Apple of Discord

Armour, Ian D.

Published by Purdue University Press

Armour, Ian D.
Apple of Discord: The "Hungarian Factor" in Austro-Serbian Relations, 1867–1881.
Purdue University Press, 2014.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/47977.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/47977

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=1868968
The Habsburg Monarchy’s structure of control over Serbia was completed by the treaties of 1880–81. This system remained in place for a generation, by the end of which time the internal stresses it produced combined to shake it to the ground. Austro-Hungarian economic domination of Serbia was resented from the start, and in the end a Serbian government came to power which was determined to break the stranglehold. Even more futile, because more keenly felt, was the political domination of Serbia by the Monarchy. In an age of rampant and un-self-critical nationalism, the Monarchy already represented one of the principal bugbears of Serbs, whether in Serbia proper or within the Monarchy itself. Imposing a restraint like the secret political treaty on Serbia was bound, in the end, to provoke a reaction. The inability of Serbian governments to criticize the Monarchy, indeed their active persecution of those Serbian subjects who did so, made both government and dynasty unpopular. The result was increasing repression and the final explosion of 1903, when Alexander Obrenović paid with his life for his father’s commitment to the Monarchy. Revolution was followed by the return of political pluralism to Serbia, and popular politics meant confrontation with Austria-Hungary.¹

Briefly summarized, the railway convention of 9 April 1880 obliged the Serbian government to construct its contribution to the Vienna-Constantinople link, the section from Belgrade to Niš, within three years.² The trade treaty of 6 May 1881 gave Austria-Hungary much more than the customary most favored nation trading rights. By establishing special reduced tariff rates for goods or livestock classified as “border traffic,” the trade treaty made the Monarchy virtually the sole market for Serbian agricultural products. Tied to this, a veterinary convention, with its famous “swine fever clause,” enabled the Austro-Hungarian authorities to close the frontier to Serbian livestock whenever they saw fit.³ Finally, the secret political treaty of 28 June 1881 effectively associated Serbia with the Austro-German alliance, soon to become the Triple Alliance. In return for Milan’s promises to suppress nationalist intrigue against Austro-Hungarian rule in Bosnia-Hercegovina, and to seek Vienna’s approval for any treaties with
other states, the Monarchy engaged to recognize Milan as King, and to abet Ser-
bian expansion to the southeast, at the expense of the remainder of the Ottoman
Empire in the Balkans.\textsuperscript{4}

The period of greatest possible control, which this settlement ushered in,
lasted from 1881 to 1906, by which time a political revolution had been effected
in Serbia with the assassination, in June 1903, of Milan’s son and successor,
Alexander Obrenović. The accession to the throne of the rival Karadordević dy-
nasty did not, in itself, signify the adoption of a particularly anti-Habsburg policy
by Serbia; indeed, the Austro-Hungarian foreign ministry initially welcomed the
change of dynasty, on the ground that King Peter was likely to be more pliable
than his late predecessor.\textsuperscript{5} However, the 1903 revolution did herald a return to
constitutional rule and genuine party politics, and in the circumstances this meant
the eventual entrenchment in power of the populist, ultra-nationalist Radical
Party, led by Nikola Pašić.\textsuperscript{6}

It was the Pašić government which, in 1906, finally took the risk of letting
the trade treaty with Austria-Hungary lapse, refusing to accept foreign minister
Agenor Gołuchowski’s conditions for renewal. To the surprise of both parties
to the dispute, Serbia did not suffer economic devastation as a result, but in fact
found alternative markets for its produce.\textsuperscript{7} The economic emancipation which
followed 1906, therefore, set the stage for the rapid deterioration of diplomatic
relations between Serbia and the Monarchy thereafter. Only with the threat of
Austro-Hungarian economic sanctions removed could Serbian governments af-
ford to tolerate the extreme nationalist sentiments against Habsburg rule in Bos-
nia, which had been building up for a generation but which, by the terms of the
1881 treaty, Serbia’s rulers had been obliged to suppress.\textsuperscript{8}

Seen in perspective, the overt Austro-Serbian antagonism of 1906–14 seems
almost inevitable, given the nationalist resentment which the preceding era of
economic and political vassalage had dammed up. And since the policy which
aimed at so explicit a domination of Serbia goes back to the early 1870s, we are
confronted once again with the contribution made by the two Hungarians, An-
drássy and Kállay, who were most involved in its formulation.

Gyula Andrásy was central to the establishment of a Hungarian voice in
foreign policy after 1867. While Hungarian minister president he could not of
course direct foreign affairs, which remained the preserve of the Emperor and
Beust. Nevertheless Andrásy availed himself to the full of his right to be con-
sulted over foreign policy issues, and nowhere more so than over policy affecting
the South Slav world and Serbia. As a result the Monarchy’s Serbian policy in
the first four years after the \textit{Ausgleich} took on a literally dualist hue, with Beust
trying to maintain the traditional line of discouraging Serbian expansionism, and
Andrássy and Kállay trying to convince the Serbian Regents that, through the
good offices of the Hungarian government, many things were possible, not least
the acquisition of Bosnia. Only with Andrásy’s appointment as foreign minister in 1871 did this institutional schizophrenia end, by which point, ironically, Andrásy himself had swung to a more traditional viewpoint. Andrásy’s tenure as foreign minister saw the Monarchy revert to a policy of keeping Serbia firmly in its box, because of its potential as a cat’s paw for Russian influence in the Balkans, and despite the reasonable working relationship built up with Russia as a result of the Three Emperors’ League. Only when, at the end of three years of Near Eastern crisis in 1878, Serbia was cast adrift by Russia, was Andrásy able to impose on Serbia the deal done at the Congress of Berlin. After 1879 Haymerle and his Hungarian deputy, Kállay, continued Andrásy’s work by putting the treaty framework of 1880–81 in place.

Andrássy was also important in furthering the rise of the Hungarian factor in Austro-Hungarian foreign policy, both before and after his own appointment as foreign minister. To some extent the advancement of Hungarians within the foreign policy establishment was implicit in the Dualist settlement, in that from the start Francis Joseph and successive foreign ministers accepted the political logic of balancing diplomatic appointments in this way. Constitutionally, however, the Hungarian government was also assured the right to be consulted in foreign policy matters, and as we have seen Andrásy was quick to avail himself of this right. Not only did Andrásy make his views on foreign policy known, especially with regard to Russia and the Near East; he also secured key appointments in the persons of Béla Orczy in the foreign ministry itself, and Kállay in Belgrade. Andrásy also reorganized the foreign ministry after 1871 to include two section chiefs, one of whom should always be a Hungarian, and over the years the number of Hungarians in the diplomatic service rose significantly, although as William D. Godsey Jr. stresses, Hungarians “never dominated the corps.” It would be quite incorrect, as Godsey also reminds us, to speak of a “Hungarian mafia” in foreign policy. Nevertheless, on the specific issue of policy toward Serbia and the South Slav world, the Hungarian factor, I would argue, was decisive, at the very outset of the Dualist period, in giving relations a decidedly negative twist. And the damage, once done, was almost impossible to rectify. Non-Hungarian policy makers, like Kálnoky, might prefer a policy of straightforward domination of Serbia; but the Hungarian factor introduced, or at least exacerbated, an element of mistrust from which Austro-Serbian relations never recovered after 1871. The imposition of the unequal treaty framework of 1880–81 only entrenched this antagonism, by rubbing the Serbs’ noses in the subordinate nature of their position.

The role of Benjámin Kállay in this story remained an important one. Kállay’s finger prints were all over both the commercial treaty and the secret treaty of 1881, just as they were on the compromise declaration negotiated with Milan Piroćanac. Foreign minister Haymerle, as was to be expected, and subject of course to the Emperor Francis Joseph’s approval, had the final say; but it was Kállay
who hammered out the details, precisely because he was the acknowledged expert on South Slav affairs, whom Haymerle had inherited from Andrásy. Furthermore, Haymerle himself had been handpicked by Andrásy, and prior to his elevation had stood very much in Andrásy’s shadow; certainly there is no evidence that, with regard to Serbia, Haymerle did anything other than follow Andrásy’s lead. Consequently, on Haymerle’s death in October 1881, it was Kállay who steered the secret treaty safely into harbor.

Kállay’s influence on Austro-Serbian relations, moreover, persisted even after he left the foreign ministry. For over twenty years, from 1882 to his death in harness in July 1903, Kállay was the Monarchy’s joint finance minister and thus, under the peculiar ad hoc arrangement reached in 1878, effectively chief administrator of occupied Bosnia-Hercegovina. He consequently remained right at the center of the Monarchy’s South Slav policy, since governing Bosnia entailed constantly juggling Serbs, Croats and Muslims one against the other, while at the same time paying due attention to the repercussions in Croatia, in southern Hungary, and of course in Serbia itself. By the time of his death Kállay had a considerable reputation as a sort of natural administrator, a sage whose advice on how to handle fractious populations was repeatedly sought after, and who was allegedly seriously considered by the United States government as a possible governor of the Philippines, after their conquest in the Spanish-American War of 1898.

Despite the official eminence he attained, however, it is difficult to regard Kállay’s career as a success. A liberal nationalist, he spent much of his time in Belgrade, in the foreign ministry, and in charge of Bosnia manipulating, or seeking to manipulate, various elements of the South Slav world, first on behalf of the Hungarian political elite and then, his vision widening somewhat, on behalf of the Habsburg Monarchy. In Belgrade, he sought to tie Serbia to the Monarchy, especially its Hungarian half. At the Ballhaus, he was a principal architect of the tripartite structure imposed on Serbia in 1880–81. As joint finance minister, he aimed at making Bosnia a showcase for Habsburg rule, while keeping the nationalities there bitterly divided, not least through his vain attempt to promote a specifically “Bosnian” national identity.

There is a fitting irony that Kállay should have died within weeks of the ghastly events in Belgrade, which presaged the collapse of Austro-Hungarian control over Serbia. It was as if, with his passing, the whole pretence of keeping Serbian nationalism in leading-strings passed away too. Within three years the antagonism had boiled over, with the outbreak of trade war between the two countries. In little over a decade trade war had been succeeded by real war. During his long tenure as proconsul in Bosnia, Kállay finally identified Serbian nationalism as the greatest problem he faced. It was an insight he might have been more honest to have faced up to thirty years earlier, instead of striving so long and so hard to shackle so intractable a force.
Notes


8 Petrovich, *History of Modern Serbia*, 2:492–504, provides a more coherent account of Serbia’s relations with the Monarchy in the late nineteenth century than Vucinich, *Serbia between East and West*, 31–32, 38–41, 172–78. The former, however, relies heavily on the standard work by Slobodan Jovanović, *Vlada Aleksandra Obrenović*, 2 vols. (Belgrade: Geze Kona, 1926–27), especially vol. 2. Documentary evidence of the degree to which Serbian governments, in the period 1881–1903, took their obligation to suppress criticism of the Monarchy’s rule in Bosnia-Hercegovina is provided in *Progoni političkih protivnika u režimu Aleksandra Obrenovića 1893–1903*, ed. Andrija Radenić (Belgrade: Istorijiski Institut, 1973), which contains a mass of material from the Serbian, Austrian and Russian archives on this subject. There is not so much on the connection between economic emancipation and the worsening of political antagonism between the Monarchy and Serbia after 1903. Among older works, that of Gerhard Hiller, *Die Entwicklung des österreichisch-serbischen Gegensatzes 1908–1914* (Halle: Akademischer Verlag, 1934), 6, tends to take the view that Austro-Hungarian domination of Serbia was normal and profitable for both parties; Walter M. Markov, *Serbien zwischen Österreich und Rußland 1897–1908* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1934), especially 62–67, is based on a wider range of sources and is more critical, particularly of the Monarchy’s handling of the trade dispute. See also Vucinich, *Serbia between East and West*, 209, 235–36, who, while making clear the economic
consequences of the “Pig War,” is muted on the inevitable political fallout; Petrovich, *History of Modern Serbia*, 2:548–54, 562–64, makes the connection more clearly. Petrovich’s interpretation, again, is undoubtedly heavily dependent on the detail provided in Đorđević, *Čarinski rat*, e.g. 568–72, which chronicles the effect the tariff war had on South Slav nationalist propaganda in Bosnia-Hercegovina. It is instructive to compare the conclusion reached by Đorđević (668), “The end of economic dependence led in the first place to Serbia’s political independence of Austria-Hungary” with that echoed by Petrovich (564): “Serbia’s economic liberation meant freedom from the Austro-Hungarian political domination of a quarter century.” Independent confirmation of the political importance of the breakdown in trade relations is also provided by Horst M. Lorscheider, “The Commercial Treaty between Germany and Serbia of 1904,” *Central European History* 9:2 (June 1976), 140–41, who not only shows how the concessions offered Serbia by the Monarchy’s principal ally, Germany, were crucial in helping Serbia to survive the tariff war, but concludes (142) that the resulting economic independence “enabled Serbia to pursue an increasingly aggressive policy vis-à-vis Austria-Hungary.”

9 Franz-Josef Kos, *Die Politik Österreich-Ungarns während der Orientkrise 1874/75–1879* (Cologne & Vienna: Böhlau, 1984), 57, following Radenić’s introduction to *Dnevnik* (xiii; 817), refers to the “national key of the Ausgleich.”


11 Ibid., 125–50, on the Hungarian presence in the foreign ministry and diplomatic corps generally.

12 See Kállay to Haymerle, 17 July 1881, HHSA, PA I/456–1, V/3b, ff. 59–66.


15 Introduction by Lajos Thallóczy to Benjamin von Kállay, *Die Geschichte des serbischen Aufstandes 1807–1810, aus dem Handschriften-Nachlass herausgegeben von Ludwig von Thallóczy* (Vienna: Adolf Holzhausen, 1910), xxxvi. According to Thallóczy, Kállay’s abilities were especially prized in the States and by President Theodore Roosevelt. I have to date been unable to verify this independently.