

THE SERBIAN RIGHT-WING  
PARTIES AND INTELLECTUALS IN  
THE KINGDOM OF YUGOSLAVIA, 1934–1941

*Edited by*  
Dragan Bakić





INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES  
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## The Yugoslav National Movement ZBOR and Nazi Germany, 1934–1941

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Following the German occupation of Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav National Movement ZBOR and its leader Dimitrije Ljotić became the faces of Serbian collaboration with the Axis powers. Like no other Serbian political movement, they cooperated with the occupiers and served as vanguard forces of the Nazi-installed Milan Nedić regime. Much was written on the movement's politics within occupied Serbia, as well as their military branch, the Serbian Volunteer Corps. Those works, while focusing on the Second World War, correctly traced the roots of collaborationism to the interwar period and the covert ties the ZBOR movement had with various German political figures and organizations during that period. However, these attempts, despite being fully justified, remained superficial and teleological.

Most works concluded that ZBOR had to be under German control even before the war and that it was supported and paid for by the German intelligence services. The nature of German intelligence gathering in interwar Yugoslavia, its successes, and its limitations remain to this day largely unexplored. There is not a single scholarly monograph devoted to this issue. However, following the communist takeover of Yugoslavia in 1945, the new regime was deeply interested in unraveling the German penetration into the structures of the "old Yugoslavia". Its Security Service, the *Uprava državne bezbednosti* (UDB), and its analysts were tasked with this complex assignment. After 15 years and thousands of documents, the results were compiled into a nine-volume,

6,600 pages-long manuscript entitled “German intelligence service.”<sup>1</sup> The manuscript was for internal use only and was envisioned as a training tool for UDB agents. Only in 1977 were some parts of the manuscript published, extensively redacted and without footnotes.<sup>2</sup> This book and the manuscript, when it was declassified in the mid-2000s, both claimed that ZBOR had been part of the German intelligence network in interwar Yugoslavia. This claim has been uncritically accepted in historiography ever since.<sup>3</sup> Only recently, there have been attempts to reexamine it.<sup>4</sup> This paper aims to describe the complex and sometimes contradictory relationship between the Nazi regime and the Yugoslav National Movement ZBOR.

It is practically impossible to tell what the stance of Dimitrije Ljotić towards the National Socialist Party and Germany as a whole was prior to the launch of his journal *Otadžbina* (Fatherland) in mid-1934. Ljotić often wrote about the political situation in Europe and observed the events in neighboring Austria and Germany very closely. He was well aware of the role the new Nazi regime played in the reorganization and dismantling of the Versailles European order. Initially fearing the reigniting of German expansionist tendencies, Ljotić criticized Nazi policies. He openly celebrated Austria’s successful defeat of the Nazi takeover attempt in 1934. Furthermore, he saw both Germany and Italy as threats to their neighbors, whose aggressive foreign policies would only bring trouble to the European continent.<sup>5</sup> National Socialism was seen as a logical consequence of German imperialism, and to

<sup>1</sup> *Nemačka obaveštajna služba, Vols – IX* (Beograd: Uprava državne bezbednosti, III odeljenje, 1955–1960).

<sup>2</sup> Slavko Odić and Slavko Komarica, *Noć i magla: Gestapo u Jugoslaviji* (Zagreb: Centar za informacije i publicitet, 1977).

<sup>3</sup> Most notably in Mladen Stefanović, *Zbor Dimitrija Ljotića* (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Rastko Lompar, „Afera “Tehnička unija” i veze JNP Zbora sa nacističkom Nemačkom 1935-1941,” *Istorija 20. veka*, 2 (2020): 85–102; Rastko Lompar, “Devil at the Gates: German Intelligence Services and Propaganda in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia 1938-1941,” in *The Balkans in the Age of New Imperialism and Beyond*, ed. Vojislav G. Pavlović (Brăila: Editura Istros a Muzeului Brăilei “Carol I”, 2021), 91–107.

<sup>5</sup> Dimitrije Ljotić, “Dogadjaji u Evropi,” *Sabrana dela 1* (Beograd: Zadruga, 2001), 236–237.



him, Hitler was walking in the footsteps of Chancellor Bismarck. As an ideology, National Socialism was nothing more than a curious mix of different and sometimes contradictory impulses, often both novel and ancient in origin, but clearly a “conglomerate.”<sup>6</sup> At that time, Ljotić thought that “National Socialism used old methods and ways, and hence could not rid itself of the shackles imposed by those methods and ways”. Therefore, he concluded that Nazism would soon transform into “pre-war imperialism.”<sup>7</sup>

When the Yugoslav National Movement was formed in late 1934, the German envoy to Belgrade, Viktor von Heeren, reported to Berlin that the new political force on the Yugoslav right had similarities with National Socialism both in its ideology and political style. Ljotić’s subtle criticism of the Nazi regime was not mentioned. It is quite possible that von Heeren was not aware of his writing in the *Otadžbina* journal, at that time somewhat obscure. He did, however, state that the Yugoslav Action, as well as the group of intellectuals around Ratko Parežanin, the director of the Balkan Institute, was quite Germanophile. He was skeptical of the role of Slovene nationalists from the BOJ organization, as they were quite hostile to Austria and, more generally, German influence. All in all, the new political organization was favorably depicted and its popularity grossly overstated. The German envoy estimated its membership at 400,000, a figure ten times higher than their actual number.<sup>8</sup>

The Yugoslav Action, one of the founding organizations of ZBOR, was seen by its enemies as a carbon copy of fascism and Nazism since its creation. The movement was undoubtedly Germanophile, as the envoy noted in his report, but rejected the label of fascism. YA aimed at portraying its nationalism as different from the Italian and German versions because they were “chauvinist and reactionary”, and, therefore, not radical enough. Serving “as puppets of the capitalists”, fascists and national socialists could not protect the interests of the common man.<sup>9</sup> Although the leadership attempted to distance themselves from fascism, many members were openly impressed by the experiences of the

<sup>6</sup> Dimitrije Ljotić, “Stara pesma,” *Sabrana dela* 1, 157–162.

<sup>7</sup> Dimitrije Ljotić, “Bespuće,” *Sabrana dela* 2, 229.

<sup>8</sup> IAB, 1929, box 2, Viktor von Heeren’s report, 20 December 1934.

<sup>9</sup> Tihomir Dožudić, “Naš stav i naš program,” *Jugoslovenska reč*, 13. 8. 1932.

March on Rome and *Machtergreifung*. When ZBOR was formed, it followed in the footsteps of the Yugoslav Action, openly rejecting the fascist label, whilst subtly acknowledging similarities between them.<sup>10</sup> They openly proclaimed: “We should not bring into our Fatherland neither the foreign spirit nor the admiration of foreigners because that would endanger what we deem the most holy, endanger our independence!”<sup>11</sup>

During 1935, ZBOR maintained a stance of indifference and rejection of National Socialism, but that was about to change soon. The Nazi regime seemed strong, successfully overcame its initial challenges and was determined to dismantle the Versailles world order. German troops marched into Rhineland in 1936, after a successful referendum in the Saar area. The years following the Saar referendum and the beginning of the Second World War were marked by increased optimism on the far right of the European political spectrum. The new world order, in which the “impotent” liberal democracy and “evil” communism would be rejected, seemed around the corner. Dimitrije Ljotić and his movement were amongst those who were not immune to the allure of National Socialism. The belief in the “Jewish conspiracy” and the looming communist revolution in Yugoslavia convinced them that they had to rethink their initial skepticism of the German regime. Its social policies served as a model for the perceived decline of morality and social and cultural degeneracy. This turn is evident in the movement’s writings from 1936. According to Ljotić, Hitler and his party succeeded in transforming the German society by “healing” it on the inside and instead of decay brought about social regeneration. Unlike France, ruled by the Popular Front government, the authoritarian German state solved the demographic problems that had previously plagued it.<sup>12</sup> He still maintained some skepticism towards fascism, but the movement as a whole unmistakably adopted a pro-German stance.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See the chapter „True Believers or Latecomers? Dimitrije Ljotić, Zbor and the Nature of Fascism.”

<sup>11</sup> Dimitrije Ljotić, “Pre svega – verni sebi,” *Sabrana dela* 2, 257.

<sup>12</sup> Dimitrije Ljotić, “Žena u današnjici,” *Sabrana dela* 3, 294–300.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. AJ, 38-353-501, Mehmed Samsarija, “Okolo predavanja g. Dimitrija Ljotića u Sarajevu,” *Jugoslovenski list*, 27. 5. 1936; Anonim, “Nova Nemačka,” *Otadžbina*, 13. 8. 1936.

The Germans were very well aware of the praises in the Movement's press. Therefore, they started paying close attention to ZBOR and its leader Dimitrije Ljotić. The Yugoslav correspondent of the *Völkischer Beobachter* and an intelligence agent of the Foreign Intelligence Service, Rudolf von Maltzahn, undertook a lengthy tour of Yugoslavia in April 1936. He wrote a comprehensive report on the political situation in the country and its most important actors. He devoted a lot of attention to ZBOR and managed to meet its leader Ljotić and his deputy Juraj Korenić. He underscored that the Movement's program had many similarities with National Socialism and rightly traced its roots to the Yugoslav Action and the ideology of the King's personal regime. When he met Korenić, he was able to ask for clarification of the Movement's program and goals. In particular, he inquired about some private convictions of the Movement leadership, which could not be publicly stated. Therefore, his report serves as remarkably informative source and a rare window into the inner workings of ZBOR. From Korenić he learned that, in many respects, ZBOR aligned itself with Germany but that there were certain differences between the two movements. Korenić openly stated that, despite being against the Jewish "harmful" influence in Yugoslavia, the Movement would tolerate the existence of the Jewish minority and would not seek to eliminate them. In his words, "we only have eighty thousand Jews in Yugoslavia, and we cannot go as far as Adolf Hitler in Germany."<sup>14</sup>

He was also able to observe Dimitrije Ljotić at a rally in Bosanska Dubica and concluded that his political style was quite extraordinary, as he did not aim to agitate the crowd like Korenić but instead spoke "abstractly." After the rally, he sat down with him and talked about the political situation in the country and the role of Germany. Ljotić harshly criticized Prime Minister Stojadinović as an immoral and deeply corrupt person and claimed that London dictated every step the government took. Equally, he criticized the separatist politics of Vlatko Maček and his Croatian Peasant Party. After that, he turned to the

<sup>14</sup> BArch, Personal Adjutancy of the Feuhrer and Reich Chancellor (Persönliche Adjutantur des Führers und Reichskanzlers), Collection no. NS 10, NS10/223, Rudolf von Maltzahn, Report on the situation in Yugoslavia, 1–20 April 1936. The same document is also kept in IAB, 1929, k-2.

international stage. He openly claimed that Germany was the sole friend of Yugoslavia and that only the Anschluss of Austria could safeguard Yugoslavia against Italian expansionist desires. More importantly, he praised Hitler as “the most popular figure amongst the Yugoslav peasantry”. He stated that he read Hitler’s speeches and was deeply convinced of their truthfulness. The German leader rejected the perfidious language of the diplomats and truthfully spoke directly to other nations, thought Ljotić. He had indeed read Hitler’s speeches and *Mein Kampf*, despite not speaking German, as evidenced by the several dozen times he referenced them in his articles.<sup>15</sup> Von Maltzahn also stated that Hitler was praised at all ZBOR rallies.<sup>16</sup> He assessed that ZBOR had between 100,000 and 150,000 followers and enjoyed significant support both in the army and within the Serbian Orthodox Church. Although he concluded that there was a possibility for ZBOR to come into power, he said that the Movement’s leadership was convinced that this would not occur bottom-up, through the electoral process, but rather through either a military coup or a decision of the Regency Council.<sup>17</sup>

It seems that Von Maltzahn’s report was taken seriously in Berlin, as it was followed by a series of contacts between ZBOR and Nazi officials. It is important, however, to keep in mind that neither Korenić nor Ljotić knew at the time that he was also an intelligence officer. As a correspondent of the largest German newspaper, he had legitimate reasons for meeting with Yugoslav political figures. Prior to meeting Korenić, he also spoke at length with Vlatko Maček and other politicians. Since 1936, many ZBOR members had established contacts of their own with different German institutions and individuals. Stevan Ivanić, a doctor and the Movement’s chief expert on racial issues, visited Germany that year, as a guest of the Robert Koch Institute in Berlin. According to some testimonies, he was in favor of implementing the German racial legislation in Yugoslavia, although the ZBOR move-

<sup>15</sup> BArch, NS 10/223, Rudolf von Maltzahn, Report on the situation in Yugoslavia, 1–20 April 1936.

<sup>16</sup> That was true, especially during the 1938 electoral campaign. See HDA, 1353, Inv. br. 3969.

<sup>17</sup> BArch, NS 10/223, Rudolf von Maltzahn, Report on the situation in Yugoslavia, 1–20 April 1936.

ment never publicly supported it.<sup>18</sup> The following year, he and his wife visited Germany again, this time as guests of the *Kraft durch Freude* (Strength Through Joy) organization.<sup>19</sup> Ratko Parežanin, one of the Movement's chief ideologues, was invited to the 7<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in Nuremberg in 1937. His participation was not justified only because he was calling for increased economic cooperation between Germany and Yugoslavia or because of his sympathies for National Socialism, but also because he was a ZBOR member.<sup>20</sup> Although some ZBOR members also attended the Party Congress in 1935, this was the first occasion when their invitation was justified due to their membership in ZBOR. Furthermore, undoubtedly instructed by Berlin, the pro-Nazi opposition within the German minority in Yugoslavia joined ZBOR in early 1937. The "Erneuerer" led by Jacob Awender remained a part of ZBOR until March 1938, when, alongside other Germans, they were forced to leave the Movement.<sup>21</sup> At the time of their ascension to ZBOR, the local German press questioned the motives of the "Erneuerer" for joining a minor political party.<sup>22</sup>

Very soon after the meeting between Von Maltzahn and Dimi-trije Ljotić, a man by the name of Milan Danić arrived in Yugoslavia. He carried credentials from the NSDAP Office of Foreign Affairs and the State Food Society, and he explained to Ljotić that he was sent by

<sup>18</sup> IAB, BDS, Stevan Ivanić Dossier (I-1117), Report on a discussion with Stevan Ivanić, 26. 4. 1941; Letter by Walter Alberti, 17. 6. 1943; Aleksandar Stojanović, *Ideje, politički projekti i praksa vlade Milana Nedića* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2015), 63–66.

<sup>19</sup> BArch, NS 42/49, Stevan Ivanić Index Card.

<sup>20</sup> Political Archive of Foreign Affairs (Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amtes, hereafter PA AA), Referat D/ German Department (Referat D/Abteilung Inland), Collection no. RZ 214, R 98692, List of Yugoslav Personalities invited to the Party Congress 1937, 7 July 1937.

<sup>21</sup> PA AA, Political Department (Politische Abteilung), Collection no. RZ 211, R 103374, Note on ZBOR, 12 October 1938; Zoran Janjetović, *Deca careva, pastorčad kraljeva. Nacionalne manjine u Jugoslaviji* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2005), 201; Petar Kačavenda, *Nemci u Jugoslaviji 1918–1945* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1991), 18–19; Dušan Biber, *Nacizem in Nemci v Jugoslaviji* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1966); Svetomir Paunović, *Sećanja svedoka jednog vremena* (Beograd: S. R. Paunović, 2004), 155.

<sup>22</sup> "Die erneuerten Erneuerer," *Deutsche Presse*, 21. 2. 1937.

these two organizations to establish economic ties between them and the cooperative movement under Dimitrije Ljotić. How Danić, whose real name was Alfred Diamantstein, a Jew and a former communist, managed to gain the trust of Walter Malletke from the NSDAP Office of Foreign Affairs and Beer from the State Food Society remains a mystery.<sup>23</sup> Regardless, both sides agreed that he would be the middle man in these negotiations, although Ljotić stated that he could only discuss economic and not political matters.<sup>24</sup> Milan Danić spent a few months (April–August 1936) in Yugoslavia, negotiating with several experts and companies.<sup>25</sup> He visited Smederevo, Belgrade, and Zagreb and established contacts with ZBOR members and engineers Marko Jurinčić

<sup>23</sup> Alfred Diamantstein (Milan Danić) was born in 1896 in Osijek. He was problematic in his youth and took part in anti-Serb riots in Zagreb in 1914. During revolutionary times he lived in Hungary and became Bela Kun's delegate to Yugoslavia due to being fluent in Serbo-Croatian. Using the false name of "Nenad," he crossed the border and entered Yugoslavia. He arrived in Zagreb and established contacts not only with the local communist cell, but with Croat separatists as well. According to later testimonies, he was not very popular in communist circles because of his excessive partying, and he was also thought to be a police provocateur. However, he was arrested and sentenced to prison in the first major anticommunist process in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1920. He then vanished from the spotlight until he once again arrived in the country as the envoy of the Nazi regime, this time using the name Milan Danić. During the Second World War, he was arrested and executed by the German forces in 1941 or 1942. Cf. Toma Milenković, "Vladimir Čopić u jugoslovenskom radničkom pokretu," in *Vladimir Čopić: život i djelo* (Rijeka: CHR, 1978), 110–113; Zorica Stipetić, *Argumenti za revoluciju – August Cesarec* (Zagreb: CDC, 1982), 110–113; Kosta Nikolić, *Boljševizacija KPJ 1919–1929* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1994), 38–40; Toma Milenković, "Nekoliko dokumenata o delatnosti Jugoslovenskih internacionalista u Madjarskoj Sovjetskoj Republici," *Prilozi za istoriju socijalizma*, br. 6 (1969): 342; Vujica Kovačev, *Na zajedničkom frontu revolucije* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1987), 140; Milan Koljanin, *Jevreji i antisemitizam u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1918–1941*, 281; *Nemačka obaveštajna služba*, knj. 4 (Beograd: Uprava državne bezbednosti, III odeljenje, 1959), 772.

<sup>24</sup> BArch, Office of the Fuehrer of the NSDAP, Bouhler Department (Kanzlei des Fuehrers der NSDAP, Dienststelle Bouhler), Collection no. NS 51, NS 51/5, Walter Malletke, Note on Yugoslavia, 17 August 1936.

<sup>25</sup> BArch, German Revision and Trust Agency Joint-stock Company (Deutsche Revisions – und Treuhand AG), Collection no. R 8135, R 8135/1651, German Revision Society Report on Technische Union, 25 May 1937.

and Marsel Srkulj, who would later lead the joint-stock company Technische Union in Zagreb. Due to internal struggles within the Nazi regime, in August 1936, control over Danić was taken from the NSDAP Office of Foreign Affairs and State Food Society and transferred over to Gauleiter of Prussia Erich Koch. Koch was under the supervision of the highly influential Herman Goering.<sup>26</sup> In late 1936, the negotiations resulted in the simultaneous creation of two joint-stock companies with the same name (Technische Union), one in Zagreb and one in Berlin.<sup>27</sup> These two companies were supposed to cooperate primarily through the clearing exchange of Yugoslav agricultural products (most notably plums from the Ljotić cooperative) for German industrial goods, but also have wide-ranging cooperation in the fields of transport, mining, electrification, etc.<sup>28</sup> German sources reveal that this whole operation was seen as a pilot program that would be employed elsewhere. Initial talks were carried out with individuals and organizations from China and Turkey as well. The first step in future cooperation was the export of 300 train carriages of Yugoslav plums. This load was supposed to be supplied by the cooperative managed by Dimitrije Ljotić.<sup>29</sup> Although some issues arose, the negotiations about the export of plums were successfully completed, and Erich Koch seemed pleased. The biggest issue, however, was the fact that the mentioned cooperative could not supply the said amount of produce, which meant that ZBOR could not remain the exclusive partner of the Germans. Nevertheless, Koch thought that this arrangement would be beneficial for the German side, even if it damaged the reputation of the ZBOR movement.<sup>30</sup> The negotiations proved that ZBOR, although an ideologically close and therefore suitable partner, was not capable of fulfilling the ambitiously stated goals of the Technische Union. The final agreement was signed in December 1936.

<sup>26</sup> BArch, NS 51/5, Walter Malletke, Note on Yugoslavia, 17 August 1936.

<sup>27</sup> AJ, Ministry of Trade and Industry of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Ministarstvo trgovine i industrije Kraljevine Jugoslavije), Collection no. 65, box 1484, Decision, 30 December 1936.

<sup>28</sup> AJ, 115, Union Draft Agreement.

<sup>29</sup> BArch, NS 51/5, Discussion with Gross, Department of Horticulture, 18. 8. 1936.

<sup>30</sup> BArch, NS 51/5, Note on a Discussion with Gauleiter Koch, 18. 8. 1936.

However, the agreed provisions could not be met, as a scandal broke out before anything concrete happened. One of the members of Parliament, Života Milanović, in his speech of 30 January 1937 accused ZBOR of being covertly financed by Germany and called on the government to stop further German infiltration in the country. In order to prove his claims, he stated that members of ZBOR were the founders of the Zagreb-based Technische Union.<sup>31</sup> He also revealed that the envoy who had mediated between Germany and ZBOR was not in fact called Milan Danić but Alfred Diamantstein. He dismissed the alleged economic agreement as nothing more but a cover for the illegal financing of ZBOR. His speech was published on the following day in the main Belgrade daily, *Politika*, and later reprinted in countless other publications. ZBOR's secretary responded two days later and rejected Milanović's accusations.<sup>32</sup> In February, a bitter debate erupted between the two men in *Politika*.<sup>33</sup> Over the following months, ZBOR was attacked as the German "fifth column" by a wide range of ideological enemies. In addition to communists and the left-wing press, ZBOR was criticized by the organs of the Croatian Peasant Party, Yugoslav Radical Union and other political organizations.<sup>34</sup> The accusations in the press

<sup>31</sup> AJ, 65, 1484.

<sup>32</sup> Velibor Jonić, "Da li 'Zbor' g. Ljotića prima pomoć od Nemačke?," *Politika*, 2. 2. 1937.

<sup>33</sup> Most important articles by Života Milanović: "Da li 'Zbor' g. Ljotića prima u svrhu agitacije pomoć iz inostranstva?," *Politika*, 4. 2. 1937; "Pozadina afere Dijamanštajn – Tehnička unija – Zbor," *Politika*, 19. 2. 1937; "Narodni poslanik g. Života Milanović tvrdi da je 'Zbor' g. Ljotića diskvalifikovan za javni život," *Vreme*, 23. 2. 1937; "U svom odgovoru 'Zboru' narodni poslanik g. Života Milanović ističe da su u otkrićima u vezi sa 'Tehničkom unijom' dokazane njegove tvrdnje o vezama 'Zbora' sa inostranstvom," *Politika*, 26. 2. 1937; For the main articles from a ZBOR point of view: "Zašto nas kleveću?," *Vihor*, 20. 2. 1937; "Drug Ljotić o Tehničkoj uniji," *Otađzbina*, 27. 2. 1937; „Kleveta i nasilja,” *Vihor*, 8. 3. 1937; "Klevetnicima," *Zbor*, 15. 3. 1937; Lj., "I 'Politika' tera politiku," *Vihor*, 20. 3. 1937; S. Ignjatović, "Nova izjava g. Ljotića o aferi," *Pravda*, 24. 3. 1937. ZBOR leaflets about the affair were censored by the authorities. See HDA, 1353, Inv. br. 3969.

<sup>34</sup> Kuburić, "Karijera jednog provokatora," *Proleter*, 5. 5. 1937; IAB, 1929, k-7, S. N. K., "Opasnost fašizma," *Narodno kolo*, 25. 2. 1937; Dimitrije Ljotić, "Slučaj g. Adama Pribičevića," *Sabrana dela* 9, 173; IAB, 1929, k-7, Leaflet: Yugoslav National Movement ZBOR and Croats.



were sometimes settled in court. ZBOR successfully sued the dailies *Vreme* and *Politika* but dropped its lawsuit against the Croatian politician Većeslav Vilder.<sup>35</sup> ZBOR was mostly accused of being a fascist party “in the Germans’ pocket,” but some criticisms went even further. Sometimes Ljotić was also accused of sowing the seeds of division within the cooperative movement and of financial misconduct.<sup>36</sup>

The Technische Union affair, as it became known in Yugoslavia, very quickly drew international attention. The British envoy to Belgrade informed his government about the affair, stating that it was his conviction that ZBOR was indeed financed by Germany.<sup>37</sup> The French<sup>38</sup> and Czechoslovak<sup>39</sup> newspapers were especially interested in the affair, but it was reported in other countries as well. Radio Moscow and Radio Strasbourg also devoted broadcasts to this topic.<sup>40</sup> Several contemporary antifascist analyses of German expansionism also included accounts of the affair. The most notable among them were the books by Hubert Beuvre-Mery (1939) and Norbert Mühlen (1938), because both of them contained certain claims found nowhere else. Beuvre-Mery placed the Technische Union within the larger context of German advancement in Hungary, Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Egypt and Persia.

<sup>35</sup> M. Bojić, *Jugoslavenski narodni pokret Zbor* (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1996), 116; “Vreme je osudjeno radi klevete Zboral,” *Vihor*, 6. 5. 1937; “Da se ne zaboravi,” *Samouprava*, 27. 10. 1937.

<sup>36</sup> S. Z., “Istina o zadružnom i političkom radu Dimitrija Ljotića,” *Severna straža*, 18. 2. 1937.

<sup>37</sup> Živko Avramovski, *Britanci o Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, knj. 2 (Beograd/Zagreb: Arhiv Jugoslavije/Globus, 1986), 469.

<sup>38</sup> “Yougoslavie,” *Le Temps*, 2. 3. 1937; „Manifestation d’ antifascistes a Belgrade,” *Le Treveil*, 2. 3. 1937; “Manifestation antifasciste a Belgrade contre un agent hitlerien,” *Le Populaire*, 1. 3. 1937.

<sup>39</sup> AJ, 38-353-501, “Technische Union chce stavet most pres Dunaj,” *Narodni Oslobozteni*, 7. 3. 1937; “Zakaz fašističke mladeže v Jugoslavii,” *Rude Pravo*, 5. 3. 1937; “Protifašističke demonstrace v Belehrade,” *Narodni Oslobozteni*, 2. 3. 1937; “Demonstrace v Belehrade pro aferu Technische Union,” *Boudelnik Narodnich Listy*, 1. 3. 1937; “Protifašisticke boure v Jugoslavii,” *Rondelni Ranni Noviny*, 1. 3. 1937; “Odhalení rozsahle hahnkrajclerske propagandy v Jugoslavii,” *Nova doba*, 27. 2. 1937; „Afera Technische Union,” *Hospodar Rozhled*, 4. 3. 1937.

<sup>40</sup> PA AA, RZ 211, R 103374, Report on a Radio Strasbourg Broadcast, 20: 45, undated; Report on a Radio Moscow Broadcast, 9 March 1937.

ZBOR's map of Greater Yugoslavia that includes the Italian town of Zadar and Istria and the South Slav Bulgaria, 1940 (Courtesy of the National Library of Slovenia, Dimitrije Ljotić, *Drama sodobnega človeštva*, Ljubljana: ZBOR, 1940)

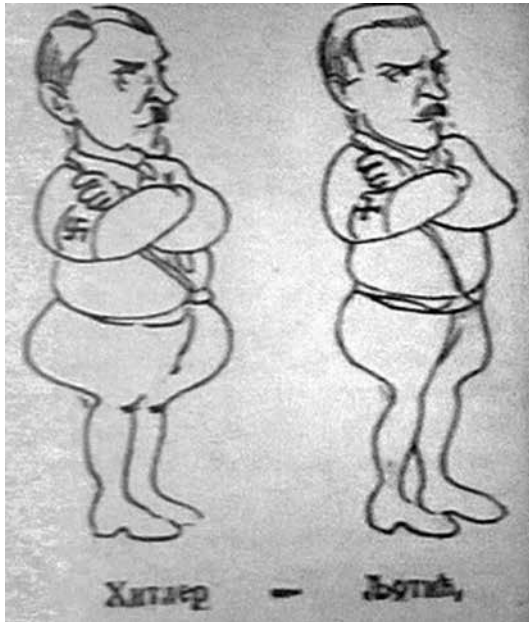


Vodja govori...

Ljotić giving a speech, April 1938 (Courtesy of the National Library of Slovenia, journal *Zbor*, 14. 4. 1938)



Dimitrije Ljotić and ZBOR members in Slovenia, recoloured, April 1938  
(Courtesy of the National Library of Slovenia, journal *Zbor*, 14. 4. 1938)



Ljotić depicted as Hitler's clone in the leftist satirical journal *Ošišani Jež*  
(Courtesy of the National Library of Serbia, journal *Ošišani jež*, 5. 10. 1935)

In his opinion, ZBOR was financed by the Technische Union in order to strengthen German political influence in Yugoslavia. He, however, had a novel explanation for the mysterious role of Danić/Diamantstein. He claimed that Diamantstein, by allying himself with the Nazis, aimed at “helping the German Jews who had fled to Yugoslavia, by freeing their assets held in Germany.”<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, Mühlen stated that Germany financed ZBOR by overpaying the market price of plums. In that way, Ljotić’s cooperative movement would benefit whilst Yugoslavia *de facto* paid for the Movement’s campaign against the regime given that the exchange was done through clearing accounts.<sup>42</sup>

In essence, the anti-ZBOR campaign brought together three different political and ideological groups, all of which had their own motives and goals. Those groups were the members of the Yugoslav Radical Union, the communists and the democratically inclined opposition circles. Members of the YRU, who had, in my opinion, launched the affair initially, exclusively criticized ZBOR and were very careful not to attack Nazi Germany and Yugoslav-German economic ties, which were seen as beneficial. Unlike them, the communists attacked both ZBOR and Germany, whilst framing the whole affair as evidence of the ongoing fascistization of the Yugoslav society.<sup>43</sup> Finally, the democratic opposition placed the Technische Union enterprise within the framework of the aggressive German foreign policy in the Balkans. Although they had initiated the affair, Prime Minister Stojadinović and his followers quickly lost control over the narrative, and the scandal started shaping into a criticism of Nazism and Germany, especially in the international press. Having this in mind, as early as February 1937, certain pro-regime periodicals, primarily within the Zagreb financial circles, launched a damage control campaign. In their texts, they claimed that the scandal as a whole had been overblown and that it was not damag-

<sup>41</sup> Hubert Beuvre-Mery, *Vers la plus grande Allemagne* (Paris: Hartmann, 1939); The Serbian edition is referenced here: H. Bev-Meri, *K najvećoj Nemačkoj* (Zagreb: b. i., b. g.), 40–42.

<sup>42</sup> Norbert Mühlen, *Der Zauberer. Leben und Anleihen des dr. Hjalmar Horace Greeley Schacht* (Zürich: Europa Verlag, 1938), 136–138; Jacob Hoptner, *Jugoslavija u krizi 1934–1941* (Rijeka: Otokar Keršovani, 1972), 130.

<sup>43</sup> “Medjunarodna komunistička zavera,” *Otadžbina*, 20. 3. 1937.

ing to Yugoslavia in any way, but that “pointless politicization” would only harm Yugoslav-German relations.<sup>44</sup>

In any case, the ambitiously envisioned project of the Technische Union was doomed from the very beginning of the political scandal in January 1937. Whilst the polemic in the *Politika* was ongoing, Ljotić began distancing himself from the Technische Union and claiming that he had in fact abandoned the whole project in December 1936, despite no evidence in the sources to support his claims.<sup>45</sup> The Technische Union joint-stock company in Zagreb publicly stated that it would not abandon the promised goals and would not be dissolved, but ultimately the damage proved to be too great for the venture to survive. In order to evade bad press, in July 1937, it was renamed “Organizacijo i privredno Joint-Stock Company” and quietly erased from the Registry of Joint-Stock Companies the following year.<sup>46</sup> The Berlin Technische Union suffered the same fate. The Yugoslav fiasco doomed the cooperation with the interested parties in Turkey and China, so the whole project was abandoned in May 1937.<sup>47</sup>

Despite its outcome, the question of who initiated the affair remains. Života Milanović was hardly a political mastermind. Already in April 1936, he was embroiled in a new corruption scandal, this time targeting two political leaders from Osijek.<sup>48</sup> It is almost certain that he was only a spokesperson whose job was to make the affair public and that he gave no statements on the Technische Union after the very public campaign in February 1937. The previously mentioned manuscript of the communist state security *German Intelligence Service* saw the reason behind the affair in the internal struggles within the Nazi regime. According to the manuscript, members of the NSDAP Office of Foreign Affairs, unhappy with the Koch takeover, supplied their leader

<sup>44</sup> I. M., “Povodom jedne kampanje,” *Jugoslovenski Lloyd*, 20. 2. 1937; x-x, “Jedna suvišna afera,” *Jugosloven*, 6. 3. 1937.

<sup>45</sup> IAB, BIA, Velibor Jonić Dossier; Miodrag Zečević, *Dokumenta sa sudjenja ravnogorskom pokretu*, knj. 1 (Beograd: SUBNOR, 2001), 1072–1073.

<sup>46</sup> AJ, 65-1484, Change of Rules, 7 July 1937; H. Bev-Meri, *K najvećoj Nemačkoj*, 42.

<sup>47</sup> BArch, R 8135/1651, German Revision Society Report on Technische Union, 25 May 1937.

<sup>48</sup> Života Milanović, *Koga su najmili da ih brani?* (B. m: b. i, 1938).

Rosenberg with *kompromat* on Danić and the affair. Allegedly, Rosenberg attempted to use these documents against Koch, but Hermann Goering sent it to the Yugoslav Prime Minister. The material given to Stojadinović was “heavily redacted” and everything to do with internal conflicts in Germany was removed.<sup>49</sup> This “gift” was then used by Stojadinović to successfully damage the reputation of Dimitrije Ljotić and his movement. Although somewhat based on provable truths, this explanation is, in my opinion, false. Conflicts within the Nazi regime did play out in July 1936, but they were carefully kept from the Yugoslav partners. Although hardly satisfied with the way the events unfolded, Walter Malletke was forced to phone the Yugoslav side and recommend Erich Koch and his new envoy.<sup>50</sup> In a report, Malletke stated that he did so, so that “the foreigners would not find out that there were conflicts within the party.” Therefore, it is evident that the German side did not want a scandal, as also evidenced by the fact that parallel negotiations were held with representatives of China and Turkey. Furthermore, sources undoubtedly reveal that Koch was acting with the support and orders of Goering himself, who had no reason to sabotage his actions.<sup>51</sup>

How intense the fallout from the affair was is best demonstrated by the reports of the German envoy to Belgrade Von Heeren. He and the Foreign Ministry were kept completely in the dark during the negotiations, and he used his daily reports on the propaganda campaign against Germany and ZBOR to air his frustrations.<sup>52</sup> He stated multiple times that the Ministry should intervene and stop any further involvement of other German governmental and party agencies in the affairs in Yugoslavia. Indeed, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had already in mid-February 1937 notified the Ministry of Propaganda not to com-

<sup>49</sup> Mladen Stefanović, *Zbor Dimitrija Ljotića*, 68–69.

<sup>50</sup> BArch, NS 51/5, Walter Malletke, Note on Yugoslavia, 17 August 1936.

<sup>51</sup> BArch, NS 51/5, Note on a Discussion with Gauleiter Koch, 18 August 1936.

<sup>52</sup> Viktor von Heeren dispatched six reports during February 1937 in which he exhaustively reported on the press campaign. Simultaneously, von Matzahn also sent his reports, with similar conclusions. Cf. PA AA, RZ 211, R103374; BArch, NS 51/5.

ment on the events unfolding in Yugoslavia.<sup>53</sup> Viktor von Heeren thought that this affair proved how damaging for German interests the contacts between party members and local actors could be if they were done without the intermediacy of the legation. In his view, anti-German circles in Yugoslavia, as well as the legations of France and Czechoslovakia, had shrewdly used the affair to hinder the further development of Yugoslav-German relations.<sup>54</sup>

On the other hand, the Yugoslav government started pressuring Germany to distance itself from ZBOR and Dimitrije Ljotić and made this a prerequisite of any further cooperation. Prime Minister Stojadinović personally told Rudolf von Maltzahn that German interference in Yugoslav internal matters damaged the good relations between the two countries. In his report, Von Maltzahn stated that “within Government circles, everybody believes that we are financing [ZBOR].”<sup>55</sup> Equally, he criticized the “Erneuerer” who started appearing at ZBOR rallies.<sup>56</sup> In stark contrast with his praise of ZBOR in April 1936, he now recommended that Germany totally distanced itself from the Movement because the government was ready to crush it with “severe police measures.”<sup>57</sup> Indeed, in March 1937, the Yugoslav National Movement ZBOR was placed under police surveillance, and local administrations were advised to deny requests for their public appearances.<sup>58</sup> The Berlin correspondent of the Yugoslav Central Press Bureau, Miloš Crnjanski, also unofficially worked on resolving the newly arisen issues. On 21 February 1937, he visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and warned against

<sup>53</sup> PA AA, RZ 211, R103374, Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry for Propaganda, 17 February 1937.

<sup>54</sup> PA AA, RZ 211, R103374, Viktor von Heeren, Report, 19 February 1937.

<sup>55</sup> BArch, NS 51/5, Rudolf von Maltzan, Report, 11 February 1937.

<sup>56</sup> When ZBOR organized a rally in the Belgrade cinema Triglav, communists attempted to disrupt it. In the ensuing brawl, Erneuerer participated on the side of ZBOR. The rally was organized so that ZBOR could defend itself against the accusations. The communist attack was most probably condoned by the police. IAB, 1929, k-7, The Truth about the Triglav Rally, 28. April 1937; Slavko Ćuruvija, *Ibeovacija, Vlado Dapčević* (Beograd: Filip Višnjić, 1990), 40–44.

<sup>57</sup> BArch, NS 51/5, Rudolf von Maltzan, Report, 24 February 1937; Report, 4 March 1937.

<sup>58</sup> HDA, 1353, Inv. br. 3969, Circular of the Banovina of Sava, 4 March 1937.

anti-German propaganda in Yugoslavia, which was coordinated by “Popular Front circles and the French Legation”. He advised the German side to reach out to Belgrade so that the affair would end without further damage to Yugoslav-German relations.<sup>59</sup> Several months earlier, he had already criticized Dimitrije Ljotić and his movement in a discussion with Rosenberg himself. He reported on that to the Yugoslav Prime Minister: “I have already told Mr. Rosenberg in Nuremberg what I think about our fascists and their leader. He has only the foggiest idea about the role of Mr. Ljotić.”<sup>60</sup>

I would argue that the affair was launched by Prime Minister Stojadinović and his allies, most notably Vojislav Djordjević, a long-time enemy of Dimitrije Ljotić within the cooperative movement. Ljotić had been expelled from the Central Union of Agricultural Cooperatives, led by Djordjević, already in 1934. He had since then organized his own cooperative movement and openly called Djordjević corrupt and referred to him as “the gravedigger of the cooperative movement.” In 1936, he attempted to set up his own sugar factory, which brought him at odds not only with the Central Union but with the “sugar cartel,” i.e., the guild of sugar manufacturers. Due to heavy pressure from the government, his factory failed, and then Ljotić started organizing agricultural protests in front of the government buildings in Belgrade in January 1937.<sup>61</sup> Having this in mind, the planned cooperation with Germany, which would have undoubtedly strengthened his dissident cooperative movement, was quite dangerous to the Yugoslav regime. One should not forget that in 1937 similar clashes between the fascist opposition and the authoritarian regimes in Hungary and Romania also took place. Despite permanently harming the reputation of the Yugoslav National Movement ZBOR, the Technische Union did not inflict long-lasting damage on the Yugoslav-German relations. German representatives simply limited their contacts to the regime.<sup>62</sup> The members of

<sup>59</sup> PA AA, RZ 211, R103374, Report on a Discussion with the Yugoslav Press Attaché, 21 February 1937.

<sup>60</sup> AJ, 37-30-217, Miloš Crnjanski to Milan Stojadinović, 31 December 1937.

<sup>61</sup> Dimitrije Ljotić, *Priča o šećeru iliti gorka istina* (Smederevo: p. i., 1939), 44–45.

<sup>62</sup> Even in 1940, accusations against ZBOR did not disappear. See IAB, 1929, k-3, Leaflet: Student Committee for the Defense of State, 13 April 1939; Dimitrije Ljotić,



the NSDAP Office of Foreign Affairs who had initiated the negotiations with ZBOR in 1936 openly participated in the electoral campaign of Prime Minister Stojadinović in 1938.<sup>63</sup>

However, ever since the Technische Union scandal, the Germans were wary of any public endorsement of ZBOR. When Rosenberg's journal *Weltkampf* (World Struggle) planned to publish a special issue dedicated to all fascist movements in the world, they consulted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on whether or not to include ZBOR in the issue. The Ministry concluded that ZBOR had "clear similarities to Nazism" but that the movement itself was against Stojadinović, and therefore "Reich institutions should not pay any attention to it".<sup>64</sup> Similarly, when the Nazi Party was preparing the Nuremberg Convention for the year 1939, ZBOR, alongside the Romanian Iron Guard and the Hungarian Arrow Cross, was expected to participate. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs concluded that ZBOR members could take part in the event, but not the movement as a whole and not in uniforms. This time, however, Stojadinović would not be invited because he was then in opposition to the ruling regime. This party convention, ironically called the "Convention of Peace", was cancelled after the breakout of the Second World War, so no ZBOR members participated in it.<sup>65</sup> It seems that not all contacts between the Germans and ZBOR members were terminated in 1939: in a letter sent to Prince Regent Paul in June 1940, Ljotić attempted to convince the Prince that the Germans would not protect the former Prime Minister Stojadinović and that they would not tolerate either Croatian separatism or Italian expansionism. He mentioned that a "friend of his" had met with the DNB reporter Walter

"Jutarnjem listu i sličnima što su od pre neki dan počeli misliti na državu," *Sabrana dela* 8, 260–266; "Tehnička unija, Marsel Srkulj i Zbor," *Naš put*, 28. 1. 1940.

<sup>63</sup> Bojan Simić, *Propaganda Milana Stojadinovića* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2007), 162–163.

<sup>64</sup> PA AA, RZ 211, R103374, NSDAP Office of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 3 October 1938; Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the NSDAP Office of Foreign Affairs, 12 October 1938.

<sup>65</sup> PA AA, RZ 214, R 99152, Invite List for the Party Convention 1939; PA AA, RZ 214, R 99153, Note on the Participation of Fascist Parties on the Convention 1939, 19 July 1939; Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Stance Towards the Participation of Fascist Parties on the Convention 1939, 20 July 1939.

Gruber, who conveyed this message.<sup>66</sup> After ZBOR had been outlawed in October 1940, following a violent clash with the communists at the University, the German news agency DNB praised the movement, claiming that “philo-Semites and freemasons” in the Yugoslav government initiated the ban.<sup>67</sup>

Much more than the fallout of the Technische Union affair, ZBOR’s reputation in Germany was hurt by the movement’s stance on the outbreak of the Second World War and its criticism of German imperialism. ZBOR was indifferent towards the occupation of Czechoslovakia, and some of its members portrayed the country as “a victim of western democracies and Bolshevik Russia” instead of Germany.<sup>68</sup> Ljotić, owing in part to his deep-seated anti-Semitism, was convinced that the Second World War would bring about the demise of the European civilization and usher in an era of destruction and slavery to Jewish masters.<sup>69</sup> He was convinced that Yugoslavia had to remain out of the war, because it would spell its doom. Therefore, he was a staunch advocate of Yugoslav neutrality. He wrote: “The new war will bring new hardships, and perhaps even the definitive downfall of the whole Christian culture and civilization.”<sup>70</sup> When the war, nevertheless, commenced, he became convinced of German responsibility. Ljotić criticized Adolf Hitler’s messianism, which had blinded him and led him to start the war, whose end would bring victory to Bolshevism and the Jews.<sup>71</sup> He disregarded German pretenses and openly claimed that Hitler and Germany were responsible for the outbreak of the war.<sup>72</sup> Hitler and Mussolini were

<sup>66</sup> AJ, 797, reel 15, photographs 420–422, Dimitrije Ljotić to Prince Paul, 22 June 1940.

<sup>67</sup> BArch, German Foreign Scientific Institute (Deutsches Auslandswissenschaftliches Institut), Collection no. R 4902, R4902/4283, *Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro Bericht*, 4. 11. 1940.

<sup>68</sup> IAB, 1929, k-3, ZBOR Leaflet: Citizens!

<sup>69</sup> Dimitrije Ljotić, “Razmišljanja o ratu,” *Sabrana dela* 2, 112–117.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>71</sup> Dimitrije Ljotić, “Bez naslova,” *Sabrana dela* 7, 6. Dimitrije Ljotić, “Jedno shvatanje neutralnosti,” *Sabrana dela* 9, 41.

<sup>72</sup> Dimitrije Ljotić, “Slabi izgledi za mir,” *Sabrana dela* 8, 195. Several ZBOR members went even further. For example, Živko Brković called Hitler and Mussolini “eternal” enemies of Yugoslavia. HDA, 1353, Inv. br. 3969, Gendarmerie Command to the Banovina of Croatia, Department of State Security, 12 March 1940.

unwittingly acting, according to Ljotić, as “unconscious Jewish agents”, who, blinded by anti-Semitism, in fact helped the “Jewish agenda.”<sup>73</sup> He stressed that they were shortsighted and did not recognize the true nature of the war, failing to see who would ultimately benefit from it. Germany, therefore, became “a danger to small and middle-sized states in Europe”, like Yugoslavia.<sup>74</sup> In protest, ZBOR members Mihailo Olčan and Milorad Mojić left the German-Yugoslav society.<sup>75</sup>

Unlike 1934, the criticism of German imperialism during 1939/1940 was limited to imperialism and did not include the ideology of National Socialism.<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, ZBOR was in favor of a strong response towards the danger of war. One of the movement’s propagandists, Janko Vujić, wrote to the Minister of Defense and suggested that lists of Yugoslav Germans, who should be taken as hostages in case of war, had to be compiled.<sup>77</sup> Ljotić called on the members to answer the mobilization order on the eve of the conflict.<sup>78</sup> This criticism of Nazi Germany and the “Greater Yugoslav stance” led to ZBOR being included in the Index Card database of the enemies of the state of the Reich Security Main Office.<sup>79</sup> Paradoxically, due to their previous contacts with Germany, some ZBOR members were considered “German agents” by the Yugoslav police.<sup>80</sup>

The invasion of Yugoslavia and the subsequent occupation of Serbia convinced both the German occupation authorities and the ZBOR movement that they needed each other. Dimitrije Ljotić and his followers needed the Germans in order to rise to power, whereas they needed

<sup>73</sup> Dimitrije Ljotić, “Spoljni pregled,” *Sabrana dela* 7, 83; Dimitrije Ljotić, “Zaključak,” *Sabrana dela* 7, 212; Dimitrije Ljotić, “Jedno cinično jevrejsko priznanje,” *Sabrana dela* 7, 252; Dimitrije Ljotić, “Pogrešan račun g. Hitlera,” *Sabrana dela* 8, 23; Dimitrije Ljotić, “Drama savremenog čovečanstva,” *Sabrana dela* 12, 57–125.

<sup>74</sup> Dimitrije Ljotić, “Nove opasnosti,” *Sabrana dela* 8, 244.

<sup>75</sup> IAB, BDS, Mihailo Olčan Dossier (O-39), Note, 24 September 1942.

<sup>76</sup> Some ZBOR members also praised Germany during that period. See Roko Kaleb, “Tajna nemačkog uspeha,” *Naš put*, 21. 6. 1940.

<sup>77</sup> AJ, 115, Janko Vujić to the Ministry of Defense, 11 May 1940.

<sup>78</sup> IAB, 1929, k-7, Leaflet: Dear comrade!

<sup>79</sup> BArch, R58/ 1144.

<sup>80</sup> Those were Ratko Živadinović, Zoran Vuković and Boško Kostić. See IAB, BIA, Nikola Gubarev Dossier.

(somewhat) trustworthy local partners. Despite undeniable ideological similarities and mutual sympathies, I argue that, during the interwar period, ZBOR was never “in German service.” The Technische Union Joint-Stock Company was envisioned as an economic endeavor, which was supposed to supplement existing bilateral agreements and simultaneously benefit an ideologically close movement. Even though it seems quite improbable that ZBOR was part of the interwar German intelligence network in Yugoslavia, it is much harder to decide if this was also the case during the Second World War. For example, several high-ranking ZBOR members were certainly in German service during the war, most notably Ljotić’s personal secretary and translator Boško Kostić.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Cf. IAB, BIA, Ludwig Teichmann Dossier; HDA, SDS, šifra 11.5, 1, Milan Banić, Ljotić’s ZBOR and ZBOR members, 16 December 1957; Branislav Božović and Mladen Stefanović, *Milan Aćimović, Dragi Jovanović, Dimitrije Ljotić* (Zagreb: CIP, 1985).