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Letter by Ivo Franić Požežanin, Director of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, to the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Milan Stojadinović in 1937

This paper gives a brief overview of political actions of Ivo Franić Požežanin, director of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb (1935-1939), mainly based on the letter that Ivo Franić Požežanin sent to the president of the Yugoslav government Milan Stojadinović. The letter was written near the end of 1937. In it Ivo Franić Požežanin presents his view of the political situation in Zagreb, Croatia, and as a supporter and member of the Yugoslav Radical Community (JRZ) suggests some moves to Stojadinović. From the letter it is evident that Ivo Franić Požežanin is a strong opponent of the HSS and the Croatian national movement, and suggests that the Croatian issue be resolved as a “Egg of Columbus”.

Keywords: Franić Požežanin, Ivo, Croatian history, year 1937, Ethnographic museum

After the death of the Yugoslav King Alexander, who was assassinated at Marseilles in October 9, 1934, the authorities in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, on behalf of his heir Peter II, a minor, set up a Regency, which consisted of the ban of Sava Banovina Ivo Perović, Senator Dr Radenko Stanković and Prince Paul of Yugoslavia, a cousin of the murdered king, who began to carry the decisive word. A gradual democratization of public life started to develop under the Regency in Yugoslavia, after the dark years of the 6th of January dictatorship. Political life in Yugoslavia was again revived during the election of 1935 (Matković 1998: 185). It was in the preparations of the government of Bogoljub Jeftić for the fifth parliamentary elections in May of 1935 that the name of Ivo Franić Požežanin came up, as a trusted confidant of the government. According to Pletenac “Jeftić government was preparing for the vote where the goal was to eliminate the opposition and show to the world’s public opinion an illusion of democracy for which a favorable climate in all public areas was to be created and therefore a series of sackings in the Croatian cultural institutions offices followed” (Pletenac, 2000

5). Ivo Franić Požežanin¹ was among the new government staff, and was placed at the head of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, by way of temporary suspending Act under which every museum official should have had at least three years of working experience in the profession and the a state license exam in order to become a director, because Ivo Franić Požežanin didn't have such qualifications (Pletenac, 2000: 27).

There is no doubt that Ivo Franić Požežanin, as the new director of the Ethnographic Museum, being a "Yugoslav ethnologist" sought unification of Croatian and Serbian ethnology in accordance with the ideas of the Yugoslav Unitarianism on the creation of a Yugoslav nation a leading ethnologist Croatia Milovan Gavazzi² often warned of the political background and aims of Ivo Franić Požežanin's appointment at the head of an important cultural institution in Croatia. In his numerous professional debates with Franić-Požežanin Gavazzi pointed out with some political invective "*Ah, what an ethnography. Just to touch it (...) Who and what is the patron of (such ethnology)*" (Pletenac, 1995/1996: 81-93). Gavazzi had hinted, and Pletenac clearly stated: "Patronage is an integral ideology of the Yugoslav government in Belgrade and the prime minister Jefić has a client in Franić who will write ethnography according to his personal preferences, with the political insistence on the creation of a Yugoslav people." (Pletenac,

¹ Ivo Franić Požežanin (1886-1945), writer and ethnologist. Graduated from high school in Požega. Ethnology classes attended on the Faculty of Philosophy from 1930 to 1934. He was an official in companies in Požega and Osijek from 1908 to 1914. During World War I he was a lieutenant in the Austrian Army then worked in Zagreb in the Main Directorate of State Railways from 1919 to 1932, edited a weekly magazine *Trader* (1919 to 1921), *Theater review* (1920-21), and in 1923 published the bulletin of the National Radical Party *Odjek* where he promoted monarchist centralism in his articles, and attacked Stjepan Radić and HRSS because of their federalist efforts. From 1935 to 1939 he was the director of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb and editor of the *Journal of the Ethnographic Museum*. He wrote poems, cartoons, short stories, theatrical debates, ethnological and archaeological articles, articles on trade and social security. He published books *The Arts and Crafts* and *Meja i Praputnjak* with professional aspirations. The first is an all-encompassing treatise on various forms of art and applied art without system and methodology, and the other is an ethnographic study of the Sušak part of the Croatian coast and the material and spiritual culture of people of the area. A series of articles about the old Zagreb Cathedral he published in the magazine *Zagreb* (1934-1935) He published books of poems *Monuments of youth*, *The struggle of life* and *Longings and imaginings*. He wrote the autobiographical story *Dream of an author*. The novel *The Death Watch* describes the battles of Krsto Frankopan against the Turks and Ferdinand Habsburg in the civil war that broke out after the Mohács battle. He has published in periodicals *Luč*, *People*, *Brother*, *Croatian worker*, *Slavonian*, *Ethnologist*, *the Croatian People*. Often he used a pseudonym: Anef, Argus, Nicif, Pif, Ivanić Fran, Veritas and others. *Croatian Biographical Lexicon*, 1998 4 E-Gm. Zagreb: Lexicographic Institute, pg. 379

² Milovan Gavazzi (1895-1992) is one of the most important Croatian ethnologists of the 20th century. He studied Slavic languages, Germanistics and Philosophy in Zagreb and Prague. He was the founder of the Ethnological scientific work and teaching of ethnology at the Faculty of Philosophy at the Department of Ethnology. Between 1923-1927 he worked as a curator at the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb. Since 1927 professor at the Department of Ethnology until his retirement in 1965. He was teaching for almost two decades after his retirement. He dealt with the history of ethnology, old Slavic ethnographic heritage of the Croatian traditional culture and other Slavic peoples, and other European nations as well as non-European cultures. In addition, he studied folk music, musical instruments and dancing. In addition to teaching and scientific work has initiated work on publishing and film industry and started the ethnological cartography. The winner of the Herder Prize in 1970. Author of numerous studies and articles and books among which we recommend *Year of Croatian folk customs* (1939), *Sources and the fate of folk traditions* (1978), *Heritage of Croatian village* (1991) http://www.hrvatskoetnologodrustvo.hr/hed/nagrada_milovan_gavazzi/ 31

1995/1996: 28). From 1935 to 1939 Gavazzi was involved in a confrontation with Ivo Franić Požežanin. The story came to a conclusion after the epilogue to a four-year debate, with the establishment of a Croatian Banovina in 1939, when Franić was removed from office, and Milovan Gavazzi took his place as acting director.

The political situation in Croatia (Sava Banovina) and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in late 1937 and the events that preceded it can be learned from the letter, which was sent at that time by Ivo Franić Požežanin to the president of the Yugoslav government Milan Stojadinović. From the election on May 5, 1935 to the establishment of Croatian Banovina there was a specific situation in the Sava and Littoral Banovina compared to other parts of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Complex political relations were more pronounced in the increasing conflict of the rising Croatian national movement under the leadership of the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS) and Vlatko Maček with the backers of the ideology of Yugoslav nationalism (Yugoslavian nationalist organizations) and members of the ruling Yugoslav Radical Union³ (JRZ) (Regan, 2007: 218). After loosening the repression and having smoother relations with the Croatian authorities (under the partial influence of Prince Paul, who was aware of the necessity of an agreement with HSS and V. Maček) the HSS, starting in 1935, began with the establishment of its parallel “*government institutions*” that were supposed to protect Croatian interests. In order to protect the Croatian people from the persecution of regime the HSS founded the Croatian Peasants’ Protection in the villages and Croatian Civil Protection in the cities in 1935. The “Economic Concord” was also important, creating an economic system that was helping the Croatian peasantry in the struggle with everyday economic problems. HSS was working to reactivate the cultural organization of Peasant Concord, “and the Croatian Peasant Party’s trade union The Federation of Croatian workers.” In mid-1935 HSS began publishing a daily newspaper titled “The Croatian Daily”. By the end of 1935 there was a large number of political actions by the members of the HSS, and the Yugoslav nationalists, mainly officials of the ruling regime, felt that they were slowly losing ground.

In order to improve the situation, the JRZ announced the municipal elections in the fall of the 1936, trying to get the administrative, and then also political power in the Sava and Littoral Banovina. However, this policy resulted in a fiasco when HSS won the largest number of municipalities in the Sava and Littoral Banovina in the elections. Fortifying their positions in municipal centers, HSS had begun to exercise power in the local (municipal) framework, promoting the Croatian interests. Municipal administrations, governed by members of HSS, turned from being the organs of state power into bodies controlled by the HSS (Leček, 2008: 999-1032).

³ Yugoslav Radical Union (JRZ) was founded as one of the youngest political party of Yugoslavia by Milan Stojadinović in August of 1935 after the breakup of the Yugoslav National Party. This party was composed largely of members and supporters of the former National Radical Party (NRS), which were joined by members of the former Yugoslav Muslim Organization and the Slovenian People’s Party. JRZ, under the leadership of Milan Stojadinović pursued a policy of state centralism based on the Yugoslav national unitarism, according to which the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs make up a single Yugoslav nation.

At the same time, because of this situation the pressure of JRZ members on the Stojadinović government increased. JRZ members of parliament and other opposition politicians assessed in their speeches in parliament that the guardians of the Yugoslav national unity were left at the mercy of the leadership of HSS and Maček. The increasingly adverse position of members of the ruling party (JRZ), as well as his own in the Croatian public and social life was acknowledged by Ivo Franić Požežanin. Therefore, he suggests in his letter to the Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović some political steps that should be taken in Croatia to stabilize the positions of the JRZ and Stojadinović's government, providing the rule of Ban Khuen in Croatia (1883-1903) as a model.

Thus Ivo Franić Požežanin in the letter warns: *“Supporters of Yugoslavism in general, and especially members of the JRZ here are outlawed. No one cares for them. They can be freely persecuted or even killed (as in Kerestinec). The ban himself declares that he is not pleased that his own officials are members of the JRZ, the very government that placed him as an exponent of the JRZ policy on his place of authority. All increasingly important positions are filled with people whose appointment was cleared with the office of Mr. Dr. Maček. These people persecute and disrupt the work of supporters of the JRZ from their official position.*

Who would enter JRZ under such circumstances, if one is persecuted even when the JRZ is in the government. What would happen if JRZ went into the opposition?”

Because of a passive stance of the Stojadinović government towards the actions of HSS, which was consistent with the previous government's policy of detente, there were fewer Yugoslav nationalists entering the ranks of the JRZ in the Sava Banovina. The position of the members of JRZ to Croatia was getting increasingly weak. Therefore, other prominent supporters of the regime from the Croatia and Slavonia, not only Ivo Franić-Požežanin, and other organizations of the JRZ addressed M. Stojadinović discussing the difficult position of its members.⁴ One of these letters is the letter by Ivo Franić-Požežanin, which is attached here.

Supplement:

Sir Minister President!

As your old comrade and friend of yours from the People's Radical Party and a supporter of the JRZ from the first day you put together the current government, after many conversations with Minister Dr Mile Miškulin⁵, I consider it my duty to provide you with these information:

On the subject of the spread of the JRZ in the Sava Banovina I am of the opinion that any work is illusory if the party leadership does not think, or can't seriously take account of those in its ranks. We cannot move forward without supporters with a certain

⁴ Archives of Yugoslavia (the AJ), (Belgrade) 37, Fund of Milan Stojadinović, the Zagreb local committee of the JRZ to Milan Stojadinović

⁵ Milan Miškulin, attorney and politician from Gospić, Justice Minister in Stojadinović government. Died in 1952 in Zagreb

authority in the local society. Even the largest number of supporters on paper means nothing, if they are only pawns on the chessboard. And where are the leading figures? Where there are any, there are too few, and they can't penetrate everywhere.

It would be ridiculous to assume that people enter the party only from programmatic reasons, therefore, in pure idealism. Instead they expect practical personal benefit, either for the general security or for personal protection, and they certainly require an acknowledgment that the party considers all of them equal to each, that the party will take care of them as they fight for her. That's this eternal: *do ut des!* Logically: politics is a real and not an abstract thing.

One thing is certain: in Croatia, except for fanatics bigots showing atavistic hatred for everything that is Serbian, today even many Croatian farmers recognize that the government of Milan Stojadinović has produced by far the most positive results, both for the benefit of all in general, and especially for the village. That's a lot! Until now no one has been recognized here thus.

About an agreement on the basis of Unitarianism with the local parties there is no mention so far, nor does it seem that it will happen at all. This expectation is a futile waste of time. There are two extreme views on fundamental issues, among them there is an insurmountable chasm. Municipal elections are not a measure. The terror did not allow other lists. A number of votes obtained by Dr Maček does not exceed on average 10-25%. Even what is there is not a homogeneous entity: these are heterogeneous patches made up of separate parts, each with their own views, their separate interests, and what binds them together is only the hate for the "schismatic Serbdom" and "hegemonic" Belgrade, as they themselves say.⁶

In this attitude they pull the rug from under one another, so that at the time of reckoning, which they believe is near, each can grab more of the cloth of the Yugoslav Christ, when they chop it up. Hence they are radical in their outbursts which inflame gluttony of the economically shortchanged mass, whose aims are much higher than the possibility of realization of their hopes and expectations, so they feed on promises of food and are comforted with hatred of the imaginary culprits for their misfortunes in Belgrade. At the same time agitators and alien hosts of traitors coming from underground channels traitor turn their gazes on Belgrade with their perfidious campaign only to make the people look away from the chasm into which they are hurling them.

Consequently, the blood spilled in the defense of peace and order, as well as unnecessary sacrifices of the agitated mass (Maser-Sibinj, Požega, Gospić, Kerestinec, Zagreb, Senj⁷, etc) are shown to the always slighted mass in a light that stains Belgrade, and hurt instincts are even more inflaming the wish for retaliation and drawing it into new excesses, "These are the sacrifices for the liberation of the Croats."

⁶ Underlined by the letter's author.

⁷ On May 9 1937 the gendarmerie shot at a group of girls and young men from Gospić. Six men and a girl were killed.

Insults of the Majesty, open irritanda of Pavelić and Perčec, are an everyday occurrence. Tolerance of the government is considered a weakness and as a herald of the imminent liquidation of the integrity of the country in favor of dissolution. Terror from above has been executed successfully by your government. But those others had no idea to end the terror from below. A while and it does not happen, the factual determination of the popular beliefs and dispositions in relation to the state cannot be made. Nobody can determine that, and what is demonstrated now, that is only a "Fata Morgana".

The fact is, that in the Sava Banovina of the 2,200,000 inhabitants there are about 600,000 Serbs and at least 250,000 nationally convinced Yugoslavs. But the fact is also that in Sava Banovina there are at least 500,000 inhabitants who belong to a families that are factionally neutral therefore nationally aware, but partly dissatisfied, partly bitter, partly politically uncertain citizens. The fact is that due to the most brutal terror from below, today very much nationally orientated and aware Yugoslav citizens are enrolled in a party to which they do not belong, but they pay a membership fee, and participate in their events. They have no comfort or support from a government that is theirs.

JRZ cannot succeed here, not because its agenda does not fit the feelings and views of local citizens, but because the moment they enter, they become an outlawed mass in this region protected by no one, open to being persecuted by anyone and spit upon. The leadership of the state administration is comprised of officials, who not only do not share the principles of the royal government, but confess and carry out through their positions principles that are openly in dissent with the current legislation and understanding of the state.

Nobody has to be in the civil service. But who is inside it should serve honestly and fairly fully dedicated to the country which pays his salary in the spirit of the principles prescribed by the Constitution to which they swore.

Supporters of Yugoslavism in general, and especially members of the JRZ here are outlawed. No one cares for them. They can be freely persecuted or even killed (as in Kerestinec). The ban himself declares that he is not pleased that his own officials are members of the JRZ, the very government that placed him as an exponent of the JRZ policy on his place of authority. All increasingly important positions are filled with people whose appointment was cleared with the office of Dr Maček. These people persecute and disrupt the work of supporters of the JRZ from their official position.

Who would enter JRZ under such circumstances, if one is persecuted even when the JRZ is in the government? What would happen if JRZ went into the opposition?

One party, if it wants to be able to live must organize and strengthen its military to be faithful to her during the war and not only in peace, in opposition, not just in the government.

When Khuen Hedervary came into Croatia as a ban in 1882, he did not know anyone and had no one behind him. Everything was against him. But he had the full confidence and support of those who sent him. In two years he had a majority, not scrapped together by force, as it is told today, but made up of those who supported him with conviction. There were talented people of great significance: Armin Pavić, Iso Kršnjavi, Egesdorfer, Šilović, Aranitski, Krajčević, Krišković, Ciraky, Nuačević (or Vuačević).

The power of Khuen was in tactics too. He strictly enforced the law. And if he was bothered by a law he changed it. If he lacked one he enacted it. But he and his departmental heads did a lot for the people. Zagreb of today, modern and cultured, is the work of Kršnjavi; with the city Khuen won over the village too. And the village was his loyal army for 20 years of his reign. These are the facts.

To rule Croatia, having the power of decree is not enough. There should be skills and intellect and diplomatic skill and iron determination. The fundamental error that has been so far constantly repeated is that each and every mediocre Belgrade politician seeks entry into history by attempting to solve the Croatian question, which has come from causes other than political. Politicians here have only abused the result of the dissatisfaction that derives entirely from other causes, different from those that the bazaar and political speculation sees. And when you know the real causes the treatment methods have to be entirely different from the ones which have been used so far and which were fundamentally misleading.

We do not emerge from experiments, although all the former proved to be wrong and bad and even harmful.

The worst government is the one of the current ban Viktor Ružić.⁸ Dilettantism is too mild a word for his experiment. Too convinced of his value he has introduced a regime which excluded all the Yugoslavs and the others and has only encouraged and incited policy which is primarily wrong and impossible. And the consequences?

Around Zagreb, they cry against the King and the Dynasty and against Belgrade. In broad daylight the Yugoslavs suffer their Yugoslav Sokol and Guard breast badges being torn off. The revolution and liquidation with Belgrade is being spoken about openly. The whole area of the village has been infested with communism. The Pavelić agents agitate openly. So Janka Puzsta is no longer needed, nor other Pavelić-Perčec hiding places. And where does such a relaxation lead, is proved by Kerestinec, Pakrac, Slavenska Požega, Gospić, Zadar, Senj. And where will it stop? The air feels electrified. Only a moment is needed, a spark, and everything will explode. University is a hotbed of communist infestation and Frankist advertising.

If one wants order in Croatia, not to look at the party, we need to fundamentally break with the experiments and the previous system. The law should be placed above each and every one and be applied equally and fully. That one that does not suffice should change. But while it is there it must be respected. It should step firmly on the tail of subversive propaganda of the ground forces / of communism and Pavelić / and

⁸ Viktor Ružić, the Ban of the Sava Banovina, 1936-1938

decisively clamp down on the terror from below. One must not offend the King and country, provoke religious and tribal animosities, let alone prevent by the terror from below that one confesses freely the principles that suit him. And the terror from above and below has to stop affecting anyone's belief and conscience. But the law for everyone should be law for everyone, and the one who breaks it should experience the sanctions. An official can freely exhibit his beliefs at the polls, but while in service he has to operate only by the Constitution and the law in force, and they should apply it to everyone equally, whether he was a felon or a brother.

The Ban and the public authorities have to be constantly among the people. They should ascertain the needs of the people not by espionage and denunciation, but with open communication and inspection at the source and these should be, within the limits of the law, met. The peasant and the little man should receive the same care and kindness as gentlemen in dress coats and hats. Let the bureaucracy that stifles us today be upended. Everything that is possible should be taken care of in the local district and the court for the peasant. His villages are far away from the headquarters of government; the communications are inadequate. He has no time to go to the centers in vain and to be fed up with promises or pushed off by rudeness, threats and punishments. In word: farmer should feel that the national state has his own interest and freedoms at heart. Only then will he get to love the country and freedom, and this will also prevent any subversive elements to succeed in our village.

That would be the duty of the Ban. At least 15 days a month he should be among the people, instead of being at the banquet and receptions in Zagreb.

The question of pacification of Croatia and the Croats / so-called solution of the Croatian question / is nothing but a Columbus egg. There has to be courage and skill, so that this egg is tapped and made to stand on its own. But neither the Columbus egg was left intact after it was hit, although that solved the problem.

Croats still have plenty of reasons to complain. A way should be found, that does not repeat previous mistakes. For today the words are not worth anything. People look only at deeds. And some Ministers, even if well intended they only increase what is already a great evil. One does not tap a wound, it is only gently touched.

Sir President! As a longtime intimate associate of our great teachers the late Nikola Pašić and as your partner since 1923 / which is known by the gentlemen Minister Janić, Djuro Janković, your head of the administrative department of the Council of Ministers Zdravko Popović, Minister Plenipotentiary at Athens Boško Hristić, the head of department at the Central Press Bureau Ranko Dostanić etc. / who has stayed with you in the main comitee since January 6 1929 until you invited us old friends to work with you, I thought that my conscience requires me to honestly write these words to you. Minister Dr Mile Miškulin will bear witness to you that today I sincerely cooperate on the great work of getting this country ordered that you, Mr President, carry out too, and that I know very well the local political constellation, and that my friends gentlemen Ministers Gjuro Janković and Dr Marko Kožul know that I have since the first day sincerely and selflessly, without personal ambition, drawn attention to these

Željko Karaula: Letter by Ivo Franić Požežanin, Director of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb,
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real moments as only in this way you will immediately, without bargaining and humiliation, achieve what you have put on your banner.

But remain quite sure about one fact: Maček is not as strong as it looks, nor are you as weak in Croatia as it appears at first sight.

But do allow your men to be for You, freely and without any terror being inflicted on them.

Please rest assured, Sir Minister President, of my sincere respect for you on this occasion.

Remaining loyal to you

Ivo T. Franić Požežanin
Director of the Ethnographic Museum

Translated by Tomislav Redep