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## **The Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia between France and Britain (1919–1940)<sup>†</sup>**

**Abstract:** The paper deals with the orientation of the Yugoslav freemasonry during the existence of the Grand Lodge of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes “Jugoslavia” (GLJ), later the Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia (GLY). The state of freemasonry in Serbia on the eve of the Great War is briefly described and followed by an analysis of how the experience of the First World War influenced Serbian freemasons to establish strong ties with French freemasonry. During the 1920s the Grand Lodge “Jugoslavia” maintained very close relations with the Grand Orient of France and the Grand Lodge of France, and this was particularly obvious when GLJ got the opportunity to organise the Masonic congress for peace in Belgrade in 1926 through its links with French Freemasonry. Grand Master Georges Weifert (1919–34) also symbolised close links of French and Serbian freemasonry. However, his deputy and later Grand Master Douchan Militchevitch (1934–39) initiated in 1936 the policy of reorientation of Yugoslav freemasonry to the United Grand Lodge of England. Although there had already been such initiatives, they could not be materialised due to the fact that it was not until 1930 that the United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE) recognised several continental grand lodges, including GLJ. In a special section efforts of GLJ to be recognised by UGLE are analysed. Efforts for reorientation of GLY were conducted through several persons, including Douchan Militchevitch (1869–1939), Stanoje Mihajlović (1882–1946), Vladimir Ćorović (1885–1941) and Dragan Militchevitch (1895–1942). Special attention is given to the plans of GLY’s grand master to make the Duke of York (subsequently King George VI), who was a very dedicated freemason, an honorary past master of GLY. This plan failed, and the main idea behind it was to make GLY more resistant to internal clerical attacks and also to the external pressure of Italy. Mihajlović’s three official Masonic visits to Britain (1933–39) are analysed as well as a private visit of Ćorović and Dragan Militchevitch in March 1940. In the context of the visits made in 1939–40 plans to establish an Anglo-Yugoslav lodge are also analysed. Finally, the context of the de facto ban on Yugoslav freemasonry in August 1940 is given and the subsequent fates of its pro-British actors are also described.

**Keywords:** Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia, French Freemasonry, United Grand Lodge of England, Duke of York, Douchan Militchevitch, Stanoje Mihajlović, Vladimir Ćorović

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On the eve of the Great War there were four Masonic lodges in the Kingdom of Serbia and all of them operated in Belgrade. The oldest was the lodge "Concord, Labour and Perseverance" ("Sloga rad i postojanstvo") established in 1883 under the protection of the Grand Orient of Italy, and the most influential was the lodge "Pobratim" consecrated in 1891 under the protection of the Symbolic Grand Lodge of Hungary. On 6 October 1908, Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had been occupied by this power since 1878. This produced a storm of discontent against Austria-Hungary in Serbia. On 30 October, the lodge "Pobratim" unilaterally broke off its relations with Budapest and then proclaimed itself "Unabhängige Loge Serbiens" (Independent Lodge of Serbia). In 1910 another lodge, "Schumadija", was established in Belgrade under the protection of the Grand Lodge of Hamburg.

The need to establish a supreme Masonic body in Serbia arose. The lodges "Concord, Labour and Perseverance" and "Schumadija" submitted regular requests to be released from the protection of Rome and Hamburg and received permissions to do that. Since other grand lodges in Europe could be reluctant to recognise a grand lodge in Belgrade, another solution was found. It was to try to establish the Supreme Council of Serbia. With this in mind, in May 1912, the three Belgrade-based lodges ("Pobratim", "Concord", and "Schumadija"), with the assistance of the Supreme Council of Greece, established in Belgrade the Supreme Council of Serbia. Already on 8 October 1912, this Council was recognised by the Supreme Council of the Southern Jurisdiction ("the mother lodge of the world") in Washington and by twenty-four other Supreme Councils that were present in the American capital.<sup>2</sup> From 1912 to 1919 the three Belgrade lodges operated under the protection of the Supreme Council of Serbia for all 33 degrees.

In other words, there was no grand lodge in Serbia in that period that would normally have under its protection the first three degrees, or the so-called blue freemasonry. Under usual circumstances a grand lodge was supposed to be established first, and only then a supreme council for the degrees from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 33<sup>rd</sup> (the so-called red freemasonry) would follow. The line taken by Serbian freemasons proved to be more efficient since the recognition by Washington was automatically valid globally, at least for the red freemasonry, while in the case of the establishment of a grand lodge Serbian freemasons would have had to wait for individual recognitions for it and that would have been more unpredictable.

In addition to the three lodges, one more operated in Belgrade. It was established in early 1909 under the name "L'Union" (*Ujedinjenje* in Serbian). It worked in Belgrade under the protection of the Grand Orient of France and

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<sup>2</sup> M. D. [Militchevitch, Douchan], "Izveštaj s internacionalne konferencije u Vašingtonu", *Neimar* 1–3 (Jan.–Mar. 1914), 25–39. *Suprême Conseil pour la Serbie. Annuaire compte-rendu première année 1912–1913* (Belgrade: Imprimerie Sv. Sava, 1913), 17.

did not place itself under the protection of the Supreme Council of Serbia. It is not clear if a Masonic “triangle” in Skoplje named “Kosovo” was operative before the Great War or if it only existed on paper.<sup>3</sup> There was also a lodge called “Terra e Sole” (Earth and Sun) established in 1909 in Monastir (subsequent Bitolj) in Vardar Macedonia under the protection of the Grand Orient of Italy.<sup>4</sup> The number of freemasons in Serbia was quite modest. In May 1911, Jovan Aleksijević mentioned sixty members of the Craft.<sup>5</sup> There was an increased Masonic activity in Belgrade in 1912–1914, but, on the eve of the Great War, their total number was still below 100.

### *The prevailing influence of France in 1915–1934*

Serbia won important battles in the war against Austria-Hungary in the summer and autumn of 1914. However, in October 1915, after the attack of the Central Powers (Austria-Hungary and Germany joined by Bulgaria) on Serbia, large parts of the Serbian Army and some 20,000 civilians began their retreat through Albania to Corfu and then to mainland Greece. Many Serbs found refuge in France during the Great War. In January 1918, according to the French authorities there were 17,000 Serbs and 3,000 Montenegrins in France, and Serbian statistics from the same month listed 3,286 Serbs enrolled in French schools and universities (1,178 of them were students). There were also many more Serbs in French North Africa.<sup>6</sup> Through the efforts of the London-based Serbian Relief Fund, established by British pro-Serbian activists, some 352 Serbian students were admitted to Britain to complete their secondary and higher education there. Through two other schemes the total number of Serbian students and orphans received in Britain reached 500.<sup>7</sup> When seminarians and theology students are added the number was around 550.

<sup>3</sup> A triangle is the nucleus of a lodge which is established as the first step in the process of establishment of a fully operative lodge. The triangle in Skoplje “Kosovo” is mentioned in contemporary publications of the Supreme Council of Serbia from 1913–1914. *Suprême Conseil pour la Serbie. Annuaire compte-rendu première année 1912–1913*, pp. xix, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Fulvio Conti, “From Brotherhood to Rivalry. The Grand Orient of Italy and the Balkan and Danubian Europe Freemasonries”, in Matevž Košir, ed., *The Secret of the Lodge* (Ljubljana: National Museum of Slovenia and Archives of the Republic of Slovenia, 2018), 86.

<sup>5</sup> Jov. Aleksijević to Brother Svetomir, 6 [19] May 1911, Arhiv Jugoslavije [Archives of Yugoslavia; hereafter AJ], Fonds 100, f. 11 – 363.

<sup>6</sup> Ljubinka Trgovčević, “Les Serbes en France durant la Première Guerre mondiale”, in D. T. Bataković, ed., *La Serbie et la France: Une alliance atypique* (Belgrade: Institut des Etudes balkaniques, 2010), 364–365; Ljubinka Trgovčević, “Školovanje srpske omladine u emigraciji”, *Istorijski časopis* 42–43 (1995–1996), 161.

<sup>7</sup> S. G. Markovich, “British-Serbian Cultural and Political Relations 1784–1918”, in S. G. Markovich, ed., *British-Serbian Relations from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries* (Belgrade: FPS and Zepeter Book World, 2018), 95–96.

A list of Serbian freemasons with their temporary addresses, compiled probably in 1916 or 1917 for the Serbian Government, reveals that about 50 Serbian freemasons found themselves exiled in Allied and neutral countries. Seventeen of them were in Salonika, 15 in France, seven in Switzerland, two in Italy and Russia and only one in England.<sup>8</sup> The seat of the Supreme Council of Serbia was temporarily moved to Marseilles. Georges Weifert, the Supreme Commander of the Supreme Council of Serbia, was also there. As the governor of the National Bank of Serbia he also made Marseilles the seat of the National Bank of Serbia and, on 1 March 1916, organised in this city the first session of this institution in exile.<sup>9</sup> In terms of freemasonry, French brethren allowed their Serbian and also Croatian brethren to deliver lectures and addresses organised in Parisian and French lodges under the jurisdiction of the Grand Orient of France (GOF) and the Grand Lodge of France (GLF). In these lodges Serbian and two Croatian freemasons promoted Serbia and also Serbia's officially declared war aim – the creation of a common state of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. They were particularly active in the lodge "Fraternité des Peuples" that operated under GOF.

During the Great War the French lodges turned out to be places in which the conflicting war aims of Italy and Serbia in the Eastern Adriatic were discussed. Serbian and Croatian freemasons insisted that the principle of nationality should be implemented in the Eastern Adriatic after the war, while Italian freemasons focused on cultural continuity and the fact that Italy had entered the war on the side of the Entente in exchange for territorial gains. The most important Masonic event during the Great War for Serbian, Croatian and Italian freemasons took place in Paris on 28–30 June 1917: the Congress of the Allied and Neutral Masonries, which anticipated the formation of the League of Nations. The congress made evident the differences that existed between Serbian and Italian freemasons on what should happen with the Habsburg Empire after the war. In a bid to reconcile these differences, the French hosts from GOF and GLF made a joint seven-member committee that included one Italian and one Serbian member. In this committee the grand master of GLF, General Peigné, demonstrated sympathy for the Serbian position.<sup>10</sup> The resolution accepted at the Congress included the following paragraph:

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<sup>8</sup> Slobodan G. Marković, *Jedan vek velike lože SHS "Jugoslavija"* (Belgrade: RGLS and Dosije Press, 2019), 55. The list of all Serbian freemasons in exile was compiled for the Serbian government, probably in 1916, with their whereabouts. Arhiv Republike Slovenije [Archives of Slovenia], Collection Dedijer.

<sup>9</sup> Saša Ilić, Sonja Jerković and Vladimir Bulajić, *Georg Weifert. Visionary and Enthusiast* (Belgrade: National Bank of Serbia, 2010), 54.

<sup>10</sup> For more on this see Dimitrije Dimo Vujović, *Francuski masoni i jugoslovensko pitanje 1914–1918* (Belgrade: Književne novine, 1994), 89–122.

The steadfast will of all Masonic Powers represented at the Congress... in order that the innumerable lives sacrificed to the altruistic ideal may bring to the peoples the right of reconstituting all the crushed and oppressed nationalities, all the elements which compose a national conscience being at the same time taken into consideration.<sup>11</sup>

This resolution was not received well by the Italian public and, on 14 July 1917, the grand master of the Grand Orient of Italy, Ettore Ferrari, had to resign.<sup>12</sup> The importance that Serbian and Yugoslav freemasons attached to this resolution may be seen from the fact that they reproduced it in 1919, in a publication prepared with the aim of influencing the members of the delegations at the Paris Peace Conference.

There was a very strong pro-Serbian campaign in Britain and throughout the British Empire during the Great War. It reached the stage of pro-Serbian euphoria in April–July 1916, culminating in a very elaborate commemoration of the Kosovo Day in Britain in June–July 1916.<sup>13</sup> Similar manifestations in France facilitated the activities of Serbian freemasons there. However, there are no available data that could confirm that this comprehensive pro-Serbian campaign in Britain had any particular influence on creating links between Serbian and British freemasons.

A letter of Jovan Aleksijević<sup>14</sup> from 1921 reveals that there was no official correspondence between the grand secretary of the Supreme Council of Serbia and the grand secretary of the United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE) between May 1915, when he received a letter from UGLE's grand secretary, and January 1920, when the new grand lodge in Belgrade informed its English brethren on its foundation.<sup>15</sup> In March 1915, during the peak of a typhus epidemic in Serbia, Serbian freemasons appealed to their English brethren and their "generous hearts... for quick and bountiful donations".<sup>16</sup> Another appeal of the Su-

<sup>11</sup> "Resolution voted at the Congress of the allied and neutral Masonries held in Paris, the 28, 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> June 1917", published in *The National Claims of the Serbians, Croats and Slovenes presented to the Brothers of the Allied Countries by the Serbian Brothers* (Paris: L'Émancipatrice, 1919), 5–6.

<sup>12</sup> Fulvio Conti, *Storia della massoneria italiana dal Risorgimento al fascismo* (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 2003), 252–253.

<sup>13</sup> Markovich, "British-Serbian Cultural and Political Relations", 65–81.

<sup>14</sup> In their correspondence with UGLE the Serbian freemasons used both phonetic transliterations of their names into Western languages and their Serbo-Croatian versions. In this text their names are given as they themselves spelled them. Some of them used both spellings, so a degree of confusion is impossible to avoid.

<sup>15</sup> Jov. Aleksijević to Colville Smith, Belgrade, 19 May 1921, LMF UGLE, "Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Yugoslavia", file 1.

<sup>16</sup> Jov. Aleksijević to "dear Sir and Brother", Leskovac, 22 March 1915, LMF UGLE, "Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Yugoslavia", file 1.



preme Council of Serbia in Marseilles was prepared in October 1918, and it was published in English.<sup>17</sup>

Only one letter sent by Serbian freemasons during the Great War has been preserved in the archives of UGLE. There is a striking difference between the substantial activities of Serbian freemasons in France and Switzerland during the First World War and the absence of their activities in the United Kingdom in the same period. This was in line with the wartime orientation of UGLE, which was focused on fostering freemasonic ties within the British Empire, or as Sir Edward Letchworth phrased it in September 1915: “there never was a time in the history of Freemasonry more fitting than the present for strengthening the ties by which the Masons of the British Empire are bound together.”<sup>18</sup> Serbian freemasonry and its Supreme Council based in Marseilles seemed from UGLE’s point of view to be part of the Latin freemasonry gathered around GOF. The English Grand Lodge had severed its relations with this stream of Freemasonry after 1877, when GOF removed the belief in the Supreme Being as a precondition for being initiated into the Craft.<sup>19</sup> At the end of 1913, a new grand lodge, the Independent Grand Lodge of France and the Colonies, was formed in France. GLNIR (Grande Loge Nationale Indépendante et Régulière pour la France et les Colonies), subsequently GLNF, was immediately recognized by UGLE.<sup>20</sup> That was the only grand lodge recognised by UGLE in France in the interwar period.

### *The impact of French Freemasonry on the GL SCS “Jougoslavia”*

The extensive assistance that France offered to Serbia during the Great War, and the rather cordial reception of Serbian freemasons in France in the same period, made the Serbian and subsequent Yugoslav freemasonry particularly tied to the two grand lodges in Paris: GOF and GLF. In June 1919, the Grand Lodge of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes “Jugoslavia” (GL SCSJ or GLJ)<sup>21</sup> was formed in Zagreb and its first grand master became Georges Weifert (grand master from

<sup>17</sup> Circular no 41 of the Supreme Council of Serbia, Marseilles, October 1918, LMF UGLE, “Croatia, Serbia...”, file 1.

<sup>18</sup> *English Freemasonry and the First World War* (London: The Library and Museum of Freemasonry, 2014), 31

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 12–13.

<sup>20</sup> *100 ans de spiritualité maçonnique. Le livre du centenaire* (Paris: GLNF, 2013), 27–28.

<sup>21</sup> The name of the grand lodge in Belgrade contained the word Yugoslavia ten years before the state officially adopted that name in 1929. In the 1920s, in the documents of the Grand Lodge “Jugoslavia” in French and English the word was mostly spelled as “J(o)ugoslavia”. The lodge officially abbreviated its name in 1930 to the Grand Lodge of Y(o)ugoslavia and during the 1930s it was spelled mostly as “Y(o)ugoslavia”. Therefore in this text I have used the

1919 to 1934),<sup>22</sup> a Serbian industrialist of German descent, and the governor of the National Bank of Serbia and later of the Kingdom of SCS (1890–1902 and 1912–1926). The grand master himself was the best link of Yugoslav freemasonry with the world of high capital, but also with the Yugoslav royal family and political élite.<sup>23</sup>

What Dušan T. Bataković termed “an atypical alliance”<sup>24</sup> was a special military and cultural nexus formed between the Kingdom of Serbia and France during the Great War and then redesigned as a Franco-Yugoslav alliance in the interwar period. In 1919–20, this alliance was confirmed by the results of peace treaties of the Paris Peace Conference. In 1920–21, the Little Entente was established consisting of the victors from the Paris Conference: Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania. France itself signed alliances with all three countries: with Czechoslovakia in 1924, with Romania in 1926, and with Yugoslavia in 1927. In this way the countries of the Little Entente became a part of the French system of alliances. As L. Stavrianos put it, “this series of treaties marked the high point of French ascendancy in the Balkans and Eastern Europe.”<sup>25</sup> The treaty with Yugoslavia faced certain delays since France had very delicate relations with Italy, and Fascist Italy opposed any treaty between France and Yugoslavia.

GOF openly supported the Little Entente by a special resolution adopted on 30 May 1923, upon the presentation of Miroslav Spalaikovitch, chief delegate of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, to the first assembly of the League of Nations, and Yugoslav minister plenipotentiary in Paris. Spalaikovitch was not a member of the Craft but his lecture was organised through GLJ and through its member D. Tomitch, the delegate of Yugoslavia in Paris.<sup>26</sup>

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abbreviation GLJ for the Grand Lodge of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes “J(o)ugoslavia” (1919–1930), and the abbreviation GLY for the Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia (1930–1940).

<sup>22</sup> He himself spelled his name in several different ways: in German as Georg Weifert, in French as Georges Wei(f)fert, in Serbian as Djordje Vajfert. One can also find a Croatian version of his name, as Djura Weifert.

<sup>23</sup> For more detail on Georges Weifert as a freemason see Stevan Nikolic, “George Weifert: Pillar of Serbian Freemasonry,” *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 116 (2003), 201–211.

<sup>24</sup> Dušan T. Bataković, ed., *La Serbie et la France. Une alliance atypique. Relations politiques, économiques et culturelles 1870–1940* (Belgrade: Institut des Études balkaniques, 2010).

<sup>25</sup> L. S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453* (London: Hurst and Company 2000 [1st ed. 1958]), 734.

<sup>26</sup> Jov. Aleksijević to all the Craft lodges, Belgrade, 1 September 1923, AJ, Fonds 100, f. 4 – 79. Spalaikovich’s address was published by GOF: Spalaikovitch (Mr.), *The League of Nations and the Little Entente* (Paris 1923). Support for the Little Entente was repeated on later occasions by prominent Serbian and French freemasons: André Lebey, “La France at les Peuples de la Petite Entente”, D. Tomitch, “L’Œuvre libératrice de la Franc-Maçonnerie française dans l’Europe Centrale et les Balkans”, *Neimar* 46 (Dec. 1925), 642–656.



The Franco-Yugoslav alliance had a strong cultural aspect. In January 1920, a special section was established in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs aimed at spreading French cultural influence in Central Europe. As far as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was concerned, this policy was designed to maintain “Francophilia” among the Serbs and to limit German cultural influences among Yugoslav Catholics.<sup>27</sup> During the 1920s, this policy was successful, but primarily in Serbian and Christian Orthodox regions of Yugoslavia.

Since the newly-proclaimed Kingdom of SCS also found itself in the political sphere of influence of France, that fact made the pro-French orientation of the Yugoslav freemasonry even more natural. Through the French freemasonry the Yugoslav freemasons became active in the International Masonic Association (Association maçonnique internationale (AMI) established in Geneva in October 1921, and in 1922 GL SCS “Jougoslavia” joined AMI.<sup>28</sup>

The emergence of Fascist Italy soon led to the ban on Freemasonry in this country. In November 1925, the Italian Senate adopted a law on secret associations that effectively banned freemasonry in Italy. On 22 November 1925, the Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Italy Domizio Torrigiani proclaimed the dissolution of all Italian lodges under GOI.<sup>29</sup> After the ban on GOI close links of Yugoslav freemasonry with France became crucially important, and GOF was seen as the most powerful actor in continental freemasonry. It is typical that regarding “Fascist barbarities” GLJ informed the lodges under its protection that the grand master of GLJ had undertaken necessary steps and that the whole action regarding events in Italy was in the hands of the Grand Orient of France, “the action of which will without doubt meet expectations”.<sup>30</sup>

It was primarily thanks to GOF that in September 1926 GL SCS “Jugoslavia” got the opportunity to organise in Belgrade a big Masonic congress in favour of peace sponsored by AMI. The “Manifestation of Universal Freemasonry for Peace and Reconciliation among peoples” (La Manifestation de la F. M. Universelle pour la Paix et le rapprochement des peuples) was attended by I. Reverchon, grand chancellor of AMI, Arthur Groussier, president of the Council of GOF,<sup>31</sup> five grand masters (G. Weifert of Yugoslavia, Dr. Brandenburg of Swiss “Alpina”, D. de Buen Lozano of Spain, Fikret Tahir Bey of Turkey and A.

<sup>27</sup> Stanislav Sretenović, “L’action culturelle française auprès des Serbes au sein du Royaume des Serbes, Croates et Slovènes (1918–1929)”, in Bataković, ed., *La Serbie et la France*, 416.

<sup>28</sup> “Iz anala svjetske masonerije. A. M. I., Šestar 5–6 (1939), 75.

<sup>29</sup> Conti, *Storia della massoneria italiana*, 318.

<sup>30</sup> Circular to the lodges and triangles, Belgrade, 20 November 1925, AJ 100, f. 4–146.

<sup>31</sup> The Grand Orient of France did not have the position of grand master between 1871 and 1945 when it was

replaced by “presidency”. A. Groussier (1863–1957) was the president of the Council of GOF in 1925–26, 1927–30, 1931–34, 1936–39, and 1944–45. He had “a decisive role in the Inter-

Teodoroff-Ballan of Bulgaria), four sovereign grand commanders (Dr. Camille Savoie of GOF, Eugen Lennhoff of Austria, Alfonse Mucha of Czechoslovakia and Fikret Tahir Bey of Turkey).<sup>32</sup> The most numerous delegations at the congress were from France and Czechoslovakia, which testified to special links that GLJ had with these two freemasonries.

The congress sent an effective message since Arthur Groussier hugged Dr. Leo Muffelmann, member of the lodge "Bluntschli" in Berlin, and later Muffelmann delivered lectures in Paris "in the spirit of reconciliation".<sup>33</sup> The conference was particularly relevant because its main part was open to the public and in this way it contributed to the media promotion of the Yugoslav grand lodge since all major media covered it in superlatives.<sup>34</sup> The main sessions were held in the Main Hall of the University Building and Belgraders attended it en masse. At the opening of the congress grand master of GLJ Georges Weifert expressed his admiration for French freemasonry: "Our people, an eternal legionnaire of liberty and justice, has always regarded with admiration and respect the great immortal France. It holds in the depth of its heart a deep gratitude for all the good she has done for it, for the fraternal love and generous help with which she has showered it at the most painful and the most dolorous moments."<sup>35</sup> In the 1920s, equally enthusiastic views on France and on French freemasonry were widely held by Yugoslav freemasons, and particularly by Serbian freemasons.

GL "Yugoslavia" closely cooperated with AMI and occasionally had its representatives in the Executive Committee of AMI. This honour was achieved through the links of the GL "Yugoslavia" with the French freemasonry. Relations were particularly cordial with GOF, but also with GLF, which even established a joint French-Yugoslav lodge "Le général Peigné". The French influence on Yugoslav freemasonry reached its climax in the late 1920s. In 1929–30, GLJ also signed special conventions with GOF and then with GLF, which regulated the

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national Masonic Association". S. v. "Groussier, Arthur" and "France" in Daniel Ligou, *Dictionnaire de la franc-maçonnerie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France), 1987.

<sup>32</sup> *La Paix et la rapprochement des peuples. Compte rendu in extenso de la Manifestation organisée par la G. L. Yougoslavie* (Paris: La Paix, 1926), 9–11.

<sup>33</sup> Eugen Lennhoff, *Die Freimaurer* (Zurich-Leipzig-Berlin: Amalthea Verlag, 1929), 287.

<sup>34</sup> "Svečani ritualni rad slobodnih zidara" [Solemn Ritual Meeting of Freemasons], *Politika*, 14 Sept. 1926, p. 5; "Svetski značaj beogradskog kongresa nesumnjiv je" [World-wide Importance of the Belgrade Congress is unquestionable], *Vreme*, 15 Sept. 1926; "Kongres Masona" [Masonic Congress], *Pravda*, 12 Sept. 1926, p. 1; "Impozantan završetak masonskog kongresa" [Grand Closing of the Masonic Congress], *Pravda*, 15 Sept. 1926, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Weifert, T.: Ill.: F.: "Discours de bienvenue", *La Paix et le rapprochement des peuples*, 22. Cf. *Neimar* 65–66 (Oct. 1926), 555–572.

issues of French nationals who wanted to become freemasons in Yugoslavia, and Yugoslav nationals who wanted to be initiated in France.<sup>36</sup>

In January 1929, due to interethnic tensions between Serbs and Croats, King Alexander proclaimed his personal rule and changed the name of his country from the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In line with that the Grand Lodge of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes “Yugoslavia”, also changed its name to the Grand Lodge of Y(o)ugoslavia (GLY), but the change did not become effective until 1930.<sup>37</sup>

### *Efforts to obtain recognition from UGLE*

It is interesting to note that the first efforts of Serbian freemasons to be recognised by the United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE) were made already in 1909, after the Belgrade lodge “Pobratim” broke off relations with the Symbolic Grand Lodge of Hungary. In February that year “Pobratim” addressed UGLE with an appeal “to take us under your protection”.<sup>38</sup> In a repeated appeal written in June 1909 the officers of the lodge “Pobratim” expressed their wish “to place ourselves as younger brethren in entire obedience under you, who are our most respected elder brethren”. It was explained that such an act of recognition “would give a mighty impulse for Masonic work in our country”. Probably referring to the great admiration for Gladstone in Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Greece, the author of the letter wrote: “The great popularity which the British people rightly enjoy in the Balkans as friends of Justice, Liberty and Progress, would mightily forward the Masonic work as soon as it would be known that we were in connection with and under the protection of your influential grand lodge.” Since it was understood that the unilateral severance of relations with Hungary might pose a problem, another proposal was put forward at the end of the letter: that a new lodge could be formed in Belgrade and placed under the protection of UGLE. The letter was signed by the 12 officers of the lodge and by 19 other members on the reverse page of the letter.<sup>39</sup> It was accompanied by another letter of Jovan Aleksijević (Yovan Alekxiyevitch) to T. M. Hamm, in which he reminded him of the history of the Lodge “Pobratim”: “It is now almost twenty

<sup>36</sup> AJ, Fonds 100, f. 4 – 293.

<sup>37</sup> D. Miličević, deputy grand master, to all the lodges of the Craft, 26 March 1930, AJ, Fonds 100, f. 4– 257.

<sup>38</sup> I could not find the letter of February 1909 in the Archives of UGLE, but its content is repeated in a letter of 25 June 1909, LMF UGLE, “Croatia, Serbia...”, file 1.

<sup>39</sup> Twelve officers of the Lodge “Pobratim” signed the letter, including the master of the lodge *ad vitam* Georges Weifert, current master of the lodge, and deputy master of the lodge Yov. Alekxiyevitch [all are spelled as in the letter].

years since in our modest workshop the flame of love and charity is spread", and asked that both letters be forwarded to Sir Edward Letchworth (grand secretary of UGLE, 1892–1917), and, on 5 July 1909, it was indeed forwarded. The first application of Serbian freemasons could not have possibly made a good impression in London since they explicitly quoted political rather than freemasonic reasons as the root of their decision to break off with Hungarian freemasonry.<sup>40</sup>

No concrete actions are known to have come out of this initiative and, as a result, negotiations began with the Grand Lodge of Hamburg. A group of members of the Lodge "Pobratim" established the new lodge "Schumadija" in May 1910 under the protection of the Grand Lodge of Hamburg.

Upon the formation of the Grand Lodge of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes "Jugoslavia" in June 1919, a circular letter was sent to grand lodges all around the world. In January 1920, such a circular letter together with the list of grand officers was sent to UGLE. In the accompanying letter the grand master of GLJ, Georges Weifert, reiterated "our desire, and our prayer to you, to have the kindness to enter upon (or to open) a Brotherly correspondence with us".<sup>41</sup>

In 1921, it was again Aleksijević who, as in 1909, appealed to UGLE for recognition, this time on behalf of the GL of SCS "Jugoslavia". He wrote a letter to the grand secretary of UGLE Philip Colville Smith (grand secretary 1917–37) reminding him that the new grand lodge had sent information on its organisation in July 1919. He essentially appealed to UGLE to follow the foreign policy of the United Kingdom, which maintained good relations with the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and with some sorrow, added: "I was expecting that the United Grand Lodge of England would be one of the first to officially acknowledge the Grand Lodge of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes."<sup>42</sup>

A report on the Yugoslav grand lodge, most likely from 1922, was prepared for UGLE. It explains the reasons that could have been behind UGLE's reluctance to recognise the new grand lodge. It was noted that grand master Weifert and grand secretary Aleksijević occupied the same positions in the Supreme Council of Serbia. The Supreme Council was assessed "to have been intensely political in character", and even the Sarajevo Assassination "is said to have been

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<sup>40</sup> Aleksijević wrote in his letter to the UGLE: "In view of the deplorable fact that the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy annexed two Servian provinces, Bosnia and Herzegovina, disregarding and indeed violating the plain and binding international engagements, and grievously injuring the national, cultural and moral interests of our nation, our Servian Lodge could not continue the relations of obedience which up to that Annexation bound us to the Symbolic Grand Lodge of Hungary." Alexiyevitch to UGLE, Belgrade, 25 May 1909, LMF UGLE, "Croatia, Serbia...", file 1.

<sup>41</sup> Grand Master to the United Grand Lodge of England, Belgrade, 31 January 1919, English translation, LMF UGLE, "Croatia, Serbia...", file 1.

<sup>42</sup> Jov. Aleksijević to Colville Smith, Belgrade, 19 May 1921, LMF UGLE, "Croatia, Serbia...", file 1.

planned and carried out by Serbian Masons, though this statement has been denied by grand master himself.<sup>43</sup>

The Yugoslav grand lodge also used diplomatic channels to support its initiative. In September 1922, J. Aleksijević sent a copy of the Constitution of GLJ to Colville Smith. He informed him that he had asked “our brother Dr. Michel Gavrilovitch, Minister of Yugoslavia at the British Court”,<sup>44</sup> to be at his disposal for all clarifications related to the paragraphs of the Constitution, so that he would get “absolute conviction that Freemasonry of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes is organized according to the rules and duly recognized”. He also mentioned that GLJ had already been recognized and was in regular fraternal relations with 68 great Masonic authorities.<sup>45</sup>

In 1923 a favourable text in English appeared on Yugoslav freemasonry and was reproduced in several freemasonic journals. The article in *The Freemason* informs its readers that the Grand Lodge of SCS “Yugoslavia” was recently formed in Belgrade. Upon reading texts from the official organ of the Yugoslav freemasonry *Neimar*,<sup>46</sup> the author concludes about the new grand lodge: “This institution is doing splendid work.” He also assesses that after the downfall of Austria-Hungary the rise of freemasonry took place in former parts of the Monarchy and that the rise “means the decline of the power of Rome in those countries”.<sup>47</sup>

In 1923, the GL SCS “Yugoslavia” was the principal actor in bringing light to a new grand lodge in Prague: “The National Grand Lodge of Czechoslovakia”. This lodge was to consist primarily of Slavs, since another grand lodge, “Lessing”, also operated in this country with meetings in German. Although this act raised the prominence of Yugoslav freemasonry in continental Europe it was closely followed by UGLE since this meant that an unrecognised European grand lodge, from the point of view of UGLE, had established yet another grand lodge.

<sup>43</sup> An undated document entitled “SERBIA (EUROPE)”, LMF UGLE, “Croatia, Serbia...”, file 1.

<sup>44</sup> Mihailo Gavrilovitch (1868–1924) was the Yugoslav minister in London from 1920 until his death in 1924. He was a capable diplomat of Serbia and Yugoslavia and the former Director of the Archives of Serbia. “Dr. Gavrilovitch’s Career”, *The Times*, 3 Nov. 1924, p. 13. In his Masonic obituary Jovan Aleksijević praised the fact that he was “exceptionally useful” for the Craft because he “maintained constant ties with Masonic circles in London.” J. A., “Brat Dr. Mih. Gavrilović”, *Neimar* 29–31 (July–Sept. 1924), 382–383.

<sup>45</sup> Jovan Aleksijević to V. W. Bro. P. Colville Smith, Belgrade, 26 September 1922, LMF UGLE, “Croatia, Serbia...”, file 1.

<sup>46</sup> From September 1923 the official organ of the Grand Lodge “Yugoslavia” was *Šestar*, a Masonic journal published in Zagreb, while *Neimar* continued to be printed in Belgrade until the end of 1926 as a Masonic review.

<sup>47</sup> “Masonry in Yugoslavia”, *The Freemason*, 16 June 1923, 723. The article was reproduced in *Masonic Chronicles*, 29 September 1923.

In February 1924 the grand master and grand secretary of GLJ addressed once more the grand master of UGLE: "The Grand Lodge of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, 'Jugoslavia', at its last meeting had with great regret to state that still it has not had the happiness to be recognised by the United Grand Lodge of England." In the letter the officials of GLJ insisted that the Constitution of GLJ was "only a faithful copy of that of the Swiss Grand Lodge 'Alpina'" and its Masonic principles "have been taken from Anderson's 'Constitutions'."<sup>48</sup> This appeal did not bring any results either.

A new situation arose in 1926 when divisions appeared within the Yugoslav freemasonry, and more specifically among the Zagreb lodges. In June 1926 GLJ brought light to a new lodge in Zagreb – "Prometheus". However, already in November the same year this lodge requested to be relieved of the protection of GLJ. GLJ instead suspended the lodge in January 1927, and then in March decided that the lodge would cease to exist. The Grand Lodge "Jugoslavia" informed all the grand lodges, including UGLE, of its decision.<sup>49</sup> Another lodge, "Fraternal love", was re-established in Zagreb without the protection of any grand lodge. On 25 September 1926 it asked UGLE to be placed under its protection. On 28 March 1927, the grand secretary of UGLE replied to barrister Bogdan Njemčić that "where there is already a Sovereign Grand Jurisdiction in a country, it is not the practice of the United Grand Lodge of England to extend its jurisdiction over any Lodge in that country, even though it may work in accordance with the landmarks of our Grand Lodge."<sup>50</sup>

In May 1927, three lodges in Zagreb formed the Symbolic Grand Lodge "Libertas". This new lodge did not get recognition from any continental grand lodge. Since UGLE had already refused to take individual lodges under its protection, the Grand Lodge "Libertas", on 9 November 1928, simply informed UGLE that at St. John's meeting it had laid "the basis of our Grand Lodge definitively on the Anglo-Saxon Free-Masonic Principles."<sup>51</sup>

In September 1929, UGLE adopted its "basic principles for grand lodge recognition". The third point of the principles demands "that all Initiates shall take their Obligation on or in full view of the open Volume of the Sacred Law." In other words the initiates had to believe in God. The fourth point restricts

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<sup>48</sup> Georges Weifert and Jov. Aleksijevic to the grand master of UGLE, Belgrade, 13 February 1924. The original letter in French has been preserved, and the quotes are taken from the English translation made for UGLE. LMF UGLE, "Croatia, Serbia..."; file 1.

<sup>49</sup> Letter of the GLJ no. 7415 "à toutes les ggr.: obédiences", Belgrade, 29 March 1927, LMF UGLE, "Croatia, Serbia..."; file 1.

<sup>50</sup> Grand Secretary [of UGLE] to Bogdan Njemcic, 28 March 1927, LMG UGLE, "Croatia, Serbia..."; file 1.

<sup>51</sup> Veljko Tomić and Branko Domac to UGLE, Zagreb, 9 November 1928, LFM UGLE, "Croatia, Serbia..."; file 1.



membership exclusively to men, and the seventh point strictly prohibits discussions on religion and politics in lodges.<sup>52</sup> These three points made fraternal relations of UGLE with GOF impossible. Since AMI was dominated by GOF, UGLE was automatically ill-disposed to this organisation. Cordial relations of GLJ and AMI were therefore another less than favourable fact regarding the grand lodge in Belgrade.

Following the adoption of basic principles, GLJ sent another letter on 22 October 1929, confirming that it worked in line with UGLE's principles.<sup>53</sup> The main points of that letter were integrated into a report on GLJ prepared by UGLE in January 1930. The report expressed reservations toward the following claim of GLJ: "No discussions of Religion or Politics are allowed within the lodge." UGLE, however, possessed a 1919 pamphlet on the national claims of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes which was seen as political. It was also mentioned that in 1926 a schism had taken place in Yugoslav freemasonry, and that the grand lodge "Libertas" had been formed in 1927, and all the three lodges under its protection had accepted "Anglo-Saxon Freemasonic Principles".<sup>54</sup>

UGLE apparently demanded additional information in its letter to GLJ dated 18 January 1930, and, on 2 March, a reply from Belgrade was sent. In his reply Douchan Militchevitch<sup>55</sup> insisted that GLJ would exclude any member of the Craft who would in the capacity of mason "either approach or enter into any religious or political society as well as if the[y] would show the tendency to give such societies Masonic stamp." The rest of the letter offers a relatively unbiased summary of how the grand lodge "Libertas" was created. A declaration of the former grand master of "Libertas" was quoted<sup>56</sup> in which he advised his brethren "to capitulate before the Grand Lodge 'Jugoslavija'", and Militchevitch assessed that the GL "Libertas" could have 60 to 80 members.<sup>57</sup>

The adoption of these basic principles prompted UGLE to consider recognising several foreign grand lodges. At the quarterly communication of

<sup>52</sup> *Gould's History of Freemasonry*, vol. III, revised edition (London: The Caxton Publishing Company, 1951), 120. *Constitutions of the Ancient Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons under the United Grand Lodge of England* (London: Freemasons' Hall, 2009), vii–viii.

<sup>53</sup> Deputy GM and grand secretary of GLJ to Colville Smith, grand secretary of UGLE, Belgrade, 22 October 1929, LMF UGLE, "Croatia, Serbia...", file 1.

<sup>54</sup> LMF UGLE, "Croatia, Serbia...", file 1.

<sup>55</sup> Also spelled Dušan Miličević. He became the first grand warden of GLJ in 1919 and was re-elected to that position in 1925. In 1930, he became deputy grand master of the Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia, and in 1934 its grand master.

<sup>56</sup> This is a reference to Veljko Tomić, the first grand master of the GL "Libertas" from 1927 until 1930. AJ, Fonds 100, f. 14 – 3–4.

<sup>57</sup> Militchevitch to Colville Smith, Belgrade, 2 March 1930, LMF UGLE, "Croatia, Serbia...", file 1.

UGLE held on 4 June 1930, four resolutions on the recognition of four foreign grand lodges were proposed: one each in Yugoslavia and Romania and two in Czechoslovakia. UGLE decided to recognise both the Grand Lodge “Lessing zu den drei Ringen” and the National Grand Lodge of Czechoslovakia and its decision was facilitated by the fact that the two lodges mutually co-operated. It also recognised the National Grand Lodge of Romania in Bucharest, but refused to recognise the Grand Orient of Romania due to its close relations with GOF. Finally it recognised the Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia in Belgrade.<sup>58</sup> The decision on the recognition of GLJ was confirmed at the quarterly communication of UGLE held on 3 September 1930. After that UGLE notified GLJ of its decision and GLJ sent a circular to all the lodges under its protection.<sup>59</sup>

The relative inactivity of UGLE in Europe in the inter-war period was a part of its general policy. It is characteristic for this period that UGLE made only three visits to other grand lodges in Europe: two to Sweden and one to Greece in 1938.<sup>60</sup>

### *Reorientation to Britain*

The Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia had around 600 members and 17 lodges in 1927, and its official Sreten Stojković claimed in 1931 that it had 900 members and 23 lodges under its protection.<sup>61</sup> Its peak in terms of both its influence and membership was in the 1926–1934 period. With up to 1,000 members in the mid-1930s, it gathered prominent members of the upper and upper middle class of Yugoslavia. It was an elitist, essentially Serbo-Croat organisation, with a single lodge in Slovenia consecrated as late as 1940. In terms of occupational structure of its members it was the following: 10.4% doctors, 10.2% barristers, 9.2% merchants, 8.2% bank or insurance owners and top managers, 7.9% engineers, 6.9% university lecturers, 6.1% of high-ranking civil servants... Workers, craftsmen and students together accounted for less than 2% of its membership.<sup>62</sup> Essentially, members of the Craft in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia were “men of good repute”, as freemasons have liked to call themselves.

<sup>58</sup> *Proceedings of the Quarterly Communication* holden on Wednesday, the 4<sup>th</sup> day of June 1930 (London: UGLE, 1930), 336–337.

<sup>59</sup> Deputy grand master Militchevitch to all the lodges of the Craft, Belgrade, 10 September 1930. AJ, Fonds 100, f. 4 – 271.

<sup>60</sup> *English Freemasonry and the First World War*, 90.

<sup>61</sup> Marković, *Jedan vek velike lože*, 65. S[re]t[en]. J. St[ojković]., *Slobodno zidarstvo. Kratka obaveštenja za neposvećene* (Belgrade 1931), 106.

<sup>62</sup> Slobodan G. Markovich, “Overview of the History of Freemasonry in Yugoslavia”, in Matevž Košir, ed., *Secret of the Lodge* (Ljubljana: National Museum of Slovenia, 2018), 212–215.

Soon after the recognition by UGLE the Grand Lodge “Yugoslavia” was also recognised by the Grand Lodge of Ireland, the second oldest grand lodge in the world established in 1725.<sup>63</sup> In spite of the occasional correspondence that existed between the GL SCS “J(o)ugoslavia” and UGLE, real relations could be developed only upon UGLE’s recognition of the Yugoslav lodge.

In January 1931 the first discussion appeared among Yugoslav freemasons on the issue of which model should be implemented in Yugoslavia: that of the French or that of the English freemasonry. Some months after recognition by UGLE, a speech by “Lj. T.” (Ljubomir Tomašić)<sup>64</sup> was published in *Šestar*, the official organ of GLY. Tomašić pointed out that the definition of what freemasonry was omitted in the Constitution of GLY: “Under our Constitution, as under the English, the definition and purpose of freemasonry is to be felt by every Br[other].” It was also emphasised that “men – idealists”, who were “the main foundation of the Craft” were those who established the first grand lodge in 1717. “Such people spread the Craft from England worldwide, such people are also today its centre.”<sup>65</sup> This means that for Tomašić there was no doubt which freemasonry should serve as a model to the GLY. It was the Anglo-Saxon freemasonry.

In Belgrade Damjan Branković (1866–1954), a prominent Belgrade industrialist, was for many years master of lodge No. 2 “Pobratim”. In January 1931, he reacted to Tomašić’s speech just after its publication, delivering his own speech on the French and English Freemasonries. He claimed: “England is the conqueror of the world, France is its educator.”<sup>66</sup> For him both French and English masonries were good examples for GLY.

We may congratulate the English, we may admire the French. French freemasonry is in geographical terms closer than English. We are in constant contact with it. We have on its territory a joint lodge “General Peigné”. We co-operate with it in the convention of A.M.I., and at every step we witness its sympathies for our institution and our country.<sup>67</sup>

Branković’s speech was in full harmony with the foreign policy orientation of King Alexander Karageorgevich and of Yugoslav governments in the

<sup>63</sup> “Još jedno priznanje naše Velike lože”, *Šestar* 1–2 (Jan.–Feb. 1931), 45.

<sup>64</sup> Ljubomir Tomašić was the second grand warden of GLJ in 1925–30. He was a lawyer, an expert on maritime law, briefly the minister of agriculture in 1933, and a senator in the 1930s. *Who’s Who in Central and East-Europe 1935/36* (Zurich: The Central European Times, 1937), 1093. In 1940, Tomašić became the sovereign grand commander of the Supreme Council of Yugoslavia; in other words, he became the head of the red freemasonry in Yugoslavia.

<sup>65</sup> “Smotra u organizaciji Vel. Lože ‘Jugoslavija’”, *Šestar* 1–2 (Jan.–Feb. 1931), 3.

<sup>66</sup> “Engleska, Francuska Masonerija i mi”, in D[amjan]. J. B[ranković], *Govori starešine lože Pobratim* (Belgrade: Planeta, 1931?), 160.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 163.

early 1930s. As long as the official policy of the Kingdom had a pro-French orientation, the same could be expected from the Grand of Lodge of Yugoslavia. Regardless, there was also an evident pro-British line in Yugoslav freemasonry.

It is indicative that the official organ of the Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia, *Šestar*, published an unusually lengthy pro-British report in 1933, one of the longest articles ever published in this journal. The illustrated report covers 18 pages, which is more than half of all pages of its issues 6-8. It was written by the retired Yugoslav diplomat Stanoje Mihajlović (1882–1946)<sup>68</sup> who, in July 1933, attended the ceremony of the opening of the Masonic Peace Memorial, the central temple of UGLE in London. The celebration was attended by representatives of only 9 grand lodges (“Lessing” from Czechoslovakia, Austria, France – GLN, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, Sweden, the Netherlands and Yugoslavia).

Mihajlović wrote his article with the clear ambition of convincing the Yugoslav freemasons that English freemasonry was the central European freemasonry, emphasising its impact on the British society. As he pointed out: “We need to realise that an institution to which the flower of a great nation belongs and that has been headed for 150 years by members of the Royal House means a lot not only for its country but for the whole world.”<sup>69</sup>

### *Plan to make the Duke of York an honorary grand officer of GLY*

In October 1934, King Alexander of Yugoslavia was assassinated in Marseilles. His murder may be seen as the symbolic end of the special Franco-Yugoslav alliance.<sup>70</sup> As the King’s British biographer noticed: “France was considered to have done but little for Serbia after the war, but the King never wavered in his sentimental devotion to the country for whom his father had fought in 1870, to the France he had been brought up to admire. In a way, Alexander, always reading the French classics, lived with the French. He had become almost French.”<sup>71</sup>

Since Alexander’s son Peter was still a child in 1934, he was succeeded by a three-member regency presided by his first cousin Prince Regent Paul (Prince Regent from October 1934 until 27 March 1941). The prince was in close family relations with the British royal family. His wife Princess Olga of Greece was

<sup>68</sup> Stanoje Mihajlović was a former minister of Yugoslavia to Tirana (1928–1929), and had previously served as the counsellor in Yugoslav legations in Athens, Prague, Berlin and Warsaw. He was retired in 1931. AJ, Fonds 334 (Personal Files) – 175.

<sup>69</sup> Br.: Dr St[anoje]. M[ihajlović], “Izveštaj sa svečanosti prilikom otvaranja Masonskog Hrama Mira u Londonu”, *Šestar* 6–8 (1933), 95.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Vojislav Pavlović, “L’Attentat de Marseille 1934. La fin symbolique d’une alliance atypique”, in Bataković, ed., *La Serbie et la France*, 575–595.

<sup>71</sup> Stephen Graham, *Alexander of Yugoslavia. Strong Man of the Balkans*. London: Cassel and Co., 1938, 216.

the sister of Princess Marina. In 1934, the latter married the Duke of Kent, who thus became Prince Paul's brother-in-law. His best man at the wedding with Princess Olga in October 1923 was the Duke of York.<sup>72</sup> Prince Paul studied at Oxford in 1913–14 and in 1918–20, and had numerous friends and acquaintances from the ranks of the British élite and aristocracy. If King Alexander “became almost French”, Prince Paul may be said to have been strongly influenced by British manners.

King Alexander had demonstrated affection and sympathies for the Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia, and the leadership of the grand lodge was very thankful to him for that support. When he was killed Masonic lodges in Paris, Zagreb and Belgrade organised special commemorative meetings usually reserved for deceased members of the Craft only.<sup>73</sup> His first cousin was, however, more inclined to Rotary Clubs and in May 1938 he became an honorary governor for life of Yugoslav Rotary clubs.<sup>74</sup> However, his royal relatives in Britain traditionally held the highest offices in UGLE, and in the recollections of his marshal of the court, Milan Antić, Prince Paul had “sympathies and a very good opinion on English freemasonry as a serious, constructive and influential organisation headed by the members of the English Royal House. But, he did not have a good opinion of the French system of freemasonry to which the Yugoslav freemasonry belonged.”<sup>75</sup> The two other members of the Regency were accused by Catholic officials of being freemasons. In May 1935, Archbishop of Zagreb Bauer accused co-regents I. Perović and R. Stankovich that they acted “in the interest of Freemasonry”, and even the London *Times* mentioned the allegation.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Neil Balfour and Sally Mackay, *Paul of Yugoslavia. Britain's Maligned Friend* (Winnipeg: Friesen Printers, 1996 [1st ed. 1980]), 34.

<sup>73</sup> The commemorative meetings of Yugoslav freemasons dedicated to the late King were held by the Zagreb lodges (12 Oct. 1934), and by the Grand Lodge in Belgrade (16 Oct.). At the meeting in Belgrade a special address of Vladimir Čorović was read. It was later published in Serbo-Croatian and French in *Šestar*. Fr.: Dr. V. Č., “Le Roi Alexandre”, *Šestar* 9–10 (1934), 177–178. \_

<sup>74</sup> *Beogradske opštinske novine* 5–6 (1938), 406–407.

<sup>75</sup> Statement of Milan Antić given to the “Institute” on 18 April 1952. The “Institute” was a cover created by the Yugoslav Secret Police in order to facilitate the gathering of information from Serbian/Yugoslav pre-war élites. AJ, Fonds 100, f. 15 – 478.

<sup>76</sup> “The Skupština meets”, *The Times*, 4 June 1935, p. 15e. As far as the links of the Yugoslav regency with freemasonry are concerned, one can find Masonic sources that may confirm membership in the Craft for Radenko Stankovich only. He was grand officer of the Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia in 1919, when it was established, and performed the duty of “expert”. Georges Weifert à tout les G.:L.: & G.:O.: de l'univers, Belgrade, no. 101, 20 November 1919, LMF UGLE, “Croatia, Serbia...”, file 1. Some sources suggest that Stankovich was later excluded from the Craft. Testimony of Ljubica Anastasijević, former administrative secretary of GLY, to the “Institute”, Belgrade, 28 March 1952, AJ, Fonds 100, f. 15 – 475.

From 1935 a growing German influence was obvious in Yugoslavia. The government of Milan Stojadinović (1935–1939) promoted German economic penetration into Yugoslavia, underestimating German political influence that would result from it.<sup>77</sup> By 1938 both exports from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to the so-called Greater Germany and imports from that area reached 50%.<sup>78</sup> This economic penetration was followed by German influence on Yugoslav society. Therefore in the late 1930s German and British cultural influence clashed in Yugoslavia, while the previously dominant French influence was in gradual decline.

In April 1934, the new leadership of GLY was elected. Douchan Militchevitch, a wealthy hotel owner from Belgrade, became the new grand master. Two Belgrade historians also became important persons in the grand lodge. Prof. Vladimir Ćorović became deputy grand master of GLY. In 1935/36 he was also the rector of the University of Belgrade. The other historian, Viktor Novak, was also professor at the University of Belgrade. He became grand secretary of GLY. Both of them performed these functions until GLY was forced to self-suspend its activities on 1 August 1940. Ćorović and Novak were the key advocates and founding fathers of Yugoslavism – the idea that Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were a single nation consisting of three tribes that would unite in a single Yugoslav nation, in a similar fashion as Italians had done. For the two of them, and for many other Yugoslav freemasons, the concept of Yugoslavism became a kind of civil religion.<sup>79</sup>

Militchevitch had multiple ties with the Anglo-American world. He was in Washington in 1912 to ask for the recognition of the Southern Jurisdiction, and he sent a letter of thanks on behalf of the Yugoslav freemasons to the American President Woodrow Wilson for his support to the principle of national self-determination.<sup>80</sup> He also proved to be instrumental in efforts to make the reorientation of Yugoslav freemasonry.

The issues of *Šestar* reveal a growing interest in and an increased inclination to English freemasonry from about 1935. Thus issues 7–8 for 1935 open with greetings to the British monarch George V on the occasion of his silver

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<sup>77</sup> John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia. Twice there was a Country* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 184–186.

<sup>78</sup> Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453*, 600.

<sup>79</sup> Marković, *Jedan vek velike lože*, 91–98. Ćorović and Novak published or edited some key books promoting the concept of Yugoslavism: Viktor Novak, ed., *Antologija jugoslovenske misli i narodnog jedinstva (1390–1930)* (Belgrade 1930); Vladimir Ćorović, *Istorija Jugoslavije* (Belgrade: Narodno delo, 1933).

<sup>80</sup> President Wilson replied to this letter on 22 April 1919 and Militchevitch copied the letter and sent it to the former Serbian Prime Minister N. Pashitch (Pašić). D. Militchevitch to N. Pashitch, Paris, 25 April 1919, Arhiv Srpske akademija nauka i umetnosti [Archives of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts; hereafter ASANU] 11704. The letter has been reproduced in Marković, *Jedan vek velike lože*, 60.



anniversary, and issues 3–4 for 1936 open with pages dedicated to the death of the British king. On that occasion both the grand master of GLY, and his deputy Prof. Vladimir Ćorović sent their condolences via telegram to UGLE.<sup>81</sup> Even the main Belgrade daily *Politika* published the telegram of GLY which was sent to UGLE, next to the official proclamation of mourning by the Yugoslav Court.<sup>82</sup> The last issue in 1936 begins with the reply of King Edward VIII to the declaration of loyalty submitted to him by the English freemasons.

There was a growing anti-Masonic campaign in Yugoslavia, which was exacerbated by the personal animosity between the principal officers of GLY and Anton Korošec, the leader of the Slovene People's Party and a Catholic priest. His party was one of the pillars of Yugoslavism. Therefore in various combinations for ruling political coalitions in Yugoslavia his presence proved to be almost inevitable. He was the only non-Serb in the interwar period who briefly occupied the post of the Prime Minister of Yugoslavia (1928–29) and between June 1935 and August 1938 he served as the Minister of Interior Affairs. Korošec and GLY belonged to the same camp in terms of Yugoslavism; however, they completely disagreed on issues of clericalism. When Korošec became the interior minister he did whatever he could to disrupt the work of GLY, including banning its journals, and he even prevented the organisation of its annual assembly in 1936.<sup>83</sup>

In addition to internal opponents, the Yugoslav freemasonry also always had in mind the fate of the Italian freemasonry, which had been banned since 1925. There was a fear that the same could happen to GLY as well. Since the Masonic congress in Belgrade in 1926, the Italian Fascist press viewed GLY as an enemy of Italy and encouraged anti-Masonic propaganda in Yugoslavia. To prevent being banned, and to make GLY more resistant to internal pressures, a group of grand officers of GLY, headed by its grand master Militchevitch, devised a plan to link GLY with UGLE.

Undoubtedly the French freemasonry was very popular and widely respected among Serbian freemasons. It was, however, clear since 1934/35 that it could not protect Yugoslav freemasons from clerical attacks. The English freemasonry had two special advantages. 1. it was traditionally religiously neutral and never undertook anti-religious actions, and 2. it was closely connected with the British royal house. Therefore, some leaders of GLY concluded that formal ties between the two freemasonries, supported by close family relations of the two dynasties, could facilitate the work of the Craft in Yugoslavia.

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<sup>81</sup> "Smrt engleskoga kralja", *Šestor* 3–4 (1936), 33–35.

<sup>82</sup> *Politika*, 23 January 1936.

<sup>83</sup> See the new-year epistle of the grand master D. Militchevitch from January 1937, *Šestor* 7–10 (1939), 132–133.

An idea appeared in 1936 that Albert, the Duke of York, the best man of Prince Paul and godfather to young King Peter II, could become an honorary grand master or an honorary grand officer of GLY. At that time Albert was the brother of the British King Edward VIII (January–December 1936). In June 1922, the Prince of York was in Belgrade when he represented his father King George V as best man at the wedding of King Alexander of Yugoslavia and Princess Maria of Romania, the great-granddaughter of Queen Victoria. On October 21, 1923, he attended the christening of Prince Peter, subsequently King Peter II of Yugoslavia, representing as proxy King George V. The next day he attended another wedding in Belgrade, this time as the best man of Prince Paul.<sup>84</sup>

From 1901 the grand master of UGLE was Prince Albert, Duke of Connaught and Streathern (1850–1942). The previous grand master of UGLE had been Albert, Prince of Wales (from 1874 to 1901). When Albert ascended the British throne in January 1901 as Edward VII he resigned his position of grand master, and was succeeded as grand master by his brother Prince Albert from 1901 until 1939. The deputy grand master of UGLE from 1926 until 1935 was Colonel F. S. W. Cornwallis.<sup>85</sup>

The Yugoslav grand master Douchan Militchevitch was a regular visitor of the French resort town of Vichy. During his stay there, in May 1936, he wrote to his grand secretary Viktor Novak on the plans that he had previously discussed with another officer of GLY, barrister Savko Dukanac. He wrote “that matters should get straight in Belgrade as soon as possible”, and that an audience with Prince Paul should be requested for that purpose. He hoped that his deputy Prof. Vladimir Ćorović could have the audience with the Prince. However, Ćorović had previously submitted his resignation to the position of deputy grand master of GLY. Therefore, Militchevitch asked Novak to try to convince Ćorović to revoke his resignation and then to go and ask Prince Paul “that we may take a step in London to get consent for the election of an honorary grand master”. He clarified the motivation behind this action: “I believe that as a motivation for the whole matter one should present that, though we are well aware of the enormous value of the Prince’s family ties, we still hold that in the moment of danger coming from Italy, our relations with the English freemasonry through the Duke of York could also be of unquestionable importance.”<sup>86</sup> He also had in mind that the grand master of UGLE, the Duke of Connaught, was

<sup>84</sup> Dušan Babac, “The Houses of Windsor and Karageorgevich – From Foreigners to Relatives”, in Markovich, ed., *British-Serbian Relations*, 238; Dušan Babac, *Alexander I. The Knightly King* (Belgrade: Evro Book, 2018), 151; Balfour and Mackay, *Paul of Yugoslavia*, 54–56.

<sup>85</sup> *Gould’s History of Freemasonry*, vol. III, 118–119.

<sup>86</sup> Douchan [Militchevitch] to Viktor [Novak], Vichy, 20 May 1936, ASANU, Viktor Novak Papers, *Masonica*.

in his 80s, and that the Duke of York, as the brother of the British king, would one day become the grand master of UGLE. The Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia had received an invitation to send its representatives to attend the installation of the new grand master of the Grand Lodge of Scotland in November, and the new head of Scottish freemasons was to become the Duke of York. Since the celebrations were to go on for several days, the Yugoslav grand master thought that it would be “the most adequate that our envoys, on that occasion, officially notify him on our election and ask for the consent of the Duke of York.”<sup>87</sup>

In April 1936, the first letter with some sort of initiative was sent to UGLE, since on April 10, 1936, the grand secretary of UGLE confirmed the receipt of Mihajlović's letter and replied: “I am sure you fully appreciate that the request is one upon which it is not possible for me to anticipate what the reply of H.R.H. the Duke of York will be.”<sup>88</sup>

On June 29, 1936, Militchevitch cabled to Novak from Paris that Colville Smith would receive him on July 3.<sup>89</sup> On July 6, the grand master of GLY sent a special letter with additional explanations to Smith. He emphasised the fact that the Duke of York had acted as the first witness at the wedding of King Alexander and as godfather at the christening of Prince Peter, later King Peter II. He explained that in the traditions of the Serbian Orthodox Church a child's godfather was treated as a relative and a second father, and after the death of King Alexander the Duke of York had become the “natural protector and father of the young King” which explains the “enormous popularity” that he enjoys “throughout the whole of our country”. He clarified that GLY was “greatly attached to the principle of Monarchy in general and to the Royal House of Karageorgevitch in particular”, and finally, in line with all of that, he proposed that the Duke should be asked “to honour our Masonry by accepting the title of honorary Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Jugoslavia”. He asked UGLE to first ascertain if the Duke would be able to accept this proposal.<sup>90</sup>

The next day he reported to Viktor Novak from London that C. Smith had “accepted to mediate.” He optimistically assessed: “It seems that only formal reasons regarding the royal house and its members could make this issue take less than a favourable course among those in charge in the government.”<sup>91</sup> The

<sup>87</sup> Douchan [Militchevitch] to Viktor [Novak], Vichy, 31 May 1936, *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Grand Secretary of UGLE to St. Mihajlovic, 10 April 1936, *Letter Book X3* (19<sup>th</sup> May 1936 – 20<sup>th</sup> July 1936), LMF UGLE.

<sup>89</sup> Cable of D. Militchevitch to Viktor Novak sent from Paris on 29 June 1936, ASANU, Viktor Novak Papers, *Masonica*. On that occasion he demanded to be urgently informed on when Stanoje Mihajlović would come to London since he needed him as his translator.

<sup>90</sup> D. Militchevitch to Colville Smith, 6 July 1936, LMF UGLE, “Croatia, Serbia...”, file 1.

<sup>91</sup> Douchan [Milichvitch] to Viktor [Novak], London, Hotel Russell, 7 July 1936, ASANU, Viktor Novak Papers, *Masonica*.

final answer came in September when the grand secretary of UGLE informed Militchevitch that the Duke of York had given “very careful consideration to the request”, but:

He desires that I should inform you that while he much appreciates the suggestion which you have made, he feels he must excuse himself from accepting the title of Honorary Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia, as it is not customary for members of the British Royal House to be connected with organisations in Foreign Countries in the manner indicated.<sup>92</sup>

In this way the plan to approach the Duke of York in November in Edinburgh failed. GLY nonetheless sent its representative. It was one among only nine continental European masonries that had sent its representative to attend the bicentenary of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, and it once again sent Stanoje Mihajlović, who had also attended the celebrations in 1933. He was a grand officer of GLY, but not one of its top-ranking officers. Since the action had already failed there was no point in sending someone with a higher rank. His report was again published in *Šestar*, but not before 1938.

In 1937, the Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia openly opposed the ratification of the Concordat between the Holy See and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. That was the only political issue in the interwar period that united the Yugoslav freemasons into a single front. In the struggle against the Concordat GLY found itself in a heterogeneous group that included the Serbian Orthodox Church and some opposition political parties. The government had to yield and revoke the agreement. In that way GLY made a bitter enemy of the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia, although its members made up 37.5% of the country’s population.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, this activity of GLY was also viewed very unfavourably by the Regency and Prince Paul since they endorsed the Concordat agreement. GLY’s reasoning during the crises was deeply entrenched in the French traditions of anticlericalism, and it was rather different from the ideals of the English freemasonry that the Craft should not interfere in any religious issues.

The following year Mihajlović’s report from Scotland was published in *Šestar*. He was particularly impressed that the Scottish freemasonry had the blessing of the church, and that in St. Giles’ Cathedral in Edinburgh the service was attended “by brethren only, and those who officiated were only priests –

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<sup>92</sup> Grand Secretary of the UGLE to D. Militchevitch, 23 September 1936, *Letter Book Y3* (20<sup>th</sup> July 1936 – 30<sup>th</sup> September 1936), LMF UGLE.

<sup>93</sup> For more information on the position of GLY in this conflict see Marković, *Jedan vek Velike lože*, 126–130. According to the census of 1931, 48.7% of the Yugoslav population was Christian Orthodox, 37.45% was Roman Catholic, 11.2% was Muslim, 1.7 was Protestant, and 0.49% was Jewish.

masters".<sup>94</sup> On 29 November 1936, the Duke of York was installed as the grand master of Scotland, and Mihajlović attended the subsequent reception. The grand master spoke with a few delegates only, including him, and Mihajlović reported their conversation in the Yugoslav Masonic journal:

He addressed me with: "Oh, we already know each other from London (he was referring to 1933). I am glad to see you again." I thanked him for his token of appreciation and I congratulated him on behalf of one of the youngest Grand Lodges for the honour of having become the Grand Master of one of the oldest. "You are young, but active", the Duke replied. "Pass my regards to your grand master and all the brethren." It goes without saying that this attention was addressed to our Freemasonry irrespectively of my person.<sup>95</sup>

Mihajlović, in his report, also expressed some of his more general political views concerning European Freemasonry: "Since it is no pure coincidence that the happiest and the most advanced countries are precisely those where Freemasonry is the most developed, and also that it is equally persecuted both by fascism and communism. Freemasonry fights both of these post-war psychoses."<sup>96</sup> Mihajlović explained: "We have been fighting both of these extremisms since it makes no difference to us if we are being pushed to break our neck by jumping into the abyss from the left or from the right." To a European liberal and freemason in the second half of the 1930s Britain indeed looked like the perfect model country in which neither left- nor right-wing totalitarianism was able to take hold, and freemasonry in the Isles seemed stronger than ever, particularly in comparison with continental freemasonries where grand lodges tended to be banned one by one.

On 12 January 1937, the honorary grand master *ad vitam* of GLY and the sovereign grand commander of the Supreme Councils of Serbia and Yugoslavia since 1912 Georges Weifert died. On that occasion GLY received condolences from various Masonic bodies. They reveal the limits of its efforts for reorientation. Although the list of telegrams starts with the one sent by UGLE, this cable of Colville Smith simply mentions a "very great loss".<sup>97</sup> The telegram of Arthur Groussier, in the capacity of grand master of the Supreme Council of GOF, was of a different kind. It insisted on the links between the two freemasonries that the deceased grand master had symbolised. "At this sorrowful moment which brings into mourning Universal Freemasonry, we are in our hearts with you,

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<sup>94</sup> Br. Stanoje Mihaljević, "Izveštaj o proslavi 200-godišnjice Škotske velike lože", *Šestar* 3–4 (1938), 50. Mihajlović's surname was misspelled in *Šestar* as "Mihaljević".

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* 51.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* 52–53.

<sup>97</sup> Colville Smith to D. Militchevitch, London, 26 April 1937, *Šestar* 4–6 (1937), 71.

and we feel even more the power of the relations uniting our two Obediences.”<sup>98</sup> Finally, Louis Doignon, grand master of GLF, expressed special condolences at a session of AMI, and *Bulletin*, the organ of GLF, published Weifert’s obituary.<sup>99</sup> Obviously things had formally changed since the 1920s and UGLE was now seen as the most important grand lodge in terms of precedence. In symbolic terms, however, the fading spectacle of the Franco-Yugoslav alliance had not yet reached a symbolic level. “Immortal France” still inhabited the imagination of many Yugoslav freemasons and the elusive Franco-Yugoslav alliance was still on the minds of some influential French freemasons.

### *Efforts to establish an Anglo-Yugoslav lodge*

The year of 1938 was one of the worst in the history of European freemasonry. Over the previous year one bright moment happened for the continental freemasonry: at a referendum held on 28 November 1937, the Swiss voters had rejected the proposal to ban freemasonry in their country with more than two thirds of votes. However, in 1938/39 four European grand lodges were banned one by one: the Grand Lodge of Austria following the Anschluss in March 1938; in November 1938, a presidential decree ordered that Masonic associations in Poland were to be dissolved: and, the two grand lodges in Czechoslovakia were banned following the dismemberment of that country. On St. John’s Day, 24 June 1939, GLY held a special meeting dedicated to “the brethren without a roof”, in other words to the brethren from Czechoslovakia, Germany, Italy and Poland. The address from the meeting was published in *Šestar* and was another clear sign of the anti-Nazi and anti-Fascist positions of GLY.<sup>100</sup>

In April 1938 grand master Militchevitch sent an urgent appeal to UGLE. He was very worried that in the last few years “one Obedience after another disappeared”, and he insisted that many masons were convinced that this could have been avoided had there been in the very beginning “a reasonable and decided reaction from the part of other Obediences throughout the world”. He mentioned that GLY was under the strong pressure of the Catholic Church through its 70 periodicals in Yugoslavia, but that “for the moment” there was “no imminent danger for Masonry in Yugoslavia”. He also pointed out that the temporary armistice should not deceive anyone. At the end, he appealed to UGLE to take part “in the masonic conferences having for purpose to find out

<sup>98</sup> Arthur Groussier to the Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia, Paris, 1 April 1937, *Šestar* 4–6 (1937), 71–72.

<sup>99</sup> *Bulletin de la Grande Loge de France* 14 (15 March 1937). It was also published in *Šestar* 4–6 (1937), 86.

<sup>100</sup> Br.: Mo Br.: “Zdravica braći bez krova”, *Šestar* 5–6 (1939), 71–73.



the means and ways for the protection of masonic Obediences in danger”.<sup>101</sup> In December he sent a rather more pessimistic letter to grand secretary White in which he warns: “the anti-masonic movement, encouraged with the last successes, (4 Grand Lodges were extinguished in the short period of one year) has suddenly increased here. The great anti-masonic wave of Central Europe is growing rapidly and it is now reaching even our shores.”<sup>102</sup>

In Yugoslavia, the proponents of the reorientation to UGLE were still very active, even after their failure in 1936 to get the Duke of York to become the past grand master of GLY. It was precisely in the gloomy year of 1938 that Mihajlović’s report on the bicentenary celebrations of GLS was published. By that time the Duke of York had already become the king of Britain more than a year ago and therefore the fraternal regards that he had sent to the Yugoslav freemasonry turned out to be the regards of the British monarch. Therefore the publication of the report in *Šestar* with the personal messages of the Duke of York/the British King to Yugoslav freemasons had the clear political aim of fostering ties not only between GLY and UGLE, but also between Britain and Yugoslavia.

The last official visit of GLY to London was made in July 1939, during the installation of the new grand master of UGLE – the Duke of Kent. The Yugoslav envoy was again, for the third time, Stanoje Mihajlović. He was received on three occasions by Lord Harewood, pro grand master of UGLE (1935–42). Harewood married the daughter of George V, and was thus a brother-in-law to Edward VIII, George VI, and the Duke of Kent. Lord Harewood demonstrated a keen interest in the key persons of the Yugoslav Freemasonry, but was also interested in GLY’s relations with political parties and the church, in the reasons of GLY’s critical condition, and in relations of the grand lodge in Belgrade with the Yugoslav Crown. He wanted to know more about the relations of GLY with AMI, and also if there were any communists among the members of the Craft. Mihajlović himself raised the question of an English lodge in Yugoslavia and Harewood agreed to the idea. The Yugoslav envoy claims that his host expected that the Yugoslav Grand Lodge would become the leader of the three Balkan freemasonries (Bulgaria, Greece and Yugoslavia). Later, Mihajlović also discussed all of these issues with UGLE’s grand secretary Sidney White, who expressed hopes that GLY would redefine its relations with AMI. This last remark may have been a reference to the efforts made by AMI in which GLY, GL “Alpina”, and other continental grand lodges took part, and which aimed at persuading UGLE to regularise GLF, but also opening up communication between regular and other grand lodges in Europe in a situation of great upheavals.

On 19 July 1939, King George VI, in his capacity as past grand master, installed his brother the Duke of Kent to the position of grand master of UGLE.

<sup>101</sup> Militevitch to Sidney White, 22 April 1938, LMF UGLE, “Croatia, Serbia...”, file 1.

<sup>102</sup> Militevitch to Sidney White, 8 December 1938, *ibid.*

The ceremony was attended by more than 10,000 freemasons.<sup>103</sup> From that moment the grand master of UGLE was the brother-in-law of the Yugoslav Prince Regent. It was on the same day that King George VI awarded Prince Paul the highest British decoration and the Prince became Knight Companion of the Order of Garter.<sup>104</sup> The Duke of Kent as grand master of UGLE (1939–42) seems not to have been equally enthusiastic regarding freemasonry as his two elder brothers, King Edward VIII and King George VI, had been. The latter is considered “the most earnest and dedicated Royal Freemason of the first half of the century.”<sup>105</sup>

Ten European delegations were invited, and from the Balkans there were representatives of two grand lodges: from Yugoslavia and Greece. Mihajlović even had the extraordinary opportunity of speaking with the British king. In the report published in *Šestar* he stated the following:

One of the greatest cares of our late grand master Douchan Militchevitch was to establish the closest possible relations with the United Grand Lodge of England. He faced many difficulties in that path, but his tireless work, especially after the visit that we made in 1936, bore unexpected fruit. Ever since 1933, the year when I established permanent contact with the Gr[and]. Lodge of England, I have noticed a substantially increasing interest in our Freemasonry. But this year’s reception and conversations in London have gone beyond all my expectations. Even in minor details I was given such tokens of appreciation that everyone noticed it, and the way how H. H. the King and Lord Harewood acted had the character of a real distinction. It is clear that my personality played no role in that. I was for them only a representative of the Yugoslav Freemasonry which they have begun to appreciate very highly. Now, and perhaps only now, we may say that the doors of English Freemasonry are fully open to us and that we have entered their hearts.<sup>106</sup>

Conspicuously enough, this whole report was published in the last issue of *Šestar*, printed in October 1939, and dedicated almost completely to the memory of the Yugoslav grand master Douchan Militchevitch who died on 30

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<sup>103</sup> “Head of English Freemasonry. Duke of Kent as grand master”, *The Times*, 20 July 1939, p. 16b.

<sup>104</sup> Balfour and Mackay, *Paul of Yugoslavia*, 179. “Prince Paul a Knight of the Garter”, *The Times*, 20 July 1939, p. 15b. There are no preserved references in the documents of GLY that would indicate that Prince Paul was a freemason in GLY. UGLE confirmed to the Grand Lodge of Croatia that members of the Yugoslav royal dynasty (King Alexander, Prince Paul and King Peter II) were not initiated in UGLE. Reply of Diane Clements, director of LMF UGLE (no date, and based on an enquiry sent to UGLE by the Grand Lodge of Croatia in May 2009). LMF UGLE, folder, „Yugoslavia G. L.”

<sup>105</sup> Paul Calderwood, “The Royal Connection in the Twentieth Century”, in John S. Wade (ed.), *Reflections on 300 Years of Freemasonry*. London: Lewis Masonic, 2017, 429–430.

<sup>106</sup> Br. St[anoje]. M[ihajlović], “Instalacija Nj. V. Vojvode od Kenta...” [Installation of H. H. the Duke of Kent], *Šestar* 7–10 (1939), 140.

August 1939.<sup>107</sup> In that way good relations with UGLE were defined as the Masonic legacy of the second Yugoslav grand master to his Yugoslav brethren.

The report in *Šestar* may also have been slightly surprising for some members of the Craft in Yugoslavia. The whole action of reorientation was largely engineered by the grand master himself, and even some highly placed grand officers of GLY did not know enough about it. It is for this reason, that after Militchevitch's death, a prominent Croatian freemason Prof. Franjo Hanaman asked the grand secretary of GLY Viktor Novak if he could deliver speech at a commemorative meeting of Hanaman's lodge in Zagreb since "Bros. in Z[agreb] believe that Bro. Douchan has informed me on everything, but it is not like that, since in recent years I have not heard anything from him, and that includes steps that he has undertaken with G[rand] L[odge] in London in terms of the reorientation of our Freemasonry."<sup>108</sup>

Mihajlović continued his correspondence about the Anglo-Yugoslav lodge with UGLE. He replied on December 10, 1939, to White in the capacity of the I grand warden of GLY that the members of GLY's Board of General Purposes had difficulties to meet due to grave international events, but they finally had a meeting and his proposal "for the creation of an English-speaking Lodge in Beograd was unanimously and enthusiastically accepted, and the hope was expressed on all hands that this step will contribute towards the strengthening of the existing relations between our Lodge and the cradle of the world's Masonry, the G[rand]. L[odge]. of England".<sup>109</sup>

In March 1940, the deputy grand master of GLY Ćorović, accompanied by Dragan Militchevitch,<sup>110</sup> editor of pro-British journals in Belgrade who had been one of 352 Serbian boys educated in Britain during the Great War, visited Paris and London. Ćorović's teaching assistant in the 1930s Jeremija Mitrović (1910–2011) claimed, half a century later, based on personal communication with him, that, on that occasion, Ćorović and Militchevitch paid visits to the French President Albert Lebrun and to Winston Churchill. He

<sup>107</sup> The cover page has the title in Serbian and French "A la memoire du † F. Douchan Militchevitch", *Šestar* 7–10 (1939), 79–150. This issue is undated but it was published in October 1939 since the last information it contains refers to the events of 3–4 October.

<sup>108</sup> Franjo Hanaman to Br. Viktor [Novak], Zagreb, 27 September, 1939, ASANU, Viktor Novak Papers, *Masonica*, no. 14474 (Viktor Novak himself delivered a speech at the commemorative meeting of Zagreb lodges held on 4 Oct. 1940), *Šestar* 7–10 (1939), 110.

<sup>109</sup> Mihajlović to White, Belgrade, 10 December 1939, LMF UGLE, "Croatia, Serbia...", file 2.

<sup>110</sup> Also spelled Dragan Milićević. The archives of UGLE keep a personal card of "Dragan Militchévitch, BA Oxon.". Among the numerous affiliations listed in his card are: Secretary of the Belgrade Chamber of Industry, member of the Committee of the Yugoslav-British Chamber of Commerce, member of the Permanent Central Opium Board of the League of Nations in Geneva. LMF UGLE, "Croatia, Serbia...", file 2. Cf. *Who's Who in Central and East-Europe 1935/36*, 744.

also claimed that the visit was made “not without the knowledge of some politicians and the Prince Regent”, and that their visit also had to do with some Masonic issues.<sup>111</sup>

From 30 August 1939, GLY had no grand master and Ćorović was considered as the most serious candidate. The lodges in Zagreb feared the potential reactions of clerical and nationalistic circles in Croatia if Ćorović was elected. He was known as a staunch advocate of Yugoslavism, and he opposed the way that the Serbo-Croatian Agreement of 1939 was made. In the end, grand secretary of GLY, Viktor Novak, himself a staunch Yugoslav as well as an ethnic Croat, mediated and convinced Ćorović to revoke his candidacy.<sup>112</sup> Instead a neutral candidate, Andreja (Andra) Dinić (1873–1951), was elected in April 1940. He was a retired judge of the Court of Cassation, and a former master of the Belgrade lodge “Schumadija.” It could be that the visit to London and UGLE was also connected with the issues of the new leadership of GLY. Whatever the case was, Ćorović continued to direct GLY’s major activities in 1940, even after the election of the new grand master.

In London two envoys from Belgrade were supposed to be received by Lord Harewood, pro-grand master of UGLE. Since he had to leave London he asked Sidney White, Grand Secretary of UGLE, to receive them.<sup>113</sup> UGLE had a translation of news reports of January 13, 1940, from the German press stating: “The Yugoslav Press unanimously demands the extermination of Freemasonry because of an article published by the Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia on the occasion of the declaration of the Prime Minister of Yugoslavia.”<sup>114</sup> Therefore the urgent situation of the Yugoslav freemasonry was certainly discussed. From Militchevitch’s letter to White one finds out that they also very much discussed the question of the Anglo-Yugoslav lodge. White announced that there would be a British visitor in Belgrade and supplied Militchevitch with Emulation rituals. What is exactly hidden behind the following words of Militchevitch one cannot positively know: “I wish, without the slightest desire to be indiscreet – to tell you that everybody (you know what I mean) is extremely satisfied with our visit.

<sup>111</sup> Jeremija Mitrović, “Vladimir Ćorović. Prilozi za biografiju”, *Spomenik [SANU]* 131 (Odeljenje istorijskih nauka no. 7, 1992), 256–257. Ćorović prepared a report on this visit. His house in Belgrade was searched by the Gestapo in April 1941, but the report was not found. His daughter burnt the report afterwards to prevent the Gestapo from finding it, and she was proven right since the German authorities searched Ćorović’s house on another ten occasions. *Ibid.* 257.

<sup>112</sup> Vladimir Žepić to Br.: Dr. Viktor Novak, Zagreb, 29 March 1940. ASANU, Viktor Novak Papers, *Masonica*.

<sup>113</sup> Harewood to Grand Secretary, London, 7 March 1940, LMF UGLE, “Croatia, Serbia...”, file 2.

<sup>114</sup> LMF UGLE, “Croatia, Serbia...”, file 2.

Our brotherhood expected with impatience our return to hear the news.”<sup>115</sup> Was this impatience only about the new lodge, or about some other projects as well, one cannot positively conclude.

One could assume that the new lodge was supposed to be launched in the autumn of 1940.<sup>116</sup> That proved impossible since the pro-governmental and pro-German daily *Vreme* started a virulent anti-Masonic campaign.<sup>117</sup> The government of Dragiša Cvetković, when it was formed in 1939, had 4 freemasons in its ranks, and by the summer of 1940 two were still there. The prime minister was under the pressure of the Third Reich to ban freemasonic activities. On July 8, 1940, a pronounced freemason and a very dedicated member of the Craft Stanoje Mihaldžić was relieved of his duty as minister of interior affairs and the prime minister took that tenure as well. In early July Vladimir Ćorović participated in the preparation of a brochure in response to anti-Masonic attacks, and the grand secretary Prof. Viktor Novak even wanted to ask some 30 to 50 prominent members of GLY to give him permission to publicly disclose their membership and then to ask the public opinion “if our activity is subversive or has it been pure and patriotic to such an extent that it deserves only recognition and gratitude of the nation!”<sup>118</sup>

There was no time either for Ćorović’s pamphlet or Novak’s action. In late July, the British minister in Belgrade Campbell was informed by the Yugoslav Prime Minister Dragiša Cvetković that Germany had requested the ban of the Yugoslav freemasonry and that he had advised GLY to suspend its activities.<sup>119</sup> In the end Vladimir Ćorović was informed that the Ministry of

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<sup>115</sup> D. Militchevitch to Brother White, Belgrade, 6 April 1940, LMF UGLE, “Croatia, Serbia...”, file 2. Militchevitch thanked White for his hospitality and also for having been “among the first of my countrymen to have been admitted to your Masonic community”. It is not clear if this indicates that he was also affiliated to some lodge of UGLE or that he simply attended several lodge meetings.

<sup>116</sup> The prominent Belgrade freemason Djura Djurović left the following testimony about this lodge: “Before the war I was in a group that was making preparations, on the basis of the permission of the Grand Lodge, to establish an Anglo-Yugoslav lodge that would have meetings in English.” Djura Djurović, “Iskustva iz robijaškog života. Izveštaj Br. Luteru Smitu 33°” [Experiences from prison life. Report to Bro. Luther Smith 33°, 1967?], Arhiv Srbije [Archives of Serbia; hereafter AS], BIA, file of Djura Djurović no. 720-01-16556, p. 134.

<sup>117</sup> See e.g. Dr. Danilo Gregorić, “Masoni” [Masons], *Vreme*, 22 July 1940. Gregorić, owner of the *Vreme*, demanded in this article that the freemasons should be removed: “If that is not possible in a peaceful way, then by force.”

<sup>118</sup> Viktor [Novak] to Brother Andra [Dinić], Belgrade, 12 July 1940, ASANU, Viktor Novak Papers, *Masonica*.

<sup>119</sup> Campbell to Halifax, Belgrade, 30 July 1940. Published in Serbian translation in Živko Avramovski, ed., *Britanci o kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, vol. 3: (1939–1941) (Belgrade: Arhiv Jugoslavije and Jugoslovenska knjiga, 1996), 504 [PRO FO 371/25030, R 7347/89/92]. Campbell was not particularly well-informed on Yugoslav freemasonry. He was aware of

the Interior had requested that the Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia terminate its activities, but that it would allow it to perform all activities connected with its own liquidation.<sup>120</sup> This was a way to avoid a formal ban. On August 1, 1940, the Administrative Council informed the Ministry of Interior Affairs of Yugoslavia that GLY had ceased all of its activities and that it would liquidate all of its lodges.<sup>121</sup> In a message to all the brethren under GLY, the grand master and his deputy stated: "The Grand Lodge knows well that neither the freemasons of our fatherland nor it [the Grand Lodge] have done anything wrong in terms of their patriotic duties and that they have always been ready to endure any possible sacrifice for the King and fatherland. But, in the life or organisations, like in personal life, it happens, on many occasions, that circumstances impose difficult decisions."<sup>122</sup>

From the correspondence of Militchevitch and Novak it appears that the issue of the re-orientation to UGLE was formulated within the Belgrade circle of GLY (Douchan Militchevitch, Vitkor Novak, Vladimir Ćorović, Savko Dukanać), which was mostly active in the Supreme Council of Yugoslavia as well. There are no available data on whether Ćorović and Dragan Militchevitch continued their action aimed at the re-orientation between the moment of the official termination of the activities of GLY (August 1, 1940) and the attack of Nazi Germany on Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941. It is, however, clear that Militchevitch continued with his pro-British activities since the last issue of his fortnightly *Danica* was published on 15 March 1941.<sup>123</sup>

The self-suspension of the *de facto* ban of the Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia came during the twelve-month period between March 1940 and March 1941 when the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was making all possible efforts to remain neu-

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its anti-Axis activities and pro-Allied orientation. He believed that Prince Regent Paul and the other two co-regents (Stankovich and Perović) were all freemasons, and that there were four freemasons in Cvetković's government. That was actually an outdated piece of information since two freemasons had already been excluded from the government, Jevrem Tomić and Stanoje Mihaldžić. Regarding the regents the British minister simply reiterated Belgrade gossips.

<sup>120</sup> Minutes from the meeting of the Administrative Council of GLY held on 1 August 1940, ASANU, Viktor Novak Papers, *Masonica*.

<sup>121</sup> And. Dim. Dimić, grand master, and V. Ćorović, deputy grand master to the Ministry of Interior Affairs, Belgrade, 1 August 1940, AJ, Fonds 100, f. 14 – 415.

<sup>122</sup> And. Dim. Dimić, grand master, and V. Ćorović, deputy grand master to all the craft lodges, Belgrade, 2 August 1940, AJ, Fonds 100, f. 14 – 126.

<sup>123</sup> *Danica* was published between 1 October 1940 and 15 March 1941. It was simply a continuation of two previous pro-British journals that were also edited by Militchevitch and eventually banned: *Britanija* (*Britannia*, only four issues were published) and *Čovečanstvo* (*Mankind*, only three issues were published). *Britanija* was banned in July 1940 during the climax of the German-sponsored anti-Masonic campaign in Yugoslavia.



tral. The fall of France produced “something approaching collective mourning” in Yugoslavia,<sup>124</sup> particularly in Serbia, and certainly the mood was the same among the Yugoslav freemasons. The Bulgarian accession to the Tripartite Pact on March 1, 1941, and the deployment of 350,000 strong German troops there “made it impossible for the regent and his regime to hold any longer.”<sup>125</sup> Yugoslavia formally joined the Tripartite Pact on 25 March, but for two days only. The Yugoslav accession to the Tripartite Pact produced “a sense of humiliation” in Serbia.<sup>126</sup> The anti-Axis and pro-British coup of 27 March deposed Prince Paul and made Peter II the reigning monarch of Yugoslavia. An attack of the Third Reich followed ten days later and the occupation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was completed in just twelve days.

In the early months of 1941 the leadership of GLY undoubtedly sympathised with the United Kingdom and also with the United States, whose envoy William Donovan may have had, in January 1941, a meeting with the ex-leadership of GLY in Belgrade.<sup>127</sup> When the coup took place, on 27 March, Ćorović was among those who staunchly supported it. Even on April 15 when the Axis occupation of Yugoslavia was almost complete he still thought that the coup “was necessary”.<sup>128</sup> In this orientation the leadership of GLY was along the same lines with the mainstream inclinations of the public opinion in Serbia, which was dominantly pro-Allied and anti-German.

Indicative are the closing sentences from Ćorović’s *History of the Serbs* completed at the end of 1940, or the beginning of 1941.<sup>129</sup> He quotes the verses of the Ragusan poet Ivan Gundulić that freedom is “a gift through which the Almighty God has given us all treasures.” In terms of Yugoslav relations with France Ćorović notes: “Our state has stayed out of the war conflict. Its relations with France after the Marseilles Assassination and after the proceedings that followed it have substantially cooled.”<sup>130</sup> Since by the end of 1940, freedom in terms of liberal democracy was preserved in Britain and the United States only, the words of Ćorović should be understood as a token of support for a foreign policy orientation to those countries.

<sup>124</sup> Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Hitler’s New Disorder. The Second World War in Yugoslavia* (London: Hurst & Company, 2008), 9.

<sup>125</sup> Lampe, *Yugoslavia*, 199.

<sup>126</sup> Pavlowitch, *Hitler’s New Disorder*, 14.

<sup>127</sup> Testimony of Ljubica Anastasijević given to the “Institute” on 10 May 1952, AJ, Fonds 100, f. 15 – 472.

<sup>128</sup> Mitrović, “Vladimir Ćorović”, 257.

<sup>129</sup> This work was first published only in 1989, and had been submitted to the publisher “on the eve of his tragic death”. Rade Mihaljčić, s. v. “Ćorović, Vladimir”, in S. Ćirković and R. Mihaljčić, eds., *Enciklopedija srpske istoriografije* (Belgrade: Knowledge, 1997), 689.

<sup>130</sup> Vladimir Ćorović, *Istorija Srba*, vol. 3 (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1989), 259–260.

Out of the four major protagonists of Anglophile reorientation the most important was grand master Douchan Militchevitch. He died in August 1939. The remaining three all turned out to be victims of what one of them had called “post-war psychoses”.<sup>131</sup> In their plans the reorientation to UGLE was a way to contribute to the fight against totalitarianism, particularly its Nazi and Fascist version, but to a certain degree the Soviet too. The first to lose his life was Ćorović who, on 16 April 1941, died in a plane crash while attempting to escape from advancing German armies from Montenegro to Greece. His daughter later claimed that when Gestapo entered his apartment, one day after the occupation of Belgrade, one of the soldiers exclaimed: “Where is that enemy number one of the Fuhrer?”<sup>132</sup> Dragan Militchevitch (1895–1942), as the most prominent Belgrade Anglophile, was arrested upon the German occupation of Belgrade. He was shot in February 1942.<sup>133</sup> Finally, in October 1946, having survived the war, Stanoje Mihajlović was killed in Slovenia by the agents of the Yugoslav communist secret police Udba when he tried to escape from communist Yugoslavia via Italy to his beloved Britain.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Br. Stanoje Mihaljević [Mihajlović], “Izvjestaj”, *Šestar*, Nos. 3-4 (1938), 52-53.

<sup>132</sup> Mitrović, “Vladimir Ćorović”, 257.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> Matevž Košir, “Razgibano diplomatsko in prostozidarsko življenje dr. Stanoja Mihajlovića ter njegov tragični konec leta 1946 na Kozjaku”, *SLO. Slovenski zgodovinski magazin* 7 (Sep. 2015), 56–59.

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