



Serbia enters the 20th century as a parliamentary monarchy ruled by twenty-four-year-old Aleksandar Obrenović. With some political talent, the king ruled autocratically and very often changed governments of his own free will. The turning point in his life, as well as in the history of Serbia, was his marriage to Draga Mašin, a twelve-year-old widow and former court lady of Aleksandar's mother, Queen Natalija. Although leading politicians as well as broad sections of the people were appalled, the King continued to behave arbitrarily, and when an affair broke out with the Queen's false pregnancy, his fate was sealed. During the night of May 29th, 1903, conspirators, including experienced politicians, senior officers and supporters of the rival Serbian royal line of Karađorđević, as ideological organizers, and junior officers as executors, surrounded the court and brutally liquidated the king and queen. Instead, from emigration, they brought the sixty-year-old Prince Peter I Karađorđević, the grandson of the leader of the First Serbian Uprising Karađorđe Petrović and the son of Prince Aleksandar Karađorđević to the throne. The new king was crowned in September 1904 in the Belgrade Cathedral, and the period of his active rule, which ended during the Balkan Wars of 1912/13, is considered the peak of the development of democracy and parliamentarism in Serbia.

Dissatisfied with the strengthening of Serbia and its influence on the position of Serbs and South Slavs in the monarchy, Austro-Hungary tried twice, by pressure, to jeopardize the evident progress of the Kingdom of Serbia. The first time through the so-called "Cannon Question", trying to impose on Serbia the cannons of the Skoda factory for artillery weapons in 1906, and the second time through the so-called "Customs or pig war", when Austria-Hungary tried to prevent the export of cattle, poultry and agricultural goods from Serbia, but Serbia emerged victorious, finding new markets and strengthening its trade. The last attack on Serbia and its national interests was related to the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in October 1908, which followed its thirty-year occupation. The annexation of a state in which Orthodox Serbs made more than half of the population provoked the anger of the people, both in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where Orthodox and Muslims united, and in Serbia, where large rallies and demonstrations were organized. However, as the great powers Russia, France and Great Britain did not want to fight for Serbia, the Serbian government was forced to make a statement in March 1909 that the annexation did not affect its interests, and that they would prevent action against Austria-Hungary on its territory. Thus, the "Serbian question" acquired a European character, and this crisis became an introduction to the Balkan wars and the First World War.