

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF FREIGHT FORWARDING ASSOCIATIONS IN SERBIA

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Abstract: *The evolution of freight forwarding associations over the time has not been much explored, particularly in a specific geographic context. Instead, the research focus has traditionally been directed to identify, describe, and explain some current phenomena in industry, often combined with the efforts to propose the solutions for certain challenges, or foresee the specific trends in the forthcoming period.*

Freight forwarding has a long and respectable tradition in Serbia. Still, the papers which explore the development of this economic activity in Serbia are notably missing. The presented research aims to reveal, consolidate, and systematize a scarce knowledge on evolution of our freight forwarding professional associations from 19th to 21st century. Their goals, activities and development could be related to the specific, and often turbulent economic, political, and social circumstances in Serbia, but also to the development of freight forwarding as an economic activity and a profession.

Keywords: *freight forwarding, customs agents, professional associations, Serbia, tradition.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The freight forwarding, as an economic activity, has evolved over the centuries. Some of traditional freight forwarders from the end of the 19th century have evolved from the small family firms into the regional and global 3PL and 4PL providers and integrators, as well to the most powerful companies in the logistics industry in the 21st century (Pavlić and Grčić, 2013; Schramm, 2012).

With time, freight forwarders have started to associate and make formal or informal groups to protect common interests, reach common goals, and develop the profession. These associations have been developed from local communities to the national and regional associations and, finally, to the most important global association — FIATA (the International Federation of Freight Forwarders Associations), founded in 1926, in Vienna

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(Turina, 1965; Zelenika, 1980).

The academic textbooks and scientific articles sometimes give a brief overview of the freight forwarding evolution, considering the evolution of logistics intermediaries in general, or the freight forwarding industry in the specific geographical context (Schramm, 2012; Vahrenkamp, 2008), for particular transport modes, including intermodal transport (e.g. Anderson, 2009), or type of cargo/services (Emery, 1950). In some cases, the freight forwarding companies like Schenker proudly point out their long and respectable tradition (Matis and Stiefel, 2004), thus contributing to the scarce literature. After the Second World War, the development of freight forwarding as the economic activity has been usually briefly described in the scholarly books in former Yugoslavia, with a repeated focus on the period after 1945. Among the rare exemptions are the textbooks of Turina (1965) and, in nowadays, Stojanović, (2021).

However, the research on the history and evolution of freight forwarding associations is notably missing. The greatest scholars in former Yugoslavia had very rare and scanty descriptions of the freight forwarders' associations for the period before the Second World War. Turina (1965) and Zelenika (1980) specified that the first associations were founded in several cities in Germany and Switzerland at the beginning of the 20th century, whereas missed any record about associations in our areas. Starting from this point, we explored how freight forwarders have been associated over time and how their associations and common activities have evolved to reach the common goals and to protect the professional interests in various political, economic, and social contexts in Serbia. The research covers the period from the late 19th century to the modern days. The presented findings reveal and systematize for the first time data on a long and respectable tradition of freight forwarding associations in Serbia and imply the significance of historical research in the development of freight forwarding as a scientific discipline.

The paper is structured as follows. In the second Section, the research methodology is presented. The third Section describes thoroughly the characteristics of freight forwarding associations in different periods, their activities and evolution, within specific, and often turbulent economic, political, and social circumstances in Serbia. The fourth Section summarizes and highlights the main results and gives the final remarks.

2. METHODOLOGY

Due to the very scarce literature on the modes and characteristics of freight forwarding associations, their appearance, work, and historical development in Serbia, it was necessary not only to review the preceding scholarly literature, but also to explore thoroughly previously unknown sources. The online national library information catalogue, COBISS platform, was used for a preliminary inquiry. The search was conducted mainly using the keywords associated with freight forwarding, such as "špedi", "otprem", "posredn", "freight forward", and "spedition". A Digital library of previous legal regulations, textbooks and monographs published by The Administration for Joint Services of the Republic Bodies was also used. The selected sources (books, newspapers, scientific articles, etc.) were further explored in the most important libraries in the country — the National Library of Serbia in Belgrade and the Matica Srpska Library in Novi Sad. A need for primary historical sources initiated further fieldwork. Therefore, a thorough investigation of local and state archives was performed in the period December 2021 - March 2022. The primary sites of explorations were the Historical Archives of

Belgrade, the Archives of Serbia and the Archives of Yugoslavia in Belgrade, the Historical Archives of Novi Sad, and the Archives of Vojvodina in Novi Sad. In the Historical Archives of Belgrade, some precious information regarding freight forwarders was found in the fond of the Belgrade Chamber of Commerce, including the important rulebooks and records from the annual assemblies of the Belgrade freight-forwarding associations. The research in the Archives of Serbia and the Archives of Yugoslavia was conducted in the fonds of the Ministry of National Economy and the Ministry of Trade and Industry, respectively. In the Historical archive of Novi Sad, the papers from the Association of merchants for the city and county of Novi Sad were inspected. In the Archives of Vojvodina, the stuff of the Ministry of Trade and Industry from the period between World Wars were examined. The periodicals were also used to fill in the gaps. They included the official newspaper such as *Srpske novine* (1895-1914), informational dailies such as *Politika* (1918-1941), and a professional journal „*Špeditersko-carinski vjesnik*” (1921-1922). Due to the volume, complexity and dispersion of explored stuff, the research is not finished. Here are presented the main results, revealed, and processed from December 2021 till the end of March 2022.

3. FREIGHT FORWARDING ASSOCIATIONS IN SERBIA FROM 19TH TO 21ST CENTURY

3.1 The first records of a professional association

The first records on a formal freight forwarders association date back to the early 19th century. In 1821, the brothers Solar applied to the local government in Zemun to get the license for opening a customs warehouse and freight forwarding firm named “Gondota”. The same application was forwarded to the local freight forwarding association, a kind of „guild”, for a professional opinion (IAB/10/2133). The answer of the guild's representative was negative, with a comprehensive explanation (IAB/10/2123). Finally, the town government (“Magistrat”) refused the request in 1822, thus indicating the role of the local freight forwarding association. This procedure was in line with the common practice in the 19th century, that states still transfer certain regulatory rights to the local guilds, related to their economic activity. The town of Zemun was on the border between the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire and it played an important role in trade between the two countries during 18th and 19th century. It could be expected that similar local professional associations have been present in some other towns, with more freight forwarders and other logistic intermediaries during the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century, or even earlier. Those were probably bigger towns, with developed international trade routes and locations near the borders, rivers, and railway stations. According to some sources, the main task of guilds in Serbia in 19th century was to protect their members from the unfair competition (Vučo, 1954). However, this business activity was modernized and formally regulated at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, in the Kingdom of Serbia.

3.2 From formal beginnings in the Kingdom of Serbia to the First World War

After liberation from the Ottoman Empire, and especially after gaining independence in 1878, the new Serbian state adopted numerous laws related to international trade, customs procedures, transport, and others, which directly impacted the freight forwarding profession. In 1895, the Ministry of Finance formally regulated the market of customs agents and freight forwarders in the Rulebook on customs intermediaries

(freight forwarders) (Ministarstvo finansija, 1895). According to the new rules, only individuals with a formal licence could be registered as freight forwarders and customs agents. Such decision has impacted to the market characteristics.

In the same year, freight forwarders, basically customs intermediaries, immediately started the efforts to establish their own professional association (AS/MNP/1903/VI/53). They applied the request to the Ministry of National Economy, arguing in detail a recent development of freight forwarding activities in Serbia and an emerging need for a formal professional organization. In July of 1895, their request was approved, and the Freight Forwarding Guild (FFG) was found. Its first assembly was held in September of the same year. This is the earliest revealed record of a formal freight forwarding association in the Kingdom of Serbia. The FFG drew up the Rules of Procedure, the aim of which was to regulate the work of freight forwarders in the guild. Rules were accepted by the Ministry of National Economy in December of 1895, and this is the first known written official rulebook of freight forwarding association in Serbian history (AS/MNP/1903/VI/53). Research to date has shown that the guild activities continued at least until 1903.

The next known information comes almost a decade later. In 1911, the Executive Board of a freight forwarding association submitted a formal Opinion and remarks on the proposal of Customs law introduced by the Ministry of Finance to the National Assembly in October 1911. Opinion and remarks were directed to the deputies of the National Assembly, and it was printed as a book with 34 pages. The Executive Board presented detailed opinions, observations, and remarks, with thorough comments on many articles proposed in Customs law (Primerbe i mišljenje carinskih posrednika špeditera o projektu Carinskog zakona, 1911). Their overall conclusion was that the proposed law was harmful for international trade and the country on a whole. Their well-argued and exhaustive comments, remarks and recommendations clearly demonstrate the main characteristics of the freight forwarding associations representatives. They were well-educated, experienced, and highly skilled professionals. They were fully aware of the practical implications and consequences of all articles in the proposed act.

The first known printed rules related to the same freight forwarding association were published in 1912 and were named the "Rules of the Association of trade-customs and railway-shipping intermediaries", thus indicating another name of the professional association, compared to the one from 1895. The main goals of the Association were (Pravila udruženja trgovačko-carinskih i željezničko-brodarskih posrednika, 1912):

- To improve the work of the association and to cooperate with the Chamber of commerce in that sense;
- To establish the useful institutions for the own profession and the members;
- To propose the regulations for governing the relationships between its members;
- To cultivate the companionship and solidarity between the members in common affairs,
- To develop the communication and cooperation with the Chamber of commerce and other economic institutions, send the relevant reports etc.;
- To make records of all firms in the country registered for this economic activity;
- To protect the profession, and the interests of association members, especially in the case of changes in laws and regulations concerning the profession, etc.

It could be noticed that the goals were well-established and matured. In essence, they could be easily applied in the statutes of modern logistics and freight forwarding

associations. Also, the printed Rulebook may indicate an increased need to make these rules more available to the members and other interested institutions and professional organizations, but also to all freight forwarders in the country.

3.3 In the Kingdom of Yugoslavia: between two World Wars

After the First World War, a new-found state, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, created new opportunities for cooperation of freight forwarders in the Yugoslav area. In 1921, the Federation of Freight Forwarders of Yugoslavia was founded, with a headquarters in Zagreb. The members of this association were also dominantly coming from Zagreb, although there were firms from other cities located in the area of the current country Croatia, and in less extent from Serbia and Slovenia. For a while, the Federation has printed its herald, "Špediterstvo-carinski vjesnik", with the first number already published in July of 1921, where Federation and its activities were mentioned on the first page (Anonymous, 1921, p. 1). Further available issues have also regularly brought the news about the Federation activities, but also many useful national and international news from the freight forwarding and freight transport world.

In the same year, a new Serbian organization was established in Belgrade, named the Association of Customs and Traffic Intermediaries — Freight Forwarders (CTIFF Association). Its rules were approved by the Chamber of Commerce in 1921 and by the Minister of Finance the next year (Pravila udruženja carinsko-saobraćajnih posrednika – špeditera, 1922). The Ministry of Finance has also published a new rulebook for customs intermediaries (Pravilnik o carinskim posrednicima, 1921). The objectives of CTIFF Association were in many ways similar to the ones set up in 1912, with the main goals as follows: to protect the interest of its members, to be an intermediary between the professionals and governmental institutions, like the Ministry of Finance, the General Directorate of Customs, etc., and to initiate the founding of useful institutions for freight forwarders. It should be emphasized that the sense of comradeship and solidarity seemed to be amplified in the 1920s, according to the new rules. For instance, the updated rules clearly determined that the burials for the deceased members must be provided at the expense of the CTIFF Association, and that their families were entitled to three months of financial assistance.

The CTIFF Association was in 1932 transformed into the Association of Customs Intermediaries and Freight Forwarders for the City of Belgrade (CIFFB), which was recorded in the new Rulebook (Pravila udruženja carinskih posrednika i špeditera, 1932). It consisted of two sections — groups of members: the customs intermediaries and the freight forwarders. As stated by the report of the Executive Board of directors of the CIFFB Association, there were 58 firms — members in 1933, of which 30 customs intermediaries, 11 international transporters and 17 local freight forwarders (IAB/509/K84/16). As planned by the rulebook from 1932, the Support Fund for the Humanitarian Purposes of the Customs Intermediaries was established in 1935. The purpose of the fund was to assist exhausted, sick, and impoverished association members. The main source of money available to the fund was the property of the old Association of CTIFF, further supported by the regular monthly contributions from the members of the new association and with charitable contributions (Pravila potpornog fonda za humane ciljeve članova carinskih posrednika udruženja carinskih posrednika i špeditera za grad Beograd, 1935). The existence of this kind of foundation indicates the level of mutual solidarity in the freight forwarding profession. It was particularly important in the

circumstances where freight forwarders faced formidable consequences of the Great Depression, which affected the reduction of trade turnover and depletion of their earnings. Apart from this fund, the association and both of its successive descendants have almost regularly allocated some charity funds for different needs of the wider community, as evidenced in the minutes from their annual assemblies.

In 1936, the CIFFB Association was divided into two separate associations — the freight forwarders (FFB), found on August 23rd, and the customs intermediaries (CIB), found on August 30th. The reasons were mostly related to the competition and conflicts of interests between these two groups of professionals. Split between customs intermediaries and freight forwarders even made it to the pages of the most influential daily in the country, „Politika” (Anonymous, 1936). The new associations almost immediately published their rules, and both were approved by the Chamber of Commerce on September 16th.

3.4 Under the occupation

The German attack on Belgrade in April 1941 marked the beginning of the World War II in Yugoslavia. After the quick defeat of the Yugoslav army, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was divided between the occupying forces and most of Serbia fell under German control. Under the new conditions, the entire Serbian economy was subjugated to the war aims of the Third Reich. The German companies had a privileged position in occupied Serbia. Both associations, FFB and CIB, have continued their activities in Belgrade during the war. They experienced a decreased need for export and import of goods, as well as a very challenging business and the living environment under occupation. Still, they have continued with their work, including the humanitarian activities that supported the members of the association and the wider community in Serbia.

The racist ideology of Nazism has penetrated all pores of society and left its marks even on freight forwarding associations. New authorities have quickly launched an investigation into the owners of freight forwarding companies looking for the Jewish people among them (IAB/509/K84/33). The number of Jews listed in the records of the association's assemblies decreased significantly during the IIWW years.

3.5 The freight forwarding associations in the period of socialism

After 1945, the Yugoslav state underwent radical ideological, political, social, and economic changes. During the Second World War and its aftermath, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia has come to power, and was set about creating a new, socialist order. Accordingly, the measures of sequestration, nationalization and confiscation have followed attempts to reorganize and rebuild the Yugoslav economy. The Association of FFB and the Association of CIB have continued to exist formally until 1948. However, they were disbanded with the disappearance of private property and the introduction of the new political and economic system. During the first post-war years, the monopoly over international freight forwarding was granted to the state-owned companies, first „DETRANS“, and then „Minšped“ and „Transjug“ (Turina, 1965). Since before 1952 the economy was extremely centralized, the governmental professional freight forwarding associations did not exist in the country (Zelenika, 1980).

The introduction of workers self-management in 1952 and the liberalization of the Yugoslav economy enabled the decomposition of monopoly in freight forwarding and the establishment of several new, specialized, state-owned freight forwarding companies.

Thus, a need arose for the establishment of a professional freight forwarding organization, which would coordinate business, economic and legal relations between freight forwarders and other participants in the foreign trade and transport system. In 1952, the Community of International Freight Forwarding Companies was founded. One of its most important outcomes was the first General conditions of international freight forwarding work in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (Opšti uslovi rada međunarodne špedicije FNRJ), published in 1954 (Zelenika, 1980).

After the reorganization of foreign trade in 1954, the freight forwarding was recognized as a distinct economic activity in international trade. The Community was replaced with the International Freight Forwarding Section at the Federal Chamber of Foreign Trade. In the period from 1954 to 1990, several sections within the Chamber have gathered freight forwarders successively: the International Freight Forwarding Section at the Federal Chamber of Foreign Trade, the Commission for International Freight Forwarding and the Group for International Forwarding. They have published several revisions of the General conditions concerned with freight forwarding economic activity: General conditions governing international forwarding agency services in Yugoslavia (1958), General business conditions of international freight forwarders of Yugoslavia (Opšti uslovi poslovanja međunarodnih špeditera Jugoslavije) (1970 and 1979).

Furthermore, the Subsection for International Freight Forwarding became a regular member of FIATA in 1959, at FIATA 6th congress held in Paris. Since then, the Yugoslav representatives have been active participants in various FIATA bodies and commissions. The crown achievement of Yugoslavia's participation in the FIATA was the organization of the 10th FIATA Congress in the city of Opatija, in August of 1967 (Zelenika, 1980).

In 1974, another very important association was founded — the Association of Yugoslav Tariff Specialists (YTS). Its main goals were (Sredić, 2005): to gather the workers of all transport modes and their inclusion into the market development, development and implementation of transport policy, the encouragement and the support of members in their professional development, the improvement of the tariff system, the cooperation with the relevant governmental institutions, chambers and other national and international associations, the organization of professional symposiums, conferences, meetings, and similar manifestations, and publishing activity in the field of tariff and transport policy. It has gathered primarily the freight forwarding experts who dealt with tariffs, especially railway tariffs, but also all other freight forwarders and logistic experts. This association has existed for more than three decades, including the first decade of the 21st century. (Sredić, 2005). Vertically, it was a part of the European Association of Tariff Specialists and the International Association of Tariff Specialists. In Yugoslavia, they have actively cooperated with the Group for international freight forwarding within the Federal Chamber of Commerce, as well as with the national transport enterprises, governmental institutions, academics, etc.

These professionals have organized numerous professional meetings and symposiums throughout former Yugoslavia. They have also had a fruitful publishing work. The YTS has published several books — handbooks, professional glossaries of terms, etc., and a bulletin with the irregularly published issues. The YTS was active from 1974 for more than thirty years, including the challenging period of economic sanctions in the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century.

3.6 The economic transition in 1990s and a new business environment in the 21st century

The collapse of Yugoslav socialism marked the beginning of the economic transition to capitalism. Although the period of transition began in the 1990s, most of the freight forwarding companies reached the 21st century without passing through the process of privatization. During the 1990s, the business has been hampered by economic and political sanctions, which culminated with the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999. Foreign companies have started entering the market during this period, and this process was accelerated after the democratic changes in 2000. The market itself has become increasingly diversified, competitive, and based on capitalist principles. This was accompanied by the rapid development of digitalization and the growing interest in environmental issues.

The YTS and the professional group for international freight forwarding within the Chamber of commerce have witnessed all three political and economic periods, struggling with their changing role for companies in the Serbian market.

In the 21st century, there is a variety of intermediaries and logistics providers in the market, who offer diversified services, or packages of services, from local market niches to global market coverage. The new business environment has also imposed a need for some changes and new solutions in associating freight forwarding and logistic companies. In the second decade of the 21st century, two associations are notable. The Serbian Chamber of Commerce continues to be a link between freight forwarders and FIATA, government institutions, and other professional groups and non-governmental bodies, but its role is not as strong as it was in the socialist period. The contemporary Group for freight forwarding and logistics within the Chamber of commerce was founded in 2017. However, its members are mainly also the members of another main professional association, the National Association of Freight Forwarding Companies and Agents "Transport and Logistics", founded in 2003 (Statut Nacionalne asocijacije "Transport i logistika", 2016). Other logistics associations active in the last decades and worthy to be mentioned are the Serbian Logistics Association (SLA) and the Serbian Supply Chain Professionals' Association. Both found their own niches in the market, organize professionals' gatherings and meetings to exchange the experience between logistics professionals, including freight forwarders, provide the educational courses, etc. The former also publishes the professional journal "Transport i logistika".

4. FINAL REMARKS AND CONCLUSION

The presented research proves that the history of freight forwarders and their associations in Serbia is a long and fascinating one. It dates back centuries. However, the sources are scarce, and it is very likely that many precious documents are still missing, undiscovered, or even destroyed.

Turbulent Serbian history and the changes in social, economic, and political circumstances, the technological development and changing business environment have strongly impacted freight forwarders common goals and activities. Thus, the professional associations and their characteristics have been changed over the time.

The earliest record on the freight forwarding association in Serbia is more than 200 years old and comes from Zemun, a city on the river Danube, where international trade was very

developed at that time. Further research that would explore more in-depth sources from the 19th century and earlier periods is necessary. It would be interesting to trace the records which evidence the foundation and work of this, or similar associations, in other towns.

Before the IIWW, the professional associations have mostly gathered local professionals in the same city or governmental region. The revealed documents evidence that the very well-organized association have existed in Belgrade from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. The oldest printed professional rulebook is 110 years old. It could be expected that similar professional associations were present in other cities with a significant number of freight forwarders and other logistic intermediaries. Further research is necessary to unveil more data. Furthermore, some sources revealed the attempts to develop a first national association in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. The findings reveal that both local and national associations at the beginning of the 20th century were advanced and followed, or even pioneered similar trends in the most developed European countries, such as Switzerland and Germany (Zelenika, 1980).

After the Second World War, in the period of socialism, there was always only one, state-owned professional association which gathered all enterprises. The first such association was established in 1952, and soon transformed into a professional group within the Chamber of commerce. During its long history, the latter has changed its name several times and has experienced different roles for the companies in the Yugoslavian and Serbian market. Currently, there are several professional groups and associations which gather freight forwarding and logistics professionals in Serbia.

Not intentionally, several anniversaries in 2022 related to the freight forwarding associations in Serbia were revealed by this research. Such respectable history deserves attention and greater responsibility in preserving the tradition and nurturing the culture of remembrance of freight forwarders and their associations in Serbia. In general, the scientific literature on freight forwarding history and evolution is scarce and deserves more attention and respect from both scholars and practitioners. The former should primarily contribute to the development of the scientific discipline, the latter should rather focus to keeping the tradition and the culture of remembrance.

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