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A disturbing revisiting for the Centenary. My reply to Mr. John Zametica

Abstract: This text presents a reply to the article published by John Zametica and his critique of the volume *Sarajevo 1914. Sparking the First World War*.

Keywords: Sarajevo 1914, Danilo Šarenac, John Zametica

Some time ago, our colleague Čedomir Antić made an insightful comment about modern Serbian historiography. He argued that the authors became very prolific. However, they stopped reading one another. I can add that this phenomenon fitted neatly into an ambient where critique or constructive discussion is perceived more as an incidental than as a desired behavior. In this context, I am glad that Mr. John Zametica has dedicated his time and effort into reading a volume that I am proud to be part of.¹ Namely, Mr. Zametica wrote an elaborate critique of *Sarajevo 1914. Spark and Impact*, edited by Professor Mark Cornwall and published in 2020.² This book was the result of an international conference held at the University of Southampton in 2014. I was one of the contributors to this volume with a chapter entitled *Why did no one control Apis? Serbian military intelligence and the Sarajevo assassination*. It should be mentioned that my essay attracted a large portion of Mr. Zameti-

1 John Zametica, „The Elusive Balkan Spark: 28 June 1914, Again and Always“, *Tokovi istorije* 3/2021, 297–331.

2 *Sarajevo 2014. Sparking the First World War*, ed. Mark Cornwall, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

ca's attention. In this respect, I feel that it is most convenient to address some of his critical remarks.

Mr. Zametica opens his critique in a very lucid and effective manner: he notices that the editor and the publisher have placed the wrong picture on the front cover. The picture is not showing the assassinated couple on the 28th of June 1914, as was believed, but the Archduke's visit to a flower exhibition some weeks earlier. Mr. Zametica rightly directs readers' attention to the periphery of the picture, indicating that the Habsburg couple was not in a car (which became an iconic object of the 20th century), but in a horse-drawn carriage. It should be mentioned that since this photo, erroneously, still occupies a prominent place in our common remembrance the editor or publisher's mistake is explicable. However, a mistake is a mistake, and it is good that someone has noticed it. Indirectly, this is a fine example of the problems historians meet while dealing with photographs.

Instead of stopping here, making a direct but polite point about his discovery, Mr. Zametica introduces us to his robust and dismissive style. He says: "Didn't it occur to Cornwall, an expert on Austria-Hungary and an aspiring Sarajevo assassination pundit, to wonder about that overcoat?"³ However, as Mr. Zametica has enlightened us, the photo was taken at the flower exhibition which also took place in the summer (2nd of June). In that sense the coat was equally "suspicious" on both occasions in June (unless it was a detail belonging to the Archduke's ceremonial outfit as was probably the case).

Yet the overall aim of Mr. Zametica in his review is to dismiss the entire volume as more or less worthless, as it simply "perpetuates several of the myths and tall tales".⁴ Even this sharp and even radical stance might be accepted as legitimate. The volume, or most of it, could indeed be poor or of inferior quality. Even if this was the case Mr. Zametica should have kept at least the minimum of decency while criticizing his opponents. Unfortunately, already here the lines of decorum have been crossed. By being extremely impolite, dismissive and contemptuous about the editor of the volume, as well as about several other authors, Mr. Zametica demonstrates a very poor understanding of the essence of the scholarly dialogue. Still, the true problem of his critique is his understanding of the Sarajevo assassination, not as a large scholarly problem, but as a cornerstone for defending the Serbian national narrative. Consequently, he understands any form of revisiting or questioning the role of the "Serbian side" in the Sarajevo events as a vicious and sinister at-

3 Zametica, „The Elusive Balkan Spark“, 298.

4 *Ibid.*

tack against Serbia and its people. From Mr. Zametica's perspective, you can only question the assassination of 1914 if you confirm his own positions. Do not read or write about this event if you want to question or reexamine anything – that is his message.

In his critique, Mr. Zametica certainly demonstrates his undisputed expertise on the topic of 'Sarajevo 1914'. After all, he has recently published a solid account of the causes of the First World War with an emphasis on the Serbian-Austrian dynamics in this process. In one of the most recent and very refreshing books about Sarajevo 1914, a distinguished American historian, Paul Miller Melamed, has observed in his preface that Mr. Zametica's own book is the first work "that has surpassed the masterpiece of Vladimir Dedijer".⁵ Perhaps, this is too generous a comment for a book that, though studious and encyclopedic about the topic, still follows too closely the safe roads Vladimir Dedijer traced some fifty years ago. Nevertheless, without a doubt, Zametica's book is indeed a contribution to the field that cannot be ignored.

As will be shown, three articles have been selected and branded as especially bad by Mr. Zametica in the volume edited by Professor Cornwall. The first text that he targets is the one written by the editor himself. The second article Mr. Zametica finds particularly poor is the one written by the Slovene historian, Andrej Rahten. Negative comments are also reserved for my own chapter.

The introductory article written by Professor Cornwall presents a comprehensive overview of the role which the South Slav Question played in the 20th century and especially in the July crisis of 1914. Professor Cornwall summed up various possibilities and policy options that were available in the early 1900s for solving the South Slav Question: he also placed these within the existing historiography. Mr. Zametica's unfortunate tactic in writing his critique is first to try to discredit the author by making some "neutral" and laconic observations. Afterwards, he misquotes the author, and finally, he argues with a position never taken by the author. For example, he writes:

"Professor Cornwall himself is a noted specialist on the history of the Habsburg Empire though, oddly, his best works so far are an essay from 1995 on Serbia during the July 1914 crisis, and an earlier essay on King Nicholas of Montenegro and the Great Powers, 1913–1914."⁶

5 Paul Miller-Melamed, *Misfire: the Sarajevo Assassination and the Winding Road to World War I*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), XII.

6 Zametica, „The Elusive Balkan Spark“, 298.

In fact Professor Cornwall's biography looks much brighter if we add a few details. In 2000, Professor Cornwall wrote a very important book called *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary: The Battle for Hearts and Minds*, about the propaganda war against the Habsburg empire. He then in 2016 he published a very notable book: *Sacrifice and Rebirth: The Legacy of the Last Habsburg War*, about the memory of the war in the former Habsburg lands. More recently he has received a prestigious Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship to work on *Treason and Disloyalty in the Late Habsburg Monarchy*. Finally, in 2022 he was awarded the Palacký Medal of Merit in the Historical Sciences by the Czech Academy of Sciences - the highest Czech award for any historian.

Besides being "incompetent," Professor Cornwall is "guilty" for arguing that the South Slav Question led to the Great War. Indeed, this sounds like a very blunt statement. The problem is that Mr. Cornwall has never written anything so blunt in this volume or any other. He does mention that one Hungarian politician named József Sztérényi said something similar in 1925. But let us be precise about what Professor Cornwall wrote. Reminiscing, Sztérényi stressed the decisive role of this Southern Slav Question in causing the Great War; it was, he added, "a thoroughly prepared, consciously and systematically directed political action."⁷ To try to discredit Cornwall's whole chapter on this basis is indeed an appalling and regrettable tactic used by Mr. Zametica.

The second author with whom Mr. Zametica has problems is the Slovene Habsburg expert, Andrej Rahten. Mr. Zametica starts this section again with a harsh accusation. He says that Mr. Rahten is "guilty of commission" implying that his chapter overlaps in its main thesis with a book already published by Rahten. This is a strange remark indeed, as historians often disseminate their ideas in lectures, articles, and ultimately in books. It is not unusual that historians further develop their ideas or simply repeat them despite the fact that these were mentioned in their previous work. This practice does not necessarily imply a deterioration of a book's quality, especially if it is a joint volume like *Sarajevo 1914*. Mr. Zametica also uses the opportunity to mock Rahten's choice of sources. For example, Rahten's interest in a rarely known book, written by the Hungarian diplomat Edmund von Horváth is ridiculed. In a similar tone, John Zametica accuses Rahten of not showing sufficient homage to the work of Vladimir Dedijer.

Here again, we have to look at what Andrej Rahten actually wrote, for simply following Zametica's interpretations has not been proven so far as trust-

7 Mark Cornwall, „The Southern Slav Question”, *Sarajevo 1914. Sparking the First World War*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 2–3.

worthy. Rahten wrote: “Interestingly, Dedijer’s impressively comprehensive list of sources and literature did not contain a book by Edmund von Horváth, a Habsburg diplomat of Croatian descent, best known as the father of the famous writer Ödön Horváth. His statements regarding trialist plans make the work of Horváth Senior particularly notable. Not only due to his Croatian descent but also because of his superior knowledge of Serbia (as a diplomat, he spent several years in Belgrade), he was undoubtedly a go-to expert in discussions on the Southern Slav Question. During a visit to the Bavarian Court on 21 April 1914, Franz Ferdinand summoned the diplomat, who was then serving in Munich.”⁸ Evidently, respect towards Vladimir Dedijer is there. Even more interesting is the segment Mr. Zametica has excluded from his text when complaining about Rahten’s use of sources. Namely, in his critique, Mr. Zametica purposely did not inform his readers as did Rahten - that Edmund von Horváth was not just any Hungarian diplomat but that he actually served in Belgrade for six years. Moreover, this was not just any period but 1902 to 1908. It was a very interesting time to be in Belgrade. By omitting these “details” Mr. Zametica misleads his readers, and his omission is serious.

However, the real problem Mr. Zametica has with this text is that Mr. Rahten dared to analyze once more the issue of potential ‘trialism’ and the views Archduke Franz Ferdinand held about this question. One of the key arguments of Mr. Zametica’s own book is that trialism was never taken as a serious reform idea by the most important holders of power in the Habsburg monarchy. It appears that he loses his temper any time someone dares to suggest other possibilities.

He omits to mention that Mr. Rahten quotes a number of other Croat and Slovene figures who also voiced support for or at least their thoughts about the issue of trialism. These included Ivanka Klemenčič, the first Slovene professional female journalist, and a number of Croatian politicians.

Mr. Zametica also has serious remarks to make about my own chapter where I focused on the role of Serbia’s intelligence network in 1914. My idea in this chapter was to deal head-on with one of the most difficult questions about Serbia’s links with ‘Sarajevo 1914’. I believed that it would be beneficial to reexamine once more the conditions, processes and forces that were there in 1914. I wanted to rearrange some old and well-known elements of this narrative in a new manner with a closer and more critical analysis.

8 Andrej Rahten, „Great Expectations. The Habsburg heir apparent and the Southern Slavs“, *Sarajevo 1914. Sparking the First World War*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 48.

This did not fit the standards of Mr. Zametica. He opens his attack on my chapter with the blunt claim that I have not performed any research. Again here, he demonstrates a very conservative stance towards the nature and methodology of historical research. This is even more absurd in the domain of the history of the Sarajevo assassination. This is not a topic where you can simply go through 400 boxes of “new materials and sources.” That is not possible. On the other hand, dealing with the context is essential. My aim was to provide a panoramic overview by assembling small pieces of those delicate and secretive intelligence networks. Indeed, many of our studies of the Sarajevo assassination remain highly speculative. However, by further stressing the context, our speculations about the facts of the Sarajevo assassination can become more rooted in reality.

Treating Serbia as an innocent bystander in the crises of 1914 did not attract me nor did the easiness and the stereotypes with which several foreign historians have approached Serbian pre-war society. I also decided not to overlook Serbia’s actual territorial ambition toward Bosnia. I supported my analysis of the Sarajevo assassination’s context with Serbian literature that has appeared in the last twenty years. The cumulative effect of such an approach proved to be valid and refreshing. Mr. Zametica however has problems with most of my writing. In his dismissive style, he mocks again my comments about the military planning of the Serbian army, treating this as irrelevant. This shows he is hardly familiar with the evolution of Serbian military thinking before 1914. I will try to clarify this here. The Serbian army had, for example, no plan of attack or defense against Romania. However, it had two plans for a potential clash with Bulgaria. And there were as many as ten (all offensive) plans for attacking the Ottoman Empire. There was only one for fighting a defensive war with Austria-Hungary. To any well-intended and professional historian, this is telling and useful information. Mr. Zametica simply expects to see his own views supported. Yes, I could have placed more coherence in my chapter and given it more punch and conviction, but unfortunately for Mr. Zametica, I have not started my research with the preconception that I intend to blame the whole 1914 crisis on Austria-Hungary.

Mr. Zametica’s problem with *Sarajevo 1914* is that the general idea of the book, revisiting the event by focusing on the South Slav question, implies danger for his own interpretation of the subject. He believes that all has been said before and it is disturbing to revisit it once again. If you are interested in the topic, well, just read Vladimir Dedijer or Fritz Fisher if you must. Do not read anything published after 2000 (except Zametica). The Habsburg Monarchy is guilty of it all anyway. In essence therefore, Mr. Zametica defends a

specific type of discourse where national feelings always have the upper hand over scholarship. It should be noted that Mr. Zametica did like something about the volume *Sarajevo 1914. Sparking the First World War*. He praised the chapters written by distinguished historians Robin Okey, Lothar Höbelt and Alma Hannig. However, from his analysis of these chapters, it seems that he likes them simply because their arguments fit into his own understanding of the Sarajevo events.

Finally, Mr. Zametica concludes his critique by saying that I should not have even bothered writing my article. This remark seems at best indecent. Later on, he practically accuses me of “scientific tourism”. It is a rather shallow attempt to gaslight those who value the scholarly engagement and constructive feedback that emerges in conference settings. Academics should appreciate the value of disagreement and nuanced understanding. They should not inferiorize or infantilize those with whom they disagree. Mr. Zametica’s patronizing approach and his obvious national priorities are not the way forward in the historical study of the Serbian-Austrian relationship or the July crisis of 1914.

Written in June, in beautiful Lisbon, at the 28th International Conference of Europeanists.

Summary

In my reply to the critique written by colleague John Zametica I wanted to point his attention to several oversights. First of all, I place an emphasis on the culture of dialogue, but also on the necessity to put the reasons of national politics aside when one debates Sarajevo assassination and the July crisis.

Sources and Literature

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Резиме

Данило Шаренац

НЕПРИЈАТНО ПОДСЕЋАЊЕ НА СТОГОДИШЊИЦУ. МОЈ ОДГОВОР ЦОНУ ЗАМЕТИЦИ

Апстракт: Овај текст представља одговор на чланак Цона Заметице и његову критику зборника радова *Сарајево 1914. Изазивање Првог светског рата*.

Кључне речи: Сарајево 1914, Данило Шаренац, Цон Заметица

У свом одговору на критику колеге Цона Заметице желео сам да му скренем пажњу на неколико пропуста. Пре свега, реч је о култури дијалога, али и неопходности да се разлози националне политике ставе у други план када је реч о расправама о Сарајевском атентату и Јулској кризи.