

Ragusans' diplomatic service in Kosovo during the 14th – 15th centuries

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Abstract:

Geographical proximity as well as the need for Kosovo mining products made this territory highly attractive for Ragusan traders during the 14th – 15th centuries. With a view to protecting the interests of its own citizens and organizing the mining trade, the Republic of Ragusa set up the consular institution in various trading and mining centers of Kosovo such as Novo Brdo, Trepca, Janjevo, Peć, Prizren and other countries. Rich documentation preserved for centuries in the archives of Dubrovnik enabled us to trace a very real representation of Ragusan diplomats serving in Kosovo medieval towns.

The most effective period of the activity of these diplomats belongs to the 14th century and lasted until the first half of the 15th century. During the years when the Ottoman power launched a heavy attack on Kosovo region, due to the war peril, the number of Ragusan colonies started to decline to the extent that in Novo Brdo, in 1439 there were 106 consuls on duty, in 1440 and 1441 there were three of them, while in March 1442 there was only one consul on duty.

Key words: Ragusans, diplomatic service, Kosovo, 14th-15th centuries

Development of civic municipalities, independent from the central government around the eastern Adriatic coast, laid out the need for a personal representation of these cities in certain states or territories. This presentation constitutes at the same

time the protection of interests, enabled through special missionaries, whom we encounter since 12th century in southern provinces of France called consuls¹. Such an institution of consuls advanced mostly in urban areas of the Mediterranean, primarily around the Italian and French coast and particularly the Italian one due to the fact that Italy lacked a strong central power and there acted independent cities-states such as the Republic of Venice, Genoa, Florence, Pisa, etc.² No doubt, this practice was not transmitted along the eastern Adriatic coast, while its most important representation was found in the city of Ragusa. Since 1272, when the city Statute of Ragusa was drafted, evidence is found also in view of Ragusan ambassadors. In the book VI, chapter 19 of the Statute, reference is made to a provision which stipulates sanctions for missionaries abstaining in the performance of their tasks charged by the municipal authorities³. The Statute contains also data accurately defined for all those evading the provisions already specified. It provided even for the ways on how an ambassador takes an oath, namely the diplomatic missionary. Based on these data, it can be concluded that the Republic of Ragusa vested great importance to the diplomatic service, which in practice proved successful in terms of protecting and representing Ragusan interests abroad. Interesting provisions regarding the consular service are kept in the Ragusan green book (*liber viridis*) and the yellow book (*liber croceus*)⁴. Given the importance of this institution for the protection and development of their commercial activity, Ragusans represented in Prizren asked to appoint a consul in

¹ The tradition of consuls existed since the time of Republican power in Rome. This institution was also passed down to the Byzantine Empire after the Empire was divided into Eastern and Western parts.

² J. Drançolli, *Shërbimi konsullor në Kosovë në kohën e nemanjidasve, "Rilindja"*, 4.X.1980, f. 13; *I njëjti, Institucioni konsullar raguzan në Kosovë...*, f. 45.

³ V. Bogišić, K. Jireček, *Liber statuorum civitatis Ragusii*, f. 132, sipas J. Drançolli, *Raguzanët...*, f. 46.

⁴ *Ibid*, f. 47.

this town. The Great Council, under proposal of the Senate, dated 13 February 1332, was to appoint five advisors tasked to investigate the commercial situation of Ragusa in Prizren and following this, to report the relevant proposals to the Council. At the meeting held on 18 February 1332 the Great Ragusa Council decided by a majority vote of 74 “pro” and 66 “against” to respond positively to the request of Ragusan traders⁵. At the next meeting dated 8 March 1332, the Great Council approved the decision on the appointment of a consul in Prizren (*Quod eius mansio sit in Prizren*). This date is taken as the beginning of diplomatic consular activity in Kosovo. Since then, Prizreni became the center of the Ragusan consul, but his competences were much larger than the space including the territory of the town. He had the obligation to organize in the interest of Ragusan trade, at least one-month big fairs twice a year in the so-called territory of “Sclavonia” (this name comprised territories including the Adriatic coast and the area of Buna river and continued to the hinterland of the Balkans), where Ragusan traders were operating⁶. In addition, consul’s competences included the obligation to settle disputes among Ragusans, to announce decisions and punishments and also to forward to Ragusa the list of those punished, because punishment competences were previously accorded to the Ragusan assembly. The consul’s salary amounted to 400 perpers a year and it was allocated into installments. Upon appointment, the consul received 200 perpers, while after 6 and 9 months he received a salary of 100 perpers. The consul was also forbidden to engage in commerce by a punishment warning⁷. Surely, this measure was intended to maintain consul’s neutrality and reflect justice in the most worthy way

⁵ G. Čremošnik, *Dubrovački konsulati u Srbiji do Dušanovog vremena* në GZM B i H, XLI, Sarajevo, 1929, f. 86-87.

⁶ I. Mitić, *Konzulati i konzularna služba starog Dubrovnika*, Dubrovnik, 1973, f. 30-31; K. Jireček, *Istorija srba II*, Beograd 1978, f. 179.

⁷ J. Drançolli, *Shërbimi konsullor në Kosovë*, f. 13.

possible. Consular service lasted one year since the day of Ragusa's surrender. After that time, the Great Council separated the consul's work and took subsequent decisions. In fact, the cost for keeping consuls was afforded by traders themselves who paid the customs and other taxes on the exported merchandise; this method was applied as long as Ragusa state existed⁸.

The first Ragusan consul in Prizren was appointed Pjetro de Martinusso, who took over this post in early April 1332. Consuls were mainly appointed from the ranks of Ragusan patriciate. It was a duty of small Ragusan Council to keep correspondence with Ragusan consuls in foreign countries. All documents issued by Ragusan consuls were of public character and also valid as if they were issued in Ragusa. Following subsequent political developments in Kosovo as a consequence of Ottoman penetration, on 16 August 1396 the Ragusan Government decided to extent the consular network in Kosovo with a view to better protecting its traders from frequent attacks taking place in these areas. Therefore, consuls and judges were appointed for Novo Brdo, Pristina and their surroundings. Consuls were assigned in judicial commissions along with judges and these commissions consisted usually of one consul and two judges, who were to settle specific conflicts. There are cases where e a consul was assigned thousands of times in judicial commissions, such as the case of the consul Michael Mar. de Croxi, who had been assigned 651 times in these commissions, or Matheus Mar de Croxi, 247 times (probably they were brothers – M. M.), Damjan J. de Georgio 237 times, Marinus Ju de Sorgo 167 times, then Damaianus Jo de Gondola 167 times and so on⁹.

Strengthening of the Ragusan colony in Novobërdë brought forward the need to appoint permanent consuls in this

⁸ K. Jireček, *Važnost Dubrovnika u trgovačkoj povijesti srednjeg vijeka*, Dubrovnik, 1915, f. 12.

⁹ J. Drançolli, *Raguzanët...*, f. 50.

town. Thus, in 1373 and 1380 the Ragusan patrician Giue de Sorgo is evidenced as the consul in Novo Brdo ¹⁰. Then, it is found Andreas de Mençe as a consul in 1382 and 1383¹¹. Below, are mentioned the subsequent consuls: Basilius de Baseglio (1385-1386)¹², Theodorus de Mlaschagna 1387¹³, Andreas de Sorgo 1387¹⁴, Dobruschus de Binçola (1391-1392)¹⁵, Perchus de Binçola (1396)¹⁶ and Françus de Basilio 1392-1396¹⁷.

During the years when the Ottoman power resorted to powerfully attacking Kosovo region due to the war peril, the number of Ragusan colonies in Kosovo started to decline to the extent that in Novo Brdo, in 1439 there were 106 consuls on duty, in 1440 and 1441 there were three of them, while in March 1442 there was only one consul on duty¹⁸. However, after the relations with the Ottomans were improved, the Ragusan colony in Novo Brdo was again restored. Even in Novo Brdo we found cases of consuls being appointed in judicial commissions in the capacity of the consul or judge, and even hundreds of times. For instance, the Ragusan nobleman Leonardus de Georgio was appointed 216 times as a consul in Novo Brdo, while in the capacity of the judge he was appointed 140 times, Alouisius de Georgio was appointed 156 times as a consul, and 115 times in the capacity of the judge, Johannes de Restio was appointed 141 times in the capacity of the consul and 189 times as a judge, Laurentius de Ragnina was appointed 60 times in

¹⁰ J. Tadić, *Pisma i upustva Dubrovačke republike I*, SKA, Beograd, 1935, f. 462.

¹¹ M. Dinić, *Odluke veća Dubrovačke republike I*, SAN, Beograd, 1951, f. 238, 360.

¹² HAD *Reformationes XXVI fol. 50* (më 6.XI.1385 Consul Merchatorum Camarantium et Conservatium in Nouaberda) sipas J. Drançolli, f. 51.

¹³ M. Dinić, *Odluke veća...*, II, Beograd, 1964, f. 341.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, f. 389.

¹⁵ HAD, *Reformationes XXIX, fol. 33V* (më 17.II.1391) Consul Sivium merchatorum Ragusi trfigancium in Nouaberda), sipas J. Drançolli, *Raguzanët...*, f. 51.

¹⁶ HAD, *Reformationes XXX fol. 17* (më 16.VIII.1395), sipas J. Drançolli, *po aty*.

¹⁷ HAD, *Reformationes XXX fol. 40* (më 16.VIII.1396), Consul in Nouabrda, Pristina et ilis partigus, sipas J. Drançolli, f. 51.

¹⁸ M. Dinić, *Za istoriju rudarstva u srednjovekovjoj Srbiji i Bosnji II*, SANU, Posebna izdanja knjiga CCCLV, Beograd, 1962, f. 91.

the capacity of the consul, while he was appointed 254 times in the capacity of the judge, Simon de Bona was appointed 106 times in the capacity of the consul, while he was appointed 119 times in the capacity of the judge¹⁹.

In the period concerned, Ragusa as a town accounted for as many as 90.000 inhabitants, while a very great number of them lived outside the town in various services²⁰. Except in the above mentioned towns, the Ragusan consul's institution is found also in other important Kosovo towns such as Trepca, Janjevo, Belasica, Mitrovica, Peć and elsewhere. Thus, from a meeting of the small Ragusan Council, dated 22 August 1415, it is evidenced that in Peć was operating a Ragusan consul. Actually, Radishin Pribilović as a consul and Dobrosllav Brenković and Gojko Tvrdković, as judges, pursuant to the above mentioned decisions, were appointed to the positions cited above in order to settle a conflict in Peć. The consul concerned and the judges were invited from Ragusan townsfolk operating in Peć, Miloman and Miolkan Pribilović, who had brought charges against Ratko Miolkosović²¹. Ten years later we find again in Peć (Forno) a Ragusan consul, mentioned in the case of an indictment filed by a Ragusan townsman against two of his fellow townsmen. In settling this conflict, the Ragusan patrician of Albanian origin Pascualis de Sorgo (Pashko Sorgo) played an important role²². The Ragusan consular institution operated in Janjevo as well. The Ragusan consul in this town is evidenced as early as 1432, while as the first appointee in this position is mentioned Nikola de Guiuschus²³. It is interesting that, scholars N. Çollak and I. Mazhuran, identify the catholic population of present-day

¹⁹ J. Drançolli, *Raguzanët...*, f. 53.

²⁰ I. Goldstein, *Croatia A history*, Hurst and Company, London, f. 28.

²¹ HAD, *Acta consili minoris I*, f. 39 v; J. Drançolli, f. 53.

²² HAD, *Acta consili minoris III*, fol. 284 v, gusht 1425; K. Jireček, *Istorija Srba II*, Beograd, 1978, f. 357.

²³ HAD, *Acta consili minoris III*, fol. 79 v (më 14.VIII.1423).

Janjevo as having originated mainly from Ragusa, which is partly true²⁴, because a certain part of today's catholic population in Janjevo has the typical Albanian surname, but croatized with the suffixes *iq* like Berishiq from Berisha, Paliq from Pali, Gashiq from Gashi etc. The fact that these people identify themselves with Croatia today, apart from elements of political and economic nature, may refer to the tradition as well, according to which Balkan noblemen, whether Albanians, Vlachs, Serbs or the like, counted it an honor to call themselves Ragusan townsmen²⁵. Novo Brda, no doubt, was leading the number of consuls appointed as compared to Janjevo and other towns. In Novo Brdo, there are 3996 cases of consuls' appointments, while Trepca accounted for 2656 such consular positions. In addition to Ragusans-represented majority, other people such as those from Kotor²⁶, Split, Bar, etc., were sometimes appointed in the capacity of consuls, but there were also other local townsmen having become Ragusan townsmen.

²⁴ N. Čolak, I. Mažuran, Janjevo selam stoljeća opstojnosti hrvata na Kosovu, Zagreb, 2000, f. 12.

²⁵ Ibid, f. 16.

²⁶ M. Mala, Marrëdhëniet e Kotorrit në trevat shqiptare gjatë shekujve XIV-XV, punim magjistrature, dorëshkrim, Prishtinë, 1996.