

FOOTBALL IN ROMANIA, YUGOSLAVIA AND BULGARIA DURING STALINISM (1944-1953)

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FOTBALUL ÎN ROMÂNIA, IUGOSLAVIA ȘI BULGARIA ÎN PERIOADA STALINISTĂ (1944-1953)

Abstract. *The current article describes the reforms in Romanian, Yugoslavian and Bulgarian football in the years of Stalinism (from the arrival of the Red army on their territory to the death of Joseph Stalin on 5 March 1953). The article present a parallel between the political processes and the changes in the local football. The Soviet influence and the specificity of their model are explained compared to the model of each individual country.*

Keywords: *football, Stalinism, Soviet influence, communist regime.*

Rezumat. *Prezentul articol descrie reformele din fotbalul romanesc, iugoslav și bulgar în anii stalinismului (de la sosirea Armatei Roșii pe teritoriul acestor state până la moartea lui Iosif Stalin, pe 5 martie 1953). Articolul prezintă o paralelă între procesele politice și schimbările din fotbalul local. Influența sovietică și specificul acestui model sunt explicate prin comparație cu modelul existent în fiecare țară în parte.*

Cuvinte cheie: *fotbal, stalinism, influență sovietică, regim comunist.*

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Introduction

The inclusion of Romania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria in the Soviet sphere of influence after the Second World War and the imposition of local totalitarian regimes changed the political and social climate in these countries. This especially concerns the years of Stalinism, when communist leaders tended to copy the Soviet experience in every sphere of life disregarding the specifics of their countries. The organization of the sport, presents one of the most evident illustrations of this process.

In terms of the most popular sport – football, Romanians, Yugoslavs, and Bulgarians offer the most eloquent example. Before the Revolution of 1917, football in Russia was an object of interest mainly to foreign workers in St. Petersburg and Moscow. In the USSR the international matches of the football teams were rare, but the Soviet football was placed on a stable basis. By the mid-1920s, the Soviet Union's four leading football clubs were all based in Moscow, and all were controlled by a different state organ. „Lokomotiv“ Moscow, as their name suggests, were controlled by the Ministry of Transportation, while the state carmaker, ZIL, owned „Torpedo“ Moscow. „CDKA“ Moscow was the Red Army's team, and „Dinamo“ Moscow, known for its notorious connection to the Soviet secret police, the KGB.¹ The most famous team in USSR „Spartak“ Moscow was founded in 1936 by the general secretary of the Komsomol Alexander Kosarev. Most Soviet republics were represented by teams that performed the function of national teams – „Dinamo“ Kiev in the Ukrainian SSR, „Dinamo“ Tbilisi in the Georgian SSR, „Ararat“ in the Armenian SSR. They were under the care of the local communist party leaders like Lavrentiy Beria in the Georgian SSR and Nikita Khrushchev in the Ukrainian SSR. The son of Joseph Stalin- Vasilij had his own interest in the most popular sport. He tried to create a super club called „VVS“, which was supposed to represent the Soviet Air Forces. Unfortunately, this club's highest ranking was the fourth place in 1950, even though the club forcibly acquired one of the most famous Soviet footballers Vsevolod Bobrov. Vasilij's father, Joseph Stalin, did not like football in general and called the players "a pathetic group of invertebrate creatures". However, until his death on 5 March 1953, the local football authorities in Romania, Yugoslavia and

¹ Hercock, Tom *More Than Just A Game: Football Behind the Iron Curtain*// <http://newhistories.group.shef.ac.uk/wordpress/wordpress/more-than-just-a-game-football-behind-the-iron-curtain/> (22.04.2014, 2:11)

Bulgaria, implemented the Soviet experience with varying degrees of success.

Romania – breaking up with the tradition

In spite of the successful coup d'état of King Michael I on 23 August 1944 against the government of Ion Antonescu, thanks to the support of the members of the opposition and the army, the situation in Romania, in the political discourse, remained very complicated. During the Second World War Romania actively helped Adolph Hitler with troops on the Eastern front and oil supplies from the refineries around Ploiești. In this situation, the forming of a new government with prime minister general Constantin Sănătescu, and the invasion of the Red Army in the country during the last days of August 1944, were the sign of capitulation. The newly-formed government presented a coalition, consisting of members of the National Peasant's Party, the National Liberal Party, the Romanian Social Democratic Party and the Romanian Communist Party. The communists did not have major support in the Romanian society, but they were in collaboration with the Union of Patriots, the Hungarian People's Union MADOSZ (who claimed to represent the Hungarian community), the Ploughmen's Front (led by Petru Groza), and the cultural organization "Amicii USSR" ("Friends of the Soviet Union"). In October 1944 the communists created the National Democratic Front and with the help of Moscow started to dominate in the organizational and political life of the country. In the following years they managed to overtake the absolute power in the country, the most notable events in this process being - the successful elections in 1946, the prohibition of the National peasant's party and the National liberal party in August 1947, and the abdication of king Mihai in December 1947.²

Since its inception, the Communist party has proved to be an arena of the struggle for power between the leading figures in it. The first group, included communists, who were in Moscow during the war, where they awaited for the moment to return to Romania. There were figures like the minister of foreign affairs Ana Pauker, Emil Bodnaras, minister of war and Vasile Luca. The second group, including the General Secretary Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and the minister of justice Lucretiu Patrascanu, consisted of party activists, who remained in the country

² Jelavich, 2006, 291.

during the war. Their ideas about the development of sport in particular, were one of the few things that united them.

The years before the Second World War about the Romanian football were characterized by strong competition between the provincial and the capital teams. “Chinezul” Timișoara dominated in 1930s with 6 titles in a row, but soon “Venus” Bucharest became the leading team in the country. The club, which was named after one of the oldest neighborhoods in the city, won 8 titles up to 1941 and participated 3 times in the Copa Mitropa (predecessor of the European Champions Clubs Cup and the Champions league, but mainly for teams from Central and Western Europe). One of the key factors for its success was the patronage of the famous lawyer Alexandru Eladescu and the minister of Interior Gabriel Marinescu. They used their personal funds to sponsor the club. The bribes of the burglars and the prostitutes in Bucharest were included in them and they were protected by Eladescu and Marinescu.³ In many cases the sponsors of the clubs were foreign (like the American and the Dutch functionaries from the oil companies of the Prahova Valley in “Romano-Americana” Bucharest) or local industrialists (baron Francisc von Neumann in “IT” Arad, founded in 1945). The first professional club in the country was “Ripensia” Timisoara, who managed to win in 1935 a friendly match against the future 7 time Champions league winner “AC Milan”.

During the war the championship continued and some new clubs were founded. On 10 of May 1944 several employees of The National Bank of Romania founded a football club, named “BNR” (the future “Progresul”).⁴ It was just the second “bank” team on the Balkans after the Bulgarian “BNB’34” (Burgas), which existed only for a few months in 1934.

When the communist government came to power, the new persons in the Romanian football tried to liquidate the whole “capitalist” heritage. A good example of this is the fate of “Carmen” Bucharest. The club, whose sponsor was the owner of the largest shoe factory in Romania Ionel

³ Roșu Emanuel, *Bani de la bordel pentru o campioană unică în istoria României! Steaua dispărută care trebuia să domine fotbalul 50 de ani! Cum a fost distrusă o super campioană.* Online source: <http://www.sport.ro/true-story/bani-de-la-bordel-pentru-o-campioana-unica-in-istoria-romaniei-steaua-disparuta-care-trebuia-sa-domine.html> (22.04.2014, 23:40)

⁴ *Povestile lui Mitran, ep.54*

Online source: <http://farablaturi.ofsaid.ro/2011/12/povestile-lui-mitran-ep-54-dupa-bombardament-bnr-progresul-fc-national/> (23.04.2014, 00:02)

Mociornita, demonstrated worrying independence in their actions. In 1945 Mociornita tried to organize a major tournament without the permission of the governing bodies. In December “Carmen” was supposed to play a friendly match against the Soviet team “Dinamo” Tbilisi. Before the game the footballers were instructed to play loosely against their opponent. Surprisingly they refused to play factitiously and the game was postponed. On 6 January a special committee was formed for this case, but the problems were yet to come. On 15 June 1947 “Carmen” won its match against “Ciocanul” with 6:0. On the next day the main newspapers criticized the humiliating result. “Sportul popular” and “Gazeta sporturilor” defined the game as “the circus of Carmen” and called the team “a nest of sport’s enemies”. On 21 August the club was removed from the league and soon after that it was dissolved.⁵

This was not the only case. In 1952 “Juventus”, one of the traditional clubs in Bucharest, was moved to Ploesti. It was financed by the local oil rafineries and was called “Petrolul”. This was not a unique example of football behind the Iron Curtain. In East Germany the transfer from one city to another of any club was considered normal. The frequent change of the names was another common feature of all communist countries.⁶

None of the existing clubs in Romania was suitable for the Soviet bipolar model – one team of the army and one team of the police, which required the creation of new teams. On 7 June 1947 the Army Sports Association (“ASA”) was founded by decree of the High Commander of the Romanian Royal Army Gen. Mihail Lascar . Among its founders were royal officers and a year later the name was changed to Central Sports Club of the Army (“CSCA”). In 1961 after many changes of its names, the representative team of the Romanian army was called “Steaua” – its most famous name. On the day of its foundation, “ASA” became part of First division without any registered player.⁷ The ministry of Interior continued this policy and founded their own team – “Dinamo” Bucharest on 14 May 1948 after the merging of “Unirea Tricolor MAI” and

⁵ Jitea, Bodan *În 1945 “Stalin cu fustă” făcea legea în fotbalul de la noi.*

Online source: http://www.historia.ro/exclusiv_web/general/articol/1945-stalin-fusta-facea-legea-fotbalul-noi (23.04.2014, 00:44)

⁶ The full list of name changes in Romanian football in „*Evolutia denumirilor echipelor de-a lungul anilor*”.

Online source: <http://www.romaniansoccer.ro/stiri/16668/evolutia-denumirilor-echipelor-de-a-lungul-anilor.htm> (23.04.2014, 00:56)

⁷ Opreșan, 2008, 18-26.

“Ciocanul” (a successor of “Maccabi” Bucharest – a team of the Jewish minority). In its first season in the First division the new club played the championship with two different squads – “Dinamo A” (with players from “Ciocanul”) and “Dinamo B” (with players from “Unirea Tricolor MAI”). However, at the end of the season the latter got relegated, but still, the tendency of political interference in football was visible.

In this situation “Rapid” Bucharest was one of the most disadvantaged teams. Before the Second World War the team won 7 national cups and was one of the most prestigious teams of the capital of the country. According to the official version, „Rapid“ was founded in June 1923 by railway workers after the fusion of “CFR” (former "Rampa Militari") and "Excelsior". The future General Secretary of the Communist Party Gheorghe Gheorghiu – Dej started his career as a railway electrician by trade, who took part in the strike of the Grivita workshops in 1933. He was a supporter of “Rapid”, but the team from the Bucharest's neighborhood Giulesti was never benefited by this fact.

In the early 1950s the Soviet model was used in the championship format – “spring-autumn” instead “autumn-spring”. “Steaua” Bucharest (at that time “CCA”) dominated in the First division and the national team, which is visible by the inclusion of 11 “Steaua” players in the starting line-up for the international friendly match against Yugoslavia in 1956 (1:0).

Yugoslavia – the own way in the socialist football

Unlike the other two countries, Yugoslavia was occupied by German, Italian and Bulgarian troops during the Second World War. This provoked the start of a guerilla war against the oppressors by two centers opposed to each other – the Chetnik Detachments of the Yugoslav Army, led by Dragoljub “Drazha” Mihailovic and the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ) under the control of the partisans, led by Josip Broz Tito - the leader of the Yugoslavian communist party. In the final stage of the war the partisans were accepted as part of the main anti-fascist force and their leader Tito flew to Moscow to discuss the future military actions of his forces in coordination with the advancing Red Army. On 20 October 1944 the capital Belgrade was liberated and on 14-15 May the Axis powers suffered a crucial defeat in the battle of Poljana. The communist party occupied a leading position in this situation because of its control over nearly 800 000 partisans and the absence of foreign troops on their territory. On 29 November 1945 the

Constituent Assembly of Yugoslavia formally abolished the monarchy and declared the Republic. The official name of the country became the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia and the six "Federal States" (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia) became "People's Republics".⁸ Political changes were felt in all spheres of life, including football.

After the liberation of Belgrade the normal life was restored. The major football rivals before the Second World War "BSK" and "SK 1913 Yugoslavia" were reestablished ("BSK" was named "Metalac"). The same process was applied to the other clubs, which were banned by the previous regime – "Radnicki", "Borac", "Graficar", "Pekar". The official gazette of the Yugoslav Communist Party - "Borba", reported that the 21 345 dinar income from the charity match between two of the Belgrade neighborhoods were to be donated to those partisans that had sustained injuries during the military struggle.⁹ On 3 March 1945 "Crvena Zvezda" (in translation "Red Star") was founded and it became one of the most famous in Belgrade. The new club took some of the best players in the capital, like the striker from "BSK" Rajko Mitic. Initially, "Crvena Zvezda" did not bear any ideological significance, but later it developed close relations with the State Security Administration (UDBA). On 4 October 1945 the football section of the Yugoslav Sports Association, "Partizan" was founded. The club was formed and initially was managed by a group of high-ranked officers of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), notably Svetozar Vukmanovic, Peko Dapcevic, Ratko Vujovic and Koca Popovic. "Partizan" began to play on the old stadium of "BSK" and transferred mainly Croatian players to their team, as the goalkeeper Franjo Glazer and the forwards Florjan Matekalo and Stjepan Bobek.

The idea of a club representing the army came from the leader of the communist party Josip Broz Tito, who tried to move the traditional team of "Hajduk" Split to Belgrade. One of the reasons was the good result in their tour to Malta, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon and Syria between 4 March and 3 July 1945. There "Hajduk" played 28 matches with the impressive balance of 21 wins, 2 draws, 5 defeats. The delegation drew up a detailed report, in which it emphasized the propaganda effect of the tour. Each player had a personal file, including his birthplace, age, occupation and political activities¹⁰ Tito's idea to move "Hajduk" was refused by the club members. They announced the same answer during

⁸ Jelavich, 2006, 295-297.

⁹ Jocich, 2009, 66.

¹⁰ APR, II-6-0/1, pp. 9-19.

the Second World War, when the Italians (in that moment allies of the Independent State of Croatia) wanted to change their name to Spalato the Italian name of Split) and gave them a secure place in their First Division – Serie A.¹¹ If the same situation had happened in USSR, Joseph Stalin wouldn't have shown any mercy to this club. Tito, however, preferred to patronize "Hajduk", being a Croatian army team. It's illustrated by his correspondence with "Hajduk"'s members in 1951, when he accepted to be a patron for the celebrations of the 40th anniversary of the club.¹² In his memoirs, the legend of "Crvena Zvezda", Rajko Mitić mentions that Tito was a famous supporter of "Partizan" and "Hajduk", while "Crvena Zvezda" and "Dinamo" Zagreb did not interest him.¹³

Due to the form of the state government in Yugoslavia (federation), the main confrontation was not between the ministries, but between the federal states. Therefore, the first championship after the war was not between clubs, but between teams, representing their states. The Yugoslavian army and the province Vojvodina had their own teams. The winner in this first competition was Serbia (1:0 against the team of the Yugoslavian army). In the next few years the so called "Yugoslav Big Four", including "Dinamo" (Zagreb), "Hajduk", "Partizan" and "Crvena Zvezda", were formed. On 4 of July 1947 the tournament for the National Cup, called "The Marshal Tito Cup" (before the Second World War its name was the "King Alexander Cup") was restored. In the first years of the competition the advantage was for the army teams – "Partizan" won the first final against "Nashi krila" (the team of the air forces, dissolved a year later), while the military garrisons in Ljubljana, Skopje, Nis, Radovljica and Novi Sad were represented by their respective teams. In 1949 and 1950 the tournament also included the team of "Egyseg" („Unity“ or „Jedinstvo“ in Serbian) Novi Sad, representing the Hungarian minority in the city.¹⁴ This fact shows the attempts for balancing between the different nations in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia.

At the same time football was used as a part of the propaganda of the communist regime. A typical example is the case with Trieste. In the aftermath of the Second World War, as both Allied forces and Tito's

¹¹ Princivili, Ivan. *Hajduk rises like a phoenix from the ashes*. Online source: <http://www.dalmacijanews.com/Hajduk/View/tabid/88/ID/46957/Cetrdesete-Hajduk-se-uzdize-kao-Feniks-iz-pepela.aspx> (accessed 25.05.2014, 23:47).

¹² APR, KM, V-4/5.

¹³ Jocić, 2009, 112.

¹⁴ History of Yugoslavian cup in RSSSF. Online source: <http://www.rsssf.com/tables/j/joegcupdetail.html#48>, (accessed 28.04.2014, 09:26).

Yugoslav army laid claim to the province and city of Trieste, the ethnic divisions were brought to the fore; often intentionally by those vying for the right to lay claim to the region. Nationalist Italians called for unification with Italy, Tito claimed the land for Yugoslavia, while Slovenes, who made up a significant minority, called for a nation of their own. The animosity between the Allied forces and Yugoslavia grew more intense as Tito's forces committed the Foibe massacres against the Italian citizens of Trieste, and the Allied forces suppressed protests by Italian nationalists calling for reunification with Italy. After an agreement between Tito and the British Field Marshal Harold Alexander, the Yugoslav forces withdrew from Trieste which came under a joint British-U.S. military administration. The Julian March was divided between Anglo-American and Yugoslav military administration until September 1947 when the Paris Peace Treaty established the Free Territory of Trieste.

During the crisis the Yugoslavs decided to recruit a local football team in their own league, and were prepared to invest heavily in order to make their project work. They found the perfect team – Ponziana, playing in Serie C (the third level of Italian football). The Italian granted 5000 lire/monthly to the players, a very low amatorial salary. Yugoslavs boasted about 30.000 lire/monthly if the project could be realized. Ponziana sent a formal request to be admitted to Serie A arguing on the forced merging ordered by Fascists in 1928. They threatened FIGC (The Italian football federation) to leave their football system. The Federal Council declared the request and the threat as unbelievable and ordered to the club to enrol into Serie C's ranks. Ponziana refused and came to Yugoslavian First Division under the name Amatori.¹⁵

The new team is the competitor of US Triestina, which played in Italian Serie A since the first-ever season in 1929. In a strong Yugoslav First Division they enjoyed little success, finishing tenth in their first season. Because of this poor showing Belgrade increased funding to the club in the hopes of bringing about success the following year. While results improved, there remained little to cheer about for the club's stakeholders, as Amatori finished just 2 points above the relegation zone in their second season of Yugoslav football. Amatori would enjoy a brief boon of affection from their compatriots as they attracted up to 50 000 fans to their games in Yugoslavia, while „Crvena Zvezda“ drew a crowd

¹⁵ Circolo Sportivo Ponziana - Short Historical Overview 1912-1960. Online source: <http://www.rsssf.com/tablesp/ponziana.html> (accessed 1.05.2014, 01:03).

of 12 000 for their visit to Trieste. The press of the time were divided along predictable lines, with the right wing Italian press offering little coverage (aside from calling the players traitors) to the now Yugoslav side, whereas the Yugoslav and Slovene media reported on the team in depth. In 1947 Triestina finished bottom of Serie A in the 1946-47 season after 25 defeats, including a streak of 11 consecutive defeats. The symbol of Italian nationalism was set for relegation, until intervention from the Italian F.A. decreed that Triestina should take their place in Serie A the following season, "thanks to their sporting merit". The Italian F.A. expanded Serie A to 21 teams and the other sides relegated that year made no protest. When Tito broke with Stalin in 1948, the propaganda advantages to be gained from the Trieste – based team were greatly diminished and Yugoslavia terminated fundings. Amatori became Ponziana again and went back to their local league.¹⁶

The close relations between Yugoslavia and Albania between 1944 and 1948 also had influence on football. This closeness was due primarily to the help the Yugoslav Communist Party gave the Albanian Communist Party in its formative years during the war. Yugoslavia also was among the first countries to recognize the Enver Hoxha government and establish diplomatic relations with Albania on 28 April 1945. Help was given to Albania by Yugoslavia in two important areas: first, in the United Nations and second, at the Paris Peace Conference. The period was marked by the continuous pressure applied by Tito from within the Albanian Party designed to force Albania into being more dependent upon Yugoslavia. On 9 July 1946, a Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation, and Mutual Aid was signed between the two states. The pressure which was given under the guise of "strengthening friendly relations," caused Albania to enter into unfair economic agreements. The agreements were theoretically mutually beneficial but were very much like the one-sided agreements made with Italy in pre-war Albania by King Zog's government. However, despite the generous aid given to Albania by Yugoslavia, the economies were becoming more and more enmeshed -- a fact which slowly was ensnaring Albania on its way into becoming the Seventh Republic of Yugoslavia. The relation between the two countries were broken when Yugoslavia was expelled from the Communist Information Bureau (COMINFORM) in June 1948.¹⁷

¹⁶ Foot, 2007, 357-359.

¹⁷ O'Donnel, 1999, 17-23.

In early of 1946 a Yugoslavian delegation of sports specialists arrived in Tirana. It included Branko Polich, rector of the State University of physical education and sport in Belgrade. Dr. Frano Tucan, chairman of the sport department in Federal Secretariat of People's Defence, Eng. Kosta Popovic, responsible for the sports construction and Ljubisa Brocic, a football coach. "This group of four instructors is very important for our sport. In a spirit of brotherhood and mutual understanding, they will prepare our sportsmen for the Balkan games in October", writes the central organ of the Democratic Front of Albania (the local communist party) "Bashkimi". The work of the Yugoslav instructors gave result and the national football team won the Balkan games in October 1946, which Albania hosted, after equal points with Yugoslavia (4) and better goal difference (6:4 for Albania, 6:5 for Yugoslavia).¹⁸

The strong club football helped the national team (in Serbian "reprezentacija"). "Plavi"¹⁹ participated in the 1950 World Cup in Brazil and it was the only team from Eastern Europe in the tournament. They finished second in their group after the host nation. But the true class of the Yugoslavian team was seen in the football tournament of the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki.

In the first round they played against USSR. This was the first participation of the Soviet team in a major football tournament. The game was mainly an ideological clash between the political systems of the two countries. In the preliminary round USSR won 2:1 after extra time against Bulgaria, one of the closest allies of Moscow. The illustrated journal "Oshisani jezh" ("Trimmed Hedgehog") published an eloquent caricature of Dushko Jovanovic "The Olympic flame", together with celebrating Soviet players and the Bulgarian goalkeeper Georgi Najdenov. The sad Bulgarian said "You have to thank me, because if I wasn't here, you would be now in Siberia"²⁰The game between USSR and Yugoslavia was played on 20 July in Tampere. In the 59th minute "plavi" led 5:1, but the final result was 5:5. According to the rules at that time, the match was to be replayed 2 days later, when Yugoslavia won 3:1. This was the biggest sports and football defeat for USSR during the period of Stalinism. The reaction of Stalin was very quick. With Decree 793 of the Sports committee to the Council of Ministers the army team „CDSA“, which was the most representative team in the unfortunate game (with 6

¹⁸ Dizdari, 2007, 35-36.

¹⁹ "The blues" - nickname of Yugoslavian national football team

²⁰ Grigorov, 2007, 100-101.

players), was dissolved. With decree 808 some personal sanctions were imposed. All newsreel records of the game were then destroyed.²¹

The popularity of football in Yugoslavia is visible in the following anecdote, told by Tito to his friends. During his visit in Split, a local little boy asked him for autograph. Tito gave him it with a smile, but after few minutes the boy came back and asked for another one. When Tito wanted to know what was the reason for this attention, the boy answered: “I have an arrangement with my friend - if I give him your two autographs, he will give me one of Hajduk’s goalkeeper Vladimir Beara”.²²

Bulgaria – partially copying the Soviet system

During the Second World War Bulgaria was a key ally to the Axis on the Balkans, winning them an important advantage when the country signed the Tripartite Pact on 1 March 1941. On 9 September 1944, when The Red Army passed the Danube River, Bulgaria was in a state of war with both of the confronting forces. The main objective of the new government of the Fatherland Front (“Otechestven front”)²³ with Kimon Georgiev as prime minister was the participation of the Bulgarian army in the defeat of Nazi Germany. Even though the situation in the country was dire, the new regime was pushing for reforms in the development of the sports. On 20 September the Interim central sport board was formed. Its chairman was Gen. Vladimir Stoychev, who after 21 November took charge of the First Bulgarian Army against the troops of the Axis. The new organization had three main tasks – introducing of politically reliable members in the sport clubs, disbanding the clubs affiliated with fascist activities and also sealing their offices.²⁴

The traditional clubs in Sofia replaced their club members and tried to adapt in the new situation. The most popular team – “Levski”, was merged with the club of the postal employees “Poshtenski sporten klub” (named in the past after the regent Prince Kiril of Bulgaria) under the name “PSK Levski”. Their main rival – “Slavia” was merged with “Bulgaria” and “Bezhanec” in „Slavia 45“. The team of the railway

²¹ Vartanyan, Aksel. *The annals of the Soviet football*, 1952, vol.5. Online source: http://www.sport-express.ru/newspaper/2009-11-27/8_1/ (accessed 3.05., 14:20)

²² Ridley, 1995, 379.

²³ The *Zveno movement*, the communist Bulgarian Workers Party, a wing of the Agrarian Union and the Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers Party are all part of The Fatherland Front.

²⁴ Manov; Pindakov, 2011, 40.

workers “ZHSK” was renamed “Lokomotiv”, just as the Soviet namesake. The same actions were repeated outside of Sofia. In Varna, the main rivals “Ticha” and “Vladislav” (combined they had 4 titles) were merged in “TV45”. The opposition press described cases of use of force during the meetings of the newly-registered clubs. Two of the members of “Levski” – Ivan Batembergski and Lazar Popov were excluded posthumously after their death sentences for involvement in the political life before 9 September 1944. Many members and players of the Officers sports club “AS23” and also of “Slavia” were victims of the new regime.²⁵

In the meantime, new clubs after the Soviet model were founded. In 1947 “Spartak” Sofia became the team of the Ministry of Interior. Two years later, the Bulgarian air forces created their own team – “VVS”. The most important for the Bulgarian football was the creation of “Septemvri pri CDV” (army’s team) on 4 May 1948. The new team was the product of the merge of “Septemvri” and “Chavdar”. Gen. Boyan Bulgaranov was designated to be the first chairman of the new team, while the Minister of Defence Georgi Damianov was the honorary chairman. In the first year since its foundation, the new team won the title after a 4:3 aggregate result from the two final games against “Levski”. This was the start of the permanent rivalry between the two clubs, known nowadays as the “Eternal derby”. Despite the protection of the Ministry of Interior, “Spartak” Sofia failed to gain popularity. Their biggest success was the second place in the 1951 championship, going undefeated throughout the season. But this was not enough to become a serious contender to the dominance of the army’s team (best known as “CSKA”). The rivalry between “CSKA” and “Levski” was exacerbated after the qualification tournament for the First Division in 1949. “Levski” and “Akademik” Sofia finished 1:1 and with this result prevented the qualification of “CSKA” for the competition. In this situation the only chance for the army’s team was an upcoming administrative reform. It resulted in the inclusion of the “Team of the People’s Army” (“Otkor na narodnata voiska”) in the First Division, which consisted of 10 players from “CSKA” and the goalkeeper of “DNA” Plovdiv, in whose place the new team played.²⁶

The football tournaments in Bulgaria were part of the propaganda of the new regime. The most notable example was the National Cup.

²⁵ Ognyanov, 2009, 10-11.

²⁶ *The first fixed match in Bulgaria – in 1949*. Online source: <http://www.24chasa.bg/Article.asp?ArticleId=680439>, (accessed 3.05.2014, 21:53)

Before the Second World War the name of the tournament was “King’s Cup”. At the end of a visit in Bulgaria on 8 March 1945, a Soviet youth delegation donated a crystal bowl on behalf of the Frunze Central House of the Red Army. The competition for this trophy was called the Cup of the Soviet Army. Just like the Cup of USSR, the new tournament relied on the numerous participating teams to show that every one of them had a chance to win the Soviet trophy.²⁷ The prestige of the competition increased, when „Levski“ won two consecutive Cups (1949, 1950) after three finals against „CSKA“ (at this time when the match finished a draw after the regular and the extra time, a replay was arranged to be played). At the same time the football clubs from Sofia were used for many tournaments with political context. In 1945 “Levski” and “Lokomotiv” played a charity game in support of the partisans of ELAS and EAM in the Greek Civil War. In December 1951 six teams from Sofia played in a tournament in honor of Joseph Stalin’s 71st birthday. The winner of the competition – “Levski”, received a red banner with the image of the Soviet leader. At the end of 1944 “Slavia” refused to participate in the tournament “People’s army” and the club was stigmatized by the leaders of the Bulgarian sport for this act.

The most important intervention of the communists in football came on 29 August 1949. On that day the decree of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party named “The situation of the physical education and sport, and the task of the party in this department” basically did not indicate any problem in the Bulgarian sport, but the result of it was a total change in the Bulgarian football. The Republican football section (forerunner of the Bulgarian football union) and the Supreme committee for physical education and sport announced the creation of Voluntary sport organizations, which were intended to replace the existing clubs. The teams in every major Bulgarian city were split to 6 main clubs, each of them associated with a particular public sphere. They were:

- “Dinamo” – a team of the postal employees, the food industry’s workers, the textile industry’s workers, the tobacco merchants, the workers in the leather industry.
- “Energia” – a team of the railway workers, the metalworkers, the electrical workers, the chemists and the miners.

²⁷ Milchev, 2003, 144.

- “Cherveno zname” (“Red banner”) – a team of the civil servants, the actors, the musicians, the educationists, the healthcare workers and the bank workers.
- “Stroitel” (“Builder”) - a team of the Labor army, the builders, the agricultural workers and the carpenters.
- “Spartak” – a team of the Ministry of Interior.
- “Akademik” – a team of the students.²⁸

The reform did not have any effect on the army’s teams in the country. The consolidation of the clubs was well thought out, but they proved to be too numerous for the cities with population of less than 1 million people. In some of them the number of players was only enough for two teams and the rest existed only on paper. At the same time there was a change in the format of the championship – “spring-autumn” instead of “autumn-spring”, once again the same as the Soviet model. Like in Yugoslavia and Romania, the army’s team was leading, but it is curious that “CSKA’s” 9 consecutive titles were achieved after the death of Stalin.

Conclusion

The development of football in Romania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria in the years of the Stalinism is directly related to the political processes. The Soviet influence was strongly enforced on every aspect of the society and football was only one example of it. In each of the countries were created the departmental teams – of the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Transport etc. In Romania and Yugoslavia the new teams were created in the place of the traditional teams (“Partizan” and “Crvena vezda” took the place of “BSK” and “Yugoslavia”, “Steaua” and “Dinamo” replaced all the Bucharest teams from before the war except for “Rapid”), while in Bulgaria the most popular teams “Levski”, “Slavia” and “ZHSK” survived. During the years of Stalinism and to the end of 1950s, the army’s clubs dominated in each of the countries, in the same way as “CSKA” Moscow, was dissolved in 1952. The communists in Romania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia realized the potential of football as a tool for propaganda and strived to use it. Their reforms changed the development of the most popular sport, but in the following decades

²⁸ Milchev, 2008, 18-19.

football events will slowly transform in means to express disagreement with the political regime.

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