

(Re)shaping the Associations of University Women in Zagreb (1931-1955)

This paper explores the way that professional, feminist and national political processes and events shaped and reshaped the organizational structure, goals and membership of Zagreb Section of the Association of University Women in Yugoslavia and its successors.

Defining the title of a paper sometimes presents a challenge. The case of the university women's associations in Zagreb, with their elusive name, structure, and status, falls right into that category. In different periods, Zagreb university women gathered in the Society of University Women of Croatia and the Society of Academic Women in Zagreb, but for the longest time they operated as the Zagreb Section of the Association of University Women in Yugoslavia (AUWY), an affiliate of the International Federation of University Women (IFUW). Hence, similar to other studies dealing with the national members of this international federation, I will begin my analysis with their story.

During an organized visit of British scholars to the United States in 1918, Dean Virginia Gildersleeve (Barnard College, USA), Professors Caroline Spurgeon (University of London) and Rose Sidgwick (University of Birmingham)¹ met and decided that university women should establish their own international organization which would promote pacifism and cross border cooperation.² The initiative aligned well with the then popular trend of setting up international women's organizations,³ and it reflected both the prevailing political sentiment of the post-war era and the professional interests of a growing group of academic women. The project came to fruition on 20 July 1920, when representatives from fifteen countries gathered at Bedford College and established the International Federation of University Women (IFUW). This marked the beginning of the

¹ Sidgwick died of the Spanish flu before the organisation itself was founded.

² RØNNING 2019; OERTZEN 2012: 27-55.

³ For example, the International Council of Women (est. in 1888), the International Alliance of Women (est. in 1904), and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (est. in 1915).

century-long history of an organisation that aimed to encourage mutual networking and facilitate the career paths of university women so that they could ultimately collaborate with their male counterparts on the same footing. Also, it sought to influence prevailing political and social trends by collaborating with the League of Nations and later the United Nations and UNESCO. The organization is active to this day, having changed its name to Graduate Women International in 2015.

The fate of the Association of University Women in Yugoslavia (Udruženje univerzitetski obrazovanih žena u Jugoslaviji; hereinafter AUWY) is considerably shorter, but the narratives surrounding its establishment, activities and goals are quite similar. With the assistance of the National Women's Alliance of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Narodni Ženski Savez Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca), later known as Yugoslav Women's Alliance (Jugoslavenski ženski savez; hereinafter YWA)⁴, IFUW president Ellen Gledicth delivered a lecture to a group of university women in Belgrade, followed shortly thereafter by the founding assembly of the Association of University Women⁵ on 11 December 1927 and this newly established association's admission to the IUFW.⁶ This marked the beginning of the association's roughly fifteen-year history which, under the leadership of Paulina Lebl-Albala and then Zorka Kasnar Karadžić, operated at the intersection of professional identity, the international women's movement and national relations. In pursuit of the Association's primary purpose, they initiated a series of activities to promote the professional development and advancement of women. They organised conferences, lectures and exhibitions, created opportunities to promote research outcomes, offered scholarships, protested the unequal status of working women, etc. Their cooperation with the IFUW created significant prospects and opportunities, but also required substantial effort, such as completing questionnaires and responding to initiatives that came from IFUW headquarters. Finally, the AUWY was operating in a multi-national state that struggled with its own national and state regulatory issues, which meant that the Association confronted unique challenges that inevitably influenced its functioning, structure and longevity. It is interesting that AUWY was one of the few Yugoslav women's organizations that briefly re-emerged after World War

⁴ The Yugoslav Women's Alliance (Jugoslavenski ženski savez) was established in 1919 under the name National Women's Alliance of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Narodni Ženski Savez Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca), but it changed its name to align with state's new name to Yugoslav Women's Alliance in 1929.

⁵ The association was initially established under the name "Association of University-Educated Women" (Udruženje univerzitetski obrazovanih žena) and in 1931 it changed its name to "Association of University-Educated Women in Yugoslavia" (Udruženje univerzitetski obrazovanih žena u Jugoslaviji AUWY). See PRAVILA PROGRAM 1928 and PRAVILA 1931.

⁶ For correspondence on its establishment, see AJ 158, Univerzitetski obrazovane žene, 1928/50-58.

II, operating under significantly different political circumstances from 1952 to 1955. Although this “new organization” tried to replicate pre-war patterns in its structure and operations, it was evident that the new political circumstances had impacted the scope of its activities, as well as its opportunities and status both in the international community and Yugoslav society.

The AUWY left behind a wealth of archival materials, and they published commemorative books, reports and articles about their work in periodicals such as *Ženski pokret* and *Glasnik Jugoslavenskog ženskog saveza*. This has made them a relatively popular research topic that historians interested in women’s history of the interwar period have continuously revisited. Jovanka Kecman wrote about the AUWY in the 1970s, Andrea Feldman in the 1980s, Mirjana Obradović in the 1990s and Tamara Kosijer only a few years ago⁷. Kecman included it as part of her extensive and pioneering analysis of women’s organizations in interwar Yugoslavia. Obradović and Kosijer provided a thorough and chronological analysis of the society’s interwar activities and placed it in the context of women’s status during that period. Feldman was the only one who also addressed the Association’s short-lived post-war activities, highlighting the feminist aspects, and she managed to interview some of its members who were still alive in 1980s.

This paper primarily focuses on the operation of the Zagreb Section of the AUWY and its successors. Zagreb was not the first city to which AUWY expanded, yet its Section swiftly evolved into one of the larger, more accomplished branches.⁸ While many of its activities mirrored the templates set by the centres in Belgrade and London, it also pioneered several unique initiatives of its own. Furthermore, the functioning of the Zagreb Section was shaped by a variety of developments, including heightened interest in university education, the activities of professional and feminist organizations, Croatia’s national movements and the ongoing dynamics of centre-periphery relationships. This paper explores the interplay in these processes and the way in which they shaped and reshaped the up-and-down tempo of its disjointed journey. The first part of the paper examines the Section’s establishment and functioning, emphasizing its networking efforts and its relationship to feminist, professional, and national movements. The subsequent chapter delves into the Zagreb Section’s endeavours to renegotiate its status within the Association, leading to its eventual separation. The final segment investigates the circumstances surrounding the short resurgence of the University Women Association’s in Zagreb during the early 1950s.

⁷ KECMAN 1978; FELDMAN 1986.; OBRADOVIĆ 1998; KOSIJER 2021.

⁸ There were branches in Skopje and Novi Sad (1929), Zagreb and Ljubljana (1931), Sarajevo (1933), and eventually in Niš (1939). In addition to these sections, a number of sub-committees were also formed.

From the perspective of Croatian political history, the AUWY could not have been established at a worse moment. Conflicts over the national and state organization of the Kingdom of SHS (Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca; Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) culminated in 1928 with gunfire in the National Assembly in Belgrade, after which Stjepan Radić, the president of the most popular Croatian political party, lost his life. In the following year, a six-year period began in which the Kingdom's political system was marked by repressive and unitarist policies⁹ that further exacerbated interethnic conflicts. Since opponents of the regime, and especially the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS),¹⁰ were prevented from engaging in political action, they resorted to alternative forms of resistance. One of these methods was "non-cooperation", which included boycotting the events and initiatives of the Belgrade regime and closely associated organizations, or even ostracising Croats who participated in such campaigns.¹¹ Women's organizations were not exempt, and this particularly applied to the pro-government Yugoslav Women's Alliance (YWA). The decision of Zlata Kovačić Lopašić, the president of the Zagreb Section of the YWA, to participate in the government's commemoration of the anniversary of the breakthrough at the Salonica Front during the Great War resulted in her expulsion from all Croatian associations.¹² Moreover, the fact that the Association of University Women was closely related to the Yugoslav Women's Alliance and that its headquarters were in Belgrade certainly did not help its popularity in Croatian society.

On the other hand, in principle the AUW(Y) did not advocate political objectives, and Zagreb was a university city with a rapidly growing number of female students. While only about twenty women graduated from the University of Zagreb on the eve of the First World War, by the end of the interwar period, almost two thousand female students earned their degree in Zagreb.¹³ This created a conducive environment for the expansion of an association that would represent the interests of women's career advancement and foster discussions on the specific issues they faced: condescending attitudes from colleagues; challenging job prospects in the private sector; hindered promotion to managerial positions; unequal pay, particularly after the removal of "cost-of-living supplements" for married women;

⁹ An outright dictatorship was imposed from 6 January 1929 to 3 September 3 1931, and thereafter an imposed constitution was introduced, although a covert dictatorship persisted until parliamentary elections were held on 5 May 1935.

¹⁰ Given the frequency of the acronyms HSS and AFŽ in the relevant literature and everyday usage, I will adhere to the convention of not translating HSS and AFŽ in contemporary English texts and leave them in their original form.

¹¹ LEČEK 2015.

¹² OGRAJŠEK GORENJAK 2020: 730.

¹³ LUETIĆ 2002; OGRAJŠEK GORENJAK 2019.

public hostility to working women during times of economic crisis; the burden of a double workload, etc.¹⁴

The AUW(Y) had several ways to reach the women of Zagreb. One of them was the feminist movement, which had already established its presence and recognition throughout the country by forming the Alliance of Women's Movements (Alijansa ženskih pokreta). Many members of the Association of University Women, including its president, Paulina Lebl Albala, were actively involved in feminist activities, thus fostering cooperation with the Women's Movement Society in Zagreb. There was also another possibility that relied on the network of contacts of its Zagreb-based members or sympathizers. It should be emphasized that at that time female intellectuals in Zagreb formed a relatively close-knit and interconnected community. They were bound by shared experiences during their studies and the fact that almost all of them had once been students at the Women's Lyceum (Ženski licej).¹⁵ The Lyceum seemed to have remained a focal point for their gatherings and contacts, serving as a base for joint action. For example, when the Children's Literature Association was established in 1922, professor and translator Adela Broch highlighted that it was a "society established by former lyceum students."¹⁶ A few years later, when the magazine called *Eva* was briefly published in Zagreb and inappropriately represented women's issues, a meeting of "ladies" was organized in the lyceum premises to strategize on how to take over and restructure it.¹⁷

The Association aimed to leverage both possibilities. They requested that Adela Broch provide them with the addresses of other female intellectuals in Zagreb. They also reached out to the president of the Zagreb Women's Movement Society, Mira Kočonda Vodvarška, who was expected to assist them in promoting the Association within the Zagreb community and among her colleagues.¹⁸ Both of them worked on popularizing the new association through personal contacts or publications, laying the groundwork for Lebl Albala's visit to Zagreb. The process of founding the Zagreb Section followed a well-established pattern. Lebl Albala delivered a lecture at the YWA conference in Zagreb in 1930, which inspired university women to initiate the establishment of the Zagreb Section. Despite some minor hiccups, they successfully completed this task on 22 January 1931.¹⁹

¹⁴ OGRAJŠEK GORENJAK 2022; KOSIJER 2021.

¹⁵ The Women's Lyceum was established in 1892, and it was the only secondary school for women until the beginning of the 1920s. It was later renamed to First State Women's Gymnasium (Državna prva ženska gimnazija).

¹⁶ IAB, UOŽ, 1928/63

¹⁷ "Poziv na konferenciju," *Eva* 5 Mar. 1928, no. 7-8.

¹⁸ IAB, UOŽ, 1930/17; 1930/40.

¹⁹ IAB, UOŽ, 1930/80; 1931/6; 1931/19.

Most of the women gathered in the Zagreb Section were impressive individuals who had a significant impact both on their own professional fields and the inter-war women's scene in Zagreb. This group included, for example, Elza Kučera, a deputy director of the Royal University Library (Kraljevske sveučilišne knjižnice) and part-time lecturer at the Department of Experimental Psychology (Katedra za eksperimentalnu psihologiju), Zdenka Marković, a writer and translator, Ida Knežević, one of the first female attorneys in Zagreb who opened her own law firm, Mira Kočonda Vodvarška, the president of the Zagreb Women's Movement, Zdenka Sertić, a painter and ethnographer, Edita Horetzky, a French language professor whose grammar book has had its 19th edition a few years ago. The Section was usually chaired by secondary school teachers from Zagreb, starting with Olga Osterman, followed by Mrs. Čeh Vranešić, Ljerka Češić, and, in the final years, the Section was presided over by painter and art historian Rokšana Cuvaj. Since this period spans only eight years (1931-1939), it is evident that presidents and board members changed at a rapid pace. However, it was equally common for the vice president to succeed the president, indicating that these changes were not the result of internal rifts but rather an attempt to rationally manage their resources.

The key problem was, of course, how to attract more members. The usual method, relying on personal contacts, lectures, informative articles and registering university-educated women working in different institutions, yielded limited results. In the first few years of its operation, the Zagreb Section could list only about forty members. Several years later they specified the presumed reasons for the low inflow: "insufficient knowledge of our work and disinterest in women's associations in general; scepticism and prejudices against our association in particular; excessive employment in professional associations, professional organizations; withdrawal from research work and dedication to household and family matters, and so forth."²⁰ Furthermore, the Association repeatedly struggled with its sense of purpose as an organization promoting professional activity but is not recognized as a guild or trade union.²¹ Therefore, it was important to effectively communicate the benefits of membership in the Zagreb Section, as well as the AUWY in general, and to actively work towards achieving those benefits.

The main appeal of the Association and its sections undoubtedly stemmed from its involvement in the international women's network. When Anica Magašić recalled her involvement in the Zagreb Section several decades later, she emphasized the "possibility of making international connections."²² The IFUW strongly encouraged and fostered various forms of networking among its members, leading to instances of numerous, very modern forms of travel and tourism.

²⁰ ALBA 1939: 56.

²¹ IAB, UOŽ, 1930/81.

²² FELDMAN 1986:53.

Members could, for example, rely on the assistance of university women in the countries or cities to which they travelled, whether for professional or personal reasons. Upon their arrival in Zagreb, Maria Omelchenko from Ukraine, Ludwig Wolska from Poland, Mrs. Horward from the USA, Miss Frey from the UK, or Mrs. Moahelicz from Budapest would be welcomed and receive valuable information and support from the Zagreb members. Similarly, Zagreb's intellectuals could expect assistance during their own travels.²³ There were even attempts to create mutual hosting arrangements for members from different countries. A Hungarian researcher travelled across Europe for a year, relying exclusively on accommodations provided by members of national Associations.²⁴ Yugoslav members sometimes practiced the same form of mutual hosting when visiting Zagreb, Belgrade, Sarajevo, or Ljubljana. If they travelled to London, the IFUW's centre, university women could apply for less expensive accommodation at Crosby Hall.²⁵ Of course, conferences and meetings organized by the IFUW provided a good opportunity for affordable travel and meeting intellectuals from different parts of the world. The Zagreb Section nominated its members for delegations to such events, but the final selection was up to the Central Board.²⁶

Furthermore, the IFUW encouraged its member associations to design and organize tourist trips or exchanges. They circulated invitations/itineraries for group tours in Sicily, holiday courses in Europe, or skiing parties in Salzburg.²⁷ The extent to which women from Zagreb actually embarked on such adventures has not been recorded, but we do know that they organized at least two group trips/exchanges themselves. The first ensued from the AUWY's support for Balkan conferences and efforts to bring Balkan countries closer together during the 1930s,²⁸ and the fact that at that time the Balkan Commission was established within the Association. The Zagreb Section did its part by organizing an exhibition of Bulgarian women artists in Zagreb in 1938. A few months later, about forty members of the Zagreb Section travelled to Bulgaria, during which time they visited Sofia, Plovdiv, Veliko Tarnovo and Varna, and were warmly welcomed by local Bulgarian women's organizations.²⁹ The second exchange initiative stemmed from personal contacts during a stay of three members of the Zagreb Section in Paris. The initial idea of exchanging French and Croatian students was implemented in 1939, but it revealed a series of cultural and practical problems faced by travellers in Eu-

²³ IAB, UOŽ, 1939/3.

²⁴ OERTZEN 2012: 35.

²⁵ OERTZEN 2012: 39-43.

²⁶ IAB, UOŽ, 1939/3: 10.

²⁷ JA, 158 UOŽ, Fasc.1.

²⁸ TÜRKEŞ 1994: 123-144.

²⁹ ABiH, UUOŽ, , Izvještaji i zapisnici, VII (1938), no. 4-6; IAB, UOŽ, 1939./3: 10.

rope on the eve of World War II. The French women feared for their safety while the Croatian women struggled to obtain foreign currency, and in the end, both groups had starkly contrasting experiences. While the Croatian female students enjoyed their stay at Lake Annecy and excursions to Venice, Milan and Paris, the French group was composed of elder women who had already graduated and who frequently changed their travel plans. They expressed dissatisfaction over their accommodations in Jelsa and requested additional trips to Dubrovnik, Sarajevo and Italy, and the Zagreb Section struggled with their 'extravagant' expenses.³⁰

Zagreb intellectuals could also apply for scholarships offered by member countries or institutions. The Zagreb Section regularly received and posted invitations to apply for various scholarships in the United Kingdom, the United States, Spain, Switzerland, etc. Interest and the applications submitted for these scholarships were significant, leading the Association to eventually limit the right to apply to its members only. However, success in actually winning scholarships was minimal. During the eight years of the Section's operation, only Nada Fabijanović managed to secure a scholarship to improve her English in Birmingham.³¹ The problem, as they emphasized, lay in fierce competition and "difficult conditions" since most of the scholarships required "published work," effectively favouring older candidates. Therefore, some of the AUWY sections, including the Zagreb Section, attempted to bridge this gap by offering their own scholarships and awards, primarily intended for female students.³²

Members could turn to the Zagreb Section for career assistance. Together with the Central Board, on several occasions they urged the Education Ministry to appoint women as superintendents in women's secondary schools in Zagreb. They succeeded twice, with Mira Kočonda Vodvarška becoming the principal of the First Women's Real Gymnasium in 1932, and Olga Osterman taking the top post in the newly established Third Women's Real Gymnasium in 1934.³³ They also advocated for women's requests to transfer from one institution to another and promoted the appointment of female agricultural engineers to the Regional Administration (Banska uprava) or the Agriculture Ministry.

It would appear that the most effective approach in attracting members stemmed from Zagreb's innovative initiatives tailored to the needs of the local community. Their courses, notably popular for their affordability among members, were a highlight. Philologists conducted courses in Italian, German, French, and English, while

³⁰ HR-HDA, 1630, DUOŽH 1939-1955, VI/1939: 3-11.

³¹ Later, the same scholarships were awarded to member from Ljubljana and two from Belgrade. IAB, UOŽ, 1937/89. In addition to these scholarships, YAUW members received several more scholarships, but none of them was awarded to a member of the Zagreb section.

³² ALBALA 1939: 59; ABIH, UOŽ, Izvještaji i zapisnici.

³³ ALBALA 1939: 57.

physicians from the Hygiene Institute conducted a first aid course just before the outbreak of World War II. Moreover, in the late 1930s, Zagreb intellectuals seeking employment could turn to the Section's 'information department' for assistance.³⁴

Another pioneering initiative originating from Zagreb was the introduction of the Junior Section. Over time, female students began to show an interest in the Section's work, mostly because all attempts to organize a functional women's organization of their own ended in failure. Indeed, in the early 1920s and 1930s, the Yugoslav Club of Female Academics (*Jugoslavenski klub akademičarki*) and then the Association of Female University Students (*Udruženje sveučilištarki*) briefly emerged, but both quickly dissolved.³⁵ Students, however, could not become full members of the AUWY because they had not formally earned their degrees yet, and so the separate Junior Section was established in Zagreb in 1935. Juniors formulated their own goals, attended exhibitions, held lectures and maintained contacts with international organizations. Historians often associate the formation of the Junior Section in Zagreb with the similar Youth Section of the Women's Movement Society, established a year earlier, and both sections have been placed in the context of the banned Communist Party's attempts to influence Croatian society by infiltrating civil organizations.³⁶ Anica Magašić, who participated in these events, offered a similar account: "So we fought in 1934 for the establishment of the Women's Movement Society, and after that, one day, Vanda Novosel and Olga Žerdik³⁷ said that the Party wanted us to get involved in the assembly of the Junior Section and take control..."³⁸ However, the relationship between the Youth and Junior Sections and the older generation of their organizations was rather different. While the Youth Section soon came into conflict with the leadership of the Women's Movement Society which ultimately led to their dissolution in 1937, the Junior Section maintained close ties with their older colleagues. Senior members took great care of the junior members, providing them with their own space to work, offering advice, organizing instruction, rhythmic gymnastics classes, and providing free or affordable meals. Additionally, the girls could receive free medical treatment from Dr. Miler, have dental work done by Dr. Šimonović and Dr. Šlezinger, or shop at a discount in various pharmacies and book shops. Seniors also assisted juniors in obtaining funds for the exchange trip to France by seeking sponsors and renting cinemas and theatrical performances. Juniors, essentially, represented a secure pool of potential new members, as they could apply for full membership after graduation. The Junior Section, on the other

³⁴ IAB, UOŽ, 1939/70.

³⁵ OGRAJŠEK GORENJAK 2019: 254-255.

³⁶ KECMAN 1978: 280, 318-323; LALATOVIĆ 2021: 481-497.

³⁷ It should be noted that the latter did indeed eventually assume the presidential post in the Junior Section, and after her graduation she became the secretary of the Senior Section.

³⁸ FELDMAN 1986: 53.

hand, sought to establish itself as a place where secondary school graduates could receive firsthand information about studying, accommodation, nutrition and, of course, membership in the Junior Section.³⁹

Finally, the motivation for joining the organization included opportunities for socializing and having fun. Lectures or meetings often ended with a dinner, banquet or at least a tea party. At the end of the 1930s, they began holding regular events every Monday in their new premises and concluded: "This allowed the Section to gather a high number of members and teach them that they have one place that will be close to them all, which is their own, where they will always be able to meet and maintain a close relationship with each other."⁴⁰ Female students socialized even more frequently. "We met daily," Dora Majer Vinski recalled. "There were ten, fifteen women from several faculties who were actively working. We would meet and go for coffee and cookies (for 75 para) and discuss women's problems in society"⁴¹

By the end of the decade, the secretariat concluded that they had tripled the number of members, as the Section had 150 seniors, 100 juniors, 15 women in the subcommittee in Osijek and 1 from Slavonski Brod, and, moreover, "new members are joining the Section on a daily basis."⁴² By way of comparison, at the same time there were 187 members in the Belgrade Section and 93 in the Ljubljana Section. The secretariat's refusal to express satisfaction with the achieved success because they were "not modest" conveyed a certain sense of self-confidence that characterized their collaborations with other associations and both their involvement with and the power struggle within the AUWY.

The Section's impact and prominence were elevated through its cooperation with other women's, national, and professional organizations, and by hosting events that enriched Zagreb's cultural scene. This was facilitated by the fact that many of its members were already affiliated with various other professional and women's organizations, creating opportunities for collaborative initiatives. They established the closest cooperation with the Women's Movement Society, the Women's Art Club (Klub likovnih umjetnica)⁴³ and the Society of Croatian Women Writers (Društvo hrvatskih književnica). With the former, they devised joint initiatives for

³⁹ IAB, UOŽ, Izvještaji i zapisnici, Skupštine i godišnji izvještaji.

⁴⁰ IAB, UOŽ, 1939/3:10.

⁴¹ FELDMAN 1986: 51-52.

⁴² IAB, UOŽ, 1939/3:10.

⁴³ The Women's Art Club (Klub likovnih umjetnica) was active in Zagreb from 1927 to 1942 under the leadership of Nasta Rojc and Lina Crnčić-Virant. During that period, they organized approximately 11 exhibitions. ALUJEVIĆ and NEKIĆ 2019. The Society of Croatian Women Writers operated from 1936 to 1941, bringing together notable literary figures such as Zdenka Jušić-Seunik (whose apartment served as its headquarters), Jagoda Truhelka, Marija Kumičić, Zdenka Marković, Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, and Marija Jurić Zagorka. Božena Begović served as the president of the Society. The Society published works by Croatian women writers and the Almanac of the Society of Croatian Women Writers. BATINIĆ 2024.

women's suffrage, shared feminist views, and, for a time, they also shared offices. They collaborated with the Women's Art Club to set up exhibitions, and they even unsuccessfully attempted to incorporate the Club as an artistic group within the Section.⁴⁴ The Society of Croatian Women Writers, on the other hand, provided them with valuable support in the organization of exhibitions and very popular literary evenings, lectures, radio broadcasts and theatre shows. Using the proceeds from these events, they even managed to rent their own premises in Bogovićevea street 2. They also collaborated with other associations, protesting alongside the YWA against government measures that were detrimental to working women, writing appeals for disarmament sent by the Women's League for Peace to governments around the world, and establishing contacts with the Women's Education Society in Karlovac (Društvo za prosvetu žene u Karlovcu).⁴⁵

Some of their actions aimed to highlight the importance of women's work to Croatian society and the development of the national movement. Marija Kralj delivered a speech at the commemoration for Ivana Brlić Mažuranić, Zdenka Marković and Olga Osterman wrote a study on Croatian women writers which would be included in synthetic overview of Yugoslav women authors edited by Paulina Lebl Albala, Branka Dizdarević and Jelka Mišić-Jambrišak prepared bibliographies of Croatian women authors and the Section and Women's Art Club organized an exhibition of paintings by Croatian women artists at the International Council of Women (ICW) conference in Dubrovnik.⁴⁶

They also participated in a series of events that fit quite well in the prevailing national and political trends of the time. Their organization of the highly attended international lace exhibition entirely aligned with the predominant discourse on the role of rural culture and ethnography in nation-building.⁴⁷ They also participated in one of the first major literacy campaigns organized by Peasant Concord (Seljačka sloga)⁴⁸, with a particular focus on the female population.⁴⁹ In this way, the Zagreb Section successfully enhanced the Society's image, which was not (only) a branch of the Yugoslav organization, but also corresponded very well with the interests and activities of the Croatian community.

The Zagreb Section proved to be a valuable yet demanding partner for the AUWY's Central Board. While it actively participated in planned projects and shared a significant portion of the workload, it also consistently questioned the

⁴⁴ ABiH, UOOŽ, Izvještaji i zapisnici, V (1936), 4-6.; IAB, UOŽ, 1939./3: 10.

⁴⁵ ALBALA 1939: 22-59.

⁴⁶ IBID.

⁴⁷ On the significance of ethnography in the construction of the Croatian Peasant Party's ideology, see LEČEK, PTEROVIĆ LEŠ 2010.

⁴⁸ Peasant Concord was the Croatian Peasant Party's cultural and educational association. From 1937 to 1941, it launched a highly successful nation-wide literacy project. LEČEK 2008: 369-404.

⁴⁹ ALBALA 1939: 56-61; IAB, UOŽ, 1939/3: 10.; ABiH, UOOŽ, Izvještaji i zapisnici.

Association's policy and structure. The Section took an active role in the first and the third congresses of the Association in Belgrade (1931 and 1938) and hosted the second congress in Zagreb (1935). It assumed its share in fulfilling numerous IFUW surveys, conducted statistical analyses on the status of university women in Croatia, and collected data on their activities. It also played a significant role in implementing key AUWY projects, such as the exhibition of books written by women authors at the International Council of Women (ICW) conference in Dubrovnik and the creation of the Bibliography of Books by Women Writers in Yugoslavia [*Bibliografija knjiga ženskih pisaca u Jugoslaviji*].⁵⁰ Its activities drew the attention of other sections. For example, the project of establishing a Junior Section was copied by Sarajevo, while Ljubljana also decided to offer language courses, which rapidly boosted its membership. In this way, the Zagreb Section gained a certain prestige and a robust status in the Association's internal dynamics. Members of different sections generally had vigorous and mostly positive interactions, which were based on a wide range of common interests, such as the status of university women, feminism, pacifism and relations with the IFUW. There was no lack of enthusiasm or cordiality in the implementation of joint projects, and they often visited each other, either for the Association's business or simply because they happened to be in the same town. However, relations between the Central Board and the sections were not devoid of political connotations and power struggles, which were particularly noticeable in the projects they implemented in cooperation with the YWA. The debate on whether the historical overview of women writers in Yugoslavia should be organized as three connected studies (Croatian, Slovenian and Serbian) or as a single (Yugoslav) text, was, in fact, a conflict between two opposing national concepts. Work on organizing and planning book exhibitions and the compilation of the Bibliography proceeded in a somewhat tense atmosphere, and Elza Kučera almost backed away from the entire project after being confronted with the demand to write a more Yugoslav-oriented introduction to the Bibliography.⁵¹ Simultaneously, the Central Board was taken aback by the request of the sections for a certain number of separate national offprints of the Bibliography. "We were painfully surprised by that," Albala said, underscoring that the project was envisioned as a Yugoslav initiative.⁵² The distribution of the Bibliography's proceeds opened a new set of problems: should the sections have the right to a share of the revenues from the Association's joint project? Were the

⁵⁰ *Bibliografija knjiga ženskih pisaca u Jugoslaviji*. Beograd, Ljubljana, Zagreb: Udruženje univerzitetski obrazovanih žena u Jugoslaviji, 1936. The Bibliography was created by merging the bibliographies compiled by the Belgrade, Ljubljana, and Zagreb sections, and the entire project was coordinated by Elza Kučera.

⁵¹ FELDMAN 2004: 243-246.

⁵² IAB, UOŽ, 1936/94. The Central Board in the end agreed to give each section 200 offprints

sections expected to work toward a common objective without compensation? What were the specific rights and obligations of the sections? Throughout that period, there were several projects to redefine the relationship between the centre and sections. Representatives of the Zagreb Section emerged as the leaders of the reformers and, on three occasions, launched initiatives to reorganize the Association, aiming to grant greater autonomy and influence to individual sections.

The first demand for the Association's reorganization was made in a letter informing Belgrade about the establishment of the Zagreb Section. Croatian intellectuals immediately sought to align the Association with new circumstances and model it after existing Yugoslav organizations: the Alliance of the Women's Movement, the Yugoslav Journalists Association (*Jugoslavensko novinarsko udruženje*), and the Yugoslav Professors Society (*Jugoslavensko profesorsko društvo*). This was the first, but not the last, instance where the dynamics of change within the AUWY intersected with the organization of one of these associations. It should be noted that the three organizations differed in their goals, origins, structures and the status of the Zagreb branch, but they were all united in two things: they operated throughout Yugoslavia, and they counted some of the members of the newly formed AUWY section among their ranks. The Alliance of the Women's Movement was a feminist association and a member of the International Alliance of Women (IAW), a global feminist organization. It consisted of several independent associations called Women's Movement established in various cities throughout the country, including Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Split, Slavonski Brod, Varaždin, etc. The Alliance's headquarters shifted as per the location of its leadership, and when Alojzija Štebi became president in 1926, the leadership moved to Ljubljana.⁵³ The Yugoslav Journalists Association emerged in 1921 by merging the existing Croatian, Slovenian and Serbian journalist organizations, which became relatively independent sections within the new Association. The Yugoslav Professors Society had the most centralized structure among the three, with its headquarters in Belgrade and sections in provinces and *banovinas*.⁵⁴ In Croatia, however, it faced competition from the independent Society of Croatian Secondary School Teachers (*Društvu hrvatskih srednjoškolskih profesora*). In the subsequent part of the letter, the Zagreb members underlined (literally!) that the new regulations should be collaboratively designed, with the main objective being the transfer of administration from the

⁵³ KECMAN 1978: 182-186.

⁵⁴ The *banovinas* were the Kingdom's administrative-territorial units. They had no autonomy, and their borders did not adhere to historical principles.

Belgrade Section to an independent joint governing body, the Central Board.⁵⁵ However, Zagreb's negotiating position was relatively weak back then. The Belgrade Section had already led the Association for three years and was unwilling to yield decision-making power to newcomers, especially at a time when the dictatorial regime in the country was enforcing strict centralization.⁵⁶ Consequently, the Belgrade Section's members drafted new rules themselves, which they then sent for review. The Zagreb Section provided suggestions, although they were only partially incorporated.⁵⁷ The new rules were ultimately adopted at the congress in Belgrade in 1931. Essentially, it only formally removed the Belgrade Section's dominant role. The Association's central office remained in Belgrade, the president of the Belgrade Section could also serve as the Association's president, and, except for the vice-presidents who were also presidents of other sections, all members of the Central Board were required to reside in Belgrade or its vicinity. At least once a year, a plenary session was to be held in Belgrade, where all sections would be represented by two members (president and vice-president), and every three years, a Congress was to be convened.⁵⁸ In practice, several Belgrade members of the Central Board still effectively governed the Association. Plenary sessions regularly saw only representatives from Belgrade, Novi Sad, and Zagreb attending, while Ljubljana usually empowered delegates from Zagreb, and other sections and subcommittees appointed the president or secretary of the Central Board to represent their interests. Since all three members of the International Commission were part of the Central Board and thus required a Belgrade address, the Belgrade Section also retained a monopoly on communication with the IFAW.

Zagreb's second attempt to decentralize and energize the AUWY's governance occurred under the significantly changed circumstances of 1936. In those days, the Kingdom was experiencing a revival of political life. Following years of unitarist pressure, inter-ethnic conflicts once again came to the fore. In Croatia, the Croatian Peasant Party emerged as a political movement dedicated to addressing the Croatian national question and it garnered open support from diverse social groups, including intellectuals and numerous women's organizations. National protests and conflicts also manifested during the ICW conference in Dubrovnik, thus making it evident that the Yugoslav women's movement could no longer ignore the exist-

⁵⁵ IAB, UOŽ, 1931/16.

⁵⁶ The so-called January 6 Dictatorship was in effect in Yugoslavia at the time (from 6 January 6 1929 to 3 September 1931). It was characterized by centralism, Yugoslav unitarism and political persecution. The state also changed its name from the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

⁵⁷ IAB, UOŽ, 1931/19.

⁵⁸ PRAVILA 1931.

ence of national tensions within its ranks.⁵⁹ Most importantly, by then the Zagreb Section had gained credibility within the Association and secured the support of the Ljubljana and Sarajevo Sections. The focal point of the new reform proposal was the empowerment of the 'plenary sessions', which were intended to assume some activities and decision-making processes both from the Central Board and Congress. Also, they could be held in different towns, and their decisions would be valid only if delegates from at least one-third of the total number of sections were present. These initiatives were accompanied by two additional proposals presented by President Zorka Kasnar Karadžić and the Ljubljana Section, aiming to reform the Central Board. According to the new concept, it would consist of a narrower and broader committee and would be entirely separate from the Belgrade Section's administrative board. Finally, the financial relationships between the sections and the Central Board were defined more clearly. The proposal successfully passed through a series of discussions during which some of the participants appeared somewhat puzzled about the nature of the changes and, ultimately, it was officially ratified at the Third AUWY Congress held in Belgrade in February 1939.⁶⁰

However, by then, the Zagreb Section was already several steps ahead. At the time of the Congress, Yugoslavia had just gone through the dramatic December 1938 elections, treated by the media and political actors as the ultimate clash between two concepts of state organization, federalism and unitarism, and a decisive moment that would determine the fate of Yugoslavia and/or the Croatian question. The months following the elections were marked by anticipation of moves by the largest Croatian party, which had made a firm electoral promise that the time had come for Croatia to achieve its freedom, either within or outside Yugoslavia.⁶¹ Thus it happened that during the same AUWY Congress that had just adopted new rules, the Zagreb Section presented another bold idea: to reorganize the Association on a federal basis, as a federation of independent associations. According to that plan, the name of the Association would be changed to the Federation of Societies/Associations of Academically Educated Women (*Savez društava/udruženja akademski obrazovanih žena*). The association's headquarters would rotate, shifting with the elected president's residence. Sections would transform into independent societies with the same goals as the Federation. At the helm of the Federation would be the Federal Board (*Savezna uprava*), consisting of the president, two vice-presidents, two secretaries, a treasurer, and one committee member from each individual association. The international commission would be separate from the Federal Board.⁶²

⁵⁹ LEČEK 2015: 45; OGRAJŠEK GORENJAK 2020: 731.

⁶⁰ IAB, UOŽ, 1936/107, 1936/94, 1938/19.

⁶¹ BOBAN 1965: 45-79.

⁶² IAB, UOŽ, 1939/70.

As could be expected, this proposal faced strong opposition from Belgrade and a vigorous debate unfolded as to whether the Zagreb proposal aligned with IFUW rules. The Zagreb Section believed that its plan was consistent with IFUW rules, stating:

“The Members of the IFUW can be associations and federations accepted by the Board after determining that their objectives align with those of the IFUW, as expressed in Article 1 of the Rules. Each country may be represented by only one association or federation recognized in this manner.”⁶³

Therefore, they emphasised that the IFUW accepted both “associations or federations” and that the Federation of Societies/Associations of Academically Educated Women would basically promote the same goals as the existing Association. Belgrade, on the other hand, believed that it actually contradicted the spirit of IFUW’s national policy. Their understanding of the aforementioned article was different from the Croatian perspective, and they believed that it meant that each country could be represented by only one “federation or association,” not a “federation of associations,” and that in this case, “federation” bore a lexical rather than political meaning.⁶⁴ The intricate relationship between international women’s organizations and their national affiliates had been a recurring challenge in transnational women’s associations. Organizations promoting the ‘one country-one representative’ policy urged women around the world to create overarching national associations, but they also faced difficulties in complex multinational countries.⁶⁵ The IFUW’s national policies aimed to achieve “comparative homogeneity.” Insisting on national affiliations that gathered all women living in the same country was intended to foster their cooperation and networking. However, as highlighted by Joyce Goodman, such a policy inevitably discouraged the aspirations of national and other minorities in their pursuit of achieving legitimate status.⁶⁶ Therefore, when presented with the draft of the Croatian proposal, IFUW was not impressed. In a response that attempted to convey a neutral tone, it expressed scepticism about accountability of the governing body of such a federation for the actions of essentially independent associations, but also they advised some leniency towards the sections up to a certain extent.⁶⁷ In any case, it seemed that the Croatian project was successfully halted at the Congress, thus marking the end of that chapter.

Six months later, new political changes in the country would once again stir unrest within the ranks of the AUWY and revive the project of federalization. By

⁶³ IAB, UOŽ, 1939/70.

⁶⁴ IAB, UOŽ, 1938/19.

⁶⁵ For example, the ICW in the Habsburg Monarchy, ZIMMERMAN 2010: 153-170.

⁶⁶ GOODMAN 2021;

⁶⁷ IAB, UOŽ, 1939/70.

late summer of 1939, influenced by heightened geopolitical tensions in Europe, a shift occurred in addressing the Croatian question. The Cvetković-Maček Agreement in August 1939 led to the establishment of the Banovina of Croatia (Banovina Hrvatska), a distinct autonomous territorial entity. From the Croatian standpoint, this marked the initial step toward restructuring the Kingdom of Yugoslavia on a federal basis, prompting swift efforts to assume and organize administration within the new entity. With a tradition of organized resistance under adverse political climates, the HSS diversified its activities across various sectors, including the economy, culture, social policy, women's issues and education.⁶⁸ Recognizing that political concessions and rights alone were insufficient for constructing an independent society, they acknowledged the need to address the cultural, economic, educational and other ramifications of prolonged unitary policies. In this process, Yugoslav institutions and associations were marked as just another manifestation of unitarism and centralism. Newspapers began listing complaints against such associations, including their centres in Belgrade, a monopoly on foreign cooperation, Yugoslav names and pro-Yugoslav politics, and called for a reorganisation in line with the new political circumstances.⁶⁹ This approach quickly influenced various associations in Croatia, leading them to seek either secession or a reformulation of their status within Yugoslav organizations. In doing so, they experienced different levels of success. The efforts of the Zagreb section of the Yugoslav Professors Society to reorganize into the Union of Professors Societies of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Savez profesorskih društava Kraljevine Jugoslavije) ended in failure, prompting the withdrawal of some Croatian professors. Conversely, the more independent Zagreb section of the Yugoslav Journalists Association successfully transformed into the Journalists Society of the Banovina of Croatia (Novinarsko društvo Banovine Hrvatske) in mid-1940. The Federation of Sports Alliances (Savez sportskih saveza), initiated by King Alexander, disintegrated into the Serbian Sports Federation (Savez srpskih sportskih saveza), Croatian Sports Concord (Hrvatska športska sloga), and Slovenian Sports Concord (Slovenska športska sloga), after which these associations fostered conflict rather than cooperation.⁷⁰

The Zagreb Section responded promptly, convening an extraordinary session in September, during which two distinct factions emerged. One faction advocated for the immediate withdrawal of the Section from the AUWY, proposing the establishment of an independent society. The moderate faction suggested another attempt to reorganize the AUWY on a federal basis. Although the latter faction prevailed in discussions, the Zagreb Section had already begun acting as an independent organization, bypassing the mediation and authority of Belgrade. For

⁶⁸ LEČEK 2015:41.

⁶⁹ IAB, UOŽ, 1939/70.

⁷⁰ NOVAK 2007: 153; ŽUTIĆ 1991: 227-272.

instance, it directly sent its proposal to all sections and an inquiry to London. In their letters, they referred to “changes in the state structure,” balancing between a plea to other sections to accept the proposal that goes “in favour (...) of all (...) sections in the country” and an ultimatum, stating that “further successful work would be possible” only if the association aligns with the new political situation in the Kingdom.⁷¹ The debate on the Zagreb proposal took place at the plenary session in early December. Zagreb was represented by its president, a member of the moderate faction. Soon though, two things became clear: the Zagreb Section would have no allies in the debate, and Roksana Cuvaj was not a good choice to defend their position. As an artist, she struggled with the legal terms and arguments that confronted her, and she was not authorized to discuss compromise solutions, making her address appear more like an ultimatum. She emphasized that Zagreb insisted on sections becoming independent associations and legal entities, and that this was a “*conditio sine qua non*.”⁷² Lengthy and agonizing discussions primarily brought attention to all of the Zagreb Section’s transgressions (failure to pay regular dues, not informing the Central Board about the issues with French guests, not seeking Belgrade’s permission when inviting four Belgrade students to participate in the exchange, etc.), before proceeding to raise specific objections to the draft. Yet again, the conversation centred on the meaning of the term “federation” in the IFUW rules and the acceptability of such a solution from the IFUW’s standpoint, since none of its affiliates were organized in that way. Furthermore, women from Zagreb were accused of succumbing to the “psychosis” prevailing in their country, allowing men to dictate their moves. “As soon as men send the ‘separate’ signal, we need to stick to it immediately, which is absurd.”⁷³ The representative of the Sarajevo Section emphasized that the transformation of sections into independent associations was possible only in larger sections. K. Marinković expressed mistrust in the Federation itself because “(...) tomorrow we could say we don’t need the Federation. Each independent society remains on its own, and competition may arise among these associations for the membership in the International Federation.”⁷⁴ Some considered it a bluff, especially as both the Zagreb and Split sections of the Yugoslav Professors Society were threatening to disintegrate, but nothing happened in the end. Another opinion was that restructuring would be premature. “Why should our association be the first to break?” However, they also conveyed a noteworthy willingness to compromise. Instead of altering the name to the ‘Federation of Associations,’ they considered adopting ‘Federation of University Women’. While sections were not to be transformed into legal entities,

⁷¹ IAB, UOŽ, 1939/51, 63, 70.

⁷² IAB, UOŽ, 1939/70.

⁷³ IAB, UOŽ, 1939/70.

⁷⁴ IBID.

they could be granted more authority and independence. Additionally, the plenary session proposed the prompt formation of a committee of legal professionals, with representatives from each section, to oversee the new reform.⁷⁵ A few weeks later, the Zagreb assembly rejected these proposals as unacceptable and commenced the process of reorganizing the Zagreb Section into an independent association. Subsequently, a decision was made to establish the Society of Academic Women in Zagreb at the beginning of 1940.⁷⁶ After that, there was no further trace of this society, and their rules are not documented in the Croatian State Archive.⁷⁷

During its brief existence, the Zagreb Section sought to balance the national, feminist and professional needs of its members. Concurrently, they aimed to position themselves as valuable and equal collaborators within the umbrella association, foster connections with the local and international women's network, and contribute to forging the national identity. The Section's withdrawal from the Association meant the prevalence of the national principle over others, at the expense of member interests. An independent association without an independent state was destined to isolation. Understanding the driving forces behind this decision is challenging, aside from evident support for the Croatian national movement. Perhaps they envisioned creating a parallel and interconnected organization over time, one that would compete with the Belgrade Association for membership in the IFUW, as Belgrade representatives somewhat feared. Alternatively, amidst the worldwide deterioration of international cooperation systems, they might have believed that emphasising allegiance to the national community took precedence. It is therefore understandable that both Kosijer and Obradović saw Zagreb's secession as a move driven solely by political motives.⁷⁸ However, while the escalating political and national turmoil undeniably pushed the conflict between the Section and the Centre to its breaking point, Zagreb's resolute stance also drew strength from its tradition of advocating for equal status within the Association and a legitimate cause for discontent. This pursuit had never been apolitical; it had consistently contained a dimension of national resistance against unitarism. On the other hand, in the same manner, Belgrade's position was not devoid of national implications. Political shifts similarly swayed the positions of the Central Board and the Belgrade Section, fluctuating from somewhat rigid to the more lenient promotion of centralism and Yugoslavism. Unfortunately, the following year none of it mattered any more. Hitler's invasion of Yugoslavia abruptly halted the activities of both Yugoslav and Croatian university women, marking the end of this chapter in their (his)story.

⁷⁵ IBID.

⁷⁶ ABiH, UOOŽ, Izvještaji i zapisnici, X (1940): 1-6.

⁷⁷ PLEŠE 2000.

⁷⁸ KOSIJER 2021: 309; OBRADOVIĆ 1998: 257.

Examining the resurgence of the university women's assembly in the early 1950s feels somewhat akin to looking at the negative of its interwar story. The political landscape had shifted from a unitary monarchy to a socialist federal republic. Instead of a vibrant political scene and a network of women's associations, there was now only the Communist Party and a single women's organization: the Women's Antifascist Front (AFŽ). The process of association also took a reverse direction: national associations emerged first and then came together into a unified entity. The initiative to launch a new society did not come from abroad but originated from within, from the meetings of "veteran members." In fact, the new association found itself isolated from the international network right from the beginning, as its establishment unfolded during a time of international seclusion that befell Yugoslavia after the Tito-Stalin split in 1948. One could even argue that the struggle to find a way out of this isolation was a catalyst for its formation.

While Yugoslavia grappled with the consequences of the Soviet economic blockade and utter political solitude, the Women's Antifascist Front (AFŽ) faced expulsion from the only international women's organization that welcomed associations from communist countries: the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF).⁷⁹ In this challenging situation, maintaining connections with women beyond the reach of Soviet influence became crucial. "We will establish the broadest contact with progressive women worldwide who are showing an increasing interest in our country,"⁸⁰ they declared few months later in a resolution intended for distribution among – largely indifferent – local peasant women and branches of the WIDF and other "progressive" organizations in Rome, London, and Paris.⁸¹ At that time, "progressive" women primarily referred to left-leaning sympathizers of the communist world, but the resolution hinted at a subtle openness to other possibilities. However, the AFŽ, as an organization that until recently actively participated in the WIDF, could not anticipate a warm reception from Western international women's alliances. As demonstrated by Francisca de Haan, the women's transnational network was not immune to Cold War divisions, espionage scandals and internal conflict. The rivalry between the major female

⁷⁹ The WIDF was established in 1945, bringing together leftist, communist and socialist women's organizations. It championed antifascism, women's rights, peace and, later, anti-colonialism, leading to an expansion of its activities among women in the Third World. Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, it emerged as the third-largest transnational women's organization, alongside the ICW and IAW. The WIDF played a pivotal role in the establishment of International Women's Year (1975) and the UN's convention on women. Originally based in Paris, the headquarters of the organization were later relocated to (East) Berlin. HAAN 2017: 524.

⁸⁰ MITROVIĆ 1950: 28.

⁸¹ BONFIGLIOLI 2013: 66; ĐORĐEVIĆ 2017:158.

umbrella organizations, the ICW and IAW, and their socialist competitor, the WIDF, reached such heights that certain members began questioning how to align this conflict with their stance on political neutrality. WIDF branches faced bans in France, persecution in the US, and individuals who were part of the ICW but also involved in WIDF activities were compelled to take sides.⁸²

In the early 1950s, the doors to the international market finally cracked open for Yugoslavia, not in the East, but rather in the West. Following the initial shock and suspicion, because it could have still been a “devious trick,” Western countries recognized the potential of this rift and cautiously began fostering collaboration with Yugoslavia. The leap forward was not easy for either side; it demanded bridging not just mutual distrust but also cultural and ideological biases.⁸³ Yugoslavia’s pivot towards the West also opened new international opportunities for the AFŽ. The Third Congress of the AFŽ in Yugoslavia in late October 1950 witnessed the arrival of a diverse group of delegates from Western nations: Great Britain, Norway, Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands and others. Some of them represented social-democratic, labour, or communist organizations, but there were also representatives or at least members from various branches of politically neutral organisations such as the IFUW or the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).⁸⁴ However, merely opening channels of communication was only the initial step toward its realization, as the interaction between the AFŽ and non-political Western women’s organizations was burdened by a legacy of mutual disdain. “Some members of the international organization did not acknowledge the AFŽ’s competence,”⁸⁵ highlighted Seka Krajačić, adding self-critically that they might have been at fault themselves for sending worthy but perhaps unsuitable comrades abroad.

The process of Yugoslavia approaching the West inevitably spurred internal reforms marked by the easing of communist control, decentralization, the adoption of democratic rhetoric, bureaucratic streamlining, and a measured opening of borders for athletes or scientists. This period also witnessed a transition to a unique path of socialism: self-management.⁸⁶ During that time, on the other hand, the AFŽ entered its final phase of operation (1950-1953). De-bureaucratization for them essentially translated into the deprofessionalization of the organization and elimination of paid positions, so the focus shifted from political engagement to voluntary activism aimed at addressing various “women’s” issues and childcare,⁸⁷

⁸² HAAN 2017: 520-533.

⁸³ JAKOVINA, 2002.:30; GOLDSTEIN 2008: 481.

⁸⁴ DIJANIĆ 2014: 49.

⁸⁵ HR HDA 1630, DUOŽH 1939-1955, Društvo univerzitetski obrazovanih žena Hrv. 1951/55, 1951/I: 17.

⁸⁶ JAKOVINA 2003: 283, 296.

⁸⁷ SKLEVICKY 2020: 271-276.

until it was finally abolished, and in its place Union of Women's Societies (Savez ženskih društava) was formed.

Opportunities arising from the partial opening to the West and the reconstruction of the AFŽ paved the way for the re-establishment of a society aimed at uniting academic women. This association would shoulder the responsibility of addressing the professional concerns of intellectual women, tap into the potential of voluntary work by educated women for specific AFŽ projects, and, most importantly, establish successful collaboration with the Western women's network based on pre-war connections with the IFUW. "The idea of reinstating the Association of University Women in our country primarily stemmed from the need to further develop (...) the connections that our women had established with women worldwide,"⁸⁸ Anka Matić emphasised in the invitation to the founding assembly of the Zagreb association. In isolated Croatia, the enumeration of the benefits of these cross-border contacts must have sounded particularly enticing: international competitions, exchanges, scholarships, etc. While the AFŽ initiated this effort and university women utilized its facilities and stationery, it was paramount for the revived association to be formally independent and include members from the interwar period, allowing it to present itself as a politically neutral entity.

Envisaging the structure of the newly revived society reflected the shifting political landscape, with Yugoslavia now comprising six federal republics. In this context, the process followed a reverse trajectory: individual societies were initially established within each Republic, later interconnecting into the overarching Federation of University Women of Yugoslavia (Savez univerzitetski obrazovanih žena Jugoslavije, FUWY).⁸⁹ The entire process was supervised and overseen by the steering committees of Yugoslavia and individual Republics and concluded with mandatory telegrams to Tito. The structure of the umbrella federation echoed elements of the pre-war Association with its centre in Belgrade and a Central Board that included an executive committee, presidents from all associations, and members of the international commission.⁹⁰ It is difficult to escape the impression that what had transpired was an overdue compromise between the 1939 Zagreb

⁸⁸ HR HDA 1630, DUOŽH 1939-1955, Društvo univerzitetski obrazovanih žena Hrv. 1951/55, 1951/7:2.

⁸⁹ It is interesting that in the Croatian draft version, the handwritten term 'societies' is added before University Women, suggesting the name 'Federation of Societies of University Women'. This indicates that even then, Zagreb proposed organizing the umbrella association as the 'Federation of Societies'. (HR HDA 1630, DUŽH 1939-1955, Društvo univerzitetski obrazovanih žena Hrv., 1952/Nacrt statuta Saveza društava univerzitetki obrazovanih žena Jugoslavije). However, evidently this was not successful, as the adopted rules prescribed the name 'Federation of University Women of Yugoslavia'. (Rješenje o odobravanju osnivanja i rada Saveza univerzitetski obrazovanih žena Jugoslavije 18.12.1952.: Službeni list FNRJ, 24.12.1952., 965).

⁹⁰ HR HDA 1630, DUOŽH 1939-1955, Društvo univerzitetski obrazovanih žena Hrv., 1952/Nacrt statuta Saveza društava univerzitetki obrazovanih žena Jugoslavije.

project and the AUWY's legal committee, though noticeably skirting any reference to it. During the founding assembly of the Society of University Women of Croatia (Društvo univerzitetski obrazovanih žena Hrvatske) on 18 January 1952, Anka Matić delivered a speech providing a somewhat inaccurate historical account of the association,⁹¹ critically addressing the shortcomings of interwar (bourgeois) society, and highlighting the potential for its revival.⁹² Ethnic and anti-centralisation disputes were intentionally omitted from the narrative and collective memory, and one participant later even recalled, "The entire society was Yugoslav orientated, never leaning towards nationalism."⁹³ Instead, emphasis was placed on university women who later joined the anti-fascist Partisan forces. The Society eventually brought together "veterans" who had been involved in organizing Zagreb university women since their "junior" days, alongside emerging figures from the "new" elite. Among its members were, for instance, Anka Matić (the first president), Dora Vinski, Anica Rakar Magošić, Ruža Francetić, Zdenka Munk, Marija Šoljan-Bakarić (the second president) and Nada Sremec.

"Comrades! I believe that our society, drawing upon its positive traditions and emphasizing new experiences in its endeavours, can indeed become a significant factor in our socialist development,"⁹⁴ Matić exclaimed. The new society truly represented a fusion of old goals and methods tailored to fit the new environment. Just like their predecessors, they began compiling lists of academic women in the country, documenting their bibliographies, highlighting the need for analyzing the number of female students at various faculties, organizing lectures and cultural events, exploring ways to expand their membership by establishing branches in different towns, and responding to surveys received from other societies (namely the AFŽ).⁹⁵ But now, aligned with the socialist vision of desirable conduct, they also ventured into factories and set up advisory sessions where they addressed health-care, education and legal queries posed by female workers.⁹⁶ However, the practice proved far less successful. While in the interwar period, people would faint due to overcrowding at lectures and cultural events, during the 1950s, lecturers were held in empty halls. The counselling sessions, admittedly, saw high attendance, but the professionals quickly became weary of unpaid work. The AFŽ's attempt to transfer some activities to the Society of University Women did not proceed

⁹¹ She said that the Zagreb Section was established in 1928. The same mistake was later repeated in the inventory description of the fund HR- HDA, 1630.

⁹² HR- HDA, 1630, DUOŽH 1939-1955, Osnivačka skupština, 1952/I:17.

⁹³ FELDMAN 1986: 52.

⁹⁴ HR- HDA, 1630, DUOŽH 1939-1955, Osnivačka skupština 1952/I:17.

⁹⁵ HR- HDA, 1630, DUOŽH 1939-1955, Osnivačka skupština 1952/I:17; 1952/I:19; 1952/V:14; 1955/3:12.

⁹⁶ Žena u borbi, srpanj 1952: 10.

as planned. Women who joined the sections set up in smaller towns were rather passive and no longer inclined to participate, even within the AFŽ, stating they had “their own society.” Furthermore, university women could not agree on the main focus of their goals; some advocated for the idea of a reduced working day for women, while others vehemently opposed it.⁹⁷ The promised travel abroad also proved challenging to achieve. While Yugoslavia had somewhat loosened its borders, it grappled with numerous political and economic defections to the West, fostering suspicion toward individual travel.⁹⁸ University women faced the issue of how to undertake individual professional journeys abroad without committing a so-called “foreign exchange offense.”⁹⁹ Therefore, after assuming the presidency of the Society of University Women of Croatia in 1955, Marija Šoljan herself concluded that the Society of University Women, as it stood, was redundant given that its functions were already served by the AFŽ’s successor: the Union of Women’s Societies. She added, though, that its sole potential role might lay in “maintaining connections with international associations.”¹⁰⁰ Yet, it was in this particular realm that the university women of Yugoslavia faced their most significant defeat.

At the outset, there was a high level of optimism, with the IFUW accession process seemingly poised to conclude within a few months. However, it soon became evident that things would not proceed so smoothly. The continuous flow of inquiries and requests for Constitution clarifications resulted in the prolongation of the admission process by several years. In a letter to Dora Vinski, her friend lamented, “The questions they’re posing seem rather inconsequential (...) It appears they’re quite hesitant about admitting us, constantly finding loopholes in our Constitution.”¹⁰¹ Given the absence of preserved IFUW responses in the Croatian State Archive and my inability to access their records at the Aletta Institute for Women’s History in Amsterdam, I can only speculate as to what prompted the IFUW’s change in attitude. Drawing from their 1939 communications, I can assume the IFUW was yet again “puzzled” by the presence of autonomous societies within the FUWY, likely hindering the expected immediate acceptance of the FUWY. As time progressed, the political landscape shifted. With the IFUW gaining permanent status in the UN and advisory roles in the ECOSOC and UNESCO, its focus shifted from the European to global perspective. Furthermore, Yugoslavia in the early 1950s, when it was an intermittent member of the UN Council, might have appeared a more appealing partner than post-1953 Yugoslavia, which began

⁹⁷ HR-HDA, 1630, DUOŽH 1939-1955, 1955/4:5.

⁹⁸ ŠARIĆ 2015.

⁹⁹ HR-HDA, 1630, DUOŽH 1939-1955, 1955/III:12.

¹⁰⁰ HR-HDA, 1630, DUOŽH 1939-1955, 1955/4:5.

¹⁰¹ HR-HDA, 1630, DUOŽH 1939-1955, 1955/4:5.

to mend ties with the USSR after Stalin's death, and Yugoslav women even got an opportunity to decline the invitation to rejoin the WIDF. Although the IFUW officially upheld a politically neutral stance, its actions, charters, and ideals leaned toward the Western system. Inspection of the list of its affiliates in early 1980s reveals only a few socialist countries included, none originating from a communist legacy.¹⁰² Alternatively, the IFUW might have accurately assessed and recognized that the Yugoslav university women's organization was merely another tool of the communist system, destined for a brief existence. After all, representatives from Czechoslovakia and Hungary, present at the IFUW conference in 1947, quickly disappeared behind the Iron Curtain, while the Bulgarian association disbanded in the early 1950s before receiving a response to its admission request.¹⁰³ In the span of a few years, the FUWY followed their lead. An organization lacking internal drive, external acknowledgment, or a place within the structure of the prevailing regime, ceased its activities in the mid-1950s.

So, what did shape and reshape the associations of Zagreb university women? Fundamentally, their structure was partly preordained by the feminist and pacifist principles of the IFUW and the intricate power dynamics between central and peripheral entities, both within the IFUW-AUWY framework and relations between Belgrade and Zagreb. However, in the interwar period, the Zagreb Section actively sought ways to reconfigure its position. Their pursuits and achievements were closely related to political shifts and their standing within Croatia and the AUWY. The power struggle within the Association intertwined with a broader political landscape, where both sides adopted pre-conceived stances. The networking with other professional and women's societies, also, played a significant role in shaping the university women's associations. It facilitated initial contacts that led to the establishment of the Zagreb Section, invigorated their activities, and opened channels for the exchange of ideas. The structures and transformations in other organizations influenced how women in the Zagreb Section envisioned their society. They contemplated a fluid centre akin to the Alliance of Women's Movements, aspired to the autonomy observed in the Zagreb section of the Yugoslav Journalists Association, and more decisively pursued the federal principle than their colleagues in the Professors Society.

In the post-World War II period, the influence of politics was the dominant factor, and it was precisely political, rather than feminist processes, that led to the establishment of the new Society of University Women. The question remains

¹⁰² INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN (IFUW) 1982.

¹⁰³ NAZARSKA 2007: 167-168.

whether it embodied a continuation of pre-war activities or marked an entirely new organization. At first glance, the Society of University Women seemed to be a direct successor to the pre-war Zagreb Section. It gathered former members, pursued similar initiatives, delved into the analysis of women's university status, and its structure echoed the Zagreb Section's aspirations from 1939. Yet the first impression was misleading. The fundamental difference between the associations does not necessarily stem from the different time or the political context in which they operated but rather from their intended purpose. The pre-World War II Section primarily focused on its members, advancing their professional and social status, with social involvement seen as important yet secondary. In the post-WWII period, the focus shifted to the system and how the newly established society and its members could aid the socialist state in bolstering international relations and addressing internal social issues. When it became evident that it would not achieve its envisioned role, its existence became redundant.

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(Pre)oblikovanje udruženja zagrebačkih univerzitetski obrazovanih žena (1931-1955)

Rad istražuje isprepletenost utjecaja profesionalnih, feminističkih i nacionalnih procesa na rad zagrebačke sekcije Udruženja univerzitetski obrazovanih žena u Jugoslaviji (UUOŽJ) i njezinih nasljednica – Društva akademskih žena u Zagrebu (1940) i Društva univerzitetski obrazovanih žena Hrvatske (1952-1955). Prvi dio rada analizira osnivanje i djelovanje zagrebačke sekcije UUOŽJ, drugo poglavlje istražuje napore Sekcije da promijeni svoj status unutar UUOŽJ što je u konačnici dovelo do njegovog odcjepljenja, a u zadnjem dijelu se proučavaju okolnosti kratkotrajnog oživljavanja Društva univerzitetski obrazovanih žena Hrvatske početkom 1950-ih.

Zaključuje se da je na oblikovanje i djelovanje zagrebačke sekcije UUOŽJ utjecalo nekoliko ključnih faktora: feministički, pacifistički, nacionalni principi krovne međunarodne organizacije univerzitetski obrazovanih žena International Federation of University Women (IFUW), dinamika centra i periferije u odnosima IFUW -UUOŽJ i Beograd-Zagreb, nacionalni procesi i politički konflikti u međuratnoj Jugoslaviji, rastući broj akademskih žena u Hrvatskoj i domaća feministička scena. Sekcija se uspjela profilirati kao jedna od uspješnijih ogranaka UUOŽJ, ističući se brojem članica, angažmanom u projektima UUOŽJ, kao i samostalnim i često originalnim inicijativama (osnivanje junior sekcije, održavanje raznih tečaja za članice, kulturne aktivnosti itd.) Zagrebačka sekcija je tijekom relativno kratkog djelovanja (1931-1940) u tri navrata pokušala ispregovarati ravnoprav-

niji status unutar UOOŽJ, a njezini prijedlozi, kao i recepcija istih, oblikovali su se pod utjecajem političkih procesa u zemlji (diktature, oživljavanja političkog života, stvaranje Banovine Hrvatske) i restrukturiranja ostalih feminističkih i profesionalnih udruženja. U poratnom razdoblju, dominirao je utjecaj politike, te je upravo sukob Tito-Staljin indirektno doveo do osnivanja Društva univerzitetski obrazovanih žena Hrvatske i Saveza univerzitetski obrazovanih žena Jugoslavije. No, za razliku od predratnog razdoblja, kada su udruženja univerzitetski obrazovanih žena prvenstveno promovirala vlastite profesionalne i socijalne interese, sada je fokus bio na promicanju međunarodnih veza socijalističke Jugoslavije u hladnoratovskom okruženju i preuzimanju volonterske uloge u rješavanju ženskih i socijalnih problema. Upravo stoga novo udruženje nije uspjelo privući interes domaće ženske scene niti steći prepoznatljivost u međunarodnim ženskim organizacijama te je sredinom pedesetih prestalo postojati.

Ključne riječi: intelektualna povijest, ženska povijest, Udruženje univerzitetski obrazovanih žena u Jugoslaviji (UOOŽJ), IFUW, feminizam, AFŽ, Hladni rat, međuratni Zagreb

Keywords: intellectual history, women's history, Association of University Women in Yugoslavia, IFUW, feminism, AFŽ, Cold War, interwar Zagreb

Ida Ograjšek Gorenjak
Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu
Ivana Lučića 3
10000 Zagreb
iograjse@ffzg.hr

FILOZOFSKI FAKULTET SVEUČILIŠTA U ZAGREBU

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