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## MILOVAN DJILAS ON NATIONAL AND MINORITY QUESTIONS IN THE POST-WAR SOCIALIST YUGOSLAVIA\*

**Abstract:** National and minority questions were an important part of the policy of Yugoslav communists before, during, and after WWII. The national question was politically very tricky, so the leadership of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) approached it with tact and caution. Some personages played a special role in this. The paper attempts to analyze the approach of one of the most prominent and influential CPY people, Milovan Djilas, the so-called “fourth” man in the Party and in the State.

**Keywords:** National question, minority question, Milovan Djilas, Communist Party of Yugoslavia

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## Introduction

For seventeen years between 1937 and 1954 Milovan Djilas<sup>1</sup> was among the top officials of the CPY and the post-war socialist Yugoslavia.<sup>2</sup> As one of the central figures in the government and in the system of post-war Yugoslavia, Djilas had the esteem and the position that

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- 1 Milovan Djilas (1911-1995), was a Yugoslav revolutionary, politician, political thinker, dissident and writer. He studied literature in Belgrade. As a student he joined the CPY in 1932. He did time in prison between 1933 and 1936 and after having served his sentence, he became one of the four leading people in the Party leadership. During the WWII he held a number of posts in the partisan army, from commanding to negotiatory and propagandistic ones. He was a member of the Supreme Staff of the partisan army. After the war he headed the Agitprop, served as minister in the Yugoslav government and as chairman of the Federal Parliament. Due to his “revisionist” views he was deprived of all offices and removed from public life in January 1954. Because of his critique of the system and the government he was sentenced to prison twice and served his time between 1956 and 1961 and 1962 and 1966. He died in Belgrade in 1995. He wrote a number of literary, publicist and memoirist works, the best known being: *Nova klasa* [*The New Class*], *Nesavršeno društvo* [*The Unperfect Society*], the novels *Crna Gora* [*Montenegro*], *Svetovi i mostovi* [*Worlds and Bridge*], *Izgubljene bitke* [*Lost Battles*], the study *Njegoš, pjesnik, vladar, vladika* [*Njegos, Poet, Prince, Bishop*] and memoirs *Besudna zemlja* [*Land Without Justice*], *Memoari jednog revolucionara* [*Memoir of a Revolutionary*], *Vlast i pobuna* [*Rise and Fall*], *Razgovori sa Staljinom* [*Conversations with Stalin*] and *Revolucionarni rat* [*Wartime*].
  - 2 The CPY/UCY [Union of Communists of Yugoslavia] and Yugoslav leadership at that time was made up of the s called “Big Four”: Josip Broz Tito, Edvard Kardelj, Aleksandar Rankovic and Milovan Djilas.

enabled him to directly influence the processes and events throughout the first decade of the new state's existence. For that reason, it can be claimed that his opinions and ideological stances were not only respected but also directly implemented in practice. Therefore, his words are undoubtedly important for the analysis of certain phenomena, processes, and events. Thus far, historiography paid attention to Djilas' activity in national question,<sup>3</sup> albeit more often within journalism than science. However, the small segment of Djilas' views on minority questions was almost completely left out not only of the focus of scholarly historiography, but also of other sciences and scientific disciplines, and even out of journalistic production dealing with him, that is not small.<sup>4</sup>

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- 3 Cf. Душан Бојковић, “Национална политика Комунистичке партије Југославије 1918-1928: отварање црногорског питања”, *Историјски записи* 3-4/2013, 185-198; Душан Бојковић, “Црна Гора у националној политици и организационој структури Комунистичке партије Југославије 1929-1941”, *Историјски записи* 1-2/2025, 195-215; Душан Бојковић, “Милован Ђилас о националом и државном питању Црне Горе”, *Токови историје* 1/2012, 106-134; Александар В. Милетић, “Милован Ђилас и концепт црногорске нације у социјализму”, *Лесковачки збоник* 2023, 415-431.
- 4 Selected domestic and foreign literature on Milovan Djilas: Günter Bartch, *Milovan Djilas oder Die Selbstbehauptung des Menschen. Versuch einer Biographie*, (München: Mainz Verlag, 1971); Stephen Clissold, *Djilas, the Progress of a Revolutionary*, (New York: Maurice Temple Smith, 1983); Vasilije Kalezić, *Џилас, миленик и отпадник комунизма. Kontroverze pisca i ideologa*, (Beograd: Zodne, 1988); Momčilo Đorgović, *Џилас, vernik i jeretik*, (Beograd: Akvarijus, 1989); Michael M. Lustig, *Trotsky and Djilas. Critics of Communist Bureaucracy*, (New York-London: Greenwood Press,

At some points, the Party leadership entrusted explicitly Milovan Djilas, as a reliable man, with tasks dealing with some big and important issues connected with the national question. In his memoirs, Djilas claims such tasks were entrusted to him because he was “tacitly considered a comrade who was interested in and had the understanding of national problems...”.<sup>5</sup> Already at the eve of WWII Djilas was given the task of presenting a report on the national question (that does not survive) at the fifth Party conference in 1940. What does survive is the report on that question that originally should have been submitted by Moshka Pijade, which Djilas heavily edited. From his comments, we can gauge just how well he was acquainted with the matter.<sup>6</sup> The leaders of the CPY were obviously aware of this propensity of Djilas’ when they entrusted him with two quite sensitive and momentous questions

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1989); Vladimir Dedijer, *Veliki buntovnik Milovan Đilas. Prilozi za biografiju*, (Beograd: Prosveta, 1991); Branislav Kovačević, *Đilas, heroj-antiheroj*, (Titograd: Pobjeda, 1991); Momčilo Cemović, *Đilasovi odgovori*, (Beograd: Svetlostkomerc, 1997); Jasna Dragovic, *Milovan Djilas. From the Early Critique of the Communist System to the Present*, (Genève: Institute Universitaire de Hautes Études Internationales, 1993); Dragutin Leković, *Milovan Đilas i socijalizam*, (Podgorica: CANU, 2010); Милош Миликић Мидо, *Ратним стазама Милована Ђиласа*, (Београд: Теовид, 2011); Александар В. Милетић, *Сарадник, противник, непријатељ. Идејно-политичка делатност Милована Ђиласа 1945-1954*, (Београд: ИНИС, 2022).

5 Milovan Đilas, *Vlast i pobuna*, (Beograd: Književne novine, 1991), 87.

6 Cf. Teze o nacionalnom pitanju, *Izvori za istoriju SKJ. Peta zemaljska konferencija KPJ (19-23. oktobar 1940)*, prir. Pero Damjanović, Milovan Bosić, Dragica Lazarević, (Beograd: Izdavački centar Komunist, 1980), 376-400.

from that sphere at the end of WWII. The first one concerned the definition of the concept of the Montenegrin nationality within the new state,<sup>7</sup> and the second drawing borders between federal units of Serbia (the Vojvodina) and of Croatia in 1945.<sup>8</sup> Both questions were very important and complicated at the time of the establishment and consolidation of the new powers that be. In both of them, Djilas played the decisive, or at least the leading role. As we have said, Djilas' individual "interventions" in minority questions during this period remained out of the focus of scholarly analysis.

*Yugoslav Communists, Yugoslav State, National and Minority Questions before and during the WWII*

The minority problem as part of the broader national question troubled almost all political actors on the Yugoslav political scene, both before and after the WWII. The national question was one of the central and most acute problems of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia on which national and political factors based their political planks. Part of it was the minority question as typical political and ideological tool often used in

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7 Cf. AJ, ЦК СКЈ, Идеолошка комисија, IV-а-29; Милован Ђилас, *Чланци 1941-1946*, (Београд: Култура, 1947), 212-225; *Борба*, Мај 1, 1945.

8 Cf. AJ, ЦК СКЈ, X-2-I/1; Александар В. Милетић, "Милован Ђилас и питање разграничења између Србије и Хрватске 1945. године", *Историја и географија. Сусрети и прожимања*, тематски зборник радова, ур. Софија Божић, (Београд: ИНИС, Географски институт "Јован Цвијић" САНУ, Институт за славистику РАН, 2014), 241-261.

multi-ethnic and complex states such as Yugoslavia that contained numerous ruling and minority nationalities.<sup>9</sup> The policy of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia could not be left untouched by the national and consequently by minority questions during the inter-war period. On the contrary: the national and minority questions were a constant part of political activities of Yugoslav communists.<sup>10</sup> Over time the attitude of Yugoslav communists towards this question was “developed” and construed depending on political and ideological needs. After the WWII, at the time the new Yugoslav state was coming to being, it was handled and construed in keeping with the new needs, but also in keeping with the ideological and programmatic views of the CPY.<sup>11</sup>

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- 9 More on national minorities in the Yugoslav state during the inter-war period cf. Zoran Janjetović, *Deca careva, pastorčad kraljeva. Nacionalne manjine u Jugoslaviji 1918-1941*, (Beograd: INIS, 2005).
- 10 On Yugoslav communists’ attitude towards the national question during the inter-war period cf. Dušan Lukač, *Radnički pokret u Jugoslaviji i nacionalno pitanje 1918-1941*, (Beograd: ISI, 1972); Десанка Пешић, *Југословенски комунисти и национално питање 1919-1935*, (Београд: Рад, 1983); Gordana Vlačić, *Jugoslovenska revolucija i nacionalno pitanje 1919-1927*, (Zagreb: Globus, 1984); Latinka Perović, *Od centralizma do federalizma. KPJ u nacionalnom pitanju*, (Zagreb: Globus, 1984); Ivo Banac, *Nacionalno pitanje u Jugoslaviji. Porijeklo, povijest, politika*, (Zagreb: Globus, 1988); Aleksa Đilas, *Osporavana zemlja. Jugoslovenstvo i revolucija*, (Beograd: Književne novine, 1990); Branislav Gligorijević, *Kominternu, jugoslovensko i srpsko pitanje*, (Beograd: ISI, 1992).
- 11 More on the development of the attitude towards the minority question during the first two decades of the Socialist Yugoslavia cf. Zoran Janjetović, *Konfrontacija i integracija. Nacionalne manjine u Srbiji 1944-1964*, (Beograd: INIS, 2022).

The creation of the first Yugoslav state, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SCS) that was actually a multi-ethnic and complex state, was coupled with creation of some new political factors. One of them was the party of South Slavic Communists, originally called the Socialist Workers' Party of Yugoslavia (of Communists), later renamed the Communist Party of Yugoslavia,<sup>12</sup> which was founded in 1919 by unification of workers' and social-democratic parties and organizations from various parts of the newly united Yugoslav territory.<sup>13</sup> Although its name suggested the basic pro-Yugoslav attitude,<sup>14</sup> during the inter-war period the CPY had at best an ambiguous attitude towards the Yugoslav state, and at times even an overtly anti-Yugoslav political program. It was in the largest degree dependent on the official policy of its sponsor, the Comintern, i.e. on political interests of the first country of socialism, the USSR, that was created at the same time as the Yugoslav state and the Yugoslav communist party.

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12 From 1952 (the 6th Party congress) until its demise in 1990 (the 14th congress) the party was called the Union of Communists of Yugoslavia. To all intents, with its disappearance, the Yugoslav state also disappeared.

13 On the origins, creation and activities of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia cf. *Историја Савеза комуниста Југославије*, (Београд: Издавачки центар Комунист, Народна књига, Рад, 1985); *Историјски архив Комунистичке партије Југославије. Том II. Конгреси и земаљске конференције КПЈ 1919-1937*, (Београд: Историјско одељење ЦК КПЈ, 1950).

14 The party of Yugoslav communists featured the name "Yugoslavia" in its appellation ever since its foundation, ten years before it officially became the state's name in 1929. (Janjetović, *Konfrontacija i integracija*, 59).

The attitude towards the Yugoslav state was closely connected with the general attitude of the CPY towards the national question.

The first Yugoslav state created in 1918 was not perceived as a friendly one by the first country of socialism, the Soviet Union, that was created after the October Revolution of 1917 on the ruins of the former Russian Empire.<sup>15</sup> Throughout its existence, the new powers-that-be in Moscow regarded the Yugoslav kingdom as a counter-revolutionary and anti-Soviet creation of the Versailles peace treaty and part of the system of new states aimed against the interests of the USSR.<sup>16</sup> For that reason Moscow tried to support disintegration of Yugoslavia by all means through its ideological proxies (communists) or by aiding various anti-Yugoslav and separatist forces in the country.<sup>17</sup> During the first years of its existence, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia did not espouse an unconditionally negative attitude towards the Yugoslav state, deeming that the creation of the first state of Southern Slavs

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15 More on this cf. Giuseppe Boffa, *Povijest Sovjetskog Saveza*, 1-2, (Opatija: Otokar Keršovani, 1985); Sava Živanov, *Crveni Oktobar*, 1-2, (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2012); Душко М. Ковачевић, *Историја Совјетског Савеза*, (Нови Сад: Матица српска, 2023).

16 Branko Petranović, Momčilo Zečević, *Agonija dve Jugoslavije*, (Beograd: IKP Zaslona, 1991), 191.

17 Бранко Петрановић, *Југословенско искуство српске националне интеграције*, (Београд: Службени лист СРЈ, 1993), 41; Коста Николић, *Бољшевиција КПЈ 1919-1929. Историјске последице*, (Београд: ИСИ, 1994), 116-147; Архив Југославије (АЈ), Комунистичка интернационала (КИ), 1925/9; АЈ, КИ, 1926/33; АЈ, КИ, 1927/24-8; АЈ, КИ, 1928/10; АЈ, КИ, 1928/42; АЈ, КИ, 1933/285-5; АЈ, КИ, 1935/278; АЈ, КИ, 1936/35.



was in principle a guarantee of peace and to a large extent, the result of the solution of the national question.<sup>18</sup> However, under Comintern's influence the attitude of the CPY towards the Yugoslav state started to change already in the first half of the 1920s. After the Party had been pushed underground, the Yugoslav communists took an explicitly anti-system, anti-state and disintegrative, and thus openly anti-Yugoslav stance.<sup>19</sup> The CPY espoused that anti-state and anti-Yugoslav view until the mid-1930s, when under the influence of the changed Comintern policy (due to the rising fascism), it changed its stance again and started espousing reorganization of the Yugoslav state along federalist lines.<sup>20</sup> In that way the "federalist" CPY concept of the Yugoslav state community remained permanent and served as the basis for reorganization of the Yugoslav state after the victory of the Yugoslav revolution at the end of the WWII and accession of communists.

The Communist Party of Yugoslavia was above all a revolutionary, and thus, ideologically clearly defined organization. Basically, all major issues, including the national one, were approached within that framework and in that way, in direct political dependence on its patron, the Comintern, i.e. the USSR. This meant acting in keeping with the interests of the first country of socialism. Since nation

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18 Пешић, *Југословенски комунисти и национално питање*, 48; Јанјетовић, *Konfrontacija i integracija*, 66; Архив Југославије (АЈ), фонд Централног Комитета Савеза комуниста Југославије (507), 1919/9.

19 Николић, *Бољшевиизација КПЈ*, 116-125.

20 АЈ, КИ, 790/1, 1935/520.

was defined as a historical product of the capitalist era, i.e. of bourgeois social, economic and political relations, seen strictly ideologically, the Yugoslav communists perceived in nation primarily its class-social (revolutionary) role as opposed to the historical and political one. However, outside of theory, in political practice, the communists also realized the everyday political role of nation and the national question, and hence their usability. Thus, in political and ideological parlance of the communists in principle, it was not directly spoken of certain nations or peoples as the root of the problem, but primarily of national “bourgeoisies” as social exploiting phenomena that championed various particularistic nationalisms for their own interests.<sup>21</sup> According to this ideological conception, in complex states the national bourgeoisie of the leading (usually the most numerous) people that is under certain circumstances also considered the ruling people, as a rule, subjugates and exploits those minority peoples with whose bourgeoisies it cooperates at the same time. Because of that, in keeping with definitions set at that time by the leader of the October Revolution Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, decisive and uncompromising struggle had to be led against those “hegemonistic” bourgeoisies of the leading peoples, helping thus the “oppressed” peoples and their movements in their struggle for “liberation”.<sup>22</sup> In practice, this meant helping separatist and anti-state elements against the leading, “hegemonistic”, i.e. the majority (“ruling”) nation, which

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21 Дејан Антић, Александар В. Милетић, “Комунистичка партија Југославије и црногорско питање до 1945. године: традиција, идеологија, политика”, *Токови историје* 2/2024, 117.

22 Gligorijević, *Kominternа, jugoslovensko i srpsko pitanje*, 106-107.

often meant indirectly helping nationalist extremism, even chauvinism of the minority “endangered” and “oppressed” nations (peoples).

The national question, understood through the prism of such ideology and politics, was perceived by Yugoslav communists within the context of the Yugoslav state, in a particular way. Following above all the evolution of the Comintern’s views in this matter, Yugoslav communists started devoting more attention to the national question already in the first half of the 1920s.<sup>23</sup> Already at that point their clearer perception of the Serbian people as the “ruling” one can be discerned.<sup>24</sup> Namely, by following the prescribed ideological and political matrix of coupling forces of workers and the peasantry with those of the oppressed national and minority communities, the communists used that ideological tenet as a means of political mobilization of non-Serbian workers’ and peasants’ masses.<sup>25</sup> In that way, the communists often equated the privileged status of the “Serbian bourgeoisie” with the allegedly privileged status of the Serbian people in the Yugoslav state. In that way, the whole Serbian people was designated as a counter-revolutionary and exploitative factor in the country. This was principally disguised under the slogan of the so-called “greater Serbian hegemonism” of the Serbian bourgeoisie.<sup>26</sup> In accordance with this, the Yugoslav

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23 Janjetović, *Konfrontacija i integracija*, 67.

24 *Ibid.*, 72.

25 *Ibid.*, 67-68.

26 *Историјски архив Комунистичке партије Југославије*, 69-70; 98; 107; 110-112; 120; 143-144; 153; 162-165; AJ, ЦК СКЈ, 1921/1-2; AJ, КИ, 1923/66; AJ, КИ, 1924/72; AJ, ЦК СКЈ, 1925/7; AJ, ЦК

communists forcefully championed and propagated the struggle of the “oppressed” non-Serbian peoples against the “ruling” Serbian bourgeoisie, espousing the right of peoples to “self-determination” and “national liberation” from Serbian “hegemonism” personified in the Yugoslav kingdom.<sup>27</sup> With some modifications, especially concerning separatist tendencies, the Yugoslav communists basically kept this view of the national question even after the CPY had switched to policy of preservation of the Yugoslav state in mid-1930s.<sup>28</sup>

National minorities had a special place in the national policy of the CPY. Concerning them, the situation was somewhat different than in the case of the leading peoples of Croats and Slovenes and the then unrecognized Macedonians and Montenegrins who had allegedly been “oppressed” by the Serbs. In principle, the Yugoslav communists recognized the right of self-determination for national minorities too, but up to the degree that tallied with the policy of the CPY at a given moment. The degree of “freedom” from the “greater Serbian hegemony” reserved for minorities varied from case to case. Thus, the most extreme form of support for minority separatism was evinced at the 4<sup>th</sup> Party congress in Dresden in 1928 when the Yugoslav communists opted for a policy of overt destructions of the Yugoslav state. Thus, the Albanians, of whom it was said they lived “in slavery” in Yugoslavia,

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CKJ, 1925/51-4; Gligorijević, *Komintern, jugoslovensko i srpsko pitanje*, 158.

27 AJ, КИ, 1924/66.

28 Петрановић, *Југословенско искуство српске националне интеграције*, 40.

were offered not only separation, but also unification with Albania, which was in fact support for creation of Greater Albanian. The right of self-determination was recognized also for the Hungarian and German national minorities in the Vojvodina.<sup>29</sup> Oscillations between self-determination, secession, and unification of certain minorities with their patron-states, and granting degrees of autonomy without secession, were visible in the policy of the Yugoslav communists during the two inter-war decades. They depended primarily on the attitude of the CPY towards Yugoslavia, but also on the policy the Comintern led at a given moment. Thus, after the change of Comintern's policy in the mid-1930s due to fascist danger, the CPY also moderated its policy of self-determination. Having perceptibly reduced its willingness to grant autonomies to "oppressed" peoples and minorities, the CPY reduced the acceptability of separatism to the minimum, keeping it only as one of the possible options.<sup>30</sup>

The Yugoslav communists entered WWII with the decision to preserve the country and to refashion it in a new, federal way. However, the situation changed considerably during the war, which influenced the national, and especially the minority questions. The first Yugoslav state disappeared together with its social and political system in the maelstrom of occupation. The ethnic map was drastically changed in some areas. The country went through bloody civil war. Genocide was perpetrated against the Serbs Jews and Roma by members of the until re-

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29 Janjetović, *Konfrontacija i integracija*, 73.

30 *Ibid.*, 74.

cently “constitutive” peoples, but also by national minorities who, to a large degree, sided with occupiers, mostly from their mother-countries. Paradoxically, the Yugoslav communists and their wartime resistance movement (People’s Liberation Movement – PLM) found largest support among the Serbs, the nation that was, in keeping with the ideological matrix, stereotyped as “hegemonistic”, whereas other “endangered” nationalities were usually much less represented in the movement or overtly sided with occupiers and were hostile both to the People’s Liberation Movement and the new Yugoslav state. This held true especially for national minorities that were poorly represented in the PLM or not at all. This was the consequence of the war and occupation since the Serbs were systematically suppressed in every way and subjected to war-crimes, whereas national minorities were favored and became privileged nationalities overnight.

For that reason, some minorities incurred punishment for crimes and genocide from the new revolutionary authorities. The first blow was aimed at the German national minority that was almost completely wiped out from the country. Other minorities were not expelled en masse, regardless of the fact that they had committed the same or even worse crimes than the ethnic Germans. These were the Albanians, Bulgarians, and Hungarians, but also some members of the peoples who (again) became constitutive in the socialist Yugoslavia. This concerned above all the Croats, whose wartime Independent State of Croatia was not only on the side of the occupiers, but was undoubtedly one of the worst criminal creations in Europe in WWII. The Yugoslavia that was (re-)created by the communists

was supposed to be “the state of reconciliation” (as the phrase went), so certain selection of culprits from among members of peoples and national minorities was made in accordance with that idea, and its spirit, from which, to be sure, the *Volksdeutsche* were excluded.<sup>31</sup> Further on, we will attempt to present the views on the national, and especially on minority questions, of one of the pivotal figures of the new regime, Milovan Djilas.

*The Policy of “Brotherhood of Peoples” –  
the Basis of Communist Approach  
to National and Minority Questions*

The basic value principle that determined the Yugoslav communists’ approach to all constitutive peoples and national minorities was national equality or “brotherhood” of peoples that constituted one of the pillars of the socialist society and of the system of the new Yugoslavia. The communists stressed this from the very beginning in their public addresses, underlining thus not only their system of values but also the major condition for building the “state of reconciliation” as Yugoslavia would be. Also, no less important was the view that such policy had been created during the difficult wartime years that was therefore sacrosanct for the new powers—that be, a value not to be tempered with.

Thus, not long after liberation of Belgrade Milovan Djilas pontificated that the solidity of the country was based on “brotherhood of peoples of Yugoslavia, on their equality

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31 More on this cf. *Ibid.*, 89-152.

that had been forged during the struggle against German invaders, against hegemony of all stripes who of necessity had found themselves on the side of foreigners”.<sup>32</sup> This was certainly also a hint at the behavior of national minorities during the war. However, he goes on in conciliatory spirit of goodwill to claim that the “policy of brotherhood and equality of peoples” in Yugoslavia proved in practice that it had nothing to do with the “policy of enslaving other peoples and countries, but was conversely strongly showing tendencies of unselfishly aiding other peoples in their struggle against imperialists”.<sup>33</sup> That “brotherhood” of peoples was the pivot of the victory that did away with everything that “obstructed brotherhood among peoples”.<sup>34</sup> He warned of the importance to preserve the “unity” of the people. In that respect he particularly stressed the difference between “popular unity”, meaning unity of one people, from the “unity or brotherhood of peoples” championed by the communists, that meant “alliance of equal peoples” within the new Yugoslav state.<sup>35</sup> Djilas underlined here especially the danger of foreign interference, i.e. of “divide and rule” policy aimed at destructions of the above mentioned unity and enslavement of other peoples.<sup>36</sup>

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32 *Борба*, December 10, 1944; Ђилас, *Чланци 1941-1946*, 177.

33 Ђилас, *Чланци 1941-1946*, 177.

34 *Ibid.*, 178.

35 АЈ, 515, Збирка штампе радничког и комунистичког покрета (ЗШ), ШС-10, “Наше народно јединство – основица наше борбе” (рукопис предавања Милована Ђиласа одржаног на Коларчевом народном универзитету, 30. децембра 1944); *Борба*, December 31, 1944.

36 АЈ, 515, ЗШ, ШС-10, “Наше народно јединство – основица наше борбе” (рукопис предавања Милована Ђиласа одржаног на Коларчевом народном универзитету, 30. децембра 1944), 3-4.



Aside from believing that Yugoslavia, especially under their leadership and thanks to their policy of “brotherhood of peoples” based on the principle of “respect for other peoples” was an “attractive force” for other Balkan peoples, i.e. a factor of “establishing different relations on the Peninsula than those that had existed before”, the communists also believed in a special kind of abstract progressiveness of the “masses”, i.e. that absolute majority in all peoples in the Balkans was on the side of “policy of brotherhood”. So it came about that Djilas construed, directly and indirectly, the position and mood of national minorities at the end of 1944 in that sign.

#### *Djilas, Bulgaria and the Bulgarian National Minority*

The Kingdom (Empire) of Bulgaria was one of four occupying powers that attacked, dismembered, and occupied or annexed parts of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in April 1941. Bulgaria occupied the largest part of the former Vardar *Banovina*, i.e. Macedonia and some parts of the former Morava *Banovina*, i.e. south-eastern Serbia (districts of Vranje and Pirot). Members of the Bulgarian national minority from Caribrod (now: Dimitrovgrad) and Bosilegrad who had found themselves within the borders of the Yugoslav state after the end of WWI, as well as those from places around Babušnica and Surdulica and eastern parts of Macedonia, greeted Bulgarian occupying troops as liberators, and subsequently took massive part in Bulgarian armed units.<sup>37</sup> Bulgarian occupational authoriti-

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37 Janjetović, *Konfrontacija i integracija*, 150-151.

es committed horrendous crimes against Serbian and Macedonian civilians in these territories during WWII, implementing at the same time a ruthless policy of Bulgari- zation.<sup>38</sup> However, after the change of government in Sep- tember 1944, the Kingdom of Bulgaria switched sides and became all of a sudden an “ally”. Numerous former mem- bers of the Bulgarian army turned into parts of the “allied” troops. The communists accepted the new arrangement with Bulgaria, glossing for political reasons (Pan-Slavism and hopes for a future federation) over the behavior of the Bulgarian national minority during the war. The whole Bulgarian turn happened under the auspices of the USSR and as a function of its Balkan policy.<sup>39</sup>

Džilas saw Bulgaria in that political key, and indirectly also the Bulgarian minority in Yugoslavia. He was of the opinion that Bulgarian “powers-that-be” played the role of “Hitler’s gendarmes in Yugoslavia”, but that the “Bulgarian masses offered all kinds of resistance to such policy of the fascist Bulgarian clique towards brotherly Yugoslavia”.<sup>40</sup> He founded this conviction on historical experience that he se- lectively construed by idealizing some historical phenome- na on which he based his inference that in Bulgaria there had always been, “just as with peoples of Yugoslavia, devel- oped striving for as cordial relations as possible with brot-

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38 Cf. Miroslav Stojiljković, *Bugarska okupatorska politika u Srbiji 1941-1944*, (Beograd: ISI, 1989); Димитрије Кулић, *Бугарска оку- пација Србије 1941-1944*, 1-2, (Београд: Јустисија, 1992).

39 Cf. Борис Томанић, *Преокрет: Југославија и Бугарска у завр- шној фази Другог светског рата 1943/1944 – 1945/1946*, (Бео- град: Catena mundi, ИСИ, 2023).

40 Ђилас, *Чланци 1941-1946*, 179.

hers of the same blood, the Serbs, Croats and others".<sup>41</sup> The peak of good relations with Bulgaria was exactly the victorious policy of the People's Liberation Struggle in Yugoslavia in which Djilas believed excessively and without reserve – one is tempted to say, superficially, in the light of recent enmity. He wrote: "Brotherhood between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria is being created in the same way, with the same means as the brotherhood among peoples of Yugoslavia was created. It is being created in the struggle against German occupiers and the blood Bulgarian soldiers shed against the German invaders in Macedonia and in Serbia, around Skoplje, and on the field of Kosovo will burn all that weeds and brambles, all the hatred sown by fascist Bulgarian criminals during the occupation. A common struggle that is now developing will fortify brotherhood between the Bulgarian and our peoples."<sup>42</sup> Would such a thing be possible "without our correct policy in national question?" asked Djilas, concluding: "Of course not, all that would have been impossible. The right, anti-chauvinist policy on national question that we and Bulgarians must continue to develop, will fortify brotherly relations between the peoples of Yugoslavia and the Bulgarian people."<sup>43</sup> Such magnanimous forgiveness of Bulgarian sins from recent occupation no doubt had favorable impact on the situation of the Bulgarian national minority in Yugoslavia that was protected in advance.

Connected with this was certainly the national question in Macedonia, that Djilas believed has been solved in

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41 *Ibid.*, 179-180.

42 *Ibid.*, 180-181.

43 *Ibid.*, 181.

war, since the Macedonians were finally granted political and cultural rights. “The solution of the Macedonian question not only does not harm the Serbs and Bulgarians, but fortifies brotherly ties between the two peoples on one hand, and the Macedonians and Serbs and Bulgarians on the other. It is one of the major historical events in the Balkans and one of the main elements for general consolidation of the situation in the Balkans, for strengthening the policy of peace and independence of the Balkan peoples,” deemed Djilas.<sup>44</sup> Djilas also advocated Macedonia as a special territorial unit in the new state in the context of suppression of the so-called “greater Serbian hegemonism,” stressing the exclusive equality of the Serbs and Macedonians. In his reply to the remark on Macedonia by the prominent Serbian politician Milan Grol in March 1945, Djilas advised him that “as a representative of a political group that in the past had not recognized and had not realized the individuality of the Macedonian people, he could only cause in Macedonia ... dissatisfaction and mistrust in the final solution of the national question and in the good intentions of all members of the government concerning the equality of all peoples in Yugoslavia.”<sup>45</sup>

### *Djilas and the Question of the Italian Minority*

The Kingdom of Italy was the second largest Axis power that attacked Yugoslavia in April 1941 occupying or annexing parts of its territory afterwards. Italian occu-

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44 *Ibid.*, 180.

45 *Борба*, March 13, 1945.

pation lasted until mid-1943, i.e. until the capitulation and fall of Mussolini's regime. Until then the Italian forces had been occupying a larger part of Slovenia, parts of the Dalmatian coast, Bay of Kotor and Montenegro that they declared "independent" (and where they tried to install a satellite separatist regime) and annexed a larger part of Kosovo to the puppet state of Greater Albania. Italian forces participated in numerous military and punitive expeditions against partisan units, often perpetrating crimes against civilian population in the process.<sup>46</sup> However, the Italian national minority in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was numerically negligible but was suddenly inflated in the new Yugoslavia after the liberation of the Kvarner Gulf, Istria, and Gorizia which had been part of Italy until then. The large, newly acquired Italian minority in Yugoslavia, which was made up of until then foreign citizens, gradually emigrated in large numbers. Nevertheless, the new Yugoslav authorities officially evinced a willingness to recognize all minority rights of the Italians in Yugoslavia.<sup>47</sup> High Yugoslav officials often made statements to that effect.

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46 Cf. Милутин Живковић, *Стара Рашка под италијанском окупацијом 1941-1943*, (Београд: Catena Mundi, ИСИ, 2020).

47 Emigration of the Italian minority was spurred by several factors: public or covert oppression by the new authorities, fear of persecution and punishment because of conduct under occupation, economic, personal or family reasons or the feeling of national "humiliation", refusal to live in a Slavic state etc. Cf. Zoran Janjetović, "(Ne)dosledni (inter)nacionalizam: Komunistička partija Jugoslavije i nacionalne manjine 1941-1948", *Између слободе и тескобе. Националне мањине у Југославији*, тематски зборник радова, ed. Божица Славковић Мирић, Милана Живановић, Давор Стипић, (Београд: ИНИС, 2023), 272-274.

During the end phase of the war, in late 1944 Djilas also indirectly touched upon members of the Italian national minority in his public comments. Thus, he spoke of the Italians comparatively well, concerning the fact that they were the second most important occupying power after the Germans. “Our correct policy on national question has already brought us huge sympathies with the democratic movement and democratic masses of Italy” stressed he and added: “Italians living in territories with Slavic majority that used to belong to the Italian state can easily see in war practice, in practical struggle against German invaders today, that chauvinism is defeated in Yugoslavia, that the Italians in Yugoslavia have more rights than in Italy itself... They can ascertain themselves that the rights of national minorities in Yugoslavia are respected, that the honor, name, and culture of every people is respected, and that in Yugoslavia there is and there will be no place for oppression of members of other nationalities, but rather that they will be equal to all other citizens of Yugoslavia.”<sup>48</sup> Djilas related such treatment of the Italian national minority to the pertinent and acute questions between Yugoslavia and still only half-liberated Italy at that time. “Therefore, it is no coincidence that... we created Italian units from soldiers of the army that fell apart after the capitulation of Italy. This thoroughly corresponded with the spirit of our policy of respect for the rights of other peoples. It is also no coincidence that the working class of Trieste and the youth of Trieste passed resolutions expressing their wish for those areas to be

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48 Ђилас, *Чланци 1941-1946*, 181-182.

united with Yugoslavia... That is the result of our correct policy in national question in general, and towards national minorities in particular”, Djilas stated.<sup>49</sup>

*Djilas, the Vojvodina,  
and the Hungarian National Minority*

In the ethno-nationally complex territory of the Vojvodina two national minorities dominated, the Hungarians and the Germans. Among all other numerous peoples, the Serbs were dominant among the Slavs, followed by the Croats, as two “leading” peoples in Yugoslavia. During the occupation, the territory of the Vojvodina was divided into three parts: the Hungarian one (Bačka and Baranya), the German one (the Banat), and the Croatian one (Syrmium). The Serbs were turned overnight from the leading, “ruling” nation into a minority that bore the brunt of the authorities, especially in Syrmium, Bačka and Baranya.<sup>50</sup> The liberation of the Vojvodina in the fall of 1944 was not greeted with enthusiasm by all peoples, especially not by the Germans and Hungarians, but also by many Croats, members of the ustasha units, while the Serbs, and the few surviving Jews

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49 *Ibid.*, 182.

50 Cf. Žarko Atanacković, *Vojvodina u borbi 1941-1945*, (Beograd: Forum, 1959); *Vojvodina u Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu i socijalističkoj revoluciji 1941-1945*, tematski zbornik radova, prir. Čedomir Popov, (Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet, Institut za istoriju, 1984); Aleksandar Kasaš, *Mađari u Vojvodini 1941-1946*, (Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet, 1996); Чедомир Попов, Јелена Попов, *Аутономија Војводине – српско питање*, (Сремски Карловци: Крбови, 2000).

who had been victims of crimes and genocide, greeted that day in quite opposite mood. The wartime has certainly upset inter-ethnic relations in this territory, not only with the minorities but also among the constitutive peoples. Such a sensitive and difficult situation on the spot had to be resolved carefully, but decisively. For that reason, Military Administration was imposed in the Vojvodina in the first months after the liberation.<sup>51</sup>

Djilas showed a willingness to forgive also the Hungarian national minority's participation in war crimes, which was anyway the view of all CPY top-brass. Similarly, to the Italian minority Djilas underscored that it was "also no coincidence that we formed a Hungarian battalion in Slavonia more than a year ago that became an example and a model of how to treat the Hungarian national minority."<sup>52</sup> Djilas was decisive concerning the Hungarian national minority: "All Hungarians cannot be responsible for the crimes of Horthy and Szálasi. They cannot and they are not. There are fascist scoundrels and butchers among the Serbs and Croats, among the Slovenes, Macedonians, and Montenegrins. Are the chetniks of Draža Mihailović or Pavelić's ustashas who slaughtered thousands of Serbs and Croats better than the Hungarian Arrow Cross men who also slaughtered thousands of Serbs and Croats? Of course, they are not. Criminals who smeared their hands with the blood of the people should be punished, regardless of the nationality they belong to. And they shall be punished."<sup>53</sup> Djilas as-

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51 Janjetović, "(Ne)dosledni (inter)nacionalizam", 232.

52 Ђилас, *Чланци 1941-1946*, 182.

53 *Ibid.*



sociated such attitude towards the Hungarians with the principles of policy towards all national minorities: "National minorities should be won over for active struggle against fascism, Yugoslavia should be made their homeland and they should be tied to it in every way. This cannot be achieved in any other way but to make them equal citizens whose national and cultural rights are respected, and who are treated in economic, legal and every other respect as other citizens of Yugoslavia."<sup>54</sup>

Interesting are Djilas' views on the national and minority problems expressed at the founding congress of the Communist Party of Serbia in May 1945. He addressed the assembled delegates: "I would like to comment on a very special question that, in my opinion, was not posed so far. I would like to encourage our comrades to dwell on it longer in their discussions. It concerns our minority policy, concretely towards Albanians in Kosovo, the Vlachs in Serbia, the Hungarians and Croats (sic) in the Vojvodina. One should ask why we have no Croats in the Party in the Vojvodina? Why we don't have Hungarians in the Party in the Vojvodina? Why we don't have Albanians in the Party in Kosovo? I don't think Croats are any worse people than the Serbs and that the Albanians are also not bad people. To speak of a bad people means to talk about higher and lower races, of a people endowed by God, and of a people that is not. We should look deeper into the matter to understand why there are no Croats and Hungarians in the Party. They are missing because our Party organizations do not implement the right policy on the nati-

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54 *Ibid.*, 182-183.

onal question.”<sup>55</sup> Apart from the critique of the provincial and the new Party’s leadership for insufficient and “incorrect” national and minority policies, one can observe a curiosity that Djilas perceived the minorities on two levels. The first concerned the “real” minorities such as the Hungarians, whereas the second concerned those “minorities” such as the Croats, who were not proportionally represented within the new Serbian Party.

Otherwise, Milovan Djilas saw the Vojvodina as a problematic and very “tricky” area when it came to national and minority questions. He even saw the developments in that sphere in the Vojvodina as “far more serious” than those in Kosovo. Things were unsettling because of tensions in the Vojvodina on two levels: on the minority one, but also on the national one, involving the two leading constituent peoples. “The relations between two main nationalities in our country are the matter there”, warned Djilas. He explained that “chauvinism, that is present among our comrades, can cause serious difficulties, it can fan hatred against the Serbs in Croatia itself, it can poison relations between Serbs and Croats, the two strongest, basic nations can develop bad relations. When comrade Veselinov said there were no Croats in the Party, he did not mention the Hungarians. But the Hungarians are today very important indeed. The more so since they are numerous and since reactionary forces did not sink such deep roots among these Hungarians as they did

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55 *Оснивачки конгрес Комунистичке партије Србије (8-12. мај 1945)*, ed. Милан Борковић и Венцеслав Глишић, (Београд: Институт за историју радничког покрета Србије, 1972), 77-78.

among the Germans. Every other policy in the Vojvodina, except that of real brotherhood, actual participation in the government must absolutely and inevitably lead to the defeat of our power and of our Party.”<sup>56</sup>

Djilas considered the problem of the position of the Hungarians and Croats in the Vojvodina as a whole and as a burning issue to be taken very seriously. For that reason, he issued concrete guidelines: “So, comrades, can we increase the influx of the Croats and Hungarians [into the Party] by recruitment? No, we cannot. We can achieve it only by really activating the antifascist democratic movement among the Croats and Hungarians. We get Party members only from a mass, revolutionary movement. And only on the basis of a mass, revolutionary movement can we solve the question of integration of the Hungarians and Croats into the Party. If we implement national policy correctly, if we activate the Croats and Hungarians, they will then understandably join our Party. That is the way we should regard that question.”<sup>57</sup>

### *Djilas and the Albanian National Minority*

One of the most numerous and the most “problematic” national minorities were the Albanians.<sup>58</sup> A Balkan people with a vital national movement and a young state, traditionally in conflict with Serbian national inter-

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56 *Ibid.*, 79.

57 *Ibid.*, 79-80.

58 According to the population census of 1931 the Albanians were the largest national minority in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, even more numerous than the Germans. (Janjetović, *Konfrontacija i integracija*, 37).

ests ever since the Ottoman times, they were included firstly into Italian, and then into German political orbit during WWII. As a large national minority, they never completely integrated into the Yugoslav state and were therefore a permanent factor of instability.<sup>59</sup> During the occupation in the course of WWII, the Albanian national minority in the territories of Kosovo, western Macedonia, and parts of Montenegro took an active part in collaboration with Italian and German authorities, committing numerous crimes against Serbian and other peoples in these areas.<sup>60</sup> The number of Albanians who sided with the People's Liberation Movement was negligible, so most of them continued to be a subversive factor in the new state after its liberation.<sup>61</sup>

Djilas regarded the Albanians as all other national and religious minorities, foreseeing for them the same rights as for others. His opinion of their situation boiled down to the belief that they had suffered constant discri-

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59 *Ibid.*, 41-42.

60 *Ibid.*, 120-144; Ненад Антонијевић, *Косово и Метохија 1941-1945. године – ратни злочини*, (Београд: Музеј жртава геноцида, 2017).

61 On the Albanian national minority in the Yugoslav state cf. *Југословенска држава и Албанци*, I, eds. Љубодраг Димић, Ђорђе Борозан, (Београд: Службени лист СРЈ, Архив Југославије, Војно-историјски институт, 1998); *Југословенска држава и Албанци*, II, прир. Љубодраг Димић, Ђорђе Борозан, (Београд: Службени лист СРЈ, Архив Југославије, Војно-историјски институт, 1999). On their conduct at the end of the war and during the first post-war years cf. Janjetović, *Konfrontacija i integracija*, 242-261, 266-268, 314-318, 381-394 (and the sources and relevant literature aduced there.)

mination in the past, which of course the new authorities had to rectify. According to Djilas, the past discrimination was the reason for Albanian crimes, treason, and collaboration during the war, whereas he almost completely disregarded the longer historical context of Albanian nationalism, striving for Greater Albania and the protracted Serbian-Albanian conflict over territories. Djilas writes about that problem thus: "We will not, we cannot do as former Yugoslavia did, that made Albanians its sworn enemies and created conditions for a large number of them to fall prey to German and Greater Albanian propaganda. The old Yugoslavia robbed Albanian peasants of their land, and forbade all schools and all cultural institutions in the Albanian language. It pauperized and made tens of thousands of Albanians beggars and poor workers abroad. We shall not and we cannot do so..."<sup>62</sup>

Even when he touched upon the history of the Albanian question at that time, Djilas completely shared the official, ideologically slanted Party platitudes about the so-called "Greater-Serbian hegemonism" of the Serbian bourgeoisie as the root of misunderstandings between the Serbs and other peoples and national minorities in the past. His *Forward* to the new edition of the book 'Serbia and Albania' by Dimitrije Tucović that the new authorities republished after WWII vividly testifies to this.<sup>63</sup> Djilas evinced understanding for and agreement with Tucović's views from the time before WWI when the noted Serbian socialist firmly

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62 Ђилас, *Чланци 1941-1946*, 183.

63 Cf. Димитрије Туцовић, *Србија и Арбанија. Један прилог критички завојевачке политике српске буржоазије*, (Београд-Загреб: Култура, 1945), 5-15; Ђилас, *Чланци 1941-1946*, 271-281.

championed “anti-imperialistic” views, disregarding actual political and social conditions and the complexity of the overall situation in which the then Serbian government had been. This disregard spawned Tucović’s naïve picture of the “conquering” policy of the Serbian government and the exaggerated danger for the Albanian people.

Discussing Tucović’s book and its importance for the moment in which it was republished (1945), Djilas stressed that the work was proof that there had been honorable men in Serbia opposed to the policy of the elite after the Balkan Wars that “poisoned the masses with chauvinism and hatred towards the small Albanian people that had just started on its way to the creation of the national state”.<sup>64</sup> Apart from acquainting the young with this “forgotten” book (as he put it), Djilas stressed its importance for “strengthening the brotherhood of the peoples of Yugoslavia with the Albanian people in the struggle against imperialism.”<sup>65</sup> In accordance with this, explaining Tucović and his book, Djilas practically construed the whole Serbian policy at the turn of the century as “imperialist”. To be sure, he spoke of the “Serbian bourgeoisie” contrasting it with the will of the Serbian people. Djilas lauded Tucović’s views, particularly those that diverged from the views of the then European social-democracy and the 2<sup>nd</sup> International. He especially stressed the Albanian people’s right to complete independence and not just to “cultural autonomy”. This certainly concerned Yugoslavia’s policy towards Albania at that moment, but indirectly also the Albanian minority, as a clear signal of

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64 Туцовић, *Србија и Арбанија*, 5.

65 *Ibid.*, 7.

community in the spirit of “brotherhood of peoples” in socialism. He wrote: “The champions of Balkan peoples’ concord against foreign invaders of today like it even better to see that at the time when the chauvinist, imperialist policy of reactionary cliques that poisoned relations with brotherly neighboring peoples was beginning, progressive spirit and consciousness of the people did not sleep but admonished and called to struggle for brotherhood and equality of peoples, to see that the thread of progressive development and struggle for progress never broke and that today too that struggle can help, and indeed that it helps, to realize the great, centuries-long ideals of the leading lights of the Balkans – solidarity and unity of the Balkan peoples in the struggle against invaders”.<sup>66</sup>

In his benevolent understanding of the reasons for the frequent subversive behavior of the Albanian minority, Djilas went so far as to criticize the very communist policy towards the Albanians, i.e. “mistakes” in their treatment of the Albanians before and during the war. He expressed his dissatisfaction openly at the founding congress of the Communist Party of Serbia in Belgrade in May 1945. “Comrades, I have, for instance, heard that members of the Party talk of the Albanians as cattle that respect only force, and for which no other means are good except force. Force is needed, but for the victory of the people”, commented Djilas on that occasion.<sup>67</sup>

Analyzing problems facing the new powers- that-be in the recently liberated territories inhabited by members

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>67</sup> *Оснивачки конгрес Комунистичке партије Србије*, 78.

of the Albanian national minority, Djilas severely criticized communists' wrong approach to the Albanians during the war. "They [the communists] did not know how to use the Albanians' mood that was quite strong against the Italians in the beginning. What did our comrades say to the Albanians? I will just comment on the writing of the journal *Glas slobode*. It wrote this: 'All you Albanians if you want to have any right, you must fight the Germans. If you don't join the uprising, you will have no rights.' For the Albanians, this meant they would be oppressed in the new Yugoslavia", Djilas concluded.<sup>68</sup> In Djilas' opinion such an attitude caused mass "counter-revolutionary uprising" of the Albanians against the new authorities. According to him, the problem lay in fear of the local authorities they would lose "those Montenegrins and Serbs who were in favor of oppressing the Albanians". Djilas was determined to win politically and to pacify the Albanian minority, so in view of this, he proclaimed: "One should tackle with determination political education of the Albanians and cooperation with the Albanians. It cannot be done immediately. All comrades should remember our policy toward [Bosnian] Muslims. Were the Serbs willing to exterminate all Muslims? Of course, they were. But we promoted doggedly, throughout three or four years, the brotherhood of the Serbs and Muslims. To be sure, with difficulties. Reactionary forces were strong. Sanjak I the best example. But we were persistent. All Muslims there were against us. We did not lead a policy of extermination and of punishment of the Muslims there, rather we treated the Muslims like

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68 *Ibid.*



brothers. In other words, we should not be led in our policy on national questions by the mood of the masses at the moment. We should know that we, the communists, are capable of swimming against the current when we have a goal before our eyes.”<sup>69</sup> Because of mass rebellions and defections of members of the Albanian minority at the end of the war, in order to reach that goal as efficiently as possible, in many cases mass amnesties were granted to collaborationists and rebels, including the prominent wartime collaborationists (such as gendarmes and others).<sup>70</sup>

Djilas firmly believed in the idea of a “brotherhood of peoples” in socialism as the reliable method of pacifying the war-ravaged and hatred-poisoned area. In that vein, he was convinced of improvement of relations with those peoples/minorities who had en masse been on the wrong side during the war, which certainly implied some kind of forgiveness for crimes, but also some kind of “pedagogical” re-education: “Only in that way and by those means can we help also those peoples who have been against the democratic block in the war, to get out of the mud into which Hitler and his helpers had thrown them”.<sup>71</sup>

*Djilas and the Solution of the Problem  
of the German National Minority*

However, there was one national minority for which there was no forgiveness. It was the Germans. They lived in parts of the former Austria-Hungary, in the largest

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69 *Ibid.*, 78-79.

70 Janjetović, *Konfrontacija i integracija*, 248-249; 254-255; 257.

71 Ђилас, *Чланица 1941-1946*, 183.

number in the Vojvodina, in Slavonia, in parts of Croatia, and in smaller numbers in Slovenia and Bosnia. They were the second-largest minority in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, after the Albanians.<sup>72</sup> The Yugoslav Germans, known in Nazi parlance as the *Volksdeutsche*, enjoyed a better position as a minority thanks to a higher cultural level and better economic development, but also thanks to the support they received from Germany. During WWII the vast majority of them took part in the occupation system in one way or another. Many of them served in German armed forces and were directly involved in crimes against civilian population.<sup>73</sup>

In his wartime memoirs, Djilas describes the prevailing attitude of the new to-brass towards members of the German national minority at the end of WWII. The predominant opinion was that the German national minority had to bear the consequences of its behavior during the war and occupation, i.e. that it had to be punished. According to his memoirs, the reasons for punishing Germans were the following: “Both the combatants and the people were so fed up with ‘our’ Germans that expulsion of German inhabitants from our soil was also mentioned many times in the Central Committee. Perhaps we would have changed our minds had the Russians,

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72 On the origins, history and disappearance of the German national minority in Yugoslavia cf. Zoran Janjetović, *Nemci u Vojvodini*, (Beograd: INIS, 2009); Vladimir Geiger, *Nestanak Folksdojčera*, (Zagreb: Nova stvarnost, 1997); Zoran Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito. The Disappearance of the Vojvodina Germans*, (Belgrade: University of Mary, 2005).

73 Janjetović, *Konfrontacija i integracija*, 101-102.

Pols, and Czechs not already decided on and partly already realized the eviction of the Germans. We accepted that decision without a session, without discussion – as something ‘German atrocities’ had made understandable and justifiable”.<sup>74</sup>

Djilas’ words we have just quoted matched his official stance on the matter at that time. Thus, in the Party newspaper, *Borba* Djilas passed the sentence on the German national minority at the very end of 1944, sealing finally its fate in the region. Curtly and clearly, without circumlocution and dilly-dallying he wrote: “The Germans are here part of the leading invading nation. They played the role of the fifth column before the war. They, without exceptions, acted in the interest of the Hitlerite state. During the war, our Germans played here the same role as the Germans from the Reich. They showed in practice that they had nothing in common with our country. To be sure, we cannot apply the same methods against the German minority as the Germans used against us (the system of hostages, places of torture etc.) But we have to draw lessons from this fight – that not an inch of our country belongs to them, because they never considered it theirs, but the land of German imperialists. By acting as we do, we actually act completely in keeping with our policy on the national question.”<sup>75</sup> In the end, Djilas stated: “The Germans are a serious obstacle for inner solidity and security of our state, for freedom of our people and it cannot be

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74 Milovan Đilas, *Revolucionarni rat*, (Beograd: Književne novine, 1990), 410.

75 *Borba*, December 31, 1944; Ђилас, *Чланци 1941-1946*, 183.

expected that they could cease to be that in foreseeable future. And there is no doubt that all obstacles on the road to the democratic, progressive development of our country, no matter which, have to be removed.”<sup>76</sup>

Surely, such a brusque and categoric opinion of one of the central figures of the new government must have had repercussions in practice. Indeed, it was so. Soon the German minority was dealt with exactly in keeping with Djilas’ “instruction”. On April 8, 1945 the official resolution of the Antifascist Assembly of People’s Liberation of Serbia declared there was “no place for the German national minority in our country any more”.<sup>77</sup>

### *Conclusion*

During the inter-war period Yugoslav communists and their political organization, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia represented a rigid ideological organization, politically dependent on its foreign sponsor, the Comintern, i.e. the USSR. They created, adapted, and changed their policy in keeping with this. It was mirrored especially in their views on national and minority questions and in their relation to the complex, multi-ethnic state such as the Yugoslav kingdom. Under the Comintern’s influence, they perceived Yugoslavia as a “Versailles” and imperialist creation aimed against the “first country of socialism” the USSR, so they strove for a decade and a half to disintegrate it and break it up. Having thus perce-

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76 Ђилас, *Чланци 1941-1946*, 183.

77 Janjetović, “(Ne)dosledni (inter)nacionalizam”, 230.

ived the Yugoslav state, they used, among other means, the national and minority questions in order to disintegrate it. According to Lenin's ideological matrix, the Serbian people were declared the "ruling" and therefore "hegemonic" as compared with other peoples (Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, and Montenegrins), but also with national minorities (Germans, Albanians, Hungarians, Italians, and others). This attitude towards the Serbian and other peoples and minorities remained basically unchanged. Although it was toned down over time after the change in policy towards Yugoslavia in the mid-1930s, it was still in place when the war broke out in 1941. During the war and occupation things changed to a large extent. Certain peoples and the majority of national minorities sided with the occupiers and their members often directly participated in war crimes against the civilian population. The largest part of the minorities was hostile both to the new government and the new state. In keeping with the policy of "brotherhood of peoples" and the concept of the "state of reconciliation", the Yugoslav communists showed a great deal of understanding, and even magnanimity (concerning the wartime behavior and crimes) both towards some constitutive peoples and national minorities, with the exception of the members of the German minority who were punished by expulsion from the country.

The reasons for such policy of Yugoslav communists towards members of national minorities at the end of the war and after it can well be observed in statements and acts of some of the leading figures of the new Yugoslavia. Publicly expressed views of Milovan Djilas,

a man from the very top of the new government, not only on the Bulgarian, Italian, Hungarian, Albanian, and German national minorities but also on principles of policy of “brotherhood” promoted by the new powers-that-be and created to large extent by himself, show that policy clearly and precisely, its reasons, arguments, views and attitudes towards national minorities as well as towards the national question in general. From his statements, attitudes, and opinions that we have analyzed, not numerous but precious, since they were expressed with no concern for “higher-ups,” one can see the stance of the new authorities towards the recent occupiers, the Bulgarians, including members of their minority, but also towards Macedonia and the situation there. Furthermore, we can see how the communists treated the Italians, Hungarians (showing all the complexity of the situation in the Vojvodina), the Albanians as the largest and the most problematic minority in the new state, and the communists’ understanding of their situation and its causes. Finally, Djilas learily and inexorably expressed the view of the Germans that was obviously implemented in the policy of the new authorities towards this minority and its fate.

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