

Common Challenges for Bulgaria and Austria in Their Relations with Yugoslavia in 1968–1980¹

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Abstract: *This article explores the hypothesis that in the last decade of Joseph Broz Tito's life, Bulgaria and Austria faced common challenges in their relations with neighboring Yugoslavia. An influential group of Yugoslav leaders in the 1960s and 1970s viewed Austria and Bulgaria in the same way – as an opportunity to achieve a territorial expansion of Yugoslavia at their expense. It thus appears that Belgrade had a similar attitude toward Vienna and Sofia, even though they were on different sides of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. For this reason, before and after the death of Tito, Bulgaria discovered several common interests with Austria. The Bulgarian Embassy in Vienna maintained unchanged assessment that “the problems that exist between the two countries on the minority issue make Austria our natural ally in our dispute with Yugoslavia”. As a result of the present article can be drawn preliminary conclusions that the common interest was recognized by both Sofia and Vienna.*

Key words: *Austria, Bulgaria, Cold War, Austro-Bulgarian relations, “Macedonian” issue, “Carinthian” issue.*

In his memoirs, Raif Dizdarević, who held the posts of foreign minister and chairman of the collective presidency of Yugoslavia, pointed out that two of the Yugoslav republics caused serious problems for Yugoslav foreign policy because they did not accept the concept of permanence and immutability of borders. These “dangerous illusions” were characteristic of the republican leaderships of Slovenia and Macedonia.² This provides a very specific and understudied perspective on the foreign policy of the Yugoslav federation during the Cold War. In the historical literature, the question of Yugoslavia's international relations usually foregrounds topics such as the personality of Joseph Broz Tito³, Yugoslavia's periodic rapprochement and disengagement with the USSR, and Belgrade's role in the Non-Aligned Movement. Only a second group of works is devoted

¹ I express my special thanks to Dr. Maximilian Graf and Dr.in Anna Graf-Steiner for their help in the research work involved to this article.

² Dizdarević 2000, p. 164.

³ Petrovic 2010.

to Yugoslavia's policy toward neighboring countries, but they all usually examine specific bilateral relations.⁴ What is missing is the comparative approach, which would show a generalized overview of Belgrade's views and intentions toward those countries with which it immediately borders. A rare exception are the texts dealing with the Yugoslavia-Austria-Italy triangle.⁵

As far as Yugoslavia's socialist neighbors are concerned, there is a tendency in the literature to regard them primarily as a function of Soviet policy. The claim is true in principle, but its generalization overshadows important specifics. It is sometimes overlooked that an essential element of Yugoslav foreign policy was its linkage to the internal balance between the individual republics of the federation. Usually the emphasis is placed on disputes between the republics over domestic issues. In fact, Joseph Broz Tito was often faced with the difficult dilemma of how to conduct "world politics" against the backdrop of the different republican leaderships' aspirations to resolve various border issues. Virtually all studies devote in-depth attention to the role of Tito's personality as a balancing factor for the aspirations of the individual republics to advance their interests as much as possible. The history of Tito's Yugoslavia reveals a broad palette of groups and generations that were involved in domestic and foreign-policy making. All this had a specific impact on the relations with its neighboring countries.

This article explores the hypothesis that an influential group of Yugoslav leaders in the 1960s and 1970s viewed Austria and Bulgaria in the same way – as an opportunity to achieve a territorial expansion of Yugoslavia at their expense. It thus appears that Belgrade had a similar attitude toward Vienna and Sofia, even though they were on different sides of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. Despite some specific differences in Yugoslav foreign policy toward Bulgaria and Austria, elements of similarity can be found. The issue has not been explored in analyses of the end of the Yugoslav federation. This article argues that in the last decade of Joseph Broz Tito's life, Bulgaria and Austria faced common challenges in their relations with neighboring Yugoslavia. This justifies the proposed chronological framework of the article, which explores the identical challenges confronting Bulgarian and Austrian foreign policy from 1968 to 1980. A further look will allow to identify what the hidden centers of power in Belgrade on this issue were. The working hypothesis is that Yugoslavia's policy on border issues was shaped by leading Slovenian politicians from the circle of Edvard Kardelj.

The extent to which Belgrade's similar attitude was understood in Sofia and in Vienna has also never been the subject of comparative analysis by researchers.

⁴ Previšić 2021.

⁵ Portmann & Ruzicic-Kessler 2014; Ruzicic-Kessler 2015; Graf 2016.

Many sources that became available in recent years have yet to be fully exploited. In addition, this article examines whether there were common approaches and interactions in the reactions of Sofia and Vienna toward Belgrade. The specific questions being posed are: How did Sofia assess the Austro-Yugoslav relations on the “Carinthian” issue, and how did Vienna assess the Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations on the “Macedonian” issue? What was the role of these particular challenges in the mechanisms of shaping foreign policy toward Yugoslavia, and to what extent were Sofia and Vienna conscious of this? The answer requires full-fledged research through critical analysis of archival documents and memoirs. The article is based on previously unused or underused Austrian and Bulgarian archival document collections. A problem-oriented chronological approach is applied in combination with foreign policy analysis. The findings contribute to the understanding of the Cold War in Europe as a complex and multidimensional process with specific local dynamics.

Overview of the Austro-Yugoslav and Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations until 1968

The relations of Bulgaria and Austria with Yugoslavia after 1945 were burdened by the shadow of the Second World War, and many of the accumulated problems were inherited even from the First World War and the period before that.

Before 1918, many territories of the future Yugoslavia were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Serbian state participated on the side of the victors of the First World War. The end of the war provided Belgrade with an opportunity for major territorial expansion. It was heralded as the unification of all the southern Slavs into one state. Serbia was formally replaced by the new Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom (SCSK), which was given the name Yugoslavia in 1929. The process took place in parallel with the collapse of the Habsburg state. Its former Slovene subjects were given the right to choose whether to join the new state of the South Slavs (SCSK) or to retain their ties to Vienna. Armed clashes broke out between supporters of the two options. In 1920, the majority of Slovenes in the Koroshka region voted in a referendum for their lands to remain in Austria. Their fate was the subject of lengthy diplomatic discussions between Belgrade and Vienna. A smaller Croatian minority also remained on Austrian territory in Burgenland. During the Second World War, the Slovene territories on both sides of the border were incorporated into the Third Reich, and the population was subjected to pressure for Germanization. After the end of the war, the Slovene republic that was established within the new Yugoslav federation formally claimed to change the border with Austria.

AUSTRIAN-BULGARIAN RELATIONS DURING THE COLD WAR

In Austria, the Slovene and Croat minorities were granted considerable privileges, which were enshrined in the text of the Austrian State Treaty when it was adopted in 1955. The leaders of the Slovene minority argued that the rights declared in the State Treaty were not fully realized until the late 1950s. Yugoslav diplomacy proclaimed to be the defender of these rights. Some other problems remained unresolved between Austria and Yugoslavia, related to the division of cultural property and archives from the period before 1918. It should be noted that these problems affected mainly the republics of Slovenia and Croatia, and not so much the whole of Yugoslavia. Joseph Broz Tito was keenly interested in Austria's neutrality because in it he found analogies with the model of non-alignment that Yugoslavia had propagandized in international relations.

As a result, a certain ambivalence emerged in Austro-Yugoslav relations. On the one hand, there were the claims in relation to the inherited unresolved problems from the time of the Habsburg Empire, on the other, the quest for political cooperation at the international level and the development of economic relations, including the participation of Yugoslav workers in the Austrian labor market. It is noteworthy that the capitals of both countries preferred to put more emphasis on the positive trends. The problems were at the local level – in Slovenia and Croatia on the Yugoslav side and in Carinthia on the Austrian side. In the 1960s, the tendency to highlight coinciding interests developed positively. The normalization of relations began with the visit of Austrian Foreign Minister Bruno Kreisky to Yugoslavia in 1960. In the historical literature, the period of the 1960s is assessed as a “honeymoon” in Yugoslavia's relations with its neighbors from the West. Even in the Austrian province of Carinthia and in the Yugoslav republic of Slovenia, leading regional politicians Hans Sima and Stane Kavčič pushed cooperation forward and tried to overcome the contentious past.⁶

In the 1960s, Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations also developed positively. However, the formative influence of matters that had remained “open” between Serbia and Bulgaria since the late nineteenth century persisted. Like Serbia, Bulgaria became an independent state after Russia's victorious war against the Ottoman Empire. The Treaty of San Stefano of 3 March 1878 restored Bulgarian statehood, but it set in motion a problem that became the greatest dividing line in the Balkans. Most of the geographical area of Macedonia was included in the territory of the restored Bulgarian state. The grounds for this were both the diplomatic and academic evidence of the Bulgarian ethnic character of the population, and its declared belonging to the Bulgarian nation, which was expressed

⁶ Knight 2017; Portmann & Ruzicic-Kessler 2014, pp. 299–301; Graf & Mayrhofer 2021, p. 158.

through a plebiscite in favor of its desire to be part of the Orthodox Bulgarian Exarchate. Only a few months later, at the Congress of Berlin, the Macedonian territory was returned to the Ottoman Empire. This laid the foundation for a long-lasting national liberation movement of the irredentist type to join Bulgaria.

Serbia's interests necessitated the use of diverse tools to prevent Bulgarian dominance in Macedonia. When in 1911–1912 the Balkan Christian states were preparing for an allied war against the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria was forced to agree in the alliance treaty with Serbia to a division of lands in the geographical area of Macedonia, hoping to keep the majority of it. During the First Balkan War of 1912–1913, Bulgaria was fighting on the main front against the Ottoman capital of Istanbul and could not commit enough troops to defend its claims in Macedonia, which was overrun by the Greek and Serbian armies. This problem lay at the heart of the Second Balkan (Inter-Allied) War, which was lost by Bulgaria. Most of the region of Macedonia was divided between Serbia and Greece. Bulgaria successfully fought against them in the First World War for the right to rule the disputed territory. On a global scale, however, the war was lost by the pro-German coalition, to which the Bulgarians also belonged. Vardar Macedonia remained in the new Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom, which had assumed international obligations to respect minority rights but was accused by Sofia of forcibly assimilating Macedonian Bulgarians.

During the Second World War, Germany defeated Yugoslavia in 1941 and let the troops of its ally Bulgaria into Vardar Macedonia. The events provided the basis for the later Yugoslav propaganda about the “fascist” Bulgarian occupation. After the end of Second World War, the Macedonian People's Republic was established as a constituent part of the new Yugoslav federation. The republic, with Skopje as its capital, developed a “Macedonian” national identity. Bulgarian communist leaders believed that the Macedonian question could be successfully resolved by creating a common Bulgarian-Yugoslav federation, but its creation was halted after a deliberate ban by Moscow. The conflict between Tito and Stalin had a direct impact on the Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations, which fell into an “unfavorable” period between 1949 and 1956. Things were mitigated after the visit of the Soviet leader Khrushchev to Belgrade in 1955. Further deterioration of Yugoslavia's relations with the socialist countries took place in 1958–1962. To outside observers, the unpleasant impression was given that Bulgaria was following the trajectory of Soviet-Yugoslav relations.

The Macedonian issue remained a problem for bilateral relations. The Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party in March 1963 allowed Bulgarian historians to refute the falsifications about the existence of a “Macedo-

nian nation” in the Middle Ages and in more recent times. However, the period coincided with another détente with Tito, and the Macedonian issue continued to be avoided at the political level. At meetings between Tito and the Bulgarian leader Todor Zhivkov in 1963 and 1965, an agreement was reached not to raise the Macedonian issue by the means of propaganda and mass communication campaigns. The agreement was respected by the Bulgarian side, but not by the Yugoslav side. From the end of 1967, Belgrade again began to place the Macedonian question at the center of Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations, as an outlet for the unfolding crises in the federation. Demands for “recognition of a Macedonian national minority” were made to Bulgaria, which Sofia did not accept. Luckily for Bulgaria, the following year Yugoslavia reacted very strongly to the suppression of the “Czech Spring”. Bulgaria felt somewhat freer in its ideological dependence on the Soviet Union and demonstrated this to Yugoslavia. A period characterized by some observers as the “Bulgarian-Yugoslav controversy over Macedonia” began.⁷

Relations of Austria and Bulgaria toward Yugoslavia after 1968

Two events of an external and internal nature for Yugoslavia had an impact on its relations with neighboring countries. The first was the entry of Warsaw Pact troops into Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1968. This violent intervention activated old fears in Belgrade of possible Soviet aggression on Yugoslav territory, motivating the Yugoslav leadership to be more critical of its socialist neighbors and to seek understanding with those in the West. The implementation of this foreign policy line was hampered by the development of internal processes that became a serious problem for the Yugoslav federation. The removal from power of the head of the secret services, Aleksandar Ranković, two years earlier, opened the possibility for the outbreak of nationalist tendencies in the individual Yugoslav republics. This had a negative impact on relations with neighboring countries, whether Western or not. In these countries there was a corresponding backlash. Sometimes the reaction was mainly at the local level, as it happened in the Austrian province of Carinthia.

The problems in the development of the Austro-Yugoslav relations were closely monitored by the Bulgarian diplomacy. Already in the information about the visit to Austria of a Yugoslav delegation led by Marshal Tito and the talks held with President Franz Jonas in February 1967, the different treatment of the guest at the central and local level was accentuated. “On the Austrian side, everything was done to emphasize the attention and respect for the esteemed guest... Only certain, mainly provincial newspapers commented on Tito’s spe-

⁷ Ognyanov 2006, Kalinova 2010, Germanov 2012, Troebst 1983.

cial security measures in an ironic and mocking tone”.⁸ The symbolic dispute about the past also did not go unnoticed by Bulgarian observers: Jonas pointed out the historical ties between Austria and the countries of the Danube basin, which created favorable conditions for Austria to serve as a bridge between the East and the West. Tito retorted that this was a fixation of the past. “There is no reason why Austria should serve as such a bridge”. The reports to Sofia also noted the problem of the return of the Yugoslav archives, on which it was decided to appoint a joint commission to study the documents. Curiously, the Bulgarian diplomats failed to include information about the calls made by right-wing organizations in Carinthia for a boycott of the visit.⁹

At the same time, the Austrian diplomats informed their minister of the deterioration of the Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations on the Macedonian question.¹⁰ The information was expanded in the report for the following year, 1968. They noted the straining of relations between Sofia and Belgrade, assuming that this was happening with the tacit consent of Moscow.

Against this backdrop, bilateral relations between Austria and Yugoslavia reached a peak in 1969 when Jonas and Tito officially opened the “Friendship bridge” over the border river Mur. The pronouncements “We come to you as if we are meeting with relatives” and “Yes, we have been together for a long time” were exchanged. The Austrian researchers noted that these references to shared history and friendship quickly turned into arguments about evaluation of the past. In the 1970s the situation changed completely. Bilateral relations deteriorated, official visits were cancelled, and a distinct “glacial period” began. However, it was balanced by attempts to dampen bilateral problems by pushing the overlapping interests of the two neutral and non-aligned countries during a delicate Cold War period.¹¹ The change began in 1970. In October, President Jonas and Chancellor Kreisky attended the 50th anniversary celebration of the Carinthian referendum in Klagenfurt. The celebrations were not well received in Yugoslavia, from where calls began to be heard to improve the situation of the “Koroshka” Slovenes. At the end of the year, Bulgarian diplomats drew up a “Report on a campaign in Yugoslavia concerning the situation of the Slovenian and Croatian minority in Austria”.¹² According to the document, “in recent years” the issue of disrespect for minority rights in Austria had not been raised

⁸ CDA, f. 1B, inv.81B, file 652, 1-7.

⁹ ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II Pol 1967, Jugoslawien 1, Tito – Besuch.

¹⁰ ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II Pol 1968, Jugoslawien 8, Information über Jugoslawien (Stand: Anfang April 1968).

¹¹ Graf & Mayrhofer 2021, p. 160.

¹² CDA, f. 1477, inv.26, file 3011, 1-6.

AUSTRIAN-BULGARIAN RELATIONS DURING THE COLD WAR

by the Yugoslav side, and in Austria relations with Yugoslavia were also presented as “impeccable”.

This changed as new problems emerged, caused by the sharp increase in the number of Yugoslav workers, which had doubled in the past year. They began to come under the spotlight with scandals and beatings during off-work hours. A brawl on 29 November in a restaurant in central Vienna became the occasion for an exchange of sharp remarks between Austrian and Yugoslav media. In the Bulgarian report it was tactfully omitted that the day was a Yugoslav national holiday. The offended Yugoslav media launched a campaign for the rights of the Slovenian minority in Austria. To these were added allegations of problems for the Croatian minority in Burgenland. Bulgarian diplomats noted that the authorities were taking measures to calm the situation but pointed out that the Austrian press maintained an entirely different position.

Austrian journalists publicly questioned why Tito was suddenly creating tensions with Austria, Italy and Bulgaria. An article in *Kronen Zeitung* replied that this was happening for domestic political reasons. “He makes a drama out of every threat against the integration of Yugoslavia. That is also why he raises such a fuss about the Bulgarian appetite for Macedonia. For only in this way can he demonstrate to the country’s individual republics, striving for ever greater independence, that the only guarantor of their independence is a united Yugoslavia”. It was important for Bulgarian diplomats to note that the publications of Austrian political observers gave similar assessments of the Bulgarian-Yugoslav and Yugoslav-Austrian problems. Especially noteworthy was a comment in *Die Presse*: “... at the moment when economic difficulties and contradictions between the individual republics emerge in the SFRY¹³, relations with the neighbors become strained... this is what happened 12 years ago when frictions suddenly appeared with Austria, Albania and Bulgaria”.¹⁴

At the same time, Austrian diplomats were monitoring the exchange of letters between the Bulgarian and Yugoslav leadership and the visit of Krste Crvenkovski to Sofia in November 1970. Yugoslav diplomats were trying to convince their Austrian counterparts that the main function of the Macedonian issue between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria was catering to USSR interests. The Austrian foreign ministry did not fully share this assessment because it was also following the development of the Yugoslav-Greek controversy over the Macedonian question in the same year, 1970, which could not have been inspired by Moscow.¹⁵

¹³ SFRY - Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

¹⁴ CDA, f. 1477, inv.26, file 277, 276.

¹⁵ ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, Politische Berichte 1970 Belgrad, Die derzeitige Beziehungen Jugoslawien – Griechenland, 22 January 1970.

In the following year, the Austrian side made a concerted effort to improve relations with its neighbor. However, this took place against the background of deepening internal Yugoslav problems. These began to have an impact on Austrian-Yugoslav relations. Struggles over inheriting the aging Tito's power created conditions for the emergence of social movements demanding liberalization and wider autonomy for the republics. One characteristic example is the "Croatian Spring" of 1971. The social processes unfolded against the backdrop of symptoms of economic decline. Tito pursued a policy of political purges within the Yugoslav one-party system. Austria observed these developments with "considerable concern". However, the arrests of dissidents and political enemies, and internal reforms did not solve the problems in the long term. Foreign policy therefore became important to strengthen Tito's position and to divert attention from the domestic situation. For Vienna, the weakening of the liberal communists in Slovenia by Stane Kavcic's circle was worrying.¹⁶

The repercussions of internal developments in Yugoslavia for relations with neighboring countries were also closely monitored by the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry. The Bulgarian diplomats in Belgrade also held informal consultations with their Austrian counterparts, during which they exchanged views on the problems of their countries in the relations with Yugoslavia. One such meeting, on 30 January 1971, was attended by the Secretary of the Bulgarian Embassy, Nikola Durzhankov, and the Secretary of the Austrian Embassy, Robert Karas. The Austrian diplomat assessed as particularly good the development of Austria's diplomatic and economic relations with Yugoslavia, notwithstanding the "incident with the Koroshka Slovenes".

In this regard, Karas expressed his dissatisfaction that Yugoslavia was in fact not one country but six essentially separate republics, with which he had to deal separately if he wanted to hold any kind of common cultural events. Particularly important was his assessment that the extremist republics in Yugoslavia were Macedonia and Slovenia. They sometimes disturbed Yugoslavia's relations with the countries neighboring the two republics – Bulgaria, Italy, Greece and Austria. Vienna did not take it well that Yugoslavia constantly made demands on its neighbors, either for the rights of "alleged" Yugoslav minorities or on border and other issues. This was also Yugoslavia's attitude toward the Koroshka Slovenes, who according to Karas were a minority that was gradually disappearing – the old people were passing away, and the young felt Austrian and spoke the official language. In December there was an incident at the unveiling of a monument in Graz, which in Ljubljana was "deliberately blown out of proportion" in order to extract political benefits. The issue was resolved, but Slovenia's

¹⁶ Graf & Mayrhofer 2021, p. 160.

AUSTRIAN-BULGARIAN RELATIONS DURING THE COLD WAR

claims about the Koroshka Slovenes remained. Of particular importance to the Bulgarian diplomat was Karas's statement that, if it was a question of claims, Austria also had something to claim from Yugoslavia in Maribor and its environs, but that this was not the policy of the Austrian government.¹⁷

The information gathered was used by the Bulgarian Embassy in Belgrade to make a comprehensive analysis of Yugoslavia's relations with neighboring countries. It was stressed that the prevailing opinion in Belgrade was that in determining the policy of the Yugoslav federation toward the neighboring countries, the individual Yugoslav republics immediately bordering the countries concerned should have a decisive say. The systematic application of this thesis produced "very unpleasant results and serious disturbances" in Yugoslavia's relations with a number of neighboring countries because of the extremist nationalist positions "in Skopje, Ljubljana and elsewhere". Comments were made on the "stubbornly" maintained thesis by the Yugoslav leadership that relations between Yugoslavia and its neighbors were excellent, good or normal, with the sole exception of Bulgaria, through the fault of the latter.

This was refuted by several crises in the relations with Italy, Austria and Greece in late 1970 and early 1971. It appeared that with almost all of Yugoslavia's neighbors there were contentious territorial or minority issues, usually fomented by "nationalist and chauvinist circles" in some Yugoslav republics. The conclusion was drawn that Bulgaria had the right to insist that Yugoslavia should determine its policy for the normalization of relations with the two countries on the same principles which it applied in its relations with Italy, Austria, Albania and Greece, namely: the Yugoslav government agreeing to develop good neighborly relations with these countries, notwithstanding the existence of certain disputed questions with them, even "in the presence of an actual pending territorial question with Italy".

As long as Yugoslavia agreed to leave aside the disputed questions with the above-mentioned neighbors and strive for good neighborly relations with them, why would the Macedonian question not cease to be the main issue of Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations and the *conditio sine qua non* for their normalization and improvement? On the basis of these observations, it was concluded that Bulgarian policy toward Yugoslavia's neighboring countries should be conducted in view of the latter's controversies with them on territorial and minority issues. "The moves of Italy and Austria on the disputed territorial or minority questions with Yugoslavia should be very carefully watched in order to be used by the Bulgarian side as skillfully as possible for synchronized opposition to anti-Bulgarian displays and claims by the Yugoslav side". It was not explicitly stated, but

¹⁷ CDA, f. 1B, inv.81B, file 652, 14–15.

the obvious conclusion was drawn that only in this way could the observed synchrony in the conduct of Ljubljana and Skopje be counteracted.¹⁸

The recommendations were accepted by the leadership of the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry. Sofia instructed the Bulgarian Embassy in Vienna to collect additional information on the minority issues between Austria and Yugoslavia. The Bulgarian diplomats immediately began to work on the preparation of a historical and political report on the Slovenian minority in Austria. The drafting of the report was delayed after it was concluded that the “complexity” of the subject required more detailed research. In this connection, it was decided to send the head of the press office to Klagenfurt to gather further informational material.¹⁹

The topicality of the subject was confirmed by the four-day visit of the Yugoslav Prime Minister, Džemal Bijedić, to Austria in April 1972. The staff of the Bulgarian Embassy in Vienna informed Sofia of the final communiqué, which stressed that the Slovenian and Croatian minorities in Austria played an important connecting role in the relations between the two countries. Yugoslavia “commends the willingness of the Austrian government” to address the rights of minorities with the participation of their representatives.²⁰ The Bulgarian Embassy in Belgrade also collected information on the results of Bijedić’s visit. At the Bulgarian request, an informative meeting was held at the Yugoslav Foreign Ministry. The hosts emphasized with satisfaction that for the first time an Austrian government had officially declared that it would fulfil its obligations under Article 7 of the State Treaty on the Rights of the Yugoslav Minority in Austria.²¹

In their later analyses Bulgarian diplomats commented on the apparent discrepancy in the terminology. The Austrian legal system referred to a Slovenian and Croatian minority, emphasizing the indigenous nature of this population. In Belgrade, they claimed that the minorities are “Yugoslav”. The latter was, in practice, grounds for interference in Austria’s internal affairs. It was perhaps no coincidence that precisely during the days surrounding Bijedić’s visit, a session of the Yugoslav state and party presidency was held in Brijuni under Tito’s personal leadership. The presented theses remained secret for many years. Part of the discussions were devoted to the question of whether Yugoslavia’s position should be that the borders were permanent and unchangeable or only inviolable. The representatives of Macedonia and Slovenia categorically did not accept the thesis of the finality of the borders. There was a sharp dispute between them

¹⁸ CDA, f. 1B, inv.81B, file 652, 22-36.

¹⁹ AMFA, inv. 22 P, file 4, 33, 67; inv. 23 P, file 6, 12.

²⁰ CDA, f. 1477, inv.28, file 249, 58-60.

²¹ CDA, f. 1477, inv.28, file 249, 79-81.

and the then Federal Foreign Minister, Mirko Tepavac. He managed to block the official acceptance of the position of the two republics. However, they did not give up. The dispute marked a precedent whose “harmfulness” lasted until the break-up of Yugoslavia.²² The most recent historical research shows that this dispute was not theoretical at all. Carinthia in the 1970s was a zone of active operations of the Yugoslav secret service UDBA. As early as 1972, at least four Yugoslav sabotage groups were sent to Austria with the task of intensifying tensions between the majority and the minority in Carinthia and Burgenland. Three of the groups operated successfully in Carinthia. In the following years, the Austrian state became the scene of nineteen various attacks and sabotages.²³

In the summer of 1972, a group of Croatian Ustasha immigrants conducted an armed action in Yugoslavia. The fact that the extremists set out from Austrian territory created serious tensions between the two countries. Yugoslavia accused Austria of being a base for terrorists. The presidents of the two countries held an emergency meeting in early September 1972 and agreed to cooperate more closely in the fight against terrorism. In this environment, the Austrian government began to place bilingual topographic signs in towns in South Carinthia where members of the Slovenian minority lived. The action met with resistance from German nationalist groups in Carinthia, who destroyed some of the signs. Their motivation was fear of alleged Yugoslav territorial claims. The Austrian government stopped the placement of the signs. The Yugoslav media conducted a press campaign against Austria for the second time within a year. Official protest notes were sent to Vienna.²⁴

Even more disturbing for the Austrian side were statements by the Yugoslav Minister of Defense in mid-December 1972 that “the Yugoslav army is in combat readiness”. His words were directly related to the problem in Carinthia. This was noted in a reference by the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry on the foreign policy of the Republic of Austria. It reported that the Austrian government held an emergency meeting, at which it was sharply noted to the Yugoslav military minister that it was unacceptable “to brandish a saber” on the eve of the European Security Conference. Particular attention was drawn to the way in which Austria responded to the accusations made by the Yugoslav side, that Austria was not fulfilling its obligations with regard to the Slovenian minority under the State Treaty. Foreign Minister Rudolf Kirchschläger stated that Austria alone had the right to decide to what extent it had fulfilled its treaty obligations

²² Dizdarević 2000, p. 164.

²³ Elste & Wadl 2015.

²⁴ Portmann & Ruzicic-Kessler 2014, pp. 302–303.

and suggested that the two sides should leave the phase of mutual accusations and move on to a calm business discussion.²⁵

This information was used in the preparation for Minister Kirchschräger's visit to Bulgaria in February 1973. His host, Petar Mladenov, took the opportunity to present the problems in the relations with Yugoslavia. Bulgaria had absolutely no claims toward this country. The Macedonian question was a remnant of the historical legacy. However, Bulgaria did not believe that it should be used to aggravate relations between the two countries. Kirchschräger agreed that with a neighboring country there would always be more problems than with a distant one, because specific events in the historical development played a certain role. He informed that the problem that preoccupied Austria in its relations with Yugoslavia was the problem of minorities. Kirchschräger described it as an extremely difficult problem that was burdened with emotions on both sides. He declared that he acknowledged the latter frankly to his Bulgarian host. According to him, difficulties were being created both on the Carinthian side and by the neighbors south of the border.²⁶

Concerns took on a very visible dimension when, in March 1973, Premier Kreisky's party suffered losses in the Carinthia municipal election. This was noted in the materials prepared by the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry for Todor Zhivkov's forthcoming visit to Austria. The briefs stressed that relations between Austria and Yugoslavia were strained. The reports from the Bulgarian Embassy in Vienna on the 1973 exchange of diplomatic notes between Austria and Yugoslavia are yet to be uncovered, but the Bulgarian head of state was presented with the assessment that "in the complicated situation that has arisen, Austria is patiently making efforts for a favorable solution of the problem." Sofia and Vienna did not directly exchange plans for joint action, but Todor Zhivkov's program included a visit to Klagenfurt on 11 October 1973. In drafting the joint communiqué for the visit, Bulgaria proposed that the draft included the text "The Chairman of the State Council, Todor Zhivkov, briefed the Austrian side extensively on the position of the PRB [People's Republic of Bulgaria] on the situation in the Balkan Peninsula. The Austrian side welcomes the constructive foreign policy pursued by the People's Republic of Bulgaria". In the Austrian draft, which became final, the second sentence was replaced by "The Austrian side welcomes all efforts aimed at intensifying good neighborly relations between the peoples of the Balkan Peninsula and at strengthening peace in this region".²⁷

²⁵ CDA, f. 1477, inv.29, file 172a, 85–86.

²⁶ CDA, f. 1477, inv.29, file 1726, 170–225.

²⁷ Hren 2004, p. 108; CSA, f. 1477, inv.29, file 168, 51, 135, 140, 233–241, 288–294, 292; file 169, 30.

AUSTRIAN-BULGARIAN RELATIONS DURING THE COLD WAR

Here is the place to note that throughout the Cold War period Yugoslavia neither accepted Bulgarian policy as “constructive” nor saw it as “an effort to intensify good neighborly relations”. In this light, the Austrian redraft can only be seen as a half-hearted gesture toward Yugoslavia. With the proposed wording, Vienna probably intended to spare itself unnecessary protests from the Yugoslav side.

This did not prevent the latter from finding further occasions for protests. In September 1974, the parties in the regional parliament of Carinthia agreed that a linguistic census of minorities was necessary. The proposal was accepted by the Austrian government.²⁸ Belgrade believed that these were measures would lead to a reduction of the “Yugoslav” minorities in Austria. Another exchange of notes between the two countries followed.²⁹

The Austrian diplomats at the embassy in Belgrade briefed their Bulgarian counterparts on the situation. According to their information, Austria was fulfilling all its obligations under the 1955 State Treaty. The only thing that had not yet been fulfilled was the placing of topographic signs in both languages. It is an interesting observation that the Belgrade press wrote much and harshly against Austria, but the Croatian and Slovenian newspapers wrote much more and much more harshly. It was important for Austrian diplomats to point out in particular that in one of its articles the Maribor newspaper *Večer* described Austria and Bulgaria as enemies of Yugoslavia.³⁰

In 1975, Federal Chancellor Bruno Kreisky visited Bulgaria. This was one of the most important visits in these countries’ bilateral relations. In preparation for it, the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry prepared a voluminous information package for the Bulgarian state leadership. The documents included a special report on Yugoslav-Austrian relations and on the Slovenian minority in Carinthia.³¹

In the course of the year, Austrian diplomats in Belgrade continued to brief their Bulgarian Embassy counterparts in detail on the situation in Carinthia. Vienna’s official position was that no more than a third of the members of the Slovenian minority maintained active ties to Yugoslavia. The most influential political parties in Austria had agreed on an up-to-date census of the minority, because significant changes had taken place among them as a result of assimilation processes. It was not feasible to open a school in a village where no one now felt Slovene.³²

²⁸ CDA, f. 1B, inv.81B, file 652, 83.

²⁹ Notes 1974.

³⁰ CDA, f. 1B, inv.81B, file 652, 45-47.

³¹ CDA, f. 1477, inv.31, file 171a, 41-48.

³² CDA, f. 1B, inv.81B, file 652, 49-50.

Common challenges for Bulgaria and Austria in their relations with Yugoslavia

In 1975, the efforts of Yugoslav diplomacy were directed toward resolving long-standing disputes with Italy. Negotiations ended successfully with the Osimo agreement. It was signed on 10 November 1975 after secret negotiations that lasted almost a full year. The processes were monitored by Bulgarian diplomats.³³ The development of relations with Italy motivated Belgrade to increase pressure on Vienna to resolve the outstanding issues. At the end of the year, Bruno Kreisky visited Yugoslavia. Many of his talks with Joseph Broz Tito were devoted to the minority question. The presence of Edvard Kardelj at the talks is noteworthy. Austrian diplomats shared with their Bulgarian colleagues that Kardelj was the most suitable partner for such talks because, in addition to being chairman of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the SFRY presidency, he was also a Slovene, and the most important “open question” in the relations between Austria and Yugoslavia was the question of the Slovene minority in Austria. Almost the same assessment was given in official Yugoslav announcements.³⁴

More should be said here about the involvement of Edvard Kardelj. He was not only a Slovene and “trusted” deputy to Joseph Broz Tito, but also a leading figure in Yugoslav foreign policy. Although he had not formally held the post of foreign minister for a long time, he held one position that remained in the shadows but had been important in shaping Yugoslavia’s foreign policy. He was chairman of the Federal Council for Foreign Policy to the presidency of the SFRY. The structure was formally nongovernmental and had only advisory functions. In practice, it was the body that worked out the country’s foreign policy strategy. In the 1970s, the council repeatedly discussed models of minority policy toward neighboring countries. Alongside this, Kardelj continued to play a decisive role in the advancement or removal of various leading figures in Slovenia.

The Yugoslav hosts failed to persuade the Austrian Chancellor to abandon the planned minority census. This hardened the Yugoslav position. In February 1976, Union Secretary for Foreign Affairs (Foreign Minister) Milos Minic delivered an exposé on the challenges facing Yugoslav foreign policy to the generals at the Army House. It highlighted the problems with Austria and Bulgaria as particularly serious.³⁵

In the summer of 1976, two laws were passed in the Austrian parliament on the census by mother tongue and on the legal status of national groups in Austria. It was envisaged that bilingual topographical signs would be placed in settlements where at least 25 per cent of the inhabitants belonged to the na-

³³ CDA, f. 1B, inv.81B, file 652, 108–112.

³⁴ CDA, f. 1B, inv.81B, file 652, 105–107; Relations 1985.

³⁵ AMFA, inv. 28 P, file 190, 57–61.

AUSTRIAN-BULGARIAN RELATIONS DURING THE COLD WAR

tional minority. The laws came under severe criticism from the Yugoslav side. Bilateral relations deteriorated. In July, three notes were exchanged. Dr. Willibald Pahr, head of the Austrian government's constitutional department and a specialist in minority law, was sent to Yugoslavia to explain "the Austrian position on minority issues in Austria". He explained in detail that with the two laws Austria neither intended nor carried out a census of its minorities. The aim was only to conduct a survey of the mother tongue of Austrian citizens throughout Austria. The Bulgarian Embassy was preparing an urgent report on the visit.³⁶

In addition to the briefing, information was prepared on the "rising temperature" in the Yugoslav media. It was pointed out that prominent Yugoslav leaders took part in the anti-Austrian campaign. One special aspect was highlighted in their statements. An example was Sergej Kraigher (a Slovene), who stressed the "revival of Great German chauvinism and Nazism," linking the question of the Slovene-Croat minority in Austria to Bulgaria: "By persistently insisting on a census of the minority, the democrats and socialists in Austria are obviously looking at the practice in Bulgaria, where, on the basis of the non-recognition of the Macedonian nation and the historical necessity of a Socialist Republic of Macedonia, the minority was simply 'wiped out' at the last census." Dr. Dusan Dragosavac expressed a similar opinion: "We are sensitive about the suppression of the rights of our national minorities in neighboring Austria and Bulgaria".³⁷

Austria was under concerted pressure from Belgrade and from calls by some Slovenian minority leaders for a boycott of the census. Nevertheless, it was held as scheduled in November 1976. Bulgarian diplomats followed the events and prepared detailed information as soon as the official results were announced.³⁸

The topic was important for Bulgaria. Therefore, at the beginning of 1977, a team of three employees from the embassy in Vienna prepared a very detailed report on minorities in Austria. It began with a historical overview and ended with their current status. The main part of the study was devoted to the Slovenes in Carinthia. Based on detailed facts, the Bulgarian diplomats made an analytical assessment of each controversial issue. They pointed out, for example, that the Austrian State Treaty spoke of the Croatian language, not Serbo-Croatian. Belgrade's linking of the Croatian language spoken in Burgenland with Serbo-Croatian was seen as an attempt to label all Slavs in Austria as Yugoslavs. The latter gave the concept a political orientation. Yugoslavia's attempts to "internationalize" the problem was especially highlighted. The Bulgarian diplomats accepted the official position of Vienna that the publications printed in literary

³⁶ CDA, f. 1B, inv.81B, file 652, 121–125.

³⁷ CDA, f. 1B, inv.81B, file 652, 113–120.

³⁸ CDA, f. 1B, inv.81B, file 652, A 129–132.

Serbo-Croatian language in Zagreb were not understood and could not be read by the Croats in Burgenland. The situation was quite different with the Slovenes in Carinthia, who had “strong support from literature in Slovenia”. Former participants in the partisan movement had been identified as an influential group that was “linked to the political administration in Yugoslavia” and was creating its own organizations in Austria. The opposite position in Carinthia was expressed by “local nationalist associations” and right-wing opposition parties.

According to the Bulgarian diplomats, the big problem was the clash of “two nationalisms”: nationalist Slovenian and pro-German groups that did not receive wide support from the population. For this reason, the universal secret census by mother tongue of November 1976 was boycotted. In actuality, the government did not receive accurate data and had to conduct policy based on the data from the general census in 1971. The report concluded with information about the letter that the organizations of the Carinthian Slovenes sent to the federal chancellor after the end of the census. They agreed to resume negotiations and to settle the unresolved problems in a “pragmatic way”. The proposal for negotiations was also supported in an official statement by the Yugoslav government. It was also indicated that the disputes practically did not affect other areas of mutual relations and perhaps accelerated the solution of a number of other unresolved issues (joint measures against the terrorist actions of the Ustaša, the transfer from Austria of the Yugoslav archives, regional cooperation in the border areas, etc.).³⁹

The comparisons were important for the Bulgarian state, because in the same period Yugoslavia tried to internationalize the “Macedonian question”. In some of the cases, the topic was developed and presented to the international institutions precisely by Slovenians.⁴⁰ Based on this detailed information, the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry officially discussed the general problems with the Austrian Embassy in Sofia. The Bulgarian interest in Austrian-Yugoslav relations was immediately reported in Vienna. Bulgarian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikolay Minchev, who was responsible for the Balkan countries, was tasked in April 1977 to discuss the current state of Austrian-Yugoslav relations with the Austrian ambassador in Sofia.

Minchev was interested, among other things, in whether Yugoslavia was making a special effort to provide cultural support for the Carinthian Slovenes. He shared the hope of the Austrian authorities that after the issue of geographical name plates had been resolved in the following few months, Yugoslavia would realize that other aspects, perhaps even more important than the issue

³⁹ CDA, f. 1B, inv.81a, file 25, 1-37.

⁴⁰ CDA, f. 1481, inv.21, file 598, 1-87.

AUSTRIAN-BULGARIAN RELATIONS DURING THE COLD WAR

of the Slovenian minority in Carinthia, would also play a role in the formation of relations between the two countries. For his part, Deputy Minister Minchev shared the ambiguity in the current state of Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations – on the one hand, there had been positive development in the economic, technical and cultural fields, but on the other, mutual relations had been overshadowed by three issues. The first was related to the Yugoslav claim for a Macedonian minority in Bulgaria. Minchev emphasized Sofia's position that Bulgaria was not ready to grant Yugoslavia the right to interfere in internal Bulgarian affairs, especially since the population of the area in question felt that they were Bulgarians. In this context, Minchev was interested in whether Yugoslavia claimed the right to conduct direct negotiations between Belgrade and Vienna on matters affecting the Slovene minority in Carinthia, and whether Austria recognized such a Yugoslav claim. Another dispute was related to the attempt by Belgrade to downplay or completely deny the role of Bulgarian troops in the liberation of Yugoslavia in 1945. The third problem was the "targeted and planned anti-Bulgarian campaign" in the Yugoslav press. Minchev shared the hope of Austrian diplomats, that one day Belgrade would look at the issue of minorities in the right perspective and admit that there were more important problems between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. He informed that in September 1976, Sofia had sent Belgrade an extensive program for comprehensive development of mutual relations, but that a satisfactory Yugoslav response was still awaited.⁴¹

The Bulgarian diplomatic archives contain a translation of publications in the Belgrade newspaper *Politika*, which protested against the request by Austrian Chancellor Kreisky for an international delegation to examine and compare the life and the situation of Slovenians in Austria and in Slovenia itself. The official Yugoslav position was that it was nobody's business in Vienna to interfere in the internal development of Slovenia and Yugoslavia.⁴²

All this allowed Bulgaria to discover several coincidences with Austria's position. The first was that both countries did not accept Yugoslavia interfering in their internal affairs regarding some of their citizens. The second was that both countries did not accept Yugoslavia's attempts to internationalize its claims. The third was about the message to Belgrade that other issues should have priority in bilateral relations, for example, related to economic and cultural cooperation and the sharing of common positions in relation to international and European security. In the report on the activities of the Bulgarian Embassy in Vienna in 1977, it was noted that Yugoslavia occupied a special place in Austrian foreign

⁴¹ ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, Politische Berichte 1977 Sofia, Bulgariens Interesse für österreichisch-jugoslawische Beziehungen, 7 April 1977.

⁴² CDA, f. 1B, inv.81B, file 652, 134-137.

policy, with political relations being clouded by disputes regarding the Slovene minority in Carinthia. It was assessed that the active party was Yugoslavia with its sharp notes accusing the Austrian government of non-implementation of the State Treaty. There was a possibility that Yugoslavia would resort to internationalizing the issue, which Austria sought to avoid. The conclusion was made that in connection to the above, Austria was a potential ally of Bulgaria regarding the Macedonian question.⁴³ In the instructions to the ambassador in 1978, the ministry directed him to pay particular attention to Austria's relations with the Balkan countries, and especially with Yugoslavia, and to monitor and inform about the resolution of controversial issues concerning minorities.⁴⁴

In the same year, Austrian diplomats were impressed by how Yugoslav diplomacy engaged China's foreign policy support. A visit by the Vice-Chairman of the Chinese Parliament to Yugoslavia included meetings in Macedonia and Slovenia, during which the guest made statements in the spirit of Belgrade's theses on the nationality question.⁴⁵

In July 1978, the XI Congress of Yugoslav Communists was held. Its documents emphasized that Yugoslavia had problems with Austria, Albania, Bulgaria and Greece.⁴⁶ It should be noted that in all the information about international meetings of Yugoslav politicians, Austrian diplomats carefully followed how the minority question was commented and whether it affected the Austrian interest.⁴⁷

At that time, the Bulgarian state leadership prepared its official position toward the Yugoslav claims. It was presented in the form of the Declaration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 25 July 1978. In the Bulgarian historical literature, it is evaluated as "one of the most serious, analytical Bulgarian documents, which informs the public opinion in the country and abroad about the overall development of Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations". The first part of the opinion ascertained that no one outside of Bulgaria was competent to determine the national composition of the population of the country, the national consciousness

⁴³ AMFA, inv. 29 P, file 7, 207-213.

⁴⁴ AMFA, inv. 29 P, file 7, 260.

⁴⁵ ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II Pol 1977, Jugoslawien, Besuch einer Delegation des Volkskongresses der VR China in Jugoslawien (11 – 21 may 1977).

⁴⁶ ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II Pol 1978, Jugoslawien, XI. Parteitag des Bundes der Kommunisten Jugoslawiens; Propaganda und Wirklichkeit; Bemerkungen zur jugoslawischen Außenpolitik, 20 July 1978.

⁴⁷ ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, Politische Berichte 1978 Belgrad, Offizieller Besuch des rumänischen Staats- und Parteichefs Nicolae Ceausescu in Jugoslawien, (16 – 17 November 1978); ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, II Pol 1980, Algerien, Besuch des algerischen Ministerpräsidenten Mohamed Benahmed Abdelghani In Belgrad, 7 February 1980.

of its people or a part of it. The second part of the Declaration emphasized that “in Bulgaria there has not been, and there is not currently, any ‘Macedonian national minority’, there is no Slavic population that differs in ethnic origin, way of life and religion from the Bulgarian nation”. The claim was substantiated with reference to the research of authoritative Bulgarian and European scientists, combined with examples of the numerous manifestations of Bulgarian national self-awareness by the population that Yugoslavia claimed. The third part of the Bulgarian opinion condemned the misuse of the past and the substitution of historical facts. The manipulative use of history through propagandistic clichés in the mass media was rejected. It was categorically stated that Sofia could not agree and did not accept “the formation of the Macedonian nation on an anti-Bulgarian basis, by falsifying well-known facts and inciting national enmity toward the Bulgarian people”.⁴⁸

The declaration represented a new stage in Bulgarian foreign policy, which for the first time placed the Macedonian issue at the international level as particularly important among the “open issues” with Yugoslavia. Measures were taken to ensure that the document received the widest possible distribution around the world. The Bulgarian Embassy in Austria also carried out the relevant instruction. 300 copies of the Declaration were printed in German. They were sent to the president, the prime minister, the members of the government, the chairmen of the main parties, the heads of departments in the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the representatives of international organizations in Vienna, the accredited ambassadors, the editorial offices of newspapers, and television and radio stations, and the foreign journalists accredited in the country. The Bulgarian ambassador held a series of meetings to personally present the Declaration to “prominent political, cultural and economic figures”. Additional meetings were also held by embassy staff. It was reported that some of the interlocutors expressed surprise as to why Bulgaria had remained silent on the subject for so long. According to the Bulgarian diplomats, the representatives of the Austrian Foreign Ministry admitted “with appropriate caution” that “the right belongs to the Bulgarian side”. In contrast, the editors-in-chief of leading newspapers expressed the same assessment “openly”. As a result of the meetings, the Bulgarian position was presented on the national radio and the central press, including in the newspaper of the ruling party *Arbeiter Zeitung*. It turned out that a week earlier the Austrian newspapers had presented the Yugoslav position on the matter. The Bulgarian reaction was defined as “timely”. This happened against the background of an anti-Bulgarian campaign by Yugoslavia in the Austrian press, taking place at the same time. It was combined with interviews of

⁴⁸ Germanov 2012, pp. 228–231.

Yugoslav officials saying that the Austrian side “will at last endeavor to fulfill the conditions of the State Treaty concerning the rights of national minorities, of the Slovenes in Carinthia and of the Croats in Burgenland”.⁴⁹

The presentation of the Bulgarian standpoint was an important element of the preparation of Todor Zhivkov’s visit to Austria. It took place between 18 and 22 September 1978. Klagenfurt was again included in Zhivkov’s program. The local press pointed out that the highlight of the visit was not the economic and cultural ties between Sofia and Vienna, but the fact that the Macedonian issue is a thorn in the relations between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia.⁵⁰

It could be a coincidence, but precisely at the same time, a comprehensive review of relations with neighboring countries was being carried out in Belgrade. The “internationalization” of disputes with neighbors was becoming a problem for Tito. On 19 September 1978, he convened a meeting of the state and party presidency in the Karadjordjevo residence. The policy regarding the minority question was discussed, based on the understanding that there had been many actions on the Yugoslav side that had benefited neither the minorities nor Yugoslavia. Tito sharply criticized such actions on the grounds that he faced a growing lack of understanding at the international level as to why the “leading non-aligned country” could quarrel with its neighbors in such a way. Tito was supported by Edvard Kardelj, who defined the Yugoslav minority policy as “one of the most unproductive and unsuccessful aspects of our foreign policy”. Kardelj sharply criticized the separation of this policy from the wider interests of developing good relations and cooperation with neighbors. He set the task of continuously expanding cooperation, opening borders with neighbors. The aim was to create an atmosphere in which the situation of minorities would be “better and their struggle more successful”. There was no renunciation of the claims regarding the Yugoslav minorities, but they were now seen as a “long-term problem,” the solution of which could come after the successful development of relations and comprehensive cooperation with neighboring countries.⁵¹

Some researchers find in these decisions a new tactic only with regard to Bulgaria and cannot understand why in the following years the general picture of the relations between the two countries remained quite difficult.⁵² There is a much more serious reason to argue that the change in Yugoslav foreign policy tactics was related to changed priorities in relation to Austria (and Italy). In November 1978, the creation of the “Alps-Adriatic Working Group” was

⁴⁹ AMFA, inv. 31 P, file 4, 4-11.

⁵⁰ Tageszeitung 1978.

⁵¹ Dizdarević 2000, p. 162.

⁵² Germanov 2012, p. 222.

announced in Venice. It included Italian, Austrian and Yugoslav administrative territories, including Carinthia, Slovenia and Croatia. This unusual-for-the-time structure set itself the goal of coordinating various issues of interest to its members, in particular “transalpine transport links, port traffic, energy production and transmission, agriculture, forestry, water management, tourism, environmental protection, nature conservation, landscape conservation, cultural and recreational landscape conservation, regional development, settlement development, cultural ties, contacts between scientific institutions”.⁵³ Perhaps the benefits expected for Slovenia from the unification explain the change in Edvard Kardelj’s position.

Toward the end of 1978, the prospects for the new structure were not fully clarified. For this reason, Austrian and Bulgarian diplomats in Belgrade commented on the problems with Yugoslavia in a traditional spirit. According to an adviser in the Austrian Embassy, the Yugoslav policy toward the neighboring countries had a conjunctural character and was not based on a permanent principled basis. He expressed pessimism regarding the future development of both the Yugoslav-Austrian and the Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations. The reason was that in Yugoslavia they were afraid for the future of the country “if the USSR after Tito or in a specific complex international situation decides to return Yugoslavia or parts of it to the socialist camp”. The Austrian Embassy showed interest in the collection of documents on the Macedonian issue, published by Sofia, which presented the Bulgarian position. The compendium was provided to them in the shortest possible time.⁵⁴ Numerous such unofficial consultations gave the Bulgarian Embassy in Vienna the reason to repeat in its report on its activities in 1978 that Austria was a potential ally of Bulgaria regarding the Macedonian question.⁵⁵

There were grounds for such hopes in the following year as well. The results of Tito’s visit to Bucharest were discussed during successive informal exchanges of views between Bulgarian and Austrian diplomats in Belgrade. The visit ended with the signing of a Yugoslav-Romanian declaration. Austria assessed its wording as a compromise by Yugoslavia. For the first time, Tito signed an official document stating that the question of the situation of nationalities in a given country was an internal matter. Tito made this compromise in the name of his overall policy toward Romania. The Austrian diplomats shared that during the last Yugoslav-Austrian talks in Vienna, the Yugoslav Foreign Minister, Josip

⁵³ Ruzicic-Kessler 2015, p. 104.

⁵⁴ CSA, f. 1B, inv.81B, file 652, 139–143.

⁵⁵ AMFA, inv. 31 P, file 5, 106.

Vrhovec, spoke very little and carefully about the Bulgarian-Yugoslav relations.⁵⁶ The unspoken assessment was that this was a change from the usual aggressive Yugoslav policy on the subject of minorities. The Tito-Ceaușescu meeting was the occasion for an exchange of views between the Bulgarian and Austrian ambassadors in Belgrade. The Bulgarian diplomat acquainted his colleague with the text of the Yugoslav constitution which stipulated activity in support of Yugoslav minorities abroad. The information turned out to be unknown to the Austrian diplomat, who immediately notified the leadership of his ministry.⁵⁷

Conclusion

Tito's death in 1980 posed new challenges to the Yugoslav Federation. As never before, two trends had collided. On the one hand, economic difficulties were increasing. This led to a search for the development of maximally profitable business contacts with all possible partners. On the other hand, the homogeneity of the "brotherhood and unity" model was beginning to crack. Each of the republics sought to derive maximum benefit from their participation in the federation. Common foreign policy became increasingly dependent on a complex balance of interests, but the man who had the qualities and charisma to maintain the balance was gone.

A characteristic example was related to the preparation of documents for the Thirteenth Congress of Yugoslav Communists in 1986. Both Macedonia and Slovenia opposed the proposed position in the draft resolution that "The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has never had and will never have territorial claims to any neighbor". The "dangerous illusions" of a possible change of the borders at some future point were maintained by Macedonia openly and by Slovenia a little more covertly. Raif Dizdarevic claimed that this created a serious problem for politicians who were not related to the two republics.⁵⁸ For example, one of the last international visits of Yugoslav Prime Minister Milka Planinc before the end of her term in 1986 was to Austria. The main goal of the talks was the development of economic and financial relations between the two countries. However, in the course of her visit, Milka Planinc met with leading representatives of the Slovenian and Croatian minority groups. The official assessment was expressed that bilateral relations were problem-free. The Bulgarian diplomats accepted it with the reservation that they were burdened by the minority issue and by the different approach of the two countries in the

⁵⁶ CSA, f. 1B, inv.81B, file 652, 145-147.

⁵⁷ ÖStA/AdR, BMAA, VI Pol 1979, Jugoslawien, Offizieller Besuch Präsident Titos in Rumänien, (2 – 4 November 1979).

⁵⁸ Dizdarević 2000, pp. 162–165.

AUSTRIAN-BULGARIAN RELATIONS DURING THE COLD WAR

implementation of commercial and economic cooperation. "The mutual agreement between them is only the result of conjunctural tactical interest." For this reason, the Bulgarian Embassy in Vienna maintained its traditional assessment that "the problems that exist between the two countries on the minority issue make Austria our natural ally in our dispute with Yugoslavia".⁵⁹

These recommendations were constantly addressed to the leadership of the Bulgarian state and the Communist Party. This shows that both before and after the death of Tito, Bulgaria discovered several common interests with Austria. The first was that both countries did not accept Yugoslavia interfering in their internal affairs regarding some of their citizens. The second was that both countries did not accept Yugoslavia's attempts to internationalize its claims. The third was about the message to Belgrade that other issues should have priority in bilateral relations, for example those related to economic and cultural cooperation, and the sharing of common positions related to international and European security. There was also a fourth topic, which was the most delicate. It was linked to the Yugoslav attempt to assign collective guilt to the two neighboring countries for the Second World War.

Preliminary conclusions can be drawn that the common interest was recognized by both Sofia and Vienna. There was one formal difference. In Austria, diplomats were more reserved, but the press was more direct. In Bulgaria it was the opposite. This was due to the specifics of the socio-political development in each country and does not change the assessments in substance. Posing these questions outlines opportunities for future, more in-depth research on the topic.

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⁵⁹ CSA, f. 1B, inv.81a, file 107, 130–136.

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