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ISTRAŽIVANJA • ИСТРАЖИВАЊА

XXIX

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ISTRAŽIVANJA

JOURNAL OF HISTORICAL RESEARCHES

29

Faculty of Philosophy University of Novi Sad

ИСТРАЖИВАЊА

29

Филозофски факултет Универзитета у Новом Саду

FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY, NOVI SAD
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

ISTRAŽIVANJA

JOURNAL OF HISTORICAL RESEARCHES

29

NOVI SAD, 2018

ISTRAŽIVANJA – JOURNAL OF HISTORICAL RESEARCHES 29
UNIVERSITY OF NOVI SAD, FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, SERBIA

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Publication information: Istraživanja – Journal of Historical Researches 29, 2018, University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of History, 2017, ISSN 0350-2112; ISSN 2406-1131 (online).
Author enquiries: For enquiries relating to the submission of articles please visit this journal's homepage at **http://istrazivanja.ff.uns.ac.rs/index.php/istr** Also accessible from here is information on copyright, frequently asked questions and more. Contact details for questions arising after the acceptance of an article, especially those relating to proofs, will be provided by the publisher: Faculty of Philosophy, Department of History, dr Zorana Đinđića 2, 21000 Novi Sad, Serbia; *Phone*: +381214853860; *e-mail*: **istrazivanja@ff.uns.ac.rs.**
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The Journal is printed thanks to the financial aid of
The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia

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I S T R A Ž I V A N J A

JOURNAL OF HISTORICAL RESEARCHES

2018 ISSN 0350-2112 **29**

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doi: 10.19090/i.2018.29.163-175
UDC: 94(=162.4)(497.1)

ISTRAŽIVANJA
JOURNAL OF HISTORICAL RESEARCHES
29 (2018)

ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER
Received: 29 May 2018
Accepted: 19 August 2018

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SLOVAKS IN YUGOSLAVIA AND IN ITS TERRITORIES UNDER FOREIGN OCCUPATION DURING WORLD WAR II (an overview of dominant features of a minority life)

Abstract: Slovak minority has been co-creating a multicultural character of contemporary Serbia since the first half of the 18th century. The Slovaks living in former Yugoslavia as an integral part of the Yugoslav society also had to experience the turbulent events at the turn of the 1930s and 1940s. After the Axis invasion and destruction of Yugoslavia in April 1941 the Slovak community, historically settled in Bačka, Banat and Srem, was divided into three countries/occupational zones. Slovaks living in Srem became the citizens of independent Croatia, Slovaks living in Bačka became the citizens of the Hungarian Kingdom and Slovaks from Banat lived in territories under direct German occupation. The paper portrays main features of this minority's political and cultural life in wartime Yugoslavia and its territories under foreign occupation, core problems of existence within changing regimes and the attitude of the Slovak minority towards the Slovak State (Slovak Republic) established on 14 March 1939 with an emphasis on religiously motivated conflicts between the mostly Lutheran Slovak minority in Yugoslavia and the Catholic regime of Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (the ruling and only allowed political party in the Slovak State/Republic).

Keywords: Slovaks in Yugoslavia, Vojvodina, Slovak-Yugoslav relations, Slovak state, occupation of Yugoslavia.

1. Preface: Slovaks in Yugoslav territories before World War II and the consequences of the country's partition in April 1941

The history of the Slovak community in Vojvodina (currently the second largest minority in the province) dates back to the 1740s. The Slovak colonization of the former Hungarian Kingdom's southern territories, which started at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries, was stimulated by a critical social situation in the Upper-Hungarian

counties (*Felvidék*/contemporary Slovakia). The main reasons why thousands of Slovak peasant families and individuals decided to migrate were economic damage to their properties caused by soldiers during the war campaign against the Turks and during the anti-Habsburg uprisings, lack of fertile soil in mountainous regions, famine accompanied by epidemic diseases (especially the plague, typhoid fever and redbreast), economic oppression practiced by landowners and by the state and the religious oppression of the Lutherans.

Ethnic Slovaks settled in Vojvodina mostly in the *third phase* of their colonization from 1740 (1745) until the beginning of the 19th century.[1] In this period, Slovak settlements were founded in Bačka, Srem and Slavonia following Serbian, Bunjevci, German and Hungarian colonization since the 1730s. In 1715 only 1.202 Serbian, 35 Hungarian and 30 German families lived in 58 settlements in Bačka (excluding the Military Frontier territories). In 1720 Bačka was inhabited by no more than 31.000 residents and the population density reached only 3–5 persons/km^2.

During the 18th and 19th centuries the Slovak settlement, in the form of homogenous enclaves as well as lonely villages, was completed in the large areas of the "Lower Land,"[2] neighbouring with and encircled by Hungarian, Romanian, German, Serbian and Croatian ethnic communities. Yet, since the first colonization flow, the Slovak settlers created their own social and cultural structures bound to their church affiliation. Because of the preservation of the Slovak language in churches, schools and community life, the Slovak culture survived almost untouched even after the period of intense Magyarization at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The Slovak community that settled in Vojvodina did not suffer from the lack of wealthy and self-confident peasant elites and educated intelligentsia. Slovaks gained respect and recognition from the neighbouring population thanks to their success in farming, their diligence and cultural achievements.

After 1918 the Slovaks in Yugoslavia remained a minority not only in terms of their quantity but in terms of their religion, too. In a multicultural state which was until its destruction in April 1941 a "Babylon" of nations and confessions, the Orthodox (Serbs, Montenegrins, Macedonians), Roman Catholics (Croats, Slovenes, Italians, Istro-Romanians) and Muslims (Bosniaks, Albanians, Turks) dominated over the Lutherans. Ethnic diversity of Yugoslavia was complemented by Germans, Hungarians, Czechs, Ruthenians, Romanians, Aromanians, Bulgarians and Romani. Slovaks inhabited mostly the regions of Bačka, Srem and Banat, i.e. Vojvodina in general, where they belonged to well established communities. According to statistics from 1937, most Lutheran Slovaks lived in Bačka (27.421), followed by Banat (18.229) and Srem (15.184). In total, 60.834 Lutheran Slovaks lived in Yugoslavia, which was a growth by 6.181 people compared to

[1] Sirácky 1980: 32.

[2] The term *Lower Land* (*Dolná zem* in Slovak; *Alföld* in Hungarian) is commonly used in the Slovak and Hungarian historiography. For Slovak historians this term means, in a broader sense of word, the extensive areas of former pre-1918 Hungarian counties south of present-day Slovak borders and, in a narrower sense of word, territories south of the line Budapest – Miskolc – Sátoraljaújhely, which approximately coincides with the Hungarian perception. The consequences of the social and economic processes in Upper Hungary (present-day Slovakia) at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries led to a massive migration of Slovaks to the Lower Land territories. The colonization of new areas by Slovak settlers was supported by pragmatic interests of the Habsburg dynasty and landlords, mainly after the expulsion of Ottoman Turks from Southern Hungary and after the suppression of Francis II Rákoczi's uprising.

the numbers from the 1927 census.[3]

Yugoslav Slovaks were the only "Lower Land" Slovak community in the interwar period with their own national high school. Their cultural identity remained unshaken even after the introduction of Alexander I's personal dictatorship in January 1929. The tendencies of Serbianization from the beginning of the 1930s, which included appointing Serbian professors, artificially increasing the quantity of Serbian students and restricting the leisure activities of Slovak students who attended the Slovak grammar school in Bački Petrovac, did not last long.[4]

Apart from this transitional period characterized by assimilation tendencies, the approach of the Yugoslavian state authorities towards the Slovak minority was very tolerant both in national and religious issues. After the dissolution of Austria-Hungary, Slovaks founded three Slovak Lutheran seniorates in Vojvodina: in Bačka and Banat (August 1920) and in Srem (Spring 1921). At the conference held in Stara Pazova on 20 June 1921 these seniorates decided to merge into a single district, which would have protected Slovak Lutherans from Hungarian influences in the province represented mainly by Hungarian Calvinists.[5]

Since the Lutheran faith shaped the identity of the Slovak minority in Yugoslavia, Yugoslavia's disintegration after the Axis invasion in April 1941 marked a fatal milestone for the community's national and religious life. Yugoslavia vanished from the map of Europe and Slovak Lutherans, merged in a united Lutheran district, were suddenly divided into three different countries/zones. Slovaks living in Srem became the citizens of independent Croatia (*Nezavisna država Hrvatska* – NDH), the Hungarian Kingdom became a new motherland of Slovaks living in Bačka and Slovaks from Banat lived in the territories under direct German occupation.[6]

2. A complicated relation: The Yugoslav Slovaks in the occupied territories and the involvement of the Axis Slovak Republic

2.1. Slovaks in Yugoslavia and occupied Bačka

The relations between the Slovak community in Yugoslavia and the Slovak Republic, established on 14 March 1939, had been tense due to confessional misunderstandings and Yugoslavia's pro-Czechoslovak stance. Even though Yugoslavia recognized the Slovak Republic *de iure*, up to its disintegration in April 1941 the country gladly provided a political shelter for Czechoslovak emigrants and their supporters. Because of this unofficial support, the bilateral Slovak-Yugoslav diplomatic, cultural and economic relations had never fully developed.

Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia had been maintaining extremely good relations

[3] 'Vymierame...' 1939: 2.
[4] Kmeť 2012: 281–284.
[5] *Ibid.* 284-285, 287.
[6] Due to a lack of sources dealing with the life of minor Slovak communities in Banat under German occupation this issue will not be part of this paper and remains a challenge for further research. For basic information see Völkl 1991.

throughout the interwar period. A base ground for these relations was an image of "common interests" in the field of foreign policy, traditional historical cooperation and anti-Habsburg resistance before 1918, the idea of Slavic proximity and shared antipathy towards separatism (mainly towards Slovak and Croatian separatist tendencies[7] within Czechoslovakia/ Yugoslavia).[8]

Yugoslav Slovaks had an attitude to the Slovak Republic similar to the Belgrade governmental institutions. Slovak chargé d'affaires in Belgrade Jozef Cieker failed to establish closer contacts with the Slovak community in Yugoslavia. On the contrary, Cieker had been only escalating the latent conflict between the Catholic-profiled regime of the Slovak Republic and the Slovak community in Yugoslavia, who were mostly of Lutheran denomination.

Cieker complained to the Yugoslav government regarding the activities of the *Matica slovenská* in Yugoslavia, the activities of the associations with the adjective "Czechoslovak" in their name and regarding the production of publishing houses and journalists of Yugoslav Slovaks' press. The Slovak chargé d'affaires blamed mainly the newspaper *Národná jednota* (*National Unity*) for spreading pro-Czechosovak propaganda. Since the Yugoslav government did not respond to Cieker's interventions, he directly asked *Matica slovenská* in Slovakia to delegate a propaganda team with a task to organize a promotion tour in Vojvodina. The propaganda campaign sought to promote the regime and ideology of Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (the ruling and the only allowed Slovak party in Slovakia) among the Slovak minority community in Yugoslavia.

Matica slovenská reacted quickly and delegated three reputable persons for the propaganda mission: a linguist and cultural activist Henrich Bartek, a literary scientist Andrej Mráz (a native of Bački Petrovac) and a journalist Vilo Kovár. Kovár immediately attempted to get in touch with the local intellectual, attorney Janko Bulík who used to serve as the first chair of *Matica slovenská* in Yugoslavia in the past. During his visit to Belgrade in February 1940 Kovár, however, found out that mood of Yugoslav Slovaks towards Hlinka's Slovak People's Party's regime was not positive and their attitude was not about to a change in the future.[9]

In his reports to Bratislava Cieker described the Yugoslav Slovaks in a bad light and pejoratively called them a "Lutheran group impregnated with Czechoslovak ideology."[10] Cieker blamed local intellectuals for this situation, mainly the representatives of the Slovak Lutheran Church in Yugoslavia, the representatives of the *Matica slovenská* in Yugoslavia, the journalists of the *Národná jednota* and professors of the grammar school in Bački Petrovac who, according to Cieker's view, manipulated the Slovak minority and indoctrinated it with anti-regime ideology.

Cieker's attempts to establish closer contacts with Slovaks in Yugoslavia finally partially succeeded in the summer of 1940.[11] As Cieker stated, despite the initial setbacks he never considered the Lutheran Slovaks in Yugoslavia to be a "hopeless case" and

[7] The discourse of the Slovak and Croatian nationalistic movement in the interwar period, however, labelled itself as a movement for *emancipation*, not separation.

[8] Brummer 2013: 47–48.

[9] Škorvanková 2017: 86–87.

[10] See e. g. the Document nr. 1 in the Appendix to this paper.

[11] Škorvanková 2017: 87–88.

believed that "there is a good will among Slovaks in Yugoslavia to correct their attitude to Slovakia and its head leaders."[12]

The Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs prepared several options how to guarantee the presence of official delegates of the Slovak Republic at the general assembly of *Matica slovenská* in Yugoslavia, which was planned to be held in Bački Petrovac on 15 August 1940. *Matica slovenská* in Yugoslavia, however, showed no interest in inviting the delegates of Jozef Tiso's regime and sent an invitation only to poet Ján Smrek (who was, by the way, a Lutheran). Cieker was afraid that his unexpected private visit to Bački Petrovac may have raised controversies or caused a possible *faux-pas*. Slovak chargé d'affaires therefore deputed only an informer to Bački Petrovac and stayed at home.[13]

Out of all political and cultural leaders of the Slovak minority in Yugoslavia, Cieker maintained the best contacts with Vladimír Hurban Vladimírov, a Lutheran priest in Stara Pazova. Hurban Vladimírov invited Cieker for a visit in the autumn of 1940. They had been maintaining correspondence and as a speech of sympathy Cieker invited Hurban Vladimírov for celebrations of Slovak independence in Belgrade organized on 14 March 1941. Hurban Vladimírov, despite being a Lutheran, was a supporter of Slovak statehood and took part in a ceremonial mass held under the auspices of the Slovak embassy on this occasion. He commented his journey to Belgrade using the following words: "I am going there exclusively in my name being convinced that a Slovak has to share his joy over the Slovak Republic, its existence and rise and that God, even despite tribulations, did not let our Family die out."[14]

Vladimír Hurban Vladimírov belonged to a negligible group of Yugoslav Lutheran Slovaks concentrated in Stara Pazova and Ljuba, who appreciated the establishment of independent Slovakia in March 1939.[15]

In general, the political and cultural elites of Yugoslav Slovaks reflected the attitude of Hlinka's Slovak People's Party towards Lutherans in Slovakia very sensitively. They considered themselves to be a sort of "distant part" of the Lutheran Church in Slovakia and due to an unenviable position of Lutherans in Slovakia they could not have identified with the idea of Slovak statehood linked to a confessional intolerant rule of Hlinka's Slovak People's Party.

Apart from that, there were many bonds between Yugoslav Slovaks and Slovakia. Slovak Lutheran priests serving in Yugoslavia studied theology in Bratislava. During the divine services they used the same liturgy like the Lutherans in Slovakia. The same applied to liturgical books and a use of the same Church name. It is a paradox that the Slovak Lutheran community in Yugoslavia did not sufficiently enhance its contacts with Lutheran communities in Slovakia. *Cirkevné listy* (*Church Letters*) published in Slovakia remarked: "The Lutheran Slovak Church in Yugoslavia is our closest one in terms of faith and blood too… However, it is strange that we do not have any contacts with it. Our Slovaks [in Yugoslavia – the authors' note] – who are all Lutherans – are visited by various academic, cultural and football associations. But in the field of religion we do not visit each other, not

[12] Jarinkovič 2012: 19–20.
[13] *Ibid.* 20.
[14] Škorvanková 2017: 87–88. For itinerary of Hurban's trip see ASEAVCS, Stara Pazova, *Vladimír Hurban Vladimírov – články*, nr. 224. Report on trip to Belgrade (15 March 1941).
[15] Sovilj 2016: 166–167.

taking the latest episcopal installation into consideration, when our and their Church representatives greeted each other…"[16]

The Slovak Lutherans in Yugoslavia had been openly criticizing the discrimination policy of the Slovak government against non-Catholic minorities thanks to whom they had become a "thorn in flesh" of Hlinka's Slovak People's Party's regime.[17] Anti-regime resentments were often expressed on the pages of *Národná jednota* (*National Unity*) published in Bački Petrovac. *Národná jednota* frequently published critical and mocking articles, making fun especially of the Prime Minister Vojtech Tuka, who was addressed in the newspaper by his authentic Hungarian name *Béla* instead of Slovak *Vojtech*. *Národná jednota* had an inclination to label the Slovak state/Slovak Republic and its representatives in quotation marks, emphasizing their puppet character ("Slovak state," "independent" state, "leader" Tiso). Similar daring articles could be found in religious press too, e. g. in the monthly magazine *Nádej* (*Hope*) published in Kisač or in *Evanjelický hlásnik* (*Lutheran announcer*) published in Erdevik. As historian Milan Sovilj stated, in 1939 and partly in 1940 the press of Slovak Lutherans in Yugoslavia used every single opportunity to verbally "kick" the government.[18] Mainly the anonymous section *List zo Slovenska* (*A Letter from Slovakia*) offered the editorial board an ideal opportunity to express their anti-regime sentiments.

The animosity of Yugoslav Slovaks towards Hlinka's Slovak People's Party's regime was not just a matter of Slovak press published in Yugoslavia. The regime not only failed in its attempts to ideologically indoctrinate the Slovak Lutheran minority in Yugoslavia but suffered serious setbacks within these activities, too. For example, the initiatives by the Student Union of the Slovak-Yugoslav League (*Študentský odbor Slovensko-juhoslovanskej ligy*) to organize promotional lectures about the Slovak state for Yugoslav Slovaks in July 1939 were a complete disgrace.[19] The members of the Union's delegation from Slovakia experienced a very embarrassing, almost ignoring reception.[20]

The position of the Slovak minority in Bačka dramatically changed after April 1941. While the authorities of the NDH in general did not cause any major inconveniences to Slovak Lutherans, Slovak Lutherans in Bačka occupied by Hungary had to confront the radicalized Hungarian minority policy. After regaining the territories in April 1941 which were part of the Greater Hungary before 1918, the Hungarian minority policy reached a new level. According to some estimates, around 5.000 citizens became victims of persecutions committed by Hungarian military units thanks to which the Hungarian administration had an even more brutal character than the Nazi national policy in the annexed part of Slovenia.[21] Besides violence on local citizens, especially during the first weeks after April 1941, the new Hungarian administration had been attempting to decimate the minorities culturally.

During the Hungarian occupation Bačka was inhabited by approximately 35.000

[16] Koštial 1992: 83; 'Evanjelická slovenská cirkev v Juhoslávii' 1939: 178.
[17] Sovilj 2016: 158.
[18] *Ibid.* 62, 161–163; Škorvanková 2017: 88–89.
[19] *Ibid.*
[20] Jarinkovič 2012: 54.
[21] Ther 2017: 125–126.

Lutheran Slovaks[22] (cca. 85% of all Slovaks living in Bačka).[23] Yet in 1941 the Hungarian authorities closed the Slovak grammar school in Bački Petrovac. Lower classes were transformed to a Hungarian royal burgher school. The political and cultural activities of Slovaks in Vojvodina were significantly weakened.[24] The publication of the *Národná jednota* was stopped. Activities of the *Matica slovenská* in Yugoslavia, formerly led by a Lutheran priest Samuel Štarke, were substituted by the Hungarian-Slovak Educational Association (*Magyarországi tót közművelődési egyesület – MTKE).*[25] *The Slovak citizens of Bački Petrovac and Pivnice, the centres of the Slovak national life in Vojvodina, however, preferred a membership in the Party of Slovak National Unity (Strana slovenskej národnej jednoty) instead of being the members of the mentioned pro-Hungarian association, well-known for its support of Hungarian patriotism. The Party of Slovak National Unity was not a classical political party but kind of a "national front" of all Slovaks in the Hungarian Kingdom. The party coordinated political activities as well as religious and cultural life until the liberation and restoration of Yugoslavia.*[26]

2.2. Slovaks in the NDH

Before April 1941 the Slovak ambassador Cieker positively reported to Bratislava only concerning the groups of Catholic Slovaks living in Croatia and Slavonia who were, however, only a torso of the Slovak minority in the multicultural Balkan kingdom. After the establishment of the NDH these small communities were politically and culturally organized by the Slovak National Unity (*Slovenská národná jednota*) led by Jozef Stupavský. The Slovak National Unity with a centre in Ilok was, after April 1941, a kind of liaison body between the Slovak community in the NDH and the Slovak embassy in Zagreb (or, in a broader sense, between Slovaks in Croatia and in the Slovak Republic).[27] Cultural activities of the Slovak minority in Croatia were intensified by the Slovak Reader Association (*Slovenský čítací spolok*). The newly opened Slovak embassy in Zagreb also supported cultural life and, in cooperation with the Slovak National Unity, helped to supply the minority with the newest Slovak books, magazines, calendars and study materials. Since the Slovak National Unity was founded on 9 April 1942 it did not have sufficient time to develop notable activities.[28]

The Slovak community in wartime Croatia never crossed the marginality of a tiny minority. According to rough estimates cca. 20.000 Slovaks lived in the territory of the NDH.[29] For example, according to the 1940 census, Ilok as a centre of Slovak community

[22] Sirácky 1980: 197.
[23] See Svetoň 1943: 52–55.
[24] Kmeť 2013: 327.
[25] On the activities of the *Matica slovenská* see Boldocký 2013: 352–362.
[26] Sirácky 1980: 199.
[27] On the activities of the organization see: Archive of the Slovak Evangelical Church in Serbia [Archív slovenskej evanjelickej a. v. cirkvi v Srbsku – ASEAVCS], Stara Pazova, *Matica slovenská*. Statute of the Slovak National Unity in the Independent State of Croatia (18 August 1942). See also: 'Dokumenty' 1943: 45–49.
[28] Ušák 1978: 14–15.
[29] Tkáč 2010: 668.

in Croatia was inhabited only by 1.505 Slovaks.[30] Other groups of Slovak communities lived in Našice, Đakovo, Pakrac, Požega, Orahovica, Osijek and the surrounding settlements inhabited mostly in the second half of the 19th century. Because of these low numbers and Ustasha regime's friendly relations with the Slovak Republic the Slovak minority in the NDH did not suffer any systematic ethnic or religious persecution like the Serbs, Jews or Romani people did – all the more, the position of the Slovak minority was guaranteed and protected by a mutual cultural agreement which strengthened Slovak-Croatian relations.

The initial sketch of the cultural agreement was drawn up on 7 July 1941 by Anton Bonifačić, the head of cultural section of the NDH's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Despite the existence of this agreement the Slovaks in Croatia, contrary to the German *Volkdeutsche*, never obtained an official status of the *Slovak national group.* The rights of the Slovak community, however, remained untouched including the right to preserve national elementary schools teaching the pupils in the Slovak language. Cultural cooperation between the Slovak Republic and the NDH was enhanced due to the founding of the Croatian-Slovak society on 13 August 1941.[31] The society, however, focused primarily on boosting the cultural relations on a higher diplomatic level and did not pay major attention to a numerically insignificant Slovak minority in Croatia and the Croatian minority in Slovakia. On the other hand, the establishment of the reciprocal Slovak-Croatian society on 13 March 1942 enabled the intensification of the bilateral cooperation in the field of education as a part of cultural life. According to the *Agreement on Cultural Cooperation between the Slovak Republic and Independent State of Croatia* prepared in Zagreb, both parties agreed on the founding of a lectureship of the Croatian language, literature and history and of a Department of Croatian language and literature at the Slovak University in Bratislava followed by the founding of a parallel institute at the university in Zagreb. This agreement opened up a possibility for Slovaks from Croatia to continue studying in the Slovak language at the university as well even though the selection of fields of study was very limited.[32]

From time to time Slovak-Croatian relations were disturbed by incidents on the regional level based on obstructions from local authorities. Part of Slovaks in the NDH had a problem with obtaining the Croatian citizenship due to their affinity with the Yugoslav regime prior to April 1941. Only those who had been holding a Yugoslav citizenship and had been living on the territory of the NDH for more than 10 years were granted a new Croatian citizenship.[33] Minor conflicts with the local Ustasha leaders accompanied by poor living conditions on the periphery of the state raised the interest of the Slovak minority to repatriate back to Slovakia. Although this question was discussed mainly during the summer of 1941 the Slovak government never asked for a mutual exchange of Slovaks from Croatia to Slovakia and Croats from Slovakia to Croatia.[34]

One of the most successful missions of Slovak diplomacy regarding the Slovak minority in Croatia was the rescue of several hundred Slovak POWs from German prison

[30] Kuric 2002: 15.
[31] Michela 2003a: 114–115.
[32] Michela 2003a: 117.
[33] Tkáč 2010: 668.
[34] Michela 2003a: 117–118.

camps. From June 1941 the Slovak ambassador in Zagreb Karol Murgaš requested the OKW via General Glaise-Horstenau to release Slovak prisoners originally from Slok, Stara Pazova, Ljuba, Lug and Ilok who fought in the Yugoslav army during the short war against the Axis powers. Thanks to diplomatic effort around 200–300 Slovaks from the NDH were allowed to go back home which, however, was not a total number of imprisoned former Yugoslav citizens of Slovak nationality.[35]

After the April of 1941 new state borders had a remarkable impact on religious life as well. Redrawing the state borders shattered the existing ecclesial administration structure of Slovak Lutherans in former Yugoslavia, mainly in Srem. According to a new border line some of Slovak Lutheran congregations in Srem belonged to the German protectorate zone while some other congregations and minor philias to the newly established NDH. The Srem seniorate of Slovak Lutherans formally existed further. However, during the first months after the occupation it remained in passivity and Srem Lutheran Slovaks did not intend to rush with the reorganization of the seniorates structure until December 1941. In December 1941 the senioral delegates from Stara Pazova came up with an idea to establish a new church organization in the NDH. The Lutheran convocation, held in Bingula on 19 June 1942, agreed to dissolve the old Srem seniorate and addressed an impulse to create a new independent Church of Slovak Lutherans in the NDH. After the election of the Administrative Committee responsible for preparatory works the Syrmian seniorate officially ceased its existence and all its competences were taken by the interim Administrative Committee. The process of establishing a new Slovak Lutheran Church in the NDH suffered from various administrative obstacles and internal conflicts within the parish offices. The Slovak Lutheran Church in the NDH therefore started its activities only in March 1944, shortly before the Front rolled through the territory of the Ustasha Croatia. Due to this reason the Church did not have an opportunity to develop any activities.[36]

* * *

Hatred against fascism and the Axis regime brought many Slovaks living in the territories of the former Yugoslavia into resistance. A key figure of the resistance in the first months of the occupation was Ján Bulík, a lawyer and the first chair of *Matica slovenská* in Yugoslavia (1932–1935). Bulík, who organized foreign anti-fascist and pro-Czechoslovak resistance in Belgrade before the occupation, was arrested in June 1941 by the Gestapo and was deported to the Mauthausen concentration camp, where he was brutally murdered on 30 January 1942.[37] Slovaks in the occupied territories of Yugoslavia also joined partisan units. A flat landscape of Bačka did not allow anti-fascists to organize armed resistance except minor sabotage actions. In Srem the Slovaks founded the first partisan unit consisting of 80 men in November 1943. The company called "Juraj Jánošík" after the famous Slovak outlaw was subordinated to the 1st Vojvodinian Brigade of the 16th Vojvodinian Division. Slovak partisans were fighting within this unit in the territories of Bosnia, Herzegovina,

[35] Michela 2003b: 109–110.
[36] Kmeť 2017: 109–111.
[37] See the biographical conference proceedings: Bajaník 2007.

Sandžak and Montenegro, where it was finally disbanded. The 16th Vojvodinian Division led the long-lasting heavy fights in the mountains against the 7th SS Volunteer Mountain Division "Prinz Eugen" and the 13th Waffen Mountain Division of the SS "Handschar" (1st Croatian). At the end of World War II the headquarters for Vojvodina merged all ethnic Slovaks into a single unit in the strength of 3.000 men.[38] Most of the towns and villages with notable Slovak population had been liberated from October to December 1944.[39]

3. Conclusion

As the Czech historian Miroslav Hroch stated, from 1918 to 1941 the Slovak minority in Yugoslavia had a unique position within the country comparable only to the position of minorities in Czechoslovakia or Estonia. A high level of cultural autonomy provided by Belgrade let the minority live its own national life almost unshaken and express their ideas freely, despite repeated interventions by the Axis authorities of the Slovak Republic and the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs with its chargé d'affaires Jozef Cieker, calling for the suppression of pro-Czechoslovak and anti-Hlinka's Slovak People's Party's tendencies.[40] In general, Yugoslav Slovaks thus represented an "island of nonconformity" which the government in Bratislava had to tolerate. Hlinka's Slovak People's Party completely failed to change their attitude towards the political regime in Slovakia and to the Slovak statehood establishment which was, in the minds of Yugoslav Slovaks, inseparably linked to the will of the Nazi Germany. The ideological gap abyss between Hlinka's Slovak People's Party's regime and most Yugoslav Slovaks was rooted in religious issues. Yugoslav Slovaks who were informed about the verbal attacks, discrimination and distrust to Lutherans in Slovakia had no reason to spiritually identify themselves with such a regime. The situation had not changed a bit even after April 1941. Slovak communities in the occupied territories lived their own life and did not show any desire to take part in "exemplary" Slovak foreign national policy in the national-socialistic "Neueuropa.

APPENDIX

Document 1
Our Standpoint to Events in Our Old Motherland

> After 20 years of nonpareil progress, the motherland of our ancestors is again enslaved and divided. Both Czech and Slovaks are destined to be humiliated by our common enemies. To master us more conveniently they again split our two fraternal nations, handing us pro forma states, with an aim to let our nations die without pain and even without protest or revolt against this cruel verdict. And, also, they were trying to convince the world that the Czechs and Slovaks had a share in their national death too as a natural consequence of various events.
> An open-minded spectator must see that contemporary situation in our old motherland – in the Czech lands and in Slovakia as well – has no prospects of a bright future for Czechs or Slovaks. We do not

[38] Klátik 1945: 40–43.
[39] For details regarding the liberation of Kovačica, Kisač, Bački Petrovac, Gložan, Kulpin, Stara Pazova, Ilok, Erdevik and Bingula see the article: 'Oslobodenie našich obcí' 1945: 58–63.
[40] Hroch 2016: 275.

want to enumerate (and it is not even needed) everything that fills us with pain! We would just like to remind that we cannot gloat and have a joy over the birth of the "Slovak state." Praise God that we have an opportunity to express our feelings and say what worries us.
Therefore, we fully support the standpoint held by the Národná jednota concerning the events in our old motherland from Munich verdict up to these days because we are all convinced that Slovaks and Czechs can freely develop and live only in one shared motherland. We beg the Národná jednota to withstand and further defend the fair cause of our old motherland like it had been doing it until today. We believe that if all the Slovaks and Czechs join our efforts, our old motherland will rise from the ashes again and will thrive for itself and for mankind. The main order is: to keep going in our work!

Stara Pazova, 26 June 1939

Karol Lilge, teacher – catechist; Katarína Opavská, Michal Filip, Michal Krajči, M. Litavský, teacher; Mišo Bohuš, Ďuro Zelenák, Ján Havran, Ján Dovčoš, Jozef Šago, Ján Ruman, Mišo Mikľan, Tomáš Petran nr. 632, Jano Kováč, Samuel Manďan, Ján Chalupka, teacher, V. Ječmen, teacher, Pavel Šuster, teacher, Ana Šusterová, teacher, Maria Litavská, teacher, Terka Ječmeňová, teacher, Anka Gengaľacká, teacher, Štefánka V. Ječmenová.

('Naše stanovisko k udalostiam v našej starej vlasti'. *Národná jednota*, vol. 20, 8. 7. 1939, nr. 27, 1)

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СЛОВАЧКА МАЊИНА У ЈУГОСЛАВИЈИ И ЊЕНИМ ТЕРИТОРИЈАМА ПОД СТРАНОМ ОКУПАЦИЈОМ ТОКОМ ДРУГОГ СВЕТСКОГ РАТА
(преглед доминантних особина живота једне мањине)

Резиме

Историја словачке заједнице у Војводини (тренутно друга најбројнија мањинска група у покрајини) почиње четрдесетих година XVIII века. Након 1918. године у Краљевини Срба, Хрвата и Словенаца Словаци су остали мањина, не само у смислу њихове бројности, већ и у религијском смислу. У вишекултурној држави која је до распада у априлу 1941. године била „Вавилон“ народа и вероисповести, Православци, Римокатолици и Муслимани су били бројчано надмоћнији у односу на Лутеране. Према подацима из 1937. године већина Словака Лутерана живела је у Бачкој (27,421), потом у Банату (18,229) и у Срему (15,184). дакле, у то време у Југославији живело је 60,834 Словака Лутерана.

Пошто је лутеранска вера обликовала идентитет словачке мањине у Југославији, распад државе након инвазије Сила осовина у априлу 1941. године значио је прекретницу у националном и религијском животу за ову мањинску заједницу. Југославија је нестала са мапе Европе и Словаци Лутерани, који су дотад живели у јединственој лутеранској области, изненада су подељени у три државе/зоне. Словаци који су живели у Срему постали су држављани Независне државе Хрватске (НДХ), Словаци који су живели у Бачкој постали су држављани Мађарске краљевине, а Словаци из Баната су живели на територијама под немачком окупацијом.

Односи између словачке заједнице у Југославији и Словачке републике основане 14. 3. 1939. били су напети због религијских неспоразума и про-чехословачког става Југославије. Иако је Југославија de iure признала Словачку републику, до њеног распада у априлу 1941. године она је прихватала политичке емигранте из Чехословачке и људе који су их подржавали. Због ове незваничне подршке билатерални дипломатски, културни и економски односи између Словачке и Југославије се никад нису у потпуности развили. Словачки отправник послова у Београду Јозеф Циекер није успео да успостави ближе контакте са словачком заједницом у Југославији. Његове активности су само погоршале латентни сукоб између католички профилисаног режима Словачке републике и словачке заједнице у Југославији, чија је вероисповест била већином лутеранска. Уопштено, политичка и културна елита југословенских Словака одражавала је став Хлинкине словачке народне партије према Лутеранима у Словачкој. Они су се видели као „удаљени део“ Лутеранске цркве у Словачкој и, због незавидног положаја Лутерана у Словачкој, нису могли да се идентификују са идејом словачке државе која је била повезана са нетрпељивом владавином Хлинкине словачке народне партије..

Кључне речи: Словаци у Југославији, Војводина, словачко-југословенски односи, словачка држава, окупација Југославије.

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ISTRAŽIVANJA – JOURNAL OF HISTORICAL RESEARCHES 29, 163-175