

N A T O      U N C L A S S I F I E D

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MEMORANDUM

To:            The Political Committee  
From:          The Chairman

YUGOSLAVIA: THE MACEDONIAN ISSUE

A point at issue between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union is the refusal of the latter to sign a reciprocal information exchange agreement, despite the fact that the USSR freely distributes its own propaganda throughout Yugoslavia, while the reverse is inhibited. An editorial in the Yugoslav party weekly, Komunist, of 15th April, 1971, stated that the Soviet refusal to sign such an agreement is because the Yugoslav text was written in Macedonian.

2. A point at issue between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria is the latter's refusal to accept the Yugoslav claim that Macedonian is a separate ethnic and language entity. The attached report taken from East European Notes, No. 212, 26th May, 1971, provides some understanding of the Yugoslav position on this subject.

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EXTRACT FROM EAST EUROPEAN NOTES, 26TH MAY, 1971

SOVIET TEAM YIELDS ON MACEDONIAN LANGUAGE

The Yugoslav party weekly, Komunist, on 22nd April, 1971, "noted with satisfaction" settlement of a long-standing dispute between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union over the status of the Macedonian language. A few days earlier an important point of principle had been conceded by a delegation from the Union of Writers of the USSR in signing with their hosts, the Union of Writers of Yugoslavia, an agreement drawn up in the Macedonian language. Implicit in the Yugoslav Constitution is the principle that every international document must be signed in the language spoken by the leader of the Yugoslav side, in this case Dr. Gane Todorovski, President of the Writers' Society of Macedonia.

Talks on Yugoslav-Soviet literary co-operation began in Zagreb on 9th April. Three days later, on 12th April, the Yugoslavs indicated in a communiqué that the talks had broken down because the Russians were refusing to sign the agreement in Macedonian. The communiqué predicted "negative consequences" for Soviet-Yugoslav literary co-operation arising out of the impasse, and the Zagreb radio commentator, Milika Sundic, went further in a broadcast on 13th April accusing the Russians of "blackmail" and "open interference in our internal affairs".

Sundic, whose outspokenness is the embodiment of Yugoslavia's relatively free Press and radio, declared:

"We must not be surprised that the Soviet delegation did not want to sign....This attitude is not merely that of the writers. It is official Soviet policy towards our country. There is nothing surprising about the action of the Soviet delegation, which in everything but form is a State body, because it has been clear for a long time that the Soviet Union supports Bulgaria's attitude to the Macedonian language and the Macedonian nation...."

Macedonians speak a variety of dialects, closely related to Bulgarian as well as to Serbo-Croat. Since the creation of a Macedonian Republic within the Yugoslav Federation, Bulgaria, with memories of the short period in 1878 between the Treaties of San Stefano and Berlin, when the whole of Macedonia was considered part of Bulgaria, has refused to recognise the existence of a separate Macedonian nation and language. In the section devoted to Yugoslav literature in the recently published Short Bulgarian Encyclopaedia, Macedonia is completely ignored. In July 1970, Bulgaria refused to sign a radio and television agreement with Yugoslavia because the document was drafted in Macedonian (Politika, 15th July, 1970). The same procedure was repeated last month in the Macedonian capital, Skopje, when Yugoslav and Bulgarian economic delegations discussed co-operation in non-ferrous metals. Reporting a breakdown, Belgrade Radio (8th April) declared: "This latest act...indicates once more that the official Bulgarian attitude has not changed and that Bulgaria continues to refuse to recognise the Macedonian language and nation".

The Soviet change of heart is all the harder to understand in view of the way they have supported the Bulgarians in the past. In November 1968, a delegation of Soviet writers refused to come to Skopje for negotiations because the Yugoslav delegation was headed by a Macedonian writer (Politika, 17th April, 1971). In March, 1969, the Soviet writers' delegation again refused to sign an agreement with the Yugoslavs, this time because it was drawn up in the Slovenian language. This action was repeated in December 1969, when the Soviet delegation refused to sign an agreement drafted in Macedonian (Ibid). In an editorial prepared while the Russians were still refusing to sign the latest agreement, Komunist (15th April, 1971) referred to "...last year's refusal of the Soviet Government to sign an agreement on cultural-educational co-operation between our country and the Soviet Union because the text was written in Macedonian..."

The Soviet climb-down must have annoyed the Bulgarians. Politika, (17th April), quoted members of the Soviet delegation as saying after the signing that they were "impressed by the firmness of the Yugoslav delegation... not to agree to any kind of compromise which would violate the rights and feelings of the Macedonian people". Politika quoted the leader of the Soviet delegation, Mirza Ibrahimov, whom it described as a member of the Supreme Soviet, as saying that in accepting the Macedonian language as equal with other languages in the world, the Soviet writers were just reaffirming "a well-known Leninist principle".