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Examples of informal practices in Yugoslavia's trade relations with Italy in the 1960s and 1970s

Abstract: The article deals with the issue of informal practices in Yugoslavia using examples of these practices in trade with Italy in the 1960s and early 1970s. The subject of the analysis is the re-export activity of Yugoslav companies, and various other illegal activities used by companies to achieve a better placement of their goods in another country, regardless of whether the state tacitly supported these activities or fought them. The research is based on documents from the Archive of Yugoslavia, media sources and literature.

Keywords: Socialist Yugoslavia; Italy; trade relations; informal practices; corruption; re-export

Trade relations between Italy and Yugoslavia¹ are one of the most fruitful examples of cooperation between countries with different economic systems. After the signing of the London Memorandum in 1954 and the de facto settlement of the main dispute (the border), the period of rising relations between the two countries began, especially in the economic sphere.² Yugoslav-Italian political relations received a new impetus, especially after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, when the Italian side gave guarantees to Yugoslavia that Italy would not use the new circumstances to raise the bor-

1 In this paper, the terms "Italy" and "Yugoslavia" will be used for the Republic of Italy (1945-), and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1963–1992).

2 Saša Mišić, *Pomirenje na Jadranu: Jugoslavija i Italija na putu ka Osimskim sporazumima*, (Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike, 2008), 18.

der issue.³ Negotiations for the final settlement of the border problem began in secret due to the sensitivity of the Italian public to this issue. This period of good relations was crowned with the signing of the Treaty of Osimo in November 1975.⁴ The reasons for such a long period to reach an agreement mostly lie in the very unstable conditions in Italian domestic politics, which often paralyzed the Italian government in making sensitive decisions.⁵

On the other hand, bilateral economic relations between Italy and Yugoslavia developed favorably, stimulated by the economic development of both countries. Following the development of the entire Western world, Italy abandoned the policy of protectionism after the Second World War and opened up to the international market.⁶ Significant American investments helped in the reconstruction of the country, and at the same time the involvement in the Western European integration processes brought a lot of economic benefits for Italy.⁷ Until 1974, Italy achieved high yearly rates of growth in industry and overall Gross Domestic Product (GDP).⁸ At the same time, the country opened up more and more to the international market, which is evident from the fact that the increase in foreign trade amounted to about 10% per year.⁹ Italy needed new markets for its industrial products, so in this period it also developed relations with the socialist countries of Eastern Europe and Yugo-

3 The reason for this was primarily in the interest of Italy to have an independent and non-aligned Yugoslavia on its eastern borders, rather than a state under the control of the Soviet Union. Ibid., 64–65.

4 Ibid., 363–365.

5 For political history of Italy see: Denis Mack Smith, *Storia d'Italia dal 1861 al 1997*, (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1997); Umberto Gentiloni Silveri, *Storia dell'Italia contemporanea, 1943–2019*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2019); Simona Colarizi, *Storia politica della Repubblica. 1943–2006. Partiti, movimenti e istituzioni*, (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2016), etc.

6 Valerio Castronovo, *Storia economica d'Italia. Dall'Ottocento al 2020*, (Torino: Einaudi, 2021), 201–212.

7 Ibid., 223–230.

8 This period of Italian economy is often called “miracolo economico” (eng. “economic miracle”), or “l'eta d'oro” (eng. “golden age”). For history of Italian economy see: Vera Zamagni, *The Economic History of Italy 1860–1990, Recovery after Decline*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Emanuele Felice, *Ascesa e declino. Storia economica d'Italia*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2015); Valerio Castronovo, *Storia economica d'Italia. Dall'Ottocento al 2020*, (Torino: Einaudi, 2021); Michele Salvati, *Occasioni mancate. Economia e politica in Italia dagli anni '60 a oggi*, (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2000), *L'Italia e l'economia mondiale. Dall'unita a oggi*, (Venezia: Marsilio, 2013), etc.

9 Emmanuele Felice, *Ascesa e declino. Storia economica d'Italia*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2015), 233–234.

slavia.¹⁰ On the other hand, Yugoslavia was also rapidly developing and industrializing, and in that process it needed the import of goods and technology.¹¹ Unlike Italy, Yugoslavia started the postwar period as a country with a centrally planned economy, with a fairly closed market, but over time it got progressively liberalized.¹² After the economic reforms of 1961 and 1965, Yugoslavia significantly liberalized its trade and became a member of the GATT.¹³ This enabled greater imports of Italian and other Western European products and stronger trade ties with Italy and the European Economic Community (EEC).¹⁴ The Italian-Yugoslav border was considered one of the most open borders in Europe, despite the fact that it was a border between a capitalist and a socialist country - visas between Italy and Yugoslavia were abolished in 1966, and since then tens of thousands of people crossed the border every day.¹⁵

In the sixties and seventies Italy was consistently either Yugoslavia's first or second largest trading partner.¹⁶ Yugoslavia was importing much more than it exported into Italy, which resulted in the fact that from at the end of the 1960s, the trade balance was constantly on the side of Italy.¹⁷ This was, in large part, the result of Italy's membership in the EEC, which entailed restrictions on Yugoslav exports to this country as part of the protectionist policy of the entire community.¹⁸ This caused a problem in relations with the EEC, which

10 Giovanni Federico, Nicolas Wolf, "I Vantaggi comprati", *L'Italia e l'economia mondiale. Dall' unita a oggi*, (Venezia: Marsilio, 2013), 453–485.

11 For history of Yugoslav economy see: David A. Dyker, *Yugoslavia: Socialism, Development and Debt*, (London; New York: Routledge, 1990); Susan L. Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment: The Political Economy of Yugoslavia, 1945–1990*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Branko Horvat, *The Yugoslav economic system: the first labor-managed economy in the making*, (New York: Routledge, 1976), etc.

12 Milan Piljak, „Reforme jugoslovenskog ekonomskog sistema 1945–1965“, *Istorijska tribina: Istraživanja mladih saradnika Instituta za noviju istoriju Srbije*, ur. Zoran Janjetović, (Beograd: INIS, 2013), 219–239.

13 GATT – General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

14 Benedetto Zaccaria, *The EEC's Yugoslav Policy in Cold War Europe, 1968–1980*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 23–25.

15 Petar Dragišić, „Kako je Trst postao `naš` . Jugoslovenska konzumeristička praksa u Trstu šezdesetih i sedamdesetih godina“, *Tradicija i transformacija: transnacionalna iskustva jugoslovenske istorije: zbornik radova*. Knj. 2, ur. Olga Manojlović Pintar, Vera Gudac Dodić, (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2019), 229–230.

16 *Jugoslavija 1918–1988; statistički godišnjak*, (Beograd: Savezni zavod za statistiku, 1989), 301.

17 Petar Dragišić, *Šta smo znali o Italiji? Pogledi iz Beograda na Italiju 1955–1978*, (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2019), 232.

18 Zaccaria, *The EEC's Yugoslav Policy*, 31–32.

were partially resolved by the trade agreement of 1970, but continued to burden relations between the two sides.¹⁹

Informal practices had a large role in the economy of both countries. Italy, and especially its southern half, was one of the most corrupt areas of the EEC (which is still the case today).²⁰ Corruption has had a long tradition on the Apennine peninsula, however, with economic development and increasing participation of the state in the economy (through the large companies like ENI²¹ and IRI²²), it has ceased to be spontaneous and has become part of the system since the 1960s. During the 1960s and 1970s, affairs were often used to settle disputes between political parties, or between different currents of the same party.²³ On the other side, due to the closed nature of Yugoslav society, there was less evidence of corruption, but there are still some indicators that it was also significantly present in this country as well.²⁴

Informal practices from both countries spilled over into their mutual trade relations. This is a topic that until now has not been given much attention in historiography, but about which there are quite solid sources. In the Archives of Yugoslavia, in the funds of the Federal Secretariat for Economic Relations for Foreign Affairs and the Federal Executive Council,²⁵ numerous examples of these practices can be found, which were often supported by the state authorities, as evidenced by the fact that most of these documents are classified under the label “strictly confidentially”. Apart from these informal practices in which the state participated, there is also evidence of illegal activities that the state system fought against and tried to suppress. This paper will discuss several types of informal practices that were present in the relations between the two countries: from re-export, as the most complex and specific informal practice, to other types of trade frauds, smuggling and border manipulations.

19 Ibid., 43–44.

20 Alberto Vannucci, “La corruzione in Italia: cause, dimensioni, effetti”, *La legge anticorruzione: prevenzione e repressione della corruzione*, ed. Bernardo B. Mattarella, Marco Pelissero, (Torino: Giappichelli, 2013), 25–28.

21 Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (eng. National Hydrocarbons Board)

22 Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale (eng. Institute for Industrial Reconstruction)

23 Carlo Alberto Brioschi, *La corruzione. Una storia culturale*, (Milano: Ugo Guanda editore, 2018), 185–188.

24 Klaus Buchenau, “The third Path into Twilight? Corruption in Socialist Yugoslavia”, *Tokovi istorije* 3/2021, 89–98.

25 Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), Fond 751, Savezni sekretarijat za ekonomske odnose sa inostranstvom; Fond 130, Savezno izvršno veće.

Re-export

Re-export represents the purchase of foreign goods and their further sale to third countries without significant additional processing. There are several types of re-exports, depending on whether the goods pass border control, and whether the goods have been altered or sold in exactly the same condition. Re-export can be used in different ways in international trade: to take advantage of certain trade benefits that one country has with another, to avoid customs barriers between countries, to avoid trade sanctions, etc. The main motive for re-exporting is the profit made by the re-export company due to the difference in prices of the two markets it connects.²⁶

Yugoslavia represented a suitable ground for this type of activity. Its position as a non-aligned country in Europe, between the Eastern and Western bloc, allowed it to act as an intermediary between all three sides: Western, Eastern and non-aligned countries. Yugoslavia was the first European country to sign a trade agreement with the European Economic Community,²⁷ at the same time it was an associate member of the Comecon,²⁸ and its position within the Non-Aligned Movement and belonging to the group of 77 underdeveloped countries of the world enabled it to access the markets of Africa and Asia.²⁹

Italy was also aware of this, so when considering the form of the trade agreement between Yugoslavia and the EEC in 1968, the Italian expert Albertario noted that Italy could allow Yugoslavia additional quotas for the export of beef, but that such an agreement would have to be accompanied by some kind of a “gentleman’s agreement” between Yugoslavia and Italy to prevent the abuse of that position. As an illustration of these claims, Albertario added that the Hungarian economic adviser in Rome had already questioned him about the details of the trade agreement between Italy and Yugoslavia “with great interest.”³⁰

26 Pol. A. Samjuelson, Vilijam. D. Nordhaus, *Ekonomija*, 18. izdanje, (Beograd: Mate. d.o.o, 2009), 295–315.

27 Zaccaria, *The EEC’s Yugoslav Policy*, 43.

28 Momir Ninković, “Establishment of Cooperation Between the SFRY and Comecon in 1964”, *Tokovi istorije* 3/2020, 139.

29 There is a very extensive literature on Yugoslav politics within the Non-Aligned Movement. Here are just a few titles: Dragan Bogetić, *Nevrstanost kroz istoriju*, (Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike, 2019); Tvrtko Jakovina, *Treća strana Hladnog rata*, (Zagreb: Fraktura, 2011); Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Non-Aligned World*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); Leo Mates, *Međunarodni odnosi socijalističke Jugoslavije*, (Beograd: Nolit, 1976).

30 AJ, fond 751, Savezni sekretarijat za ekonomske odnose sa inostranstvom, Fascikla 154, Izveštaj o konsultativnim razgovorima po pitanjima robne razmene sa Italijom, održanim u Rimu, od 20. do 23. novembra 1968, 3–5.

Yugoslav companies Generalexport and Interexport (Belgrade), Intertrade (Ljubljana), Astra (Zagreb), Interimpex (Skopje) and others, carried out numerous re-export operations that brought them significant profits. They often had the support of the state for this practice, although it was never discussed publicly, since re-export was not considered a “fair” trade activity. However, since the state authorities, unlike these companies, also had to take care of diplomatic relations with Italy, and that re-export was often the cause of certain problems, there were occasional conflicts with these companies and attempts to suppress their re-export activity.

The permit for the execution of re-export operations was issued by the National Bank of Yugoslavia, after consultation with the Federal Secretariat for Foreign Trade (FSFT). A company that wanted to re-export certain goods was obliged to fill out a special form, which contained information about the quantity and type of goods, the country of origin and the country to which it is exported, the profit expected from the business, etc. In addition, this questionnaire included questions such as “*Is it evident that it is re-export?*”, or “*Is there tacit consent of the country to which the goods are exported?*”, which clearly show that often these activities had a secret character. However, the most important question was related to whether the re-export company needed (false) proof of the Yugoslav origin for the goods from the state authorities, that is, whether the re-export business would be concealed with the cooperation of state authorities. Although the answer to this question was very rarely positive, the very fact that it was in the form is very interesting and says a lot about the relationship between state authorities and self-governing enterprises.

The most important forms of re-export carried out by Yugoslav companies were the re-export of goods from Eastern Europe (most often primary industrial raw materials and products) and from developing countries (mainly agricultural products and industrial raw materials) to the developed countries of Western Europe (including Italy), and vice versa, re-export of finished products with a high degree of processing from Western countries to the Eastern Europe and to the markets of Africa and Asia.

Italian goods re-exported to the countries of Eastern Europe and developing countries were mainly consumer goods: they were industrial products with a high degree of processing or products of specific Italian quality (food or textiles), which could not be obtained directly from Italy in these countries due to trade barriers. In the majority of cases, the Yugoslav authorities approved the re-export of these goods, which may mean that they had tacit agreements with the authorities of those countries to carry out this type of work.

The Italians were particularly interested in trade opportunities with non-aligned countries through Yugoslavia. In addition to regular trade, Italian producers often agreed to re-export deals with Yugoslav companies. For example, various products of the Italian industry were approved for re-export to Syria by the company from Belgrade "Jugoexport" in 1969.³¹ A similar mechanism existed in the case of African countries, as can be seen from the example of the re-export of 15,000 boxes of cherry compote from Italy to Sudan, which was allowed to the company Agrovjvodina from Novi Sad in 1970.³² Libya was also a frequent location of Italian products, but due to trade barriers, it was often more profitable to re-export them via Yugoslavia, despite completely unjustified geographical circumstances (Libya's proximity to Italy). These jobs were mainly performed by Yugoslav companies located in Slovenia - Slovenijales from Ljubljana, for example, re-exported furs from Italy to Libya in 1967,³³ and Metalka (Ljubljana), ceramic tiles in 1970.³⁴ Also, despite the fact that there was a trade agreement between Turkey and the European Economic Community, it did not cover all the necessary products that Turkey imported from Western Europe, so Yugoslavia could also act as an intermediary towards this market. The business with Turkey was mainly carried out by the company Interimpex from Skopje: it was mostly about the products of the chemical and textile industry.³⁵

Re-export jobs to Eastern Europe were somewhat rarer, but there are also numerous examples from this period. In 1972, the company Rapid from Belgrade re-exported various switch parts to the German Democratic Republic (East Germany),³⁶ and Generaleksport, Belgrade, re-exported spare auto parts and accessories from Italy to Hungary. In both cases, it was evident that it was a matter of re-export, so there was no falsification of the certificate of origin, and the job was done with the consent of foreign authorities.³⁷

However, not every re-export business was approved by the Yugoslav authorities. An example of a deal that was rejected is the request of Interexport

31 AJ, 751-229, odobrenje za reeksport Jugoeksport - Narodnoj banci Jugoslavije, 4. 5. 1969.

32 AJ, 751-506, odobrenje za reeksport, Agrovjvodina - Narodnoj banci Jugoslavije, 2. 7. 1971.

33 AJ, 751-6, odobrenje za reeksport, Slovenijales - Narodnoj banci Jugoslavije, 5. 4. 1967.

34 AJ, 751-365, odobrenje za reeksport, Metalka - Narodnoj banci Jugoslavije, 10. 9. 1970.

35 AJ, 751-6, 751-229, 751-365, 751637, odobrenja za reeksport, Interimpex - Narodnoj banci Jugoslavije.

36 AJ, 751-506, odobrenje za reeksport, Rapid - Narodnoj banci Jugoslavije, 6. 9. 1972.

37 AJ, 751-776, odobrenje za reeksport, Generaleksport - Narodnoj banci Jugoslavije, 24. 9. 1973.

from Belgrade to export 150,000 raincoats from Italy to the USSR in 1968. FSFT did not give a reason why this job was rejected, so we can only assume that it was an assessment that such a quantity of this product would produce unwanted effects on the Soviet market and problems in relations with this superpower.³⁸

Re-exports from Eastern Bloc countries and developing countries to Italy were under far greater control of the Yugoslav authorities. The reasons for this were numerous misunderstandings and problems arising in relations with Italy as a result of this activity. The Italians often accused Yugoslavia of re-exporting, due to the very low prices of Yugoslav goods.³⁹ In some cases, these accusations were true, but sometimes Yugoslav products were simply significantly cheaper than Italian products due to differences in economic systems and markets. For example, in 1967, the Italians banned the import of acetic acid, mining explosives, couplings for cast pipes, ethyl acetate and nitrocellulose, under the suspicion that it was re-exported due to their low price. In the confidential Yugoslav information about the third session of the Mixed Committee for Economic, Industrial and Technical Cooperation, it is stated that all these products, except for ethyl acetate, were goods of domestic production, and that it should be explained to the Italians that Yugoslavia is exporting these goods for the first time and is not familiar with the Italian market; on that grounds, Yugoslavia should request lifting of the import ban. However, it is further acknowledged that as far as ethyl acetate is concerned, it is true that it was re-exported, and that it was sold at lower than competitive prices. It is emphasized that “the possibilities of justification do not exist”, and that the mistake must be acknowledged to the Italians while guaranteeing that such a case will not be repeated.⁴⁰

However, this did not mean that the Yugoslavs were always ready to admit to Italy their re-export arrangements. Only a few months after this case, we come across a note about the re-export of sunflower oil from Eastern Europe to Italy.⁴¹ It is stated that the re-export of a total of 23,400 tons of sunflower oil was approved, of which 20,000 tons to Generalexport to import goods from the USSR, 3,000 tons to Progress for import from Romania, and 400 tons to Centroprom for import from “an Eastern European country.” It goes on to say that the assumptions of the Italian authorities that it is a matter of re-export are

38 AJ, 751-115, odobrenje za reeksport Intereksport – Narodnoj banci Jugoslavije, 6. 5. 1968.

39 Mišić, *Pomirenje na Jadranu*, 206.

40 AJ, 751-6, Informacija o predstojećem III Zasedanju Mešovitog komiteta za privrednu, industrijsku i tehničku saradnju sa Italijom, 10. 11. 1967, 3-5.

41 AJ, 751-154, Beleška o reeksportu suncokretovog ulja iz IEZ u Italiju, 29. 3. 1968, 1.

correct, and that “we are threatened with an export ban”. It is suggested that all re-export activities be stopped as soon as possible, and that companies should be warned in the future to be careful about the quantities and prices that they export to Italy. Until last year, Yugoslavia did not export this product to Italy because it had obligations to the USA, so that “should be used as an explanation of why there was such a sudden jump in exports.”⁴²

Although re-export was mostly an informal practice that had the permission of the Yugoslav authorities, sometimes it was carried out in a completely illegal manner, without the awareness of the government. Evidence of this can be found in the example of the re-export of grooved iron plates originating from Bulgaria in 1968. The Italian embassy sent a complaint to the FSFT regarding the suspected re-export of this product, as it did many times before.⁴³ However, this time FSFT itself was surprised by this information. Petar Tomić, advisor to the federal secretary for foreign trade, in an attempt to find out who was re-exporting, since they did not issue any permits, wrote to the companies Intertrade (Ljubljana), Interexport, (Belgrade), Metalka (Ljubljana), and the association of Yugoslav ironworkers. All these companies denied the allegations that they were re-exporting. However, the association of Yugoslav ironworkers claimed that it was certainly a matter of re-export because Yugoslavia had never exported these domestically produced products to Italy to a large extent.⁴⁴ Since they did not find information on which Yugoslav company was re-exporting, FSFT asked for help from the Italian embassy.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, the documentation about this event ends there, so it is not certain what the final outcome of this dispute was, nor which company carried out this illegal activity.

However, four years later, some new documents shed more light on this case. In a letter from the Yugoslav Embassy in Rome to FSFT dated July 28, 1972, it is stated that representatives of the Italian siderurgy industry visited them and informed them of the difficulties they are in. They note that this year there was a sudden increase in Yugoslav exports of ferroalloys to Italy, although, according to their and Yugoslav data, there was no increase in pro-

42 Ibid., 2–3.

43 AJ, 751–154, Zabeleška o razgovoru P.Tomića, pomoćnika saveznog sekretara za spoljnu trgovinu sa V. Gorgom, ekonomskim savetnikom italijanske ambasade 28. 10. 1968.

44 AJ, 751–154, Prepiska Saveznog sekretarijata za spoljnu trgovinu sa Intertrade-om, Intereksportom, Metalkom, i Udruženjem jugoslovenskih železara (oktobar-novembar 1968).

45 AJ, 751–154, Zabeleška o razgovoru P.Tomića, pomoćnika saveznog sekretara za spoljnu trgovinu sa V. Gorgom, ekonomskim savetnikom italijanske ambasade 16. 11. 1968.

duction, which alludes to re-exports. The association requests that the embassy enable them to meet with Yugoslav producers of ferroalloys in order to jointly examine this problem.⁴⁶

Danilo Šoškić, an official of FSFT in charge of Western Europe, contacted the association of Yugoslav ironworkers and directed them to a meeting with the Italians.⁴⁷ It is interesting to note that at the same time he writes to some Yugoslav export companies, warns them that Yugoslavia has banned the re-export of these products, and asks if any of the companies still carried out this activity, which the companies deny, of course.⁴⁸

The meeting of two associations of ironworkers, Yugoslav and Italian, took place in February 1973 in Belgrade.⁴⁹ During the meeting, in a “very friendly and comradely atmosphere”, the two delegations agreed on the key points of trade in ferrous metallurgy products. According to the Yugoslavs, the Italians proved with “concrete data” that a larger amount of ferrous metallurgy products were re-exported from Yugoslavia in previous years. They also say that Italian and Yugoslav statistical data on export and import differ significantly, even up to 100,000 tons in some years, which indicates that the scale of re-export operations was enormous. Italians also noted that all imported goods had official documents of Yugoslav origin, issued by various points of the republic’s chambers of commerce. The Yugoslav Association of Ironworkers pointed out that Yugoslavia banned the re-export of these products at the end of last year, and that they will plead with the state authorities to comply with that decision. However, the Italians did not trust the Yugoslav state authorities, especially those at the republic level. They requested that every certificate of origin of the goods should be authenticated by the Yugoslav Association of Ironworkers. This proposal could not be accepted by the representatives of the Association due to the large administration work needed for the verification of all documents related to each delivery. As a temporary solution, it was proposed that the verification should be performed by a federal body, for example, FSFT, in which the Italians had more confidence than the republican authorities.⁵⁰

46 AJ, 751–687, Pismo Ambasade SFRJ u Rimu Saveznom sekretarijatu za spoljnu trgovinu, 28. 7. 1972.

47 AJ, 751–687, Pismo Saveznog sekretarijata za spoljnu trgovinu Poslovnom udruženju Železara, 26. 9. 1972.

48 AJ, 751–687, Prepiska Saveznog sekretarijata za spoljnu trgovinu sa Poslovnim udruženjem Železara, Generaleksportom, Intereksportom i Metalkom (avgust-septembar 1972).

49 AJ, 751–826, Pismo Poslovnog udruženja železara Savetnog sekretarijatu za spoljnu trgovinu, 6. 2. 1973, 1.

50 Ibid., 2–5.

After this meeting, there is no more information about the re-export of iron industry products to Italy. This coincides with the general downward trend in the number of data on re-export arrangements in the second half of the 1970s. It is possible that Yugoslavia began to suppress re-export more strongly, due to the pressure from the European Economic Community, or that this activity was simply better hidden.

This event is interesting because it shows the relationship between Italian and Yugoslav companies, as well as their relationship with the Yugoslav state authorities. It is noticeable that on the Yugoslav side, the interests were not the same for the Association of Yugoslav Ironworkers (producers), re-export companies, and federal and republican authorities. While the Association tried to find common ground with the Italians and fought against re-exports, re-export companies, supported primarily by the republican authorities, carried out profitable re-export operations. The Federal Secretariat for Foreign Trade was interested in maintaining good relations with Italy, but at the same time, it had to take care of the balance of payments and re-export companies, which put it in the most difficult position. The federal authorities were particularly troubled by the increasing role of the European Economic Community, which passed increasingly strict regulations against any imports that could threaten its internal market. In the confidential information of FEC (Federal Executive Council) from April 1968, regarding the new regulations that were to enter into force in the EEC, it is pointed out that re-export is an “absolutely undesirable practice” in the EEC, and at the same time, that “they often complained about Yugoslavia”. It is further suggested that the Community should immediately be given guarantees that Yugoslavia will no longer re-export, and that re-exports to EEC members will be banned, in order to avoid Yugoslavia from being placed on the list of “unreliable” countries to which the special import regime will be applied.⁵¹ Although, as it is seen from the source, re-exports to Italy, a member of the EEC, continued after 1968, these measures (“guarantees”) produced results. Two years later, during the signing of the agreement with the EEC, Yugoslavia managed to win the highest level of import liberalization and the clause of the most favored nation in mutual exchange.⁵² Italy also helped in this, supporting Yugoslavia during its negotiations with the EEC,

51 AJ, Fond 130, Savezno izvršno veće (SIV), Fascikla 658–1089, Predlog mera u vezi sa novim propisima EEZ, 3. 4. 1968.

52 AJ, 130–658–1089, Izveštaj o završenim pregovorima SFRJ sa EEZ, 9. 2. 1970, 1–2.

guided by its interest in closer cooperation with Yugoslav companies and easier import of certain Yugoslav products.⁵³

Examining further the relationship between the state and re-export companies, one can see that this relationship changed over time, as well as that there was no uniform attitude of the government towards this practice. Re-export, as an activity that was not in accordance with socialist values, and that enabled the enrichment of certain individuals and companies disproportionately compared to the rest of society, faced criticism from members of the Federal National Assembly on several occasions. To investigate the operations of re-export companies, in 1963, information on their work was submitted to the Committee for Social Supervision. In a letter to the President of the Federal National Assembly dated April 12, 1963, this body pointed out that “re-export companies were the initiators and perpetrators of many irregularities that led to various deformations in foreign trade exchange” and that those re-export companies operated under “much more favorable conditions than other import-export companies”. The board further proposes to adopt measures that will equalize the business conditions of these companies with the business conditions of other import-export organizations.⁵⁴

This initiative led to a discussion in the Assembly and the adoption of the Law on Amendments to the Law on Trade in Goods and Services with Foreign Countries. This law, together with other measures and laws passed during the economic reform in 1965, was supposed to lead to the unification of economic conditions and strengthen the competitiveness of the Yugoslav economy abroad. One of the measures was equalizing the business conditions of re-export companies with other import-export organizations and allowing production companies to trade directly with foreign countries, which was supposed to mean the end of their supremacy in Yugoslav foreign trade. However, even before this Law came to the Assembly, at the session of the SIV, on April 6, 1966, it was proposed to include provisions that would enable business organizations engaged in re-export and other mediation activities to continue their work.⁵⁵ The new law, after long discussions, was finally passed at the end of 1966 (effective from January 1, 1967), but with significantly more moderate changes in

53 Dragišić, *Šta smo znali o Italiji*, 233.

54 AJ, 130-736–1193, Pismo odbora za društveni nadzor, predsedniku Savezne Narodne skupštine, 12. april 1963.

55 AJ, 130-732–1189, Informacija o sprovođenju zaključaka SIV, donetih na sednici od 6. aprila 1966, u vezi predloga Zakona o izmenama i dopunama Zakona o prometu robe i usluga sa inostranstvom, 21. maj 1966.

the regime of goods circulation than was initially planned.⁵⁶ Re-export companies continued their work with the same intensity, which is evidenced by numerous approved re-export jobs even after 1967.

The fact that President Tito mentioned it as one of the pressing problems at the 21st session of the SKJ presidency in Karađorđevo (December 1 and 2, 1971) shows that the re-export problem continued to be relevant.⁵⁷ A year after that, in the so-called “liberal purge” in Serbia, re-export was used as one of the reasons for overthrowing part of the Serbian republican leadership. Vlada Višnjić, the director of Generaleksport, the largest and most influential re-export company, also submitted his resignation, along with several other company directors, under accusations of “technocratism”: that was also in part because of their re-export business, as told by the later director of Generaleksport, Miodrag Savićević.⁵⁸ Višnjić, together with Ratko Dražević, colonel of the State Security Administration, was the one who founded the company Generaleksport, which over time would develop into one of the largest Yugoslav companies. It is interesting that Ratko Dražević, in an interview he gave to RTS for the Trezor program in 1992, justified the re-export operations carried out by Generalexport with the need of the state to obtain foreign currency and thereby improve its balance of payments. He also pointed out that Generalexport had the support of the state.⁵⁹ However, it should be pointed out that, although these foreign currencies undoubtedly helped the Yugoslav economy to deal with the payment deficit at the moment, they harmed the Yugoslav economy in the long run, because domestic production companies were placed in a subordinate position to re-export companies. Re-export companies did business with goods that had either significantly better prices (from Eastern Europe) or quality (from Western Europe) compared to Yugoslav goods, which made it difficult to market Yugoslav products. In a way, they were a harmful and favored competition to domestic production companies,

56 AJ, 130–733, Predlog Zakona o izmenama i dopunama Zakona o prometu robe i usluga sa inostranstvom, 15.12.1966.

57 AJ, 130–1318, Autorizovane stenografske beleške sa 21. sednice predsedništva SKJ održane 1. i 2. decembra 1971 (u Karađorđevu), 6.

58 Miodrag Savićević, „Demokratija je došla preko Geneksovog toaleta: Odbrana srpske spoljne trgovine pred Titom”, *Nedeljnik*, 7. 8. 2017 (online edition, accessed 22. 6. 2022). Also see: Rade Grujuć, *Kako smo smenjeni: kako i zašto su smenjeni direktori Miodrag Čepković - „Jugometal kombinat”, Vlada Višnjić - „Geneks”, Prvoslav Raković - Zavodi „Crvena zastava”, Vladimir Jasić - Ei Niš, Čedomir Jelenić - Robne kuće „Beograd”, Vljako Brković - Valjaonica Sevojno, Marko Šaranović - „Utva” Pančevo, Lazar Lotvin - AMSJ*, (Beograd: Privredni Pregled, 1989).

59 Intervju sa Ratkom Draževićem, Emisija Trezor, Radio televizija Srbije 2, 1992.

which explains why conflicts between them occurred. A deeper analysis of the business of re-export companies and the people who stood behind them, however, requires more extensive academic work dedicated specifically to it, and is beyond the scope of this research.

Trade goods manipulations and smuggling

Apart from re-exports, other types of trade manipulations were common in the relations between Italy and Yugoslavia. One of the factors that particularly contributed to fertile ground for machinations was the different nomenclature of trade goods between Yugoslavia and Italy (later) of the European Economic Community. This can be seen in the example of a customs dispute from 1971 when the Italians complained to the Yugoslav embassy about the export of jute fabrics from Yugoslavia at very low prices. After the FSFT's extensive correspondence with the customs authorities and export companies, we found out what happened. Namely, the mentioned goods entered Yugoslavia as "Textile", then left Yugoslavia as "Fabric", and in Italy, the same goods were reported as "Jute Fabric". FSFT, therefore, did not approve the re-export of jute fabrics - they gave several approvals for the re-export of "fabrics" from Romania to Italy to the company Interexport from Belgrade, and one approval each to the company Agrooprema, Belgrade, and Astra, Zagreb.⁶⁰ The Yugoslav authorities considered that the re-export of such a quantity of fabrics would not cause problems in the Italian market, while on the other hand, the re-export of specific jute fabrics caused a reaction from the Italian authorities. The misunderstanding arose because of the different nomenclature since the European Economic Community had a more elaborate list of products and therefore more effective control over the market than Yugoslavia. Of course, we can wonder how much in this case this was an actual misunderstanding, and how much was the deliberate use of different nomenclature by the state or re-export companies. This problem and the need to harmonize the nomenclature of the two partners were discussed as early as 1969 at the meeting of the Yugoslav working group for negotiations with the EEC.⁶¹ However, that process was slower than planned, so it was only when the second trade agreement with the EEC

60 AJ, 751-506, Prepiska Saveznog seretarijata za spoljnu trgovinu sa Saveznom upravom carina, Ambasodom SFRJ-u Rimu, Interekportom, Agroopremom i Astrom (1971).

61 AJ, 130-733, Spoljnotrgovinski i devizni režim i njegovo sprovođenje u 1970, Međuresorska radna grupa - strogo poverljivo, 23. 6. 1969.

was concluded in 1973 that the nomenclature was equalized for almost all positions, which reduced the possibilities of fraud in trade.⁶²

One of the best examples that show the scale of informal practices in trade relations between Italy and Yugoslavia can be found in the example of the “baby beef” agreement from March 1970. This agreement was signed to facilitate the export of Yugoslav beef and cattle, considering that in previous years this product was under the target of strong restrictive measures by the EEC.⁶³ According to the agreement, the EEC recognized the specific quality of Yugoslav beef (“baby beef”), and approved preferential customs quotas with reduced levies for the import of these products, with a special certificate issued by the Yugoslav authorities.⁶⁴ This agreement was supposed to facilitate and increase the export of meat and cattle from Yugoslavia, which was a burning problem in the relations between the two parties and of particular importance for the Yugoslav trade balance, so its implementation was eagerly awaited. However, in the information from October of the same year, which states the results of the implementation of this agreement from the first six months, numerous problems in its implementation are mentioned. To begin with, statistical data on Yugoslav exports show that in the period from May to September there was actually a significant decrease in the export of cattle and beef compared to the same period last year.⁶⁵

While it is true that the cattle concessions were used for only six weeks, given that there was a high demand in the EEC, so there was no levy, it would be expected that even in such conditions, exports would still increase a little or at least remain at the same level like a year before. The investigation into this case revealed significant flows of informal trade between Italy and Yugoslavia, which existed before the agreement, and which the implementation of the agreement only disrupted. Italian buyers of Yugoslav meat did not like to buy meat protected by certificates, because then they had to pay levies (even if reduced) for that meat, considering that it was obviously Yugoslav meat. Because of this, they put pressure on Yugoslav exporters to continue exporting meat to them without a certificate, which they then repackaged and sold in Italy as domestic meat, thereby avoiding paying the tax. In cases where the meat came with a certificate, after crossing the Yugoslav border, it was cut and processed in

62 Zaccaria, *The EEC's Yugoslav Policy*, 65–66.

63 Mišić, *Pomirenje na Jadranu*, 118–119.

64 AJ, 130–658, Izveštaj o završenim pregovorima SFRJ sa EEZ, 9. 2. 1970, 3–4.

65 AJ, 130–658, Informacija o primeni Sporazuma sa zemljama članicama EEZ kod izvoza junadi tipa „baby beef“, i mesa od ove junadi (oktobar 1970), 2.

such a way that it cannot be determined that it is Yugoslav “baby beef”. Yugoslav sellers agreed to these arrangements, considering that Italian buyers could offer them a higher price if they did not pay levies to the Italian government. This benefited Yugoslav and Italian companies, while the Italian and Yugoslav states, as well as Italian domestic producers, suffered from these arrangements. This elaborate system of informal trade, which has been functioning smoothly for years, was only disrupted by the implementation of the “baby beef” agreement, given that the controls at the customs office were strengthened, which is how this whole case was discovered. The information states that the situation is the same with the export and import of livestock, that is, that Italian buyers try to avoid paying the levy at all costs.⁶⁶

In the end, it is concluded that the implementation of the agreement has led to a serious decline in meat and beef exports covered by the agreement and that serious measures need to be taken to stop trade manipulations at the border. It is necessary to increase the control at the crossing in Sežana and the border crossings of Sežana, Koper, and Gorica. What is very interesting is that the information also states that “since there are indications that the Italian authorities tacitly support these activities, we should contact the European Commission in Brussels and complain to them”, which implies that the Yugoslav authorities were very ready to fight against these machinations.⁶⁷ However, considering that there were also numerous examples of corruption on the Yugoslav side, and it is clear that some Yugoslav companies also had their own account in this trade, it is not justified to draw a conclusion about the anti-corruption nature of FSFT based only on this document. The fact that this information was more advice on how to act, but not a policy that was later implemented, is also shown by the lack of other information about this case. Moreover, a few months later, in the information about the meeting of the SFRY-EEC Joint Commission (January 7 and 8, 1971), thus an ideal opportunity to inform the EEC about it, there is no more mention of this problem, and of the implementation of the “baby beef” agreement. It is only briefly noted that only eight months have passed since its signing, so it is “early to talk” about any of its effects.⁶⁸ Given that this is a diametrically different approach to the agreement than the one that can be found in the information from October 1970, we can conclude that in the meantime there was some “intervention” in this

66 Ibid., 2-5.

67 Ibid., 6-7.

68 AJ, 130-658, Informacija o prvom zasjedanju Mešovite komisije SFRJ-EEZ, 7. и 8. januar, 1971, 2.

case that the sources do not tell us about. Nevertheless, one can assume that the mentioned informal activities on the Yugoslav-Italian border did not stop in the following period either.

In some cases, even more absurd methods were used to avoid paying levies to the Italian authorities. From the report of the general consulate in Zagreb for 1967, we learn about an unusual method of Yugoslav exporters. Namely, since there was a levy on Yugoslav eggs, they were transported to Bulgaria and nationalized there, since there were no similar measures for this country, and then they were transported again to Italy and sold as “Bulgarian eggs”. Sometimes this phenomenon assumed drastic proportions, so eggs produced in Slovenia only a few tens of kilometers from the Italian border were transported to Bulgaria for hundreds of kilometers, and then returned to Italy. The fact that this kind of work was profitable indicates that the levy on eggs was very high. In the report, it is suggested that the Yugoslavs should “carefully” point out this practice to the Italian authorities, as an illustration of excessive levies, and request their reduction or abolition.⁶⁹

Another example of the informal nature of trade relations between Italy and Yugoslavia can be found in the implementation of the provisions of the Trieste and Gorica agreements on the local exchange. According to this agreement, signed for the first time in 1955, and then extended and expanded several times, in the border area between Italy and Yugoslavia (former zones A and B, and several other nearby cities), a duty-free trade regime was established for lists of products with a certain maximum value in Italian lira.⁷⁰ This agreement was supposed to help the development of the border areas and compensate for the disruptions that occurred in the economy after the division of this once unique economic space between the two countries. Nevertheless, various manipulations and the use of this agreement by both sides in a way that was not foreseen by the agreement occurred very quickly. Thus, for example, on the Yugoslav side, a large number of takeovers were registered in border towns, although these companies came and performed their duties on the territory of entire Yugoslavia, and did not come from the border area at all.⁷¹ There were also frequent examples of false certificates of origin being issued so that goods produced in other parts of Yugoslavia could avoid customs duty as goods of

69 AJ, 751–154, Izveštaj generalnog konzulata u Zagrebu o Jugoslovensko-italijanskim ekonomskim odnosima, godišnji izveštaj za 1967 (januar 1968), 5–6.

70 AJ, 751–776, Stavovi o institutu malograničnog i susedskog prekomorskog prometa, Savezni sekretarijat za privredu, 21.februar 1973, 1–2.

71 Ibid., 3–5.

local origin. In 1973, the Federal Secretariat for the Economy warned that as much as 95% of all goods exported under the agreement does not come from the border areas, but from the interior of Yugoslavia.⁷² Both the Italians and the Yugoslavs were aware of this practice, but they considered it useful and tolerated it because very soon after the signing of the agreement it was established that the list values were too high for the small border area and that it would be a “shame” for those quotas to “go to waste”. Only in 1973, in the already mentioned report of the Federal Secretariat for the Economy, measures were proposed that would return this agreement to its original purpose, which is the development of border territories.⁷³

Smuggling on the Yugoslavia-Italy border was the topic that have already been discussed in academic literature, with some good case-studies on this matter.⁷⁴ Essentially, there were two main “types” of smuggling. One of them involved giving bribes to customs officers in order to transfer goods without paying customs duties, and the other was the transfer of goods as goods for personal use which were then resold for profit. The first one was a much bigger job – it was done by professional criminal groups in cooperation (Italian and Yugoslav), and it brought great profits to them. Unlike other informal activities already mentioned, smuggling was a completely illegal and criminal activity. In funds of the Federal secretariat for foreign trade and Federal Executive Committee, which are the primary focus of this paper, there are not many sources about smuggling cases, as this was the matter of other state authorities, mainly for police and customs offices, and other institutions that dealt with criminal activities. However, some evidence can be found; for example in a report about a meeting of a group of experts from Italy and Yugoslavia on the fight against smuggling (early March 1974), a widespread problem of smuggling and corruption among customs officials on both sides of the border was acknowledged. In order to reduce the scope of these illegal activities cooperation between the two customs officials was proposed.⁷⁵ Also, there is another interesting way in which one can discover illegal activities that went unpunished. If smuggling was carried out only at one border, and at the other, the goods were cleared regularly; this could later lead to differences in the statistical data of the two statistical institutes. This problem was discussed in the bulletin of the

72 Ibid., 7.

73 Ibid., 8–9.

74 See: Buchenau, „The third Path into Twilight?“, 89–120; Dragišić, „Kako je Trst postao `naš`“, 227–241; Dragišić, *Šta smo znali o Italiji?*.

75 AJ, 751–924, Izveštaj o sastanku grupe eksperata u vezi sa suzbijanja krijumčarenja, 5. 3. 1974.

Yugoslav-Italian Chamber of Commerce from May 1967, which states that different data from the two statistical institutes regarding certain categories (such as exported cattle, which are in absolute numbers) indicate certain illegal activities at the border and that more decisive action is needed to combat them.⁷⁶

Although the Yugoslav daily press was hesitant to report about the smuggling, in fear that it will damage the image of Yugoslavia abroad, the biggest cases of smuggling revealed by foreign authorities were impossible to ignore. The most notable example was the case of cigarette smuggling made by the crew of the ship "Cavtat" in 1970 captured by Italian border police, about which Klaus Buchenau wrote in his recent work.⁷⁷ This case created an international affair between Italy and Yugoslavia and caused a broad investigation by the Yugoslav authorities about the alleged claims about the participation of higher government officials in cigarette smuggling. The investigation that followed revealed what everybody already knew, that this was not an isolated case and that cigarette smuggling was widespread across the border of Yugoslavia and Italy.⁷⁸ Ratko Dražević also mentioned cigarette smuggling in his interview. He claimed that he was appointed by state authorities to lead cigarette smuggling in order to obtain foreign currencies for state reserves.⁷⁹

As for the second type of smuggling, Petar Dragišić wrote about it in detail in his article titled "*How Trieste Became "Ours". Yugoslav consumerist practices in Trieste in the 1960s and 1970s.*" When ordinary Yugoslav citizens went to Trieste, they often bought far more goods than they needed for personal use, reselling them to third parties in the country for a profit.⁸⁰ It was difficult to assess what the goods were for personal use, so the regulations in that field changed several times, and became more and more precise, as this practice gained momentum. Still, people were really imaginative in avoiding customs duties – they often brought their children to Trieste, just to enable bringing more „goods“ in return, because quotas were given per capita.⁸¹ This phenomenon eventually became so widespread that it began to be considered part of Yugoslav culture.⁸²

76 „La riunione comune delle Camere miste a Milano”, Jug-Ital: informazioni economiche della camera di commercio jugoslavo-italiana, Maggio 1967, 1–4.

77 Buchenau, „The Third Path into the Twilight?”, 107.

78 Ibid., 108–110.

79 Intervju sa Ratkom Draževićem, *Emisija Trezor*, Radio televizija Srbije 2, 1992.

80 Dragišić, *Kako je Trst postao „naš“*, 230.

81 Ibid., 231.

82 Ibid., 237–239.

Summary

During the 1960s and 1970s, Yugoslavia and Italy had a large volume of trade, and at the same time, they were among the European countries with an increased level of corruption and informal activities, which meant the occurrence of a greater number of informal practices in their trade relations. Sometimes these informal activities were carried out with the support of the state, and sometimes in opposition or conflict with it. In terms of importance, re-export stands out as a practice that often led to problems in relations with Italy and the European Economic Community. Yugoslav companies took advantage of Yugoslavia's position as a member of the Non-Aligned movement, situated between two blocks; connecting these three markets, they were making profitable re-export deals. The attitude of the Yugoslav authorities towards re-export was complex and changed over time and in relation to the level of government (republican and federal authorities, president, federal assembly). Re-export companies had a significant influence in Yugoslavia due to the volume of business and the profits they made. Apart from re-exports, other trade manipulations of goods were also frequent at the border, most often to avoid paying high Italian levies on certain categories of Yugoslav goods. These types of manipulations were most often initiated by Italian importers and accepted by Yugoslav exporters, profiting at the expense of the Italian state. Smuggling was also a frequent occurrence and was most often organized in collaboration with Yugoslav and Italian criminal groups, or on a smaller scale, by individual citizens. Although informal practices occasionally helped the functioning of trade between the two countries and in the short term improved the economic situation of individuals or certain companies, in the long run, they represented an obstacle to the development of trade relations between the two countries in a sound basis and hindered the development of the Yugoslav (and Italian) economy as competitive partners on the international market.

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Резиме

Огњен Томић

ПРИМЕРИ НЕФОРМАЛНИХ ПРАКСИ У ТРГОВИНСКИМ ОДНОСИМА ЈУГОСЛАВИЈЕ СА ИТАЛИЈОМ 1960-ИХ И 1970-ИХ

Апстракт: Чланак се бави питањем неформалних пракси у Југославији на примерима трговине са Италијом крајем шездесетих и почетком седамдесетих година прошлог века. Предмет анализе је реекспортна активност југословенских предузећа, као и разне друге неформалне и илегалне праксе које су предузећа користила за бољи пласман своје робе, без обзира да ли је држава прећутно подржавала те активности или се борила против њих. Истраживање је засновано на документима Архива Југославије, периодици и релевантној литератури.

Кључне речи: социјалистичка Југославија, Италија, трговински односи, неформалне праксе, корупција, реекспорт

Југославија и Италија су током шездесетих и седамдесетих година имале велики обим трговинске размене, а истовремено су спадале међу европске земље са повећаним степеном корупције и неформалних активности, што је значило појаву већег броја неформалних пракси у њиховим трговинским односима. Понекад су ове неформалне активности биле спровођене уз подршку државе, а понекад у супротности или у сукобу са њом. По значају се издваја реекспорт као пракса која је често доводила до проблема у односима са Италијом и Европском економском заједницом. Југословенска предузећа користила су положај Југославије као чланице Покрета несврстаних, смештене између два блока, повезујући ова три тржишта склапањем профитабилних реекспортних послова. Однос југословенских власти према реекспорту био је сложен и мењао се током времена и у односу на ниво власти (републички и савезни органи, председник, савезна скупштина). Реекспортна предузећа имала су значајан утицај у Југославији због обима послова и профита који су остваривала. Осим реекспорта, и друге трговинске манипулације робом биле су честе на граници, првенствено да би се избегло плаћање високих италијанских прелевмана на поједине категорије југословенске робе. Ове врсте манипулација преваходно су иницирали италијански увозници, а прихватили југословенски извозници профитирајући на рачун италијан-

ске државе. Кријумчарење је такође било честа појава, а најчешће је организовано у сарадњи југословенских и италијанских криминалних група, или, у мањем обиму, од стране југословенских грађана. Неформалне праксе, иако су повремено помагале функционисање трговине између две земље и на краatak рок побољшавале економску ситуацију појединаца или појединих предузећа, на дуже стазе су представљале сметњу за развој трговинских односа између две државе на здравим основама и ометале развој југословенске (и италијанске) економије у конкурентног партнера на међународном тржишту.