

**RUSSIAN / SOVIET CULTURAL INFLUENCE IN SERBIA / YUGOSLAVIA
IN THE XX AND XXI CENTURY**

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This short analysis of the Russian influence in Yugoslavia / Serbia has been developed on the starting premise that the sphere of culture is closely related to the spheres of politics and ideology. Moreover, the importance of research into cultural relations arises from the inter-related nature of these spheres: cultural relations can be an indicator of the relationship between states and peoples, since they are determined by political needs and ideological models. Three indicators will be used in this article to draft Russian-Serbian relations: the viewing of Soviet / Russian films in Yugoslavia / Serbia, the translation of Russian literature into the Serbian language, and the learning of the Russian language in Yugoslavia / Serbia. Particular emphasis will be placed on today's situation.

The first question that should be raised is whether it is possible at all to talk about Russian – Serbian cultural relations in the twentieth century, i.e. between 1918 and 1991.¹ During this period, two countries, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, existed in parallel, and their international roles hardly overlapped with the previous and the later roles of Russia and Serbia. Since cultural cooperation is connected to political relations and is conditioned by them, it is important to note that the politics and ideology of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia were different from the politics and ideology of Russia and Serbia. On the one hand, Russian-Serbian cultural relations can be traced back to a more distant past, even as far back as the sixteenth century, and were practically uninterrupted up until the end of the First World War. On the other hand, their cultural relations represent a completely new phenomenon and can be mapped out only through the last two decades.²

Yugoslavia was formed at the Paris Peace Conference with the blessing of the Allied Powers. Its role was to prevent a revision of the post-war European order and to be an obstacle to the possible extension of the Soviet state and its ideology to the West. It is a substantially different principle from the role that Serbia had, as a friend, and, occasionally, intimate of the Russian Empire.

The First World War and the Great October Socialist Revolution brought about the interruption of cultural cooperation between the newly formed state of Yugoslavia and Soviet Russia. Relations that had existed until the two events were transferred to representatives of Russian emigration,

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¹ This time-frame can be considered as an encircled whole in historical science, defined by the term "short twentieth century", which has become customary, and does not overlap with the calendar twentieth century.

² For the beginning of this cooperation, see: *Moskva-Srbija, Beograd-Russia: dokumenta i materijali* [Moscow-Serbia, Belgrade-Russia: Documents and Materials], Volume I, *Drustvene politicke veze* [Social and Political Connections], (group of authors), Belgrade/Moscow, 2009.

since Yugoslav authorities could not reconcile with the newly established order in Soviet Russia. Russian emigrants were the repositories of traditional relations. This can be seen in the fact that Russian writers, painters and architects, who found their refuge in Yugoslavia, were mostly focused on traditional artistic trends, while only in the sphere of theatre were artists inclined towards modern currents.³ The behaviour of the Yugoslav government and, in particular, the Serbian political elite, towards Russian refugees, is indicative of huge differences between the values, and even the culture of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union.

While Russian emigration enriched cultural activities, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia viewed cultural exchange with the Soviet Union as a potential channel for enemy propaganda, thus actively inhibited and controlled any such cultural exchange. Alongside ideological contrasts with the Soviet authorities, this approach arose from the international political function of Yugoslavia as a part of the “French system” of European security.

The first signs of softening in censorship appeared in the mid thirties. With the first appearance of Soviet cinema in Yugoslavia, all ideological messages were censored. The attitude towards Soviet film had changed due to the rise of the Nazi threat in Europe. Eight Soviet films were purchased for the 1934/35 season, while the censor approved six⁴. Seven films were purchased for the 1935/36 season, all without any political contents.⁵ Even the Soviets were helpful in this matter, since they were almost exclusively producing entertaining films without any propaganda.⁶ The last film distributed was a comedy entitled *Volga-Volga* (Grigori Alexandrov, 1938) in September 1940.⁷ This took place just after diplomatic relations with the USSR were urgently resumed, due to the deterioration of the international situation, and in particular the fall of France in May 1940.⁸

³ Jovanovic, Miroslav, *Ruska emigracija na Balkanu 1920–1940* [Russian Emigration to the Balkans 1920 - 1940], Belgrade 2006, pp. 409–442.

⁴ Škrabalo, Ivo, *101 godina filma u Hrvatskoj 1896 –1997: Pregled povijesti hrvatske kinematografije* [101 Years of Cinema in Croatia 1896 – 1997: Review of the History of Croatian Cinematography], Zagreb 1998, p. 101; Mikac, Marijan, “Ruski filmovi kod nas” [Russian Films in Our Home], in: *Hoba Evropa* [New Europe], vol. XXVIII, No. 3, March 1935, pp. 88–89; Ostojic, Stevo *Rat, revolucija, ekran* [War, Revolution, Screen], Zagreb, 1977, p. 12.

⁵ Ostojic, Stevo, *Rat, revolucija, ekran* [War, Revolution, Screen], Zagreb, 1977, pp. 13–14.

⁶ Mikac, Marijan “Novi ruski filmovi” [New Russian Films], in: *Nova Evropa* [New Europe], vol. XXVIII, No. 8, August 1935, pp. 267. During the first Five Year Plan, when the country was afflicted by hunger (1932–33) and systematic preparations for the period of terror were ongoing, after the murder of Kirov (1934), the Soviet film industry attempted to reduce social disappointment and hide the real situation in the country by focusing on either apocalyptic or cheerful topics. Geller, Mikhail; Nekrich, Alexander, *Utopija na vlasti. Istorija Sovjetskog Saveza* [Utopia in Power: the History of the Soviet Union], Podgorica, 2000, pp. 243, 247–249.

⁷ See: *Dnevnik Online*, February 2, 2002, <http://www.dnevnik.co.yu/arhiva/02-09-2002/Strane/servisi.htm>, (September 29, 2008).

⁸ Yugoslavia had started to change its attitude towards the USSR even earlier. See the book, finished in May 1940 and published by Nolit: Dragovic, Vuk, *SSSR: Savez Sovjetskih Socijalistickih Republika* [USSR. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics], Belgrade, 1940.

A group of Yugoslav intellectuals tried to establish the Society of Friends of the Soviet Union in the mid 1940s. They thought that the social climate was suitable for the improvement of relations with the USSR. The initiator was Dr Ivan Ribar from the Democratic Party. However, this proposal was rejected by the Yugoslav authorities. The growing trend of cultural cooperation was then completely abandoned in 1941, when Yugoslavia was occupied by Central Powers, while the Soviet Union was attacked and partially occupied.

Nevertheless, cooperation between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union was re-established even before the end of the Second World War. The first concert of Red Army musicians was organized in liberated Belgrade in October 1944 at the National Theatre. Numerous visits of Soviet artists and intellectuals to Yugoslavia were organised and similarly Yugoslav visits to the USSR. The Society for Cultural Cooperation of Yugoslavia with the USSR was established in Belgrade on January 14, 1945. Its 59 founders included many famous intellectuals, communists and Russophiles.⁹ The Society, with more than 80 local committees, gathered a membership of over 15.000 and published a glossy journal called Yugoslavia - USSR.¹⁰ However, the activities of the Society were reduced to zero in the spring of 1949, due to the conflict between Yugoslavia and the USSR in 1948.

The reason for this twist in fate lay in the fact that socialist Yugoslavia had the same international-political function after the Second World War as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia had had between the two Wars. Although the new order in the rebuilt country was Stalinist, Yugoslavia became a barrier to the expansion of Soviet influence in the West and a catalyst of dissatisfaction in Eastern Europe. The attractive picture of successful socialism with higher living standard that Yugoslavia offered, threatened the loyalty of the members of the socialist lager. Culture became the main channel of Yugoslav influence on other socialist states.

Film is not only a very popular and suggestive media, but also a valid indicator of political influence. Soviet films had a 62 percent share of the repertoire in Yugoslav cinemas in 1945, just over a half in the period between 1946 and 1950, while in 1951 they were completely eliminated due to the conflict with the USSR. They appeared once again in 1955, but only as a marginal part of the film program (2.32 percent), while Hollywood and Western

⁹ Among the founders, the most famous were: Antun Augustincic, Isidora Sekulic, Rasa Plaovic, Rados Novakovic, Lojze Dolinar, Dr. Ivan Ribar, Dr. Sinisa Stankovic, Sreten Stojanovic, Dr. Pavle Savic, Milovan Djilas, Rodoljub Colakovic, Radovan Zogovic, Marko Ristic, Bozidar Malaric, Dr. Vladislav Ribnikar, Djuro Salaj, Oskar Danon, Rato Dugonjic, Boris Zihelr, Bane Andreev, Jara Ribnikar, Mosa Pijade and Leposava Nestic – Pijade. GARF Fond R-5283 (BOKC), оп. 17, д. 530, л. 15. [*Государственный архив Российской Федерации* / State Archives of the Russian Federation]. Copies of the Minutes from the founders' meeting and Guidelines defined at the meeting of the Action Committee on February 1, 1945, confirmed by the Commission of Interiors of the the National Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia (NKOJ), Act n. 212/45, February 10, 1945.

¹⁰ "Rad Društva za kulturnu saradnju Jugoslavije sa SSSR" [Work of the Society for Cultural Cooperation of Yugoslavia with the USSR], in: *Jugoslavia – SSSR* [Yugoslavia - USSR], December 14, 1946, p. 39 (from the Report of the Society's first assembly meeting).

European productions were dominant. However, alongside improving political relations, Soviet film also gradually recovered and constituted 14 percent of the film repertoire in Yugoslavia in 1964.¹¹

Table 1: Share of the film repertoire in Yugoslavia

Year	Total	Soviet Films	%	Yugoslav Films	%	American Films	%
1945	150	93	62.00	-	-	7	4.66
1955	734	17	2.32	55	7.50	291	39.65
1964	1015	142	14.00	152	14.98	205	20.20

As elsewhere, with the advent of television in the mid-sixties, the importance of film started to decline in Yugoslavia, thus the recovery of Soviet cinematography on the Yugoslav market is relative.

The presence of Russian film has been marginal in the Serbian film repertoire at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. An analysis of the titles available on the best supplied networks of video clubs in Belgrade and Serbia (**Zabac**, 7.200 titles; **Moro**, 6.300 titles; **Lav**, 10.800 titles) reveals a very limited repertoire of less than two dozen Soviet/Russian films all together, including co-productions. Moreover, no one video club stocked all the titles in question: **Zabac** only 10; **Moro** - 13 and **Lav** -16.

These films can be divided into three categories, according to the time of production:

- ✧ Soviet production from 1950s and 1960s;
- ✧ Russian production from 1990 - 1999; and
- ✧ Russian production after 2000.

Why the number of Russian/Soviet films is so low and why only these titles are available can be understood through a structural analysis of the films in question.

For the most part these Soviet films are adaptations of classics from Russian literature. In total, there are six such titles:

- **Anna Karenina** and **War and Peace** by Leo Tolstoy;
- **The Idiot**, **the Brothers Karamazov** and **Crime and Punishment** by Fyodor Dostoyevsky;
- And **Quiet Flows the Don**, by Mikhail Sholokhov.

The reason behind the interest in these films lies in the fact that the literature on which they are based is part of the required reading in secondary

¹¹ *Jugoslavija 1945–1964. Statistički pregled* [Statistical Review], Belgrade, 1965, p. 328.

schools in Serbia. It has become a tendency among young people in Serbia to watch these Soviet films instead of reading the book on which they are based, due to the considerable length of the novels and a diminishing reading culture among Serbian youth. Moreover, these films offer a very consistent and linear interpretation of novels' contents, contrary to American adaptations of the same titles.

Although the film *Aleksa Dundic* from 1958 does not fall into the category above, it is nevertheless relevant as it is a co-production with Yugoslavia in which many Serbian actors played and included contents partially connected to the Serbian history.¹²

Finally, three films from the same period can be found on the video market due to their unquestionable quality which has stood the test of time: *Rublev*, *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* and *Repentance*.

Films from the nineties are a case apart, since they were almost exclusively co-productions between Russia and one or more European states. Three films were made by Nikita Mikhalkov (*Urga – Close to Eden*, *Burnt by the Sun* and *The Barber of Siberia*), and one by Régis Wargnier (*East-West*). The only exception is *The Brother* (Aleksei Balabanov, 1997), which anticipated a certain change in direction compared to the previous decade.

Alongside political will, rich production and advertising are key factors influencing film audience, particularly when the public is used to Hollywood standards, as is the case in Serbia. As a consequence, American cinema, which was present on the Yugoslav market at 4.66 percent in 1945, 39.65 percent in 1955 and 20.20 percent in 1964¹³, has increased to around 80 percent at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This situation is similar to the period between the two World Wars, when American film almost completely dominated Yugoslav cinemas.

A few Russian films from the beginning of the twenty-first century confirm that they can find their public in Serbia, when higher production quality is achieved and better advertising organized. They are: *Brother 2*, *Night Watch*, *Day Watch*, *The Return*, and *Mongol*.

Table2: **Soviet/Russian films in video clubs in Serbia**

	Film Title	Director	Production	Year
1.	<i>Aleksa Dundic</i>	Leonid Lukov	USSR, Yugoslavia	1958
2.	<i>The Idiot</i>	Ivan Pyryev	USSR	1958
3.	<i>And Quiet Flows the Don 1 - 3</i>	Sergei Gerasimov	USSR	1958
4.	<i>Anna Karenina 1–2</i>	Alexander Zarhi	USSR	1967

¹² The second Soviet – Yugoslav co-production was a film: *In the Mountains of Yugoslavia* (Abram Room, 1946).

¹³ Yugoslavia 1945–1964. *Statistički pregled*, [Statistical Review], Belgrade 1965, p. 328.

Table2 (continued from previous page): **Soviet/Russian films in video clubs in Serbia**

	Film Title	Director	Production	Year
5.	<i>War and Peace</i> 1–4 (only the first of three parts available)	Sergei Bondarchuk	USSR	1968
6.	<i>Crime and Punishment</i> 1–2	Lev Kulidzhanov	USSR	1969
7.	<i>The Brothers Karamazov</i> 1–3	Ivan Pyryev	USSR	1969
8.	<i>Rublev</i> 1–2	Andrei Tarkovsky	USSR	1969
9.	<i>Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears</i>	Vladimir Menshov	USSR	1979
10.	<i>Repentance</i>	Tengiz Abuladze	USSR	1984
11.	<i>Urga</i>	Nikita Mikhalkov	Russia, France	1992
12.	<i>Burnt by the Sun</i>	Nikita Mikhalkov	Russia, France	1994
13.	<i>The Barber of Siberia</i>	Nikita Mikhalkov	Russia, France, Italy, the Czech Republic	1999
14.	<i>East – West</i>	Régis Wargnier	France, Russia, Bulgaria, Spain, Ukraine	1999
15.	<i>Brother</i>	Aleksei Balabanov	Russia	1997
16.	<i>Brother 2</i>	Aleksei Balabanov	Russia, USA	2000
17.	<i>The Return</i>	Andrey Zvyagintsev	Russia	2003
18.	<i>Night Watch</i>	Timur Bekmambetov	Russia	2004
19.	<i>Shadowboxing</i>	Aleksey Sidorov	Russia	2005
20.	<i>Day Watch</i>	Timur Bekmambetov	Russia	2006
21.	<i>Mongol</i>	Sergei Bodrov Senior	Russia, German, Kazakhstan, Mongolia	2007

The second indicator of Russian cultural influence in Serbia is translated literature. Based on an analysis of translations from five major European languages into the Serbian language during the nineties and after 2000, available through the Cooperative Online Bibliographic System and Services (COBISS)¹⁴, the following observation can be made:

Table 3: **Translating Frequency (Incidence) from the five most widely spoken European languages into the Serbian language**

Language	1990/1999	2000/2009	+	%
Italian	709	1728	1019	143.72
English	9440	17126	7686	81.42
French	2412	3500	1088	45.11
German	2039	2519	480	23.54
Russian	2573	2908	335	13.02

¹⁴ This is an active data base in which information is accurately updated, thus the listed data is continuously changing and should be read bearing this fact in mind.

During the last decade of the twentieth century (1990–1999) there were 926 titles translated from Russian listed in the catalogue of the National Library of Serbia.¹⁵ Two particularly numerous and clearly defined parts can be identified:

- Belletristic - 380 titles or 41 percent;
- Theology, Mystic Literature, Conservative philosophy, Church literature - 112 titles or 12.10 percent

Table 4: Belletristic titles published during the nineties

	Author	Number of Titles	Number of Copies Printed
1.	Fyodor Dostoyevsky	51	1.000–10.000
2.	Alexander Pushkin	23	1.000–15.000 <i>(The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish)</i>
3.	Nikolai Gogol	16	500–5.000
4.	Leo Tolstoy	14	500–5.000
5.	Anton Chekov	10	1.000–3.000
6.	Mikhail Sholokhov	8	2.500–5.000
7.	Mihail Bulgakov	7	1.000–1.500 <i>(5 X The Master and Margarita)</i>
8.	Sergej Jesenjin	7	500–6.000
9.	Vladimir Nabokov	7	1.000
10.	Daniil Kharms	7	500–5.000
11.	Marina Tsvetaeva	7	500–3.000
12.	Alexander Belyayev	6	10.000–20.000 <i>(5 X The Star KETs)</i>
13.	Eduard Limanov	6	2.000
14.	Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn	5	500–2.000

Two scientists came close to the authors from above, according to number of titles translated into Serbian:

15.	Pavel Rovinski (ethnographer)	7	Unknown number of copies
16.	Lev Vygotsky (psychologist)	6	1.500

Table 5: Theology, Mystic Literature, Conservative philosophy, Church literature published during the nineties

	Author	Number of Titles	Number of Copies Printed
1.	Nikolai Bergiaev	22	500–1.000
2.	Mikhail Epstein	7	1.000
3.	Pavel Florensky	6	500–2.500
4.	Vladimir Solovjov	6	300–500

¹⁵ Reprints of previously published translations have also been taken into consideration. All bibliographic units have been counted, from multi-volume monographs to individual short texts published in journals. Data in the catalog of the National Library of Serbia is also regularly updated.

Table 5 (continued from previous page): **Theology, Mystic Literature, Conservative philosophy, Church literature published during the nineties**

	Author	Number of Titles	Number of Copies Printed
5.	Sergei Bulgakov	5	300–700
6.	Nikolai Fyodorov	3	500–600
7.	Georgi Florovski	1	1.000

Such contents are published often in *Istocnik*, a journal for faith and culture.

There were 2,176 titles translated from the Russian language in the catalogue of the National Library of Serbia during the first decade of the twenty-first century.¹⁶ The two previously defined groups are clearly present again, and both have substantially increased:

- Belletristic – by 1.070 titles or 49.20 percent;
- Theology, Mystic Literature, Conservative philosophy and Church Literature – by 516 titles or 23.71 percent.

Table 6: **Belletristic published after 2000**

	Author	Number of Titles	Number of Copies Printed
1.	Fyodor Dostoyevsky	98	500–1000 (<i>The Eternal Husband, The Brothers Karamazov</i> – 50.000)
2.	Leo Tolstoy	45	500–5.000 (<i>Anna Karenina</i> – 130.000)
3.	Alexander Pushkin	40	500–5.000 (<i>The Tale of Tsar Saltan</i> –15.000)
4.	Anton Chekov	37	500–2.000
5.	Nikolai Gogol	32	500–1.000 (<i>Dead Souls</i> – 50.000)
6.	Alexander Genis	27	1.000
7.	Sergej Jesenjin	25	500–2.000
8.	Boris Akunin (Grigory Chkhartishvili)	22	1000–2.000 (4 X <i>Azazel</i>)
9.	Mihail Bulgakov	19	500–1.000
10.	Mikhail Sholokhov	18	1000–7.000 (only <i>And Quiet Flows the Don</i>)
11.	Victor Pelevin	15	700–1.000
12.	Ludmila Ulitskaya	12	500–2.000 (<i>Women’s Lies</i> , translated into Serbian as <i>Transparent Stories</i> – 15.000!)
13.	Vladimir Suteev	12	2.000 (12 X Fairytales and illustrations)

¹⁶ Reprints of previous translations have been also taken into consideration. All bibliographic units have been counted, from multi-volume monographs to individual poems printed in journals.

Table 6 (continued from previous page): **Belletristic published after 2000**

	Author	Number of Titles	Number of Copies Printed
14.	Joseph Brodsky	11	500 (mostly in journals)
15.	Boris Pasternak	11	1.000–5.000 (<i>Doctor Zhivago</i> – 35.000)
16.	Ivan Bunjin	10	1.000–8.000
17.	Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn	10	1000–3.000
18.	Daniil Kharms	9	500–1.000
19.	Alexander Zinoviev	9	500–1.000
20.	Nina Berberova	8	2.000
21.	Ivan Turgenev	7	1.000–2.000
22.	Chyngyz Aitmatov	7	500
23.	Nikolay Afanasyev	7	1.000
24.	Gaito Gazdanov	7	1.000
25.	Vladimir Nabokov	7	500–1.000
26.	Vladimir Voinovich	6	1.000
27.	Vladimir Sorokin	6	500–1.000
28.	Yuri Polyakov	5	500–1.000
29.	Valentin Cernih	1	500–1.000 <i>Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears</i> (1980) 7 editions in 4 years 2006-2009

Table 7: **Theology, Mystic Literature, Conservative philosophy, Church literature published after 2000**

	Author	Number of Titles	Number of Copies Printed
1.	Nikolai Bergiaev	23	500–1.000
2.	Ignatius Brjancaninov	12	500
3.	Teofan Zavoratul	10	500–2.000
4.	St. John of Kronstadt	10	500
5.	Vladimir Solovjov	9	500–1.000
6.	Pavel Florensky	8	500–1.000
7.	George Florovsky	8	500–1.000
8.	Alexander Schmemmann	8	500–3.000
9.	Boris Visoslavcev	7	500
10.	George Gurdjieff	7	500–1.000
11.	Sergei Bulgakov	5	500
12.	Archbishop Averkey	5	500–1.000

Literature from the field of alternative medicine is a new phenomenon:

13.	Gennady Malakhov Quack, TV compère	37	500
14.	Alternative Medicine	24	500–1.000
15.	Bio-energy	17	500–1.000

Chess literature experienced a renaissance after 2000: 66 titles were printed, compared to a symbolic presence during the nineties.

It is worth mentioning that the Literary society *Pismo* ("Letter") from Zemun has been publishing a specialized journal entitled *Russian Almanac* with translations of selected extracts from Russian contemporary literature. Fourteen issues were published over a period of 19 years (Zorislav Paunovic, editor-in-chief). Most of the Russian authors published were appearing in the Serbian language for the first time. Thanks to the *Russian Almanac*, a great number of Russian writers and intellectuals have become available to Serbian readers, including: Dovlatov, Pelevin, Dobicin, Baskirceva, Vaclav Nizhinsky, Gazdanov, Daniil Andreyev, Arseny Tarkovsky, Solzenicyn, Averincev, and, from the older generation, Konstantin Leontiev, Leonid Andreyev, Vasily Rozanov, Alexei Losev, Mikhail Bakunin and many others. The list includes more than one hundred of most distinguished Russian authors, including the celebrated Russian rock-poetry by Egor Letov and Roman Neumoev, rare content made available to Serbian readers.

The third indicator of the Soviet / Russian influence in Yugoslavia / Serbia in the twentieth century is the study of the Russian language. The Russian language became the obligatory foreign language in Serbian primary and secondary schools after 1946. However, this was abrogated after the conflict with the USSR in 1948. It was then reintroduced in schools a few years later, but its popularity suddenly decreased and by the mid-fifties it was "severely dwindling".¹⁷

According to one Soviet analysis, the Russian language, during the first years after the war, was taught in all secondary schools and universities in Yugoslavia, sometimes as the first foreign language, sometimes as the second, but also as the only contemporary foreign language. However, at the university level, it was evident that for "[...] one lecturer [...] there were between 150 and 200 students. It is obvious that the importance of teaching the Russian language has been reduced to zero. Particularly during 1948 – 1949, university authorities attempted to make the teaching of the Russian language difficult at universities, using different manoeuvres. [...] Three-quarters of secondary school teachers in Belgrade gymnasiums attended only short courses in the Russian language and often know less than their students. It is not rare to see a student of Russian origin who reads, translates and interprets in classes on the teacher's request. Lecturers of such a category [...] write examples on the board in some fantastic Russian-Serbian language [...]"¹⁸ This was not only an issue in schools. Some

¹⁷ "Učenje ruskog jezika – nekad i sad" [Learning of the Russian Language – Earlier and Now], RTV, Wednesday, December 10, 2008. [Naslovi.net](http://www.naslovi.net) <http://www.naslovi.net/2008-12-10/rtv/ucenje-ruskog-jezika-nekad-i-sad/951860> Interview with the President of the Serbian Slavic Society, prof. dr. Bogoljub Stankovic; Beta, "Raste interesovanje za učenje ruskog jezika u Srbiji" [Increase in Interest for Learning the Russian Language in Serbia], in: Blic, October 13, 2008, <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Drustvo/60777/Raste-interesovanje-za-ucenje-ruskog-jezika-u-Srbiji>. Interview with Jelena Ginic, the Secretary of the Serbian Slavic Society.

¹⁸ GARF [Государственный архив Российской Федерации / State Archives of the Russian Federation]. ГАРФ, Ф5283, Оп.17, Д.556, л. 75. *Постановка народного образования в*

texts in a less fantastic “Serbian-Russian” were “translated” from the Russian language and printed in the journal *Yugoslavia – USSR*, the organ of the Society for Cultural Cooperation of Yugoslavia with the Soviet Union.¹⁹ It is therefore obvious that mass participation in learning the Russian language, under such circumstances, could not leave a deeper trace in culture, although such an educational policy was enforced by the authorities.

The change in the international position of the country at the beginning of the fifties redirected the orientation in learning foreign languages. Until the beginning of the seventies, in 70–80 percent of Belgrade schools, parents were choosing English as the foreign language first and foremost, neglecting Russian, German and French. One attentive and well informed observer remarked that “[...] the absolute dominance of English is equivalent to the earlier absolute supremacy of Russian. In both cases, the regime's absolute dependence on one or the other political (ideological) system was obvious, through economic, cultural and other sources [...]”.²⁰ Whether Russian or English, both policies on teaching foreign languages were one-sided and were the direct consequence of a state decision and the reflection of its international position. Informal resistance towards the Russian language after the war was led by the old, pre-war cadre in the field of education, who, by doing so, were expressing their specific attitudes toward communist ideology, while mass acceptance of the English language demonstrated the attitude of the population in general, born into socialism – two poles representing two ideologies.

Nevertheless, the Russian language became popular again at the beginning of seventies due to the development of the Soviet science and technology. During that time the matriculation exam for the Russian language at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade was taken by 300 candidates annually. At the end of nineties and the beginning of the twentieth century, the candidates were reduced to less than two dozen (15 times less!), and the actual number would be increased in September only thanks to those who failed to find a place in other foreign language departments. In 2008, for the first time in more than a decade, interest in the Russian language at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade was such that the number of applications (106) was almost double the number of places available at the course (59). However, Russian is still rarely taught at private schools and institutes for foreign languages. According to the data from the Serbian Slavic Society, around 15 percent of the population in Serbia uses Russian up to the certain level, but they belong mostly to older generations.²¹

Югославији (Справка), April 20, 1949, No. 1. This is a detailed analysis of the overall educational system in Yugoslavia on 46 tightly typed pages.

¹⁹ For example, it was possible to find a translation roughly equivalent to the following: “Gybird fruits were produced by T. A. Gorschkova crossed with apples and pears” and similar absurdities. See: “Novi radovi micurinaca”, in: *Yugoslavia – USSR*, No. 1, November 1945, pp. 44.

²⁰ Krstic, Dragan, *Психолошке белешке 1974–1975* [Psychological Notes 1974 - 1975], Belgrade, 1992, pp. 368–369. Krstic was a member of the state commission responsible for introducing foreign languages in primary schools and had insight into statistical data, the behavior of the regime's representatives and parents' attitudes.

²¹ “Ucenje ruskog jezika – nekad i sad” [Learning the Russian Language – In the past and Now], RTV, Wednesday, December 10, 2008. *Naslovi.net* <http://www.naslovi.net/2008-12-10/rtv/ucenje-ruskog-jezika-nekad-i-sad/951860> Interview with the President of the Serbian

Many teachers of the Russian language lost their posts after 2000, but during the last two years some teachers have returned to their classrooms, bringing the number of active Russian language teachers and professors to around 500 in 2008, compared to around 2,000 in the seventies and eighties.²²

Conclusion

Russian/Soviet cultural influence in Serbia during the twentieth century was closely related to events on the international political scene, and particularly to mutual relations between the two states. Generally speaking, relations between Russia and Serbia have been better than the relations between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.

The periods of increased Soviet cultural influence in Yugoslavia were short-lasting, politically conditioned, and without any deep or long term effects. Soviet influence during the era of socialist Yugoslavia could be defined as belonging to the sphere of modern myth rather than fact. Western influences, the US first and foremost, were dominant in Yugoslavia.

Alongside a political influence, the sphere of cultural relations was also determined by ideology. Both extremes of Russian/Soviet cultural influence in Serbia/Yugoslavia, the most and least enthusiastic, were primarily conditioned by the political moment and ideological needs.

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia's severing of ties with the Soviet Russia after the First World War, including cultural relations, was an expression of an ideological non-acceptance of communism.

The sudden massive increase of Soviet influence after the Second World War was a consequence of a change in the ideological model in Yugoslavia, while the interruption of that influence came as a consequence of a Yugoslav political turn towards the West at the beginning of fifties.

The disappearance of the socialist federations, the USSR and Yugoslavia, also brought a change of ideology in Russia and Serbia, i.e. reverting to traditional values, conservatism and religiosity. As a consequence we can speak about a return of cultural cooperation, or of Russian cultural influence in Serbia.

Slavic Society, prof. Dr. Bogoljub Stankovic; Beta, "Raste interesovanje za učenje ruskog jezika u Srbiji" [Increase in Interest for Learning the Russian Language in Serbia], in: Blic, October 13, 2008, <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Drustvo/60777/Raste-interesovanje-za-ucenje-ruskog-jezika-u-Srbiji>. Interview with Jelena Ginic, the Secretary of the Serbian Slavic Society.

²² "Učenje ruskog jezika – nekad i sad" [Learning of the Russian Language – In the past and Now], RTV, Wednesday, December 10, 2008. *Naslovi.net* <http://www.naslovi.net/2008-12-10/rtv/ucenje-ruskog-jezika-nekad-i-sad/951860> Interview with the President of the Serbian Slavic Society, prof. Dr. Bogoljub Stankovic; Beta, "Raste interesovanje za učenje ruskog jezika u Srbiji" [Increase in Interest in Learning the Russian Language in Serbia], in: Blic, October 13, 2008, <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Drustvo/60777/Raste-interesovanje-za-ucenje-ruskog-jezika-u-Srbiji>. Interview with Jelena Ginic, the Secretary of the Serbian Slavic Society.