



The impact of Russian enlightenment on Serbian culture

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ABSTRACT

The French Enlightenment of 18th century was the spiritual successor of Descartes' rationalism and English empiricism. It gave the main inspiration to the radical political and cultural changes in whole Europe. Descartes himself escaped to draw possible logical consequences from his philosophical method in the field of moral and politics. But subsequent development of suggested method of critical inquiry soon raised suspicion not only to the existing scientific knowledge, but also to all forms of social beliefs and institutions. Very soon the critical reasoning spread over the European continent influencing all people who considered themselves progressive and modern. Different kind of followers united the idea of Reason and the power of new knowledge.

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Introduction

The first echo of some form of Rationalism and Enlightenment sprung among Serbs (living in Austrian Empire in the broad space between Danube, Budapest and Temisoara) through the great resonance of the tremendous reforms in Russia at the turn of 17th and in the early 18th century. In order to comprehend this influence we should remember some historical facts about important events that occurred in the life of both nations.

In the last decade of 17th century (1690) masses of Serbs, after taking active role in the war between Austrians and Turks on old Serbian territory, having been on the defeated side, had to escape and settle to the north of the Danube river. The Patriarch of the Serbian church Arsenije III Carnojevic together with major noble families led this large migration to Austrian territory - in that sense it might be said that all important symbols of Serbian statehood found a new location. As soon as the diocese of the metropolitan was settled in Sremski Karlovci, Serbian ecclesiastical authorities tried to organize spiritual and civic life. But the circumstances were highly unfavorable since the mighty Austrian empire, being a Catholic country didn't want to allow much independence to Serbian Orthodox Church. The Austrian court favored settlement of Serbs as a protection of possible Turkish invasion, but on other hand it couldn't accept emergence of a different religious pattern. From the very beginning, the Serbian Church acknowledged the will of the Catholic Church for domination, and felt deprived of its rights. The Serbs had been forced to convert and become members of the Uniate Church (the Uniate Church has Orthodox ritual, but it is subjected to the control of Rome). The high ecclesiastical Serbian authorities were disappointed with their status and turned to the Russian court in the belief that the same orthodox religion and the Slavonic roots make them natural allies. These contacts intensified and multiplied when Peter the Great took the throne. Namely, Peter the Great, as no one before him, generously helped Serbs and Montenegrins in their aspiration for independence, both in the Turkish and in the Austrian Empire.

Very soon Serbian priests and teachers started to educate themselves in Russian religious and civil schools, and Russian teachers and priests were sent to the province of Vojvodina where most Serbs were concentrated. Russian cultural influence spread among Serbs primarily through teachers, priests and religious and civic books. So we even might say that during whole 18th century cultural life of the Serbs in Austria had been shaped dominantly by Russian influence.

It is well known that Peter the Great had started a new epoch in Russian history. As Richard Pipes says "The western civilization had discovered the secrets of power and wealth, which one had to acquire if one wished to compete with it".² Peter the Great still in his youth had discovered that imperial Russia needed not only to copy western military techniques, because the fundamental sources of west's strength lay in the social, economic and educational base. As one decisive step in that direction Peter the Great curtailed the power of the church and introduced civil control over it. The rule of Patriarchy was abolished and replaced by Holy Synod. The leading political theorist of Peter's reign, Teofan Prokopovich (1681-1736), the Archbishop of Novgorod, wrote Spiritual Reglament, the official document by which the church had been subordinated and put under control. Teofan Prokopovich was the follower of Bacon, Descartes and Christian Wolf, and before all of Samuel Pufendorf. Pufendorf (1632-1696), the great German theorist and one of the founding fathers of the school of Natural law (Chistovitch, 1868). Pufendorf sharply distinguished the natural law from the theology and raised law to the level of self-founded doctrine. The law supposed to conform only to the rules of Reason and to be independent of clerical dogmas (Chartier, 1991). In Prokopovich's works we can also trace the influence of Hugo Grotius, another great founder of natural law school.

It might be said that Prokopovich's document (printed 1721) brought first important traces of early Enlightenment among the Serbs. It greatly influenced Serbian intellectuals at that time and it served as highly authoritative instruction for the organization of spiritual and civil institutions among Serbs. As soon as this

document reached the metropolitan's residence in Sremski Karlovci, the center of spiritual and cultural life, the Serbian metropolitan Mojsije Petrovic (1713-1730) welcomed the ideas that it contained. He ordered the way of disciplined life in monasteries, made the education for all priest obligatory, opened new civic schools. And the metropolitans who succeeded Vicentije Jovanovic continued to pursue the main ideas of Reglamente.

We might say that Russian influence on Serbian cultural life was due to Austria's rigid policy. For instance, the Austrian authorities refused to allow the printing of books in Cyrillic alphabet and in that way made great difficulty for church and schools to continue their educational tasks (Kostic, 1952). The need for teaching books forced the Metropolitan Mojsije Petrovic to ask the Russian court for help. The answer was in the positive. From that moment on for a long time ahead Russia was to be the main supporter and protector of the spiritual and civic autonomy of Serbs in the Austrian empire. The Tsar and then Emperor Peter I had helped the opening of schools in Vojvodina where Russian teachers had leading positions. So in the year 1724 the translator from Holy Synod, Maxim Suvorov, came to Sremski Karlovci with 400 primary books (written by Prokopovich), 100 copies of grammar books and 10 dictionaries. He worked as a teacher, who regularly informed the Russian Synod about political events. Very soon Russian books started to dominate as teaching stuff in schools. The next metropolitan, Vicentije Jovanovic, founded first secondary school in S. Karlovci under the governance of Russian teacher Emanuel Kazanskij. In 1731 bishop Vasarion opened civic high school in Novi Sad, and the headmaster of the school was Dionisije Novakovic, who completed his education at the Academia in Kiev. Same bishop asked the Russian Consulate in Vienna to send him the Russian translation of Pufenorf's work "An introduction into the History of Europe". Namely, this book was obligatory literature for the new Academy, envisaged by Prokopovich.

The whole generation of young Serbian intellectuals, who were to become teachers, men of letters and priests, had been educated in that spirit. It implied two important things; first, the ideas and thoughts they spread clearly followed the paths which dominated in Russian court at that time. And second, the influence of the early Enlightenment came predominantly through Russian sources. So, the Serbs who had attended schools in Russia introduced there the works of French Encyclopedists and other leading ideas of European Enlightenment.

I would like to mention some distinguished Serbs who were representatives of the early Enlightenment. The best known Serbian thinker of that time was Zaharije Orfelin. He wrote in Russian-Slavonic language. That language is some kind of artificial language that emerged through the influence of Russian teachers and Russian books. How was it possible for educated Serbs to read Russian books? The answer lay in the fact that both nations in the Middle Ages used the same language - Church Slavonic. Church Slavonic was literary language devised by Byzantine missionaries: that language was used in written documents, lay and clerical. So in 17th century, Serbs actually used the Russian version of Church Slavonic. In the first half of 18th century it was accepted and used by educated people in Vojvodina. But most of the population simply didn't understand that language; it was the language of educated classes. Orfelin was the author of three important works: (1) large monograph

about Peter the Great, based on rich resources (46 books) occupying more than 3,000 pages; (2) The poem: "Great Cry" and (3) the poem "The Cry of the Serbs". Those poems were written under the influence of Rejhelj (1721-78) and Popovski (1730-1760) and both poems deal with the destiny of Serbs depicting the historical events that caused the dissolution of the medieval state and the slavery under Turks and Austrians.

Another important author that brought impulses of the early Enlightenment was Jovan Rajic. He finished elementary school in S. Karlovci, and then continued his education in Kiev and Moscow. It was he who translated Prokopovich's Spiritual Reglamente into Russian-Slavonic and made it the most influential document among the Serbs. He is also the writer of a large history book "History of Slavic People" which was published first in Vienna, and then in St. Petersburg.

In the middle of the century the Austrian authorities made a decision to change the special status of the province inhabited by Serbs. By that time the province had been treated as a military territory and its inhabitants were considered a kind of a temporary army in case of war with Turks. So, they were under direct authority of the Court in Vienna and had some privileges. But under the pressure of Hungarian noblemen Vienna decided to abolish this special status and the Serbs came suddenly under the rule of local Hungarian landlords. They lost their military privileges. It caused a great revolt and Serbian military gentry decided to migrate to Russia. Leaving Austrian territory was encouraged by Russian Queen Elisabeth (1741-61), who wished that Serbian orthodox people settle the empty space on the South-west part of Russia, more precisely in Ukraine. So in the years 1751-53 there were several mass emigration movements of Serbs into Russia. Many Serbs, who had been professional Austrian soldiers left Vojvodina together with their families and servants and settled in Russia.

One of them was Simeon Pischevich, professional officer of Austrian cavalry, who left for Russia in 1753. As a writer of memoirs (first published at the end of the century) he gave a convincing picture of the history of the time, its values and expectations. As one of the most educated Serbs of the period, he shares convictions of his class; belief in reason, high ethical ideal of nation, faith in enlightened king, etc. Reading his memoirs it is possible to get an idea of the intellectual life of educated strata in the middle of 18th century. Pischevich was familiar with Lomonosov and Sumarkov. His works were published in Russia and only later became known in Vojvodina and Serbia.

The mass migration of Serbs to Russia was frowned on by the Austrian authorities. To suppress the agitation of Russian emissary that organized and encouraged migration of Serbs, the Austrian authorities introduced Penalty Law (So-called Penal Patent): any agitation in that sense was forbidden, and the persons involved in it risked prison. Those measures had a clear aim to stop this flow of refugees. The reasons for such measures were twofold: Austria wanted dense population network on the border with Turks. But she also wanted loyal citizens. Cultural ties between the orthodox Serbs and Russians, many Russian priests and teachers, overwhelming Slavophilia among Serbs - all that was very unpopular to Austrian domestic diplomacy. The primary task was breaking tight connections between Russia and the Serbs. One of major objectives was to eradicate the influence of Russian policy over Serbs and to make them loyal citizens to Austria. In the second half of the 18th century this policy was

realized step by step. The major role therein was played by the reforms under Empress Maria Theresa and her successors.

It is hard to judge the results of those reforms. From one angle they had tremendous positive impact on the development of general literacy and education among Serbs; those reforms heightened elementary literacy among the Serbs living in Austria, organized state elementary schools which were obligatory not only for boys but also for girls. On the other hand, they caused extinguishing of the cultural and language ties with Russia. Those reforms succeeded in both aims: to heighten the level of general education and to give Serbs a West-orientated cultural pattern, and to lessen the Russian influence. The Russian-Slavonic cultural pattern was superseded by the German-one that became dominant.

The reforms promoted by Maria Theresa (1770-1780) and her successors the Emperors Joseph II and Franz II, were introduced to eradicate the Russian influence. The first step was abolition of the independent schools and teaching curriculum. The whole school system was centralized and brought under control of the Viennese authorities. The civic schools were clearly separated from theological schools, and a centralized educational program was introduced. All textbooks were written simultaneously in German and Serbian language, and all those remaining in Russian were scrapped from the teaching material. The Russian-Slavonic language was completely eliminated. In its place came the ordinary language spoken by the majority of uneducated Serbs.

In 1780 Iliric Court Print House was founded in Vienna where all books for Serbs were printed. At the same time import of any book printed in Cyrillic script were strictly forbidden. Russian books were also forbidden and the Russian teachers had to leave the country. Harsh censorship was introduced, so the all books had to be approved by censorship before they were permitted for printing. The foreigners were strictly forbidden to have posts in the schools for Serbs.

It is worth to note that the first reactions of Serbs to this cultural program were riots and upheavals. Mass protests followed one another, among which the upheaval in 1778 was the largest one. But, living in a foreign country, without possibility to change their own living conditions, the Serbs in Vojvodina slowly had to accept those changes. The influence of Russian culture hadn't ceased automatically. Great many of Serbian intellectuals continued to make contacts with Russian intellectuals and to praise Russia. It was quite natural, especially if we take in consideration that all hopes for freeing Serbia from the Turks were laid in Russia. All Russian successful wars against Turks raised great expectations among Serbian population, who saw in Russian empire a guarantee that their interests would be protected.

Of course, there were some positive traces of Austrian reforms. Emperor Franz II turned against Catholic church and its influence: as a consequence the Catholic church became weaker and ceased suppressing other religious groups, such as the Orthodox and Protestants. Religious tolerance started to be a general civic virtue of Austrian domestic polity. It silenced high tensions that existed earlier among different confessional groups. Meanwhile, the Serbian class of merchants, clerks and soldiers became more independent and more able to pursue their own interests. They started to send their sons to study in Protestant colleges in Germany and Bohemia, where they came in touch with the works by Locke, Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Lessing, Goethe and many other leading luminaries.

The most autonomous and most unique person who brought the Enlightenment to Serbs was Dositej Obradovic (1740-1811), surely the most educated Serb intellectual of that time. He traveled through most of European countries and spoke many languages. He spent some years in Russia, but due to his visits to West Europe he came in direct touch with English and French Enlightenment. Dositej Obradovic was the first enlightened intellectual in the sense of European enlightenment and made a tremendous influence on Serbian intelligentsia not only in Vojvodina, but also in Serbia. Dositej himself translated a number of important works into Serbian. His views in many ways changed the general pattern of comprehending the actual reality. Speaking in general the cultural impact of the Enlightenment at the beginning of the 19th century definitely made Serbian population in Vojvodina citizens of the Enlightened Europe. Nonetheless, in the course of time the intensive cultural connections with Russia ceased and never reached the level they had in the whole 18th century.

At the beginning of the 19th century many Serbs were attending universities in Austria and Germany and become well-known professors. They also represented the people acquainted with school reforms which were promoted in Austria. Having reputations of good scientists and pedagogues they were invited to organize courses at the University of Harkow, as soon as the university was founded in 1803. So they started to teach a number of Serbian intellectuals, among them the best known were Atanasije Stojkovich (a personal friend of Pushkin's), Gligorije Tarlajic, Sava Petrovic and Djordje Koritori. Working in Russian universities and schools they were repaying the debts that Serbs owed to the Russian Enlightenment of previous century.

Conclusion

The first impulses of Enlightenment came among Serbs from Russia at the beginning of the 18th century. It was due to special circumstances that Serbs living in Austria wishing to settle an independent church and educational system made tight relations with Russia. During the rule of Peter the Great the most influential literature that came among Serbs was *Spiritual Reglament* written by Prokopovich. That official document introduced a purely rational element in organizing civil society in Russia, but it was also welcomed by enlightened Serbian bishops. Influenced by the Russian teachers and priests the educated Serbs started to speak the so-called Russian-Slavonic language (some kind of mixture of Russian Slavonic and Serbian), and could relatively easily understand Russian books. The familiarity of the same religious pattern and similar need for radical reforms attracted many educated Serbs to see in the Russian radical reform the inspiration for resolving domestic problems concerning civic life, education, eradicating religious superstitions, etc.

The best known Serbian enlightened figures in the first half of the century inspired by Peter the Great were Zaharije Orfelin, Mojsije Petrovic, Simeon Piscevic, Rajic and Dositej Obradovic. But since the mid-century the fundamental ideas of Continental Rationalism were developed among Serbian population mainly through the German, or more precisely Austrian sources. Namely, the German cultural orientation was brought through elimination of Russian religious and school books, elimination of Russian elements in the language and transforming Russian-Slavonic into Serbian-Slavonic and finally in 1774 transforming the two said sophisticated languages into a simple language of illiterate masses. School reform completely eliminated the traces

of Russian language and as obligatory books in Serbian School in Austria introduced primary books which simultaneously consisted of German and Serbian texts.

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