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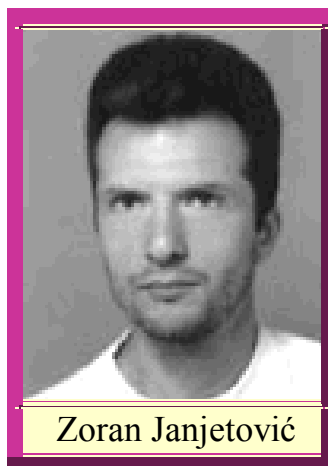
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The Making of the German Minority

in Yugoslavia

1918-1929



Yugoslavia was founded at the end of WWI. It comprised the former kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro and the former Habsburg lands: the Vojvodina (the former South Hungary), Croatia-Slavonia, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Practically all these territories were to a smaller or larger degree multi-ethnic. Apart from the Slavic majority, the former Habsburg possessions were also home to numerous Hungarians, Germans, Romanians, Jews and other ethnic groups. Their numbers, dispersion and history were different and in that they matched the heterogeneity of the majority Slavic population of the newly founded state. Among the non-Slavic ethnic minorities, the Germans were the largest group. However, they too were not a homogeneous ethnic community, but formed rather a string of more or less scattered settlements in various parts of the Vojvodina, Syrmium, Slavonia, Slovenia and Bosnia. Having lived in administratively separated territories with different ethnic make-up, history and historically acquired characteristics, these groups evinced great diversity. After the formation of Yugoslavia, the German leaders had to overcome these differences and to forge a unified national minority. Within the framework of this paper we will outline the basic events and institutions which furthered that process.

The Ethnic-Germans were not only the largest national minority in the former Habsburg territory, but also the largest minority in the country as a whole. According to the 1921 census, there were 505.790 Germans in Yugoslavia.¹ Ten years later, the census registered a slight drop in the number of the *Volksdeutsche*: 499.969.² Most of these Germans, some

¹ Statistički pregled Kraljevine Jugoslavije [1921.] po banovinama [Statistical survey of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1921) According to *Banovinas*]. Beograd 1930, p. 5.

² Das Schicksal der Deutschen in Jugoslawien. Augsburg 1994, p. 11E.

305.000, lived in the Vojvodina.³ Some 80.000 lived in Slavonia, and almost 50.000 in its Eastern ending, Syrmium. Less than 30.000 lived in Slovenia – out of that number some 12.500 in the wooded area of Gottschee/Kočevje, and most of the others in the Lower Styrian towns of Cilli/Celje, Marburg/Maribor, Petau/Ptuj as well as in some villages. The smallest group comprising some 15.000 people, lived scattered in villages in Northern Bosnia. The remaining Germans were to be found in smaller numbers as workers, experts and artisans in many towns throughout the country. This territorial dispersal, historical and numerical differences would play a significant role in the building of a unified national minority.

One may ask how reliable the Yugoslav censuses were? Members of the minorities tended to adduce much higher numbers for their respective groups, and the German minority was no exception. Its leaders claimed that the actual number of Ethnic-Germans in Yugoslavia ranged (depending on the source) between 550.000 and 900.000!⁴ Although the authorities of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia were not well disposed toward minorities, they conducted the censuses with fairness – for their own benefit. Thus the results of the 1931 census were never published by the Yugoslav government since it was deemed publication would be nefarious for the interests of the State. After the dismemberment of Yugoslavia in April 1941, the Germans themselves made a census of the German population of the enclave of

³ The Vojvodina was the political concept of Serbs in Southern Hungary during 19th century who strove to acquire political autonomy in that area. It comprised the Western part of the Banat, most of the Bacska and the southernmost tip of Baranya. Paradoxically, almost immediately after the foundation of Yugoslavia the central government did its best to erase it from the mental map of the population. The Autonomous Province of the Vojvodina which was created after WWII had a somewhat different territory: it didn't comprise Baranya, but it included Eastern Syrmium.

⁴ Zoran Janjetović: *Deca careva, pastorčad kraljeva. Nacionalne manjine u Jugoslaviji 1918-1941* [Children of the Emperors, Stepchildren of the Kings. National Minorities in Yugoslavia 1918-1941]. Beograd 2005, p. 77.

Gottschee. They found 12.487 Germans in Gottschee,⁵ whereas the Yugoslav census of 1921 showed 12.680 *Volksdeutsche* in the enclave.⁶ Even though twenty years had elapsed between the two censuses, if one takes into account the large emigration from the area, the results of the Yugoslav census seem quite plausible. Another example was the census the Hungarian authorities took in the occupied Bacska in 1941. They found 161.905 Ethnic-Germans there,⁷ as opposed to 173.058 the Yugoslav census registered ten years previously. Allowing for the declining birth-rate, emigration and the fact that some Swabians certainly gave Hungarian as their nationality under the changed circumstances in 1941, one has another proof that the Yugoslav, rather than the *Volksdeutsche* numbers were correct. Indirectly, the accuracy of the Yugoslav census was confirmed also by the census the *Volksdeutsche* themselves took in the occupied Banat in 1941: under the propitious conditions for the Ethnic-Germans, they found only some 10.000 Germans more than the Yugoslav authorities ten years before.⁸ If these findings were applied to the whole country, it would mean one can accept the number of roughly 500.000 Ethnic-Germans in Yugoslavia as reliable.

We shall now briefly show the ways these Germans came into the country and give a brief survey of their relations with the majority Slavic populations. The enclave of Gottschee was the oldest non-Slavic area in the territory which had been inhabited by the Slavs ever since 6th century. It is

⁵ Hans Hermann Frensing. Die Umsiedlung der Gottscheer Deutschen. Das Ende einer südostdeutschen Volksgruppe. München 1970, p. 116.

⁶ Hugo Grothe. Deutsche Sprachinsel Gottschee. Ein Beitrag zur Deutschtumskunde des europäischen Südostens. Münster in Westfalen 1931, p. 80.

⁷ Josip Mirnić. Nemci u Bačkoj u Drugom svetskom ratu [The Germans in the Bacska in WWII]. Novi Sad 1974, p. 116.

⁸ Ekkerhard Vökl. Der Westbanat 1941-1944. Die deutsche, die ungarische und andere Volksgruppen. München 1991. p. 64.

the land of some 800 km² between the Krka and the Kulpa in the former Habsburg crownland of Carniola. It was settled with German colonists by the counts of Ortenburg in 14th century. Although German and Slovenian authors tend to disagree as to the exact date, it is actually of no particular importance.⁹ It is also of little importance if some Slovenes from Carinthia were also among the colonists, as some Slovenian authors claim,¹⁰ or if the area had already been thinly populated by Slovenes.¹¹ What is important is the fact that Gottschee remained solidly German until 1918, even though some Slovenes immigrated there during the last couple of decades before WWI.

Most of the towns in the Slovenian territory were founded by the Germans or German feudal lords who settled predominantly German burghers there. The number of Germans in towns increased later on through immigration and assimilation of numerically and economically weaker Slovenian newcomers.¹² In Cilli, Petau and Marburg the German burghers retained preponderance until the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy, whereas in some other towns they represented an economically and socially

⁹ Grothe (as the footnote 6), p. 18; Herbert Otterstädt. *Gottschee. Verlorene Heimat deutscher Waldbauer. Freilassung* [1962], pp. 6-8; Idem, *Gottschee. Eine deutsche Volksinsel im Südosten*, Graz 1941, p. 9; Ivan Simonič, *Zgodovina kočevskega ozemlja* [History of the Gottschee Territory], in: *Kočevski zbornik. Razprave o Kočevski in njenih ljudeh* [The Gottschee Collection. Studies on Gottschee and its People]. Ljubljana 1939, pp. 51-58; *Jubiläums-Festbuch der Gottscheer-600-Jahresfeier. Aus Anlaß des 600-jährigen Bestandes des Gottscheer Landes*. [Kočevje 1930], pp. 39-42; *500 let mesta Kočevja* [500 Years of the Town of Gottschee]. [Kočevje 1971], pp. 8-10; Karl Schemitsch, *Das war Gottschee. Landskron, Kitchener* [1977], p. 16-18; *Kočevsko. Izgubljena kulturna dediščina kočevskih Nemcev / Gottschee. Das verlorene Kulturerbe der Gottscheer Deutschen*. Ljubljana 1992, p. 18.

¹⁰ 500 let (as footnote 9), p. 9.

¹¹ Simonič (as footnote 9), pp. 45-46; Jože Rus: *Jedro kočevskega vprašanja. Zgodovina, sedajnost in bodočnost kočevskega gospodarstva in njegovih prirodnih in socijalnih podlag* [The Core of the Gottschee Question. History, Present and Future of the Gottschee Economy and its Natural and Social Basis], in: *Kočevski zbornik*, pp. 131-133; S. Šantel: *O izvoru kočevske narodne noše* [On the Origins of the Gottschee Folk-Costumes] in: *Kočevski zbornik*, pp. 347; *500 let* (as footnote 9), pp. 8

¹² *Handwörterbuch des Grenz- und Auslandsdeutschtums* (henceforth: HWBGAD), III. Breslau 1938, p. 322; Doris Kraft. *Das untersteierische Drauland. Deutsches Grenzland zwischen Unterdrauburg und Marburg*. München 1935, p. 127.

important minority.¹³ Until Slovenian national consciousness started awakening in mid-19th century, the relations between the two ethnic groups were good.¹⁴ However, since then, an increasingly dogged struggle developed with the Germans striving to preserve their supremacy and the Slovenes striving to attain equality.¹⁵ It would leave a bitter aftertaste and it would determine to the largest degree the treatment of the Germans in Slovenia between the world wars.

The largest German group in Yugoslavia inhabited the Banat, the Bacska and Baranya – i.e. the respective counties of Southern Hungary. They were settled there by the Viennese Court, feudal and ecclesiastical lords from the early 18th century to early 19th century. After some 150 years of Ottoman rule, vast tracts of land in Southern Hungary was liberated in 1699 and 1718. In order to make the thinly populated new territories productive, secular and ecclesiastical powers-that-be launched colonization of people of various descent in several waves. The Germans, who were seen as obedient, frugal, modern and hard-working farmers, were the most desirable colonists. At first only Roman Catholics, mainly from Southern and South-Western Germany, Alsace and Lorraine, as well as from Austrian lands and Bohemia, were admitted, but later on under Josef II (1780-1790), Protestants were also allowed to settle down. The colonists received government aid in money and kind, including houses, tools and some cattle. Although the colonization was an uneven process, not without set-backs, by

¹³ Fran Zwitter: Etnična struktura in politična vloga mest v slovenskih deželah od srede XIX do začetka XX stoletja [The Ethnic Make-Up and the Political Role of Towns in the Slovenian Territory from Mid-19th to Early 20th Century]. In: Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis, 3-4 (1973); Balduin Saria: Mittelalterliche deutsche Besiedlung in Krain. In: Gedenkschrift für Harold Steinacker (1875-1965). München 1966, p. 102; Ferdo Gestrin, Vasilj Melik. Slovenska zgodovina od konca osamnajstega stoletja do 1918 [Slovenian History from the End of 18th Century to 1918]. Ljubljana 1966, p. 6.

¹⁴ Gestrin, Melik (as footnote 13), pp. 83, 105.

¹⁵ Janez Cvirn. Trdnjavski trikotnik. Politična orijentacija Nemcev na Spodnjem Štajerskem (1861-1914) [The Fortress-Triangle. Political Orientation of the Germans in Lower Styria (1861-1914)]. Maribor 1997.]

mid-19th century the colonists were firmly established. The Germans made up roughly one quarter of the total population of the area.¹⁶

Unlike their Serbian, Romanian or Magyar neighbors, the Germans in Hungary (usually called Swabians) had no interest in politics, and only little in developing national culture. This made them prey to Hungarian attempts at assimilation of the non-Magyar population of the country which became increasingly intensive since 1840s. It was particularly the better-off and the educated who renounced their German ethnic affiliation and who identified themselves with the Hungarians.¹⁷ Most of the time their relations with the main Slavic people in the area, the Serbs, were correct but never very close. Initially, clashes between German farmers and Serbian cattle-breeders occurred, but gradually the Serbs adopted the German way of life – however, without their materialism and frugality. In the last decades of 19th century the Serbs saw the Germans as economic rivals who, being better workers and thriftier, were expanding their plots at the expense of other ethnic groups. At the same time, since most of the Swabians remained ethnically dormant until WWI, the Serbs could find only few allies against the Magyars among them. On the other hand, the Magyarized Swabians who often out-Hungarianed the Hungarians, caused animosity both with their own fellow-Germans and members of other non-Magyar ethnic groups.¹⁸

¹⁶ The literature on colonization of Southern Hungary is immensely rich. Probably the best overviews are: Oskar Feldtänzer. *Donauschwäbische Geschichte*, Bd.I. *Das Jahrhundert der Ansiedlung 1689-1805*. München [2006]; Borislav Jankulov, *Pregled kolonizacije Vojvodine u XVIII i XIX veku* [A Survey of the Colonization of the Vojvodina in 18th and 19th Centuries]. Novi Sad 1961; Konrad Schünemann. *Österreichs Bevölkerungspolitik unter Maria Theresia*, I. München [1935].

¹⁷ Johann Weidlein. *Madjarisierung der Deutschen in Ungarn*. Schorndorf 1955.

¹⁸ Zoran Janjetović. *Konflikte zwischen Serben und Donauschwaben*. In: *Südost-Forschungen* 58 (1999), pp. 120-122, 128

The first German settlements in Slavonia date from the late 18th century, but their number was small:¹⁹ that province was more densely populated than Southern Hungary and at the same time economically less opened for exploitation. It was only after serfdom had been abolished and the quicker economic development of Croatia-Slavonia set in that a larger number of Germans started coming to Syrmium and Slavonia – either as colonists on estates of large landowners, or as buyers of land from the impoverished Croat and Serbian peasants. This emigration lasted until early 20th century,²⁰ and was often resented by the local Slavic peasantry.²¹

The youngest group of Ethnic-Germans came into being approximately at the same time, but only partly for the same reasons. Already before the Habsburg Empire had occupied the formerly Ottoman provinces of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1878, smaller groups of land-hungry Germans from Southern Hungary and the German Reich started obtaining land in Northern Bosnia and settling down. Theirs was a private enterprise at first, but was later on helped by the authorities who hoped to gain loyal subjects, to weaken the Serbian compactness by riddling it with German, Polish or Ruthenian villages and to spur faster economic development.²² However, these groups of Germans remained weak both numerically and economically and would play insignificant role in the development of the German minority in the new South Slav state after 1918.

¹⁹ Georg Wild: Die Deutschen in Syrmien, Slawonien und Bosnien. In: Südostdeutsches Archiv, XIV (1971), p. 150; Valentin Oberkersch. Die Deutschen in Syrmien, Slawonien und Kroatien bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Donauschwaben. Stuttgart 1972, pp. 17-19; Vladimir Geiger. Nijemci u Đakovu i Đakovštini [The Germans in Djakovo and the Djakovo Area]. Zagreb 2001, pp. 13-17.

²⁰ Geiger (as footnote 19), pp. 43-49; Oberkersch (as footnote 19), pp. 22-33; Wild (as footnote 19), p. 151.

²¹ Oberkersch (as footnote 19), pp. 35-42, 62-65; Holm Sundhaussen: Die Deutschen in Kroatien-Slawonien und Jugoslawien. In: Günter Schödl (Hg.): Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas. Land an der Donau. Berlin 2002, pp. 296-314.

²² Hans Maier. Die deutschen Siedlungen in Bosnien. Stuttgart 1924; Tomislav Kraljačić: Kolonizacija stranih seljaka u Bosnu i Hercegovinu za vrijeme austrougarske uprave [The Colonization of Foreign Peasants in Bosnia-Herzegovina During the Austro-Hungarian Rule]. In: Istorijski časopis, XXXVI (1989).

From the above said, it is clear just how much various groups of Germans in various areas of settlement differed among themselves. The territorial dispersal, denseness of German population in certain places or areas, vicinity to other German groups, relations with the leading and other nationalities, as well as political and national goals of the latter influenced the behaviour of these German groups in the days of the break-up of the Habsburg Monarchy and later on. For this reason we shall briefly sketch the role of the Ethnic-Germans in the days of that historical upheaval first.

The easiest situation prevailed in Croatia-Slavonia (which comprised Syrmium too) and in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Having clear-cut borders and certain political autonomy, the leading Slavic politicians of these two crownlands simply seceded from the collapsing Monarchy and started preparing unification with Serbia.²³ Being only a small fraction of the population and the suffrage being anyway extremely limited, the minorities had no say in the process whatsoever. In the Bacska, the Banat and Southern part of Baranya, the situation was somewhat different. The borders were not clear in advance, but the local Serbs could count on the support of the occupying Serbian troops. This enabled the Serbian People's Council, founded on the model of the Hungarian People's Council and similar bodies of other nationalities, to organize the elections for the Great Popular Assembly, to be held on November 25, 1918. To be sure, since the Assembly was to proclaim unification with Serbia, only Slavs had the right to vote. However, despite that, among its 757 members, there were six Germans and one Hungarian.²⁴ Presumably that was the token of

²³ Branko Petranović. *Istorija Jugoslavije, I* [History of Yugoslavia]. Beograd 1988, pp. 21-26; Josip Horvat. *Politička povijest Hrvatske* [Political History of Croatia], II. Zagreb 1989, pp. 85-98.

²⁴ Petar Pekić. *Povijest oslobođenja Vojvodine* [History of the Liberation of the Vojvodina]. Subotica 1939, p. 310.

appreciation for their personal merits, but it couldn't influence the course and the outcome of the debate. Indeed, not even the names of the German deputies came down to us.

The situation was even more complicated in the territory predominantly inhabited by the Slovenes. Their chronic dispute with the Germans escalated in the moment the future state borders were to be drawn. Thus the Germans of Gottschee tried to proclaim their enclave integral part of the new Austrian republic which was in the making. When this failed, they tried to proclaim an independent republic under American protectorate.²⁵ The Slovenes nipped this in the bud by arresting the ringleaders.²⁶ In Cilli, the Slovenes took over military control and sacked non-Slovenian officers. Faced with the loss of real power, the German town administration resigned.²⁷ In the German citadel of Marenberg, the power was taken over by the Slovenian People's Council. When looting began in the Mežica Valley, the German authorities called help from Klagenfurt/Celovec, but the Slovenes from Cilli came first, reestablished order, disbanding German administration in the process.²⁸ In Petau a Slovenian detachment from Ljubljana disarmed the local German Civilian Guard on November 7 and disbanded the Town Council by the end of the month.²⁹ The more numerous Germans of the town of Marburg an der Drau/Maribor which was situated on the German-Slovenian ethnic border, offered stronger resistance. Already on October 30, 1918, the Town Council

²⁵ This choice of the prospective protector was made due to the large number of Gottschee emigrants in USA, particularly in Brooklyn.

²⁶ Frensing (as footnote 5), p. 10; Grothe (as footnote 6), p. 180; HWBGAD, III (as footnote 12), p. 76; Dušan Biber: Kočevski Nemci med obema vojnama [The Gottschee Germans Between the Two World Wars]. In: Zgodovinski časopis XVII (1963), p. 27.

²⁷ Janko Orožen. Zgodovina Celja in okolice [History of Cilli and its Surroundings], II. Celje 1971, p. 314.

²⁸ Lojze Ude. Boj za severno slovensko mejo 1918-1919 [Struggle for the Northern Slovenian Border]. Maribor 1977, pp. 65-66.

²⁹ Ude (as footnote 28), p. 64.

decided that the town would become (i.e. remain) part of Austria. However, the Slovenes took command of the troops in the town, as well as power in Lower Styria. Thus they were able to threaten Marburg with cession of food supply.³⁰ After some wrangling, power dualism ensued, with the Slovenes controlling the military and the Germans the civilian administration.³¹ After the Slovenes took control of railroads, the German railwaymen went on strike between November 28 and December 13. Eventually the strike petered out: the railways – hitherto a bulwark of Germanism – remained firmly in Slovene hands.³²

Clearly, this ambiguous situation couldn't last long – particularly since the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (renamed Yugoslavia in 1929) was proclaimed on December 1, 1918. On January 2, 1919 Slovene forces disbanded the town administration and took power.³³ However, the Germans wouldn't give up. They used the visit of the American mission under colonel Sherman Miles (which was part of the commission of Professor Coolidge mediating in drawing the border in Carinthia and Styria) to stage large demonstrations on January 27, 1919. During the rally, hustling began which led to shooting in which 9 Germans were killed and 18 severely wounded. The two parties accuse one another for the beginning of the massacre to this day. The bloodshed changed nothing. German victims were in vain: the town remained in Slovenian hands and was eventually allotted to Yugoslavia. The intention of the provincial authorities in Graz to send troops

³⁰ Anton Vončina: Maribor v letih 1918-1919 [Marburg in the Years 1918-1919]. In: Kronika IV (1956), p. 94; Fran Kovačič. Slovenska Štajerska in Prekmurje [Slovenian Styria and Prekmurje]. Zgodovinski opis. Ljubljana 1926, p. 399.

³¹ Lojze Penič. Konec avstrijske oblasti v Mariboru 1918-1919. In: Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje, L (1979), pp. 385-387; Ude (as footnote 28), pp. 40-63, 66-80; Vončina (as footnote 29), p. 95; Kovačič (as footnote 29), pp. 400-401.

³² Penič (as footnote 30), p. 388; Ude (as footnote 28), pp. 87-94.

³³ Penič (as footnote 30), p. 389; Ude (as footnote 28), p. 101; Vončina (as footnote 29), p. 96.

to the beleaguered city were soon dropped due to the opposition of Social-Democrats, snowy weather and Austrian military weakness.³⁴

The incident only served to further embitter the relations between the two ethnic groups. The events in Slovenia in fall 1918 and in winter 1918/1919 were a kind of continuation of the German-Slovenian ethnic strife that had been going on ever since mid-19th century. The relations remained tense throughout the inter-war period, which would impede the integration of the Slovenian Ethnic-Germans into the new state. It would also hinder their full integration into the new German national minority that would be built around the Vojvodina Swabians: the Germans in Slovenia would always have a somewhat different agenda from other *Volksdeutsche* in the country.

Of all German groups the Swabians in the Vojvodina had the best possibilities of development. Not only were they the largest *Volksdeutsche* group in the country, but they also enjoyed certain benevolence on part of the authorities which other German groups didn't. The reason was the wish of the powers-that-be to wean them from the Magyars under whose influence many Swabians stood. This being one of the consequences of the decades long policy of Magyarization the new authorities were bent on undoing.³⁵ The leaders of the Ethnic-Germans there seized the opportunity. Their first step was to found a common German newspaper which would be read in all areas inhabited by the *Volksdeutsche*. This was necessary, since

³⁴ Penič, (as footnote 30), p. 389; Ude (as footnote 28), p. 104-115; Arnold Suppan: Ethnisches, ökonomisches oder strategisches Prinzip? Zu den jugoslawischen Grenzziehungsvorschlägen gegenüber Österreich im Herbst und im Winter 1918/1919. In: Saint Germain 1919. Wien 1979, p. 172; Kovačič (as footnote 29), pp. 401; Vončina (as footnote 29), p. 98.

³⁵ Janjetović (as footnote 4), pp. 228-229.

until then practically all German papers were strictly of local character.³⁶ Furthermore, in the Vojvodina, where most of these newspapers appeared, most of them wrote in Hungarian national spirit, albeit in the German language. This called for a widely read newspaper that would not only be written in German, but one that would also awake the nationally dormant *Volksdeutsche* in the Vojvodina and Slavonia.

This was achieved comparatively quickly. The weekly *Deutsches Volksblatt für Syrmien* which had been published in Ruma (Syrmium) between 1904 and 1914, was transferred to the largest town in the Vojvodina, Novi Sad/Neusatz. In order to secure its financial independence a joint-stock company (*Druckerei- und Verlags-Aktiengesellschaft*) was founded on September 29, 1919. Some prominent German industrialists from Slovenia were also among the stock-holders, supporting thus the unifying tendencies of the Ethnic-German political leaders. The company's aim was to publish a newspaper and to run a German book-store. The first issue of the *Deutsches Volksblatt* appeared on October 25, 1919. The paper would become the leading German daily in the country. It was read in all parts of Yugoslavia where the Ethnic-Germans lived, although its readership was not equally distributed. It was moderate, well informed and with ties to institutions in Germany, which lent it occasional support. After the common *Volksdeutsche* institution, the Swabian-German Cultural Union (*Schwäbisch-deutscher Kulturbund*) was founded the next year, it became its mouthpiece, contributing significantly to the development of the sense of common identity among Ethnic-German groups in various parts of the

³⁶ Smilja Amon: Nemško časopisje na Slovenskem [German Press in Slovenian Territory]. In: Teorija in praksa, XXV (1988), pp. 1330-1332; Tanaj Žigon. Nemško časopisje na Slovenskem [German Press in Slovenian Territory]. Ljubljana 2001, pp. 32-59; Branko Bešlin. Vesnik tragedije. Nemačka štampa u Vojvodini 1933-1941. godine [Harbinger of Tragedy. German Press in the Vojvodina 1933-1941]. Novi Sad, Sremski Karlovci 2001, pp. 17-20.

country. It also wrote about the problems of the *Volksdeutsche* throughout Yugoslavia, and not only in the Vojvodina, where the majority of its readers lived. Although its influence shouldn't be overestimated (it had the print-run of 10.000 to 12.000 copies), it was the largest German daily and was read by the Ethnic-German opinion leaders.³⁷

Another important vehicle meant to further the *Volksdeutsche* unity was the Swabian-German Cultural Union (*Schwäbisch-deutscher Kulturbund*). The Ethnic-German leaders used the comparative goodwill of the authorities in the Vojvodina right after WWI, to found a blanket organization for the national minority they hoped to build. They envisaged it as much more than just a cultural association. Before its foundation the German leaders sounded the most important Yugoslav politicians (the Prime Minister Stojan Protić, the leader of the Democratic Party Ljubomir Davidović, the leader of the strongest party, the People's Radical Party, Nikola Pašić, the Minister of the Interior, Milorad Drašković). On principle, none of them was against the idea, but they feared the new association could be used for spreading Hungarian influence (thanks to pro-Hungarian sentiments of large part of the Swabians) or that it would be emulated by the Hungarians.³⁸ The founders of the Union took the former cultural association of the Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina *Prosvjeta* and the cultural association of the Germans in Czechoslovakia, *Deutscher Kulturverband* as their models.³⁹

³⁷ Bešlin (as footnote 36), pp. 22-30.

³⁸ Branimir Algeyer. Elaborat o njemačkoj narodnoj skupini, I[Study on the German Ethnic Group, I], s.l. 1947 in: Vojni arhiv [Military Archives] (henceforth: VA), Belgrade, Nemačka arhiva, k. 40-D, f. 3, d. 1.

³⁹ Oskar Plautz. Das Werden der Volksgemeinschaft in Südslawien. Novi Sad 1940, p. 26; Josef Volkmar Senz. Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben im Königreich Jugoslawien. München 1969, pp. 51.52; Idem: Politische Aktivitäten der Donauschwaben in Jugoslawien zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen. In: Deutsche Forschungen in Ungarn IX (1944-1985), p. 300; Dušan Biber. Nacizem in Nemci v Jugoslaviji 1933-1941. Ljubljana 1966, pp. 32-33.

The Union was founded in Novi Sad on June 20, 1920, and after some minor changes had been inserted into its statutes, it was approved by the government.⁴⁰ The declared goals of the *Kulturbund* were spreading of German books, works of art, musical literature and films, founding and supporting of libraries, reading rooms and other cultural institutions, organizing public lectures, educating of German teachers and priests, taking care of social issues and economical institutions. The most important task of them all was writing a curriculum according to the *Volksdeutsche* wishes and founding of private German schools.⁴¹ This was a tall order indeed. There were two major obstacles to be conquered. On the one hand, there was the religious rift between the Lutheran and the Roman-Catholic Ethnic-Germans coupled with the pro-Hungarian sentiments of the latter. Large part of German Roman-Catholic priests were Hungarian-friendly and viewed the *Kulturbund* as a Protestant organization.⁴² Since 80% of the Yugoslav Germans were Roman-Catholics, this was a serious obstacle to the development of the Cultural Union.

On the other hand, the government benevolence was short-lived: soon after the borders were secured by the treaty of Trianon, the *Volksdeutsche* were increasingly the target of the government's anti-minority policy. The problem was that Yugoslavia was a country where no strict division of

⁴⁰ Biber (as footnote 39), p. 33.

⁴¹ Biber (as footnote 39), p. 33; Mathias Annabring, *Volksgeschichte der Donauschwaben in Jugoslawien*. Stuttgart 1955, p. 40; Plautz (as footnote 39), p. 34; Hans Rasimus. *Als Fremde im Vaterland*. M[nchen 1989, p. 43.

⁴² Branko Bešlin: *Nemačka katolička štampa u Vojvodini i njen spor sa nacionalsocijalistima 1935-1941*. godine. In: *Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju*, XXIV (1999), p. 110; *Handwörterbuch des Grenz- und Auslandsdeutschtums*, I (henceforth: HWBGAD, I). Breslau 1933, p. 283; Theodor Grentrop. *Das Deutschtum an der Mittleren Donau in Rumänien und Jugoslawien*. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner kulturellen Lebensbedingungen. Münster in Westfalen 1930, pp. 93-94; Josef Haltmeyer. *Die katholische Donauschwaben in der Batschka*. In: *Die katholische Donauschwaben in den Nachfolgestaaten 1918-1945*. Im Zeichen des Nationalismus. Freilassing 1972, p. 240; Anthony Komjathy Rebecca Stockwell. *German Minorities and the Third Reich*. Ethnic-Germans of Eastern Europe Between the Wars. New York, London 1980, p. 127.

spheres of activity existed: economy, culture, religion and politics were inextricably intertwined, the developments in one sphere influencing those in others. This was one of the reasons the *Kulturbund* had to suffer.

However, in the very beginning, the prospects were bright. 97 branches were founded by 1921, and 128 by 1924.⁴³ The numbers also show that the vast majority of branches was founded during the first year of the Union's existence. Later on, the pace slackened considerably. By 1923 the *Kulturbund* managed to attract some 55.000 Ethnic-Germans,⁴⁴ i.e. 11% of the *Volksdeutsche*. Obviously, the increasingly anti-minority policy, which prevented the *Volksdeutsche* from taking part in political life, from developing their educational facilities or from benefiting from the land distribution within the framework of the agrarian reform, discouraged many from joining. Furthermore, the Union's territorial dispersion was very much one-sided: 13 branches were founded in Syrmium and all the rest, except for one, in the Banat and the Bacska.⁴⁵ This corresponded with the area of settlement of the majority of the *Volksdeutsche*, but it still left out tens of thousands of Ethnic-Germans in Croatia, Slavonia, Bosnia and Slovenia. The reasons for this were twofold. In Slovenia, where most of the Germans were nationally very conscious, the main obstacle was the authorities⁴⁶ who were engaged in vicious persecution of the German minority, which they saw as comeuppance for the inequality the Slovenes had suffered in the Habsburg Monarchy as well as for the unsatisfactory position of the

⁴³ Biber (as footnote 39), p. 35.

⁴⁴ Komjathy, Stockwell (as footnote 42), p. 130.

⁴⁵ Biber (as footnote 39), p. 34.

⁴⁶ Although representatives of the Ethnic-Germans from Slovenia took part at the founding assembly of the Union, only several short-lived branches were founded there. The *Kulturbund* managed to take root there only in 1930s. (Biber (as footnote 39), p. 34.)

Slovenes in Austrian Carinthia.⁴⁷ In Croatia-Slavonia the obstacles on part of the powers-that-be⁴⁸ were only partly responsible. More important was the fact that the Germans there lived scattered in many small villages which were far apart, or were just a tiny minority in Croat villages and towns, and therefore well on the way to be assimilated to Croats.⁴⁹

The Cultural Union engaged in various activities: in public lectures, musical and folk festivals, amateur drama and puppet performances, in publishing song-books, founding libraries, promoting German-language schools, stamps collecting and even reading fairy tales to children. It strove to found youth sections and choirs. It was not active only in the field of culture: it also strove to find work for the unemployed *Volksdeutsche*, to take care of apprentices and to organize professional training courses.⁵⁰ All this was aimed at fostering national solidarity that would overcome social and religious differences which were quite deep. For this reason it enjoyed support of the Association for the Germans Abroad (*Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland*).⁵¹

Although its work went unmolested at no time,⁵² the Union could evolve into an important institution – the more so, since all other German

⁴⁷ Cf. Arnold Suppan: Zur Lage der Deutschen in Slowenien zwischen 1918 und 1938. In: Idem, Helmut Rumppler (eds.): Geschichte der Deutschen im Bereich des heutigen Slowenien 1848-1941. Wien, München 1988; Martin Wute, Oskar Lobmeyr, Die Lage der Minderheiten in Kärnten und in Slowenien. Klagenfurt 1926.

⁴⁸ Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (henceforth: PA AA), Abt. IIB. Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker in Jugoslawien. Politik 6, Jugoslawien, Bd. 1; Plautz (as footnote 39), p. 35; Rasimus (as footnote 41), pp. 71-73.

⁴⁹ Valentin Oberkerschh. Die Deutschen in Syrmien, Slawonien, Kroatien und Bosnien. Geschichte einer deutschen Volksgruppe in Südosteuropa. Stuttgart 1989, p. 282-283; Sundhaussen (as footnote 21), pp. 324-325.

⁵⁰ HWBGAD, I (as footnote 42), p. 284; Rasimus (as footnote 41), pp. 46, 52-64; Annabring (as footnote 41), pp. 42-43.

⁵¹ Komjathy, Stockwell (as footnote 42), p. 130.

⁵² It was sometimes accused of meddling into politics and therefore put under pressure of local authorities. (Arhiv Jugoslavije [Archives of Yugoslavia] (henceforth: AJ), 14, 135/479; 144/502; 105/405; PA AA. Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker in Jugoslawien. Politik 6, Jugoslawien, Bd. 1.)

associations were local in character. Then came the blow: on April 11, 1924 the government dissolved the *Kulturbund* and confiscated its property. The alleged reason was the treatment of the Slovene minority in Austria, but the real one was that the Party of the Germans had joined the opposition in Yugoslav Parliament.⁵³ This was yet another proof of the intermingledness of politics and other issues. Luckily for the *Volksdeutsche*, some local authorities ignored the ban, so some branches continued operating – albeit illegally.⁵⁴

Under the changed political circumstances, the *Kulturbund* was allowed to resume its operations in January 1927.⁵⁵ 29 branches were registered in that year, 12 more the next, and until the royal dictatorship was imposed on January 6, 1929, 13 more were founded.⁵⁶ This time the zeal of the *Volksdeutsche* was visibly dampened. People lost confidence that they themselves could change anything, even in the apparently nonpolitical field of culture. It took a wide recruitment action to gather only 5.000 members before the dictatorship put an end to the Union's activities once again.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, despite all odds, the *Kulturbund* scored some successes between 1924 and 1929, such as the founding of the National Union of the University Graduates (*Landesverband deutscher Akademiker*) (1926) and the Union of Singers (*Sängerbund*) (1928).⁵⁸ Probably the most important achievement of the *Kulturbund* during the first ten years of Yugoslavia's existence, was that it managed to survive in the face of all odds of the

⁵³ Annabring (as footnote 41), 41; Senz: Politische (as footnote 39), 41; Plautz (as footnote 39), p. 35; Biber (as footnote 39), p. 34; Oberkersche (as footnote 47), p. 283.

⁵⁴ AJ, 14, 27/71; Altgeyer (as footnote 38), p. 15; Biber (as footnote 39), p. 34.

⁵⁵ Plautz (as footnote 39), p. 35-39; Biber (as footnote 39), p. 34; Arnold Suppan. Jugoslawien und Österreich 1918-1938. München, Wien 1996, p. 722; Oberkersch (as footnote 47), p. 283.

⁵⁶ Biber (as footnote 39), p. 35. Mirnić adduces 64 branches in this period. (Mirnić (as footnote 7), p. 30.)

⁵⁷ Annabring (as footnote 41), pp. 41-42.

⁵⁸ Plautz (as footnote 39), p. 43; Mirnić (as footnote 7), p. 30.

minority-unfriendly environment. Its very survival would be an important fact in the further development of national cohesion of the *Volksdeutsche* in 1930s.

The *Kulturbund*'s importance lies partly in spin-off associations which covered other fields of activity, particularly in the economy. Thus already on October 1, 1922 the association of German cooperatives, "Agraria", was founded in Novi Sad. The *Kulturbund*'s agricultural section switched to the "Agraria". The leading Ethnic-German politician, Dr Stefan Kraft, became its first chairman.⁵⁹ This very fact testifies to the extraordinary importance the Ethnic-German leaders ascribed the economy. This was in keeping with the materialist world-view of most of their fellow-countrymen, 80% of whom were engaged in agriculture.⁶⁰

The goal of the "Agraria" was to sell and buy agricultural products of its members, as well as to bankroll them.⁶¹ Even though not all German cooperatives were part of the "Agraria", it became synonymous with the success of the *Volksdeutsche* cooperatives.⁶² Their number was 39 in 1925. In 1930 it reached 251, and would continue to rise throughout 1930s.⁶³ Since 1927 the "Agraria" became only trade central office for selling

⁵⁹ Jovan Durman: Zadrugarstvo Nemaca u Jugoslaviji do Drugog svetskog rata [The Cooperatives of the Germans in Yugoslavia Before WWII]. In: Zadrugni arhiv 2 (1954), p. 115; Plautz (as footnote 39), p. 90; Todor Avramović. Privreda Vojvodine od 1918. do 1929/30. godine s obzirom na stanje pre Prvog svetskog rata [The Vojvodina Economy 1918-1929/30 Regarding its Situation Before WWI]. Novi Sad 1965, pp. 113-114.

⁶⁰ Das Schicksal (as footnote 2), p. 15E. Even those Germans living in towns relied heavily on agriculture for their income.

⁶¹ Josef Wilhelm. Dr. Stefan Kraft, Stuttgart 2008, p. 19; Leopold Egger. Das Vermögen und die Vermögensverluste der Deutschen in Jugoslawien. Sindelfingen 1983, p. 189; Arno Oebser. Das deutsche Genossenschaftswesen in den Gebieten der ehemaligen Tschechoslowakei, in Rumänien, Südslawien und Ungarn. Stuttgart 1940, pp. 220, 224; Plautz (as footnote 39), p. 90.

⁶² Daka Popović. Banat, Bačka i Baranja. Savremeni nacionalni, politički i društveni profil [The Banat, the Bacska and Baranya. Their Contemporary National, Political and Social Profile]. Novi Sad 1935, p. 30; L. Lenard: Narodne manjine u SHS [National Minorities in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes]. In: Jubilarni zbornik života i rada SHS 1.XII 1918-1928. Beograd 1928, p. 736; Branko Bešlin: Nemci u Vojvodini 1918-1941 [The Germans in the Vojvodina 1918-1941]. In: Tokovi istorije 1-4 (1999), p. 226.

⁶³ Egger (as footnote 61), pp. 181-182; Ljubica Šijački. Privreda Banata između dva svetska rata [The Economy of the Banat Between the Two World Wars]. Novi Sad 1987, p. 149.

agricultural products and buying industrial goods for agriculture. Three departments were set up: for goods (dealing in agricultural machines), grain and hemp.⁶⁴ These organizations branched out further during 1930s and they gave the German minority a stabile economic backing which no other minority possessed. Among other things, their advantage was that they were more or less immune to political turbulences. From the national point of view, their major weakness was that their members (and thus main beneficiaries) tended to be farmers who were better off in the first place, so that cooperatives rather widened than bridged the social gap.

The institution which was meant to represent the *Volksdeutsche* national interests was the Party of the Germans (*Partei der Deutschen*). In a country where politics was the ultimate activity, and in which almost all parties were organized on ethnic basis, it was only too natural that the Germans wanted to set up a party of their own. Although normal for them, it didn't delight the leading Yugoslav politicians who wanted to recruit members of national minorities for their parties (the Democratic and the People's Radical Party, Croat Peasants' Party).⁶⁵ The obstacle to participation in political life on part of the minorities in the former Habsburg lands in the first years after WWI were stipulations of the peace treaties with Austria and Hungary which left the people in these areas the possibility of choosing to remain in their homeland and acquire Yugoslav citizenship, or to emigrate to Austria or Hungary and retain Austrian or Hungarian citizenship they had had until 1918. This stipulation was used by the Yugoslav government to deny the Germans and Hungarians the right to vote at the elections for the Constituent Assembly. "People who could become

⁶⁴ Ivan Milivoj Varga: Naše zadrugarstvo [Our Cooperatives]. In: Jubilarni zbornik života i rada SHS 1.XII 1918-1928. Beograd 1928, pp. 279-289.

⁶⁵ Wilhelm (as footnote 61), p. 17; Annabring (as footnote 41), p. 32.

foreign citizens the next day, couldn't decide on the Yugoslav constitution", ran the argument.⁶⁶ It would have been a valid one, if the same authorities didn't levy taxes and call up members of the minorities. As it was, it was clearly a measure aimed at depriving the minorities of the right to have a say in the debate about the constitution of the new state.⁶⁷

The *Volksdeutsche* reluctantly put up with it, but started making preparations for the foundation of their own political party already before the right to opt expired. German press started discussing the matter already since the beginning of 1921. It would seem the nationally ripe and politically experienced German burghers of Lower Styria were the obvious choice for the leadership of the new party.⁶⁸ However, it didn't turn out quite so. They were not numerous enough, they lived far from the areas where bulk of the Yugoslav Germans lived, the government pressure on the *Volksdeutsche* was the strongest in Slovenia, and, last but not least, they tended to look down on their less developed Swabian fellow-Germans, which the latter resented.⁶⁹ On the other hand the Germans of Gottschee, organized in their Gottschee Peasants' Party (*Gottscheer deutsche Bauernpartei*) too weak economically and not numerous enough to play an independent political role, joined

⁶⁶ Branislav Gligorijević. *Parlament i političke stranke u Jugoslaviji (1918-1929)*[Parliament and Political Parties in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia]. Beograd 1970, pp. 70-71; Zlatko Matijević: »Građani na odkaz« - njemačka nacionalna manjina i 9. članak Zakona o izborima narodnih poslanika za Ustavotvornu skupštinu Kraljevine SHS (1920) [»Conditional Citizens«. The German National Minority and the article 9 of the Law on the Election of the MPs for the Constituent Assembly of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes]. In: *Godišnjak Njemačke narodnosne zajednice X* (2003); Geiger (as footnote 19), pp. 92-93.

⁶⁷ Just how important the minorities could be was subsequently proven by the fact that the Constitution was passed only thanks to the votes of the Turkish-Albanian Xhemiet party. (Cf. Gligorijec (as footnote 66), pp. 103-104 ; Janjetović (as footnote 4), pp. 175-176.)

⁶⁸ As late as 1938 the Germans (who were just 2.5% of the population) were 13% of all medical doctors and 10.6% of engineers in Slovenia. (Dušan Biber: *Socijalna struktura nemačke nacionalne manjine u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji* [Social Structure of the German National Minority in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia]. In: *Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis* 1-4 (1978), p. 408.)

⁶⁹ Two Germans from Slovenia made it to the upper echelons of the *Volksdeutsche* organizations: Oskar Plautz, the manager of the "People's Bank" in Zemun/Semlin and Franz Perz, manager of the *Druckerei- und Aktiengesellschaft* which published the *Deutsches Volksblatt*. (Bešlin (as footnote 34), p. 25.)

collectively the Party of the Germans in the making already in February 1922.⁷⁰ Until July 1922 47 chapters of the new party were founded. Out of that 22 were in the Banat, 17 in the Bacska and 4 in Syrmium.⁷¹ The less numerous Banat Swabians founded more chapters than the more numerous and more opulent Bacska Germans. This was in keeping with the tradition from the Habsburg times: the *Volksdeutsche* in the Banat lived with the nationally conscious Serbs and Romanians and with comparatively few Hungarians, becoming therefore nationally riper than their fellow-countrymen in other parts of Hungary. On the other hand, those in the Bacska lived predominantly among the Magyars and stood under their spell. Thus the Swabians in the Banat were the first to found a German political party in the German-Serbian town of Werschetz/Vršac back in 1906.⁷²

These facts were at least partly responsible for the birth-place of the Party of the Germans and the make-up of its leadership. The party was founded in the town of Hatzfeld/Žombolj/Jimbolia on the Yugoslav-Romanian border.⁷³ Other important factors speaking in favour of Hatzfeld were its predominantly Swabian population and its peripheral position which sheltered it to a degree from possible attacks of raiding parties of Serbian nationalist organizations.⁷⁴ Furthermore, in such an out-of-the way place one

⁷⁰ Biber (as footnote 26), p. 30; HWBGAD, III (as footnote 12), p. 77; 500 let (as footnote 9), p. 42; Kočevsko (as footnote 11), p. 26.

⁷¹ Plautz (as footnote 39), pp. 47-48.

⁷² Friedrich Gotas: Die Deutschen in Ungarn. In: Adam Wandruszka, Peter Urbanitsch (eds.). Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848-1918, Bd. III. Die Völker des Reiches. Wien 1980, pp. 372-374, 395-398, 401-402, 407-410; Ingomar Senz, Die nationale Bewegung der ungarländischen Deutschen vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Eine Entwicklung im Spannungsfeld zwischen Alldeutschtum und ungarischer Innenpolitik. München 1977, pp. 63, 98; Arpad Lebl. Gradanske partije u Vojvodini 1887-1918 [The Bourgeois Parties in the Vojvodina 1887-1918]. Novi Sad 1979, p. 271; Günter Schödl: Am Rande des Reiches, am Rande der Nation. Deutsche im Königreich Ungarn (1867-1914/18). In: Idem (ed.). Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas. Land an der Donau. Berlin 2002, pp. 402-408.

⁷³ Yugoslavia and Romania swapped pieces of territory, so Hatzfeld eventually fell to Romania in November 1923. (Das Schicksal (as footnote 2), p. 4E.)

⁷⁴ PA AA, Abt. IIb, Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker in Jugoslawien. Politik 6, Jugoslawien, Bd. 2; Senz. Politische (as footnote 39), p. 302.

could count on weaker police surveillance.⁷⁵ The founding assembly was held on December 17, 1922. The party program of 26 points was adopted, calling for fulfillment of all civil rights guaranteed by the Constitution, equality of churches, reduction and professionalization of the administration and an end to its arbitrariness. The program asked for social justice and equality of taxes.⁷⁶ Pursuing the interests of its peasant voters, the party demanded a tax and customs policy which would favor the farmers, as well as building of such a traffic infrastructure that would aid the development of agriculture. It also called for a fair census and that military service be served in one's region of origin. Another set of demands concerned strictly minority issues such as personal and educational autonomy, ethnically rounded precincts, a fair agrarian reform for all, economic liberties for all, German share of state employees, application of German place-names etc.⁷⁷

Such a party program was tailored according to the needs of the majority of the Ethnic-German community. It mirrored above all economic interests, which played major role in the *Volksdeutsche* thoughts and actions. It abstained from dealing with the major Yugoslav political issues (such as federalism vs. centralism, one Slavic nation or several etc.). This remained the rule throughout 1920s: the Party of the Germans felt it counterproductive to meddle into what its leaders considered strictly Slavic matters. They were fearful lest taking sides in the internal Yugoslav squabbles would hurt Ethnic-German interests. On the other hand, this sometimes brought the party reproaches for isolationism from the major Slavic parties.

⁷⁵ AJ, 14, 104/401.

⁷⁶ Various Yugoslav provinces had inherited different taxation systems from the predecessor states, so that very different amounts of taxes were paid in various parts of the country. The Vojvodina, where bulk of the *Volksdeutsche* lived, had inherited the Hungarian system of taxation and paid the highest taxes. This was often incorrectly construed as deliberate measure of the government against the minorities. However, this view is unacceptable, since the local Serbs and Croats had to pay the very same taxes.

⁷⁷ Rasimus (as footnote 41), pp. 627-629; Annabring (as footnote 41), pp. 29-30.

The first elections at which the party took part, on March 18, 1923, seemed promising. It ran on its own ticket and, despite the government pressure, received 43.007 votes, which was translated into 8 MP.⁷⁸ Although this was a good showing for the beginners, most of the *Volksdeutsche* voted for other, non-German parties: the Croat Peasants' Party in Croatia and Slavonia, the Socialists in the Bacska or the Slovenian People's Party in Slovenia.⁷⁹ The reason lay partly in the division of constituencies, partly in pressure of the authorities and nationalist organizations,⁸⁰ but also in the opinion of the many that the *Volksdeutsche* could better further their interests if they went along with the strongest Slavic parties.

The same pattern prevailed in the next two elections in 1920s. Those in 1925 were marked by increased violence. Adherents of opposition and minority parties were attacked by nationalist organization, and even the leaders of the Party of the Germans, Dr. Stefan Kraft and Dr. Georg Grassl, were severely beaten in the village of Neu-Siwatz/ Novi Sivac at the beginning of 1925.⁸¹ In such atmosphere of violence and intimidation the party managed to broaden a little its electorate. It got 45.172 votes, but due to the changed electoral system, only 5 MPs.⁸² At the parliamentary

⁷⁸ Plautz (as footnote 39), pp. 53-55; Annabring (as footnote 41), p. 32; Das Schicksal (as footnote 2), p. 33E.

⁷⁹ Altgeyer (as footnote 38), p. 48; PA AA, Abt. IIB, Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker in Jugoslawien. Politik 6, Bd. 2; Biber (as footnote 26), p. 30; 500 let (as footnote 9), p. 42; HWBGAD, III (as footnote 12), p. 77.

⁸⁰ Ballot was public so it was no secret how one voted.

⁸¹ Živko Avramovski. Britanci o Kraljevini Jugoslaviji. Godišnji izveštaji britanskog poslanstva u Beogradu 1921-1938 (The British on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Annual Reports of the British Embassy in Belgrade (1921-1938). I. Zagreb, Beograd [1987], p. 307; Annabring (as footnote 41), p. 27; Stenografske beleške Narodne skupštine Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca. Vanredni saziv za 1925 [Minutes of the Parliament of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Extraordinary Session of 1925], II. Beograd 1925, pp. 216-217; Branislav Gligorijević: Srpska nacionalna omladina (SRNAO). Prilog izučavanju nacionalističkih i terorističkih organizacija u staroj Jugoslaviji [The Serbian Nationalist Youth (SRNAO) A Contribution to the Research of Nationalist and Terrorist Organizations in the Old Yugoslavia]. In: Istorijски glasnik 2-3 (1964), p. 27; PA AA, Abt. IIB, Politische Beziehungen Jugoslawiens zu Deutschland. Politik 2, Jugoslawien, Bd. 1.

⁸² Plautz (as footnote 39), p. 55; Annabring (as footnote 41), p. 36; Das Schicksal (as footnote 2), p. 33E.

elections on September 11, 1927, the party again increased the number of votes – 48.032 – achieving six MPs this time.⁸³ The party also did well at the local elections on November 6, 1927.⁸⁴ It got 511 deputies in assemblies of 111 communes.⁸⁵ However, the number of *Volksdeutsche* mayors was only 10, which was less than would have been, had the offices been distributed proportionally.⁸⁶

The Party of the Germans usually stuck to the governing parties in the Parliament, but voicing minority complaints every now and then. These concerned the agrarian reform, German language education, civic equality and malpractices of the authorities. The party was too weak to do more. It never had the occasion to influence the vital decisions or to tip the parliamentary scales. Its major success was to prevent the passing of a stipulation that would strongly limit the possibility of members of minorities to acquire real-estate in the zones along the state border in 1928/29.⁸⁷ Its important bill on primary schools, submitted on December 20, 1928 never came before the Parliament since it was disbanded after the imposition of King's dictatorship on January 6, 1929.⁸⁸

Although the palpable results of the party's activity were meager, it nevertheless contributed to political ripening of the German minority. Its

⁸³ Annabring (as footnote 41), p. 38; Das Schicksal (as footnote 2), p. 33E; Plautz (as footnote 39), p. 55; Gligorijević (as footnote 66), p. 294.

⁸⁴ Unlike other parts of the country, this was the first time after WWI that local elections were organized in the Vojvodina too. Due to the large number of non-Slavic inhabitants of the province, the government had avoided to introduce local self-government there for years.

⁸⁵ Plautz (as footnote 39), p. 64; Goran Nikolić. Društvena obeležja nemačke nacionalne manjine u Vojvodini u periodu 1918-1929. godine. Magistarski rad u rukopisu [Social Characteristics of the German national Minority in the Vojvodina 1918-1929. MA paper, manuscript]. Novi Sad 1992, p. 191.

⁸⁶ Annabring (as footnote 41), p. 38; Nikolić (as footnote 85), p. 191; László Rehak. Manjine u Jugoslaviji. Pravno-politička studija. Doktorska teza u rukopisu [Minorities in Yugoslavia. A Legal and Political Study. Ph.D. paper, manuscript]. Novi Sad, Beograd 1965, p. 243.

⁸⁷ Plautz (as footnote 39), pp. 64-65.

⁸⁸ Plautz (as footnote 39), pp. 77-78; Der Minderheitenschulgesetzentwurf des deutschen Abgeordnetenklubs. Nation und Staat. II, no. 4, 1929, pp. 275-280.

leaders learned the rules of the political game as played in Yugoslavia and could gain experience and acquaintances in government circles. Even though it never managed to attract the majority of the *Volksdeutsche* votes, and had its electorate mostly in the Vojvodina at that, its existence was an important step in the direction of building up an unified national minority.

Yugoslavia entered the second decade of its existence without having overcome many legacies of the past. Legislation was still not unified in its historical provinces and political integration couldn't surpass ethnic level. Except for few marginal parties ideological issues were not the able to unite the population across ethnic borders. Differences in the levels of economic development remained great. The Ethnic-Germans basically fitted into that pattern. They didn't manage to achieve full unity of various *Volksdeutsche* groups. Many people of German origin, particularly in Croatia and Slavonia were still ethnically unconscious and due to internal weaknesses and government pressure, Ethnic-German organizations couldn't take root in many areas. Nevertheless, there were some undeniable achievements. The first one was the *Deutsches Volksblatt* which reached supra-regional readership. The other was the *Kulturbund*, which, despite all odds, managed to overcome the tribulations of 1920 and to survive as a pivotal folk institution. Economic cooperatives which evolved from it were even stronger and would continue to grow in number and strength in 1930s. The Party of the Germans wasn't so lucky, but its leaders gathered experiences and continued to make politics under the changed circumstances in Yugoslavia and in Europe in 1930s. In the decade preceding WWII the

German minority in the country would finally be blended into a solid whole
– albeit under the nefarious influence from Hitler's Germany.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Biber (as footnote 39), pp. 43-210; Zoran Janjetović: Die Donauschwaben in der Vojvodina und der Nationalsozialismus. In: Mariana Hausleitner, Harald Roth (eds.): Der Einfluss von Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus auf Minderheiten in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa. München 2006, pp. 219-235.