

The Treaties that almost created a Federation: Albania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria (1944-1948)

LEDION KRISAFI

PhD candidate

Faculty of Social Sciences and International Relations

European University of Tirana

Tirana, Albania

Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to show how, in the years 1944-48, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania went very close on creating a federation between them. Two treaties on customs union were signed between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria and Yugoslavia and Albania apart from the other treaties on friendship and cooperation between them. These treaties enabled a very close relationship between these countries, especially an economical relationship, but at the same time intended to abolish the borders and the custom union between them. The treaties between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria were more specific and mentioned the possibility of a Federation between them, while in the case of Albania and Yugoslavia, this was never put to paper. Stalin supported the idea of a Balkan Federation at the beginning but it seems that the Yugoslav leaders weren't that much interested in it. The Albanian leadership seemed at times very supportive and at other times very reluctant on this idea, maybe because of the troublesome history of the Albanians with the Slavic nations of the region. The purpose of this paper is to show what steps these three countries undertook towards creating a common union and not to explain why it didn't happen in the end which would have changed the history of the Balkans in the 20th century.

Key words: Albania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Federation, 1944-1948, international relations

Objective of the study

This paper doesn't aim to be a detailed study of the idea of the Balkan Federation between Albania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria after the Second World War. This paper aims to make a simple and straightforward presentation of the treaties that Albania and Yugoslavia and Yugoslavia and Bulgaria signed with each other in the years 1945-1948. These treaties not only enabled a very close political and economic cooperation between the three countries, but at the same time were meant to be the first steps in the creation of a Federation. Even though the title of this paper concerns Albania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, the main focus will be on the treaties and relation between Albania and Yugoslavia.

This paper doesn't aim to show how and why, in the end, this didn't happen. In writing this paper I have relied heavily on published documents from the archives in Albania, former Yugoslavia and Russian Federation.

Introduction

On 27th May 1946, Joseph Stalin and Josip Broz Tito met in Moscow to discuss over the future of the Balkan states controlled by the communists and their relations with each other and with the Soviet Union. Other high profile officials of the respective countries who attended this meeting were Molotov for the Soviet Union and Aleksandar Rankovic for Yugoslavia. According to the soviet registration of that meeting, Stalin pressed forward with the idea of a Balkan Federation between Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Albania. He asked Tito if Enver Hoxha, Prime Minister of Albania and the Leader of the Communists in the country, accepted the idea of Albania being a part of Yugoslavia and Tito responded affirming this.

Stalin seemed very keen on this idea and pressed Tito to further good relations with Bulgaria too, especially because Bulgaria in the Second World War was an enemy of Yugoslavia and Soviet Union. On the other hand, Tito responded that the idea of a Federation was not worth it because in Bulgaria the Communists didn't have all the power in their hands as they did in Yugoslavia and Albania. There were other political parties which had a lot of influence and would not accept a Federation with Yugoslavia, but Stalin replicated: "This must be done". Also at this time Yugoslavia was focused on the problem of Trieste with Italy.

The meeting registered by the Yugoslavs seems a bit different. On the idea of a Balkan Federation, according to the Yugoslav document Stalin said that it wasn't the right time for a Federation with Bulgaria and it was more important for Yugoslavia at the moment to solve the case of Trieste with Italy. The hesitation of the Yugoslav leader Tito in the soviet document of this meeting about a Federation with Bulgaria is 'confirmed' in the Yugoslav document by the words of Stalin himself.

About Albania the two documents have almost the same things. Yugoslavia and Albania should sign a treaty between them on the territorial sovereignty and the independence of Albania which will be protected by Yugoslavia.

One month later, on July 1946, Albania and Yugoslavia signed the "Treaty of friendship and reciprocal help" between them. At the beginning of this treaty was written that "Albania and Yugoslavia had during their history the same enemies..." but this was not true.

Albania's relations with Yugoslavia before the Second World War had never been so idyllic. Even before the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918 that later became Yugoslavia, the Slavic nations of this region had territorial aspirations towards Albania. Montenegro had the intention of taking the city of Shkodër and its surroundings in

North Albania, while Serbia's intentions were much larger. She aspired to reach as far as the river Shkumbin in central Albania.

Later in the 1920s and 30s Yugoslavia never restrained from interfering in the internal politics of Albania. In December 1924 it helped materially and militarily Ahmet Zogu to return to power in Albania after the June Revolution ousted him and later taking refuge in Belgrade. It was only after Ahmet Zogu, from 1925 President of Albania and from 1928 King of Albania, turned his attention and friendship towards Italy that Yugoslavia's influence in Albania's political sphere began to fade.

The Treaties

In December 1944 the newly liberated Yugoslavia and the Liberation Front of Bulgaria had signed a treaty on furthering the relations with each other after the end of the war with the intention of creating a federal state of all the Slavs of southeast Europe.

In the fifth point of the treaty it was agreed in the union of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria in one federal state which will have a common government and common state representatives, but until the end of the war, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria will remain with their current governments.

A sign of the goodwill between the two countries in the future was the sixth point of the treaty in which Bulgaria and Yugoslavia recognized the Macedonian nation, which in the past had been a troublesome case and a casus belli for the Second Balkan War in 1913 between Serbia and Bulgaria. Not very long ago, Serbia considered the Macedonian Slavs as Serbs and Bulgaria considered them as Bulgarians.

Edvard Kardelj writes in his Memoirs that the impulse for a federation between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria was given by Stalin and later accepted by Dimitrov, who after the war

became the first communist Leader of Bulgaria.⁴ Kardelj in his Memoirs also writes that even though Dimitrov accepted the creation of a Federation, other members of the Politburo of the Communist Party of Bulgaria like Trajčo Kostov were against the union because of the different political and cultural traditions between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia and that nothing would result of this union.

The treaty of December 1944 was followed in the same month with a treaty on political, military and economical collaboration between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria.

Stalin was very keen also on the inclusion of Albania in the new Balkan Federation as we saw in the meeting with Tito in 1946. He had expressed the same wish to Milovan Djilas two years before during his first visit in Moscow when he had demanded from Djilas information about Albania and the albanians. During the same time it was an old Yugoslav communist of Jewish origins who many years before had integrated Josip Broz inside the Communist Party, called Moša Pijade who had proposed that in the new federal hall in Belgrade to include a new room for the seventh republic of Yugoslavia: Albania.

A few days before the treaty of friendship between Albania and Yugoslavia, on the first of July was signed in Belgrade for Yugoslavia by Nikola Petrovic and for Albania by Nako Spiru, who later committed suicide because of his work in the economic relations with Yugoslavia, a treaty between Albania and Yugoslavia on creating common economical corporations.

With this treaty would be created common corporation about the railways, electrification, import and export, extraction of oil, exploitation of mines in Albania and finally a common Yugoslav-Albanian Bank.

In a letter of 22 November 1946, Enver Hoxha wrote to Nako Spiru, who was in Belgrade at that time "about the accord in principle on the unification of prices, unification of customs

and the collaboration on the (economic) plans, that we have no objection, too”.

In this letter for Nako Spiru it seems that Enver Hoxha, who later objected and sent to death a lot of those who had worked for the close relations between Albania and Yugoslavia, had no objection himself whatsoever about these relations.

It didn't pass much time and on November 1946 Albania and Yugoslavia signed another economic treaty. Nako Spiru, Minister of Economy for Albania and Boris Kidricin, Minister of Industry for Yugoslavia signed the treaty between Albania and Yugoslavia on the coordination of plans, customs union and the unification of the currencies.

On the third point of this treaty was written that there would not be anymore customs between Albania and Yugoslavia and that there will be created a single, common customs union between Albania and Yugoslavia and Yugoslav laws will be implemented in this new customs union.

Since 1912, when the independence of Albania was proclaimed in the city of Vlorë, Albania had never had a relationship so close with another country. During the 20s Yugoslavia helped Ahmet Zogu to return to power in Albania and during the 30s Mussolini's Italy and at that time King Zog's Albania had close relations, especially economically, but at never time did Albania went so far with the Kingdom of Yugoslavia or Fascist Italy in establishing relations as with the Communist Yugoslavia after the Second World War.

In the extraordinary Plenum of the Central Committee of the Albanian Communist Party, held in December 1946, one month after the signing of the new economic treaty with Yugoslavia, Nako Spiru declared that the only interest that Yugoslavia had in this treaty and other treaties with Albania was the economic development of Albania, and beginning from that moment the Yugoslav investments in Albania were not to be called 'foreign' because now Albania and Yugoslavia had an economic union.

In the same Plenum, Enver Hoxha touched on his speech the problem of Kosovo, about which he said that it wasn't progressive for Albania to demand Kosovo from Yugoslavia as a territory inhabited with a majority of Albanians, but the Kosovars should fraternize with the Yugoslavs and that with the customs union between Albania and Yugoslavia it wasn't anymore important if Kosovo was part of Yugoslavia or with Albania.

In the years after the Second World War the problem of Kosovo was discussed many times inside the leadership of Yugoslavia. At that time, two principal ideas existed about this case: first, that Kosovo should be united with Albania and the two will be integrated into Yugoslavia and will remain inside the federation of Yugoslavia, and second, that Albania should be united with Yugoslavia and therefore there would not be anymore a boundary between Albania and Kosovo inside Yugoslavia. But this problem was not touched in all its problems anymore because it had not the support of the Soviet Union. Only after the split with Yugoslavia in 1948 did Enver Hoxha and the Albanian leadership returned to the problem of Kosovo.

At a meeting of the Politburo of the Albanian Communist Party, Enver Hoxha expressed his suspicions about a second group inside the ACP that was against the Yugoslavs, he doesn't mention names, but he says that every treaty signed until that time with Yugoslavia should be fulfilled.

This is the first time that doubts and suspicions inside the leadership of the Communist Party of Albania against the Yugoslav began to surface. The reason of these doubts is not understood as it is not understood who at first expressed these doubts.

But from the documents it seems that Enver Hoxha had no doubt about the relation with Yugoslavia and he was keen on going further with it.

It seems that at this time (1946-47) Albania and the Soviet Union had not very close relations with each other. The Albanian leadership always looked towards the Soviet Union for inspiration but the Soviet Union wasn't very interested in the relations with Albania. In the meetings with Tito in 1946, Stalin was reluctant in accepting a visit of Enver Hoxha in Moscow. He thought that Enver Hoxha at first should visit Belgrade and meet Tito and then, if it was necessary, he can go to Moscow.

It was only on July 1947, that Enver Hoxha finally meets with Stalin in Moscow. At the meetings between the two, Stalin expressed his belief that Albania was a small country and it needed the support of a big country, in this case of Yugoslavia, which was geographically very close to Albania. The Soviet Union could help Albania only through Yugoslavia.

Even though there were a lot of treaties that linked Albania close to Yugoslavia and there was talk of an eventual union between the two countries, this was a total mystery for the very person who had signed the economic treaties.

In a letter of July 1947 that Nako Spiru sent to Hoxha in Moscow from Belgrade, he expressed his ignorance about the union of Yugoslavia with Albania. In that letter he writes about the fact that Yugoslavia and Bulgaria will create a common state and that the same thing could happen with Yugoslavia and Albania too, but not that this will happen, or that the economic treaties he had signed were steps in that direction.

This letter casts doubts on how informed was the Politburo of the Communist Party of Albania about the real intentions of Yugoslavia towards Albania. How is possible that the Minister of Economy, who had signed economic treaties about the economic union of Yugoslavia and Albania had no knowledge about the union between Yugoslavia and Albania? From the meetings of Stalin and Tito in Moscow it is clear from the words of Tito that Enver Hoxha in Albania had full knowledge about the union and he approved of it.

Also at this time, 1947, the relations between Albania and Yugoslavia began to crack. The Yugoslavs were not satisfied with these relations and expressed doubts on the possibility that people in Albania were frightened about the relations with Yugoslavia. They said that the relations with Bulgaria, Hungary or Romania were much more constructive than with Albania with whom the Slavic nations of Yugoslavia had a long history of close relations. In the critique that the Central Committee of Yugoslavia made to Albania most of all it put in evidence problems concerning the economic relations, even small problems with the Yugoslav experts working in Albania at that time.

It also expressed the conviction that Yugoslavia had never done so much economically for its own republics as it had done for Albania. They too were trying to understand what it was going wrong.

It is difficult at this point to discern the real cause of the doubts that the Yugoslavs had about the relations with Albania. Doubts were cast by the Yugoslavs on Nako Spiru, which seems a little strange because Spiru was the man himself who had signed the economic treaties with Yugoslavia about the collaboration with economic plans and the customs union etc., so it seems bizarre that he was at this point against the Yugoslavs.

Did he really know what he was signing? From his words in the Plenum of 1946 it seems that he knew very well.

At the same time that relations between Albania and Yugoslavia began to deteriorate, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria on the other hand seemed like they were on the road to a common federation. In Bled, Slovenia, in 1947 Yugoslavia and Bulgaria signed a treaty on preparing the two countries for creating a customs union between them and collaborating on the economic plans of the two countries.

The treaty also oversaw close relationships between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria on electricity, industry, common

market, transport and culture. At the time, this treaty was seen as a major step towards unification of the two countries. But, this was the last time that the relations between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria were this close. A year later Yugoslavia was isolated inside the Communist Block in Eastern Europe and it soon turned the attention towards the USA and the United Kingdom.

Conclusion

The idea of a federation between Yugoslavia, Albania and Bulgaria in the years 1944-48 was not something new in the Balkans, but it was the first time that real, practical steps were taken towards creating a common state between them. Treaties signed between Yugoslavia and Albania and Yugoslavia and Bulgaria in the years 1946-47 on the customs union were the first steps toward a union and common state between these three countries.

While the Yugoslav leaders were mostly supportive of this project even though at certain times they expressed doubts especially concerning the union with Bulgaria, the Albanian leadership was ambivalent in its stance towards this idea, supporting it most of the time, but also in certain moments and from certain peoples doubts and fears about the influence of Yugoslavia in Albania were secretly expressed.

LITERATURE

Banac, I. (1988) *With Stalin againts Tito*, Cornell University Press

Clark, C. (2012), *The Sleepwalkers*, Allen Lane

Gjilas, M. (2006), *Fytyra e Totalitarizmit*, Fan Noli.

Glenny, M. (2012), *The Balkans: Nationalism, War & the Great Powers, 1804-1999*, Granta

- Kaba, H. & Çeku, E. (2011), Shqipëria dhe Kosova në Arkivat Ruse 1946-1962, Brezi 81
- Kardelj, E. (1980), Sećanja - borba za priznanje i nezavisnost nove Jugoslavije, 1944-1957, Delo, Ljubljana Milo, P. (1991), Shqipëria dhe Jugosllavia 1918-1927, Nëntori.
- Petranović, B. (1981), Istorija Jugoslavije 1918-1978, Nolit, Beograd
- Plasari, N. & Malltezi, L. (1996), Marrëdhëniet shqiptaro-jugosllave, 1945-1948, Drejtoria e Përgjithshme e Arkivave
- Zivotić, A. (2009), Otvaranje albanskog pitanja u Jugoslaviji u senci sukoba između Jugoslavije i Informbiro-a 1948-1954, Istorija 20. Veka 2\2009