



## **Weekly Briefing**

**Bosnia-Herzegovina social briefing:  
Battle for King Tvrtko: Whose ruler was he?  
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# Battle for King Tvrtko: Whose ruler was he?

## Summary

*In the sea of current social turmoil and arguments regarding the present and future of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is (another) battle for the past, that is, for the interpretation of history. King Tvrtko, the medieval ruler of Bosnia, got a bust in the center of Sarajevo, opposite the BiH Presidency building, in a pretty controversial way. In the midst of intense discussions about many details related to the installation of the monument, which is the work of the flamboyant mayor of Sarajevo and which includes exactly whose Tvrtko was the king (Bosnian or Serbian), her young colleague from Banja Luka announced that the king Tvrtko will get a monument there as well. Some serious historians have tried to answer why there is so much drama in connection with the ruler from the fourteenth century.*

## Introduction

On, also a historically significant day, when the famous Bosnian ban Kulin wrote the Charter before 834 years (1189), which is interpreted as a confirmation of the medieval statehood of Bosnia, after many administrative and legal vicissitudes, a monument to King Tvrtko I Kotromanić was erected in Sarajevo. He is the first and one of the most famous Bosnian kings who reigned from 1371 to 1391. The initiator of the installation is the City Administration of Sarajevo led by Mayor Ms Benjamina Karić, who was the first to take a picture with the monument to King Tvrtko and publish it on social networks, where she is very active<sup>1</sup>.

As the media reported, numerous citizens were delighted<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, almost automatically, they also started a debate, both about the form and about the substance, and there

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1 "That's where it belongs" In Sarajevo, under the cover of night, a monument to King Tvrtko was erected. <https://srpskainfo.com/tamo-gdje-i-pripada-u-sarajevo-nocas-postavljan-spomenik-kralju-tvrtku-foto/>

2 The monument to Tvrtko I Kotromanić in Sarajevo, the citizens are delighted: "That's our king."  
<https://n1info.ba/vijesti/spomenik-tvrtka-i-kotromanica-u-sarajevo-gradjani-odusevljeni-to-je-nas-kralj/>

were also reactions that, like the installation of the monument itself, come from the nationalist register of appropriating King Tvrtko.

### **Administrative and legal barriers**

The installation of the monument to Tvrtko in late August, organized by Mayor Karić, is actually the culmination of a long-standing problem with finding a place for a monument to this king. In short, the central area of Sarajevo was declared a national monument of Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>3</sup>. According to this Decision, in the central zone of Sarajevo, any construction, including the installation of monuments like this one of King Tvrtko, requires the consent of the Commission for the Preservation of National Monuments of BiH. Such a decision should be made unanimously by three members of the Commission, who must be from among the three constituent nations of Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks. The Serbian member of the commission, Ms Anđelina Ošap Gaćanović, did not vote for the installation of a monument to King Tvrtko in the central zone, with an explanation that corresponds to the Serbian nationalist narrative, that King Tvrtko is not a Bosnian king, but a Serbian king<sup>4</sup>.

Due to the blockage in the Commission, the monument has been moved for more than a year to various, mostly inadequate proposed locations<sup>5</sup>. Then a way was found to bypass the Commission. The Bosniak member of the Commission, Faruk Kapidžić, the mayor of Sarajevo Ms Karić and the head of the Municipality of Center (One of four Sarajevo City communes), Srđan Mandić, participated in this circumvention. The Municipality of Center granted a temporary permit for the lease of public space. The City of Sarajevo and Mayor Karić submitted requests, the Municipality of Center, headed by Mandić, issued a temporary permit for the use

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3 Decision on declaring the historical urban landscape of Sarajevo a national monument of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Official Gazette of BiH, number 1/21, <http://glasila.ba/page/akt/durAH15gztz5k76kjin45hqME=>

4 SCANDALOUS STATEMENTS OF A MEMBER OF THE COMMISSION FOR THE PRESERVATION OF NATIONAL MONUMENTS: "I did not give my consent for the monument. There was no king of Bosnia and no Bosnian kingdom!" <https://www.slobodna-bosna.ba/vijest/315780/skandalozne-izjave-chlanice-komisije-za-ochuvanje-nacionalnih-spomenika-ja-nisa-m-dala-saglasnost-za-spomenik-nije-postojao-kralj-bosne-niti-bosanska-kraljevina.html>

5 The monument to King Tvrtko in a rural setting is waiting for a location to be found in Sarajevo. <https://n1info.ba/vijesti/spomenik-kralju-tvrtku-ceka-u-seoskom-okruzenju-da-mu-nadju-lokaciju-u-sarajevo/>

of the public area at the place where the monument was placed, and for, as stated, the exhibition entitled "Medieval Bosnian State - King Tvrtko I Kotromanić"<sup>6</sup>.

This *de facto* and *de iure* means that the monument to King Tvrtko is not a monument, but an exhibition. The exhibition in front of the BiH Presidency will last until the end of September, when the City will have to request a new permit from the Center Municipality. And that they will ask for it, announced the mayor Karić, who said that she is sure that "our Tvrtko will stay there forever, and that 25 tons is not light, even if someone thinks to remove it"<sup>7</sup>.

### **Nationalistic narratives**

Many have already declared this kind of "action" and circumvention of the Commission as a problematic act, an *ad hoc* solution that in itself entails a series of mistakes. In one such text, historian and diplomat Slobodan Šoja pointed out that there are at least three "amateur, inadmissible" mistakes on the monument to King Tvrtko, such as the date of birth and death on the monument instead of the period when Tvrtko was king<sup>8</sup>.

But why this battle regarding the legacy of King Tvrtko? Well, in a nationalist way. The essence of the problem is that Tvrtko was crowned as the "King of the Serbs and Bosnia..." which is a sufficient sign for the Serbian nationalist narrative that King Tvrtko was the "Serbian King"<sup>9</sup>.

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6 IT'S NOT A MONUMENT, BUT AN EXHIBITION: The company will be at the table in front of the Presidency until the end of September. <https://www.zurnal.info/clanak/tvrtko-stoluje-pred-predsjednistvom-do-kraja-septembra/26231>

7 "Tvrtko" has a permit for temporary residence at the BiH Presidency, and "25 tons is not light, for someone to think of hiding it" <https://faktor.ba/vijest/tvrtko-i-ima-dozvolu-za-privremeni-boravak-kod-predsjednistva-bih-a-25-tona-nije-lagano-da-ga-neko-i-pomisli-skloniti/209318>

8 DOCTOR OF HISTORY, SLOBODAN ŠOJA: "There are at least three mistakes on the monument to Tvrtko I Kotromanić!" <https://www.slobodna-bosna.ba/vijest/316442/doktor-historije-slobodan-soja-na-spomeniku-tvrtku-i-kotromanicu-primjetne-su-najmanje-tri-greske.html>

9 Our king Tvrtko. <https://www.dw.com/hr/na%C5%A1-kralj-tvrtko/a-66702625>

"It is unfortunate that the monument to the Bosnian king Tvrtko has become the object of manipulation," says respected Bosnian historian Husnija Kamberović. He recalls that Tvrtko's Bosnia was a larger and more stable country than BiH today, that Tvrtko was a Bosnian king and Bosnia a feudal state. "And it is completely inappropriate to impose contemporary national identities on the rulers of the 14th century. This is an absolutely non-historical approach", says Kamberović and adds: "Modern states cannot be identified with medieval ones"<sup>10</sup>.

In the same context, liberal journalist Danijal Hadžović from a Sarajevo daily *Dnevni avaz* recalled that the real Tvrtko was a typical medieval aristocrat. The land over which he rules is his country, those who live on it are his subjects. Like every ruler, he aspired to increase his territory, because more territory, more power, more strength and more collected taxes. This was achieved through constant wars, clever dynastic weddings or diplomacy, and Tvrtko was especially known for good diplomacy. If necessary, he was everything he needed in order to expand his territory, so with the collapse of the Serbian Empire, after the death of king Uroš, he had the ambition to establish rule (in which he failed) over all areas of the Serbian Empire, calling for kinship with the nobles Nemanjići through his grandmother's line, which is why he took the title of "King of Serbia". He referred to his second grandmother, who came from the house of Croatian nobles Šubići, when he wanted to legitimize his authority over Croatian territories and occasionally called himself the king of Croatia. Tvrtko tried to show himself to the Serbs as the legitimate heir to their throne, and not as a foreign subjugator, and to the Croats as a more desirable ruler.

"The identity of Tvrtko, like that of every medieval ruler, is primarily family and class, and in that sense he uses his family, and not then non-existent national foundations, to legitimize, expand and consolidate power", points out this journalist, who actually answered two apparently opposing concepts, of an all-Bosnian who tries to draw a parallel between modern and medieval Bosnia, and a Serbian, who sees in Tvrtko proof that Bosnia was a Serbian state<sup>11</sup>.

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10 *Ibid.*

11 Was King Tvrtko a Serb or a Bosniak? <https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/852786/je-li-kralj-tvrtko-bio-srbini-ili-bosnjak>

That is why the mayor of Banja Luka, Draško Stanivuković, reacted thunderously to the Sarajevo monument, announcing that "Banja Luka will correct the injustice committed by Sarajevo".

"By appropriating the medieval Serbian ruler Tvrtko I Kotromanić, the mayor of Sarajevo and her associates are making a rough rewrite of history with the aim of filling in the historical holes of their people and collecting daily political points by touching the very core of King Tvrtko, his struggle and rule," Stanivuković said, and added that Tvrtko was a Christian ruler<sup>12</sup>.

Although it is indisputable that Tvrtko was a Christian ruler, it is interesting that his monument in Sarajevo lacks any Christian or religious symbolism, which was noticed by the critically oriented journalist and historian Nedžad Novalić. He correctly noted that the Sarajevo monument to King Tvrtko perfectly corresponds to the current Bosniak nationalist narrative to which the mayor, nominally a representative of the social democratic option, also belongs. Assuming that the Tvrtko from Banja Luka will be "much more Serbian" than the one from Sarajevo, Novalić concludes that the latter is also a monument to anti-intellectual atmosphere, political kitsch and social regression<sup>13</sup>.

### **Fight for past**

History professor Dragan Markovina, historian and left-wing activist from Split (Croatia), a native of Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina), also wonders the same. He literally says that a world in which "it is normal for social democrats to joyfully unveil a monument to a medieval king, swearing an oath to the state, instead of some modernist monument to Bosnian miners, is actually a world that has irretrievably gone to hell."<sup>14</sup>

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12 "PERMANENTLY AND WITH ALL PERMISSIONS...": Draško Stanivuković revealed what the monument to the "Serbian ruler" Tvrtko I Kotromanić will look like. [https://www.slobodna-bosna.ba/vijest/317385/trajno\\_i\\_sa\\_svim\\_dozvolama\\_drasko\\_stanivukovic\\_otkrio\\_kako\\_ce\\_izgledati\\_spomenik\\_srpskom\\_vladaru\\_tvrtku\\_i\\_kotromanicu\\_video.html](https://www.slobodna-bosna.ba/vijest/317385/trajno_i_sa_svim_dozvolama_drasko_stanivukovic_otkrio_kako_ce_izgledati_spomenik_srpskom_vladaru_tvrtku_i_kotromanicu_video.html)

13 MONUMENTAL TERROR: The monument to the Company is a monument to anti-intellectual atmosphere, political kitsch and social regression. <https://www.lupiga.com/hiperlink/spomenicki-teror-spomenik-tvrtku-spomenik-je-jednoj-antiintelektulnoj-atmosferi-politickom-kicu-i-drustvenoj-regresiji>

14 Kitsch in Sarajevo. <https://pescanik.net/kic-u-sarajevu/>

Where does such a craze for the Middle Ages come from in BiH? Perhaps the best answer is given by Emira O Filipović, professor of medieval studies at the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo, who earned his doctorate on the topic "Bosnian Kingdom and Ottoman Empire (1386-1463)", at a time that partially corresponds to the time of Tvrtko's reign. In an interview on the occasion of the construction of the monument to the Company, expressing his personal disagreement with the way the monument was erected, as well as the details that decorate it, Filipović pointed out in the interview: "Unfortunately, the past is often perceived as one huge repository from which, according to current needs, it can be extracting what someone likes the most at a certain moment, so by using a skillful 'technique' of hiding what does not suit a thesis and emphasizing what is in favor of it, any narrative can be created that would favor any political or ideological goals, and even and the most down-to-earth ones".

Finally, as a curiosity, let's note that the fans of the Sarajevo football club "Željezničar", before the last game, invited their members to match with a photo with a banner in front of this monument, which caused the public enthusiasm of the mayor Karić<sup>15</sup>. And quite symbolically, the favored "Željezničar" lost that match in a shocking defeat.

## **Conclusion**

Although King Tvrtko I Kotromanić was undoubtedly a significant historical figure, attempts to ascribe some Bosnian or Serbian state-building patriotism to him from a modern perspective are funny but not harmless. Fans of both sides do not think rationally or use arguments. The main goal is the mobilization of voters on a patriotic basis, because in BiH some elections are always around the corner. The culprits of such a policy, the mayor of Sarajevo Karić and the mayor of Banja Luka Stanivuković are a new generation of leaders, who could be on the scene for decades to come. And this is what worries the rest of serious people's circles in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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15 Karić delighted with Maniac's gesture: This is the best call for me, I love you Željo!  
<https://raport.ba/karic-odusevljena-gestom-manijaka-ovo-je-za-mene-najbolji-poziv-volim-te-zeljo/>