

BISER BANCHEV, PhD, Research Fellow
Institute of Balkan Studies & Centre of Thracology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
Sofia, Republic of Bulgaria
natstudies@abv.bg

UDK 327(497.2)"1979/1980"
32:929 ТИТО"1980"

originalan naučni rad / original scientific paper 327(497.2:497.1)"1979/1980"
primljeno / received: 29. 7. 2022.
prihvaćeno / accepted: 23. 11. 2022.

<https://doi.org/10.29362/ist20veka.2023.1.ban.199-220>

DEATH OF JOSIP BROZ TITO AND THE BULGARIAN FOREIGN POLICY

ABSTRACT: *The link between Tito's illness and death, the events in Afghanistan and the Macedonian question is explored through newly declassified archival documents and memoir sources. In 1980, Belgrade and the world feared that Yugoslavia would descend into chaos after Tito's death. The Soviet Union was expected to invade Yugoslavia after Afghanistan in order to reach the Adriatic coast before its NATO adversaries. Soviet troops would attack through Bulgarian territory, and Bulgaria would take advantage of the situation to settle the Macedonian question in its favour. "The Bulgarian threat" has served as one of the important instruments for preserving the internal cohesion of the nations of the federation.*

KEYWORDS: Todor Zhivkov, Josip Broz Tito, Soviet–Afghan War, Macedonian question, Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations

The death of Josip Broz Tito, the Yugoslav leader of many years, had a wide variety of diverse consequences. It had a serious impact on the internal unity of the Yugoslav federation, on the regional stability, and though for a short time even on the Cold War confrontation. The etiquette proceedings related to the event was also important. Tito's funeral is often stated to have been the biggest gathering of political and state leaders of the 20th Century ("*the Funeral of the Century*") as it was attended by 209 delegations from 127 countries.¹ Bulgaria had its special role in all aspects of the above mentioned. Its specific attitude has remained somehow overlooked by the traditional analyses of the Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations. This matter was partially treated in two studies, written "hot on the scent" in the 1980-ies.² The assessments offered by them

¹ *Svet o Titu* (Beograd: Izdavački centar Komunist, 1981), 395.

² Stefan Troebst, *Die bulgarisch-jugoslawische Kontroverse um Makedonien 1967–1982* (München: Oldenbourg, 1983); Иван Боев, *Политиката на САЩ на Балканите 1975–1985* (София: Партиздат, 1988).

were somewhat not well enough understood by subsequent researchers.³ The link between Tito's death, the events in Afghanistan and the Macedonian question was pointed out in some newer analyses but was not viewed in its depth.⁴ This connection has to be fully researched, with the help of archive documents and memoir sources.

Tito was admitted in the Ljubljana hospital on 3rd January 1980, and after a number of operations and desperate efforts to prolong his life, he was officially announced to be dead on 4th May 1980.⁵ In his memoirs, the Bulgarian Foreign Minister at the time expressed his painful impression that “*by prolonging his (Tito's) life, by cutting away parts of his body the doctors only prolonged his agony*”.⁶ Governments all over the world were following the medical reports and carefully considering who the members of their delegations for the funeral should be. That needed a special consideration because of the unique place Yugoslavia had in the blocs division during the Cold War. However, the mourners from abroad had a worry much more serious than their participation in the funeral ceremony. Nine days before Tito's going to hospital Soviet troops entered Afghanistan. That served as a beginning of a large scale crisis in the international relations. The reaction of the Western countries, led by the USA, was extremely sharp – from introducing economic sanctions against the USSR to refusal to take part in the Moscow Olympic Games, and organizing armaments deliveries to the Afghan resistance forces.

The news of the event had a special meaning for Belgrade. Afghanistan was a member of the Non-aligned Countries Movement whose leader Yugoslavia was. Under the circumstances of growing hysteria in the country and abroad, combined with the unlikely probability of Tito's recovery, Yugoslavia was viewed as a possible next target of aggression. With the approaching loss of the unifying personality of the Marshal, the South-Slav federation could have become a site of internal confrontations similar to those in Afghanistan, the hostile fractions in the country seeking help from abroad. The Belgrade leaders were very much disturbed by the Soviet military action in Afghanistan because they were afraid that their country could become a victim of a similar action of “*fraternal aid*”. For them that was a second case of a communist country's aggression toward a non-aligned state, after the invasion of Vietnam in Cambodia in January 1979. As early as 30th December 1979 the Federal Secretariat of foreign

³ Стоян Германов, *Македонският въпрос 1944–1989. Възникване, еволюция, съвременност* (София: МНИ, 2012), 249.

⁴ Spyridon Sfetas, “The Bulgarian-Yugoslav Dispute over the Macedonian Question as a Reflection of the Soviet-Yugoslav Controversy (1968–1980)”, *Balkanica*, XLIII, (2012), 241–271; Артем А. Улунян, *Балканский „щит социализма“. Оборонная политика Албании, Болгарии, Румынии и Югославии (середина 50-х гг. – 1980 г.)*, (Москва: Русский Фонд Содействия Образованию и Науке, 2013).

⁵ Джаспър Ридли, *Тито* (София: Репортер, 1995), 492–493; Жан-Кр. Бюисон, „Дългата нощ на Тито“, в: *Последните дни на диктаторите*, съставители Диан Дюкре и Еманюел Ешт (София: Фама, 2015), 127–131.

⁶ Петър Младенов, *Животът – плюсове и минуси* (София: Петекс, 1992), 143.

affairs expressed Yugoslavia's disapproval. At the insistence of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Josip Vrhovec, the language used in the respective document was extremely balanced, and the Soviet Union was not openly referred to.⁷ To compensate for that the attitude of the Yugoslavs' media was a great deal harsher and condemning.

On 4th January 1980 a joint closed session of the Party and State chairmanships was convened on which the participants were informed of the health condition of the Yugoslav leader. Afterwards the Minister of Defence, General Nikola Ljubičić delivered a report. He presented the existing situation in rather grim colours.

The predominant conviction was that following the Soviet euphoria caused by their blitzkrieg action in Afghanistan and Tito's illness "it is not unrealistic to expect" that the Soviet Union would undertake acts of aggression against Yugoslavia. It was decided that Belgrade's first declaration regarding the invasion was excessively "diplomatic", and that an official position requiring the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan should be publicly announced.⁸ The decision was agreed with Tito, who approved it when his state and party deputies, Lazar Koliševski and Dušan Dragosavac visited him on 7th January. The same day at the UN Security Council the Yugoslav representative supported the proposal for immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan.⁹

Moscow's reaction followed with no delay. On 8th and 9th January the Soviet press accused the Yugoslav mass media of employing the arguments of the "imperialist propaganda" by supporting the USA's position and attacking the USSR. The most important critical comments of the TASS were published in the Bulgarian press.¹⁰ Socialist countries' media supported the view that the international law was not violated by the Soviet action since it was in accordance with the Treaty of friendship, good-neighbourliness and co-operation between the USSR and Afghanistan of 1978.¹¹ In that connection the Federal Chairmanship ordered an urgent examination of all bilateral agreements signed after 1956 so that none of them might be "used against Yugoslavia". The order was issued at a new session in Belgrade which took place on 9th January 1980. It was stated as well that the USSR was ready to assault Yugoslavia via the territories of Bulgaria and Hungary. The high rank military personnel were to be acquainted with the threat and were to check the combat readiness and the military supplies. It was decided to call up military reservists and to instruct the Party's activists accordingly. The participants were informed that the USSR and the Eastern Bloc countries refused the military deliveries agreed the previous year

⁷ Slobodan Stanković, "Belgrade's Reaction to Afghanistan: Stalinist Methods", *RFE/RL Background Report/5(Yugoslavia)*, 10. 1. 1980, 4; Tvrtko Jakovina, "Sovjetska intervencija u Afganistanu 1979. i Titova smrt", *Historijski zbornik*, LX, (2007), 299.

⁸ Raif Dizdarević, *Od smrti Tita do smrti Jugoslavije – svjedočenja* (Sarajevo: OKO, 1999), 38.

⁹ UN Security Council, Official Records S/PV.2189 – 07.01.1980, 7–9.

¹⁰ „Отпор срещу клеветите“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 9, 9. 1. 1980, 8.

¹¹ Емил Константинов, „В съответствие с правните норми“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 9, 9. 1. 1980, 7.

which was considered to be “*an alarming signal*”.¹² It is significant that on the same day Matthew Nimetz, a special representative of the USA State Department, visited the country and discussed the possibilities of providing new credits and making new deliveries of weapons. The Yugoslav media published extensive analyses explaining how dangerous for the non-aligned states the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan was.¹³

Tito had his operation on 12th January. Following his instructions and the decision of the state leadership, on 14th January at the UN General Assembly the Yugoslav representative voted in support of the resolution condemning the military intervention in Afghanistan and requiring immediate withdrawal of the foreign troops from that country.¹⁴ The tension mounted after the information that the Yugoslav leader's operation was not successful. The Yugoslav leadership began discrete informal preparation for his funeral. In the country the importance of the so-called Council of People's Defence which superseded in certain activities the Federation Chairmanship and the Party Chairmanship increased.

Higher degree of war alert was officially declared, and military exercises were carried out with called-up reservists. The hypothesis suggesting forthcoming internal instability and a possible Soviet threat for Yugoslavia was considered more and more applicable. It was acknowledged in all its seriousness abroad and was discussed at a NATO meeting in Brussels urgently summoned on 15th January. Both the NATO and the USA fixed 25th January as a final date for updating of the plans of military support for Yugoslavia prepared in 1968 during the period of the suppression of the Prague Spring. Great Britain's Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher declared support for the independence of Yugoslavia in the parliament, and the EEC accelerated the negotiations for signing an agreement of cooperation with Yugoslavia.¹⁵

The leading Western media took up the topic too. They published information about the reservists' call-up and the emergency military exercises in Yugoslavia. The German magazine *Der Spiegel* even published a special issue under the title “Yugoslavia after Tito. The next World Crisis”.¹⁶

A Soviet lightning reaction followed. On 16th January TASS published a commentary stating that “*in the Western reactionary press a new vicious campaign, inspired and coordinated by the NATO is being flared up ...in an attempt to accuse the Soviet Union of hostile intentions against Yugoslavia*”. As a proof an article in the British newspaper *Daily Telegraph* was pointed out

¹² R. Dizdarević, *op. cit.*, 40.

¹³ S. Stanković, “Belgrade's Reaction...”, 2–4; Slobodan Stanković, “Yugoslavs Tell Moscow: No Crude Interference”, *RFE/RL Background Report/12 (Yugoslavia)*, 16. 1. 1980, 3–4.

¹⁴ UN General Assembly, Record of Meeting held on 14 Jan. 1980 - A/ES-6/PV.7.

¹⁵ Memorandum From Stephen Larrabee of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs, Washington, January 17, 1980. In: *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980, Volume XX, Eastern Europe*. Editors Carl Ashley and Mircea A. Munteanu. General Editor: Adam M. Howard, 908; Ante Batović i Branko Kasalo, „Britanski i američki izvori o smrti Josipa Broza Tita“, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, br. 1, (2012), 13.

¹⁶ “Yugoslawien nach Tito. Die nächste Weltkrise”, *Der Spiegel*, 21. 1. 1980, 91–109.

because it insisted that *“the NATO should have plans for action ready in case that the Soviet Union threatens the independence of Yugoslavia”*. The TASS refuted this insinuation and declared that *“The relations between the Soviet and Yugoslav peoples are characterized by deep-rooted good feelings, with everlasting aspiration for better cooperation. The different approach towards certain international problems by no means put in the shade this essential point... mutual commitment to the principles of equality and mutual non-intervention in each other’s internal affairs”*.¹⁷

Under the circumstances more and more eyes from Yugoslavia and abroad were directed to Bulgaria. The Yugoslav Foreign Minister’s visit to Sofia agreed a long time ago was postponed. Even in the beginning of the year the Yugoslav media stated that only a few of the USSR’s true allies in the Warsaw Pact had expressed officially their support to the new situation in Afghanistan but Bulgaria was the only one of them mentioned by name.¹⁸ The Yugoslav press and top leading circles were convinced that in a possible military conflict the threat would come from Bulgaria – *“an instrument of the Soviet policy in the Balkans”*.¹⁹ It was supposed that the Soviet troops would launch their attack through the territory of Bulgaria which would make possible for them to reach the Adriatic shore ahead of their NATO adversaries. Next came the expectation that Bulgaria would avail of the problems Yugoslavia would face after Tito’s death to settle the Macedonian question. This threat was presented in official publications as well as in the secret instructions given to the Party’s activists. Bulgarian intelligence agents and diplomats reported that many Yugoslav citizens who were traditionally well-disposed toward Bulgaria, and especially some of those living in the border areas had abruptly changed their attitude and began to act with animosity and fear. A Yugoslav citizen told a Bulgarian diplomat: *“On a Party meeting we were given explanation that you and the USSR would attack us”*. The Bulgarian intelligence detected movement of troops in the region of the Bulgarian-Yugoslav border ... under the cover that exercises of the self-defence units were in progress *“with codes that the enemy was Bulgaria... The business circles expressed their fears of civil war and even an external interference”*. A Bulgarian citizen on a private visit in Yugoslavia was asked by the authorities if *“there are Soviet troops in our country”*. His relatives in the town of Leskovac told him that from 14th January all the population had been put on war alert; they were on duty rota in schools, industrial and public establishments and that was kept on during all his stay there. Exercises for assisting the UDBA in uncovering illegally infiltrated persons were carried out with the local citizens, at that the people were required to inform of any unknown person they spotted as soon as possible, and when they have relatives visiting, they

¹⁷ „Поредният блъф“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 17, 17. 1. 1980, 5.

¹⁸ Slobodan Stanković, Sl. “Initial Yugoslav Reactions to Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan”, *RFE/RL Background Report/2 (Yugoslavia)*, 4. 1.1980, 3.

¹⁹ Райко Николов, *Дипломация на четири очи. Спомени на българския посланик в Югославия* (София: Лик, 1999), 137.

were obliged to register them immediately... He noticed certain estrangement and restrain from his relatives who induced him to remain in Yugoslavia.²⁰

The Bulgarian leadership tried to demonstrate goodwill. New Year cards were sent to good many Yugoslav leaders by their Bulgarian colleagues of the same rank. From 13th January, the official party newspaper *Работническо дело* started publishing press releases about Tito's health.²¹ Personal telegram was sent by Todor Zhivkov to Tito in which he wished him “*a quick recovery and to live many more years for the further prosperity of the Yugoslav peoples*”, certainty was also expressed that “*the relations between our two socialist countries will progress in the spirit of friendship, of good neighbourhood, in the interest of the peace and socialism in the Balkans and all over the world*”. The Bulgarian press published the telegram but the Yugoslav did not.²²

At the same time, the accusations against Bulgaria became too substantial to be ignored. There were talks of two Soviet divisions already deployed at the border. The Bulgarian answer was announced on 17th January. It accused the French newspaper *Figaro* of publishing comments based on the story, fabricated from beginning to end, about “*two mechanized divisions positioned in the Bulgarian regions bordering Yugoslavia*” following „*a plan for assault on Yugoslavia via Bulgaria*”. “*This lie was further spread by the Belgian and French televisions and a number of Western newspapers*”, claiming that the source was „*certain NATO circles in Brussels... Disgust is provoked by the fact that the illness of the Head of Yugoslavia was used for speculations aiming to injure the relations between the socialist countries and to poison the international political climate. The fabricators of false news are very well aware that there are no Soviet soldiers on the Bulgarian territory, and that neither two divisions nor even two Soviet or Bulgarian soldiers are “positioned” in the in the border area with Yugoslavia but obviously there are people who need these fabrications ...let us recall Todor Zhivkov's words: “There is nothing unclear, nothings ambiguous, nothing depending on conjuncture in our foreign policy and our relations with other countries ... Our aim has always been to build our relationship with Yugoslavia as a relationship with a socialist country, in the interest of our friendly peoples, the peace and socialism in the Balkans”. This is the consistent, based on principle and peaceful foreign policy followed by the People's Republic of Bulgaria.*”²³

²⁰ Архив на Комисията за разкриване на документите и за обявяване на принадлежност на български граждани към Държавна сигурност и разузнавателните служби на Българската народна армия (АКРДОПБГДСРСБНА). Р. Литерно дело 8921, том 9, л. 127-128; Литерно дело 7279, том 8, л. 74-75; Ф.4, оп. 10а, а.е. 11, л.8-9. Информация относно провеждани мероприятия на югославските власти за засилване на охраната и повишаване на бдителността във връзка със заболяването на Тито. 3. 2.1980.

²¹ „Здравословното състояние на президента на СФРЮ Й. Б. Тито“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 13, 13. 1. 1980, 4.

²² Дипломатически архив на Република България (ДАРБ). Опис 36, а.е. 5068, л.3-4; В дух на приятелство и добросъседство. *Работническо дело*, бр. 17, 17. 1. 1980, 1.

²³ „Някому са нужни тези измислици“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 18, 18. 1. 1980, 2.

Tito's left leg was amputated on 20th January.²⁴ The hospital reports weighed additional tension in the Yugoslav society. Students' demonstration against "*the Soviet aggression*" in Afghanistan took place in Zagreb.²⁵ On 22nd January the Soviet press spread another denial "*The fabrications of the NATO propaganda that the Soviet Union "threatens the independence of Yugoslavia" can be qualified as provoking, rude and false... using Tito's illness as a pretext, the Western reactionary press day after day... is doing its best to cast a shadow of doubt on the relations between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia*".²⁶

The Bulgarian press reacted in a more reserved way and restricted itself to reprinting a relevant article of the Soviet official party newspaper *Правда*. The visit of Ivan Stambolić, Chairman of the Executive Council (government) of Serbia was covered in many more details. He took part in the agreed before the crisis trilateral meeting in Sofia with the Deputy Prime Minister of Rumania in charge of the hydrotechnical projects Nikopol-Turnu Magurele. Stambolić was invited to dinner given by Todor Zhivkov on 24th January. The Bulgarian Party and state leader talked of extending the mutual cooperation and described joint projects as "*a contribution reinforcing the good neighbourly relations in the Balkans and in Europe*". Todor Zhivkov finished by sending Tito his cordial wishes to get well soon and reassume his responsibilities.²⁷

The noisily announced official messages of goodwill concealed the failure of the trilateral meeting. Yugoslavia did not withdraw its objections against the Nikopol-Turnu Magurele project. For Todor Zhivkov however the main topic for discussion was something else. He tried to convince Stambolić to report to Belgrade that the situation should not be dramatized, and the people there should not succumb to "*foreign schemes*", to over-worry because of Tito's illness and to be suspicions towards Bulgaria. Zhivkov expressed readiness to have the public polemics on the Macedonian question discontinued and declared that "*we do not support any opposition forces in Yugoslavia though some members of the underground SKJ sought contacts with us*". Stambolić did not express opinion on the Macedonian question but denied that any "*particular*" steps were taken for the defence of the federation. His words however were of no consequence; later on the Bulgarian Ambassador was informed that "*Stambolić is not an emissary of Tito's*". A possible explanation of the latter is that the federal authorities were extremely displeased with the attempt for establishing closer relations between Bulgaria and Serbia at time when the preservation of the "*brotherhood and unity*" was an issue of "*life or death*" for Belgrade.²⁸

²⁴ „Здравословното състояние на Й. Б. Тито“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 21, 21. 1. 1980, 4.

²⁵ Slobodan Stanković, „More Yugoslav Reactions to Afghanistan“, *RFE/RL Background Report/19(Yugoslavia)*, 21. 1. 1980, 1.

²⁶ Ив. Боев, *op. cit.*, 46; „Провокационни измислици“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 23, 23. 1. 1980, 7.

²⁷ „В дух на добросъседство и взаимно разбирателство“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 24, 24. 1. 1980, 2; „Прием на другаря Тодор Живков“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 25, 25. 1. 1980, 1–2.

²⁸ Р. Николов, *op. cit.*, 139–142.

At the same time, from 21st to 25th January, a Bulgarian Party delegation, led by Tsvetan Nikolov, deputy-head of *Foreign policy and international relations* department of the Central Committee (CC) of the Bulgarian Communist Party visited Yugoslavia. The official purpose of the visit was to discuss the annual programme of cooperation between the two parties for 1981 but the bigger part of the talks was dedicated to the world situation and its impact on the bilateral relations. At the talks with his hosts Nikolov maintained the position that “*the situation in Afghanistan is dangerous for the world’s peace but it is without alternative*”. Not to answer an appeal for help in order to stop a counter-revolution and intervention of the imperialism was to fail one’s “*international duty*” and „*the international solidarity*”. At the unofficial dinner on the day of his arrival he quoted the conversation between Todor Zhivkov and the Spanish communist leader Santiago Carrillo that the brotherly socialist countries should always provide help when it was required because the history would never forgive a failure to offer assistance. The hosts accepted this message in a completely opposite way and reported to the federal chairmanship that „*there are definitely some negative indications in the Bulgarian position showing that the global targets of the Soviet Bloc configuration have included new elements*”. It was decided at the highest level in Belgrade that “*the vocabulary of Stalin’s time*” is used and threat is detected in the words that “*Yugoslavia should be helped to remain a socialist country*”.²⁹

A considerable part of the talks was dedicated to the Macedonian question. Thus, the traditional “open issues” between the two countries fit into an emerging new polemics. “*The aggravation of Yugoslavia’s policy towards Bulgaria*” was reconfirmed in a special information-analysis prepared by the head of the Bulgarian intelligence. It was a summary of the existing tendencies and data collected until that time. By pointing out the growing economic and political problems of the Yugoslav federation, the threat of internal opposition and active emigration, together with the emerging struggle for power between Tito’s eventual successors, General Vassil Kotzev predicted that “*there is no ground to believe that the new Yugoslav leadership will change fundamentally the line of hegemonism and chauvinism against Bulgaria which has been followed till now concerning all unsettled problems ... It is not to be really expected that in the period of transition the new leadership ...on its own initiative or inspired by the West would create a situation of confrontation with our country on the Macedonian question in order to settle its own internal political problems. However, the slogan about the “threat coming from Bulgaria and the USSR” will remain operative for a long time to come*”.³⁰

In the hours when the abovementioned information was being written the passions in official Belgrade showed certain relaxation. The reason was a

²⁹ Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), fond 507, Savez komunista Jugoslavije (SKJ), Međunarodna komisija, IX, 15, Odnosi SKJ sa stranim partijama i pokretima. Bugarska, a.e. 485, s.1-28; R. Dizdarević, *op. cit.*, 53.

³⁰ Архив на МБР, Ф.1, оп.12, а.е. 392а. Положение и тенденции в развитието на Югославия при настоящата международна обстановка. (30. 1. 1980).

publication in the *Time* magazine that President Carter assured Tito that “*the USA will help Yugoslavia if it is attacked by the Russians*”. This assurance was given in reply to a “*personal request*” of the Yugoslav leader. On 30th January the TANJUG denied the information and called it a pure fabrication which statement immediately appeared in the Bulgarian press.³¹ Such help had most probably been offered by the USA but making the offer public was embarrassing for the new Yugoslav leaders as they did not want to appear in need of foreign assistance. The appearance of a “*certain nuance*” in the Yugoslav approach was immediately appreciated in Sofia where they were happy with the expressed “*striving in the Yugoslav foreign policy to restore the balance in the relations with the USSR and the USA*”.³² It was tactfully forgotten that from the beginning of the year both the Bulgarian and the Soviet press had been criticising Yugoslavia precisely for its declaring that the USSR and the USA were equally guilty for the deterioration of the international security. In May at Tito’s funeral the hosts thanked the American representatives for their constantly demonstrated public support against intervention from abroad.

The official Belgrade propaganda kept on insisting that the Yugoslav peoples could fend off any attack from abroad without foreign help. For instance, the speech of Aleksandar Grličkov, member of the chairmanship of the SKJ, at a meeting of the Party activists in Belgrade was on these lines, warning all “*enemies within and enemies without*” that they would not be allowed to harm Yugoslavia. He denied the rumours that Yugoslavia was not capable to defend its unity, independence and freedom. A detail of importance was that at the same time an extensive analysis of Tito’s strategy appeared in the American press, its purpose being to discourage eventual invaders by making clear that Yugoslav army was ready to cause them extremely serious losses. The analysis was based on US intelligence data and is kept in the archives of the CIA.³³

On 6th February a subsequent session of the Yugoslav chairmanship took place. At it the Foreign Minister, Vrhovec presented the position of the Bulgarian head of state as one preaching the doctrine of “*limited sovereignty*” and the right of military intervention.³⁴

On the same day Zhivkov and the Prime Minister Stanko Todorov received the Commander-in-chief of the United Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact, Marshal Viktor Kulikov and the Chief of staff of the UAF, Marshal Anatoly Gribkov. No reliable information has been discovered so far of what those

³¹ Ив. Боев, *op. cit.*, 45; „Опровержение на една лъжа“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 31, 31. 1. 1980, 5; Т. Jakovina, *op. cit.*, 306.

³² ЦДА, ф. 1 Б, оп.101, а.е.346. Информация за отражението на събитията в Афганистан на Балканите и позицията на отделните балкански страни. (6. 2. 1980). The report was written by Tsvetan Nikolov after his return from Belgrade.

³³ Slobodan Stanković, “Grličkov: Yugoslavia to Defend its Independence with All its Means”, *RFE/RL Background Report/40(Yugoslavia)*, 25. 2. 1980, 2; Jack Anderson, “Tito’s Strategy: Make Invaders Pay”, *The Washington Post*, 27. 1. 1980, B7, (NARA, CREST, CIA-RDP90-00965R000100170146-5).

³⁴ Т. Jakovina, *op. cit.*, 318.

two officers of the highest rank in the organization did for two days in Bulgaria.³⁵ The visit was a part of the tour they were making of all East-European socialist countries, except Romania. Memoir sources claim that in order to calm down Belgrade, military exercises of the Warsaw Pact planned to take place in February 1980 in Hungary were cancelled.³⁶ Thus the movement of the Soviet armed forces in East Europe was limited to the two marshals.³⁷ Yet, that was probably what induced Jimmy Carter to state once again at his subsequent press conference of 13th February: “*we will undertake any action required for keeping Yugoslavia as a non-aligned country*”.³⁸

The Bulgarian Party and state leader also made a public speech - before the National Council of the Fatherland Front (*Отечествен фронт*). The conference was on 11th February, and Zhivkov's words were published on the next day in *Работническо дело* newspaper. The part dedicated to the foreign policy declared common interest and joint actions with the Soviet Union, and the American campaign against the Olympic Games in Moscow was condemned. In the end a review on the Balkan policy of Bulgaria was made: a general one (“*for maintaining good neighbourly relations and friendship*”) and specific one for each neighbouring country. In regard of Yugoslavia it was said: “*Recently, availing of the health condition of President Tito many media in the West took the liberty to make basest insinuations and speculations concerning Bulgaria and the Soviet Union... The People's Republic of Bulgaria recognizes the political realities and the state borders established after the WWII, and it has never had and does not have any territorial claims neither against the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia nor against any of its other neighbours*”.³⁹ Zhivkov's speech was immediately translated into several languages, and a campaign was organized for its being published in a number of countries: from Czechoslovakia and Italy to India and Nigeria, and that fact was announced in the Bulgarian press. The speech was distributed as an official document at the UN Conference of Disarmament in Geneva.⁴⁰

On 14th February without delay the head of the Balkan department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ivan Ganев handed over a copy of the speech to the Yugoslav Ambassador, Danilo Purić, offering also some additional clarifications regarding Sofia's Balkan policy, claiming that it remained true to the aims of

³⁵ „В сърдечна другарска обстановка“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 38, 7. 2.1980, 1.

³⁶ Сергей А. Романенко, *Между „пролетарским интернационализмом“ и „славянским братством“*. *Российско-югославские отношения в контексте этнополитических конфликтов в Средней Европе. От начала XX в. до 1991 г.*, (Москва: Новое литературное обозрение, 2011), 712.

³⁷ Т. Jakovina, *op. cit.*, 309.

³⁸ Ив. Боев, *op. cit.*, 46.

³⁹ Тодор Живков, „България е за мира, разведрияването и сътрудничеството“. В: *Избрани съчинения, т.30*. (София: Партизидат, 1984), 258–292.

⁴⁰ „С вяра в бъдещето“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 61, 1. 3. 1980, 1; „Ярък израз на градивна политика“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 62, 2. 3. 1980, 1; „Политика на мир и стабилност“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 92, 1. 4. 1980, 5.

consolidating the peace and security, good mutual understanding, and neighbourhood cooperation regardless of the current complications in the international situation. Purić's opinion was that mutual information about the movement of troops, military exercises and other similar activities would be a better response to the insinuations. It became clear that the Ambassador had had extensive talks with the Bulgarian Defence Minister, Dobri Djurov of which he was "pleased".⁴¹

On the next day Purić travelled to Belgrade to inform his superiors accordingly. Obviously, the Bulgarian position was extremely important for them. The Ambassador received additional instructions, and immediately at his coming back to Sofia on 27th February he had a meeting with the Deputy Foreign Minister Marii Ivanov. The official reason for it was to present Tito's letter (actually written on his behalf) of 20th February and addressed to Brezhnev, Carter, Castro and other heads of state insisting that the General Assembly of the UN should adopt a resolution condemning intervention as a way and means to settle international problems. Ambassador Purić explained that Yugoslavia was "as much against the export of revolution as against the export of counter-revolution to other countries", because it was anxious to preserve its own independence and integrity. It was believed in Belgrade that the tension between the USA and the USSR had impact on the Balkan states too. In this connection it was inquired how certain words in Todor Zhivkov's speech were to be understood and interpreted, i.e.: "*The People's Republic of Bulgaria recognizes the political realities and the state borders established after the WWII*". A clarification was required because according to the Yugoslavs there were press publications contradicting them.

According to the Bulgarian Deputy Foreign Minister, the Bulgarian policy on the controversial matters was not ambiguous. It was made known at the meetings Lilov - Vidić (1976) and Kubadinski - Minić (1979). The current international situation could not change the Bulgarian policy because it was not influenced by current events and was not conjectural. It was constant and it favoured a steady and multilateral progress in the Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations which was reconfirmed by Todor Zhivkov's speech of 11th February. Some speculations of the Western press in relation to Tito's illness stating that Yugoslavia was under threat from Bulgaria and the USSR were meant to damage the good neighbourly policy. Such allegations were categorically denied by the Bulgarian News Agency (BTA). However, the Yugoslav public was never informed either of Zhivkov's speech or of BTA's release while *anti-Bulgarian* publications always found place in the Yugoslav press which makes one believe that nothing was done to make the Yugoslav peoples aware of the Bulgarian attitude which was in favour of the development of cooperation and good neighbourly relations. The political realities showed that Bulgaria recognized the existence of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia as part of Yugoslavia, established after the WWII and the creation of a Macedonian nation but that it

⁴¹ ДАРБ, оп. 36, а.е. 5081, л. 5-8. Паметна бележка за среща с югославския посланик Данило Пурич на 14. 2. 1980.

was a difficult and time-consuming process which could not be built on anti-Bulgarian foundations.⁴²

As far as the media polemics were concerned, the predominant belief expressed in the academic literature traditionally is that “*at the time of Tito’s illness and death certain attenuation of the disputes on the Macedonian question was observed*”.⁴³ The contemporaries of the events did not share this opinion. They point out Yugoslav press particularly sharp response to the presentation of Bulgarian historical works at the Indian International Book Fair in Delhi as well as to the celebrations related to the 102 anniversary of the San-Stefano Treaty.⁴⁴ The Embassy in Belgrade’s regular report on the *anti-Bulgarian* propaganda in Yugoslavia showed that it had decreased in comparison to the previous year but it was during the period after Tito’s death not before it. Persistent publishing of books with *anti-Bulgarian* contents was also reported.⁴⁵

The Council of People’s Defence had a session on 13th March in Belgrade. The possibility of a Soviet surprise attack was discussed. It was assumed that 15–20 divisions could take part in it, and when the Soviet allies from the Warsaw Treaty were taken into consideration, the number might reach 50 divisions or 1 million soldiers. A probable Soviet attack would provoke NATO troops situated in Greece and Italy to enter Yugoslav territory too. The country was getting ready for a partisan war. The conflict could be triggered as a result of struggles for power after Tito’s death, and separatists’ riots might outbreak in each one of the republics with about additional 50 thousand armed emigrants taking part in them. A serious cause for concern was the congress of the Croatian anti-communist emigration in London in January whose slogan was: “Better Yugoslavia divided and occupied by Russia than Yugoslavia united and supported by the USA”.⁴⁶ When comparing the above stated with the information found in declassified American documents one is impressed with the fact that the many parameters of the supposed attack reported by the Yugoslav military experts are completely identical with the American military analyses.⁴⁷ The main difference is that according to the American analyses the possibility for such action was a last, fourth, least possible scenario, only in case that Yugoslavia grew considerably weaker owing to inner separatism and extreme acts on part of the emigration. Obviously, Yugoslavs considered it to be a first de-

⁴² ДАРБ, оп. 36, а.е. 5077, л. 2-5. Паметна бележка за среща с југославскиј посланик Данило Пурич на 27. 2. 1980. (за служебно ползване).

⁴³ Ст. Германов, *op. cit.*, 249, repeats without checking St. Troebst, *op. cit.*, 146.

⁴⁴ Slobodan Stanković, “Yugoslav Polemics with Several Soviet Bloc Countries Intensified”, *RFE/RL Background Report/59(Yugoslavia)*, 12. 3. 1980, 6–7.

⁴⁵ ДАРБ, оп.38, а.е. 3240, л.46-51. Справка за антибългарската пропаганда в Југославија от јануари до октомври 1980 г.

⁴⁶ R. Dizdarević, *op. cit.*, 49–50, 53–54; A. Batović i Br. Kasalo, *op. cit.*, 15.

⁴⁷ Yugoslavia: US Politico-Military Strategy. Paper Prepared in the Department of State Washington, March 3, 1980. In: *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980, Volume XX, Eastern Europe*. Editors Carl Ashley and Mircea A. Munteanu. General Editor: Adam M. Howard, 925–928.

gree danger. The scenario gave an important place to the threat from the Eastern border. According to a Belgrade journalist used as an open information source by the Bulgarian intelligence: “Yugoslavia is not afraid of an attack or provocation of Bulgaria itself but the Yugoslav leadership believes that in case of a likely increase in the tension between the Great Powers, i.e. the USA and the USSR, in relation to Yugoslavia, regardless of Bulgaria’s will its territory may be used against Yugoslavia. Therefore, the reassurances, proposals and so on made in the speeches of the leader number one of the PRB and the BCP were never communicated to the Yugoslav public. The intensification of the anti-Bulgarian propaganda and the indoctrination of the population are related to the international tension and are decided by the federal leadership and not from Skopje. The measures against the Bulgarian citizens and among the Bulgarian minority are means of protection in case of even a higher degree of confrontation between the foreign forces around Yugoslavia”.⁴⁸

In fact, the Soviet activity during that period was reduced predominantly to the energetic measures taken by Moscow diplomatic services within the Non-aligned Countries Movement aiming to limit the effect of the Yugoslav appeals for withdrawal of the foreign troops from Afghanistan. The Yugoslav leaders accepted that the danger of a Soviet armed attack decreased because of Moscow’s growing problems in Afghanistan but they believed that the political pressure exerted by the Soviet satellites remained unchanged, once again assigning the first place to Bulgaria.⁴⁹

There was a leakage of CIA secret analyses into the US press maintaining that the destruction of Yugoslavia continued to be Moscow’s objective but no direct invasion of the Soviet army was expected at Tito’s death. It was forecasted that the USSR would simply wait for Yugoslavia’s destabilization by internal controversies.⁵⁰

In that period Bulgaria was an object of increased interest in some of the different Yugoslav emigrant organizations. Todor Zhivkov received a letter with a proposal for cooperation from the so-called *Committee for destruction of Yugoslavia* whose seat was in Paris. The increased activity of the Croatian emigration and the pro-Soviet opposition groups in the country gave reason for serious concern in Yugoslavia which was noticed by the US intelligence analysts.⁵¹

Another cause for Belgrade’s dissatisfaction was found. There emerged an idea that the East-European countries’ media offered very little information

⁴⁸ АКРДОПБГДСРСБНА. Р. Литерно дело 7278, том 2, л. 48–49.

⁴⁹ R. Dizdarević, *op. cit.*, 52–53.

⁵⁰ Anderson, Jack, “Soviet Strategy: Unravel Yugoslavia”, *The Washington Post*, 2. 3. 1980, C7, (NARA, CREST, CIA-RDP90-00965R000100170128-5).

⁵¹ “Lettre de Comité mondial pour la destruction de la Yougoslavie, Ivan Ilitch, Alia Bosnitch – Todor Jivkov, Premier Secrétaire du Comité Central du Parti Communiste Bulgare et Président du Conseil d’Etat de la République Populaire de Bulgarie”, March, 1980. – quoted in Kaloyan Metodiev, „Bugarsko-hrvatski politički odnosi 1990.-2015“, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, br. 2, (2016), 333; National Intelligence Daily, “Yugoslavia: Concern About Terrorism”, 1. 4. 1980, (NARA, CREST).

of Tito's illness; it was at a ratio of 5:95 in favour of West Europe.⁵² An Italian journalist openly posed the question to Ambassador Ivan Ganey. The Ambassador denied the allegation and offered proves for the opposite.⁵³ As a matter of fact the Bulgarian press published releases at all stages of Tito's treatment.⁵⁴ It became obvious when they were compared date by date with the official medical bulletins.⁵⁵ Nevertheless there were certain differences. All the releases were set in small squares usually consisting of three sentences. In variance to it the Western press accompanied its releases with pictures taken in the hospital in Ljubljana, and there were also extensive comments on the future of Yugoslavia. At the same time it was impossible to deny that till that time no other socialist leader was paid such attention, and that was impressive. In order to avoid questions and to discourage rumours among the Bulgarian population, a topic was sought to divert the public attention. The illness of the Vietnamese president Ton Duc Thang was a suitable one. Actually, he had been on deathbed since August of the previous year but the press started to write about his death and subsequent funeral only in March 1980. It was impossible to avoid the irony that Vietnam was the socialist country most attacked after the USSR by the Yugoslav press as it was the first one to send its troops in a non-aligned country (Cambodia).⁵⁶

⁵² Slobodan Stanković, "East Silent, West Full of Praise for Tito", *RFE/RL Background Report/50 (Yugoslavia)*, 4. 3. 1980, 1.

⁵³ ДАРБ, оп. 36, а.е. 4658 в, л. 29–30.

⁵⁴ „Здравословното състояние на президента на СФРЮ Й. Б. Тито“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 13, 13. 1. 1980, 4; „Здравословното състояние на Й. Б. Тито“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 15, 15. 1. 1980, 6; „Здравословното състояние на Й. Б. Тито“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 21, 21. 1. 1980, 7; „Здравословното състояние на Й. Б. Тито“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 26, 26. 1. 1980, 5; „Здравословното състояние на Й. Б. Тито“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 42, 11. 2. 1980, 7; „Съобщение на ТАНЮГ“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 43, 12. 2. 1980, 5; „Съобщение на ТАНЮГ“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 45, 14. 2. 1980, 6; „Здравословното състояние на Й. Б. Тито“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 46, 15. 2. 1980, 8; „Здравословното състояние на Й. Б. Тито“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 47, 16. 2. 1980, 5; „Здравословното състояние на Й. Б. Тито“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 48, 17. 2. 1980, 4; „Здравословното състояние на Й. Б. Тито“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 58, 27. 2. 1980, 7; „Здравословното състояние на Й. Б. Тито“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 63, 3. 3. 1980, 7; „Здравословното състояние на Й. Б. Тито“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 70, 10. 3. 1980, 7; „Здравословното състояние на Й. Б. Тито“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 75, 15. 3. 1980, 5; „Здравословното състояние на Й. Б. Тито“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 79, 19. 3. 1980, 7; „Здравословното състояние на Й. Б. Тито“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 83, 23. 3. 1980, 3; „Съобщение на агенция ТАНЮГ“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 104, 13. 4. 1980, 3; „Здравословното състояние на Й. Б. Тито“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 106, 15. 4. 1980, 5; „Съобщение на ТАНЮГ“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 113, 22. 4. 1980, 6; „Здравословното състояние на Й. Б. Тито“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 115, 24. 4. 1980, 5; „Здравословното състояние на Й. Б. Тито“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 120, 29. 4. 1980, 6.

⁵⁵ Grupa autora, *Titova poslednja bitka* (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1981).

⁵⁶ „Здравословното състояние на президента на СР Виетнам“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 86, 26. 3. 1980, 8; *Работническо дело*, бр. 91, 31. 3. 1980, 1; „Най-искрени съболезнования“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 93, 2. 4. 1980, 1; „Славен син на своя народ. Телеграма от Тодор Живков и Станко Тодоров“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 95, 4. 4. 1980, 8; The funeral in *Работническо дело*, бр. 96, 5. 4. 1980, 8.

Under such circumstances Bulgaria began to prepare the relations with its West neighbour after Tito's death. The intelligence prepared an analysis, offering the following assessments: *"no illusion is to be created that the supporters of the idea of strong Party and strong Yugoslavia are nearer to us. On the contrary, objectively viewed, such Yugoslavia will be a much more dangerous adversary as these are the forces that will most definitely support Skopje's claims against Bulgaria. At the same time the strengthening of the positions of the Croatian and Slovenian leaderships i.e., the supporters of a broader autonomy of the individual republics, will weaken the links between the republics and will take the edge of the conflict between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. That is why the assessment of the real prospects for the relations from the points of view of the two main groups should not be based on preconceived ideas of which one of them will be closer to us and which one will not. In essence both groups are of anti-Bulgarian orientations but if the Croatian-Slovenian group prevails, the contacts between us would become closer but Yugoslavia's orientation will become even more pro-Western".*⁵⁷

The rulers in Sofia needed the forecasts of intelligence officers and diplomats to enable them to get ready for the forthcoming change in Belgrade. On 1st April 1980 the Politburo of the BCP adopted a resolution concerning the relations with Yugoslavia in the "post-Tito" period. On the ground of an analysis that our Western neighbour's problems in all fields were becoming worse, the possibilities of setting in motion crisis processes in the federation were considered, such as: its becoming financially dependent on the West, activation of various opposition forces and of clerical elements in the Western republics and among the Muslim population in Bosnia and Herzegovina. No change in the Yugoslav policy in regard of Bulgaria was expected, and subsequently in order to protect the Bulgarian interests, a number of complex measures in the fields of politics, economics and culture were planned. Some of them were a strong defence of the Bulgarian positions on the Macedonian question and immediate rejection of the Yugoslav propaganda allegations against Bulgaria in the Bulgarian and world press. There was not even the slightest hint of forceful interference but a hope was expressed that the old Cominformburo supporters would come back to power in Belgrade.⁵⁸

Ambassador Nikolov noticed the curious fact that the memo addressed to the highest Party leadership was signed not only by the Foreign Minister Petar Mladenov but also by Lyudmila Zhivkova who officially was in charge of the cultural affairs but not of the foreign policy ones. Russian authors were also impressed with that and explained it with the latter's family ties and ambitions for power. It is possible that the matter viewed from abroad could look so but this assumption is too convenient to be true. The truth should be possibly sought in two other motives. First – Petar Mladenov wanted to protect himself against

⁵⁷ АКРДОПБГДСРСБНА. Р. Литерно дело 7278, том 2, л. 59–63.

⁵⁸ ЦДА, Ф. 1Б, оп. 64, а.е. 586. Протокол № 8 от 1 април 1980 г. от заседание на Политбюро на ЦК на БКП.

the risk that some proposals might be viewed in Moscow as “nationalistic”. Second – the preparation of the celebrations of 1300 years existence of the Bulgarian state was in progress, and they were on the initiative of Lyudmila Zhivkova and controlled by her. A part of those celebrations were events in direct connection with the disputes with Yugoslavia related to history, and Belgrade and Skopje accepted them precisely as such.⁵⁹

The measures also included establishing active relations on all levels. On 24th April the Bulgarian Ambassador paid visit to the secretary of the Chairmanship of SKJ, Dušan Dragosavac in order to give him a letter from Todor Zhivkov who was inviting him and his family for a holiday in Bulgaria at any time of his convenience. The Ambassador pointed out that it might be a good reason for meeting his host, Todor Zhivkov, and their talks would be good for the improvement of the relations between the two parties. Dragosavac said that the Leadership of SKJ adopted a resolution against the working holidays as a form of cooperation with other parties. Rayko Nikolov inquired about the reason of the postponing of Yugoslav Foreign Minister, Vrhovec’s visit to Sofia and drew attention to Todor Zhivkov’s speech at the National Council of the Fatherland Front which expressed “good feelings” toward Yugoslavia and denied as groundless all speculations which appeared in relation to Tito’s illness. The diplomat “wondered” at Yugoslav media’s not paying the due attention to that speech, and brought to notice the way Ivan Stambolić was met in Bulgaria which according to him was another proof of Sofia’s goodwill for the development of Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations. Dragosavac replied that he did not know why Vrhovec had postponed his visit and the media had not published any information about Todor Zhivkov’s speech. The Ambassador expressed the Bulgarian disagreement with the Yugoslav position in regard of Afghanistan which was equally critical towards both opposite blocs. Dragosavac agreed that the imperialism was extending its pressure but he thought that it could not be denied that the socialist countries had also engaged in acts of aggression as the examples with Vietnam against Cambodia and China against Vietnam showed.⁶⁰

Josip Broz Tito died on 4th of May. Even then Bulgaria was not forgotten. A day before Tito’s death a meeting took place in the hospital between members of the Yugoslav leadership and the medical consilium Stane Dolanc, one of the most influential people in the party, in charge of the inner security of the state, addressed the physicians with an appeal to fight for the life of the chairman as: “in Bulgaria a column of tanks had moved toward the Yugoslav border that same day and stopped a few meters from it before turning back, after some time. Because of this every day, every hour of the president’s life is precious”.⁶¹

⁵⁹ P. Николов, *op. cit.*, 149; Ар. Улунян, *op. cit.*, 829.

⁶⁰ AJ, 507, IX,15 a.e. 487, л.1-3, Zabeleška o razgovoru sekretara Predsedništva CKSKJ dr Dušana Dragosavca sa ambasadorom NR Bugarske u Beogradu, Rajkom Nikolovim, 24 aprila 1980; P. Николов, *op. cit.*, 148.

⁶¹ Predrag Lalević, *S Titom po svetu*, „Drama na granici” (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2. izd., 2012), 170, quoted in Joze Pirjevec, *Tito and His Comrades* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2018), 454.

The sentiments with which the news of Yugoslav long time leader's death was met in Sofia were expressed in the memoirs of the Bulgarian Foreign Minister: "At last God had mercy on Tito and took his sinful soul".⁶² Mladenov wrote that because of the long-time of Tito's agony they "had enough time to do all the necessary" preparations required by the etiquette. The reality, though, turned out to be a little more complicated. The members of the funeral delegations were chosen under the shadow of fear and mistrust prevailing in the last months. In view of the aggravation in the Soviet-Yugoslav relations Moscow decided to send to the funeral its Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin. The previous year at the funeral of Tito's closest associate and collaborator, Edvard Kardelj the Soviet state was represented only by its Ambassador in Belgrade. Analyses from both sides of the Atlantic showed that that might have only added to the insecurity of Yugoslavia's future. On 22nd of April the USA Vice State Secretary renewed the assurances of his country that they would give a relevant response to "*any open pressure applied on Yugoslavia by the Soviet Union and its allies, aiming to undermine its unity, territorial integrity and independence*".⁶³ On 28th April in Paris a meeting of the European communist parties took place with their Yugoslav comrades not attending. Moscow decided that a public gesture was required. Their delegation was led by Leonid Brezhnev himself. In Belgrade he, first among the 209 delegations attending, laid wreath at Tito's grave. In order to evade meeting Brezhnev, the American President Carter sent to the funeral his Vice-President W. Mondale and his mother, and he himself came to Yugoslavia several months later.

All socialist countries' leaders followed Leonid Brezhnev's example. Bulgaria originally planned to send to the funeral its Prime Minister Stanko Todorov, and had even informed about it Belgrade. Instead of him at the last moment Todor Zhivkov set off. Petar Mladenov remembered that this decision was made after a telephone call from Kremlin. He stated that he had been insisting that Stanko Todorov should go but this does not sound credible.⁶⁴ According to the official announcement and Foreign Minister's memoirs, the delegation consisted of Todor Zhivkov, Petar Mladenov and Ambassador Rayko Nikolov. Nikolov included in it as well the chief of Zhivkov's personal guard, Gen. Iliya Kashev. The latter was mentioned in the official Yugoslav information releases together with the head of the state protocol service, Boris Djibrov.⁶⁵

On 5th May, without delay a telegram of condolences at the death of Josip Broz Tito was sent without delay by Todor Zhivkov to the SKJ and the chairmanship of the SFRJ. "*For more than 40 years comrade Tito led the Party contributing enormously for the success of the Yugoslav peoples' struggle for freedom, against the fascism and capitalism, for the building of contemporary*

⁶² П. Младенов, *op. cit.*, 143. The Yugoslav Funeral Commission was formed as early as 15 January!

⁶³ Ив. Боев, *op. cit.*, 46–47.

⁶⁴ П. Младенов, *op. cit.*, 143; Р. Николов, *op. cit.*, 150.

⁶⁵ П. Младенов, *op. cit.*, 143; Р. Николов, *op. cit.*, 150; *Svet o Titu*, 398.

socialist Yugoslavia. A prominent statesman and politician, he was one of the most distinguished figures and creators of the Non-aligned Countries Movement. On these days of sorrow, the Bulgarian communists and working people most sincerely wish to fraternal Yugoslavia to develop as a peaceful and stable socialist state. We express our firm conviction that under the leadership of the BCP and the SKJ the relations between our two parties, states and peoples will develop and expand for the sake of the peace and socialism in the Balkans, Europe and the world.” This text was sent with an open telegram to the Bulgarian Embassy in Belgrade and was published in the Bulgarian press.⁶⁶

The media in Sofia showed extraordinary activity. Immediately on 5th May information of Tito’s death and an obituary with Tito’s portrait were published. On the following day the Bulgarian readers were informed in all details of the seven days mourning in Yugoslavia, of the history of Tito’s death and the election of Lazar Koliševski as chairman of the chairmanship of the SFRJ, of the condolences expressed by Bulgaria and the USSR. On 7th May pictures of Todor Zhivkov and large group of party and state functionaries signing the book of condolences in the Yugoslav Embassy were published as well as information of a memorial session in the big hall of the Palace of the Yugoslav Trade Unions in Belgrade. On 8th May the foreign delegations present in Belgrade were enumerated, the first of them to be mentioned being the Soviet delegation, and the information of Todor Zhivkov laying a wreath at the coffin of the deceased was accompanied by a picture. On 9th May the reports of the official funeral were published, and it was emphasized that the first to “show respect” at the tomb was L. Brezhnev. Todor Zhivkov’s meetings and talks with other official guests were also reported in all details, and finally it was shown how the Bulgarian and the Soviet delegations were leaving Belgrade.⁶⁷

The world’s press, radio and television showed similar interest. A detailed report of TANJUG stated that though the Bulgarian television did not show the funeral ceremony live, it showed a special report about it.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ „Най-дълбоки съболезнования“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 127, 6. 5. 1980, 1; ДАРБ, оп. 36, а.е. 5068, л.7-10, 11-14, 29-30. There is a handwritten note on the document stating that no reply has been received.

⁶⁷ „И. Б. Тито – президент на СФРЮ и председател на Съюза на югославските комунисти“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 126, 5. 5. 1980, 8; „Седемдневен траур в СФРЮ по случай смъртта на Й.Б.Тито, Съобщение на ТАНЮГ, Медицинско заключение, Дълбоки съболезнования от ЦК на КПСС, Президиумът на върховния съвет и Министерският съвет на СССР“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 127, 6. 5. 1980, 1, 8; „Най-дълбоки съболезнования, Възпоменателна сесия за Й.Б.Тито“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 128, 7. 5. 1980, 1, 6; „Чуждестранни делегации за траурната церемония в Белград, Партийно-държавна делегация, ръководена от другаря Тодор Живков замина за Югославия, Дълбоки съболезнования“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 129, 8. 5. 1980, 1; „Погребението на Й.Б. Тито, Срещи на др. Тодор Живков, Съветската делегация отпътува от Белград, Партийно-държавната делегация, ръководена от др. Тодор Живков се завърна от Югославия“, *Работническо дело*, бр. 130, 9. 5. 1980, 1, 8.

⁶⁸ *Svet o Titu*, 229–370, 526; Милош Пауновић, „Титова смрт и сахрана у британској штампи“, *Годишњак за друштвену историју*, бр. 1–3, (2007), 129–137.

The details of Todor Zhivkov's meeting with the leaders of the Yugoslav state and party remained unknown to the general public. Through irony of history at that particular time the head of the collective chairmanship was Lazar Koliševski who was notorious for his negative attitude toward Bulgaria. Together with him in the evening of 8th May in Palace of the Federation the party leader D. Dragosavac, the Foreign Minister J. Vrhovec and the representative of Serbia Tihomir Vlaškalić were present. The memories of Zhivkov, Mladenov and Ambassador Nikolov presented identical pictures. Zhivkov was the most laconic of the three. In one paragraph only he said that immediately at the moment of his appearance the host opened discussion on the Macedonian question which lasted longer than the assigned time though there were other delegations waiting, and thus a queue was formed. Zhivkov did not refer to his opponent by name though he knew him very well but called him "*the Yugoslav chairman of the chairmanship of the SFRJ*". Mladenov confirmed that Lazar Koliševski broached the Macedonian question *aggressively*. The delegations next in turn were obliged to "queue" because the short courtesy meeting continued nearly an hour and ended scandalously with impermissible raising of voices and mutual insults. Only the researcher's rich imagination might guess what is hidden under the expression: "*We were aware of his unrestrained rudeness, tactlessness and arrogance*". Nikolov added diplomatically that Koliševski was of "*only elementary education, an intellectually limited person*" and that some people in Macedonia called him the "*janissary*". Mladenov, Vrhovec and Dragosavac were able only occasionally to take part in the discussion. After a rather heated exchange of words Todor Zhivkov threatened: "*we are never going to drop on our knees before you*". Months later Vrhovec would admit that Zhivkov and Koliševski did not have any chance for "*a real discussion*". Rumours about the scandal became known to the world abroad.⁶⁹

Fadilj Hodža of the SKJ and Tihomir Vlaškalić of the League of the Communist of Serbia saw off the Bulgarian delegation at the airport. Their impression was that during his visit in Belgrade Todor Zhivkov was unusually aggressive. Those were actually the measures adopted in the decision of Politburo of 1st April 1980. However, in the following months the Bulgarian position took a softer line and disappointed some of the supporters of the "harder approach" like Ambassador Nikolov. This change is explained by Moscow's unwillingness to support Bulgaria because of the Olympic Games and the increasing aggravation of the situations in Afghanistan and in Poland. Sofia directed its efforts toward the events included in the celebration of the 1300 anniversary of the creation of the Bulgarian state.

United in their fears, the Yugoslav peoples and their representatives in the collective leadership of the state succeeded in preserving their unity in the period immediately after Tito's death. The threat from Bulgaria served as one of the important instruments for upholding the inner unity of the peoples of the

⁶⁹ Тодор Живков, *Мемоари* (София: Труд и право, 2006), 433; П. Младенов, *op. cit.*, 145; Р. Николов, *op. cit.*, 157–161, 181; St. Troebst, *op. cit.*, 146.

federation. Gradually, the Yugoslav unity began to crumble, and with it the readiness for defence of the united state weakened. Eventually, it turned out that the scenario of inner separatism and emigration's extreme activities, followed by military offensive of foreign states really happened only some 11 years later. After another 8 years only, the Bulgarian territory (the Bulgarian air space) was used for an assault on Belgrade. Only the assailant was not the one envisaged in the threatening scenario of 1980.

REFERENCE

- Anderson, Jack. "Tito's Strategy: Make Invaders Pay". *The Washington Post*, 27.01.1980, B7, (NARA, CREST, CIA-RDP90-00965R000100170146-5).
- Anderson, Jack. "Soviet Strategy: Unravel Yugoslavia". *The Washington Post*, 02.03.1980, C7, (NARA, CREST, CIA-RDP90-00965R000100170128-5)
- Batović Ante, i Branko Kasalo. „Britanski i američki izvori o smrti Josipa Broza Tita“. *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, br. 1, (2012), 7–22.
- Boev, Ivan. *Politikata na SASHT na Balkanite 1975-1985*. Sofiya: Partizdat, 1988.
- Byuison, Zhan-Kr. „Dalgata nosht na Tito“. V: *Poslednite dni na diktatorite*. Sastaviteli Dian Dyukre, Emanyuel Esht, 127–131. Sofiya: Fama, 2015.
- Dizdarević, Raif. *Od smrti Tita do smrti Jugoslavije – svjedočenja*. Sarajevo: OKO, 1999.
- Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980, Volume XX, Eastern Europe. Editors Carl Ashley and Mircea A. Munteanu. General Editor: Adam M. Howard - <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v20/ch8>
- Germanov, Stoyan. *Makedonskiyat vapros 1944–1989. Vaznikvane, evolyutsiya, savremennost*. Sofiya: MNI, 2012.
- Grupa autora. *Titova poslednja bitka*. Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1981.
- Jakovina, Tvrtko. „Sovjetska intervencija u Afganistanu 1979. i Titova smrt“. *Historijski zbornik*, LX, (2007), 295–320.
- "Jugoslawien nach Tito. Die nächste Weltkrise". *Der Spiegel*, 21. 1. 1980, 91–109.
- Metodiev, Kaloyan. „Bugarsko-hrvatski politički odnosi 1990.-2015“. *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, br. 2, (2016), 331–354.
- Mladenov, Petar. *Zhivotat – plyusove i minusi*. Sofiya: Peteks, 1992.
- Nikolov, Rayko. *Diplomatsiya na chetiri ochi. Spomeni na balgarskiya poslanik v Yugoslaviya*. Sofiya: Lik, 1999.
- Paunović, Miloš. „Titova smrt i sahrana u britanskoj štampi“. *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju*, br. 1–3, (2007), 129–137.
- Pirjevec, Jože. *Tito and His Comrades*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2018.
- Ridli, Dzhaspar. *Tito*. Sofiya: Reporter, 1995.
- Romanenko, Sergej A. *Mezhdú „proletarskim internacionalizmom“ i „slavjanskim bratstvom“*. *Rossijsko-jugoslavskie otnoshenija v kontekste*

jetnopoliticheskikh konfliktov v Srednej Evrope. Ot nachala XX v. do 1991 g. Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2011.

- Sfetas, Spyridon. "The Bulgarian-Yugoslav Dispute over the Macedonian Question as a Reflection of the Soviet-Yugoslav Controversy (1968–1980)". *Balkanica*, XLIII, (2012), 241–271. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2298/BALC1243241S>
- Stanković, Slobodan. "Initial Yugoslav Reactions to Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan". *RFE/RL Background Report/2 (Yugoslavia)*, 4. 1. 1980, 1–3 (Open Society Archives).
- Stanković, Slobodan. "Belgrade's Reaction to Afghanistan: Stalinist Methods". *RFE/RL Background Report/5 (Yugoslavia)*, 10. 1. 1980, 1–4 (Open Society Archives).
- Stanković, Slobodan. "Yugoslavs Tell Moscow: "No Crude Interference". *RFE/RL Background Report/12 (Yugoslavia)*, 16. 1. 1980, 1–6 (Open Society Archives).
- Stanković, Slobodan. "More Yugoslav Reactions to Afghanistan". *RFE/RL Background Report/19 (Yugoslavia)*, 21. 1. 1980, 1–3 (Open Society Archives).
- Stanković, Slobodan. "Grlickov: Yugoslavia to Defend its Independence with All its Means". *RFE/RL Background Report/40 (Yugoslavia)*, 25. 2. 1980, 1–3 (Open Society Archives).
- Stanković, Slobodan. "Yugoslav Polemics with Several Soviet Bloc Countries Intensified". *RFE/RL Background Report/59 (Yugoslavia)*, 12. 3. 1980, 1–7 (Open Society Archives).
- Stanković, Slobodan. "East Silent, West Full of Praise for Tito". *RFE/RL Background Report/50 (Yugoslavia)*, 4. 3. 1980, 1–3.
- *Svet o Titu*. Beograd: Izdavački centar Komunist, 1981.
- Troebst, Stefan. *Die bulgarisch-jugoslawische Kontroverse um Makedonien 1967 – 1982*. München: Oldenbourg, 1983. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/soeu-1983-3211-1205>
- Ulunyan, Artem A. *Balkanskij „shhit socializma“*. *Oboronnaja politika Albanii, Bolgarii, Rumynii i Jugoslavii (seredina 50-h gg. – 1980 g.)*. Moskva: Russkij Fond Sodejstvija Obrazovaniju i Nauke, 2013.
- Zhivkov, Todor. „Balgariya e za mira, razvedryavaneto i satrudnichestvoto“. V: *Izbrani sacheninya*, t. 30. Sofiya: Partizidat, 1984.
- Zhivkov, Todor. *Memoari*. Sofiya: Trud i pravo, 2006.

BISER BANCHEV, PhD, Research Fellow
Institute of Balkan Studies & Centre of Thracology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
Sofia, Republic of Bulgaria
natstudies@abv.bg

DEATH OF JOSIP BROZ TITO AND THE BULGARIAN FOREIGN POLICY

Summary

Josip Broz Tito was admitted to hospital nine days after Soviet troops had entered Afghanistan. At the UN Security Council, the Yugoslav representative supported the proposal for immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan. Under the circumstances of growing hysteria in the world, combined with the unlikely probability of Tito's recovery, Yugoslavia was expected as a possible next target of aggression. In Belgrade and abroad feared that the Soviet Union would invade Yugoslavia after Afghanistan in order to reach the Adriatic coast before its NATO adversaries. President Jimmy Carter declared publicly several times that the United States would undertake any action required for keeping Yugoslavia as a non-aligned country. It was expected that the Soviet troops would attack through Bulgarian territory, and Bulgaria would take advantage of the situation to settle the Macedonian question in its favour. In response to the accusations, Todor Zhivkov declared that Bulgaria had no territorial claims to the SFRY. As far as the media polemics were concerned, the predominant belief expressed in the academic literature traditionally is that "at the time of Tito's illness and death certain attenuation of the disputes on the Macedonian question was observed". The contemporaries of the events did not share this opinion. Yugoslavia's state leadership continued to regard the threat from the eastern border because it believed that in case of a likely increase in the tension between the Great Powers, i.e. the USA and the USSR, in relation to Yugoslavia, regardless of Bulgaria's will its territory may be used against Yugoslavia. As a public gesture, the Soviet delegation at Josip Broz Tito's funeral was led by Leonid Brezhnev, and the Bulgarian delegation by Todor Zhivkov. Nevertheless, "The Bulgarian threat" has served as one of the important instruments for preserving the internal cohesion of the nations of the federation after Tito's death.

KEYWORDS: Todor Zhivkov, Josip Broz Tito, Soviet–Afghan War, Macedonian question, Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations