

Serbs in Croatia (1918–1929): Between the Myth of “Greater-Serbian Hegemony” and Social Reality

Abstract: The situation of the Serbian community in Croatia in the years following the 1918 unification has been analyzed in order to test whether the clichéd view of Croatia and Croats as having been endangered and exploited had any impact on the status of the Serbian community and, if it did, in what way. Although the topic is far from being exhausted in this contribution, the examples given suggest that the two nations in Croatia were deeply divided. The sources studied cast quite a different light on the thesis that Croats were “oppressed” by Serbs, a thesis that has for quite a long time been passing as a valid historical interpretation in historiography. These sources suggest that the perception of Serbs as hegemony-minded resulted from propaganda rather than from the actual state of affairs. Besides, they show that the Serbs — systematically portrayed to the Croatian public as invaders and enslavers, while, by contrast, they saw themselves as being “third-rate citizens” — lived their daily lives under strain, surrounded by intolerance, subjected to various forms of pressure and violence, often fearing for their livelihoods, even for their lives. The inexorable logic of facts leads to the conclusion that members of the Serbian community in Croatia felt discriminated against and not quite safe.

Key words: Kingdom of SCS/Yugoslavia, Serbs, Croatia, ethnic relations, political ideologies, society

The relationship between Serbs and Croats in the common Yugoslav state was from the very beginning a tension-ridden one. The opponents of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SCS)/Yugoslavia from the ranks of the Croatian political elite systematically implanted a negative stereotype of Serbs (as hegemonist conquerors, enslavers and exploiters) into the conscious and subconscious minds of their co-ethnics, thereby instigating Serbophobia in Croatian society. The motives behind this demonization of Serbs and the Yugoslav state have already been the object of study by historians and other scholars.¹ The question remains open, however, as to whether the cliché about Croatia and Croats having been endangered and exploited — still persisting in Croatian historiography: the Serbs “sought to

¹ See e.g. Vasilije Krestić, *Srbija i Hrvatska – uzroci sukoba* [Serbia and Croatia—Causes of Conflict] (Čačak 1997); idem, *Genocidom do velike Hrvatske* [By Genocide to Greater Croatia] (Novi Sad–Belgrade 1998); idem, *Iz istorije Srba i srpsko-hrvatskih odnosa* [From the History of Serbo-Croatian Relations] (Belgrade 1994).

impose domination on other nations from day one”² — had any impact on the situation of the Serbs in Croatia and, if it did, in what ways.

The kind of welcome extended to the Serbian Army in the regions across the Sava and Danube rivers in the days of the creation of the Kingdom of SHS is a well-known fact: festive public receptions were organized in many places in Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia, and the local population expressed their enthusiasm about the Serbian army entering towns and villages in the territory of the former Habsburg Monarchy.³ Contemporaries suggest that in the second half of 1918 Serbophilia came into vogue in Zagreb and other Croatian towns.⁴ Prominent Serbs responded likewise. Seeking to infuse the Serbian community with positive feelings for Croats, they called for them to leave the ordeal they had been put through during the Great War behind, not to let themselves be overcome by unchristian hatred and vengeful feelings, but to choose the road of love, concord and unity with their Roman Catholic brothers. Pro-Yugoslav Serbs believed forgiveness to be the only way to begin a new life in the common state, just as they believed respect for individual and “tribal” freedoms to be the road to winning over those hesitant or opposed.⁵ The most distinguished of the Serb politicians who tried to allay the strong feelings of the Serb population in Croatia was Milan Pribičević. He tirelessly spread among the Serb peasantry the idea of equality between Croats and Serbs, which in turn stemmed from his view of their being one and the same people simply divided by religion. Earlier strife and disagreement — seen mainly as the result of “enemy intrigues” — should be left behind: “It does not matter, my Serbian brethren, if some Croats did us wrong. If they made mistakes in the past, we shall not make mistakes today. Their mistakes brought them no benefit; indeed they brought them a lot of harm. ... We shall not make mistakes. We shall

² Hrvoje Matković, *Povijest Jugoslavije (1918–1991): hrvatski pogled* [History of Yugoslavia 1918–1991: Croatian Perspective] (Zagreb 1998); characteristic in that sense is also Bosiljka Janjatović, “Karadjordjevićevska centralizacija i položaj Hrvatske u Kraljevstvu (Kraljevini) SHS”, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 1 (1995), 55–76.

³ It should be noted that those Serbian forces were quite small and unable to cope with potential social unrest or armed revolts against the unification project. They in fact only “assisted” local authorities in disarming the population, functioning more as a “psychological and political factor in stabilizing what basically was the old system”. Cf. Mile Bjelajac, *Vojaska Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1918–1921* [The Army of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes 1918–1920] (Belgrade 1988), 216; Djordje Stanković, *Izazov nove istorije*, 2 vols. [The Challenge of New History] (Belgrade 1994), vol. 2, 87–90.

⁴ Pavle Janković, *Velikohrvati protiv naše države* [Croatian Nationalists against our State] (Novi Sad 1922), 4.

⁵ “Narodna propovjed o jedinstvu”, *Pučke novine* No. 3 (Zagreb), 21 Jan. 1919, 1–3.

not become proud in good times, as we did not humiliate ourselves in evil times. We have always lived for justice. For justice we shall always live.”⁶

Although the Serbian side did not fail to call for tolerance and respect for the *other*, national reconciliation was not substantial. Josip Horvat argued that at the time of unification and during the first post-war years “a serious sign of hatred was impossible to detect in the masses” (although there was no affection either),⁷ but only two months after the birth of the new state some contemporaries believed that the Serbs and Croats in Lika were worlds apart, that distrust, intolerance, even hate between the two nations were “in full bloom”.⁸ Dr Djordje Branković, MP, acquainted the Parliament with what he had experienced in Lika in 1918: the volunteers returning home from the war were given “sullen” looks and called “derogatory names”, and by the anti-state element that had fought on the Austro-Hungarian side until the very end.⁹ A certain Miškulić, priest from Gornji Kosin, overtly demanded that Serbs be expelled. The 4th Military District Command put down the tension among the people and their discontent with the state to the lenient attitude of authorities towards serious offences and to inconsistent law enforcement practices. A report to the General Headquarters described “an inauspicious situation in Lika due to campaigning by the untrustworthy element ill-disposed towards the present situation and to the passivity of officials and gendarmerie”.¹⁰

The same claim came from the commander of Otočac. Warning that a “clique” of “bigoted” supporters of Josip Frank’s faction (*Frankovci*), intent on breaking up the state, “scold the Serbs, the Serbian army and the king”, he blamed this “waywardness” on the police’s failure to respond, “either out of fear, out of generosity, or for party reasons”.¹¹

⁶ Milan Pribičević, “Pisma bratu rataru. Zašto Srbin i Hrvat zajedno i ravnopravno?”, *Srpsko kolo* No. 36 (Zagreb), 23 Oct. 1919, 1.

⁷ Josip Horvat, *Živjeti u Hrvatskoj 1900–1941 (Zapisci iz nepovrata)* (Zagreb 1984), 302.

⁸ Dr Mile Miškulin, “Lička politika”, *Riječ Srba-Hrvata-Slovenaca* No. 51 (Zagreb), 1 Feb. 1919, 1.

⁹ *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine: redovan saziv za 1923–1924* [Proceedings of the National Assembly: Regular Sessions 1923–24], 14th Regular Session of 24 January 1924, 663.

¹⁰ Komanda IV armijske oblasti Vrhovnoj komandi [4th Army District Headquarters to General Headquarters], Zagreb, 6 Oct. 1919, Narodna biblioteka Srbije, Rukopisno odeljenje [National Library of Serbia, Manuscript Department] (hereafter NBS, RO), P706/50.

¹¹ Komanda mesta Otočac komandantu Vrbaske divizijske oblasti [Command of Otočac to Vrbas Division District Commander], 23 Feb. 1920, Arhiv Jugoslavije [Archives of Yugoslavia] (hereafter AJ), 335–26.

How tolerant the Serbs must have been becomes obvious from articles brought out in *Straža*, a newspaper published in Osijek, Slavonia. They show that the office of state prosecutor in Osijek was still held by Hinko Vuković, notorious for having prosecuted the eminent Serbian literary critic Jovan Skerlić over his article “Serbia of Tomorrow” in *Srpski književni glasnik* (Serbian Literary Journal) which offered his vision of twenty-first-century Belgrade as a flourishing modern city; for having persecuting Serbs during the war; and for having banned in 1918 the Croatian Press in Osijek from publishing a literary-philosophical study by Miloš Djurić.¹² Vuković was not the only public servant hostile towards Serbs who kept his office, to mention but the public notary Tucaković, or “director” Sokolić, who was even promoted to the office of governor of Varaždin County,¹³ or Anton Hrzić, town captain and chief of police during the war, now head of the Osijek economic office.¹⁴ Many other examples show that there was little change in Osijek as compared to the pre-war period. The police, for example, banned men from wearing the traditional Serbian peasant cap (*šajkača*), but the Austro-Hungarian army cap was freely worn in the streets.¹⁵ As the Orthodox, in other words Serbs, kept being termed “Eastern-Greek” in the judicial and schooling systems, *Straža* made a rightful objection: “Messrs. judges and school principals still cannot get accustomed to this being a kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, where everyone has the right to have their faith called the way their church calls it, and no longer an Austrian province where Vienna, for its political reasons, assigns names and ranks even to faiths.”¹⁶ In 1920 on the Old Style Christmas Day (7th January) observed by the Orthodox Serbs, all Roman Catholic and Jewish

¹² “Neokajani gresi” [Sins unatoned], *Straža* No. 2 (Osijek), 9 Aug. 1919, 3.

¹³ “Neokajani gresi” [Sins unatoned], *Straža* No. 7 (Osijek), 13 Oct. 1919, 2. It was only in 1921 (15 July) that Vuković was reproved by the seven-member Croatian-Slavonian-Dalmatian Judicial Council, which was a mild disciplinary measure. Another year had to pass until the Commission for Croatia and Slavonia, in charge of assessing which judges were to be guaranteed the permanence of judicial tenure (under Article 137 of the Constitution), ruled that Hinko Vuković was “unworthy of judicial office”. This ruling refers to Vuković’s case against Panta Popović, a Judicial Council member, who had been arrested at the beginning of the Great War and forced by judge Vuković to drop his defence witnesses. Unlawfully deprived of the possibility to prove his innocence, Popović had been sentenced for disturbing public order; more precisely, his guilt consisted in inquiring about the course of war operations. Cf. Zapisnik Komisije [Commission Minutes], 12 June 1922, Belgrade, AJ, 63 pov. [classified]-2.

¹⁴ “Neokajani gresi” [Sins unatoned], *Straža* No. 8 (Osijek), 20 Sept. 1919, 2.

¹⁵ “Vesti iz mesta i sa strane” [Local and external news], *Straža* No. 4, 23 July 1919.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 10, 3 Oct. 1919, 3.

owners in Osijek opened their shops.¹⁷ Cyrillic script was the object of aversion to the extent that not even a year after the war did Serbian merchants dare remount their Cyrillic shop signs.¹⁸ When Cyrillic advertisements appeared on tramcars, *Hrvatski list*, the local organ¹⁹ of the Croatian Union, promptly launched an attack on local authorities for having allowed such a thing.²⁰ While the Croats of Osijek found Cyrillic script unacceptable, they did not mind that a square in their town retained its old name: Franz Joseph Square.²¹ Writing on the robbery of the Popović & Veselinović shop, located in the immediate vicinity of the police station, *Straža* suspected that the police had deliberately chosen not to act because it was a Serb-owned shop.²² According to *Straža*, the portrait of King Peter I Karadjordjević was only mounted in a small number of public offices, and the Serbian national anthem and flag were a rare occurrence.²³ Croatian national associations, which freely resumed their activities in the new state, tended to distance themselves from whatever sounded Serbian. Most members of Kuhač Croatian Singing Society in Osijek, for instance, refused to sing the Serbian anthem in church, which led to an internal dissent and the Yu-

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, No. 3, 10 Jan. 1920, 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 6, 21 Jan. 1920, 3.

¹⁹ A daily paper edited by Slavko Tomislav Diklić of Nin; contributors were Ljubomir Maštrović, Mirko Dečak, Djuro Oršić and Josip Pavišić (AJ, 14-96-235). As its initial circulation of 6,000 grew over the years, reaching 10,000 in 1924, an editorial concluded that the paper had at least 40 to 50 thousand readers, and that “the entire bourgeois and artisan classes of Slavonian towns, and even villages, generously back this paper as their own, finding there an outlet for their patriotic feeling...” Cf. “Hrvatsko novinstvo”, *Hrvatski list* No. 14 (Zagreb), spec. issue, 15–17 Aug. 1924, 9–10.

²⁰ “Vesti iz mesta i sa strane”, *Straža* No. 120, 5 Oct. 1920, 2. The paper *Dubrovnik*, in its issue of 7 June 1922, warned about a public campaign being run against Cyrillic script on the pretext that its use was an expression of Serbian hegemony. In contrast to Croatian papers, where not a single Cyrillic letter could be seen, the Serbian papers published in Croatia used both scripts. Moreover, *Srpsko kolo* argued for the parallel use of Latin script on the grounds of its being a world alphabet, and hence not only Croatian but Serbian as well, the official script alongside the Cyrillic, and that knowledge as such, and thus the knowledge of another script, had always ensured progress and prosperity. *Srpsko kolo* assured its readers that the use of Latin script could not threaten national identity: the Serbs from America and even Croatia who did not know the Cyrillic script had nonetheless volunteered for the Serbian army during the world war. Cf. “Zašto donosimo i latinicu” [Why we also print in Latin script], *Srpsko kolo* Nos. 10 and 11, 1 April 1920, 6.

²¹ “Vesti iz mesta i sa strane” [Local and external news], *Straža* No. 6, 21 Jan. 1920, 3.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Straža* No. 14, 18 Feb. 1920, 3.

goslav-oriented choir members eventually left the Society.²⁴ The rallies of the Croatian Union in Osijek did not have a good word to say about the Serbs and union with them. Their recurring theme was that of “breaking up” with Serbia, creating an independent Croatian army, independent Croatian finances and so on.²⁵ *Hrvatski list* ran a systematic anti-government and anti-Serbian propaganda campaign, which did not seem to be countered adequately. As a result, the governor of Osijek County felt compelled to request from the chief state prosecutor in Zagreb to take legal action against “the destructive activity of the press”. According to him, texts whose goal was to “disturb public peace and order”, to “provoke and create disquietude among people”, slanderous texts against the government and state institutions and officials, were published in the Croatian press almost on a daily basis, but their authors faced no consequences.²⁶ “The Serbs of Osijek are being provoked and their feelings offended daily, and *nothing?*”²⁷ — was *Straža*’s terse editorial comment expressing concern over the discriminatory attitude towards the Serbs of Osijek.

In Petrinja, the local elections held on 15 March 1920 were followed by the *Frankovci*’s open attacks on Serbs. Later that night a “mob” of people,

²⁴ “Bruka u Kuhaču” [Outrage in Kuhač], *Straža* No. 133, 31 Oct. 1920, 2.

²⁵ “Vesti iz mesta i sa strane” [Local and external news], *Straža* No. 133, 31 Oct. 1920, 3. In spite of such an attitude towards the Serbs in Osijek, some Yugoslav Army officers, e.g. General Živan Mitrović, took a very reconciliatory stance. He showed respect for prominent Croat representatives, was well-disposed towards anti-government Croat officers and acknowledged Stjepan Radić as the legitimate leader of the Croatian people. However, the good intentions of General Mitrović, who probably “believed that the power of personal example would help popularize the Army in the Croatian environment and win the favour of Croat officers, and of all those who were unsympathetic to the new system following unification”, bore no fruit; namely, it brought no “positive change in the behaviour of an environment”. Cf. Mile Bjelajac and Predrag Trifunović, *Između vojske i politike: biografija generala Dušana Trifunovića (1880–1942)* [Between Army and Politics: Biography of General Dušan Trifunović] (Beograd–Kruševac 1997), 159–166.

²⁶ Veliki župan Osiječke oblasti kr. državnom nadodvetništvu u Zagrebu [Osijek County Governor to Royal State Chief Prosecution Office in Zagreb], Osijek, 28 March 1924, AJ, 14-69-235. Neither earlier nor contemporary Croatian historiography makes mention of any example of authorities’ tolerance towards the press. On the contrary, the emphasis has always been on the press in Croatia having been closely watched, opposition papers banned, texts censored and journalists repressed. Cf. e.g. Josip Horvat, *Povijest novinstva Hrvatske 1771–1939* (Zagreb 1962), 388; Bosiljka Janjatović, “Položaj Hrvatske i Hrvata u karadjordjevićevskoj Jugoslaviji u svijetlu tadašnjeg tiska”, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 3 (2000), 500–501.

²⁷ “Mahnitanje gradskog zastupnika šustera Belića” [Frenzy of councillor Belić], *Straža* No. 42, 2 June 1921, 2.

including some local notables, took to the streets and eventually stopped in front of the Serbian printing house to protest for half an hour, shouting out various slogans, including: “Down with Serbs!”²⁸

In Zagreb, two Serbs were killed (Milić Martinović and Ilija Radović). Emigrants from Lika to America, they had returned to Europe to join the Serbian Army as volunteers and fought on the Salonica front. In a Zagreb bakery they tried to buy bread using *dinars*, the new state’s official currency. The seller demanded Austro-Hungarian crowns instead and poured scorn on the newly-formed state. After a short argument, Martinović pulled his gun and killed the baker with one shot. This act of violence received an immediate response from a group of Zagreb citizens. The police intervened, but the two men, badly beaten and trampled over by the infuriated crowd, died before long. Instead of being tried in a court of law for their crime, the two Serbs were punished by the lynch mob. Belgrade’s *Politika* commented: “Had the baker been assaulted, robbed and killed by two hoodlums, no hand in Zagreb would have been raised to them. But two veterans trying to defend the *dinar* in Zagreb had to pay with their lives.”²⁹

The Serbs of Križ and its environs were upset and intimidated by anti-Serbian campaigners, such as the priest Juraj Tomac, a *Frankovac*, and his associates, the teacher Avgust Petrović, Josip Djurina and Ivan Rukavina. Tomac used his pulpit for political speeches, calling the congregation to stand up against the supporters of the common state with Serbia and to back the creation of a Croatian republic. Rukavina, who held the office of “provost” in Križ, refused to swear the oath of allegiance to King Peter I, threatened “to cut down with an axe” anyone who should swear the oath, and mocked St Sava, the first archbishop of the autocephalous Serbian Orthodox Church, as “donkey-headed”. Tomac also launched threats: “Serbs are yet to get what’s coming to them.” The terrified Serbian community was compelled to plead with the Army and Navy Minister for protection. Describing themselves as subjected to harassment and utterly unprotected, they ended their pleading in a very emotional way: “Do not forget us!”³⁰ The Serbs of Veliki Grdjevac were overwhelmed with fear. Every evening they locked themselves in their homes with their only weapons, axes and hay forks, at hand in case of attack.³¹

²⁸ Komanda mesta Petrinja komandantu divizijske oblasti Banja Luka [Petrinja Town Command to Banja Luka Division District Commander], 17 March 1920, AJ, 335-26.

²⁹ “Linč u Zagrebu” [Lynch in Zagreb], *Politika* (Belgrade), 16 March 1920.

³⁰ Srbi sa teritorije Hrvatske ministru vojnom i mornarice [Serbs from the territory of Croatia to the Army and Navy Minister], Križ, 19 Oct. 1920, AJ, 335-26.

³¹ *Srpsko kolo* No. 13, 31 March 1921, 5.

The end of the war obviously did not relieve tensions between Serbs and Croats, as shown by a case which involved a group of Dubrovnik's Catholic Serbs. Before the impending collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy, soldiers of the defeated Austro-Hungarian army had flooded into Dubrovnik, bringing with them military equipment, tools, money and valuables, either looted during the retreat or their own. All of that was seized and handed over to the National Council of Dubrovnik without having been inventoried. Rumours soon began to circulate that millions of crowns had been embezzled in the process. No later than 5 January 1919, Dr Bogdanović, District Commissioner, submitted a report to the Split-seated regional government for Dalmatia headed by Dr Ivan Krstelj, advising that criminal proceedings be instituted against the suspects. However, it was not until Jova Todorović, Commissioner for Refugees, a Serb from Serbia, intervened, that the Dalmatian regional government took action, and the apprehension of the suspects in the middle of May 1919 marked the beginning of the so-called *Dubrovnik Millionaire Affair*. Incidentally, all of the twenty-nine arrested were Catholic Serbs (Marquis Luko Bona, Božo Hope, Kristo Dominković, Djildo Job etc).³² Malicious comments in Dubrovnik were that they had it coming, as a gift from Serbia and King Peter I, alluding to their pre-war loyalty and commitment to the Serbian national idea.³³ The ex-members of the National Council were held in custody for three months without being heard. The hearing of Marquis Luko Bona, Vice-president of the National Council, was conducted only after seventy-six days in custody. Meanwhile, the Serbs of Dubrovnik did not just sit by and watch. Antun Pugliesi and priest Sava Barbić went to Belgrade to demand that their fellow-citizens be given a lawful treatment. Pugliesi and Barbić even succeeded in getting an audience with the Crown Prince Alexander (21 July 1919).³⁴ The effort of the two distinguished citizens of Dubrovnik bore fruit: the Ministry of Justice sent its representative (Dr Drljević) to Dubrovnik, and in mid-August the detained were released from custody.³⁵ The decree of 28 February 1921 put an end to the Dubrovnik Affair and the prosecution dropped the case.

What the ex-members of the National Council wanted, however, was not abolition, but the opportunity to prove their innocence in court and

³² Shortly before their arrest, Kristo Dominković and Djildo Job were received in audience by Crown Prince Alexander (on 30 April 1919), presumably in connection with the suspicions that fell on the National Council members. Cf. "Dnevnik kraljevog adjutanta" [Diary of the King's aide-de-camp], AJ-74, knj. [book] 516.

³³ *Dubrovačka milijunaška afera* [Dubrovnik Millionaire Affair] (Dubrovnik 1921), 2.

³⁴ "Dnevnik kraljevog adjutanta".

³⁵ "Ostavka Dra A Pugliesi-a" [Dr A. Pugliesi resigns], *Rad* No. 3 (Dubrovnik), 6 Dec. 1919, 4.

thus clear their names. They believed they were purposely targeted because they were Serbs, and Serbs of Catholic faith. Smeared as criminals, they would have been stripped of all influence in the new state's society and politics. Struggling to prove their innocence to the public, they addressed the embezzlement topic openly and quite sharply in the brochure *Dubrovnik Millionaire Affair* published shortly after their release.³⁶ But that was not the end of their troubles. The brochure copies were seized and the publishers brought to trial. The state prosecutor, Dr Učović, sought to disprove the claim stated in the brochure that the affair had been instigated by the Croat officials from the regional government in order to discredit Dubrovnik's Catholic Serbs. He based his argument on the fact that their arrest had been initiated by a Serb, Jova Todorović;³⁷ on the other hand, Stojan Protić, who stood up in their defence, saw Todorović's involvement as the best proof that the whole thing was rigged. According to Protić, the adversaries of the Serbian Catholic community of Dubrovnik had used a Serb from Serbia as a cover for their premeditated scheme.³⁸ To complicate matters further, all of the arrested Serbs were members of the Radical Party. Therefore the whole affair could also be interpreted in terms of inter-party rivalries, as

³⁶ "What is particularly striking about this process is that the only members of the National Council subjected to investigative detainment and publicly stigmatized by the press as perpetrators of most shameful deeds are Catholic Serbs, which may make it look as if the intention was to stigmatize only them in the public eye, and thus exclude them from having any say in the new state. This is a fact which coincides with the belief of some members of the Regional Government in Split and their humble wishes — which they have purportedly expressed — that they accept that there are Orthodox Serbs but refuse to recognize Catholic Serbs and consider that these must be destroyed." Cf. *Dubrovačka milijunaška afera*, 50. The brochure pointed to the unlawfulness of the Catholic Serbs' arrest, because there had never been any official suspicion or probe into their work to find out whether there was any irregularity at all. They discredited the prosecution witnesses as non-credible and malevolent, and produced strong evidence in support of their innocence. What the accused Catholic Serbs were particularly bitter about was that they were put through an ordeal (utterly unjustly, they argued) in the new state, the one for the creation of which they had made great sacrifices (pp. 15–16): "The National Council was composed of distinguished and honourable citizens, most of them men who had suffered severely under Austrian tyranny, and were persecuted by foreign masters all their lives. There are among them men who barely survived imprisonment, men who were at death's door with gallows being mounted for them, men who gave all they had, spent their properties and ruined their health while their families starved under Austrian persecution ... those men are in the dock today!"

³⁷ "Milijunaška afera pred sudom" [Millionaire Affair before court], *Rad* No. 102, 5 Nov. 1921, 2.

³⁸ Stoj. M. Protić, "Demokratija i dubrovačka afera" [Democracy and Dubrovnik Affair], *Radikal* No. 169 (Belgrade), 9 May 1922, 2.

a Democratic attempt to put the Radicals out of the way. At any rate, the ugly affair had long-lasting effects for all implicated persons, even for their children (e.g. Luce Hope could not find employment in her native town because her father, Božo Hope, had been one of the twenty-nine Serbs arrested).³⁹

Tensions in relations between Serbs and Croats during the Provisional Period (1918–1921) heightened also as a result of vigorous anti-Serbian campaigning by Stjepan Radić and his associates from the Croatian Peasant Party. Systematically spreading falsehoods and half-truths about Serbs, Serbian (un)culture, Serbian politicians, they sought to make the Croatian community believe that they were victims of a primitive, barbarous and backward people who had occupied their lands. The allegations even reached the ears of foreign tourists, such as, for example, Dr Dolton, a politician and professor of the London School of Economics who spent the August and September of 1923 holidaying in Dalmatia. Having realized how badly Serbs were spoken of, and for no obvious reason, Dr Dolton concluded: “Back in Dalmatia I heard so many allegations against the government and the Serbs that I unknowingly concluded that the protests were tendentious and I instinctively began to feel sympathy for the Serbs, even more so as I had no opportunity to hear their side.” A later conversation with Stjepan Radić in London only strengthened his view: “Radić’s endless vilification of everything Serbian has definitely made me side with the Serbs [...]” While in Dalmatia, Dr Dolton was told that Croats paid much higher taxes than Serbs. Astonished to hear that, he made a few enquiries and, naturally, learnt that taxes were the same for the whole country: “This and similar examples have led me to unknowingly distrust the allegations against Serbs I’ve heard from Croats.”⁴⁰

But if Radić’s anti-Serbian propaganda had no effect on a foreigner, it had success among Croats. The royal family was increasingly often an object of ridicule and insult. According to reports to the Ministry of Interior: “In every quarrel and drinking bout scorn is poured on the late King Peter and other members of the dynasty.”⁴¹ In 1922, of the fifty-six com-

³⁹ Marko Murat to Milorad Pavlović, s.1., s. a, NBS RO, R756/8; Marko Murat to Milorad Pavlović, 1920 or 1921, NBS RO, R756/9; Marko Murat to Milan Grol, Dubrovnik, 27 Sept. 1928, Arhiv Srpske Akademije nauka i umetnosti [Archives of the Serbian Academy of Art and Sciences] (hereafter ASANU), Milan Grol Fonds, 14575/I-45.

⁴⁰ Mih. Gavrilović to Minister, London, 6 Nov. 1923, ASANU, Fedor Nikić Fonds, Documents on Stjepan Radić, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Records, 14530/XIX.

⁴¹ Minister of Interior Pribičević to Minister of Justice, Belgrade, 27 Oct. 1921, AJ, 63 (pov.) [classified]-1/I.

plaints over insulting the royalty the prosecutor's office in Osijek filed with the higher office in Zagreb, proceedings were instituted only in three cases, and of the thirty-four filed in 1923 a single one reached the court.⁴² Nor was there much sympathy for Serbian politicians: a wall calendar with the portrait of Nikola Pašić, placed by a policeman of Serbian nationality, was torn and Pašić's eyes gouged out.⁴³ On the other hand, there were attempts at promoting Croatian figures prominent for their anti-Serbian attitude in a recent political past, such as Ante Starčević. The proposal to name one of the main streets in Osijek after this instigator of hatred between the two peoples was understood as a provocation and resolutely rejected by the Serbs of Osijek.⁴⁴

That the anti-Serbian propaganda had effect is also shown by the report of a certain Z. Bogoiević travelling in mid 1921 through Croatia, Slavonia, Srem, Lika and Dalmatia. He observed "great hate against Serbs on the part of the followers of Radić and Frank",⁴⁵ thus confirming the writing of Osijek's *Straža* that "a Serb in Virovitica County is as persecuted and maltreated today as he was in war times, under Austria-Hungary".⁴⁶ At the same time, the head of the Knin District reported that in the predominantly Catholic-inhabited parts of the district, notably in Miljevačka *Krajina* (Drniš Municipality), Radić's ideology had taken root and that the political attitude was "exclusionary towards the other two tribes of our nation, especially towards its Serbian part".⁴⁷ And indeed, it was in the Roman-Catholic village of Miljevac that on 29 June 1921 followers of Stjepan Radić attacked the minstrel and teacher Petar Perunović who toured Dalmatia, singing and promoting the idea of national unity. The sound of his *gusle* attracted an audience, but Radić's fanatical followers tried to disrupt the performance using sticks and stones, and shouting "Down with Serbia!" and "Long live the Croatian peasant republic!" Perunović threatened to use a revolver to defend himself. The incident, which threatened to become an epic fight such as those described in the folk songs performed by Perunović,

⁴² Osijek County Governer to Minister of Interior, 28 March 1924, AJ, 14-69 -235.

⁴³ "Oči g. Pašića" [The eyes of Mr Pašić], *Straža* No. 7, 1 Feb. 1921, 2.

⁴⁴ "Odbijeno izazivanje Srba u gr. zastupstvu" [Provocation of Serbs Rejected in Town Council], *Straža* No. 7, 1 Feb. 1921, 2.

⁴⁵ Ž. Bogoiević Report, Belgrade, 28 July 1921, AJ, 14-179-663. The appendix to the report says: "In general, Serbs are hated by the *Frankovci*, *Pravaši* [Croatian Party of Rights], *Zajedničari* [Croatian Union], *Radićevci* [Radić's followers] and Communists."

⁴⁶ "Srpska krv" [Serbian blood], *Straža* No. 34, 11 May 1921, 1.

⁴⁷ District Police Headquarters to Ministry of Interior, 8 Aug. 1921, AJ, 14-179-663.

ended with the arrest of the attackers, and the minstrel left Miljevac uninjured.⁴⁸

Besides the Serbian folk songs that provoked such an angry response, the very name “Serbian” was an object of controversy. There was a trend among the Croatian intellectual elite to replace the term “Serbs” with “Vlasi” (Vlachs), most prominently by the historian and university professor Vjekoslav Klaić. Professor Aleksa Ivić criticized Klaić, basing his critique on the scholarly proven fact that the population referred to in various sources as *Vlasi* were in fact Serb. The influential papers *Obzor* and *Hrvat* stood in the Croatian historian’s defence.⁴⁹

That it was not easy being a Serb in Croatia was what even Serbs from other parts of the Kingdom of SCS experienced. The local Osijek press registered that an academic drama company from Belgrade, touring the Kingdom to raise funds for a hospital for ill students, was boycotted in Osijek.⁵⁰ With as few as 150 visitors, an exhibition of Belgrade painters in Zagreb in 1922 was as good as boycotted.⁵¹ Maga Magazinović, the woman who established modern ballet in Serbia, wrote in her memoirs years later of her train trip to the Croatian coast in 1922 and how she had been ridiculed for being Serbian by a group of Croats headed by a school mistress.⁵² An observation made by Božidar Kovačević, a leader of the Republican Youth at Belgrade University who attended Radić’s rallies as his party’s representative, was that Serbs in Croatia used to lock themselves in their homes at night and did not venture out.⁵³ Risto Grdjić returned from his four-year studies in Zagreb with unpleasant impressions. He perceived Zagreb as a town lacking the openness, ease of communication and warmth typical of Belgrade and Serbian environments in general. Grdjić found the capital of Croatia to be “closed and reserved” towards outsiders and foreigners, notably Serbs. During his student’s days, he was admitted into a single Croatian family, and one that rented rooms to students. But even in that family, whose

⁴⁸ Report on the work of Petar Perunović, a *gusle*-player and teacher, for July and August 1921, in northern Dalmatia, Zones I and II, AJ, 66-2300-2166.

⁴⁹ A. Ivić, “O srpskom i hrvatskom imenu” — Odgovor ‘Obzoru’ i ‘Hrvatu’ [‘On the Serbian and Croatian names’ — Reply to *Obzor* and *Hrvat*], *Radikal* No. 165, 4 May 1922, 2; *ibid.* No. 166, 5 May 1922, 2.

⁵⁰ “Jedna sramota” [A shame], *Jug* No. 176 (Osijek), 6 Aug. 1921, 4. We have not been able to find information for other Croatian towns. Osijek may have been an exception.

⁵¹ “U Zagrebu nikad Srba nema” [There are no Serbs in Zagreb, ever], *Privrednik* No. 7 (Zagreb), July 1922, 114.

⁵² Maga Magazinović, *Moj život* [My Life] (Belgrade 2000), 192–193.

⁵³ Kosta Dimitrijević, *Životne ispovesti: Milan Budimir, Božidar Kovačević, Vojislav Minić* [Life Stories: Milan Budimir, Božidar Kovačević, Vojislav Minić] (Belgrade 2001), 67.

livelihood depended “on rents paid by Serbs”, he felt “that they do not like us and consider themselves superior”. They never missed an opportunity to make the young man feel less worthy. The victory scored by a Croatian football team was as good a reason as any to talk about the superiority of Zagreb over Belgrade. Briefly: “A phoney, empty, puffed-up ‘millennium-long’ culture lurking round every corner.”⁵⁴

Croatian culture was also seen as phoney or, more precisely, as non-existent, by Ljubomir Micić, editor of *Zenit*. In his harshly-toned article “The parrot and the ‘Croatian culture’ monopoly”, Micić ridiculed the Croatian self-image of superiority, and harked back to the stand Croatian intellectuals had taken during the First World War. Instead of raising their voices in protest, they had “subserviently” written “panegyrics to Austro-Hungarian generals and military leaders”. Micić reproached them for their support to the “leader of the people” (Stjepan Radić) and his politics which was “based solely on uncultured insults and affronts to the most cultural people in the Balkans — the creative Serbian people”. Micić argued “that Serbs culturally surpass Croats by fifty Zagreb cathedrals”. In line with his basic thesis about “the Balkan barbarogenius” that was to reinvigorate the Western spirit, he reminded that *the Greek miracle* that modern Europe rested on had occurred in the Balkans. Therefore “constructive Serbian Balkanism” could rightfully challenge “destructive Croatian ‘Europeanism’.”⁵⁵ This article caused the editor of *Zenit* a lot of problems. He was fired, received threats from Stjepan Radić, there was even a plan for his assassination. Micić eventually moved to Belgrade and thus escaped the fate of Milan Crevar, a high school student killed in a fight between the Serbian and Croatian nationalistic youths in Gospić.⁵⁶

It should be noted that the situation of the Croatian Serb community in the new, Yugoslav, state was (as it had been in Austro-Hungary) closely connected with the understanding of Croatian politicians that only a political nation was entitled to self-determination. As the institute of political nation was seen as resulting from the historical state right, the Croatian political leadership recognized the status of a political nation only to Croats who, it was argued, had a millennium of political, national and cultural distinctiveness behind them. It was already at the convention of the Croatian Republican Peasant Party (CRPS) of 8 December 1920, and then in

⁵⁴ Risto Grdjić, *Uspomene* [Memories], ed. Miloš Spajić (Valjevo–Belgrade 2002), 150.

⁵⁵ *Zenit* No. 24, April 1923.

⁵⁶ Micić was one of 9.2% of intellectuals born in Croatia who moved to Serbia between the two world wars. By contrast, persons born in Serbia accounted for only 0.8% of the Croatian intelligentsia in the same period. Cf. Milosav Janićijević, *Stvaralačka inteligencija medjuratne Jugoslavije* (Belgrade 1984), 62.

the “Constitution of the Neutral Peasant Republic of Croatia” adopted on 1 April 1921, that the stance was taken about Croatia being entitled to self-determination.⁵⁷ Relying on the CRPS “Constitution”, the Croatian block (CRPS, Croatian Union, Croatian Party of Rights, Croatian Workers’ Alliance) insisted in its Memorandum on “Croatia’s true sovereignty”, on recognition of a “Croatian state within the borders of the international union of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes”.⁵⁸ As the concept of political nation also had a national meaning, Serbs were not even mentioned in the CRPS “Constitution”. They in fact were considered political Croats. As such, they had no right to self-determination, but were to enjoy national minority status, as is obvious from the CRPS constitutional programme written by Dr Rudolf Horvat, one of the party leaders. In a confederal association between Croatia and Serbia, the Serbs in Croatia were to be guaranteed, according to Horvat, the following rights: church autonomy, the use of Cyrillic script in municipalities with a Serbian majority, the use of the Serbian flag as a national symbol, the proportionate number of Serbian teachers in lower schools attended by Serbian pupils, the right to the district head in districts with a Serbian majority. There was also a promise that the career of Serbian civil servants would not be hampered because of their nationality, and that the appellation “Serbian” will be completely equal to “Croatian”.⁵⁹ Horvat’s interpretation suggests that the Serbs in Croatia were denied the possibility of territorial self-organization based on the national principle, and that they were not guaranteed a genuine cultural and educational autonomy, such as the one they had enjoyed under Habsburg rule in the form of ecclesiastical and school autonomy.⁶⁰

Was there a Serbian reaction to the position of the leading Croatian political forces that Croatia, by the decision of the Croatian Diet of 29 October 1918, was an independent state with the right to its separate existence within the existing union or, to put it differently, did the idea arise of forming a separate territorial unit to encompass the Serbian ethnic space in Croatia?

The issue of the Kingdom’s internal borders became topical immediately after the unification, as it became vital to address the problem of

⁵⁷ The Constitution published in Stjepan Radić, *Politički spisi: autobiografija, članci, govori, rasprave*, ed. Zvonimir Kulundžić (Zagreb 1971), 366–393.

⁵⁸ Documents published in Branko Petranović and Momčilo Zečević, *Jugoslavija 1918–1988: tematska zbirka dokumenata* (Belgrade 1988), 198.

⁵⁹ Prof. Dr Rudolf Horvat, *Hrvatsko pitanje* [The Croatian Question] (Zagreb 1923), 48–50.

⁶⁰ Mirjana Stefanovski, *Ideja hrvatskog državnog prava i stvaranje Jugoslavije* [The Concept of Croatian State Rights and the Creation of Yugoslavia] (Belgrade 1995), 189.

growing “tribal” particularisms. Colonel Milan Pribičević advocated the abolition of historic provinces and of all borders that “Austria had built between us”.⁶¹ Through Peasant Councils he sought to raise popular awareness of the necessity to preserve the newly-formed state not only because Serbs and Croats were so intermingled that peaceful demarcation between them was impossible, but also because he believed that Serbia and Croatia as two separate states would fall easy prey to neighbouring powers.⁶² But Colonel Pribičević had to confront the Croatian political force’s view of Croatia as a sovereign state. One of his associates wondered: “If they can demand Croatia’s separation from the State based on ‘the principle of self-determination’, why can’t our Serbian part separate from them according to the same principle and remain in the State? Are they blind not to see that hundreds of thousands of peasants are on our side and do not want their republic. How can they despise the feelings of so many peasants on our side and act as if they were the only household head in Croatia?”⁶³

That the Serbian population really was against Croatia’s autonomy or independence became obvious when the Serbs of Lika came out with the demand that Lika, as well as Bosnia, Kordun and Banija, unite with Serbia in case of Croatia’s separation.⁶⁴ Concerned for the wellbeing of the Serbian community in Croatia and its national survival in case of Croatia’s separation even Milan Pribičević felt it appropriate to warn: “Those who are creating a Croatian Ireland in Yugoslavia should know that they are also creating a Serbian Ireland in Croatia, because without the will of half a million Serbian peasants being taken into account there cannot be peace in Croatia.”⁶⁵ When the question of the country’s administrative division was placed on the agenda and the state leadership eventually agreed that a larger number of smaller units should be established in order to avoid any one “tribe” being encompassed within a large region which it then could come to consider as a state of its own,⁶⁶ the question of Serbs in Croatia became an agenda item as well. According to Dr Ivan Ribar, Svetozar Pribičević insisted upon the Serbs of Lika, Kordun and Banija being encompassed within one subdivi-

⁶¹ Milan Pribičević, “Pismo bratu rataru. Pripazimo na one što hoće autonomije”, *Srpsko kolo* No. 22, 10 June 1920, 1.

⁶² Milan Pribičević, “Pismo bratu rataru. Zašto Srbin i Hrvat zajedno i ravnopravno”, *Srpsko kolo* No. 37, 30 Oct. 1919, 1.

⁶³ *Srpsko kolo* No. 47, 2 Dec. 1920.

⁶⁴ “Ličani protiv separatista”, *Demokratija* No. 494 (Belgrade), 20 Feb. 1921, 3.

⁶⁵ Milan Pribičević, “U odbranu seljačkih veća u Hrvatskoj”, *Srpski književni glasnik* IV/2, 16 Sept. 1921, 156.

⁶⁶ Djordje Dj. Stanković, *Nikola Pašić i Hrvati (1918–1923)* (Belgrade 1995), 142.

sion to counterbalance Radić's Croats.⁶⁷ Milan Pribičević, on the other hand, advocated the abolition of the border between Croatia and Bosnia to create a new province (*Unska oblast*) by uniting *Krajina* on the Croatian side with *Krajina* on the Bosnian side.⁶⁸ According to him, Banija and the districts of Bihać and Banjaluka (where Serbs were a majority) formed a geographical, economic and cultural whole, and it was logical therefore to unite them administratively as well. He claimed that the idea to create the Province of Una was the authentic desire of the peasantry from his native Banija.⁶⁹ And while the idea of Colonel Pribičević did not materialize, that of his brother Svetozar did: such heterogeneous regions as Lika, Primorje and Banija were united to form *Primorsko-krajiška oblast* with its seat in Karlovac, no more than forty kilometres away from the seat of another province in Zagreb.

Let us see what contemporary sources had to say about the life of Serbs in Croatian environments.

The divide between Serbs and Croats seems to have been readily observable. Mileta Matović, a native of Užice serving an apprenticeship in the small town of Otočac in 1923, observed that the shop signs of all Serb-owned shops were written in both scripts, Cyrillic and Latin, while those of Croat owners had their signs only in Latin.⁷⁰ While Serbs seemed to embrace the idea of national unity,⁷¹ Croats insisted on their singularity and their distinction from Serbs. Official reports increasingly suggest that the natural desire of Croats to preserve national individuality was turning into a strong intolerance of Serbs, Serbia and the Yugoslav state. A letter of Colonel Milorad Radovanović dated 22 May 1923 may be indicative: "... what I can clearly see and positively know is the fact that we, Serbs, are considered here as despicable intruders; that our King is detested and

⁶⁷ Dr Ivan Ribar, *Politički zapisi* [Political Notes] (Belgrade 1948), 97; idem, *Iz moje političke suradnje (1901–1963)* [From My Political Cooperation] (Zagreb 1965), 218–219.

⁶⁸ Milan Pribičević, "Pismo bratu rataru. Pripazite na sve što hoće autonomije", *Srpsko kolo* No. 23, 17 June 1920, 1.

⁶⁹ Milan Pribičević, "Pismo bratu rataru. Šta kažu seljačke skupštine u Baniji", *Srpsko kolo* No. 34, 2 Sept. 1920, 1.

⁷⁰ *Sećanja Privrednikovih pitomaca*, vol. II (Belgrade 1998), 365.

⁷¹ The new state's indulgent attitude towards Croats went so far as to issue a decree (24 January 1923) exempting the children of all faiths other than Orthodox from the obligation to celebrate St Sava's Day in schools, while another one (1 February 1923) imposed on Orthodox children the celebration of Bishop Strossmayer. The Serb MPs from Croatia condemned the decrees as introducing inequality at Serbian expense and called for the celebration of both great historical figures by the children of all faiths. Cf. *Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine: redovni saziv za 1922. godinu*, vol. I (Belgrade 1923), 361 (4th Regular Session of 5 June 1923, discussion by Svetozar Pribičević).

that our common state is seen as a bloodsucker sucking the blood of this people for the benefit of Serbs and Serbia!" Radovanović noted that the attitude of Croats had not been as radical only a year earlier. The villagers from the Petrinja area had used to greet him politely, gladly conversed, and even expressed sympathies for Serbs and the common state. As a result of Radić's propaganda, however, everything changed: "Today rarely does anyone greet me upon meeting, I get sulky and resentful responses even to my most polite address, and whenever a company of two or three people passes by, they make political comments loudly, and always at the expense of Serbs and Belgrade, or they shout in an insolent and provocative manner: Long live the republic! Long live Radić!" That Radić was not to blame for everything after all, and that Serbs had been at risk even before the unification, Colonel Radovanović illustrated by the acts of vandalism on the Serbian cemetery committed by inhabitants of Petrinja in 1914. Five years after the war, the cemetery offered the same sight: knocked-down crosses, broken gravestones, headstone portraits with the eyes gauged out; the grave of Field Marshal Borojević's parents had also been vandalized, even though Borojević had been an Austrian officer.⁷²

Some suggested that the Serbs, persecuted even before the war, had been more resilient and tougher. A railway police officer in Slavonski Brod was therefore led to conclude that the local Serbs had lost their edge after the fulfilment of their national goal and fell into a state of "ambiguity, unable to orientate themselves according to a fixed point or direction, which puts them in a disadvantageous position in relation to Croats".⁷³ In the decades before the war Slavonski Brod "had emanated hatred for Serbs", and when the war broke out it "was overenthusiastic about the former monarchy's war against the 'detested Vlachs'". The *Frankovci* and clericalists, at first dismayed by the defeat of the Habsburg Monarchy, resurfaced as early as 1919 encouraged by the fact that the crimes committed against Serbs went unpunished.⁷⁴ Moreover, high-ranking posts in Slavonski Brod

⁷² AJ, 335–15.

⁷³ This disorientation was especially observable in religious matters. In mixed environments it was customary for Orthodox children to pray silently during joint prayer at the beginning and end of the school day, while Catholic children, being a majority, were allowed to pray aloud; even though this practice was introduced only to avoid vocal confusion caused by saying two differently worded prayers aloud, the result was that the Serbian children, listening to Roman-Catholic prayers over and over again, eventually began to repeat them, thus becoming estranged from their own faith and indifferent to it. Cf. Prosvetni inspektor Sremske oblasti Ministru prosvete [Srem District School Inspector to Minister of Education], Vukovar, 6 March 1925, AJ, 66–1251–1497.

⁷⁴ The question of civil servants unable to put up with the fall of the Habsburgs and remaining loyal to the old regime was even raised in Parliament. Dr Žarko Miladinović

were held by adversaries of the Serbs: Josip Rupčić, a sympathizer of the *Frankovci*, was chief of police; Mato Zuvčić, “a Serbophobe like no other under heaven”, was head of the court, and his deputy, judge Vladoje Hok, was also a Serbophobe. Zuvčić is known for his statements about the Serbs as *balkanesers*, about barbed wires that should be laid out along the Drina, about too many Serb employees at the Slavonski Brod Court, and for those he had made during the war, such as: “There is going to be no peace and order in Croatia until the Vlach heads are hanging all over the town park”. The local Serbs also complained about the ethnically biased rulings by judge Marijan Laksar. “The great protector” of the three judges was the lawyer and public notary Dr Nikola Nikić, chair of the Slavonski Brod district branch of the CRPP.⁷⁵

The courtrooms were not the only place where the Serbs were reminded, and in a variety of ways, of their place. Delko Bogdanić, the roommate of Gojko Nikoliš, a high-school student at Karlovac, would let it drop that “you, Serbs, should be expelled to Serbia, then there will be peace and order in Croatia”.⁷⁶ That he did not mean it as a joke, for which young Nikoliš took it at the time, was seen during the Second World War, when his roommate became a prominent Ustasha commander. That dead Serbs were no less at risk, their graves being vandalized both before and after the Great War, is shown by the desecration of the Lubarda family tomb at the Orthodox cemetery in Sinj reported by a newspaper.⁷⁷

An incident that occurred on 25 July 1926 illustrates perfectly the anti-Serbian mood in Croatia. The final match for the National Football Championship was to be played between Jugoslavija, a Belgrade club, and Gradjanski from Zagreb. According to press reports, about 1500 Belgrade fans arrived in Zagreb by train. The Jugoslavija players were upset by the appointment of Anton Felver as referee, suspecting that he, being a member of a Croatian nationalistic organization, might favour the home team. That the atmosphere was far from friendly is shown by the police force equipped with rubber batons deployed round the football field, and six mounted police officers behind one of the goals. Gradjanski played very rough and, as

warned that the government’s reconciliatory attitude encouraged its enemies: “Our handling things with gloves is taken for our weakness and our opponents feel encouraged to do things they would not dare do if we were just a little more energetic and determined.” Cf. *Stenografske beleške Privremenog narodnog predstavništva* [Minutes, Provisional Popular Representative Body], 30th Regular Meeting of 2 July 1919, 805–806.

⁷⁵ Ministarstvo unutrašnjih dela Ministarstvu pravde [Ministry of Interior to Ministry of Justice], Belgrade, 2 Oct. 1923, AJ, 63 (pov.) [classified]-2/2.

⁷⁶ Gojko Nikoliš, *Korijen, stablo, pavetina. Memoari* (Zagreb 1981), 69.

⁷⁷ “Iz pokrajine”, *Novo doba* No. 11, 15 Jan. 1925, 6.

a result, two Jugoslavija players, Jovanović and Djurić,⁷⁸ were seriously injured. It turned out that the visiting team's suspicions were not unfounded: the referee was turning a blind eye to Gradjanski's violations of rules, and at the score 1:1, which would have made Jugoslavija the champion, he awarded a highly dubious penalty shot against the guests.⁷⁹ Gradjanski won 2:1 and took the title. Even though their team won, local fans breached the police cordon and rushed onto the field, throwing stones at Jugoslavija players and shouting "Down with Belgrade!", "Vlach pigs!", "Down with Vlachs!" The Belgraders showed restraint. The rampage did not end there. The train with Jugoslavija fans departed from the railway station in Zagreb amidst curses and exclamations of disgust. On their trip back home, the fans were attacked in Sisak, and one of them sustained a knife injury. Belgrade fans saw the final game as a sporting event, and Zagreb fans saw it as a battle between Serbs and Croats, and Gradjanski's victory as a victory of Croatness. Belgrade fans only carried their red club banners. Zagreb fans carried their blue team banners, but also their national red, white and blue flags. A sporting event thus degenerated into a typically *Frankovci* anti-Serbian demonstration, such as those organized at the beginning of the Great War. The *Politika* correspondent rightfully wondered: "Imagine what would have happened if the Belgrade team had won?"⁸⁰

Observable in larger towns, the divide between Serbs and Croats was perhaps even more conspicuous in smaller ones. In Knin, for example, only Croats visited the "Croatian" reading-room, and the Sokol Society was only attended by Serbs; the two communities did not even mix in pubs, one basically being attended by Serbs, another by Croats. In order not to confuse potential customers, Serb and Croat merchants and craftsmen mounted

⁷⁸ Dragan Jovanović nicknamed Žena (1904–1936), a Jugoslavija player and ten-time member of the national team, had the strongest kick in his generation. He played in both Jugoslavija teams that won the national championship. He was killed in a car crash. As for Djurić, we have not been able to ascertain whether that was Damjan Djurić nicknamed Dača (?–1958), a Jugoslavija first-team player from 1922, or Vladeta Djurić nicknamed Era (1905–1976), the club's first-team player from 1924. The two players were not related.

⁷⁹ In Zagreb, the colloquial term for penalty shot was *elver*, so after this event the referee was nicknamed "Felver-elver". Cf. Prof. Dr Mihailo Andrejević Andrejka, *Dugo putovanje kroz fudbal i medicinu (doživljaji, sećanja, uspomene)* [Long Journey through Football and Medicine (Experiences, Events, Memories)] (Gornji Milanovac 1989), 25.

⁸⁰ Ž. B., "Kako je Zagreb dočekaio i ispratio Beograđane" [How Zagreb received and saw off Belgraders] *Politika* No. 6556, 27 July 1926, 5–6.

their shop signs in Cyrillic and Latin scripts respectively.⁸¹ In rural environments strife could be caused even over the introduction of modern devices which facilitated everyday life and enabled more efficient communication with distant parts of the country and the world: in the Nova Gradiška area, the Croat village of Dragalić and the Serbian village of Medare were in dispute over the location of the post office, as both communities laid claim on it.⁸²

Croatian antagonism was additionally fuelled after the shooting in June 1929 at the National Assembly by Puniša Račić, a Serb from Montenegro, at Croatian MPs, and especially by the death of Stjepan Radić as a result of it.⁸³ From then on, the inequality of Serbs compared to the Croatian majority was becoming more visible. In Zagreb, as *Privrednik* wrote, Croats refused to use Cyrillic script and discouraged Serbs from using it: Cyrillic doorplates were torn down or smeared, Cyrillic signs on Serb-owned shops and offices were broken or painted over. The Serbs of Zagreb were boycotted and had trouble finding employment.⁸⁴ The appointment of Petar Panjković, a “Serb from Serbia”, to a clerical post in the Croatian Archives provoked a storm of protests.⁸⁵ Officers and soldiers of the Yugoslav Army were increasingly often subjected to insults or even attacked.⁸⁶ The British ambassador in Belgrade was informed about terrorist attacks on Serbs in Croatian villages in the environs of Split.⁸⁷ Dubrovnik saw demonstrations against the performance of a freshly-restored Serbian musical company.

⁸¹ Josip Draganić, “Kroz Dalmaciju. Pismo iz Knina” [Through Dalmatia. A letter from Knin], *Riječ* No. 176, 6 Aug. 1926, 3.

⁸² “Borba sela Medare i Dragalić za poštu” [Post-office fight between villages Medare and Dragalić], *Novosti* No. 98 (Zagreb), 8 Feb. 1927, 6.

⁸³ The testimony of Dejan Medaković shows what kind of fear took hold of the Serbs in Zagreb upon hearing the news of Stjepan Radić’s death: “I remember my father’s panic and excitement when he waked me in the middle of the night, shouting: ‘Quickly, quickly, get up quickly, we’re leaving.’ It was when Stjepan Radić died and large-scale anti-Serbian demonstrations broke out in Zagreb. He took us to Laško, to a hotel, and I’ll never forget that nocturnal car race of his, as if he had been chased.” Cf. Dejan Medaković, *Efemeris: hronika jedne porodice*, vol. II, 2nd ed. [Ephemeris: Chronicle of a Family] (Belgrade 1991), 259.

⁸⁴ “Beleške” [Notes], *Privrednik* No. 11, Nov. 1928, 171.

⁸⁵ AJ, 66-462-727; “Srbijanski žandari u hrvatskom arhivu” [Serbian gendarmes in Croatian Archives], *Hrvat* No. 2619 (Zagreb), 29 Nov. 1928, 1.

⁸⁶ Bjelajac, *Vojska Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*, 257.

⁸⁷ Živko Avramovski, *Britanci u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji: godišnji izveštaji Britanskog poslanstva u Beogradu 1921–1938* [The British in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia: Annual Reports of the British Embassy in Belgrade 1921–1938], vol. I: 1921–1930 (Belgrade–Zagreb 1986), 543.

Physical clashes in some parts of the town required police intervention.⁸⁸ A new incident occurred at a football match in Split, between a Belgrade club, Jugoslavija, and the local team of Hajduk. Belgrade normally received Croatian sportsmen with due respect. By contrast, the Jugoslavija players in Split suffered abuse “every step of the way”, and at the end of the match were attacked by the crowd intent on settling the score both with the visiting players and with the objective referee Segedinski, who was hit in the chest with a stone. On police advice, the Jugoslavija players were compelled to stay hidden in the locker room for a whole hour before the fuming Hajduk fans dispersed. They were additionally appalled by the fact that they were attacked not only by the crowd, but also by home team players, including the captain Kaliterna. As a result, Jugoslavija Football Club took the decision to boycott Hajduk for the next two years. As Jugoslavija players passed along the Hajduk players’ message to Belgrade’s B.S.K. not to come to Split or else they would be given a very unfriendly welcome, B.S.K. decided to officially request that the scheduled match be played on neutral turf.⁸⁹

Not only did sportsmen encounter unpleasantness in Croatia. The popular film actor Svetislav Petrović was greeted by hoots of scorn when he arrived in Zagreb. But thanks to the female part of the awaiting crowd who greeted the celebrity with cheers and stood in his defence, the protesters eventually withdrew. That politics did not discourage Petrović’s fans is shown by the ovations the actor received on the opening night in a Zagreb cinema. Yet, it seems that the protesters left a stronger impression on the actor: he left Zagreb the very next day on the pretext of having urgent obligations.⁹⁰

That relations between Serbs and Croats were extremely strained is shown by the tragic end of a Belgrade journalist, Vladimir Ristović,⁹¹ editor of the sensationalist newspaper *Jedinstvo* where he, in course language, attacked the leaders of the Croatian opposition, Radić and Pribičević. Upon arriving in Zagreb he was attacked several times and lightly injured. Even-

⁸⁸ “Demonstracije protiv Srba u Dubrovniku” [Demonstrations against Serbs in Dubrovnik], *Politika* No. 7256, 14 July 1928, 10.

⁸⁹ “Zašto tako Splićani?!” [Why like that, Split?!], *Reč* No. 1300 (Belgrade), 2 Aug. 1928, 7; “Jugoslavija bojkotuje Hajduk” [Jugoslavija boycotts Hajduk], *Reč* No. 1301, 3 Aug. 1928, 6.

⁹⁰ “Dva dočeka Svetislava Petrovića u Zagrebu” [Two kinds of reception for Svetislav Petrović in Zagreb], *Riječ* No. 214, 16 Sept. 1928, 6.

⁹¹ “Sv. Pribičević ubio je noćas u Zagrebu Vladu Ristovića, našeg urednika i osnivača” [Sv. Pribičević killed Vlada Ristović, our editor and founder, last night in Zagreb], *Jedinstvo* No. 19 (Belgrade), spec. issue, 5 Aug. 1928, 1.

tually, in the night between 4 and 5 August he was killed by a railroad worker (Josip Hunić).

* * *

Although the topic is far from being exhausted in this contribution, the examples given suggest that the two nations in Croatia were deeply divided. The sources studied cast quite a different light on the thesis that Croats were “oppressed” by Serbs, a thesis that has for quite a long time been passing as a valid historical interpretation. These sources suggest that the perception of Serbs as hegemonist resulted from propaganda rather than from the actual state of affairs. Besides, they show that the Serbs — systematically portrayed to the Croatian public as invaders and enslavers, while, by contrast, they saw themselves as being “third-rate citizens” — lived their daily lives under strain, surrounded by intolerance, subjected to various forms of pressure and violence, often fearing for their livelihoods, even for their lives. The inexorable logic of facts leads to the conclusion that members of the Serbian community in Croatia felt discriminated against and not quite safe.

UDC 94(497.1) 1918/1929
316.356.4(=163.41)(497.5)
316.75(093)

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