

## BALANCING TRUST: YUGOSLAV COMMUNISTS AND GERMAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATS (SPD) 1950–1953\*

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**ABSTRACT:** *Yugoslav and German “questions” emerged in the early 1950s as specific issues in international politics marked by the Cold War. Through them, the strengths of the opposing blocs led by the superpowers, the USA and the USSR, were measured in various ways and with different intensities. This paper attempts to reconstruct and analyze the initial phase of the relationship between Yugoslav Communists and German Social Democrats, from the establishment of closer contacts to the change in the foreign policy situation after Stalin's death. The paper is mainly based on research using unpublished archived materials from domestic sources and relevant domestic and foreign literature.*

**KEYWORDS:** Yugoslav Communists, German Social Democrats, Yugoslavia, FR Germany, Cold War

In the early 1950s, amidst the increasingly dynamic development of Cold War relations between the Eastern and Western blocs, Yugoslavia and West Germany found themselves in specific international positions, each in its own way. After the split with the USSR and the Eastern bloc in 1948, Yugoslavia became an isolated socialist country in Europe, without allies either in the East or the West. Due to the complexity of this situation, the Yugoslav leadership was forced to seek allies in the West. Thus, in the early 1950s, Yugoslavia managed to break out of isolation but found itself in an even more unusual situation of being the only European socialist country cooperating closely with capitalist countries (primarily with

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the USA as the leader of the Western bloc), based on a common threat from the Eastern socialist bloc.<sup>1</sup>

The position of Germany after World War Two was specific in the sense that it was occupied and divided between the Allied Powers (USA, USSR, Great Britain and France). This way, its territory in the post-war era turned into a special battleground for the competing forces of the opposing blocs led by the USSR and the USA. In many ways, the German “question” also meant the issue of Europe itself,<sup>2</sup> so that controlling internal political factors in Germany implied, to a large extent, having control over the Old Continent. In other words, the issue of Germany and its political destiny became a geostrategic centerpiece and a top priority, primarily a European issue and then a global one. The power struggle among the anti-fascist wartime allies over dominance and control of the entire territory of occupied Germany gradually but dynamically led to the divergence between the two occupation zones: the eastern zone under the USSR and the western zone under the USA, Great Britain, and France. This resulted in contouring the future “two Germanies”, i.e., the creation of two new countries: the Federal Republic of Germany (Bundesrepublik Deutschland - BRD) in May 1949 from the Western Allies' occupation zone, and the German Democratic Republic (Deutsche Demokratische Republik - DDR) in October 1949 from the Soviet occupation zone. However, this did not resolve the already greatly intensified relations between the USSR and the Western powers. Instead, it opened up a series of new issues regarding Germany. In the early 1950s, the most sensitive ones were reintegration or reunification and defense against the USSR, as well as the issue of rearmament and the inclusion of West Germany in the collective security system of the West.<sup>3</sup> Thus, after the war, in the atmosphere of internal stabilization and gradual renewal of political life, especially in West Germany where the revitalized multi-party parliamentary system gained momentum in the late 1940s, the old and new German political parties formed their positions on current issues.

Following World War II, the activities of political parties were once again approved of in West Germany, which led to the establishment of new parties or revival of old ones. Undoubtedly, the most influential and largest party whose activities were revived after the war was the Social Democratic Party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands - SPD). The Social Democratic Party was the oldest and most prestigious German party, and its revival meant,

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<sup>1</sup> For the foreign policy position of Yugoslavia during this period see: Darko Bekić, *Jugoslavija u Hladnom ratu. Odnosi sa velikim silama 1949–1955* (Zagreb: Globus, 1988); Dragan Bogetić, *Jugoslavija i Zapad 1952–1955. Jugoslovensko približavanje NATO-u* (Beograd: Službeni list SRJ, 2000); *Velike sile i male države u hladnom ratu 1945–1955. Slučaj Jugoslavije*, priredio Lj. Dimić, (Beograd: Filozofski fakultet, Arhiv SCG, INIS, 2008); Ljubodrag Dimić, *Jugoslavija i Hladni rat. Oglеди o spoljnoj politici Josipa Broza Tita (1944–1974)* (Beograd: Arhipelag, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Mark Mazover, *Mračni kontinent. Evropa u dvadesetom veku*, (Beograd: Arhipelag, 2011), 259.

<sup>3</sup> See more on the “German question” after the World War II and in the Cold War: David F. Patton, *Cold War Politics in Postwar Germany* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Волтер Лакер, *Историја Европе 1945–1992*, (Beograd: CLIO, 1999), 110–123; Џон Л. Гедис, *Хладни рат. Ми данас знамо*, (Beograd: CLIO, 2003), 168–223.

especially symbolically, that political life was slowly returning in Germany.<sup>4</sup> The main pillars of the post-war revitalized political life in Germany were, alongside the SPD, the newly established Christian Democratic Union (Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands - CDU) and the Free Democratic Party (Freie Demokratische Partei - FDP).<sup>5</sup> After the first post-war elections in the newly formed Federal Republic of Germany in 1949, CDU and its leader Konrad Adenauer would assume a dominant role, while the SPD, although very strong, would remain in opposition for a longer period of time.<sup>6</sup> Also, it is important to emphasize the fact that the political atmosphere in West Germany was very anti-communist, primarily due to the existence of communist East Germany (DDR), which was under Soviet control. In such a distribution of political forces in West Germany, Yugoslav communists began intensive contacts with German social democrats in the early 1950s.

In an atmosphere of general uncertainty and complexity of the foreign political situation in the early 1950s, the Yugoslav leadership, in its efforts to find various ways to break out of isolation, established contacts and connections with representatives of Western European socialist and social democratic parties.<sup>7</sup> Cooperation was quickly established with almost all major socialist and social democratic parties in Western Europe, including the British Labour Party, the Socialist Party of France, the Socialist Party of Belgium, the Social Democratic Party of Switzerland,

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<sup>4</sup> The Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) represents the oldest German political party and one of the most influential in German history. It was founded in 1875 under the name Socialist Worker's Party of Germany, through the merger of the General German Workers' Association and the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Germany. It has carried its current name since 1890. Shortly after its official establishment, the SPD became the leading political representative of the working class in the German Empire and the strongest political party until World War I. It retained this position during the Weimar Republic period, until the Nazis came to power in 1933, when it was banned and its representatives were outlawed. After World War II, its activities were revived, and it once again became one of the leading political forces representing the working class and the left in West Germany, while its branch in East Germany was merged with the Communists in 1946 to form the new Socialist Unity Party of Germany (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands - SED). The SPD reached its zenith in the 1960s and 1970s during the tenure of Willy Brandt (1964–1987), the mayor of West Berlin and later the Chancellor of West Germany. Today, it is one of the leading political forces in the Federal Republic of Germany.

<sup>5</sup> To some extent, these three parties have represented the cornerstone of German parliamentarism to this day.

<sup>6</sup> See more: Gregor Kritidis, *Linkssocialistische Opposition in der Ära Adenauer. Ein Beitrag zur Frühgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Hannover: Offizin, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> See more on the Western European socialists and social democrats after the Second World War: Stephen Padgett, William E. Paterson, *A History of Social Democracy in Postwar Europe*, (New York: Longman, 1991); Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy. The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); David Childs, *The Two Red Flags. European Social Democracy and Soviet Communism since 1945*, (London-New York: Routledge, 2002); Peter Van Kemseke, *Towards an Era of Development. The Globalization of Socialism and Christian Democracy 1945–1965*, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2006); Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism. The West European Left in the Twentieth Century*, (London-New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010); Talbot C. Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism. European Socialists and International Politics, 1914–1960*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

and the social democratic parties of Scandinavian countries, etc.<sup>8</sup> Thus, cooperation with the SPD was established very early, but unlike other Western parties, despite its intensity, relations progressed quite cautiously in the first half of the 1950s, in an atmosphere of caution and latent mistrust, particularly from the German side. The main focal points of cooperation between Yugoslav communists and German social democrats were international relations and foreign policy, domestic policy and ideology, as well as certain attempts at indirect and covert influence of Yugoslav politics on the internal political life in West Germany.

The initiation of cooperation with the SPD took place in the context of establishing the first relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and Yugoslavia in the early 1950s, precisely during the establishment of official diplomatic relations between the two countries.<sup>9</sup> Thus, along with the advancement of diplomatic and other official intergovernmental relations, cooperation with various German political actors, parties, movements, and individuals took place at official, unofficial, and secret levels. This represented an important additional “channel” for activities and the promotion of Yugoslav politics and its influence in the West at the time.<sup>10</sup> Special attention was focused on establishing relations with socialist-oriented parties, naturally leading to cooperation with the most influential among them, the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Despite being in opposition at that time, the importance of contacts with the SPD was of multiple significance, both in terms of politics and ideology, for expanding Yugoslav influence not only in Germany but also in Europe. Relations with the SPD were established as early as 1950 and were conducted, like with other parties, through the newly established Foreign Policy Commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY), as well as through official Yugoslav representatives in Germany, primarily through

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<sup>8</sup> For more information on the establishment and development of cooperation between Yugoslav communists and Western European socialists and social democrats in the first half of the 1950s, see: Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), fond 142, Socijalistički Savez Radnog Naroda Jugoslavije (SSRNJ), Materijal o saradnji SSRNJ sa socijalističkim partijama i progresivnim pokretima. Socijalističke partije Zapada; Александар В. Милетић, *Преломна времена. Милован Ђилас и западноевропска социјалистичка и социјалдемократска левица (1950–1954)*, (Београд: ИНИС, 2019); Никола Мijatov, *Milovan Đilas i evropski socijalisti 1950–1958*, (Beograd: ISI, 2019); Aleksandar V. Milić, „The Relationships between Yugoslav Communists and Scandinavian Socialists in the Light of Yugoslav Sources (1950–1953)”, *Acta Histriae*, no. 1, (2019), 75–87; Natalija Dimić, „In Search of an Authentic Position: The First Phase of Political and Ideological Cooperation between Yugoslavia and West European Left, 1948–1953”, *Acta Histriae*, no. 1, (2019), 55–74; Aleksandar V. Milić, „Yugoslav Communists and Belgian Socialists 1950–1956”, *Токови историје*, no. 3, (2021), 121–141; Александар В. Милетић, „Југословенски комунисти и норвешки лабуристи 1951–1956”, *Токови историје*, бр. 2, (2022), 101–124.

<sup>9</sup> Official diplomatic relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and Yugoslavia were established in 1951, shortly after West Germany received its own Ministry of Foreign Affairs and thus the right to establish official diplomatic relations with other countries. See: Dušan Nećak, *Hollsteinova doktrina i Jugoslavija: Tito između Savezne Republike Njemačke i Demokratske Republike Njemačke*, (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> See more: Aleksandar V. Milić, „Political Parties and Movements as Alternative Options for Yugoslavia’s Policy of International Cooperation”, in: Srđan Mićić, Jovan Čavoški (eds.), *On the Fault Lines of European and World Politics: Yugoslavia between Alliances and Neutrality/Non-Alignment* (Belgrade: INIS, 2022), 289–356.

the Yugoslav Embassy in Bonn. However, despite intensive contacts, the relations with the SPD were not on the same level as with other major socialist parties from Western Europe. Despite initiatives being taken, an official delegation from the SPD did not visit Yugoslavia during the period of 1950–1953, even though the relations between the two sides were intense and regular, while individual members of the German Social Democrats did visit Yugoslavia.<sup>11</sup> The positions of both sides more or less coincided on issues related to foreign policy, but the main stumbling block lay in different conceptions of internal social organization, particularly regarding the construction of democratic political relations and socialism as a system.<sup>12</sup> A particular point of disagreement concerned Yugoslavia's engagement in aiding and financing certain communist “renegades” and their newly established party, which the leadership of the SPD saw as competition.<sup>13</sup>

### Foreign Policy Issues

Despite the fact that, as some authors emphasize, SPD has traditionally never managed to impose its influence on broader layers of German society and become a “true people's party,” but instead primarily appealed to the strong German working class,<sup>14</sup> this party has been a significant political factor, especially in post-war West Germany.<sup>15</sup> The social democratic tradition has persisted in certain parts of Germany, particularly in larger cities, and SPD has possessed undeniable moral capital as a result of the sacrifices it endured under the Nazi regime.<sup>16</sup> This image of SPD was also attributed to the personality of its post-war leader, Kurt Schumacher, a World War I veteran, former prisoner under the Nazis during World War II, and a strong, principled, and uncompromising politician.<sup>17</sup> It should be emphasized that SPD

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<sup>11</sup> See: AJ, fond 507, CK SKJ, 507/IX, Komisija za međunarodne odnose i veze (KMOV), 87/II-16, Materijal o poseti poslanika SPD Jugoslaviji, 8. III 1951; AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-16, „Beogradski razgovori sa Titovim poverenicima” (Od poslanika Saveznog parlamenta Arna Beriša), 7. VII 1951; AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-64, Zabeleška o razgovoru Đilasa sa nemačkim poslanikom dr. G. Šesnijem, 10. X 1953; A. B. Милетић, *Преломна времена*, 179–185; A. V. Miletić, „Political Parties and Movements as Alternative Options for Yugoslavia's Policy of International Cooperation”, 346.

<sup>12</sup> A. B. Милетић, *Преломна времена*, 180–181.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 175–176.

<sup>14</sup> B. Лакер, *Историја Европе*, 112.

<sup>15</sup> In the first post-war federal elections in the newly formed Federal Republic of Germany in August 1949, the SPD came in second with 29.2 percent of the votes, just behind the CDU, which received 31 percent. D. F. Patton, *Cold War Politics in Postwar Germany*, 17.

<sup>16</sup> B. Лакер, *Историја Европе*, 113.

<sup>17</sup> Kurt Schumacher (1895–1952), German Social Democratic politician and jurist. He participated in World War I, from which he emerged as a severely disabled veteran. Between the two wars, he joined the Social Democratic Party and became one of its most prominent younger representatives in the German Reichstag. After the Nazis came to power, Schumacher was arrested and spent the entire World War II imprisoned, including a period in the Dachau concentration camp. After World War II, he became the General Secretary of the SPD and held this position from 1946 until his sudden death in 1952. He was known for his consistent and firm political and ideological beliefs and positions while leading the SPD.

was considered a party with strong sovereignist views that, as some foreign authors noted, “did not support any occupying force”<sup>18</sup> after the war, while the Western allies harbored “deep mistrust” towards its leader, Schumacher.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, SPD’s political distance from both the Soviet Union and the Western alliance evidently contributed to its popularity among a significant portion of the public. Thus, despite its current opposition role and relatively limited influence on the main directions of German politics at that time, the importance of SPD’s presence in German political life was not negligible.

During this period, the foreign policy situation prompted the Yugoslav side to closely monitor internal developments in West Germany, primarily the positions of political actors regarding international relations. In this regard, particular attention was given to monitoring the activities of SPD.<sup>20</sup> It was observed towards the end of 1950, from the Yugoslav side, that SPD represented the “strongest political party” in West Germany, especially at the local level, while facing stronger opposition at the federal level. It was assessed that SPD was the “most determined political factor” with good prospects for the future.<sup>21</sup> According to certain Yugoslav intelligence channels, it was also reported that SPD was starting to objectively assess Yugoslavia’s politics after the split with Moscow, showing understanding for the initiated internal changes.<sup>22</sup> At that time, it was noted that the leadership of SPD, particularly its chief Kurt Schumacher (despite his dependence on the occupying authorities),<sup>23</sup> openly displayed a desire for the affirmation of greater German equality and sovereignty. Such tendencies were especially observed regarding rearmament and German unity. Although the leadership of SPD was fundamentally against the rearmament of Germany, it did not completely reject the idea but, according to Yugoslav assessment, advocated for rearmament on an equal footing with the West, referring to the Anglo-Saxon occupying forces, which meant a clear refusal to “contribute to the defense of the West in any form” without considering German equality. The

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<sup>18</sup> The Yugoslav side estimated in 1950. 6 that the strength and popularity of the SPD owed, among other things, to support from the occupying authorities, “especially in the British zone”. AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-10, Socijaldemokratska partija Nemačke, 1950.

<sup>19</sup> B. Лакер, *Историја Еспоне*, 113.

<sup>20</sup> See: Diplomatski arhiv Ministarstva Spoljnih poslova Republike Srbije (DAMSPRS), Politička arhiva (PA), 1950, fascikla (f) 73, br. 422131, Kratak izveštaj o parlamentarnim izborima u Hessenu i Württemberg-Badenu, 21. XI 1950; DAMSPRS, PA, 1951, f. 59, br. 4425, Politički i ekonomski izveštaj privredne delegacije FNRJ u Nemačkoj, 10. I 1951; DAMSPRS, PA, 1951, f. 59, br. 4441, Plitički izveštaj Generalnog konzulata FNRJ u Münchenu; DAMSPRS, PA, 1952, f. 60, br. 4338, Izveštaj MIP-u, 2. II 1952; DAMSPRS, PA, f. 61, 1953, br. 4885, Politički izveštaj MIP-u za novembar i decembar 1952; DAMSPRS, PA, 1953, f. 61, br. 47964, Izveštaj Ambasade FNRJ u Bonu SIP-u, jun 1953; DAMSPRS, PA, 1953, f. 61, br. 49239, Izveštaj Ambasade FNRJ Koči Popoviću, državnom sekretaru SIP-a, jul 1953; DAMSPRS, PA, 1953, f. 61, br. 416462, Izveštaj Ambasade FNRJ u Bonu SIP-u, decembar 1953; etc.

<sup>21</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-10, Socijaldemokratska partija Nemačke, 1950; AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-60, Pismo R. Čolakovića upućeno Sibinoviću, 9. I 1952.

<sup>22</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-9, SPD štampa o politici KPJ, 8. XII 1950.

<sup>23</sup> The Yugoslav side often perceived Kurt Schumacher, the leader of the SPD, as representing British interests, while Erich Ollenhauer, the vice president of the party, was seen as an American man AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-10, Socijaldemokratska partija Nemačke, 1950.

SPD leader also demonstrated a similar “sovereignist” stance regarding the reestablishment of German statehood, advocating for it in the broadest capacity and affirming the idea of Germany as a “unified entity.”<sup>24</sup> In summary, the foreign policy positions of SPD in the early 1950s focused on supporting a “new organization of Europe as a community of equal nations”,<sup>25</sup> based on democratic principles but without supporting the Schuman and Pleven plans,<sup>26</sup> as well as insisting on advocating for “German unity,” equality of German actors in the Western defense system and maintaining a negative attitude towards Germany’s membership in the Atlantic Pact.<sup>27</sup> In line with these positions, SPD represented a strong opposition to the ruling CDU and Chancellor Adenauer<sup>28</sup>

The Yugoslav side evidently recognized early on that one potential avenue for successful cooperation with German social democrats could be through focusing on foreign policy as a possible cohesive factor. This would involve emphasizing a shared goal of maximizing national sovereignty in relation to both the United States and the Soviet Union, which each side was striving to achieve in their own way at the time. However, the Yugoslav leadership was fully aware that the SPD, as a whole, belonged to the Western camp, just like the Federal Republic of Germany within whose political environment it operated.<sup>29</sup> The SPD leadership generally understood and supported the efforts of Yugoslavia to defend its independence right from the start, although they emphasized that Yugoslavia pursued its own national interests in foreign policy, rather than solely representing the interests of the working class as a whole.<sup>30</sup> Thus, representatives of the SPD in COMISCO<sup>31</sup> in the spring of 1951, were ready to support Yugoslav policy and propose connecting Yugoslavia with other socialist parties. On that occasion, individual visits of SPD representatives

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> It was particularly characteristic of the social democratic vision of European integration on a “broader” basis than the Coal and Steel Community plan proposed by Robert Schuman at the time. According to Yugoslav assessments, social democrats included Great Britain and Scandinavia in their vision of European integration, and such a Europe, under the political dominance of socialists (Labour Party in Britain and social democrats in Germany and Scandinavia), would represent “a factor of peace, not a satellite of either American or Russian policy.”. DAMSPRS, PA, 1952, f. 61, br. 415939, Zapisnik sa sastanka kolegija Ambassade FNRJ u Bonu, održanog 18. XI 1952.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Schuman, French Minister of Foreign Affairs, presented the plan for the European Coal and Steel Community in May 1950, which would evolve into the European Economic Community in 1952, composed of France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. In October 1950, René Pleven presented his plan for the establishment of the European Defense Community (European Army) as a “supranational” military organization that would include the countries of the European Coal and Steel Community. DAMSPRS, PA, 1952, f. 60, br. 41571, Mesečni politički izveštaj, januar 1952.

<sup>27</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-57, Materijal o SPD, 1951.

<sup>28</sup> DAMSPRS, PA, 1951, f. 59, br. 417147, Pitanje suverenosti i ravnopravnosti, naoružanja i jedinstva Nemačke, 7. XI 1951.

<sup>29</sup> The wing of the reestablished SPD that operated in the Soviet occupation zone (East Germany) was quickly abolished and merged with the local communists, forming a new party known as the Socialist Unity Party of German (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands – SED).

<sup>30</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-7, Socijaldemokratska partija Nemačke, 25. XI 1950.

<sup>31</sup> COMISCO, an international organization of socialist and social democratic parties, was the direct predecessor of the Socialist International, founded in the summer of 1951.

to Yugoslavia were also considered, which would be realized in the same year.<sup>32</sup> However, despite this, the relations with the SPD during this period were still not at a satisfactory level.<sup>33</sup> It should be also noted that the internal divisions within the SPD posed a consistent obstacle to a more favorable stance. This included disagreements regarding Yugoslavia, which was not the case from the Yugoslav side, considering the unity of the Yugoslav Party and the state leadership.

On the other hand, the Yugoslavs continued to regularly and thoroughly monitor the developments in the Federal Republic of Germany, especially in the spring of 1952 during the new turmoil surrounding the “German question” and Stalin’s proposal for the reintegration of Germany as a unified, rearmed, and strictly neutral country.<sup>34</sup> German social democrats, especially within the leadership, were inclined to accept the proposed suggestion, although divisions on this issue were quite present.<sup>35</sup> Changes in the stance of the SPD leadership regarding this event were observed at the Yugoslav Embassy in Bonn. Although the SPD representatives stated that there were no changes in their foreign policy positions, Yugoslav Ambassador Mladen Iveković reported that changes within the Social Democrats were noticeable, particularly in the sharpening of rhetoric towards the West while avoiding criticism towards the East and Moscow’s policies.<sup>36</sup> The Yugoslav Embassy in Bonn concluded that the positive attitude of the SPD towards Moscow’s proposal aimed to capitalize on the current Soviet “goodwill” towards a positive resolution of the German question based on the East-West opposition. However, the growing proximity of the SPD to Soviet politics clearly worried the Yugoslav side, as it was concluded that the restrained stance of the Social Democrats in public regarding Yugoslavia and its policies stemmed precisely from the “opportunistic attitude of the SPD towards the Kremlin.”<sup>37</sup>

The support of the SPD on this issue was very important, so the Yugoslav side decided to strengthen the initiative for closer ties with German Social Democrats.<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, Belgrade persistently proposed that an SPD delegation should visit Yugoslavia, with which the opposing party agreed in principle,<sup>39</sup> although with restraint and without a clear readiness to take that step.<sup>40</sup> The visit of the delegation did not happen, neither then nor in the following years, but both sides, in the first half of 1952, reached a common understanding that their mutual aspirations for

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<sup>32</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-13, Depeša iz Nemačke od 13. III 1951; AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-16, Materijal o poseti poslanika SPD Jugoslaviji.

<sup>33</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-60, Pismo R. Čolakovića upućeno Sibinoviću, 9. I 1952.

<sup>34</sup> Ц. Л. Гедис, *Хладни рат*, 186.

<sup>35</sup> А. В. Милетић, *Преломна времена*, 177

<sup>36</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-64, Zabeleška o razgovoru sa Ollenhauer-om, Heine-om i Wehner-om, 6. V 1952; AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-65, Izveštaj ambasadora M. Ivekovića o poziciji SPD-a u vezi sovjetskog predloga o Mirovnom ugovoru sa Nemačkom, 16. V 1952.

<sup>37</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-65, Izveštaj ambasadora M. Ivekovića o poziciji SPD-a u vezi sovjetskog predloga o Mirovnom ugovoru sa Nemačkom, 16. V 1952.

<sup>38</sup> DAMSPRS, PA, 1952, f. 61, br. 46662, Zapisnik sa redovnog sastanka kolegija Ambasade u Bonu, održanog 15. IV 1952.

<sup>39</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-62, Pismo Vladimira Dedijera Erich Ollenhauer-u, 13. III 1952.

<sup>40</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-64, Zabeleška o razgovoru sa Ollenhauer-om, Heine-om i Wehner-om, 6. V 1952.



independence from both blocs (USSR and USA) could bring them closer in cooperation.<sup>41</sup> In such circumstances, the Yugoslav Embassy in Bonn was particularly engaged in approaching the Social Democrats, and during the spring and summer of 1952, it organized or had several meetings with the highest-ranking officials of the SPD.<sup>42</sup> Especially noteworthy in this regard was the very cordial meeting between the Yugoslav ambassador Mladen Iveković and the top leadership of the SPD, headed by Kurt Schumacher, on June 26, 1952. During this meeting, the head of the SPD openly expressed anti-American attitudes, showing sympathy and understanding for Yugoslavia's independent policy. Both sides emphasized the importance of the geopolitical positions of Germany and Yugoslavia, as well as the possibilities for cooperation and even the potential formation of a “third” actor between the opposing blocs.<sup>43</sup> In the meantime, Kurt Schumacher passed away (August 1952), and Erich Ollenhauer took over the leadership of the SPD,<sup>44</sup> who had held the position of the party's vice president and maintained a more flexible stance towards Yugoslavia than his predecessor. By the end of 1952, relations with the SPD had progressed to a significant extent, but they still remained distant and cautious,<sup>45</sup> and this situation would continue into 1953. Although a visit by a high-level SPD delegation was planned, it would not be realized in the subsequent period, although several distinguished figures from the circles of the SPD visited Yugoslavia by the end of 1953.<sup>46</sup> The poor performance of the SPD in the elections in mid-1953 contributed significantly to this course of events in the relations between the two sides.

The moves of the Yugoslav leadership in foreign policy at the beginning of 1953 found support within the leadership of the SPD. The head of the SPD, Erich Ollenhauer, expressed a positive stance towards the tripartite alliance (Balkan Pact) formed by Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey at the end of February 1953, referring to it as a “very effective way of regional understanding” and a “very tangible example of the path to be taken.”<sup>47</sup> The death of Stalin (March 1953) certainly brought new challenges in the field of foreign policy, as well as new expectations regarding the next moves of the Soviet government. In that regard, it was critical to monitor Moscow's policy towards the “German question” and West Germany, which the Yugoslav

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<sup>41</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-62, Izveštaj Vladimira Dedijera o sastanku sa socijalistima, februar-mart 1952.

<sup>42</sup> A. V. Милетић, *Преломна времена*, 177–178.

<sup>43</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-66, Zabeleška o razgovoru Ambasadora FNRJ u Bonu Mladena Ivekovića sa šefom SPD Kurt Schumacher-om, 26. VI 1952.

<sup>44</sup> Erich Ollenhauer (1901–1963) was a German social democratic politician. After the Nazis came to power, he emigrated to Great Britain, where he stayed during World War II. After the war, he became the deputy leader of the SPD, and from 1952 until 1963, he served as the party's general secretary. He also held the position of the head of the Socialist International for a period of time.

<sup>45</sup> A. V. Милетић, *Преломна времена*, 178–179.

<sup>46</sup> See: AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-104, Zabeleška o boravku u Jugoslaviji Stephan Thomas-a, člana Predsedništva Socijaldemokratske partije Nemačke, 19–29. oktobar 1953; AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-64, Zabeleška o razgovoru Milovana Đilasa sa nemačkim novinarom dr G. Šesnijem, 10. oktobra 1953.

<sup>47</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-93, Zabeleška o razgovoru Ambasadora FNRJ u Bonu M. Ivekovića sa prvakom SPD Ollenhauer-om i norveškim poslanikom Dag-Bryn-om, 25. III 1953.

Embassy in Bonn diligently did. By mid-1953, it was assessed that the latest moves by Moscow indicated a tendency towards gradually separating Germany from the Western European defense alliance, with a special inclination within SPD.<sup>48</sup> In this context, special attention was drawn to Soviet tendencies towards closer ties with the SPD, which, on the other hand, showed reservation.<sup>49</sup> During the pre-election period, the sovereigntist policy of the SPD was noted, particularly in its vision of a united Europe as an alliance of “free and equal” nations, contrasting the idea of a “small Europe without equal partnership.”<sup>50</sup> Such a policy of the SPD, as assessed by the Yugoslav Embassy, stood in opposition to the “pro-American” policies of the ruling CDU.<sup>51</sup> However, despite the SPD's correct stance towards Yugoslavia and its policies, a sense of restraint in relations with Yugoslav communists was evident, especially during the pre-election period when the leadership of the SPD considered cooperation with the communists to be compromising.<sup>52</sup>

### The sensitive point of disagreement - UAPD

In the relations between Yugoslav communists and German Social Democrats, a significant and very uncomfortable obstacle was the Independent Workers' Party of Germany (Unabhängige Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands – UAPD/UAP).<sup>53</sup> UAPD was a party formed in 1950 (formally established in 1951) by former German communists, “renegades” from the Communist Party of Germany, led by Josef Schappe.<sup>54</sup> From the very beginning, this political organization had close cooperation with Yugoslavia, from which it received significant political and financial support from 1950 to 1952. However, in its short existence, UAPD failed to maintain a significant political presence and quickly lost support from Yugoslavia, leading to its dissolution in 1952.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>48</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-93, Izveštaj Ambasade FNRJ u SR Nemačkoj za mesec maj 1953, od 14. VI 1953.

<sup>49</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-99, Depeša od 11. VII 1953.

<sup>50</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-93, Izveštaj Ambasade FNRJ u SR Nemačkoj za mesec maj 1953, od 14. VI 1953.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-100, Zabeleška o razgovoru sa Fritz Heine-om, članom užeg rukovodstva SPD, u Bonu 5. VIII 1953.

<sup>53</sup> See more on UAPD/UAP: Peter Kulemann, *Die Linke in Westdeutschland nach 1945. Die Erste Nachkriegszeit, zwischen sozialdemokratischer Integration und dem Stalinismus der KPD – das Scheitern der „Titoistischen“ Unabhängigen Arbeiterpartei UAP 1950* (Hannover: SOAK Verlag; Frankfurt: ISP Verlag, 1978); G. Kritidis, *Linkssocialistische Opposition in der Ära Adenauer*, 153–172; Ulrich Gausmann, *„Für Volk und Vaterland“. Eine historisch-soziologische Studie über die Politik der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands zur nationalen Frage 1945–1949* (Paderborn: IFB Verlag, 2001), 251–258.

<sup>54</sup> Josef Schappe (1907–1994) was a German communist, socialist, and social democratic politician. He started as a manual worker in his youth, later becoming a journalist and a left-wing activist. Between the two world wars, he joined the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). He was arrested and persecuted during the Nazi era and was imprisoned in Buchenwald concentration camp during World War II. After the Yugoslav-Soviet conflict, as a “Titoist,” he was expelled from the KPD and became one of the founders of UAPD. After the dissolution of UAPD, he joined the SPD, where he remained until his death. .

<sup>55</sup> A. В. Милетић, *Преломна времена*, 201.

Nevertheless, the brief period of UAPD's existence and the support it received from Yugoslavia were sufficient to disrupt the relations that Yugoslav communists had established and sought to develop with the SPD during this period.

In the early 1950s, a group of “renegades” German communists, former members of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), emerged with the idea of establishing a new workers' and socialist party. This group, including prominent figures such as Josef Schappe, Wolfgang Leonhard, Georg Fischer, and others, some of whom had close ties with Yugoslav communists,<sup>56</sup> initially gathered around the newly founded magazine *Freie Tribüne* (1950), which largely represented the core of the future party. Yugoslavia's need for expanding its influence in the West, particularly among communists and the local working “masses,” quickly led the Yugoslav leadership to engage with individual German communist “renegades” and “dissidents,” recognizing them as potential and promising partners in this endeavor.<sup>57</sup> Thus, in early 1950, contacts were established with individuals from the mentioned group of “defectors” from the KPD, and from the very beginning, i.e., from the initial initiatives for the establishment of the magazine *Freie Tribüne* and the idea of a new party, the Yugoslav side was not only aware but directly involved in the activities and assistance for the realization of this concept.<sup>58</sup> Since UAPD ambitiously presented itself as a party with the potential to become the leader of all free and independent German communists, Yugoslavs provided them with secret financial assistance during 1951.<sup>59</sup> They also did the same with their party organ, *Freie Tribüne*. Although it seems that the Yugoslav side, by supporting and assisting UAPD, did not have the intention to “undermine” or, even less, confront the SPD, this Yugoslav involvement was not received sympathetically in the leadership of the German Social Democrats.

Yugoslav communists did instruct the founders of UAPD<sup>60</sup> to reduce ideological rigidity and adapt the party's program to a broader section of the socialist-oriented public, which inevitably meant winning over a portion of potential SPD voters. This was clearly understood by the SPD, as its leadership not only adopted a negative stance towards the new party but also displayed open restraint in their relations with the CPY. The Yugoslav leadership clearly sensed the SPD's position and sought to change it as much as possible. They approached the leadership of UAPD, some

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<sup>56</sup> See: Наталија Димић, „Обрачун са титоистима у Совјетској окупационој зони Немачке: Случај Леонард”, *Токови историје*, бр. 1, (2021), 133–164.

<sup>57</sup> N. Dimić, „In Search of an Authentic Position: The First Phase of Political and Ideological Cooperation between Yugoslavia and West European Left, 1948–1953”, 61–62.

<sup>58</sup> Some of the mentioned KPD “renegades” were already in contact not only with Yugoslavs but also resided and worked in Yugoslavia as pro-Yugoslav political “emigrants,” such as Wolfgang Leonhard, a prominent communist activist who would become one of the key figures in UAPD and crucial “channels” for cooperation with Yugoslav communists. Н. Димић, „Обрачун са титоистима у Совјетској окупационој зони Немачке: Случај Леонард”, 155; N. Dimić, „In Search of an Authentic Position: The First Phase of Political and Ideological Cooperation between Yugoslavia and West European Left, 1948–1953”, 58–59; 63–64.

<sup>59</sup> N. Dimić, „In Search of an Authentic Position: The First Phase of Political and Ideological Cooperation between Yugoslavia and West European Left, 1948–1953”, 67.

<sup>60</sup> See: AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/III-5, Diskusija o listu *Freie Tribüne* i o pokretu za osnivanje Nezavisne radničke partije Nemačke, 26. XII 1950.

members of which were initially highly critical of the SPD.<sup>61</sup> During a meeting in January 1951, high-ranking Yugoslav officials explicitly stated that “any undermining of the SPD would be a mistake” and that “any splitting of the SPD would weaken the labour movement in Germany and strengthen the position of the United States.”<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, despite these statements, Yugoslav representatives also recommended to UAPD members the infiltration of the SPD, as well as other labour and socialist parties and organizations, as a method of expanding their influence.<sup>63</sup> Undoubtedly, this gave the SPD leadership grounds for suspicion towards the CPY.

The leadership of the SPD was well-informed about all of this.<sup>64</sup> Kurt Schumacher, the then leader of the Social Democrats, was openly critical of Yugoslav representatives on this matter. In the summer of 1951, he told them that by assisting in the establishment of UAPD, the Yugoslavs had damaged their relationship with the SPD and were themselves to blame for supporting a party that had “no chance” of success. Schumacher believed that the Yugoslavs, with the help of UAPD, were trying to “undermine” the SPD.<sup>65</sup> The Yugoslav side immediately reacted, attempting to convince the staunch and inflexible Kurt Schumacher of the good intentions of the Yugoslavs. They emphasized that despite supporting UAPD, they had no ill intentions towards the SPD and wanted to deepen cooperation. One of the highest-ranking Yugoslav officials, Milovan Đilas, made it clear that Yugoslavs were guided by a respect for freedom of thought within the labour movement, firmly dismissing the possibility of supporting any splitting of the SPD. He stated that “UAP can have a positive significance in terms of weakening the IB (Information Bureau), but there are still strong elements there that do not yet and some that cannot understand the essence of contemporary problems in general and the labour movement in particular. There is some cooperation between us and UAP, but we do not think we are only collaborating with them, but with every labour movement, even if we disagree on some issues. We maintain that position towards UAP, whose views on the SPD we do not fully share.”<sup>66</sup> This reaction of the leaders of the German Social Democrats happened at a time of intensive Yugoslav financial support to the UAPD, which continued even after that, indicating that the Yugoslavs did not pay much attention to the reactions of the SPD. They simply believed it was in their best interest to support the UAPD. However, after the cessation of financing and assistance to UAPD at the end of 1951, which quickly led to the demise of the party in the spring of 1952, relations with the SPD visibly improved. This indicates that this issue was a significant obstacle to the stabilization and development of relations between Yugoslav communists and German Social Democrats.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>61</sup> See: AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/III-6, Izveštaj o Shappe-u i razgovoru sa njim, 1950.

<sup>62</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/III-8, Zabeleška o sastanku sa predstavnicima Nezavisne radničke partije Nemačke (UAP) – Shappe-om i Gese-om, 27. I 1951.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-26, Depeša od 6. juna 1951.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-26, Depeša Đilasa Sibinoviću, 9. jun 1951. See also: A. B. Милетић, *Преломна времена*, 175–176.

<sup>67</sup> N. Dimić, „In Search of an Authentic Position: The First Phase of Political and Ideological Cooperation between Yugoslavia and West European Left, 1948–1953”, 67.

### Socialism, democracy, parliamentarism

Yugoslav communists and German social democrats were further divided by another significant obstacle in establishing sincere and full cooperation. It pertained to the two sides' attitudes towards the fundamental principles of democracy and parliamentarism, as well as socialism as a system, and Marxism as an ideological paradigm. This, to a greater or lesser extent, posed a problem for Yugoslav communists in developing relations with other socialist and social democratic parties in Western Europe. It is important to emphasize that throughout the entire process of relations between Yugoslav communists and Western European socialists and social democrats, it involved the relationship between a communist party, built for years along Soviet and Stalinist lines, which held absolute power in the state, and parties of different size, influence, and ideological nuances that were part of parliamentary and pluralistic systems in the West. Consequently, there were completely different circumstances and conditions in which Yugoslav communists and Western European socialists operated, and therefore, it was natural for them to have different views on fundamental social and ideological issues. The only thing that reliably brought them together was the leftist and socialist ideological paradigm and their stance towards the Eastern Bloc and the USSR, albeit not always to the fullest extent. This also applied to relations with German social democrats.

Initially, the SPD had a strongly negative attitude towards Yugoslavia, which began to soften already in the early 1950s due to international circumstances.<sup>68</sup> Changes within the Yugoslav leadership towards distancing themselves from Stalinism and tendencies towards societal democratization were noticed early on by social democratic circles, and the SPD considered it a positive trend.<sup>69</sup> However, despite acknowledging and welcoming such tendencies, the leadership of the SPD remained firmly committed to the positions of democratic parliamentarism and anti-Stalinism. Therefore, they regarded the Yugoslav leadership with a view of a one-party dictatorship and saw the Yugoslav system and society as fundamentally undemocratic. Consequently, German social democrats believed that there could be no ideological identification or recognition of Yugoslavia's system as democratic.<sup>70</sup> Regarding socialism, Yugoslavia's position on the right of every country to choose its own path to socialism provided an opportunity to bridge some differences in understanding socialism compared to the SPD, which fundamentally advocated and supported socialist measures and changes but only within the framework of the parliamentary and capitalist system that existed in West Germany.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>68</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-9, SDP štampa o politici KPJ, 8. XII 1950.

<sup>69</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-13, Izveštaj o zasedanju COMISCO-a i komentar SPD štampe povodom članka druga Đilasa, 10. I 1951.

<sup>70</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-16, Stav SPD-a i nekih funkcionera DGB prema Jugoslaviji, mart 1951.

<sup>71</sup> AJ, CK SKJ, 507/IX, KMOV, 87/II-71, Diskusije povodom akcionog programa SPD, 17. VIII 1952.

## Conclusion

The overall international situation, conditioned by the Cold War in the early 1950s, and the specific positions of both West Germany and Yugoslavia dictated the relations established between the CPY and the SPD. These relations were always cordial but clearly marked by a visible distance and mutual “trust weighing.” This was particularly applicable to the SPD, which approached cooperation and contacts with Yugoslav communists with much less trust, considering them unreliable allies, both politically and ideologically. The CPY, to some extent, contributed to such an attitude of German social democrats by supporting and assisting UAPD, which the leadership of the SPD saw as political competition. Seeking ways to break out of isolation, the Yugoslavs were forced to exert influence on the West by all possible means, which they attempted through UAPD, but the social democratic leadership did not show understanding. Furthermore, significant ideological and political differences regarding socialism and the understanding of democracy posed a substantial barrier between the two sides. This state of “trust weighing” and reservations towards Yugoslavia from one of the leading social democratic parties in Western Europe would persist for the next several years, keeping the relations between the two sides largely at a standstill.

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BALANCING TRUST:  
YUGOSLAV COMMUNISTS AND GERMAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATS (SPD)  
1950–1953

Aleksandar V. Miletić, PhD\*

*Summary*

The specific Cold War position of Yugoslavia led its leadership to vigorously seek allies in the world in order to overcome the isolation imposed by the USSR as quickly and effectively as possible. One possibility was to “break through” to the West and cooperate with political factors there. In the early 1950s, a good opportunity for such a policy was cooperation with representatives of the Western European socialist left, whose parties were ideologically close to the CPY and non-Stalinist. One of the leading and most influential parties in Western Europe was the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), with which Yugoslav communists established connections as early as 1950. Cooperation between the two sides continued constantly from 1950 to 1953 but with distrust and distance on the part of the SPD. The reasons lay both in the sensitive external political conditions of that time and in the moves made by the CPY, which German social democrats did not understand. The ongoing power struggle between the USSR and the US in West Germany, the relations of the Great Powers towards Europe and the European question, the position and issue of German reunification, as well as the issue of collective security of the West in relation to the USSR, certainly had consequences for the SPD's stance towards Yugoslavia. A particular problem in the relations between the CPY and the SPD was the short-lived Yugoslav support for UAPD, a party that the SPD saw as competition, as well as the stance of German social democrats towards the CPY and the system in Yugoslavia, which they considered non-democratic and ruled by a one-party dictatorship. All of this contributed to a period of relations characterized by warmth and public friendliness but also marked by mistrust, especially on the part of the SPD, which would persist in the following years.

KEYWORDS: Yugoslav Communists, German Social Democrats, Yugoslavia, FR Germany, Cold War

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