SERBIAN RULERS AND THE SOKOL MOVEMENT

Jevdja A Jevdjevic
Union of Serbian Soko, Belgrade

SUMMARY

The origin of the Sokol idea and movement is related to the second half of the 19th century. At that time, most of the Slavic peoples were enslaved, their national consciousness was awakening. The Czechs, who were exposed to great pressure and Germanization, founded Soko in 1862 as a Slavic gymnastics organization. Unlike them, the Serbs already had their own state and gymnastic knightly societies were created in a free state under the auspices of Serbian rulers. The first gymnastics troupe was created in 1857 under the leadership of Steve Todorović, who was raising Prince Mihailo's illegitimate son Velimir. In addition to him, several other children from Belgrade families practiced in the company. Prince Mihailo Obrenović, who lived in Europe for a long time, knew the importance of gymnastics and sports, so he bought exercise equipment and gave a plot of land for exercise on the site of the current Academy of Sciences.

During the reign of King Milan, the first Belgrade Society for Gymnastics and Wrestling was founded in 1882, which changed its name to Soko in 1891. Since the foundation of this society, the patron was the heir to the throne, later King Aleksandar Obrenović. After the May coup 1903, Crown Prince Đorđe Karadorđević became the patron of Sokol. When he abdicated, his brother King Alexander did not officially receive patronage, but he considered himself a Sokol and had a decisive influence on the strengthening of the organization and the profiling of the Sokol ideology. In 1929, he decided that his minor son, the Crown Prince Petar, would become the head of the Sokol (Sokol elder) of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The seniority of the Crown Prince and later of King Peter gave the Sokol movement a certain amount of exclusivity. The Sokol movement grew rapidly, the number of members grew, Sokol houses were built, and Sokol Slets were organized. The official uniform of the young Crown Prince was the Sokol uniform, and he even wore it to his father's funeral. His brothers Tomislav and Andrej were also members of Sokol. After the death of King Alexander, Regent Prince Pavle enrolled his sons in Soko.
The Serbian rulers correctly understood the importance of exercise and sports and used their authority to strengthen the Sokol idea and movement. Thanks to them, the Serbian and Yugoslav Sokol movement was largely supported by the state and was able to strengthen and develop indiscriminately.

**Key words:** prince, king, crown prince, Sokol movement, patron, head of the Sokol

**INTRODUCTION**

The origin of the Sokol idea and movement is related to the second half of the 19th century. At that time, most of the Slavic peoples were enslaved, their national consciousness was awakening. The Czechs, who were exposed to great pressure and Germanization, founded Soko in 1862 as a Slavic gymnastics organization. Unlike them, the Serbs already had their own state and gymnastic knightly societies were created in a free state under the auspices of Serbian rulers.

**SOKO AND OBRENOVIC FAMILY**

At the time of the beginning the organized physical exercise in Serbia and the Sokol movement and the world, Serbia was ruled by Prince Mihailo Obrenovic. The appearance of organized exercise in Serbia is linked to the Painting School of Stevan Todorović. In the school, which was active in the period from 1857 to 1864, in addition to painting and singing, gymnastics and fencing were practiced. The painting school functioned with numerous improvisations. Todorović managed to attract and inspire a few children and young men from Belgrade families to work, and one of the first trainees was Prince Mihailo's son, Velimir, who was put into his hands for education. The prince was a great lover of horses and is considered the founder of horse breeding and equestrian sports in Serbia. Also, living for a long time in Europe, he was familiar with the importance of physical exercise. For the above reasons, but also because of his son, he helped with the work about the school. The prince provided this group with an apartment with two rooms, for painting and gymnastics, as well as money for the purchase of exercise equipment. The first public gymnastics presentation held by the group and attended by Prince Mihailo was held on Easter 1860.¹

¹ Др Владан Вукашиновић, Гимнастика и соколство у Србији до 1941. године, великани српске гимнастике и соколства, Универзитет у Београду, Факултет спорта и физичког васпитања, Београд, 2016, стр.10.
The painting school of Stevan Todorović might not be considered a gymnastics club because it was not registered with the authorities of the Principality of Serbia as a gymnastics club, but as a painting school. It functioned without a statute, administration and other characteristics of a society and association.²

During the reign of Prince Milan Obrenović, the first gymnastics club in Serbia was founded under the name "Belgrade Club for gymnastics and wrestling" in 1882. Prince Milan understood the importance of physical exercise properly, so he allowed his minor son, Crown Prince Aleksandar, to become the patron of the Belgrade Gymnastics and Wrestling Association. Serbian newspapers report that Their Highnesses were pleased to approve that His Highness the Crown Prince be the patron of this society.³

Significant attention was paid to the education of the future King Aleksandar Obrenović at the request of King Milan, the curriculum was drawn up by Baron Gaucha of Frankenturn, the Minister of Education in the German part of the Habsburg Monarchy.⁴ During the school year 1888-1889, King Alexander had sixteen subjects. He was taught gymnastics and wrestling by Đorđe Vujic (a reserve officer and official in the Ministry of Defense), and horse riding by a stable master. Later, in addition to the regular university subjects, military profession courses were added. ...he gave his best to master riding and showjumping to be ready to command troops.⁵ The King's condition and physical fitness were of special importance. During the winter, he practiced in the room, lifted weights up to 20 kilograms, did exercises on the loom and the goat, while since May he practiced gymnastics in the garden. He practiced six times a week for half an hour. In the summer of 1892, he began to practice swimming regularly in the closed bath pool in cold water. According to the governor, the King swam very well.⁶ The young king attended the officer's parties and celebrations and played Serbian traditional dance with them and often stayed until midnight.

In addition to his patronage of the "Belgrade Gymnastics and Wrestling Association", Aleksandar also visited numerous sports and chivalry societies, such as the Belgrade Shooting Society, Serbian Horse Society and others.

³ Током фебруара 1883. више пута је у Српским новинама изашао оглас
⁴ Сузана Рајић, Александар Обреновић, владар на прелазу векова, Београд 2014. стр.29.
⁵ Сузана Рајић, Александар Обреновић, владар на прелазу векова, Београд 2014. стр.36.
⁶ Сузана Рајић, Александар Обреновић, владар на прелазу векова, стр. 36.
The name of King Alexander is associated with the first renewed Olympic Games in 1896 in Athens. King Alexander was the only foreign head of state presented. His host, King George of Greece, showed him great honor with an invitation and attention during his stay. As noted by the Serbian press, on March 27, 1896, His Majesty King Alexander arrived at the Athenian port of Piraeus, where he was greeted by the firing of cannons from all the warships. He was welcomed by the Greek King with the playing of anthems and other military honors. The king stayed at the Court in Athens and in the afternoon, he attended the Olympic Games.  

**SOKO AND KARADORĐEVIĆ FAMILY**

After the state coup in May in 1903, the Karadorđević dynasty ascended the Serbian throne and took over numerous patronages of the previous dynasty. Crown Prince Đorđe received patronage over Falcon. During his care of Sokol, he often visited Sokol events. Prince Đorđe was also the patron of "Dušan the Mighty", so he mediated the unification of those two societies. King Peter also showed his favour towards physical exercise in 1910, when he prepared reception at the court for numerous Serbian, Czech and Croatian falcons, participants of the falcon meeting and public class on July 7 and 8. On All Souls' Day in May 1911, King Petar attended the opening of the summer training ground of the Sokol Society "Dušan the mighty" in the eastern part of Belgrade’s Vračar neighborhood. On Vidovdan in 1919, the great Vidovdan Sokol Assembly was held with delegates from the entire newly created state of SHS. Živojin Mišić was an envoy of King Peter at the Sokol Assembly.

Indeed, the most important Serbian ruler of the new century, King Aleksandar Karadorđević, never directly became a patron of the Sokol organization, but his contribution is very significant and enormous. From January 1904, Aleksandar began to be taught by professors and in addition to other subjects, he was also trained in wrestling and horse riding. Even as the heir to the throne, he and his sister Jelena attended the public exercises of the Sokols, which were on the All-

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7 Српске новине, 29.март 1896, стр.1.
10 Др Бранислав Глигоријевић, Краљ Александр у ратовима за национално ослобођење, Београд 2010, стр.16.
Sokol meeting and public class on July 7 and 8, 1910. During the following year, the heir to the throne attended academic gymnastics evenings organized by the Belgrade falconry association "Dušan the Mighty" and on October 27 he received a delegation of Serbian falconry from outside the Kingdom of Serbia.\(^{11}\) It is not known when he joined the falconry organization, but he unequivocally has proven his affiliation to the Sokol movement and idea. During a meeting with the Sokol leadership when he received an invitation to attend the Sokol public exercise (Slet) in Skopje in 1928, King Alexander declared: "I am a Sokol."\(^{12}\) During his wedding with the Romanian princess, later Queen Maria, falcons were included in the protocol and provided a guard of honor. After the death in Marseille in 1934, falcons carried the coffin with the dead king in Split, from the destroyer "Dubrovnik" to the train that took the body to Belgrade. During the stopover in Zagreb, the Sokols also provided a guard of honor. Members of falconry societies were deployed all along the way, during the journey to Belgrade and later the day of the funeral to Oplenac. On the day of the funeral, his son heir Petar was in the Sokol’s uniform. Slovenian sokol leaders and falcons participated in the funeral procession through the streets of Belgrade. The flags of all Sokol parishes were also carried. The Sokols lined up on Terazije stand still, and there are numerous Sokol ensigns around the square.\(^{13}\)

King Alexander presented the Sokol Association with the two most important regalia. Knight’s sword of King Alexander (1926) and the flag of the Sokol Union (on Vidovdan 1930).\(^{14}\) He also donated Sokol parish flags throughout Yugoslavia: Sokol parish Split in 1926, Sokol parish Užice 1928, Sokol parish Niš and Sokol parish Kragujevac.\(^{15}\) He was a patron of the Sokol Festivals (Slet) and attended some of them, such as The Yugoslav All-Sokol festival in Ljubljana (1922), the All-Sokol festival in Belgrade (1930). King Alexander, his son Petar II and the court helped build numerous sokol homes. King Alexander gave a contribution of 100,000 dinars for the construction of the Sokol’s Home Belgrade-Matica. (Now known as the Old -DIF building).\(^{16}\)

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12 Е. Гангл, Краљ и Соколство, Спомен књига 10 година владавине Његовог Величанства Краља Александра I 1921-1931, уредио Нико Бартуловић, Београд, 1931, стр.78.
13 Политика,19.октобар 1934, стр.8.
14 Јевђе А.Јевђевић, рукопис Соко и Карађорђевићи. 2016, стр. 5, 6.
15 Јевђе А.Јевђевић, рукопис Соко и Карађорђевићи. 2016, стр.6.
King Alexander gave the Sokol Association the historic palace of Krsmanović in Terazije, where the unification of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was proclaimed and where the royal court was located from 1918 to 1922. Thus, Karadjordje's home in Topola given as a gift to the Sokol Association for the Sokol home and training room. The king also decided to tie his first-born son to the Sokol organization, that's why when the Sokol of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was founded, he appointed his son as the permanent head of the Association in article (number 17) of the Statute on the Organization and Business of the Sokol in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, it is stated "The permanent head of the Alliance, according to the authority and order of His Majesty the King from December 4, 1929 and the Law on the Foundation of the Sokol of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Article no 5), is His Royal Highness the Heir to the Throne Kingdom of Yugoslavia."

After the birth of Crown Prince Peter on September 6, 1923, his father King Alexander decided to connect him with the Sokol organization. Thus, at the end of October of the same year, the King's office informed the Sokol Association about the King's approval for the Crown Prince to be a benefactor member of all Sokol children. In the following years, while the heir to the throne was small, the royal treasury paid the annual membership fee to the Belgrade Sokol Society every year. Pictures of the little crown prince exercising were often reproduced and published. On the front page of the newsletter of the Belgrade Sokol Parish "Sokol Dušan the Mighty" there was published a photo of the little Crown Prince Peter in a Sokol suit with the title "The Youngest Yugoslav Sokol", and below the picture is the text "Dear grandson of the great Grandfather, thousands of children now look at you, like a falcon you make them you lead straight to the goal of the Sokols, be salute from us now!" Great attention was paid to the upbringing and education of the heir to the throne and later the king. It was planned that he would be educated in England, but after a short time, due to the death of his father, he had to return and become king before his time. After his return from England in 1934, it was decided that he would continue his education according to the program that was applied in Belgrade's private schools, and Jeremija Živanović was appointed as the director, who held the title of "Manager". It was planned that the young king would finish two school years in one year. He was brought up to be the leader of a large and complex country composed of many opposites. Since his shyness was noticed, it was thought that through Sokol and sports, but not socializing with his peers, he could overcome it.

17 Јевђа А. Јевђевић, рукопис Соко и Карађорђевићи, 2016, стр.7,8.
18 Анте Брозовић, Соко краљевине Југославије, Београд 1930. стр.107.
19 Политика, 27.октобар 1923. стр.5.
20 Јевђа А. Јевђевић, Соко и Карађорђевићи, 2016, стр. 4.
21 Соко Душана Силног, Београдске соколске жупе, год. II Београд, фебруара 1926, Број 2.
That is why special attention is paid to his physical development, falconry, and sports. King Petar first did Sokol exercises with his teacher three times a week from 12.00 to 12.30. Gymnastics was practiced in the cinema hall in the old palace, but when they determined that the premises were too stuffy, the equipment was moved to the White Palace, which had just been built. 22 Educator Cecil Perot had good ideas for the education of King Peter, so he came up with the idea to invite the king’s peers to the court and to play various sports. 23 Ivan Kovač, a sokol worker, oversaw the implementation of this idea.

Kovač was a good educator and was able to instill in children a falcon spirit and drive. His idea was to cultivate falconry and camp under tents for exercise and song. 24 At first the boys were reserved and Petar himself was quite shy, but as soon as they started playing ball, all the discomfort stopped, and they really started having fun. After a while, fourteen boys came regularly so they split into two teams of seven. By Christmas they had organized two full football teams of eleven players on each side. That his team did not always win, Petar concluded in his memoirs, that it was a sure sign that his shyness was over. 25 According to the testimony of Dr. Ljuba Kostić (the head of Soko Yugoslavia in those 90 years) who was in that group, the children who practiced with the king were from the Sokol Society Belgrade II.

At first, we only practiced gymnastics, and gradually we moved on to other sports, and so in the five, almost six years we spent together, there was no sport we did not play and compete in.” From gymnastics (horse, goat, circles, loom, rope), we moved on to the athletic disciplines of running, shot put, high jump, long jump, then to volleyball and basketball, sports that were still in their infancy in our country, and finally we also played real football matches... Saša, the son of Prince Pavla, was most often with us, we called him Schultz, he was the closest to us in terms of age, and Tomislav and Andrija were small children. Saša was physically stronger than Petar, so in football matches he was always on the opposing team. We played tennis, ping-pong, rowing, kayaking, camping, and camped together, too. 26 With our Sokol leader Ivan Kovač, we visited all the mountains of Slovenia and climbed to the top of Triglav. Petar did not have any privileged place in the competition, nor did we give him any concessions because he is the king. We even provoked him in sports and that influenced him to try hard

22 Петар II Карађорђевић, Жivot једног краља, Београд 1990, стр. 51.
23 Томислав Карађорђевић, Мемоари, Задужбина краља Петра I, Топола, стр.89.
24 Јевђа А. Јевђевић, Повратак краља, Петар II Карађорђевић, Београд 2013, стр. 42.
26 Јевђа А. Јевђевић, Повратак краља, Петар II Карађорђевић, (Мој пријатељ краљ Петар, сећања из младости др Љубомир Костић) стр..201.
and to be better and better in sports. According to the memory of his friend to dr. Ljuba Kostić, the young King Petar was calm, composed and measured, a good friend and a dear friend.

Petar, as the heir to the throne and later the king, presented several Sokol flags. Among others, in 1937 he donated flags to the Sokol parishes of Cetinje and the Sokol parish of Belgrade. In addition, kings Alexander and Peter donated and sponsored many social Sokol flags. Sokol homes throughout the Kingdom of Yugoslavia bore the names of kings Peter I, Alexander I and Peter II. There were also homes that bore the name of the prince Tomislav.

Sokols (Sokol parishes Sarajevo, Mostar, Tuzla, Užice and Kragujevac) are (in 1934) in honor of King Peter I carried the falcon baton - a baton with flame of gratitude and with it they lit a lamp over the graves of King Peter I and Karadorde. On the occasion of the 17th birthday of King Peter II (1940) the falcon baton was carried from all parishes. It was planned to carry the baton for the 18th birthday of the king, when a big festival (Slet) was planned, which was not held because of the war. The other children of King Alexander were also members of Sokol. This can be seen in their preserved photos, where Princes Petar and Andrej are in Sokol uniforms. For Prince Tomislav, it is known that on February 18, 1928, the Marshal of the Court informed the Sokol Society Belgrade I that the King was pleased to order that the Prince Tomislav be enrolled as a regular member of the Belgrade Sokol I.

At the beginning of his regent mandate, Prince Regent Pavle Karadorđević enrolled his sons Aleksandar and Nikola in Sokol. Politika reports on this: "On January 19, 1935, Prince Regent Pavle received Đura Paunković, deputy head of the Sokol Association, in a long audience, who reported on current activities in Sokol Society. During this reception, the prince ordered that his two sons, Prince Aleksandar and Prince Nikola, be enrolled in the ranks of the Sokols."

The writer of this paper had the opportunity after 2000 year to meet Prince Alexander several times. The prince said, we are Sokol brothers, and we address each other as you. The prince also received a photo of him boxing with his cousin, King Peter, the head of Sokol.

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28 Јевђа А. Јевђевић, Повратак краља, Петар II Карађорђевић, (Мој пријатељ краљ Петар, сећања из младости др Љубомир Костић) стр.203.
29 Соколски гласник, 1. децембар 1934. стр.8.
31 Јевђа А. Јевђевић, рукопис Соко и Карађорђевићи, 2016.
32 Политика, 19. фебруар 1928, стр.5.
33 Политика, 23. јануар 1935, стр.2.
34 Јевђа А. Јевђевић, рукопис Дневне белешке.
The son of King Peter II, the heir to the throne, Alexander II, has been the patron of the Serbian Soko Association since February 24, 2009. Before that, Crown Prince Aleksandar was the patron of the 100th anniversary jubilee of Sokol Society in Kragujevac and Šumadija in 2007. Brother of King Peter and son of King Alexander, Prince Tomislav Karadorđević was declared an honorary member of the Sokol parish of Šumadija in May 1999. Sokols was visited and supported by another old Soko prince, Aleksandar Karadorđević, son of Prince Pavle, as well as his son Dušan, who joined the Kragujevac Sokol Society on November 16, 2001. The eldest son of Prince Andrej Karadorđević, Prince Vladimir, received a Sokol membership card on August 22, 2011 year.

During the state funeral of King Peter II, his wife Alexandra, mother Maria and brother Andrej, Sokol members had their duties. When the body of King Peter arrived in the palace church, the coffin was covered with the national flag, which the guards took down the national flag and handed it over to the guard officer. The guard was changed, the guardsmen were replaced by members of the gendarmerie. The Head of Sokol brought in the king's personal standard (flag) and handed it over to the chairman of the crown alliance, Dragomir Acović (who was once the head of Sokol), who is with the members of the crown council, and they place it over the coffin. At the reception of the body, the falcons carried the crosses of Queen Maria, Alexandra, and Prince Andrej in their falcon uniforms, and at the funeral, the crosses of Queen Alexandra and Prince Andrej. The head of Sokol is with Crown Prince Alexander laid a wreath on the coffin of the king. During the funeral in Oplenac, in addition to the national flag, the flag of the royal family and the Association of the Kingdoms of Serbia, the flag of the Serbian Soko Association was ceremonially carried.

**CONCLUSION**

The Serbian rulers correctly understood the importance of exercise and sports and used their authority to strengthen the Sokol idea and movement. Thanks to them, the Serbian and Yugoslav Sokol movement was largely supported by the state and was able to strengthen and develop indiscriminately.

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35 Архива Савеза српски соко, писмо престолонаследника Александра.
36 Лична архива Јевђе А. Јевђевића.
37 Архива Савеза српски соко, приступнице.
38 Јевђа А. Јевђевић, рукопис Дневне белешке.
39 Вељко Лековић, Споменица поводом двадесетогодишњице соколског рада Јевђе А. Јевђевића и десетогодишњице старешинства у Савезу српски соко, Београд 2018, Савез Српски Соко, стр.35.
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9. Јевђевић Јевђа, лична архива.
10. Јевђевић Јевђа, рукопис Дневне белешке.
11. Јевђевић Јевђа, рукопис Соко и Карађорђевићи, 2016.
15. Райић Сузана, Александар Обреновић, владар на прелазу векова, Београд 2014.
17. Политика, 1923;1928;1934; 1935.
18. Српске новине, 1883; 1896

Received on 24.11.2023.
Accepted on 13.12.2023.