

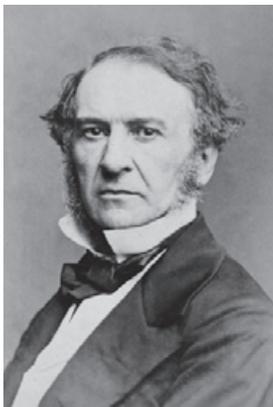


Centre for
British Studies



Speeches delivered at the Opening of the Centre for British Studies

Belgrade, January 26-27, 2018



On January 26, 2018, the International Conference entitled “Serbian (Yugoslav) – British Relations from the 19th to the 21st Centuries” was held at the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Belgrade. It was organised by the Centre for British Studies of the Faculty of Political Science. It was opened by the speeches of Prof. Dragan R.Simić, Dean of the Faculty of Political Science, HM Ambassador to Serbia Denis Keefe, and Prof. Vukašin Pavlović, President of the Council of the Centre for British Studies.



Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished participants of the conference,
Your excellencies, Distinguished professors,
Dear Prof. Pavlović,

It is my exceptional pleasure to welcome you all as esteemed participants of this important conference on the topic of Serbian-British relations – the biggest of its kind since the 1980s.

We have gathered in Belgrade a little more than 180 years after the first British General Consul in Serbia, Colonel Hodges, presented his Letters of Credence to the Serbian ruler, Prince Milos Obrenovic. We have as well gathered in the year celebrating precisely the centenary of the huge victory of Entante Cordiale in the First World War – the first joint victory of the British and Serbian armies. Since in international relations the anniversaries of important events provide opportune moments for summaries and critical analyses of their consequences and legacy, I would like to summarize the very purposefulness of this event:

Firstly, let me underline the contribution which this conference gives to academic research on the nature of Serbian (Yugoslav) – British relations from the 19th century onwards. Numerous prominent Serbian historians and cholars, from Cedomilj Mijatovic and Slobodan Jovanovic, to Dimitrije Djordjevic, Stevan Pavlovic and Mihailo Vojvodic, to Slobodan G. Markovic, Milos Kovic and Cedomir Antic have, among others, given significant contributions to this academic research, together with their outstanding British counterparts. However, as the remarkable professor Dragoljub Zivojinovic claimed in his brilliant book on British – Serbian relations six years ago, there are still numerous aspects of the Serbian – British relations which call for further explanation.

Secondly, this conference should provide an impetus for deepening future cooperation between Serbia and the UK in various spheres. The two nations are known to have had moments of great partnership and close cooperation throughout the history. We are not to forget that:

- we were on the right side of history in both world wars;
- the first Serbian plans for national liberation (establishment of “Serbian Vice-Kingdom” within the Ottoman Empire) were drawn up by Ilija Garasanin with the support of British diplomats and nationals;
- Britain helped Serbia to economically survive the so-called Customs War with Austria-Hungary in the 1900s;
- Serbia received significant aid from the UK ranging from various humanitarian missions during the First World War, such as the one of Lady Paget, to the significant economic help of the UK and the EU in the transition of the 2000s;
- the UK has provided inspiration and refuge for many Serbian intellectuals and political dissidents, such as Count Cedomilj Mijatovic (a great Serbian statesman whose life professor Slobodan G. Markovich turned into a comprehensive biography), Milos Crnjanski, Borislav Pekic, Desimir Tosic or Aleksa Djilas.
- Reputable British universities have been and still are Alma Maters of numerous prominent Serbian scholars and statesmen.

However, it is equally important to be aware of numerous hurdles that have lain in the path of Serbian – British cooperation in their history. From Disraeli’s Turkophile approach in the 1870s, to the breakup of diplomatic relations after the assassination of King Alexander Obrenovic or the brink of military conflict in Trieste in 1945, all the way to the NATO attack on Yugoslavia in 1999 and the consequential recognition of unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo in 2008. The last two events could be named (in analogy with the new British blockbuster) – the “darkest hours” of bilateral relations between two nations. Despite the fact that the Serbs cannot easily forget these historic challenges, especially the NATO bombing, it is important for both nations to continue their cooperation and focus on the positive aspects in the history of their bilateral political relations, but at the same time to analyze these less pleasant aspects in a scholarly and unbiased manner so as to identify mistakes made on both sides.

Some people claim that it was a huge mistake on the Serbian side to insist on the Yugoslav state solution during the First World War, instead of accepting British and Allied proposals for territorial extensions of the Serbian state. Many Serbs blame Britain for its attitude towards Serbia in the 1990s



and 2000s, while the majority of Brits tends to think that Serbia needs to face its own responsibility for the unfortunate events during the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia. Some people even claim that the coup in Yugoslavia on the eve of the conflict with Nazi Germany was a huge mistake for our nation, blaming the British for having influenced such a decision.

While all the previous claims are subject to discussion, the last one can hardly be doubted – the decision to fight against Fascism and Nazism was morally irreproachable. And this righteous alliance is still one of the strongest ties of our two nations.

For a while it seemed that we were going become the members of “the same club” again, but then suddenly – British citizens voted for Brexit! No matter how slowly the Brexit process seems to be progressing, it is most likely to be faster than Serbia’s accession to the EU, predicted for 2025. However, if the British ever decide to come back to the Union – we can promise the reciprocal support for their accession!

Building on this and other positive aspects of our past, we are here to continue our discussion and co-operation in the future, striving for stronger economic, cultural and structural ties between our two countries.

At the very end of my speech on behalf of the Faculty of Political Sciences of the University of Belgrade I would like to express our gratitude to Prof. Slobodan G. Markovic for for having organized this event and for his

really great efforts. Slobodan did an outstanding job, first of all to establish the Centre for British Studies and after that to organize such a conference.

I wish all the participants in the conference a pleasant stay at our faculty and in our country and, of course fruitful work.

Thank you very much!

Prof. Dragan R. Simić,

Dean of the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Belgrade



Unofficial transcript of the Speech of HE Ambassador
Denis Keefe CMG

Prof. Simić,
Prof. Pavlović,

It is a great pleasure to be at this inaugural event of the Centre for British Studies. I would like to welcome all of you to it, particularly those of you who travelled from the UK. We have a really wonderful panel of participants to deal with something which is of great importance. And I do not say that it is of great importance simply because I am the British ambassador to Serbia, but because I think that the relationship between Serbia and Britain is one that is genuinely important for the future of this part of the world and for Britain's future in Europe. Not in the EU, but in Europe.



We devoted a great deal of effort last year to celebrating the hundred and eightieth anniversary of our bilateral relations. We think that we were in fact the first of the Powers to establish diplomatic relations directly with Serbia, at a time when Serbia was not yet a fully-fledged state.

Those hundred and eighty years have been a period of great ups and downs. Of times when we were seriously in disagreement, and times when we

were very much together. On both sides we have had to manage a relationship based both on our interests and on our values. At times we have found these in conflict – in ourselves, and between ourselves. But when the really decisive moments came in the First and Second World Wars we found that they came together. I hope that the future of our relationship is going again to be a period when our interests and our values coincide.

Britain is leaving the European Union. It is doing so in pursuit of a democratic decision, whatever you may think about the costs and benefits of doing so. Serbia has taken a democratic decision that it wants to join the European Union. There is a tension there that many people point out to me and ask me about.

I say in reply that it is easily resolvable, because in leaving the European Union we are pursuing the interests and values that we see for Britain today, and in supporting Serbia's accession to the EU we are also expressing those interests and values. We want to see a prosperous, secure, successful Serbia based on the rule of law, and a prosperous, secure, successful Balkans based on the rule of law. So to us it seems straightforward that to support Serbia's ambition to modernise, to improve its relations with its neighbours, to become a successful member of the European Union is simply in our interests, and fully in accordance with our values.

The values that we look for in our joint history are represented by many wonderful, heroic, creative people. Many of them are illustrated on the cover of the programme of this Conference. One of them is Dr Elsie Inglis.



I have named my house after her, and a few weeks ago I was in Edinburgh commemorating the 100th anniversary of her death with HRH The Princess Royal. Elsie Inglis is one of the most charismatic, one of the most easy to explain representatives of our joint relationship. And that is one reason why we have concentrated on her. The human story of Elsie Inglis and the Scottish Women's Hospitals is very straightforward to grasp.

But there is more to it than that. Elsie Inglis became a figure in the British-Serbian relationship precisely because she was a campaigner for woman's rights, a campaigner for woman's suffrage. It was her political role in British society that created the conditions for her to become such a symbol of the British-Serbian relationship. It is an example of why the study of our hundred and eighty years of relationship is so important. It is so often the case that what is important in our relationship is not simply fortuitous, but is rooted deeply in who we are and who you are.

I would like to finish by commending the work of the Centre, wishing it well, commending the work of the conference and wishing it well, and adding my thanks to all of those who have helped to make this a reality: Prof. Simić, Prof. Pavlović, Prof. Markovich. And if I may add the name of Srđan Gligorijević, without whose efforts perhaps none of this would have happened in the way it has.

Thank you very much.

Belgrade, January 26, 2018.



Dear Prof. Simić,
Your Excellency Ambassador Keefe,
Distinguished guests,
Dear colleagues and friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Centre for British studies, I have the honour and great pleasure to welcome you all and to thank participants from Britain, Serbia and Montenegro for taking part in this conference.

It is my special pleasure to welcome our distinguished guests:

Sir John Randall, former prominent Member of the British Parliament and currently Special Adviser on the Environment to Prime Minister Theresa May;

HE Ambassador Branimir Filipović, Assistant Minister in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia

David Gowan, former Ambassador of the UK to Serbia and Montenegro.

It also is my great pleasure today to welcome our colleagues from six British universities, from the University on Montenegro, from three different faculties of the University of Belgrade (the Faculty of Philology, the Faculty of Philosophy and the Faculty of Political Science), and from two Belgrade institutes (the Institute for Balkan Studies and the Institute for Recent History of Serbia) .



The Conference is entitled “Serbian (Yugoslav) – British relations from the 19th to 21st Centuries”. It is the first conference organised by our recently established Centre for British Studies and represents an official beginning of the work of our Centre.

Dear colleagues,

Allow me to draw your attention to the fact that the Faculty of Political Science in Belgrade was established in 1960 as one of the first educational institutions of its kind in any of the then so-called socialist countries. It became a part of the Belgrade University in 1968.

From the very beginning, our curriculum has been predominantly oriented towards the Anglo-American school of political thought, as the most influential and leading school in political science in the world. It is not an easy task to answer how it was possible at that time in the one-party system in Yugoslavia, and under the strong influence of communist ideology, to stay close to the best part of political science and thought in the West. In my view, the usual answer that Yugoslavia was a special case in the socialist world is correct, but it does not represent a full answer. It seems to me that the most important element for that peculiar achievement of teaching political science in an open-minded way and in the best theoretical framework of modern time is to be found in persistent struggle for academic freedom. Even under strong authoritarian political pressure, the University of Belgrade was able to defend its academic autonomy.

Several distinguished professors from the ranks of the first generation of our faculty members were very familiar with British political ideas and theory. On this occasion, I would like to mention only two of them and to pay tribute to them. The first is Professor Najdan Pašić, one of the founding fathers of our faculty. In the second half of the 1950s, concomitantly with his diplomatic post in London, he prepared his PhD thesis on “Public Corporations in Great Britain”. Due to this fact he became very familiar with British political theory. The next important name is Prof. Vojislav Stanovčić, professor of political theory and member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. His favourite author among classical British political thinkers was John Locke and especially Locke’s theory of constitutional state, accompanied by the rule of law and a strong civil society. Professor Stanovčić was so impressed with the importance of the rule of law that he even gave it precedence over formal democracy. He was one of the co-founders of the Anglo-Serbian Society and also one of the co-directors of the Yugoslav-British Summer School for Democracy.

Having in mind intensive co-operation between the Faculty of Political Science and our colleagues and partners from British universities in the last

two or three decades, I would like to mention several names on the British side, because they deserve our best compliments and special recognition. In the first period, during the 1990s two of our colleagues from Britain played a decisive role: first of all Professor Margaret Blunden, who unfortunately passed away two years ago. During the 1990s she was the Provost of the University of Westminster and gave us great support from the very beginning of our academic cooperation.

The next important figure in our academic relations is John Keane, who was at that time Professor at the University of Westminster and Director of the Centre for the Study of Democracy. In the mid-1990s, we organised a joint research project with John Keane on the Suppressed Civil Society in Serbia. With our British partners we also organised several conferences, including a conference in January 2000, under the title “Democratic Reconstruction in the Balkans.”

Both of them (Blunden and Keane) were co-directors of our British Yugoslav Summer School. During the period of 15 years more than 450 young scholars from the entire region (MA and PhD students) attended the school.

In recent decades, we have established a good academic link with the Centre for South-East Europe of the London School for Economics and Political Science, known under its acronym LSEE. Professor Christopher Coker from the Department of International Relations at LSE has taught at our Summer Schools since 2003. The next prominent figure is Dr. Spyros Economidis, also from the London School of Economics and from LSEE and he has also been co-director of our International Summer School for Democracy. Here with us is also James Ker-Lindsay, Professor at Saint Mary’s University who is also affiliated with LSEE at LSE.

I need to stress that the Belgrade office of the British Council recognised the importance of our co-operation with British universities from the very beginning, and this support played a crucial role in the difficult period of the 1990s.

I am very glad that education at British universities still holds its appeal for new generations of our young scholars in the field of political science. As far as I know about 15 members of our current teaching staff at the Faculty of Political Science got their MAs and PhDs at different universities in Great Britain during the last 10 or 15 years. This is the best academic investment for the improvement of studies of different fields at the FPS. The Chevening Scholarship in Serbia has been one of the most successful local programmes, and it has achieved particular impact on Serbian academia and therefore there are substantial resources for the Centre for British Studies within the alumni of the Chevening network of Serbia.

Now I wish to give all of my compliments to my young friend and close associate, Professor Slobodan G. Markovich. I am personally very grateful for all of his efforts to organise this Conference. I am also grateful to our dear colleagues from the Faculty of Philology at the University of Belgrade (Katarina Rasulić and Zorica Bečanović-Nikolić) for their activities in the Programme Committee of the conference and for their participation at the conference.

I would like to particularly thank the British Embassy in Belgrade and His Excellency, Ambassador Keefe, and all former British ambassadors in Serbia during the last two decades, for their continuous support to our efforts to improve academic relations and co-operation between British and Serbian universities. Let me mention the names of former ambassadors who helped us in these efforts. They are: Charles Crawford, David Gowan, Stephen Wordsworth and Michael Davenport.

Finally, I am really very glad that our Dean, Professor Dragan Simić, who himself established the Centre for American Studies, has given us his support in establishing the Centre for British studies at the Faculty of Political Science.

Thank you very much.

Vukašin Pavlović,
President of the Council of the Centre for British Studies/FPS

On January 26, a special cocktail party was organised by the Centre for British Studies at Aero Klub in Belgrade. It was sponsored by I&F McCANN Grupa. The cocktail party was attended by more than 100 guests including ambassadors of the UK, the USA and the EU, many prominent professors, journalists, writers and other persons from cultural and political life of Belgrade and Serbia. It was an opportunity to officially launch the Centre for British Studies.

The event started with the screening of the documentary “I married a Serb.” It is a story on five British women who married Serbs at the time when Yugoslavia existed and who stayed in Serbia till now and it was symbolically chosen to show relevance of cultural links between the two cultures. Two of the heroines of the film attended the event. After the screening Head of the Centre for British Studies Prof. S. G. Markovich, and Mr. Srdjan Šaper, CEO of I&F McCANN Grupa delivered speeches.



Your Excellencies,
Dear friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great privilege to say a few words on the occasion of the International Conference on Serbian-British relations, the biggest conference of that kind since 1987. Since June last year the UK and Serbia have been celebrating 180th anniversary of mutual diplomatic relations. This year the UK, Serbia and many other countries, mark the centenary of the end of the Great War in which the two nations took part jointly and in which Serbia received enormous material help, military assistance and humanitarian and medical aid from Britain and the British Empire and from other allies (France, the United States and Imperial Russia). Two thirds of medical staff that helped Serbia to combat a disastrous typhus epidemics in 1915 was from Britain, followed by medical staff sent from the Russian Empire and the United States. Thousands of Serbs survived thanks to this help. Additionally, in 1916, Britain received around 370 Serbian boys and enabled them to continue their education in the best British grammar schools and universities. Among other institutions they enrolled to George Heriot School

in Edinburgh, and many later continued their studies at the universities of Cambridge and Oxford. Ever since 1916 not a single year passed without Serbian and Yugoslav students at the best British universities.



On the various lists of top ten universities in the world, Cambridge and Oxford are usually the only two listed from Europe, all other top universities being American. Thanks to Chevening scholarship provided by the FCO and affiliated scholarships provided by the Soros Foundation, the Serbian State Fund Dositeja and other funds, nowadays there is a very substantial number of young specialists in Serbia who have British educational background. I will just give the most striking example. There are virtually dozens of young mathematicians from Serbia studying at this moment at Cambridge, and to a lesser degree at Oxford, and their studies are fully funded by the two universities. This human capital is the greatest asset in Serbia's quest to find its proper place in Europe but also in developing British-Serbian relations.

The University of Belgrade has been fortunate enough to develop close relations with several British universities and the Centre for British Studies has been created with an aim to foster and further encourage already existing and strong links in the field of education between the two countries. Since

the mid-1990s a group of political scientists led by Prof. Vukašin Pavlović and late professor Margaret Blunden from London had been trying to reconnect the two academies. For that purpose Yugoslav British Summer School for Democracy was created in 1998. Thanks to the support of the British Embassy, the British Council, The Soros Foundation, The US Embassy in Belgrade and the Balkan Trust for Democracy this school existed for 15 years and this is an opportunity to express our gratitude to all the above mentioned sponsors.

Today we launch a new form of co-operation between the two countries, the Centre for British Studies and our first important activity is the international conference discussing mutual relations in the previous three centuries. The visit of Prince Charles to Serbia in 2016, and a very cordial reception that he encountered from ordinary citizens of Serbia, clearly demonstrated huge potentials for mutual relations. Recently, in October 2017, the FCO organized the first event to mark the 180th anniversary of mutual relations and the international conference in Belgrade is a kind of its follow-up.



This conference would not be possible without a very sincere support of the dean of the Faculty of Political Science, Prof. Dragan R. Simić, and without a close co-operation between colleagues from two faculties of the University of Belgrade: the Faculty of Philology and the Faculty of Political Science. For that co-operation we are very much indebted. There are eleven top experts at our conference from abroad, from the UK, the USA and Montenegro and 15 prominent panellists from Serbia and we are indeed privileged to have all of them here.



Most importantly I would like to thank the British Embassy in Belgrade for supporting this event. As a person who has been involved in Anglo-Serbian relations for many years I would like to express my special gratitude to Ambassador Denis Keefe for his particular efforts to commemorate the centenary of the Great War with a series of events including the naming of British residence after Dr. Elsie Inglis, the woman who symbolises the best part of British-Serbian relations, the same part that the five heroines from our film “I married a Serb” that we have just seen also symbolise, and that is the capital of very deep personal relations. The Centre for British Studies will be focused exactly on fostering such links.

Allow me at the end to thank my friend Srđan Šaper for organizing this cocktail party. He has created a company that has made Belgrade one of the centres of marketing communications for the region of South-East Europe and the Nordic Region and has given in that way an example on what kind of advantage globalisation may bring.

Slobodan G. Markovich,
Head of the Centre for British Studies
at the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Belgrade

Ladies and Gentlemen,

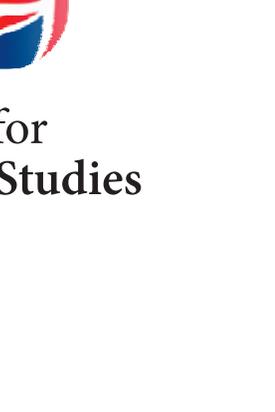
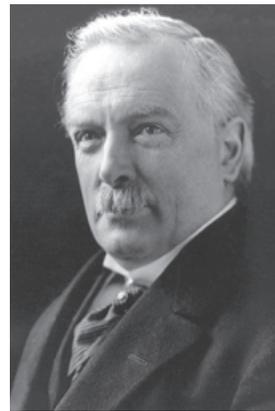
Thank you, thank you Slobodan. I'll be very brief and I must say very personal.

It's been a real honor for me and my company to host this event and to help organise the Centre for British Studies. For me the reason is really very simple – because I feel that Great Britain is the country that most influenced me and my entire generation, and I think that this particular influence on culture as a whole and pop culture specifically created the way we think and liberated our minds. In that sense I have to say that I am and always will be a very adamant and agile remainer, because I would like this liberating and liberal influence to remain persuasive in the future for many generations to come, and I'm sure that the Centre for British Studies will have a major contribution to that cause.

Thank you very much.

Srdjan Šaper





Centre for
British Studies

