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SLOVENIANS AND YUGOSLAVIA 1918–1941

Slovenians joined the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Kingdom of SHS) expecting that “in the new state context they would have significantly better prospects of adopting decisions on their basic socio-political, socio-economic as well as cultural-educational matters than in the dissolved Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, i.e. that they would have broad autonomist or federalist rights”.¹⁹² However, that was not the case. The hopes to achieve an autonomous Slovenian state-legal position within the Yugoslav state were finally buried by the Constitution of 28 June 1921. Since the Constitution was adopted on a Serbian national holiday (28 June, St. Vitus’ Day), it became known as the St. Vitus’ Day Constitution. In principle it was relatively progressive in comparison with other contemporary constitutions as far as the classic rights and freedoms as well as socio-economic rights were concerned. However, it was extremely non-democratic in relation to the national issues.¹⁹³ The two

192 Miroslav Stiplovšek: Prizadevanja za avtonomijo Slovenije od ustanovitve jugoslovanske države do kraljeve diktature (1918–1929) [Endeavours for the Slovenian Autonomy Since the Establishment of the Yugoslav State Until the King’s Dictatorship (1918–1929)]. *Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje*, 1994, No. 1, p. 77.

193 Majda Strobl, Ivan Kristan and Ciril Ribičič: *Ustavno pravo SFR Jugoslavije* [Constitutional Law of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia]. Ljubljana, 1981, pp. 33–34.

fundamental characteristics of the St. Vitus' Day Constitution, decisively marking the political life in the Kingdom of SHS, were the Yugoslav national unitarianism and state centralism. The Constitution deprived Slovenians, Croatians and Serbs (the names of other nations were not even mentioned) of their national individuality and incorporated them as an invented single national (Yugoslav) entity into a strict centralist Yugoslav state context. The already formed Yugoslav national entities, defined by the Constitution simply as "tribes" of the single (Yugoslav) nation, were therefore formally and legally condemned to national erasure. The national unitarianism of the St. Vitus' Day Constitution was substantiated by the provisions designed specifically to this end, i.e. that the "official language of the Monarchy (...) is Serbo-Croat-Slovene" and its citizens were – with the exception of the minorities belonging to "other tribes and languages" – of Serbo-Croat-Slovene nationality. In addition to these provisions, the national unity principle was also asserted by certain other provisions: the provision that the King and Heir Apparent should declare, in their oath in front of the National Assembly, to protect the "unity of the nation"; the provision that all schools should "provide moral education and develop civic consciousness in the spirit of national unity"; the provision on banning the newspapers and press which might incite "tribal discord"; and the provision that all citizens had the obligation to "serve the interests of the national community".¹⁹⁴

Along with national unitarianism, the St. Vitus' Constitution also enforced state centralism. The Constitution provided for the uniform implementation of the administrative authority throughout the Monarchy, i.e. by the individual administrative-territorial units (the so-called "oblasti" – the expression was taken from Serbian language), established in accordance with the natural, social and economic criteria and with a maximum of 800,000 inhabitants. The Constitution also stipulated that each administrative unit was headed by a so-called "head mayor", appointed by the King and responsible for implementing, through public authorities, the operations of the state administration within the individual administrative units.¹⁹⁵

The centralist state system, established by the St. Vitus' Day Constitution, was legally completed on 26 April 1922, when Pašić's government declared the decree on dividing the state into administrative units, the law on general administration and the law on the self-governance of administrative units and districts. After the decree on dividing the state into administrative units, the Kingdom of SHS was mechanically divided into 33 administrative units regardless of all national and historical criteria. Two of these units were located in the Slovenian territory: the

194 *Uradni list Deželne vlade za Slovenijo*, 27 July 1921, *Ustava kraljevine Srbov, Hrvatov in Slovencev*.

195 Jurij Perovšek: *Unitaristični in centralistični značaj vidovdanske ustave* [Unitarian and Centralist Character of the St. Vitus' Day Constitution]. *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 1993, No. 1–2, p. 20.

administrative units of Ljubljana (with its seat in Ljubljana) and Maribor (with its seat in Maribor). The Ljubljana administrative unit included the Yugoslav part of the former Carniola region with Jezersko and the judicial districts of Laško, Brežice and Sevnica of the former Styria region, as well as the Croatian district of Kastav; the Maribor administrative unit comprised the rest of the Yugoslav part of Styria, the former Carinthian district of Prevalje, as well as Prekmurje and Međimurje. Slovenia was thereby administratively divided in two parts, depriving Slovenians of one of their fundamental prospects of a harmonious national development – the unity of their own national territory. This prospect was further limited by the law on general administration, stipulating that the head mayors, proposed by the Minister of the Interior and appointed by the King, were subordinate to the Belgrade government and in fact merely state officials adhering to the decisions of the central administration. Thereby the central administration did not only gain control over the head mayors, but also over the authorities of the constitutionally guaranteed self-governance of the administrative units – i.e. the Administrative Unit Assemblies (their jurisdiction included especially the financial and economic matters of the administrative units). According to the law on general administration, the head mayors as the political representatives of the government also represented this government in the administrative unit self-governances. They had sufficient autonomy to withhold, of their own accord, the execution of any decisions taken by the self-governance authorities and not warranted by the Constitution, legal acts, or administrative unit decrees. The decisions of the head mayors could only be appealed at the state council – i.e. the supreme administrative court whose members were appointed by the King and the National Assembly. The self-governance and self-governing powers of the administrative units, warranted by the St. Vitus' Day Constitution, were therefore subordinate to the decisions of the head mayors and the state council. In view of all these considerations the self-governance of the administrative units by no means undermined the centralist state system codified in the St. Vitus' Day Constitution, because the self-governance authorities of the administrative units were subordinate to the supreme central administration. According to the St. Vitus' Day Constitution, the institute of self-governance of the administrative units was based purely on the technical division of state administration. Thus, according to the *iure delegatio* principle, the self-governance authorities at the administrative unit level carried out, on behalf of the central state authorities, a part of their tasks, while at the same time they were still subordinate to the central Belgrade administration. The St. Vitus' Day Constitution and the resulting administrative and self-governance arrangement thereby created a comprehensive and impenetrable centralist state system which precluded the artificially formed

administrative territorial units from taking independent decisions with regard to public matters.¹⁹⁶

The national-political and state-legal development in the Yugoslav state was also substantiated in a similar manner after the introduction of the personal dictatorship of King Alexander Karađorđević on 6 January 1929. On that day King Alexander abolished the St.Vitus' Day Constitution, dissolved the National Assembly, and disabled the driving force of the democratic parliamentary system – the political parties – by prohibiting and dissolving them. By the end of 1929 he renewed the enactment of the Yugoslav national unitarianism and state centralism. In the Act Amending the Protection of Public Security and Order Act of 6 January 1929 he again defined Slovenians, Croats and Serbs as “tribes” of the single Yugoslav nation. He went even further in the law on the name and division of the Kingdom, declared on 3 October 1929. The Yugoslav national unitarianism was also enacted with the new state name, as King Alexander changed the name of the Kingdom, previously composed of three “tribal” names – Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian – into a single Yugoslav name covering all of the national individualities. Thus, as of October 1929, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia came into existence and was newly divided into nine Banates. Consequently the administrative units of Ljubljana and Maribor were merged into the Drava Banate, which encompassed the whole Slovenian territory in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia with the exception of the districts of Črnomelj and Metlika, but with the Croatian district of Čabar. These districts were then exchanged between the Drava Banate and the neighbouring Sava Banate on 28 August 1931, which allowed for the adjustment to ethnic borders. However, the new administrative division into individual Banates – in the Slovenian case adapted to the ethnic borders – never challenged the principle of state centralism. The Banates were administrative-territorial units, directly subordinate to the central state administration in Belgrade regardless of their legally guaranteed general administrative jurisdictions. The Bans, who implemented the highest political and general administrative powers in the Banates, were merely representatives of the King's government. The Bans and all senior officials of the Banate administration were proposed by the Minister of the Interior and appointed by the King, while the members of the Bans' advisory bodies – Bans' Councils – were proposed by the Bans and appointed or replaced by the Minister of the Interior. The Banates therefore never negated centralism, although they represented a specific manner of administrative decentralisation in the Yugoslav unitarian state. Thereby the Banate administration was only one of the steps in the completely one-tier system of the Yugoslav state authorities' strict hierarchic scale.¹⁹⁷

196 Ibid., pp. 20–25.

197 Jurij Perovšek: “V zaželjeni deželi”. *Slovenska izkušnja s Kraljevino SHS/Jugoslavijo 1918–1941* [“In the Desired Land”. Slovenian Experience with the Kingdom of SHS/Yugoslavia 1918–1941]. Ljubljana, 2009, pp. 161–164.

King Alexander enacted all the elements of further centralist development of the Yugoslav state also with the Constitution of 3 September 1931. He imposed this Constitution, i.e. laid it down and proclaimed it without the cooperation of the Parliament. Thus he also constitutionally confirmed the Yugoslav national unitarianism and state centralism in an absolutist fashion. The prevention of the national development of the various Yugoslav national individualities, substantiated in this way, was a constitutionally and politically stipulated reality of the first Yugoslav state community.¹⁹⁸

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The question of how to declare one's attitude toward the unitarian centralist Yugoslav national-state reality was decisive for defining the relationship between Slovenians and Yugoslavia, between the nation and the state. Slovenians responded to this question in different ways. There was a division of opinion among them regarding the decision whether to accept the merging with the imaginary Yugoslav nation or resist such a national fate and fight, on the basis of the conscience of the specific Slovenian national individuality, for the right to the Slovenian language, culture and national statehood, which could be ensured by the Yugoslav state union reorganised in the autonomist or federal manner. The majority of the Slovenian nation and politicians opted for the Slovenian autonomist-federalist position, which was shared in the entire Slovenian political space of that time through individual political subjects or public servants. In the 1920s the Slovenian autonomist-federalist position was defended by the autonomist-oriented Slovenian cultural workers; the Catholic Slovenian People's Party; the liberal National Socialist Party (only in the first half of the 1920s); Prepeluh's and Lončar's Slovenian Autonomist Association; Novačan's Agrarian or Slovenian Republican Party; the Alliance of Working People (the electoral alliance between the communists, Christian socialists and the Ljubljana local fraction of the Socialist Party of Yugoslavia, the so-called Zarjani, for the municipal elections in Ljubljana on 3 December 1922); the Socialist Party of Working People; the Slovenian Republican Party of Workers and Peasants; the communists (after 1923); and, since the middle of the 1920s, also the so-called Bernot's Group from the socialist camp and the Slovenian Peasant Party, formed in 1926 by the merger between the former liberal Independent Peasant Party and the Slovenian Republican Party of Workers and Peasants. All these political subjects called for a revision of the St. Vitus' Day Constitution and the

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 164–165.

formation of the autonomist-federalist system of the Yugoslav state.¹⁹⁹ The most accomplished autonomist-federalist state-legal programmes in terms of contents were written before the elections for the National Assembly of the Kingdom of SHS by the Slovenian Republican Party and the Slovenian People's Party. These two parties were the first to substantiate, in concrete terms, the right to and appeal for the statehood of the Slovenian nation within the Yugoslav state community. Thus the Slovenian Republican Party, claiming that the Slovenian nation was sufficiently mature to manage itself and breathe with "its own lungs", demanded absolute national sovereignty and statehood for Slovenians according to the examples of Switzerland and the United States of America. It insisted on the transformation of the Kingdom of SHS into a Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which would not only include Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia but Bulgaria as well. In the beginning of February 1923 this party presented a detailed explication of its state-legal programme and pointed out that Slovenia would be an independent state within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia with its own National Assembly and state administration, connected to the other federal units only as an equal state component of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia would be a state composed of separate units, where only the following elements would be common: the army (whereby Slovenians would serve the military in Slovenia), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (with a certain number of Slovenian and Croatian members according to a commonly agreed formula), finances (they would be common only in the common matters), currency (it would only have a common design, while the banknotes would only have either Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian or Bulgarian inscriptions), trade agreements with foreign countries, customs and tariffs, and the President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. For one mandate of "three or four years", the President would be Slovenian, for the next he would be Croatian, then Serbian, and then Bulgarian.²⁰⁰

Like the Slovenian Republican Party, the Slovenian People's Party also emphasised the national, political, social and economic independence of Slovenia within the South Slavic community. At the end of February 1923 it published an extensive brochure entitled *Sodite po delih!* (Judge by Actions!), which contained a special section with a "short description of the political programme of the Slovenian People's Party as adopted at numerous meetings and submitted

199 Ibid., pp. 145–146. Jurij Perovšek: *Liberalizem in vprašanje slovenstva. Nacionalna politika liberalnega tabora v letih 1918–1929* [Liberalism and the Question of Slovenianism. The National Policy of the Liberal Camp 1918–1929]. Ljubljana, 1996, pp. 120–123, 178–180, 204–237.

200 Jurij Perovšek: *Oblikovanje programskih načrtov o nacionalni samoodločbi v slovenski politiki do ustanovitve Neodvisne delavske stranke Jugoslavije* [Formation of the National Self-Determination Programme Plans in the Slovenian Politics Until the Establishment of the Independent Workers' Party of Yugoslavia]. *Zgodovinski časopis*, 1984, No. 1-2, pp. 20–24.

by our members of the Constituent Assembly”.²⁰¹ Its purpose was to present a “clear picture of how our Slovenian People’s Party would like to organise the state”.²⁰² According to this programme, Slovenia would be a part of the common state, co-formed by Croats, Serbs and Bulgarians. This community, founded on the principle of self-determination of peoples, would have a federal state-legal arrangement with common citizenship, foreign and military matters, currency, the most important infrastructure resources and common finances, for which a common tax would be introduced, while all other taxes would remain in the domain of the individual autonomous state-legal units. Common state matters would be governed by the central parliament and all other matters by the autonomous regional authorities. The autonomous Slovenia would be governed by the Slovenian government, elected by the Slovenian National Parliament. The Slovenian Parliament would have legislative competence over the definition of the relationship between the Church and the state, determination of the Church’s rights and duties, school legislation, organisation of political and financial administration and judiciary, as well as corporatist legislation. It would also have jurisdiction over socialisation, control of factories, production and consumption, establishment of technical schools for peasants, workers and craftsmen, health care, social policy, and social insurance.²⁰³ This would ensure the political, economic, social, cultural and national independence of the Slovenian people – i.e. the Slovenian self-determination, which was explained in the brochure as the Slovenian nation’s right to govern its own matters in its own territory.²⁰⁴ The realisation of this right, as it was emphasised in the brochure, “corresponds to our demand for autonomy”.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, the Slovenian People’s Party maintained its demand for autonomy, specified in 1923, also in the following years²⁰⁶ – between 1927 and 1929 it attempted to implement it in the context of the functioning of the so-called administrative unit self-governances.

Apart from the Slovenian Republican Party (SRS) and the Slovenian People’s Party (SLS), in 1923 the communists also made an important contribution to the Slovenian autonomist thought of the 1920s. In the context of the broad public theoretical political debate about the national question, held in the newsletters of the Independent Workers’ Party of Yugoslavia (NDSJ); the Communist Party of Yugoslavia – KPJ – was forbidden on 2 August 1921 due to its methods of

201 *Sodite po delih!. Vsem, ki so dobre volje! Kažipot slovenskih volivcem v boju za slovensko samostojnost* [Judge by Actions!. For Everyone of Good Will!. Guidelines for the Slovenian Voters in the Struggle for Slovenian Independence]. Ljubljana, 1923, p. 70.

202 *Ibid.*

203 *Ibid.*, pp. 70–71.

204 *Ibid.*, pp. 1–3, 27.

205 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

206 Perovšek, “V zaželjeni deželi”, p. 154.

individual terrorism, resorted to by certain communists), they abandoned their initial unitarian centralist view in the second half of that year. After the conclusion of the debate at the end of 1923, they emphasised the multinational character of the Yugoslav community and the federal state-legal principle as far as the state organisation was concerned. The changed national programme of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was developed with a significant contribution of the Slovenian communists.²⁰⁷

The opposite of the autonomist-federalist view – the Yugoslav unitarian and centralist view – was also argued for by different ideological-political subjects in the 1920s: until 1923 or in the first half of the 1920s, by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and the liberal Independent Peasant Party; the Slovenian section of the state-wide (in reality Serbian) National Radical Party and the Socialist Party of Yugoslavia; the liberal National Progressive Party; and by the leading representative of the Slovenian liberal politics in the 1920s – the Yugoslav Democratic Party or the Independent Democratic Party. Orjuna, the combat and terrorist organisation of the Yugoslav Democratic Party/Independent Democratic Party was also an intense supporter of the Yugoslav unitarian and centralist programme.²⁰⁸

The liberals, united in the Yugoslav Democratic Party or the Independent Democratic Party, were the most important and influential protagonists of the Yugoslav unitarianism and centralism in Slovenia. They shared their view with other unitarian and centralist political forces in Slovenia: that the creation of the Yugoslav state had brought about a decisive period of establishing a single Yugoslav nation, which supposedly represented the natural and historically substantiated end of the previously separate development of the individual South Slavic ethnicities. Their integration into a new, higher and politically stronger Yugoslav national community would thus represent a reason, in the national and state sense, for their existence in the centralist Yugoslavia, as only such a state would be able to settle all the national, cultural, economic and state-legal differences between them; while their transformation and elevation into a Yugoslav state nation would grant them true historical freedom and give sense to their national emancipation efforts.²⁰⁹ The Yugoslav Democratic Party (JDS) or the Independent Democratic Party (SDS) rigorously defended this conviction, as pointed out by the leading Slovenian liberal politician of the 1920s, Dr. Gregor

207 Jurij Perovšek: *Samoodločba in federacija. Slovenski komunisti in nacionalno vprašanje 1920–1941* [Self-Determination and Federation. Slovenian Communists and the National Question 1920–1941]. Ljubljana, 2012, pp. 72–108.

208 Perovšek, *Liberalizem in vprašanje slovenstva*, pp. 28–109, 124–174, 181–201, 238–284.

209 Jurij Perovšek: Jugoslovanstvo in vprašanje narodov v južnoslovanski problematiki 19. in 20. stoletja [Yugoslavism and the Question of Nations in the South Slavic Context in the 19th and 20th Century]. *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 1999, No. 2, p. 14.

Žerjav, in February 1924: “To transform the Slovenian part of the nation into Yugoslavism, to continue to build upon the achievements of our cultural and economic efforts in order to assure the greatest possible unification, to realise the Slovenian organisational potentials in all parts of the nation so as to grow into an indivisible Yugoslav entity, to bring together all of the creative forces among Slovenians in this action: that is the wish of the Slovenian democracy. *In this way the problem of Slovenians as a small nation would be solved in a favourable manner.*” (underlined by J. P.).²¹⁰ The second fundamental thought which led the Slovenian liberals in their devotion to the Yugoslav unitarianism and centralism, stemmed from the opposition to the strongest Slovenian political party – the SLS. Its autonomist orientation was seen by the Slovenian liberals only as an effort to “surrender the whole of Slovenia into the hands of clericalism”.²¹¹ That would imply the establishment of an episcopal government in the autonomous Slovenia, which would turn into a papal province.²¹² According to the unitarian liberal assessment such a development would have critical consequences. In this context the liberals revealed their ideological message of what kind of circumstances would arise “should Slovenia become some sort of an autonomous country as desired by the Slovenian People’s Party”. Its terror would “sustain the clerical supremacy in Slovenia for many decades”, as it was written in 1926 in the leading liberal newspaper *Jutro*, “the lower and higher administrative authorities, public safety, everything would be under the control of the bishops and political clergy, and no countermeasures whatsoever could be taken against their actions (...). *The clericalists are in a fortunate position nowadays,*” warned the *Jutro* newspaper, participating in the cultural struggle, “*that they do not have to consider how to violently suppress a bourgeois war in the autonomous Slovenia!*” (underlined by J. P.).²¹³

For the liberals the introduction of King’s dictatorship and the related reinstatement of the unitarian and centralist definition of the Yugoslav national statehood meant the confirmation of their erstwhile orientation with regard to the national question. In the system of political monism and as a part of the state government, the liberals, integrated into the unitarian-centralist state-wide Yugoslav Radical Peasant Democracy (JRKD) or the Yugoslav National Party (JNS), the only political party allowed by the regime in the first half of the 1930s, even enhanced their unitarian and centralist national programme, already formed in the 1920s. In the 1930s this programme was also shared by the

210 *Jutro*, 5. February 1924, Jugoslovenska demokracija na pohodu: veličasten zbor zaupnikov JDS v Ljubljani.

211 *Jutro*, 20. November 1923, editorial of 19 November.

212 Gregor Žerjav: Naglavni greh klerikalne stranke. *Domovina*, 25. March 1926. *Jutro*, 14. August 1925, editorial of 13 August.

213 *Jutro*, 23 January 1926, editorial of 21 January.

liberally-oriented movements, operating through their political gazettes (Pohod, Borba, Boj), liberal youth organisations and associations, as well as liberal-unitarian groups at the Ljubljana University.²¹⁴ Slovenian political liberalism expressed its adherence to the Yugoslav national integralism most emphatically in the middle of the 1930s, when the leading JNS politicians from the Drava, Sava and Primorska Banates (Slovenia and Croatia with Dalmatia and Herzegovina) drew up the so-called Pohorje Declaration on 19 and 20 August 1935 under the leadership of the Slovenian liberal leader Dr. Albert Kramer. In this Declaration the liberals presented their outlook on the national issue yet again. According to them, Serbs, Croats and Slovenians were “*a single nation, in the ethnic sense*”, while the Yugoslav national unity was “*a sense of the internal connection between Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, resulting from these people’s destiny, and the conviction that all of us form a community, no parts of which could live freely and independently*”. Therefore “*the nationalities, (...) the independent parts of the nation, can only develop their individual cultural characteristics and preserve their traditions in unity, in connection with the traditions of the national whole. Yugoslavs as a nation*”, the Pohorje Declaration stated, “*can only develop in a unitarian state*”.²¹⁵

Naturally, such emphases of the Pohorje Declaration also revealed the liberal political standpoint regarding the issue of the state-legal character of the Yugoslav community. Also in the 1930s the liberal politics argued in favour of the Yugoslav state centralism. This became most apparent in January 1933, when it opposed the so-called Ljubljana Declaration – a federal state-legal programme, outlined by the former Slovenian People’s Party on 31 December 1932 – extremely resolutely. The Ljubljana Declaration, which called for the establishment of a Slovenian federal unit (apart from the Serbian and Croatian units) in the Yugoslav state and demanded the recognition of the Slovenian national individuality, name, flag, financial independence as well as political and cultural freedom,²¹⁶ represented, in the eyes of the liberal politics, an “insane demand”, a “national sin and criminal act”.²¹⁷ That was because it supposedly meant nothing less than “*an attempt to divide Yugoslavia by means of a federation*” and create a new state, “*in fact consisting of three states*”.²¹⁸

Despite these emphases that denied the Slovenian national emancipation efforts, the SLS Declaration nevertheless prompted the liberals to adopt a standpoint – as the Jutro newspaper underlined in January 1933 – that “*as many administrative and public matters as possible [should be transferred] to the lower-*

214 Perovšek, “*V zaželjeni deželi*”, pp. 166–167.

215 Jutro, 22 June 1935, Beseda jugoslovenskih nacionalistov.

216 Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Rokopisni oddelek, 312, 1–9, 1933.

217 Jutro, 11 January 1933, Nihče se ne sme igrati z življenjskimi narodnimi interesi.

218 Jutro, 8 January 1933, Slovenci ogorčeno zavračajo in ostro obsojajo politiko razdiranja.

level administrative units, at least to the extent allowed by the vital interests of the state and national community”.²¹⁹ Of course, the administrative decentralisation defined in such a manner remained within the framework of the unitarian state. This was also confirmed by the actions of the liberal politics in the context of the Ban’s Council of the Drava Banate, which, in the first half of the 1930s, consisted of the liberals. The liberal Ban’s Councillors may have demanded the broadening of the Ban’s Council jurisdiction when it came to drawing up the budget. However, their demands, in view of the fundamental liberal centralist orientation, never radicalised into demands for the establishment of a Slovenian Banate with considerable autonomist legislative, executive and financial powers.²²⁰ Until the very end of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia the liberals refused to listen to the wider Slovenian aspirations for the establishment of an autonomous Slovenian state-legal unit in the Yugoslav community. They remained the only political factor to avoid the Slovenian national problem in their political ideas and practices. Thus the liberals narrowed their political space considerably, and this was one of the factors leading to their political decline in the second half of the 1930s.

The situation on the autonomist-federalist side of the Slovenian politics, where the former Slovenian People’s Party enjoyed widespread support, was completely different. This became very obvious as early as in 1932, when the SLS – after taking part in the government of the King’s dictatorship regime for more than two years and a half – rekindled its autonomist programme. Its restoration was associated with the birthday of the SLS leader Dr. Anton Korošec on 12 May.

On this occasion the SLS prepared a grand celebration of Korošec’s 60th anniversary on 8 May 1932 in the Union hall in Ljubljana. Here they displayed Slovenian national flags and cheered: “Down with the government!”, “Long live independent Slovenia!”, “Long live Dr. Korošec!”. The police dispersed the crowd and arrested eleven people.²²¹ The celebration of Korošec’s birthday did not only take place in Ljubljana, but all over Slovenia. Bonfires burned, and men wore green ties as a sign of their adherence to the SLS and its leader, Korošec. The

219 Ibid.

220 Miroslav Stiplovšek: *Banski svet Dravske banovine 1930–1935. Prizadevanja banskega sveta za omilitev gospodarsko-socialne krize in razvoj prosvetno-kulturnih dejavnosti v Sloveniji ter za razširitev samoupravnih in upravnih pristojnosti banovine* [Ban’s Council of the Drava Banate 1930–1941. The Endeavours of the Ban’s Council to Alleviate the Socio-Economic Crisis, Develop the Educational-Cultural Activities in Slovenia, and Expand the Banate’s Self-Governance and Administrative Jurisdictions]. Ljubljana, 2006, pp. 157, 159–166, 176–177, 183, 197–198.

221 Silvo Kranjec: *Slovenci v Jugoslaviji* [Slovenians in Yugoslavia]. In: *Spominski zbornik Slovenije. Ob dvajsetletnici kraljevine Jugoslavije* [Slovenian Memorial Collection of Texts. At the 20th Anniversary of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia]. Ljubljana, 1939, p. 98. Metod Mikuž: *Oris zgodovine Slovencev v stari Jugoslaviji 1917–1941* [Outline of the History of Slovenians in the Old Yugoslavia 1917–1941]. Ljubljana, 1965, pp. 389, 395–396.

so-called Green Tie Movement developed in the Domžale region.²²² After the green ties were forbidden, the movement's supporters wore green socks. The protests culminated in the so-called Šenčur Events on 22 May 1932, when the SLS prepared anti-regime protests in Šenčur during the gathering of the JRKD. Gendarmerie intervened and fired shots in the air. This was followed by extensive demonstrations against the regime all around Slovenia. At this time the SLS also sought the support of the Church. The celebrations of Korošec's birthday turned into eucharistic parish gatherings. Since the gendarmerie was forbidden from entering the churches, Korošec's supporters could gather there and safely celebrate him and the political goals he personified. The political epilogue of the celebration of Korošec's sixtieth birthday took place at the Court for the Protection of the State in Belgrade: in February 1933 eleven defendants were sentenced to several months in prison due to their anti-regime declarations and exclamations during the JRKD gathering in Šenčur or at Korošec's birthday celebrations.²²³ The federalist demands of the SLS, or the aforementioned Ljubljana Declaration, also referred to as Korošec's Declaration or Slovenian Declaration, were even more resounding. The regime responded resolutely and ordered the confinement of the members of the highest SLS leadership, including Anton Korošec. After its leaders were confined (they were allowed to go free after the death of King Alexander in October 1934) and until the change of the regime in June 1935 the SLS no longer emphasised the federalist demands, but it did not forget them. This especially proved to be true in the second half of the 1930s, when the former Slovenian People's Party – as a part of the ruling Yugoslav Radical Association, another all-Yugoslav political party which existed in the 1930s – once again, though gradually, started making demands for the national assertion of Slovenians and autonomist reorganisation of the state. Apart from the SLS, various political groups, movements and associations made demands for the Slovenian national emancipation at that time as well. The issue was emphasised by the peasant and workers' movement (in their gazettes *Slovenska zemlja*, *Ljudska pravica*, *Delavska politika*, *Delavski obzornik*, *Neodvisnost*, and *Edinost*), the socially-progressive movement gathered around the *Slovenska beseda* gazette, and the Catholic-corporatist oriented groups gathered around the gazettes *Straža v viharju* and *Mi mladi borci*. The same demands were also strongly supported by the People's Front movement. Its protagonists – the communists,

222 For more information about this see Jure Gašparič: *SLS pod kraljevo diktaturo. Diktatura kralja Aleksandra in politika Slovenske ljudske stranke v letih 1929–1935* [The SLS under the King's Dictatorship. King Alexander's Dictatorship and the Policy of the Slovenian People's Party 1929–1935]. Ljubljana, 2007, pp. 141–152.

223 Matija Škerbec: *Šenčurski dogodki* [Šenčur Events]. Kranj, 1937, pp. 99–100. Mikuž, *Oris zgodovine Slovencev 1917–1941*, pp. 396–397. Gašparič, *SLS pod kraljevo diktaturo*, pp. 153–158.

Slovenian-oriented national democratic intelligentsia, Christian socialist and the transformed national democratic Slovenian Sokol organisation – were brought together by the self-confident emphasising of the Slovenian national autonomy as well as the clear and resolute demand for the Slovenian national self-determination and autonomist-federal transformation of the Yugoslav state. The equality of Slovenians and their self-governance – meaning such a Yugoslav state as to ensure the existence, unobstructed development and free self-expression of the Slovenian nation in all the areas of its linguistic, cultural, national, economic and political life – was also argued for by the national democratic groups that had distanced themselves from the policies of the liberals due to their support of the undemocratic regime and Yugoslav unitarianism. The majority of these groups were established in the middle of the 1930s (the Slovenian supporters of Maček, the Association of Peasant Boys and Girls Societies, the democratically transformed Slovenian Sokoli organisation). Meanwhile, the first groups to break away from the Slovenian liberal unitarian policy between 1932 and 1933 were, apart from Josip Vidmar with his work *Kulturni problem slovenstva* (Cultural Problem of Slovenian Identity), the cultural and scientific workers of the liberal-national orientation, gathered around the *Sodobnost* magazine. At the same time the Slovenian national standpoint was also supported by the group gathered around the *Slovenija* gazette. Thus an authentic Slovenian national orientation, which continued the Slovenian liberal autonomism from the 1920s, also existed within the liberal camp in the 1930s. It was based on the ideas of the most prominent Slovenian liberal minds of the time: Ivan Prijatelj, Josip Vidmar, and Lojze Ude.²²⁴ Even though the autonomist-federalist orientation was supported by the majority of the Slovenian politics and many interesting and detailed state-legal plans of how the Slovenian autonomy was to be substantiated were drawn up in its context, the question of its realisation only began to define the actual dimensions of the Slovenian autonomism. Only some of the contemporaneous Slovenian autonomist ambitions were realised in the First Yugoslavia. The first goals were reached in the time of the aforementioned administrative unit self-governances between 1927 and 1929, when the strongest Slovenian political party – Slovenian People's Party – established a sort of a “silent autonomy” in Slovenia. As it was, on 23 January 1927 the elections for the Administrative Unit Assemblies took place, and the SLS received the majority of votes on the basis of its autonomist programme in the Ljubljana and Maribor administrative units. During the constitution of the Administrative Unit Assemblies a month later, its deputies elected the representatives of the SLS as the Presidents of the Ljubljana and Maribor Administrative Assemblies and their executive bodies

224 Perovšek, “V zaželjeni deželi”, pp. 171–172.

– the Administrative Unit Committees. Furthermore, both head mayors of the Ljubljana and Maribor administrative units, appointed on 28 February 1927, belonged to the ranks of the SLS as well. Because the SLS judged it could take advantage of the existing political circumstances and at least partly implement its autonomist ideas through the administrative self-governance, simultaneously ensuring its authority and domination in Slovenia, it entered the government in February 1927. Thus it opted for pragmatism after long years of being on the side of the opposition.

The introduction of administrative unit self-governances meant a partial alleviation of the strict centralist state-legal system implemented by the St. Vitus' Day Constitution. Thus we can also refer to the period when this took place – from the formal establishment on 23 February 1927 until the introduction of the King's dictatorship on 6 January 1929, when the Administrative Unit Assemblies were abolished – as the time when Slovenian parliamentarism came to life in the First Yugoslavia. This period was characterised by the intense endeavours of the SLS to ensure – through the administrative unit self-governances and under its leadership – as much independence in the management of the important socio-economic and cultural-educational affairs as possible, because the centralist state administration had been either addressing these issues inappropriately or neglecting them for many years. In the first half of 1927 both Slovenian administrative unit self-governances took over a variety of jurisdictions from the Ljubljana and Maribor head mayors in accordance with the provisions of the St. Vitus' Day Constitution and the subsequent government Decree on the Administrative Unit and District Self-Governance: the control of municipalities and local self-governances, as well as the management of the former provincial assets. Later these administrative units also organised their own financial institutions. In the time when the SLS was still in the government – until the middle of April 1927 – the Belgrade National Assembly also gave the Slovenian Administrative Unit Assemblies the right to amend, supplement and abolish the former provincial laws in line with the constitution and state legislation. Thus the Slovenian Administrative Unit Assemblies also had a broader legislative jurisdiction. A year later, in March 1928, both Slovenian administrative unit self-governances were the only administrative units in the state to also receive – according to a special authorisation from the National Assembly – the right to change certain important decrees of the National Government of SHS in Ljubljana as well as those of the Provincial Government for Slovenia from 1918–1921. Thus they had the right to adopt not only the executive decrees accompanying the laws passed in the National Assembly, but also legally binding regulations – *de facto* they even started to carry out limited legislative functions. This privilege

resulted from the participation of the SLS in the government. The asymmetric implementation of the administrative unit self-governance in Slovenia gave rise to criticism, especially in Croatia, where they referred to the Slovenian administrative units as “a state within the state”.

After its repeated victory at the Assembly elections on 11 September 1927, the SLS once again entered the government on the basis of the renowned Bled Agreement, reached by the SLS and the Serbian National Radical Party on 11 July 1927, and numerous jurisdictions and institutions were transferred from the individual ministries to the Slovenian administrative unit self-governances. The SLS remained in the government until the onset of the King’s dictatorship. In comparison with other self-governances in the state, in the second half of 1927 the Ljubljana and Maribor administrative unit self-governances took over – from the individual line ministries – the greatest share of matters and institutions in the field of public construction, agriculture, non-agrarian industries, health, social welfare and vocational education. Furthermore, their administrative unit budgets for the years 1928 and 1929, which ensured the financial foundations for their operation and were the largest in the state, were confirmed by the Minister of Finance swiftly and without any complications. In this context the centralist authorities managed to attain their goal: to relieve the central budget of the obligations to finance the individual administrative units. Namely, those self-governances that wanted to carry out their tasks successfully – of these the Slovenian self-governances were especially prominent – had to rely mostly on their own resources for the preparation of their budgets. This imposed an additional tax burden on the Slovenian population, which was severely criticised by the opposition.

The introduction of the dictatorship put an end to the two-year period when Slovenians managed a wide range of important matters on their own, especially in the socio-economic field. At this time both Slovenian administrative unit self-governances functioned as a single Slovenian administrative unit, in so far as this was possible in accordance with the legislation. However, the efforts to organise joint sessions of both Administrative Unit Assemblies as a kind of a Slovenian Parliament were unsuccessful. The Slovenian Administrative Unit Assemblies also strived to function in accordance with the model of the Belgrade Parliament – with limited competences, of course. As a wide range of issues, including political, were addressed, the pluralism of the outlooks of all of the twelve parties, represented in the Slovenian Administrative Unit Assemblies at the time, came to the forefront. In this sense the Ljubljana and Maribor Administrative Unit Assemblies were even forerunners, of a sort, of the Slovenian Parliament, elected in April 1990. Otherwise, in the intervening periods, the Slovenian representative bodies consisted of a single party.

The Slovenian self-governances achieved their greatest successes in the economic field – in public construction and encouragement of the development of agrarian industry. One of their exceedingly important achievements was also the organisation of the health system in the context of addressing the social issues. They also managed to improve the situation in education and culture. The leading political factor in Slovenia at the time – the SLS – also exploited the activities of both administrative unit self-governances for its own party gains, which was criticised resolutely by the opposition. However, we should emphasise that the most visible achievements of the SLS benefitted everyone, or served the general Slovenian interests.

Through the activities of the two administrative unit self-governances between 1927 and 1929, Slovenians demonstrated their own will and capacity to independently solve the important issues pertaining to their development. Despite the exaggerated – and on the other hand undervalued – estimates with regard to the results of the activities of both Slovenian administrative unit self-governances, we should underline the fact that the financial situation and organisation of all the activities and institutions taken over by these two self-governances improved swiftly and significantly in comparison with their condition during the year-long centralist management. However, the successful operation of the Slovenian self-governances – significantly more efficient than in the other thirty-one administrative units in the state – nevertheless remained far from the successful implementation of the programmes of Slovenian legislative autonomy with a Slovenian parliament and government, which had been comprehensively outlined already in the 1920s.²²⁵

With the introduction of King Alexander's dictatorship on 6 January 1929, all self-governance bodies and authorities of the Ljubljana and Maribor Administrative Unit were abolished. In the autumn of 1929 the Drava Banate and its King's Ban's Administration were formed. The Ban took over all the affairs of the general administration and the former self-governance, and he carried out all of his duties under the supervision and according to the guidelines issued by the relevant ministries in Belgrade. The possibility for Slovenians to address the important questions regarding their development – like in the years 1927–1929 through the administrative unit self-governances – was now gone. The struggle for the Slovenian autonomy returned to the beginning.²²⁶

225 Miroslav Stiplovšek: *Slovenski parlamentarizem 1927–1929. Avtonomistična prizadevanja skupščin ljubljanske in mariborske oblasti za ekonomsko-socialni in prosvetno-kulturni razvoj Slovenije ter za udejanjenje parlamentarizma* [Slovenian Parliamentarism 1927–1929. Autonomist Efforts of the Ljubljana and Maribor Administrative Unit Assemblies for the Socio-Economic and Educational-Cultural Development of Slovenia and the Enactment of Parliamentarism]. Ljubljana, 2000, pp. 12–13, 106–302, 325–331, 346.

226 Stiplovšek, *Slovenski parlamentarizem 1927–1929*, pp. 316–317.

However, despite the Slovenian integration into the centralist state system, a “silent” Slovenian autonomy came to life again in the second half of the 1930s. At this time the Ban’s Council, functioning as the Ban’s consultative body since 1931, strengthened its role in the adoption of the budget. The main task of the Ban’s Council was to comment on the Ban’s budget proposal with regard to the economic, social, health and cultural-educational activities and institutions from the viewpoint of the needs of the districts and cities represented by the Ban’s Council as well as, more generally, for the territory of the whole Banate. However, it could not adopt any decisions on the budget.²²⁷ Later the discussions about the budget developed from the focused local framework into thorough debates about all the outstanding economic, financial, social, health, educational and cultural issues and the activities of the public administration. Occasionally they also touched upon political issues and reflected all of the current affairs in Slovenia. Such functioning of the Ban’s Council was encouraged by the SLS after it had entered the government in the summer of 1935. The SLS leader Anton Korošec, who became the Minister of the Interior, used his function to ensure that the leading positions in the authorities of the Drava Banate and the majority of those in the Ban’s Council were taken over by the members of his party. With the domination of the SLS adherents in the Ban’s Council – who, like in the first half of the 1930s when the Ban’s Administration was in the hands of the liberals, exploited their administrative privileges to secure party benefits – the specific circumstances from the time when administrative unit self-governance had been in force were restored. The Ban’s Council became an increasingly important factor in solving the issues relevant to the socio-economic and cultural-educational progress of Slovenia. A new era in the efforts for an autonomous Slovenia began. The demands for the Slovenian economic, financial, social and cultural independence as well as equality of the Slovenian language in the official affairs became more numerous, and the name “Slovenia” increasingly often replaced the designation “Drava Banate” in the Ban’s Council discussions. These demands were made by the Ban’s Councillors at each session. The autonomist endeavours of the Ban’s Council reached their peak on 17 February 1940, when it adopted the resolution on the establishment of a separate state-legal unit, the Banate of Slovenia. At this point the Ban’s Councillors also underlined that the Ban’s Council should be immediately replaced with an elected Banate Assembly, which would, among other things, be responsible for all the aspects of the Banate budget as well as enjoy legislative competence. The resolution on the establishment of the

227 Miroslav Stiplovšek: Ukinitve oblastnih samouprav in oblikovanje banske uprave Dravske banovine leta 1929 [Abolishment of Administrative Unit Self-Governance and Establishment of the Ban’s Administration of the Drava Banate in 1929]. *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 1997, No. 2, pp. 102–103.

Banate of Slovenia reflected the existing state of affairs in Slovenia, where during the second half of the 1930s life in fact proceeded independently and according to the will of Slovenians, even in the absence of the formal legal basis for this.²²⁸

The demand for the establishment of the Banate of Slovenia in February 1940 was made in the time when the Ban's Administration of the Drava Banate had already carried out the intense preparations for the establishment of the Slovenian Banate after September 1939. The work was undertaken after the establishment of the Banate of Croatia on 26 August 1939, which had a special state-legal position and certain features of statehood in the context of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. When the Banate of Croatia was established, the Yugoslav state leadership also provided for the possibility of the formation of other state-legal units (Banates) in the country. A special commission responsible for drawing up the legal acts for the establishment of the Banate of Slovenia was appointed with the government on 14 September 1939. On this basis the Ban's Administration of the Drava Banate prepared the texts of all sorts of decrees: about the establishment of the Slovenian Banate; organisation of Ban's Administration and Banate Assembly as the Slovenian parliamentary representation; elections for the Banate Assembly and its rules of procedure; administrative court for Slovenia; and about the Banate budget. Proposals were also prepared with regard to transferring the matters from the individual ministries to the offices in Ljubljana. In 1940 the former SLS minister, Dr. Andrej Gosar, published his study *The Banate of Slovenia* in a special publication, substantiating numerous state-legal, economic and financial reasons for the formation of the Slovenian Banate. The preparations for the establishment of the Banate of Slovenia then came to a halt due to the looming danger of war. Thus the Ban's Council no longer discussed the establishment of the Slovenian Banate at its final session in February 1941.²²⁹ However, even three weeks before the attack of the Axis Powers against the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, *Slovenec*, the gazette of the Slovenian People's Party, underlined that "our goals (...) are [nevertheless] ... completely clear". These goals involved "Slovenian autonomy, which will sooner or later become a fact in the new state system."²³⁰

History has prevented us from finding out whether Slovenians could achieve autonomy in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia or not, because after April 1941 the Kingdom no longer existed. We can only ascertain that the fundamental

228 Stiplovšek, *Slovenski parlamentarizem 1927–1929*, pp. 335, 338–339. Momčilo Zečević: Neki pogledi u Srbiji na političku delatnost dr. Antona Korošca. *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 1991, No. 1, p. 72. Janko Prunk: Slovenske predstave o avtonomiji (oziroma državnosti) in prizadevanja zanjo v Kraljevini Jugoslaviji [Slovenian Notions of Autonomy (or Statehood) and the Endeavours to Ensure It in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia]. In: Grafenauer et al. (eds.), *Slovinci in država*, p. 140.

229 Perovšek, "V zaželeni deželi", pp. 223–224. Zečević, Neki pogledi u Srbiji na Korošca, p. 72. Stiplovšek, *Slovenski parlamentarizem 1927–1929*, pp. 339–342.

230 *Slovenec*, 16 March 1941, Naša pot.

Slovenian national-political goal – Slovenian autonomy – was not reached in the first Yugoslav community. Another disappointment was the loss of the Littoral (Primorska) region, which the Kingdom of SHS renounced – in the international legal sense – in favour of Italy by signing the Peace Treaty of Rapallo on 12 November 1920.²³¹ However, if we analyse the relationship between Slovenians and Yugoslavia between 1918 and 1941 thoroughly, we can emphasise that the negative Slovenian experiences with it were offset by certain favourable characteristics and achievements of the Slovenian development in this state community. As it was, apart from the progress in the national-cultural, educational, economic and political area the so-called silent autonomy proved that Slovenians were capable of managing and pursuing their national, cultural, economic as well as political life on their own, autonomously. This strengthened Slovenians in their conviction that their majority national autonomist-federalist goals were well-founded, which in turn strengthened the Slovenian national awareness and self-confidence as well as represented a national-political background for them to carry on from the Kingdom of SHS/Yugoslavia and apply in the subsequent historical developments.

231 Perovšek, “V zaželjeni deželi”, pp. 239–240.