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## THE ETHNIC-GERMANS IN POLITICAL LIFE OF YUGOSLAVIA 1918-1941

Participation in political life and government are one of the important indicators of quality of the status of national minorities. In this paper we propose to investigate in what way and to what extent the Volksdeutsche participated in the political decision-making (on national and, partly, local level) in the inter-war Yugoslavia. The peoples and national minorities that found themselves united under one state umbrella (in the territory which was politically reunited within common state borders for the first time since the Roman Empire), stemmed from various political, state and cultural traditions. Political systems and body politic which had dominated regions inhabited by individual peoples, differed greatly in the breadth and the way population participated in public affairs, in political traditions and political culture. Furthermore, different peoples had different political priorities, and the great upheaval of 1918 caused some to change their political goals and tactics. This was particularly true of the national minorities, who, found themselves in a new and alien body politic, politically cut off from their co-nationals, and often barren of the privileged status the defunct empires had guaranteed, or at least provided for.

The old Austria had general suffrage (to be sure, only for men) since 1907 for the national Parliament, whereas the right to vote for diets of the crownlands and for the local government remained archaic and restricted.<sup>1</sup> Hungary had a very narrow suffrage right, which was further restricted for minorities through gerrymandering. The voting process itself was famous for its corruption and all kinds of pressure.<sup>2</sup> In Croatia, the right to vote was even more restricted than in Hungary proper.<sup>3</sup> The annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina was only making its first steps on the road to a somewhat little more modern participation of at least parts of the population in the political life.<sup>4</sup> Similar was the situation in the Ottoman Empire after the Young-Turk Revolution.<sup>5</sup> The paternalist system of rule in Montenegro was far from modern. To be sure, the Kingdom of Serbia had a liberal political system, but it was neither old nor stable. Furthermore, it was tailored for a small and ethnically more or less homogeneous state. At the same time, Serbian politicians were used to thinking and acting within the framework of a small and homogeneous country. They had little understanding for different

<sup>1</sup> Stefan Vajda, *Felix Austria. Eine Geschichte Österreichs*, Wien 1980, p. 538; Taylor, pp. 262-263.

<sup>2</sup> Lazar Rakić, *Radikalna stranka u Vojvodini (do početka XX veka)*, Istraživanja, 3, 1974, pp. 281-282; Oskar Jászy, *Magyariens Schuld, Ungarns Sühne. Revolution und Gegenrevolution in Ungarn*, München 1923, p. 11; Idem, *The Dissolution*, pp. 227, 333-334; Margan, *Pomadarivanje*, pp. 147-151; R.W. Seton-Watson, *Ungarische Wahlen. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der politischen Korruption*, Leipzig 1912; I. Senz, pp. 90, 248.

<sup>3</sup> Less than 3% of the population had the right to vote after the electoral reform of 1911. Until then, suffrage rights had only 2% of the inhabitants. (Milorad Ekmečić, *Stvaranje Jugoslavije 1790-1918*, II, Beograd [1989], p. 568.)

<sup>4</sup> In 1910 curial electoral system was introduced which made disproportionate representation of social classes in the Bosnian Diet possible. (Ibid., p. 618.)

<sup>5</sup> The constitution of 1876 which prescribed high property census, was reintroduced there. (Ibid., p. 640.)

political traditions, just as the politicians from other territories had difficulties growing accustomed to the rules of the political game as played in Yugoslavia. This lack of knowledge and understanding, coupled with conflicting interests, contributed to numerous political conflicts in the inter-war Yugoslavia.

The whole political history of Yugoslavia between the two world wars can be divided into two major periods: the first one until the imposition of the “January Dictatorship” in 1929, and the second after it. The first was characterized by parliamentary life marred by frequent interference of the Court, whereas, after the introduction of the dictatorship, and even after it was mitigated in 1931, authoritarian tendencies visibly prevailed over democratic ones. All this influenced the political activity of the national minorities.

As we have seen, the first to get a chance of political activity were the Slovaks, Ruthenians and Czechs in the Vojvodina. They were called upon to participate in the Great Popular Assembly which declared unification with Serbia. Obviously, it was a tactical move, aimed at showing that not only the Vojvodina Serbs, but also all other Slavs in the province were in favour of unification with the Kingdom of Serbia. They were given suffrage in the Vojvodina much earlier than the Germans, Magyars or Romanians. As for the participation in the local government, until the first communal elections in the Vojvodina in 1927, it remained as little accessible to them as to members of other Vojvodina minorities, and indeed, the members of the “state people”, i.e., it remained dependant on party, rather than on national affiliation.<sup>6</sup> The Germans, Hungarians and Romanians, were denied suffrage with the subterfuge that the right of option has not yet lapsed, so that they, as potential foreign citizens could not be allowed to decide on the supreme legal act in the state (i.e. the Constitution).<sup>7</sup> The so-called St. Vitus’-Day-Constitution was therefore passed without the participation of the non-Slavic national minorities from the Northern parts of the country.<sup>8</sup>

The lapse of the opting time enabled the Germans, Magyars and Romanians in the Northern parts of the country to get suffrage: there was no excuse for withholding it any longer, the Constitution having already been passed, anyway. The new electoral law, passed for the 1923 elections, stipulated that members of the minorities who had not opted, gain the right to vote, provided they had been living in the Yugoslav territory for at least ten years. However, in August 1923, the Ministry of the Interior, issued a confidential order to its subaltern organs, not to enter the members of the minorities into the electoral rolls, because the time for option has allegedly expired six days after the electoral law came into force. The intervention of some distinguished Yugoslav MPs and the Yugoslav Association for the League of Nations was needed to have this order annulled as politically damaging.<sup>9</sup> However, the law was not fully implemented, since there were complaints about non-registration of voters in many places.<sup>10</sup> At the communal elections in Slovenia in April 1921 the electoral rolls were the reason that, despite the lapse of the opting time, members of the minorities

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<sup>6</sup> There were representatives of national minorities in town and communal administration installed by higher authorities from the very beginning, but they were always underrepresented.

<sup>7</sup> Branislav Gligorijević, *Parlament i političke stranke u Jugoslaviji (1918-1929)*, Beograd 1979, p. 71; Zlatko Matijević, “Građani na odkaz”. *Njemačka nacionalna manjina i 9. članak Zakona o izboru narodnih poslanika za Ustavotvornu skupštinu Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca (1920)*, *Godišnjak Njemačke narodnosne zajednice*, X, 2003. There was a dilemma in Croatia if the right of option applied only to the Germans and Hungarians in the Bačka, the Banat and Baranya, or to those in Croatia too. There were different interpretations, but there was a possibility of at least some of the Germans and Hungarians getting the right to vote there. (Geiger, *Nijemci u Đakovu*, pp. 93-98.)

<sup>8</sup> National minorities in the Southern parts (Kosovo, Macedonia, the Sandjak, Montenegro) were granted suffrage right after the the First World War. The Serbian constitution was introduced there in August 1919, since these territories had belonged to Kingdoms of Serbia and of Montenegro already in 1914.

<sup>9</sup> *AJ*, 14, 126/457.

<sup>10</sup> Gligorijević, *Parlamentarizam*, pp. 131, 366-367.

couldn't take part because the electoral rolls from the elections for the Constitutive Assembly were used.<sup>11</sup>

The members of the minorities liable to opt, didn't await its expiry unprepared. The Volksdeutsche press started writing about political organizing, and in early 1922 preparations for the foundation of the German Party began. Already in February 1922 the Kočevje Peasants' Party (Gottscheer Bauernpartei) declared it was collectively joining the new party in the making,<sup>12</sup> and by early July 47 local committees were already set up (22 in the Banat, 17 in the Bačka and 4 in Syrmium).<sup>13</sup>

The German Party (Partei der Deutschen) was the second minority party to be founded in the Northern parts of the country (after the Hungarians had already set up theirs). It was founded in the Vojvodina, since the bulk of the Yugoslav Germans lived there, but its aim (which it partly fulfilled) was to be the party of all the Germans in the country. Its founding convention was held in Žombolj (Hatzfeld)<sup>14</sup> (which still belonged to Yugoslavia at that time) on December 17, 1922. Out of 50 local branches which had been founded in the course of the year, several hundred representatives from 34 branches were present.<sup>15</sup> The party programme adopted on that occasion, contained general part about civic rights, economic liberties, demands for more equitable tax system, improvements in passenger, commercial, postal and financial traffic, stability of the national currency and military service in one's area of origin in peacetime. The demand that those matters which should be regulated by laws would not be regulated by decrees and secret orders<sup>16</sup> (for which the government has already shown a propensity.)

A particular part of the programme concerned national demands. In it constitutional guarantee of the freedom of national development was demanded, the right to found private schools with proportional state subventions, the right of parents to choose the school for their children, as well as the right of attending schools abroad, the right to use the mother-tongue in

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<sup>11</sup> Suppan, Jugoslawien, p. 696; Lenz, p. 57; Wutte, Lobmeyr, p. 22; Kerner, p. 38.

<sup>12</sup> It was headed by priest Josef Eppich, and in the leadership of the GP it was represented by Hans Arko. Due to special conditions prevailing in Slovenia, it continued to work as a subdivision of the GP in Slovenia until 1929. Being too weak to muster the 6.000 votes necessary for an MP it made election deals with the largest Slovenian party, the Slovene People's Party. (Biber, Kočevski Nemci, p. 30; 500 let, p. 42; HWBGAD, III, p. 77; Kočevska, p. 26.) Furthermore, in a few towns the German Economic Party (Deutsche Wirtschaftspartei) was active. It achieved noteworthy results at the communal elections in 1924 in Ptuj, Celje and Maribor. (Melik, Nemci u Sloveniji, p. 69; Suppan, Jugoslawien, p. 696.) We cannot agree with Suppan that the election results in these three towns, which brought more votes for this German party than were the Germans according to the census, prove that the census was flawed, because it is not to be excluded that part of the (German-friendly) Slovenes voted for the German Economic Party (which in the Slovenian translation of its name did not feature the word German!). V. Melik is of the same opinion. He thinks the German Party received higher percentage of votes in Slovenia than was the percentage of the Germans in the overall population, due to the fact that some Slovenes voted for it because of the German economic power and social prestige. This is even more plausible, since it is known that part of German workers voted for the Socialists. (Vasilj Melik, Nemci in volitve v jugoslovanski Sloveniji med obema vojnama, Zgodovinski časopis, XL, 3, 1986.) At first, part of the Germans in Slovenia were adherents of the Socialist Party, but they turned Nazis in the late 1930s. (SBNS KJ, II redovan saziv za 1936/37, Beograd 1937, p. 356.)

<sup>13</sup> Plautz, pp. 47-48.

<sup>14</sup> According to the German ambassador Keller (who was minutely informed of the meeting), the congress was held in such a peripheral place in order to reduce the danger of attacks – most probably by nationalist organizations. (PA, Abt. IIb, Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker in Jugoslawien, Politik 6 Jugoslawien, Bd. 2; Josef Volkmar Senz, Politische Aktivitäten der Donauschwaben in Jugoslawien zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen, Deutsche Forschung in Ungarn, IX, 1-4, 1944-1985, p. 302.)

<sup>15</sup> Matthias Annabring, Volksgeschichte der Donauschwaben in Jugoslawien, Stuttgart 1955, p. 31; Plautz, p. 48. A terse police report about the foundation of the party's branch (wrongly called Deutsch-Schwäbisches (sic!) Partei) in Žombolj from February 26, 1922, is interesting, not because it contains interesting information, but because it shows how superficially the police was doing its job. (AJ, 14, 104/401.)

<sup>16</sup> Plautz, pp. 48-50.

oral and written communication in communes, districts and town communes, in the protocols of the German communes, oral communication in German in all administrative, financial and juridical offices, freedom to use the German language in German associations, cooperatives, commercial and other firms. In the administrative field, separate national units were demanded, and within them, the autonomous rights of the communes, towns, districts and municipalities, including free election of officials and proportional participation of German officials in the administration. Equal participation in the agrarian reform, works at reclamation of land, repealing of arbitrary acts concerning German associations and institutions were demanded. In order to represent the German cultural and economic interests, the foundation of the National Cultural Council and a state secretariat was asked for. Furthermore, preservation of German place-names and free use of national symbols was demanded.<sup>17</sup> Both German and Hungarian parties were immediately put under police surveillance.<sup>18</sup>

In the programme of the German Party, together with the usual minority demands for equality and participation in power, those about cultural self-reliance (based on the Convention on Protection of Minorities), i.e. about founding private schools, stand out. It can be presumed with a great dose of certainty, that for this purpose the party leaders expected, apart from state subventions, grants from Germany and Austria, since such examples had existed in the past (especially in Slovenia). Since the thrifty, and partly still nationally dormant Swabians who formed the bulk of the German population in Yugoslavia, were not very liberal when it came to giving money for cultural needs,<sup>19</sup> such aid was almost a *conditio sine qua non* for possible existence of private educational facilities. Large part of the programme was devoted to economic demands. This mirrored the traditional interest of the majority of the Germans in economic activities on the one hand,<sup>20</sup> and partly personal overlapping of the leadership of the German Party with that of German economic organizations on the other.<sup>21</sup> The leading Serbian parties, the Democratic Party (DP) and the People's Radical Party (PRP) were not delighted with the foundation of minority parties<sup>22</sup> because they hoped members of the minorities would join them (DP and PRP).<sup>23</sup> The reactions of the Yugoslav press, the party newspapers included, were also only partly positive.<sup>24</sup>

Since the elections were drawing near, the minority parties were faced with a dilemma, that would become eternal: how and with whom to participate at the elections. The German Party decided to run alone.<sup>25</sup>

However, the PRP and DP tried to win over the minority parties, or to neutralize them and prevent them from running independently. In doing this the DP relied on the bullies' nationalist organization the ORJUNA, whose members attacked rallies of the minority parties

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<sup>17</sup> AJ, 14, 127/462; Plautz, pp. 50-52; Gligorijević, Parlamentarizam, p. 138.

<sup>18</sup> AJ, 14, 123/438; 148/514.

<sup>19</sup> Zoran Janjetović, Duhovni profil vojvođanskih Švaba, Tokovi istorije, VII, 1-2, 2000, p. 58.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 57-58.

<sup>21</sup> Until 1927 Stefan Kraft, the co-president of the German Party was also the leader of the central German agricultural cooperative, the "Agraria" which was founded in 1922. (Plautz, pp. 52, 90.)

<sup>22</sup> The Romanian Party was also founded in February 1923. (Popi, Rumuni, pp. 54-55; Idem, Formiranje, pp. 323-326.)

<sup>23</sup> Indeed, some Germans had joined the DP and the PRP even before the opting time expired. (Altgayer, p. 48.)

<sup>24</sup> AVII, pop. 17, k. 21, f. 2, d. 3; PA, Abt. IIb, Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker in Jugoslawien, Politik 6, Jugoslawien, Bd. 1; Gligorijević, Parlament, p. 146; Mesaroš, Položaj, pp. 160, 164; Popi, Rumuni, p. 59; Idem, Formiranje, p. 336.

<sup>25</sup> Plautz, p. 53; Gligorijević, Parlament, p. 138.

and demolished premises of minority newspapers.<sup>26</sup> The minority parties were disturbed also by the police, and especially the Hungarian and Romanian Parties were suspected of irredentism.<sup>27</sup> The German Party, since the Volksdeutsche couldn't aspire to secession, was a bit better off in this respect, but it certainly enjoyed no benevolence of the government.

The German Party secured 8 MPs<sup>28</sup> becoming thus the second-strongest minority party, after the Turkish-Albanian Cemiyet which scored as many as 14 MPs!<sup>29</sup> Even if it was weaker than the latter, and even though it couldn't possibly match the large Yugoslav parties, the German Party achieved a significant representation in the national Parliament, giving thus the German minority not only the voice in the broader public, but sometimes even an opportunity of bargaining with the government over certain issues.

The German Party used these opportunities. Their representatives criticized the government in the Parliament – much more often and much more volubly than the more numerous but less educated and less fluent in the “state language” Cemiyet MPs – but they still hoped to achieve their goals by relying on the government. Just like the Cemiyet, the German Party leaned on the government partly because the opposition parties were rejecting it. (The GP accused the strongest Croatian party, the Croatian Republican Peasants' Party (CRPP) and the main Slovenian party, the Slovenian People's Party of national selfishness and work against the Volksdeutsche.)<sup>30</sup> However, its expectations were not fulfilled, the German Party openly sided with the opposition. The whole German minority was immediately punished by disbanding of the central Volksdeutsche cultural association, the Kulturbund, at the order of the anyway nationally intolerant, Minister of Interior Svetozar Pribičević, on April 11, 1924.<sup>31</sup> In Yugoslav democracy the opposition had extremely modest leeway, and this held particularly true for national minorities. The ban of the Kulturbund, was lifted by the next government headed by Ljuba Davidović of the DP. The new Prime Minister told the Germans and Hungarians he would not treat them as second class citizens.<sup>32</sup> This was clearly an offer of cooperation between the new government and political representatives of these two minorities. Unfortunately, the government was too short-lived and it fell already in November 1924.

The next elections in 1925 were held with unprecedented government terror – directed not only against the national minorities, but against all opposition forces.<sup>33</sup> Still the

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<sup>26</sup> Gligorijević, *Parlament*, p. 140; *Idem*, *Organizacija jugoslovenskih nacionalista*, *Istorija 20. veka*, 5, 1963, p. 336; Mladen Đorđević, *Organizacija jugoslovenskih nacionalista (ORJUNA)* (Msc. of BA paper), Beograd 1998, p. 38; Wutte, *Lobmeyr*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>27</sup> *AJ*, 14, 118/430; Gligorijević, *Parlament*, p. 371; *Popi*, *Formiranje*, p. 336; *Idem*, *Rumuni*, p. 59.

<sup>28</sup> *Plautz*, pp. 53-55. In the places without the GP ticket in Slavonia and Symium, the Volksdeutsche voted for the CRPP, and for the Croatian Community in towns, whereas in the Bačka, according to the German ambassador Keller, two socialists were elected thanks to German votes. (*Altgayer*, p. 48; *PA*, *Abt. Iib*, *Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker in Jugoslawien, Politik 6, Jugoslawien, Bd. 2.*)

<sup>29</sup> *Hrabak*, *JMO*, p. 168.

<sup>30</sup> Gligorijević, *Parlament*, p. 158.

<sup>31</sup> The official explanation was that the measure was retaliation for the bad situation of the Slovene national minority in Austrian Carinthia. The Davidović government repealed the ban, but most of the property of the association was not returned and local branches reopened slowly. (*Plautz*, pp. 35-36; *Annabring*, pp. 35-36, 41; *J.V. Senz*, *Politische*, p. 311.) In that way the PRP showed what uncooperative national minorities had to expect. Although some Kulturbund branches continued to work clandestinely (*AJ*, 14, 118/430), the disbanding of the Kulturbund disappointed and passivized part of the Germans, whereas others became disgruntled and driven to the arms of the opposition CRPP. (*PA*, *Abt. Iib*, *Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker in Jugoslawien, Politik 6, Bd. 2.*)

<sup>32</sup> *Mesaroš*, *Položaj*, p. 167.

<sup>33</sup> *Bogumil Hrabak*, *Radikalska nasilja u Vojvodini u vezi s izborima 8. februara 1925*, *Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju*, 24, 1981; *SBNS*, *Vanredni saziv za 1925. godinu*, knj. II, Beograd 1925, p. 52. Apart from the terror, surveillance of the minority parties increased. (*AJ*, 14, 118/430) *The Times of London*, found an exonerating circumstance on February 7, 1925: “Still, it must be remembered that the only election in Serbia proper which

terror of the SRNAO and the Chetniks<sup>34</sup> was the strongest in the Vojvodina, where, in collusion with the authorities, they attacked the German Party, the Democrats, and the Union of Agriculturists, dispersing their rallies.<sup>35</sup> The most prominent victims among the national minorities were Dr Stefan Kraft and Dr Georg Grassl who were brutally beaten up in Stari Sivač, which led to a diplomatic mini-scandal in the Yugoslav-German relations.<sup>36</sup> As the instigator of the assault, the German diplomacy and press accused Svetozar Pribičević, known as an enemy of the minorities.<sup>37</sup> Apart from physical violence, there were also more subtle methods of pressure, such as threats to close down minority classes.<sup>38</sup> There was also a bloody clash between the Serbs and the Swabians in Pardanj (now: Međa) after the already troubled elections, but that was part of the general picture prevailing all over the country.<sup>39</sup>

The outcome of the 1925 elections was different for various national minorities, i.e. for their respective parties. The most important change on the political scene was the disappearance of the Cemiyet as an organized political force which paid the highest price for its defection from the cooperation with the PRP<sup>40</sup>. The GP, on the other hand, received more votes than ever, but only five MPs, because of changes in the electoral system.<sup>41</sup> After the elections, the party at first united with the Union of Agriculturists in the Parliamentary Club of Agriculturists,<sup>42</sup> but it could not stay in the opposition for long.<sup>43</sup> Because it needed support of a big ruling party, it implicitly offered cooperation to the PRP in October 1926, which, since its alliance with the CRPP was on the wane, accepted it, promising, as always, to rectify the minority complaints.<sup>44</sup> This cooperation continued until the next parliamentary elections in 1927.<sup>45</sup> The German Party submitted a memo to the Vukićević government in which it demanded restitution of the confiscated property of German associations, rectification of the damage caused by the agrarian reform, communal elections, proportional participation of the Germans in the state apparatus, ten to twelve MPs and equality in social and economic matters.<sup>46</sup>

At the regional elections in 1927, the GP ran with the Radicals, - the price being lifting the ban on the Kulturbund, religious instruction in mother-tongue and 5-6 classes of German in primary school. It won 19 representatives.<sup>47</sup> At the parliamentary elections on September 11, 1927, the GP was not exposed to government pressure because of the alliance with the

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passed without bloodshed was that of 1912, that the great majority of the Croats had no political experience in the Hungarian days and that a population mainly composed of sturdy peasants who hold strong simple views on most subjects is naturally inclined to follow the Punjabi adage "A stout stick is the best argument."

<sup>34</sup> The Germans and Hungarians could also become members of the SRNAO and the Chetniks if they declared themselves "Serbian Radicals". (Hrabak, Radikalna nasilja, p. 175; Branislav Gligorijević, Srpska nacionalna omladina (SRNAO). Prilog izučavanju nacionalističkih i terorističkih organizacija u staroj Jugoslaviji, Istorijski glasnik, 2-3, 1964, p. 12.) Obviously, political opportunism knew no bounds.

<sup>35</sup> Gligorijević, Parlament, p. 191; Idem, Srpska nacionalistička omladina, p. 27. The national minorities were subject to the SRNAO terror even without the elections campaign. (AJ, 14, 118/430; PA, Abt. IIb, Deutschland in Jugoslawien, Politik 25, Jugoslawien, Bd. 1; Gligorijević, Srpska nacionalistička omladina, pp. 6, 19-20.)

<sup>36</sup> Avramovski, Britanci, I, p. 307; Janjetović, Die Konflikte, p. 138; Annabring, p. 36.

<sup>37</sup> PA, Abt. IIb, Politische Beziehungen Jugoslawiens zu Deutschland, Politik 2, Jugoslawien, Bd. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Vinaver, Jugoslavija i Mađarska 1918-1933, p. 283.

<sup>39</sup> PA, Abt. IIb, Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker in Jugoslawien, Politik 6, Jugoslawien, Bd. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Gligorijević, Parlament, p. 189; Hrabak, Džemijet, pp. 244-246, 271-272.

<sup>41</sup> Plautz, p. 55.

<sup>42</sup> PA, Abt. IIb, Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker in Jugoslawien, Politik 6, Jugoslawien, Bd. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Like other minority parties, the GP was also under police surveillance. (AJ, 14, 109/413.)

<sup>44</sup> Annabring, p. 38; Gligorijević, Parlament, 217-218.

<sup>45</sup> Gligorijević, Parlament, p. 239.

<sup>46</sup> Plautz, pp. 63-64.

<sup>47</sup> PA, Abt. IIb, Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker in Jugoslawien, Politik 6, Jugoslawien, Bd. 3; Sajt, p. 69.

PRP.<sup>48</sup> The German Party got six MPs.<sup>49</sup> In the period until the introduction of the royal dictatorship, the German Party and its representatives continued to try to influence the minority policy of the state. These attempts were sometimes made through speeches in the Parliament, but more often through personal contacts, by sending delegations, by submitting memos etc. The complaints and demands remained more or less the same as in the previous years. The major successes of the German Party were that it managed to ensure that the stipulation limiting the transfer of property rights on real estate in the border zone 50 km deep is left out of the financial law for 1928/29. Their representatives also secured the original way of writing proper names (as opposed to phonetically in Serbo-Croat) in the registers.<sup>50</sup> As we have seen, especially the first was important for their voters. One of the more important moves of the GP was its draft bill on primary schools submitted in late 1928, which came too late to be discussed before the dictatorship was introduced.<sup>51</sup>

Apart from participating in the parliamentary elections, the German Party also took part at the communal and regional ones. They were opportunities for some of its smaller demands to be met at the lower levels. Often it was easier to establish cooperation in the elections on the lower levels, because the stakes in party haggling were not big questions touching the basics of the state system or determining fatefully the situation of national minorities. To be sure, the most successful in this game were the Radicals. They strove to establish the alliance of the local elites. Although the main minority demands were usually refused, there was not only party cooperation on the local level, but also integration of the members of the minorities into the PRP. The same was achieved by the Democratic Party.<sup>52</sup> In their penetration of minority settlements, the Radicals were often strong there where the GP was strong too, whereas the DP and the Union of Agriculturists managed to gain a foothold in places with no Germans.<sup>53</sup> How successful the integration of members of the minorities was, is testified by the leadership of the local PRP branch in Pančevo, in which in mid-1926 (together with the Serbs), the Slovaks, Germans, Magyars and Romanians were represented. In mid-1920s the influence on the Hungarians and Germans was on the increase, which was mirrored in the number of candidates of these nationalities on various levels.<sup>54</sup> However, in some places (Ruma, Stara Pazova), there was an alliance of the Croats and Germans against the Serbs gathered in the PRP.<sup>55</sup> Although there were comparatively many German adherents of the CRPP (in Slavonia),<sup>56</sup> it was rather typical for the CRPP reproaching the Germans for their alleged closeness to the “Greater-Serbian” parties.<sup>57</sup>

In the communal elections in the Vojvodina the GP did well, winning 511 seats in communal councils in 111 communes (most of them in the Vojvodina) and even the majority in 53 communes.<sup>58</sup> Although the local elections were marred by only minor irregularities,<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Gligorijević explains this by the fact the PRP was already in the process of dissolution at that time. (Gligorijević, *Politička*, p. 151.)

<sup>49</sup> Annabring, p. 38; Plautz, p. 55; Gligorijević, *Parlament*, p. 294.

<sup>50</sup> Plautz, pp. 64-65.

<sup>51</sup> J.H., *Kampfansage an die Minderheiten: der Volks- und Mittelschulgesetzentwurf*, *Nation und Staat*, II, 3, 1928; *Germania*, November 30, 1928; Plautz, p. 77.

<sup>52</sup> Krivokapić-Jović., pp. 310-311.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 316.

<sup>54</sup> *AJ*, 14, 118/430; 120/433; 66, 56/138; Krivokapić-Jović, pp. 324-336, 340, 344-346.

<sup>55</sup> Krivokapić-Jović, p. 353.

<sup>56</sup> Suzana Leček, »Freies Heim« - Hrvatska republikanska seljačka stranka i Folksdojčeri, *VDG Jahrbuch/Godišnjak Njemačke narodnosne zajednice*, 2002, pp. 202, 214-217; *Idem*, *Folksdojčeri i Hrvatska (republikanska) seljačka stranka 1918-1941*, *VDG Jahrbuch/Godišnjak Njemačke narodnosne zajednice*, X, 2003, p. 153.

<sup>57</sup> Suppan, *Jugoslawien*, p. 722. Despite this, most of the German peasants in Bosnia voted for the CRPP. (*HWBGAD*, I, p. 500.)

<sup>58</sup> Plautz, p. 64; Nikolić, p. 191.

unfortunately for the minorities, installing of the new communal authorities was sometimes slow, and sometimes the elected administrations were deposed on various pretexts.<sup>60</sup> However, even after these communal elections, most of the public notaries were Yugoslavs.<sup>61</sup> In other words, the German Party, as well as most of the other minority parties couldn't use to the full their good results at the communal elections.

Members of the national minorities obviously did not take part in the political life only through their minority parties. These were above all, an attempt of parts of intellectual (and partly economic) elites of the national minorities to articulate what they saw as primary national interests. The more pragmatic part of the politically active members of the national minorities sought an opportunity for political action (and to be sure, advantages it brought along) within the framework of the Yugoslav parties. Thus the wealthier Volksdeutsche were more prone to join the big Yugoslav parties, whereas the voters of the German Party belonged mostly to the poorer strata.<sup>62</sup> The party affiliation mattered more than the ethnic one, especially on the local level.<sup>63</sup> Some members of the German minority were indeed indispensable there – for instance Jožika Mayer, who was the pillar of the PRP in Novi Sad.<sup>64</sup> Large part of members of the minorities also voted for these Yugoslav parties.<sup>65</sup> The main reason was the belief certain minority interests can better be served through them. This held particularly true for parts of the country where minority parties were not active, or for diasporas. For that reason, a lot of Germans in Slovenia voted for, or cooperated with the Slovenian People's Party,<sup>66</sup> and the majority of the Volksdeutsche in Croatia and Bosnia sympathized with the CRPP.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, in the days of electoral campaigns the Yugoslav parties strove to win (also) the minority parties and voters by giving resounding promises, holding speeches in minority languages and even by publishing party journals in these languages. Thus the largest Croatian party, the Croatian Peasants' Party published its German-speaking journal "Freies Heim from October 1923 to January 1925."<sup>68</sup> This was the way to cajole the Volksdeutsche voters in siding with the Yugoslav parties.

At the same time, the Yugoslav parties, vying in nationalism, accused each other of ties with members of the national minorities, whose members they wanted to see among their own ranks and whose votes they tried to attract with all means at their disposal during the election campaigns.<sup>69</sup> As for the ballots at the elections, it is certain that the Ethnic-Germans cast them more often than not for the Yugoslav parties, with hardly a half of them actually voting for the German Party.<sup>70</sup> This was (with no secret ballots, and often coupled with various kinds of pressure) certainly more a reflection of the situation, than of the political will. However, it is worth mentioning that that the leaders of the GP (with the exception of Kraft)

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<sup>59</sup> PA, Abt. IIb, Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker, Politik 6, Jugoslawien, Bd. 4.

<sup>60</sup> SBNS Kraljevine SHS, Redovan saziv za 1927/28, knj. IV, pp. 239-244.

<sup>61</sup> Rehak, p. 243; Nikolić, p. 191.

<sup>62</sup> Altgayer, p. 48; ASANU 14530-XIV 2.

<sup>63</sup> SBNS Kraljevine SHS, Redovan saziv za 1927/28, knj. IX, Beograd 1928, p. 304.

<sup>64</sup> Milutinović, Vojvodina i stvaranje Jugoslavije, p. 212.

<sup>65</sup> SBNS Kraljevine SHS, Redovan saziv za 1927/28, knj. IX, p. 253.

<sup>66</sup> PA, Abt. IIb, Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker in Jugoslawien, Politik 6, Jugoslawien, Bd. 3.

<sup>67</sup> HWBGAD, I, p. 500. In Ruma the majority, German, population supported the CRPP until mid-1920s, and the GP since then. (Krivokapić-Jović, p. 353.) In Vinkovci, the PRP always used to win thanks to German support, but gradually increasing number of Germans started sympathizing with the CRPP. (Ibid., p. 355.)

<sup>68</sup> Leček, »Freies Heim; Altgayer, p. 50. The practice of publishing party newspapers in minority languages would partly be continued during the 1930s. (AJ, 37, 73/457.)

<sup>69</sup> SBNS Kraljevine SHS, Redovan saziv za 1921/22. godinu, knj. V, Beograd 1922, p. 108; Ibid., za 1928/29. godinu, Beograd 1928, p. 459; Ibid., za 1926/27, knj. II, Beograd 1927, p. 419; Hrabak, Autonomizam, 101.

<sup>70</sup> J.V. Senz deems hardly one half of the Volksdeutsche voted for the GP, but if the Slovenes who voted for that party are considered, even that estimate seems exaggerated. (Cf. J.V. Senz, Politische, p. 315.)



didn't compromised themselves with their conationals by mutual squabbles and egoism, like the leaders of other minority parties<sup>71</sup> or unprincipled collusion with the ruling circles.

The royal dictatorship of January 6, 1929 abolished all parties, including those of the minorities.<sup>72</sup> During the next two years and a half, there was no political life worthy of the name, and when its renewal began, it was under the circumstances drastically different from those of the parliamentarism of the 1920s. This held true especially for members of the national minorities who were particularly hit by prohibition of parties based on ethnic affiliation.<sup>73</sup> Despite this, the parties from the days before the dictatorship, or their parts, lived on. To a certain, although lesser, extent, this was true of the minority parties too. Political activity began through groups which had no formal party approval, but which were, as a rule, composed of the leaders of the former parties. According to the model of integrating politicians from the times before the dictatorship into new ruling parties founded by the regime, some minority politicians were also included. Thereby, the participation of members of the minorities in the political life and their influence on it diminished further in comparison with the times before January 6, 1929.

For few days after the dictatorship had been imposed, the leaders of the German Party were hoping it would escape disbanding, and the new powers-that-be encouraged such hopes in the beginning. However, they were soon disappointed.<sup>74</sup> Surveillance of the former politicians was very sharp in the beginning, so that they had withdrawn from public life. The GP leaders also retreated from public life,<sup>75</sup> but since the German minority, like the others, was chronically plagued by the lack of cadres for various organizations, party leaders always had something to do – either in cultural or economic organizations, or in the minority press.

Political life was kept under strict police control so that under such circumstances, there was almost no leeway for legal political activity. One of the few were sections of the Union of Associations for the League of Nations.<sup>76</sup> Thus the German Association for the League of Nations and Understanding Among Peoples, was founded on January 22, 1928, but unlike its Hungarian opposite number, after some difficulties it received the government approval on May 15, 1929. The leaders of the German Association were partly the leaders of the German Party, so that after the party had been disbanded, the Association became an informal Volksdeutsche political representation – a substitute for the GP.<sup>77</sup>

Until the second part of the 1930s, the political life of the national minorities was in hibernation, just like that of the rest of the population. The first signs of activity were shown by the former leaders of the GP, who visited the Banus (Governor) of the Danube Province (“banovina”) in August 1930 and requested the resumption of the activities of the Kulturbund

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<sup>71</sup> Dr Stefan Kraft was suspected of economic irregularities at the expense of mostly poor Germans. (ASANU, 14530-XIV 2.) Nevertheless, he managed to retain the leadership in the party and in the Volksdeutsche affairs in general well into the 1930s.

<sup>72</sup> The representatives of the new regime claimed in the beginning they would respect the rights of the national minorities, but they were evasive when they spoke about the political rights. (Berliner Tagblatt, January 17, 1929.)

<sup>73</sup> Members of the national minorities complained about this on many occasions, but always in vain. (SBNS KJ, Redovan saziv za 1932/33, knj. III, Beograd 1933, p. 88.)

<sup>74</sup> PA, Abt. Iib, Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker in Jugoslawien, Politik 6, Jugoslawien, Bd. 4; Plautz, p. 65.

<sup>75</sup> Annabring, p. 39.

<sup>76</sup> The Commission for the Minorities of the League of Nations' Secretariat, decided on founding such sections in the countries of the Little Entente. (Mesaroš, Mađari, p. 33.)

<sup>77</sup> J.V. Senz, Politische, p. 317; Annabring, p. 55; Plautz, pp. 89-90. Already in 1927 there was an attempt at founding the Association for the League of Nations in Slovenia, but the authorities would not have it. Therefore, founding of such an Association for all Germans in the whole country was requested, which, overtaken by the introduction of the dictatorship, came into the position to be the ersatz for the GP. (PA, Abt. Iib, Deutschtum in Jugoslawien, Politik 25, Jugoslawien, bd. 1; Die Gemeindewahlen in der südslawischen Wojwodschafft und die Deutschen, Nation und Staat, I, 1928, pp. 439-440.)

(on the work of which great limitations were imposed in January 1929)<sup>78</sup> and rectification of irregularities in school policy.<sup>79</sup> This visit, combined with foreign-policy factors, yielded results, and on August 28, the Kulturbund was allowed to resume working – under condition of modifying its statutes still further, which was eventually done by April of the next year.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, the Banus and other officials refused to see a delegation of former Hungarian politicians – which testifies to a somewhat better standing of the Volksdeutsche leaders in the eyes of the authorities. Indeed, the situation of other minorities grew worse – it was only the Germans who got concessions in the field of cultural organizing and education, but, as we shall see, the reasons for this were of foreign policy nature.<sup>81</sup>

During the election campaign for the first post-dictatorial elections in 1931 the Germans agreed with the government on the candidates in six precincts. It seems the Volksdeutsche leaders were blackmailed by the government to take part at the elections at its side in exchange for permission to open a private teachers' training college.<sup>82</sup> However, only Stefan Kraft was actually elected, because in other places Serbian candidates were also put on the government tickets.<sup>83</sup>

After the elections of November 18, 1931, in mid-December the government MPs buckled down to founding the new ruling party under the name of the Yugoslav Radical Peasants' Democracy which would help implement the government policy. The Ethnic-German leader Dr. Stefan Kraft was also the member, but he excelled himself by his inactivity.<sup>84</sup> The new party considered the minority question to be a cultural one, and it called on members of the minorities to be loyal and participate actively in state and communal bodies, and in exchange they would receive the right to use their mother-tongues and to preserve their national identity.<sup>85</sup> In fact, the new governing party was a paper one, so it could not elicit a real activity of its formal members.

While other minorities were mostly apathetic, within the German one changes started that would, although in the beginning they did not concern political life, eventually have fateful importance for the orientation and destiny of this minority. Since 1931, Nazi ideas started to penetrate the intellectual Volksdeutsche youth, partly educated in Germany and Austria.<sup>86</sup> The first to start promoting it in public was a medical doctor from Pančevo, Jakob

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<sup>78</sup> Plautz, p. 39.

<sup>79</sup> Mesaroš, Madari, p. 45.

<sup>80</sup> Plautz, p. 39.

<sup>81</sup> Plautz, p. 79.

<sup>82</sup> Deutsches Volksblatt, October 21, 1931. The information stems from the Budapest Pester Lloyd, that was ill-disposed towards the Yugoslav authorities, but well informed. (Pester Lloyd, November 14, 1931.) In an indirect way, this was confirmed by a report by von Janson of the German Embassy in Belgrade on September 23, 1931. (PA, Abt. IIB, Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker, Politik 6, Jugoslawien, Bd. 5.)

<sup>83</sup> Annabring, p. 62; Die deutsche Wahlbeteiligung. Die Eröffnung der deutschen Lehrerbildungsanstalt, Nation und Staat, V, 2, 1931, p. 123; Die Wahlen, Nation und Staat, V, 1931, pp. 187-189. The Deutsches Volksblatt of Novi Sad accused the German voters of the precincts Odžaci and Bačaka Palanka, for the failure of the Volksdeutsche candidates Dr Hans Moser and Dr Georg Grassl. (Deutsches Volksblatt, November 11, 1931.)

<sup>84</sup> ASANU, 14530/XIV 2.

<sup>85</sup> Tagespost, December 16, 1931; Mesaroš, Madari, p. 85. The next government party, the Yugoslav National Party, never bothered to mention the minorities in its party programme, except at the very end, where it was said: "In the minority question the YNP will remain true to its principle of justice and equality of all good citizens of Yugoslavia and it will observe all international agreements in that respect." (AJ, 74, 11/22.)

<sup>86</sup> At most German universities the Nazi influence prevailed already before the Nazis came to power. (Cf. George C. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology. Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*, New York 1964, pp. 268, 271; Richard Grunberger, *The 12-Year Reich. A social History of Nazi Germany 1933-1945*, New York 1972, pp. 335-337.) On the role of the Ethnic-German students educated at German, Austrian and Yugoslav universities, see: Suppan, *Jugoslawien*, pp. 703-704; Biber, *Nacizem*, pp. 44-53, 327-328; Altgayer, (Appendix), p. 7.)

Awender, through his weekly *Pančevoer Post* (since 1934 *Volksruf*).<sup>87</sup> The struggle went on within the central German cultural organization, the *Kulturbund*, in the guise of the movement of the young “Renewers” (*Erneuerungsbewegung*) against the old *Volksdeutsche* leadership which was compromised by modest achievements and accumulation of offices, and it ended only in 1938/39 with the victory of the young Nazis.<sup>88</sup> Except for a brief connection of the “Renewers” with the pro-fascist movement “Zbor” of Dimitrije Ljotić (February 1937-May 1938),<sup>89</sup> this conflict had more a world-view and generation, than a really political dimension, but its outcome, due to the unification of all *Volksdeutsche* organizations under the auspices of the *Kulturbund*, *Gleichschaltung* (including political behaviour) of almost the whole German national minority under the *Kulturbund* leadership (which turned into the “Folk-Group” at the end of the 1930s) and interference of agencies from the Reich, in the last resort had also a political character. The struggle of the “Renewers” although it was started neither within a political organization nor with overtly political goals, removed from the scene the old political elite of the Yugoslav Germans which couldn’t keep pace with the young in pandering to National-Socialism.

Simultaneously with the development of the “Renewal Movement”, the “Young German Movement”, headed by medical doctor Nikolaus Hasslinger, started developing among the Vojvodina Germans since August 1933.<sup>90</sup> It was leveled both against the pro-Nazi “Renewers” and the old leaders of the minority. Unlike the “Renewal Movement”, it was much more openly political. Its avowed aims were loyalty to Yugoslavia, ties with the “state people”, good relations between Yugoslavia and Germany, but also preservation of their nationality, opening of minority schools, and erasing social and religious differences among the *Volksdeutsche*.<sup>91</sup> The Yugoslav authorities and the press lent support to the movement which was seen as a counterbalance to the penetration of the Nazi ideas. The movement integrated into the ruling parties, one after the other: first into the Yugoslav National Party and then into the Yugoslav Radical Community. Although it gathered more adherents than the movement of its Hungarian counterpart led by Gabor Szántó, it was obvious it was an inspired movement controlled by the government.<sup>92</sup> For that reason it couldn’t attract the German masses, and even less the young German intelligentsia. Its role, which was never too big anyway, started to wane since 1935, until it fizzled out completely after the “Renewers”

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<sup>87</sup> About the *Volksruf* see: Branko Bešlin, *Vesnik tragedije. Nemačka štampa u Vojvodini (1933-1941.)*, Novi Sad, Sremski Karlovci 2001, pp. 52-61. In his memoirs, the later leader of the *Volksdeutsche* in Yugoslavia, Dr Sepp Janko, described the »Renewal Movement« as foremostly concerned with social questions, which was at variance with his articles steeped in ideology of »Blood and Soil« he was publishing in the *Volksruf*. (Cf. Sepp Janko, *Weg und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien*, Graz, Stuttgart 1982, pp. 27-26; *Idem*, *Reden und Aufsätze*, Groß Betschkerek 1944.)

<sup>88</sup> *Annabring*, pp. 67-71; *Biber, Nacizem*, pp. 45-89, 167-210. According to Altgayer’s testimony, in some places the authorities were visibly forthcoming toward the „Renewers“ – surely in order to disunite the Germans. (Altgayer, p. 90.)

<sup>89</sup> This connection aroused great dissatisfaction of both the Prime Minister Stojadinović and the German ambassador von Heeren. (*Biber, Nacizem*, pp. 69-73; *Suppan, Jugoslawien*, p. 729; *Altgayer*, p. 53.) Awender himself was rebuked for it and for the writing of his paper by the chief of the Central Press Bureau in May 1938, to whom he promised the “Renewers” would break up with the “Zbor” and join the Yugoslav Radical Community, the then ruling party. (*AJ*, 37, 73/457.) Already the next month Awender offered Stojadinović cooperation of the “Renewers” with the YRC. According to him, it was necessary because arrests, and fines caused dissatisfaction among the *Volksdeutsche*. (*AJ*, 37, 62/378.)

<sup>90</sup> According to Altgayer, the real initiator and protector of the movement was the prominent politician Daka Popović, whereas the organizer was Alexander Rupp, the District Chief. (*Altgayer*, p. 53.)

<sup>91</sup> The whole programme in: *Novosti*, September 28, 1933.

<sup>92</sup> Hasslinger’s newspaper the *Deutsche Press* received government subventions, and the chief of the cabinet of the Minister of Social Policy and Health, Mirko Latas, even said of it, “it was our “Samouprava” in German.” (*AJ*, 37, 45/296.)

victory within the Kulturbund.<sup>93</sup> The influence of the extreme right-wing “Borbaši« of Svetislav Hođera on some Germans was only transient.<sup>94</sup> In Croatia, the influence of the CPP (which dropped its republicanism) remained dominant, and in Slovenia partly that of the Slovenian People's Party.<sup>95</sup>

Members of the minorities became more involved in politics after the assassination of King Alexander and abandoning of the overt dictatorship.<sup>96</sup> The post-election government of Milan Stojadinović renounced open dictatorship, trying, among other things, to bring together former parties which de facto still existed – the YMO, Slovenian People's Party and parts of the PRP. Out of these heterogeneous elements the Yugoslav Radical Community was formed. Few representatives of the minorities took part in the founding. Kraft joined only later on and was coopted into the Main Committee.<sup>97</sup> In some Ethnic-German places, local branches of the YRC were set up, with all members belonging to the German minority.<sup>98</sup> The party as a whole did not remain immune to inner political, but also ethnic, strife in which the Volksdeutsche were sometimes also implicated.<sup>99</sup>

In Northern parts of the country the leaders of the former parties behaved as if their parties still existed, whereas the authorities tacitly agreed to regard them as the representatives of the minorities. They were submitting grievances, and representatives of the government, like in the previous years, gave promises which would be, at best, only halfway kept.<sup>100</sup> The CPP, which remained the strongest opposition party, wanted also not only to have the Germans on its side, but to use them against Belgrade too, which nationally conscious Volksdeutsche resisted, convinced that their organizations could better prosper relying on the

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<sup>93</sup> Biber, *Nacizem*, pp. 63-67. As late as mid-1938 Hasslinger asked for an audience with the Prime Minister Stojadinović and the Marshal of Court, to talk with them about their further actions. (AJ, 74, 196/280; 37, 22/176.) This plainly shows his connections with the ruling circles. Both opposition movements fed on dissatisfaction, particularly of the younger Volksdeutsche, with national and social prospects the then Volksdeutsche leaders were not able to improve, and Stefan Kraft was their pet hate because of his numerous offices and his dictatorial nature. (ASANU 14530; 14530-XIV 2.)

<sup>94</sup> It was somewhat stronger in Southern Bačka. (Altgayer, p. 52; AJ, 38, 7/27.) For a while part of the Slovaks sympathized with the “Borbaši«. (AJ, 38, 7/27.)

<sup>95</sup> The Germans of Kočevje regularly voted for the ruling party until 1929, reckoning they would achieve the fulfillment of their demands most easily in that way. (HWBGAD, III, p. 77.)

<sup>96</sup> Petranović, p. 211.

<sup>97</sup> Annabring, p. 64; *Bewegte innere Entwicklung. Neue außenpolitische Gesichtspunkte. Die deutsche Volksgruppe und die Regierungspartei, Nation und Staat*, IX, 7, 1936; *Belgrad im Mittelpunkt internationaler Besprechungen. Konstituierung der Regierungspartei, Nation und Staat*, IX, 9, 1936.

<sup>98</sup> Altgayer, p. 54.

<sup>99</sup> Thus for instance, according to a report from 1935, the Pačevo Serbs were disgruntled that a German, Dr Alexander Preler was entrusted with the task of setting up the YRC in the Pačevo District, because he was not only of the wrong nationality, but a former member of the DP to boot. (AJ, 37, 13/88.) Nevertheless, he remained in office, discharging his party duties until 1938, when he was arbitrarily sacked to general dissatisfaction, by nephew of the Minister of Agriculture, Stanković. (AJ, 37, 12/80.) In Vršac, a desperate fight between two Serbs, Velimir Juga and Joca M. Georgijević raged in which the local Germans also took part. During it Georgijević accused Juga of facilitating the spread of Nazi propaganda among the Volksdeutsche. (AJ, 37, 54/351.) In a flier in German, Georgijević called on the Volksdeutsche to live in harmony with the Serbs and against the Nazi »Folk Community«. (Ibid.) The Vršacer Gebirgsbote estimated on May 18, 1938, that the majority of the Germans were in favour of Juga, and the majority of the Serbs in favour of Georgijević. (AJ, 37, 45/296.) The CPP was also not immune to ethnic strife in which the Croats were pitched against the Germans in some places. (Hrvatski državni arhiv (henceforth: HDA), grupa VI c, inv. br. 677.)

<sup>100</sup> Biber, *Nacizem*, p. 190; *Unklare Lage der Regierung Stojadinović. Abordnung der deutschen Volksgruppe beim Ministerpräsidenten, Nation und Staat*, IX, 5, 1936, pp. 236-237.) The fulfillment of the demands of the minorities, including the Volksdeutsche who were somewhat better treated, when it came about at all, was very slow. Representatives of the authorities often had “no time” for representatives of the minorities. (AJ, 37, 52/328; 48/311.)

ruling circles.<sup>101</sup> In the Vojvodina, the alliance between the YRC and the Magyars and Germans proved successful at the communal elections of 1936 too.<sup>102</sup> In Slovenia most of the Germans voted for the Slovenian People's Party out of opportunism, and German industrial workers partly for the Socialist Party.<sup>103</sup>

An extraordinary phenomenon on the political scene in the Vojvodina was the autonomist movement. Due to the dissatisfaction with the economic and political situation in the Vojvodina, autonomist ideas existed already in the 1920s,<sup>104</sup> but the movement made its full mark only in 1932. It was headed by Duda Bošković, and it attracted heterogeneous elements from various parties. The movement insisted on the right of the people of the Vojvodina to decide their own fate and on preservation of distinct provincial identity. Some representatives of the national minorities joined it but most of them were Magyars and not Germans.<sup>105</sup> Despite participation at the elections, it remained outside of the mainstream of the Vojvodina and Yugoslav politics. It achieved its greatest success in the local elections of 1936, when it came to power in 23 communes in the Banat, 20 in Syrmium and 8 in the Bačka. After the Serbian-Croatian compromise in 1939, autonomist tendencies started to die down, and the nationalist ones flared up. The movement could exist as multi-party and multi-ethnic only if certain preconditions outside of the Vojvodina existed, and it did not represent a true integrative attempt across the party and ethnic lines.<sup>106</sup> In any case, by the late 1930s, the Volksdeutsche have already reached a point of national homogenization and organization that effectively prevented joining multi-ethnic movements.

Such were the conditions under which the Prime Minister Stojadinović decided to call the elections for December 1938. He promised equality to the Magyars and Germans at a big rally in Novi Sad on November 13, whereas his Minister of Education Dimitrije Magarašević promised schools in their mother-tongues.<sup>107</sup> On the other hand, Milan Stojadinović asked of the Banus of the Danube Province, Rajčić, that the authorities pay attention how members of the minorities and the Jews voted<sup>108</sup> / proving thus that he didn't trust them.

Due to the elections, the representatives of the infighting Volksdeutsche groups were forced to make truce in late October by a representative of the VoMi (Volksdeutsche Central Office), ordering them that all Germans should vote for the YRC, since this was in the interest

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<sup>101</sup> Arhiv Kulturbunda, Osijek (henceforth: AKB), I 1.1.1.; I 2.1.1.; I 2.1.2. The Germans started leaving the CPP especially since mid-1938 – influenced by the rise of the Reich (Anschluss), by the work of the Cultural and Humanitarian Association of the Germans in Slavonia (Kultur- und Wohlfahrtsvereinigung der Deutschen in Slawonien) and propaganda from Yugoslavia and abroad. However, considerable part remained loyal to the CPP. (AJ, 66 (pov.), 99/283.)

<sup>102</sup> AJ, F. 398, f. 1; 37, 22/178; AVII, pop. 17, k. 21, f. 2, d. 3; Mesaroš, Mađari, p. 146. In his complaint about violence during the communal elections in 1936, the MP Dr Kosta Popović claimed the majority of peaceful Germans of the Sombor District abstained because of the violence, whereas the Magyars voted for the YRC in exchange for concessions concerning activities of cultural associations and the analysis of names at enrollment of children in schools. (Ljubodrag Dimić, *Kulturna politika Kraljevine Jugoslavije 1918-1941*, III. Politika i stvaralaštvo, Beograd 1997, p. 86; SBNS KJ, I redovni saziv za 1935/36. godinu, II redovni saziv za 1936/37. godinu, knj. I, Beograd 1937, p. 354.)

<sup>103</sup> Suppam, *Zur Lage*, p. 232. Nevertheless, at the communal elections in 1936 the Kočevje Germans ran, and won for greater part, together with the opposition. (Biber, *Kočevski Nemci*, pp. 35-36.)

<sup>104</sup> Hrabak, *Borba*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>105</sup> AJ, 38, 7/27.

<sup>106</sup> Petranović, pp. 294-295; Mesaroš, Mađari, p. 138.

<sup>107</sup> Biber, *Nacizem*, pp. 190-191; Mesaroš, Mađari, p. 167. On the eve of these elections, a correspondent of the Central Press Bureau suggested to solve minority questions "in accordance with a certain plan and some measures" because members of the minorities became more active and they expected that more of their wishes would be respected. By solving the minority questions they were to be attached to Belgrade on every occasion. (AJ, 38, 7/27.)

<sup>108</sup> AJ, 37, 4/27.

of the Reich.<sup>109</sup> The Volksdeutsche representatives negotiated with Stojadinović on November 13, demanding four MPs and two deputies, but were promised only two MP candidatures and two deputies, as well as some school concessions.<sup>110</sup> To all appearances, this was hypocrisy on part of the government, since the representatives of the Hungarian Party had previously been told that only one MP was foreseen for the Magyars and Germans respectively,<sup>111</sup> which would eventually come true after the elections. Obviously, despite a large number of minority members in its ranks and even in the leading posts on the district level,<sup>112</sup> the YRC wanted only a few minority candidates who would serve as multi-ethnic decoration and attract minority votes.<sup>113</sup>

The outcome of the elections, at least concerning the representation of the minority candidates, was as the leaders of the YRC had hoped. The Germans got only one MP at first (Franz Hamm),<sup>114</sup> but managed to obtain another seat (for Dr Josef Trischler) thanks to the pressure of the German ambassador.<sup>115</sup> In Apatin the Volksdeutsche mostly voted against their will for the baptized Jew Oton Gavrilović (previously Fischer!), because they were ordered to do so (and being put under pressure by the authorities).<sup>116</sup> The Germans in Kočevje also followed orders this time, although they ran with the opposition at the local elections two years before.<sup>117</sup> In Slavonia, where the assimilation was stronger and sympathies of the majority of the Germans for the CPP traditional, most of them voted for the CPP despite the directive, and only some for the YRC.<sup>118</sup> In all, Milan Stojadinović's ticket received some 400.000 votes from the minorities (compared with some 170.000 votes of the adherents of the Slovenian People's Party and some 135.000 sympathizers of the YMO!).<sup>119</sup> Whereas the members of these two parties were given ministerial posts, power in "their" parts of the country, great influence on the state policy and more, in exchange, the national minorities had to make do with a few MPs whose (anyway rare) protests in the Parliament were the voice of the one crying in the wilderness. A few senatorial seats for representatives of the minorities were also a decorative measure of little use to the minorities. The Senator representing the Ethnic-Germans since 1935 was Dr. Georg Grassl. He was joined by the bishop of the German Evangelical Church, Dr. Philipp Popp in 1940.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Biber, *Nacizem*, pp. 188-189.

<sup>110</sup> Dimić, *Kulturna politika*, III, p. 47; *Die Lage der deutschen Volksgruppe*, *Nation und Staat*, XII, 2, 1938, p. 138; Biber, *Nacizem*, p. 190.

<sup>111</sup> Mesaroš, *Mađari*, p. 168.

<sup>112</sup> *AJ*, 37, 13/87.

<sup>113</sup> Thus the YRC ticket in the Danube province contained 7 members of minorities and 78 Yugoslavs. (*AJ*, 37, 47/305; 48/311.)

<sup>114</sup> This was breach of trust on part of the government which enraged the Volksdeutsche. (*AJ*, 37, 52/328.)

<sup>115</sup> *PA*, VI A Bd. 18, 640/39.

<sup>116</sup> Biber, *Nemci*, p. 192. According to Sima Rocić, former MP, the local Germans, but the Serbs too, were anti-Semitic, and were so disgruntled that the authorities had imposed Gavrilović on them, that Rocić feared bloodbath. (*AJ*, 37, 4/30.) On the day of the elections, the situation was verging on a clash, and the demonstrations of adherents of Gavrilović's opponent from the YRC ticket, Ludwig Keks, lasted in Apatin for two subsequent days. Some of the protesters were arrested and manhandled by the police. (*AJ*, 37, 4/30; 57/328.)

<sup>117</sup> Biber, *Kočevski Nemci*, p. 36.

<sup>118</sup> Geiger, *Nijemci u Đakovu*, p. 131. About the conflict between the nationally conscious and semi-assimilated Volksdeutsche in Slavonia see: Leček, *Folksdojčeri*, pp. 158-159.

<sup>119</sup> Dimić, *Istorija*, p. 181. The German ambassador von Heeren estimated the government got the (small) majority of the votes (54,09%) only thanks to the votes of members of the national minorities, the number of which he estimated at 330.000. He believed the Volksdeutsche alone had given cca. 120.000 votes. (Biber, *Nacizem*, p. 193.)

<sup>120</sup> Plautz, p. 67; M. Mitrinović, *Biografski leksikon*. Narodno predstavništvo, s.l. [1935]; *Biografski leksikon*. Narodno predstavništvo. Senat. Narodna skupština, Beograd 1939.

Until the Second World War the inner policy revolved first around reaching, and then implementing the compromise between the leading Serbian and Croatian circles.<sup>121</sup> Under such conditions the minority question became increasingly dependant on the relations between Yugoslavia and their respective mother-countries. This held true particularly for the three “big” minorities – the Germans, Magyars and Albanians. After the Anschluss Germany became Yugoslavia’s neighbour whose interests Belgrade had increasingly kept in mind even before that.<sup>122</sup> Whereas the Yugoslav authorities previously used to persecute the Nazi excesses, since 1939 they became more tolerant and the outrages were increasingly controlled – at the directive from the Reich – by the leadership of the “German Folk Group” which reduced the number of the Volksdeutsche manifestations.<sup>123</sup> The government was pursuing the policy of forthcoming in allowing the activities of the cultural associations, opening of minority classes and non-interference in the “internal” Volksdeutsche affairs, and, according to reports in part of the press, there were even signs in autumn of 1940, the Volksdeutsche would be granted some kind of autonomy in predominantly German places.<sup>124</sup> Part of the Slavonian Volksdeutsche, who had long been devoted to the CPP, started deserting it and joining the Kulturbund which became an umbrella political-economic-social organization of the Germans in Yugoslavia. In some cases this led to clashes with those Germans who remained loyal to the CPP at the communal elections in 1940.<sup>125</sup>

The sign of fateful changes in the country and Europe, was the, to be sure vague, promise of Prime Minister Cvetković to revamp the minority policy so as to recompense them for what they had missed so far.<sup>126</sup> Based on this, some newspapers expected the government would soon issue a decree about the national minorities that would regulate their position similarly as it had been done in the conventions about the Volksdeutsche which Germany concluded with Hungary and Romania.<sup>127</sup> Although not only the German minority, but others

<sup>121</sup> Dimić, *Istorija*, pp. 182-197.

<sup>122</sup> J.V. Senz writes Germany secured the rights of the Volksdeutsche – in order to rule them and the countries in which they lived. (J.V. Senz, *Politische*, p. 329.)

<sup>123</sup> Biber, *Nacizem*, pp. 199-200; Janjetović, *Die Konflikte*, p. 152. In mid-1940 the leadership of the “Folk Group” called on the Volksdeutsche not to make excesses, since it was difficult to intervene for the arrested. (*Deutsches Volksblatt*, June 7, 1940.) On July 1, 1940 the leader of the Kulturbund, Janko temporarily suspended the enrolment of new members. (AVII, pop. 17, k. 527, f. 3, d. 45.)

<sup>124</sup> *Il piccolo*, November 11, 1940; *Magyarország*, November 14, 1940; Dimić, *Kulturna politika*, III, p. 49; *Annabring* pp. 71-72. The German youth insisted particularly on appointment of German notaries. (AJ, 38, 7/27.) In December 1940 the *Deutsches Volksblatt* started the initiative that the Volksdeutsche be represented in the new town councils by at least one or two representatives. (*Deutsches Volksblatt*, December 4, 1940.) As for concessions in administration, according to the German correspondent Dr Berge, Vice-Premier Maček was against any kind of concessions. (AJ, 38, 122/267.)

<sup>125</sup> Geiger, *Nijemci u Đakovu*, p. 129. Even under the changed circumstances, the Germans in Croatia were able to come to power in just six communes in the local elections, whereas in mixed communes they had to make agreements about power sharing. (*Deutsches Volksblatt*, May 28, 1940; *Der Angriff*, April 25, 1940.) Altgayer, whose forte is not precision, claims wrongly they gained power in five communes. (Altgayer (Appendix), p. 14.) Only five communes were also mentioned in a report by the First Army District Command of June 7, 1940. (AVII, pop. 17, k. 527, f. 3, d. 45.)

<sup>126</sup> *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, October 8, 1940.

<sup>127</sup> *Dnevnik, Утро, Зарја*, October 10, 1940. On occasion of the Second Vienna Award (about division of Transylvania) Germany made Hungary and Romania sign the „Agreement about the Folk Group”. (In fact it was important only for Hungary, since the Germans in Romania had already enjoyed far-reaching rights.) It granted the Volksdeutsche the following rights: the right to preserve their national characteristics and to manifest their National-Socialist world-view; the right to found organizations; the right to exercises freely all professions; proportional representation in the government and among civil servants; the right to schools and education of teachers-to-be; the right to use freely their mother-tongue in private and business matters and in public assemblies, as well as freedom of the press under the same conditions as the Magyars; Hungary committed itself to avoid assimilationist measures, especially the change of family names; freedom of cultural communication with Germany was granted, as well as the right of option for the Transylvanian Saxons. The organization of the

too cherished such hopes, nothing came of it, so the leadership of the German “Folk Group” submitted a memo to the government on January 20, 1941, demanding that the “Folk Group” be recognized as a legal person with the right to independently decide on its cultural, economic and social matters, whereas the leadership of the “Folk Group” would represent all the Volksdeutsche before the authorities. Proportional representation of the Germans in the administration, judiciary and police was demanded, as well as the school autonomy.<sup>128</sup> To be sure, despite the increasing dependence on the Third Reich, such demands remained unacceptable for the Yugoslav government so that they had to await the dismemberment of Yugoslavia in the Second World War for their (partial) fulfillment.

Participation of the Ethnic-Germans in the political life of Yugoslavia on the national level was rather marginal. The strongest Yugoslav parties strove to gather them as their voting army, giving very little in exchange. Breach of promises was the rule, and keeping of the given word, an exception. The Volksdeutsche were always disproportionately underrepresented. On lower levels, in district and communal assemblies – as long as they existed – the situation was somewhat better, but even there members of the minority received less than their due. In the Parliament, the German MPs could only expound (often in an inimical ambience) the complaints of their constituencies in public,<sup>129</sup> but situations when they could actually do something for their conationals in the Parliament were extremely rare. Representation among the officials, both state and communal, was even worse than in the assemblies on different levels.<sup>130</sup> Only representation among the communal elders made the situation somewhat better.<sup>131</sup> And yet, even in representation in communal government, there existed a large differences depending on time and place.<sup>132</sup> Due to their territorial dispersion and/or the small number, but also due to the electoral system that was designed unfavourably to the minorities, members of the Volksdeutsche never managed to achieve the political

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German national minority, the Volksbund, was empowered to determine, based on personal statement, who was German and who wasn't. The Hungarian government managed to leave out of the agreement that the Folk Group was a legal person. Both parties interpreted this agreement in accordance with their respective interests later on, the Volksdeutsche (unfoundedly) claiming they had been recognized as a legal person. (Lórant Tilkovszky, *Zeitgeschichte der Deutschen in Ungarn seit 1919 mit einer Vorgeschichte*, Budapest 1991, pp. 115-120; Idem, *Ungarn und die deutsche „Volksgruppenpolitik“ 1938-1945*, Budapest 1981, pp. 93-96; *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa*, II, Bonn 1956, pp. 23E-25E, 73E-74E; Norbert Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn 1938-1945 unter Horthy und Hitler*, München 2002, pp. 214-222; Mathias Annabring, *Volks Geschichte der Deutschen in Ungarn*, Stuttgart 1954, pp. 105-110; Idem, *Volks Geschichte der Sonauschwaben in Rumänine*, Neuhausen/F bei Stuttgart 1956, p. 57.)

<sup>128</sup> Josip Mirnić, *Nemci u Bačkoj u Drugom svetskom ratu*, Novi Sad 1974, pp. 72-73.

<sup>129</sup> Sometimes the censorship curtailed even this possibility by shortening speeches of MPs before the publication of the minutes and in the press. (Cf.: *Das hin und her der jugoslawischen Minderheitenpolitik*. Ernennung Dr. Grassls zum Senator, *Nation und Staat*, V, 6, 1932, p. 413; *Die Budgetredender deutschen Parlamentsvertreter*. Unerhörte Verdächtigungen der deutschen Minderheit. *Die Zensur*, *Nation und Staat*, V, 7, 1932, p. 497; *Die Lage der deutschen Volksgruppe*, *Nation und Staat*, VII, 7, 1934, p. 450.) Sometimes the censorship was stricter with minority newspapers than with the Yugoslav ones, which could publish certain items that were erased from the minority press. In minority papers, even reports of the official agency, the “Avala” were bowdlerized. (*Die innenpolitische Lage*. Die Novelle zum Wahl- und Versammlungsgesetz. *Die Frage der deutschen Bürgerschulen*. *Die Unterdrückung der Minderheitenpresse*, *Nation und Staat*, V, 3, 1932, p. 179.)

<sup>130</sup> SBNS KJ, *Redovan saziv za 1932/33. godinu*, knj. IV, Beograd 1933, p. 332. During our whole research we managed to find only one mention of a non-Yugoslav district chief - the German Alexander Rupp. (SBNS KJ, *I redovan saziv za 1935/36*, *II redovan saziv za 1936/37. godinu*, knj. I, Beograd 1937, p. 375.)

<sup>131</sup> This despite the stipulation of the Law on Communes that foresaw that duties were to be performed in the official language alone, which gave a handy opportunity of interference and curtailing the participation of members of the minorities in the local government. (SBNS KJ, *Redovan saziv za 1932/33. knj. III*, pp. 89-90.)

<sup>132</sup> Thanks to party considerations, everything was possible, even that a Serbian mayor be deposed in favour of a German one. (SBNS KJ, *I redovan saziv za 1935/36*, *II redovan saziv za 1936/37. godinu*, knj. I, Beograd 1937, 352.)



importance they could have had. Cooperation between minority parties and their voters practically never occurred – if a few joint rallies are excluded. The Germans didn't want cooperation with the Magyars,<sup>133</sup> the most likely partner in the areas they together inhabited, due to the memories of Magyarization, suspicions under which the Hungarian minority stood,<sup>134</sup> irredentist propaganda from Hungary that would misuse such cooperation,<sup>135</sup> disunity of the Hungarian leaders,<sup>136</sup> and finally, due to bad treatment of the Germans in Horthy's Hungary.<sup>137</sup> On the other hand, due to political calculations, the Hungarian Party was not always willing to cooperate either,<sup>138</sup> and sometimes it explained the lack of cooperation with the GP by the alleged Belgrade's favouring of the Germans.<sup>139</sup> Cooperation with minorities from other parts of the country was made difficult by huge regional differences that made difficult the integration of the whole Yugoslav territory: what did a German burgher from Maribor have in common with an Albanian shepherd from Western Macedonia?!? However, probably the main reason why there never was real cooperation between minorities, lies in the fact that the leading political personages of all minorities believed they could get more by cooperating with the ruling parties than through arduous building of a common minority front, to which so many things stood in the way. This does not mean sporadic attempts at cooperation didn't occur, but their importance was marginal.<sup>140</sup> Finally, ever since the early 1930s, the German leaders were increasingly convinced they could achieve more by leaning on the ever stronger Germany, than by making complicated and precarious combinations with other minorities.

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<sup>133</sup> One such attempt failed in 1938. (AVII, pop. 17, k. 21, f. 2, d. 3.)

<sup>134</sup> Höpfner, p. 342.

<sup>135</sup> Stefan Kraft refused to cooperate with the Magyars fearing political damage for the Volksdeutsche. (Pester Lloyd, November 22, 1931.) In 1939 the situation was pretty much the same: the Germans didn't want to compromise themselves by collaborating with the Hungarians who suffered under constant suspicion of disloyalty. (AJ, 37, 58/371.)

<sup>136</sup> The German ambassador to Belgrade Ulrich von Hassel wrote in 1931 the Hungarians lacked a firm organization and clear leadership – which was one of the preconditions for cooperation with the Volksdeutsche. Furthermore, in his opinion, the Hungarians didn't realize the difference of their position and that of the Volksdeutsche, and they had to stop seeing in the latter the "seceded Magyars". (PA, Abt. IIb, Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker, Politik 6, Jugoslawien, Bd. 5.) These views held true for the greater part of the inter-war period. Thus Georg Grassl reproached the Hungarians for not having a unified leadership, and that they had attacked the GP "from the rear" by joining the Pašić-Pribičević "terrorist block." (PA, Abt. IIb, Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker, Politik 6, Jugoslawien, Bd. 5.) In 1937 a Volksdeutsche leader reproached the Hungarian leaders with inconsistency and sympathies for the opposition. (Magyarság, February 23, 1937.)

<sup>137</sup> Loránt Tilkovszky Die Frage der politischen Zusammenarbeit der deutschen und ungarischen Minderheiten in Donaubecken, in den Staaten der Kleine Entante, in: Gerhard Seewann (ed.), p. 403.

<sup>138</sup> Vinaver, Mađarska i Jugoslavija 1918-1933, pp. 382, 384.

<sup>139</sup> Sajti, Hungarians, p. 182.

<sup>140</sup> AVII, pop. 17, k. 21, f. 2, d. 3; AJ, 14, 110/414; Vinaver, Jugoslavija i Mađarska 1918-1933, p. 384; Popi, Rumuni, pp. 69, 75; Mesaroš, Položaj, p. 247; Nikolić, p. 190.