

ANTIFASCIST FRONT OF WOMEN OF SERBIA, 1945-1953: “NEW” WOMAN AND NATIONAL IDENTITIES

Abstract: *The article analyzes the activities of the Antifascist Front of Women (AFŽ) in Serbia in the period from 1945 to 1953. The main directions of work and peculiarities of this organization in the territory of Serbia, its role in the political engagement of women, as well as its attitude towards different national groups were studied. Special attention is paid to the efforts to create the identity of the new socialist woman and the attitude towards different nations and national identities. The changes that occur in the work of AFŽ and the attitude towards women due to the reconstruction of the country, the five-year plan and the conflict with the Cominform were discussed.*

Keywords: Serbia, Yugoslavia, national identities, national minorities, national belonging, socialism, new woman, Antifascist Front of Women (AFŽ)

Origin and development of AFŽ in Serbia

The emancipation of women, as one of the postulates of the communist ideology, stemmed from the communist aspiration towards the transformation of society, class liberation and emancipation of the working class.¹ It was also accepted by members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ), which led to an increase in the number of women in party membership from the second half of the 1930s. At the Fifth Conference of the KPJ, in 1940, the women's issue was specifically considered, and two women were elected to the Central Committee of the KPJ, which testified to the growth of the role of women in the Yugoslav communist movement.²

¹ Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women. Toward a Unitary Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 44–48.

² Neda Božinović, *Žensko pitanje u Srbiji u 19. i 20. veku* (Beograd: „Devedesetčetvrta“, „Žene u crnom“, 1996), 127–128.

The Second World War brought significant changes regarding the activities of women within the communist organization. After the military collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the April War, in 1941 an uprising broke out on the territory of occupied Serbia, one of the leading forces of which was the People's Liberation Movement under the leadership of the KPJ. The peculiarity of this movement at the time of the uprising was a significant activity aimed at winning over women. Lectures and meetings with women were held, they were organized to provide assistance to the movement, and in some places women's committees were formed, which were the forerunners of the AFŽ.³

From the founding of AFŽ of Yugoslavia in 1942 until the end of WWII, two basic groups of tasks can be distinguished in the work of this organization: helping the People's Liberation Movement and working on the political and cultural emancipation of women.⁴ The development of the AFŽ was conditioned by the activities of the People's Liberation Movement, which had the effect that this organization developed more slowly in Serbia during the war.⁵ During that time, the formation and activity of the Yugoslav AFŽ organization was greatly influenced by certain women from the territory of Serbia, primarily Mitra Mitrović and Spasenija Babović.

Already during the war, discussions began about the role of the AFŽ after the liberation of the country and in general the need for its continued existence or possible abolition. On this occasion, Milovan Đilas stated his position in 1943 in the file "Prospects for the development of AFŽ". He expressed the expectation that after liberation the AFŽ will become a mass organization that will mobilize all layers of women and enable even those with a low level of education who are "illiterate, working and suffering" to stand out and assert themselves.⁶ He believed that the main task of the AFŽ will be further work on the achievement of equality by including women in the economy, politics and society, their activation in public life and breaking the conservative resistance that would arise during this process. These views were followed up by Mitra Mitrović in the article "On the Antifascist Front of Women" published in *Žena danas* in September 1944.⁷ She pointed out that AFŽ's activity does not stop after the liberation of the country, but

³ Jovan Marjanović, *Ustanak i narodno-oslobodilački pokret u Srbiji 1941*. (Beograd: Institut društvenih nauka, 1963), 277.

⁴ Lydia Sklevicky, *Konji, žene, ratovi*, Odabrala i priredila Dunja Rihtman Auguštin (Zagreb: Ženska infoteka, 1996), 25.

⁵ Лубинка Шкодрић, *Жена у окупираној Србији 1941–1944* (Београд: Институт за савремену историју, Архипелаг, 2020), 491.

⁶ Војни архив (ВА), Народнослободилачка војска Југославије (НОВЈ), 12-1-52.

⁷ Mitra Mitrović, „О Antifašističkom frontu žena“, *Žena danas*, br. 33, septembar 1944, 6–8.

that it takes on a new role. That role was "building the foundations of a new Yugoslavia" for which AFŽ should gather as many women as possible and work on the creation of a "new woman of Yugoslavia". The post-war activity of the AFŽ therefore has a special significance, since in that period the basic principles of the new identity of women were constructed through the work of this organization. To the greatest extent, those activities concerned the issues of equality, the legal and economic position of women and their status in marriage and family.⁸

The AFŽ of Yugoslavia, as one of the mass organizations that became part of the People's Front of Yugoslavia during its constitution in August 1945, became the only recognized form of gathering of women. Its activity was organized hierarchically and the main bearer of the activity was the Central Committee of the AFŽ of Yugoslavia, which transmitted work instructions and guidelines to the republic committees.⁹

In Serbia, the AFŽ's work intensified after the liberation. A few days after the liberation of Belgrade, in October 1944, the City Committee of the AFŽ of Belgrade was formed.¹⁰ Then, in January 1945, at the First Antifascist Meeting of the Women of Serbia, the Main (Republic) Committee (GO) of the AFŽ for Serbia was elected.

In order to encourage the mass organization of women, to win them over and engage them in the construction of the new government and society, the AFŽ tried to form its organization and committees in all populated areas so that every village and town had its own committee. Although it managed to gather a large number of women, this organizational goal was never fully realized. Certain committees existed only formally and were not active, or there were oscillations in their work.¹¹ Over time, it was even acknowledged that the AFŽ was becoming an organization of women activists.¹²

⁸ Ivana Pantelić, Ljubinka Škodrić i Svetlana Stefanović, „Nova žena – Ženska društva i ženski identiteti u Srbiji. Jugoslovenska iskustva i prakse“, *Limes Plus. Geopolitički časopis*, 2 (2021), 173–204.

⁹ Државни архив Србије (ДАС), Централни комитет Савеза комуниста Србије (Ђ-2), Комисија за друштвене и масовне организације, ф. 4.

¹⁰ „Београдске жене против фашизма, за слободу и коначну победу над непријатељом. На јучерашњем успелом збору изабран је Градски одбор Антифашистичког фронта жена Београда“, *Политика*, 30. октобар 1944, 3.

¹¹ Until 1947, there were 18 district committees of the AFŽ operating in the territory of Serbia, but due to the administrative reorganization of the country, they were abolished and direct work of the Main Committee of the AFŽ of Serbia began with county and city committees, followed by the formation of regional committees. During 1950, the Main Committee of the AFŽ of Serbia determined that in 42 cases the work of the AFŽ was satisfactory, in 49 cases AFŽ committees existed only formally, and in 31 cases the work of the committee was assessed as weak. Архив Југославије (АЈ), Антифашистички фронт жена Југославије (141), 13-530.

¹² АЈ, Централни комитет Савеза комуниста Југославије - ЦК СКЈ (507), Комисија за рад међу женама, XVII/9.

Apart from the problems surrounding the realization of the plans to gather all women, very quickly the enthusiasm and level of engagement of the women who were active in its ranks waned. The GO of the AFŽ for Serbia noticed as early as May 1945 the “subsiding of the great enthusiasm that arose after the liberation of Serbia”.¹³ Problems at work were created, among other things, by the still unstable political situation, disagreement with the new authorities and the order, but also by family interference with women's work and underestimation of their activities and their ability to organize themselves independently.

The decline in activities and the failure to include and engage all women in the work of the AFŽ resulted from organizational weaknesses due to lack of autonomy. Subordination to the Communist Party organization and the creation of a new regime had the effect that the autonomy and independence in the work of the AFŽ was increasingly narrowed over time. In addition, changes in the organization, instead of improvement, led to even greater disorganization and weakening. Such was the case with the termination of professional work. In 1948, it was considered to be the cause of the lack of initiative and persistence in the GO of the AFŽ of Serbia. The opinion was gradually formed that the “almost violent attraction of women to the AFŽ” should be overcome and the organization should be based on the voluntary activity of women and the choice of jobs that interest them the most.¹⁴ To this end, AFŽ sections were established, among which the “Mother and Child” section was the most widespread. However, since 1950, with the abolition of professional work in the AFŽ, the activity further declined, and it became even more subordinated to the work of the People's Front.¹⁵

Over time, women were less and less represented in the People's Front, government bodies, companies and cooperatives. At the same time, the presence of patriarchal norms and behavior returned and increased. Already in 1951, it was observed that “the woman has completely returned home”, that the AFŽ is not active, but that the women “remember fondly the days when they worked very selflessly for their elevation even though the conditions were incomparably more difficult”.¹⁶ Despite the repeated remarks about the decline of women's interest in working in various organizations and their poor representation, no significant changes were made. Stagnation in the work of the AFŽ continued to accompany

¹³ ДАС, Главни одбор АФЖ Србије (Ђ-79), ф. 2.

¹⁴ Архив Војводине (АВ), Покрајински одбор Антифашистичког фронта жена за Војводину (338), 5.1.1.4.

¹⁵ Gordana Stojaković, *Rodna perspektiva u novinama Antifašističkog fronta žena (1945–1953)* (Novi Sad: Zavod za ravnopravnost polova, 2012), 45.

¹⁶ АЈ, 141-33-257.

this organization until its closure in 1953, when the 4th Congress of the AFŽ of Yugoslavia adopted a proposal to abolish it and establish the Union of Women's Societies of Yugoslavia.

Achieving equality and activity of the AFŽ

One of the foundations on which the identity of a women under socialism was built was their political and legal equality, which was promised and implemented during the war through national liberation committees.¹⁷ The Law on Voters Lists passed in August 1945 gave women the right to vote in the first post-war elections, and the AFŽ played a significant role in promoting women's equality, advocating the implementation of their newly acquired rights and inviting women to vote in elections.

Apart from persuading women to support the new government in the elections, the AFŽ also worked to break the resistance of the male part of the population. In Eastern Serbia, the agitation for women's suffrage included special work with men, who were encouraged to approve and support female family members to vote.¹⁸ A step forward compared to the past was also reflected during 1945 in the holding of special pre-election rallies that gathered only women. Women prominent in their home regions most often took part in them. In their speeches, they tried to contribute to the adaptation of traditional views to changes. Thus, Mitra Mitrović pointed out at the gathering of women in Užice that achieving equality does not imply breaking with traditional female roles, but rather the additional involvement of women in building the state. She believed that women, apart from the family, should also contribute and restore the country and that "no one has the right to take away so much strength from the fatherland, which lies in the millions of women and mothers, and which they are ready to provide and have provided for the good of their country and people."¹⁹

The first parliamentary elections in which women participated in Serbia were the elections for the Constituent Assembly in November 1945. The Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (FNRJ) Constitution, adopted in January 1946,

¹⁷ Dušan Živković, *Postanak i razvitak narodne vlasti u Jugoslaviji 1941-1942*. (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1969), 173.

¹⁸ *KPS u Istočnoj Srbiji. Okružni komitet 1945-1948*, priredili Momčilo Mitrović i Strahinja Popović (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, Arhiv Srbije, Istorijski arhiv „Timočka krajina“, 2012), 160.

¹⁹ „Нема нико право да отаџбини одузима толике снаге које леже у милионским масама жена и мајки“, *Политика*, 29. октобар 1945, 5.

guaranteed the equality of women with men in all areas of “state, economic and socio-political life”. According to the constitution, women had the right to equal pay for equal work as men, and they were guaranteed special protection in the employment, as well as the protection of the interests of mothers and children. Provisions on equality were also applied in the laws that were subsequently adopted, and were also included in the Constitution of the People's Republic of Serbia in 1947.²⁰

Despite the achieved legal equality, the struggle for the implementation and realization of women's political rights was a process that the AFŽ continued to lead even after the participation of women in the first elections. After crushing the initial resistance, it was necessary to influence the environment and the women themselves to continue using their voting rights. During the elections for local committees in 1949 on the territory of Niš, rumors spread in several places that women no longer had the right to vote. Then, during 1950, the slogan “women will not vote in these elections” was present, among others, in the territory of Kruševac, which influenced AFŽ committees to take action to suppress this phenomenon.²¹

Participating in elections, in addition to exercising political rights, gave women personal importance, but also the opportunity to provide support to women who were presented to them as identity models. These were participants in the People's Liberation Movement, and the most prominent of them, in addition to holding positions in the government and in the Party, also held important positions in the AFŽ.²² However, this largely hindered the work of the AFŽ, since prominent communist women neglected the work in this organization, and turned to the real centers of power.²³ It often happened that women who stood out for their work in AFŽ were transferred to work in other bodies, and it was later difficult to find suitable replacements for them.²⁴ In her analysis of these statements, Vida Tomšič emphasized that this was exactly the task of the AFŽ. She stated that women had to work on their own elevation in order to politically and ideologically influence ot-

²⁰ Вера Гудац Додић, *Жена у социјализму. Положај жене у Србији у другој половини 20. века* (Београд, Институт за новију историју Србије 2006), 10–15.

²¹ ДАС, Ђ-2, Организационо-инструкторска управа. Разно.

²² Ivana Pantelić, *Partizanke kao građanke. Društvena emancipacija partizanki u Srbiji 1945–1953*. (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, Evoluta, 2011), 164.

²³ Gradually, a closed circle of influential women who occupied leading positions emerged. Among them, Spasenija Babović, Mitra Mitrović, Milka Minić, Ljubinka Milosavljević and Bosa Cvetić stood out. Ibid, 72

²⁴ AJ, 141-36-284

hers, and that the AFŽ should be a kind of school for female personnel in which they would overcome the feeling of inferiority, eliminate prejudices, gain new knowledge and experiences and thus rise.²⁵

The KPJ and the government often considered that the women's issue was solved by achieving equality. Based on this, they were convinced that there were no special women's issues that would require women to have a separate organization in the sense of feminist societies, but that the AFŽ should facilitate wider contact of the party organization with women.²⁶ The party authorities wanted the new position and role of women to be presented "not as a result of the AFŽ's activities, but as a result of the existence of the people's government and the proper solution for the women's issue by that government."²⁷ In this, the AFŽ was to be used to involve women as much as possible in social and political events.

The acquisition of legal and political equality marked a radical change compared to the previous era, which was particularly emphasized in the party's rhetoric as an achievement that won the favor among women. Women were presented as the group that gained the most from the changes. However, while on the one hand it was emphasized that women had won and deserved equality with their contribution in the war, on the other hand there was a real impression that they had an obligation to repay by helping the government.

Equality was achieved within the framework of legal norms, but the gap between the normative and the proclaimed in relation to reality was noticeable. Despite the significant positions occupied by prominent communist women, the wider representation of women was low not only in the government bodies, but also among the membership of the communist organization. By the end of the observed period, the decline in the influence and activities of the AFŽ was accompanied by an additional decline in the already insufficient representation of women in government bodies and social organizations. These changes are most apparent when observing the elections for people's committees in 1949, when 7.37% of women were elected to these bodies in Serbia, while 2.28% of them were elected in 1952.²⁸ Among the reasons that caused this decline in the representation of women was the fact that in 1952, voting was not done according to lists, but for individual candidates, which had the effect that women were less represented

²⁵ II Пленум Централног одбора Антифашистичког фронта жена Југославије, 19–20. септембар (Београд: Централни одбор АФЖ Југославије, 1948), 113.

²⁶ AJ, 507, Комисија за рад међу женама XVII/3.

²⁷ AJ, 507, Идеолошка комисија, ф. 36, VI/1-b-46.

²⁸ Mirjana Stanišić, „Društveni položaj žene u Srbiji 1944–1952“ (magistarska teza, Univerzitet u Beogradu, Filozofski fakultet, Odeljenje za istoriju, 2003), 218.

and elected. In addition, they were nominated in the last places on the lists. Besides that, the jobs of committee members became more and more complex, which made it difficult to engage women, who were already burdened with taking care of the family or were insufficiently educated for increasingly demanding political jobs. These phenomena were noticed and commented on within the AFŽ. In 1953, Vida Tomšič found the justification for them in the woman's burden with the household and the family, even though significant efforts were made to overcome these very obstacles.²⁹

Creating the identity of a new woman

Apart from direct contact through work in committees, meetings and various types of conferences, the AFŽ's press played a significant role in conveying messages to women and creating roles intended for them.³⁰ Its importance is evidenced by the fact that by 1948, 14 women's monthly magazines were published in Yugoslavia with a total circulation of 400,000 copies.³¹ Magazines had their own hierarchy that determined their content and purpose. While *Žena danas*, as a body of the AFŽ of Yugoslavia, to the greatest extent served educated women and activists of the AFŽ committee for guidelines and directives in their work,³² *Zora*, like other AFŽ magazines that were published in the republics, was intended for common women, housewives, peasants and farm workers in area of Serbia.³³

In this period, women's magazines propagated a new model of women in socialist society, so the women's press had an educational, but also a political-ideological and mobilizing role. In the beginning, its role was to mobilize women in the reconstruction of Yugoslav society as actors equal to men. It promoted active female roles, such as women who worked on the reconstruction of

²⁹ „Рад међу женама није дужност само другарица већ свих политичких активиста и организација“, *Жена данас*, бр. 105, март 1953, 5.

³⁰ Gordana Stojaković, „Antifašistički front žena Jugoslavije (AFŽ) 1946–1953. Pregled kroz štampu“, u: *Ciklus tribina: Rod i levica*, ur. Lidija Vasiljević (Beograd: Ženski informaciono-dokumentacioni trening centar, 2012), 14.

³¹ The number of papers was then reduced to 10 magazines with a circulation of 370,000. AJ, 141-15-715.

³² G. Stojaković, *Rodna perspektiva u novinama Antifašističkog fronta žena*, 173.

³³ This division is also visible when analyzing the magazine *Žena danas* and the magazine *Nova žena* published by the AFŽ of Bosnia and Herzegovina. More details: Ivana Pantelić, „*Nova žena*, emancipatorski diskurs u časopisima *Nova žena* i *Žena danas* od 1945. do 1955. godine“, u: *Prijelomne godine bosanskohercegovačke prošlosti* (2), uredio Sedad Bešlija (Sarajevo: Institut za historiju, 2021), 171–194.

the country or were gaining education. Communist propaganda celebrated the women fighters, and, the model of a strong woman who was a shock-worker, a heroine of work, a heroine of reconstruction and a model mother was presented as an ideal. These models, with the exception of the emphasis on motherhood, were far from traditional views of women, and at the same time they were a mirror of the value system of the socialist order and social expectations. They originated not only from the emancipatory values and ideals of communism, but also from economic and political needs.³⁴ The construction of a new government and the economic reconstruction of the country meant that they quickly came to life in practice.

After the conflict with the Cominform, especially during 1949, it was insisted that the AFŽ press reduce the content that was taken from Soviet women's magazines.³⁵ In this period, the women's press was reproached by the party authorities for insufficiently reporting on the conflict with the Cominform, or even for its superficial and simplified presentation while taking a mild and defensive stance.³⁶ In addition to the criticism of the monotonous reporting, there were also objections that the women's press had until then been too much directed against American imperialism, that it "often ran to the left" and that therefore it seemed that Yugoslavia was "in a state of war with all countries except the countries of people's democracy".³⁷ Under the influence of this criticism, one of the identity role models presented to women through the AFŽ magazines, namely the women of the Soviet Union, disappeared in this period.

The foundations of the new identity of women rested on their participation in the construction and modernization of the post-war society in large numbers, which was expected to fundamentally change Yugoslavia. The AFŽ representatives believed that, first of all, by raising the cultural and educational level of women, they would carry out their ideological transformation into builders of a new social order, and distance them from the "overthrown exploiter classes and various imperialist agents".³⁸ The education of women was therefore necessary not only for cultural

³⁴ Вера Гудац Додић, „Нови лик жене у југословенском социјализму“, у: *Нови човек. Конституисање српског и југословенског друштва у 20. веку кроз идеологије и јавне политике*, уредио Александар Стојановић (Београд: Институт за новију историју Србије, 2023), 208–209.

³⁵ Ivan Simic, *Soviet Influences on Postwar Yugoslav Gender Policies* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 39.

³⁶ AJ, 507, Идеолошка комисија, ф. 26, II/5-b-39.

³⁷ Ibid, II/5-b-25.

³⁸ AB, 338. 1.2.2.2.3.1.

and educational reasons, but also for political and ideological reasons. In that way, they wanted to include uneducated women from underdeveloped regions to join the AFŽ organization and win them over with the educational campaigns and give them health and hygiene advice on child care and household management.

These actions were especially intense immediately after the liberation, and they continued in the later period as well. In her speech for the celebration of 8 March 1947, Spasenija Babović pointed out that in Serbia alone, during the literacy campaign, 106,000 women learned to read and write, and that another 140,000 of them attended courses for the illiterate.³⁹ The following year, she also emphasized literacy as a condition for social engagement of women and their participation in economic, political and cultural life.⁴⁰ During 1948, there were remarks that about 207,177 women were involved in literacy campaigns in Serbia, but that 166,099 of them had learned to read and write.⁴¹ The AFŽ also made efforts so that after the completion of the courses women would continue with the application of the acquired knowledge. In addition to literacy campaigns, various courses were being organized aimed at winning over women who had a special interest in them, such as training in sewing and embroidery.⁴²

Since the establishment of the AFŽ in Serbia, it was generally acknowledged that women participated in large numbers and willingly in voluntary work actions and various campaigns of providing and collecting aid, but it was constantly repeated that cultural, ideological and political work with them was not sufficiently developed. Women's magazines were also criticized for insufficient reporting on these topics.⁴³ One of the causes of this phenomenon, which was recognized by the AFŽ itself, was that the women who were in charge of work in this organization at the local level were not skilled enough for that work themselves. That is why different courses were organized for them, but despite that, objections remained. The most common forms of political and cultural work with women were reading groups where mostly women's and daily newspapers were read and analyzed. Their importance especially increased during the conflict with the Cominform, since the Cominform Resolution and the response of the Yugoslav authorities were explained in this way. According to some data, in 1948, there were 8,565 reading groups in Serbia and 1,087 political seminars for women were held in the AFŽ.⁴⁴

³⁹ AJ, 141-14-188.

⁴⁰ *Други конгрес жена Србије* (Београд: Главни одбор АФЖ Србије 1948), 103.

⁴¹ *II Пленум Централног одбора Антифашистичког фронта жена Југославије*, 77–79.

⁴² AJ, 141-36-221.

⁴³ AJ, 141-13-705.

⁴⁴ AB, 338.1.2.2.2.4.

The construction of a new woman through her participation in the construction of a new society corresponded simultaneously with the growing need for workers. The participation of women in the reconstruction of the country, especially immediately after the end of the war, was not only formal, but they participated in performing heavy physical works such as repairing roads, digging canals, transporting and cutting wood.⁴⁵ The AFŽ mobilized women to contribute to the construction of various facilities through voluntary work, and women's work brigades were also organized. Work and physical contribution to the construction of a new society became one of the basic social values and measures of patriotism.⁴⁶ The anxiety and uncertainty of the war affected the collective psychosis which, after the end of the war, was even manifested and released in the form of enormous post-war enthusiasm.⁴⁷ The euphoric mood, excessive enthusiasm for work and the post-war ecstasy due to the victory did not escape the women either, and they responded in large numbers to calls to make a contribution as equal participants in the construction of socialism. However, over time, that enthusiasm began to fade, and the need remained for the development of the economy to involve women more and more.

A new wave of workforce mobilization began in 1947, when the implementation of the five-year plan began, which predicted an increase in the number of people employed in the economy. One of the main tasks of the five-year plan was to "implement the labor force mobilization plan on time and in full." At the same time, two groups were seen as reservoirs of labor force – youth and women. The AFŽ had the task to politically explain to women their role in the implementation of the plan, but also to influence them to get involved in the economy, to have women's representatives join various councils and committees, to present them with the advantages of employment such as wages, social and health insurance, paid vacation and acquiring qualifications. The organization of nursery and kindergarten work was of particular importance.⁴⁸ Although there was resistance in the traditional layers of society to the wider employment of women, general poverty and scarcity influenced, along with ideological attitudes, the increase in the number of employed women.

⁴⁵ AJ, 141-13-705.

⁴⁶ Ivana Dobrivojević, *Selo i grad. Transformacija agrarnog društva Srbije 1945–1955* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2013), 98–99.

⁴⁷ Carol S. Lilly, *Power and Persuasion. Ideology and Rhetoric in Communist Yugoslavia 1944–1953* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2001), 31.

⁴⁸ AJ, 141-32-23.

The AFŽ played a significant role in the fight to improve the position of employed women, as this topic was often discussed within the work of its bodies. Concrete measures were also taken to protect the interests and rights of individual women, especially those whose position and status were assessed as vulnerable. AFŽ representatives held meetings with company management and union representatives and influenced the protection of the rights of working women.⁴⁹

The employment of women was a synonym of modernization and a necessary element for the acquisition of economic independence of women, on which their emancipation was based. However, the rationalization of economic production in the early 1950s led to a decrease in the number of employed women. It was women who were most often fired when the number of laborers was reduced, and their employment was increasingly considered unprofitable, while the opening of nurseries and kindergartens was declared irrational and expensive. The dismissal of employed women was also conditioned by their insufficient qualifications, since they were mostly unskilled and semi-skilled labor despite the efforts made by the AFŽ in their training.⁵⁰

Apart from reconstruction work, in the countryside, women were expected to contribute to agricultural production and purchase policy through the AFŽ. The ideal image of a woman in the village was a member of the cooperative. As part of promoting women joining cooperatives, the AFŽ encouraged the establishment of seasonal kindergartens that worked during field work and relieved women of childcare responsibilities.⁵¹ During 1948, it was particularly noticeable that little effort was made in Serbia to involve women in the work of cooperatives, that their number was lagging behind the number of involved men, and that cooperatives did not have enough plans for the work and contribution of women.⁵² In praise of the women's press in 1949 for paying a lot of attention to the issue of villages and cooperatives, there were also complaints that women in cooperatives were idealized and not looked at objectively. At the end of this period, during 1953, data was presented that there were over 25% of women in agricultural cooperatives, but that their number in the management boards was minimal and did not exceed 2%, and that they were not active enough in the assemblies of agricultural cooperatives.⁵³

⁴⁹ AJ, 141-13-602.

⁵⁰ В. Гудац Додић, *Жена у социјализму*, 58.

⁵¹ ДАС, Ђ-2, Комисија за друштвене и масовне организације, ф.4.

⁵² AJ, 507, Комисија за рад међу женама, XVII/10.

⁵³ АВ, 338.1.2.2.2.4.

Although these topics were present from the beginning of its work, over time the AFŽ paid more and more attention to issues of motherhood and child care. The construction of a new identity was based on the struggle to change consciousness, habits and customs, and one of the roles of the AFŽ in that process was to influence women as mothers who, in addition to personal development and contribution to the construction of a socialist society, would also educate their offspring in this direction.⁵⁴ The formation of a new identity of women was therefore important as it would ensure the reproduction of the ideological matrix for new generations and thereby strengthen the foundations of the government. In his speeches, Josip Broz Tito often emphasized the conviction that women who participated in the construction of socialism would become the best educators of the new generations, as well as that the most important task of women was to take care of children and educate the new socialist man.⁵⁵ As the other roles of the new socialist woman slowly declined, motherhood became more prominent. Although these were important social expectations with new identity contents, they returned the woman to the traditional family framework. The AFŽ tried to overcome that situation by emphasizing that caring for future generations and taking care of children was also a political task. Numerous campaigns, courses and lectures were held for women on household management and child care. These campaigns were not exclusively educational, but also had a political and ideological role. Motherhood and child care were less and less part of the private sphere of life, and the state and the party tried to establish control and influence over future generations by interfering in them.⁵⁶

With the institutionalization of child care, the establishment of a network of nurseries and kindergartens, as well as legal regulations, significant steps were taken to protect and support motherhood, and to partly relieve women from family obligations so that they could get a job. To that end, efforts were also made to form a network of public services and canteens that would help with household chores, but they also had a limited reach.⁵⁷ The woman, in addition to her professional engagement, was still burdened with taking care of the house and family, within the framework of which the traditional roles survived and where she performed most of the family and household tasks and responsibilities. These circumstances influenced the weak social and political engagement of women.

⁵⁴ AJ, 507, Комисија за рад међу женама, XVII/9.

⁵⁵ M. Stanišić, *op. cit.*, 125.

⁵⁶ В. Гудац Додић, „Нови лик жене у југословенском социјализму“, 224.

⁵⁷ Момчило Исић и Вера Гудац Додић, *Жена је темељ куће. Жена и породица у Србији током двадесетог века* (Београд: Институт за новију историју Србије, 2011), 175–183.

Attitude towards Serbian nationality and identity

Since most of its activities were focused on creating the identity of a new socialist woman, the national question was not one of the AFŽ's priorities. It touched this issue only in the circumstances when it was an obstacle for this organization in the struggle to build a new government. The building of socialism was supposed to become a central and unifying force, and it was expected that each nation would fight against nationalism within its own ranks and stand up for the rights of national minorities.

The foundations of the post-war multinational and multi-confessional Yugoslav state were based on the idea of brotherhood and unity of the Yugoslav peoples and their equality. By building the future on these foundations, it was expected that the severe consequences of the civil war would be neutralized.⁵⁸ In this respect, the AFŽ followed the policy of the KPJ, which consistently emphasized the importance of the equality of nations, national tolerance and brotherhood and unity, but it avoided confronting the crimes committed during the war.⁵⁹ In June 1945, Josip Broz Tito referred to possible doubts in this regard in his speech at the First Congress of the AFŽ of Yugoslavia: "We cannot allow anyone to raise the question of revenge for what happened in 1941. We took revenge, and that is enough, and no one has the right to do that anymore."⁶⁰

The experience of integral Yugoslavism from the period of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia influenced the rejection of the concept of the creation of the Yugoslav nation, but there was a belief that national identities should not be suppressed as they represented a transitional phase towards socialism.⁶¹ Ethnonational pluralism included the recognition and equality of all Yugoslav nations, which were supposed to enjoy equal treatment, with the expectation that ethnic antagonisms would disappear with the development of socialism.⁶² The authorities, as well as the AFŽ, believed that the national question had been resolved and that national differences had been neutralized through joint efforts to build a new society. In

⁵⁸ Коста Николић, *Мит о партизанском југословенству* (Београд: Завод за уџбенике, 2015), 467–468.

⁵⁹ C. S. Lilly, *op. cit.*, 30.

⁶⁰ „Ја се обраћам вама, женама Југославије, равноправним члановима наше заједнице, и тражим од вас да посветите сву своју пажњу и сву своју снагу у првом реду питању учвршћивања наше власти“ - рекао је маршал Тито“, *Политика* 18. јуни 1945, 1.

⁶¹ Мари-Жанин Чалић, *Историја Југославије у 20. веку* (Београд: Clio, 2013), 225–226.

⁶² Холм Зундхаузен, *Историја Србије од 19. до 21 века* (Београд: Clio, 2009), 372.

this respect, the socialist dimension of the identity had priority in relation to the Yugoslav one.⁶³

When it comes to the Serbian nation, the interwar legacy and divisions created during the occupation and the civil war played a special role in the relationship towards it. Apart from a radical confrontation with the most prominent class, political and war opponents in the immediate post-war repression and retaliation, the rest of the civil forces were kept under control, and efforts were made to win over those who were receptive to cooperation.⁶⁴

The peculiarity of the Main Committee of the AFŽ of Serbia, elected in January 1945, was that its composition largely included members of earlier civil women's associations and prominent public figures.⁶⁵ In this respect, in 1946, there were praises that "all honest and loyal women of former women's organizations" had joined the AFŽ. However, this cooperation represented only a short-term period.⁶⁶ Although they initially occupied important positions in the AFŽ, women from earlier civic associations were gradually pushed out, such as the professor and writer Katarina Bogdanović.

Immediately after the liberation, there were great tensions among the population. At the same time, the new authorities, on the one hand, rhetorically emphasized the desire for reconciliation, while on the other hand, they carefully monitored and punished any attempt to express views that were contrary to the official ones. As early as in December 1944, the AFŽ City Committee of Belgrade discussed the issue of attitudes towards women who behaved passively, as well as those who were sympathetic to the Ravna Gora movement, but showed willingness to cooperate. It was concluded that they should not be rejected, but that they should not be accepted in the AFŽ committees.⁶⁷ During 1945, this committee monitored the behavior of women who were considered hostile to the new government and viewed outbursts against them in a conciliatory or benign manner.⁶⁸ Indignation and intolerance were also reflected in the views

⁶³ Božidar Jezernik, *Yugoslavia without Yugoslavs. History of a National Idea* (New York: Bergahn Books, 2003), 248.

⁶⁴ Наташа Миљевић, *Југословенска власт и српско грађанство 1944–1950* (Београд: Институт за новију историју Србије, 2009), 461.

⁶⁵ Among the members were also members of former civic women's associations that were active during the occupation, such as Anastasija Naka Spasić. The unfulfilled plans to elect Krista Đorđević as the president of the AFŽ of Serbia should have represented a kind of compromise with civil forces. N. Božinović, *Žensko pitanje*, 148.

⁶⁶ ДАС, Б-2, Комисија за кадрове, ф. 29.

⁶⁷ ДАС, Б-79, ф. 1, Записници са седница Градског одбора АФЖ Београд.

⁶⁸ ДАС, Б-2, Организационо-инструкторска управа. Разно.

expressed at the meetings of the AFŽ Belgrade City Committee in October 1945 that female opponents of the government should not be prevented from speaking out for the sake of detection and that one should not be fooled “that they will be our friends”.⁶⁹

The effect of these circumstances was that in October 1945 the AFŽ in Belgrade comprised about 50% of women, but it was estimated that 10-20% of that number could be relied on. There was also dissatisfaction over the large pre-election women's conference in Belgrade. The press reported that about 70,000 women participated in it, but at the meetings of the City Committee it was stated that there were 58,000 of them. It was determined that with 100,000 registered women with the right to vote, the conference “was unsatisfactory” and many women were left on the sidelines.⁷⁰

Women were viewed with a lot of mistrust stemming from the belief that due to their lower level of education and increased religiosity, they were easily susceptible to enemy propaganda.⁷¹ It was even stated that “the enemies counted on the women of Serbia as their reserve” and that they were particularly inclined to monarchism. Contrary to this, women were also seen as a repository of personnel “who were not touched by the party and political system and the struggle in the old Yugoslavia, so they were not compromised like their husbands and brothers.”⁷²

Despite the declarative attempts to win them over, the resistance to the new authorities, especially in central Serbia, can also be seen in the fact that in the first post-war elections, compared to other Yugoslav areas, in Serbia without provinces the lowest percentage of the population voted (77%). Abstentionists, those who were deprived of the right to vote and those who voted in a box without a list made up about 28.7% of voters on this occasion in the entire territory of Serbia.⁷³ Records on the percentage of women who voted in the elections indicated that in some regions their turnout was very low. Thus, 35% of women voted in the Valjevo county, and only 15% in the Podrinje district.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ ДАС, Ђ-79, ф. 1.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ *I Пленум Централног одбора А.Ф.Ж.-а Југославије* (Београд: Централни одбор АФЖ Југославије, 1946), 14.

⁷² АЈ, 507, Комисија за рад међу женама, XVII/4.

⁷³ Srđan Cvetković, „Proces zatiranja parlamentarizma u Srbiji i oblici pritisaka na opoziciju uoči izbora 11. novembra 1945.“, *Istorija 20. veka*, 2 (2020), 168.

⁷⁴ M. Stanišić, *op. cit.*, 205.

Josip Broz Tito's speeches at meetings of the Serbian and Yugoslav AFŽ in January and June 1945 were the main landmark in the formation of the AFŽ's political positions. During 1945, the press mostly attacked the former civil parties and the pre-war regime and authorities. It was said that they wanted a return to the old ways, that they were against the new rights gained by women, but after the election, those accusations mostly fell silent.⁷⁵ The speeches and addresses of Josip Broz Tito and other representatives of the government during 1945 were coordinated with the current situation and hierarchically measured, so sharp attacks and words were mainly directed by those who were on the lower ladder in terms of positions and proved their loyalty in that way. In January 1945, Josip Broz Tito addressed the women at the First Antifascist Rally of Serbian Women with the words "Serbian mothers and sisters" and spoke about the attitude towards the forces in emigration, the position of King Petar and the wartime contribution of the People's Liberation Movement. He called on women to participate in the control of the authorities, but also those who sabotaged them and presented themselves as friends, which could refer to civil forces that cooperated with the new authorities.⁷⁶ On this occasion, Ruža Pribićević, who was later elected as the president of the Main Committee of the AFŽ of Serbia, spoke much more sharply than Josip Broz Tito and Spasenija Babović. She criticized King Petar II Karadorđević, stressing that he "praised and helped those who had slaughtered and destroyed the Serbian people."⁷⁷

At the First Congress of the AFŽ Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito addressed the gathered women as "women of Yugoslavia, equal members of our community". Unlike his first address to the women of Serbia almost six months before that, this time his appearance was much more combative and open. He strongly expressed that the greatest enemies of brotherhood and unity were primarily the Chetniks in Serbia and the Ustasha in Croatia, as well as all those who had been against the People's Liberation Movement in the war. He resolutely advocated for the equality of the Yugoslav peoples: "There can be no favoring of Croats at the expense of Serbs, no favoring of Serbs at the expense of Croats or other peoples, no favoring of one at the expense of the other."⁷⁸

⁷⁵ „Осми март. Међународни дан жена“, *Политика*, 8. март 1945, 6.

⁷⁶ „Ја сам увјерен – има прилично знакова који то говоре - да ће наши велики савезници коначно убрзати оно натезање у Лондону, па да се споразум одмах спроведе у дјело - или да не буде. То је моја порука Лондону““, *Политика*, 29. јануар 1945, 1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 2.

⁷⁸ „Ја се обраћам вама, женама Југославије, равноправним члановима наше заједнице, и тражим од вас да посветите сву своју пажњу и сву своју снагу у првом реду питању учвршћивања наше власти“ - рекао је маршал Тито“, *Политика*, 18. јуни 1945, 1.

The negative attitude towards the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was one of the elements on the basis of which socialist Yugoslavia was built, which was first of all reflected in the rejection of the monarchy, the introduction of a federal system and the support of nations that were considered vulnerable, weak and exploited.⁷⁹ In that context, the attitude towards the Serbian people was twofold. It was recognized for its massive participation in the People's Liberation Movement and its contribution to liberation, but the interwar "Greater Serbian hegemony" was constantly emphasized. The contribution and participation of the Serbian people in the construction of the Yugoslav state could not be ignored, but their supremacy as the most numerous nation in the Yugoslav state was to be disabled. In this context, the contribution to the People's Liberation Movement was buffered by highlighting the activity of the collaborationist forces in Serbia, which was then equated with the activities of the Ravna Gora movement. The Ravna Gora movement was particularly attacked as a wartime competitor of the People's Liberation Movement and additionally discredited by highlighting the crimes committed by its members against women and children.

In 1946, special attention was paid to the capture and trial of the leader of the Ravna Gora movement, Draža Mihailović. On the occasion of the capture of Draža Mihailović, AFŽ committees sent telegrams of gratitude, and then encouraged the women whose family members had been killed by this movement to do the same.⁸⁰ The court proceedings were then monitored, and some AFŽ committees, even those outside the territory of Serbia, sought the death penalty for Mihailović.⁸¹ In the area of South Banat alone, during July 1946, 90 conferences were held where this trial was discussed.⁸² Women's magazines reported on it in detail, especially *Zora*, in which Mihailović was qualified as "the biggest criminal and traitor".⁸³ Even after the end of this process, the condemnation of the Ravna Gora movement was used for a long time in the rhetoric of the AFŽ, especially when implementing measures that were faced by resistance of the population. In 1948, Spasenija Babović, while reviewing the resistance that arose towards the compulsory delivery policy, even among women active in the AFŽ and participants in the People's Liberation

⁷⁹ Dejan Jović, "Communist Yugoslavia and its 'Others'", in *Ideologies and National Identities. The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*, edited by John R. Lampe and Mark Mazower (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 283–284.

⁸⁰ ДАС, Ђ-79, ф. 3.

⁸¹ Архив Босне и Херцеговине, Главни одбор АФЖ Босне и Херцеговине, Општи списи, 1945–1946, ф.1.

⁸² АВ, 338.5.1.1.7.

⁸³ „Нека ваш конгрес буде снажан подстрек за још веће успехе“, *Zora*, бр. 29, јануар 1948, 1.

Movement, emphasized that the terror of the occupiers must not be forgotten as well as the fact that "Draža Mihailović and other bandits had slaughtered our children and sons".⁸⁴

From 1947, very little attention was paid to the Serbian national identity within the AFŽ of Serbia. This was done during the adoption of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Serbia, when claims that the introduction of a federal order meant the subordination of the Serbian people in the state union were denied. In particular, it was emphasized that the year 1804 is inscribed in the new coat of arms of Serbia as a symbol of the national past, and that the only and true heirs of "the glorious past of the Serbian people are those sons of our country who bravely fought for its final liberation".⁸⁵ From this period the forces were directed towards the five-year plan which was given priority to the extent that women's contribution to it was compared to their war contribution.⁸⁶ From a national point of view, attention was paid only to those areas where there were possible difficulties or resistance to the authorities. In this respect, the greatest attention was attracted by other Yugoslav regions, primarily populated by Catholics, where the resistance of the Roman Catholic Church manifested itself since the appearance of the Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops of Yugoslavia in 1945 and then the trial against Zagreb Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac.⁸⁷ As public pressure and accusations against the Serbian national forces subsided during 1946 and 1947, statements about the influence of the Catholic Church primarily on women in Slovenia and Croatia, but also in Vojvodina, were more noticeable and frequent.⁸⁸ In addition to the appreciation of national peculiarities, there was a pronounced intolerance towards religious communities, since the clergy were considered opponents of communism and modernization, as well as propagators of nationalism. Even after the end of the 4th Congress of the AFŽ of Yugoslavia in 1953 and after the decision to shut down the AFŽ, Josip Broz Tito in his address to the women who visited him after the end of the congress specifically spoke out against the strengthening of religious influences in the area of Croatia and Slovenia.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Други конгрес жена Србије, 108.

⁸⁵ „Устав Народне Републике Србије”, *Зора*, бр. 18, фебруар 1947, 1.

⁸⁶ „Нека ваш конгрес буде снажан подстрек за још веће успехе”, *Зора*, бр. 29, јануар 1948, 1.

⁸⁷ Милан Гулић, *Југословенска држава 1918–2006. Од Прводецембарског акта до Мајског референдума* (Београд: Институт за савремену историју, 2023), 557–558.

⁸⁸ *I Пленум Централног одбора А.Ф.Ж.-а Југославије*, 5.

⁸⁹ „Потребно је да се и мушкарци и жене обострано боре за отклањање негативних схватања о односу према жени” - истакао је друг Тито у разговору са делегатима конгреса“, *Зора*, 89–90, октобар–новембар 1953, 3.

Attitude towards national minorities

A common identity was built through AFŽ by raising class consciousness and solidarity among women. The sense of community was spread by establishing mutual contacts, frequent trips and visits of women from one republic to another, as well as social actions and providing aid or gathering of women in order to express protest or support on the occasion of important political events.

In relation to different nations, the need to respect national peculiarities was constantly emphasized, along with constant political and educational advancement. The issue of inter-ethnic relations was particularly relevant immediately after the liberation and in the first post-war years. Great efforts were made at that time to establish cooperation between women of different nationalities and suppress their mutual intolerance, which most often stemmed from their sympathy for opposing forces in the war, war crimes committed by those forces, and issues of collective responsibility. There were also political disagreements, but also resistance caused by post-war repression and retaliation.

In the vicinity of Vranje in the first half of 1945, several problems were manifested in the work of the AFŽ. In the regions with a larger percentage of the Bulgarian population, problems stemmed from national relations and resistance to the Yugoslav state. Difficulties in national relations made it difficult to work in the Preševo county, where women often expressed intolerance towards the Albanian population.⁹⁰ In Eastern Serbia, during July 1945, it was noticed that stronger work was needed to spread brotherhood and unity and curb hatred towards other peoples, especially considering their role in World War II. The development of national consciousness of minority groups such as the Vlachs and the education of women from this group was encouraged.⁹¹

Immediately after the liberation in the area of Vojvodina, it was noticed that there were national tensions, and in order to win over women more easily, national committees of the AFŽ were first established, which were then merged into common ones.⁹² Special difficulties in the cooperation between Hungarian and Serbian women existed during 1946 in the area of the Subotica district and were mainly based on accusations of crimes committed during the war and immediately after its end.⁹³ Even

⁹⁰ Љ. Шкодрић, *op. cit.*, 524.

⁹¹ *KPS u Istočnoj Srbiji. Okružni komitet 1945–1948*, 17.

⁹² AB, 338.5.1.1.7.

⁹³ AB, 338.5.3.4.1.

when they refrained from activities in the AFŽ, members of national minorities were eager to take part in joint public works and social welfare actions.⁹⁴ There were difficulties when trying to get more involved and include women of Slovak and Romanian nationality in the work of the AFŽ, who were found to be hindered by language barriers, an insufficient number of activists who spoke their language, but also traditional family relationships and women's attachment to their home. In the selection of the governing bodies of the Provincial Committee of the AFŽ of Vojvodina, consideration was given to the equal representation of all nations.⁹⁵ Since the implementation of the compulsory delivery policy, the area of Srem was also a problem, for which there were repeated claims that it had had a developed and active women's organization during the war and immediately after the war, but that its work was then neglected.⁹⁶

In Vojvodina, an additional problem was the way of achieving cooperation with female colonists and getting them to work in the AFŽ. In some places, women's committees were formed, which were in charge of cooperation with female colonists and providing help to their families. Mistrust existed on both sides, and among the natives there were also those who considered themselves damaged and deprived at the expense of the colonists.⁹⁷ Such impressions existed in 1952, when the party authorities emphasized that the life of women in colonist villages "must not be left to the elements", but on the other hand, there were also complaints from the population regarding the dismissal of the workforce that this area was neglected and that people were brought from other regions, so now there was not enough work for everyone.⁹⁸

While in Kosovo and Metohija the most important task of the AFŽ was the enlightenment and inclusion of Albanian women in the social life, in Vojvodina there were difficulties due to the narrowing of the organization and activities involving only a small number of women. The difference between these two areas was also reflected in the AFŽ press intended for minorities. The newspaper of the Provincial Committee of the AFŽ of Vojvodina in Hungarian language *Dolgozó Nő* (*Employed Woman*) was published during 1948 in a circulation of about 10,500, while the newsletter for Albanian women published by the Regional Committee of the AFŽ of Kosovo and Metohija in the same period was produced in only three issues of 1,000 copies. In order to

⁹⁴ AB, 338.5.1.1.7.

⁹⁵ AB, 338.5.1.1.4.

⁹⁶ AB, 338.12.1.7

⁹⁷ AB, 338.5.3.4.1.

⁹⁸ AJ, 141-36-392.

enlighten Albanian women, among other things, the *Alphabet for Mothers* was printed in Albanian.⁹⁹

In the area of Vojvodina, immediately after the end of the war, the existence of national tensions was observed and efforts were made to overcome them, while the political situation in Kosovo and Metohija was often idealized. It was even stated that this area, instead of an area of discord, animosity and hatred, became an area of harmony and love, and the support of the female part of the Albanian population was emphasized. At the same time, a constant problem was the lack of activists of Albanian origin. In order to encourage togetherness, trilingual conferences for women were held in Turkish, Albanian and Serbian in one period.¹⁰⁰ Similar problems persisted in 1949 and 1950, except in Kosovo and Metohija and in the area of Bujanovac. Eventually, in regions with a population of mixed nationalities, women of Serbian nationality were involved in the work of the AFŽ to a significantly greater extent, regardless of their lower number among the population. The lack of interest and the low educational and cultural level of Muslim women were often cited as justifications. However, it was observed that they showed interest in other issues that were of vital importance to them, especially when it came to the compulsory delivery policy.¹⁰¹ Attempts to win over Albanian women with concrete and important topics and problems were considered successful when they were addressed in their mother tongue and when women of their nationality worked with them.

A special intrusion on the identity of the Muslim population ensued in 1947, when an ambitious campaign to remove the veil (*feredža*) was launched as part of the five-year plan. The issue of removing the veil and hijab was not seen as an identity or religious issue, but as a form of struggle against the backwardness and subordination of women. It was also a socio-economic issue due to the need to involve Muslim women in social events and the economy and to employ as many of them as possible. In 1947, the National Assembly of the People's Republic of Serbia passed a resolution on removing the veil, and the AFŽ press regularly reported on women who had removed the veil and pointed out that 30,000 women in Kosovo and Metohija had followed that example that year.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ АВ, 338.1.2.2.2.3.1.

¹⁰⁰ I Пленум Централног одбора А.Ф.Ж.-а Југославије, 82.

¹⁰¹ Историјски архив Ниш (ИАН), Обласни одбор АФЖ за област Ниш, Извештај са обиласка организације нишке области 1949.

¹⁰² I. Simic, *op. cit.*, 166.

It soon became clear that the campaigns, rallies and conferences dedicated to removing the veil gave only temporary results and that a large number of women returned to wearing it after removing it at various gatherings. In particular, the holding of conferences where women were addressed with the help of translators was criticized and the holding of events, lectures and courses was advised. Within the AFŽ, it was planned that the women who took off the veil would become agitators, but also that other organizations be engaged in this work in order to break the resistance of men.¹⁰³ The issue of removing the veil began to be treated as a form of expressing support for the authorities, but varying successes in this regard led to a legal ban on wearing the veil. First, in 1950 in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, and then in 1951 in Serbia and Macedonia, republic laws were passed prohibiting the wearing of the veil.¹⁰⁴ In a certain way, they indicated the failure of previous campaigns, but even the legislative regulation did not fully eradicate this problem. In parallel with it, a campaign was launched to educate women about health, and during 1951 AFŽ representatives visited places inhabited mainly by Muslims, held courses on child care and household management, and also checked the implementation of the law.¹⁰⁵ Despite this, these phenomena persisted in different forms, so for the area of Kosovo and Metohija it was acknowledged that women appeared in public with headscarves that were only slightly different from the veil.¹⁰⁶

Apart from Kosovo and Metohija, the campaign of removing veil was also carried out in the area of Novi Pazar. Here, too, special influence was exerted on KPJ members whose wives wore veil. Rallies were held, resolutions were signed and conversations were held with older Muslims and Hodjas who were won over for this campaign.¹⁰⁷ After the adoption of the law, in reports from this area during April 1952, it was observed that the policy of equality was implemented by state and party bodies, but that there were national and religious divisions among the population.¹⁰⁸ The ban on wearing the veil affected the withdrawal of a large number of Muslim women from the public, who less and less attended various social events. The most active among them were those

¹⁰³ II Пленум Централног одбора Антифашистичког фронта жена Југославије, 125.

¹⁰⁴ Marko Božić, "The Law Unveiled: On Burka Ban, Kanzelparagraph and Militant Secularism in the Socialist Yugoslavia", *Pravni zapisi*, 2 (2021), 421.

¹⁰⁵ АВ, 338.1.2.2.3.1.

¹⁰⁶ ДАС, Ђ-2, Комисија за друштвене и масовне организације, ф. 4, 110.

¹⁰⁷ ДАС, Ђ-79, ф. 1.

¹⁰⁸ ДАС, Ђ-2, Организационо-инструкторска управа. Разно.

who were employed, and at the same time the largest number of them were party members.¹⁰⁹

The dynamics of the efforts invested in the education of women of national minorities and their inclusion in the work of the AFŽ depended not only on the measures taken in the field of internal politics, but also on the foreign political situation. Since 1948, the attitude towards national minorities whose home countries in the immediate vicinity were members of the Cominform underwent a significant change. The propaganda highlighted Yugoslavia's war contribution, different from these countries, the aid that Yugoslavia provided to them and the efforts made after the end of the war conflict to establish mutual relations and solve the issue of war responsibility. Since 1949, women's magazines were expected to pay more attention to minorities, and newspapers in Vojvodina played a special role in this regard.¹¹⁰ It was also insisted that women of Bulgarian, Hungarian and Albanian nationality become more involved in the public and in showing support for the authorities. In Vojvodina, during 1950, female members of national minorities sent letters and held rallies in support of the KPJ and Josip Broz.¹¹¹

The conflict with the Cominform had the effect of gradually suppressing the propagation of Soviet models and proletarian internationalism, while greater importance was attached to the spread of patriotism. One of the conclusions of the 6th Plenary Session of the Main Committee of the AFŽ of Serbia in 1949 was that, in addition to the need for women to become familiar with the nature of the dispute with the Soviet Union and the countries of the Eastern bloc, it was necessary to develop "socialist patriotism towards their socialist homeland".¹¹² In this respect, there was an increasing pressure to promote female heroines and participants in the People's Liberation Movement as identity models. The Minister of Education of the People's Republic of Serbia, Mitra Mitrović, already at the Second Congress of the AFŽ of Yugoslavia in January 1948, promoted the "character of a war heroine" as a role model for the new woman, but for the majority of women, burdened by employment and family and suppressed from political and public life, that role model became increasingly unattainable.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ AJ, 507, Идеолошка комисија, ф. 26, II/5-b-34.

¹¹¹ AB, 338.5.1.1.4.

¹¹² AB, 338 1.2.2.2.3.1.

¹¹³ I. Pantelić, Lj. Škodrić, S. Stefanović, *op. cit.*, 187.

Conclusion

In the history of women's organizing in Serbia during the 19th and 20th centuries, the AFŽ was the organization that managed to gather the largest number of women. Apart from its numbers, its reach was not negligible either. The AFŽ had a political, ideological, cultural and economic role in the turbulent changes and social transformation after World War II. It encouraged the education and employment of a large number of women and influenced their political affirmation. The change in the position of women was so striking that it became one of the hallmarks of the new government.

In the period from 1945 to 1953, the position of women was improved to a great extent, but at the same time many proclaimed positions on equality were difficult to implement in practice. In the social transformation and modernization of the position of women, when instilling new values and practices and constructing new narratives, there was still no complete break with the traditional role of women. Women were mostly willing allies of the authorities, but they did not participate equally in the distribution of power. They achieved legal and social protection, gained easy access to education and employment, but failed to develop political skills, as well as to continue the struggle for the further development of gender equality and achieve a stronger influence in the political sphere. Over time, the women's issue became increasingly marginalized, it was widely discussed, but no concrete steps were taken. Priority was given to issues of the economy, industrialization, and the conflict with the Cominform. At the end of this period, women were pushed to the margins of social events, they lost their organization, they were less and less represented in government bodies, they were fired from their jobs and they turned more and more to the household and family.

The revolutionary potential of the war was the basis on which national and gender emancipation was expected. Although represented immediately after the liberation and then during the conflict with the Cominform, the national question was not in the center of attention of the AFŽ. Already from 1946, when the government became more and more consolidated, national identity lost its importance. The identity of a new socialist woman was being built, which did not contain national characteristics, but the main characteristics of such a woman were that she was supranational, socially active, emancipated, educated, employed and politically aware, but also a responsible mother and wife. In addition to avoiding debates about nationality and treating the national issue as resolved, women had identity roles as guardians of brotherhood and unity while emphasi-

zing antifascist commitment and role in raising children in accordance with the government's expectations. Although it was expected that, due to the low level of education and insufficient education, it would be difficult to get women in Serbia to cooperate, they showed a willingness to get involved in political and social life and within the AFŽ, they demonstrated the ability to work independently and organize. In the territory of Serbia, the resistance of the Serbian population was crushed and suppressed immediately after the liberation, and then with the conviction of Draža Mihailović, and the focus was on winning over national minorities. Any kind of opposition and resistance was considered enemy activity and harsh condemnation followed these phenomena at the Yugoslav level. At the same time, such a situation was maintained by the power and authority of the government and the party.