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## **The Yugoslav State and Military Alliances: Between Partnerships and Neutrality**

### **Between the Legacy of the Entente and the Regional Challenges 1919–1939**

With gained independence and territorial expansion to the south in 1878, Serbia did not complete its national programme. Although it obtained equal position in the European community of nations, Serbia was nevertheless subject to powerful political and economic influence of Austria-Hungary up until the beginning of the XX century. Transition on the throne that took place in 1903, years of severe political and economic confrontations, as well as the emergence of a new generation of political, military and cultural elite who felt entitled to a national mission, brought about a widespread belief that the national liberation and unification can be reached only through permanent political, military, as well as cultural and educational action. Annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary and the compulsion to formally recognize the act, at the recommendation of Russia, propelled Serbia to steer its national action towards the south and, in alliance with other Balkan countries, try and accomplish the proclaimed ideal of national liberation and unification by seeking support and anchor in Russia and France.

Triumphs in two successive Balkan Wars put new challenges before Serbia. In territorial terms, its area nearly doubled, and the population rose from 3 to 4.5 million. It acquired borders with Montenegro and Greece, which strengthened its geostrategic position. For South Slavs in Austria-Hungary, Serbia became a beacon of liberty and a country to aspire to. A small Balkan country evolved into a state of medium power in the south of Europe. Alliance ties with Greece and Montenegro were reinforced, as was the support from Russia and France. On the other hand, although it expanded to a greater territory, Serbia turned from a uni-national to a multi-national and multi-religious country. This posed a seri-

ous threat to its previous internal compactness. The Second Balkan War did not only mark the end of the Balkan Alliance, but at the same time it also symbolized the “tomb” for the Serbian-Bulgarian relations throughout the XX century, and initiated the era of considerable instability and tension between these two neighbouring countries. Despite enormous efforts, Serbia did not gain access to the sea, thus remaining confined within its Balkan boundaries, regardless of the major breakthrough to the south. Additionally, Serbian triumphs in previous wars intensified the aversion of Austria-Hungary as it grew aware that Serbia was significantly invigorated after the wars and that its rise should be stopped by a prompt military action, before it raises the issue of South Slavs position in the Monarchy by relying on the alliance with other Balkan countries and support from the Little Entente.

As it was exhausted after two subsequent wars and the Albanian rebellion of 1913, Serbia pursued peace. According to the projections of the political and intellectual elite, Serbia needed at least two decades of peacetime in order to consolidate the expanded country and fully integrate the newly liberated territories, to economically and militarily reinforce itself, raise the general cultural level of the population and prepare itself for the new national undertakings. At the outbreak of the First World War, warfare was the last thing Serbia wanted. At the time, Serbia was economically exhausted and debt-ridden, its army possessed depleted and insufficient weaponry, its agrarian economy was facing a series of drawbacks, and there was no alliance agreement with the Entente countries, while the agreements with Montenegro and Greece dated back to the period of preparations for the war against Turkey. The outbreak of the war and the first military victories over Austrian-Hungarian forces also marked the beginning of strenuous efforts on the part of Serbian politicians and intellectuals to establish a Yugoslav agenda of the Serbian government. In the thick of the Kolubara battle, just as its army was breaking the third subsequent Austrian-Hungarian offensive, Serbian Government and Parliament passed the Niš Declaration and clearly defined its war aim – liberation and unification of all South Slavs. This marked the beginning of the fight for the creation of a joint Yugoslav state. In the beginning, the allies disapproved of such a programme, primarily due to the fact that they still had not clearly defined a common position on the post-war destiny of Austria-Hungary. On the other hand, Serbian Government kept pursuing its war aim, even after the defeat in 1915 which drove its army and part of population to exile. Only when Russia left and USA

entered the War did the situation change, and Serbia gained the support from allies for the proclaimed agenda of the Serbian government.

The victorious ending of the First World War and establishment of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia saw the creation of a country that fundamentally changed the geopolitical position of Serbia, as the originator of the Yugoslav unification. From a country with the population of 4.5 million people, by merging with Croatian and Slovenian territories, Serbia grew into a country of nearly 14 million people. In territorial, demographic and natural wealth terms, it became a European country of medium size. The previous, decisively Balkan and inland setting of the Serbian country, completely changed with a major territorial breakthrough towards central Europe and Adriatic Sea. Such changes brought about significant shifts in relations with the existing allies, aggravated further the conflicts with enemies and provoked various views and policies from world powers. Having gained the outlet to the Adriatic Sea, the Yugoslav Kingdom became a maritime, Adriatic and Mediterranean power, but its access to the sea was greatly limited by the naval and political power of Italy. The advancement towards Central Europe secured the country's Adriatic and Balkan hinterland, but it was also shadowed by the danger of Austrian and Hungarian revanchist aspirations. In the east, the difficult demarcation with Romania was on a verge of a conflict, while the Bulgarian discontent with the peace terms threatened to escalate. Unstable internal affairs in Albania made this territory potentially dangerous for the Yugoslav state and fuelled the fear of potential Italian penetration, which would completely diminish the importance of the Yugoslav access to the Adriatic and make it dependent on the relations with Italy. Only the relations with Greece represented a potential relief and opportunity to use the railway connection with this country and its port in Thessaloniki to somewhat compensate for the potential threat of the Italian encirclement and ensure an alternative entrance point to the global markets for the Yugoslav economy.<sup>1</sup>

Early days of the Yugoslav Kingdom were marked by a series of spatial and geopolitical challenges. On a global scale, this was the most loyal and reliable ally of France in the Balkans. Britain's distancing from this region, as well as the American retreat from Europe deprived Yugoslavia of valuable support from the Allied powers, while the biggest blow for the Yugoslav state was the disappearance of the Tsardom of Russia and birth of the soviet Russia, with whom it did not have any relations. Lacking Rus-

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1 Момчило Нинчић, *Спољна политика Краљевине Срба, Хрвата и Словенаца у год. 1922-24. Говори и експозе у Народној скупштини* (Београд, 1924), 10-12.

sian support, and perceived by the global powers as one of the countries that serve as the barrier against the spread of Bolshevism across Europe, made the Yugoslav state exceptionally vulnerable.<sup>2</sup> Concurrently, due its central position in the Balkans and control over transport nodes of south-east Europe Yugoslavia was a unique resistance point against the spread of German influence towards the south and east of Europe. As a result of the strong revanchist aspirations of Hungary and Austria, Yugoslavia was given a particular geopolitical importance. With the support from France, and through the bilateral ties with Czechoslovakia and Romania, a newly established Yugoslav state became a barricade against the restoration of the Habsburg Monarchy. Designed with this aim, Little Entente also signified to Yugoslavia a strong reliance on France, Romania and Czechoslovakia.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the greatest challenge and the most serious threat were posed by Italy. Its aspirations to firmly set foot on the Balkan soil through Dalmatia and ensure a steady Adriatic hinterland, while keeping Yugoslavia far from the sea, resulted in a series of tensions between the two countries. The Yugoslav-Italian rivalry was particularly evident in Albania. The struggle for influence in that country was more than the battle for political dominance. For Italy, Albania was the entrance point to the Balkan mainland. Striving to exert simultaneous pressure in the north and the south, and by holding absolute control over both sides of Otranto, Italia aspired to make the Adriatic bay its own and Yugoslav outlet to the sea practically meaningless. The conflict with Italy ended with the establishment of a border line, entering into international agreement and temporary Yugoslav victory marked by the elevation of their favourite, Ahmed Zogu, to the Albanian throne. In the east, Bulgarian discontent and resistance to the provisions of the peace Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine produced constant instability on the border that was almost a thousand kilometres long. Temporary attempts at appeasement and finding a solution proved fruitless, which was why this issue, coupled by a persistently intimidating Italian problem, remained the greatest security threat for Yugoslavia until mid-1930s. Southern and most reliable neighbour - Greece, which represented for Yugoslavia a source of additional strategic capacity and alternative outlet to the Mediterranean and world seas, was in a difficult

2 AJ, фонд 341 – Посланство Краљевине Југославије у Енглеској – Лондон, к. 31, а.ј. 104, *Извештај Обавештајног одсека Министарства иностраних послова од 20. новембра 1926.*

3 Jan Šeba, *Paměti legionáře a diplomata*, ed. Jindřich Dejmek (Praha: Historický ústav, 2016), 271.

situation owing to the conflict with Turkey and smaller interstate disagreements, which further complicated the strategic position of Yugoslavia in Europe and the Balkans.<sup>4</sup>

Increasingly complicated international relations caught the Yugoslav state in a severe political and economic crisis. Constant border tensions that overshadowed the Yugoslav Kingdom since its establishment, a number of unresolved internal issues, and a strong surge of global economic crisis that swept over Yugoslavia in 1930s aggravated its international position and weakened its foreign policy capacity. Continuous threat on the borders with Italy, Bulgaria and Hungary, coupled with rivalry with Italy over Albania and the fear of Habsburg restoration in Austria had been wearing out the Yugoslav diplomacy for over a decade. On the other hand, relatively good relations with Greece, alliance with Romania and Czechoslovakia under the Little Entente, followed by the Balkan Pact, served as guarantees of security for the Yugoslav borders. Old alliances with Great Britain and France that had been forged during the First World War signified to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia the pillars of protection of its interests by great powers.<sup>5</sup> There were no diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union. Yugoslav government and King Aleksandar held the position that the revolutionary changes in that country should not be recognized.<sup>6</sup> Such position was not shared by any other country in the European continent. Yugoslav allies among great powers, soon followed by members of the Little Entente, formally recognized the changes as early as in the first several years after the establishment of the Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup> Yugoslav foreign-affairs position was particularly undermined after the assassination of King Aleksandar.<sup>8</sup> His passing and departure from political scene signified the disappearance of an ultimate authority figure who not only symbolized the unity of the state, but by virtue of his reputation, ensured a special position of his country in the international arena.

New Yugoslav government formed in 1935 under the leadership of the vigorous and proficient financial expert Milan Stojadinović, who

4 AJ, фонд 341 – Посланство КЈ у Лондону, к. 31, а.ј. 105, *Допис Министарства иностраних послова Посланству у Лондону од 8. марта 1933.*

5 AJ, фонд 341 – Посланство КЈ у Лондону, к. 31, а.ј. 105, *Писмо министра иностраних послова посланику у Лондону од 16. фебруара 1927.*

6 AJ, фонд 341 – Посланство КЈ у Лондону, к. 31, а.ј. 105, *Писмо посланика у Паризу министру иностраних послова од 15. јануара 1934.*

7 Здењек Сладек, *Мала Антанта 1919-1938. Њене привредне, политичке и војне компоненте* (Београд: Службени гласник, 2019), 146-150.

8 J. Šeba, *Paměti legionáře a diplomata*, 271.

was also in charge of the diplomacy, strove to redefine its own principles for international relations, in the times of grave internal crisis and numerous foreign policy challenges. Anticipating that in near future the Kingdom of Yugoslavia will not be able to ensure its own national security by relying on principles and instruments that had been established in the wake of the First World War, Stojadinović's government tried to find new solutions aimed at ensuring a stable international position. This belief stemmed from the fact that the geo-political situation in Europe abruptly changed following Hitler's rise to power, and that a formidable barrier had appeared between Yugoslavia and its western allies which was embodied by the Axis Powers from the North Sea to the Mediterranean. In these circumstances, Yugoslavia was left without a direct connection with its allies. It was considered that in the event of a wider conflict, allies would not be able to directly assist Yugoslavia. Foreign trade balance of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia also imposed the need for a different foreign policy approach. Yugoslavia complied with and fully implemented the policy of economic sanctions imposed on Italy by the League of Nations due to the Italian intervention in Ethiopia. Until then, the Italian share in Yugoslav foreign trade was 20%. During the sanctions, Yugoslav government turned to France and Britain asking them to compensate for a part of its loss by introducing a new foreign trade arrangement. Britain and France replied affirmatively, but the implemented measures produced almost insignificant results.<sup>9</sup> Since Italian economy managed to find new markets during the imposed sanctions, its share in the foreign trade with Yugoslavia dropped to barely 8%. It was quite clear that the Yugoslav economy was complementary with the Italian, but entirely incompatible with the French and the British. Essentially, Great Britain and France could not buy from Yugoslavia those goods they had already been receiving from their own colonies.<sup>10</sup>

In such circumstances, the Yugoslav government faced extremely difficult tasks. Traditional alliances imposed certain obligations of both political and sentimental nature, while the foreign policy situation called for a speedy and efficient reaction. It also became clear that alignment was needed even with those powers that had not been entirely benevolent towards the Yugoslav state in the past. Stojadinović's government endeav-

9 АЈ, фонд 37 – Лични фонд Милана Стојадиновића, ф. 31, а.ј. 228, 31-133, *Писмо Милану Стојадиновићу од 11. јуна 1936.*

10 Anthony Read, David Fischer, *The Deadly Embrace: Hitler, Stalin and the Nazi-Soviet Pact 1939-1941* (London: Norton, 1988), 40-42.

oured to find an exit from such a delicate international situation by preserving the old friendships and hard-earned international positions. It also tried to initiate and intensify relations with powers with whom previous relations had not been enviable but whose impact on the international scene had abruptly increased. Additionally, it intended to normalize and develop further the relations with neighbours and other countries in the region. Such foreign policy aspirations reached their peak in the course of 1937, when Yugoslav diplomacy implemented a series of dynamic foreign-affairs actions that resulted in both formal and genuine reinforcement of its relations with old allies. Furthermore, new external policy channels were opened, relations with neighbours and regional powers were also regulated and strengthened.

In the years following the end of the First World War, the most significant Yugoslav ally among the great global powers was France. The depth of political, economic, military and cultural ties in many aspects put Yugoslavia in an almost dependent position to France. With the Declaration of the Franco-Yugoslav Friendship signed in 1927, this relation was also formally endorsed. For Yugoslavia, reliance on France did not only represent a means for preserving its national security, but it also involved a practical adoption of a certain model, as well as of the French outlook on international relations. A decade later, Franco-Yugoslav relations would reach one of their peaks, but would also signal a serious crisis. Since the Declaration of the Franco-Yugoslav friendship was nearing its expiry, as it had been concluded in 1927 for a period of 10 years, French party proposed an extension, but to a great surprise of the Yugoslav party, the validity was to be extended only for additional five years. The talks between Prime Minister Stojadinović and French officials were not too promising. Utterly vague position of the French prime minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, insisting on the mechanism of the League of Nations as the only guardian of peace in Europe, coupled with disregard of the threatening danger, caught the Yugoslav delegation by surprise. In addition, the Yugoslav prime minister did not receive any concrete guarantees for preserving Yugoslav independence in the event of a serious conflict on the European soil. A new trade agreement and payment agreement were also concluded but the general impression was disappointing.<sup>11</sup>

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11 Vuk Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Francuska između dva svetska rata: Da li je Jugoslavija bila francuski „satelit“* (Beograd: ISI, 1985); Vladimir Cvetković, *Ekonomski odnosi Jugoslavije i Francuske 1918–1941* (Beograd: INIS, 2006); Милан Стојадиновић, *Нунат ни пакт* (Београд: Глас јавности, 2002).



The fear of Yugoslav diplomacy was intensified because of the bitter experience from the previous year. Since France and Great Britain practically recoiled from the impudent German remilitarisation of the Rhineland in March 1936, Yugoslav diplomacy was apprehensive about the reaction of great powers in the event of military threat to Yugoslavia. The prevalent conviction was that Yugoslavia was traditionally jeopardised from the west by Italy, and that in the future Germany would impose pressure from the north since the accession of Austria to Germany was a virtual certainty. It was estimated that Yugoslavia had very little time and a narrow manoeuvre space to avoid such kind of pressure as it was believed that, being faced with a number of open internal issues, as well as serious problems, Yugoslavia would not be able to resist the pressure. Additionally, the starting point of various analyses was the assumption that a temporary guaranty of the Yugoslav security absurdly lied in the disagreement between Italy and Germany regarding the future Balkan policy. This led to the conclusion that the extremely short period during which the Yugoslav diplomacy had to find an optimal solution was available until the moment when the German and Italian interests align. French diplomacy did not make any efforts to try and understand the reasons behind the Yugoslav apprehension. Paris showed little understanding for the explanations that Yugoslavia remained firmly in the camp of the allies, but that there was also a need for an agreement with Italy in order for Yugoslavia to avoid the scenario of becoming an easy prey to Italy and Germany already during the early phases of the future conflict. Concurrently, France, which struggled with serious economic and social problems, was not even in the position to provide any significant help to Yugoslavia, nor any meaningful guarantees for the future. To a certain extent, French positions were surprising for the Yugoslav side, but undoubtedly also had a sobering effect. Once a firm alliance, extremely strong emotional relation to France, memory of joint warfare conquests from the Salonica front and years of looking up to France, in practice confronted the actual political situation that called for swift solutions. Even though formal alliance with France was reinforced, Yugoslav diplomacy was well aware that it also had to seek future solutions elsewhere. Years of strong reliance on France in the international arena were now a thing of the past.

Yugoslavia endeavoured to strengthen its ties with Great Britain, but experienced serious setbacks on this course, as well. Great Britain was connected with Yugoslavia through the wartime alliance but until the mid-1930s it kept its distance from the Balkans. Its colonial power



instilled certain confidence in Yugoslavia in the event of a potential future conflict. Furthermore, Yugoslav diplomacy believed that Great Britain had extremely strong interest in the territory of Mediterranean and that Britain's existential interest in this region was closely connected with assurance of the Yugoslav foreign security. However, as early as in 1937, a rebuttal of such conviction arrived from London. Following the conclusion of the "gentlemen's agreement" between Great Britain and Italy, Yugoslav diplomacy congratulated their British counterparts and expressed enormous pleasure, considering that this also meant the security of the Yugoslav borders. London sent a reply that was least expected and utterly unpleasant for the Yugoslav side. In the most direct form, the Britain stated that, by signing the agreement, it did not assume any obligations related to the sanctity of Yugoslav borders. It was clear that, despite all the humiliations endured from Mussolini, Great Britain was strongly committed to the agreement with Italy. Even though Britain refrained from guaranteeing the safety of Yugoslavia and essentially excluded Yugoslavia and its interests from the agreement with Italy, this agreement created necessary manoeuvre space for Yugoslavia. There was a possibility to enter into a Yugoslav-Italian agreement that would not jeopardize relations between Yugoslavia and Great Britain due to its strong encouragement for an agreement with Italy.

In October of 1937, Yugoslav prime minister and Foreign Affairs Minister, Milan Stojadinović visited Great Britain. He met with the Prime Minister Chamberlain and the Foreign Secretary Eden. Unlike the French, the British expressed more understanding for the Yugoslav position, stressing that they firmly believed in the appeasement agreement with Germany and Italy, and in the commitment of Hitler's regime to preserve peace in Europe. It was perfectly clear that in future developments, Yugoslavia would not be able to rely on Great Britain and France, but it had to try and find a solution on its own by adjusting its own needs to the political aspirations of the two of its powerful allies. Simultaneously, owing to the France's exhaustion with its own internal struggles and the resulting international inactivity, there was more room for the reinforcement of the Yugoslav-British ties stemming from the growing concern of Britain to safeguard its interests in the territory of the Mediterranean Sea. As the British interest was primarily oriented towards the security of the Mediterranean hinterland, keeping the Italian interest under control and preventing the German penetration to the basin, Yugoslav diplomacy understood that Yugoslavia would have a special place in the British politics

during the future events. The present British insisting on the agreement with Germany and Italy excluded the provision of any guarantees to Yugoslavia, but also clearly indicated its interest in the region, including the Yugoslav position. Yugoslav side was aware of this and vigorously strived in its communication with the British side to ensure its position, believing that in near future, the position of the Great Britain towards Yugoslavia would bear great significance.

At the same time, Great Britain managed to indirectly eliminate the pivotal French influence in Yugoslavia and take its place as once most influential western force in Yugoslavia and the Balkans. Strengthening of the relations between Yugoslavia and Great Britain opened new perspectives for Yugoslav diplomacy, primarily in terms of the almost identical positions regarding the policy of cooperation with Italy and Germany, but nevertheless did not provide any solid guarantees in the event of direct external threat. Thus, Yugoslavia was placed in a certain foreign policy vacuum, forced to seek new solutions.<sup>12</sup>

Even though relations between the Kingdom of Serbia and Italy had been very good, a newly established Yugoslav state confronted Italy over the border in Dalmatia and opposed Italian territorial claims in this area. An additional clashing point was Albania. Struggle for influence in this country and Yugoslav alarm that Italy would completely enclose it in the Adriatic Sea should it fortify its position in Albania, represented constant generators of conflict. Consequently, if mid 1920s are excluded, relations between Italy and Yugoslavia until 1935/36 were marked with continuous clashes and lack of understanding. Following the death of King Aleksandar, French government sent signals to the Yugoslav counterpart that it should regulate its relations with Italy since it was particularly keen to ensure good relations between these two countries as a means to prevent the establishment of an Italian-German alliance. Italy sent positive signals, too. At the time when it was opposing great powers over Abyssinia, and Germany threatened to become its neighbour through annexa-

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12 Јован Јовановић, *Дипломатска историја Нове Европе I-II* (Београд: К. Ј. Михаиловић, 1939); Јакоб Нортнер, *Југославија у кризи 1934-1941* (Ријека: Отокар Кершовани, 1965); Милан Стојадиновић, *Ни рат ни пакт* (Београд: Глас јавности, 2002); Богдан Кризман, *Ванјска политика југословенске државе 1918-1941. Дипломатско-историјски преглед* (Загреб: Школска књига, 1977); Дунја Херцигонја, *Велика Британија и спољно-политички положај Југославије (1929-1933). Британска политика према југословенско-италијанским sukobима у време свјетске привредне кризе* (Београд: ISI, 1987).

tion of Austria and thus raise the issue of South Tirol, Italy considered it necessary to regulate its relations with Yugoslavia.

Following lengthy preparatory talks, negotiations for the conclusion of a separate agreement between Yugoslavia and Italy began in late 1936. The negotiations were progressing well and through special emissaries it was agreed that the future agreement should be concluded within the framework of a wider agreement on amity and mutual consultation. The pace and efficiency of negotiations were impacted by the Italian aspirations to achieve an important foreign policy success amidst the unfavourable developments in Spain. At the same time, Stojadinović desired to finalize the talks before the session of the Little Entente Permanent Council where he would be forced to provide clear response and firm guarantees addressing numerous potentially unpleasant questions posed by the alliance member states. Italian side tried to bring a new dimension to the agreement by insisting on a military alliance. In practice, this would imply Yugoslav accession to the military axis Berlin-Rome, which was utterly unacceptable for the Yugoslav diplomacy. Both sides agreed with the general principles of the ensuing treaty, which were related to the overcoming of past conflicts, prevention of any surprises in near future and strengthening of good neighbourly relations and mutual economic trade.

The agreement was signed on 23 March 1937 in Belgrade by Italian Foreign Minister, Count Ciano and his Yugoslav counterpart, Milan Stojadinović. The duration of the agreement was set at five years. Simultaneously, a trade agreement was concluded aimed at reinforcement of economic trade. With the agreement, Italy strengthened its position both compared to its main ally Germany, but also in relation to its major competitor in the Mediterranean – Great Britain. It seemed that Yugoslavia managed to normalize the relations with its most significant opponent and ensure the stability of its western border. By guaranteeing the Yugoslav borders, Italy directly renounced its claims over Dalmatia. It also made a commitment to suppress Ustaša actions in its territory and guarantee minority rights of Slovenes in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region. Italian-Yugoslav treaty also struck a blow to the Hungarian and Bulgarian revisionist ambitions. The former Italian support to Bulgarian and Hungarian claims was withdrawn, which reinvigorated the Yugoslav position towards these countries, as well. The agreement also raised the issue of the position of Albania in mutual relations. Yugoslav diplomacy clearly understood that Italy increased its impact on the territory of this country, which was, openly or tacitly supported by great powers, and as such, it would not aban-

don the advantage it had already sized. Yugoslavia sought a promise from Italy that it would refrain from any action in this country without prior announcement and consent from Yugoslavia. Italy made such a promise and honoured it for next several years. For Yugoslavia, this agreement exceeded the framework of a bilateral treaty and paved a way for the establishment of lasting friendly relations with Italy. The achieved agreement was further solidified during the visit of Yugoslav Prime Minister Stojadinović to Italy in December 1937. On that occasion, Stojadinović was also received by Pope Pius XI. Despite Stojadinović's fear that another foreign policy issue would be raised and that Roman Pope would insist on addressing the matter of relations between the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Holy See, in view of the problems with ratification of the concordat by the Yugoslav Parliament, the Vatican side was not willing to discuss this issue. Therefore, a new issue in the relations between Vatican and Yugoslavia was not put on the table.<sup>13</sup>

A warm reception of Stojadinović in Rome intrigued the British and French diplomacy. The policy they had wholeheartedly supported became suspicious. The statement made by Stojadinović to the British ambassador that he remained committed to what he had discussed during his visit to London only partially restored the shaken confidence. In the course of his visit to Rome, Stojadinović also arranged for improved economic relations and launch of the talks of future military cooperation. At the time when the Rome-Berlin axis was not fully ensured, it seemed that for Italy the agreement with Yugoslavia signified a dose of assurance, should the planned union of Austria with Germany jeopardise the vital Italian interests in the region.

Real-political approach of the new Yugoslav government also affected the relations between Yugoslavia and Germany. Although there were no precise arrangements, the foundation of the future cooperation was laid soon after the King Aleksandar's death. Several frequent private and official visits by marshal Göring denoted the growing German inter-

13 For more details on Yugoslav-Italian relations see: Galeazzo Ciano, *Dnevnik* (Zagreb: Majer i Lušičić, 1948); Vuk Vinaver, „Politika Jugoslavije prema Italiji 1935-1941“, *Istorijski zapisi*, 1, 1968, 67-112; Vladislav Stakić, *Moji razgovori s Musolinijem* (Minhen: s.n, 1967); Надежда Д. Смирнова, *Политика Италиии на Балканах 1922-1935. Очерк дипломатической истории* (Москва: Наука, 1979); Enes Milak, *Italija i Jugoslavija 1931-1937* (Beograd: ISI, 1987); Džejms H. Bergvin, *Imperija na Jadranu. Mussolinijevo osvajanje Jugoslavije 1941-1943* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2007); Massimo Bucarelli, *Mussolini e la Jugoslavia 1922-1939* (Bari: V. A. Graphis, 2006); Бојан Симић, *Милан Стојадиновић и Италија. Између дипломатије и пропаганде* (Београд: ИНИС, 2019).

est in Yugoslavia. Economic relations with Germany were on the rise, but the political aspect of the relations was still secondary. Yugoslavia looked favourably upon the German opposition to the Habsburg restoration in Austria, as well as upon a potential pressure on Italy at a certain moment. Germany, on the other hand, and in the circumstances of economic crisis, regarded Yugoslavia as an important link in the chain of territories seen as supplementing economic space. For Stojadinović's government, Germany, which opted for overcoming the economic crisis by increased production, signified an important foreign trade partner for the supply of industrial products necessary for the reinforcement of its own industry and meeting the market demands. For Germany, Yugoslavia was important as the market where it could place the surplus of its industrial production, and in return it could buy at favourable prices grains and raw materials needed for the military industry that was undergoing expansion. A series of diplomatic and political preparations followed, which would result in the visit of the Yugoslav Prime Minister Stojadinović to Germany in January 1938. Stojadinović's visit to Berlin and meetings with Hitler and Göring marked the beginning of a new era in the Yugoslav-German relations. By opening an additional course of its foreign policy, Yugoslavia strengthened its international position, primarily as its direction coincided with the political course regarding Germany which was followed by France and Great Britain. When leaving for Berlin, Stojadinović received advice from the British to act with great caution and to bear in mind that the establishment of close relations with the totalitarian regimes would expose Yugoslavia to danger of not only losing its old friends, but of jeopardising the general stability, as this could encourage Italy and Germany to enter into a sort of an adventure clinging to the belief that they had Yugoslavia firmly on their side. Therefore, Stojadinović's cautious steps in relation to Germany did not disturb traditional alliances in the early stage. Although opening two new paths of its foreign policy, Yugoslavia did not fully change its external course as it was aligned with principles and positions of its traditional allies, but it demonstrated the capacity of independent action and decision-making in the international arena.

Regional challenges of the Balkans, the reshaping of existing relations and possible creation of new alliances seriously hindered Yugoslav foreign policy. Relations with Bulgaria were still hostile. Defeat in the First World War and Bulgarian denial of permanent loss of territories gave rise to almost constant tensions between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria during the entire period from the conclusion of peace Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine

until 1937. The only exceptions were attempts at normalisation of mutual relations during the government of Aleksandar Stamboliyski and the efforts of King Aleksandar in 1933/34. Frequent border tensions, incursions of Bulgarian Komitas to the Yugoslav territory, coupled with Bulgarian demands for the revision of borders marked an entire era of Yugoslav-Bulgarian relationship. Yugoslavia had multiple motives to try and normalise the relations with Bulgaria. After the Balkan Pact was established, Bulgaria was excluded, and thus was considered as a source of potential instability. Additionally, vulnerability of Yugoslavia from the west and north was extremely strong, which was why the threat from the east had to be reduced. Similarly, the root of the problem with Bulgaria lay in a foreign policy issue which was initiated and induced by the internal instability on the territory of Macedonia where groups of Komitas sent from Bulgaria roamed. Their actions were suppressed by the Yugoslav security forces through repression over its own population, especially during the personal reign of King Aleksandar. It was considered that only an agreement with Bulgaria could end the state of silent, un-proclaimed war on the border and the crawling rebellion on the south of the country. Leaders of the Yugoslav diplomacy thought that a pact of eternal friendship consisting of only one article should be concluded with Bulgaria. This was agreed during the visit of the Yugoslav Prime Minister Stojadinović to King Boris in the late 1936.

Bulgarian–Yugoslav Treaty of Eternal Friendship was signed in Belgrade in January 1937. The treaty led to normalization of the relations between the two countries, but a shadow of doubt emerging from bitter memories dating back to the Second Balkan War and the First World War was still looming over. Consequently, cautious of possible complications and sudden Bulgarian changes of position, Yugoslav government intensified contacts, especially that of military nature, with its ally members of the Balkan Pact, striving to shelter itself from potential abrupt changes in Bulgaria. Yugoslav decision to pursue peaceful policy with Bulgaria to a certain extent jeopardised its relations on the other side, with Greece and Romania, which also faced a number of unresolved issues with Bulgaria. In the beginning, these two countries advocated for a tripartite Yugoslav-Romanian-Greek pact with Bulgaria, but Yugoslavia insisted on bilateral agreements aimed at solving mutual problems. Romania feared the strengthening of Bulgaria, while Greece was afraid of a potential alignment between Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Turkey. Romania acknowledged the Yugoslav-Bulgarian agreement only after Stojadinović provided the



justification that another motive for a treaty with Bulgaria was internal political reason - to prevent the Croats from relying on this block during the ongoing negotiations. Greece granted its acknowledgment after having received Turkish assurances that it would provide its assistance should Bulgaria try to forcefully gain the outlet to the Aegean Sea. This prevented potential damage that the treaty could inflict on the relations within the Balkan Pact. Commotion was also pacified by the decision passed by the Little Entente Permanent Council, held in Athens from 15 to 18 February 1937, to ratify military conventions entered into in November of the preceding year in Bucharest which regulated military cooperation in the event that Bulgaria should attack a member of the Balkan Pact.<sup>14</sup>

On the subject of Yugoslav relations with the Little Entente, from 1935 onwards, it gradually became clear to the Yugoslav government that this alliance was somewhat obsolete and that it was capable of efficiently functioning in the post-First World War setting, but in the new circumstances and radically different geopolitical situation it could not serve its purpose. Additionally, the threat that it was supposed to shield its member states from no longer seemed significant, which was why the very existence of the Little Entente was called into question. Yugoslav prime minister and foreign minister Milan Stojadinović did not conceal his animosity towards this organisation. Between 1935 and 1937, Czechoslovakia and Romania drew nearer to the Soviet Union. Yugoslav diplomacy opposed such steps, believing that a pact with the Soviets would jeopardize the foreign policy position of Czechoslovakia and indirectly throw it into the arms of Germany. Concerning relations with the Soviets, Yugoslav diplomacy still maintained that the Kingdom of Yugoslavia did not recognize USSR, but it would not enter into any pacts that might jeopardize the Soviet Union.<sup>15</sup>

This was reiterated by Prime Minister Stojadinović during his talks in Rome with Ciano and Mussolini, who openly expressed their aversion to this country. Stojadinović underlined Yugoslav allied loyalty to Czechoslovakia, but strongly criticized its foreign policy stressing that its diplomacy placed too much trust into written agreements. He further expressed his opinion that Germany considered the alliance between Czechoslovakia

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14 Živko Avramovski, *Balkanska Antanta 1934-1940* (Beograd: ISI, 1986); Воин Божинов, „Пактът за ‘вечно приятелство’, или осъществили се българо-югославското сближение, *Токови историје*, 1-2, 2008, 38-55.

15 Vuk Vinaver, „Neuspeh tajnih jugoslovensko-sovjetskih pregovora 1934-1938. godine (Jedna značajna etapa u nemačkom osvajanju Podunavlja)“, *Zbornik za istoriju*, 3, 1971, 28-84.



and Soviet Union as a threat to its own interests and that, in the event of conflict with Germany, France and Great Britain would not come to its aid. Similarly, Yugoslav alignment to Italy affected the functioning of the Little Entente. Italian open hostility to Czechoslovakia spurred by the Czech animosity to Hungary and Germany, as Italian allies, discouraged a firm cooperation between Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. Statement made by Count Ciano in Belgrade that Czechoslovakia as a state must disappear, further aggravated Yugoslav-Czech relations. European press openly wrote that the Little Entente was on its last legs, and that through its agreement with Italy, Yugoslavia made a final blow by siding with German-Italian policy of concluding bilateral pacts to the detriment of collective security. Czechoslovakia took a reconciliatory position towards the pact arguing that solving problems of one member state reinforced the position of the entire organisation and opened possibilities for the other two members to achieve similar arrangements. Nevertheless, several Czech officials openly expressed their concern and apprehension fearing that Czechoslovakia ultimately lost one of the most important guarantees of its national security, and therefore must seek other instruments outside the Little Entente. Romania endeavoured to reach some kind of agreement with Italy, dreading that otherwise it could end up in a state of utter isolation, surrounded by revisionist-minded Hungary and Bulgaria.

Particularly important was the issue of Yugoslav relations with Hungary. It was expected that, after signing the agreement with Bulgaria, who did not directly abandon its revisionist aspirations, Yugoslavia would also sign an agreement with Hungary whereby the latter would not entirely abandon its demand for revision of The Treaty of Trianon. Following the conclusion of the Yugoslav-Italian pact, Hungarian government proposed to Yugoslavia to enter into a friendship pact by which it would not recognize the existing borders, but only guarantee not to attack Yugoslavia. This clearly indicated that the real goal was to dissociate Yugoslavia from its allies, against which Hungary still harboured revisionist aspirations. Initially, Yugoslavia principally accepted the proposal, but soon pulled back since Stojadinović's government believed that another pact would burden its relations with the Western allies, the Little Entente and the Balkan Pact. Therefore, Yugoslavia yielded to the French pressure and the demands from the Little Entente partners to regulate the issue of relations with Hungary by means of a common agreement. On the other side, Hungary insisted on protecting its minorities in the Little Entente countries, and refused to publicly renounce its revisionist ef-

forts that underpinned its neighbourhood policy pursued from the end of the First World War. This was the subject of heated discussion during the entire 1937, which ultimately led to the conclusion of the Bled Agreement in the following year. Yugoslav insistence on its own foreign policy course, different foreign policy priorities of Czechoslovakia and Romania, as well as sporadic interference of great powers in the relations among member states, brought the Little Entente alliance to the verge of extinction. The very core of the Little Entente was shaken and disrupted, but the shell prevailed, although with great difficulty.<sup>16</sup>

A visit of Yugoslav prime minister and Foreign Minister Milan Stojadinović to Germany at the beginning of 1938, his reception, the warnings made by the British and French before the visit, as well as the subsequent reaction, put Yugoslavia in a very peculiar international position. In Berlin, Stojadinović was assured of peaceful German politics. It was firmly stated that Germany had exclusively economic interest in the Balkans and harboured no territorial pretensions towards Yugoslavia. It was also stressed that Germany fully supported the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia, and was ready to offer assistance in overcoming the border tensions with Hungary. The only concrete German request was related to the safeguarding of rights of the German minority in Yugoslavia. Great honours given to the Yugoslav prime minister, the programme of the visit and the approach of German officials were all aimed at convincing Stojadinović of German power and invincibility. At the same time, western diplomats did not conceal their reservation as to Stojadinović's genuine intentions, nor their suspicion about his real commitment to the Germans. His growing optimism and apparent confidence fuelled the distrust of western diplomats.

Before long, the geostrategic position of Yugoslav Kingdom fundamentally changed. Following the annexation of Austria, Germany reached Yugoslav border, thus becoming a new neighbour to Yugoslavia. This circumstance caused certain apprehension of the Yugoslav prime minister. Nevertheless, he hoped that two totalitarian neighbouring countries would suppress each other's ambitions, consequently creating additional manoeuvre space for the Yugoslav foreign policy. Contrary to such expectations, Stojadinović also feared possible agreement between Germany and Italy, and potential alignment of their interests vis-à-vis Yugoslavia. Regardless of the fear and doubts, Yugoslav government regarded the Annexation of

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16 Андрей И Пушкеш, *Внешняя политика Венгрии: Февраль 1937 – сентябрь 1939 г* (Москва: ИнСлав, 2003); Vuk Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Mađarska 1933-1941* (Beograd: ISI, 1976); Živko Avramovski, *Balkanska Antanta 1934-1940*, (Beograd. ISI, 1986).

Austria utterly as a right to self-determination of the German people.<sup>17</sup> Since it was not able to react more decisively, Stojadinović's government defended its position with the policy of safeguarding national interests and trusting the assurances provided by the German side during the prime minister's visit to Berlin.<sup>18</sup> Stojadinović himself also contemplated a similar arrangement believing that, after the amicable regulation of relations with Bulgaria, he was gradually paving way for a future union of the two countries. Bulgarian side thought otherwise. New international setting fuelled again the old aspirations towards Macedonia and parts of Greece. Although Bulgarian officials assured Stojadinović that they harbour no territorial pretensions towards Yugoslavia, but only Greece, it was clear that in the changed international circumstances Bulgaria would make an attempt at a revision of borders. In that sense, proposals of a joint outlet to the Aegean Sea were dismissed by the Yugoslav side and interpreted as a form of a political trap.

Mistrust of the Balkan allies towards their partners' intentions was more than evident. Italy tried to take advantage of this situation by stirring animosity among the Balkan allies, aiming to reinforce its own position in the Mediterranean. Italy encouraged the preservation of the Little Entente in order to oppose the growing impact of Germany. Simultaneously, Italy, as was the case with Germany, strove to reduce the tensions between Hungary and Yugoslavia. France kept reminding Yugoslav government of its alliance-based commitments and past joint military actions, while Britain strove to simultaneously fortify its own position as well as the existing Balkan alliances as a form of assurance against German penetration. As a result, and with the British support, the Salonika Agreement was signed in August 1938 between the Balkan Entente and Bulgaria. It laid down mutual commitment of refraining from military actions against each other, but Bulgaria was also allowed to breach the provision of the peace treaty and arm itself. Soon after, by means of the Bled Agreement, the Little Entente returned the same right to Hungary, as well. The possibility of Hungarian and Bulgarian re-armament stirred a sense of foreboding among the Serbs and revived old fears.

17 For more details on the position of Yugoslav diplomacy on the issue of German annexation of Austria see: Срђан Мићић, *Краљевина Југославија и анилулс Аустрије 1938* (Београд: Службени гласник–ЕСРД, 2010).

18 *Izjava predsednika kraljevske jugoslovenske vlade od 15. marta 1938. Šefovima parlamentarnih klubova o anšlusu i spoljnoj politici Kraljevine Jugoslavije*, u: Fabijan Trgo, *Aprilski rat 1941. Zbornik dokumenata*, I, Beograd, 1969, 17-20.

The beginning of the Sudeten crisis put the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in an unfavourable position. Although the signed bilateral agreement obligated it to launch military actions only in the event of a Hungarian attack on Czechoslovakia or Hungarian military support to the aggressor, Yugoslav government was put under enormous pressure from the national, predominantly Serbian public, who expected a stronger reaction. Czechoslovakia's incapacity to defend itself, coupled with the reconciliatory policy of the western allies, eased the position of Stojadinović's government. Despite growing complications in the international scene, as well as imminent and direct danger on the Yugoslav borders, Stojadinović in his domestic propaganda continuously stressed his foreign policy achievements, highlighting the established peace on the borders, creation of new and confirmation of old friendships.<sup>19</sup> Essentially, it was a fragile shell seriously threatened by the speedy dynamics of international relations, which during a one-year period brought the country on the brink of war five times.<sup>20</sup>

Government led by Dragiša Cvetković, which was set up after the fall of Stojadinović's cabinet<sup>21</sup>, faced a new foreign policy problem soon after its establishment. Italian annexation of Albania additionally complicated the Yugoslav international position. As it finalized a decade-long rivalry with Yugoslavia in the territory of Albania to its advantage, Italy now firmly held the Strait of Otranto, thus calling the Yugoslav outlet to the Adriatic Sea in question. By expanding its border pressure from the west to the south, it firmly held Yugoslavia in the strategic embrace together with Germany on the north-west. Despite open discomfort, Yugoslavia, as well as Greece, refrained from a more decisive reaction. Yugoslav and Italian ministers of foreign affairs commonly stated that Italian

19 For more details on the propaganda of Milan Stojadinović see: Бојан Симић, *Пропаганда Милана Стојадиновића*, (Београд: ИНИС, 2007).

20 Владимир Волков, *Германо – југославске одношенија и развал Малой Антанты 1933 – 1938* (Москва: Наука, 1966); Vladimir K. Volkov, *Minhenski sporazum i balkanske zemlje* (Beograd: Nova knjiga, 1987); V. Vauhnik, *Nevidljivi front: Borba za očuvanje Jugoslavije* (Minhen: Iskra, 1984); Душан Глишовић, *Иво Андрић – Краљевина Југославија и Трећи рајх 1939–1941* (Београд: Службени гласник, 2012); Далибор Денда, *Шлем и шајкача. Војни фактор и југословенско-немачки односи 1933-1941* (Нови Сад: Матица српска, 2019).

21 For more details on the circumstances surrounding the fall of Milan Stojadinović's government and setting up of the government of Dragiša Cvetković see: Todor Stojkov, *Vlada Milana Stojadinovića* (Beograd: ISI, 1985); Милан Јовановић Стоимировић, *Дневник 1936-1941*, приредили Стојан Трећаков, Владимир Шовљански (Нови Сад: Матица српска, 2000); Бојан Симић, *Милан Стојадиновић и Италија. Између дипломатије и пропаганде* (Београд: ИНИС, 2019).

annexation of Albania would not aggravate their mutual relations, but would reinforce them instead. Simultaneously, the existing international agreements were also extended to the Kingdom of Albania as the Italian protectorate.<sup>22</sup>

German preparations for the attack on Poland put Yugoslavia back in the centre of German-Italian relations. During the talks in Berchtesgaden, held in August 1939, Hitler openly suggested to Mussolini to follow in the footsteps of Germany in its aggression over Poland by attacking Yugoslavia and invalidating its sovereignty with an efficient military action with the aim to occupy Dalmatia and Croatia, which would mark the disappearance of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia from the political map of Europe as one of the important international factors. Italian orientation to follow a neutral foreign policy course, underpinned by the belief that Italy was not ready for a war at that moment, and would not be before 1942, influenced the decision of the Italian leadership not to take military action against Yugoslavia. The outbreak of the Second World War in Europe put a number of new political and military challenges before Yugoslavia.

When faced by the sudden complication of international relations in Europe, severe polarization among the great forces and sharp contrasts between blocks and pacts, Yugoslav diplomacy was committed to try and ensure survival of the Kingdom by reinforcing the existing political friendships and creating new perspectives. Regulation of the relations with traditionally ill-disposed neighbours – Bulgaria and Italy, created new hopes and perspectives. Alignment to Germany was supposed to open new economic horizons, while ratification of agreements with traditional allies – France and Great Britain was intended to ensure steadiness of Yugoslav own foreign policy main principles. However, a seemingly idyllic international position of Yugoslavia, where old animosities are turned into pacts and the existing alliances are appreciated, approving the creation of new ones, was essentially in collision with the sharply conflicting interests of the great powers. Temporary pacts, occasional withdrawals and hesitations among the great forces promised no continuity, nor sustainability of the new strategy pursued by the Yugoslav diplomacy, which reached its peak over the course of 1937. Already in 1939, it was threatened by the imminent danger of external aggression and deep internal political crisis.

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22 For more details on Yugoslav reaction to the Italian annexation of Albania: Ђорђе Борозан, *Велика Албанија. Поријекло. Идеје. Пракса* (Београд: Војноисторијски институт, 1995).

Amidst the absolute complication of the international situation, particularly at the time when in cooperation with the French they prepared a major shift towards the Soviet Union, the British showed interest in the position of the Yugoslav government and the attitude of the general Yugoslav public towards the Soviet Union. British diplomats were aware of the fact that Yugoslav dynasty harboured anti-Soviet sentiment and was on the side of the Russia refugees that enjoyed a particularly special position in Yugoslavia. However, a slight change of the attitude was noticeable since Prince Pavle grew suspicious of the honesty of Russian emigrants stressing that many of them are pro-Soviet and pro-Bolshevik and are openly working in the interest of the Soviet government. For this reason it was believed that Prince Pavle's sentiment to Russian emigrants was changing. British believed that in the future, after an agreement with the Croats was reached, the opposing political forces, that were not anti-Soviet oriented, would grow stronger and eventually enter the cabinet, gradually shifting the Government's policy towards the Soviet Union. It was further believed that a more democratic part of the society and a greater segment of the public would welcome the creation of a Soviet-British-French alliance, although it was stressed that a larger part of the Yugoslav elite, although principally supportive of such an alliance, was openly mistrustful of the Soviet foreign policy sincerity, suspecting the power of the Soviet armoury and trustworthiness of their cooperation. It was concluded that Slavophilia would not play a significant part in the politics of the Yugoslav government.<sup>23</sup> However, information reaching the Yugoslav diplomats about "difficult progress of the Anglo-Franco-Soviet talks" discouraged the Yugoslav diplomatic leadership.<sup>24</sup>

New international circumstances forced Yugoslav diplomacy to pursue the policy of balancing between the western forces, Germany and Soviet Union. Since the spring of 1939, soviet diplomacy possessed reliable information about the German and Italian pressures on the Yugoslav government, not only to join the Anti-Comintern Pact, but to form a unique political organisation of fascist nature while destroying other political parties and providing certain political concessions to the Croat and Slovenian national factor. Soviet diplomacy believed that Germany and Italy would try to use Yugoslavia to attract Romania and Greece

23 Živko Avramovski, *Britanci o Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, knjiga treća (1939-1941), (Beograd: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1996), 105.

24 АЈ, фонд 341 – Посланство КЈ у Лондону, к. 31, а.ј. 106, *Телеграм посланика у Лондону министарству иностраних послова од 18. јула 1939.*



to their political orbit and thus annihilate the Balkan Entente and create a new alliance instead composed of Yugoslavia, Romania and Hungary.<sup>25</sup> On the contrary, Soviet diplomacy was also informed, through its representative in Rome, that the Italian diplomacy, especially its Minister Count Ciano, believed that the main Italian goal vis-à-vis Yugoslavia was its neutralisation, in other words, a creation of an adequate foundation for safe exploitation of its raw material resources. They were utterly sure in this achievement. From the same source, the Soviet diplomatic leadership was assured that Italy and Germany did not think it possible that Yugoslavia would completely move to the Germany and Italian side. Soviets were assured that, consequently, Italy would by no means make any steps aimed at pushing the Kingdom of Yugoslavia into the Anti-Comintern Pact.<sup>26</sup> In this respect, Soviet diplomacy was concerned about the reserved manner of Count Ciano vis-à-vis Yugoslavia, particularly regarding the results of the visit paid by Prince Pavle, which was seen by the Soviet diplomacy as indirect confirmation of their earlier information about the Italian intentions towards Yugoslavia. However, Soviets did not trust the Italian assurances about their friendly relations to Yugoslavia, but were on the contrary concerned by the reports of possible Italian military action against the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.<sup>27</sup> Soviet fears were not unfounded given that, according to the testimony of Count Ciano, Benito Mussolini was during those days completely obsessed with the idea of breaking the Yugoslav state apart and “annexing the Croatian Kingdom”.<sup>28</sup> On the subject of Germany and its future actions on the Balkans, Soviet diplomacy took into consideration the visit of Prince Pavle to Berlin, held in June 1939, and concluded that Germany offered to guarantee the safety of Yugoslav borders but only under the condition that Yugoslavia refrain from entering into alliances with the enemies of Germany. Soviets were certain that, should Yugoslavia form an alliance with Great Britain, Germany would repudiate its guarantee of the integrity of Yugoslav-German border.

25 АВПРФ, ф. 6, о. 1а, п. 25, д. 5, л. 3-4, *Письмо народного комиссара иностранных дел СССР М. М. Литвинова полномочному представителю СССР во Франции Я. З. Сурицу 23 апреля 1939 г.*

26 АВПРФ, ф. 59, о. 1, п. 304, д. 2102, л. 157-159, *Телеграмма временного поверенного в делах СССР в Италии Л. Б. Гельфанда народному комиссару иностранных дел СССР В. М. Молотову 8 мая 1939 г.*

27 АВПРФ, ф. 98, о. 22, п. 146, д. 5, л. 63—68, *Запись беседы временного поверенного в делах СССР в Италии Л. Б. Гельфанда с министром иностранных дел Италии Г. Чиано 18 мая 1939 г.*

28 Galeazzo Ciano, *Dnevnik* (Zagreb: Majer i Lušičić, 1948), 106.



Following the visit of Prince Pavle to Berlin, Soviets possessed information that Yugoslavia promised Germany neutrality and economic cooperation, and that Hitler did not receive anything else from Prince Pavle. Soviet side considered the German approach to Yugoslavia as delicate and aimed at provoking a certain psychological effect with the Yugoslav representatives in order to elicit the softening of their position towards Germany, and create an atmosphere of mutual trust.<sup>29</sup>

During their communication with German representatives, Prince Pavle and Foreign Affairs Minister Aleksandar-Cincar Marković stressed that Yugoslavia would not join the Anti-Comintern Pact. Cincar-Marković explained this position with the belief that Yugoslav accession to this pact would be interpreted by the Yugoslav population as an anti-Russian diplomatic move. He was convinced that the sentimental feelings towards Russia, particularly felt by the Serbian people, would render such a move extremely unpopular.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, Cincar-Marković held a reserved position during the talks with the German counterparts, justifying the policy pursued by the Yugoslav government by strong pro-Russian sentiment, and avoided referring to the Soviet Union and thus provoking the German side. On the other hand, in this manner he demonstrated a clear distinction between the notions of pro-Russian and pro-Soviet sentiment. Similarly, government instructed the press not to make any attacks on the Soviet-German pact and to attach as much importance to it as possible.<sup>31</sup> This fitted in the Yugoslav government's efforts to pursue a policy of ever stronger alignment towards Germany, and the pacification policy towards Russia, but without any decisive steps towards the establishment of diplomatic relations. The British received from the Yugoslav diplomats, who were mainly Anglophiles, regular reports that Yugoslavia was closely monitoring the Anglo-Franco-Soviet talks and that such a pact would be extremely well accepted by the majority of the public, particularly by the Serbian population where, in addition to the clear sentimental feelings, this alliance would also create a strong belief in its invincibility in the event of a potential military conflict. Milan Antić, Min-

29 АВПРФ, ф. 6, о. 1, п. 7, д. 66, л. 89-92, *Дневник временного поверенного в делах СССР в Германии Г. А. Астахова 14 июня 1939 г.*

30 *Zapisnik o razgovoru princa Pavla s Hitlerom od 5. juna 1939. O jugoslovensko-nemačkim i jugoslovensko-italijanskim odnosimai nekim aktuelnim pitawima u vezi s balkanskim paktom*, u: Fabijan Trgo, *Aprilski rat 1941. Zbornik dokumenata I* (Beograd: Vojnoistorijski institut, 1969), 232-234.

31 *Direktiva Centralnog presbira od 24. avgusta 1939*, u: Fabijan Trgo, *Aprilski rat 1941. Zbornik dokumenata I* (Beograd: Vojnoistorijski institute, 1969), 306.

ister of Karađorđević Dynasty Court, did not conceal this attitude and his open support for the formation of such an alliance.<sup>32</sup> Through their Turkish connections, Soviet diplomats were trying to find out what was the position of the Yugoslav government towards the talks that were launched between the Soviet and Anglo-French representatives. They received information that there was serious fear of potential expansion of Germany towards the Balkans and that the prevailing sentiment was oriented towards the preservation of the Yugoslav neutral position and the need for stronger relations with London and Paris. On the subject of establishment of diplomatic relations with Soviet Union, Soviet diplomats received the news that Yugoslav government was ready to address this issue, but were not certain of the sincerity of the signals coming from Belgrade.<sup>33</sup>

This was why Yugoslav diplomacy endeavoured to follow the progress of the Soviet-German talks, within the scope of its capacities, and obtained first reports in mid-July 1939. Information circulating among the diplomatic circles was that the talks were launched, while German officials denied any talks on alliance, but insisted that the only aim of the talks was to reinforce mutual economic relations.<sup>34</sup> Only two days before the Soviet-German pact was signed on 21 August 1939, Yugoslav diplomacy received information that trade negotiations in Berlin were nearly finalized and that the arrangement included German export of machines and industrial installations to USSR and delivery of Soviet wheat, wood and ore to Germany. Concurrently, it was noted that German economic delegation travelled to Moscow to attend a great agricultural exhibition. Still, Yugoslav diplomacy did not attach any particular political importance to the news of these economic talks.<sup>35</sup> Yugoslav emissary in Berlin, Ivo Andrić, was informed on the signing of the Soviet-German pact on nonaggression by the state secretary Vermahn only on the day when the Soviet-German pact was signed, 23 August 1939. On that occasion Vermahn stated that the pact came suddenly for the German side, but not unexpect-

32 Živko Avramovski, *Britanci o Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, knjiga treća (1939–1941), (Beograd: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1996), 191.

33 Запись беседы народного комиссара иностранных дел СССР В.М. Молотова с послом Турции в СССР А.Х. Актаем 18 августа 1939, *Документы внешней политики*, т. 22, кн.1, Москва, 1964, стр. 612-613.

34 *Посланство Краљевине Југославије, Берлин – Посланству Краљевине Југославије, Лондон, 16. јула 1939.* у: Иво Андрић, *Дипломатски списи*, приредио Миладин Милошевић (Београд: Просвета, 1992), 237.

35 *Министарство иностраних послова, Београд – Посланству Краљевине Југославије, Лондон, 21. август 1939.* у: Иво Андрић, *Дипломатски списи*, приредио Миладин Милошевић (Београд: Просвета, 1992), 245.

edly. Yugoslav side assumed that the pact would have a common form and that the Soviet Union would commit itself to refraining from interfering in the internal affairs of Germany, whose position to Communism would not change. The same source provided the information that Italy, as the German ally, was kept abreast with the talks, while Japan was informed. Vermahn assured Andrić that this made the Anglo-French talks with the Soviet Union virtually pointless.<sup>36</sup> The latest developments in the international arena related to the Soviet-German alignment caused apprehension and confusion in Yugoslavia. Disappointment with the unsuccessful talks between USSR and the western forces renewed old fears. Prince Pavle himself, although not secretive about his anti-Bolshevik sentiment, could not hide his disappointment with the failure of the talks between the Soviet Union and western allies, marked by the signing of the German-Soviet Pact.<sup>37</sup> Yugoslav side was particularly interested whether a newly concluded Soviet-German pact contained a clause related to the future of the Balkans, and consequently the Yugoslav Kingdom. The entire issue also had a broader dimension due to the fact that the western press speculated the possibility of secret clauses of the pact that addressed the German-Soviet division of interest spheres on the Balkans. Already in early September, Yugoslav diplomacy was informed through its emissary in London, Ivan Subotić, that pact did not include any secret provisions dealing with the Balkans. Namely, during his conversation with Subbotić on 4 September 1939, Soviet ambassador in London, Ivan Maisky, semi-officially advised him that he could inform his government that there was no German-Soviet agreement related to the division of the Balkans and that Soviet Union had never requested such a thing from Germany. Maisky's information was positively welcomed by the Yugoslav side, easing its foreign policy position amidst the escalation of the military conflict on the European soil. Hence, the signing of the German-Soviet pact reduced the tensions in the Balkans, while on the other side, it temporarily removed the threat of the Italian aggression on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.<sup>38</sup>

36 *Министарство иностраних послова, Београд – Посланству Краљевине Југославије, Лондон, 23. август 1939, у: Иво Андрић, Дипломатски списи, приредио Миладин Милошевић (Београд: Просвета, 1992), 245-246.*

37 Živko Avramovski, *Britanci o Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, knjiga treća (1939-1941), (Beograd: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1996), 206.

38 Владимир К. Волков, „Советско-југославске одношенија в начални период Второй мировой войны в контексте мировых событий (1939-1941.гг)“, *Советское славяноведение*, 6, 1990, 4.

Several weeks later, Minister Cincar-Marković compared information obtained from various diplomatic sources and reached a conclusion that Soviet-German pact did not affect the Balkans, that in reality there was no Soviet-German military alliance, and that one of the main Soviet motives for military penetration on the Polish territory was related to the retrieval of the “national territories – western part of Ukraine and Belorussia”, which he regarded by quoting the Soviet formulations as the territories that came to the Polish possession “with the assistance of the imperialistic forces”. He expected that in the future, the Soviet Union would continue insisting on the policy of “the national front”. In other words, that it would not abandon its formerly identified foreign policy course, that the agreement with Germany did not imply settling of the existing ideological differences and changing of the prevalent political and ideological position towards Nazism. He did not consider the achieved Soviet-German pact as an alliance, but chiefly as a temporary agreement. He was convinced that any idea about the alliance with Germany would be decisively stopped by the Soviet side. He explained Soviet distancing from the existing conflict with ideological reasons, and Soviet understanding that this was an “imperialist war”, a conflict among “bourgeois countries” that could evolve into internal civil conflicts, and consequently cause Bolshevik revolutions. In his view, the policy of “national front” could play a critical role in that scenario.<sup>39</sup> Cincar-Marković founded his interpretation of the Soviet policy towards Germany on thorough considerations of basic ideological principles and current Soviet foreign policy interests. Essentially, it reflected the reality of the Soviet approach to international relations and suggested that the Balkans, as the connecting zone of mutual interests, including Yugoslavia, could become an integral part of a future Soviet-German treaty. In view of the coinciding Soviet and German traditional interest in the Balkans, the existing agreement about Poland, but also the internal political and social tensions in the Balkan countries, the region was emerging as the arena of the future Soviet-German rivalry.

### **From Neutrality to the Soviet Bloc 1939–1948**

The beginning of World War II on European soil brought the Yugoslav kingdom into a specific geostrategic position. Globally, the stance

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39 РГАСПИ, ф. 458 опис 9, д.264, л. 308-310, *Писмо Александра Цинцар Марковића Драгиши Цветковићу од 30. новембра 1939.*

and politics of the Yugoslav government were dictated by the situation that arose after Germany's attack on Poland and the reaction of traditional Yugoslav allies to the German aggression. France and Great Britain responded to the German attack on Poland by a declaration of war against Germany, which forced the Yugoslav government to take a clear stance to the emerging conflict. On the other hand, Germany became a northern neighbour to the Yugoslav kingdom after the annexation of Austria and even before then it had been the main foreign trade partner and the supplier of weaponry and military equipment to the Yugoslav armed forces. Italy, with which Germany was establishing an allied relationship at an accelerated pace, did not follow Germany in its offensive against Poland, but it clearly stated it would stand firmly with Germany in future. The very fact that Yugoslavia bordered with both countries of the Axis, widely clenched by Italy, made the situation particularly complicated, especially in terms of its foreign policy position. In its surroundings, Hungary – which did not backtrack on its policy to revise the peace treaty from the end of World War I, though it did not officially join the Axis – was sending signals that in case of a major geopolitical shock it would side with those who enabled it to achieve its interests and regain old borders. It demonstrated such policy with the division of Czechoslovakia. After Titulescu, Romania turned more and more to the right, both in terms of its foreign and interior policy, hence it was clear that the policy of close cooperation with Yugoslavia – once the moment was ripe – would be tested, especially if an opportunity arose to occupy Banat and move the border towards the Tisa River. Despite the policy of regulating disputes with Yugoslavia, Bulgaria persisted in its stance that it had suffered an injustice at the end of World War I and did not give up on its aspirations toward Macedonia and Southeast Serbia. Pressed by Italy, and closely connected to Great Britain, Greece was the only country which Yugoslavia could have counted on as an ally, if Greeks relied on western allies going forward.

In the face of such circumstances, as soon as fighting broke out, the Yugoslav government opted for the policy of open neutrality, of which it gave an official statement on 4 September 1939.<sup>40</sup> A day earlier, via Subotić, its emissary in London, it was assured by the Soviets that the USSR would take a neutral position in the nascent conflict.<sup>41</sup> Despite the fact

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40 *Службено саопштење Краљевске владе о ставу Југославије у данашњим међународним околностима*, „Политика“, 5. септембар 1939, стр. 1.

41 АЈ, фонд 341 – Посланство КЈ у Лондону, к. 31, а.ј. 106, *Телеграм посланика у Лондону министарству иностраних послова од 3. септембра 1939.*

that war was being waged relatively far away from Yugoslav borders, the country's foreign security was indirectly threatened. In addition to the unfavourable foreign policy situation, the decision of the Yugoslav government was also made under the impact of numerous internal problems, such as unresolved international relations, a deep political crisis, as well as utter military unpreparedness. Therefore, the government took up the policy of strengthening neutrality by trying to form a bloc of neutral countries in the Balkans, made up of countries of the Balkan Pact and Bulgaria,<sup>42</sup> strengthening ties with Germany as an important geostrategic factor, maintaining good relations with western allies and openly contemplating regulating relations with the Soviet Union. After Yugoslavia supported the German-Soviet pact, which was considered the backbone of the future determination of political stability in Europe, the issue of the relations with the Soviets started gaining special importance.

The Soviet Union stepped into the spotlight after the Soviet troops entered Poland. The moments when the consequences of the German-Soviet Pact became visible drove the Yugoslav government to see the Soviets as a real factor in the future. On the one hand, there was a possibility of using the Soviet factor to rein in any German aspirations towards the Balkans, while on the other, in case of the Soviets and western allies coming together again, they could be a powerful side to rely on. Western allies took a serious approach to contemplating the newly-arisen Yugoslav foreign policy stance, speculating that the Soviet Union may play an important role in Yugoslavia's future orientation. It was thought that the future Yugoslav policy would largely depend on the policy pursued by the Soviets in territories annexed from Poland. Similarly, it was believed that the religious factor in Yugoslavia also played an important role, though it was assessed as weaker than in some other regions, and that the Serbian Orthodox Church could have an important role in future closer ties with the Soviet Union. Special attention was paid to the role which a strong Pan-Slavic stream could play in Yugoslavia's future orientation – it nurtured a negative stance to Bolshevism, but would certainly evolve in the Yugoslav environment if the Soviet policy made a sharper turn to national politics.<sup>43</sup> Paradoxically, the Soviet policy in Poland, its occupation of a large portion of that country, was often interpreted by the Belgrade public as a guarantee that the Soviet Union can more easily and better pro-

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42 Živko Avramovski, prir., *Britanci o Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, knjiga treća (1939-1941), (Beograd: ArhivJugoslavije, 1996), 233.

43 *Ibid*, 247.



tect Slavic interests in Europe than Great Britain and France. It was noted that, out of reasons of its own, German propaganda supported such conviction. The British were convinced that such German policy would certainly produce a backlash effect against Germany's long-term interests. This undermined the British position in Yugoslavia, even more so because the increasingly present Russophiles believed and publicly spoke about the danger of a British-Soviet conflict.<sup>44</sup> In this regard, with the onset of the war conflict on European soil, an opinion took shape within British diplomatic and scientific circles that German imperialism quite naturally encourages Pan-Slavic solidarity. It was thought that the Soviet intrusion into the Balkan region was triggered by two main factors – Pan-Slavism and the need to conquer the region of the strait. Pan-Slavism was seen as a “useful magnet” that pulled South Slavs away from Germany and brought them closer to Russia, while communists, being ideologically the closest to the Soviet Union, were the main stronghold for the “use of this medium”. Also, the British side thought that in the Balkan territory, especially in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, the old narrative about Russia as the liberator of South Slavs and the image of new Russia as the liberator from class hierarchy were blended in the field. Still, they were convinced that the Soviet revolutionary spirit epitomised in collectivism and atheism was absolutely unacceptable as an alternative to traditional models of Balkan societies.<sup>45</sup>

The German and then the Italian attack on France, its swift military defeat and capitulation produced multiple negative experiences among Serbs. An utter military crash of previously the strongest land armed force in Europe and the defeat of the country that was seen by the Serbian side as a military, intellectual and cultural role model caused widespread concern and overwhelming downheartedness. Italy's focus on the Balkans and the amassing of troops in Albania necessitated a Yugoslav response in the form of drafting people and stepping-up military expenditures. Germany was opposed to the Italian campaign in the Balkans as it did not want to open a new front that would be a distraction from its actions against Great Britain and the planned attack on the Soviet Union. A lack of a strong strategic ally, such as France used to be, required a search for a new foothold. Accelerated normalisation of relations with the USSR, mutual recognition and establishment of diplomatic relations in the summer of 1940 were accompanied by frequent requests for Soviet military and economic aid.

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44 *Ibid*, 248-249.

45 Veselin Đuretić, *Saveznici i jugoslovenska ratna drama. Između nacionalnih i ideoloških izazova* (Beograd: Balkanološki institut, 1983), 20.



What ensued were numerous Soviet promises about prompt deliveries of the needed weapons and military equipment. Faced with a direct military threat on the island and having suffered losses in military power during the fights in France, Great Britain was unable to strengthen the Yugoslav defence power.<sup>46</sup> A new complication of the Yugoslav kingdom's geostrategic position came after Hungary and Romania joined in with Germany and German troops entered the Romanian territory. Italy's attack on Greece at end-October 1940, undertaken despite Germany's opposition, required an adequate response by the Yugoslav side for which Yugoslavia was unprepared both in military and economic terms.<sup>47</sup>

The fate of Yugoslavia depended on the future stance of Bulgaria and actions of Turkey as the key regional military ally. Due to the failure of the Soviet-German negotiations in November 1940, as well as the defeat of Yugoslav and Soviet efforts to deter Bulgaria from joining the Tripartite Pact, Yugoslavia found itself in an entirely hostile environment, threatening to sever its only tie with western allies via Thessaloniki. Brave resistance by the Greeks was pivotal in shaping the future German policy in the Balkans.<sup>48</sup> Italy's inability to defeat the Greek army provoked a reaction by the Germans. Amid hurried preparations to launch an attack on the Soviet Union, Germany was forced to help its ally defeat Greece as soon as possible and thus secure its position in the Balkans and the Mediterranean, before the planned offensive to the East. German troops entering Bulgaria was the trigger for Britain's last attempt to set up a separate front in the Balkans. Having failed to form a joint front in the Balkans due to Yugoslavia's reservations and Turkey's exclusive focus on defending its borders, Great Britain decided to send limited military aid to Greece.<sup>49</sup> In addition to Great Britain, in early 1941, after more than two decades of absence from the Balkans, the influence of the American factor began to emerge. In January 1941, a special US envoy William Donovan visited capital cities in the Balkans in order to scan the terrain and determine

46 Memorandum by an Official of the Foreign Minister's Secretary, November 29, 1940, *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945*, series D (1937-1945), volume XI-XII, Washington, 1960, pp. 733-734.

47 Mihailo Konstantinović, *Politika sporazuma. Dnevničke beleške 1939-1941. Londonske beleške 1944-1945* (Novi Sad: MIR, 1998), 155-157.

48 Jacob Noptner, *Jugoslavija u krizi 1934-1941* (Rijeka: Otokar Keršovani, 1965), 190.

49 Татьяна В. Волокитина, „Между Сциллой и Харибдой: Болгария в геополитических расчетах Германии и СССР в начальный период Второй мировой войны“; у: *Славяне и Россия: Россия, Болгария Балканы. Проблемы войны и мира. XVIII-XXI вв. (Мифы и реальность)*. Уредник: Константин В. Никифоров (Москва: ИнСлав, 2019), 466.

the possibilities for their resistance to Germany.<sup>50</sup> Through official channels, US diplomacy sought to sway the Yugoslav government by encouraging it to resist the German expansion in the region. On its side, the Yugoslav diplomacy claimed it would not sign a pact with Germany that would chip its state sovereignty, and that it would resist any attempt to launch an aggression.<sup>51</sup>

Against the backdrop of increasingly pronounced German pressure, the Yugoslav government attempted to clarify its relations with Germany. At the initiative of the Yugoslav side, on 14 February 1941, a meeting was held in Berghof between Yugoslav Prime Minister Dragiša Cvetković and Hitler. The Yugoslav side put forth the idea about the need to create a Balkan bloc between Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Turkey, with the aim of intervening in Athens in order to establish Greek-Italian peace and thus create a safety mechanism for Germany, ensuring that it would not be attacked from the Balkans by Great Britain.<sup>52</sup> The idea was not even taken into consideration by the German side. In contrast, Yugoslavia was asked to join the Tripartite Pact, while the German side would guarantee Yugoslavia's sovereignty with territorial expansion to Thessaloniki and its immediate surroundings. Given that Yugoslav emissaries were not in possession of adequate authorisations, Hitler requested a meeting with Prince Pavle. An explicit request to join the Tripartite Pact was made on 4 March during Prince Pavle's meeting with Hitler and Ribbentrop. The German side justified the need for Yugoslavia to join the Tripartite Pact with hedging against all dangers in the future. Prince Pavle spoke about the possible difficulties arising from reactions in the country and the moral scruples to "Greece and Russia which might find itself in a conflict with Japan."<sup>53</sup> The German side responded decisively that Yugoslavia would not be asked to provide troops in case of a war in the East, or to let German troops pass through Yugoslav territory. It was agreed that negotiations about Yugoslavia joining the Tripartite Pact should commence.

As soon as Prince Pavle returned to Belgrade, the first session of the Crown Council was held in the White Court on 6 March. Prince Pavle reported to the Council about talks in Germany, while Dragiša Cvetk-

50 ВА, пописник 16, к. 8, ф. 1, д. 7, *Разговор с америчким пуковником Донованом* 24. јануара 1941.

51 Александар Животић, *Московски гамбит. Југославија, СССР и продор Трећег рајха на Балкан 1938-1941* (Београд: Слио, 2020), 412-413.

52 АЈ, фонд 797 – Лични фонд кнеза Павла Карађорђевића, ролна 16, *Телегрампосланика у Москви министру иностраних послова од 25. фебруара 1941.*

53 АСАНУ, 14387 – Оставштина Милана Антића, 9545, *Сећања*, 24–26.

ović stood adamantly against signing the Tripartite Pact, stressing that this would mean the destruction, dissolution and occupation of the country. Regent Radenko Stanković was also explicitly against joining the Pact, while foreign minister Cincar Marković and defence minister General Petar Pešić were explicitly for joining it, citing solely military reasons. Vlatko Maček and Fran Kulovec, as representatives of Slovenian and Croatian political parties in the government, were generally in favour of accepting the German initiative and launching negotiations in this direction, which drove Dragiša Cvetković to change his initial stance and propose a meeting between Cincar Marković and Ribbentrop. The talks between the two ministers, aimed at “clarifying” the conditions for joining the Pact, lasted until 19 March. Though the decision had essentially been made on 6 March, they procrastinated being wary of the possible reaction of the Serbian factor and explicit opposition to the Pact by ministers from the ranks of the farmers’ association and Independent Democratic Party.

Once the talks were wrapped up, German plenipotentiary minister in Belgrade, Heren, informed the Yugoslav side that the deadline for signing the protocol on accessing the Tripartite Pact was 24 March. The Crown Council and government sessions were held on 20 March. Prime Minister Cvetković voiced his reservations, noting that he thought there was no need for hurry and that Germany could not be trusted, fearing the possibility that the Czechoslovakian scenario could be repeated. Cincar Marković and Maček were openly in favour of accessing the Pact, and Prince Pavle also openly supported such decision after a lengthy and occasionally pathetic speech about his dilemmas regarding the fate of Greece and relations with Great Britain. Cvetković justified his dilemmas with fear of the possible reaction by the military, while defence minister General Pešić confidently claimed he could guarantee the future conduct of the army. Regent Stanković asked that, since the Assembly had not been formed, a session of the Senate should be summoned where the definitive decision could be announced. The government session was held in the evening. The debate was dramatic and lasted well into the night. It was quite clear that the government session was summoned so that the government could take on the responsibility for the decision made elsewhere. Ministers Srđan Budisavljević, Branko Čubrilović and Mihailo Konstatinović were adamantly against joining the Tripartite Pact. All three advocated for maintaining neutrality and for armed resistance to aggression, should it come to that. With a majority vote by ministers, the decision was made to join the Tripartite Pact. Srđan Budisavljević, as a leader

of the Independent Democratic Party, resigned immediately, while still at the session, whereas farmers' representative Branko Čubrilović and justice minister Mihailo Konstatinović delivered their written resignations the following day; however, a few hours later, Konstatinović changed his mind and revoked his resignation. Thus, the decision to join the Pact was endorsed by the Croatian Peasant Party, Slovene People's Party and the Yugoslav Muslim Organisation. Traditional Serbian political parties that constituted opposition were explicitly against joining the Pact.

The government crisis caused a great turmoil in the Serbian public as well. Even prime Minister Cvetković, in a conversation with Prince Pavle, complained about the overwhelming indignation and the "difficult and dangerous psychosis among Serbs." Therefore, Prince Pavle sought to postpone the signing ceremony, however an ultimatum soon came from the German side that the deadline for signing was 25 March. In his letter to Dragiša Cvetković of 22 March, Winston Churchill tried to dissuade the Yugoslav government from joining Germany by voicing his conviction in Germany's final defeat and presenting Cvetković with the possible consequences of such act. In a reception with Prince Pavle, General Simović spoke openly about the disapproval of junior officers and their readiness for an armed action in case of joining the Pact. Since the final decision had already been made, a Yugoslav delegation led by Dragiša Cvetković and Aleksandar Cincar Marković left the Topčider railway station in the evening of 24 March, heading to Vienna for the announced signing of the protocol on Yugoslavia's accession to the Tripartite Pact.<sup>54</sup>

The very act of signing took place in Vienna's Belvedere palace on 25 March. For the Yugoslav side, the document was signed by Dragiša Cvetković and Aleksandar Cincar Marković, for the German and Italian side by ministers Ciano and Ribbentrop, and by Ambassador Oshima for the Japanese. Only the German text of the agreement was signed, while the Serbo-Croat text was merely aligned with the German. Along with the protocol on Yugoslavia's accession to the Tripartite Pact, the representatives exchanged notes about Yugoslavia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, about "no passing or transport of troops", about Germany not asking for military assistance and a note about ceding Thessaloniki to Yugosla-

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54 For more details on Yugoslavia joining the Tripartite Pact see: Живан Кнежевић, 27.март 1941 New Yoek: Ж. Л. Кнежевић, 1979); Branko Petranović, Nikola Žutić, 27.mart 1941, Tematska zbirka dokumenata (Beograd: Nicom, 1990); Момчило Павловић. уред., 27. март 1941. Седамдесет година касније, Зборник радова (Београд: Институт за савремену историју, 2012).

via. That same evening, a Yugoslav delegation, accompanied by a German emissary, headed for Belgrade, arriving there in the early hours of 26 March. Protests and a military coup resulted in the fall of the government and the formation of a new cabinet under Prime Minister General Simović. Faced with an external threat and deep internal contradictions, the new government confirmed Yugoslavia's accession to the Tripartite Pact.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, it endeavoured to secure British and Soviet assistance. The Pact concluded with the USSR on the night of 5/6 April was unable to produce the desired effect.<sup>56</sup>

In the first days of the war, the Soviet policy to Yugoslavia was rather cautious and at times controversial. After a break, which occurred on 8 May 1941, the USSR renewed the "suspended" diplomatic relations with the Kingdom of Yugoslavia after 22 June 1941.<sup>57</sup> By this act, the Yugoslav government in exile was formally accepted and recognised as the only legitimate representative of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.<sup>58</sup> The renown acquired on 27 March 1941 contributed to the government and the monarch being seen as the bearers of the state, legal and international continuity of the Yugoslav state. The exiled government being recognised by the Soviets and the British meant the respect of the territorial integrity and the order of the Yugoslav state. Thereby, for the USSR, as well as other allies, the invaders' division of Yugoslavia and the dismemberment of the country were invalid. The declaration on solidarity between allies and joint fight against Germans, which the Kingdom of Yugoslavia signed in early June 1941 in Palestine, turned Yugoslavia – after Germany's attack on the USSR – into a natural ally in the fight against a common enemy. In September 1941, the government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia accepted the war objectives of allied countries, expressed in the Atlantic Charter. By signing the Declaration by United Nations on 1 January 1942, the Yugoslav government once again confirmed its resolve to persist until the end in the war against the occupying forces. Support to the

55 Branko Petranović, *Srbija u Drugom svetskom ratu 1939-1941* (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački i novinski centar, 1992), 80-84.

56 Николай В. Новиков, *Воспоминания дипломата* (Москва: ИПЛ, 1989), 82.

57 *Беседа первого заместителя наркома иностранных дел СССР А. Я. Вышинского с посланником Югославского королевства в СССР М. Гавриловичем 8 мая 1941*, Документы внешней политики, т. 23, кн. 2-2 (Москва: МИД РФ, 1998), 661-662; АЈ, фонд 103 – Емигрантска влада Краљевине Југославије, ф. 61, а. ј. 281, Телеграм Момчила Нинчића Милану Гавриловићу од 15. јула 1941.

58 АЈ, фонд 341 – Посланство Краљевине Југославије у Лондону, ф. 31, а. ј. 106, д. 872, *Разговор Ивана Мајског и Ивана Субботића 8. јула 1941.*

Yugoslav government in exile simultaneously meant indirect help of the allies to the core of the civil resistance movement gathered around colonel Dragoljub Mihailović.<sup>59</sup>

As of the summer of 1942, with the permanent institutional fortification of the anti-fascist alliance of the USSR, Great Britain and the USA, it became clear that of critical importance for allies at the end of the war would be the war efforts they invested, and not the ideological and political proximity to any member of the anti-fascist coalition. In addition to mutual distrust and differing views of the future of the post-war world, over time the fight against the invader became a key defining point in the relations of London, Washington and Moscow toward resistance movements in Europe. Such policy was suitable for the Partisan movement which, since the first day of the war, saw the fight against the invader as their duty as allies. War efforts of the Partisan movement resulted in greater attention which the press in the USSR, as well as in the West, started to pay to this movement as of spring 1942. Not incidentally, breaking the "media blockade" coincided with the successful development of military operations in the Eastern Front and strengthening of the USSR's positions in the anti-fascist coalition. In the summer and autumn of 1942, support to the Partisan movement deepened the crisis in the relations between the USSR and the Yugoslav government; however, after the victories of the Red Army at Stalingrad and Kursk, and the successful operations of allies in North Africa, the question of opening the second front in Europe came to the foreground once again.<sup>60</sup> This elevated the strategic and military significance of the Balkans, and increased the interest in military movements fighting against the invader in these territories. In such circumstances, the western allies, notably the British, were no longer able to ignore the military power of the people's liberation movement. In the final years of the war, London was aware of the fact that it was no longer either the sole or the key factor impacting the events in the Balkans. The legitimacy of the Yugoslav government in exile, which, regardless of all differences in the opinions of the situation in Yugoslavia, still pursued the British policy in the Balkans, was almost non-existent. Due to insufficient military activity and defeat in direct conflict with Partisan forces in spring 1943, Chetniks were no longer a respectable military force, and collaboration with the invader stripped them of the legitimacy of bearers of an-

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59 *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici SFRJ 1941–1945, I* (Beograd: SSIP, 1988), 148-151.

60 Dušan Biber, *Tito-Churchill, strogo tajno* (Beograd: Arhiv Jugoslavije; Zagreb: Globus, 1981), 29-37.



ti-fascist resistance, additionally compromising them in the eyes of the British. Only one of the conflicted movements in Yugoslavia was able to respond to the allies' demands for increased military engagement in the fight against the invader – the People's Liberation Movement.

In spring 1943, faced with the military defeat of the Chetniks and the fact that the policy of "making peace" between two antagonistic movements had finally foundered, Great Britain was forced to define a new political tactics in Yugoslavia. The policy of "equal distance" ("equidistance" or "two-track"), which London had opted for, implied the continuation of existing relations with Chetniks and at the same time establishing and developing ties to the People's Liberation Movement.<sup>61</sup> The first "official" contact between the Supreme Headquarters of the PLA and the British command in the Middle East, which was made by sending a military mission headed by captains Bill Stewart and Bill Deakin in May 1943, were turned into a *de facto* recognition of the People's Liberation Army of Yugoslavia with the arrival of Fitzroy McLean's mission in September 1943. A formal recognition of the PLA soon followed and took the form of a secret conclusion reached at a Tehran conference which stated that Partisans should be assisted with all available forces. By this decision of the "great three" (Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill), after three years of war, the PLA was definitively recognised as a full-fledged military factor within the anti-fascist coalition.<sup>62</sup>

The "politics of compromise", formulated by Winston Churchill, despite differing interests and motives for pursuing such policy, at the same time was the Soviet policy in Yugoslavia as well. The dominant opinion in Moscow was that with the current relations within the anti-fascist coalition, accepting the "politics of compromise" was a realistic possibility for the People's Liberation Movement to come out of the war victorious and gain international recognition. During the first half of 1944, the command of the People's Liberation Movement, under the impact of international circumstances and aware of the international dimension of the Yugoslav revolution, was forced to accept the "politics of compromise". It was an estimate, made under pressure from Moscow, that time had come to secure what had been achieved by then. In August 1944, with the con-

61 AJ, 836-KMJ, II-9-a/3, Телеграм председника Националног комитета ослобођења Југославије, маршала Југославије Јосипа Броза Тита, шефу Војне мисије НОВ и ПОЈ при Врховној савезничкој команди за Средњи исток, потпуковнику Владимиру Велебиту, Јајце, 14. децембра 1943.

62 Branko Petranović, *AVNOJ i revolucija*, Zbirka dokumenata (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1983), 466.



sent of Moscow, Josip Broz Tito met with Winston Churchill in Naples. On that occasion, Churchill demanded that Yugoslav communists put a stop to the civil war and issue a “statement” asserting that they would not impose communism or resort to armed forces to directly affect the freedom of expression of the population about the future state and legal order of Yugoslavia. Attempts to impose “previous conditions” and extort “concessions” were made in line with London’s estimates that the revival of a strong, democratic and independent Yugoslavia represented the British interest in the Balkans. Accordingly, and irrespective of the relationships within the anti-fascist coalition, Churchill made every effort to distance Yugoslav communists from Moscow and free them from “international and dogmatic communist” views. Churchill’s attempts to provide Serbia with some kind of a special status and subjectivity, and pit it against the People’s Liberation Movement were supposed to strengthen British political positions in the Balkans prior to a meeting with Stalin, planned for October 1944 in Moscow. Not even in the last years of the war did Churchill give up on his plans to unite all military forces in Yugoslavia.<sup>63</sup>

In the second half of September 1944, Tito secretly took off from the island of Vis and flew to Moscow. Two topics were dominant in his meeting with Stalin – the future cooperation between the PLA and the Red Army on the territory of Yugoslavia, and the international position of the People’s Liberation Movement. Based on the agreement with Stalin, Tito accepted that Bulgarian units also take part in the fights for the liberation of Yugoslavia, under the operational command of the Red Army, considering this as “internationalist aid” to the government of the Fatherland Front. On that occasion, agreement was reached that the Red Army would fictively ask the National Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia for consent to enter the Yugoslav territory.<sup>64</sup>

During the meeting in Moscow on 18 October 1944, the governments of the USSR and Great Britain “agreed” that they should “pursue joint politics in Yugoslavia with the aim of concentrating all forces in the fight against the retreating Germans and in order to resolve the internal difficulties of Yugoslavs by uniting the Yugoslav royal government and the People’s Liberation Movement”. It was agreed in Moscow that the political influence of Moscow and London in Yugoslavia should be equally bal-

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63 Dušan Biber, *Tito-Churchill, strogo tajno* (Beograd: Arhiv Jugoslavije; Zagreb: Globus, 1981), 273-282.

64 ВА, НОР, к. 26, 5-3/8, *Наредба врховног команданта НОВ и ПОЈ маршала Јосипа Броза Тита Главном штабу НОВ и ПО за Србију, 6. септембар 1944.*

anced. This most directly “opened” room for a new agreement between Tito and Šubašić.<sup>65</sup> However, only two days later, on 20 October 1944, it was clear that the British policy of equally balanced political influence in Yugoslavia was defeated. Victory in the Operation Belgrade was a joint triumph of the Red Army and the People’s Liberation Movement in the fight against fascism. By this act, the Partisan movement won the decisive battle for Serbia in which it defeated the main opponent of the Yugoslav revolution – the Chetnik movement. An important share of the collaborator and quisling forces also suffered a defeat. The propagandist impact of the Serbian political emigration was eliminated and the essence of the British policy, which persisted in its stance that Serbia is the stronghold of anticommunism, was rendered meaningless.

Finding itself on the margin, in early 1944, when Churchill announced that London and Moscow would pursue a “common policy”, Washington estimated that there should be no “further illusions” that the three main allies “can act on any equal basis in Yugoslavia”. In the opinion of American diplomats, independently “of the presence of Soviet forces and Tito’s proven communist tendencies”, neither the British nor the Soviets showed true interest in Yugoslavs in the events that occurred, but rather saw that space as a battlefield where each can conduct its own policy in Southeast Europe. It was especially evident that the “Soviet government did not go to any great lengths to find out what the United States thought about the Yugoslav situation”. It was also concluded that the British endeavour to “keep abreast with the Russians” and their readiness to “engage” the USA in their failed policy in order to cover for the “activities of the British and Soviet forces in the Balkans and share the responsibility once the public finds out about the true state of affairs in Yugoslavia and for the kind of governing authority which the AVNOJ intends to establish”. Washington thought that the only true policy in Yugoslavia was the one pursued with the intention of “achieving the highest level of consensus among Yugoslavs and ensuring that these problems do not cause a rift between the allies”.<sup>66</sup>

In spring 1945, Tito once again came to Moscow. On that occasion, on 11 April 1945, he signed a “Treaty of Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Post-War Cooperation between the USSR and Yugoslavia”.<sup>67</sup> The

65 TNA, PRO, FO, 371/48865.

66 TNA, PRO, CAB, 121/678.

67 Закон о Уговору о пријатељству, узајамној помоћи и послератној сарадњи између Југославије и Савеза совјетских социјалистичких република, *СЛ ФНРЈ*,

Treaty served as a foundation of the Yugoslav foreign policy orientation. It was built on the principles that were affirmed by the allies' anti-fascist coalition, and was the foundation on which the USSR and the countries of the "democracy of the people" based their security in the post-war Europe. Tito's visit to Moscow surprised the West and took it aback. In London, the visit was seen as Yugoslavia's clear decision to abandon the "balance" established through the "politics of compromise" and stand with the USSR. Western diplomats, customarily well informed, hinted in their reports that "the first public visit here as a foreign official" serves the function of an important "political demonstration" and a sort of recognition.<sup>68</sup> They estimated that the visit "had military and political character", and stemmed from the need at the end of the war to take a look at important issues of Tito's foreign policy in relation to Koruška, Julijska Krajina, the Balkan Federation. In the reactions of the press and reports of diplomatic, military and intelligence services, the West treated Yugoslavia as a Soviet satellite, a country that supported the Soviet model of socialism, a Soviet exponent in the Mediterranean and Central Europe, a country that spread Soviet influences and stirred up multiple European crises (the Trieste crisis, Greek Civil War, establishing the Balkan Federation ...). In reports sent to London, British diplomats noticed very early on that there was no full harmony in the Yugoslav-Soviet relations. They advised that it should be always borne in mind that the genesis of the Yugoslav revolution unfolded in a "strategic environment and without the direct influence of Moscow." The communist regime in Yugoslavia was considered "a reality which we need to accept."<sup>69</sup>

At the end of World War II, Yugoslavia found itself in a complex international position. Its international position arose from a series of factors of global, foreign policy and internal nature. The end of World War II also meant the beginning of a visible dissolution within the victorious coalition that had begun during the war, and once the war ended, it went through full affirmation, striving towards a stark division and the formation of mutually conflicting military, political and ideological blocs. In a situation where it gradually came into conflict with yesterday's allies, the Soviet Union strove to set up its own military and political bloc within its own zone. It came across a series of obstacles on that path. The only reliable Soviet ally in the Balkans, without the mortgage of being on the los-

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број 40/45, 12. јуни 1945, 341-344.

68 TNA, PRO, CAB, 120/729.

69 TNA, PRO, CAB, 121/678.

ing side in the war, was Yugoslavia. Against the backdrop of the nascent Cold War, this was a clear division into blocs. The beginning of Cold War confrontations in the territory of Europe was an exceptional foreign policy challenge for Yugoslavia, which found itself in one of its centers, too. In the first post-war years, Yugoslav communists were on the same political lines as the Soviet leadership. At the same time, their own war and revolutionary experience did not allow them to play the role of an extra in the processes initiated by the war. In the first years after World War II, Yugoslavia's foreign policy position was characterised by serious misunderstandings with western forces, the major one being the Trieste conflict, involvement in the Greek Civil War, standing with the USSR in all important international issues, and the attempt to build as good relations as possible with other East European countries, notably Slavic ones.

As the relations between the Soviet Union and the western forces tightened more evidently and the Cold War antagonism flared up, the West saw Yugoslavia as a key Soviet satellite. In terms of international relations, Yugoslavia followed the general Soviet model. Globally, it sought to persist in Soviet foreign policy positions, though in certain moments it acted contrary to the Soviet policy and the generally accepted views. The regular line of communication between the Soviet and Yugoslav party top took place via the Yugoslav party representative in Moscow and the two embassies, but the relations between the two parties and, in turn, two countries where they were the leading and, essentially, the only political forces, were resolved at the highest level during Josip Broz Tito's visits to Moscow in 1945 and 1946, then during the visits by representatives from a series of Yugoslav top political, union, economic, military and cultural organisations to Moscow in the first years after the war, as well as Kardelj's consultations with Molotov at the Paris Peace Conference.<sup>70</sup> In addition, there were frequent individual consultations during certain Yugoslav foreign policy actions, on which Stalin particularly insisted. The Soviet side underlined the need for consultations and coordinated foreign policy actions concerning problems that implicitly bound the Soviet side in the international community, notably in the relations with large western powers in terms of delicate points of international relations.<sup>71</sup>

70 Slobodan Selinic, Aleksandar Zivotic, „Conversation Between Soviet and Yugoslav Delegation in Moscow (May 27-June 12, 1946)“, *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 1-2, (2009), Sofia, 180-202.

71 AJ, 836-KMJ, I-3-b, *Совјетска депеша маршалу Јосипу Брозу Титу од 19. маја 1945.*

For Yugoslav foreign policy, the tight alliance with the USSR was at the time marked as “one of the strongest factors of our independent and peaceful progress”. Right behind the USSR were Czechoslovakia and Poland. They were not described using such nice words as the USSR, but they received the label of countries with “similar” relations as the ones with the USSR. As for other states, the relations with Bulgaria and Albania were the best, and those with Romania were good, and there were “good perspectives”; Hungary was at the bottom, with expressions of good will extended to it, though confidence in Hungary was undermined by the existence of Hungarian “chauvinism and revisionism”. The highest expression of cooperation between Yugoslavia and Eastern European countries was a system of treaties of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance, on which foundations were laid for cooperation in all fields. During Broz’s visit to Poland and Czechoslovakia, on 19 March 1946<sup>72</sup> the Yugoslav-Polish Treaty was signed, and on 9 May 1946 the Yugoslav-Czechoslovakian Treaty was concluded in Belgrade, during the return visit of the Czechoslovakian delegation.<sup>73</sup> The order in which treaties of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance were signed reflected precisely the position which some countries, “democracies of the people”, held in Yugoslav foreign policy. The agreement with the USSR meant bringing a strong ally close, one in whom many hopes were placed, who was an older ideological brother and a role model whose internal system was sometimes copied onto the Yugoslav reality without any criticism. Treaties with Czechoslovakia and Poland meant creating an alliance with countries with whom alliances had been forged during the war, alliances of equal partners. The treaty with Bulgaria was a way for this country, who suffered a defeat in the war, to come out of the losers’ camp by establishing ties with Yugoslavia, thus helping the communist forces in these countries in their struggle to gain power after the war. This is what was supposed to be achieved by, among other, military cooperation between the Yugoslav army and Bulgarian units that had to be turned from invading forces into a liberation army. Unlike the relations with Poland and Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia entered the relations with Bulgaria and Albania as an older and stronger partner. Still, Bulgaria was much closer to Yugoslavia than Romania

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72 Указ о ратификацији Уговора о пријатељству и узајамној помоћи између Федеративне Народне Републике Југославије и Републике Пољске, *СЛ ФНРЈ*, број 28/46, 5. април 1946, 313-316.

73 Указ о ратификацији Уговора о пријатељству, узајамној помоћи и сарадњи у миру између Федеративне Народне Републике Југославије и Чехословачке Републике, *СЛ ФНРЈ*, број 42/46, 449-452.

and Hungary. Signing a peace treaty with Bulgaria on 10 February 1947 in Paris helped remove one more obstacle on the path to Yugoslavia and Bulgaria becoming closer. Talks between Tito and Dimitrov on the Lake of Bled from 30 July until 1 August 1947 envisaged a maximum trade in goods, cultural cooperation and preparations for a customs union. Yugoslavia even gave up on war reparations which Bulgaria was obligated to pay under the peace treaty (25 million dollars). Finally, the Yugoslav-Bulgarian Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance was signed on 27 November 1947 in Varna.<sup>74</sup> The Yugoslav-Hungarian Treaty was signed on 8 December 1947,<sup>75</sup> and the Yugoslav-Romanian on 19 December 1947.<sup>76</sup> Yugoslavia expected the USSR to extend help in many segments of life, from creating an intelligentsia, through developing the economy to strengthening the military. Still, blinded by expectations, it seems that Yugoslav communists never truly and fully grasped the scope of the material devastation and human losses which the USSR had suffered in the war.<sup>77</sup> It was evident that during the war years, the USSR broke through the forced isolation which it had been exposed to in the period between the wars and began to play a more active and important role in “the great affairs of the world”. Yugoslavia’s foreign policy orientation towards the USSR was also determined by the position of the Soviet Union in the international community. As one of the leading world forces, the Soviet Union was a permanent member of the Security Council, with the right to place a veto. Yugoslavia consistently supported the Soviet side in one of the crucial issues in post-war international relations – the denazification and disarmament of Germany. Yugoslavia wholeheartedly supported the Soviet policy of dividing Germany into occupation zones so that it would never arise as a unified state again.

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74 Указ о ратификацији Уговора о пријатељству, сарадњи и узајамној помоћи између Федеративне Народне Републике Југославије и Народне Републике Бугарске, *СЛ ФНРЈ*, број 4/48, 14. јануар 1948, 41-43.

75 Указ о ратификацији Уговора о пријатељству, сарадњи и узајамној помоћи између Федеративне Народне Републике Југославије и Републике Мађарске, *СЛ ФНРЈ*, број 4/48, 14. јануар 1948, 43-45.

76 Указ о ратификацији Уговора о пријатељству, сарадњи и узајамној помоћи између Федеративне Народне Републике Југославије и Краљевине Румуније, *СЛ ФНРЈ*, број 5/48, 49-51.

77 ДАСМИП, ПА – строго поверљиво, 1947, ф. IV, документ 166, Писмо генерал – лајтнанта Бранка Пољанца, начелника Војне мисије Југословенске армије у СССР – у помоћнику начелника Генералштаба Оружаних снага СССР-а генерал-лајтнанту Славину од 3. марта 1947.



In the last days of World War II, Yugoslavia was in conflict with yesterday's allies in war. Taking a clear stand alongside the Soviet Union after signing the agreement in April 1945, and the tightening of relations due to the problem of Yugoslavia's north-west borders, then the crises regarding the Greek Civil War and Yugoslavia's assistance to the guerrilla movement, bringing down US airplanes by the Yugoslav air forces and a sharp western protest over stifling political freedoms in Yugoslavia and trials to the commanding officer of the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland General Dragoljub Mihailović, brought the relations between Yugoslavia and the western world to a severe crisis that threatened to escalate and turn into a serious armed conflict. The ideology of interventionism, implemented by the USA, as well as other western countries, stood on the belief that freedom could not be defended in the long term if the mission defined by those countries for themselves ended on their borders. Their foreign policy was shaped by liberal ideas about the free market, unrelenting anticommunism, and fear of a totalitarian state. Belief that communism was a mortal enemy that had to be destroyed was formed not only because of the danger which "revolutionary collectivism" posed to capitalism, but also because it was imposed as a "vision of modernism", more advanced than the one offered by the West. The readiness of the West to grapple with communism implied that it would impose its own ideas, values, capital, development models, interests and its will. After the change in the government, which occurred through the revolution, Yugoslavia emerged as a challenge to the very essence of such a concept of the West's mission. Hence, a conflict was inevitable.

Yugoslav troops entering Trieste on the last days of the war took Yugoslavia directly into conflict with the western world. Heavy British-American military pressure on Yugoslavia to withdraw its forces from Trieste, as well as the lack of the expected help from the Soviets, resulted in the signing of the Belgrade Agreement in June 1945, whereby Trieste was divided into zones A and B, mutually separated by the "Morgan Line", called after General Morgan, chief of staff to Field Marshal Alexander, who led the negotiations with the Yugoslav side. The issue of Yugoslavia's north-west borders came up during the war and reflected on the relations between allies during the war. A particular feature of that issue was the fact that it not only reflected on the relations between the Soviet Union and the western world, but also on the relations between Yugoslavia and Italy, and was critical in preventing them to regulate this issue bilaterally. From the point of view of western forces, the Yugoslav takeo-

ver of Trieste would indirectly imply Soviets gaining an exit to the northernmost point of the Adriatic Sea, becoming closer to Italy and possibly strengthening political pressure and influence in Italy where the communist-led "left" was extremely strong. Besides, as a large and important port, Trieste could become an indirect exit to the sea for Central European countries as well – Czechoslovakia and Hungary – which were now in the Soviet sphere of interest. For the Soviet Union, the issue of Trieste also posed a point of division between Yugoslav and Italian communists.<sup>78</sup> By supporting Yugoslavia, the Soviets risked weakening the position of the strongest communist party in the western world or endangering its position in the still raw and unpredictable Italian political scene.

The provisions of the peace treaty with Italy were definitively determined at the session of the Council of Ministers in New York, from 4 November to 2 December 1946. The Yugoslav side was not satisfied with the offered solution. It was only after a hint from the Soviets that Yugoslavia agreed to sign the peace treaty. The Soviet side thought that failure to sign the peace treaty with Italy would make the western forces keep their troops in Italy, which would threaten the USSR, as well as impact the position of Italian communists; also, the payment of war reparations to Italy would be indirectly jeopardised.<sup>79</sup> Compelled to sign a treaty it was not entirely satisfied with, the Yugoslav government issued a special declaration underlining that by signing the peace treaty, Yugoslavia was not giving up on the territories that ethnically belonged to it, but which remained outside its borders under the treaty, as well as that it would continue to claim those territories as its own. The Free Territory of Trieste was established, whose territorial integrity and independence were defined and secured by the UN Security Council. When these territories were given over to Yugoslavia, there was a mass exodus of the Italian population from those regions, and these people moved deeper into the Italian territory.<sup>80</sup>

An important cause of the conflict between Yugoslavia and the West was the Yugoslav interference in the events in Greece. During the Greek Civil War (1945–1950), Yugoslavia provided extensive political and military aid to Greek communists. With the support of an ideologically like-minded side, the Yugoslav state leadership was realising its own territo-

78 АВПРФ, ф. 6, о.7, п. 15, д. 144, л. 18-26, Главни аргументи совјетске делегације за припремну конференцију.

79 *Dokumenti o spoljnoj politici SFRJ 1947 II* (Beograd: SSIP, 1988), 178-188.

80 TNA, PRO, FO, 371/48898.

rial aspirations towards the northern part of Greece by setting up local boards of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in places where the population included many people of Macedonian origin. Such Yugoslav tendencies were particularly opposed by Great Britain. Normalisation of Yugoslav-Greek relations began in 1949 by suspending Yugoslav aid to Greek communists, and the relations were finally normalised with the exchange of ambassadors in early 1951.<sup>81</sup>

The Soviet side was obviously not convinced of the possibility of victory in Greece. Stalin did not want to cross the border of inter-allied agreements on the division of spheres of interest and borders in the Balkans. All Soviet interference in the Greek Civil War during 1947 took place via Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania. With this regard, room was created which enabled the Soviets to balance at all times, posing in front of the western forces as a country not involved in the conflict. In addition, based on field information about fighting, the strength of Greek government forces, state of affairs within the Greek communist party and the Partisan movement, Soviets estimated that the movement did not have the sufficient military and political sway, even with the largest possible help from Yugoslavia, Albania and Bulgaria, to change the balance of forces established by inter-allied agreements during the war and bring Greece from the western into the eastern ideological and political bloc. With such ratio of powers, Yugoslav foreign policy had narrowed and limited room for action. Yugoslavia was faced with the fact that any deeper engagement on its part could cause a stronger reaction of western forces, and that in such a scenario it could not count on Soviet support and protection, because the Soviet diplomacy sought to distance itself from that conflict. Albania followed suit down the same path, faced with an even narrower room for action than Yugoslavia, and at the same time encumbered by a heavy weight of full-on western blockade. Realistically, Albanian policy to Greece was essentially a transmission lever between Yugoslavia and the Democratic Army of Greece, to which Yugoslavia provided various and extensive aid.<sup>82</sup>

A special source of misunderstanding between Yugoslavia and the western world was the Marshall Plan. According to available sources, Yugoslavia was indirectly notified about the existence of the Marshall Plan, via foreign ministers of France and Great Britain. Though not famil-

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81 TNA, PRO, FO, 371/48899.

82 AJ, 836-KMJ, I-3-b/763, Забелешка о разговору начелника Прице са америчким саветником Кеботом 18. 8 1947.

iar with the details of the Marshall Plan, Yugoslavia initially voiced interest in such an act, aware of the realistic economic situation in the country which did not offer too much room for optimism. In one such campaign, the Yugoslav authorities saw a strong impulse to rebuilding the European economic potential that had been devastated by war, but at the same time it feared that accepting extensive economic support from the West could endanger the nascent wave of internal economic and social changes that splashed over Yugoslavia in a revolutionary enthralment in the immediate aftermath of World War II. After lengthy considerations and comprehensive analyses, the Yugoslav government rejected the plan, obviously under the Soviet influence. Namely, the Yugoslav rejection of the Marshall Plan as a selective plan for providing assistance, unlike the UNRA plan, was rooted in adamant Soviet opposition to such a plan and in understanding that this was an American aspiration to resolve the economic situation in Western Europe in order to prevent Soviet expansion, social shocks and any spread of extreme leftist ideas, which would be conducive to the spread of communism.<sup>83</sup> At the end of this period, marked by the onset of Cold War tensions and grouping into blocs, Yugoslavia was one of the socialist countries most exposed to the West. It was designated by the West as the key Soviet satellite, simultaneously politically and ideologically fully incriminated and accused of involvement in the events in Greece. In the eyes of the West, Yugoslavia was the main Soviet ally in Eastern Europe.<sup>84</sup>

The beginning of a more visible phase of the Yugoslav-Soviet conflict in the autumn of 1947 in regard to the nature of the Yugoslav military and political engagement in Albania, interference in the civil conflict in Greece and creation of the Balkan Federation did not only lead to Yugoslavia's distancing from the Soviet Union, but also to a clear distancing from the military and political bloc that was emerging under its leadership. Breaking up from the existing military and economic arrangements essentially led to Yugoslavia's estrangement from the camp of socialist countries and, in conditions of stark opposition to western countries, this resulted in Yugoslavia's initial isolation and the inevitable neutral status in an already starkly divided Europe.

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83 AJ, 836-KMJ, I-3-b/933, Забелешка о разговору Беблера са британским амбасадором Пиком 23. 6. 1947.

84 *FRUS*, 1947, IV, pp. 834-837.

## On the Path of “Active and Peaceful Coexistence” 1949–1991

The conflict between Yugoslavia and its former allies led by Soviet Union, which occurred in 1948, as well as its spiralling during 1949, caused numerous consequences for the Yugoslav foreign policy orientation and set the future directions of its international positioning. Alienation from Soviet Union as the most important ally and support in the international relations, but also as the country that in various aspects of life was seen as a pattern of a desired social progress and embodiment of socialist ideals, also implied an immediate ideological distancing from the previously respected paragons, rejection of Soviet models of economic and cultural development, and, above all, obligatory military and political realignment. Although at that moment the eastern military bloc had not been established formally, it existed in reality. The system of bilateral treaties of “friendship and mutual assistance” concluded between the Soviet Union and East European countries, as well as among Soviet East European allies, marked the creation of a military bloc under Soviet leadership with Yugoslavia, as the most important Soviet ally in the Balkans and the Mediterranean, being one of its major pillars. Owing to the escalation of the confrontation with Inform biro, Yugoslavia did not only lose a powerful military and political anchor in the East, but also faced the possibility of a military conflict with its former allies.<sup>85</sup>

85 For more details on the nature of conflict between Yugoslavia and Inform biro countries see: Milovan Đilas, *Vlast i pobuna* (Beograd: Književne novine, 1990); Milovan Đilas, *Razgovori sa Staljinom* (Beograd: Književne novine, 1991); Čedomir Štrbac, *Svedočanstva o 1948* (Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 1989); Vladimir Dedijer, *Izgubljena bitka Josifa Visarionoviča Staljina* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1968); Бранко Петрановић, *Југославија на размеђу 1945 - 1950* (Подгорица: ЦАНУ, 1998); Бранко Петрановић, *Велика шизма. Четрдесетосма* (Подгорица: ЦИД, 1999); Анатолий С. Аникеев, *Как Тито от Сталина ушел: Югославия, СССР и США и начальны период холодной войны 1945–1957* (Москва: ИнСлав РАН, 2002); Артем А. Улунян, *СССР, стрны народной демократии и революционное движение в Греции 1944-1950* (Москва: ИВИ АН СССР, 1988); Артем А. Улунян, *Балканы. Горячий мир холодной войны 1945-1960* (Москва: ИВИ РАН, 2001); Jiri Vukoukal, Bohuslav Litera, Miroslav Tejchman, *Východ, vznik, vývoj a rozpad sovětskeho bloku 1944-1989* (Praha: Libri, 2000); Юрий Гиренко, *Сталин -Тито* (Москва: ИПЛ, 1991); Милан Терзић, Михајло Басара, Дмитар Тасић, *Југословенска (народна) армија и Информбиоро. Зборник докумената* (Београд: Службени гласник, 2015); Леонид Я. Гибианский, „К истории советско-югославского конфликта 1948-1953: Секретная советско-югославо-болгарская встреча в Москве 10. февраля 1948. года“, *Славяноведение*, бр. 3, (1991), 12-23; II, *Славяноведение*,

As the conflict with the Informbiro countries intensified, Yugoslav government found itself in the gap between ideological prejudice and political pragmatism, since it was faced with the possibility of military intervention by the countries siding with the Soviet Union, but economically and militarily it was unprepared for an efficient resistance. On the one hand, aligning with the West implied renunciation of the established political and ideological perception of the capitalist world, while on the other hand, the West doubted the sincerity of Yugoslav leadership during their conflict with Informbiro. However, the loss of China in 1949, and to a greater extent, the outbreak of war in Korea, encouraged American diplomats to consider the role of Yugoslavia in a potential conflict with USSR. The prevailing belief was that Yugoslavia could play a significant role due to its special geographic position, capacity and strength of armed forces, as well as the strong opposition to Soviet geopolitical and ideological aspirations. From the western point of view, the proclaimed wedge strategy<sup>86</sup>, which implied a geopolitical penetration of the West to the Soviet interest zone, provided a strategic advantage to the western powers. Additionally, the Yugoslav territory provided the western forces with a greater operational range in the event of a potential conflict, and a stronger land connection with their allies – Greece and Turkey, that were already in the process of NATO accession. In order to utilize the geopolitical position of Yugoslavia as efficiently as possible, it was necessary to fortify the Yugoslav defence capacities.<sup>87</sup>

At the same time, Yugoslav international and security position was extremely unfavourable. Following the split with the Soviet Union and its satellite states in the summer of 1948, Yugoslavia was put in a complete diplomatic and economic isolation. Confrontation with its former allies deprived it of a strong military foothold, while relations with the western world were still poor as a result of the Yugoslav clash with the West over the Trieste issue, its involvement in the internal conflict in Greece, trials

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бр. 4,(1991), 4-36; III, *Славяноведение*, бр. 1, (1992), 42-56; IV, *Славяноведение*, бр. 3, (1992), 35-51.

86 For more details on the “wedge strategy” see: Alan P. Dobson, Steve Marsh, *US Foreign Policy Since 1945* (London: Routledge, 2001), 56-64; John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (London: Oxford University Press, 2005), 24-86; Gregory Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin. American Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc 1947-1956* (London: Cornell University Press, 2009), 15-82; John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), 337-405.

87 Lorejn M. Lis, *Održavanje Tita na površini. Sjedinjene Države, Jugoslavija i Hladni rat* (Beograd: AGM, 2003), 121-139.



to Dragoljub Mihailović and Alojzije Stepinac, downing the American aircrafts above Slovenia, and due to the western assessment of the state of human rights and freedom in Yugoslavia. Faced with the threat of military intervention from the East, economically exhausted and yet unrecovered from the war destruction and obliteration, still predominantly agricultural country severely affected by draught and low crop yield, Yugoslavia was on a verge of economic collapse, and consequently, a social and economic crisis. The only escape was the improvement of relations with the western world and obtaining a much needed economic and military aid. First steps to this end were made in late 1949 and resulted in the decision passed by the American National Security Council on 17 November 1949 to grant Yugoslavia military assistance but only in the event of attack. Concurrently, a number of economic arrangements were relatively quickly agreed and promptly yielded results. Nevertheless, Yugoslavia urgently needed military assistance, and since it was dissatisfied with such decision, it strove to ensure immediate military support.<sup>88</sup>

Although faced with a dreadful state of its armed forces and serious military threats, Yugoslav side refused to receive military assistance from the West subject to direct threat of war or accession to the North Atlantic military alliance, stressing its neutrality in the event of a potential war. However, the escalation of the situation on Yugoslav borders and evolution of the existing conflict into a widely spread confrontation in the ideological and propaganda sphere, caused the shift in the Yugoslav position. In late 1950 and early 1951, Yugoslav emissary in Washington, Vladimir Velebit opened a series of talks with American diplomatic and military officials.<sup>89</sup> Negotiations resulted in the organization of a visit from the Chief of General Staff of Yugoslav Army, General Koča Popović

88 For more details on the rise of American military and economic power see: Анатолий С. Аникеев, *Как Тито от Сталина ушел: Югославия, СССР и США и начальный период холодной войны 1945–1957* (Москва: ИнСлав РАН, 2002); Dragan Bogetić, *Jugoslavija i Zapad, 1952–1955. Jugoslovensko približavanje NATO-u* (Beograd: Službeni list SRJ, 2000); Darko Bekić, *Jugoslavija u Hladnom ratu. Odnosi sa velikim silama, 1949–1955*, (Zagreb: Globus, 1988); Lorejn M. Lis, *Održavanje Tita na površini. Sjedinjene Države, Jugoslavija i Hladni rat* (Beograd: AGM, 2003); Ivan Laković, *Zapadna vojna pomoć Jugoslaviji 1951–1958* (Podgorica: Istorijski institute Crne Gore, 2006); Александар Животић, *Вашингтонска конференција 1951. Југословенско приближавање САД* (Београд: Завод за уџбенике, 2014).

89 Darko Bekić, *Jugoslavija u Hladnom ratu. Odnosi sa velikim silama, 1949–1955*, (Zagreb: Globus, 1988), 251–255; Александар Животић, *Вашингтонска конференција 1951. Југословенско приближавање САД* (Београд: Завод за уџбенике, 2014), 10–17.

to Washington, London and Paris in May and June of 1951.<sup>90</sup> At the same time, Edvard Kardelj and Milovan Đilas, accompanied by leading Yugoslav generals, conducted separate missions to London, searching for a possible model of obtaining western assistance without formal accession to the western military alliance. In August 1951, a Yugoslav military delegation visited USA making first arrangements for the American military assistance to Yugoslavia.<sup>91</sup> During the talks, Yugoslav officers made a strong impression on the American hosts with their competence and willingness to oppose the Soviet military intervention. This made the American side feel more confident about Yugoslavia as a potentially stable partner, and subsequently an ally.<sup>92</sup> Political opening up to the West was followed by media and cultural opening to the western world, which in turn favourably impacted the perception of Yugoslavia as an allied country.

Following numerous visits of Yugoslav military and political delegations to western countries and missions of their delegations to Yugoslavia, late 1951 and early 1952 saw the inflow of a significant economic and military aid, which lasted until the end of 1957. During this period, sizeable quantities of artillery, tanks, various armoured vehicles, trucks and radars were delivered. Considerable amounts of food and ammunitions were also supplied. Additionally, Yugoslav air forces received a great number of aircrafts. Majority of the contingent consisted of jet airplanes. Anti-aircraft and anti-tank battalions of Yugoslav armed forces improved notably. Firepower of the offensive component of Yugoslav army, embodied in armoured and air forces, was increased by several times. The cooperation with western countries realized through the delivery of necessary equipment also improved the capacities of the national military industry. Yugoslav army underwent a radical modernization. It received the necessary technical assistance that mainly satisfied the Yugoslav needs. However, from the West, especially from the American officials, there were frequent demands, usually voiced in the informal setting, for a stronger military and political association of Yugoslavia with NATO.

From the western perspective, delivery of military equipment to Yugoslavia predominately served the purpose of creating preconditions

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90 ВА, АЈНА, инвентарски број 2958, документ 1, *Меморандум Владе САД од 4. фебруара 1951*; ВА, АЈНА, инвентарски број 2958, документ 1, *Меморандум Владе САД од 2. марта 1951*.

91 ВА, АЈНА, инвентарски број 2958, документ 31, *Допис генерал-пуковника Коче Поповића генерал-пуковнику Гошњаку (недатирано)*.

92 Bojan Dimitrijević, *JNA od Staljina do NATO pakta* (Beograd: Službeni list SCG, 2006), 21.

for efficient defence of the Mediterranean. In the military agenda of the NATO Headquarters, Yugoslavia had a manifold role of strategic nature. Mediterranean region represented an extremely sensitive area in a potential warfare, due to the Soviet ability to promptly and easily cut off the communication between the West and Middle East.<sup>93</sup> For that reason, according to NATO military assessments, Yugoslav participation in the defence of NATO's southern flank was supposed to fortify this line and ensure a bridgehead to the new NATO members – Greece and Turkey, thus safeguarding the continuity of the chain of alliances and pacts designed by the Western Bloc as a buffer zone against USSR and its allies. Nevertheless, Yugoslav military and political leaders decidedly rejected the possibility of accession to NATO. Reasons behind such position were diverse and multi-layered. At the root were predominantly political and ideological dogmas, but also the apprehension about a complete attachment to the one of two potentially confronted sides. Consequently, Yugoslavia insisted on the organization of joint defence without stronger connections to military and political NATO structures.<sup>94</sup>

Faced with Yugoslav refusal to join NATO, western military planners, in cooperation with intelligence and diplomatic structures, searched for a model that would ensure Yugoslav fundamental attachment to NATO. It was decided to implement the model of Yugoslav inclusion in the NATO defence plans through its regional integration with the new NATO members – Greece and Turkey. According to this scheme, as part of the preparations for the defence of the Mediterranean, Yugoslav, Greek and Turkish forces would be tasked with forming a joint front against potential aggression from USSR and its allies. As a result, in the course of 1952, and through mediation of western powers, negotiations on the establishment of Yugoslav-Greek-Turkish alliance were launched. The beginning was marked by mutual visits of political delegations, followed by talks between military delegations. In the course of the visit from Turkish military delegation to Belgrade in December 1952, together with necessary strategic observations, the modalities of mutual military cooperation were agreed.<sup>95</sup> At the end of the same month, delegation of the Yugoslav General Staff visited Athens. Since Yugoslavia and Greece were neighbouring

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93 BA, AЈHA, ГШ-1, к.14, ф. 7, р.б. 1/1, *Записник Прве конференције одржане 17. маја 1951. у Вашингтону*, 7-19.

94 Lorejn M. Lis, *Održavanje Tita na površini. Sjedinjene Države, Jugoslavija i Hladni rat* (Beograd: AGM, 2003), 128-133.

95 BA, AЈHA, ГШ – 2, к. 14, ф. 8, регистарски број 2 / 1, *Записник са састанка југословенских и турских војних делегација, Београд, 20, 24. и 27. децембар 1952.*

countries, and in the event of a war they would have a common front towards Bulgaria, negotiations were more concrete. Discussion focused on the characteristics of the border front to Bulgaria, strength of enemy military forces, potential shape of a joint defence, possibilities of combined military operations, and size of necessary troops for the execution of operations.<sup>96</sup> Participants especially emphasized the need for setting up a common *Balkan Front* in case of a potential war, in order to avoid the possibility of cutting off the land ties between the Balkan countries, which would minimize their chances of successful defence. As regards Albania, the Soviet ally that was not geographically connected with the rest of the Eastern military bloc but in the event of a war, it was deep in the Greek and Yugoslav hinterland, a decision was made to launch a common preventive military action, should the governments of the Balkan allies fail to ensure its neutrality.<sup>97</sup> The Treaty of Friendship and Collaboration between the three countries was concluded in Ankara on 28 February 1953.<sup>98</sup> Negotiations on the formation of political alliance were preceded by tripartite military talks held between Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey during 17 to 20 February 1953. During the talks, the establishment of a joint front in the event of war, as well as general strategic priorities were defined.<sup>99</sup> By means of a special instruction issued to all Yugoslav diplomatic offices, Balkan Pact was primarily defined as an association that set a broad framework and solid basis for extension and deepening of the cooperation between the three countries in the area of joint security.<sup>100</sup> Yugoslav political and military leaders believed that in this manner they managed to counterbalance the Soviet aggressive approach and ensure national safety. Nevertheless, even if only seemingly, the threat of Soviet military intervention was still looming. For this reason, it was necessary to continue with military and political talks aimed at strengthening

96 ВА, АЈНА, ГШ – 2, к. 14, ф. 8, регистарски број 3 / 1, *Записник са разговора вођених између грчке и југословенске војне делегације у Атини од 27. до 30. децембра 1952.*

97 Александар Животић, *Југославија, Албанија и велике силе 1945-1961* (Београд: Архипелаг, 2011), 428-450.

98 ДАСМИП, ПА (1953), ф. 69, документ број 429736, *Уговор о пријатељству и сарадњи између Федеративне Народне Републике Југославије, Краљевине Грчке и Републике Турске од 28. фебруара 1953.*

99 ВА, АЈНА, ГШ – 2, к. 15, ф. 1, регистарски број 1 / 1, *Меморандум о разговорима војних делегација Турске, Грчке, ФНРЈ у Анкари, 17-20. фебруара 1953.*

100 АЈ, 837 – Кабинет председика републике, I-5-с, *Балкански савез, Допис ДСИП свим југословенским дипломатским претставништвима о Тројном споразуму, 13. март 1953.*

mutual relations among the Balkan allies. The purpose of further military negotiations was to define common priorities, harmonize military plans and specify the tasks of certain military groups, as well as to jointly organize the system of combined supply from western allies and communication.<sup>101</sup> Despite Yugoslav insistence on preserving neutral position, it was clear that each new step took it closer to the essential integration in the western military system. One of the direct consequences of the Balkan Pact creation was intensified delivery of the western military assistance to Yugoslav, Greek and Turkish army, significantly increasing their operational capacities. Armed forces were enabled to successfully counter a potential attack of the Soviet Union and its allies, according to the western plans and protocols.

Military rapprochement between the allied countries imposed the need for further broadening of a comprehensive cooperation. The needs of armed forces required a more precise definition of the existing alliance, which called for a new contractual form. As a result of further talks, the pressure from the West, but also due to common interests and needs for stronger mutual cooperation, the scope of Ankara Treaty was extended. Consequently, a new Treaty of Alliance, Political Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance was signed on 9 August 1954 on Lake Bled.<sup>102</sup> The Treaty had a special military importance. It stipulated the obligation of allied countries to jointly act in the event of a war, since it was specified that a potential attack on one country would be treated as an attack on all three alliance members. This marked the finalization of a military union of the three countries, which significantly increased the level of their national security, but at the same time, dependence on the western military alliance.

Since the issue of political and legal framework of the alliance was resolved by the Bled Treaty, this created grounds for further military rapprochement. Therefore, the political negotiations were also followed by the talks between the General Staff delegations of the three countries on the issue of mutual military cooperation in the event of war, addressing the common military goals and manners of joint operation, as well as certain operational zones. These issues were finally solved during the conference attended by Commanders of General Staff of allied armies, which

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101 BA, AЈНА, ГШ – 2, к. 15, ф. 1, регистарски број 2 / 1, *Записник са трипартитних војних разговора (Југославије, Грчке и Турске) вођених у Атини, 3-12 јуна 1953.*

102 *Међународни уговори FNRJ, свеска 1 (1955), Уговор о saveзу, политичкој сарадњи и узajамној помоћи између Федеративне Народне Републике Југославије, Кралјевине Грчке и Републике Турске, потписан на Бледу 9.августа 1954.*

was held in Athens from 4 to 12 November 1954.<sup>103</sup> During the conference, a number of strategic and operational issues were discussed. Special attention was paid to the matters related to the implementation of plans for joint operation, air force cooperation, as well as logistics, liaisons and exchange of maps. Additionally, intensive sharing of intelligence information was agreed. As part of strategic observations, careful attention was paid to the assessment of enemy warfare plans. It was concluded that, in the event of a broader confrontation to Soviet Union and its allies, Balkan allies were exposed to a great danger of being cut off from the main body of NATO forces in Europe. In that context, Yugoslav army gained considerable importance since one of its priority tasks was the protection of the land connection between the Balkan allies and NATO forces in Italy. Two of the most vital directions were the Ljubljana Gap (nearest communication between Hungary and Trieste whose severance would also threaten the Italian territory, as well as southern France) and the territory of Macedonia, as a zone connecting the joint front. In that sense, it was emphasized that Bulgaria was seen as a possible operational centre for the attack on all three members of Balkan Pact. In an emergency situation, common plans also envisaged the taking over of the Albanian territory in order to ensure the supply of Yugoslavia via maritime corridors. Yugoslav marine forces were entrusted with a task of extreme priority. The plan was that Yugoslav marine forces ensure a continuous supply of all necessities through marine transportation corridors from USA and Western Europe countries. In addition to the air support to ground forces and air defence of the territory, Yugoslav aviation was tasked with air defence of the convoys that would supply the Yugoslav army.<sup>104</sup>

From Yugoslav perspective, validity of the Balkan Pact was limited by the potential military threat. Ideological orientation of the Yugoslav leadership, development of internal economic and social relations, as well as a firm resolution to establish a socialist system pushed Yugoslavia away from western allies. Gradually, in the course of 1954 and 1955, the military threat diminished due to the reduction of armed forces of Soviet Union and their allies. After Stalin's death in March 1953, first signs of warming between Yugoslavia and Soviet Union emerged which also implied the end of the military threat. During 1955, the Yugoslav-Soviet relations nor-

103 ВА, АЈНА, ГШ – 2, к. 18, ф. 5, регистарски број 1 / 48, *Записник, меморандум и документа са трипартитних војних разговора ФНРЈ, Турске и Грчке у Атини 4-12. новембра 1954.*

104 *Ibid.*



malized.<sup>105</sup> Settling of the conflict coincided with the Turkish-Greek confrontation over the status of Cyprus and the resulting alienation between Greece and Turkey.<sup>106</sup> Western pressures for Yugoslav accession to NATO, which would inevitably lead to the loss of political monopoly held by the League of Communists on the one side, and the unwillingness to go back to the Eastern bloc on the other side, encouraged Yugoslavia to seek an independent route of its foreign policy. Therefore, since 1954, Yugoslavia increasingly turned to the cooperation with the *third world* countries, initially setting up an informal alliance with Egypt and India as a backbone of the future much wider Non-Aligned Movement. In this manner, Yugoslavia tried to distance itself from both confronted blocs. Suez crisis in 1956/57, wholehearted Yugoslav support to Egypt, Turkey's backing of the tripartite aggression and Greek neutral position additionally fuelled the alienation between the Balkan Pact members.<sup>107</sup>

However, key reasons for Yugoslav distancing from the Balkan Pact, and consequently from the western military alliance, lay in the Yugoslav dissatisfaction with the development of cooperation with the western powers, as well as in the prospect of complete normalization of relations with the Soviet Union. Following the settlement of interstate and interparty relations (1955-1956), it was time to resolve the military relations with USSR and the newly established Warsaw Pact. Yugoslav side strove to use bilateral arrangements to ensure modern weaponry and military equipment from the Soviet Union but without forming alliance ties with Warsaw Pact. However, Soviets denied such arrangements, making the supply of modern military technology contingent upon the termination of Yugoslav military arrangements with the West and consequent distancing from NATO and Balkan Pact. An ardent supporter of renewed military relations with Yugoslavia was soviet minister of defence, famed marshal Georgy Zhukov. However, he was personally apprehensive about the Yugoslav position towards the western military alliance. In June 1957 in Moscow, he quite bluntly informed Yugoslav military officials headed by the state secretary for national defence, general Gošnjak, that there were no justified reasons for "Yugoslavia to continue receiving western military support as there was no threat from the East, nor had Soviets

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105 AJ, 837 – КПР, I-3-а, СССР, *Записник са преговора југословенске и совјетске владине делегације 27-28. мај 1955.*

106 Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey. A Modern History* (London – New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 235-238.

107 Александар Животић, *Суецка криза 1956-1957* (Београд: ИНИС, 2008), 212-214.

ever perceived Yugoslavia as a potential enemy.“ He further argued that American military mission to Serbia was harmful for the Yugoslav interests and insulting to the Yugoslav sovereignty as USA had the rights of inspection in the Yugoslav armed forces and as such, Yugoslav army evidently served to the US as an intelligence centre about the Soviet Union. For this reason, the Soviets could not provide modern military technology, such as the air craft “MIG 17”, to Yugoslavia as it would hence become available to the Americans. In his opinion, American military support was not aimed at strengthening but weakening the Yugoslav armed forces, since they provided obsolete technology to the Yugoslav side, such as aircraft “F 86”, which had been removed from the US weaponry. He stressed the problem of spare parts and Yugoslav entire dependence on USA. Addressing the international position of Yugoslavia, Zhukov spoke of the Balkan Pact as a *de facto* connection to NATO, underlying that Yugoslav position was not anti-bloc oriented, neither in political nor in economic sense, that Yugoslavia was essentially connected with the Western Bloc, while the Soviets did not exert pressures on Yugoslavia to join the Eastern Bloc, but relied on the solidarity of communists. For all these reasons he believed that Yugoslavia should cancel western military support and leave the Balkan Pact.<sup>108</sup> Essentially, Zhukov repeated the positions on the western military support to Yugoslavia and presence of the American military mission in Belgrade that had been taken by Politburo in its session held on 8 December 1956.<sup>109</sup>

Yugoslav side responded that Yugoslavia no longer needed western military support, and the only pending issue was how to reach the agreement with the US government on its cancellation. It was also explained that Yugoslav government wished to buy necessary equipment, but lacked the required guarantees.<sup>110</sup> Opening this sensitive issue clearly indicated the present military position of Yugoslavia and its desire to elegantly relinquish the western military support. For the Soviet side, the matter of cancelling western military support bore tremendous strategic importance. The military significance of Yugoslavia, together with military and geographic position of Albania, was viewed in the context of strategic observations of potential south-western arena of combat op-

108 Александар Животић, *Југословенско-совјетске војне супротности 1947-1957* (Београд: Архипелаг, 2015), 199-202.

109 *Протокол 63. Заседание 8. декабря 1956*, А. А. Фурсенко (составитель), *Президиум ЦК КПСС 1954-1964*, I, Москва, 2004, стр. 213.

110 Veljko Mićunović, *Moskovske godine 1956-1958* (Zagreb: Globus, 1977), 299-300.

erations – the Bulgarian-Turkish course, which was essentially directly correlated to the zone of straits and coastal area of Black, Egean, Ionian and Adriatic Seas.<sup>111</sup> A meeting between Tito and Khrushchev, which was held in Romania in August 1957, somewhat attributed to the settlement of differences, but did not completely reinforce the mutual relations. It was jointly determined that both sides held similar views on the international relations and relations within the socialist bloc.<sup>112</sup> Predominant belief of the Soviet side was that the Yugoslav military, state and party leaders did not want to depend on the West and that in the future they would turn towards USSR for military cooperation.<sup>113</sup> Ideological conflict between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, which had begun in 1957, as well as Yugoslav cancellation of the western military support, brought Yugoslavia to a neutral position towards both military pacts. Forced distancing from the military allies continued until the fall of 1961, when on the grounds of proclaimed Yugoslav diplomatic positions, the relations with the Soviet Union started to change swiftly, followed by a new aggravation of relations with the western world. Simultaneously, Yugoslavia endeavoured to secure its neutral position by strengthening its relations with third world countries.<sup>114</sup>

Since the normalization of relations with the Soviet Union, which occurred in late 1961 and early 1962, Yugoslavia kept close relations with the Warsaw Pact countries. New normalization of relations resulted in the establishment of close political and economic ties, but also a comprehensive Yugoslav military reliance on the Soviet Union and its allies. Intensification of close ties that began in 1964 culminated at the time of the Middle East crisis of 1967, when Yugoslavia, striving to provide military and diplomatic assistance to its Arab allies, faced with utter inefficiency of the Non-Aligned Movement but also afraid that the shift of the inter-bloc confrontations regarding the Mediterranean region could jeopardize its national stability, participated in all four conferences of the Warsaw Pact countries. These conferences were dedicated to the modalities of support to be provided to Arab countries in order for them to overcome

111 Иван В. Наумов, *Георгий Жуков. Стенограмма октябрьского пленума ЦК КПСС и другие документы* (Москва: Фонд „Демократия, 2001), 165-168.

112 AJ, 507/IX-КМОВ ЦК СКЈ, СССР, 119/1-85, *Саопштење о састанку делегација ЦК СКЈ и ЦК КП СС 1. и 2. августа 1957.*

113 Иван В. Наумов, *Георгий Жуков. Стенограмма октябрьского пленума ЦК КПСС и другие документы* (Москва: Фонд „Демократия, 2001), 177-178.

114 Dragan Bogetić, *Nova strategija spoljne politike Jugoslavije 1956-1961* (Beograd: ISI, 2006), 309-362.

heavy losses suffered during the war with Israel.<sup>115</sup> In this manner, Yugoslavia became an informal member of the Warsaw Pact, and brought its relations with the member states, led by the Soviet Union, almost to the level that had existed from the end of Second World War to the beginning of the conflict in 1948. Particular reliance on the Soviet Union for military machinery, especially the supply of the most complex weaponry systems and military equipment, made Yugoslavia completely depend on the Warsaw Pact.<sup>116</sup>

The idyllic image of cooperation between Yugoslavia and Warsaw Pact members changed due to sudden disruptions within the socialist camp in the summer of 1968. Fear of potential Soviet interfering in the Yugoslav internal affairs, which had been harboured by its leadership since the conflict of 1948, culminated in late August 1968, at the time of intervention in Czechoslovakia by five Warsaw Pact members. Soviet explanation that it was a legitimate action in accordance with the socialist internationalism was seen by the Yugoslav state and party leadership as a direct threat, which was further upheld by the reaction of the West to the developments in Czechoslovakia. Essentially, the West acknowledged the Soviet right to regulate relations inside the socialist grouping at its own discretion.<sup>117</sup> At the same time, the situation also opened the issue of the western attitude towards Yugoslavia in the backdrop of tacit division of interest spheres on the European soil, which was respected by both sides after the provisional solution of the Berlin crisis. Yugoslav side was not certain whether the leading western countries treated Yugoslavia as a member of the eastern bloc or not, which pushed it away from its ideological allies and forced it to the cooperation with ideological opponents.<sup>118</sup> In an extremely difficult situation caused by the Soviet intervention in the

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115 For more details on the influence of the 1967 Middle East crisis on the foreign policy of Yugoslavia and its international position see: Dragan Bogetić, Aleksandar Životić, *Jugoslavija i Arapsko-izraelski rat 1967* (Beograd: ISI 2010).

116 For more details on the restoration of the military-technical cooperation between Yugoslavia and Soviet Union see: Bojan Dimitrijević, *Jugoslovensko ratno vazduhoplovstvo 1942-1992* (Beograd: ISI, 2006); Bojan Dimitrijević, *Modernizacija i intervencija. Jugoslovenske oklopne jedinice 1945-2006* (Beograd: ISI, 2010); Ненад Ж. Петровић, *Војна сарадња Југославије са Совјетским Савезом 1953-1964. године. Поглед из Београда* (Београд: Одбрана, 2016) Ненад Ж. Петровић, „Војна сарадња СФРЈ са СССР 1965-1970“, *Војноисторијски гласник*, 2, (2016), 182-197.

117 Драган Богетић, „Југословенско-совјетски односи у светлу војне интервенције у Чехословачкој 1968. године“, у: *Зборник 1968-40 година после*, уредник Радмила Радић (Београд: ИНИС, 2008), 129-130.

118 Dragan Bogetić, „Jugoslovensko-američki odnosi u svetlu vojne intervencije u Čehoslovačkoj 1968“, *Istorija XX veka*, 2, (2007), 75-80.

night between 20 and 21 August, Yugoslav state leadership immediately organized a session of the Presidency and Central Committee's Executive Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia for 22 August, as well as a session of the Plenum for the following day.<sup>119</sup> At the suggestion of Josip Broz, it was concluded that the intervention implied a breaching of one country's sovereignty, an aggressor's act, and a clear indicator of Soviet hegemonic aspirations, a heavy blow to socialism and an act that encouraged the opponents of the socialist system. An important element was the appeal to Yugoslav citizens to be ready to defend their country, which sent to the local and international public a clear message of Yugoslav unequivocal confrontation to the Warsaw Pact. At the same time, necessary measures for strengthening the country's defence systems were taken, in terms of increasing the defence capacities, in accordance with the doctrine of people's war and principle of a general confrontation to a potential aggressor, which illustrated not only the Yugoslav determination to stay on the same foreign policy course, but also the fact that Yugoslavia did not expect any significant support from the western world.<sup>120</sup>

Condemnation of the military intervention, solidarity with the Czech leadership, and demand for urgent withdrawal of Warsaw Pact countries from Czechoslovakia were the main points of the official Yugoslav demarche to the governments of the five member states of the Warsaw Pact that invaded Czechoslovakia. The document was delivered to their embassies in Belgrade on 22 August. Similar positions were stated in the session of the United Nations Security Council that was organized due to the intervention in Czechoslovakia.<sup>121</sup> Such Yugoslav policy caused a surge of dissatisfaction in USSR. Soviet accusations were personally expressed to Josip Broz by the Soviet ambassador Benediktov during his visit on 30 August.<sup>122</sup> The strict tone of the Soviet objections and lack of western reactions served as signals to the Yugoslav side to intensify the already launched defence preparations.

Yugoslav position towards its neighbours that were part of the Warsaw Pact was further complicated by its geopolitical setting that was

119 Ljubodrag Dimić, „Pogled iz Beograda na Čehoslovačku 1968. godine“, *Tokovi istorije*, 3-4, (2005), 205-207.

120 AJ, 507/III, 134, *Девета заједничка седница Председништва и Извршног комитета ЦК СКЈ од 21. августа 1968.*

121 ДАСМИП, ПА-строго поверљиво (1968), ф. III, документ број 83, *Преглед југословенских ставова у СБ ОУН.*

122 AJ, 837 – КПР, 1-3-а, СССР, *Забелешка о пријему совјетског амбасадора код Председника Тита*, 30. август 1968.

characterized by broad geographic openness to the member countries of the Warsaw Pact. A long border in the Pannonia Plane to Hungary and Romania, hostile border front to Bulgaria from Djerdap to Dojran, long and geographically unfavourable border zone to Albania, limited operational depth of the country's territory, easy access to northern and western parts of the state suitable for quick penetration of motorized armed units, together with the exposure of the surrounding areas of main urban centres to relatively easy tactic and operational assaults, as well as the fact that a great deal of Adriatic coast was suitable for attacks from stronger units opening their routes to the depth of the Yugoslav territory, caused concern among the Yugoslav state and military leadership.<sup>123</sup> In those moments, Yugoslavia, as an essentially neutral country, was potentially in a great danger should the Warsaw Pact decide on a military intervention.

Military dependence on the Soviet Union, lack of modern anti-tank and anti-aircraft systems, air forces comprised of a small number of modern Soviet fighter planes, type MIG-21 and already obsolete machinery of American origin, insufficient supplies of food, gas and ammunition, poor technical state of the weaponry and military equipment received through the system of Soviet and subsequently, western military assistance that dated back to the end of Second World War and first post-war years, combined with dissatisfaction with the state of road and railway communication lines, made the Yugoslav situation even more difficult.<sup>124</sup> Considering the unfavourable economic situation and poor living standard of the professional Yugoslav National Army staff resulting from the restrictive financing after 1965, Yugoslav defence capacity was evidently inadequate. Furthermore, human resources structure of the Yugoslav National Army was seriously damaged due to the inevitable turning of generations, various political and nationalist arrangements, as well as non-selective retirement and demobilization. The damage was particularly evident among the senior staff officers who, despite their professional competences, owing to deeply rooted national and regional divisions, were not able to respond to the challenges as it was expected by the state and party leader-

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123 For more details on the military-geographic characteristics of Yugoslav border fronts towards Warsaw Pact countries see: Андреј Божич, Милан Кнежевић, *Основи војне географије. Суседне земље* (Београд: Војно дело, 1955).

124 АЈ, 837 – КПР, I-5-с, *Белешка о закључцима са састанка код председника СИБ-а о предузимању мера поводом најновије ситуације на Блиском истоку одржаном 7. јуна 1967. у 17,30 часова.*



ship.<sup>125</sup> This shaped “the Yugoslav reality”, characterized by a firm belief that the held positions should be preserved on the one side, and the fear of a potential conflict escalation and military intervention of the Warsaw Pact on the other side, and without any hope of possible support from the NATO Pact in the event of critical situation.

Amidst the heated confrontation to the Warsaw Pact, there was still hope of making allies among the nearest neighbours. Military intervention of five Warsaw Pact countries on Czechoslovakia led to improved relations between Yugoslavia and Albania that condemned the military intervention and formally left the membership in the Pact, from which it essentially distanced itself back in 1961. Faced with the threat of armed intervention, the two countries strove to reinforce their defence capacities. Longstanding conflict, ideological obstacles, apprehension of the Albanian state and political leaders of returning to the shadow of a much bigger and stronger neighbour were the reasons why the initial warming of the relations stayed at a general level, without a stronger and more precise mutual connection. The events in Czechoslovakia created the room for mutual dialogue, but did not enable a closer and more active joining of the two neighbouring countries. Additionally, foreign affairs that led to the current Yugoslav-Albanian aligning started reshaping, which significantly reflected on the nature of their mutual relations, creating a favourable setting for re-emergence of old problems that had been pushed aside in light of the more pressing matters.<sup>126</sup>

Concurrently, the position of the Romanian state management regarding the USSR and Warsaw Pact offered a wider perspective for Yugoslavia. Clenched between the Soviet Union, Hungary and Bulgaria, although not a negligible country in terms of its geographic and demographic potentials, from a military perspective Romania was seen as inferior compared to the alliance it belonged to. Economically and military dependent on the Soviet Union and its allies, widely open towards its socialist neighbours, it could potentially rely only on the support from Yugoslav side. Such belief was also underpinned by the fact that the fears caused by the events in Czechoslovakia were also fuelled by earlier disagreements with the Soviets. For this reason, the reactions of Yugoslav and Romani-

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125 For more details on the overall situation in JNA during the second half of 1960s see: Bojan Dimitrijević, *Jugoslovensko ratno vazduhoplovstvo 1942–1992* (Beograd: ISI, 2006); Id, *Modernizacija i intervencija. Jugoslovenske oklopne jedinice 1945–2006* (Beograd: ISI, 2010).

126 Александар Животић, „Југославија, Албанија и чехословачка криза (1968–1971)“, *Токови историје*, 2, (2012.), 62–85.

an side to the intervention in Czechoslovakia were almost identical. Similarly to the Yugoslav state, military and party top, Romanian leadership launched a number of measures aimed at increasing country's entire defence capacities and announcing a general mobilization of the Romanian society in order to put up resistance in the event of intervention by the Warsaw Pact countries.<sup>127</sup> At first diffidently, but afterwards quite openly, Romanian side inquired about the Yugoslav support in case of Soviet intervention in Romania. Romanians believed that, if under Soviet attack, they would be exposed to a swift invasion of powerful Soviet troops, and the only safety would come from the Yugoslav side. During his talks with the Romanian delegation led by Nicolae Ceausescu, which were held in Vršac in late August 1968, Josip Broz responded that Romania could fully rely on a safe Yugoslav border. However, Romanians implied that in case of Soviet intervention they would leave the zone Timișoara – Turnu Severin open and unprotected, and they wanted to know if in that case there was a possibility for interventionist forces to enter Yugoslavia and from there progress further to the Romanian territory. Josip Broz guaranteed to the Romanian side that such scenario was not the least expected. Nevertheless, the conversation occasionally took an unpleasant tone. Clarifying the significance that said zone would have for Romania in the event of intervention, Ceausescu explained that this would be the only supply route for the Romanian army due to a potential blockade of the Red Sea. Realizing what was the future direction of the talks desired by the Romanian side, Broz promptly reacted and stressed that in such case Romanians could count on a safe hinterland, but should they enter the Yugoslav territory they would have to be aware of the Yugoslav principle to act in accordance with international norms. He suggested that in that event, the Romanian heavy weaponry should be transferred to the Yugoslav territory to avoid being seized by the Soviets. This response startled the Romanians. They continued stressing the importance of said zone and their intention to leave their territory, while Broz reiterated his willingness to accept the Romanian weaponry, but not the army, as this could be used by the Soviets as an argument for attack. He further assured the Romanian side that Yugoslavia would refrain from any attacks. He denied consent for the supply through the Yugoslav territory, avoiding a precise response

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127 For more details on the position of Romania in the Warsaw Pact, the fear of its leadership of potential Soviet military intervention and accelerated military preparations see: Petre Opris, *Romania in Organizatia Tratatului de la Varsovia 1955-1991* (Bucaresti: Editura Militara, 2008).

and insisting that concrete modalities of aid to be provided to Romania if under attack had not been discussed yet and should be carefully considered. As the talks progressed, Broz tried to make clear to the Romanian side that he did not find the Romanian position more difficult than that of Yugoslavia, and that he did not see significant differences between the Yugoslav and Romanian position in terms of their relations to the neighbouring countries. He advised the Romanians to act in a conciliatory manner, to underscore their obligations pursuant to the Warsaw Pact and emphasize their loyal position. Two sides jointly agreed that Soviet policy was a reflection of fear from potential democratization, and that the intervention itself was a result of a long-term aspiration to suppress democratic or self-governing social relations.<sup>128</sup> Demonstrating the Yugoslav policy of consistently adhering to the proclaimed principles of international relations, as well as relations within the socialist camp, Yugoslav President, as the ultimate creator of the Yugoslav policy, endeavoured to provide the necessary support to the Romanian side, but also to suggest a more flexible policy towards the Soviet Union that would enable them not only to avoid the provocation of a direct intervention, but also to map the future normalization of mutual relations while managing to maintain the right to their own social and economic progress. Consequently, this not only eliminated the threat of a potential military intervention to the territory of Romania, but also created important preconditions for comprehensive strengthening of the Yugoslav-Romanian relations in the future, particularly in the area of mutual foreign trade, joint construction of infrastructure and energy facilities, cooperation in the field of machine industry, as well as joint defence industry projects, but without concrete military obligations and establishing a potential military alliance.<sup>129</sup>

However, from spring 1969, there was an evident Soviet desire to resolve the situation and resume the interrupted negotiations on various matters relevant for the European security, which was a direct consequence of the escalation of Soviet-Chinese conflict, stark contradictions with the western world, as well as emergence of a number of internal problems. Instead of fearing that the Soviets would conceal their actual attempt to restrict and control the Yugoslav foreign policy potential

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128 AJ, 837 – КПП, I-3-а, Румунија, *Забелешка о разговорима Тито – Чаушеску, 24. август 1968. године.*

129 Владимир Цветковић, „Југословенско-румунски односи у данима совјетске интервенције у Чехословачкој 1968. године, у: *1968-четрдесет година после*, уредник Радмила Радић (Београд: ИНИС, 2008), 167-174.

by inviting them to consultations at the highest level, leadership of SFRY believed it was necessary to improve the relations with USSR. Exacerbation of the internal crisis, fragmentation of the single Yugoslav economic area, increasingly pronounced nationalism and growing independence aspirations of the republics, motivated the Yugoslav state leaders to accelerate the normalization of relations with USSR and Warsaw Pact countries. From the Soviet perspective, the nascent rapprochement of Yugoslavia with the East represented only one of the evident results of the new steps taken in the foreign policy arena that could lead to closer ties with the Warsaw Pact, while preserving the non-aligned and neutral position. For this reason, in the coming days the bilateral relations between Yugoslavia and Warsaw Pact countries were determined by a constant need to maintain the balance between the necessary level of close relations and preservation of a special position and role of Yugoslavia. Normalization of relations with USSR, which coincided with the global political setting of easing international tensions, as well as the decision of the Yugoslav leadership to start building a new model of national security as part of setting up a new system of collective European security, created a positive atmosphere regarding the relations with USSR and their allies. Close cooperation during the Middle East crisis of 1973, as well as Soviet support to the integrity of Yugoslavia during the "Croatian Spring" in 1971 fortified the bilateral ties and opened the prospects for further development of the political, economic and military cooperation.<sup>130</sup>

However, the end of 1970s brought about new challenges for the Yugoslav state leadership. They believed it was quite possible that USSR would exert strong political and military pressure on Yugoslavia, after the passing of Josip Broz Tito and disappearance of his enormous international authority. The acute phase of his illness coincided with the launching of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, which caused serious fears and doubts about the Soviet intentions towards Yugoslavia.<sup>131</sup> Nevertheless,

130 Đoko Tripković, *Jugoslavija-SSSR 1956-1971* (Beograd: ISI, 2013), 265-288; AJ, 837 – КПР, I-3-а/101-133, *Забелешка о разговору Ј. Б. Тита са потпредседником владе и председником Госплан-а СССР-а Н.К. Бајбаковом, вођеном 9. децембра 1971. у Карађорђеву*; AJ, 837 – КПР, I-2/25, *Информација о посети председника СФРЈ и председника СКЈ Ј. Б. Тита СССР-у. јун 1972*; AJ, 837 – КПР, I-3-а/101-145, *Забелешка о разговору председника Републике Ј. Б. Тита са председником Савета министара СССР-а А. Косигином. вођеном 28. септембра 1973. на Брионима*; AJ, 837 – КПР, I-1/1020, *Писмо Ј.Б. Тита Л.И. Брежњеву о ситуацији на Блиском истоку*.

131 AJ, 507/III, документ 264, *Четрдесет трећа заједничка седница Председништва СФРЈ и Председништва ЦК СКЈ одржана 4. I 1980*; AJ, 507/III, документ 265,

the fears were dispelled by the Soviet side. Even during the acute phase of Tito's illness and during the talks held "behind closed doors" following his funeral, Soviet side made it clear that USSR would defend the integrity and independence of Yugoslavia.<sup>132</sup> Amid the general confusion and open apprehension for the future of the country, which spread among the Yugoslav state and party leadership, signals from Moscow were reassuring. However, social and economic processes that took place in both countries were contradictory to the political agreement reached. The rise of Yugoslav foreign debt, constant drop of production, growing dependence on import that was increasingly difficult to finance, accentuated tensions between members of Yugoslav federation, as well a general inability to maintain the minimum level of political unison and discipline within the federation reduced the Yugoslav influence in the international arena and weakened the Yugoslav reliance on USSR and Warsaw Pact. Soviet Union also fell deeper in the abyss of economic crisis which spurred economic reforms and search for a new model of relations with the western world, indirectly imposing on Yugoslavia an imperative dependence on the western world and NATO alliance.

A visit from the new Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1988 offered the opportunity to resume the old discussion that had been abandoned in 1948, but also to demonstrate mutual readiness to reach an agreement on the courses of future cooperation. The joint declaration, announced shortly before the talks ended, underlined the need for a broad cooperation while respecting general and reconfirmed principles.<sup>133</sup> At that time, both countries underwent serious systemic crisis. In light of

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*Четрдесет четврта заједничка седница Председништва СФРЈ и Председништва ЦК СКЈ одржана 10. I 1980; АЈ, 507/III, документ 266, Четрдесет пета заједничка седница Председништва СФРЈ и Председништва ЦК СКЈ одржана 13. I 1980; АЈ, 507/III, документ 267 Четрдесет шеста заједничка седница Председништва СФРЈ и Председништва ЦК СКЈ одржана 15. I 1980; АЈ, 507/III, документ 268 Четрдесет седма заједничка седница Председништва СФРЈ и Председништва ЦК СКЈ одржана 17. I 1980.*

- 132 Российский государственный архив новейшей истории (РГАНИ). Ф. 80. Оп. 1. Д. 936. Л. 7–19, *Запись беседы Генерального секретаря ЦК КПСС. Председателя Президиума Верховного Совета СССР Л.И. Брежнева с югославскими руководящими деятелями во время визита Л.И. Брежнева на похороны И. Броз Тито.*
- 133 Андрей Б. Едемский, „О визите М. С. Горбачева в Югославию в марте 1988 года“ у: *Slobodan Milošević: put ka vlasti. Osmi sednica CK SKS: uzroci, tok i posledice*, urednik Vladimir Petrović (Beograd-Stirling: ISI, 2008), 229-255; Елена Ю. Гуськова, „Сербия ждала поддержки. Визит М.С.Горбачева в Югославию в марте 1988 года“, *Новая и новейшая история.*, 5, (2019), 128-144.

the Soviet leadership determination to pursue the policy of internal reforms and rapprochement with the West, particularly in view of German reunification, Yugoslavia disappeared from the Moscow list of foreign policy priorities. Yugoslav leaders failed to understand the changed international role of the Soviet Union, as Yugoslavia faced grave internal crisis, collapse of communism, adamant demands for the restoration of a multi-party political system, rising nationalist movements and open claims to dissolve the federation. Shifting of the Soviet focus to its internal problems, withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Europe, termination of the Warsaw Pact and reconciliation with the West occurred in parallel with the escalation of the Yugoslav crisis and outbreak of the civil war in its territory. In the absence of a reliable support to Yugoslavia from USSR, the decision on Yugoslav destiny was made by the western countries that without hesitation sided with the entities that called for the country's dissolution. The attempt from the Yugoslav army, supported by the Soviet military leadership, to perform a coup and thus prevent the breakup of Yugoslavia did not succeed.<sup>134</sup> Violent civil war in Yugoslavia and signing of the treaty on dissolution of USSR put an end to the era when Yugoslavia tried to restore its reliance on the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact and left the country's destiny in the hands of the western political interests and NATO domination.

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134 Вељко Кадијевић, *Контраудар. Моје виђење распада Југославије* (Београд: Филип Вишњић, 2010), 141-147.



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