

YUGOSLAV DIPLOMACY AND THE IDEAS OF THE BALKAN UNITY, 1925–1930*

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ABSTRACT. This paper analyzes policies of the Yugoslav foreign ministers Momčilo Ninčić and Vojislav Marinković towards the ideas of the Balkan unity. Not only were both of them prominent political figures, but also economists and in several mandates ministers of finance, national economy, trade (and industry) and/or construction. Therefore the aim is to analyze their views on the political unification and economic co-operation between the Balkan states, and factors that provided opportunities or stood as constraints to the implementation of their plans. Chronologically, the paper covers the period from the beginning of the Locarno period in the Balkans to the beginning of the Balkan Conferences. The paper is primarily based on the Yugoslav and Bulgarian archival sources, domestic and foreign published sources, and scientific literature.

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Although the delegation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SCS) at the Paris Peace Conference reintroduced the idea of collaboration between the Balkan nations against the exterior threat of the Great Powers — under the 1912–1913 wars slogan “The Balkans for the Balkan nations” — as the core of the future regional policy,¹ it was not implemented immediately. For the Serbian elites which were guiding the

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¹ Further on the work of the Yugoslav delegation at the Paris Peace Conference: I. Lederer, *Yugoslavia at the Paris peace conference: a study in frontiersmaking*, New Haven 1963; A. Mitrović, *Jugoslavija na konferenciji mira 1919–1920*, Beograd 1969; A. Хорват, *Барања 1918–1922*, Нови Сад 2013; А. Митровић, *Разграничење Југославије са Мађарском и Румунијом 1919–1920*, Нови Сад–Београд 2019.

Yugoslav state policy,² the Balkans was the most important region in the Foreign Policy during 1918–1941.³ Nevertheless, the regional concept was gradually developing during the 1920s. It was based on the historical experience of the Serbian people with particular nations and its main goal was to prevent any Great Power to take foothold in the Balkans. Italy represented the greatest menace not only in the Adriatic region but also in the Balkans. Since the Yugoslav delegation at the Paris Peace conference could not prevent allocation of the larger territorial areas in the eastern part of the Adriatic Sea to Italy, the real jeopardy after 1918 was that Rome could take on a role that Vienna played hitherto. The key task for the Yugoslav Foreign Policy was to prevent further penetration of the Italian influence or the territorial expansion. Belgrade, however, was not contented with the presence of any other Great Power in the region.

The precondition was cooperation with other Balkan states. Due to the Yugoslavia's dominant position in the region, Belgrade was pursuing control over the development of the regional security structure. An important factor in regulating the bilateral and multilateral relations was the historical experience with particular nations. Albania was the key for the prevention of the further Italian penetration in the Balkans. Mutual rivalry began already at the Paris Peace Conference. Belgrade and Rome had competed with various successes all the way until the signing of the Italian-Albanian Treaty of Friendship and Security, in November 1926. This enabled full Italian control over the Albanian foreign policy and army. This represented the defeat of the Foreign Minister Momčilo Ninčić's policy of the Yugoslav-Italian friendly relations, which led to his resignation in December 1926.⁴

² For further reading: B. Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918–1988*, vol. 1, Beograd 1989; Љ. Димић, *Историја српске државности*, vol. 3, Нови Сад 2001; М. Радојевић, *Српски народ и југословенска краљевина 1918–1941*, vol. 1, Београд 2019.

³ V. Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Mađarska 1918–1933*, Beograd 1972, pp. 9, 10; A. Suppan, *Jugoslawien und Österreich 1918–1938: Bilaterale Außenpolitik im europäischen Umfeld*, Wien–München 1996, pp. 222, 225; Á. Hornyák, *Hungarian-Yugoslav relations 1918–1927*, Boulder–Wayne 2013, p. viii; С. Мишић, *Спољна политика југословенске краљевине 1918–1941* [in:] *Српски народ и југословенска држава — спољна политика 1918–1990 — каталог изложбе*, eds. Јелена Ђуришић, Драган Теодосић, Београд 2021, pp. 11, 12.

⁴ For further reading on the Yugoslav-Italian relations concerning the Adriatic region, the Balkans and Albania during the 1920s: B. Krizman, *Italija u politici kralja Aleksandra i kneza Pavla (1918–1941)*, "Časopis za suvremenu povijest" 1975, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 33–41; E. Milak, *Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca i Rimski sporazum (1922–1924)*, "Istorija XX veka" 1982, vol. 14–15, pp. 131–170; M. Schmidt-Neke, *Entstehung und Ausbau der Königsdiktatur in Albanien (1912–1939). Regierungsbildungen, Herrschaftsweise und Machteilen in einem jungen Balkan staat*, München 1987, pp. 49–209; V. Pavlović, *Le conflit franco-italien dans les Balkans 1915–1935: Le rôle de la Yougoslavie*, "Balcanica" 2005, vol. 36, pp. 182–189; M. Bucarelli, *Mussolini e la Jugoslavia (1922–1939)*, Bari 2006, pp. 27–153; L. Monzali, *Italiani di Dalmazia 1914–1924*, Firenze 2007, pp. 191–440; S. Sretenović, *Le poids grandissant de l'Italie dans les relations entre la France et le Royaume des Serbes, Croates et Slovènes 1924–1927*, "Istorija 20. veka" 2007, no. 2, pp. 9–33; С. Мишић, *Албанија: пријатељ и противник. Југословенска политика према Албанији 1924–1927*, Београд 2009; Б. Глигоријевић, *Краљ Александар Карађорђевић у европској политици*, Београд 2010; Д. Р. Живојиновић, „La

Bulgaria and Greece were the two other significant factors in the Balkan concept of the Yugoslav Foreign Policy during 1920s. The Yugoslav-Greek relations were hampered by the opposite interpretations of the allied obligations during the Great War. After the Kingdom of SCS was formed, Greeks were troubled with the alleged South Slavic (Serbian, Yugoslav or Yugoslav-Bulgarian) territorial claims towards the Aegean Macedonia, and Thessaloniki in particular. Governments in Athens were pursuing various policies for the change of the ethnic structure of the local population. As Belgrade and Sofia were arguing on the national identity of the South Slavic population in the region, the Greek statesmen implicitly acknowledged the Bulgarian thesis by signing the convention of 1919 and the protocol of 1924 on the population exchange. After the military defeat in the Asia Minor in 1922, the majority of the Greek refugees were settled in the Aegean Macedonia. The new problem was concerning real estates and evictions of the Slavic population from the region. Simultaneously with the expiration of the treaty of the Serbian-Greek alliance in November 1924, the new stumbling block was discussion on the Serbian Free Trade Zone in the port of Thessaloniki and on the ownership of the part of the railway from Thessaloniki to Gevegelija since 1923. For the Yugoslav side this was primarily the geostrategic issue and secondarily it was the economy issue. Due to the underdeveloped railways between the Adriatic ports and the hinterland, Thessaloniki remained the most significant point for the overseas communication with France and the United Kingdom. For the same reason, and based on the historical experience from 1915, the Yugoslav delegation at the Paris Peace Conference was asking for the correction of the mutual border with Bulgaria. This request was not based on the ethnic principle, yet it was the strategic issue of the military defense of the railway which ran via the Vardar Macedonia and connected the port of Thessaloniki with the Kingdom of SCS. After the failure of the agreement of 1926, the bilateral relations were renewed on the contractual basis during the last government of Eleftherios Venizelos in October 1928. The ownership of the railway Thessaloniki–Gevgelija was settled through the series of protocols signed in March 1929. The Pact of Friendship, Conciliation and Judicial Settlement was also signed in March 1929, and the instruments of ratification were exchanged in February 1930.⁵

Dalmazia o morte: *италијанска окупација југословенских земаља 1918–1923. године*, Београд 2012; D. Bakić, *The Italo-Yugoslav conflict over Albania: a view from Belgrade, 1919–1939*, “Diplomacy & Statecraft” 2014, vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 594–602; M. Ristović, *Diffidenza e cooperazione: relazioni politiche ed economiche tra il regno dei Serbo, Croati e Sloveni e il regno d'Italia negli anni Venti del Novecento* [in:] *Prove di imperialismo: espansionismo economico italiano oltre l'Adriatico a cavallo della Grande guerra*, eds. Emanuela Costantini, Paolo Raspadori, Macerata 2017, pp. 89–110; idem, *Италијански фашизам и југословенско суседство (1919–1925)*, Београд 2021, pp. 57–273.

⁵ For further reading: N. Stelios, *Greek Macedonia and the Convention of Neuilly (1919)*, “Balkan Studies” 1962, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 169–184; E. Prevelakis, *Eleutherios Venizelos and the Balkan Wars*, “Balkan Studies” 1966, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 363–378; Ж. Аврамовски, *Некои аспекти на македонското прашање во односите на Југославија со Грција и Бугарија од 1918 до 1925 година*, “Гласник на Институтот на национална историја” 1972, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 63–96; D. Todorović, *Jugoslavija*

The Yugoslav-Bulgarian relations were influenced by the mutual mistrust based on the historical experience of Serbs and Bulgarians. The Serbian elites were suspicious of the Bulgarian elite on several issues: distrust of the German dynasty Sachsen-Coburg und Gotha, experiences with the Bulgarian attacks in 1913 and 1915, war crimes committed during 1915–1918, and the struggle over Macedonia which had continued even after 1918. Even Aleksander Stambolijski — the renowned advocate of the South Slavs solidarity — could not surmount the mutual distrust during 1920–1923. The bloody *coup d'état* in June 1923 only substantiated the supposition of the Serbian elite. During governments of Aleksandar Cankov and Andrey Lyapčev, in 1925–1927, there were several initiatives for personal- or customs union between the Kingdom of SCS and Kingdom of Bulgaria. The assassination of General Mihailo Kovačević in Štip in October 1927, led to the closing of the mutual borders as the countermeasure against the terrorist actions of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO).

After 1918, the so-called Macedonian question after 1918 was not only based on the IMRO's guerrilla warfare and the terrorist actions, but also included the recognition of the local population as Serbs and as Bulgarians by the governments in Belgrade and Sofia, respectively.⁶ It became the part of the minority issues which were raised

i balkanske države 1918–1923, Beograd 1979, pp. 105–111, 146–152, 173–180, 207–217; *Македонија и односите со Грција*, Скопје 1993; I. D. Michaëlidis, *Traditional friends and occasional claimants: Serbian claims in Macedonia between the wars*, "Balkan Studies" 1995, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 103–116; P. Sioussiouras, *Geopolitical expediencies and foreign policy implications in Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria following the signing of the Lausanne Treaty*, "Balkan Studies" 2003, vol. 44, no. 1 (2003), pp. 81–93; H. Gardikas-Katsiadakis, *Greek-Serbian relations 1912–1913: Communication gap or deliberate policy*, "Balkan Studies" 2004, vol. 45, no. 1 (2004), pp. 23–38; D. T. Bataković, *Serbia and Greece in the First World War: an overview*, "Balkan Studies" 2004, vol. 45, no. 1, pp. 59–80; J. Paszkiewicz, *Grecja a bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe na Bałkanach 1923–1936*, Poznań 2012, pp. 25–27, 35–52, 69–75, 139–162; D. Bakić, *The Port of Salonica in Yugoslav Foreign Policy 1919–1941*, "Balcanica" 2014, vol. 43, pp. 191–200; A. Loupas, *From Paris to Lausanne: aspects of Greek-Yugoslav relations during the first interwar years (1919–1923)*, "Balcanica" 2016, vol. 47, pp. 263–282; D. Bakić, *Nikola Pašić and the foreign policy of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, 1919–1926*, "Balcanica" 2016, vol. 47, pp. 307, 308; Д. Т. Батаковић, *Србија и Балкан. Албанија, Бугарска, Грчка 1914–1918*, Нови Сад–Београд 2016; А. М. Пећинар, *Српско-грчки дипломатски и савезнички односи (1912–1918)*, Београд 2016; Л. Хасиотис, *Српско-грчки односи 1913–1918. Савезничке предности и политичка ривалства*, Нови Сад–Београд 2017; J. Paszkiewicz, *Main challenges for the Greek national security against the geopolitical changes in the Balkans during the period 1918–1923*, "Balcanica Posnaniensis" 2019, vol. 26, pp. 194–210; S. G. Marković, *History of Hellenic-Serbian (Yugoslav) alliances from Karageorge to the Balkan Pact 1817–1954*, "Balcanica" 2020, vol. 51, pp. 164–170; М. Милошевић, *Србија и Грчка 1914–1918. Из историје дипломатских односа*, Нови Сад–Београд 2021.

⁶ For further reading: Ž. Avramovski, *O stavu jugoslovenske vlade prema Devetojunoskom prevratu u Bugarskoj 1923. godine*, "Istorija XX veka, Zbornik radova" 1968, vol. 9, pp. 133–178; idem, *Некои аспекти на македонското прашање*, pp. 63–96; D. Todorović, *Jugoslavija i balkanske države 1918–1923*, pp. 27–48, 91–120, 164–170, 174–186, 191–206, 218–227; Ž. Avramovski, *Makedonsko pitanje u jugoslovensko-bugarskim odnosima od 1918. do 1925. godine* [in:] *Jugoslovensko-bugarski odnosi u XX veku. Zbornik radova I*, ed. Živko Avramovski, Beograd 1980, pp. 147–178; idem, *Pitanje balkanskog garantnog pakta i jugoslovensko-bugarski odnosi 1925. godine u svetlu britanske politike na*

during the Paris Peace Conference. Since the Belgrade government did not recognize the existence of the Bulgarian minority in the Kingdom of SCS, this population was excluded from the international system for the protection of the minority rights established in the ranks of the League of Nations (LoN).⁷ The IMRO, subordinate organizations and individuals were raising the issue in Geneva. This was particularly the case during the great debate on the reorganization of the protection system of the minorities' rights in the ranks of the LoN, in 1928–1930, and during the subsequent German and Italian campaigns, in 1931–1932.⁸

Yugoslav foreign ministers Momčilo Ninčić and Vojislav Marinković were using similar tactics in their Balkan policies during 1922–1930. Both were ready to cooperate with Bulgaria or Greece, but on their terms. The aim was to establish the good relations with both countries, but the priority was always given to one of the negotiating sides. In cases when the bilateral negotiations on the one track were reaching the deadlock, the Yugoslav foreign ministers were shifting to the bilateral negotiations on the other track. The difference was that Ninčić was giving priority to an accord with Athens, while for Marinković the Yugoslav-Bulgarian rapprochement was the core of the rebuilding the Balkan alliance. Both were opposed to the reorganization of the regional security structure under the Great Powers' patronage.

Balkanu, "Vojnoistorijski glasnik" 1984, vol. 35, no. 2, pp. 87–111; В. Василев, *Правителството на БЗНС, ВМРО и българо-югославските отношения*, София 1991; V. Vlasidis, *The "Macedonian question" on the Bulgarian political scene (1919–23)*, "Balkan Studies" 1991, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 71–88; I. Dobrovský, *Bulharsko-jihoslavenské sblížování a Makedonská otazká (2. polovina 20. let)*, "Sborník prací Filozofické Fakulty Brněnské university" 1994, vol. 43, no. 4, pp. 117–126; К. Палешутски, *Македонското освободително движение след Първата световна война (1918–1924)*, София 1993; Д. Косев, *Външната политика на България при Управлението на Андрей Ляпчев 1926–1931*, София 1995; Л. Панайотов, К. Палешутски, Д. Мичев, *Македония и българско-югославските отношения*, София 1998; Б. Лилић, *Одређивање државне границе између Краљевине СХС и Бугарске после Првог светског рата* [in:] *Југословенска држава 1918–1998*, eds. Владо Стругар и др, Београд 1999; Н. Жежов, *Македонското прашање во југословенско-бугарските дипломатски односи (1918–1941)*, Скопје 2008; З. Тодоровски, *Автономистичката ВМРО на Тодор Александров (1918–1924)*, Скопје 2013; И. Ристић, *Бугарска у политици Краљевине Срба, Хрвата и Словенаца (1919–1929)*, PhD thesis, Београд 2017; Т. Миленковић, *Политичка емиграција из Бугарске у Југославији 1923–1944*, Београд 2018; Александар Литовски, *Македонското прашање и Краљевството на СХС 1918–1923 година* [in:] *Дан вредан века I – XII – 1918*, Београд 2018.

⁷ The international system was exclusively established for the successor states of the four dissolved empires. The Great Britain and France, the two Great Powers with the largest minorities in colonies, dominions and mandatory areas, were excluded from the system; R. Veatch, *Minorities and the League of Nations* [in:] *The League of Nations in retrospect: proceedings of the symposium*, Berlin–New York 1983, p. 396.

⁸ A. Mitrović, *Jugoslavija na konferenciji mira 1919–1920*, Београд 1969, pp. 200–204; R. Veatch, op. cit., pp. 370, 371; S. Bartsch, *Minderheitenschutz in der internationalen Politik. Völkerbund und KSZE/OSZE in neuer Perspektive*, Opladen 1995, p. 104; Z. Janjetović, *Pitanje zaštite nacionalnih manjina u Kraljevini SHS na konferenciji mira u Parizu 1919–1920*, "Istorija 20. veka" 2000, vol. 2, pp. 33–40; *От Скопие до Женева. Димитър Шалев — защитник на малцинствата в Обществото на народите*, ed. Димитър Митев, София 2012; S. Mičić, *Minority petitions against Yugoslav authorities before the League of Nations*, "Tokovi istorije" 2020, vol. 3, pp. 35–42.

During 1925 Ninčić was rejecting plans of the Greek Foreign Minister Konstantinos Rendis for the multilateral Balkan agreement. His clarification was that no one in Belgrade trusted the Greek promises after the experience from 1915.⁹ King Aleksandar and Ninčić were certain that Athens could not guarantee the national security of the Kingdom of SCS, and that the real situation was *vice versa*.¹⁰ After the Pact of Locarno was signed, the Yugoslav Foreign Minister was rejecting British, Italian and French initiatives for the reorganization of the regional security structure based on the Locarno model. His main argument was that the settlement of the bilateral disputes with Bulgaria and Greece was the precondition for any multilateral regional agreement.¹¹

The PM Nikola Pašić was supporting this view.¹² Ninčić had also rejected Rendis' proposition to allocate the rights to the LoN to conduct negotiations for the Balkan model in the *esprit de Locarno*. The Yugoslav standpoint was that Geneva did not have the capacity to compel the Great Powers to subordinate their national interests to the international order. The government and the diplomatic service did not want to provide an opportunity for the British, French, Italian and German representatives — which had a key role in the LoN — to demonstrate their international responsibility by imposing the solution on the Balkan states. Furthermore, Rendis' proposal was partially reaction to the Slavic minority's complaints before the LoN against the policy of the Greek government.¹³ Combined with the hypocrisy of the western democracies — which excluded themselves from the international system for the minority rights — Athens's initiative was undesirable for Belgrade, since it could create the pretext for the LoN to impose new obligations.¹⁴

⁹ Archive of Yugoslavia, Belgrade [further: AY], Records of the Legation of the Kingdom Yugoslavia in Romania — Bucharest (395), box 1, folder 2, folios 57–59.

¹⁰ AY, 395, b. 1, f. 2, folios 56–59; *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*, serie 7, Vol. 4 (15.05.1925–6.02.1926), Roma 1962, no. 671, p. 411.

¹¹ V. Vinaver, *Engleska i italijansko „zaokruživanje Jugoslavije“ 1926–1928*, “Istorija XX veka” 1966, vol. 8, pp. 77, 78; Д. Тодоровић, *Путање успостављања дипломатских односа између Краљевине Срба, Хрвата и Словенаца и Републике Турске (1923–1925)*. “Balcanica” 1973, vol. 4; С. Jordan-Sima, *La Turquie kémaliste et l'idée du Pacte balkanique dans les années 1925–1926*, “Revue des études sud-est européennes” 1981, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 317, 318; Ž. Avramovski, *Pitanje Balkanskog garantnog pakta*, pp. 90, 91, 94, 95, 99–105, 108–110; V. Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Francuska između dva svetska rata (da li je Jugoslavija bila francuski „satelit“)*, Beograd 1985, pp. 84–86; 564; P. Finney, *The Relations between Entente powers and Greece 1923–1926*, PhD thesis, The University of Leeds, 1993, pp. 261, 353–358, 362, 363; idem, *Raising Frankenstein: Great Britain, 'Balkanism' and the search for a Balkan Locarno in the 1920s*, “European History Quarterly” 2003, vol. 33, no. 3, pp. 322–325, 327; S. Sretenović, *Le poids grandissant de l'Italie*, p. 25; D. Bakić, “Must will peace”: *British brokering of “Central European” and “Balkan Locarno”, 1925–1929*, “Journal of Contemporary History” 2012, vol. 48, no. 1, pp. 28, 30, 44, 45, 47, 48.

¹² AY, Records of the Legation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in England — London (341), box 1, folder 2, Counselor of the Legation in London Đorđe Todorović to the MFA, no. 309 (2.11); plenipotentiary minister in London Đorđe Đurić to Ninčić, without register (12.11); Ninčić's dispatch, no. 8611 (8.12.1925); AY, 395, b. 1, f. 3, folio 126.

¹³ The complaints started in August 1925 and were on the LoN's agenda until March 1926; I. Mičačlidis, *Traditional friends and occasional claimants*, pp. 108–110.

¹⁴ AY, 395, b. 1, f. 3, folios 126, 128; AY, 395, b. 14, f. 136, folio 169.

During autumn and winter 1925/26, it was quite visible that the Balkan strategy allowed Ninčić to adapt easily to the changes in the bilateral and the multilateral relations. While retaining the initiative in the bilateral relations, he was able to use any interruption of the negotiations with Athens to renew the negotiations with Sofia, and *vice versa*.¹⁵ The sustainability of Ninčić's model for diplomatic activities was proven in the same period — after belligerence was ended and the official diplomatic relations were established between Belgrade and Ankara — and Turkey became a new, although not significant factor in the Yugoslav concept of the Balkan policy.¹⁶ In December 1925 or in January 1926, Ninčić instructed strictly confidentially the Chief of the III Department of the General Political Directory (GPD) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)¹⁷ Aleksandar Cincar-Marković¹⁸ to elaborate the views on the customs union with Bulgaria.¹⁹

¹⁵ AY, Records of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (334), box 8, folder 28, folios 239, 240, 245; AY, 341, b. 12, f. 25, Đurić to Ninčić, no. 363 (24.12.1925); AY, 395, b. 13, f. 132, folio 665; Archive of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade [further: ASASA], Collection of Milan Antić (14.387), issue no. 9028, 9029, 9039; Central State Archive, Sofia [further: CSA], Records of the Bulgarian Legation in Athens (322 k), inventory no. 1, folder 693, folios 101–108; *Чехословацки извори за българската историја*, vol. 1, eds. Ђ. Коларж et al., Софија 1985, no. 220, p. 395; H. Psomiades, *The Diplomacy of Theodoros Pangalos 1925–1926*, "Balkan Studies" 1972, vol. 13. M. Радојевић, *Српски народ и југословенска краљевина 1918–1941*, vol. 1, Београд 2019, pp. 8, 9; C. Iordan-Sima, *La Turquie kémaliste*, p. 318; V. Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Francuska*, p. 86; J. Paszkiewicz, *Grecja a bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe*, pp. 150, 151, 153; A. Klapsis, *Greek diplomacy towards fascist Italy, 1922–1940* [in:] *Mannheimer Beiträge zur Klassischen Archäologie und Geschichte Griechenlands und Zyperns*, eds. Reinhard Stupperich, Heinz A. Richter, vol. 20 (2013), p. 295; idem, *Attempting to revise the treaty of Lausanne: Greek foreign policy and Italy during the Pangalos dictatorship, 1925–1926*, "Diplomacy and Statecraft" 2014, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 247, 248.

¹⁶ Д. Тодоровић, *Питање успостављања*, pp. 282–289; С. Мићић, *Југословенске дипломате и дописници за штампу из Смедерева* [in:] *Смедеревски крај 1918–1941. Зборник радова научног скупа*, Смедерево 2017, p. 54.

¹⁷ After internal reorganization of the MFA, on 5 December 1925, III Department of the General Political Directory was responsible for the political issues concerning the Balkan states, i.e. Albania, Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey; С. Мићић, *Од бирократије до дипломатије. Историја југословенске дипломатске службе 1918–1939.*, Београд 2018.

¹⁸ Aleksandar Cincar-Marković was well acquainted with the Yugoslav Foreign Policy in the Balkans and the struggle against the Italian menace. He was the consul in Zara (Zadar) 1921–22, in Trieste 1922–23, the secretary (later counselor and *chargé d'affaires*) of the Legation in Tirana 1923–25. After successful return of Ahmet bey Zogu to power in Albania, he was appointed as the chief of the IV section of the Political Department of the MFA (responsible mainly for Albania) in March 1925. Cincar-Marković was in charge of the political issues concerning Albania, cooperation with Bulgarian and Hungarian political emigrants in the Kingdom of SCS, guerilla warfare of the IMRO and communist actions in the Balkans. All those duties were very sensible issues for the contemporary Yugoslav foreign and internal policies. After internal reorganization of the MFA, in December 1925, he became the chief of the III Department of the GPD of the MFA, responsible for the policies towards four Balkan states; AY, 334, b. 202, f. 525, personnel dossier of Aleksandar Cincar-Marković; S. Mišić, *Albanija: prijatelj i protivnik*, passim; idem, *Od birokratije do diplomatije*, passim.

¹⁹ In the early 1925 there were some indications that a number of politicians in Sofia would accept the idea of a customs union with the Kingdom of SCS; I. Ristić, *Bugarska u spoljnoj politici*, p. 313.

Cincar-Marković's report is very interesting, since it reveals some continuity in the MFA's assessments concerning the political and economy aspects of the Balkan unity. Because the economy issues were studied in the MFA on the historical ground — and the customs unions were not an exception — he stated at the beginning that the projected Yugoslav-Bulgarian customs union should have completely different basis compared to the Serbian-Bulgarian customs union from 1905.²⁰ Since the latter did not reconcile the political and economic interests of the two contractual parties, Cincar-Marković was emphasizing that new projects on the economic rapprochement and the customs union must be harmonized with the general objectives of the Yugoslav state policy. He advocated a thesis that national interests should not be subordinated to the existing theories, proclaimed principles or historical experience; on the contrary, the realization and the protection of the national interests should have a priority, and afterwards, the theorists should set principles and create legal bases and new theories grounded on the achieved result. Cincar-Marković was supporting Ninčić's view that the new customs union's project had to overcome deficiencies of the 1905 agreement, and introduce a single customs and trade policy toward third parties. Based on the historical experience that the political alliances could not be long-lasting without the harmonization of the economic interests, he was arguing that the principle "The Balkans for the Balkan nations" was achievable only if the necessary preconditions were reached. Nevertheless, he was convinced that the revived Balkan Entente should be the most important regional alliance in the Yugoslav Foreign Policy. Therefore, one of the most important tasks for Belgrade was to counter any protector, guarantor, counselor or intermediary role of the Great Powers in the region.

Cincar-Marković defined the Yugoslav leadership in economic gathering of the regional states as the main goal in the Balkan policy. He considered it as the precondition for the political alliance based on the Locarno model. The first steps in that direction were signing agreements with Albania, Greece and, to some degree with Turkey, and forging the Yugoslav-Bulgarian customs union. After Bulgaria the most important was the economic rapprochement with Albania, i.e., the conclusion of the trade negotiations in order to prevent further Italian penetration. Although, the Yugoslav-Albanian customs union was excluded from the MFA's draft of the bilateral trade agreement,²¹ Cincar-Marković was convinced that the customs union with Bulgaria

²⁰ The agreement on the Serbian-Bulgarian customs union from 1905 created a common customs area in which mutual customs borders for domestic products were abolished (except for the import of Bulgarian cattle to Serbia). It was not a real customs union because a common customs border was not established, nor was the signing of joint trade agreements with third countries envisaged (before 1917). The agreement was supposed to remain secret — due to the Austro-Hungarian pressure on Serbia — but it was presented to the Bulgarian parliament (Sobranje) and the agreement failed; Д. Ђорђевић, *Царински рат Аустро-Угарске и Србије 1906–1911*, Београд 1962, pp. 116–131.

²¹ The MFA and the Ministry of Trade and Industry started mutual work on drafting the trade agreement with Albania in October 1925. In the final draft, finished on 23 January 1926, the bilateral customs union was excluded. The focus was on the improvement of the border trade as an instrument to strength-

and the contractual bilateral trade with Albania would be step toward the inclusion of the latter in the tripartite customs union. Considering economic and political aspects of the issue, he was emphasizing difficulties in reaching an agreement with the Greeks due to their fear of the South Slavs. Cincar-Marković identified two factors: 1) the government in Athens was offering Belgrade — during the negotiations on the Free Trade Zone in Thessaloniki — a region which was inaccessible and impractical for economic exploitation; 2) the cruelty of the Greek state policy toward Slavic population in the Aegean Macedonia. Therefore, he was convinced that Greece was the most suitable candidate for the inclusion in the political alliance directed against other Balkan states. He emphasized the possibility of the political cooperation between Athens, Sofia and Tirana to expand their influence on territories they considered seized from them, only to vindicate the importance of the economic rapprochement between the Balkan states as the measure to defend the regional peace structure from the revisionist tendencies in Europe.

Based on the analysis of the economic preconditions and circumstances, Cincar-Marković was convinced that customs union would spur development — particularly industrial — of the member states, and at the same time enable them to lower customs tariffs on appropriate level. He was arguing that international tendencies to reduce the customs tariffs were the reflection of a desire of the large industrial powers to achieve the economic unification of Europe, which would negatively affect the development of the national economies of the Balkan states.²² He considered the aspiration for the economic unification of the continent as the dangerous process that would be impossible to oppose. Therefore, the Balkan economic union was important for preventing the inclusion of the Balkan states into economic groups under leadership of some Great Power. He emphasized the necessity for the MFA to commence in-depth analyzes of the regional economies in order to estimate the effects of the customs union on partic-

en ties with Albanians who have gravitated politically towards the Kingdom of SCS, in order to prepare the ground for future political and economy rapprochement and close cooperation; S. Mišić, op. cit., pp. 107, 109, 110.

²² After 1918, eastern-, central- and southeastern European countries were setting high customs tariffs to protect the national economies. Another two significant problems were inflation and instability of the national currencies. Issues of the protectionist and the differential tariffs, the stabilization loans and currency policies were discussed at several international conferences and in the ranks of the LoN. Finally, the lifting trade bans and restrictions were agreed in 1927. Yugoslavia signed the agreement in 1928, but the Foreign Minister Vojislav Marinković was arguing before the LoN in 1931 that although high customs tariffs were irrational measure there was no rational measure for poor agricultural states to undertake in the first post-War years. During 1923–29, twenty countries managed to stabilize their national currencies and return to the gold standard. During the decade several stabilization loans were issued under control of the LoN; Z. Steiner, *The Lights that failed: European international history 1919–1933*, Oxford 2005, pp. 123, 182–185, 200–205, 272–293, 369–371, 431–452; I. Berend, *An Economic history of twentieth-century Europe*, Cambridge 2006, pp. 44, 45, 51, 56–59; Ch. Feinstein, P. Temin, G. Toniolo, *The World economy between the world wars*, Oxford 2008, pp. 27–57, 64–69; И. Бецић, *Мунисипалство финансија Краљевине Југославије 1918–1941*, Београд 2012, pp. 136, 378–396. P. Calvin, *Securing the world: the reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920–1946*, Oxford 2013, pp. 17–46.

ular member states. Cincar-Marković was stressing the need to conduct study, since respecting the special national interests of the particular parties was very important in the first phase of forging the regional customs union. Regarding the leadership, he was convinced that the Kingdom of SCS had a secure position based on the state size, its economic strength and geographical position.

Regarding particular factors in the bilateral relations, Cincar-Marković was warning the MFA to count on the negative effects which the internal political situation in the Kingdom of SCS would have on the future developments in the ranks of the union. His estimation was that the moment was not ripe for Belgrade to join the union. State areas were not connected in the solid community and tendencies for the conflict between the different ethnic groups of the Yugoslav nation existed. Simultaneously, the economic policy lacked cohesive influence and had the disruptive input, since the excessive fiscal levies were discouraging the business initiative and repressing the economy. His assessment was that Bulgaria would undoubtedly join the bilateral customs union, as it was the only real instrument “to preserve the Bulgarian spirit, the Bulgarian name, the Bulgarian influence and culture, in other words, to preserve the Macedonian population and Macedonia as the Bulgarian domain”. Cincar-Marković was emphasizing that Aleksander Cankov was advocating the opposite process. Cankov was asking for the resolution of the so-called Macedonian issue within the ethnic boundaries, as the precondition for the bilateral customs union. Cincar-Marković was convinced that the union policy should be based on the exploitation of the Bulgaria’s aspirations to achieve the dominant role in the region. Within the union Belgrade could gradually influence Sofia never to realize those aspirations, and reduce Bulgarians to their ethnic borders and guarantee their national development within the reduced Bulgarian state territory. He was warning the MFA that, if they did not exploit current favorable circumstances, the same aspirations would force Bulgarians to turn to an alliance against the Kingdom of SCS, which would transform the policy “The Balkans for the Balkan nations” into a parody. He assessed that the foundations of the customs union would be: 1) the unified trade and customs policy; 2) the abolition of the mutual borders, including the police control; 3) the uniform traffic policy and the railway tariffs; 4) the equalization of the internal taxes and monopolies; 5) the stabilization of both national currencies and the determination of the mutual exchange rate. According to Cincar-Marković the last condition was the most important one due to the instability of the currency system in Europe, while the establishment of the monetary union was the precondition for abolishing the customs control. As was the case with the regional economies, he was advising the MFA to conduct studies on the common customs tariff and traffic policy, the regulation of the currency relations, and the preservation of the internal order in both countries, before proposing the whole project to Bulgaria.

As one of the significant external threats, he was emphasizing that some Great Powers would strive to hinder the internal consolidation of the union, which would be facilitated by the poorly developed bilateral trade. On the other hand, he was not dismissing internal opponents toward the union in both countries. He believed that the

good governance first prepares the ground for the long-term realization of the project, instead of starting the realization through the half measures due to the unfavorable internal and external circumstances. As the preparatory action for the introduction of the common trade policy, he proposed that the two countries sign new trade agreements with a maximum duration of three years, with each new agreement having a shortened deadline so that all agreements expire at the same time as the first trade agreement. He set this precondition based on the duration of the Yugoslav-Italian trade agreement, which was projected to last three years but was not ratified at the time.²³

Summarizing the factors of international relations and internal political situation, Cincar-Marković came to a conclusion that Belgrade was at the crucial turning point: it could accept or reject the project which offered the most favorable prospects. As the precondition for the customs union, he was considering necessary to develop a new state policy that would change the entire internal political life in the Kingdom of SCS. At the same time, he was advising the MFA that Belgrade should start negotiations with Sofia on the basis of the projected union and not hasten the process of harmonizing national interests and legislation.²⁴

The issue of the Yugoslav-Bulgarian customs union was raised by the plenipotentiary minister in Sofia Milan Rakić, in January 1926.²⁵ Although the project was not accepted, the Yugoslav-Bulgarian rapprochement continued due to the halt in the bilateral Yugoslav-Greek negotiations. In the economic sphere, the MFA wanted to “close all the open issues” through the conclusion of the general railway convention, the railway tariff convention and the convention on the mutual railway stations. The issue of the railway traffic of goods was settled during the conference in Sofia in mid-April 1926.²⁶ Ninčić also showed leniency towards the Bulgarian request for the LoN’s refugee loan until the Lyapchev’s government rejected his proposal to sign the bilateral arbitration agreement in April 1926. Sudden halt in the political relations had repercussion on the economic rapprochement, and Belgrade launched an unsuccessful campaign against the LoN’s loan for Bulgaria.²⁷

Since the plans for the Balkan Locarno pact failed completely, the new initiative for the mutual agreement in the region came from the ranks of the international societies. The Greek politicians, once again, took the first step in 1928 and soon the multilateral conversations were transformed into the informal diplomatic talks. From the

²³ The Yugoslav-Italian trade agreement was signed in July 1924, but ratified only in November 1928; G. Latinović, *Yugoslav-Italian economic relations (1918–1941)*, Banja Luka 2019, p. 47.

²⁴ AY, Collection of Aleksandar Cincar-Marković (310), box 4, the report [of the chief of the III Department of the GPD MFA Aleksandar Cincar-Marković] on the possibility of the customs union between the Kingdom of SCS and Bulgaria, written by the strictly confidential order of the [Foreign] Minister [Momčilo Ninčić], s.l. [Belgrade], s.a. [12.1925 or 1.1926], pp. 1–27.

²⁵ V. Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Francuska*, p. 97.

²⁶ I. Ristić, *Bugarska u politici*, p. 482.

²⁷ И. Ристић, *Између старих и нових изазова — Бугарска у политици Краљевине СХС 1926. године*, „Токови историје” 2013, vol. 2.

beginning of this process, the MFA and, in particular, Vojislav Marinković had the two main standpoints concerning the reconstruction of the regional security. The first was to avoid the introduction of new international obligations toward minorities. This was particularly sensitive issue during the great debate in the ranks of the LoN on the revision of the international system for the protection of the minority rights in 1928–1930, and during the subsequent German and Italian initiatives in 1931–1932. The second standpoint was manifested in the greater interest for the economic Balkan union. This was particularly the case during the Great Depression. Regarding the political alliance, Marinković and the Yugoslav diplomats were paying special attention whether Italy stood behind various Albanian, Greek, Turkish or Bulgarian initiatives.

During 1928–1929 the MFA was very careful regarding the work of the International Federation of League of Nations Societies (*l'Union Internationale des associations pour la Société des Nations*). In the subordinated organization — the International University Federation for the League of Nations (*Fédération Universitaire Internationale pour la Société des Nations*) — the Yugoslav, Greek and Bulgarian delegation²⁸ signed the Balkan Pact and collaborated on several issues during the 5th congress of the International University Federation for the League of Nations, in 1928. The Bulgarian delegation did not ratify the pact, yet all three delegations opposed the resolution which did not recommend the formation of new regional pacts. The Yugoslav delegation had to oppose the proposal of forming the Albanian group on the Italian universities.²⁹ On the 12th annual congress held in The Hague in 1928, the International Federation of League of Nations Societies started to advocate the general study on minorities and formation of the Permanent Minority Committee in the ranks of the LoN. The resolution on these issues was represented before the IX session of the LoN's Assembly. It was not accepted, but some proposals for the reform of the LoN's minority procedures were implemented by the LoN's Council in 1929.³⁰ During the 12th annual congress in The Hague, the Yugoslav, Romanian,

²⁸ The University associations of all three countries became the members of the International University Federation for the League of Nations in 1925.

²⁹ AY, Records of the Permanent Delegation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia at the League of Nations — Geneva (159), box 2, folder III, the Delegation of the University Association of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes for the LoN to Fotić, Geneva (1.09.1928).

³⁰ The International Federation of League of Nations Societies was founded in Geneva in 1919 as a reaction to the disappointing draft of the LoN's Covenant. It was acting on self-initiative and avoided to be patronized by the diplomats or the LoN. Therefore, the headquarters was set up in Brussels, so to express independence from Geneva. The summer office was in Geneva, so they could be present during the sessions of the Assembly of the LoN. They were pursuing to influence the LoN through their national public and governments. The Yugoslav delegation was one of the founding members; while the French Association (*l'Association française pour la Société des Nations*) had a dominant position; J.-M. Guieu, *La SDN et ses organisations de soutien dans les années 1920. Entre promotion de l'esprit de Genève et volonté d'influence*, "Relations Internationales" 2012, vol. 151, no. 3, pp. 11–23; T. Davis, *Internationalism in a divided world: the experience of the international federation of League of Nations Societies, 1919–1939*, "Peace & Change" 2012, vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 227–252.

Greek and Bulgarian delegates formed the Balkan committee of the Commission. The Bulgarian delegation started the campaign for the rights of the population in the Vardar Macedonia, in autumn 1928 and spring 1929. This was the sequel of the Serbian-Bulgarian disagreements, and in September 1928 Marinković assigned two new members of the Yugoslav delegation — one Croat and one Slovene — the professor of the University of Zagreb Miroslav Staržnjicki and the professor of the University of Ljubljana Leonid Pitamic.³¹ Their work was clearly well appreciated as both were appointed as the plenipotentiary ministers next year,³² yet the MFA decided to withdraw support to the Balkan committee and asked for its demission in July 1929.³³ Caution regarding the Bulgarian complaints was evidently not excessive, because even the head of the *Deutsche Liga für Völkerbund* Baron Albert von Bodman estimated in 1932 that the Bulgarian Association for the LoN was in fact the group for the minority rights and for the revision of the peace treaties.³⁴

The MFA was reluctant to organize the delegation for the XXVI Universal Peace Congress (*Congrès universel de la paix*) in Warsaw, in June 1928.³⁵ The acting Foreign Minister Konstantin (Kosta) Kumanudi was again interested in the XXVII congress planned in Athens, for October 1929. He wanted to appoint the Yugoslav delegates based on the agenda and the reported participation of the prominent foreign individuals.³⁶ Both the *chargé d'affaires* and the *attaché de presse* Milan M. Jovanović and Pavle Jevtić warned the MFA that for the fourth item on the agenda (*actualité*), the minority rights were unofficially planned as the main topic. They suggested the MFA to choose delegates prudently, prepare them for the discussion and instruct them to make a prior contact with the allied and friendly delegations so to influence the debate in a direction that would best suit the Yugoslav interests. Jevtić warned that the non-existence of the official delegation, encouraged the Academic Club for the Study of the International Problems from Ljubljana — founded by Leonid Pitamic³⁷ — to ap-

³¹ AY, 159, b. 3, f. VII, Marinković to the MFA, no. 570 (19.09.1928); the acting Foreign Minister Pija Šumenković, dispatch, no. 11669 (26.09.1928).

³² Stražnjicki was appointed as the plenipotentiary minister in Buenos Aires in February 1929, and Pitamic as the plenipotentiary minister in Washington in May 1929. It should be noted that Pitamic was hired on several occasions as an expert by the MFA prior to September 1928; Б. Исаилович, *Посланство Краљевине Југославије у Аргентини — Буенос Ајрес 1928–1945*, „Архив. Часопис Архива Југославије” 2000, vol. 1, no. 1; Д. Петровић, П. Крејић, *Српски и југословенски дипломатски представници у Сједињеним Америчким државама 1917–1945*, „Архив. Часопис Архива Србије и Црне Горе” 2007, vol. 8, no. 1–2.

³³ AY, 159, b. 4, f. III, the acting general political director of the MFA Konstantin Fotić to the Permanent Delegation in Geneva, no. 6436 (4.07.1929).

³⁴ T. Davis, op. cit., p. 237.

³⁵ AY, 159, b. 2, f. I, Marinković, dispatch, no. 223 (16.06.1928); the permanent delegate in Geneva Konstantin Fotić to the MFA, no. 379 (18.06.1928).

³⁶ AY, Records of the Legation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Greece — Athens (379), box 9, Kumanudi, dispatch, no. 10920 (21.09.1929).

³⁷ Leonid Pitamic and the member of the Carnegie Endowment for Peace Florence Wilson founded the Academic Club in early 1929. After they had learned that the German delegation planned to raise the

ply as the unofficial delegation. Due to Greek initiatives for the establishment of the Balkan Institute in Athens — as a tool for pacifying the national spirits, the rapprochement and forging Balkan federation — Jevtić suggested that one of the members of the Yugoslav delegation should be the retired Brigadier General (Sanitary) Čedomir Đurđević. Jevtić considered him a suitable candidate since Đurđević was the founder of one group in Belgrade with similar notions and started his public campaign for the formation of the Balkan Union through press in all Balkan states.³⁸ The boldness of the *attaché de presse* — who exceeded his duty by proposing the delegate to the MFA — irritated Kumanudi and he called Milan Jovanović on responsibility.³⁹

In the end, the Yugoslav delegation was not sent on the XXVII congress, while the Bulgarian and Turkish delegations were sent in the last minute.⁴⁰ According to Jevtić the absence of the Yugoslav and the Italian delegation was noticed, and it gave momentum to the president of the International Peace Bureau (IPB) and the vice-president of the Belgian Senate Henri La Fontaine to heavily criticize the Yugoslav security policy. La Fontaine ascribed the military guards near the railway bridges and tunnels not to the terrorist actions of the IMRO, but to the dictatorship of King Aleksandar whom he compared to the “emperors, admirers of the military parades” from the era prior to 1914. He condemned the Yugoslav and Turkish militarism, without mentioning the Italian responsibility for the security situation in the Balkans. According to Jevtić, Greeks were using the congress to promote thesis that the Slavic population was an insignificant minority in the Aegean Macedonia; while Bulgarians were raising the question of their minority in the Vardar Macedonia only in the private conversations.⁴¹ The most important initiative raised at the congress was the idea of the former PM Alexandros Papanastasiou for the establishment of the Institute for the Balkan Entente in Athens and for the organization — formal or informal — that would work on the solidarity and agreement between the Balkan states. The goal was to prevent further involvement of the Great Powers in the region. Since the Greek delegates were assessing that the state of the Yugoslav-Bulgarian relations and the issue of the Bulgarian minority in the Vardar Macedonia were the main obstacles for the realization of the plan, the congress’ Special commission for the Balkan federa-

minority issue on the XXVII congress, the Academic Club asked the MFA for the financial support for the participation in the Congress. Since the reply was not received at the appropriate time, only the president Stanislav Mencinger went to Athens; AY, 379, b. 9, the plenipotentiary minister in Athens Jovan Vučković to the GPD MFA, no. 769 (29.10.1929).

³⁸ AY, 379, b. 9, Kumanudi, dispatch, no 10920 (21.09.1929); Jovanović to the GPD MFA, no. 668 (23.09.1929), no. 668 (27.09.1929).

³⁹ AY, 379, b. 9, Jovanović to the GPD MFA, no. 678 (23.09.1929).

⁴⁰ AY, Records of the Central Press bureau of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (38), box 39, folder 91, Mih. Stojanović, report, without ref. no. and date [10.1930]; AY, 379, b. 9, the Legation in Athens to the MFA, no. 700 (3.10.1929).

⁴¹ AY, 38, b. 39, f. 91, Jevtić to the director of the Central Press Bureau Milan Marjanović (17.10.1929).

tion had authorized the IPB to initiate the convening the First Balkan Conference in Athens for 1930.⁴²

After the XXVII congress, the French delegate Lucien Le Foyer was planning to stay in Belgrade for two days on the return trip. His intention was to support the formation of the Yugoslav section of the IPB and immediately promote the president of the Yugoslav section to the member of the IPB's Council. He was asking the Yugoslav Legation in Athens to organize the official meetings with the Foreign Minister Vojislav Marinković, the PM Petar Živković and, if possible, with king Aleksandar.⁴³ The secretary of the Legation in Paris Dušan Tomić — who was in charge of the communication with the French Masonic circles — made contact with the head of the MFA's Protocol Boško Hristić in order to organize those official meetings, since Le Foyer was the French Grand Master.⁴⁴ Although the main idea of the Papanastasiou's initiative was coinciding with the main goal of the Yugoslav Foreign Policy in the Balkans — to prevent further penetration of the Great Powers in the region — Le Foyer's initiative was not well received by Marinković. The Foreign Minister was irritated by the La Fontaine's criticism of the Yugoslav security policy in the Vardar Macedonia. And since Le Foyer intended to stay in Belgrade in the company of La Fontaine, Marinković had criticized Milan Jovanović for even discussing the issue with the French delegate.⁴⁵ The Foreign Minister refused to meet the delegates officially and ordered state institutions to deny them official contact. He only allowed the journalists to organize one banquet under the strict supervision of the Central Press Bureau.⁴⁶ Contrary to that, Marinković did not deny the official support for the planned stay of the head of the British delegation Rennie Smith in Belgrade and Zagreb.⁴⁷ This was not merely the expression of the Yugoslav assessments of the Belgian and British reports to the congress on the situation in the Balkans. It was the manifestation of Marinković's anti-Italian tactics, which included veiled collaboration with the Foreign Office.⁴⁸ Therefore he had to facilitate the intentions of Smith, who was the Labor MP, the Parliamentary Secretary of the Foreign Secretary Arthur Henderson and the secretary of the National Council for the prevention of war.

During the preparatory work of the IPB and the government in Athens for the First Balkan Conference, in March–June 1930, Marinković was reluctant to form the

⁴² E. Campus, *The Little Entente and the Balkan Alliance*, București 1978, pp. 35, 36; Ž. Avramovski, *Balkanska antanta (1934–1940)*, Beograd 1986, pp. 35, 36; M. Türkeş, *The Balkan Pact and its immediate implications for the Balkans states 1930–1934*, "Middle Eastern Studies" 1993, vol. 30, no. 1, p. 132.

⁴³ AY, 379, b. 9, Jovanović to Marinković, no. 710 (9.10.1929).

⁴⁴ AY, 379, b. 9, Tomić, dispatch from 7.10.1929.

⁴⁵ AY, 379, b. 9, Marinković to the Legation in Athens, no. 12440 (15.10.1929).

⁴⁶ AY, 38, b. 39, f. 91, note written by Z. A. in the Central Press Bureau (25.10.1930).

⁴⁷ AY, 379, b. 9, Jovanović to Marinković, no. 711 (9.10.1929); Marinković, no. 12215 (12.10.1929).

⁴⁸ S. Mičić, *Vojislav Marinković and Italy, 1927–1932*, "Qualestoria: Rivista di storia contemporanea" 2021, vol. 49, no. 1, pp. 195–206.

Yugoslav delegation.⁴⁹ He wanted to avoid the discussion on the minority issue, and changed his views only after the conversation with Henri La Fontaine in Geneva. The reaction of all Balkan governments forced Papanastasiou to remove all political items from the agenda, including the minority rights. Venizelos wanted to avoid the discussion on the Balkan Entente and direct the work of the conference toward the economy and the mutual trade. The Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Tevfik Rüştü bey and Ankara were suspicious of the idea of the political Balkan unity, and considered it utopian, especially if forged through the expansion of the Little Entente. The government in Sofia was skeptical, and considered the idea of the Balkan Entente as the plan to support Aristide Briand's initiative for the European Federation and strengthening of the territorial *status quo*. In one moment, the Bulgarian government even recalled the approval for the delegation to participate in the conference under the influence of the IMRO and the legal organizations of the Macedonian Bulgarians. In the end, new Bulgarian delegates were elected among moderate politicians.⁵⁰

The former member of the Macedonian legal and illegal organizations, the collaborator of Stamboliyski and the political emigrant in Belgrade Georgi Ivanov Kapčev made the study on the minority issue and the peace in the Balkans, on 30 August 1930. As the Yugoslav and Bulgarian population did not differ in race, language and religion — three categories that defined minorities by the international acts and by the LoN — he considered the Bulgarian lawsuits against the government in Belgrade as unjustified, but the lawsuits against the governments in Athens and Bucharest as legally acceptable. Kapčev emphasized that the Bulgarian government did not make the official accusations against Belgrade until 1929, and petitions were submitted by “legally incompetent” individuals who were members of the political and revolutionary organizations in Bulgaria. Therefore, their struggle of the minority rights in Yugoslavia was not in the service for the preservation of the peace in the Balkans. This study was submitted to the Palace and to the Chief of the III Section⁵¹ of the Political Department of the MFA Vukašin Životić.⁵²

During the preparatory work for the First Balkan Conference in 1930, Vojislav Marinković had two directions of the action. The first was to prevent the forging of the Balkan alliance short of the dominant influence of Belgrade. The second was to

⁴⁹ AY, Records of the Legation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Turkey — Constantinople, Ankara (370), box 43, folder 117, folio 35.

⁵⁰ Archive of Serbia, Belgrade, Collection of Tanasije Dinić, item no. TD-46, folios 5, 6, 9, 16–18, 23; CSA, Records of the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana (325 k), inventory no. 1, folder 88, folio 13; *Извештаји Министарства иностраних послова Краљевине Југославије (август–децембар) 1930. године*, vol. 1, eds. Н. Петровић, С. Илић, Београд 2005; Ž. Avramovski, *Balkanska antanta (1934–1940)*, pp. 37–39.

⁵¹ After the reorganization of the MFA, implemented by the law of 25 March 1930, the III section of the Political Department was in charge of the LoN, Vatican, minority and religious issues, and war reparations; S. Mičić, *Od birokratije do diplomatije*, p. 108.

⁵² AY, Records of the Court of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (74), box 50, folder 68, folios 36–55; ASASA, Personal records of Vukašin Životić (14.458), folder I, item no. 30, folios 1–19.

collaborate paving the road for the regional political agreement through the economic rapprochement. During 1929–1930 the main obstacle in the Yugoslav-Bulgarian relations — closed mutual border — was removed after the series of negotiations and signing the so-called Pirot's protocols. This allowed the opening of the mutual border and re-establishment of the mutual trade and traffics.⁵³ Under the influence of the Briand's initiative for the European federation, Marinković was more lenient for the Balkans economic unity, while Edvard Beneš was pursuing the pan-European economic collaboration. During the first half of 1930, the Yugoslav Foreign Minister was often speaking with the secretary of the Bulgarian Legation on the necessity of close economic bilateral cooperation. His main argument was that Belgrade and Sofia should prevent further exploitation by the industrialized West, and through mutual cooperation sell their grain at much higher prices than was the case. For Marinković this was the first step toward the economic rapprochement between the Balkan countries.⁵⁴ In July, he publicly expressed the idea of the pan-Balkans based on the economic agreement between the countries in the region.⁵⁵ At the time, he was more interested in the customs union with Romania — as an instrument to overcome the economic insolvency of the Little Entente⁵⁶ — but he did not give up the idea of close economic cooperation with Bulgaria. In mid-August, Marinković did not hide from the diplomatic corps that he had no illusions regarding the outcome of the First Balkan Conference. The choice of the Yugoslav delegates made it clear that he wanted to direct future discussion to the economy and culture issues.⁵⁷

The MFA decided to give the financial support to the Yugoslav delegation for the First Balkan Conference only in mid-September 1930.⁵⁸ The instructions were issued to the delegates to leave the conference at once in case the Bulgarian delegation raised the minority issue.⁵⁹ The head of the Yugoslav delegation was Čedomir Đurđević, as a founder of the Association for the Balkan community in Belgrade in 1929.⁶⁰ He claimed publicly in 1931 — while promoting the plan for the customs union in the

⁵³ The main issues were: the mutual responsibility for the control of the illegal border crossings (concerning the IMRO terrorist actions on the Yugoslav soil) and for the armed incidents between border guards, regulation of the border crossing for the double owners (prevention of the illegal border crossing by the members of the IMRO), regulation of the trade and traffic; I. Ristić, *Bugarska u politici*, pp. 443–453, 468, 469.

⁵⁴ CSA, Records of the Ministry for the Foreign and Religious Affairs (176 k), inventory no. 6, folder 1759, folios 11–14.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, folios 15, 16.

⁵⁶ Marinković's idea was based on the historical experience with the trade agreement between Serbia and Austro-Hungary from 1881. His plan was to establish the fair cooperation between the agrarian and the industrial states in the ranks of the Little Entente, and then to apply same model in the area between the Baltic and the Aegean Sea (S. Mičić, *Influence of European powers plans for reorganization of European affairs on reorganization of the Little Entente in first half 1930s* — work in progress).

⁵⁷ CSA, 176 k, inv. no. 6, f. 1759, folios 23–25.

⁵⁸ AY, 159, b. 7, f. 9, Kumanudi to Marinković, personally, no. 17953 (12.09.1930).

⁵⁹ *Izveštaji Ministarstva*, p. 89.

⁶⁰ Ž. Avramovski, *Balkanska antanta (1934–1940)*, p. 33.

Balkans⁶¹ — that he was the only advocate for the same idea in 1926 but did not get any support in Belgrade before 1929.⁶² Due to the partially preserved archive records, it is not clear if Đurđević had any contact with Momčilo Ninčić or Aleksandar Cincar-Marković regarding the issue of the customs union in 1926.

The Yugoslav delegates were following the MFA's instructions and during the First Balkan Conference, 5–12 October 1930, were concentrating efforts to bring the discussion on the issues of the economic rapprochement and collaboration between the Balkan states.⁶³ Also, they were making distinction between the Balkan alliance — which excluded Turkey — and the Balkan-Anadolu [Asia Minor] alliance.⁶⁴ The Yugoslav delegation collaborated with the Greek and Romanian delegations to prevent the joint Bulgarian-Albanian attempt to raise the minority issue.⁶⁵ One of the Yugoslav delegates Živko Topalović publicly promoted the Yugoslav-Bulgarian unification as the most suitable solution for the minority issue and for the lessening of the strategic importance of the Vardar Macedonia.⁶⁶

Athens and Ankara wanted to present the Greek-Turkish Pact of Friendship, Reconciliation and Arbitration, signed on 30 October 1930, as the first step towards the Balkan alliance.⁶⁷ Rüştü bey launched an initiative for the Turkish-Greek-Bulgarian rapprochement and represented it as an instrument to surmount the key problems in the Balkans — the Yugoslav-Bulgarian disputes over the population of the Vardar Macedonia. He wanted to achieve two goals: to ensure the inviolability of the northern Turkish border and to prevent the Yugoslav-Bulgarian rapprochement or unification.⁶⁸ Since he was also pursuing to reduce the Great Powers' influence, Rüştü bey opposed the Italian efforts to subordinate the Turkish-Greek-Bulgarian rapprochement to their

⁶¹ Đurđević launched initiative in May 1931, but it seems there was no positive response in any of the Balkan capitals; E. Campus, op. cit., p. 40.

⁶² Č. Đurđević, *Balkanski pokret* [in:] *Prva balkanska konferencija (rad Jugoslovenske grupe)*, Beograd 1931.

⁶³ Ibidem, pp. 23–33; I. Mohorič, *Problem ekonomske saradnje balkanskih država* [in:] *Prva balkanska konferencija (rad Jugoslovenske grupe)*, Beograd 1931, pp. 37–41; V. Đorđević, *Poljoprivreda Balkana* [in:] *Prva balkanska konferencija (rad Jugoslovenske grupe)*, Beograd 1931, pp. 45–49; C. Gregorić, *Privredni sporazum balkanskih država s industrijske tačke gledišta* [in:] *Prva balkanska konferencija (rad Jugoslovenske grupe)*, Beograd 1931, pp. 57–73.

⁶⁴ *Prva balkanska konferencija*, pp. 17, 18; C. Gregorić, op. cit., p. 60.

⁶⁵ The consultations between the Bulgarian and Albanian MFA's on the collaboration on this issue were started in July 1930; CSA, 325 k, inv. no. 1, f. 88, folio 13; П. Нейков, *Спомени*, София 1990, pp. 324–328, 331, 332; P. Milo, *Albania and the Balkan Entente*, "Balkan Studies" 1998, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 101, 102; Ž. Avramovski, *Balkanska antanta (1934–1940)*, p. 39.

⁶⁶ Ž. Topalović, *Za balkanski sporazum*, Zagreb 1931, pp. 33–36.

⁶⁷ E. Campus, op. cit.; D. Barlas, *Etatism & diplomacy in Turkey: economic & foreign policy strategies in an uncertain world, 1929–1939*, Leiden 1998, p. 138; I. Stefanidis, *Reconstructing Greece as European state: Venizelos' last premiership, 1928–32* [in:] *Eleftherios Venizelos: the trials of statesmanship*, ed. Paschalis M. Kitromilides, Edinburg 2008, pp. 223, 224; Dž. Hakov, *Istorija savremene Turske*, Prizren 2011, p. 166.

⁶⁸ Ž. Avramovski, *Balkanska antanta (1934–1940)*, pp. 42–48; D. Barlas, *Etatism & diplomacy*, p. 139.

interests and the expansion of the French influence over Bulgaria through its membership in the Little Entente.⁶⁹

The Legation in Athens concluded that the failed Bulgarian-Albanian initiative on the First Balkan Conference was a clear signal the moment was not ripe to move from the informal to the official negotiations. The discussion in the same format on the particular obstacles was considered as appropriate for the time being.⁷⁰ Therefore, Rüştü bey's initiative from November 1930 to raise the discussion to the higher level during the Second Balkan Conference⁷¹ got a cold shoulder from Belgrade. Venizelos supported the Turkish plan in March,⁷² but in early April 1931 Marinković repudiated it on the pretext that terrain was not prepared for the work on the political rapprochement.⁷³ This forced Rüştü bey to renounce his initiative in late April, and accept Marinković's concept to forge the Balkan unity through the economic rapprochement.⁷⁴ Marinković's influence over Rüştü's understanding of the Balkan policies was strengthened after their meeting in Geneva in May 1931,⁷⁵ where the Turkish Foreign Minister could personally witness the reputation which the Yugoslav Foreign Minister enjoyed in the ranks of the LoN.⁷⁶

For the Yugoslav statesmen the Greek-Turkish rapprochement opened several issues at once: Rome's secret influence on Athens and Ankara, Italy's potential involvement in the project of the reorganization of the regional security structure in the Balkans, and most importantly — the suppression of the Yugoslavia's dominant position in the region. During the official visit to Athens, 10–14 December 1930, Marinković was so irritated by Venizelos's proposals for the formation of the Balkan Entente and for the Yugoslav recognition of the Bulgarian minority in the Vardar Macedonia, that he was ready to cut his stay short. He was convinced that Italy was hiding behind the proposal for the Balkan Entente, and he refused to sign the political regional agreement on the pretext of the validity of the peace treaties and other international acts.⁷⁷ Marinković contested the Greek-Turkish leadership in regulating the regional relations with the prior standpoint that the real Balkan unity could be

⁶⁹ D. Barlas, Y. Köksal, *Turkey's foreign policy towards Bulgaria and Turkish minority (1923–1934)*, "Southeastern and Black Sea Studies" 2014, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 184, 185.

⁷⁰ *Izveštaji Ministarstva*, pp. 150, 151.

⁷¹ His plan was to call the foreign ministers of the Balkan countries as observers, and to organize a mutual unofficial meeting in case the atmosphere at the Second Conference indicated the moment was ripe; AY, 159, b. 8, f. 21, Lazar Marković to the MFA, no. 1074 (22.11.1930); AY, 370, b. 6, f. 33, folio 811.

⁷² AY, 370, b. 43, f. 117, folio 47.

⁷³ AY, 370, b. 6, f. 33, folio 818.

⁷⁴ AY, 370, b. 2, f. 13, folio 591.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, folio 622.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, folio 660.

⁷⁷ Ž. Avramovski, *Balkanska antanta (1934–1940)*, pp. 46, 47; J. Paszkiewicz, *Grecja a bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe*, pp. 212, 213; С. Мићић, Н. Милићевић, *Изазови унутрашње и спољне политике у време диктатуре краља Александра* [in:] Коста Ст. Павловић, *Дневник 1930–1932*, eds. С. Мићић, Н. Милићевић, Београд 2020.

forged only on the basis of the Yugoslav-Bulgarian cooperation.⁷⁸ Since the bilateral relations between Belgrade and Sofia were descending at the time,⁷⁹ he was not able to actively suppress the momentum of the Athens–Ankara initiative. Therefore, the Yugoslav diplomats in Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria continued to negatively assess the intentions of the three governments for the rapprochement.⁸⁰

The policy of the MFA towards the Balkan conferences and the multilateral agreement during 1930 and first months of 1931 was not changing as long as Vojislav Marinković was the Foreign Minister (until mid-1932). He directed the Yugoslav Foreign Service to keep a watchful eye on the diplomatic activities of the Balkan states, particularly concerning the potential Italian role behind the scenes. The Yugoslav delegations for the Balkan conferences continued to avoid at all costs promulgation of the new obligations toward minorities, and were most concerned with economy. The strategy changed from early 1933, when king Aleksandar took charge of running the Balkan policy.

During the period from 1925 till 1930 some distinctive features of the Yugoslav policy towards the idea of the Balkan unity were outlined. Decision makers were ready to accept the idea on Belgrade's terms and leadership. The most important factors in devising Yugoslavia's Balkan policy were Italy, Albania, Greece and Bulgaria. Romania and Turkey had insignificant impact in that matter during 1920s. The Yugoslav statesmen did not pursue the multilateral diplomatic action — under the influence of the *esprit de Locarno* — because they were keen to avoid the Great Powers' interference in the relations between the Balkan nations. Therefore, open issues were discussed on the bilateral level. In that respect, diplomatic actions in Tirana, Athens and Sofia were primarily designed to prevent or at least throttle Italian penetration in the region. Second important goal was to surmount distrust based on historical experience and resolve territorial, economic and minority issues.

During this particular period, possible directions of the Yugoslavia's Balkan policy were outlined. The first was bilateral settlement with particular Balkan nations. The second was multilateral agreement under the leadership of Belgrade. Third was exploiting economic cooperation as the basis for the political settlement. The fourth was the pursuit for the rapprochement with Bulgaria as the supplement or replacement for the relations with other Balkan nations.

The fifth was in the economy sphere. Since both Ninčić and Marinković were economists' first, and foreign ministers only as political figures, they were devising foreign policy concepts with economy cooperation as the significant factor. Although there were differences in their views on the priorities in political arrangements with

⁷⁸ С. Мићић, Н. Милићевић, *Изазови унутрашње и спољне политике у време диктатуре краља Александра*, р. 77.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 83–85.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 77, 78.

particular Balkan nations, both were advocating close economic cooperation with Bulgaria as the core for the future multilateral economic unification of the region.

During 1930s these outlines were clearly noticeable. The Great Depression had its share in pressurizing Marinković to seek the solution for economy issues through Balkan cooperation, during 1930–1932. King Aleksandar was pursuing rapprochement with Bulgaria in the ranks or outside the ranks of the Balkan alliance, in 1933 and 1934. While, Milan Stojadinović, another prominent economist who served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, revived project for the Yugoslav-Bulgarian customs union in 1938. The most significant change in the Yugoslavia's Balkan policy during 1930s, compared to 1920s, was changed view on the Turkey's role in the region.

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