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GREAT BRITAIN AND THE BULGARIAN- -YUGOSLAVIAN RAPPROCHEMENT (FALL 1944-WINTER 1945)

ABSTRACT Due to their geographical position in the vicinity of the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, where the main routes to British colonies started, the Balkans were always an important region of Europe for London. Therefore, when towards the end of World War II, Britain's influence in Greece and Turkey was endangered by the projected union of communist Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, both within the Kremlin's orbit, the British leadership firmly counteracted. On the one hand, Churchill made an agreement with Stalin on retaining Greece under almost exclusive influence of the Anglo-Saxon powers. On the other hand, the Foreign Office issued a strong objection to Moscow regarding the concept of federalization of both Southern Slavic states, which, from London's point of view, would be conducive to the the expansion of communism from those countries and with the main role of the Soviet Union. The British attempts led to breaking the Yugoslavian-Bulgarian negotiations regarding the federation, which was, paradoxically, beneficial also for Moscow, Sofia, and even Belgrade, which initially made efforts to implement this plan without delay.

Key-words: British policy in the Balkans in autumn 1944, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, the idea of federation of the South Slavs, The Soviet Union's approach towards Belgrad and Sofia

For many ages, the Balkans, seated at the crossroads of Europe, Africa and Asia, have been the territory of expansion and rivalry of the empires. One of the expanding empires was Great Britain, which, thanks to its sea power, had an immense influence

on the region, especially on Greece and the whole eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, where the main routes to English colonies started. During World War II, however, Britain's position in the Balkans became weaker, resulting mostly from the unfavourable structure of the anti-Nazi coalition leadership. Winston Churchill, Britain's prime minister, was overshadowed in the Big Three by both the American president Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the Soviet dictator Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin. It led to the fiasco of the Yugoslavian-Greek confederation in 1942, planned by the governments in exile of both countries under London's auspices, due to firm objections of the Soviet Union, supported by the United States. Soviet leaders were certain that the new structure in the Balkans might collide with their hegemonic plans vis-à-vis the post-war Central and Eastern Europe, which they considered their exclusive sphere of influence.¹

The failure of the concept promoted by Churchill in 1943 had similar reasons. It proposed opening a second front in the Balkans and was motivated by the need to forestall the Red Army, whose presence there would undoubtedly lead to Soviet control over the region, which was strongly against the British interests in this part of Europe. The rejection of the British proposal by the other two allies opened way for such a scenario, unfavourable for London. As a result, the threat of Soviet expansion became real, when the Soviet army was dislocated in Romania, Bulgaria and (temporarily) Yugoslavia, in the direct neighbourhood of Greece – a key country in the Balkans from the British point of view.² Moreover, Turkey's delay to join the war against the Third Reich, in spite of the Foreign Office's efforts, further weakened Britain's position in this region in the final phase of World War II.³

In the light of the above, the government of Great Britain realized that it had increasingly less ability to control the international situation in the Balkans, which led to the pursuit of potential ways of strengthening its position, at least in the southern part of the region. One such way was to be the famous, informal agreement between Churchill and Stalin, achieved in October 1944, during the former's visit to Moscow. It was then that he presented an offer of dividing influence by percentage between

¹ National Archives, Foreign Office, London [NA, FO], 371/37147, 9 January 1943; H. Bartoszewicz, *Polityka Związku Sowieckiego wobec państw Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w latach 1944-1948*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 21-22; E. Znamierowska-Rakk, *Federacja Słowian południowych w polityce Bułgarii po II wojnie światowej. Korzenie, próby realizacji, upadek*, Warszawa 2005, p. 78; see more: T. Kisielewski, *Federacja środkowo-europejska. Pertraktacje polsko-czechosłowackie 1939-1943*, Warszawa 1991.

² Г. Гунев, И. Илчев, *Уинстън Чърчил и Балканите*, София 1989, p. 178 *et seq.*

³ С. Рачев, *Чърчил, България и Балканите*, София 1995, p. 258 *et seq.*; D.P. Hupchick, *The Balkans – from Constantinople to Communism*, New York 2004, p. 378, see more: E.L. Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, London 1962, pp. 307-308 (*History of the Second World War*); S.G. Xydis, 'The Secret Anglo-Soviet Agreement on the Balkans of October 1944', *Journal of Central European Affairs*, Vol. 15 (1965), pp. 248-271; A. Koryn, *Rumunia w polityce wielkich mocarstw, 1944-1947*, Wrocław 1983, pp. 47-49; idem, 'Rumunia w polityce wielkich mocarstw. Od przewrotu sierpniowego 1944 r. do ustanowienia republiki ludowej w grudniu 1947 r.' in T. Kisielewski, N. Kasperek (eds.), *Czy Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia mogła się wybić na wolność? Materiały z sesji naukowej, Olsztyn 26 października 1995*, Olsztyn 1996, pp. 87-88 (*Studia i Materiały Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej w Olsztynie*, 99).

the Anglo-Saxon powers and the Soviet Union in particular Balkan states.⁴ Yet, even though according to the agreement, tacitly approved by the Soviet dictator, the Anglo-Saxon influence in Greece was to reach the level of 90%, it still did not guarantee its security, especially in the context of political rapprochement between Tito's Yugoslavia and Bulgaria of the Fatherland Front. In September 1944, the Foreign Office became aware that more or less concrete talks are being held between Sofia and Belgrade regarding the establishment of a common state and, as an idea organically related to such union, the cession of Pirin Macedonia to the People's Republic of Macedonia.⁵

According to the British authorities, the implementation of the idea of a Southern Slavic federation, necessarily followed by the annexation of Pirin lands to Vardar Macedonia, would threaten the territorial integrity of Greece, which, damaged from the occupation by Nazi Germans and their allies, as well as by the civil war, would not be able to defend its northern borders. Moreover, the Yugoslavian leadership's designs to annex the Aegean Macedonia, and the Bulgarian attempts to capture Western Thrace need to be taken into account. British concerns in that matter were based not only on the information from their intelligence and diplomacy, but also on the public speeches of Yugoslavian and Bulgarian highest government and party representatives.⁶

The analysis of the results of establishing the South Slavic union led the English to some troubling conclusions regarding the Macedonian issue. It was assumed that annexing Pirin Macedonia to the People's Republic of Macedonia within (or outside) the Yugoslavian-Bulgarian federation, would aggravate the Macedonian issue in Greece. In the Foreign Office's perspective, the fusion of both Slavic parts of Macedonia would necessarily lead to Macedonian irredentism in Aegean Macedonia. Those people, called Slavophones by the Greeks, would gravitate towards the newly established republic within the South Slavic union, which might lead to the disintegration of the Greek state, as well as fatal economic consequences.⁷ Therefore, British authorities concluded that the cession of Pirin lands to the People's Republic of Macedonia would become a dangerous conflict factor in the Balkans, harmful for British interests and, therefore, necessary to prevent.

For British analysts, the fact that the government in Belgrade emphasized that Macedonians living in the Aegean Macedonia should become united with the inhabitants of the People's Republic of Macedonia meant that Yugoslavia's confederation with

⁴ W.S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. 6: *Triumph and Tragedy*, London 1954, pp. 198-200, 227-228.

⁵ NA, FO, 371/48182; С. Пинтев, 'Англия и българо-югославското сближаване през есента на 1944 г. и пролетта на 1945 г.', *Векове*, No. 5 (1979), pp. 16-21; М. Лалков, *Българо-югославските отношения и връзки (септември 1944-февруари 1947)*, София 1975, pp. 134-135; E. Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War*, London 1976, p. 200 (*Studies in Russian and East European History*).

⁶ NA, FO, 371/48182; R.L. Wolff, *The Balkans in our Time*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1956, p. 314 (*Russian Research Center Studies*, 23. *American Foreign Policy Library*); Z. Rutyna, *Jugosławia na arenie międzynarodowej 1943-1948*, Warszawa 1981, p. 153; С. Пинтев, 'Англия и българо-югославското сближаване...', pp. 21-22.

⁷ E. Barker, *British Policy...*, pp. 200-201.

Bulgaria might lead to the annexation of the Aegean lands (with Thessaloniki – the main port of northern Greece), as well as facilitate the recapturing by Bulgaria of territorial access to the Aegean Sea through Western Thrace (at the expense of Greece). In London's opinion, such spatial modifications might lead to the radical diminishing of Greece's territory, Greece being the United Kingdom's key ally in the Balkans, as well as damage the power balance in this part of Europe, resulting in the isolation of Greece, which would be most undesirable for London.⁸

The government in London also feared that the communist regimes in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, being the Soviet sphere of influence in Central and Eastern Europe, are becoming stronger. The British considered the realization of the concept of South Slavic federation as highly probable, since the Kremlin's support played a major role in the rapprochement between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. Therefore, analyzing the potential results of the creation of South Slavic Union, they believed it would become a branch structure of the Soviet Union, due to ideological and political proximity, as well as ethnic, religious and cultural affinity of the Russians, Yugoslavians and Bulgarians.⁹ Moreover, the Foreign Office speculated that the presence of the Red Army in Romania and Bulgaria was leading to such strong Soviet control of the Balkans, that the chance to revise the status of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles according to Moscow's demands, became real. The strategic objectives of the Kremlin in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea (plans to capture the Black Sea straits and disintegration of the Turkish territory by gaining control over the Kras and Ardehan provinces) threatened the security of Turkey.¹⁰ The British could not be indifferent to that, because Turkey, even though its role in the continuing war was unclear, continued to be considered as a second crucially important sphere of Britain's interest. Therefore, Soviet expansion, aimed against Britain's regional allies, affected the key objectives of her Balkan policy.

The South Slavic federation, in the assessment of the Foreign Office, might cause Bulgaria not to bear consequences of its participation in the war on the side of the Axis powers against its neighbours and Western democracies. Such a scenario would become highly probable after the accession of Bulgaria to the Yugoslavian federation, as a result of certain diffusion, in terms of uniting the country with Yugoslavia as a member of the United Nations. London speculated that, as a result, it would become very difficult to execute from Bulgaria the war indemnity due to the Greeks because of the Bulgarian

⁸ NA, FO, 371/48182; E. Barker, *British Policy...*, p. 201; С. Рачев *Чърчил...*, p. 395; Л.Й. Гибыанский, 'Проблема Македонии и вопрос о федерации на Балканах в отношениях между Москвой и коммунистами Югославии и Болгарии в 1941-1945' in *Македония: проблем истории и культуры*, Москва 1999, pp. 250-251.

⁹ NA, FO, 371/43583; *ibid.*, 371/43608; Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych, z. 6, w. 7, vol. 101, k. 113; W. Rojek, 'Reakcje Wielkiej Brytanii na ideę utworzenia federacji bałkańskiej 1944-1946' in I. Stawowy-Kawka, W. Rojek (eds.), *Ku zjednoczonej Europie. Studia nad Europą Środkową i Południowo-Wschodnią w XIX i XX wieku*, Kraków 1997, pp. 104-105 (*Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace Historyczne*, z. 124, *Studia Polono-Danubiana et Balcanica*, 10).

¹⁰ Д. Хаков, *История на Турция през XX век*, София 2000, p. 201.

occupation of Western Thrace and Kavala Macedonia. This, according to British analysts, would deteriorate both the economy and international status of the Greek state, which would obviously result in the weakening of Britain's position in the Balkans.¹¹

The dangerous, hypothetical vision of negative implications of the establishment of a common Yugoslavian-Bulgarian state led the British to actively fight against this concept. First of all, in November and December 1944, a diplomatic survey was conducted in both Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. Yet, both countries' leaders, when questioned, categorically rejected the idea that the Yugoslavian-Bulgarian union concept might be anywhere near becoming reality. Nonetheless, they were informed of Britain's firm objection against the federation of Southern Slavs.¹² London's position on the issue was also communicated to the Soviet government on January 1, 1945. The key point of British *démarche* was the threat to Greece's security, which, as emphasized in the document, remained on the frontline of the new state structure designed by Belgrade and Sofia. Soviet leadership's attention was pointed to the fact that an idea of uniting all three parts of Macedonia within one Macedonian union republic, being one of the seven parts of the South Slavic union, was debated during the Yugoslavian-Bulgarian negotiation. The activities of Skopje leaders were also mentioned, who aimed at recreating the "united Macedonia" within Yugoslavia, and recruiting Pirin and Aegean Macedonians to a special brigade, being part of the Yugoslavian army. Bulgarians were also accused of supporting such actions.¹³

It must be emphasized that, while opposing the idea of South Slavic federation, London simultaneously opted for a federation of all Balkan states, including Greece and Turkey, pointing to the fact that such a political constellation would guarantee peace in the Balkans. On the other hand, the union of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, according to the British government, would isolate Greece, suppressing it with the Slavic hegemony and cutting off from the main trade and communication routes from Western and Central Europe. Moreover, the British note emphasized, that it is the Bulgarians, as opposed to the Greeks, that would benefit from such a South Slavic union, which would be against historical justice, as they had taken to arms against their neighbours three times in the near past (in the Second Balkan War, World War I, and World War II). By becoming an integral part of the South Slavic federation, the Bulgarian state would lose its sovereignty, becoming a new subject of international relations, from which it would be difficult to execute war indemnities resulting from the Bulgarian occupation of Greek lands in 1941-1944.¹⁴

¹¹ NA, FO, 371/48182.

¹² NA, FO, 371/43649; I. Stawowy-Kawka, 'Powojenne koncepcje federacji jugosłowiańsko-bułgarskiej', *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace z Nauk Politycznych*, No. 43 (1988), pp. 126-127; Г. Даскалов, *Българо-югославски политически отношения*, София 1989, p. 296.

¹³ NA, FO, 371/58566; *ibid.*, 371/43649; *ibid.*, 371/48181; *ibid.*, 371/48182; С. Пинтев, *България в британската дипломация 1944-1947*, София 1998, p. 82; E. Znamierowska-Rakk, *Rozwój stosunków Bułgarii z Grecją i Turcją po II wojnie światowej 1944-1975*, Wrocław 1979, pp. 73-74; R. Zięba, *Stanowisko Polski w sprawie paryskich traktatów pokojowych 1947 r.*, Warszawa 1981, pp. 110-112.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Moreover, the British note informed the Kremlin leaders that Great Britain would tolerate the establishment of the People's Republic of Macedonia as part of the Yugoslavian federation, on the condition that Belgrade renounced the intention to annex Aegean and Pirin Macedonia under the banner of uniting the Macedonian Lands.¹⁵

The key argument, however, supporting the British veto against the Yugoslavian-Bulgarian union, was the formal and legal principle that no agreements may be made between countries, of which one is an enemy (like Bulgaria), and the other belongs to the United Nations (like Yugoslavia). London assumed that a reference to this principle, which had to be respected in the international space by both Slavic countries in the Balkans, would prevent any further debates on this matter between the Soviet Union and the Anglo-Saxon powers.¹⁶

Moscow's response, consistent with London's expectations, was sent only on January 29, 1945, when Stalin, after a Soviet-Yugoslavian-Bulgarian meeting, became reassured that halting the pluralist (i.e. one in which Bulgaria would have the same status as each particular member republic of Yugoslavia) federalization process of the Slavic states in the Balkans would not only comply with British demands, but also with Soviet interests. Tito's visible efforts to establish Yugoslavian hegemony in the Balkans, undesirable for the Soviet dictator, pushed him to limit the rapprochement of both South Slavic countries to a bilateral alliance. The draft of Belgrade-Sofia agreement, however, prepared by the Soviet and Yugoslavian sides, stated in a secret annex that the strategic goal of both signatories is to establish a federation. This statement was to prove to Yugoslavians and Bulgarians that Moscow is open to their unionist plans, and its secrecy is dictated by the need to pacify the British by proving to them that the idea of a federation is off the map. Finally, in their note, the Soviet leaders claimed that Yugoslavians and Bulgarians negotiate only the alliance, which was supposed to put London off guard.¹⁷

However, this tactical trick led to a fiasco. During the Big Three conference in Yalta, at the beginning of February 1945, the British firmly opposed both the federation and an alliance between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, motivating it with the arguments mentioned above in this paper. In spite of the Soviet pressure aimed at allowing the South Slavic nations to sign an alliance, the British forced the common decision of the Big Three in Yalta, namely that until a peace treaty is signed with Bulgaria, it can neither join a union, nor form an alliance with any other country. Analyzing the potential implications of the Yugoslavian-Bulgarian treaty, the British pointed to the fact that Yugoslavian leadership was forcing Bulgaria to hurriedly cede Pirin Macedonia to the

¹⁵ NA, FO, 371/48181; *Foreign Relations of United States, 1945*, Vol. 5, Washington 1967, pp. 304-305; С. Пинтев, *България в британската дипломация...*, pp. 83-84; В. Ангелов, 'Ролята на Великобритания за осуетяване на опитите за присъединяване на Пиринска Македония към обединената македонска държава в югославската федерация (септември-февруари)', *Минало*, No. 3 (1999), p. 70-86.

¹⁶ NA, FO, 371/48182.

¹⁷ Ž. Avramovski, 'Devet projekata ugovora o jugoslovensko-bugarskom savezu i federaciji (1944-1947)', *Istorija 20. veka*, No. 2 (1983), pp. 120-121; NA, FO, 371/48181.

People's Republic of Macedonia. In London's perspective, it could generate further demands towards Aegean Macedonia, the annexation of which might take place after the establishment of South Slavic federation, the first step towards which would be the planned bilateral alliance.¹⁸

The United States, similarly to Britain, held a negative position towards the Yugoslavian-Bulgarian federation and alliance, even though at first they did not show much interest in South-Eastern Europe. Soon, however, Washington realized that it could play a key role in the Balkans and the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea after the war. Therefore, the Americans fully supported London's position, protesting against the federation and alliance of the Balkan Slavs. Still, compared to Britain, the United States were much more open to compromise; the British government actually threatened Yugoslavia with sending their forces, should Tito force the alliance with Bulgaria against the Anglo-Saxon powers' protests.¹⁹

Stalin accepted his Big Three partners' demands regarding the Balkans, as he decided that the global objectives of the Soviet Union in the final phase of the war require that he does not risk the unity of the Allies. As a consequence, the issue of Yugoslavian-Bulgarian alliance gradually became less important and disappeared within the next few months.

Nonetheless, due to information coming to the Foreign Office from the Balkans regarding the rapprochement between Yugoslavians and Bulgarians under the Kremlin's supervision, the British government remained alert. Even though it was believed that the establishment of a Southern Slavic federation was not very probable at that stage, still it was possible that Yugoslavia and Bulgaria would join in an alliance, similar in content to the treaties that Belgrade had already signed with Tirana, Warszawa and Prague. Such treaties, the British speculated, might soon become a foundation of a broader union, controlled by the Soviet Union and encompassing not only the Balkan states, but also Central European ones. Yet, such a union of states in the Balkans could, in London's opinion, lead to a much deeper conflict in the international relations, potentially on a global scale, bearing in mind that it was a region of the demarcation line, separating the Western "free world" from the Soviet bloc under construction.²⁰

It is worth noting that the union offer, including all Balkan states, presented by the Foreign Office to the Soviet leadership in the note of January 1, 1945, was in fact

¹⁸ Кримската конференция на ръководителите на трите съюзни държави – СССР, САЩ и Великобритания, 4-11 февруари 1945 г., София 1985, pp. 220-230; E. Barker, *British Policy...*, p. 201; J. Tomaszewski, *Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia 1944-1968. Powstanie, ewolucja i kryzys realnego socjalizmu*, Warszawa 1992, p. 144.

¹⁹ NA, FO, 371/48181; *ibid.*, 371/481823; *Foreign Relations of United States, 1944*, Vol. 3, Washington 1965, pp. 304-305; B. Kondis, 'The Macedonian Question as a Balkan Problem in the 1940's' in *Macedonia. Past and Present*, Thessaloniki 1992, p. 189 (*Hidryma Meletōn Chersonēsou tou Haimou*, 231); W. Rojek, 'Kwestia Macedonii Egejskiej w polityce mocarstw anglosaskich 1944-1949' in M. Pułaski (ed.), *Z dziejów przemian w Europie Środkowo-Południowo-Wschodniej po drugiej wojnie światowej*, Kraków 1993, *passim* (*Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace Historyczne*, 107. *Studia Polono-Danubiana et Balcanica*, 6).

²⁰ NA, FO, 371/58566.

just a tactical move, aimed to create a balance to the concept of Southern Slavs federation. In fact, it was unthinkable for Britain that pro-Western Greece and Turkey might join a federalist structure dominated by the communist regime of Yugoslavia, ideologically supported by the "people's democracies" governments of Bulgaria, Albania and Romania, and staying in a close relationship with Moscow. The harm that the broad Balkan union would cause to British interests in the context of increasing polarization between the Soviet Union and the Anglo-Saxon powers was also perceived in that it would lead to a faster elimination of democratic opposition in the countries, where government was being monopolized by communists.²¹

In the summer of 1946, London followed with concern the hegemonic attempts of Yugoslavian leadership and the pressure on Sofia, retained with support from the Soviet dictator, aimed at the Macedonization of the Pirin lands. The British understood that those were the first steps towards annexing the Bulgarian part of Macedonia to the People's Republic of Macedonia within the Yugoslavian federation. The events were followed with a sense of helplessness, as well as concern that the united state organism might be established as a vanguard of Soviet imperialism and a tool for communism expansion in the Balkans.²²

Yet, it remains a fact that the rapid establishment of a South Slavic federation, which the Yugoslavians initially wanted, was prevented, and the Yugoslavian-Bulgarian treaty was only signed at the end of 1947, after the peace treaty with Bulgaria had been signed and ratified.²³ Therefore, a consequent, firm opposition of London, and then also Washington, was crucial in torpedoing the first stage of Belgrade-Sofia dialogue regarding the establishment of a common state, as well as in significantly postponing their mutual alliance.

Analyzing the motives and political objectives of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria in the context of increasingly tense international situation in the final phase of World War II, as well as in the regional and global scale, leads to a conclusion that blocking the negotiations regarding a South Slavic union in some way also served the direct and long-term interests related to it of all three parties involved. As for the Soviet leadership, it is rather clear that at the turn of 1944 and 1945 it must have already seen some symptoms of emancipation among the leaders of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Stalin, known for his pathological suspicion against both political opponents and his closest co-workers, must have seen the growing independence of Tito with concern and disapproval. It was perceived, *inter alia*, in territorial demands raised against Austria, Italy, and in attempts to take control of Aegean and Pirin Macedonia. Such an attitude towards neighbouring countries pointed to the ambition of the Yugoslavian leadership, to establish supremacy in the Balkans, which collided with the Soviet hegemony in this part of Europe.

²¹ Ibid., W. Rojek, 'Reakcje Wielkiej Brytanii...', p. 111.

²² NA, FO, 371/58566.

²³ Г. Грозев (ed.), *Външна политика на Народна Република България*, Vol. 1: 1944-1962, София 1970, pp. 45-78, 96-99.

Belgrade's desire to capitalize on the unregulated international position of Bulgaria by forcing concessions on Sofia and achieving maximum benefits from the union, as well as the support for Greeks left during the civil war (not consulted with the Kremlin and against its will), made the Soviet dictator aware that the federation with Bulgaria, forced by Tito and dominated by Yugoslavian leaders, might get out of his control. Moreover, it might become a competitor for the Soviet Union as the leadership centre of the soviet bloc in Central-Eastern Europe.

Stalin's suspicions were also raised by the hastened communization of Yugoslavia, implemented by the Yugoslavian party leadership, and their negative attitude towards the exiled politicians, in spite of the Soviet dictator's orders to feign good cooperation for the sake of the Anglo-Saxon powers. Soviet experts, both civil and military, were treated with reserve in Yugoslavia, which further increased Moscow's suspicion against Belgrade. One may suppose that all this led to a radical change in Stalin's position on the planned union of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. While in the fall of 1944 he was not against the pluralist union, proposed by the Yugoslavians, by the beginning of 1945 he decided in favour of the dualist shape of the federation. Undoubtedly, he believed that the 6:1 formula, promoted by Belgrade, would strengthen Yugoslavia within the common state, whereas dualism of the union would provide for Moscow's domination in the Balkans, through Sofia – fully dependent on the Soviets. Therefore, one may assert that Stalin considered the setback of the federalization process of both Balkan countries following the seven-unit model beneficial for his interests. Hence Moscow's directive issued to the leaders of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria in the spring of 1945 regarding the gradual establishment of Southern Slavic federation. It stipulated firstly re-establishing diplomatic relations between Belgrade and Sofia; next, signing the alliance treaty; and only then the establishment of a common state, which Stalin preferred in a dualistic form.

It must be emphasized that halting the Yugoslavian-Bulgarian talks on federation and alliance at the beginning of 1945, generated positive results for Bulgaria, too, mostly because Sofia had a much weaker position in the dialogue with Belgrade and was not an equal partner of the negotiations. It was a result of the unregulated status of Bulgaria and the fact that it formally remained at war with Yugoslavia, as well as its dependence upon the Yugoslavian government regarding the participation of Bulgarians in military actions against Germany on the territory of Yugoslavia. Therefore, slowing down the federalization process of both Slavic countries in the Balkans gave the Bulgarian leaders a chance to avoid the establishment of a common state on conditions convenient mostly for Yugoslavia, which would necessarily lead to Belgrade's supremacy over Bulgaria's national interests.

Paradoxically, blocking the union negotiations between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria was also in some ways beneficial for the former's leadership, as they were the party that initiated the dialogue with Sofia and strongly opted to quickly establish the federation. The efforts of the Anglo-Saxon powers aimed at stopping those attempts made Belgrade aware that, in spite of the international prestige and glory of the Yugoslavian marshal and his army, it was impossible in the current situation to present Great Britain and

the United States with a *fait accompli*. Meanwhile, the leaders of communist Yugoslavia realized that Kremlin's support for the pluralist federation option is elusive and dependent upon the lack of collision of Soviet and Yugoslavian interests. They also understood that Stalin would not give up direct (or possibly via Sofia) Soviet control over the Balkans. The pan-Slavic ambitions of the Soviet dictator, rivalling with Tito's aspirations and hidden under the slogan of struggle against Nazi Germany in the neo-Slavic union and solidarity movement, made the Yugoslavian leadership aware that the federation of South Slavs may become a Trojan horse to Belgrade's interests.

Therefore, by renouncing the actions leading to immediate federation with Bulgaria, the Yugoslavians were able to avoid unfavourable consequences. The Southern Slavic Union in the shape compliant to Belgrade's hegemonic objectives, and colliding with the Kremlin's interests in the Balkans, would be with no doubt rejected by the Soviet dictator. At the same time, a common Yugoslavian-Bulgarian state in the dualist option would, in fact, be an effective tool, leading to total dependence of Yugoslavia on the Soviet Union. This experience shed new light on the federation in design, damping the Yugoslavian leaders' enthusiasm and enhancing their vigilance regarding the concept. This, however, did not make Belgrade abandon the plans to annex Aegean and Pirin Macedonia to the internal Yugoslavian federation.

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