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International aspects of the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Międzynarodowe aspekty rozpadu Socjalistycznej Federacyjnej Republiki Jugosławii

Abstract: This article analyses the international conditions during the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It is an outline of a broad research problem, a historical analysis from the perspective of the decades-long evolution of Yugoslavia's international position. After its expulsion from the Eastern Bloc in 1948, the country balanced between East and West, becoming one of the founders and leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement. The author focuses on the aspect of Yugoslavia's role in the politics of the West, especially the US and the EEC, during and at the end of the Cold War. It was the West that could, possibly, have played a role in preventing the disintegration of the country in the early 1990s, in contrast to the USSR, which had its own internal problems at that time. What factors influenced Western support for the SFRY during the Cold War? How did Yugoslavia's position in Western politics change when the Cold War rivalry ended? The author points out the temporal connection between the disintegration of the SFRY and, among other things, the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union, the democratisation process in Eastern Europe, German reunification, European integration, and the crisis in the Middle East. In the end, there was a lack of real and coherent action by Western countries to bring about a peaceful solution to the crisis in the Balkans. The consequence of this would be the disintegration of the SFRY and several years of war in the former Yugoslavia.

Keywords: Balkans, Yugoslavia, disintegration of Yugoslavia, the end of the Cold War, diplomacy

Streszczenie: W artykule przeanalizowano międzynarodowe uwarunkowania rozpadu Socjalistycznej Federacyjnej Republiki Jugosławii. Jest to zarys szerokiego problemu badawczego, analiza historyczna z perspektywy kilkudziesięciu lat procesu ewolucji pozycji międzynarodowej Jugosławii. Po usunięciu

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z bloku wschodniego w 1948 r. państwo to balansowało pomiędzy Wschodem a Zachodem, stając się jednym z założycieli i liderów Ruchu Państw Niezaangażowanych. Autor koncentruje się na aspekcie roli Jugosławii w polityce Zachodu, szczególnie USA i EWG, w okresie zimnej wojny i w momencie jej zakończenia. To właśnie Zachód mógł, ewentualnie, wpłynąć na powstrzymanie rozpadu kraju na początku lat 90. XX wieku, w przeciwieństwie do ZSRR, mającego w tamtym czasie swoje problemy wewnętrzne. Jakie czynniki wpływały na wspieranie SFRJ przez państwa zachodnie podczas zimnej wojny? Jak zmieniła się pozycja Jugosławii w polityce Zachodu w momencie zakończenia zimnowojennej rywalizacji? Autor zwraca uwagę na połączenie czasowe dezintegracji SFRJ z m.in. rozpadem bloku wschodniego i Związku Radzieckiego, procesem demokratyzacji Europy Wschodniej, zjednoczenia Niemiec, integracji europejskiej czy kryzysu na Bliskim Wschodzie. Ostatecznie zabrakło realnych i spójnych działań państw zachodnich, by doprowadzić do pokojowego rozwiązania kryzysu na Bałkanach. Konsekwencją tego będą rozpad SFRJ i trwające kilka lat wojny na obszarze byłej Jugosławii.

Słowa kluczowe: Bałkany, Jugosławia, rozpad Jugosławii, koniec zimnej wojny, dyplomacja

1. Tito's Yugoslavia¹ – balancing between the East and the West

After the end of World War II, significant political and social changes occurred in the Balkans. As Svetozar Rajak noted: 'Although the Balkan peninsula was an amalgamation of small nations with diverse cultures and religions, with only a modest proportion of the world's population, its geostrategic position and its complex politics led it to play a large part in the formative years of the Cold War. [...] The role the Balkan states played in the early Cold War helps us fully appreciate the ways in which the dynamics of the superpower competition were distorted and were critically influenced by regional political forces and distinct historical legacies.'² The involvement of the superpowers in this part of the European continent, such as the dispute over Trieste³, could be observed as early as the beginning of the Cold War, although it was obviously not the most important front of competition for them.

Yugoslavia stood out among the countries of the region, and in the first years (until 1948) it was, according to the Western press, referred

1 In 1963 the name of the Yugoslav state was changed to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – SFRY (*Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija*).

2 S. Rajak, *The Cold War in the Balkans, 1945-1956*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. I: *Origins*, M. P. Leffler, O. A. Westad (eds.), Cambridge 2010, p. 238.

3 See more: R. G. Rabel, *Between East and West. Trieste, the United States, and the Cold War, 1941-1954*, Durham 1988; G. Sluga, *The Problem of Trieste and the Italo-Yugoslav Border. Difference, Identity and Sovereignty in Twentieth-Century Europe*, New York 2001.

to as Soviet satellite No. 1.⁴ But at the same time, disagreements were growing between Soviet and Yugoslav leaders, for example over Josip Broz-Tito's significant independence. Finally, in June 1948, Yugoslavia was officially expelled from the Eastern Bloc. The previous allies severed ties with Yugoslavia in terms of politics, economics, the military, culture, etc. Tito did not yield to pressure from the USSR and its satellites, but he was aware of the fact that he needed outside support to survive.

The West, including the United States, decided to support the Yugoslav communists and take advantage of the Tito-Stalin conflict. Western politicians believed that it would be possible to draw Yugoslavia into their sphere of influence, and the policy of 'keeping Tito afloat' was pursued. It should also be noted that in the late 1940s, Americans, for the first time in their history, became major players in the Balkans.⁵

The Yugoslav communists enjoyed support from the West but had no intention of joining the Western camp, such as NATO⁶ (as Greece and Turkey had done in 1952). Yugoslavia also did not depart from the political model adopted after the end of World War II. Tito began to look for opportunities to maintain an independent position on the international stage because, the Yugoslavian leader, ambitious as he was, did not wish to swap one camp for another and become subservient to a superpower again. As S. Rajak observed: 'Following the split with Moscow in 1948, through its international activism, Yugoslavia was the only Balkan country with the ambition to play a global role.'⁷

After Stalin's death in 1953, relations with Moscow and its satellites were re-established, but there was no return for the 'prodigal son' to the Eastern bloc, neither in a political, economic, nor military sense.

4 M. Dijlas, *Rise and Fall*, London 1985, p. 82; R. West, *Tito and the Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia*, New York 1995, p. 217.

5 F. S. Larrabee, *US Policy in the Balkans: From Containment to Strategic Reengagement*, [in:] *Crises in the Balkans. Views from the Participants*, C. P. Danopoulos, K. G. Messas (eds.), Boulder 1997, pp. 276-277.

6 P. Żurek, *Sprovokowany sojusz. Współpraca Jugosławii z NATO (1948-1955)*, [in:] *Balkany Zachodnie w systemie bezpieczeństwa euroatlantyckiego*, A. Głowacki, S. L. Szczesio (eds.), Łódź 2015, pp. 35-46.

7 S. Rajak, *From Regional Role to Global Undertakings: Yugoslavia in the Early Cold War*, [in:] *The Balkans in the Cold War*, S. Rajak et al. (eds.), London 2017, pp. 81-82.

Yugoslavia did not join the Warsaw Pact created in 1955 and was only an observer at The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA).⁸

The Yugoslav authorities wished to maintain friendly relations with the West and the Eastern Bloc, pursuing an independent and active foreign policy. Tito saw an opportunity in the process of decolonisation and the possibility of establishing contacts with Third World countries. The Non-Aligned Movement was formed, and Yugoslavia became an important part of the structure (the only European country), since Tito was one of the founders and leaders of the movement.⁹ Balancing the Warsaw Pact and NATO allowed the Yugoslav federation to continue functioning as a socialist country independent of the superpowers, and Yugoslavs had more freedom than citizens of the Soviet Union's satellites.

Tito's involvement in the Non-Aligned Movement also improved Yugoslavia's political position because the multinational federation played an important role in international politics, even becoming, as Robert Niebuhr put it, 'a global actor with an important voice.'¹⁰ However, one must also agree with Jože Pirjevec, who noted that Yugoslavia 'acquired vast influence in the international context.'¹¹ Certainly, during the Cold War, the relations of Western countries, including the United States, with Yugoslavia were defined in the broader context of East-West relations. The SFRY was an important pawn in the Americans' game with the Soviets, including their policy toward Eastern European countries.¹² The West thus sought to maintain good relations with Yugoslavia and contacts between Washington and Belgrade played an essential role in that effort. As Warren Zimmermann said: 'U.S. policy toward Yugoslavia in the entire Cold War period can be

8 W. Walkiewicz, *Jugosławia. Państwa sukcesyjne*, Warszawa 2009, pp. 220-221; F. Gołembski, *Balkany. Determinanty stabilności*, Warszawa 1982, p. 94.

9 See more: R. Niebuhr, *Nonalignment as Yugoslavia's Answer to Bloc Politics*, "Journal of Cold War Studies", 2011, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 146-179; H. Ognik, *Polityka zagraniczna Jugosławii – aspekty europejskie*, Warszawa 1986, pp. 38-66.

10 R. Niebuhr, *The Search for a Cold War Legitimacy. Foreign Policy and Tito's Yugoslavia*, Leiden 2018, p. 128.

11 J. Pirjevec, *Tito and His Comrades*, Madison 2018, p. 456.

12 D. Rusinov, *Challenged premises of U.S. policy in Southeastern Europe*, [in:] *Problems of Balkan Security. Southeastern Europe in the 1990s*, P. S. Shoup (ed.), Washington 1990, pp. 252-253; A. Mania, *Détente i polityka Stanów Zjednoczonych wobec Europy Wschodniej, styczeń, 1969-styczeń 1981*, Kraków 2003, pp. 19-20, 57 et seq.

summed up in four words: independence, unity, territorial integrity. This mantra was a code for saying that we wanted to see Yugoslavia remain free of Soviet control or influence and that preservation of her unity was the best way to assure this.¹³

America's intention was to keep Yugoslavia out of the influence of the USSR and to have it be an alternative model for states subordinated to Moscow. As Henry Kissinger wrote: 'Yugoslavia was an asset to us in the Balkans and to a lesser extent in Eastern Europe. It symbolised the possibility of independence. It relieved to some extent the threat to NATO. ... Yugoslavia's autonomy improved our global position. Stalin was quite right in worrying about the disruptive example it established for other countries of Eastern Europe. In addition, the security of Europe was enhanced by Tito's refusal to join the Warsaw Pact.'¹⁴

For Yugoslavia, the European Economic Community (EEC) had also been an important partner in political and economic relations since the 1960s.¹⁵ The SFRY was the first Eastern European country to accredit its ambassador to the EEC. In the 1970s, two trade agreements were signed with the EEC, and in 1980, the EC-Yugoslavia Co-operation agreement was concluded.¹⁶ According to Benedetto Zaccaria: 'Both the EC and Yugoslavia depicted the Agreement as a milestone for future relations. ... the agreement symbolised the EC's support to Yugoslavia's stability in the perspective of the post-Tito era and, at the same time, preserved its non-aligned stance.'¹⁷

Although socialist Yugoslavia was not a perfect partner for the USA, the Americans tried to avoid situations embarrassing for Tito

13 W. Zimmermann, *Yugoslavia 1989-1996*, [in:] *U.S. and Russian Policymaking with Respect to the Use of Force*, J. R. Azrael, E. A. Payin (eds.), Santa Monica 1996, p. 178.

14 H. Kissinger, *White House Years*, Boston-Toronto 1979, pp. 927-929.

15 For example, in 1973, 43.2% of the SFRY imports came from the EEC countries, and Yugoslavia sent 37% of its exports to the EEC. In 1980, 35.4% of Yugoslavia's imports came from the EEC, and in 1990 - 47.4%. In 1980, 26.5% of the SFRY exports went to the EEC, and in 1990 - 46.5%. See: A. Orzelska, *Wpływ konfliktu w byłej Jugosławii na stosunki między Stanami Zjednoczonymi a Unią Europejską 1990-1995*, Warszawa 2004, p. 28.

16 H. Ognik, op. cit., pp. 170-172, 182-191; B. Zaccaria, *The European Community and Yugoslavia in the Late Cold War Years, 1976-1989*, [in:] *Disintegration and Integration in East-Central Europe. 1919 - post-1989*, W. Loth, N. Păun (eds.), Baden-Baden 2014, pp. 264-283; B. Radeljić, *Stosunki między Wspólnotą Europejską a Jugosławią: dokumenty, które miały znaczenie (1980-1992)*, [in:] *Nowe perspektywy badawcze w transnarodowej historii komunizmu w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej*, K. Brzechczyn (ed.), Poznań-Warszawa 2019, pp. 251-261.

17 B. Zaccaria, op. cit., p. 274.

(e.g., the absence of a Yugoslav section of Radio Free Europe,¹⁸ and the omission of human rights issues). Of course, at times there were rifts and frictions between Yugoslavia, which was engaged in various parts of the world as a representative of the Non-Aligned Movement, and the West, such as during the Vietnam War and in the Middle East.¹⁹ The SFRY supported the position of the socialist states condemning American actions in Vietnam. Yugoslavia also supported the Arab states in the conflict with Israel.

Other important factors in the strategy of Western support for the SFRY were the geopolitical and strategic importance of Yugoslavia in the region as a buffer separating NATO countries, such as Italy, Greece and Turkey from the Warsaw Pact countries, as well as providing access to the Mediterranean Sea and Africa.²⁰ According to a National Security Council analysis in 1971, the strategic importance of the SFRY came from its geographic position on the Adriatic Sea, which could be a possible starting point for the beginning of military operations, and also the possible use of Yugoslavia's ports or bases with their access to the Mediterranean Sea. If Yugoslavia were fully under the influence of the USSR, it would be a convenient point from which to start invasions, such as into Italy or Greece. According to American intelligence, occupation of the SFRY by the Warsaw Pact might destabilise the political situation in Italy and Austria and would possibly create good starting points for operations against Western Germany through Austrian territory.²¹

The West also feared that an unstable situation in multi-ethnic Yugoslavia, such as the one occurring after Tito's death, could involve

18 According to Arch Puddington, 'RFE's sponsors in the government decided ... against establishing broadcasts to Yugoslavia as acknowledgment of the positive role Tito was playing in East European politics. ... RFE broadcasts spoke favourably of Titoism as a way station between Soviet-style communism and Western-style democracy.' See: A. Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom. The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*, Lexington 2000, pp. 44, 87.

19 A. N. Eskridge-Kosmach, *Yugoslavia and US Foreign Policy in the 1960-1970s of the 20th Century*, "Journal of Slavic Military Studies", 2009, vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 393, 400-402; H. Ognik, op. cit., pp. 78-79.

20 W. Zimmermann, *Yugoslavia...*, p. 179; I. Paparella, *Yugoslavia: A Question Mark for NATO and the Warsaw Pact*, [in:] *The Warsaw Pact and the Balkans. Moscow's Southern Flank*, J. Eyal (ed.), New York 1989, pp. 154-208; J. Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will. International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War*, London 1997, p. 25.

21 A. N. Eskridge-Kosmach, op. cit., pp. 408-409.

the threat of Soviet intervention. This could lead to confrontation between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and even to a third world war.²² According to Richard H. Ullman, ‘The breakup of post-Tito Yugoslavia was a staple ingredient in Western war game scenarios. Searching for a plausible train of events to trigger a hypothetical war between East and West, scenario writers in the Pentagon or at the War Colleges could always safely posit a Yugoslav crisis. They frequently did so.’²³ The threat of an invasion of the SFRY by the USSR was mentioned, for example, in intelligence analyses at the beginning of 1980, just before Tito’s death and at the start of the Soviet Army’s invasion of Afghanistan.²⁴

2. The SFRY after Tito’s death

In May 1980, the long-time leader of the Yugoslav state died. The funeral, attended by representatives of the major countries of the East, the West, and the Non-Aligned Movement, was a remarkable tribute to Tito and the SFRY. As Marie-Janine Calic said, ‘Never before had the multi-ethnic state received so much international recognition and attention.’²⁵ Unfortunately, without Tito, the process of change and gradual disintegration of the state began, and the international importance of the SFRY diminished. The growing economic crisis, rising prices, inflation, unemployment levels, foreign debt levels, etc., became a major challenge for Yugoslavia’s economy in the 1980s.²⁶

- 22 J. Pirjevec, op. cit., p. 439 et seq.; P. Shoup, *The Disintegration of Yugoslavia and Western Foreign Policy in the 1980s*, [in:] *State Collapse in South-Eastern Europe. New Perspectives on Yugoslavia’s Disintegration*, L. J. Cohen, J. Dragović-Soso (eds.), West Lafayette 2007, pp. 334-337; J. Gow, op. cit., p. 14. Such a vision was shown in 1978 by General Sir John Winthrop Hackett in his futuristic book, *The Third World War*.
- 23 R. H. Ullman, *The Wars in Yugoslavia and the International System after the Cold War*, [in:] *The World and Yugoslavia’s Wars*, R. H. Ullman (ed.), New York 1996, p. 12.
- 24 ‘Prospects for Post-Tito Yugoslavia. M/H NIE 15-79: 1 February 1980, [in:] *Yugoslavia. From “National Communism” to National Collapse. US Intelligence Community Estimative Products on Yugoslavia, 1948-1990*, Pittsburgh 2006, p. 623.
- 25 M.-J. Calic, *A History of Yugoslavia*, West Lafayette 2019, p. 251.
- 26 For more on the situation in the SFRY in the 1980s and the causes of the breakup, see: M. J. Zacharias, *Komunizm, federacja, nacjonalizmy. System władzy w Jugosławii 1943-1991. Powstanie, przekształcenia, rozkład*, Warszawa 2004, pp. 396-477; S. P. Ramet, *Thinking about Yugoslavia. Scholarly Debates about the Yugoslav Breakup and Wars in Bosnia and Kosovo*, Cambridge 2005, pp. 54-75; *Debating the End of Yugoslavia*, F. Bieber, A. Galijaš, R. Archer (eds.), Farnham 2014.

The West, despite the emerging internal problems of the federation after Tito's death, tried to continue supporting Yugoslavia, which initially maintained its exceptional status. According to a statement made by the delegation of the Federal Republic of Germany to NATO in June 1980: 'The West should show its interest in an independent, stable, economically strong Yugoslavia, but should avoid creating the impression that we want to urge Yugoslavia towards a one-sided western orientation or to the abandonment of its social order.'²⁷

Americans thought along similar lines. According to a U.S. State Department statement in 1981, 'An independent, economically-viable Yugoslavia capable of resisting external pressure is a factor for stability and peace in the Balkans, the Mediterranean, and Europe as a whole.'²⁸ By contrast, a 1984 Ronald Reagan administration document entitled 'National Security Decision Directives' (NSDD-133) stated that: 'Yugoslavia serves Western and U.S. interests. Yugoslavia is an important obstacle to Soviet expansionism and hegemony in southern Europe. Yugoslavia also serves as a useful reminder to countries in Eastern Europe of the advantages of independence from Moscow and of the benefits of friendly relations with the West.'²⁹

The West thus continued its wishes to support the SFRY as a socialist country, an important element in Cold War relations with the USSR and a factor of stability in the Balkans. However, despite these declarations, after Tito's death a weakening of contacts with representatives of the West could be observed, if only in the political sphere. An example was the less frequent visits of the leaders of the most important countries to the SFRY.³⁰ This fact was undoubtedly due to the lack of clear and charismatic successors to Tito and the growing crisis in the country.

27 B. Zaccaria, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

28 *United States Relations with Europe and the Soviet Union – 1981. Hearings before the Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. House of Representatives. Ninety-seventh Congress. First session. June 2 and 10, 1981, Washington 1982*, p. 101.

29 'United States Policy toward Yugoslavia, National Security Decision Directives 133, March 14, 1984', <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/6879731> [10.06.2021].

30 E.g., the last visit of the United States president in Yugoslavia took place in 1980, already after Tito's death, when Jimmy Carter travelled to the SFRY. Another visit by an American leader (Bill Clinton) did not take place until after the breakup of the federation – in 1997.

One of Yugoslavia's challenges was its increasing debt. Western representatives tried to remedy this difficult situation. In the early 1980s, the Yugoslavia Consolidation Group (informally known as the Friends of Yugoslavia) was formed. Thanks to the efforts of the international consortium, the SFRY received further loans from international institutions under strong American influence, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.³¹ At the same time, Western representatives urged Yugoslav leaders to undertake economic reforms. However, as Paul Shoup noted: 'The overall commitment of Europe and the United States to aid Yugoslavia was impressive, given the sorry state of affairs in the country at the time. The hope that the Yugoslavs would use this aid to carry out economic reforms ... proved illusory. One senses that Western governments were reduced to providing aid out of desperation rather than out of hope for real reforms, no other means of halting Yugoslavia's slide into chaos being at hand.'³²

During the 1980s, the SFRY maintained friendly relations with the EEC. Some politicians even considered including the federation in the process of expanding the European Communities. At that time the EEC was growing, with the accession of other countries (Greece in 1981, Spain and Portugal in 1986). Undoubtedly, contacts between the Yugoslav federation and the Community were affected by the deepening internal crisis, which made the prospect of the SFRY's future membership even more remote.³³ Some Yugoslav politicians, however, hoped to join the European integration process,³⁴ which would, they hoped, also be linked to reforms in the country. In 1988, Yugoslav Foreign Minister Budimir Lončar stated, 'In all the discussion and dilemmas in Yugoslavia today, there exists full consensus, both among responsible political leaders and in the general public, that Yugoslavia needs to integrate itself more widely and more fully into Europe ... This is

31 J. R. Lampe, R. O. Prickett, L. S. Adamović, *Yugoslav-American Economic Relations since World War II*, Durham 1990, p. 167 et seq.

32 P. Shoup, op. cit., p. 337.

33 B. Radeljić, *Stosunki między...*, pp. 251-261.

34 J. Drnovšek, *Riding the Tiger. The Dissolution of Yugoslavia*, "World Policy Journal", 2000, vol. XVII, no. 1, p. 60; D. Gibas-Krzak, *Serbsko-albański konflikt o Kosowo w XX wieku. Uwarunkowania – przebieg – konsekwencje*, Toruń 2009, pp. 154-155.

a long-term strategic orientation imposed by the vital national interests of our country.³⁵

In contrast, in 1989, Prime Minister Ante Marković said, “The opening of Yugoslavia to the world, Europe in particular, is the cornerstone of the changes and reforms.”³⁶ However, the internal problems of the federation and the democratisation process in Eastern Europe, which began in 1989, resulted in scepticism being felt by many politicians in the Western world towards the SFRY’s accession to the EEC.

Yugoslavia, apart from the economic crisis, suffered from criticism of the regime, growing nationalist sentiments and autonomist, or even secessionist, aspirations in some regions of the country, such as Kosovo, Slovenia and Croatia.³⁷ The Serbian-Albanian conflict in Kosovo was one of the key factors that had a major impact on the stability of the SFRY. The internal turmoil contributed to the deterioration of the SFRY’s position in the international arena. Many representatives of the international community watched developments in Yugoslavia with growing concern. The violation of human rights and the persecution of Kosovo Albanians caused apprehension abroad, especially in Western Europe, both among national governments and European structures (for example, in the European Parliament),³⁸ but also across the Atlantic – in the United States. At the time, some representatives of the American Congress were particularly interested in Kosovo, on which the Albanian diaspora in the United States also had an effect. A pro-Albania group of congressmen formed, relatively few in num-

35 B. Radeljić, *The European Community and Yugoslavia’s Non-Alignment Policy: from acceptance and collaboration to disillusionment and confrontation*, “Eastern Journal of European Studies”, 2020, vol. 11, no. 2, p. 325. E.g., in December 1989 Janez Drnovšek, President of the Presidency of the SFRY, discussed with German Chancellor Helmut Kohl the issue of Yugoslavia’s accession to the EEC and its participation in European structures. See: P. Sokołowska, *Polityka zagraniczna i bezpieczeństwa RFN wobec państw obszaru byłej Jugosławii w latach 1990-2005*, Toruń 2010, p. 60.

36 B. Radeljić, *The European Community...*, p. 326.

37 See more: M. Korzeniewska-Wiszniewska, *Serbia pod rządami Slobodana Miloševića. Serbska polityka wobec rozpadu Jugosławii w latach dziewięćdziesiątych XX wieku*, Kraków 2008, p. 57 et seq.; K. Pawłowski, *Państwowość Kosowa. Geneza, uwarunkowania, współczesność*, Lublin 2018, pp. 169-191; P. Żurek, *Słowenia w walce o niepodległość (1980-1992). Wyjść z cienia Jugosławii*, Kraków 2019, p. 24 et seq.

38 H. Clark, *Civil Resistance in Kosovo*, London 2000, p. 90; B. Radeljić, *Stosunki między...*, p. 256; D. Gibas-Krzak, op. cit., p. 154.

ber, yet nevertheless including some of the most influential representatives of the Republican and Democratic parties.³⁹

3. Yugoslavia and the end of the Cold War

An important factor that certainly influenced the international situation, and the position of Yugoslavia itself, was Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms (perestroika and glasnost) in the USSR and the Eastern Bloc in the second half of the 1980s. Gorbachev also transformed Soviet foreign policy and changed the relationship between the East and the West. The Cold War was coming to an end, and the previous rivalry between the USSR and the USA was turning into cooperation, as evidenced, for example, by the Kuwait issue in 1990. For the Americans, the key task was to prevent the collapse of the recent 'Empire of Evil.' According to Beth A. Fischer: 'The Bush administration believed that stable, managed change [in Europe] could occur only if the USSR remained united and Gorbachev's position remained strong. Therefore, Bush and his advisers did not want the Soviet Union to dissolve. In particular, they feared what would happen to the Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal should the center collapse.'⁴⁰

The end of Cold War rivalry, the collapse of the Brezhnev doctrine and the end of the potential Soviet threat were viewed positively in the SFRY.⁴¹ However, the thaw in relations between the USSR and the USA reduced the significance of the Yugoslav federation for Western countries. 1989 was a turning point for the countries of Eastern Europe, where the process of democratisation had begun, but it was also significant for the SFRY. This coincided with the appointment of the new U.S. president, George Herbert Walker Bush, whose administra-

39 W. Zimmermann, *Yugoslavia...*, pp. 180-181; P. Hockenos, *Homeland Calling: Exile Patriotism & the Balkan Wars*, Ithaca-London 2003, p. 203 et seq. They sought to pressure the U.S. administration on the Yugoslav situation, including human rights, particularly in Kosovo. Some of the congressmen involved in the Kosovo issue would also support the independence aspirations of Slovenes, Croats, and later Muslims, in the first half of the 1990s. Among them was the current US President Joe Biden.

40 B. A. Fischer, *US Foreign Policy under Reagan and Bush*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. III, *Endings*, M. P. Leffler, O. A. Westad (eds.), Cambridge 2010, p. 282.

41 According to Dejan Jović: 'The Yugoslav Communists welcomed the policy of detente between East and West, even seeing in it yet further recognition of the success of the Yugoslav road to Socialism.' See: D. Jović, *Yugoslavia: A State that Withered Away*, West Lafayette 2009, p. 27.

tion (paradoxically) included a group of diplomats well-versed in the issues of the Balkans and Yugoslavia.

The message that American authorities sent to the SFRY in 1989 through the new ambassador, Warren Zimmerman, as he later wrote in his memoirs, was, 'Yugoslavia and the Balkans remained important to U.S. interests, but that Yugoslavia no longer enjoyed its former geopolitical significance as a balance between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Warsaw Pact. It was no longer unique since both Poland and Hungary now had more open political and economic systems.'⁴²

The Yugoslav federation was losing the privileged position it had enjoyed for many years in its relations with the West as a socialist rebel. According to Josip Glaurdić, 'from a crucial buffer zone between the two blocs, Yugoslavia had now been turned into a marginal member of Europe's periphery.'⁴³ Apart from the changes in the Eastern bloc, the situation resulted from the SFRY's internal problems, the economic crisis, the issue of Kosovo and human rights, and a vague vision of democratisation.⁴⁴ Confirmation of the new US policy was President Bush's visit to Eastern European countries in July 1989, when Yugoslavia was left out.⁴⁵

It should also be noted that Yugoslavia at that time had several political centres: the Serbian centre of Slobodan Milošević, the Slovenian centre of Milan Kučan and the federal centre with the government of Ante Marković and the SFRY's Presidium. The West tried to support the politicians who sought to maintain a multinational federation, such as Prime Minister Marković. However, the prime minister

42 W. Zimmermann, *Origins of a Catastrophe. Yugoslavia and its Destroyers – America's Last Ambassador Tells What Happened and Why*, New York 1996, p. 7.

43 J. Glaurdić, *The Hour of Europe. Western Powers and the Breakup of Yugoslavia*, New Haven-London 2011, p. 44.

44 Senator Joe Biden, for example, spoke of the SFRY's changing geopolitical position in February 1991, pointing out two factors: 'First, with the collapse of the Soviet bloc, Yugoslavia no longer need stand and Americanize as a bulwark against the Warsaw Pact expansionism. And second, the cement of Yugoslav unity has begun to crack as certain of the republics have moved to assert autonomy and adopt democratic institutions.' See: *Civil Strife in Yugoslavia: The U.S. Response. Hearing before the Subcommittee on European Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations. United States Senate. One hundred second Congress. First Session. February 21, 1991*, Washington 1991, p. 1.

45 Bush visited Poland and Hungary. See: G. Nycz, *Amerykańska polityka wspierania demokracji w Europie Wschodniej w latach 1989-1991*, "Przegląd Zachodni" 2010, no. 1, pp. 211-212; J. Glaurdić, op. cit., p. 42.

hoped for real help from abroad, including financial support, and not just verbal declarations. Despite many talks with representatives of the West, including a visit to Washington in October 1989, Marković did not receive any real support.⁴⁶

As admitted by one Bush administration official, Robert L. Hutchings, 'In retrospect, we and our European partners should have paid more attention to Marković's efforts to forge a new Yugoslav consensus on economic and political reform.'⁴⁷ In contrast, Robert Rackmales, Zimmermann's deputy, said, 'Our effort in '89-'90 was to try to bolster Marković, whom we saw as the best hope, maybe the last hope, because if he failed, the prospects were very gloomy.'⁴⁸ Many diplomats and Western politicians, however, did not believe in the chances of success of the SFRY prime minister, who did not have a strong position in a country where the republics were playing an increasingly important role.

Yugoslavia was not high on the list of priorities of the most important Western countries at the time. For Americans, for example, the German issue or support for Poland⁴⁹ was more important on the European scene. The same was true for representatives of EEC countries, for whom, after the 'Autumn of Nations,' Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia were more deserving of aid and more likely to become candidates for membership than Yugoslavia.⁵⁰

Soon the key foreign policy issue for Washington would be relations with the Soviet Union (and its potential breakup) and the situation in the Middle East, especially after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. The Americans formed an international coalition to liberate this tiny but important country with oil fields. The United States came to be called the *gendarme* or *policeman of the world order*. The

46 W. Zimmermann, *Origins...*, pp. 44-51.

47 R. L. Hutchings, *American Diplomacy and the End of the Cold War. An Insider's Account of U.S. Diplomacy in Europe, 1989-1992*, Washington 1997, p. 304.

48 *Yugoslavia Breaks Up. Robert Rackmales. Deputy Chief of Mission, American Embassy, Belgrade, Yugoslavia, 1989-1993*, [in:] *American Diplomats. The Foreign Service at Work*, W. D. Morgan, Ch. S. Kennedy (eds.), New York 2004, p. 229.

49 Poland then applied for economic aid and, unlike the SFRY, received it from the West. See: J. Glaurdić, op. cit., pp. 67-68; G. Nycz, *Różnicowanie polityki USA wobec krajów Europy Wschodniej po roku 1989*, [in:] *Amerykomania. Księga jubileuszowa ofiarowana profesorowi Andrzejowi Mani*, vol. 2, W. Bernacki, A. Walaszek (eds.), Kraków 2012, p. 614.

50 M. J. Zacharias, op. cit., p. 541.

U.S. leaders themselves claimed that they had accepted a special responsibility for leadership in dealing with international emergencies. President Bush began to talk about the New World Order.⁵¹ His dream was ‘a new era – freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace, an era in which the nations of the world, East and West, North and South, can prosper and live in harmony.’⁵² According to Steven Hurst, the Yugoslavian crisis was ‘the first major challenge to Bush’s vision of a New World Order.’⁵³

4. Failure of the international community

In 1990 and in the first half of 1991, the crisis in the SFRY worsened, and disagreements increased between representatives of individual nations and republics, including Serbia, Slovenia and Croatia. Many columnists, diplomats, and Western politicians warned of the danger of a breakup of the federation, and even the threat of war and complications for the West. George F. Kennan, in the summer of 1989, said: ‘Today, with the Cold War ending, people think Yugoslavia isn’t in a position to do any damage. I think they’re wrong. There’s a fault line of instability running through the Balkans. I think events in Yugoslavia are going to turn violent and to confront the Western countries, especially the United States, with one of their biggest foreign policy problems of the next few years.’⁵⁴

Alarming titles started appearing in the Western press, such as: *One Yugoslavia or Six?*;⁵⁵ and *Evolution in Europe, Yugoslavia Seen Breaking Up Soon*;⁵⁶ and *Serbs and Croats teeter on the edge of an abyss: Civil war or military rule threaten to fill Yugoslavia’s political vacuum*;⁵⁷ and *Unstable Balkans totter on the brink: Yugoslav nation-*

51 S. Hurst, *The Foreign Policy of the Bush Administration. In Search of a New World Order*, London-New York 1999, p. 129 et seq.

52 ‘*Toward a New World Order*. President Bush. Address before a joint session of Congress, Washington, DC, September 11, 1990, “US Department of State Dispatch”, 1990, vol. 1, no. 3, p. 91.

53 S. Hurst, op. cit., p. 213. According to Pierre Hassner, ‘Like pre-1914 Europe, the New World Order of George Bush died in Sarajevo.’ See: M. Rezun, *Europe and War in the Balkans. Toward a New Yugoslav Identity*, Westport 1995, p. 177.

54 W. Zimmermann, *Origins...*, p. 52.

55 ‘The New York Times’, January 31, 1990, p. 26.

56 ‘The New York Times’, September 27, 1990, p. 7.

57 ‘Financial Times’, January 30, 1991, p. 7.

*alism could set off a wider, regional upheaval.*⁵⁸ One of the articles of November 1990 warned: 'Yugoslavia is Europe's forgotten problem. ... western governments have turned a blind eye to the destructive force of nationalism which is pulling away the foundations of the state.'⁵⁹

The danger lurking in southern Europe was also reported by the intelligence services of some countries. The most well-known public report on the matter was written in October 1990 and disclosed by The New York Times a month later.⁶⁰ According to this analysis, called 'Yugoslavia Transformed,' the SFRY would cease to function as a federal state within a year, and would probably dissolve within two. A full-scale civil war was unlikely, but serious intercommunal conflict would accompany the breakup and will continue afterward. Unfortunately, politicians did not want to accept this prophetic vision. As R. L. Hutchings noted: 'It was evident that Yugoslavia was in the advanced stages of disintegration. It was also clear that a breakup would be contested and violent. ... No one in the policy community disagreed with the main thrust of these judgments. ... The crisis we saw coming was too catastrophic to accept.'⁶¹

Despite many subsequent intelligence warnings,⁶² the United States continued to officially proclaim its support for Yugoslavia unity and for Prime Minister Marković, unwilling to be involved in any real solution to the SFRY's problems.

It seemed that the best partner to support the nations of the SFRY during this difficult time were the European states and the EEC. According to Brendan Simms: 'Many Europeans now hoped that the Community would no longer be what the Belgian foreign minister, Mark Eyskens, had called it during the Gulf War: "an economic giant, but a political dwarf and a military worm"'⁶³

58 'Financial Times', March 27, 1991, p. 2.

59 'Financial Times', November 2, 1990, p. 20.

60 *Yugoslavia Transformed*, 18 October 1990, NIE 15-90, [in:] *Yugoslavia. From...*, pp. 653-674; 'The New York Times', September 27, 1990, p. 7.

61 R. L. Hutchings, op. cit., p. 306.

62 Another reports by American intelligence were, for example, in January and June 1991, when it was warned that the crisis would lead the federation into a civil war with hundreds of victims. See: J. Glaurdić, op. cit., pp. 135, 192-193.

63 B. Simms, *Europe. The Struggle for Supremacy, from 1453 to the Present*, New York 2013, p. 493.

Through political and economic connections, European politicians could have had played a significant role in an attempt to prevent the possible breakup of the country. Many of them watched the situation in the Balkans with concern. In November 1990, the French President, François Mitterrand, declared that he wanted Yugoslavia to remain a single state and that Paris would not support separatist movements.⁶⁴ In January 1991, Italian Foreign Minister Gianni De Michelis warned about the situation, 'which would be extremely grave not only for Yugoslavia but for the whole of Europe. ... We will use all the political means at our disposal to prevent the use of force concerning the very delicate situation in Yugoslavia.'⁶⁵

In the first half of 1991, envoys of the EEC and the Council of Europe visited Yugoslavia several times, and the institutions issued declarations which called for the preservation of the unity of the federation and the necessity to solve the crisis in a peaceful manner.⁶⁶ There were many such speeches and declarations, but in fact they brought little results. According to J. Glaurdić: 'Western diplomats and foreign policy makers continued to cling to their policy of strong (but only verbal) support for Yugoslavia's unity and the hope that the Yugoslavs might somehow still stay together.'⁶⁷ Moreover, as the Dutch diplomat Herman Schaper⁶⁸ said: 'Following Tito's death we had heard many times that Yugoslavia would fall apart. ... We were hoping so hard that nothing would happen that we did not want to think about it too hard.'⁶⁹

According to the then ambassador of the United Kingdom in Yugoslavia, Peter Hall, 'the only response of the Foreign Office to his alarm-

64 M. Mikołajczyk, *François Mitterrand wobec rozpadu Jugosławii w latach 1991-1995*, "Balcanica Posnaniensia. Acta et studia", 2013, vol. XX, pp. 196-197; M. Waldenberg, *Rozbicie Jugosławii. Jugosłowiańskie lustro międzynarodowej polityki*, Warszawa 2005, p. 89.

65 'Financial Times', January 30, 1991, p. 7.

66 S. Touval, *Mediation in the Yugoslav Wars, The Critical Years, 1990-95*, New York 2002, pp. 32-33; A. Krawczyk, *Czyja jest Bośnia? Krótka historia kraju trzech narodów*, Kraków 2021, p. 173; P. Żurek, *Słowenia...*, pp. 163-166, 175.

67 J. Glaurdić, op. cit., p. 119.

68 It should be noted that the Netherlands played an important role in the European Community at that time.

69 Other Dutch diplomat, Peter van Walsum, added: 'Because since Tito's death everyone had really been waiting for the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the admonitions by the Eastern Europe Division were not exactly hot news.' See: N. Both, *From Indifference to Entrapment. The Netherlands and the Yugoslav Crisis 1990-1995*, Amsterdam 2000, p. 80.

ing reports from the end of 1989 and the beginning of 1990 was that “they really would much prefer it not to be happening”.⁷⁰

Some observers, however, were concerned about the possible impact of separatist actions in the SFRY on other countries, such as the USSR and Czechoslovakia⁷¹. This scenario was considered in the West,⁷² as well as in the Soviet Union. The authorities in Moscow feared that the aspirations of Slovenes and Croats could become an example to be followed by other Soviet republics. As James Headley has noted, the Kremlin policy in 1991: ‘was based primarily on a perception of the significant “mirror factors”; that is, it reflected their own priorities in facing a parallel situation and an awareness of the precedents that international reaction to events in Yugoslavia could set for responses to possible future events in the Soviet Union.’⁷³ There was also a fear of precedent in other parts of Europe, in countries where there were (and still are) separatist movements (e.g. Corsican, Basque or Irish).⁷⁴

Another element of the international aspects of the SFRY’s disintegration should also be mentioned. Some politicians in Europe (e.g. Germany and Austria) and America looked favourably on Croatian and Slovenian aspirations for independence, which were sometimes linked to the process of collapse of the communist system in Yugoslavia. There was also hope that the Yugoslav federation could be democratised.⁷⁵ Certainly, the lack of a common policy of the West towards the SFRY meant that different, often contradictory signals were sent

70 J. Glaurdić, op. cit., p. 47.

71 M. J. Zacharias, op. cit., p. 546; A. Orzelska, op. cit., pp. 33-34; R. Lukic, A. Lynch, *Europe from the Balkans to the Urals. The Disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union*, Oxford-New York 1996, p. 253.

72 In December 1989 the representatives of the Department of State during the meeting with the U.S. ambassadors working in Europe informed about the necessity of preserving the SFRY, because if it disintegrated it would be a model for the disintegration of the USSR. See: T. P. Melady, *The Ambassador’s Story. The United States and the Vatican in World Affairs*, Huntington 1994, p. 138; W. Zimmermann, *Origins...*, pp. 41-42.

73 J. Headley, *Russia and the Balkans. Foreign Policy from Yeltsin to Putin*, London 2008, p. 68. On the parallel between events in the USSR and the Yugoslav federation, see: P. Chmielewski, *Konflikty bałkańskie pierwszej połowy lat 90. XX wieku w polityce Kremla*, [in:] *Bośnia i Hercegowina 15 lat po Dayton. Przeszłość – teraźniejszość – perspektywy. Studia i szkice*, P. Chmielewski, S. L. Szczesio (eds.), Łódź 2011, pp. 214-217.

74 J. Wojnicki, *Proces instytucjonalizacji przemian ustrojowych w państwach postjugosłowiańskich*, Pułtusk 2007, pp. 108-109; R. Lukic, A. Lynch, op. cit., p. 254.

75 B. Koszel, *Mitteleuropa rediviva? Europa Środkowo- i Południowo-Wschodnia w polityce zjednoczonych Niemiec*, Poznań 1999, p. 248. See also: M. Waldenberg, op. cit., p. 87 et seq.

out, which were received by the conflicting political forces in the country and contributed to the aggravation of the situation.⁷⁶

Ultimately, despite successive initiatives on the part of the European partners (e.g. proposals of an economic aid plan) and the USA (Secretary of State James Baker's visit to the SFRY on June 21, 1991) and repeated calls for the maintenance of a unified and united Yugoslavia, Slovenia and Croatia declared independence on June 25, 1991, which was the symbolic 'crossing of the Rubicon.'

Conclusions

The SFRY's disintegration occurred at a crucial moment for the world and Europe, with the end of the Cold War, the beginning of the democratisation process in the former Eastern Bloc, German reunification, the Gulf War, the ongoing collapse of the Soviet Union, and during the negotiations on European integration. These factors had a significant impact on the perception of the Balkan crisis by individual countries and organisations. Yugoslavia lost the privileged position it had enjoyed for four decades.

Although Yugoslavia had been in deep crisis for a long time, most governments did not notice the fact or ignored the problems of the multinational country. It was not a priority for their diplomacy. Although in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the superpowers had influenced the fate of the Balkan peoples many times,⁷⁷ the early 1990s lacked decisive and real action and a coherent Western policy, as many politicians, diplomats, experts and columnists later pointed out.

The disintegration of Yugoslavia became a challenge with which the representatives of various states and organisations had to deal over the next few years. In June 1991, Luxembourg's Foreign Minister Jacques Poos said: "This is the hour of Europe – not the hour of the Americans,"⁷⁸ which reflected the mood of European leaders at

⁷⁶ M. J. Zacharias, op. cit., pp. 558-559.

⁷⁷ See: M. Glenny, *The Balkans. Nationalism, War and the Great Powers 1804-1999*, New York 2000, passim; M. Tanty, *Balkany w XX wieku. Dzieje polityczne*, Warszawa 2003, passim; K. Pawłowski, *Ante bellum: Uwarunkowania historyczne procesów dezintegracyjnych na terytorium Socjalistycznej Federacyjnej Republiki Jugosławii i jej państw sukcesyjnych po zimnej wojnie*, "Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska. Sectio K, Politologia", 2017, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 47-73.

⁷⁸ J. Glaurdić, op. cit., pp. 1, 183.

the time. Europe wanted to deal with the problem without the help of the US or other organisations. Americans readily agreed. Secretary of the Department of State, J. Baker, uttered the famous sentence that has become a symbol of the Bush administration's attitude to the disintegration of the SFRY: 'We don't have a dog in this fight.'⁷⁹ In his memoirs he recorded: 'Unlike in the Persian Gulf, our vital national interests were not at stake. The Yugoslav conflict had the potential to be intractable, but it was nonetheless a regional dispute.'⁸⁰ European countries had a chance to test their ability to respond to a crisis. Yugoslavia would be the first test. Unfortunately, Europe did not manage to prevent bloodshed in the Balkans. Even the initial announcements that the international community would not recognise the secession of the Slovenes and Croats, given the situation in the USSR, for example, turned out to be fiction. This was an effect, among other things, of the war in Croatia and the involvement of German diplomacy. At the beginning of 1992, the EEC and many other countries recognised the independence of Slovenia and Croatia, but this did not stop the process of national disintegration. In the spring of 1992, the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina broke out. Representatives of many states and organisations, e.g. the EC, the UN and NATO, were involved in an attempt to stop this conflict for three and a half years. Finally, only the active involvement of US diplomacy in 1995 ended the conflict, which resulted in about 100 thousand casualties. However, this is not going to be the end of the problems of the states formed on the ruins of the SFRY, and the same applies to the international involvement in the Balkans.

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79 L. Silber, A. Little, *Yugoslavia. Death of a Nation*, New York 1997, p. 201.

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