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YUGOSLAV-BULGARIAN RELATIONS ON THE EVE OF
POPOVIC'S VISIT TO SOFIA

At a press conference in Belgrade on January 14, the following exchange took place between the official spokesman of the Yugoslav Government, Dušan Blagojević, and the correspondent of the West German DPA news agency:

- Is President Tito going to visit Bulgaria?
- You will be informed about this in due course.
- Does this mean that you are neither confirming nor denying this?
- Please ask another question.

This exchange was published only in the Skopje daily Novi Makedonija of January 15. The Belgrade daily Politika, the Zagreb Vjesnik and the Ljubljana Delo only reported the first part of it -- Blagojević's claim that any visit by Tito to Bulgaria would be announced in due course. Dorba, however, completely omitted the question about a possible visit by the Yugoslav leader to the neighboring country.

Actually, Blagojević could neither confirm nor deny such rumors, for Yugoslavia's Foreign Minister, Eda Popović, who is to visit Sofia between January 27 and 30, will first have to see whether the Bulgarian leaders would be willing to invite Tito, and if so, under what conditions.

Todor Zhivkov's visit was followed by an exchange of delegations between the two front organizations -- the Yugoslav "Socialist Alliance" (which visited Bulgaria between 21 and 31 January 1963) and the Bulgarian "Otechestven Front" (which was in Yugoslavia between 2 and 11 May 1963).

Main Issue Remains

At the beginning of June 1963, Veljko Vlahovic, at present a member of the Politburo Secretariat of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, suddenly went to Sofia. In a speech which he delivered in the Macedonian town of Tetovo on June 11, Vlahovic said that he encountered in Bulgaria "at every step a willingness for the further development of cooperation with our country."³ At the time, however, Vlahovic's unexpected visit to Sofia was considered as a sign that something was still wrong in the relations between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria.

That indeed not all differences have been resolved can best be seen from the fact that at the same press conference of January 14 at which the question of a possible visit by Tito to Bulgaria (18 years after his first visit to that country) was posed, the editor of Borba asked Blagojević to comment on a recent "anti-Yugoslav" article in the Bulgarian periodical Slavianski. The editor of Borba criticized the Bulgarian magazine for having described "some Yugoslav towns as if they were in Bulgaria."⁴ Blagojević answered that the publication of such articles did "a bad service to the policy of rapprochement between the Yugoslav and Bulgarian peoples."

This episode, though not warranting the assertion that Yugoslav-Bulgarian relations must permanently be clouded by the unsolved Macedonian problem, is yet another indication that full agreement between Sofia and Belgrade can be reached only if a workable solution is found for this sensitive issue.

Despite Zhivkov's January 1963 visit, and a number of large-scale economic agreements, as well as the joint construction of a highway connecting the Yugoslav town of Srebrenica with the Bulgarian border, Yugoslav-Bulgarian relations have up to this day not been fully clarified. In April 1964 Borba suddenly found it necessary to list a series of "anti-Yugoslav articles and speeches" published in Bulgaria for the most part

3) Tova Makedonija, Skopje, 12 June 1963.

4) Borba, 15 January 1965.

What will the Greek reaction be? If anyone is interested in maintaining the status quo, with neither Yugoslavia nor Bulgarians voicing territorial claims -- then it is the Greeks. If in the past the Greeks were afraid of any all too close friendship between Belgrade and Sofia, this time -- having themselves good relations with the Bulgarians -- they will be satisfied if the Balkans cease to be a powder keg. The Yugoslavs have much the same interest. Zofa Popovic will soon see what the Bulgarian leaders' ideas on this subject are, before the Greek Prime Minister, Papandreu, comes on an official visit to Belgrade on February 4.

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