
BETWEEN YUGOSLAVIA AND BULGARIA: THE MACEDONIAN QUESTION AND PROPAGANDA STRUGGLES IN NORTH AMERICA (1929–1941)

Miloš Žikić, PhD*

ABSTRACT: *The paper examines the development of the Macedonian Question in North America from 1929 to 1941. It analyses the propaganda activities of Yugoslav diplomatic and consular representatives, as well as representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North America, in their efforts to win over emigrants from Macedonia for the Yugoslav state and idea, and their struggle with members of the Macedonian Political Organisation in North America and other proponents of Bulgarian-Macedonian propaganda. The paper is based on archival sources and relevant literature.*

KEYWORDS: Macedonian Question, emigration, Macedonian Political Organisation (MPO), Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (IMRO), Yugoslavia, Bulgaria

Introduction

Mass emigration of the Slavic population from the Balkan Peninsula began only at the end of the 19th century, with the western regions leading.¹ At the beginning of the 20th century, this trend spread to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia, where the main reasons for emigration were economic. During the first decade of the 20th century, the population of Serbia also joined this process. The reason for this “delay” was that, during the 19th century, the Serbian state, given its economic and social conditions, was a country that attracted immigrants from the surrounding areas of the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary. As an immigration country, the proportion of its population emigrating was very small. Research by historian Aleksandar Miletić indi-

* Research Associate, Institute for Contemporary History, Belgrade, Republic of Serbia
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5470-8085>; E-mail: zikic90@gmail.com

¹ More in: Aleksandar R. Miletić, *Journey under Surveillance: The Overseas Emigration Policy of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in Global Context 1918–1928* (Belgrade: INIS, 2009); Vesna Đikanović, *Iseljavanje u Sjedinjene Američke Države: Jugoslovensko iskustvo 1918–1941* (Beograd: INIS, 2012); Vesna Š. Đikanović, „Iseljenici u Severnoj Americi i jugoslovenska država: 1918–1945“ (doktorska disertacija, Univerzitet u Beogradu, Filozofski fakultet, Odeljenje za istoriju, 2016).

cates that this did not change even after the end of the First World War.² Bulgarians also began immigrating to North America at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, mainly for economic reasons.³ The US Department of Labour, based on its annual reports, noted that between 1899 and 1910, 142,441 Bulgarians, Serbs, and Montenegrins immigrated to the United States of America (USA).⁴

The backbone of Yugoslav-Bulgarian relations in the interwar period was the unresolved Macedonian Question, which originated in the 19th century, when the process of creating national states based on historicism began in the Balkans. As a result, both Serbia and Bulgaria claimed the territory of Macedonia. Owing to the existence of the Bulgarian Exarchate (founded in 1870) as a legal Ottoman institution, Bulgarian propaganda among the Macedonian population had a significant advantage over Serbian efforts. Its almost uninterrupted long-term activity through churches and schools to foster Bulgarian national consciousness led to the education of numerous teachers and priests, who further promoted Bulgarisation among the population.⁵

Emigration from Macedonia began after the Berlin Congress in 1878, led by emigrants from Aegean Macedonia. A larger wave of Macedonian emigration followed the suppression of the Ilinden Uprising by the Turks in 1903.⁶ Yugoslav diplomat Božidar Purić states that according to official American statistics from 1910, there were about 40,000 “Bulgarians and Macedonians” in the USA, of whom about 30,000 were from Aegean and Vardar Macedonia.⁷ Due to stronger Bulgarian propaganda, Macedonian emigrants in North America, organised into Bulgarian-Macedonian brotherhoods, represented a significant factor of the Bulgarian diaspora.⁸ Their activities were managed by the Bulgarian-Macedonian Committee, founded in Chicago in 1914 and headed by priest David Nakov, a former comitadji of the Internal Macedonian-Odrin Revolutionary Organisation (IMORO, later IMRO) from Veles. The Committee, in association with the Bulgarian Legation in Washington, directed Bulgarian propaganda in the USA during the First World War. After the war, and in anticipation of the peace conference, the Committee held its Congress in Chicago at the beginning of December 1918, from which, “on behalf of 40 thousand Bulgarians from Macedonia”, a telegram was sent to the President of the USA, Woodrow Wilson, asking him to advocate at the Conference for the survival of Macedonia as part of Bulgaria. After the war, the Committee’s influence began to weaken, and its activity almost ceased in 1921 due to divisions within IMRO in Bulgaria between autonomists and federalists.⁹

² V. Đikanović, *Iseljavanje u Sjedinjene Američke Države...*, 41–49, 56–57; A. R. Miletić, *n. d.*, 75–76.

³ Костадин Гърдев, *Българската емиграция в Канада* (София: Академично издателство „Марин Дринов“, 1994), 10–14.

⁴ V. Đikanović, *Iseljavanje u Sjedinjene Američke Države...*, 56.

⁵ Урош Шешум, *Српска четничка акција (1897–1908): Оружана дипломатија* (Нови Сад: Матица српска, 2019).

⁶ К. Гърдев, *Българската емиграция в Канада*, 10.

⁷ Божидар Пурић, *Наши исељеници* (Београд: Књижарница С. Б. Цвијановића, 1929), 57; V. Đikanović, „Iseljenici u Severnoj Americi...“, 152, napomena 527.

⁸ Srđan Mićić, “Mission of Konstantin Todorov in North America 1927–1928: Yugoslav Foreign Service vs. Macedonian-Bulgarian Organisations in North America”, *Токови историје*, бр. 1, (2015), 87, 91.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 87–88; Б. Пурић, *н. д.*, 50–51; V. Đikanović, „Iseljenici u Severnoj Americi...“, 152, napomena 528.

Nevertheless, Bulgarian propaganda continued to strengthen through the American press and public lectures. At the same time, contacts were established with representatives of the Croatian, Turkish, and Albanian emigration with the aim of joint action in Yugoslav territory.¹⁰ Based on these successes, it was decided to reorganise the Bulgarian-Macedonian Committee. At the end of 1921 and the beginning of 1922, several people from Sofia were sent to the USA, but they were not successful. The situation changed in the second half of 1922, when protosyncellus Dr Krsto Cernov, also a former comitadji, arrived in the USA and was appointed head of the Bulgarian Church Mission in North America. Shortly after his arrival, a congress of nine Macedonian brotherhoods was held in Fort Wayne, Indiana, from 1 to 4 October 1922, at which the Bulgarian-Macedonian Committee was reorganised into the Macedonian Political Organisation (MPO). On that occasion, there was a conflict between two factions, with victory going to the group that opposed IMRO's guerrilla actions and advocated the implementation of propaganda activities. The organisation's main goal was to fight by legal means for the establishment of an independent Macedonian state, which could later become part of a Balkan federation. Yugoslav diplomats believed that the adoption of this idea was due to current international circumstances, which were unfavourable to Macedonia's unification with Bulgaria. Another goal of the MPO was to advance the education of emigrants and to develop their political and social awareness.¹¹ After the Congress ended, the organisation began to expand among the Macedonian colonies. By 1923, 13 such organisations had been registered in North America, and by 1929, there were 30.¹²

At the same time, given the political situation in Bulgaria following the 9 June 1923 coup d'état, steps were taken to make the organisation independent of IMRO. This was confirmed at the Second Congress, held at the beginning of September 1923 in Indianapolis, Indiana, when it was decided that the MPO would be independent from IMRO but would maintain good relations with that organisation. However, IMRO did not wish to allow this. Therefore, on the recommendation of one of the later IMRO autonomist leaders, Ivan Mihailov, Jordan Chkatrov was sent to the USA in 1924 to reorganise propaganda, as he was known as an effective speaker and agitator. At the Third Congress of the MPO, held from 31 August to 4 September 1924 in Fort Wayne, Chkatrov was elected general secretary of the organisation. Pandil Shanev was elected president of the Central Committee, a position he held until he died in 1939.¹³

At the end of 1924 and the beginning of 1925, the IMRO autonomists achieved a victory over the federalists in Bulgaria, further strengthening Jordan Chkatrov's position. Bulgaria's position was also reinforced by the appointment of diplomat Simeon Radev, a former comitadji from Resen, as Plenipotentiary Minister in Washing-

¹⁰ Б. Пурић, н. д., 51; S. Mičić, "Mission of Konstantin Todorov...", 88.

¹¹ Иванъ Михайловъ, *Спомени IV: Освободителна борба: 1924–1934 г.: (продължение)* (Indianapolis: Ivan Mihailoff, 1973), 482; Б. Пурић, н. д., 51–54; Зоран Тодоровски, *Внатрешната Македонска Револуционерна организација: 1924–1934* (Скопје: ИП „РОБЗ“, 1997), 89; V. Đikanović, „Iseljenici u Severnoj Americi...“, 152–155; S. Mičić, "Mission of Konstantin Todorov...", 89, 105.

¹² Б. Пурић, н. д., 55–56; V. Đikanović, „Iseljenici u Severnoj Americi...“, 154.

¹³ И. Михайловъ, *op. cit.*, 482–483; З. Тодоровски, *op. cit.*, 90; S. Mičić, „Mission of Konstantin Todorov...“, 89–90.

ton.¹⁴ These Bulgarian initiatives began to yield results. In February 1927, the newspaper *Македонска трибуна* was launched in Indianapolis as the MPO's newsletter, with Chkatrov as editor. Subsequently, the Macedonian Press Bureau was established in New York, managed by Lambo Kiselincev and Nikola Mitrov, while a special Department for Macedonian Propaganda was created in the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religion, which maintained direct contact with the Press Bureau in New York.¹⁵

The activity of the Bulgarian-Macedonian propaganda in North America attracted the special attention of Yugoslav diplomacy, especially as its actions were in complete contrast to Yugoslav policy towards the Slavic population in Macedonia, which was regarded as Serbian. In addition, some concern was raised by the financial support provided by emigrants for IMRO's actions on Yugoslav territory.¹⁶ To monitor the activities of Macedonian emigrants in the USA and to undertake countermeasures, the Yugoslav diplomacy, in addition to the Legation in Washington, had at its disposal general consulates in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, established in 1919 and 1920. With the appointment of the former Montenegrin Consul in Montreal, Anto Seferović, to the Yugoslav service, the General Consulate in Montreal was also subordinated to the Legation in Washington. In addition, there were several honorary consulates. The General Consulate in Chicago played the most important role, as it was closest to the centres of Bulgarian-Macedonian propaganda.¹⁷

The Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) issued an order to the diplomatic-consular missions in North America in 1923, based on the proposal of the then General Consul in Chicago, Božidar Purić, to suppress pro-Bulgarian propaganda. His proposals included capturing Macedonian agents in the country through whom money was delivered, seizing archives, breaking up congregations, printing brochures, and winning over Macedonian emigrants.¹⁸ Accordingly, certain steps were taken, yielding positive results. At the same time, it was established that the MPO did not have as much strength as had been assumed.¹⁹

However, there was a lack of financial resources for a specific action, which is why Yugoslav diplomatic and consular representatives turned to cooperation with priests of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) in North America,²⁰ through whom they attempted to suppress the influence of the Bulgarian church, and therefore the members of the MPO, among the Macedonian diaspora. On the other hand, the Yugoslav authorities, due to the questionable loyalty of Macedonian emigrants, introduced a new principle for issuing visas to the population of Southern Serbia.²¹ Having learned that IMRO members were procuring false passports for emigrants from these areas, Yugoslav diplomats intervened with the US authorities to deport these indivi-

¹⁴ S. Mičić, "Mission of Konstantin Todorov...", 90.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*; И. Михайловъ, *op. cit.*, 484; Б. Пурић, *н. д.*, 55.

¹⁶ V. Đikanović, „Iseljenici u Severnoj Americi...“, 154.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 77–78; S. Mičić, "Mission of Konstantin Todorov...", 91.

¹⁸ S. Mičić, „Mission of Konstantin Todorov...“, 93–94; V. Đikanović, „Iseljenici u Severnoj Americi...“, 155.

¹⁹ S. Mičić, "Mission of Konstantin Todorov...", 94–97.

²⁰ During the 1920s, the American-Canadian bishop Mardarije Uskoković and priest David Popović were especially prominent in this work. More in: *Ibid.*, 101–109.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 96–98; V. Đikanović, „Iseljenici u Severnoj Americi...“, 156.

duals. In addition, lists of active MPO members were delivered to Belgrade, so that by influencing their families, they would be dissuaded from anti-Yugoslav activities.²²

However, the results achieved by Jordan Chkatrov and the Bulgarian Plenipotentiary Minister Simeon Radev forced the Yugoslav MFA to change the Yugoslav diplomatic and consular representatives in the USA in late 1926 and early 1927.²³ Afterwards, broader measures were taken to counter the MPO's propaganda, aiming to win over the Macedonian emigration and the American public. Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović and Kosta Todorov, a close associate of former Bulgarian Prime Minister Aleksandar Stamboliyski and Bulgarian Plenipotentiary Minister in Belgrade until 1923, were sent to the USA for this purpose. Todorov was given a special mission. The main obstacle in winning over the Macedonian emigration was the complete alienation between them and the Serbs in North America. Therefore, his efforts focused on promoting South Slavic unification, rather than the MPO's idea of creating an independent Macedonian state. At the same time, he used the American press to inform the public about IMRO's activities on Yugoslav territory. His mission lasted from November 1927 to May 1928, during which he achieved notable results, including the founding of the Permanent Committee for Yugoslav-Bulgarian Unification in Chicago. However, his mission was abruptly cut short in May 1928 when a powerful earthquake struck Bulgaria, as it was concluded that, as a result of this event, continuing in the intended direction could be counterproductive.²⁴

After the termination of Kosta Todorov's mission, the Yugoslav MFA gradually changed its views on the possibility of the MPO providing IMRO with significant financial support. Therefore, it decided to change its tactics and, in June 1928, issued instructions to oppose the MPO with identical means: systematic propaganda through the press and congregations, informing the American public, engaging prominent individuals, establishing societies as a counterweight to the Macedonian organisation, and inserting trusted people into the MPO.²⁵

Meanwhile, within the autonomist wing of the IMRO, disagreements that emerged shortly after the victory over the federalists became increasingly serious. These concerned the process of generational change and, consequently, the previous methods of operation. Terrorist activities, specifically assassinations, increasingly replaced the traditional tactic of sending comitadji companies into Yugoslav territory. The conflict culminated in July 1928, when General Aleksandar Protogerov, leader of the older generation, was assassinated on the orders of Ivan Mihailov, leader of the younger generation. This led to a split between the supporters of the two leaders (Protogerovists and Mihailovists) and their mutual reprisals.²⁶ The consequences of this conflict will also be felt within the Macedonian diaspora in North America.

²² V. Đikanović, „Iseljenici u Severnoj Americi...“, 156; Vladan Jovanović, *Jugoslovenska država i Južna Srbija: 1918–1929: Makedonija, Sandžak, Kosovo i Metohija u Kraljevini SHS* (Beograd: INIS, 2002), 207–208; S. Mičić, „Mission of Konstantin Todorov...“, 98.

²³ S. Mičić, „Mission of Konstantin Todorov...“, 98–99.

²⁴ More about the mission of Kosta Todorov in: *Ibid*, 109–119.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 118; V. Đikanović, „Iseljenici u Severnoj Americi...“, 155.

²⁶ More in: Димитар Тасић, „Војно-политичка акција „македонствујушчих“ у Краљевини СХС/Југославији 1919–1934. године“, *Архив. Часопис Архива Југославије*, бр. 3, (2002), 92–

Division in the MPO and subordination of the organisation to Ivan Mihailov

Meanwhile, the establishment of the 6 January Dictatorship in the Kingdom of SCS in 1929 led to a closer association among opponents of the Yugoslav state. In this context, efforts to strengthen cooperation between Macedonian and Croatian emigrants in North America were also intensified. As a result, a document on action “against the common enemy” was signed in February 1929 between the MPO and the organisation “Hrvatsko Kolo”.²⁷ The desire for cooperation was strengthened after the establishment of collaboration between Ante Pavelić and the IMRO Mihailovists in Bulgaria. During the visit of Pavelić and Gustav Perčec to Sofia in April 1929, with representatives of the Macedonian National Committee (MNC), the legal organisation of Macedonian emigrants in Bulgaria, the so-called “Sofia Declaration” was signed, by which the Croatian emigrants and the MNC joined forces for coordinated action against the Yugoslav kingdom.²⁸ During the meeting, Pavelić and MNC President Konstantin Stanishev greeted “Croats and Macedonians” in America, which was published by *Hrvatski list* and *Danica Hrvatska* in the USA.²⁹ MPO members were regularly informed about Pavelić’s movements in Bulgaria and his meeting with Ivan Mihailov.³⁰

At the beginning of 1929, Jordan Chkatrov, who had been in Bulgaria since 1927, returned to the USA. The murder of General Protogerov in July 1928 was poorly received among MPO members. It was condemned at the VII Congress of this organisation, held in Detroit in September that year. This was a significant blow to Ivan Mihailov’s line, further compounded by the fact that Chkatrov was not re-elected as the organisation’s general secretary at the congress.³¹ Therefore, upon his return to the USA, his task was to consolidate the situation in the MPO and bring the organisation under Mihailov’s control. At the same time, he published several articles in American newspapers in which he glorified Mihailov and justified the terrorist activities of the IMRO on Yugoslav territory.³²

In accordance with the previously received instructions from the MFA, the General Consul in Chicago, Radoje Janković, applied the same measures and led a campaign against Chkatrov and his associates through the newspaper *The Indianapolis Star*, as *Македонска трибуна* was also published in Indianapolis. In addition, he hired the former Plenipotentiary Minister in Belgrade, Charles Vopicka, “as a proven

108; Срђан Мићић, „Протогеровисти ВМРО у југословенској служби 1930–1935. године“, *Војноисторијски гласник*, бр. 2, (2018), 70–109.

²⁷ Архив Југославије – АЈ, фонд 371, Poslanstvo Kraljevine Jugoslavije u Sjedinjenim Američkim Državama – Вашиington, fascikla 35, jedinica opisa 46, 339.

²⁸ Bogdan Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše* (Zagreb: Globus, 1978), 54–58.

²⁹ АЈ, 371–35–46, 361.

³⁰ АЈ, фонд 414, Generalni konzulat Kraljevine Jugoslavije u Čikagu, fascikla 8, jedinica opisa 17, Janković MID-u, Str. Pov. Br. 27, 17. 5. 1929.

³¹ Костадин Палешутски, *Македонското освободително движење 1924–1934* (Софија: Академично издателство „проф. Марин Дринов“, 1998), 165, 176; Георги Марков et al., сџс., *Алманах на българските национални движения след 1878 г.* (Софија: Академично издателство „Марин Дринов“, 2005), 374.

³² АЈ, 371–35–46, 341; АЈ, 414–8–17, Janković MID-u, Str. Pov. Br. 29, 17. 5. 1929.

friend of ours”³³. A large number of articles about Macedonia were also published in the Serbian emigrant press.³⁴ At the same time, following the same instructions from Belgrade, he also worked on forming a Yugoslav society in Chicago, named “Jugoslovenska budućnost”, which, in addition to suppressing Bulgarian-Macedonian propaganda, was intended to prevent cooperation between Macedonian and Croatian emigrants.³⁵ However, this organisation appears not to have been founded, as we have not found any mention of it in the available sources. We could not determine whether this was due to the financial difficulties Janković reported or to other reasons.

On the other hand, on 16 and 17 August 1929, a meeting took place in New York between representatives of the MPO and some Croatian emigrants associated with the organisation “Hrvatsko Kolo”. It was stated that the common interest of “Macedonians and Croats” in North America was a joint struggle “against Belgrade and Serbian hegemony”. A greeting telegram was also sent from the meeting to Pavličić in Vienna.³⁶ Contacts between Macedonian and Croatian emigrants were also noticeable in Canada, which is why the Yugoslav consul in Montreal, Anto Seferović, tried to ensure the loyalty of the Croats to the Yugoslav state.³⁷

Canada was also the venue for the VIII MPO congress, which was scheduled for early September 1929 in Toronto. This location was chosen because the Canadian National Exhibition was taking place at the same time, allowing people from around the world to learn about the Macedonian Question. As part of preparations for the Congress, members of the MPO “Pravda” branch in Toronto received permission to march through several main streets of the city, accompanied by military music. Then they laid a wreath at the monument to soldiers who fell in the First World War. This act was intended to contribute to the MPO’s propaganda efforts and to demonstrate the loyalty of Macedonian emigrants to the Canadian state.

Additionally, it is possible that the Canadian authorities’ response to such requests was motivated by a desire to secure votes in the upcoming election. Seferović reported that it was already too late to prevent the Congress, as the necessary permits had been issued and the planned honouring of fallen Canadian soldiers was set to proceed. However, he believed there was still an opportunity for counter-propaganda, which is why he requested and received various propaganda materials from the Legation in Washington.³⁸

The eighth Congress of the MPO was held in Toronto from 1 to 4 September 1929, attended by 40 delegates from various Macedonian organisations representing 24 cities in the USA and Canada, along with about 3,000 other participants. The Con-

³³ In September 1913, Charles Vopicka was appointed US Plenipotentiary Minister to Romania, Serbia, and Bulgaria, resident in Bucharest. He was relieved of his duties as Plenipotentiary Minister in Serbia and Bulgaria in December 1918, but remained in post in Romania until July 1920. As he was well acquainted with Balkan affairs, his opinion carried weight with the American public. <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/vopicka-charles-joseph> (accessed 24 March 2026).

³⁴ AJ, 414–8–17, Janković MID-u, Str. Pov. br. 29, 17. 5. 1929.

³⁵ AJ, 371–35–46, 394–396; AJ, 371–49–64, 751–752; AJ, 414–8–17, Janković MID-u, Str. Pov. Br. 29, 17. 5. 1929.

³⁶ AJ, 371–35–46, 447–449.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 334a–338, 401.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 414–420.

gress was opened by the president of the Central Committee of the MPO, Pandil Shanef, followed by the vice-president, Cvetko Anastasov, who called for the use of peaceful and legal means in the struggle for the liberation of Macedonia. In this context, the organisation decided to adopt a neutral position regarding the conflict between the IMRO Mihailovists and the Protogerovists in Bulgaria. This decision was likely influenced by the absence of Jordan Chkatrov, who travelled to London at the end of July or beginning of August 1929 to study the attitudes of the new British Labour government towards the Macedonian Question³⁹. Also, given Canadian and American legislation, MPO leaders did not want to be publicly associated with events within an illegal revolutionary organisation. One of the points adopted by the Congress referred to joint work with the organisation “Hrvatsko kolo”, which made the conclusions adopted at the meeting in New York official.⁴⁰

Given that he could do nothing about the Congress ban, the General Consul in Montreal, Anto Seferović, tried to mitigate its effects. He visited Canadian officials in Toronto and Ottawa, as well as the editorial offices of local newspapers, drawing their attention to the anti-Yugoslav activities of the MPO, which, according to him, led to their lack of interest in the event. At the same time, he organised the distribution of propaganda books and brochures. Seferović reported that these measures were effective because the members of the MPO were dissatisfied with the results of the Congress.⁴¹

The IMRO Mihailovists in Bulgaria also expressed dissatisfaction with the results of the Congress and the situation in the MPO. Therefore, at the end of September or the beginning of October 1929, Asen Avramov, one of Ivan Mihailov's most trusted associates, arrived in Indianapolis, where he assumed the position of general secretary of the MPO, which had been vacant since the VII Congress held in September 1928. On that occasion, he was required to promise to act in accordance with the proclaimed policy of neutrality. However, he immediately began working to subordinate this organisation to Ivan Mihailov. The apparent intention of the Mihailovists to completely take over the leadership of the MPO led to conflict within the organisation, as some members supported the Protogerovists. This was demonstrated at the meeting held from 27 to 30 October in Indianapolis, which was not attended by one of the heads of the Macedonian Press Bureau in New York, who was also the vice president of the MPO, Lamba Kiselinchev⁴². After a three-day “bitter struggle”, the Mihailovists achieved victory, confirming Avramov's position as general secretary of the MPO. It was then decided to adopt a new editorial policy for *Македонска трибуна*. In this context, editor Boris Zografov was deprived of the independence he had previously enjoyed, as he now had to obtain the approval of three newly elected members of the board of directors for publishing.⁴³ According to the opinion of the General Consul in New York, Radoje Janković, the changes that began to be implemented in the MPO confirmed the difficult situ-

³⁹ К. Палешутски, *op. cit.*, 176.

⁴⁰ AJ, 371–35–46, 444–446; AJ, 414–8–17, Kolombatović Fotiću, Pov. Br. 246, 16. 9. 1930.

⁴¹ AJ, 371–35–46, 459–464.

⁴² Kiselinchev did not agree with Asen Avramov's way of working. He was also influenced by the actions of his father, Lazar Kiselinchev, a member of the MNC, who resigned from his position after the murder of Georgi Bazdharov in September 1929 by the Mikhailovists. *Ibid.*, 473–474, 481.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 450–454, 467, 473–474, 481; Георги Марков et al., *ссь.*, *op. cit.*, 258.

ation in which this organisation found itself.⁴⁴ On the other hand, his colleague in Chicago, Đuro Kolombatović, believed that since Avramov's arrival, the MPO had shown "more combativeness and signs of life", which is why he emphasised the need to allocate financial resources to counter the organisation's propaganda.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the weakening of the MPO was becoming increasingly apparent, prompting Kolombatović to change his opinion. After taking over as general secretary of the MPO, Avramov undertook an "agitational trip" to the Macedonian colonies. However, at a meeting held in Detroit on 30 November 1929, a conflict arose, forcing the police to intervene and break it up. The dispute broke out between Avramov and the former IMORO voivode of Ohrid, Smile Voidanov, president of the Temporary Initiative Committee of the "Macedonian Independent Progressive Groups"⁴⁶, because Avramov refused to discuss the conflict between IMRO Mihailovists and Protogeroivists in Bulgaria and denied Voidanov the floor. As the meeting was broken up, representatives of the "independent groups" held a protest meeting the next day, 1 December, where they condemned the actions of the Mihailovists and founded a branch of their group in Detroit.⁴⁷

Conflicts among Macedonian emigrants were also evident in Canada. In early January 1930, Smile Voidanov arrived in Toronto and established a branch of his organisation in the city under the name "Vardar". The Yugoslav General Consul in Montreal, Anto Seferović, assessed those fundamental contradictions, as well as the personal interests and enmities of the leaders, would inevitably lead to open conflict between this association and MPO "Pravda", which could only benefit the Yugoslav state. This soon proved true. At the end of February 1930, there was a physical confrontation between representatives of "Vardar" and "Pravda", followed by a dispute in the Canadian press. The heated atmosphere was further fuelled by Seferović, who published articles under the pseudonym "Jasamović".⁴⁸

Due to the strengthening of its ranks, the Temporary Initiative Committee of the "Macedonian Independent Progressive Groups" decided to give the organisation an official form. The first constituent assembly was held on 22 and 23 March 1930 in Toledo, Ohio. After that, the expansion of the organisation began, during which it publicly spoke out against the MPO, the bloody reckoning of the Mihailovists and Protogeroivists of the IMRO, and the "imperialist policy" of the Bulgarian government.⁴⁹ Soon,

⁴⁴ AJ, 371–35–46, 473–474.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 485.

⁴⁶ During the second half of the 1920s, left-leaning Macedonian emigrants in the USA founded several independent groups based on instructions from the pro-communist IMRO (United). In 1928, the Temporary Initiative Committee was established in Pontiac, Michigan, to unite the activities of these groups and to form a new Macedonian emigrant organisation. These groups, in accordance with communist principles, advocated the creation of a Balkan federation with an independent Macedonian state as an equal member. Their main opponent was the MPO. More in: Mile Mihajlov, „Makedonskiot naroden sojuz vo Soedinetite Amerikanski Državi i Kanada 1928 do 1935 god.“, u: *Ise-ljeništvo naroda i narodnosti Jugoslavije i njegove uzajamne veze s domovinom: zbornik*, urednički odbor dr Ivan Čizmić, dr Koča Jončić, dr Vladimir Klemenčić, Radoslav Rotković, prof. Tihomir Telišman (Zagreb: Zavod za migracije i narodnosti, 1978), 329–348.

⁴⁷ AJ, 371–35–46, 490–492, 500–501.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 509–511, 552, 555–556.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 558–559, 565–567, 575–576, 578. M. Mihajlov, *n. d.*, 334–337.

the Bulgarian newspaper *Народен глас*, published in Granite City, Illinois, began to give space to the propaganda of independent progressive Macedonian groups.⁵⁰

In addition to the aforementioned conflicts, the Yugoslav diplomatic and consular representatives in the USA attempted to use the terrorist attacks that occurred on Yugoslav territory in March 1930, particularly those in Pirot and Strumica, to undermine the IMRO Mihailovists through the American press.⁵¹ Namely, the goal of these attacks was to undermine the agreements on the settlement of border issues that Yugoslavia and Bulgaria signed in Sofia in February 1930, and thus halt the process of Yugoslav-Bulgarian rapprochement. Yugoslavia was dissatisfied with the steps taken by the Bulgarian government and therefore decided to adopt a firmer stance towards Bulgaria.⁵² It even planned a military operation to occupy southwestern Bulgaria and destroy IMRO.⁵³

In June 1930, several more terrorist attacks were carried out in Niš.⁵⁴ Consequently, in July 1930, the MFA requested detailed reports on the activities of the MPO from Yugoslav diplomatic and consular representatives in the USA. In line with their earlier reports, they again stated that it was an organisation assisted by the Bulgarian Legation in Washington, and especially by the Plenipotentiary Minister, Simeon Radev, which directed propaganda against the Yugoslav state. At the same time, they observed that this propaganda had changed, and that the idea of creating an independent Macedonian state had shifted towards promoting Macedonia's accession to Bulgaria.⁵⁵

The General Consul in Chicago, Đuro Kolombatović, submitted the most comprehensive report, in which he presented the history of the MPO in North America, as well as brief biographical information about the leading figures of this organisation. Kolombatović was well informed about Asen Avramov's efforts to subordinate the MPO to Ivan Mihailov. He even states that, in connection with this, Jordan Chkatrov again stayed in the USA during June or July 1930, arriving under a false name. However, we could not verify these allegations about Chkatrov in other available sources or literature. The final position on the conflict within the IMRO MPO was supposed to be taken at the upcoming Congress in Youngstown, Ohio, where Kolombatović expected a major confrontation between the supporters of the Mihailovists and the Protogerovists.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ AJ, 371–35–46, 561. These are daily newspapers that have been published since 1907. Unlike *Македонска трибуна*, which was the newsletter of an organisation and therefore promoted its views, *Народен глас* was a commercial paper that aimed to be objective. Thus, its pages featured articles about violent confrontations within IMRO, Protogerovists, Macedonian independent progressive groups, and others. Due to the publication of texts with “anti-Macedonian content”, it was often attacked by the MPO and *Македонска трибуна*. Костадин Гърдев, *Македонските патриотически организации в Канада от основаването им до 1987 г.* (София: Университетско издателство „Климент Охридски“, 1991), 54; https://www.kroraina.com/bugarash/mbinna/naroden-glas/naroden_glas.html (accessed: 30 March 2026).

⁵¹ AJ, 371–35–46, 524–534, 548.

⁵² More in: Милош Жикић, *Југославија и Бугарска: 1929–1941*. (Београд: ИСИ, 2024), 43–113.

⁵³ More in: Miloš Žikić, „Jugoslovenski plan za upad u jugozapadnu Bugarsku i likvidiranje VMRO (1930–1939)“, *Istorija 20. veka*, br. 1, (2024), 87–104.

⁵⁴ М. Жикић, *Југославија и Бугарска...*, 113–114.

⁵⁵ AJ, 371–35–46, 579–585, 604–607; AJ, 414–8–17, Kolombatović Fotiću, Pov. Br. 212, 6. 8. 1930.

⁵⁶ AJ, 414–8–17, Kolombatović Fotiću, Pov. Br. 212, 6. 8. 1930, Pov. Br. 246, 16. 9. 1930.

Kolombatović's predictions were confirmed. At the IX Congress of the MPO, held in Youngstown from 31 August to 4 September 1930, a bitter debate arose over the Central Committee's work and the organisation's stance on the conflict within the IMRO. In the end, the Mihailovist wing prevailed, and it was decided that the MPO should abandon neutrality and support Ivan Mihailov. Disagreeing with this decision, the editor of *Македонска трибуна*, Boris Zografov, resigned and ended any further cooperation with the MPO. Lambo Kiselinčev did the same.⁵⁷ On 17 July 1931, he left for Bulgaria, which the General Consul in New York, Radoje Janković, considered a definite "profit for our propaganda," as it led to the closure of the Macedonian Press Bureau in New York.⁵⁸

The weakening of the MPO and the attempt to establish associations based on the ideology of integral Yugoslavism

The recognition of Ivan Mihailov as the sole representative of the "Macedonian liberation movement" deepened divisions within the MPO. Protogerovists supporters refused to cooperate with representatives of the Central Committee of the MPO. This was evident at the organisation's X Congress, held in September 1931 in Gary, Indiana, which attracted only 700–800 people, all supporters of the Mihailovists. However, a more significant factor in the weakening of the MPO was the economic crisis, which left many members without jobs and with their savings lost in bankrupt banks. As a result, they shifted their focus in the organisation from activities to the struggle for survival. The Yugoslav General Consul in Chicago assessed that the MPO had not been in a worse position since its inception, except for its first year, when it was still in the formative phase.⁵⁹

The weakening of the MPO was also evident in the growth of the Macedonian independent progressive groups, which numbered 19 by early 1931. Consequently, in April 1931, the first congress of these groups was held in Gary, Indiana, where it was decided to change the name of the organisation to the Macedonian People's League (MPL). The Constitution was also adopted, stating that the organisation's goal was to support the struggle "for the liberation and unification of Macedonia into an independent people's republic and its inclusion as an equal member in the future Balkan federation of free Balkan nations". The Central Committee was formed, with Smile Voidanov elected as its president. Thus, this MPO gained a more organised competitor. Reporting on this, Đuro Kolombatović noted that the MPL was not yet strong enough to threaten the MPO, but that it continually attracted members dissatisfied with the organisation's alignment with Ivan Mihailov.⁶⁰

Taking advantage of this situation, Kolombatović, in agreement with the editor-in-chief of *Народен глас*, Vasil Stefanov, published news from the Yugoslav press several times about internal struggles among IMRO members. This provoked a reaction from *Ma-*

⁵⁷ AJ, 414–8–17, Kolombatović Fotiću, Pov. Br. 246, 16. 9. 1930.

⁵⁸ AJ, 371–36–47, 86; К. Гърдев, *Македонските патриотически организации в Канада...*, 55.

⁵⁹ AJ, 371–36–47, 28–31; AJ, 414–8–17, Kolombatović Fotiću, Pov. Br. 248, 18. 11. 1931.

⁶⁰ AJ, 371–36–47, 74–77; M. Mihajlov, *n. d.*, 337–340.

кедонска трибуна, which called Stefanov “a traitor to the Macedonian cause and a Serbian mercenary”. Although the conflict between the newspapers *Македонска трибуна* and *Народен глас* predated these events, we assume that the difficult financial situation caused by the economic crisis pushed Stefanov to cooperate with the Yugoslav General Consul. At the same time, Kolombatović took steps to deport the general secretary of the MPO, Asen Avramov. Through a trustee, he informed the immigration director in Indianapolis that Avramov had arrived in the USA as a student without a quota visa, but was not attending classes and was instead engaged in revolutionary activities.⁶¹ His intervention was successful, and Avramov had to leave the USA in 1932 and return to Bulgaria.⁶²

The General Consul in Chicago operated on several other fronts. One of these involved organising the Yugoslav diaspora. The Yugoslav state's efforts to establish stronger ties among the diaspora in North America were unsuccessful. The emigrants remained divided by nationality, and only the Serbian segment of the emigration demonstrated genuine loyalty to the Yugoslav state.⁶³ However, after the establishment of King Alexander's dictatorship and the proclamation of the policy of integral Yugoslavism in 1929, it was decided to apply the spirit of the new ideology to the organisation of emigration. For this reason, as during the First World War, the creation of societies with a Yugoslav character was initiated, which should have clearly demonstrated the determination of the emigrant community. At the same time, these societies were expected to implement the policy of Yugoslavism further. In 1930, Kolombatović began work on forming such an organisation. This was realised in October 1931 with the establishment of the Yugoslav Central Organisation (YCO) in Chicago. According to its rules, the purpose of the YCO was to protect and promote the interests of emigrants, to enable their mutual acquaintance and support, to find work, “maintain national consciousness and harmony among Yugoslavs”, and so on. In addition to this official role, it had another important function – to create a unified Yugoslav front to prevent the activities of separatist movements. After the organisation's formation in Chicago, Kolombatović immediately took steps to establish branches in various locations across the USA. However, it soon became clear that the old divisions were insurmountable and that this organisation would not take root among emigrants from Yugoslavia.⁶⁴

In connection with the implementation of the policy of integral Yugoslavism and the fight against Bulgarian-Macedonian propaganda, the Yugoslav Home was established in Indianapolis. On 23 June 1931, Đuro Kolombatović informed the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vojislav Marinković, that the Yugoslav colony in Indianapolis, consisting of 30 families originating from Šar Planina, had developed strong activity in support of Yugoslav ideology “at the heart of the Macedonian movement”. Kolombatović emphasised that it was necessary to pay serious attention to their actions, as only through them could a successful fight against the MPO be conducted and later win over a large number of “seduced” Macedonian emigrants. The General Consul reported that one of the first steps in this colony was the construction of the Yugoslav

⁶¹ AJ, 371–36–47, 53.

⁶² Георги Марков et al., *със.*, *op. cit.*, 258.

⁶³ More in: V. Đikanović, „Iseljenici u Severnoj Americi...”.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 200–203, 209–210; AJ, 371–50–65, 633–639.

Home, which would also include a chapel, since they had been forced to use the Bulgarian church until then. In this way, service by Serbian Orthodox priests would be enabled, creating the conditions to prevent further Bulgarian propaganda. In addition, the priest would conduct a propaganda campaign among the American public.⁶⁵

The Yugoslav Home was completed and consecrated on 27 September 1931. Bishop Mardarije conducted the service⁶⁶ in the presence of the Yugoslav Plenipotentiary Minister in Washington, Leonid Pitamic, the General Consul in Chicago, Đuro Kolombatović, and several American dignitaries. Although the Yugoslav Home was intended as a gathering centre for Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, its most important function, as well as that of the Eparchy of the SOC, was the “fight against the Macedonian-Bulgarian clergy”. According to Kolombatović, a more serious struggle was yet to come, given the planned establishment of the Bulgarian eparchy in North America⁶⁷. Kolombatović considered the very act of opening the Home a major blow to Bulgarian-Macedonian propaganda, as the Yugoslav ideology was the most effective means to counter it. In his report, Plenipotentiary Minister Pitamic also referred to the opening of the Home, believing that it would serve “as a barrier to Bulgarian-Macedonian propaganda”.⁶⁸ However, for reasons unknown to us, the intention of using the Home by the priests of the SOC was not realised during the interwar period. The first church services were held only after the end of the Second World War, when the Yugoslav Home was converted into a church.⁶⁹

There was another organisation whose establishment was credited to General Consul Kolombatović and which met the same fate as YCO – the “Vardarska Banovina” Association. In early June 1931, Kolombatović was visited by Georgi Pop Kostov⁷⁰, formerly a prominent member of the MPO, who invited him to attend his wife’s funeral. Knowing that several hundred members of the Macedonian diaspora, many of whom were MPO supporters, would be present, Kolombatović accepted the invitation. According to him, the funeral “turned into a manifestation of Yugoslav thought”. As a result, he soon held two meetings with prominent members of the MPO, who agreed to found the Association of Yugoslavs “Vardar Banovina”, aiming to unite Macedonian emigrants under a broad Yugoslav ideology. Kolombatović drafted the rules, and the Association was officially founded on 21 June 1931 with a temporary administration headed by Georgi Pop Kostov. The official administration was to be elected at the general assembly on 5 July 1931.⁷¹ Živojin Lazić, the ban of the Vardar Banovina, also welcomed the establishment of this Association.⁷²

⁶⁵ AJ, 371–50–65, 567–569.

⁶⁶ Bishop Mardarije Uskoković headed the American-Canadian Eparchy until his death on December 12, 1935. Ђоко Слијепчевић, *Историја Српске православне цркве: III. књига: За време Другог светског рата и после њега* (Келн: б. и., 1986), 396.

⁶⁷ Yugoslav diplomacy repeatedly received information about the intended establishment of the Bulgarian diocese in North America, but it was not realized until 1937. AJ, 371–36–47, 162; AJ, 414–8–17, Kolombatović MIP-u, Pov. Br. 111, 8. 6. 1933.

⁶⁸ AJ, 371–50–65, 570–586; V. Đikanović, „Iseljenci u Severnoj Americi...“, 203–204.

⁶⁹ <https://www.st-nicholas-indy.org/history> (accessed 2 April 2026).

⁷⁰ In the report, Kolombatović uses the Serbianized version of his first and last name – Đorđe Pop Kostić. Kolombatović indicated that the main credit for the establishment of the Association belonged to Pop Kostov. AJ, 414–8–17, Kolombatović Marinkoviću, Pov. Br. 123, 23. 6. 1931.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² AJ, 414–8–17, MIP Generalnom konzulatu u Čikagu, Pov. Br. 17430, 31. 9. 1931.

The establishment of the association “Vardarska banovina” in Chicago provoked a fierce reaction from the MPO through the press. Furthermore, at the X congress of this organisation in September 1931, the Association’s activities were described as a very dangerous means of opposing Macedonian organisations. In early 1932, General Consul in New York, Radoje Janković, also joined the initiative to establish Yugoslav associations, with the help of his main trustees, Stojan Ristić and priest David Popović⁷³ from Omaha (Nebraska). By March 1932, four such associations had been established: in Chicago, New York, Gary, and Pittsburgh. In their letters to Ban Lazić, Popović and Ristić also mention the existence of such associations in Steelton, Akron, McKeesport, St. Louis, and Loren, but we have no information about these. In any case, the plan was to organise a single union that would include all associations. According to the agreement with the aforementioned general consulates, the Banovina administration in Skopje supported this initiative by receiving all petitions or complaints from members of these associations through them. In addition, to connect the emigrants as closely as possible with the state, news about the associations was published in the Yugoslav press, while relatives of the emigrants in the country were informed that submitted requests and complaints would be considered as soon as possible.⁷⁴

The Yugoslav state, however, did not seriously address this matter. The lack of financial resources and, consequently, the lack of involvement of people – primarily those from Macedonia – in carrying out propaganda in the field led to the rapid dissolution of these associations, with many “members” returning to cooperation with the MPO. Priest David Popović wrote very harshly about this in connection with the ban on the Vardar Banovina. Clearly disappointed, he stated that the venture should not have been started if there was no willingness to take it seriously and finance it.⁷⁵

To at least partially maintain the achieved results and continue suppressing pro-Bulgarian propaganda, in March 1932, the General Consul in New York, Radoje Janković, proposed to Ban Živojin Lazić that priest David Popović be relieved of his parish duties and assigned to work at the General Consulate.⁷⁶ Lazić advocated the proposal, requesting intervention in the MFA, and the Minister of Internal Affairs, Milan Srškić, agreed. At the request of the MFA, the chargé d’affaires in Washington, Božidar Stojanović, also supported this idea.⁷⁷ On the other hand, he believed that pro-Bulgarian propaganda was not successful in North America.⁷⁸ The General Consul in Chicago, Ko-

⁷³ Priest David Popović, a native of Skopje, collaborated from the early 1920s with the General Consulate in New York to suppress Bulgarian-Macedonian propaganda. He was therefore well acquainted with conditions in the Macedonian colonies. He also enjoyed a good reputation among the Macedonian diaspora, as after the liberation of Southern Serbia in 1918, he frequently intervened with the military authorities as a teacher in support of the local population [AJ, 371–36–47, 168; S. Mičić, “Mission of Konstantin Todorov...”, 106].

⁷⁴ AJ, 371–36–47, 165–168; AJ, 414–8–17, Kolombatović Poslanstvu u Vašingtonu, Pov. Br. 229, 9. 10. 1931; Kolombatović Fotiću, Pov. Br. 248, 18. 11. 1931; Kolombatović MIP-u, Poslanstvu u Vašingtonu i banu Vardarske banovine, Pov. Br. 56, 15. 3. 1932.

⁷⁵ AJ, 371–36–47, 166.

⁷⁶ AJ, fond 449, Generalni konzulat Kraljevine Jugoslavije u Njujorku, fascikla 13, jedinica opisa 27, Lazić Generalnom konzulatu u Njujorku, Pov. II/2 Br. 1623, 7. 5. 1932.

⁷⁷ AJ, 371–36–47, 164–166, 168–171.

⁷⁸ AJ, 371–36–47, 164, 169–171.

lombatović, held a similar opinion. Additionally, unlike Popović and Ristić, he reported on the strengthening of the pro-Yugoslav movement among Macedonian emigrants and the establishment of new associations.⁷⁹ Since Popović's appointment to the General Consulate in New York was not realised for reasons unknown to us, the question arises whether such reports from Washington and Chicago influenced that decision.

Regarding the mentioned associations, their sudden disappearance indicates that the movement did not develop as reported. This is also confirmed by the sources, as the last reference to the existence of certain associations dates back in 1933⁸⁰. Based on this, we can conclude that the Yugoslav ideology was accepted by only a very small number of the Macedonian diaspora. On the other hand, given the consequences of the economic crisis, most Macedonian emigrants who joined these associations did so not out of sincere motives but to obtain personal benefits for themselves or their families in Yugoslavia.

Attempts to undermine pro-Bulgarian propaganda through prominent members of the MPO and Bulgarian priests in the mid-1930s

The MPO, however, was losing its influence among the emigrants, while the group gathered around the MPL was becoming stronger. Whenever possible, members of this organisation disrupted MPO meetings. They attacked them in the press for their "purely Bulgarian point of view".⁸¹ Such a situation in the MPO was also noticed by the IMRO Mihailovists, which is why, at the end of 1932, on the recommendation of Asen Avramov and Jordan Chkatrov, the position of general secretary of the MPO was taken over by Petar Acev⁸². His arrival in the USA provoked a strong reaction among supporters of the Protogerovists and members of the MPL. As they shared a common enemy, the General Consul in Chicago, Đuro Kolombatović, reported that these two groups had become so closely aligned that they appeared as a single group. They held protest meetings against Acev and the editor of *Македонска трибуна* Ljuben Dimitrov⁸³, demanding their deportation from the USA. Both Kolombatović and the General Consul in Chicago, Radoje Janković, reported that Acev was very unpopular among the Macedonian emigrants. Kolombatović suggested that the increased activity of Protogerovists supporters, as well as their cooperation with the MPL, may have been prompted by Georgi Pophrstov's stay in the USA.⁸⁴ Pophrstov was one of the two leaders of the IMRO Protogerovists who, in February 1931, after being forced by Ivan

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 162, 188; AJ, 414–8–17, Kolombatović MIP-u, poslaniku u Vašingtonu i banu Vardarske banovine, Pov. Br. 56, 15. 3. 1932, Kolombatović Poslanstvu u Vašingtonu, Pov. Br. 202, 17. 9. 1932.

⁸⁰ AJ, 371–36–47, 207–208; AJ, 414–8–17, Kolombatović poslaniku Leonidu Pitamicu, Pov. Br. 179, 11. 9. 1933.

⁸¹ AJ, 371–36–47, 161; M. Mihajlov, *n. d.*, 340.

⁸² Petar Acev succeeded Asen Avramov as secretary of the Macedonian Youth League, and in November 1931 he was one of the leaders of the demonstrators in front of the Yugoslav Consular Department in Sofia [М. Жикић, *Југославија и Бугарска...*, 135; Г. Марков et al., *op. cit.*, 265].

⁸³ Dimitrov took over as editor of the *Македонска трибуна* at the end of June 1931. AJ, 371–36–47, 82, 85.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 190–191, 196, 205.

Mihailov, signed a “truce” and withdrew from active participation in the Macedonian movement.⁸⁵ However, the Yugoslav Legation in Sofia and the Yugoslav Ministry of the Interior had information that his arrival in the USA at the end of 1932 was related to a visit to relatives, that is, a private matter.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, Kolombatović reported that Pophristov, while visiting the Macedonian colonies, actively carried out propaganda against the Mihailovists, but “very carefully and covertly”, fearing the reaction of Ivan Mihailov.⁸⁷

The Yugoslav state soon had the opportunity to further undermine the MPO from within. During his stay in Pittsburgh in May 1933, through his trustee Bogdan Dimitrijević, Kolombatović got in touch with MPO Vice-President Kosta Popov in McKeesport, who was responsible for maintaining ties with Croatian separatists. Popov was born near Kostur in Aegean Macedonia. He graduated from the Bulgarian Teachers’ School in Skopje and served as a teacher in the Bulgarian Exarchate. After the liberation of Southern Serbia, he emigrated to the USA, where he became a prominent member of the Macedonian organisation. He later joined the Central Committee of the MPO, where he was elected vice-president several times. Over the years, as he was stationed near Pittsburgh, priest David Popović also came into personal contact with him, who believed that he could have won him over “if someone from our people had taken an interest in him”. However, Popov himself approached the Yugoslavs when he was on the verge of financial collapse. Popović believed this opportunity should be seized, noting that it should not be forgotten that Popov was forced to take this step by the threat of bankruptcy. Yugoslav diplomatic and consular representatives in the USA agreed with this idea. The main role in winning him over was taken by Popović, who succeeded in October 1933. Persuaded by the chargé d’affaires in Washington, Božidar Stojanović, Popov remained a member of the MPO and was re-elected vice-president at the organisation’s congress in September. According to the agreement with Popović, he agreed to deliver photographs of confidential orders from Sofia to the Yugoslavs.⁸⁸

Taking all this into account, the Yugoslav MFA decided to provide financial support for Popović’s work to suppress pro-Bulgarian propaganda. In this regard, at the end of November 1933, the MFA informed the General Consul in New York, Radoje Janković, that from 1 January to 1 April 1934, Popović would receive monthly aid of 40 dollars. At the same time, the possibility of extending this assistance was indicated should his results prove positive.⁸⁹ Apparently, the Yugoslav representatives were also satisfied with Kosta Popov’s work. At the beginning of March 1934, Janković asked the Minister of Internal Affairs, Živojin Lazić, to grant Popov monthly assistance of 70 to 100 dollars. At the beginning of June 1934, 70 dollars was delivered to Janković, and the same amount was indicated for the following month.

⁸⁵ Part of the Protogerovists still continued the fight with the Mihailovists, forming a new Central Committee of this wing [M. Жикић, *Југославија у Бугарска...*, 123].

⁸⁶ AJ, 414–8–17, MIP Generalnom konzulatu u Čikagu, Pov. Br. 21022, 12. 12. 1932 i Pov. Br. 21067, 14. 12. 1932.

⁸⁷ AJ, 371–36–47, 191, 204–205, 217.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 217, 239–248; AJ, 414–8–17, pismo Popovića Kolombatoviću, 26. 5. 1933.

⁸⁹ AJ, 449–13–27, MIP Jankoviću, Pov. Br. 23133, 27. 11. 1933.

However, he was instructed, taking into account the change of regime in Bulgaria⁹⁰, to assess whether there would still be a need for this assistance.⁹¹

During the spring of 1934, Popović also came into contact with the aforementioned David Nakov, a Bulgarian priest in Steelton. Although Nakov was one of the most important promoters of Bulgarian propaganda in North America, he came into conflict with the MPO after he began criticising the work of this organisation and attacking IMRO. As they could not remove him from Steelton due to his popularity, he was reported to the Holy Synod in Sofia, which excommunicated him. This led to a split in the colony in 1929, while Nakov sought to form a new Macedonian church, independent of the Bulgarian Exarchate. Priest Marko Komnenić from Steelton also worked towards this, striving further to deepen the existing divisions within the Bulgarian church. This situation led to a court trial in 1934 between Cenov and Nakov. Following this case, priest David Popović pointed out to Božidar Stojanović and Radoje Janković the possibility of potential cooperation with Nakov. The Bulgarian priest also considered this, and the two met on 19 May 1934. A second meeting was held on 26 May, also attended by Radoje Janković. They discussed the possibility of launching a weekly newspaper in Bulgarian and the Macedonian dialect, which Nakov would use to promote rapprochement with Yugoslavia. Janković was clearly very pleased with his interlocutor. Stojanović also informed the MFA about this issue, with a warning that only Nakov's future actions could show whether his reversal was sincere or a consequence of his current attitude towards Sofia. At the same time, Janković wrote to the Minister of Interior Affairs, considering that with "Zveno" coming to power in Bulgaria, there was no longer a need to grant aid to Kosta Popov.

On the other hand, he advocated granting aid to Nakov. However, Janković was told that the MFA did not have the funds to finance the proposed newspaper, while the monthly aid to David Popović was also cancelled due to "savings".⁹² We assume that Kosta Popov's financing was also halted at that time. Apparently, the MFA, taking into account changes in Bulgaria, the aspirations of Kings Alexander and Boris for rapprochement, and the dissolution of IMRO, concluded that there was no longer a need for more active pro-Yugoslav propaganda in North America.

The reports from Yugoslav diplomatic and consular representatives in the USA probably contributed to this attitude. The General Consul in Chicago, Đuro Kolombatović, reported that members of the MPO had fallen into complete apathy, and that this situation worsened after the coup in Bulgaria in May 1934 and the start of the persecution of the IMRO Mihailovists. In this context, the Central Committee of the MPO sent protest telegrams to King Boris and Prime Minister Kimon Georgiev Stoyanov. On this basis, Ko-

⁹⁰ On 19 May 1934, a coup was carried out in Bulgaria by the "Zveno" group with the support of the Military League. The putschists advocated rapprochement with Yugoslavia and, shortly after coming to power, they disbanded the IMRO, while Ivan Mihailov fled to Turkey after several months in hiding. More about the coup in: Войн Божинов, *Управлението на деветнадесетомайците: (19 май 1934 - 22 януари 1935 година)* (София: Арка, 2017).

⁹¹ AJ, 449–13–27, Janković Laziću, Pov. Br. 41, 1. 3. 1934; Lazić Jankoviću, Pov. II Br. 22332, 2. 6. 1934.

⁹² AJ, 371–35–46, 407; AJ, 371–36–47, 284–295; AJ, 449–13–27, pisma Popovića Jankoviću od 11. 5 i 19. 5. 1934; Janković MIP-u, Str. Pov. Br. 178, 12. 6. 1934; Janković Laziću, Pov. Br. 181, 20. 6. 1934; MIP Generalnom konzulatu u Njujorku, Pov. Br. 14596, 4. 7. 1934; MIP Generalnom konzulatu u Njujorku, Pov. Br. 16729, 20. 8. 1934; S. Mičić, "Mission of Konstantin Todorov...", 109.

lombatović optimistically concluded that the MPO's activities in the USA and Canada had completely died down, and that it was only a matter of time before they ceased altogether.⁹³ According to reports from Yugoslav diplomatic and consular representatives, the situation did not change in 1935 either.⁹⁴ What was new were the celebrations of the assassination of King Alexander and the glorification of his murderer, Velichko Dimitov Kerin, better known as Vladimir Georgiev Chernozemsky.⁹⁵

During the first half of 1936, representatives of the SOC and Yugoslav diplomatic and consular officials in the USA again attempted to use their connections with Bulgarian priests to create discord within the Bulgarian church in North America. Since the priest of the Bulgarian church in Detroit, Velik Karadzhov, opposed the IMRO and advocated Serbian-Bulgarian reconciliation, he was in conflict with the protosyncellus Krsto Cenov, which led to his resignation in December 1935. Through Cenov and Ivan Mihajlov, a new priest, Georgi Nikolov, was appointed in his place, resulting in a division within the parish. Meanwhile, in March 1936, Karadzhov contacted representatives of the SOC, asking for admission to the American-Canadian Eparchy and assignment to a vacant parish. However, as this was not possible, representatives of the SOC and Yugoslav diplomatic-consular officials, considering his views and conflict with the MPO, attempted to involve him in countering pro-Bulgarian propaganda among the Macedonian emigrants. Karadzhov agreed, and priest David Popović once again acted as negotiator. The proposals drafted on this occasion did not differ significantly from previous ones. Karadzhov sought to establish an independent Orthodox church in Detroit, free of narrow national identity, through which he would promote Yugoslav-Bulgarian rapprochement. The second proposal involved influencing the content of the Bulgarian newspaper *Народен глас*, which was experiencing financial difficulties and was also in conflict with *Македонска трибуна*, as there were no funds to launch a new newspaper. The new Yugoslav Plenipotentiary Minister in Washington, Konstantin Fotić⁹⁶, submitted these proposals to the MFA, noting that such an initiative could be undertaken with a monthly expenditure of 150 to 200 dollars. Although he could not predict the outcome, he believed it was worth attempting. We do not have the MFA's reply, but apparently the \$50 monthly aid was approved and paid to Karadzhov in June 1936. However, this was terminated almost immediately at Popović's suggestion, as he considered direct financial support to Karadzhov inappropriate unless funds were allocated to support and organise the new church and parish. His letter also indicates that he did not fully trust Karadzhov's reports on his activities, as no one could verify them. As Fotić reported to Popović that the funds intended for Karadzhov were to be managed by his trustee,⁹⁷ it is clear that Belgrade did not seriously intend to pursue this venture.

⁹³ AJ, 371–36–47, 254, 262, 265–267, 275.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 329; AJ, 449–13–27, Janković MIP-u, Pov. Br. 282, 6. 7. 1935; Janković MIP-u, Pov. Br. 448, 21. 9. 1935.

⁹⁵ AJ, 371–36–47, 333–336; AJ, 449–13–27, pismo Popovića Stojanoviću od 16. 4. 1937.

⁹⁶ Fotić was appointed to the post of Plenipotentiary Minister in Washington on August 7, 1935, while he took over the position from charge d'affaires Božidar Stojanović on October 25, 1935 [Nataša Milićević, „Konstantin Fotić – diplomata od karijere“, *Istorija 20. veka*, br. 1, (1998), 151–152].

⁹⁷ AJ, 371–36–47, 351–380.

Fotić also tried to reestablish contact with MPO Vice President Kosta Popov. For this, he again used David Popović, who spoke with him at the beginning of April 1936. However, this time Popov resolutely refused any cooperation. Another attempt by Popović after the signing of the Pact of Eternal Friendship between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria in January 1937 was also unsuccessful.⁹⁸ In addition, Popović unsuccessfully attempted to restore contact with the Bulgarian priest David Nakov,⁹⁹ while the Legation also commissioned him to compile a report on the MPO to be submitted to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).¹⁰⁰ At the same time, he participated in the search for Ilija Zlatev, who was allegedly intended to assassinate Prince Paul Karađorđević.¹⁰¹

The Pact of Eternal Friendship between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria in 1937 and its consequences on the Macedonian Question in North America

The signing of the Pact of Eternal Friendship between the two South Slavic kingdoms in January 1937 had repercussions in North America as well. The Yugoslav Legation in Washington reported that the MPO led a vigorous campaign against the government of Georgi Kyoseivanov and its policy of friendship with Yugoslavia. In this context, the MFA was interested in whether the two legations in Washington cooperated to suppress this action, since the attacks were directed against both governments. If there was no cooperation, the Legation was instructed to ascertain the attitude of Bulgarian diplomats towards the MPO. Plenipotentiary Minister Fotić reported that cooperation with the Bulgarian Legation on various issues would be of great benefit. Still, he did not know whether the Bulgarians were prepared to do so without the necessary instructions from Sofia.¹⁰²

On the other hand, Yugoslav-Bulgarian friendship was demonstrated during the visit of a group of artists from the Bulgarian National Theatre to the USA and Canada in the summer of 1937. The invitation for this tour came from the Macedonian emigration in the USA, at the suggestion of Macedonian circles in Sofia. In this way, they sought, after the changed political situation, to raise the spirits of the emigrants. Bulgarian actors were welcomed in New York by MPO representatives, who accompanied them around American cities, including the general secretary of the organisation, Petar Acev. The Yugoslav Legation in Washington reported that, on that occasion, propaganda was carried out, which was common for all Macedonian public manifestations: Yugoslavia was attacked, as was the government of Kyoseivanov for pursuing a policy of rapprochement with Belgrade. The leaders of this group, actors Krsto Sarafov and Georgi Stamatov, participated. At the same time, in line with the purpose of the trip, performances were held only in Macedonian colonies, while Bulgarian ones were avoided, which in turn caused dissatisfaction among their members. Based on the report of the Yugoslav diplomatic-consular representatives, the MFA instructed the Legation in Sofia to draw the attention of the Bulgarian government to

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 388–391, 431, 439–441, 448.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 426–427, 429–434.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 392, 420–421, 429.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 428–434. The search for this person continued until 1939. More in: *Ibid.*, 610–666.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 437, 449–450.

the fact that this act “compromised the policy of Yugoslav-Bulgarian rapprochement”. All the more so, as the cooperation between the Belgrade and Sofia National Theatres was one of the important links in the cultural rapprochement of the two countries¹⁰³. The Bulgarian reaction was swift, and the director of the Sofia National Theatre and actors Sarafov and Stamatov were retired.¹⁰⁴

The visit of Bulgarian artists was also discussed at the XVI MPO Congress in Indianapolis, held at the beginning of September 1937¹⁰⁵. In particular, their leaders, Sarafov and Stamatov, were celebrated as patriots and heroes for not hesitating to speak out against the “treacherous Bulgarian government”. At the same time, they were thanked for raising “the spirit of patriotism and sacrifice in our emigration”. General Consul in New York, Božidar Stojanović, wrote that bringing the theatre group to America was planned specifically to raise spirits before the Congress, which proceeded in a more or less “standard” manner regarding the Yugoslav state: the continuation of the fight for a “free and independent Macedonia”, attacking Yugoslavia for the oppression of the Macedonian population, but also criticising the Bulgarian government for its policy of rapprochement with Belgrade. However, the extent to which that struggle was truly focused on the creation of an independent Macedonia is best illustrated by the words of MPO Vice President Dr Cvetko Anastasov. In his speech, he pointed out that this is an idea “for now” and that, after liberation, there might no longer be a need for a border between Macedonia and Bulgaria. “We are brothers, one nation, so we will live as brothers in the community”.¹⁰⁶

Official Bulgaria, however, sought to align the MPO in North America with its policy. To achieve this, it used the Bulgarian Exarchate. The Holy Synod therefore decided to reorganise the Bulgarian Church in North America, forming the Bulgarian Eparchy from the existing parishes in December 1937. Bishop Andrey Velichky was appointed as its head in January 1938. One of his tasks was to reduce the influence of the MPO on church communities.¹⁰⁷ According to information from the Yugoslav Legation in Sofia, King Boris advocated for his appointment, which the Holy Synod accepted in agreement with the Bulgarian government. Belgrade followed these developments closely. Therefore, the Legation in Sofia was instructed to draw the aut-

¹⁰³ The first contacts between the two theatres were made in March 1934 during the visit of the director of the Bulgarian National Theatre to Belgrade. At that time, an agreement was reached regarding mutual guest appearances by the actors, which was very successfully realised during 1935 and 1936. Among others, Krsto Sarafov was also a guest at the Belgrade National Theatre in November 1936 [Здравка Мичева, „Българо-югославско културно сближение през 30-те години: (1933–1940 г.)“, *Исторически преглед*, XXIII, кн. 3, (1967), 13, 16–19; М. Жикић, *Југославија и Бугарска...*, 327, 388].

¹⁰⁴ АЈ, 371–36–47, 477–498.

¹⁰⁵ All the reports from the Congress of the MPO were delivered to David Popović by Bogdan Dimitrijević, who, at Popović's persuasion and with the approval of the chargé d'affaires Božidar Stojanović, joined the MPO in 1935, where he gained great trust [АЈ, 371–51–66, 357–361, 519].

¹⁰⁶ АЈ, 371–36–47, 466–471; АЈ, 449–13–27, Stojanović MIP-u, Pov. Br. 183, 28. 8. 1937; pismo Popovića Stojanoviću od 4. 9. 1937; Stojanović MIP-u, Pov. Br. 268, 8. 11. 1937; V. Đikanović, „Iseljenici u Severnoj Americi...“, 296–298.

¹⁰⁷ К. Гърдев, *Македонските патриотически организации в Канада...*, 124; Момчил Методиев, *Между вярата и компромиса: Българската православна църква и комунистическата държава: (1944–1989 г.)* (София: Институт за изследване на близкото минало, Институт Отворено общество София, 2010), 403.

horities' attention to the Yugoslav government's hope that Bishop Andrey's work would be in accordance with the policy of Yugoslav-Bulgarian friendship. At the same time, the Legation in Washington was ordered to inform Belgrade immediately if the bishop's actions were contrary to that policy.¹⁰⁸

Upon his arrival in the USA in April 1938, Bishop Andrey faced strong resistance from the leaders of the MPO, as well as from part of the clergy led by Dr Krsto Cenov. Unable to persuade him to adopt their policy, they challenged his appointment and toured the Macedonian colonies, agitating against the bishop as a confidant of the Bulgarian government, particularly Prime Minister Kyoseivanov. Through their influence, they gained control of five of the seven Bulgarian churches, where Bishop Andrey was forbidden to serve. This situation led to a split among emigrants and within the Bulgarian church in North America between those who supported the bishop and those who supported the MPO. The fact that the two groups held separate church conferences in February 1939 demonstrates how divided they were on this issue. This situation persisted until the end of the Second World War.¹⁰⁹

The division among Macedonian emigrants and the activities of Bishop Andrey were closely monitored by priest David Popović, who regarded Andrey's work as a significant threat to Yugoslav national interests. According to Popović, 95% of Macedonian emigrants, regardless of their membership in the MPO, identified as Bulgarians and viewed the Yugoslav state as an enemy. For this reason, he considered Bishop Andrey's organisation of the Bulgarian eparchy a far greater danger than the MPO posed at that time. He believed that an organised Bulgarian church would unite all Macedonian emigrants and initiate their Bulgarianisation, as had occurred during the Ottoman occupation of Southern Serbia. Such activity in the USA would be entirely legal, and any opposition to it would be "not only unsuccessful, but actually futile". In this way, a unified Bulgarian front would be formed, as Bishop Andrey highlighted in his speeches. Although Popović claimed that almost all Macedonian emigrants identified as Bulgarians, he still maintained that organising them into Yugoslav associations was the only way to win them over.¹¹⁰ Given Popović's long-term efforts to suppress Bulgarian-Macedonian propaganda, it is understandable that he viewed every action from Bulgaria, especially those of its church, as hostile. However, his proposal was entirely at odds with his statement regarding the national sentiment of the Macedonian emigration. If such a plan had ever been feasible earlier, particularly due to the economic crisis, its implementation was unrealistic at that time. Furthermore, the political landscape had changed completely, as a Pact of Eternal Friendship had now been concluded between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. In this context, it is evident that official Belgrade had lost interest in suppressing pro-Bulgarian propaganda, and activities were thus reduced to mere monitoring.

The Yugoslav state sought to pursue a policy of Yugoslav-Bulgarian friendship, viewing Bishop Andrey's work as an expression of this policy. The Bulgarians also aimed to demonstrate that his mission served this purpose. During his stay in Belgra-

¹⁰⁸ AJ, 371–36–47, 501–503, 551.

¹⁰⁹ К. Гърдев, *Македонските патриотически организации в Канада...*, 124–131; М. Методиев, *op. cit.*, 403–404.

¹¹⁰ AJ, 371–36–47, 553–561; AJ, 449–13–27, pismo Popovića Stojanoviću od 15. 12. 1938.

de in September 1938, the Bulgarian Metropolitan Stefan conveyed this to the American-Canadian Bishop Damaskin¹¹¹. Also, in November of the same year, the Bulgarian Legation in Washington approached the Yugoslav Legation “for opinion and cooperation” regarding the organisation of the Bulgarian eparchy, an unusual step in international relations. We did not have information on the background of this Bulgarian initiative. However, if we take into account the concern of the Yugoslav ruling circles about revisionist tendencies in Bulgaria after the Munich Conference of September 1938, which led to the meeting of the two prime ministers at the end of October¹¹², this move by the Bulgarian Legation can be seen as another form of assurance of the continuation of the policy of Yugoslav-Bulgarian friendship. In any case, Plenipotentiary Minister Konstantin Fotić suggested to Bishop Damaskin that Bishop Andrey should be treated “correctly and brotherly”, which the Serbian eparchy did, providing certain explanations about the organisation of the eparchy and its registration with the American authorities.

Nevertheless, Bishop Damaskin also recognised the danger posed by the complete organisation of the Bulgarian eparchy, if it succeeded in uniting emigrants from South Serbia and a small number from Bulgaria. For this reason, he believed that it would be necessary, through the Holy Synod in Sofia, “in some suitable way” to indicate to Bishop Andrey that emigrants from Southern Serbia should be referred to the SOC. Conveying the above to the Legation in Washington, the MFA instructed Fotić to recommend to Bishop Damaskin the extension of cooperation with the Bulgarian bishop, with the clarification that this did not mean that Belgrade was no longer interested “in our compatriots from Southern Serbia”. On the contrary, it was necessary to take advantage of the division among the emigrants and make every effort to join them to the SOC. However, it was noted that this work should not take the form of a confrontation with Bishop Andrey, nor should his position, “which is not easy for him anyway”, be made even more difficult. According to Damaskin’s proposal, a step was taken in Sofia. In May 1939, the Plenipotentiary Minister in the Bulgarian capital, Momčilo Jurišić-Šturm, spoke with Metropolitan Stefan, asking him to recommend to Bishop Andrey the closest possible cooperation with representatives of the SOC. The Bulgarian metropolitan reportedly fully agreed “with our reasons and promised to meet our request”.¹¹³ Such “peaceful” instructions from the MFA show that Belgrade’s attention was focused on the increasingly tense situation in Europe.

The changes taking place in Europe also affected the “Macedonian problem” in North America. Priest David Popović reported to Fotić that after the Munich Agreement, a movement for unity and joint action against Yugoslavia was increasingly evident in the Macedonian colonies.¹¹⁴ At the same time, a certain rapprochement between the MPO and the Bulgarian government was observed. In mid-January 1939, trustee Bogdan Dimitrijević attended the MPO ceremony in Youngstown, where, for the first time, speeches omitted attacks on the Bulgarian government.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Dr Damaskin Grdanički served as the American-Canadian bishop from 1 July to 8 December 1938. Ђ. Слијепчевић, *н. д.*, 400.

¹¹² More in: М. Жикић, *Југославија и Бугарска...*, 457–466.

¹¹³ *AJ*, 371–36–47, 553, 599–601.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 562.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 571–574.

However, the Macedonian organisation suffered two major setbacks in a short period. First, in November 1938, Krsto Cenov, who provided the most support to the Macedonian cause through the church, died in Steelton.¹¹⁶ Then, on 26 January 1939, the long-time president of the MPO, Pandil Shanev, committed suicide. According to information available to David Popović, Shanev took this action because of the FBI's investigation into the MPO for allegedly sending an assassin after Prince Paul. Shanev was then succeeded as head of the MPO by the aforementioned Kosta Popov.¹¹⁷

The actions of the Axis powers in Europe also had a significant impact on Macedonian emigration: the German dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in March and the Italian occupation of Albania in April 1939. In this context, Macedonian leaders held a secret conference in Akron, Ohio, on 9 March, which was also attended by Bogdan Dimitrijević. According to his report, the participants expressed both concern about the German and Italian invasions and enthusiasm. At the conference, the attitude of the MPO towards the Macedonian Question was also discussed. According to Dimitrijević, the leaders of the MPO received instructions from Macedonian circles in Bulgaria to "come out with open cards", to stop advocating for an independent Macedonia, and to direct all efforts towards the accession of Macedonia to Bulgaria. After a brief discussion, it was decided to accept these instructions and to immediately change the editorial policy of *Македонска трибуна*.¹¹⁸ However, adopting the above position led to a certain disorientation among the members of this organisation between aspirations for an independent state and unification with Bulgaria.¹¹⁹

On the other hand, the Yugoslav state further reduced financial subsidies for more regular monitoring of MPO activities.¹²⁰ This was certainly influenced by the increasingly complex situation in Europe, the outbreak of war, and reports from diplomatic and consular representatives in North America, who noted the MPO's reduced strength and harmlessness. Nevertheless, monitoring of this organisation was not interrupted.¹²¹ The previously mentioned "disorientation" among the Macedonian ranks persisted until Yugoslavia entered the war in April 1941. Yugoslav diplomatic and consular missions received reports from their trustees that members of the MPO sometimes advocated one option and at other times another.¹²² The existing heterogeneity was further increased by the actions of the Macedonian-American People's League (Macedonian People's League until 1938), which held pro-communist views.¹²³ With the occupation of Yugoslavia in April 1941, and with the entry of the USA into the war at the end of that year, the development of the Macedonian Question occurred under different circumstances.¹²⁴

¹¹⁶ Г. Марков et al., *op. cit.*, 83.

¹¹⁷ AJ, 371–36–47, 568–569, 587–588.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 602–608; AJ, 449–13–27, pismo Popovića Stojanoviću od 11. 4. 1939.

¹¹⁹ V. Đikanović, „Iseljenici u Severnoj Americi...“, 324.

¹²⁰ AJ, 371–36–47, 678–683, 687–691, 695–696.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 699, 703, 719.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 723–724, 769–772, 786.

¹²³ Борис С. Томанић, „Југославија и Бугарска: 1941–1945: између сукоба и савеза“ (докторска дисертација, Универзитет у Београду, Филозофски факултет, Одељење за историју, 2022), 593.

¹²⁴ More in: *Ibid.*, 592–598.

Conclusion

In addition to Europe, the Macedonian Question was also active in North America, where Yugoslav and Bulgarian propaganda sought to win over emigrants from Vardar and Aegean Macedonia. In this, the Bulgarians had a certain advantage, as they began their activities earlier and had at their disposal experienced personnel (members of IMRO) and considerable financial resources. At the beginning of the 1930s, conflicts within IMRO benefited the Yugoslavs, spilling over onto American soil and leading to serious divisions among Macedonian emigrants. However, the economic crisis was more significant, as it forced many MPO members to focus on their personal survival. Yugoslav diplomatic and consular missions, with the help of SOC priests, sought to take advantage of the situation and counter pro-Bulgarian propaganda by establishing associations based on the ideology of integral Yugoslavism. However, at one point, it seemed the Yugoslav idea would prevail, but these attempts ultimately failed. A certain lack of interest on the part of the Yugoslav state, and therefore a lack of financial resources and the necessary personnel to operate among emigrants, led to the rapid dissolution of these associations. This was also an indicator that the majority of “members” did not join these associations out of sincere motives but rather for personal gain, driven by the economic crisis. Attempts to undermine pro-Bulgarian propaganda through cooperation with prominent members of the MPO and priests of the Bulgarian Church also had no effect.

The renewed process of Yugoslav-Bulgarian rapprochement by the two monarchs, along with the coup in Bulgaria in May 1934 and the dissolution of IMRO, prompted Belgrade to reduce its interest in the “Macedonian problem” in North America. This resulted in a certain consolidation of the MPO during the subsequent period, but also in its ideological wavering between support for an independent Macedonian state (while retaining Bulgarian identity) and the annexation of Macedonia to Bulgaria at the end of the 1930s. The signing of the Pact of Eternal Friendship between the two South Slavic kingdoms in January 1937 also had repercussions in North America. In this context, it is evident that official Belgrade lost interest in suppressing pro-Bulgarian propaganda, limiting its activities to monitoring it. Meanwhile, the MPO began to criticise the Bulgarian government for its policy of Yugoslav-Bulgarian friendship. Bulgaria, in turn, sought to align the MPO’s activities with its own policy. For this reason, the Eparchy of the Bulgarian Church was established in North America in 1938, headed by Bishop Andrey, who was tasked with forming a “unified Bulgarian front”. Yugoslavs monitored all these activities, as well as those of the MPO. Still, due to the worsening political situation in Europe at the end of the 1930s, and especially after the outbreak of war, they directed all their attention to that area.

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BETWEEN YUGOSLAVIA AND BULGARIA: THE MACEDONIAN QUESTION AND PROPAGANDA STRUGGLES IN NORTH AMERICA (1929–1941)

Miloš Žikić, PhD*

Summary

This paper examines the development of the Macedonian Question in North America from 1929 to 1941. The efforts of the Yugoslav diplomatic and consular representatives, as well as representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church, in their struggle with the Macedonian Political Organization (MPO) and other proponents of Bulgarian-Macedonian propaganda from 1929 to 1937 included campaigns in the press, the formation of independent Macedonian churches by dissatisfied Bulgarian priests, the establishment of associations based on the ideology of integral Yugoslavism, winning over prominent members of the MPO, and inserting trusted individuals into this organisation. On this occasion, the Yugoslavs benefited from divisions among Macedonian emigrants and the consequences of the Great Depression. However, these efforts ended unsuccessfully, both due to the hostile attitude of the majority of the Macedonian diaspora towards the Yugoslav state and a certain lack of interest on the part of official Belgrade. The Yugoslav stance was also influenced by the process of improving relations with Sofia during the mid-1930s, and, in connection with this, the dissolution of the IMRO in Bulgaria. The conclusion of the Pact of Eternal Friendship with Bulgaria in 1937 led to the cessation of Yugoslav efforts to suppress pro-Bulgarian propaganda in North America, and to a reduction in its activities to monitoring. In addition to the policy of Yugoslav-Bulgarian friendship, reports on the harmlessness of the MPO and the deterioration of the political situation in Europe also contributed to this.

KEYWORDS: Macedonian Question, emigration, Macedonian Political Organisation (MPO), Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (IMRO), Yugoslavia, Bulgaria

* Research Associate, Institute for Contemporary History, Belgrade, Republic of Serbia
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5470-8085>; E-mail: zikic90@gmail.com