

SLAVOJKA BEŠTIĆ-BRONZA

University of Banja Luka, Faculty of Philosophy
Department of History
ssbestic@hotmail.com

WESTERN PERCEPTION OF YUGOSLAVIA DURING 1980

Abstract: In the late 1970s and early 1980s a new significant wave of cooling in the relations between NATO and the Warsaw Pact dominated various aspects of world politics. In this situation, Yugoslavia was at the centre of an intricate system of relations between the two blocs, especially with projections regarding the future of the country immediately before and after the death of Josip Broz Tito, who as a person then literally symbolized Yugoslavia on the world political scene. With the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the perception of a potential crisis in Yugoslavia absolutely dominated the world media during the first half of 1980. In the months before Tito's death and during the first year after his funeral, the Western media were very active in trying to predict the fate of the Yugoslav federation and some of the predictions were very pessimistic, especially in the context of expectations of a potential Soviet invasion targeted towards Yugoslavia. In general, the character of Western media analysis of Yugoslav reality underwent a significant evolution in the short term and the viewpoint on the Yugoslav state changed quite rapidly, primarily in the negative context. In this regard, the examples of American, British and West German analytical approaches were particularly illustrative. As it is precisely within these three perceptions that change has been the greatest and most illustrative, it is the intention of this paper to concentrate only on aspects of those three perspectives.

Keywords: Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito, United States of America, Great Britain, West Germany.

1. Growing economic crisis in Yugoslavia at the end of 1970s

With the development of the Helsinki Process and the creation of the OSCE in the mid 1970s it seemed that a crucial step was made on the road of permanent stabilization of a complex constellation inside a détente between opposing military-political blocs. However, with the outbreak of several political conflicts in 1979, with a particular emphasis on the last and decisive phase of the Iranian Revolution in the period from January to December and the Soviet military invasion of Afghanistan at the very end of December that year, a general system of stability was significantly ruined and an escalating crisis that threatened with even new global conflicts was in full emergence.

The Yugoslav position in the world in this respect was especially characterized by the

rather obvious decline in the country's reputation in the context of economy. A growing economic crisis, which was reflected in the rapid increase of external debt and further extreme borrowing, was without a doubt the main obstacle for further polishing of the Yugoslavian image.¹ The year 1979 was particularly problematic in this regard. During that year alone the country's payment deficit amounted to \$3.6 billion, raising the country's total debt to about \$14 billion.² Basically, it was the worst annual balance in the entire history of the economy of the Socialistic Yugoslavia and it was at the same time the last year when Josip Broz Tito had complete control over the state. Therefore, estimations leading to the conclusion that the most significant economic decline occurred only after Tito's death were fairly wrong because it was exactly in the second half of the 1970s that the largest external debt was notified.

Yugoslavia tried to mask its economic problems by continuing its active political role as evidenced by the ambitious performance of the Yugoslav delegation led by President Tito himself at the Non-Aligned Conference in Havana in September 1979.³ At the conference held in Cuba Yugoslavia openly opposed Fidel Castro's intentions to link more closely the Non-Aligned Movement to the Warsaw Pact and the general political philosophy of socialism.⁴ As Tito's last meeting with the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev in May 1979 did not bring the desired results for Yugoslavia to achieve a certain financial assistance arrangements, it became clear that Yugoslavia would seek to intensify its cooperation with the West.

The possibility of a developing conflict with the East became even greater with the sudden Soviet invasion of Afghanistan since 24 December 1979. The US was especially motivated to observe the reactions of almost all countries of the world to the Soviet breakthrough in Central Asia and in this regard the CIA immediately made a reference to both the perspectives regarding Yugoslavia and its position inside of USSR policy. The CIA's report of 3 January stressed that Yugoslavia and Romania would be seen separately in the context of the response to the crisis in Afghanistan. In this sense, it was implicit that in addition to Yugoslavia, which was not a member of the Warsaw Pact, Romania was referred to in the same context. Because of President Nicolae Ceaușescu's somewhat "dissident" policy (1918–1989), Romania was considered a country that should be seen in isolation from the other members of the Warsaw Pact.⁵ As expected, the reactions in Yugoslavia to the Soviet invasion were much louder and more articulate than the reactions

¹ Schönfeld 1983: 149.

² German weekly „Der Spiegel“ wrote about it in particular detail in July 1980: „Hans Friderichs kennt die Probleme der Dritten Welt: Die Armen, meinte der Vorstandssprecher der Dresdner Bank kürzlich in Luxemburg, müssen viel zu hohe Zinsen für Kredite zahlen... Die vorsichtigen Bankiers verweisen auf die 14 Milliarden Dollar, die Jugoslawien dem Ausland schuldet. Allein im vergangenen Jahr betrug das Zahlungsbilanz-Defizit 3,6 Milliarden Dollar.“ „Banken. Sehr seltsam“, *Der Spiegel* 28/1980, 07.07.1980.

³ Jakovina 2011: 211–221.

⁴ „Auf der 6. Konferenz der Blockfreien in Havanna wollte Kubas Fidel Castro Führer der Bewegung werden und der Dritten Welt das Rezept der kubanischen Revolution verordnen. Doch Kubas Operationen in Afrika und seine Abhängigkeit von Moskau stießen auf Ablehnung. Tito erschien wieder als respektierter Anwalt der Blockfreiheit.“ „Dritte Welt: Tito gegen Castro“, *Der Spiegel* 36/1979, 03.09.1979.

⁵ A segment of the CIA's letter of 3 January relating to the reactions of Yugoslavia and Romania is titled "Yugoslav anxiety about Soviet intentions in the post-Tito period has heightened as a result of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan; the Romanians are also concerned", <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP82T00466R000100010007-9.pdf> (accessed 20 March 2019, 21:34)

of the Romanian president, who only spoke generally about the “contemporary problems” when facing the diplomatic corps during protocol celebrations in Bucharest.

It was in this context that, in the early 1980, with the spread of the news about the serious illness of the Yugoslav president, there was a complete concentration of Western media on calculations related to the geopolitical perspective of the Yugoslav space, primarily in the sense of a sort of anticipation of the Soviet invasion of Yugoslavia. Western visions and attitudes of the Yugoslav public opinion and the political leadership were almost identical in this context. It was clear that there was one specific clash between the ideological staging and actions of both the West itself and the Yugoslav political elite that was to succeed President Tito. From the Western perspective, news of the Soviet danger and its targeted expansion should have indicated the necessity of intensifying Yugoslavia’s engagement with the West as much as possible, and primarily for the NATO Pact itself, since it was in fact positioned as the only “straw of salvation” for the country that was facing an almost certain destruction by an absolutely overwhelming enemy. In addition, such news for internal Yugoslav political use primarily had the role of a total mobilizer of public opinion in terms of forcing the unity of the state and at the same time maintaining the full vigilance of all institutions of the system, which by that time had become quite complex and in many segments dysfunctional.

Some of the most illustrative testimonies of crucial Yugoslav actors of the time, published sometimes some 20 years after Tito’s death, as in the case of the memoirs of Raif Dizdarević (b. 1926),⁶ who served as President of the Presidency of Socialist Republic Bosnia and Herzegovina in the period 1978-1982, and later (1988-1989) in the function of the President of the Presidency of Yugoslavia, show that the degree of ideological indoctrination of virtually the entire society was at its maximum.⁷ These testimonies are full of information about ideological and practical attacks on the Yugoslav state, both from the West and from the East, about the sophisticated operation of the US-British promonarchist link, as well as about the Soviet model of “reactivation” of Aleksandar Ranković and all other methods from the endless propaganda arsenal of all Yugoslav enemies, who for decades were “just waiting for an opportunity” to fully deal with Yugoslavia and, with the illness and anticipated death of Josip Broz, that possibility seemed more real than ever before.

2. Initial American reactions regarding the growing tensions around Yugoslavia

The very dynamics of setting Western perceptions and Yugoslav internal defensive reflexes ultimately proved to be the key consequence and at the same time a kind of emulation of tactics regarding the perception of the system of the Soviet attack on Afghanistan, which had been developing since the end of December 1979 and exactly during first months of 1980, when the Yugoslav president was already in agony and when

⁶ Dizdarević 2000.

⁷ In addition, many of these testimonies continued to be significantly influenced by the indoctrination even decades after Tito’s death.

the whole country was enduring the drama because of it, for everyone was listening to the daily news about the health bulletin from Ljubljana. The dynamics of the Soviet initial advancement in Afghanistan, that is, the effectiveness of deep assault desants, which in fact very quickly made it possible for Soviets to gain control of key points throughout the country, prompted both Western and Yugoslav analysts to immediately apply Soviet ranges from Afghanistan to an imagined Yugoslav battlefield.

One of the most direct illustrations of US visions of the situation in Yugoslavia following Tito's expected death is reflected in a memorandum prepared for the US President Jimmy Carter (b. 1924) by his national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski (1928–2017)⁸ in January 1980. In the memorandum the national security adviser informs the president of the talks already held between the quadrilateral political directors, which included representatives of West Germany, France and the United Kingdom in addition to the United States, and attended by military representatives of those countries. The conclusions of the talks referred to the assessment of the possibility of a military assistance of the US and their allies in the event of the Soviet military intervention on Yugoslav soil.⁹

The National Security Advisor sublimated the issue of the form and intensity of assistance to Yugoslavia in the event of a heightened Soviet pressure and invasion in the context of a focus on the need to supply Yugoslavia and develop a system of division of duties among Western states in that case. The political directors were tasked at the next meeting scheduled for 31 January together with military representatives to analyze precisely what kind of assistance could be provided to Yugoslavia, which states would offer assistance and how best to distribute the roles in giving assistance among states in the event of an invasion.¹⁰ Brzezinski stressed that the obstacles to a fast and successful action and cooperation were the bureaucracies of the Western countries concerned, which also concerned the US.

The specific proposals of US military analysts gathered around Major General of the United States Air Force Richard Carl Bowman (b. 1926) addressed to associates in Bonn, London and Paris by telegram No. 9542 of 12 January referred to the need to send a clear message to Yugoslavia that the West would stand firmly with it and defend the concept of its independence in the event of a Soviet attack. According to the US general, this could best be achieved by sending the most sophisticated military equipment, such as Stinger or Dragon missiles, as well as TOW missiles, with the making of radar footage of US AWACS

⁸ Zbigniew Brzezinski served in that capacity throughout the whole term of the US President Carter, from 20 January 1977 to 20 January 1981.

⁹ "Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski) to President Carter", "SUBJECT Yugoslavia: Contingency Planning (S)." "In addition to our own contingency plans to be implemented upon Tito's death, at the quadripartite meetings the Political Directors of the FRG, France, Britain and the US, together with the Military Officers of these countries associated with the quadripartite meetings, have been engaged in an ongoing study of assistance to Yugoslavia in the event of Soviet pressure on or intervention in Yugoslavia." Carter Library, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, Country File, Box 86, Yugoslavia: 1/80. Secret. Sent for information. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980, Volume XX, Eastern Europe, 1977–1980, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v20/d275> (accessed 11 March 2019, 22:34)

¹⁰ Simes 1980: 3–25.

spy planes available for Yugoslavs.¹¹ A few days later, on 15 January, at an extraordinary meeting of NATO members in Brussels, US Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher (1925-2011) said that a wave of instability would spread to Europe, noting Romania, West Berlin and Finland, but Yugoslavia was its mainstay. His statement “After President Tito, the USSR will soon become more aggressive towards Romania and then seek to destabilize Yugoslavia,”¹² seemed very well founded at that moment.

In principle, US politics and the media during the months of Tito’s agony, which ended in Ljubljana on 4 May, had been quite lavish in their approach to the Yugoslav question, which in many respects gave rise to ignorance of the essential elements in the complex Yugoslav social system. What was also present was an objective inability to predict successfully the development of the situation in a constellation where many variables overlapped. In a Washington Post article of 2 March entitled “Soviet Strategy: Unravel Yugoslavia”, journalist Jack Anderson, citing sources from the CIA, reiterated the Soviet Union’s efforts to act against Yugoslavia. In particular, claims were made that in this attempt the Soviets would exclusively use people in Yugoslavia who remained faithful to the idea of the Comintern and later Cominform, “known in Yugoslavia as Cominformists” and who were just waiting to take action because they were constantly in contact with the Soviet Union, primarily through the centres in Moscow, Kiev and Prague.¹³ Such somewhat sensationalist excursions further obscured the possibilities of actually understanding the true state of affairs in Yugoslavia and this remained a basis of American perception until Tito’s death.

On the day after Tito’s death, in its issue of 5 May, The New York Times published a large text about the late Yugoslav president entitled “Giant Among Communists Governed Like a Monarch”, where once again the specifics of the Yugoslav system in relation to all other communist states were emphasized above everything. The readers were offered an explanation of the complex context of Titoism as a specific form of political organization, i.e. communism with elements of the free market, Western publications available on newsstands, including erotic content magazines, and a significant role in decision-making by all employees, and most importantly, the freedom for literally all citizens to travel¹⁴ was the ultimate sign of recognizing the freedom of the society in which these citizens lived.

¹¹ Bowman went on to suggest that “if the crisis were bad enough and the Yugoslavs requested” the United States could provide Stinger, Dragon, and TOW missiles, as well as “tie US AWACS radar downlink into the Yugoslav air defense net.” National Archives, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy File, P870104-0252, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v20/d275> (accessed 11 March 2019, 22:47)

¹² Jakovina 2007: 295–320.

¹³ “The Soviets, therefore, are more likely to use the same strategy that they have initiated in the Persian Gulf – to destabilize, divide, to decentralize and dismember Yugoslavia. They will seek to stir up old animosities and hostilities among the 22 million Croats, Bosnians, Macedonians, Serbs, Montenegrins, Slovenes and other ethnic factions. To accomplish this, Kremlin is expected to use Soviet sympathizers known in Yugoslavia as Cominformists.” <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90-00965R000100170128-5.pdf> (accessed 19 March 2019, 20:57)

¹⁴ “What emerged in Yugoslavia was to become known as Titoism, a brand of Communism with free-market forces, consumerism, Western publications at the newsstands, including nude centerfold magazines, a decision-sharing role for employees called workers’ self-management, and, importantly, freedom for virtually all citizens to travel abroad and to return at will.” The New York Times, 5 May 1980, “Giant Among Communists Governed Like a Monarch” by Raymond H. Anderson. <http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/topics/tito-obit.pdf> (accessed 15 March 2019, 20:27)

The author concentrated on Tito's biography from his childhood in Kumrovec in Zagorje, through detailed descriptions of his activities in the communist movement and war adventures, and the construction of the socialist Yugoslavia and all the way until his appearance at the Non-Aligned Summit in Havana in September 1979, when the Yugoslav president opposed Fidel Castro's view that the Non-Aligned Movement needed to be brought closer to the Soviet Union,¹⁵ which also in the eyes of many Americans meant the emphatic potential of Yugoslavia in the context of positioning itself against the Soviet Union. The biographical segment also dealt with the details of Tito's private life, that is, his marriages and relationships, and especially his relationship with Jovanka Broz, which was "mysteriously broken" in 1977.

With a detailed analysis of Tito's lavishness between the East and West (without escaping episodes of occasional ideological clashes with the US), the main focus was definitely on Tito's fighting spirit and on the fact that the Yugoslav President became the only international symbol of recognizing of the country he led in the decades after World War II. The text also brings details of the internal (linguistic and ethnic) differences in the Yugoslav state and in that sense Tito was highlighted as a crucial factor in the unity of Yugoslavia, that is, the only person who without a discussion was accepted as the chief arbiter in all situations, either because of the agreement, worship, or fear.¹⁶

When the text of one of the most circulating and influential American dailies is analyzed in full, it is clear that the basic stream of recognition of the late Yugoslav president, including the state, or system, which was thought to be primarily organized and symbolized by him, was extremely positive. Tito's personality was seen as a welcome atypicality in a world of markedly rigid political divisions.

Unlike The New York Times, the Washington Post, in its also very extensive article of 5 May, focused more on analyzing the very situation in Yugoslavia at the time of Tito's death, that is, the mechanisms of power transfer to the collective presidency and the perspectives which in that context stood before Yugoslav citizens. For its readers, mostly focused on political issues, the daily from the US capital introduced the system of the Yugoslav collective presidency, which would be temporarily headed by Lazar Koliševski as the current vice president, and who then, after ten days, within the previously agreed system of rotation, was to be replaced by Cvijetin Mijatović. Future rotations at the presidency would take place annually. The rotation system in the Yugoslav Presidency, which was based on the participation of representatives of all republics and provinces, was presented by the Washington Post journalist as "a gathering of representatives of different Yugoslav nationalities."¹⁷

¹⁵ "Last year, at the age of 87, Tito flew to Havana to lead a fight at a third-world conference against efforts by Fidel Castro, the Cuban leader, to orient the movement towards Soviet Union." Ibid.

¹⁶ "Tito seemed to be the main unifying force in the country. The mystique of his wartime leadership remained a powerful influence. His was virtually the only voice in Yugoslavia to which all listened, whether in agreement, awe or fright." Ibid.

¹⁷ "The collective state presidency, designated by Tito to succeed him and composed of representatives of Yugoslavia's many different nationalities, went into emergency session. Its first act was to appoint Vice President Lazar Kolisevski, 66, as head of state. Kolisevski will serve as modern Yugoslavia's second communist president for only about two weeks under a complex system of annual rotation of important posts. He will then be succeeded by the new vice president, Cvijetin Mijatovic." "President Tito Dies" by Michael Dobbs, Washington

The Washington Post came from classical ideological positions that the crucial danger to Yugoslavia at the very moment of Tito's death was the prospect of a Soviet attack, that is, of a revanchist ideological action. In that sense, the author of the article, Michael Dobbs, did not miss the opportunity to emphasize the existence of internal Yugoslav divisions and the expectation that the Soviet Union would just seek to use them within its goals.¹⁸

Hand in hand with the reaction of public opinion in the US was the reaction of the US state administration. On 4 May, immediately after the death of the Yugoslav leader, President Jimmy Carter issued a statement saying "President Josip Broz Tito was a towering figure on the world stage. After leading his partisan forces to a hard-fought victory during World War II, he founded and led the postwar Yugoslav State for nearly 35 years. During that period he and his peoples faced many challenges, but met them with a resolute determination to maintain Yugoslavia's independence and unity and its own unique approach to domestic and foreign policies."¹⁹

In addition to the protocol statement of condolences to the new Yugoslav President Lazar Koliševski and to the entire Yugoslav people, the US President also made several sentences that essentially sublimated the US position on Yugoslavia globally. He stressed that, for more than three decades, US policy, regardless of the political orientation of the current government (Republican or Democratic), had been aimed at supporting "independence, territorial integrity and unity of Yugoslavia". As President Tito's death "came at a particularly unfavourable period of international relations", the US President also felt the need to emphasize that his country would "continue with a long-term policy of support for Yugoslavia, and do whatever is necessary to provide such support." Particularly significant was the statement in which President Carter emphasized that the US government "would not tolerate terrorist acts against Yugoslavia or its representatives here," referring to US soil. He also expressed confidence in the new Yugoslav leadership, "created in accordance with constitutional provisions".²⁰

The statement made by the President of the leading country of the NATO and of the entire Western world further emphasized the fact that, in the context of the perception of

Post, 5 May 1980 https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1980/05/05/president-tito-dies/0df00f64-f525-4783-8a0c-2af1b92b2f9a/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.a8671065dad5 (accessed 15 March 2019, 23:37)

¹⁸ "Although the transition of power had taken place smoothly, this Balkan country of 22 million faces a complex variety of problems that include pressures from the Soviet Union and considerable internal divisions. The Soviets have never reconciled themselves to Yugoslavia's defection, diplomats here say. Apart from a strategic interest in gaining access to the Mediterranean, the Soviets would also like to eliminate Tito's ideological heresy, which other East Europeans find attractive. At the same time, Moscow would silence a Third World force that has opposed Soviet efforts to harness the nonalignment movement." Ibid.

¹⁹ <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/josip-broz-tito-statement-the-death-the-president-yugoslavia> (accessed 16 March 2019, 21:27)

²⁰ "For more than three decades, under administrations of both parties, it has been the policy of the United States to support the independence, territorial integrity, and unity of Yugoslavia. President Tito's death comes at a particularly troubled time in international relations. I reaffirm today that America will continue its longstanding policy of support for Yugoslavia and do what it must to provide that support. I pledge again that this Government will not tolerate terrorist acts directed against Yugoslavia or its representatives here. We have confidence in the new Yugoslav leadership, duly established in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution of Yugoslavia, to lead the nation and its economy through this period. I have already informed the Yugoslav President, Mr. Koliševski, of my condolences and my Nation's support." Ibid.

Yugoslavia in the American eyes, basically all the options were on the table or under consideration at all times and that it was clear that there was a new situation altogether. Clearly emphasizing the intention to support Yugoslavia in the fight against external and internal enemies further proved that the Americans were well aware of the dimensions of Yugoslav enemies, both externally and internally, as well as of the mechanisms themselves for potentially manipulating aspects of such “enemies” in the context of their possible instrumentalization against Yugoslavia if it would suit American interests.

There was no dilemma that for American foreign policy intentions at that moment the key intention was to prevent a potential Soviet invasion of Yugoslavia, that is, to prevent the expansion of the Warsaw Pact-controlled area all the way to the shores of the Adriatic Sea. In this sense, loud assurances were given to the Yugoslav state and government in terms of readiness to help, even in the event of an invasion, which, in the classic sense, wanted to demonstrate American deterrence tactics based on an understanding of one’s own military superiority over opponents.

Nevertheless, the political weight of Tito’s death had direct consequences on the position of President Carter. Just after the announcement of the news of the death of the Yugoslav leader, a decision was announced that the US president would be absent from a funeral at which each presence had a prominent political character and that he would be replaced by Vice-President Walter Mondale. In that way the Republican Party received the desired cause for fierce attack on the current administration of the Democratic Party.

In the issue of 9 May of the influential Florida daily *The Ledger* (owned by The New York Times Company), just after the funeral, the diplomat and future republican president George H. W. Bush (1924–2018) vehemently attacked the US president’s decision not to attend Josip Broz Tito’s funeral in person. In a speech he gave in Annapolis, Maryland, the former US ambassador to Beijing and the United Nations, who was campaigning for the Republican Party as part of the electoral process (which would end with the triumph of Republican presidential candidate, Ronald Reagan), stressed the need to give adequate weight and respect to the Yugoslav side, which had decidedly distanced itself from the Soviet Union.²¹

George Bush’s reaction just relied on the current geopolitical constellation in the Cold War, where especially the republican wing of the American political spectrum felt it necessary to take every opportunity to halt the Soviet expansion in all parts of the world and gain all possible allies to accomplish such a mission. Of particular importance to Bush was the fact that the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev was at the funeral. He therefore argued that all US allies must be concerned about Tito’s death and that President Carter, along with his advisers, made the huge mistake of noting that the situation in Yugoslavia was just critical

²¹ “Bush blasts Carter for not attending Tito funeral.” George Bush said Thursday that President Carter made a big mistake for not attending a funeral of Yugoslavia Marshal because the United States should do nothing that even “inferentially slights the Yugoslavs at a time that country has pulled away from the Soviet Union”. *The Ledger*, 9 May 1980, page 4. <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1346&dat=19800509&id=edEvAAAIBAJ&Sjid=5PoDAAAIBAJ&pg=4437,3526115> (accessed 11 March 2019, 22:54)

in the context of the future relationship of the conflicting forces.²²

The White House commented on the allegations by the statement that the US administration was “well represented” in Belgrade and that the main reasons for the president’s personal inability to attend the funeral were related to his general preference for avoiding most travels during the Iranian crisis,²³ that is, he personally felt that in the given situation his journey would not be adequate.²⁴ To further improve the impression, the US president nevertheless visited Yugoslavia and Tito’s tomb at the Flower House in Belgrade on 24 and 25 June and spoke with the newly established Yugoslav Presidency, which was then headed, as part of its first annual rotation, by Cvijetin Mijatović (1913-1993).²⁵ The Washington Post expressed some dismay at the visit due to the fact that the US president was obliged to speak with as many as eight partners and it seems that such a Yugoslav rotational practice would be rather impractical for the future.²⁶

3. British stance towards situation in Yugoslavia

Ambivalent attitudes about the perception of future Yugoslav stability prevailed in both the British and West German public during the 1980s. Ever since mid 1970s British public opinion had been preparing for political changes that, as expected, would occur in Yugoslavia at the time of Tito’s death. As early as mid 1975 the British ambassador to Belgrade, Dugald Stewart, reported in great detail to London about Tito’s health. As a result, the British Foreign Office had, since 1975, had a detailed plan of action in case of Tito’s death. In this regard, adequate statements were prepared in advance by both the Queen and the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister and the composition of the British delegation to attend the funeral was strictly set.²⁷ The British experience of Yugoslavia during the 1970s was largely reduced to a relative dismay at the strange modalities of life in Yugoslavia, that is, a mixture of Western and Eastern social systems. London-based *The Guardian* insisted in particular on Yugoslavia’s contradiction, arguing that Yugoslavia was both a communist and a free society, in the meantime becoming a mixture of communism and anomalies from

²² “Breznev will be there... Every one of our allies must be concerned about the death of Tito...The President made a big mistake. What happens in Yugoslavia is going to be critical... I simply cannot understand that the president and his advisers didn’t understand this.” Ibid.

²³ In doing so, Carter referred to a hostage crisis in which 52 U.S. officials and citizens, who were hiding in the US Embassy premises in Tehran during an attack by Iranian revolutionary forces on the embassy because the United States refused to extradite former Shah Reza Pahlavi to Iran, were kept as hostages in Tehran. This process lasted exactly 444 days, from 4 November 1979 to 20 January 1981. Buchan 2013: 257.

²⁴ “A White House official said Wednesday that the United States was ‘ably represented’ at the funeral. He said, after noting that Carter had so far refrained from most travel during the Iranian crisis, that the President ‘felt a foreign trip under these circumstances would not be appropriate’.”

²⁵ <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/travels/president/yugoslavia> (accessed 21 March 2019, 21:32)

²⁶ “Carter’s Visit to Be a Tryout for 8-Man Yugoslav Presidency”, by Michael Dobbs, Washington Post, 24 June 1980, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1980/06/24/carters-visit-to-be-a-tryout-for-8-man-yugoslav-presidency/ee4ebd30-b574-4064-bcc3-1b4da763fbb4/?utm_term=.f037b3e05957 (accessed 20 March 2019, 20:14)

²⁷ Document under the title “Contingency Planning in the Event of the Death of President Tito of Yugoslavia”, in the frame of file “Tito’s Expectation of Active Life”, was concluded already on 19 July 1975. Batović and Kasalo 2012: 12–13.

the Western world, which made it so unique.²⁸

When the news of Tito's illness emerged in the early 1980, the British political system as well as the public opinion were fundamentally quite prepared and aspects of the foreign policy system acted relatively quickly. Based on the exchange of information with other NATO members, the Foreign Office estimated that there would be no military intervention by the Soviet Union in Yugoslavia, but there were assumptions that an attempt could be made to politically destabilize the country. Britain's Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, still relatively new to her post²⁹ but with a clearly stated uncompromising agenda over the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, recognized the extraordinary importance of the Yugoslav position in the current geopolitical constellation and on 15 January said in the British parliament that the British government would do everything to preserve Yugoslav independence. In addition, she insisted on her own visit to Yugoslavia, which was in preparations for March.

In this regard, British policy also followed the general positioning of the European Economic Community (EEC) on the problem of Yugoslav heritage after Tito's eventual death. As early as mid January, the EEC Foreign Ministers Council decided to conclude a favourable trade agreement between Yugoslavia and the EEC. The initiative was also an attempt to re-position the EEC towards Yugoslavia, given that between 1970 and 1979 the EEC trade segment with Yugoslavia dropped from 43 percent to 35 percent in the total volume of Yugoslav foreign trade. In addition, the intention was to further reduce the role of the East in shaping Yugoslav economic policy and, in particular, trade. The agreement would help in the long run to reduce in the meantime the growing Yugoslav external debt (largely due to the debt to the EEC Member States) as well as the trade deficit, primarily by making the Yugoslav economy instantly facilitated the export of products to the EEC space. The treaty was finalized in mid-April, but its ratification was delayed for several more years.³⁰

Western analysts were particularly concerned with the Yugoslav economic situation, knowing that the key to future Yugoslav political orientation depended on how and to whom Yugoslavia would be tied because of aspects of economic dependence. In this sense, there was a conscious intention to make Yugoslavia even more dependent on increasing dependence on the West. In addition, it was clear to the West, and especially to the Americans, that the standard of living in Yugoslavia had reached an enviable level for a socialist country and that its eventual drop would lead to an outbreak of fierce internal tensions in the country.³¹

²⁸ "Yugoslavia is a contradiction: communist, yet a free society. The explanation is that it is no longer purely communist, yet there are anomalies, which westerners would regard as serious limitations of freedom. Above all, Yugoslavia is highly self-disciplined.", "The contradiction of Yugoslavia" by Michael Lake, *The Guardian* on 21 February 1970. <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2012/feb/21/archive-1970-contradiction-of-yugoslavia> (accessed 21 March 2019, 20:52)

²⁹ Margaret Thatcher had been Prime Minister since 4 May 1979.

³⁰ CIA report, written for Lawrence Eagleburger (1930–2011), who was then deputy US secretary of state, and was former US ambassador to Yugoslavia (1977–1980), and additionally served in Belgrade earlier as a diplomat (1961–1965). <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85T00287R000501700001-0.pdf> (accessed 18 March 2019, 20:51)

³¹ CIA report under title "Yugoslavia: The Strains Begin to Tell": "Yugoslavia's economic problems are part of Tito's legacy. The country's 19 billion USD debt burden... has resulted from heavy dependence on foreign

It was certainly not particularly favourable for the British relations with Yugoslavia, as the activities of Croatian political emigration on the British soil became increasingly intense over the years. Among other things, in January 1980, the “Third Congress of the Croatian National Council” was held, in which even the former minister of Croatian pro-fascist state established during the Second World War, Vjekoslav Vrančić, who had lived in Argentina for decades, participated. As a result, Yugoslav diplomacy strenuously protested to London that something like this had been made possible in the British capital.³² However, at Tito’s funeral on 8 May in Belgrade, the United Kingdom sent a very high-level delegation, which included Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher as well as the British Foreign Minister Peter Carrington and the Queen’s husband Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.

4. West Germany and Yugoslavia in 1980

Of particular importance for the overall perception of Yugoslavia in the eyes of the west was the positioning of the West German government, including the role of the West German media. Because of the geography, and especially based on the fact that hundreds of thousands of Yugoslav workers were situated in the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany, West Germans themselves were much more aware of the events in Yugoslavia, so their analyses had a somewhat specific character.

From the very first news of Tito’s illness in January 1980 and the form of engagement of the international doctoral team, a systematic analysis of the perspectives of the Yugoslav situation in the German media began. The initial focus was on the very course of the treatment of Josip Broz Tito so the amount of information presented instantly made West German public definitely the best informed public about Tito’s health development, or in any case more informed than it was possible for the Yugoslav public, who received only brief information from Ljubljana on daily basis.³³

However, soon the topic of the fate of the Yugoslav state given the potential Soviet invasion began to dominate the West German public.³⁴ *Der Spiegel* and *Die Zeit*, Hamburg papers, were particularly analytical but also imaginative in the context of the analysis of possible directions for the development of the Soviet invasion.³⁵ In doing so, *Der Spiegel* emphasized the importance of Yugoslav internal problems and in its review of 21 January 1980 the paper focused specifically on the fact that, for “many Serbs and Montenegrins, the

loans to spur economic growth in the 1970’s.” <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP83M00914R002700060008-3.pdf> (accessed 19 March 2019, 22:37)

³² Batović and Kasalo 2012: 15.

³³ „Im Regelfall wird das verschlossene Blutgefäß dabei durch eine körpereigene Ader, meist ein Stück von der großen Beinvene, ersetzt. Der Eingriff dauert rund eine Stunde und ist auch sehr alten Menschen zuzumuten. Weil aber Titos Beinvenen wegen ihrer Erweiterung als Schlagader-Ersatz nicht in Frage kamen, entschied sich das Ärzteteam für eine Kunststoff-Ader.“ Ibid..

³⁴ „Zur Zeit entwickelt sich die am meisten spürbare Spannung zwischen Belgrad und der albanischen Minderheit in der unterentwickelten Provinz Kosovo.“, „*Ein Vorgeschmack auf die Krise*“, *Die Zeit*, 6/1980, 01.02.1980; „Jugoslawien, nach dem Ende von Titos Herrschaft vermutlich ein auseinanderbrechendes Staatswesen, das eine sowjetische Intervention nur so herausfordern würde.“, „... wenn die Russen Boston besetzen“, *Der Spiegel* 4/1980, 21.01.1980.

³⁵ Beštić-Bronza 2017: 75–77.

enemy is not currently based in Moscow but in Zagreb. In the event of a civil war, the army will confidently turn against Catholic, anti-Communist and Western-oriented Croats.”³⁶ This was a testimony to the provenance of much of Spiegel’s knowledge of internal affairs in Yugoslavia, but also how the boundaries between the real perceptions and journalistic sensationalism were sometimes very thin.

During the first half of 1980, a number of interviews with certain military experts were recorded in the German media, which sought to dissect in detail the possibilities of a military invasion of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact countries in Yugoslavia. In March, *Der Spiegel* published a major interview with the Austrian General Wilhelm Kuntner, who was considered a tank unit specialist, and outlined detailed visions of developing a Soviet invasion plan and Yugoslav defense capabilities.³⁷ From such analyzes, it definitively emerged that anxiety existed on the soil not only of the Federal Republic of Germany but also of Austria, that the Soviet invasion of Yugoslavia could represent an introduction to the wider movements of the Warsaw Pact in Central Europe and West Germany, as well as formally neutral Austria, were in that context literally on the first front line. Thus, the emphasis on the Soviet quantitative superiority should also serve as an additional appeal to Americans to understand the gravity of the situation.³⁸ The very fact that the Austrian expert ended his excursion with the hope that Yugoslavia could eventually wage a successful partisan war against the Soviets shows how not only on the territory of Yugoslavia, but also in the wider region of Central Europe, the mentality conditioned by aspects of the legacy of the Second World War was still very dominant and how because of that some analytical approach often resulted in very retrograde conclusions.

On the other hand, it was precisely Hamburg’s *Die Zeit* that insisted, especially because of a sudden overflow of military experts, that there was a pronounced tendency of “experts” towards sensationalism in order to sell their own “expertise” to the media. In this respect, it was warned that it was completely exaggerated to imagine that the Soviets were already massively entering Yugoslavia. In doing so, however, the journalist of *Die Zeit* newspaper, Christian Schmidt-Häuer, emphasized that such fantasies were present not only among some Western military experts but also among “Albanian communist sectarians”.³⁹

As no invasion came over the subsequent months, the attention of the West German

³⁶ „Für viele Serben und Montenegriener sitzt der Feind auch heute noch nicht in Moskau, sondern im kroatischen Zagreb. Heißt der Ernstfall Bürgerkrieg, wird sich, muß sich die Armee mit Gewißheit gegen das katholische, weithin antikommunistische, nach Westen orientierte Kroatien wenden.“ „Gott stehe den Jugoslawen bei. *Nach Tito - alle Macht den Generalen*“, *Der Spiegel* 4/1980, 21.01.1980.

³⁷ „Spiegel Gespräch: Moskaus Armee gegen Partisanen hilflos“, *Der Spiegel* 12/1980, 17.03.1980.

³⁸ „Vor zehn Jahren hatten wir in Europa ausgewogene militärische und politische Kräfte. Dieses Gleichgewicht der Kräfte am Beginn des Entspannungsprozesses hätte damals eine militärische Veränderung nicht zugelassen. Nun gibt es eine solche Ausgewogenheit nur noch zwischen der UdSSR und den USA durch die interkontinentalen Raketen. Bei dem auf Europa gerichteten eurostrategischen Potential hingegen besteht ein Übergewicht der Sowjet-Union, das noch in den nächsten vier, fünf Jahren bestehen wird.“ *Ibid.*

³⁹ „Die „brüderliche Hilfe“, der Durchstoß der Roten Armee bis zum Mittelmeer – wovon Titos Partisanen einst träumten — wurden unmittelbar nach dem Afghanistan Schock zum Menetekel des Westens. Szenarien, Apokalypsen und Science fiction-Schmöker phantasiereicher Generäle wurden von den Medien so breit ausgewalzt, als trieben sie geradezu die Lust am Untergang. Aufgeregte Militärexperten im Westen und kommunistische Sektierer in Albanien entdeckten bereits sowjetische Truppenmarschieruren an der jugoslawischen Grenze.“, Christian Schmidt-Häuer, „Gelassen am Ende der Ära Tito“, *Die Zeit* 05/1980, 25.01.1980.

government and the public was focused solely on the question of what would happen to Tito and what the transfer of power would look like shortly after his death.⁴⁰ When the news broke out on 4 May that the Yugoslav president had passed away, West German public opinion had unanimously paid tribute to Tito as a man who had shown political wisdom on numerous occasions. The biography of the Yugoslav leader was dissected to the smallest detail and his rise from poverty in Zagorje to rule over a country even larger than West Germany was presented as the embodiment of the “fairy tale in the Balkans”.⁴¹

Along with unanimous praises at the expense of the Yugoslav president from the West German government and the media came the pragmatic approach of Chancellor Helmut Schmidt (1918–2015), who had excellent relations with Tito, but who saw an excellent opportunity to meet with the East German leader Erich Honecker (1912–1994) as well as with other statesmen in the upcoming funeral in Belgrade.⁴² Thus, unlike the United States, FR Germany sent the highest possible delegation to the funeral in Belgrade on 8 May. In addition to Chancellor Schmidt, President of the Republic Karl Carstens (1914–1992), Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher (1927–2016), and former chancellor and then leader of the Socialist International, Willy Brandt (1913–1992) were present. In this way, the role of West Germany in European frameworks was emphasized, as well as the special dimension of relations that Yugoslavia had with that country, which was reflected in the fact that West Germany was the most important foreign trade partner of Yugoslavia.

The West German delegation made a number of very successful bilateral contacts⁴³ and the Yugoslav side was also very pleased with the impression that that event was actually one of the largest state funerals in history (among visitors there were four monarchs, 31 heads of state, 20 prime ministers and 47 foreign ministers).⁴⁴ Helmut Schmidt was so pleased with the outcome of the negotiations over the funeral that he even stated on his return: “We should have such a funeral every year.”⁴⁵

5. Change of perception as consequence of the growing crisis

According to many announcements by the West, Tito’s funeral should have served as a significant step in further approaching to Yugoslavia, that is, in the opening of a new episode

⁴⁰ Genscher 1997: 959.

⁴¹ „Ein lebenslustiger Kättersohn aus der Zagorje, einer Landschaft -noch heute Notstandsgebiet -- zwischen Kroatien und Slowenien, gründete einen Staat, hielt 35 Jahre lang alle auswärtigen Gefahren von ihm fern und alle inländischen Kritiker kurz, förderte Volkswohlstand, Volksbildung und Gesundheitswesen -- es klingt wie eine Mär vom Balkan. Doch so ist es wirklich gewesen.“ Ibid.

⁴² Helmut Schmidt, *Menschen und Mächte*, Teil 2: Die Deutschen und ihre Nachbarn, Berlin 1990, 546

⁴³ „Daß sich der DDR-Staatsratsvorsitzende Erich Honecker und Bundeskanzler Helmut Schmidt vor der Residenz des Bonner Botschafters in Belgrad mit bemüht herzlichem Winke-Winke verabschieden, geschieht, glaubt man der offiziellen jugoslawischen Nachrichtenagentur Tanjug, im Auftrag des verstorbenen Josip Broz Tito. Das Treffen in der Tolstojeva 29 am vergangenen Donnerstag müsse, so hatte die Agentur in einem euphorischen Vorausblick gemeint, einfach ein Erfolg werden.“, „Nicht zu breit lächeln“, *Der Spiegel* 20/1980, 12.05.1980.

⁴⁴ Mirosavljev 1981: 262–264.

⁴⁵ „Der deutsche Kanzler sah es pragmatischer: "So ein Begräbnis müßte man jedes Jahr haben."“, *„Trauer-Gipfel am Grabe“*, *Die Zeit*, 20/1980, 09.05.1980.

of economic cooperation. However, this did not happen. Following the interest and positive euphoria in the context of perception of Tito's personality and heritage, the US, British and West German public generally viewed Yugoslavia in the years to come in a much more pejorative light, without showing a significant initiative towards developing an economic cooperation that would be essential for Yugoslavia's importance for longer-term stability.

Just a few years later, the same American newspaper which wrote in 1980 about Yugoslavia as a potential US ally and about the need for US assistance to this country threatened by the impending Soviet invasion with much sympathy for the image and work of the Yugoslav President Tito, mostly wrote to their readers much more critical texts on views on the current state of affairs in the Yugoslav state. Negative tones were prevalent in almost all aspects of perception, with a clear ideological disappointment over the fact that, after Tito's death, Yugoslavia did not formally approach NATO structures, that is, it did not take a crucial step towards becoming a part of Western socio-economic circle.

It was the New York Times that was at the forefront of such a transformation. A very classic illustration in this respect is the article entitled "Yugoslavia since Tito" by Fergus M. Bordewich in April 1986. The author concentrated on the analysis of the weaknesses of the system of the Yugoslav leadership itself, arguing that the last six years after Tito's death brought to the surface a number of weaknesses of the Yugoslav state.⁴⁶ Accordingly, the dominance of the economy, as a crucial problem, was complete. Indisputable facts include the data that Yugoslavia's foreign debt exceeded \$20 billion, making the country one of the most indebted countries in the world, that unemployment was 17 percent, the highest rate in Europe, and that inflation rose to 85% annually.

The final conclusion was that the standard of living had fallen by 30 percent in just a few years, which was a key segment of Western, and especially American, perceptions of Yugoslav reality in the early 1980s, as well as the perspectives facing Yugoslavia in the years ahead.⁴⁷ All aspects of Western analysis in the early 1980s suggested that the long-term perspective of Yugoslavia's sustainability was very bleak, precisely because of the poor economy, which would further imply internal ethnic problems.⁴⁸

The reactions of Western media, especially those in the US, UK and FR Germany, to

⁴⁶ "In the six years since Tito's death, conflicts and jealousies that had lain buried beneath the Titoist myth have escaped like the ills of mankind from Pandora's box. Yugoslavia today is a daunting landscape of competing nationalisms, of resurgent religion, of economic disorder, of bureaucratic paralysis, of pluralists who would dismantle the one-party state and neo-Stalinists who would suppress them.", *The New York Times*, 13 April 1986, "Yugoslavia since Tito" by Fergus M. Bordewich <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/04/13/magazine/yugoslavia-since-tito.html> (accessed 19 March 2019, 20:19)

⁴⁷ "Yugoslavs trace most of their country's current problems to economics. Indeed, a few simple statistics tell a dismal tale. Yugoslavia owes more than \$20 billion to foreign banks and governments, putting it among the champions of international debt. Unemployment stands at 17 percent, the highest figure in Europe. The current inflation rate has climbed to 85 percent a year. Since 1980, the standard of living has declined by 30 percent." *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Conclusion of a detailed CIA report under title "Yugoslavia: Trends in Ethnic Nationalism", from September 1983: "In sum, although the leadership may muddle through its immediate ethnic challenges, ethnic problems will continue to grow. Yugoslavia's long-term stability is likely to depend on relations between its endemic ethnic disputes, fragile economic prospects, and cumbersome, decentralized political structures." <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP84S00895R000100040008-8.pdf> (accessed 20 March 2019, 21:13)

the political situation in Yugoslavia in the period immediately before and immediately after Tito's death in May 1980 represent one of the more interesting episodes in the decades-long conglomeration of the Cold War on Yugoslav soil. At the core of this reaction was one of the latest links in this global conflict, where Yugoslavia as a state was still viewed as a relevant factor. As Yugoslavia was losing ground rapidly in economic terms even during the last years of Tito's life, its role in the eyes of the West became ever smaller. Ideological phrases that were of far greater importance and weight during the 1950s and 1960s lost dramatically on the value in the new environment of the early 1980s, which was primarily characterized by a faster movement, both in politics and militarism, and in communications and economics.

The role of the Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito was, in fact, in the eyes of Western public opinion all the time standing ahead of the role of the entire Yugoslav state. The inclination to view Yugoslavia through the prism of the classical socialist dictatorship conditioned the understanding of the Yugoslav system after Tito as completely unstable and generally irrelevant.

The new Yugoslav political leadership (i.e. the collective Presidency) dramatically missed the chances of its more efficient external positioning as well as its internal transformation, which would instantly make it a much more desirable partner for Western positions. The situation of neutrality and "non-alignment" was fundamentally completely unsustainable for Yugoslavia in the long run. On the other hand, the often very superficial and sensationalist approach of Western media as well as of state analysts did not help to create the preconditions in which, with a considerable amount of mutual trust, the desired transformations and aspects of future partnership could be achieved. In this sense, the events of 1980 were a clear hint of the relatively recent end of the Yugoslav state and especially of the West's attitudes towards that development.

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СЛАВОЈКА БЕШТИЋ-БРОНЗА

Универзитет у Бања Луци, Филозофски факултет
Одсек за историју

ЗАПАДНА ПЕРЦЕПЦИЈА ЈУГОСЛАВИЈЕ ТОКОМ 1980. ГОДИНЕ

Резиме

Касних седамдесетих и раних осамдесетих година XX века нови талас захваљења односа између НАТО пакта и Варшавског пакта доминирао је разним аспектима светске политике. У овој ситуацији Југославија је била у средишту сложеног система односа између два блока, нарочито кад су у питању прогнозе о будућности земље непосредно пре и после смрти Јосипа Броза Тита, који је као личност тада буквално био симбол Југославије на светској политичкој сцени. У периоду после Иранске револуције и совјетске инвазије на Афганистан, перцепција потенцијалне кризе у Југославији је апсолутно доминирала светским медијима током прве половине осамдесетих година. У месецима након Титове смрти и током прве године након његове сахране западни медији су били веома активни у покушајима да предвиде судбину југословенске федерације, а нека од предвиђања су била веома песимистична, нарочито у контексту очекивања могуће совјетске инвазије усмерене на Југославију. Уопштено гледано, карактер западне медијске анализе југословенске стварности је за кратко време доживео значајне промене и поглед на југословенску државу се прилично брзо променио, углавном у негативном контексту. Стога су примери америчких, британских и западнонемачких аналитичких приступа нарочито илустративни. Пошто су управо код ове три државе промене у перцепцији биле највеће и најилустративније, рад намерава да се концентрише само на аспекте ових перцепција.

Кључне речи: Југославија, Јосип Броз Тито, Сједињене Америчке Државе, Велика Британија, Западна Немачка.