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A YUGOSLAV DIPLOMAT IN HUNGARY: LAZAR BRANKOV (1945-1949)*

Abstract: Lazar Brankov is best known in Hungary for his role during the Rajk trial (1949) in which he was sentenced to imprisonment for life. This paper does not intend to analyze all aspects of his eventful career, but rather focuses on the period between 1945 and 1949. During these years, Brankov was one of the leading diplomats working at the Yugoslav mission of the Allied Control Committee in Hungary and, from 1947 on, as the first secretary of the Yugoslav embassy in Budapest. Brankov established contacts with leading Hungarian politicians, participated in different social and political events and dealt with economic issues, reparations, the extradition of supposed Hungarian war criminals and the plight of the South Slavic minorities in Hungary. The paper also deals with the circumstances leading up to his emigration in autumn 1948 and his role in organizing the so called Cominformist emigration in Hungary. For this paper I carried out primary research at the National Archives of Hungary, especially in the papers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Hungarian Working People's Party, and at the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security.

Keywords: Lazar Brankov, Hungarian-Yugoslav relations after 1945, Hungarian-Yugoslav diplomatic relations, Soviet-Yugoslav conflict 1948-1953.

Lazar Brankov is probably best known in Hungary as the tertiary defendant of the Rajk trial, a Titoist show trial that started on 16 September 1949. According to its indictment, Brankov, former Yugoslav diplomat, secretary of the Yugoslav embassy in Budapest and first leader of the Yugoslav Cominformist emigrants in Hungary, was “the resident of the official Yugoslav spy agency in Hungary. For more than four years he had steadily picked up secret data from László Rajk, [György] Pálffy and a whole number of other recruited Hungarian agents. It was Tito who directly ordered him for this activity.

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He was Tito's stoutest spy.”¹ If we continue to read the indictment in full, we might get the impression that Brankov must have been a corrupt and unscrupulously ambitious person whose main aim was to overthrow the Hungarian state on Tito's order. But who was the real Lazar Brankov and why did the authorities choose him to play the Yugoslav connection in this trial? In order to find an answer to this question, it is necessary to have a closer look on Brankov's career between 1945-1949. Therefore, my aim in this paper is to analyse and evaluate his role as an influential member in the Yugoslav mission accredited to the Allied Control Committee (ACC) in Hungary and as the first secretary of the re-established Yugoslav embassy in Budapest. I will also briefly investigate the motives and circumstances of his emigration and his activities as the organizer and first leader of the so called Cominformist emigrants in Hungary. This paper is based on the intensive research I carried out at the National Archives of Hungary and at the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security. The daily reports and press reviews of the Hungarian News Agency also proved to be useful.

1. As a Yugoslav Diplomat in Hungary

Lazar Brankov arrived, or to be more precise, returned to Hungary, this time at Debrecen, as a member of the sub-commission on reparations of the Yugoslav mission accredited to the ACC.² The Yugoslav authorities chose Brankov because of his Communist background, his partisan activities during the war, and his role in the military administration in Vojvodina. In fact, the Central Committee of the Yugoslav Communist Party had asked for someone who was familiar with the local circumstances in Vojvodina.³

As a member of the Yugoslav delegation, Brankov immediately got in touch with the democratic Hungarian leadership, among them prime minister Béla Miklós of Dálnok, defence minister János Vörös, minister of interior Ferenc Erdei.⁴ He later became acquainted with prime minister Ferenc Nagy and, from the members of the Communist party, Mátyás Rákosi, László Rajk and Imre Nagy, to mention just a few. He often met

¹ Rajk László és társai a népbíróság előtt. 40 év távlatából.... Az ún. „Kék Könyv” hasonmás kiadása. [László Rajk and his accomplices in front of the people's court. 40 years later ... The reprint edition of the so called „Blue Book”]. Edited by: Zinner Tibor. Budapest, Magyar Eszperantó Szövetség, 1989. 17. All primary texts were translated by the author of this paper.

² For the activities of the Allied Control Committee in Hungary see: Földesi Margit: *A szabadság megszállása. A megszállók szabadsága – a hadizsákmányról, a jóvátételről, Szövetséges Ellenőrző Bizottságról Magyarországon.* [The Freedom of the Occupiers – on booty, reparations and the Allied Control Committee in Hungary]. Budapest, Kairon, 2002. The notes of the ACC in English are available in English: Cseh Gergő Bendegúz (ed.): Documents of the Meetings of the Allied Control Commission for Hungary. <http://www.coldwar.hu/>. Retrived: 19 November 2013.

³ Állambiztonsági szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára, Budapest. [Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security. Henceforth: ÁBTL] ÁBTL 2.1. I/109 (V-143403). 30.

⁴ Bokor Péter: A harmadrendű vádlott. Párizsi beszélgetés Lazar Brankov egykori jugoszláv diplomatával. [The Tertiary Defendant. Conversations with Lazar Brankov, former Yugoslav diplomat, in Paris]. In: *Valóság*, 1989/9. 52.

Gábor Péter, leader of the Hungarian State Security (ÁVH), too, who, according to later charges, was one of Brankov's agents, under the cover-name of „Bogdán”.⁵

The political career of Lazar Brankov reflected the main events, contradictions and changes of Yugoslav-Hungarian relations, which formulated within the framework of international and Soviet-Yugoslav relations. As one of the leading members of the Yugoslav mission, and from 1947, of the Yugoslav embassy, he dealt with cultural and press affairs, economic matters, reparations and Yugoslav possessions that were dragged off during the war. He also took part in tracing down war criminals and was the secretary of the Yugoslav Military Mission from its establishment in 1946 until early 1947.⁶ Hereinafter I would like to outline these activities with some relevant examples.

Although Hungary had always endeavoured that the extraditions of the war criminals be based on the provisions of law, the country's restricted sovereignty, the physical presence of the Red Army, the veto power of the ACC, and the international prestige of Yugoslavia did not make it possible to enforce these provisions in each and every cases.⁷ Even if some press sources claimed in 1947 that Yugoslavia had asked for the extradition of 350 war criminals, the archival sources confirm only that the Yugoslavs requested for 173 people directly from the ministry of the interior.⁸ Probably one of the best-known cases is the extradition of Ferenc Galambos, lawyer from Novi Sad. Galambos was born at Stari Bečej, just as Brankov, spent some time in a concentration camp during the war and settled in Budapest after the war. He was arrested in the building of the ministry of justice on 30 July 1945 for the immediate personal request of Brankov, who recognised him in the building, and without taking notice of the laws in force.⁹ Because of the unlawful process, the ministry of justice wished to interrogate Brankov from September 1946 on,¹⁰ but regardless of their multiple requests, the ministry of foreign affairs did not wish to deal with the case on the merits. Besides the regulations of international law, the ministry referred to the possible political complications and feared that “the Yugoslavs themselves did not wish to deal with a legally binding case at all.”¹¹

Similarly to the case of Ferenc Galambos, the Hungarian government tried to interpose in the behalf of Simon Kókai. Simon was condemned to be hanged by the neck by the Sombor district court of first instance on 6 March 1946. The ministry of justice

⁵ ÁBTL 2.1. VI/1. (V-150028). 146.

⁶ ÁBTL 2.1. I/109 (V-143403). 30.

⁷ Galántha Gergely: Adalékok a délvidéki háborús bűnösök Jugoszláviába irányuló kiadatási eljárásához [Contribution to the Processes of Extradition of War Criminals from the Délvidék to Yugoslavia]. *Limes*, 2009/2. 177-181.

⁸ *Ibid.* 183.

⁹ Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Magyar Országos Levéltára, Budapest. [The National Archives of Hungary. Henceforth: MOL.] MOL XIX-J-1-k-Jugoszlávia-30/c-60.800/1945 (49.d.). József Galambos was first recognized by József Rex, who accompanied Brankov. His arrest was ordered by Tibor Rex, the brother of József Rex. A. Sajti Enikő: Jugoszláv kommunista káder a külügyen: Rex József. [A Yugoslav Communist Cadre in Foreign Office: József Rex.] In: *Idem.: Bűntudat és győztes fölény. Magyarország, Jugoszlávia és a délvidéki magyarok.* [Guilty Conscience and Victorious Superiority. Hungary, Yugoslavia and the Hungarians in Délvidék.] Szeged, SZTE Történettudományi Doktori Iskola, 2010. 276.

¹⁰ MOL XIX-J-1-k-Jugoszlávia-30/c-110.725/1948 (49.d.).

¹¹ Pro Domo, 1948. június 30. MOL XIX-J-1-k-Jugoszlávia-30/c-117.154/1948 pótív (49.d.).

asked foreign under-secretary Rex on 17 May 1946 to “get in touch with Brankov on the phone, too, and ask for the good offices of the mission”. This became necessary as the court of appeal in Novi Sad upheld the sentence of the court of first instance, therefore, it took legal effect. Though, because of the unlawful extradition and the appearance of some witnesses, the Yugoslav court granted appeal and suspended the execution of the death sentence.¹²

Parallel to the extradition cases, Brankov dealt with the reparations of certain Yugoslav citizens. For example, on 11 September 1946, he consulted with the political department of the Hungarian ministry of foreign affairs on the the repatriation of those Yugoslav citizens whose nationality was Hungarian and who were about to return from Soviet captivity.¹³ Brankov officially stated at the meeting that Yugoslavia was ready to repatriate them after the necessary documentation. For the process of documentation, he asked the Hungarian authorities to open a recreation camp at Kecskemét *or* Cegléd.¹⁴ Although the number of such prisoners were estimated to be 10 thousand at the meeting, a Hungarian ministerial draft, dated on 27 September, mentioned the urgent need for such camps in Kecskemét *and* Cegléd for accommodating 20 thousand returning war criminals.¹⁵ Still, the Hungarian authorities were only able to build a camp for 800 people in Hódmezővásárhely. Naturally, it was overcrowded and wrestled with bad hygienic conditions and difficulties in catering. Therefore, in a verbal note on 19 November, the Hungarian government asked from Yugoslavia that those living at the camp, after the necessary identification, “and in the order of their documentation, in larger or smaller groups, be guided to return home, to Yugoslavia”.¹⁶

Brankov also dealt with Yugoslavia's claims for reparations and the quest for those goods and possessions which had been transferred from the Vojvodina and, according to the Yugoslav claims, belonged to their ownership. On behalf of the Yugoslav government, Brankov initiated discussions on 21 April 1945 on the question of assets transferred from Yugoslav territory and the reimbursement of the damages caused. As an “urgent compensation” he demanded that the Hungarians deliver coal, coke and silk cocoon (or silkworm) to Yugoslavia and asked for a minute plan for the shipment of goods in six years in accordance with the armistice agreement. The officer responsible at the foreign office asked for three weeks for the fulfilment of this demand.¹⁷ Exactly one day earlier than the deadline expired, on 11 May, Brankov reappeared at the department of armistice in the ministry of foreign affairs and asked “very urgently” for a clear-cut and realistic draft about the volume of the Hungarian production because “they intended to base their claims for reparation and their regular trade on it.” The Yugoslavs were particularly

¹² MOL XIX-J-1-k-Jugoszlávia-30/c-101.570/1946; 10.570/1946 and 10.570/10a/1946. (49.d.).

¹³ The armistice agreement did not deal with the repatriation of prisoner of wars. For the question in details see: Bognár Zalán: A magyar hadifoglyok ügye, sorsa 1947-ben – a párizsi békeszerződés és a parlamenti választások függvényében. [The Case and Fortune of the Hungarian War Criminals in 1947 – as seen in connection of the Paris Peace Treaty and the parliamentary elections.] *Aetas*, 2010/1. 132.

¹⁴ MOL XIX-J-1-k-Jugoszlávia-7/a-32.258/1945. (15.d.).

¹⁵ MOL XIX-J-1-k-Jugoszlávia-7/b-146.255/7/1945. (15.d.).

¹⁶ MOL XIX-J-1-k-Jugoszlávia-7/b-145.267/7/1945. (15.d.).

¹⁷ MOL XIX-J-1-k-Jugoszlávia-23/d-44/57/a/1945. (33.d.).

interested in steel and iron constructions, electro-technical goods, cast iron, coal and chalk cole, instruments for measurement and, in general, different types of machines. In return, Brankov proposed that Yugoslavia would be ready to deliver copper to Hungary and partly pay the wages of the workers in the factory if there were any operating factory producing brass cyclinders in operation in Hungary.¹⁸

Brankov also took steps when the South Slavic minorities experienced real or imaginary insults (regardless of the fact that Brankov had a personal role in the execution of thousands of Hungarians in Vojvodina in autumn 1944¹⁹) and regularly enquired on the living possibilities of South Slavic minorities, especially of those who lived in and around Baja.²⁰ In March 1946 he was a member of the Hungarian-Yugoslav mixed commission which investigated the census of South Slavs living in Baja, in the so called Baja triangle and Mohács, the condition of their school buildings and the behaviour of the local notaries. In the detailed report of the mixed commission Brankov surmised that the Hungarian authorities had put pressure on the local South Slavs who, in many cases, proclaimed themselves Hungarians and not Serbo-Croats. Still, the commission stated that “on behalf of the notaries, no influence could be ascertained and only in a few cases [could such influence be ascertained] on behalf of the cenzus-takers.” The report also mentioned that the Yugoslav members of the commission (Brankov and lieutenant Smiljanić) “showed the most distrust” towards those notaries who served in the *Délvidék*²¹ between 1941–1944. The commission, after having visited nine minority schools at nine villages, summarized that “although the results concerning minority schools is not satisfactory, they are still much favourable than the [earlier] information of captain Brankov, according to which, our South Slavic minority had no minority schools at all.”²²

Yugoslavia also considered the better educational conditions of the South Slavic minorities a prerequisite for improving Yugoslav-Hungarian bilateral relations as Brankov made it clear to under-secretary Rex on 19 December 1945. During the meeting, Rex enquired on the possibilities for improving the temporarily deteriorating Hungarian-Yugoslav relations but Brankov replied that Hungary must prove by acts her good intentions. He bluntly stated that they were expecting results in the following three fields: 1. the extradition of war criminals; 2. establishing schools for the South Slavs at least for

¹⁸ MOL XIX-J-1-k-Jugoszlávia-23/h-42.295/1945. (39.d.).

¹⁹ Lazar Brankov was a member of the summary court that passed nearly 150 death sentence at Novi Sad on 15 November 1944. He was also a member of that military tribunal that passed 12 death sentences on 29 December 1944. Mészáros Sándor: Újvidéki hideg hetek 1944-ben [Cold Weeks at Novi Sad in 1944]. *Regio*, 1994/1. 85. and 89.

²⁰ The history of the South Slavic minorities between 1945–1956 is shortly dealt in: Tilkovszky Loránt: *Nemzetiségi politika Magyarországon a 20. században*. [Nationality Politics in Hungary in 20 Century]. Debrecen, Csokonai Kiadó, 1998., especially on pages 124-147. Some documents concerning the establishment of South Slavic minority organizations are published in: Tóth Ágnes: A magyarországi délszlávok helyzete és törekvései 1945–1948 (Dokumentumok). [The Situation and Aspirations of South Slavs in Hungary. Documents.] In: *Bács-Kiskun Megye Múltjából*. XII. 1993. 361-382.

²¹ Délvidék is a collective term used in Hungarian historiography that refers to those territories that were annexed to Yugoslavia from Hungary (except Croatia), e.g. the Bačka, the Banat, Prekmurje and Medumurje.

²² MOL XIX-J-1-k-Jugoszlávia-8/b-890.pol./1946. (15.d.).

such an extent and under such conditions as the Hungarians had it in Yugoslavia; and 3. the cessation of the insults against the South Slavic minorities.²³

Owing to his good knowledge of Hungarian, Brankov acted as an interpreter, too. It is widely alleged that he interpreted between the Hungarian and Yugoslav ministers of internal affairs, László Rajk and Aleksandar Ranković, respectively, during their meeting at Kelebia in December 1947 but I would like to refer to other, similarly important occasions here. It was also Brankov who acted as an interpreter at the meeting between Colonel Cicmil and János Gyöngyösi, Hungarian minister of foreign affairs, on 17 September 1945 when Cicmil enquired about the Hungarian stand in the Trieste question and promised that in case Hungary supported the Yugoslav case, Yugoslavia would not only grant Hungary the treatment of most favoured nation when using Yugoslav ports and transit routes but “the Yugoslav government, on her part, would [also] be ready to support Hungary at the peace negotiations and during the peace preparations in particular and in all such cases which did not contradict the interests of Yugoslavia.”²⁴

Nine months later, on 4 June 1946, Brankov informed György Heltai, counsellor of the ministry of foreign affairs, on the latter's inquire concerning the modification of the Yugoslav-Hungarian border that “Yugoslavia will have no demands against Hungary [at the peace negotiations], they will not submit the question of technical rectification of the [Yugoslav-Hungarian] border, which can be settled between the two countries on a friendly bases”²⁵ It is important to note that his statement took place shortly after Tito's visit in the Soviet capital. At his meeting with Stalin on 27 May Tito reported on the improvements of the Yugoslav-Hungarian relations and informed the Soviet leader that the Yugoslav government has decided not to raise territorial demands towards Hungary at the Council of Foreign Ministers.²⁶

As a leading Yugoslav diplomat Brankov appeared at nearly all the important receptions, gala dinners, as well as social and cultural events. For example, he was invited to the gala dinner that foreign minister János Gyöngyösi gave on the occasion of re-establishing Hungarian-Yugoslav diplomatic relations on 30 October 1946,²⁷ and held a speech on the “friendship between the Hungarians and the South Slavs” at a literary soirée on 19 March 1947 organized by the National Alliance of Cultural Organizations (Kulturális Egyesületek Országos Szövetsége), the Centre of Public Education of Budapest (Fővárosi Népművelődési Központ) and the Hungarian-Yugoslav Society (Magyar–Jugoszláv Társaság). In his speech, Brankov pointed out to the fact that the “Yugoslav and Hungarian people did not properly know each other due to the oppressive governments”, and admitted that “the Hungarian people and the peoples of Yugoslavia

²³ MOL XIX-J-1-k-Jugoszlávia-4/af-44/1945. (4.d.).

²⁴ MOL XIX-J-1-k-Jugoszlávia-9/c-sz.n./1945. (16.d.). Finally, the Yugoslav government did not consider the Hungarian note on the Trieste question satisfactory. Ibid.

²⁵ MOL XIX-J-1-k-Jugoszlávia-4/bc-sz.n./1946. (6.d.).

²⁶ Mezei Géza (ed.): *Európa kettészakítása és a kétpólusú nemzetközi rend születése (1945–1949)*. [The Division of Europe and the Birth of a Bipolar International World Order, 1945–1949.] Budapest, Új Mandátum, 2001. 178.

²⁷ Magyar Távirati Iroda. [Hungarian News Agency. Henceforth: ÁBTL]. MTI. 31 October 1946. 39. Available: <http://www.mol.arcanum.hu/mti/opt/a090829.htm?v=pdf&a=start>, retrieved: 17 September 2012.

had been victims of imperialist powers many times throughout their histories”, but, using the language and ideology of the time, he was certain that “if the Hungarian people positioned itself on the solid foundation of legal continuity that started with Kossuth and Petőfi, then, they would meet the peoples of Yugoslavia on the field and the Hungarian people would find an ally in their fight for freedom, independence and democracy in the peoples of Yugoslavia”.²⁸ Brankov expounded his views on the real dimensions of Yugoslav-Hungarian relations more frankly when giving a toast at the journalists' club in Szeged on 17 February 1946: “Yugoslavia had already settled with the past and opened a new page in the history of the Yugoslav and the Hungarian peoples. [...] Today it is an honour to be a friend of Yugoslavia: those who are friends of Yugoslavia, are the followers of freedom, democracy and progress.”²⁹

2. Brankov's emigration

Brankov seemingly climbed higher and higher on the ladder between 1945 and 1948. Even the deterioration of Soviet-Yugoslav and, as a consequence, the Hungarian-Yugoslav relations did not bring any immediate change in it. He was closely affected when, as part of the escalating anti-Yugoslav propaganda warfare, the Hungarian authorities attacked Živko Boarov, who was indebted for his post as press attaché at the embassy to Brankov.³⁰ Boarov shot Miloš Moić, correspondent to *Naše Novine*, the paper of the South Slavic minorities in Hungary, and a Yugoslav citizen on 10 July 1948. The Hungarian authorities wanted to create a monstrous anti-Yugoslav trial, but because of the muddled story, they finally relinquished.³¹

After Boarov's case, the emigration of Brankov and six other members of the Yugoslav embassy in Budapest on 25 October 1948 served as another possibility for propaganda warfare. Brankov's emigration can not be considered as an isolated case. The first secretary of the Yugoslav embassy in Tehran resigned in August. In September, press attaché Momčilo Ješić, assistant secretary Zora Ješić and librarian Ljubomir Karinja handed in their resignation in Oslo. As the military attaché of the embassy had already given up his post, ambassador Moskovljević practically remained without employees in

²⁸ MTI Magyar Országos Tudósító [National Enquirer], 1947. március 19. 22-23.

²⁹ MTI. 18 February 1946. 14. The reception took place after the premier of Boszorkánytánc [Witch Dance] by Béla Balázs in Szeged. The Hungarian ministry of foreign affairs attached great importance to Brankov's speech, and emphatically asked the journalists to published the whole report, and especially Brankov's speech at a good place and in its entirety. MTI Napi híradás [Daily News Edition], 18 February. 14.

³⁰ ÁBTL 2.1. 1/110. (V-54381). 10. For the connection between Brankov and the other Yugoslav diplomats from Stari Bečej see: Vukman Péter: Négy óbecsei kommunista diplomata Magyarországon. [Four Communist Diplomats from Stari Bečej in Hungary.] In: *Bácsország*, 2011/2. 136-144.

³¹ For the Boarov case see: Ripp Zoltán: Példaképből ellenség. Magyar kommunisták viszonya Jugoszláviához, 1947-1948 [From Models to Enemies. The Attitude of the Hungarian Communists to Yugoslavia, 1947-1948]. In: *A fordulat évei 1947-1949. Politika-Képzőművészet-Építészet*. [The Years of Revolution 1947-1949. Politics-Applied Arts-Architecture]. Ed. Standeisky Éva. Budapest, 1956-os Intézet, 1998. 45-62., Rainer M. János: Sztálin és Rákosi, Sztálin és Magyarország 1949-1953 [Stalin and Rákosi, Stalin and Hungary 1949-1953]. *Évkönyv*, 1956-os Intézet, 1998. 91-100. and Gellért Kis Gábor: Szerelmi gyilkosságból politikai gyilkosság? [From Jealousy to Political Murder?] *História*, 1987/3. 27-29.

Tehran. Similar situation occurred in Ottawa where counsellor Pavle Lukin resigned in early October together with six other members of the embassy. Although Ondržej Vojtjrhovski surmised that no such high ranking diplomat like Brankov emigrated in Eastern Europe,³² Brankov's emigration was preceded by Radonja Golubović, Yugoslav ambassador to Romania, on 31 July and followed by councillor Haji Panzov in early November in Sofia.³³

It is natural that the propaganda machines of the Soviet Union and the so called people's democracies tried to utilize each emigration and desertion. Their aim was to discredit the Yugoslav system and to emphasize the incorrect nature of Tito's policies. According to their official communiqué, Brankov decided to emigrate because the Yugoslav Communist leadership refused to accept the critical remarks of the “comradely” parties, first after the Bucharest declaration of the Cominform (28 June 1948), and then after the Fifth Congress of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (21-28 July 1948). Among the seven emigrants who signed the communiqué, we can find Ozren Krstonošić, Budapest bureau chief of the Yugoslav news agency TANJUG, and vice chancellor Branislav Doroslovački. Both were born in Stari Bečej, like Brankov, whom they both owed their posts at the embassy. The communiqué was also signed by Klára Balassa, who, according to some archival records, was Brankov's bride.³⁴

Brankov's emigration launched a whole series of exchanges of notes between the two countries. Between 26 October and 10 November Yugoslavia sent eight notes to the Hungarian ministry of foreign affairs but the Hungarians replied to them only twice. Also in connection with Brankov's emigration, altogether 12 diplomats were expelled, nine from the Yugoslav embassy in Budapest and three Hungarian diplomats from Belgrade.³⁵ The Yugoslav leadership tried to present Brankov's emigration as if it had been the consequence of fraudulence and a possible criminal investigation. According to the articles published in *Borba* and *Politika*, Brankov left the building of the embassy with 30 thousand forints and 508 US dollars by the embassy's car.³⁶

The Yugoslav citizens in Budapest also “gave expressions to their shock and wonder because it was nobody else but counsellor LAZAR BRANKOV [capitals in the original – V. P.] who set himself against Tito's policy.” As they did not expect it from him, some gave voice to their belief that Brankov might emigrated on Belgrade's order to provoke those Cominformists who had already deserted.³⁷ Brankov himself later provided rather confused and inconsistent accounts on the circumstances of his emigration. For example, he mentioned at the Department of Interrogation of the Ministry of Internal

³² Војтјеховски, Одржеј: Из дипломатије у ИБ емиграцију. Догађаји у југословенским дипломатским представништвима у САД-у поводом резолуције Информбироа 1948.године. In: *Југословенска дипломатија 1945-1961. Зборник радова*. Београд, Институт за новију историју Србије, 2012. 175.

³³ Vukman Péter: *Moszkvától Londonig. Nagy-Britannia és Jugoszlávia a szovjet–jugoszláv konfliktus idején (1948–1953)*. [From Moscow to London. Great Britain and Yugoslavia during the Soviet-Yugoslav Conflict, 1948–1953.] Szeged, SZTE Bölcsészettudományi Kar, 2011. 85.

³⁴ MTI. 27 October 1948. 18-19. For Klára Balassa see: ÁBTL VII/637 (V–22083).

³⁵ MOL XIX-J-1-k-Jugoszlávia-1/a-0218/1948. (1.d.); MOL XIX-J-1-k-Jugoszlávia-3/i-0224/1948. (1.d.); 0269/1948; and MOL XIX-J-1-j-Jugoszlávia-3/c-796/pol/res/1948. (3.d.).

³⁶ Sajtószemle, 1948. október 27. MOL XIX-J-4-b-15/b-1947-48. (3.d.) 108.

³⁷ ÁBTL A–2127/24. 25-26.

Affairs of Hungary on 1 September 1954 that he made his decision during the fifth congress of the CPY (21-28 July 1948) and wrote a letter to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party in August 1948 in which he condemned Tito's policies and stated that he "would be unconditionally disposable for the fight against Tito."³⁸ However, on 14 September 1954 Brankov wrote that he had emigrated on the order of Ranković, because "the most important thing [was] to know the intention and plans of the Soviet Union towards Yugoslavia".³⁹ One day earlier (on 13 September 1954) he mentioned that the real purpose of his emigration was to organize a political group within the Hungarian Workers' Party on the order of Ranković which would be faithful to the Yugoslavs and led by László Rajk. If Rajk did not voluntarily undertake the task, Brankov would have to raise suspicions against him in the leadership of Hungarian Workers' Party (HWP).⁴⁰

Based on the archival records, I am certain that Mátyás Rákosi, chairman of HWP, himself invented the above scenario. Beside of the fact that Rákosi distinguished himself in the propaganda warfare against Yugoslavia, three other sources support my argument. During his interrogation (on 20 October) Gábor Péter confessed that Rákosi even urged Soviet lieutenant general Feodor Belkin to get a clear-cut confession from Brankov but Belkin "was not willing to carry out Rákosi's demands." Moreover, Rákosi even phoned to Péter wandering "while was Belkin reluctant to do this and why he did not want to accept this role."⁴¹ The attachment of the detailed report that the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party sent to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party on 17 August 1962 on the infringements of the law during the period of "personal cult" in Hungary provides the second argument as it consisted the verbatim records of those original notes that Fjodor Bjelkin and Makarov wrote in 1949. One of them stated the following: "[...] In connection to Brankov's case, comrade Rákosi expounded the following conception. Brankov must say that he remained in Hungary and "broke away from" the Yugoslav government, not honestly, but on the order of Tito and Rankovics with the aim of deeply infiltrate and carry out further intrigues in Hungary." Moreover, "comrade Rákosi ordered the Hungarian interrogators to receive [such a] confession from Brankov according to which he has been an old police provocateur and personally participated in the preparation of a terrorist plot against Rákosi".⁴² Thirdly, after Brankov had been arrested in Moscow on 21 June 1949 Rákosi urged the Soviets to send Brankov back to Hungary. He sent the following telegram to Moscow on 10 July 1949: "I emphatically request that Brankov be immediately handed over to us because we really badly need need his confession."⁴³

³⁸ ÁBTL 2.1. I/109-a (V-143403/1). 224-225.

³⁹ Ibid. 275-276.

⁴⁰ ÁBTL 2.1. I/109 (V-143403). 64.

⁴¹ ÁBTL 2.1. VI/1 (V-150028). 254/a.

⁴² ÁBTL 2.1. IX/1/1. 3. és 22-23.

⁴³ The document is published by: Rainer M. János in *Távírat „Filippov” elvtársnak. Rákosi Mátyás üzenetei Sztálin titkárságának, 1949–1952. [Telegram to Comrade „Filippov”. The Messages of Mátyás Rákosi to Stalin's Secretariat, 1949–1952.]* In: *Évkönyv*, 1998. Budapest, 1956-os Intézet, 1998. 107. Rákosi again urged Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Vishinsky to send Brankov back to Hungary. Ibid. Note 11.

3. First leader of the Yugoslav Cominformist emigrants in Hungary

After he emigrated, Brankov was accommodated in a villa at Szalonka Street.⁴⁴ The Hungarian leadership grasped every opportunity of his emigration to discredit the Yugoslav leadership and emphasize the improper nature of Tito's policies. Brankov made speeches at mass rallies against Tito – including the congress of the Democratic Alliance of Southern Slavs in Hungary (Magyarországi Délszlávok Demokratikus Szövetsége, MDDSZ) at Baja on 14 November 1948⁴⁵ –, wrote articles in the party daily *Szabad Nép* and in the paper of the emigrants, *Nova Borba*, gave interviews to the journal of the Hungarian-Yugoslav Society (*Déli Csillag*)⁴⁶ and the Hungarian Radio.⁴⁷ From the many speeches, remarks and interviews, I would like to quote here the speech that was published in *Déli Csillag* on 11 November 1948 in detail. In the interview, Brankov drew attention to the fact that “the Tito clique, after having betrayed the interests of the Yugoslav peoples, are destroying the comradely cooperation between Yugoslavia and Hungary and strive for hostility towards the neighbouring people's democracies by flaring up the chauvinistic emotions in the Yugoslav peoples.” At the same time, “the Tito-clique are betraying the international workers' movement and the mutual friendly cooperation of the peoples of Yugoslavia and Hungary, too.” Under these circumstances, “the activities of the Hungarian-Yugoslav Society will become highly significant and important. [...] These activities can only be carried out successfully if the Society continues to fight consistently against the treacherous policies of the Tito-clique and do everything to unveil these policies”.⁴⁸

Besides the ritual propaganda interviews and speeches, Brankov had a more serious part in the anti-Yugoslav campaign. For example, Brankov sent a four-point working proposal to the Hungarian Workers' Party in which he proposed that the headquarters of the emigrants' paper, *Nova Borba* be relocated in Budapest and three logistic bases be established for its more efficient distribution in the vicinity of Szeged, Pécs and Nagykanizsa. Brankov also suggested that the Democratic Alliance of the Hungarian South Slavs and its paper, *Naše Novine*, be more involved in the anti-Tito propaganda warfare and quadruplicate the Serbian language program of Radio Budapest from 8 minutes a day to twice 15 minutes. His proposals, that were based on his discussions with other emigrant leaders in Prague, were discussed and supported by the Secretariat of the HWP on 24 November 1948 except that it recommended that a temporary committee be established instead of a permanent editorial board.⁴⁹ In the realization of the above mentioned tasks, Brankov especially relied on Ozren Krstonošić and Branislav Doroslovački. Both of them were born at Stari Bečej and got their positions at the Yugoslav embassy in Budapest owing to Brankov.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Gellért Kis: op. cit. 28.

⁴⁵ MTI. 14 November 1948. 21-22.

⁴⁶ MTI. 11 November 1948. 31.

⁴⁷ MTI. 8 November 1948. 21.

⁴⁸ MTI. 11 November 1948. 31.

⁴⁹ MOL M-KS 276.f. 54.cs. 18.ő.e. 1948. november 24. 3. and 19.

⁵⁰ For this in detail see: Vukman Péter: Négy óbcesei kommunista diplomata... op. cit. 136-144.

In his short summary to the Secretariat of the HWP titled *On the situation and work of the group of Yugoslav Communists in Hungary*, dated 12 January 1949, Brankov raised objections to the planned South Slavic radio programs. Instead of the rather varied and entertaining programs, he suggested that the articles and theoretical papers of the emigrant press be read, just like in Radio Moscow.⁵¹ Brankov attached this summary to the letter he wrote to Mátyás Rákosi on 10 February. In this letter Brankov reported on the talks he held with Pero Popivoda and Radonja Golubović, former Yugoslav ambassador to Romania, in Bucharest between 15 January and 7 February. During their discussions, the three emigrant politicians surveyed the situation of the emigrant communities and passed a resolution on the strengthening of the emigrant organizations. Therefore, they decided to establish an action committee whose main task was to improve the agitational and propaganda warfare, to raise the quality of *Nova Borba* and to solve certain problems concerning the radio broadcasts. In his letter, Brankov again urged Rákosi to put the register of the emigrants at his disposal. Brankov also wanted to organize so called collectives. These bodies, comprising 4 or 5 members, would be responsible for compulsory and collective studying (probably for the better command of Marxist-Leninist teaching). He also found it possible to establish a club for the emigrants at a later date. He had the building of the Hungarian-Yugoslav Society (Magyar-Jugoszláv Társaság) at 77 Stalin Road (today Andrásy Avenue) in his mind.⁵² Brankov's report and recommendations were dealt by the party secretariat on 16 February. The participants decided to appoint Brankov to the position of the political advisor of South Slavic language programs of Radio Budapest and gave their permission to him to assume authority in the Hungarian-Yugoslav Club "in a constitutional way". Only two conditions were attached: Concerning the radio broadcasts, Brankov must held preliminary discussions on theoretical topics with Mihály Farkas and the suggested list of the collective leaders, together with the necessary characterization, must be submitted to the Secretariat for approval.⁵³

Finally, I would like to raise the reader's attention to a short but interesting detail. In 1987 Gábor Gellért Kis quoted Stevanović Milutin, Yugoslav emigrant and former member of the Yugoslav economic delegation to Hungary, who had found a bulky volume in the cottage of the emigrants. Because of the dialogues, Stevanović first thought that he was holding a play in his hands but as he had started reading it, he realized that it was a text of a court hearing and the two protagonists were Krstonošić and Brankov. Stevanović also found out that the text was written by Brankov himself for a trial in which he wanted to justify a Titoist plot against the Hungarian Communist leadership through the murder of Miloš Mojić.⁵⁴ Milán Ognjenovics, former organizational secretary of the MDDSZ, also supports Stevanović's hypothesis. In September 1954, still in custody, he referred to the Hungarian State Security (ÁVH) about a meeting with Brankov which had taken place in March 1949. According to his recollection, Brankov informed him about the trial of Živko

⁵¹ MOL M-KS 276. f. 54. cs. 30. ő. e. 1949. február 16. 29-30.

⁵² MOL M-KS 276. f. 54. cs. 30. ő. e. 1949. február 16. 25-27.

⁵³ MOL M-KS 276. f. 54. cs. 30. ő. e. 1949. február 16. 4.

⁵⁴ Gellért Kis Gábor. op. cit.

Boarov, who killed Mojić, which, as a matter of fact, would be a “trial against Tito”. Brankov also made it clear that it was the highest echelons of the HWP that entrusted him with collecting compromising material.⁵⁵ Still, Brankov could not suspect that it was no one else but him who would finally have to play the role of the “Titoist agent”. However, the circumstances of his arrest, his role in the Rajk trial and his years spent in solitary confinement (between 1949–1956) could be a topic of another paper.

ПЕТЕР ВУКМАН

ЈУГОСЛОВЕНСКИ ДИПЛОМАТА У МАЂАРСКОЈ ЛАЗАР БРАНКОВ (1945-1949)

Сажетак

Лазар Бранков је најбоље познат у Мађарској по својој улози у време Рајковог процеса у коме се осуђен на доживотни затвор. Овај рад нема намеру да анализира све аспекте његове богате каријере, већ се радије фокусира на период између 1945. и 1949. године. Током ових година Бранков је био један од водећих дипломата који су радили при југословенској мисији у Савезничком контролном комитету у Мађарској и, од 1947. године, радио је као први секретар југословенске амбасаде у Будимпешти. Бранков је успоставио везе са водећим мађарским политичарима, учествовао је у бројним друштвеним и политичким догађајима и бавио се економским темама, репарацијама, екстрадицијама наводних мађарских ратних злочина и неприликама јужнословенских мањина у Мађарској. Рад се такође бави околностима које су водиле ка његовој емиграцији у јесен 1948, као и његовом улогом у тзв. *Коминформистичком* емиграцијом у Мађарској. За овај рад сам пре свега истраживао у Мађарском националном архиву, посебно у списима Министарства спољних послова и Мађарске радничке народне партије, као и у Историјском архиву мађарске тајне службе.

Кључне речи: Лазар Бранков, мађарско-југословенски односи после 1945, мађарско-југословенски дипломатски односи, совјетско-југословенски сукоб 1948-1953.

⁵⁵ АВТЛ 2.1. I/109-а. 299-300.