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SPHERE-OF-INFLUENCE POLITICS ON THE BALKANS IN THE MID-20TH CENTURY IN THE MIRROR OF THE SOVIET–YUGOSLAV RELATIONS

Abstract. – The study investigates the penetration of the Powers into the Balkan Peninsula – through highlighting the relationship between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. The article analyses the Soviet Balkan policy, the response of the Soviet Union to the German aspirations in the 1930s. After the German attack and Yugoslavia's capitulation, the Soviet Union lost the rivalry for the Balkans to Germany, and, since Romania and Bulgaria had joined the Tripartite Pact earlier, the Soviet Union had been cut off of the Balkan Peninsula. After these events the article focuses on the British-Soviet rivalry over the Peninsula. Churchill and Stalin made a secret agreement on dividing Europe into British and Soviet spheres of influence. The British policy of compromises aimed to ensure via negotiations that the people they supported were included in the Yugoslav government. The Soviet–English rivalry was in Yugoslavia, to a large extent, influenced by the war events. The Communist takeover, however, was impossible to prevent. Finally the paper analyses the geopolitical background of the Tito-Stalin split. Regarding its Balkan policy, the Soviet Union observed the terms of the 1944 Moscow agreement and it respected the stipulations thereof. The Soviet Union in its own sphere of influence, however, insisted on its unquestionable leadership (even though not always successfully, as demonstrated by the Yugoslav and Albanian examples) and it sought to prevent the formation of any alliance that could potentially counterweight its efforts..

Key words. – Balkan, great power rivalry, diplomatic relations, World War II, Tito–Stalin split.

Empires and great powers often aspire to gain influence in their neighbouring states. Partly they do so for reasons of security, that is, to create a buffer zone along their borders, while partly these efforts are motivated by possible economic advantages to be gained (markets, raw materials, concessions, capital outflow) by developing a certain political strategy. In the present paper we will be investigating the Balkans in the mid-20th century, a territory that has always been in the centre of competition among the great powers.[1]

In ancient times, the peninsula was part of the Roman Empire, and after the fall of Byzantium the Ottoman Empire took control of this strategically important region. In the power politics, the weight and role of the Ottoman Empire was taken into consideration for a long time. The decisions of the Congress of Vienna, taken with the cooperation of the defeated France, aimed to restore the balance of power in Europe among the five great powers and also implemented the principle of the great powers' responsibility. The Congress of Berlin that closed the Russo–Turkish War of 1877–1878 attempted to maintain the earlier equilibrium and to check the increasing Russian domination they sought following their victorious war. Despite all efforts, however, relations deteriorated between the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy and Russia, the two great powers that had competed and collaborated to control the Balkans, which, to a great extent, determined the composition of the European systems of alliances for decades to come. The great powers in Berlin abandoned the principle of the integrity of the Ottoman Empire and accepted the system of small states (recognized the sovereignty of Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania and the autonomy of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia. This meant that these smaller players were also actively involved in the power games of the great powers.

In the early 20th century, the political equilibrium in Europe was upset by the shifting rankings of economic power; the mounting conflicts and the opposition of the military alliances culminated in the outbreak of World War I. During the post-war peace settlements, the security policy based on the balance of power and agreements made by the great powers was abandoned and gave way to the creation of small states; the great powers hoped that the French influence and the alliance of small states (Little Entente) would provide enough defense and guarantee against the revanchist aspirations of

[1] See for example: Ördögh, Tibor. A Balkán geopolitikai szerepe. In: Géczi, János. – András, Ferenc. (eds.). *Térátlépések*. Veszprém, PE MFTK Antropológia és Etika Tanszék, 2015. 265–280.

the defeated states. Thus, a brand new order came to be in Europe: the Ottoman Empire had lost its European territories before the war, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was dissolved in order for Germany to lose its "natural" ally, and after the Bolshevik Revolution Russia also ceased to be a determining factor in European politics.

GERMANY GAINS GROUND AND THE SOVIET RESPONSE

In the second half of the 1930s the great powers' competition to increase their control over the Balkans entered a new stage. Germany exerted ever increasing pressure on the small states of Central Europe and the Balkans first by developing mutually beneficial trade relations and then by assuming the role of arbiter in territorial feuds and in developing alliance systems. In the second half of the decade the actions of Germany and Italy aiming at territorial gains largely influenced the relations of the Balkans. The non-aggression pact of August 23, 1939 between the Germans and the Soviets (Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact) indicated that the European spheres of influence were about to be redefined. In regard to South-East Europe the Secret Protocol only recognized the interest of the Soviet Union in Bessarabia, yet it forecasted a change in relations where countries that were theoretically allies cooperated and rivalled with one another at the same time. As Yugoslavian Minister of Foreign Affairs Aleksandar Cincar-Marković put it in his telegram to the Yugoslavian diplomatic representatives abroad: In the flurry of events Russia assumed an important role to play in the Balkans and "will attempt to acquire Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Turkey, (…) and the countries of the Balkan will try to find support in Russia to decrease the German pressure".[2]

Those in charge of the Yugoslavian diplomacy calculated (or hoped) in 1939–1940 that the Soviet Union would maintain the *status quo* on the Balkans and would not let Italy divide the Southern-Slavic state. Their hope was founded on reports sent by the Yugoslav diplomats abroad. In these they related that the Soviet Union wanted no significant territorial changes in the Balkans and desired that the peninsula remain neutral,[3] while they also gave

[2] Cited by: Petrović, Dragan. *Jugoslovenska politička javnost i SSSR 1922–1941*. Doktorska disertacija. Novi Sad, 2014. 602. http://nardus.mpn.gov.rs/bitstream/handle/123456789/8137/Disertacija9352.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y. (Published: Petrović, Dragan. *Kraljevina Jugoslavija i SSSR 1935–1941*. Beograd, Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu, 2017.) On the era see also: Hoptner, Jacob B. *Yugoslavia in Crisis 1934–1941*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1962.

[3] Petrović. Op. cit. 614.

information that the Soviet Union intended to do nothing on its own accord on the Balkans, especially if it was not in the interest of Germany.[4] In the summer of 1940 it became evident that after the collapse of the Western Front the international power relations had shifted, and Yugoslavia could rely only on Great Britain and possibly on the Soviet Union to protect them against the aspirations of Italy (this led to Soviet–Yugoslav arms transfer talks to be discussed later and, ultimately, to the assumption of diplomatic relations between the two countries). It was also clear that the Soviet Union would aspire to (or would be forced to) play a more significant part in the region.[5]

The Soviet Union also responded to the shift of balance in the international relations. The Soviet Union witnessed the strengthening of Germany, and therefore, following the territorial changes in Europe and during the German–Soviet negotiations of the spheres of influence, the country articulated its aspiration to increase its strategic influence on the Balkans. In the summer of 1940, the Soviet Union believed that the problems of Southeastern Europe were to be solved during the negotiations of the German–Italian–Soviet "triangle". Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vyacheslav Molotov communicated in various diplomatic memorandums and at several negotiations that the Soviet Union's main interests in the Balkans are in the countries next to the Black Sea. (The Soviets mostly supported Bulgaria against Romania, in the latter case they also mentioned territorial demands.) However, Molotov conspicuously avoided talking about Yugoslavia apart from vaguely mentioning that the relations between the two countries needed to be improved.[6] In the summer of 1940 the leadership of the Soviet Union was still convinced that Germany was interested in maintaining a good relationship with them and therefore was preparing to settle issues of foreign policy in collaboration with the Germans (even though the Germans, having disguised their true intentions were of a different opinion in Berlin).[7]

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[4] The telegram of Ivo Andrić, Yugoslav ambassador in Berlin is cited by: Petrović. Op. cit. 648.

[5] Petrović. Op. cit. 661.

[6] Волков, Владимир Константинович. – Гибианский Леонид Янович (ред.). *Восточная Европа между Гитлером и Сталиным. 1939–1941 гг.* Москва, Индрик, 1999. 246–247. Chapter V. entitled Балканские проблемы в отношениях Советского Союза и Германии в 1940 г. was written by Vladimir Volkov (241–296.). On the different interpretations of the events of 1939–1941, see also: Случ, Сергей Зиновьевич. (ред. и сост.). *СССР, Восточная Европа и Вторая мировая война, 1939–1941. Дискуссии, комментарии, размышления*. Москва, Наука, 2007.

[7] Волков–Гибианский (ред.). Op. cit. 262.

By the autumn of 1940 the problems of the Balkans had manifested on the stage of international politics: the conflicts between the Greeks and Italians escalated and the negotiations about the territorial claims between Hungary and Romania and between Romania and Bulgaria had started. As a consequence of the Second Vienna Award of August 30, 1940, the Soviet Union was presented with *faits accomplis*, although the Soviet–German Pact of 1939 postulated preliminary negotiations regarding questions that concerned the interests of the Soviet Union. The way the decision was made indicated the ambiguity of the Soviet–German relationship as well as the intention of Germany to edge the Soviets out of the settlement of the Balkan issues. As a result, Moscow protested the developments, claiming that it gave no authorization or exclusive rights to Germany in the Danube Basin.[8]

On November 12–13, 1940, Molotov met Hitler and Ribbentrop in Berlin. The documents drafted in preparation of the negotiation show that the agenda had two main aims: to reveal the Tripartite Pact's countries intentions toward the "new Europe" (including Greece and Yugoslavia) and to make clear the interests of the Soviet Union (mainly in the Danube and the Black Sea region), the consideration of which could have served as the basis for a new German–Soviet Pact (establishing the spheres of influence). Molotov reported that the warm welcome and enthusiasm shown in order to encourage the Soviet Union to co-operate with the countries of the Tripartite pact had abated by the second day, when concrete issues were discussed, and the negotiation finally "failed to produce the desired result". Simultaneously, Germany was forging secret military plans (aiming to invade the Greek mainland territories by launching an offensive from Bulgaria and thus placing Turkey under pressure), and in doing so, the country completely disregarded the Soviet interests.[9] In his memorandum of November 25, 1940, Molotov expressed that the Soviet Union was ready to co-operate with the countries of the tripartite Pact, albeit on certain stringent conditions: he wanted Germany to recognize Soviet interests (naval bases in the region of the Bosporus and the Dardanelles, influence in Bulgaria and the increase of the area of Bulgaria). However, Germany did not respond to the memorandum and Bulgaria also rejected the Soviet aspirations.[10] A few days later, on December 18, 1940, Hitler issued Directive No. 21 Operation Barbarossa, in which he ordered the leadership of Wehrmacht to work out in detail the plans for a total war against

[8] Волков–Гибианский (ред.). Op. cit. 265–268.

[9] Волков–Гибианский (ред.). Op. cit. 272–278.

[10] Волков–Гибианский (ред.). Op. cit. 290–292.

the Soviet Union. This virtually marked the end of the German–Soviet joint plans, and the two countries' co-operation and mutual respect for each other's spheres of influence was over.

Compared with the other countries of the Balkan Peninsula, Yugoslavia appeared later as a significant factor in Soviet foreign policy. Partly because of the country's geographical location, as the Southern Slavic state did not border on the Soviet Union and partly because Yugoslavia – unlike the other Balkan countries – established diplomatic relations with Soviet Union only significantly later. Besides, the Soviet state had no particular interests in the West Balkan, as opposed to the region along the Mediterranean Sea and on the East Balkan region.[11]

The development of diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia was hindered by differences in ideology and mutual distrust. For a long time, Soviet politics had been governed by two main aspects: on the one hand, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs tried to act within the customary diplomatic framework, on the other hand it was characterized by the illegal activity of the Communists, who – with the help of the Comintern, among others – propagated the world revolution and promoted the confederation of workers and peasants on the Balkan Peninsula. These latter goals did not help to build trust in Belgrade. By the mid-1920s, Moscow had come to terms with the fact that there would be no revolution in the Balkans and after Hitler had come into power, the Soviets thought that keeping the Yugoslav state as one entity would be a more beneficial solution. It was then that they started to aspire to develop diplomatic relations with the country.[12]

However, due to the objections of the Yugoslav government, the Soviet Union had to wait until 1940 to build these relations. Only in the mid-1930s, after the strengthening of Germany, did relations start to form: in London, 1933, both countries signed the Conventions for the Definition of Aggression, then the states of the Little Entente soon recognized the Soviet Union, but Yugoslavia refused to do so. On May 11, 1940, the two countries signed a trade agreement; diplomatic relations were established on June 24, 1940, in

[11] Волков–Гибианский (ред.). Op. cit. Chapter IX., Югославия перед лицом фашистской агрессии и Советский Союз was written by Leonid Gibiansky (405–504.).

[12] Романенко, Сергей Александрович. *Между «пролетарским интернационализмом» и «славянским братством». Российско-югославские отношения в контексте этнополитических конфликтов в Средней Европе (начало XX века – 1991 год)*. Москва, Новое литературное обозрение, 2011. 153–251.

a situation when Yugoslavia, concerned about possible Italian and German aggression, was seeking to find an ally at any cost.[13]

It was also in the interest of the Soviet Union to maintain the Yugoslavian independence, partly because the USSR had no significant influence in the other Balkan countries either; furthermore, the Soviets were concerned as the Central European countries were making overtures toward the Axis Powers and then joined those. In the autumn of 1940, the main foreign political ambition of the Soviets was to hinder the speedy development of the German system of alliance without the deterioration of the Soviet–German relations and without England's gaining more influence on the Balkans.[14] The Hungarian–Yugoslav Treaty of 'Everlasting Friendship' was interpreted in the Soviet Union as Yugoslavia's gesture toward Germany and as another step in the process of the country's overturning to the Axis Powers. The German–Yugoslav trade agreement was viewed in much the same way.[15]

Yugoslavia also faced a dilemma as to what country and in what manner to choose as its patron in order to keep its territorial integrity. The Soviet Union was far from the Balkans, unlike the Germans who had approached the Southern Slavic state; furthermore, Belgrade thought that Moscow was relying on their rival, Bulgaria in shaping the Soviet Balkan-policy. (However, in October–November, 1940, negotiations were on-going between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia about an arms deal.)[16] It seemed that England could hardly save Greece, which had far more significance for England and Yugoslavia received but words of encouragement to support their resistance. In the meantime, Germany exerted great pressure on Yugoslavia to join the Tripartite Pact: On November 28–29, 1940, Minister of Foreign Affairs Cincar-Marković made a visit at the Berghof. During the negotiations Hitler demanded that Yugoslavia joined the Axis Powers. In return he made a vague promise to fulfil the long-standing ambition of Yugoslavia to gain Saloniki. When making their decision, the Yugoslav leaders wanted to make sure that their state suffered no disadvantages compared with the other neighbouring small states as a result of Germany's plans.

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[13] Živković, Aleksandar. *Jugoslovensko-sovjetski odnosi 1939–1941. godine*. Beograd, Filip Višnjić, 2016.

[14] Волков–Гибианский (ред.). Op. cit. 414–415.

[15] Волков–Гибианский (ред.). Op. cit. 430.

[16] On the Yugoslav dilemmas and the negotiations of the Yugoslav missions with the Soviets, see also: Bjelajac, Mile. „Pokušaj strateškog oslanjanja na SSSR 1939–1941". *Vojnoistorijski glasnik* 56.1–2 (2006), 41–66.

After prolonged diplomatic pressure the Yugoslav regency, convinced that they would opt for the 'lesser evil' decided to sign the Tripartite Pact (three ministers resigned in protest). On March 25, 1941, the representatives of Yugoslavia signed the Pact in Vienna. The agreement included four secret clauses: Italy and Germany would respect the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia; the Axis powers would neither attempt to get Yugoslavia involved in the war, nor request any military assistance; the Axis Powers would seek no permission to transport troops across Yugoslavia; and at the demarcation of the borders on the Balkans, they would take into consideration the Yugoslav interests (particularly in Greece).[17] In the meantime, England attempted to convince the Soviet Union to support Yugoslavia; the Kremlin, however, refrained from any intervention, as the Soviets believed that the Yugoslav accession to the Pact was already decided. At the same time the Soviets secretly sent a message to the Yugoslav Communists, telling them to prepare for the resistance.[18]

Following the signing of the Pact, during the night of March 26–27, 1941, a military *coup d'état* led by Generals Dušan Simović and Borivoje Mirković took place in Belgrade; the rule of the Crown Council and the government of Dragiša Cvetković were overthrown. A new government, under the leadership of General Simović was formed. In spite of the fact that the new government refused to withdraw from the Tripartite Pact, in the Soviet Union it was believed and regarded as a positive development that an anti-German turn took place in Yugoslavia and that the new government seemed to have distanced itself from the Axis Powers. Certain Soviet leaders entertained the idea that the Yugoslav turn might result in Germany turning against Greece first, which might delay the German offensive against the Soviet Union.

On the eve of March 27, following the regime change in Belgrade, Hitler made his decision: He issued Directive no. 25 in which he ordered the attack against Yugoslavia and the annihilation of the Yugoslav state. The Yugoslav intelligence services reported German troop movements and the Yugoslav government took desperate measures to stop the German offensive. In the increasingly hopeless situation, the Yugoslav diplomacy expected to receive help from the Soviet Union. On April 3 the Yugoslav diplomats in Moscow proposed a military agreement which would have granted an obligation

[17] Волков–Гибианский (ред.). Op. cit. 455. From the Hungarian literature, see: Major, Nándor. Jugoszlávia a második világháborúban. *Múltunk* 50.1. (2005), 37–43. 33–88.

[18] Волков–Гибианский (ред.). Op. cit. 460.

for military assistance in the case of an offensive launched by a third country (by this, they virtually placed Yugoslavia under the protection of the Soviet Union). However, the Soviets offered only a treaty of friendship and non-aggression, committing themselves to pursue a neutral policy and not to support the aggressor state. The Soviet leadership wanted to avoid the clash with Germany, and did not want to be the first to break the Pact of 1939.[19] Finally, during the night of April 5–6, the parties signed the Treaty of Friendship and Non-aggression,[20] in which the term 'policy of neutrality' had been omitted, as the Soviets understood it would make the impression as if "they washed their hands".

Considering the fact that the next morning, on April 6, German troops invaded Yugoslavia, the treaty had no substantive significance. The question naturally arises: what could have prompted the Soviet leadership to sign a treaty that could potentially escalate the conflict with Germany? On the one hand, by this gesture Stalin was hoping to make Hitler refrain from attacking Yugoslavia and he hoped that this way the disputed questions of the Black Sea and the Balkan region would be decided through negotiations.[21] On the other hand, it may have seemed favourable to the Soviet Union if the Germans launched their offensive toward the Balkans, rather than against the East. These days, however, owing to the news about Germany's plan to attack the Soviet Union, a turn took place in the Soviet politics: they were calculating on the possibility that anti-German actions could be conducted in Greece and Yugoslavia, partly with the help of the English.[22] After the negotiations in Moscow, the Soviet Union also suggested to Yugoslavia to establish contacts with the English and also urged the negotiations to be started on the Soviet arms transports.[23]

The Soviet Union did not expect Germany to launch such a speedy offensive against Yugoslavia. Although the Soviets did not endorse Germany's actions on the Balkans, they did not wish to refrain from the 1939 Pact, nor

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[19] Волков–Гибианский (ред.). Op. cit. 480.

[20] Cvetković, Slavoljub. „Jugoslovensko-sovjetski pregovori 1941. o zaključenju ugovora o prijateljstvu i nenapadanju." *Vojnoistorijski glasnik* 41.1. (1991), 11–26. On the documents of the Yugoslav–Soviet relations, see: Petranović, Branko. (prired.). *Odnosi Jugoslavije i Rusije* (*SSSR*) *1941–1945. Dokumenti i materijali*. Beograd, 1996.

[21] Гибианский, Леонид Янович: Советский Союз и сербский военный переворот 27 марта 1941 года: Историческая действительность, мифы, загадки. In: Никифоров, Константин Владимирович. (ред.). *Из истории Сербии и русско-сербских связей: 1812–1912–2012*. Москва, Институт славяноведения РАН, 2014. 210–264.

[22] Волков–Гибианский (ред.). Op. cit. 484.

[23] Гибианский. *Советский Союз и сербский военный переворот*. Op. cit. 254.

did they want to side with England (while Germany's offensive against the Balkans meant for the Soviet Union that no German–English compromise could be reached, whatsoever). Seeing the rapid victory of the Germans, the Soviet diplomacy found it prudent to resolve the tension with Germany caused by the Soviet–Yugoslav negotiations and treaty; thus The Soviet Union made no objection to the German aggression against Greece and Yugoslavia, and accepted the territorial changes on the Balkans. All Molotov said to Friedrich Schulenburg, German ambassador in Moscow was: "It is very sad that, despite all efforts, expansion of the war, therefore, turned out unavoidable".[24] Ultimately, after the German attack and Yugoslavia's capitulation, the Soviet Union lost the rivalry for the Balkans to Germany, and, since Romania and Bulgaria had joined the Tripartite Pact earlier (on November 23, 1940 and March 1, 1941, respectively), the Soviet Union had been cut off of the Balkan Peninsula.

Soviet–English rivalry during World War II

The German attack against the Soviet Union marked a new phase in the history of the war: the German–Soviet Pact, which had always allowed several interpretations, broke up; and the declaration signed by 26 states during the Washington Conference laid the foundation of the United Nations and also facilitated the anti–Hitler alliance of the "Big Three". All this also meant that once the Allies defeated Germany, a new peace system would be worked out. The preparation for the new system of great powers took place in the spirit of simultaneous cooperation and rivalry; this ambiguity hallmarked the politics and relations of the Allies. A perfect illustration of this spirit is the Balkans, or, more precisely, Yugoslavia: here the local forces that had emerged victorious from the power struggle simply 'overwrote' the agreements of the great powers and chose themselves which bloc the country should belong to.

On April 17, 1941, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia capitulated never to be reborn again.[25] Two days earlier King Peter II and the Simović government

[24] Волков–Гибианский (ред.). Op. cit. 500.

[25] A detailed interpretation of WWII from a Serbian aspect: Petranović, Branko. *Srbija u Drugom svetskom ratu 1939–1941*. Beograd, Vojnoizdavački i novinski centar, 1992. See also: Никифоров, Константин Владимирович (ред.). *Югославия в XX веке. Очерки политической истории*. Москва, 2011. 305–522. (Chapter entitled Югославия в период Второй мировой войны.) On the Soviet Union's Yugoslavia policy and the Soviet support see also: Романенко. Op. cit. 314–418.

fled to Greece (and later to London through Jerusalem). During the final phase of the war the return of the king and of the government, and the establishment of a new government of unity became parts of the great power agreements. The Anglo-Saxon powers had long supported the Yugoslav government-in-exile; in 1942 the United States of America and the Yugoslav government-in-exile signed a military cooperation and assistance agreement and then concluded a lend-lease agreement. Immediately after the collapse of the South-Slav state the Soviet Union broke official diplomatic relations with the Yugoslav government-in-exile; however, the ties were not completely severed. Following the German offensive against the Soviet Union, the Soviet government faced a new situation. On July 17, 1941, the Soviets restored diplomatic relations with the government-in-exile, which meant that the Soviet Union stood for Yugoslavia's (territorial) integrity. The relations with the government-in-exile were of varying intensity, and after the Soviet Union had recognized the Anti-Fascist Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ) on December 15, 1943, these relations cooled significantly.

Several resistance movements started in 1941 in Yugoslavia. Colonel Draža Mihailović, who had been Minister of the Army of the government-in-exile, refused to recognize the capitulation of the Yugoslav army and started to organize the royalist resistance and the Chetniks at Ravna Gora. However, the royalist resistance movement that was also supported by the English, never won much appreciation in the Soviet Union, and later, following the Tehran Conference, the concepts regarding the establishment of the Yugoslav state to be reorganized also fell on deaf ears in Moscow. The other movement proved to be much better organized: following the orders of the Comintern, on June 27, 1941, the High Command of the National Liberation Army and Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia was founded with its seat in Belgrade. Josip Broz Tito became Commander-in-Chief and all members of the Political Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) were in the command. Then the CPY issued a resolution on armed resistance against the Fascist invasion. From August the Soviet Union officially started to support the Partisan movement, but it did not yet mean that the Soviets would break the official relations with the government-in-exile. For a while the Soviets only encouraged the Partisans to fight against the invaders and believed that the question of the "social revolution" could be discussed in a timely manner after victory was achieved. The Soviets also tried to restrain the Partisan efforts, as they were in contact with the government-in-exile, as well. Despite the friendly advice, the AVNOJ established in Bihać on the night of November 26–27, 1942, served not only as an organization to lead the fight for liberation,

but it also wished to achieve certain political goals as a representative body. The majority of the 52 members of the Council were Communists, but some members were from other parties while others had no party affiliation. Moscow also cautioned the Communists and the AVNOJ to be moderate: the instructions from the Comintern emphasized that the AVNOJ should not be another executive body standing in opposition to the government-in-exile, and the questions regarding the Monarchy and the system should be raised only after the defeat of the Italian–German coalition and the full liberation of the country.[26]

Out of the two resistance movements, the Communist-led Partisan movement proved more efficient (both against the Germans and the other resistance forces that followed different ideologies). Following the Italian capitulation, in August–September, 1943, the Partisan army disarmed most of the Italian divisions on Yugoslav territories; as a result, their armament improved significantly and by the end of the year they had become a 300 thousand strong, organized army. Its growing significance is illustrated by the fact that in September 1943 an English mission contacted the movement; this signified the de jure recognition of the people's liberation movement. Fitzroy MacLean already suggested that Great Britain should support the Partisans rather that the Chetniks (what is more, he called back the English government's military mission from the Chetniks and ceased to provide financial support to them). The shift in the attitude of the English was caused by the changing war situation, the military power of the liberation movement and the weakness and compromised state of the forces led by Mihailović and it also entailed the development of a new political tactics aiming to protect the English interests. The English aspired to protect their positions and interests on the Balkans and in certain parts of Central Europe by pursuing a "policy of compromises", by reducing the influence of the Communists and forcing them to make concessions and by organizing the moderate civilian forces. In this respect, the "policy of compromises" was not a particularly Yugoslav phenomenon; the reason why the English opted for this policy was that they had had no sufficient military power in the Balkans.[27]

Meanwhile, the liberation movement set out to realize its political and social ambitions, such as the renewal of the joint state of the South Slavic peoples as a federation and the Socialist transformation of the country's social

[26] Dimić, Ljubodrag. – Životić, Aleksandar. *Napukli monolit. Jugoslavija i svet 1942–1948*. Beograd, Arhipelag, Službeni glasnik, 2012. 14–15.

[27] Dimić–Životić. Op. cit. 17–18.

conditions. In the night of November 29–30, 1943, the AVNOJ became the supreme legislative body and formed a government by the name Yugoslav National Committee of Liberation (YNCL), under the leadership of Tito. The AVNOJ refused to recognize the legitimacy of the government-in-exile, and they decided that the fight against the invaders had to be increased and Peter II might not return to the country until the end of the war. While the Partisans received a remarkable amount of support from both England and the Soviet Union, they never tried to hide the fact that they regarded the latter country as their ideal. The Communist Partisan leaders took oaths of allegiance during their visits in Moscow. What also showed the international recognition of the liberation movement was that at the Tehran Conference (November 28 – December 1, 1943) the Allies agreed to support the movement with every means at their disposal. On December 15, 1943, Great Britain and the United States recognized Tito as an independent allied commander of equal standing, the Soviet Union regarded the Committee of Liberation as the one and only government of Yugoslavia and simultaneously broke relations with the government-in-exile in London.

The British policy of compromises aimed to ensure via negotiations that the people they supported were included in the Yugoslav government. To that end, on May 17, 1944, certain changes took place in the government-in-exile. Ivan Šubašić, the last Ban of Croatia, who had condemned Greater Serbian aspirations, was appointed Prime Minister, while Mihailović was left out of the new cabinet. During the summer and autumn, Churchill pressured Tito and Šubašić, and the two started negotiations on several occasions at different locations. In June, on the island of Vis they agreed to cooperate and in August, in Italy, the Šubašić government issued a statement in which they recognized the temporary governance of the AVNOJ and the people's liberation army as the force that continued the fight against the invaders. However, on August 12–13, 1944, in Naples, Tito refused to accept Churchill's proposal to unite with the government-in-exile.[28]

The Soviet–English rivalry was, to a large extent, influenced by the war events. On September 22, 1944, the troops of the Red Army crossed the Danube and reached Yugoslavia via Romania. The Soviets and the Yugoslav government agreed on close military cooperation during Tito's first official visit to Moscow on September 21–28. On this occasion Tito also made clear

[28] For more information on this see: Dimić, Ljubodrag. *Jugoslavija i hladni rat. Ogledi o spoljnoj politici Josipa Broza Tita* (*1944–1974*). Beograd, Arhipelag, 2014. 33–67. (Chapter entitled Jugoslovensko-sovjetski odnosi: pogled diplomata sa Zapada, 1944–1946.)

that if the British troops reach Yugoslavia, his army will also offer resistance to them.[29] Therefore the Brits could still hope for agreements via diplomatic means. At their mid-October meeting in Moscow, Stalin and Churchill agreed that the Soviet Union and Great Britain would have equal amount of influence in Yugoslavia. As a result, on November 1, 1944, a new agreement was concluded between Tito and Šubašić in Belgrade. They agreed that the Yugoslav government would be completed with certain members of the government-in-exile, the king might not travel to Yugoslavia before the elections and that he would transfer his rights to the Regency Council.

The Communist takeover, however, was impossible to prevent. At the elections of November, 1945, the Communist-led People's Front won a landslide victory. Shortly afterwards, the new national assembly approved the new bills about the nationalization of assets and the transformation of the country. As for the social changes, Yugoslavia followed the Soviet example and from a political point of view the country regarded itself as the Soviet Union's main ally on the Balkans. On April 5–11, 1945, Tito and Šubašić, Minister of Foreign Affairs went to Moscow and, among other things, they concluded a Soviet–Yugoslav pact on mutual assistance. This step was interpreted in London as Yugoslavia's openly and publicly siding with the Soviet Union and the English understood that the leaders of Yugoslavia abolished the policy of compromises.[30] With these steps Yugoslavia distanced itself from the West and as a result of its own voluntary actions, the country soon found itself in the Soviet bloc;[31] what is more, it quickly carried out the Socialist transformation, following the Soviet example in every aspect.[32]

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[29] Dimić–Životić. Op. cit. 144.

[30] Dimić–Životić. Op. cit. 25.

[31] A review of the Yugoslav foreign policy in the Tito-era: Pavlović, Vojislav. Ideološki koreni Titove spoljne politike. Jugoslavija kao deo sovjetske interesne sfere. In: Popov, Čedomir et al. (ur.). *Dva veka moderne srpske diplomatije*. Beograd, Balkanološki institut SANU, 2015. 223–264.

[32] Pavlović, Vojislav G. Stalinism without Stalin: The Soviet Origins of Tito's Yugoslavia, 1937–1948. In: Pavlović, V. G. (ed.). *The Balkans in the Cold War. Balkan Federations, Cominform, Yugoslav–Soviet Conflict*. Belgrade, Institute for Balkan Studies of Serbian Academy of Science and Arts, 2011. 11–42.; Никифоров (ред.). *Югославия в XX веке*. Op. cit. 525–566. (Chapter entitled По советскому образцу. Первые годы коммунистического направления.).

In the Soviet zone

The Soviet Union was powerless at the 1918–1920 negotiations when the relations of the new era were discussed and arranged; later, during the interwar period the country once again lacked the necessary influence to change the course of events. However, in the new spheres of influence created during 1944–1945, it finally got to play a major role. The country's new position was in part founded on its military activity and in part on its newly gained respect in the international diplomatic scene. In the years of WWII, the Soviet Union reached considerable military and economic potential and became a great power that was impossible to ignore when shaping the future of the world.

What ultimately determined the future of the Balkans was that by the autumn of 1944, the Soviet troops had reached the peninsula. As a consequence, all former aspirations and plans in connection with the possible landing of Anglo-Saxon troops on the Balkans had to be abandoned; also, the possibility that these troops would check the spread and growth of the Soviet sphere of influence could not be entertained any longer. It was also by 1944 that the Soviet Union's concepts regarding the ensuing peace period had taken shape, even though these concepts were not yet officially accepted at the time. The Soviet strategists believed that the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union would play the most important roles in shaping international politics in the aftermath of the war and thus these countries would have to agree on their spheres of influence. The Soviet leaders envisioned a powerful country that would never have to suffer again the aggression it experienced in 1941. To that end, the Soviets were determined to secure "favourable strategic borders" for their country. In the plans of the Soviet political analysts, the smaller countries along the Western borders of the Soviet Union functioned as a buffer zone; accordingly, the Slavic states of the Balkans and, to a certain extent, Turkey also belonged to the Soviet sphere of interest. The Soviets regarded Greece as part of the British sphere of influence. Furthermore, based on earlier Russian political traditions, they planned to prevent Turkey from gaining strength and influence in the region; they wanted to restore Yugoslavia's former borders (or with a bit of territorial gain); and they wanted Bulgaria to return the Macedonian territories obtained from Yugoslavia.[33]

The post-war settlement of the world was discussed at the highest level at the Fourth Moscow Conference (October 9–20, 1944). Churchill and

[33] Романенко. Op. cit. 352–354.

Stalin made a secret agreement on dividing Europe into British and Soviet spheres of influence. According to the proposal, Bulgaria would belong to the Soviet sphere, Greece would belong to the Brits, while in Yugoslavia the two countries would have equal influence. In connection with Yugoslavia, the proclamation issued after the negotiations said that the most important task was to unite the internal forces and "it [was] the right of the Yugoslav people to determine themselves the form of their post-war government".[34] The Allies made a decision in a similar spirit at the Yalta Conference (February 4–11, 1945): the Yugoslav Communists and civilian forces had to form a joint government.

The foundation for plans for peace had to be laid down on the theatres of war. As Stalin said once confidentially: because in this war, unlike in the previous one, whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system; everyone imposes his own system as far as his army can reach.[35] In August, 1944, the Soviet troops crossed the Romanian border and following the coup d'état of August 23, Romania aligned with the antifascist coalition. In September the Soviet government made it clear that it would not put up with Bulgaria's ostensible neutrality: on September 5 the Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria and on September 8 the Red Army crossed the Bulgarian border. The following day the Patriotic Front comprising the representatives of the left-wing parties took over and the new government declared war on Germany. The Bulgarian Communist Party that ascended to power won the parliamentary elections of 1945 and stayed in power until 1990. All those years, the Party aligned its politics with the expectations of the Soviet Union.

Before the turn of 1947–1948, as long as they had hopes to cooperate with the Western states, Stalin and the Soviet leaders had not urged the states that became part of the Soviet sphere of influence to carry out the Socialist turn (in certain Balkan states it happened nonetheless). The Soviets first only aspired to ensure the best possible position for the left-wing, and, more specifically, for the Communist parties. Besides, they demanded that the foreign policy of these smaller countries would not conflict with Soviet aspirations, while they safeguarded Soviet economic interests by establishing joint ventures. The Soviet leadership envisioned the relationship of the different

[34] Resis, Albert. "The Churchill–Stalin Secret "Percentages" Agreement on the Balkans, Moscow, October 1944". *The American Historical Review* 83.2 (1978), 368–387.

[35] Cited by: Гибианский, Леонид Янович. СССР, Восточная Европа и формирование советского блока. In: Марьина, Валентина Владимировна. (ред.). *Тоталитаризм: Исторический опыт Восточной Европы. «Демократическое интермеццо» с коммунистическим финалом 1944–1948*. Москва, Наука, 2002. 18.

Communist parties as a hierarchic system with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) on the top, but the individual parties (or later: single-party states) were not allowed to discuss important issues without informing the CPSU. The CPSU acted as a 'guiding star', showing the right direction and resolving disputes. The Soviet Union and its Communist Party expected unconditional alignment of the other Communist parties and the countries that became part of their sphere of influence. In this respect they were adamant, especially after the autumn of 1947 when the "international situation was escalating".[36]

After the war the countries of Central and Southeast Europe hoped to realize their national interests and ambitions with the help of Moscow. At first, Yugoslavia was no exception; the country particularly wanted to enforce its territorial claims as it tried to expand in every possible direction from Trieste and certain parts of Carinthia to the Baja triangle and Saloniki and to the shore of the Aegean Sea.[37] Over time it became evident that the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia had disparate visions about the future of the Balkans, and both states regarded it as part of their own sphere of influence. (Yugoslavia formed a customs union with Bulgaria, nurtured federation plans, developed special relations with Albania, supported the Communists in the Greek civil war and made various territorial claims. These will be discussed later in detail).

From the outside, the relationship between Stalin and Tito seemed most amicable. However, some tension could be felt as early as the 1945 Moscow negotiations. After the liberation of Yugoslavia, a rather self-confident Tito stated bluntly: "We demand that everybody should be master in his own house. (...) We have no wish to become involved in any sphere of influence.

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[36] On the Sovietization process in individual countries, see: Волокитина, Т. В. – Мурашко, Г. П. – Носкова, А. Ф. – Покивайлова, Т. А. *Москва и Восточная Европа. Становление политических режимов советского типа: 1949–1953. Очерки истории*. Москва, РОССПЭН, 2002.; Murasko, G. P. – Noszkova, A. F. „A szovjet tényező Kelet-Európa országainak háború utáni fejlődésében, 1945–1948". *Múltunk* 41.2 (1996), 49–80.

[37] For example, Hebrang also mentioned the territorial claims to Stalin at their Moscow negotiation of January 9, 1945. He did not receive unambiguous support, because Stalin considered the existence of the South-Slav population as the most important, and he also expected the local population to express their desire to join Yugoslavia. Волокитина, Татьяна Владимировна и др. (ред.). *Восточная Европа в документах российских архивов 1944–1953 гг. Т. 1: 1944–1948*. Москва–Новосибирск, Институт славяноведения Российской академии наук – Сибирский хронограф, 1997. 118–133.

(...) We will not be dependent upon anybody any more..." Stalin assessed these words as an attack against the Soviet Union.[38]

The Yugoslav comrades believed that their war efforts justified their will to promote their interests on the Balkans, regardless of the implicit international sphere-of-influence agreements. They aspired to further their influence in many directions,[39], therefore the Soviet–Yugoslav relations that had appeared untroubled until then were shadowed by a number of issues.[40] The Yugoslav designs, one by one, met the disapproval of the Soviet leaders, and ultimately were doomed to fail. First it was during the Trieste Crisis that the Soviet Union did not exactly support the Yugoslav aspirations the way Yugoslavia expected (although Yugoslavia acquired Istria, the country's leaders also made claims for Trieste and certain parts of Carinthia).

It was also due to the Soviet resistance that Yugoslavia could not make Albania a part of its sphere of influence. During the world war, the Yugoslav Communist Party acted as a "guardian" for the Albanian Communist Party. On November 27, 1946, Yugoslavia concluded an economic agreement with Albania on the discussion of economic plans and a customs union, which marked the beginning of the integration of the Albanian economy into the Yugoslavian. During the Greek civil war, Yugoslavia wanted to station troops in Albania. In order to express their disapproval, in October 1947 the Soviets admitted the Albanian Communist Party to the Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties (Cominform), which marked a major

[38] Романенко. Op. cit. 410.

[39] Životić, Aleksandar. Između velikih sila i ideje balkanskog jedinstva. Jugoslovenska politika na Balkanu (1945–1948). In: Popov (ur.). Op. cit. 265–284.

[40] To read more on the conflict, see: Kullaa, Rinna Elina. Origins of the Tito–Stalin Split within the Wider Set of Yugoslav–Soviet Relations (1941–1948). In: Pavlović (ed.). Op. cit. 87–107.; Banac, Ivo. *With Stalin against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism. Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1988.; Аникеев, Анатолий Семенович. *Как Тито от Сталина ушел: Югославия, СССР и США в начальный период «холодной войны» (1945–1957)*. Москва, Институт славяноведения Российской академии наук, 2002.; Lampe, John R. *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000. 241–255. (Chapter entitled Setback and the Tito–Stalin Split.); Никифоров (ред.). *Югославия в XX веке*. Op. cit. 567–595. (Chapter entitled Из друзей – во враги: конфликт с Кремлем, 1948–1949.); Романенко. Op. cit. 419–476.; Majstorović, Vojin. The Rise and Fall of the Yugoslav–Soviet Alliance, 1945–1948. *Past Imperfect* 16. (2010), 132–164.; Tripković, Đoko. Iza gvozdene zavese. Početak i eskalacija sukoba Tito – Staljin prvih meseci 1948. *Istorija 20. veka* 14.1 (1996), 89–99.; Živanov, Sava. Uzroci i posledice sukoba. In: Kačavenda, Petar. (ur.). *Jugoslovensko-sovjetski sukob 1948. godine*. Beograd, Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1999. 21–34.

turn in the Soviets' attitude; earlier they had accepted that Albania was effectively a Yugoslav satellite. With this step the Soviet Union included Albania into its own sphere of influence. (In return for the Soviet help, Albania aligned with the Soviet politics until the 1960s when the country sided with China in the Soviet–Chinese dispute, regarding both the Soviet and Yugoslav Communists revisionists. Finally, in 1961 Albania broke relations with the Soviet Union and the European Socialist countries.)[41]

At the turn of 1947–1948 the Soviet Union wanted to bring the Greek civil war to an end as soon as possible, therefore it demanded that Yugoslavia and Bulgaria stop supporting the Greek Communists.[42] That is, the Soviets upheld their end of the promise they made in the 1944 Moscow conference: they had no interest in Greece and it ended the dispute about where Macedonia belonged. (After the Soviet–Yugoslav conflict escalated, the Yugoslavs were no longer able to provide substantial help to the Greek Communists.)

During the Greek civil war the bloc politics was already taking shape and the opposition between East and West was becoming institutional. In order to strengthen the relations among the countries of the Socialist Camp, the Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties was founded in Belgrade on September 30, 1947, and then, to harmonize the economic activity within the Bloc, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) was established in Moscow, in January, 1949. In this atmosphere the Soviet Union could not afford his allies to conclude without its supervision such agreements that could have resulted in the rise of regional powers. From 1947, the Soviet Union regarded with suspicion the negotiations the Balkan states conducted with one another.

The idea of the cooperation of the Balkan states' dates back to the 19th century; while it was often represented by sentimental intellectuals, it rarely happened that several politicians in various countries of the Balkan supported the idea of a federation at the same time. While the concept of a Yugoslav–Bulgarian confederation came up as early as the last years of the war, it was impossible to realize due to foreign political circumstances. (Bulgaria was

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[41] Pavlović, Momčilo. Albania between Tito and Stalin. In: Pavlović (ed.). Op. cit. 159–167. See also: Životić, Aleksandar. Jugoslavija, *Albanija i velike sile 1945–1961*. Beograd, Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2011.; Suljagić, Boris. „Odnos jugoslavenskoga i albanskoga komunističkog vrha od kraja Drugoga svjetskog rata do prekida odnosa (1945. – 1948.)". *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 51.1 (2019), 213–230.

[42] Anikeev, Anatoly. The Idea for a Balkan Federation: The Civil War in Greece and Soviet–Yugoslav Conflict 1949. In: Pavlović (ed.). Op. cit. 169–184.

at war with the Western states, therefore those would not have recognized the federation.) Tito wanted to achieve a stronger and larger Yugoslavia through the federation; he would have preferred Bulgaria to join as a member state to Yugoslavia rather than a Yugoslav–Bulgarian dualist state. (This idea was understandably not welcomed by either Bulgaria or Stalin, who viewed it as Yugoslavia's attempt to 'swallow up' Bulgaria.) The idea of the federation also raised the problem of the Kosovar–Albanian relations, the question of Albania's accession to Yugoslavia and the issue of the Macedonian territories.[43] The Yugoslav–Bulgarian negotiations on closer cooperation did not break down in spite of the conflicts between the two countries. On August 1, 1947, in Bled, representatives of the two countries drafted agreements on political and economic cooperation and on the customs union. In the months that followed, several assistance and friendship agreements were signed by various states in the region. In his statement of January 1948, after the Bulgarian–Romanian treaty had been concluded, Dimitrov envisioned a greater federation, which, besides the countries of the Balkan, would have included friendly Central European states as well. The statement fiercely clashed with the Soviet interests. Stalin and the Soviets could not reconcile themselves to the existence of a country the size of Yugoslavia in the region, which, even though it had a Socialist social structure, could possibly counterweight the Soviet influence and around which the other countries in the region could have gathered. The Soviets more and more frequently expressed its disapproval of the regional federalist designs of the Balkans. After the Yugoslav–Bulgarian agreement was concluded, on February 1, 1948, Tito received a telegram from Molotov saying: "The Soviet Union cannot accept being put in front of a *fait accompli.*" The Yugoslav and Bulgarian leaders were summoned to Moscow. At the February 10 meeting Stalin and Molotov made it clear that they consider the Yugoslav–Bulgarian customs union as the creation of a new country which they could not but reject.[44] On February 11, the Parties signed an agreement, in which the Yugoslavs and the Bulgarians committed themselves to discussing all matters of international importance with the Soviets. In the weeks to come the decision became final: the Soviet Union would not support the Balkan federation and expected unconditional obedience of its allies.

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[43] Gibianskii, Leonid. Federative Projects of the Balkan Communists, and the USSR Policy during the Second World War and at the Beginning of the Cold War. In: Pavlović (ed.). Op. cit. 43–60.

[44] Гибианский, Леонид. К истории советско-югославского конфликта 1948–1953 гг. Секретная советско-югославо-болгарская встреча в Москве 10 февраля 1948 года. *Славяноведение* 26.3 (1991), 12–23., 26.4 (1991), 27–36., 27.1 (1992) 42–57., 27.3 (1992) 35–51.

However, Yugoslavia did not display the obedience it was required to show. Firstly, in their resolution of March 1, the CPY refused to comply with the demands of Moscow; secondly the Yugoslav leaders refused to provide information on the economic state of their country (and they also did not follow Moscow's directions in their Greek policy). The Soviet response was swift: on March 18–19 the Soviet economic and military advisors were summoned home from Yugoslavia. In the following weeks the CPSU harshly criticized the CPY. The Yugoslav leadership rejected the accusations, refused to exercise self-criticism and did not apologize to the Soviet Union.

The conflict finally resulted in the Soviet Union expelling Yugoslavia from the Socialist Camp.[45] The sentence was publicly announced in the Bucharest session of the Cominform on June 20–22, 1948. The CPY was not in attendance. The resolution, which was unanimously accepted, condemned the CPY. According to the friendly parties, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia had deviated from the proper direction, the leaders departed from the Marxist theory of class struggle, they criticized Marx's teachings about the Party and the CPY maintained an unfriendly attitude towards the Soviet Union. The Yugoslav leadership was also accused of nationalist deviation. The ideological disguise of the text suggests as if the antagonism between Yugoslavia and the other countries had had theoretical grounds. However, the resolution does not mention the genuine reasons why the CPY was condemned. After the Bucharest session, the countries of the Soviet Bloc isolated and expelled Yugoslavia. In September–October 1949, the Soviet Union and the People's democracies – with the exception of Albania – terminated the assistance and friendship agreements concluded in 1945–1947 on the grounds of "evidence presented in the trial of László Rajk". Thus, economically speaking, these countries virtually blockaded Yugoslavia.

[45] On the accusations about the CPY's leaders' anti-Marxist deviation in home and foreign policy see for example the memorandum of the Foreign Political Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU (March 18, 1948). The telltale titles of the document's chapters: I. Ignoring the principles of Marxism, II. Ignoring the Soviet Union as the leading power of the Democratic and Socialist Camp, III. Overestimating the results of the Yugoslav development on the way to Socialism, IV. Underestimating the dangers posed by rural class struggle and kulaks, V. Opportunism and liquidatorship regarding the place and role of the Communist Party in the People's Democratic State. According to the ultimate conclusion, the leaders of the CPY were not Marxists (although as it is also emphasized in a quotation by Stalin: Marxist theory helps practical work not only by making clear the course of events the classes should follow in the present but also how and when they must develop in the future), and made a series of mistakes which posed a threat in the building of Yugoslav Socialism. Волокитина (ред.). Op. cit. 787–800.

Contrary to popular belief, the Stalin–Tito split did not result from the conflicts between two leaders of similar personality, and neither did it stem from their disparate concept of Socialism and the building thereof (the latter was not even an issue in 1948). The split happened at a time when the Soviet leadership was intent on establishing their own model in the international Communist movement and in the interstate relations. At the end of the day, the Soviet Union took advantage of the conflict and used it to regulate the other Communist parties and the leaders prone to disobedience.[46]

However, Yugoslavia did not collapse after the split. Although the Western states were caught by surprise by the unfolding events, the United States soon concluded that they could benefit from the Soviet–Yugoslav conflict, and, as much as they could, they took advantage of the situation. They regarded Tito's separation as an opportunity from a number of reasons: they wanted to use it for propaganda purposes, and they also thought it would be suitable as an example for the other client states. The United States therefore committed itself to aiding Tito. America's reason was to "help keep his regime in existence as a cancer in the Cominform apparatus".[47] Yugoslavia received aid and loans from the Western states, primarily from the United States. Following the Tito–Stalin split, the USA considered the safety of Yugoslavia to be of strategic importance, and in November 1951 the two countries concluded a military agreement. Besides, Yugoslavia was seeking to find greater latitude in pursuing its foreign policy: In 1953, Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia concluded an assistance and friendship agreement in Ankara (the Balkan Pact). From 1955 the country attempted to unify the so-called noncommitted countries. A new balance in the Yugoslav–Soviet relations could not be attained before the death of Stalin.[48] In its home policy, Yugoslavia developed the model of the so-called self-managing Socialism, which in many respects differed from the practice followed by other Socialist countries. In the long run the decentralization continued, but the leading role of the party and the principle of the democratic centralism could not be questioned, and the idea of public property as the foundation of Socialism, and the planned economy that ruled out the free market economy, were also beyond criticism. Yugoslavia did not wish to permanently sever ties with the Socialist Camp; it only

[46] Murasko–Noszkova. Op. cit. 76–80. The letters and notes criticizing the leaders of the Communist parties are published by: Волокитина (ред.). Op. cit.

[47] Vukman, Péter. „Amerikai források a szovjet–jugoszláv konfliktus történetéhez". Múltunk 52.2 (2008), 198.

[48] On this topic see: Selinić, Slobodan. (ur.). *Spoljna politika Jugoslavije 1950–1961. Zbornik radova*. Beograd, Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2008.

wanted to be more independent and to achieve more latitude in its foreign policy while it also tried to increase its influence.

Regarding its Balkan policy, the Soviet Union observed the terms of the 1944 Moscow agreement and it respected the stipulations thereof (for example regarding the issue of Trieste and of the Greek Civil War). In its own sphere of influence, however, it insisted on its unquestionable leadership (even though not always successfully, as demonstrated by the Yugoslav and Albanian examples) and it sought to prevent the formation of any alliance that could potentially counterweight its efforts. The Soviets were also aware that in the Balkans, where two military blocs were present, the outbreak of an armed conflict would have been extremely dangerous, therefore they were determined to avoid the escalation of any tense or delicate situations there. In addition, they insisted that the borders remained unchanged in the Balkans, and until 1990, when their influence in the region was diminished, there had been no border changes on the peninsula.

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