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THE MISSION OF MAJOR JOVAN DRAGAŠEVIĆ IN BUCHAREST IN 1876

Summary

This paper examines the 1876 mission of Major Jovan Dragašević in Bucharest, a topic that has not yet been the subject of a dedicated scholarly study. Drawing on unpublished archival materials and published sources, the paper reconstructs the circumstances, objectives, and course of this diplomatic and political mission, as well as its place within the broader foreign policy efforts of the Principality of Serbia on the eve of the First Serbo-Ottoman War (1876). Particular attention is devoted to the contacts between the Serbian government and Bulgarian revolutionary committees in Bucharest, as well as to the reasons why broader coordination between the Serbian and Bulgarian national movements did not occur. The research shows that internal divisions within the Bulgarian political movement, together with Romania's policy of neutrality and the pressures exerted by the Great Powers, constituted significant obstacles to such coordinated efforts.

Keywords: Jovan Dragašević, Serbia, Bulgarian committees, Bucharest, Ottoman Empire.

1. INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the Herzegovina Uprising in July 1875 marked the beginning of the Great Eastern Crisis (1875–1878), one of the most significant political upheavals in the Balkans in the second half of the nineteenth century. The rebellion

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of the Serbian population against Ottoman rule soon spread to other areas of the Bosnian Vilayet, generating strong resonance in neighbouring Serbian lands as well as in the broader European public. In the Principality of Serbia, the uprising stimulated intense national enthusiasm and prompted preparations for a possible armed conflict with the Ottoman Empire. The state leadership, headed by Prince Milan Obrenović, sought to conduct these preparations simultaneously on the military and diplomatic fronts, aiming to secure the support—or at least the goodwill—of Russia, while also establishing contacts with other Balkan states and Christian peoples under Ottoman rule (for more on this, see: Рајић, 2015, pp. 370–459; 2024, pp. 356–401; Радовић, 2023, pp. 323–351). The mission of Major Jovan Dragašević to Bucharest in 1876 should also be viewed within this context.²

The mission of Major Jovan Dragašević has been noted within the broader framework of research on Serbian–Bulgarian relations and the diplomatic activities of the Principality of Serbia on the eve of the First Serbo-Ottoman War (1876), but it has not, to date, been the subject of a dedicated scholarly study (Игњатович, 1969, pp. 284–287; Арнаудов, 1972, pp. 766–769; Џамбазовски, 1976, pp. 173–177; Стојанчевић, 1988, p. 355; Реџић, 1992, pp. 187–196; Рајић, 2015, pp. 425–450; 2024, p. 389; Радовић, 2023, pp. 342–343). The aim of this paper is therefore to shed light, on the basis of archival materials of Serbian provenance, in particular the report of Jovan Dragašević and the correspondence between the Serbian representative in Bucharest, Milan A. Petronijević, and the Serbian government in Belgrade, on the

² Jovan Dragašević (Požarevac, 16 February 1836 – Niš, 14 July 1915) belonged to the circle of the most educated and versatile Serbian officers of the second half of the nineteenth century. He graduated from the Artillery School in Belgrade—the forerunner of the Military Academy—in 1860, after which he was commissioned as a second lieutenant. Already in 1861, he entered the teaching service at the same institution, where, with brief interruptions, he taught until 1885, educating generations of Serbian officers. Alongside his pedagogical work, he also developed a distinguished military career. He rose through the ranks from lieutenant (1862) to colonel (1880), commanded the Lyceum Legion during the bombardment of Belgrade in 1862, and the Bulgarian Legion in 1867. On the eve of the First Serbo-Ottoman War (1876), he was appointed commander of the Kruševac Brigade. In 1877, he served as Chief of the General Staff, while during the Second Serbo-Ottoman War he held the position of Chief of the Adjutant’s Department of the Supreme Command. As an expert on territorial issues, he participated in the work of the Serbian delegation at the Berlin Congress in 1878. He later served as Chief of the Historical Department of the General Staff and as Assistant Chief of Staff of the Supreme Command during the Serbian–Bulgarian War of 1885. He retired in 1888 and, in 1900, was promoted to the rank of honorary general with the right to wear a uniform. In addition to his military and scholarly activities, he was also a writer, belonging to the generation of Serbian intellectuals inspired by the ideas of national romanticism. He achieved particular renown with the epic poem *Jeka od gusala* (1859), whose famous verse—“Only unity saves the Serbs”—became a national motto (Тирић, 1940, p. 16; Иветић, 2000, pp. 13–14; Бјелајац, 2007, pp. 364–365; Војводић, 2008, pp. 131–135; Јововић & Шуљагић, 2016, pp. 82–142, 157–186).

course, circumstances, and significance of this mission. It also examines its place within the broader context of Serbian foreign policy and diplomatic activity on the eve of the wars of liberation and independence (1876–1878).

2. MISSION

At a session of the Council of Ministers held on 8 March 1876 in Belgrade, upon the proposal of the Minister of War, Tihomilj Nikolić, it was decided that Major Jovan Dragašević would be sent to Bucharest. His task was to establish contact with the Bulgarian revolutionary committees and to assess the possibilities of coordinating their activities with Serbian war plans against the Ottoman Empire. Two days later, he was issued a passport, and by mid-March he had arrived in the Romanian capital, where he immediately established contact with Serbia's diplomatic representative, Milan A. Petronijević (Грујић, 1923, 150; Војни архив (=ВА), Пописник 16 (=П–16), К 33, Ф 8, Д 4/1; Државни архив Србије (=ДАС), Министарство иностраних дела (=МИД), Политичко одељење (=ПО), 1876, Д. I, Ф II, П/5-III, Conf. № 159).

Upon his arrival in Bucharest, Dragašević began carrying out the mission entrusted to him. He sought to establish contacts with prominent representatives of the Bulgarian political emigration, relying on the letters of recommendation he had brought from Serbia. However, as he was not familiar with their content, this made his initial steps somewhat difficult and left room for misunderstandings, as well as for caution on the part of his interlocutors. He first turned to the so-called “Older” Bulgarians, that is, the more affluent and influential segment of the Bulgarian émigré community in Bucharest. Proceeding from the assumption that this group was the most suitable for initial contacts, he visited Dr Georgi Atanasovich, one of the more approachable and respected figures within the Bulgarian colony. He paid this visit accompanied by Aleksa Spasić, secretary of the Serbian legation in Bucharest, who was well acquainted with Atanasovich. The initial conversation was primarily devoted to establishing mutual acquaintance and trust; however, it was already indicated on that occasion that the Serbian officer wished to ascertain the mood and intentions of the Bulgarian patriots at a time when the situation in the Balkans was rapidly deteriorating (ДАС, Лични фонд Љубомира Ковачевића (=ЉК), № 1446).

Through Atanasovich, a meeting was soon arranged with the Bulgarian Metropolitan Panaret Rashev, the spiritual and political authority of the Bulgarian colony in Bucharest. The meeting was also attended by Dr Petar Protich, another prominent representative of the Bulgarian emigration. The conversation initially

unfolded in an atmosphere of reserve and caution. The Bulgarian leaders considered it necessary first to consult among themselves and harmonize their positions, and only then to continue discussions with the Serbian envoy. Such an approach indicates that, although interested in cooperation, they sought to avoid rash moves that could entail political consequences (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1446).

During his stay in Bucharest, Dragašević also met with the most prominent representatives of the so-called Older Bulgarians. Among them, the wealthy merchants and financiers Evlogi Georgiev and Mihail Koloni stood out in particular. Georgiev was regarded as the wealthiest Bulgarian in Bucharest and served as a member of the board of a Romanian bank, while Koloni ranked immediately after him in terms of wealth and influence. Together with Metropolitan Panaret, Atanasovich, and Protich, they constituted the core of the Older Bulgarian political current, whose influence derived from economic strength and social prestige (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1446).

In addition, Dragašević also sought to assess the mood of the so-called “Younger” Bulgarians, that is, the more radical and revolutionary current within the Bulgarian émigré community. To this end, he contacted Ljuben Karavelov, one of the leading representatives of the Younger Bulgarian movement. Karavelov displayed an inclination towards a more active struggle against the Ottoman Empire; however, at that moment he was unable to make concrete decisions, as other influential members of his group were not in Bucharest. The Serbian envoy exercised considerable discretion, seeking to assess each group separately and without revealing the full extent of his contacts (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1446).

The decisive conversation with the Older Bulgarian leaders was held at the residence of Metropolitan Panaret Rashev. At the outset, the Bulgarian leaders asked the Serbian envoy to present his assessment of the political situation and the possible courses of action. Proceeding from the broader European context, Dragašević emphasized the significance of the uprising in Herzegovina, which had already attracted the attention of European public opinion and diplomacy. If the uprising of a relatively “small and poor” people could arouse the interest of the Great Powers, then, in his view, armed action by the more numerous Bulgarian population could likewise draw Europe’s attention to the Bulgarian question. Within this framework, practical preparations for a possible uprising were also discussed. It was emphasized that the first step would be to establish contacts with the Bulgarian population in the areas under Ottoman rule, in order to assess their readiness for armed action. At the same time, the need to raise funds among wealthy Bulgarian patriots in Bucharest—who,

by virtue of their social position, could provide the material basis for a future movement—was also highlighted (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1446).

Particular attention was devoted to the issue of armaments. Since the Romanian government sought to maintain neutrality and did not permit the transport of weapons across its territory, a solution was considered whereby weapons would be procured indirectly through Serbia. If the Bulgarian leaders were able to raise the necessary funds, the money could be sent to Belgrade, where the Serbian authorities—while procuring arms for their own needs—could also secure a certain quantity of weapons for the Bulgarian insurgent units. These weapons would then be stored in the border regions of eastern Serbia, from where, at an appropriate moment, they could be transferred into Ottoman territory. It was emphasized that the insurgents would be better equipped with older rifles, the so-called *sprednjača* (muzzle-loading rifles), as ammunition for such weapons was easier to obtain. Gunpowder and lead could be procured more readily, and even captured Ottoman ammunition could be adapted for use. By contrast, modern firearms required ammunition that the insurgents would not be able to obtain on a regular basis (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1446).

Despite this, the Older Bulgarian leaders displayed considerable reserve. The main reasons cited were a lack of financial resources, fear of a reaction from the Romanian authorities, and the belief that, under conditions of strict Ottoman control in the Bulgarian regions, it was almost impossible to carry out the necessary preparations. More importantly, they believed that the Great Powers were not, at that time, prepared to allow the crisis to escalate into a broader conflict with the Ottoman Empire. Accordingly, they held that an uprising would be feasible only once Serbia, in alliance with the Principality of Montenegro, entered into open war, which would provide the Bulgarian movement with more realistic prospects for success (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1446). Such an attitude demonstrates that caution, pragmatism, and a careful assessment of international developments prevailed among the more affluent and influential representatives of the Bulgarian emigration. This did not imply an absence of national sentiment, but rather a conviction that, without the support of the Great Powers and neighbouring Christian states, a Bulgarian uprising had little chance of success.

After that, Dragašević turned to the Younger Bulgarian movement. The meeting with its representatives—besides Ljuben Karavelov and Kirjak Tsankov—was also attended by Pavel Kalyanji, a Bulgarian tenant farmer from Chişinău; Trifon Panov, a lawyer educated in Russia and described as a “travelling propagandist of the Bulgarian national idea”; the secretary of the Serbian legation, Aleksa Spasić; as well

as Vasa Živanović,³ head of the Krajina District, who was attached to Dragašević as an assistant. Although the meeting had initially been intended merely as an opportunity for mutual acquaintance, the discussion soon assumed a serious and polemical character. It became evident that there existed a strong degree of suspicion among the Younger Bulgarian activists regarding Serbia's intentions. As the discussion progressed, the atmosphere grew increasingly tense, and criticism of Serbian policy became ever more explicit (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1447; ОБТИ, I, 1961, № 89).

The Younger Bulgarian circles displayed even greater reservations regarding cooperation with Serbia than their Older émigré counterparts. Although they stated that, in the event of a Serbo-Ottoman War (1876), they could raise an uprising, they also emphasized that the moment was not yet favourable. The basis of their caution lay in their distrust of Serbian policy. They feared that Serbia might initiate a war for its own purposes and, upon obtaining certain concessions, subsequently abandon the Bulgarian insurgents. While they acknowledged Serbia's interest in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a natural tendency, they regarded with suspicion its intentions towards territories that they themselves considered part of the Bulgarian national space. From such positions it followed that, in their view, an uprising should not be launched from Serbian territory, but exclusively within Ottoman lands inhabited by Bulgarians. At the same time, a certain contradiction was evident in their demands: although they doubted Serbian intentions and emphasized the need for independent action, they nevertheless expected Serbia to assist in the procurement of weapons, after which they themselves would decide when and where to initiate the uprising (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1447).

There were also differences within this group. The most radical positions were represented by Pavel Kalyanji and Trifon Panov, while Kirjak Tsankov adopted a somewhat more moderate stance. Ljuben Karavelov, despite his critical tone, appeared more cautious and displayed a greater inclination towards cooperation with Serbia. In his view, joint action could represent a realistic path to liberation, as the Bulgarian people, once freed from Ottoman rule, would be sufficiently strong to resist any external political pressure. The discussion was, however, further complicated by the intervention of Vasa Živanović, who began to speak about the immediate organization of volunteer units and the preparations already underway in Serbia. Such an intervention was not in line with the tactic of gradually assessing the mood that

³ Vasa Živanović had previously served as secretary of the Serbian Legation in Bucharest and possessed well-established contacts with the Bulgarian émigré community in Romania.

Dragašević was attempting to implement and only served to increase the suspicion of his Bulgarian interlocutors (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1447).

The primary objective of the Serbian envoy was to direct the talks towards gradual preparation: establishing contacts within the Bulgarian regions under Ottoman rule, assessing conditions on the ground, and securing material resources. However, the immediate discussion of the formation of insurgent units and their transfer aroused suspicion among the Younger Bulgarian representatives, who feared that premature action might lead to the exposure of their plans. Another important issue was Romania's policy of neutrality, which did not permit the transfer of weapons or the organization of armed groups on its territory. It was therefore emphasized that any prospective insurgent units would have to be organized in Little Wallachia, Great Wallachia, and Bessarabia, from where operations could be launched towards the Balkan mountain range. Within such a framework, Serbia would assume a significant logistical role, since without a continuous connection with it as a source of arms and ammunition, the Bulgarian uprising would have had little chance of long-term survival (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1447).

Despite the intensity of the debate, contacts with the Younger Bulgarian circles continued in the following days. Ljuben Karavelov and Kirjak Tsankov sought to mitigate the impression left by the initial meeting and proposed the convening of a broader gathering in Bolgrad, as well as the establishment of a permanent coordinating committee to oversee the preparations. Its composition was to include Karavelov, Tsankov, a retired Bulgarian officer who had served in the Russian army, and Jovan Dragašević (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1447).

At the same time, signs of increased interest in these activities began to appear among diplomatic and police circles. Some Bulgarian émigrés received anonymous messages and telegrams claiming that Serbia had no intention of entering the war at all. Such information was clearly intended to undermine confidence in Serbian intentions. Moreover, the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs was already aware of the arrival of the Serbian major and his contacts with Bulgarian émigrés. During his stay in the city, Dragašević repeatedly noticed suspicious individuals who appeared to take an interest in his movements. Among them was a priest from Jasika near Kruševac who frequently followed him, as well as an unidentified man who inquired about him at the hotel in the middle of the night. He also attracted the attention of the Ottoman consul. Nevertheless, Dragašević did not exercise sufficient caution, while Vasa Živanović even informed the Russian consul, Ivan Alekseevich Zinoviev, about the purpose of the mission (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1447; МИД, ПО, 1876, Д I, Ф II, П/5-III,

Conf. № 167, 179; Посланство у Букурешту (ПсБк), 1876, Conf. Ф I, P 3; ОБТИ, I, 1961, № 89, 91).

Despite this, the talks continued. In subsequent meetings, the Younger Bulgarian representatives expressed their willingness to engage in preparations for an uprising and accepted the possibility that volunteer units could assemble and train in Serbia, given that Bulgarian volunteers lacked sufficient military experience. At the same time, they emphasized the need to overcome the division between the Older and Younger Bulgarian political circles, believing that a Serbian mediator could play an important role in bringing them closer together. One of the ideas that emerged during these discussions was the launch of a political newspaper in Bucharest. Such a publication was intended to stimulate national consciousness and revive political activity among the Bulgarian émigré community. Since a similar paper had already ceased publication, the Younger Bulgarian activists believed that its revival could contribute to the dissemination of political ideas and to preparations for a future uprising (ДАС, ЛБК, № 1448).

By the end of March 1876, the talks had entered a new phase in which, alongside general principles of cooperation, specific issues related to preparations for armed action and mutual trust increasingly came to the fore. In conversations with Ljuben Karavelov, Kirjak Tsankov, and a certain Dr Georgi, it was observed that among the Younger Bulgarian political circles there existed a willingness to discuss the organizational and material foundations of the movement, but also a tendency towards political manoeuvring and the tactical concealment of real intentions. Although they claimed that funds could be raised, it remained unclear to what extent these assurances were grounded in actual possibilities (ДАС, ЛБК, № 1448).

In these discussions, the Bulgarian conviction regarding the central importance of their national question for the future of the Ottoman Balkans was strongly expressed. From this perspective, it became clear that certain Bulgarian political circles did not envisage their state solely within the framework of Danubian Bulgaria, but in a much broader sense—encompassing Thrace, Macedonia, and likely also territories that Serbian political circles regarded as parts of Old Serbia. This clearly revealed one of the fundamental contradictions of Serbian–Bulgarian rapprochement: while cooperation against the Ottoman Empire was possible, underlying it were already discernible competing national visions regarding the future political order in the Balkans (ДАС, ЛБК, № 1448).

Ljuben Karavelov, Kirjak Tsankov, and their circle did not openly articulate claims of such a broad territorial scope as some more radical Bulgarian figures;

however, they nevertheless expected Serbia to initiate open hostilities, while Bulgarian forces would follow at a more favourable moment. It was precisely this attitude that led Dragašević to adopt a more reserved stance. He emphasized the necessity of timely preparation but avoided explicitly stating which side would have to take the first step. However, it became evident from the circumstances that, owing to Romania's position and its policy of neutrality, he assumed that the initial blow would have to come from the Serbian side (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1448).

In the following days, the Bulgarian interlocutors demonstrated a greater willingness to transform the talks into a more permanent form of cooperation. The idea also emerged that Serbia should maintain a permanent representative in Bucharest who would work directly with Bulgarian circles on the preparation of the movement. A particular role in the attempt to overcome internal divisions was played by Kirjak Tsankov, who, unlike the more impetuous Ljuben Karavelov, gave the impression of a more composed and tactful political actor. The idea of convening a broader gathering in Bolgrad, however, proved difficult to implement. Consequently, Bulgarian circles proposed expanding contacts through individual visits to influential figures in other centres, particularly in Brăila.⁴ At the same time, the issue of establishing a Bulgarian political newspaper in Bucharest was raised once again. This proposal had significance beyond mere propaganda: the newspaper was intended to stimulate national consciousness, overcome discouragement, and strengthen confidence in joint action. Serbia was expected to provide financial support (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1448).

In parallel, efforts continued to strengthen ties with the Older Bulgarian leaders, particularly with Mihail Koloni, whose opinion carried considerable weight. Through the mediation of Georgi Atanasovich, attempts were made to arrange a new meeting. An important political idea also emerged in these discussions: namely, that the enduring strength of Serbs and Bulgarians in the Balkans might rest upon some form of federative community, or even a personal union. The Serbian envoy responded to such proposals with great caution. He did not reject the idea of harmony between the

⁴ Jovan Dragašević requested that Milan Petronijević provide him with 50 ducats for his planned journey to Brăila. The funds were sent from Belgrade for that purpose, accompanied by instructions to submit regular reports, economize resources, and exercise the utmost caution. This caution was deemed necessary because the Romanian representative in Belgrade, Aleksandar Sturza, acting on instructions from his government, had informed the Serbian authorities that Serbia was dispatching administrative officials and officers to Romania in order to incite the Bulgarian population to unrest. In the end, Dragašević did not travel to Brăila, most likely due to the aforementioned circumstances—namely, the fact that he was compelled to leave Romanian territory (ДАС, МИД, ПО, 1876, Д I, Ф II, П/5–III, Conf. № 175, 179, 200).

two peoples, but he consistently avoided any concrete formulation of a future state or legal arrangement. In his view, the primary task was liberation from Ottoman rule, while the regulation of subsequent relations should be left to a later stage (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1447, 1448).

On the last day of March, the position of the Serbian envoy in Bucharest became significantly more complicated. His activities among the Bulgarian émigrés attracted the attention of the Romanian authorities, as well as of the diplomatic representatives of the Great Powers. A direct summons was then issued from the office of the chief of the Romanian police, requesting that the Serbian officer report to the station. The Serbian representative, Milan A. Petronjević, attempted to defuse the situation through diplomatic channels. He first tried to initiate an indirect conversation with Minister Ion Bălăceanu, but the latter was not at home. Subsequently, the President of the Romanian Council of Ministers, Lascăr Catargiu, requested an explanation regarding the matter. On that occasion, the Romanian Prime Minister openly informed him that police agents had submitted reports on the activities of the Serbian major, and that Bulgarian circles themselves had confirmed, in conversations with foreign diplomats, that he had been involved in inciting action against the Ottoman Empire. The situation was further complicated by the fact that representatives of several foreign powers visited the Romanian Prime Minister daily, protesting that Bucharest was tolerating activities that could call Romanian neutrality into question. In addition to these political concerns, a further detail was mentioned that heightened suspicion among the Romanian authorities. Upon his arrival in Bucharest, the Serbian major had failed to report to the garrison command, as was customary for military personnel, and instead registered at the hotel as an innkeeper from Orșava. Although it was later explained that this had occurred due to an error on the part of the hotel staff, this circumstance only reinforced, in the eyes of the police, the suspicion that he was engaged in a covert mission (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1449; МИД, ПО, 1876, Д I, Ф II, П/5-III, Conf. № 200; ОБТИ, I, № 91).

At the request of Jovan Dragašević, the Serbian representative spoke the following day with the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ion Bălăceanu. In the course of the conversation, Bălăceanu emphasized that every state has the right to prevent foreign nationals from organizing revolutionary movements on its territory, even when such movements are directed against a third state. In this context, he drew a comparison intended to illustrate how a similar situation would be interpreted in Serbia. If the Romanian government were to send its agent to regions of Serbia inhabited by the Vlach population in order to incite unrest, this would undoubtedly be

perceived in Belgrade as a hostile act. From this perspective, the Romanian authorities considered that they were fully justified in preventing any comparable activity on their territory (ДАС, МИД, ПО, 1876, Д I, Ф II, П/5-III, Conf. № 206).

In addition to the issue of the Serbian officer himself, the Romanian government also cited specific reasons that led it to tighten its measures. According to information available to the police, Bulgarian revolutionary circles were preparing to form a volunteer legion that would cross the Danube and initiate an uprising in Ottoman territories. An investigation had already been launched in Craiova against certain Bulgarians who had collected financial contributions for that purpose. At the same time, reports circulated that a crossing point was being prepared along the river and that a vessel carrying weapons intended for the insurgents was expected. For the Romanian government, such activities constituted a serious threat. Romania was not prepared for war, and the authorities in Bucharest were convinced that any armed conflict in the region could have had disastrous consequences for national security. Accordingly, the government sought to prevent the formation of Bulgarian insurgent units and, if necessary, to seize weapons that could be used in an uprising. Within this broader context, the presence of a Serbian officer in Bucharest assumed far greater significance than it might otherwise have had (ДАС, МИД, ПО, 1876, Д I, Ф II, П/5-III, Conf. № 206).

In the course of the conversation, Ion Bălăceanu acknowledged that the Romanian government's decision had also been influenced by pressure from foreign diplomatic representatives. In recent days, the phrase "Dragašević is still in Bucharest" had effectively become a shorthand within diplomatic circles for the broader question of Romanian neutrality. Particularly notable in this regard was the representative of Austria-Hungary, who displayed considerable zeal in urging the Romanian government to prevent any activities that might lead to a Bulgarian uprising. Although the government's decision was final, the Romanian minister nevertheless adopted a cautious approach. The Serbian officer was not required to leave the country immediately, but was granted several days to prepare for his departure. The Serbian representative took advantage of this interval to inform Belgrade of the situation and to request further instructions. When, in the meantime, orders arrived for Dragašević to return to Serbia, the situation was effectively resolved. According to the Serbian representative, the major himself had already been preparing to depart in the following days (ДАС, МИД, ПО, 1876, Д I, Ф II, П/5-III, Conf. № 205, 206; ПсБК, 1876, Conf. Ф I, P 3).

Jovan Dragašević used the remaining time to complete the talks he had initiated. Contacts with Ljuben Karavelov and Kirjak Tsankov, which had been established in order to overcome earlier misunderstandings and to return the discussions to the issue of practical preparations for the future movement, were continued. At the same time, he sought to maintain contacts with the Older Bulgarian circle, particularly with Mihail Koloni, although this proved difficult, as the latter was frequently absent from the city. During a meeting at the residence of Metropolitan Panaret Rashev, the question of Serbian–Bulgarian relations in the event of a war against the Ottoman Empire was also raised. In these discussions, some Bulgarian representatives expressed doubts regarding Serbia’s actual readiness for war, pointing to the shortage of arms and the need for larger quantities of weapons. Dragašević responded to such remarks diplomatically, but also with a certain degree of irony: he noted that uprisings in history are most often initiated by the poorer strata of the population, rather than by the wealthy, who tend to be more concerned with their own security. In this sense, the conviction was expressed that the Bulgarian people would likewise be mobilized once Serbia raised the banner of struggle (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1449).

Meanwhile, signs were emerging that concrete steps towards armament were already being undertaken within Bulgarian circles. Ljuben Karavelov reported that certain merchants in Romania were purchasing rifles and revolvers and secretly transporting them into Ottoman territories. The Romanian authorities were therefore showing increasing interest in these activities. Faced with the inevitability of leaving Bucharest, Dragašević provided his Bulgarian interlocutors with clear instructions: to continue disseminating the idea of an uprising among the Bulgarian population, to proceed with the procurement of weapons, and to send the collected funds to Belgrade, where arms could be acquired and stored until the outbreak of hostilities. He also emphasized the need for those prepared for combat to gradually organize themselves into insurgent units, either within Bulgarian regions under Ottoman rule or via Serbia. Karavelov, however, warned that his arrival in Belgrade at that moment might attract the attention of the Romanian authorities, and it was therefore agreed that contacts would continue in writing (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1449). Thus, under pressure from the Romanian authorities and broader international circumstances, the mission of the Serbian envoy to Bucharest came to an end. Although it was terminated earlier than planned, over the course of several weeks direct contacts were established with the most important representatives of the Bulgarian emigration, their political positions were assessed, and the foundations for further cooperation were laid on the eve of major Balkan developments.

On 6 April 1876, after leaving Bucharest, Dragašević used his journey to Serbia to establish several additional direct contacts with Bulgarian activists and merchants in the cities of southern Romania. The first stop was Slatina, where he attempted to contact the Bulgarian merchant Hadji Nikola Hadjistoyanov, to whom Karavelov had referred him. Hadji Nikola, however, declined to meet the Serbian officer in person, probably out of concern that such a connection might jeopardize his business interests in the Ottoman Empire, and instead sent his associates, Atanasije Katranov and Dimitrije Zenkovski, to the hotel (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1450).

The conversation with them revealed that Bulgarian circles were aware of the rapid change in political circumstances and believed that the moment was approaching when the Bulgarian question might become the focus of wider Balkan developments. They emphasized the need to begin serious, yet cautious, preparations for a possible uprising, while also pointing to the lack of material resources and organizational foundations. In particular, they stressed that the wealthier strata of the Bulgarian emigration often demonstrated patriotism in words, but not in their willingness to sacrifice part of their wealth for the national cause. It was evident from their views that initiative and political encouragement were expected from Serbia (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1450).

After Slatina, Dragašević continued his journey to Craiova, where he attempted to meet several individuals to whom Karavelov had previously referred him. However, he succeeded only in establishing contact with the Danilov brothers, members of the Bulgarian mercantile colony in that city. The meeting in Craiova revealed a markedly different mood from that in Slatina. The elder Danilov brother displayed pronounced reserve and even open hostility towards Serbia. He argued that Serbian and Bulgarian interests were fundamentally opposed and that Serbia's policy was primarily directed towards its own territorial expansion. As evidence, he referred to events from the time of Prince Mihailo Obrenović (1860–1868), claiming that Serbia had previously used Bulgarian revolutionary movements for its own purposes and had subsequently abandoned the Bulgarians without support. In this context, the movement of Georgi Rakovski was also mentioned, as were developments related to the acquisition of Ottoman-held towns by Serbia (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1450).

Accusations were also made that Serbia was attempting to “Serbize” the Bulgarian population in areas under Ottoman rule through cultural influence, particularly by means of books and teachers. Dragašević responded to such remarks calmly and with reasoned arguments, explaining that Serbia provided educational assistance to all who requested it, but that it could naturally supply only those books

that it itself possessed—namely, Serbian books. As a historical parallel, he cited examples from the past, when Serbs sent books and teachers to Russia not in order to “Serbize” the Russians, but to contribute to the development of Slavic literacy. Likewise, he noted that the Serbs themselves had not later interpreted Russian spiritual and cultural assistance as a threat to their own national identity (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1450).

The discussion also raised the issue of national borders in the Balkans. The Bulgarian interlocutor claimed that Bulgarians were present even in the towns of eastern Serbia, such as Zaječar, using this as an argument in support of broader Bulgarian territorial claims. Dragašević responded by emphasizing that the border regions of the Balkans had always been ethnically mixed and that a clear-cut division between peoples could scarcely be drawn. He further noted that Bulgarian populations were present in other parts of the Balkans and Central Europe, just as Serbian populations existed outside the borders of Serbia; however, territorial claims to entire regions could not be automatically derived from such demographic circumstances (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1450).

From these conversations, it became increasingly clear that, in certain Bulgarian circles, liberation from Ottoman rule was not viewed merely as an end in itself, but also as a step towards the creation of a much broader Bulgarian state. Within such conceptual frameworks, the idea of restoring the medieval Bulgarian state—often associated with the name of Tsar Samuil—was revived. Consequently, the belief was occasionally expressed that, if several million Bulgarians were to be mobilized, Serbia itself could be overshadowed by the scale of the Bulgarian national movement (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1450).

Nevertheless, Dragašević drew an important conclusion from these meetings: such views were far more pronounced among Bulgarian émigrés outside the Ottoman Empire than among the Bulgarian population itself under Ottoman rule. It was from these regions that reports also arrived indicating that certain individuals were travelling to Romania in order to establish contact with the Serbian representative and to prepare for possible action in the event that Serbia entered the war (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1450).

On the basis of these experiences, Dragašević concluded that it would be useful to draft a more extensive memorandum on the Bulgarian question and on the manner in which Serbia should conduct its policy towards the Bulgarian movement. Such a document was intended to encompass various political scenarios, both in terms of the future development of the Bulgarian liberation movement and its relationship to Serbia and Serbian interests in the Balkans. Despite the unfavourable course of events

in Bucharest, he believed that the contacts established should not be left without continuation. Should the political situation in Romania change, particularly in the event of a change of government, the possibility of re-establishing direct ties with Bulgarian circles in that country would re-emerge. In this way, the influence created during his stay could be preserved, and connections with individuals who had expressed an interest in joint action against the Ottoman government could be maintained (ДАС, ЈБК, № 1450).

3. CONCLUSION

The mission of Major Jovan Dragašević to Bucharest represents a hitherto insufficiently researched episode in the history of Serbian diplomacy during the Great Eastern Crisis. It formed part of the Serbian government's broader efforts to establish cooperation with the Bulgarian national movement on the eve of the Serbo-Ottoman War (1876) and to encourage coordinated action against the Ottoman Empire.

During his stay in Bucharest, Dragašević established contacts with several prominent representatives of the Bulgarian political emigration; however, these discussions revealed the absence of a unified position among Bulgarian political circles regarding both the timing and the manner of launching an uprising. The mission was further constrained by Romania's policy of neutrality which, under pressure from the Great Powers, resulted in the Serbian officer being required to leave the country.

Although Dragašević's mission did not lead to a concrete political agreement with the Bulgarian committees, it nevertheless constitutes a valuable source for understanding political relations in the Balkans on the eve of the wars of liberation and independence (1876–1878). It reveals both Serbia's efforts to coordinate action with the Bulgarian movement and the numerous limitations arising from divergent national interests, internal divisions within the Bulgarian political sphere, and the broader diplomatic constraints imposed by the prevailing European balance of power.

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МИСИЈА МАЈОРА ЈОВАНА ДРАГАШЕВИЋА У БУКУРЕШТУ 1876.
ГОДИНЕ

Сажетак

Мисија генералштабног мајора Јована Драгашевића у Букурешту 1876. године представља део дипломатских настојања Кнежевине Србије уочи Првог српско-турског рата. Српска влада је тежила да предстојећи сукоб са Османским царством повеже са устанничким покретима у другим деловима Балкана, посебно са бугарским националним покретом. У том циљу Драгашевић је упућен у Букурешт, једно од главних средишта бугарске политичке емиграције, како би успоставио контакте са бугарским политичким круговима и испитао могућности за координацију деловања. Његови извештаји показују да међу бугарским политичким представницима није постојао јединствен став о покретању устанка, што је ограничавало могућности сарадње са Србијом. Мисију је додатно отежавала политика неутралности Румуније, која под притиском великих сила није желела да дозволи револуционарне активности на својој територији. Иако није довела до конкретног политичког споразума, ова мисија представља значајан извор за разумевање српско-бугарских односа и дипломатских активности Србије уочи ратова за ослобођење и независност (1876–1878).

Кључне речи: Јован Драгашевић, Србија, бугарски комитети, Букурешт, Османско царство.

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