Right-Wing Politics in Interwar Southeastern Europe: Between Conservatism and Fascism

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Dragan Bakić,
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Editor in chief
Vojislav G. Pavlović
Director of the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA

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Zoran Janjetović

Institute for Recent History of Serbia
Belgrade

GERMAN, HUNGARIAN AND ROMANIAN NATIONAL MINORITIES IN THE VOJVODINA AND THE EXTREME RIGHT

Most national minorities usually have smaller political leverage or social influence due to their smaller numbers. Of course, in some cases, this disadvantage is offset by greater economic power, but this is more of an exception than a rule.[1] This usually underprivileged position is, more often than not, combined with the unwillingness of the majority population and governments of respective countries (which tend to legitimize their power by the "will of the people" or ethnically defined "national interests") to make due concessions to the particular needs of members of minority populations. In worse cases, this is translated into outright discrimination, and in the worst, into persecution. This underprivileged position usually forces national minorities to seek help from their mother-countries, which in this way become their "patron states," as the term goes. In that scenario, the actual position of an ethnic minority is determined by the interplay of inner political needs of the host country and of its relations with the mother country of the minority in question,

[1] Even the Jews, often accused by Anti-Semites of running certain countries or even the whole world, have some influence only in a handful of countries. In all others, they tend to be just another minority. This was so even before the Holocaust, when the bulk of the Jewish Diaspora was underprivileged, to say the least.

with the minority itself often playing a merely tertiary role. This constellation could be reduced to the formula "the stronger the influence of the mother country, the better the situation of its minority in another country" – and vice versa. This held particularly true for the interwar period when internationally recognized standards of minority rights were much more rudimentary than today.[2]

Minority identification with mother countries and isolation from the majority society in the host country sometimes also leads to identification with political parties or movements in the mother country. For obvious reasons, this usually cannot find expression in the electoral behavior of the minority populations, but it still seems to influence the ideological make-up of each national minority, just like in the mother country. The goal of this paper will be to examine if this held true for the ethnic Germans, Hungarians and Romanians in the northern Yugoslav province of the Vojvodina during the interwar period, as well as in the Second World War when extreme right influences were given free rein and became much more visible than before.

In this context, one could ask why our explications are limited to these three national minorities and why members of the second-largest national minority in 1921, and the largest in 1931, the Albanians, were left out. The answer has several aspects. Firstly, the Albanians had no tradition of party organization whatsoever until 1908. Even after 1908, as well as after 1918, they never had political parties of their own. The party that claimed to represent their interests in Yugoslavia, the Xhemiet, was, in fact, an Islamic-oriented Turkish-Albanian organization, and a fairly short-lived one at that.[3] After that, they never had a political party,

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[2] In the case of Yugoslavia, an illustrative example is the tiny Italian minority which, because the Yugoslav government wanted to appease its dangerous western neighbor, enjoyed many privileges denied to much larger minorities. (Zoran Janjetović, *Deca careva, pastorčad kraljeva. Nacionalne manjine u Jugoslaviji 1918–1941* (Beograd: INIS, 2005), 141, 259.)

[3] It was headed by large landowners mostly of Turkish and Albanian origin who represented their own class interests as the common interests of all Muslims from the southern parts of the country (Kosovo, Metohija, Macedonia and Sandžak). When it was no longer needed as a prop of the ruling Serbian parties, it was destroyed. (Cf. Bogumil Hrabak, *Džemijet: Organizacija muslimana Makedonije, Kosova, Metohije i Sandžaka* (Beograd: Author's edition, 2003).

but rather took part in or voted for Yugoslav parties. The Fascist Party, introduced in Albania after the Italian occupation of 1939, also spread in 1941 to the Italian-occupied parts of Yugoslavia inhabited by ethnic Albanians, but disappeared without a trace after Italy's capitulation in September 1943[4] – which goes to show that it was a paper creation with no roots among the people: its members were political opportunists and not right-wing believers.

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later renamed Yugoslavia) was founded as a South-Slavic nation-state according to the Western model. However, its population included numerous ethnic minorities inherited, along with the territories, from the defunct Ottoman and Habsburg empires. The largest minorities – the Germans, Albanians, Hungarians and Turks – belonged to formerly dominant nationalities. For reasons of national revenge for past oppression and indignities, the leading politicians of the new state were not disposed to grant the national minorities equal status with the majority South Slavic population. Quite the contrary, their policy was aimed at reducing the social, economic and political power of the minorities perceived as having been privileged before 1918. To avoid precedents and out of nationalist egoism, such a minority policy was also applied to smaller and even Slavic minorities.[5] On the other hand, the practice in almost all European countries was more or less the same, so it would have been hard to find a different example, even if the powers-that-be had wanted to.[6]

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[4] Đorđe Borozan, *Velika Albanija. Porijeklo – ideje – praksa* (Beograd: Vojnoistorijski institut Vojske Jugoslavije, 1995), 300–304; Spasoje Đaković, *Sukobi na Kosovu* (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1986), 117–119; Branislav Božović, Milorad Vavić, *Surova vremena na Kosovu i Metohiji. Kvislinzi i kolaboracija u Drugom svetskom ratu* (Beograd: ISI, 1991), 54, 90–91, 127–130; Ali Hadri, *Narodnooslobodilački pokret na Kosovu 1941–1945* (Beograd: Sloboda, 1973), 102–104, 107; Nenad Antonijević, *Kosovo i Metohija 1941–1945. godina – ratni zločini* (Beograd: Muzej žrtava genocida, 2017), 127, 130, 221, 223; Pavle Dželetović Ivanov, *Balistički pokret 1939–1952. Masovnost, saradnja sa italijanskim i nemačkim okupatorima i zločini nad Srbima* (Beograd: Arhiv Srbije, 2000), 93–94, 109–111, 126–128.

[5] Such as the Czechs, Slovaks, Poles and Ruthenians, with whose mother countries the relations were usually good.

[6] Rare exceptions were Estonia and partly Czechoslovakia. For a still useful overview from the early 1930s, cf. Ewald Ammende (ed.), *Die Nationalitäten in*

Although a leading nationality in Austria, the Germans in the Hungarian half of the Habsburg Monarchy were a national minority, albeit mostly a Hungarian-friendly one. Because of that and their economic expansion, there was an ethnic distance between them and the local Slavs.[7] The Romanians had been fellow sufferers, political allies, and rivals of the Serbs. However, their common past with the Serbs and good relations between Yugoslavia and Romania would set them apart from the Hungarians and Germans.[8]

After the First World War, the Hungarians in the Vojvodina were reduced from being part of the ruling nationality to an unwanted national minority. Although nominal affiliation with the ruling nation had not put them into a privileged economic and social position before 1918, national slight rankled all the more after the Great War because it was combined with economic discrimination, which even increased.[9] Yugoslavia's relations with Hungary oscillated between frigid and tense for most of the

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den Staaten Europas. Sammlung von Lageberichten (Wien, Leipzig: Europäischer Nationalitätenkongress, 1931).

7 Zoran Janjetović, "Die Konflikte zwischen Serben und Donauschwaben," *Südost-Forschungen*, 58, (1999): 126–128.

8 On Serbian-Romanian relations before 1918, cf. Nikola Gavrilović, *Srbi i Rumuni. Srpsko-rumunske veze kroz vekove* (Beograd, Novi Sad: Zavod za udžbenike, 1998); Svet. Bradvarević, *Naše hijerarhijske deobne parnice sa Rumunima* (Novi Sad: s.n. 1913); Gligor Popi, "Srpsko-rumunska saradnja i zajednička borba ugnjetenih narodnosti u periodu dualizma," *Balcanica* 7 (1976): 209–217; K. N. Milutinović, *Predratna Mala antanta* (Sarajevo: Sarajevska pošta,1937); Vojislav J. Vučković, "*Pariski komitet triju narodnosti*," *Zbornik Matice srpske za društvene nauke*, 15, no. 15 (1965): 50–61; Miodrag Milin, "Rumunski nacionalni pokret u Banatu i antidualistička borba narodnosti (1884–1896)," *Godišnjak Društva istoričara Vojvodine* 8, no. 8 (1981): 83–90.

9 On ethnic Hungarians between the two world wars, cf. Šandor Mesaroš, *Položaj Mađara u Vojvodini 1918–1929* (Novi Sad: Institut za izučavanje istorije Vojvodine, 1981); Idem, *Mađari u Vojvodini 1929–1941* (Novi Sad: Institut za izučavanje istorije Vojvodine, 1989); Aleksandar Kasaš, *Mađari u Vojvodini 1941–1946* (Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet, 1995), 13–24; Enkő A. Sajti, *Hungarians in the Vojvodina, 1918–1947* (Boulder, Col.: Atlantic Research and Publications Inc., 2003), 3–188. On relations between Yugoslavia and Hungary, cf. Vuk Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Mađarska 1918–1933*, (Beograd: ISI, 1971); Idem, *Jugoslavija i Mađarska 1933–1941* (Beograd: ISI, 1976).

interwar period, and the authorities tended to perceive the Hungarian national minority as a pawn of Budapest's irredentist policy.

The Romanian national minority was the smallest of the three. It was also weak economically and politically.[10] On the other hand, after initial tensions, Yugoslavia's relations with Romania became friendly. The two countries became allies within the framework of the so-called Little Entente, and regent Alexander married a princess from the Romanian ruling house.[11] However, the relations were never good enough to completely quell irredentist desires among nationalists in Romania, whereas Yugoslav powers-that-be were loath to give concessions even to members of a "friendly" minority for fear of precedent.[12]

The three minorities had their own political parties between 1923 and 1929, but they failed to attract the majority of votes from their co-nationals. The Party of the Germans was the most successful, despite the weaker national consciousness of the Germans in the Vojvodina. However, even its successes were less than moderate. The Hungarian Party was elitist in composition, disunited and under constant suspicion of irredentism. For these reasons, its influence was weak. This was even truer for the Romanian Party: its leaders were constantly at odds with each other, and their voting base was very limited. These parties could be placed in the center of the political spectrum: they espoused mainstream liberal bourgeois values, coupled with special national demands. They hardly ever tried to establish cooperation between themselves, usually hoping (rather in vain) to gain more from direct horse-trade with the governing parties. By the same token, most minority voters voted for large Yugoslav parties in the vain hope that they would redress their grievances.[13] The ineffectiveness of minority parties on the one hand, and

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[10] Gligor Popi, *Rumuni u jugoslovenskom Banatu između dva rata (1918–1941)* (Novi Sad: Intitut za istraživanje istorije Vojvodine, 1976).

[11] Gligor Popi, *Jugoslovensko-rumunski odnosi 1918–1941* (Novi Sad: Sloboda, 1984).

[12] Janjetović, *Deca careva*, 251–252, 256.

[13] Janjetović, *Deca careva*, 176–196; Idem, *Nemci u Vojvodini* (Beograd: INIS, 2009), 145–166; Mesaroš, *Položaj*, 151–156, 160, 162, 172–181, 252; Sajti, *Hungarians*, 34–38, 48–49, 43, 53, 65–69; Popi, *Rumuni*, 54–60, 66–76; Oskar Plautz, *Das Werden der deutschen Volksgemeinschaft in Südslawien* (Novi Sad: Druckerei- und Verlags Aktiengesellschaft, 1940), 48–55, 63–65; Carl Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische*

the lack of understanding on the part of large Yugoslav parties, on the other, must have left members of national minorities frustrated by the end of the parliamentary era that lasted until January 1929. The royal dictatorship introduced in January 1929 was meant to do away with ethnic and political tensions, but served only to push them under the carpet, while radicalizing them at the same time.[14]

This would seem to open a wide window of opportunity for extreme-right ideas and movements, but the 1920s in most countries were not the time of real extremism. On the contrary, after the initial turmoil in the wake of the Great War, most European countries settled into a kind of democratic or semi-democratic parliamentary order. Germany and Hungary, as wartime losers, were especially economically and politically vulnerable and had to tread carefully both in domestic and foreign policies. That means that extremist movements were kept in check so as not to disturb consolidation at home and on the European scene.[15] Victorious Romanian nationalism had enough on its plate with digesting the three-million-strong and recalcitrant Hungarian minority, together with the increased number of Germans and Jews in the much-enlarged state. This caused difficulties, but also came in handy to divert social dissatisfaction onto national minorities.[16] Although right-wing extremist movements and groups abounded in these three countries, the time was not ripe for them to play a more influential role on national stages, let alone radiate across the border.

Minderheiten in Kroatien und in der Vojvodina 1918–1941. Identitätsentwürfe und ethnopolitische Mobilisierung (Wiesbaden: Harassowitz Verlag, 2009), 287–296.

14 Ljubodrag Dimić, *Istorija srpske državnosti III. Srbija u Jugoslaviji* (Novi Sad: SANU et al., 2002), 137–153.

15 Anikó Kovács-Bertrand, *Der ungarische Revisionismus nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Der publizisitsche Kampf gegen den Friedensvertrag von Trianon (1919–1931)* (München: Oldenbourg, 1997); Jörg K. Hoensch, *A History of Modern Hungary 1867–1986* (London, New York: Longman, 1989), 84–121; Péter Hanák (ed.), *Die Geschichte Ungarns von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Budapest: Corvina, 1991), 195–201; Hagen Šulce, *Pregled nemačke istorije* (Beograd: Narodna knjiga et al., 2001), 115–146.

16 Othmar Kolar, *Rumänien und seine nationalen Minderheiten 1918 bis heute* (Wien, Köln, Weimar: Bohlau Verlag, 1997); *Kurze Geschichte Siebenbürgens* (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 1990), 659–578.

The full extent of right-wing radicalization among national minorities in Yugoslavia was well-researched only in the case of ethnic Germans – for political reasons after the Second World War. The developments among the Yugoslav Germans had parallels among other German minorities throughout East-Central Europe and had to do with Germany's cultural history fraught with nationalist and racist thought strengthened during the interwar period by the German defeat of 1918 and the world economic crisis. Through *Volksdeutsche* students, Nazi ideas spilled over to all countries with German minorities.[17] There they became the figureheads for local resentments, although this does not imply that they were any less sincerely internalized by sections of ethnic German populations.

In the case of the Yugoslav Germans, especially in the Vojvodina, the reasons for dissatisfaction were rooted in the Yugoslav minority policy and in the inability of the old *Volksdeutsche* leaders to win concessions from the government.[18] Dissatisfaction was especially rife among young intellectuals, many of whom attended German and Austrian universities where they came in touch with Nazi ideas. They were disgruntled that they were at the same time barred from entering state service and securing posts in minority organizations. Thus they accused the old guard not only of incompetence, but also of accumulating offices in a few hands. The young Nazis took the name "Renewers" from their counterparts in Romania. They gathered around the Pančevo dentist Jakob Awender and his paper *Pantschewoer Post* (launched in 1932 and renamed *Volksruff* in August 1934), using Nazi parlance to attack their opponents. Under their influence and in order to curry favor with Nazi institutions in Germany, the representatives of the older generation of national activists also started shifting to the right, using an increasingly Nazi vocabulary. The struggle between the "Renewers" and the old guard was fought within the *Kulturbund*, the umbrella cultural association of the *Volksdeutsche*,

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[17] Theodor Schieder (ed.), *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa*, I–V (Bonn: Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge und Kriegsbeschädigte, 1956–1961), passim.

[18] The main complaints of national minorities concerned the lack of schools in their mother tongue above the elementary level, exclusion from public offices and civil service, discrimination within the framework of agrarian reform, prohibition of using their mother tongue in official affairs, restriction of activities of cultural associations, etc. (Cf. Janjetović, *Deca careva*.)

which comprised less than 10% of the German minority – albeit in the Vojvodina, that percentage was somewhat higher.[19] The young Nazis managed to win over most youth organizations of the *Kulturbund* with whose support they demanded 50% of seats in the association's leadership, while also demanding independence for the youth organization. Young leaders were ousted in early 1935, and youth groups disbanded in October of that year, but a parallel pro-Nazi organization was set up in Slavonia in March 1936. For a while, the "Renewers" joined the extreme right-wing ZBOR movement led by Dimitrije Ljotić. Both parties sought and found support in the Reich: the older conservatives in the Foreign Ministry and the younger ones in the Foreign Organization of the Nazi Party, the National Union for Germans Abroad (VDA) and the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*, which stood under SS influence. Nazi influence grew stronger thanks to printed matters smuggled from Germany, propaganda spread by youth wanderers from the Reich, and Hitler's foreign policy successes.[20]

The dispute between politically active factions of the *Volksdeutsche* was finally resolved in favor of the young Nazis in 1938/39, under pressure from the Reich. The solution was closely connected with the radicalization of Germany's policy on the eve of the Second World War: Hitler wanted to have reliable leaders of German minorities abroad

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19 The *Kulturbund* (German-Swabian Cultural Association) was founded in 1920 in Novi Sad. It had very ambitious aims of supporting all kinds of cultural activities of the *Volksdeutsche*. Most of its branches were in the Vojvodina, not only because the bulk of the German minority lived there (some 350,000 out of 500,000), but also because the authorities were more forthcoming there: not out of tolerance, but because they wished to weaken the bond that still tied many Swabians to the Magyars. It was banned in 1924 when the German Party joined the opposition and then renewed in 1927. However, after the introduction of the royal dictatorship, it was banned again and allowed to resume operations only in August 1931. After the first ban, it never recovered the number of members it had had in its first years.

20 Dušan Biber, *Nacizem in Nemci v Jugoslaviji 1933–1941* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1966), 43–92, 167–210; Janjetović, *Nemci*, 219–233; Akiko Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941–1944 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2003), 41–58; Bethke, *Deutschen und ungarische Minderheiten*, 381–420, 443–350; Josip Mirnić, *Nemci u Bačkoj u Drugom svetskom ratu* (Novi Sad: Institut za izučavanje istorije Vojvodine 1974), 36–50.

whom he could manipulate for his aggressive goals. The German minority in Yugoslavia was streamlined according to Nazi pattern, comprising – on paper at least – most of the *Volksdeutsche*.[21] With its privileged position, political indoctrination and pressure, Berlin managed to harness the German minority in the Vojvodina for military service and economic support of the Reich's war effort during the Second World War. Members of the German minority sided with the invaders, who carved up Yugoslavia in April 1941, took part in the persecution of Jews and Serbs, served in the occupation or collaborationist administrations, guarded concentration camps, prisons, infrastructural and economic facilities, contributed labor, agricultural products and money for the war effort, fought against the eventually victorious communist Partisans and committed war crimes in the process.[22] Due to Hitler's resettlement schemes, some ethnic Germans from Slovenia and Bosnia were moved to the Reich during the war. Having taken the side of the invaders and participated in battles and atrocities, the Vojvodina *Volksdeutsche* had to be evacuated or flee as the end of the war approached. Those who remained were subject to arbitrary mass shootings, plundering, rape and manhandling at the hands of the Partisans and the Red Army. Eventually, from the fall of 1944 to mid-1945, almost all ethnic Germans who stayed in the country were put into concentration camps. Some 12,000 were sent to do forced labor in the USSR, whereas the rest were earmarked for "resettlement" (i.e., expulsion) to Germany. Awaiting "resettlement," which never materialized because of the Allies' opposition, they remained incarcerated in

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[21] Janjetović, *Nemci*, 232–237; Mirnić, *Nemci*, 56–58; Biber, *Nacizem*, 211–229; Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten*, 558–581.

[22] Mirnić, *Nemci*, 171–180, 197–218; Janjetović, *Nemci*, 287–332; Mirna Zakić, *Ethnic Germans and National Socialism in Yugoslavia in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 104–105, 114, 126–127, 144–160, 216–238; Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation*, 204–218, 245–251, 345–382; Norbert Spannenberger, *Der Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn unter Horthy und Hitler* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2002), 282–294, 355–366; Thomas Casagrande, *Die Volksdeutsche SS-Division "Prinz Eugwen". Die Banater Schwaben und die National-Sozialistische Kriegsverbrechen* (Frankfurt, New York: Campus, 2003), 167–324.

concentration camps until the spring of 1948, where some 50,000 died of malnutrition, disease and hard labor.[23]

This harsh treatment had to be explained and excused, which is why so much is known about the *Volksdeutsche's* flirtation with National Socialism. The communist regime vilified all *Volksdeutsche* as part of its official narrative about the freedom-loving and patriotic Partisans led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia versus the foreign invaders and their collaborators – among whom the *Volksdeutsche* held pride of place. This black-and-white version was upheld until the fall of communism[24] and even later.[25] But while much is known about the events and organizational level, the depth and scope of actual ideological influence of National Socialism remain debatable. The evidence is patchy, but it seems that it was above all the young who embraced National-Socialism: much of the older generation, especially in Bačka, remained Hungarian-friendly. Also, Nazi ideology found more supporters among the poor than among the well-off (who, by the nature of things, were more conservative), and more among the Protestants – who, thanks to their religion, were more nationally conscious – than among Roman Catholics, who were pro-Hungarian or pro-Croat due to the influence of their clergy. Of course, with the worsening situation in the later stages of the Second World War, a sobering tendency set in.[26]

Much less is known about the relations of ethnic Hungarians and Romanians with extreme right-wing ideologies and movements. Indeed, these phenomena have yet to be researched. There are several reasons for that. In the Hungarian case, despite the governing parties' right-wing

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[23] Zoran Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito. The Disappearance of the Vojvodina Germans*, 2nd ed. (Belgrade: University of Mary, 2005), 249–286; Idem, *Nemci*, 353–366.

[24] Cf. the work from the last year of Yugoslavia's existence: Petar Kačavenda, *Nemci u Jugoslaviji 1918–1945* (Beograd: ISI, 1991).

[25] Srđan Božović, *Divizija "Princ Eugen"* (Pančevo: Narodni muzej Pančevo, 2011).

[26] For an attempt at descerning these groups and influences, cf. Zoran Janjetović, "O nacifikaciji vojvođanskih Švaba," *Tokovi istorije* 7 (1999), 1–4: 240–260. On ways of influencing the *Volksdeutsche* youth, cf. Caroline Mezger, *Forging Germans: Youth, Nation and the National Socialist Mobilization of Ethnic Germans in Yugoslavia, 1918–1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 69–206; Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten*, 450–504.

leanings, there was never an extreme right-wing movement in power in Hungary before the final stage of the Second World War. The most successful right-wing extremist movement was the Arrow Cross, which, through demagogy, gained quite broad support in Hungary on the eve of the war.[27] Thanks to the similar social structure of the Hungarian population on both sides of the border,[28] they also gained some supporters among the members of the Hungarian minority in the Vojvodina and the adjacent areas, but their number is hard to gauge. They came to the fore during the Hungarian occupation of Bačka during the war, taking part in the oppression of non-Magyars.[29] However, the main pillar of the Hungarian authorities in the annexed Bačka were not the Arrow Cross extremists but the former leaders of the Hungarian Party,[30] who were complementary with the regime in Budapest (whose instructions they had been following since the 1920s).

It seems the Arrow Cross enjoyed substantial support in Srem and around Osijek in northeastern Slavonia. They enjoyed the sympathies of the Ustasha authorities because of their ideological affinity and shared their hatred of Jews, Serbs and the Romani.[31] Nevertheless, the organization was disbanded in late 1942 as the Ustasha wanted to improve their relations with Budapest. However, it was reactivated next year under German auspices, since its members took part in combat against the Partisans.[32] The alleged high number of sympathizers of the

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[27] Miklos Lackó, *Arrow-Cross Men, National Socialists 1935–1944* (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 1969), 20–109.

[28] Before 1918, ethnic Hungarians in South Hungary and in Srem on average had smaller plots than their non-Magyar neighbors. There were also more landless peasants among them. (Cf. Janjetović, *Deca careva*, 145–149.)

[29] Kasaš, *Mađari*, 65, 108–111; Sajti, *Hungarians*, 318–319. However, it needs to be kept in mind that, after the war, the communist authorities very liberally labeled their opponents as "fascists" (or the Arrow Cross members in the case of Hungarians).

[30] Kasaš, *Mađari*, 74–79.

[31] Andor Végh, "Mađarsko stanovništvo u NDH – brojčano stanje i proces nestajanja u periodu između 1941. i 1945.," *Slav Varia* 1, no. 1 (2021): 228.

[32] Kasaš, *Mađari*, 126–127; Marica Karakaš Obradov, *Novi mozaici nacija u "novim poredcima". Migracije stanovništva na hrvatskom području tijekom Drugog svjetskog rata i poraća* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2014), 339–340.

Arrow Cross was adduced as one of the reasons for the introduction of the Military Administration in the Vojvodina in October 1944.[33] On the other hand, the fact that the policy of the communist powers-that-be toward the Hungarian national minority started turning from oppression to inclusion, only a month after it had been introduced,[34] seems to indicate that the number of Arrow Cross sympathizers was not very high after all. This phenomenon warrants further research.

Similarly, little is known about the spread of the influence of the Iron Guard, the leading extreme right-wing movement among Romanians in the Yugoslav Banat. The Iron Guard was the only truly mass right-wing movement in Southeastern Europe.[35] It was a movement with mostly peasant supporters in a predominantly rural country.[36] At the same time, some 90% of ethnic Romanians in Yugoslavia were

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[33] Ruža Cvejić, "Uloga Komunističke partije Jugoslavije u organizovanju i radu Vojne uprave za Banat, Bačku i Baranju," *Istraživanja* 1, no. 1 (1971): 248, 251. Military Administration was imposed in order to put the Vojvodina, with its large share of the non-Yugoslav population and large economic resources, under firmer control of the Partisans. Although restrictive measures were imposed on everyone, members of the German and Hungarian minorities were collectively perceived as collaborators of the occupiers and put under particularly strict control.

[34] On 19 October 1944, the Partisans started incarcerating Hungarians in concentration camps. Just a month later, a gradual change of policy was outlined: the culprits for collaboration and crimes were to be distinguished from the rest, who were to be recruited into labor battalions of the Partisan army. The inmates were released from concentration camps, although mass retribution in southern Bačka ensued only in early 1945 – at the demand of the local Serbian population, which had suffered at the hands of the local Magyars during the infamous *Racija* (government-organized pogrom of Jews and Serbs) in January 1942. The newly-acquired equality was proven by the recruitment of ethnic Hungarians into combat units, which suffered grave losses in subsequent battles. (Michael Portmann, *Die kommunistische Revolution in der Vojvodina 1944–1952. Politik, Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft, Kultur* (Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2008), 269, 275–276; Sajti, *Hungarians*, 408, 422–423, 409; Kasaš, *Mađari*, 179–180, 184–189; Karakaš Obradov, *Novi mozaici*, 345–346).

[35] In the late 1930s, it was the third-strongest fascist movement in Europe. (Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2003), 277.)

[36] Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 277–289.

peasants.[37] This would imply a similar worldview and propensity for the ideas of the Iron Guard as in Romania. However, there were differences: the Iron Guard used the semi-democratic system in Romania to spread its message and win supporters during the 1930s. On the other hand, no mass propaganda of the movement was registered in Yugoslavia at that time. In the 1920s, most Romanian voters in Yugoslavia tended to vote for large Yugoslav parties rather than for the small and often disunited Romanian Party.[38] This shows more of a disinclination than inclination toward extremism – of course, at that time, extremism was not yet in vogue.

As we have seen, the 1930s were the heyday of extremist right-wing movements. This left its mark on the Romanians in the Yugoslav Banat, too. The available evidence, scanty as it is, suggests that the main missionaries of the Iron Guard were teachers from Romania who came to the country under the Romanian-Yugoslav school convention of 1933.[39] The legionnaires' movement was also strengthened thanks to the Iron Guard members from Romania who sought refuge in Yugoslavia until April 1941.[40] The German authorities in the Serbian Banat during the Second World War tolerated the activities of the Iron Guard, which enabled its influence to take hold in some villages.[41] During the war, some of the Iron Guard's sympathizers went to Romania to join the Romanian army in its crusade against the Soviet Union, but in the Banat itself the nationalist organization *Astra* remained the main form of the political

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[37] Popi, *Rumuni*, 13.

[38] Ibid., 54–76.

[39] After prolonged negotiations and one failed attempt, the two countries concluded a convention regulating educational and ecclesiastical affairs of their respective national minorities. Among other things, contractual minority teachers were allowed to come from the other country. (Branislav Gligorijević, "Jugoslovensko-rumunska konvencija o uređenju manjinskih škola Rumuna u Banatu 1933. godine," *Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju* 3 , no. 7 (1973): 80–101; Popi, *Rumuni*, 94–113; Janjetović, *Deca careva*, 254–257.)

[40] Gligor Popi, *Românii din Banatul sârbesc (1941–1996)*, Vol. II (Pančevo: Libertatea, 1998), 26.

[41] Popi, *Românii*, 27–28.

organization and ideological mobilization of the Romanian minority,[42] which shows that the majority of ethnic Romanians did not embrace the right-wing extremism of the Iron Guard. It was only in the summer of 1944, a couple of weeks before the arrival of the Red Army, that the supporters of the Iron Guard headed by Ilie Rotea (from Romania) took the helm of the Romanian national minority. They recruited refugees from Romania and local Romanians to help Germans confront the advancing Soviets.[43] However, nothing came of it due to the German withdrawal. The overall number of supporters of the Iron Guard seems to have been small. This can be inferred from the fact that so very few Romanians were killed by the communists at the end of the war:[44] had the number of the politically compromised been higher, their death toll would have reflected it.

The true impact of extreme right-wing parties and movements on ethnic Hungarians and Romanians is not as well-researched as in the German case. After their reckoning with their main enemies at the end of the Second World War, the Yugoslav communists pursued a policy of integrating all ethnic groups, including minorities (except for the Germans), into the socialist system. Thus, collaborators and supporters of right-wing ideologies among the members of national minorities were relegated into the (allegedly small) group of traitors that was to be found among all nationalities. The number of participants in the Partisan movement was exaggerated and the sympathizers of right-wing ideologies consigned to oblivion – especially if they belonged to the lower classes, as they often did.[45] Indeed, it seems that the adherents of movements

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[42] Popi, *Românii*, 15, 17–18, 32–42, 35, 46–47, 51–61, 81; Mirča Maran, *Kulturne prilike kod Rumuna u Banatu 1945–1952* (Vršac: Visoka škola strukovnih studija za obrazovanje vaspitača "Mihajlo Pavlov," 2008), 31–32, 35, 37–42.

[43] Popi, *Românii*, 28.

[44] According to a contemporary document, only 119. (Srđan Cvetković, "Pregled uhapšenih i streljanih lica od Ozne na teritoriji Vojvodine do 20. juna 1945," *Istorija 20. veka* 28, no. 1, (2011): 200.) This was in keeping with the small overall Romanian share in the total population of the Yugoslav Banat and reflected the fact that ethnic Romanians were just a somewhat privileged national minority and not a ruling nationality like the *Volksdeutsche*.

[45] Zoran Janjetović, *Konfrontacija i integracija. Nacionalne manjine u Srbiji 1944–1964* (Beograd: INIS, 2022), 188–190.

such as the Arrow Cross and the Iron Guard were to be found among the same strata as in their mother countries. The scope of influence that right-wing movements had on the members of the Hungarian and Romanian national minorities in Yugoslavia has yet to be fully explored. However, it seems that, in general, it was comparable to that in Hungary and Romania, possibly even smaller. The degree of the influence of extreme right-wing movements on minorities seems to be correlated with their influence in the mother country. It also appears that it reflected the influence of the mother countries in Yugoslavia – which could explain why it was the strongest with the *Volksdeutsche*. However, these hypotheses require further research to be confirmed.

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