

Diplomatic Missions of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia in the Kingdom of Romania 1918-1941: Documents from the Archives of Yugoslavia in Belgrade

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Relations up to 1918

The history of diplomatic and political relations between Serbian and Romanian people is rich and dynamic. In the early 19th century, the period of the struggle for national liberation from the Ottoman Empire, Serbs and Romanians shared a similar destiny and were therefore directed to each other. Because of the same political tendencies expressed in the struggle to liberate themselves from the Ottoman dominance, but also because these nations were neighbors, it's no surprise that very serious diplomatic contacts were made in the early phase of both nations' incomplete statehood¹. The first ever Diplomatic Agency the semi-independent Serbia established was in Bucharest in February 1836, a move that was allowed by the Ottoman government². The documents that ratify the establishment of this Diplomatic Agency state that the most important goal of the mission was to improve trade between the two nations and to control the business operations conducted on the estates owned by Serbian Prince Miloš Obrenović in Wallachia and Moldavia. The Agency conducted consular affairs, provided passports for travelers as well as legal assistance, kept record of Serbian ex-patriots who lived and worked in Romanian lands. Another duty not to be neglected was the collecting of vital intelligence: monitoring the political situation, obtaining delicate information and forwarding it to Prince Miloš³.

In July 1863 the Serbian Agency in Bucharest was upgraded to the level of formal High representation. Serbian High representative was Kosta Magazinović. At the same time, in July 1863, Romania established a Diplomatic Agency in Belgrade with Theodore Kalimakis as its diplomatic agent⁴. Both nations had a common interest – to deepen and strengthen diplomatic relations, not only for the possible

¹ Milan Vanku, *Srpsko-jugoslovesko-rumunski odnosi kroz vekove*, Belgrade, 2005, II, p. 1.

² Djordje Lopičić, *Pregled konzularnih odnosa Srbije 1804-1918*, "Branic" 1-2 (2007), p. 188.

³ Idem, *Prvo srpsko diplomatsko predstavništvo, Knjaževsko srpska agencija u Bukureštu 1836. godine*, "Arhiv za pravne i društvene nauke" 3 (2000), p. 401-411.

⁴ M. Vanku, *Uspostavljanje diplomatskih agencija u Beogradu i Bukureštu 1863. godine*, "Balcanica" 5 (1974), p. 297.

political benefits, but also having in mind the emerging economic, commercial and traffic contacts. After the conference in Berlin in 1878 Serbia and Romania obtained complete independence and diplomatic relations were raised to the highest level. Serbian High representation in București had been upgraded to Diplomatic Mission in January 1879 and from May the same year Minister Resident Miian A. Petronijević was put in charge of the mission⁵.

Political Situation in Inter-War Period

When the First World War ended, the map of Europe had changed dramatically. The Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire were gone and the victorious Entente powers helped their recently established allies to create a new geo-political reality in Southeast Europe. The newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes – a country that was built when Serbia united with Slavic parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire – and the unified Kingdom of Romania were the pillars of safety and the new order in this part of Europe⁶. They were the stronghold against all revisionist forces that were, although defeated in the war, gaining in strength, rapidly becoming dangerous. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and the Kingdom of Romania, like all other nations in the region, had differences and points of conflict, and the issue most notable in the period after the First World War was the question concerning the Banat region⁷. The impression was that the decision of dividing the region into two parts, the western Yugoslav and the eastern Romanian, which was passed in the Versailles Peace Conference, was not satisfactory for any of the sides. However, representatives of both countries were very much aware that the threats coming from deprived nations (such as Hungary and Bulgaria) were becoming increasingly alarming, in a long term perspective. Soon it became clear that collaboration is necessary in order to maintain peace and security, and most importantly, all the benefits gained in the war. Having this in mind, possibly under some influence from France, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia formed an alliance in 1920 and 1921 that obligated all sides to provide help and assistance to each other, diplomatic, economic and military, in case of any threat coming from revisionist nations (Italy, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, etc.)⁸. This alliance, called the Little Entente, was not based just on the issues of safety, but also on the foundation of economic exchange and cooperation; it proved to be a formidable obstacle to all revisionism to the Versailles order in the region of Central and Southeast Europe⁹. When the alliance ended prior to the Second World War, it was not the result of disrupted relations among the two countries, but the result of circumstances which launched Nazi Germany as a dominant force in Central and Southeast Europe, at the same time diminishing French influence in the region.

⁵ Gligor Popi, *Jugoslovensko-rumunski odnosi 1918-1941*, Vršac, 1984, p. 27.

⁶ Ivan Božić, Sima Ćirković, Milorad Ekmečić & Vladimir Dedijer, *Istorija Jugoslavije*, Belgrade, 1972, p. 403-405.

⁷ Miloš Savin, *Situacija u Banatu krajem I svetskog rata*, "Istraživanja" 21 (2010), p. 357-365.

⁸ M. Vanku, *Mala Antanta* Titovo Užice, 1969.

⁹ Idem, *Srpsko-jugoslovensko-rumunski odnosi cit.*, V/VI, p. 17-112.

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and the Kingdom of Romania agreed upon unique and specific points: the marriage between King Aleksandar Karadjordjević and Princess Maria of Romania, the second daughter of King Ferdinand of Romania, which would established a dynastic friendship; the Danube river, as a very important trading and traffic corridor would be to great extent shared by the two countries; another point of agreement was a shared struggle against communist influences spreading from Russia.



King Aleksandar I Karadjordjević and Queen Maria of Yugoslavia

Diplomatic Relations between Romania and Yugoslavia

The ensuing relations within the Little Entente, which matured over time into a strong, friendly and efficient cooperation, was only possible owing to the capability and professionalism of both Yugoslavian and Romanian diplomatic agencies. Regent Aleksandar of Yugoslavia and his advisors thought it was very important to keep the highest possible standard of their homeland's diplomatic missions in Romania. The diplomatic agencies of Yugoslavia functioned on two levels, as it was common in European diplomatic practice: on high political level (the level of diplomatic mission) and on practical level (the level of consulates). The Yugoslav Foreign Ministry law at the time stated that the diplomatic mission abroad had the obligation to: 1) keep and strengthen the relations between two countries and prepare the ground for and participate in all negotiations that would resolve shared questions of interest; 2) inform the authorities of the political situation in the country of residence; 3) protect Yugoslav citizens¹⁰. In December 1918, after the unification had been proclaimed, the government of The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes issued an order that all diplomatic and consular agencies of the Kingdom of Serbia should from that point on be known as missions and consulates of The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Initially these occurrences brought about few changes to

¹⁰ *Uredba o organizaciji MID-a, diplomatskih zastupništava i konzulata Kraljevstva SHS u inostranstvu*, "Službene novine Kraljevstva SHS" I (1919).

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diplomatic missions already at work. Serbian Minister Resident in Bucharest until 1918 was Pavle Marinković, who was very well informed about Romanian occasions. The Yugoslav government regarded him so highly that they had even asked him to participate in the Paris Peace Conference, in case there would be any misunderstandings between The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and Romania over Banat¹¹. Pavle Marinković never returned to Bucharest because he was appointed minister in the Stojan Protić government.



Pavle Marinković (1865-1925)



Boško Čolak-Antić (1871-1949)



Ninko Perić (1886-1961)

¹¹ Andrej Mitrović, *Razgraničenje Jugoslavije sa Mađarskom i Rumunijom 1919-1920: prilog proučavanju jugoslovenske politike na Konferenciji mira u Parizu*, Novi Sad, 1975, p. 55.

During the period up to February 1921 the vacant place of Minister Resident in București was given to Djordje Nastasijević, but he was only temporary and acting Minister Resident. After long consideration, the Yugoslav government decided to appoint Boško Čolak-Antić, a confidential friend of the Yugoslav royal family and later Marshall of the Court, as Minister Resident¹². His main mission was to arrange the marriage between Princess Maria Hohenzollern and King Aleksandar which he carried out to the satisfaction of both sides. Following that success was a long and fairly fruitful service as Minister Resident in București. The cooperation between the two countries in the 1920s and first half of the 1930s reached its high, and to the great extent Boško Čolak-Antić was the man responsible for creating such a productive political atmosphere. He retained the position of Yugoslav Minister Resident until March 1935.

After Boško Čolak-Antić, the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs had trouble deciding who was going to take such an important place in diplomatic service. Two short-term appointments that followed were those of Ninko Perić and Dragomir Kasidolac¹³. Although they both were capable civil servants, they did not satisfy Prince Regent Paul, who was the most important political figure in Yugoslavia after the assassination of King Aleksandar. Prince Paul was very eager to preserve the Little Entente as the outside political pressure, especially the pressure coming from Italy, was becoming overwhelming for Yugoslavia. He chose Jovan Dučić, politician, diplomat, poet and a former Minister Resident in Rome, to take up duty as Minister Resident in Bucharest¹⁴.

In late 1938 Yugoslavia and Romania promoted their diplomatic agencies to the level of embassy, even though such an action was not in accordance with Yugoslav diplomatic practice. The then current Yugoslav law which regulated the practice in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not recognize the institution of embassy. This decision was strictly political and was greatly influenced by the meeting of the Council of Little Entente held on Lake Bled in August 1938. One document that refers to this matter states: "*Pitanje uzdizanja nivoa naše diplomatske misije u Rumuniji na nivo Ambasade je dogovoreno na sastanku, prema željama rumunske strane. Ovaj čin daće našoj misiji veći značaj i prestiž; Stoga će biti u mogućnosti da predstavlja interese naše zemlje sa većim autoritetom* [The question of raising the level of our Diplomatic Mission in Romania to the level of Embassy has been agreed upon at the meeting, in accordance with the wishes of the Romanian side. This action will give our mission greater significance and prestige; it will therefore be able to represent the interests of our country with greater authority]."¹⁵

¹² Archives of Yugoslavia [hereafter, AJ], *Ministry of foreign affairs* (334), Appointments no 5621, December 9, 1920.

¹³ AJ, 334, App. no 912, March 11 1935 and App. no 1339, April 14, 1936.

¹⁴ AJ, 334, App. no 2734, June 12, 1937.

¹⁵ AJ, *Diplomatic mission in Romania – București* (395), Inventory, 8.



Jovan Dučić (1871-1943)

However, the good relations were not long-lasting. Romania was increasingly falling under the influence of Germany, which considered the Little Entente an alliance with hostile intentions. Downgrading of the Embassy in March 1941 was the signal that Yugoslavia and Romania were no longer on same terms as before¹⁶. Only one month after the reestablishment of the Yugoslav Diplomatic Mission in Bucharest, the Axis powers attacked and defeated Yugoslavia¹⁷.

During the first stages of the Second World War, Yugoslavia broke all diplomatic relations with Romania (on April 9, 1941) and decided to accredit the Embassy of the United States of America to take the Yugoslav Diplomatic Mission, its archives and the care of Yugoslav citizens' interests in Romania into protection. The Diplomatic Mission of Yugoslavia informed general Ion Antonescu of this decision. The above mentioned arrangement worked for a while, until the USA was dragged into the war in December 1941. According to some partial documents, the Swiss Embassy took over the job of protecting Yugoslav interests in Romania from the Americans¹⁸.

Alongside the Yugoslav Diplomatic Mission in București, which had always been a political institution, The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia) also had consular agencies in Romania, which were instructed to deal with practical issues. In Yugoslav judicial and diplomatic theory, consuls had to fulfill missions of economic and administrative nature, not political ones. They were obliged to represent intellectual, trade and industrial interests of their country and to protect

¹⁶ AJ, 334, App. no 1225 and 1416, March 19, 1941.

¹⁷ Dušan Lukač, *Rumunija i komadanje Jugoslavije 1941-1942*, Belgrade, 1985-1986, p. 135-144.

¹⁸ AJ, *Diplomatic mission in Romania – București* (395), Inventory, 9.

Yugoslav subjects abroad¹⁹. The Consulate General of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes operated in Romania in the period between 1918, when the Serbian General Consulate became Yugoslav, and 1929 when the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to reorganize the Diplomatic Mission in Bucharest and to delegate the duties of the General Consulate to the Diplomatic Mission, with an excuse of over lapsing jurisdiction and great expenses²⁰. However, the consular job was very difficult for the delegates of the Diplomatic Mission to handle and Yugoslav Minister Residents in Bucharest often complained to the Yugoslav Foreign Ministry about their unenviable situation. Most of their complaints were about the sheer volume of work they faced on everyday basis and their inability to cope with it²¹.

Besides the Consulate General of The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in București, which operated in the period between 1918 and 1929, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes put into operation two more consulates in Romania with the intention of dealing with specific issues. In April 1926 the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes established a consulate in Brăila for the purpose of protecting Yugoslav merchants and sailors who lived and worked there in large numbers. The above mentioned consulate was active until the Foreign Ministry decided to close it down in March 1934, despite protests by merchants and sailors. At some point one more consulate had been established, this one in Timișoara in 1935, only to later be disbanded and then re-established once again in January 1941. In explanation for establishing this consulate, the Secretary for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs wrote: "*Potrebno nam je poslanstvo koje će pokriti zapadnu Rumuniju, kako bi na što bolji način iskoristili sve ekonomske I trgovačke potencijale regije a Temišvar, kao najveći grad, predstavlja očigledan izbor.* [we need an agency that would cover western Romania in order to better exploit all the economic and trade potentials of the area and, Timișoara, the largest city in the region, would be the obvious choice]."²²

Archival Funds

The entire archival material considering the diplomatic missions of Yugoslavia in Romania is at present held in the Archives of Yugoslavia in Belgrade and is given code number 395. Originally, it was stored in the archives of the Federal Secretary for Foreign Affairs of SFRJ. The material is now properly sorted, by year and by structure. The structure of the fund (sorted in accordance with year progression) is as follows: 1) Highly classified archives; 2) Classified archives: Romania, Yugoslav-Romanian relations, International relations, Court, protocol, medals, working material; 3) General archives: General material, Trade, Tourism, Yugoslav institutions in Romania, Publications, Diplomatic agencies in Romania,

¹⁹ Miloje Milojević, *Naši odnosi sa drugim državama*, Belgrade, 1929, p. 747.

²⁰ "Službene novine Kraljevine SHS" 138 (1929).

²¹ AJ, *Diplomatic mission in Romania – Bucharest*, 395-44-326, General archives, no 3512, March 1, 1939.

²² AJ, 334, App. no 434, January 26, 1941.

Correspondence with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; 4) Administrative books. Unfortunately many documents were not saved, especially the documents of political significance for the period between 1935 and 1941. When one examines the material that remained and is currently stored in fond of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is obvious that a lot of it was destroyed during the Second World War. Even prior to the war, many sensitive documents were destroyed by officers of the Yugoslav diplomatic missions because the information they contained were very valuable to the Axis intelligence services²³. In general, the fond contains 6.5 running meters of files, 47 folders and 342 descriptive units.

The fond contains various documents, mostly in Serbo-Croatian language, but also in other languages, especially French and Romanian. It touches various subjects and can be very informing and inspirational for someone investigating the history of Yugoslav-Romanian relations or general history of the Balkans and Southeast Europe in the interwar period.

²³ Dragoš Petrović, Predrag Krejić, *Vrednovanje dokumenata diplomatsko – konzularnih fondova Kraljevine Jugoslavije (1918-1945)*, "Arhiv" 1-2 (2003), p. 10-12.