

# Serbia's king, or the great pretender?

## 'Alexei II' claims ties to medieval royalty

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BELGRADE — Alexei of Anjou, the man who would be king of Serbia, is the talk of this Balkan capital.

The idea of a king is particularly appealing to Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic. Although he is a Communist at heart, he'll do practically anything to restore his prestige after an expensive and unpopular war waged for a half-year on Croatia.

Serbia's economy is bankrupt. Mr. Milosevic's dream of creating a

Greater Serbia is in shambles. Peacekeepers from the United Nations almost certainly will arrive soon.

The sentiment grows that Serbia needs a dramatic change.

A new king could do the trick.

A universally recognized pretender to the throne of Yugoslavia — and thus of Serbia — exists in Crown Prince Alexander Karadjordjevic, 46, a London businessman whose father was the last king of Yugoslavia. But the popular Prince Alexander doesn't like Mr. Milosevic, whom he blames for bankrupting the republic and preventing democracy to grow.

What Mr. Milosevic needs at the moment is a king who will be beholden to him. This makes the

self-proclaimed Alexei II Romanov-Dolgoruki-Nemanjic the man of the moment. A couple months ago, nobody had even heard of the man who says he is "the only direct descendant" of Serbia's medieval kings and grandson (or great-grandson) of Russian Czar Nicholas II.

The White Eagle, a Serbian genealogical society, has deplored the whole adventure as the product of a "suspicious world of merchants of false titles and honors."

The European Monarchist Association alleges that the "so-called prince" is really Victor Brimeyer, a naturalized Spanish citizen born in Zaire 45 years ago, son of a Luxem-

## War-weary Serbs turn attention to 'Alexei II'

**KING**, from 1A

bourg engineer. It says his titles and claims are fraudulent, and that he is registered with Interpol as a suspicious character once convicted of fraud in Madrid, where he lives.

This is at odds with the pretender's contention that he is fabulously wealthy. He is described as a "highly esteemed and wealthy businessman" who controls an extensive network of companies, none of them named. He has offered \$3.5 billion to the Serbian nation to show that his heart is "bleeding because of the suffering of the Serbian people."

Not a cent of this has been seen. But the generous offer has captivated the media, as well as the politicians of a dispirited, war-weary and bankrupt nation.

Alexei claims a fantastic background. His mother, he asserts in some claims, was Grand Duchess Maria, one of the daughters of Nicholas II. Never mind that Maria was murdered along with the czar and his family in 1918 — 29 years before Alexei was born.

Sometimes he asserts that he is the great-grandson of Czar Nicholas and that his mother, described as the Grand Duchess Olga Beatriz, is the daughter of Maria. This helps with the dates. But Maria not only was murdered at 19; she died unmarried and — to the best of anyone's knowledge — childless.

Alexei provides no details of his claimed links to the other two noble families in his name, even more ancient than the Romanovs. One of the princes Dolgoruki founded Moscow. The Nemanjas were a princely family who, in the 12th century, founded a stable Serbian kingdom stretching from the Danube to the Adriatic, Aegean and Black seas.

After the death of the last Nemanja czar, in 1355, the empire disintegrated and was swallowed up in Ot-



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Alexei of Anjou claims a centuries-old royal heritage.

toman Turkey's conquest of the Balkans.

On the surface, it looks like a Balkan farce. But beneath the surface, others see the sinister political machinations of Mr. Milosevic. For this is only the latest wrinkle in the Serbian president's royalist dabbling to shore up his image.

Mr. Milosevic flirted with a few relatives of Crown Prince Alexander Karadjordjevic, the recognized pretender. But when they spurned the old Communist, some say, he dreamed up his latest royal gambit.

Its objective seems twofold: to discredit the monarchist idea by throwing into the fray various pretenders and, in the process, possibly find a puppet king who would provide a fig leaf of nationalistic popularity for the discredited government.

Last week, the leader of the Serbian Radical Party, Vojislav Seselj, who frequently performs missions for Mr. Milosevic, traveled to Spain to offer Alexei the Serbian crown.

Alexei eagerly accepted it and pledged he would immediately start studying the language of his kingdom.