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VSEBINA / INDICE GENERALE / CONTENTS

Martin Bele, Tone Ravnikar, Andrej Hozjan: Današnja slovenska Štajerska v obdobju med letoma 1246 in 1260	1
<i>L'odierna Stiria slovena nel periodo 1246–1260</i>	
<i>The today Slovenian Styria in the period 1246–1260</i>	
Martin Bele, Tone Ravnikar, Andrej Hozjan: Štajerski deželni zbori med letoma 1246 in 1311	27
<i>Le assemblee provinciali nella Stiria negli anni 1246 e 1311</i>	
<i>The Regional Assemblies in Styria between 1246 and 1311</i>	
Tone Ravnikar, Aleš Maver: Mestno plemstvo v Slovenj Gradcu med 13. in 15. stoletjem	55
<i>Nobiltà urbana a Slovenj Gradec tra il Duecento e il Quattrocento</i>	
<i>The Urban Nobility in Slovenj Gradec from the 13th till 15th centuries</i>	
Andrej Hozjan, Tone Ravnikar: Deželni knez notranje Avstrije Karel II. Habsburžan na Ptuju poleti 1578	79
<i>L'arciduca Carlo II d'Asburgo dell'Austria Interna a Ptuj nell'estate del 1578</i>	
<i>Charles II of Habsburg, Ruler of Inner Austria, in Ptuj during the Summer of 1578</i>	
Aleš Maver, Darko Friš: <i>Iudica me, Deus:</i> duhovniki v politiki na Slovenskem ter v srednji Evropi v prvi polovici 20. stoletja in Anton Korošec	109
<i>Iudica me, Deus: i sacerdoti in politica nel mondo sloveno e nell'Europa centrale nella prima metà del Novecento e Anton Korošec</i>	
<i>Iudica me, Deus: Priests in Politics in Slovenia and in Central Europe in the first half of the twentieth century and Anton Korošec</i>	
Darko Friš: Razmah in napredek Maribora v času županovanja dr. Josipa Leskovarja (1924–1927)	127
<i>Espansione e progresso di Maribor durante il mandato da sindaco del dott. Josip Leskovar (1924–1928)</i>	
<i>Expansion and Progress of Maribor during dr. Josip Leskovar's Term as Mayor (1924–1928)</i>	

- David Hazemali, Mateja Matjašič Friš, Ana Šela, Majda Schmidt Krajnc:**
 Med priložnostmi in pomanjkanjem: Maribor v času prvega županskega
 mandata dr. Alojzija Juvana, 1928–1931 159
*Tra opportunità e carenze: Maribor durante il primo mandato da sindaco
 del dott. Alojzij Juvan, 1928–1931*
*Between Opportunities and Shortage: Maribor during dr. Alojzij Juvan's
 first Term as Mayor, 1928–1931*
- Darko Friš, Nina Gostenčnik:** Dr. Alojzij Juvan – drugič na čelu
 mariborske mestne občine (1935–1941) 181
*Il dott. Alojzij Juvan – per la seconda volta a capo del Comune cittadino
 di Maribor (1935–1941)*
Dr. Alojzij Juvan – second term as Mayor of Maribor (1935–1941)
- Dragan Bakić:** Milan Stojadinović, the Croat Question and the International
 Position of Yugoslavia, 1935–1939 207
*Milan Stojadinović, la questione croata e la posizione internazionale
 della Jugoslavia, 1935–1939*
*Milan Stojadinović, hrvaško vprašanje in mednarodni položaj
 Jugoslavije, 1935–1939*
- Yizheng Zou:** English Newspaper and WWII: The War Reporting
 of the *South China Morning Post* in British Colonial Hong Kong 229
*Un giornale inglese e la Seconda guerra mondiale: le cronache
 di guerra del South China Morning Post nella Hong Kong ai tempi
 del colonialismo britannico*
*Angleški časopis in druga svetovna vojna: vojno poročanje
 časopisa South China Morning Post in britanski Hong Kong*
- Darko Friš, Gorazd Bajc:** Iz Istre v Avstrijo? Nekateri vidiki ameriških
 in britanskih obveščevalnih služb med drugo svetovno vojno 251
*Dall'Istria verso l'Austria? Alcuni aspetti riguardo l'intelligence
 statunitense e britannica durante la Seconda guerra mondiale*
*From Istria to Austria? Some aspects regarding the US and
 the British Intelligence during the Second World War*
- Tamara Griesser-Pečar:** Ciril Žebot. Prizadevanje za samostojno Slovenijo 277
Ciril Žebot. L'impegno per una Slovenia indipendente
Ciril Žebot. The Quest for Independent Slovenia

Tomaž Kladnik: Mirko Javornik, kot interes Službe državne varnosti Socialistične Republike Slovenije	305
<i>Mirko Javornik come interesse del Servizio di sicurezza di stato nella Repubblica Socialista della Slovenia</i>	
<i>Mirko Javornik, as the Interest of State Security Service of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia</i>	

Bojana Lakičević Đuranović: The interpretation of Articles 2 and 3 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) in the light of the Jurisprudence of International Judicial Authorities	325
<i>L'interpretazione degli articoli 2 e 3 della Convenzione sulla Prevenzione e la Repressione del crimine di Genocidio (1948) alla luce della giurisprudenza delle autorità giudiziarie internazionali</i>	
<i>Interpretacija 2. in 3. člena Konvencije o preprečevanju in kazovanju zločina genocida (1948) v luči pristojnosti mednarodnih sodnih organov</i>	

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REVIEWS

<i>Marta Verginella (ur.):</i> Slovenka (Federico Tenca Montini)	351
<i>Dejan Jović:</i> Rat i mit. Politika identiteta u suvremenoj Hrvatskoj (Federico Tenca Montini)	354
Navodila avtorjem	357
<i>Istruzioni per gli autori</i>	360
<i>Instructions to authors</i>	364

MILAN STOJADINOVIĆ, THE CROAT QUESTION AND THE
INTERNATIONAL POSITION OF YUGOSLAVIA, 1935–1939*Dragan BAKIĆ*Serbian Academy for Sciences and Arts, Institute for Balkan Studies, Knez Mihailova 35/IV,
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ABSTRACT

This paper analysis the policy of Milan Stojadinović, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1935–1939) towards the Croat question, i.e. the passive resistance with which the Croat Peasant Party led by Vlatko Maček opposed the Belgrade government, struggling for an autonomous status of Croatia. Based on the private papers of Stojadinović and Prince Regent, Paul Karadjordjević, the reports of the well-informed and shrewd British Minister in Belgrade, Ronald Hugh Campbell, as well as the rich literature on the Serbo-Croat relations in the Kingdom, this article attempts to examine Stojadinović's approach to the Croat problem. It is argued here that Stojadinović's treatment of the Croat question was closely related to his foreign policy, especially towards Italy and Germany.

Keywords: Milan Stojadinović, Yugoslavia, Croat question, foreign policy, 1935–1939

MILAN STOJADINOVIĆ, LA QUESTIONE CROATA E LA POSIZIONE
INTERNAZIONALE DELLA JUGOSLAVIA, 1935–1939

SINTESI

L'articolo analizza la politica di Milan Stojadinović, primo ministro e ministro degli esteri del Regno di Jugoslavia (1935–1939), verso la cosiddetta questione croata; infatti, per conquistare un'ampia autonomia della Croazia il Partito contadino croato guidato da Vlatko Maček si opponeva al governo di Belgrado con una resistenza passiva. Sulla base dell'archivio privato di Stojadinović e del reggente della Jugoslavia, il principe Pavle Karadjordjević, e delle relazioni di Ronald Hugh Campbell, il ministro plenipotenziario britannico a Belgrado che era ben informato e scaltro, nonché di una ampia letteratura dedicata alle relazioni serbo-croate nel Regno, il saggio intende presentare l'approccio di Stojadinović verso il problema croato. Si intende dimostrare che il suo atteggiamento verso questa questione era strettamente legata alla sua politica estera, in particolare verso l'Italia e la Germania.

Parole chiave: Milan Stojadinović, Jugoslavia, questione croata, politica estera, 1935–1939

INTRODUCTION

There is a fair amount of literature covering the perennial Croat question in the interwar Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Čulinović, 1961; Boban, 1965a; Boban, 1974; Petranović, 1980; Dragnich, 1983; Banac, 1988; Djokić, 2007). Nevertheless, a full-blown study of the policy of Milan Stojadinović, the Prime Minister of Yugoslavia in the latter half of the 1930s, towards the Croat opposition is still lacking, despite a number of useful works (Stojkov, 1985; Trifković, 2012; Svirčević, 2012; Nadoveza, 2010). There is also a dearth of studies that attempt to assess Stojadinović's premiership in its totality, or place it in the larger framework of interwar Yugoslavia and South-Eastern Europe – and no biography of this important politician. This paper offers an analysis of his policy towards the Croat opposition with special reference to international situation and foreign policy. It will closely examine Stojadinović's twin-aims of ensuring the inviolability of Yugoslavia's borders in the increasingly perilous European situation and the maintenance of the existing constitutional order threatened by Croat federalist and separatist aspirations. It will also look at the rupture between him and Prince Paul, the Regent of Yugoslavia, which brought about Stojadinović's downfall, and discuss the extent to which it resulted from their differing concepts as to how to proceed with the solution of the Croat problem. This paper argues that Stojadinović dealt with the Croat opposition in close correlation with his foreign policy in keeping with his appreciation that, at least on the tactical level, he would maintain the upper hand as long as his handling of external affairs cut the ground from under the feet of any attempt to internationalise the Croat question.

THE CROAT QUESTION, ITS ORIGINS AND INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

To set the context for this study, one has to look back to the unsettled internal situation in Yugoslavia which was a permanent feature of that country since her creation on 1 December 1918. As has been noted, the internal bickering was essentially “*an issue of the Jacobin state versus the old Habsburg constitutional complexity of historic units.*” (Trifković, 1992, 355). The Serbs had lived in their independent national and unitary state for decades before the First World War and saw no reason to change that in a new state which was predicated on the national unity of South Slavs (Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) expressed through slogans “*one people with three names*” or “*the three tribes of the Yugoslav nation*”. For them, the complex constitutional solutions smacked too much of the hated and dismantled Austria-Hungary and were not compatible with the notion of a strong and powerful state. In contrast, the Croats had been part of the multinational Habsburg monarchy for centuries and used to having their status arranged through negotiations and contracts such as that of 1868 concluded between them and the Hungarians (*Nagodba*). When Stjepan Radić, the charismatic leader of the Croatian Peasant Party (CPP) in which the vast majority of Croats closed their ranks, reached an agreement with Belgrade in 1925 and entered the government, it appeared that Serbo-Croat differences had been resolved. His death after the attempt on his life at the National Assembly made by a fellow-MP from the Serb Radical Party in June 1928 plunged Yugoslavia into dramatic

crisis. His successor, Vladimir – Vlatko Maček, ordered the CPP's members of parliament to boycott that institution and, moreover, disputed the legitimacy of the Kingdom. Unable and not inclined to find a democratic solution to the crisis, King Aleksandar introduced his personal regime and proclaimed the ideology of integral Yugoslavism which was supposed to abolish all ethnic, religious and cultural-historical differences. It was then that Yugoslavia became the official name of the country instead of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The King also banned the activities of the existing "tribal" political parties as relics of the past.

His experiment in statecraft remained futile. The entire country opposed the loss of civil liberties and the Croats were particularly embittered by what they saw as a violent suppression of their national identity. In 1927, the CPP had made a coalition pact with the Independent Democratic Party that rallied a number of Serbs living mostly in Croatia and Bosnia known as the Peasant Democratic Coalition. On 7 November 1932, this coalition signed an agreement, along with a representative of the right-wing Croatian Party of Right (*Hrvatska Stranka Prava* or *frankovci*). Breathing fire against Serbian hegemony, the Zagreb Points (*Zagrebačke punktacije*) called for the annulment of the octroyed Constitution of September 1931 and the return to the pre-constitutional situation of 1918 from which a negotiated settlement between the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes would determine the future internal composition of the country. As for that composition, the resolution vaguely mentioned "*the association of interests*" based on the freely expressed will of the constituent units (Boban, 1971). This reflected the diversity of views between the signatories of the Zagreb Points and the consequent difficulties of formulating a more precise political programme. The author of the text, Ante Trumbić, the first Yugoslav Minister for Foreign Affairs (1919–1920) and now formally a member of the CPP, expounded that a prospective state "*would more resemble the organisation of the Little Entente [the alliance between Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Romania] after the latest pact [January 1933] than a federation, even such as Switzerland*" – in fact, he conceived of a loose association of fully independent states (Boban, 1971, 180–209). On the other hand, Maček maintained an ambivalent attitude that would allow him to move in different directions depending on the given situation: he publicly espoused the solution of the Croat question within the framework of Yugoslavia, but he privately assured the Italians that his true goal was an independent Croatia (Sadkovich, 1988, 59; Boban, 1965b, 50–56).

Apart from the CPP's passive resistance, the most extreme elements of the Croat political right formed the *Ustaša* revolutionary organisation under Ante Pavelić, the future infamous Führer (*Poglavnik*) of the Nazi-puppet Independent State of Croatia during World War Two. The *Ustaša* organisation was imbued with the racist anti-Serb ideology and wanted nothing short of a sovereign Greater Croatia. It was only natural that Pavelić and his most ardent followers found refuge in Italy which had been inimical to Yugoslavia since her creation. The Italians hankered after the dissolution of Yugoslavia for they had designs on the littoral province of Dalmatia and generally perceived a South Slav state as a thorn in their flesh – supported by France it thwarted Mussolini's ambitions to establish predominant Italian influence in the Danube region and in the Balkans. Propped up by

logistics from Rome, Fascist protégés, the *Ustašas*, were conducting a terrorist campaign in Yugoslavia from their bases in Italy – and also from Hungary. One of the more striking examples of their activities was the abortive attempt to instigate a rebellion in the province of Lika (Stojkov, 1970). Their greatest success was no doubt the assassination of King Aleksandar in Marseilles in October 1934. The unrest in Croatia, the *Ustaša* terrorist campaign and the connivance of the Italian and Hungarian authorities lent the Croatian question an international dimension.

It was not just the *Ustaša* movement, but also the CPP that actively sought foreign support in their struggle against the Yugoslav government. In October–December 1928, prior to the proclamation of King Aleksandar's personal regime, Ante Trumbić paid visit to Paris and London on behalf of the CPP with a view to promoting the Croat cause and sounding the French and British officials as to their attitude towards the internal conflict in Yugoslavia. His mission was a dismal failure. The Secretary-General of the Quai d'Orsay, Philip Berthelot, advised him to seek for an agreement directly with King Aleksandar, while the Foreign Office remained completely aloof (Krizman, 1962). In mid-1929, two prominent members of the CPP, Josip Krnjević and August Košutić, went abroad to mobilise public opinion and win over officials with whom they might get in touch for the Croat cause (Boban, 1965b, 69). It should be noted that the CPP closely cooperated in their activities with the pro-Habsburg ex-Austrian group of officers in Vienna led by General Stjepan Sarkotić and with the *Ustaša*. Maček's envoy Košutić and Ante Pavelić together presented the Italians with an elaborate plan for an armed rebellion in Croatia in October 1929 (Sadkovich, 1988, 57). On his return from Karlové Vary where he had received medical treatment in October 1930, Maček had a meeting in Salzburg with his emigrant party colleagues and the *Ustaša* leader. On that occasion, they assigned a country to each participant as their respective field of propaganda work: "*Pavelić conducts policy with the Italians, [August] Košutić [travels] between Italy and England, [Juraj] Krnjević sticks with the English and [Ljudevit] Kežman acts legally and is in touch with the French.*" (Boban, 1965b, 78). The co-operation between the CPP and the *Ustaša* somewhat similar to that of the *Sinn Féin* and the *Irish Republican Army* made it more difficult for the Belgrade government to deal with security challenges; both the Yugoslav and the Italian government viewed the two Croat organisations as two factions of a single movement striving for the same goal rather than two distinct groups (Sadkovich, 1988, 57–58).

PRINCE REGENT, STOJADINOVIĆ AND THEIR VIEW OF THE CROAT PROBLEM

It was in the difficult circumstances following the murder of King and the demission of the short-lived Jevtić government formed after the 5 May 1935 elections that Stojadinović became Prime Minister and Foreign Minister in June that year. He was a friend and confidant of Prince Paul, King Aleksandar's first cousin, who assumed regency until the 11-year-old King Petar II had not come of age. From the outset, the two men embarked on an all-round policy of appeasement both in domestic and foreign affairs. To form a basis for his government, Stojadinović decided to found a new party – the

Yugoslav Radical Union (*Jugoslovenska radikalna zajednica* – JRZ) (Tešić, 1997). It was a typical governmental party like that of his predecessor Jevtić, but it differed insofar as it included the Slovene People Party headed by Anton Korošec and the Yugoslav Muslim Organisation led by Mehmed Spaho which truly represented the majority of the Slovenes and Bosnian Muslims. Being a prominent member of the oldest Serbian – Radical – party, Stojadinović himself stood for the Serbs, although his legitimacy was very dubious, to say the least. Significantly, the strong representation of the Slovenes and Bosnian Muslims in the JRZ and Stojadinović's Cabinet isolated the Croats and strengthened the government in dealing with Maček's party. From Stojadinović's perspective, this could either make Maček more conciliatory and eventually bring him into the fold or keep him in an inferior position if he proved intransigent.

The Prime Minister's intention was to make a gradual shift from the late King's policy which would allow the internal situation to settle down. Stojadinović, Korošec and Spaho recognised that the 5 May elections had failed to tranquilise the country and had produced the government devoid of any real authority due to the elections methods used by Jevtić. They called for the formation of a government that would be supported in all parts of the country and invited the Croat leader to enter their Cabinet. New elections under more democratic election law were also promised. Another indication that Stojadinović was willing to compromise was his apparent abandonment of the concept of integral Yugoslavism: he spoke of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes rather than of the Yugoslavs, albeit without qualifying them as separate nations.¹ Moreover, he hinted at broad local self-government, with a view to appeasing regional and historical particularism, but without specifying its exact nature and extent.² The Stojadinović government also allowed the outward expression of national identity such as the use of Croat flag which had been banned under King Aleksandar's personal regime. As a special sign of goodwill, Maček was released from prison in which he had been since April 1933, having been sentenced for treason. In addition, political rallies and activities of the opposition parties were revived through the more lenient application of the restrictive legislation. With all this in view, there were unmistakable signs that Stojadinović was preparing the ground for the restoration of democratic rights in the country and, along with that, an agreement with the Croats.

But there was no basis on which such an agreement could be made, as the Crown and Prime Minister did not allow for the possibility of a federal state in order to satisfy the Croats. The well-informed British Minister in Belgrade, Sir Ronald Hugh Campbell, recorded the Regent's opinion in this matter: "*Apart from his determination not to modify the constitution by unconstitutional means during the King's minority, Prince Paul remains convinced that the division of Yugoslavia, in its present state of development, into a number of autonomous federal units would lead to its early disruption.*"³ To fend off Maček's demands, Prince Paul and his government refused any constitutional change

1 AJ, 37-1-4, The Declaration of Stojadinović, Korošec and Spaho, undated but likely from June 1935, scans 16–17.

2 AJ, 37-1-4, Declaration of Stojadinović's Cabinet, 4 July 1935, scans 31–33.

3 TNA FO 371/21197 R 7514/175/92, Campbell to Eden, 8 November 1937.

under the Regency that would prejudice the rights of the underage King. But this was just a convenient excuse: Prince Paul had it on the authority of four leading law professors in the country that the Regency was not constrained in the exercise of royal powers and could even revise the constitution for the purpose of changing the state structure.⁴ Prince Paul's view chimed with that of Stojadinović, who was also reported to have said repeatedly that the Croat question “*could not be settled by a stroke of the pen and would in fact only be settled by the passage of time.*” He intended to make headway by “*the progressive grant of autonomous measures,*” but Maček was not forthcoming and he came to the conclusion that no agreement could be reached.⁵

As will be seen later, Stojadinović decided to proceed with a different approach to the Croat opposition to which his foreign policy was instrumental. But negotiations with Maček were carried on and, at least, served the useful purpose of improving the atmosphere in the country. It was Prince Paul rather than Stojadinović who cultivated initial contacts with the Croat leader. This was agreed between the two of them as they thought that Prince Paul would impress Maček with his title, appearance and demeanour. “*In fact, he [Prince Paul] was supposed to keep Maček ‘under control’ for the time being, so that he would not do anything stupid, until things in the country got a little more settled and the time came for more serious political conversations with him, which I was supposed to conduct as Prime Minister and the leader of the largest political party,*” Stojadinović explained in his memoirs (Stojadinović, 1963, 513).

NEGOTIATIONS WITH MAČEK AND STOJADINOVIĆ'S FOREIGN POLICY

Maček was granted an audience with Prince Paul on 8 November 1936 and had the opportunity to elaborate on his views. This meeting was followed up. Stojadinović made contact with Maček through the intermediary of Ljubomir Pantić, General Secretary of the JRZ and Stjepan Krasnik, the president of the Chamber for Trade and Industry in Zagreb. Another channel of communication was an exchange of views between Dragiša Cvetković, his Minister for Social Policy, and Ivo Pernar, Maček's lieutenant. To demonstrate his goodwill, Stojadinović made sure that the 1936 municipal elections in the Savska and Primorska banovina, the two (out of nine) administrative units comprised of the Croat lands, were conducted orderly. Cvetković went to Zagreb to sound out the Croat position and reported optimistically that Maček would be moderate in his demands (Boban, 1970a, 194). However, Stojadinović did not expect much from this discussion as he was not prepared to consent to either revision of the constitution or federation – he later claimed to have received such instructions from the Regent (Jovanović Stoimirović, 2000, 95–96; Stojadinović, 1963, 513–514). Finally, he met with Maček in the village of Brežice in January 1937. He made it clear that he could not contemplate a solution which would infringe on the constitution until King Petar had taken his throne. He also repeated his offer to the CPP to join his Cabinet and receive five ministerial posts, and,

4 AJ, Prince Paul Papers, reel 2, Korošec to Antić, 16 January 1937, scans 483–497.

5 TNA FO 371/21196 R 4041/125/92, Campbell to Eden, 4 June 1937.

in doing so, contribute to passing of a new electoral law and conducting parliamentary elections. Maček declined. Stojadinović then proposed – he later suggested it publically – that Maček should maintain his coalition with the Serbian United Opposition (*Ujedinjena opozicija*) and stand for their federalist program, whereas he would lead another grouping standing for a unitary state; the two large political blocs (resembling a two-party political scene in the USA and Great Britain) would face each other at the completely free elections in the fall of that year and proceed further depending on the outcome of such elections (Boban, 1970a, 195; Stojadinović, 1963, 516).⁶ This proposal appealed to Maček and Stojadinović promised to prepare the draft of a new electoral law and submit it to the Croat leader for his approval. The contact between them was maintained: Dragan Protić, head of Stojadinović's office, visited Maček twice over the next two months. The Croat leader was anxious to receive the promised draft, but he was met with excuses, since Stojadinović was still not prepared to call the elections (Boban, 1970a, 203–210).

Stojadinović's great success, however, was in the field of foreign policy. He fully realised that Nazi Germany's growing strength would lead to its predominance in Central Europe and constitute a principal factor in Belgrade's conduct of external affairs. In the wake of the Abyssinian crisis and the German remilitarisation of the Rhineland, it was clear that the Versailles settlement was crumbling down, spelling danger to all the successor states along the Danube. Yugoslavia was in an especially vulnerable position, bordering not just on her arch-enemy Italy but also on revisionist Hungary and Bulgaria, while her traditional links with France and Britain – and her membership in the Little Entente and the Balkan Entente formed in 1934 together with Greece, Romania and Turkey – did not provide sufficient guarantee for her security. With the rising Germany in sight, Yugoslavia had some room for manoeuvre, largely on account of the fact that, despite their increasingly close relations, Berlin and Rome pursued conflicting interests in the region in which Belgrade was a cornerstone. Stojadinović was quick to seize his opportunity. In December 1935, the new Yugoslav Minister in Berlin, Aleksandar Cincar Marković, assured Hitler that Yugoslavia would not enter any political arrangements directed against Germany (Krizman, 1975, 84). This was not a difficult promise to make as Yugoslavia was neither conterminous with Germany nor had any previous commitments that would pit her against that country. Appreciating Belgrade's stance, Marshal Göring sent a message that Germany was willing to guarantee Yugoslavia against both Hungary and Italy, the importance of which Stojadinović stressed to Prince Regent. "*For the sake of our tranquillity and securing the future of Yugoslavia, we must find an insurance against Italy as soon as possible,*" he pointed out.⁷ Friendly relations with Berlin were also required on account of the increasing volume of trade between the two countries, which was partly a natural state of affairs due to geographic reasons and their complementary economies and partly resulted from the comprehensive German effort to acquire political dominance in South-Eastern Europe. Finally, Yugoslavia was opposed

6 For Stojadinović's public reference to the electoral trial of strength between the unitarist and federalist party see AJ, 37-2-9, Stojadinović's speech given to the JRZ youth on 24 October 1937.

7 AJ, Prince Paul Papers, reel 4, Stojadinović to Prince Paul, 12 June 1936, scan 329.

to a possible Habsburg restoration in Austria, because she feared internal repercussions of such a development and the revival of revanchist ambitions more than she was weary of the Anschluss, which Stojadinović found inevitable in the long run (Biber, 1966a, 129–130). After the Anschluss of Austria in March 1938, the German colossus emerged on the borders of Yugoslavia, which was an unpleasant geopolitical change in the position of that country. But Stojadinović could at least point out the foresight of his policy and calm down the public opinion with the unequivocal Hitler's assurances with regard to the inviolability of Yugoslavia's borders (Biber, 1966a, 138–139; Mičić, 2010, 82–108).

Stojadinović also managed to reach an agreement with Italy. In a sweeping diplomatic move, he signed a pact of friendship with Count Galeazzo Ciano, Italian Foreign Minister, in Belgrade on 25 March 1937. The Italians were anxious that Germany might swallow Austria and then channel its growing power in the direction of the Adriatic Sea, and thus sought to strengthen their position by establishing close relations with Belgrade. Apart from providing a reinsurance against Germany, Ciano was convinced that the Pact of Belgrade offered the opportunity to achieve the long-standing Italian objective of wresting Yugoslavia away from France's sphere of influence and disrupting the Little Entente. (Knox, 1982, 35–36; Burgwyn, 1997, 155–156; Strang, 2003, 76–79; Bucarelli, 2000, 467–509; Bucarelli, 2006, 327–383). In the circumstances, Stojadinović was able to obtain considerable benefits for his country: Italy dropped its support for the Hungarian and Bulgarian revisionism, promised to improve the status of the Yugoslav (Slovene) national minority and renounced its patronage over the *Ustaša* organisation – Pavelić and his supporters were even interned on the Eolian (or Lipari) island, in Sardinia and elsewhere in southern Italy (Avramovski, 1968, 261–317; Hoptner, 1956). The main stumbling block between the two countries for the last decade at least, namely Italy's effective protectorate over Albania, a country placed at Yugoslavia's flank, lay dormant. With his skilful diplomacy, Stojadinović defused a potential threat to Yugoslavia from the Axis partners, not to speak of the minor powers such as Hungary and Bulgaria.

Although Stojadinović's foreign policy was pursued in full agreement with and subject to the approval of Prince Paul, it bore the mark of dynamism and personal charisma of the Yugoslav premier. He was a frequent visitor in the capitals of the Great Powers – for example he met face to face with Ciano four times – and made a strong impression on his interlocutors. Stojadinović's policy was much facilitated by his personal rapport with the leading figures in Germany and Italy such as Göring and Ciano. The latter praised his qualities in his famous diaries and had much personal sympathy for Stojadinović; in addition, he believed that the Yugoslav premier was inclined to fascism, which appealed to the ideological affinities of Italian foreign policy (Ciano, 1948, 98–105; Ciano, 2002, 32–33). Stojadinović's standing in Rome and the understanding he established with the Germans were seen in Hungary as a major obstacle to their own policy of breaking the Little Entente ring. After having failed to obtain Italy's military guarantee against an unprovoked Yugoslav attack, Kalman Kanya, the Hungarian Foreign Minister, bitterly complained to Ciano: "*Hungary's misfortune is that Ciano and Göring have fallen in love with Stoyadinovich.*" (Ciano, 2002, 110). This was certainly the whining bred out of disappointment, but it was not entirely amiss: Ciano – and Mussolini, to lesser extent

– put a higher premium on the friendship of Yugoslavia than that of Hungary in their long-term plans for the Balkans and Central Europe (Ciano, 2002, 138–139).

Despite Ciano's impressions, however, Stojadinović was not inspired by fascist leanings, or any other ideological sympathies. As a recent study has suggested, he was not an ideologue, but rather a shrewd practitioner of *realpolitik*; if he exhibited authoritarian tendencies while dealing with Ciano, this largely served a practical purpose to impress and cement their cordial relations (Djokić, 2011). Far from being a fortuitous improviser, Stojadinović had strong views on foreign policy and a clear strategy to steer Yugoslavia's course in a hostile international environment. Firstly, he appreciated that Germany's rise would bring about far-reaching consequences in Europe, that Austria and Czechoslovakia would fall victim to Hitler and that France and Great Britain would do nothing effective to prevent such a development. Secondly, he was convinced that his country had to stay away from the Great Powers' trial of strength and focus on the Balkans where it was something of a regional power (Ciano, 2002, 140–141). That was a difficult undertaking, but Stojadinović believed, as early as mid-1937, that "*in case of war, 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. "*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]*" (Jovanović Stoimirović, 2000, 132–138). It should be noted that Stojadinović did not believe in the "cordiality of Italo-German cooperation" and hence did not imagine the possibility of Yugoslavia's being forced to wage war against both Axis Powers. He was not alone in this misapprehension; in fact, many a European diplomat shared his views. But it is significant that Stojadinović continued to perceive Italy as Yugoslavia's main potential enemy even after the conclusion of the Pact of Belgrade – incidentally, this is a proof that his view of that country was not tinged with the alleged fascist propensities. Likewise, Stojadinović was alive to the danger of the growing German economic hold on Yugoslavia and he tried to counter it by intensifying trade with France and Britain, including the purchases of military equipment. His economic expert Milivoje Pilja toured Paris and London in futile efforts to arrange for the increased trade with a view to preventing a virtual economic and political monopoly of Germany over Yugoslavia (Kaiser, 1980, 178–179). It was the failure of Western democracies to meet him halfway, because of their inability and unwillingness to depart from economic orthodoxy and counter the Germans with their own methods, and provide an alternative outlet for Yugoslavia's products – and those from other countries in the region – that brought Stojadinović's attempts to nothing.

Although Stojadinović's flirtation with the Axis Powers stemmed from the requirements of Yugoslavia's delicate geopolitical position and reflected her true interests, it was rather distasteful to Belgrade's old friends. Fearful of the threat Germany posed to them, France and Czechoslovakia wanted to see the tightened Little Entente transformed from an anti-Hungarian into an anti-German alliance and Yugoslavia's policy ran contrary to their agenda. It was no surprise then that these two countries took a dim view of Stojadinović's

handling of foreign affairs and went as far as intriguing with the opposition in Belgrade to have him removed from power (Stojkov, 1979; Vinaver, 1985, 367, 369–370). The British Foreign Office also entertained some suspicions, especially after the Pact of Belgrade, that Prince Paul and Stojadinović were drifting into the Axis camp, despite the fact that the Regent was a pronounced Anglophile. Such fears especially peaked during the time of Stojadinović's visit to Rome in December 1937 which was suspected of being a further step in his sliding towards the Axis. "*We are being double crossed, & taking a long time to perceive the fact,*" Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, declared, despite Campbell's assurance to the contrary.⁸ Nevertheless, the British were not willing to lend their support to surreptitious French attempts to undermine the Yugoslav premier, since they saw no viable alternative to his regime.⁹ Following the Anschluss, Stojadinović underscored Yugoslavia's difficulties in the newly-created situation and assured Campbell that he would follow the policy of His Majesty's Government.¹⁰ The Foreign Office came to appreciate the adroitness with which he managed Yugoslavia's affairs and took a favourable view of the prospect of his staying in office – shortly before his downfall.¹¹ For all their doubts and diplomatic lecturing in Belgrade, the British provided a measure of support to Prince Paul and his head of government.

THE IMPACT OF STOJADINOVIĆ'S FOREIGN POLICY ON THE CROAT QUESTION

As has been seen from this brief review, the requirements of *realpolitik* were certainly sufficient to determine the course of Stojadinović's foreign policy. But the requirements of internal policy, namely the Croat question as the most pressing problem for consolidation of Yugoslavia, also considerably contributed to his conduct of foreign affairs. Once he concluded that an agreement with Maček could not be reached within the framework of a unitary state, Stojadinović decided to bring the Croat leader to heel by means of a political war of attrition. He embarked on a policy that would isolate the CPP both within and outside Yugoslavia. Internally, he had already won over the main political parties of the Slovenes and Bosnian Moslems to his JRZ and the government, depriving Maček of potentially valuable allies in his struggle for federal restructuring of Yugoslavia. In addition, Stojadinović tried to foment an opposition to the CPP among the Croats themselves with a view to splitting their monolith national movement. For that purpose, he sought to promote, albeit in a rather circumspect manner, the rise of dissidents from Maček's party, including the son of Stjepan Radić, but his efforts in this respect remained

8 TNA FO 371/21199 R 8392/224/92, Minute by Eden, 21 December 1937; Biber, 1976; Biber, 1983; Avramovski, 1986, 305–705.

9 TNA FO 371/21197 R 6319/175/92, Eden to Foreign Office, 20 September 1937; R 6432/175/92, minutes by Sargent, 29 September 19137, and Vansittart, 30 September 1937, and Sargent to Phipps, 7 October 1937; R 6519/175/92, minute by Vansittart, 9 October 1937.

10 TNA FO 371/22475 R 5481/147/92, Campbell to Foreign Office, 3 June 1938.

11 TNA FO 371/22477 R 9778/234/92, Minutes by Brown and Noble, 12 December 1938, and Nichols, 15 December 1938.

futile.¹² However, in a volatile international situation during the latter half of the 1930s, the real danger was that the CPP could find a powerful support from beyond Yugoslavia's borders. Italy's and Hungary's backing for the *Ustaša* movement had already created great difficulties and had been responsible for the assassination of King Aleksandar; but if the CPP, a political organisation in which the vast majority of Croats closed their ranks, had equally become an instrument of foreign disruption, and especially if Germany had interfered with the Serbo-Croat differences, Yugoslavia would have faced a crisis on a much larger scale. Stojadinović perfectly understood this and acted accordingly.

As he early established good relations with Berlin, building on the growing economic exchange, Stojadinović made a point of making German treatment of *Ustaša* émigrés in that country a test of its loyal cooperation. Although most of *Ustašas* were sheltered in Italy, a group of them, in which the most prominent member was Branimir Jelić, settled in Germany. Stojadinović seized on Göring's offer to act as a protector of Yugoslavia during the delicate negotiations with Rome that led to the Pact of Belgrade and tried to exploit it in the matter of Jelić. He instructed Cincar-Marković to inform Göring "*that we have reports that Pavelić has been out of Italy, that he keeps in contact with Jelić and that they are apparently preparing another attentat, perhaps on the life of His Majesty Prince [Paul] when he travels to London. The aim of your statement is: 1) to show the insincerity of the Italians at the moment when we negotiate with them, and 2) to ask for Jelić's extradition, because he is increasingly becoming a very dangerous terrorist leader.*"¹³ A month later, Cincar-Marković reported that Göring had ordered that the émigrés be moved from Munich to northern Germany and interned, although he procrastinated with the extradition of Jelić – his internment and that of his comrades had been carried out by early May 1937.¹⁴ After the Anschluss, the German Reich became a neighbour of Yugoslavia and its potential to influence internal developments in that country was considerably greater. Stojadinović formed the impression from his discussion with Maček's intermediary "*that the Croats are scared of Germany and that, in their fear, they feel that only the Serbs can save them.*"¹⁵ This was not an unreasonable assumption given that the Croat areas, along with the Slovene ones, were closer to Germany than those of the Serbs. However, Maček seems to have thought otherwise. His emissary went to Vilhelmstrasse to seek for German support for an independent Croatia, but the Germans immediately relayed the whole matter to Belgrade.¹⁶ This mistake on the part of the Croat leader clearly demonstrated that the Germans, just like the Italians, were intent on working with Belgrade and not with Zagreb, and it fully vindicated Stojadinović's foreign policy in terms of its effect on internal situation in Yugoslavia.

12 AJ Prince Paul Papers, reel 4, Stojadinović to Prince Paul, 14 July 1938, scans 478–480; Stojadinović to Prince Paul, 30 August 1938, scan 501; AJ, 37-10-59, Report by Niko Novaković, scans 263–299; AJ, 37-19-138, Report by Dr. Vorkapić, 25 November 1937, scan 136.

13 AJ, 37-30-221, Stojadinović to Cincar-Marković, 27 February 1937, scan 632.

14 AJ, 37-30-221, Cincar-Marković to Stojadinović, 25 March 1937, scans 633–638; also AJ, 37-62-378, Aćimović to Stojadinović, 4 May 1937, scans 34–37; Biber, 1962.

15 AJ, Prince Paul Papers, reel 4, Stojadinović to Prince Paul, 13 October 1938, scans 563–567.

16 TNA FO 371/22476 R 5193/234/92, Campbell to Halifax, 23 May 1938.

As has been seen, with the conclusion of the Pact of Belgrade, Italy assumed the obligation to clamp down on the terrorist and political activities of *Ustašas* in its territory. But the sudden rapprochement between the Adriatic neighbours also made a strong impression in Croatia. “*In connection with the arrival of Count Ciano and the signature of the Yugo-Italian treaty, there is a depression and confusion, to a large degree, among the ranks of Dr. Maček’s supporters. In this respect, many prominent political people sharply criticise the policy of Dr. Maček in intimate conversations, which is barren and outdated and almost always based on the erroneous calculations and assumptions*” (Boban, 1974, I, 411). The greatest confusion, however, was among the *frankovci*, who were practically a political wing of the *Ustaša* movement and who regarded Italy as having sold the Croats out to Belgrade. This appreciation was not far off the mark. While sending off Hitler from the railway station on the occasion of the latter’s visit to Rome, Mussolini told the Yugoslav Minister in Rome, Boško Hristić, that “*the Croats cannot do anything now.*”¹⁷ This equally applied to *Ustašas* and the CPP. Stojadinović must have been pleased with himself upon reading Hristić’s letter. But the Yugoslav premier went even further in order to exploit the favourable opportunity presented to him to keep under control and ultimately disintegrate Pavelić’s movement in Italy. In agreement with the Italians, he sent to Rome Vladeta Milićević of the Ministry for Internal Affairs with the special mission to oversee the interment of Pavelić and his supporters. Moreover, Stojadinović decided to capitalise on the despondence of *Ustaša* émigrés with their position in the newly-created situation and allow them to come back to Yugoslavia, save the most notorious criminals. Central to this was the return of Mile Budak, one of the most prominent leaders of the *Ustaša*, with whom Stojadinović even personally met during his visit to Italy in June 1938 – the former arrived in Zagreb next month (Boban, 1970b; Krizman, 1978, 301–313; Jonjić & Matković, 2008). As Stojadinović explained to Prince Paul, Budak’s return was designed to deal “a heavy blow” to Pavelić’s supporters.¹⁸ Indeed, a large number of Croat émigrés was allowed back to Yugoslavia and the *Ustaša* organisation was, at least during Stojadinović’s premiership, rendered rather impotent.

Since Stojadinović’s relations with the Axis Powers ensured that the CPP would not find a sympathetic ear in Berlin and Rome, Maček was forced to look for support in Britain and France, especially since he professed his democratic convictions. His main emissary to these countries was Krnjević, Secretary-General of the CPP, who had been in emigration since after the introduction of King’s personal regime in Yugoslavia, mainly staying at Geneva where he endeavoured to internationalise the Croat question through the League of Nations. However, Krnjević could not establish contact with the Foreign Office, despite the intercessions on his behalf of the prominent public figures such as the Duchess of Atholl and an English journalist Wickham Steed. Whitehall was weary of allowing him to cause difficulties in its official relations with Belgrade and deplored even the prospect of Krnjević’s making propaganda in Britain against the Yugoslav

17 AJ, 37-30-217, Hristić to Stojadinović, 29 May 1938, scans 284–285.

18 AJ, Prince Paul Papers, reel 4, Stojadinović to Prince Paul, 24 June 1938, scans 445–450.

government.¹⁹ Stojadinović was thus entirely justified when, after receiving a report to the effect that the CPP placed much confidence in the eventual British diplomatic advice to Prince Paul, he scorned the idea.²⁰ At Geneva, the Yugoslav delegate to the League of Nations, Ivan Subbotić, claimed that Krnjević was practically “*imperceptible, i.e. no activity of his is felt here nor he has special access anywhere.*”²¹ It was only in Paris that Maček’s lieutenant could find a receptive audience on account of the utter dissatisfaction there with Stojadinović’s foreign policy, but his lobbying in France was of no practical value, just as anywhere else. Nevertheless, during his conversation with the new French Foreign Minister, Georges Bonnet, an advocate of appeasement of Germany and thus sympathetic to the Yugoslav premier, Subbotić pointed out the negative attitude in France towards Stojadinović, as well as Krnjević’s contacts with French parliamentarians and the encouragement given to Maček.²² In short, Krnjević did not have much to show for all his sojourns in Western Europe.

In September 1938, the dramatic events in Czechoslovakia culminating during the Munich conference that led to Hitler’s annexation of the German areas of that country provided an apparent justification for Stojadinović’s policy. A successor state that sprang from the peace settlement in Paris, was riddled with nationalities conflict and dismembered along ethnic lines through an orchestrated combination of foreign interference and domestic subversion was a pattern to which Yugoslavia could fit all too easily. It was not without a touch of irony that Stojadinović alluded to the failure of Lord Runciman’s mediating mission between the Czechoslovak government and the Sudeten Germans when he spoke with the First Secretary of the British Legation. “*He did not wish a situation to arise in which Lord Runciman might have to visit Belgrade in circumstances similar to those in which he had gone to Prague.*”²³ The Prime Minister referred to the German minority in Yugoslavia, but it did not take much imagination to conceive of the Croat problem in similar terms. Stojadinović’s diplomacy seems to have made Yugoslavia safe from such a disruption, despite the criticism of both the Serbian and Croat opposition that he sided with the Axis against the democratic countries. In the existing international situation, the CPP was deprived of external backing with which it could bring pressure to bear on the Yugoslav government or embark on some sort of illegal and violent separatist campaign. “*Since Maček cannot count on the assistance of Italy and Germany, we do not believe in some revolutionary action. Eventual winking on the part of Pest does not seem dangerous, because the Hungarians are unpopular in Croatia,*” Stojadinović assured Prince Paul.²⁴

In fact, Stojadinović was so convinced in the salutary effect of his dexterous foreign policy on the electorate that he called for elections on 10 October 1938, something he had

19 TNA FO 371/22476 R 3657/234/92, Minutes by Ross and Ingram, 31 March 1938, and Sargent, 1 April 1937; Halifax to Duchess of Atholl, 4 April 1938.

20 AJ, 37-46-299, Stojadinović to Korošec, 17 May 1938, scan 741.

21 AJ, 37-31-233, Subbotić to Stojadinović, 7 May 1938, scans 720–721.

22 AJ, 37-31-233, Subbotić to Stojadinović, 16 May 1938, scans 724–726.

23 TNA FO 371/22378 R 7457/178/21, Shone to Foreign Office, 2 September 1938.

24 AJ, Prince Paul Papers, reel 4, Stojadinović to Prince Paul, 7 October 1938, scans 554–559.

been angling for some time. The main contenders in the elections held on 11 December were the JRZ led by Stojadinović and the coalition consisting of the CPP and the Serbian opposition parties headed by Maček, which was essentially a clash between two large blocs, the centralists and federalists, just as the premier had long advocated. In his vigorous election campaign, Stojadinović stressed, along with his considerable success in economic policy, the security he provided for Yugoslavia amidst the grave European crisis (Lažetić, 1989; Simić, 2007, 250). The results were, however, a mixed blessing for Stojadinović: his list won around 300,000 votes more than that of Maček, which translated into an overwhelming majority in the parliament due to election rules, but it fell short of his expectations (Opra, 2001; Radojević, 1994a, 183–184). Ironically, instead of verifying Stojadinović's political supremacy in Yugoslavia, the 1938 elections proved to be the beginning of his undoing.

STOJADINOVIĆ'S DOWNFALL

In view of the Yugoslav premier, the elections revealed the failure of his policy of appeasement in Croatia. In the wake of the elections, the reconstruction of Cabinet took place that saw Milan Aćimović, Stojadinović's trusted supporter, replace the Slovene leader Korošec as the Minister for Interior Affairs. Aćimović was instructed to undertake the necessary measures to re-establish the authority of state in the Croat *banovinas*, seriously undermined by terror to which Maček's supporters subjected their political opponents during the elections.²⁵ Stojadinović apprised Prince Paul of his intention to tighten the reins on the Savska and Primorska *banovina* and added: "*If an end is not put on this state of affairs quickly, I fear that we might experience unpleasant surprises.*"²⁶ But there was nothing to change in the field of foreign policy. When Stojadinović advised Prince Paul to arrange for his visits to Rome and Berlin, following those to London and Paris that had taken place in 1938, he insisted that these diplomatic sojourns "*were necessary both for our foreign and internal policy.*"²⁷ However, more pressing matter was Ciano's visit to Yugoslavia in January 1939, which he undertook in order to sound out the Belgrade government as to potential partition of Albania – no decision was made in this respect (Bakić, 2014, 602–612). During his tête-à-tête conversations with Ciano, Stojadinović did not seem to be concerned about the failure to come to terms with the Croats. Just as he had once told Campbell, he maintained the view that the Croat question could not be solved soon and invoked a historical parallel: "*Only the years and the passing of generations will be able to modify a state of affairs which calls to mind the friction which long existed between Prussia and Bavaria, between North and South Italy*" (Ciano, 1948, 267–272).

On 4 February 1939, Stojadinović was, to his great surprise, removed from office as a result of the carefully prepared plot which aligned against him the Slovene and

25 AJ, 37-46-299, Aćimović to Stojadinović, 1 January 1939, scans 893–900.

26 AJ, Prince Paul Papers, reel 4, Stojadinović to Prince Paul, 15 December 1938, scans 584–585.

27 AJ, Prince Paul Papers, reel 4, Stojadinović to Prince Paul, 21 January 1939, scans 527–530.

Bosnian Muslim members of his Cabinet together with Dragiša Cvetković, a Serb who replaced him as premier. More importantly, Prince Paul was behind this coup. The official explanation for Stojadinović's demission was that his presence in the government became an obstacle to reaching an agreement with the Croats. Nevertheless, Prince Paul's intention to conciliate the Croats could not be equated with his decision to get rid of Stojadinović. It has long been claimed that it was a complex combination of internal and external factors, which could hardly be untangled, that accounted for Prince Paul's dismissal of his premier (Biber, 1966b). To be true, Prince Paul made contact with Maček behind Stojadinović's back through the agency of his Court Minister, Milan Antić, and Cvetković, who seized on the negotiations with the Croats as a means of furthering his own career.²⁸ Maček insisted on the substance of his demands – a territorial autonomy for Croatia – but he made a concession insofar as he agreed that the procedure would respect the provisions of the existing Constitution, a move clearly designed to save face to the Prince Regent. It is difficult to believe that Prince Paul's opinion as to the merits of a federal solution for Yugoslavia had undergone a substantial change. After having granted another audience to Maček as late as July 1938, he confided to Campbell "*that there were many moments during the course of this lengthy interview when he had had difficulty in keeping his temper as he had found the Croat leader was more narrow-minded and obstinate than ever.*"²⁹

What then made Prince Regent persist in his negotiations with Maček and deprive himself of the services of his capable Prime Minister? There is considerable evidence that the Croat question was not the sole, and not even the most important, reason for the change in government. Prince Paul was rather reticent on the subject, but he did refer in retrospect to Stojadinović's fascist inclinations (Djordjević, 1991, 114). His words must be taken as a crucial evidence in this matter. Indeed, he ordered Milan Aćimović, then Chief of the Belgrade police, to enquire into the allegations that Stojadinović was moulding the ruling party and the government on the pattern of a fascist dictatorship. He was also adamant in a conversation with his Chief of the General Staff and the French Minister that he would never allow the Karadjordjević dynasty to suffer the fate of the House of Savoy (Biber, 1966b, 37–50). Clearly, Prince Regent was fearful that Stojadinović might become Yugoslavia's Mussolini. This initial impetus for Prince Paul's break with Stojadinović then gave rise to other suspicions which seem to have amplified and underpinned each other. The Regent came to believe that Stojadinović was not just bent on imposing himself as a fascist leader of the JRZ, but that he was trying to further his plans by making clandestine deals with Ciano during the latter's visit to Yugoslavia in early 1939. He even suspected Stojadinović of carrying out the most fantastic plot which involved the cession of the western non-Serb parts of Yugoslavia to Italy and the formation of Greater Serbia in which Stojadinović would be a fascist dictator and which would include the northern parts of Albania and Thessaloniki (Biber, 1966b, 16–19).

28 AJ, Prince Paul Papers, reel 14, Antić to Prince Paul, 9 January 1939, scans 841-843; reel 15, Cvetković to Prince Paul, 2 February 1939, scans 812-813.

29 TNA FO 371/22476 R 6426/234/92, Campbell to Halifax, 15 July 1938.

Ciano's visit and his conversations with Stojadinović appear to have been a catalyst for Prince Paul's decision to remove the latter from office. Antić, who was a confidant of the Regent and inimical to the Prime Minister, has asserted that the Ciano-Stojadinović talks remained secret for Prince Paul and presented "*the last drop of poison in the relations between the Prince and Stojadinović.*"³⁰ The first assertion was groundless, as Stojadinović not just asked Prince Paul for an audience on 17 January in order to discuss Ciano's impending visit, but also sent him a letter, detailing what had passed between him and the Italian.³¹ Ciano's own records confirm that Stojadinović did nothing that could be construed as disloyal to either Prince Paul or his country. But the Regent made up his mind not to trust Stojadinović, however unfounded his suspicions were. Being in such frame of mind, Prince Paul hastened to engineer Stojadinović's downfall and thus prevent both his alleged personal ambitions and the special arrangements he was suspected of having made with Italy.

EPILOGUE

With Cvetković as his new premier, Prince Paul made every effort to maintain cordial relations with Berlin and Rome which, after all, had no alternative for Yugoslavia. Internally, Prince Paul was anxious to consolidate the country so that it could face the disturbing political situation in Europe with more strength and confidence. He decided to work together with Maček to that end and pay the price by satisfying the principal Croat demands. The outcome of Prince Paul's new political course was the Cvetković-Maček agreement (*Sporazum*) concluded on 26 August 1939 that resulted in the creation of *Banovina Hrvatska*, the Croatian province with an extensive autonomy (Boban, 1965a). It should be noted, however, that Prince Paul yielded to Maček's intransigence largely for reasons of the precarious international situation on the eve of the Second World War. A full discussion of the merits and implications of such an agreement is beyond the scope of this paper, but a few observations are of interest for the assessment of Stojadinović's policy. Notwithstanding the general necessity to settle the Serbo-Croat dispute and resolve the internal Yugoslav crisis, the 1939 agreement was heavily flawed from the Serb point of view. Firstly, if Stojadinović's mandate to represent the Serbs might have been deemed contentious after the December elections, Cvetković's legitimacy was virtually non-existent; the latter merely acted as a Prince Paul's messenger and he was no match for Maček. The Crown thus assumed responsibility for the agreement on behalf of the Serbs and practically imposed it on the largest nation in Yugoslavia. Secondly, Prince Paul accepted what amounted to extortionist concessions to Maček – the territorial scope of the Croatian *Banovina* far exceeded that of the historic province of Croatia under the Habsburgs or, for that matter, today's Croatia. This resulted from inconsistent application of ethnic criterion in the districts

30 A SANU, 14387/8734, undated note; Hoptner, 1962, 126–127.

31 AJ, Prince Paul Papers, reel 4, Stojadinović to Prince Paul, 16 January 1939, scans 531–532; Stojadinović to Prince Paul, 20 January 1939 (from Belje), scans 534–541.

in which the Croats constituted the majority of population and historical principle in those in which the Serbs were the majority. Thirdly, Croatia was now something of a *corpus separatum* in Yugoslavia, whereas the Serbs and Slovenes – although the latter were autonomous for all the practical purposes in their Drava *banovina* – remained in an undefined and uncertain position. Thus, the Serb question replaced that of the Croats. The future status of Bosnia and Herzegovina was a particularly sensitive issue, since the aspirations of Serbs and Croats in respect of this province were irreconcilable (Radojević, 1994b, 30–39). This meant that the *Sporazum* effectively had an unfortunate effect of prolonging the Serbo-Croat differences instead of bringing them to an end by means of a definite compromise solution.

Finally, Stojadinović's fall undermined the confidence that Berlin and Rome, in particular, had in Yugoslavia's policy and consequently Belgrade's standing was weakened both in foreign and internal affairs. Maček was quick to exploit his opportunity and his emissaries started to pay visits to Ciano, offering him cooperation and even personal union of Croatia with Italy. They were no longer ignored; in fact, they were put in contact with Pavelić and received pecuniary subsidies for their subversive activities (Boban, 1974, II, 108–118; Trifković, 1993, 537–542). On the other hand, Mussolini hesitated to endanger the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia, because he feared that Germany might emerge as a champion of an independent Croatia and break out to the Adriatic (Ciano, 2002, 202–203, 221, 226). Despite German assurances to the effect that Italian interests in this area would be preeminent, Mussolini and Ciano sent a cable to Belgrade “*to inform the Regent, Paul, that we have called a halt to German action and also to advise him to hasten negotiations with Zagreb, because any waste of time might be fatal*” (Ciano, 2002, 204–205). Italian apprehensions were, in fact, groundless. Although Maček's people did go to Berlin and seek support for their separatist plans, the Germans refused to give them any encouragement in February and March 1939, as they were careful not to wound Mussolini's susceptibilities (Boban, 1974, II, 80–82, 84; Trifković, 1993, 537–538).

It was Prince Paul now who felt more anxious than Maček to conclude an agreement due to Yugoslavia's aggravated international situation – and he paid for it dearly at the expense of the Serbs. To that extent, Stojadinović had a point when he criticised Prince Paul for frittering away the achievements of his own foreign policy. “*By sticking with Germany,*” he told his friend Aćimović, “*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*” (Cvetković, 1958, 7; Jovanović Stoimirović, 2000, 259). These words aptly summed up the substance of his policy. Although there was no apparent change in Germany's attitude towards Yugoslavia, the Italians reverted to their hostility to Belgrade. There is thus no doubt that the shaken confidence of the Axis Powers in Belgrade after the ouster of Stojadinović created better international conditions for Maček's party and strengthened his hand in negotiating with Prince Paul. Out of office, Stojadinović headed a group of 20 senators and 83 members of parliament in their opposition to Cvetković's negotiations with Maček (Boban, 1965a, 180–185). After the

Sporazum, he founded a new political organisation, the Serbian Radical Party, which advocated the union of all the Serbs in a single federal unit within Yugoslavia, but he could not reverse or affect the course of internal policy. Stojadinović's political star was on the decline: he was interned and, finally, handed to the British to take him away from Yugoslavia – because he was a potential German favourite – shortly before Yugoslavia was involved in the war in April 1941.

MILAN STOJADINOVIĆ, HRVAŠKO VPRAŠANJE IN MEDNARODNI
POLOŽAJ JUGOSLAVIJE, 1935–1939*Dragan BAKIĆ*

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POVZETEK

V članku je prikazana politika jugoslovanskega ministrskega predsednika in zunanjega ministra Milana Stojadinovića glede hrvaškega nezadovoljstva in opozicije do srbske vlade v Beogradu, s posebnim poudarkom na mednarodnih razmerah in zunanjih političnih posledicah. V sicer bogati literaturi o srbsko-hrvaškem sporu v obdobju med obema svetovnjima vojnama je bilo o tem vprašanju posvečene bolj malo pozornosti. Za Stojadinovića sta bili zunanja in notranja politika neločljivo povezani, predvsem zaradi nevarne mednarodne situacije, ki jo je povzročila agresivnost Hitlerja in Mussolinija. Menil je, da je bilo vzdrževanje prijateljskih političnih odnosov z Nemčijo in Italijo ključnega pomena za sposobnost Jugoslavije v boju proti hrvaškemu separatizmu. V okviru take strategije ideološka vprašanja niso imela nobene teže, kljub pogosto ponavljajočim se obtožbam o Stojadinovićeveh pro-fašističnih nagnjenjih. Stojadinović je bil odločen, da bo treba Hrvaško kmečko stranko, ki jo je vodil Vlatko Maček, prikrajšati in izolirati, in sicer s partnerstvom na jugoslovanski politični sceni s političnimi predstavniki Slovencev in bosanskih muslimanov. Dosegel je določene uspehe, dokler ga na niso na začetku leta 1939 odstavili – bil je to konec njegove politike zadrževanja Hrvatov, ko so se tudi postavili temelji glede rekonstrukcije Jugoslavije na federalni podlagi.

Ključne besede: Milan Stojadinović, Jugoslavija, hrvaško vprašanje, zunanja politika, 1935–1939

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