

**January 9, 1945**

**Record of I. V. Stalin's Conversation with the Head  
of the Delegation of the National Liberation  
Committee of Yugoslavia, A. Hebrang**

**Citation:**

"Record of I. V. Stalin's Conversation with the Head of the Delegation of the National Liberation Committee of Yugoslavia, A. Hebrang", January 9, 1945, Wilson Center Digital Archive, AVP RF, f. 06, op. 7, p.53, d. 872, l. 8-28. Published in Vostochnaia Evropa, edited by G.P. Murashko, et al, vol. 1, pp. 118-33. Translated for CWIHP by Svetlana Savranskaya. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118440>

**Summary:**

Stalin and Hebrang discuss building armed forces in Yugoslavia, its territorial problems, and its relations with Bulgaria and Albania

**Credits:**

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

**Original Language:**

Russian

**Contents:**

Translation - English

Record of I. V. Stalin's Conversation with the Head of the Delegation of the National Liberation Committee of Yugoslavia A. Hebrang about Building Armed Forces in Yugoslavia, Its Territorial Problems, and Its Relations with Bulgaria and Albania

Moscow

9 January 1945

TOP SECRET

Present from the Soviet Side: V. M. Molotov, A. F. Kiselev, V. M. Sakharov

Present from the Yugoslav side: Chief of the Supreme Staff of the Yugoslav Army A. Iovanovich

After the members of the delegation greeted Comrade Stalin and Comrade Molotov, Comrade Stalin asked how the delegation's trip was, to which Hebrang responded in Russian: "Very good." Hebrang transmitted oral greetings from Marshal Tito to Comrade Stalin.

Comrade Stalin asked what questions the delegation had.

Hebrang responded that there were three groups of questions: 1) questions of economic assistance to Yugoslavia; 2) Yugoslav foreign policy demands; and 3) issues of arming and organization of the Yugoslav army.

When speaking about the necessity of economic assistance from the Soviet Union, Hebrang said that assistance in food products was especially needed. Apart from food products, Yugoslavia would also like to receive raw materials for a number of its plants and factories from the Soviet Union, clothes and shoes for the army and the population, first aid materials, equipment for schools and universities and propaganda materials (paper for newspapers and books, paint, etc.)

Comrade Stalin asked whether Yugoslavia received anything from UNRRA, to which Hebrang responded negatively and added that some things were received from the allies on the lend-lease basis. Comrade Stalin emphasized the need to get assistance from the UNRRA as well and then asked if the Yugoslavs expected to receive anything from Hungary as reparations.

Hebrang responded that the Hungarians inflicted material damages on Yugoslavia estimated at approximately 900 million dollars, and therefore Yugoslavia expected reparation of the damages.

Comrade Stalin also asked if the Yugoslavs expected to get anything from Germany as reparations.

Hebrang responded positively and added that they also planned to take part in the occupation of certain German districts.

Comrade Stalin said that negotiations were now being conducted with the Americans and the British on the conditions of armistice with Hungary. The sum of reparation payments for Hungary will probably be set at 300 million dollars, i.e., the same as Romania and Finland are paying. The Americans and the British are against large sums of reparation payments, because they believe that large reparations would weaken that country and its purchasing power.

Hebrang noted that the sum of reparations is very small and that it was clear why the Americans and the British opposed the increase of reparations -- they were afraid that

Hungary would be too weak.

Comrade Stalin asked how was the coal situation in Yugoslavia.

Hebrang responded that they used to extract coal in Yugoslavia, but in very small quantities. Now they are extracting even less as opportunities have decreased. The Yugoslav leadership expects to receive coal from Hungary and hopes for assistance from the Soviet Union.

Comrade Stalin, speaking about the general economic assistance to Yugoslavia, said that the Soviet Union could not provide substantial economic assistance to Yugoslavia right now, during the war. The assistance will be provided as it becomes possible, but while the war is going on we cannot provide substantial assistance.

Then Comrade Stalin asked whether the Yugoslavs received bread, to which Hebrang replied affirmatively, however, he added that food deliveries from Rumania and from the Northern part of Yugoslavia were included in the shipments of the Russian bread, and that, according to Hebrang, was not Russian bread.

Comrade Stalin said that part of the bread could have quite naturally come from the trophies taken by the Red Army. Then Comrade Stalin added that the Yugoslavs generally have a wrong understanding of the issue of trophies. The Yugoslav leaders including Tito believe that the Red Army should leave everything taken from Yugoslavia to the Yugoslavs -- that is not correct. Trophies belong to the army that captures them. If the army knows that it will have to return the trophies that it captures it would not try to acquire them. An army wants to make itself known not only for eliminating the personnel of the enemy but also by capturing the enemy's property, trophies. It would be wrong to demand that the Red Army return all the trophies.

Hebrang noted that many Yugoslavs understand incorrectly the transfer of the captured food products from Yugoslavia to Hungary and that left a bad impression among the population.

Comrade Stalin said that those food products were shipped out for the Red Army and it does not matter where it was stationed--the food could be shipped to Hungary for the Red Army which cannot wage war without systematic food deliveries. The Army is fighting, spilling blood, and to think that it is stealing is insulting (oskorbitel'no) for the Red Army. Comrade Stalin reminded them about Djilas' statement where he said that the moral and political stature of Soviet officers is lower than the moral and political stature of British officers. Comrade Stalin stressed that it was absolutely wrong and offensive. You cannot characterize an army on the basis of separate cases; you cannot humiliate the entire army because of one degenerate (urod). One has to understand the soul of the soldier who traveled three thousand kilometers of battle from Stalingrad to Budapest. The soldier thinks that he is a hero, everything is permitted, he is allowed to do anything, he is alive today and might be killed tomorrow, [and] he will be forgiven. The soldiers are tired, they are worn out in the prolonged and difficult war. It is wrong to take the point of view of a "decent intellectual." The British officers showed their moral stature in Greece best of all. There are certain cases that embarrass our soldiers. We execute them in those cases. But we have to remember that people are worn out, nervous; they think that they are heroes that are allowed to do anything, everything is permitted. Comrade Stalin told us about one recent case when one pilot, a very good pilot, drank too much with his company and killed somebody. He was put in jail and he had to be executed. They investigated the case for a long time. It turned out that he was very drunk and did not remember what he had done. Comrade Stalin said that he bailed the pilot out, because he was a very good pilot. Now he is out of jail and transferred to the front. We have to remember that a soldier is always open to danger especially a pilot, not

only during the battle but all the time while he is in the air. It is not that easy to fight the Germans and then to chase them. The nerves are worn out. People lose balance. You cannot measure them by an ordinary yardstick.

Then Comrade Stalin summarized the discussion on the issue regarding material assistance to Yugoslavia and he said that everything possible would be provided, the assistance would be provided.

Turning to military issues Hebrang said that in this sphere the Yugoslavs were counting on two kinds of assistance from the Soviet Union: assistance in equipment and in personnel (instructors and advisors), that they were hoping for assistance in creating a modern organized army.

Iovanovich added to Hebrang, stressing that the basis of such an army already existed in Yugoslavia. It was necessary to organize the central leadership of the army, the general staff, the headquarters of the armies and other big headquarters.

Comrade Stalin asked how many divisions were there in the Yugoslav Army at the present time.

Iovanovich responded that there were 50 divisions totaling 518 thousand men. When all Yugoslav territory is liberated, they would mobilize an additional 300 thousand men. Among these divisions there exist small guerrilla divisions which should be transformed, so the overall number of divisions will be cut to 40. They planned to organize three groups of armies and in addition to them -- 12 corps. Groups of armies will have five divisions each, each corp will have 2 or 3 divisions each.

Comrade Stalin inquired how much artillery a Yugoslav division possessed, to which General Kiselev responded that currently a division had 72 units of artillery including mine launchers, the Yugoslavs would like to increase the number of units to 84 for a division of 12,500 men.

Comrade Stalin pointed out that such a big number of large divisions was not realistic, there would not be enough officers for them. Comrade Stalin cited the Polish example where they mobilized enough soldiers for 20 divisions, but they did not have enough officers. They had to decrease the number of divisions to 10, 5 of which were currently on the front and the remaining 5 would also be sent to the front very soon. But those would be, Comrade Stalin said, good divisions. Each of the divisions will have 8 to 9 thousand men. If Yugoslavia had 20 divisions, but good divisions, it would be very good. It's not the number that counts. You can have many divisions, but their value would be very low. You have to teach officers and that is very important. Even 20 divisions is a lot, do not get carried away. Comrade Stalin said that the resistance movement in China has been fighting for 8 years now, but they did not learn well. They created 400 divisions, but they did not teach the officers, and therefore, they have poor officers. Recently, the Japanese attacked them from the north and eight Japanese divisions defeated 43 Chinese divisions. Taking into account the fact that the officer pool was lacking in Yugoslavia, Comrade Stalin suggested that several guerrilla divisions should be left behind and armed with lighter artillery. A division should have less than 13 thousand people. 20 good divisions, according to Comrade Stalin, would be sufficient for Yugoslavia, it would be very good. Each division then could be transferred into a corp and 3 divisions could be created from one of those. It is very difficult to feed many divisions and they would be unstable in combat.

Comrade Stalin drew attention to the difficulties of this plan and said that the goal should be set but it is impossible to achieve it now - the divisions will exist only on paper.

Comrade Stalin asked how the Yugoslav Army would be build: whether it would have

general command or if the Serbian, Croatian and other armies would exist separately.

Iovanovoch responded that the command would be united.

Comrade Stalin asked how they were going to solve the language problem, which language would be excepted.

To that Iovanovich responded that they would choose the Serbian-Croatian language, and that only in Slovenian Macedonia they would use Slovenian and Macedonian languages, because these languages differ from the Serbian-Croatian.

Comrade Stalin said that we would help in the organization of the headquarters: we would provide people, provide our military charters, but they would have to have their own officer cadres, good commanders of companies and battalions. Yugoslavia used to have the necessary officer cadres, because some time ago Yugoslavia had a good army; the Yugoslavs learned mostly from the French.

Iovanovich said that even now the fighting ability of the Yugoslav soldiers is very good. General Kiselev added that the army is still not very stable and gave an example where the 21st Yugoslavian division under light enemy pressure retreated and lost a part of its artillery. Comrade Stalin interjected that such cases happen everywhere: in the German army and even in our army.

Comrade Stalin inquired about the future organization of the Yugoslav Army, to which General Kiselev responded that there were two models of army organization. According to the first version, each division would be a full division of the normal constitution, and according to the second version, parts of divisions would be smaller. The draft layouts of the divisions have been prepared.

Comrade Stalin said that they might want to introduce the brigade system giving examples from the Red Army's experience, which in 1942 had between 100 and 120 brigades, 4.5 - 5 thousand men each. Those brigades fought very well and subsequently were transformed into divisions. It is much easier to command such brigades, and when the commanders have enough experience they could lead normal divisions. Maybe Yugoslavia should have 7 to 10 divisions of ten thousand men each, and the rest of them should be transformed into brigades, so that young officers would acquire experience in management and command. We could even call those brigades divisions. Later they could be transformed into normal modern divisions, but for the time being let the officer corps grow. In 1942 they did the same in the Red Army, later the brigades were transformed into divisions. According to Comrade Stalin, the guerrillas should be trained -- they are not right for a modern army. When the Red Army entered guerrilla districts, the guerrillas were moved to the rear, some of them were left in the army or sent to study, and the rest of them were dismissed. They are good for the rear, but they are not good for open combat: they do not like open combat, and they are not used to army discipline.

Iovanovich said that Yugoslavia has enough cadres for 40 divisions, to which Comrade Stalin replied that somebody would have to command those divisions. Developing the same thought, Comrade Stalin said that the Germans were good military men, they knew that there could not be an army without any officers, and therefore in each country, which they entered, they took away all officers and moved them to Germany. They hunted officers in Poland, in Yugoslavia, and in France. De Gaulle complained about the lack of officers in France in his conversation with Stalin.

Returning to the question about the composition of the future Yugoslav divisions, Comrade Stalin expressed an idea that maybe they should create divisions of 7 to 8 thousand men each. Comrade Stalin said that the guerrillas need to be taken in hand

and reformed in such a way that they would fit a modern army. Often they do not want that, but they have to be prepared for the modern army.

Comrade Stalin asked if the Germans were leaving Yugoslavia, to which Iovanovich responded affirmatively, but emphasized that at the same time they were erecting fortifications in a number of directions. Comrade Stalin mentioned that the Germans would fight for Zagreb, for Ljubljana, because they knew that those points cover the flanks of German troops stationed in Italy. Comrade Stalin inquired about which parts of Yugoslavia were already liberated.

Iovanovich replied that Serbia and Macedonia were liberated and Chemogorie and Voevodino were almost liberated. The German resistance was especially stubborn in Lika and in the Croatian Maritime District.

Returning again to the issue of the composition of the Yugoslav Army, Comrade Stalin pointed out that they should decide after preliminary consultations with our people what kinds of divisions to create and how many. They should not create large divisions. The Japanese had 20 thousand men per division however, now they are decreasing the size of their divisions down to 17 thousand and below. The normal size of a division, said Comrade Stalin, is between 12 to 13 thousand men. The problem of command cadres is especially difficult -- you must train commanders over many years.

Comrade Stalin asked how much equipment from the amount that was earmarked for Yugoslavia had been received.

General Kiselev responded that they received enough equipment for almost 10 divisions.

Comrade Stalin ordered them to find out what was received and what was not received.

Iovanovich asked him to provide equipment for at least 20 more divisions.

Comrade Stalin responded that they still had to decide what kind of division it would be. All the questions, said Comrade Stalin, will be discussed with Comrade Bulganin and General Antonov.

Iovanovich asked for instructors for the Yugoslav Army, and said that they planned to grant them certain rights and responsibilities. They would have the same rights as deputy commanders of the units, and they would have an opportunity to inform higher ranks about their ideas and suggestions. They also plan to provide the Yugoslav uniform for the Soviet instructors.

Comrade Stalin said that in order to wear a uniform an instructor should know the language, otherwise the uniform does not make any sense. The Polish experience has shown that in cases where the Soviet officers put on the Polish uniform and could not speak Polish, the change of uniform was not successful. It looked like a masquerade. An instructor should be simply an instructor, an advisor. He does not have a right to repeal or to impose decisions on the commander. Comrade Stalin said that we would provide instructors temporarily. According to Comrade Stalin, the Yugoslavs had a weakness to rely on advisors, but when the Yugoslavs know that the advisor would leave, they would know that they should learn themselves.

Comrade Stalin noted some changes in the composition of our artillery in connection with the production of the new lighter type of weapons and asked how many weapons

above the 72-millimeter caliber should be in one Yugoslav division.

General Kiselev responded that there should be 36 such weapons.

Comrade Stalin asked whether the Yugoslav Army needed trophy equipment.

Iovanovich replied positively, adding that they would also need ammunition, to which Comrade Stalin noted: "Of course".

Comrade Stalin said that currently there were none of our troops in Yugoslavia.

General Kiselev said that they planned to create army reserves (artillery, tank units, engineering units), and they would also need equipment and other material provisions. The Yugoslav Army would require the creation of 3 army structures with supply organs and organs of management and the rear.

Iovanovich especially stressed the urgent need for transport, because in the situation of its absence all the army apparatus and the rear services cannot function normally. The transportation routes and the means of transport that the country had before were destroyed; there are very few horses left in the country

To this Comrade Stalin responded that the transportation question was difficult not only because it was necessary to provide certain number of cars, but also because it would require large amounts of gasoline and it was a much more difficult question. Nonetheless, a certain number of transportation vehicles for heavier kinds of weapons will be provided. All light artillery will have to be transported by horse.

Comrade Stalin inquired what tank and engineering units specifically they were planning to create.

To this Iovanovich responded that it was suggested to create 4 tank brigades, 9 engineering battalions and 2 anti-aircraft regiments. Besides, during the next 3 years it was suggested to prepare the Yugoslav personnel and to receive equipment from the Soviet Union (approximately 1000 planes) for 8 to 10 aviation divisions.

Comrade Stalin asked how was the preparation of personnel going for the two aviation divisions transferred to the Yugoslavs.

Iovanovich responded that the preparation was made difficult by the absence of sufficient numbers of training planes.

Comrade Stalin asked how the preparation of officers for the army was going overall, whether they had a military academy.

Iovanovich responded that there were separate officer schools that prepared artillery, machine gun officers and communications officers. Preparation of officers for the artillery was most successful. There is no academy in Yugoslavia, but they plan to create a united officer school in which they will educate junior and mid-rank officers, intermediate officer personnel and there will be groups for continuing education for the higher ranks.

Comrade Stalin pointed to the need to prepare general commanders in addition to educating officer cadres for individual kinds of troops--the machine gun officers, tank officers, artillery officers. Comrade Stalin pointed to the need to develop a tradition of

education and preparation of military specialists in the country. Comrade Stalin asked what other questions of a military character the delegation had.

Iovanovich responded that the main questions had been exhausted and they have only one request -- to provide equipment for the military-topographical institute. The equipment that they had in Belgrade was taken by the Germans and partially given to the Bulgarians.

This ended the discussion of military issues, and Comrade Stalin asked the members of the delegation to present the essence of the political issues.

Hebrang began with a summary of the Yugoslav claims to Hungary. He said that it was extremely important for the Yugoslav economy to have the coal that was located in a Hungarian region bordering Yugoslavia with town of Pech as the center. The majority of the population in that area is Hungarian, but there is also a certain number of Slovenians. This area, together with the Pech mines, should become a part of Yugoslavia. Besides, the Yugoslav territorial claims to Hungary include the transfer to Yugoslavia of the so-called Bai triangle, a Hungarian region with the center in Baya. This region, which used to be a part of the historical province Barania, has a large Slavic population.

Comrade Stalin intervened: "Do the Hungarians agree with it?"

Hebrang responded that the Hungarians would not agree, of course, but it was very important for Yugoslavia to have those regions, and maybe it would be possible only to occupy them.

Comrade Stalin responded that the Yugoslavs were somewhat late with the idea of occupation, and that he did not feel sorry for Hungary, but the Americans and the British would strongly oppose such a solution. They stand by the ethnic principle in the solution of most territorial issues. According to Comrade Stalin, the Yugoslavs who live in those regions should raise the question about joining Yugoslavia themselves, they should make decisions and make noise. They must claw their way to joining Yugoslavia.

Then Comrade Stalin asked whether the Yugoslavs knew that the Germans annually extracted 5,000 tons of petroleum from around the town of Lenti.

Hebrang and Iovanovich responded negatively, after which Comrade Stalin showed them those oil reserves on the map.

Hebrang asked to include a Yugoslavian representative in the Allied Control Commission on the issue of armistice with Hungary.

Comrade Stalin said that they should insist on this, and that there would be no opposition from our side.

Then Comrade Stalin and Comrade Molotov exchanged opinions on the issue of including a Czechoslovak and a Yugoslav representative into that commission.

Hebrang turned to presenting the Yugoslav claims to Austria and Italy. The Yugoslavs raised a question of transferring a part of the Korush district (of the Corinthia province, which belonged to Austria), which is populated by Slovenians, to Yugoslavia. This area belonged to Yugoslavia after World War I, but was transferred to Austria after a plebiscite was held there.



Hebrang said that Istria which currently belongs to Italy, with the ports of Trieste, Pola and Rijeka (Fiume) should also be transferred to Yugoslavia. Croats and Slovenians populate Istria, and only the port towns have a certain percent of Italians. Hebrang showed an ethnic map of those regions and a map with the border demarcation requested by the Yugoslavs.

Comrade Stalin said that it would be necessary that those regions themselves demanded to join Yugoslavia.

Hebrang said that last year the anti-fascist congress of Croatia and Slovenia in response to the demands of the population of those regions regarding joining Yugoslavia, decided to join Yugoslavia. Those decisions were later approved by the anti-fascist congress of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia.

Hebrang then said that there was an active Yugoslav guerilla movement in those regions that emerged in the first days of the war, and still is active now.

Iovanovich added that 2 Yugoslavian corps, 1 division and several guerilla units were present in the territory of those regions now. Those regions are completely in Yugoslav hands. Continuing, Hebrang said that there were only small groups of autonomists in Trieste and Rijeka (Fiume) who demanded autonomy for that region under the British protectorate.

Comrade Stalin asked about the size of those groups, and when he found out that they were very small, semi-jokingly proposed to drown them. Then Comrade Stalin and Comrade Molotov recalled their unofficial conversation with Churchill, in which the latter proposed to separate Istria as an autonomous region, which would allow Austria access to the Adriatic Sea in the future.

Hebrang, turning to the question of Romania, presented the Yugoslav territorial claims to Romania, which included transfer of Romanian territory in the area of Timișoara, including the city of Timișoara. Hebrang justified it by the fact that there was one district in this region, which was populated exclusively by Serbs. The city of Timișoara was predominately populated by Germans and now could also be transferred to Yugoslavia.

Comrade Stalin asked whether there was anything in the press on this issue, and when he received a negative answer, noted that it would be necessary that the population of that region, the Serbs themselves, raised the question of joining Yugoslavia. Generally speaking, this is a question for the future peace conference, but in order to raise it at the peace conference, one has to have certain arguments.

Hebrang also asked to change the border with Romania in the area of Reshitsa, because there were iron and steel plants in that city which is located in the Romanian territory 20 kilometers from the Yugoslav border. Those iron plants are very important for Yugoslavia. If it is impossible to transfer Reshitsa to Yugoslavia, it would be extremely important for Yugoslavia to secure iron deliveries from these plants with some other arrangements.

Then Hebrang said that he would like to inform Comrade Stalin about the relations with Bulgaria. According to Hebrang, the relations were very problematic and the Bulgarians were the ones to blame. The Yugoslavian draft federation treaty was rejected by the Bulgarians.

Comrade Stalin said that he had read the draft of the treaty, and that the draft would not work. Bulgaria and Yugoslavia are two states that could possibly confederate, but

with a possibility of a complete unification of those two states based on the principle of dualism. In the federation treaty proposed by the Yugoslavs, Bulgaria would have received equal rights with individual Yugoslav nationalities: the Serbs, the Croats, the Macedonians, and the Slovenians-the Bulgarians would perceive a desire to swallow them in such a treaty. We should strive for a complete unification -- it would be an epochal event in the history of Europe. But we have to move toward this in stages, beginning with an alliance, with a treaty of mutual assistance and then moving toward unification gradually. It would not be a temporary union, but a permanent union. It is a free union, an organic union, which would comprise two states, freely united in a confederation. Do not create an impression that somebody wants to swallow the Bulgarians.

Hebrang said that the Yugoslav leadership saw an attempt to simplify the solution of Macedonia and an effort to break up the situation of isolation in which Bulgaria found itself as a result of being on the German side during the war, in the Bulgarian desire to conclude the friendship and mutual assistance treaty. Such a treaty would allow the Bulgarians to avoid the responsibility for the crimes committed during the war. On the other hand, Bulgaria would preserve its status as a sovereign state. The Yugoslav leadership rejected the proposal to sign the mutual assistance treaty and adopted a new version of a federation treaty based once again not on the principle of dualism, but on Bulgaria joining the federation with the same rights which would be guaranteed to individual nationalities of Yugoslavia: the Serbs, the Croats, the Macedonians and others. The Yugoslav leadership believed that in such a case, the future federation would be able to have a positive influence on Bulgaria with its internal efforts. A federation treaty would be much more positively received in Yugoslavia. It was decided that the highest organs of government of federal entities of Yugoslavia should ratify the treaty: Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia and others. When the Yugoslav government proposed the first draft of federation treaty, it thought that the treaty should be signed on 31 December 1944 and announced on 1 January [1945]. They planned to officially celebrate the signing of the treaty on January 1. They prepared all the details: the halls, in which the festivities were supposed to take place, the speakers and so on. But the Yugoslav draft was rejected, and the Bulgarian Comrades informed them that Comrade Dimitrov advised them against it in his telegram from Moscow. He suggested signing a treaty of friendship and mutual assistance. The Yugoslav leadership considered it wrong and proposed another draft of the federation treaty in the beginning of January.

Comrade Stalin stressed once again that we should approach the unification gradually and that it was very good that the Bulgarians agreed to the alliance, and if they agreed to create a dual state, it would be good to sign a treaty on friendship and mutual assistance for 20 or 10 years. Now we should accept the principle of dualism as the basis for unification, creating a dual state following the model of Austria-Hungary, but we could avoid the numerous negative features that the old Austria-Hungary possessed.

If we turn it out too fast, the Bulgarians could run toward America and Britain and even toward Turkey. We should prepare for federal unification based on the principle of dualism.

Comrade Molotov stressed that even a treaty of friendship and mutual assistance would scare the Turks and the Greeks, would scare the Romanians and would produce confusion in Europe. It would be a huge event in Europe. Everybody would be scared, except for the Soviet Union.

Comrade Stalin and Comrade Molotov exchanged opinions on the issue of what kind of reaction would Czechoslovakia have. The Czechs should not be afraid, because they support the principle of the Slav community, but they would be scared because it would be a left Slav unification. Besides, it will affect internal relations in Czechoslovakia -- the Slovaks could demand the introduction of the same model

inside Czechoslovakia.

Comrade Stalin asked what the situation with Greece was like.

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Hebrang responded that Yugoslavia expected to receive Greek Macedonia and Saloniki from Greece. These demands were not put forward, so that they would not create problems for the Greek ELAS, because that would weaken and complicate the situation for ELAS inside the country. Now this demand will be raised.

Comrade Molotov noted that the Greek Macedonians could raise this issue themselves.

Comrade Stalin said that there they had a situation in which they would find themselves in hostile relations with Romania, Hungary, and Greece, that they were planning to wage a war with the whole world and it did not make sense to create such a situation.

Comrade Stalin asked about the Greek Communists.

Hebrang responded that previously, during the period of occupation, they had a much more negative opinion about them, but they had showed their positive side recently.

Comrade Stalin asked whether Hebrang considered it correct that the EAM representatives left the Papandreou government.

After an unclear response of Hebrang, Comrade Stalin said that it was a wrong step taken without our advice.

Comrade Stalin asked about relations with Albania.

Hebrang responded that the Albanians were the best friends of Yugoslavia. According to Hebrang, there are representatives of all parties in the People's Liberation Movement of Albania, but the Communist Party plays the leading role. King Zogu does not enjoy support in the country. There are small reactionary groups in Albania, which do not represent any danger for the People's Liberation Movement.

Hebrang also informed the audience that during the recent visit of the Albanian governmental delegation to Belgrade, they signed the Yugoslav-Albanian treaty of friendship and mutual assistance, and that they also signed a trade treaty.

Comrade Stalin said that since Yugoslavia undertook the obligations under the treaty, it would have to carry them out. In case of complications, it will have to fight, and whether it would be able to fight against Britain, whether it has enough forces -- it is a question. They should think about Albania. The British recognize only force. It is very good that Belgrade is liberated. It opens additional opportunities. The British were afraid that the Red Army could enter Greece, and if the Red Army went to Greece, of course, it would be a completely different situation, but you cannot do anything in Greece without the navy. The British were surprised when they saw that the Red Army did not go to Greece. They cannot understand the strategy that does not allow the army to move along the lines that split away from each other. The strategy of the Red Army is based on moving along the lines that lead to a single center.

Comrade Stalin asked about the Albanian army.

Iovanovich responded that Albania has 3 corps, consisting of 8 divisions.

Comrade Stalin said that they should not fight Britain. They should wait, they should think through the question of relations with Albania. It is good that the mutual assistance treaty has not been ratified yet and has not been announced. He advised them not to publish the treaty until February.

Comrade Stalin then asked what did Albania have -- a National Committee or an Interim Government.<sup>1</sup> I' I

Hebrang responded that not long ago the Interim Government was established in Albania, which appealed to the allied governments for recognition. However, so far the Interim Government of Albania has not been recognized.

Comrade Stalin asked whether the Yugoslavs recognized the Albanian Interim Government.

Hebrang responded negatively, saying that there was only the Yugoslav military mission stationed in Tirana.

Comrade Stalin asked whether Yugoslavia recognized the Bulgarian government, and whether the Bulgarian government recognized the National Liberation Committee of Yugoslavia.

Hebrang responded that the Bulgarians had their own ambassador, Todorov, in Belgrade. There are Yugoslav military and commercial missions in Sofia.

Comrade Stalin addressed Comrade Molotov and noted that it seemed like according to the laws of international relations, one should first establish diplomatic relations and only then sign treaties and agreements.

Then Comrade Stalin asked Hebrang about the situation with the formation of the Yugoslav government.

Hebrang responded that after Shubashich arrived in London, they received a telegram from Churchill, in which he approved the agreement signed between Shubashich and Tito with subsequent amendments and expressed his hope for a fast formation of the Yugoslav government. However, it is noticeable that the British intentionally postponed the creation of the united government (Shubashich was given a deadline of December 31) and that affects the situation in Yugoslavia very negatively.

Recently there was a telegram sent to Shubashich in London from Belgrade, in which he was told that the deadline for the creation of a new government should not be postponed to the second half of January.

According to Hebrang, the Yugoslav leadership led by Tito decided that if a unified government is not created by January 15, then the National Liberation Committee of Yugoslavia would be proclaimed as an interim Yugoslav government.

Comrade Stalin said that they should not proclaim the National Committee as the interim government now. The interim government should be recognized, and the British and the Americans will probably not recognize it. The Soviet government, however, could recognize it, but it is still tied up with Polish affairs. In the Polish case the Soviet government made a simple decision -- it recognized the Interim

Government without taking into account the position of Britain and America. Churchill swallowed this pill, but Roosevelt was disappointed and is still offended.

Comrade Stalin advised to wait with proclaiming the government until February, until other questions were clarified.

Comrade Stalin made a suggestion that Churchill, infatuated by successes in Greece, was looking for a pretext to conduct a similar campaign in Yugoslavia. We should not help Churchill in doing it. The fact that the ELAS was beaten is, of course, bad for Yugoslavia as well. The Greek opposition does not have sufficient forces to resist an armed attack. Representatives of the BAM made a wrong step when they left the Papandreou government. They did not ask us about it. They made it easy for Churchill. We should not make it easy for Churchill in Yugoslavia by getting into a fight. We should not give them any pretext, and Churchill is looking for one. Churchill has burned himself in Greece to some extent, and he cannot easily repeat the same campaign, and he is afraid of us.

Comrade Stalin then expressed his doubts regarding the expediency of starting a fight against both Romania and Hungary. First of all, it is important to finalize the composition of the government. Churchill believed that the government of Tito and Shubashich would not be able to satisfy the demands of the population, because both Tito and Shubashich were Croats. However, the British failed in their calculations and it is apparent now.

Comrade Stalin expressed his wish that it would be good (khorosho bylo by) to ask our [Soviet] opinion before making important decisions, otherwise we find ourselves in a stupid situation.

Comrade Stalin made a statement that the Albanians were also Slavs by their origin. In order to feel confident, the Yugoslav leadership should have enough forces. It is widely known that when you cannot attack -- you should defend yourselves, when you accumulate enough power -- you should attack. One should be very careful in dealings with bourgeois politicians. They, bourgeois politicians, are very sensitive and revengeful. You should keep your feelings under control. If your emotions rule you -- you will lose. In his time, Lenin did not even dream about such a correlation of forces, which we have achieved in this war. Lenin started from the assumption that all the countries would attack us, and that it would be good if some far away country, for example America, would be neutral. And now the situation has developed where one group of the bourgeoisie is against us, but the other one is with us. Lenin did not even think that it was possible to be in alliance with one wing of the bourgeoisie, and to fight the other. We have succeeded in this. We are ruled not by our emotions, but by our reason, analysis and calculations (rassudok, analiz, raschet).

At the end of the conversation, Comrade Molotov proposed to discuss the questions raised by the Yugoslav delegation in groups, and he promised to assign competent people to do that.

In the end, Hebrang presented the request of the whole Yugoslav delegation to allow the members of the delegation to meet with Comrade Stalin before their departure, to which Comrade Stalin agreed.

The conversation lasted 3 hours and 15 minutes.

GENERAL-MAJOR KISELEV  
and Major SAKHAROV recorded the conversation