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THE POLITICAL VIEWS OF MILAN GROL AND THE DEMOCRATS OF MACEDONIA AND THE MACEDONIAN QUESTION IN THE PERIOD 1940 - 1945

Abstract:

This text analyzes the political views and positions of Milan Grol, as president of the Democratic Party, from 1940, when he assumed leadership of the party, to 1945, when he resigned from the government of Democratic Federal Yugoslavia and withdrew from political life. It also follows Grol's initiatives and considerations as a minister in the émigré governments in London, as well as those of his political allies and opponents, concerning the postwar organization of Yugoslavia, Serbia's position, and the status of Macedonia within the future Serbian territorial unit. Entries in Grol's diary, kept in London from 1941 to 1945, clearly show his stance that Macedonia could only have a certain degree of autonomy within Serbia. Grol consistently maintained this political position from the 1930s until the end of his active political involvement in 1945.

Keywords: Milan Grol, Ljubomir Davidović, Democratic Party, Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Macedonia, AVNOJ Yugoslavia

Milan Grol, a long-time member of the highest leadership and ideologist of the Democratic Party¹, assumed leadership in February 1940 during an extremely complex period for the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, both internally and externally. The country's international position was deteriorating. Italy had occupied Albania in April 1939. After Austria's annexation by Germany in March 1938, Yugoslavia bordered the Reich and became increasingly economically dependent on Germany. Traditional Yugoslav allies, France and Britain, were losing influence in the region. Prince Pavle² and Vladko Maček³ recognized the threat posed by the international crisis. The former was prepared to make concessions to the Croats, namely forming a Croatian territorial unit, while Maček accepted that the Croatian question should be resolved within Yugoslavia's borders. (Djokic, 2007: 190). On August 26, 1939, the Cvetković-Maček Agreement was signed, establishing the Banovina of Croatia⁴. Without constitutional change, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia thus transformed from a unitary state into a federation. While war had already been raging in Europe for half a year, internal debates on reorganizing Yugoslavia and forming Slovenian and Serbian

¹ The Yugoslav Democratic Party, known simply as the Democratic Party, was founded in 1919. The Democrats closely cooperated with the People's Radical Party in the adoption of the first Constitution of the Kingdom, succeeding in implementing a unitary-centralist concept of state organization. Part of the Democratic Party leadership in the early 1920s supported this centralist concept of state organization and was unwilling to compromise. From 1922 onwards, Ljubomir Davidović and his like-minded associates and fellow party members—primarily Milan Grol and Božidar Marković—began to soften their stance on the Croatian question, and consequently on rigid centralism and unitarism, which eventually led to a split within the party. (Gligorijević, 1970: 29–56; Prpa, 2018: 186–189; Радојевић, 2019: 321–325).

² Pavle Karađorđević (1893–1976), after the assassination of King Alexander in 1934, served as Prince Regent of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. After the military coup on March 27, 1941, he lived in exile.

³ Vladko Maček (1879–1964), a lawyer, politician, and president of the Croatian Peasant Party since 1928, was one of the signatories of the agreement of August 26, 1939, which established the Banovina of Croatia. He died in exile in the United States.

⁴ After several months of negotiations, on August 26, 1939, the Cvetković-Maček Agreement was formalized with the formation of a new government and the proclamation of the Banovina of Croatia. The then Prime Minister Dragiša Cvetković formed a new cabinet. The president of the Croatian Peasant Party, Vladko Maček, was appointed as his deputy. The Banovina of Croatia was created by merging the Sava and Littoral Banovinas, as well as parts (districts) of neighboring Banovinas—Zeta, Danube, Drina, and Vrbas—where Croats constituted the majority. The seat of the Banovina was in Zagreb. The Banovina of Croatia had full autonomy in agriculture, trade, industry, forestry, mining, public works, social and health policy, justice, education, and internal affairs. Foreign policy and foreign trade remained under the jurisdiction of the government in Belgrade. Ivan Šubašić was appointed as the Ban. (Boban 1965: 208–218; Константиновић, 2023: 21–51).

units (banovinas), similar to the newly established Banovina of Croatia were ongoing.⁵

These were the challenges Milan Grol faced when, in February 1940, after the death of Ljubomir Davidović⁶, was elected president of the Democratic Party. Grol was born in Belgrade in 1876. His father was a German from Bačka, and his mother was Serbian. In 1899, he graduated from the historical-philological department of the Grand School in Belgrade and began working as a high school French teacher in his town of birth. In 1900, he received a scholarship for professional development in Paris, where he stayed for two years. Upon returning to Serbia, he continued teaching high school. In 1911, he was appointed manager of the National Theatre, a position he held until 1914, until the breakout of the First World War. After the Serbian army's retreat through Albania, he was sent to Switzerland, where he led the Serbian press bureau in Geneva alongside Božidar Marković, his future Democratic Party colleague. He returned to Serbia in August 1919 and was again appointed manager of the National Theatre until 1924. He was elected as a Democratic Party MP in the 1925 and 1927 elections. (Рadojeвић, 2014: 7 – 17). In 1928, he was appointed Minister of Education in the coalition government of the Radicals, Democrats, and Slovenian People's Party. (Čulinović, 1961: 301). After King Alexander proclaimed a personal regime, Grol joined the opposition with Davidović.

After the Cvetković-Maček Agreement, the Democratic Party leadership abandoned its earlier proposal to divide the country into four regions: Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, and Bosnia and Herzegovina as an independent unit and transitional zone between Serbian and Croatian banovinas. (Radojević, 1994: 19 – 20, 36 – 37). The Democrats supported the so-called trialist concept of state organization. According to their view, Bosnia, Vojvodina, and Macedonia should

⁵ Professor at the Faculty of Law in Belgrade, close associate of Prince Pavle, minister in Dragiša Cvetković's government, and one of the architects of the Cvetković-Maček Agreement, Mihajlo Konstantinović, recorded in his diary a conversation with the president of the Serbian Cultural Club, Professor Slobodan Jovanović, on January 1, 1940, in which Jovanović stated: "...if the formation of a Serbian unit were carried out, it would block the autonomist tendencies in the provinces of the Serbian part (Macedonia, Vojvodina, Montenegro, Bosnia). In Macedonia (referred to as Serbian Macedonia), the administrative apparatus is poor. The Macedonians are becoming increasingly reserved because they do not know what is going to happen." (Константиновић 2023: 91).

⁶ Ljubomir Davidović (1863–1940) held a very significant place in the history of the Kingdom of Serbia and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia during the first half of the 20th century. Since 1912, he was the president of the Independent Radical Party, and from 1919, the president of the Democratic Party. In 1885, he graduated from the natural sciences and mathematics department of the Faculty of Philosophy at the then "Grand School" in Belgrade. After graduating, he worked as a high school teacher. During his political career, he served as a municipal councilor, president of the Belgrade municipality, member of parliament, Speaker of the Assembly, minister, and Prime Minister. (Popović 2009: 37–52).

receive a certain degree of autonomy within the Serbian unit⁷. (Димић, 2001: 194 -195). They had no doubt that Macedonia—with autonomous status—must be part of the Serbian territorial unit. From the beginning of 1940, state reorganization was a central political issue for the Democratic Party. In this context, Grol stated at the party conference in Šabac in February 1940: “Now that we have embarked on this path, we must remove from the agenda the question of what is Serbian in this country.” (*Politika*, 17.02.1940).

In the light of the political situation and regarding Grol’s question “what is Serbian in this country,” the Macedonian question inevitably came up on the agenda of the Democrats. One of Grol’s first actions as Democratic Party president—just a week after his appointment—was to address the Macedonian question, commonly referred to as Southern Serbia in the public political discourse at the time. On February 27, 1940, the party’s Executive Board, chaired by Grol, held a meeting to discuss “party activities in the South.”

The party’s press release, published in *Politika* under the headline “The Executive Board of the Democratic Party on Party Activities in Southern Serbia,” first highlighted the role of the recently deceased party president, Ljuba Davidović, who shortly before his death, after talking with the party representatives from the South, had been preparing to address the Southern friends with a political letter. The release noted: “The people of the South, having suffered greatly in their difficult past, demanded justice, equality, and humanity more than others. From the start, these people felt that justice and humanity were the core values that united us with Davidović. They joined him and the party without hesitation—not only those of our own blood, but also members of the Muslim minority in the South. Ljubomir Davidović and the Democratic Party often couldn’t protect these good people from the violent regime officials who, because of their limitation and narrow-mindedness, upon hearing the name Macedonia referring to the Southern region, saw only separatism and alienation.” The statement also addressed the current issue of state reorganization, citing the letter by Lj. Davidović to his friends from January 1933, emphasizing: “the need to provide for the people local self-government in all natural regions—in administration, economy, transportation, and social affairs. (*Политика*, 19.02.1940).

In the party’s press release following the death of their long-term president Davidović, who enjoyed authority in the political life of the Kingdom, the

⁷ After the formation of the Banovina of Croatia, fearing further “autonomist tendencies” in the regions considered to be Serbian national territory, most of the Serbian political and intellectual leadership intensified efforts to establish a separate Serbian territorial unit. This unit, in addition to the existing Drina Banovina, was to include all territories not incorporated into the newly established Banovina of Croatia.

A draft regulation was prepared for the “organization of the Serbian lands,” which was to encompass the then-existing Vrbas, Drina, Danube, Morava, Zeta, and Vardar Banovinas. The seat of this special territorial unit, referred to as the “Serbian lands,” was planned to be in Skopje. (Boban 1965: 412).

Democrats undoubtedly aimed to retain their supporters in Macedonia, and in a way appealing to potential voters in "Southern Serbia." This press release of the Democrats suggests a hesitant acknowledgment of the societal reality in Macedonia—namely, acceptance of a distinct identity still in its early stages.

Almost a month later, Milan Grol spoke at a party conference in Skopje on current political issues. He reiterated the party's position that the issue of the "third unit"—the Serbian territorial entity or banovina—must be formed before elections could take place. "For democracy, it is essential that the national situation on this terrain be clarified. That's why we proclaimed the demand for a third, Serbian unit, to be formed. We didn't sign this Agreement (Cvetković-Maček), nor will we—but that doesn't mean we want to annul it... The issue of the third unit must be resolved, so that we know where we stand, and then go for elections." Right after the commemorative event in honor of Davidović, Grol in a way defined the borders of the mentioned Serbian territorial unit and the indivisible connection between the Vardar, Morava, and Danube regions—a theme he had been promoting since the late 1920s. "I could use several names to refer to this region. For me, it is absolutely the same when I say our South, Southern Serbia, or the old prewar name Old Serbia. For us, Democrats, all these names mean one thing—people. Regardless of what one's called on both banks of the Vardar, the people, the names, and the programs may change, but the Vardar will continue its flow in the same direction, just like the economic and transportation invisible ties, that is, all the life conditions, that make Vardar inseparable from the Morava and the Danube." (*Време*, 25.03.1940)

A correspondent from the Central Press Bureau at the Ministerial Council in Skopje reported to Belgrade headquarters about Milan Grol's and his associates' visit to Skopje, the commemoration held in honor of Ljubomir Davidović on 24 March 1940, and about the Democratic Party's conference. According to this report, which is more detailed and substantial than the published reports in the daily newspapers, Mihajlo Kujundžić, head of the Democratic Party board for the Vardar Banovina, opened the commemoration with a critique of the Cvetković-Maček Agreement and the formation of Croatian Banovina. Milan Grol then gave a long speech, stating: "The election fever has driven politicians southward with various slogans. We debate many issues, but never those that are vital to the state. The South's transformation won't be achieved with slogans—or by recognizing one name for this region: Macedonia. The name doesn't do much for us. The problem with the name Macedonia is complex. This region has endured a difficult fate for centuries. Today, we must show an open heart and help, so that this region may do the same and approach us as brothers. Ljuba Davidović could do that. Only he could speak with the common folk here. All the political parties have programs which so far have been empty words, while civil rights haven't been realized. For twenty years, this South has only been administered—not developed economically or culturally. If Southern Serbia and Macedonia join our goal to unite the democratic forces, they too will

benefit." In his address, Grol spoke out sharply against the ruling Yugoslav Radical Union.

On the same day, the Democratic Party held a conference attended by delegates from across the Vardar Banovina. Grol addressed about 600 Democratic Party supporters, presenting the party position on the formation of the Croatian Banovina. "It was difficult to convince the Croats that without democratic governance of the people, this country could not prosper. Our position was that we should first establish democracy and then address the Croatian question. However, as we have seen, they did the opposite. But on August 26, the Croatian question was in some way settled, while democracy was not. Our main objection to the Agreement of August 26 is the fact that it wasn't made with the people's consent. It's built on false foundations, because it is being enforced by many in the Government who called us traitors before December 11⁸, that is, during the period when we were fighting for this kind of agreement. You know that this agreement was prepared in a top-down manner, affecting 16 million people without their input. Federal units weren't created based on people's needs, economic conditions, or cultural and transportation factors... The reorganization of this country began poorly, with mere formal territorial divisions, while our people have been interwoven for centuries and can't be separated into individual geographic units." At the end of his speech, Grol concluded by stating that the territories outside the Croatian and Slovenian banovinas should be part of the Serbian unit. The conference ended with a speech by Mihajlo Kujundžić. According to the detailed report from the correspondent of the Central Press Bureau, he "in his speech presented the development of the Democratic Party in the South, advocating for the use of the name Macedonia instead of Southern Serbia."⁹

However, the international situation and the war in the neighboring regions would force the leadership of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to set aside state reorganization and focus on the pressures to join the Tripartite Pact. Yugoslavia accepted the terms of the Axis powers on March 25, 1941. A significant portion of Serbian public opinion, the army, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the majority of Serbian political party leaderships, who were anti-German, opposed the pact. (Hadži Jovančić, 2022: 179 – 190). After the military coup on March 27, 1941, a new government was formed led by General Dušan Simović. Milan Grol, after 12 years in opposition, became a member of the coup government as Minister of Social Policy and Public Health. (Čulinović, 1961: 309). In that capacity, he left the country. Together with other government members and the King, he fled Yugoslavia and, via Greece, Egypt, and Jerusalem, settled in Britain in

⁸ This refers to the last parliamentary elections in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which were held on December 11, 1938. The ruling Yugoslav Radical Union won the elections, although the United Opposition—which included the Democratic Party as one of its components—also received a significant number of votes.

⁹ Državen arhiv na Republika Severna Makedonija (DARSM) 1.1042.2.111/264 – 269.

the summer of 1941. In London, he served as a minister in the Yugoslav exile governments from 1941 to 1943, led by Slobodan Jovanović and Miloš Trifunović. (Радојевић, 2014: 194).

Political Reflections in Exile

In his first entry in the *London Diary* titled *Balkan Question*, Milan Grol examined the issue of Macedonia within the broader context of a future Balkan unity that would include Bulgaria. In the extended text, Grol stated: "...At the Congress of Slavs in Moscow, until today, the idea of Pan-Slavism has not been propagated in any form. But now the solidarity of the Slavs and the idea of a unity of Slavic nations in the Balkans—Montenegrins, Macedonians—are loudly manifested," (emphasis in original). Grol continues with his reflections, clearly defining Macedonia as a vital interest for Serbia. "Matters must be set in a certain order. That order is the advocacy for a Balkan unity. Bulgaria is naturally part of it. Such a wide unity does not exclude the possibility of close ties with the Bulgarians, if attitudes, mutual trust, and circumstances go in that direction. Those on the Bulgarian side who sincerely desire rapprochement and community with us, like the highly committed proponent of that idea, Dimitrov¹⁰, must understand our views and the situation we are in. In discussions with them and other friends, the inclusion of Macedonia in the conversation must be rejected. What certain autonomous regions within the Serbian unit in Yugoslavia will be organized remains an internal matter. No one can call themselves a friend of the Serbs if they do not understand that the Serbs see in this issue their natural right and a vital interest." (Grol, 1990: 10–11).

Discussions in Yugoslavia prior to World War II about the state's organization, federalization, the number of federal units, and their territorial coverage continued in London. Within this context, Grol's political reflections on the future organization or reorganization of the state paid special attention to Vojvodina and Macedonia as "peripheral areas," but extremely important for Serbian interests. In a discussion with Milan Gavrilović¹¹ on February 28, 1942, concerning the positions of Croatian politicians in London, Gavrilović expressed concern over their tendency to create a "Greater Croatia." Grol responded: "We

¹⁰ This refers to Georgi Mihov Dimitrov – Gemeto, from the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union.

¹¹ Milan Gavrilović (1882–1976) was a lawyer, diplomat, and politician. He earned a doctorate in law from the Sorbonne in 1910 and entered the diplomatic service. He also participated in Chetnik actions in Macedonia. In the diplomatic service, he was active in London, Athens, Berlin, Paris, Rome, and Corfu. He was one of the founders of the Agrarian Union and became president of the party after the death of Jovan Jovanović Pižon. He was the first ambassador of Yugoslavia to the Soviet Union and a member of the émigré governments led by Slobodan Jovanović and Miloš Trifunović. After 1945, he was one of the leaders of the Serbian political emigration in the United Kingdom and the United States.

gain nothing if we now raise the question of our territorial program. I was the one who, over two years ago, raised the slogan of the Serbian unit. But today, in this situation, opening this issue would give them (the Croats) an excuse for their actions and would legitimize them. Both sides would be compromised in front of the British. We would gain nothing. Our Serbian interest is to preserve, to the last breath, the integrity of the whole and to advocate for it. Only with the authority of the whole of 16 million people can we defend our peripheral regions of Vojvodina and Macedonia. We have no right to expand the mandate with which we left the country. We will pass on the responsibility for integral Yugoslavia to the people, and they will decide how they want in the future." (Grol, 1990: 117). Grol expressed similar views in a discussion with Miloš Trifunović¹² in August 1942, stressing that the integrity of the Yugoslav state must be preserved at all costs. To Trifunović's doubts and assumptions about whether the Serbian people would want to remain in a common state with the Croats, Grol responded with the same arguments and positions he had often expressed earlier. "I do not assume or especially prejudice with doubts and my behavior, but I want to pass on the mandate of March 27 to the people, untouched and uncompromised. Then, I emphasize the need for some kind of union, within the borders we already hold and with which alone we can defend the peripheral regions of Vojvodina and Macedonia, or else enter some new adventure with the Bulgarians." (Grol, 1990: 257).

Undoubtedly, Grol, like many other Serbian civic politicians, viewed Bulgaria as a rival and competitor regarding Macedonia and its "organic" connection to Serbia. Milan Grol expressed such political views in a conversation with Soviet diplomat Vikov in mid-December 1942. They discussed Albania, Greece, Bulgaria, and Macedonia. Repeating his political views on the future of a reorganized Yugoslavia, Grol remarked: "Regarding Macedonia, I emphasized: This is not about the victory of a certain belief, nor the ambition of every region to have something of its own in the future reorganized Yugoslavia. But this cannot call into question the belonging of that region to Yugoslavia, with which it has an organic connection. The Serbs gave their lives for it three times. They would not have done so unless they instinctively felt they could not live without it. In 1917, the Bulgarians claimed that Dobrudja was an economic issue for them, the access to the Aegean Sea (Thrace) a matter of lungs, an issue of connection to the world, and Macedonia a sentimental issue. For the Serbs, it is a *vital* (emphasis in original) issue. There are sentiments, too, but above all, it is a matter of lungs." Grol concluded that: "Between Macedonia and Bulgaria there is nothing that organically connects them, while with Yugoslavia, there is everything." (Grol, 1990: 247).

¹² Miloš Trifunović (1871–1957) was one of the leaders of the People's Radical Party. Along with the party president Aca Stanojević, he was in opposition to the January 6th regime. In 1943, he served as the president of the Yugoslav émigré government in London.

As time passed and the national liberation movement gained momentum on the ground, discussions about the federal organization of Yugoslavia intensified among the exiled ministers. On May 7, 1943, Grol wrote in his diary: "Slobodan¹³ insists on a precise number, three units... He always thinks about minor points, losing sight of the whole. To now say unyieldingly "'three" means to boost propaganda for Macedonia outside Yugoslavia. Because in one form or another, it will find protectors for its federal status. If alarm is not raised, the matter could be resolved through its autonomy within a decentralized Serbian unit. But today, scratching that topic is dangerous." (Grol, 1990: 336).

Probably the reality on the ground in occupied Yugoslavia forced even the exiled ministers to think in terms of realpolitik. On April 23, 1944, Grol and Božidar Vlajić¹⁴ concluded in a private conversation that national trialism—Serbs, Croats, Slovenes—was no longer realistic. "Bosnian Muslims, Turks in Macedonia, and Muslim Albanians outnumber the Slovenes. The term *minority* (emphasis in original) can no longer be used in the same way. The Macedonian issue can no longer be addressed within the current framework of trialism." Grol did not accept the decisions of AVNOJ. In a discussion in late April 1944, he emphasized: "...the decisions from Bihać and Jajce cannot be accepted as a political foundation. No one intends to take those decisions as a basis, but we still must consider them as elements in the Constitution." (Grol, 1990: 553). Grol continued to note such political positions regarding Macedonia even after the First Session of ASNOM and the establishment of federal Macedonia. In September 1944, Grol wrote: "...there must not be a severing of the organic life of the provinces with borders, which the Serbs especially fear; there must be an uninterrupted transport connection between Serbia and Macedonia, without which the development of neither region in the Morava and Vardar valleys can be imagined." Regarding AVNOJ's decisions, Grol emphasized that with respect to federalization, it must be made clear that the Jajce program is only

¹³ Slobodan Jovanović (1869–1958) was a jurist, historian, professor, and rector of the University of Belgrade. One of the leading Serbian intellectuals, he did not actively participate in political life until 1941. He was the president of the Serbian Cultural Club and served as Deputy Prime Minister in the government of General Simović. From January 1942 to June 1943, he served as Prime Minister in two émigré governments in London. In 1946, he was sentenced in absentia to 20 years in prison. He died in exile in London.

¹⁴ Božidar Vlajić (1888–1974) was a lawyer, publicist, and politician. During World War I, he worked in the Central Press Bureau at the Supreme Command and as a translator for a French brigade in Thessaloniki. In the interwar period, he published several articles on Yugoslav domestic politics. He was a prominent member of the leadership of the Democratic Party and served as chief of staff to Ljuba Davidović during his brief term as Prime Minister in 1924. Vlajić was the secretary of the Main Committee of the Democratic Party from 1925 to 1929. In the 1927 elections, he was elected as a member of parliament. During World War II, he served as Minister of Social Policy and Public Health in the government of Miloš Trifunović. After the war, he remained in exile. He died in London.

a program, and its realization lies in the hands of the people and the Constitution.¹⁵

By the end of 1944, when it was becoming clear that the decisions of AVNOJ were not just ideas and programs, Grol emphasized in several conversations his irreconcilable stance toward the federal status of Macedonia in Yugoslavia, "which deeply affected the Serbs." He believed that "there is not a more sensitive issue than the separation of Macedonia from Serbia." His views on Macedonia were not changed at all compared to the pre-1941 period, when there had been considerations for some form of self-government for Macedonia—but within the Serbian unit of a reorganized Yugoslav kingdom. Near the end of the war, Grol wrote in London that self-government for Macedonia was justified, but not a "federation, i.e., political-national individuality." (Grol, 1990: 654).

Within the top leadership of the Democratic Party, there was significant dissatisfaction with the new structure of Yugoslavia, which was equated with a defeat for Serbia. Mihailo Konstantinović,¹⁶ in his diary, recorded a conversation from early November 1944 with Božidar Vlajić, a long-standing member of the Democratic Party's top leadership and close ideological associate of Milan Grol. Among other things, Konstantinović noted: "According to him, the Serbs lost the war. I openly expressed my surprise. He insisted. He was almost upset that I didn't understand. The Serbs lost the war! Now decisions are being made that may be final! For example, Macedonia! We are going to lose it for good." (Константиновић, 2023: 467).

Vice President of the Provisional Government of Democratic Federal Yugoslavia

At a time when some of Grol's closest political allies believed everything was lost, he decided to return to Yugoslavia at the end of 1944. Despite mutual mistrust, the political developments in early 1945 necessitated cooperation

¹⁵ This context also includes the conversation with Ivan Šubašić on October 4, 1944. In his diary, Milan Grol notes that regarding the federation, Šubašić supported the idea of three units, to which Grol replied:

"There is no reason to be upset even about four (Bosnia), but in these rare opportunities, [Šubašić] should continue advocating for Istria, while we Serbs must advocate to the end for maintaining the connection with Macedonia. Self-government cannot be denied to it, but federal status would complicate the organic link of the indivisible Morava-Vardar valley." Grol concluded his thought with the observation: "Šubašić seemingly understands that." (Grol 1990: 641–646).

¹⁶ Mihajlo Konstantinović (1897–1982) was a professor at the Faculty of Law in Belgrade and one of the authors of the Cvetković–Maček Agreement. He served as a minister in the governments of Dragiša Cvetković. After the signing of the Tripartite Pact, he resigned from his position. During the war, he stayed in Egypt, Palestine, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. He returned to Yugoslavia in 1945.

between the communist leadership and Grol, one of the most prominent civic politicians from the pre-war period.

The new authorities, for both internal and international reasons, needed cooperation with representatives of the civic parties. Mira Radojević noted that Grol was one of the few civic politicians against whom there were few objections: "His political past was almost impeccable. He was known to the public as a staunch defender of democracy, unwavering in his defense of the Yugoslav state, one of the first Serbian politicians to accept the federal reorganization of the Yugoslav monarchy, personally and politically untainted, heir to Ljuba Davidović, and a distinguished cultural and public figure. Moreover, his republican tendencies and support for the idea of social justice were also known." (Радоевић, 2014: 272, 280). On March 7, 1945, the Provisional People's Government of Democratic Federal Yugoslavia, led by Josip Broz Tito, was established. Edvard Kardelj and Milan Grol were appointed as vice presidents.

Although in a high political position, Grol had no real control over the processes, particularly not over the "revolutionary justice" carried out by the new authorities. Confronted with the new political circumstances, only two months after becoming Vice President, he told a diplomat from the British embassy in Belgrade that Yugoslavia was under a regime of terror, where there was no rule of law or inviolability of private life and property, and that the judiciary was run by people qualified solely by their loyalty to the party line. (Радоевић, 2014: 297).

Together with his ideological allies and politicians from the interwar period, he opposed the proposed law on agrarian reform and colonization. He insisted that religious communities be compensated for part of the confiscated land. He criticized the proposed laws on electoral rolls and was particularly opposed to some provisions of the proposed law on crimes against the people and the state, for which he was criticized by Kardelj and Đilas. (Petranović, Zečević, 1988: 762–766). These and a number of other disagreements led him to resign as Vice President on August 18, 1945—just five months after his appointment. This resignation became one reason for the security service to constantly monitor opposition leaders, including the Democratic Party leadership, in efforts to discredit them. (Pavlović, 2011: 17–19).

The Democratic Party moved into open opposition, decided not to participate in the parliamentary elections, and began publishing its party newspaper *Demokratija*.¹⁷ In the first issue, Grol again addressed the status of Macedonia, essentially repeating his long-held views on its political status in Yugoslavia:

¹⁷ The newspaper *Demokratija* was published from September 27 to November 8, 1945. It was the weekly publication of the Democratic Party. In terms of content, the newspaper was sharply critical of government abuses, electoral legislation, and the conditions surrounding the elections. Its articles strongly emphasized the importance of preserving political and civil liberties. A significant portion of the texts were written by Milan Grol. The authorities consistently attacked the newspaper, accusing it of being treasonous and serving foreign interests. (cf. Cvetković 2020: 159–164).

"The topic of the federal unit of Macedonia is interesting. We Democrats supported its self-government even during Davidović's mission in 1932, and from 1938 we explicitly advocated for its autonomous life, i.e., a structure that would satisfy the people's desire to resolve their most significant issues independently, with direct participation in public affairs through individuals chosen primarily from their own community. The federal framework in modern federations does not go much further than what is now manifested through the Macedonian language and nationality. The distinctiveness of the ethnically complex Slavic population in Macedonia pertains more to character, mentality, economic and social living standards than to features of a distinct nation. However, we are far from denying that people have the right to express what they feel and want to be. That is a matter of nationality and language. Whether several dialects will evolve into a language... that is not something to be decided by a legal paragraph. It is paradoxical that Serbian and Bulgarian chauvinistic tendencies are being suppressed by artificially fencing off a region that cannot progress without a broad cultural movement—fencing that also carries a tendency toward a narrow local chauvinism, which, fortunately, is not feasible... Therefore, we emphasize the indivisibility of the Morava–Vardar line. We judge Macedonia's federal status should be only based on these vital interests—economic, cultural, the dynamics of moral and material values, and of course, national interests in the broader sense. Today's doubts arise from exclusive tendencies strictly within Macedonia's federal boundaries, from an unnatural, outdated cultural self-sufficiency that offers no conditions for life advancement for the people of the Vardar region, and causes unrest, a tendency of new restriction to natural development—both national and general—for the people on this side in Pomoravlje." (*Демократија*, September 27, 1945).

Shortly after Grol's resignation and the Democratic Party's decision to enter the opposition and boycott the parliamentary elections, attacks against him from the highest levels began. Communist Party ideologue Milovan Đilas, in the Communist Party newspaper *Borba* on August 22, 1945, in a piece titled *The Significance of the New Political Laws and the Intentions of the Reaction*, launched an attack on Grol, indirectly criticizing him for leaving the government: "...the small, confused politician, a conservative intellectual, by origin a German, by culture a Frenchman, and by political orientation a Greater Serb. A demagogue for democracy who never understood the greatness of the struggles among our peoples and who spent his entire life in fruitless schemes... When Grol couldn't achieve anything serious in the government, he went into opposition. But his strength is too small, and in the new Yugoslavia, support from abroad is not enough for success." (*Борба*, August 22, 1945; Koštunica, Čavoški, 1987: 18).

A month later, Đilas again in *Borba*, in a text titled *The Two-faced Actions of the Opposition*, attacked Grol and his political orientation, equating him with Mihailović, Nedić, and Ljotić: "Behind the opposition lie monstrous traitors and crimes. Behind the intellectual head of Milan Grol peeks Draža Mihailović, the

ideologues of Ljotić and Nedić, who await salvation from Grol's democracy. Behind the opposition are the destroyed Ustashas of Pavelić and the Domobrans of Maček–Pavelić. Behind it stands Rupnik's shameful White Guard." (*Borba*, September 22, 1945). The next day, the same party organ (*Borba*), featured a response by Lazar Koliševski, President of the Macedonian Government, who, writing about "The Macedonian People and the Elections for the Constituent Assembly", also targeted Grol and the civic parties: "Our people detest even the names of the former imposed civic parties during King Alexander's dictatorship and his supporters Petar Živković, Bogoljub Jevtić, Stojadinović, and the rest. Especially during elections, Macedonia was an arena where the people bled while the organizers of those massacres included Pera Živković, Žika Lazić, and other predecessors of today's false democrat Grol, along with all his associates—from local chiefs, municipal presidents, and tax collectors to the scum among the ranks of national traitors." (*Borba*, September 23, 1945).

With such attacks and political persecution, Milan Grol was placed on the list of enemies of the people by the new authorities. The newspaper *Demokratija* was banned in November 1945, and with Grol's resignation and withdrawal from political life, criticism of the new regime gradually faded—precisely the goal of the new communist authorities: to destroy multiparty life and eliminate the opposition. Milan Grol died in a kind of political isolation in Belgrade in 1952.

Conclusion

In the political debates about the reorganization of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia during the 1930s and early 1940s, the Democratic Party maintained a consistent position regarding Macedonia. Milan Grol and members of the Democratic Party leadership believed that Macedonia could have a certain degree of self-governance within the Serbian political unit of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Grol repeatedly emphasized the unbreakable link along the Vardar–Morava–Danube line as the backbone of the Serbian national organism. His positions did not change even in the radically new political circumstances of 1944/45.

Among his contemporaries and political opponents, such as Dragoljub Jovanović, Milan Grol was described as a pessimist, critic, and perpetual dissenter, a skeptic, but also a conservative democrat of a strictly civic type. Because of this conservatism and his advocacy for civic democracy, Grol's cooperation with the communist authorities was very brief. He and the Democratic Party were subjected to numerous criticisms from the ideologues of the new regime, which led to Grol's resignation from the post of Vice President of the Government and the party's decision not to participate in the elections. Just before the elections in November 1945, *Demokratija*, the only opposition newspaper, was banned, thus effectively silencing public criticism of the government and suppressing opposition activity in the public sphere.

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