the radicals sent Lazar Dokić to Vienna to discuss the proclamation of King Aleksandar's majority with King Milan, promising the former king that the radicals would form the opposition in the Assembly and support the proclamation of the king to the throne.⁵⁴ The coup was scheduled for April 12th, but King Aleksandar wanted the ministers to agree with his aide-de-camp Ilija Ćirić, postponing the coup until April 13th. Ćirić suggested that the king invent an excuse to summon all the ministers to the palace and facilitate their arrest; the king followed the suggestion and on 13 April summoned the ministers to court on the pretext that he wanted to discuss with them the law forbidding the return of his parents to the country.⁵⁵

Thus, as Galvagna recounts, on the evening of April 13th, 1893, at a lunch at Court, to which the two Regents and all the Ministers had been invited, the young King Aleksandar, who had not yet turned 17 at the time, "solemnly announced that the Regency had ceased to exist and that he henceforth assumed in his hands the Royal authority". Against this unexpected resolution, the two Regents protested vigorously, but King Aleksandar,

"after ordering his First Field Adjutant to carry out his orders, he left the room, followed by the Officers of Ordnance. And when, somewhat surprised, the Regents and Ministers wanted to leave the dining room to join the Sovereign, they were ordered to be arrested by the First Field Marshall. Rebelling against this order, the Regent-General Beli-Markovitch wanted to defend himself by drawing his sabre, but the Adjutant of the Field was on him with a revolver in his fist, and the General, ceasing all idea of resistance, allowed himself, together with his colleague Mr. Ristitch and the Ministers, to be led under

53 ASMAE, Affari Politici P, 1891–1916, folder 192, N. 204/98, Cucchi Boasso to Brin, Belgrado, August 18th, 1892.

54 C. Рајић, *Александар Обреновић*, 76–78.

55 J. Ivetić, *Le relazioni diplomatiche tra Serbia e Italia*, 144.

the escort of armed guards to a secluded room in the Royal Palace to await further orders from the King.”⁵⁶

King Aleksandar, therefore, once he had assembled the principal state officials he had appointed, went from one barracks to another, receiving tributes of loyalty and obedience from the troops. “All this”, writes Galvagna, “took place in the middle of the night, unbeknownst to everyone, and the public did not become aware of the serious event until the next morning, when the proclamation was posted on the walls of the city with which King Aleksandar announced to the nation that he had assumed power”. The people of Belgrade greeted the news with jubilation, feeling relieved of “the nightmare that had been oppressing them for some time”, i.e., the whole blanket of uncertainty hovering around the nation’s destiny, which was now consolidated thanks to the young king’s assumption of full power. In what did this uncertainty consist? Obviously in the creeping antagonism between radicals and liberals:

“a Regency faithful to its constitutional duties would have been able to curb the impetuosity of the two parties, and by being the first to set an example of respect for the law, prevent the abuses of power that the Cabinet headed by Mr Avacumovitch was committing in order to fight and crush the radical opposition. In contrast, the Regents, blinded by partisan spirit and greed for empire, had made common cause with the Liberals, so that the struggle was no longer between Ministry and Opposition, but between Opposition and Regency.”⁵⁷

According to Galvagna, the Regency’s behaviour had even criminal levels when, despite the unhappy election result, it did not force the Ministry to resign, provoking such animosity in the radical party that an uprising could be feared at any moment.⁵⁸ Galvagna correctly contemplated that:

“the coup d’état of 13 April averted a grave danger for Serbia, removing the country from the critical situation in which the Regency government had placed it. The lawlessness without number and without measure committed by the Avacoumovitch [sic] Ministry had produced such discontent in the masses that not only public order, but the dynastic principle itself, was endangered. The change of re-

56 ASMAE, *Affari Politici P*, 1891-1916, folder 192, N. 100/41, Galvagna to Brin, Belgrade, April 15th, 1893.

57 *Ibidem*.

58 *Ibidem*.

gime, which took place without the slightest inconvenience and was greeted with jubilation by the nation, restored calm in the souls.”⁵⁹

Towards 1894

From Belgrade royal letters were sent to the various European sovereigns and heads of government notifying King Aleksandar’s accession to the throne, with the sole exception of Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria, to whom no notification was sent, for reasons of convenience, it seemed, towards Russia.⁶⁰ Nigra, in this regard, reported that Kálnoky had accepted the new arrangement of the Serbian monarchy and was awaiting official confirmation from King Aleksandar.⁶¹ However, as far as Kálnoky’s declarations were concerned, one should “certainly not give much weight to those manifestations of mutual friendship, for the causes of friction between Serbia and Austria-Hungary are too many and too deep”, although Austro-Serbian relations were improving considerably at the time.⁶² From London, Baron Giuseppe Tornielli Brusati di Vergano reported the lively enthusiasm that the news of King Aleksandar’s seizure of power *plenis titulis* aroused at the *Foreign Office*.⁶³ From St. Petersburg, Baron Marochetti reported the pride that the event aroused in the imperial Ministry of Foreign Affairs in these precise terms: “the Russian Cabinet could not but rejoice at the act of vigour of the young King Aleksandar, since the situation had become more than turbulent and a brawl was to be feared in Serbia, following the electoral pressure exerted to the bitter end in favour of the Liberals, and the protest of the radical party against the violation of the constitution”.⁶⁴ Some perplexity circulated, however, at the Sublime Porte, where “general opinion was not averse to attributing to the King of Serbia communications prior to the coup d’état aimed at securing the approval of the Russian government”.⁶⁵ It was, therefore, the demeanour of Count Kálnoky, who, noting that King Aleksandar had declared himself “of age a few

59 ASMAE, Serie Politica P, folder 192, N. 110/45, Galvagna to Brin, Belgrade, April 26th, 1893.

60 *Ibidem*, N. 113/48, Galvagna to Brin, Belgrade, May 2nd, 1893.

61 DDI, XXV, N. 347, Brin to the Embassies in Berlin, Constantinople, London, Paris, Petersburg and Vienna and to the Legation in Belgrade, Rome, April 15th, 1893

62 ASMAE, Serie Politica P, folder 192, N. 150/67, Galvagna to Brin, Belgrade, June 9th, 1893.

63 DDI, XXV, Serbia, N. 398, Tornielli to Brin, London, April 19th, 1893.

64 *Ibidem*, N. 399, Marochetti to Brin, Petersburg, April 27th, 1893.

65 *Ibidem*, N. 397, Di Bisio to Brin, Constantinople, April 24th, 1893.

months before the regular time”, also noted that this act had been well received by his people and made no other remark about that “regular way of proceeding”.⁶⁶

At the end of April, Galvagna wrote about the internal situation in Serbia following the coup d'état, seeing it as a key moment in the country's crisis scenario, which the Avakumović government and the governor had only worsened, expressing, moreover, his personal misgivings about the position of Russian diplomacy with regard to King Aleksandar, who was not happy about the progressives joining the new government, as they were known to be proponents of the Austrophile current in foreign policy.⁶⁷ New elections were, therefore, called for May 30th, 1893, with the Radicals gaining a landslide victory: Galvagna had already predicted a few days earlier that within the Serbian National Assembly, the Radicals would gain more than 120 seats, and so they did. The radical Lazar Dokić, whom we have already met in the role of his party's delegate in Vienna, in charge of discussing the legitimacy of King Aleksandar's assumption of full powers, was given the responsibility of forming a new government. Galvagna, in all of this, fervently hoped that Dokić would remain at the head of the Serbian administration for a long time, given his sensibility and, above all, the salutary influence he exerted on the young ruler's soul.⁶⁸ The result of the general election therefore reflected Galvagna's prediction: 120 radicals, 10 progressives, 1 liberal and 3 ballots.⁶⁹ Immediately after his accession to the throne of Belgrade, King Aleksandar met for three days with the former Queen Natalija in Klado-vo, Trajan's Bridge, and then returned to Romania as he did not want to create dissension in Belgrade with his return to Serbia. Galvagna was informed that in the meantime, a reconciliation had taken place between Queen Natalija and King Milan IV, “advised solely by the dangerous direction that things had taken in Serbia and by the convenience, in the interest of her son, of putting an end to the scandal of the divorce”.⁷⁰

On June 16th, 1893, the proceedings of the Narodna Skupština were solemnly opened. In this regard, Galvagna wrote that King Aleksandar's speech there, although interrupted several times by the assembly itself, was not a great success with the people, as the King could “explain to the nation the imperious reasons that drove him to the coup d'état of April 13th, but he should not rail, as he did, against the fallen; and even less so since the fallen are not mere individuals, but

66 *Ibidem*, N. 393, Nigra to Brin, Petersburg, April 27th, 1893.

67 С. Рајић, *Александар Обреновић*, 85–89.

68 ASMAE, Serie Politica P, folder 192, N. 135/60, Galvagna to Brin, Belgrade, May 26th, 1893.

69 *Ibidem*, N. 153/68, Galvagna to Brin, Belgrade, June 17th, 1893.

70 *Ibidem*, N. 133/59, Galvagna to Brin, Belgrade, May 26th, 1893; N. 583/156, Curtopassi to Brin, Bucarest, June 10th, 1893.

a whole party with many strong adherents in the country”.⁷¹ It should come as no surprise, however, that in July, a proposal arrived at the National Assembly to impeach the members of the previous Avakumović government on at least eight counts, the most serious of which, it appeared, was the one relating to the appointment of the Third Regent.⁷² Nonetheless, the new Minister of Finance would shortly afterwards finally manage to take out a loan of 44 million of francs, at a nominal value, and at a rate of 76, and repayable in 50 years, provided by the following credit institutions: the Ottoman Bank, the *Handelsgesellschaft* in Berlin, the *Crédit Lyonnais* and the *Länderbank* in Vienna.⁷³

It dates back to this period, in fact, a considerable cooling of diplomatic relations between Serbia and Austria-Hungary: for travel from one side of the Danube to the other, passports were again compulsory from September 3rd, since in the opinion of Count Kálnoky, “resounding invocations of the ideal of *Greater Serbia*” began again in Serbia, and, more generally, the Serbs had great illusions in assuming that the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina were favourable to them and willing to indulge their aspirations: those populations, Count Kálnoky added, were not at all willing to join Serbia, whose poor administration and poor financial conditions they were unaware of. It is true that, as pointed out by Jovana Ivetić, it was precisely during the Dokić government that the newspaper *Odjek* prodigiously published nothing less than the secret agreement with Austria-Hungary of 1881.⁷⁴ He did not share the Slavophile views of his ministers and believed that the best policy for Serbia was not to take sides with either Russia or Austria-Hungary, but to remain strictly neutral and maintain fair relations with both.⁷⁵ Moreover, Pašić, who was then Minister Plenipotentiary in Russia at the time, was rather suspect among Austro-Hungarian diplomats, if Baron Alois Lexa von Aehrenthal, ambassador in St. Petersburg at the time, stated that “Mr Pachich’s [*sic*] constant dealings with the editors of the Chauvinist newspapers in St. Petersburg and Moscow, and the rather murky sources from which he usually draws his information, cast a very ambiguous light on the actions of this diplomat”.⁷⁶

71 *Ibidem*, N. 153/68, Galvagna to Brin, Belgrade, June 17th, 1893.

72 *Ibidem*, N. 180/81, Ranuzzi to Brin, Belgrade, July 14th, 1893.

73 *Ibidem*, N. 160/71, Galvagna to Brin, Belgrade, June 23th, 1893.

74 *Ibidem*, N. 209/96, Ranuzzi to Brin, Belgrado, August 25th, 1893; N. 276/123, Ranuzzi to Galvagna, Belgrado, October 22th, 1893; DDI, XXV, Serbia, N. 408, Avarna to Galvagna, Vienna, October 25th, 1893; J. Ivetić, *Le relazioni diplomatiche tra Serbia e Italia*, 145.

75 ASMAE, Serie Politica P, folder 192, N. 283/127, Galvagna to Brin, Belgrade, October 30th, 1893.

76 DDI, XXV, Serbia, N. 412, Costa to Brin, Petersburg, November 28th, 1893.

Due to Dokić's serious illness, the respective government – which had to undergo a change and receive a second term, on June 16th, with the replacement of the Minister of War, Dragutin Franasović, by General Grujić⁷⁷ – fell on December 5th, 1893, followed by the death of Dokić himself on the 13th of the same month. Almost coincidentally, in those very days, the Italian government also changed: on 15 December, when the first Giolitti government fell, Francesco Crispi returned for the third time, precisely on 15 December 1893, with Baron Alberto de Blanc as Foreign Minister.

The new government was formed by General Grujić himself, in his fourth term of office, on December 5th, 1893: the respective composition was announced in a telegram from Belgrade dated December 6th.⁷⁸ Very important is that in this government, no less than Milenko Radomir Vesnić was to appear as Minister of Cults, while Vujić remained, as in the previous government, in the Finance Ministry. This government lasted only until January 24th of the following year, and after all, Austria-Hungary looked favourably on the overthrow of that government, since, according to Baron Marius von Pasetti, an official in the Foreign Ministry at the time, the Serbian government had, among other things, created manoeuvres in Bosnia and Herzegovina "of proportions that not could remain unnoticed, either with events intended to realise the idea of a large kingdom Serbian, and with the organisation of armed waves, aimed at promoting unrest in those provinces".⁷⁹

In January 1894, King Aleksandar also informed the ministers that he would allow his father to return to the country. King Milan returned to Serbia on January 21st. Cesare Ranuzzi Segni, First Secretary of the Italian Legation in Belgrade, reporting to Galvagna about King Milan in a dispatch dated January 22th, hoped that his authority would restore calm in a country torn apart by the conflict between radicals and progressives. He concludes his dispatch: "Some political figures do not regard it as improbable that the king will take full powers and rule with a military minister. Others do not exclude the hypothesis that King Milan may take over the regency for some time during a journey that King Aleksandar wishes to undertake for a few weeks". When King Milan returned, King Aleksandar summoned the radicals to the palace and asked them to accept 18 points that had been set as a condition for remaining in power. Refusing to accept the repeal of the law forbidding the return of the king's parents, the radicals refused to accept

77 ASMAE, Serie Politica P, folder 192, N. 154/69, Galvagna to Brin, Belgrade, June 18th, 1893.

78 *Ibidem*, Telegramma in arrivo N. 4046, Visart to Brin, Belgrade, December 6th, 1893.

79 ASMAE, Serie Politica P, folder 192, N. 2739/1088, Avarna to Brin, Vienna, November 9th, 1893.

Milan's return.⁸⁰ The situation started to become extremely serious from that moment on, because with that refusal on the part of the fourth Grujić government, the cooperation of the radical party with the young king was lost. About this, in another dispatch, also dated January 22th, Galvagna also explained that:

“The state of affairs appears serious, since on the one hand the radicals do not intend to change their plans, conscious, as they are, of their strength; on the other hand the progressives and liberals do not want, even out of deep personal animosities, to come to an agreement with some of their opponents. Nor would the dissolution of the House bring any significant remedy, considering that it would revert to a radical majority. It is to be hoped that the experience and authority of King Milan will triumph over the difficulties.”⁸¹

Now, it should be noted that King Aleksandar supported a centralist state, a constitutional monarchy in which the sovereign would be the most important power in the country, bringing together legislative and executive power. The radicals, who constituted the electoral majority, supported a popular government in which the National Assembly would bring together the executive, legislative and judicial powers. Since King Aleksandar professed himself to be adamantly opposed to this governmental set-up and felt his power under threat, he was pushed to fight against parliamentarianism, while the radicals positioned themselves at the opposite extreme.⁸² On January 24th, 1894, with the disastrous resignation of the fourth Grujić government, Đorđe Simić formed a new government, at the suggestion of King Aleksandar, and with the help of his father, reversed in three uninterrupted days of government consultations.⁸³ The new government, therefore, was made up of progressives and liberals who did not belong to the political sphere but rather to the intellectual one: Mihailo Đorđević at the Interior, Milovan Đ. Milovanović, who would play such a large part, as minister plenipotentiary in Rome, in Italian-Serbian diplomatic relations, at Justice, Vujić again at Finance, Andrea Nikolić at Education and Ecclesiastical Affairs, Jovan Mišković at War, Petar Velimirović at Public Works and Ljubomir Krelić at the National Economy. Secretary Ranuzzi could only note from Belgrade the considerable satisfaction expressed by Kálnoky for the newly formed Serbian government, while the Italian dispatches from Constantinople, on the other hand, testified to the Sublime Porte's considerable fears about the constant changes of government in Serbia, where

80 ASMAE, Serie Politica P, folder 192, N. 18/4, Ranuzzi to Blanc, Belgrade, January 22th, 1894.

81 DDI, XXV, Serbia, N. 413, Ranuzzi to Brin, Petersburg, November 28th, 1893.

82 C. Рајић, *Александар Обреновић*, 103–105.

83 ASMAE, Serie Politica P, folder 192, N. 21/8, Ranuzzi to Blanc, Belgrade, January 25th, 1894.

Russian and Austrophile governments alternated at every turn, contemplating the possibility of sending military reinforcements to the border. It was believed that this situation could lead to a conflict between Russia and Austria-Hungary and thus undermine peace in Europe. It was, therefore, in the opinion of the Italian ambassador to Constantinople, Luigi Avogadro di Collobiano Arborio, necessary for the Powers that be to work "to ensure that the King and his new cabinet use restraint and, while remedying a state of affairs that was really disturbing the country, do not fall into the errors and abuses of the past".⁸⁴ The dramatic aspect of the affair was that Austria-Hungary also mobilised troops on the border with Serbia: the VII Army Corps near Timisoara, the XIII Army Corps near Zagreb, and the XV deployed in Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁸⁵

The Simić government lasted only two months, until April 2nd, 1894. King Aleksandar was dissatisfied with the work of the prime minister, and felt that he did not listen to his instructions and did not intend to force him into obedience. It was at this specific juncture that the king had the intention of abrogating the Constitution of December 22th, 1888. After the dissolution of the Simić government, the new government of Svetomir Nikolajević, which the Russian Foreign Ministry, by the way, greeted with great disdain, as it considered its members to be "creatures of the former king Milan, who, as a result, cannot inspire any confidence in St. Petersburg".⁸⁶ On Palm Sunday, April 22nd, the day on which the second Serbian uprising, which had begun in 1813, was commemorated in Serbia, King Aleksandar openly announced the fight against the radicals, again mentioning the abolition of the constitution; he would fight the radicals to the last, at the cost of abdicating. It is important to note, what the reading of the Italian diplomatic documents especially allows us to do, that Tsar Alexander III could, by this time, only openly express his indignation against the 'mortifications suffered by Russia in the Balkans, where the spirit of autonomy and independence every day destroys the hopes of panslavism'. If one adds to this the fact that the Tsar had just as indignantly refused to welcome Simić to Petersburg after the fall of his government, the picture is complete.⁸⁷ Ranuzzi then goes on to report the details of a singular incident that occurred to the second finance minister of the past Simić government, Cedomilj Mijatović. From his work desktop a letter was

84 DDI, XXVI, Serbia, N. 415, Ranuzzi to Blanc, Belgrade, January 25th, 1894; N. 416, Ranuzzi a Blanc, Belgrade, January 26th, 1894; Di Collobiano to Blanc, Constantinople, January 25th, 1894.

85 *Ibidem*, N. 418, Di Beccaria to Blanc, Budapest, March 1st, 1894.

86 *Ibidem*, N. 423, Marochetti to Blanc, Petersburg, April 6th, 1894.

87 *Ibidem*, N. 426, Marochetti to Blanc, Petersburg, April 9th, 1894.

stolen, addressed to the banker Hoskier in Petersburg, in which the following was written:

“Our Cabinet is convinced that, in the present state of affairs, it is strictly necessary for the King and our country to be able to rely on the Tsar’s good dispositions. We are very sorry to see that the Tsar has made Mr Simić’s coming to St. Petersburg dependent on certain circumstances that we ministers are in a position to present, especially on account of the radical press, which writes in such a revolutionary tone that the idea that the radicals might in fact rise up against him as soon as King Milan leaves Serbia can be discerned in the young King’s mind.”⁸⁸

This letter was treacherously published in the *Odjek*, with the consequences that were natural to expect: new disturbances in Serbia, which generated fears in Baron Blanc, who was already aware that the Russian Foreign Ministry was rather unhappy about the presence of the former King Milan in Serbia, which, given Baron von Aehrenthal’s admittedly oblique character and the tenor of the news he might have provided to Vienna, might even have justified an Austro-Hungarian military intervention in Serbia.⁸⁹ For all these reasons, prior to the abolition of the constitution, King Aleksandar repealed the laws of 1891 and 1892 prohibiting the return of his parents until they came of age.⁹⁰ On May 21st, 1894, the king suspended the Constitution of December 22th, 1888, thus reinstating the old Constitution of 1869. Prior to the suspension of the Constitution, the government had formally resigned, and for this reason the aforementioned reinstatement took place unilaterally, i.e., without the opinion of the government itself. After the new legislation was passed, the cabinet resumed its duties. The only ones to contest the constitution were the radicals, because this represented the failure of their decades-long battle. Galvagna pointed out that the abolition of the constitution was more than expected, as demonstrated by previous events in the country. He emphasised, in particular, the following:

“After the court of cassation had ruled, by a majority of nine against four, against the validity of the royal decree concerning the King’s parents, the government was left with no other course of action, either to remove the members of the court of cassation from office in open violation of the constitution, or to suspend the constitution itself. This second party was preferred in order to be able to apply the

88 *Ibidem*, N. 426, Ranuzzi to Blanc, Belgrade, April 10th, 1894.

89 *Ibidem*, N. 430, Marochetti to Blanc, Petersburg, May 10th, 1894.

90 *Ibidem*, N. 431, Galvagna to Blanc, Belgrade, May 11th, 1894.

old statute of 1869, which was much less liberal than that of 1888. By such a substitution, the government can, with greater resolve and without going outside the law, proceed against subversives of the order or supports such. To this end, all the old laws regulating the freedom of the press, the right of assembly, etc. were put back in force. [...] The return to the 1869 constitution was greeted by the general public with that apathy that is one of the characteristics of the Serbian people. Only the radical newspapers are clamouring, declaring that they recognise no other fundamental law than that of 1888, on which the prince, ministers and people have sworn.”⁹¹

* * *

Contrary to what one might have believed, King Aleksandar’s act of imperium did nothing but cause deep concern in official Russian circles, and for one simple reason: it effectively ousted the radicals from power, putting them in very serious difficulty.⁹² On the other hand, the 1894 coup d’état left completely indifferent, at least apparently, Austria-Hungary, and in general the political stability that king Aleksandar granted with his act of imperium – stability whose end coincided with engagement with Draga Mašin in 1900 – this allowed the Serbian government, at the beginning of 1895, the unification of its four loans with the Länderbank of Vienna, with the Ottoman Bank and the Handelsgesellschaft of Berlin: 1. the 1881 one (bonds of the Semendria railways; worth: 12,500,000 francs); 2. the 1882 one (agricultural bonds; worth: 8,400,000); 3. the 1890 one (bonds of the salt monopoly); 4. the 1893 one; worth: 44,000,000 francs.⁹³

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91 *Ibidem*, N. 435, Galvagna to Blanc, Belgrade, May 25th, 1894.

92 *Ibidem*, N. 434, Marochetti to Blanc, Petersburg, May 13th, 1894.

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ИТАЛИЈА И КРАЉ АЛЕКСАНДАР ОБРЕНОВИЋ (1889–1894)

Резиме:

У чланку се третира италијански однос према краљу Александру Обреновићу и Србији, од абдикације краља Милана (1889) до 21. маја 1894. године, када је краљ Александар државним даром суспендовао Устав из 1888. године.

Абдикација краља Милана изазвала је забринутост код великих европских сила. Између осталог, показало се да она води постепеном смањењу аустроугарског утицаја у Србији, што је италијански врх врло брзо приметно. У Риму су били врло заинтересовани за догађаје у Србији. Њихов примарни

интерес састојао се у одржању политичке стабилности српске државе и избегавању великих промена, које би могле да поремете однос снага. Дипломатски представници Италије детаљно извештавају о држању великих сила према променама, унутрашњој ситуацији, односу краља Милана и краљице Наталије, спољнополитичким потезима Србије, питању наоружавања и финансијском стању земље. Посебно велику пажњу изазвали су државни удари краља Александра Обреновића (1893 и 1894) – проглашење пунолетним и укидање Устава из 1889. године. Италијански посланик у Београду Франческо Галвања показао се као нарочито прецизан и поуздан сведок важних догађаја у унутрашњој и спољној политици Србије тог времена.