

Andrzej Koryn

THE FEDERATION ISSUE IN THE BALKANS AND THE DANUBE BASIN AFTER WORLD WAR II

The idea of a Balkan, or more broadly speaking Danube federation has a long tradition reaching back to the middle of the 19th c.; it sprang up in Hungary at the time of the Springtide of Nations and blossomed later in the Southern Slav territories, especially in Serbia. Politicians of various nationalities living in the Balkan–Danube region perceived it as a chance for defence against the hegemony of the Habsburg, Russian or Ottoman empires. However, during the creation of a new order in Europe after World War I it did not play a major role — apart from the realization of its narrow variant in the form of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croatsians and Slovenians, after 1929 the Kingdom of Yugoslavia — since on the one hand it clashed with the strivings of the Great Powers who treated this region as a buffer zone, and on the other with very strong nationalistic trends among the nationalities of this very region, especially revitalized when some of them faced new opportunities of creating national states and when the whole Balkan–Danube region faced the problem of a re–delineation of its borders.

However, this idea did not completely die away in the inter-war period. It was from time to time revived by its adherents, politicians and publicists, especially Yugoslav but also Bulgarian and others. It often re–emerged in connection with the Macedonian question, which was one of major conflict points in the Balkan area, but on the other hand it inspired a search for solutions directed towards supra–state structures. In a sense, federative concepts underlay the Balkan conferences and the Balkan Entente of the 1930s.

This idea was also invoked by the communist movement, though it had other, Moscow–directed purposes in view — which

found their expression in the creation of the Balkan Communist Federation on the initiative of the 3rd International in 1920¹.

The concept of federative or confederative unions in the Balkans, in the Danube basin and in Central Europe gained new impetus after the outbreak of World War II. This was visible not only in the political circles of the severely afflicted states of this region — occupied, frequently dismembered or turned into Axis satellites — but also in the political Cabinets of the Great Powers, above all Great Britain.

The question of regional federations, seen as an element of the future post-war system of European security and as a significant instrument of the traditional British policy of balance of power, was considered in London already in Autumn 1939². From there came the impulses to the politicians of this region — who, anyway, generally remained in exile in London or Cairo. These strivings and endeavours resulted in the initiation of talks between Polish and Czechoslovak politicians on the one hand and Yugoslav and Greek on the other — talks that found their expression in agreements of January 1942, clearly referring to the idea of the Balkan federation and Central-European confederation, and were intended as their nucleus³.

The British plans concerning the creation of the Balkan Federation took into account as its participants Yugoslavia, Greece, Bulgaria, Albania and perhaps Rumania, maybe even Turkey⁴. The Foreign Office analysed the internal conditions of such a future federation. Envisaged as its center was a Greek-Yugoslav union, joined successively by Bulgaria and other countries, and not the equally possible Yugoslav-Bulgarian union, since in such a situation the role of Athens would clearly weaken

¹ Z. Rutyna, *Jugosławia na arenie międzynarodowej 1943–1948 (Yugoslavia on the International Arena 1943–1948)*, Warszawa 1981, p. 149.

² H. Bartoszewicz, *Związek Sowietki wobec koncepcji federacyjnych w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej 1941–1948 (The Soviet Union in the Face of Federation Concepts in Central-Eastern Europe 1941–1948)*, "Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego" 1995, MCLXXVII, "Prace Historyczne", fasc. 118, pp. 137–138.

³ M. J. Zacharias, *Jugosławia w polityce Wielkiej Brytanii 1940–1945 (Britain's Policy on Yugoslavia 1940–1945)*, Wrocław-Warszawa 1985, pp. 84–85; E. Duraczyński, *ZSRR wobec projektów konfederacji polsko-czechosłowackiej (1940–1943) (The USSR in the Face of Projects for a Polish-Czechoslovakian Confederation, 1940–1943)*, "Dzieje Najnowsze" 1994, fasc. 3, pp. 135–136.

⁴ Public Record Office (further on PRO), Foreign Office (further on FO) 371/37173, R587/214/57; PRO CAB 66/59, W.P. (44)707.

and the whole region would be more susceptible to penetration by the USSR⁵.

On the other hand, restraint was shown with regard to the Turkish initiatives of the first half of 1943 to enter into talks with Bulgaria, Rumania and Hungary over the prospective creation of a federation that would strengthen the region's resistance to the Soviet influence⁶. One of the reasons for this restraint — apart from the fact that these three states continued to be satellites of the Axis — was London's reckoning, since the end of 1941, with the Moscow stand on these federation plans, while after Soviet victories in 1943, envisaging and accepting the supreme role of this Power in East-European matters, London considered Stalin's consent as a condition *sine qua non*⁷. This prejudged the failure of British plans, since Stalin was by no means interested in their realization, on the contrary — saw them as referring to the policy of a "sanitary cordon"⁸.

Hence, although at the beginning the Soviet politicians avoided taking a clear stand, yet they acted so as to destroy these plans, especially as regards the project of a Polish-Czechoslovak confederation. In June 1943 they indeed signalled explicitly their negative stand on this matter and at the conference of the foreign ministers of the Three Powers in Moscow in October 1943 they achieved an actual withdrawal of London from initiating and supporting federative plans in Central and South-Eastern Europe⁹.

Since the Moscow conference, and the more so, a month later, since the conference of the Big Three in Teheran, the USSR became an unquestioned, main player in this part of Europe. This

⁵ PRO, FO 371/37173, R4144/214/57; *ibidem*, R3674/214/57. Correspondence of O. Sargent with G. Rendel from 21 and 30 April and 7 May 1943.

⁶ *ibidem*, R632/214/67; *ibidem*, R649/214/57; *ibidem*, R685/214/67; *ibidem*, R6753/214/67.

⁷ *ibidem*. Of course, this concerned not only the issue of federation, but the overall British policy towards the USSR on East-European matters.

⁸ PRO, CAB 66/51, W.P.(44)304. Soviet Policy in the Balkans. Memorandum by Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 7 June 1944.

⁹ E. Duraczyński, *op. cit.*, p. 151; H. Bartoszewicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 142–143; M. K. Kamiński, *Rząd RP Stanisława Mikołajczyka wobec konferencji ministrów spraw zagranicznych Wielkiej Brytanii, Związku Sowieckiego i Stanów Zjednoczonych w Moskwie (19–30 października 1943 roku)* (Stanisław Mikołajczyk's Government of the Republic of Poland in the Face of the British, Soviet and American Foreign Affairs Ministers' Conference in Moscow, 19–30 October 1943), "Mazowieckie Studia Humanistyczne" 1997, № 2, pp. 77–78.

also concerned the matter of a possible Balkan or Danube federation (the plans of Polish–Czechoslovak confederation were finally torpedoed in May 1943 by Moscow, who ill-disposed Czechoslovakia towards them). The British thought that the USSR, who disapproved of the plans of a wide federation, could now start supporting a more narrow, South–Slav plan, with the Yugoslav–Bulgarian union as axis. Thus, since the end of 1943 Great Britain, with a formal support of the USA, focussed all its activity in this regard on blocking the potential, and since Autumn 1944 the already real — as it was regarded — possibility of a Bulgarian–Yugoslav alliance, while taking advantage of the fact that Bulgaria was a defeated state. Great Britain had here in view the future situation of Greece and Turkey — states, which — at best linked in the future by a tri-lateral alliance with London — were considered as the basis of Great Britain's position in the eastern part of the Mediterranean.

There was a fear that the alliance, and the more so a Bulgarian–Yugoslav union as its outcome, would upset the balance of this region, isolating and weakening especially Greece and making it easier for the USSR to play the card of the Black Sea Straits. It was thought that such a union would sooner or later start to expand in the direction of Western Thrace and Aegean Macedonia.

And it was precisely the Macedonian problem that was considered crucial in London — on the one hand as threatening the integrity of Greece, in view of a rise of only a narrow, Yugoslav–Bulgarian federation, and on the other determining the appeal of the union to both states (because of the possibility of an autonomy for the united Pirin and Vardar Macedonias)¹⁰.

However, the British fears turned out to be premature since the USSR did not exhibit much interest in the realization of such plans. The USSR meant to subjugate directly particular states of South–Eastern and Central Europe, by linking them to itself with bi-lateral agreements and establishing the so-called “friendly governments”, and then introducing a system modelled on the

¹⁰ PRO, CAB 66/51; W.P. (44)304; *ibidem* CAB 66/50, W.P. (44)289. *Memorandum of O. Sargent of 30 May 1944*; *ibidem* CAB 66/59, W.P. (44)707. *Memorandum of A. Eden of 5 December 1944*; *ibidem*, War Office (further on WO) 193(302). *WO memorandum at a government session 7 July 1944*; *ibidem*. Halifax to FO, 28 Febr. 1945; *ibidem*. Houston–Boswall from Sofia to FO 21 June 1945; M. Zacharias, *op. cit.*, pp. 304–305; Z. Rutyna, *op. cit.*, pp. 155–157.

Soviet one. While the construction of such a system was underway, the USSR favoured all borderline and national conflicts in this region, since they made it easier to apply the principle of *divide et impera*¹¹. Thus the Soviet Union was not interested in the rapid liquidation of those conflicts and the strengthening of the cohesion of this region — which could result from the realization of wider or more narrow federation plans.

However, Moscow clearly did not want to give the impression that she was opposed to these plans — she looked with a friendly eye on the initiatives of the interested parties and took part in talks on this subject. All the time she controlled the situation, leaving for herself openings for any action and treating it as an element of pressure on London. It should also be taken into consideration that initial discussions on the subject of the future federation on the one hand favoured a rapprochement, but on the other disclosed the existing differences and fields of conflict.

In Autumn 1943 Yugoslav communists appeared as the main spokesmen of the future federative links, who referred rather to the goals of the above-mentioned Balkan Communist Federation than to the idea of regional unions propagated earlier by London. However, the plan proposed by Josip Broz-Tito to create the Balkan Headquarters in order to co-ordinate the activities of the national liberation movements of Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Greece and Albania, and thus form the nucleus of the future federation, fell through, faced with a refusal by the Greek Left (*EAM*) and reserve of Bulgarian communists, and above all the lack of support from the USSR.

However, in Autumn 1944 — already after the *volte-face* of Bulgaria, the rise of her Home Front government and the withdrawal of Bulgarian troops from the occupied Yugoslav (and Greek) territories — the central committees of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the Bulgarian Workers' Party (communists) started talks about an alliance pact and the future federation. The leaders of both parties, in fact wielding the power in their countries (formally still monarchies), consulted Stalin in Moscow on this matter (Edward Kardelj in November 1944, Moše

¹¹ See also: H. Bartoszewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 143; I. Maysky in his analysis of this subject submitted to Molotov on 11 Jan. 1944 drew attention that the creation of a Balkan or Danube federation after the war was at variance with USSR interests. "Istochnik" 1995, № 4.

Pijade and Anton Yugov in January 1945, Tito and Georgi Dimitrov in April 1945). The Soviet dictator invariably declared his support but at the same time recommended far-reaching caution and the protracting of the whole process because of the stand of the Anglo-Saxon powers¹². Significantly, he was ready to accept the protests of London and Washington (e.g. in Yalta in February 1945) against the Bulgarian-Yugoslav alliance pact, and explained to Bulgarians and Yugoslavs that these protests precisely blocked the possibility of an alliance between their countries, at least before the signing of a peace treaty with Bulgaria. He saw the creation of a federation as a *later* stage — and did not specify closer this extensible term. One might think then that the Kremlin's soft attitude — so rare — towards the Anglo-Saxon stand on East-European matters was connected with the above-mentioned reluctance of Moscow to stabilize the region over which she only recently extended her domination, and on the other hand with her avoidance of being suspected of creating a bloc or its mere nuclei in Eastern Europe.

This, in turn, was connected with the general matter of relations between the allies, including — as it seems — Moscow's plans for her future expansion beyond her prior sphere of influence, entertained by her until 1947. Thus the Soviets avoided any action in the East of Europe that could provoke a process of unification and consolidation of its Western part¹³.

Regardless of this wide — and probably decisive — international context, the progress in preparing the foundations of a South-Slav union was also hindered by the differences between the approach of Bulgarian and Yugoslav communists. The Bul-

¹² Z. Rutyna, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27, 153, 155.

¹³ The view that Stalin all the time took into consideration the extension of the USSR sphere of influence in the West is only a hypothesis, since there is no source documentation to support it. However, the analysis of the whole USSR policy between 1944-1947 seems to corroborate it. Nevertheless, we know that there were tendencies among Soviet diplomats and experts to continue the co-operation with Western Powers after the war, on the basis of a clear definition of the spheres of influence — yet they were not the decision-makers on this issue — see V. O. Pechatnow, *The Big Three after World War II: New Documents on Soviet Thinking about Post War Relations with the United States and Great Britain*, Cold War International History Project. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, July 1995. See also L. Glibianskiy, *Problemy mezhdunarodno-politicheskogo strukturirovaniya Vostochnoy Evropy v period formirovaniya sovet'skogo bloka v 1940-e gody*, in: *Kholodnaya vojna, Novye podkhody, novye dokumenty*, ed. M. M. Narinskiy, Moskva 1995, pp. 99-100.

garians were in favour of a dualistic concept (formula 1 + 1), that is a federation of the two countries on an equal basis (possibly later to be joined on the same basis by others), while Yugoslavs wanted to create a federative state consisting of seven members (formula 6 + 1), that is of Bulgaria and six autonomous national members of Yugoslavia¹⁴. Neither side wanted to accept the variant of the other — indeed, for Bulgaria the acceptance of the Yugoslav formula was more difficult. On top of that she had to deal with the Macedonian problem — was Pirin Macedonia to remain in the Bulgarian part of the federative state, or to create its federative unit together with the existing Yugoslav (Vardar) Macedonia?

The attempts to realize Yugoslav–Bulgarian federative plans, even their initial stage in the form of an agreement of allies, were stalemated in Spring 1945, but were never forsaken¹⁵ and revived in other circumstances and in a more extensive form in 1947.

Apart from these tendencies to unification among South–Slav communists, in 1945 the designs of integration appeared in the political circles of the Danube countries, Rumania and Hungary.

The foreign policy of the Rumanian government established in Bucharest in March 1945 under the pressure of the USSR, and in fact controlled by the communists, was determined, of course, by its relations with Moscow. However, Rumania, while respecting this general point of reference, conducted also her own policy on the East–European plane. And here she accorded a prominent position among its partners to Czechoslovakia. This was in a large measure to the credit of Gheorghe Tătărescu, a liberal politician who since 1944 had co-operated with the communists and was head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from March 1945 till November 1947, and within the narrow field of manoeuvre at his

¹⁴ Z. Rutyna, *op. cit.*, pp. 153–155; J. Tomaszewski, *Rozwój Bułgarii w latach 1944–1956 (The Development of Bulgaria 1944–1956)*, Warszawa 1980, pp. 88–90.

¹⁵ Tito and Dimitrov spoke to Stalin about the alliance pact and the future federation also in June 1946 — M. Isusow, *Stalin a stosunki bułgarsko–jugosłowiańskie 1944–1948 (Stalin and Bulgaro–Yugoslav Relations 1944–1948)*, in: *Polska–Bułgaria przez wieki XVII–XX*, ed. W. Balcerak, Warszawa 1991, pp. 156–157; N. Ganczowski writes that in 1946, and even earlier, Dimitrov discussed the plans of integration in the Balkans and the Danube basin “in closed circles” — N. Ganczowski, *Georgi Dymitrow. Z notatnika sekretarza osobistego (Georgi Dimitrov. From the Notebook of his Personal Secretary)*, Warszawa 1980, pp. 229–230.

disposal, tried to realize some of his plans. They were akin to Beneš's conceptions of a "bridge" between East and West¹⁶. Both countries were also linked by the question of the Hungarian minority in their territories and the possibility of territorial claims on the part of Budapest — especially during the creation of the conditions of the peace treaties.

However, in the years 1945–1946 another tendency appeared in the policy of Rumania, let's call it a tendency "to integrate Hungarians", whose exponent was Petru Groza, the leader of the Ploughmen's Front subordinated to communists, and prime minister from March 1945 till June 1952. We cannot ascertain for sure whether his policy in this question stemmed from real, deep strivings, or was merely a tactical play, calculated to neutralize the anti-Rumanian attitude of Hungary and opening a door to the possible reorientation of Bucharest's political line. However, the former seems more probable.

Already in the second half of March 1945 a Hungarian diplomat, Laszlo Reczei, was sent to Bucharest in order to present to the new Rumanian government initiatives aimed at the improvement of relationships between the two countries. He reported to the foreign minister Janos Gyöngyösi that prime minister Groza in reply had presented a vision of so far-reaching co-operation, containing integrating elements, that he was surprised. Reczei reported that Groza "has a vision of a uniform bloc from Lithuania up to the Black Sea, whose kernel would be a Hungarian-Rumanian state union where customs frontiers would disappear, the currency would be common and a full political co-operation would develop"¹⁷.

Such conceptions corresponded at that time with Hungarian declarations, which referred to the Kossuth idea of the Danube federation as a prospective goal, and to the tariff union and the creation of "an area of closest economic co-operation" as an initial

¹⁶ M. K. Kamiński, *Wielka Brytania wobec czechosłowackich prób stworzenia "pomostu" między Wschodem a Zachodem 1945–1948 (Great Britain in the Face of the Czechoslovak Attempts to Create a "Bridge" between East and West 1945–1948)*, "Studia z Dziejów ZSRR i Europy Środkowej" 1985, vol. 21; The Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a note by S. Vengerov for the MFA, 22 Jan. 1947.

¹⁷ G. Gyarmati, *Węgry a południowo-wschodnioeuropejskie plany federacyjne 1945–1948 (Hungary and South-Eastern-European Federation Plans 1945–1948)*, "Studia z Dziejów ZSRR i Europy Środkowej" 1988, vol. 24, p. 122.

task. They were openly expressed by various Hungarian political centres: both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, directed by a representative of the Independent Party of Petty Farmers (although supposed to have secret connections with communists)¹⁸, the Temporary National Assembly (since November 1945 National Assembly), and the Communist Party of Hungary — in its election programme of 23 September 1945¹⁹. It was argued that the realization of this idea would diminish the political contradictions in the Danube region (in the case of Rumanian-Hungarian relations it would solve the problem of Transylvania) and would augment the power and economic significance of this area, consisting of a number of small state organisms, economically weak.

It seems that neither side treated its statements merely as declarations made for popaganda purposes, since both Groza and Gyöngyösi addressed in this matter the Soviet side — the leaderships of the Allied Control Commissions — and Groza even turned to Stalin and Tito²⁰. This was necessary, considering the status of both states that barred taking any independent action on the international arena. To be sure, one cannot rule out here the significance of propaganda, tactical elements, considering that all these declarations took place in Autumn 1945 when the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Great Powers started the discussions of the peace conditions for, among other countries, Rumania and Hungary (11 September — 2 October 1945). This was before the parliamentary elections in Hungary (4 November 1945) and during the sharp weakening of the position of Groza's government as a result of the so-called royal strike (August 1945 — January 1946)²¹.

Since the turn of 1945 this issue has abated, especially on the official plane. Both to the Hungarian and Rumanian policy the conditions of peace were then a central problem. Both countries endeavoured to achieve the most favourable territorial solutions which, considering the conflicts involved (the problem of

¹⁸ P. Hamori, *Soviet Influences on the Establishment and the Character of the Hungarian People's Republic*, Univ. of Michigan, 1964, p. 81.

¹⁹ G. Gyarmati, *op. cit.*, pp. 123–125.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ A. Koryn, *Rumunia w polityce wielkich mocarstw 1944–1947 (Rumania in the Policy of the Great Powers, 1944–1947)*, Wrocław 1983, pp. 142–157.

Transylvania), were bound to lead to polemics and made them resort for support to the Great Powers (e.g. the diplomatic offensive of Ferenc Nagy, the Hungarian prime minister, who went "on tour" of Moscow, Paris, London and Washington, or the presentation of the positions of both sides at the Paris Peace Conference)²². However, this polemic did not acquire a sharp character, it was much calmer than e.g. the Hungarian–Czechoslovak controversy about minorities²³. Moreover, it did not lead to forsaking the issue of integration of both countries, which continued to be postulated. Especially active on this point was the Budapest-based weekly "Köztársaság", the organ of a social Committee of Danube Co-operation. It propagated an economic and tariff union, political integration, the creation of the Danube Ministry or the convening of a round table of the Danube states on economic matters. It presented a vision of creating a politically and economically integrated area in the Danube basin by joining the Hungarian–Rumanian union to the Yugoslav–Bulgarian federation. It presented the views of authors from various Danube states. However, since the second half of 1946, when the Hungarian–Rumanian territorial questions had been finally solved by the Great Powers (the decision of the Council of Foreign Ministers of 7 May 1946, approved by the Paris Conference), official bodies started to voice their opinions on this matter again. In September that year Mátyás Rákosi, secretary general, at the 3rd congress of the Communist Party of Hungary stated that the party viewed "a democratic Danube federation not only as possible, but also desirable", and Petru Groza went even farther, beyond the declarative approval of the idea itself, by proposing in the press as a first step a Rumanian–Hungarian tariff union, and suggesting even the term of its realization — after the elections in Rumania and signing the peace treaties²⁴.

²² *Ibidem*, pp. 195–198; S. Kertész, *Diplomacy in a Whirlpool. Hungary between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia*, Notre Dame 1953, pp. 180–185; British documentation of Nagy's visit in London; also reports on his stay in Washington, Paris and Moscow — in PRO, FO 371, folders: 59020–59026, 59053.

²³ See a new work published in Poland: A. Kastory, *Rewanż za Monachium. Z dziejów czechosłowackiej polityki wobec sąsiadów w latach 1945–1947 (Revenge for Munich. From the History of Czechoslovak Policy towards Neighbours in the Years 1945–1947)*, Kraków 1996, pp. 139–171.

²⁴ G. Gyarmati, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

The elections took place on 19 November 1946, and on 10 February 1947 peace treaties were signed, among other countries with Rumania and Hungary, while in May 1947 prime minister Groza paid a visit to Budapest, which however did not push the issue ahead. Though the visit was accompanied by press articles about the intention of both countries to conclude a tariff union and a federation in the future, yet the politicians' statements were cautious — thus e.g. secretary general of the Hungarian Social-Democratic Party, Arpad Szakasits, who co-operated closely with communists, said clearly in his interview for the Rumanian daily "Libertatea" of 25 May 1947: "the Hungarian-Rumanian tariff union is still untimely. If we start talking about it before its due time, we shall rather hinder than promote this splendid idea"²⁵.

Thus, although the Rumanian-Hungarian union as a fixed goal was not crossed off the agenda, yet it was approached with restraint — especially by Budapest — and viewed in a changed time perspective.

On the other hand the change in the status of Bulgaria (the signing of a peace treaty, which however did not yet come into force) and a clear change in the policy of the Great Powers towards the Balkans (Truman's doctrine of March 1947) reanimated the process of rapprochement between Sofia and Belgrade. Not only the question of alliance but also of the federation of both states was postulated again, even at the Bulgarian National Assembly²⁶. In March 1947 initial talks started, crowned with a top meeting at Bled on 30 July — 1 August 1947 and the signing of an extensive protocol. This document not only announced a prompt conclusion of the alliance whose draft (unpublished) was appended to it, but also a far-reaching economic and political co-operation of an integrating character: a tariff union, co-ordination of economic planning, establishment of the rates of currency exchange, abolition of visas in the traffic of persons, close co-operation in foreign policy²⁷.

There can be no doubt that the agreement from Bled could open the way for the federation of both countries or even become a nucleus of a wider union in the Balkans — although the word "federation" did not appear in the documents, and two days later

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 133-134.

²⁶ J. Tomaszewski, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

²⁷ *Ibidem*; Z. Rutyna, *op. cit.*, pp. 323-324.

at a press conference prime minister Georgi Dimitrov said among other things that the realization of the idea of a federation of Southern Slavs or of the Balkan states was not the subject of talks in Bled and it was too early to discuss it²⁸.

However, the Bulgarian–Yugoslav talks were very critically appraised by Moscow. Stalin accused Dimitrov, who since 8 August had been staying in the capital of the USSR, that he made a mistake by informing the public opinion about the co-ordination of the text of the alliance, before the ratification of peace treaties, especially with Bulgaria. He said this would facilitate American action in Greece and Turkey, and assessed the conduct of Bulgarian and Yugoslav leaders as “nervous” and causing “too much fuss”. On 12 August Dimitrov was handed in a letter which expounded the critical attitude of Moscow. Among other things, it contained a statement that the USSR could not bear the responsibility for facts of enormous gravity to foreign policy, created without any consultation with the Soviet government²⁹.

The next day, the severely reprimanded Dimitrov sent a cryptogram to Tito, containing a postulate to annul the agreement of Bled and postpone the whole matter because of the stand, as he defined it, “of the best friend”³⁰. However, on 14 August Stalin unexpectedly changed his tone and informed the Bulgarian leader that since the peace treaties would come into force on 16 September that year, the governments of Bulgaria and Yugoslavia were free to realize their alliance.

In fact, between 12 and 14 August nothing happened in the matter of peace treaties — at least according to our hitherto knowledge — that could make the Soviet dictator change his stand so diametrically. The process of ratification of the treaties in Great Britain was finished on 29 April 1947 and in the USA on 14 June that year. Both the Anglo–Saxon Powers strove for their promptest coming into force, while it was the USSR which protracted the completion of the ratification procedure (the Presidium of the Highest Council signed them towards the close of August)³¹. Thus it seems that Stalin aimed above all to bring to

²⁸ A. Koseski, *Bulgaria w polityce europejskiej 1944–1948 (Bulgaria in European Politics 1944–1948)*, Warszawa 1975, p. 200.

²⁹ M. Isusow, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 156–157.

³¹ For the political implications of the process of ratification of the peace treaties see A. Koryn, *op. cit.*, pp. 271–274, 283–284.

order the Balkan leaders, who according to him were becoming too independent at a time when because of the change in American policy (Truman's doctrine, Marshall Plan) he intended to transform the Soviet sphere of influence into a strictly subordinated bloc. When he saw the result of his admonition — he certainly knew the content of Dimitrov's cryptogram sent from Moscow to Tito — he softened his tone.

The divergencies around the Marshall Plan, the creation of Cominform and the directives of the conference at Szklarska Poręba, Poland (September 1947) traced out a new stage in Eastern European relations. It led to the creation of a distinct bloc of states that declared their intention to build socialism and completely subject their internal and foreign policy to the directives from Moscow. This tendency was expressed among other things by the development of a network of alliances — started by the USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia as early as 1945–1946, and in case of the Soviet–Czechoslovak alliance even in December 1943 — with the greatest intensity from the end of 1947 till the middle of 1948³².

However, it should be noted that this activity in concluding alliances in Eastern Europe was not — as it is frequently thought — merely a derivative of the establishment of the Cominform line, a Moscow-inspired tightening of ties between the countries of this region in order to create a bloc. There were also other aspects to this situation. The first — legal-formal. In all the fourteen agreements concluded during these several months took part one of the ex-satellites of the Axis, i.e. Bulgaria, Rumania or Hungary. This was connected with the coming into force on 15 September 1947 of the peace treaties between these three countries and the Allied States. These treaties — for the next few years the last word of the successful co-operation of the Great Powers — normalized the legal status of these three states on the international arena,

³² From the 23 agreements concluded in the territory of Eastern Europe in the years 1943–1949, as many as 14 were finalized during a few months at the turn of 1947. Only two, later: the Polish–Rumanian on 26 Jan. 1949 and the Czechoslovak–Hungarian on 16 April 1949 — this was connected with controversial problems concerning financial settlements between Poland and Rumania (this subject is treated extensively by A. Sowińska-Krupka in *Stosunki polsko-rumuńskie 1945–1949, Polish–Rumanian Relations, 1945–1949*, Warszawa 1985) and with a conflict over the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia (A. Kasty, *op. cit.: Hungarians in Czechoslovakia*, New York 1959).

thereby removing any formal obstacles to concluding alliances with them.

However, the six alliances concluded between November 1947 and January 1948 between the Balkan states, or more broadly speaking the Danube states (including Hungary), were connected also with another problem, not completely clarified to his day — and linked to the plans of integration. At that time in the area of Eastern Europe appeared two tendencies, contradictory, as it turned out — which led to the elimination of one of them and victory of another, i.e. the line of Cominform.

The eliminated one was the conception of integration (prospectively, federation), alive especially in the Balkans, whose moving spirits were mainly Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, although the idea found strong support also in Rumania, and a more cautious in Hungary.

The Yugoslav-Bulgarian agreement on friendship, co-operation and mutual assistance was finally signed on 27 November 1947 in Evxinograd near Varna. Its resolutions went far beyond those of the hitherto seven East-European agreements. Its settlements about the preparation of the tariff union, consultations on economic plans, common action as regards the exchange of goods with abroad, close co-operation and consultations in foreign policy and a broad *casus foederis* (mutual assistance in case of assault from any other state, and not only from Germany and its allies, as specified in earlier East-European treaties) determined the qualitative distinctiveness of this treaty. Yet although this agreement contained distinct elements of integration, and Tito's arrival in Sofia on 25 November was welcomed with slogans: "We are against borders — we are for federation", still, neither this treaty, nor the subsequently published communiqué included the announcement of its prompt realization. Tito's, Dimitrov's and others' statements show that the tariff union was perceived as a minimum programme, feasible in the short term, and the federation as a larger conception to be carried out in the future.

Still in December Yugoslavia signed with Hungary (8 December) and with Rumania (19 December) alliances that emphasized political co-operation and established the same broad *casus foederis* as with Bulgaria, but did not envisage any integration of economic ties — above all no tariff union. The literature appraises

that this was due to Belgrade's lack of interest and even fear of becoming economically tied with these states at a time when they were suffering from considerable economic difficulties³³.

On 16 December 1947 a similar agreement was signed by Bulgaria and Albania, and a month later, on 16 January 1948, Bulgaria and Rumania signed an alliance in Bucharest. It was similar to the Yugoslav-Bulgarian one of November 1947, i.e. besides a promise of close political co-operation, and a broad *casus foederis*, it also contained a promise to implement the process of integration by making preparations for the tariff union and by making an obligation to mutually co-ordinate economic plans and follow a close economic and commercial co-operation, also in relation to the third countries³⁴.

Several days later, on 24 January, a Rumanian government delegation signed an alliance with Hungary in Budapest. The Polish ambassador in Bucharest, Piotr Szymański, reported that the Rumanian visit was decided suddenly, after the Rumanian-Bulgarian alliance, which together with the earlier Rumanian-Yugoslav one signalled to Budapest the advanced organization of a community in the Balkan-Danube region, which was attractive to Hungarians and speeded up their action, so that they would not be left on the margin of events³⁵. I think that what ambassador Szymański had in mind was only the speeding up of Budapest's decision on the completion of the agreement with Rumania, since preparatory talks had certainly lasted some time (the November 1947 visit in Bucharest), and moreover the agreement with Yugoslavia of December 1947 showed that Hungary was not completely left on the margin of those events.

At any rate the Hungarian-Rumanian agreement — as the above-mentioned Polish diplomat said — was the climax of the specific Balkan policy initiated by Yugoslavia and the last success of this policy³⁶. Let us add — a policy that found ready partners in Bulgaria, Albania, Rumania and Hungary and which could

³³ Z. Rutyna, *op. cit.*, p. 328; A. Sowińska-Krupka, *Rumunia we wspólnocie krajów socjalistycznych 1948–1960 (Rumania in the Community of Socialist Countries 1948–1960)*, Warszawa 1988, typescript, p. 17.

³⁴ A. Koseski, *op. cit.*, pp. 231–232; N. Ganczowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 479–480.

³⁵ A. Sowińska-Krupka, *Rumunia we wspólnocie*, p. 23.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, Hungary concluded an alliance with Bulgaria only in July 1948, but it testified to another political line and its text was based on the model of alliances concluded by the USSR with other countries of "people's democracy".

have led just after the war to the creation of an economically and politically largely integrated area in this region of Europe, and which was forsaken because of the strongly critical stand of the USSR.

Towards the close of 1947 there was apparently considerable activity in establishing alliance and even integration ties in the Balkan–Danube region, but we do not know to what extent the agreements then made were connected with the vision of a federation. These actions were not co-ordinated with Moscow³⁷, at least to an extent that would satisfy the USSR, and it seems that nobody in Belgrade, Sofia and other capitals fully realized that they would turn out to be so much at odds with the Soviet concepts.

Since the meeting in Bled, and more attentively since November–December 1947, the events in the Balkans started to be observed in Western capitals from the point of view of integration ties. Anglo–Saxon officials and diplomats preoccupied with these problems assessed that integration tendencies were born in Eastern Europe, and although they were not crystallized, yet the following conceptions could be distinguished: a federation of Southern Slavs, embracing Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, and perhaps even Albania; a Balkan confederation or even federation — the above-mentioned countries plus Rumania; the Danube confederation — with the addition of Hungary; and an East–European confederation or union — all the above plus Poland and Czechoslovakia³⁸. The head offices addressed their posts in all the countries of Eastern Europe asking for opinions about the possibility of a rise of these federation or confederation unions. Research was also undertaken into the legal consequences of the creation of a Balkan federation for the obligations of the ex-sat-

³⁷ This is indicated by the later course of events as well as by a few statements of Soviet politicians, confirmed by the sources: Stalin's above-mentioned criticism of Dimitrov's actions expressed in August 1947 (M. I s u s o w, *op. cit.*, p. 155); A. Wyshinsky's opinion presented in Febr. 1948 to ambassador Naszkowski ("So it happens, when things are not co-ordinated" — after H. B a r t o s z e w i c z, *Stosunki polityczne ZSRR z państwami Europy Środkowej i Południowo–Wschodniej w l. 1944–1948 (The Political Relations of the USSR with the States of Central and South–Eastern Europe in 1944–1948)*, Warszawa 1988, p. 467); M. Rokósi's talk with M. Suslov of 19 Febr. 1948 (*Vostochnaya Evropa v dokumentakh rosyiskikh arkhivov 1944–1953 gg.*, vol. I 1944–1948 gg., Moskva 1997, p. 761), or intra-party reports on the activity of communist parties in the so-called people's democracies (*ibidem*, pp. 743–746).

³⁸ PRO, FO 371/72162, R 730/5/67; *ibidem*, R 740/5/67.

ellites of the Axis (Bulgaria, Rumania and Hungary) resulting from peace treaties. The opinions conveyed were divergent, based above all on rumour and conjecture. They ranged from the opinion that this matter was dying away, faced with the differences between communist Balkan states (e.g. over the matter of Macedonia) and with the ill-will of the USSR; the opinions that in January a complex of alliances in the Balkans (perhaps including Hungary) would be concluded and a *de facto* confederation would arise; up to the speculations that a form of closer integration would be officially declared, whose organization was underway and functions were already assigned (e.g. Tito would assume the leadership of the integrated army, and Dimitrov would direct the foreign policy). The British Foreign Office, which carefully watched the situation — approached this type of information with its characteristic scepticism and caution. It did not see sufficient basis for assuming a direct relation between this system of treaties and the future of federation plans in this region. It acknowledged that the realization of the projects of the Danube confederation or a wider East-European one, was not then probable, but that a Southern Slav federation could arise soon³⁹.

All these doubts were dispelled when the USSR made a public declaration of its stand at the end of January.

The Soviet side found a pretext in Dimitrov's statement at a press conference that took place on 17 January 1948 on the train by which the Bulgarian delegation was returning from Bucharest (in the presence of the Rumanian minister of foreign affairs, Ana Pauker)⁴⁰. In reply to journalists' questions the Bulgarian prime minister said that the tariff union was vital to the Balkan countries of people's democracy, could contribute fundamentally to their development and "therefore we consciously and boldly prepare for the creation of the tariff union with allied countries and will realize it". While referring to the concept of federation he said: "The problem of federation or confederation is to us premature. It is not at present on the agenda and therefore it was not

³⁹ PRO, FO 371/72162, R 700/5/67; *ibidem*, R 52/5/67; *ibidem*, R 484/5/67; *ibidem*, R 740/5/67.

⁴⁰ "Scintea" of 21 Jan. 1948; PRO, FO 371/72162, R 1319/5/67; *ibidem*, R 1391/5/67; N. Ganczowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 482, 491. The dates of this press conference (from 17 till 21 Jan. 1948) as well as its venue (Bucharest, Sofia, the train) differ in the literature. This probably results from the dates of press information published about it.

the subject of discussion at our conference. When this problem ripens, which will certainly take place, then our nations, the countries of people's democracy — Rumania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Albania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and Greece — remember, Greece too — will solve it. They will decide what emerges, a federation or a confederation, and when and how it is realized. I can say that what our nations are doing at present to a large extent will facilitate the solution of this problem in the future". Then he emphasized that the future federation or confederation would have to co-operate closely with the USSR.

In the light of many earlier political and public statements (e.g. the article of 7 December 1947 in "Szabad Nep" about a great new rising Power formed by the seven countries building democracy)⁴¹ on this subject, as well as the events themselves connected with the creation of an alliance of the Balkan and Danube states, this statement, full of reservations as to the pace of the process of integration, was nothing unusual. And the fact that on 23 January the Moscow "Pravda" published it without a commentary could indicate that Dimitrov's views found approval in Moscow. It was not then known that on 24 January 1948 Dimitrov received a cryptogram signed by Stalin where his statement was criticized sharply and which referred to the argument used against him in August 1947 (an imprudent action, making it easy for the imperialists to create a bloc directed against the countries of people's democracy), and which considered it especially harmful to mention Czechoslovakia, Poland and Greece⁴² in the context of federation plans. Therefore a commentary published in the same journal five days later (28 January) aroused a sensation in the political world. In the form of a reply "to numerous letters from the readers" it said that the earlier publication of the Bulgarian prime minister's statement without a commentary did not mean that editors went along with it, on the contrary, in the opinion of "Pravda" editors, the countries mentioned in this statement "do not need any problematic and artificial federation or confederation or tariff union, but the strengthening and defence of their independence and sovereignty, by mobilizing and organizing their internal democratic

⁴¹ G. Gyarmati, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

⁴² M. Isusow, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

forces — as was duly stressed in the well-known declaration of the nine communist parties⁴³.

Naturally, all those preoccupied with and interested in politics understood the sense of the word “editors” as well as the value of this commentary. The next day the organ of the Bulgarian Workers’ Party “Robotnichesko Delo” carried the explanation of the Bulgarian Telegram Agency that was to show that prime minister Dimitrov shared the same view as the Soviet journal, and that his statement was misunderstood. BTA’s explanation decidedly renounced any plans to create an Eastern bloc or attempts to discuss the problem of federation at the present stage, as well as any idea of a general east-European tariff union that would go beyond the announcement of “tariff conveniences” recorded in the three alliance treaties. On 2 February 1948, at the 2nd Congress of the Home Front, Dimitrov touched on this question again, and agreed with the critical remarks of “Pravda”; he renounced especially the idea of an Eastern bloc, pointing to the mistaken presentation of his statement in the West and stressing that the actions of the states of people’s democracy should be directed by decisions made as a result of consultations whose mechanism was established in September 1947 at the conference of nine parties⁴⁴.

This meant a full withdrawal of Bulgaria from the plans to create a wider structure of integration in Eastern Europe or merely in the Danube basin. Soon Sofia, under the influence of Stalin’s criticism, withdrew even from the plan to realize a tariff union with Rumania. Bucharest accepted it in silence. Rumanian communists soon signalled their renouncement of the whole undertaking by expelling from their ranks Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu — at the unification congress of the communist and social-democratic party (21–23 February 1948) — among other things for his supporting the plans of a Balkan federation⁴⁵.

⁴³ “Pravda” of 28 Jan. 1948; PRO, FO 371/72162, R 1319/5/67; N. Ganczowski, *op. cit.*, p. 490. The literature usually omits the telling last phrase of “Pravda’s” commentary that points to the significance of the settlements by the nine parties at Szklarska Poręba (see: Z. Rutyna, A. Koseski, H. Bartoszewicz, G. Gyarmati).

⁴⁴ N. Ganczowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 490–491; *Vostochnaya Evropa v dokumentakh*, I, p. 761 (note 5); PRO, FO 371/72161, R 1391/5/67.

⁴⁵ E. Hazard, *Cold War Crucible: United States Foreign Policy and the Conflict in Romania, 1943–1953*, Boulder 1996, pp. 189–190.

Also the leader of Hungarian communists, Rakósi — during his talks in Moscow on 19 February 1948 — said he had never supported any federation designs, whether wider, set forth by Dimitrov, or more narrow, including Rumania and Hungary, suggested earlier by Groza⁴⁶.

For a short time to come the idea of a Southern-Slav federation was still alive. There were even tri-lateral talks held about it between the USSR, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria in Moscow on 10–12 February 1948⁴⁷. And although Stalin and Vyacheslav Molotov criticized sharply the policy of both exponents of federation plans (especially the inclusion in them of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Greece without any endorsement of those countries; the creation of an impression on the international arena that the USSR was backing up these plans; providing Anglo-Saxon Powers with an argument for creating a Western bloc) and accused them of not consulting Moscow, nevertheless they spoke for the creation of a Southern-Slav federation and even envisaged the future creation of three separate federations in Eastern Europe (Bulgaria-Yugoslavia-Albania, Rumania-Hungary, Poland-Czechoslovakia)⁴⁸; no agreement, however, was reached and nobody counted on it. The whole context of the problem changed, and Bulgarians and Yugoslavs became cautious. At any rate, Belgrade and Sofia started to go in different directions. Bulgarians took the apologetic attitude of an obedient and faithful satellite, while Yugoslavs under the cover of accepting criticism (the agreement of 12 February 1948 about mutual consultations on foreign policy) started to construct their independent position. E.g. at a secret session on 1 March 1948 the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia rejected Stalin's suggestions about the creation of a federation with Bulgaria, acknowledging that under the new conditions this would threaten the sovereignty of their

⁴⁶ *Vostochnaya Evropa v dokumentakh*, vol. I, p. 761.

⁴⁷ Tito did not come to Moscow for consultations, to which Stalin called the party-government delegations of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. The Yugoslavian side was represented by: Kardelj, Milovan Djilas and Vladimir Bukarić. The Bulgarian delegation was headed by Dimitrov, there were also Vasil Kolarov and Traycho Kostov. *Georgi Dymitrov. Dnevnik (9 mart 1933 – 6 februar 1949)*, Sofiya 1997, pp. 596–603 (minutes taken by Traycho Kostov).

⁴⁸ M. Isusow, *op. cit.*, p. 160; H. Bartoszewicz, *Związek Sowietcki wobec koncepcji federacyjnych*, p. 147; B. Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, vol. II, Cambridge 1983, pp. 324–325. Stalin was also critical of the Yugoslavian policy towards Albania and her engagement in the internal conflict in Greece.

state⁴⁹. For several months to come Bulgarians tried to give the impression that they were striving for a federation with Yugoslavia for which they had Moscow's assent and which had not been the subject of Soviet criticism in January⁵⁰. But soon the subject became empty in face of the emergence of an exacerbated conflict between the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the *VKP(b)*, whose side was taken by the remaining communist parties. It seems that one of important causes of this conflict was the question of the far-reaching plans of integration piloted by Yugoslavia.

The existence — though not the realization — of various political concepts, including a federation, was tolerated by Stalin in the period when he admitted a limited diversity in the Soviet sphere of influence and had in view an extension of this sphere.

However, since the Autumn of 1947, because of a change in USA policy, demonstrated since March that year, he decided to close and bring into line the bloc of countries subordinated to him and stopped tolerating any designs to create within this bloc any closer integration ties that would infringe its structure, which he meant to remain loose, though strongly subjected to Moscow. This ruled out any plans to create an integrated East-European union which would, certainly, acknowledge the leading role of the USSR, but in practice would become a strong partner instead of a set of satellite states.

(Translated by Agnieszka Kreczmar)

⁴⁹ Z. Rutyna, *op. cit.*, p. 352.

⁵⁰ PRO, FO 371/72162, R 8655/5/67. Sterndalle-Bennett from Sofia to the Foreign Office, 21 July 1948.