Telegram from the British Embassy in Belgrade to the Foreign Office, on Yugoslav-Soviet Relations, dated 30 June 1948

FROM BELGRADE TO FOREIGN OFFICE

IMMEDIATE

CONFIDENTIAL

Yugoslav Soviet Relations

As I have reported the whole emphasis of Yugoslav statements and behaviour so far is upon their determination to maintain their internal and external policy unaltered evidently in the hope that it will soon prove so obviously correct that their critics will be confounded. The immediate results seem likely to be:

(1) The position of Markos must become acutely difficult. The Yugoslav Government are perfectly capable of continuing unaided their intervention in Greece. Even if an economic boycott by Russia and remaining satellites made it impossible for them to spare material assistance they could still provide territorial bases. On the other hand, strategy between Yugoslavs, Russians and Bulgarians in Greece is presumably now extremely difficult and as seen from here K.K.E.[[1]](#footnote-1) are likely to follow Moscow and N.O.F.[[2]](#footnote-2) to follow Yugoslavia. In these circumstances divergences between these two bodies will become even more acute and Markos’s prospects even more gloomy.

(2) Unless Russia or one of the satellites is ready to take over responsibility for support of Albania, the Albanian party can scarcely avoid following Yugoslavia. Again a Russian and satellite economic boycott might make it extremely difficult for Yugoslavia to continue to subsidise Albania. If a Russian boycott made Albania an expensive luxury, it might also make Albanian oil an absolute necessity. The Yugoslavs will however spend as little as they possibly can on Albania. There are indications that standard of living in that country is disastrously low despite Yugoslav subsidies. If these are reduced it must fall still deeper to disease and unrest levels. It is now possible to imagine both the political and economic circumstances dictating a Yugoslav occupation or incorporation of Albania.

(3) Yugoslav policy towards the west is likely for the present at least to be even tougher than it has been. Economic necessity may cause the Government to redouble their efforts to trade with the west and if their trade with eastern bloc decreases they will not only be more anxious to buy from the west but will also have more to offer in payment. But while, failing a rapprochement with the eastern bloc, such economic trends may eventually drive them into the arms of the west, they will for the present be anxious above all to prove in deeds as well as words the purity of their communism and their determination not to flirt with western imperialism.

(4) In these circumstances particularly in view of (3) above I see no reason for any change in our policy toward Yugoslavia. It is undoubtedly in our interests that the present divergences should continue and that a rival brand of communism should be established. But Yugoslav leaders still retain undiminished, as is only natural, their suspicions and dislike of capitalism and the west and if our publicity were to conclude that Yugoslavia will now fall into the arms of the west, most unfortunate consequences might result. If it is possible to give the Yugoslav party credit, which they undoubtedly deserve, as the first party ever to stand up to the Russians, so much the better. For the rest I think it most important that we should not go beyond your Intel 261 and paragraph 3 of my telegram No. 662.

(5) Nevertheless there are certain international questions in which you do state that Yugoslav Soviet relations may perhaps be used to immediate advantage. I think it reasonable to assume that the Russians are by now thoroughly exasperated with the Yugoslavs and by no means favourable to any extension of their power or influence. If questions are raised again it would not be surprising if we were to find the Russians much more ready to agree to the return of Trieste to Italy and to the maintenance of present Austrian frontier.

[TNA, FO 371/72580]

Keywords: Yugoslavia, the Balkans, Cominform

1. KKE – Communist Party of Greece. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The National Liberation Front, the fighting force of the ethnic Macedonians in Greece allied with the KKE during the civil war. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)