

DRAGUTIN DIMITRIJEVIĆ APIS AS A SYMBOL OF THE SERBIAN STRATEGIC CULTURE

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Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis was an intelligence officer who significantly influenced the Serbian history at the beginning of the 20th century. His turbulent, almost adventurous life ended with a rigged trial in Thessaloniki in 1917. Since then until today, in the Serbian strategic culture, Apis is a symbol of military interference in politics, and also a symbol of a patriot and a dedicated officer, depending on the needs of the ruling elites and the subculture that analysts belong to. The objective of this paper is to analyse the activities of Colonel Apis in an analytical and objective way, to describe various strategic subcultures in Serbia on the example of the attitude towards the symbol that Apis represents and to remove some misconceptions about the (mis)use of his name and legacy.

Key words: Apis, Black Hand, Karađorđević dynasty, strategic culture, Serbian political and legal system

Initial consideration

There are 75 pieces of library material in the National Library of Serbia, which contain the name of Dragutin Dimitrijević in their name. Of course, there are numerous pieces of writing in which the consequences of the actions of this important historical figure are mentioned, studied or stated. Among the authors who wrote about Colonel Apis and the secret organization he belonged to are some of the most prominent Serbian intellectuals, who marked the modern era with their work, such as Slobodan Jovanović, Milan Živanović, Milorad Ekmečić, Đorđe Stanković, Vaso Kazimirović, Dušan Bataković and many other scientists of different backgrounds, and also writers, dramatists and journalists. There are few figures in the Serbian national history who deserve by their work and actions to be mentioned, analysed and evaluated in the context of not only national, but also the world history, such as

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Colonel Apis. The attitude of Serbs towards the secret services that Apis was a prominent member of, was intriguing, according to his foreign policy engagement in important events in the Balkans in the first decades of the last century. The political topics of the relationship between the military and civilian authorities are eternal, as well as the influence of important personalities on the course of key historical events, such as the dynastic coup of 1903, the Balkan wars, the beginning of World War I and the dramatic end of the life of Apis in a rigged trial organized by a member of the Karađorđević dynasty, who came to power owing to his engagement.

All these facts are qualified by the study of biography and the consequences of Colonel Apis' actions as a person who influenced the establishment of the Serbian strategic culture, which is confirmed by the fact that he is interesting to historians, political scientists, sociologists, psychologists, lawyers, soldiers and various cultural workers not only in Serbia, but to experts dealing with the study of the Serbian history. A little more than a century after his execution, Apis became a symbol of a professional officer of undoubted importance, although he was tried from almost diametrically opposed positions. For some, it is a top Serbian patriot, who dedicated his life to Serbia and was ready to make a personal sacrifice, and for others it is an eccentric and a man who acted "on his own", out of responsibility and not according to official foreign policy defined by representatives of civilian authorities. The symbol represented by Apis has not lost its significance over time; it was relevant in the interwar period and in socialist Yugoslavia, and we are witnessing it appears in the contemporary social reality of Serbia, as well.

The biography of Apis

Dragutin Dimitrijević was born into an Aromanian family in Belgrade, on August 5, 1876. Shortly after his birth, the family moved to Kragujevac, where his father worked in an ammunition factory. Moving to Kraljevo and Niš followed, where Dragutin finished primary school in 1885, and lower grammar school in Pirot in 1889. Since he lost his father early, Dragutin was looked after by his sister Jelena and brother-in-law Živan Živanović, who brought him to Belgrade, where he completed First Belgrade Gymnasium in 1892 and was nicknamed Apis. In the same year, he enrolled in the Lower School of the Military Academy, which he completed as the sixth in the 1896 class, and as a lieutenant he was assigned to the 7th Infantry Regiment, and from 1901 he was a commander in the infantry non-commissioned officer school in Belgrade. He enrolled in the Higher School of the Military Academy in 1898, and was promoted to the rank of an infantry lieutenant in 1899. He completed his general staff training in 1905 and was promoted to a captain first class. He lived in Germany in 1906-1907, where he perfected the language and studied the strategic and doctrinal principles of the engagement of military formations of the greatest power at that time.¹ Upon his return to Serbia, he

¹ David MacKenzie, *Apis: Čovjek koji je izazvao Prvi svjetski rat - Život pukovnika Dragutina T. Dimitrijevića*, Profil, Zagreb, 2014, p. 70.

performed various duties. He was Assistant Chief of Staff of the Danube Divisional Area in Belgrade, Chief of Staff of the Drina Divisional Area in Valjevo, Battalion Commander in the 11th Infantry Regiment in Kragujevac, Chief of Staff of the Cavalry Division in Belgrade 1910-1912. Since then, besides his regular duty, he was a strategy lecturer at the Lower and Higher Academy. After the Balkan wars, he was appointed Head of the Reporting Section of the General Staff.²

The fact is that Apis was not „the spiritual leader” of the May Coup³, but only one of the perpetrators, whose role was significant because in critical moments he encouraged and led the wavering putschists to the court.⁴ During the entry of the putschists into the court’s building Apis was seriously wounded by a guard with several shots. According to eyewitnesses, he did not allow to be helped until the intention of the putschists was carried out. Having barely survived the wounds that became infected, he was transferred to Vienna and Nice for treatment, which was paid by King Peter I Karađorđević. After the May Coup, Apis became better known to general public.⁵

The violent change of government in Belgrade, especially the cruelty shown by the conspirators, was very negatively received in the dynastic centres of power in Europe at the time.⁶ Even in modern times, the May Coup is cited among experts in the West as an example of “barbarism” and the essential character of Serbs.

² For more details, see: Mile Bjelajac, “Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis” in Čedomir Popov (ed.), *Srpski bibliografski rečnik*, 3, D 3, Matica srpska, Novi Sad, 2007, pp. 223-224; David MacKenzie, *Apis: Čovjek koji je izazvao Prvi svjetski rat - Život pukovnika Dragutina T. Dimitrijevića*, Profil, Zagreb, 2014, pp. 13-60; Strahinja Jeremić, “Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis i Karađorđevići (od majskog prevrata 1903. do solunskog procesa 1917)”, *Vojno delo* 5/2017, p. 450.

³ It is the dynastic coup that was carried out at dawn on May 29 according to the old calendar (June 11 according to the new one) 1903, by the conspirators against King Alexander Obrenović and Queen Draga, who were killed in an extremely cruel way and thrown from the balcony of the court. Quoted from: Vasa Kazimirović, *Crna ruka – ličnosti i događaji u Srbiji od majskog prevrata 1903. do solunskog procesa 1917*, Prometej, Novi Sad, 2016, pp. 67-156.

⁴ Apis was introduced among the conspirators by Lieutenant Antonije Antić, son-in-law of Dr Đorđe Genčić, one of the few civilians who supported the conspirators and a prominent leader of the Liberal Party. By hiring Apis, Antić counted on his determination, honesty and popularity among younger members of the officer corps. Colonel Aleksandar Mašin, Damjan Popović and Leonid Solarević were prominent military conspirators. For more see: Mile Bjelajac, “Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis” in Čedomir Popov (ed.), *Srpski bibliografski rečnik*, 3, D 3, Matica srpska, Novi Sad, 2007, p. 224; Strahinja Jeremić, “Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis i Karađorđevići (od majskog prevrata 1903. do solunskog procesa 1917)”, *Vojno delo* 5/2017, pp. 450-451.

⁵ Our famous lawyer Slobodan Jovanović also writes about this, *Apis*, “Moji Savremenici”, Vindzor, Kanada, 1962. Cited according to Živanović Ž. Milan, *Pukovnik Apis, Solunski proces, hiljadu devetsto sedamnaeste*, Beograd, 1955 (fototipsko izdanje 2015), pp. 759-772.

⁶ For more details, see: Milorad Ekmečić, *Istorija Srba u novom veku 1492-1992*, Zavod za udžbenike, Beograd, 2008, pp. 326-327; Milorad Ekmečić, *Stvaranje Jugoslavije 1790-1918*, Vol. II, Prosveta, Beograd, 1989, pp. 394-395; Vasilij Popović, *Evropa i srpsko pitanje u periodu oslobođenja 1804-1918*, Geca Kon, Beograd, 1940, pp. 142-146; Stevan K. Pavlović, *Istorija Balkana 1804-1945*, Klio, Beograd, 2004, pp. 255-257; David MacKenzie, *Apis: Čovjek koji je izazvao Prvi svjetski rat - Život pukovnika Dragutina T. Dimitrijevića*, Profil, Zagreb, 2014, p. 60.

The Coup had a very negative effect on the foreign policy position of the Kingdom of Serbia, so in 1903 Prime Minister Nikola Pašić asked King Peter I Karađorđević to replace the conspirators, which the King did not accept.⁷ Under the influence of newspaper articles, the government in London took the stance not to recognize the new government in Serbia until the conspirators were punished. At the same time, the British ambassador to Serbia was ordered to leave Belgrade, which ultimately resulted in the severance of diplomatic relations. France, Germany and Italy had similar views on the recognition of the new government in Serbia, while Austria-Hungary and Russia recognized the new regime due to the fear of a civil war in Serbia and previous consultations with representatives of the conspirators.⁸

The May Coup of 1903 was the first step towards ending the policy of cooperation with Vienna, which was the foreign policy and economic support of the Obrenović dynasty. The Karađorđević dynasty came to power in Serbia, trying to harmonise its foreign policy with Russia and France in the long run, and since 1907 with Great Britain, as well.⁹ The consequence of the May Coup is shying away from Serbia in the dynastic circles throughout Europe, but it had a particularly negative effect on relations with Vienna, which in 1906 declared the Customs War against Serbia and imposed an economic blockade. Serbia managed to redirect its trade and develop its industry and thus free itself from the economic dependence on Vienna, but that did not solve the problem.¹⁰

However, in 1906, the older conspirators were replaced, but Apis remained in the service, as one of the promising officers close to the royal family. His reputation in the military and society grew. After the Coup, the concept of “conspirators” was introduced into the political life of the young Serbian Kingdom, which was an increasingly important political factor in internal and later foreign policy. The conspirators were soon classified into younger and older, and Apis became the informal leader of the younger generation that supported Pašić’s radicals and King Peter, and later opted for Alexander as the heir to the throne. The conspirators were actively involved in the Chetnik activities in the Old Serbia and Macedonia, and after

⁷ After the coup, Putnik, as the Minister of War, retired a group of officers including Colonel Živojin Mišić. Although there was no official explanation, it is believed that Mišić was retired due to the criticism of the conspirators, which he considered “the gravediggers of discipline in the army”. One of the proofs of such attitudes was the letter by Mišić’s daughter, in which she stated her father’s bad opinion of the conspirators. Quoted according to Vasa Kazimirović, *Crna ruka – ličnosti i događaji u Srbiji od majske prevrata 1903. do solunskog procesa 1917*, Prometej, Novi Sad, 2016, pp. 233-236.

⁸ Ljubodrag P. Ristić, *Srbija u britanskoj politici 1889-1903*, Balkanološki institut SANU, Beograd, 2014, pp. 498-506.

⁹ Čedomir Popov, *Građanska Evropa (1770-1914)*, Društvena i politička istorija Evrope (1871-1914), Zavod za udžbenike, Beograd, 2010, p. 201.

¹⁰ For more details, see: Vladimir Đorović, *Odnosi između Srbije i Austrougarske u 20. veku*, Biblioteka grada Beograda, Beograd, 1992; Veljko Blagojević, Stanislav Stojanović, “Zašto rat, a ne međunarodni kongres 1914. godine? – neuspeh diplomatije i uloga Srbije u događajima koji su prethodili Velikom ratu”, *Vojno delo*, 3/2015, p. 332.

the Annexation Crisis (1908), they became involved in internal and foreign policy plan and came into conflict with Pašić.¹¹ Since Christians from the Old Serbia and Macedonia unsuccessfully sought assistance from the Serbian officials in opposing Young Turks, the conspirators met their needs and provided assistance.

Shortly afterwards the secret organization "Unification or Death" was established, better known as the Black Hand. There are different opinions about the role of Apis in its establishment, and he is often attributed a key role. However, according to his confession, he was not among the founders, but was invited to join the organization, which already had seven members, at the initiative of Bogdan Radenković and Velimir Vemić. Apis agreed to be a member under conditions they did not count much on him, due to his professional obligations.¹² Crown Prince Alexander Karađorđević initially financially supported their magazine *Pijemont*, which began to be published in 1911. However, a few years later, Alexander was increasingly surrounded by members of the other group of conspirators, the so-called White Hand¹³, such as Petar Živković and Josif Kostić. They tried to present Apis as ill-intentioned, so the heir to the throne began to shy away from him.¹⁴

Before the beginning of the Balkan wars, Apis secretly organized the support of the Christian population for the future conflict in the Turkish territory, by the order of General Radomir Putnik and tried unsuccessfully to negotiate cooperation with the Albanian leaders. He then became seriously ill with Maltese fever and did not take part in war.¹⁵ The entire officer corps clashed with Pašić over the organization of power in the New areas, which resulted in the abdication of King Peter and snap elections that were not conducted due to the beginning of World War I. Mile Bjelajac, an authority in this field of historical sciences, points out the following about the role of Apis in the preparation of the Sarajevo Assassination: "Dragutin Dimitrijević and his associates

¹¹ Although he was very useful in his efforts and worked tirelessly for the accomplishment of national goals, Dimitrijević proved to be quite incompetent and naive in politics. His political ideas remained unclear and poorly defined, but with his natural militancy he recklessly expanded his influence on the court and government. This inevitably brought him into conflict with the ruling radicals. Pašić and some people at the court considered him a dangerous and irresponsible contender for power. Quoted from: David MacKenzie, *Apis: Čovjek koji je izazvao Prvi svjetski rat - Život pukovnika Dragutina T. Dimitrijevića*, Profil, Zagreb, 2014, p. 71.

¹² For more details see: David MacKenzie, *Apis: Čovjek koji je izazvao Prvi svjetski rat - Život pukovnika Dragutina T. Dimitrijevića*, Profil, Zagreb, 2014, pp. 78-93; Strahinja Jeremić, "Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis i Karađorđevići (od majskog prevrata 1903. do solunskog procesa 1917)", *Vojno delo* 5/2017, p. 451.

¹³ For more see David MacKenzie, *Apis: Čovjek koji je izazvao Prvi svjetski rat - Život pukovnika Dragutina T. Dimitrijevića*, Profil, Zagreb, 2014, pp. 94-107.

¹⁴ Mile Bjelajac, "Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis" in Čedomir Popov (ed.), *Srpski bibliografski rečnik*, 3, D 3, Matica srpska, Novi Sad, 2007, pp. 223-225.

¹⁵ Some of the authors state that he was poisoned by Albanians, which confirms the claims that various stories and rumours about Apis have always been circulating, not only after the Thessaloniki process, but also during his lifetime. For more on Colonel Apis' intelligence operation in Kosovo and Metohija, see: Aleksandar Životić, "Apis na Kosovu 1912. godine", *Vojnoistorijski glasnik*, 1-2/2005, pp. 44-57.

helped the execution of the Assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo. They actively helped and encouraged the youth of 'Young Bosnia' to carry out the assassination. Apis believed that the disappearance of Ferdinand would remove the danger to Serbia because he considered him the main holder of warmongering policy. When he found out about Apis' decision, the Main board of the secret organization did not approve it and he promised to issue other instructions".¹⁶

The events that followed caused an avalanche of articles in the European press, which have not yet "forgotten" the cruelty of the conspirators during the May Coup, and it did not take long for the Serbian secret services to be accused of organizing the assassination. The Austro-Hungarian ultimatum to Serbia followed, which started a war whirlwind in Europe and brought great victims and destruction around the world. Although no great power seriously counted on the military power of Serbia before the beginning of the war, it turned out that Serbs won the first victories of the allies in World War I (the Battle of Cer and Kolubara). Austria-Hungary, mainly engaged on the Eastern Front, was not able to defeat Serbia on its own. It succeeded only after the engagement of German and Bulgarian forces in 1915. The Serbian government and army, squeezed into the territory of Kosovo and Metohija in November 1915, decided not to sign the capitulation, but to withdraw to the coast through the territory of Montenegro and Albania.

After the collapse of Serbia, a new Supreme Command was formed in Shkodra because the seriously ill Duke Putnik was relieved of his duty and sent for treatment. Thus Colonel Apis was left without support. An attempt to reconcile two opposing factions in the Serbian officer corps failed in Corfu.¹⁷ Apis was deployed to the front in the army of General Miloš Vasić, who was not in his favour. While he was engaged at the front, he did not deal with politics, but politics dealt with him;¹⁸ the White Hand and Crown Prince Alexander were preparing for the final showdown.¹⁹

¹⁶ Mile Bjelajac, "Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis" in Čedomir Popov (ed.), *Srpski bibliografski rečnik*, 3, D 3, Matica srpska, Novi Sad, 2007, pp. 223-225.

¹⁷ The newly elected Minister of War, General Božidar Terzić, persuaded Apis to renounce all political activities and stay away from everything except military duties. Terzić pointed out that he would no longer tolerate any involvement in politics. Apis denied that he was involved in politics, but said that he would never stop being interested in the national issues of Serbia. Dimitrijević and Terzić parted, each still strongly defending his position. Quoted from David MacKenzie, *Apis: Čovjek koji je izazvao Prvi svjetski rat - Život pukovnika Dragutina T. Dimitrijevića*, Profil, Zagreb, 2014, p. 261.

¹⁸ Asked by a close associate about his future plans, Apis replied: "We have to tell our friends to dedicate themselves to their military service because our main problem is to get out of this catastrophe and return to our homeland, and that moment will surely come. If we survive, then we can meet and talk." It is clear from this statement that Apis had no plans for political engagement during the war. By the way, he participated in the conspiracy with those associates in 1903 and trusted them immensely. Quoted from David MacKenzie, *Apis: Čovjek koji je izazvao Prvi svjetski rat - Život pukovnika Dragutina T. Dimitrijevića*, Profil, Zagreb, 2014, p. 262.

¹⁹ Often subjective due to his family ties with Apis, Milan Živanović points out that Alexander and his associates, back in Kragujevac in 1914, had the idea of liquidating Apis by a hired killer. In Corfu in 1916, an orderly, a major by rank, allegedly offered to liquidate Dimitrijević, but that intention was abandoned. They wanted not only to kill Apis, but also to exclude all members of the

Colonel Apis was arrested on an indictment for plotting to assassinate Crown Prince Alexander, along with a group of conspirators, including Major Ljuba Vulović, Rade Malobabić and Muhamed Mehmedbašić. A false witness was found, who testified by the order of the conspirators including the Minister of the Interior and War, and also General Pavle Jurišić Šturm.²⁰ At the Thessaloniki process, which the historian Bjelajac said was “the political murder rather than a legal trial”,²¹ Apis, Vulović and Malobabić were sentenced to death by firing squad. During the trial, Apis behaved with dignity and did not give up his principles and attitudes. He wrote a secret report in which he explained his role in the Sarajevo Assassination, which still provokes different interpretations, but was not considered during the trial. However, it is believed that this report contributed to Pašić not asking for pardon for Apis. During his imprisonment, Colonel Apis wrote his last will, in which, among other things, he says: “I am dying innocent, but with the knowledge that Serbia needs my death for some higher reasons. Maybe, not wanting to, I made a mistake in my work as a patriot... Maybe I did not know about the Serbian interests. But, even if I am guilty of that, I know that I only worked for the benefit of Serbia...”²² The verdict was executed on June 24, 1917, when he was only 41 years old. Thus ended the life and career of one of the most controversial officers in the Serbian history.

Apis' shadow in the interwar period

In the accusations that the Serbian government and secret services are to blame for the outbreak of World War I, a Serb, former professor of international law at the University of Belgrade and diplomat Miloš Bogićević, especially “stood out as the executor of works”.²³ The damage to the Serbian interests that Bogićević caused in

Black Hand from the army. Stated according to Živanović Ž. Milan, *Pukovnik Apis, Solunski proces, hiljadu devetsto sedamnaeste*, Beograd, 1955 (fototipsko izdanje 2015. godine), p. 51; Mile Bjelajac, “Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis” in Čedomir Popov (ed.), *Srpski bibliografski rečnik*, 3, D 3, Matica srpska, Novi Sad, 2007, p. 225.

²⁰ It is interesting to note that Šturm, of Sorbian origin, educated in Germany, certainly did not have an understanding for the actions of officers in secret associations, no matter how justified and legitimate it seemed. The different strategic culture of the German society can be seen in this example. If he has to choose, German will opt for legitimacy and support to the ruler in the Serbian Army. By the way, Šturm was an excellent professional, loyal to Serbia, which he proved by his entire military career, which does not lag behind the career of the Serbian dukes in terms of achievements and merits.

²¹ Mile Bjelajac, “Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis” in Čedomir Popov (ed.), *Srpski bibliografski rečnik*, 3, D 3, Matica srpska, Novi Sad, 2007, p. 225.

²² Srđan Graovac, Crna ruka i Solunski proces 1917, Kulturni centar Novog Sada, October 16, 2018, <https://www.kcns.org.rs/agora/crna-ruka-i-solunski-proces-1917-godine/>, accessed December 24, 2019.

²³ Bogićević was the charge d'affaires of the Embassy of the Kingdom of Serbia in Berlin from 1907 to 1914. At the personal intervention of King Peter Karađorđević in 1904, he was appointed secretary of the Embassy in Paris, and three years later he became the charge d'affaires of the

Berlin is tremendous. During the war, he was fired from the Serbian diplomatic service because the French counterintelligence service documented his intelligence work in favour of the German service in 1915.²⁴ In the interwar period, he continued to act in favour of the German propaganda, so in 1919 he published the book "The Causes of War" in Switzerland, which accuses Serbia and Russia for the outbreak of the war. After that, his name and status of a former Serbian diplomat were used to support revisionist theses in relation to the decisions of the Versailles Conference.²⁵ It is interesting to note that Bogičević criticized almost everything and everyone in Serbia, but never Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis, his personal friend and the man who was a great patriot and a victim of Pašić's hypocrisy according to him.

With the disappearance of Colonel Apis from life scene, the Black Hand essentially ceased to exist. Its members were convicted, and then pardoned. Most of them received pension. The well-known Black Hand sympathizers are, as a rule, labelled and systematically transferred to secondary duties in the army or retired.²⁶

In contrast, the White Hand organization experienced full affirmation, which lasted until the assassination of King Alexander in Marseilles in 1934. Petar Živković became a general and the closest associate of the King, at the same time the Guard commander,²⁷ and he submitted his reports only to King Alexander. During the

Serbian Embassy in Berlin. It is documented that Bogičević left Cairo in 1915 and travelled to neutral Switzerland, where he received a German passport from their Embassy in Bern and travelled with it to Berlin, without the knowledge of Belgrade. He was among the first diplomats to openly join the Black Hand for friendship with Apis. He published three books: *The Thessaloniki Process*, *Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis* and *The Foreign Policy of Serbia*, which compromised him the most. He spent his retirement days in Berlin, and in the spring of 1938 he submitted a request to be allowed to return to the country. The authorities in Belgrade at the time were convinced that he had submitted the request by Hitler's order. Shortly afterwards, he was found dead in a Berlin hotel. It remained unknown whether he committed suicide or was killed. Quoted according to Kazimirović Vasa, *Crna ruka – ličnosti i događaji u Srbiji od majske prevrata 1903. do solunskog procesa 1917.*, Prometej, Novi Sad, 2016, p. 714; Vladimir Jovanović, "Bogičević Miloš", *Srpski biografski rečnik* 1, AB, Matica Srpska, Novi Sad, 2004, p. 625-626.

²⁴ It has been documented that Bogičević left Cairo in 1915 and travelled to neutral Switzerland, where he received a German passport from their Embassy in Bern and travelled with it to Berlin, without the knowledge of Belgrade.

²⁵ For more details see: Mile Bjelajac, *1914-2014 Zašto revizija – stare i nove kontroverze o uzrocima Prvog svetskog rata*, MC Odbrana, 2014, pp. 111-117.

²⁶ A number of members of the Black Hand sided with the Russian authorities after the February revolution including Mustafa Golubić, an intelligence officer and liquidator of the Comintern, and Božen Simić, who returned to Yugoslavia in 1935, and was later a member of the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia and Yugoslav ambassador to Ankara. Stated according to Živanović Ž. Milan, *Pukovnik Apis, Solunski proces, hiljadu devetsto sedamnaeste*, Beograd, 1955. (fototipsko izdanje 2015. godine), pp. 659, 414-417; Kazimirović Vasa, *Crna ruka – ličnosti i događaji u Srbiji od majske prevrata 1903. do solunskog procesa 1917.*, Prometej, Novi Sad, 2016, p. 675.

²⁷ The Guard was in many ways a specific unit. According to the Decree on the competencies of officers from 1923, it was directly subordinated to the First King's Adjutant, and he was directly subordinated to King. The Guard formation grew continuously, from a small and protocol unit, to a

dictatorship of January 6, 1929, he was appointed Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The White Hand and General Petar Živković, its undisputed leader, were the grey eminence of the authorities in the Kingdom of SCS/Yugoslavia.²⁸

It can be said that from the beginning of the 20th century until the military collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the April War, the army was under the influence of various military cliques. For the period from the May Coup to 1916, the Black Hand was the primary one, and after the Thessaloniki process, the White Hand took over. Although there are many other reasons, which refer to unresolved political issues in Yugoslavia, one of the reasons for the military defeat is the great interference of King Alexander in military profession, in which the White Hand had one of the key roles.

One of the greatest problems of the Royal Yugoslav Army was personnel policy and the change of doctrine in which King Alexander had a decisive influence, in consultation with members of the White Hand. The backbone of the newly established army, which had 8,864 officers per formation, consisted of personnel of the victorious Kingdom of Serbia (3,500) and the Montenegrin Army (469), as well as the defeated Austro-Hungarian Army (2,590).²⁹ The Serbian officer corps suffered heavy losses during the Balkan wars and World War I. The educated and experienced officer personnel of the Kingdom of Serbia was mainly out of active service, and war veterans, who mostly did not graduate from the Military Academy, came to their positions. Moreover, on the initiative of King Alexander, the competencies of the Chief of the General Staff were reduced at the expense of the Ministry of War, which began with the new Law on the Army and Navy from 1923. Until 1926, almost all positions in the Ministry of War were occupied by members of the White Hand.³⁰

History rarely records that a victorious state changes the doctrine that has been proven in war. This was the case with the Kingdom of SCS/Yugoslavia, which adopted the doctrine of positional and abandoned the doctrine of manoeuvre warfare, which brought the Kingdom of Serbia the greatest victories in the Balkan wars and World War I. As Dalibor Denda points out: „... fast marching and skillful manoeuvring, the widest implementation of initiative and surprise, skillful use of terrain and masking, the closest mutual assistance of infantry and artillery in attack

serious and numerous formation that was engaged in peacetime by the order of commander, without usual procedure that included the chain of command from the Minister of War, through the government, to King Alexander. Stated according to Mile Bjelajac, *Vojska Kraljevine SHS/ Jugoslavije 1922-1935*, Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, Beograd, 1994, p. 37.

²⁸ Mile Bjelajac, *Generali i admirali Kraljevine Jugoslavije 1918-1941*, Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, Beograd, 2004, pp. 29-38.

²⁹ In addition to them, the ethnic structure of the officer corps of the new army included 12 Russians and 3 Albanians, as well.

³⁰ Dalibor Denda, "War Veterans and Peace-time Military Service – Yugoslav Experience after WWI", in Andrzej Krzak & Dariusz Gregorczyk (ed.) *The Art of War in the Balkans from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century*, Jan Dlugosz University in Czeszosthova, Poland, 2018.

and defence, and also versatile use of night and Chetnik (guerrilla) actions, were the basis of the national tactical doctrine of the Serbian Army...³¹ It is the Prussian model that was carefully and systematically developed in the Serbian Army since the establishment of the Artillery School, and its persistent protagonist and executor was Duke Radomir Putnik. In contrast, the first Yugoslavia adopted the French model based on the doctrine of positional warfare, which favoured firepower over manoeuvre. The principle of centralized command was adopted, and subordinates were only expected to perform tasks and self-initiative of those who, as a rule, knew the situation in the field better, as well as the state of their and enemy forces, was not allowed. This became particularly expressed after signing the agreement between the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and France on cooperation in the field of defence. The consequences of that were visible in the April War, although defeatism and betrayal should be added to that.³²

The sympathizers and admirers of Colonel Apis and the Black Hand were very dissatisfied and disappointed with the new state, its internal policy and the situation in the army. The spirit of that time is best seen in historical research, as well as in the literature that dealt with that time (the novel "Čizmaši" by academician Dragoslav Mihailović, "Knjiga o Milutinu" by Danko Popović and many other works).

Several initiatives were unsuccessfully launched for the rehabilitation of Colonel Apis, but they were not accepted because King Alexander and the secret organization White Hand were in power. The appearance of an unsigned pamphlet entitled "Thessaloniki Process 1916-1917", in Belgrade in 1923, again aroused speculation about the alleged causal connection of the Thessaloniki process with the negotiations on separate peace with Austria-Hungary. The pamphlet insists that "internal reasons coincided with foreign policy necessity". The conclusion points out that "members of the Black Hand were not executed due to some personal guilt, but for political reasons".³³

The territory of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was dismembered in 1941, after the military defeat and capitulation, which annulled all Serbian efforts for life in a common state. The Independent State of Croatia was created, and other territories were distributed to neighbouring countries as a kind of war booty. Serbs were particularly exposed to persecution, conversion to Catholicism and facing physical extermination. The Chetnik and partisan military formations were established, in which the majority were oppressed Serbs, and their mutual conflicts were often fratricidal. Serbs unequivocally paid the highest price of World War II in the territory of Yugoslavia.

³¹ Dalibor Denda, *Šlem i šajkača – vojni faktor i jugoslovensko-nemački odnosi (1918-1941)*, Matica Srpska, Novi Sad, 2019, p. 64.

³² For more details, see: Dalibor Denda, *Šlem i šajkača – vojni faktor i jugoslovensko-nemački odnosi (1918-1941)*, Matica Srpska, Novi Sad, 2019.

³³ Miloš Kazimirović, "Sto godina od streljanja Apisa: Život posle smrti", *Politika*, June 27, 2017. <http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/383832/Drustvo/Zivot-posle-smrti#!>, accessed on December 12, 2019.

Apis as a symbol in the Socialist Yugoslavia

After World War II, the new Yugoslav state faced great challenges of international recognition, as well as the security and political challenge regarding the fate of the so-called free territory of Trieste, and also the hostile actions of Albanian nationalists and other counter-revolutionary forces, as political dissidents were called then. At that time, Josip Broz Tito was one of rather warmongering followers of the Comintern and actively helped the communist movements in Albania and Greece, which was at a civil war. The ultimate goal was the establishment of the Balkan Federation, in which Josip Broz saw himself as a leader. It is certain that Stalin did not approve of such aspirations.

In such circumstances, Tito came into conflict with Stalin, and in addition to political (ideological) conflicts, border armed incidents became more frequent. The Socialist Yugoslavia was systematically and organizedly preparing for possible military intervention by the Soviet bloc. The West was initially suspicious of the seriousness of a potential conflict, but after demonstrating the Yugoslav communists' determination to oppose Soviets, it began to provide military assistance to them. Preparations for the establishment of a military alliance between Yugoslavia, Turkey and Greece, as a NATO member, began.³⁴

In such international circumstances, the Yugoslav socialist (communist) government, through the media, launched an initiative to renew the Thessaloniki process in April 1953. The initiator was Aleksandar Ranković, Federal Secretary for Internal Affairs, one of the most influential figures of the political elite at that time. This was not accidental because the socialist (communist) government implemented the principle that personnel from ethnic corps "deals with counter-revolutionary and retrograde personalities and ideas" among them. A public letter sent to the Public Prosecutor of the People's Republic of Serbia stated that new information had been obtained regarding the character of the Thessaloniki process and that "at the end of last year (1952) the Minister of Interior of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia received a letter, which convicted major Ljubomir Vulović, before his execution on June 12, 1917³⁵ wrote to his friend Todor Mihailović in the Thessaloniki prison".³⁶ A quick reaction from the Public Prosecutor of the People's Republic of Serbia followed, so the Supreme Court decided to renew the court procedure. In the same year, at the trial held from June 2 to 13, it was decided that the decisions of the Thessaloniki process be declared null and void and that the convicted persons should be acquitted.³⁷

³⁴ For more details see: Darko Bekić, *Jugoslavija u hladnom ratu (odnosi sa velikim silama 1948-1955)*, Globus, Zagreb, 1988; Nemanja Milošević (ed.), *Zbornik radova Balkanski pakt 1953/1954*, Institut za strategijska istraživanja, Beograd, 2008.

³⁵ The date is mentioned according to the Julian calendar.

³⁶ Živanović Ž. Milan, *Pukovnik Apis, Solunski proces, hiljadu devetsto sedamnaeste*, Beograd, 1955. (fototipsko izdanje 2015. godine), p. 619.

³⁷ Živanović Ž. Milan, *ibid.*

The socialist authorities did not have just and legitimate motives for resuming the trial to Colonel Apis and his comrades. There was an intention to use the symbol of Colonel Apis at a national and foreign policy level by renewing the Thessaloniki process. The atmosphere created by persecution and captivity on Goli Otok and other casemates, as well as forcible confiscation of property, needed to be relaxed³⁸. Furthermore, any thought of the Serbian national corps that the Karađorđević dynasty would return to the country had to be removed. There was an intention to show that the former dynasty was unscrupulous towards those who brought it to power, unlike the socialist government, which took care of its “orthodox” comrades. There was clear and unequivocal evidence for that and there was no need to make a special effort and explain who Colonel Apis was and what he did because he was known to general population and placed in a mythical context during his lifetime. His tragic end only contributed to the strengthening of the mythical elements of his activities to the symbol of an uncompromising fighter for national liberation and a great intelligence officer. Therefore, he was portrayed in the national press as a revolutionary, who, like communists, did not shy away from destroying tradition and rules of political behaviour and actions.³⁹

At a foreign policy level, the revision of the Thessaloniki process was supposed to present the new communist government as fair and committed to respecting legal procedures, unlike the former government, and thus make it easier for the Western centres of power to explain the military and economic assistance to the communist authorities to national public. The time context of launching the initiative for the renewal of the Thessaloniki process should not be forgotten. At that time, Yugoslavia received significant military assistance, mostly from the United States, and negotiations were under way to sign a defence alliance with Turkey and Greece. By some kind of specific acceptance of Yugoslavia in the preparations for the defence of the southern wing of the Alliance, NATO significantly strengthened and expanded strategic and operational depth of potential battlefield in the event of a conflict with the Soviet bloc. Therefore, there was no political will to criticize the renewal of the politically motivated legal process, nor there was a need for that or formal legal reasons.

When it comes to circumstances and consequences of the revision of the trial against Apis and his comrades in 1953, the claims of historians that the ideological creator for initiating the procedure was Moša Pijade seem more realistic. Namely, he was a member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts’ commission for the evaluation of the doctorate of Apis’ nephew Milan Živanović, who dedicated his life to redressing this injustice. The commission worked on the evaluation of this doctorate since March 1952, and there is no doubt that Pijade was acquainted in detail with the

³⁸ For more details see: Desimir Tomić, *Kolektivizacija u Jugoslaviji 1949-1953*, Službeni list SRJ, Beograd, 2002.

³⁹ For more details on myths, see: Vojislav Stanovčić, *Politička teorija I*, Službeni glasnik, Beograd, 2008, pp. 279-283.

Thessaloniki process.⁴⁰ He was one of the most prominent ideologues of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, a pre-war journalist⁴¹ and the founder of Tanjug, a polyglot and an intellectual who understood international politics. An additional argument to this claim can be the fact that almost all media in the socialist (communist) Yugoslavia reported on the renewed Thessaloniki process. Who, if not a former journalist, will understand the importance of the media attention for the formation of public opinion and its consequences on political life.

It can be argued with certainty that the renewal of the trial against Apis and his comrades has achieved the expected effect both at a national and foreign policy level. This indicates the planned and systematic action of communists in creating the notion that the new government is a just, reliable and predictable foreign policy partner. It is important to emphasize that the renewed Thessaloniki process discussed only, and exclusively, the evidence related to the 1917 indictment, but not other important events in which Apis participated, such as the May Coup in 1903 or the Sarajevo Assassination in 1914.

Concluding remarks

The fate of Colonel Apis is known, but his significance as a symbol of a selfless and self-sacrificing Serbian patriotic officer, a member of the secret service and a conspirator is rarely analysed. The fact that contemporaries of different professional, political and value orientations refer to Apis as a symbol indicates the importance of studying his personality from the aspect of strategic culture.

Apis is mentioned as “a shining example of patriotism and sacrifice for the Serbian cause”, and also as the leader of the dynastic coup, who acted contrary to legal order and thus brought unprepared Serbia into the war against great powers. In modern times, for example, Dobrica Ćosić compared Apis with James Bond, and writer Biljana Srbljanović with Vojislav Koštunica.

According to the classification of the Serbian strategic subcultures carried out by Milan Igrutinović,⁴² the attitudes of the national liberation and national liberal strategic subcultures in relation to Apis as a symbol can be unambiguously differentiated.⁴³ While the national liberation subculture treats Apis with great

⁴⁰ Živanović Ž. Milan, *Pukovnik Apis, Solunski proces, hiljadu devetsto sedamnaeste*, Beograd, 1955. (fototipsko izdanje 2015. godine), pp. 638-639.

⁴¹ Pijade was one of the constant associates of the Black Hand's newspaper *Pijemont*, so some authors concluded that he was close to the circles around Apis, and perhaps a member of the Black Hand organization. Quoted from Strahinja Jeremić, “Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis i Karađorđevići (od majskog prevrata 1903. do solunskog procesa 1917)”, *Vojno delo* 5/2017, pp. 520-521.

⁴² Milan J. Igrutinović, “Blumfildov model potkultura i moguća primena u razumevanju strateške kulture Srbije”, *Vojno delo*, 8/2019, pp. 273-293.

⁴³ Filip Ejodus has dealt with the mentioned topic earlier and conducted a similar classification of the Serbian strategic culture. Compare: Filip Ejodus, “Bezbednost, kultura i identitet u Srbiji”, *Bezbednost Zapadnog Balkana*, No. 7-8, October 2007 – March 2008, pp. 65-93.

reverence and respect for his sacrifice and largely neglects his extra-institutional activities, the national liberal subculture considers him a negative example of the irresponsible interference of professional soldiers into politics, resulting in great victims and suffering of Serbs.

Even in modern times, Apis is a very current symbol in the political and public life of Serbia. In 2015, the Union of War Veterans of the National Liberation Wars of Serbia and the Association of Old Warriors and Descendants launched an initiative to transfer Apis' remains from Thessaloniki to Belgrade and bury them with his comrades on Kalemegdan with state honours. The supporters of this initiative point out that it is a contribution to the culture of memory and tradition of Serbs. This was opposed by many representatives of the national liberal strategic subculture including the views of the historian Olga Manojlović Pintar, who emphasized that Apis was "a man who is (used to be) the initiator and organizer of two assassinations" and therefore could not be a role model to young generations in Serbia. She has also wondered what values Serbia stands for today.⁴⁴

A similar assessment about Colonel Apis is made by many Western experts who study the Serbian strategic culture including the controversial Australian historian Christopher Clark. They tend to view Serbs as barbarians who are to blame for all the misfortunes that befell the Balkans in the 20th century. It is the fact that they have remembered the May Coup and Apis a century later, after the assassination of the Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić. These events have been "read" in those analytical circles as continuity of uncivilized problem-solving in the Serbian society. It should not be emphasized that political assassinations are, unfortunately, a phenomenon to which no society is resistant and there are such examples in historical heritage of other, if not all, nations.

The statement by the former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and Deputy Secretary of Defense Karl Deutch can be analysed on the basis of the same way of thinking, who, in the context of the analysis of "the deep state" phenomenon in the US contemporary political reality, has mentioned the example of Colonel Apis and the secret organization Black Hand. He pointed out that the May Coup in 1903 and the organization of the Sarajevo Assassination in 1914 were the consequence of the activities of Colonel Apis and his secret organization and were an example of the actions of "the deep state".⁴⁵

By giving an adequate and realistic measure to the mentioned dichotomous attitudes about Apis as a symbol, we would not only provide essential lessons for the present and the future, but we would also have the opportunity to get closer, at least

⁴⁴ Miloš Kazimirović, "Sto godina od streljanja Apisa: Život posle smrti", *Politika*, June 27, 2017. <http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/383832/Drustvo/Zivot-posle-smrti#>, accessed on December 12, 2019.

⁴⁵ Deutch also served as Deputy Secretary of Defense of the United States in the administration of President Bill Clinton and as an intelligence adviser to President George W. Bush. Listed according to <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/svet/bivsi-sef-cia-najbolji-i-najozloglaseniji-primer-duboke-drzave-viden-je-u-srbiji/qey0fp>, accessed on November 1, 2019.

one step, to the necessary consensus. The answer to these seemingly complex questions is essentially simple and lies in respecting the code of professional officer ethics, and also in adopting the principle of “good governance”, which should guide the actions of political elites.

The question remains why we cannot reach a consensus, at least on this issue, for which it is clear that it is not difficult to give an answer from this historical distance. The academic Dušan Kovačević gave the essential answer in the last sentence of each chapter in his book *20 srpskih podela (Srba na Srbe)*: “If, for example, this division were ‘more tolerant’ - without hatred, bitterness, pre-infarction rage, we would ‘spend’ our life on more practical, useful and smarter things, if we are (already) destined to quarrel, worry and, to the point of pain, annoy ourselves”.⁴⁶

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Драгутин Димитријевић Апис као симбол српске стратешке културе

Рад представља анализу живота и деловања пуковника Драгутина Димитријевића Аписа, официра и обавештајца, који је значајно утицао на историју Срба на почетку XX века. Буран, готово авантуристички живот пуковника Аписа је завршен монтираним суђењем у Солуну 1917. године. Од тада до данашњих дана, у стратешкој култури Србије Апис представља симбол мешања војске у политику, али и симбол патриоте и пожртвованог официра, у зависности од потреба владајућих елита и поткултуре којој припадају аналитичари. Циљ рада је да се на аналитички и објективан начин сагледа деловање пуковника Аписа, опишу различите стратешке поткултуре у Србији на примеру односа према симболу који Апис представља и отклоне поједине заблуде око (зло)употребе његовог имена и дела.

Кључне речи: *Апис, Црна рука, Карађорђевићи, стратешка култура, политички и правни систем Србије*