

We love France just as it loves us

French-Serbian relations date back to the Middle Ages, to the time when Helen of Anjou married Stefan Uroš I and become the Serbian queen. Although her connection to the House of Anjou is disputed in modern historiography, in case this claim proves to be true, French-Serbian friendship and state relations have lasted for more than seven centuries.

Formally speaking, this year marks the 186th anniversary of the official diplomatic relations established between Serbia and France – in 1839, during Miloš Obrenović's reign, while Serbia was still a vassal principality. Immediately after the Congress of Berlin and Serbia's gaining independence, diplomatic relations between these two countries were established. However, even before the official establishment of diplomatic relations, the French influence in Serbia was quite strong. Karadžević's efforts to establish relations with France were recorded, while it was exactly under the influence of the French revolutionary climate that Dimitrije Davidović wrote Serbia's first modern constitutional

act – the Sretenje Constitution, which was enacted by the Great National Assembly in Kragujevac in 1835. Although due to the pressure of great powers it was legally in force for an extremely short period, the Sretenje Constitution left a deep trace in Serbian legal, political and social history, while the date of its enactment is celebrated today as Serbia's National Day.

The historical development of Serbian-French relations (or French-Serbian, let readers choose which of the two they prefer) has had its rises and falls. What is certain is that an indelible trace in Serbian history was made by the French-Serbian alliance during the First World War and intense struggle for liberty of the anti-fascist movements in the two countries during the Second World War, just as an unforgivable stain was made by France's participation in the NATO aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, primarily Serbia, in 1999. Frenchmen would probably disapprove of Yugoslavia's support to Algerian independence, while Serbs would in turn disapprove of France's

6 | recognition of the independence of the fake „State of Kosovo”. Nevertheless, Serbs also remember Mitterrand’s landing and unblocking of Sarajevo airport on St. Vitus Day in 1992, which not only opened the road for humanitarian aid reaching Sarajevo, but also prevented the NATO’s announced intervention. Because of that move, the French president was criticized by many in the European Community, first of all by all representatives of the German government, while Serbs objected to his recommendation that Robert Badinter should chair the Arbitration Commission of the Peace Conference on Yugoslavia. On that occasion, Badinter’s Commission expressed the opinion that the borders of the Yugoslav republics were unchangeable. Although at that time it harmed the unity of the Serbian national corpus, Serbia can now cite this opinion of the Commission chaired by the President of the Constitutional Council of France and Mitterrand’s close friend, regarding the separatism of Kosovo Albanians.

In the modern stage of interstate relations, France is one of seven countries which have signed the Strategic Partnership Agreement with Serbia. A special contribution to Its implementation and accelerated realization has been made by

two statesmen, President Vučić and President Macron. Their personal relationship, frequent communication and wish to develop relations in compliance with the traditional friendship between these two nations is a stake for the future successful development of the relations between the two countries. Unfortunately, we sometimes witness the fact that diplomacy is not always able to follow leaders, but it is an important rule that success is measured by leaders.

Because of all the above-mentioned reasons, but also those unmentioned reasons which go without saying, we dedicate this thematic issue to French-Serbian relations, wishing to bring them closer to Serbia’s academic public not only through history, but also nowadays, as well as to point to France’s position in the world, its internal political scene, and to recall great Frenchmen and Serbs who sealed the friendship between the two nations. *Liberty, equality, fraternity* are not only the guiding ideas of the French Bourgeois Revolution, but also the foundations of Serbian national identity. In our opinion, these three words reveal the reasons for the closeness of the two nations which has survived temptations and has always been re-affirmed.