

## Mussolini of Yugoslavia? The Milan Stojadinović regime and the impact of Italian fascism, 1937-1939

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*The Yugoslav prime minister (and foreign minister), Milan Stojadinović, and Italian foreign minister, Galeazzo Ciano, signed a friendship agreement on 25 March 1937, ushering in an atmosphere of confidence between the two formerly hostile countries. This rapprochement resulted from the changing international constellation: the resurgent Germany was expected to annex Austria and become a powerful neighbour to both countries. Ciano and Stojadinović struck close personal relations which no doubt buttressed the solidity of their agreement. Moreover, Ciano believed that Stojadinović was inclined towards authoritarian concept of power. There were also increasing signs that the Stojadinović regime was acquiring some fascist trappings in line with the new course of foreign policy. Indeed, Prince regent, Paul, dropped Stojadinović from the government in February 1939 because he came to believe that his premier was intent on becoming a fascist dictator. This paper will explore whether there was substance to the often repeated accusations that Stojadinović was sliding towards fascism. Much of these accusations were centred on his foreign policy, especially his cordial relations with the fascist regime in Italy and, to a lesser extent, with Nazi Germany. Therefore, this paper will analyse, on the one hand, to what extent Stojadinović aligned Yugoslavia's conduct of foreign affairs with Rome's foreign policy and, on the other, to what degree the Yugoslav-Italian rapprochement was reflected in internal developments which might smack of fascism. The analysis will be undertaken with reference to the recent and influential theories of fascism.*

**Keywords:** Milan Stojadinović, Yugoslavia, fascism, Italy, Galeazzo Ciano

**Parole chiave:** Milan Stojadinović, Jugoslavia, fascismo, Italia, Galeazzo Ciano

«If the Danubian States begin now to put on the Nazi garb, it will be because imitation is the sincerest form of flattery and because they want to ingratiate themselves in time with their future master»<sup>1</sup>. This is how Sir Orme Sargent, an assistant under-secretary in the Foreign Office, explained the strengthening of authoritarian tendencies in Danubian Europe in the late 1930s when the rise of the Iron Guard in Romania and what the British saw as the increasing propensity for totalitarian methods of the Milan Stojadinović government in Yugoslavia occasioned a debate among diplomats and Whitehall officials. For Sargent then, it was the expediency of foreign policy, namely the inevitable German domination over the region, that largely propelled the smaller states in south-eastern Europe to acquire some fascist trappings. This line of thinking, however, has not been fully examined in historiog-

<sup>1</sup> The National Archives, UK, Foreign Office Records, General Correspondence, R 8788/162/37, FO 371/21189, Sargent minute, 1-1-1938.

raphy and the references to geopolitical requirements as a reason for Stojadinović's policy have often had an air of dismissiveness.

But it was perhaps the more apparent relations with fascist Italy based on a formal treaty rather than his links with Berlin that accounted for the accusations which many contemporaries levelled at Stojadinović and which later spilled into historiography. These relations earned him, to a large extent, the reputation of a fascist-in-the-making responsible for the shift in Belgrade's conduct of external affairs from supporting Western democracies to collaborating with the Axis Powers, a common place in the historiography of communist Yugoslavia<sup>2</sup>. Such interpretation of his premiership has survived to this day, perhaps more in public discourse than among professional historians. An important exception in the old Yugoslav historiography insofar as it is reserved towards the routine classification of Stojadinović in the fascist camp is a thorough study of the circumstances leading to his fall<sup>3</sup>. The American historian of Slovene origin has portrayed him as an exceedingly ambitious politician who resorted to fascist methods to establish his dictatorship<sup>4</sup>. Italian historiography has tended, not unnaturally, to perceive Stojadinović through the lenses of Mussolini's foreign minister, Galeazzo Ciano, assessment of Stojadinović's fascist affinities<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, the Yugoslav prime minister's has been described as a «political opportunist» who gambled on Nazi Germany's market for economic benefit<sup>6</sup>. A more recent assessment has also come to the conclusion that there is no ground to consider Stojadinović a fascist dictator, but this piece has failed, despite its focus on ideology, to explore fully the fascist trappings of the later phase of his power-holding<sup>7</sup>.

This paper will discuss whether there was substance to the view that Stojadinović was increasingly sliding towards fascism with special reference to his cordial relations with the fascist regime in Italy and, to a lesser extent, with Nazi Germany. In order to do so, this essay will analyse, on the one hand, what was the extent to which Stojadinović aligned his conduct of foreign affairs with Rome's foreign policy and, on the other, to what degree the rapprochement with Italy was reflected

<sup>2</sup> For example, F. Čulinović, *Jugoslavija između dva rata*, v. 2, Jugoslavenske akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, Zagreb 1961, pp. 113-118; D. Lukač, *Treći Rajh i zemlje jugoistočne Evrope*, v. 2, Vojnoizdavački zavod, Beograd 1982, pp. 133-134; V. Terzić, *Slom Kraljevine Jugoslavije 1941: uzroci i posledice poraza*, v. 1, Narodna knjiga, Beograd 1984, p. 224; B. Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918-1988*, v. 1, *Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, Nolit, Beograd 1988, pp. 285-286.

<sup>3</sup> D. Biber, *O padu Stojadinovićeve vlade*, in «Istorija 20. veka», v. 8, 1966, pp. 5-71.

<sup>4</sup> J. Hoptner, *Jugoslavija u krizi 1934-1941*, Otokar Keršovani, Rijeka 1972, pp. 121, 144-145 (Serbo-Croat edition of J.B. Hoptner, *Yugoslavia in Crisis, 1934-1941*, Columbia University Press, New York 1962).

<sup>5</sup> For example, L. Monzali, *Il sogno dell'egemonia. L'Italia, la questione jugoslava e l'Europa Centrale (1918-1941)*, Le Lettere, Firenze 2010, p. 69; G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano. Una vita (1903-1944)*, La Nave di Teseo, Milano 2019, p. 277.

<sup>6</sup> J. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There was a Country*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000, pp. 183-185.

<sup>7</sup> D. Djokić, 'Leader' or 'Devil'? Milan Stojadinović, Prime Minister of Yugoslavia (1935-39) and his Ideology, in *In the shadow of Hitler: Personalities of the Right in Central and Eastern Europe*, eds. R. Haynes, M. Rady, Tauris Academic Studies, London 2011, pp. 153-168.

in Yugoslavia's internal developments which might smack of fascism, especially the organisation and activities of his political party, the Yugoslav Radical Union (JRZ)<sup>8</sup>. The analysis will be an empirical one, but it will also relate its findings to the influential theories which dominate the fascism studies and try to assess how the case in question can contribute to wider considerations in that vibrant field.

### *Milan Stojadinović and the Creation of the JRZ Regime*

To begin with, it is necessary to sketch briefly Stojadinović's background and the circumstances in which he found himself at the head of the Yugoslav government. As a fairly young man he rose from the ranks of the People's Radical Party led by Nikola Pašić, Serbia's pre-1914 and Yugoslavia's post-1918 prime minister and a legendary personality of Serbian politics. With reputation of a finance expert Stojadinović became a finance minister in Pašić's cabinet (December 1922 - April 1926) and proved his abilities by managing to stabilise *dinar*, the faltering Yugoslav currency, and eliminating the budget deficit<sup>9</sup>. Following Pašić's death in 1926, his party splintered into factions and was officially dissolved after the introduction of King Alexander's dictatorship in 1929, along with all other political parties. King Alexander attempted to forcefully suppress the conflict between the Serbs and Croats by promoting the ideology of integral Yugoslavism – he forbade manifestations of the separate Serb, Croat and Slovene identity in favour of the common Yugoslav nationality. While the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS) was interested in struggling for an autonomous Croatia rather than political liberties, the Serbian opposition parties rose against the suppression of parliamentary democracy. Contrary to the recent claim that he was inactive<sup>10</sup>, Stojadinović was perhaps the most agile member of the Main Committee of his Radical Party in organising a united opposition to the royal dictatorship. He was especially engaged in keeping contact with the leadership of the Independent Democratic Party, a coalition partner of the HSS which mostly gathered the Serbs from Croatia, in a bid to reach an agreement with Vladimir Maček, the president of HSS<sup>11</sup>. It was a measure of his involvement in the

<sup>8</sup> There is a number of works dealing with Yugoslav-Italian relations in interwar period, including the Stojadinović era, cited throughout this article. Of special interest for the issues scrutinised here are: T. Stojkov, *Vlada Milana Stojadinovića*, Institut za savremenu istoriju, Beograd 1985 unfinished due to the death of the author; D. Tešić, *Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica u Srbiji 1935-1939*, Institut za savremenu istoriju, Beograd 1995; and the most recent, B. Simić, *Milan Stojadinović i Italija: između diplomatije i propagande*, Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, Beograd 2019.

<sup>9</sup> B. Mijatović, *Ekonomске ideje i dela Milana Stojadinovića u prvom periodu rada*, in *Milan Stojadinović: politika u vreme globalnih lomova*, ur. M. Đurković, Službeni glasnik i Centar za konzervativne studije, Beograd 2012, pp. 101-123; D. Gnjatović, *Evolution of Economic Thought on Monetary Reform in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes after the Great War*, in «Balcanica», v. 51, 2020, pp. 183-205.

<sup>10</sup> B. Simić, *Milan Stojadinović i Italija*, cit., p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> Lj. Boban, *Držanje srbijanskih opozicionih stranaka povodom Zagrebačkih punktacija (1932-33)*, in «Historijski zbornik», n. 1-4, 1962, pp. 1-40; id., *Geneza, značenje i odjek Zagrebačkih punktacija*, in «Časopis za savremenu povijest», n. 1, 1971, pp. 153-209; T. Stojkov, *Opozicija u vreme šestojanuarske diktature 1929-1935.*,

anti-regime activities that the police searched both his house and office to find some leaflets which were believed to have been authored by him<sup>12</sup>. He also distinguished himself during this time by penning an article in which he argued for establishing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union on both economic and political grounds, a view that stood out in the visceral anti-communist atmosphere of the official Belgrade<sup>13</sup>. This reflected his pragmatic *realpolitik* view of foreign relations, with no place for ideological dogmatism, which was reminiscent of Pašić's realism. But most importantly, it was during this time that Stojadinović struck friendship with Prince Paul, a first cousin of King Alexander, a democratically-minded Anglophile and an art connoisseur, who would soon come to play a paramount role in the country. According to Stojadinović's memoirs, their befriending owed a great deal to the fact that both were good friends with Sir Nevile Henderson, British minister in Belgrade<sup>14</sup>.

After the assassination of King Alexander in Marseilles in October 1934, Prince Paul became regent until Petar II had come of age. Paul insisted that Stojadinović become a finance minister in the Boško Jevtić cabinet which proved incapable of dealing with national and social tensions in Yugoslavia. Having brought about a crisis of the cabinet, Paul handed a mandate to Stojadinović who formed his cabinet on 24 June 1935. It was a coalition consisting of Anton Korošec's Slovenian People's Party, Mehmed Spaho's Yugoslav Muslim Organisation and Radicals, widely regarded as the most influential Serbian party. This combination was another variant of a governmental party formed from above, not unlike the Yugoslav National Party which had underpinned the royal dictatorship, but it was different insofar as it assembled the legitimate representatives of Slovenes and Bosnian Muslims and, at least, of a considerable number of Serbs. Stojadinović was thus supposed to be a legitimate voice for the Serbs and, as such, in a position to negotiate with authority with Maček to find a solution for the Croat grievances. The governmental formula was replicated in the creation of the Yugoslav Radical Union (JRZ) in September that year which was effectively a coalition of Korošec's and Spaho's parties with Radicals rather than a single unified political organisation.

But Stojadinović fell out with the Radical Main Committee as early as December 1936: he wanted to be a true head of both the government and JRZ, while they envisaged him as a mere spokesman for the Radical leadership<sup>15</sup>. In what was pre-1914 Serbia, the rift between Stojadinović's supporters and Radicals loyal to the Main Committee turned into a battle for Pašić's succession. Đurđina Pašić, a widow of the grand old man, sent a letter to Stojadinović stating that she knew how Pašić had respected him and believed he would be his successor. The letter was published in

Prosveta, Beograd 1969, pp. 228-229, 231, 241, 246-247, 256-257, 266, 270.

<sup>12</sup> Historical Archive of the City of Belgrade, Kosta St. Pavlović, Beleške 1933, entry for 19-04-1933.

<sup>13</sup> M. Stojadinović, *Šta je rukovodilo Sjedinjene Američke Države da priznaju Sovjete*, in «Politika», 6 January 1934, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> Id., *Ni rat ni pakt: Jugoslavija između dva rata*, El Economista, Buenos Aires 1963, pp. 291-298.

<sup>15</sup> T. Stojkov, *Vlada Milana Stojadinovića*, cit., pp. 90-114.

«Samouprava», the JRZ newspaper<sup>16</sup>. Significantly, this episode was part of the events surrounding the marking of ten years since Pašić's death which JRZ used to promote itself as his sole heir and the guardian of his policy. On that occasion, the JRZ also published a book on Pašić under the guidance of the editor of «Samouprava», Milan Jovanović-Stoimirović<sup>17</sup>. For the Radical Main Committee, the letter of Mrs. Pašić was a blow and they were even reluctant to turn up at the commemoration. She had to write a letter to Aca Stanojević, the president of the Main Committee and an old friend of her husband, to beseech him to make an appearance at the church, and implicitly denied the veracity of what had been published in «Samouprava» by insisting that the late Pašić had never talked politics with her<sup>18</sup>. In fact, Pašić never designated his successor. He was one of those leaders whose life was inseparable from politics and who could not imagine himself in retirement; after all, he died at the age of eighty while trying to get another mandate from King Alexander to form a cabinet.

Most of Serbia's Radicals joined Stojadinović, not least because of the government privileges. In other Yugoslav provinces, the outcome very much depended on the local conditions. In northern Dalmatia, Niko Novaković, a member of parliament, swayed Radicals on the side of JRZ<sup>19</sup>. The vast majority of Serbs there, and in some regions of Croatia, closed their ranks in JRZ because they felt threatened by anti-Yugoslav and Serbophobic attitude of the Croats<sup>20</sup>. It was different in Bosnia and Herzegovina, however, where Spaho was able to capitalise on his participation in the Belgrade government to the benefit of local Muslims' interests. The formation of the JRZ branches met with difficulties, since there was distrust between Radicals and Spaho's supporters<sup>21</sup>. For example, a leader of Radicals from the town of Brčko complained that an anti-Serbian regime was established in his county as the local Muslim leadership replaced decent Serbian officials with the Croats who were known to have been inimical to the Yugoslav state<sup>22</sup>. Stressing how the local Serbs in a small town in Herzegovina resented JRZ for favouring Muslims over themselves, a prominent Radical from Stolac was adamant that none of them would support it, «because defending JRZ among us is the same as converting to Turkish [Muslim] religion!»<sup>23</sup>. In Slovenia, the number of Serbs, and by extension Radicals, was negligent and that province was an absolute preserve of Korošec. Overall, the rift with the senior Radical figures weakened Stojadinović vis-à-vis the undisputed Slovene and Bosnian Muslim leaders. In reality, his authority solely rested on the confidence Prince Paul placed in him. A logical ramification of such a position was that the JRZ was run by the Stojadinović-Korošec-

<sup>16</sup> M. Jovanović-Stoimirović, *Dnevnik 1936-1941*, Matica srpska, Novi Sad 2000, p. 90.

<sup>17</sup> Nikola P. Pašić: *povodom desetogodišnjice Pašićeve smrti*, Redakcija Samouprave, Beograd 1937.

<sup>18</sup> Archives of Yugoslavia (AJ), Lazar Marković Papers, fond no. 85, box 2, f. 6 (hereafter 85-2-6), Đurđina Pašić to Aca Stanojević, 9-12-1936.

<sup>19</sup> AJ, 85-2-6, Ljuba Jurković to Lazar Marković, 16-4-1936.

<sup>20</sup> AJ, 85-2-6, Ljuba Jurković to Lazar Marković, 22-5-1936.

<sup>21</sup> AJ, 85-2-6, Mehmed Alija Hodžić to Lazar Marković, Konjic, 7-12-1935.

<sup>22</sup> T. Stojkov, *Vlada Milana Stojadinovića*, cit., p. 82.

<sup>23</sup> AJ, 85-2-6, Miho Mihić to Lazar Marković, Stolac, 25-4-1936.

Spaho triumvirate and the prime minister exercised real control over the Serbian members of the party alone.

The newly-minted JRZ adopted a political programme typical of a conservative party which operated within the framework of parliamentary democracy, although Yugoslavia certainly remained an authoritarian state<sup>24</sup>. The legislation and constitution introduced during Alexander's dictatorship was still in force, but the Stojadinović government brought about considerable change. In practice, the oppressive regime was abandoned; after releasing political prisoners, the old political parties were allowed to resume their activities in a relatively free manner. Moreover, the JRZ presented itself, and was generally perceived, as a moderate conservative constituency which had done away with the dictatorial regime of the Yugoslav nationalists. In parallel, it tacitly dropped the integral Yugoslavism and returned the concept of the three constituent "tribes" of a single nation in public discourse, whereas the adherence to a unitary state remained, albeit with the hint at local autonomies to placate the Croats<sup>25</sup>. The watchword was the need to calm down the passions in the country as a prelude to settling the thorny issues, primarily the Croat discontent.

Initially at least, the JRZ leadership underscored their democratic credentials. In a registration form submitted to the Ministry of Interior Affairs in late August 1935, the point was made that membership in the party would not be allowed to "Yugo-fascists" alone, a reference to the prominent followers of the former prime minister, Bogoljub Jevtić<sup>26</sup>. In a similar strain, during a speech in parliament in mid-March 1936, in which he denied the accusations of having abandoned the ideology of integral Yugoslavism and unitary state, Stojadinović stated that it was not true that the JRZ was demobilising national energies, «except those Yugo-fascist forces, which authorised themselves in the national assembly to be the only protector of the state and national unity»<sup>27</sup>. This was consistent with the instructions he had given a month earlier to Jovanović-Stoimirović for publication of the first issue of the revamped «Samouprava»: «All that is anti-democratic and fascist – condemn»<sup>28</sup>. On the other hand, the leader of the extreme far-right party known as *Borbaši*, Svetislav Hođera, noted that the JRZ labelled all their political opponents either communists or fascists<sup>29</sup>. Nonetheless, the disrepute of the Yugoslav nationalists and the extremism of both left- and right-wing fringe political parties boosted the JRZ's image as a moderate conservative alternative, even among the opposition. For example, Dragoljub Jovanović, the leader of the left-wing Agrarians, warned that «the hydra of the Jevtić regime» had not died as yet and «various fascist elements» were rais-

<sup>24</sup> *Program i statut Jugoslovenske radikalne zajednice*, Štamparija 'Privreda', Beograd 1935.

<sup>25</sup> AJ, Milan Stojadinović Papers, 37-1-4, The Declaration of Stojadinović, Korošec and Spaho, undated but likely from June 1935, scans. 16-17. It is published in an abridged form, without the important part indicating the departure from integral Yugoslavism, in *Jugoslovenski federalizam: ideje i stvarnost-tematska zbirka dokumenata*, v. 1, 1914-1943, ur. B. Petranović, M. Zečević, Prosveta, Beograd 1987, pp. 338-339.

<sup>26</sup> D. Tešić, *Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica*, cit., p. 43 fn. 68.

<sup>27</sup> Ivi, p. 98, fn. 102.

<sup>28</sup> M. Jovanović-Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, cit., p. 37.

<sup>29</sup> D. Tešić, *Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica*, cit., p. 160.

ing their heads, stressing that the opposition would stand by the government in the defence of democratic freedoms<sup>30</sup>.

Such an image of Stojadinović was facilitated by the failed attempt on his life in the midst of parliament on 6 March 1936. The shooter was a member of parliament and a supporter of Jevtić. It was widely regarded that Jevtić and General Petar Živković, the main pillar of King Alexander's dictatorship and currently the army minister in Stojadinović's cabinet, were behind the assassination attempt. This belief boosted Stojadinović's popularity and made him, at least temporarily, «a symbol of the spirit of the people in the struggle between the democratic idea and dictatorship»<sup>31</sup>. The most important political consequence of the affair was that General Živković was dropped from the cabinet, which further shored up the prime minister's prestige. On the other hand, Stojadinović did not fulfil his promise to hold a truly free elections under the newly-introduced democratic legislation in the not so distant future. This undermined his democratic credentials, along with his continued use of the government apparatus for the purpose of consolidating JRZ. The reason for his renegeing in this respect was one of expediency rather than of principle: he and his political allies needed time to complete the organisation of JRZ before testing its strength at the poll. This contradiction made it somewhat difficult to place the JRZ on the political spectrum. Having been asked by his own chief propagandist whether the regime was moving to the right or to the left, Stojadinović replied through laughter: «*Democratie dirigée*»<sup>32</sup>.

### *Stojadinović, Ciano and Italo-Yugoslav Relations*

In foreign policy, Prince Paul and Stojadinović sought security for Yugoslavia, especially against Italy's aspirations on the Yugoslav territory. Mussolini's aggression against Abyssinia in fall 1935 directed Italian expansionism towards Africa rather than the Balkans, but it laid bare the impotence of both the League of Nations and the collective security. It was clear to policy-makers in Belgrade that France and Britain would provide no effective military assistance in case of a war arising from the League-imposed sanctions against Italy<sup>33</sup>. The German remilitarisation of the Rhineland in March 1936 demonstrated that the traditional French friendship could not be counted on in Belgrade's hour of need. Stojadinović was aware of the growing German power and made an effort to establish good relations with Berlin. In December 1935, the Yugoslav minister declared to Hitler that his country would not be part

<sup>30</sup> AJ, Stojadinović Papers, 37-10-60, A speech prepared for the opposition rally, 19-10-1935.

<sup>31</sup> M. Jovanović-Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, cit., p. 42. For details on the failed attempt, see B. Simić, *Atentat u Narodnoj skupštini marta 1936. godine-pozadina, sudski proces, posledice*, in «Nauka i savremeni univerzitet», n. 9, 2020, pp. 163-174.

<sup>32</sup> M. Jovanović-Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, cit., p. 161.

<sup>33</sup> Ž. Avramovski, *Pitanje učešća Jugoslavije u vojnim sankcijama protiv Italije za vreme italijanske agresije na Etiopiju (1935-1936)*, in «Jugoslavenski istorijski časopis», n. 1, 1964, pp. 13-36.

of any anti-German political combinations<sup>34</sup>. After all, the two countries were not conterminous and had no outstanding issues, both were opposed to the Habsburg restoration in Austria and their trade was on the rise. Moreover, Yugoslavia had special geostrategic importance for Germany as it was the linchpin of the Balkans to which Berlin directed its economic and political expansion. This was Göring's motivation for an overture to Belgrade to the effect that Germany was prepared to guarantee Yugoslavia against both revisionist Hungary and Italy. For Stojadinović, German friendship was essential in view of the necessity to keep in check Italian danger, a role which France was no longer willing and able to perform. As he explained to Prince Paul, «For the sake of our tranquillity and securing the future of Yugoslavia, we must find an insurance against Italy as soon as possible»<sup>35</sup>.

The Germans suggested to the Italian foreign minister, Ciano, during his visit in October 1936 in which the Axis was born, an Italo-Yugoslav rapprochement to wrest Belgrade away from British influence. In fact, Germany needed the break-up of the Little Entente to isolate Czechoslovakia<sup>36</sup>. But Italy was not entirely sincere with Berlin either. Although Hiler declared that the Mediterranean was Rome's sphere of interest, the Italians were concerned about Germany's plans to annex Austria and seek an outlet to the Adriatic. They wanted the destruction of the Little Entente to remove French influence and establish their own predominance over the Balkans and the Danube basin, but it was their fear of the overwhelming German might that prompted them to seek an understanding with Belgrade<sup>37</sup>. This was the rationale behind the conclusion of the Italo-Yugoslav pact of friendship on 25 March 1937. Stojadinović scored a success, since Italy made major concessions – a guarantee of Yugoslavia's borders, confinement of the Croat *Ustasha* terrorists who had found refuge in Italy and been responsible for the murder of King Alexander, maintaining Albania's independence and improvement in the treatment of the Yugoslav (Slovene and Croat) national minority<sup>38</sup>. In addition, the agreement cut the ground from any potential attempt of the HSS to internationalise the Croat question and strengthened the government in their negotiations with Maček<sup>39</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> B. Krizman, *Vanjska politika jugoslavenske države 1918-1941: diplomatsko-historijski pregled*, Školska knjiga, Zagreb 1975, p. 84.

<sup>35</sup> AJ, Prince Paul Papers, reel 4, Stojadinović to Prince Paul, 12-06-1936, scan 329.

<sup>36</sup> V. Vučković, *Politika Osovine prema Jugoslaviji (1936-1941)*, in «Jugoslovenska revija za međunarodno pravo», n. 2, 1954, pp. 23-43; B. Krizman, *Italija u politici kralja Aleksandra i kneza Pavla (1918-1941)*, in «Časopis za suvremenu povijest», n. 1, 1975, pp. 33-97.

<sup>37</sup> On Italian motives, see A. Breccia, *Jugoslavia, 1939-1941. Diplomazia della neutralità*, Giuffrè, Milano 1978, ch. 1; M. Bucarelli, *Mussolini e la Jugoslavia (1922-1939)*, B.A. Graphis, Bari 2006, pp. 327-383; G.B. Strang, *On the Fiery March: Mussolini Prepares for War*, CT, Westport 2003, pp. 76-79.

<sup>38</sup> For an account of the negotiations leading to the Pact of Belgrade, see Ž. Avramovski, *Balkanske zemlje i velike sile, 1935-1937.: od italijanske agresije na Etiopiju do jugoslovensko-italijanskog pakta*, Prosveta, Beograd 1968, pp. 261-292; J. Hoptner, *Jugoslavia as Neutralist: 1937*, in «Journal of Central European Affairs», n. 2, 1956, pp. 156-76; E. Milak, *Italija I Jugoslavija 1931-1927*, Institut za savremenu istoriju, Beograd 1937, pp. 132-141.

<sup>39</sup> S. Trifković, *Milan Stojadinović, Italija i hrvatsko pitanje*, in *Milan Stojadinović: politika u vreme globalnih lomova*, cit., pp. 75-84; D. Bakić, *Milan Stojadinović, the Croat Question and the International Position of Yugoslavia*, in «Acta Histriae», n. 1, 2018, pp. 207-228.



To highlight the importance attached to his diplomatic move, Ciano personally came to Belgrade to sign the treaty with Stojadinović. During the first of their four face-to-face meetings they established cordial personal relations which set the tone for Italo-Yugoslav rapprochement over the next two years. Stojadinović stated his views as to Yugoslavia's position and future developments: he intended to confine himself to the Balkans rather than pursue a European policy; relations with Italy would assume principal importance whereas those with France were weakened – he would openly reject the French proposal for the conclusion of a military alliance with the Little Entente countries aimed to defend Czechoslovakia from Germany; moreover, Stojadinović found the Anschluss inevitable and he was certain that Beneš “would find himself alone” in case of a German action. Importantly, Stojadinović couched his assertions in the language designed to appeal to a fascist foreign minister. For example, he did not fail to dismiss the cultural influence on Yugoslavia «of the Jewish, Masonic and Communistic mentality of [...] France», or to point out the particular peril of Bolshevik propaganda among his countrymen due to the closeness with the Russians in terms of race, language and temperament. This apparently accounted for Ciano's impression that Stojadinović was a fascist «by virtue of his conception of authority, of the State and of life»<sup>40</sup>.

With those strong impressions in view, Ciano would have been disappointed to learn of Stojadinović's grand neutralist strategy for a war he knew was coming. The latter mused in June 1937, two and a half months after the conclusion of the Pact of Belgrade, that «we have to try to remain neutral until the last moment and to preserve strength until after the war, so that we could dictate our demands to the weakened world». In order to do so, he found it necessary to keep in balance relations with all powers. But he was in no doubt from which quarters Yugoslavia faced danger: «Our eventual opponents in the first future war are Germany or Italy. [...] We cannot afford ourselves today the luxury of someone's enmity. We have to weigh carefully our every word. And what is cardinal and fundamental, we must not declare ourselves in a future war before Italy [has done so]»<sup>41</sup>. Stojadinović was clearly far from being as honest with Ciano as the Italian came to believe.

To reinforce his neutralist policy, Stojadinović undertook a diplomatic tour of Paris, London and Rome in late 1937. In the first two capitals he made an effort to dispel the growing doubts that he was going too far in his relations with the Axis. Stojadinović renewed the 1927 friendship treaty with France, but he resolutely refused the repeated French offer to conclude a mutual assistance pact between France and the Little Entente countries. Having been criticised for the Italian treaty, he assured Yvon Delbos, French foreign minister, that Yugoslavia was firmly attached to France, the Little and Balkan Ententes but she was a mouse caught between two cats, Germany and Italy, and must deal with them carefully to avoid the fate of Abyssinia and Spain<sup>42</sup>. Stojadinović then arrived in Italy to return Ciano's

<sup>40</sup> *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, ed. M. Muggeridge, Odhams Press, London 1948, pp. 98-105.

<sup>41</sup> M. Jovanović-Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, cit., pp. 133-138.

<sup>42</sup> V. Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Francuska između dva rata (Da li je Jugoslavija bila francuski "satelit")*, Institut za savremenu istoriju, Beograd 1985, p. 356.

visit and meet the Duce for the first time (5-9 December). In conversations with the Italian statesmen, he modified his account of the visits to France and Britain and the direction of Yugoslav policy to their liking. He had no qualms about playing the ideological card, stating that he was engaged in formation «of a large party which will have as its chief aim the organisation of Yugoslav youth. All that will produce an increasingly marked approach to the political system formed by the authoritarian countries and a break away from France»<sup>43</sup>. Even more typical of Stojadinović's tactics was the manner in which he handled two issues which were central to the Axis's approach to drawing the smaller powers into their own orbit, namely demands for leaving the League of Nations and joining the Anti-Comintern Pact concluded between Germany, Japan and Italy in 1936-1937. After Mussolini had offered him to postpone the announcement of Italy's withdrawal from the League so as not to coincide with Stojadinović's visit and cause harmful polemics, the Yugoslav prime minister said he would write himself a commentary on the League's lack of purpose following Italy's exit. In fact, he deceived the Duce about his dismissal of the Geneva organisation. Just two weeks later, Stojadinović informed his diplomatic representatives that Yugoslavia would remain a member of the League because that was necessary to keep on good terms with all the great powers, a veiled reference to France and Britain<sup>44</sup>. He was also determined to keep Yugoslavia out of the Anti-Comintern Pact, since adhering to it would have placed Belgrade on the side of the Axis. He instructed the press to explain that Yugoslavia refused to join either of the two ideological blocs in Europe<sup>45</sup>.

What emerged most clearly from Stojadinović's visit was the extent to which Ciano was convinced both in his fascist proclivities and in the great prospects of cooperation between their countries. He believed that Stojadinović returned «home to form the base of his dictatorship Party» using the «Mussolini formula» and found their conversations «fundamental for an alliance, which could be used in many different directions. One day, maybe, also towards the north [Germany]»<sup>46</sup>. But all along, Stojadinović paid special attention to his relations with Germany. Despite paying lip service to Ciano, reminding him that the Rome-Belgrade axis would come into operation if Germany went too far, he regarded Berlin as a counterweight against another Italian change of policy. Stojadinović admitted to Konstantin von Neurath, German foreign minister, during his visit to Belgrade in June 1937 that the guns on the Yugoslav side of the Adriatic were not removed<sup>47</sup>. Two considerations were central to Stojadinović's view of Yugoslavia's position vis-à-vis Germany and Italy. He did not

<sup>43</sup> *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, cit., pp. 149-152. For Stojadinović's account, see *Ni rat ni pakt*, cit., pp. 478-485.

<sup>44</sup> D. Lukač, *Treći Rajh i zemlje jugoistočne Evrope*, II, cit., p. 130.

<sup>45</sup> B. Simić, *Milan Stojadinović i Italija*, cit., p. 112.

<sup>46</sup> *Ciano's Diary*, Phoenix Press, London 2002, p. 34. It seems that Stojadinović, partly at least, won Ciano's confidence on the cheap. The Italian, for example, believed that the former started to «enjoy the idea of dictatorship» because he «adopted the Roman salute and wears his coat inside out showing the suede lining because it is "more military"». See *ivi*, p. 33.

<sup>47</sup> D. Denda, *Šlem i šajkača: vojni faktor i jugoslovensko-nemački odnosi*, Matica srpska, Novi Sad 2019, pp. 272-277.

believe in the sincere and durable Italo-German collaboration given the conflicting interests of the Axis powers in south-eastern Europe. And he had no doubt that Germany was the paramount political factor in the region on which both the security of Yugoslavia's borders and the upper hand of the Belgrade government in dealing with the Croats hinged. Stojadinović later explained the substance of his policy as follows: «By sticking with Germany it was not necessary [...] to make any concessions to the Croats [...] The friendship with the Germans [...] was sufficient to us Serbs to keep in check all our opponents in the Balkans, within and beyond the state borders»<sup>48</sup>. The Germans made much of Stojadinović's visit to Berlin in January 1938, with Göring acting as his personal friend, not unlike Ciano in Italy. In line with his prediction of the future events, Stojadinović made it clear that he saw the Austrian issue as «a purely internal question of the German people»<sup>49</sup>. In return, Hitler solemnly declared that once the Anschluss had been completed he would consider Yugoslavia's borders inviolable from not just the German, but also the Hungarian side. Stojadinović was thus completely calm when the Anschluss took place in March 1938.

He was deeply concerned, however, about Berlin's next move – the annexation of Czechoslovakia's German-populated Sudeten area. The crux of the problem was that Hungary was anxious to exploit the crisis in order to take back as much territory as possible from what it had lost to Prague after the war. In case of a Hungarian attack on Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania were obliged under the terms of the Little Entente pact to rise to arms in defence of their ally. In Stojadinović's view, the danger was that a European-scale conflagration could arise from the Czechoslovak crisis and that Yugoslavia could find herself ranged against Germany and, quite possibly, Italy, and risk her existence. To avoid such a disastrous development, the Yugoslav premier turned to Rome. Italy had long been a champion of the Hungarian revisionism and concluded with that country and Austria the Rome Protocols of 1934 which rendered some weight to Mussolini's advice to Budapest. Boško Hristić, Yugoslav minister in Rome, relayed Stojadinović's prediction that Hungary and Poland would be involved in a crisis, resulting in «the creation of a small Czech state with a neutral character», and the assurance that Yugoslav policy would conform with that of Italy<sup>50</sup>. Stojadinović was effective in his pandering to the special relationship with Rome. Ciano found his willingness to coordinate policy in the Czechoslovak crisis «remarkable» and concluded that he was «right» in keeping out of trouble<sup>51</sup>. This was a major theme during their third meeting in Venice in June 1938 when Stojadinović pleaded with the Italians to use their «influence to prevent Hungary from taking the initiative in the attack»<sup>52</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> *Dokumenti o Jugoslaviji*, ur. D. Cvetković, v. 10, *Sovjeti, Britanija i Jugoslavija 1940-41*, Paris 1958, p. 7; also M. Jovanović-Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, cit., p. 259.

<sup>49</sup> M. Stojadinović, *Ni rat ni pakt*, cit., pp. 497-503. D. Denda, *Šlem i šajkača*, cit., pp. 284-295. For a book-length analysis of Belgrade's attitude towards the Anschluss, see S. Mičić, *Kraljevina Jugoslavija i Anšlus Austrije 1938. godine*, Službeni glasnik, Beograd 2010.

<sup>50</sup> *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, cit., pp. 200-201.

<sup>51</sup> *Ciano's Diary*, cit., p. 81.

<sup>52</sup> *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, cit., pp. 212-216. For Yugoslav-Hungarian relations in connection with the Munich crisis, see V. Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Mađarska 1933-1941*, Narodna knjiga, Beograd 1976, pp. 289-300.

A month later the Italians met Stojadinović's request. Both Mussolini and Ciano did their best to reassure the Hungarian prime minister, Béla Imrédy, and foreign minister, Kálmán Kánya, during their visit to Rome that they had nothing to fear of Yugoslavia unless Hungary attacked Czechoslovakia before Germany had done so<sup>53</sup>. In the midst of the Munich crisis, however, Stojadinović turned to Germany to protect Yugoslav interests. He appealed to Göring not just to halt Budapest's action, but also to prevent the establishment of the common Polish-Hungarian border which would considerably increase the territory and prestige of Hungary<sup>54</sup>. It was clear that Italy would not have the deciding role in settling the new map of central Europe. But the growing territorial ambitions of Hungary made Ciano and Mussolini doubt the wisdom of extending their full support to Budapest. Fearing that Hungary might facilitate Germany's outlet to the Adriatic, they concluded that it was necessary to maintain close relations with Belgrade<sup>55</sup>. As for Stojadinović, the Munich agreement confirmed his foreign policy vision, since at no other time had Yugoslavia's international position been stronger. He maintained equidistance from both political blocs and played a subtle diplomatic game in respect to the Axis – close relations with Germany and Italy served to offset the pressure from both powers, the more immediate from Rome and the more distant, but more dangerous, from Berlin.

The last episode in Stojadinović's dealings with Italy took place in January 1939 when Ciano arrived in Yugoslavia to discuss the Italian intention to occupy Albania. In view of the importance attached to the Yugoslav friendship, Mussolini decided to proceed only in agreement, and even in cooperation, with Yugoslavia for which he was prepared to offer territorial compensation in northern Albania. Stojadinović did not give a definite reply, but political and military leaderships in Belgrade busied themselves with studying the situation; the prevailing opinion was, in line with traditional Albanian policy, that it was less of an evil to divide Albania than to let Italy take the whole of the country<sup>56</sup>. To prove his intention to follow Italy's lead, Stojadinović announced Yugoslavia's *de facto* abandonment of the League of Nations in May that year by withdrawing the delegates from Geneva. In addition, he promised to examine the adherence to the Anti-Comintern Pact, especially if Germany favoured it. This reflected the recent German success in the international arena and it was the least Yugoslavia could do to show her favourable attitude towards the Axis short of a definite commitment. It should be noted that Ciano had no compunction to make his official report more flattering to his achievement and more to Duce's liking. He recorded, *inter alia*, that Stojadinović «stated that he was completely calm as far as the internal situation and his personal position were concerned». In fact, the contrary was the case: Ciano observed in his diary, not to be read by Mussolini, that the Yugoslav premier was «careful about his relations with

<sup>53</sup> *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, cit., pp. 227-229.

<sup>54</sup> J. Hoptner, *Jugoslavija u krizi*, cit., pp. 141-142.

<sup>55</sup> *Ciano's Diary*, cit., pp. 138-139.

<sup>56</sup> D. Bakić, *The Italo-Yugoslav Conflict over Albania: A View from Belgrade, 1919-1939*, in «Diplomacy & Statecraft», v. 25, n. 4, 2014, pp. 592-612.

the monarchy, which do not seem good»<sup>57</sup>. Apart from his considerable ego, this can only be explained by Ciano's personal political investment in the Belgrade Pact and his working relationship with Stojadinović.

### *Fascistisation and the Downfall of the Stojadinović Regime*

The origins of Stojadinović's reputation of a fascist-in-the-making lay in the propaganda of his political adversaries. Stojadinović was labeled a fascist by the illegal Communist Party of Yugoslavia, but their voice was not influential, apart from stemming from their crude stigmatisation of every single cabinet, and the Yugoslav monarchy as such, as the "monarchical-fascist dictatorship". The communist view became important only after the war when it was translated into the official historiography, as has been mentioned at the beginning of this essay. Of the Serbian democratic opposition, Dragoljub Jovanović was the first to mount an attack on Stojadinović's foreign policy as early as February 1937, i.e. before the conclusion of the friendship treaty with Italy. He pointed out the emergence of the anti-democratic and fascist front in Europe and concluded that whoever claimed to be neutral was «in fact on the side of fascism, which is in the position of an attacker»<sup>58</sup>. This was not surprising in view of the left-wing Agrarians' foreign policy vision, favouring a «Russo-Franco-English orientation, for democracy, for the Slavdom», with little regard for the realities of the latter half of the 1930s.

It was, however, the concerted campaign of the United Opposition, a coalition of Democrats, Agrarians and the faction of Radicals siding with the Main Committee of their party – that inflicted most damage to the image of Stojadinović's JRZ. It should be noted that the campaign of the above mentioned parties was especially pronounced from October 1937 onwards. The timing is significant for understanding how and why the fascist label came to be used against Stojadinović. By that time the Pact of Belgrade had been much hailed in the state-controlled media as a great foreign policy success. On the other side, the Serbian opposition parties had centred their criticism of the government on the Italian rapprochement and the shift in Yugoslav foreign policy, ignoring the *realpolitik* considerations and appealing to the emotional sympathy of the people for their allies from the Great War. «Mr. Stojadinović's government has accepted the initiative from Rome and Berlin the sole purpose of which is to detach Yugoslavia from her earlier foreign policy system, and in the spirit of that new policy they have concluded bilateral pacts and agreements outside the framework of the League of Nations, the policy of France and England, which base the maintenance of peace on the collective security», read

<sup>57</sup> *Ciano's Diary*, cit., p. 179; *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, cit., pp. 267-272. For Stojadinović's accounts, see AJ, Prince Paul Papers, reel 4, Stojadinović to Prince Paul, private, 21-01-1939, scans 527-530 and 20-01-1939, scans 534-541; M. Stojadinović, *Ni rat ni pakt*, cit., pp. 566-574.

<sup>58</sup> AJ, Stojadinović Papers, 37-22-156, 'Spoljna politika Stojadinovićeve vlade', 6-2-1937.

a declaration signed by the leaders of Radicals, Democrats and Agrarians<sup>59</sup>. The United Opposition also criticised the terms of the friendship treaties concluded with Italy and Bulgaria (in January 1937). It was a mark of their determination to score political points on account of Stojadinović's unpopular foreign policy that they used the occasion of the visit of the French foreign minister, Delbos, to Belgrade in December 1937 to stir dissatisfaction among the people<sup>60</sup>.

In addition to the invective in the realm of foreign affairs, the United Opposition accused the government of organising their own «storm detachments» and threatened that terror would be met with force<sup>61</sup>. Moreover, the opposition leaders addressed Radenko Stanković, one of the three members of regency (of which only Prince Paul mattered), with the warning that JRZ was «forming combat organisations from their members, dressing them in uniforms, and intend, as we have received reports, to arm them as well, and to start a fight with such organised, uniformed and armed detachments»<sup>62</sup>. They referred, in fact, to the youth organisation of JRZ which was about to hold a grand congress in Belgrade and demonstrate the mass appeal of Stojadinović's party. As will be discussed later, a relatively modest number of the JRZ youth would indeed wear uniforms, but there were certainly no plans for the formation of the party storm troops, whether armed or not, on the pattern of the youth detachments in Italy and Germany.

But there was another important development that informed, to a large extent, the campaign against the JRZ government. The three Serbian opposition parties concluded an agreement with Maček and his political allies on 8 October 1937 in the village of Farkašić, demanding restoration of the full political liberties, revision of the 1931 constitution and rearrangement of Yugoslavia's internal structure on the basis of a consensus between the majority of Serbs, majority of Croats and majority of Slovenes<sup>63</sup>. This development, in particular, allowed the Serbian United Opposition to pose as a champion of democracy and to raise the prospect of solving the Croatian question by democratic means – although Maček was, unlike them, only concerned with the Croatian settlement and would drop his partners in 1939 to make a deal with the Crown. Nevertheless, the Serbian opposition was seemingly able to offer a coherent political strategy and to attack the JRZ regime on grounds of both foreign and domestic policy. The accusations of distancing from France, Britain and the Little Entente were now coupled with incrimination for the growing

<sup>59</sup> AJ, Stojadinović Papers, 37-10-60, Declaration signed by Aca Stanojević, Ljubomir Davidović and Jovan Jovanović, 2-4-1937.

<sup>60</sup> AJ, Stojadinović Papers, 37-10-60, Leaflet titled «Delbos u Beogradu» with the statement of the United Opposition leaders dated 11-12-1937 and the press clips describing the clash between the pro-French demonstrators and the police in the streets of Belgrade.

<sup>61</sup> AJ, Stojadinović Papers, 37-10-60, Anonymous leaflet, 10-10-1937; also «Obaveštenje građanima Beograda» signed by «Akcioni odbor građana», October 1937.

<sup>62</sup> AJ, Stojadinović Papers, 37-10-60, Jovan Jovanović, Ljubomir Davidović and Miloš Trifunović (on behalf of Aca Stanojević) to Radenko Stanković, 20-10-1937.

<sup>63</sup> T. Stojkov, *O stvaranju Bloka narodnog sporazuma*, in «Istorija 20. veka», v. 6, 1964, pp. 245-301; M. Radojević, *Udružena opozicija 1935-1939*, Institut za savremenu istoriju, Beograd 1964, pp. 176-181.

fascistisation at home, the most visible sign of which was the emergence of the uniformed JRZ formations allegedly prepared for violence against their political opponents<sup>64</sup>. Despite the weak foundations of their agreement with the HSS, the Serbian opposition thus wielded a powerful slogan among the democratically-minded, predominantly anti-German, and much less anti-Italian, Serbian population: for peace and democracy, against totalitarian aggressiveness and fascism in Yugoslavia associated with Stojadinović and his party.

This begs the question whether there was substance to the accusations against Stojadinović. To begin with, it is clear that the JRZ cannot be considered a fascist organisation according to the most influential theories of fascism expounded by Roger Griffin and Stanley Payne. Starting from his “new consensus”, an approach which prioritizes fascist ideology over structures and points out that generic fascism was a transnational phenomenon, Griffin defined fascism as revolutionary political ideology «whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism», which separates fascism from conservative and radical/extreme far right<sup>65</sup>. Payne’s different, but complementary, theoretical paradigm considers a movement fascist if it meets certain criteria: «common points of ideology and goals, the fascist negations, and also special common features of style and organization»<sup>66</sup>. In his typology of authoritarian nationalist interwar right, Payne distinguishes between the fascist right, radical right and conservative right. According to such approach, the JRZ regime was no doubt firmly placed on the conservative section of the right-wing political spectrum. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the Stojadinović government displayed certain fascist trappings, indicating the interwar dynamics between the “old”, conservative and radical, “new” right. António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis have offered a fresh perspective on the relationship between the conservative and fascist right: they view it as fluid and reflexive interaction, involving a (differing) degree of mutual influence and selective borrowing, creating different hybrid forms of right-wing politics according to the specifics of a particular national setting and, ultimately, leading the conservatives towards radicalization of their attitudes and policies<sup>67</sup>. The Stojadinović regime will be analysed here with reference to their theoretical framework in order to assess the impact and influence of fascist ideas and practices on the JRZ conservative constituency. It seems most beneficial to look at the conspicuous features immanent to fascist studies and recognisable, to some extent, in the JRZ political platform and activism such as the youth organization, the workers organisation and fascist style. Of special interest is the link between the close Italo-Yugoslav relations and fascis-

<sup>64</sup> M. Radojević, *Udružena opozicija*, cit., pp. 138-139.

<sup>65</sup> R. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, The Pinter Press, London 1991. The constraints of a space make it impossible to engage here more fully with the vast literature in the field of fascism studies.

<sup>66</sup> S.G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945*, Wisconsin Press, Madison 1995.

<sup>67</sup> *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe*, eds. A. Costa Pinto, A. Kallis, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2014; A. Kallis, *Fascism and the Right in Interwar Europe: Interaction, Entanglement, Hybridity*, in *The Oxford Handbook of European History, 1914-1945*, ed. N. Doumanis, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016, pp. 301-322.

tisation of the Yugoslav regime, which could provide new insights to Costa Pinto's and Kallis' theoretical considerations.

The JRZ had its own student club at the University of Belgrade named the "Slav South" (*Slovenski jug*) which carried on the tradition of the famous pre-1914 organisation renowned for championing the Yugoslav unification. It was a typical student branch of a political party with the main purpose of containing the communist tendencies among the university youth. Resulting from the growing network of student clubs under the aegis of JRZ from universities across the country, a congress was held on 11 July 1937 and the Main Committee of the Academic Youth of JRZ was elected with Milivoje Đikanović as its president<sup>68</sup>. In ideological terms, the Academic Youth toed the line of the party leadership: they made a solemn declaration to «use every legitimate means to fight against all extremists, fascists on the most far-right and communists on the most far-left alike, regarding both as the imported doctrines, totally alien to our liberal-minded people» and to struggle for «true democracy»<sup>69</sup>. There was certain ambivalence in terms of looking for a role model abroad, perhaps reflecting an unspoken assumption that it was necessary not to identify with any single organisation of the same kind. For example, the JRZ student congress proposed the launching of courses for the political education of their members on the pattern of the academic youth in both Nazi Germany and democratic Czechoslovakia<sup>70</sup>. It was only after Stojadinović's fall from power that the extreme far-right ideas took hold of, and even dominated over, the JRZ student organisation<sup>71</sup>.

For practical Stojadinović, *Slovenski jug* was also a convenient means of facilitating the desirable image of his regime abroad. In step with his direction of foreign affairs, it served the purpose of promoting the close Italo-Yugoslav relations and demonstrating the reception of Italian ideas in Yugoslavia. After the initial attempts of the leaders of *Slovenski jug* to visit Italy had failed for financial reasons, Stojadinović put his own authority behind their enterprise. The Italians responded immediately and decided to fund the visit. The purpose of the visit was to familiarise the Yugoslav students with the work and organisation of the Fascist Party, especially with its youth section and to exchange experiences regarding the anti-communist struggle. Two groups of twenty students each visited Italy in July 1938 and the second one was received by Mussolini himself, which ensured wide coverage in the Italian press. However, the results of their sojourn were a dismal failure. The Yugoslav press attaché in Rome, Miloš Crnjanski, reported that the students had made an unfavourable impression and showed little interest in attending lectures on the organisation of the Fascist Party. They were more interested in

<sup>68</sup> D. Tešić, *Klub studenata Jugoslovenske radikalne zajednice 'Slovenski jug' na Beogradskom univerzitetu 1935-1941*, in «Istorija 20. veka», n. 1-2, 1993, pp. 53-71.

<sup>69</sup> AJ, Stojadinović Papers, 37-17-116, Milivoje Đikanović to Milan Stojadinović, 12-7-1937.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> R. Ristanović, *Ideološka orijentacija članova Kluba studenata JRZ Slovenski jug*, in «Tokovi istorije», n. 1, 2016, pp. 143-164.



having a good time and perhaps getting Italian stipends<sup>72</sup>. If Stojadinović wanted to further the impression in Rome that he was progressing towards the formation of a fascist-like party youth, the visit fell far short of his intention. A delegation of thirty students was also invited to the student manifestations in Germany in June 1938 and yet another one had been in Greece three months earlier; in return, thirty German students spent a month in the *Slovenski jug* camp in Sutomore<sup>73</sup>.

Another, more important, form of the youth organisation was the emergence of JRZ youth (OJRZ). After setting up JRZ youth branches in Belgrade at the initiative of some members of the Executive Committee, the minister of physical education, Josip Rogić, proposed on 1 May 1937 the extension of these organisations to the entire country, which Stojadinović approved. It was not, however, before 24 October that a large congress of OJRZ took place at a Belgrade football club stadium on which occasion Stojadinović delivered a speech<sup>74</sup>. That event alarmed the opposition not just because it showed the growing strength of the government party, but also as a sign of fascistisation of the country. The opposition youth organisations inveighed against the JRZ youth congress as an abuse of young people, proclaimed their own commitment to democracy, peace and the agreement between the Serbs and Croats, and protested against the rapprochement with the Axis<sup>75</sup>. But despite the fascist flavour of a mass rally, the adopted statutes of OJRZ required of its members to cultivate «a sense of civil liberties and political rights of the people and to resist communism as well as all the teachings and movements which in practice destroy the dignity of a human, his personal and civil liberty»<sup>76</sup>. Stojadinović seems to have been interested in the practical side of the youth organisation as a way of strengthening his party. There is no doubt, however, that he was influenced by the Italian example. On 2 January 1938, fresh from his visit to Rome, he said that «children need to be won over to the party from the age of four, if we want to have the Radical youth (Count Ciano has given him that advice)»<sup>77</sup>.

As has been said, the opposition parties were particularly disconcerted on account of the uniform-wearing of the young JRZ members. That feature of a fascist style has also retained a strong resonance in all the accounts that suggest Stojadinović was prone to totalitarian dictatorship and, therefore, needs to be examined more closely. The making of uniforms was indeed connected with the ongoing preparations for the grand OJRZ rally when prices were tendered for a contract in summer 1937, as Stojadinović was informed that «there is great interest for the uniforms among the youth ranks in the countryside»<sup>78</sup>. In September, 161 uniforms were or-

<sup>72</sup> B. Simić, *Posete kluba studenata Jugoslovenske radikalne zajednice 'Slovenski jug' Italiji 1938. godine*, in «Tokovi istorije», n. 2, 2011, pp. 81-92.

<sup>73</sup> D. Tešić, *Klub studenata Jugoslovenske radikalne*, cit., p. 66.

<sup>74</sup> For details, see D. Tešić, *Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica*, cit., pp. 333-346.

<sup>75</sup> AJ, Stojadinović Papers, 37-10-61. An undated leaflet distributed by the youth branches of the United Opposition together with the leftist youth groups.

<sup>76</sup> *Sabor i kongres omladine Jugoslovenske radikalne zajednice*, Samouprava, Beograd 1937, p. 55.

<sup>77</sup> M. Jovanović-Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, cit., p. 159.

<sup>78</sup> AJ, Stojadinović Papers, 37-16-105, Milutin Krivokapić to Milan Stojadinović, 11-8-1937.

dered for those youngsters designated to guard the JRZ rallies; a group of them also wore the same uniforms on the occasion of the visit of Turkish prime minister, Celâl Bayar, to Yugoslavia. After May 1938, these uniforms, in fact 76 which had been made as there were problems with the quality of work, were handed over to *Slovenski jug* on the basis of a decision of the Main Committee of OJRZ<sup>79</sup>. Partly remade and partly newly tailored, the uniforms were meant for students visiting Italy and Germany and two of them were earmarked for the occasions of the party manifestations. «Since there is a general feeling in the Club that all members get their uniforms and the membership has been increasing remarkably, especially this academic year», the president of *Slovenski jug*, Dušan Janković, requested another 98 uniforms for students<sup>80</sup>. The numbers do not quite match as some uniforms were remade to fit the size or provided material for caps (*šajkače*), but 160 were at the disposal of the student club on 1 December 1938. Janković needed more to meet the demand and suggested that a new order be placed with a tailor who made uniforms for OJRZ and proved himself more dutiful and efficient than the one he had worked with earlier. The need for uniforms must have grown considerably with the coming of the general elections set for 11 December 1938, since the young party members were expected to accompany Stojadinović and secure the rallies. A major order was placed the details of which are unknown, but Stojadinović was informed less than three weeks before the elections that «the second thousand» of uniforms had been completed and their distribution had already started<sup>81</sup>.

Despite this expansion in the number of uniforms, it cannot be said that Stojadinović pushed for a full-scale fascistisation of his party youth, even in terms of their appearance. He decided that uniforms were not compulsory and that sportsmen alone should wear them in order to create an impression and inspire pride in having them. Stojadinović insisted on the fact that the initiative for uniform-wearing in Italy and Germany had come from the poorest to make them appear the same as the rich; paradoxically, given the historical background, he concluded that a uniform was «in fact, a democratic institution»<sup>82</sup>. Stojadinović's views informed the practice of dressing the party youth. All members of OJRZ were only obliged to wear the party youth badges. Outside the sport venues, the members of sport teams, whom Stojadinović was particularly supportive of, wore uniforms if they chose so and paid for it<sup>83</sup>. The appropriate uniforms were mandatory for those who followed Stojadinović during his journeys across the country, were present at the

<sup>79</sup> AJ, Stojadinović Papers, 37-16-105, Petar Marjanović to Jovan Marković, 4-10-1938; Radoslav Ilkić to Milan Stojadinović, 28-9-1938.

<sup>80</sup> AJ, Stojadinović Papers, 37-17-117, Dušan Janković to Milan Stojadinović, 4-10-1938 with the documents attached. It was some of the students selected to go to Italy who «expressed their wish» to bring uniforms (AJ, Stojadinović Papers, 37-17-117, Dušan Janković to Milan Stojadinović, 29-4-1938).

<sup>81</sup> AJ, Stojadinović Papers, 37-16-105, Josip Rogić [President of the Main Committee of OJRZ] to Milan Stojadinović, 23-11-1938. For a discussion of the use of uniforms, see B. Simić, *Propaganda Milana Stojadinovića*, Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, Beograd 2007, pp. 275-278.

<sup>82</sup> AJ, Stojadinović Papers, 37-16-115, Milan Stojadinović to Ranko Dostanić, 7-9-1938.

<sup>83</sup> D. Tešić, *Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica*, cit., p. 345.

official reception of the visiting statesmen and securing the party rallies during the 1938 elections (which would prove significant, as will be seen later). Overall, their number was modest and seems to have never exceeded three hundreds, as estimated during Ciano's visit in January 1939. It should also be noted that on the European scale uniform-wearing was a widespread craze and by no means confined to fascist or far-right groups<sup>84</sup>. Although sufficient to draw fire from the political opponents, especially in Serbia, the practice of uniform dressing seems to have reflected the fact that OJRZ was far from the mass movement like those in Italy and Germany. In fact, it was not organised on a larger scale, or more militarised, than other party formations in Yugoslavia such as Maček's Croatian Peasant Defence (*Hrvatska seljačka zaštita*) and Croatian Civil Defence (*Hrvatska građanska zaštita*), or Korošec's *fanti*. It was certainly a far cry from the single-state EON organisation in the less populated Greece under the Ioannis Metaxas dictatorship with its no less than 600,000 members<sup>85</sup>.

Yet another example of the Italian (and German) inspiration at home was the establishment of the Yugoslav Workers Association (*Jugoslovenski radnički savez-Jugoras*). Starting from professional associations within JRZ, it was formed on 26 July 1936 under the authority of Dragiša Cvetković, minister of social policy. He summed up the rationale for the creation of Jugoras in a major speech a month and a half later: «Instead of the [Third] International, instead of Marxism, we must lead our workers movement on the basis of our conditions, on the basis of our customs and economic position»<sup>86</sup>. With the growing number of Jugoras branches, the JRZ leadership decided to hold a large congress of the organisation on 25-26 April 1938. Stojadinović addressed the crowd himself stressing the importance of the event. For Jovanović-Stoimirović, Stojadinović's speech was "fascist". «He has thundered against socialism and communism, and delivered the phrase in which he said, *urbi et orbi*, what he wanted: a dictatorship for the next few years, because he said he wanted to unite all the constructive forces etc»<sup>87</sup>. The "Rules" of Jugoras were also adopted on that occasion, which proclaimed it the sole legitimate workers representative through which the government could execute their social and economic programme; such tendency was coupled with the request to take over all agencies for workers protection from the hands of marxist syndicates<sup>88</sup>. Just like in the OJRZ, uniform-wearing was introduced in Jugoras. The extent of that practice is impossible to trace, but given the case of the party youth organisations it could hardly amount to much. Nevertheless, it served Stojadinović's opponents well enough as another example of his fascistisation of Yugoslavia. He was later adamant that it

<sup>84</sup> J.F. Fuentes, *Shirt Movements in Interwar Europe: a Totalitarian Fashion*, in «Ler História», v. 72, 2018, pp. 151-173.

<sup>85</sup> A. Kallis, *Neither Fascist nor Authoritarian: The 4<sup>th</sup> of August Regime in Greece (1936-1941) and the Dynamics of Fascistisation in 1930s Europe*, in «East Central Europe», n. 2-3, 2010, pp. 317-320.

<sup>86</sup> D. Tešić, *Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica*, cit., pp. 318-321.

<sup>87</sup> M. Jovanović-Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, cit., p. 183.

<sup>88</sup> *Prvi zemaljski kongres Jugoslovenskog radničkog saveza*, Jugoras, Beograd 1938, p. 69.

had been Cvetković's, and not his own, initiative to dress the JRZ workers in blue uniforms<sup>89</sup>.

Along with anti-communist and nationalist rhetoric, the discourse on Jugoras was increasingly resembling the corporatist themes of Fascist Italy with its insistence on the harmonious collaboration between the classes instead of class struggle. It is not surprising then that Stojadinović did not fail to make use of Jugoras to foster the image of close cooperation with Italy. In September 1938, at the time of the Munich crisis, the Jugoras delegation visited Venice, Milano, Torino, Rome and Florence to see some of the important industrial facilities, institutes and fascist organisations. A number of Italian officials received the Yugoslav workers, including Ciano. The visit was a success, unlike that of the JRZ students. This time Crnjanski informed the Yugoslav premier that the reception of the delegation was excellent among both the officials and the public. To mark his satisfaction, Stojadinović received the workers on their return to Belgrade to hear their impressions and instructed Hristić to thank Ciano on his behalf<sup>90</sup>. But for all this fanfare, corporatism made no progress that would tabgibly affect economy and social structure in Yugoslavia.

The fascist trappings of the Stojadinović regime manifested themselves in a much more conspicuous manner during the campaign for the 11 December elections. Importantly, Stojadinović called the elections in the wake of Czechoslovakia's dismemberment in Munich, calculating that his foreign policy would be a major asset. Even before the elections, in May 1938, a group of JRZ members had prepared a proposal for carrying out party propaganda, criticising the old primitive approach and drawing inspiration from Fascist Italy. The gist of the proposal concerned the application of methods that proved successful in Italy. The admiration to the Italian «new type of organising political life», the general tenor of suggestions, especially the one for the formation of a secret party police responsible to the head of the party alone, smacked of fascism<sup>91</sup>. The only signature attached to the document is that of Milutin Krivokapić, vice-president of the Main Committee of OJRZ, which might indicate that the impulse for fascistisation was coming from the younger generation prone to perceiving themselves as the “new men” suited to the new age marked by the rise of fascism. Much more certain is the fact that the more extreme, fascist-like suggestions were not adopted, but those concerning the practical side of propaganda served as the basis of the soon-to-be-made manual for the party activists and were put into practice during the election campaign<sup>92</sup>.

Once the election campaign began, Stojadinović held the first out of his nine major rallies in the JRZ office in Belgrade on 16 October. He had no qualms about ad-

<sup>89</sup> M. Stojadinović, *Ni rat ni pakt*, cit., p. 589.

<sup>90</sup> B. Simić, *Milan Stojadinović i Italija*, cit., pp. 169-171.

<sup>91</sup> AJ, Stojadinović Papers, 37-12-81, ‘Predlog za partijsku propagandu’, 8-5-1938, attached to Milutin Krivokapić to Milan Stojadinović, without date. This document is also discussed in D. Tešić, *Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica*, cit., pp. 198-200.

<sup>92</sup> *Upustvo za praktično izvođenje partijske propagande*, Beograd 1938.

mitting to Prince Paul that the staging of the event had been «entirely à la Hitler»<sup>93</sup>. In Petrovgrad, the fascist flair was even more pronounced because the rally was held out in the open, with the Yugoslav premier arriving in a car surrounded with motorcyclists. Jovanović-Stoimirović has recorded with displeasure that it was there that «the fascist organisation of Stojadinović's guard emerged at once, suddenly and loudly. The uniformed members of the party yelled "Leader, Leader!" [...] All in all, the people did not like it. They voiced disapproval, and serious, dignified at that»<sup>94</sup>. But the same staging was repeated in Novi Sad on 13 November on an even larger scale. According to the German minister in Yugoslavia, Viktor von Heeren, that rally was a grand expression of the authoritarian character with which Stojadinović imbued his party<sup>95</sup>.

It was hardly coincidence that the fascist iconography was most conspicuous at the two rallies held in northern part of Serbia/Yugoslavia (Petrovgrad and Novi Sad) which was populated by considerable German (and Hungarian) minority. Stojadinović killed two birds with one stone: he demonstrated his inclination to fascist methods before Berlin and Rome, and secured the votes of the local Germans. He was not aware of the fact that Berlin had signalled the German minority to cast their votes for JRZ, although he might have expected it. He toned down the fascist colouring of his campaign in the two towns of what is nowadays Serbia, Negotin and Šabac. For example, seventy members of OJRZ traveled to the rally in Petrovgrad – forty from Belgrade accompanying Stojadinović and thirty from Vršac – as opposed to twenty-six Belgraders who went to the rally in Negotin, in eastern Serbia, although the two rallies were not that much different in terms of attendance (40,000 and 30,000 respectively)<sup>96</sup>. Moreover, Stojadinović did not organise a large rally in a single town in Šumadija, Serbia's heartland, since he knew that aping of fascist methods there would not be well received among the Serbian peasants. This is an interesting example that can contribute to Costa Pinto's and Kallis' concept of the transnational transfer of fascist ideas and practice affecting the conservative constituency. The election campaign of JRZ can certainly be understood in those terms, but Stojadinović clearly manipulated the use of fascist technique to achieve a foreign policy goal which also benefited him domestically during the elections.

Stojadinović won the elections, but his lead over the opposition bloc headed by Maček was less than impressive. Although he was surprised and dissatisfied, it seemed that he could continue in office as long as Prince Regent supported him. But Stojadinović's electoral flirtation with fascist iconography undermined the confidence Prince Paul had placed in him. A later inquiry revealed that the Novi Sad rally had alarmed the regent. Prince Paul complained to the chief of the Belgrade police,

<sup>93</sup> AJ, Prince Paul Papers, reel 4, Stojadinović to Prince Paul, 16-10-1938, scans 568-573.

<sup>94</sup> M. Jovanović-Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, cit., p. 216.

<sup>95</sup> D. Biber, *O padu Stojadinovićeve vlade*, cit., p. 42.

<sup>96</sup> AJ, Stojadinović Papers, 37-16-105, Josip Rogić to Jovan Marković, 4-11-1938; Josip Rogić to Jovan Marković, 5-11-1938. For the estimates of the crowd in different places, see J. Opra, *Izborna kampanja Milana Stojadinovića 1938. godine*, in «Arhiv: časopis Arhiva Jugoslavije», n. 2, 2001, p. 176.

Milan Aćimović, about the crowd hailing Stojadinović as the Leader. «What am I then?», he said<sup>97</sup>. This is consistent with the regent's utterance to his close friend, an art historian Milan Kašanin, to the effect that he removed Stojadinović because of his ambition to become «a second Duce» and to protect the crown for the sake of his young cousin, Petar II<sup>98</sup>. Prince Paul was determined not to allow the Karađorđević dynasty to suffer the fate of the House of Savoy. Based on Prince Paul's conversation with the British minister, Ronald Campbell, it is clear that he had made his mind to drop Stojadinović from the government by mid-January 1939<sup>99</sup>. Then came Ciano's visit, as discussed above, and the sight of some 300 uniformed members of OJRZ saluting the Italian foreign minister at the train station further discredited Stojadinović in the eyes of the Crown. This manifestation was not wasted on Ciano as an evidence of fascistisation, especially as he did not notice that the same 300 young men greeted him again in the JRZ office and on several other occasions during his visit<sup>100</sup>. But that little spectacle served Stojadinović to buttress his utterance to the effect that he modelled JRZ on the Fascist Party.

In fact, the shirted JRZ youth lined up to be seen by Ciano encapsulated the essence of Stojadinović's playing with fascist motifs: just like his youth and workers organisations, it lacked a true conviction, but was rather geared towards producing the effect and conveying the political message he believed to have been opportune. In that sense, this particular transmission of fascist style did not simply stem from the Italian influence as part of the unconscious borrowing from a model which seemed attractive because of its apparent political success; it was a performance for the specific purpose of Ciano's visit to Yugoslavia, a feigned act which served the needs of Yugoslav foreign policy. Unfortunately for Stojadinović, his tête-à-tête with Ciano made the Regent even more suspicious of him. As Milan Antić, the court minister, put it, the talks between Ciano and the Yugoslav premier were 'the last drop of poison in the relations between the Prince and Stojadinović'<sup>101</sup>. It seems almost fantastic that Prince Paul came to suspect his own premier of plotting with the Italians with a view to ceding western non-Serb parts of Yugoslavia to Rome and creating a Greater Serbia, incorporating northern Albania and Thessaloniki, in which Stojadinović would realise his intention to rule as a fascist dictator<sup>102</sup>. Apparently, one suspicion bred another, but it is likely that Stojadinović's opponents, of which Antić was certainly one, must have worked hard against him at the court. Once convinced that Stojadinović was bent on establishing his own totalitarian dictatorship, it appeared logical to Prince Paul that he would make full use of his

<sup>97</sup> M. Jovanović-Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, cit., p. 377.

<sup>98</sup> K. Dimitrijević, *Vreme zabrana*, Prometej, Beograd 1991, p. 288. For more evidence, see D. Biber, *O padu Stojadinovićeve vlade*, cit., pp. 47-50; also D. Đorđević, *Na raskrsnici '41: prilozi za srpsku istoriju Drugog svetskog rata*, Dečje novine, Gornji Milanovac 1991, p. 114.

<sup>99</sup> Ž. Avramovski, *Britanci o Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, v. 3, 1939-1941, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd 1996, 53.

<sup>100</sup> D. Gregorić, *Samoubistvo Jugoslavije: poslednji čin jugoslovenske tragedije*, Jugoistok, Beograd 1942, p. 53.

<sup>101</sup> Archives of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, ref. no. 14387/8734, Antić's undated note; J. Hoptner, *Jugoslavija u krizi*, cit., pp. 126-127.

<sup>102</sup> D. Biber, *O padu Stojadinovićeve vlade*, cit., pp. 16-19.

cordial relations with Italy for that purpose. The Regent engineered the crisis of the cabinet and Stojadinović resigned on 4 February 1939.

### *Out of Office and Out of Yugoslavia*

After his fall from power, Stojadinović and a number of his supporters were expelled from JRZ in July 1939. His opposition to the Dragiša Cvetković government centred on his refusal to accept the (con)federalisation of the country in order to reach an agreement with Maček. Stojadinović was not a true supporter of King Alexander's integral Yugoslavism, but he was in favour of an integral (meaning unitary) Yugoslavia. In February 1940, he founded the short-lived Serbian Radical Party on that basis, which was liberal-democratic in its outlook. In the realm of foreign affairs, he did not shy away from suggesting that neutral Yugoslavia should establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union after the outbreak of the Second World War<sup>103</sup>. It was perhaps no wonder then that Jovanović-Stoimirović, his earlier propagandist, started to think that «Stojadinović does not know what he wants. He used to want to be a successor of Pašić, then he lurched into fascism, and now he jumps from fascism into democracy»<sup>104</sup>.

With this in view, it is interesting to note that his fascist label stuck to Stojadinović even during this later period and remained unshaken in much of historiography. This in part resulted from the continued tarnishing of his reputation on the part of his successor, and soon bitter political opponent, Cvetković: to justify his own policy and discredit Stojadinović, the new prime minister presented him as having slid to fascism during his premiership<sup>105</sup>. Prince Paul and Cvetković were both afraid that Berlin and Rome could press for Stojadinović's return to power on the grounds of their confidence in his friendly attitude towards the Axis. For that reason, and to keep him quiet about the Croatian issue, they interned him barely two months after he had formed the Serbian Radical Party. Despite the eleven months of his complete isolation, concern about Stojadinović culminated in the run-up to Yugoslavia's adherence to the Tripartite Pact and on 18 March 1941, just ten days prior to the signing, Prince Paul handed him to the British in contravention of the Yugoslav constitution. Since Churchill was anxious at that time to draw Yugoslavia into the war, he saw Stojadinović as «a potential Quisling» and extended his full assistance to have him transported to Mauritius where he remained until 1948 under the watchful eye of the British colonial administration<sup>106</sup>. It was a bitter irony

<sup>103</sup> For documents concerning this part of his political career, see B. Nadoveza, *Srpska radikalna stranka Milana Stojadinovića*, Srpska radikalna stranka, Beograd 2006.

<sup>104</sup> M. Jovanović-Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, cit., p. 368.

<sup>105</sup> AJ, Stojadinović Papers, 37-12-79, unsigned record of the 9 July 1939 meeting of the JRZ Main Committee; M. Jovanović-Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, cit., p. 294.

<sup>106</sup> D. Biber, *Britanske ocjene Stojadinovića i njegove politike*, in *Fašizam i neofašizam*, Fakultet političkih nauka, Zagreb 1975, pp. 265-277.

that after the coup d'état on 27 March which refuted Yugoslavia's adherence to the Tripartite Pact just two days earlier, the putchists handed Prince Paul and his family to the British – they were interned in Kenya and the Regent was long disparaged as having deceived his British friends. This clearly shows the absurdity of taking the not disinterested official British assessments of either Stojadinović or Prince Paul for granted.

From 1948 to his death in 1961 Stojadinović lived in Argentina where he started the eminent «El Economista» journal, arguably his most enduring legacy. Working as an economic adviser to the provincial and central government, painting and writing his memoirs, he was not politically active like so many other Serbian and Croatian exiles. Therefore, it sent shockwaves when he concluded an agreement with the most famous of them all, the *Ustaša* leader of the Nazi-puppet Independent State of Croatia during WWII, Ante Pavelić, responsible for the genocide committed against the Serbs, Jews and Roma, in 1954. The two exiles agreed on the formation of a Greater Serbia and a Greater Croatia on the ruins of Josip Broz Tito's communist Yugoslavia. This act had no impact on Yugoslavia whatsoever, but it was a devastating blow for Stojadinović's standing among the Serbs. The background of that episode became known much later, although not in detail. Tito's secret service (UDBA) contacted Stojadinović from the early 1950's onwards with a view to enlisting his services against the *Ustaša* exiles in Argentina – it should be noted that Pavelić's dealing with the former Yugoslav prime minister undermined his authority over the *Ustaša* movement – using his financial strings and keeping under control the hostile attitude of the Serb exiles; in return, Stojadinović's brother Dragomir was released from prison and joined him in Buenos Aires, and life was made easier for his ill sister in Belgrade<sup>107</sup>. The episode once again demonstrates Stojadinović's pragmatism, since he had no illusions about the imminent collapse of the Tito regime, unlike many of his exiled compatriots.

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In retrospect, Stojadinović pointed out the absurdity of imagining him as a fascist leader in multinational Yugoslavia<sup>108</sup>. There might have possibly emerged a Serbian fascist dictator, or a Croatian (Pavelić became one during the war), or a Slovenian one, but he was no doubt correct that there could not have been a Yugoslav Leader. This was obvious to other political personalities as well, for example to Korošec who claimed a month before the 11 December elections that “there were not ele-

<sup>107</sup> Historical Archive of the City of Belgrade, BIA [Security Intelligence Agency] files, Milan Stojadinović Dossier. This material was published in 2005 in the «Novosti» newspaper under the title *Milan Stojadinović u tajnom Arhivu UDBE*, <https://www.novosti.rs/feljton/455/milan-stojadinovic-u-tajnom-arhivu-udbe>. Bogdan Krizman has given an account based on the Serbian and Croatian émigré press in his *Pavelić u bjekstvu*, Globus, Zagreb 1986, pp. 261-288. The best reconstruction of this controversial episode can be found in M. Đurković, *Uvod: enigma Milana Stojadinovića*, in *Milan Stojadinović: politika u vreme globalnih lomova*, cit., pp. 21-26.

<sup>108</sup> M. Stojadinović, *Ni rat ni pakt*, cit., p. 589.



ments for fascism” in Yugoslavia because it was impossible to find a single leader for the Serbs, Croats, Slovenes and Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina<sup>109</sup>. Besides, the case of Dimitrije Ljotić, the leader of fascist ZBOR, which propounded Yugoslav nationalism, although most of its supporters were Serbs, and could not garner more than one per cent of votes at the 1935 and 1938 elections, was self-explanatory. On the other hand, the allegation that Stojadinović fancied himself as a fascist Serb dictator following the break-up of Yugoslavia is based on nothing more than rumours and speculations<sup>110</sup>. Had he been playing with such ideas, their realization would have required Italy’s consent and participation and Ciano would have surely known and made some mention of it. With these considerations in view, Stojadinović emerges as a typical conservative politician who found himself caught up in the era of fascist expansion. The fascist traits in the later phase of his premiership seem rather superficial and brought no real change in the political and social structure of the authoritarian Yugoslav monarchy. On closer examination, his flirtation with fascist trappings was a pragmatic, and even cynical, response to Yugoslavia’s foreign policy requirements in the international environment increasingly dominated by the Axis powers. It was all mostly window dressing effectively employed to cultivate relations with Rome and Berlin. In terms of Costa Pinto’s and Kallis’ theoretical framework, the case of the Stojadinović era in Yugoslavia points to the need to pay attention to the interplay between political pragmatism, especially in foreign affairs, and the extent of the real social and political transformations with a view to coming to a more reliable assessment whose developments might be regarded as genuine fascistisation.

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<sup>109</sup> M. Jovanović-Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, cit., p. 206.

<sup>110</sup> The origins of those are impossible to trace. Korošec said that Prince Paul was angry with Stojadinović after having found out during his visit to Rome in mid-1939 that the latter had allegedly «given statements» according to his own lights concerning the amputation of Croatia from Yugoslavia. (M. Jovanović-Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, cit., p. 282). For the regent’s utterance, most often cited is I. Meštrović, *Uspomene na političke ljude i događaje*, Knjižnica Hrvatske revije, Buenos Aires 1961, pp. 290-291.