

**Original research article**

**MORE THAN A GAME – FOOTBALL MATCHES BETWEEN  
YUGOSLAVIA AND BULGARIA 1937-1939**

*UDC 79.332(497.1) (497.2)*

**Ivan Becić<sup>1</sup>, Dejan D. Antić<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Institute for Serbian culture in Priština/Leposavić, Serbia

<sup>2</sup>University of Nis, Faculty of Philosophy, Serbia

**Abstract.** *Competitions in sport are very often marked by political, social and national relations. Interstate relations between The Kingdom of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria were burdened with the past, especially after the crimes which the Bulgarian army committed against the Serbs during World War I. Therefore, the football matches between the football clubs and national teams of these two countries were burdened with not only a desire for winning in sports, but also with the aspiration to prove the power of one country over its neighboring country. In the period between 1937-1939, Yugoslav and Bulgarian football teams played around forty matches; however, the most important match in terms of politics was the match between the national teams in 1937. In this paper, which is based on the archival structure and relevant literature, we offer an overview of the process of getting the license for the enactment of the matches, reactions of the various Ministries to the results, as well as singularities that followed the team matches and the matches between the national teams.*

**Key words:** *football, The Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Department of Physical Education of people.*

INTRODUCTION

Although it had been imagined as a game, a sort of exercise for building up stamina, knightly tournaments and leisure, modern sport, in its early phase was exposed to various impacts that led the sport away from its primary goal. The desire for winning was often marked by political, national and racist characteristics and rarely by the right ones, related to sport. Political goals were dominant especially in the moments when the state had the support to prove itself at the international level or when some unresolved relations with some states were at stake.

---

Received March 10, 2014 / Accepted March 18, 2015

**Corresponding author:** Dejan Antić

University of Niš, Faculty of Philosophy St. Ćirila i Metodija 2, 18000 Niš, Serbia

Phone: +381 28 84700 • E-mail: dejan.sdk@gmail.com

Relations between The Kingdom of Serbia - later SHS/Yugoslavia - and Bulgaria during the XX century were burdened with the pursuit of both countries for dominance over the same territories, especially in the region of Vardar in Macedonia. The alliance made in 1912 against The Ottoman Empire was short lived, since all the events that occurred during the Balkan wars made rivals out of allied countries. Nationalism, the dream of one big country, the interference of other countries was only adding fuel to the flames, and the remains of the past alliance were burning. A bigger and stronger Serbia was born from the Balkan wars, which managed to change the relations between Austria and Serbia, while on the other hand Bulgaria got the nick name "the country that lost each war" even though Bulgaria planned to enlarge its territory.

World War I flared the hostility even more. Bulgaria was the only Slavic country that was fighting for the Central Powers and the effects of the army were focused towards the neighboring territories: Serbia, Romania and Greece. The Bulgarian troops played a great role in breaking the Serbian forces in 1915. The Bulgarians entered the war on October 14, 1915 without even announcing it, with the King's manifest, although the hostilities had started a day earlier, the Bulgarian army took over Vranje on October 17, and cut the railway line Skoplje-Niš, which made any movement of the Serbian army towards Greece, impossible (Tomač, 1937, pp 288.).

Creating "West Bulgaria" in southern Serbia was accompanied by horrifying terror denationalization, theft, crimes of the Bulgarian forces. The Bulgarian army did not spare women, children, the elderly, sick and disabled. The Bulgarian government even reinforced punishment for the incriminated and different forms of creative responsibility. Violations of the principle of humanity, international laws and conventions were obvious. Beyond that, the occupation authority on the Serbian territory did not respect even the basic principle of international law. The Bulgarian Red Cross refused to recognize the right of the Serbian Red Cross to take care of their soldiers in the Bulgarian camps (Stojančević, 1988. pp 64).

Nikola Pašić, as the president of the delegation of The Kingdom of Yugoslavia during the Paris Peace Conference, expressed his opinion about the Bulgarian cooperation with the Germans in Eastern Serbia to Tardieu<sup>1</sup>, for which Bulgaria deserved "capital punishment" (Krizman, 1975. pp 17). The decisions made at the Peace Conference and the signing the Peace Treaty with Bulgaria did not manage to calm the hostility. The treaty of Neully-sur-Seine provided the international legal support for the Yugoslav and Bulgarian misunderstanding during the XX century. This contract signed by the winners and Bulgaria on November 27, 1919 in Neully caused Bulgaria national humiliation. Bulgaria had to agree to the annexation of Bosiljgrad and the Caribrod region as well as Strumice to the Kingdom of SHS; a part of Trakia in Greece, at same time, the loss of the access to the sea; Dobrudza-Romania. Bulgaria had to accept the Kingdom of SHS, to accept paying reparation dues and restrictions related to its army.

The defeated countries showed the desire to change the peace contracts. Their revision was focused on the common interest of Hungary, Turkey and Austria. The Bulgarian press and public were not satisfied with the decisions of the Peace Conference. Demonstrations occurred in all the parts of the country. The Communist party condemned the bourgeoisie politics of the government and bourgeoisie system that led the country to a national catastrophe. The Serbian army in Sofia informed that Bulgaria was getting ready for the

---

<sup>1</sup> Andre Tardieu was the President of the Committee for Yugoslav and Romanian actions at the Peace Conference in Paris in 1919. Later on, he was President of the government of the French Third Republic (Sretenović, 2008, pp 100).

proclamation of the republic and the Bulgarian government was forced to forbid protests in order to prevent some large scale riots.

#### POLITICAL RELATIONS AFTER THE GREAT WAR

In the period between 1919-1921, the arrangement of the relations between the Kingdom of SHS and Bulgaria was strange even for the Yugoslav government. They denied all proposals with the explanation that it was not the right time to discuss them (democrats) (Skakun, 1984, pp 65). The era of optimism started with Aleksandar Stamboljski and the Agricultural Party. The conspiracy finished with the “bloody overturn” on June 19, 1923. The government in Belgrade condemned the overturn since it was not in accordance with the Neuilly contract and represented a direct danger for the Kingdom of SHS. The reason for this kind of attitude the government found in the Bulgarian efforts to mobilize their army. Only after the great forces had become involved, the passions settled (Vinaver, 1984, pp 54-55). The events that occurred in the period between 1923-1926 caused the Bulgarian emigration into the territory of the Kingdom of SHS. The position of the main base of the Bulgarian emigrants in the Kingdom of SHS was the result of the politics which the Yugoslav country led towards Bulgaria after World War I, and some dilemmas that Bulgaria had about its foreign policy and ideological base. The Bulgarian emigrants reached the Kingdom of SHS a few days after the overturn. The main role of the Yugoslav army was important especially for the organization of the emigrants, where the secret officers’ organization “The White Hand” had a great impact, since it was a patron of the emigrants. On the other hand, the invasions of the guerrilla units from Bulgaria were frequent, and their main aim was to cause instability. The relations were so tense that the best illustrations were the actions around the border and some actions in Sofia. To stop combatant troops from moving along the Bulgarian-Yugoslav border, they put up barbed wire, dug pits, installed alarms with bells, built watch towers, border guards were equipped with the police dogs in order to take care and control every inch of the Yugoslav border (Stojadinović, 1970, pp 407). On November 2, 1923, two or even three perpetrators attacked the Yugoslav army attaché in his house and injured him. Therefore, the Yugoslav government asked for some actions to be taken and for the reparation from the government (Avramovski, 1986, pp 174).

During 1926, when the first football match was played between the national teams of the Kingdom of SHS and Bulgaria, the government of Aleksandar Cankov was replaced by the government of Andrej Ljapčev, which led the same politics, but had different methods (Jovanović, 2012, pp 37).

#### THE FOOTBALL MATCHES

Until 1937, the two neighboring countries were meeting during the competitions of the national teams for the Balkan Cup, but since the 1937, the matches occurred more often, which was a reflection of the current politics. The Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia<sup>2</sup> and Bulgaria signed a two-article contract January 24, 1937 in Belgrade.

---

<sup>2</sup> Until October 3, the country was called the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, and then until March 7, 1945 the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

According to the first article, the two countries had to take an oath for an “unshakeable peace” and an honest and sincere friendship, while the second article determined the terms of ratification (Avramovski, 1986, pp 540). “The contract of eternal friendship” had an impact on intensifying the football matches between the Yugoslav and Bulgarian football clubs, although each game required a license from the government.

The procedure for getting a license for an international match was not simple, nor fast. Football clubs that were interested had to send an application to the Football Association of Yugoslavia, which then had to be forwarded to the Ministry of Physical Education. After having obtained approval from the Ministry, the request had to be sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, then if it received a positive opinion, the Ministry of Internal Affairs was asked for its approval. The requirements had to be sent a month in advance, in order to get all the necessary licenses in time. Although the “eternal friendship” was still in power on the field, in the political circles the situation was quite different. After the game with *Gradjanski* from Niš, when they lost from the Bulgarians, the Ministry of Internal Affairs sent the application to the Ministry of Physical Education to give their approval only to “leading football clubs in Belgrade and Zagreb, as well as to the champion of Split” to be the guest teams. The clubs that were “weak”, were characterized as harmful for the reputation of Yugoslav sport abroad (AJ, 71-23-60, The application of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of April 13, 1937).

The leading Yugoslav clubs were interested in visiting Bulgaria, not only for international games and checking their current level, but also for financial reasons. During the Easter holiday and on Easter Monday, on March 28 and 29, 1937 in Split, a friendly game was played between *Hajduk* and FC13 from Sofia. *Hajduk* was founded in 1911 and since then it was the champion of Yugoslavia in 1926/27 and 1928/29. The football club had an international reputation, because together with the *BSC* from Belgrade it had been a participant of the prestigious Middle-European Cup, which at that period was the strongest international club competition (One hundred years of football in Serbia, 1896-1996). *Hajduk* got a compensation of 25.000 dinars.

The teams from Kruševac, “*Tzar Lazar*,” founded in 1921 and *Obilić* tried to use the visit of the team from Sofia. For that purpose the sports club *Obilić* sent an application for the realization of the game, to the relevant ministry on March 26, 1937. The deal with the leadership of the Bulgarian club had been closed the day before, while the train was passing through Stalać. The realization of the game was planned for the period between March 31 and April 4, after the arrival from Split. Knowing the limitations, proposed by the ministries for the Yugoslav clubs, Kruševac suggested that both clubs should be in the best shape. Furthermore, if it was necessary, the clubs would have supplemented and played one game as the national city team. The leadership of the club was aware that the application had been sent late, so they justify the mistake by claiming that they had not been able to refer in time, since they were not able to define the date (AJ, 71-23-60, The application of ZSC *Obilić* of March 26, 1937). The plans that the clubs from Kruševac had did not come true, since the Department of National Security of the Ministry of Internal Affairs had never given them the necessary permission (AJ, 71-23-60, Rescript of the Ministry of the Internal Affairs of April 1, 1937). The football club from Sofia used a trip to Dalmatia to negotiate and talk about the realization of the friendly games with a few Yugoslav football clubs. One of them was the sports club *Slavia* from Sarajevo. The club mentioned above was founded in 1908. In its application for the permission it was cited that they would play with the complete first team “with possibly

a team reinforced with league player” (AJ, 71-23-60, The application of SC *Slavia* of April 9, 1937). The dates that were planned for the realization of the game were May 2, 3, 6, and the games were supposed to be played in Bulgaria. The Ministry of Internal Affairs recommended approval of the game, but only if this team played with the first complete team in order not to become like *Gradjanski* (AJ, 71-23-60, The Act of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of April 17, 1937). One of the Yugoslav clubs, whose applications were always accepted was the sports club *Omladinac* from Pirot, founded in 1920. Despite the fact that the club was from the town near the border with Bulgaria, *Omladinac*, the club from a small town, played with Bulgarian clubs that were not from the capital city or the national team. During the Easter holiday on May 2 and 3, 1937. *Omladinac* played two games with the club *Tzar Boris III* from Gar Koinar (AJ, 71-23-60, Permission of the Ministry for Physical Education of the people of April 28, 1937), and got a license for games on July 11 and 12, 1937. The club delegation needed to have a “limited number of players and officials” (AJ, 71-23-60, The rescript of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of June 23, 1937).

Some matches between the Yugoslav and Bulgarian football teams were realized because of the cooperation of the institutions of the two countries and planned trips in one or the other country. That was how the subcommittee of the Union of Yugoslav national railway men and shipping from Niš organized a trip to Sofia on May 22 and 24, 1937. SC *Železničar* (1928) attended the event and it was seen as an opportunity to play two games against the Bulgarian SC *Železničar* and one more game would have been determined by the Bulgarian club (AJ,71-23-60, The application of SC *Železničar* of May 13, 1937). The competent Yugoslavs met in order to give the permission for this kind of game. Although it was cited in a negative context during the discussion of getting a license for taking part in the game, the football club *Gradjanski* did not give up on the friendly game with the Bulgarian clubs. A football club from Niš was founded in 1923. The club asked for a license for the match with the club *Duchess Maria Louisa* from Loma in Bulgaria. Originally, it was planned for the game to be on June 15, 1937 and the leadership started negotiations with a couple of clubs from Bulgaria (AJ, 71-23-60, The application of the sports club *Gradjanski* of April 12, 1937). Although the leadership had sent the application two months before, the results for its rejection are unknown.

In 1937 one Yugoslav club organized a tour in Bulgaria. The Belgrade sports club *Istra* (1931) sent an application on May 26, 1937. The application referred to a tour which was supposed to begin in June. As they planned to stay in Bulgaria a little bit longer, the Ministry of Internal Affairs asked to be informed in detail about the number of persons attending the event and which places they planned to visit, even though it was considered that the tour should be postponed since during June and July a huge number of Yugoslavs used to organize trips to Bulgaria (AJ,71-23-60, the opinion of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of July 9, 1937). The sports club *Ruse* would have paid the expenses in Bulgaria. For each played game, *Istra* would have got 1.000 dinars and several games were already played (AJ,71-23-60, The application of BSC *Istra* of June 26, 1937). The most important event on the sports field during 1937 was the game between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria in Spain. Although it was the national teams that played, some necessary official permits had to be secured.

That the Football Association of Yugoslavia was unsure of the reaction of the State leadership, and one can conclude from the application for a license in which it was highlighted that the Association was under the “sponsorship of His Majesty King Peter II” (AJ, 71-23-60, The application of the Football Association of Yugoslavia of June 23, 1937).

The reason for the organization of the match was the death of Dimitar Ivanov, the founder and President of the Bulgarian National Sports Federation. It was planned for the Yugoslav team to travel to Sofia on July 11 and attended the commemorative matinee in the hall of the Bulgarian Academy of Science and then in the afternoon or during the following day to play the game on the stadium Junak (*Politika*, 1937, No. 10.438.).<sup>3</sup>

Until the beginning of the game in 1937, the national teams of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria played 16 matches. Yugoslavia was more successful, with 11 triumphs and two lost games. Yugoslavia lost two games with only one goal-difference. It was interesting that Yugoslavia lost two games at home, and the results were identical, 2:3. After 1934, these two national teams rarely met, only once a year, and until that moment they had been playing two games a year. The only reason for that was the fact that the national team of Yugoslavia devoted itself to playing football for the Middle-European Cup.

**Table 1** Football matches between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria (*Politika*, 1937, No. 10.457).

Year	Place	Result
1926.	Zagreb	3:1
1927.	Sofia	2:0
1930.	Belgrade	6:1
1930.	Sofia	2:2; 3:0
1931.	Belgrade	1:0
1931.	Sofia	2:3
1932.	Belgrade	2:3
1933.	Bucharest	4:0
1934.	Sofia	2:1; 1:0
1934.	Belgrade	2:1; 2:3
1934.	Athens	4:3
1935.	Sofia	3:3
1936.	Sofia	3:1

For the match in Sofia, the Yugoslav national team had some problems with its staff members. The first draw was announced in public and it consisted of 15 players. It was clear that the strongest team would play. The first team was: Pešle, Čabrić, Marjanović, Tomašević, Zečević, Perlić, Lazbec, Lehner, Kokotović, Glazer, Aca Petrović, Belošević, Higl, Urh and Matošić. Aleksandar Tirmanić was not on the list, he was forbidden from playing for two months since an incident during a game with Belgium (*Politika* 1937, No. 10.444).

Two weeks later it was announced that the national team would also include two goal keepers: Glazer and Urh, quarterbacks: Higl and Matošević, Belošević; halves: Lehner, Lazbec, Kokotović; attackers : Perlić, Pleše, Marjanović, Petrović, Zečević, Čabrić and Tomašević. The upcoming match was seen by the newspaper *Politika* as a sort of rehearsal for the Bulgarian team, which had the opportunity to, after a series of bad results, once more compare its strength with a serious national team. "The Bulgarian football players had never got over the crisis and brought back the form they used to have when the Yugoslav national team competed with them for the Balkan Cup. The Bulgarian football players would have been able to see whether they advanced, the game with the

<sup>3</sup> The Bulgarian national team played at the Junak stadium. Soko was the bearer of the ideology of Yugoslav nationalism, and Junak was the same thing in Bulgaria. The advance of their relations, was at least ostensibly affected during the 1937 the exchange visits of the Yugoslav Soko and the Bulgarian Junak (Avramovski, 1986, pp 541).

Yugoslav national team would have been the ice-breaker. In case they lost, they would have to understand and see the mistakes and try to overcome the crises” (*Politika*, 1937, No. 10.457).

The next day, on July 8, 1937, changes occurred in the Yugoslav national team. Instead of the Vice President of the Yugoslav national team, Andrejević, who should have been the leader but who due to private problems could not travel, Raka Milutinovac was the leader of the team, along with the member of the management of the Union, Klemenčić. Matošić cancelled since he had to take a master exam (the Association, after a thorough check, determined that this was true) and Lehner was replaced by Jazbinšek, since he was sick. Seven football players from Zagreb were members of the national team, so the half line was the same as in the matches against Belgium and Hungary; however, the changes occurred in the attack (*Politika*, 1937, No. 10.458). The game played on July 12, 1937 was not successful for the Yugoslavs, they lost, and the result was 0:4. This result was the greatest disappointment for the Yugoslav press. This game was described as the greatest defeat in Yugoslav football since its foundation (*Politika*, 1937, No. 10.463). Having cited that the game was attended by 10.000 spectators, *Politika* analyzed the preparations that the Bulgarian team had had before the match. The Bulgarians had seriously been preparing their players for the game. Eighteen Bulgarian players spent a few days outside of Sofia, under the constant supervision of their coach Tomaš, whom the Bulgarian Federation had enlisted especially for the national team a month earlier. The Bulgarian team showed a level of performance that people did not expect from them, quick, sharp - the perfect game. Besides that, they showed that their usual patterns, powerful actions, sacrifice, fantastic and the unbelievable militancy they carried in their genes. This feature was established by their players whenever they played for the national team. When they found themselves in this kind of situation, they never spared their energy, they believed in the slogan “for Mother Bulgaria” in order to be motivated to make non-human efforts. Our team did not play so well in the first half of the game, their game was amateurish. In the second half of the game it seemed like the Bulgarians were alone on the terrain (*Politika*, 1937, No. 10.463).

The Bulgarian paper *Vreme* wrote about the impressions of the game. There were 15.000 spectators, *Vreme* put the result on the front page of its July 13 issue. *Vreme* indicated that the weakest part of the team was the half-line and commented on the perfect game that the Bulgarian team showed. The engagement of the Czech coach Tomaš was quite a success, and the Yugoslav game was described using the Hungarian referee Ger’s comment: “There were no traces of the Yugoslav national team that played in Budapest!” The sports section of this paper hardly accepted the defeat and that was illustrated through the comment that the Yugoslav player Božović “in the Zoo Garden in Sofia asked a parrot whether he could play and dribble” (*Vreme*, 1937, No. 5.562).

The defeat was taken quite seriously and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of the Public Office sent a note about a few reports from the Yugoslav mission in Sofia, related to the reactions to the defeat, to the Football Association of Yugoslavia. It can be seen from this note that the success in the football matches “the Bulgarians consider to be of national importance and at the same time pointed out that our sport was disorganized and stagnant”. The consequence of the defeat was the decision of the Ministry that it was forbidden to include into the procedure the application of the provincial clubs for playing in Bulgaria, until the end of the year, since the results were not satisfactory and were harmful for the country’s reputation (AJ, 71-23-60, The report from the Ministry of Physical Education of people of July 24, 1937).

The importance of the games of the Bulgarian national team was noticed in the reaction of the Bulgarian press and public. Euphoric reactions were expected after the match and the victory over the Yugoslav national team; however it was not expected for the match they played with Germany on October 23, 1939. Bulgaria was under German influence, and a friendly game was welcomed in the germanophile circles as a political manifestation. The German national team was warmly welcomed and around 15.000 spectators attended the event. However, some German players were not so kindly welcomed on the terrain, even their goals were not accompanied by ovations. The German players made fouls, which caused an outcry of the majority of the spectators. The game was played in a fair sports spirit, thanks to the referee, Vasa Stefanović. In the Bulgarian paper *Sport*, the whole game was shown as a “small war” and the Bulgarian players were described as brave, so they managed to prove that they were “proud ancestors of the Koloyan’ soldiers, who had defeated Baludin with hooks and clubs, therefore they were proud grandsons of those who fought against the empire with the wooden cannon, and finally proud sons of those who were among us and who used the top of the bayonets to write the most beautiful pages of Bulgarian history, the immortal glory” (AJ, 71-23-60, The report of the mission in Sofia, of October 31, 1939).<sup>4</sup>

The result that the national team made in 1937 had an impact on the events during the next year, and fewer games were played between the Yugoslav and Bulgarian national teams, and also between the clubs that participated. The football team *Omladinac* from Pirot showed interest to participate, like in 1937. The first two games were planned for April 24 and 25, 1938, against the club *Belita Orlet* from Plevne. However, the Bulgarians did not manage to obtain all the necessary permissions, so their visit had to be postponed until June (AJ, 71-23-60, The application of SC *Omladinac*, of May 31, 1938). The replacement for the team from Plevne was SC *Železničar* from Sofia. These two games were played on April 28 and 29, 1939, and in the application the club from Pirot cited that “our club has been playing successfully through the years, against the football teams from Bulgaria, therefore, it represented Yugoslav sport in Bulgaria with dignity” (AJ, 71-23-60, The application of SC *Omladinac* of May 15, 1938).

The positive results of this club had an impact on getting the license for playing, as well as for postponing the game with the team from Plevne. Shortly before the game with *Belite Orleta* on June 12 and 13, in Pirot, the home team won four games against Bulgaria: 3:1, 4:2, 3:0, 3:1 (AJ, 71-23-60, The application of the SC *Omladinac* of October 31, 1938). The success motivated SC *Omladinac* to ask for permission for a tour around Bulgaria during September 1938 (AJ, 71-23-60, The application of SC *Omladinac* of August 4, 1938).

In order for the application to get a positive response, they often asserted their success at home and when they played abroad. The athletic club *Žak* from Subotica pointed out in its application that they were the champions of the football sub-association in Subotica, in the 1930/31 1934/35 and 1935/36 season. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave the license to this club to play in Sofia on March 5 and 6, but only if the Ministry of Physical Education considered that they could “represent our sport with dignity” (AJ, 71-23-60, The application of *ŽAC* Subotica, of February 23, 1938). The result this club managed to achieve was satisfactory, since it got permission to play one more game with the

---

<sup>4</sup> Kalojan- the Bulgarian ruler (1197–1207) during whose regency the New Bulgarian Empire reached its first peak (Ostrogorski, 1993, pp 385); Balduin I Flandrijski – the end of Latin empire in Constantinople (1204–1205) (Keravica, Kačavenda, Lazović, Pešić, Savić, Petrović, 2008, pp 172).



Bulgarian *Železničar* in Sofia, as well as with *Železničar* in Ruščuka on July 1, 1938. The team from Subotica welcomed *Bočkaj* from Debrecin during July and August (AJ, 71-23-60, The application of *ŽAK* from Subotica of May 31, 1938). *Krajišnik* from Banja Luka played with *Slavia* from Sofia on April 24 and 25, in Banja Luka and *Jedinstvo* from Pančevo played with *Železničar* from Sofia on July 13, 1938 in Pančevo (AJ, 71-23-60, The application of SC *Omladinac* and SC *Krajišnik* of April 15 and 20, 1938 and The application of SC *Jedinstvo* of July 8, 1938). During 1939, more games were played than during the previous year; however, it was not so easy to get a license. The football teams from Kruševac wanted to play against SC *13* from Sofia, as the national city team. In order to support their demands, they pointed out that *Obilić* was the ex-champion of the football sub-association in Niš and that the games should have been played on June 3 and 4, 1939 in Kruševac (AJ, 71-23-60, The application of KSC *Tzar Lazar* of May 9, 1939). Since the team from Sofia started the tour all over Yugoslavia, this appointment had to be postponed for June 6 because SC *13* had already played two games with the national teams from Niš *Gradjanski* and *Sindjelić* (AJ, 71-23-60, The application of SC *Gradjanski* from Niš of May 22, 1939).

Besides *ŽAK* from Subotica, the only club from Vojvodina that played with Bulgarian teams was SC *Vojvodina* (1914) from Novi Sad. They welcomed Bulgarian team from Sofia and *Slavia* on May 28 and 29, 1939 (AJ, 71-23-60, The application of SC *Voivodina* from Novi Sad, of May 25, 1939). *Hajduk Veljko* from Negotin played two games. After having played in Vidin, they played with *Viktoria* in Negotin on June 28, 1939).

The cooperation of these two teams spread on the referees and high-ranking officials. The Belgrade sub-association asked the Administration to give a collective passport without formalities for the necessities of the trip in Sofia. This particulate trip predicted the visit and the exchange of experience of the 35 members of the sub-association, referees, the games were played on June 16 and 19, 1939 (AJ, 71-23-60, The Application of Belgrade football sub-association of June 9, 1939).

The climax of the sports competition and cooperation of the football clubs from these two countries was the game between SC *Yugoslavia* from Belgrade and SC *Slavia* from Sofia. These two games were played on September 9 and 10, (AJ, 71-23-60, The application of SC *Yugoslavia* of September 7, 1939). The trip leader was Srba Todorović and SC *Yugoslavia* travelled in this particular composition: Žmara, Tasić, Stokić (the first), Stokić (the second), Ajbl, Bročić, Atanasković, Djurdjević, Lakar, Lev, Moša Marjanović, Aca Petrović, Stevkov and Drenovac (*Politika*, 1939, No. 11.232).

The first game was finished with a result of 4:2 (4:0) for Yugoslavia, Aca Petrović scored once, and Moša Marjanović three times (*Vreme*, 1939, No. 6.333). The game was played on the stadium Junak in front of 5.000 spectators. A stronger impact was left by the events during the game, because of an incident, the game had to be stopped in the 43<sup>rd</sup> minute, in the first half. The commentator from *Politika* pointed out that the Yugoslav players had played a remarkable game in the first half and continued in the same spirit in the second half, but they were sanctioned by the referee. The Bulgarians played rough, which resulted in an incident, namely, a Yugoslav player got hurt. In the 43<sup>rd</sup> minute the incident happened. It was caused by the center-forward player of *Slavia*. When the ball was in front of the Yugoslav goal, he hit Stokić Senior in the back, for no reason. Then, he hit Stokić Junior in the head. Stokić Junior fell on the ground. Afterwards, the spectators tried to enter the field. The police had to interfere. The Yugoslav players managed to stay calm. The game was stopped. Mr Todorović asked to continue the game, but the referee left the field and no one could find him. After 15

minutes the game continued. The Yugoslavs played without Stokić. The referee had to prolong the game, believing that the Bulgarians would score. The main culprit of the incident, a *Slavia* center-forward was not excluded from the game. After the incident, the Yugoslav players decided not to play the following match with Bulgaria, which was set up for the next day (*Politika*, 1939 No. 11.234).

The game was relocated from the field to the heart of the Bulgarian organization. The night after the incident during the meeting, the Bulgarian football Association decided to forbid *Slavia* center-forward Kitamov from playing football ever again. The President of the Association apologized to the leadership of Yugoslavia and guaranteed that the game, set up for the next day, would be secure since more authorities would attend the game, as well as the best Bulgarian referee Čupov. After this apology, the leadership of Yugoslavia decided to play the second game in Sofia (*Politika*, 1939, No. 11.234).

The Yugoslavs played with different team. Instead of the goal-keeper Spasić, they included Žmar, and even seven injured players had to play. The players were exhausted. However, the game they played was satisfactory. In front of 8.000 spectators, the Bulgarian national team won 1:0 and “after the game the Yugoslav players were acclaimed since the spectators were satisfied with the victory of their team and wanted to show that they were satisfied with the nice game of the Yugoslav team” (*Politika*, 1939, No. 11.235).

#### CONCLUSION

The events on the field and outside of it evoked reactions of the Yugoslav national team in Bulgaria. The royal mission in Sofia asked to forbid any further visits of the Yugoslav clubs to Bulgaria. The fact that they understood the situation in Bulgaria, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented in the following way: this kind of manifestation was not being held in the right location, since the achieved effect is opposite from the one they should have strived for. Especially in Bulgaria, where sports culture still has not reached the desired level and where the results of the sports games were understood as a question of national honor and prestige, in the spirit of the Bulgarian motto: “Through sport for the homeland”. With this attitude, which was deeply rooted in Bulgarian consciousness it was hard for them to accept defeat, that can later on lead them to incidents on the field, what actually happened, thanks to the Bulgarian players during the last visit of *Yugoslavia* from Belgrade (AJ, 71-23-60, The letter of the Ministry of foreign affairs of September 13, 1939). That was why the Ministry asked the Ministry of Physical Education of people to forbid further matches in Belgrade.

The Ministry of Physical Education had sent a positive answer to the demands of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, so SC *Vojvodina* was ordered to cancel the game, set up for September 16 and 17. The club did not get the license to play against *Slavia* in Bulgaria on the October 3. The Yugoslav mission in Sofia heard about the journalist’s visit from Sofia, so deputy Momčilo Jurišić Šturm was against any visit of Yugoslav clubs under the given circumstances.<sup>5</sup> The games between *Gradjanski* from Niš and the *Železničar* sports club from Rus, as well as the game between *Žak* from Subotica and *Slavia* in Ruščanin, set up for October 7 and 8, were left without the license for playing (AJ, 71-23-60, The application of SC *Gradjanski* from Niš, of August 8, 1939).

<sup>5</sup> Momčilo Jurišić Šturm was the nephew of Duke Pavle Jurišić Šturm. Apart from Sofia, he was minister of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Berne (Jovanović, 1991, pp 151–152).

The events that occurred during the match *Yugoslavia* vs. *Slavia* left a long-lasting mark since none of the clubs could get a license for playing in Bulgaria and World War II made the realization of sports events in Europe impossible. In the period from 1937-1939, Yugoslav clubs applied for a license for 38 games and one tour with Bulgarian football teams. Thirty applications received a positive response; however, the rescript for two games and the tour of SC *Istra* are unknown. FC *13* from Sofia had the most applications and played games, while in 1939 the most attractive opponent was *Slavia*. The national teams of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria played one game, and SC *Yugoslavia* from Belgrade played one match with the Bulgarian national team. The Yugoslav football clubs were more successful in the duels, while the clubs from the provinces frequently lost, which triggered the reaction of the Yugoslav mission in Sofia. Based on the aforementioned, one can clearly perceive that football matches were important, not only as sports events, but also as the component part of the politics and interrelations of the two states.

#### SOURCES

Archives of Yugoslavia, The Ministry of Physical Education of people  
*Politika*, Belgrade 1937-1939  
*Vreme*, Belgrade 1937-1939

#### REFERENCES

- Avramovski, Ž. (1986). *Britanci o Kraljevini Jugoslaviji, Godišnji izveštaji Britanskog poslanstva u Beogradu 1921–1938*. (The British about the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, The annual report of the British mission in Belgrade 1921-1938). Zagreb, Archives of Yugoslavia-Globe.
- Jovanović, A. (1991). *Sedam ratova generala Pavla Jurišića Šturma*. (Seven wars of General Pavle Jurišić Šturm). Belgrade, Litera.
- Jovanović, V. (2012). "Srpski književni glasnik" o jugoslovensko-bugarskim odnosima 1920-1930." *Istorija 20. veka*", (*History of the 20<sup>th</sup> century*) 1, 27–42.
- Keravica, N., Kačavenda, N., Lazović, N., Pešić, A., Savić, A., & Petrović, Ž. (2008). *In nomine dei*. Belgrade: Zavod za udzbenike.
- Krizman, B. (1975). *Vanjska politika jugoslavenske države: 1918–1941: diplomatsko-historijski pregled*. (The external politics of Yugoslav country: 1918-1941: diplomatic-historical view). Zagreb: Školska knjiga.
- Ostrogorski, G. (1993). *Istorija Vizantije (History of Byzantine)*. Belgrade: Prosveta
- Skakun, M. (1984). *Jugoslovensko-bugarski odnosi* (Yugoslav-Bulgarian relations), Belgrade: NIRO Zadruga.
- Sretenović, S. (2008). *Francuska i Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1918–1929*. (France and the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenians 1918–1929.) Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju.
- Stojadinović, M. M. (1970). *Ni rat ni pakt, Jugoslavija između dva rata*. (Nor war, nor pakt, Yugoslavia between two wars). Rijeka: Otokar Keršovani.
- Stojančević, V. (1988). *Srbija i srpski narod za vreme rata i okupacije 1914–1918. godine. (Serbia and Serbian people during the occupation 1914-1918.)* Leskovac: Narodni muzej Leskovac.
- Todorović, D. (1979). *Jugoslavija i balkanske države 1918–1923*. (Yugoslavia and Balkan countries 1918-1923.) Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju – Narodna knjiga.
- Tomac, P. (1973). *Prvi svetski rat 1914–1918. (World War I 1914–1918.)* Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački zavod.
- Vinaver, V. (1985). *Jugoslavija i Francuska između dva rata, Da li je Jugoslavija bila francuski „satelit“*. (Yugoslavia and France between two wars, Was Yugoslavia the French „satellite“) . Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju.

## **VIŠE OD IGRE – FUDBALSKI DUELI JUGOSLAVIJE I BUGARSKE 1937–1939.**

*Sportska nadmetanja često u sebi nose konotaciju političkih, društvenih i nacionalnih odnosa. Međudržavni odnosi Kraljevine Jugoslavije i Bugarske bili su opterećeni prošlošću, posebno zločinima koje je bugarska vojska počinila nad srpskim stanovništvom u Prvom svetskom ratu. Stoga su fudbalski mečevi klubova i reprezentacija ovih država bili opterećeni ne samo zdravom željom za pobedom u sportu, već i htenjem da se dokaže nadmoć države i nacije nad susedom. U periodu od 1937. do 1939. godine jugoslovenski i bugarski klubovi odigrali su četrdesetak mečava, a od posebnog političkog značaja bio je meč reprezentacija 1937. godine. U radu je, prvenstveno na osnovu arhivske građe, kao i relevantne literature, dat osvrt na postupak za dobijanje dozvole za odigravanje utakmica, reakcije različitih ministarstava na postignute rezultate, kao i osobenosti koje su pratile mečeve klubova i reprezentacija dveju susednih država.*

*Ključne reči: fudbal, Kraljevina Jugoslavija, Bugarska, Ministarstvo fizičkog vaspitanja naroda.*