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**Serbian Academician Aleksandar Belić and the USSR
(early 1920s – late 1950s)***

ABSTRACT: The article examines the President of the Serbian Royal Academy / Serbian Academy of Sciences, Aleksandar Belić's stances on the USSR, and his perception of this country over a forty-year period, based primarily on materials from Belić's personal fund kept in the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts' Archives, as well as documents from other Serbian archives, literature, and press. The specified period, which lasted from the early 1920s to the late 1950s, saw many phases in Soviet-Yugoslav bilateral relations that can be traced through the eyes of this particular respective public and scientific figure by the two Yugoslav regimes.

KEYWORDS: Aleksandar Belić, Yugoslavia, USSR, Russian emigration, interwar period, postwar period

Soviet-Yugoslav relations saw several phases between 1920s and 1950s, ranging from conflicts, lack of diplomatic relations to military, political, and economic cooperation. Political and geopolitical settings and land-

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scape, as well as ideological grounds, shaped the courses of the two countries' policies. The outbreak of the Second World War altered the anticommunist Yugoslav government's decision to establish diplomatic relations with the USSR in June 1940, after refusing to do so for more than 20 years due to political and ideological considerations. Following the end of the global conflict, the Soviet regime became the primary ally of the Yugoslav state, now governed by the new communist authorities, although only for the next three years. The prior coordination and cooperation came to an end during the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict. The Soviet-Yugoslav rapprochement was publicly displayed in 1955 but bilateral relations deteriorated soon after, leading to a new rapprochement in the early 1960s.¹

However, the political relations between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia do not fully show the complexities of bilateral ties. Social, cultural, and scientific connections indicate the diversity and multi-layered nature of countries' relations over the specified period. Its complexity, as well as the "perception of the other," can be traced through the eyes of the respective public and scientific figures who played an important role in the political and public life of one of the two nations from the 1920s to the 1950s. One of them was unquestionably one of the most prominent academicians, slavists, philologists, and public figures, Aleksandar Belić (1876–1960), who received his edu-

¹ Вук Винавер, „Спољнополитичка позадина успостављања југословенско-совјетских дипломатских односа 1940. године”, *Зборник Мајнице српске за друштвене науке*, бр. 45 (1966): 5–60; Никола Б. Поповић, *Југословенско-совјетски односи у Друјом светском рату* (Београд: Институт за савремену историју, 1988); Љубодраг Димић, „Јосип Броз и Никита Сергејевич Хрушчов: разговори у Београду 27. мај – 2. јун 1955”, *Историјски гласник*, бр. 1–2 (1997): 35–67; Љубодраг Димић, „Јосип Броз, Никита Сергејевич Хрушчов и мађарско питање 1955–1956”, *Токови историје*, бр. 1–4 (1998): 23–59; Leonid J. Gibianski, „Sovjetsko-jugoslovenski sukob 1948: istoriografske verzije i novi arhivski izvori”, u *Jugoslavija v hladni vojni: zbornik z Znanstvenega posveta Jugoslavija v hladni vojni*, urednik Jasna Fischer (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino; Toronto: University, 2004), 27–47; Андрей Б. Едемский, *От конфликта к нормализации. Советско-югославские отношения. 1953–1956 годов* (Москва: Наука, 2008); Алексеј Тимофејев, *Руси и Друји светски рат у Југославији: Ушницај СССР-а и руских емиграната на догађаје у Југославији 1941–1945* (Београд: Институт за новију историју Србије, 2011); Đoko Tripković, *Jugoslavija – SSSR (1956–1971)* (Београд: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2013); Aleksandar Životić, *Moskovski gambit. Jugoslavija, SSSR i prodor Trećeg Rajha na Balkan 1938–1941* (Београд: Clio, 2021).

cation in the Russian Empire, served as Secretary (from 1923), then as President of the Serbian Royal Academy (from 1947 – Serbian Academy of Sciences) (from 1937 to 1960), traveled to Russia and the USSR, maintained contacts and cooperation with Russian and Soviet scholars but also was respected by both regimes – Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes / Kingdom of Yugoslavia, as well as Democratic Federal Yugoslavia, and Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia.

Aleksandar Belić was born in 1876 in Belgrade. After graduating from capital's First Male Gymnasium, he enrolled in Belgrade's Faculty of Philosophy, History and Philology Department in 1894. However, Belić later transferred to the University of Odesa, where he studied for two years before earning a scholarship from the Serbian Ministry of Education to study at Moscow State University. He graduated from this university in 1899, and returned to Belgrade briefly before moving to Germany where he defended his PhD in 1900. He then came back to Serbian capital and became a university professor. In 1906, at age of 30, he became a full member of the Serbian Royal Academy.² Just four years later, in December 1910, Aleksandar Belić was elected a corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences.³

During the First World War, Belić was tasked with an important mission: to advocate for the Yugoslav union in Russia. In response to the Triple Entente's 1915 negotiations with Italy, Bulgaria, and Romania, the Serbian government sent cultural and public leaders to the Entente capitals to endorse the Yugoslav cause. To substantiate Serbian claims to certain claimed territories, Ljubomir Stojanović and Aleksandar Belić worked in Russia from the end of April until the beginning of July 1915. Although their discussions with high-ranking Russian government officials produced no concrete results, Russian authorities gained additional information about the Yugoslav pro-

² Д. Ђупић, „Александар Белић”, *Српски биографски речник*, књ. 1, А-Б (Нови Сад: Матица српска, 2004), 473; *Ош чужих к своим: њисьма выдающихся иредставителей русской интеллигенции начала XX века Александру Беличу* (Белград: Логос, 2016), 11, 13, 14; *Зборник радова о Александру Белићу*, (Београд: САНУ, 1976); Владимир П. Гудков, „А. Белич – почетный профессор Московского университета”, в В.П. Гудков. *Славистика и сербистика. Сборник статей* (Москва: Издательство Московского университета, 1999), 151–153.

³ Российская академия наук, accessed on 25. 6. 2025, <https://new.ras.ru/staff/chlen-korrespondent-ran/Belič-aleksandr-ivanovich/>

gram for the first time. The Serbian scholars carried out similar missions the following year.⁴ Acting on orders from the exiled Serbian government, Aleksandar Belić was once again dispatched to Russia on a propaganda mission, this time accompanied by the historian Stanoje Stanojević. The two scholars gave lectures at the university and various socio-political and professional associations, printed publications on political and historical topics, collaborated with Russian newspapers, and published information and preferred interpretations in the capital's press. They also made contacts with Russian intellectuals, particularly those from academic circles. The professors attempted to influence members of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as instruct a circle of educated Russians sympathetic to Serbia on the main Serbian political and social issues, and then to spread these understandings throughout Russian society.⁵

Belić left Russia in October 1917, without witnessing the coup d'état.⁶ We might assume that because he witnessed the February Revolution and the social-political situation in Russia in 1917, what he saw reflected his views not just on the Bolsheviks and Soviet Russia but also the Russian Empire. In letters and reports dating back to 1917, Belić was harshly critical of the Russian Empire, its regime and the prevailing conditions there. After Emperor Nicholas II's abdication and power transfer to the Russian Provisional Government in March 1917, he made a scathing remark in a letter about the situation there, claiming that this country, which is not "a land of idiots, was run as if someone had transformed a madhouse into a supreme government and sought to drive the rest of the world insane."⁷ In a report co-written with Stanoje Stanojević and sent just a few days later to the Serbian Prime Minister Nikola Pašić, the two professors expressed their opinion that "a free and social Russia" cannot utilize the "same dark means that the previous regime did."⁸ Jovan Jovanović Pižon, the Serbian Ambassador to London at the time, even repor-

⁴ Љубинка Трговчевић, *Научници Србије и стварање југословенске државе: 1914–1920* (Београд: Народна књига; Српска књижевна задруга, 1986), 33–34, 40–44, 114.

⁵ Ibid, 116–122; Горан Милорадовић, „Борба за душе: српска пропаганда у Русији 1916. године”, *Историјске свеске*, бр. 14 (2015): 15–25

⁶ Зоран Бајин, Мирослав Радивојевић, „Мисија Александра Белића и Станоја Станојевића у Русији 1916–1917. године”, *Баштина*, бр. 60 (2023): 358.

⁷ Quoted by: Ibid, 353.

⁸ Quoted by: Ibid, 353.

ted in his notebook that Belić, after leaving Russia in October 1917, had made comments on the Russian people, alleging that they have no other ideal “than to bring their heads back under the imperial yoke.”⁹

Aside from his mission to Russia in 1916–1917, Belić's views on the USSR were impacted by another political and social phenomenon that occurred following the 1917 October Revolution and the Russian Civil War (1918–1922): the rise of Russian emigration.

Between 1919 and 1923, between 41,000 and 44,000 Russian refugees arrived in the newly established state of the South Slavs – the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (the Kingdom of Yugoslavia since 1929).¹⁰ The country welcomed these individuals on humanitarian, moral, and political grounds, in recognition of the aid received from the Russian Empire during the First World War, particularly from Emperor Nicholas II in 1916,¹¹ and also due to the familiar ties between the Romanovs and Karadjordjević dynasties.¹² It provided the refugees with medical, moral, and financial assistance, as well as employment. The entire political system was thrown into motion to coordinate the reception and accommodation for the Russian refugees: aside from ministries, new institutions were founded to help the newcomers.¹³ In that system, Aleksandar Belić performed an important, if not one of the critical roles.

In June 1920, Belić was appointed vice-president of the newly established State Committee for the Reception and Accommodation of Russian Refugees, an institution that would become the most influential émigré institution during the interwar period due to its scope, activity, as well as its power and impact on the refugees' lives in the Kingdom of SCS / Yugoslavia. Since

⁹ Јован Јовановић Пижон, *Дневник: (1896–1920)* (Нови Сад: Прометеј; Београд: Радио-телевизија Србије; Архив Југославије, 2015), 348.

¹⁰ Мирослав Јовановић, *Досељавање руских избеглица у Краљевину СХС 1919–1924* (Београд: Стубови културе, 1996), 186.

¹¹ Ibid, 58–59; Никола Б. Поповић, *Односи Србије и Русије у Првом светском рату* (Београд: Институт за савремену историју, 1977); Никола Б. Поповић, *Србија и царска Русија* (Београд: Службени лист СРЈ, 1994); Мирослав Јовановић, *Срби и Руси 12–21. век: (историја односа)* (Београд: Народна библиотека Србије, 2012).

¹² Людмила В. Кузьмичева, „Правящие династии Сербии и Черногории в восприятии представителей Дома Романовых в конце XIX– начале XX в.,” в *Человек на Балканах: Власть и общество: опыт взаимодействия (конец XIX – начало XX в.)*, редактор Ритта П. Гришина (Санкт-Петербург: Алетея, 2009), 189–201.

¹³ Јовановић, *Досељавање руских избеглица у Краљевину СХС 1919–1924*, 75–84.

Ljubomir Jovanović retired from public life shortly after the 1927 election due to illness,¹⁴ it can be assumed that Belić succeeded him on the State Committee that year, and he would preside over it until 1940.¹⁵ In 1921, Belić even negotiated with the French authorities to provide financial aid for Russian refugees.¹⁶

From 1928,¹⁷ he additionally served as president of the Russian Cultural Committee – a state institution dedicated to presenting, protecting, and cultivating Russian culture. It invited scientists, writers, and artists from Yugoslavia and throughout the world to conduct scientific research, as well as hold public lectures and cultural events. The committee had an active publishing program, producing works on Russian culture.¹⁸ In addition, Aleksandar Belić actively supported Russian émigré scholars and artists. He was praised and rewarded for his efforts by Russian émigré community in the Kingdom of SCS / Yugoslavia. For instance, he was elected honorary member of the Union of the Russian Writers and Journalists in Yugoslavia.¹⁹

Despite providing aid to Russian refugees and refusing to establish diplomatic relations with the USSR until 1940, the Yugoslav state did not restrict its citizens from communicating with their Soviet counterparts. Moreover, contacts between public and scientific figures, as well as two countries' institutions were maintained throughout the interwar period.²⁰ Already in

¹⁴ Саша Недељковић, „Љуба Јовановић – државник из Боке”, *Зборник Мајнице српске за друштвене науке*, бр. 133 (2010): 154; Milan Gulić, „Politički predstavnici dalmatinskih Srba u vrijeme Kraljevine SHS/Jugoslavije”, u *Jugoslavija-između ujedinjenja i razlaza: hrvatsko-srpski odnosi u kontekstu društvenog razvoja dve Jugoslavije 1918–1991* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2018), 41.

¹⁵ Јовановић, *Досељавање руских избеглица у Краљевину СХС 1919–1924*, 83–84.

¹⁶ Архив Југославије (АЈ), Министарски савет Краљевине Југославије (138), 22–21, Кратак извештај о путовању у Париз и преговорима са Министарством Спољних Послова у Паризу о руским избеглицама француске евакуације.

¹⁷ Виктор И. Косик, „Русская Югославия: фрагменты истории, 1919–1944”, *Славяноведение*, 4 (1992): 26.

¹⁸ Историјски архив Београда, Општина града Београда (6), Техничка дирекција, 27-33-1931, Уверење.

¹⁹ Остоја Ђурић, *Руска лијерарна Србија: 1920–1941: (писци, кружоци, издања)* (Горњи Милановац: Дечје новине; Београд: Српски фонд словенске писмености и словенских култура, 1990), 156.

²⁰ *Советско-югославские отношения 1917–1941 гг. Сборник документов и материалов* (Москва: Наука, 1992); *Москва–Србија, Београд–Русија. Документи и мајерија*–

1923, after the Serbian Royal Academy proposed to the Russian Academy of Sciences to resume publication exchanges, the two institutions agreed to send each other publications covering the years 1914–1922. Yugoslav academies of sciences and scientific societies begun sending its publications to Soviet scientists. From 1923, the Russian Academy of Sciences started sending publications to members living in Yugoslavia, including Belić.²¹

It is still unclear whether Aleksandar Belić maintained contacts and interactions with scientists from the Soviet Russia / USSR throughout the interwar period. However, it is apparent that several Soviet political figures saw his potential trip to the USSR at the time as undesirable. Belić's name was on a guest list for the USSR Academy of Sciences' 200th anniversary celebration. However, the list was thoroughly reviewed by the NKID (People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs) – Deputy People's Commissar Maxim Maximovich Litvinov directed the jubilee celebration in this institution – and was given to the NKID's national studies departments for evaluation: their responses were positive; only the Balkan countries sub-department was opposed to the entrance of three slavists: Vasil N. Zlatarsky and Ljubomir Miletić (from Bulgaria) and Aleksandar Belić, calling it “definitely undesirable.”²² The USSR Academy's invitation was, however, sent to the Serbian Royal Academy to participate in its 200th anniversary celebrations. The Academy was eager to accept this invitation but after “receiving a report from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs”, it greeted the ceremony with a letter.²³ The letter itself was published in Serbian Royal Academy's Yearbook in Russian.²⁴

We can assume that Soviet representatives were aware of Belić's positions on the USSR, even though in his addresses at events featuring Russian

ли. Том 4, Руско-српски односи 1917–1945, приредили Алексеј Тимофејев, Горан Милорадовић и Александар Силкин (Београд: Архив Србије; Москва: Главное архивное управление города Москвы, 2017); Милана Живановић, „Совјетски филмови на биоскопским репертоарима у Краљевини СХС/Краљевини Југославији”, *Токви историје*, бр. 1 (2016): 115–141.

²¹ *Советско-југославске односи 1917–1941 гг. Сборник документов и материалов*, 159.

²² Марина Ю. Сорокина, „Двухсотлетний юбилей Академии наук”, в *На переломе: Отечественная наука в конце XIX–XX вв. Вып. 3* (Санкт-Петербург: Нестор-История, 2005), 206–235.

²³ *Годишњак Српске краљевске академије 1925*, 79.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 419–421.

émigrés, he praised the refugees' contributions to culture and science, rarely reflecting on the Soviet regime.

Opening a gathering of Russian émigré scientists, the Russian Scientists' Congress, in Belgrade in September 1928, Aleksandar Belić showed restraint in addressing the causes of Russian scientists and professors' departure from their homeland, noting that with the fall of "postwar Russia", they had scattered around the world in search of better prospects for life and work "than they believed they would find in their home country."²⁵ Ten days later, at the Congress of Russian Writers and Journalists Abroad in Belgrade, another Russian émigré event, Belić reflected on "the tragedy that had struck" the Russian people but again failed to mention the causes or reasons for the tragedy.²⁶ He merely underlined the limitations of human rights and freedom in "modern Russia", which did not "eradicate" Russian literature and journalism.²⁷

Aleksandar Belić spoke more openly on the events that occurred in Russia following the 1917 Revolution and the Russian Civil War at the opening ceremony of the Russian House, named after Emperor Nicholas II, in Belgrade in April 1933. He reflected on "an unprecedented and unheard-of catastrophe" that "overtook the vast Slavic state" "destroying everything that was national and cultural in it, as well as everything that believed in God and in modern civilization."²⁸ He said that it caused "those who felt Russian and for those who could save themselves" "to seek salvation outside their Motherland, losing their property, home, and sometimes even children and parents."²⁹ "There aren't many instances of people being so brutally expelled from their homes and the land of their ancestors in human history",³⁰ he added. Belić reflected on the "unheard violence" which "come so suddenly and so treacherously, taking by surprise this cultural and native Russian force, unorganized and scattered to all ends of the vast country."³¹ However, Belić

²⁵ Архив Српске академије наука и уметности (АСАНУ), Збирка Александра Белића (14386), III-2469.

²⁶ АСАНУ, 14386-III-2468.

²⁷ *Полиџика*, 26. 9. 1928, 7.

²⁸ *Русский домъ имени Императора Николая II въ Бѣлградѣ ул. Королевы Наталіи: Открытіе 9 апрѣля 1933 года* (Београд: Издательская Комиссія, 1933), 31.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 31.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 31.

³¹ *Ibid*, 32.

openly and publicly voiced hope that Russia will break free from the “chains”: “Our faith is firm; Russia is eternal, and it will cope with this current misfortune in the same manner that it has coped with previous misfortunes throughout the history, by taking giant steps towards glory and greatness.”³²

Also, in a non-dated manuscript titled “Russia and Russians” sent to a Russian political figure who fled Russia, the economist Petr Berngardovich Struve, Aleksandar Belić very openly remarked on his thoughts on the USSR, Russian Empire, and the state’s future. In his own words, he said what “has been on his mind for a long time.”³³ He claimed that Russia should “naturally be a source of balance in global politics” and added: “If its relevance in this regard has now diminished significantly, it can only be restored by life itself as soon as Russia escapes her confined circle.”³⁴ Belić evidently believed in the evolution of the system in Russia, and hoped that this country which “traditionally provided natural support to Slavs”, particularly the South Slavs, will resurrect in the future. In his words, it will be a democratic and national country: “And the current misfortune that has befallen a substantial portion of the Russian people is only proportionate with the circumstances that will give rise to a democratic and national Russia.”³⁵ Calling the current circumstances in Russia a “misfortune”, Belić expressed hopes for an evolution in the thinking of the people living in the USSR, as well as the unification of the Russian nation in Soviet Union and abroad: “However, even this misfortune shows all of the hallmarks of the Russian man's centuries-long struggle with the elements (...) We may fairly assume that the Russian people are the same everywhere, and that such an internal, quiet, but successful evolution must have occurred in those who live in Russia and watched what happened there. If this were not the case, the historical progression of Russia's past would be incomprehensible. It would also be incomprehensible if the two victories of the natural development of the Russian man, prepared here and there, were not united at the moment of sufficient, mature development into a great Russian, and, I can freely say, despite the disagreement that exists in this regard, – a Slavic and universal triumph.”³⁶

³² Ibid, 38–39.

³³ АСАНУ, 14386-III-2470, Россия и русские, 3.

³⁴ Ibid, 1.

³⁵ Ibid, 2.

³⁶ Ibid, 2–3.

In one of the few rare mentions of the USSR's regime, in a non-dated and untitled manuscript dealing with the refugee issue, Aleksandar Belić strongly criticized the "ferocious rule of the exclusive Bolshevik proletariat, which believed that the revolution should remain in an active state until the old Russian civilization was destroyed."³⁷

In 1937, the prominent scholar was chosen to lead the Academy, a role he held throughout World War II (occupation) and the years following the war in the new sociopolitical system. Aleksandar Belić joined the new communist regime as early as 1945, "saving both himself and the Academy," whose future was uncertain, "out of fear, realism, honesty, or opportunism."³⁸

The aftermath of the World War II also brought changes to Belić's core positions on the USSR. The 1944/1945 liberation of Yugoslavia marked the beginning of a new era in Soviet-Yugoslav / Russian-Serbian relations. The Soviet Union became the primary ally of the Yugoslav state, which was now governed by the new communist authorities. The two countries started to cooperate and collaborate closely in all fields, including science and culture.³⁹

Just two days after the end of the Great Patriotic War, that is, the end of World War II in Europe, on 11 May 1945, at the request of Academician Nikolay Grigoryevich Bruevich, the Serbian Royal Academy, the University of Belgrade, and Professors Pavle Savić and Aleksandar Belić received an invitation to participate in the 220th anniversary celebration of the USSR Academy of Sciences, which was overseen by Deputy Commissar of Foreign Affairs Andrey Yanuaryevich Vyshinsky in NKID.⁴⁰ Unlike the previous occasion, the Yugoslav side accepted the invitation, and in June 1945, a five-member state delegation led by Aleksandar Belić flew to Moscow to participate in

³⁷ АСАНУ, 14386-III-2488, 1.

³⁸ Quoted by: Драгомир Бончић, „Професори Београдског универзитета после Другог светског рата – „непријатељи” и „поштена интелигенција”, у *Мулињетиничка држава и национални идентитети: српско искуство у 20. веку. Зборник радова* (Београд: Институт за савремену историју, 2024), 156.

³⁹ Горан Милорадовић, *Лейоша под надзором. Совјетски културни утицаји у Југославији 1945–1955* (Београд: Институт за савремену историју, 2012).

⁴⁰ Марина Ю. Сорокина, „Несостоявшаяся встреча: юбилей АН СССР (1945) и судьбы русской научной эмиграции в Югославии”, *Журнал российских и восточноевропейских исследований*, 1 (2022): 122.

the USSR Academy of Sciences' 220th anniversary.⁴¹ At the Moscow airport they were greeted by Soviet academics and institute researchers.⁴²

The celebration took place in Moscow and Leningrad from June 15th to 29th, 1945. The festivities opened on June 16th, and the USSR Academy of Sciences President, after receiving richly connected epistles from the Yugoslav delegation, even stood up and thanked them, something he did not do with other guests.⁴³ Aleksandar Belić, chairman of the Yugoslav delegation and the President of the Serbian Royal Academy, delivered a speech at the Academy's ceremony. His address at the event was significant not only for the honor given to the Serbian Academy but also for representing a shift in his stance toward the Soviet Union. Calling the end of the World War II in Europe the "greatest victory that the mankind has ever known," Belić publicly praised the Soviet Union for the first time. He stated that for the USSR "it is a common occurrence at the outset of planting any science or art on its soil to produce such outstanding people who, shortening the long history of gradual perception, assimilation, and further development of sciences and arts, immediately jumped to the highest stages and became their leaders."⁴⁴ Reflecting on science in that country, he complimented the "Soviet nation" and the "Soviet man", not once using the term "Russian." The Academy of Sciences could never have held "such a prominent position in the Soviet people's lives if the Soviet man's fundamental character did not possess the rare ability for multi-

⁴¹ The Yugoslav delegation included academician, Chairman of the Anti-fascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Serbia Siniša Stanković, Belgrade University Professors Jevrem Nedeljković and Pavle Savić, and Fran Kidrič from Ljubljana. Драгомир Бонџић, „Научна сарадња Југославије и Совјетског Савеза 1944–1947.”, у *Ослобођење Београда 1944. године*, ур. Александар Животић (Београд: Институт за новију историју Србије, 2010), 376; АСАНУ, 14386-III-2167-в. Belić was personally invited as a corresponding member of the USSR Academy of Sciences. АСАНУ, 14386-III-185, Академији наука Савеза совјетских социјалистичких република; АСАНУ, 14386-IV-3, Академия Наук Союза Советских Социалистических Республик, профессору Белич А.И.

⁴² Александар Белић, *Из историје установа: Српска академија наука и уметности, Универзитет, Коларчев народни универзитет, Руска академија наука; Сећања на људе и догађаје* (Београд: Завод за уџбенике и наставна средства, 1999), 408.

⁴³ Ibid, 408, 410–411; АСАНУ, 14386-IV-3, Академия Наук Союза Советских Социалистических Республик, профессору Белич А.И.

⁴⁴ АСАНУ, 14386-III-2147, Речь председателя Сербской академии наук и ее же делегации А.И. Белича, 2–3.

faceted scientific and creative endeavor.”⁴⁵ Belić then praised Vladimir Ilyich Lenin for providing “full reign and comprehensive assistance” to the Soviet people’s growing interest in science “with the sole purpose of benefiting the nation.”⁴⁶ He recalled Lenin’s blueprint for the economic advancement of the Soviet peoples, in which the Soviet leader emphasized that the Academy of Sciences should play a prominent role and that the Soviet government should support it in every possible way, “as it had”, Belić concluded. He then added: “Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, the great successor of Vladimir Ilyich in national construction, brought the matter to a victorious end, as he was accustomed to doing with any task he undertook.”⁴⁷ Belić also expressed gratitude on behalf of the Serbian Royal Academy and the Yugoslav people to the USSR for “not sparing” its own blood in liberating Yugoslavia’s capital, Belgrade, from the “despicable enemy.”⁴⁸ He ended his speech by expressing “eternal appreciation” to Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “the founder of the Academy’s new life, and everyone who worked in its field of benefit”, and hailed Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin and the entire Central Committee of People’s Commissars, “their successors in the job of developing the Academy of Sciences. Long live the glorious Academy and all of its members and staff.”⁴⁹

Aleksandar Belić’s remarks reflected the official state narrative about the USSR. The image of the Soviet Union, its science, ideology, and policy were propagated through the Yugoslav press, party, state authorities, and mass organizations, as well as the Association for Cultural Cooperation between Yugoslavia and the USSR, which was established in January 1945 by a group of distinguished intellectuals, cultural and scientific workers. Soviet science was portrayed as “the leader of all humanity,” “the most advanced,” and “infallible” science “in the service of man.”⁵⁰

Following the conclusion of the program’s official part in Moscow, Belić and other members of the Yugoslav delegation attended the Red Square Military Parade on June 24th. Afterwards, they visited Leningrad, and on June 30th, a gala dinner was organized for the participants at the Kremlin, which

⁴⁵ Ibid, 3.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 3.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 3.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 4.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 5.

⁵⁰ Бонцић, „Научна сарадња Југославије и Совјетског Савеза 1944–1947”, 360, 364.

Stalin, Kalinin and members of the Soviet government attended.⁵¹ After returning from the USSR, Belić shared with the readers of “Politika” and “Yugoslavia – USSR” journal of the Association for Cultural Cooperation between Yugoslavia and the USSR his impressions of the trip, and the “unforgettable days.” He reflected on culture, spiritual life in USSR, and its academy.⁵² In 1946, a book titled “From the Soviet Union: Impressions and Memories” was released in a print run of 15,000 copies.⁵³

Aleksandar Belić put a lot of effort into developing bilateral scientific collaboration and applying Soviet scientific experiences in Yugoslavia. In November 1946, during the First Congress of Association for Cultural Cooperation between Yugoslavia and the USSR,⁵⁴ he was elected a member of the Association's administration. The academician gave lectures and took part in planning its events. In the summer of 1946, Aleksandar Belić attended the Leningrad slavists' meeting where a resolution on the collaboration of Slavic states slavists was adopted. He gathered information and made notes about the structure, number, management, tasks, and work programs of the USSR's Academy of Sciences institutes, libraries, and laboratories throughout his stays there. In 1947 and 1948, the Serbian Academy underwent a reorganization based on the Soviet model.⁵⁵

Aleksandar Belić traveled to Moscow once again in May 1947,⁵⁶ this time at the invitation of Moscow State University, to give lectures to students and aspirants from the Faculty of Philosophy Slavic group.⁵⁷ He also delivered lectures at the Institute of Pedagogy, Institute for Defectology and Frunze Military Academy.⁵⁸ During his time in the Soviet capital, on June 2nd, 1947, the Academic Council of Moscow State University awarded him the title of honorary professor.⁵⁹ The university made this decision out of “significant re-

⁵¹ Белић, *Из историје устјанова*, 411–412.

⁵² Ibid, 403, 470.

⁵³ АЈ, 524, Друштво за културну сарадњу Југославија – СССР, фасцикла бр. 4, Издање бр. 1013; АЈ, 524, фасцикла бр. 4, Писмо др Александру Белићу од 13. јуна 1946.

⁵⁴ АЈ, 524, Друштво за културну сарадњу Југославија – СССР, фасцикла бр. 3, Управа друштва.

⁵⁵ Бонцић, „Научна сарадња Југославије и Совјетског Савеза 1944–1947”, 366, 377–378.

⁵⁶ *Борба*, 18. 5. 1947, 4.

⁵⁷ *Борба*, 16. 6. 1947, 1.

⁵⁸ *Борба*, 13. 7. 1947, 2.

⁵⁹ *Борба*, 16. 6. 1947, 1.

gard and consideration for his contributions to science and culture,”⁶⁰ making Belić the first foreign academician in USSR to receive the highest respect in academic circles.⁶¹

The diploma was awarded to Aleksandar Belić at the meeting of the Academic Council of Moscow State University on June 16th. Rector Ilya Savvich Galkin opened the ceremony by describing Belić as “one of the best sons of Slavic people, one of those scientists who fought for science, culture, progress, and democracy,”⁶² praising the unity of the Slavic people and scientists. In his acceptance speech, Aleksandar Belić thanked the University for the distinction, viewing it as a tribute to his Motherland, Yugoslavia, and his home country, Serbia. He expressed his devotion to “the great Russian people” and the entire Soviet Union, as well as the love for it that he brought from home when he first went to Russia,⁶³ and even stated that if Serbia had not requested his services, he would never have left his alma mater and his teachers, who made Russia feel like a second motherland to him.⁶⁴ Finishing his speech, Belić considered his duty to acknowledge “the wisdom of the glorious leader, Generalissimo Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, and his associates, who made this cultural and scientific community both possible and desirable through their selfless activity, putting brotherly love, mutual understanding, and respect at the heart of Slavic relations.”⁶⁵

On that occasion, “Moscow University” Press quoted its Rector as saying that Aleksandar Belić was “an old friend of Russia and the Soviet Union” who “maintained cordial relations with Moscow University, especially during the post-October period.”⁶⁶

⁶⁰ АСАНУ, 14386-III-2138, Стенограмма заседания Ученого совета Московского Государственного Университета им. М.В. Ломоносова, 3.

⁶¹ Гудков, „А. Белич – почетный профессор Московского университета”, 150, accessed on 26. 6. 2025, <https://www.letopis.msu.ru/peoples/9000>

⁶² АСАНУ, 14386-III-2138, Стенограмма заседания Ученого совета Московского Государственного Университета им. М.В. Ломоносова, 2–3.

⁶³ АСАНУ, 14386-III-2137, Выступление профессора Белича А.И. на заседании Ученого Совета Московского Государственного Университета им. М.В. Ломоносова, 1.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 2.

⁶⁵ АСАНУ, 14386-III-2137, Выступление профессора Белича А.И. на заседании Ученого Совета Московского Государственного Университета им. М.В. Ломоносова, 4.

⁶⁶ Газета „Московский университет”, 16. 5. 1947.

After returning from Moscow, Belić again revealed his impressions of the trip. He described the “sympathies, love, and loyalty” of the Soviet people to Yugoslavia. Belić further claimed that representatives of the Russian people have stated that they are willing to make any sacrifice for our nations. “Stalin's wise policy toward the Slavic people, which included fostering brotherly love and mutual respect, began to bear fruit”, he concluded.⁶⁷

In the postwar era, Belić frequently praised the USSR and its leaders while attending various events. At the First Post-war Slavic Congress held in Belgrade in December 1946, he saluted “the great architects of that future, the representatives of the mighty Soviet Union, and all the other Slavic nations assembled around them,” hailing Slavic mutuality, the new Slavic civilization, and “today's great Slavic leaders”: Generalissimo Stalin, Benesh, Berut, Dimitrov, and Tito.⁶⁸

Belić also spoke on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the October Revolution in November 1947, at a ceremonial event held at Kolarac University, attended by Josip Broz Tito, other members of the Yugoslav political elite, and foreign diplomats.⁶⁹ His lecture titled “The significance of the October Revolution in Slavic culture”,⁷⁰ was then printed in May 1948 under the title “After the October Revolution.” Aleksandar Belić called the 1917 October Revolution not only a social or economic revolution that has fundamentally changed the internal organization of Russia, which he hailed by saying it was “an old and great country”, replaced the capitalist social order with a socialist system, “with popular rule, or rather, with the entire people”, and transformed society itself and “gave man a completely different place than he had before.”⁷¹ “Today's man in the Soviet Union has been liberated from” all different ties that surrounded pre-revolutionary Russia's nation, “as if by a single stroke.” Belić then hailed the new Soviet system which “placed man outside of everything else. Everything is subordinate to him, everything is done for his benefit, and all attention is directed toward him. Man is the beginning and conclusion of all endeavors; his

⁶⁷ Борба, 13. 7. 1947, 2.

⁶⁸ Борба, 12. 12. 1946, 3.

⁶⁹ Борба, 6. 11. 1947, 1.

⁷⁰ АСАНУ, 14386-III-3197, Значај Октобарске револуције за словенску културу.

⁷¹ Александар Белић, *После Октобарске револуције... Предавање одржано на Коларчевом народном универзитету* (Београд: Књижница за народно просвећивање, 1948), 7.

spiritual and financial well-being, as well as that of the social total of which he is a member, is the sole objective to be pursued.”⁷² “The Soviet man moved toward the ideal of accomplished transformation in large steps, and after overcoming difficult trials, he set out on a great, broad path that would undoubtedly lead him to the aforementioned goal,”⁷³ he added.

In 1948, Aleksandar Belić claimed that since 1918, when the people's power represented by Lenin highlighted the critical role of science in the establishment of a socialist state, Soviet science has grown to enormous proportions, adding that the assistance provided by the “great Stalin, as the extender and implementer of the genius Lenin's ideas”, to science and scientific workers, raising the very high reputation of the USSR Academy, and assisting in the establishment of 8 republican academies and a large number of scientific institutions, “undoubtedly significantly popularized scientific work and demonstrated its great importance, which was widely and sincerely recognized by the country's highest officials.”⁷⁴ He supplied data to back up his words: in 1946, the USSR had more than 10,000 doctors of sciences and professors, as well as more than 23,000 candidates, whereas in pre-revolutionary times, the number barely surpassed 1,000.⁷⁵ Belić also hailed the Soviet man, his spirit, “the nature” of the Soviet man “to delve into the deepest depths of phenomena, to devote himself to scientific research without rest”, which had Mikhail Lomonosov in the 18th century and Nikolai Lobachevsky, Ivan Pavlov, and Dmitri Mendeleev in the nineteenth, adding that the “favorable opportunities for scientific development” were “at the heart of the Soviet new order.”⁷⁶

However, the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict changed the bilateral relations fundamentally, influencing Belić's positions. Relations between the two Communist parties/countries began to deteriorate as early as January-February 1948. This situation arose as a result of the Yugoslav side's independent foreign policy, which included undertaking certain foreign policy efforts in the Balkans without consulting the Soviet side.⁷⁷ As a result, from the end of

⁷² Ibid, 7–8.

⁷³ Ibid, 8.

⁷⁴ АСАНУ, 14386-III-2151, Тридесетогодишњица совјетске науке, 1.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 2.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 2.

⁷⁷ Леонид Я. Гибианский, „К истории советско-югославского конфликта 1948–1953 гг.: секретная советско-югославо-болгарская встреча в Москве 10 февраля 1948 го-

March to June 1948, the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (b) sent secret letters to the Communist Party of Yugoslavia's leadership accusing them of pursuing an anti-Soviet line, of nationalism, of taking "the path of breaking away from the united socialist front of people's democracies with the Soviet Union," and of abandoning Marxism-Leninism.⁷⁸ The correspondences and the Yugoslav side's rejection of the accusations resulted in a meeting of the Cominform Bureau in Bucharest, where communist party representatives issued a Resolution "On the Situation in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia." In this document, the Cominform supported "the assessment of the situation in the Yugoslav Communist Party, criticism of the mistakes made by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, and political analysis of these mistakes set forth in the letters of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia for March-May 1948."⁷⁹

Shortly after the Resolution was adopted, the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts, as well as the Slovenian Academy of Sciences made statements on the subject. During the first meeting of the Academy's Assembly in September 1948, following the approval of the resolution, Aleksandar Belić emphasized the need for the Serbian Academy to do the same, in order to avoid "giving the impression that we take a neutral position with regard to attacks against our country."⁸⁰ So the President of the Serbian Academy of

да", *Советское славяноведение*, 3 (1991): 12–23; Леонид Я. Гибианский, „К истории советско-югославского конфликта 1948–1953 гг.: секретная советско-югославо-болгарская встреча в Москве 10 февраля 1948 года", *Советское славяноведение*, 4 (1991): 27–36; Леонид Я. Гибианский, „К истории советско-югославского конфликта 1948–1953 гг.: секретная советско-югославо-болгарская встреча в Москве 10 февраля 1948 года", *Советское славяноведение*, 1 (1992): 42–56; Леонид Я. Гибианский, „К истории советско-югославского конфликта 1948–1953 гг.: секретная советско-югославо-болгарская встреча в Москве 10 февраля 1948 года", *Славяноведение*, 3 (1992): 35–51.

⁷⁸ Леонид Я. Гибианский, „Предисловие", у *Југославија – СССР: сусрећи и разговори на највишем нивоу руководилица Југославије и СССР: 1946–1964. Том 1*, приређивачи Љубодраг Димић, Леонид Гибијански (Београд: Архив Југославије, 2014), 37; Љубодраг Димић, „Предговор", у *Југославија – СССР: сусрећи и разговори на највишем нивоу руководилица Југославије и СССР: 1946–1964. Том 1*, приређивачи Љубодраг Димић, Леонид Гибијански (Београд: Архив Југославије, 2014), 10.

⁷⁹ Vladimir Dedijer, *Dokumenti 1948. Knj. 1* (Beograd: Rad, 1980).

⁸⁰ АСАНУ, Административни архив (АА), Ванредна скупштина Академије 1948.

Sciences proposed issuing a public statement on the matter. The Academy's Presidium drafted the text of the address in advance, and it was unanimously adopted at the meeting. In it, the institution openly declared its full commitment to the Yugoslav leadership, dismissing all of the allegations.⁸¹

In a speech at the Academy's Annual Assembly in March 1951, Aleksandar Belić publicly denounced the USSR's state administration, accusing it of "immediate and diverse bureaucracy and management of certain scientific fields and arts," which resulted in crises in a variety of scientific fields like linguistics, biology as well as music. He even claimed that the freedom of scientific thought had been destroyed, and that in its place had formed a required scientific truth, comparable to dogma, which he saw as impeding the USSR's scientific growth in a variety of fields.⁸² During an address to the Academy in December 1951, Aleksandar Belić expressed regret that the Academy's ties with "the fraternal Slavic institutions" had been almost completely severed. "We had hoped that at least those ties, scientific and cultural connections would remain outside of the hard political realities but this was not the case. Nonetheless, we remain hopeful. We are convinced that the reasonable interests of people's lives must prevail in this case as well,"⁸³ he stated. In 1954, Belić claimed that the Soviet authorities banned scientific contacts with Yugoslav institutions, the transmission of publications from the USSR Academy of Sciences to the Serbian Academy, and any correspondence between members of both academies. Soviet Ambassador to Yugoslavia did not deny his claims.⁸⁴

The Soviet-Yugoslav conflict had an influence on not only bilateral scientific cooperation but also Aleksandar Belić personally. According to the author of an article in one of the Yugoslav literature journals who remarked on Belić's fiftieth scientific anniversary, the academician's work "About linguistic nature and development. Linguistic testing," which was translated into Russian, has yet to be released in the USSR for "presumptive reasons."⁸⁵ Also,

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² АСАНУ, АА, Годишња скупштина Академије 15. март 1951, 6.

⁸³ АСАНУ, 14386-III-3261-е, 12.

⁸⁴ *Југословенско-совјетски односи: 1945–1956: зборник докумената, прир. Љубодраг Димић и др. (Београд: Министарство спољних послова, 2010), 655–657.*

⁸⁵ Б. Д. „Педесет година рада дра Александра Белића”, *Књижевност*, октобар 1949, 320.

the article about Belić was omitted from the fourth volume (B-Berezko) of the second edition of the “Great Soviet encyclopedia”, released in 1950.⁸⁶ In 1954, Soviet Ambassador to Yugoslavia Valjko commented that they had two options: write negative things about Belić, which he does not deserve, or write positive things, which could lead to issues in Yugoslavia.⁸⁷

Following Stalin's death in March 1953, international and domestic developments prompted the Soviet side to make the first steps toward rapprochement with Yugoslavia. In June 1954, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and its First Secretary, Nikita Khrushchev, issued a letter to Yugoslavia's state and party leadership, ushering in a new chapter in bilateral relations. The conflict officially came to an end when the leaders of Yugoslavia and Soviet Union met in Belgrade in 1955.⁸⁸

A month before the above-mentioned letter was sent, there were obvious indications of a shift in Soviet policy and approach toward Yugoslavia during the talks between Soviet and Yugoslav representatives, held after a dinner with the Soviet envoy, which Aleksandar Belić also attended. Both parties were quite forthright about the difficulties in bilateral relations throughout the discussions, which addressed the challenges and the normalization of relations. Scientific cooperation was also discussed. The Soviet Ambassador Valjko encouraged Belić to write again to his contacts at the USSR Academy, stating his confidence that he would obtain a response, after Belić provided several examples of how the Soviet authorities prohibited scientific contacts with Yugoslav organizations.⁸⁹

Following the 1955 Soviet-Yugoslav reconciliation, cooperation in various fields, including science and the arts, resumed. Aleksandar Belić was elected to the International Board of Slavists, joining 11 other slavists from throughout the world. For the first time after the conflict, he traveled to Mo-

⁸⁶ *Большая советская энциклопедия. Б-Березко. Второе издание* (Москва: Государственное научное издательство „Большая советская энциклопедия”, 1950), 437.

⁸⁷ *Југословенско-совјетски односи: 1945–1956*, 655–657.

⁸⁸ Димић, „Предговор”, 11; Љубодраг Димић, „Југословенско-совјетски односи у 1954. години”, у *Балкан после Другој светској ратна: зборник радова са научној скупштини*, уредник Петар Качавенда (Београд: Институт за савремену историју, 1996), 155–165; Љубодраг Димић, „Јосип Броз и Никита Сергејевич Хрушчов: разговори у Београду 27. мај – 2. јун 1955”, *Историјски гласник*, бр. 1–2 (1997): 35–67.

⁸⁹ *Југословенско-совјетски односи: 1945–1956*, 655–657.

scow in May 1956 to attend the Board meeting that planned the 4th Slavic Congress for 1958.⁹⁰ A month later, Belić published an essay in “Borba” about Slavic studies in Moscow, in which he reflected on his recent trip to Moscow and expressed his pleased surprise at how Slavic studies had developed in the USSR over the previous decade. He lauded the Soviet Union for sparing no material resources to advance science to its utmost level.⁹¹ Belić then attended the 4th Slavic Congress which took place in Moscow during September 1958. He was the head of the Yugoslav delegation which included 23 members. The President of the Serbian Academy of Sciences even presented a welcome message alongside officials from the USSR’s Academy of Sciences, Moscow State University and other international delegations.⁹²

Belić’s 1958 journey to Moscow appears to be his final visit to the Soviet Union. A year later, in 1959, the USSR Academy of Sciences re-elected Aleksandar Belić and altered his title from corresponding to foreign member.⁹³ In December 1959, Belić and Pavle Savić, obtained their diplomas at the solemn session of the Serbian Academy of Sciences, presented by the Soviet envoy Ivan Zamchevski. The ambassador reminded the audience that Belić is the oldest member of his country’s Academy and emphasized his contributions to scientific growth, particularly his “role in the establishment of the Serbian Academy of Sciences.”⁹⁴ Just two months later, in February 1960, Belić died in Belgrade at age of 83.⁹⁵

SUMMARY

From 1937 to 1960, Aleksandar Belić was President of the Serbian Royal Academy / Serbian Academy of Sciences. During the interwar period, he served as chairman of the State Commission for Russian Refugees – those who fled Russia following the Russian Revolution and Russian Civil War. Belić openly supported and assisted members of this social group in Kingdom of SCS / Yugoslavia while criticizing the USSR. Following the end of

⁹⁰ *Борба*, 29. 4. 1956, 6.

⁹¹ *Борба*, 1. 6. 1956, 4.

⁹² *Борба*, 2. 9. 1958, 2.

⁹³ АСАНУ, 14386-III-2144, Многоуважаемый Иван Константинович.

⁹⁴ *Борба*, 16. 12. 1959, 8.

⁹⁵ Ђупић, „Александар Белић”, *Српски биографски речник*, 473.

WWII, Aleksandar Belić began praising the Soviet Union, and actively collaborating with the USSR Academy of Sciences and other organizations from this country. He was even named an honorary professor at Moscow State University, making him the first foreign academician in the USSR to gain the highest level of recognition in academic circles. However, when the Soviet-Yugoslav conflict broke out in 1948, the Serbian Academy of Sciences strongly supported its government, condemning the Cominform Resolution, and Belić began openly criticizing the USSR. After the conflict was resolved and the two academies restored contact, Belić continued to collaborate with Soviet scholars.

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Резиме

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СРПСКИ АКАДЕМИК АЛЕКСАНДАР БЕЛИЋ И СССР (ОД ПОЧЕТКА 1920-ИХ ДО КРАЈА 1950-ИХ)

АПСТРАКТ: У чланку се изучавају ставови председника Српске краљевске академије / Српске академије наука Александра Белића о СССР-у и његова перцепција ове земље током периода од четрдесет година. Рад је базиран првенствено на материјалима из Белићевог личног фонда из Архива Српске академије наука и уметности, као и документима из других архива у Србији, те литературе и штампе. У периоду од почетка 1920-их до краја 1950-их совјетско-југословенски односи пролазили су кроз различите фазе које се могу пратити кроз погледе ове утицајне јавне личности и научника у две југословенске државе.

КЉУЧНЕ РЕЧИ: Александар Белић, Југославија, СССР, руска емиграција, међуратни период, послератни период

Александар Белић био је председник Српске краљевске академије / Српске академије наука у периоду од 1937. до 1960. године. Током међуратног периода обављао је функцију председника Државне комисије за руске избеглице (оних лица која су напустила Русију након Октобарске револуције и Грађанског рата у Русији). Белић је отворено подржавао и помагао припадницима ове друштвене групе у Краљевини СХС / Југославији, а критиковао СССР. Након завршетка Другог светског рата Александар Белић је почео да хвали Совјетски савез и активно сарађује са Академијом наука СССР-а и другим институцијама из ове земље. Академик је чак био именован за почасног професора Московског државног универзитета, што га је учинило првим иностраним научником у СССР-у који је стекао највише признање у академским круговима. Међутим, када је избио совјетско-југословенски сукоб 1948. године, Српска академија наука је снажно подржала југословенску власт, осудила Резолуцију Информбироа, а Белић је почео отворено да критикује СССР. Након што је сукоб окончан, а две академије обновили контакт, Белић је наставио сарадњу са совјетским научницима.