

# The European Community and Yugoslavia's Non-Alignment Policy: from acceptance and collaboration to disillusionment and confrontation

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## Abstract

*The normalization of relations between Belgrade and Moscow in the mid-1950s and the Yugoslav authorities' decision to develop closer relations with the West coincided with Yugoslavia's intention to seek its own way forward, characterized by self-management at home and a lead role in the international Non-Aligned Movement. Later, following the establishment of official relations between the European Community and Yugoslavia in 1968, the Community accepted that Yugoslavia remained where it stood ideologically and continued to provide it with new trade agreements. However, a careful examination of official debates and archival collections reveals that it did not take long before the appreciation for the policy of non-alignment was overshadowed by uncertainty (due to the death of President Tito, but also the end of the Cold War and collapse of communism), with the movement eventually losing its significance with the outbreak of the Yugoslav state crisis and consequent policy-making preferences.*

**Keywords:** Yugoslavia, European Community, Non-Aligned Movement, international collaboration

## Introduction

In 1948, following the Tito-Stalin split and the consequent expulsion of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia from the Cominform, a period of policy reconsiderations and possible alternatives emerged. Accordingly, the Yugoslav authorities decided to develop closer relations with the West, which generated substantial financial support and thus helped mitigate the unfavourable economic situation at home as well as military support, which was deemed crucial in order to

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withstand Soviet pressure.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, by the mid-1950s, as Svetozar Rajak has succinctly summarized the trend, “Yugoslavia became effectively incorporated into NATO through defence coordination, arms deliveries, and other military assistance” (2010, p. 214). The US administration, even though exposed to some sharp criticism locally – centred on the incompatibility of totalitarian regimes such as Tito’s with the Western commitment to democratic values – nevertheless agreed to reward Yugoslavia’s orientation, praising its performance at the UN, the stabilization of relations with Austria and Italy, and a more relaxed approach vis-à-vis political dissent. Still, as rightly observed elsewhere, “[s]ome of these gestures, no doubt, were more cosmetic than substantive, and there was no way of guaranteeing that Tito would continue them after he got the aid he wanted. They did suffice to convince a majority of Congress” (Brands, 1987, p. 46).

The normalization of relations between Belgrade and Moscow in 1955, but also the negotiations surrounding the signature of the Treaty of Rome and the establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957, actually coincided with the Yugoslav authorities’ intention to seek their own way forward, characterized by self-management at home and a lead role in the international Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), launched in Belgrade in 1961. In fact, as widely discussed in the literature, the decision of a European state to embrace a foreign policy direction comparable to the one adopted by Asian and African countries was a major move, which in return helped the Yugoslav leadership to consolidate its standing in the Third World; moreover, the fact that the close of the 1950s was marked by a fresh ideological clash between Belgrade and the Soviets meant that Tito’s solid rapport with figures like Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India, and Gamal Abdel Nasser, President of Egypt, represented a serious obstacle to future involvement of both Moscow and Beijing in the Afro-Asian area (Čavoški, 2014; Kullaa, 2011; Rubinstein, 1970; Životić and Čavoški, 2016). In the West, the growing scepticism among its leaders about Yugoslavia’s future direction, with some of them going as far as to question any additional provision of assistance, was accompanied by Tito’s continuous explanations, altogether trying to reassure them that the adoption of a middle position was not intended against any of the two blocs (Bogetić, 2006, pp. 27–42; also Byrne, 2015; Močnik, 2008, pp. 25–39; Rajak, 2014).

Although successful in defending their country’s policy, the Yugoslav representatives were also aware of the importance of the previously secured assistance and trade arrangements with the West. However, the more the idea of European integration was advancing (primarily in economic terms), the more the Yugoslavs seemed to be preoccupied. For example, in an interview to French weekly *Observateur*, Yugoslav Vice-President Edvard Kardelj (cited in Council, 1959)

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<sup>1</sup> For book-length analyses, see Banac (1988), Bekić (1988), Bogetić (2000), Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije (2008), Laković and Tasić (2016), Lees (1997), Marković (1996), Niebuhr (2018), Rajak (2011), and Vucinich (1982).

complained that his country's external trade was affected negatively due to the establishment of the European Common Market: "I am afraid that unsatisfactory methods of economic cooperation, far from resulting in integration, may lead to disintegration. I believe that I can already see some signs of this type." A similar point was also made by President Tito during the Belgrade NAM conference; in his view, non-aligned countries outside the European Community and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) were discriminated against – something that "could be even further aggravated and could affect even more adversely the economic development of non-aligned as well as all other countries" (Stanojević, 1963, p. 400). Here, it is also worth recalling that at this very point, "Belgrade was not on the best of terms with the Community's major participants" (Tsakaloyannis, 1981, pp. 31–32); for instance, the French presence in Algeria and close relations with Israel contradicted the Yugoslav sympathy for the Arabs, not to mention the political distortions with West Germany following the Yugoslav recognition of East Germany, and the border dispute with Italy over the Trieste question, which altogether implied some real discomfort.

In response to the Yugoslav official remarks, EEC trade experts used to recall a 1958 study, published in Belgrade, which argued that "the Community of Six will represent no more than a very slight risk to Yugoslavia," and stressed that "[t]he idea of 'Little Europe' has indeed never been popular among Yugoslav politicians, whose attitude in this respect is the same as that of their Soviet colleagues. In taking up a position against the European Common Market they are actually adopting a political standpoint" (Council, 1959). So, while there is no question that the European integrationist project had a dividing capacity economically even in Western Europe – a fragmentation additionally reinforced by the formation of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in 1960 (Patel, 2017, pp. 33–34) – the EEC officials used Yugoslavia's non-aligned positioning to discredit its concerns regarding trends in trade. Still, following Belgrade's adoption of a more relaxed position vis-à-vis Brussels<sup>2</sup> and a Community-led meeting about the existing and possible trends in trade with Yugoslavia in 1965, some serious diplomatic moves were made, culminating in the establishment of official relations between the EEC and

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<sup>2</sup> As summarized by Tsakaloyannis (1981, pp. 33–34), "[t]he Yugoslavs had valid reasons for this change of attitude. In the first place, the announcement in 1962 of Comecon's decision to deepen economic links aggravated the Yugoslav fear of being squeezed between two regional economic blocs ... In addition, the ongoing negotiations between Britain and the EEC during 1962, and the Association of Greece and Turkey with the EEC, further threatened Yugoslavia with economic isolation. On the other hand, many newly independent countries had expressed a desire to establish trade and other economic links with the Six, and the Yaoundé Convention between the EEC and 18 newly independent African states was soon to be signed. Yugoslavia's proximity to Western Europe, the level of her economic development, her desire not to return to the Soviet fold, and limited economic links with the Third World thus all pointed towards closer links with Brussels."

Yugoslavia in 1968 (Radeljić, 2012, pp. 56–57). The Belgrade authorities interpreted the new setting as an opportunity to develop the optimum strategies for obtaining Western aid and the Community accepted that the Yugoslav federation remained where it stood, ideologically.

The existing scholarly examinations, especially those produced after Yugoslavia's disintegration, have dedicated considerable attention to the EEC–SFRY dynamics; they look into the Brussels leaderships' rationale in supporting Belgrade by signing trade agreements, the Yugoslav positioning in the new context and prospects for political cooperation, and the subsequent crises and uncertainties dominating the post-Titoist constellation (Obadic, 2014; Radeljić, 2012; Zaccaria, 2016). Accordingly, while in the beginning “the preservation of Yugoslavia's non-aligned credentials was, at the same time, a major Western goal and a serious constraint to the development of economic negotiations between the parties,” later on, when political cooperation was acknowledged as equally important and indeed a prerequisite for a successful relationship between the two, “the safeguarding of Yugoslavia's non-alignment and independence was confirmed as the basis for future EEC–Yugoslav relations” (Zaccaria, 2016, p. 9, 124).

However, in order to complement the existing accounts, which are largely concerned with the Yugoslav insistence on its unique orientation and its consequent contribution to alienation from the European Community, this article is primarily concerned with the Brussels administration and its treatment of Yugoslav foreign policy in the context of European Community–Yugoslav official relations. Here, a careful examination of numerous official debates and standpoints, found in the archival collections of the European Union and in edited volumes containing specific documentary sources about the complex EEC–Yugoslav relationship (Radeljić, 2017), helps us understand that both sides felt strongly about the significance of non-alignment, albeit from different angles. Most relevant for this study, in contrast to the early period when the Brussels authorities showed appreciation for the Yugoslav policy of non-alignment and in fact deemed it worthy of preservation, over time they gradually changed their position and eventually ended up abandoning their original point of view. Such a shift was additionally facilitated by the outbreak of the Yugoslav state crisis and the resulting wars in the early 1990s, which fully eroded the relevance of non-alignment vis-à-vis debates about recognition of new states and the future of the post-Yugoslav space.

## **1. The 1970s: Yugoslavia's approach accepted**

There were some genuine internal problems – the 1968 student demonstrations erupting in Belgrade (Fichter, 2016; Kanzleiter, 2008), the 1970 and 1971 dockworkers' strikes in Koper and Rijeka respectively (Rutar, 2015), and the 1971 Croatian Spring (Gruenwald, 1982; Irvine, 2008). There was also the regime's readiness to intervene and harshly penalize reformist initiatives, most obviously

through the means of purges that were accompanied by public campaigns – usually calling for additional purges and interethnic revenges (Flere and Klanjšek, 2019, pp. 115–136). Despite this, the early part of the new decade offered a positive sign in the field of economic cooperation between Yugoslavia and the European Community. A new trade agreement signed in February 1970 was aimed at providing the Yugoslav federation with trade benefits and additional political cooperation with the Brussels administration. While acknowledging the Yugoslav government's appreciation, Toma Granfil, from the Federal Executive Council, nevertheless felt the need to clarify Belgrade's position:

Having reminded delegates of the intention of the Yugoslav government to develop economic cooperation with foreign countries, and especially with the Community, to reject any ideas about self-sufficiency and to 'integrate itself in a real and long-term fashion with international economic trends and to continue a policy of non-alignment,' Granfil stressed the consequences of an increasing deficit in the trade balance with the Community (Granfil cited in European Commission, 1970).

Indeed, while the trade between the two parties kept increasing, so did the trade imbalance.

Looking more closely at the Yugoslav non-aligned orientation, the European Community reflected the position of its members. Altogether, they were aware of how easy it was for the Soviets to invade Czechoslovakia in 1968, with the local army powerless to defend their small country, and therefore they believed that an ever-increasing involvement of the EEC in the case of Yugoslavia was key. Accordingly, with the case of Czechoslovakia serving as an indication of how badly matters can become, EEC representatives agreed on the significance of looking after Yugoslavia's independent, non-aligned status, which in reality resulted in a hasty signature of a trade agreement between Brussels and Belgrade (Tsakaloyannis, 1981, p. 36). Furthermore, another analysis placed emphasis on other initiatives, possibly pursued by European members of NATO; here, they could probably take the lead by showing their opposition to external interference in the Yugoslav federation. In John Campbell's view (1973, p. 787), "[t]hat might serve as an additional warning and a signal that European nations have a proper concern with containing crisis and violence anywhere on their own continent." But still, as this analysis frankly urged, the Community had to accept the fact that a one-off, quick-fix solution was not likely to resolve the problem; instead, the Brussels authorities should have focused on "a broadening of relations with the countries of south-eastern Europe," the success of which was admittedly conditioned by the development of *détente* but also the genuine willingness of West and East European countries to agree on mutually acceptable terms (*ibid.*). So, what the above impressions and prescriptions about the

most convenient way ahead suggest is that the Yugoslav federation enjoyed some kind of a special, yet delicate status.

In reality, by this point, European Community representatives had altogether accepted and welcomed Tito's statesmanship, steadily raising the profile of the Yugoslav state. As summarized by Sergej Flere and Rudi Klanjšek (2019, p. 86), despite its domestic antagonisms and interethnic disparities, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) was perceived as a united and fairly successful communist state: "The downfalls of the established order are not yet fully visible, and the general spirit of the day is that the state has many possibilities to prosper." For example, West Germany had started opening towards Belgrade by the mid-1960s, with discussions about reparations, trade agreements and re-establishment of official relations in 1968 ranking high on the agenda (Gray, 2003, p. 165). Later, following the visit of Chancellor Willy Brandt, Tito himself decided to visit West Germany in 1974. The editorial of the daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* stated that "[t]he security of Western Europe partially depends on the country between the Danube and the Adriatic not belonging to the Moscow empire" and "at the same time, Yugoslavia's security is a precondition for a functional Atlantic Alliance." *New Solidarity* (1974, p. 20), while quoting this, tried to argue that the situation was much more complex:

This blunt statement targets Yugoslavia as a crucial strategical pawn for NATO, and a country Rockefeller wants to win away from its Soviet ties. This spring NATO provocations at the Yugoslav-Italian border demonstrated NATO's utter disregard of Yugoslav sovereignty, which took the form of an attempt to stir up nationalist strife within traditionally ethnically divided Yugoslavia by blaming the provocations on Soviet influence in the country.

In the case of neighbouring Italy with whom Yugoslavia had a rather problematic relationship in the post-Second World War context (mainly because of the contested territory of Trieste, which required a UN mission to administer it), economic cooperation was promoted nevertheless, with Rome granting loans to Yugoslavia for its development. In the latter's view, "the economic rapprochement ... was a very important milestone in bilateral relations" and "a good example of international cooperation beyond ideological barriers" (Ruzicic-Kessler, 2014, pp. 646-647). Going forward, by the time the two finally agreed on a durable solution for the Trieste question and signed the Treaty of Osimo in 1975, both players had witnessed enough of internal divisions (between Christian Democrats and Communists in Italy, and among the constituting republics in Yugoslavia), which somehow implied a greater need for collaboration and lasting stability internationally (*ibid.*, p. 655). With this in mind, the Yugoslav non-aligned orientation did not seem to represent any major obstacle.

However, the apparent acceptance of the Yugoslav position did not fully connote that speculations about its reorientation were utterly non-existent. This was especially so because of the progressing détente, which encouraged endless questions in relation to the strategic aspirations of the global powers and made the previous obsession with ideological orientation less prominent. Aware of this, Dusko Doder, Eastern Europe and Moscow chief correspondent for the *Washington Post*, kept warning that Yugoslavia was in front of a rare dilemma; in contrast to other European states which embraced neutrality in military terms but then continued openly to side with the West in terms of cultural, economic, and political spheres, the Yugoslav authorities insisted on their state's Slavic background and communist orientation with economic and political features largely corresponding to the socialist commonwealth, even though it was the very same socialist commonwealth which paradoxically posed the main challenge to Yugoslav security (Doder, 1979, pp. 141-142). Looking more closely at the relations between Belgrade and Moscow, both of them continued to promote, by this point a fairly consolidated, cooperative spirit. Throughout the 1970s, President Tito visited Moscow three times, and whenever there were concerns among the Yugoslav leadership that the Soviet Communists could possibly decide to impose tight control on communist parties elsewhere and consequently erode the balance of socialist international relations, the Soviet authorities tried to reassure Belgrade that this did not apply to the SFRY. In fact, this was made explicitly clear during Leonid Brezhnev's visit to Yugoslavia in late 1976, when the Soviet leader felt the need to fully convince the Yugoslav authorities about Moscow's position and, most accurately, its appreciation of Yugoslavia's sovereignty (Hall, 1993, pp. 430-431).

When it comes to the relations between Belgrade and Brussels, the mid-1975 Memorandum of the Yugoslav Mission to the European Communities communicated a range of concerns dominating commercial arrangements between the two parties, seeing them as rather discriminatory. The document went even further and stated that "if a non-aligned and a developing country at the same time were exposed to certain economic difficulties and limitations, such treatment would inevitably influence the Yugoslav foreign policy" (European Commission, 1975). Still, such objections did not generate any substantial attention – nothing like the reactions that accompanied Brezhnev's visit to Belgrade the following year, when he advocated for a closer Yugoslav–Soviet economic link. Interestingly, at the very same time, the then Foreign Ministers of EEC Member States agreed on and proudly announced a declaration promoting a closer economic cooperation between the Community and the Yugoslav state (Tsakaloyannis, 1981, pp. 39-40). In addition to recognizing the SFRY as a non-aligned and a developing country, the visits between Brussels and Belgrade surrounding the negotiations and then the signature of the so-called Belgrade Declaration in late 1976, were also promoted as a new chapter in EEC–Yugoslav relations and an important undertaking towards political cooperation. Still, as one study described the atmosphere, while "[o]n one hand,

Yugoslav authorities sought a public manifestation of confidence on the part of the EEC, [o]n the other, they had explained that, as a non-aligned country, they could not contemplate any clear-cut political choice in favour of the Community, which would embroil them in problems with the Soviet Union” (Zaccaria, 2016, p. 118).

As it turned out, the 1976 declaration did not manage to reduce the trade gap between them or pave the way to some genuine political cooperation. The idea for a broader agreement (to cover energy, transport, and tourism, as well as science and technology) was not really appreciated by the Yugoslavs; they believed that the arrangement's preferential as well as non-reciprocal character worked against Yugoslav interests (Artisien and Holt, 1980, p. 367). More precisely, the striking of preferential deals with Western European states was not permissible due to Belgrade's devoted relationship with the Non-Aligned Movement, but also the absence of reciprocity was in obvious opposition to the declaration whose clauses advocated mutual cooperation in economic, financial, and social domains. On top of this, and in accordance with Brezhnev's visit, “the Soviet Union had definitely emerged as the major external variable, conditioning Yugoslavia's relations with the EEC,” making the overall meaning of the declaration rather ambivalent. Even though it sought to ensure greater economic cooperation, Yugoslavia's non-alignment came to represent an impediment, paving the way to “institutional detachment from the EEC” (Zaccaria 2016, p. 125, 127).

Going forward, while the Yugoslav authorities tended to believe that because of their country's non-aligned position, they should keep balancing between the East and the West (Obadic, 2014, pp. 332-336), the Brussels administration refrained from acknowledging Yugoslavia's domestic problems. For too long, for the European Community, it seemed that keeping Yugoslavia afloat was the most appropriate way forward. Here, it is also worth saying that for the Brussels leadership, the Yugoslav non-alignment policy represented a certain conundrum, comprehension of which required a fuller picture of its relevance for Third World countries – also for European equilibrium and the maintenance of peace. More problematically, it was not clear whether Belgrade was going to direct its path towards the Community, becoming pro-Western, or towards the Eastern bloc, usually meaning anti-Western (*Official Journal of the European Communities*, 1977). It was exactly this aspect that made certain Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) begin to advocate for a greater political cooperation with Yugoslavia – largely coinciding with scholarly explanations, according to which it was “in the political interests of the EEC to arrest the trend of Yugoslavia's growing trading dependence on Comecon countries” (Artisien and Holt, 1980, p. 369). In Brussels, Enzo Bettiza – an Italian politician and MEP – called the Community to specify the type of relationship it wanted with Yugoslavia. He discredited the idea of relations with Yugoslavia being exclusively based on financial aid, but supported an urgent complementary political approach, capable of assisting with the Yugoslav problem. For him, financial assistance, if not accommodated within a political



framework, did not necessarily lead to problem-solving but rather to problem-deepening (*Official Journal of the European Communities*, 1977). Similarly, Mario Zagari, another MEP, invited the Europeans to look at the Yugoslav problem as political in its very nature and thus political cooperation as an instrument leading to stable economic relations and not the other way around (*ibid.*).

Given the overall situation, the end of the 1970s suggested that the volume of contacts between Yugoslavia and the European Community was likely to increase further. One study examined the official encounters and concluded that there were 202 visits recorded in the period 1972-1979, which represented a 20% increase over the second half of the 1960s; accordingly, “the West had assumed a more prominent position in Yugoslav foreign policy. Yugoslavia was in desperate need of Western aid and equipment ...” (Hall, 1993, pp. 438-439). As a matter of fact, the growing problems across different economic sectors constrained the Belgrade authorities to revisit their options and therefore seek rapprochement with Bonn in order to receive a more favourable treatment from Brussels going forward. This was a rapprochement also viewed by Bonn as of utmost importance due to its appreciation for Yugoslavia’s dedication to non-aligned orientation and, probably even more relevantly, its readiness to expose and criticize pro-Soviet features and propagandistic discourse in the NAM (Tsakaloyannis, 1981, p. 43). At the same time, President Tito was getting old and genuinely ill. Referring to this particular aspect, some tended to insist that

[i]n so far as EEC–Yugoslav relations have been problematic, the ‘problem’ has been mainly on the Yugoslav side. The passing of the Tito era may change all this. The Member States of the EEC all have a direct interest in the political stability of Yugoslavia. If they wish that stability to be maintained, they would be well advised to ensure that the country’s economic problems do not become too acute (Artisien and Holt, 1980, p. 369).

In the West, aware of its internal disagreements, some authors had already become rather pessimistic about the future of the post-Titoist state (Borowiec, 1977, p. 7; Johnson, 1974, p. 55). In Brussels too, some Community officials started to make a clear distinction between the country’s constituent parts, namely between the most developed (Croatia and Slovenia) and the poorest or underperforming ones (Kosovo, in particular) (Radeljić, 2012, pp. 68-77). Locally too, divergent standpoints were alluding that various state and non-state actors could find it impossible to cooperate in years to come. In the absence of ideology, Doder was predicting that “Tito’s heirs will not have the charisma or reputations to sustain the Titoist illusion – the illusion that something unique and new has emerged at the juncture of East and West Europe, that new Marxist truths have been discovered” (1979, p. 241). In his view, Yugoslavia was heading towards a major change, as it would be impossible to go up against the process of unavoidable awakening: “In

Yugoslavia one is aware – perhaps more than in most other Communist countries – that communism is a mosaic of half-truths, that it was based upon a misunderstanding of nineteenth-century Western European ideas transplanted into the backward world of Slav Europe in the twentieth century” (*ibid.*). All these aspects would dominate both national and international dilemmas in the following decade, either when considered in relation to the readiness to embrace political pluralism or, more drastically, in relation to the very survival of the Yugoslav state.

## 2. The 1980s: Yugoslavia's approach rejected

Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late 1979, the European Community rushed to sign one more trade arrangement with Yugoslavia. It was defended as yet another (and improved) initiative aimed at promoting trade between the two parties as well as mitigating the problem of trade imbalance. The Yugoslav federation granted the Community most-favoured-nation treatment and the Community reduced the number of sensitive products, in order to please the Yugoslav side. According to Panos Tsakaloyannis's detailed account,

[t]he EEC–Yugoslav joint communiqué clearly conveyed the new atmosphere of compromise: the negotiations, the communiqué reads, ‘took place on the basis of new Community proposals, which largely took account of the (Yugoslavia's) fundamental position as a Mediterranean country, developing and non-aligned ...’ The position of the nine EEC countries vis-à-vis Yugoslavia was further elaborated by the Italian Foreign Minister, Attilio Ruffini, the President of the EEC Council of Ministers, on 5 February 1980. The EEC, he stated, was making ‘a very big effort to improve its offer’ notably regarding the list of industrial products subject to EEC restrictions ... The EEC, Ruffini went on, ‘in no way wants Yugoslavia to go over to the Western camp,’ but everything that helps that country to remain ‘free, autonomous and non-aligned serves the cause of peace and world equilibrium’ (Tsakaloyannis, 1981, p. 44).

In addition, a very similar point was made by European Commission President Roy Jenkins, when visiting Belgrade on 29 February 1980. While insisting that the new agreement was *sui generis* in its nature and thus truly extensive in economic terms, it was produced by entirely appreciating the fact that Yugoslavia was a developing non-aligned country, as well as European or, even more precisely, Mediterranean (*European Community News*, 1980). Still, even though the agreement was rather generous (surely more so than those the Community had concluded with other non-associates), it was not entirely straightforward. As a matter of fact, the phrasing of certain sections was rather ambiguous, allowing the two parties (especially the Brussels side) to interpret them in their own way and thus push

forward their own agenda. With this in mind, but also the experience accompanying other formerly concluded arrangements, some observers did not hide their reservations. More to the point, a number of representatives from the Community's industrial sectors (for example, chemicals and textiles), while concerned that their overall progress could be at risk due to Yugoslav competition, kept calling the Commission for more prudence: "They argued that in a few years Yugoslavia could become an appreciable industrial power with lower production costs than those of EEC countries and that it would then be difficult to go back on concessions already made" (Tsakaloyannis, 1981, p. 47).

Thinking about Yugoslavia after Tito, a good number of Brussels officials regularly praised the country's capacity to stay non-aligned and balance its domestic and foreign policies, while at the same time they did not really think that the situation should significantly change going forward. As evident from primary material from the time, during one of the debates the European People's Party went as far as to claim that they were "prepared to do everything we can to enable Yugoslavia to continue in its independence, by virtue of which it occupies a leading position among the non-aligned countries" (European Parliament, 1980). Similarly, the European Democratic Group maintained that "we have to ensure that Yugoslavia remains a united and essentially non-aligned country" (*ibid.*). Even more so, the Communist and Allied Group continued that "[i]n today's tense and danger-fraught international situation, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, as a non-aligned and Mediterranean country, has an exceptionally important role, a role which is also capitally important for us Europeans" (*ibid.*). The group glorified not only the Yugoslav ideological orientation per se, but also its courage to approach all countries and convey a bold message about peace and peaceful coexistence worldwide, an essentiality going hand in hand with the sovereignty, autonomy and independence of all: "Yugoslavia is at the forefront of the struggle for social and political progress, for the preservation of peace" (*ibid.*).

Furthermore, following the 1981 Greek accession to the Community, the European Parliament insisted even more that political cooperation with Yugoslavia be prioritized, while economic cooperation and trade expansion, with all its mutual benefits, would inevitably continue to develop (*Official Journal of the European Communities*, 1981). The EEC Political Affairs Committee, while "stressing the geographical importance which Yugoslavia holds for the Community both as a land-link with Greece and as a pivot in relations with Eastern Europe," called on both the Commission and the Council to make the agreement operational as soon as possible. It also called on the Foreign Ministers of the EEC Member States to work towards political cooperation with Yugoslavia and to "use their influence to assist the country, which has a balancing effect on the non-aligned countries and plays a decisive role in furthering peace, particularly within the framework of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe" (European Parliament, 1983a). To summarize the relations between the two, the Committee reported: "There is no

doubt that advocates of a pro-Western policy in Yugoslavia encounter difficulties at the moment, but majority opinion remains in favour of a policy of collaboration with the EEC, since it is clear that the Community does not intend to interfere in Yugoslavia's internal affairs and that it is entirely in its interests to assist the stabilization of the country" (*ibid.*). Many of its representatives continued to insist that "Yugoslavia is the most important of the non-aligned states," inviting the Community "[to] consider the political influence that Yugoslavia exerts," when developing future projects (European Parliament, 1983b).

The Yugoslav reality was not an easy one and many feared that the country's internal dynamics would affect its future international standing. In his memoirs, Raif Dizdarević (1999, pp. 123–124), the then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Yugoslavia, recalled that both the East and the West looked upon Yugoslavia with great suspicion. For them, the failing socialist system, combined with continuous disagreements among the republics (some of which had endorsed disintegrationist rhetoric), represented a serious threat to the Yugoslav unity. At home, the issues in the sphere of politics and economics (further inflamed by the "(good) us" vs. "(bad) them" type of discourse) were additionally burdened with the so-called cultural integrity dimension. According to Karen Mingst (1984, p. 315), "[d]ifferentiators in Yugoslavia – language, religions, ethnicity – all command allegiance, sometimes obedience which rivals the central state" and in this respect, Yugoslavia was more of a periphery country, as "[m]ost core countries, even if they have such cultural differentiators, have developed a high level of unified cultural integrity." Nonetheless, the signals coming from Yugoslavia also served as an incentive for a greater external involvement. For example, certain members of Western political elites started promoting the notion of human rights and supporting the Yugoslav political émigrés as a possible opposition to the ruling regime. It was only after a number of meetings Dizdarević (1999, p. 125) had with foreign representatives that it turned out that all the interference was aimed at testing Yugoslavia's capacity to resist external pressures and preserve its own unity.

The Community's readiness to assist Yugoslavia was confirmed by the adoption of a new financial protocol to run from 1985 to 1990, approving a considerable increase in European Investment Bank loans. Even more so, the initially agreed amount was revisited soon after and raised further as the projects the Yugoslav federation was planning to pursue required greater financial investment (Council, 1987a). As argued by Oskar Kovač, member of the Yugoslav Federal Executive Council, "[t]he establishment of this cooperation contributed to the identification of Yugoslavia's position as a transit country, as a European, Mediterranean, and developing country. The achieved level of financial cooperation to date gives special meaning to our mutual relations and represents a warrant of the further expansion of relations in this field and in general" (Council, 1987b). Despite its rather optimistic echo, Kovač's convincing speech reflected the situation characterizing a very short period of time. More importantly, there was an absolute

necessity to persuade Community authorities to proceed with a new financial protocol. Therefore, Kovač insisted: “Yugoslavia attaches great significance to the structural adjustment of its economy. In that respect, exceptional efforts have been exerted to bring about changes in the economic system and in development” (*ibid.*).

Indeed, there is no doubt that the Yugoslav federation was going through a difficult period: a deteriorating economic situation followed by alarming inflation, social tensions, and growing divergences among its constituent republics all threatened the political stability of the country (Allcock, 2000; Sørensen, 2009; Woodward, 1995b). In Brussels, the European Parliament was the first institution to acknowledge these aspects. While perceiving Yugoslavia simultaneously as a Mediterranean country, thus an active party in agreements related to this particular region, a developing country in Europe and moreover, a non-aligned country, the Parliament insisted on the assumption that the Community might have been responsible for most of the Yugoslav problems. Recalling the three major objectives stipulated in the 1980 Agreement – the EEC was expected to contribute to the overall development of Yugoslavia; to encourage consolidation of the relations between Belgrade and Brussels; and to intervene by a complementary action in order to influence the Yugoslav authorities to pursue the necessary policies for further development – the Parliament called on the Community to react by requiring the Yugoslav authorities to commence a new process of economic reforms necessary for the restructuring of the Yugoslav economy (European Parliament, 1987).

In his remarkable analysis, Hall traced the shifting in Yugoslav foreign policy after Tito, noting that even though the country continued to support the general non-aligned principles (mostly directed towards peaceful coexistence and international cooperation), “the Yugoslav commitment to non-alignment underwent a transformation in the 1980s, diverging from the basic NAM agenda” (Hall, 1993, p. 483). For example, the volume of contacts between Yugoslavia and the non-aligned world dropped significantly: “President Tito, the symbol of Yugoslavia’s non-aligned diplomacy, had departed from the scene, and, his successors were preoccupied with the country’s mounting internal problems” (*ibid.*, p. 496). So, when the alarming issues are considered – such as the political discord and separations within the League of Communists and the further erosion of Yugoslav economic performance, with both contributing to the escalation of interethnic tensions – we can conclude that “there was no direct relationship between self-managed socialism and non-alignment during the 1980s period” (*ibid.*, p. 525). Even in Brussels, the more the 1980s were progressing, the more the importance of Yugoslav non-alignment was disappearing from the official sessions. In fact, we can argue that it was increasingly perceived as something irrelevant – not really suited for the

changing and fast-approaching post-Cold War context.<sup>3</sup> For example, during an early 1988 debate, which largely focused on a report regarding economic and trade relations between Brussels and Belgrade produced a few months before, one speaker showed appreciation for the fact that “Yugoslavia has considered its position on non-alignment to be a successful part of its foreign policy,” but then stressed that because of the ever-present change of circumstances “various currents within Yugoslavia at the moment are seeking stronger ties with the European Community with all the demands that [it] might involve in other fields for the present Yugoslav constitution, currently undergoing possible reform” (European Parliament, 1988).

In order to get a better picture of the nature of relationship between the Community and Yugoslavia towards the end of the decade, it is important to look at a number of interactions, altogether exposing some genuine problems as well as misunderstandings between them. For example, in late 1988 Budimir Lončar, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Yugoslavia, travelled to Brussels to address the Community's high-ranking representatives. While briefly acknowledging the successes of the European integrationist project, he moved on to warn his Brussels colleagues (somewhat similarly to what Kardelj did back in the late 1950s) of the negative implications of the Community turning into a fortress, with every potential to disturb Yugoslavia's economic progress (European Commission, 1988). To illustrate his government's concerns, Lončar used the Community's decision to introduce a number of protectionist measures affecting imports from Yugoslavia (for example, imports of iron and steel, but also agricultural products). Lončar's words were sound, since he tackled something the Community itself was afraid of – becoming a fortress which would surely compromise the initial, focused on all-European interests, ideals of European integration. In a similar fashion, Lončar continued: “We believe that the strengthening of the European identity by breaking down the existing economic, political, ideological and other barriers in Europe would be in the interest of all Europeans” (*ibid.*). For him, taking everything into consideration, the two possessed a common interest in being open to each other, as he concluded:

[i]n all the discussion and dilemmas in Yugoslavia today, there exists full consensus, both among responsible political leaders and in the general public, that Yugoslavia needs to integrate itself more widely and more fully into Europe ... This is a long-term strategic orientation imposed by the vital national interests of our country. Needless to say, Yugoslavia and Europe have never been separated whether from the historical, geopolitical or broadest civilizational point of view (*ibid.*).

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<sup>3</sup> This was largely because of Mikhail Gorbachev's introduction of the so-called new thinking. In addition to Gorbachev's own account (1987), see Coffey (2009), Hasegawa (1988), Holloway (1989), Meyer (1988), and Woodby (1989).

However, even though Lončar stated that the Yugoslav leadership had agreed to pursue constitutional, economic, and political reforms, he completely avoided discussing the gravity of his country's problems. Instead, he underlined that Yugoslavia was a country with lower levels of development, hoping to secure further EEC assistance.

On another occasion, this time solely between Lončar and Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission in April 1989, it was confirmed that Yugoslavia was in a difficult position, both economically because of its debt-ridden economy and politically due to internal disputes over which direction to pursue. The Community's attempt to comprehend the situation in Yugoslavia resulted in its diplomatic engagement: "The Community said that once the negotiations had been concluded with the International Monetary Fund on the improvement of Yugoslavia's economic and financial situation it would be prepared to examine the additional measures to support reforms being carried out there and to strengthen its cooperation with Yugoslavia" (European Commission, 1990a, p. 340).

In Belgrade, Ante Marković, Prime Minister of Yugoslavia and the author of the Memorandum on Yugoslav Economic Reforms, maintained that "[t]he opening of Yugoslavia to the world, Europe in particular, is the cornerstone of the changes and reforms" (European Commission, 1989a). He was not really preoccupied with the non-aligned orientation even though his country hosted the Ninth Summit Conference a few months earlier. Then, while welcoming the highest NAM representatives to Belgrade Janez Drnovšek, President of the Presidency of the Yugoslav federation, acknowledged that the world was at a crossroads and therefore the movement was in need of substantial modernization in order to confront challenges evolving around political instability and uneven economic development, among others (Drnovšek cited in NAM, 1989).

During the Q&A session, when asked to comment on the Yugoslav non-aligned orientation, Drnovšek sought to reassure the participants that the SFRY's active role in the movement did not go against the country's European or pro-Western vision:

We are very much aware that now there are no more tensions between the two blocs and that the NAM must change ... [W]e now focus mainly on economic issues, and on the North-South problem which we consider is still serious. There is a stalemate in the development process throughout the world and Yugoslavia will remain active in solving that problem ... We believe [the NAM] to be an additional forum for international coordination that can sometimes contribute to efforts of other organizations, especially the United Nations (*ibid.*).

Even more relevant to our discussion here, when asked to reflect upon future aspirations and the SFRY in the context of the European integrations project, he

stated that his country's membership in one body did not necessarily exclude membership in another, such as the accession to the European Community. In fact, as clarified,

Yugoslavia has always been opposed to the Non-Aligned Movement being a formal organization with formal requirements. It is an informal international organization and it does not prevent any member from participating in regional, economic, or political integrations, such as the European Community. We have changed the practice of the Non-Aligned Movement and we are now ready for cooperation with everybody and to integrate with all countries. We avoid ideological or any other confrontations (*ibid.*).

Considering Drnovšek's remarks, it did seem that he had somewhat circumvented the internal problems of both a political and a socio-economic nature, which had altogether polarized the members of the Yugoslav elite as well as the country's constituent units and their respective peoples.<sup>4</sup> The so-called ethnic entrepreneurship was successfully employed to spread fear and erode popular trust in the Yugoslav state and, so much spoken of, the concept of Yugoslavism (Flere and Klanjšek, 2019, pp. 137-183). So arguably, with the outbreak of the Yugoslav crisis, for Slovenia and Croatia non-alignment had "little appeal to the two westernmost republics," which hoped to join the European Community in the future. Accordingly, they perceived non-alignment "as expensive, useless, detached from the realities of international relations and, finally, as the policy which has led to the Africanization rather than the Europeanization of Yugoslavia" (Vukadinović, 1992, p. 152).

Looking even more closely at the official state-level standpoint, Marković genuinely believed that the Yugoslav federation had to do its utmost to catch up with the West, by adopting a market economy, political pluralism and democratic values (European Commission, 1989a). In fact, during a late November 1989 visit to the European Community, Lončar further advertised Marković's optimistic ideas, but then went on to argue that the process of consolidation of economic efficiency and political democracy in Yugoslavia would not be possible without external, mainly EEC, financial input. In Lončar's words, "the time has come to mutually find new forms of cooperation and a more adequate institutional framework that would enable further incorporation of Yugoslavia into integration processes in Europe" (European Commission, 1989b). In his attempt to persuade his EEC interlocutors, Lončar went on to suggest the relationship between the Community and Yugoslavia be framed "on the basis of the 'proximity policy' and on a status for Yugoslavia similar to that

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<sup>4</sup> For some lengthy analyses of the problems, see González-Villa (2017), Jović (2009), Meier (1999), Radeljić (2012), Silber and Little (1997), Woodward (1995a), and Zimmermann (1996).



accorded to some European countries, such as EFTA and some Mediterranean non-Member States, with which the Community has an agreement on association” (*ibid.*). Indeed, the official talks between the two delegations, both in March and April of 1990, resulted in the European Commission (1990b) producing a document addressed to the Council about relations between the Community and Yugoslavia, allowing the opening of negotiations for a third financial protocol. Some officials saw this as a very good sign, which clearly suggested that the process of transforming Yugoslav political and economic organization had been activated and, even more optimistically, that the Community’s future relations with Yugoslavia could be upgraded to a Stabilization and Association Agreement (European Commission, 1990c). Even though the new protocol was signed in June 1991, it never reached the European Parliament for further approval, due to the outbreak of the Yugoslav state crisis (European Commission, 1992, p. 343).

## Conclusions

From the early days of the Cold War and later when the Yugoslav federation stood at the forefront of the Non-Aligned Movement, to the period of stagnation in the 1980s accompanied by an ever-increasing pessimism about its future and the subsequent collapse of the state, the European Economic Community embraced cooperation with the Balkan country. Even though the relationship between Brussels and Belgrade was not always at its best, the Community continued to provide support and tolerate Yugoslavia’s decision to look eastward politically and westward economically, while proudly maintaining a non-aligned status.

European Community representatives were well aware of the prestigious reputation of the policy of non-alignment across Third World countries as well as of the necessity to ensure the equilibrium and the preservation of peace in Europe. Accordingly, throughout the 1970s it was the financial assistance that dominated the relations between Brussels and Belgrade, with the Community leaving an impression of being genuinely interested in its Mediterranean partner. Later, towards the end of the decade, the relevance of political dialogue as a prerequisite for a long-term success of the relationship between the two was also acknowledged. However, following the death of the Yugoslav leader Tito in 1980, which implied more domestic disagreements and an increasing scepticism with regard to Yugoslavia’s stability and overall survival, the Community’s advocacy of Yugoslav unity proved “unrealistic for Slovenia and Croatia, insofar as it did not at all take into account the entire intra-Yugoslav course of events which had driven Slovenia and Croatia to decide on independence” (Meier, 1999, p. 216). Indeed, the Brussels misperception of Yugoslavia seemed to gain its full relevance only with the outbreak of the Yugoslav state crisis; as Warren Zimmermann (1996, p. 65), the last US ambassador to Yugoslavia put it, “the Europeans couldn’t believe that Yugoslavia was in serious trouble ... [T]heir approach to Yugoslavia was without [T] any of the urgency with

which they acted fourteen months later, when the breakup they said couldn't happen was upon them.”

Considering the relevance of non-alignment, a careful examination of the numerous official debates points out that in contrast to the early period when it was greatly appreciated, over time it became overshadowed by the approaching end of the Cold War and the fall of communism. With fresh ideas about greater interconnectedness and a new global order, many non-aligned players found themselves in front of a clear-cut choice between progress and stagnation, if not further erosion of relevance. The movement found itself in crisis, with an unclear *raison d'être*. In the case of Yugoslavia, for the pro-Western members of the political elite, the non-alignment dilemma was something distinctly *passé*, left to the historians to discuss. Across the NAM, with the eruption of fighting and on the insistence of the Muslim nations, the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina (and not the Yugoslav government, as non-Muslim nations feared they could be in similar position due to their own approach towards secessionist territories) were condemned for “the obnoxious policy of ethnic cleansing” (Shenon, 1992). On the other hand, lengthy conversations taking place in Brussels and Belgrade discussing the conflict and possible resolution, as well as the future of the post-Yugoslav space, left non-alignment out.

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