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## MUSTAFA KEMAL ATATURK IN THE SERBIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

### *Sırp Tarih Yazımında Mustafa Kemal Atatürk*

**Ema PETROVIĆ**

**Abstract:** The personality and achievements of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, first president of the Republic of Türkiye, as well as his cordial friendship with Yugoslav King Alexander I (1921-1934), has not been properly treated in the Serbian as well as Yugoslav historiography. There is no single book written by Yugoslav historians dedicated to this subject, and there is no biography of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Serbian language (even the translations from other languages to Serbian are rare). The only monograph treating at least partially this subject is monograph under the title “Kemal Atatürk in the eyes of the Yugoslav public”, written by Mirjana Teodosijević, who is prominent professor of Turkish language, but not historian. The situation remains similar for the later periods, although is well known fact that the relations between two countries strongly developed during the twenties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, until the assassination of the king Alexander I of Yugoslavia in Marseilles in 1934. Although the King Alexander and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had good political and even friendly relations, this was not treated properly by Serbian and Yugoslav historiography. It is our strongest believe that the years to come will bring changes in that direction and that some of Serbian historians of the younger generation will dedicate their research to those important subjects.

Quite opposite to the historiography, the Serbian press had followed the events in Türkiye and informed the Serbian public about them. Some of the most distinguished newspapers and magazines published in Belgrade between the two world wars had covered the events in Türkiye, stressing the importance of the Atatürk's reforms and paying great attention to the King Alexander's visit to Ankara in 1933.

**Keywords:** Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Yugoslavia, King Alexander, Serbian Historiography, Türkiye

**Öz:** Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin ilk Cumhurbaşkanı Mustafa Kemal Atatürk'ün kişiliği ve başarılarının yanı sıra Yugoslav Kralı I. Alexander (1921-1934) ile olan samimi dostluğu, Sırp ve Yugoslav tarih yazımında gerektiği gibi ele alınmamıştır. Yugoslav tarihçilerin bu konuyu ele alan tek bir kitabı olmadığı gibi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk'ün Sırp dilinde biyografisi de yoktur (hatta diğer dillerden Sırpçaya yapılan çeviriler de nadirdir). Bu konuyu en azından kısmen ele alan tek monografi, tanınmış bir Türk dili profesörü ama tarihçi olmayan Mirjana Teodosijević'in "Yugoslav Kamuoyunun Gözünden Kemal Atatürk" başlıklı monografisidir. Sonraki dönemler için durum benzer kalmaktadır, ancak 20. yüzyılın yirminci yıllarında iki ülke arasındaki ilişkilerin güçlü bir şekilde geliştiği iyi bilinen bir gerçektir. Bu gelişmeler, Yugoslavya Kralı I. Alexander'ın 1934'te Marsilya'da suikaste uğrayana kadar devam etmiştir. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk'ün iyi siyasi ve hatta dostane ilişkileri vardı, bu durum Sırp ve Yugoslav tarih yazımında gerektiği gibi ele alınmadı. Gelecek yılların bu yönde değişiklikler getireceğine ve genç nesilden bazı Sırp tarihçilerin araştırmalarını bu önemli konulara adayacaklarına en güçlü inancımızdır. Tarih yazımının tam tersi olarak Sırp basını Türkiye'deki olayları takip etmiş ve Sırp kamuoyunu bilgilendirmişti. İki dünya savaşı arasında Belgrad'da yayımlanan en seçkin gazete ve dergilerden bazıları Türkiye'deki olaylara yer vermiş, Atatürk'ün inkılaplarının önemine vurgu yapmış ve Kral Alexander'ın 1933'teki Ankara ziyaretini büyük bir ilgiyle izlemişti.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Yugoslavya, Kral Alexander, Sırp Tarih Yazımı, Türkiye

### **Introduction**

There is no single book written by Yugoslav historians dedicated to this subject, and there is no biography of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Serbian language (even the translations from other languages to Serbian are rare). The only book treating at least partially this subject is monograph under the title „Kemal Atatürk in the eyes of the Yugoslav public“, written by Mirjana Teodosijević, who is prominent professor of Turkish language, but not historian. The situation remains similar for the later periods, although is well known fact that the relations between two countries strongly developed during the twenties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, until the assassination of the king Alexander I of Yugoslavia in Marseilles in 1934. Although the King Alexander and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had good political and even friendly relations, this was not treated properly by Serbian and Yugoslav historiography. It is our strongest

believe that the years to come will bring changes in that direction and that some of Serbian historians of the younger generation will dedicate their research to those important subjects.

Quite opposite to the historiography, the Serbian press had followed the events in Türkiye and informed the Serbian public about them. Some of the most distinguished newspapers and magazines published in Belgrade between the two world wars had covered the events in Türkiye, stressing the importance of the Atatürk's reforms and paying great attention to the King Alexander's visit to Ankara in 1933.

The relationship between Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and King Alexander I of Yugoslavia was complex and multi-layered. It was influenced as much by the geopolitical challenges and opportunities of their time as by their personal ambitions and the wider regional context of the early 20th century. The period after the First World War was characterized by significant changes in the Balkans as the Ottoman Empire disintegrated and several new states emerged. Türkiye, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, was in transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. At the same time, Yugoslavia was in its infancy, having been officially founded in 1918 after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires.

#### **Early interactions:**

After the First World War and the Sevres Agreement, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, as one of the successor states of the Ottoman Empire, did not agree with the provisions on the distribution of the last debts of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, in the last years of the Ottoman Sultans, no diplomatic relations were established between the Ottoman Empire at the end and the newly founded Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. (Жупанчић, 2004)

After the signing of the Lausanne Agreement and the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes again did not accede to the agreement due to its economic provisions. However, the dispute was settled a year later, in 1924, when the Kingdom accepted its share of 5.25% of the debt and accepted the agreement. This marked a new era in relations between the two countries, which would be characterized by cordial relations between King Alexander I of Yugoslavia and the President of the Turkish Republic Kemal Atatürk. (Жупанчић, 2004)

The first contacts between Atatürk and King Alexander were through diplomatic channels, as both heads of state sought to consolidate the position of their respective nations on the international stage. Their initial exchanges were characterized by a mutual interest in securing recognition for their newly founded countries and stabilizing their borders. Both leaders wanted to establish diplomatic relations and promote economic co-operation to strengthen their nations. Diplomatic relations were established in 1926.

#### **Yugoslavian publicity about Kemal Atatürk:**

In the period after the establishment of diplomatic relations until the assassination of Kemal Atatürk in 1938, the Yugoslav public was very interested in the figure of the first President of the Republic of Türkiye. At that time, not only did the press write about this outstanding political and public figure, but several monographs on his biography were also written in Serbian.

One of the most important books was published in 1938 by the Institute for Balkan Studies in Belgrade (founded in 1934) under the title "Atatürkova Turska" (The Türkiye of Atatürk), written by Miodrag Mihajlović Svetkovski. Although this book is very rich in historical facts, it is also full of personal descriptions and opinions and in some parts written in a very novelistic way, for a wide audience. Nevertheless, this book is still one of the best books about Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his time in Serbian. (Teodosijević, 1998)

Another book written on the first anniversary of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's death could be considered more serious from a methodological and discursive point of view. The book was divided into two parts, the first of which was dedicated to the history of the Ottoman Empire from its beginnings to its dissolution and the second to the Turkish Republic (divided into 11 chapters). This book, entitled "Kemal Atatürk, tvorac nove Turske" (Kemal Atatürk, the Founder of the New Türkiye), was written

by Zoran Sv. Tomić, Ph.D., a lawyer and diplomat who earned his doctorate in France. (Teodosijević, 1998)

### **The Yugoslav press on Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the events in Türkiye:**

The Yugoslav press was also very interested in the events in Türkiye. The list of newspaper and magazine articles compiled by M. Teodosijević shows the great interest of the Yugoslav press both in the activities of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and in the mainly political events in Türkiye.

Atatürk and King Alexander maintained diplomatic relations and exchanged visits during their respective terms of office. This primarily involved talks on trade agreements, border disputes and mutual recognition. They also worked together in a number of international forums, such as the League of Nations, where they promoted the interests of their countries.

One of the topics that caused a great stir in the Yugoslav press, especially in the leading Belgrade and Serbian newspaper (which is still influential today) „Politika“ (Politics), was King Alexander's visit to Türkiye in 1933

The aim of this visit was to strengthen diplomatic relations between the two countries. The visit included meetings with Atatürk and other Turkish officials to discuss matters of mutual interest. It should be emphasised that the visit took place on the 10th anniversary of the Republic of Türkiye.

The newspaper “Politika” reported extensively on this visit and was very positive about it. We quote only a few titles to show what the official Belgrade thought about this visit. On 5 October 1933, “Politika” published three articles on the front page with the title “Turski politički krugovi očekuju da će sastanak u Carigradu učvrstiti politiku mira, poverenja i saradnje na Balkanu. Sastanak Nj.V. Kralja sa predsednikom Turske Republike: Doček Nj.V. Kralja i Kraljice u Carigradu vrlo je srdačan.” (Turkish political circles expect that the Istanbul meeting will consolidate the policy of peace, mutual trust and cooperation in the Balkans. His Royal Highness's meeting with the President of the Republic of Türkiye; the reception for H.R.H. the King and Queen in Istanbul is very warm) (Politika. Year 30, Number 9121).

The very next day, “Politika” published another article on the front page, signed by the well-known journalist Mihailo Petrović, with the long title: “U Carigradu turski politički krugovi očekuju Balkanski sporazum. Posle sastanka u Carigradu Nj.V. Kralj i Kraljica stižu Dubrovnikom pred Krf, a na ostrvo će se iskrcati sutra ujutru”. (Turkish political circles expect an understanding in the Balkans. After the meeting in Istanbul, the King and Queen will arrive on the shores of the island of Corfu. They will leave the ship tomorrow morning) (Politika, Volume 30, Number 9122).

On the same day, two other articles directly related to the visit appeared on the front page of Politika: “Zvanično saopštenje o sastanku” (Official statement on the meeting) and “Večera kod Gazi Mustafa Kemal-paše” (Dinner of Gazi Mustafa Kemal-Pasha) (Ibid.)

When HRH King Alexander I Karadjordjević of Yugoslavia was assassinated in Marseille in 1934, the newspaper Politika published Gazi Mustafa Kemal Pasha's telegram of condolences, as the title says. (Telegram from Gazi Mustafa Kemal Pasha, Politika volume 31, number 9483, p. 6).

Politika also had an article under the title “Zvanične delegacije stranih država na pogrebu: Turska delegacija” (Official delegations of foreign states at the funeral: Turkish delegation). (Politika 16th October 1934, Volume 31, Number 9488, ppg. 11.

The death of the First President of the Republic of Türkiye also attracted a great deal of attention in the Yugoslav press. We mention here only a few articles from the newspaper Politika.

Politika reported on the illness of Kemal Mustafa Atatürk. The article appeared on the front page on 10 November 1938 under the title “Bolest g. Kemala Atatürka pogoršala se” (Kemal Atatürk's illness had worsened) (Politika, volume 35, number 10939).

The following day, both the front page and page 2 were dedicated to the title “Gazi Kemal Atatürk, tvorac nove Turske, izdahuno je juče u dvorcu Dolma Bahçe” (Gazi Kemal Atatürk, the founder of New Türkiye, died yesterday in Dolma Bahche Castle). The article was signed by the journalist M. Marković (Politika, volume 35, number 10940). One of the page titles was “Pripreme sahrane u Ankari”

(Preparations for the funeral in Ankara) (*Politika*, year 35, number 10940, p. 1). *Politika* also wrote about the suicide of the deputy Sali Bozoka under the coffin of Atatürk (“Samoubistvo poslanika Sali Bozoka and samrtničkim odrom Atatürka”) (*Ibid*), the programme of the funeral in Ankara (“Programme sahrane u Ankari”) (*Politika*, year 35, number 10940, p. 1, written by M. Marković), official declaration of death (“Zvanično saopštenje o smrti”) (*Politika*, year 35, number 10940, p. 1).

The newspaper *Politika* also published condolence telegrams from the highest Yugoslav authorities of the time to the Turkish authorities and the Turkish people (telegram from HRH Prince Pavle, condolences from the Yugoslav Prime Minister M. Stojadinović to the Turkish MP, condolences from the President of the Yugoslav National Assembly, Mr Ćirić) (*Politika*, year 35, number 10940, pp. 1-2)

There were also articles about the new president of Türkiye “Danas već u Ankari se bira novi predsednik” (The new president is still being elected in Ankara today) (*Politika*, year 35, number 10940, p. 2) and “G. Ismet Ineni najoizbiljniji kandidat za novog predsednika” (Mr Ismet Ineni the most serious candidate for the new president) (*Politika*, year 35, number 10940, p. 2).

On the same day, "*Politika*" also published the article “Život i delo Kemala Atatürka” (Life and Deeds of Kemal Atatürk) (*Politika*, Volume 35, Number 10940, p. 2).

All these titles show how much the Yugoslav public was interested in the life and death of Türkiye's first president and had great respect for his achievements.

Although political and diplomatic relations between the two countries had been good since the Second World War (with some spikes, especially during the Yugoslav crisis in the 1990s), the interest of Yugoslav and later Serbian historiography in the personality of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was not at the level one could expect.

The only relevant monograph on this topic is the already cited book by Prof Mirjana Teodosijević, Ph.D., distinguished professor of modern Turkish language and literature at the Department of Oriental Studies at the Faculty of Philology of the University of Belgrade. Her book “Mustafa Kemal Atatürk u jugoslovenskoj javnosti” (Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in the Eyes of the Yugoslav Public) provides an overview of monographs, articles and archival documents on the personality of President Atatürk and his relations with Yugoslav statesmen, especially King Alexander I Karađorđević. (Teodosijević, 1998)

This book, full of valuable information, a detailed bibliography and an overview of the current state of research on the subject, should have prompted historians in Serbia (since the book was published after the dissolution of Yugoslavia) to write a detailed biography of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the first president and founder of the Republic of Türkiye and one of the most important political figures of the 20th century.

However, this never materialised. There is still no biography of Atatürk in Serbian, and although some aspects of relations between Yugoslavia and Türkiye (economic, diplomatic and even the architectural significance of the Yugoslav embassy building in Ankara) have been researched, it can be said that there is a lack of in-depth research into the overall picture of relations between the two countries at the time of Atatürk.

#### **Possibilities for future joint projects:**

Since there are documents on this topic in the Archives of Yugoslavia (it should be emphasized that at the personal archive of the Karađorđević Dynasty there are no documents or photographs regarding the subject of our research), we believe that such a project, in addition to the archival materials kept in the archives in Ankara and Istanbul, a team of younger researchers from Serbia and Türkiye could make a very good and useful joint project in this regard. It is very important to emphasise that since this year, the Master's curriculum for Oriental Studies at the Faculty of Philology of the University of Belgrade includes the topic “The History of the Republic of Türkiye”, so that students would have the opportunity to learn about the hundred years of the Republic and develop their interest in this direction.



### Legacy and long-term impact

The interactions between Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and King Alexander I of Yugoslavia were influenced by the dynamic and ever-changing geopolitical landscape of the time. Their diplomatic relations helped both leaders secure international recognition for their countries and overcome the complex challenges of state-building after the First World War.

In summary, the relationship between Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and King Alexander I of Yugoslavia was characterised by a mixture of cooperation, shared challenges and mutual respect. Their interactions played a role in shaping the early years of the Republic of Türkiye and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and left a mark on the history of the Balkans and the wider international stage. Therefore, the above-mentioned biography of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Serbian is of interest not only to historians or researchers in related fields, but also to the general public.

### Conclusion

Despite the very good relations between King Alexander I of Yugoslavia and the founder and first president of the Republic of Türkiye Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Türkiye at that time, Serbian historiography has not examined in detail the relations between two important rulers of the Balkans or the relations between the two countries. There is also a large gap in the Serbian-language literature on the personality and achievements of Kemal Atatürk. Not only is there no biography of the Turkish leader in Serbian, but the few works that have been translated from other languages date from the 1930s.

Therefore, such research should be carried out in the near future, if possible, as a project in collaboration with Turkish colleagues. There are some valuable primary sources in Serbian which, together with the Turkish sources, could provide very good and valuable results that would benefit interested scholars and a wider public in both countries and in the Balkans in general.

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