

# The Railway Station of Timișoara in Serbian Sources (1863-1919)

Jovana Kasaš<sup>1</sup>

Travelling by train in Banat, a region that was divided between Hungary, Romania, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes after World War One, has been a vital part of the everyday life of its inhabitants since the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> The city of Timișoara (currently in Romania), the largest settlement and the seat<sup>3</sup> of the Banat region, was named after the river Begej, known as Little Timiș in the past. In the nineteenth century, it was the seat of the Tamiș County, situated along the Bega canal. From as early as the mid-fourteenth century, it has been standing at the intersection of the main roads between the East and West; it thereby represented a powerful economic hub and it remains to this day one of the largest economic, social, and cultural centres of Romania with over 300,000 inhabitants.

The current central Railway Station of Timișoara, whose official name is Railway Station Timișoara-North (Timișoara Gara de Nord), is located in the Iozefin Quarter and is one of the oldest in Romania. The station changed its name over the years: it was called both the Railway Station Iozefin and the Railway Station Princess Elena (Domnița Elena), but since the 5<sup>th</sup> of January, 1939, it is known as the Railway Station Timișoara-North. Timișoara now has two other smaller stations: the East station and the South station.

The first building of the Railway Station was inaugurated on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November, 1857, at the same time when the railway line Szeged–Kikinda–Jimbolia–Timișoara (amounting 112 kilometres) was put into

---

<sup>1</sup> University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Philosophy, History Department, Serbia.

<sup>2</sup> Jovana Kasaš, “Srbi u Temišvaru kao građani prvog reda: svakodnevni život” [Serbs in Timișoara as first-class citizens: everyday life], *Attendite* 15 (2019): 97.

<sup>3</sup> In 1716, Timișoara passed from Turkish to Austrian dominance and was transformed into the seat of the Banat region. Radu Bellu, Dušan Dejanac, Ivan Simić, Jovan Čudanov, Horváth Ferenc, Gyula Gyarmati, *Szeged–Kikinda–Jimbolia–Timișoara* (Jimbolia: Asociația Glasul Roților de tren), 2007, 5.

service. Timișoara station was the last station and had low passenger flow at the time.<sup>4</sup>

It took two hours and a quarter to reach Szeged from Kikinda by train, and then another two hours to go from Kikinda to Timișoara. At first, two trains departed daily from Timișoara and Szeged. Thus, Timișoara became a city connected to Western Europe by rail. Apart from combined trains, freight trains were soon to be introduced, and the first train crossed the Budapest–Kikinda–Timișoara line in 1861. In 1857, the Railway station in Timișoara started to use gas lamps for lightning, and in 1884, it became the first railway station in Europe to use electrical lighting prior to the stations in Paris and Vienna.<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Đorđe Lazarević, a resident of Novi Sad, noted in his biography that travelling by the Timișoara rail had a significant impact on him as a young man. In May 1863, Lazarević was invited to attend his brother's wedding in Pest, which he reached by boat on the Danube river; afterwards, he travelled from Pest to his sister's wedding in Timișoara:

Oh, the joy! I have never travelled by boat, never been to Pest, and furthermore, I am also going to travel by train, which I have never seen yet.<sup>6</sup>

I will never forget the moment when I first set foot on a train and when it set in motion. I travelled at such speed that I could hardly dare to look at the fields I passing through and I was shaking.<sup>7</sup>

On the journey by rail back from Timișoara to Novi Sad, Đorđe Lazarević also went through and Pančevo.

In 1897, a new building was constructed for the Timișoara Railway Station, designed by the architect Felix Speidl, professor at the Technical University in Budapest. It was built in French neo-Renaissance style, with towers adorning it. Its façade held four statues, each representing the most significant economic branches of the time. Two of those statues were the work of sculptor Lajos Lantai.<sup>8</sup> With a construction cost

<sup>4</sup> R. Bellu, D. Dejanac, I. Simić, J. Čudanov, H. Ferenc, G. Gyula, *Szeged–Kikinda – Jimbolia–Timișoara*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Đ. Lazarević, *Moja Biografija [My biography]* (Novi Sad: Gradska biblioteka, 2013), 50.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>8</sup> General information concerning the Timisoara Railway Station as well as the photographs were obtained thanks to Dr. Zoran Markov, a historian from Timișoara, the

amounting to one million crowns, it was a grand building, likely one of the most beautiful railway stations of the time in Hungary. The railway complex included a warehouse for locomotives and a service for locomotives and carriages.



Fig. 1. The old building of the Railway Station in Timișoara.  
Photo courtesy: Dr. Zoran Markov.

The building was described at the time by the famous Serbian writer Miloš Crnjanski, who was living in Timișoara. Writing for the daily paper “Politika,” he described the railway station as “enormous,” concluding that it was “larger” than the one in Belgrade, and was “red like a house on fire, engulfing all the surrounding parks in soot and smoke.”<sup>9</sup>

---

head of the history department at the Museum of Banat, to whom I would like to express my gratitude.

<sup>9</sup> M. Crnjanski, “Naš Temišvar” [“Our Timisoara”], *Politika* 6001 (1925): 16.



Fig. 2. The building of the Railway Station in Timișoara.  
Photo courtesy: Dr. Zoran Markov.



Fig. 3. The building of the Railway Station in Timișoara.  
Photo courtesy: Dr. Zoran Markov.



Fig. 4. The building of the Railway Station in Timișoara.

Photo courtesy: Dr. Zoran Markov.

In the pre-war Serbian press, the only mention of the Railway Station Timișoara (that we found) is when the Serbian Timișoara bishop Geogrije (Letić) was greeted at the station in 1904. We found the record of the festive welcome in the Serbian newspaper “*Srpski Sion*.”<sup>10</sup>

After the breakthrough of the Salonika Front on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September, 1918, the Serbian army and the Allied Forces hastened towards the territory of Banat, Bačka, and Baranja, inhabited by Serbs. A part of the Serbian army reached the seat of Banat, Timișoara, by rail. A division led by Major Dušan Dodić reached the Railway Station in Timișoara on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November, 1918. The Major noted in his journal that his division was transported to Timișoara in wagons.<sup>11</sup>

Afterwards, the newspaper “*Srpski list*” reported that Voivode Petar Bojović “entered Timișoara with great pomp” and was welcomed at the Timișoara railway station by a great number of Serbs, of members of the Serbian National Council of Timișoara, as well as by Dr. Otto Roth, the Hungarian commissioner and president of the Council of Banat. Bojović

---

<sup>10</sup> *Srpski Sion* 10 (1904): 273.

<sup>11</sup> Entries for the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 1918. Ljubica Zdravković, “Dušan Dodić, oslobodilac Jagodine – ratni dnevnik” [Dušan Dodić, Liberator of Jagodina – War Journal] *Koreni* (2003): 218.

was greeted by the president of the Serbian National Council Ivan Prekajski, followed by Roth, who spoke in Hungarian. When Roth greeted the voivode as both the president of the Council of Banat, and as a commissioner of the Hungarian Republic, some of the citizens of Timișoara gathered there expressed their disagreement.<sup>12</sup> To this, Bojović replied that one could not have heard of a Hungarian Republic in Banat; he added that he did not acknowledge “any Hungarian commissioners in the places that the Serbian army had occupied.” Furthermore, the voivode took advantage of this opportunity to highlight that “all that the Serbian army has conquered remains Serbian and united with the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes” adding that the Serbian army was going to remain in Banat until the Peace Conference, and that “Banat will always be Serbian.”<sup>13</sup>



Fig. 5. The building of the Railway station in Timișoara.  
Photo courtesy: Dr. Zoran Markov.

However, the non-Serbian population of Timișoara did not acknowledge “the Serbian Imperium” established in the city. Consequently, a great workers’ strike broke out on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February,

---

<sup>12</sup> *Srpski list* 45 (1919): 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

1919. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of February, 1919, the editorial board of the newspaper “Sloga” communicated to the strikers that if their purpose was to “protest against the finished act of the imperium falling into Serbian hands,” they had not achieved anything because they had only inflicted “damage to the entire city, and not particularly to the imperium of the Serbs.” Furthermore, they noted that while the damage was widespread, it was not irreparable, adding that “the almost difficult issue” was the disruption of railway transport as it could lead to a shortage in food supplies.<sup>14</sup>

The military sources and the daily press of the time reveal that the great workers’ strike started with the union of the workers and engineers from the railways of Timișoara who sent their delegates to the French general Léon Farret. The delegates requested permission from Farret to hold a peaceful manifestation and warned him of possible unrest in the near future.<sup>15</sup> On the 19<sup>th</sup> of February, 1919, the Minister of Defence in Belgrade proposed the Supreme Command a set of guidelines for measures to be taken in case of a strike; the guidelines were based on the standpoint that the railway workers were “in the military service of the occupier.” The Supreme Command received an order that in case of an attempted strike, a list of all railway staff should be compiled and hostages should be chosen based on it. The workers were then to be informed that they were subject to court-martial trial and that the strike was considered a military rebellion. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of February, 1919, not only the railway workers of Timișoara, but also tram drivers, water supply line workers, and others went on strike. The serious threats of the military authorities, the taking of hostages, along with the standpoints of the leftist social democrats, forced all workers (except for railway workers) to end the strike on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February, at ten o’clock. The railway workers in Timișoara and Subotica ended their strike on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February.<sup>16</sup>

The press in Novi Sad informed that an absolute order reigned in the Tamiș County during “the Serbian Imperium,” although the traffic was

---

<sup>14</sup> *Sloga* 61 (1919): 3.

<sup>15</sup> B. Hrabak, “Veliki politički štrajk u Vojvodini i na ugarskoj teritoriji pod okupacijom srpske vojske 21-22. februara 1919. godine” [The Great Political Strike in Vojvodina and in the Hungarian Territory Under the Occupation of the Serbian Army on 21–22 February 1919], *Zbornik Historijskog instituta* (1965), 318.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, 322-323.

poor due to an insufficient quantity of coal. The Vršac newspaper “Nova zora” communicated that it was this very shortage of coal that caused the railway line of Timișoara–Valkanj–Žebelj–Čakovo to stop operating.<sup>17</sup> The traffic and the problems it faced in the aftermath of World War One gradually diminished, thus the newspaper “Sloga” announced that as of the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, 1919, the citizens of Pančevo also had a direct connection to Timișoara.<sup>18</sup>

In compliance with the terms of the Paris Peace Conference, by which Timișoara became part of the Kingdom of Romania, the Serbian Supreme Command sent a report to the Serbian Minister of Defence and Commander of the Fourth Army Province, stating that in the event of the military evacuation of Timișoara, they should begin by evacuating hospitals, warehouses, recruits and all who did not have to wait until the last moment. Furthermore, it was stated that the evacuation was to be carried out by rail or by navigable rivers and canals.<sup>19</sup>

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of June, 1919, the French General Franchet d’Espèrey arrived in Timișoara from Hungary by rail in order to supervise the evacuation of the army from the city. In compliance with his wish, there was no welcoming reception organized and he was greeted at the Timișoara Railway station solely by Dušan Kalafatović and the Commander of the Cavalry Division. According to Kalafatović’s testimony, d’Espèrey was “very forthcoming and kind, acting in a quite amicable manner.” Kalafatović was one of d’Espèrey’s guests at the dinner he organized in a train carriage at the Timișoara Railway Station.<sup>20</sup>

While the evacuation of the army was unfolding, the Serbs of Timișoara were also leaving the city. Military reports show that influential Serbs from Timișoara (national activists who fought for the unification of Timișoara with the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes), requested help from the military authorities to be moved out of

<sup>17</sup> *Jedinstvo* 1 (1919): 1; *Nova zora* 41 (1919): 2.

<sup>18</sup> *Sloga* 122 (1919): 2.

<sup>19</sup> Report of the Supreme Command to the Minister of Defence and commander of the Fourth army province dated 18<sup>th</sup> July 1919. *Veliki rat Srbije za oslobođenje i ujedinjenje Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1914–1918, odbrana države ujedinjenih Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1919–1920*, knj. 32 [The Great Serbian War for the Liberation and Unification of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes 1914–1918, Defence of the Unified State of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes 1919–1920] (Beograd: Medija centar “Odbrana”, 2014), 328–329.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, 281–285.



Timișoara.<sup>21</sup> For that purpose, they addressed the Commander of the Cavalry Division in Timișoara. In his report, sent to the Commander of the First Army Province, he stated that the Serbs “feared the terror” of the Romanians, who would “retaliate the patriotic manifestations, friendliness and hospitality they had shown the Serbian army since its arrival in Timișoara.”<sup>22</sup> The Commander, trying to support the families on the move, requested the Supreme Command to issue an order to help them. This order was to be directed to the delegate of the railway inspection in Timișoara who would provide the transport service required by these families; however, support would be given only “based on the merits of the persons in question.”<sup>23</sup> The Serbs who left Timișoara by rail generally went to Veliki Bečkerek, Velika Kikinda, or Pančevo. Often, they had nowhere to live upon arrival, so they had to remain, for a period of time, in the very carriages that brought them there. The press in Banat wrote that these people “were nonetheless happy because they escaped the Romanian revenge” and thankful to the county governor Martin Filipon who provided them with the railway transport for their migration.<sup>24</sup>

Following the delimitation between the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes and the Kingdom of Romania, Timișoara became part of the “Greater Romania.” The Railway Station in Timișoara was in Romanian territory and fell under the administration of the Kingdom of Romania. Following the terms of the Treaty of Trianon, ratified by the act no. 136 and published in the issue of *The Official Gazette* of the 21<sup>st</sup> of September 1920, the ownership of the railway line between Jimbolia and Timișoara was also transferred to the Romanian state.<sup>25</sup>

During the Second World War, the Railway Station was bombed by the Allied Forces on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July, 1944. This caused extensive damage. In 1945, reparation works commenced, and three years later, they were near completion.

---

<sup>21</sup> Report of the Commander of the Cavalry Division in Timișoara to the Commander of the First Army Province dated 12<sup>th</sup> July 1919. *Veliki rat Srbije*, 317-318.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>24</sup> *Banatski glasnik* 155 (1919): 2.

<sup>25</sup> R. Bellu, D. Dejanac, I. Simić, J. Čudanov, H. Ferenc, G. Gyula, *Szeged-Kikinda-Jimbolia-Timișoara*, 8.



Fig. 6. The Railway Station in Timișoara in 1924, view from today's Boulevard Gen. I. Dragalina. Photo courtesy: Dr. Zoran Markov.



Fig. 7. The building of the Timișoara Railway Station after the bombing in 1944. Photo courtesy: Dr. Zoran Markov.

After the Second World War, the station acquired a new appearance. Initially, parts of the original building were preserved (its east wing) while a new façade was built (figs. 8 and 9, representing the station the 1960s).

In 1976, a complete reconstruction was carried out and the building acquired its present appearance. Not much has changed in the architecture of the station since then and although renovation works were planned, they were never implemented.

Today, the railway junction in Banat seems to be falling out of use. This is currently being opposed by the “Association of Railway Enthusiasts” who are taking action for the revitalization of the railway to Hungary and for re-establishing traffic along the line Timișoara–Kikinda–Szeged.<sup>26</sup>



Fig. 8. The Railway Station in the 1960s.  
Photo courtesy: Dr. Zoran Markov.

---

<sup>26</sup> R. Bellu, D. Dejanac, I. Simić, J. Čudanov, H. Ferenc, G. Gyula, *Szeged–Kikinda–Jimbolia–Timișoara*, 11.



Fig. 9. The Railway Station in the 1960s.  
Photo courtesy: Dr. Zoran Markov.



Fig. 10. The current appearance of the Railway station in Timișoara.  
Photo courtesy: Dr. Zoran Markov.

## References

- Bellu, Radu, and Dušan Dejanac, Ivan Simić, Jovan Čudanov, Ferenc Horváth, Gyula Gyarmati. *Szeged – Kikinda – Jimbolia – Timișoara*. Jimbolia: Asociația Glasul Roților de tren, 2007.
- Crnjanski, Miloš. “Naš Temišvar” [Our Timișoara]. *Politika* 6001 (1925): 16.
- Hrabak, Bogumil. “Veliki politički štrajk u Vojvodini i na ugarskoj teritoriji pod okupacijom srpske vojske 21-22. februara 1919. godine” [The Great Political Strike in Vojvodina and in the Hungarian Territory Under the Occupation of the Serbian Army on 21–22 February 1919]. *Zbornik Historijskog instituta* (1965): 301-346.
- Kasaš, Jovana. “Srbi u Temišvaru kao građani prvog reda: svakodnevni život” [Serbs in Timișoara as First-class Citizens: Everyday Life]. *Attendite* 15 (2019): 91-102.
- Lazarević, Đorđe. *Moja biografija* [My Biography]. Novi Sad: Gradska biblioteka, 2013.
- Veliki rat Srbije za oslobođenje i ujedinjenje Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1914-1918, odbrana države ujedinjenih Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1919-1920*, knj. 32 [The Great Serbian War for the Liberation and Unification of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes 1914–1918, Defence of the Unified State of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes 1919–1920]. Beograd: Medija centar “Odbrana”, 2014.
- Zdravković, Ljubica. “Dušan Dodić, oslobodilac Jagodine –ratni dnevnik” [Dušan Dodić, Liberator of Jagodina – War Journal]. *Koprenu* 1 (2003): 201-234.

## Newspapers

- Banatski glasnik*, Veliki Bečkerek (1919).
- Jedinstvo*, Novi Sad (1919).
- Nova zora*, Vršac (1919).
- Politika*, Beograd (1925).
- Sloga*, Temišvar (1919).
- Srpski list*, Novi Sad (1919).
- Srpski Sion*, Novi Sad (1904).