

**THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION AND ITS IMPACT
ON THE IDEA OF BALKAN UNION (1918–1933):
NATIONAL VS. INTERNATIONAL**

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Abstract: The paper explores and analyzes the influence of the Russian Revolution in developing and promoting the concept and idea of a Balkan union or Balkan (con)federation from 1918 until 1933. It emphasizes the fact that the idea of a Balkan federation was very often associated with a broad multilateral cooperation and peace consolidation and perceived as a sort of antipode to irredentist and ethnocentric ideas in the Balkans. Additionally, the paper examines the ideas of political organizations promoting the Balkan unity, especially of their most prominent representatives: Aleksandar Stamboliyski, Boris Sarafov, Anastas Kocarev, Alexandros Papanastasiou and others. In accordance with these, the paper outlines the activities of the Balkan Committee and Balkan Communist Federation, as a part of the Comintern. The aim of the paper is to explain the political dichotomy among the political left in the Balkans, and its indecisive ideological overextension between the call for resolving the national question and the need for supranational association at the forefront of internationalism, in addition to its other various inconsistencies.

Keywords: Russian Revolution, Balkan Federation, Balkan Union, Balkan Conferences

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1. Introduction

The idea of a Balkan federation (confederation) and Balkan union developed simultaneously with the ideas of national unification. They were interwoven in a variety of theoretical considerations, sometimes interdependent with national unification and sometimes in absolute confrontation with it. For some, this idea was an example of an ideal state, so-called concept of a final and lasting peace, in which all Balkan nations would be organized on equal and voluntary basis, in accordance

with their wishes and their needs. However, a Balkan union was an unacceptable model for those who aspired towards the realization of ethnocentric archetypal ideas, very often with megalomaniac goals. Thus some viewed the concept of Balkan unity as a perfect temporary ‘backyard’ for the completion of their expansion plans.

Towards the end of the nineteenth and in the first half of the twentieth century, the concept of Balkan integration was primarily affirmed by the Balkan socialists. This idea has become a sort of trademark of the Leftist movement in the Balkans, because it contained deep anti-war ideas and ideals of national equality and freedom.

It is important to say that the terms Balkan union, Balkan federation or confederation and Balkan federative republic are usually treated in this paper as synonyms. The reasons for this are multiple. The largest number of propagators of this idea made no essential difference between these terms (with some exceptions like Dimitar Blagoev), which further suggest that this idea has not been thoroughly and carefully elaborated. It was treated more as a kind of ideal or superior model, which would be harmonized and coordinated *after*. Propagators of this idea primarily insisted on the integration and collaboration of the Balkan nations, and they usually treated the format of that cooperation as a formality. The social networks analyzed here, such as the *Balkan Communist Federation* or *League for Balkan Confederation* were dominantly political; at the same time, there were some specific forms of diaspora networks (which comprised e.g. *Macedonian club*, *Macedonian Committee*, etc.). This paper will demonstrate that social networks in the Balkans did exist, but they were not sufficiently synchronized, consistent and organized as those in Western Europe. At the same time, they were not clearly structured and they largely relied on internal hierarchy which varies at different levels. Thus, for example the Balkan Communist Federation (BCF) was essentially subordinate to the Comintern, while the *Balkan Committee* was subordinate to BCF. On the other level, the Balkan Committee was composed of different organizations, which also only formally acknowledged its organizational structure; the aforementioned Committee could not affect their practical activities, though it did control the publishing of *La Federation Balkanique* journal. To some extent, this type of organization was similar with other networks in the Balkans, which largely explains their short existence.

The preconception that only the Balkan socialists advocated the idea of Balkan unity in the 20th century has existed for many years as an indisputable historical fact in most countries of the Balkan Peninsula. That view was the result of political and ideological circumstances, but also the need for idealization of socialist movement, as the revolutionary basis for what came later. However, it turned out that thinkers and political figures of various ideological backgrounds promoted this idea.

On the eve of the First World War, Balkan socialists insisted on authentic anti-war discourse and promotion of the idea of a Balkan (con)federation. Serbian Social Democratic Party openly opposed the war through its newspaper *Radničke novine*, as well as the *Serbian Chamber of Labor* in Paris and its newspaper *Budućnost*. During 1915, the Second Balkan Social Democratic Conference was held in Bucharest, where the *Resolution on the Establishment of a Balkan Democratic Federation* was adopted. The Conference unanimously pleaded for the principle of neutrality of

the Balkan countries, and condemned every form of war and imperialism. Within this conference, the *Balkan Workers' Social-Democratic Federation* was formed. It was actually the umbrella organization of the Balkan Socialist Parties, and it was supported by prominent Balkan socialists such as: Geogri Dimitrov, Mikhail Bujor (and his newspaper *Lupta Zilnica*), Dimitar Blagoev, Dušan Popović, etc.

The Greek socialist organization *Federatio* published a decree in 1917, which underlined its commitment to a unified Balkan democratic federation, as a lasting solution of the Eastern Question (Simovski 1965: 196). In November 1918, at the Athens conference, all Greek socialist organizations were united into a single *Socialist Labour Party of Greece*. Accordingly, they adopted the *Memorandum on External Issues*, in which it was announced that “the only way to ensure a lasting peace agreement among the Balkan nations is the establishment of the Balkan Democratic Federation, based on all democratic principles that would guarantee full and true political and national freedom for all nationalities, regardless of their religion or ethnicity” (Nadoveza 1997: 63).

In the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the idea of the Balkan unity had different perceptions. Official government was too occupied with internal Yugoslav problems, which became increasingly dramatic. Territorial tensions with Italy, Romania and Greece additionally burdened foreign relations of the country. Yugoslav communists, under the influence of the Comintern, denounced the centralist concept that existed in Yugoslavia.

After becoming the Bulgarian Prime Minister in 1919, Aleksandar Stamboliyski organized a political tour over the country, which lasted one hundred days, where he promoted the thesis of a Balkan union as a vital political interest of Bulgaria. He was a leader of *Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union* whose program, among other things, said that: “The Agrarian Union favours durable and peaceful relations between Bulgaria and her neighbours (...) It seeks to strengthen these good relations by uniting Bulgaria with other Balkan states on a federative basis” (Hatzopoulos 2008: 137). Although many of these views were perceived as a ‘policy of peaceful revisionism’, Aleksandar Stamboliyski will be remembered as one of the biggest advocates of inter-state cooperation in the Balkans. After the putsch in 1923, he was overthrown and brutally murdered.

2. Nation or federation?

The impact of the Russian Revolution on the idea of a Balkan union is indisputable. The *First Balkan Socialist Conference*, which was held in Belgrade in 1910, was openly supported by Lenin. In his suggestive letter, he said: “Conscious workers of the Balkan countries were the first to point out the steady solution of the national question in the Balkans. That solution is a Federal Balkan Republic” (Kozic 1964: 195). The second man of the revolution, Leon Trotsky promoted the idea of a Balkan federation (since 1909) in his articles in *Kievskaya Mysl* and *Pravda*. In 1915, he stated that “the dissolution of Austro-Hungary would correspond to European

interests and the inclusion of Romania in a Balkan federation would be a defensive rampage against Russian imperialism and tsarism” (Nadoveza 2000: 52).

The Executive Committee of the Comintern, in the year of its establishment (1919), without denying the possibility of dissolution of Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, called for the formation of the Balkan Federal Soviet Republic (Vlajčić 1984: 47).

At its Second Congress in Vukovar in 1920, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia¹ adopted the Program, which states: “The Soviet Republic of Yugoslavia should enter a fraternal alliance with all the neighbouring nations in order to establish the *Soviet Federation of the Balkan-Danube States*, which will be integral part of the *International Federation of Soviet Republics*” (Vlajčić 1984: 320). On the basis of this chapter of the program we can conclude that the position of Yugoslav communists in relation to the Yugoslav state was still relatively affirmative. Such a position of Yugoslav communists was criticized at the *Second Conference of the Balkan Communist Federation*, held in Sofia in 1922. It is important to point out that the Yugoslav communists, under the influence of the Comintern, condemned the centralist concept that existed in Yugoslavia. The attitude of the Comintern towards the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later Kingdom of Yugoslavia) gradually became extremely negative. Serbian sociologist Aleksa Đilas wrote about it in the following way: “The Comintern considered the new state as the successor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as a new dungeon of the people”, which was the creation of British and French ‘imperialists’, and a sort of Serbian mini-empire itself. For Comintern, therefore, it was natural to look for ‘allies’ in non-Serb nations who felt national oppression, and to support their search for national rights, including the right to secede and create independent states. If the request for a complete break-up of the country contributes to the strengthening of the influence of the Comintern, its Executive Committee would without hesitation demand that the Communists of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes make such a slogan. Croatian nationalism was a very important ally, because of its mass base and separatist-revolutionary potential” (Đilas 1990: 88).

At the Third Congress of the Independent Workers Party of Yugoslavia (as the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was renamed after the ban of its political activity), which was held in 1923, the party changed the position regarding the national question, while emphasizing that the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes “cannot be considered as a homogeneous nation state, with some national minorities, but as a country in which the ruling class of one nation oppresses other nations”, referring as the greatest problem of the new state “Serbian hegemony and the colonial policy of the Serbian bourgeoisie” (Vlajčić 1984: 419). A particularly interesting moment at this conference is the adoption of the *Resolution on the National Question*, which emphasized the right of all nations in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes to separate from the Yugoslav state: “The IWPY recognizes for all nations right to their

¹ It was founded as the *Socialist Workers’ Party of Yugoslavia (Communists)*, in Belgrade (1919), after the unification of the Serbian Social Democratic Party, Social Democratic Party of Croatia, Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina etc.

own sovereignty and free right to the secession and formation of their independent states, or joining their own national state” (Cesarec 1962: 22).

In the mid-1923 Comintern stopped using formulation *Balkan-Danubian Federation*, and insisted on the term Balkan Federation, in the context of efforts to redefine the national question in the Balkans. At its Fifth Congress, in 1924, it called for self-determination of nations in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, emphasizing separation of Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia, as independent countries (Babić 1972: 72). The evident anti-Yugoslav policy of the Comintern was conditioned by the interests of the USSR. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was the centre of organizing military emigration of *White Guard*, and it was a country which represented the type of political system that was dominant in Tsarist Russia. In the same year, Independent Workers Party of Yugoslavia (former Communist Party of Yugoslavia)² adopted a resolution on the political situation in the country, in which it condemned the Serbian chauvinism³, and once again suggested the commitment to self-determination of all nations in Yugoslavia, and for “their latter freelance agreement in the *Balkan Federation of Peasant-workers’ Republic*” (Vlajčić 1984: 485).

In 1924, the IWPY supplemented the *Resolution on the National Question*, in which it was outlined: “The Party is obliged to work with the organizations of the oppressed nations’ working masses and to lead an open struggle for the right to secession, or to assist the movements of oppressed nations in order to form independent states of Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia and Montenegro, as well as for the liberation of Albanians” (Vlajčić 1984: 499). The opposition faction inside the IWPY led by Sima Marković, who advocated the survival of Yugoslavia, condemned this resolution.⁴

The Fourth Congress of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, which was held in Dresden in 1928, was in many ways controversial. Namely, the aforementioned Congress unconditionally accepted the thesis of the Comintern on the break-up of Yugoslavia, and the formation of new states: Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Slovenia, as well as ‘united Macedonia’. The right of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina to secede and join Hungary, as well as the right of the Albanian minority in Kosovo and Macedonia to unify with Albania, was outlined. This attitude of the CPY has

² A short-lived political party in Yugoslavia, a legal form of the illegal CPY.

³ At that time a faction of Serbian Communists, led by Sima Marković, expressed their discontent with what they perceived as the singling out of Serbian nationalism while ignoring other nationalisms and separatist movements.

⁴ Sima Marković (1888–1939) – Serbian and Yugoslav communist. In his work *Nacionalno pitanje u svetlosti marksizma* [*The National Question in the Light of Marxism*] he opposed the position of the Comintern, regarding the break-up of Yugoslavia, and pledged for the survival of the Yugoslav state, as a federal republic. He also stated his commitment to a Balkan union: “The Alliance of the Balkan Nations would mean the economic and political emancipation of the Balkans from the slavery of Western European imperialism” (Source: Marković, Sima. 1923. *Nacionalno pitanje u svetlosti marksizma*. Beograd: Izd. Centralnog odbora NRPJ). He was expelled from the CPY in 1929. During 1935 he emigrated to the USSR, where he joined the Communist Party. In 1939, he was convicted to the death penalty by Soviet authorities, due to the accusation that he belonged to the ‘right-wing Trotskyist terrorist organization’.

evolved over time, and it was upgraded during next year with advocacy for the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Vojvodina as well (Pešić 1983: 259). It was highlighted that this approach was formulated to prevent any “attempt of the imperialist powers to turn the Balkans into a base for a counterrevolutionary war against the Soviet Union.” From the communist perception, resolving the national question in Yugoslavia must be based on the principle of self-determination and territorial separation of the ‘suppressed nations’, and CPY will represent such a position until 1936.

In 1920, in Sofia, the Balkan Socialist Democratic Workers Federation was transformed into the Balkan Communist Federation, which joined the Third International, as the Balkan party network. The Balkan Communist Federation (BCF) offered an ideological perspective to all nations in the Balkans for establishing their own national states, as federal units within the Balkan Federation of Soviet Republics (Cvetkovićs. *a.*: 49-59). In this sense, we can freely say that BCF was a political network of Balkan communist parties, whose contours and roots date back from the Balkan socialist conferences. On the basis of that continuity it formed the platform through which the Balkan communist parties were able to articulate common positions. In August 1923 BCF issued a proclamation on the national question in Yugoslavia, advocating for federalization of Yugoslavia and the formation of Slovenia, Croatia, Vojvodina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro, with emphasis that four nations live in Yugoslavia: Serbs, Croats, Slovenes and Macedonians (Vinaver 1982: 171).

In the period from 1924 to 1931, the Balkan Communist Federation issued multilingual communist newspaper *La Federation Balkanique* (Balkan Federation), which affirmed the idea of an independent Macedonia within the Balkan Federation (Serge 2002: 180).⁵ However, the publisher of this journal was (*de facto*) Balkan Committee, which was formed in Vienna in 1923. It was made up of different factions of Balkan communist parties and organizations: IMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization), Kosovo Committee (Albanian Committee of National Liberation), DRO (Revolutionary Organization of Dobruja) and Revolutionary organization of Thrace (Cvetković 1997: 62). Therefore, among its constituents BCF counted some organisations with a terrorist background.

It is important to say that IMRO had earlier opted for a Macedonian state, as part of a Balkan federation, but its fundamental commitment to these ideas was brought forward at the congresses in 1904 and 1905. The congress directive from 1904 states: “The Congress stresses again the program’s demand for the attainment of an autonomous independent state in the framework of a future Balkan federation” (*Revolucionarni list*, p. 12). At the general congress of IMRO in Rila Monastery in 1905, the Constitution of the organization was adopted, and its first article imperatively identified as a goal of the organization “the struggle for the

⁵ It is interesting to mention the protest of the Greek Communists, after the journal *La Federation Balkanique* promoted the political slogan *Autonomous Macedonia!* The protest letter actually stated: “Communist Party of Greece had to take into consideration the fact (we asked the *Balkan Federation* for practical instruction regarding this issue) that the working and peasant classes of Greece are not yet prepared to adopt this slogan” (Vlajčić 1984:460).

establishment of an autonomous or independent Macedonia, within the framework of a Balkan federation” (Hristov 1967: 960). At the same time IMRO created around itself a strong network of Macedonian (Slavic) diaspora, with identical political goals.

Gligor Hadži Tašković and his *Macedonian Club* in Serbia, who collaborated with IMRO, in the first issue of its journal *Autonomous Macedonia*, in the article “The idea of a Balkan confederation with Macedonia as its member”, announced: “Free Balkan nations should be satisfied with maintaining and fostering cultural and ethnic ties with their compatriots in Macedonia. If this disturbs the cherished ideas of the unification of Serbhood, Bulgarhood or Greekhood, we are free to express our own belief that this unification can hardly be achieved by creating one large medieval Balkan country; on the contrary it is certain that it will be achieved by establishing an association of free Balkan states as one big Balkan confederation. We believe that this confederation is viable matter of political maturity of the Balkan peoples.” At the same time, the *Macedonian Committee* in London, headed by Boris Sarafov, who supported the activities of IMRO as their member, advocated the idea of the Balkan confederation. Sarafov worked, together with Ricciotti Garibaldi, on the project of *bulgarocentric* autonomous Macedonia, stressing the importance of a political agreement between “Bulgaro-Macedonians, Greco-Macedonians and Albanian Christian elements” (Hrabak 1981: 143). Until 1918, Macedonian (Slavic) diaspora sent intensive demands for political independence of Macedonia. At first it was Krsto Petkov Misirkov and his newspaper *Slavjane*, which was published in St. Petersburg, as well as Dimo Hadži Dimov (Hristov 1971). Dr. Anastas Kocarev from Geneva advocated the formation of a Balkan federation (excluding Romania and Greece) (Pandevski 1967: 690). All these individuals were extremely close to the political leadership of IMRO and supported their activities.

3. Balkan Conferences (1930–1933)

On the other hand, despite strong internal political turmoil, the official authorities of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia also showed their interest in the integration of the Balkans. Most importantly, Yugoslavia initiated the establishment of multilateral cooperation through the organization of the Balkan Conferences. Moreover, in 1920 the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes formed a military union with Romania and Czechoslovakia, historically known as the Little Entente, in order to hinder potential restoration of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, but as well to create a new *cordon sanitaire* towards the USSR. In 1928 in Belgrade, a group of intellectuals of a liberal provenance, in order to counter the nationalist Serbian Culture Club, pledged to form the *Society of Balkan Community* (Đorđević 1934:6).

At the Twenty-seventh World Congress of Peace in 1929, held in Athens, upon the initiative of the Greek delegation and former Prime Minister of Greece Alexandros Papanastasiou, it was decided to organize the transnational Balkan Conference, with the purpose of creating a political alliance of the Balkan states. As a result, national committees were established in all the Balkan countries: Albania,

Bulgaria, Greece, Yugoslavia, Romania and Turkey. The role of the committee was to form national delegations (consulting with their governments) that would represent each of the states at the First Balkan conference. National committees were made of various intellectuals, ranging from reputable politicians to journalists. Although the official diplomatic representatives of the Balkan states had only the role of observers, the attitudes of state delegations were in absolute correlation with the official position of the state from which they came (Papanastasiou 1934: 62).

The First Balkan Conference, consisting of 99 delegates and about 50 experts and observers, was held in October, 1930 in Athens. At the ceremonial opening of the conference, Balkan flag (hexachrome) was hoisted for the first time. It consisted of six fields of white, blue, green, yellow, red, and (again) white, and six gold stars (Kernert and Howard 1970: 30).⁶ For this occasion, Greek military orchestra for the first time performed “The Balkan Anthem for Peace”, whose author was Kostis Palamas. The resolution, which envisaged the establishment of the Balkan Alliance, reads: “The Alliance should comprise independent nations, it should not violate the sovereignty of the participating states or suppress certain ethnic entities; The Alliance needs to strengthen peace between the countries and foster free collaboration between them [...] Finally, the Alliance should operate within the system of the League of Nations” (Lopandić and Kronja 2010: 39). A resolution on social and sanitary issues was also passed. It proposed to adopt a special convention through which the Balkan countries would guarantee “to provide the same treatment for the nationals of other Balkan states as well as the citizens of their own country, in terms of freedom of movement, work and overall activity” (Lopandić and Kronja 2010: 41). The first Balkan Conference adopted the Statute, which stipulated that the Balkan Conference is a permanent organization, dedicated to promoting rapprochement and cooperation of the Balkan peoples.

“We wish to state that direct contact between us and our cooperation in the course of the conference clearly demonstrated that we are fraternal nations, and that we can resolve disputes that divide us by mutual understanding and peaceful means... We invite all Balkan nations, Albanians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Romanians, Turks, Yugoslavs, to follow our example. It is only our responsibility to be independent, to achieve a high reputation in the world and to improve our destiny ... Nothing prevents us from following a new path that we have set. Our Alliance: here is the new ideal for all the peoples of the Balkans.”

(From the Messages to the peoples of the Balkans
at the *First Balkan Conference*, Delphi, 30 October 1930)

⁶ It is interesting that the first informal flag of the Balkans (Pan-Balkan Federation) was described by Rigas Feraios in 1797, in the *New Political Constitution of the population of Rumelia, Asia Minor, the Aegean islands and the principality of Moldavia and Wallachia*, as the tricolor flag with three horizontal sections: red, white and black, with the rod of Hercules with three crosses. The colour red is supposed to symbolize the former Byzantine, white is a symbol of justice, while black means death for freedom (Velestinlis, 1797).

It is interesting to analyze the contemporary Greek public perception of the First Balkan Conference. While the Greek ambassadors in Paris (Nikolaos Politis) and London (Dimitrius Kaklamanos) reported on how the European West regarded this initiative with enthusiasm,⁷ internally this project caused divided opinions. The prestigious journal *Ergasia* attacked the idea of the political unification of the Balkans. The reason for this opposition was contained in the acute fear of potential South Slavic domination within such a political alliance. However, despite initial reservations, the right wing *People's Party* and its leader Panagis Tsaldaris publicly supported the creation of a Balkan customs union in the Greek Parliament (Papasratis 1990: 158). On the other hand, the *Progressive Liberal Party*, led by Georgios Kafantaris, considered that the idea of the Balkan Union is the best foundation for post-war construction of the Balkan Peninsula. The idea of the Balkan Union was supported and respected by journal *Peitharchia* (Papasratis 1990: 159). There are some indications that the famous photographers, the Manaki brothers, were also the supporters of this idea (Cowan 2008: 45).

The Second Balkan Conference was held in October 1931, in Istanbul and Ankara. It was attended by about 300 delegates from all the Balkan states. The Conference work was conducted within the framework of six commissions, which adopted appropriate resolutions. The Greek delegation put forward a proposal to establish a joint military alliance – the Balkan Pact, which was aimed at preventing a new war in the Balkans. Accordingly, the above-mentioned conference brought a resolution on political measures for the creation of the Balkan League, in which they outlined the following principles: (a) placing the war outside the law; (b) resolving all disputes by peaceful means; (c) mutual assistance in case of a breach of obligations on the prohibition of war (Lopandić and Kronja 2010: 39). The Second Balkan conference also formed Transbalkan Trade and Industry, Transbalkan Postal Union and the Balkan Tourist Federation.⁸ What might be especially interesting in today's context is the fact that during the Second Balkan Conference demands for the abolition of visas for citizens of the Balkan countries were voiced. In 1931 there began the annual celebration of Intercultural Balkan Sunday, which was organized in all the Balkan countries.

In October 1932, in Bucharest, the Third Balkan Conference was held. The Commission for a political rapprochement adopted a blueprint for the formation of the *Balkan Pact*. It also adopted a draft *Convention on the Status of the Balkan States Citizens*⁹ as well as the proposal for the establishment of the Balkan Medical

⁷ These dispatches were being exchanged between April and November, 1931.

⁸ It is interesting that the Pan-Balkan sports games, as well as the Balkan World Cup, had been held in Athens since 1929.

⁹ "In the first article of the draft Convention, the nationals of each Contracting Party shall be allowed free access to the territory of the other Contracting Party, without passport formalities. The Convention would grant all citizens of the Balkans equality in respect to all activities of commercial character (trade, industrial, financial), including the same treatment of companies, as well as "free lances" (with certain exceptions). National treatment is provided in terms of hereditary rights, acquisition, and possession or leasing of movable or immovable property (Article 5). All Citizens are equal, in terms of legal and judicial protection, as well as in terms of taxes, fees and levies of a fiscal nature. Article 9 of the draft defines the affiliation of trade companies (constituted under the legislation of certain countries), which permits activities in the territories of other Balkan states, under the laws of the country in which they operate" (Lopandić and Kronja. 2010:41).

Association. There were also some proposals for the creation of a common history textbooks.

The draft on the Balkan Pact consisted of five sections: 1) non-aggression and alliance, 2) peaceful resolution of conflicts, 3) mutual assistance¹⁰, 4) the protection of minorities¹¹, 5) general provisions. This document, however, caused controversy among some delegations. Revisionist countries Bulgaria and Albania were not satisfied with the progress of resolving minority problems, while other countries (especially Yugoslavia) feared the possibility that the decisions of the Balkan Conference (particularly the liberal approach regarding the status of citizens) may affect the revision of the borders.¹²

The Fourth Balkan Conference was held in November 1933, in Thessaloniki. During the conference, the *Draft on Regional Economic Agreements* was passed, as well as the first stage towards the formation of the Balkan Customs Union. According to the draft of the agreement, the Balkan countries should mutually guarantee the greatest economic favours, in order to improve mutual trade and commerce, standardize customs tariffs, as well as protect export interests from non-Balkan countries. In Article 2 of the draft, the status of the Balkans as a preferential zone is predicted, meaning that mutual benefits would not include non-Balkan countries. The Balkan countries would thus be obliged in their economic dealings with non-Balkan countries to activate the ‘Balkan clause’ (Lopandić and Kronja. 2010: 41). According to Alexandros Papanastasiou, “the introduction of preferential tariffs is the first step for the creation of a single Balkan market” (Papanastasiou 1934: 198). In the same year, the normalization of relations between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria began, which surprisingly started off well. This situation, however, alarmed Greece, who still dreaded the prospect of a Pan-Slavic domination.

Although scheduled for 1934, the Fifth Balkan Conference was never held. Yugoslavia refused to attend, due to the insistence of the Conference to discuss minority issues. For some reasons, Turkey did the same. The Balkan conference thus dissolved. Its mission still bears relevance today, if we take into account its legacy: regular exchange of students; Balkan tourism development measures; cooperation in air, sea, rail and road transport; teaching Balkan languages, history and literature at universities and schools; Transbalkan Pact on Extradition and Judicial Assistance; preparation of Charter for Protection of Children, Women etc.

As an epilogue of the Balkan Conference in Athens, February 1934, at the initiative of France, a military agreement was signed. The Balkan Pact (Balkan Entente) was formed between Yugoslavia, Greece, Romania and Turkey. This pact was based on a series of bilateral agreements between these countries, which were

¹⁰ “In case of violation of the obligation of non-aggression, each of the Contracting Powers undertakes immediately to provide assistance to a foreign country against which such an offense is directed.”

¹¹ This chapter predicted the existence of *Office for Minorities* in every country, as a competent authority for requests and complaints related to the international treaties on minorities.

¹² Yugoslavia was against the adoption of the chapter on the protection of minorities in the framework of the draft of the Balkan Pact (due to Bulgarian and Albanian minorities in its territory), while Bulgaria was against the adoption of the entire draft. Both countries were outvoted. However, the Bulgarian delegation suspended its participation in the Conference.

signed in the period from 1928 to 1933. Bulgaria and Albania refused to accede to the Balkan Pact, believing that this act will legitimize the *status quo* in the Balkans, and close the question of the revision of borders. Against the formation of the Balkan Pact were Italy, Hungary and the USSR.

4. Conclusion

It turned out that the earliest initiatives for the Balkan unity were not effective enough and that they mainly remained in high political and intellectual circles, like some utopian paradigms. It is interesting to mention that due to the realignment within the communist movement in 1934 the Balkan Communist Federation ceased to exist, as the very important part of the Third International. In this way, the Balkan communist parties abandoned the idea of a Balkan federation, turning to the national and social problems within the borders of the existing Balkan countries. New political course of the Comintern (established at the Seventh Congress) influenced the change of policy in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY), which was particularly obvious in 1936, in the *Resolution on the National Question*. In fact, this resolution brought out self-criticism at the expense of the former party policy regarding the national question, particularly issues of self-determination in Yugoslavia, in the following way: “Many errors were made by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in the national question. (...) CPY propagated the slogan of self-determination, including secession, in a completely sectarian way. Secession was not considered as a right of oppressed nations, but as the conditional necessity. A political and territorial autonomy for the people who do not want to secede was not even considered. (...) CPY stands against the dissolution of the present state territory of Yugoslavia, because we want to achieve the reorganization of the country by peaceful means, on the basis of national equality” (Petranović and Zečević 1988: 348).

In early 1936, due to different foreign policy orientations of its members, the Balkan Pact slowly began to lose its essence. First, it was agreed to transform it into a political pact (the Belgrade meeting, May 1936). In January 1937, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria signed an agreement on ‘eternal friendship’, and the following year, in Thessaloniki, on behalf of the Balkan Pact, the minister of foreign affairs of Greece Ioannis Metaxas signed an agreement of friendship and non-aggression pact with Bulgaria. In 1940 Romania left the pact. Inaction of each state during the Italian invasion of Greece in October 1940 marked the formal end of the Balkan Pact.

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