

CHAPTER 2



THE BAD BOYS OF THE BALKANS

As I have said, the British perceptions of the Balkan countries depended substantially on the persons of their monarchs. Most of the nineteenth century Balkan monarchs belonged to the West European dynasties. Not only the esteem in which the Balkan countries were held, but also the very recognition of their autonomy or independence was often conditioned by the election of a foreign prince. The Balkan dynasties were mostly German by origin. In Greece it was first the Bavarian Wittelsbach's dynasty, represented by King Otto (1832–1862), and then the Danish-German Sonderburg-Glücksburg (1863–1924; 1935–1973), in Bulgaria first the Battenberg family (1879–1886) and then Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (1887–1946), and in Romania the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen line (1866–1947).¹

Only the Montenegrin and Serbian royal families were native. They emerged during the struggle for independence of their countries. In Montenegro, the dynasty of Petrovich ruled until 1918, in Serbia (and later in Yugoslavia) it was the dynasties of Obrenovich (1815–1842; 1858–1903) and Karageorgevich (1842–1858; 1903–1945). This fact left Serbia and Montenegro

¹ For more details on the modern Balkan dynasties see: Jiri Louda and Michael Maclagan, *Lines of Succession. Heraldry of the Royal Families of Europe* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1999), pp. 281–299.

somehow isolated in terms of international relations. J. D. Bouchier once pointed out that ‘the other newly-constituted States of the Peninsula have escaped the misfortune of a native dynasty, but Servia has been afflicted with two’.² It was only when Prince Nicholas of Montenegro (1860–1910, king 1910–1918) married his numerous daughters, from 1889 till 1897, to the members of major European dynasties, that the isolation of the Montenegrin Court came to an end. The Kingdom of Serbia never achieved this goal and it was only during the reign of King Alexander of Yugoslavia (1921–1934) and Prince Regent Paul (1934–1941) that the Yugoslav Court won the respect of the major European Courts. At the beginning of the twentieth century almost all European states were monarchies, and the foreign monarchs of the Balkan countries were often able to take advantage of this fact by contacting their relatives who reigned in the major European countries and their influential friends in major European capitals.

‘Foxy’ King Ferdinand and James David Bouchier

In comparison with the Greek and Serbian national uprisings, the Bulgarian national awakening began several decades later, and Bulgarian nationalism remained essentially cultural until the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1870. Following the Eastern Crisis a greater independent Bulgaria, resembling Bulgaria from the Middle Ages, was established by

² James D. Bouchier, ‘The Balkan States – Their Attitude Towards the Macedonian Question’, in Luigi Villari (ed.), *The Balkan Question* (London: John Murray, 1905), pp. 80–81.

the Russian dictated Treaty of San Stefano. European reactions forced Russia to yield to the provisions of the Treaty of Berlin, and Bulgaria was limited to an autonomous region north of Sofia. Southern Bulgaria became a separate province within the Ottoman Empire, known as Eastern Rumelia. Macedonia, originally fully incorporated into the Bulgarian state, was now left outside Bulgaria, within the Ottoman Empire. This will raise continual internal tensions in Bulgaria during the following decades.

Precisely as other European Powers feared, the new Bulgarian state proved to be a Russian puppet, and consequently a Russian candidate ascended the throne of Bulgaria. He was twenty-two year old Prince Alexander Battenberg, beloved nephew and godson of Russian Tsar Alexander II (1855–1881), and beloved relative of Queen Victoria. However, new Russian Tsar, Alexander III did not share his father's sympathies for Germany, and Alexander of Battenberg was for him the living symbol of the Russian failure in Berlin. With Russian backing Alexander was twice deposed in the late summer of 1886, and Bulgaria was left with no ruler. Russian officials left Bulgaria, but Russian agents stayed behind trying to overthrow the regency led by Stefan Stambolov. Stambolov's first task was to find an appropriate candidate for the Bulgarian throne and a delegation was formed for this purpose. Naturally, the image of the Bulgarian throne being offered throughout Europe gave quite good foundations for satirical stories in the European Press. Many thought that Alexander of Battenberg was lucky enough to have saved his own head. Bismarck, speculating on the potential new prince of Bulgaria said 'if there is in the world a being unfortunate enough to take that position'.³

³ Quoted in Stephen Constant, *Foxy Ferdinand, Tsar of Bulgaria* (London, 1979), p. 50.

Bulgarian delegates had a hard task but suddenly, a candidate approached them in the Viennese opera house on 13 December 1886, during the first interval, offering himself for the throne of Bulgaria. Curiously, a new Balkan operetta started in an opera house. The candidate turned to be Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, son of Augustus, Prince of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and Clementine, Princess of Orleans who was the daughter of the last French King Louis Philippe. Ferdinand lacked respect at European courts, even among his relatives, but he had a very rich and ambitious mother, eager to see her son as the king of any state. The Bulgarian delegation was very happy that someone would accept the Bulgarian throne. Consequently he was officially invited by the Bulgarian regents to accept the throne of Bulgaria, in April, but he hesitated till August fearing for his own life. Having more or less overcome his fears Ferdinand started his reign by a comical trip by train during which, fearing a possible attempt on his life, he locked himself into a WC.

Punch immediately had a cynical article connecting his acceptance to become Bulgarian Prince with the decision of the Bulgarian Government ‘to order at a local Ready-Made Clothing Establishment a complete brand-new Uniform for us to wear the moment we set our foot on Bulgarian soil. “Buttons and all?” we asked “Buttons and all!” was the reply’.⁴ However, the new Prince was fortunate enough to find his advocate in the British Press, and Bulgaria found a true defender of her interests in Britain. His name was James David Bourchier (1850–1920). With the background of a classical scholar at Trinity College, Dublin and King's College, Cambridge, he was a master at Eton for a decade, but his increasing deafness forced him to resign in

⁴ Quoted in *Ibid*, p. 77 (see *Punch* of August 20, and September 10, 1887).

1888, and he went to consult an aurist in Vienna. There he met the Vienna correspondent of *The Times*, fellow Etonian, Brinsley Richards, who sent him on a trial mission to Bulgaria and Romania. He soon became the best-informed Briton on Bulgaria. Besides his articles in *The Times* he published his first impressions on Bulgaria in two issues of *The Fortnightly Review*. His enthusiasm for Bulgaria was immediate. For him there was no country in modern Europe 'which more closely approximates to the ideal Arcady'.⁵ Still, it was the Oriental country for Burchier, which 'has not been ruled by an Asiatic Power for centuries without imbibing the ideas of autocratic despotism which prevail from the Levant to the Pacific'.⁶ At this stage, he shared Victorian pre-Gladstonian respect for the Turks. Thus, commenting on the reception of Prince Ferdinand by the population in a Turkish area, he mentioned that 'their natural dignity of manner did not allow them to cheer, but they all saluted respectfully as the Prince passed',⁷ or when Ferdinand visited a school even the little Osmanlis cheered quite loudly 'forgetting their native dignity'.⁸

In political matters he took quite an anti-Russian attitude. Although his first impression of Bulgarian Premier S. Stambolov was not very agreeable, he soon concluded: 'Bulgaria cannot do without M. Stambouloff'.⁹ Similarly he described Prince Ferdinand as 'gifted with that essentially royal combination of qualities, tact and good memory',¹⁰ characterising him as presently

5 J. D. Burchier, 'Through Bulgaria with Prince Ferdinand', *The Fortnightly Review*, vol. 44 (July-December 1888), p. 39.

6 *Ibid*, p. 46.

7 *Ibid*, p. 50.

8 *Ibid*, p. 53.

9 *Ibid*, p. 47.

10 *Ibid*, p. 52.

‘the only possible ruler of Bulgaria’, and saying it was the ‘true interest of England and other Powers friendly to Bulgarian independence to support him’, since with every day of his rule, ‘Russian influence and prestige are on the decline’.¹¹ The Prince and Bouchier were mutually delighted and their friendship would last for several years. It was characteristic for the whole of Bouchier's activity as a Balkan correspondent that, from the very beginning of his career until his sudden death, he had quite an open admiration for the Bulgarian national idea. “‘Bulgaria for Bulgarians’”, he stated, ‘is being raised more loudly than ever’, and the sympathies of Englishmen, ‘who have received at their birth the priceless heritage of liberty, should be directed towards this interesting people, whose patriotism is among the brightest of their virtues.’¹² In another article on Prince Ferdinand, published in *The Fortnightly Review* in the next year, Bouchier repeated his appreciation for Prince Ferdinand and S. Stambolov. He even concluded that Bulgaria at that moment was ‘the most independent state in the world’. Moreover ‘she owes no man anything; she is hampered with no proletariat; she is free from the trammels of diplomatic intercourse’.¹³

However, after the murder of Stambolov, who, in the meantime, became Bouchier's personal friend, his relations with Prince Ferdinand deteriorated. In his famous dispatch for *The Times*, Bouchier declared: ‘A heavy responsibility rests with those who refused Stambolov permission to leave the country, and who detaining him here like a prisoner, neglected the mea-

11 *Ibid*, p. 56.

12 *Ibid*, p. 56.

13 J. D. Bouchier, ‘In the Balkans with Prince Ferdinand’, *The Fortnightly Review*, vol. 46 (July-December, 1889), p. 56.

asures necessary to ensure his safety'.¹⁴ Ferdinand, however, had his opponents in England as well. One of the most influential, W. T. Stead had quite opposite views on the situation in Bulgaria. For him Stambolov was the 'despot of Bulgaria'¹⁵ and 'if one half of the stories about him' were true, he 'deserved assassination, if ever man did; and although the wild justice of revenge must always be deprecated, no one can be surprised that the relations of men whom he had tortured to death in the Bulgarian dungeons should have deemed themselves justified in slaying him when opportunity offered'.¹⁶ Nor did Stead share Bouchier's Russophobia. He claims: 'It is right and proper that Russia should have the influence in Bulgaria which rightfully belongs to an empire that has spent £100,000,000 of money and 100,000 lives in liberating the principality... At the same time, in the interests of European peace, it might be desirable that Russia's power was greater than less'.¹⁷ If Bouchier contributed to the good image of Ferdinand during his initial years of reign, then W. T. Stead was trying to make his image as bad as possible from the very beginning. Caricatures about Ferdinand that Stead diligently reproduced from the German and Viennese Press in his *The Review of Reviews* had such an aim.

After his famous dispatch on the murder of Stambolov Bouchier ceased to be *persona grata* with both the Prince and the Bulgarian Government. Now he became more considerate about the position of the Pomaks, whom he considered as

14 *The Times*, July 21, 1895; quoted in Lady Grogan, *The Life of J. D. Bouchier* (London: Hurst & Blackett Ltd., 1926), p. 46.

15 *The Review of Reviews*, vol. 12 (July-December 1895), p. 223.

16 *Ibid*, p. 110.

17 *Ibid*, p. 110.

‘Moslemised Bulgars’.¹⁸ He reported in August 1895 about the massacre of Pomaks in the Macedonian village of Dospat. He soon went personally to Dospat, and wrote about it: ‘Terrible scene. Resembled Sodom and Gomorra after fire and brimstone’.¹⁹ *The Times* requested further investigation by Bouchier, and later supported him although he could not prove the scope of the massacre that he had described in his initial despatches. Now that he had fallen into total disgrace in Bulgaria he went to Athens to cover the first Olympic Games and was soon to become very prominent in reporting on the Cretan Uprising, when he demonstrated clear sympathies with the Greek Christian population.

As a consequence of the murder of Stambolov Ferdinand's image severely deteriorated. When Ferdinand came to Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee two years later, Lord Salisbury remarked: ‘Now there is a man, but I would not like to be his Prime Minister’.²⁰ A trial that followed, in Bulgaria, was called a farce by the European Press. Ferdinand had already previously acquired the reputation of an intriguer, of being ‘foxy’ and feminised, now he was also considered as being Machiavellian. In the European Press his caricatures often exaggerated his ‘Bourbon nose’ and took advantage of his passionate interest in ornithology.

After the assassination of Stambolov and the death of the Russian Tsar Alexander III, he had a chance to try for interna-

18 He called them ‘Bulgarophone Mahometan Bulgarians’; v. James D. Bouchier, ‘The Pomaks of Rhodope’, *The Fortnightly Review*, vol. 54 (July-December, 1893), p. 509; the same article was later published in Lady Grogan, *The Life of J. D Bouchier*, pp. 247–265.

19 *Lady Grogan, The Life of J. D Bouchier*, p. 49.

20 Sir George Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia* (London: Cassel, 1923), p. 63.

tional recognition. The new Tsar, Nicholas II set him one condition: Ferdinand's son, Boris, was supposed to be admitted to the Orthodox Church. First Ferdinand asked the astonished Pope to permit him his son's admission to the Orthodox Church. The Pope naturally declined to sanction 'spiritual murder'. When he was forced to choose between his son's conversion and his own throne, he decided to yield and his son Boris was confirmed into the new Church with General Kutuzov acting as Imperial godfather by proxy. Naturally his decision shocked the whole Catholic world. The Pope announced the so-called 'greater excommunication', but Ferdinand assumed a new role. He started to dream of himself as a new Byzantine Emperor, and did not worry much about Rome. He made a speech to the *Sobranie* (the Bulgarian Parliament) prophesising 'the West has pronounced its anathema on me, the dawn of the East shines its rays on my dynasty and brightens our future'.²¹ In March 1896, Ferdinand finally received international confirmation of his rule.

The Macedonian Question

Speaking about the races in Macedonia, Bouchier designated her, in 1911, as 'the principal theatre of the struggle of nationalities in Eastern Europe'. With all races disputing Turkish reversion from Europe, he described the Macedonian question as 'the quintessence of the Near Eastern Question'.²²

The whole of Macedonia was under the Turkish rule at the beginning of the twentieth century. At that time this term

21 Constant, *Foxy Ferdinand*, p. 178.

22 James David Bouchier, s. v. 'Macedonia', *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, The Eleventh Edition, vol. 17 (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1911), p. 217, b.

included territories of three Turkish vilayets: the whole vilayet of Salonica, the eastern and greater part of the vilayet of Monastir (sanjaks of Monastir, Servia and part of that of Korcha), and the south-eastern part of the vilayet of Kosovo (sanjak of Usküb). It was a region with a population of some 2,200,000 inhabitants. Around 1,300,000 were Christians, 800,000 Muslims and about 75,000 Jews. There were also some minor Christian groups: Uniate Bulgarians (around 3,600) and Bulgarian Protestants (*c.* 2,000).²³ The dynamism of the region originated from two features: racial propaganda, and the fight of two Macedonian revolutionary movements. After the suppression of the Serbian Patriarchate of Pech (Ipek) in 1766, the Slavs in the Ottoman Empire were left without any national ecclesiastical organisation. Consequently, the traditionally dominant Greek culture was unchallenged in Macedonia until the middle of the nineteenth century. Then the *Bulgarians* started to exercise their cultural influences and, when in 1871 the Sultan recognised an independent Bulgarian Church called Exarchate, the Bulgarians were able to appoint their bishops in some Macedonian towns. Bulgarian propaganda made especially remarkable progress in the period between 1891 and 1898. According to official Bulgarian figures, in 1900 there were 785 Bulgarian schools in Macedonia. *Serbian propaganda* came later and made some progress in the 1890s. At the beginning of 1899 there were 178 Serbian schools in the vilayets of Usküb, Monastir and Salonica. Finally *the Greeks* had in 1901 927 Greek schools in the vilayets of Salonica and Monastir.²⁴ Obviously, the main struggle for cultural and educational influence in Macedonia, at the beginning of the twentieth century, was fought between the Bulgarians and the Greeks.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 217, a.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

Macedonian Revolutionary Organisations

Following the disturbances in Armenia, Macedonian activists renewed their activity with the open encouragement of the Bulgarian Government of Stoilov. They established, at the end of 1894, their Central Committee in Sofia, and soon started with provocations along the Macedonian boarder, holding even town of Melnik for several days in 1895. This put the Sofia based movement into the forefront against an indigenous Macedonian organisation. To emphasise their universal pretensions to Macedonia, Sofia based movement convened the second Macedonian congress and changed its name to the Supreme Macedonian Committee, in 1895. The other organisation was formed in 1893 and was known by 1896 as ‘the Bulgarian Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organisation’, changing its title, in 1902, to ‘the Secret Macedonian-Adrianople Revolutionary Organisation’. However, it is nowadays mostly known by its last name ‘the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation’, adopted in 1905, and even more by its acronym IMRO.²⁵

The year of 1896 was the year of international recognition of Bulgarian Prince Ferdinand and therefore it was quite a significant year for Macedonia. Stoilov's Government failed to come to agreement with the Greeks on Macedonia and then, it turned to Serbia, signing in February, a secret Serbo-Bulgarian Treaty. In this the Bulgarians recognised the Serbs a part in the settlement of Macedonia. However, the Russo-Austro-Hungarian agreement, in April 1897, to put the Balkans ‘on ice’ for as long as possible, made it impossible for the Bulgarian Government to help the movement directly. Besides the IMRO was now ascend-

25 It is also known in its Bulgarian form ‘VMRO’.

ing, and by 1900, a new Supreme Committee was elected led by Boris Sarafov, who was committed to the IMRO.

For the image of Macedonian revolutionary movements the critical incident was abduction and ransoming of Miss Ellen Stone, an American missionary in Bulgaria. She was kidnapped in September 1901. She had to arrange ransom for herself and her Bulgarian Protestant friend Katerina Tsilka, amounting to 25,000 Turkish liras. Their captivity lasted 6 months, and produced a furor in Western Press. Mrs. Tsilka even gave birth to a baby girl during her captivity. Finally the American Missionary Board made a compromise with her abductors and collected 14,000 liras.²⁶ Although Miss Stone later became outspoken proponent of the IMRO, her immediate reactions included various stories about abductors, which emphasised the already existing image of Macedonia as a savage country, ruled by brigands. As W. T. Stead put it, speaking about Miss Stone's experience in Macedonian Turkey, revolutionaries and brigands very frequently made 'common case together, as was unquestionably the case in this instance'.²⁷

In Britain *The Sunday Magazine* communicated Miss Stone's narrative to its readers, in six successive numbers. *The Sunday Magazine* even published a picture of 'the type of Macedonian brigand' who captured Miss Stone. Resemblance to the image of savages was obvious. Although Miss Stone's narrative is now and then sympathetic with the brigands, the overall picture she offered was less than a favourable one. Speaking of her sorrow when she found out that the American President

26 See: Duncan Perry, *The Politics of Terror. The Macedonian Liberation Movements 1893–1903* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1988), pp. 103–105.

27 *The Review of Reviews*, vol. 25 (January-June 1902), p. 505.

William McKinley was assassinated, she commented on the brigands' behaviour:

So little did they care or appreciate my sorrowful feelings, that they would frequently indulge in dances, singing softly to themselves the accompaniment. One Albanian dance was especially weird and grotesque. After the cold weather obliged the brigands to put on their white woollen leggings, they seemed elfish, not human, with their legs suspended spider-like, in the movements of this dance.²⁸

Most of the money collected by the abduction was used by the IMRO to purchase much-needed guns. The IMRO's leadership did not believe in tactics of the Supreme Macedonian Committee who wanted to use incursions of bands (or cheti) into Macedonia and to thereby force the Porte in that way to cede autonomy. They had their own plan to instigate a mass uprising, and to create an autonomous Macedonia in that way. Some believed that it should be an introduction to a wider Balkan socialist federation. Ferdinand supported supremacist bands between 1900–1902. He established personal rule in 1896 with considerable control over the Bulgarian army and foreign policy. However, the Bulgarians needed Russian financial help and when in December 1902, the Russian Foreign Minister, Count Lamsdorf visited Belgrade and Sofia, he made clear to both monarchs that Russia would support neither Serbian nor Bulgarian military actions in Macedonia. Soon the Bulgarian Government had to dissolve its Macedonian organisations in Bulgaria, but this action only gave rise to the IMRO in Macedonia. Finally, the IMRO's

28 Ellen M. Stone, 'In the Grip of the Brigands', *The Sunday Magazine* (June 1902), pp. 485–486. The story was published in seven parts in *The Sunday Magazine's* issues from May till November 1902.

activists decided, in January 1903, to stage the mass uprising the coming summer. Although they lost their leader, Delchev in May, the rising started on 2 August, St Elijah's day in Macedonia,²⁹ and 17 days later in the Adrianople province. However, the insurgents desperately needed help to persist in their fight. Bulgaria was obliged to Russia not to react. For the Serbs and the Greeks this was essentially a pro-Bulgarian movement, and consequently the Ottoman army crushed the uprising with harsh reprisals.³⁰

However, many in Europe were afraid of a new war in the Balkans which could become uncontrollable. At that time Bosnia seemed quite peaceful and it was rather Macedonia that seemed to many as a potential source of a European conflict. Ferdinand, with his policy of duplicity over the Macedonian question, was awarded with the image in the European Press of persistent disturber of European peace, while his counterpart in Serbia, King Alexander, was rather seen as exercising his intentions to ruin parliamentary life in Serbia. These two rulers started to be perceived as 'the bad boys of the Balkans'.

Imagining Macedonia

Prospects of the immediate war in Macedonia between the Christian population and the Turks that could affect the whole of Europe were carefully followed in the British Press, at the

29 The insurrection is also known in its Bulgarian form *Ilinden* Uprising.

30 For the full treatment of the Macedonian revolutionary organisation see: Duncan Perry, *The Politics of Terror. The Macedonian Liberation Movements 1893–1903*, and Richard J. Crampton, *Bulgaria 1878–1918. A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 229–240, 271–286.

beginning of the twentieth century. Public opinion was still divided in Britain, although now less than it had been during Gladstone's Midlothian campaign, at least in terms of condemnation of the misrule. The atrocities of the Turkish army and Albanian irregulars against the Christians of Macedonia provoked general condemnation in Britain. St. Elijah insurrection of August 1903 only strengthened this mood. As members of the Balkan Committee, Noel Buxton and Charles Roden Buxton, pointed out at the end of the same year: 'Indignation is voiced by public meetings in every part of the country, and by a Press, which is, with very few exceptions, in sympathy with the Macedonian cause'.³¹ Names of the leaders of Macedonian revolutionaries became familiar to British public. W. T. Stead openly advertised Macedonian rebels. He wrote a very sympathetic text on one of their leaders Boris Sarafov.³² Yet, the Buxtons still had to argue in their article against those who found that the Macedonian question was irremediable and that English intervention was not possible. Moreover, it was widely believed 'in some quarters that the population of Macedonia', was 'in the common phrase, "no better than the Turks"'.³³ Noel Brailsford gave an answer why this was so: 'The Slav peasant has no passport to the foreigner's heart. He cannot point, like the Greek, to a great past; he cannot boast that his forbears have been your tutors in civilisation... If he is poor he lives in squalor and in

31 Noel Buxton and Charles Roden Buxton, 'Public Opinion and Macedonia', *The Monthly Review*, vol. 13 (December 1903), p. 95.

32 W. T. Stead, 'Boris Sarafoff, the Macedonian Leader', *The Review of Reviews*, vol. 28 (1903), p. 472; Another leader of Macedonian rebels General Tsonchev also published an article in *The Review of Reviews: 'The Macedonian Question'*, vol. 29 (1904), pp. 83–84.

33 *Ibid*, p. 97.

dirt... He has been demoralised by dealing with masters who are childish and capricious as well as tyrannical'.³⁴

Two prominent Victorian journalists, Dr. Joseph Dillon and James David Bouchier, tried to direct public opinion towards intervention. But as the Buxtons sadly remarked 'the conscious of Europe requires nothing less than a first-class massacre to rouse it'.³⁵ Perhaps in order to rouse it, both Dillon and Bouchier took every opportunity to emphasise any hints about massacres in Macedonia. But this time the public opinion was more careful than in the late 1870s. The press was ready to condemn but, at the same time, cautious to propose military intervention. Every report on atrocities had to be checked and many criticised Bouchier and Dillon for exaggerations of atrocities.³⁶

St. Elijah Uprising was crushed but the British Press continued to write about Macedonia, announcing every winter that a war would start the following spring. As late as 1906, Stead had his 'interview of the month', with the Secretary of the Balkan Committee, W. A. Moore, with the characteristic title 'Will there be war in spring?'.³⁷ However, many springs were to

34 H. N. Brailsford, 'The Bulgarians of Macedonia: A Psychological Study', *The Fortnightly Review*, vol. 75 (June 1904), p. 1049.

35 Noel Buxton and Charles Roden Buxton, 'Public Opinion and Macedonia', p. 97.

36 See, for instance, a polemic between Dillon and Edward B. Haskell of an American Mission in Macedonia: Edward B. Haskell, 'The Exaggerations of the Macedonian Outrages', *The Spectator*, April 4, 1903, p. 528; Dillon's answers in: *The Spectator*, April 18, 1903, pp. 605–606 and May 16, 1903, p. 779; and Haskell's clarification in *The Spectator*, May 2, 1903, p. 698.

37 W. T. Stead, 'Will There Be War in Spring?', *The Review of Reviews*, vol. 34 (1906), pp. 603–604.

come before the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913. This gave the Balkan states a chance to intensify their propagandist efforts, and to arm bands of irregulars that were constantly sent to Macedonia. A state of permanent interethnic strife became characteristic for Macedonia. Bouchier had to admit in 1905: ‘Unhappily the Balkan States are not yet ripe for an amicable arrangement, and their discords seem likely as heretofore to offer a new lease of life to Turkey, and to serve selfish purposes of their great neighbours’.³⁸

In the meantime, in Britain, an image was created concerning Macedonia and the Macedonians. Macedonia started to be identified as a country of brigandage. In 1904 Herbert Vivian published a terrifying photo of beheaded Macedonian brigands. About them he wrote:

*Macedonia is now the headquarters of brigandage, but most of its brigands come over from Bulgaria, where they are organised to pave the way for annexation or autonomy. As there are at least three rival organisations, the brigands are as much at loggerheads with each other as they are with the authorities. They come over in bands and terrorise the whole country, greatly to the discomfort of the peaceful inhabitants, whom they compel to storm arms and pay tribute.*³⁹

Moreover, a dilemma appeared as to whether there was anyone there who deserved British sympathies. Even N. Bra-

38 James D. Bouchier, ‘The Balkan States – Their Attitude Towards the Macedonian Question’, p. 88.

39 Herbert Vivian, *The Servian Tragedy with Some Impressions from Macedonia* (London: Grant Richards, 1904), p. 263, see plate No. xvii (the picture is placed between pages 252 and 253).

ilsford, an advocate of Macedonian emancipation, felt obliged to remark:

I have tried so far as a European can, to judge both Christians and Turks as tolerantly as possible, remembering divergence that exists between the standards of the Balkans and of Europe. In the land where the peasant ploughs with a rifle on his back, where his rulers govern by virtue of their ability to massacre upon occasion, where Christian Bishops are commonly supposed to organise political murders, life has but a relative value, and assassination no more than a relative guilt. There is little to choose in bloody-mindedness between any of the Balkan races – they are all what centuries of Asiatic rule have made them.⁴⁰

The associations that an average Briton was able to get from the British Press about Macedonia included: bombs, assassinations, brigands, terror, and abductions. If some prominent Britons, even after this image of Macedonia had been created, still had some sympathies for the Macedonian Slavs, then one can explain this only through the feelings of compassion for their fellow Christians living under the Ottoman yoke, a feeling so common in Britain after the Midlothian campaign.

King Alexander Obrenovich

In his thirteenth year he was made King of one of the most difficult countries in the world, abandoned by both his

⁴⁰ H. N. Brailsford, *Macedonia Its Races and their Future* (London: Methuen & Co., 1906), p. xi.

*parents, delivered into the hand of cynical men, without proper moral education, thought to distrust everyone, or rather to hate everyone.*⁴¹

This is how C. Mijatovich, the personal friend of Alexander's father Milan, described the position of the young King when he came to the throne of Serbia. The situation was not easy indeed. King Milan suddenly decided to abdicate in 1889. He was bored by Serbia, perhaps even disgusted. Like Prince Ferdinand he preferred being in Paris and Vienna. But, besides sexual outlets he also liked gambling. Now he was also in love with a Greek woman. To make himself free and to be able to dedicate himself to his new love, he had first to divorce. Since his son was abroad with his mother, Milan sent a general to bring the boy back and to persuade the Queen to accept official separation. The Queen was stubborn but it made Milan no less determined. He forcibly took Alexander from Wiesbaden, thus scandalising Europe, and involving even Bismarck who intervened in his favour by sending his police to take Alexander from Natalie. Now he only had to arrange his divorce and soon the Metropolitan Theodosius signed a divorce decree, though the legality of it was dubious. Milan also appointed a committee to draft a new constitution, and in December 1888 (in January according to N.S.) Serbia got very liberal constitution, and he finally abdicated in March 1889, leaving Serbia immediately.

The years to come were filled with the struggle between Ex-King Milan and Queen Natalie, and most of political energy of Serbia was spent in this dispute. Milan even returned to Belgrade in 1891, demanding a sum of six million francs, offering in exchange to leave Serbia. Eventually, he got half the

⁴¹ Chedomille Mijatovich, *A Royal Tragedy Being the Story of the Assassination of King Alexander and Queen Draga* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1906), p. vi.

sum, but he had to sign a contract saying that he renounced his rights both as a member of the royal family and as a citizen of Serbia. The Russians immediately agreed to cover Milan's expenses, just in order to get rid of their Germanophilic adversary.

However, in April 1893, 16-year old Alexander demonstrated quite extraordinary abilities for his age. He invited his ministers and regents to dinner in the royal palace and amused them for a while, telling them when the main course was served that he wanted to thank them for their services and to inform them that he was proclaiming himself of age and taking royal authority into his hands. Some thought it was a joke, but when soldiers appeared with bayonets they realised that Alexander had outsmarted them by organising his first coup. Soon, Milan came back again in January 1894, provoking Tsar Alexander III to call him 'that animal'. However, from 1895 till the autumn of 1897 Natalie regained influence over Alexander, but it was for the last time. When Milan returned, in 1897, he became a General and the Commander of the Serbian army. In July 1899, on the feast of St. John, an unsuccessful attempt was made to kill Milan and he organised a show trial. The Foreign Press, having just been through with Dreyfus rehabilitation in France, had become increasingly sensitive to political trials. As a consequence of this 'the reputation of Serbian justice and the already shaken reputation of the Obrenovic dynasty suffered greatly, both in Serbia and abroad'.⁴² W. T. Stead commented: 'An occasional attempt at assassination appears to be regarded as within the rules of the game in Servia',⁴³ and Mrs. F. N. Wilson summarised British opinion of Milan during his last years: 'The venom of political

42 Michael Boro Petrovich, *A History of Modern Serbia* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich), vol. II, p. 479.

43 *The Review of Reviews*, vol. 20 (1899), p. 123.

intrigue has poisoned his name, so that at one time it was no uncommon thing for people in England and abroad to speak of the “infamous King Milan”.⁴⁴

Although Alexander achieved some successes during his reign, the most notable being penetration of Serbian propaganda into Macedonia, his ten years of reign were filled with various scandals. In this relatively short period he succeeded in making four coups, and in changing three constitutions and twelve governments. Not surprisingly, Serbia enjoyed an image of unstable and comic country.

However, the worst matter for the reputation of the Kingdom of Serbia was only to come. Alexander decided to marry the previous lady-in-waiting of his mother. Draga was at least nine years older than he and a widow. With father who had ended up in an insane asylum, and a mother who was alcoholic, and with substantial doubts that she could have children, she was the worst possible choice for Alexander. The very decision to marry her was a scandal and even Milan, not very concerned about ethics, resigned his post as the commanding General of the Serbian army. W. T. Stead commented on the news of Alexander's marriage: ‘It will probably be found in an examination of the history of Europe that love affairs have been more fatal to monarchs than the dagger or the revolver of the assassin. The Obrenovitches of Servia are singularly unfortunate in this respect’.⁴⁵ Although it was widely believed that she was not capable of delivering a baby, when her pregnancy was announced in August 1900, everyone believed it, and the King was delighted. However, April of 1901 was approaching but with no

44 Mrs. Northesk Wilson, *Belgrade the White City of Death. Being the History of King Alexander and of Queen Draga* (London: R. A. Everett & Co. Ltd., 1903), p. 38.

45 *The Review of Reviews*, vol. 22 (1900), p. 109.

signs of delivery. The Russian Government sent a doctor and he immediately realised that Draga's pregnancy had been faked. It was officially announced that the Queen had 'all the symptoms that usually follow pregnancy', and that 'these symptoms indeed often get the kind of character so that neither the interested person nor her surroundings can doubt the veracity of the pregnancy'.⁴⁶

The Serbian Press had to remain silent about the affair. However, Draga's case turned into a European scandal. The European Press was full of comments, both in verses and prose, and, of course, in pictures (caricatures). Even expert reports of doctors were published. The image of the Queen as an adulteress and the King as an idiot was created in the European Press. As S. Yovanovich pointed out 'the Serbian state, with the kind of royal couple that Alexander and Draga were, appeared to be the last among states whose history did not differ from a scandalous chronicle'.⁴⁷ This whole image was carefully fostered in German and Austro-Hungarian Press. The British Press was calmer in this respect.⁴⁸

After this, Alexander thought that the only way out of this scandal was to arrange a Russian Imperial reception for his wife and himself. In order to achieve this objective he even directed the foreign policy of Serbia completely towards Russia. However, the Russian Imperial Court endlessly postponed the reception. Contemporaries knew this and it became another favourite topic in the European satirical Press.

46 Слободан Јовановић, *Влада краља Александра Обреновића*, сабрана дела, том 12, Геца Кон, Београд 1936, том III, р. 126 [Slobodan Yovanovich, *Vlada Kralya Aleksandra Obrenovicha* (Collected works, vol. 12, Belgrade: Geca Kon, 1936), vol. III, p. 126].

47 *Ibid*, p. 129.

48 Cf. *The Times*, May 20, 1901, p. 7 f ('Servia'). The article calls the affair a 'delicate matter', without specifying what the whole thing is about.

Soon, Russian diplomacy clearly informed Alexander that Russia could not wait much longer and that the question of appointing an heir to the throne must soon be settled. Rumours started in Belgrade that Alexander planned to appoint Draga's brother as an heir. These rumours only hastened his tragic end.

The May Coup

*Servia seethes with conspiracy. It is its normal condition. The little Kingdom lying between Austria and Russia, with rival dynasties and unsatisfied ambitions, is one of the most politically feverish centres in Europe. In Servia assassination has long been regarded as one of the natural and almost necessary political methods.*⁴⁹

When W. T. Stead wrote this in 1899 he could not have known that his words were prophecy. Only two years later a group of junior Serbian officers started to plot to kill Alexander Obrenovich. They were embarrassed by the King's decision to marry a woman of dubious background and considered Alexander as not capable of fulfilling Serbian historical mission to liberate the Serbs living under the Ottoman yoke. The prospects of hated Draga's brother being future King just outraged them more.

The conspirators were encouraged by the assassination of the American President William McKinley in September 1901. They tried to organise an assassination twice in 1901 but their plans failed. Still, the number of conspirators grew, and by 1903

⁴⁹ W. T. Stead, 'Character Sketch. Ex-King Milan of Servia', *The Review of Reviews*, vol. 20 (1899), p. 138.

it reached 120, mostly officers. Several politicians joined the plot as well. Russian and Austro-Hungarian Ministers certainly had some hints about the conspiracy. However, the Russian Minister, Charykov, was given an order by his Foreign Minister Lamsdorf during his visit to Serbia in December 1902, ‘not to meddle with the internal affairs of Serbia’. Charykov later commented that neither Lamsdorf nor he knew that ‘this order was the death-warrant of King Alexander and Queen Draga’.⁵⁰ Be that as it may, he was not eager to warn Alexander. On the other hand, Alexander's sudden shifts in foreign policy between St. Petersburg and Vienna made the Austrians very cautious as well. In such circumstances he was left to himself. Still, Alexander must have felt that something was going on, especially because it seems that he even transferred ‘large sums of money’ to English banks.⁵¹ The British Minister in Belgrade, Bonham, reported in January 1902 that the Serbian Army was not reliable any more. He noticed that Alexander Obrenovich had estranged himself from the army which had always been of key significance for the Obrenovich dynasty.⁵² What was to happen to King Alexander was similar to the misfortune of many tyrants. As Roman Emperor Domitian once claimed: ‘the lot of all Emperors is necessarily wretched, since only their assassination can convince the public that the conspiracies against their lives are real’.⁵³ Apparently, Alexander was warned in advance by his police that a plot had been organised, but top army men refused to believe

50 N. V. Tcharykow, *Glimpses of High Politics. Through War and Peace 1855–1929* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1931), p. 234.

51 N. Wilson, *Belgrade the White City of Death*, p. 91.

52 FO 105/64/102.

53 Gaii Suetonii Tranquilli *Domitianus*, 21; English translation quoted from: Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, *The Twelve Caesars*, translated by Robert Graves (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 313.

that army officers could be implicated in a plot against their sovereign. Therefore no decisive action was undertaken.

The conspirators decided to assassinate the royal couple in the early hours of 29 May (11 June, N.S.). It was an ominous date when 35 years earlier Prince Michael Obrenovich had been killed, although the conspirators may not have been aware of this fact. The command of the coup was entrusted to forcibly retired Colonel Alexander Mashin, brother of Queen Draga's first husband, an able officer of Czech origin. The conspirators entered the royal palace at 2.00 a.m. and searched it for some two hours but in vain. The Russian Legation was just opposite the Royal Palace, and Russian Minister Charykov witnessed what followed, refraining himself from any action:

Suddenly a window was opened in the lower story of the Palace facing the street, and we heard the Queen's voice calling to the soldiers outside for help. We also heard one of them answer, 'Fear nothing, Majesty'. This showed the conspirators where the Royal couple had taken refuge... The conspirators rushed in and shot down the King, who had no arms and was standing in front of the Queen to shield her with body. The Queen was also shot, and then horribly mutilated by the swords of the conspirators. About an hour later the same window was opened again, and the bodies of the King and Queen, wrapped in the window-curtains, were thrown out into the garden.⁵⁴

The list of others killed that night included: Draga's two brothers, the Premier, the War Minister, the Commander of the Danube Division and various palace guards. Several conspirators

54 N. V. Tcharykow, *Glimpses of High Politics*, pp. 235–236.

were killed as well. Altogether some fourteen people were killed from both sides.⁵⁵

King's Milan death in a voluntary exile, in Vienna, in January 1901, and the murder of Alexander eradicated completely the dynasty of Obrenovich that had ruled Serbia some seven decades. Serbia needed a new ruler. The conspirators were previously able to find out that a Russian, and especially a Montenegrin prince, would not be acceptable to Austria-Hungary while a German candidate would not be welcomed by Russia. A domestic candidate seemed to be the best solution, and there was only one suitable figure: Prince Peter, the grandson of the leader of the first Serbian Uprising Karageorge. The assembled troops, in front of the dead royal bodies, were induced to shout: 'Long live King Peter Karageorgevich'.⁵⁶

Within the conspirators there were two groups: younger and older conspirators. The leader of the younger group was Dragutin Dimitriyevich Apis, later notorious for his complicity in the Sarajevo Assassination. Soon after the Coup, he became the *éminence grise* of political life in Serbia. MacKenzie, biographer of Apis, finds that the May Coup was 'apparently the only successful coup in modern European history organized and led by junior officers'.⁵⁷ Moreover for him it 'had perhaps the most far-reaching and generally positive results of any such takeover in modern European history'.⁵⁸ However, such a positive char-

55 Cf. Constantin Dumba, *Memoirs of a Diplomat* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1933), p. 113.

56 The best, and least biased, treatment of the May Coup was given in Serbian by Slobodan Yovanovich: S. Yovanovich, *Vlada Kralya Aleksandra Obrenovicha*. The most recent studies in English are already quoted works of David MacKenzie. A very detailed account is also given in: Constantin Dumba, *Memoirs of a Diplomat*.

57 Mackenzie, *Serbs and Russians*, p. 135.

58 *Ibid*, p. 321.

acterisation of the May Coup is far from being generally accepted in historiography. Even in Serbian historiography the influence of the conspirators after the May Coup was severely criticised.⁵⁹

59 Voyislav Y. Vuchkovich, 'Unutrashnye krize Srbiye...'; Dragolyub Zhi-voyinovich, *Kraly Petar*; for later developments regarding conflict between Serbian civilian authorities and the younger conspirators who founded a secret organisation called the Black Hand in 1911 see: Dusan T. Batakovic, 'La "Main noire" (1911–1917) l'armee serbe entre democratie et autoritarisme', *Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, 2 (1998).