

## WHY REVISION?<sup>1</sup>

One of the most relevant books dedicated to the topics of Serbian in the Great War has been the book written by Serbian prominent historian Mile Bjelajac, under the title “1914-2014. Why revision. Old and new controversies regarding the causes of The First World War”. M. Bjelajac is one of the most distinguished Serbian military historians of the generation of eighties, with outstanding knowledge not only of Serbian history but of foreign production as well.

In this very original and highly evaluated book, Bjelajac states, that as the anniversary of the First World War has been approaching, there were more and more historical works wanting to make the readers paying attention to it. But, Bjelajac continues, “unlike previous anniversaries, this one has been characterized by the attempt of certain historians and their public relations managers to reinterpret the role of the Balkans, especially Serbia, regarding the essential reasons for beginning of the war. The part of the production has been characterized by the attempt of intentional hiding of the already documented facts regarding the international influence of the inter-war policy of the German governments, insisting to shift on someone else the blame for starting the war, at any prize.”<sup>2</sup>

Before starting to analyze the works of the foreign historians who headed in those shift of blame from Germany and Austro-Hungary to Serbia, Bjelajac emphasizes, similar to previously mentioned conclusions of Ekmečić, Mitrović, Popović, Dimić and Radojević, that the geopolitical reasons, as well as keeping the balance between the Triple Alliance and Antante, on one side, and the intention of the Triple Alliance to take a lead in Europe on the other side, had been the real cause of the war which began in the summer of 1914.

He insists on the fact that as early as March 1914 all preparations had been finished on the side of the Triple Alliance, while on the side of the Antante unfinished military reforms were in order, as well as unfinished military projects planned to be established by the end of 1917.

When the war became inevitable, the members of the Antante, although unprepared, had expected the final victory and fulfillment of their historical geopolitical aims. The little countries, such as Serbia, Luxembourg or Belgium were either victims since they were positioned “on the way of the great forces intentions”, or in the state of expectations which side should be chosen (Bulgaria, Romania, even Italy.)

Bjelajac raises the question how did Serbia find itself in the situation that the most loud revision voices of today are almost the same as those voices that could be heard in the media published by the Great Powers

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1 Mile Bjelajac, 1914-2014. Why revision. Old and new controversies regarding the causes of The First World War, Belgrade, Media centar “Odrbrana”, 2014, 1-246.

2 M.Bjelajac, *op. cit.*, 6.

in 1914 or 1941. "How is it possible" he asks, both himself and his readers," that for Europe the small Serbian nationalism was the most dangerous one?" "Which values", he continues with his thoughts, "gave the 'moral right' to the big ones to occupy, make annexation, and at the same time to deny that right to the smaller nations". He concludes that it seems that the whole world make a step back toward the political mentalities being present hundred years ago and need for economical domination, which had to dictate everything.

Bjelajac emphasizes the fact that even today there are a certain number of historians who put all the blame for the war on the Serbian government, as an accomplice in the Sarajevo assassination, as well as its project "Greater Serbia". Such authors, according to Bjelajac are Annika Mombauer, Manfred Rauchensteiner, and some others.

Generally, Bjelajac concludes, that in the last twenty years had survived three general trends: one established new historiography, mainly in Germany and Austria regarding the imperial roots and mainly German intention to make new shift of power; second, the mild conservatism respecting the new findings, but also want to emphasize the danger to which were exposed Germany and Austria, thus forced to conduct the "defensive war", and the third wanting to put to the Balkans merely and only all the guilt for starting the war.

One important chapter of Bjelajac's book has been dedicated to the books written especially for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great War, with the aim to be read by larger public, not by the professional historians only. Thus, he gives to his readers the critical overview of the books written by Professor Kenneth Clark from the Cambridge University, under the title *The Sleepwalkers. How Europe went to war in 1914*<sup>3</sup>, then above mentioned book of Annika Mombauer "The debates on the origin of World War One (available also in Serbian translation)<sup>4</sup>, as well as to the book written by British historian Margaret Mac Millan<sup>5</sup>.

The author analyzes these books in detail, giving his view on disputable parts, and enriches his statements by the valuable document and literature. In this overview, we shall present just some of the most important Bjelajac's remarks regarding Clark's book.

According to opinion of M. Bjelajac, Professor Clark tries to convince his readers that after the events of 1903 (assassination of royal couple Obrenović by the clandestine organization "Crna ruka" (Black Hand)) Serbia had drastically changed its foreign policy course, relying more and more on Russia. Even for the "Annexation crisis" and "Custom war", professor Clark puts a blame on Serbia. He is not ready, continues Bjelajac, to see the Austro-Hungarian and even Bulgarian rough intentions in the fragile times for Serbia, when it was unprepared for war.

Regarding the assassination of Sarajevo, Clark insists that although Prime Minister Pašić was aware of the fact that Serbia should keep fragile

3 HarperCollins Publishers, 2012, pp. 557.

4 See note 33.

5 M. MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that changed the world*, Random House 2001 (2003, 2006), Forward Richard Holbruck, pp. 545.

peace, he “unconsciously” made plans to start the war as soon as possible, to make Serbian national project a reality. The problem is, concludes Bjelajac that Clark does not have any relevant historical sources or proves, his assumption is well enough. Clark also emphasizes the importance of the document called “Načertanije”, which is according to him (and some other authors in the West) the beginning of malign project of Great Serbia. He refuses to see the fact that Serbia had announced, as early as end of August 1914, the program of creation of one state of South Slavs (Yugoslavia), which was its main war goal.

However, the Clark`s thesis had not been supported by all important western authors. Prominent American historian Maria Todorova has written very serious and argumentum critique of Clark`s book.<sup>6</sup>

The most important remark in her critique overview to Clark`s book is the fact that she questioned his methodological approach. She insists that he tried to run away from the essential „why“(factors of long duration) in order to arbitrate freely in his constructions.

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<sup>6</sup> M. Todorova, *Outrages and their outcomes*, Times Literar Supplement, 4th January 2013, quoted according to M. Bjelajac, *op. cit*, 207.

