

Yugoslavia's Search for Hard Currency

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Trusted Enough? Yugoslav Diaspora and US Foreign Investment in Socialist Yugoslavia

Migration scholarship has traditionally examined emigrant remittances as monetary transfers sent to families in sending societies. This paper shifts focus to a distinct form of diaspora engagement: Yugoslav emigrants in the United States who acted as agents of economic diplomacy, facilitating joint ventures between US corporations and Yugoslav enterprises from the 1960s to the 1990s. Rather than sending money home, these emigrants channeled foreign capital, brokered business partnerships, and transferred technological and managerial knowledge across the Cold War "nylon curtain."

The paper asks what role diaspora members played in shaping Yugoslav-US joint ventures and how their involvement influenced the scale and outcomes of these investments. Drawing on archival sources and periodicals from both US and Yugoslav provenance, the analysis operates at multiple scales. At the macro level, it traces how Yugoslav state policy evolved from treating diaspora with suspicion during the 1970s to pragmatic engagement amid the 1980s economic crisis. At the meso level, it examines enabling institutions: consular networks in Cleveland, Chicago, and San Francisco, and the Center for Yugoslav-American Studies at Florida State University. At the micro level, it follows individual emigrants whose ventures, such as Milan Panić's 1990 partnership with Galenika representing one-quarter of all foreign investment that year, shaped local economies through capital infusion and knowledge transfer.

Yet did Yugoslav authorities ever fully trust the diaspora? The paper reveals a persistent gap between policy aspirations and outcomes, contributing to underexplored questions about emigrant investment as a form of engagement with sending societies in socialist Central and Southeastern Europe.

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