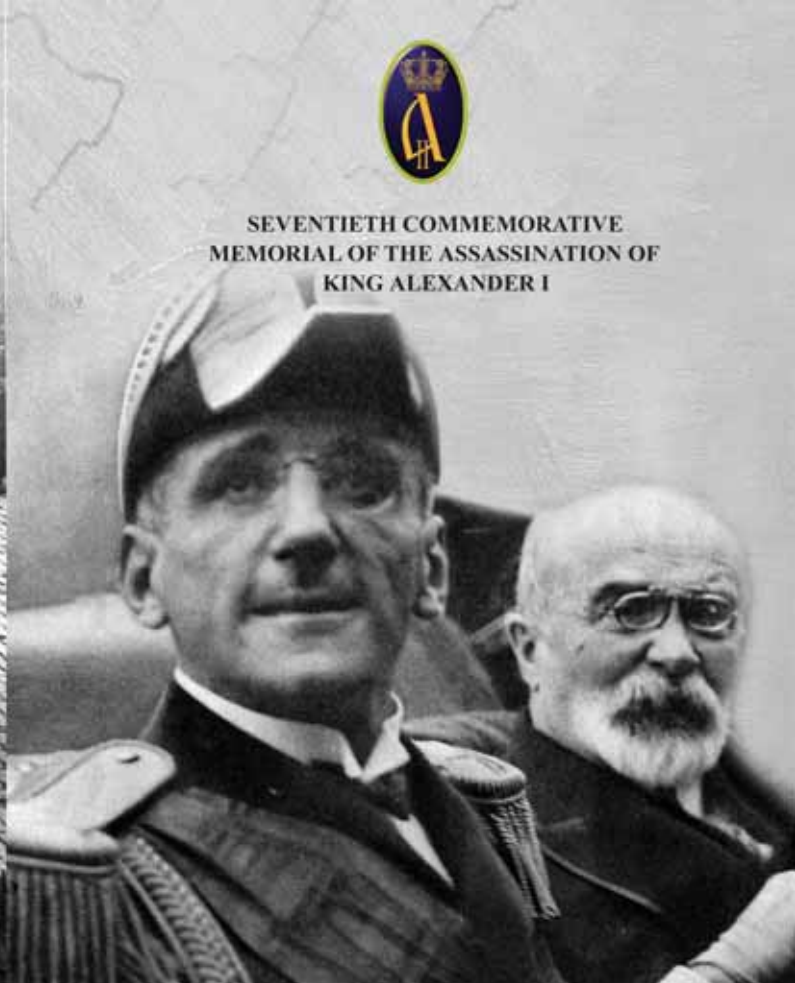


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SEVENTIETH COMMEMORATIVE  
MEMORIAL OF THE ASSASSINATION OF  
KING ALEXANDER I



Belgrade, October 9<sup>th</sup> 2004



*"Disunited through the centuries, but not estranged from one another, torn apart by crude force or shrewdness of the Roman and Byzantine Empires, Vienna and the City of Istanbul, but not defeated in our spirit, we stayed loyal by preserving the holy heritage of our ancestors. Living on the basis of unity we survived centuries of hard times, under different influences and developed, where and when we had a chance, our unity and personal characteristics, always remembering and having in mind, that we are brothers, that we are ONE".*

15 March, 1919

Crown Prince Regent Alexander



## **KING ALEXANDER I**



*King Alexander I*

King Alexander I, King of Yugoslavia, was the second son of King Peter I and the Montenegrin Princess Zorka; he was born in Cetinje, Montenegro 16 December 1888. His Godfather was Tsar Nikola II of Russia. He spent his childhood in Montenegro and was educated in Geneva. He continued his education at the Military School in St. Petersburg, and then in Belgrade, after King Peter I ascended the Serbian throne.

The twist of fate in the life of young Prince Alexander occurred in 1909, when his elder brother, Prince Djordje renounced the throne. Then as Crown Prince Alexander he started reorganizing the army, setting up for the ultimate fight against the Ottomans.

In the First Balkan War in 1912, as the commander of the First Army, Crown Prince Alexander fought victorious battles in Kumanovo and Bitola, and later in 1913, during the Second Balkan War, the battle in Bregalnica. He was the supreme commander of the Serbian army in World War I at the Cer and Kolubara battles in 1914, where the Serbian troops were victorious against the Austro-Hungarian army. In 1915 Serbia was defeated in a uneven battle for the second time by Germany and Bulgaria,. The Serbian army, which suffered many losses, withdrew through Albania to Corfu with the aged King Peter I and Crown Prince Alexander. In Corfu

the army was reorganized. When King Peter I renounced his duties owing to his illness on 11 June 1916, Crown Prince Alexander became the Regent. After the army was regrouped and reinforced, it had a glorious victory at the Thessalonica Frontline at Kajmakalan. The Serbian army carried out the final operations of the Thessalonica breakthrough in the autumn of 1918, under the supreme command of the Regent Alexander, with superb commanding officers such as Marshals Zivojin Misić, Stepa Stepanović and Peter Bojović.

Regent Alexander's military success was followed by his political accomplishments. After the decree of the National Assembly and the National Council in Zagreb, Regent Alexander proclaimed the unification of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenians into a single state on 1 December 1918. This act completed the dream of his father and great grandfather - to unify all Southern Slavs.

When King Peter I died on 16 August 1921, Regent Alexander became the King of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenians. In 1922, he married Princess Maria of Romania and they had three sons – Peter, Tomislav and Andrej.

Owing to internal politics, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenians (SCS) faced crisis caused by severe conflicts between different political parties and nations. Due to the chaotic situation in the country King Alexander I suspended the Constitution in 1929, changed the name of the state to Yugoslavia (Southslavs) and instead of the inherited historical regions reorganized the state administration by establishing nine “banovinas” (provinces). When the King estimated that the political state of affairs in the country had calmed down, he proclaimed a new Constitution in 1931 (known as the “Octroyed Constitution”). The King firmly believed that the state crisis would be permanently resolved only when the Yugoslav nation was established. King Alexander I tried to achieve that goal by implementing a policy “Yugoslav integralism”, which eventually failed.

In foreign policy, the King worked intensively on making defensive alliances against the forces that aimed at the revision of the Versailles peace treaties. The King's first achievement was the “Small Entente” alliance, proclaimed in 1921 (consisting of SCS, Romania and the Czech Republic). The alliance with France was established in 1927, and the one established later in 1934 included Yugoslavia, Romania, Turkey and Greece.

German's appearance in Danube countries unbalanced relations among the “Small Entente” and Italy, which was also supported by Austria and Hungary. France tended to support resistance towards German's breach. A suggestion by

Louis Barthou, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, about reconciliation between Italy and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was not well received in Belgrade. It was believed that France was going to sacrifice Yugoslav interests in order to secure support of Italy in confrontation with Germany. In June 1934 Barthou came to Belgrade. King Alexander's visit to France was then agreed. The King was a strong opponent of Bolshevism, Fascism and National Socialism. On the eve of

his trip to France the situation was such that King Alexander was facing a German-Italian alliance and the possible choice between Berlin and Rome. The King was not favourable towards French pressure to make concessions to Italy. That created rather unhappy feelings in Paris.



*King Alexander greets French Minister Luy Barton after they disembarked in Marseille*

In August 1934 the European newspapers wrote about King Alexander's trip to France. The preparations for the assassination were speeded up. A group of extremists was formed to prepare, together with VMRO, the assassination of King Alexander. They knew that King Alexander was going to sail to Marseille. Warned about the possibility of the assassination attempt the King was unreceptive, convinced that this was not possible.

The security question was discussed in Belgrade as well as in Paris. Information was sent from Belgrade to the French government that the assassination attempt was being prepared, a list of participants was sent and a request was made to remove them from the country, for preventive reasons. Also, it was requested that Yugoslav security bodies take part in protecting the Yugoslav King.

From Paris came the reply that they would not accept the requests, assuring the Court that all the measures would be taken to protect the King. According to historians the French authorities were unreceptive to the request for Yugoslav security and it was rejected according to the Yugoslav government's delegates Vladeta Milicevic and Spalajkovic, the envoy in Paris. The French Minister of Foreign Affairs Louis Barthou was quoted: "Let's let people look at the King freely".

It was known in Belgrade that preparations for the assassination attempt were under way but the King refused to take the warnings seriously and others in charge of his security did the same. Before setting off the King was nervous and tired; he was feeling ill, his weight was only 49 kilograms. Instead of going on the trip he should have undergone medical treatment. The atmosphere on board of “Dubrovnik” was sombre, the assassination attempts were also discussed; Queen Maria requested that the King wear a bullet proof vest, but he refused. The Queen decided not to sail. Poor weather in Herceg Novi at the time of King Alexander’s departure was not a good omen. For two days the weather was windy and only on the 9th October the sun came out. Accompanied by a French destroyer, “Dubrovnik” sailed in to Marseille around 3:30pm. Meanwhile information had reached Paris that assassins were in the port. The Marshall of Court, General Dimitrijevic, advised King Alexander not to disembark, but he refused the suggestion. The reception on shore was magnificent and gun salutes welcomed the King. The crowd was huge on shore and surrounding the ship.

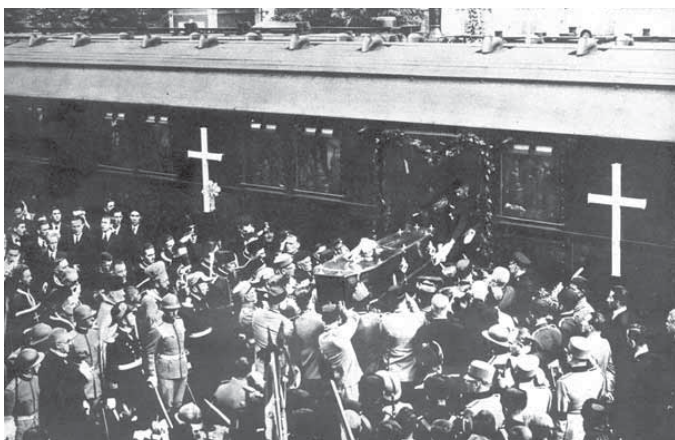


*The car in which King Alexander and Luy Barton left the port a couple minutes before the assassination*

It was difficult to move through the crowd and all the curious people, but the assassins were in midst of the crowd. The King’s car was a part of a cortege and he was seated in “Delaj” - a cabriolet. Next to King Alexander in the car was Louis Barthou, and opposite of them was General George. The cars moved slowly and the crowd was passing freely in between them. The street was narrow so the pavement was close by and there were no ranks of soldiers, uniformed policemen were standing at 8-10 m distance apart from each other. Only thirty-fourty meters were co-

vered before shots rang out. The police intervened, but it was too late. Apart from King Alexander who was mortally wounded Foreign Minister Barthou and French General Georges suffered wounds. After a few minutes of speedy driving the cars with the injured arrived in front of the prefecture police headquarters and the King was taken out of his car, but he did not show any signs of life. The physician could only have proclaimed him dead.

The following day, on the 10th October, Queen Maria arrived in Marseille. Until her arrival, the King's sister Jelena and aunt Princess Xenia were by the King's side. When Crown Prince Peter, now King Peter II arrived, the body was transferred on board the "Dubrovnik", where Queen Maria was waiting. The body of the late King was sent off by President of the French Republic Labren, Eduard Heriot, Tardier and others.



*The last goodbye to King Alexander from the citizens of Zagreb*

In Yugoslavia mourning was pronounced and on the 9th October the King's will was found. It anticipated a Regency body of three members with Prince Paul as one of its members. The mourning lasted for six months, flags were flown at half mast and the administrative and military personnel wore black ribbons. The "Dubrovnik" sailed to the old city and continued its sailing towards Split where she docked on the 14th October. The officials in charge performed an acceptance of the King's body and then the coffin was sealed. Domestic and foreign ships saluted the King for the last time. The body was taken by train to Zagreb and it lay there for the whole day in front of the main Train Station, and about 200.000 citizens of Zagreb walked past the coffin. On its way to Belgrade the train stopped a lot

for crowds of citizens. They were kneeling, crying and kissing the car of the train where the King's body was.

Around midnight on the 15th October the King's body reached Belgrade where it was met by around 100.000 people. They carried him to the big Hall in the Old Palace. The coffin lay in state there on the 16th and 17th October. The estimation was that around 600.000 people from Belgrade and other parts of the country came to see it. On the 17th October, just before midnight, the coffin was transferred to Saborna Crkva, where Patriarch Varnava with bishops held the funeral service. High officials and foreign representatives were present at the service. After the funeral service, a procession, lead by the Queen and King Peter II set off toward the Train Station, where the body was embarked on the train. From Mladenovac to Topola the coffin was met by more than 500 kneeling people, mostly farmers. The



*Queen Maria and King Peter II in front of the walk to the grave*

people were crying, mourning, wailing, women were wearing black scarves. The King, whose death they were mourning with grief, was a familiar and close personality to all of them.

The bareheaded farmers, wearing their national jackets turned up side down, took the coffin into the memorial Church of St. George in Oplenac. Bishop Nikolaj Velimirovic gave a sermon at the funeral. The crowd was entering the Church all the time, identifying themselves with the assassinated King.

The assassination in Marseille had a huge echo throughout the world and it was considered as a heavy hit for European peace. Mourners at the funeral included the French President Lebrun and Marshall Pétain, Britain's Duke of Kent (later King George VI), King Carol of Rumania, Prince Kyril of Bulgaria, Prince Paul of Greece (later King Paul of the Hellenes), Archduke Anton of Austria, the President of the German Reichstag, Herman Goering, Italian Duke of Spoleto and many others. The Russian Minister Maxim Litvinov said that the late King was the most decisive supporter of European peace. The Ecumenical Patriarch had words of praise for the late king too.



*The crying and mourning of people*



*People mourn their King*

Although the French police obtained from the arrested assassins a confession that they had been hired by Pavelic and Eugene Kvaternik and requested their extradition, the Italian government was not prepared to accept the request. The Yugoslav government announced to the world that Italy was the source of terrorists and originator of the assassination. Pavelic and Kvaternik were arrested. Mussolini convinced the French and British governments that Italy had nothing to do with the assassination and that the Yugoslav accusation was unfounded. The sharpness of the accusation was made blunt. The whole process of investigation was stopped in the mud of empty phrases and lies. France admitted her responsibility for the assassination, but everything ended there. The British government took a similar stand, and that was confirmed by ministers Anthony Eden and John Simon.



## **Anecdotes About King Alexander I**

“When I think of our glorious King, I remember all his fame and good times in our history, when we were happy and when we had King, as you have one, of your flesh and blood, Hussite Izirij from Podjebrada, who understood his people and served him in peace, as well as when the sword was needed, because he was a son of his nation. Your King is the representative of the Slav heroism. He is truly one genuine King of the Nation, who was rare and a ruler that came from the heart of his people.”

Klophac

“I am no Republican, I am no Monarchist, but King Alexander is one of the people in front of whom everyone should take a bow. That is the only ruler who shared all the hard times with his people.”

Boyer, Famous Norwegian writer

“The best characteristics of the Great King were strong will, diligence, dedication – and it is our duty to accept those characteristics of his in our public and private work, because we all know that great goals may be achieved only by strong will, diligence and dedication.”

Dr Anton Koroshec

“We are ready to give our lives for a better future in any moment, for the happiness, for the prosperity and the greatness of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and follow our immortal King to the grave, having his last word on our mind: Watch over Yugoslavia.”

R. Erber, The City Mayor of Zagreb

The small Entente and the Balkan agreement, King Alexander had the biggest role in creating it, are part of the global peace. The King's work in the foreign affairs was not finished. Europe needed His personality.

The authority of King Alexander was great, and his prestige was enormous. The breadth of his mind and his intuition, the strength of his character and the accuracy and the certainty in making decisions created him superior, whose authority imposed.

Milran, Former President of French Republic

*“The Balkans is not litter of chaos; it is a place of mutual understanding. I dare to confirm, that the relation between the countries in the Balkans is much better regulated than anywhere in Europe and that here, the danger of war is less, than in all other parts of the continent...”*

*...It is necessary for the Balkans to stay free from other influences, because the countries in the region can only then be on their own, and only then they could fulfil the people's will for peace...*

*King Alexander*