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**Anton Korošec and the “Croatian Question”
in Yugoslavia**

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In the article are presented views of Anton Korošec on the “Croatian Question” in the interwar Yugoslavia. Despite relatively tense relations with most Croatian politicians, Korošec knew that certain concessions had to be made to the Croats in terms of the state administration reform. Yet, he made his support conditional on the simultaneous fulfilment of Slovene political demands. The paper is based mostly on the analysis of the press and publications of the Slovene People’s Party.

Key words: Anton Korošec, Stjepan Radić, Vladko Maček, Yugoslavia, Croatian Question

Introduction

Anton Korošec, a long standing leader of the Slovene People’s Party, was undoubtedly one of the founding fathers of Yugoslavia.¹ As the chairman of a group of deputies composing the Yugoslav Club in the Vienna Parliament and the president of the National Council of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (the SHS-National Council) in Zagreb, he played a pivotal role in the decisions South Slav politicians made during the disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy and the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes

¹ The article was written in the framework of the programme group P6–1038(A), titled “The past of North Eastern Slovenia between the Central Europe and the European Southeast”.

(the SHS-Kingdom).² Korošec and the generation of politicians who assumed responsibility for the definitive break from the Habsburg past in 1918, saw Yugoslavia as the best possible solution for the preservation of the Slovene nation and its further development.

Korošec changed his attitude towards Yugoslav integralism a number of times. He clearly supported it when the Yugoslav state was formed in 1918, and in 1929, when the dictatorial rule of King Alexander was established. In the 1920s, however, he put himself at the helm of Slovene autonomists and resumed this stance at the beginning of 1930s, when he assessed that the royal dictatorship had failed to achieve its goal. Serving as Minister of the Interior in the government of Milan Stojadinović between 1935 and 1938, Korošec resorted once again to the time-tested formula of promulgating "national and state unity", in which the Slovenes formally were merely one of the "three tribes of a single nation". On the hundredth anniversary of the creation of Yugoslavia, it thus seems pertinent to cast more light on Korošec's views about the main political challenges of his times. One of them was undoubtedly the "Croatian Question".³ Until his death, Korošec was unable to shake off the accusations of committing "treason" against the Croats, which became very much vivid in the Croatian historical consciousness after the assassination of Stjepan Radić and Korošec's appointment as the Yugoslav Prime Minister. Therefore, the following contribution deals especially with Korošec's attitude towards the "Croatian Question" in interwar Yugoslavia.

Towards the new state

Anton Korošec entered the final phase of the disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy as the president of the united club of all Southern Slav deputies in the Vienna Parliament. In their name, he read on 30 May 1917 the famous *May Declaration* expressing the demand that, on the basis of national principles and Croatian state law, all territories inhabited by the

² Although the designation "founding father" is informal one and still lacks a precise historiographical definition, there is no doubt that Korošec earned it as the president of the Yugoslav Club and the National Council in Zagreb, as well as for all his merits in the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. There is not enough room to provide a detailed argument here. However, based on the decisive influence of their work on the establishment and the initial years of royal Yugoslavia, apart from Korošec, one could name the following six statesmen: Regent Alexander Karadorđević; the long-standing Prime Minister of Serbia and Yugoslavia Nikola Pašić; the first President of the Ministerial Council of the SHS-Kingdom Stojan Protić; the Vice-President of the National Council in Zagreb and the first Interior Minister of Yugoslavia Svetozar Pribičević; the President of the Yugoslav Committee and the first Foreign Minister of Yugoslavia Ante Trumbić; as well as the leader of the Yugoslav Muslim Organization Mehmed Spaho.

³ The following article is based mainly on the Slovene historical sources and literature. For a more detailed evaluation of the "Croatian Question" in the interwar Yugoslavia compare Ivo BANAC, *Nacionalno pitanje u Jugoslaviji. Porijeklo, povijest, politika*, Zagreb: Globus, 1988; Hrvoje MATKOVIĆ, *Povijest Jugoslavije (1918–1991). Hrvatski pogled*, Zagreb: Naklada Pavičić, 1998, 191–214; Dejan DJOKIĆ, *Elusive Compromise. A History of Interwar Yugoslavia*, London: Hurst and Company, 2007; Sabrina RAMET, *Die drei Jugoslawien. Eine Geschichte der Staatsbildungen und ihrer Probleme*, München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2011, 94–109, 148–158; Dragan BAKIĆ, "Milan Stojadinović, the Croat Question and the International Position of Yugoslavia, 1935–1938", *Acta Histriae* 1/2018, 207–228.

Slovenes, Croats and Serbs should be united into an independent state unit under the Habsburg crown.⁴ The *May Declaration* corresponded in many ways with the pre-War "trialistic" plans of the Slovene and Croatian politicians. The important difference, however, was that the pre-War programmes provided for a long-term answer, while the *May Declaration* postulated an immediate solution.⁵

The declaration movement rapidly spread throughout the southern Slav provinces of the Habsburg Monarchy and gained support by some of the most influential Slovene and Croatian politicians.⁶ By late summer 1917, Korošec and his political allies declared the *May Declaration* as the "minimum" and began emphasising the principle of self-determination of nations. At the beginning of October 1918, the southern Slav politicians established the National Council of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs and appointed none other than Korošec as its President. The *Imperial Manifesto* of 16 October came too late and offered too little. Emperor Karl of Habsburg solemnly declared that Austria should, "in respect of the will of its nations", become "a federal state" in which each nation would constitute its own "national community" in its own "area of settlement". That was most certainly a step towards the federalisation of the Monarchy on the basis of a national principle. Nevertheless, the *Imperial Manifesto* had at least one major flaw, the most obvious being the stipulation that "the integrity of the lands of the Crown of St. Stephen should in no way be disturbed".⁷ This would entail the preservation of the Austro-Hungarian dualist state organisation, so abhorred by the Slav politicians. Korošec found such a solution unacceptable.⁸

The Habsburg crown was no longer of any interest to the most Slovene and Croatian politicians. In the capacity of President of the SHS-National Council, Korošec set out from Vienna to Geneva to attend a conference with the Serbian Prime Minister Nikola Pašić and the President of the emigrant Yugoslav Committee Ante Trumbić.⁹ As Korošec himself later recounted, the last Austrian Imperial Prime Minister Heinrich Lammasch had implored him even on the eve of his departure to Switzerland to comply with the Emperor's demand and enter the coalition cabinet, which would see to the reorganisation of the state into a confederation. But Korošec remained firm in his resolve.¹⁰

⁴ Andrej RAHTEN, *Od Majniške deklaracije do habsburške detronizacije. Slovenska politika v času zadnjega habsburškega vladarja Karla*, Celje: Celjska Mohorjeva, 2016, 282.

⁵ Vasilij MELIK, "Die Reformpläne Österreich-Ungarns und die Slowenen", in *Mitteleuropa-Konzeptionen in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, (ed.) Richard G. PLASCHKA et al., Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1995, 77–80.

⁶ Vlasta STAVBAR, *Majniška deklaracija in deklaracijsko gibanje*, Maribor: Založba Pivec, 2017, 79–88.

⁷ For a more detailed discussion on the manifesto see Helmut RUMPLER, *Das Völkermanifest Kaiser Karls vom 16. Oktober 1918. Letzter Versuch zur Rettung der Habsburgermonarchie*, Munich: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 1966.

⁸ *Grada o stvaranju jugoslovenske države (1. 1.–20. 12. 1918)*, (ed.) Dragoslav JANKOVIĆ-Bogdan KRIZMAN, vol. 1–2, Belgrade: Institut društvenih nauka, 1964, here vol. 2, 373–374.

⁹ Feliks J. BISTER, "Delovanje dr. Antona Korošca od majniške deklaracije do 1. 12. 1918", *Zgodovinski časopis* 1/1990, 73–90, here 87.

¹⁰ RAHTEN, *Od Majniške deklaracije do habsburške detronizacije*, 182–183.

By the end of October 1918, the Slovene political leaders removed the portraits of the Emperor Karl from their apartments. The more far-sighted, however, had already replaced them – with the portraits of King Peter I and the heir to the throne Alexander Karađorđević. The reasons for so doing were more than obvious. The Slovenes could only helplessly observe while Italy was grabbing Slovene territory piece by piece, in line with the infamous *London Pact* concluded with the Entente Powers in April 1915. To make the situation even worse, Carinthia witnessed a new increase in confidence among German nationalists after a short period of decline. Under those circumstances the Kingdom of Serbia was, in fact, the only state to offer military support for the realisation of Slovene territorial claims. Therefore, representatives of the Slovene political elite probably had no other alternative but to lean on the Serbian state of the Karađorđević dynasty. However, the irrefutable fact remains that they knew absolutely nothing about their ally.¹¹

When Korošec entered the negotiation arena in Geneva, he simply could not believe Trumbić, who warned him of Pašić's "Balkan methods".¹² When it finally became clear to him it was too late. Serbian diplomats welcomed Korošec in Switzerland with open arms, patting him on the back for the great service he had done in the Vienna Parliament for the "Yugoslav cause". And they were even more pleased to hear him say that he was in favour of a monarchy and "has embraced the idea of a unified state".¹³ Allegedly, the President of the SHS-National Council arrived at the Geneva Conference, which started on 6 November 1918, as "an adamant centralist".¹⁴ Nevertheless, he gradually moved closer to the view of Trumbić's Yugoslav Committee advocating a federative form of the state. On 9 November Korošec and Trumbić eventually succeeded in persuading Pašić into signing the *Geneva Agreement*. Its provisions stipulated the establishment of a state whose organisation would in many ways correspond to the dualist system of Austria-Hungary. They, furthermore, envisaged the formation of a joint government in which half of all ministers would be appointed by the Serbian government and swear allegiance to the Serbian King Peter Karađorđević, whereas the other half would be delegated by the SHS-National Council and swear allegiance in the presence of Korošec.¹⁵ However, the signed agreement remained a dead letter. Stojan Protić, Pašić's deputy, resigned in protest as early as 11 November 1918. His resignation was followed by the resignation of the entire Serbian government – and with it the annulment of the agreement with the representatives of the SHS-National

11 France DOLINAR, *Odsotnost slovenske državne misli v prevratu 1918*, Buenos Aires: Založba SIJ, 1971.

12 Silvo KRANJEC, "Koroščevo predavanje o postanku Jugoslavije", *Zgodovinski časopis* 16/1962, 218–229, here 226.

13 Momčilo ZEČEVIĆ, *Slovenska ljudska stranka in jugoslovansko zedinjenje 1917–1921. Od majniške deklaracije do vidovdanske ustave*, Maribor: Obzorja, 1977, 142–143.

14 Quoted from an entry in Izidor Cankar's notebook, Archives of the Republic of Slovenia, *Personal Collection of Izidor Cankar*, fascicle 1.

15 ZEČEVIĆ, *Slovenska ljudska stranka*, 152.

Council and the Yugoslav Committee.¹⁶ But the unpleasant surprises did not end there.

The Vice-President of the SHS-National Council Svetozar Pribičević made excellent use of Korošec's absence in Zagreb to follow his plans and achieve a speedy unification with Serbia. After a rather long hesitation of his Croat-Serbian coalition, Pribičević quickly took over the reins, pressing for the earliest possible unification with Belgrade.¹⁷ Korošec's arrival from abroad was much delayed, so he was only able to return to Ljubljana one day after the fateful *First of December Proclamation* of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Nevertheless, in a statement to one Croatian newspaper he said that he approved of the address of the SHS-National Council and that the Regent's statement "satisfied him /.../ completely". Korošec and his adherents were left with no other alternative but to believe Alexander's guarantees. The latter received Korošec in audience on 6 December 1918. Korošec was rewarded for his cooperativeness with the position of Vice-President in the first joint Ministerial Council of the SHS-Kingdom, which was appointed on 20 December 1918.¹⁸

The first years in the SHS-Kingdom already held many disappointments for the Slovene politicians, even though the All-Slovene People's Party, led by Korošec, initially appeared to adapt well to the new situation. Korošec remained an influential figure in politics and managed to establish in the Belgrade National Assembly a new version of Yugoslav Club.¹⁹ After his first visit to Belgrade, the Bishop of Ljubljana, Anton Bonaventura Jeglič was extremely pleased with the role which Korošec's parliamentary club had in state politics: "Our Yugoslav Club headed by Korošec's deputies, has a tremendous reputation. Korošec is the most popular man in Serbia; they are particularly delighted to see him organise food supplies effectively, and punish and remove many swindlers."²⁰

In the new state, Korošec pragmatically tied the fate of his All-Slovene People's Party to agreements with the leader of the Serbian Radicals, Nikola Pašić, and the leader of the Democrats, Ljuba Davidović. He most likely assumed that at least one of them would remain in power throughout the reign of the Serbian Dynasty, irrespective of the government's composition. But of course it was not only the leadership of the *All-Slovene* People's Party, which was due to the diplomatic loss of the Littoral and Carinthia soon renamed the *Slovene* People's Party, that succumbed to "Serbian charm". Slovene liberals, having united in the Yugoslav Democratic Party just before the disintegration

16 Olga POPOVIĆ, *Stojan Protić i ustavno rešenje nacionalnog pitanja u Kraljevini SHS*, Belgrade: Savremena administracija, 1988, 22–23.

17 Hrvoje MATKOVIĆ, *Svetozar Pribičević. Ideolog – stranački vođa – emigrant*, Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, 55–61.

18 ZEČEVIĆ, *Slovenska ljudska stranka*, 182–200.

19 Andrej RAHTEN, *Slovenska ljudska stranka v beograjski skupščini. Jugoslovanski klub v parlamentarnem življenju Kraljevine SHS 1919–1929*, Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2002.

20 ZEČEVIĆ, *Slovenska ljudska stranka*, 273.

of Austria-Hungary, linked up with Pribičević. Nevertheless, the formula envisaging a single "triune nation" at the time also engaged the leaders of the Slovene People's Party. Such thinking, among others, was reflected in the action that Korošec took during the session of the interim national representative body on the verification of mandates, when he interrupted the reading of the Slovene version of the report made by the verification section on 12 March 1919, saying: "that all Slovenes understood the Serbo-Croatian language and proposed that the reading be dispensed with."²¹ In brief, the leaders of the two most powerful Slovene parties actually competed in who would exhibit a greater degree of commitment to the "triune nation".

However, not all members of the Slovene People's Party greeted Korošec's consorting with the Belgrade behind-the-scene-circles of čaršija with enthusiasm. A priest Matija Škerbec later accused his chairman of ruining the political concept of solidarity with the Croatian Rightists and the peasant movement of Stjepan Radić, which the Slovene Catholic patriots had built prior to the Great War.²² And rightfully so, because without the alliance with Radić's Croatian Republican Peasant Party Korošec could not rely on a broad Croatian support for his policies. It should be borne in mind that Radić won most of the Croatian population to his side with his charisma and radical slogans directed against the centralist policy of Yugoslav unitarists and Greater Serbian circles. Even though he had been considered a friend of the Slovene Catholic patriots in the Habsburg Monarchy, the formation of the new state brought about a reversal of the relations between the former allies.

Rivals and foes: Korošec and Radić

The Slovene and Croatian transition from the Austro-Hungarian to Yugoslav state framework entailed the breakdown of a majority of traditional coalitions having been built between Slovene and Croatian political parties during the Austro-Hungarian period.²³ Alliances that seemed utterly impossible during the days of the Habsburg reign became a constant in the political life of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. And vice versa: former allies were now set against each other as adversaries and enemies.

On 16 January 1919, a delegation of Radić's party came to Ljubljana to reach an agreement with Korošec's party on future cooperation, but returned to Zagreb empty-handed, after the Slovenes assured them "that they adamantly insisted on the proclaimed national unity and unification, and considered the

current situation as a fully implemented self-determination of our nation".²⁴ The abortive meeting was followed by Radić's caustic attacks on Korošec and his "clericals". The Croatian tribune could soon read the response to his conduct in the leading newspaper *Slovenec*, charging him with the responsibility for the "Croatian chaos". The old sympathies no longer sufficed for the Slovene People's Party to support Radić's struggle against the Greater Serbian circles, for his fear of Greater Serbia was considered "downright naïve". Korošec's party furthermore condemned Radić's pro-republican orientation, even though there were a considerable number of republicans within its own ranks. According to the daily *Slovenec*, this was a "tragedy of a talented person, but also a tragedy of a party condemned to unimportance and subjection to mockery".²⁵

But Korošec was not the only culprit for the deteriorating relations between the Slovene People's Party and Radić's movement. The fact is that Radić's anti-clerical statements and calls for the establishment of a republic had greatly curtailed the possibilities for cooperation with Korošec, who was a priest and a monarchist. The Croatian tribune, furthermore, hardly contributed to the warming of relations by tenacious agitating in Prekmurje.²⁶ At the meeting of his followers in Ljubljana on 23 November 1924, Korošec accused Radić of attempting to usurp Prekmurje, "place it in the Croatian national and cultural circle" and then ultimately "harness the Slovenes to the Croatian carriage". Korošec could not hide his exasperation over Radić's manoeuvres, which he described as "ugly imperialism". He made it perfectly clear to the Croatian tribune as to where the region of Prekmurje belonged: "Prekmurje was Slovene-minded in the past as it continues to be Slovene-minded today and it shall never forsake the Slovene community. And all the Slovenes will stand as a watchful guard so that no one can rob us of our beautiful Prekmurje."²⁷

But even though Korošec was willing to somehow overlook the attacks of the Croatian leader, who would, moreover, very often radically change his opinions, he disposed of very limited opportunities to cooperate with him. As an adversary of political Catholicism, Radić also opposed the Croatian People's Party – a faithful ally to the Slovene People's Party – making it understandably hard for Korošec to associate with its bitter election rival.

Loyal allies: The Croatian People's Party

Leaders of the Slovene People's Party were much more successful in developing liaisons with the political wing of the Croatian Catholic movement – the Croatian People's Party, established in May 1919.²⁸ One of the leaders

21 RAHTEN, *Slovenska ljudska stranka*, 40–41.

22 Matija ŠKERBEC, *Pregled zgodovine novodobnega slovenskega katoliškega gibanja*, vol. 1–2, Cleveland: Samozaložba, 1956–1957, here vol. 2, 124.

23 For a more detailed evaluation of the Croat-Slovene cooperation in the Habsburg Monarchy see Andrej RAHTEN, *Savezništva i diobe. Razvoj slovensko-hrvatskih političkih odnosa u Habsburškoj Monarhiji 1848.–1918.*, Zagreb: Golden Marketing – Tehnička knjiga, 2008.

24 "Odposlanci Hrvatske seljačke stranke v Ljubljani", *Slovenec*, 17 January 1919, 3.

25 "Hrvatski kaos", *Slovenec*, 5 February 1919, 1.

26 Katja PERŠAK, "Anton Korošec in slovensko-hrvaška nasprotja v Prekmurju", *Pilar*, 7–8/2009, 133–150.

27 "Volivni govor dr. Korošca", *Slovenec*, 25 November 1924, 1.

28 Zlatko MATIJEVIĆ, *Slom politike katoličkog jugoslavenstva. Hrvatska pučka stranka u političkom životu Kraljevine SHS (1919.–1929.)*, Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest – Dom i svijet, 1998.

of the political wing of the Croatian Catholic movement, Janko Šimrak, attended the meeting of the Slovene Catholic patriots in mid-February 1919 in Ljubljana. In his speech he welcomed the party's intentions "to expand across the entire territory of Yugoslavia" and gather "everything that is Christian and democratic" in the state.²⁹

The Croatian People's Party remained an unfailingly loyal ally to Korošec in the Belgrade Parliament. In early March 1919, Croatian deputies, Janko Šimrak, Stanko Banić and Velimir Deželić Jr., helped the Slovene Catholic patriots to establish the Yugoslav Club.³⁰ There was no doubt about who was to be elected President of the Club – it was Korošec, while the vice-Presidency over the 19-member body was assigned to Šimrak.³¹ On 11 April 1919, the Yugoslav Club adopted a decision to accede to the establishment of a Yugoslav party "that will endeavour in the cultural field for religious education of the nation in observance of autonomous religious beliefs". The party was primarily to represent the interests of peasants, workers and tradesmen. Its constitutional programme was to draw on the principle of "state and national unity" and envisaged "an internal organisation of the state on the basis of cultural, as well as economic and geographic conditions".³²

As part of his efforts to establish a Yugoslav People's Party, Korošec visited Dalmatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in late April and early May 1919.³³ The Dalmatian tour started on 26 April in Split and continued to Sinj and Trogir. Korošec visited Dalmatian towns in the company of Stanko Banić and Petar Rogulja. At every destination, the President of the Yugoslav Club was greeted by cheering and showered with flowers.³⁴ The Split-based newspaper *Jadran* described his visit in nothing but superlatives: "Never will Dalmatia forget /.../ how he [Korošec] and his memorable friend [Janez Evangelist] Krek have at all times stood for this godforsaken province. He is coming to us as the bearer of new ideas, power and order in the state. He preceded by announcing the revision of nutrition offices, suspensions and arrests of highest ranking officers who have sinned against the people. The people rejoice and welcome him as their steadfast representative and liberator."³⁵

On 29 April 1919, Korošec attended the inaugural meeting of the Croatian People's Party for Dalmatia.³⁶ In a brief speech he outlined the objectives of the Yugoslav People's Party which should be established in the near future: "By planning to establish this party we are demonstrating that our work has not been accomplished by the liberation struggle. /.../ We have

29 "Zborovanje vodstva V. L. S.", *Slovenec*, 21 February 1919, 2.

30 Neda ENGELSFELD, *Prvi parlament Kraljevstva Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca – Privremeno narodno predstavništvo*, Zagreb: Globus, 1989, 112; MATIJEVIĆ, *Slom*, 131.

31 "Strankarske razmere v parlamentu", *Slovenec*, 7 March 1919, 1.

32 "Jugoslovska ljudska stranka", *Slovenec*, 12 April 1919, 1.

33 ZEČEVIĆ, *Slovenska ljudska stranka*, 244–245, 254 and 257–258; MATIJEVIĆ, *Slom*, 92–106.

34 "Dr. Korošec v Dalmaciji", *Slovenec*, 30 April 1919, 3.

35 "Politične novice", *Slovenec*, 3 May 1919, 2.

36 "Hrvatska ljudska stranka v Dalmaciji", *Slovenec*, 4 May 1919, 4.

liberated and created a homeland, and we seek cooperation. Our party wishes this state to become a home to all those who faithfully build on positive Christian principles. Drawing from eternal Christian principles the state must make arrangements for public and social work practices. We are not saying that we are alone in this cause. We salute anyone who shares the same Christian principles. They are welcome among us or to work with us. We are reproached for being a clerical, church party. To this we respond that we are a politically completely independent party that pursues its public activities on the basis of Christian principles. We are not set against other confessions; to the contrary, we shall join hands with Orthodox Christians and Muslims. We shall reach out to all those who are oppressed and downtrodden. Our principal idea is to help individuals, the poor and needy."³⁷

On 2 May 1919, Korošec visited Sarajevo, where he met with high dignitaries of the Catholic Church and political adherents who had laid the foundations of the Croatian People's Party for Bosnia-Herzegovina. Despite initial organisational successes in setting up the Croatian People's Party in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the ultimate establishment of a united Yugoslav party on Catholic principles never took place. Even within the Yugoslav Club both sister parties opted to retain their individuality. Notwithstanding, the Slovene People's Party continued to support its Croatian ally in its efforts to increase its influence among the Croatian people. This is also why the members of the Croatian People's Party were often attacked by their adversaries for being nothing more than an appendage to Korošec's "clericals".³⁸

Opposition years: Korošec against Pašić

Nikola Pašić, an elder among the Serbian politicians, took excellent advantage of the Slovene-Croatian disputes during the process of forming the constitution of the new state. The struggle of the opposition parties against the informal coalition of the Greater Serbian nationalists and Yugoslav unitarists was completely uncoordinated. Refusing to pledge allegiance to the Serbian King, Radić and his fifty deputies declined cooperation in the Constituent Assembly, while the remaining Croatian deputies spent a long time trying to persuade the government to fulfill the Croatian demands through consensus rather than by dictate. But Pašić flatly ignored their demands. The deputies of the Yugoslav Club were the last to leave the Assembly on 14 June 1921. With the main part of the opposition thus out of the way and with the support from the representatives of the Yugoslav Muslim Organisation, Pašić ultimately secured himself a definitive majority.³⁹

37 "Politične novice", *Slovenec*, 6 May 1919, 3.

38 MATIJEVIĆ, *Slom*, 106–109.

39 DJOKIĆ, *Elusive Compromise*, 47.

The constitution was adopted on 28 June 1921 – on *Vidov dan* or St. Vitus' Day. The Serbian national holiday was therefore another fatal blow to the Slovenes and Croats. Precisely seven years after the day of the assassination of Francis Ferdinand, whose death had shattered the dreams of the Slovene and Croatian politicians about a state administration reform of the Habsburg Monarchy, Regent Alexander proclaimed a constitution that subjugated the Slovenes and Croats to Greater Serbian hegemony. The newspaper of the People's Radical Party, *Samouprava*, described the constitution as a Serbian national victory which had restored their "Tsardom".⁴⁰ Korošec's adherents saw the *Vidovdan Constitution* as "the negation of our national individuality, which has inflicted a mortal wound on the genius of our nation". At that moment "the struggle" began "for our national existence, which was not immediately evident but carefully concealed, covert and hence all the more treacherous".⁴¹ Such manoeuvres performed by Pašić and his allies occasionally prompted even the proverbially tolerant Korošec to take a stand against his Serbian colleagues. The Slovene People's Party thus remained in the opposition till January 1927.

One of Korošec's crucial public appearances in which he minutely described the Slovene disappointment with their position in the Yugoslav state was the speech given in the National Assembly on 8 February 1926. On that occasion Korošec concluded "that Slovenia was overtaxed, that budgetary burdens were excessive, that taxes were exacted in a relentless, one might say more than rigorous manner, and that Slovenia was neglected and marginalised". He stressed that despite their "close ethnic relation to the Serbs and Croats", the Slovenes nevertheless considered themselves as "a nation in its own right". Embracing the thesis on "national unity" meant relinquishing their own, already established culture and language. Korošec appealed to the Serbian deputies that they should have the same understanding as the Slovenes had for the Serbian policy in Macedonia: "None of the nations in our state understands the struggle for Macedonia better than we do, because we know that with every man lost to it, we lose a piece of our heart and a drop of blood from our body. If you are so intransigent and unwilling to lose Macedonia to another, likewise, brotherly nation, then let us follow your suit and fight for our national individuality, our national rights and our national existence." Korošec stressed that the Slovene nation demanded a "united Slovenia" with "substantial and broad autonomy". He rejected the claims that the Slovene demands were unreasonable: "We are not being intransigent by trying to make you realise that we demand a united Slovenia because we wish to share a common existence and because the state cannot afford to be indifferent whether Slovenia is a culturally thriving, progressive, unified and free bulwark against Italy and Austria." He continued in a sharper tone,

40 BANAC, *Nacionalno pitanje*, 376.

41 Janko BREJČ, "Od prevrata do ustave", *Avstrijski in jugoslovanski državni problem. Tri razprave Janka Brejca iz prelomnega obdobja narodne zgodovine*, (ed.) Andrej RAHTEN, Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 21–74, here 25.

which drew several interjections from the Serbian deputies: "Look at the situation in the state today: The Serbs are wielding their power, the Croats are talking, and we are paying – while the Germans, Hungarians and Muslims are taking action. /.../ Your population amounts to 43%, and yet it has come so far that you have no less than two thirds of deputies in the Assembly. What is more, you have your King." The Serbian deputies interrupted him: "Isn't he also your King?" Korošec's answer was firm: "Yes, he is also our King, but not a Slovene, this you have to admit: We certainly recognise him as the King of our state, but he is not a King of Slovene birth." Korošec pointed to the marginalisation of the Slovenes in the public administration, which he supported with concrete numbers: "The Government is exclusively Serbian, diplomacy is predominantly Serbian, the General Staff is exclusively Serbian, and the central administration is 98% Serbian; the gendarmerie is more than 60% Serbian and growing more so every day, the customs administration is 70% Serbian and likewise the state financial service. Seeing that individual branches of the state administration are growing more Serbian with each passing day gnaws not only at our nerves but at our bread and butter. In the light of high unemployment, which drives our people away to America and to seek seasonal work in every possible country, at least allow us to earn our living in our own state."⁴²

However, forging a coalition between Korošec and Radić remained "mission impossible". Instead, the two national leaders confronted each other again and again. Korošec was furious when Radić entered the coalition with Pašić in July 1925. And Radić did not hesitate to fight against Korošec ferociously when the Slovene People's Party entered the Uzunović cabinet in February 1927.⁴³

Prime Minister against Croatian will

On 20 June 1928, a Montenegrin deputy, Puniša Račić, settled his scores with the opponents from Radić's party with a pistol, killing two and inflicting serious injuries to Stjepan Radić. Immediately after the assassination allegations emerged in the press that Korošec, the then Interior Minister, knew what was happening but did nothing to prevent it. While there is no proof of his involvement, a record has been preserved about his conversation with Račić on the eve of the assassination in which he was told that there was going to be an "accident".⁴⁴ However, regardless of the allegations and

42 "Proračunski govor dr. Antona Korošca", *Slovenec*, 9 February 1926, 1.

43 Aleksandra BERBERIH-SLANA, "Minister Stjepan Radić in Sloveni", *Stiploškov zbornik*, (ed.) Dušan NEČAK, Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta, 2005, 237–266; Andrej RAHTEN, "Radić na štajerski fronti. Hrvaško-slovenska politična razmerja v mariborskem volilnem okrožju v Kraljevini SHS", *Studia Historica Slovenica* 1/2018, 173–192.

44 Stanko MAJCEN, "Moji spomini na Antona Korošca", in *Zbrano delo*, vol. 4 (Ljubljana 1996), 313–348, here 337.

the extremely volatile political situation in the wake of the assassination, it was precisely Korošec who ultimately saved the King and the state from the impending crisis.

Rudolf Hanzelič, a Theology teacher at the Celje First Grammar School and a member of Korošec's round table of friends at the Abbey of Celje, would hear Korošec talk about it in person. Immediately after the tragedy in Parliament, the king stated that he would allow the amputation of Croatian and Slovene territories, to which Korošec replied: "Your Highness, you will not." When the King asked him why, the Slovene leader said: "Because you are too intelligent." The amputation was allegedly not the King's idea but, as Korošec believed, advocated by the "court camarilla". Alexander inquired what camarilla, anxiously lighting one cigarette after another. He had barely lit the first one and he already threw it on the Persian rug. Korošec bent down, picked up the cigarette and put it in an ashtray. The same repeated five times or so. They looked at each other in silence for a long moment: two founding fathers of Yugoslavia, facing the biggest crisis in its history yet. Then Alexander placed his hand on the priest's shoulder and said calmly: "Father, you shall be my Prime Minister."⁴⁵

On 27 July 1928 a Prime Minister of Slovene descent became the head of the Ministerial Council of the SHS-Kingdom for the first time in history. Even though he had secured a place in his government for the leader of the Croatian People's Party Stjepan Barić, Korošec faced sharp accusations from the Croatian public for exploiting the Croats in his machinations with the Serbs.⁴⁶ Radić's successor, Vladko Maček, born of a Slovene father, argued that in the struggle between the East and West Korošec had positioned himself "where he had no place either as a man of West European civilisation or a Slovene, and even less a Catholic priest".⁴⁷ Allegations of Korošec's coming to terms with the dynasty often also assumed irrational dimensions. But the fact remains that the Slovene leader felt that the Yugoslav state, which he had co-created, found itself at a crucial juncture in history. During the days when revisionist forces were overtly expressing their ambitions on practically the entire Yugoslav borders and the state was facing the threat of internal political conflict of major proportions, Korošec knew it was high time to take pragmatic and swift solutions. Even when King Alexander introduced dictatorship on 6 January 1929, Korošec endorsed it and joined it as Minister of Forests and Mines.

45 Rudolf HANŽELIČ, "O dr. Antonu Korošču", *Zbornik Svobodne Slovenije* 23/1977, 295–302.

46 "Vlada dr. Antona Korošca", *Slovenec*, 28 July 1928, 1.

47 "Za svobodno Slovenijo", *Kmetški list*, 31 October 1928.

Korošec at the zenith of his political power

The initial enthusiasm over the imposition of the "Sixth of January Dictatorship" soon gave way to disillusionment with the King's actions. Since all parties with religious or "nationalist" foundations were legally abolished, the Slovene People's Party was dissolved as well. Even though the newly established Dravska *banovina* with its seat in Ljubljana had restricted jurisdiction, the Slovene politicians sought comfort in the fact that at it least encompassed almost an entire Slovene ethnic territory in Yugoslavia.⁴⁸ Although Korošec publicly expressed loyal support for the King's actions, in private he was deeply concerned by the development of the state. On 28 September 1930 he eventually resigned as Minister, while his adherents continued supporting the government for a while. The King decided to restore constitutional and parliamentary life, yet the new legislation only further centralised the state. The election was public, and only parties whose candidates covered the entire state's territory were eligible for participation. Therefore Korošec and the former Slovene People's Party did not partake in the election which took place on 8 November 1931 and, together with other opposition groups in the state, opted to call for abstention instead.⁴⁹ The regime pressure on Korošec increased and ultimately unleashed a wave of spontaneous anti-regime demonstrations in May 1932, on the celebration of Korošec's sixtieth anniversary.⁵⁰ The abolished Slovene national flags were fluttering again.

In November 1932 the former and likewise disbanded Croatian Peasant Party and its political allies adopted the *Zagreb Points* demanding the year of 1918 to be recognised as the starting point for further negotiations. Serbian political groups too started voicing their programming statements.⁵¹ Korošec did not wait long. He summoned a meeting of the leadership of the former party and by New Year's Day issued the *Ljubljana Points*, later known mostly as the *Slovene Declaration*, demanding "national individuality, a name, flag, an ethnic community, financial independence and cultural freedom" for the Slovenes. Korošec is said to have given his colleagues the instructions to "deliver him a plan and explain the conditions" for Slovene independence.⁵² Regime measures against the advocates of the *Slovene Declaration* followed soon. Korošec was first confined to the Sanatorium at Vrnjačka banja. He

48 *Law on the Name and Division of the Kingdom in Administrative Areas* of 3 October 1929 granted the district of Črnomelj to the Savska *banovina*, but that only lasted until the adoption of the octroyed Constitution in 1931. Lovro BOGATAJ, "Uprava dravske banovine," *Krajevni leksikon dravske banovine*, Ljubljana: Zveza za tujski promet za Slovenijo v Ljubljani, 1937, 1–8, here 1.

49 Jure GAŠPARIČ, *Diktatura kralja Aleksandra in politika Slovenske ljudske stranke v letih 1929–1935* Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2007, 121–135. Even Robert William Seton-Watson, a great advocate of a Yugoslav state, described the King's abolition of parliamentarianism and political parties as "sheer absolutism, unacceptable for an adherent of any kind of free institution". *Ibid.*, 69.

50 Janko PRUNK, "Anton Korošec v opoziciji 1930–1934," *Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje* 2–3/2006, 83–91.

51 DJOKIĆ, *Elusive Compromise*, 131–137.

52 Andrej RAHTEN, *Izidor Cankar – diplomat dveh Jugoslavij/A Diplomat of Two Yugoslavias*, Mengeš – Ljubljana: Center za evropsko prihodnost – ZRC SAZU, 2009, 260.

was soon transferred to Tuzla and therefrom to the island of Hvar for medical reasons.⁵³

On 9 October 1934 Yugoslavia was shocked by the assassination of King Alexander in Marseilles. He became the victim of his own erroneous approach to striking an agreement among the nations under his rule. The assassination also enabled the return of Korošec from Hvar. The leader of the banned Slovene People's Party made a great comeback. He established ties with the cousin of the assassinated King, Prince Paul, who de facto assumed leadership over the three-member regency during the minority of the young heir to the throne, Peter, and thus decisively determined the course of the state's politics. Korošec played his usual card of cooperating with the Serbian political elite and joined forces with Milan Stojadinović, former Minister of Finances in the Pašić governments. His authority and long experience again made him one of the most influential political figures in the state. He incorporated the former Slovene People's Party into the coalition with Stojadinović's Radicals and Muslim politicians from Bosnia and Herzegovina under the leadership of Mehmed Spaho. The result was the establishment of the Yugoslav Radical Union.⁵⁴ But this was, then, yet another transformation of Korošec's political pragmatism, which effectively favoured tactics over programme.

Korošec was at the zenith of his political power. In the period of 1935–1938, during which he sat in the government as Minister of Interior, he was the most influential statesman, next to Prime Minister Stojadinović, and, of course, the Prince Regent. Stojadinović learnt that to his own cost, when on the eve of the Second World War, he and Korošec went their separate political ways. Although the Dravska *banovina* encompassed most of Slovene ethnic territory in Yugoslavia, Korošec was not entirely satisfied with its existing competences.⁵⁵ Therefore, he endeavoured to strengthen Slovene autonomy also within the framework of the Yugoslav Radical Union's regime and with a more or less tacit blessing of Prince Paul. In the shadow of the rising Third Reich, Slovenia was thus well on its way to obtain more attributes of autonomy. Nevertheless, Korošec was aware of the fact that without the solution of the "Croatian Question" the stability of the state could not be preserved.

Establishment of the *banovina* of Croatia

Prince Paul lamented the key weakness of the Yugoslav Radical Union – the failure to incorporate the former Croatian Peasant Party under Maček's authoritative leadership. Stojadinović turned out not to be the most suitable man for striking a compromise with the Croats. This must have also been clear

53 GAŠPARIČ, *SLS*, 178–179.

54 MATKOVIĆ, *Povijest Jugoslavije*, 184–187.

55 Miroslav STIPLIČEK, "Anton Korošec in prizadevanja Slovenske ljudske stranke za uresničenje narodne avtonomije", *Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje* 2–3/2006, 122–137.

to Paul, who then entrusted Korošec with the task of examining all possible options for a constitutional reform. Korošec asked four eminent legal counsels to draw up their opinions for the prince. The counsels unanimously found no legal impediment to the constitutional change, even during the period of regency on behalf of the minor king. While performing his mission as a mediator, Korošec also established contacts with Ivan Šubašić, who acted as Maček's informal liaison officer.⁵⁶

In the National Assembly election held in December 1938, the Slovene part of the Yugoslav Radical Union led by Korošec, who had an excellent overview of the events as Minister of Interior, won more than 78% of votes in the Dravska *banovina*.⁵⁷ Maček's result was even better: 767,000 Croats gave him vote, as opposed to 32,000 Croat votes for the government.⁵⁸ The Prime Minister then wrote a letter to the Regent, expressing dissatisfaction with Korošec's excessive leniency towards the opposition.⁵⁹ On 21 December 1938 Korošec was removed from the government and appointed President of the Senate.

Nevertheless, Korošec was not easy to be rid of. On 3 February 1939 five Ministers offered their resignation; officially because of the unsolved "Croatian Question".⁶⁰ Korošec, who still harboured the memory of Stojadinović having removed him from the ministerial cabinet to the position of the President of the Senate, was the one who masterminded the conspiracy with Prince Paul's support.⁶¹ Following the fall of the Stojadinović's government in early February 1939 and the appointment of Dragiša Cvetković as the new Prime Minister, the settlement of the "Croatian Question" was officially moved to the top of the government's agenda.⁶²

One of the leading Catholic patriots Matija Škerbec, albeit a most adamant critic of Korošec, described the situation as follows: "That Dr. Korošec was a true master of 'corridor politics' who knew how to jerk the rug under someone's feet was perhaps best demonstrated when he hurled Prime Minister Stojadinović to the floor. The entire Belgrade laughed at the incident and admired Korošec's agility. Serbian notabilities would say to me in the Belgrade prison in 1932: 'He's a maestro indeed!' Many Serbs regarded him as the greatest Yugoslav politician, the only one who could cope with the Serbian machinations, once he had become accustomed to the conditions in Serbia and Belgrade."⁶³

56 DJOKIĆ, *Elusive Compromise*, 115.

57 Janko PRUNK, »Slovenska parlamentarna izkušnja v prvi Jugoslaviji (1918–1941), *Parlamentarna izkušnja Slovencev*, (ed.) Janko PRUNK-Cirila TOPLAK, Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, 2005, 81–130, here 128.

58 DJOKIĆ, *Elusive Compromise*, 187.

59 Ciril ŽEBOT, *Neminljiva Slovenija. Spomini in spoznanja iz razdobja sedemdesetih let od Majniške deklaracije*, Ljubljana: Magellan, 1990, 138.

60 MATKOVIĆ, *Povijest Jugoslavije*, 201.

61 Jacob B. HOPTNER, *Jugoslavija u krizi 1934–1941*, Rijeka: Otokar Keršovani, 1973, 146–150; Ljubo BOBAN, *Sporazum Cvetković-Maček*, Beograd: Institut društvenih nauka, 1965, 79–80.

62 Korošec's party was represented in the government by Miha Krek and Franc Snoj.

63 ŠKERBEC, *Pregled*, vol. 2, 118.

Stojadinović's fall met with an unfavourable reaction in Germany, notwithstanding that the Cvetković's government was even more favourable to the Third Reich policy. The crucial test for the new government was posed by the "Croatian Question", which seriously threatened the state consolidation. The task facing the Cvetković's cabinet was anything but easy. In addition to the vengeful Stojadinović, who had later established his own party, the agreement with the Croats was also countered by the Serbian Cultural Club, which was established in 1937 and pursued the motto "All Serbs, unite!".⁶⁴ Initially, the reports which appeared in the daily *Slovenec* on the necessity to strike a Croatian-Serbian agreement leave no doubt that Korošec, too, supported the convergence of the government's and Maček's positions. Paul exerted every effort to reach an agreement with the Croatian politicians, but ultimately came to the conclusion that "they abhorred the Slovenes and Korošec". The latter, however, equally ill-disposed towards the Croatian leader Maček, compared his demand to unite all Croatian ethnic territories into a single entity to Hitler's "banditry".⁶⁵

According to Joško Krošelj, Korošec's former personal secretary and later editor of *Slovenec* in Belgrade, Cvetković kept the President of the Senate regularly informed about the course of negotiations. However, being gradually pulled into Maček's line of reasoning, Cvetković reduced his meetings with Korošec to a mere formality. In those days, Maček talked with a deep suspicion in his intimate circles about Korošec; on one occasion, he even described him as a "gangster". In Maček's opinion, the agreement was a matter that rested entirely with the Serbs and Croats, while the Slovenes were of secondary importance. The Yugoslav problem could hence be solved exclusively through a "dualist understanding". Maček's newspapers wrote that the Slovenes had no place intervening in matters that did not concern them directly. They should be satisfied with what they currently had.⁶⁶ For Korošec, however, who traditionally steered his policy by tipping the balance between Belgrade and Zagreb, this dualist exclusion of the Slovenes was the worst nightmare. It was clear which part of the expected dualist structure – should the latter be created – would ultimately incorporate the Dravska *banovina*. Geographical reasons, at least, were in favour of the solution envisaging the formation of some kind of Greater Croatia, incorporating the Slovene ethnic territories as well.

Some sources state that Korošec was well informed about the talks between Cvetković and Maček on the preparation of an agreement.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, he found out about the final outcome of the negotiations only after the agreement had been reached and signed on 26 August 1939. The *banovina* of Croatia was established, encompassing Croatian ethnic territories

64 MATKOVIĆ, *Povijest Jugoslavije*, 209–214.

65 DJOKIĆ, *Elusive Compromise*, 114–117.

66 BOBAN, *Sporazum*, 261–263.

67 Joško KROŠELJ, "Dr. Korošec, sporazum s Hrvati in Slovenci", *Zbornik Svobodne Slovenije* 21/1969, 103–113, here 105; Ruda JURČEC, *Skozi luči in sence*, vol. 1–3, Buenos Aires: Editorial Baraga, 1964, 1969, here vol. 3, 246–248.

that had been previously distributed among various administration units. Croatia had its own *sabor* once again. Ivan Subašić was appointed *ban* and responsible to the King.⁶⁸ The arrangement was somehow reminiscent of the dualist compromise reached between Korošec and Pašić in Geneva in 1918, but rejected then by the Serbian political elite.⁶⁹ With one important exception: the future status of the Slovenes, living now mostly in Dravska *banovina*, was not defined.

While Korošec was aware of the talks that Cvetković and Maček held with regard to the drawing up of the agreement, the course of developments that unfolded indicated that he was not familiar with the final contents of the agreement. It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which this was a result of his decision to refrain from further complicating the negotiations by voicing the Slovene demands. In one of his writings, Krošelj specifically mentioned Korošec's disappointment and feeling betrayed when he first heard the final wording of the agreement. Albeit visibly upset, he did not stand in the way of compromise. Even though Korošec was disappointed to learn that the final negotiations were conducted without consulting him, he did not prevent the agreement.⁷⁰ In his practical politics the preservation of Yugoslavia as a guarantor of autonomous development of the Slovene nation was the main constancy. Korošec was well aware that Yugoslavia could not be preserved without the Croats. How could it ever be? He had created it with them.

On 10 September 1939, the agreement was discussed by the Dravska *banovina* board of the Yugoslav Radical Union presided by Korošec and then soon after, two special commissions were founded in Ljubljana: one for political and legal issues and one for financial questions. These bodies were to submit their proposals to the commission on the state level. Opinions in favour of establishing a *banovina* of Slovenia were brought forth not only by Slovene members of the Yugoslav Radical Union but also Slovene adherents of the oppositional Yugoslav National Party.⁷¹ A very detailed justification of the demands to create the *banovina* of Slovenia was provided by Andrej Gosar in an article of September 1939 and later in a special booklet which was published in 1940.⁷²

In his conversation with the royal regent Ivo Perić on 1 November 1939, Maček purportedly proposed maintaining the Croato-Serbian state dualism by simply incorporating Slovenia into the *banovina* of Croatia and bringing the thus expanded Croatia into a sort of personal union with the rest of the state.⁷³ Maček, as well as some other influential members of the party's

68 MATKOVIĆ, *Povijest Jugoslavije*, 202–209.

69 Igor GRDINA, *Moč umetnosti in sila politike*, Ljubljana: ICK, 2007, 148.

70 Joško KROŠELJ, "Dr. Korošec in Hrvati", *Zbornik Svobodne Slovenije* 13/1961, 87–103, here 100.

71 Ljubo BOBAN, *Maček i politika Hrvatske seljačke stranke. Iz povijesti hrvatskog pitanja*, vol. 1–2: Zagreb: Globus, 1974, here vol. 2, 321.

72 Andrej GOSAR, *Banovina Slovenija*, Ljubljana: Dejanje, 1940.

73 Mihajlo KONSTANTINOVIĆ, *Politika sporazuma. Dnevničke beleške 1939–1941. Londonske beleške 1944–1945*, Novi Sad: Agencija Mir, 1998, 65.

leadership, advocated the establishment of a dualist Yugoslavia. Among them, special mention ought to be made of Juraj Krnjević and August Košutić, who both left the country during dictatorship and worked in emigration. They suggested to Maček that he could agree to creating a dualist state modelled on Austria-Hungary, but that he should refrain from invoking this analogy in order not to exasperate the circles in Belgrade.⁷⁴

In the autumn of his life, Korošec thus saw history repeat itself as farce. When still in the Vienna Parliament, he relentlessly criticized the dualism of Austria-Hungary and was embittered by the politics of Hungarian government circles towards Croatia. And now he was suddenly faced with the possibility of reorganizing Yugoslavia into some kind of "Serbo-Croatian monarchy", with the only difference that, this time, the Croatian politicians obviously forgot about his merits from the Habsburg era. Having once defended a trialist reform of Austria-Hungary, he was now calling for the formation of three state entities within, of course, much narrower geographical coordinates. Another substantial difference between Greater Austrian trialism and that of Yugoslavia was in that the former was based on the unification of the Slovenes and the Croats, and the latter on their disunion.

Epilogue

The establishment of a *banovina* of Slovenia remained an unfulfilled wish and yet another Slovene disappointment in the history of the Yugoslav Kingdom. Even though Korošec still regarded Yugoslavia as the best guarantor of the Slovene national development, he too had obviously renounced his former belief that it would be possible to preserve it. The testimonies of his colleagues contradict themselves on the issue. He said to Father Kazimir Zakrajšek in 1939, "that we would have to return under Austria". Because the Transdanubian federation was apparently advocated by Great Britain, Korošec talked of the "British plan".⁷⁵ However, the very same year he would also maintain in a discussion with the representatives of the Carinthian Slovenes that should Yugoslavia be dissolved, the Slovenes had better "wait for a new Yugoslavia" under the Italian rule.⁷⁶ Furthermore, given Korošec's mysterious visit to Bratislava, during which the President of the newly created Slovakian state, Jozef Tiso, honoured him with a festive dinner on 27 May 1940 and discussed with him the possibility of independent Slovenia becoming part of Hitler's New Order,⁷⁷ Korošec seemed to have all doors open to him at the outbreak of the Second World War. Nevertheless, prioritizing the stability of

⁷⁴ DJOKIĆ, *Elusive Compromise*, 95–96.

⁷⁵ Bojan GODEŠA, "Pobuda patra Kazimirja Zakrajška za ustanovitev samostojne slovenske države poleti 1941", *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 2/1999, 103–121.

⁷⁶ JURČEC, *Skozi luči in sence*, vol. 3, 293.

⁷⁷ Bojan GODEŠA, "Odnos SLS do vprašanja rešitve državnopravnega položaja Slovenije po napadu sil osi na Jugoslavijo", *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 2/2001, 77–104, here 89–91.

the state over all else, Korošec continued to live up to his reputation as the founding father of Yugoslavia.

Despite relatively tense relations with most Croatian politicians in the entire interwar period, Korošec knew that certain concessions had to be made to the Croats in terms of the state administration reform. Yet, he made his support conditional on the simultaneous fulfilment of Slovene political demands. The settlement of the "Croatian Question" following the Cvetković-Maček recipe certainly did not help to ease the tensions between Zagreb and Ljubljana; quite on the contrary. In early March 1940, Korošec tried to explain to the U. S. Minister in Yugoslavia Arthur Bliss Lane that Slovenia would soon obtain a status on a par with that of the *banovina* of Croatia.⁷⁸

However, this view turned out to be too optimistic. Further administrative reorganization of the state was rendered impossible by a combination of war developments, turbulent foreign politics, and nationalist frictions on the domestic front. On 14 December 1940 Korošec died. The death of the Slovene founding father of Yugoslavia left the political leadership in Ljubljana without the key authority. Not the Slovene People's Party only, the entire Yugoslavia was left without the most experienced leader precisely at the time when Europe became almost completely swallowed in the darkness of the Third Reich.

⁷⁸ BOBAN, *Maček*, vol. 2, 264.

Sažetak

ANTON KOROŠEC I "HRVATSKO PITANJE" U JUGOSLAVIJI

Andrej RAHTEN

100. godišnjica postanka Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca dobra je prilika za evaluaciju biografija njezinih utemeljitelja. Među slovenskim političarima, nedvojbeno treba istaknuti ulogu Antona Korošca, dugogodišnjeg čelnika Slovenske pučke stranke. Posebno je zanimljivo njegovo viđenje državnopravnih pitanja u Jugoslaviji, prije svega njegov odnos prema „hrvatskom pitanju“. Prelazak Slovenaca i Hrvata iz austro-ugarskog u jugoslavenski državni okvir doveo je i do raspada većine tradicionalnih koalicija slovenskih i hrvatskih stranaka. Korošec je sudbinu Slovenske pučke stranke pragmatički vezao uz srpske stranke. Vjerojatno je zaključio da će pod srpskom dinastijom, bez obzira na sastav vlade, jedna od tih stranaka uvijek biti na vlasti. Uoči postanka jugoslavenske kraljevine, unitarističku formulu o jednom „trojednom narodu“ tako su isticali i slovenski katolički narodnjaci. Na taj način srušio se i politički koncept solidarnosti s hrvatskim pravašima i seljačkim pokretom Stjepana Radića, koji je Slovenska pučka stranka izgradila prije Prvoga svjetskog rata. A bez savezništva s Radićevom Hrvatskom republikanskom seljačkom strankom Korošec u svojoj politici doista nije mogao računati na podršku hrvatskog stanovništva. Korošec je, međutim, bio znatno uspješniji u povezivanju s Hrvatskom pučkom strankom. Na tu stranku oslonio se Korošec, nastojeći ostvariti ambicije da u novom državnom okviru svoj utjecaj proširi i izvan slovenskih granica. Hrvatska pučka stranka ostala je u Kraljevini SHS najlojalniji Korošćev saveznik u državnoj politici, osnivajući zajedno sa zastupnicima slovenske sestrinske stranke i Jugoslavenski klub u Narodnoj skupštini. Korošec nije bio isključivi krivac za zahlađenje odnosa između Slovenske pučke stranke i Radićeva pokreta. Činjenica je da je Radić svojim protuklerikalnim izjavama i pozivima na osnivanje republike i sam otežao uvjete za suradnju s Korošćem, koji je bio svećenik i monarhist. Uz to, Korošćev manevarski prostor za suradnju s Radićem bio je vrlo sužen. Naime, kao protivnik političkog katolicizma, Radić je bio i protivnik Hrvatske pučke stranke, pa je logično da se Korošec teško povezivao s njezinom neposrednom suparnicom na izborima. Mostove s najjačom hrvatskom strankom Korošec je srušio u ljeto 1928., kada je, nakon atentata na Stjepana Radića, pristao da bude predsjednik vlade. Iako je u vladu privukao i čelnika Hrvatske pučke stranke Stjepana Barića, Korošec je iz hrvatske javnosti bio zasut optužbama da na račun Hrvatske spletkari sa Srbima. Kao što je rekao Radićev nasljednik Vladko Maček, vođa Slovenske pučke stranke postavio se u borbi između Zapada i Istoka ondje „gdje se nije smio postaviti ni kao čovjek zapadnoeuropske civilizacije, niti kao Slovenac, ponajmanje pak kao katolički svećenik“. Korošec se sve do smrti nije uspio osloboditi predbacivanja

za svojevrsnu izdaju, koja su u hrvatskoj povijesnoj svijesti i dandanas živa. Međutim, treba istaknuti da je nakon povratka iz internacije na Hvaru Korošec više puta pokazao da je svjestan težine „hrvatskog pitanja“. Dok je bio ministar unutrašnjih poslova u vladi Milana Stojadinovića, on se otvoreno sukobio s premijerom zbog provedbe izbora u Hrvatskoj. Pad Stojadinovićeve vlade bio je, prije svega, rezultat Korošćeve politike. Naime, slovenski se državnik, za razliku od Stojadinovića, zalagao za sporazum prema kojem bi došlo do ispunjenja barem dijela hrvatskih zahtjeva, pa je čak u početku bio ovlašten od kneza Pavla da radi na tom pitanju. Ali u finalu pregovora oko sporazuma Cvetković-Maček, Korošec više nije bio konzultiran, pa se tako osjećao prevarenim. Usprkos tome, Korošec je u ime državne konsolidacije podupro sporazum, ali je zahtijevao da se uz Banovinu Hrvatsku utemelji i slična slovenska tvorevina.