

A Contribution to the Understanding of Socialist Fashion Yugoslav State Protocol and Western Fashion (1952–1961)

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Abstract:

Since her first public appearance, Jovanka Broz, the wife of Josip Broz Tito, shaped the perception of Tito's, new Yugoslavia in two distinct styles – one adjusted to diplomatic circles and the other attuned to the local context. As far as fashion is concerned, one of the key assumptions for the study of the First Lady's collection is the fact that she had access to the very top circles of the world's fashion industry and that she could freely order garments to be made, or select among the abundance of offered items according to the most appropriate ones. Unlike other First Ladies, the presence of Jovanka Broz was not restricted to a limited term of office of her husband, but her influence on the public spanned several decades. In this respect, it is even more important and challenging to analyze certain aspects of this influence or a segment of her activities.

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Jovanka Broz as the First Lady

Jovanka Broz, the wife of Josip Broz Tito and the First Lady of the Yugoslav communist regime, had to deal with the difficult task of shaping the perception of new, Tito's Yugoslavia both in diplomatic circles and in the local context. As far as fashion is concerned, it is usually assumed that the president's wife has access to the very top circles of the world's fashion industry, supreme fashion designers and *haute couture* salons, where she can freely order garments to be made for various occasions, or equally freely select, among the abundance of offered items, those that are the most appropriate for her taste and needs. This assumption is certainly applicable to Jovanka Broz, as opposed to the other First Ladies behind the Iron Curtain. And more than that – Jovanka Broz did not have a limited term of office ahead of her, as her husband was an undisputed leader.

For the Yugoslav communist regime, and especially for Josip Broz Tito personally, it was crucial to keep a distance to both the East and the West, and to maintain communication with both sides, while preserving the fragile support of multiple nations within Yugoslavia. As a figure, Jovanka Budisavljević was ideal: she was a soldier of the First Women's Partisan Unit of the Sixth Lika Division – the only women's military unit in Europe, and she was demobilized with the rank of major (fig. 1).



Fig. 1:
Jovanka Broz in Partisan uniform at the end of the II World War, Soko Banja, 1945, III-16871.

The news of the marriage was made public during the visit of the British Foreign Minister Sir Anthony Eden on 18 September 1952 (*Time*, 29 November 1952). The visit of distinguished guests and the public inauguration of the wife were equally important for Tito, who was elected President of the Republic already in January 1953, to be subsequently elected the President for Life. At the reception, Jovanka Broz wore a burgundy satin dress, in which she looked lavishly. The visual adjustment to the West, accompanied with a strict protocol, which was insisted upon by Josip Broz and which implied grandeur unacceptable to a genuine communist, put an end to the close relations with the East. After many years during which the stress had been laid on the 'people's' character of the government and the partisan uniform had been adopted as politically correct clothing, this shift was an illustration of prosperity, which the communist government also wanted to highlight in a local context.

The first appearance of Jovanka Broz on the international scene powerfully resounded in the Western media (fig. 2). "The Unexpected Mrs Broz," she was called by Bruno Tedeschi in *Giornale d'Italia* (7 October 1952), was described as you can see.



Fig. 2:
Jovanka Broz and Sir Anthony Eden at the reception on September 18th, 1952, 1952_16_074.

Equally sensational were the secret wedding, a drastic age difference, the figure of a women-warrior and the emergence of an elegant communist woman, until then unimaginable.

The return visit of Josip Broz to the United Kingdom in March 1953 was the first foreign visit after 1948 and a moment to define the protocols, especially the dress code, due to which the Yugoslav political elite would be recognized and accepted in the coming decades as a pro-Western and strictly formal. The Protocol of the President of the Republic was established on the initiative and according to instructions of Josip Broz in June 1954. The protocol of the New Yugoslavia played a superb role in representing the country. Visits were prepared that not a single detail was considered insignificant. The team decided who was to be seen in the photographs for newspapers and defined the furnishings and decoration of the rooms used during visits, the dress code for diplomats, members of the delegation and assistant staff. A single visit – to France in 1955 – was covered on 573 pages held by the Archives of Yugoslavia which reveal the names of the staff responsible for the wardrobe, hairstyles and the appearance of the presidential couple (AJ, 837 – I-2/6, KPR I-2/6).



Fig. 3:
Josip and Jovanka Broz with French officials during their visit to the Paris City Hall, 1956, 1956_055_063.

The early years of the marriage were consumed in intensive foreign policy campaigns (fig. 3). Based on press evidence, a huge role in preparing Jovanka Broz to assume the role of the First Lady was played by Clarissa Eden, the wife of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Britain, Anthony Eden (*Donas de Casa*, 1975). Visually appealing and content-relevant photographs were used as photo illustrations. Photos that show the presidential couple in the company of famous English actors were made in England, whereas photos from France and Italy featured Jean-Paul Sartre and Mario Del Monaco, respectively. Photos for the press were carefully selected: local newspapers mostly showed the First Lady in afternoon dress or outdoors, in a coat. Ever since Josip Broz had been elected president of Yugoslavia, the daily newspapers with the highest circulation published reports on his diplomatic activities as the headline news, *Politika* and *Borba* being the most influential ones. Typically, the articles were illustrated with photographs showing President Tito, often accompanied by his wife. The first visit of the Prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter Indira to Belgrade

(July 1st – 8th 1955), or Tito's visits to Paris (May 6th – 14th 1956) and the Soviet Union (May 31st – June 21st 1956) were the occasions to set an example how to create press coverage (*Politika*, *Borba*, the dates specified above). Simple, but sophisticated and glamorous dress style of Jovanka Broz could mainly be seen in international press.

The traits of the current fashion styles were always adjusted to her personal style, while every piece of clothing was tailored to her size, rendered in top-quality fabrics, attractive colours and textures, in accordance with the protocol and her role. Her make-up was also discreet, except for the red Dior lipstick. Her evening dresses were marked by a wide neckline that revealed the shoulders, short sleeves and luxurious fabrics.

For daytime occasions, Jovanka Broz usually chose perfectly tailored tight-waisted suits made of light georgette fabric, raw silk or shantung. Less commonly, she wore Chanel boucle suits.

Shoes were matched by small purses of box leather, kidskin, crocodile leather or snakeskin, and, in accordance with the rules of conduct in high society hats.

Yugoslav State Protocol and Western Fashion

The presidential couple dress style was determined by the protocol, while the details were left to personal choice. Already in the 1930s, Tito was noted as a person of an excellent taste, "a member of world-class dandies," as described by Salvador Dali during the Spanish Civil War (Petrovic 2002). Jovanka Broz could certainly learn a lot from her husband. She had access to international fashion magazines and the protocol included fashion shows, offering an opportunity to order clothing and accessories. Although her budget for this was practically unlimited and she had access to top fashion houses, she extensively relied on the skills of local milliners and embroiderers. Her clothes included handcrafted items made at *Narodna radinost* in Belgrade and garments sewn at the fashion salons of Mila Kavaloti in Rijeka, Melar and Dujšin in Zagreb, Croatia and Klara Rotschild, Budapest.

Since the mid-1950s, the diplomatic activities of the Yugoslav President were focused on the Non-Aligned Movement, undoubtedly guided by Tito's intention to position himself as its leader. The diplomatic efforts of Josip Broz were crowned by the First Conference of Non-Aligned Countries in Belgrade in 1961. Jovanka Broz was actively involved in this endeavour and invested considerable effort to be thoroughly informed about the countries they visited.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the extraordinary gowns of Jovanka Broz always bore details rendered in traditional decorative techniques of the peoples whose countries they visited.

The encounter with the photos of Jovanka Broz from the time when her beauty was at its peak causes mixed feelings (fig. 4). Despite the officers' rank and the partisan war biography, in terms of dress, demeanor and self-confidence, Jovanka Broz was a Western-style First Lady. In her thirties and forties, she was rightly considered the most elegant among the first ladies of the communist world. She spoke fine English and she was proud of it; she was well-informed about modern literature, painting and music. Unlike other wives of communist leaders, not only was she not hidden from the public eye, but was highlighted as a representative picture of the Yugoslav communist society and Tito's regime (Velimirović, 2006).



Fig. 4:
Josip and Jovanka Broz on a yacht, 1959, 1959_101_0002.

The power of the political elite in socialist Yugoslavia did not stem from and rely on the institutions and laws, but was derived from the personal authority of one powerful man. The spheres of competence were not clearly defined; the responsibility was not delegated, the system depended on personal relations and the arbitration of the powerful ones. The form became increasingly important, especially in the context of Tito's status abroad. It was a challenge for the Yugoslav diplomacy and it was solved through etiquette stricter than those of European courts.

Conclusion



Fig. 5:
Jovanka Broz in front of the President's residence, 1955, 1955_46_0116.

In this framework, Jovanka Broz built her outlook and set the standards of conduct that represented Yugoslavia as a country worthy of respect (fig. 5). Her dress style was not based on 'invented traditions', which was a common path in the process of creating the national symbolism in European countries, but was rather marked by a spontaneous promotion of the current traditions. Although the personal aspect of her role in the events that determined the position of Yugoslavia in international relations has remained under a veil of secrecy, it is certain that as a person, she inbuilt in Yugoslavia's 'good name' a considerably larger part of her personality than anyone else from her environment.

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