

UDC 930.85(4-12)

ISSN 0350-7653

SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS
INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

BALCANICA

XLVI

ANNUAL OF THE INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

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BELGRADE
2015



IN MEMORIAM



Miroslav Svirčević
(1970–2014)

It is a sad privilege to be given the opportunity of paying tribute to the memory of our beloved Miroslav Svirčević. But it is also an honour, as rare as was the privilege to know him and to share with him our Institute conversations, our time together when the passing of hours was of little consequence.

I first saw Miroslav on the occasion of the international conference “An atypical alliance: Franco-Serbian relations 1878–1940” which was taking place at the Institute for Balkan Studies in late 2007. Miroslav spoke about constitutionalism in Serbia from 1835 to 1903 and about the influence of Benjamin Constant on its development. Still an undergraduate earnestly listening to all speakers, I could not even imagine that I would soon become Miroslav’s colleague and that we would share the same office, desk to desk. It was even then that he drew my attention by his erudition, eloquence, talkativeness. Behind his somewhat baroque demeanour hid a meticulous scholar who left nothing to chance and was committed to pa-

tient, level-headed work, competently resolving even the knottiest questions he posed to himself.

Miroslav graduated from the Belgrade University Faculty of Law in 1994 as one of the best students. While his master's thesis, defended in 2000 and published a year later under the title *The Dawn of Democracy in Westminster*, was concerned with the development of the British Parliament in 1832–1911, he subsequently shifted the focus of his academic interest to the issue of local self-government in the modern Balkans, emerging as a leading Serbian scholar in the field. He defended his doctoral dissertation *Local Self-Government in Serbia and Bulgaria, 1878–1914* at the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Political Sciences, in 2008. In 2011 Miroslav published his voluminous synthesis *Local Self-Government and the Development of Modern Serbian State* under the auspices of the Institute for Balkan Studies.

Miroslav's interest in Benjamin Constant was not a random choice. He was very well acquainted with the classics of modern political philosophy. Although he did not devote much of his writing to them, it was obvious that he found in their work safe reference points and tools for moving through a field as broad as the history of ideas. It was that kind of reading, with its sweeping and well-organised knowledge, that enabled Miroslav to venture into bold research undertakings and to move confidently across the heterogeneous range of history topics to which he devoted his life. He was exceptionally proud of his unflinching libertarianism and his visits to the prestigious Cato Institute.

In the manner of the historians of old, Miroslav was preoccupied with the great issues of his day and did not separate that which he stood for as a scholar from civic courage to state and defend his stance. He devoted many texts to Huntington's *Clash of Civilisations* as a bitter metaphor for the time we live in; to the problems surrounding the disintegration of Yugoslavia; and, finally, to the question of neo-Ottomanism, in which he followed Professor Darko Tanasković. We used to debate passionately over all these topics. Always well versed and geared up, Miroslav felt them intensely, almost existentially, and that is why he was able to get so close to them and to elucidate them so comprehensively.

A restless mind as he was, Miroslav was always busy making grand plans. One of his unrealised ideas of which he often talked to me (apart from a book on the Balkan Wars in English which he finished but did not live to see it published), was a study on Banovina Croatia. He was doing background research for it and we were already exchanging books, articles, information, both looking forward to teaming up on the project. There is no doubt that Miroslav would have combined his legal education and historical vocation fruitfully in that area too. In fact, he had already come quite close to

the issue of the Croatian question in Yugoslavia, as evidenced by the study "Milan Stojadinović and the Croats" which he contributed to the edited volume on this politician and economist published by the Institute of European Studies to the activities of which Miroslav was favourably inclined.

Wholeheartedly supportive of his Institute for Balkan Studies' endeavours, Miroslav contributed to its journal *Balkanica* not only original scholarly articles but also regular and studious reviews of latest history books. He crossed swords with influential figures in the area of Balkan studies such as Richard Clogg, Richard Crampton, Mark Mazower or Robert Donia and John Fine, and levelled merciless criticism at pseudo-historical works such as those by Philip Cohen and Branimir Anzulović, in defence of the integrity of the historical science against the bias of propaganda disguised as history. His last review, devoted to the book of the American professor of anthropology and law Robert Heyden *From Yugoslavia to the Western Balkans*, once again combines the perspectives of a historian and an engaged observer to look at some of the most complex developments in our recent history.

A tireless traveller who did not seem ever to make a stop, Miroslav would return from his many destinations bringing new ideas and books, fresh experiences from the conferences he took part in, never failing to amuse us with his vividly told funny stories from his journeys. The list of the countries he visited, and more than once, is quite impressive: from the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Italy, Switzerland, Ireland, Finland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia to Georgia, not to mention the Balkan countries.

In the end, a picture remains impressed on my memory: I'm in a hurry to leave the office, Miroslav stays behind, almost always until evening hours, "to do a thing or two more", as he used to say. He never complained; quite the opposite, ever sprightly and curious, happy to share information or a thought, Miroslav felt at ease at the Institute. I believe it would not be a mistake to say that he made it his second home, a place where he was giving his best, where he was really making a difference. We know now that his life courageously lived had an almost chivalric dimension to it, a mark of true gentility that is his legacy and that we shall remember him by.

Veljko Stanić

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Compiled by Valentina Babić

