



World Bank Group Archives Exhibit Series

Early Mission Trip to Yugoslavia

NUMBER 028
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED: JULY 2003

January 2016





The World Bank Group Archives Exhibit Series contains exhibits originally published on the Archives' external website beginning in 2002. When the Archives' website was transferred to a new platform in 2015, it was decided that older exhibits would be converted to pdf format and made available as a series on the World Bank's external database, [Documents & Reports](#).

These exhibits, authored by World Bank archivists, highlight key events, personalities, and publications in the history of the World Bank. They also bring attention to some of the more fascinating archival records contained in the Archives' holdings.

To view current exhibits, visit the [Exhibits](#) page on the Archives' website.



Early Mission Trip to Yugoslavia

The Bank lent Yugoslavia an amount in various currencies equivalent to \$28 million in October 1951 [Loan 00510]. The loan provided foreign exchange needed to complete projects in the fields of electric power, coal mining, non-ferrous metals development, industry, forest products utilization, agriculture and fisheries, and transportation.

Rene Brion, a World Bank Staff Member from the Treasurer's Department, describes some of the local color during a mission to Yugoslavia during late 1951 and early 1952, and reflects on the history of Sarajevo. This article originally appeared in the May 1952 issue of "International Bank Notes."



Author Rene Brion

The DC-3 of the Yugoslav Airlines flew over the Sava River, circled Belgrade, crossed the Danube River twice and landed smoothly at the Belgrade airport. The weather was glorious on December 1, 1951, and our flight from Frankfurt over the Alps had been exhilarating. Two American cars of the Yugoslav Government were waiting for us and took us to the city, where flags were floating in the wind, colorful in the sun. Blue, white and red national Yugoslav flags and red flags of the Communist Party were about evenly distributed. I must admit that the flags and the crowds in the streets were not there to welcome the arrival of an International Bank mission. It was purely coincidental that we arrived in Belgrade on the weekend of the national holiday of Yugoslavia. It was not coincidental, however, that Yugoslavia revealed to us, at first sight, the main components of her present equilibrium: socialism, nationalism, and Western techniques symbolized by the Douglas DC-3 and the Chevrolets.

This was the first day of a five-week stay in Yugoslavia. After some time spent in Belgrade meeting with officials of the National Bank and various ministries, we traveled around the country visiting Bank-financed projects and implementing, in the field, supervision of the Yugoslav loan.



*Women employed at the Rade Koncar Electrical Machinery Plant in Zagreb, Croatia, Yugoslavia.
Photo: United Nations*

Belgrade itself is a city where very little of the past remains—broad streets and avenues and most of the buildings not over 30 years old;



an opera house where we saw a very good ballet of folk dances; a few legitimate theatres (one of them staging “Death of a Salesman,” in translation, of course); several movie theatres playing, for the most part, American, British and French pictures; and football games on Sunday afternoons in a large new stadium packed with some 60,000 people.

In spite of all this, the atmosphere in Belgrade was not so Western as it sounds. I cannot explain exactly why. It was more a matter of feeling than of logic. Maybe it was the Cyrillic lettering in the newspapers and in the signs along the streets, the fur hats, the almost total absence of automobiles resulting in an abnormal silence; but above all, no doubt, it was my imagination in search of the exotic.

The West—we found it again later when we stayed a few days in Zagreb and Ljubljana. But to me, the climax of the trip to Yugoslavia was our visit to Sarajevo.

Sarajevo! I heard that name for the first time when I was a little boy of five, and it was associated in my mind with a tremendous change in my environment—a change, as I discovered later, which was only a reflection of the tremendous change in the world. Sarajevo! Every man and woman, every child in Europe, had said that name and said it again. It sounded like a strange curse. Until very recently I never thought I would see Sarajevo. Now that I have seen it I understand why it was in that city that Destiny chose to strike. It is a true “meeting of East and West,” but not a recent meeting, as in cities in the Near or Far East. It is a place where, for centuries, East and West have met through the coming and going of conquerors, travelers, merchants, and missionaries of various religions; and during those centuries Destiny was patiently building up the setting for the drama. On one side of the stage it elegantly placed mosques, with their minarets looking, in the sunset, like pink flamingos, and tortuous little streets smelling of oriental pastries. On the other side it constructed an Austrian town in that Franz Josef style which is a little too pompous, with just a little too much stucco and a little too many ornaments. And right in the middle, a peaceful river. And Destiny knew what it was doing in making that bridge so narrow.



Checking the assemblage of the frame and field coils of a large generator being built at the Rade Konar Plant at Zagreb, Yugoslavia.



There I stood at the very place where the shot of Princip, the Bosnian student, started humanity's current struggle against itself. It all started there. Maybe it had to start, and it might have started somewhere else; but it started there.

And I was pondering that controversial issue—whether History does repeat itself.