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## Andrej Mitrovic, 1937–2013<sup>1</sup>

Andrej Mitrovic was the leading Serbian historian of his generation, a generation that came of age in the initially promising, then descending, final decades of the former Yugoslavia. During the decade of disintegration and warfare that followed, his generation faced the temptation of the narrow nationalist agenda promoted by the Milosevic regime to justify its authority and abuses. Based in the University of Belgrade, Mitrovic took the lead in protecting his scholarly profession of history and its public face from this contagion. That it did not spread via largely unscholarly accounts of longstanding Serbian victimization by non-Serbs and the major powers to the current generation of Belgrade historians is much to his credit.

An impressive set of scholarly credentials supported his principled efforts. He had long established his standing in the former Yugoslavia and beyond as a highly regarded historian of twentieth-century Europe. Joining the Belgrade faculty in 1967 and advancing to the highest professorial rank by 1980, he was on his way to creating a corpus of twenty-five books and some four hundred journal articles. Research years in Italy and then West Germany had already broadened his perspective. Two books and several articles followed quickly from his doctoral dissertation on the politics of the Paris Peace Conference concerning the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Turning ahead to the broader political landscape of interwar Europe, he published *Vreme netrpeljivih: Politička istorija velikih država Evrope, 1919–1939* (*Times Intolerant: A Political History of the Great Powers, 1919–1939*) in 1974. His prize-winning book focused on growing ideological division and the intolerance that followed from it.

In 1981 he turned back to an earlier geopolitical division by addressing the origins and course of World War I in *Prodor na Balkan: Srbija u planovima Austro-Ugarske i Nemačke, 1908–1918* (*Penetrating the Balkans: Serbia in Austro-Hungarian and German Plans, 1908–1918*). He provided well-referenced Balkan detail to support Fritz Fisher's controversial thesis on expansionist German war aims (less controversial for the war years themselves). It should, however, be noted that Mitrovic's title listed the relatively neglected Austro-Hungarian intentions first. His account drew on Austrian and German as well as Serbian archives in order to pay them critical attention. This still-instructive volume was republished in 2011. His only volume to be republished

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<sup>1</sup> *Slavic Review*, 73, no. 2 (Summer 2014), pp. 455-456

in English came from the 1984 *Srbija u Prvom svetskon ratu*, his contribution to a series of six volumes on Serbia's history of which he was the editor. Appearing as Serbia's Great War, 1914–1918 (2005), it is widely regarded as a major contribution to a subject revived by the approaching centenary years. Mitrovic again mined all relevant archives to address controversial issues, from the responsibility for the Sarajevo assassination in 1914 to the formation of the first Yugoslavia. Chapters on the Austro-Bulgarian occupation of Serbia and the armed resistance against it broke new ground that is only now being explored in western scholarship.

Ranging beyond Serbian political history, Mitrovic also explored the role of the arts in Europe's troubled twentieth century. A book on Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* in 1977 was followed in 1983 by *Angažovano i lepo: Umetnost u razdoblju svetskih ratova, 1914–1945 (Engaged and Beautiful: The Art of the Period of the World Wars, 1914–1945)*. Looking across the entire period from the start of the First World War to the end of the second, he appraised the considerable extent to which ideological engagement had informed or inspired the various arts. Reaching a wider Yugoslav audience through television, he hosted one series on the history of European art and another on film history.

His most enduring interest, however, was in social and economic history. In 1994, as the Milosevic regime was favoring the diplomatic history of Serbia's victimization, he launched a journal for the study of largely domestic social history, *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju (Yearbook for Social History)*. It continues to this day. To provide a forum for the younger historians who were its major contributors, he founded the Society for Social History (*Udruženje za društvenu istoriju*) in 1998. But the centerpiece for these younger historians, typically his own graduate students, was the set of frequent round table (*okrugli sto*) seminars that he organized at the history offices of his University of Belgrade Faculty of Philosophy. Leading foreign scholars were often invited to discuss their latest work there. Having begun in the 1970s, these seminars continued well past the breakup of Yugoslavia and helped to preserve Serbia's otherwise threatened connection to western scholarship.

The accumulation of these efforts and publications established Mitrovic's wider European reputation. In addition to his multiple scholarly memberships and distinctions in Serbia, he also served on the advisory board of a major Austrian journal and the advisory council of a major German one. In 2001 he was awarded the Herder Prize for his many contributions to the field by the University of Vienna and the Alfred Toepfer Foundation of Hamburg. In 2004 Germany's Southeast European Association selected him on similar grounds for its Konstantin Jirecek Medal.

Andrej Mitrovic had begun his scholarly life in Serbia committed to the multi-ethnic promise of Yugoslavia and to the democratic promise of Yugoslav socialism. But when both promises were laid to waste in the 1990s, he refused to abandon Serbia to the political leadership and Serbian scholarship to the pseudoscholarly

arguments that had helped to destroy Yugoslavia. Joined by his wife and fellow historian, Ljubinka Trgovcevic, their voices were often heard demanding that Serbia honor its own democratic aspirations and European identity. Now, to cite one of the many expressions of homage in Belgrade, his passing has left a deep empty space in Serbia's academic community, a space that no one person can expect to fill. But a significant number of his former students have already stepped forward to carry on his commitment to scholarly integrity and connection to the wider European community of historians. They are his most enduring legacy to Serbia.