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*Bogdan ŽIVKOVIĆ*

Institute for Balkan Studies SASA, Belgrade

[bogdan.zivkovic@bi.sanu.ac.rs](mailto:bogdan.zivkovic@bi.sanu.ac.rs)

ORCID: 0000-0002-4021-1983

### **Tito's Canossa or Pyrrhic victory? Yugoslavia and the 1976 Conference of Communist and Workers Parties of Europe\***

**ABSTRACT:** This paper explores Yugoslavia's unexpected decision to participate in the 1976 Conference of Communist and Workers Parties of Europe, analysing the broader foreign policy context that shaped its engagement. The Yugoslav leadership viewed the conference as an opportunity to assert their core foreign policy principles within the European communist movement. Closely aligned with the Italian Communist Party, Belgrade played a key role in shaping the final document, which formally promoted the autonomy of national communist parties. The conference was widely seen as a success for the so-called autonomist bloc, but this victory proved temporary. The article concludes that while the conference was a symbolic milestone for Yugoslav foreign policy, it ultimately represented a Pyrrhic victory in the broader struggle for autonomy within the communist movement.

**KEYWORDS:** Yugoslavia, Tito, communism, Europe, autonomy, Berlin Conference 1976, Eurocommunism, Italian Communist Party (PCI), CSCE, Cold War

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In June 1976, Josip Broz Tito arrived in Berlin to participate in the Conference of European Communist Parties. It was a highly unusual occurrence. Since 1948, Tito had avoided multilateral gatherings of the communist movement. Yugoslavia's communist identity was rooted in its maverick stance: so autonomous that it deliberately distanced itself from the movement's hierarchical structures. Yet beyond Tito's symbolic presence, the Berlin conference held broader significance. On one hand, it signalled a shift in Yugoslav foreign policy in the 1970s, reflecting Belgrade's attempt at rapprochement with Moscow and the broader European communist sphere. On the other hand, it marked the twilight of the movement's unity. Just four years later, at the 1980 Paris conference, many parties chose to boycott the event, which was a clear sign of the deepening divisions within European communism.

This paper aims to address several questions regarding Yugoslavia's participation in the 1976 Conference of European Communist Parties. First, it examines Yugoslav activities in the lead-up to the conference. During two years of intense bilateral and multilateral encounters, Yugoslav officials assiduously promoted their key foreign policy principles. These principles illuminate not only Belgrade's goals for the conference but also its broader motivations for participation. Second, the paper analyses Yugoslav activities during the conference itself. This includes a review of bilateral meetings held on the sidelines of the main sessions. Tito met with various communist leaders, and their conversations often focused on pressing international issues. As such, the conference extended beyond purely ideological matters, serving as a platform for broader geopolitical dialogue. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the key findings and reflects on the limited and short-lived impact of the conference's outcomes.

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Yugoslavia entered the 1970s with a sense of optimism. The Lusaka conference of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was a momentous event, transforming what had previously been only an alliance of non-aligned states into a coherent movement.<sup>1</sup> However, the decade brought many challenges to the Yugoslav leadership. Domestically, it opened with a national revolt in

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<sup>1</sup> Tvrтко Jakovina, *Treća strana hladnog rata* (Zaprešić: Fraktura, 2011), 73–80.

Croatia that shook the foundations of the federation. The response to this crisis was the 1974 constitutional reform, which paved the way for internal fragmentation and ultimately contributed to Yugoslavia's collapse in 1991.<sup>2</sup> On the international front, increasing collaboration between the two superpowers, Moscow and Washington, threatened to render both the NAM and Yugoslavia's policy of non-alignment redundant.<sup>3</sup> In the first half of 1970s, relations between Yugoslavia and the United States were tense due to the NAM's criticism of American imperialism.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, relations with the Soviet Union improved after 1971, as Moscow supported Tito during the Croatian crisis.<sup>5</sup> Yet this support was far from altruistic: as Yugoslav officials recognized, the USSR sought to use the internal turmoil to expand its influence.<sup>6</sup> The United States, in turn, attempted to counter Soviet ambitions through the European Economic Community (EEC), which Washington regarded as a proxy for limiting Soviet influence in Southern Europe and the Mediterranean, including Yugoslavia.<sup>7</sup>

In light of the growing Yugoslav-Soviet relations, and Belgrade's stronger European engagement, the Yugoslav party started entertaining the idea of finally participating at a multilateral communist meeting. The history of Yugoslav participation in the European communist conference began on July 28, 1974, when Sergio Segre and Bogumil Suika visited Belgrade to present a novel initiative from their respective parties, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP). Their proposal was to convene a conference of European communist parties focused on issues of peace, détente, and cooperation. To encourage Yugoslav participation, Segre and Suika emphasized that discussions would be free and respectful of each party's autonomy, with no preparatory documents

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<sup>2</sup> Dejan Jović, *Jugoslavija – država koja je odumrla. Uspon, kriza i pad Četvrte Jugoslavije (1974.–1990.)* (Beograd: Samizdat B92, Zagreb: Prometej, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Dragan Bogetić, *Jugoslovensko-američki odnosi u vreme bipolarnog detanta 1972–1975* (Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike, ISI, 2015), 7–8.

<sup>4</sup> Bogetić, *Jugoslovensko-američki odnosi*, 9–15.

<sup>5</sup> Александар Животић, „Нови правци спољне политике Југославије (1971–1980)“, у *Нови хоризонти спољне политике Југославије – Балкан, Европа, свет*, ур. Јован Чавошки и др. (Београд: ИНИС, 2023), 284–287, 297–299.

<sup>6</sup> Bogetić, *Jugoslovensko-američki odnosi*, 82–97.

<sup>7</sup> Benedetto Zaccaria, *The EEC's Yugoslav Policy in Cold War Europe, 1968–1980* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 2–9, 171–172, 180.

serving as a starting point. However, the two inadvertently revealed differing visions. Segre advocated for a public debate at the conference, a stronger focus on underdeveloped countries, and the development of a new perspective on socialism in the West. Issues mentioned by Segre highly resonated with the Yugoslavs. Consequently, a PCI-LCY alliance during the conference preparations seemed natural.<sup>8</sup> Conversely, Suika emphasized continuity with previous European communist conferences, reflecting a more institutionalized and hierarchical view of relations between communist parties. This was an approach the Yugoslavs fundamentally rejected. The two contrasting visions, one prioritizing autonomy, the other hierarchy, became the primary source of division throughout the negotiations over the following two years.<sup>9</sup>

The two visions clashed over a practical issue: what would be the decision-making procedure. Vladislav Obradović, from the International Department of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY), emphasized that the key question was how the parties would reach consensus. More specifically, what would happen to minority views. Although eventually this proved to be very problematic, Segre was optimistic. He believed the issue could be resolved, either by excluding controversial issues, or by acknowledging dissenting views. Although stressing that he was not expressing a formal party position, Obradović revealed the core views of the LCY. He insisted that the conference must be a free and democratic debate, respectful of each party's autonomy and opinions. Moreover, the Yugoslavs wished to include non-communist forces also. The only document they could accept was one that would impose no obligations on individual parties, as all parties were accountable only to their own working class and nation. Furthermore, the Yugoslavs insisted on avoiding condemnation of parties absent from the meeting and on rejecting any continuity with previous conferences.<sup>10</sup> This clearly ar-

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<sup>8</sup> During the two years of conference preparations, between 1974 and 1976, the communist parties of the Eastern Bloc labelled the Yugoslav and Italian communists as leaders of an „reformist bloc“ which also included the Romanian, Spanish and, at one point, French communist party; Luka Filipović, „Jugoslovenski komunisti u reformističkom taboru marksističkih partija Evrope 1967–1948“, u *Nova istraživanja jugoslovenske prošlosti: perspektive sa postjugoslovenskog prostora*, ur. Natalija Dimić Lompar i dr. (Beograd: INIS, 2025), 620.

<sup>9</sup> Arhiv Jugoslavije, SKJ Međunarodna komisija 507/IX (AJ, 507/IX) – 48/I–519.

<sup>10</sup> AJ, 507/IX – 48/I–519.

tulated an autonomist vision focused on preventing the institutionalization of the multilateral initiative.

On July 29, 1974, Segre had a similar discussion with Aleksandar Grlićkov, a prominent figure in Yugoslav foreign policy, who reiterated the Yugoslav autonomist position. Segre fully agreed with it, adding how his party had a debate with a delegation from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Namely, the Soviets emphasized Marxism-Leninism and proletarian unity as core values underpinning their collaboration. The Italians, however, perceived these terms as indicative of a closed ideological system that isolated communists from other political forces and thus insisted on rephrasing them.<sup>11</sup> The concept of proletarian unity was regarded by the Yugoslavs and Italians as a coded expression of Soviet hegemony, while the Soviets viewed it as a safeguard preserving ideological purity. This fundamental disagreement proved to be a persistent point of contention during the subsequent years of conference preparations.

Belgarde viewed the Italian communists as their main ally in further conference preparations. Thus, in the following months, the LCY held a series of meetings with various PCI officials. In August 1974, there were two meetings with Gian Carlo Pajetta, a prominent PCI figure known for his pro-Soviet stance. Pajetta informed the Yugoslavs about further developments in the preparations for the conference. Most importantly, he emphasized that the fall of regimes in Greece and Portugal was not limited to those countries alone but reflected broader issues that needed to be addressed at the conference. According to Pajetta, these issues included the peaceful transition to socialism and alliances with non-communist forces; the relationship between socialism and democracy; overcoming the division of blocs; collaboration with liberation movements; and the situation in the Arab world. These views were closely aligned with the core positions of the LCY. However, Dobrivoje Vidić<sup>12</sup> responded cautiously, stating that his party had not yet decided whether to participate and that further bilateral discussions between the PCI and LCY were desired on this matter.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> AJ, 507/IX – 48/I–520.

<sup>12</sup> Vidić was a high-ranking Serbian party official who also had a prominent role in Yugoslav diplomacy. Prior to this conversation he was twice the Yugoslav Ambassador to Moscow and once to London.

<sup>13</sup> AJ, 507/IX – 48/I–521, 522.

To further discuss the issue with the PCI, Grlićkov traveled to Rome in early September. There, he met with a PCI delegation composed of Gian Carlo Pajetta, Sergio Segre, and Angelo Oliva.<sup>14</sup> Once again, both sides reaffirmed the shared autonomist views of their parties and emphasized the importance of collaboration with developing countries and the non-communist left. Pajetta offered more detailed insights into PCI policy positions. He stressed that there were certain key issues on which the PCI was unwilling to compromise. On others, such as the situation in Czechoslovakia or the case of Solzhenitsyn, the PCI was prepared to avoid discussion, despite its opposition to Soviet actions. Segre added that the turmoil in the Mediterranean needed to be included as a topic, and that the conference should wait until the conclusion of the CSCE process.<sup>15</sup> Grlićkov, for his part, addressed a range of issues, emphasizing the need for parties to identify shared interests and focus the conference agenda accordingly. However, he highlighted one crucial point that reflected a fundamental Yugoslav principle: the conference must not become a sectarian gathering. In his view, it should open up to non-communist forces and offer avenues for collaboration with them.<sup>16</sup>

Despite initial reluctance to formally commit to the conference, the Yugoslavs ultimately decided to participate in a multilateral preparatory meeting.<sup>17</sup> In October 1974 Aleksandar Grlićkov represented the LCY at a meeting in Warsaw. Grlićkov emphasized the Yugoslav commitment to the principle of consensus. He stated how only the decisions and principles accepted by all were

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<sup>14</sup> Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Archivio del Partito comunista italiano (APCI), Esteri, MF 082, p. 310.

<sup>15</sup> The Italian communists feared that U.S. involvement, both military and otherwise, in Western Europe could increase, particularly in Italy, following the fall of the regimes in Greece and Portugal; Silvio Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo* (Turin: Einaudi, 2006), 38.

<sup>16</sup> AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-523.

<sup>17</sup> It should be emphasized that the Yugoslavs were still not entirely comfortable with this decision, which contradicted the party's post-1948 history. Even minor issues caused concern at this stage, and the decision to participate was not as firm as it eventually became. For example, when news arrived that economic issues would be discussed, the Yugoslavs questioned their participation. Although this was a relatively minor matter, the LCY was displeased that a new topic was introduced despite prior agreements on the conference agenda; Diplomatski arhiv Ministarstva spoljnih poslova Republike Srbije, Politička arhiva (DAMSPRS, PA), Italija, 1974, f. 56, d. 19, s. 457463.

acceptable to his party.<sup>18</sup> On December 20, 1974, a delegation from the LCY took part in another meeting, this time held in Budapest. The delegation consisted of officials who had previously engaged in discussions on the issue: Aleksandar Grličkov, Dobrivoje Vidić, and Vladislav Obradović. At this meeting, the LCY and the PCI once again acted in close coordination. For the Yugoslavs, the central concern was the conference document. While some parties proposed issuing several topical texts, the Yugoslavs insisted on producing a single comprehensive press release encompassing all the key issues. Pajetta and the PCI delegates agreed with this approach. However, the PCI was more focused on European issues. From their perspective, the socialist countries and the French Communist Party (PCF) held a negative and triumphalist view of Western Europe that clashed with the PCI's more nuanced position. Most importantly, the Italian communists opposed the idea of sending a formal letter to the non-communist left, arguing that this decision should be left to each national party.<sup>19</sup>

The first serious problems in the conference preparations arose in mid-February 1975, during a new preparatory meeting held in Berlin. According to the agreed principle, the discussions were to proceed *tabula rasa*, with no pre-circulated documents. Nevertheless, the representatives of the Hungarian and Polish parties arrived with a prepared text, a draft of the conference document. In response, a group of parties formed in opposition to this move. It included the Yugoslavs, Italians, Spaniards, and Romanians, supported by several smaller parties, who collectively represented an opposition minority inspired by autonomist principles. From this point onward, the dynamic of the preparations would be shaped by the tension between two opposing blocs: the autonomist minority and the Soviet-led majority. As Angelo Oliva noted in his report, these two groups held diverging views regarding the conference document. The majority bloc was described as "maximalist," advocating for a comprehensive ideological text. The opposition parties, particularly Yugoslavia, took a "minimalist" stance, favouring a shorter document limited to essential political statements. Despite this division, the Yugoslavs were not entirely dissatisfied with the outcome of the meeting, as Obradović conveyed to Oliva in a private conversation.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Bogetić, *Jugoslovensko-američki odnosi*, 109.

<sup>19</sup> AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-525.

<sup>20</sup> APCI, Esteri, MF 202. pp. 1559–1563.

This meeting further illustrated the growing alliance between the LCY and the PCI, which extended beyond the immediate context of the conference preparations. As one Yugoslav diplomat observed, the Italian communists were gradually freeing themselves from Soviet influence, and the Yugoslavs were seen as an important ally in that process.<sup>21</sup> This deepening cooperation culminated in a visit by PCI leader Enrico Berlinguer to Belgrade, where he met with Josip Broz Tito on March 29, 1975. Although the conference itself was not a major topic of discussion, the broader situation within the international communist movement was. Tito was thrilled to hear Berlinguer adopting positions that closely aligned with Yugoslav views. Both leaders criticized the Portuguese Communist Party for its sectarianism, and the Soviet Union for encouraging such behaviour rather than promoting broader alliances. More broadly, Berlinguer criticized the communist movement for being monolithic and rigid, and for failing to understand or influence new global dynamics—such as the expansion of revolutionary movements and internal crises within the socialist and social democratic camps. The PCI, he emphasized, was now focused on promoting cooperation with other political forces. Tito responded enthusiastically, stating that these were the same principles guiding Yugoslav foreign policy and its collaboration with countries like Algeria, India, and Egypt.<sup>22</sup> While Berlinguer may have had more freedom to articulate such positions abroad than in Rome, where he still had to accommodate pro-Soviet elements within the PCI,<sup>23</sup> his alignment with Tito marked a significant political alliance.<sup>24</sup> This relationship would prove influential in shaping the course of preparations for the European communist conference.

Shortly after Berlinguer's visit, on April 5, 1975, the highest organ of the Yugoslav party<sup>25</sup> convened to discuss the ongoing preparations for the European communist conference. The conclusion was unequivocal: to oppose the new draft of the conference document, this time proposed by the Socialist Unity

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<sup>21</sup> DAMSPRS, PA, Italija, f. 54, d. 9, s. 48422.

<sup>22</sup> AJ, 837, I–3–a/44–59, Zabeleška o razgovoru Predsednika SKJ Josipa Broza Tita sa generalnim sekretarom KP Italije E. Berlinguerom, 29. marta 1975. godine u Beogradu

<sup>23</sup> Marco Galeazzi, *Il PCI e il movimento dei paesi non allineati 1955–1975* (Milan: Franco-Angeli, 2011), 247–248.

<sup>24</sup> Silvio Pons, *The Global Revolution A History of International Communism 1917–1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 286.

<sup>25</sup> Predsedništvo Centralnog komiteta – the Presidency of the Central Committee.



Party of Germany (SED). At this meeting, two of the main Yugoslav principles were reaffirmed. First, the conference document should be strictly informative in nature and not an elaborate or binding political platform, as advocated by the Soviet Union. Second, the proposed draft contained several substantive issues: it failed to address the importance of underdevelopment, disregarded the value of collaboration with the non-communist left, and promoted a monolithic structure for the movement. Nevertheless, the decision was not to withdraw from the preparations. Instead, the official position was to adhere firmly to Yugoslav principles while maintaining a constructive approach.<sup>26</sup> Aleksandar Grlićkov was the key speaker at the meeting, briefing the Yugoslav leadership on the LCY's platform for the upcoming stages of the conference process.<sup>27</sup>

The meeting of the LCY Presidency was convened in anticipation of an upcoming visit by a Yugoslav delegation to Berlin, where another multilateral meeting was scheduled from April 8 to 10, 1975. This encounter ended poorly, resulting in a stalemate. The Soviet-led majority endorsed the draft prepared by SED, while the autonomist minority, led by the Yugoslavs and Italians, firmly opposed it. Emphasizing the principles of "equality, non-interference and autonomy," the autonomist group rejected any binding document, as well as any implicit or explicit references to a central authority within the movement. The majority, by contrast, insisted on unity and the formulation of joint tasks. With no compromise in sight, the participants agreed to draft a new document. However, the core problem remained unresolved: the parties were fundamentally divided over key questions of principle.<sup>28</sup>

As Yugoslavia declined to participate in the next multilateral meeting in Berlin, the PCI grew concerned that it might be left isolated in defending autonomist principles.<sup>29</sup> In response, PCI representatives Sergio Segre and An-

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<sup>26</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Zaključci Devete sednice Predsedništva CK SKJ od 5. IV 1975. godine

<sup>27</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Uvodno izlaganje Aleksandra Grlićkova sekretara u Izvršnom komitetu na Devetoj sednici Predsedništva CK SKJ održanoj 5. aprila 1975. godine o daljem toku priprema za konferenciju komunističkih partija Evrope

<sup>28</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Sastanak radne grupe za pripremu Konferencije KP Evrope; Rad redakcione grupe u Berlinu; Informacija o drugom sastanku Radne grupe u Berlinu

<sup>29</sup> Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, 47; APCI, Direzione, II bimestre 1975, MF 203, pp. 346-365.

gelo Oliva visited Belgrade on May 11, 1975, where they held discussions with Vladislav Obradović. During the meeting, Segre and Oliva criticized the imposition of the East German draft,<sup>30</sup> and discussed the apparent flexibility of the Soviet position. However, their primary aim was to assess Yugoslavia's intentions moving forward. Oliva elaborated on the Soviet stance. While acknowledging some degree of flexibility, he admitted that the Soviets were still determined to reaffirm the vanguard role and overarching aims of the communist movement. Obradović replied that Yugoslavia's final decision on participation, always conditioned by its non-aligned foreign policy, would depend on future developments. In the meantime, Yugoslavia remained interested and constructive. For that reason, despite not attending the Berlin meeting, the LCY sent a formal letter with its draft of the document to the participants. The main reason for the Yugoslav absence was the belief that bilateral meetings had proven more effective. Moreover, since the LCY was more focused on economic issues related to underdevelopment than the PCI, Obradović once again emphasized that this topic must be addressed at the conference. The Italians agreed, and Segre requested that this meeting remain confidential, so as not to provoke speculation about the presence or absence of certain parties.<sup>31</sup>

Eventually, the Yugoslav draft was discussed at the Berlin meeting. It emphasized peace, détente, international cooperation, the overcoming of political blocs, and the anti-colonial struggle. Unsurprisingly, issues concerning the Global South were central to the text, as the Yugoslavs maintained that European economic problems were deeply intertwined with questions of global development. As they argued, the challenges facing Europe should not be resolved at the expense of either the European working class or the developing world. At the Berlin meeting, the PCF representatives strongly criticized the Yugoslav draft. They denounced it as a counter-project, accusing it of aligning with imperialist interests and lacking a proper revolutionary spirit.<sup>32</sup> However, other participants responded more favourably. Vadim Zagladin

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<sup>30</sup> The content of the draft was also problematic. As Pajetta had told in Berlin, in August, it was written "in German translated from ancient Russian" from the Comintern times; Bernardo Valli, *Gli eurocomunisti* (Milan: Bompiani, 1976), 42–43.

<sup>31</sup> AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-534; APCI, Esteri, MF 206, pp. 412–415.

<sup>32</sup> A few days later, on May 17, the PCF's journal *L'Humanité* published a strong critique of the LCY and the PCI. In the article, the two parties were accused of abandoning the revolutionary perspective; Valli, *Gli eurocomunisti*, 44.

from the CPSU spoke positively about the Yugoslav proposal. He agreed that the contributions of liberation movements and Non-Aligned countries should be acknowledged in the final document.<sup>33</sup>

As Obradović had mentioned, the LCY decided to place greater emphasis on bilateral contacts. Accordingly, Aleksandar Grlićkov visited Romania and the Soviet Union in May 1975, while Edward Babiuch of the Polish United Workers' Party visited Belgrade in June of the same year. In Romania, Grlićkov had the opportunity to meet none other than the country's leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu. The preparations for the European Communist Conference were not discussed in depth; however, Ceaușescu made his position clear: his party saw no need for such a conference, particularly if its main purpose was to applaud Moscow. Instead, he expressed interest in a conference that would address pressing international issues, such as the new international economic order and the problems of underdevelopment.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, Grlićkov's meetings in Moscow focused much more directly on the issue of the conference. During the initial encounter, Soviet representatives Boris Ponomarev and Konstantin Katushev were cordial and flexible, signalling acceptance of the well-known Yugoslav positions. However, in a subsequent meeting, the tone shifted markedly. The Soviets adopted a more rigid stance, insisting on communist unity to be reflected in a single ideological document: one that would codify shared goals and tasks.<sup>35</sup> Grlićkov, unsurprisingly, rejected this vision. In his report to the LCY, he noted that two main issues remained unresolved between the Yugoslav and Soviet parties: the nature of the conference document, and the importance of addressing underdevelopment. Nevertheless, he predicted that Moscow would eventually become more open to dialogue and compromise. For the time being, it remained focused on the CSCE, relegating the European communist conference to a lower priority.<sup>36</sup> Finally, in June, Polish official Babiuch visited Belgrade and held talks with Stane Dolanc, at the time arguably the second most power-

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<sup>33</sup> APCI, Esteri, MF 206, pp. 416–473.

<sup>34</sup> AJ, 837, I–2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Razgovori druga Grlićkova u Bukureštu

<sup>35</sup> This tactic, of publicly endorsing Yugoslav positions while privately contradicting them, was a recurring feature of Soviet diplomacy toward Yugoslavia. As Gian Carlo Pajetta observed, Ponomarev would speak positively about non-alignment in public, yet privately referred to the policy as a “betrayal.”; APCI, Direzione, IV bimestre 1975, MF 207, pp. 64–87.

<sup>36</sup> AJ, 837, I–2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Informacija o razgovorima druga Grlićkova u Moskvi o daljim pripremama Konferencije KP Evrope.

ful figure in the LCY. Babiuch struck a conciliatory tone, appearing to align with Yugoslav views. However, given that his party had previously opposed Yugoslav autonomist positions, this was interpreted in Belgrade as a tactical shift, a manoeuvre aimed at drawing the LCY into formally committing to the conference.<sup>37</sup>

The July 1975 meeting in Berlin confirmed the ongoing stalemate in preparations for the conference. The majority and minority factions clashed primarily over the character of the final document. Another key point of contention was the political situation in Portugal and developments in Western Europe. Despite the lengthy discussions, the two sides remained far from reaching a compromise, and the only tangible outcome was the rejection of the East German draft.<sup>38</sup> Both the Yugoslav and Italian parties expressed frustration with this impasse, particularly with the inflexibility of the Soviet position. These concerns became a central theme in their bilateral discussions throughout the summer of 1975.<sup>39</sup>

The successful conclusion of the OSCE Summit in August 1975 significantly altered the dynamics surrounding the preparations for the European communist conference. With détente now bolstered, the Soviets became eager to convene the conference as soon as possible, displaying a newfound willingness to compromise with the minority autonomist parties. The Yugoslavs observed this shift during two meetings in September 1975. The first with East German official Hermann Axen in Belgrade, and the second with Soviet Georgy Shakhnazarov in Moscow. Both encounters were marked by cordiality and a notable respect for Yugoslav positions, with Axen and Shakhnazarov assuring that the autonomy and sovereignty of each party would be respected. Although Shakhnazarov still spoke of the need for joint action, he and Axen demonstrated a level of openness to Yugoslav autonomist principles that had not been seen before.<sup>40</sup> Axen also visited the PCI, where he held

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<sup>37</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Zabeleška o razgovoru Dolanca i Edvarda Babjuha (sekretar CK PURP), 4. juna 1975, u Beogradu.

<sup>38</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Rad podgrupe za pripremu dokumenata za Konferenciju KP Evrope; Izveštaj o sednici Podgrupe održanoj u Berlinu od 15. do 17. jula 1975; Informacija sa Četrnaeste sednice Komisije održane 16. septembra 1975.

<sup>39</sup> AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-536; Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, 48.

<sup>40</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Stanje priprema za održavanje konferencije KP Evrope; Pripreme za održavanje sastanka KP Evrope

a similar meeting, offering assurances of greater respect for the positions of the autonomists.<sup>41</sup> While Berlinguer remained somewhat intransigent during the discussion, challenging Axen on several points,<sup>42</sup> the overall trajectory suggested that progress was finally being made.

The renewed sense of momentum was embodied in a new draft proposal, once again prepared by the SED. Titled *For Peace, Security, Cooperation and Social Progress in Europe*, the document was set to be discussed at a meeting in Berlin on October 9, 1975. Its central theme was a celebration of the CSCE process and its core principles – peace, disarmament, cooperation, and détente. From the Yugoslav perspective, the inclusion of a reference to the Non-Aligned Movement was a welcome gesture, as was the concluding call for dialogue with other democratic forces. However, the LCY was dissatisfied with several key elements: the document's excessive emphasis on the Soviet and socialist bloc's contribution to peace, its harsh condemnation of U.S. and NATO "imperialism," and its monolithic portrayal of the communist movement, grounded in proletarian unity.<sup>43</sup> Still, it represented a compromise solution, positioned somewhere between the views of the majority and the minority. As a result, the October meeting was considered a success, with all parties agreeing to accept the draft as a working basis for further negotiations.<sup>44</sup>

Further progress on the draft text was made in early November 1975. Once again, a new version of the document was circulated, and once again, the Yugoslavs viewed it as another step toward compromise. However, they remained dissatisfied with two key issues. First, the revised draft had partially breached the agreed-upon procedure by failing to incorporate all of the comments made at the previous meeting. Second, the Yugoslavs were displeased that only some of their own suggestions had been taken into account. While the views on coexistence, autonomy of communist parties, and non-align-

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<sup>41</sup> AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-538.

<sup>42</sup> AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-538; Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, 49. The Yugoslavs and Italians also held a meeting to discuss this development. Both agreed that, as before, they could only accept a document reflecting views acceptable to all parties; AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-540.

<sup>43</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Za mir, bezbednost, saradnju i socijalni napredak u Evropi.

<sup>44</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Izveštaj delegacije SKJ o radu Trećeg sastanka Radne grupe Redakcione komisije za izradu prednacrtu dokumenta Konferencije komunističkih i radničkih partija Evrope.

ment were indeed modified in line with Yugoslav positions, many of their other remarks were ignored. These included objections to the document's continued criticism of the United States, its bloc-based mentality, its implicit endorsement of interference in the internal affairs of certain states, and the omission of any reference to the Mediterranean region. Finally, the Yugoslav delegation also noted with concern that the section addressing cooperation with social democrats had been weakened.<sup>45</sup>

The new draft was discussed on November 15, 1975, in a meeting with Paolo Bufalini. In addition to being a high-ranking official of the PCI, Bufalini held a special place in Yugoslav esteem, having served in the Yugoslav Partisan Army as a member of the Garibaldi Division.<sup>46</sup> The Italians expressed dissatisfaction with the revised text, adopting a position even more critical than that of the Yugoslavs. However, like their Yugoslav counterparts, their primary objection centred on the breach of agreed procedural norms. Bufalini spoke at length, listing a number of issues that he and his party believed needed to be either added to or more strongly emphasized in the document.<sup>47</sup> He also emphasized that the text must not equate anti-Sovietism with anti-communism, warning that such a formulation would imply that any criticism of Soviet policy amounted to a rejection of communism itself. Additionally, he proposed replacing the term *coordinated action* with *joint action*, to allow for greater flexibility among the parties. Grlićkov fully agreed with Bufalini's assessment. Consequently, the Italian communists proposed that the two parties act in coordination at the upcoming meeting in Berlin.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Informacija o prednacrtu završnog dokumenta od 4. novembra 1975.

<sup>46</sup> Following the collapse of Mussolini's regime in September 1943, many Italian soldiers found themselves stranded in Axis-occupied Yugoslavia. Some, including Bufalini, chose to join the Yugoslav Partisans and became members of the Garibaldi Division; Eric Gobetti, *La Resistenza dimenticata. Partigiani italiani in Montenegro (1943-1945)* (Rome: Salerno, 2018).

<sup>47</sup> Among the issues raised were: party autonomy, disarmament, overcoming bloc divisions, cooperation with the Third World, the fight against famine, collaboration with non-communist leftist forces, and the promotion of democracy.

<sup>48</sup> AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-537; APCI, Direzione, VI bimestre 1975, MF 209, pp. 24–30. Since 1974, the PCI had pursued plans to build broader coalitions within Western communism. However, by the time of Bufalini's meeting in late 1975, it had become clear that

The European communist parties continued work on the draft text during two meetings held in Berlin, in November and December 1975. As in previous rounds, the majority of parties emphasized unity, while the minority insisted on full consensus and advocated for a shorter, non-binding document. Key points of division remained the demand for full consensus, the nature of the final document, and the majority's negative stance toward developments in Western Europe. Nevertheless, all parties adopted a constructive tone, and meaningful progress was achieved. Although several crucial issues remained unresolved, the meetings left the Yugoslav delegation increasingly optimistic. The only notable concern was the growing Yugoslav distrust toward the Italian and Spanish parties. LCY representatives feared that these Western parties were beginning to retreat from their previously firm opposition to the majority line, potentially leaving Yugoslavia and Romania as the only staunch defenders of autonomist principles.<sup>49</sup>

A meeting of the PCI Directorate, held on December 12, confirmed that the Yugoslavs were right to begin questioning the Italian party's commitment to the autonomist line. The PCI was indeed becoming less adamant than the LCY in defending minority positions. The Directorate session was largely dedicated to discussing whether the Yugoslavs were prepared to accept the latest version of the draft document, with some PCI officials expressing frustration at what they perceived as Yugoslav intransigence. At one point, Umberto Terracini<sup>50</sup> even asked whether the PCI was proposing amendments to accommodate Yugoslav concerns or to promote its own political positions. In response, Enrico Berlinguer stated that the PCI was acting in accordance with its own principles but was also taking into account the positions of other parties. Paolo Bufalini, by contrast, adopted a more pro-Yugoslav stance, emphasizing that while the PCI's views were not dependent on those of the LCY, Yugoslav participation in the conference carried major political significance.

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these efforts had faltered, and the LCY remained the PCI's most reliable and prominent ally; Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, 51.

<sup>49</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Pregled informacija o pripremama konferencije evropskih KP; Rad redakcionog grupe u Berlinu; Izveštaj delegacije SKJ o radu Četvrtog sastanka Radne grupe Redakcionog komisije za izradu Prednacrt dokumenta Konferencije komunističkih i radničkih partija Evrope.

<sup>50</sup> Terracini was a historic figure in Italian communist, octogenarian at the time of this meeting. Although marginalized in the day-to-day party affairs, his voice remained important.

He therefore proposed that the PCI push for three changes to the text in order to address Yugoslav concerns: to remove the strong emphasis on U.S.-Soviet relations; to avoid any mention of previous summits or continuity with them; and to clearly state that not all criticism of the USSR constitutes anti-Sovietism. Berlinguer agreed with Bufalini's proposal, underscoring that LCY participation was essential to the PCI, and that the party should initiate contact with Belgrade to resolve the issue.<sup>51</sup>

Despite the progress made since September 1975, the Yugoslavs were perplexed when a new draft arrived in January 1976. Both the Romanian and Italian parties shared their view that the new version marked a regression, resembling more of an ideological platform than a compromise document. The Yugoslavs described it as "a negative escalation" by the Soviets. However, this proved to be only a short-lived manoeuvre. During the subsequent discussions in Berlin, the will to compromise prevailed. The outcome was a significantly more balanced draft. The Yugoslav delegation welcomed the fact that the new text gave prominence to the CSCE process, addressed issues of development and non-alignment, and softened the bloc-oriented tone that had characterized earlier versions. Still, several important issues remained unresolved and were left for discussion at the following meeting in March.<sup>52</sup>

The March 1976 meeting in Berlin centred on three crucial issues. The first was whether the conference should produce both a press release and a formal document. The second was whether it should adopt additional texts – separate resolutions on a range of international issues, including the Middle East, Cyprus, Indochina, Angola, and Chile. Finally, the third category encompassed unresolved matters from previous meetings: the global role and importance of the USSR, anti-Sovietism, proletarian internationalism, and disarmament. Once again, the Yugoslavs remained firm in their positions, this time supported only by the Romanians. The PCI was no longer fully backing them. For the LCY the only acceptable solution was to produce a single document. The introduction of multiple texts, they argued, would alter the character of the main conference document, turning it into an ideological plat-

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<sup>51</sup> APCI, Direzione, VI bimestre 1975, MF 209, pp. 95–100.

<sup>52</sup> AJ, 837, I–2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Rad redakcione grupe u Berlinu; Izveštaj o sastanku Redakcione grupe za izradu završnog dokumenta Konferencije komunističkih i radničkih partija Evrope, održanom od 13. do 23. januara 1976. godine u Berlinu.



form. In addition, the Yugoslavs were dissatisfied with how certain key issues were addressed in the proposed draft. They believed that the concessions offered by the Soviets were limited to areas of secondary importance, leaving the core ideological disagreements unresolved.<sup>53</sup>

The issue of proletarian internationalism once again proved to be central. It was a symbolic concept that encapsulated the broader struggle between the hegemonic majority and the autonomist minority. It came to the forefront during the May 1976 meeting in Berlin. The opposition parties expressed clear dissatisfaction with Boris Ponomarev's insistence on retaining the term in the final document. They reiterated that inter-party collaboration must not, under any circumstances, take on an institutionalized character.<sup>54</sup> This term also played a significant role in the broader narrative battle surrounding the conference. In most socialist countries, the press emphasized proletarian internationalism, presenting the preparatory process as a demonstration of ideological unity. In contrast, the press in Yugoslavia, Romania, as well as PCI and PCE journals, portrayed the process as one based on party autonomy and broad consensus. Surprisingly, by this stage, both the Hungarian and French communist parties began to move closer to the autonomist position. Reflecting this shift, their party publications also began to speak increasingly in terms of autonomy rather than ideological unity.<sup>55</sup>

On May 19 the SED called for another preparatory meeting, scheduled for June 9, 1976.<sup>56</sup> Alongside this, the German party circulated a new draft of the conference document. The Yugoslavs were generally satisfied with the fact that it emphasized party autonomy, adopted an anti-colonial orientation, and included praise for the Non-Aligned Movement. Notably, it made no reference to proletarian internationalism. As in earlier drafts, however, the Yugoslavs objected to the excessive praise of the USSR and the sharp criticism of the United States, which they considered too provocative for non-commu-

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<sup>53</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Izveštaj o sastanku Redakcione grupe za pripremu dokumenta Konferencije komunističkih i radničkih partija Evrope, koji je održan u Berlinu, 16–18. marta 1976.

<sup>54</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Rad Redakcione komisije u Berlinu, 9. V 1976.

<sup>55</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Tanjugova hitna informacija iz Međunarodnog radničkog pokreta, 2. 6. 1976.

<sup>56</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Razgovor B. Miloševića sa otpravnikom poslova ambasade DDR-a Hitze-om, 19. maja 1976. u Beogradu.

nist audiences. They also expressed the desire for the document to address minority rights and issues related to the Mediterranean region.<sup>57</sup>

However, in the weeks leading up to the June 9 meeting, most of the remaining issues were resolved through a series of bilateral consultations. During this period, Yugoslavia also held multiple meetings with other European communist parties – most notably with the PCI and the CPSU. The first of those meetings was with Antonio Rubbi and it took place on May 26. During the conversations Rubbi addressed all outstanding issues in discussions with Obradović. Two points were especially crucial: proletarian unity and anti-Sovietism, both of which the PCI and LCY viewed as instruments for reinforcing Soviet hegemony. The PCI was also determined to protect sections of the draft that dealt with themes central to its own agenda – namely, Western Europe, the European Economic Community, and cooperation with non-communist forces. More significantly, the Italians pushed for a postponement of the conference. Holding it in late June posed several problems: not only were a number of issues still unresolved, but the PCI was also preparing for national elections in Italy. They asked for Yugoslav support to move the conference to September. Obradović expressed support in principle, but noted that Tito had already agreed to the June date, and that Yugoslavia would be preoccupied with preparations for the Non-Aligned Summit during the summer.<sup>58</sup>

The crucial meeting, however, was with the Soviets. Despite their firm commitment to autonomism, the Yugoslavs, much like the Romanians,<sup>59</sup> requested a direct bilateral meeting with the CPSU in order to resolve all remaining contentious issues with the central power of the communist movement.<sup>60</sup> As a result, on June 6, Konstantin Katushev arrived in Belgrade. He first met with Grlićkov, and together they successfully resolved all outstanding points of disagreement. Later that same day, Katushev held a meeting with Stane Dolanc. The Yugoslavs agreed both to the content of the final draft

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<sup>57</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Za mir, bezbednost, saradnju i socijalni napredak u Evropu, 2. 6. 1976.

<sup>58</sup> AJ, 507/IX – 48/I-548; 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Susret Obradović-Rubbi, 26. maj 1976, u Beogradu.

<sup>59</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Susret 6. 6. 1976. u Bukureštu, Stanislav Stojanović (sekretar KMO) i Vasile Šandru.

<sup>60</sup> AJ, KPR, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Susret Obradovića sa sovjetskim ambasadorom Stjepakovim, 1. juna 1976.

document and to the proposed date for the conference. Both Dolanc and Katushev expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the talks. Notably, the Yugoslavs even agreed to include the term proletarian internationalism, after it was more precisely defined. Katushev explained that the CPSU understood the concept primarily as an expression of their solidarity with others, rather than a demand for reciprocal loyalty.<sup>61</sup> In an effort to appeal to Yugoslav autonomist sensibilities, Katushev also emphasized that there was no "centre" in the international communist movement, and that the so-called "theory of limited sovereignty" was merely a Western fabrication. The only unresolved issue that remained was how to address the situations in Portugal, Greece, and Turkey – where the Yugoslavs insisted on avoiding any language that could be construed as interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states.<sup>62</sup> He further stated that if no agreement on the document was reached at the June 9 meeting, the Soviets would, albeit reluctantly, accept issuing only a press release in place of a final document. Dolanc then flew to Rome and used this argument to persuade Enrico Berlinguer to support the conference.<sup>63</sup> With that, a consensus was reached, and no party opposed holding the conference in late June.<sup>64</sup>

In the final days leading up to the conference, several parties attempted to reopen discussion and introduce modifications to the agreed document. The Yugoslavs, however, firmly opposed any changes, insisting that not a single word be altered and that the unanimous, all-party consensus already reached be fully respected.<sup>65</sup> The Western press followed these final developments closely, often portraying them as a victory for the autonomist opposition, led by Yugoslavia. According to many reports, the autonomist bloc had

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<sup>61</sup> Although Yugoslavia had accepted the inclusion of the term proletarian internationalism after it was redefined during the bilateral meeting with the CPSU, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) remained firmly opposed to its use. As a result of the PCI's intransigence, the term was ultimately excluded from the final document. Instead, the more neutral phrase internationalist solidarity was adopted as a compromise; AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Razgovor Grličkov-Aksen 25. 6. 1976.

<sup>62</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Razgovor Dolanca i sekretara CK KPSS Konstantina Katuševa, 6. 6. 1976.

<sup>63</sup> AJ, 507/IX – 48-I-549.

<sup>64</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Diplomatske informacije od 19. 6. 1976. iz Moskve

<sup>65</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Razgovor Grličkov-Aksen 25. 6. 1976.

succeeded in imposing its core principle, party autonomy and national sovereignty, on Moscow. Some outlets, however, offered a more nuanced interpretation. The British press, in particular, emphasized that the Soviet Union had its own strategic interest in ensuring the conference took place, and therefore made tactical concessions to secure its success.<sup>66</sup>

The conference was held on June 29–30, 1976. While the debates remained largely implicit, as no party wished to openly criticize the document and risk undermining the hard-won consensus, the underlying differences were still evident. The pro-Soviet parties emphasized the unity of the movement and the strength of the socialist bloc. In contrast, the autonomist parties raised several previously avoided issues, including democracy, autonomy, and the existence of different paths to socialism. Remarkably, the PCI even referred to non-alignment. The Yugoslav delegation was particularly struck by the fact that, for the first time, both the Soviets and the Poles acknowledged certain internal problems within the socialist bloc.<sup>67</sup> President Tito used his speech to restate the fundamental principles that had guided Yugoslavia's position within the communist movement: independence, equality, non-interference, democracy,<sup>68</sup> and respect for different roads to socialism. He argued that the conference discussion itself had affirmed these values as the foundation for cooperation among communist parties. In addition, Tito addressed several broader issues central to Yugoslavia's foreign policy. He voiced strong support for the CSCE process and called for the broadest possible cooperation among "progressive and democratic forces in our continent." He condemned imperialism and neocolonialism, advocated for more equitable international economic relations as a means to address growing global inequalities, and praised the role of the Non-Aligned Movement. He also emphasized the interconnectedness of Europe with the Mediterranean and the Middle East,

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<sup>66</sup> AJ, 837, I–2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Tanjugova hitna informacija iz Međunarodnog radničkog pokreta 16. 6. 1976; „Tanjugova hitna informacija iz Međunarodnog radničkog pokreta 17. 6. 1976.

<sup>67</sup> AJ, 837, I–2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Zapažanja o nekim pitanjima iz izlaganja predstavnika partija – drugi dan – 30. juna 1976.

<sup>68</sup> Tito made a particularly noteworthy statement that echoed both the principles promoted at the 1975 OSCE Summit and Western critiques of socialism's perceived democratic deficit. He asserted that socialism must be affirmed as "the synonym for democracy, equality, independence, humanitarian justice and freedom."

declaring that lasting peace in Europe would not be possible without peace in those neighbouring regions.<sup>69</sup>

The conference was a significant success for both the Yugoslav and Italian parties, as it effectively legalized pluralism within the communist movement. Initially, the Soviets failed to fully grasp the implications of this development, though they later sought to contain it.<sup>70</sup> Simultaneously, the term *Eurocommunism* entered public discourse, notably introduced by Berlinguer in Berlin.<sup>71</sup> Three key aspects made this conference unprecedented: the presence of Tito,<sup>72</sup> the promotion of Eurocommunism, and the content of the final document. The document represented a compromise between the “centrists” and the “autonomists”,<sup>73</sup> while promoting several core values of the latter group. Namely, the autonomy of parties, respect for the free choice of different paths to socialism, equality in interparty relations, respect for differences, voluntary cooperation, and openness toward the non-communist left. Even Brezhnev appeared to concur with this approach. Departing from the doctrinaire tone of his February CPSU congress speech, he emphasized the equality and independence of communist parties. The Soviet leader also congratulated the PCI on its electoral success and notably refrained from commenting on Berlinguer’s notorious interview with *Corriere della Sera*.<sup>74</sup> Ber-

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<sup>69</sup> AJ, 837 I–2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Govori.

<sup>70</sup> Pons, *The Global Revolution*, 288.

<sup>71</sup> Although the PCF preferred the more traditional formulation of *autonomy of the parties*, rather than adopting the term *Eurocommunism*. Silvio Pons, „The Rise and Fall of Eurocommunism”, in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War. Volume III Endings*, eds. M. P. Leffler and O. A. Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 54–55.

<sup>72</sup> As the Yugoslav leader had, after decades of absence, finally agreed to attend an international communist meeting, his presence was given special attention: he was seated at the central table alongside Brezhnev and Honecker – the most prominent leader and the host, respectively.

<sup>73</sup> The “autonomists” included the communist parties of Yugoslavia, Italy, Spain, Romania, Great Britain, Belgium, Sweden, Finland, and, to some extent, France.

The Belgian Trotskyist Ernest Mandel correctly described the conference as neither a display of Soviet strength nor a major schism within the movement. Rather, he argued, it was simply a sign of the gradual but growing crisis of Soviet hegemony within global communism. Ernest Mandel, *From Stalinism to Eurocommunism: The Bitter Fruits of ‘Socialism in One Country’* (London: Verso, 2016), 46.

<sup>74</sup> In the interview, Berlinguer stated that he did not wish for Italy to leave NATO, as such a move would disrupt the international equilibrium. He also added a more personal rea-

linguer, in turn, chose not to pursue the matter further.<sup>75</sup> With the principle of party autonomy ratified at the conference, the Yugoslav and Italian communists frequently invoked the decisions of the Berlin Conference in their subsequent disputes with Moscow, asserting that its authority had to be respected by the Soviet comrades.

As the conference document had already defined the core issues and the parties appeared to be in agreement, prominent communist leaders largely avoided engaging in substantive debates on the future of international communism. Instead, they used the occasion to hold bilateral meetings and discuss a range of pressing international matters. Tito took full advantage of this opportunity, meeting with Berlinguer, Honecker, Brezhnev, Gierek, and Ceaușescu. In these talks, only minimal attention was devoted to the conference itself, its guiding principles, or the state of communism in Europe. Far greater focus was placed on global issues – particularly the situation in the Middle East.<sup>76</sup>

The first meeting took place with Erich Honecker on June 27th. The East German leader expressed his appreciation that Tito had personally come to lead the Yugoslav delegation, and both leaders expressed satisfaction that the conference had finally been convened — marking the culmination of two years of preparation. However, their conversation focused primarily on international issues. The most important topic was the upcoming Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit in Colombo. Tito proudly noted that it would gather representatives of 2.5 billion people – three-quarters of the world's population. Honecker listened attentively and stated that the SED followed the activities of the NAM with great “attention and approval.” The two leaders also agreed that the section of the conference document addressing non-alignment was well written.<sup>77</sup>

On the following day, June 28th, Tito held the two most important meetings – with his closest ally, Enrico Berlinguer, and with Soviet leader Le-

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son – that he “feels more safe” remaining within the Atlantic Pact; „Berlinguer conta «anche» sulla NATO per mantenere l'autonomia da Mosca”, *Corriere della Sera*, 15 6. 1976, 1-2.

<sup>75</sup> Miodrag Marović, *Tri izazova staljinizmu* (Opatija: Otokar Keršovani, 1983), 397-409; Valli, *Gli eurocomunisti*, 54-56.

<sup>76</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Susreti sa stranim delegacijama

<sup>77</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Susret Tito Honeker, 27. juna 1976.

onid Brezhnev. The first topic in the meeting with Berlinguer was, naturally, the PCI's recent electoral success.<sup>78</sup> The two leaders also discussed the state of the NAM and the situation in the Middle East.<sup>79</sup> However, the central topic was the conference itself. Notably, Tito engaged in a detailed discussion on this issue only with Berlinguer, reflecting their close political alignment. Both leaders expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the preparations and the direction the conference had taken. Berlinguer remarked not only on the considerable attention given to Tito's presence, but also on the perception, widespread among participants, that the conference marked a political victory for both the LCY and the PCI. As for the final document, although he acknowledged that some parts were written "in the old manner," Berlinguer praised its inclusion of new and forward-looking ideas, "particularly regarding internationalism and the relations between the parties." Tito, in turn, focused on Third World issues raised during the conference. He criticized Brezhnev's earlier assertion that colonial metropolises, and not the USSR, were solely responsible for the economic difficulties of developing countries. Finally, the two leaders discussed rumours about a possible new global communist conference. Despite their participation at this European conference, both were explicitly opposed to the idea of a global one. It was evident that Berlinguer and Tito were satisfied with the concessions obtained from the Soviets in Berlin, but doubted that future multilateral collaboration with Moscow could be useful. Namely, in a prescient remark, Berlinguer stated that this would likely be the last summit of its kind, doubting that a similar event could be organized again. Tito agreed, arguing that it made no sense to discuss a global or future communist conference at that point. He advised that such initiatives should be ignored unless they gained momentum – and only then actively opposed. In his view, it was more important to observe the conference's immediate impact on relations among communist parties.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> In June 1976, the PCI achieved an astonishing 34.4 percent of the vote – the highest electoral result in the party's history.

<sup>79</sup> Tito blamed U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger for sowing discord within the Non-Aligned Movement and among Arab countries. Despite being critical of his intervention in Lebanon, Tito expressed strong support for Syrian President Hafez al-Assad and advised him to work toward renewing unity with Egypt.

<sup>80</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Zabeleška o razgovoru Predsednika SKJ Josipa Broza Tita i generalnog sekretara KP Italije Enrika Berlinguera u Berlinu, 28. 6. 1976.

During the meeting of the Yugoslav and Soviet delegations little was said about the conference, its principles, or the state of the international communist movement. The Soviet leader merely remarked that he was pleased to attend alongside Tito, stating that his presence “strengthens the authority of the international communist movement.” Tito agreed, but the conversation quickly shifted toward Third World issues – particularly underdevelopment and the crisis in the Middle East. Brezhnev once again emphasized the need to distinguish between socialist and capitalist countries, opposing the emerging global division between rich and poor states. Konstantin Katushev added that this distinction was especially relevant in debates concerning the developing world, claiming that these countries were being exploited by capitalist, not socialist, states. The Yugoslavs rejected the idea that they equated all developed countries, socialist and capitalist alike, but maintained that all had an obligation to support underdeveloped nations and contribute to global equality. On the topic of the Middle East, the Soviets took a highly critical stance toward both Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Syrian President Hafez al-Assad. Regarding Sadat, Boris Ponomarev even alleged that he was a heavy drinker – a claim Tito flatly denied. Rather than engage in personal attacks, Tito focused on broader principles, once again stressing that U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was working diligently to divide the Arab world. He also noted that Sadat had become more reserved recently, as the Americans had failed to deliver on their promises. Stane Dolanc added that Yugoslavia had consistently advised Arab leaders not to turn against Moscow. As for Assad, Brezhnev teasingly remarked that he had heard Tito had “fallen in love” with the Syrian leader. Tito remained composed, simply replying that while Yugoslavia had good relations with Syria, Assad had made a mistake by intervening in Lebanon.<sup>81</sup>

On June 29th, Tito met with the Polish leader Edward Gierek. As Poland was experiencing internal turmoil due to widespread protests over rising prices, the conversation focused largely on this issue. The two leaders discussed how prices could be determined in a socialist society, and touched upon strikes and increased productivity in the West. While discussing these issues, they implicitly expressed frustration with the economic expectations of both Polish and Yugoslav citizens. Regarding the conference, Gierek was somewhat moderate

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<sup>81</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Susret Tito-Brežnjev, 28. 6. 1976.



and restrained in his comments. Still, he appeared closer than before to Yugoslav positions. Most notably, he stated that it was “unrealistic” and “wrong” to expect a monolithic communist movement. Dolanc picked up on this point, emphasizing that the conference had brought about positive changes. Gierek agreed, repeating that it was essential to remain realistic, acknowledge the challenges within the movement, and move away from outdated views and paternalistic approaches. However, the Polish delegation was not pleased with Santiago Carrillo’s comparison of the communist movement to a church. Gierek also warned that any evolution of the movement must be grounded in the reality of socialist countries and their specific conditions.<sup>82</sup>

Finally, on June 30th, Tito held his last bilateral meeting. This time it was with Romanian leader Nicolae Ceaușescu. Like the others, the conversation focused more on broader international issues than on the conference itself. Regarding the conference, Ceaușescu only briefly remarked that it was a free exchange of views and that the final document was “acceptable.” The two leaders primarily discussed the situation in the Middle East, especially since President Assad had recently visited both Belgrade and Bucharest. Tito reiterated his familiar position: that U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was the main culprit behind the growing divisions in the Arab world. Ceaușescu agreed that Arab unity or fragmentation would be decisive in resolving the regional crisis, although he believed other actors also bore responsibility. The upcoming NAM Summit in Colombo was also briefly discussed. The Yugoslav delegation inquired why the Soviets appeared dissatisfied with Romania’s planned participation. Ceaușescu replied that, in his view, Moscow did not actually see it as a problem. Finally, both the Romanian and Yugoslav delegations expressed concern over the protests erupting in Poland.<sup>83</sup>

Although the conference ended in apparent harmony, its press coverage revealed deep divisions. Different actors portrayed the event in starkly contrasting terms. The Yugoslavs emphasized the principles of independence, equality, non-interference, diverse paths to socialism, the importance of the Non-Aligned Movement, minority rights, and Tito’s alliance with Berlinguer.<sup>84</sup> As previously

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<sup>82</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Susret Tito-Gjerek, 29. 6. 1976.

<sup>83</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Razgovor Tito-Čaușesku, 30. 6. 1976.

<sup>84</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Borba; Izjava Tita po povratku iz Berlina, 1. jula 1976. u Beogradu

noted, Western media depicted the conference as a victory for Tito, an apotheosis of autonomy within the communist movement and a blow to Soviet hegemony. In contrast, Eastern Bloc media presented a completely different narrative. Discussions of party autonomy were largely ignored, while the leading role of the CPSU was prominently highlighted.<sup>85</sup> The way *Pravda* covered Tito's speech is particularly revealing in understanding this narrative divide. Although the Soviet newspaper reported on his address at length, several key points were omitted: his call for diverse paths to socialism, the importance of respecting national sovereignty and debating differences, criticism of growing global inequality, an appeal to overcome bloc divisions, and his emphasis on Mediterranean security.<sup>86</sup> This media coverage illustrated a broader reality – that the autonomists had achieved only a fragile, partial victory, and that the struggle for their principles within the international communist movement was far from over.

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As stated at the beginning of this paper, Yugoslavia's decision to participate in the 1976 European communist conference was rather unexpected. In fact, both this decision and the subsequent Yugoslav activity can only be fully understood within the broader context of more pressing Yugoslav foreign policy priorities. Most importantly, Yugoslavia's European policy played a decisive role. As noted in historiography, during the 1970s Tito and the Yugoslav communists recognized that Europe was gaining increasing importance in international relations due to the dynamics of détente. In response, they turned their attention more fully toward the continent, projecting the core principles of their non-aligned policy into European affairs.<sup>87</sup> These principles were central to Yugoslavia's platform at the CSCE, which remained the cornerstone of its European engagement.<sup>88</sup> Participation in the European

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<sup>85</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Bilteni i štampa; Mandel, *From Stalinism to Eurocommunism*, 49.

<sup>86</sup> AJ, 837, I-2/68, Berlinska konferencija, Informacija o interpretiranju govora druga Tita na Konferenciji komunističkih i radničkih partija Evrope u *Pravdi* od 2. jula 1976.

<sup>87</sup> Ljubodrag Dimić, *Jugoslavija i Hladni rat. Ogledi o spoljnoj politici Josipa Broza Tita (1944–1974)* (Beograd: Arhipelag, 2014), 357–383.

<sup>88</sup> Ljubodrag Dimić, *Između Istoka i Zapada. Jugoslavija, velike sile i pitanje bezbednosti u Evropi (1945–1975)* (Beograd: IK Filip Višnjić, 2022), 5–6, 321–334.

communist conference was, in this sense, only a secondary extension of Yugoslavia's broader interest in Europe and its CSCE-related activities. The policy approach applied in this context, one grounded in autonomy, merely reflected Yugoslavia's wider European orientation. As Belgrade sought to assert a more prominent role in European affairs, the conference represented another opportunity, albeit of lesser significance, that could not be overlooked.

On the other hand, Yugoslav–Soviet relations during the 1970s must also be considered a key factor. Historiography notes a period of rapprochement between Belgrade and Moscow, as well as a notably close personal relationship between Tito and Brezhnev.<sup>89</sup> In light of this improvement, it is less surprising that the Yugoslav president ultimately decided to end his decades-long absence from multilateral communist meetings and participate in the 1976 conference. This decision also reflects another important feature of Yugoslav foreign policy in the period: the growing alliance with the Italian Communist Party.<sup>90</sup> As noted in the literature, Tito and Berlinguer regarded

<sup>89</sup> Dimić, *Jugoslavija i Hladni rat*, 378; Ivo Banac, „Yugoslav Communism and the Yugoslav State”, in *The Cambridge History of Communism, Volume II, The Socialist Camp and World Power 1941–1960s*, eds. N. Naimark et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 589–590; Љубодраг Димић, „Предговор”, у *Југославија – СССР, Сусрећии и разговори на највишем нивоу руководилица Југославије и СССР, 1965–1980, Том 2* (Београд: Архив Југославије, 2015).

<sup>90</sup> Marco Galeazzi, *Togliatti e Tito. Tra identità nazionale e internazionalismo* (Rome: Carrocci editore, 2005); Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*; Saša Mišić, „Yugoslav Communists and the Communist Party of Italy, 1945–1956”, in *Italy's Balkan Strategies (19th–20th Century)*, ed. Vojislav Pavlović (Beograd: Balkanološki institut SANU, 2015), 281–292; Саша Мишић, „Обнављање односа између Савеза комуниста Југославије и Комунистичке партије Италије 1955–1956. године“, *Токови историје*, бр. 2 (2013), 121–145; Саша Мишић, „Не може се више поновити 1948. година!“ Југославија и италијански комунисти и социјалисти 1957–1962, *Токови историје*, бр. 2 (2022), 153–185; Bogdan Živković, „Le questioni delle minoranze e del confine nei rapporti fra il PCI e la Jugoslavia, 1955–1975”, *Quaderni*, vol. 31 (2020), 12–47; Богдан Живковић, „Један италијански поглед на Југославију: о активности новинара листа Унита у Београду током шездесетих и седамдесетих година 20. века“, *Архив. Часопис Архива Југославије*, бр. 1–2 (2020), 206–236; Богдан Живковић, „Од новог помирења до стратешког савеза: односи југословенских и италијанских комуниста од 1962. до Тољатијевог посете јануара 1964. године“, *Историјски записи*, бр. 3–4 (2020), 121–146; Bogdan Živković, „In Quest of a New International Communist Alliance: The Yugoslav Mediation in the Renewal of Relations Between the Communist Parties of Italy and China (1977–1979)”, in *Iconografie europee*, eds. W. Montanari and S. Zakeri (Rome: Edizioni Nuova

one another as valuable allies in promoting the principle of autonomy for national communist parties. They consistently used opportunities such as the Berlin conference to advocate for these values and to consolidate their political cooperation.

Finally, something must be said about the fate of the Berlin Conference and the principles it promoted. The years that followed revealed that the Soviet Union's concessions were largely tactical. In reality, Moscow remained committed to preserving its hegemonic role within the international communist movement. As such, the Soviet leadership soon turned against the Western Eurocommunist parties that had embraced autonomist positions. Tito himself was not targeted directly, and he made efforts to mediate the growing tensions between Moscow and the PCI. However, the ideological rift proved irreconcilable, and the autonomist parties, Yugoslavia included, were inevitably drawn into conflict with the Soviet Union. This confrontation culminated in 1980, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The principle of autonomy for national communist parties, once championed by the Yugoslav and Italian communists, gradually eroded.<sup>91</sup> In retrospect, the Berlin Conference amounted to a Pyrrhic victory.

#### SUMMARY

Yugoslavia's participation in the 1976 Conference of Communist and Workers' Parties of Europe, held in Berlin, marked a significant shift in its previous policy toward the communist movement. After decades of distancing itself from the Soviet bloc and multilateral communist gatherings, the decision to join this meeting came as a surprise. However, as this paper demonstrates, the move did not signal a change in ideological direction but was instead part of a broader Yugoslav foreign policy strategy. During the 1970s, in the context of global détente, Yugoslavia increasingly viewed Europe as a region of special importance. In addition to its key activities in the CSCE process, participation in the communist conference offered another

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Cultura, 2021); Bogdan Živković, „Inspiring Dissent: Yugoslavia and the Italian Communist Party during 1956”, *Tokovi istorije*, no. 3 (2021), 171–198; Bogdan Živković, „The Two Last Encounters between Broz and Berlinguer – the Epilogue of an Alliance”, *Balkanica – Annual of the Institute for Balkan Studies*, no. 53 (2022), 273–300.

<sup>91</sup> Živković, „The Two Last Encounters between Broz and Berlinguer”, 273–300.

opportunity to promote its core principles. Particularly autonomy, equality, non-interference, and the idea of different paths to socialism. In close cooperation with the Italian Communist Party, Yugoslavia played a key role in shaping the final conference document. As a result, the document largely reflected the views of the so-called autonomist bloc, which emphasized the sovereignty of each party.

Although the conference proceeded in an atmosphere of apparent unity and agreement on the principle of autonomy, subsequent events showed that the Soviet Union had made more of a tactical than a genuine concession. The Soviets soon began attacking the Western communist parties for their autonomist orientation. Josip Broz Tito attempted to moderate the conflict, but without lasting success. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1980 marked the end of any illusions about the possibility of compromise, and the principles proclaimed in Berlin were left largely unfulfilled. In this sense, the Berlin conference was an important diplomatic victory for Yugoslavia, but also the final moment in which the principles of autonomy had a broader platform within the communist movement. It was a symbolic and short-lived success, a Pyrrhic victory in a struggle that was ultimately lost.

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## Резиме

Богдан Живковић

### ТИТОВА КАНОСА ИЛИ ПИРОВА ПОБЕДА? ЈУГОСЛАВИЈА И КОНФЕРЕНЦИЈА КОМУНИСТИЧКИХ И РАД- НИЧКИХ ПАРТИЈА ЕВРОПЕ 1976. ГОДИНЕ

АПСТРАКТ: Овај рад истражује учешће Савеза комуниста Југославије на Конференцији комунистичких и радничких партија Европе 1976. године, анализирајући ову активност у светлу ширих спољнополитичких принципа и ангажмана Југославије. Конференција је у Београду била виђена као прилика за афирмацију југословенских спољнополитичких принципа, што је кроз савезништво са Комунистичком партијом Италије у великој мери и остварено. Завршни документ конференције у пуноћи је афирмисао аутономију националних комунистичких партија. Ипак, овај успех се показао привременим. У раду се закључује да је конференција, иако симболичка прекретница за југословенску спољну политику, у суштини представљала Пирову победу у широј борби за аутономију унутар комунистичког покрета.

КЉУЧНЕ РЕЧИ: Југославија, Тито, комунизам, Европа, аутономија, Берлинска конференција 1976, еврокомунизам, Комунистичка партија Италије (КПИ), КЕБС, Хладни рат

Учешће Југославије на Конференцији комунистичких и радничких партија Европе, одржаној у Берлину 1976. године, представљало је значајан заокрет у дотадашњој југословенској политици према комунистичком покрету. Након деценија дистанце од совјетског блока и мултилатералних комунистичких скупова, одлука да се прикључи овом састанку деловала је изненађујуће. Ипак, како овај рад показује, такав потез није био израз промене идеолошког курса, већ део шире југословенске спољнополитичке стратегије. Током седамдесетих година Југославија је, у контексту глобалног детанта, у све већој мери посматрала Европу као простор од посебног значаја. Поред најважнијих активности у окви-

ру процеса КЕБС-а, учешће на комунистичкој конференцији представљало је још једну прилику за промоцију сопствених принципа – пре свега аутономије, равноправности, немешања и различитих путева ка социјализму. У сарадњи са Комунистичком партијом Италије, Југославија је одиграла кључну улогу у формулисању завршног документа конференције. Стога, документ је у великој мери одражавао ставове тзв. аутономистичког блока, усредсређеног на промоцију суверености партија.

Иако је конференција протекла у духу привидног јединства и сагласја о принципу аутономије, каснији догађаји показали су да је Совјетски Савез више учинио један тактички него суштински уступак. Совјети су убрзо почели да нападају западне комунистичке партије због њихове аутономистичке оријентације. Јосип Броз Тито је покушавао да ублажи конфликт, али без дугорочног успеха. Совјетска интервенција у Авганистану 1980. године означила је крај сваке илузије о могућем компромису, а принципи о којима се говорило у Берлину остали су махом мртво слово на папиру. У том смислу, берлинска конференција представљала је важну дипломатску победу за Југославију, али и последњи тренутак у коме су принципи аутономије имали ширу платформу унутар комунистичког покрета. Победа је била симболична и краткотрајна – једна Пирова победа у борби која је, у коначници, изгубљена.