

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

Edited by
Dragan Bakić



INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES
OF THE SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS

SPECIAL EDITIONS 155

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BELGRADE

2022

Publisher
Institute for Balkan Studies
Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts
Belgrade, Knez Mihailova 35/IV
www.balkaninstitut.com
e-mail: balkinst@bi.sanu.ac.rs

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ISBN 978-86-7179-121-2

Prepress and Print ∴ Interklima-grafika, Vrnjci

This research was supported by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia,
PROMIS, Grant no. 6062708, SerbRightWing.

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Фонд за науку
Републике Србије

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, PROMIS, Grant no. 6062708, SerbRightWing.

As indicated above, this edited volume was made possible by the financial backing of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia and has come into being as a major result of the project entitled *The Serbian Right-Wing Parties and Intellectuals in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 1934–1941* (acronym SerbRightWing), the Principal Investigator of which is the editor of the volume, Dragan Bakić. The completed project and, consequently, the book are products of the efforts of five people that comprised the project team. It was my great pleasure to cooperate with four of my dear colleagues. They are the authors of the chapters in this volume, and I will list their names as they appear here: Rastko Lompar, Research Assistant, and Dušan Fundić, Research Associate, both my colleagues from the Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts; Svetlana Šeatović, Principal Research Fellow at the Institute for Literature and Arts; and Vladimir Cvetković, Senior Research Associate at the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory. I can only hope that they have found our joint efforts to complete this volume as satisfying as I have, and I extend my warmest gratitude to them for all their hard work, patience and valued assistance on many occasions.

It is customary to thank the staff of all the institutions in which the researchers had the pleasure to work, and I am pleased to do so and acknowledge the professionalism and good humor of a number of archivists and librarians in a range of archives and libraries (listed in the Bibliography) that facilitated the research of our team members. But

one institution and its staff deserve special praise. It was in the Archives of Yugoslavia that the bulk of the research was done by the three historians that contributed to this volume (Dušan Fundić, Rastko Lompar and Dragan Bakić). As it happened, our archival investigations had to be carried out in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and, with all the restrictions imposed on accessing material in the reading room, it seemed that this would be virtually impossible to do. Indeed, it would have been impossible if it had not been for the understanding and unstinting support of the Director of the Archives of Yugoslavia, Dr. Milan Terzić, who appreciated the project's time constraints and made special arrangements for the team members to complete their research. Without his help, this volume would have never seen the light of day. Along with their director, we are indebted to the archivists Tamara Ivanović and Ivana Božović, in particular, for their kind assistance during the sweltering summer months of 2021 when most of our research was done.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and its director and the person in charge of publications, Prof. Vojislav G. Pavlović, for including this volume in the publication plan. For the unfailing administrative support my thanks, as always, goes to our inimitable office assistant, Ms. Radmila Pejić. I am thankful to my colleagues from the Institute, Junior Research Assistants Andjelija Miladinović and Marija Milinković, for taking the time to compile the index for the entire volume. Last but not least, I am grateful to the reviewers, Academician Ljubodrag Dimić of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Zoran Janjetović, Principal Research Fellow at the Institute for Recent History of Serbia, and Aleksandar Stojanović, Senior Research Associate at the Institute for Recent History of Serbia for their careful reading of the manuscript and their valuable comments. The responsibility for any shortcomings of this publication rests with the editor alone.

PART 1

**Conservative Authoritarianism: the Yugoslav
Radical Union (JRZ) and the Serbian Radical Party (SRS)**
(Dragan Bakić)

A Makeshift Party: Conservative JRZ under Milan Stojadinović, 1935–1939*

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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.¹

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

* This chapter is an extended version of my article, "Mussolini of Yugoslavia? The Milan Stojadinović Regime and the Impact of Italian Fascism, 1937–1939," *Qualestoria. Rivista di storia contemporanea* XLIX, No. 1 (Giugno 2021): 243–267.

¹ The National Archives, London, Foreign Office Records, General Correspondence Series, FO 371, R 8788/162/37, FO 371/21189, Sargent minute, 1 January 1938.

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 leveled 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.² Such an 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, in that it is reserved towards the routine classification of Stojadinović in the fascist camp, is a thorough study of the circumstances leading to his fall.³ An American historian of Slovene origin has portrayed him as an exceedingly ambitious politician who resorted to fascist methods to establish his dictatorship.⁴ Italian historiography has tended, not unnaturally, to perceive Stojadinović through the lenses of Mussolini's foreign minister's, Galeazzo Ciano's, assessment of Stojadinović's fascist affinities.⁵ On the other hand, the Yugoslav prime minister has been described as a "political opportunist" who gambled on Nazi Germany's market for economic benefit.⁶ A more recent assessment has also come to the conclusion that there are no grounds to consider Stojadinović a fascist dicta-

² For example, Ferdo Čulinović, *Jugoslavija između dva rata*, vols. 2 (Zagreb 1961), II, 113-118; Dušan Lukač, *Treći Rajh i zemlje jugoistočne Evrope*, 2 vols (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1982), II, 133-134; Velimir Terzić, *Slom Kraljevine Jugoslavije 1941: uzroci i posledice poraza*, 2 vols (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1984), I, 224; Branko Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918-1988*, 3 vols (Beograd: Nolit, 1988), I, *Kraljevina Jugoslavija 1914-1941*, 285-286.

³ Dušan Biber, "O padu Stojadinovićeve vlade," *Istorija 20. veka: zbornik radova*, VII (1966): 5-71.

⁴ Jacob Hoptner, *Jugoslavija u krizi 1934-1941* (Rijeka: Otokar Keršovani, 1972), 121, 144-145 [Serbo-Croatian edition of *Yugoslavia in Crisis, 1934-1941* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962)].

⁵ For example, Luciano Monzali, *Il sogno dell'egemonia. L'Italia, la questione Jugoslava e l'Europa Centrale (1918-1941)* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2010), 69; G. B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano. Una vita (1903-1944)* (Milano: La Nave di Teseo, 2019), 319 (epub ed.).

⁶ John Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There was a Country*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000), 183-185.

tor, but this piece has failed, despite its focus on ideology, to fully explore the fascist trappings of the later phase of his power-holding.⁷

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 analyze, on the one hand, the extent to which Stojadinović aligned his conduct of foreign affairs with the Axis and, on the other, the degree to which the rapprochement with Italy and Germany was reflected in Yugoslavia's internal developments which might smack of fascism, especially the organization and activities of his political party, the Yugoslav Radical Union (JRZ).⁸ The analysis will be an empirical one, but it will also contextualize its findings in the influential theories that dominate fascism studies and try to assess what 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

⁷ Dejan 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 Rebecca Haynes and Martyn Rady (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2011), 153–168.

⁸ There is a number of works dealing with Yugoslav-Italian relations in the interwar period, including the Stojadinović era, cited throughout this article. Of special interest for the issues scrutinized here are Todor Stojkov, *Vlada Milana Stojadinovića* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1985) unfinished due to the author's death; Dragan Tešić, *Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica u Srbiji 1935-1939* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1995); and the most recent, Bojan Simić, *Milan Stojadinović i Italija: između diplomatije i propagande* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2019). Simić's book includes his articles: "Susret grofa Čana i Milana Stojadinovića na Bijenalu u Veneciji 1938. godine," *Arhiv*, 1–2 (2016): 124–136; "Poseta Milana Stojadinovića Italiji decembra 1937," *Istorija 20. veka*, 2 (2017): 71–84; "Poseta grofa Čana Jugoslaviji u januaru 1939. i pad Milana Stojadinovića," *Arhiv*, 1–2 (2018): 67–76; "Milan Stojadinović and Count Ciano – A History of a Friendship," *Tokovi istorije*, 3 (2019): 11–36. Of special interest is also his "Milan Stojadinović and Italian-Yugoslav Relations (1935–1941), *Qualestoria*, no. 1 (giugno 2021): 269–285.

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. Highly regarded as a finance expert, Stojadinović became finance minister in Pašić's cabinet (December 1922–April 1926) and proved his abilities by managing to stabilize the *dinar*, the faltering Yugoslav currency, and eliminating the budget deficit.⁹ 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 separate Serbian, Croatian and Slovene identities in favor of the common Yugoslav nationality. While the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS) was interested in fighting 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,¹⁰ Stojadinović was perhaps the most agile member of the Main Committee of his Radical Party in organizing 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 that mostly gathered the Serbs from Croatia, in a bid to reach an agreement with Vladimir Maček, the president of HSS.¹¹ It was a measure of his involvement in the anti-regime activities that the police searched both his house and office to find some

⁹ Boško Mijatović, "Ekonomске ideje i dela Milana Stojadinovića u prvom periodu rada," in *Milan Stojadinović: politika u vreme globalnih lomova*, ed. Miša Djurković (Beograd: Službeni glasnik i Centar za konzervativne studije, 2012), 101–123; Dragana Gnjatović, "Evolution of Economic Thought on Monetary Reform in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes after the Great War," *Balkanica*, LI (2020): 183–205.

¹⁰ Simić, *Milan Stojadinović i Italija*, 17.

¹¹ Ljubo Boban, "Držanje srbijanskih opozicionih stranaka povodom Zagrebačkih punktacija (1932–1933)," *Historijski zbornik* XV, no. 1–4 (1962): 1–40; Ljubo Boban, "Geneza, značenje i odjek Zagrebačkih punktacija," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, v. 3, no. 1 (1971): 153–209; Todor Stojkov, *Opozicija u vreme šestojanuarske diktature 1929–1935* (Beograd: Prosveta, 1969), 228–229, 231, 241, 246–247, 256–257, 266, 270.

leaflets believed to have been authored by him.¹² 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 viscerally anti-communist atmosphere of the official Belgrade.¹³ 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 up a 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.¹⁴

After the assassination of Alexander in Marseilles in October 1934, Prince Paul became Regent until Peter II came of age. Paul insisted that Stojadinović become the finance minister in the Bogoljub Jevtić cabinet, which proved incapable of dealing with national and social tensions in Yugoslavia. Having brought about a crisis of the cabinet, Paul handed the mandate to Stojadinović, who formed his cabinet on 24 June 1935. It was a coalition consisting of Anton Korošec's clerical Slovenian People's Party, Mehmed Spaho's Yugoslav Muslim Organization and the 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 (JNS), 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

¹² Istorijiski arhiv grada Beograda, Kosta St. Pavlović Papers, Beleške 1933, entry for 19 April 1933.

¹³ Milan Stojadinović, "Šta je rukovalo Sjedinjene Američke Države da priznaju Sovjete," *Politika*, 6 januara 1934, 15.

¹⁴ Milan Stojadinović, *Ni rat ni pakt: Jugoslavija između dva rata* (Buenos Aires: El Economista, 1963), 291–298.

the creation of the Yugoslav Radical Union (JRZ) in September that year, effectively a coalition of Korošec's and Spaho's parties with the Radicals rather than a single unified political organization.

But Stojadinović fell out with the Radical Main Committee as early as December 1935: he wanted to be the true head of both the government and JRZ, while they envisaged him as a mere spokesman for the Radical leadership.¹⁵ 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. Djurdjina Pašić, the widow of the grand old man, sent a letter to Stojadinović stating that she knew that Pašić had respected him and believed he would be his successor. The letter was published in *Samouprava*, the JRZ organ.¹⁶ Significantly, this episode was part of the events surrounding the tenth anniversary of Pašić's death, which JRZ used to promote itself as his sole heir and the guardian of his political legacy. On that occasion, the JRZ also published a book on Pašić under the guidance of the editor of *Samouprava*, Milan Jovanović-Stoimirović.¹⁷ For the Radical Main Committee, Mrs. Pašić's letter 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 discussed politics with her.¹⁸ In fact, Pašić never designated a 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.

¹⁵ Stojkov, *Vlada Milana Stojadinovića*, 90–114.

¹⁶ Milan Jovanović Stoimirović, *Dnevnik 1936–1941* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 2000), 90. For the relaunching of *Samouprava*, see Bojan Simić "O ponovnom pokretanju lista 'Samouprava' 20. februara 1936. godine," *Tokovi istorije*, 1–2 (2005): 70–80.

¹⁷ Nikola P. Pašić: *povodom desetogodišnjice Pašičeve smrti* (Beograd: Redakcija Samoprave, 1937).

¹⁸ Archives of Yugoslavia (Arhiv Jugoslavije, hereafter AJ), Belgrade, Lazar Marković Papers (Zbirka Lazara Markovića), fond no. 85, box 2, folder 6 [hereafter 85-2-6], Djurdjina Pašić to Aca Stanojević, 9 December 1936.

Most of Serbia's Radicals joined Stojadinović, not least because of 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.¹⁹ The vast majority of Serbs there, and in some regions of Croatia, closed their ranks in JRZ because they felt threatened by the anti-Yugoslav and Serbophobic attitude of the Croats.²⁰ It was different in Bosnia and Herzegovina, however, where Spaho was able to capitalize 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.²¹ 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.²² Stressing how the local Serbs in a small town in Herzegovina resented JRZ for favoring 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 the Turkish [Muslim] religion!"²³ In Slovenia, the number of Serbs, and by extension Radicals, was negligent and that province was the 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-Spaho triumvirate,²⁴ and the prime minister exercised real control over the Serbian members of the party alone.

¹⁹ AJ, 85-2-6, Ljuba Jurković to Lazar Marković, 16 April 1936.

²⁰ AJ, 85-2-6, Ljuba Jurković to Lazar Marković, 22 May 1936.

²¹ AJ, 85-2-6, Mehmed Alija Hodžić to Lazar Marković, Konjic, 7 December 1935.

²² Stojkov, *Vlada Milana Stojadinovića*, 82.

²³ AJ, 85-2-6, Miho Mihić to Lazar Marković, Stolac, 25 April 1936.

²⁴ There existed formally the Executive Committee of JRZ comprised of the three leaders, which is mentioned in AJ, 37-3-15, Jovan Mijušković to Vojko Čvrkić, 9 April 1939.

Ideological Positioning in Relation to the Opposition Parties

The newly minted JRZ adopted a political program typical of a conservative party which operated within the framework of parliamentary democracy, although Yugoslavia certainly remained an authoritarian state.²⁵ The legislation and constitution introduced during Alexander's dictatorship were 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 that had done away with the dictatorial regime of the Yugoslav nationalists. In parallel, it tacitly dropped integral Yugoslavism and returned to the earlier concept of the three constituent "tribes" of a single nation, whereas the adherence to a unitary state remained, albeit with the hint to the local autonomies to placate the Croats.²⁶ The watchword was the need to calm down the passions in the country as a prelude to settling the thorny issues, primarily the Croatian discontent.

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 Jevtić.²⁷ The propaganda brochures stigmatized the former regime of JNS under Nikola Uzunović and Jevtić as a period of the darkest reaction, a rule that had been "fundamentally false, anti-people, anti-liberal, usurper-like and tyrannical".²⁸

²⁵ *Program i statuti Jugoslovenske radikalne zajednice* (Beograd: Štamparija "Privreda," 1935).

²⁶ AJ, Milan Stojadinović Papers (Zbirka Milana Stojadinovića), no. 37, 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*, 2 vols, eds Branko Petranović and Momčilo Zečević (Beograd: Prosveta, 1987), I (1914–1943), 338–339.

²⁷ Tešić, *Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica*, 43, f. 68.

²⁸ AJ, Dobrivoje Stošović Papers (Zbirka Dobrivoja Stošovića), no. 81, 81-6-23, Rade Drainac, *Uzurpatori (Uzunović, Jevtić i V. Popović)*, 2 izd. (Beograd, 1935).

In a similar vein, 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 said that it was not true that the JRZ was demobilizing national energies, “except those Yugo-fascist forces, which authorized themselves in the national assembly to be the only protector of the state and national unity.”²⁹ This was consistent with the instructions he had given a month earlier to Jovanović Stoimirović to publish the first issue of the revamped *Samouprava*: “All that is anti-democratic and fascist – condemn [it].”³⁰ Indeed, 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, at least initially. 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 raising their heads, stressing that the opposition would stand by the government in defense of democratic freedoms.³¹

Such an image of Stojadinović was facilitated by the failed attempt on his life in the parliament on 6 March 1936. The shooter was a member of parliament and a supporter of Jevtić. It was widely believed that Jevtić and General Petar Živković, the main pillar of King Alexander’s dictatorship and the incumbent Minister of the Army 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.”³² The most important political consequence of the affair was that General Živković was dropped from the cabinet, which further shored up Prime Minister’s prestige. General Živković then openly entered the political arena and became the president of the JNS, which still championed integral Yugoslavism and the unrelenting cen-

²⁹ Tešić, *Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica*, 98, f. 102.

³⁰ Jovanović Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, 37.

³¹ AJ, 37-10-60, A speech prepared for the opposition rally, 19 October 1935.

³² Jovanović Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, 42. For details on the failed attentat, see Bojan Simić, “Atentat u Narodnoj skupštini marta 1936. godine – pozadina, sudski proces, posledice,” *Nauka i savremeni univerzitet* 9 (2020): 163–174.

tralist constitutional arrangement. The Stojadinović government continued to attack it along the same lines: JNS never constituted itself into a real political movement, having repulsed popular support, declared political parties to be a luxury and the people too immature to make their choice.³³ With a view to the next parliamentary elections, an editorial of *Samouprava* read: “In today’s parliament there are political people who seek to restore meaning to democracy on the one side, and those who contest any importance to democratic principles.”³⁴ On the other hand, the leader of the extra-parliamentary extreme far-right party known as *Borbaši*, Svetislav Hodjera, noted that the JRZ labeled all their political opponents either communists or fascists.³⁵ In his party’s case, regardless of the grounds, this was true as the JRZ propagandists wrote that “the dark shadow of a fascist blue shirt” fell on them.³⁶

The illegal communists were persecuted as a matter of course given their ideology and destructive intentions towards the state. The shift in their tactics following the decisions of the 7th Congress of the Comintern in 1935, which meant infiltration into legal national and social associations and institutions, and even non-rightist political parties, under the banner of the antifascist Popular Front, made it more difficult to fight them. In addition to police repression, the government sponsored a “private initiative” to disseminate anti-communist propaganda best exemplified through the activities of the Yugoslav Anti-Marxist Committee.³⁷ Apart from communists, the notion of leftist danger was

³³ AJ, 81-6-25, Partijski presburo Jugoslovenske radikalne zajednice, Partijski bilteni u prvom tromesečju 1938 g., 28 januara 1938 g.; see also the bulletins from 16 and 17 February 1938.

³⁴ AJ, 81, 81-6-25, Partijski presburo Jugoslovenske radikalne zajednice, Partijski bilteni u prvom tromesečju 1938 g., 8 marta, 1938 g.

³⁵ Tešić, *Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica*, 160.

³⁶ AJ, 81-6-23, Rade Drainac, *Dragoljub Jovanović ili seljački Napoleon* (Beograd, 1935). For more details on Hodjera’s party, see Rastko Lompar’s chapter in this book.

³⁷ Nadežda Jovanović, “Propao pokušaj ‘privatne inicijative’ na suzbijanju komunističke ideologije,” *Tokovi revolucije* 1 (1988): 149–168. For different phases in the development of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and its strategy in the fight against the authorities, see Kosta Nikolić, *Komunisti u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji: od socijaldemokratije do staljinizma 1919–1941* (Gornji Milanovac: Lio, Beograd: Centar za savremenu istoriju Jugoistočne Evrope, 2000).

extended to the left-leaning Agrarians, whose leader Dragoljub Jovanović was characterized as “the greatest political braggart that Serbia ever had,” while his appeals to the peasantry were said to “sometimes smack of a green international”. Stojadinović’s propaganda proclaimed that Jovanović’s political views on the peasant state were no more than a nebulous agglomerate of political theories and sheer demagoguery, but they were harmful because they impeded the “inauguration of liberalism,” the essential task of the Stojadinović government.³⁸

It can be said that, as far as an authoritarian regime went, that of Stojadinović was fairly lax in its treatment of opposing views. There were voices in the government arguing for constraint of political liberties as they existed in practice. For example, Milan Ćimović, chief of the Belgrade police, submitted a proposal in April 1938 in which he outlined measures, “within the bounds of the existing legislation,” to strengthen the authority of government and to let political groups know “how far their political activity can extend and where the limit to their work is.” In a broadly conceived plan, the aim was to ensure that the university, high schools, people universities, theatres, films, radio, press and national associations carry their work out in keeping with the Yugoslav national and state idea, especially in the sphere of education, culture and media, to ensure that “constructive views” prevail over those of “leftist orientated public and critics.”³⁹ But these suggestions were never acted upon, probably because they were incompatible with the image of liberalization that the government was keen to project.

In fact, the liberalization that the regime media was prone to boasting of was a somewhat half-hearted business. There were some grounds to assert, as *Samouprava* did, that “Democratic policy has contributed to the soothing of the agitated passions so that there is political peace in our country, which is reflected in intense political activity in all parts.”⁴⁰ But for all the talk of introducing democratic-minded political laws and holding truly free elections in the not so distant future, the

³⁸ AJ, 81-6-23, Rade Drainac, *Dragoljub Jovanović ili seljački Napoleon* (Beograd, 1935).

³⁹ AJ, 37-9-48, Report of Milan Ćimović.

⁴⁰ AJ, 81-6-25, Partijski presburo Jugoslovenske radikalne zajednice, Partijski bilteni u aprilu mesecu 1938 g., 2. aprila 1938 g.

government procrastinated on delivering on their promises. This undermined their democratic credentials, along with their continued use of the government apparatus for the purpose of consolidating JRZ. The reason for Stojadinović's renegeing in this respect was one of expediency rather than of principle – he and his political allies needed time to complete the organization of JRZ before testing its strength at polling stations. Trying to explain away the absence of new liberal legislation, Stojadinović declared on the occasion of the first national assembly of JRZ: "But as long as all those elements of disorder have not been suppressed, which seek to abuse the holy asset of popular liberties, whether they are positioned on the extreme left or the extreme right, we would sin against the vital national and state interests if we were not very cautious in choosing the moment to launch new political reforms."⁴¹ This was stated at the moment when, as Stojadinović himself noted in his speech, the JRZ had just completed its formal organization. The party and state leadership thus retained full freedom to make their own decision on when the time was right to act on their promises and show that they were committed to democratic rule (a recurring theme among the speakers at the party congress).

A contradiction between democratic proclamations and the retention of the dictatorial legislation and apparatus, albeit not applied in the same way as under King Alexander, made it difficult to place the JRZ on the political spectrum. It was possible to genuinely believe or portray, for opportunistic reasons, that the regime was indeed moving towards democratic standards. It is telling that Djura Janković, a close associate of Stojadinović, instructed the members of his party not to fall for provocations on the part of their opponents during Maček's visit to his political partners, the leaders of the Serbian United Opposition, in Belgrade in August 1938 "because we want such political life in which all political people can discuss matters freely."⁴² Stojadinović himself provided a succinct definition when, after having been asked by his own chief propagandist whether the regime was moving to the

⁴¹ AJ, 81-6-23, *Rad prve Zemaljske skupštine Jugoslovenske radikalne zajednice: Održane 1 i 2 juna 1936 g. u Beogradu* (Beograd: izdanje Samouprave, 1936), 16.

⁴² This document intended for internal use can be found in AJ, 37-16-101.

right or to the left, he replied, laughing: “*Democratie dirigée*.”⁴³ Ironically, it was during the election campaign in late 1938, when Stojadinović’s promise was finally translated into practice, at least to some extent given that the election was held under the old illiberal legislation, that different tendencies came into play, as will be seen later. It was only then that the semi-official *Vreme* pointed out the crisis of democracy, namely its difficulties to cope with internal problems and the consequent strengthening of the executive powers, as well as the dominance of dictatorships in Germany and Italy at the international level, and concluded that Western democracies “show all signs of languor, dilapidation and decadence.”⁴⁴ With Stojadinović’s firm control over *Vreme*, edited by his brother Dragomir, such a piece was not a coincidence. But by that time, foreign policy considerations were paramount and affected internal developments, as the following sections of this chapter will discuss.

Of special interest for an inquiry into the complex relationship between fascist and conservative constituency in Yugoslavia is an examination of the relations between JRZ and the Yugoslav National Movement ZBOR led by Dimitrije Ljotić. Although he was at first reserved towards Nazi Germany and its ideology, Ljotić’s movement was becoming increasingly fascist in outlook with its growing insistence on anticommunism, anti-Semitism and admiration of Hitler’s social policy from 1936 onwards. It was then that contacts intensified between the prominent members of ZBOR and the Third Reich, and the pro-Nazi faction “Restorers” among Yugoslavia’s German minority collectively joined Ljotić’s followers, certainly not without a nod from Berlin.⁴⁵ This was not lost on the authorities, which consequently had good reasons, regardless of the marginal importance of ZBOR and their own friendly relations with Germany, to take a dim view of such developments. As has been recently demonstrated, the controversy over the Technical Union, the Zagreb-based corporation founded by ZBOR members for the purpose of clearing exchange of Yugoslav ag-

⁴³ Jovanović Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, 161.

⁴⁴ Drag. Janković, “Biti il’ ne biti,” *Vreme*, 24. novembra 1938.

⁴⁵ Rastko Lompar, “Afera ‘Tehnička unija’ i veze JNP Zbora sa nacističkom Nemačkom 1935–1941.” *Istorija 20. veka* 38, 2 (2020): 85–89.

ricultural products for the German industrial goods, in early 1937, was launched by the government with a view to discrediting ZBOR, accused in the Belgrade press of being financed from Germany.⁴⁶ It should be noted that a political clash with ZBOR took place the same year as the clamping down of Regent Horthy's authoritarian regime on the fascist Arrow Cross in Hungary and the measures undertaken by the Romanian King Carol II against the Iron Guard as another instance of the conservative right's battling the fascist opposition.

In case of ZBOR, this clash was also part of the infighting between different agencies of the Nazi government. Stojadinović was informed that Ljotić's attempt to secure financial means for his movement, undermine the position of Dragoslav Djordjević, minister without portfolio and the head of the association of agricultural cooperatives (*Glavni savez zemljoradničkih zadruga*), and agitate against the regime was serious inasmuch as he had acquired support from "very influential people" in Berlin, including the gauleiter of East Prussia, Erich Koch, who had won over the economic dictator, Marshal Goering himself. The plan had almost succeeded, but Stojadinović's friends in the German government, most notably Fritz von Bruck of the economic department of the Nazi Party's foreign policy service, intervened with Goering and foiled it as "an unnecessary act of disloyalty to Mr. Stojadinović's government."⁴⁷

The authorities also obstructed the activities of ZBOR; for example, they banned a rally in Smederevo, Ljotić's home town, which he duly announced to the police for mid-May 1937, under the pretence of legal formalities.⁴⁸ Stojadinović then facilitated a rift in the ZBOR leadership. In November 1937, some of its most prominent personalities, formerly in the Yugoslav Action, which joined forces with the other extreme right groups to form ZBOR, were excluded from the party (Dimitrije Subotin, Djordje Perić, Danilo Gregorić and Velibor Jonić). Ljotić let it be understood that the rift was about tactical differences

⁴⁶ Ibid., 89–100.

⁴⁷ AJ, 37-47-301, Appendix to the letter of 7 December 1936, strictly confidential, attached to a letter sent from the Ministry without portfolio [illegible signature] to Milan Stojadinović, 4 January 1937.

⁴⁸ AJ, 37-74-465, Odluka Načelstva sreza podunavskog, broj 1080, 28.IV.1937.

between him and the excluded founders of the party, while they maintained that he suppressed any criticism at his expense. In fact, their estrangement stemmed from disagreement over the formation of a national front, a wider grouping of Yugoslav nationalists in which the ruling JRZ would also participate and, naturally, have a leading role.⁴⁹ After the split, Ljotić remained the undisputed leader of ZBOR, whereas Jonić, Gregorić, Perić and some others defected to Stojadinović's JRZ. The latter were given appropriate positions in the JRZ propaganda in keeping with their background in journalism and the roles they had played in Ljotić's party. This was a great opportunity for *Samouprava* to note with glee that ZBOR meant nothing without the Yugoslav Action and that both groups were, in fact, finished after the split.⁵⁰

Ljotić hit back and portrayed Stojadinović, just when the latter was about to pay an official visit to Germany in January 1938, as an imitator of foreign doctrines, "a fascist apprentice," steeped into corruption and without the qualities necessary to impose an authoritarian regime.⁵¹ Their conflict was going from bad to worse. In mid-June 1938, some dozen members of ZBOR were arrested on charges that they were preparing an assassination of Stojadinović and Korošec, Minister of Interior Affairs.⁵² Ljotić's attacks on Stojadinović, including his more wild allegations, such as that he plotted to murder King Alexander, led to his arrest on 26 October 1938, in the midst of the campaign for parlia-

⁴⁹ AJ, 102-7-17, Velibor Jonić to Dimitrije Ljotić, 14 November 1937; Danilo Gregorić to President of ZBOR, 16 November 1937; Dimitrije Subotin to Dimitrije Ljotić, undated; Članovi privremenog Vrhovnog odbora iz Dravske banovine, Starešinstvo područja i Banovinski izvršni odbor Dravske banovine to Dimitrije Ljotić, 25 November 1937; Ratko Parežanin, *Drugi svetski rat i Dimitrije V. Ljotić 2.* izd. (Beograd: A. Ž. Jelić i P. Janković, 2001), 142–151; an interview of Dragomir Stojadinović given to Borislav and Ljiljana Pečić, published in Kosta Nikolić i Bojan Dimitrijević, eds, *Danilo Gregorić i 25. mart 1941* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2007), 239–248.

⁵⁰ AJ, 81-6-25, Partijski presburo Jugoslovenske radikalne zajednice, Partijski bilteni u prvom tromesečju 1938 g., 1. januara, 1938. See also Partijski bilteni u mesecu maju 1938 g., 10 maja 1938 g.

⁵¹ AJ, Stanislav Krakov Papers (Zbirka Stanislava Krakova), no. 102, 102-7-17, brochure entitled *Poruka fašističkom šegrtu*.

⁵² Vasilije Dragosavljević, "Teror jugointegralističkih snaga kao faktor destabilizacije i dekompozicije prve jugoslovenske države," *Leskovački zbornik LXI* (2021): 26.

mentary elections.⁵³ ZBOR's candidate list was one of just three submitted for the 11 December 1938 election. Ljotić was released from prison some two weeks before the election, at which his party suffered a fiasco having won just around 30,000 votes, not enough to enter the parliament. It is important to note that of all political parties and people (except the illegal communists) Ljotić and his followers alone were subjected to police repression during Stojadinović's premiership.

Stojadinović, Ciano and Italo-Yugoslav Relations

In foreign policy, Prince Paul and Stojadinović sought security for Yugoslavia, especially against Italy's aspirations to 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 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.⁵⁴ The German remilitarization 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 of any anti-German political combinations.⁵⁵ 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

⁵³ Mladen Stefanović, *Zbor Dimitrija Ljotoća 1934–1945* (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1984), 52–53; Rastko Lompar, *Dimitrije Ljotić – učitelj ili farisej: Zbor, hrišćanstvo i verske zajednice: 1935–1945* (Beograd: Catena Mundi, 2021), 215.

⁵⁴ Živko Avramovski, "Pitanje učešća Jugoslavije u vojnim sankcijama protiv Italije za vreme italijanske agresije na Etiopiju (1935–1936)," *Jugoslavenski istorijski časopis* 1 (1964): 13–36.

⁵⁵ Bogdan Krizman, *Vanjska politika jugoslavenske države 1918–1941: diplomatsko-historijski pregled* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1975), 84.

its economic and political expansion. This was Goering's motivation for an overture to Belgrade to the effect that Germany was prepared to give guarantees to Yugoslavia against both revisionist Hungary and Italy. For Stojadinović, German friendship was essential in view of the necessity to keep in check the Italian threat, a role which France was no longer willing and able to perform. As he explained to Prince Paul, "For the sake of our tranquility and securing the future of Yugoslavia, we must find an insurance against Italy as soon as possible."⁵⁶

The Germans suggested to the Italian foreign minister, Galeazzo 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.⁵⁷ But Italy was not entirely sincere with Berlin either. Although Hitler declared that the Mediterranean was Rome's sphere of interest, the Italians were concerned about Germany's plans to annex Austria and seek an access point 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.⁵⁸ 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 Croatian *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 (Slo-

⁵⁶ AJ, Collection of Microfilms (Zbirka mikrofilmova), no. 797, Prince Paul Karadjordjević Papers (Arhiva kneza Pavla Karadjordjevića), reel 4, Stojadinović to Prince Paul, 12 June 1936, scan 329.

⁵⁷ Vojislav Vučković, "Politika Osovine prema Jugoslaviji (1936–1941)," *Jugoslovenska revija za međunarodno pravo*, 2 (1954): 23–43; Bogdan Krizman, "Italija u politici kralja Aleksandra i kneza Pavla (1918–1941)," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, vol. 7, n. 1 (1975): 33–97.

⁵⁸ On Italian motives, see Alfredo Breccia, *Jugoslavia, 1939–1941: Diplomazia della neutralità* (Milan: Giuffrè Editore, 1978), ch. 1; Massimo Bucarelli, *Mussolini e la Jugoslavia (1922–1939)* (Bari: Edizioni B. A. Graphis, 2006), 327–383; R. Bruce Strang, *On the Fiery March: Mussolini Prepares for War* (Westport: CT, 2003), 76–79.

vene and Croat) national minority.⁵⁹ In addition, the agreement cut the ground from any potential attempt of the HSS to internationalize the Croatian question and strengthened the government in their negotiations with Maček.⁶⁰

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 the 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 at defending Czechoslovakia from Germany; moreover, Stojadinović found the Anschluss inevitable and he was certain that Beneš “would find himself alone” in case of a German offensive. Importantly, Stojadinović couched his assertions in a 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”.⁶¹

⁵⁹ For an account of the negotiations leading to the Pact of Belgrade, see Živko Avramovski, *Balkanske zemlje i velike sile, 1935–1937.: od italijanske agresije na Etiopiju do jugoslovensko-italijanskog pakta* (Beograd, 1968), 261–292; Jacob Hoptner, “Yugoslavia as Neutralist: 1937,” *Journal of Central European Affairs*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1956): 156–76; Enes Milak, *Italija I Jugoslavija 1931-1927* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1937), 132–141.

⁶⁰ Srdja Trifković, “Milan Stojadinović, Italija i hrvatsko pitanje,” in Miša Djurković, *Milan Stojadinović: politika u vreme globalnih lomova, 75–84*; Dragan Bakić, “Milan Stojadinović, the Croat Question and the International Position of Yugoslavia,” *Acta Histriae*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2018): 207–228.

⁶¹ *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, ed. by Malcolm Muggeridge, translated by Stuart Hood (London: Odhams Press, 1948), 98–105.

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]."⁶² 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 criticized for the Italian treaty, he assured Yvon Delbos, the French Foreign Minister, that Yugoslavia was firmly attached to France, the Little and Balkan Ententes but was a mouse caught between two cats, Germany and Italy, and must deal with them carefully to avoid the fate of Abyssinia and Spain.⁶³ Stojadinović then arrived in Italy to return Ciano's 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 working to form "a large party that will have as its chief aim the organization of Yugoslav youth. All that will produce an increasingly marked approach to the political system formed by the authoritarian countries and a break

⁶² Jovanović Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, 133–138.

⁶³ Vuk Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Francuska između dva rata (Da li je Jugoslavija bila francuski „satelit“)* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1985), 356.

away from France.”⁶⁴ 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 personally write 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 organization. Just two weeks later, Stojadinović informed his diplomatic representatives that Yugoslavia would remain a member of the League because that was necessary to stay on good terms with all the great powers, a veiled reference to France and Britain.⁶⁵ 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.⁶⁶

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].”⁶⁷ But all along, Stojadinović paid special attention to his relations with Germany.

⁶⁴ *Ciano’s Diplomatic Papers*, 149–152. For Stojadinović’s account, see *Ni rat ni pakt*, 478–485.

⁶⁵ Lukač, *Treći Rajh i zemlje jugoistočne Evrope*, II, 130.

⁶⁶ Simić, *Milan Stojadinović i Italija*, 112.

⁶⁷ *Ciano’s Diary 1937–1943: the complete unabridged diaries of Count Galeazzo Ciano, Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs, 1936–1943*, preface by Renzo De Felice, introduction to the original English edition by Malcolm Muggeridge (London: Phoenix Press, 2002), 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 *Ibid.*, 33.

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 had not been removed.⁶⁸ Two considerations were central to Stojadinović's view of Yugoslavia's position vis-à-vis Germany and Italy. He did not believe in a 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."⁶⁹ The Germans also made much of Stojadinović's visit to Berlin in January 1938, with Goering 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."⁷⁰ In return, Hitler solemnly declared that once the Anschluss had been completed he would consider Yugoslavia's borders inviolable from any side. Stojadinović was thus unperturbed 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 as possible of the territory it had lost to

⁶⁸ Dalibor Denda, *Šlem i šajkača: vojni faktor i jugoslovensko-nemački odnosi* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 2019), 272–277.

⁶⁹ Dragiša Cvetković, ed., *Dokumenti o Jugoslaviji*, vol. 10, *Sovjeti, Britanija i Jugoslavija 1940–41* (Paris, 1958), 7; also Jovanović Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, 259.

⁷⁰ Stojadinović, *Ni rat ni pakt*, 497–503; Denda, *Šlem i šajkača*, 284–295. For a book-length analysis of Belgrade's attitude towards the Anschluss, see Srđjan Mičić, *Kraljevina Jugoslavija i Anšlus Austrije 1938. godine* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2010).

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 defense 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, he turned to Rome. Italy had long been a champion of Hungarian revisionism and concluded with that country and Austria the Rome Protocols of 1934, which gave some weight to Mussolini's advice to Budapest. Boško Hristić, the 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 the Yugoslav policy would conform to that of Italy.⁷¹ Stojadinović was effective in his pandering to the special relationship with Rome. Ciano found his willingness to coordinate their policies in the Czechoslovak crisis "remarkable" and concluded that he was "right" in keeping out of trouble.⁷² 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."⁷³

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 from Yugoslavia unless Hungary attacked Czechoslovakia before Germany had done so.⁷⁴ In the midst of the Munich crisis, however, Stojadinović turned to Germany to protect Yugoslav interests. He appealed to Goering not just to halt Budapest's action, but also to prevent the establishment of the common Polish-Hungarian border, which would considerably increase

⁷¹ *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, 200–201.

⁷² *Ciano's Diary*, 81.

⁷³ *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, 212–216. For Yugoslav-Hungarian relations in connection with the Munich crisis, see Vuk Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Madjarska 1933–1941* (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1976), 289–300.

⁷⁴ *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, 227–229.

the territory and prestige of Hungary.⁷⁵ 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.⁷⁶ 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 the political and military leadership 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.⁷⁷ 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 favored it. This reflected the recent German success in the international arena, and it was the least Yugoslavia could do to show her favorable attitude towards the Axis short of a definite commitment. Moreover, Stojadinović had no qualms about buttressing Ciano's confidence in him on the cheap; after Ciano had received good

⁷⁵ Hoptner, *Jugoslavija u krizi*, 141–142.

⁷⁶ *Ciano's Diary*, 138–139.

⁷⁷ Dragan Bakić, "The Italo-Yugoslav Conflict over Albania: A View from Belgrade, 1919–1939," *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, vol. 25, n. 4 (2014): 592–612.

news from Spain where Italian troops were fighting on the side of General Franco, he reacted by “shouting, ‘Corsica, Tunisia, Nice!’”⁷⁸ It should also be noted that Ciano had no compunction to make his official report more flattering to his achievement and more to the 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 opposite was the case: Ciano observed in his diary, not to be seen by Mussolini, that the Yugoslav Prime Minister was “careful about his relations with the monarchy, which do not seem good”.⁷⁹ Apart from his considerable ego, this can only be explained by Ciano’s personal political investment in the Pact of Belgrade and his working relationship with Stojadinović.

Fascistization 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 effectively labeled a fascist by the illegal Communist Party of Yugoslavia, but their voice was not influential, apart from stemming from their crude stigmatization of every single cabinet and the Yugoslav monarchy as such as a “monarchical-fascist dictatorship.”⁸⁰ The communist view became important only after the Second World War, when it was translated into official historiography, as 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 democratic and fas-

⁷⁸ *Ciano’s Diary*, 179.

⁷⁹ *Ciano’s Diary*, 179; *Ciano’s Diplomatic Papers*, 267–272. For Stojadinović’s accounts, see AJ, Prince Paul Papers, reel 4, Stojadinović to Prince Paul, private, 21 January 1939, scans 527–530 and 20 January 1939, scans 534–541; Stojadinović, *Ni rat ni pakt*, 566–574.

⁸⁰ For examples of the leaflets issued by young leftist and antifascists, which was how communists disguised themselves in the context of the Popular Front policy, from different parts of Yugoslavia, see AJ, 37-9-54, two leaflets entitled “Hrvatski narode,” from April 1937 and a leaflet of the United Student Youth (*Ujedinjena studentska omladina*) after the Anschluss in AJ, 37-66-388.

cist 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.”⁸¹ This was not surprising in view of the left-wing Agrarians’ foreign policy vision, favoring a “Russo-Franco-English orientation, for democracy, for 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 the heaviest 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 enthusiastically hailed in the state-controlled media as a great foreign policy success. On the other side, the Serbian opposition parties had centered their criticism of the government on the rapprochement with Italy and the shift in Yugoslav foreign policy, ignoring *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 all peace-keeping efforts on collective security”, read a declaration signed by the leaders of the Radicals, Democrats and Agrarians.⁸² The United Opposition also criticized 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 visit of Delbos to Belgrade in December 1937 to stir dissatisfaction among the people.⁸³

⁸¹ AJ, 37-22-156, “Spoljna politika Stojadinovićeve vlade,” 6. februara 1937.

⁸² AJ, 37-10-60, Declaration signed by Aca Stanojević, Ljubomir Davidović and Jovan Jovanović Pižon respectively, 2. aprila 1937.

⁸³ AJ, 37-10-60, Leaflet titled “Delbos u Beogradu” with the statement of the United Opposition leaders dated 11 December 1937 and the press clippings describing

In addition to the invective in the realm of foreign affairs, the United Opposition accused the government of organizing their own “storm detachments” and threatened that terror would be met with force.⁸⁴ Moreover, the opposition leaders addressed Radenko Stanković, one of the three members of the Regency Council (of which only Prince Paul mattered), with the warning that JRZ was “forming combat organizations from their members, dressing them in uniforms, and intend, as the reports we received suggest, to arm them as well, and to start a fight with these organized, uniformed and armed detachments.”⁸⁵ They referred, in fact, to the youth organization 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 party storm troops, armed or not, modeled after 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 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.⁸⁶ 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

the clash between the pro-French demonstrators and the police in the streets of Belgrade.

⁸⁴ AJ, 37-10-60, Anonymous leaflet, 10 oktobra 1937; also “Obaveštenje gradjanima Beograda” signed by “Akcioni odbor gradjana,” October 1937.

⁸⁵ AJ, 37-10-60, Jovan Jovanović, Ljubomir Davidović and Miloš Trifunović (on behalf of Aca Stanojević) to Radenko Stanković, 20 October 1937.

⁸⁶ Todor Stojkov, “O stvaranju Bloka narodnog sporazuma,” *Istorija XX veka: zbornik radova VI* (1964): 245–301; Mira Radojević, *Udružena opozicija 1935–1939* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1964), 176–181.

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 allegations of growing fascistization at home, the most visible sign of which was the emergence of uniformed JRZ formations allegedly prepared for violence against their political opponents.⁸⁷ 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 any substance to the accusations against Stojadinović. To begin with, it is clear that the JRZ cannot be considered a fascist organization 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.⁸⁸ 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.”⁸⁹ In his typology of the authoritarian nationalist interwar right, Payne distinguishes between the fascist right, radical right and conservative right. According to this 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

⁸⁷ Radojević, *Udružena opozicija*, 138–139.

⁸⁸ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: The Pinter Press, 1991). The constraints of a space make it impossible to engage here more fully with the vast literature in the field of fascism studies.

⁸⁹ Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison: Wisconsin Press, 1995).

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.⁹⁰ The Stojadinović regime will be analyzed 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 recognizable, to some extent, in the JRZ political platform and activism such as the youth organization, the workers’ organization and fascist style. Of special interest is the link between the close Italo-Yugoslav relations and fascistization of the Yugoslav regime, which could provide new insights for 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 organization renowned for championing 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 Djikanović as its president.⁹¹ On Stojadinović’s instructions, the Academic Youth of JRZ was constituted as a separate organization within the party rather than within

⁹⁰ *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe*, eds Antonio Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Aristotle Kallis, “Fascism and the Right in Interwar Europe: Interaction, Entanglement, Hybridity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of European History, 1914–1945*, ed. N. Doumanis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 301–322.

⁹¹ Dragan Tešić, “Klub studenata Jugoslovenske radikalne zajednice ‘Slovenski jug’ na Beogradskom univerzitetu 1935–1941,” *Istorija 20. veka*, 1–2 (1993): 53–71.

the youth organization of JRZ.⁹² 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.”⁹³ 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 organization of the same kind. For example, the JRZ student congress proposed launching courses for the political education of their members modeled after the academic youth in both Nazi Germany and democratic Czechoslovakia.⁹⁴ It was only after Stojadinović’s fall from power that extreme far-right ideas took hold of, and even dominated over, the JRZ student organization.⁹⁵

For practical Stojadinović, *Slovenski jug* was also a convenient means of facilitating a desirable image of his regime in the Axis camp. In step with his direction of foreign affairs, it served the purpose of promoting 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 familiarize the Yugoslav students with the work and organization 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 trip were a dismal failure. The correspondent of the Yugoslav Central Press Bureau from Rome, the writer Miloš Crnjanski, reported that the students had made an unfavorable impression and showed little interest in attending lectures on the organization

⁹² *Ibid.*, 58–59.

⁹³ AJ, 37-17-116, Milivoje Djikanović to Milan Stojadinović, 12 July 1937.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Rade Ristanović, “Ideološka orijentacija članova Kluba studenata JRZ Slovenski jug,” *Tokovi istorije* 1 (2016): 143–164.

of the Fascist Party. They had been more interested in having a good time and perhaps getting Italian scholarships.⁹⁶ If Stojadinović wanted to impress upon 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.⁹⁷

Another, more important, form of the youth organization was the emergence of the JRZ youth (OJRZ). After setting up the 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 organizations 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.⁹⁸ That event alarmed the opposition not just because it showed the growing strength of the government party, but also as a sign of fascistization of the country. The opposition youth organizations inveighed against the JRZ youth congress as an abuse of young people, proclaimed their own commitment to democracy, peace and an agreement between the Serbs and Croats, and protested against the rapprochement with the Axis.⁹⁹ But despite the fascist flavor of a mass rally, the adopted statutes of OJRZ required 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”.¹⁰⁰ Stojadinović encouraged the growth of JRZ youth branches wherever possible, but especially in

⁹⁶ Bojan Simić, “Posete kluba studenata Jugoslovenske radikalne zajednice ‘Slovenski jug’ Italiji 1938. godine,” *Tokovi istorije*, 2 (2011): 81–92.

⁹⁷ Tešić, “Klub studenata Jugoslovenske radikalne zajednice,” 66.

⁹⁸ For details, see Tešić, *Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica*, 333–346.

⁹⁹ AJ, 37-10-61, An undated leaflet distributed by the youth organisations of the United Opposition together with the leftist youth groups.

¹⁰⁰ *Sabor i kongres omladine Jugoslovenske radikalne zajednice* (Beograd: Samouprava, 1937), 55.

towns, and with the proviso that they consisted of young adults aged 17 to 25, while older members should leave them.¹⁰¹ He seems to have been interested in the practical side of the youth organization as a way of strengthening his party. There is no doubt, however, that he was in time 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).”¹⁰²

As has been said, the opposition parties were particularly disconcerted on account of the uniform-wearing of the young JRZ members. That feature of 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 the summer of 1937, as Stojadinović was informed that there was “great interest for the uniforms among the youth ranks in the countryside.”¹⁰³ In September, 161 uniforms were ordered for the 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 only 76 that had been made due to product quality issues, were handed over to *Slovenski jug* based on a decision of the Main Committee of OJRZ.¹⁰⁴ 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. According to Dušan Janković, the president of *Slovenski jug* and the editor of the eponymous journal, some of the twenty students designated by the executive and supervisor committee of *Slovenski jug* to go to Italy “expressed their wish to bring the appropriate number of the completed uniforms about

¹⁰¹ AJ, 37-44-295, Milan Stojadinović to Mehmed Spaho, 30 November 1937; 37-45-297, Milan Stojadinović to Djura Janković, 12 October 1936.

¹⁰² Jovanović Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, 159.

¹⁰³ AJ, 37-16-105, Milutin Krivokapić to Milan Stojadinović, 11 August 1937.

¹⁰⁴ AJ, 37-16-105, Petar Marjanović to Jovan Marković, 4 October 1938; Radoslav Ilkić to Milan Stojadinović, 28 September 1938.

which they would come to an agreement with Mr. Petar Marjanović, the first vice-president of the youth Main Committee.”¹⁰⁵ As we can see in this instance, the initiative came from below rather than from the top. The same appears to have been true for the student organization as a whole. “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,” Dušan Janković requested another 98 uniforms for students.¹⁰⁶ 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 impending general election 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 election that “the second thousand” of uniforms had been completed and their distribution had already started.¹⁰⁷

Despite this growth of the number of uniforms, it cannot be said that Stojadinović pushed for full-scale fascistization 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 that the initiative for uniform-wearing in Italy and Germany had come from the poorest to make them look the same as the rich; paradoxically, given the historical background, he concluded that a

¹⁰⁵ AJ, 37-17-117, Dušan Janković to Milan Stojadinović, 29 April 1938.

¹⁰⁶ AJ, 37-17-117, Dušan Janković to Milan Stojadinović, 4 October 1938 with the documents attached. It was some of the students selected to go to Italy who “expressed their wish” to bring uniforms (Ibid., Dušan Janković to Milan Stojadinović, 29 April 1938).

¹⁰⁷ AJ, 37-16-105, Josip Rogić [President of the Main Committee of OJRZ] to Milan Stojadinović, 23 November 1938. For a discussion of uniform use, see Bojan Simić, *Propaganda Milana Stojadinovića* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2007), 275–278.

uniform was “in fact, a democratic institution.”¹⁰⁸ 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 sport venues, the members of sport teams, whom Stojadinović was particularly supportive of, wore uniforms if they chose to do so and paid for them out of their own pockets.¹⁰⁹ The appropriate uniforms were mandatory for those who followed Stojadinović during his journeys across the country, were present at official receptions for visiting statesmen and securing the party rallies during the 1938 election campaign (which would prove significant, as will be seen later). Overall, their number was modest and seems to have never exceeded three hundred, 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.¹¹⁰ Although sufficient to draw fire from political opponents, especially in Serbia, the practice of uniform dressing seems to have reflected the fact that OJRZ was far from a mass movement like those in Italy and Germany. In fact, it was not organized on a larger scale or more militarized than other party formations in Yugoslavia, such as Maček’s Croatian Peasant Defense (*Hrvatska seljačka zaštita*) and the Croatian Civil Defense (*Hrvatska građanska zaštita*) or Korošec’s *fanti*. It was certainly a far cry from the single-state EON organization in the less populated Greece under the Ioannis Metaxas dictatorship, which had no less than 600,000 members.¹¹¹

Yet another example of the Italian (and German) inspiration at home was the establishment of the Yugoslav Workers Association (*Jugoslovenski radnički savez* – JUGORAS). Stemming from professional associations within the 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

¹⁰⁸ AJ, 37-16-115, Milan Stojadinović to Ranko Dostanić, 7 September 1938.

¹⁰⁹ Tešić, *Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica*, 345.

¹¹⁰ Juan Francisco Fuentes, “Shirt Movements in Interwar Europe: a Totalitarian Fashion,” *História* 72 (2018): 151–173.

¹¹¹ Aristotle Kallis, “Neither Fascist nor Authoritarian: The 4th of August Regime in Greece (1936–1941) and the Dynamics of Fascistisation in 1930s Europe,” *East Central Europe* 37 (2010): 317–320.

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.”¹¹² With the growing number of JUGORAS branches, the JRZ leadership decided to hold a large congress of the organization on 25–26 April 1938. Stojadinović personally addressed the crowd, 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.”¹¹³ The “Rules” of JUGORAS were also adopted on that occasion, proclaiming it the sole legitimate workers’ representative through which the government could implement their social and economic program; such a tendency was coupled with the request to take over all agencies for workers’ protection from the hands of Marxist syndicates.¹¹⁴ 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 organizations, it could have hardly amount to much. Nevertheless, it served Stojadinović’s opponents well enough as another example of his fascistization of Yugoslavia. He was later adamant that it had been Cvetković’s, and not his own, initiative to dress the JRZ workers in blue uniforms.¹¹⁵ This cannot be verified, but it is certain that Cvetković’s role in JUGORAS introduced a level of authoritarian organization as he assumed the title of its Leader (Vodja). Cvetković boasted of his special authority and determination to exercise it in order to meet his goals.¹¹⁶

Along with anti-communist and nationalist rhetoric, the discourse on JUGORAS increasingly resembled 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 Stojadino-

¹¹² Tešić, *Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica*, 318–321.

¹¹³ Jovanović Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, 183.

¹¹⁴ *Prvi zemaljski kongres Jugoslovenskog radničkog saveza* (Beograd: Jugoras, 1938), 69.

¹¹⁵ Stojadinović, *Ni rat ni pakt*, 589.

¹¹⁶ *Prvi zemaljski kongres Jugoslovenskog radničkog saveza*, 38–51.

vić did not fail to make use of JUGORAS to foster an image of close cooperation with Italy. In September 1938, at the time of the Munich crisis, the JUGORAS delegation visited Venice, Milan, Turin, Rome and Florence to see some of the important industrial facilities, institutes and fascist organizations. 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 Prime Minister that the reception of the delegation was excellent among both officials and the general public. To show his satisfaction, Stojadinović received the workers on their return to Belgrade to hear their impressions and instructed Hristić to thank Ciano on his behalf.¹¹⁷ But for all this fanfare, corporatism made no progress that would tangibly affect economy and social structure in Yugoslavia.

The 11 December 1938 Elections and the Downfall of Stojadinović

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. This was not lost on the leaders of the Serbian United Opposition who, in anticipation of the call, appealed to Prince Paul, invoking the critical international situation (which had blown over in reality) and asking him not to allow the Stojadinović government to carry out the election "in which only violence and forgery would decide."¹¹⁸ Even before the elections were scheduled, in May 1938, a group of JRZ members had prepared a proposal for carrying out party propaganda, criticizing the old primitive approach and drawing inspiration from Fascist Italy. The gist of the proposal concerned the application of methods that had proved successful in Italy. The admiration of the Italian "new type of organizing political life", the general tenor of suggestions, especially the proposal to form a secret party police responsible to the head of the party

¹¹⁷ Simić, *Milan Stojadinović i Italija*, 169–171.

¹¹⁸ AJ, 37-65-386, leaflet "Raspis novih izbora," Zagreb, 10 October 1938.

alone, smacked of fascism.¹¹⁹ The only signature attached to the document was that of Milutin Krivokapić, vice-president of the Main Committee of OJRZ, which might indicate that the impulse for fascistization 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 a soon-to-be-made manual for party activists and were put into practice during the election campaign.¹²⁰

Once the election campaign began, Stojadinović held the first of his nine major rallies in the JRZ office in Belgrade on 16 October. He had no qualms about admitting to Prince Paul that the staging of the event had been “entirely à la Hitler.”¹²¹ He must have believed that the Anglophile Regent would regard such a staging as a matter of pragmatic expedience rather than political conviction. In Petrovgrad (nowadays Zrenjanin), 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.¹²² Jovanović Stoimirović recorded with displeasure that it was there that “the fascist organization 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

¹¹⁹ AJ, 37-12-81, “Predlog za partijsku propagandu,” 8 May 1938, attached to Milutin Krivokapić to Milan Stojadinović, undated. This document is also discussed in Tešić, *Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica*, 198–200.

¹²⁰ *Uputstvo za praktično izvodjenje partijske propagande* (Beograd, 1938).

¹²¹ AJ, Prince Paul Papers, reel 4, Milan Stojadinović to Prince Paul, 16 October 1938, scans 568–573.

¹²² Twelve members of the moto-section Wings (*Krila*), associated with the local JRZ branch for Belgrade, Zemun and Pančevo (a list of names is given) accompanied Stojadinović on his journey in Montenegro in September 1938. There were 40 permanent members of the section. The travel log shows that, during the election campaign, 14 motorcyclists accompanied Stojadinović to Petrovgrad, 19 to Novi Sad, 8 to Bosanski Novi and 11 to Bijeljina. 13 motorcyclists were present at the arrival of Count Ciano in January 1939. (AJ, 37-16-103).



Milan Stojadinović at the JRZ rally in Petrovgrad, 6 November 1938
(Courtesy of the Archives of Yugoslavia, Photo Collection, no. 377)

at that.”¹²³ But the same staging was repeated in Novi Sad, the largest city in Vojvodina, 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.¹²⁴

It was hardly a coincidence that the fascist iconography was most conspicuous at the two rallies held in the northern part of Serbia/Yugoslavia (Petrovgrad and Novi Sad), which had a considerable German (and Hungarian) minority. Stojadinović killed two birds with one stone: he demonstrated his inclination to fascist methods to Berlin and Rome and secured the votes of the local Germans. He was not aware that Berlin had signaled to the German minority to cast their votes for JRZ,

¹²³ Jovanović Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, 216.

¹²⁴ Biber, “O padu Stojadinovićeve vlade,” 42.

although he might have expected it.¹²⁵ He toned down the fascist coloring of his campaign in two towns of central 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).¹²⁶ Moreover, Stojadinović did not organize a large rally in any towns in *Šumadija*, Serbia's heartland, since he knew that aping fascist methods there would not be well received among the Serbian peasants who cherished their memories of fighting Austria-Hungary and Germany. This is an interesting example that can contribute to Costa Pinto's and Kallis' concept of the transnational transfer of fascist ideas and practices affecting the conservative constituency. The election campaign of JRZ can certainly be understood in those terms, but Stojadinović clearly manipulated the use of fascist techniques to achieve a foreign policy goal which also benefited him domestically during the elections.

Apart from Ljotić's marginal movement, the election saw a clash between two major blocs, JRZ together with Hodjera's *Borbaši*, the Radical Social Party and dissidents from other parties headed by Stojadinović and Maček's list comprised of his Peasant-Democratic Coalition (HSS and Independent Democratic Party), the Serbian United Opposition and, surprisingly, the integral Yugoslav JNS, which joined it because of technical difficulties for a small party to present its own list. The two blocs stood for different political program in relation to the most important Croatian problem: JRZ was in favor of "one king, one nation, one state,"¹²⁷ a unitary Yugoslavia, whereas Maček's followers

¹²⁵ Dušan Biber, *Nacizem in Nemci v Jugoslaviji 1933-1941* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1966), 188; Zoran Janjetović, *Deca careva, pastorčad kraljeva: nacionalne manjine u Jugoslaviji 1918-1941* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2005), 206.

¹²⁶ AJ, 37-16-105, Josip Rogić to Jovan Marković, 4 November 1938; Josip Rogić to Jovan Marković, 5 November 1938. For the estimates of the crowd in different places, see Jelena Opra, "Izborna kampanja Milana Stojadinovića 1938. godine," *Arhiv*, 2 (2001): 176.

¹²⁷ *Jedan kralj, jedan narod, jedna država* (Beograd: Sekcija za unutrašnju propagandu JRZ, 1938).

championed some sort of federal, albeit never clearly established, rearrangement. For Stojadinović, it was especially important to win a clear majority of Serbian votes in order to prove that he was the true representative of the Serbian population rather than the leaders of the United Opposition, whose legitimacy had long been disputed in the press under his control.¹²⁸ Stojadinović won the elections with 1,643,783 (54.09%), whereas Maček had 1,364,524 (44.90%) and Ljotić 30,734 votes (1.01%), but his lead over the opposition was less than impressive.¹²⁹ The Prime Minister was surprised and disappointed since he had expected to win around two million votes, as Sir Ronald Campbell, British minister in Belgrade, recorded. Campbell believed his estimate, found Stojadinović superior to all other politicians, and his prolonged premiership preferable to returning to the earlier disorder. Commenting on speculations about further development of Stojadinović's internal policy, the British minister did not subscribe to the view that he would proceed as "a full-blooded dictator on the Mussolini model"; Campbell did not believe Stojadinović had dictatorial tendencies and thought that the latter must be familiar with the mentality of his countrymen unwilling to accept them and aware that Prince Paul would not allow them.¹³⁰

Despite the election disappointment, it seemed that the Prime Minister could stay in office as long as the Prince Regent supported him. But Stojadinović's electoral flirtation with fascist iconography undermined the confidence Prince Paul 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, Milan Aćimović, about the crowd hailing Stojadinović as the Leader. "What am I then?", he said.¹³¹ He immediately ordered Aćimović to investigate what was go-

¹²⁸ AJ, 81-6-25, Partijski presbiri Jugoslovenske radikalne zajednice, Partijski bilteni u prvom tromesečju 1938 g., 22 januara 1938. g.

¹²⁹ For an analysis of the election results, see Radojević, *Udružena opozicija*, 74; Simić, *Propaganda Milana Stojadinovića*, 284-291.

¹³⁰ TNA, Ronald Campbell to Viscount Halifax, 5 December 1938, R 9778/234/92, FO 371/22477; Ljubo Boban, *Maček i politika Hrvatske seljačke stranke 1928–1941: iz povijesti hrvatskog pitanja*, 2 vols (Zagreb: Liber, 1974), I, 364-366.

¹³¹ Jovanović Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, 377.

ing on. The latter saw Stojadinović on 18 November and discussed “his information and personal observations with regard to certain new tendencies, which especially came into play during the Novi Sad rally.” Stojadinović failed to understand that the Prince Regent was behind Aćimović’s inquiry and he smilingly replied that, unsurprisingly, it was the opposition that launched this attack, just like many times before, and that the JRZ’s attitude towards fascism was clearly defined, with the wording he approved himself, in a propaganda brochure printed fifteen days earlier (entitled *What does the Yugoslav Radical Union want?*). Stojadinović also pointed out that the said brochure explained that the title “Leader” related to him solely in the capacity of the head of JRZ. “Mister Prime Minister further stressed that neither he nor JRZ had any intention to fascistize the country and that certain things, like uniforms, shouts leader-leader, saluting with a hand etc. have an entirely different meaning of which I will report orally and in detail to Your Highness.” After seeing more of Stojadinović and talking over the same subject on two occasions, Aćimović conveyed his impression “that Mister Prime Minister will certainly do nothing that would not be entirely in accordance with the wishes and views of Your Highness.” To further prove his point, Aćimović reported to Prince Paul – who was in an official visit to London at that time – that he had seen a film recording of the rallies held in Novi Sad and Šabac and that to him “it seems that the versions spread after this rally [in Novi Sad] are, to a considerable extent, exaggerated,” and he also attached the brochure to which Stojadinović had referred.¹³² Aćimović was a friend of Stojadinović and he tried not just to dispel the Prince Regent’s suspicions, but also, it seems likely, to discreetly warn the Prime Minister about the doubts entertained at the highest place – that is certainly how Prince Paul would come to interpret his action and treat him accordingly.¹³³

The evidence provided in Aćimović’s report is consistent with the Prince Regent’s utterance to his close friend, the 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

¹³² AJ, Prince Paul Papers, reel 14, Milan Aćimović to Prince Paul, 24 November 1938.

¹³³ Jovanović Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, 378–379.

of his young cousin, Petar II.¹³⁴ Prince Paul was determined not to allow the Karadjordjević dynasty to suffer the fate of the House of Savoy. He expressed himself to that effect in the conversations with Serbian interlocutors and Milan Antić, the court minister, interpreted Stojadinović's demise in such terms, while the Prince Regent's explanations to the Croats and foreign diplomats and statesmen were designed for their consumption.¹³⁵ Based on Prince Paul's conversation with the British minister, Campbell, it is clear that he had made up his mind to drop Stojadinović from the government by mid-January 1939.¹³⁶ 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 lost on Ciano as evidence of fascistization, especially as he failed to notice that the same 300 young men greeted him again in the JRZ office and on several other occasions during his visit.¹³⁷ But that little spectacle served Stojadinović to buttress his claim that he modeled JRZ on the Fascist Party.

In fact, the shirted JRZ youth lined up to be seen by Ciano encapsulated the essence of Stojadinović's toying with fascist motifs: just like his youth and workers' organizations, it lacked true conviction and was instead geared towards producing an effect and conveying the political message he believed to be opportune. In that sense, this particular transmission of fascist style did not simply stem from Italian influence as part of unconscious borrowing from a model that 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 that served the needs of Yugoslav foreign policy. There was another instance that

¹³⁴ Kosta Dimitrijević, *Vreme zabrana* (Beograd: Prometej, 1991), 288. For more evidence, see Biber, "O padu Stojadinovićeve vlade," 47-50; also Dragoslav Djordjević, *Na raskršnici '41: prilozi za srpsku istoriju Drugog svetskog rata* (Gornji Milanovac: Dečje novine, 1991), 114.

¹³⁵ Biber, "O padu Stojadinovićeve vlade"; Boban, *Maček i politika Hrvatske seljačke stranke*, I, 470-471.

¹³⁶ Živko Avramovski, *Britanci o Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, 3 vols (Beograd: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1996), III, 53.

¹³⁷ Danilo Gregorić, *Samoubistvo Jugoslavije: poslednji čin jugoslovenske tragedije* (Beograd: Jugoistok, 1942), 53.



Milan Stojadinović and Count Ciano on the premises of JRZ's Main Committee in the Dečanska street, 22 January 1939 (Courtesy of the Archives of Yugoslavia, Photo Collection, no. 377)

reflected Stojadinović's pragmatism in employing features of fascist style in order to make an impression in the right quarters. Making use of German technical expertise, he had a member of the JRZ newly-fledged film section edit a promotion film for the election, first of its kind in Yugoslavia, in Berlin. The Yugoslav expert reported that the footage from Petrovgrad created the impression of a grandiose rally and that some prominent Nazi functionaries had been thrilled to see Stojadinović say "Hail Hitler" with his extended hand at the end of his promotion speech filmed in parliament – that segment was, of course, later cut in production.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ The title of the film was "On the Road to Revival – Yugoslavia yesterday and today" (*Putem preporoda – Jugoslavija juče i danas*), and it was the climax of the mass media-based, intensive propaganda that drew on the experiences of Italy and Germany. The film was distributed in the country by 24 special couriers for 16 days



Departure of Count Ciano from the railway station in Belgrade, 22 January 1939
(Courtesy of the Archives of Yugoslavia, Photo Collection, no. 377)

Unfortunately for Stojadinović, however, his tête-à-tête with Ciano made the Regent even more suspicious of him. As Antić put it, the talks between Ciano and the Yugoslav Prime Minister were “the last drop of

prior to the election. Feedback on the reception was indicative of the difficulties that flirtation with the fascist traits of political activism created in different parts of the country. For example, the Slovene supporters of JRZ in the town of Ptuj disliked it because the chant “Leader” had an air of fascism, while the disgruntled Jews from Sarajevo were said to have financed the opposition. See AJ, 37-12-81, Gradimir Kozomarić [head of the film section] to Milan Stojadinović, 13 November 1938; Kako je primljen film “Putem preporoda – Jugoslavija juče i danas”, 2. decembra 1938; Gradimir Kozomarić to Milan Stojadinović, 21 November 1938; Predrag Lažetić, “Milan Stojadinović i predizborna propaganda 1938,” *Zbornik Istorijskog muzeja Srbije* 25 (1988): 123–125. Transcript of the film is published in Bojan Simić, *In the Spirit of National Ideology: Organization of State Propaganda in Eastern and Southern Europe in the 1930s, Comparative Perspectives on Poland, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2013), 207–212.

poison in the relations between the Prince and Stojadinović.”¹³⁹ 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 realize his intention to rule as a fascist dictator.¹⁴⁰ 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 cordial relations with Italy for that purpose and that informed, and grossly distorted, the Regent’s reading of all Stojadinović’s moves. Prince Paul then engineered the crisis of the cabinet, and Stojadinović resigned on 4 February 1939.

* * *

In retrospect, Stojadinović pointed out the absurdity of imagining him as a fascist leader in multinational Yugoslavia.¹⁴¹ There might have possibly emerged a Serbian fascist dictator, a Croatian (Ante Pavelić became one during the war) or a Slovenian one, but he was no doubt correct that there could not have been an all-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 elements for fascism” in Yugoslavia because it was impossible to find a single leader for the Serbs, Croats, Slovenes and Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina (today’s Bosniaks).¹⁴² Besides, the case of Dimitrije Ljotić, the leader of the 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

¹³⁹ Archives of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Arhiv Srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti), Belgrade, ref. no. 14387/8734, Milan Antić’s undated note; Hoptner, *Jugoslavija u krizi*, 126–127.

¹⁴⁰ Biber, “O padu Stojadinovićeve vlade,” 16–19.

¹⁴¹ Stojadinović, *Ni rat ni pakt*, 589.

¹⁴² Jovanović Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, 206.

fancied himself as a fascist Serbian dictator following the break-up of Yugoslavia is based on nothing more than rumors and speculations.¹⁴³ Had he been playing with such ideas in cahoots with Italy, as had been implied, their realization would have required Rome's consent and participation, and Ciano would have surely known and made some mention of it – and he did not.

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, limited to the exuberant fascist style, seem rather superficial and brought no real change in the political and social structure of the authoritarian Yugoslav monarchy. It is too often overlooked that the Stojadinović government was the most liberal one between the imposition of King Alexander's dictatorship in 1929 and the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1941 (his treatment of Ljotić was, to an extent, an exception to the rule).¹⁴⁴ Far from imposing corporatism, violence against political opponents – in fact, Maček's followers organized in the Croatian Peasant Defence terrorized the government supporters during the 1938 election – and ideological indoctrination, he held elections, which he won with less than 55 per cent of the vote. Campbell, an objective and perspicacious observer, reported on the relatively free manner in which the election was held: "In general the Opposition are highly incensed at the freedom with which they are being permitted to conduct themselves, as, in the expected event of the Government's victory, they will be deprived of the excuse that they are subjected to police interference." Another explanation for the marked leniency on the part of the au-

¹⁴³ 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. (Jovanović Stoimirović, *Dnevnik*, 282). For the Regent's utterance, most often cited are the notoriously unreliable memoirs of Ivan Meštrović, *Uspomene na političke ljude i događaje* (Buenos Aires, 1961), 290–291.

¹⁴⁴ To prove this point in relation to his predecessors, Stojadinović had statistics prepared, showing the number of interned individuals, political convictions, emigrants abroad and pardons granted to political prisoners. (AJ, 37-45-296, the statistics attached to Milan Stojadinović to Dragiša Cvetković, 19 September 1938).

thorities was that it resulted from political machinations of Korošec, interior minister, who sought to prevent a landslide victory that “would render M. Stojadinovič independent of the support of the Slovenes.”¹⁴⁵ It was only after Stojadinovič’s fall from power that the parliament was suspended and the internment camps for communists and the anti-Semitic legislation were introduced.¹⁴⁶

Admittedly, Stojadinovič decided to impose a much stricter regime in the Croatian areas after the election, having realized that his liberal approach of the past three and a half years had solely benefited Maček. He reconstructed his cabinet on 21 December, most notably replacing Korošec (who became the chairman of the Senate) with the energetic Aćimović at the crucial post of interior minister.¹⁴⁷ This was also necessary in order to tighten the reins on the administrative apparatus, which had failed him during the election. For that purpose, on 27 December 1938, the cabinet formed “a committee of ministers for a revision and change of the disciplinary regulations for all civil servants and clerks.”¹⁴⁸ Information was duly collected on those civil servants who stood out as overt opponents of the government.¹⁴⁹ Stojadinovič had no time left to carry out any sanctions against the unpliant officialdom, but even if he did, that would not have signaled a shift to fascism – the legislation introduced during King Alexander’s dictatorship provided sufficient means to ensure complete control over civil servants.

With all the intricacies of Yugoslavia’s internal and foreign policy in view, it was exceedingly difficult at times, even for finer analysts, to

¹⁴⁵ TNA, Ronald Campbell to Viscount Halifax, 5 December 1938, R 9778/234/92, FO 371/22477.

¹⁴⁶ See the next chapter on the post-Stojadinovič JRZ.

¹⁴⁷ Biber, “O padu Stojadinovičeve vlade,” 46.

¹⁴⁸ AJ, 37-45-297, Dobrivoje Stošović to Mehmed Spaho (acting for Stojadinovič), 27 December 1938.

¹⁴⁹ AJ, 37-9-57, Spisak službenika resora Ministarstva saobraćaja, sa službom na teritoriji Zetske banovine, koji se ističu kao protivnici Vladine politike; Spisak službenika resora Ministarstva finansija, sa službom na teritoriji Zetske banovine, koji se ističu kao protivnici Vladine politike; Spisak službenika resora Ministarstva socijalne politike i narodnog zdravlja, sa službom na teritoriji Zetske banovine, koji se ističu kao protivnici Vladine politike; Spisak penzionera nastanjenih na teritoriji Zetske banovine, koji se ističu kao protivnici Vladine politike.

take stock of the situation and predict further developments.¹⁵⁰ On closer examination, Stojadinović's 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 mostly window dressing effectively employed to cultivate relations with Rome and Berlin – and rather successfully at that. Ironically, it was also Stojadinović's undoing, as the Crown came to believe that he went too far and started to pose a threat. In terms of Costa Pinto's and Kallis' theoretical framework, the case of the Stojadinović era in Yugoslavia points to the need to take into account the interplay between political pragmatism, especially in foreign affairs, and the extent of real social and political transformations, with a view to coming to a more reliable assessment of which developments might be regarded as genuine fascistization.

¹⁵⁰ Amidst his gravest doubts following Stojadinović's visit to Germany, Campbell informed the Foreign Office as follows: "I said [...] that there were those who believed that M. Stoyadinovitch was still at heart a democrat, and that his coquettings with authoritarianism were designed to please the dictators whose attentions he was receiving. I should perhaps add that there are also those who, on the contrary, think that he had definitely changed his spots, that he will appear as time goes on more and more openly in the skin of a dictator and that the trial of strength with the Prince Regent arising out of this transformation is already begun. I am no more prepared to accept the latter than the former view." See TNA, Ronald Campbell to Anthony Eden, 31 January 1938, R 960/234/92, FO 371/22476; Boban, *Maček i Hrvatska seljačka stranka*, I, 471–472.