

CHAPTER 3



BRITISH OFFICIAL PERCEPTIONS

Reactions to the May Coup

It is difficult even now to estimate the scope of foreign complicity in the conspiracy. Henry Wickham Steed learned in Vienna that von Kállay, Austrian administrator of Bosnia and Herzegovina, knew about preparations for the conspiracy, thanks to 'a Hungarian Under Secretary of State in the Bosnian Administration who attended the meetings of a Vienna section of the conspirators at the Café Imperial on the Ringstrasse'.¹ From the other side, if Russian Minister Charykov really did not know anything about the conspiracy, then why had the Russians dispatched a special agent to protect Alexander's life?² One of the civilian leaders of the conspiracy, a former minister Dyordye Genchich, made several trips to Vienna in the course of 1902 and early 1903 to inquire about Russian and Austro-Hungarian attitudes about a possible change of the dynasty in Serbia. He talked with Dumba, who later became Austro-Hungarian Minister in Belgrade (from February 1903 till May 1905), and with

1 Henry Wickham Steed, *Through Thirty Years 1892–1922. A Personal Narrative* (2 vols. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1924), vol. 1, p. 204.

2 Wayne Vucinich, *Serbia Between East and West*, p. 76.

the Russian Ambassador in Vienna, Count Kapnist.³ He spoke in general terms without mentioning the conspiracy, but diplomats in Vienna must have noticed his frequent trips. Yet, if one cannot definitely confirm Austro-Hungarian and Russian complicity, it is quite certain that the British Minister, Sir George Bonham, had not the slightest idea of what was going on. Sir Charles Hardinge, who at that time was an Assistant Under Secretary, was particularly upset by this fact. 'How can a man', he ironically asked, 'who is stone deaf hear what is going on? People do not shout out this sort of things down an ear-trumpet or into a man's deaf ear'.⁴ Other foreign diplomats were also unaware of any conspiracy. Some even linked the assassination with the Macedonian revolutionary movement.⁵

British Official Perception

Political assassination was, at that time, in no way an event restricted to Serbia. V. Dedijer gives a list of major political assassinations from 1792 till 1914. It includes 89 names. Only in the period between 1893 and 1902 some 15 prominent figures were killed, including five presidents and three crowned heads.⁶ What was specific in the Belgrade Assassination was the dis-

3 *Ibid.*, p. 50.

4 Bertie Papers, Hardinge to Bertie, 15 June 1903, Private, PRO FO 800/173.

5 Wayne Vucinich, *Serbia Between East and West*, p. 75.

6 Vladimir Dedijer, *The Road to Sarajevo* (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1967), pp. 449–451. The list of fifteen killed persons, in a decade before the May Coup, includes: Carnot, President of France, Cánovas del Castillo, Prime Minister of Spain, Presidents of the United States, Uruguay, Guatemala and Dominican Republic, Shah of Persia, King Umberto of Italy, and Empress Elizabeth of Austria.

gusting way in which the conspirators killed the royal couple. Even more peculiar, at least by European standards, was the fact that some of the conspirators entered the new Government. Actually, out of ten members of the Provisional Government, four were conspirators.⁷ Bonham saw the list of the new members of the Serbian Government immediately in the morning of 11 June. The list included Genchich, ‘a well-known conspirator’, and Mashin, ‘one of the actual murderers’. In his opinion this made it impossible to believe that any one of the new ministers was unaware of the plot.⁸ This struck Lansdowne, who made the following remark: ‘This matter strongly against the recognition of the new gov[ernmen]t’.⁹

At the time of the May Coup Britain was governed by a Unionist Cabinet. The Prime Minister, from July 1902 till December 1905, was Arthur James Balfour, and the Foreign Secretary was the Marquis of Lansdowne. The latter possessed ‘an aristocratic and imperial “Britishness”’, embodied in distant areas of India and Canada, and was hostile to local nationalisms.¹⁰ A bunch of the regicides celebrating their ‘patriotic’ deed must have been utterly revolting to the Marquis. Britain was quick to formulate her policy towards the new Serbian Government. Arthur James Balfour announced in the House of Commons, on 15 June, that the British Minister to Serbia was accredited only to King Alexander, and with the latter’s death diplomatic relations between the two countries had come to an end. The

7 Wayne Vucinich, *Serbia Between East and West*, p. 60.

8 Bonham to Lansdowne, 17 June 1903, No. 106 Confidential, PRO FO 105/157.

9 Radovich, *Aftermath*, p. 24; Lansdowne’s minute on Bonham to Lansdowne, 17 June 1903, Tel. No. 24, PRO FO 105–157.

10 Keith Robbins, “‘Experiencing the Foreign’: British Foreign Policy Makers and the Delights of Travel”, in Michael Dockrill and Brian McKercher (eds.), *Diplomacy and World Power* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p. 22.

relations, he remarked, had terminated of themselves.¹¹ Lansdowne, responding to Lord Newton speech in the House of Lords, said on 19 June ‘... nothing is further from our thought than to maintain what he spoke of as ordinary relations with persons who were implicated in these events’.¹² In reply to a note from the Russian ambassador, Count Benckendorff, Lansdowne stated that his Government was *in no hurry* to recognise either a new Serbian government or a new Serbian king.¹³ Lansdowne, moreover, proposed that all foreign envoys should be removed from Belgrade. But his appeal for such a joint demonstration by the Great Powers evoked little response.¹⁴ After this failure Lansdowne soon instructed the British Minister to leave Belgrade before Prince Peter arrived from Geneva. Vice-Consul Wilfred Thesiger was to take charge of the British Legation,¹⁵ and Bonham left Belgrade on 21 June. The only other minister who was permanently withdrawn from Belgrade was the Dutch Minister.¹⁶

Russian and Austro-Hungarian position was softer. As soon as conditions appeared to be normal they accepted the change of Government as *fait accompli*. Already on 12 June, Austro-Hungarian and Russian Foreign Ministers, Goluchowski and Lamsdorf communicated and concluded that the ending of the Provisional Government and the recognition of Peter Karageorgevich would be the ‘relatively lesser evil’.¹⁷ The Austro-

11 *Great Britain, 4 Hansard's Parliamentary Debates CXXIII* (1903), p. 946.

12 *Ibid*, p. 1416.

13 Lansdowne Papers, Lansdowne to Benckendorff, 15 June 1903, Copy, PRO FO 800/140.

14 MacKenzie, *Serbs and Russians*, p. 327.

15 *Ibid*, p. 328.

16 Wayne Vucinich, *Serbia Between East and West*, p. 80.

17 *Ibid*, p. 79.

Hungarian Minister Dumba will later summarise: ‘In view of the great interests which Austria-Hungary had in Serbia, moral considerations had to take a back seat’.¹⁸ Sir Francis Plunkett, the British Ambassador at Vienna was struck by the extraordinary calmness of the press and Government concerning the May Coup, although he was aware that the late Serbian royal couple was not very popular in Vienna. Plunkett was even able to perceive a degree of admiration for the conspirators in Vienna because they had so completely exterminated the Obrenovich and Lunyevitsa families, that the chances for future dynastic strife were reduced.¹⁹ Yet he soon rejected information about Austro-Hungarian complicity. Their principal anxiety was to refrain from any steps which would lead to domestic turmoil in Serbia, and therefore they initially proclaimed the Belgrade slayings ‘... perhaps with indiscreet bluntness... (as) an internal matter which primarily concerned the Servian people themselves’. Later, as the brutal fact became known, public and official opinion in the Empire assumed an appropriate response. Plunkett also noticed how undesirable it was for the Monarchy to do anything which would imperil the election of Prince Peter, whom the Austrian Government regarded as an acceptable candidate for the Serbian throne. Plunkett also turned his attention to an article of *The Times* (16 June) advocating an Austrian military occupation of Belgrade as a sign of its disapproval of the gruesome and bloody deeds. He commented that an Austrian occupation of Belgrade:

...would doubtless have incensed Russia, who, as we have reason to know, had already taken umbrage at the

18 Dumba, *Memoirs of a Diplomat*, p. 116.

19 Radovich, *Aftermath*, p. 38; Plunkett to Lansdowne, 12 June 1903, No. 158, PRO FO 105/157.

*mere fact that Austria-Hungary moved a few men-of-war from Smyrna to Salonica to protect her numerous subjects at that port from the effects which were feared after the Bulgarian explosions.*²⁰

Wickham Steed noticed in his memoirs that 'it was not only in Belgrade that cynical indifference to the crime was shown. On the morrow of the murders, the *Fremdenblatt*, official organ of the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Office, published an article arguing that though the bloodshed was deplorable, the Balkans were a bloody region and that it mattered little who reigned in Serbia provided he were on good terms with Austria-Hungary'.²¹ Moreover when King Peter passed through Vienna, on his way to Belgrade, from Geneva, a crowd of Serbs and Croats was allowed to welcome him and to cheer him not only as King of Serbia but as King of Croatia as well, which was part of Austria-Hungary. Steed commented this: 'Had not the Austro-Hungarian Government believed that King Peter would be its obedient puppet, no such demonstration would have been tolerated. It turned against him when it realized, two years later, that he was devoted to Serbia and Serbia alone'.²²

For the image of the new Serbian King in the Foreign Office a huge dossier entitled 'The Karageorgevitch Family 1868 to 1903'²³ was of key importance. It was compiled at the Foreign

20 Radovich, *Aftermath*, pp. 39–40; Plunkett to Lansdowne, 18 June 1903, No. 168 Confidential, PRO FO 7/1339.

21 Henry Wickham Steed, *Through Thirty Years*, p. 206.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 206.

23 PRO FO 105/152; cf. Филипс Оти, 'Необјављени документи енглеског министарства о Србији', *Историјски часопис* [Phyllis Auty, 'Neobyavlyeni dokumenti engleskog ministarstva o Srbiji', *Istorijski Chasopis*, Belgrade, vol. 12–13 (1963), p. 438].

Office immediately upon learning of the assassination. The dossier included incriminating details of Peter's complicity in the murder of Prince Michael Obrenovich in 1868. Especially reports from British representatives in Vienna suggested such complicity.²⁴ By 1883 Sir Henry Elliot was claiming that Prince Peter's '... complicity in the assassination of the late Prince (Michael) is scarcely a matter of doubt ...'²⁵ These claims must have shaken any belief in Peter's innocence as in the May Coup and a favourable report news from Sir Conyngham Greene in Switzerland exonerating the Prince of complicity in the conspiracy could hardly have seemed convincing. Greene merely confirmed that the Swiss Government had no information connecting the Prince Karageorgevich with the conspiracy.

As far as the personal qualities of the new Serbian King were concerned, the British Consul-General in Belgrade, Thesiger, who was not at all prejudicial about the new King got the impression '...of a thoroughly honourable man, of a gentleman in every sense of the word, but of no exceptional strength of character'.²⁶ And this was the best that Lansdowne might have read about Peter. Especially damaging for King Peter's reputation was a letter written by the British Minister in Montenegro, Kennedy, who concluded about the new King:

Prince, or rather, King Peter is clever and plausible, but timid and unscrupulous—in plain words he is a

24 Bloomfield to Stanley, 30 June 1868, No. 123, PRO FO 105/152; Bloomfield to Stanley, 7 July 1868, No. 131, PRO FO 105/152; and Bonar to Stanley, 16 October 1868, No. 152, PRO FO 105/152.

25 Radovich, *Aftermath*, p. 44; Elliot to Granville, 18 June 1883, No. 177 Confidential, PRO FO 105/152.

26 Radovich, *Aftermath*, p. 45; Thesiger to Lansdowne, 2 July 1903, No. 125, PRO FO 105/149; and Lansdowne Papers, Lord Brooke to Lansdowne, 29 June 1903, PRO FO 800/142.

*cunning cheat, a liar, and a coward. His own brother-in-law, the Crown Prince of Montenegro, has spoken of him to me in those terms. He is thoroughly Russian in his sympathies, as he and his family owe everything to Russian patronage and protection... but he always seemed to keep on good terms with the Austrians.*²⁷

Accumulated information that became available over time must have strengthened suspicions in Lansdowne's mind not only about the involvement of King Peter in the conspiracy, but also about the complicity of the Russian Government in the plot to remove King Alexander. This along with news about unstable internal conditions in Serbia reduced chances that the British Government would take steps leading to a rapid renewal of diplomatic relations with Serbia.²⁸

The British terms were vital for a renewal of diplomatic relations with Serbia. In Serbia, it was not quite clear what they included. Even in Italy, British terms were misunderstood. So, in April 1904, Sir Francis Bertie, British Ambassador to Italy wrote that the Italians believed that the British Government was holding out '... for the punishment of the guilty before renewing diplomatic relations with Servia whereas what the Italian Government required was the removal from the Court of King Peter of all officers connected with the plot'.²⁹ However, the British Government itself never stipulated such a requirement, knowing that such a demand would not be acceptable for the Serbian King and Government. Soon, after Balfour had announced the suspension of the Anglo-Serbian diplomatic relations, questions were

²⁷ Radovich, *Aftermath*, p. 46; Lansdowne Papers, Kennedy to Lansdowne, 18 June 1903, Confidential, PRO FO 800/142.

²⁸ Radovich, *Aftermath*, pp. 46–47.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 54; Bertie to Lansdowne, 21 April 1904, No. 55, PRO FO 105/158.

raised in Parliament as to whether the British Government would require punishment of the Serbian regicides as a prerequisite for the renewal of diplomatic relations with Serbia. Balfour gave an ambiguous answer. He concluded: ‘We have taken our line in the matter’.³⁰ But, Lord Lansdowne was quite clear when, on 19 June, he declared:

I am not quite sure whether I understood (Lord Newton) to suggest that it was our duty to concert with other Powers measures of a punitive character directed against the authors of these outrages. My Lords, no proposal of that kind has been made to us, nor, I conceive, could we usefully have made such a proposal to other Powers...³¹

Lansdowne found out from Lord Brooke, who was on a short tour in the Balkans at the time of the May Coup, and who interviewed King Peter in June, that the King had at first intended to punish the assassins, but that upon his arrival in Belgrade he realised the effect of such an action would be a civil war, and therefore he abandoned his intentions to punish the guilty officers.³²

British official and popular reaction can be gleaned from the reactions that the Serbian Minister in London, Chedomille Miyatovich was facing. He received threatening letters and faced such contempt that he resigned his post. The daughter of his

30 *Great Britain, 4 Hansard's Parliamentary Debates CXXIV* (1903), p. 65.

31 *Great Britain, 4 Hansard's Parliamentary Debates CXXIII*, (1903), pp. 1416–1417; cf. Wayne Vucinich, *Serbia Between East and West*, p. 77.

32 Lansdowne Papers, Lord Brooke to Lansdowne, 29 June 1903, PRO FO 800/142; and Thesiger to Lansdowne, 2 July 1903, No. 125, PRO FO 105/149.

successor, Lena Yovichich, who wrote a biography of her father, described the obstacles that Miyatovich and her father faced in London:

Since the news of the Obrenovitch tragedy had been received he (Miyatovich) met with the cold shoulder wherever he went. Official doors were suddenly closed, and the circumstances of the murder put a strain even on personal friendship... To mention Serbia was enough to raise a wall of prejudice; English people could have no association with a race who had murdered their King. Every one of Serbian decent must be made to feel responsible for that terrible deed. They were beyond the pale of a Society whose principles were irreproachable; with the best of intentions Englishmen never lost an opportunity to proclaim the fact that moral feelings were very high in their country, that what had happened in Serbia could not be condoned and must be expiated by the entire nation.³³

After Miyatovich's resignation the Serbian Government appointed, in July 1903, Alexander Yovichich as Chargé d'Affaires. However, the British Government refused to accept his credentials. Yovichich was accepted only as the Consul-General. This status did not include regular diplomatic relations. Yovichich soon received the clear explanation of the British terms from the Foreign Office functionaries. He reported to Belgrade that: '... so long as the officers who were compromised by the events of 29 May (11 June) of last year are found in the direct company of His Majesty King Peter and in the most important

³³ Lena A. Yovitchich, *The Biography of a Serbian Diplomat* (London: The Epworth Press, 1939), pp. 190–191.

state posts, then Great Britain will not join into regular relations with us'.³⁴

Certainly, the main reason for the British Government to continue the disruption of diplomatic relations with Serbia were contained in Thesiger's observations. According to his reports, a power struggle in the army as a result of the dynastic change had begun almost immediately after King Alexander's assassination. This meant the possibility of a counter-revolution. Additionally, the probable complicity of both King Peter and Russia in the assassination conspiracy, and the uncertain future of his dynasty in Serbia, were obstacles for an early recognition of his position to the British Government and King. Thesiger immediately informed the British Foreign Secretary about the campaign to obtain signatures on a memorial to be presented to the King.³⁵ The memorial requested the dismissal of the regicide officers from their positions and the trial of these same officers before a court martial. Thesiger commented specifically upon the 'strong probability' of the counter-conspirators '... taking the law into their own hands', and of their determination '... to break the power of the committee (of regicide officers) at any cost'.³⁶ In the following months Thesiger on at least four occasions expres-

34 Quoted in Radovich, *Aftermath*, p. 60; Yovichich to Nikolich, 16/29 January 1904, unnumbered but marked Personal and Strictly Confidential, DASIP 1904 I/9, Pov. Br. 119. (this is old numeration, the new would be AS instead of DASIP).

35 See the article by Božin Simić (Marco), 'Srpska vojska pre i posle 29. maja 1903 (Uticaj zaverenika na politiku predratne Srbije)', *Nova Evropa* XVI (11 July 1927); Thesiger to Lansdowne, 10 September 1903, No. 152, PRO FO 105/149.

36 Radovich, *Aftermath*, p. 70; Thesiger to Lansdowne, 20 August 1903, No. 144, PRO FO 105/149; also Thesiger to Lansdowne, 2 September 1903, No. 150, PRO FO 105/158.

sed confidence about the ultimate success of the anti-regicide forces. The army dispute, he wrote, was spreading throughout society and was encompassing civilian supporters.³⁷

The reports of domestic instability in Serbia no doubt darkened the prospects for a rapid renewal of Anglo-Serbian relations. The prospects that the rule of the regicides might be replaced by officers faithful to the oath that they had given to their late King encouraged the British Government to wait.

King Edward and Diplomatic Relations with Serbia

There is a widespread belief in both Anglo-Saxon and Serbian historiographies that King Edward was instrumental in the decision of Britain to break diplomatic relations with Serbia. Moreover, it is believed that it was due to his influence that diplomatic relations were not resumed until 1906. In this sense Wayne Vucinich mentions: 'The intransigence of King Edward VII and of certain elements in Serbia regarding the regicides was blamed for the unclosed breach between Serbia and England.'³⁸ Serbian historiography is even more direct in blaming King Edward. Both Aleksich-Peykovich and Zhivoyinovich attributed continuation of the disrupt relation to 'the stubbornness of King Edward'.³⁹

37 Radovich, *Aftermath*, p. 70; Thesiger to Lansdowne, 10 September 1903, No. 152, PRO FO 105/149, and Thesiger to Lansdowne, 1 October 1903, No. 159, PRO FO 105/149.

38 Wayne Vucinich, *Serbia Between East and West*, p. 97.

39 Lyilyana Aleksich-Peykovich, *Odnosi Srbiye sa Frantsuskom i Engleskom*, pp. 61–62; Dragolyub Zhivoyinovich, *Kraly Petar Karageorgevich*, vol. II, p. 224; MacKenzie follows Serbian historiography in attributing policy of non-recognition to 'King Edward's stubbornness'. David MacKenzie, *Serbs and Russians*, p. 331.

The person responsible for the initiation of this line of argument is Chedomille Miyatovich. Edward Legge, biographer of King Edward, received from his ‘distinguished friend’ Miyatovich a letter giving details of an important meeting that took place in summer of 1905, between King Edward and Russian and Italian Ambassadors:

Dear Mr. Legge (London, June 21, 1912)

...You know that after the cruel assassination of King Alexander and Queen Draga (in 1903, June 2)⁴⁰ England broke off her diplomatic relation with Servia... I myself, living in London, tried as much as I could, unofficially, to prepare the way for that diplomatic reconciliation. But all in vain. As King Peter was rather a persona grata with the Tsar of Russia, and as he was brother-in-law of Queen Helena of Italy, both the Russian and the Italian Ambassadors in London received instructions to exercise their influence with the British Government in favour of a speedy re-establishment of the diplomatic relations with Servia.

But their representations at the Foreign Office were not successful. It would seem that those two Ambassadors got a hint that the true difficulty lay with King Edward. Anyhow both Count Benckendorff and Signor Pansa received orders to ask together a special audience from King Edward. He received them in Windsor and listened patiently to their representations, at the end of which he spoke à peu près in these terms: 'I regret very much indeed that I cannot comply with your suggestions. The assassination of King Alexander and Queen Draga was so terrible that

40 This is erratum. The assassination took place on 11 June 1903 (29 May 1903, O. S.).

it made a deep impression on public opinion in England... And, besides this reason, I have another, and so to say, a personal reason. Mon métier à moi est d'être Roi. King Alexander was also by his métier "un Roi". As you see, we belonged to the same guild as labourers or professional men. I cannot be indifferent to the assassination of a member of my profession, or, if you like, a member of my guild. We should be obliged to shut up our businesses if we, the kings, were to consider the assassination of kings as of no consequence at all...⁴¹

It is not surprising that after Legge's biography, two other British biographers of King Edward VII followed the same pattern. Sidney Lee and Philip Magnus simply reiterated Miyatovich's narrative as published in Legge's book.⁴²

Yet after the initial negative attitude of Britain, both the Serbian Government and the King hoped that relations would soon be re-established. The new Serbian King sent a telegram on 25 June, to King Edward announcing the decision of the Serbian parliament to elect him 'unanimously' to be the new King of Serbia:

Je suis heureux de pouvoir annoncer à votre Majesté que le peuple Serbe, par la voix unanime de ses représentants légaux, m'ayant élu Roi de Serbie, j'ai considéré comme un devoir envers ma patrie de répondre à cet appel. Ayant prêté le serment Constitutionnel devant

41 Edward Legge, *King Edward in his True Colours* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1912), pp. 81–82; Miyatovich repeated the same in his *Memoirs of a Balkan Diplomatist*, p. 137.

42 Sidney Lee, *King Edward VII: A Biography* (2 vols., London: Macmillan & Co., 1927), II, pp. 270–271; Philip Magnus, *King Edward the Seventh* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1964), p. 341.

la Représentation Nationale, j'ai pris aujourd'hui le pouvoir Royal et le titre de Roi de Serbie. Confiant dans l'auguste bienveillance de votre Majesté et dans ses sympathies envers la Serbie, je me plais à espérer qu'elle fera bon accueil à l'annonce de cet événement.

After several days, on 30 June, King Edward replied:

J'al l'honneur d'accuser réception de la dépêche de votre Majesté par laquelle elle m'informe que le peuple Serbe l'a élue à l'unanimité Roi de Serbie, et qu'elle a cru devoir répondre à cet appel.

J'offre en ces circonstances à votre Majesté l'assurance de ma bienveillance personnelle, et tout en exprimant mon désir sincère que son règne apporte au peuple confié à ses soins les bienfaits de la paix, de la justice, et de la prospérité, j'espère que votre Majesté parviendra à rétablir le bonne renommée de sa patrie sur laquelle les événements récents ont laissé une tâche si regrettable.⁴³

In his answer Edward VII, basically followed pattern of the replies given to King Peter by Emperors Franz Joseph and Nicholas II. Both the Serbian Minister in London, and the Serbian Government wrongly interpreted this letter as the first step towards the re-establishment of the diplomatic relations.⁴⁴

It must have soon become the general belief that King Edward was the key person if any effort to re-establish diplo-

⁴³ *The Times*, July 3, 1903, p. 5 f ('King Edward and King of Servia').

⁴⁴ *Документи о спољној политици Краљевине Србије 1903–1914*, том. I/1, уредник Андрија Раденић, САНУ, Београд 1991, стр. 162 [Andriya Radenich (ed.), *Dokumenti o spolynou polititsi Kraljevine Srbiye 1903–1914*, vol. I/1 (Belgrade: SANU, 1991), p. 162].

matic relations was to be undertaken. Both Serbian and continental diplomats believed so. The new Serbian Consul-General, appointed in July 1903, Alexander Yovichich reported that the British Government had succumbed to the dictates of King Edward.⁴⁵ Following this belief the new Serbian Consul-General in Glasgow, W. P. Campbell Everdeen, hoped to influence the British Monarch through King Edward's and King Peter's mutual female acquaintances. However, his efforts in summer 1904, failed.⁴⁶

A son of W. T. Stead, Alfred also tried to directly influence King Edward in the autumn of 1904. W. T. Stead was acquainted with Edward's private secretary, Lord Knollys, and Alfred also had his own court contacts. A. Stead visited Serbia in 1904, and was very charmed by the country. He authorised the release of information from his letter to his wife to King Edward. In Belgrade Stead asked Foreign Minister N. Pashich that a memorandum be sent to him in England dealing with Anglo-Serbian relations, in order that 'extremely favourable effect which my letters about Serbia created upon King Edward will not prove abortive'. Moreover, Stead believed that the King had 'a lively interest in hearing more about Serbian affairs, and since the renewal of the relations depends solely upon him, it is superfluous that I should further explain to you the necessity of sending to me the above mentioned summary of facts as soon as possible'. The Italian Ambassador believed that Lansdowne was inclined to send a British representative to King Peter's coronation. Stead concluded the same when he had an opportunity for conversation with Lansdowne. It seemed to Stead that it was King Edward

45 See: Frances Radovich, 'The British Court and Relations with Serbia, 1903-1906', *East European Quarterly*, vol. 14 (Winter 1980), p. 462.

46 *Ibid*, p. 463.

who was still inflexible. An Austro-Hungarian diplomat discovered that Stead was telling Serbian statesmen as well as Vice-Consul Thesiger that Lord Lansdowne ‘... would gladly be ready to restore diplomatic relations with Serbia but is meeting insurmountable resistance from His Majesty the King’. Stead finally got the memorandum from Serbia and by February 1905, he expressed his gratitude. He wrote that it was already in King Edward's possession, and he intended to submit a copy of it to Lord Lansdowne. He was an optimist at that stage, but six months later he still had no definite information regarding King Edward's reaction. He knew the King had read the report he had drafted on the basis of the Serbian memorandum, but, ‘... the king has not made any observations in the presence of his friends...’ in response to the information presented.⁴⁷ Even at the end of 1905, the Serbian Government was receiving news that King Edward was the key obstacle for the re-establishment of diplomatic relations. The French Ambassador to Italy Camille Barrère, wrote in November 1905: ‘They are not ignorant at Beograd, that this situation [of ruptured relations] is due to the personal sentiments of King Edward and especially Queen Alexandra’.⁴⁸

Frances Radovich was the first to challenge this belief in King Edward's instrumental role in the re-establishment of Anglo-Serbian relations. She concludes: ‘it appears there is no discrepancy at all between the conclusions of recent historians such as George Monger and Zara Steiner regarding the king's negligible overall influence on foreign policy formulation and

⁴⁷ Radovich, *Aftermath to Regicide*, pp. 112–114.

⁴⁸ Frances Radovich, ‘The British Court and Relations with Serbia, 1903–1906’, p. 463 [Barrère to Rouvier, 19 November 1905, *Documents diplomatique français* (1871–1914), VIII (2^e série; Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1929–1959), pp. 202–203].

his actual part in the suspension and final restoration of relations with Serbia'.⁴⁹ King Edward really expressed on several occasions his disgust about the Belgrade Regicide, but he also seemed to be very conciliatory, even very soon after the May Coup. At the beginning of August, the King minuted: 'I presume that immediately Diplomatic relations will have to be resumed. Two months later the new Serbian Government expressed hopes that King Edward would soon appoint a new British Minister to Belgrade 'as all the other powers had already done'. Having read this the British King noted that it would be difficult not to accredit a Minister to the Court of Serbia since all other Powers had done so. However, it was Lansdowne who commenting on the King's remarks said, 'there is no hurry'. In the spring of 1904, the King again showed no initiative. To the Dutch inquiry on what British attitude towards re-establishment of the diplomatic relations would be he asked Lansdowne: 'What does Lord Lansdowne think?' It was again King Edward who, in November 1905, minuted in a dispatch: 'Has not the time arrived for diplomatic relations being renewed with Servia'.⁵⁰ This all led Radovich to conclude: 'The British king reigned but did not rule'.⁵¹

Yet, recently, Simon Heffer once again turned the whole discussion upside down. In his book he tried to revive Legge's and Lee's argumentation insisting on the substantial influence that King Edward VII had on both British internal and foreign policy. In Heffer's interpretation the Foreign Office started to

49 Frances Radovich, 'The British Court and Relations with Serbia, 1903–1906', p. 464.

50 *Ibid*, pp. 465–466.

51 *Ibid*, p. 466.

press the King, as early as the spring of 1904, to re-establish diplomatic relations, but the King did not want to compromise. Heffer concluded: 'The King had had his way'.⁵²

Frequent shifts of the King's attitudes towards the regicide question confirm the conclusion of Zara Steiner about Edward VII that 'the future king had neither the inclination, the industry nor the ability to play a decisive role in international affairs'.⁵³ Therefore Radovich's analysis of the role of King Edward VII in the Anglo-Serbian diplomatic crisis provides more support for Steiner's characterisation of King Edward's role.

That the Serbian Government was not always well informed can be seen from another fact regarding Amero-Serbian relations. A certain Mr. John Jackson was supposed to become the new American Minister in Belgrade. He was on his way to Serbia when he heard the news of the regicide. He was subsequently instructed by John Hay, Secretary of State (1898–1905), on 20 July that he could recognise the new Government only if there was unanimous recognition from the rest of the diplomatic corps in Belgrade. Otherwise he was advised not to hasten to enter the diplomatic relations.⁵⁴ The American attitude was milder than the British reaction, and as early as July, Deputy Secretary of State, Loomis supported Jackson's motion to re-establish diplomatic relations. Loomis also insisted that King Peter should send the American Government notification of his accession. From this point the whole matter became an issue of protocol. All that was expected for recognition was that Serbia

52 Simon Heffer, *Power and Place. The Political Consequences of King Edward VII* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998), p. 170.

53 Zara Steiner, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy* (London, New Jersey: The Ashfield Press, 1986) p. 202.

54 Bogdan Popović, 'Majski prevrat i SAD', *Jugoslovenska revija za međunarono pravo*, 1 (1961), p. 87.

should send a letter of notification. The Provisional Government simply forgot to send such a letter to the State Department. Even in September, the State Department was only waiting for Serbian notification.⁵⁵

However, the Serbian Government jumped to the wrong conclusion since the United States, The Netherlands and Britain were the only three countries that did not recognise the new order in Serbia. The Government of the Kingdom of Serbia believed that there was Anglo-American solidarity on this matter. Even Mabel Gruyich, wife of Serbian diplomat Slavko Gruyich, herself an American, was sent to talk to her father's friend, Secretary of State, John Hay. But, as B. Popovich points out 'this was all unnecessary. American recognition was ready and waiting, and although the Serbian Government considered that there was some deep principled policy of the State Department, the whole matter was about a simple formality'.⁵⁶

Finally King Peter's letter was sent, in October, to the United States. The President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt answered it on 11 December, and Jackson was sent a letter of credentials. Although Jackson had to wait for several months to submit the letter of credentials due to the diplomatic strike, he finally submitted it in May 1904, which marked the re-establishment of the Amero-Serbian relations that had originally been established in 1881.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 92.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 93.

⁵⁷ See Драгољуб Живојиновић, „Успостављање дипломатских и трговинских односа између САД и Србије (1878–1881)“, *Зборник за историју Маџине Српске* [Dragolyub Zhivoyinovich, 'Uspostavljanje diplomatskih i trgovinskih odnosa izmedy SAD i Srbiye (1878–1881)', *Zbornik za istoriyu Matitse Srpske*, vol. 25 (1982), pp. 31–49].

Although American recognition of the new regime, as a de facto government, was never challenged it was due to the neglect of protocol that it was delayed. Similarly, the belief that King Edward was instrumental in re-establishing Anglo-Serbian relations gave a wrong signal to Serbian diplomacy and contributed to the loss of a substantial amount of time. In both cases the Serbian Government took recourse to unnecessarily informal missions.

Further Development of the Crisis

Diplomatic Strike

At the end of 1903 the Austro-Hungarian Minister in Belgrade, Dumba, persuaded his Foreign Minister Goluchowski to co-ordinate with Russian Foreign Minister Lamsdorf 'a kind of diplomatic strike' against King Peter, in order to induce him to remove conspirator officers from influential posts at court and to punish them appropriately. Dumba's decision was influenced by the emergence of a counter-conspiracy in Serbia, which offered Austro-Hungarian diplomacy a pretext to interfere in Serbian internal relations. The strike was almost complete and, in January, only the Greek and Turkish Ministers stayed in Belgrade. Britain now co-operated with other Powers hoping to create impression that Europe was unanimous in requiring dismissal of the regicides from the Court.⁵⁸

Thesiger, however, was not satisfied with the diplomatic strike. In his opinion, it lacked common goal and a synchronized course of action. The significance of the departure of the Foreign

⁵⁸ MacKenzie, *Serbs and Russians*, pp. 332–334.

Ministers was much minimised, he wrote, because they pleaded ill-health or deferred leave, instead of presenting the true political motives for their action. Therefore, it was not unreasonable at all for the Serbs to be confused about what precisely 'the policy of Europe toward them' was.⁵⁹

The diplomatic strike was ended by a cynical decision of the Serbian King. His *Aides-de-camp* who participated in the regicide were removed from the Court, but at the same time they were promoted to higher positions. Colonel Mashin became the Acting Chief of the Serbian General Staff and Colonel Popovich became the Commander of the Danube Division. Russia immediately announced the appointment of a new Minister, and the Austro-Hungarian and Italian Ministers returned. Others soon followed.⁶⁰ Thesiger very strongly suggested that Britain should also be satisfied with the Austro-Russian solution of the conspiracy question. He noted the indifference of the two Powers with regard to the 'unsatisfactory conclusion' of the issue. They were content with 'such nominal concessions'. He warned, '... if we do not renew relations with Servia now, accepting as sufficient the fact that the British Minister will not be brought officially into contact with the authors of the revolution, the present situation may be prolonged for an indefinite period.'⁶¹

However, Thesiger's recommendation that Britain should demand no further concessions from Serbia failed to change policy at the Foreign Office. Therefore Lansdowne decided to

59 Radovich, *Aftermath*, p. 85; Thesiger to Lansdowne, 13 January 1904, No. 3, PRO FO 105/158.

60 MacKenzie, *Serbs and Russians*, pp. 334–335.

61 Radovich, *Aftermath*, pp. 87–88; Thesiger to Lansdowne, 12 April 1904, No. 30, PRO FO 105/158; also Thesiger to Lansdowne, 2 April 1904, No. 25, PRO FO 105/158; and Thesiger to Lansdowne, 7 April 1904, No. 28, PRO FO 105/158.

bring the matter up at the next Cabinet meeting,⁶² but even after this meeting the British Government made no move to restore relations with Serbia. This was influenced by rumours about the unstable internal situation in Serbia, about the dubious future of King Peter and his dynasty, and especially about the probable complicity of both King Peter and Russia in the Obrenovich assassination.

The Re-establishment of Anglo-Serbian Diplomatic Relations

It was only in 1905 that the situation started to change. This change was related to change in Britain's international position. When, in July 1902, Lord Salisbury retired from office many in Britain were not satisfied with his policy of 'splendid isolation'. As Wickham Steed characteristically observed 'British influence had ceased to be felt as a constant element in European public life'.⁶³ The Anglo-French '*Entente Cordiale*' of April 1904, and the worsening of Anglo-German relations, in connection with the Baghdad Railway as well as the First Moroccan Crisis, were of great significance to implementation of British policy in the Balkans. Simultaneously, Anglo-Russian relations improved after Russia's defeat by Japan in 1905. The crisis in Anglo-Serbian relations was now viewed as very favourable for the strengthening of Austro-German influence in Serbia. Therefore the Foreign Office was more inclined to settle the dispute. Salisbury was ready to tell Mijatovich, in 1900, that since the Balkan nations were not capable of forming a federation he considered 'as a second best solution that Austria-Hungary

62 Radovich, *Aftermath*, pp. 88–89; Lansdowne's minute on Thesiger to Lansdowne, 2 April 1903, No. 25, PRO FO 105/158.

63 Henry Wickham Steed, *Through Thirty Years*, p. 192.

should occupy the entire Balkan Peninsula'.⁶⁴ By 1905 no one would have thought of repeating these words in the Foreign Office. Thesiger also stressed throughout 1905, the interests of British industry in Serbia opposed to German capital.

At the same time, Miyatovich made his own unofficial diplomatic efforts. He asked Lord Lansdowne about the possibility of the re-establishment of diplomatic relations.⁶⁵ Lansdowne replied: 'My dear Miyatovitch, Servia does not seem the least anxious to see those relations re-established'. At the beginning of 1905 Miyatovich spoke to Sir Eric Barrington, '*l'homme de confiance*' of the Marquis Lansdowne. He told Miyatovich: 'England does not suggest anything nor asks for anything. She does not contest the right of Servia to have the murderers of King Alexander Obrenovitch at Court, in the Government, in the Army and in the highest government administrative post, to promote them and to bestow decorations on them. But she maintains the liberty and the right to refuse to have diplomatic and friendly relations with such Servians'. Miyatovich inquired if the retirement of three leading regicides would satisfy Britain, and Barrington with reservations approved Miyatovich's plan.⁶⁶ However, the Serbian Government was not at that point ready to accept this proposal. But the new Serbian Government (appointed in May 1905) was keen to re-establish diplomatic relations with Britain. The Macedonian question was constantly threatening to explode and the new Stoyanovich Government believed that Britain would play the key role in the settlement of the Macedonian question.

64 Chedo Mijatovich, 'Lord Salisbury-The Peacemaker', *Fortnightly Review*, vol. 82 (1907), p. 974.

65 It probably happened in late 1904.

66 Lena Yovitchitch, *The Biography*, pp. 218–221.

British public opinion was, however, more sympathetic with Bulgarian cause in Macedonia than with Serbian. This pro-Bulgarian line of British public opinion was evident ever since the Serbo-Bulgarian War of 1885. After the outbreak of St. Elijah's Uprising, pro-Bulgarian agitation in Britain intensified. This influenced the Foreign Office that persistently tried, since the summer of 1903, to convince the European Concert to accept an autonomous Macedonia. An alternative British solution was a Big Bulgaria. Balfour had some sympathies for this plan under certain conditions. Lansdowne and O'Connor also had high opinion of the Bulgarians especially in comparison with other nationalities in the Balkans.⁶⁷ In a letter to Lansdowne, in February 1903, Balfour remarked: 'The Bulgarians are the only Nationality in the Balkans with the making of a nation in them and I hold (in this differing from Percy and many others) that they would be much more efficient guardians of the Straits than Turkey seems ever likely to be'. Still Balfour thought that a Big Bulgaria should not 'be the aim of diplomacy in existing circumstances.' He was rather for *status quo* and reform.⁶⁸

Balfour Government was under the constant pressure of its public opinion to do something for the Macedonian Christians. British diplomats really did try to achieve some sort of autonomy for Macedonia in the last months of 1903. However, British designs for the autonomous Macedonia were rejected in Europe until February 1904. Only Italy supported them. But Serbian Governments were not properly informed of Balfour's impoten-

67 Frances A. Radovich, 'Britain's Macedonian Reform Policy, 1903-1905', *The Historian*, vol. 43 (August 1981), p. 502.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 502 (Balfour to Lansdowne, 22 February 1904, BP, Add. MSS 49728).

ce. What they could see had been substantial activity of the British diplomacy regarding Macedonia, and clear sympathies of important sections of British public opinion for the Bulgarian cause in Macedonia. It is natural that 'Serbian Government has now overrated Britain's power to effectuate Balkan affairs and partly because of this miscalculation became especially eager to mend its British political fence'.⁶⁹

Therefore Stoyanovich Government was very inclined to re-establish diplomatic relations with Britain. However, the conspirators, learning of the intentions of the Serbian Government, allied with Austro-Hungarian diplomacy against their own Government.

In Britain, at the end of 1905, the Unionist Government was replaced by a Liberal one. The new British Government, with Sir Edward Grey as the Foreign Secretary, made repeated efforts to re-establish diplomatic relations, though constantly demanding the retirement of seven leading regicides. The Serbian Government, elected in April 1906 and headed by N. Pashich, offered the retirement of five regicides. Finally, six regicides were retired and the diplomatic relations were re-established in June. The Serbian King made another cynical decision. In order to satisfy the regicides, he offered them a substantial sum of money. Every conspirator got 60,000 francs (approx. £ 3,000) and in return the conspirators retired voluntarily. Moreover, their pensions were to be equal to their salaries had been. Grey accepted this cynical compromise, which was somewhat similar to the one Lansdowne had refused to accept in 1904. As D. Zhivoyinovich summarised: 'King Peter persistently and for a long time, often to his own detriment, protected the conspirators from the pressures of Government, parties, public opinion and

⁶⁹ Radovich, *Aftermath*, p. 204.

the Great Powers. He denounced them as soon as they became instruments of Austro-Hungarian diplomacy. Personal feelings and solidarity were replaced by political and state reasons.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Zhivoyinovich, *Kraly Petar*, vol, II, p. 243.