

# The secret police of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

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## Absztrakt:

A polgári biztonsági-hírszerzési tevékenység intézményi kereteit 1899-ben hozták létre először Szerbiában. A Központi Államigazgatás módosításáról szóló törvényt 1899 októberében fogadták el a Népi Nemzetgyűlés Nisben tartott ülésén. Létrehozták a Belügyminisztériumban a titkosrendőrségi munka osztályát, amelynek feladata a belső államrend és a világi biztonság megőrzése volt. A polgári biztonsági-hírszerzési tevékenység első jogi keretei megszilárdításának napját Szerbiában, a jelenlegi biztonsági szolgálat, a Biztonsági Információs Ügynökség október 17-én ünnepli. A cikkben a szerző a különböző jugoszláv hírszerző szervezetek történetét tekinti át, és mutat be az 1944 és 2002 között titkos tevékenységeire néhány példát.

**Kulcsszavak:** gyilkosságok, elhárítás, hírszerző szolgálatok, titkosrendőrség, állambiztonsági szolgálat

## Abstract:

The civil security-intelligence work has been institutionalized for the first time in Serbia in 1899. A Law on amendments of the Central State Administration was adopted on October 5/17 1899 on the session of the National Assembly held in Nis. The Department for Secret Police Work was established within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, with task "to ensure the preservation of the internal state order and worldly security in general". Respecting the significance of the first legal structuring of civil security-intelligence work in Serbia, the current civil security service the Security-Information Agency celebrates October 17 as its day.<sup>2</sup> In this article the author go through the history of different Yugoslavian intelligence organizations and introduce some examples on their secret activities from 1944 to 2002.

**Keywords:** Assassins, counterintelligence, intelligence organizations, secret police, state security service

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<sup>2</sup> *Security Information Agency website, <http://www.bia.gov.rs/enq/istorijat/vremeplov-006.html> (downloaded: 30 April 2017)*

## Introduction

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia (between 31 October 1929 and 6 April 1941) then Federal Republic (between 10 August 1945 and 3 February 2003) was situated in the Balkan Peninsula. On 25 June, 1991 Slovenia and Croatia became independent countries, they were followed by Macedonia on 8 September, 1991. Bosnia and Herzegovina proclaimed independence on 1 March, 1992. On 3 June, 2006 Montenegro, then on 17 February, 2008 Kosovo too proclaimed independence. The territory of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was 255 804 km<sup>2</sup>. Population: 21 155 000 people. Capital: Belgrade. Form of government: federal republic.<sup>3</sup>

### 1. The establishing of the Yugoslavian intelligence organizations

In the army of Yugoslavian partisans led by Josip Broz Tito (1892-1980) intelligence and security tasks were carried out by different organizations. Department for Protection of the People, (Орган Заштите Народа Армије, ОЗНА, Oddelek za zaščito naroda- OZNA) was formed in 1944 with the leadership of Aleksandar Ranković (1909-1983), which was the first (military) security agency of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (established in 1943). All OZNA tasks were divided into four groups:

1. intelligence
2. counter-intelligence
3. army security
4. technical/statistics<sup>4</sup>

OZNA had six divisions:

1. intelligence work,
2. counter-intelligence service in liberated territory,
3. counter-intelligence service in the army,
4. for statistics and technology,
5. for detecting and countering activities of foreign services (as of January 1945) and
6. for counter-intelligence protection of transportation objects and institutions in the country (as of April 1945).

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<sup>3</sup> RADÓ Sándor (szerk.): *Képes politikai és gazdasági világtalasz, Kartográfiai Vállalat Budapest, 1979., 224. o.*

<sup>4</sup> Military Security Agency, [http://www.mod.gov.rs/multimedia/file/staticki\\_sadrzaj/skolovanje/katalozi/military\\_security\\_agency.pdf](http://www.mod.gov.rs/multimedia/file/staticki_sadrzaj/skolovanje/katalozi/military_security_agency.pdf) (downloaded: 30 April 2017) 2. o.

In 1946 OZNA split and the Administrative Directorate for Security of Yugoslav Army (Kontra-Obaveštajna Služba-KOS) was created and a civilian counterpart under the name of Administrative State Security Directorate which was transferred from the Ministry of National Defence to the Ministry of Interior.

## 2. The Administrative State Security Directorate (Uprava Državne Bezbednosti known as UDBA)

The *Yugoslavian intelligence*, the Administrative State Security Directorate (UDBA) operated in a centralized structure. The organization was established on 13 March, 1946. UDBA was composed of six semi-independent secret police organizations — one for each of the six Yugoslav federal republics — they were coordinated by the central federal office. It was primarily responsible for internal state security. The UDBA targeted "domestic enemies", "right-wing bourgeois", Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, Bosnian Muslim, Albanian separatists, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Muslim religious leaders, former Ustasha officials, Serbian royalist Chetniks, members of the Cominform, separatists, and nationalists.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the years the UDBA underwent numerous reorganizations. Between 1946 and 1947 the UDBA was organized into districts. Following the reorganization in 1950 the intelligence and security activities concentrated more on internal security. The organization, as a state security directorate, was under the direction of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

In August 1950 military-defense intelligence, which was handled by the 2nd Department Counterintelligence Service of the Yugoslav People's Army, and the regional and district departments of the I. Intelligence Division were combined, and as a result a decentralized, *united intelligence organization* was created. The majority of the officers in the organization started their careers in the partisan war and gained invaluable experience about the German and later the western intelligence organizations.

Following the abolishment of the Department for People's Protection (OZNA), intelligence and counterintelligence duties were carried out by the different ministries.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs coordinated the State Security Department (SSD).

The tasks of SSD were: organising service, undertaking measures and performing governing tasks with the aim of detecting and preventing activities oriented towards undermining and disrupting constitutionally determined economic, political and legal order and gathering information to this effect.

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<sup>5</sup> CARL Savich: *Yugoslav dissidents during the Cold War*

<http://www.serbianna.com/columns/savich/090.shtml> (downloaded: 30 April 2017)

### **SSD had eight departments:**

1. Intelligence department,
2. Political department (struggle against internal enemy),
3. Counter-intelligence department,
4. Relations and keeping of records
5. Service for material and technical protection and financial affairs,
6. Counter-intelligence protection of the highest state and party officials,
7. Cryptography protection of secret data and
8. Personnel department.

State security work was decentralised, transferred to the newly established republic and provincial security services within republic or provincial secretariats responsible for internal affairs, and directed, coordinated and harmonised by Federal Secretariat for Internal Affairs (SSUP).<sup>6</sup>

The Service of Investigation and Documentation (SID) was transferred under the direction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The 2nd Directorate of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Peoples' Army coordinated the military counterintelligence service. SDB was authorized to utilize all instruments and methods for the sake of gathering intelligence. During its activity, the State Security Administration (SDB) enjoyed a wide range of powers, including classical police powers (identifications, interrogations, and arrests).

During the conflict with the Soviet Union the main focus of the Yugoslav intelligence services was on the number, location and armament of the Soviet troops stationed in Hungary. However, on the list of priorities, gathering intelligence on the Hungarian armed forces, internal security and the Yugoslav emigrants in Hungary were just as important.<sup>7</sup>

### **3. The State Security Service (SDB)**

During the Fourth Plenary Session of the Yugoslav Communist Party in 1966, a decision made and UDBA was reorganized as a State Security Service (SDB). The following tasks were given to SDB:

1. to act against the internal enemies of Yugoslavia;
2. to protect Yugoslavia from foreign intelligence services;
3. to act against anti-Yugoslav political émigrés;
4. to protect Yugoslav political and public officials;
5. to protect civil defense structures;
6. to engage in criminal prosecution;

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<sup>6</sup> Security Information Agency website, <http://www.bia.gov.rs/enq/istorijat/vremeplov-006.html> (downloaded: 30 April 2017)

<sup>7</sup> RITTER László: *Titkos háború Magyarország és Jugoszlávia között, História, 2010. 12. sz.*

7. to inform of any enemy activities against Yugoslavia.<sup>8</sup>

Until the death of Tito (1980) the organization was united but the republics were given a wide range of authority. Following the conflict in Kosovo, at the end of 1980, their authority was significantly downgraded.

SDB had a special unit the “liquidators” which assassinated perceived opponents of Yugoslavia in the USA and the Western Europe. These assassinations were the Yugoslav version of “targeted killings” and were conducted in the US and in Western Europe. Dragisa Kasikovic, the editor of the Serbian-American journal *Sloboda-Liberty* and his successor were suspected to have been assassinated by the UDBA in USA. Dragisa Kasikovic was stabbed to death along with his nine-year-old step-daughter Ivanka Milosevic in Chicago, Illinois in 1977. The UDBA was also suspected in the following murders of prominent Serbian dissidents: Ratko Obradovic in Munich, West Germany in 1969, Sava Cubrilovic in Stockholm, Sweden in 1969, Jakov Ljotic in Munich, Germany in 1974, Boro Blagojevic in Brussels, Belgium in 1975, Miodrag Boskovic in Brussels in 1976, Dusan Sedlar in Dusseldorf, West Germany in 1980, and Petar Valic in 1975.

During the 1970s and 1980s, more than 40 people were killed in West Germany by the SDB.<sup>9</sup>

After 1986 many people started publicly criticizing the SDB. As a result the party organizations were abolished in the SDB, and parliamentary control began by appointing a commission to monitor the work. The commission had no investigative powers and the head of the service was tasked simply to deliver requested information, even classified, to the commission. The above-mentioned events undermined the morals of the SDB, which formulated its own, unpublished regulations.

In 1990 the first democratic multi-party elections were held, which enhanced the process of democratization. Following the Croatian war in 1991, every republic formed its own secret police and united with the state security service of the Serbian Republic.

#### **4. The State Security Directorate**

After the breakdown of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), the State Security Directorate of the Republic of Serbia was established in the Republic of Serbia within the Ministry of Interior by the Law on Internal Affairs and

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<sup>8</sup> *CARL S. i. m.*

<sup>9</sup> *CARL S. i. m.*

the Decree on principles for internal organisation and systematization of working posts in ministries and specialised organizations from 1991.<sup>10</sup>

The State Security Administration (SDB) recruited criminals to carry out assassinations against the enemies of the Tito regime, the Yugoslav emigrants in Western Europe. These criminals were given false identifications, passports, the secret service rented apartments for their use and they were also promised impunity by the SDB.

The organization was so effective that between 1965 and 1990 they murdered more than 100 emigrants. Željko Ražnatovi Arkan started his career as an „assassin”, and became a popular icon as the leader of the Serb „Tigers”, a paramilitary formation, as well as the lord of the criminal underworld in Belgrade.

Following the breakup of Yugoslavia the new State Security Service, (*RDB - Resor Drzavne Bezbednosti*), located in Belgrade, continued the dubious activities. The service also recruited criminals in the paramilitary formations, who then were sent to the frontline in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. Such paramilitary units were not strong military forces but they willingly took up any dirty jobs without questions and they are known to have been responsible for the deadly episodes of ethnic cleansings.

Following the war in Bosnia and Croatia a special unit was formed in Serbia called „crveni bereci” the „Red Berets”, which was built up of the veterans of the above mentioned paramilitary units, theoretically capable of carrying out counter terrorism duties.

The regime under Slobodan Milošević (1941-2006) also supported smuggling rings which helped to circumvent the sanctions imposed against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia by the UN in May 1992.

The main leader of such rings was Mihalj Kertes (1947- ), the director of Federal Customs Bureau of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, who remained a close associate and man of trust of President Slobodan Milošević until the last moments.

It was very revealing in terms of the regime’s corruption that not long after the fall of Slobodan Milošević (March 2001), 624 kilograms of heroin, cocaine and hashish were found in the bank vaults of certain state security leaders and directors of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The Serbian political and business elite too had ties to the criminal underworld. Marko Milošević, the son of former Serbian President Slobodan Milošević, was the head of one of the largest cigarette smuggling rings.

According to the employees of an American research institution during the Milošević’s regime the Serbian government bodies became a network of kleptocratic organizations, which main goals were to manipulate the bank system and

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<sup>10</sup> Security Information Agency website, <http://www.bia.gov.rs/eng/istorijat/vremeplov-006.html>, (downloaded: 30 April 2017)

to systematically ransack public property, to monopolize the profitable smuggling rings and to make profit of the war.

Among the main beneficiaries were the Milošević administration (SPS), Mirjana "Mira" Marković's (Milošević's wife) left wing party called the Yugoslav Left (JUL), the State Security Service as well as some politicians of the opposition and some criminals. Strong ties with organized crime of course led to many conflicts and the affected politicians and their circles were not exempt from the retributions.

Public safety got worse in 1998 when Radomir "Rade" Marković succeeded Jovan "Jovica" Stanišić as head of the State Security Service (RDB). Following the appointment of Marković a series of political assassinations started which forced Zoran Đinđić and Vuk Drašković, the leaders of the Serbian opposition, to flee to Montenegro for a while.

After the fall of Milošević, when the coalition of the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (Demokratska opozicija Srbije - DOS) came to power, they were sent clear messages at once that if they wanted change, they should get ready for war.

The first car that was blown up in the beginning of 2001 belonged to representative Čedomir "Čeda" Jovanović who was a close associate to Zoran Đinđić (1952-2003). A couple of months later a former State Security Colonel Momir Gavrilović was executed by the Serbian mafia.

The new leadership was unable to avoid confrontations with the Serbian mafia for long. The Zemun clan, which was the most powerful criminal organization in Serbia, started to carry out political assassinations as soon the Prime Minister of Serbia, Zoran Đinđić, made the first major steps to end organized crime.

The Mafia used the criminal members and commander of the well-known paramilitary unit the Red Berets to carry out the crimes. The peak of the series of murders was the assassination of Zoran Đinđić, which was carried out by Zvezdan Jovanović, a former Special Forces operative. The assassination of Zoran Đinđić made the governing politicians realize that not only the political stability of Serbia was in danger but their own physical existence as well.

Immediately after the assassination of Đinđić, the Prime Minister of the new government, Zoran Živković, declared a state of emergency and during the so called Operation Sabre they eliminated the Zemun and Surčin clans. Dušan Mihajlović Minister of Interior of Serbia declared that anyone who resisted police would be liquidated.

During the operation more than 10 thousand people were interrogated and 26 thousand people were arrested, among them the murderer of Zoran Đinđić, who was later convicted of his assassination. There were neither taboos nor „untouchable“ people any longer. Among the detainees were the widow of Željko Ražnatović (Arkan), Svetlana Ražnatović, known by her stage name Ceca, who was one of the most popular singers in Serbia, the head of military intelli-

gence as well as Rade Bulatović, who was the security adviser for Vojislav Koštunica, the president of Yugoslavia.

Operation Sabre was a critical turning point in the history of Serbia: the government defeated its most dangerous enemy and split with the unmaintainable politics when the government not only tolerated but used organized crime for its own purpose.

The new circumstances made the leaders of the government to redefine the goals and interests of the nation. Following the breakup of Yugoslavia the state security organizations were transferred to Serbia.

The **Security Information Agency** was established in July 27, 2002 by the Law on Security-Information Agency. According to the law, for the first time in modern Serbian history civil security-intelligence work is separated from the Ministry of Interior.<sup>11</sup>

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