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BRANKO BESLIN'S MONOGRAPH ABOUT EUGENE OF SAVOY – A HISTORICAL PANORAMA OF AN EPOCH²

*Бешлин, Б. (2014). Евѣније Савојски и њејово доба.
Нови Саг: Маџица срѣска.*

If Eugene of Savoy had been born a century later, Njegoš would have included him in the “twins from the cradle of Bellona.” Napoleon said of him that he was one of the seven greatest military leaders in history, and many thought that was the greatest. Prince Eugene, a great warrior and military leader, marked the time at which he proved himself, an epoch and all its specificities can be seen through the prism of life and work of such a person. Exactly in this way, an extensive (655 p.) monograph *Eugene of Savoy and His Time* was designed by distinguished professor Branko Beslin. The book delighted many researchers who study the early new century, as well as all admirers of literature on somewhat older history of Europe and this area. The author gave valuable work to early modernism, but also improved university teaching, because the book enlightens the whole epoch.

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What can be noticed immediately is the fact that professor Beslin conceived the book in a contemporary way, managing to bring it close to the reader, but also to maintain solid principles of a scientific monograph. His "Introductory Considerations" are a skillful symbiosis of a prologue and methodological introduction, which are both interesting and professionally meaningful. The story starts from the roots of Prince Eugene, which were deep in the Alpine regions, where one of the oldest European dynastic houses was established. During the Middle Ages, the house of Savoy strengthened its possessions and influence in the Savoy region of the Alps, in order for, as the author writes: "Exactly in the twilight of the Middle Ages and at the dawn of the new century, the importance of Savoy to come to the fore." Professor Beslin, in several chapters, succeeded in showing the flow of events of Prince Eugene's childhood and youth, and answering the question posed to every reader in front of which this book is found. In what way such a warrior and military leader was formed? The author rightly points out at one point that Prince (apart from his personal skills and ambition) "largely owed his rise to his origin." The entire story of Prince Eugene's youth, which is sad and ordinary at times, also controversial occasionally, is vividly explained in this literary work.

What lifted up Prince Eugene on a pedestal of glory, but also brought him into direct interest of Serbian national historiography, was his involvement "In the East." Circumstances brought him to the greatest war events in the then Europe, to the great Viennese war between the Ottomans and the Habsburgs. It was a conflict that led Christian Europe to the danger of Islamic invasion. Today the prevailing view among researchers is that the modern Western historiography has substantially ignored the great threat that the Ottoman Empire posed to the West between the 15th and 17th centuries, reducing it to regional conflicts. Professor Beslin took this opportunity, showing the true image of the magnitude of the threat that hanged over Europe at the time. Certainly, it was also influenced by the importance of this issue to the Serbian national historiography and bitter historical experience of this area with the Ottomans. When Palatinate War (1688-1697) The Nine Years' War (1688-97) broke out, military operations were transferred to two fronts, and Savoy found himself opposite the troops of Louis XIV, on whose court he grew up. Soon, at the age of only 28, he received a serious military-diplomatic mission, to lead a corps of

imperial troops to Italy. It was the beginning of the rise of the young prince on a scale of military duties, first he became a general, and later a field marshal. At the same time, he also waged war in the Serbian region, staying remembered as an invincible commander, who had victories against the Turks in Belgrade, Slankamen and Senta. In this part of the book, presenting the first military engagements of Prince Eugene, the author did not have an easy task to fit all sequences of European history that marked this time into a historical story. In this way, the part of the book that is an excellent and modern synthesis of general and national history of the epoch of the Great Vienna War was created.

The historical circumstances that exposed Prince Eugene to become a warlord and politician were the events related to the beginning of the War of the Spanish Succession. In this great conflict that marked the time of the early 18th century, Prince Eugene found himself at one point on the same side as an ally of Savoy, his homeland. With his relative, the Duke of Savoy Vittorio Amadeo, in 1706, he occupied Turin (the capital of Savoy since 1663). There, in the heart of his homeland, as professor Beslin writes: "in 1736, the heart of Prince Eugene was placed in an urn." Great victories that accompanied him in Italy contributed to his becoming the president of the Court Council of War. He found himself at the top of the then European politics, became the governor of Lombardy, was proposed for the king of Poland, and later he became the governor of the Austrian Netherlands. Prince Eugene "triumphantly" returned to the East at the time of his greatest military glory. He fought in Bosnia, Wallachia and won the battle of Petrovaradin. Again he came to Belgrade (where "almost thirty years before, he suffered the biggest wound"), freed it, and Serbian volunteer troops helped him. The author concludes: "In Belgrade, Prince Eugene won his last and most famous big victory in his long military career."

In the book that describes a warrior and warlord, there is also space for topics that are not political or martial, and that are unavoidable in the reconstruction of the biography of Prince Eugene. "At the same time, he built magnificent castles, whose chambers he filled with works of art and a splendid library, and gardens with rare plants and animals." Belvedere was built for him, one of the most beautiful architectural monuments of Baroque Europe. Just like emperor Rudolf II used to do, he organized a network of agents who bought for him works of art throughout

Europe. In this way, the famous art collection of Prince Eugene was created, among the paintings, there were Prince's portraits, on which his image was saved from oblivion of the past. The library he owned was one of the most valuable in Europe, with around fifteen thousand books, hundreds of manuscripts, volumes with etchings and boxes with portraits. Many were surprised that Prince had time to read, and it was believed that he read much. The book has a harmonious structure, which goes towards the end in the way that the life candle of aging Prince, tormented in military campaigns, life and family adversities, without old friends and relatives, extinguished.

Professor Beslin's monograph represents an extraordinary literary work, whose quality is so high that there are not many of those in the Serbian historiography. The author managed to include in the monograph content, not only an interesting history of an exceptional person, who marked his time, like Eugene of Savoy did, but also to show the full historical picture of the epoch of the last decades of the 17th and the first decades of the 18th century. He also succeeded in including in this historical composition the national history of the Serbian people, who were under the "force of darkness" at the time, and could not play an important role on the European political scene. Professor Beslin succeeded in pointing out the most important sequences in the history of this time, in which the Serbs took part, within historiographical principles and norms. The author has been skillful (and this is a method of contemporary European historiography) to link the events of the older past with certain reflections that were projected in the future. At the place where Prince Eugene raged with his troops, a colonization of the German population occurred later. The author emphasizes that the military leader lived in the Swabian tradition of the Serbian area, between the two world wars, and that respect for the great warrior assumed proportions of a cult. The 7th SS Volunteer Mountain Division Prinz Eugen from the Second World War bore his name, and consisted mainly of volunteers Danube Swabians.

Our impression is that the book belongs to the literary works, which, after reading, leave a pleasant feeling in the reader, a feeling that he read good and worth reading, from which he can learn. It is a book about which the reader thinks, and which leads the researcher to reflection on some questions from the past that are dealt with in it. Therefore, we recommend it for reading to the

researchers of the past, but also to the audience who loves to read a good history book. With his book, distinguished professor Beslin enriched classes at study program of history, where it is worth reading for students of all levels of study.