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**FROM “SAVE THE CHILDREN” TO “SAVE THE TRIBE”.
CHILD CARE IN YUGOSLAVIA AND BULGARIA 1919–1939**

Introduction

During the process of modernization, important social projects focused on youth and children. Child mortality and morbidity rates, social care for certain groups of children and public control of youth were discussed by professionals, social activists and state employees. Special societies and institutions were established to organize youth. Child care focusing on poor children and orphans underwent important changes. Through the efforts of different expert groups, including doctors, teachers, jurists and municipal officers, and based on public knowledge of modern health, food and lodging standards, new groups of children became targets of social care and support. These groups included undernourished children, children brought up with inadequate health practices, and children threatened by tuberculosis or abuse.

In the first decades of the 20th century, the Balkan region had a comparatively high fertility rate and high infant mortality rate. In Yugoslavia and Bulgaria after the First World War the indexes were roughly the same (Mishajkov 200, Dragoev 12):

Fertility rate: 1932 –1936 (per 1000)	
Yugoslavia	Bulgaria
30,8	28,3
Child mortality rate: 1936 (per 1000 children born alive)	
Yugoslavia	Bulgaria
141	144

Researchers pointed out that most of the children in both countries were brought up in the villages (around 80-85 %) under similar living conditions with respect to nutrition and housing. (Ristovich and others 5)

In the 1930s, the majority of peasant children in Yugoslavia were fed mostly on bread: milk was not available between October and May and meat was served only three or four times during the winter months at feasts. Children shared food with their parents (Petrovich 10-44). The situation in Bulgaria was similar. According to one study, 94% of the children in one village went without breakfast or ate only bread with beans; only 3% of them were offered milk, 1% cheese, and another 1% butter (Georgiev 14-15). Children in rural economies hardly fared better: child labor was widespread in domestic farming. While certain statistical data changed in both countries along similar lines of development, it is interesting to also see the differences in social dialogue about child care institutions. Research on child care in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia in the inter-war period, a time of intense debate about the issue, is an important topic worthy of study, the more so as there does not exist any comparative research on the topic.

Social Care for Children in Serbia at the End of the 19th Century and Beginning of the 20th century and the First Years of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes

The historical narrative on child care in Serbia and Yugoslavia was influenced by the large corpus of reports published during the inter-war period. One of the main activists of the Movement for Child Protection was Dr. Milosh Popovich. (Popovich, "Razvoj dechje zashtite u Jugoslaviji", 14-15) Popovich maintains that child care in Serbia was initiated with the foundation of the Society of Support for Abandoned and Homeless Children in 1879. This was the first in a series of new institutions that were established to address the growing problem of child care, including the founding of a hostel for abandoned and homeless children in Belgrade in 1887 (Potkonjak 7), a Society for Blind and Deaf-and-Dumb Children in 1894, a Mother's Society in 1904 through the initiative of Draga Ljochich-Miloshevich, and the society 'Serb Mother' in 1908 through the work of Dr. Jovanovich. The latter organization saw the development of branches in the big cities and initiated many activities during the inter-war period.¹ Another society in support of children was founded by the activist of Women's Union, Danica Hristich. Until the First World War, societies and institutions related to child protection were concentrated mainly in the capital, Belgrade. The role of Jewish charity organizations, including the "Jewish Women's Society" founded in 1874, "Podpora" society founded in 1897, Serb-Jewish Society "Malbash Arumshi" founded in 1927, Jewish women's society "Dobrotvor", Jewish Women *Zadruga* in Panchevo (founded in 1863), Jewish Women's Society in Zemun, founded in 1865), was impressive with their long tradition of child welfare organizations.²

1 Drushtvo "Srpska majka i njegov rad za 25 godina 1911 – 1936, Beograd, 1936.

2 Balkanski Congress, *Narodni Podmladak*, sv. 1-1, 1939, pp. 201-245.

During the First World War, new groups of neglected and homeless children appeared which demanded a response. In 1916, for instance, Dr. Milosh Popovich founded a child camp in Voden (North Greece). It formed the basis for the establishment of the Society for Protection of Yugoslav Children in 1917. A branch of the Society was founded on the island of Corfu. Its main task was: “To work for the physical and moral health of the national youth generation; to contribute to eliminating the causes of child mortality, morbidity and moral decadence” (Popovich, “Shta sme...”). Special attention was paid to the care of abandoned and lost “children of Serb soldiers” (Popovich, “Shta sme ...”, Potkonjak 18). According to Dr. Milosh Popovich, the Society started a new era of child protection, which was marked by the cooperative work of state and society. The new institution received broad international support from the Red Cross, American Near East Foundation and the newly founded “Save the Children” Fund. In 1920, the society contacted the International Union of Child Protection in Geneva founded in the same year. Local organizations, such as the Women’s Union, Serb Nurses, also supported child protection societies (Potkonjak 20-21).

Dr. Milosh Popovich also launched a program celebrating the *Day of the Children*. The first celebration took place in 1920, and in the following year he also launched a new periodical *Narodni Podmladak* (National Youngsters). The time and the origin of the movement for child protection defined the structure and ideas of *Narodni Podmladak* – the organization was founded during the First World War and many of its initiators and activists were army officers. The image of the soldier as a protector of children became the emblem of the Movement: a soldier’s helmet giving shelter to small chickens was placed on the journal’s cover.³ This image was also the emblem of the Society for Protection of Yugoslav Children for many years. In 1923, *Narodni Podmladak* was discontinued, only to be re-issued in 1935. Many of the articles returned to the time of the First World War to find new impulses for the protection of children (Milosh Popovich, “Listak uspomena...” 119). “All of these (experiences) should give impulses to all of us who experienced and witnessed it [the war] to realize that the protection of children is a necessity not only during war but also during times of peace” (Popovich, “Listak uspomena...” 122). “It is not necessary – Dr. Milosh Popovich remembered – to describe our joy, when we, people separated from our homes and children – were bathing and dressing by our own hands these orphans – the future citizens of Yugoslavia”(Popovich, “Listak uspomena ...” 122)._

After the foundation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, old catholic traditions in child welfare organizations were added to the existing practi-

3 *Narodni Podmladak*, g. 1-3.

cies in Serbia. In 1920, the People's Committee for Child Support was founded (later it was renamed as Committee for Child Questions); Dr. Milosh Popovich and the Croatian professor Josip Shilovich joined the Committee. Josip Shilovich was also editor of a journal on child protection, *National Defense*, which was edited in Zagreb.

With the Vidovdan Constitution, the new political order in Yugoslavia created possibilities for government sponsored child care. A Ministry of Social Policy was founded in 1922 (Bakicevich 37). In 1919, a state department for the protection of children was created with the main goal to care for orphans of the war and contribute to the health and development of the new generation of children. More specifically, the main tasks of the department included: to take care of the physical and moral well-being of children; to collect data on child morbidity and mortality; to elaborate state regulations concerning child protection; and to coordinate the activities of the local and international charity organizations. According to the regulation, local and district-wide (*zhupan*) committees were established with representatives of the state and charity organizations. An Expert Committee on the preparation of the Law for Protection of Children and Youth was formed by Josip Shilovich, Milosh Popovich, and Vl. Vujnoivich. (Popovich "Razvoj..." 383 – 385). The Law of Child and Youth Protection was approved, even though many of the proposals of the Expert Committee were neglected. A bureaucratic variant of the law was adopted. What was put into action was merely a bureaucratic measure based on the law, which limited charity initiatives. The district committees lost their functions and no longer had any practical influence because they lost financial support from the state and municipal child protection activities were not guaranteed (Bakicevich 37). The journal *Narodni Podmladak* stopped publication in 1923.

Over the next years during the 1920s, the child welfare developed mainly through the activities of charity societies and their institutions. In a parallel effort, the state and municipal institutions in Belgrade also enlarged their activities. A circle of experts working for the Municipal Child Service in Belgrade, Child Clinic and Social Ministry was formed. This circle developed an expert discourse on child care.

The re-launching of the *Narodni Podmladak* in 1935 and creation of the Union for Child Protection in Yugoslavia were connected to the enlargement of the social activities of the Belgrade Municipality. The famous activist of the Yugoslav Cities Union, Dr. Slobodan Vidakovich, contributed much to child welfare development.⁴ In 1932, he started to edit the journal *Belgradske opshtinske*

4 Slobodan Vidakovich, *Nashi socijalni probleme*, Beograd, 1932; Slobodan Vidakovich, *Za komunalni preporodzhaj*, Beograd, 1933. Slobodan Vidakovic, *Komunalna Zastita Dece, Duzhnosti nashih gradova i varoshi na podizanju buducih generacija*, *Narodni Podmladak* 1937, g. 3, sv. 1 -2, p. 15.

novine (Belgrade Municipality News), which became a forum for discussing the social problems of the municipality.⁵ The Yugoslav Union for Child Protection was established by his initiative and in close coordination with the Union of Yugoslav Cities. The first chairperson of the Union was Prof. Josip Shilovich. (Potkonjak 23-24, Ambrozich 4-6). The content of the journal *Belgrade Municipality News*, edited by Slobodan Vidakovich, influenced the *Narodni Podmaldak*. In 1934, the *Belgrade Municipality News* devoted a special issue to the protection of children, in which the following basic problems were discussed: settlement of poor city and town children in peasant families; municipal social problems and the role of the state; educational and health importance of soup kitchen; “national- and race”-related problems of child protection, child health and the threat of tuberculosis.⁶

Child Care in Bulgaria at the End of 19th and Beginning of the 20th Century

During the 19th century in Bulgaria there were isolated charity activities for children, which mainly provided orphans and poor children with educational support. Social initiatives based on the research of conditions of children first started at the end of 19th century. The first study on the nutrition of children appeared in the 1890s. This was the time when the first publications on child mortality began to appear (Popova 42).

In 1897, a group of teachers founded a Society for the organization of free soup kitchens for young students in Sofia. In 1900, the society *Evdokia*, founded by women in Sofia opened the first kindergarten for abandoned children. American, English and Russian charity organizations worked also in the field of child care. Before the Balkan Wars and First World War, several orphanages were established. These institutions were financed by different societies, including the *Saint Patrick* society of the Irish benefactor Pierce O’ Mahony, *King Boris of Turnovo*, *Bitolja*, *The Father Paisij*, and *The Queen Eleonore* (Popova 46). At the beginning of 20th century, the first societies for organizing summer camps for young students, mainly from towns, were founded. During the First World War, the fear of the growing child criminality led to the establishment of a Society for Fighting Child Criminality. The so-called Home of Humanism provided housing for children with criminal records. In 1924, the International Union for Child Protection made a request to the Bulgarian Red Cross Society to send two representatives to the Fourth International Congress of Child Protection in Vienna and Budapest. Upon their return the Bulgarian

5 *Beogradske opštinske novine, Časopis za komunalno socijalni, privredni i kulturni život* 1, 1932. See also Bogdan Krekich, “Javno staranje u stanbenom pitanju”, *Beogradske opštinske novine*, vol. 2, 1932, pp. 94-99., Dr. Staja Staich, “Zdravstvena zaštita beogradske školske dece”, *Beogradske opštinske novine*, 1932, vol. 7, pp. 429-439.

6 Nacionalni i socijalni problemi dechje zaštite, *Beogradske opštinske novine*, br. 4-5, Maj, 1934.

delegates Prof. Stefan Vatev and Dr. Kirov called together the representatives of all institutions related to children to discuss the “conditions of the public and the private care of children and to establish a Union for Child Protection in Bulgaria on the basis of the recognition of the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of Children and having the status of a branch of the International Union.” Prof. Stefan Vatev was elected as the first chairperson of the newly founded union. To support the first initiatives of the Union, Frederica Freund, a representative of the International Union, arrived in Bulgaria and stayed in the country for more than four years.

Through the direct assistance of the International Union new institutions were founded in Sofia: a home Save the Children for wandering and homeless children and for children forced to go begging. In 1926, a child health exhibition was organized as well as new branches of the Union opened in nine towns, including Lovech, Kjustendil, Varna, Shumen, Russe, Razgrad, Plovdiv, Pleven and Samokov. In many of these towns, the branches worked with the existing local women’s associations.

Two events contributed to the enlargement of the Union for Child Protection as a coordinating center for child care in Bulgaria: the institution of so-called female teacher advisors at the beginning of 1927 and the start of the periodical *Nasheto dete (Our Child)* in 1928. Training courses for female teacher advisors became a permanent practice of the Bulgarian Child Protection Union. It assumed the responsibility to prepare staff for education and social work in the villages; to investigate the socio-economic and health conditions of the families and children; to raise the health culture of mothers and children; to organize soup kitchens for young students; and, to organize local societies of child protection by coordinating the efforts of educated peasants, teachers, priests, and municipal employees.

The Symbolic Images of Children in Child Care in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia

Poor Belgrade Children as the Most Popular Public Image

As the child care activities in Belgrade grew, a stable group of experts was formed to consult on the activities, and the periodical *Belgrade Municipality News* turned into a forum for discussion of child care. The experts discussed the directions and the organizational development of the Union for Yugoslavian Child Protection.

The slogan “To work for the Yugoslavian children!”, which was made into a motto of the special issue of *Belgrade Municipality News*, devoted to child care, came from the experience of supporting poor Belgrade suburban children and researching their life and health.

The coordination of the activities of societies and institutions and the overcoming of bureaucratic obstacles was proclaimed to be the most urgent task of the movement led by Dr. Vidakovich, who had been pleading for centralization of child care since 1930 (Vidakovich, *Komunalno-socijalni problemi* 335-339).

The experience with the poor Belgrade children and orphans provoked the idea that poor city children should be resettled in village families. The Ministry of Social Affairs established the first summer camp for small children. The first leader of the camp, which opened in 1931 in Miloshevac, was Matija Ambrozhich, the director of the Department of Protection of Motherhood and Childhood (Vajs 2-7). Prof. Josip Shilovich, the chairperson of the Yugoslavian Child Protection Union, supported the idea that the village accommodation of poor Belgrade children was the best that could be done for them (Shilovich 309-313).

Nevertheless, Slobodan Vidakovich addressed the question concerning the care of peasant children. This problem remained peripheral to the activities of the Union and its branches for a long time. He argued that one must extend child protection to the villages. But Dr. Vidakovich's main concern was with the problems of municipality's social policy, and his major contributions were in this sphere, even though he did address the problems of peasant children as well (Vidakovich, "Komunalno-socijalni problemi" 335-339). While in the press the images of town people were quite detailed and expressive – photos of children, houses, suburban homes, poor and dirty rooms, shortage of air, sun and space, the images of the villages were quite general. The periodical *Belgrade Municipality News* published studies and reports on the conditions of Belgrade homes and family life (Vidakovich, "Komunalno-socijalni problemi" 335-339). In these studies and reports, certain standard features had to be described, including the occupation of the parents, the number of family members, the size of the home, and general characteristics concerning hygiene. The social problems were considered mainly on the municipality level. In Belgrade, coordination of the efforts of many institutions and the development of public services contributed to a considerable decrease in the child mortality rate. It decreased to 50 per 1000, which was relatively low for Yugoslavia as a whole and the region.

In the middle and the second half of the 1930s, the Yugoslavian Child Protection Union established branches in all district centers (so-called *banovini*) and in most of the large cities. The whole spectrum of institutions developed, from hostels and kindergartens to soup kitchens. The accelerated development of institutions dedicated to child care can be seen from data of soup kitchen research (Anton Skala 427-431).

Year	Kitchens	Children
1924/25	14	525
1938/39	566	33 620

Until 1938 on the eve of the Second Balkan Congress of Child Protection in Belgrade, the generalized data of child care development in Yugoslavia were the following:⁷

Until 1938	in Belgrade	in the Country
Hostels	27	361
Kindergartens	14	13
Boarding Schools	10	13
Courses and Schools	47	77
Soup Kitchens	41	703
School Funds	35	–
Dispensaries	2	23
Number of Children		
Accommodated Children	3767	5446
Fed Children	2865	45385
Sent to Summer Camps	4752	23000
Consulted	34535	11787
Supported	8902	66733

As can be seen from the data presented by the Union, most of the activities were still focused on the capital. For a long period, the Union did not even plan to prepare a special staff for villages to introduce its ideas and extend its activities. Up to 1939, five courses were organized in Novi Sad, 115 female teachers and 19 male teachers received course preparation. One course was organized in Belgrade (by the assistance of the Red Cross) that involved 57 male teachers and 48 female teachers (Dimnik 431-445). Despite the proclaimed intention of many activists in the Union to reach peasant children, the activities of Union did not extend its activities to the villages and there were no child care activists present in the villages. Even when the journal *Narodni Podmladak* published studies on peasant children they were rather general (with the exception of the article about feeding Divljan children) (Vukovich

7 Balkanski Congress, *Narodni Podmladak*, sv. 1-1, 1939, pp. 201-245

15-20). The reports about the villages did not come from the villages themselves but were done by town reporters. In the journal *Narodni Podmladak* no place was set aside for letters and other written materials of local village activists.

An example: *Narodni Podmladak* (1938, a part of the annual content)

- Dr. Milosh Popovich – “Mental hygiene of youth”
- Dr. Milovan Petrovich – “Feeding the peasant children in Yugoslavia”
- Slobodan Vidakovich – “The duty of our cities for developing of future generations”
- R. Tomashich – “Education and protection of school children out of school”
- Prof. Vera Nikolich – “How to protect female servants”
- Dr. Zora Ilich – “First activities for our homeless children”
- Dr. M. Petrovich – “Let’s teach parents how to bring up children”

The work of the Unija members:

Belgrade, Zajchar, Nish, Valjevo, Bitolja, Zemun, Kraguevac etc.

Contributions to the history of our child protection work:

- Milosh Popovich – “20 Years ago”

Office informations

News from abroad – Geneva, Denmark, Spain, Japan, Chinese

- “The visit of the chairperson of the Committee of Second Balkan Congress – Dr. Alexander Kostich in Sofia”

Bibliography (book presentations)

- Slobodan Vidakovich – “Communal protection of children”
- Marija Gaich – “The first grooves of the protection of children”
- Ljubomir Zhivkovich – “Human society and race theory”

Peasant Children as a Symbol of the Bulgarian Child

As far as the themes and problems are concerned, a great similarity is given between *Narodni Podmladak* in Yugoslavia and *Our Child* in Bulgaria. These similarities are due to the common orientation in the movements for child protection, which stem from the international standards introduced by the Geneva Declaration. The other reason was that communication between the two organizations increased during the second half of the 1930s when Bulgaria and Yugoslavia became closer politically and the Second Balkan Congress for Child Protection took place.

Nasheto dete (Our Child, Content, 1937, N 7)

Prof. Dr. B. Shpishich (Yugoslavia) – “Crippled children, their treatment and education”

“International Union of Child Protection”

B. Balkanski – “Social conditions and child criminality”

Dr. B. Nenov – “Deaf-and-dumb children”

“Child care in Yugoslavia”

Iv. Andreev – “The child- pupil”

Dr. N. Vasileva – “The Sea and the children”

“Logopedia and phoniatria”

“Healthy Bulgarian mother. Family cult of Bulgarian woman”

“Coat milk”

“District orphanage of Lovech”

Z. Furnadjieva. “Child home in Sofia”.

Celebration of the Day of the Child in: Lovech, Veliko Tarnovo, Simeonovgrad, Altimir village, Orjahovo region, Belitsa village, Razlog region

The activities of the Union of Child Protection

Summer playgrounds:

Summer playground in the village of Brezovo, Plovdiv region and in Suhindol

Summer kindergarten:

the village of Pavel Banja, Kazanlak region

Soup kitchens:

The village of D. Kmetovci, Gabrovo district, the village of Kalojanovo, Plovdiv district, the village of Mokren, Kotel district, the village of Bojno, Kardjali district.

Summer camps:

The village of Mokren, Kotel district, the village of Bojno, Kardjali district, the village of Smjadovo, Preslav district.

Official greetings /News/ Books

Looking through the content and the structure of *Our Child*, we can note similarities and differences with *Narodni Podmladak*. Both journals had special rubrics for reports of institutions for child care and photos and letters from specific places where branches of the movement opened. The activists of village branches, including female teacher-advisers, male teachers, priests, were encouraged to write reports to the journal, send their findings on the nutrition and nurturing of small children, collect photos of children in soup kitchens, summer playgrounds, and summer camps for publication. In the 1930s, villages became the main focus of Bulgarian Union of Child Protection. A great part of the newly established institutions were concentrated in the villages. Peasant children were the focus of attention in the Union’s ideology, propaganda and staff preparation.

Village establishments of the branches of Bulgarian Child Protection Union and the number of children are listed below (Ljapcheva 5-14)

Type of establishment	Number of establishments	Number of children
Kindergarten	1	10
Day Houses	6	157
Orphanages	2	47
Hostels	48	1036
Soup Kitchens	3042	179 258
Children's Playgrounds	342	25 755
Summer Colonies	32	1504
Summer Camps	2	140
Health-Counseling Centers	449	127 570
Total	3924	355 477

Town Branches of the Bulgarian Child Protection Union

Type of establishment	Number of establishments	Number of children
Distribution Centers	1	22
Kindergartens	7	344
Day Houses	60	3065
Orphanages	15	704
Social Prevention Homes	1	35
Homes for Handicap and Underdeveloped Children	1	80
Homes for Juvenile Offenders	2	111
Education Homes	1	26
Homes for Deaf-and-Dumb Children	3	17
Homes for Blind Children	1	89
Hostels	15	704
Soup Kitchens	287	34 899
Children's Playgrounds	118	23 291
Summer Colonies	130	13 145
Summer Camps	25	1975
Maternity Hospitals	3	191
Health-Counseling Centers	104	94 619
Total:	787	174 247

Attracting a considerable number of female teachers and educated elite in the villages, the Union made attempts to build new networks that included peasant mothers. Mothers had to acquire new knowledge and modern standards of raising a child. Peasant mothers, housewives and young girls were the focus of other initiatives as well, including health education, additional

agriculture schools, and courses for housewives, which grew in number during the 1930s (Zagorov 84). In close cooperation with Agriculture Schools and Housewife and Motherhood Courses, The Child Protection Union involved many women of the new generation in social activities, thus enlarging the social basis of its activities.

The second Balkan Congress in Belgrade, 1938

In April 1937, Konstanca Ljapcheva (Vice President of the Bulgarian Union of Child Protection) visited Belgrade.⁸ She was met by Naka Spasich (Vice President of the Yugoslavian Union) as an official guest. Her week-long visit gave her the possibility to become acquainted with the activities of the Union in Belgrade. Marija Gaich, Head of the Department of Child and Motherhood Cares in the Belgrade Municipality, introduced to her the practice of the department to accommodate children in families where they are under medical supervision. This was a new practice for the Balkans, and the experience in Belgrade represented an important example for Bulgaria, where foster child care was still considered in traditional terms as an adopted child who was expected to share family work as well.

Konstanca Ljapcheva was impressed by the great number of doctors, jurists and other specialists in Belgrade “who voluntarily sacrifice a great deal of their time and work for the protection and support of children”.⁹ She visited all the child and adolescent organizations in Belgrade. Prof. Matija Ambrozich, Director of the Child Clinic and President of the Society for Care and Protection of Descendants, presented the activities in children’s healthcare. Konstanca Ljapcheva informed the Yugoslavian hosts about the work of the Union for Child Protection in the villages. “Care for children in villages” was the heading of the Balkan Congress, which was to be held in the coming autumn.¹⁰

Several months after her visit, the President of Yugoslav Union, Dr. Slobodan Vidakovich, came to Bulgaria to take part in the Annual Meeting of Bulgarian Child Protection Union. Alexander Kostich, the President of the Organizing Committee of the Second Balkan Congress, also visited Bulgarian colleagues.¹¹ The exchange of visits was of an official nature but it still raised public interest in the activities of the two organizations and in the preparation of the Second Balkan Congress for Child Protection in Belgrade.¹²

8 “Grizhi za decata v Jugoslavija”, *Nasheto dete*, 1937, vol. 7, pp. 9-10.

9 Ibidem. See also Dr. Marija Gaich, *rve brazde na komunalnoj zashtiti dece Beograda*, Beograd, 1937.

10 “Grizhi za decata v Jugoslavija”

11 “Edinadeseto obshto godishno sabranie na SZDB”, *Nasheto dete*, 1938, vol. 6, pp. 2-10.

12 “Balkanski Congress”, *Narodni Podmladak*, sv. 1-1, 1939, pp. 201-245

Preparing the Balkan Exhibition

The Yugoslav Union for Child Protection organized a Balkan Exhibition to present the social problems of children in Yugoslavia and the institutions involved. A great corpus of statistical data was collected, processed and presented graphically in charts. In preparation for the Congress, teachers and municipal governments of 1840 village municipalities collected materials for the exhibition.¹³ The material, collected from different parts of the country, was worked up under the guidance of Slobodan Vidakovich along with the assistance of State Statistical Department. Alexander Kostich, Matija Ambrozhich, Anton Skala, Milena Atanackovich, Marija Gaich took part in the preparations. Uglesha Davidovich and Vlada Ilich, distinguished representatives of the Belgrade municipality, also took part.¹⁴ Prominent experts were involved in the preparation of the exhibition. Their efforts were directed at increasing the public awareness of the exhibition through a presentation of the activities of the Union in statistics and photos. Large photomontages, 400 photos covering the life of Belgrade children and 35 art graphics intended to show child care in the Belgrade municipality and to illustrate the decrease in the child mortality rate which had been presented by statistical data for the different Belgrade quarters. Another 40 panels were presented on the municipalities of Zagreb and Ljubljana.¹⁵

A further part of the exhibition was devoted to child welfare initiatives and to the organizational structure of the Yugoslav Union for Child Protection. The Scout Organization and other educational institutions were also discussed. Many miniature models of homes for children built recently in the country were also presented. Famous artists, photographers and architects were attracted to work on the art and architectural design of the exhibition.

The other Balkan countries, including Bulgaria, Turkey, Rumania, and Greece, were represented by their own pavilions and by a collective exhibition of the Balkan region. The International Union of Child Protection also had an exhibition. Examples of the social policy of European municipalities were introduced, such as Masarik's houses in Prague. The Organizing Committee considered the Balkan exhibition very successful: 45 000 people attended it and it attracted wide public interest.¹⁶

13 Ibidem.

14 Ibidem.

15 Ibidem.

16 Ibidem.

Child Care in Diagrams and Photomontages. Statistics and Images of the Exhibition

The published materials from the exhibitions in Yugoslav and Bulgarian periodicals can be used as sources for analyzing the way the Yugoslav Union became known to a larger public and how the social problems of children found expression in statistics.¹⁷

The exhibition influenced the audience through the composition of the materials in the rooms: photos picturing the life of Belgrade children were put on walls, and above them immense panels of graphics and photomontages depicted the development of child care with statistical data and schematic images of mothers, fathers and children. Images of motherhood and the child care of nurses and midwives along with dynamic graphs depicted the increase in child welfare institutions and the Union's infrastructure.

Special attention was given to the problems of fertility and child mortality rates, including fertility rates according to the mortality rates of children born out of wedlock; mortality rates of abandoned children; and mortality rates according to occupation of parents. Father figures appeared in occupational outfits. The mortality rate of children born out of wedlock was illustrated by images of mothers also dressed in their typical clothing. A diagram with a suckling child at the center reflected the decreasing child mortality rate in Belgrade, but also the continuous problems in other parts of the country. On photomontages, figures of smiling nurses and other medical personal looking after playing children canvassed the buildings.

The exhibition panels suggested confidence – it did not matter how difficult the problems were; the new institutions could manage them. Mothers, fathers and babies strictly divided into social groups illustrated statistically proven tendencies.

Generally speaking, the exhibition impressed upon the audience the idea of a coordinated social organism. Care for children was depicted as a care for future generations. The Geneva Declaration promoting the rights of children to nutrition, healthcare and education in a spirit of solidarity and brotherhood was interpreted as social care for healthy progeny.

After the Congress – the Enforcement of Eugenic Impulses

In January 1940, the *Narodni Podmladak* printed the slogan “Let's save our tribe”. On the front cover of the journal, this was portrayed as the elimination of a series of social problems, including disease, war, drunkenness, dirtiness, ignorance, poverty; out of the sea of all these calamities came a hand search-

17 Ibidem.

ing for help, a young women trying to keep away her two small children.

The eugenic component of the journal appeared in the ideology of child care during the inter-war period. Dr. Milosh Popovich was a prominent advocate of eugenics in the Yugoslavian Child Protection Movement. He was not alone; many other experts and doctors supported the idea of genetic hygiene. The expert discourse reinforced eugenics. Social activists, such as Dr. Slobodan Vidakovich, advocated the idea of genetic hygiene for the future generation (*Vidakovich Nashi socialni probleme*). Immediately after the Balkan Congress, Georgy Dragoev, Director of the Child Protection Union in Bulgaria, also published an article in *Our Child* about the “strength of Balkan peoples”, fertility, mortality and other demographic factors (Dragoev 11-17).

The analysis of the ideology of child welfare reveals a complex mixture of humanistic, modernization and nationalistic impulses. At the end of 1930s, the centralization of child care and the increased role of the state led to a new attitude towards children and childhood. Children were no longer simply considered to be a value on their own, but also a valuable resource for the future of the nation. The eugenic interest of activists and policy-makers led to a new symbiosis of modernization, hygiene, health, soberness and nationalistic discourses. Humanistic, modernization and national pathos could be observed in all documents (central and local) in different proportions. The economic crises in the beginning of 1930s reinforced the humanistic and social components, and during the second half of the 1930s these components were integrated into the rhetoric of care for the progeny.

A Program for the Protection of Village Children

According to the decisions of the Balkan Congress, the Yugoslav Child Protection Union planned to extend its activities to villages and discussed the organization of qualification courses for the staff of the new child care establishments. The Balkan Congress recommended the organization of special courses for village teachers and priests (Manolova 5-8). In 1939, *Narodni Podmaldak* devoted a special issue to the protection of village children. Prominent authors took part in the special issue, including: Slobodan Vidakovich (“Duty of village municipality to child protection”); Dr. Marija Gaich (“Accommodation of city children to village families”), Milosh Popovich (“Child Protection”); and, Prof. Leposlava Zhugich (“The initiative of women societies for child protection”) etc.¹⁸ During the following year, a special conference of the Union was held on this topic. The influential newspaper *Politika* also became involved in the discussions, carrying out an inquiry why village female teachers did not take part in child care activities. *Narodni Podmaldak* emphasized that much work had to be done to create a new awareness “that

18 “Za zashtitu seoske dece”, *Narodni Podmaldak*, 1939.

cultural progress in the villages would strengthen the nation and state” (Dimnik “Sprema...” 431-445).

In an article about the activities of teachers in child protection, Ivan Dimnic suggested a system of ten initiatives: organizing agriculture and courses on being a housewife; adopting the syllabus of institutes for teachers to meet the needs of village schools; providing holidays for teachers willing to work in villages; opening new village schools; cooperative schools for housewife and child-rearing courses for mothers, etc. (Dimnik “Sprema...” 431-445) In 1940, a conference of the Yugoslav Union of Child Protection developed a program for child care in the villages. It was designed to introduce a significant change in the activities of the Union, which however was never realized due the war:¹⁹

1. Concerning the question of organizing and financing child soup kitchens
 - state subsidies were to be provided for “feeding our children”.
2. Concerning the question of preparation of assistant staff:
 - Courses for midwives were to be organized in each district;
 - Doctors were to prepare their own assistants, attracting village female teachers and educated women.
 - For every 3000 citizens a health counseling center was to be provided
 - Visiting nurses were to be prepared
3. Concerning the question of preparing teachers for the protection of motherhood and childhood in the villages:
 - Teachers were to be considered as a main resource for child care.
 - Special ideology courses were to be organized with the material and moral assistance of the Yugoslav Union of Child Protection
 - Teacher’s school programs were to be reformed to meet the needs of “our people living and working in the villages”.
 - A special subject “Hygiene of motherhood and childhood” was to be introduced in the school programs.
 - Special seminars for social work were to open in the schools.
 - Free access of poor and peasant children to teacher’s schools was to be provided.
 - Basic schools were to be reformed in respect to village needs.
 - New people’s schools, courses on being a housewife for peasant girls were to be started.
 - Regular attendance of schools was to be required

19 “Za socijalno-kulturno, zdravstveno I ekonomsko podizanje sela”, *Narodni Podmladak*, 1940, sv. 11-12.

Social Child Care and National Ideologies

When analyzing the developments of social care in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia we can easily recognize similarities: child care started most often as care for traditional groups of children, such as orphans. The basis for the activities of child protection unions was the same: the Geneva Declaration. The International Movement for Child Protection was the engine for Balkan cooperation. In both countries, child care also provided men and women with possibilities for social and professional realization. A modern expert discourse with doctors, pedagogues and municipality officers developed concerning child mortality and health. Both organizations supported each other in adopting biological and eugenic conceptions, especially at the Second Balkan Congress in Belgrade.

In Yugoslavia, state participation and legislation played a more important role than in Bulgaria. The social policy of the municipality concerning children was central to its activities. This is especially true for the Belgrade municipality. The Belgrade municipality initiated studies on the lives of children, established many institutions, and popularized child care activities through periodicals and exhibitions. In the 1920s and 1930s, an expert discourse developed which directly influenced the municipality and the state. Child care experts were mostly concerned with modern recipients of social care, such as city children suffering from tuberculosis due to unsanitary living conditions. They actively contributed to the public debate about the future of the nation as well. When the theme of peasant children was introduced, no village representative took part in the discussions. When the Union of Child Protection in Yugoslavia was founded in 1935, several groups of societies took part: women's societies, such as Serb Mother, local organizations of Serb nurses and other local women's societies at the town level. The Serb element was the strongest in the Child Protection Union: the branches of the Union were concentrated in the Serb parts of Yugoslavia. In Belgrade, however, where most of the societies of Union were located, not only Serbs but other ethnic groups were also represented by their own charity societies. In the central documents of the Union, the Yugoslavian allegiances were predominant and not the Serb national one: the motto was "To work for Yugoslavian children". The Yugoslavian Union for Child Protection contributed greatly to the study of the problems in the lives and health of children, turning them into subjects of scholarly interest. New models of child care were developed that played an important role not only in Yugoslavia but also across the Balkans. The Union's ideology influenced national rhetoric through its eugenic ideas and the social enthusiasm of charity societies and the professional elite.

In Bulgaria, the Child Protection Union was able to create a thick network of activists and supporters mainly due to the special role of female teachers, who worked as – advisers in the branches of the small towns and villages.

Modernization, along with humanistic and national pathos, merged into an ideology promoting the protection of “Bulgarian children”. Teachers, mothers, children were involved in the network in a variety of forms: summer kindergarten, courses on being a housewife and mother, soup kitchens, etc. The Union of Child Protection succeeded in penetrating into the villages and even to turn village institutions into a vital part of its organizational structure. The rapid spread of the network and its maintenance generated many volunteers, which partly compensated for the shortage of funds. To provide housing, food and health treatment, the Union’s activists addressed the central institutions with a nationalistic rhetoric.

The comparison between the Yugoslav and the Bulgarian Union of Child Protection in the inter-war period reveals many common features: similar social circumstances and demographic indexes, a common ideological basis and historical context of modernization, an openness to the achievements of other organizations. Nevertheless, the two organizations developed in different ways and they integrated themselves in a different manner into the national projects of the two countries.

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