

Serbian/Yugoslav-Romanian Relations and Interactions in the 20th Century

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Belgrade, 2025

INSTITUTE FOR RECENT HISTORY OF SERBIA
Series „Zbornici radova” Vol. 30
FACULTY OF HISTORY, „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA” UNIVERSITY OF IAȘI

For Publishers

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ISBN 978-86-7005-205-5

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UDK: 327(497.1"19"
327(498)"19"

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31212/2025.serb-roman.mar.51-70>

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Establishing the Dynastic Link between the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and the Kingdom of Romania

Abstract: The paper describes how the marriage between King Alexander I and Princess Maria, daughter of King Ferdinand, led to the establishment of the dynastic link between two Balkan countries, the Kingdom of SCS and the Kingdom of Romania. The King's marriage was an integral part of the country's foreign policy and its political meaning in the 20th century was still undeniable. Greece, Romania and the Kingdom of SCS were supposed to serve as the guardians of the order established in Europe after the Great War so the relations in the Balkans were dependent upon the balance among these countries. The question of the province of Banat was considered as „the bone of contention” for Belgrade and Bucharest. The Big Powers solved this problem at the Peace Conference by dividing the region while French foreign policy eased the establishment of the dynastic relations with Romania.

Keywords: Kingdom of SCS, Kingdom of Romania, King Alexander I, Princess Maria, King Ferdinand, Queen Maria of Romania, Banat, Yugoslav foreign policy, Little Entente

The Kingdom of SCS and Romania or Banat and Marriage

Europe, after the end of World War I, was divided into victorious and defeated states. In the Balkans, the victorious countries were Romania, Greece and the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. These countries were expected to serve as guardians of the peace and the territorial order established by international treaties from 1919 to 1921. Relations in this part of the continent were then based on a balance between Bucharest, Athens and Belgrade.¹ The Balkans, devastated by the war and burdened by conflicts among national elites and their mutual prestige, remained a sensitive point in European politics. For France, Great Britain and Italy, a new era

¹ Јован М. Јовановић, *Дипломајска историја Нове Европе*, II, (Београд: Књижара Косте Јов. Михаиловића, 1938), 253.

of creating spheres of influence had begun, and each state on the Peninsula sought to align itself with at least one of the great powers.² During 1920 and 1921, the Kingdom of SCS and Romania, together with Czechoslovakia, formed a regional defensive alliance called the Little Entente, aimed at preventing the revisionist ambitions of defeated neighbouring states and the restoration of the Habsburg monarchy in Hungary and Austria. All three members of the alliance fell within the French sphere of influence.³

An integral part of the foreign policy of all monarchies, including those in the Balkans, was the establishment of dynastic ties, so royal marriages retained their significance even in the 20th century. Before World War I, the Serbian royal government had a plan for the future ruler to marry a Russian princess. As the heir to the throne, Alexander Karađorđević enjoyed the favour of Russia and the Tsar himself. Nicholas II Romanov even stated that he regarded him as „his own son” and was ready to accept him as a son-in-law.⁴ In January 1914, Alexander and Prime Minister Nikola Pašić visited the Russian court, where they were warmly received, and one of the secret aspects of that visit was the proposal for the Tsar's daughter, Olga. Pašić addressed Nicholas II: „If it is destined for us to have the daughter of the Russian Tsar as our queen, she will enjoy the sympathies of the entire Serbian people, and may, if God and circumstances allow, become the empress of the Serbo-Croatian Yugoslav people”.⁵ The Russian Tsar received this proposal favourably; it aligned with Russian interests and was in the spirit of Serbian policy of relying on the Slavic empire. Marrying Olga would have meant a great deal for both Alexander and Serbia. His prestige would have been enhanced, making it easier for him to deal with the Black Hand, the conspiratorial organization, and it would have improved the position of the Serbian court in relation to other European royal houses. The significance of this marriage is underscored by a report from the envoy of the Habsburg Monarchy in Belgrade, who somehow discovered the true nature of Alexander and Pašić's trip to Russia: „(...) because, after all, a radical solution to our relations with Serbia can only be achieved if the current Kingdom is destroyed as an independent state entity and the Karađorđević dynasty is expelled; this necessity, of course, will be more difficult to achieve if a Russian princess sits on the Serbian throne.”⁶ Claude Elan, King Alexander's biographer, noted that during World War I, wounded Russian officers teased Princess Olga while she was nursing them, asking if she wanted to see a picture of the one she was thinking about:

² Desanka Todorović, *Jugoslavija i balkanske države 1918–1923*, (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1979), 10.

³ Здењек Сладек, *Мала Анџанија 1919–1938. Њене привредне, политичке и војне комбинације*, (Београд: ЈП Службени Гласник, 2019), 279.

⁴ Бранислав Глигоријевић, *Краљ Александар Карађорђевић. У рајовима за национално ослобођење*, I, (Београд: Завод за уџбенике и наставна средства, 2002), 147.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 354.

⁶ *Ibid.*

„(...) and photographs of the Serbian prince regent, whose army, in a victorious surge, had defeated Potiorek, would emerge from the pockets of their military tunics. Olga blushed with discomfort”.⁷ Interestingly, as early as November 1913, the American illustrated magazine *Dress & Vanity Fair* published an article titled „Cupid to Seal the Balkan Peace”, which hinted at the marriages of the heirs to the thrones of Serbia, Greece and Romania, the victorious countries in the Second Balkan War.⁸ The article, along with portraits of the mentioned princes and their future brides, stated that the Serbian and Romanian heirs, Alexander and Carol, would soon marry Russian princesses, the Tsar's daughters, Olga and Tatiana, while the Greek heir, George, would marry the Romanian princess Elisabeth.⁹

Princess Olga, however, along with her sisters, brother and parents, perished in the Bolshevik terror, while Alexander bravely led his army to victory. The Serbian nation was „finally united”, yet the thirty-year-old regent still did not have a wife. After the liberation of the country, the Belgrade press often explained the regent's trips to Western countries as his search for a bride. There was also a possibility that Alexander might marry the daughter of the Duke of Guise. This idea was supported by the President of the French Republic, Raymond Poincaré, who wanted to further strengthen the ties with their Balkan ally in this way. The potential bride was Princess Françoise of Orléans (1902–1953), whose brother was the Count of Paris at the time and the pretender to the royal throne in republican France.¹⁰

However, the Yugoslav monarch did not become the son-in-law of the Duke of Guise but instead of the Romanian King Ferdinand of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen. The Romanian royal house had close familial ties with the courts of England, Germany, Russia, Spain, Portugal... Marrying a member of such a royal house undoubtedly presented a significant opportunity for the affirmation of the Serbian national dynasty, which, due to the regicide in 1903, had encountered open antipathy from European courts, particularly the British one.

The founder of the last Romanian dynasty was Carol I of Hohenzollern (1866–1914), during whose reign Romania declared its independence in 1877 and later, in 1881, became a kingdom. In the Second Balkan War, Romania was an ally of Greece and Serbia, and through the Treaty of Bucharest in 1913, it gained Southern Dobruja, taken from Bulgaria. Romania entered World War I in 1916 on the side of the Entente, but was forced to sign a separate peace in May 1918. In November of that same year, Romania annulled the peace agreement and re-entered the fight against the Central Powers. Romania emerged

⁷ Клод Елан, *Живот и смрт Александра I краља Југославије*, (Београд: Ново дело, 1988), 17.

⁸ *Dress & Vanity Fair*, November 1913.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Gi Gotje, *Orlovi i lavovi. Istorija balkanskih monarhija (1817–1974)*, (Београд: Paideia, 2002), 45.

from the war as a victorious country and an ally of the Kingdom of SCS, though the two had a dispute over the rights to the Banat region.

At that time, Romania was ruled by Ferdinand of Hohenzollern, who became king in 1914 after the death of his uncle, Carol I (who left no living descendants). Ferdinand was married to English Princess Marie, the daughter of the Duke of Edinburgh, Alfred (son of Queen Victoria and brother of King Edward VII) and Princess Maria Alexandrovna (daughter of Russian Tsar Alexander II and sister of Alexander III). Upon becoming the Queen of Romania, Marie became actively involved in the political life of the state and had a significant influence on establishing dynastic ties with the court of the Kingdom of SCS. She was a capable, intelligent and beautiful woman who would charm anyone wherever she appeared. Everyone admired her – statesmen, diplomatic officials, and the Romanian people adored her. Her husband, King Ferdinand, however, left a „slightly different” impression. Milan Stojadinović, who was a member of the Belgrade Municipal Council at the time of King Alexander's marriage, described the Romanian Queen and King in his memoirs as follows: „She dazzled with her beauty – though not exactly in her first youth at the time – and her noble bearing... In stark contrast to her was her husband, King Ferdinand, with his large, floppy ears and a big, downward-curved nose that turned red at the tip. (...) His wife, the intelligent and ambitious Queen Marie, completely dominated him, not only in domestic matters but also in politics. Her sympathies lay with Great Britain and Russia, and she was the one who contributed most to Romania joining the Western powers, declaring war on Austria-Hungary in August 1916.”¹¹ The Romanian royal couple had, in addition to the future Queen of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Maria, two other daughters, Elisabeth (older than Maria) and Ileana (younger than Maria), as well as three sons.¹²

The future King of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, celebrated in war, was considered an „excellent match” for the Romanian princesses, and „match-making” began at the same time when the dispute over the rights to Banat reached its peak at the peace conference in Paris. The delegation of the Kingdom of SCS, led by Nikola Pašić, sought to convince the conference that Banat should belong to their kingdom based on historical, economic, ethnic and strategic reasons.

Their arguments were as follows: according to the SCS delegation, Banat was neither an ethnic, geographical, nor economic unit but consisted of two parts that were geographically and ethnographically separate. The western part was the Banat plain, stretching from the Tisza River to Timișoara, Vršac and Bela Crkva, while the eastern part was hilly. Both parts had once been distinct historical units.

¹¹ Milan M. Stojadinović, *Ni rat ni pakt. Jugoslavija između dva rata*, (Rijeka: Otokar Keršovani, 1970), 157–158.

¹² Марија Краљица Румуније, *Историја моја животи*, (Београд: Звезда–Београд, 1936), 374–375.

It was crucial to demonstrate that the Banat plain, in terms of economy and transportation, was an integral part of the Morava–Vardar valley and had been oriented towards Serbia as early as the 17th and 18th centuries. The centre of Banat's trade with the Balkans at that time was Timișoara, a city that the new South Slavic state wanted within its territory.¹³ It was also emphasized that since the 16th century, after the fall of the Serbian state, Banat began to be referred to as Raška, or Serbia, and had never had any connection with Romania.¹⁴

Strategic reasons were also significant: Banat was indeed a natural protector of the Vardar–Morava valley and the hinterland that safeguarded Belgrade. Without it, the capital would be exposed. For all these reasons, it is clear why the Yugoslav delegation, which included historians Stanoje Stanojević and Jovan Radonić, sought to justify their claims by reaching as far back as the 4th century when the Slavs first settled in the region. They also found support in the time of Despot Stefan Lazarević, who was granted the administration of Torontál County by Hungary. Additionally, they referenced the rule of Despot Đurađ Branković over Tamiš County, as well as the era of Zmaj Despot Vuk, Count Đorđe Branković and Patriarch Arsenije III.

Among all the ethnic groups in Banat (Serbs, Hungarians, Germans, Romanians...), the delegation of the Kingdom of SCS argued that only the Serbs were indigenous, while the others were considered either "intruders" or recent arrivals.¹⁵ They also pointed out that all seventeen Orthodox monasteries in Banat were endowments of Serbian despots and nobility and were under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Peć.¹⁶ As an argument, historical data about the Germanization of Banat after the Treaty of Požarevac in 1718 was also presented. At that time, Vlachs from Moldavia were allowed to settle in Banat. According to Serbian reasoning, Romanians were not mentioned in historical records until the 18th century, and even then, until 1864, their population was under the jurisdiction of the Serbian Metropolitanate of Karlovci, while the Serbs were indigenous, with their numbers increasing after the migration of 1690.¹⁷ Even the Imperial Court in Vienna recognized the Serbian character of Banat in 1790 and 1848, and statistics supported this claim. According to data from 1910, there were 199,760 Serbs and 86,937 Romanians living in Torontál County, which included Pančevo, while in Timiș County, which included Timișoara, there were 69,905 Serbs and 163,030 Romanians. However, when adding more than 41,000 other Slavs (Croats, Slovaks...), the total number of Slavs was 55,000 greater than the number of Banat Romanians.¹⁸ In terms of the size of private estates, Serbs

¹³ J. M. Јовановић, *op. cit.*, 224.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 226.

were also at an advantage compared to Romanians, and in Banat, as the delegation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes emphasized, many famous Serbian artists, military leaders and scientists were born. One of them was Mihajlo Pupin, whose acquaintance with American President Wilson was to be utilized, so this great inventor was also in Paris to help his homeland.¹⁹

Based on these arguments, the Yugoslav kingdom demanded that the border be east of the line Bela Crkva–Vršac–Timișoara. However, the Romanian delegation wanted entire Banat and its leader Jon Brătianu, before his trip to Paris, had discussed it in Belgrade with Prime Minister Stojan Protić and Regent Alexander. Romania referred to a secret treaty from 1916 that promised it Banat, but Protić replied to Brătianu that it was pointless to demand the execution of the treaty whose annulment he himself sought at the time of Romania's military collapse.²⁰ In Paris, the great powers from the beginning sought to solve the problem by dividing Banat. Belgrade maintained the advantage gained by the fact that the Serbian army was also present in central Banat, but on January 31, 1919, Brătianu requested that these troops be evacuated and replaced by Allied forces.

At the beginning of March, Pašić reported to the government that the right to Bela Crkva, Vršac and Velika Kikinda was being contested by the Kingdom of SCS. However, the head of the delegation already on March 20, thanks to his friendship with the president of the territorial commission, Frenchman Andre Tardieu, very confidentially learned that the border would still be east of Bela Crkva, Vršac and Velika Kikinda, but that Timișoara was lost. On June 21, 1919, the Supreme Council of the Conference accepted the decision of the Tardie Commission. Brătianu was not satisfied with the outcome and began to act contrary to the peace conference, which brought him into conflict with the great powers. He was forced to step down from power, which opened the possibility of Romanian–Yugoslav rapprochement. With the fall of Brătianu, the peace conference removed the Banat issue from the agenda.²¹

The final demarcation, however, took place only in February 1922, during the official engagement of King Alexander with Princess Maria in Bucharest. Before that, on June 7, 1921, a defense treaty was signed between the two countries, which also addressed the issue of demarcation. The Assembly of the Kingdom ratified the demarcation agreement with 108

¹⁹ In his autobiography, Pupin states that at the conference, the Romanians „could not refute the fact that the population of Banat was Serbian, especially in the area where Idvor is located.” Regarding his personal contribution to securing Banat, the great scientist writes: „President Wilson and Mr. Lansing knew me personally, and when they learned from the Yugoslav delegates that I was born in Banat, the Romanian arguments lost much of their persuasiveness.” (Михајло И. Пупин, *Са њашњака до научењака*, (Београд: Завод за унапређивање образовања и васпитања, Истраживачки центар ИЦНТ, 2009), 13–14.)

²⁰ Andrej Mitrović, *Jugoslavija na Konferenciji mira 1919–1920*, (Beograd: Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika Socijalističke Republike Srbije, 1969), 134.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 140.

votes in favour and 51 against. Jovan M. Jovanović wrote that this border was unsuitable, winding, „as if it had been drawn up by two litigants, not two allies.”²² In the so-called Supplementary Protocol No. 3/5 of the same guarantee treaty (from June 7, 1921), there was a provision concerning the regulation of church and school matters in Banat, in which the two countries committed to negotiate in order to reach an agreement.²³ According to the 1921 census, the number of Romanians in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was over 72,000, but after the final demarcation, that number decreased to around 64,000.²⁴ About 100,000 Serbs remained in Romania.²⁵ The situation in which both groups found themselves was not enviable. Teachers, lawyers, priests – in other words, the intelligentsia of the Romanian national minority – pursued a secessionist policy and did not recognize the territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.²⁶ The authorities' reaction was harsh: the use of the Romanian language in civil registers was prohibited, the Serbian language was introduced in minority elementary schools, Romanian cultural societies were banned, Romanian clergy were deprived of the right to teach religious education, and teachers were required to learn Serbian within a year or leave their jobs, which were then entrusted to Serbian or Russian teachers.²⁷ In such „allied” relations, the marriage arrangements took place.

Stojan Protić, the Prime Minister of the newly formed state, received the first hint about a possible wedding in a letter dated January 6, 1919, sent to him by the chargé d'affaires of the embassy in Bucharest, Đorđe Nastasijević.²⁸ The diplomat informed his government that in the last days of 1918, the Marshal of the Court, and then the wife of the Chief of Staff of the Romanian Army, General Prezan, who was a personal friend of the Queen, started a conversation with him about the marriage of Regent Alexander to one of the Romanian princesses. Mrs Prezan told Nastasijević that she was authorized by the Romanian royal couple to talk about it and that King Ferdinand allegedly said that he would be happiest if Alexander became his son-in-law.²⁹ At the same time, the chargé d'affaires reported on the atmosphere in Bucharest regarding the situation in Banat: „(...) they only complain about our military authorities in Banat, saying that our forces are interning and sending Romanian teachers to Albania for hard labour. I assu-

²² J. M. Јовановић, *op. cit.*, 156.

²³ Љубодраг Димић, *Културна њолишка Краљевине Југославије 1918–1941. Полишка и сиваралашиво*, III, (Београд: Стубови културе, 1997), 92.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁵ J. M. Јовановић, *op. cit.*, I, 34.

²⁶ Љ. Димић, *op. cit.*, 93.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁸ Arhiv Jugoslavije [Archives of Yugoslavia] (AJ), Fond 335, Zbirka Vojislava Jovanovića Maramboa, fasc. 3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

red them that this is impossible, but they claim to have reports from their agents..."³⁰ This letter (the telegraph was avoided as a precaution) intrigued the Ministerial Council, and Nastasijević was invited to Belgrade to „present the situation orally”.

As it was only appropriate that the oldest daughter should marry first, King Ferdinand and Queen Maria initially wanted Princess Elisabeth to become the Queen of the Serbs Croats and Slovenes. British admiral Ernest Trubridge was also engaged and he entrusted Panta Draškić, the regent's former adjutant and at that time commander of the Serbian army in Baja, to „work on Alexander's marriage with Elisabeth”.³¹ However, it seems that the regent didn't like her portrait, because Nastasijević, upon his return to Bucharest, apologized to Mrs Prezan that Protić had not yet discussed the marriage with Alexander, and along the way asked her to hand over a photo of the younger Princess Maria.³² Mrs Prezan, it seems, „read between the lines” well and replied that they were interested in making family connections with the Serbs, and that it didn't matter which of the princesses would be the bride. She added that King Ferdinand would personally write to Alexander about it, were it not for parental pride and personal shyness.³³ The Romanian Queen was also persistent, and before leaving for Paris, where she was working for the interests of her country at the conference, she asked Mrs Prezan to inform her by a coded telegram of the result of the marriage negotiations.³⁴ In a letter dated May 1, 1919, Nastasijević reported that the Queen was very pleased with the welcome she received in Zemun when she returned from her trip, and that she did not lack words of praise for Alexander, and that the Romanian press was openly writing about the future engagement of the princess Elisabeth with Karađorđević. Now Alexander's photo was also being looked at, because the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at Ferdinand's request, sent a picture of the future king to Bucharest on May 6. At the state ceremony on May 10, 1919, Nastasijević spoke with the Romanian monarch and learned that Queen Maria had invited Alexander to visit.³⁵ Everything was going well, but as soon as it became known in Bucharest that Torontal had been given to the Kingdom of SCS, Mrs Prezan began to avoid talking about the marriage, and even about Ferdinand's impressions of the regent's photograph. However, Nastasijević believed that the issue of establishing a dynastic relationship would only be postponed for a while, while the Romanians „get over Torontal”, and that would „come very quickly, because they take everything lightly here...”³⁶

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Panta Draškić, *Memoari*, manuscript.

³² AJ, 335-3.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

A campaign was launched in the press against the Serbs, but also against all allies, especially the French. General Prezan even threatened that „bayonets will determine the border when this cannot be done in peace” and the leader of the Romanian Liberals and head of the delegation in Paris, Brătianu, allegedly stated that he would leave the conference if he did not get Banat.³⁷

Over time, however, the atmosphere calmed down, the bitterness disappeared and Romanian officials changed their attitude in the conversation with the diplomats of the Kingdom of SCS and indicated the need for friendship between the two countries and their joint action. Negotiations about the wedding continued, and Queen Maria inquired about her future son-in-law from Pavle Marinković, an envoy.³⁸ She asked seemingly innocent questions about Alexander's popularity, intelligence, whether he was thinking of getting married or, perhaps, was against marriage... The ambassador easily understood the Queen's intention and explained to her that the regent had not even had the chance to think about marriage, as he had been leading his people in a victorious struggle for unification, that he had a good disposition, was completely healthy, and well-liked by his subjects. The Queen was also curious whether the stories about a strong republican sentiment in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were true, as she certainly would not want a son-in-law who might end up without a crown. Marinković pointed out that this was a misunderstanding and that such sentiment did not exist among the people at all.³⁹

The Romanian Queen had met Alexander in London in 1910 during the coronation of George V, which the Serbian crown prince had attended as an envoy of his father, King Peter.⁴⁰ The time had come for her daughters to meet him as well, so she informed Pavle Marinković of her intention to travel to Paris and London with the princesses and expressed her desire to meet Alexander. The envoy learned that, at the invitation of Brătianu, the Queen was leaving in order to support Romanian interests with the English, and especially with the Americans, but that she also had another hidden desire to get closer to the regent of the Kingdom of SCS, because it was „indicative that she is going with her daughters”.⁴¹ Ion Brătianu had no scruples in his efforts to annex Banat to Romania, going so far as to promise the then-American envoy to Romania, Serbia and Bulgaria, Charles Vopicka, in front of witnesses, that he would erect a monument to him „in the most beautiful place” in the Romanian capital if America supported Romania in the Banat issue.⁴² This dishonourable

³⁷ AJ, Fond 395, Poslanstvo Kraljevine Jugoslavije u Rumuniji – Bukurešt, fasc. 2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Б. Глигоријевић, *op. cit.*, I, 73.

⁴¹ AJ, 395-2.

⁴² *Ibid.*

attempt did not help Brătianu,⁴³ as the dispute over Banat was soon resolved and the Romanian princess Elisabeth married not Alexander but the Greek crown prince George. A double dynastic bond was then established between the Greek and Romanian courts, as the Romanian heir to the throne, Carol, also married the Greek princess Helen.

Belgrade took notice of the fact that the events in the Balkans were beginning to develop beyond the Kingdom of SCS. There was even a possibility for Princess Maria to get married to Boris, the King of Bulgaria, the country defeated in the war.⁴⁴ The diplomacy of the Yugoslav kingdom was filled with terror at the potential creation of a Greek–Romanian–Bulgarian–Hungarian alliance under the leadership of Italy.

In Bucharest, at the beginning of 1921, there was talk in diplomatic circles that Aleksandar Stamboliyski, the Prime Minister of Bulgaria, had come to the Romanian capital because of this marriage proposal.⁴⁵ Unlike Brătianu, Take Ionescu, the Minister of Foreign Affairs since the beginning of 1920, was in favour of an alliance with the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and he played a significant role in arranging the marriage between Alexander and Maria, while „the Western powers wanted a different marriage.”⁴⁶ The historian of Yugoslav foreign policy, Bogdan Krizman, notes that the French government „discreetly suggested” to Belgrade that, „for protection against Italy, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Albania, and to draw closer to Romania”, Regent Alexander should marry a Romanian princess.⁴⁷

Boško Čolak-Antić,⁴⁸ an envoy in Bucharest from February 1921 until 1935 and one of the most prominent Serbian diplomats, asked his government

⁴³ Ambassador Vopicka noted the following in his memoirs regarding the division of Banat: „Numerous reasons were presented as to why Torontal should belong to Romania. Truth be told, Torontal is the richest part of Banat and probably the wealthiest agricultural area in Europe. It is, therefore, no surprise that such a great struggle was fought over this (Serbian) part of Banat. The Romanians began to threaten the Serbs, saying they would attack if they did not stop insisting that Torontal should belong to Serbia. This controversy was one of the main reasons why the Romanian liberal government resigned. At certain moments, the situation was so strained and tense that there was a risk of a break in relations between the Allies and Romania. The Romanians blamed President Wilson entirely for this division, claiming that they had been informed of it by representatives of France and England. I argued with them daily, pointing out that the entire Peace Commission was responsible. It was composed of representatives from all the Allies, so all the allied countries share the responsibility, not just the Americans.” (Čarls Dž. Vopicka, *Tajne Balkana. Sedam godina diplomatske službovanja u epicentru evropske oluje*, (Beograd: JP Službeni glasnik, 2009), 310.)

⁴⁴ AJ, 395-5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* The Yugoslav envoy reported that the wife of the Greek chargé d'affaires had asked him if he had heard that Maria was betrothed to Boris.

⁴⁶ *Vreme*, June 12, 1922.

⁴⁷ Bogdan Krizman, *Vanjska politika jugoslavenske države 1918–1941*, (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1975), 26.

⁴⁸ Srđan Mičić, a historian of Yugoslav diplomacy, notes about Boško Čolak-Antić: „Along with Živojin Balugdžić and Miroslav Spalajković, he became one of the three most prominent diplomats of the Regent and later King (after 1921) Aleksandar I Karađorđević. They held

in April 1921 about the possible arrival of Regent Alexander, because the local press wrote a lot about it.⁴⁹ At this time, negotiations on the conclusion of the alliance within the Little Entente were already underway, and from the middle of 1921 it became certain that Alexander would marry Princess Maria. A defense treaty was concluded with Romania on June 7, 1921, and in October of the same year, the international conference concluded its work on establishing the border between the two countries. During the summer 1921 the agreement was reached between Queen Maria and Regent Alexander that the future king of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes would come to Romania for a private visit during the Orthodox Christmas. The regent received the Romanian Queen in Paris while he was recovering from complications caused by appendicitis. King Peter I died on August 16 and as the royal house was in six months of mourning, the trip had to be organized without the usual pomp.⁵⁰ The Belgrade press guessed what the visit meant, especially because of the frequent diplomatic trips between Belgrade and Bucharest. *Politika* reminded its readers that in the preceding years, numerous attempts had been made from Sofia to have Princess Maria become the Queen of Bulgaria, with the aim of creating a Balkan bloc through ties between Athens, Sofia and Bucharest, directed against the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.⁵¹

On the third day of Christmas, January 9, 1922, at 11:30 AM, in the royal palace in Sinaia, Alexander became engaged to Maria, and at 3 PM, *Politika's* special correspondent spotted a car driven by the King, „with his fiancée, Princess Maria, sitting beside him.”⁵² The news of the engagement quickly spread through Belgrade, and thanks to this event, the capital soon took on a „cheerful and festive appearance.”⁵³ Upon returning from Romania, the King – now engaged – was greeted magnificently, and on January 14, New Year's Day according to the Julian calendar, he received a telegram from his fiancée: „Sending my best wishes for the New Year. Many kisses. Mignon.”⁵⁴ Soon after, a letter from the Romanian princess arrived. It was addressed as „Dear Alexander” and ended with „Your Mignon”. Princess Maria wrote to her fiancé about how eagerly she was anticipating their next meeting.⁵⁵

some of the most important posts in the Yugoslav diplomatic service, until mid-1935. Čolak-Antić's personal relations with the Yugoslav Court were strengthened during 1920–1922.” (Srđan Mičić, „Boško Čolak-Antić and Yugoslav-Romanian Relations”, *New Cultural and Political Perspectives on Serbian-Romanian Relations*, ed. by Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović, Jovana Kolundžija, Mircea Măran, Otilia Hedeşan and Christene D' Anca, New York: Peter Lang, 2023, 85.)

⁴⁹ AJ, 395-5.

⁵⁰ AJ, 395-7.

⁵¹ *Politika*, January 5, 1922.

⁵² *Ibid.*, January 10, 1922.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, January 16, 1922.

⁵⁵ Б. Глигоријевић, *op. cit.*, II, 122.

Take Ionescu, then the Prime Minister of Romania, told the Bucharest newspaper *Epoca* that the engagement did not create or change the political situation, as there was already an alliance between the two countries, which this marriage only strengthened.⁵⁶ The Czechoslovak envoy Ferdinand Veverka published an article titled „The Historical Significance of King Alexander's Engagement” in the Romanian newspaper *Dimineața* on January 23. In line with his government's policy, the envoy wrote that this marriage was of interest to all of Central Europe and that Czechoslovakia welcomed this event, which contributed to the consolidation of the Little Entente. Veverka emphasized the importance of the fact that the Romanian dynasty had „nationalized”, that linguists had identified a high percentage of Slavic words and phrases in the Romanian language, and that the shared Orthodox faith „demonstrated the similarity of mentality between the two peoples.”⁵⁷

On January 18, the Romanian Queen Maria addressed a letter to the Yugoslav public, intended to express her feelings towards her future son-in-law and his people, and to „prepare the ground” for her daughter: „The great joy we feel knowing that our beloved daughter is marrying a man whom the entire world admires as a brave soldier and a great patriot is doubled by the happiness that this joyful event will bring to our two nations. My daughter, accustomed to hard work, will be happy to devote all her abilities to the beautiful country that has suffered so much, with all the passion of her heart, always ready to alleviate suffering. It will be a joy for her to work for your people and to contribute to the development of the brilliant qualities they possess, to support art and poetry, especially music and folk poetry, which have always particularly fascinated her. Her greatest desire when she comes to you will be, above all, to collaborate with the king, her future husband, in addressing all the needs of the country, knowing how much he has suffered, how admirable his heroism is, and how his patriotism and courage have been the crown of glory for that noble people in their most severe trials. My joy will be even greater and more justified if we are fortunate enough to see our beloved daughter, one day, through the virtues she has acquired in her home, become a true mother of her people.”⁵⁸

The King made another trip to Bucharest on February 20, 1922, accompanied by Prime Minister Nikola Pašić and Foreign Minister Momčilo Ninčić. The next day, a religious betrothal ceremony was performed at the Cotroceni Palace. During this stay in Romania, Alexander was made honorary commander of the Ninth Hunter Regiment of the Romanian Army, and Pašić and Ninčić, along with their Romanian counterparts, finally resolved the issue of establishing the border between Romania and the Kingdom of Serbs,

⁵⁶ *Politika*, January 16, 1922.

⁵⁷ *AJ*, 395-7.

⁵⁸ *Politika*, January 22, 1922.

Croats and Slovenes.⁵⁹ During this visit, a marriage contract was also drafted on February 21 between King Ferdinand and King Alexander, with the final version being signed by the court ministers of both countries, Mišu and Jan-ković, in Belgrade on June 7, 1922.

The young King of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was marrying the great-granddaughter of Queen Victoria of England and the great-granddaughter of Russian Tsar Alexander II, making her the first queen of royal lineage in modern Serbian history. The future couple met for the first time on January 9, 1922, on the princess's birthday, at the royal palace in Sinaia, when the engagement was announced. They always communicated in French, although Princess Maria began actively learning Serbian from the day of the engagement. According to her son, Prince Tomislav, she spoke Serbian using only the masculine gender, as she was surrounded exclusively by men in the family.⁶⁰

Princess Maria was marrying a man of immense personal bravery, a great military leader and diplomat who had commanded his army for seven years in the wars of liberation and easily renounced all comforts. She was marrying a king who almost always wore a uniform because civilian clothes didn't suit him, a ruler who, due to superstition, never received anyone or signed anything on Tuesdays, and who loved Serbian national dishes and ate very quickly. Although Marshal of the Court Ješa Damjanović wrote very critically about his king in his memoirs, he acknowledged Alexander's fearlessness, intelligence and ability to quickly and accurately assess people and situations.⁶¹ He had only words of praise for the King's chosen bride. In his opinion, she was the best child of the Romanian royal couple and „the most ideal female creature destined to be the wife and mother of the offspring of a king of one of the most noble and patriarchal peoples in Europe today.”⁶² The Marshal of the Court was therefore convinced that in choosing Maria, Alexander had „undoubtedly made the most brilliant and happiest choice and the greatest gain”.⁶³

Around the King's Wedding

After the liberation, the wedding of King Alexander was the first national celebration. As noted by a correspondent from the *Daily Chronicle*, it also had a social dimension.⁶⁴ In honour of the King's engagement,

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, February 26, 1922.

⁶⁰ Томислав Карађорђевић, *Мемоари*, (Топола – Оплепац: Задужбина Краља Петра I, 1999), 443.

⁶¹ Ješa Damjanović, *Мемоари*, „Događalo se na dvoru Karadorđevića”, *Intervju*, 1991, No. 272.

⁶² *Ibid.*, No. 275.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, No. 273.

⁶⁴ *Politika*, June 11, 1922.

on January 12th, thanksgiving ceremonies were held in all churches, mosques and synagogues. Belgrade was „hurrying to heal its war wounds” and to properly prepare for the grand event, but the capital's press did not miss the opportunity to mock the Bulgarian King Boris, from whom Alexander „snatched” Maria and to whom, in February 1922, the Italian King reportedly refused to give his daughter's hand in marriage.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the preparations for the King's wedding were more important, and Belgrade newspapers, often under the headline „Around the King's Wedding”, regularly informed the public of everything interesting, and, of course, criticized the city authorities for delays in the work. However, by June 8th, when the wedding took place, Belgrade was arranged in such a way that the impression on the guests was pleasant. The State Committee for the Preparation of Festivities on the Occasion of His Majesty the King's Wedding was formed, headed by the president of the Belgrade municipality, Dobra Mitrović.

The Romanian Queen Maria visited the Kingdom of SCS at the beginning of April and was warmly welcomed from the border to the capital. The purpose of her visit was to acquaint herself with the progress of the wedding preparations, to arrange the furniture in the apartments of the New Palace for the future royal couple, and to learn details about the wedding itself from Patriarch Dimitrije, who feared that the wedding might be scheduled during Lent.⁶⁶ During the Queen's visit, journalists learned from Mişu, the Romanian Minister of the Court, that Alexander's fiancée was doing very well in her Serbian language lessons, having learned the alphabet excellently and reading any text with ease. The only problem, Mişu said, were the sounds „Đ” and „DŽ”, which do not exist in the Romanian language.⁶⁷

The younger son of the English King George V, the Duke of York, was his father's envoy at the wedding in Belgrade. It was very important that the King of England accepted to be the best man. The credit, for sure, belongs to the family ties of Queen Maria of Romania. The Duke of York, Prince Albert, would become King George VI of England in 1936. The wedding was also attended, apart from the Romanian royal family and the English prince, by Prince Alfonso and Princess Beatrice (sister of the Romanian Queen) as emissaries of the Spanish court, the Prince of Udine, the leader of the Italian delegation, and the French delegation was headed by the honorary Serbian duke, Marshal Franchet d'Espèrey. The Allied Czechoslovak Republic was represented by its first minister, Edvard Beneš, and the son of President Tomáš Masaryk, Jan. It was also very important for Greece that its delegation, which included the heir to the throne, the minister of foreign affairs and the minister of the army, attend the wedding, because the Greek government

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, February 20, 1922.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, April 4, 1922.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, April 3, 1922.

again talked about joining the Little Entente.⁶⁸ The capital had never witnessed so many princesses and princes of royal blood.

A large number of domestic and foreign journalists reported on the wedding, which was an ideal opportunity for the communists. The Zagreb police confiscated some letters addressed to the local communist committee, calling for the preparation of a general strike across the country on the day the King's wedding festivities began.⁶⁹ Following the Comintern's directive, the communists constantly attacked the Yugoslav alliance with Romania, considering it to be aimed against the „headquarters of the revolution“. This is evident from a question posed by Bolshevik Commissioner for Foreign Affairs Chicherin to Yugoslav Minister Ninčić: „Didn't your king marry a Romanian princess to strengthen ties between Yugoslavia and Romania, intending to unite them against us?“⁷⁰

The King's fiancée set foot on the soil of her new homeland on Tuesday, June 6th, 1922. At the Sava River dock, the Romanian royal family was welcomed by the King, the Serbian patriarch, the Duke of York as the best man, and the president of the Belgrade municipality, who greeted them with a warm welcome. That evening, 1200 members of the choir sang the composition „Greeting to the King's Fiancée“ in front of the Old Palace. When the princess, dressed in a „light pink toilet with a pink hat“, said in Serbian – „Thank you“, the crowd cheered with boundless enthusiasm.⁷¹

On the day of the wedding, June 8th, at 8 o'clock, 101 cannon shots from Kalemegdan marked the beginning of the festivities. At 10:20, the King left his residence in the Krsmanović House and headed to the Old Palace, where the bride's brother escorted the bride. After the royal guard's orchestra played a wedding song and the fanfare sounded, the procession made its way to the Cathedral Church. On the way to the church, they were accompanied by the cheers of the excited crowd, while airplanes circled over the centre of Belgrade, dropping flowers.⁷² The groom was dressed in a ceremonial general's uniform, and the bride wore a white wedding dress with a long train. She had a bridal wreath made of myrtle on her head, a diamond necklace around her neck, and the Order of the White Eagle sash across her shoulder.⁷³

The wedding was announced by the ringing of bells from all the churches in Belgrade and by salvos fired from the fortress and the Danube. King Alexander and Queen Maria received congratulations at the palace, followed by a ceremonial lunch. Milan Stojadinović recalled how the Romanian Queen „...during lunch, scanned the entire hall with her eagle eyes, as if she

⁶⁸ D. Todorović, *op. cit.*, 163.

⁶⁹ *Politika*, June 1, 1922.

⁷⁰ Б. Глигоријевић, *op. cit.*, II, 102.

⁷¹ *Politika*, June 7, 1922.

⁷² *Ibid.*, June 9, 1922.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

wanted to closely observe everyone and place them in their proper position with a single glance... and curiously watched as we eagerly indulged in the good food and drink, with little regard for court etiquette..."⁷⁴

The Marshal of the Court later told Stojadinović how "...half of the spoons, knives, and forks disappeared from the table that day in the general excitement... as mementos. Certainly, the day was of historical significance, but immediately afterward, it was decided at the palace that such ceremonial lunches with numerous guests and silverware would be avoided in the future."⁷⁵

In the afternoon, a football match was first played between the national teams of the two countries, followed by a military parade in which 18,000 soldiers participated. The „High Newlyweds” and all the „High Guests” were present. In the evening, a large concert of military bands was held at the Belgrade Fortress. That same evening, the young royal couple departed for their honeymoon in Bled, and the capital bid farewell to its guests.

The State Committee for the Preparation of Festivities for His Majesty the King's Wedding sought to ensure that as many concerts, theatre performances, art and craft exhibitions, sports events, and other entertainment activities and attractions as possible were held in the capital during those days. It became evident that attendance at these events depended on the presence of the royal couple and their distinguished guests. In places where Queen Maria and King Alexander were not present, the public's attendance was also lacking.

For the state propaganda of the Kingdom of SCS, it was important to demonstrate that, in addition to the Serbs, the Croats and the Slovenes were also eager to attend the celebrations: „It was as if the world had been eagerly waiting for the opportunity to show that the King's persona was above all party disputes and that it was precisely the King who was the most suitable figure to bring back love, peace and reconciliation among the quarreling tribes.”⁷⁶ The truth, of course, was different. The Croatian peasantry was entirely under the influence of Stjepan Radić and perceived the Belgrade government as an occupying force.⁷⁷ Nonetheless, the King's wedding was marked in Zagreb as well. A ceremonial performance was held at the Croatian National Theatre on June 7th, and on June 8th, solemn liturgies were held in both Catholic and Orthodox churches. On the same day, in the evening, a military parade was held, followed by a formal ball.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ M. Stojadinović, *op. cit.*, 157–158.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Сїомен књиїа десей їодина владавине Њ. В. Краља Александра I 1921–1931, (Београд: Управа „Спомен књиге”, 1931), 24.

⁷⁷ In the report by the German consul in Zagreb, it is stated that during the wedding celebrations, there were demonstrations and clashes: „On the very day of the wedding, a conflict broke out on Jelačić Square, the main city square, between pro-Serbian students and other demonstrators. According to newspaper reports, three people were seriously wounded by gunfire, and a larger number were slightly injured.” [Consul Valbek in Zagreb to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Živko Avramovski, *Nemci o Kraljevini Jugoslaviji. Izveštaji nemačkih diplomatskih predstavnika 1920–1941*, Tom 1, 1920–1929, (Beograd: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 2020), 142.]

⁷⁸ *Politika*, June 9, 1922.

There were also events held in Bucharest and Prague, and the English and French press provided extensive reports on the wedding. In Washington, the Kingdom of SCS's embassy hosted a grand reception on June 8th, attended by 600 guests, including members of the American administration and the entire diplomatic corps.⁷⁹

Conclusion

Although statesmen and theoreticians, influenced by liberalistic ideology, considered the King's marriage as a matter of his family life, its political meaning in XX century was still undeniable. The King's marriage was an integral part of the Yugoslav foreign policy on the conduct which the King Alexander had the greatest influence. As a member of the Little Entente, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes strived, together with Czechoslovakia and Romania, for the preservation of peace and territorial status quo in Europe, formed after the First World War. It was necessary to stop restoration of the Habsburgs in Hungary and in Austria, to prevent arming of the revisionist states and to force them to fulfil the obligations from the peace agreement. Italy strived to weaken the Little Entente, to change the existing relations and to isolate, by diplomatic means, the state of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, so this Kingdom, in order to avoid being surrounded, was forced to rely on France. French foreign policy eased the reinstatement of dynastic relations with Romania that preserved balance on the Balkans.

The question of the province of Banat was considered as „the bone of contention” between the two allied states and the Big Powers solved this problem at the peace conference by dividing the region. At the same time, when the problem of the province of Banat was examined, the negotiations about the marriage of the Regent Alexander with one of the daughters of the Romanian King began.

Before the war, it was of the utmost importance for the Serbian interests that the heir apparent marries a daughter of the Russian Tsar and for that reason Pašić and Alexander visited Nikolai II. However, the Great Empire – protector of Serbia, disappeared in the Bolshevik Revolution, so the Yugoslav King found a bride from the Royal Family of the allied Romania.

The first time after liberation, the Yugoslav capital had a great reason to celebrate. More than 10,000 people came to Belgrade on June 8, 1922 to see the wife of their favourite ruler. King Alexander's marriage strengthened the international standing of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and the Karađorđević dynasty rose from its folk roots to become a prestigious European royal house.

The King's marriage represented an important act in the domestic policy. According to the article 56 of the „Vidovdan” Constitution, the king

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, June 11, 1922.

was to be inherited by male descendants from the legal marriage, by their birthright. After the heir was born, the conditions for the peaceful life were to be secured, and the marriage of the Royal couple was blessed with three sons – King Peter was born on September 6, 1923, Prince Tomislav on January 19, 1928 and Prince Andrej on June 28, 1929.

Summary

The King's marriage was an integral part of the country's foreign policy and its political meaning in the 20th century was still undeniable. Greece, Romania and the Kingdom of SCS were supposed to serve as the guardians of the order established in Europe after the Great War so the relations in the Balkans were dependent upon the balance among these countries. The question of the province of Banat was considered as „the bone of contention” for Belgrade and Bucharest. The Big Powers solved this problem at the Peace Conference by dividing the region while French foreign policy eased the establishment of the dynastic relations with Romania.

As a member of the Little Entente, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes strived, together with Czechoslovakia and Romania, for the preservation of peace and territorial status quo in Europe, formed after the First World War. It was necessary to stop restoration of the Habsburgs in Hungary and in Austria, to prevent arming of the revisionist states and to force them to fulfill the obligations from the peace agreement. Italy strived to weaken the Little Entente, to change the existing relations and to isolate, by diplomatic means, the state of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, so this Kingdom, in order to avoid being surrounded, was forced to rely on France.

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