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The Refractory Community: Yugoslav Anti-communists in Post-war Italy

Abstract: In the months between the Italian armistice (September 1943) and the end of the war (May 1945), Italy became the destination of a large group of Yugoslav exiles who, in various ways, opposed Tito and the Socialist and Federal Republic in the process of being formed. These exiles, divided by nationality and political affiliation (ranging from exponents of the resistance linked to the government in exile in London to the most radical collaborators with the Nazis), were united by their staunch anti-communism. Carefully observed by both the Italian secret services and the Allied military government, with the approach of the Cold War this Yugoslav "refractory community" was increasingly used as a centre of propaganda and in part also of information by the West. After the Tito–Stalin split, this function was reduced, and the community waited for new developments that would only appear forty years later with the dissolution of the disdained Federal and Socialist Republic. This essay is an integral part of research based on the archives of the Italian Military Intelligence Service (SIM) kept at the Historical Office of the Italian Army General Staff in Rome, in the fonds of the Confidential Affairs of the General Directorate of Public Security of the Italian Ministry of the Interior and in the "Affari Politici – Jugoslavia" collections of the Historical-Diplomatic Archive of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The research is still in progress and aims to create a map of the Yugoslav anti-communist community in Italy from the end of the Second World War until the dissolution of the Federal Republic between 1989 and 1992.

Key words: Yugoslav collaborationism, anti-communist propaganda, Allied intelligence, Italian secret services, political emigration

In September 1952, a notice from the embassy of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in Rome stated:

The Yugoslav refugees who are in various foreign prisoner camps [...] in Italy and wish to be repatriated are warned that they must present themselves [...] at the consular department of the Embassy, [...] Refugees are considered to be former members of the Yugoslav army who were imprisoned by the enemy after they were betrayed by the rulers of old [sic] Yugoslavia and did not return to their homeland after liberation; civilians and members of military formations who fought on the side of the enemy and took refuge abroad; persons who collaborated in various ways with the enemy during the war, beyond the borders of our country and, finally, all those who, after the war, for various reasons illegally left Yugoslav territory. *Traitors of the country, war criminals and active organizers*

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*of enemy activity abroad against the New Yugoslavia, whether convicted by Yugoslav courts or not, do not have the right of return (italics are ours).*¹

Seven years had passed since the end of the war and eleven since the beginning of a civil conflict that had bled Yugoslavia dry. Having entered the war as a monarchy and conservative country, divided between centralist and centrifugal forces, this Balkan state had emerged from the cauldron of war as a republican, socialist and federal state. A triumph for some, a tragedy for others: thousands of Yugoslavs (or, if you prefer, Slovenes, Croats, Bosnians, Serbs, Montenegrins, Kosovars, Macedonians) had rejected Tito and his “Federation”, as was defined the socialist republic clandestinely created in 1943 and officially proclaimed in 1945 was called.

Within the anti-communist group scattered around the world, there was everything. First and foremost, there was the almost complete government-in-exile, which was fighting for the restoration of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia headed by the Karadjordjević dynasty; the Montenegrin legitimists linked to the Petrović-Njegoš dynasty; representatives of the Slovenian bourgeoisie that had grown up in Habsburg Austria, divided between imperial nostalgia and dreams of independence and united by staunch Catholic traditionalism or Anglo-Saxon liberalism; the collaborationist militia from Belgrade with a group of politicians who had already served the Germans; the former ministers of the deposed pre-war prime minister Stojadinović; the remnants of Ante Pavelić’s regular Croatian army and his Ustaša militia; the aging colony of Russian tsarist exiles who had fled to Yugoslavia after 1918; Catholic priests, Orthodox clergy, Muslim ulemas, united by their hatred of the atheistic and materialistic state established by the Partisans; exponents and guerrillas of the “Ravna Gora Movement” of General Draža Mihailović, the “Yugoslav Army in the Homeland” created to fight the Germans and their collaborators in the name of the exiled sovereign and transformed during the war into an anti-communist army not averse to agreements with the occupiers; *voivode* and members of the Chetnik formations created in Croatia and Bosnia to protect the Serb minorities from the Ustaša pogroms and transformed into collaborationist units with an anti-Partisan function; leaders of pre-war “bourgeois” or social-democratic political parties, who hoped for a democratic and parliamentary turnaround by rejecting the Titoist dictatorship; clerical fascists and Belogardists from Axis-occupied Slovenia; high dignitar-

¹ Notice of the Consular Department of the Embassy of the FNRJ [Federativna Narodna Republika Jugoslavija, Federative People’s Republic of Yugoslavia, first name of socialist Yugoslavia until 1963] received by the Directorate of Camp AAI (Amministrazione Aiuti Internazionali) in Capua (Caserta) through the Central Directorate of AAI in Rome, copy to the Chief of Police, No 224–22287, 24th September 1952, in Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero dell’Interno, Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, Affari Generali e Riservati (d’ora in avanti ACS MI DG PS AR) 1951–53, Busta 30, Fascicolo 10/9.

ies of the powerful Yugoslav Freemasonry, linked to France or Great Britain; nationalists of all kinds ill-disposed to the unitary and federal solution wanted by Tito and in favour of a Greater Slovenia, Greater Croatia or Greater Serbia; Kosovar and Macedonian independentists.

It was a Babel tower of nationalities with different and opposing political and personal positions but united in their political and military opposition to Tito. Italy was a country that welcomed a large part of this group. This group, which might be called the Yugoslav “refractory community” in Italy, grew in successive layers between the war and the post-war period. First of all, between 1941 and 1943, there was a vanguard made up of political-military exponents who collaborated in various ways with the occupying authorities and who moved between Italy and Yugoslavia under Axis control. After 25 July 1943 and the fall of the fascist regime, some of these political and military figures attempted to approach the Badoglio government, and after the Italian armistice of 8 September, they sought to position themselves alongside post-fascist Italy, now co-belligerent with the Allies. This small but enterprising community was to be joined by others. Between the autumn of 1944 and the spring of 1945, the course of irreducible Yugoslav collaborationism would turn into a flow of fugitives who joined – not without difficulty and problems – the vanguards in Italy, making the “refractory community” reach significant numbers. Finally, from May 1945, the usual consequences that accompanied the building of every People’s Republic in Europe (punishment of collaborationists, the annihilation of bourgeois and social-democratic opposition, ethnic cleansing, collectivisation, confiscation and nationalisation) led to a new arrival of refugees of various kinds.

This was a problem in a wider context. Leaving aside the issue of refugee flows from Eastern Europe to Italy to be discussed in other studies, we can recall here, as Matteo Sanfilippo writes, that “the Peninsula was becoming the destination of a massive immigration”.² Above all, the author notes, the Italian route was followed by the entire anti-communist universe, both democratic and pro-Western and pro-Nazi and collaborationist, both fleeing the repression enacted by the new regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

It was in this context that the great Yugoslav exodus to Italy took place, and with it the birth – in the camps run by both the Allies and the Italian authorities (civil and Vatican) – of a variegated and unsettled community of south Slavs. In this paper, we will try to outline the main aspects of what happened with the Yugoslav community “refractory” to Tito’s regime in Italy between the last phase of the conflict and the early post-war period, a theme that current

² M. Sanfilippo, “Per una storia dei profughi stranieri dei campi di accoglienza e di reclusione nell’Italia del secondo dopoguerra”, *Studi Emigrazione/Migration Studies*, XLIII, 164 (2006), 838–839.

research still in progress aims to continue, at least until the 1970s–1980s. The most interesting fact, we believe, is that this “refractory community” was, while the war was still in progress, looked at with caution, if not with active vigilance. Later, when the eastern border heated up, as the Cold War between the two blocs began to take shape, the same community was first tolerated and then used until it was transformed, with the 1946–47 negotiations for the delineation of the eastern borders, into a deterrent, a propaganda tool or even an operational instrument (in the form of an information and intelligence service) in the confrontation with the new socialist Yugoslavia. From the documentation consulted, moreover, it would appear that after 1948 and the break between Tito and Stalin there was less Allied attention towards this community (due to the *détente* with Belgrade) compared to a continuation of relations between the Italian military authorities and some exponents of the anti-communist exile, at least until the phase of the confrontation over Trieste (1952–54).

Just over two months after the liberation of Rome, on 24 August 1944, Major Guido Ripoli, group leader of the “Bonsignore” section of the Military Intelligence Service (SIM) at the General Staff of the Royal Italian Army, forwarded to the headquarters of the military intelligence service three important secret reports concerning the “activity of Slavic and Croatian elements” in Rome. These were reports from the Allied Military Government (AMG) and some reports made by the new authorities on the “refractory community”.³ From those reports, a broad and heterogeneous reality emerged, from both a political and an ethnic-national point of view. On the whole, there were about 1,200 Yugoslav subjects in the capital. Of these, 850 received assistance from the Royal Yugoslav Legation (representing the royal government in exile in London). Note the comment of the anonymous writer of the report: “Since the Partisans claim that most of the Yugoslavs in Rome are their members, it is evident that many of them, until our arrival, had been receiving money from a government to which the Partisans were opposed. It is, therefore, to be doubted whether many of them are perhaps Partisans now that things are unfolding in favour of the latter.”⁴

Which government was the report referring to? A diplomatic delegation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, i.e., its government in exile, before 4th June 1944

³ Il maggiore capo gruppo CS Guido Rispoli – Stato Maggiore Generale – SIM Sezione “Bonsignore” al Centro C.S. di Roma, n. 43979/B/CS, 24 agosto 1944, in Archivio dell’Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell’Esercito (d’ora in avanti AUSSME), Fondo SIM, Serie RGPT 12[^] divisione, Busta 22. Le versioni in lingua inglese di queste relazioni si trovano in: AUSSME, Fondo SIM, 1[^] divisione, Busta 94.

⁴ ‘Yugoslavs currently in Rome’ (translation), SCI/R/434/I, enclosed in: Il maggiore capo gruppo CS Guido Rispoli – Stato Maggiore Generale – SIM Sezione “Bonsignore” al Centro C.S. di Roma, n. 43979/B/CS, 24 agosto 1944, in AUSSME, Fondo SIM, Serie RGPT 12[^] divisione, Busta 22.

and thus during the German occupation, was unthinkable. Perhaps those donations had come from the government in exile in Great Britain (which was not recognised by the People's Liberation Army until the Tito-Šubašić agreement) through clandestine channels – unless the reference was to an unofficial deputation of the Serbian collaborationist government of Milan Nedić, with which Mussolini's Italian Social Republic (RSI) had some diplomatic relations⁵ or the embassy of the independent Croatian state, the Ustaša Croatia allied to the Third Reich and the RSI.

Apart from this, another conspicuous aspect of the document is the unreliability of the large group. Among the prominent names (carefully divided between Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, "Partisans" – the Titoists, "doubtful elements", and various personalities), important names emerged. Among the Serbs, for example, there was the Archbishop of Šibenik Irinej Djordjević (interned in Florence during the Italian occupation), considered the "ideological head of the pan-Serbian movement". Djordjević was one of the representatives of Mihailović's movement in Italy, and his secretary had close contacts with the Chetnik leaders. Then there was General Milojko Janković, former commander of the 6th Army of the Royalist Army until 1941, a senior officer who had signed the armistice of 18 April and was interned by the Italians. Released after 4th June 1944, Janković was a candidate for the post of commander of Yugoslav forces abroad in the British army. Other names included the former Minister of Press and Propaganda in the Stojadinović government, Milan Marjanović, who was suspected by the Allied authorities of having relations with members of the "Government of National Salvation" of the Belgrade quisling Nedić.

The Croats were more numerous, although less easily identifiable than the Serbs. They were concentrated in Rome around the secretive and mysterious rectory-college of San Girolamo degli Illirici (today the Church of San Girolamo dei Croati), in Via Tomacelli. It was an institute founded in the 14th century to welcome to the Eternal City Catholics fleeing from the Ottoman advance in the Balkans, to whom Pope Nicholas V had granted the creation of a "Congregation of the Slavonians" (a term of direct Venetian derivation indicating the mostly Croatian inhabitants of the Dalmatian regions) for charitable purposes. Since 1941, San Girolamo had been collaborating with the University of Zagreb and the Pavelić regime, and many of its religious guests had been of the Ustaša persuasion.⁶

⁵ M. Viganò, *Il Ministero degli Affari Esteri e le relazioni internazionali della Repubblica sociale italiana (1943–1945)*, (Milano: Edizioni universitarie Jaca, 1991), 321–323.

⁶ P. Adriano, G. Cingolani, *La via dei conventi. Ante Pavelić e il terrorismo ustascia dal Fascismo alla Guerra Fredda*, (Milano: Mursia, 2011), 370.

Immediately after the liberation of Rome, the monastery became the centre of operations for the Croatian community already present in the city or recently expatriated from Yugoslavia. To this end, a “Committee of Croatian Refugees” was created to handle any future mass exoduses. From August 1943, the secretary of the college was a theologian, professor of Church History at the University of Zagreb, Monsignor Krunoslav Draganović, who also held the position of Croatian representative in the Italian Red Cross: a fervent nationalist, suspected of being an Ustaša, and in any case always surrounded by numerous Ustaša members, in an ambiguous relationship with the Allies, Draganović would become a key figure in the flow of political refugees from Croatia, helping to provide Pavelić’s followers and collaborators with facilities such as the San Girolamo and creating escape routes to safer shores, such as Argentina.

However, at the time, the enterprising monsignor claimed to be “one of the main adherents” of the Croatian Peasant Party (*Hrvatska seljačka stranka*) led by Vladko Maček, hostile to Pavelić since 1941 and repeatedly arrested or confined by him. The old leader of the Peasant Party had come in handy to restore a license of loyalty to Croatian exile, removing suspicions of past collaboration with the Nazis and at the same time maintaining an anti-Communist identity, and his name was mentioned by Draganović at a meeting in July 1944 with the Hungarian ambassador to the Holy See, Baron Gabriel Apor. On that occasion, the secretary of St Jerome had proposed a plan for the creation of a Danubian Confederation with Croatia, in place of Yugoslavia. Draganović had assured the Hungarian diplomat that Croatian troops loyal to Pavelić were ready to betray him and follow Maček and the Allies in the event of a probable German collapse. Therefore, he requested that Apor act as a go-between with the GMA to obtain the necessary support. From the conversation, the elderly Hungarian diplomat got the impression of the Croatian prelate’s strong ambiguities, and the fact was promptly registered by the British authorities.⁷

However, the largest Yugoslav community in Rome in the summer of 1944 was Slovenian. This was mainly due to the fact that since 3rd May 1941 the southern districts of the Slovenian Banovina (i.e. Ljubljana) had been annexed as an autonomous province to the Kingdom of Italy. In the summer of 1944, numerous members of the clerical *Slovenska ljudska stranka* (Slovenian People’s Party), the main political force that had partly sided with the Axis after the invasion (but with a powerful member in the government-in-exile, the Minister of Education Miha Krek), were based in the capital. One of the most

⁷ “Croatian aspirations (translation) SCI/ROME/434 (5, 22 luglio 1944, enclosed in: Il maggiore capo gruppo CS Guido Rispoli – Stato Maggiore Generale – SIM Sezione “Bonsignore” al Centro C.S. di Roma, n. 43979/B/CS, 24 agosto 1944, in AUSSME, Fondo SIM, Serie RGPT 12[^] divisione, Busta 22.

famous names was Ciril Žebot, the last leader of the “Storm Guard” (Straža v viharju), an anti-communist and anti-Semitic organisation that had staunchly sided with the Italians between 1941 and 1943. Numerous among the Slovenes were the Belogardists (from Bela Garda, White Guard), whom the Italians had recruited to form the MVAC (Anti-Communist Voluntary Militia) units, and who had fled to Italy after 8th September, disliking the German presence and fearing Partisan revenge. Others, however, maintained relations with the Slovenian quisling Lev Rupnik, the new strongman in Ljubljana in the service of the Nazis. The group had formed a “Slovenian Committee” in Rome, which used funds from the Yugoslav government-in-exile intended for refugees to strengthen anti-communist political initiatives. The Committee consisted, among others, of Ivan Ahčin, a prelate and professor of sociology at the University of Ljubljana, a member of the People’s Party and collaborator with the Italians in 1941–43, who was under sentence of death by the Titoists, and Milko Brezigar, an economist and exponent of the most conservative wing of Slovenian liberalism before the war. In another document, Brezigar was described as “perhaps the most fanatical anti-Partisan element among Slovenes in Rome” and his movements had to “be monitored”, not least because it appeared that he had made a trip to Ljubljana in May 1944, “a trip that was not possible without some authorisation from the German authorities”. Despite this, Brezigar also went to Bari to meet some representatives of unidentified “British organisations” (“certain British organisations”, the English version reads), to explain the imminent transfer of Slovenian collaborationist units to the Allied camp and to advocate the occupation of Slovenia and Croatia by the Americans and the British, possibly entrusting the task to the Polish Corps attached to the British 8th Army. Brezigar’s collaborators also included the organisers of another ambiguous Slovenian Chetnik group, the royalist “Blue Guard” (Pleva Garda) of Major Karel Novak, a controversial figure closely linked to Mihailović. Others were arrested by the British as “informers in the pay of the fascists”. The Committee, according to the Allied authorities, carried out a “courier service” between Italy and German-controlled Slovenia, linking up with the entire exile movement (Slovenian, Serbian and Croatian) and with Mihailović’s units, but also maintaining relations with Minister Krek in London. In the annex devoted to the Slovenes, the Allied authorities expressed their opinion as follows:

In view of the very close relations between the Slovenian clerics [sic!, recte: clerics] and the Germans in Slovenia, it would be advisable that the policy of the Slovenian group in Rome and its moves [...] be carefully watched, especially the diplomatic personnel in Rome. The vast majority of suspected couriers and agents in the service of the clerics, who are believed to have collaborated with

the Nazi-Fascists, are still free, and their arrest and the investigations into their activities would clarify what is still a confusing situation.⁸

Finally, the lengthy translations by the SIM described the “suspicious elements” (an expression used in the Italian translation, but the English version used the more disturbing definition of “sinister elements”). It was a mixed group, composed of Serbs, Slovenes and Croats, all linked to the central figure of Dobroslav Jevdjević, the Bosnian Serb deputy for four legislatures before the war, exponent of the Yugoslav National Party (Jugoslovenska nacionalna stranka), then leader (vojvoda) of the Chetnik formations in Herzegovina and from 1943 throughout Croatia. A convinced anti-communist and anti-Semite, a great friend of Italy with ties to the Italian intelligence services during the first phase of the war,⁹ Jevdjević had decided to side with the Germans after 8 September, and in the summer of 1944, he was fighting the Partisan units with his men in the inland districts of the Slovenian coast. A military leader but also a skilled politician, the former deputy, anticipating a German collapse, was attempting to establish relations with the Yugoslav community in Italy and, through it, with the authorities in Rome and with the Allies. But, at the time, Jevdjević represented an enemy like any other collaborationist and, therefore, his group of “itinerant agents” (the “sinister elements”) was carefully controlled by the GMA and, consequently, also by the SIM.

In short, it was a variegated and ambiguous “refractory community”, where, at times, elements generating a certain embarrassment stood out, especially taking into account the diplomatic relations between the Italian cabinet and the new Yugoslav Tito-Šubašić government, which came into being in May 1944 and which had definitively recognised the communist leader as the only resistance leader in his homeland.¹⁰ The fact that some of these exponents declared themselves members of an unspecified “Yugoslav Committee” seemed more of an aggravation than a guarantee. It is no coincidence that the first annex of Major Rispoli’s report concluded with the suggestion to transfer the Yugoslavs to “transit camp number 1” in Bari, where they would be “minutely interrogated”

⁸ Al: Sig. Maggiore Ripoli, S.I.M. – C.S.; dal: N. 1 S.C.I. Unit – segreto (traduzione), appended in Il maggiore capo gruppo CS Guido Rispoli – Stato Maggiore Generale – SIM Sezione “Bonsignore” al Centro C.S. di Roma, n. 43979/B/CS, 24 agosto 1944, in AUSSME, Fondo SIM, Serie RGPT 12[^] divisione, Busta 22.

⁹ A. Vento, *In silenzio gioite e soffrite. Storia dei servizi segreti italiani dal Risorgimento alla Guerra fredda*, (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2010), 384.

¹⁰ L. Monzali, “La questione jugoslava nella politica estera italiana dalla prima guerra mondiale ai trattati di Osimo (1914–1975)”. In *Europa adriatica. Storia, relazioni, economia*, (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2004), 36.

by the official representatives of AVNOJ, the Titoist Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia, present on Italian territory.¹¹

The Bari transit camp opened the question of the collection centres. As has been mentioned, there were 1,200 Yugoslavs in Rome alone, and the number was progressively rising as the advance of the People's Liberation Army continued. With the fall of Belgrade (October 1944), the retreat of Serb royalist nationalists began, including some of the collaborationists and the Chetniks: expatriations to Italy increased accordingly. The subsequent fall of Sarajevo (April 1945), Zagreb and Ljubljana (May 1945) to the Partisan troops would lead to new waves of refugees and displaced persons from Bosnia, Croatia and Slovenia.

Between the end of 1944 and the beginning of 1945, a sort of "Yugoslavian emergency" therefore arose, which the democratic government – with the limited means at its disposal and the cumbersome presence of both the GMA and the omnipresent Vatican mission (Pontificia Opera di Assistenza – POA) – tried to manage as best it could. The old internment facilities set up by the Fascist regime were used, public or private buildings where displaced persons of all kinds, but also prisoners of war, including soldiers of the Royal Yugoslav Army captured in the April 1941 campaign, had been gathered.¹² During the twenty-nine months of Italian occupation of the former Balkan kingdom, these were joined by the so-called "Slavic internees", also known as "elements considered Italian by annexation":¹³ these were people from the occupied areas who were imprisoned there for various reasons (displaced persons, sociopaths, politically unreliable or potentially dangerous); soon these groups were joined by a portion of Slovenian deportees from the "Autonomous Province of Ljubljana" and several hundred Roma. Collection centres generically referred to as "Slavic camps" were thus created. After the fall of the fascist regime and the subsequent armistice, these centres continued to hold thousands of Yugoslav citizens with an uncertain fate. Among the main gathering places were the Renicci camp, near Arezzo, and the Lipari camp, which had been training centres for Ustaša terrorists before the war; Ferramonti di Tarsia, in the province of Cosenza, formerly a transit camp for Jews; and above all, the former "Mussolini's Hollywood", Cinecittà, which, after reuniting the victims of the Nazi-Fascist round-up of the

¹¹ 'Yugoslavs currently in Rome' (translation), SCI/R/434/I, appended in: Il maggiore capo gruppo CS Guido Rispoli – Stato Maggiore Generale – SIM Sezione "Bonsignore" al Centro C.S. di Roma, n. 43979/B/CS, 24 agosto 1944, in AUSSME, Fondo SIM, Serie RGPT 12^A divisione, Busta 22.

¹² M. Sanfilippo, "I campi in Italia nel secondo dopoguerra", *Meridiana*, 86 (2016), 41.

¹³ La R. Prefettura di Bari al ministero dell'Interno, n. 05876, Bari, 18 luglio 1945, in ACS, MI DG PS AGR., "Massime (1880–1954)", Busta 74, Fascicolo 30, Sottofascicolo 31 "Ex confinati ed internati" Ins. 3 "Iugoslavi".

Roman district of Quadraro in 1943 and Italian evacuees, had become a refugee camp for foreigners, mainly Yugoslavs. In total, at least according to the Yugoslav War Crimes Commission, there were at least 195 “Slavic camps” at the end of the conflict, with a total of 98,703 detainees (civilian and military) from the Balkan country.¹⁴

Obviously, at the end of the conflict, the past management of the camps had been done away with, with on the one hand the aforementioned Commission of the Yugoslav government accusing Fascist Italy of mistreating, if not torturing, the detainees, and on the other hand the prefectural and police authorities of democratic Italy refuting these accusations, describing life in the camps, even under the former regime, as dignified and acceptable. However, the problems were not limited to the past. What to do with these multitudes now that the war was over? The former prisoners of war from 1941 and, even more so, the civilians from the Balkan country, with the arrival of the Allied authorities and the liberation of Italy, could consider themselves free to repatriate. To this end, in December 1944, the new government in Belgrade began to send officers of the People’s Army (and OZNA, Tito’s political police) to the camps to enlist former prisoners in the new Titoist armed forces. One of the very first centres visited was Cinecittà. But, to the surprise of the captain sent from Belgrade, the reception was not what he had hoped it would be. “Since it is known to all”, recalled a dispatch from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “that the Yugoslavs in that camp are royalists and anti-Bolsheviks, they are in great ferment, and many have fled to avoid repatriation, which is presumed to be imminent”.¹⁵ It was in this context that the action of the leaders of the “refractory community” found its catchment area, which would grow with the arrival, across the Adriatic and the eastern borders of Italy, of the “other Yugoslavia” that had been collaborating with the German occupying authorities. From the fusion of the former prisoners of 1941 and the new refugees of 1945, together with the thousands of civilians who had fled in terror of the imminent establishment of the communist regime at home, the manoeuvring space of Yugoslav nationalists in exile would emerge. And Marjanović, Draganović and Ahčin, with the support of the Royalist ministers in London – now defeated by Tito and eager for revenge – would find, or believe they would find, the nucleus of the new anti-communist liberation

¹⁴ Stralcio di relazione n. 2 della dalla “Commissione di Stato per l’accertamento dei crimini degli occupanti e dei coadiuvatori”, a firma Dušan Nedeljković, s.d., in ACS, MI DG PS AGR., “Massime (1880–1954)”, Busta 74, Fascicolo 30, Sottofascicolo 31 “Ex confinati ed internati” Ins. 3 “Jugoslavi”.

¹⁵ G.E.P. Sottogruppo Balcani, “Questioni jugoslave”, 3 dicembre 1944, in Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Affari Politici (d’ora in avanti ASDMAE, AP) Jugoslavia 1946–50, Busta 33, Fascicolo “Attività di jugoslavi contrari al regime di Tito in Italia”.

army. The shadow of the Cold War would soon be cast over everything, and the enemies of yesterday could become today's allies.

The government in Belgrade was aware of this new situation, also thanks to the discouraging reports of the itinerant agents who, like the anonymous captain sent to the Cinecittà camp, encountered a penetrating nationalist and anti-communist rivalry from the various expatriate committees, which literally flooded the Yugoslavian assembly centres with propaganda material of a Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian royalist-nationalist kind. Protests by the minister plenipotentiary of Tito's Yugoslavia in Rome, Mladen Iveković, were almost weekly. The conversation between the Italian ambassador in Moscow, Quaroni, and his Yugoslav colleague, General Vlado Popović, on 20th October 1945 is interesting in this regard. Invited to celebrate the first anniversary of the liberation of Belgrade, Quaroni was hit by the Balkan diplomat's vehement protests. Popović not only condemned the fact that Italy was protecting the "traitors" (i.e. the followers of Mihailović, Nedić, and Pavelić) "from the people's vengeance": "They were not satisfied with having saved themselves in Italy; they were hatching intrigues, organising armed gangs, engaging in threatening activity against the Yugoslav government". In his report to the Foreign Ministry, Quaroni said that Belgrade's suspicion that the Italian government was continuing the fascist policy for Yugoslavia "was not entirely unjustified". However, the able diplomat omitted to mention this observation to his Yugoslav colleague, limiting himself to reminding him that the Italians were not "masters" in their own house: the activities of the old quislings in the country could take place almost undisturbed, Quaroni seemed to suggest, because the GMA allowed it. Popović replied that it was Italy that gave accommodation to "these people" and that "there were Italian elements, even important ones, who collaborated in all this activity". The Yugoslav ambassador then asked the Allies to intervene to obtain a drastic crackdown on the whole affair. Quaroni concluded his report to the Foreign Ministry by suggesting that action be taken as requested and pointing out that "clearing the field" of "minor issues" (i.e. Yugoslav emigrants) would improve the relations between Rome and Belgrade, especially in view of the negotiations on the eastern borders.¹⁶

On 7th March 1945, the National Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia united with the Tito-Šubašić government, leading to the definitive defeat of Mihailović's national movement. For some months, Mihailović had sent to Bari the president of the "National Democratic Union of Yugoslavia" (JDNZ, a clandestine political formation of rural-democratic persuasion founded in 1944

¹⁶ *Lambasciatore a Mosca, Quaroni, al Ministro degli Esteri, De Gasperi, R. 954/429, Mosca, 20 ottobre 1945, in: I Documenti diplomatici italiani, Decima serie, 1943-1948, volume II (12 dicembre 1944-9 dicembre 1945), (Roma: Libreria dello Stato, 1992), 883-884.*

at the Chetnik congress in Ba), Živko Topalović, former leader of the Yugoslav Socialist Party and exponent of its anti-communist fraction. Topalović planned to make the Chetnik forces available to the Allies in the event of the expected and believed-to-be imminent break between the Anglo-Americans and the Soviets.¹⁷

During contacts in January with officials of the Italian Foreign Ministry, the JDNZ leader spoke of about a hundred thousand Chetniks on Yugoslav territory ready to go into action under Anglo-American orders.¹⁸ However, in May 1945, about ten days after the surrender of the Third Reich, the war also ended in Yugoslavia. Thousands of collaborationists and anti-communists, not necessarily connected to the Nazi occupation system but certainly hostile to the new regime established in Belgrade, had started the long journey to the Italian borders. Mihailović's troops had been routed, and any Allied initiative seemed impossible. Therefore, the remnants of the "Yugoslav Army in the Homeland" also joined the flood of Croatian, Slovenian and Serbian fugitives. Most of those who were not repelled and captured by Tito's soldiers headed for Italy.

Topalović, helped by a group of expatriate Serbian soldiers and politicians, set up a new "Yugoslav National Committee" in Rome, which could enjoy the favour of the Allied authorities (especially the French and Polish). According to reports from the Italian Foreign Ministry, the "Slavic camps" were transformed into "Chetniks camps", "scattered throughout Italy". In Cesena and Forlì, several thousand followers of Jevdjević, who in the meantime had escaped capture and arrived in Italy, were grouped together. General Miodrag Danjanović, former commander of Nedić's collaborationist troops and the new military and political leader of the Chetnik emigration, dominated the scene.¹⁹ To this ever-growing Serb colony, which, according to Italian sources, amounted to 100,000,²⁰ were to be added the Slovenes from Ahčín and Brezigar, under the supervision of former minister Krek, and the Croats from the College of St. Jerome and the College of St. Anthony in Via Merulana. Both Slovenes and Croats, according to the Italian Foreign Ministry notes, were subsidised by the Holy See and the US embassy.²¹ The Serbs enjoyed special British protection, French sympathy, and

¹⁷ W. R. Roberts, *Tito, Mihailović and the Allies 1941–1945*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 283–284.

¹⁸ Promemoria, 24 gennaio 1945, in ASDMAE, AP 1946–50, "Yugoslavia", Busta 33, Fascicolo "Attività di jugoslavi contrari al regime di Tito in Italia".

¹⁹ Personalità jugoslave a Roma, 6 luglio 1945, in ASDMAE, AP 1946–50, "Yugoslavia", Busta 33, Fascicolo "Attività di jugoslavi contrari al regime di Tito in Italia".

²⁰ M. Sanfilippo, *I campi in Italia* cit., 44.

²¹ Personalità jugoslave a Roma, 6 luglio 1945, in: ASDMAE, AP 1946–50, "Yugoslavia", Busta 33, Fascicolo "Attività di jugoslavi contrari al regime di Tito in Italia".

relationships with many Italian officials developed during the years of collaboration in occupied Yugoslavia in 1941–43. Among the most famous names of the newcomers, for some time, was Ante Pavelić, who had escaped the collapse of his Independent State of Croatia with some of his fellow Ustaša and was believed to have arrived in the Vatican under a false name.²² In reality, the former Croatian *poglavnik* was in Austria at the time and only came to Italy, disguised as a monk, in mid-1946.²³

The situation immediately became incandescent. The “Yugoslav National Committee” united with Krek’s Slovenes and a part of the Croats (those less compromised by involvement with the Ustaša) and, having obtained the support of the Allies and the Polish units of General Anders, tried to maintain contact with the anti-communist units still present on the Yugoslavian territory and far from resigned to defeat.²⁴

In the following months, various politicians from the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia arrived in Rome, starting with Dragiša Cvetković, the former prime minister who had joined the Tripartite Pact and had been deposed in the coup d’état of 27th March 1941.²⁵ Others included prominent members of the collaborationist governments, such as Serbian leader Mihailo Olčan, former Minister of Economy in Nedić’s government and commander of Ljotić’s militia of the “Serbian Volunteer Corps” (*Srpski dobrovoljački korpus*).²⁶ The activities of Yugoslav nationalists present in Italy raised more than one perplexity within the Italian authorities: a report by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the programme of this vast group was divided into three levels: the minimum, a “Greater Serbia”, the medium, the restoration of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia along pre-war borders, and the maximum programme, a “Greater Yugoslavia, from the Isonzo to Varder (Thessaloniki), a programme perfectly equal to Tito’s” (underlined in the original).²⁷ A useful but also dangerous group, at least in view of future post-war arrangements: a leaflet distributed by anti-communist Slovenian nationalists praised Yugoslav Trieste and ended with the phrase “We

²² Questioni jugoslave, 9 luglio 1945, segreto, in AUSSME, Fondo SIM, Prima Divisione, Busta 273, “Personalità jugoslave a Roma. Loro attività”.

²³ P. Adriano, G. Cingolani, *La via dei conventi* cit., 375.

²⁴ Comitato Nazionale Jugoslavo e situazione jugoslava, segreto, 24 luglio 1945, in AUSSME, Fondo SIM, Prima Divisione, Busta 273, “Personalità jugoslave a Roma. Loro attività”.

²⁵ Z”, Seguito segnalazione del 24 corrente, 25 novembre 1946, in AUSSME, Fondo SIM, Prima Divisione, Busta 273, “Personalità jugoslave a Roma. Loro attività”.

²⁶ Mouvement de criminal de guerre, appunto jugoslavo dattiloscritto, 4 maggio 1946, in AUSSME, Fondo SIM, Prima Divisione, Busta 273, Fascicolo “Attività degli Ustascia in Italia”.

²⁷ Promemoria riservato “Nazionalisti jugoslavi”, 21 agosto 1945, in ASDMAE, AP 1946–50 “Jugoslavia”, Busta 33, Fascicolo “Attività di jugoslavi contrari al regime di Tito in Italia”.

are not afraid of anyone. Not the communists, not the Italians”, was just the confirmation of the emerging explosive situation.²⁸ The affair involved the historian Federico Chabod who, as president of the Aosta Valley Council, wrote to the Ministry of the Interior in July 1946 that the Serbs who had taken refuge in the valley were “fascists” and were proving to be “neither friendly nor loyal” to the Italian authorities.²⁹ For these reasons, the Italian government preferred not to take any position for the time being, in order not to irritate the British who, on the other hand, were very interested in helping, even materially, the exiles’ movement in Italy.³⁰

In any case, the objective of the “Yugoslav National Committee” was the “reorganisation of the Royal Yugoslav Army” using the thousands of ex-prisoners and refugees present in the various camps. The aim was to create an invasion force to be sent to the Balkan country, with Anglo-American, French and Polish support (and Italian approval) to depose the government in Belgrade and restore King Peter to the throne. At the head of the new militia (still unarmed) was General Damjanović, who was in the Cesena refugee camp.³¹ Having moved to Eboli, in the province of Salerno, the Serbian officer had to face difficult issues: his “army” was showing restlessness and indiscipline bordering on criminality. The confidential reports of the SIM agents described a picture far removed from the image of an organised liberation army. The report on the camp where the command of the new Yugoslav army was to be based encapsulates the situation:

[In the Eboli camp], the behaviour of the refugees leaves a lot to be desired. Being free to move about, they constantly roam the nearby countryside and the town of Eboli, asking for bread and offering themselves as domestic service personnel, committing wrongdoings and thefts. There are frequent cases of drunkenness. The intervention of the CC. RR. with the Yugoslavian commander of

²⁸ Volantino distribuito a Trieste il 10/VIII/1945 (ad opera dei nazionalisti jugoslavi: monarchici), n. 69091/9.7, in ASDMAE, AP 1946–50 “Jugoslavia”, Busta 33, Fascicolo “Attività di jugoslavi contrari al regime di Tito in Italia”.

²⁹ Il Presidente del Consiglio della Valle d’Aosta, Federico Chabod, al Ministero dell’Interno, Direz. Gen. Della P.S., Div. A.G.R. – Sezione 3[^], Aosta, 11 luglio 1946, in ASDMAE, AP 1946–50, “Jugoslavia”, Busta 33, Fascicolo “Attività di jugoslavi contrari al regime di Tito in Italia”.

³⁰ Notizie sul movimento jugoslavo contrario all’attuale regime, s.d., p. 14, in ASDMAE, AP 1946–50 “Jugoslavia”, Busta 33, Fascicolo “Attività di jugoslavi contrari al regime di Tito in Italia”.

³¹ Riorganizzazione Reale Esercito Jugoslavo – Campo di Cine Città, 19 agosto 1945. AUSSME, Fondo SIM, Prima Divisione, Busta 273, “Personalità jugoslave a Roma. Loro attività”. Il campo di Cesena conteneva nell’agosto 1945 almeno 18 mila cetnici (Situazione forze fedeli a Re Pietro di Jugoslavia in patria e all’estero; sentimenti verso l’Italia, n. 69034/3, segreto, 26 agosto 1945, in: AUSSME, Fondo SIM, Prima Divisione, Busta 273, “Personalità jugoslave a Roma. Loro attività”).

the camp [possibly Damjanović himself] did not have a satisfactory outcome, as the commander pointed out that he was unable to curb the misconduct.³²

Even the leadership of the organisation seemed not immune to such laxity. An associate of Damjanović, Lieutenant Colonel Vukotić, former head of the military mission in Rome of the government in exile and a travelling agent between Rome and London, had even been captured by the British and tried for currency trafficking and document forgery.³³ It is probable, according to the papers consulted, that this was an artfully orchestrated allegation, perhaps by the more political fractions of the “refractory community” (Topalović, for example), who saw themselves disempowered by the military: a fact that confirmed the high level of quarrelsomeness within the group. Alternatively, the accusations could have been the work of Tito’s agents who, having infiltrated the camps, worked to tarnish the “good name” of the anti-communists and, in some cases, even kidnapped and killed former alleged or real collaborationists locked up in Italy.³⁴ But one cannot exclude the real culpability of Vukotić, who later reinvented himself as an international businessman.

Both the War and Foreign Ministries began to monitor the situation, using informants from within the “refractory community”. Among the numerous reports, one, dated 26 August 1945, written by an anonymous “Vojvoda” (Chetnik leader) described the organisational charts and personnel of the Yugoslav royalist army, under the command of which the anonymous nationalist leader (presumably Jevdjević) indicated General Mihailović himself.³⁵ In addition to the forces at home (overestimated and amounting, according to the document, to as many as three divisions), the forces in Italy were described: 18,000 “combatants” in the camps at Cesena, under the former commander of the Dinara Division of the “Yugoslav Army in the Homeland”, priest Momčilo Djujić. He

³² A Piero, n. 34/R R.f. n. 869/R del 10–10 u.s., 29 ottobre 1945, in AUSSME, Fondo SIM, Prima Divisione, Busta 273, “Personalità jugoslave a Roma. Loro attività”.

³³ Traduzione del col. Vukotić a Salisburgo, segreto, 30 novembre 1945, in AUSSME, Fondo SIM, Prima Divisione, Busta 273, “Personalità jugoslave a Roma. Loro attività”.

³⁴ Stato Maggiore del Regio Esercito – Ufficio informazioni, n. 69077/3/7 di prot., “Campo di Cine Città”, 11 settembre 1945, in AUSSME, Fondo SIM, Prima Divisione, Busta 273, “Personalità jugoslave a Roma. Loro attività”. Nell’aprile 1946 venne rinvenuto in una località presso Eboli il cadavere della fidanzata di Damjanović, uccisa da mano ignota con una serie di coltellate (A Piero, Napoli, 19 aprile 1946, in AUSSME, Fondo SIM, Prima Divisione, Busta 273, “Personalità jugoslave a Roma. Loro attività”.

³⁵ In realtà le truppe cetniche erano ormai disperse e Mihailović, braccato dall’esercito di Tito dopo la definitiva sconfitta a Kalinovic, in Bosnia meridionale (22 maggio 1945), stava ritornando nella sua Serbia con solo diciassette uomini al seguito (J. Tomasevich, *The Chetniks. War and revolution in Yugoslavia 1941–1945*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 456). Il “Combattente di Ravna Gora” sarebbe stato catturato il 12 marzo 1946, quindi processato e fucilato il 17 luglio dello stesso anno.

was a well-known member of the complicated Chetnik hierarchy, which had – resolutely fought alongside the Italian occupation authorities in 1941–43. The report went on to add “modest numbers” of soldiers from the former Royal Yugoslav Army serving with the Allies (belonging to the few contingents that had followed the sovereign to Cairo after his surrender in April 1941), as well as unidentified “other groups” believed to be in the process of being formed in Italy.³⁶ Finally and significantly, 200,000 civilian refugees scattered between Italy and Austria were added to the available troops. At the head of all the forces in Italy was General Damjanović.³⁷

The confusion would increase with the arrival of the Ustaša. Unlike the Serb-Chetnik, Slovenian and Croatian components of a “Maček-ian” persuasion or in favour of Croatia being included in the restored Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which, giving themselves a “democratic” image (if not social-democratic and labour, as in the case of Topalović), could represent for the Italian military authorities an interlocutor – admittedly restless, not very disciplined and at times unrepresentable, but at least in line with the previous Allied ideas about the future of Yugoslavia, the Ustaša were something else. The pro-Axis orientation of Pavelić and his bloodthirsty regime and the blatantly fascist ideology that inspired them represented a problem not easy to solve. In August, the first members of Pavelić’s regime (Independent State of Croatia, *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* – NDH) had arrived on Italian territory (in Venice and Treviso), mostly from the Croatian consulate in German-occupied Ljubljana, led by Salih Baljić, a Muslim Herzegovinian who had embraced the Ustaša creed, helped by Teodor Longarić, former head of the Ustaša secret service in the Slovenian capital.³⁸ Longarić, in particular, was followed for a long time during his journey from Venice to Rome, where he was received at San Girolamo. Another prominent name was General Vilko Pečnikar, former NDH police chief, who arrived in Rome between September and October 1945 and who, according to Foreign Ministry sources, was preparing the ground for Pavelić’s imminent arrival.³⁹

³⁶ I cetnici oltre a Cesena erano distribuiti nei campi di Argenta (in provincia di Ferrara), Forlì e Rimini (Promemoria riservato “Nazionalisti jugoslavi”, 21 agosto 1945, in ASDMAE, AP 1946–50 “Jugoslavia” Busta 33, Fascicolo “Attività di jugoslavi contrari al regime di Tito in Italia”).

³⁷ Situazione forze fedeli a Re Pietro di Jugoslavia in patria e all'estero; sentimenti verso l'Italia, in AUSSME, Fondo SIM, Prima Divisione, Busta 273, Fascicolo “Attività degli Ustascia in Italia”.

³⁸ Il Ministero della Guerra – SMRE Ufficio I – 2^a sezione, segreto, n. 103379/2/CS di prot., P.M. 3800, 5 settembre 1945, in AUSSME, Fondo SIM, Prima Divisione, Busta 273, Fascicolo “Attività degli Ustascia in Italia”.

³⁹ Il Ministero degli Affari Esteri D.G.A.P. – Uff. IV al Ministero della Guerra, Stato Maggiore, Uff. I, telesspresso n. 949, Roma, 19 ottobre 1945, “Generale ustascia Vilko

The presence of the Ustaša, hated by all Serb-Montenegrin and royalist elements, who considered them “war criminals”,⁴⁰ forced the Italian authorities to separate them into different camps (Santa Maria di Leuca, Riccione, Forlì, Cesena but in a camp far from the Serb one).⁴¹ However, as the head of the collection centre in Bologna recalled, the future “Yugoslav National Army” would soon include “selected elements” from the ranks of the Ustaša. In the name of the anti-communist cause, the old rivalries, as they had been at the end of the conflict at home, would disappear or at least be palpably softened.⁴² Soon, the “refractory community” thus composed (and composite) would be employed by the SIM to monitor the new socialist Yugoslavia. The network of informers from across the border would be formed not only around the military opposition groups present on the spot (the so-called “Crusaders”, or *Križari*), but also by numerous agents from the Italian camps sent undercover to Yugoslavia under the command of the Italian military authorities. The reports, contained in the SIM archives and opened as early as the summer of 1945, were written by former Chetniks, passed off as loyal Titoists and sent across the border, and – in a task renamed the “Chetniks Service” by the Italian intelligence commands – would have reported any useful information on the military situation in the new federal and socialist Yugoslavia: the new, fearsome enemy of Italy. The “Chetnik Service” would continue until the early 1950s.

Starting from the Yugoslavian figures for 1945 (98.000 Yugoslavs interned in Italy) and the arrivals of post-war “refractory” people (Ustaša, Chetniks, anti-communists of all kinds), amounting to at least another 100,000, the number of Yugoslav emigrants to Italy would decrease over the next two years. Some returned home (obviously, those who risked little or nothing or who acted “undercover”); to others, Italy had been merely a transit station before they moved on; others – the most problematic and heavily compromised – had been accompanied, with varying degrees of grace, to the borders (Pavelić, for example). Nevertheless, the numbers remained significant for a long time. In January 1946, the “refractory community” was redistributed into nine camps: Eboli

Pecnikar”, in ASDMAE, AP 1946–50 “Jugoslavia” Busta 1, Fascicolo “Esponenti del cessato regime ustascia in Italia”.

⁴⁰ Attività svolta all'estero dagli jugoslavi contrari al regime di Tito, D.G.A.P., Uff. IV, in ASDMAE, AP 1946–50 “Jugoslavia” Busta 33, Fascicolo “Attività di jugoslavi contrari al regime di Tito in Italia”.

⁴¹ Il Ministero degli Affari Esteri, D.G.A.P. Ufficio IV alla R. Ambasciata a Londra, telesspresso n. 14983, Roma, 4 agosto 1945, “Attività jugoslave contro Tito”, in ASDMAE, AP 1946–50 “Jugoslavia” Busta 1, Fascicolo “Esponenti del cessato regime ustascia in Italia”.

⁴² Il Maggiore dei CC.RR. Capo centro Umberto Pompei, “Riorganizzazione dei militari jugoslavi reduci dalla Germania”, n. 2657 di prot., Bologna, 6 giugno 1945, in AUSSME, Fondo SIM, Prima Divisione, Busta 273, Fascicolo “Attività degli Ustascia in Italia”.

(the Chetniks under Djujić's command, Olčan's Serbian fascists, General Parać's Croats loyal to Maček), Fermo (Ustaša and former members of the Croatian army of the NDH); Palombina, Jesi, Riccione and Grumo (Croatian civilians and politicians), Padua (Slovenes), Turin (sorting centre) and Aversa ("international" camps with a hundred or so Yugoslavs of various ethnicities).⁴³ In Naples, in March 1953, an "Association of Fighters of the Royal Yugoslav Army" was founded under the leadership of a certain Ljubomir Spasojević, named after Mihailović and linked to the world headquarters created in Chicago and presided over by General Damjanović, who had immigrated to the United States in the meantime. Inspired by pan-Yugoslavism and therefore open to accepting not only Serbs but also members of other ethnic groups, this organisation contrasted with the groups of Djujić and Jevdjević, open only to Serb exiles. The opposition between the two organisations was fierce, as evidenced by a circular from Jevdjević, who warned to "beware of the Yugoslav Royal Association led by General Damjanović" because its representatives were "generally swindlers and suspicious persons."⁴⁴ In September of the same year, Djujić would also depart for Chicago, leaving only Jevdjević in Rome, at the head of a "Local Committee for Italy of the Serbian Chetnik Organisation". This committee, which had a press organ, the "Srpske Novine" ("Serbian Newspaper"), distributed among the Serbian communities in Italy and abroad, would have been monitored by the Italian police authorities, fearful of the infiltration of Belgrade agents among the Chetniks of the *Voivoda*. The comment made by the Questor of Rome in January 1954 is illustrative:

It is not known whether any of Tito's agents are hiding in the group linked to Jevdjević, but it is a fact that the local Yugoslavian Legation, while not disturbing him, follows his activity, which it does not consider dangerous, especially because Jevdjević, due to his personal ambitions [sic] and lack of farsightedness and experience in the problems of emigration, contributes with his actions to unwittingly supporting Tito's manoeuvre, which aims to split up and break up the communities of Serb exiles abroad.⁴⁵

Similarly, Jevdjević's anti-communist activities – he moved between the Chetnik communities in Italy and those in the USA, participating, for example, in the congress of the "Srpska Narodna Obrana" ("Serbian National Defence")

⁴³ Campi jugoslavi in Italia, 12 gennaio 1946, in ASDMAE, AP 1946–50 "Jugoslavia" Busta 33, Fascicolo "Attività di jugoslavi contrari al regime di Tito in Italia".

⁴⁴ Il Questore di Napoli, Dott. F. Salvatore alla Questura di Caserta e alla Questura di Roma, n. 1034252 Div. UP, Napoli, 22 novembre 1953 "Organizzazione Cetnica Serba", riservata, in ACS, MI, DGPS, AARR 1951/53, Busta 30, Fascicolo 10/9.

⁴⁵ Il Questore di Roma, Arturo Musco, alle Questure di Napoli e di Caserta, e al Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Generale della P.S., Divisione Affari generali, n. 050024 U.P. A.s., Roma, 2 gennaio 1954, in ACS, MI, DGPS, AARR 1951/53, Busta 30, Fascicolo 10/9.

organisation in Niagara Falls in June 1952 – were also followed by the American CIA, as a 1955 report suggests.⁴⁶

From these communities, some continued to move in the political and conspiratorial background: the Slovenes would concentrate along the eastern border, in the Free Territory of Trieste and then in Trieste, by then returned to Italy; the Serbs settled mostly in Rome; the Croats, for the most part, joined the powerful communities in Western Europe and overseas. Others, such as the socialist Topalović, are said to have worked as informants for the British: according to a note from a trusted source at the Questura in Rome, the former president of the JDNZ was commissioned by the UK Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin to resume contact with the community of Yugoslav exiles in order to convince them to tone down their arguments with Tito and the government in Belgrade. According to Topalovic himself, “[...] both the British and the Americans want the Yugoslav refugees in the West to respect the truce and not to do anything against Tito, pending further developments and progress in Tito’s rapprochement with the West”. The information is dated 23 November 1949, a year after the break between the Yugoslav head of state and Stalin.⁴⁷ Yugoslavia’s new international position suggested that the subversive initiatives of the exiles’ organisations should be reduced to a minimum or cancelled altogether. However, the Allied decision was not shared by the Italian SIM and, at least until the resolution of the Trieste crisis (1953–54), the “Chetnik Service” would continue to operate.

In the first months of 1948, according to the British authorities, the Yugoslav “refractory community” in Italy exceeded 23,000,⁴⁸ a medium-sized town, largely politically inclined to consider the lost war as a simple, temporary defeat and the attenuation of friction between the West and Belgrade as a passing setback. The *redde rationem* of Tito’s “Socialist Federative” would come almost half a century later. And some of the younger members of the “refractory community” would have had time to become the elderly spectators and, in some cases, inspirers of the new dissolution of Yugoslavia.

⁴⁶ Official Dispatch ORW-6h89, 16th June 1955, secret classification, subject: “Dobroslav Jevdjevich”, in www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DJUIJIC,%20MOMCILO_0016.pdf.

⁴⁷ Appunto per il Dr. Darcangeli, n. 224/39030, 23 novembre 1949, in ACS, MI, DGPS, Cat. O, Busta 97 “Stranieri pericolosi”, Fascicolo “Topalovich Zivko”

⁴⁸ P. Adriano, G. Cingolani, *La via dei conventi* cit., 366.

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