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## THE COMINFORM EMIGRATION IN BULGARIA

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**ABSTRACT:** *The main aim of this paper is to analyze the organization and activities of the Yugoslav political emigration in Bulgaria from 1948. to 1955. As a Soviet-satellite, Bulgaria was one of the countries chosen by the political dissidents (after the Yugoslav split with Cominform) not only for the purpose of political asylum, but also for the continuation of their struggle against Yugoslav government. Research is mostly based on unpublished sources from the State Security Service (UDB) that are kept in the State Archives of Serbia, and also on relevant literature.*

**KEYWORDS:** Cominform, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, emigration, Communism.

As the Second World War ended in Europe, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria emerged as allies. Both countries were under Soviet political influence, and with communist parties establishing power in both states. In the immediate aftermath of the world conflict, serious talks were held about the unification of the two states into a federation. However, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria had different views on how federal state would be organized, with Yugoslavia insisting on pluralistic concept of the state made of seven republics, and Bulgaria wanting dual federation. Beside this, the two countries also increased trade and started to improve cultural relations.<sup>1</sup>

As a part of Moscow's plan for binding communist parties in Europe to its policy, especially those who were in power, the Information Bureau of Communist and Workers' Parties (Cominform) was founded at the meeting in Szklarska Poreba (Poland) in September 1947, with the Yugoslav capital designated as the seat of the organization.<sup>2</sup> Very soon, in the first half of 1948, tensions erupted between Yugoslavia and USSR, which also strained Yugoslav relations with other Cominform countries. From March to May 1948, the Yugoslav and Soviet parties were exchanging letters in which Soviets accused Yugoslav communists for turning away from

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<sup>1</sup> Борис Томанић, *Преокрет: Југославија и Бугарска у завршној фази Другог светског рата 1943/1944–1945/1946*, (Београд: Институт за савремену историју–Catena Mundi, 2023), 372–377.

<sup>2</sup> Бранко Петрановић, *Велика шизма: Четрдесетосма*, (Подгорица: ЦИД, 1999), 34–38.

authentic communist path, which Yugoslav side strongly denied. On 28 June 1948, at the Cominform meeting in Bucharest, which was held without Yugoslav representatives, a resolution was passed concerning the conditions inside the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY). After the meeting, the Cominform countries followed Soviet policy on Yugoslavia, criticizing its government and the communist party, and also started breaking agreements with Yugoslavia.<sup>3</sup> The Yugoslav expulsion from the group of communist states and denunciation by the Soviets had big impact on Yugoslav communists, who had developed strong cults of Stalin and the USSR. As Yugoslavia came to a conflict with the Cominform, warm relations between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria came to an end in 1948, and were replaced with increasing tensions, mutual accusations and border incidents.

With relations between the two countries deteriorating, old Bulgarian pretensions towards parts of Yugoslavia, especially Vardar Macedonia, emerged again. This was supported by state propaganda which portrayed Vardar Macedonia as an old Bulgarian territory that had been occupied by Yugoslavia. Also, several dozens were imprisoned in Bulgaria for alleged collaboration with Yugoslav government. In Yugoslavia, propaganda that portrayed Bulgaria positively after the war was gradually changing, resulting in negative texts about Bulgaria.<sup>4</sup> Later, as Yugoslavia became involved in military cooperation with NATO members Greece and Turkey through the Balkan pact, Bulgaria saw this move as a great threat.<sup>5</sup>

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The Cominform emigration started to form almost immediately after the First Resolution of the Cominform came out. In Bulgaria, Politburo of Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) decided on 8 July 1948 to provide political asylum to every Yugoslav citizen who expressed support for the resolution.<sup>6</sup> Beside Bulgaria, other Cominform countries like Soviet Union, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Albania and Poland started to accept Yugoslav cominformists. Most of the political emigrants in Bulgaria were defectors, i.e. those who illegally crossed the border between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. Largest number of defectors was originally from eastern parts of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Macedonia) that were near the Bulgarian border, but there were also cases of defectors from western parts of Yugoslavia that chose to defect to Bulgaria, like military personnel. Smaller portion of emigrants were Yugoslav citizens already living in Bulgaria, like students who decided to stay in Bulgaria,

<sup>3</sup> Александар Животић, *Југославија, Албанија и велике силе 1945–1961*, (Београд: Институт за новију историју Србије–Архипелаг, 2011), 317–320.

<sup>4</sup> Мита Миљковић, *Бурне дипломатске године: Из софијског дневника 1953–1956*, (Београд: Службени лист СРЈ, 1995), 167, 218; Димитър Петков, *Българо-югославските политически отношения (февруари 1947-октомври 1956 г.)*, (София: Сиела норма АД, 2022), 444–445.

<sup>5</sup> Vojan Dimitrijević, “Jugoslavija i NATO 1951–1958: Skica intenzivnih vojnih odnosa”, u: *Spoljna politika Jugoslavije 1950–1961*, ur. Slobodan Selinić, (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2008), 263–267; Петков, *нав. дел.* 562–563.

<sup>6</sup> Дигитални колекции, Държавна агенция „Архиви“ (ДАА), Решение на ПБ от 8. јули 1948. година. (available on: <https://politburo.archives.bg/bg/2013-04-24-11-12-48/dokumenti/1944-1949/300---125--8--1948->, accessed at: 02.06.2024. at 15:32h).

or other citizens who expressed support for the resolution and decided to not return to Yugoslavia. This was the case of Blagoje Hadžipanzov<sup>7</sup> who was an official at the Yugoslav embassy in Sofia and who supported the Cominform Resolution. Also, there were many cases of the members of Bulgarian national minority who emigrated for ethnic or family reasons. Bulgarians who defected from Yugoslavia were mostly from Bosilegrad and Dimitrovgrad counties that bordered Bulgaria, which were regions with significant Bulgarian population.<sup>8</sup>

### Life in emigration

In 1948, there were around 40 Yugoslav citizens who defected to Bulgaria, with rapid increase of this number in 1949, when 500 more Yugoslavs defected. 85% of this figure accounted for ethnic Bulgarians. According to Yugoslav estimates, number of defectors in Bulgaria in 1952 was around 750 people. The task of politically organizing emigrants was assigned to Asen Cherakchiev, a member of the Central Committee of BCP.<sup>9</sup>

By the end of 1948, the living conditions of emigrants were on highest level during the entire period of research, with conditions constantly deteriorating as larger numbers of emigrants arrived. The first group of emigrants that defected in 1948 were accommodated in Hotel "Slavyanska beseda" in Sofia, and they also had freedom of movement. For the first several months, defectors were not officially interrogated by the Bulgarian State Security (Държавна сигурност, DS) or detained at the border. Instead, Bulgarian agents gathered information about conditions in Yugoslavia through informal conversations with defectors. With the greater number of defections, the Bulgarian authorities decided to place different groups of emigrants in cities and spas around the country, and with police supervising their movement.<sup>10</sup>

A significant reason why Bulgarian authorities decided to impose stricter measures towards Yugoslav emigrants is because the DS detected several hidden agents of the Yugoslav State Security that were infiltrated among the defectors. At the end of 1948, it was decided that Yugoslav emigrants were to be put in the building where they all lived together (општежитије), which was located in Georgi Kirkov Street in Sofia. This action made control of the emigrants easier. As the number of defectors increased greatly in 1949, it was decided that new emigrants were to be put in Pavlovo camp located on Vitosha Mountain, where they stayed for up to five months. This period was later extended up to ten, and sometimes even 15 months. During this time, new emigrants were regularly interrogated about military, economic and political conditions in Yugoslavia by the DS, and placed under

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<sup>7</sup> Blagoje Hadžipanzov, ethnic Macedonian, born in 1911. in Veles, lawyer by profession. He participated in the trial of Trajcho Kostov and was one of the most active political emigrants. As an editor of cominform newspaper "Napred", he actively participated in propaganda against Yugoslav government (Državni arhiv Srbije (DAS), fond Bezbednosno-informativne agencije (BIA), zbirka dokumenata II-124, Elaborat. Jugoslovenska politička emigracija u IB zemljama, 153).

<sup>8</sup> DAS, BIA, II-124, 6.

<sup>9</sup> DAS, BIA, zbirka dokumenata III-75, Elaborat. Jugoslovenska IB emigracija u Bugarskoj 1, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 2–3.

constant supervision, with no more freedom of movement. The living conditions in Pavlovo were very poor, there was lack of heating and no hot water during winter, so emigrants used to stay under their blankets during winter days in order to warm up, and washed their clothes with cold water. Apparently, there were also outbreaks of diseases with epidemic characteristics. Later on, the Pavlovo camp became unsuitable for housing too many emigrants because the camp area was small and emigrants could easily get in touch with the local population as camp was not enclosed. Because of this, the Bulgarian authorities started building a new camp, located two kilometers north-east of Sofia in Maleševci, which had wired fences up to two meters high. The camp was completed in June 1951. All new emigrants were since then placed in this camp and were under complete supervision by the DS. After each emigrant was checked and no traces of their collaboration with the UDB was found, it would be decided in which emigrant center they were going to be placed, and also type of their job. Unlike the treatment of emigrants in 1948, the new and “preventive” measures were introduced when Yugoslav defectors illegally entered Bulgaria. These measures included constant interrogations and beating of new defectors by the police and DS in order to discover the infiltrated UDB agents.<sup>11</sup>

After the emigrants were completely checked by the DS and left the camp, they would be relocated to several emigrant centers across Bulgaria and given certain amount of money and clothes by the authorities. After arriving in these centers, they applied for work at the local party committees, who decided about type of their jobs, with some emigrants waiting for several months to be employed. Jobs of the emigrants varied, and included factory work, farm work and even working in mines in Nikolaevo and Pernik (Dimitrovo mine). The social status of emigrants also varied greatly, with some emigrants receiving salaries up to 20.000-30.000 Bulgarian levs, and living in private flats. This was the case of politically active emigrants, especially those who participated in propaganda against Yugoslavia and those who were being sent on missions in Yugoslavia by the DS. Others, who were factory workers, and also some lower officials, received salary of 8.000-13.000 levs, farm workers had income of 5.000-7.000 levs, and students received scholarship of 10.600 levs. Emigrants were also periodically awarded money, and based on their loyalty and performance they had shown during the assignments, the DS decided what amount of money they would get.<sup>12</sup>

After the first group of defectors settled down in Bulgaria, supplies and employment of the emigrants became very important. At first, the tasks of supplies and accommodation of emigrants were assigned to the Bulgarian Red Cross. This organization gave emigrants coupons for lunch and dinner in Sofia restaurants, and supplied them with furniture in shared apartments. For other needs, like breakfast and personal needs, there were not enough financial means. More emigrants in Bulgaria meant significant pressure on finances, and Bulgarian authorities started to consider employing emigrants in industry and agriculture. This move was met with fierce resistance by the emigrants, who said that they had defected in order to fight against

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 3–4; М. Миљковић, *Бурне дипломатске године...*, 89.

<sup>12</sup> DAS, BIA, III-75, 7.

“Tito's regime, and not to work”. At the end of 1948, the Colony of the Yugoslav emigrants in Bulgaria was founded, with the task of finding jobs and employing defectors in Bulgarian economy. The Colony's administration included significant and trusted emigrants, like Radoslav Pešikan<sup>13</sup> and Ilko Mladenov<sup>14</sup>. The Colony was in charge of organizing cultural life for emigrants, and it also managed scholarship for Yugoslav students who supported the Cominform Resolution. However, after several months of work, this organization lost all its influence among emigrants, and its meetings became unattended.<sup>15</sup>

At the beginning of August 1949, it was decided that after a thorough check, emigrants who were former officers of the Yugoslav Army were to be allowed in Bulgarian army, keeping their Yugoslav military ranks. Most of them were aviation officers, who were stationed in Plovdiv airport after joining the Bulgarian army. Soon, the purge hit the Bulgarian army, and all Yugoslav officers were demobilized in December 1949. This action greatly demoralized emigrants, as some of them tried to escape to Turkey, while others tried to reach USSR from Romania, but were arrested and put in prison.<sup>16</sup>

In the mid-1949, there were serious plans to create a new communist party organization made up of Yugoslav cominformists. This party was supposed consist of political emigrants and secret (illegal) party committees that were inside Yugoslavia. The BCP was initially opposed to this saying that two parties were too much for one country. On the other hand, the BCP decided to allow some prominent Yugoslav emigrants to become its members, like Radomir Andrić “Kmet”<sup>17</sup> and Jovan Pavićević “Joca”<sup>18</sup>, as well as Hadžipančov and Pešikan.<sup>19</sup>

The formal organization of the Yugoslav emigrants in Bulgaria was the “Association of Yugoslav citizens in People's Republic of Bulgaria” (Удружење југословенских грађана у НР Бугарској). The DS entirely controlled this organization, as it decided who would be a member of its administration, and its work was

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<sup>13</sup> Radoslav Pešikan was one of the first political emigrants in Bulgaria, where he decided to move during the exchange of letters between Yugoslav and Soviet Communist parties. Before emigrating, Pešikan was removed from Yugoslav army. He got married in emigration (DAS, BIA, III-75, 60).

<sup>14</sup> Ilko Mladenov also defected in 1948. and became one of the most prominent political emigrants. In 1951. he was placed as the secretary of Yugoslav emigration in Sofia (DAS, BIA, II-124, 51–52).

<sup>15</sup> DAS, BIA, III-75, 2–6.

<sup>16</sup> ДАА, Протокол на Политбиро, Протокол А-69 на Политбиро от 9. август 1949. год. (available at: <https://politburo.archives.bg/bg/2013-04-24-11-12-48/dokumenti/1944-1949/172--69-9-1949->, accessed at: 30.05.2024. at 19:33h); DAS, BIA, III-75, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Radomir Andrić “Kmet” originally from the area of Toplica, was a retired lieutenant colonel of the Yugoslav army. During the war he was for a short period of time member of the Chetniks of Kosta Pećanac. Later, he joined Yugoslav partisans, and became a commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade of the People's Defense Corps of Yugoslavia (KNOJ). He defected to Bulgaria at the end of 1948. He was one of the speakers at a funeral of Georgy Dimitrov. He returned to Yugoslavia in 1962. and lived in Belgrade, but maintained relations with other notable cominformists in Yugoslavia and was regularly organizing meetings with them in Toplica region (DAS, BIA, Zbirka dokumenata IV-56, Spiskovi lica po IB, Spisak prebeglih lica u inostranstvo).

<sup>18</sup> Jovan Pavićević defected to Bulgaria in 1948. alongside Radomir Andrić “Kmet”. Before defecting, he was member of KOS (Counter-intelligence service) in Skopje (DAS, BIA, III-75, 59).

<sup>19</sup> Петков, *нав. дело*, 467; DAS, BIA, III-75, 51.

completely based on directives from the Central Committee of BCP, which were transmitted by Mihailo Dimitrov, instructor of the BCP. At DS' suggestion, president of the Association was Jelenko Tošić<sup>20</sup>. The association had subsections in different cities where emigrants lived, like Ruse, Silistra, Pleven, Varna, Teven, etc. Political emigrants were used solely for the purpose of propaganda war against Yugoslavia and for spying tasks. These actions were coordinated from Moscow, according to the State Security Service documents based on interrogations of the emigrants who were caught. In March 1951, Radomir Andrić "Kmet" was sent to Moscow as a representative of the Cominform emigration from Bulgaria. Bulgarian authorities also took care of ideological development of emigrants through organizing three-month long ideological courses for them about Leninism, history of the Soviet Communist party, and a Russian language course. Also, there were party schools in Sofia with Marxist programs that lasted from one to three years. Despite this, there was little interest among emigrants for attending these courses, with most of them thinking they did not need them because of having proper knowledge of Marxism.<sup>21</sup>

A milestone event in the organization of Yugoslav political emigration in Bulgaria was the categorization of emigrants into two groups: political and economic emigrants. At first, all emigrants were formally considered political emigrants, but as many defected to Bulgaria for ethnic reasons, many immigrants were in fact completely inactive in politics. On the other hand, the DS wanted to separate the trusted emigrants who could be used for actions on the Yugoslav soil, from those who were not reliable and who were not ready for these tasks. The categorization ended in mid-1951, resulting in two-thirds of all emigrants losing their political status and afterwards being considered economic emigrants. This action led to some emigrants losing their jobs; for example, 29 miners working in Nikolaevo mine were fired after they had been categorized as economic emigrants. Many of the emigrants started to wander in different parts of Bulgaria after losing their jobs, looking for some kind of work.<sup>22</sup> Also, after the categorization had been carried out, new leadership of emigrant organization was installed, with Tošić again as its president, Mladenov as a political secretary, and Jon Kranjanović<sup>23</sup> as a staff manager. This was followed with the creation of a new section within the

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<sup>20</sup> Jelenko Tošić was born in 1911. in Zagradje and was a school teacher. He defected to Bulgaria in August 1949. Before defecting to Bulgaria he worked as a secretary of the County Committee in Minićevo, Zaječar. He was very active among emigrants, he gave public speeches and participated at the Peace Congress in Austria (DAS, BIA, zbirka dokumenata II-113, Spisak IB emigranata u IE zemljama; DAS, BIA, III-75, 51).

<sup>21</sup> DAS, BIA, III-75, 14, 35; Other members of Association's administration were: secretary Mladen Manuilov, who was a former official of the County Committee in Dimitrovgrad; Petar Mišić, former public prosecutor in Zaječar and his wife Živka Mišić who previously worked as official at the Department of internal affairs in Belgrade; Radoslav Pešikan and also Stojančev Georginov, former member of parliament from Bosilegrad county. (DAS, BIA, III-75, 12).

<sup>22</sup> DAS, BIA, III-75, 5–9.

<sup>23</sup> Jon Kranjanović, born on 1901. in Zaječar, was a former official of the County Council in Zaječar. He guided the group of eleven persons who defected to Bulgaria in June 1949. from the village of Rgotina, near Zaječar. Before being selected into emigration's leadership, he was a farm worker in Bulgaria (DAS, BIA, Zbirka dokumenata I-91, p. 44).

BCP that was managing emigration's affairs, led by Kata Avramova, a member of the Central Committee of BCP.<sup>24</sup>

Those who maintained their political status were concentrated in three Bulgarian cities: a center in Sofia, which numbered around 130 emigrants; a center in Ruse with 40, and in Varna with 20 political emigrants. These three centers had separate organizations, each with its secretaries and officials. On the other hand, economic emigrants were placed in other towns across Bulgaria, like Plovdiv, Shumen, Pernik and Pleven. Students were mostly placed in Sofia, and minors and disciples were dispatched to Teteven. To punish disloyal emigrants, the Bulgarian authorities organized the TVO (Трудово воспитателно општежитије) where emigrants worked in very poor conditions. For example, emigrants in the TVO camp in Tutrakan county worked in hardest conditions and lived together with Bulgarian convicts. Emigrants were put in these camps for a year and in some cases even longer, after which they would be released. Some notable emigrants were placed in this TVO, like Jovan Pavićević "Joca", who was punished after leading the group of 25 emigrants at the end of 1949 towards Yugoslav border in order to re-emigrate, but were instead arrested by the Bulgarian authorities.<sup>25</sup>

Big problems of the political emigration arose from seriously bad relations among emigrants. Bulgarian authorities also had impact on this, mostly through igniting a rivalry between the emigrants of Serbian and Bulgarian origin, which was manifested in praising Bulgarian history and culture on the one hand, and on the other through denouncing Yugoslavs as "primitive compared to Bulgarians" and "weaker soldiers than Bulgarians". After the categorization, constant quarrels among the emigrants led to the creation of three separate groups of political emigrants who were fighting for political power among themselves. The first and most influential group was being led by Jovan Pavićević, and was mostly made of emigrants who were actively collaborating with DS. The second group consisted mostly of ethnic Bulgarians, who were led by secretary Ilko Mladenov, and the third group was led by Radomir Ilić "Mika"<sup>26</sup>, with the group mostly made up of emigrants from Zaječar and Krajina counties.<sup>27</sup>

### Role of emigrants in anti-Titoist propaganda

The Yugoslav emigration in all Cominform states developed active propaganda against Yugoslav government and leaders of the CPY. The most notable example of using emigrants for propaganda against Yugoslavia was the trial of Trajcho Kostov, in which Hadžipanzov, as a former official at the Yugoslav embassy, had a role of confirming the alleged connections between Kostov and the Yugoslav govern-

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<sup>24</sup> DAS, BIA, III-75, 15–18.

<sup>25</sup> DAS, BIA, III-75, 5–9.

<sup>26</sup> Radomir Ilić "Mika" was born 1921. in village Rgotina in Zaječar county. In 1940. he became a member of the Communist party of Yugoslavia. He organised a group that defected to Bulgaria on 1st of May 1949. In 1951. he was arrested by bulgarian authorities because of spying accusations. He was also a member of the Bulgarian Communist Party (DAS, BIA, I-91, 29).

<sup>27</sup> DAS, BIA, III-75, 19.

ment. The aim of this action was to portray Yugoslavia as an aggressive nation that interferes in internal affairs of other countries.<sup>28</sup> In addition to Bulgarian claims about Yugoslavia being a threat, the Bulgarian propaganda represented Yugoslav cominformists as true patriots and revolutionaries. Some emigrants were also present in public events organized by the BCP.<sup>29</sup>

Newspapers were of great importance in Cominform propaganda. The Yugoslav Cominform emigration in Bulgaria thus had its own newspaper that entitled “Napred” (Forward). The editorial office of this newspaper was located in Dunav Street no. 10 in Sofia, and was founded after former Yugoslav general and prominent member of Cominform emigration in USSR, Pero Popivoda<sup>30</sup>, had visited political emigrants in Bulgaria in April 1949. First issues of the newspaper came out next month. There were reports that newspaper of Yugoslav emigrants was founded prior to Popivoda’s visit, and was initially named “Bratstvo i jedinstvo” (Brotherhood and Unity), but no issues of this newspaper were ever published. In other Cominform countries Yugoslav emigrants also organized editorial offices and issued similar papers.<sup>31</sup> Soon after the first issues of “Napred” had been published, at the end of May 1949, Yugoslavia sent a note asking the Bulgarian authorities to prevent “hostile work” of Yugoslav emigrants.<sup>32</sup>

Issues of “Napred” were printed in the office of “Rabotnichesko delo”, which was the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the BCP. “Napred” was publishing texts in which Yugoslav government and CPY were strongly criticized, especially Yugoslav economic policies, agricultural system, and politics of the CPY. The newspaper also regularly praised Cominform states, mostly the USSR and its industry, political system and prominent political leaders. These texts were edited by a group of political emigrants in which some students were involved, and with Bulgarian officials directing its editorial policy, most notably Cherakchiev who had been delegated to the editorial office by the BCP. “Napred” had some usual sections, like a section consisting of different news from Yugoslavia, in which new emigrants wrote reports about the bad economic situation in Yugoslavia. Some issues of the newspaper copied articles of newspapers issued by the Cominform emigration in other countries.<sup>33</sup> The newspaper was published every 15<sup>th</sup> day for some period of time. There were also periods in which it was not issued on time, without explanation of the causes. In 1951, issues were being published almost regularly, with new

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<sup>28</sup> DAS, BIA, II-124, 21.

<sup>29</sup> ДАА, Препис от протокол 101 от решенията на Политбиро на ЦК от 3. май 1950. (available at: <https://politburo.archives.bg/bg/2013-04-24-11-09-24/1950-1959/2953-----9--1950> (accessed on 17.06.2024. at 13:14); *Бурне дипломатске године...*, 85.

<sup>30</sup> Pero Popivoda (1916–1979), born in Montenegro, was a former general of the Yugoslav army. As one of the most prominent Yugoslav political emigrants, Popivoda organized cominform emigration in USSR, and was influential on cominform emigration in other communist countries (DAS, BIA, II-113, Spiskovi ibeovaca, Popis emigranata, 1).

<sup>31</sup> DAS, BIA, II-124, 21.

<sup>32</sup> Петков, *нав. дело*, 465.

<sup>33</sup> DAS, BIA, III-75, 22–24; „Морално-политичко распаѓање титовске партије“, *Напред*, бр. 6 (78), 29.11.1952; „Пораст животног стандарда у земљама народне демократије“, *Напред*, бр. 1 (73), 10.01.1952.

issues coming out every 10<sup>th</sup> day, which meant thrice a month. Issues usually consisted of four to eight pages, and were published in Serbian and Macedonian language. There were also attempts by the editorial board to publish the newspaper in Bulgarian language in order to raise public interest for Yugoslav emigration, but this failed as the Bulgarian version had poor sales. In 1952, the newspaper started to be distributed for free, because there was lack of interest among emigrants who were buying it less and less.<sup>34</sup> The most notable emigrants who worked as editors of “Napred” were Blagoje Hadžipanzov and Radomir Andrić “Kmet”. The editorial board was strongly criticized by general Popivoda during his visit to Bulgaria in September 1952, who then blamed its editors that nobody was reading “Napred” because in their articles they had made every Yugoslav a fascist, and that the issues were full of lies.<sup>35</sup> After the beginning of normalization of the Yugoslav-Bulgarian relations, the newspaper’s editorial office was shut near the end of 1954.<sup>36</sup>

The main goal of “Napred” was for it to be inserted into Yugoslav territory for propaganda purposes. There was a major difference in printing issues that were meant to be inserted into Yugoslavia, and those that were intended for the emigrants. The design of the papers that were meant to be inserted in Yugoslavia were usually made of better quality materials, and the paper was thinner, so that issues could be easily inserted across the border and in larger quantities. There were several ways of inserting the newspaper into Yugoslavia. Most issues were carried across the border by the saboteurs who were illegally crossing into Yugoslavia. One time, the Bulgarian representative office in Belgrade sent copies of the newspaper to the addresses of different Yugoslav institutions. Also, some copies of the newspaper were put into crates and were thrown into the Nišava River.<sup>37</sup>

Another form of propaganda were radio shows. At first, radio shows were broadcasted in Serbian and Macedonian language, with the show in Slovenian appearing later. The first editor of radio shows was Ostoja Rokić<sup>38</sup>, and later Radomir Ilić “Mika”. From 1950, the speaker of these shows was Vitomir Đorđević<sup>39</sup>, who was also a translator. The shows usually started at 6:30 in the morning and ended at midnight, but with several breaks during the day. The radio section was funded by Radio Sofia, and controlled by the representatives of the BCP in the Association of Yugoslav emigrants. Like “Napred”, these shows aimed to portray Yugoslav government and its policies negatively. Editors of the shows used texts from “Napred” and from other Cominform newspapers, as well as news broadcasted by radio sta-

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<sup>34</sup> DAS, BIA, III-75, 22–24.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 21–25.

<sup>36</sup> Petar Dragišić, “Napred – List jugoslovenskih emigranata (pristalica Kominforma) u Bugarskoj”, *Tokovi istorije* 2005/3-4, 126; Петков, 547.

<sup>37</sup> DAS, BIA, II-124, 15.

<sup>38</sup> Ostoja Rokić defected to Bulgaria on 1st of May 1949. He was former director of Tim-Bas mine in Zaječar. At first, he was an editor, as well as a speaker in the radio emissions. He returned to Yugoslavia in 1959 (DAS, BIA, II-113, Odeljenje SDB Zaječar. Spisak povratnika iz IE zemalja).

<sup>39</sup> Vitomir Đorđević, originally from the area of Prokuplje, he was a student at the Gymnasium in Nis. He defected to Bulgaria in 1949. and continued his studies in Bulgaria. Beside being speaker and translator in the radio section, he was also active in sabotage actions during 1951. and 1952. (DAS, BIA, II-124, 81).

tions in other communist countries. Beside this, Bulgarian saboteurs also placed several radio stations inside Yugoslavia.<sup>40</sup>

### Espionage and sabotage actions

After the Yugoslav split with Cominform, many incidents and provocations occurred on the borders between Yugoslavia and its communist neighbors. This was part of the pressure from the Cominform states on Yugoslavia, alongside the introduced economic blockade. Some emigrants were also active in provocations against Yugoslav representatives in Bulgaria, as was insulting them in public, spitting on their cars and stopping them. Also, the secretary of the Yugoslav embassy in Sofia was attacked in 1949.<sup>41</sup> Other forms of pressure were sabotage and espionage actions, in which a group of political emigrants in Bulgaria took active part.

The DS started sending saboteurs and spies inside Yugoslavia from the beginning of 1949. In the following three years, out of 245 known emigrants who had been inserted into Yugoslavia from neighboring countries, 74 were inserted from Bulgaria (around 30% of all inserted emigrants). Out of 74 saboteurs from Bulgaria, one-fourth were Bulgarians from Dimitrovgrad and Bosilegrad counties. The DS coordinated these actions through the centers that were located near the Yugoslav border, one being located in Blagoevgrad, which coordinated actions in the People's Republic of Macedonia, and in Vratsa, Sofia and Vidin for actions towards the People's Republic of Serbia. Most of the actions on Yugoslav soil were directed from the center in Sofia. Around 20 officers in Sofia were involved in the planning of these actions, with one of them being former military attaché of the Bulgarian embassy in Belgrade. Other notable officers that worked with saboteurs were colonel Iliev, who managed a DS center in Sofia, and Cvetkov, who was in charge of training courses for saboteurs. According to some saboteurs that were caught by the Yugoslav authorities, officers of the Soviet NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) had also occasionally been present during their trainings.<sup>42</sup>

Recruitment of the emigrants for the DS unfolded in several ways. Many emigrants were actually recruited to work for the DS after they had defected, being given the task to follow other emigrants and to watch out for suspicious defectors. More complex was the process of recruitment for the mission inside Yugoslavia. For this purpose, the DS recruited only those who had proven themselves on the previous tasks, or those who had been recommended by the prominent and trustful emigrants like Radomir Andrić and later Radomir Ilić, who even became an officer of the DS. Some emigrants were recruited in the seat of the emigration's political organization in Sofia, after a conversation with a DS officer. Others were recruited on their working places. Although Bulgarian authorities divided emigrants into political and economic groups, they didn't completely abandon those who they had

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<sup>40</sup> DAS, BIA, III-75, 18, 27, 29; DAS, BIA, II-124, 37.

<sup>41</sup> Марко Милетић, „Инциденти на границама између Југославије и земаља Информбироа 1948–1955“, *Токови историје*, год. XXVIII, 2020/2, 192–197.

<sup>42</sup> DAS, BIA, II-124, 40–42.

designated as economic emigrants, as sometimes they were also hired for various tasks by the DS, alongside political emigrants.<sup>43</sup>

Recruiting of emigrants was covered with several actions. To prevent suspicious emigrants from seeing that the DS was conducting activities inside Yugoslavia, the Bulgarian authorities conducted “false arrests” of the individuals that had accepted to work with the DS, while some were allegedly taken for health reasons and were to be admitted to the hospital. Some were reportedly sent to party courses, and others were “arrested” on their jobs. Afterwards, the recruited emigrant would be taken to a secret location in Sofia, where he needed to stay away from other emigrants in order not to be seen by others, and especially to avoid walking during the day. Alongside the recruited emigrant there was usually one security officer assigned to instruct him, and in cases where bigger action was planned, more officers were involved. The training of the recruited individuals was carried out on Vitosha Mountain near the camp where emigrants had originally been placed, with Ivan Nikolov as manager of these courses. The training was based on firearm use and ground movement. Before the start of the mission, the recruiters gave agents information about the contacts they planned to establish after crossing the border, with the reasons why they had chosen them. Most of the time, the recruited emigrants were put to operate from the regions they originally came from, because they had better knowledge of the terrain, and also had family and friendship ties there. Before illegally entering Yugoslavia, emigrants had to sign a declaration undertaking to fight against “Tito and Ranković’s gang”.<sup>44</sup>

The types of tasks on which emigrants were sent varied. In the first actions, the saboteur’s goal was to connect with dissatisfied members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, and to establish secret and small groups consisting of three members. This represented an intention to create parallel party organizations inside Yugoslavia. Later, recruiters went on sabotage and espionage missions, with tasks of gathering military information, like deployment and size of the troops, locations of bases, bunkers and airfields, while some had task of gathering information about Yugoslav economy, i.e. the conditions in Yugoslav factories, mines, conditions in agriculture, public opinion, etc. In some actions, emigrants also used photo devices in order to capture images of Yugoslav facilities. At first, the DS usually sent individuals and groups of up to three saboteurs. In later actions there were changes in the size of the groups that were deployed in Yugoslavia, with some of the groups numbering up to ten members. Sometimes, group members would split up after crossing the border, and then went on different locations. After completing the task, they would regroup at a certain place before returning to Bulgaria. Besides Yugoslav emigrants, these groups were also made of Bulgarians, and sometimes saboteurs that were originally from Aegean Macedonia.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> DAS, BIA, III-75, 31–34.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 34–40.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 36–39; DAS, BIA, Zbirka dokumenata II-108. Lica suđena i kažnjena zbog delatnosti po IB, 4–7.

Table no. 1: Number of caught and liquidated saboteurs<sup>46</sup>

	Caught in action	Liquidated
1949.	6	/
1950.	15	5
1951.	9	2
1952. (until October)	17	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>17</b>

During their missions in Yugoslavia, saboteurs were usually equipped with German-made MP-40, a pistol, up to four hand grenades, and were also carrying binoculars. In terms of food, they usually carried bread biscuits, food cans, chocolates and sugar with them, and also a significant amount of money (Yugoslav dinars) which was used for bribing contacts. One of the most notable actions conducted by saboteurs was the killing of Pane Djukić<sup>47</sup> in the village of Veliko Trnjane near Leskovac on 30 June 1952. Afterwards, members of a saboteur group were arrested and publicly trialed by the County Court of Leskovac.<sup>48</sup> Around Leskovac and Lebane, Zarije Mujović's group was also active in gathering information about industry and mines in southern Serbia.<sup>49</sup> Other notable groups were the group of Stojadin Veljković that operated in the area around Surdulica, a group that operated in the region of Negotin which was, according to some witnesses, led by former chetnik Čedomir Gajić, and Milutin Veljković's group which was liquidated.<sup>50</sup> With more saboteurs entering from Bulgaria, Yugoslav authorities imposed stricter measures in the border regions. Local population was also very active in reporting unknown individuals and groups who were seen in rural regions, as the news of the sabotage and espionage activities caused war psychosis among the population. This made work of the UDB agents difficult, with many reported individuals having no connections with saboteurs, as local population in some villages reported almost every unknown person who they had seen.<sup>51</sup>

The deployment of the armed groups was present in 1953, and continued in the months after Stalin's death, with the UDB recording crossings of 46 saboteurs from Bulgaria, from the beginning of 1953 until 20 July 1953. Most of illegal crossings into Yugoslavia from Bulgaria were recorded in May 1953, with 19 known saboteurs illegally crossing the border. Activities varied in different months, for example there were no recorded illegal crossings in March 1953. This data accounts

<sup>46</sup> DAS, BIA, III-75, 37.

<sup>47</sup> Pane Djukić (1922–1952), born in Bosanski Petrovac, worked as a tinsmith in Kruševac. He was active in uprising in Yugoslavia from 1941. Djukić was also officer of the UDB and People's Hero of Yugoslavia („Народни херој потпуковник Панае Ђукић“, *Борба*, бр. 156, 2. 7. 1952).

<sup>48</sup> „После крвавог злочина бугарских терориста: Осуђени су на смрт бугарски шпијуни и припадници бандитске групе Чедо Стојиљковића“, *Наша реч*, бр. 26, 12. 7. 1952.

<sup>49</sup> DAS, BIA, Zbirka dokumenata II-103.

<sup>50</sup> DAS, BIA, III-75, 42–44.

<sup>51</sup> ДАС, фонд Централног комитета Савеза комуниста Србије, кутија 725/9, Допис организационо-инструкторског одељења Обласног комитета КПС за Нишку област Контролној комисији Централног комитета КПС, бр. 148, 15.08.1952.

for the crossings that were recorded by the UDB, with the real number surely being higher. On eight of these occasions, saboteurs were prevented from entering Yugoslavia after being caught in ambush.<sup>52</sup>

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Normalization of relations between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria was closely related to Soviet-Yugoslav relations. A new chapter in these relations was formally announced with the signing of the Belgrade Declaration on June 1955. As for Bulgaria, this meant gradual abandonment of hostile policies towards Yugoslavia, with regarding Yugoslavia again as a democratic country, and not a “bourgeois state”.<sup>53</sup>

With the normalization of the Yugoslav-Bulgaria relations, one of the questions that burdened this process was the future of Yugoslav political emigrants, and their potential return to Yugoslavia. In the period 1948–1952, there were already 12 emigrants who were disappointed by the treatment in Bulgaria and decided to return to Yugoslavia.<sup>54</sup> In the mid-1950s, larger numbers of emigrants began to return to Yugoslavia as part of the negotiations between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. For example, on the territory of Dimitrovgrad municipality, there were 142 individuals who were repatriated by 1969. A portion of defectors decided to stay in Bulgaria, with some of emigrants marrying and graduating from universities there. This was mostly the case of emigrants who took part in sabotage activities. Some of them feared that their return would subject them to punishment by the Yugoslav authorities.<sup>55</sup>

Yugoslav defectors who decided to return to Yugoslavia were under constant supervision by Yugoslav security and authorities in the years following their return. Former emigrants were later on divided into three groups based on their political positions, as extreme and most dangerous ones, those that posed moderate threat and passive ones. Yugoslav authorities were also following their reactions during important political events, like in the case of change in Soviet political leadership in 1964.<sup>56</sup>

## Conclusion

The Yugoslav Cominform emigration in Bulgaria was a political group with no autonomy, as Bulgarian authorities instructed its work and financed its activities. In economic terms, emigrants were totally dependent on Bulgarian authorities, and after 1948, the mistrust grew between the two sides. Out of the total number of emigrants, there was a small group active in sabotage activities and propaganda against

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<sup>52</sup> DAS, BIA, II-113, Delatnost naše emigracije iz susednih IB zemalja za period 1. 1. – 20. 7. t.g.

<sup>53</sup> Branko Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918–1988. Treća knjiga*. (Beograd: Nolit, 1988), 357; Петков, *нав. дело*, 578.

<sup>54</sup> DAS, BIA, II-124, 38.

<sup>55</sup> *Бурне дипломатске године...*, 110, 122; DAS, BIA, II-113, Izveštaj SDB Dimitrovgrad, 24. 11. 1969.

<sup>56</sup> DAS, BIA, II-113, Izveštaj o akciji “Boris” 1964.

Yugoslavia. This propaganda had minor impact inside Yugoslavia. In the regions targeted by Bulgarian authorities, people had negative attitudes towards Bulgaria, mainly due to the Bulgarian involvement in both world wars in these regions, so no greater impact of pro-Bulgarian propaganda in bordering regions was to be expected. This, however, was not the case with the Bulgarian national minority, which exploited political situation as a pretext to emigrate to Bulgaria. Also, Bulgaria utilized expulsion of Yugoslavia from the group of communist states to express pretensions towards Yugoslav territories that had been under its rule during World War II.

Politics of the Cominform states towards Yugoslavia were reflected in the types of activities on which the emigrants were deployed. At first, when the change in Yugoslavia's leadership and the CPY was expected, the DS directed actions in Yugoslavia towards the creation of parallel party organizations in connecting with known cominformists inside Yugoslavia. The goal of these activities was to undermine the power of the CPY in the case of uprising against Yugoslav government, or to try to organize resistance inside Yugoslavia. As this failed completely, later tasks were directed at gathering information that could be valuable in case of war.

Because the change of power in Yugoslavia was not carried out, as well as the awaited intervention from the Cominform states, political emigrants were deeply demoralized. As emigrants were also in constant quarrels, and with most economic emigrants having weak material status, the Cominform emigration in Bulgaria most of the time acted like unorganized and clueless group, and this situation left many emigrants without choice but to work in hard conditions or to try to return to Yugoslavia. On the other hand, actions of Bulgarian authorities also added to the confusion among the emigrants. Clearly, Bulgarian authorities and emigrants had different views on the status of the emigration, as the BCP wanted to integrate emigrants in Bulgaria's system, while the most active part of political emigration was interested only in regime change in Yugoslavia. The Cominform emigration lost its remaining importance after normalization of the relations between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria.

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## THE COMINFORM EMIGRATION IN BULGARIA

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### *Summary*

The Bulgarian authorities completely controlled the Yugoslav political emigration, whose members were also economically dependent on the Bulgarian government. The political activities of the emigration, which were financed and directed by the Bulgarian authorities, were limited to propaganda work and actions of an espionage and sabotage nature, which can be used to reconstruct to a certain extent the attitude of the Cominform countries towards Yugoslavia in the various phases of the conflict. The first sabotage actions were aimed at creating parallel party organisations and establishing links with people within the FPRY who were known to support the Cominform resolution. The aim of these actions was to provoke organised resistance, as an uprising against the Yugoslav government and the CPY was expected at the beginning of the conflict. Since there was no change of government in Yugoslavia, the Bulgarian authorities began to use emigrants to collect military and economic data that could be useful in the event of war. On the other hand, the propaganda activities of political emigration from Bulgaria had very little impact in Yugoslavia, except among the members of the Bulgarian national minority. Since these actions were directed towards the eastern parts of Yugoslavia, especially the area of the Yugoslav-Bulgarian border, the population there retained in their collective memory an extremely negative memory of Bulgaria's role in both world wars. The Yugoslav authorities capitalised on this sentiment and fuelled it with newspaper articles reminding the population of the Bulgarian occupation and war crimes. In the early 1950s, news of espionage and sabotage as well as the reawakened memories of Bulgaria's role in the previous war fuelled the war psychosis among the Yugoslav population, especially in the border zone.

At the end of 1949, great disappointment spread among the emigrants, which was influenced by several factors. The emigrants were dissatisfied with the attitude of the Bulgarian authorities, as their material situation was constantly deteriorating, especially in the case of economic emigrants. On the other hand, the demobilisation of the Bulgarian army at the end of 1949 had a particularly negative effect on the mood of the former Yugoslav officers. The Bulgarian authorities also used measures to punish the emigrants, especially if they were suspected of being

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agents of the UDB or of acting outside the framework set by the Bulgarian authorities. Frequent disputes within the emigration, mutual distrust between the emigration and the Bulgarian authorities, the categorisation of emigrants and the lack of political changes in Yugoslavia constantly increased the disappointment. Thus, the Cominform emigration in Bulgaria represented a dysfunctional and often non-ideological group of dissidents. After the normalisation of relations between the two sides, it lost its political role completely, and the issue of Yugoslav emigration led to friction in relations between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria.