

THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AND CROATIAN INDEPENDENCE – ACTIVITY IN THE BANATE OF CROATIA ¹

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The clergy of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the most influential institution among the Serbs, split over the political solution involving establishment of the Banate of Croatia on August 26, 1939. On one side were those who endorsed the solution to the Croatian question as negotiated in the Agreement concluded by Dragiša Cvetković and Vladko Maček, followed by the establishment of the Banate of Croatia, while on the other side were those opponents of these negotiated policies whose activities were rooted in Greater Serbian ideology.

On the eve of the Second World War, the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) was among the most important and influential institutions among the Serbs in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.² Although the Church's leadership (the Holy As-

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¹ A slightly different Croatian version of this article is “Djelovanje Srpske pravoslavne crkve na području Banovine Hrvatske,” in: *Zbornik radova Hrvatska između slobode i jugoslavenstva* (Zagreb, 2009), pp. 249-278.

² The Serbian Orthodox Church was founded by Sava Nemanjić, the brother of the Serbian king, Stefan Nemanjić, who obtained permission to establish an independent Serbian archeparchy from the Byzantine emperor and the patriarch of Constantinople in Nicaea in 1219, and he secured for himself the title of archbishop. After returning to his homeland, Sava established the church's seat in the monastery at Žiča, while he divided the Principality of Rascia of the time into eight eparchies and he replaced the Greek clergy with Serbs. The jurisdiction of the new Orthodox Church extended parallel to the expansion of the Serbian state, which during the reign of Stefan Dušan (1308-1355) encompassed all of modern-day Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia and slightly over half of today's Greece. In 1346, the SOC became an autocephalous church seated in the monastery in Peć. As a state church, whose territory expanded or contracted parallel to that of the Serbian state, and whose head was chosen by the clergy and

sembly of Bishops) did not publicly oppose the establishment of the Banate of Croatia and the internal political reforms in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the clergy did divide into supporters and opponents of the new political-territorial organization of the state. Those who opposed the politics of accommodation were adherents of the Greater Serbian ideology, which took root most firmly among the Orthodox clergy in the Bosnian Posavina region. The Orthodox clergy established action committees as point organizations for the defense of Serbdom. At the same time, a group of Orthodox priests operated within the governing Peasant Democratic Coalition, supporting a federalist Yugoslav ideology. These priests assumed high posts in the committees of the Croatian National Diet and they were involved in the promotion of the Cvetković-Maček Agreement in the territories of western Slavonia, Banovina and even the Vrbas Banate.

nobility, and confirmed by the Serbian ruler, the SOC was critically threatened by the Ottoman conquests in the latter half of the fifteenth century and the efforts of the Greek clergy of the Ohrid archiepiscopate to abolish it, which ultimately came about in 1463, when all of the territory of the Peć Patriarchate was relegated to the Ohrid Archiepiscopate. However, despite the loss of ecclesiastical independence, the SOC was the only medieval Serbian institution which functioned among the Serbs during the period Ottoman suzerainty over Serbia, which its patriarch was, after the restoration of the Peć Patriarchate in 1557, practically the informal ruler of the Serbs in the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans once more abolished the Peć Patriarchate in 1766. During the Austro-Ottoman wars at the end of the seventeenth century, the Serbian Patriarch Arsenije III Crnojević, together with a considerable number of the Orthodox population, withdrew to southern Hungary, where, thanks to privileges granted by Emperor Leopold II (1692), by 1713, the SOC preserved its religious and political freedom. Although it was still formally under the jurisdiction of the Peć Patriarchate, the Metropolitanate of (Srijemski) Karlovci became the hub of religious and cultural life. After the creation of the Serbian autonomous principality (1830) and an independent kingdom (1878), in 1879 the SOC once more became an autocephalous church, while in 1920 the Belgrade Metropolitanate was elevated to the status of patriarchate. "Pravoslavlje," *Enciklopedija Leksikografskog zavoda*, vol. 5 (Zagreb, 1969), p. 267; *Srpska pravoslavna crkva 1219–1969/Spomenica o 750-godišnjici autokefalnosti* (Belgrade, 1961); *Srpska pravoslavna crkva 1920–1970/Spomenica o 50-godišnjici vaspostavljanja Srpske patrijaršije* (Belgrade, 1971); Sima Ćirković, "Problemi biografije Svetog Save", in: *Zbornik radova Sava Nemanjić-Sveti Sava/istorija i predanje* (Belgrade, 1979), pp. 7-13; Božidar Ferjančić, "Autokefalnost Srpske pravoslavne crkve i Ohridska arhiepiskopija," in: *Zbornik radova Sava Nemanjić*, pp. 65-72; Marija Janković, "Episkopije Srpske crkve 1220. godine," in: *Zbornik radova Sava Nemanjić*, 73-84; Dušan Lj. Kašić, *Pogled u prošlost srpske crkve* (Belgrade, 1984); Ivo Pilar (L. V. Südland), *Južnoslavensko pitanje: prikaz cjelokupnog pitanja* (Varaždin, 1990); Srećko M. Džaja, *Konfesionalnost i nacionalnost Bosne i Hercegovine* (Sarajevo, 1992); "Srpska pravoslavna crkva," *Opći religijski leksikon* (Zagreb 2002), p. 888; László Hadrovics, *Srpski narod i njegova Crkva pod turskom vlašću* (Zagreb 2000); Radoslav Katičić, "Pogovor," in: L. Hadrovics, *Srpski narod*, pp. 145–167; Ivana Andrić, "Položaj Pečke patrijaršije u Osmanskom Carstvu od 1557. do 1690. godine," *Povijesni prilozi*, 27/2004, no. 27: 71-88; Zlatko Kudelić, "Srpska pravoslavna crkva u Bosni i Hercegovini tijekom austrougarske vladavine u novijoj domaćoj i inozemnoj historiografiji," *Croatica Christiana Periodica* 2008, no. 62: 29-62.

1. Political Activity of the Opponents of Pro-Agreement Policy inside the Serbian Orthodox Church

Just as “Krajina” societies operated among the Serbs in the territory of western Slavonia, Banovina, Kordun, Lika, northern Dalmatia and part of Herzegovina, as well as the Serbian Culture Club (SKK) and later the Sokol Federation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, whose sole objective was to separate the “Serbian” districts of the Banate of Croatia and annex them to Greater Serbia, identical political initiatives similarly appeared in the territory of the Bosnian Posavina, which at that time was divided into the Derventa, Gradačac and Brčko Districts.³ However, as opposed to the leaders of such initiatives who belonged to the aforementioned associations, in the Bosnian Posavina the lead role was assumed by the Orthodox clergy of the Tuzla Eparchy, which was part of the Sarajevo Metropolitanate. They launched a political campaign among the dissatisfied Serbs of the Banate under the slogan “Serbs Together.” This campaign, as in other regions of the Banate of Croatia, was conducted in uniform fashion. First the clergy initiated the establishment of local and district action committees at meetings of the Serbian Orthodox ecclesiastical municipalities. At these meetings, they coordinated the anti-Banate and anti-Agreement activities of their fellow residents, instructed them to carry out propaganda activities at their places of residence, and kept them abreast of the activities of like-minded individuals by reading articles in the newspaper *Srpski glas* (‘Serbian Voice’) and brochures promoting anti-Banate positions.⁴ At the same time, they undertook preparations for holding the Pan-Serbian Convention in Doboј on New Year’s Eve, 1939, at which they demonstrated the unity of the Serbs of the former Austro-Hungarian Bosnia-Herzegovina. Finally, they launched a series of field activities which constituted an attempt to popularize their Greater Serbian idea among the Serbs of the Banate of Croatia.

Establishment of action committees in Bosnian Posavina

The organization of action committees in the territory of Bosnian Posavina among the anti-Banate Serbs was one of the most important prerequisites for the successful implementation of the “Serbs Together” campaign, which was led by local residents and, particularly important to this discussion, the local Orthodox clergy. Among the first activities was to dispatch a delegation of Brčko Serbs to Belgrade, where, from August 26 to October 3, 1939, they agitated among the highest officials of the then governing Yugoslav Radical Union (JRZ – *Jugoslavenska radikalna zajednica*) to have Serbian towns and

³ Krešimir REGAN, “Političko djelovanje Krajine u Banovini Hrvatskoj,” *Historijski zbornik* 60/2007, no. 60: 179-213.; IBID., “Srpski kulturni klub i Banovina Hrvatska,” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 40/2008, no. 2: 397-424.

⁴ *Brčko, srez i grad: riječ Srba Brčana povodom pripojenja srezova sjeverne Bosne Banovini Hrvatskoj* (Brčko, 1939).

municipalities from their district removed from the Banate of Croatia and assigned to the Drina Banate.⁵ This demand put forward by the Brčko Serbs was not without legal grounds, for the Agreement foresaw not only the expansion of the Banate of Croatia by adding certain districts or municipalities with Croatian majorities in the Vrbas, Drina and Danube Banates, but also the separation of towns and municipalities with Serbian majorities from those districts which were incorporated into the Banate of Croatia with the merger of the Sava and Littoral Banates.⁶

An initiative was launched in Tuzla on October 14, 1939, presided over by Tuzla Bishop Nektarije, to merge all of Bosnia-Herzegovina into Serbia. Also established was the "Action Committee for Defense of the National Interests of the Serbs of Tuzla" and a resolution was adopted which asserted that "...the Serbs from Tuzla neither desired nor sought the reorganization of the State on a federal basis, for they know that partition of the state into tribal communities, due to the intermingling of settlements, will lead to deep and incurable wounds among both the Serbs and Croats. However, since such reorganization was demanded at all costs, the Serbs from Tuzla, faithful to the votive thought of their people and forefathers, demand that Bosnia-Herzegovina not be separated from Serbia and they are prepared, if necessary, to fight with all available means for unity with Serbia."⁷

The initiative then moved from the Drina Banate to the Banate of Croatia, where, at a meeting of all Serbian associations and institutions in Bčko on November 15, 1939, those gathered sought the removal of the Brčko District from the Banate of Croatia, like all other Bosnian-Herzegovinian districts incorporated by it, for according to them they did not belong to the Banate of Croatia but rather to Serbia.⁸ At a narrower meeting of Serbs in Brčko held on November 22, 1939, a district Action Committee was established, and those gath-

⁵ "The Serbs/Orthodox are dissatisfied with the incorporation of their district into the Croatian Banate, which they demonstrated by sending a delegation of some citizens to Belgrade with the task of seeking the removal of municipalities and villages with Orthodox populations from the Croatian banate." Croatian State Archives, Zagreb (hereinafter: HDA), Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 5481. Predmet: Tromesečni izvještaj o općoj političkoj situaciji za III tromesečje 1939. godine. Izvještaj kotarskog načelstva u Brčkome od 3. listopada 1939.

⁶ "By contrast, for most Serbs the text of the Agreement provoked dissatisfaction due to incorporation into the Croatian Banate, although among them one may notice also a certain hope that areas with largely Serbian residents will be excluded from it." See: HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 5494. Item: Tromesečni izvještaj o opštim prilikama u srezu derventskome u toku meseca jula, augusta i septembra 1939. god. Izvještaj kotarskog načelstva u Derventi od 4. listopada 1939.

⁷ HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 13716/1940. Predmet: Pokret "Srbi na okup" otcijepjenje i odvajanje pojedinih sreza sa područja banovine Hrvatske - izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Gradačcu od 13. ožujka 1940.

⁸ HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Predmet: Pokret "Srbi na okup" otcijepjenje i odvajanje pojedinih sreza sa područja banovine Hrvatske - izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Brčkom od 14. ožujka 1940.

ered reiterated their decision from the previous meeting that "...the Serbs of Bosnia-Herzegovina will struggle against the autonomy of Bosnia, and Brčko natives will oppose the incorporation of the Brčko district into the Banate of Croatia."⁹ Establishment of the "Bčko District Action Committee" greatly embittered the local Croats and Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina.¹⁰ According to the report of the Brčko district supervisor, the "Serbs Together" anti-Banate movement was led by almost all of the Orthodox clergy of that region, with the exception of the Orthodox priests Svetozar Lazarević from Crkvina, Mika Jovanović from Mačkovice and Risto Nakić from Bukvik, who did not agree with this political campaign conducted by their colleagues. The most prominent among the leaders of this campaign was the Brčko attorney Milorad Kostić and Rev. Rajko Sofrenović from Brčko.¹¹ Even though the Brčko district supervisor's report noted that there was "...not one publicly open gathering at which there was talk of the consolidation of the Serbs and secession of the Brčko district from the Banate of Croatia...", the report clearly stresses that the promotion of these political ideas "...is being conducted by Orthodox priests at every opportunity whenever they are in contact with distinguished hosts or at smaller or larger gatherings such as feasts, weddings, masses, etc."¹² The district supervisor found it necessary to underscore the fact that the Brčko Serbs approved of this political activity in large number "...precisely because it is being led by priests..."¹³

For the purpose of Greater Serbian propaganda activities, a group of Serbian malcontents from the Brčko District published a "scholarly/popular" booklet on Bosnian Posavina, in which they claimed that establishment of the Banate of Croatia constituted a grave injustice to the Serbs and Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina.¹⁴ They claimed that the Croats received far more terri-

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ According to the periodical *Hrvatski dnevnik* (Zagreb), on Oct. 26, 1939, p. 5, "... the campaign and resolutions of the Brčko Serbs published in the Belgrade press against the inclusion of the Brčko District into Croatia and for its incorporation into Serbia, particularly embittered the local Muslims, who have been brought even closer to the policies of Dr. Maček by such conduct. There are no Serbian peasants from the vicinity involved in this, as they have an entirely different view of the efforts and peasant policy of Dr. Maček, and they do not heed the futile calls of the well-fed gentlemen from Brčko. The campaign is generally being led by biased state bureaucrats and horse-traders, who fear for their comfortable positions." Article with headline "Akcija brčanskih Srba i muslimana".

¹¹ HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Predmet: Pokret "Srbi na okup" otcijepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih srezu sa područja banovine Hrvatske – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Brčkom od 14. ožujka 1940.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ The booklet contains the assertion that "...the act of 26 August of this year resolved (...) the question of the extent of Croatian territory such that what happened is precisely what we oppose: an extreme injustice to Serbdom, and also an injustice against our Muslim brothers, whose feelings and opinions nobody took into account. At the same time, the entire demarcation has

tory than they should have, while the Serbs, "...for the love of Croatian special aspirations..." sacrificed "...the compactness of the state as a whole."¹⁵

The anti-Banate and anti-Agreement oriented Serbs of the Gradačac District convened a meeting of the Serbian Ecclesiastical Municipality in Modriča in the premises of the Serbian reading room on November 26, 1939.¹⁶ According to the report of the Gradačac district supervisor, the reason for calling this meeting was for their representatives to take a stance on the content of the resolution of the "Action Committee for Defense of the National Interests of the Serbs of Tuzla." After a series of speeches, they proceeded to establish municipal action committees in Modriča, Vranjak, Tolisa, Skugrići, Dugo Polje and Koprivne, and then a resolution was adopted whereby the Brčko and Gradačac Serbs committed themselves to establishing "...a standing local committee of 10 persons for the defense of the national interests of the Serbian people in the Gradačac District, which will stand in solidarity with the campaigns of like committees established in Brčko, Tuzla and Sarajevo."¹⁷

A meeting of all local "Action Committees" of the Gradačac District was convened in the Serbian Reading Room in Modriča on January 8, 1940, where, in the presence of roughly two hundred local Serbs, the "Gradačac District Action Committee" was established.¹⁸ The founding assembly of this action committee was addressed by Milorad Kostić as the delegate from Brčko, and as many as three Orthodox priests: Zdravko Borisavljević as the delegate from Derventa, Svetozar Popović from Donji Skugrić and Srećko Roki from

been pointless in and of itself – but it is in and of itself a major sacrifice for the Serbian side – and conducted without regard for principle, or, better stated, according to a single principle: wher-ever one turns, it must be to the detriment of the Serbs, and to the benefit of the Croats." *Brčko, srez i grad*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁵ "The sacrifice was made, it would appear, to satisfy certain other principles that were abundantly cited and employed by the Croatian side, the historical, constitutional principle. It was for the sake of this principle that the Serbs have forsaken northern Dalmatia, Lika, Kordun and Slavonia; the Croats stressed in response that Srijem was left to the Serbs, but the question remains as to when Srijem ever belonged to the Croatian Triune Kingdom? And how long was it a part thereof? (...) Thus, the historical and constitutional principle won over when it benefited the Croats. But when it would have been necessary to be consistent in this regard and show respect from their side of the border of this historical Triune Kingdom which they so vehemently extolled as their enlightened right, the Croats willfully passed over it. When it was necessary to assume Bosnian-Herzegovinian districts, then all at once – naturally, at the expense of the Serbs – the ethnographic-religious principle was distinguished as the sole criterion, and even here, as shown by many districts, such that all the Croats required was a relative majority of 40 or less percent for them to demand these regions. Regardless of the fact that, for example, the Bosnian Posavina was never under any form of Croatian authority." *Brčko, srez i grad*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁶ HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 13716/1940. Predmet: Pokret "Srbi na okup" otcijepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih sreza sa područja banovine Hrvatske – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Gradačcu od 13. ožujka 1940.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Gradačac.¹⁹ It is particularly interesting that in this report, the Gradačac District supervisor mentions as the leaders of the anti-Banate and anti-Agreement campaign in the territory of his own district, and the Brčko and Derventa Districts, Tuzla Bishop Nektarije and the priest Milan Božić from Sarajevo.²⁰ The same assertion was reiterated in the consolidated report of the Internal Affairs Department of the Banate Government of April 13, 1940, in which it is noted that the “Serbs Together” movement in the Gradačac district was led largely by the Orthodox clergy under the leadership of the priest Rajko Sofrenović.²¹ Further activity by the proponents of the anti-Banate movement among the Serbs in the Gradačac District, according to the district supervisor’s report, ceased, because “...all actions by the local Serbs were transferred to the territory of the Derventa district, where they apparently went for consultations.”²²

Based on the report of the Derventa District supervisor and the consolidated report of the Banate Government’s Internal Affairs Department of April 13, 1940, it is apparent that the activities of the movement in the Derventa District commenced on December 13, 1939 with a meeting in Derventa, at which the “Derventa District Action Committee” was established and a resolution was passed on the separation of this district from the Banate of Croatia. The Derventa District supervisor managed to halt and neutralize the continuation of this campaign, which was conceived in the form of a new meeting of the “Derventa District Action Committee” scheduled for February 7, 1940,²³ to which his report of March 13, 1940 clearly testifies.²⁴ That the Derventa District supervisor was not falsely boasting is clearly shown by the letter sent by the Yugoslav Prime Minister to the Croatian ban, Dr. Ivan Šubašić, in which he stated that “...from many quarters (...) my attention has been turned to the fact that circumstances in the district of Derventa are quite difficult, so please

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.; HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 21422. Predmet: Odcjepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih srezova od banovine Hrvatske u vezi sa pokretom “Srbi na okup” – izvještaj odjela za unutrašnje poslove BV BH od 13. travnja 1940.

²¹ HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 21422. Predmet: Odcjepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih srezova od banovine Hrvatske u vezi sa pokretom “Srbi na okup” – izvještaj odjela za unutrašnje poslove BV BH od 13. travnja 1940.

²² HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 13716/1940. Predmet: Pokret “Srbi na okup” otcjepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih srezova sa područja banovine Hrvatske – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Derventi od 14. ožujka 1940.

²³ HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 21422. Predmet: Odcjepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih srezova od banovine Hrvatske u vezi sa pokretom “Srbi na okup” – izvještaj odjela za unutrašnje poslove BV BH od 13. travnja 1940.; HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 13639/1940. Predmet: Pokret “Srbi na okup” otcjepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih srezova sa područja banovine Hrvatske – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Gradačcu od 13. ožujka 1940.

²⁴ HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 13639/1940. Predmet: Pokret “Srbi na okup” otcjepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih srezova sa područja banovine Hrvatske – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Gradačcu od 13. ožujka 1940.

look into this,”²⁵ as well as the response from the Derвента District supervisor who managed to quell this movement in his district despite the fact that most Serbs residing therein opposed unification with the Banate of Croatia.²⁶

However, a general Greater Serbian campaign under the slogan “Serbs Together” was conducted throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina at the beginning of 1940, which resulted in the convening of the “National Assembly” of all Serbian national associations, held in Doboj. All of the Serbian proponents of anti-Banate and anti-Agreement policies in this region participated in this assembly. Also present were the representatives the dissatisfied Serbs of the Mostar District, where the Orthodox clergy also played a considerable role in organizing the anti-Banate movement.²⁷ At the assembly in Doboj, held on December 31, 1939 and January 1, 1940, the delegates adopted a resolution in which they protested “...against all actions and attempts to partition and weaken the Yugoslav state, and particularly the division of the Serbs in that state...” and against “...the fact that the question of our national accord was resolved without the participation of the Serbian portion of our nation²⁸ and to its detriment, and, not acknowledging this *fait accompli*, we declare that, as in the past, so too in the future, we shall fight against what has been done and against all efforts toward separating the Serbian regions of our Fatherland

²⁵ HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Predmet: Pismo Dragiše Cvetkovića za dr. Ivana Šubišića od 1. listopada 1940., in: HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. No. 13716/1940. Predmet: Pokret “Srbi na okup” otcjepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih sreza sa područja banovine Hrvatske – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Derventi od 14. ožujka 1940.

²⁶ “...that the Serbs in this district, regardless of party affiliation, have agreed on one thing, and that is that they oppose the inclusion of this district into the Banate of Croatia. They have, as is known, visibly and actively shown this from the beginning after the Agreement until February 1940 in various declarations, statements, and fliers, and they also attempted to hold rallies, but these were banned. Some delegations were even dispatched to Belgrade, they sent protest telegrams, etc. to certain High Officials. After February this year, due to foreign politics and the currently difficult international situation, they halted this activity, and today they no longer distinguish themselves in this regard.” HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Predmet: Derвента srez političke prilike – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Derventi od 16. listopada 1940., in: HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 13716/1940. Predmet: Pokret “Srbi na okup” otcjepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih sreza sa područja banovine Hrvatske – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Derventi od 14. ožujka 1940.

²⁷ HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Predmet: Pokret “Srbi na okup” otcjepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih srezova od područja banovine Hrvatske – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Mostaru od 16. ožujka 1940; HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 21422. Predmet: Odcjepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih srezova od banovine Hrvatske u vezi sa pokretom “Srbi na okup” – izvještaj odjela za unutrašnje poslove BV BH od 13. travnja 1940].

²⁸ The phrase “Serbian part of our nation” was clearly a reflection of the rhetoric used by the JNS and the Sokol Federation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia since the introduction of the January 6th Dictatorship, which advocated the ideology that the Yugoslav nation consisted of three tribes

from Serbia, Montenegro and the other Serbian lands.”²⁹ It would appear that Doboj was not a chance selection for this assembly, for not was it close to the districts of Brčko, Derвента and Gradačac, it was also in the territory of the Tuzla Eparchy.

At a meeting held in the premises of the Serbian Ecclesiastical Municipality in Brčko on January 25, 1940, attended by approximately 300 participants and representatives of the Derвента and Gradačac Districts, the “Action Committee” of Bosnian Posavina was established.³⁰ Out of the seven speakers who addressed this founding assembly, five were Orthodox priests.³¹

The first campaign of the consolidated “Action Committee” of Bosnian Posavina was to send eighty representatives from all three districts in Bosnian Posavina to Belgrade for an audience with national Prime Minister Dragiša Cvetković and Armed Forces Minister Milan Nedić.³² But this move, in which its organizers had invested high hopes, ended rather ignominiously. According to the report of the Gradačac District supervisor, “...after the unsuccessful assembly in Derвента, something of a lull in the activities of the action com-

²⁹ “Narodni sabor u Doboju,” *Srpski glas* (Belgrade), no. 13, Feb. 8, 1940, p. 8.

³⁰ The “Action Committee” of the Bosnian Posavina is this author’s working designation which will be used in the remainder of the text to describe the political activities of the proponents of anti-Banate and anti-Agreement activity under the slogan “Serbs Together” in this region. As opposed to the “Lika and Kordun Action Committee” and the “Banija Action Committee,” which were the only instances charged with conducting anti-Banate and anti-Agreement campaigns in the territory of today’s Banovina, Lika and Kordun, this action committee did not operate as a unified organization, but rather as a combination of the action committees in the Brčko, Derвента and Gradačac Districts, which held joint meetings from time to time at which they coordinated their actions in the Bosnian Posavina. See: HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 5008/1940.; Predmet: Kostić dr. Milorad održanje sastanka u srpskoj dvorani u Brčkom – izvještaj kotarskog načelstva u Brčkome od 26. siječnja 1940; HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 21422. Predmet: Odcjepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih srezova od banovine Hrvatske u vezi sa pokretom “Srbi na okup” – izvještaj odjela za unutrašnje poslove BV BH od 13. travnja 1940.

³¹ Rajko Sofrenović, Srećko Roki, Zdravko Borisavljević, Svetozar Popović and Simo Petrović. HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 5008/1940.; Predmet: Kostić dr. Milorad održanje sastanka u srpskoj dvorani u Brčkom – izvještaj kotarskog načelstva u Brčkome od 26. siječnja 1940.

³² Since it was not possible to ascertain the precise date of this delegation’s departure for Belgrade using the existing archival materials, to reconstruct the dating of this event I used the consolidated report of the Internal Affairs Department of the Banate of Croatia Government of April 13, 1940, in which it states that the delegation traveled after the ban of the gathering in Derвента on February 7, 1940, and the report of the Gradačac District supervisor of March 13, 1940, which mentions this delegation. See: HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 21422. Predmet: Odcjepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih srezova od banovine Hrvatske u vezi sa pokretom “Srbi na okup” – izvještaj odjela za unutrašnje poslove BV BH od 13. travnja 1940.; HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. No. 13639/1940. Predmet: Pokret “Srbi na okup” otcjepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih srezova sa područja banovine Hrvatske – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Gradačcu od 13. ožujka 1940.

mittees was observed, and especially notable in recent days was some kind of turmoil among the Serbs after their return from Belgrade, whence they allegedly dispatched 80 Serbs from the districts of Brčko, Gradačac and Derventa to the Prime Minister and the Armed Forces Minister, for they were not received there in the manner that they expected.”³³

Attempts to separate the municipality of Bosanski Kobaš from the Derventa District of the Banate of Croatia met with something of a similar fate. Even though the anti-Banate and anti-Agreement movement in the Derventa District under the slogan “Serbs Together” had been neutralized as a coordinated campaign which should have been conducted by that district’s action committee, in April 1940 some of the proponents of this political standpoint among the Serbs attempted to carry out the separation of the Bosanski Kobaš Municipality from the Derventa District and attach it to the Srbac Municipality in the Bosanska Gradiška District of the Vrbas Banate.³⁴ This move, according to the Derventa District supervisor, was prevented by the decisions of other municipal councilors.³⁵

The last news concerning the political activities of the action committees in Bosnian Posavina came during the municipal election campaign in the Banate of Croatia, when members of the “Gradačac District Action Committee” held a meeting (otherwise banned) in the premises of the Serbian Reading Room in Modriča on May 16, 1940. According to the report of the Gradačac District supervisor, the relevant authorities, when breaking up this meeting, did not manage to ascertain “...whether they discussed social themes or whether they also covered political issues. In so far as they did cover political issues, this could only pertain to the composition of the candidate slates for the Modriča Municipality, for after the meeting, the president of the reading room, Maksim Maksimović (chairman of the “Gradačac District Action Committee”) proposed his slate for the election of municipal councilors for the Modriča Municipality to the relevant court.”³⁶

³³ HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 13639/1940. Predmet: Pokret “Srbi na okup” otcjepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih srezova sa područja banovine Hrvatske – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Gradačcu od 13. ožujka 1940.

³⁴ According to the Cvetković-Maček Agreement, individual municipalities with Serbian majorities could legally separate from the Banate of Croatia and join a neighboring banate.

³⁵ HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Predmet: Derventa srez političke prilike – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Derventi od 16. listopada 1940. in: HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. No. 13716/1940. Predmet: Pokret “Srbi na okup” otcjepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih srezova sa područja banovine Hrvatske – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Derventi od 14. ožujka 1940.

³⁶ HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 29408. Predmet: Akcioni odbor održao sjednicu u selu Modriču, bez odobrenja vlasti - Izvještaj Savskog žandamerijskog puka u Zagrebu od 20. svibnja 1940.; HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 34930. Predmet: Akcioni odbor održao sjednicu u selu Modriču bez odobrenja vlasti - Izvještaj gradačačkog kotarskog načelstva od 20. lipnja 1940.

2. Political Activity of Supporters of the Agreement inside the Serbian Orthodox Church

As opposed to the activities of their colleagues in the eparchies of Srijemski Karlovci, Tuzla, Mostar and Zadar, some clergymen from the Upper Karlovac, Banja Luka and Pakrac eparchies were much more in favor of accepting the transformation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia from a unitary to more complex state, which was reflected in their political activity. They were most often sympathizers and even members of the Independent Democratic Party (SDS – *Samostalna demokratska stranka*), and they participated in the promotion of the new pro-Agreement policies among the Serbs in the Banate, to which the numerous reports of the district supervisors in Banovina, Kordun, Lika and western Slavonia testify, as do the newspaper articles in the Banate press which supported the policies advocated and implemented by the Peasant Democratic Coalition (SDK – *Seljačko-demokratska koalicija*). Not only did they participate in these activities, some of them even held very high posts in the Banate's official bodies, such as Orthodox priest Rajko Kokanović, who participated as a Croatian national delegate in the first session of the Croatian National Diet in Zagreb in August 29, 1939 after the establishment of the Banate of Croatia.³⁷ He also was elected to sit on the Ban's Committee on the Economy, and together with another Orthodox priest, Dušan Kecmanović from Banja Luka, he was a member of the Education Committee.³⁸ Prior to the establishment of the Banate of Croatia, the latter had been very active in promoting the policy of accord between the Croats and Serbs, which is clearly shown by the report of the Okučani District supervisor on his meeting held in Okučani.³⁹ Kecmanović once more spoke of the need for unity among Croatian and Serbian peasants and all Croats and Serbs on August 27, 1939 during a cultural event organized by a branch of the Seljačko kolo ('Village Circle') cultural association in the feudal burg of Zrin in Banovina.⁴⁰ That Dušan Kecmanović was among the most active Orthodox priests in furthering the political activities of the SDS, of which he was a member, was demonstrated by the fact that he established

³⁷ "Sjednica Hrvatskog narodnog zastupstva," *Nova riječ* (Zagreb), no. 142, Aug. 31, 1939, p. 5.

³⁸ "Izbor banskih odbora," *Nova riječ* (Zagreb), no. 142, Aug. 31, 1939, p. 6.

³⁹ A political rally of the SDS was held in Okučani at which Dušan Kecmanović pointed out to his gathered supporters "...that the Serbs and Croats have already lived together for a long time and never has their been a clash between them because they always saw that they were one and that they have to live together... That our unity has confused a few disreputable individuals from Belgrade and that this is all the fault of the state government in Belgrade... The Serbs and Croats are called upon to organize... The Serbs are assured that unity with the Croats poses no threat to Serbdom and Orthodox, rather Village Circle organizations need to be united and organized and the culture of the village needs to be elevated as much as possible." HDA. Grupa VI. Građanske stranke. Inv. br. 1388. Br. 20294. Predmet: Politički sastanak / dogovor / pristaša b.S.D.S. u Okučanima dana 23. travnja 1939.

⁴⁰ HDA. Grupa XXI. Politika situacija. Inv. br. 5539. Predmet: Kostajnica sresko načelnštvo, politička situacija za mesec august- Izvještaj kotarskog načelstva Kostajnice od 5. rujna 1939.

the SDS Action Committee for the Vrbas Banate in Banja Luka and that he was elected its first chairman.⁴¹ At this founding assembly, he announced that one of his first aims would be to establish SDS organizations. Kecmanović very quickly put these words into practice, for numerous articles in the periodical *Nova riječ* reported on SDS political conferences in the Bihać, Prnjavor and Dvor districts, were presided over, like the conference in Kukovi in the Prnjavor district, by Orthodox priests.⁴² His example was followed by other priests from the Upper Karlovac and Pakrac Eparchies. One of the most active in the promotion of the Agreement was the Orthodox priest Danilo Podunavac, who convened a series of meetings during August and September 1939 with the Serbs of the Banate as a representative of the SDS.⁴³

The reports of district supervisors from the territory of Lika on the visit of the highest SDS officials to Lika, headed by SDS chairman and minister, Srđan Budisavljević,⁴⁴ who were very heartily greeted by Orthodox priests, clearly show that besides anti-Banate and anti-Agreement Orthodox priests there were also those who sympathized with the SDS. Numerous reports on the ban's trip to Dalmatia via Lika testify to the same thing. On their journey, they were sincerely welcomed by Korenica Parson Rade Stanisavljević⁴⁵ and the Ortho-

⁴¹ "Kretanje SDS u Vrbaskoj Banovini," *Nova riječ* (Zagreb), no. 151, 2 Sept. 1939, p. 6.

⁴² "An entire series of wider conferences were held in the Vrbas Banate were held by the members of the SDS Banate Committee. Thus, in the Prnjavor District a conference was held by pastors Milan Milanović and Rajko Mileusnić. In Bosanski Petrovac, Đuro Smiljanić held several meetings. In Bosanski Novi, Dr. Branislavjević held meetings. In the Dvor District, wider conferences were held in Rujevac, Žirovac and Javoranj." "Kretanje SDS," *Nova riječ* (Zagreb), no. 157, Dec. 14, 1939, p. 6.; "In Bihać a wider conference of the SDK was held, which was attended by delegates of the SDS and HSS. The conference was opened by Stjepan Šimić, while speakers included Dr. Nikola Cvetojević and Dr. Niko Ljubičić. (...) In Kokovi, Prnjavor District, an SDS conference was held, at which the speakers were Dobrivoje Gorjanić, Rev. Milan Milovanović and Mitar Mitrović," "Sastanci i skupštine," *Nova riječ* (Zagreb), no. 158, July 21, 1939, p.11.

⁴³ At these rallies, he spoke "...on the SDK's struggle to create the agreement, the significance of the agreement to the life of the people in the Croatian Banate, and the strength of the current Royal Government given the internal pacification and the very difficult external situation..." and called on those present "...to refrain from assisting the JRZ and all other parties that seek the people's support." HDA. Grupa VI. Građanske stranke. Inv. br. 1389. Br. 42559. Predmet: Podunavac Danilo prota i predsjednik SDS-a iz Pakraca prijavljuje konferenciju S.D.S. u Bučju 3. rujna 1939. – Izvještaj kotarskog načelstva u Pakracu od 31. kolovoza 1939.; Grupa VI. Građanske stranke. Inv. br. 1389. Br. 43129. Predmet: Podunavac Danilo prota i predsjednik SDS-a iz Pakraca održao konferenciju u Bučju 3. rujna 1939. – Izvještaj kotarskog načelstva u Pakracu od 4. rujna 1939.; HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 5464. Predmet: Pakrac, srez, izvještaj o političkoj situaciji u mesecu augustu 1939. – Izvještaj kotarskog načelstva u Pakracu od 1. rujna 1939; HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 5464. Predmet: Tromjesečni izvještaj o radu opšte uprave – Izvještaj kotarskog načelstva u Pakracu od 2. listopada 1939.

⁴⁴ HDA. Grupa VI. Građanske stranke. Inv. br. 1402. Br. 58061. Predmet: Putovanje i politički sastanci Gospodina Ministra Dr. Srdjana Budisavljevića – Izvještaj kotarskog načelstva slunjskog od 3. prosinca 1939.

⁴⁵ "After conducting an inspection tour through Dalmatian Croatia from November 23 to 28, the ban of the Banate of Croatia, Dr. Šubašić, took a similar tour through Lika (...) He toured:

dox priest Petar Vujnović of Gospić, the regent bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Parish in Gospić. The latter came because of the political coup staged by the Krajina Society and the so-called Sava Group of the JNS under the leadership of Petar Zec.⁴⁶ According to the periodical *Seljačko kolo*, these associations sent a protest note to the Serbian Orthodox Parish in Gospić, "...against the local Regent Bishop Petar Vujnović, who always advocated a policy of accord between the Serbs and Croats, as conducted by the Independent Democratic Party. The immediate motive for this action was that Rev. Vujnović met Ban Šubašić upon his arrival in Gospić."⁴⁷

3. The Political Relationship between the Serbian Orthodox Church and other Serbian Parties and Organizations

The ties between the so-called Sava Group of the Yugoslav National Party (JNS – *Jugoslavenska nacionalna stranka*) and the Serbian Orthodox Church, especially the Tuzla Eparchy, was clearly demonstrated by the fact that out of the total of eighteen founders of the "Gradačac District Action Committee," eleven were members of the JNS. This action committee's members included, among others, the Orthodox priests Stevan Popović from Modriča, the chairman of the "Modriča Action Committee," Risto Mihić, chairman of the "Koprivne Action Committee," Srećko Roki, chairman of the "Gradačac Action Committee" and later member of the "Gradačac District Action Committee," and Rado Marković, chairman of the "Dugo Polje Action Committee."⁴⁸ The Orthodox clergy of the Bosnian Posavina were not the only opponents of pro-Agreement policy. The Orthodox priest Jovan Delić, the pastor of Vrhovine, "the seat of the Lika and Kordun Action Committee," was also a member of the so-called Sava Group of the JNS. It should also be noted that one of the founders of the Krajina Society in Zagreb on February 10, 1939 was the Orthodox priest Lazar Jakšić, who served in Zagreb.⁴⁹ The priest from Vrhovine was not

Josipdol, Modruš, Jezerane, Križopolje, Brinje, Otočac, Udbinu, Gospić, Medak, Lovinac, Gračac, Donji Lapac, Korenicu, Plitivička jezera, Rakovicu and Slunj. (...) In Korenica the ban was once again met with a great ceremony. Korenica, ceremonial illuminated, awaited its first people's ban. He was greeted by the municipal chief Nikola Cuić, and by the chairman of the SDS Mladen Lukić and Pastor Rade Stanisavljević." *Put bana po Lici*, *Nova riječ* (Zagreb), no. 157, Dec. 14, 1939, p. 7.

⁴⁶ Krešimir Regan, "Djelovanje Jugoslavenske nacionalne stranke u Banovini Hrvatskoj," *Koločasopis Matice hrvatske* 2007, no. 4: 108-125.

⁴⁷ "Gospićki 'velikosrbi' protiv salvske i bogojavlj. vodice," *Seljačko kolo* (Zagreb), no. 116, Jan. 18, 1940, p. 9, in: Čedomir Višnjić, *Srbi u Hrvatskoj/annotirana bibliografija* (Zagreb, 2000), p. 253.

⁴⁸ HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 21422. Predmet: Odcjepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih srezova od banovine Hrvatske u vezi sa pokretom "Srbi na okup" – izvještaj odjela za unutrašnje poslove BV BH od 13. travnja 1940.

⁴⁹ "Oko 'Krajine'/ Perjanice 'Krajine,'" *Nova riječ*, March 30, 1939, no. 120, p. 9; HDA. Grupa VI. Građanske stranke. Inv. br.: 2970. Predmet: "Krajina" udruženje za kulturno-prosvjetno unapređenje naroda.

alone in the territory of Lika in his political displeasure over the Banate of Croatia, as shown by the report of the Udbine District supervisor, in which he mentioned that in his district "...there is a certain number of Serb malcontents..." and that "...this dissatisfaction (...) is also felt among a few Orthodox priests, who have a Greater Serbian orientation..."⁵⁰

The situation was similar in the territory of eastern Slavonia, where there was also a high number of Orthodox priests participating in anti-Banate and anti-Agreement political activity. At a meeting of all representatives of the Vukovar ecclesiastical municipalities presided over by Orthodox priest Jovo Kozobradić, held in Vukovar on December 25, 1939, a resolution was passed which sought the removal of the Vukovar District from the Banate of Croatia, which Kozobradić personally delivered to the Serbian Patriarchate in Belgrade for review.⁵¹ In contrast to this group, a Vukovar sub-committee of the Serbian Culture Club was established, and the head of the Vukovar chapter of the Yugoslav Radical Union (JRZ) party was elected its chairman, and in this way the political activity of the Orthodox clergy in eastern Slavonia linked the Serbian Orthodox Church with the Belgrade-based Serbian Culture Club and part of Cvetković's JRZ.⁵² Additional evidence of the political ties between the governing JRZ and the Serbian Orthodox Church concerning anti-Banate and anti-Agreement policy can be found in the report of the Glina District government on the activities of the Krajina Society. Namely, on December 3, 1939, the Krajina Society's members held the founding assembly for the "Glina District Action Committee" on behalf of the JRZ municipal committee.⁵³ Among the four appointed leaders of this committee, two were Orthodox priests – the pastor from Bačuga, and Jovan Obrenović, the pastor in Veliki Šušnjar, together with Gligorije Živković. Further evidence of these ties between a part of the JRZ, the Krajina Society and the Serbian Orthodox Church in the territory of Ba-

⁵⁰ HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Predmet: Pokret "Srbi na okup" otcepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih sreza sa područja banovine Hrvatske – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Udbini od 14. ožujka 1940.

⁵¹ "Immediately after the signing of the act of August 26 of last year, the concerned Greater Serbian patriots removed the slogan 'Serbs Together.' In the sense of this slogan, one may see an almost constant upheaval among the Serbs, who together with certain political individuals were also supported by their church dignitaries." "Povodom parole 'Srbi na okup,'" *Srijemski Hrvat* (Vukovar), no. 49, Nov. 30, 1940, p. 1.; "Akcija srpsko-pravoslavne hijerarhije," *Srijemski Hrvat* (Vukovar), no. 40, Nov. 28, 1940, p. 2; "No, don't laugh! – much was said about this in the middle of Vinkovci on Sunday by Radovan Miljković, a professor of Orthodox theology in Srijemski Karlovci, during the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the local Orthodox church. People laughed, and how could they not?" "O 'srpskom karakteru' Vinkovaca u prošlosti," *Srijemski Hrvat* (Vukovar), Nov. 21, 1940, no. 39, p. 2.

⁵² Krešimir Regan, "Djelovanje Jugoslavenske radikalne zajednice u doba Banovine Hrvatske (1939-1941)," *Studia lexicographica* 1/2007, no. 1 (1): 217-254.

⁵³ HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. No. 14123. Predmet: Pokret "Srbi na okup" otcepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih sreza sa područja banovine Hrvatske – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Glini od 16. ožujka 1940.

novina were also demonstrated by the meeting of local Serbs on December 10, 1939 referred to as the “Conference of Serbs from the districts of Vrginmost-Vojnić, Petrinja, Glina and Kostajnica,”⁵⁴ which was convened by the Orthodox priest Gligorje Živković, as the chairman of the steering committee.⁵⁵ The Glina and Vrginmost Districts were not the only ones in the territory of Banovina and Kordun in which the anti-Banate and anti-Agreement mood could be observed among the Orthodox clergy, for there was also the example of the Petrinja District, in which, among the four leaders of this movement known to the Banate authorities in the district, two were Orthodox priests.⁵⁶

Anti-Banate and anti-Agreement campaigns under the “Serbs Together” slogan were not unheard of in the coastal sections of the Banate of Croatia, either. This can be seen in the report of the Sinj District supervisor dated March 20, 1940, in which he wrote that “... the movement under the slogan ‘Serbs Together’ had (...) begun to spread among the Serbs of this district, of which there are approximately 50% in the Vrlika Municipality...” and that the leaders of this political activity were “...the Serbian priests Petar Stojisavljević from Otišići and Vladimir Cerić from Cetina.”⁵⁷ This was further reflected in an incident which occurred during the celebration of the Feast of St. Vitus (Vidovdan) next to the Lazarica Church in Kosovo, near Knin, in 1939, at which, according to *Srpski glas*, representatives of the Serbs from the Knin, Kistanje, Skradin, Obrovac, Benkovac and Zemunik Municipalities sought, in their “St. Vitus’ Day Declaration of Dalmatian Serbs,” the removal of their municipalities from the Coastal Banate and their merger into the Vrbas Banate.⁵⁸ The situation was similar in neighboring Herzegovina, where, according to the report

⁵⁴ HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Predmet: Pokret “Srbi na okup” otcijepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih sreza sa područja banovine Hrvatske – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Vrginmostu od 13. ožujka 1940.

⁵⁵ HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 5728. No. 58910/1939. Predmet: Politička situacija u srezu glinskom. Izvještaj kotarskog načelstva u Glini od 9. prosinca 1939.

⁵⁶ Nino Navala, pastor from Glina, and Dušan Klipan, pastor from Staro selo. HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 21422. Predmet: Ocjepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih srezova od banovine Hrvatske u vezi sa pokretom “Srbi na okup” – izvještaj odjela za unutrašnje poslove BV BH od 13. travnja 1940.

⁵⁷ HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 15025. Predmet: Pokret “Srbi na okup” otcijepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih sreza sa područja banovine Hrvatske – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Sinju od 20. ožujka 1940.

⁵⁸ “As is known, the Serbs of Northern Dalmatia, precisely those who belong to the municipalities of Knin, Vrlika, Kistanje, Skradin, Obrovac, Benkovac and Zemunik, because over 90% of these municipalities are Orthodox Serbs, are demanding to be separated from the Banate of Croatia and attached to the Vrbas Banate, since there are conditions for this, since there is a continuity of Serbian national territory, and since it is the desire of all Serbs of this northern-Dalmatian Krajina. The Serbian people of this region have expressed this desire spontaneously on many occasions, and especially during last year’s St. Vitus Day ceremonies in Dalmatian Kosovo.” “Vidovdanska deklaracija dalmatinskih Srba,” *Srpski glas* (Belgrade), no. 14, Feb. 15, 1940, p. 10.

of the Mostar District supervisor, the anti-Banate campaign led by the Sokol Chapter in Mostar and the followers of Serbian fascist leader Dimitrije Ljotić was joined, among others, by the entire Orthodox clergy.⁵⁹

By way of contrast to the political activities of the anti-Banate and anti-Agreement members of the Orthodox clergy, there was also a group of Orthodox priests in the Banate of Croatia among the Banovina Serbs who, as members or sympathizers of the SDS, lobbied among the Banate's Serbs for support of pro-Agreement policy and cooperation between the Serbs and Croats in its development, which is why some of them, like the aforementioned case of the Orthodox priest Petar Vujnović, the regent bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Parish in Gospić, came under fire from the members and sympathizers of the Krajinina Society under the leadership of Petar Zec.⁶⁰

4. Municipal Elections and the Serbian Orthodox Church

I have already mentioned that the members and sympathizers of the Krajinina Society and the Serbian Culture Club, through their so-called Serbian independent slates, achieved relatively poor results in elections given their high expectations. Almost identically poor electoral results were experienced by the so-called Serbian independent slates in the territory of the three districts in Bosnian Posavina, despite the fact that the anti-Banate and anti-Agreement policy among the Banate's Serbs of this region was largely conducted by Serbian Orthodox priests. All together, the "Action Committee" of the Bosnian Posavina won in only five of the thirty-two municipalities of this region.⁶¹ So even though the Serbian press rationalized these election results in advance by stating that a regrouping of municipalities had occurred in these three districts immediately prior to the municipal elections, which is why these elec-

⁵⁹ HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Predmet: Pokret "Srbi na okup" otcijepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih srezova od područja banovine Hrvatske – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Mostaru od 16. ožujka 1940.

⁶⁰ "Gospićki 'velikosrbi' protiv salvske i bogojavl. vodice," *Seljačko kolo* (Zagreb), no. 116, Jan. 18, 1940, p. 9, in: Čedomir Višnjić, *Srbi u Hrvatskoj*, p. 253.

⁶¹ Out of the ten municipalities of the Gradačac District, the so-called Serbian independent slates won only in the Vranjak Municipality, while out of the one city and thirteen municipalities of the Derventa District, the so-called Serbian independent slates won only in the municipalities of Bosanski Kobaš and Podnovlje. Out of the nine municipalities of the Brčko District, the so-called Serbian independent slates won only in the Obodovac Municipality, while in the Brezovo Polje Municipality it won in a coalition with the Democratic Party and the People's Radical Party of Aco Stanojević. "Rezultati naknadnih općinskih izbora u Hrvatskoj," *Hrvatski dnevnik* (Zagreb), May 28, 1940, p. 5; "Rezultati općinskih izbora od nedjelje," *Hrvatski dnevnik* (Zagreb), June 4, 1940, p. 1; "Na općinskim izborima u brčanskom kotaru stranke su ostvarile sljedeći uspjeh," *Hrvatski dnevnik* (Zagreb), May 28, 1940, p. 5; Mile Konjević, "Općinski izbori u Banovini Hrvatskoj 19. maja 1940. godine," *Prilozi instituta za istoriju Sarajevo* 9/1973, no. 9/1: 271-300.

tions were held several days later than in the other municipalities of the Banate of Croatia (May 26 and June 2 1940), the fact remained that the so-called Serbian independent slates of the action committees of the Derventa, Brčko and Gradačac Districts, compiled under the leadership of a part of the Serbian Orthodox clergy of this region, experienced an electoral fiasco. As was the case in the preceding districts, in the Mostar District as well the so-called Serbian independent slates, which were endorsed by all Serbian ecclesiastical municipalities and the entire Orthodox clergy of this district, also met with failure in the municipal elections, for out of the nine municipalities in that district, they did not manage to win in even one.⁶²

The reason for the defeat of these proponents of anti-Banate and anti-Agreement policy under the slogan "Serbs Together" in the territory of the Derventa, Brčko and Gradačac Districts should be sought, among other things, in the fact that the Serbs saw the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina as Islami-cized Serbs,⁶³ and they counted on their votes in the municipal elections.⁶⁴ This political gamble was not without grounds, for there was among the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims during that period a current which struggled for a unitary state and political unity between the Serbs and Bosnian-Herzegovini-

⁶² "Rezultati općinskih izbora u Hrvatskoj," *Hrvatski dnevnik*, May 22, 1940, p. 5.

⁶³ This is vividly illustrated by a speech delivered by the Orthodox priest Zdravko Borisavljević at a rally in Brčko on January 26, 1940, in which he said there 95,000 Serbs in the three districts of Bosnian Posavina. Since, according to the official censuses of 1931 and an estimate from 1939, there is an excess of 20,000 Serbs here, there can be no doubt that he included a portion of the Bosnian Muslims in this figure. Besides Borisavljević, Dr. Milorad Kostić also spoke during this rally, at which he declared that "...according to the current agreement, Serbian districts have been included in the Banate of Croatia which do not belong there, among them the Brčko, Gradačac and Derventa Districts, in which besides Serbs there are 55,000 Muslims, whom the Serbs consider Serbs." After his speech, the rally was addressed by Rev. Rajko Sofrenović, who claimed that the Croats "...are persecuting Croat bureaucrats who are Yugoslav oriented, and Muslims are feel themselves Serbs, and they call this equality." HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 5008/1940; Predmet: Kostić dr. Milorad održanje sastanka u srpskoj dvorani u Brčkom – izvještaj kotarskog načelstva u Brčkome od 26. siječnja 1940; "In Derventa and Bosanski Brod, a great majority of the Muslims cooperate with the Croats, and during the last elections they jointly appeared on the HSS slate. Only in Bosanski Kobaš did a part of the Muslims go together with the Serbs and take the majority." HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Predmet: Derventa srez političke prilike – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Derventi od 16. listopada 1940, in: HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 13716/1940. Predmet: Pokret "Srbi na okup" otcepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih sreza sa područja banovine Hrvatske – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Derventi od 14. ožujka 1940.

⁶⁴ "The electoral contest in Derventa itself was particularly interesting, where Muslim autonomists, helped by the Serbs, ran their own slate against that of the HSS. Even though the ratio between Muslims, Catholics and Serbs is 8:4:2, the HSS slate received twice as many votes than the autonomists together with the Serbs." "Značajni rezultati općinskih izbora u derventskom kotaru," *Hrvatski dnevnik* (Zagreb), June 5, 1940, p. 5.

an Muslims.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, the results of the municipal elections in all districts of Bosnia-Herzegovina showed that the Muslims largely voted for the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS – *Hrvatska seljačka stranka*).⁶⁶

It was not only the opponents of the Agreement and the Banate of Croatia among the Serbian Orthodox clergy who lost in the municipal elections, as shown by the example of their colleague, the Orthodox priest Danilo Podunavac, who held numerous rallies on behalf of the SDS throughout the Okučani and Pakrac Districts and sought support for the Agreement among the Banate's Serbs. As a reward for his efforts, he had to be content with winning only one of the three municipalities in this district in the municipal elections of May 18, 1940.⁶⁷ However, he had greater electoral success in the neighboring Pakrac District, where the so-called Serbian non-partisan slate won only a single municipality among the ten in that district, while his SDK slates won in all of the remaining municipalities.⁶⁸

Concluding considerations

Like the Serbian parties operating in the territory of the Banate of Croatia, the clergy of the Serbian Orthodox Church at the end of the 1930s and onset of the 1940s was divided among proponents and opponents of the internal political reform of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The strongest anti-Banate and anti-Agreement activities could be found among the Orthodox priests in the Bosnian Posavina, who were not only involved in the promotion of the policy

⁶⁵ "Former national delegate Šukrija Kurtović said in *Gajretu* ? that the agreement is invalid, for Bosnia-Herzegovina should be attached to Serbia and that the Muslims have nothing to do with the Croats." "Hrvati katolici i muslimani," *Hrvatski dnevnik* (Zagreb), Jan. 24, 1940, p. 5; "Akcija Behmenove frakcije," *Hrvatski dnevnik* (Zagreb), Oct. 5, 1940, p. 5; "Tko je i zašto je za dra Behmena," *Hrvatski dnevnik* (Zagreb), Oct. 9, 1940, p. 5; "Još o muslimanima beogradske orijentacije," *Hrvatski dnevnik* (Zagreb), Oct. 27, 1940, p. 5.

⁶⁶ According to the report of the Derventa District supervisor, the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims of this district "...chose the lesser of two evils, so for now they rather go with the Croats rather than the Serbs, so even if there is a partition of Bosnia, they would still rather be with the Croats than the Serbs." HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Predmet: Derventa srez političke prilike – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Derventi od 16. listopada 1940., in: HDA. Grupa XXI. Politička situacija. Inv. br. 6129. Srbi na okup. Br. 13716/1940. Predmet: Pokret "Srbi na okup" otepljenje i odvajanje pojedinih srezu sa područja banovine Hrvatske – izvještaj Sreskog načelstva u Derventi od 14. ožujka 1940.; "Zajednički nastup katolika i muslimana Hrvata," *Hrvatski dnevnik*, May 16, 1940, p. 5.

⁶⁷ "In the Okučani District, the Serbian independent slates won in two of three municipalities, in Medari and Okučani. Our slate headed by Branko Knežević won in Medari, receiving 395 votes, or 20 seats. The other slate won 131 votes and 4 seats. This slate was also a non-partisan Serbian slate, headed by Joco Zubović. (...) In the Okučani Municipality, the non-partisan Serbian slate won, headed by Pero Dragoslavljević, winning 25 seats in contrast to the 11 seats won by the SDK," "Naši dopisi," *Nova srpska riječ* (Zagreb), no. 11, June 20, 1940, p. 4.

⁶⁸ "Rezultati općinskih izbora u Hrvatskoj," *Hrvatski dnevnik* (Zagreb), May 22, 1940, p. 6.

conducted under the slogan "Serbs Together," for they also encouraged the establishment of the action committees in the Brčko, Derventa and Gradačac Districts as core organizations in the defense of Serbdom. Moreover, a high number of Orthodox priests from the territory of the Bosnian Posavina had the last word in the formation of their political activities. They, like the Krajina Society in western Slavonia, Banovina, Kordun, Lika and northern Dalmatia, the Serbian Culture Club in eastern Slavonia and the Sokol Chapter in Mostar in Herzegovina, undertook identical political action, such as the collection of signatures on a petition for the separation of Bosnian Posavina from the Banate of Croatia, the establishment of crisis headquarters and the adoption of numerous resolutions calling for such secession. The Tuzla Eparchy organized the "National Assembly" of all Serbian national associations in Doboj on December 31, 1939, which was attended by all other Serbian proponents of anti-Banate and anti-Agreement policies from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Also included were representatives of the discontented Serbs of the Mostar District, who were also greatly encouraged to join the anti-Banate movement by the Orthodox clergy together with the Mostar Sokol Chapter. Nevertheless, the so-called independent Serbian slates in the municipal elections in the Banate of Croatia in mid-1940 experienced a genuine disaster. Because of this, their political activity – which was not the case in the remaining parts of the Banate of Croatia – gradually declined in the latter half of 1940, and completely disappeared by the beginning of 1941.

At the same time, a group of Orthodox priests was active in central Croatia, who occupied high posts in the committees of the Croatian National Diet, or Parliament, and who were actively involved in the promotion of the Agreement in western Slavonia, Banovina and even in the Vrbas Banate, and also in the establishment of municipal, district and banate (in the Vrbas Banate) chapters of the SDS. As opposed to their colleagues in the Bosnian Posavina, these priests in the territory of the two "Serbian" districts of western Slavonia had only partially electoral success, while in Banovina they made it possible for the SDS, either independently or in a coalition with the HSS, to win a majority in this part of the Banate of Croatia.

Even though numerous clergymen of the Serbian Orthodox Church were actively involved in the formation of the movement under the slogan "Serbs Together" (there is data on several dozen Orthodox priests from the Banate of Croatia and neighboring banates who propagated the Greater Serbian state idea among the Serbs of the Banate and Yugoslavia in general, and played a major role in the popularization of this idea), it would be unfair and historically inaccurate to conclude, despite the almost generally accepted view among the Croatian public and a portion of contemporary Croatian historiography, that this Church was the primary proponent of the Greater Serbian idea. An analysis of numerous historical sources on the political activity of the clergy of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the territory of the Bosnian Posavina clearly

confirmed that the Church, like all of the Serbian political parties participating in the formulation of Serbian policies in the Banate of Croatia, was also politically divided into supporters of the internal state reform initiated by the establishment of the Banate of Croatia and supporters of the creation of a Greater Serbia. The latter were the most politically active in the Bosnian Posavina, Herzegovina and the inland section of northern Dalmatia.

Die Serbische Orthodoxe Kirche und die Unabhängigkeit Kroatiens – Aktivität zur Zeit der Banschaft Kroatien

Zusammenfassung

Priesterschaft der Serbischen Orthodoxen Kirche – der einflussreichsten Institution unter Serben – spaltete sich wegen politischer Lösung der kroatischen Frage, welche die Gründung der Banschaft Kroatien am 26. August 1939 einschloss. Auf der einen Seite waren diejenigen, die die Lösung der kroatischen Frage akzeptierten, wie sie in den Verhandlungen und im zwischen Dragiša Cvetković und Vladko Maček unterschriebenen Vertrag fixiert war und die in Gründung der Banschaft Kroatien endete. Auf der anderen Seite aber waren die Opponenten dieser Politik der Verhandlungen mit Kroaten, deren Aktivitäten ihre Wurzeln in großserbischer Ideologie hatten.