

*“WE HAVE TO MOVE FORWARD!”*  
THE SLOVAK MINORITY IN THE KINGDOM  
OF YUGOSLAVIA IN 1935–1939

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The paper “We Have to Move Forward!” focuses on presenting the organisation and position of the Slovak minority in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, placing emphasis on the period between the elections for the National Assembly in 1935 and the establishment of the Banat of Croatia in 1939. Special attention was paid to the minority’s viewpoints on the Kingdom’s internal politics, as well as, externally, the conditions in the mother country, that is, Czechoslovakia and Slovakia after the first half of March 1939. The research required the use of archived materials from the Croatian State Archives in Zagreb and the Slovak National Archives in Bratislava, the Slovak minority newspapers, which, among other things, helped reconstruct the zeitgeist, and also the published sources and relevant literature. Although the Slovaks inhabited the entire territory of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, it is important to mention that the representative area used for this research was the Danube Banat (mostly the area of the present day Vojvodina and Baranja), which was most densely populated by the Slovak minority.

Keywords: Slovak minority. Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Banat of Croatia. Czechoslovakia. Slovak Republic. Interwar period.

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### **Introduction**

In the interwar period, the Yugoslav state represented a very heterogeneous formation with regard to its political, social and national structure. As its title in the first ten years after the First World War stated, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, this was a state composed of these nationalities, but also of numerous other nationalities, which surely could not have been mentioned in the country’s name. The new name, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which was introduced in October 1929, must have alluded mostly to Yugoslav nations, regardless their position, individual privileges, or emphasis on the minority rights of some over others. Besides the usual majority issue, which mostly addressed the problems

referring to the position of the Croatian people in relation to the Serbs, or Slovenes in relation to Serbs, or, on the other hand, the position of a part of the Serbian population who were seen as neighbours to the Croatian people inside Croatia (from 1929 on the area of the Sava Banat and the Primorje Banat), there were numerous other problems of the same kind. The issues the majority faced, as opposed to the hardships of the minorities, could have in fact labelled the real situation because national minorities, regardless of their importance or number, could not have produced issues larger than the ones the country had already been dealing with.

The interior territorial-administrative division of the Yugoslav state into Banats in 1929 did not resolve a single important national issue. Moreover, it enhanced the differences between the already divided Yugoslav society. For an average Yugoslav citizen (regardless his/her national and religious affiliation or inclination to a political party), the year in which the mentioned territorial-administrative divisions into Banats were introduced could have also marked the year in which King Aleksandar I Karađorđević instituted his dictatorship, that is the 6 January Dictatorship.<sup>1</sup> Looking from a greater temporal distance, it is possible to interpret the king's political decisions from January 1929 in various ways. Furthermore, the consequences of these decisions were also evident in the 1930s, when not only political but also the numerous national problems kept rapidly increasing. Regardless of the elections for the National Assembly held in 1931 and 1935, it appeared that the Yugoslav society suffered even greater divisions and mutual discord than in the time before the dictatorship was established.<sup>2</sup> In these

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- 1 See: ČULINOVIĆ, Ferdo. *Državnopravna historija jugoslavenskih zemalja XIX. i XX. vijeka. Knjiga 2. Srbija – Crna Gora, Makedonija – Jugoslavija 1918–1945* (The history of the state and law in the Yugoslav lands in 19th and 20th centuries. Vol. II. Serbia – Montenegro, Macedonia – Yugoslavia 1918–1945). Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1959, pp. 286-291; PETRANOVIĆ, Branko. *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918–1988. Knjiga prva. Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914–1941*. (History of Yugoslavia 1918–1988. Vol. I. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia 1914–1941). Beograd: Nolit, 1988, pp. 176–184. ISBN 86-19-01664-4; MACAN, Trpimir. *Hrvatska povijest – pregled*. (Croatia: A History – overview). Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 2004, p. 205. ISBN 953-150-702-3; GOLDSTEIN, Ivo. *Hrvatska 1918–2008* (Croatia 1918–2008). Zagreb: Novi Liber, Europapress holding, 2008, pp. 101–102. ISBN 978-953-6045-57-0 (Novi Liber). ISBN 978-953-300-096-1 (Europapress); ŠESTÁK, Miroslav et al. *Dějiny jihoslovanských zemí*. (History of the south Slavic countries). Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 1998, p. 417. ISBN 80-7106-266-9.
  - 2 The 1931 National Assembly elections cannot be referred to as multiparty because only the government's land list led by Prime Minister Petar Živković took part, while the winning land candidate list in the 1935 elections, according to the amendments of the election law from 24 March 1933, automatically received 3/5 parliamentary terms (instead of the former 2/3). As for the distribution of other mandates, it also took part in other candidate lists. ČULINOVIĆ, Ferdo (ed.). *Dokumenti o Jugoslaviji. Historijat od osnutka zajedničke države do danas*. (Documents about Yugoslavia. The history from the establishing of the common state until today).

extremely complicated times which befell the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Slovak minority too tried to find its rightful place in both its political and social life.<sup>3</sup>

### “Steps to action”<sup>4</sup>

At the end of the eighteenth century, the Slovaks started inhabiting the so-called Lower Land. This term in Slovak historiography defines the areas which were exceptionally depopulated after the Ottoman conquests, and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they became inhabited by various nations, including the Slovaks. This land stretches from the southern state border of Slovakia and onto parts of present-day Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Western Romania and Northern Bulgaria.<sup>5</sup> This population intensified at the end of the nineteenth and beginning

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Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1968, p. 324.

- 3 See some of the recent papers connected to the position of the Slovak minority in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia: JANJETOVIĆ, Zoran. *Deca careva, pastorčad kraljeva. Nacionalne manjine u Jugoslaviji 1918–1941*. (The children of emperors, the stepchildren of kings. National minorities in Yugoslavia 1918–1941). Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2005. ISBN 86-7005-043-9; KUČEROVÁ, Kvetoslava. *Slovaci u Hrvatskoj: od početaka naseljavanja*. (Slovaks in Croatia: from the beginning of settlement). Martin: Matica slovenská, 2005. ISBN 80-7090-797-5; TKÁČ, Ján. *Demografia a postavenie vojvodinských Slovákov v Juhoslávii 1918–1941*. (Demography and the status of Vojvodina Slovaks in Yugoslavia 1918–1941). In *Historický zborník: vedecký časopis o slovenských národných dejinách*, 2017, year. 27, no. 2, pp. 52–80. ISSN 1335-8723; JARINKOVIČ, Martin. *Slovensko a Juhoslávia v rokoch II. svetovej vojny*. (Slovakia and Yugoslavia during World War II). Banská Bystrica: Klub priateľov múzea SNP, 2012. ISBN 978-80-895141-3-7; DUGAČKI, Vlatka. *Svoj svome. Češka i slovačka manjina u međuratnoj Jugoslaviji 1918–1941*. (Each to their own. Czech and Slovak minorities in the interwar Yugoslavia 1918–1941). Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2013. ISBN 978-953-7963-04-0; DUGAČKI. *The Slovak Republic and the Banovina of Croatia from the Point of View of the Slovak Minority*. In HOLJEVAC, Željko – HOMZA, Martin – VAŠŠ, Martin (eds.). *Croatia and Slovakia. Historical Parallels and Connections (from 1780 to the Present Days)*. Zagreb; Bratislava: FF press, 2017, pp. 143–149. ISBN 978-953-175-605-1; SOVILJ, Milan. *Činnosť slovenskej menšiny v Jugoslávii proti Slovenskému štátu v letech 1939–1941*. *Príspevek k jugoslávsko-slovenským vzťahom na začiatku druhej svetovej války*. (The activities of the Slovak minority in Yugoslavia against the Slovak state in 1939–1941. Contribution to the Yugoslav-Slovak relations at the beginning of World War II). In TOKÁROVÁ, Zuzana – PEKÁR, Martin (eds.). *Človek, spoločnosť, doba. Stretnutie mladých historikov III*. Košice: Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Filozofická fakulta, Katedra histórie, 2014, pp. 183–196. ISBN 978-80-8152-161-4; SOVILJ, Milan. *Otázka identity Čechů a Slováků v Jugoslávii v letech 1939–1941*. (The Question of identity of Czechs and Slovaks in Yugoslavia in the years 1939–1941). In *Slovanský přehled*, 2014, year 100, no. 2, pp. 297–322. ISSN 0037-6922; HRUBOŇ, Anton – MIČKO, Peter. *Slovaks in Yugoslavia and in its territories under foreign occupation during World War II (an overview of the dominant features of minority life)*. In *Istraživanja. Journal of Historical Researches*, 2018, no. 29, pp. 163–175. ISSN 0350-2112.
- 4 *Kroky ku skutkom*. (Steps to action). In *Národná jednota*, 27. 1. 1922, no. 4, p. 1.
- 5 The term was adopted from Hungarian historiography. The name Délvidék refers to the

of the twentieth centuries. It somewhat subsided during the First World War but then intensified again in the interwar period. Most Slovak immigrants came from the administrative counties of the Kingdom of Hungary called Hont and Nógrád.

The Slovaks first inhabited present-day Croatia when they started emigrating from the overpopulated northern areas of the Kingdom of Hungary, which was already at the end of the seventeenth century and upon the invitation of the Ilok princes Odescalchi. They were Catholics and mostly seasonal workers, traders, and soldiers by vocation. A larger influx of Slovaks to Croatia occurred during the so-called secondary migration, which took place between the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. The Vojvodina Slovaks who were predominantly members of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession inhabited the aristocratic family estates Pejačević, Turković and Janković, as well as Đakovo ecclesiastical properties owned by Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer. The members of the Slovak minority mostly settled the territory of Baranja and Slavonia, which are today the counties of Vukovar–Srijem, Osijek–Baranja, Požega–Slavonia, Sisak–Moslavina and Virovitica–Podravina.<sup>6</sup> According to Jan Auerhan, a Czech statistician and president of the Czechoslovakian institute for foreign countries, who during the interwar period conducted field research of the Czech and Slovak minorities, Croatia and Slavonia were in 1880 inhabited by 9 078 Slovaks, in 1890 by 13 614, in 1900 by 17 342, in 1910 by 21 613, and in 1921 by 21 895.<sup>7</sup>

The first encounters of the Slovaks and the Serbian and Croatian people in present-day Vojvodina go back to the first half of the eighteenth century, more precisely after 1745 when the Slovak immigrants inhabited the south of the Kingdom of Hungary, that is Bačka, Banat and Srijem, which were left devastated after the Ottoman conquests. According to the Slovak historian Ján Sirácky, who also studied the position of the Slovak minority on what was then Yugoslav territory, in 1900 there were 14 969 Slovaks in the Banat region.<sup>8</sup> Already in 1921

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southern provinces in the Kingdom of Hungary (Slavonia, Srijem and Vojvodina), while Felvidék (the upper region) refers to present-day Slovakia.

- 6 For more detail see: KURIC, Andrija. *140 rokov slovenskej školy v Iloku (1864–2004)*. (One hundred and forty years of the Slovak school in the town of Ilok 1864–2004). Osijek: Zváz Slovákov v Chorvátsku, 2004. ISBN 953-989277-5.
- 7 AUERHAN, Jan. *Čechoslováci v Jugoslavii, v Rumunsku, v Maďarsku a v Bulharsku*. (The Czechoslovaks in Yugoslavia, Romania, Hungary and in Bulgaria). Praha: Tiskem a nákladem družstevních podniků Melantrich, 1921, p. 5; AUERHAN. *Československá větev v Jugoslavii*. (The Czechoslovak branch in Yugoslavia). Praha: Nákladem Československého ústavu zahraničního, 1930, p. 90.
- 8 SIRÁCKY, Ján. Slovaci u Jugoslaviji. Prilog istoriji naseljavanja. (Slovaks in Yugoslavia. Contribution to the history of their settlement). In *Zbornik za društvene nauke Matice srpske*, 1966, vol. 44, p. 19. ISSN 0352-5732.

the figure rose to 15 362.<sup>9</sup> However, the Bačka territory was inhabited by a large number of Slovaks. Based on Hungarian statistics, Sirácky emphasised that in 1900 there were 30 002 of them, whereas according to Auerhan’s data in 1910 there were 30 092 Slovaks in Bačka and 30 312 in 1921.<sup>10</sup>

As opposed to Banat and Bačka, the Slovak habitation of Srijem took place in the second migration wave, at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. This was mainly agricultural population who were in search of cheaper land for cultivation. According to the already mentioned Ján Sirácky’s studies, in 1900 there were 11 415 members of the Slovak minority in Srijem, and according to Jan Auerhan in 1921 there were 13 940 of them.<sup>11</sup>

Two censuses were carried out in interwar Yugoslavia, which also in a way contributed to understanding what number of people belonged to the Slovak minority. According to the 1921 census, 68 732 Slovaks lived in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, of which 21 920 settled in Croatia, Slavonia and Medimurje and 45 825 in Banat, Bačka and Baranja.<sup>12</sup> A new census from 1931 in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia registered 110 662 *Czechoslovaks*, 35 372 of which lived in the Sava Banat, and 63 068 in the Danube Banat.<sup>13</sup> The following planned census, which was expected in 1941, was never realised, since already in spring of that year Yugoslavia ceased to exist as an independent state due to the April War, that is, the start of the Second World War on its territory and its occupation by the Germans and its allies. However, the question is, what would the new census reveal concerning the Slovak and the Czech minorities, except that we could assume their number grew in the period between 1931 and 1941. Furthermore, what such statistics surely would not have been able to show had to do with the analysis of the Slovak minority members’ social position and political activity, which was very important for the Slovaks’ life in Yugoslavia.

In the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Slovak minority was granted citizenship. According to the already men-

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9 AUERHAN, *Československá větev v Jugoslavii*, ref. 7, p. 59.

10 SIRÁCKY, ref. 8, p. 15; AUERHAN, *Československá větev v Jugoslavii*, ref. 7, pp. 61, 90.

11 SIRÁCKY, ref. 8, p. 20; AUERHAN, *Československá větev v Jugoslavii*, ref. 7, pp. 59, 62.

12 Hrvatski državni arhiv (HDA) (The Croatian State Archives), fund (f.) Republički zavod za statistiku SRH 1857. – 1948. /1961. (RZZS SRH), (The State Institute for Statistics of the Socialist Republic of Croatia 1857–1948/1961), Popis stanovništva 1921 (The 1921 Census), box 47.

13 HDA, f. RZZS SRH, Popis stanovništva 1931 (The 1931 Census), box 53. According to the 1931 census, there was a possibility to declare one’s nationality and mother tongue, but the members of the Czech and Slovak minorities were classified in the group *Czechoslovaks* because the Yugoslav authorities viewed the Slovak and Czech minorities as one people, which was similar to their attempts to connect the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes within the frames of one state.

tioned Jan Auerhan's research, most Slovaks who lived in interwar Yugoslavia were also its rightful citizens.<sup>14</sup> Even the Law on Citizenship from 1928 was supposed to facilitate getting this citizenship for those who had been living on the Yugoslav territory for over ten years, and which came under the jurisdiction of the Yugoslav state after 1918. A number of Slovaks used the regulations of that law. There is no accurate data on the number of Slovak minority people with Yugoslav citizenship or those with Czechoslovakian citizenship. At the time when the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was already occupied by the German army and their allies, in May of 1941, the Slovakian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had already had the information concerning the members of the Slovak minority in what was at the time practically former Yugoslavia. According to that information, most Slovaks had obtained Yugoslav citizenship.<sup>15</sup>

In the period between the two world wars, the Slovaks in Yugoslavia were organised on the social, educational, cultural, economic, and political fields. They had their schools, social organisations, banks, and a publishing house.<sup>16</sup> The cultural and social centre was considered to be Petrovac (present-day town Bački Petrovac), which at the same time represented one of the largest places inhabited by the Slovaks (about 8 000 inhabitants).<sup>17</sup> Petrovac was also home to the centre of the most significant cultural organisation for the Slovak minority – *Matica slovenská*, established in 1932 and similar to a few decades older organisation of the same name from the city of Martin.<sup>18</sup>

14 AUERHAN, *Československá větev v Jugoslávii*, ref. 7, pp. 124–126.

15 Slovenský národný archív (SNA) (The Slovak National Archive), f. Ministerstvo zahraničných vecí 1939–1945 (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs) (MZV), kartón (k.) 268, no. 3352/40, Slováci v bývalej Juhoslávii (The Slovaks in the former Yugoslavia).

16 EDEDY, Ján. Prítomný stav slovenského ľudového školstva v Juhoslávii. (The present status of the Slovak national education in Yugoslavia). In *Náš život. Časopis Matice slovenskej v Juhoslávii*, 1939, year 7, n. 1, pp. 50–54; JANJETOVIČ, ref. 3, pp. 261–263; DUGAČKI, *Svoj svome*, ref. 3, pp. 374–375; SKLABINSKÁ, Milina – MOSNAKOVÁ, Katarína. *Slováci v Srbsku z aspektu kultúry*. (The Slovaks in Serbia from the cultural aspect). Nový Sad: Ústav pre kultúru vojvodinských Slovákov, 2013, pp. 50–51. ISBN 978-86-87947-11-5.

17 AUERHAN, Jan. *Československé jazykové menšiny v evropském zahraničí. Národnostní poměry, v nichž žijí, a vztahy, které je poutají k staré vlasti*. (The Czechoslovak language minorities in the European abroad. The National relations, in which they are leaving and the connections, which hold them to the old homeland). Praha: Orbis, 1935, p. 11.

18 On *Matica slovenská* at Petrovac, see some of their recent papers: BOLDOCKÝ, Samuel. Spoločensko-politické zázemie pôsobenia Matice slovenskej vo Vojvodine v rokoch 1932–1941. (Socio-political background of the *Matica slovenská* activity in Vojvodina in the years 1932–1941). In SEDLÁK, Imrich (ed.). *Matica slovenská v národných dejinách. Zborník príspevkov z medzinárodnej vedeckej konferencie Matice slovenská v národných dejinách 26. – 27. 2. 2013*. Martin: *Matica slovenská* 2013, pp. 352–362. ISBN 978-80-8128-086-3; TKÁČ, Ján. Účinkovanie Matice slovenskej vo Vojvodine v rokoch 1932–1941. (The activities of the *Matica slovenská* in Vojvodina in the years 1932–1941). In SEDLÁK, Imrich (ed.). *Matica*

Besides in state primary schools, children of the Slovak minority members could continue their education at the Slovak state real gymnasium at Petrovac (today Gymnázium Jána Kollára), founded on 1 October 1919 as a private Slovak secondary school.<sup>19</sup> In 1920 it became a state school and from 1930 onwards its financing was taken over by the authorities of the Danube Banat in the city of Novi Sad. In the same year when the Slovak secondary school was open, there was an initiative for establishing a school of economics very soon.<sup>20</sup> On 29 October 1927, upon the request of the Slovak Agricultural Association from Petrovac, the Minister of Agriculture of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Svetozar Stanković, granted the founding of the School of Economics at Petrovac, where the curriculum was carried out in Slovak language.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, in 1935 this school also opened boarding for the pupils.<sup>22</sup>

In most places inhabited by the Slovak minority, there existed active societies, which were from 1921 members of the Czechoslovakian Union (*Československý svaz*) as the headquarters of the Czech and Slovak minorities. The Union’s role was envisaged as supportive and exclusively non-governmental, whose aim was to unite the members of the Czech minority, who are today “*neither Czechs nor Croats*”, with the Slovaks.<sup>23</sup> Besides the Czechoslovakian Union, the territory of

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*slovenská v národných dejinách. Zborník príspevkov z medzinárodnej vedeckej konferencie Matica slovenská v národných dejinách 26. – 27. 2. 2013.* Martin: Matica slovenská, 2013, pp. 363–372. ISBN 978-80-8128-086-3; JARINKOVIČ, Martin. *Matica slovenská v slovensko-južnoslovanských kultúrnych vzťahoch v rokoch 1939–1945.* (Matica slovenská and the Slovak-South Slavic cultural relations in the years 1939–1945). In SEDLÁK, Imrich (ed.). *Matica slovenská v národných dejinách. Zborník príspevkov z medzinárodnej vedeckej konferencie Matica slovenská v národných dejinách 26. – 27. 2. 2013.* Martin: Matica slovenská 2013, pp. 394–405. ISBN 978-80-8128-086-3.

- 19 Dni radosti (Days of joy). In *Národná jednota*, 8. 6. 1922, no. 23, p. 1. See: DUGAČKI, *Svoj svome*, ref. 3, pp. 349–354.
- 20 Naše kultúrne ciele. (Our cultural goals). In *Národná jednota*, 30. 4. 1920, no. 11, p. 2; Žiadame hospodársku školu. (We ask for a school of economics). In *Národná jednota*, 18. 6. 1920, no. 18, p. 1.
- 21 Hospodárska škola v Petrovci. (School of economics in the town of Petrovac). In *Národná jednota*, 17. 11. 1927, no. 46, p. 1; Slováci! Roľníci! (Slovaks! Peasants!). In *Národná jednota*, 11. 10. 1928, no. 41, p. 1; Hospodárska škola v Petrovci. (School of economics in the town of Petrovac). In *Národná jednota*, 26. 1. 1928, no. 4, p. 1; Vyzvanie (Invitation). In *Národná jednota*, 26. 1. 1928, no. 4, p. 1; SROKA, Anton. O potrebe odbornej výchovy roľníckej mládeže chmeliarsko-hospodárske škole v Petrovci. (About the necessity of the specialized education of the peasant youth of the school of hop-growing and economics in the town of Petrovac). In *Náš život*, 1937, year 5, no. 2, pp. 105–108.
- 22 Vyzvanie. (Invitation). In *Národná jednota*, 28. 9. 1935, no. 39, p. 1.
- 23 HDA, f. Politická situacija (1363) (Political situation, fund number 1363), Inv. no. 2294, Právila Česhoslovačkog saveza u Kraljevini SHS (The rules of the Czechoslovakian Union in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes); Svaz (Union). In *Československé listy*, 21. 5. 1921,

the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes saw the appearance of associations named the Yugoslav-Czechoslovakian League (*Jihoslovansko-československá liga*), whose aim was to empower Slavic solidarity. The leagues were modelled on the Yugoslav Commission, which was founded in Prague in 1919, as well as an association entitled the Czechoslovakian-Yugoslav League (*Československo-jihoslovanská liga*), which was also established in Prague in 1921.<sup>24</sup>

Although the Czechoslovakian Union was founded because of synchronising the Czech and Slovak viewpoints regarding the cultural, educational and social aspects,<sup>25</sup> already in November of 1926, it was evident that it was not caring for the needs of the Slovaks in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and there was a need to establish a central Slovak cultural organisation.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, a part of the Slovak minority was not comfortable with “Czechoslovakism”. They believed this term denoted state affiliation and not national, and they were pointing to the problem of learning the “Czechoslovakian” language in Slovakian schools. As for nationality, they considered themselves Yugoslavs or Slovaks from Yugoslavia, in the same way they regarded Hungarians and Germans in Czechoslovakia Czechoslovakians. On the other hand, the idea of Yugoslavism was more than acceptable for the Slovaks, as it was not suffocating their national identity.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, in 1932 the Advisory Board of the Danube Banat Slovaks, founded in Petrovac in 1929,<sup>28</sup> decided to establish the already mentioned *Matica slovenská*. It was expected that the *Matica* activity would not be in conflict with the activity of the Czechoslovakian Union, which would have kept the organisational, educational, and social work, while the *Matica* would primarily

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no. 20, pp. 1–2.

- 24 *Pravila Saveza Jugoslovensko-čehoslovačkih liga u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*. (The rules of the Union of Yugoslav-Czechoslovakian leagues in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia). Beograd: Savez jugoslovensko-čehoslovačkih liga, 1936, pp. 1–3.
- 25 LILGE DRAGOVIĆ. Slováci v Juhoslávii! (Slovaks in Yugoslavia!) In *Národná jednota*, 3. 6. 1921, no. 22, p. 1; Všem Čechoslovákóm v Juhoslávii. (To all Czechoslovaks in Yugoslavia). In *Národná jednota*, 27. 5. 1921, no. 21, p. 2; Niekoľko slov o organizácii československej vetve v Juhoslávii. (A few words about the organization of the Czechoslovak branch in Yugoslavia). In *Národná jednota*, 10. 6. 1921, no. 23, p. 1; ... k: Zjazd delegátov československých spolkov v Osijeku. (The congress of delegates of the Czechoslovak associations in the city of Osijek). In *Národná jednota*, 8. 7. 1921, no. 26–27, pp. 1–2.
- 26 LABÁTH, Andrej. Ako sa máme organizovať? (How should we organize ourselves?) In *Národná jednota*, 11. 11. 1926, no. 45, pp. 1–2.
- 27 Veľká manifestácia juhoslovanskej ideje v Petrovci. (The great manifestation of the Yugoslav idea in the town of Petrovac). In *Národná jednota*, 20. 9. 1930, no. 76, pp. 1–2.
- 28 The advisory board of the Danube Banat Slovaks was founded with the aim of realising Slovak economic and cultural-educational goals, having in mind that the Slovak National Party (from 1927 the Slovak National Agricultural Party) froze its activities soon after the introduction of the dictatorship.



deal with cultural activities, such as opening libraries or establishing literary or drama groups.<sup>29</sup> Generally, the aim of the Matica was uniting all friends of the Slovak people and their life inside Yugoslavia. The planned future activity of the association had an emphasis on cherishing and popularising “*science and arts, especially the studies on the life of the Slovakian people, both in the past and in the future*”, supporting Slovak pupils, students and artists, organising useful lectures, establishing and managing public libraries, as well as supporting amateur theatres, concerts and “*all other social activities which promote the Slovak speech and arts*”.<sup>30</sup>

The Slovaks in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were mostly members of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession. Until the end of the First World War, Slovak ecclesiastical municipalities in present-day Vojvodina belonged to Hungarian Evangelical Church. After the fall of Austria-Hungary and the founding of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the Slovak ecclesiastical municipalities began organising themselves into seniorates. In 1921 in Stara Pazova, Slovak Evangelists from Banat, Bačka and Srijem founded a Slovak ecclesiastical district,<sup>31</sup> which held its first synod at Novi Sad in 1925.<sup>32</sup> The district got its first bishop on 3 January 1929 in Novi Sad and ever since then there is the Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession with a seat in Ilok. The first elected bishop was Adam Vereš.<sup>33</sup>

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- 29 Založenie Maticy slovenskej. (The founding of Matica slovenská). In *Národná jednota*, 21. 5. 1932, no. 40, p. 1; or: K otázke kultúrneho strediska. (On the question of the cultural centre). In *Národná jednota*, 25. 5. 1932, no. 41, p. 1.
- 30 Návrh stanov Maticy slovenskej v Juhoslávii. (Proposal of the statutes of Matica slovenská in Yugoslavia). In *Národná jednota*, 6. 8. 1932, no. 58, pp. 2–3.
- 31 HRÚZ, S. Ku otázke samostatnej slovenskej ev. a. v. cirkvi v SHS. (On the question of the independent Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes). In *Národná jednota*, 28. 5. 1920, no. 15, p. 1; K histórii banátskeho seniorátu. (On the history of the Banat Seniorate). In *Národná jednota*, 9. 7. 1920, no. 21, p. 1; Naša slov. ev. cirkev v SHS. (Our Slovak Evangelical Church in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes). In *Národná jednota*, 23. 7. 1920, no. 23, pp. 1–2; EVANJELIK: Z nášho cirkevného života. (From our ecclesial life). In *Národná jednota*, 10. 6. 1921, no. 23, p. 1; Porada cirkev ev. aug. sl. v Starej Pazove. (Consultation of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the town of Stara Pazova). In *Národná jednota*, 8. 7. 1921, no. 26–27, p. 2.
- 32 Zasadnutie slov. evanj. synody. (The session of the Slovak Evangelical Synod). In *Národná jednota*, 5. 11. 1925, no. 45, p. 1; Pamätný deň 31. okt. 1925. (Memorial Day on 31 October 1925). In *Národná jednota*, 5. 11. 1925, no. 45, pp. 1–2; ZGÚTH, Ladislav. Slovenskí a Slovinskí evanjelici v SHS. (Slovak and Slovenian protestants in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes). In *Národná jednota*, 12. 11. 1925, no. 46, p. 1; Úryvok z ročnej správy. (Extract from the annual report). In *Evanjelický Hlásnik*, 6. 1926, no. 1, pp. 43–44.
- 33 Voľba dištriktuálneho predsedníctva. (Election of the district presidency). In *Národná jednota*, 5. 1. 1929, no. 3, p. 1. See about the activity of Adam Vereš and protestants in the town of Ilok: KRAJČÍR, Lukáš. Adam Vereš and Slovak Protestants in Ilok as seen by the Czecho-

However, the Slovak minority did not stop solely at social activities. The work of the Slovak National Party, whose tradition spanned from the end of the nineteenth century, was re-established in 1918 and the party took part in the elections for the Constitutional Assembly in 1920.<sup>34</sup> Already at that time, they began to oscillate between the most powerful Serbian political parties, the National Radical Party and the Democratic Party, weighing to see which one would offer them more mandates. Therefore, they entered the parliamentary elections of 1923 with the Independent Radical Party led by Stojan Protić, and the 1925 and 1927 elections with the National Radical Party, with which they signed an agreement in 1924. Due to this coalition with the radicals, in 1925 Pavel Popovický became the first (and as we shall see later, the last) representative of the Slovak National Party at the National Assembly. When the 6 January Dictatorship was established in 1929, the leadership of the Slovak National Party stopped the political activities and focused on economic and educational-cultural work.<sup>35</sup> After the state changed its name on 3 October 1929 to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and was organised into nine Banats, the Slovaks were mostly present in the Danube Banat, whose centre was in Novi Sad. After Šid and Ilok were annexed to the Danube Banat in 1931, most Slovaks were joined in one territorial-administrative unit.<sup>36</sup>

***“Let us prepare for the future times and the changes that must come and will come during our lives”<sup>37</sup>***

The already mentioned 6 January Dictatorship did not resolve the state crisis, it only became deeper. Internal failure and pressure from abroad, especially France and Czechoslovakia, as they did not approve of the dictatorship or were not in favour of it,<sup>38</sup> forced King Aleksandar I to make more efforts to end the crisis,

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slovak State Authorities. In HOLJEVAC, Željko – HOMZA, Martin – VAŠŠ, Martin (eds.). *Croatia and Slovakia. Historical Parallels and Connections (from 1780 to the Present Day)*. Zagreb, Bratislava: FF press, 2017, pp. 116-125. ISBN 978-953-175-605-1.

34 The party was re-established at the end of 1918 at Novi Sad. JANJETOVIĆ, ref. 3, p. 172.

35 DUGAČKI, *Svoj svome*, ref. 3, p. 314.

36 Zmeny hraníc v jednotlivých bánovinách. (Border changes in some subdivisions). In *Národná jednota*, 2. 9. 1931, no. 70, p. 1.

37 Pripravujme sa k budúcim časom a zmenám, ktoré musia prísť a prídu ešte za nášho života. (Let us prepare for the future times and the changes that must come and will come during our lives). In *Národná jednota*, Veľká noc 1939, no. 14, p. 2.

38 For more information about the relationship of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia and King Aleksandar I's dictatorship, see: ŠKERLOVÁ, Jana. *Věrnost za věrnost? Československo-jugoslávské politické vztahy v letech 1929–1934: přání, rozpory, realita*. (Fidelity for fidelity? Czechoslovak-Yugoslav political relations 1929–1934: wishes, variances, reality). Praha: Historický ústav, 2016. ISBN 978-80-7286-289-4.

even if that meant that he had to go back to limited constitutionality. An octroyed constitution was passed on 3 September 1931 and the king proclaimed the establishment of a representative regime, which resulted in passing numerous legislative measures, which would have made it legally possible.<sup>39</sup> Although the decree of 23 September 1931 called the already mentioned parliamentary elections due on 8 November of that year, the Slovaks were not politically organised for them.

The situation did not drastically change a few years later either. During the new planned parliamentary elections in May of 1935, a conference of the Advisory Committee of the Danube Banat Slovaks was held on 14 February. The Committee passed a resolution which placed forward the view on organising the Slovaks entirely on a cultural basis, who would on the next elections come forward as Yugoslav citizens. The resolution also informed all the Slovaks that while voting, they should, besides as fully-fledged Yugoslav citizens, also behave as good Slovaks and according to their own beliefs and following their local needs, but having in mind primarily the interests of Yugoslavia and of the Yugoslav people.<sup>40</sup>

Just before the elections, the editorial office of the minority newspaper *Národná jednota* (National Unity),<sup>41</sup> which were also considered one of the most important papers among the representatives of the Slovak minority in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia,<sup>42</sup> published a proclamation that the Slovaks were denying all their political aspirations and focusing entirely on cultural and national interests, which would not depend on political courses of action. They again emphasised that they were loyal citizens of Yugoslavia and that the interests of Yugoslavia as a whole were to them above anything else. Moreover, the Slovak voters were warned that the Yugoslav government had done a lot considering the internal consolidation and that very much is expected of it in the future, which is

39 GOLDSTEIN, ref. 1, pp. 135–136; MATKOVIĆ, Hrvoje. *Povijest Jugoslavije 1918–1991–2003*. (The history of Yugoslavia 1918–1991–2003). Zagreb: Naklada Pavičić, 2003, pp. 177–178. ISBN 953-6308-46-0; DUKOVSKI, Darko. *Povijest Srednje i Jugoistočne Europe 19. i 20. stoljeća. II. dio 1914. do 1999*. (The history of Central and South-East Europe in 19th and 20th century. Volume two, from 1914 to 1999). Zagreb: Alinea, 2005, p. 121. ISBN 953-180-117-7; PERIĆ, Ivo (ed.). *Povijest Hrvata. Knjiga 3. Od 1918. do danas*. (The history of Croats. Vol. III. From 1918 until today). Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2007, pp. 62–63. ISBN 953-0-60589-7.

40 Naše stanovisko. (Our attitude). In *Národná jednota*, 16. 2. 1935, no. 7, p. 1.

41 *Národná jednota* started operating in Petrovac on 21 February 1920 and was published in continuity as a weekly newspaper until 5 April 1941.

42 Besides *Národná jednota*, the interwar Yugoslavia had eight other more or less successful Slovak Minority newspapers: *Dolnozemský Slovák* (Slovak from the Lower land), *Frčka* (Pip), *Nádej* (Hope), *Svit* (Light), *Zornička* (Morning star), *Evanjelický hlásnik* (Lutheran Announcer), *Náš život* (Our life) and *Hévis*. See: DUGAČKI, *Svoj svome*, ref. 3, pp. 72–83.

something each Slovak had to have in mind, who would through his vote deciding not only about his future but the future of the nation as a whole.<sup>43</sup>

After the assembly elections in 1935 and adhering to the politics, and in the following period of the ruling coalition led by the Yugoslav Radical Community (Jugoslavska radikalna zajednica), the Slovak minority lost interest in internal occurrences and started paying more attention to international politics in Central Europe, as well as the political situation in the Republic of Czechoslovakia, especially so after the Slovak politician Milan Hodža was elected Prime Minister (1935–1938) and at the end of 1935, he was shortly the minister of Foreign Affairs. It was precisely someone like Milan Hodža who was very familiar to most Yugoslav Slovaks and was in their favour since the time of Austria-Hungary when in 1905 he received a parliamentary mandate for the Kulpin District in the Hungarian Parliament.<sup>44</sup> This was an area inhabited by Slovak minority and after 1918, it became a part of the newly established Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

What especially arose the interest of the Slovak Minority concerned the empowerment of German expansionism, which was also aided by the gradual approach of the leading figure of the Yugoslav Radical Community and the Yugoslav prime Minister Milan Stojadinović (1935–1939) to fascist Italy and Germany. After 1933 and the rise of national-socialism in Germany, the editor's office of the already mentioned minority newspaper *Národná jednota*, led by Andrej Sirácky from 1931, who was also a teacher at the Slovak secondary school at Petrovac,<sup>45</sup> adopted very consistent antifascist attitudes, which was also evident in the published articles. The newspaper *Národná jednota* set up Slavic solidarity against German nationalism and called for others "not to be used by the Germans in realising their imperialistic ideas either out of ignorance or stupidity".<sup>46</sup> The Slovak Minority in Yugoslavia was not ready to give up the borders of the states of the Little Entente or allow history to repeat itself, which would jeopardise their rights and freedoms.<sup>47</sup> However, the rise of national-socialism in Germany

43 Pred voľbami. (Before the election). In *Národná jednota*, 4. 5. 1935, no. 18, p. 1.

44 AUERHAN, *Československá větev v Jugoslavii*, ref. 7, p. 108. See: SOVILJ, *Činnost slovenské menšiny v Jugoslávii*, ref. 3, p. 191; TKÁČ, ref. 3, p. 57.

45 Andrej Sirácky was after 1948 and emigration from Yugoslavia to Czechoslovakia a prominent cultural worker, docent at university and later professor of sociology and philosophy at the Faculty of Humanities, Comenius University in Bratislava. KOLLÁR, Karol. *Od etiky k apologetike: na pomedzí filozofie, sociológie a ideológie – Andrej Sirácky*. (From ethics to apologetics: between philosophy, sociology and ideology – Andrej Sirácky). Bratislava: Infopress, 2008, pp. 8–15, 94. ISBN 978-80-85402-94-0.

46 Lživá a tendenčná propaganda Berlína proti ČSR. (False and tendentious propaganda of Berlin against Czechoslovakia). In *Národná jednota*, 5. 9. 1936, no. 36, p. 1.

47 A. V.: Naše „Nie, nie, nikdy“ (Our: “No, no, never”). In *Národná jednota*, 12. 12. 1936,

was not the only threat to the Slovaks. At the same time, there was fear of the growing Hungarian revisionism carried out by the Hungarian admiral and regent Miklós Horthy, which was also a topic for the newspaper *Národná jednota*.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, the Sudeten Germans sought to broaden their autonomy and finally join Czechoslovak borderlands in Hitler’s Germany,<sup>49</sup> whereas in March of 1938, the Slovak People’s Party led by Andrej Hlinka in Bratislava proclaimed their petition for Slovak autonomy and connection with the Slovak Germans and Hungarians.<sup>50</sup> *Národná jednota* did not comment on the requests of the Sudeten Germans, while the Slovak People’s Party’s requests were not directly mentioned at all. However, at the time they cited the words of the Czechoslovakian Prime Minister Milan Hodža, who concluded that the Slovak People’s Party can speak for all its voters, but not in the name of the Slovak nation because the foundation of Slovak freedom is the Republic of Czechoslovakia.<sup>51</sup> The official attitude of the Slovak Minority in Yugoslavia was that the Slovaks were constituent of the Republic of Czechoslovakia and not a minority, so their issue could not have been resolved in the same way as that of the Germans and Hungarians. They believed that if Slovakian became the official language of Slovakia, most disputes between the Slovaks and Czechs would be solved.<sup>52</sup>

Although in September of 1938 they still had hopes of a favourable resolution of the Czechoslovakian issue and were collecting contributions to help Czechoslovakia, they were disrupted by the Munich Agreement at the end of September of the same year, which granted Germany their rights to the Sudeten. The first titles which appeared in the Slovak minority press *Národná jednota* spoke of “*preserved peace*”, but also of “*the greatest sacrifice which Czechoslovakia*

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no. 50, p. 1.

- 48 O revízií mierových zmlúv. (On the revision of the peace treaties). In *Národná jednota*, 18. 3. 1933, no. 11, p. 1.
- 49 Sudetská menšinová otázka. (Sudeten minority issue). In *Národná jednota*, 15. 4. 1938, no. 16, p. 2; Sudetskí Nemci žiadajú „úplnú samosprávu“ a zmenu československej zahraničnej politiky. (Sudeten Germans demand “complete self-government” and a change of the Czechoslovak foreign policy). In *Národná jednota*, 30. 4. 1938, no. 18, p. 2.
- 50 BARTLOVÁ, Alena. Slovenská otázka a slovenské štátoprávne snahy v rokoch 1918–1938. (The Slovak issue and Slovak constitutional efforts 1918–1938). In VALENTA, Jaroslav – VORÁČEK, Emil – HARNA, Josef (eds.). *Československo 1918–1938. Osudy demokracie ve Střední Evropě. Sborník mezinárodní vědecké konference v Praze, 5. – 8. října 1998, sv. 1*. Praha: Historický ústav, 1999, pp. 170-178. ISBN 80-85268-99-X.
- 51 HODŽA, Dr. Milan. “Toto je naša slovenská hrdosť a táto slovenská hrdosť je nám zárukou, že Slovensko po 20. rokoch v republike stalo sa nezničiteľným, stalo sa večným” (“This is our Slovak pride and this Slovak pride is a guarantee that Slovakia after 20 years in the Republic became indestructible, it became eternal”). In *Národná jednota*, 10. 6. 1938, no. 24, p. 1.
- 52 Riešenie národnostnej otázky v Československu. (The resolution of the national question in Czechoslovakia). In *Národná jednota*, 9. 7. 1938, no. 28, p. 1.

*has to make to keep European peace*".<sup>53</sup> However, very soon these words were exchanged with the information about, as it was presented at the time, "*dictate from Munich*" and the resignation of the Czechoslovakian president Edvard Beneš (1935–1938).<sup>54</sup>

Further interests of the Slovak minority was directed towards observing the situation connected to Czechoslovakian-Hungarian borders, which were resolved according to the First Vienna Award on 2 November 1938 when Hungary acquired the borderland in Southern Slovakia and Carpatho-Ukraine, that is, a quarter of Slovakian territory and about 1 000 000 Slovaks.<sup>55</sup> The newspaper *Národná jednota* notified its readers about this, mainly using a negative and critical attitude towards Hungary.<sup>56</sup>

The Slovakian acquisition of political and territorial autonomy, as well as the change of the state's name to Czecho-Slovak Republic, attracted a lot of interest from the Slovak minority in Yugoslavia.<sup>57</sup> Besides losing the mentioned part of Slovak territory to Hungary, according to the words in *Národná jednota*, the Slovak minority was elated about the proclamation of Slovak autonomy.<sup>58</sup>

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- 53 Československo v záujme európskeho mieru prináša najväčšiu obeť. (Czechoslovakia makes the greatest sacrifice in the interest of the European peace). In *Národná jednota*, 24. 9. 1938, no. 39, p. 1; Mier bol zachránený. (Peace was saved). In *Národná jednota*, 1. 10. 1938, no. 40, p. 1.
- 54 Mníchovský diktát. (The Munich dictate). In *Národná jednota*, 8. 10. 1938, no. 41, p. 3; Odstúpenie prezidenta dr. E. Beneša. (The resignation of President Dr. E. Beneš). In *Národná jednota*, 8. 10. 1938, no. 41, p. 1.
- 55 See: KOVÁČ, Dušan. *Dějiny Slovenska*. (A History of Slovakia). Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 1998, p. 212. ISBN 80-7106-267-7; PASÁK, Tomáš. *Pod ochranou říše*. (Under the protection of the Reich). Praha: Prah, 1998, p. 12. ISBN 80-85809-88-5.
- 56 See: DRUGA, Ondrej. Reakcie slovenskej vojvodinskej publicistiky na rastúce ohrozenie ČSR v roku 1938. (Reactions of Slovak journalism in Vojvodina to the growing danger of Czechoslovakia in 1938). In *Acta historica Neosoliensia*, 2018, year 21, no. 2, pp. 53–54. ISSN 1336-9148.
- 57 Slovenská autonómia má byť uzákonená do 22. novembra. (Slovak autonomy should be enacted by 22 November). In *Národná jednota*, 19. 11. 1938, no. 47, p. 2; Za prezidenta Česko-Slovenskej republiky zvolený bol predseda Najvyššieho správneho súdu dr. Emil Hácha. (The chairman of the Supreme Administrative Court, Dr. Emil Hácha was elected President of Czecho-Slovak Republic). In *Národná jednota*, 2. 12. 1938, no. 49, p. 1.
- 58 Slováci v Maďarsku žiadajú autonómiu. (The Slovaks demand autonomy in Hungary). In *Národná jednota*, 22. 10. 1938, no. 43, p. 2; Otázka nových československo-maďarských hraníc ešte vždy nie riešená. (The issue of new Czechoslovak-Hungarian borders has not been yet solved). In *Národná jednota*, 22. 10. 1938, no. 43, p. 2; Slovákom sa stála veľká krivda. (The Slovaks experienced a great injustice). In *Národná jednota*, 5. 11. 1938, no. 45, p. 1; Nemecko-taliansky súd v prospech Maďarska. (German-Italian court in favour of Hungary). In *Národná jednota*, 5. 11. 1938, no. 45, p. 1; Slovensko ustúpilo Maďarsku 780 obci. (Slovakia gave 780 municipalities to Hungary). In *Národná jednota*, 12. 11. 1938, no. 46, p. 1;

The editor’s office of the mentioned newspaper sent in their name a telegram to the president of the first autonomous Slovak government Jozef Tiso, in which they welcomed the new government and wished it success in pushing Slovakia and the whole Czechoslovakian republic forward, asking of them not to forget the Slovak minority abroad.<sup>59</sup> In accordance with this, the editors believed the acquisition of Slovak autonomy within Czechoslovakian frames was historically inevitable and the only possible solution for their internal political disputes. The newspaper’s editorial office believed that antagonism between the Czechs and the Slovaks began after the liberation in 1918 because the Slovaks in Czechoslovakia began living their traditional lives. With the help of Czech intellectual circles and the teaching staff in schools in Slovakia, there certainly occurred a growth in culture and economy, but a new intellectual generation was raised, who within the frames of Slovak nationalism demanded their rights. They warned that it was not the Czechs who were the enemies of the Slovaks, but the Hungarians, against whom they suggested to create a common frontier as they emphasised having equal feelings for autonomous Slovakia and Czecho-Slovakia.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, they emphasised that they loved both the first and the second republic and that they would love the third one as well if it is established.<sup>61</sup> Already in mid-October 1938 the newspaper *Národná jednota* wrote about the wishes of all Slovaks in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia that the Slovak people and their old home country enjoys better and happier days.<sup>62</sup>

The Slovak minority was too preoccupied with gaining Slovak autonomy in that period to focus on the elections for the Yugoslav National Assembly, which was planned for 11 December 1938. Therefore, the parliamentary elections went on without their participation with regard to their possible representatives in the newly elected assembly,<sup>63</sup> where the ruling coalition led by the Yugoslav Radical

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Maďarsko bude mať 700 tisíc Slovákov a na Slovensku zostalo 68 tisíc Maďarov. (Hungary will have 700 000 Slovaks while 68 000 Hungarians remain in Slovakia). In *Národná jednota*, 19. 11. 1938, no. 47, p. 1.

59 Pozdrav prvej slov. vláde v Bratislave. (Welcoming the first Slovak government in Bratislava). In *Národná jednota*, 15. 10. 1938, no. 42, p. 1.

60 Bratom na Slovensku! (To our brothers in Slovakia!) In *Národná jednota*, 2. 12. 1938, no. 49, p. 1.

61 MOKIČ, Branislav. Naša pomoc starej vlasti. (Help to our old homeland). In *Národná jednota*, 24. 12. 1938, no. 52, p. 2.

62 Autonómne Slovensko. (Autonomous Slovakia). In *Národná jednota*, 15. 10. 1938, no. 42, p. 1. For a very detailed analysis on the writing produced by Slovak minority press in Yugoslavia about the situation in Czechoslovakia in 1938 see: DRUGA, ref. 56, pp. 47–59.

63 According to the writing of *Národná jednota*, the Slovaks mostly voted for the government’s list, especially in the Novi Sad circle, where the elected minister was Branko Nikolić, who the Slovaks believed „best understood their minority needs“. See: DUGAČKI, *Svoj svome*,

Community and Milan Stojadinović won and gained 306 (of the total 373) seats according to the election law of the time.<sup>64</sup>

The Yugoslav Slovaks entered 1939, the same as the majority of the Czechoslovakian public, convinced that the establishment of Czecho-Slovakia created the pre-conditions for a quality coexistence of the Slovaks and the Czechs.<sup>65</sup> However, this ostensible peace did not last long. Already on 14 March 1939 independent Slovak state was proclaimed, two days later the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, with the eruption of the Slovak-Hungarian conflict taking place at the same time, which ended with a peace treaty in Budapest, according to which Slovakia had to let go of its territories in the east of the state.<sup>66</sup>

The Slovak minority in Yugoslavia was surprised with such a development of events, calling it a tragedy that struck their old homeland. The newspaper *Národná jednota* were brimming with articles which mourned the disappearance of the common state of the Czechs and the Slovaks, the loss of which cannot lessen, as it was then emphasised, the disappearance of the independent Slovak state.<sup>67</sup> Czecho-Slovakia, that is, the state which at that moment ceased existing, was referred to as the creation which had stemmed from the efforts of entire generations of both nations.<sup>68</sup>

Considering that Slovaks in Yugoslavia wanted autonomous Slovakia solely within the frames of the common Czechoslovakian state, as *Národná jednota* wrote, newspapers were full of appeals not to lose hope in its restoration. They blamed, at least at the beginning, the already proverbial discord and disunity of

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ref. 3, pp. 336–337.

64 See: STOJKOV, Todor. Rezultati parlamentarnih izbora u Jugoslaviji kao izraz političkog raspoloženja biračkog tela 1931, 1935, 1938. (The results of the Parliamentary elections in Yugoslavia as an expression of political mood of the election body in 1931, 1935 and 1938). In ŠTASTNÝ, Vladislav – ŠESTÁK, Miroslav (eds.). *Československo a Jugoslávie od roku 1929 do rozpadu buržoazních společenských, politických a ekonomických systémů. Sborník prací z vědeckého zasedání československo-jugoslávské historické komise v Martině 19. – 22. 10. 1981*. Praha: Československo-sovětský institut, 1983, pp. 224–225.

65 Nový poriadok na Slovensku znamená trvale zabezpečený pokoj medzi Čechmi a Slovákmi. (The new order in Slovakia means permanently secured peace between Czechs and Slovaks). In *Národná jednota*, 31. 12. 1938, no. 53, p. 1; Vianoce znamenajú začiatok nového bratstva medzi Slovákmi a Čechmi. (Christmas means the beginning of a new fraternity between Slovaks and Czechs). In *Národná jednota*, 31. 12. 1938, no. 53, p. 2.

66 See: PASÁK, ref. 55, pp. 29–35; KOVÁČ, ref. 55, pp. 217–218; DUKOVSKI, ref. 39, pp. 89, 160; KIRSCHBAUM, Stanislav J. *A History of Slovakia. The Struggle for Survival*. New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 190–191. ISBN 1-4039-6929-9.

67 Samostatný slovenský štát pod ochranou Nemecka. (Independent Slovak State under the protection of Germany). In *Národná jednota*, 18. 3. 1939, no. 11, p. 1.

68 Ibid.



Slavic people for the tragedy.<sup>69</sup> In order to corroborate those claims *Národná jednota* covered the reaction of American Slovaks published in the newspaper *Slovenský sokol* (The Slovak Falcon), who isolated themselves from the claims that the Slovak separatist movement was the only cause of the fall of Czecho-Slovakia, saying that the Slovaks were fleeing from the Hungarian yoke and were forced to succumb to the German one.<sup>70</sup> They also stated that they would focus all their efforts on regaining democracy in Slovakia and rebuilding the old united Czechoslovakian republic.<sup>71</sup>

The same news was reported by the Czech minority newspaper *Jugoslávští Čechoslováci* (The Yugoslav Czechoslovaks),<sup>72</sup> which referred to collaboration with the brothers Slovaks in Yugoslavia because, as the press emphasised, neither of them could no longer expect help from the old mother country.<sup>73</sup> In accordance with that, the Czechoslovakian Union, which still represented the most significant central cultural organisation for the Czech and Slovak minorities in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, issued a decree on 22 April 1939, where it emphasised that the Czechs and the Slovaks in the spirit of their twenty-year-old free public life as devoted citizens of the fraternal Slavic state of Yugoslavia continue their joint efforts and express their sorrow because of the demise of the joint state, continuing the tradition of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk.<sup>74</sup>

Traditional Slovakian national festivities in Petrovac were regularly organised every August. In 1939, along with the annual assembly at the Matica they were of a somewhat different character, considering the great changes which befell the Czechs' and Slovak's home country. The members of the Slovak minority made their proclamation from these festivities, similarly to how the Czechs had done in June of 1939 at the annual assembly of the Czechoslovakian Union

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69 Ibid; Žije, žije, duch slovanský. (It lives, it lives, the Slavic spirit). In *Národná jednota*, 18. 3. 1939, no. 11, p. 2; Nezúfať. (Do not despair). In *Národná jednota*, 18. 3. 1939, no. 11, p. 3; Vytrváme a zvíťazíme. (We will persist and win). In *Národná jednota*, 25. 3. 1939, no. 12, p. 1.

70 Pripravujme sa k budúcim časom a zmenám, ktoré musia prísť a prídu ešte za nášho života. (Let us prepare for the future times and the changes that must come and will come during our lives). In *Národná jednota*, Veľká noc 1939, no. 14, p. 2.

71 Hlasy a prejavy, Časopis „Slovenský sokol“ v Amerike (Voices and speeches, the newspaper “The Slovak Falcon” in America). In *Národná jednota*, Veľká noc 1939, no. 14, p. 2.

72 The newspaper *Jugoslávští Čechoslováci* was published as a weekly periodical from 1922 in Daruvar, a place in Slavonia which was considered the main political and cultural centre of the Czech minority in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

73 Naším spolkům a krajanům (To our societies and compatriots). In *Jugoslávští Čechoslováci*, 30. 3. 1939, no. 13, p. 2.

74 Prehlásenie. (Statement). In *Národná jednota*, 29. 4. 1939, no. 17, p. 1.

in Daruvar,<sup>75</sup> where they appealed for “*our unity to be protected, defended and cherished*”.<sup>76</sup>

Since most Slovaks were concentrated in the Danube Banat, and, as mentioned before, Croatia stretched across the territory of the Sava and Primorje Banats until the summer of 1939, the occurrences there were in general outside of the Slovak sphere of interest. At the beginning, the Slovaks did not pay much attention to the Croatian issue, that is, the position of the Croatian people inside the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which was usually considered worse in comparison to the position of the Serbian people. In the already mentioned newspaper, *Národná jednota*, there were occasionally headlines and articles which emphasised the views of the editors, but also of the Slovak minority, concerning the resolution of the Croatian issue. After the Slovaks gained their independence, the Slovak minority supported the resolving of the Croatian issue in Yugoslavia, as the newspaper *Národná jednota* explained it at the time, “*our state, the powerful and united Yugoslavia must thrive and flourish in the fraternal unity of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes*”.<sup>77</sup> Although the issue of the agreement between Dragiša Cvetković, the new leading person at the Yugoslav Radical Community and the Yugoslav Prime Minister (1939–1941) and Vladko Maček, the president of the Croatian Peasant Party (Hrvatska seljačka stranka), one of the main opposition parties, was considered resolved already at the end of April 1939,<sup>78</sup> the negotiations were finished a few months later.

The Cvetković–Maček agreement from 26 August 1939 concerning the forming of a new Yugoslav government with Dragiša Cvetković still the Prime Minister, but also with Vladko Maček and a few politicians from the Croatian Peasant Party who were close to him entering the scene, resulted in the establishment of the Banat of Croatia, a territory with a broader autonomy inside the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.<sup>79</sup> The *Národná jednota* editorial office believed that the agreement was of both historical and political significance, especially because it allowed legitimate Croatian representatives to actively participate in the governing of the state. It was especially emphasised that for the Croats the agreement was “*the aim of each of our governments since 1918*”.<sup>80</sup> However, the articles published

75 Manifestácia československej vzájomnosti v Daruware. (A manifestation of the Czechoslovak togetherness in the town of Daruvar). In *Národná jednota*, 10. 6. 1939, no. 23, p. 1.

76 Prehlásenie. (A Statement). In *Národná jednota*, 26. 8. 1939, no. 34, p. 2.

77 Riešenie chorvátskej otázky. (Resolution of the Croatian question). In *Národná jednota*, 22. 4. 1939, no. 16, p. 1.

78 Dohoda s Chorvátmi. (Agreement with the Croats). In *Národná jednota*, 29. 4. 1939, no. 17, p. 1.

79 BOBAN, Ljubo. *Sporazum Cvetković–Maček*. (The Cvetković–Maček Agreement). Beograd: Institut društvenih nauka, 1965, pp. 188–190.

80 Dohoda znamená duchovnú mobilizáciu všetkých síl Srbov, Chorvátov a Slovincov.

in the above-mentioned newspapers, besides transferring general information concerning the Cvetković–Maček agreement, the forming of the new Yugoslav government, and establishing the Banat of Croatia,<sup>81</sup> also mentioned some other details which pointed to a kind of analogy with the situation on the territory of what was then already the former Czechoslovakian state. Unlike the already mentioned positive reactions regarding Slovak autonomy inside Czechoslovakia in the autumn of 1938, the *Národná jednota* editors did not accept the establishment and further existence of independent Slovakia. By comparing the newly established Banat of Croatia and everything that happened to Czechoslovakia in the turbulent period from the autumn of 1938 and until spring of 1939, the mentioned editor’s office led by A. Sirácky condemned those who “ruined the great work done with the agreement with their Czech brothers, thus aiding the ruin of the young and prospective Czechoslovak state”.<sup>82</sup> Both Slovakian autonomy inside the Czechoslovak state and Croatian autonomy inside Yugoslavia were acceptable for the majority of the Slovak minority. Unlike the Slovak autonomy, the attitude of most Slovaks in Yugoslavia with regard to independent Slovakia was a completely different matter.

The negative attitude of the newspaper *Národná jednota* towards independent Slovakia grew with time. This had to do not only with Slovakia but also the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and also Germany to some extent. The articles in the mentioned newspaper, especially where authors’ comments were emphasised in 1939, the negative attitude towards independent Slovakia was clearly visible, as well as for its regime represented by the leading figures of the Slovak state, such as Jozef Tiso, Vojtech Tuka, Alexander Mach, and others. The newspaper *Národná jednota* wrote about independent Slovakia with a lot of irony, precisely when Slovakian independence and freedom was being asserted. At the same time, that independence and freedom was put in quotation marks.<sup>83</sup>

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(The agreement means the spiritual mobilization of all forces of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes). In *Národná jednota*, 2. 9. 1939, no. 35, p. 1.

81 Dohoda s Chorvátmi uskutočnená. (The agreement with Croats has been implemented). In *Národná jednota*, 26. 8. 1939, no. 34, p. 2; Vláda Cvetković–Maček. (The Cvetković–Maček government). In *Národná jednota*, 2. 9. 1939, no. 35, p. 1; Rozloha a obyvateľstvo Chorvátskej bánoviny. (Area and population of the Banat of Croatia). In *Národná jednota*, 2. 9. 1939, no. 35, p. 2; Nová vláda v práci. (The new government in practice). In *Národná jednota*, 2. 9. 1939, no. 35, p. 2; Text srbsko-chorvátskej dohody. (The text of the Serbo-Croatian agreement). In *Národná jednota*, 2. 9. 1939, no. 35, p. 3.

82 Ref. 80, Dohoda znamená duchovnú mobilizáciu všetkých síl Srbov, Chorvátov a Slovincov, p. 1.

83 See: Ako žije „slobodné“ a „nezávislé“ Slovensko? (How does “free” and “independent” Slovakia live)? In *Národná jednota*, 24. 6. 1939, no. 25, p. 3; Naše stanovisko k udalostiam v našej starej vlasti. (Our attitude on the events in our old homeland). In *Národná jednota*, 8. 7. 1939, no. 27, p. 1; Cez Slovinsko a Dalmáciu. (Via Slovenia and Dalmatia). In *Národná jed-*

Furthermore, the newspaper *Národná jednota* did not pay special attention to Jozef Tiso being elected the new president of independent Slovakia in October 1939, again ironically emphasising that he was a “*unanimous vote*”.<sup>84</sup>

At the same time, when the news of electing Jozef Tiso President of Slovakia, *Národná jednota* dedicated an unusually large amount of attention through its headlines to the significance of Czechoslovakian national holiday on 28 October 1939 and its celebration at Petrovac.<sup>85</sup> They asserted the national holiday of the state, which no longer existed, considering the actual situation in Slovakia, which according to *Národná jednota* Slovaks in Yugoslavia were not interested in. Similar negative comments appeared regarding Germany, which was, among other things, described in texts as the enemy state and the culprit in the fall of Czechoslovakia.<sup>86</sup>

The reasons why the newspaper *Národná jednota* wrote against independent Slovakia can be analysed from various angles. Surely, one of the main reasons was the fact that the common state of the Czechs and the Slovaks ceased to exist at the time when Slovakia was formed with German support.

As mentioned before, Yugoslav Slovaks were loyal citizens of Yugoslavia, but at the same time, they harboured deep feelings of connection with their old homeland, both with regard to language and culture, and tradition. Finally, one other very important factor was reinforcing the negative attitude of Yugoslav Slovaks towards Slovakia. Having in mind that most Slovaks in Yugoslavia belonged to Evangelical Church, the news which was occasionally published by *Národná jednota*, and some other Slovak minority newspapers, such as the monthly publications *Nádej* (Hope) and *Evanjelický hlásnik* (Lutheran Announc-

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*nota*, 8. 7. 1939, no. 27, p. 2; Dnešné zvučné mená (Tiso, Tuka, Murgaš, Mach atď.) sa stratia v pripadlisku histórie. (Today's well-known names, Tiso, Tuka, Murgaš, Mach, etc., are lost in the history gap). In *Národná jednota*, 22. 7. 1939, no. 29, p. 2; Čo sa robí na „slobodnom Slovensku“? (What happened in “free Slovakia”)? In *Národná jednota*, 23. 9. 1939, no. 38, p. 1.

84 Verní zostaneme odkazu 28. októbra. (We will remain faithful to the legacy of 28 October). In *Národná jednota*, 28. 10. 1939, no. 43, p. 1; Dr. Béla Tuka – „slovenský“ min. predseda. (Dr. Béla Tuka – “The Slovak” Prime Minister). In *Národná jednota*, 4. 11. 1939, no. 44, p. 2.

85 Ref. 84, Verní zostaneme odkazu 28. októbra, p. 1; Oslava československého národného sviatku v Petrovci. (Celebration of the Czechoslovak national holiday in the town of Petrovac). In *Národná jednota*, 28. 10. 1939, no. 43, p. 1; Za nový 28. október. (For a new 28 October). In *Národná jednota*, 4. 11. 1939, no. 44, p. 1; Oslavy 28. októbra. (Celebrations of 28 October). In *Národná jednota*, 4. 11. 1939, no. 44, p. 1.

86 Akými prostriedkami pracujú naši nepriatelia? (By what means do our enemies operate)? In *Národná jednota*, 20. 5. 1939, no. 20, p. 1; Germanizácia Čiech a Moravy. (Germanization of Bohemia and Moravia). In *Národná jednota*, 20. 5. 1939, no. 20, p. 1; Naše stanovisko k udalostiam v našej starej vlasti. (Our attitude on the events in our old homeland). In *Národná jednota*, 8. 7. 1939, no. 27, p. 1.

er),<sup>87</sup> on the worsening position of evangelists in Slovakia and a rise of the Catholic influence,<sup>88</sup> which supported Jozef Tiso’s regime, had a bad impact on Yugoslav Slovaks and increased their aversion towards the Slovak state.

However, it seemingly all referred to the majority of Slovaks in Yugoslavia. The claims made by *Národná jednota* in mid-April 1939 that the newspaper’s negative opinion of Slovakia was the opinion of each and every Slovak<sup>89</sup> were hardly realistic. It is not possible to determine precisely how many Slovaks not only shared such views but also how many read the mentioned newspaper regularly. According to the information from February 1940, when the celebration of the newspaper’s 20 anniversary was being organised, the editors emphasised that it was very important to increase the number of subscribers of *Národná jednota* to at least 5 000.<sup>90</sup> Considering the already mentioned large number of the Slovak minority members, and also the fact that these people mainly lived of agriculture, it is possible to conclude that *Národná jednota* was mostly read by the few representatives of Slovak intellectual circles, and also that in places where the Slovaks were the majority population they were at least familiar with the newspaper’s criticism directed at Jozef Tiso regime.<sup>91</sup>

On the other hand, according to the information which the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs regularly received from the diplomatic representatives of Slovakia in Belgrade, especially the chief of staff (chargé d’affaires) Jozef Cieker,<sup>92</sup>

87 The newspapers *Nádej* were first published in 1921 in a place called Kisač in Bačka and were the first press of Slovak evangelists, while *Evanjelický hlásnik* for the first time appeared in 1926 in the Srijem town of Erdevik. See: DUGAČKI, *Svoj svome*, ref. 3, pp 76–77, 79–80.

88 See: Ťažký boj slovenských evanjelikov. (The difficult struggle of the Slovak Protestants). In *Národná jednota*, 25. 5. 1940, no. 21, p. 2; Slovenské evanjelictvo v Slovenskom štáte. (Slovak Evangelicalism in the Slovak State). In *Nádej*, 5. 1939, no. 5, pp. 2–3; Koľko nás je v Slovenskej republike. (How many of us are in the Slovak Republic). In *Nádej*, 6. 1940, no. 6, p. 3; Tragédia nášho starého domova. (The tragedy of our old home). In *Evanjelický hlásnik*, 4. 1939, no. 4, pp. 51–52; Evanjelictvo na Slovensku a u nás. (Evangelicalism in Slovakia and here). In *Evanjelický hlásnik*, 11. 1939, no. 11, p. 169.

89 Slovenskému nemluvňatú zo „Slovenskej pravdy“. (To Slovak babies from the “Slovak Truth”). In *Národná jednota*, 15. 4. 1939, no. 15, p. 2.

90 Dvadsať rokov Narodnej jednoty (Twenty years of National Unity). In *Národná jednota*, 24. 2. 1940, no. 8, p. 2.

91 See: SOVILJ, Milan. *Československo-jugoslávské vzťahy v letech 1939–1941. Od zániku Československej republiky do okupácie Kráľovství Jugoslávie*. (Czechoslovak-Yugoslav relations in 1939–1941. From the dissolution of Czechoslovakia to the occupation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia). Praha: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2016, p. 162. ISBN 978-80-7308-686-2.

92 The Slovak embassy in Belgrade began with its diplomatic mission in September 1939, in the same building where until mid March of the same year resided the embassy of Czechoslovakia, which then took over German diplomats after the dissolution of the Czechoslovakian

there were also some Slovaks in Yugoslavia, probably a few hundred of them, who sympathised with the newly established Slovakian state.<sup>93</sup> They were the members of the Slovak minority in the places called Stara Pazova and Ljuba, which was at the time home to around 7 000, that is, 250 Slovaks. One of the most prominent Slovaks there was the evangelist priest and writer Vladimír Hurban Vladimírov, who was also for a while the vice president of *Matica slovenská*.<sup>94</sup> It can be assumed that Vladimír Hurban Vladimírov, as well as the people around him, could not have made much difference to the attitude of *Matica slovenská*, or the articles published in *Národná jednota* against Slovakia and Jozef Tiso's regime. At the same time, *Matica slovenská*, and the many-times-mentioned newspaper *Národná jednota* have for a long time been "a thorn in the eye" of not only the representatives of the Slovak state, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bratislava and the Slovak diplomatic representatives in Belgrade, but also the German embassy in the Yugoslav capital. However, in 1939, the Yugoslav authorities did not administer repressive politics against the members of the Slovak minority, or against *Matica slovenská* in Petrovac, nor did they ban the newspaper *Národná jednota*, regardless of the fact that the Slovak and German diplomatic representatives complained about them.<sup>95</sup>

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state. The chargé d'affaires of the Slovak diplomacy, Jozef Cieker, had an important role in diplomatic contacts, or at least in the attempts to establish cooperation with the Yugoslav side. The official ambassador of Slovakia in Belgrade, Ivan Milecz, was at the same time a Slovakian ambassador in Romania and Yugoslavia, but he did not spend a lot of time in the Yugoslav capital. See: SOVILJ, ref. 91, pp. 134–137.

93 See: SNA, f. MZV, k. 143, no. 2284/40, Ľuba, 14. 2. 1940; SNA, f. MZV, k. 277, no. 3658/40, Slováci v Juhoslávii. Návšteva u evanj. farára a spisovateľa Vladimíra Hurbana Vladimírova (The Slovaks in Yugoslavia. A visit to the evangelist pastor and writer Vladimír Hurban Vladimírov); SNA, f. MZV, k. 268, no. 3352/40, Slováci v bývalej Juhoslávii (The Slovaks in former Yugoslavia).

94 JARINKOVIČ, ref. 3, p. 21; DUGAČKI, *Svoj svome*, ref. 3, p. 362.

95 See some of recent papers connected with Slovakian-Yugoslav relations 1939–1941: TKÁČ, Ján. Slovensko-juhoslovanské a slovensko-chorvátske vzťahy v rokoch 1939–1941. (Slovak-Yugoslav and Slovak-Croatian relations in 1939–1941). In *Historický zborník*, 2009, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 154–168. ISSN 1335-8723; JARINKOVIČ, Martin. Zriadenie slovenského vyslanectva v Belehrade a jeho aktivity v oblasti propagácie 1. Slovenskej republiky v rokoch 1939–1941. (Foundation of the Slovak Embassy in Belgrade and its activities in the field of promotion of the First Slovak Republic in 1939–1941). In *Pamäť národa*, 2012, year VIII, no. 4, pp. 25–38; SOVILJ, ref. 91; SOVILJ, Milan. Hľadání vhodného spojence. Konec slovensko-jugoslávských vzťahů a navázání styků mezi Slovenským státem a Nezávislým státem Chorvatsko v roce 1941. (The search for an appropriate ally. The end of Slovak-Yugoslav relations and the establishment of relations between the Slovak state and the Independent State of Croatia in 1941). In *Historický časopis*, 2018, year 66, no. 2, pp. 289–310. ISSN 0018-2575; ŠKORVANKOVÁ, Eva. Slovensko-juhoslovanské vzťahy v rokoch 1939–1941 (Slovak-Yugoslav relations in 1939–1941). In ŠTĚPÁNEK, Václav – MITÁČEK, Jiří (eds.). *Studia Balkanica Bohemo-Slovaca VII. Příspěvky přednesené na VII. mezinárodním balkanis-*

Similar feelings which existed when the news of Slovak autonomy came, and the forming of the Banat of Croatia, appeared among the most of the Slovak minority upon commemorating the Day of the Unification of the Yugoslav State on 1 December 1939. Just as they welcomed the creation of Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1918, in 1939 they expressed their loyalty to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, in which they saw the only guarantee of their future, which they still envisaged with optimism. They believed that only a powerful and united Yugoslavia guaranteed the life and safety of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and therefore all the other nations as well.<sup>96</sup>

The events which followed 1939, especially due to further blazing of the Second World War and its beginning on Yugoslav territory in the spring of 1941, showed whether the above attitude of the newspaper *Národná jednota* suited the times. Anyhow, one of the headlines from March 1940 read “*We have to move forward*”<sup>97</sup>, which came out during the festivities surrounding the first anniversary of the establishment of independent Slovakia in Bratislava, and which most Yugoslav Slovaks did not want to accept, could symbolically have represented the attitudes of those members of the Slovak minority who in the practical times of war found themselves on the crossroads of European events, but which they could not influence in any way and in order to overcome them they had to “move forward” no matter the obstacles.

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„*WIR MÜSSEN NACH VORNE SCHAUEN!*”  
DIE SLOWAKISCHE MINDERHEIT IM KÖNIGREICH JUGOSLAWIEN  
IN DEN JAHREN 1935–1939

VLATKA DUGAČKI – MILAN SOVILJ

Ende des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts begannen sich die Slowaken in der Tiefebene Jugoslawiens niederzulassen. Diese Migration wurde Ende des neunzehnten und zu Beginn des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts stärker und ließ während des Ersten Weltkriegs

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96 K prvému decembru. (To December First). In *Národná jednota*, 1. 12. 1939, no. 48, p. 1.

97 Musíme ist' napred. (We have to move forward)!. In *Národná jednota*, 9. 3. 1940, no. 10, p. 1.

etwas nach. In der Zwischenkriegszeit nahm der Zustrom der slowakischen Einwanderer jedoch wieder zu. Der slowakischen Minderheit wurde im neu gegründeten jugoslawischen Staat die Staatsbürgerschaft verliehen, und sie pflegte ein hoch entwickeltes soziales, erzieherisches und kulturelles Leben mit der Stadt Petrovac in der Batschka-Region als Zentrum.

In den meisten von der slowakischen Minderheit bewohnten Gebieten bildeten sich verschiedene Formen slowakischer Gesellschaften heraus. Neben der zentralisierten Organisation für die tschechische und slowakische Minderheit – der 1921 gegründeten Tschechoslowakischen Union – verfügte die slowakische Minderheit außerdem über ein eigenes äußerst aktives Organ – das seit 1932 tätige slowakische Kulturinstitut „Matica slovenská“. Für die meisten jugoslawischen Slowaken stellten die Evangelische Kirche und der seit 1929 aktive Slowakische Kirchenbezirk mit einem eigenen Bischof äußerst wichtige Elemente dar.

Die slowakische Minderheit beschränkte sich jedoch nicht nur auf die soziale Agenda. Da die Slowaken seit dem Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts traditionell von einer eigenen politischen Partei vertreten wurden, deren Existenz 1918 wieder erneuert wurde, erwarteten sie sehnsüchtig die ersten Wahlen zur verfassungsgebenden Nationalversammlung. Die Slowakische Nationalpartei hatte bereits begonnen, mit den stärksten serbischen politischen Parteien, den Radikalen und den Demokraten, zu verhandeln, um sich schließlich auf diejenige Seite zu stellen, die ihnen die meisten Mandate ermöglichen würde. Auf der Grundlage ihrer Koalition mit den Radikalen wurde im Jahre 1925 Pavel Popovický zum ersten (und letzten) Vertreter der Slowakischen Nationalpartei in der Jugoslawischen Nationalversammlung ernannt. Die Königsdiktatur vom 6. Januar 1929 bedeutete eine vollkommen neue Neuordnung der Prioritäten. Jetzt ging es um die Sicherstellung der nationalen Bildung und der slowakischen Sekundarschule, die Einrichtung einer Wirtschaftsschule, den Bau von Lesesälen, Bibliotheken und Theatern sowie die Unterstützung der Slowakischen Evangelischen Kirche Augsburgischen Bekenntnisses und die Erhaltung des kulturellen Erbes.

Zu Beginn der 1930er Jahre betrachteten sich die Slowaken als vollwertige jugoslawische Bürger und vorbildliche Slowaken, die zwar an ihren eigenen Überzeugungen und lokalen Interessen festhielten, aber die Interessen Jugoslawiens und seiner Bevölkerung respektierten. Schon bald erregte die Außenpolitik die Aufmerksamkeit der slowakischen Minderheit, insbesondere nachdem der slowakische Politiker Milan Hodža zum Ministerpräsidenten der Tschechoslowakei gewählt worden war (1935–1938). Die slowakische Minderheit sah in Hodža einen Förderer der „tschechoslowakischen Brüderlichkeit, Zusammengehörigkeit und Einheit“ und glaubte zugleich, dass die Slowaken eine staatsbildende Nation der Tschechoslowakischen Republik seien, und keine Minderheit, deren Angelegenheiten so behandelt würden wie diejenigen der Deutschen oder der Ungarn. Dementsprechend begrüßte die slowakische Minderheit in Jugoslawien die Gründung der Tschechoslowakei sowie die erworbene slowakische Autonomie, die für sie gleichzeitig einen Schutz gegen den ungarischen Revisionismus darstellte. Der Großteil der slowakischen Minderheit in Jugoslawien sah in der Slowakischen Republik, die in allen Bereichen von Deutschland abhängig war, nicht ihre alte Heimat. All ihre Befürchtungen und Ängste wurden wahr, als nach dem Angriff Deutschlands und seiner



Vlatka Dugački – Milan Sovilj “*We Have to Move Forward*”...

Verbündeten auf Jugoslawien im April 1941 die Regionen Batschka und Baranja, die Heimat des Großteils der slowakischen Minderheit, unter ungarische Herrschaft gerieten.

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