

LAZAR BRANKOV AND THE YUGOSLAV COMMUNIST EMIGRANTS IN HUNGARY (1948–49)*

Abstract

Communities of so-called Cominformist (*ibeovci*) emigrants were established in the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites after 1948 as part of the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict. In Hungary, it was Lazar Brankov who first took an active role in organizing the emigrant community and led their political activities. The scope of this article covers the short period between October 1948 and June 1949, during which Brankov was the leader of the *ibeovci* emigrants in Hungary. A careful analysis of the archival sources suggests, rather, that he emigrated of his free will and with the knowledge of the Hungarian and Soviet party leadership. He immediately took an active part in the political activities of the emigrants. He delivered many speeches, gave radio and press interviews, met the leaders of the Hungarian Workers' Party and the leaders of the other *ibeovci* emigrants in Eastern Europe. At the turn of 1948–49, the emigrants formed only a small community in Hungary. Their everyday lives were based on collectivist morals and supervised by the agents of the Hungarian secret police. Brankov's arrest in June 1949 had a dramatic and destructive effect on the emigrants' lives.

Key words: Soviet–Yugoslav conflict, Lazar Brankov, Cominformist emigrants, Hungarian–Yugoslav relations (1948–49)

Introduction

Soviet-Yugoslav relations deteriorated in a rapid and dramatic way after the Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties (*Cominform*) condemned Marshal Josip Broz Tito and the leadership of the Yugoslav Communist Party in its Bucharest resolution of 28 June 1948. As the conflict escalated during 1948–49, the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites isolated the Yugoslav economy, annulled most of the hitherto valid treaties and agreements, deliberately organized incidents on the Yugoslav borders, and launched a violent propaganda campaign against Yugoslavia. Moreover, similar to modern trials for heresy, political show trials took place in various countries condemning the Yugoslav leadership, giving harsh sentences to their real or imagined sympathizers. In this conflict, Yugoslav Communist political emigrants played an important role, too. The collectives of so-called Cominformist emigrants (*ibeovci*) were established as a consequence of the conflict, from among those Yugoslavs who had lived in, or had emigrated after the summer of 1948 to, the Soviet Union or to the other countries of the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. Some of them were leading diplomats who had worked at different Yugoslav embassies; they could therefore be regarded as possible members of a future emigrant government. The emigrants proved to be especially useful in the anti-Titoist propaganda campaign as they wrote articles in the local papers, edited their own newspapers and magazines, transmitted radio programs in the South Slavic languages and took part in the distribution of leaflets and pamphlets on Yugoslav territory.¹

In this paper my aim is to analyse and evaluate the role Lazar Brankov played in organizing the emigrant community and leading their anti-Titoist political activities. Brankov is probably best known as one of the tertiar defendant in what is now known as the Rajk Trial, a Titoist show trial

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that started in Budapest on 16 September 1949.² He was a Yugoslav diplomat of Serbian origin who was born at Stari Bečej in 1912. He began to sympathize with Communist ideas while he was studying law at the University of Belgrade and fought as a Communist partisan during the Second World War. After the war had ended, Brankov became an influential member of the Yugoslav sub-commission on reparations accredited to the Allied Control Committee in Hungary. At the so-called Yugoslav mission (*jugoszláv misszió*), he dealt with cultural and press affairs, economic matters and reparations, and took part in tracking down war criminals. From 1946 until early 1947, he served as secretary of the Yugoslav Military Mission and later in 1947 he was appointed first counsellor at the re-established Yugoslav embassy in Budapest. As a leading diplomat of a fraternal country, Brankov immediately got in touch with the Hungarian leadership and numerous members of the Hungarian Communist Party. He took steps in matters of high importance, and appeared at nearly all important receptions, gala dinners, as well as social and cultural events. He openly condemned the Yugoslav leadership in October 1948 and became the first leader of the Yugoslav Cominformist emigrants in Hungary until he was arrested in the summer of 1949.³

The focus of this article will be on the short period between October 1948 and June 1949, during which Brankov was the leader of this emigrant community. First I investigate the motives and circumstances of his emigration. Then I discuss the number, social composition and everyday life of the Yugoslav emigrants. In the third part of the article I provide an in-depth analysis of Brankov's political activities and his work as an organizer, and I briefly discuss the circumstances of his arrest and how it affected the emigrant community. This paper is based on the intensive research I carried out at the National Archives of Hungary (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára) and at the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security (Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára). My research on the lives and political activities of the Yugoslav Cominformist emigrants in Hungary (1948-1956) is still in progress, and therefore further archival research can modify the conclusion of this paper.⁴

Brankov's emigration

Lazar Brankov emigrated on 25 October 1948 as a participant of the escalating Soviet–Yugoslav conflict, and served as another vehicle of propaganda warfare for the Hungarian leaders to discredit the Yugoslav system and emphasize the incorrect nature of Tito's policies. According to an official communiqué, Brankov and six other members of the Yugoslav embassy in Budapest decided to emigrate because the Yugoslav Communist leadership refused to accept the critical remarks of the “fraternal” parties, and they started to fight “crookedly and villainously” against it. The communiqué also emphasized that the Yugoslav leadership demanded “from them, Communists living abroad, to create illegal organizations in every country with the aim of distributing treacherous propaganda and propagating their destructive policies”. At the end of the communiqué, they also expressed their firm belief that “remaining faithful to the tradition of internationalism, the members of the heroic Communist party of Yugoslavia possess the strength to reintegrate Yugoslavia with the fraternal community of the Communist parties of the world” (MTI 1, 18-19).

Brankov's emigration launched a whole series of exchanges of notes between Hungary and Yugoslavia. Between 26 October and 10 November the Yugoslavs protested in no less than eight notes but the Hungarians replied to them only twice (MNL OL 1; MNL OL 2; MNL OL 3; MNL OL 4).⁵ In connection with Brankov's emigration, the Hungarian ministry of foreign affairs, in notes dated 26 and 28 October, expelled nine Yugoslav diplomats from Hungary.⁶ At the same time, 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 Yugoslav embassy in the embassy's car with 30 thousand

forints and 508 US dollars (MNL OL 5; MNL OL 6).⁷

The Yugoslav citizens living in Budapest also “gave voice 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 of him, some of them supposed that Brankov might have emigrated on Belgrade's order to provoke those who had already deserted (ÁBTL 1). According to an undated note I found in the papers of Mihály Farkas, minister of home defence and deputy secretary of the Hungarian Workers' Party (HWP), the remaining members of the Yugoslav embassy discussed Brankov's emigration at a meeting where some of the diplomats argued that he “should receive the fate of Moics Milos,” but this scenario was rejected by commercial attaché Vladimir Gavrilović, who reasoned that “we have had enough trouble with Boarov,⁸ [therefore] there is no need for having more such rubbish talk” (MNL OL 8).

Brankov himself later provided rather confused and inconsistent accounts of the circumstances of his emigration. For example, during a review of the Rajk trial, he first said at the Department of Interrogation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Hungary (on 1st September 1954) that he made his decision during the Fifth Congress of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY, 21–28 July 1948) and wrote a letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in August 1948 in which he “condemned Tito's policies and stated that as a Communist I would be unconditionally available for the fight against Tito” (ÁBTL 2, 224-25). Brankov also said here that he had emigrated at an order from the Soviets: “In the middle of October 1948, the secretary of the Soviet embassy in Budapest informed me about the decision. He first asked me about my intentions, whether I wish to emigrate or go back [to Yugoslavia]. I answered that it made no difference to me, they could use me in any way that would best serve the cause [e.g. anti-Titoist propaganda]. He then said that in accordance with [the] decision, I should emigrate.” (ÁBTL 2, 224-25)

However, two weeks later (on 14 September) Brankov wrote that he had emigrated on the order of Aleksandar Ranković, Yugoslav minister of Internal Affairs, because for Yugoslavia “the most important thing [was] to know the intentions and plans of the Soviet Union towards Yugoslavia” (ÁBTL 2, 275-76). One day earlier (on 13 September 1954) Brankov wrote 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 Rajk in the leadership of HWP (ÁBTL 3, 64).

Brankov again elaborated on the circumstances of his emigration on 3 March 1955. According to this version he travelled to Belgrade to report on the Boarov case in the first days of October 1948. During their meeting, Ranković told him that “a very large group of emigrants is forming in the people's democracies”. He found it “extremely important” to know the activities of the emigrants, and especially to know “which way the IB [ie., the Cominform] is guiding the activities of the emigrants”. Therefore Ranković found it necessary to “have such a person in the leadership of the emigration who is familiar with the activities of the emigrants” and “who can inform the Yugoslav government about it”. He regarded Brankov as the most suitable person for this position, and Brankov dutifully accepted Ranković's order. However, he became uncertain and decided to emigrate of his free will. He justified the move with the following argument: “If I had refused the order of RANKOVICS [capitals in the original – V. P.], I would have been arrested immediately but if I had carried out the instructions and got caught, a similar fate would have awaited for me.” (ÁBTL 2, 387)

Based on the archival records, I am certain that Brankov emigrated by his own conviction and with the full knowledge of the Hungarian and Soviet leaders. As a rare example from this period, an original note has survived in the Historical Archive; it was written by an agent of the Hungarian State Security (ÁVH) about his meeting with Ozren Krstonošić at a Budapest café on 7 November 1949. Krstonošić, who emigrated together with Brankov from the Yugoslav embassy building, said that before his emigration, Brankov had held “constant discussions with Mátyás Rákosi, János Kádár, Mihály Farkas and the other leading members of the HWP, who supported them [e.g. the emigrants] to the utmost” (ÁBTL 4, 74). The contradictions in Brankov’s testimonies can be resolved if we take into account that Brankov was held in solitary confinement between 1949–56 and was not allowed to meet other prisoners, receive visitors or be informed of any political changes. He was not informed about the changing political climate after Stalin had died, either. However, his interrogators mentioned that he was susceptible to influence and during the interrogations, “he seized every opportunity to compromise the Yugoslav leaders”. It was easy to get false testimonies from him and, similarly to his confessions in the Rajk trial in 1949, he again changed his testimonies day after day (ÁBTL 2, 73 and 333; ÁBTL 5, 385; ÁBTL 6, 291).

Based on the archival records, I am also certain that Rákosi, chairman of HWP, invented the Yugoslav scenario of Brankov’s emigration himself. Beside the fact that Rákosi distinguished himself in the propaganda warfare against Yugoslavia, three other sources support my argument. During his interrogation (on 20 October 1956) Gábor Péter, leader of the Hungarian state security between 1945–1952, confessed that Rákosi urged Soviet lieutenant general Fedor Belkin to get a clear-cut confession from Brankov but Belkin “was not willing to carry out Rákosi’s demands”. Rákosi even phoned Péter wondering “why Belkin was reluctant to do this and why he did not want to accept this role” (ÁBTL 7, 254/a). The attachment to the detailed report that the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party sent to the Central Committee of the CPSU on 17 August 1962 on the infringements of the law during the period of “personal cult” in Hungary provides the second argument. This consisted of the verbatim records of the original notes that Belkin and N. I. Makarov wrote in 1949. One of them stated the following: “[...] In connection with Brankov’s case, comrade Rákosi expounded the following concept. 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 infiltrating and carrying out further intrigues in Hungary.” Moreover, “comrade Rákosi ordered the Hungarian interrogators to obtain [this kind of] 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” (ÁBTL 8, 3, 22-23). Thirdly, after Brankov had been arrested in Moscow on 21 June 1949, Rákosi urged the Soviets to send him 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 badly need his confession” (cited by Rainer 1998b, 107).⁹

The number, social composition and everyday life of the emigrants

According to the statistics that the Yugoslav secret police (the UDBA) compiled in 1964, altogether 4928 Cominformist emigrants lived in the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellite countries after 1948. Most of them lived in Bulgaria and Albania (1705 and 1340, respectively), which number was even higher than the number of emigrants who lived in the Soviet Union (718). In Hungary, 455 emigrants found refuge after 1948. Of these 455 emigrants 84 “fell out” for different reasons, 136 returned to Yugoslavia after Stalin died and 235 remained in Hungary after 1953. However, the historians Momčilo Mitrović and Slobodan Selinić cited another statistic, according to which 650 emigrants lived in Hungary in the mid-1950s (Banac 1988, 223; Banac 1990, 212; Митровић & Селинић 2009, 34. **Note 11**).

The Hungarian archival records that I have consulted do not put the number of emigrants living in Hungary as high. The first two detailed analyses that I could find were from as late as 1950, two years after the emigrant community was established. The first was written by Pero Popivoda, former deputy commander-in-chief of the Yugoslav air force and supreme leader of the emigrants, in a letter to the Central Committee of the HWP on 27 January 1950. Based on his observations during his visit to Hungary, he mentioned 77 emigrants and another, 14-member group of former diplomats who lived in exile in Hungary (MNL OL 9). A few months later, in May 1950, a detailed report was written for Rákosi. This one analyzed the one-year period between May 1949 and May 1950 and put the number of the emigrants much higher than Popivoda's figures: according to this report, 221 Yugoslavs lived in Hungary, 107 of them in the capital. However, only 102 people living in Budapest belonged officially to the political emigrants' group. The great majority of these emigrants (92 people) were male. 52 people were of Serbian origin, 18 were Croat, 10 were Montenegrin and 5 were Slovenian. The number of Hungarian emigrants was 13. According to their profession, 38 were intellectuals and white-collar workers, 35 were blue-collar workers and 28 peasants. Rather more than half of the emigrants were party members (57 people; however, it is unclear whether the figures refer to CPY or HWP membership), an additional 17 emigrants belonged to some party youth organizations. Among the party members, 21 were blue-collar workers, 16 were peasants and 23 were intellectuals (MNL OL 10).

During my archival research I also consulted a list compiled on 7 October 1952 containing the name of 80 Yugoslav citizens who chose exile in Hungary between July 1948 and July 1949. Six of them were not admitted to the political emigrants' group, hence the number of the Cominform emigrants in Hungary in this period was 74, quite close to the figures cited by Popivoda in early 1950. Most of them must have arrived after the spring of 1949 as two archival records, a report on the actual situation of the Yugoslav emigrants (dated 16 December 1948) and another report to the Secretariat of HWP (prepared on 24 February 1949), mention 28–28 political emigrants. Fifteen of these were the Yugoslav diplomats and the members of their families who emigrated together with Brankov in October 1948 (MNL OL 11, 21–22; MNL OL 12, 56).¹⁰ This may indicate that considerably few people, mostly diplomats, chose life in exile during the late autumn and winter of that year. I would also like to bring the reader's attention to Popivoda's figures cited above. He mentioned 14 diplomats, and if we add Brankov to that number (Brankov had already been in prison since 1949), we come to the same figure, which means that no other Yugoslav diplomats emigrated or arrived to Hungary after October 1948.

According to historian Ivo Banac, the Cominform emigrants originated from three different categories. The first comprised those Yugoslav citizens who had already lived in the Soviet Union and its satellites when the Soviet–Yugoslav conflict started to escalate. Most of them were students who studied at different universities and military academies, the majority of them in the Soviet Union and in Czechoslovakia. The second group comprised those Yugoslav diplomats and members of their families who emigrated after the conflict had escalated. The third group consisted of those Yugoslav citizens who illegally crossed the Yugoslav border, either because they were strong supporters of Stalinist ideas or because they wanted to flee from the consequences of some crime they had committed earlier (Banac 1988, 222-23; Banac 1990, 211-12; Митровић & Селинић 2009, 35).

In this sense, Brankov's emigration cannot be regarded as a special case. For example, Slobodan Lala Ivanović, press attaché at the Yugoslav embassy in Washington, emigrated on 27 July 1948, and this was followed by the resignation of the first counsellor of the Tehran embassy in August. In September, members of the Yugoslav embassy in Oslo, the Norwegian capital, including press

secretary Momčilo Ješić, second counsellor Zora Ješić and librarian Ljubomir Karinja resigned. Practically speaking, ambassador Moskovljević remained there without any staff. A similar situation occurred at the Yugoslav embassy in Ottawa, in Canada, where counsellor Pavle Lukin resigned in early October with his six colleagues (Vukman 2011b, 86. For Ivanović's emigration see: Војтјеховски 2012, 192–93).¹¹ In Eastern Europe, Radonja Golubović, Yugoslav ambassador to Romania, resigned on 31 July 1948, and Hanji Panzov, counsellor of the Yugoslav embassy in Sofia in November 1948, respectively (Vukman 2011b, 85).

On the other hand, it may be considered rather unusual that among the six other employees who emigrated together with Brankov from the Yugoslav embassy (major Dušan Vidović, deputy head of the military mission of the embassy; Ozren Krstonošić, Budapest bureau chief of TANJUG, the Yugoslav news agency; his wife, Pavka Krstonošić; vice-consul Branislav Doroslovački with his wife Ksenia and Klára Balassi), two diplomats, namely Krstonošić and Doroslovački, had closer relations with Brankov. They were also born at Stari Bečej, in 1913 and 1920, and owed their posts at the embassy to Brankov's personal intervention in early 1947. Also, it was Brankov who persuaded them to follow him into exile, where both of them took an active role in the anti-Titoist work of the emigrant community.¹²

At first, the small community of political emigrants had to cope with serious difficulties. They received 10,380 forints in relief aid until the middle of December 1948 but 22 emigrants had neither housing nor jobs (MNL OL 11, 21-22). The party was unable to provide their previous salaries and offered altogether 11,000 forints as monthly salary for Brankov and the other former embassy employees. That sum was slightly more than one third of their earlier combined salary of 29,500 forints. The party also intended to reduce Brankov's salary from 6,000 forints to a mere 1,000 (MNL OL 13). Fortunately, their financial situation improved in the following months. All of them were accommodated by the end of February 1949, either in Budapest or in the vicinity of the capital. For food, clothing, furniture as well as financial and material allocation they received 55,300 forints. Brankov himself got a monthly salary of 3,000 forints. In comparison, his salary was similar to the monthly salaries of the highest ranking state and party cadres in Hungary. The monthly salary of the ministers was 3,850 forints and of the under-secretaries 3,300 forints in January 1950, while an ordinary blue-collar worker received an average gross wage of 606 forints (MNL OL 12, 56; Honvári 2006; Valuch 2013, 38). For accommodation, a cottage was allocated to Brankov at 6, Szalonka Street in the 2nd district of the capital, where he certainly was not in need. According to a detailed inventory, the cottage was furnished with chairs and armchairs with pads, tables with marble inlay and four large Persian carpets (ÁBTL 9, 27–8).

Beside their participation in anti-Titoist propaganda, the emigrants lived their lives apart from the Hungarian public. Their everyday life was based on a collectivist system. They ate their meals together, walked together and went out together to watch movies or theatrical performances. On those occasions, the agents of the secret police accompanied them as bodyguards. Iván Berán and four other agents of the ÁVH joined them immediately after they had emigrated. Berán accompanied Brankov during his official journeys to Prague and Bucharest, too. They left the emigrants only for a short period in the spring of 1949 at Brankov's personal request (ÁBTL 3, 166, 250, 252). In my opinion, the presence of the security agents served a dual purpose: on the one hand, it secured the safety of the emigrants (as they feared a possible attempt of assassination by the Yugoslavs); on the other hand, it also meant their close observation. In his detailed note written in the summer of 1954 while in custody, Krstonošić could not remember a single event when Brankov went anywhere without the protection, and control, of at least one security agent. In this note, he characterized Brankov as a balanced, sober and amicable person. He could not recollect a single case when Brankov had entanglements with women, although he knew that Klára Balassa was in

love with him. He only found out after Brankov had left for Moscow in May 1949 that, reportedly, he and Klára had an intimate relationship. Still, Ksenia, Ozren's wife, believed that Brankov did not care for Klára, but a certain Marija Stevanović, (ÁBTL 3, 253-255) who happened to be the wife of another emigrant, Milutin Stevanović.

It is worth mentioning, that three years earlier, in the curriculum vitae that he wrote for the ÁVH (on 29 August 1951), Krstonošić held a rather negative view of Brankov's political activities and criticized him because "Brankov immediately appointed himself captain of the collective". Because of this, Krstonošić felt that the "spirit of the UDB[A] has been introduced [to our community]. Titoist methods were used: resolutions were passed arbitrarily without asking for the opinion of the collective." (ÁBTL 4, 168) Still, I suppose that Krstonošić used this kind of negative tone in describing Brankov because he himself had been arrested and held in custody; for this reason he wished to justify his own deeds while presenting Brankov as negatively as possible. Similarly negative was the opinion of Doroslovački, who, unlike Krstonošić, characterized Brankov in his note written in August 1954 as reserved and inaccessible who "tried to preserve the crust of a diplomat" but "was not a serious revolutionary of communist cadre" (ÁBTL 3, 166-67).¹³

The first leader of the Yugoslav Cominformist emigrants in Hungary

After he emigrated, Brankov immediately took an active part in the ongoing propaganda warfare against Yugoslavia. He made speeches against Tito at mass rallies, including the congress of the Democratic Alliance of Southern Slavs in Hungary (Magyarországi Délszlávok Demokratikus Szövetsége, MDDSZ) in Baja on 14 November 1948 (MTI 2, 21-22); he wrote articles in the party daily *Szabad Nép* and in the emigrants' paper, *Nova Borba*; and he gave interviews "on the guilty deviation of the Tito clique" to the journal of the Hungarian-Yugoslav Society (*Déli Csillag*) (MTI 3, 31) and the Hungarian Radio (MTI 4, 21). The Hungarian Communist leadership also sent him to agitate among the South Slavic minorities in Hungary and propagate the official standpoint concerning Tito and the Yugoslav policies. As stated, Brankov participated at the conference of the MDDSZ in Baja where, together with Ljubica Mirković, secretary of the Alliance of South Slavic Women (Délszláv Nőszövetség) and Dušan Vidović, former military attaché at the Yugoslav embassy in Budapest, he delivered a speech in which he again ritually condemned Tito's policy. He ended his speech with the following warning: "There is only one road ahead us: [...] the Stalinist road. This is the road on which Mátyás Rákosi leads the millions of Hungarian workers. This is the force that has destroyed every other force working against it and it will destroy Tito [and his followers], too." (MTI 2, 21-22)

Brankov also delivered a speech at the ceremony held at Madách Theatre in Budapest on 28 November 1948 on the occasion of the Yugoslav national holiday. Having summarized the main events of the Second World War, Brankov drew a sharp contrast between the merits and wartime achievements of the Soviet Union and the current Yugoslav situation. In harmony with the spirit of the celebration and the propaganda aims, he finished his speech in an optimistic tone: "But the pain and exasperation will not last long. [...] The working people of Yugoslavia, even if they have to be confronted with difficulties ahead, will realize that their leaders, whom they have believed so much, have betrayed them. At that moment, the plans of Tito's clique will fall into the dust and the dams [gátak] that have been erected between the working people of Yugoslavia and the peoples of the Soviet Union and the people's democracies, will collapse." (MTI 5, 19; MTI 6, 11)

Apart from the ritually recurrent propaganda interviews and speeches, Brankov took a more serious part in the anti-Yugoslav campaign and immediately set to the task of organizing the emigrant community. On 26 October 1948, however, one day after he had emigrated, Gábor Péter

characterized the work of the former Yugoslav diplomat in his letter to Farkas, as “planless” and showing signs of “a certain lukewarmness and a lack of adequate caution” (MNL OL 14). After the discussions he had had in Prague with the leaders of the local emigrants,¹⁴ Brankov wrote a four-point working plan on 12 November in which he proposed that the headquarters of the emigrants’ paper, *Nova Borba*, be relocated to Budapest¹⁵ and three logistic bases be established for its more efficient distribution in the areas 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 anti-Titoist propaganda warfare, and that the Serbian language program of Radio Budapest should be quadruplicated from 8 minutes a day to two broadcasts of 15 minutes each¹⁶ and the standard of the programs should be improved. Brankov also found it important that the cooperation between the emigrants and the general public through the different press organs and radio programs be as wide as possible. He also thought it indispensable that the Hungarian–Yugoslav Society (Magyar–Jugoszláv Társaság) be “fully” activated in this respect (MNL OL 15). His proposals 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. József Révai, who presented Brankov’s proposals at the meeting, also suggested that they should ask the opinion and consent of the other *fraternal* parties before establishing a permanent editorial board (MNL OL 15). The secretariat accepted his arguments and declared that they would make a decision only after obtaining the necessary information (MNL OL 16, 3.). In the last two cases, where additional information was not necessary, the Political Committee of the HWP passed Brankov’s suggestion in its meeting the following day (MNL OL 17., 3, 18).

While involved in related tasks, Brankov considered the South Slavic radio programs to have high priority. Still, his cooperation with the leaders of Radio Budapest was not smooth. In his brief to the Secretariat of the HWP on 12 January 1949, titled *On the situation and work of the Hungarian branch of the Yugoslav Communists*, Brankov resented the fact that the emigrants had not been involved in the preparation of the Serbo-Croat radio programs, had been left out from the decision-making process and had not been regularly consulted on the programs to be aired. Brankov also raised objections to the planned South Slavic radio programs. Instead of rather varied and entertaining programs, he suggested that the articles and theoretical papers of the emigrant press be read, exactly as on Radio Moscow. He also recommended that a short, soul-stirring text, containing references to the “basic conclusions of Tito’s betrayal”, be read aloud before each broadcast – similarly to the programs of Radio Free Yugoslavia that aired during the Second World War (MNL OL 18, 29–30).

The everyday working relations between the emigrants and the leaders of the radio did not improve. In his letter to Farkas on 29 April 1949, Brankov again protested because he had not been involved in editing the radio programs and programs other than those that had been agreed had been broadcast. He also argued that the weekly meetings of the editorial board had been too short, the news had not been accurately translated into Serbian, and resented the fact that not even one copy of the Yugoslav papers were available for the emigrants (MNL OL 19, 71–6). Having accepted Brankov’s critical remarks, Rákosi ordered on 2 May that “besides sufficient control, the Yugoslav comrade must receive the utmost opportunities [to carry out his work]”, including the provision of sufficient places in the radio building for editorial work and all the press, radio and other materials concerning Yugoslavia (MNL OL 19, 71).

Besides the South Slavic radio programs, another important method for propagating the Soviet standpoint was the illegal circulation of pamphlets, leaflets and brochures on Yugoslav territory, among them the copies of the emigrants’ papers. Therefore, Brankov insisted in his petition of 21 November 1948 that three packages of *Nova Borba*, each containing 500 copies, be circulated in a

certain way in Yugoslavia (MNL OL 18, 31). He also recommended that the emigrants establish connections with the members of the Yugoslav embassy in Budapest and the Yugoslav citizens who were living in the Hungarian capital (Brankov put their numbers over 600), improve their activities and carry out more tasks among the South Slavic minorities in Hungary, whom Brankov regarded as outposts of Titoist propaganda. Therefore, he considered the role of the teachers who taught at the schools of the South Slavic minorities especially important. In order to deepen and intensify the framework for life in exile, Brankov repeatedly asked for the register of all Yugoslav citizens living in Hungary (MNL OL 18, 31-32).

During this organizational work, Brankov participated in important meetings with the other Cominform emigrant leaders. The main aim of these meetings was to harmonize the activities of the emigrant communities. Brankov held talks 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. They therefore 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 summarizing the main points of this meeting, 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 a 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 at 77 Stalin Road (today Andrásy Avenue) in mind (MNL OL 18, 25–7). Brankov’s report on his discussions and his recommendations were dealt by the party secretariat on 16 February. The participants decided to appoint Brankov to the position of political advisor of the 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” (quotation marks in the original documents, too). Only two conditions were attached: Concerning the radio broadcasts, Brankov must hold preliminary discussions on the theoretical topics with Farkas; and the suggested list of the leaders of each small emigrant group, together with the necessary documentation, must be submitted to the Secretariat for approval (MNL OL 18, 4).

Brankov apparently performed increasingly numerous tasks, and his arrest as a Titoist agent came as a huge surprise, therefore. The circumstances of his arrest are rather confused, just like the circumstances of his emigration half a year earlier. The Hungarian authorities had probably planned his arrest in the spring of 1949 at the latest, but the Soviet cadres objected to it. Still, Brankov was arrested in the Soviet capital on 21 June 1949 (ÁBTL 3, 149, 272; ÁBTL 7, 257; MNL OL 10, 6).

His arrest had a destructive effect on the lives of the other political emigrants in Hungary. Everybody was afraid of being arrested and an air of mutual denunciation became a general feature. Discipline totally collapsed and everybody was suspicious of others. It became common that the emigrants resorted to drinking and entertainments (ÁBTL 9, 111–12). Their lives were not without difficulties in later years, either. Various members of the emigrant community were arrested in connection with the Rajk or other show trials and were sentenced to long years in prison, or were simply relocated to detention camps. Personal frictions became an everyday feature among the leadership of the emigrants, too.

Conclusion

The communities of the so called Cominform emigrants were established after 1948 as a

consequence of the Soviet–Yugoslav conflict. They proved especially useful in propaganda warfare against Tito and the Yugoslav leadership. Different archival sources provide us with different data about the number of the *ibeovci* emigrants in Hungary. While the most cited Yugoslav archival source puts their number at 455, the available Hungarian archival sources suggest that their number was much less, and varied between 77 and 221 (of whom 102 emigrants living in the Hungarian capital belonged officially to the political group) in the early 1950s.

It was Brankov, a leading diplomat at the Yugoslav embassy in Budapest, who took the main role in organizing the emigrant community and their political activities in Hungary. Brankov emigrated on 25 October 1948 by his own free will and probably with full knowledge of the Hungarian and Soviet leaders. Six other diplomats and employees of the embassy followed suit on the same day. Together with the members of their families, these 15 people formed the nucleus of the 28-member emigrant community in Hungary at the turn of 1948–49. It is also worth noting, that among the six diplomats, two had closer relations with Brankov.

At first, the emigrants had to struggle with great difficulties but their material and financial situation, and their accommodation was settled by February 1949. Their everyday life was based on a collectivist system and supervised by the agents of the Hungarian secret police. Brankov immediately took an active part in the ongoing propaganda campaign against Yugoslavia through his many speeches and interviews. He also met the leaders of both the HWP and the other communities of Cominform emigrants. His suggestions were regularly supported by the Hungarian Communist party leadership, although sometimes minor alterations were made to them. He considered the South Slavic radio programs of Radio Budapest of special importance, but his collaboration with the leaders of the radio programmes was not without conflict. Brankov was arrested in Moscow on 21 June 1949. Although the circumstances are not clear, it is certain that the arrest had a destructive effect on the emigrants in Hungary. The everyday life and the political activities of the Cominformist emigrants in Hungary after July 1949, would however be a topic of another paper.

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- ¹ For Yugoslav political emigrants in general see Banac 1988, 221-242; Banac 1990, 210-228; Митровић & Селинић 2009; and for the political emigrants in Bulgaria in particular, see Dragišić 2007, 242-250.
- ² Brankov was sentenced to life imprisonment by the verdict of the trial. The full text of the Rajk trial is available in Hungarian: Zinner 1989. For the trial itself, see Zinner 2013.
- ³ For his life and political activities, see Vukman 2011a, 197-213; Vukman 2012, 291-313.
- ⁴ My research on the lives and political activities of the Cominformist Yugoslav political emigrants in Hungary (1948-1956) is financed by the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA PD 108386). All texts in italics are the author's translations from Hungarian.
- ⁵ Contemporary Yugoslav sources mention only three Yugoslav notes (27 October, 7 November and 10 November) and two Hungarian ones (28 October and 3 December). *White Book* 1951, 117. [Note 8](#).
- ⁶ The nine diplomats were: secretaries Vaso Jovanović, Djurica Jojkić and Dušan Devedžić; military attaché Alojz Žokalj; Stevan Sinanović, head of the Yugoslav delegation on reparations; deputy commercial attaché Mihajlo Ljubić; as well as employees Lazar Torbica, Ivan Berenja and Karel Gercelj. (*White Book* 1951, 465. [Appendix 12](#)).
- ⁷ The Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs handed over their evidence on 10 November 1948. Counsellor János Beck acknowledged that the evidence was true; therefore, the Hungarian authorities did not wish to revert to this case (MNL OL 3; MNL OL 7).
- ⁸ Boarov shot Miloš Mojić, 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 large-scale anti-Yugoslav trial, but because of the muddled story, they finally declined. For the Boarov case, see: Ripp 1998, 45-62; Rainer 1998a, 91-100.; Gellért Kis 1987, 27-29.
- ⁹ Rákosi again urged Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Vishinsky to send Brankov back to Hungary (Rainer 1998b, [Note 11](#)).
- ¹⁰ One of the emigrants was expelled from the emigrants' community and relocated by February 1949, due to fraudulence (MNL OL 12, 56).
- ¹¹ For Ivanović's emigration see: Војтјеховски 2012, 192-193.
- ¹² For their relations in more detail, see: Vukman 2011c, 136-144.
- ¹³ At the same time, Brankov also wrote critically of Doroslovački: "[He] had kept on his old 'petite bourgeoisie' habits and therefore had many frictions with his comrades", though he added that "he was good at his work and behaved frankly in the war against the Titoists". (ÁBTL 2, 235).
- ¹⁴ It was not by accident that Brankov held discussions with the emigrants in Prague. Although the number of the Yugoslav political emigrants in Czechoslovakia was no more than 160-180 in the early 1950s, they were one of the strongest, most important and politically most active groups among the emigrants. (For the Yugoslav emigrants in Czechoslovakia, see: Митровић & Селинић 2009, 37; Selinić 2010, 547-62; Војтјеховски 2008, 207-30; Perišić: 2006, 103-23).
- ¹⁵ The periodical of the political emigrants, *Nova Borba*, was established by Slobodan Lala Ivanović and Pero Dragila, who emigrated to Czechoslovakia from the Yugoslav embassy in Washington. Its title was not accidental; it referred to *Borba*, the official daily organ of the Yugoslav Communist Party (Banac 1998, 224; Banac 1990, 213; Митровић & Селинић 2009, 41).
- ¹⁶ In comparison, during the winter of 1948-1949 2 programs were broadcast from Budapest and Sofia on a daily basis, 2 or 3 from Prague and 6 or 7 from Moscow. (*White Book* 1951, 476. [Appendix 20](#)).