

Pašić, Nikola

By [Dalibor Denda](#)



Nikola Pašić (1845-1926)

As a Serbian/Yugoslav politician and statesman Nikola Pašić served twenty-two times as prime minister and fourteen times as foreign minister.

Petrovic, Vojislav Maksim: M. Nikola Pashitch, black-and-white photograph, n.p., 1915, in: idem.: Serbia; her people, history and aspirations, London 1915, p. 96; source: Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/serbiaherpeopleh00petruoft>.

Courtesy of the Internet Archive.

Pašić, *Nikola*

Serbian (later Yugoslav) politician and statesman

Born 18 December 1845 in Zaječar, Serbia

Died 10 December 1926 in Belgrade, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (now Serbia)

Summary

Nikola Pašić was a Serbian/Yugoslav politician and statesman. He served twenty-two terms as prime minister and fourteen terms as foreign minister, some only a few months long.

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Early Years

Nikola Pašić (1845-1926) was born to a shopkeeper and a farmer. He attended Serbian schools in Zaječar, Negotin and Kragujevac. He then studied engineering in Belgrade (1865-67), where he adopted the ideals of the romantic nationalism of the *Ujedinjena omladina srpska* (United Serbian Youth). As an engineering student, he was sent with a state scholarship to the University of Zurich (1868-1872), where he was exposed to [Herman Franz Schultze-Delitzsch's \(1808-1883\)](#) ideas about credit unions, met Russian *Narodniks* and came temporarily under the influence of [Mikhail Bakunin \(1814-1876\)](#). Soon, however, he accepted the socialist views of Serbian journalist and social democrat [Svetozar Marković \(1846-1875\)](#). He soon became one of socialism's foremost exponents.

After a year spent building the railroad between Budapest and Vienna in 1873, Pašić returned to [Serbia](#). There he worked as an engineer. He volunteered in 1875 collecting money to help anti-Turkish insurgents in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where he met Prince [Petar Karadjordjević \(1844-1921\)](#), a top candidate for the throne of the Serbian Karadjordjević dynasty that opposed the ruling Obrenović dynasty fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina. When the Serbian-Turkish war broke out in 1876, Pašić was conscripted into the Serbian Pioneer Troops.

Pašić as a Politician

Elected to the Serbian parliament in 1878, Pašić was one of the founders of the People's Radical Party in 1881. In their political program inspired by French radicalism, Serbian radicals called for a change in the constitution, freedom of the press and open politics, judicial independence, educational reform and enhanced local self-government. They were full of criticism against the ruling monarchy and demanded democracy, public liberties and liberal reforms of the bureaucratic system. Radicals successfully mobilized Serbian peasantry and the provincial middle classes and as a result became the dominant political party in Serbia. Pašić was their main – and most popular – leader. An armed rising, the so-called Timočka Buna that broke out in East Serbia in 1883, led to repressive measures, including the arrest of most of the Radical leaders. Accused of complicity in a revolutionary plot, Pašić was forced to flee the country in 1883. He was sentenced to death in absentia. While in exile he became an ardent Russophile and supporter of the Karadjordjević dynasty, building friendships in Russia, Bulgaria and Rumania that would prove invaluable later on.

Pašić returned to Serbia in 1889 after the abdication of [Milan Obrenović, King of Serbia \(1854-1901\)](#) in favour of his son [Alexander Obrenović, King of Serbia \(1876-1903\)](#), when General [Sava Grujić's \(1840-1913\)](#) Radical government amnestied him. After his return, he was elected speaker of the National Assembly (*Narodna skupština*) and served at two different times as the mayor of Belgrade (1889-1891 and 1897). He was premier from 1891 to 1892, and ambassador to Russia 1893-94, but resigned in protest against ex-King Milan's illegal return to Serbia. The Radicals' fierce opposition grew. When an attempt was made on ex-King Milan's life in 1899, the government rid itself of Radical leaders based on trumped-up charges of engineering the crime. As a result of Russian remonstrances, Pašić was soon amnestied on condition of leaving the country. He returned after Milan's final withdrawal in 1901. After that he remained for the most part politically inactive until the coup d'état in 1903.

Pašić as a Statesman

After the fall of the Obrenović dynasty, which also signalled a turning point in Serbian foreign policy and [Austria-Hungary's](#) loss of influence in Belgrade, the Radical Party became dominant. Pašić was named foreign minister in 1904. He was premier of Serbia during the periods 1905-06, 1906-08 and 1909-11. At the same time, he served as foreign minister and minister of constructions (1909). Pašić led state foreign policy reckoning on Russian [Pan-Slavic](#) circles and the Russian court. Between 1906 and 1911, during the so-called Customs War (Pig War), when Austro-Hungary closed its borders to Serbian exports (mostly pork meat), Pašić managed to make Serbia less economically dependent on the neighbouring Habsburg monarchy. Until this point, Serbia had been, economically, little more than an Austrian satellite.

Pašić was the primary creator of the slogan "The Balkans for the Balkan nations" and focused his efforts on strengthening the Serbian army, thus avoiding the militarization of the entire society and saving parliamentary democracy. As a result of the tension with the army circles, the secret organisation "[Black Hand](#)" was founded in 1911. This non-institutional factor influenced Serbian policy and Pašić was not able to control it.

Pašić also took part in [Milovan Milovanović's \(1863-1912\)](#) negotiations for the Balkan League. Upon Milovanović's death in 1912, Pašić resumed the premiership. He remained in office throughout the [Balkan Wars](#) and World War I. He contributed toward the alliance with Greece and the rapprochement with Romania. He also headed the Serbian delegation during the peace conference in Bucharest in 1913.

Prior to the [assassination](#) of [Franz Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria-Este \(1863-1914\)](#) in Sarajevo, Pašić warned [Leon Bilinski \(1846-1923\)](#), Austria-Hungary's joint minister of Finance

and Governor of Bosnia and Herzegovina, on 18 June 1914 through the Serbian minister [Jovan M. Jovanović \(1869-1939\)](#) that the archduke's visit to Sarajevo following military maneuvers on the Serbian national holiday, *Vidovdan*, could provoke some reckless act with serious consequences. After the assassination, the Serbian government led by Pašić conducted the investigation, arrested Major [Vojislav Tankosić \(1880-1915\)](#), a member of Black Hand who trained both [Gavrilo Princip \(1894-1918\)](#) and other Young Bosnia Organization members in military skills. Pašić issued a warrent for the arrest of [Milan Ciganović \(1888-1924\)](#), in an attempt to punish two persons directly connected with the assassination.

World War I

When the [July crisis](#) of 1914 broke out, Pašić was in the middle of a political campaign for the parliamentary elections. He immediately returned to Belgrade and prepared a response to the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum. Serbia accepted all the ultimatum demands except that Austrian police be allowed to travel independently throughout Serbia and conduct their own investigations. Serbia was also ready to discuss the problems in the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague and to accept its ruling on all doubtful questions. According to [Wilhelm II, German Emperor \(1859-1941\)](#), the answer was written so wisely that any cause for war disappeared with it.

However, using the formal Serbian refusal as a pretext, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on 28 July 1914. After the war broke out, one of the main problems facing Pašić was the situation in [Albania](#). In an attempt to both avoid the subversive actions inspired by Austria-Hungary in Albania and to secure a sea outlet for Serbian trade in the future, Pašić decided to support [Essad Pasha Toptani \(1863-1920\)](#) as leader in Albania. On 17 September 1914 Pašić signed a secret convention in Niš with Essad Pasha. The fifteen points called for the creation of joint political and military institutions, but the most important provisions focused on a military alliance, the construction of an Adriatic railroad to Duress, and guarantees that Serbia would support Essad Pasha's election as the Albanian ruler. The treaty left open the possibility that Serbia, at the invitation of Essad Pasha, could carry out a military intervention to protect the Albanian regime. The demarcation between the two countries was to be drawn by a Serbo-Albanian commission created for this purpose. Essad Pasha was to confirm the treaty only upon being elected ruler, with consent from the National Assembly. Provided with Serbian money and armaments, and with over 4,000 volunteers mustered in the vicinity of Debar, Essad Pasha marched peacefully into Duress at the beginning of October 1914, set up his government, and proclaimed himself supreme commander of the Albanian army.¹

Pašić also played a predominant role in forming Serbia's war goals and creating [Yugoslavia's](#) unification program. He opposed the creation of "Greater Serbia" after the war, although the Allies supported it. According to Pašić, the main Serbian goal was the creation of a joint Serbo-Croatian state, as it was difficult to separate Serbs and Croats in the many mixed territories. A Great Serbia would contain many Croats (Bosnia and Herzegovina, South Dalmatia, Central and East Slavonia) inside of its borders and many Serbs (North Dalmatia, Lika, Banija, Kordun and West Slavonia) outside of it. The second greater "Yugoslav" solution, in comparison, would include Slovenes together with the Serbs and Croats inside the borders of the future state. The Yugoslav solution was proclaimed as a Serbian war program on 7 December 1914 in the Serbian Parliament with the so-called "Declaration of Niš". After the Central Powers invaded Serbia in autumn 1915, Pašić fled with his cabinet, court and army through Albania to Corfu. In exile, Pašić decided, together with the Serbian court, to get rid of the most prominent members of the Black Hand organization. The so-called Salonika Trial followed and the leaders were sentenced to death.

Pašić was also mainly responsible for signing the Corfu Declaration on 20 July 1917 with the Yugoslav Committee – a political interest group formed by South Slavs that aimed to unify the south Slavic nations in an independent state – as a new step toward the creation of a future Yugoslav state. Keeping in mind the ruling principles of national self-determination proclaimed by the Allies, the declaration envisaged a parliamentary monarchy under the Karadjordjević dynasty. The state would possess indivisible territory and unitary power; the three national denominations and the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets would be equal before the law and there would be religious freedom and universal suffrage. The declaration provided for a Constituent Assembly to establish a constitution prescribing all powers.² When the [February Revolution in Russia](#) had withdrawn Serbia's major ally from the diplomatic table, Pašić turned his policy toward the United States, seeking their understanding and backing for Serbian goals. In the second half of 1918, when the Yugoslav program became part of the Allies' war goals, Pašić fought against the creation of two centers of Yugoslav unification and the possible federalization of a future state.

After the war, Pašić served as the chief Yugoslav delegate to the [Paris Peace Conference](#) and as the premier of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia) – except for brief intervals – from 1921 to 1926. Due primarily to an abstention of the Croatian Republican Peasant Party, as premier Pašić was able to steer the new liberal, but centralist constitution through parliament on 28 June 1921.

Dalibor Denda, Department of Military History, Institute for Strategic Research, Belgrade

Notes

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2. The full text of Corfu Declaration, 20 July 1917, online:
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External Links

- [Pašić at the Little Entente Conference at Versailles \(1920\), Imperial War Museum \(Video\)](#)
- [Petrovitch, Woislav M.: Serbia. Her People History and Aspirations, London 1915 \(Internet Archive\) \(Book\)](#)
- [Photo of Nikola Pašić, Berlin State Library \(Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin\) \(Article\)](#)
- [Troops Assembled in Belgrade and King of Serbia and Nikola Pašić \(1914\), Europeana and European Film Gateway \(Video\)](#)

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