

## **FALCONS IN “HIGH TREASON PROCESSES“, CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF SERBIAN FALCON SUFFERING ON THE EVE AND DURING “THE GREAT WAR“**

*(Original scientific paper)*

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### **Abstract**

*From the very beginning of founding falcon associations on South Slavic territory, they, besides the body exercising, aimed for high political objectives - to achieve greater national rights, independence and unity of nations. An idea of freeing the nation from German influence and strengthening the national and cultural consciousness rapidly expanded. The skeleton of exercising and body exercising of falcon performances was moral, spiritual and body strengthening that contributed to the great interest for the Falcon which from an organization grew into a falconry movement. Strong national and all-Yugoslav feeling and the spirit of patriotism followed the falcons on the territories where the Serbs lived under the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. A historic method was used in the research. The aim of the study was to present and break away the facts from oblivion due to the centenary of the First World War about suffering of the Falcons. In the whirl of complex social and political events and war happenings before and during the “Great War” as well as later, the Falcons of “Serbian Falcon Fruska Gora Parish” and “Bosnia and Herzegovina Parish” paid an extremely high price of devotion to the idea of creating a joint state. The falcon members staunchly shared the fate of their country with their nation and therefore thanks to “high treason” court processes were sentenced to prison, persecution, internment, execution and hanging.*

**Keywords:** *Falconry, Serbian and Bosnian and Herzegovina Falcon movement history, The Great War*

### **INTRODUCTION**

On the model of Czech falconry, at the beginning of the twentieth century Serbian falcon movements started being founded outside of the Kingdom of Serbia, on the territories where the Serbs lived under the Austro-Hungarian - Hungary Monarchy. The idea of the Czech falconry founder MD Miroslav Tirs was quickly accepted – to gather and enlighten members through exercising, mass meetings and performances in order to develop physically and morally a healthy, cultured and versatile personality of each individual, with a feeling of national belonging, social equality and democracy. Tirs’s ideas and high goals are basic principles of Falcon’s ideology: body education and moral as well as cultural uprising to wake the sense of equality, higher national rights, love of country and people, national rebirth, independence and unity of the South Slavic nations.

This kind of organized training was accepted as the most dominant form of resistance to Germanization and it soon rose into Falcon movement in the occupied territories of the South Slavic nations. It was taking place at

the time of complex social and political occurrences and stormy events. The new national streaming in countries under Vienna and Pesta – the crisis of Bosnian regime, the fall of the Hungarian regime in Croatia, outbreaks in Southern Serbia and Macedonia, tension in Dalmatia, May revolution and changes of dynasties on the throne of the Kingdom of Serbia in 1903 – the beginning of the Petar Karadjordjevic Reign (Brozovic, 1935) and others started a wave of new optimism within the population.

Outside of borders of Serbia the first Falcon movement was founded in Sremski Karlovci, by founding of “Serbian Falcon“ (1904) and on that occasion the goal was set to spread the Falconry wherever the Serbs lived under a foreign reign, for the purpose of the national gathering and waking of freedom thought. In the short period of time the first “Serbian Falcon Fruska Gora Parish“ headquartered in Sremski Karlovci (1905) was founded and in the first three years 30 Falcon associations were founded in Pakrac, Osijek, Vukovar, Mitrovica (Sremska, author’s note), Vinkovci, Zagreb, Ruma, Sid, Zemun, Indjija, Novi Sad etc. (Vukasinovic, 2013).

The founder - MD Laza Popovic cooperated with Czech, Slovenian and Croatian falcons and in an inspired way he started spreading the idea of Serbian Falconry in Srem, Banat, Backa, Slavonija and Western Croatia by writing for the newspapers "Branik", "Srbobran" and "Youth Courier" and later on "Serbian Falcon" and "Serbian Falcon Courier". As of 1905. Falcon rallies were held in Ravanica on Vidovdan, where in front of a several thousand people it was exercised, trained and spoken about the significance of the Serbian holiday Vidovdan, the Kosovo heroes, Milos Obilic and Prince Lazar on whose grave in the monastery it was pledged to the idea of freedom and unity.

In Bosnia, firstly the knight association "Obilic" was founded in Sarajevo in 1903. and then the association "Dusan Silni" (Dusan the Mighty) in 1906. The "Serbian Falcon" was founded in Tuzla in 1908. within the "Tuzla" parish. Then falcon associations were formed in Derventa, Maglaj, Bijeljina, Modrica and Doboj. In the meeting of representatives of all falcon associations from Bosnia and Herzegovina, held in Sarajevo in 1908, it was decided to form a "Union of Falcon Associations" and have a mutual name "Serbian Falcon". In less than 7 years the Falconry counted around 100 associations, one union and 3 falcon parishes. The foundation of Falcon parishes happened after the annexation, when the persecution of the Serbs ended. The first Serbian "Bosnia and Herzegovina Parish" with 20 associations was founded in Sarajevo in 1910. The first rally was held in Priboj, on the Pentecost in 1910. In the same year "Serbian Frontier Parish" with 20 associations was established in Zagreb (1910) with 14 associations. The "Seaside Parish" with its headquarters in Dubrovnik and Herceg Novi was set up in 1912. (Vukasinovic, 2013). The first Falcon association in Southern Serbia was founded in Kumanovo in 1909. and after the I Balkan War falcons were organized in Skopje, Prizren, Mitrovica (Kosovska, author's note), Pec, Djakovica, Vucitrn, Pristina, Nova Varos (Metikos, 1914.). In Vojvodina, the Hungarian authorities did not allow forming falcons' associations, but those existed in secrecy nevertheless (Spornjak, 1931.). In Montenegro Falconry started by founding the first Falcon association "Cetinje Falcon" in Cetinje, in 1906.

Karlovac falcons were tireless in attempts to start and unite all Falcon associations as well as in founding Falcon parishes. On their initiative, the meeting of all Serbian Falcon associations was organized in Zagreb (1911) where the "Union of Serbian Falcon Associations" was founded with Stevan Todorovic as president (Medakovic, 2004). Shortly, this union became a member of "Whole Slavic Falcon Union" (Todorovic, 1912). Serbian falcons met and performed together at Ravanica rallies, whole falcon rallies in Zagreb (1906, 1911), in Sofia (1908, 1910) and Prague (1907. and 1912., The First Whole Slavic Rally) representing the unique Serbian falconry. They also founded the "Countrymen Falcons" and besides exercising they attempted to provide as much as possible their populations with introducing

literacy, upbringing, enlightenment, cultural and moral uprising. Reading rooms and book shops, choirs and orchestras, literature and other sections, lectures, parties and country parties were organized as well as the professional work was improved by the arrival of Czech teachers and by specialization of our falcons holding by Czechs instructors.

Versatile, persistent, devoted and humane work of falcon associations, as well as behavior of massive membership contributed to the reputation of the falconry within the citizens. Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian falcons reached such a high level of mutual cooperation that the representatives of their falcon unions, considered the initiative from the Sixth Whole Falcon Rally (Prague, 1912) and they agreed upon forming of the "Yugoslav Falcon Union at the Falcon Rally in Ljubljana on the eve of the First World War. This rally, scheduled for June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1914 was forbidden by Austro-Hungarian authorities, even though everything was ready for it. Besides that, the Sarajevo Assassination also unexpectedly initiated the completely different development of events. The goal of this research was to find, systematized and critically review the data about the suffering of the Serbian falcons because of their role in the period before and during the Balkan and the First World War.

## METHODS

A historic method was applied in the study. Regarding heuristics a wide range of fact oriented material was used: monographs, Falconry periodicals, anthologies, annuals and legacies of former falcon members. The data collected from historic sources was studied regarding to various aspects which characterized the development and activities of falcon organizations and falcons themselves, depending on the events in the Kingdom of Serbia and the occupied territories outside of Serbia.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The history of Serbian falconry of the territory under the Monarchy, outside of the Kingdom of Serbia is characterized by three periods: a difficult start on falcon's work and inspiration of tireless national romanticists until 1914, then suffering of falcons during the great war and postwar re-organizing of falcon associations.

The occasions under which Serbian falconry made its first steps were complex. Radicals and liberals hated each other and argued while city, municipal, church and school authorities were suspicious of the ideas related to new cultural contents. Nevertheless, individuals managed to wake the falcon spirit within the youth by being persistent and romantically inspired so the membership started growing. The assistance of brotherly Czech professionals came, so people started understanding the falconry better and gradually. Also, the cultural contents, that were politically colored too, played their role.

The Austro-Hungarian authorities, both in Croatia and Bosnia were distrustful and critical to each cultural and national movement and especially to any gathering

and work of Serbian associations. Since the relationship between the Austro - Hungary and Serbia became tense, the authorities acted harsher and more unpleasant. During the annexation crisis "Serbian falconry was condemned and persecuted" (Brozovic-b, 1935) because falcons in the autonomous provinces under Austria were accused of "Great Serbia Propaganda". At that time it was spoken in a discreet manner that if it came to a war between the dual monarchy and Serbia, falcons would end up imprisoned. When the First Balkan War started, Austro-Hungarian authorities forbade the work of "Serbian Falcon" at the end of 1912. for a whole year, until the beginning of 1914. The position of Serbian falconry became harder for some falcons transited to Serbia to fight for it as volunteers.

General Pocorek, the head of all the territories ordered using exceptional measures dismissal of all Serbian associations on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The occasion for this ban of falcons' work in 1913. in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Zagreb was the enthusiastic reaction of Serbian nation to the successes of the Serbian army in the Balkan Wars. It was expected that 40 falcon associations, gathered in Serbian "Bosnia and Herzegovina Parish" would stop the work and that every connection between Serbian and Croatian falcons would cease, but those measures had the opposite effect (Brozovic, 1935).

But misfortunes for the falcons were just getting through. On the Vidovdan holiday in 1914., the assassination of Prince Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo by Gavrilo Princip took by surprise the Karlovac falcons and their guests at the Vidovdan rally near Ravanica. The police dispelled the presence and some of the leaders and their deputies were immediately arrested, while some of the rest of the leaders of "Serbian Falcon" were later brought into the custody. Even the MD Laza Popovic was arrested along with four reputable falcons and accused of high treason, which meant the death penalty. Several foremen were shot. In Sarajevo, after the assassination, the Austro-Hungarian authorities carried out raids, some of the materials were stolen, disseminated and destroyed (Vukasinić, Mijatović and Kocić, 2014). The associations were adjourned and documentation was taken away. All falcons who kept patriotic speeches with them were arrested. A Serbian falcon rally was held in Banja Luka, but without the afternoon public performance because of the assassination. After the Vidovdan shooting of the Monarchy crown-prince, three falcons were hanged, among whom Veljko Cubrilović – head of Priboj association and another 50 falcons were under the accusation of high treason (Vukasinić, 2013).

A criminal investigation began in November 1914. and due to high treason all falcon officials, leaders, deputies, secretaries and other employees of falcon parish societies were held under suspicion. The trial was conducted in accordance with the Austrian law, and investigation lasted 3-4 months without a break, starting in the

morning and ending in the afternoon and it was "a true verbal inquisition" (Brozovic, 1935). In order to prove the claims about the "Great Serbia Propaganda" a joint indictment was placed against the suspects from the associations "Falcon", "Prosveta" (education) and "Pobratim" (blood-brother). This mass court trial should have shown the European public that "The National Defense" in Serbia planned to cutoff parts of Austro – Hungary and especially that the participation of members from Bosnia and Herzegovina was organized. The discussion lasted for 6 months (October 1915. – March 1916.), in order to make a decision on Orthodox Holy Saturday whereby 97 accused were found guilty of high treason, of whom 16 were sentenced to death and 81 to heavy prison sentences (Brozovic-c, 1935). The 30 accused falcon workers, of whom 15 were guilty of "high treason", amongst whom the distinguished MD Vojislav Besarović (18 years in prison), Cedo Milic (death penalty) as organizers of Serbian falconry in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while Stevan Zakula, Jovan Popovic, Atanasije Sola, Vladimir Males, Dusan Subotic and many others (5 to 14 years of hard labor) as participants in that "high treason" work (Brozovic, 1935).

A sin that was pinned to the accused was: organizing activities in falconry, working on unity with falcons from the Kingdom of Serbia, travelling to Belgrade for falcons' sessions, recommending the book and newspapers "Chetnik", cooperation with MD Laza Popovic, "being imbued" with hatred for Austria and love for Serbdom and Serbia, preparation of contenders for the national freedom army, preaching about the political unity of the entire Serbian nation, unity of Bosnia and Herzegovina with the Kingdom of Serbia, spreading of written words and distribution of articles with antimonarchist content, friendship with destructive elements, participation in rallies in Prague and Ravanica, stalking for the benefit of the Kingdom of Serbia, etc. For certain falcons punishment was increased, for some decreased and Cedo Milic was amnestied with 20 years of difficult dungeon. The falcons of Banjaluka process served their sentences in Zenica for 6 months in 1917. and then they were amnestied, while Milic was serving his sentence until the national freedom (Brozovic, 1935).

Banjaluka, Sarajevo and Zagreb processes clearly showed how Serbian falconry was a serious problem for the occupying authorities. In a shorter trial in Zagreb, where Popovic wasn't defending himself, but the falcon's idea and Serbian falconry, the charges were dropped, so he was sentenced to 14 months in prison in 1915. (Petrović, 1987).

The falcons were ready for the Balkan and First World War. In those wars falconry gave many devoted fighters. They gathered and organized Yugoslav volunteer units in different fronts and those who were forcibly recruited, deserted the Austro-Hungarian army and moved to Serbian or Russian side. Falcons carried by the falcon idea and ideals, made great support in breaking through the Salonika front. After the war had fin-

ished falcon newspapers, column "Falcons – Yugoslav volunteers" wrote about their life stories. Despite being different nationalities, falcons were faithful to the same falcon idea – the idea of unity, brotherhood and freedom, ready to give their lives for the unity and forming of a new state the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The war events also decimated the part of falcon membership which did not fight in the war. Due to the transparent patriotism, they were persecuted and deported to notorious camps and casemates, as well as they were taken to trials in Banjaluka, Sarajevo and Zagreb "high treason processes" during 1915 and 1916, where they were labeled as carriers of "great Serbian propaganda" or "participants of Serbian army". Many falcons were interned in camps in Arad and Jindrichovice at that time and because of exhausting labor, torture, illnesses and famine many of them died there (Vukasinovic, 2013).

After the First World War had ended, falcons were still consistent in their ideals and faithful to the falcon idea. Initiatives for unity of Yugoslav falconry has been repeated. Many associations spontaneously changed their names to Yugoslav, and main propagators in those events were falcons. Many association and parishes names were altered into "Gavrilo Princip", "Peter the Great Liberator", etc. The united falcon organization got a proper name in accordance with the newly established state (December 1, 1918) – "Falcon Union of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes" (on Vidovdan holiday 1918) based in Ljubljana. On that occasion a famous ideological credo was proclaimed "One state, one nation, falconry", which was designed by falcons to express their orientation for one state.

The respect which the Falcons enjoyed in population was confirmed by the fact that representatives of the dynasties, politicians, artists, writers, for example Prince Djordje Karadjordjevic, Minister Vladan Djordjevic, doctors and writers Jovan Jovanovic Zmaj, Laza Kostic, Jovan Jovanovic Batut, Branislav Nusic, and after the "great war" Aleksa Santic, Jovan Ducic, Svetozar Corovic and others were active and prominent participants.

The destiny of the falcons on the Balkans was tragic for many members since the time before the Balkan wars and later on, on the eve and at the beginning of the Second World War. In Croatia, falcons suffered great reprisals to tragic dimensions (1938-1941), but such things happened in other republics as well. At Doboj falcon home, the insurgent court - marshal was in session (1941) and convicted 111 Serbs – falcons to a death sentence. They were persecuted by the German occupiers and liquidated by the newly established Yugoslav authority, which was documented by numerous examples.

## CONCLUSION

In this work, data about the role of the Serbian Falcon Organization in preservation of the national identity and independence of Serbian nation was presented, having in mind, the reflexion of total social and historic

events on the territory out of Serbia, as well as the suffering of falcons because of their patriotic participation in stormy and fateful events in the state and nation. The character of their activity was significantly influenced by social, economic, cultural and first of all the political and war conditions. Falcons supported the idea of nation coalition into a unique state and during the Balkan and First World War they participated in defensive war operations. A strong national and whole Yugoslav sense of affiliation and patriotism towards their country, altruism towards the nation and readiness for sacrifice because of higher interests were features of falcon movement members. That was especially expressed by members of Fruska Gora and Bosnia and Herzegovina parishes, because they were in the territories where extremely cruel relationship, influences and pressures were expressed by the occupation authorities towards them. Therefore, they were exposed to the biggest tortures and life endangering situations. They believed in ideals and were loyal to falcon idea and suffered high price of forming a joint state therefore. In the so-called "high treason processes" they were sentenced to hard labor, persecution and internment while respectful falcon personalities were sentenced to death by shooting and hanging.

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