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The Second World War and the National Question: The Origins of the Autonomous Status of Vojvodina in Yugoslavia

Dr Vladimir Unkovski-Korica

Lecturer in Legacies of Communism

Central and Eastern European Studies

School of Social and Political Sciences

University of Glasgow

vladimir.unkovski-korica@glasgow.ac.uk

Abstract

This article investigates the origins of the autonomous status of Vojvodina in post-war Serbia and Yugoslavia. It charts the formation of national and regional consciousness among Vojvodina's Serbs, Germans and Hungarians, from Habsburg times to the Second World War. It then argues that Nazi Germany's racial war radicalised national tensions in Vojvodina. Nazi defeat resulted in the brutal expulsion of Vojvodina's Germans, making Serbs for the first time a majority. The region's claim to autonomous status after the war therefore clashed with the national-territorial principle applied to federalism by the victorious Communist Party of Yugoslavia, causing frequent friction and instability.

Article¹

The borderlands of Eastern Europe and the Balkans witnessed violent processes of nation-state formation in the nineteenth and particularly the twentieth centuries. War and revolution in these areas of mixed population were the road from imperial domination to independent statehood. In *The Lands Between* (Prusin, 2011), Alexander V. Prusin shows the borderlands between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia moving towards inter-ethnic

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competition between and among nationalising states, before the impact of the Second World War radicalised these pre-existing tensions. As the *Homelands* (Baron and Gatrell, 2004) built after the First World War became the *Warlands* (Gatrell and Baron, 2009) of the Second World War, the region of Eastern Europe saw the biggest population displacement in history as 14 million Germans moved out of the region with the approval of the Allied powers (Douglas 2012). The states that re-emerged after the Second World War had undergone 'war as revolution' (Gross, 1997), with its social levelling tendencies taking on obvious racial, national and violent overtones. Inter-war nationalism reached its peak during and after the war in Poland (Prazmowska, 2004) and in Czechoslovakia (Heimann, 2011) and led to ethnic expulsion which had an impact not just on the post-war nation-building of the countries themselves but also beyond their borders in Germany as well (Ther and Siljak, 2001).

The Balkans were similar, and in many ways the regimes run by Communist Parties after the war embraced nationalism; Yugoslavia, nonetheless, with its multinational mix and complex federalism continues to be seen as an 'exception' (Biondich, 2011, 180-187). While it is indeed true that Yugoslavia did remain a multinational country with a complex federal set-up, it is also the case that regional dynamics across Yugoslavia were different and often diverging. This article argues that studying Yugoslav integration through the regional prism, here from the perspective of Vojvodina, reveals certain forms of historical continuities in Yugoslavia, similar to other countries of the Balkans and Eastern Europe in the twentieth century. Namely, it studies the emergence of Serbian nationalism among Serbs in southern Hungary in the Habsburg era, its continuation and strengthening under in the Serbian-dominated inter-war Yugoslav state, and its radicalisation locally during the Second World War, under the impact of Croatian, Hungarian and German rule, before the establishment of post-war autonomous Vojvodina. Comparing and contrasting Vojvodina with other Yugoslav regions, at least tentatively, this article will explore ways in which particular regional dynamics then impacted on post-war federalism. In that sense, it joins other similar studies, such as Marko Attila Hoare's *Genocide and Resistance in Hitler's Bosnia* (Hoare, 2006), which sought to explain the salience of regional dynamics and historical continuities in explaining later trends. Indeed, as Catherine Baker notes, recognising the complexity of the Second World War in Yugoslavia, often regionally, allows for a more subtle treatment of the 1990s wars themselves as more than simply nationalist conflicts (Baker, 2015, 17-19).

This article will, therefore, also contribute to discussions about the collapse of Yugoslavia. For, as noted by Dejan Jović, the fear of Serbian politicians that Serbia and Yugoslavia were threatened by disintegration because of the decentralising constitution of 1974 lay at the centre of the country's existential crisis in the

1980s. Vojvodina was part of this crisis because, alongside Kosovo, it represented an autonomous region inside the republic of Serbia, but also at the level of the Yugoslav federation. This made Serbia weaker than the other republics, in the view of Serbian politicians. They resented the autonomous provinces' ability to obstruct republic-level decision-making and to associate with other republics against Serbia in policy discussions at the federal level. The rise of Slobodan Milošević and his more radical mode of solving the problem of Serbia's status than that of his more institutionally-minded predecessors contributed decisively to the rise of nationalism in Yugoslavia. Milošević mobilised a self-proclaimed 'anti-bureaucratic revolution' after seizing control of the Serbian party in 1987. He used crowds to topple the autonomous leaderships of Vojvodina and Kosovo, as well as to replace the government of the neighbouring republic of Montenegro. His goal was to garner a majority of votes at the federal level to challenge the 1974 constitution. Nonetheless, the increasingly nationalistic flavour of this campaign radicalised nationalist politics in the other republics of the federation, leading ultimately to the country's dissolution and a succession of brutal wars. (Jović, 2009, 171-282).

Despite the fact that Vojvodina was chronologically the first object of the 'anti-bureaucratic revolution', in October 1988, however, few scholarly works have emerged focusing on the origins and evolution of the autonomy of Vojvodina in post-war federal Yugoslavia. The answer to the question of the origins of its autonomous status was indeed apparently obvious. The ultimate federal settlement at the end of the Second World War, which resulted in the creation of six republics and two autonomous units, in large part corresponded to Yugoslavia's national make-up. Communist federations followed the national-territorial principle, so this was in synchrony with the Soviet approach and resembled the Czechoslovak case (Shoup, 1968; Connor, 1984; Bunce 1999; Bakić 2004; Haug, 2012). Superficially, at least, Vojvodina, which had a Serbian majority in every post-war census, appeared to warrant autonomy within Serbia on account of the fact that it was the most diverse region of Serbia and Yugoslavia.

Yet appearances can be deceptive in as nationally complex a country as Yugoslavia was. After the Second World War, Kosovo had an Albanian majority, but represented only an autonomous region, while Vojvodina with its Serbian majority was an autonomous province. Kosovo had only four deputies in the reformed federal legislative chamber in 1953 in comparison with the six which went to Vojvodina. Kosovo only became equal to Vojvodina in the 1963 constitution. (Lapenna, 1972, 217-8). Another mixed region, the Sandžak, with a large Muslim component, was promised regional autonomy during the Second World War, but did not receive it. Kosovo and Vojvodina, however, did, even though they were not even mentioned at the famous Second Antifascist Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ). This took place in November 1943 and was

the highest decision-making body of the Communist-led liberated territories that proclaimed Yugoslavia would be a federal republic after the war (Morrison and Roberts, 2013, 105-122). Furthermore, a region with no overall national, or indeed religious majority, Bosnia and Herzegovina, became a republic, on the basis of historic right and regional identity, and as a compromise between Serbia and Croatia, while Vojvodina, promised a similar status to that of Bosnia and Herzegovina in pre-war statements of the Communist Party, did not (Kon•ar and Boarov, 2011, 102-103; Haug, 2012, 87-114).

Why Vojvodina did become an autonomous region and why it specifically became tied to Serbia thus has to be explored, historically, since no simple response arises. Simply asserting that this was part of the Communist Party programme before and during the Second World War is evidently insufficient explanation. That, of course, was the official account, exemplified by the memoirs of the wartime leader and long-time functionary from Vojvodina, Jovan Veselinovi• } arko (Veselinovi• } arko 1971, 1980).

Other responses did arise in the historiography, following the ‘anti-bureaucratic revolution’. They largely underlined the Serbian demand for national unification. Serbia’s most famous historian of the Tito era, Branko Petranovi•, wrote a book on the Second World War in Serbia, simply treating Vojvodina as part of Serbia (Petranovi• 1992). Going further, •edomir Popov and Jelena Popov (Popov and Popov 1993) argued that accounts like that by Veselinovi• } arko overplayed the extent of autonomy exhibited by the Communist Party in Vojvodina during the Second World War in order to defend the privileges the Vojvodina leadership enjoyed during the decentralising period from the mid-1960s. Indeed, they argued that, following the fall in 1966 of Tito’s right-hand man, Aleksandar Rankovi•, a leading centraliser, long-time security chief and a top federal party leader from Serbia, the Vojvodinian leadership was in fact trying to invent a Vojvodinian nation (Popov and Popov, 1993, 66-70). Later, Jelena Popov (Popov, 2001) offered a more detailed polemic against the key claims of the leading *autonomaši* (‘autonomists’ or supporters of autonomy, as they came to be known in the constitutional debates of the Tito and post-Tito era). In particular, she tried to show that no wartime decision at any point pointed to a federal solution to the status of Vojvodina. Perhaps most devastatingly, she demonstrated that a famous letter issued in autumn 1944, which appeared to suggest a possible federal solution, was in all likelihood not issued by the Central Committee or in the name of the Central Committee, as claimed by the *autonomaši*. Rather, it appears to have most likely been written by a member of the Vojvodinian party leadership, after conversations with individual members of the federal party leadership, and had no formal significance (Popov, 2001, 49-63).

No direct rebuttal from the *autonomaši* has substantially tried to question this interpretation of the authorship of the key document, but has continued to claim that the wartime activities of the Serbian leadership, and Rankovi• in particular, foreshadowed their centralising and essentially Greater Serbian ambitions. The publication in late 2006 of the gargantuan part-memoir and part-historical work of a leading ideologue of autonomy in the 1970s and 1980s, Duan Popovi•, was the central new work to present the case for federal autonomy. His three-volume *Letopis o Vlaovi•ima* (Popovi• 2006a, 2006b, 2006c) is part the history of his family, part the publication of the diaries of family friends or members, and part his own memoir. An added difficulty with the book is that most actors retain their true names, while he himself is referred to in the third person, and with a pen-name, a practice he extends to his entire family. Despite all the problems that arise from this unorthodox style, Popovi• revealed new information about wartime and post-war Yugoslav history. His argument is that leadership mattered, and that the lack of pressure from Vojvodina on Tito, who was well-disposed to federal autonomy, allowed the Serbian party to take control of Vojvodina. He alleges that the controversial letter contested by Popov is important since, regardless of its authorship, it communicated a decision by the Central Committee to call a Council of Liberation, and that the carrier of the letter himself thought that Rankovi• had delayed the communication of the decision in order to scupper Vojvodinian autonomy (Popovi• 2006c, 24). Moreover, Popovi• maintains that later events, which he was the first to reveal in post-Yugoslav times, showed he was right: attempts existed from the turn of the 1960s to downgrade Vojvodina's status within Serbia, leading to a major faction fight, which only the defeat of Rankovi• at a federal level partially abated.

Several studies followed the publication of the *Letopis* and corroborated much of the post-war account by Popovi•. First, historian Ranko Kon•ar and journalist Dimitrije Boarov published a biography of Stevan Doronjski (Kon•ar and Boarov, 2011), long-time post-war leader in Vojvodina, and the main challenger to Rankovi•'s political vision of Serbia. Relying largely on papers found in Doronjski's home, and a plethora of official documents at provincial, republic and federal level, the two authors confirm the details of the post-war faction fights alleged in Popovi•'s *Letopis*. Next came historian Slobodan Bjelica's more detailed archival account of the factional struggle at its height, between 1961 and 1974 (Bjelica, 2015), which also confirmed in more dispassionate fashion most of the Popovi• account of the post-war period.

This article does not provide a definitive answer to the conundrum of Rankovi•'s wartime attitude to the national question. Rather, its starting point is that the question of autonomy cannot be explained with sole reference to the leading figures of the Communist movement. Rather, placing Vojvodina in the context of the Communist strategy towards the national question in all of Yugoslavia, and perhaps the Balkans, makes it more

possible to understand final decisions about its status. Moreover, the article argues that local factors played a major role and impacted on decision-makers. Relations between Serbs, Hungarians and Germans, the three main national groups of Vojvodina, changed decisively during the Second World War. Following several decades of nationalising rule from Belgrade during the interwar years, tables turned on the Serbs of the region, who found themselves under occupation and annexed to new, nationalising states, under overall German hegemony. The revanchist dynamic of the changes, and particularly the ascendance of the Partisan movement among the Serbs of Vojvodina, appears to have contributed to the decision to deport the Germans of Vojvodina and replace them with Slavs from other parts of the Yugoslavia. While the deportation of the Germans is no new discovery, and was not unique to Vojvodina or Yugoslavia, bringing it under closer scrutiny in relation to decisions about regional autonomy does bring completely new perspectives to both questions. In particular, it shows that it is likely that the deportation of the Germans decisively shifted the Party towards republic-level rather than federal-level autonomy. Moreover, this discovery also leads to a different understanding of post-war federalism, since the actors involved did not want to re-visit their role in changing the national composition of Vojvodina and the issue therefore remained for a long time dormant in the Yugoslav historiography. The article will duly proceed to present its argument in three separate sections, concentrating respectively on the emergence of the question of autonomy before the Second World War, the decisions around autonomy during the Second World War in the Communist Party, and the post-war evolution of Vojvodinian autonomy in Yugoslav federalism, before concluding by placing the findings in a wider framework.

The Historic Basis for Vojvodinian Autonomy: Between Serbian nationalism and 'Multi-nationalism'

Vojvodina emerged as a national demand of Serbs settled in Habsburg lands from the late seventeenth century. Promised religious freedom, tax exemptions and right to live by their own customs and under their own leaders, or *vojvode* in Serbian, in exchange for fighting on the side of the Habsburgs against the Ottoman Empire, Serbs populated what came to be known more widely as the Military Frontier. After the Belgrade Treaty of 1739, the border between the empires stabilised around the Danube and Sava rivers, by which time tens of thousands of Serbs had moved northwards into Habsburg lands, fearful of reprisals from the Ottoman Empire (Pavlowitch, 2002, 19-21, Popovič, 1990a, 308-345, and Popovič, 1990b, 17-186). Slowly, a Serbian or South Slav national consciousness emerged, coupled with a demand for territorial representation. The Habsburg Serbs on the border with the Ottomans initially received various ecclesiastical and legal privileges from Vienna in the latter's

attempt to consolidate the borderlands and play off the south Slavs against the Hungarians. Later, Empress Maria Theresa established the short-lived Illyrian Court Commission and then the Illyrian Court Deputation, allowing Serb representation and limited self-rule, from 1747 to 1777. Serb cultural life flourished around Karlowitz, the seat of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Habsburg Empire, from where modern nationalist ideas spread to Ottoman Serbia around the time of the First Uprising against the Ottoman Empire in 1804 (Lampe, 2000, 48-49).

The rising autonomy of Ottoman Serbia in the first half of the nineteenth century had a radicalising effect on Serb feeling in the Habsburg lands. Most dramatically, following the 1848-9 establishment of 'Serb Vojvodina', the Emperor Francis Joseph I formed a duchy named the 'Voivodeship of Serbia and Banat of Temeschwar' which lasted until 1860. Comprising lands which today traverse Romanian, Hungarian and Serbian borders, and only partly coincide with the much smaller Serbian province of Vojvodina of today, the 'Voivodeship of Serbia and Banat of Temeschwar' clearly represented an attempt by the Habsburgs to diminish Serbian nationalism by granting Serbs territorial autonomy as a minority within a larger duchy than they had demanded in 1848-9. According to the 1850/1 census, Serbs only comprised just over a fifth of the population of the duchy, outnumbered by Romanians and settled Germans, though outnumbering Hungarians. Moreover, there were scant concessions to national feeling from Vienna, with German being the official language. (• irkovi•, 2004, 146-152; Petsinis, 2004, 43-46).

Over the following half-century, the region's Serbs developed a different set of traditions from Serbs in the other Habsburg lands. Following the *Ausgleich* of 1867, which divided the Habsburg Empire between its Austrian and Hungarian components, traditionally Croat lands, with large Serbian minorities, ended up in different parts of the Empire. Dalmatia remained in Austria, while Croatia-Slavonia was part of Hungary. The *Nagodba* of 1868 created an autonomous kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia within Hungary, but Count Károly Khuen-Héderváry, who ruled as *ban* or governor from 1883 to 1903, imposed harsh magyarisation policies. Yet, by 1905, the Croato-Serb Coalition emerged as ideas of South Slav cooperation began to take root, and the Coalition dominated politics until 1914 (Miller, 1997). By contrast, in the former Vojvodina, while intellectuals sympathetic to South Slav ideas emerged, especially among the youth, the force of magyarisation was greater and the numbers of Croats smaller. Resistance took several forms, including for a time alliances with Romanian groups, as a form of 'multi-nationalism' sprung up merely to win concessions from Budapest. A more strident Serbian nationalism also emerged, with the Vojvodinian branch of the Radicals, the dominant party in Serbia, being a dominant party until its collapse in 1910, on account of its own lack of success in gaining concessions.

The Radicals were not openly secessionist, but the difference with the other Habsburg Serb areas was obvious. Although more militant nationalism did begin to recover with Serbian victories in the Balkans Wars in 1912 and 1913, Vojvodinian Serbs did not resist Austria-Hungary's assault on Serbia in 1914, though they did desert *en masse* on the Eastern Front, and fight with the Serbian Army as it marched back to Serbia and into former Habsburg lands in 1918 (Boarov, 2001, 87-103).

The First World War catalysed the formation of a joint South Slav state. Different actors and nationalities had different expectations of the new state and different understandings of nationhood, though, and the role of the Serbian army in liberating much of what became the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes proved contentious (Banac, 1984; Djokić, 2007 and 2010). Vojvodina would be no exception in this process, and its incorporation into Serbia and then the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes proved contentious from the start. Indeed, Serbs, Germans, Hungarians and Romanians often claimed the same territory which was known in Hungarian as the 'South Country'. Serbian and Romanian military power largely determined post-war borders in the region, with the blessing of the Entente Powers, particularly the French. The post-war Peace Conference generally allotted to the new Kingdom what it already held through military occupation, mainly western parts of the region of Banat, and most of the regions of Bačka and Baranja. The region of Srem, too, which would come to be seen as part of Vojvodina from the Second World War, joined Serbia. The Great Powers furthermore allotted to the Kingdom parts of formerly Hungarian territory that were adjacent to Croatia, though this did not constitute the new Vojvodina. One of the Kingdom's representatives later recalled that the question was never whether the Kingdom would gain Vojvodina, but only how large it would be. A sign of the times, however, was that a popular mandate had to be constructed, so an assembly of Serbs, Bunjevci (Croats) and other nationalities, containing token numbers of non-Slavs, proclaimed Vojvodina's unity in November 1918, and then its appendage to Serbia and dissolution in the new Kingdom (Sajti, 2003, 3-6; Njegovan, 2004, 203-248).

National self-determination, then, seemed to be very tenuously upheld as a principle in the case of Vojvodina. Local Serbs appeared keen on dividing the local Germans, whose loyalty to Hungary appeared to be wavering. Most Germans in the area of the Banat appeared to have preferred autonomous rule or continuation of rule from Hungary, as they had been formerly a titular nationality of the Empire. The Banat National Council headed by Otto Roth in Temeswar (Timisoara) made German priorities clear in late October 1918. Indeed, it proclaimed a Banat Republic on 1 November, which lasted 15 days, until the arrival of the Serbian army. By February 1919, the local Serbian authorities, contrary to international law, set up a local administration dominated by Serbs, but containing smaller numbers of Germans. The removal of Otto Roth, however, led to mass strikes of both

German and Hungarian workers, again signalling their disapproval of Serbian domination. Moreover, the leading Germans of Hungary, while still unhappy at the prospect of their separation from Hungary, began to believe that the unity of the Banat was their greater interest. This became especially so after the establishment of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, and then Horthy's counter-revolution. The former's stance against private property in land and the latter's nationalism appeared to convince Germans that Hungary did not offer a stable home. So representatives of the Hungary Germans began to gravitate towards unity with Romania instead of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. They indeed continued to hope to convince the great powers that some kind of Banat Republic was still possible even after the signing of the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, but this proved illusory. Despite some revisions, in 1922, with territory ceded to the Kingdom in favour of Hungary, it had become clear that international borders were now stable. The Germans of Vojvodina, tied greatly to landed estates, did not have an interest in leaving. Germany and Austria were distant, and the Vojvodina Germans' national consciousness was not closely tied to either country. By contrast, just under 40,000 Hungarians left areas controlled by Serbia and then the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The first post-war census, held in 1921, revealed that Serbs were only a third of the population in the parts of the Banat, Bačka and Baranja that had become part of the new Kingdom. Meanwhile, Hungarians and Germans followed close behind with over a quarter and a fifth each (Janjetović, 2009, 83-105; Sajti, 2003, 7-20).

Indeed, Vojvodina soon ceased to exist in the new Kingdom, as the Serbs of Vojvodina, or, rather, their political elites, resentful of having been second-class citizens of Austria-Hungary, feared being a minority again in any regional autonomy. Rather, they strongly supported a unitarist solution to the national question, with the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes a centralised and racially South Slav state. The Radicals and Democrats, both Serb parties and both unitarist, albeit the former with closer ties to the old Kingdom of Serbia and the latter more rooted among Serbs outside it, polled strongly in the Banat, Bačka and Baranja, three of the four territories that later reconstituted the region of Vojvodina in 1945. The Radicals also did extremely well in Srem, the fourth region of Vojvodina. (Banac, 1984, 156) Vojvodina itself was divided in four different administrative units in 1921, though it came to be part of the enlarged Danubian Banovina, as the administrative units came to be called, in 1929 (Petsinis, 2004, 53-54).

Nevertheless, tensions slowly emerged between the Vojvodina Serbs and Belgrade during the 1920s, though no multinational Vojvodinian regional identity crystallised. In part, this was because most of the dominant parties among the Serbs remained nationalist. For a time, secure in the new state, the opposition parties in Vojvodina unleashed major liberal democratic criticisms of the corruption, clientelism and backward rule that allegedly

contrasted the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes with more advanced Europe. This apparently Habsburg legacy coupled with another Habsburg problem in the new Kingdom: former Habsburg territories faced excessive taxation from Belgrade. Moreover, lack of land reform riled the largely Serb peasantry. With the failure of the early parliamentary model amid national tensions, and the declaration of a nationalising, royal dictatorship in 1929, discontent increased. The country, now named Yugoslavia, saw political opposition spread more decisively for a time to several of the Serbian parties. Indeed, in Vojvodina, a cross-party Radical, Democratic and Agrarian statement, the 'Sombor Declaration', passed in summer 1932, criticised changes to Vojvodina's borders, denounced its economic plight under heavy taxation, and demanded that the local administration be staffed by locals. Some months later, in the same year, the Independent Democrats, a breakaway from the Democrats, and the Croatian Peasant Party, passed a resolution in Zagreb calling for the regionalisation of Yugoslavia. They conceptualised Vojvodina as a region. The Vojvodinian parties duly passed a 'Novi Sad Resolution' backing and radicalising the United Opposition's demand for regionalisation by calling for federalism in December 1932. Nevertheless, the Radicals and Democrats criticised this as a form of breaking the united front of democratic forces among Serbs against the royal dictatorship. Duly, the Vojvodina parties did not stand separately in the 1935 elections, but they did set up a 'Vojvodinian Front' in the same year, as a form of pressure group to represent the region's interests. The United Opposition, nonetheless, did badly in Vojvodina in 1939 (Kon•ar, 1995).

When, however, the 1939 Cvetkovi•-Ma•ek Agreement created an asymmetric federation in Yugoslavia, with an enlarged Croatian Banovina, many of the Serb parties expressed unease. Although the smaller Independent Democrats in Vojvodina greeted the new federal arrangement as a potential breakthrough, hoping that the creation of a Croatian unit may herald the beginning of the full federalisation of Yugoslavia, the Radicals and Democrats called for the inclusion of Vojvodina in a bigger Serbian federal unit. They feared expansion of Croatia at the expense of Serbs in Vojvodina, the rise of Nazi sympathies among the German population, and rise in irredentism among the Hungarian population (Boarov, 2001, 161-163; Petsinis, 2004, 54-60). The change in the international climate by this point did not make such fears completely illusory. Much of the press in Croatia argued that more of Vojvodina should be in Croatia (Djoki•, 2011, 68-69) while the Hungarian and German minorities had more aggressive representation than they had had in the 1920s. Initially, both communities had in fact developed an orientation to Budapest and Berlin, which encouraged moderation and cooperation in exchange for minority rights guaranteed at the Peace Treaty and by the League of Nations. Their political parties had to adapt to a climate of political repression and corruption, in which they ended up

cooperating with the dominant Radicals in the late 1920s in exchange for minimal political representation and cultural rights (Sajti, 2003, 25-81; Janjetovi•, 2009, 139-166).

After the establishment of the dictatorial regime in 1929, political parties based on national belonging were no longer legally allowed and this complicated national relations in the 1930s in Vojvodina. The German and Hungarian community leaders tended to compromise with the regime party in order to win seats, though promises to them were ritually only half-fulfilled. For instance, in the wake of the 1938 election, the regime candidate for Prime Minister, Milan Stojadinovi•, promised German community leaders two parliamentary seats after they asked for four, but he would tell Hungarian community leaders they would each receive just one mandate anyway (Janjetovi•, 2009, 174). The communities therefore split. Among Hungarians, a smaller, radical pole developed around a prominent Hungarian politician in Zagreb, who supported the democratic bloc in the 1930s and argued for the autonomy of Vojvodina. Meanwhile, official Budapest preferred Hungarian moderation, and even when the revisionist powers, backed by Berlin, seemed at the height of their powers in 1940, Hitler in fact cautioned Budapest not to upset Belgrade, as he was trying to maintain stability in the Balkans ahead of his eastward push (Sajti, 2003, 90-121). German community leaders also split, with many younger intellectuals gravitating towards Nazism, frustrated with lack of progress for the Yugoslav Germans (Janjetovi•, 2009, 168-9). Their increasing control of the main cultural society of the Germans became clear by 1938. Despite major compromises in domestic affairs, the German community still solidly voted to keep the regime in power against the opposition, on account of its pro-German foreign policy. Moreover, Nazi pressure on Belgrade ensured the regime delivered the afore-mentioned second parliamentary seat for the German minority in reward for that support (Janjetovi•, 2009, 173-5).

National relations in Vojvodina on the eve of the Second World War therefore appeared strained, on account of the manner of the region's incorporation in Yugoslavia, discrimination against the national minorities, lack of consistent federal proposals on the part of the opposition parties, and increasing international strength of the revisionist powers in Europe. The only party that still held steadfast to a federal vision, claimed to have a multinational membership, and strongly argued in favour of Vojvodinian autonomy was the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY). The CPY from 1936 re-envisaged, following a similar programme in the early 1920s, the federal reorganisation of Yugoslavia. This time, it would be with seven federal units, Vojvodina being included on account of its multinational character (Haug, 2012, 37-57). Tito himself wrote in 1936 that he believed that the federal constitution should ensure seven federal units and the obvious implication was that Vojvodina was a federal unit in the Communist programme (Kon•ar and Boarov, 2011, 91-92). Yet the leadership's position was

flexible. For instance, a leading party member from Vojvodina argued that there was no single blueprint, but that Vojvodina could join either Croatia or Serbia, or be an autonomous federal unit of Yugoslavia, depending on the balance of forces at the time of the seizure of power. [Kon•ar and Boarov, 2011, 89-90] It was on this basis that the CPY entered the Second World War, as a party with moderate, although rising support (Avakumovi•, 1964).

From Hitler's New Order to the Ethnic Expulsion of the Germans from Yugoslavia: Vojvodina in the Second World War

Communist victory in the Second World War would restore Vojvodina as a territorial unit. Nonetheless, the impact of the Second World War on the region's multi-national mosaic, which had on some level survived several centuries of border changes, several regime changes and several rounds of warfare, underwent profound change. This was a complex process which, to a large degree, was driven by external powers. When the Axis powers invaded Yugoslavia in April 1941, they parcelled out the country and Vojvodina itself was divided between several administrations. The Banat was placed under the collaborationist government of Serbia, though the local German population received major powers of local self-government and German forces enforced the occupation. Ba•ka and Baranja came under Hungarian rule. Srem, later incorporated in Vojvodina, became part of the fascist-ruled Independent State of Croatia.

Under all three regimes, Serbs came under severe repression. Mass executions and other forms of state-sponsored violence began immediately and killed tens of thousands in the Banat, which was under direct German occupation. Hungarian repression in Ba•ka and Baranja started slowly, but reached fever pitch in 1942, when several thousand Serb and Jewish civilians died in one operation in January. Srem, which had Serb majority, also faced severe persecution, including forced labour of all Serbs and Jews. So severe were regime crimes that the region came to be controlled by Germany, even though nominally still part of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH). Here, too, around 15,000 died. Notably, however, many of the crimes were committed by outsiders, units brought from outside Vojvodina. Though most Germans, Hungarians and Croats did not join the resistance, they often did not enthusiastically collaborate with the various regimes and had reasons for discontent. In the Banat, many Germans refused to join the local police, which became a local SS unit. In Ba•ka and Baranja, Hungarian settlement came at the expense of local Hungarians, as well as other nationalities, causing resentment towards colonists. NDH regime violence also appeared to irritate and horrify the local

German population, and the levels of violence towards civilians actually dropped after power passed from the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) to the German occupiers (Petsinis, 2004, 62-67).

Thus, though it appears local populations did not participate in each other's repression to the same degree as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where locals were often themselves perpetrators (Hoare, 2006), the potential for reconciliation slowly ebbed away, as resistance appeared to be concentrated mainly among Serbs. Revenge attacks and brutality against the local Serb population during the Second World War, since Serbs were often seen as supporters of the formerly Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia, indeed led Serbs to mass armed resistance. Why Serbs in Vojvodina predominantly joined the Communist-led Partisans rather than the Chetniks, the nationalist remnants of the pre-war and Serbian-dominated royal army, loyal to the exiled government in Vojvodina, is however still unclear, but they did (Strugar, 1978, 124). Unlike in Bosnia and Herzegovina or Croatia (Hoare 2011), however, the Partisan movement did not manage to become truly multinational, and remained largely Serb-based. This had implications for how the war was fought and for Vojvodina's ultimate position in Yugoslavia.

The strengthening of the Serb element in the Partisan war certainly had much to do with the Hungarian and German occupations, but it also had to do with the course of the war itself. The Partisan focus slowly shifted from the urban and strongly multinational Banat, where the CPY had been strong before the war, to Srem, where Serbs were a majority. Part of the reason for this shift were the changing strategic priorities of the CPY as a whole, and of the place of Vojvodina within this shift. Relating to the former, the CPY changed its belief in the nature of the war in the course of 1941 and 1942. During this period, the Communist leadership believed in the swift victory of the USSR. As a consequence, it expected a frontal military advance by the Red Army, and Serbia was of major importance to this, as the eastern-most part of the country. Indeed, the Partisan strategy was to engage in more frontal warfare and to hold or reconquer positions in Serbia, from which they were ejected at the close of 1941. When it became clear that the Red Army would not be reaching Yugoslav borders soon, in early 1942, a change in strategy ensued. Guerrilla warfare became the new norm and mountainous areas like Bosnia and Herzegovina became more important. A similar shift followed in Vojvodina. Frontal and urban warfare in the Banat had led to major early losses in the war. Moreover, Banat, Ba•ka and Baranja were cut off by the Sava and Danube rivers, which were heavily policed on both banks. So the Partisan movement shifted towards more hilly range in Srem, which was majority Serb and adjacent to mountainous East Bosnia with its large Partisan presence (Petranovi•, 1992, 350-355). The shift to Srem proved fortuitous despite the loss of the Vojvodina party's historic leadership as it attempted to cross over to Srem: the fighting capacity of the Srem

units led the CPY leadership to revive the Vojvodina regional party committee and military high command in early 1943, on a par with Bosnia and Herzegovina (Petranovi•, 1992, 355-362).

The base of the Vojvodina party in the Srem Serbs strained its internationalism. Close reading of the regional committee leadership's proclamations and documents suggests an increasing prioritisation of Serbs, a direct contrast with the lessening of this prioritisation in statements in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Earlier documents had a clearly more multi-national appeal than later ones. Thus, in September 1942, a proclamation to the peoples of Ba•ka and Baranja in its very title calls for the united struggle against the occupier (Vasili•, 1971, 54). It proceeds by beginning with an internationalist explanation of the war, arguing Nazi Germany had instrumentally sent its workers abroad to fight, and had instead of them imported enslaved workers from the rest of Europe (Vasili•, 1971, 54-5). The clear implication is that all workers, German and non-German, were the victims of the Nazi war machine. It then goes on to explain that the Nazi war machine would be exhausted in a two-front war, and that the workers of the Axis states in Europe would rise up against their ruling classes. Pointing to other parts of Yugoslavia where the partisan struggle was at its peak, it says that Srem had risen and it was time for the peoples of the Ba•ka and Baranja to rise too (Vasili•, 1971, 55). It then moves on to appeal to all the peoples of the region separately. While imploring the working people of all the nations to fight, the proclamation was most positive about the Serbs, but it went to great lengths to underline it saw a difference between the Hungarian workers and peasants on the one hand, and the Hungarian ruling classes on the other (Vasili•, 1971, 56). To the other Slavic groups of the region, it appealed for a joint Slav struggle with the Serbs, since the Slavs were the centre of the struggle against Nazism (Vasili•, 1971, 56). When it reached the German workers and peasants, the last to be mentioned, it was markedly cooler. It asked them whether they had finally realised that Hitler was doomed. It called on them to see what German workers and peasants had already seen in Germany and Austria. Moreover, it ended by imploring them to join the struggle to win their right to 'durable existence (*opstanak*) on this fertile land' (Vasili•, 1971, 56).²

The party was still appealing to the German workers and peasants of Vojvodina in summer of 1943 as 'brothers' (Vasili•, 1971, 179), but by November 1943, a noticeable change in rhetoric had come about. On the occasion of the anniversary of the October revolution, the party committee issued a statement which still addresses 'the peoples of Vojvodina', but this time addresses the peoples in terms of Slavic hierarchy, starting with the 'brother Serbs', then the 'brother Croats', then the 'Slovaks, Russianians and other Slav peoples', and then finally 'honest Hungarians and Germans'. (Vasili•, 1971, 220-221) It tells these individuals that 'a large part of your peoples'

² Thank you to Cathy Carmichael for suggesting this translation of *opstanak*.

had helped Hitler and Horthy (Vasili•, 1971, 221). ‘It is high time,’ it continues, ‘that all honest Hungarians and Germans, all those who are not steeped in the blood of our peoples, realise that their place is in the ranks of the fighters for freedom...(Vasili•, 1971, 222)’ The section finishes with promises of equality of all the peoples of Yugoslavia (Vasili•, 1971, 222). Greeting the decisions of the second Antifascist Council of the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ), which declared itself the true representative of the peoples of Yugoslavia and promised a federal constitution after the war, the Vojvodina party committee did not even mention the non-Slavic peoples (Vasili•, 1971, 236-238). A proclamation issued in January 1944 to the Hungarians of Vojvodina used similar language to the November 1943 proclamation, addressing in the first instance ‘honest Hungarians’ in the first section, before addressing ‘the Hungarians of Vojvodina’ in the next (Vasili•, 1971, 240).

This tone changed in relation to the Hungarian nation after the Wehrmacht invaded Hungary in March 1944, and the Ba•ka and Baranja came under direct German occupation, but it did not change towards the German nation. In relation to the former, though the tone never returned to the inclusive, internationalist line of 1942, the proclamations went back to differentiating between some Hungarians who had committed crimes, and those who had not, in March 1944 (Vasili•, 1971, 334-336), and to exhorting in Hungarian for food not to be dispatched to Hungary or the German military machine and for Hungarians not to join the army in June 1944 (Vasili•, 1971, 363-364). There was a change in the way the German nation came to be mentioned, too, but the change was different. In fact, no mention of Germans or statements in German came out in the same period. With the advance of the Red Army through Serbia in the autumn of 1944, reports did filter through that Germans were joining the Partisan resistance, but this remained internal information (Vasili•, 1971, 406). In all, the German population seemed no longer the object of the proclamations, an important indication of the party leadership’s thinking.

Moreover, the tone of the party press had changed, becoming ever more pejorative and vindictive, consciously deploying notions of collective guilt towards Germans. The first issue of *Vojvo•anka u borbi*, the organ of the women’s section of the liberation movement in Vojvodina,³ in January 1944 carried a story entitled ‘The woman partisan metes out justice’ (*Partizanka sudi*) on page 14. The story is of a night-time raid in which a German officer, the son of a Viennese doctor, is killed in his home. His privileged life is contrasted with that of his poor, peasant assassin. The joint second and third issues of *Vojvo•anka u borbi*, which came out in

³ Only four issues came out. They were published as *Vojvođanka u borbi: organ Antifašističkog fronta žena za Vojvodinu*, Novi Sad: Muzej Radničkog pokreta i narodne revolucije Vojvodine: Istorijski arhiv pokrajinskog komiteta SKS za Vojvodinu, Matica srpska, 1963.

February-March 1944, printed on page 7 an emotive fictionalised account of the occupied USSR entitled 'a cube of sugar' (*Kocka ae•era*). The story is about a single mother raising a boy, who is hungry, but who cannot eat because a German officer lives in their home and eats their food, throwing cubes of sugar on the floor for the boy to eat like a 'dog'. Concluding, the article points out that the Red Army is moving 'west, towards Berlin' and carrying on its bayonets 'revenge' on behalf of all those who had suffered from 'fascist beasts'. The theme of revenge became ever more immediate and less directed at the enemy as an ideological and more as an ethnic group, however. The fourth and final, June-July 1944 issue of *Vojvo•anka u borbi*, carried a story signed by 'Ninica', called 'My revenge' (*Moja osveta*). It marked a change in tone, as story was told in the first person, by an ordinary woman who had lost relatives and friends, and had a brother and friend in an infamous concentration camp. Prevented from giving them packets to keep them going, she, rather implausibly, caught a ride back home from a German (*Švaba*), a rich neighbour, whom she 'knew as a hardcore villain and rotten man' (*poznavala kao okorelog zlikovca i pokvarenog •oveka*). As she told him her story, he smiled, but said she should come by so he could help her. 'Ninica' knew the German was up to no good, but she too had her cunning plan. She enlisted a friend who pretended to be a woman and carried a gun when they went to see the German. As soon as they arrived and he tried to embrace her, her friend drew the pistol and killed him. The account finishes with 'Ninica' telling the readers that that was how she 'avenged' her loved ones.

The combined rise in Slavic nationalism, visible in the proclamations of the Vojvodina party, and the vengeful writing of the Partisan press, indicated the Partisan movement had undergone a transformation. These trends coincided with the apparent decision of the Yugoslav Communist apex to deport the German population, and to relegate Vojvodina from the status of a federal to a republic unit. The evidence connecting these decisions is circumstantial, but this is necessarily the case, since neither studies devoted to the study of the expulsion of the Yugoslav Germans nor studies relating to borders in Yugoslavia have found direct proof of decisions relating to either process. Much certainly appears to have occurred on both counts in the period from late 1943 to early 1944. The second session of Antifascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia (henceforth, AVNOJ II) in late November 1943 appears to have been an important focal point of decision-making. AVNOJ II proclaimed Yugoslavia would become a federal republic after the war. This important moment also emerges centrally in many relevant memoirs relating to the status of Vojvodina, and, it will be argued here, it was especially important for the German minority in Yugoslavia. The evidence presented dovetails with much of the novel work done by Marko Attila Hoare, which also brings forward evidence relating to how decision-making

before, at and after AVNOJ II finally led to the decision to establish the republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hoare, 2014, 167-170).

Why Vojvodina did not become a republic, according to recent memoir literature, was due to leadership factors. Unlike the Bosnian and Herzegovinian leaders, who met in advance of AVNOJ II and sought republic status from Tito himself, Vojvodinian leaders did not even send a strong delegation to AVNOJ II (Popovič, 2006c, 26). The allegation, raised by the ideologue of the *autonomasi*, Popovič, is that the new Vojvodinian party leader from 1943, Jovan Veselinovič } arko, was a close ally of Rankovič, who already at this time had ambitions to strengthen the role of Serbia in post-war Yugoslavia. Moreover, Veselinovič } arko was easily blackmailed on account of his allegedly dubious pre-war past as a factionalist and as a weak prisoner under torture (Popovič, 2006c, 32). This appears difficult to fully accept, largely because it contradicts Popovič's earlier statements on the topic. Namely, in an interview in 1983, Popovič claimed Veselinovič } arko' and another regional leader had resisted Vojvodina's appendage to Serbia in 1944-5, and were therefore moved as punishment to higher positions in Serbia in order to be removed from their powerbase in Vojvodina (Banac, 1988, 102).

Nonetheless, it may indeed be the case that the question of leadership did play a role in the decision on the final status of Vojvodina. The Vojvodina party had had equal status to the other six regional parties that were assured in November 1943 that their regions would gain federal status. It had issued and it continued to issue after November 1943 all its calls as a regional leadership, to the 'peoples of Vojvodina' (Vasilič, 1971, 120-134, 236-239, 350-3...). Moreover, the Vojvodina party certainly appeared to be in better shape than, for instance, the Serbian party throughout 1943, despite the killing of its historic leadership in November 1942 at the hands of German troops. In moves suggestive of respect for the Vojvodina party, the federal Central Committee not only sided with the Vojvodina party against the Croatian party's attempts to gain control of parts Srem and Vojvodina, but also asked the Vojvodina party to be the conduit for mail with the Serbian party (Vasilič, 1971, 163-172, 187). The Vojvodina party, moreover, repeatedly offered aid to the Serbian party during 1943 (Vasilič, 1971, 185-189). There was rivalry between the two leaderships, as the Serbian party leadership appeared to have complained of 'uncomradely' acts on the part of the Vojvidinian leadership to the federal leaders (Vasilič, 1971, 196-200), so it is possible under the circumstances that stronger Vojvodinian presence at AVNOJ II could have made a difference. It has long been alleged that Tito favoured Vojvodina's federal status as late as December 1944 (Banac, 1988, 101, ff. 124).

The question of why, if they did want federal autonomy, Vojvodinian leaders never appeared to raise the issue at the time, remains salient. Factors other than leadership, in fact, appear to have been critical in this period. Indeed, after AVNOJ II, a Serbian party leader wrote to the Vojvodinian leadership asking them to popularise the struggle in Serbia, a request issued to no other party leadership, suggestive of an even closer relationship.⁴ Tito himself wrote an article in March 1944 stating that Vojvodina would receive autonomy, but that the extent of that autonomy, and which republic Vojvodina would join, would be decided at the end of the war, according to the wishes of the people (Kon•ar and Boarov, 2011, 104). While Tito's formulation appeared to leave the question of Vojvodina's future open, it did suggest Vojvodina's autonomy was to be tied to that of a republic, rather than the federation. The contested September 1944 letter, mentioned in the introduction, also used similar formulations. In those circumstances, the implication was that the national principle would prevail. It seemed difficult that Vojvodina would ever join Croatia, since the numbers of Croats in Vojvodina were comparatively small. That left only Serbia as an option. Yet Serbs were not a majority in Vojvodina, merely a plurality, as in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Veselinovi• } arko•, who became a vocal opponent of autonomy in the 1950s and 1960s, until he softened his stance after the fall of Rankovi•, stated in his memoirs that, 'we learned later [after Tito's letter] that already at the time of the Second session of AVNOJ, in the absence of the representatives of Vojvodina, the belief prevailed that autonomous Vojvodina should, because of its national composition, enter into the composition of federal Serbia.' (Veselinovi• } arko, 1980, 42). Similarly, Popovi• also claims that Serb opposition to both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Vojvodina gaining republic status was key to decision-making in AVNOJ, on account the national principle (Popovi•, 2006c, 28-9).

The missing aspect of all these explanations is precisely why Vojvodina could be read to be Serbian in terms of the national principle, if no decision had been made to change the national composition of the region. In fact, as noted above, there was a major change of tone in the Vojvodina party committee's treatment of the non-Slavic inhabitants of Vojvodina in late 1943 and early 1944, collectively blaming the Hungarian and German populations in Vojvodina for war crimes. While this changed slightly in a positive in relation to the Hungarians after March 1944, the German population completely disappeared from public proclamations or got ever harsher treatment in Partisan publications. Around this time, moreover, the German occupying authorities were either beginning to move remote German settlements, vulnerable to Partisan attack, from inner Yugoslavia to the Reich, and often enough to parts of Slavonia in Croatia and to parts of Vojvodina (Janjetovi•, 2003, 1-11; Janjetovi•, 2005, 73-174). With the onset of the Red Army and the partisan army in autumn 1944, the occupying

⁴ A CK SKJ, 507, (cannot find currently) FIND ME

authorities evacuated up to 70,000 Germans, but many remained and were interned. AVNOJ III in November 1944 confiscated almost all German property in Yugoslavia and took away German civil rights. New research suggests Tito himself oversaw what he called the 'cleaning of Swabian inhabitants' in Vršac in November 1944 (Geiger, 2008, 805). This was the beginning of several major massacres in late 1944 which then led to the internment of most German inhabitants of Vojvodina. Rather than leaving voluntarily, as many Yugoslav historians and memoirists claimed, the more than 100,000 Germans from Vojvodina who emigrated after 1945 had certainly been left with little choice (Carmichael, 2009, 123-124). The numbers of Hungarians killed or expelled is not agreed, but the numbers are likely to be near 20,000 (Boarov, 2001 183).

All this decisively changed the national and ethnic map of the region. The German population as registered in the 1948 census saw numbers dwindle to less than 42,000 in Serbia, rising slightly in the 1953 census to 46,000 and then in 1961 to 47,800. Many were clearly hiding their ethnic origins in the post-war years and the numbers reaching West Germany between 1949 and 1969 suggest even those figures were underestimates of the surviving population (Janjetovi•, 2005, 337-8). The settlement of many Serbs and Montenegrins from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Montenegro, largely poor peasants who had fought in the war or were dependents of fallen fighters, usually on former German noble land, suggested the desire by the federal leadership to ensure the Slavic majority in this border region. By the time of the first post-war census in 1948, Serbs apparently made up a very thin majority of the population, although it is possible that occurred in reality only later. Hungarians still represented over a quarter. Despite some minor border changes to Vojvodina in favour of Croatia at the end of the war, Croats also contributed over eight percent of the population. Vojvodina overall remained the most diverse region in Yugoslavia, though, with the greatest number of nationalities and ethnicities in its borders. Vojvodina was therefore still a complex and multi-national society, with the Hungarian population concentrated in the north, on the border with Hungary (Jankov, 2004, 76-78).

The inclusion of Vojvodina as an autonomous region in Serbia occurred in this context. It seems possible that, since Communist authority was still in question in Serbia, even after the Red Army had helped break the Chetnik movement, and since the Chetnik leadership was still at large, the federal leaders wanted to cement Communist legitimacy in the republic. Including Communist-led Vojvodina in Serbia strengthened Communist power there and in all of Yugoslavia. Stability seemed an important consideration and appeasement of Serb sentiments appeared key to establishing state power. Another wartime leader, Isa Jovanovi•, argues conflicts about Vojvodina's role in Serbia started immediately, with republic and federal leaders pressing the Vojvodinians to both aid Serbia and ensure multi-national peace. In an informal discussion, Vojvodina leaders

talked with Blagoje Neaković, party leader in Serbia. They insisted autonomy could not be formal and he insisted it had to be subordinate to Serbia. When they asked Kardelj about it, they received a similar response. Kardelj insisted Vojvodina had to 'help' Serbia. Moreover, he continued, Vojvodina had to think about itself not starting with its own interests, but from the perspective of the whole of Serbia. Serbian leaders simply came to Vojvodina making demands and having them met, like trade union leader Dragi Stamenković demanding and getting fusion of union organisations (Jovanović, 1987, 214-215).

The extent to which this account is true is difficult to judge, but Kardelj has recently been presented as sympathetic to Serbian interests (Jović, 2009), and the overall suggestion that Vojvodina's accession to Serbia strengthened Communist legitimacy and power rings true. Yet the implication that Serbian authority was being imposed on Vojvodina simply out of Greater Serbian nationalism appears hard to accept. Further to the Vojvodinian leadership's proximity to the Serb peasant masses in Srem and Vojvodina, it appears that the Vojvodina leaders too zealously punished the Hungarian population after the war, offering Hungarians only half-rations given to Slavs. There was also Croatian discontent. The Serbian leadership used this as a reason to shake up the Vojvodina party leadership, and, as noted, bring Veselinović and others to Belgrade, with Tito's apparent approval (Končar and Boarov, 2011, 113, 119).

In any case, the Vojvodina leadership did not appear to be contrary to republic and federal suggestions. It announced its intention to include Vojvodina in Serbia on several occasions. This first occurred in November 1944 at the holding of the first session of the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Serbia. Veselinović also spoke for autonomy, but against separatism, presumably from Serbia, at the founding assembly of the Popular Front in Vojvodina in December 1944. The formal decision came at the level of the leadership of the Regional Committee of Liberation in April 1945. Then, in July, the regional assembly of nationalities voted for the joining of Autonomous Vojvodina with Federal Serbia, which the third session of the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia ratified in August, and the Presidency of the People's Council of Serbia legalised in November 1945. Vojvodina thus became an autonomous province of Serbia in the 1946 constitution of Yugoslavia, the first post-war constitution, adopted after Communist consolidation of power (Končar and Boarov, 2011, 108-116).

Hobbled Autonomy: Vojvodina between Republic and Federation

The post-war period of federalism did not revolve primarily around Vojvodina's status, but that status nevertheless became problematic. Just as in the interwar period, Vojvodinian Serb politicians had managed to have Vojvodina enlarged and appended to Serbia, but they now also had a potential base for political operations. Namely, the existence of a party and state apparatus in Vojvodina always created the possibility for centrifugal pulls in relation to Serbia. Moreover, the historical legacy of the demand for federal status remained as a fall-back option in struggles with Serbia. On the other hand, since Communist federations rested on the nationality principle, the wartime and immediate post-war demographic changes in favour of Serbs and South Slavs crippled the most important aspect of the claim to greater, federal autonomy. The only avenue for Vojvodina's struggle with Serbia was recourse to the federation, in other words, it was to pact with other republics against Serbia. Serbia tended to try to minimise Vojvodinian autonomy to enhance its own power and Vojvodina tried to increase its status at the expense of Serbia. This is why the question remained fundamentally problematic throughout the post-war period.

In the initial post-war period, though, the question did not arise, partly clearly because it had been majority will of those who remained in Vojvodina to be part of Serbia. Certainly, the dispersal of the more prominent members of the Vojvodina leadership, to republic and federal offices, as well as abroad, contributed to lack of stable and independent cadre developing in Novi Sad, the capital. In addition to its leadership's dispersal, part of the reason for better relations with Serbia was certainly the height of Cold War tensions, or, more specifically, of the Tito-Stalin split from 1948 to 1953. As a plain, and as a region with a Hungarian minority whose potential homeland was in the Soviet bloc, Vojvodina had been seen as one of the most vulnerable spots for Soviet bloc military aggression. Industry moved out of Vojvodina during this period and collectivisation hit the region hard, for which reason one of the prominent wartime leaders was sent back to Vojvodina to lead the party and make sure these measures did not lead to an open break with its wartime ally, the peasantry. Stevan Doronjski's return was probably important for Vojvodina's challenge to Belgrade in the late 1950s and early 1960s, since he had standing in the region as a wartime hero. (Kon•ar and Boaroy, 2011, 117-165)

As in the inter-war period, it was economic questions which came to the fore. Vojvodina depended on agricultural investment and stood to benefit from the relaxation of tempo in industrial investment from 1957 (Hoffman and Neal, 1962, 283-287). With relations mildly worsening with both superpowers, the federal Central Committee decided on a more protectionist economic environment and a boost to domestic agricultural

production.⁵ The Vojvodina leadership also took the opportunity to push for deeper cooperation in collectives through greater state-led mechanisation, which satisfied top republic and federal leaders, who visited Vojvodina in 1958 (Hoffman and Neal, 1962, 212).

Between 1957 and 1960, however, the Vojvodina leadership became increasingly dissatisfied with its position in Serbia. Serbia received average federal investment from the budget for the five-year plan, but it continued to prioritise new industrial investment over renewal of existing capacities (Končar and Boarov, 2011, 217-224). That was a policy over which there were greater debates across the country, and the former Habsburg areas, particularly Slovenia, protested against the continuation of this policy in the second five-year plan, since they were the seat of most old industry. Moreover, when a strike hit an old mine in Slovenia, party unity across Yugoslavia was shattered. The leaderships of other republics, especially of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had lost priority status in the second five-year plan, thought the Slovene leadership had channelled dissatisfaction among the miners against Belgrade in order to have policy changed through non-institutional pressures.⁶

The Vojvodina leaders sympathised with the Slovenes. This is clear because they approached top federal politician, a Slovene and a top proponent of decentralisation, Edvard Kardelj, to complain about the Serbian leadership (Končar and Boarov, 2011, 224-230). The latter controlled the republican investment fund, the central source of money at republic level. Though the position of Serbia was to be improved in the new five-year plan, the Serbian leadership deferred renewing old industrial capacity, and ordered Vojvodina to make up for the shortfall through its own increased income from agriculture, which the Vojvodina leaders resented.⁷ Doronjski remained convinced such a model would not allow Vojvodina to modernise its agriculture sufficiently, and raised his suspicions openly with Kardelj, as noted, and then publicly, through a forum of the mass organisations at the close of 1960. Other leaders in Vojvodina took similar steps. The President of the Executive Committee of the autonomous region of Vojvodina, Geza Tikvicki, wrote to the republican Executive Committee asking for a strategic document covering Vojvodina's industry, since the latter had produced one for Serbia proper. Tikvicki also wrote a critical article for the Vojvodina press on 1 January 1961 announcing

⁵ Archives of Yugoslavia (AJ) J 507-III, 'Zapisnik sa sednice Izvršnog komiteta Centralnog komiteta SKJ održane 27. februara 1957. godine u Beogradu'

⁶ AJ 507-III/7, 'Stenografske beleške sa proširene sednice Izvršnog komiteta Centralnog Komiteta SK Jugoslavije održane 6. februara 1958. godine u Beogradu'

⁷ Archives of Serbia, Dj. 2, Central Committee, Executive Committee, F.2, 'Zapisnik sa sednice Izvršnog komiteta CK SK Srbije održane 10.X.1960'

greater industrial investment in the third five-year plan, without approval from Belgrade (Končar and Boarov, 2011, 230-261).

The result was a joint meeting of the two central committees, with the Serbian leadership ruling out any possibility of prior consultations between the Serbian and Vojvodina executive committees about the republic's five-year plan, as requested by the Vojvodina side (Končar and Boarov, 2011, 253-273). The Vojvodina leadership's appeal to Kardelj, and also a Serbian cadre closer to Kardelj than the Serbian leadership, soon-to-be-premier Petar Stambolić, had caused embarrassment to the Serbian leaders at a time when they felt they had to stand united in discussions over the 1961-1965 plan (Končar and Boarov, 2011, 255). Curiously, the meeting ended with Veselinov questioning whether Vojvodina's autonomy should be continued: 'The question of autonomy is a national question of the Serbs. There was one set of reasons for the autonomy of Kosovo and another for Vojvodina (*Drugi su bili razlozi za autonomiju na Kosmetu, a drugi za Vojvodinu*). There, there are some wider complexities (*kombinacije*) that should be solved by the Federation. We should see with the Federation whether they are still actual. The autonomies are on the borders, and that should be kept in mind.' (Končar and Boarov, 2011, 271). Indeed, the question of the forthcoming constitutional changes came up too, with different views expressed, but Doronjski returned from the meeting feeling that Serbian premier, Miloš Minić, was substantially in agreement with the Vojvodinians (Končar and Boarov, 2011, 272-3).

This impression proved incorrect, and the argument that Veselinov had raised, that autonomy was essentially a Serb question, proved a guiding idea for Serbian leaders from that point until at least 1966. The parting shot in the emerging faction fight was a piece Minić published in the autumn of 1961, stating he wanted to decentralise Serbia. Decentralisation was the reform position of the majority in the federal leadership, and it looked like Minić was moving in that direction. But the Vojvodina leadership reacted angrily to his draft, which foresaw greater competencies being passed to the municipal level, while its autonomous government would be bereft of previous decision-making powers. This was decentralisation in order to strengthen centralism, they argued, in a series of meetings between the two leaderships in late 1961 and early 1962. They were quick to refer to the pre-war parallel of Serbian hegemony in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Moreover, most of the leadership in Novi Sad resented the proposals since they went in the direction of making clear that autonomies were regulated, created and abolished by the republics, rather than the federation (Bjelica, 2015, 69-90).

The substance of disagreement also related to the history of the demand for autonomy. Veselinov argued that the national complexity of Vojvodina did not in and of itself constitute an argument for autonomy. He said that the demand for autonomy when the Serbs made it in Austria-Hungary had nothing to do with the proletariat's demand for autonomy in the inter-war period, when Vojvodina was ethnically mixed. Vojvodina had joined Serbia since Serbs were a majority in it at the end of the war, and perhaps its existence should be seen in a more contemporary, administrative light. Veselinov mentioned that there were Albanians in Macedonia, but that that did not constitute reason for autonomy, implying the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina was not reason enough for Vojvodina's autonomy (Kon•ar and Boarov, 2011, 287-288; see also, Bjelica, 2015, 121-148). The Novi Sad leadership, too, was divided, however, and its majority around Doronjski felt weak, with Doronjski admitting during debates around the constitution that the role of the minorities in the creation of autonomy had been frequently overstated. He nonetheless underlined that the national question was important, since it was Serb chauvinism creating an atmosphere of distrust: he pointed to the way claims were raised about the national question: 'What do the Hungarians want, where were they during the war, what do the national minorities want...' (Kon•ar and Boarov, 2011, 313). The situation was reminiscent of the situation at the federal level, where the republics were becoming ever more important players at the expense of federal politicians, and general disagreement about direction reigned (Popovi•, 2006c, 393-404).

That Vojvodina's case for autonomy was indeed weak was now becoming clear. Doronjski's argumentation was fragile because of his inability to counter Veselinov's arguments about Vojvodina's comparative situation in Yugoslavia and the Party's own role in changing the national composition of Vojvodina during the Second World War. The extent to which Vojvodina's autonomy depended on federal dynamics more than republic-level ones, moreover, became obvious between 1962 and 1966. The case of the faction fight in Vojvodina came up in the famous expanded meeting of the Executive Committee in March 1962, in which the market reform and decentralising wing of the federal leadership got major support from the north-western republics, while the centralising and statist wing got most support from Serbia. Indeed, the unitarists were led by a federal politician from Serbia, Aleksandar Rankovi•, who rhetorically asked who was threatening the republics, when the only republic being threatened and divided by the federal leaders was the Serbian republic?⁸ Unable to convince the Vojvodina leaders to accept Serbian leadership in the course of 1962, the Central Committee of the League of Communist of Serbia ultimately forced Doronjski to resign in 1963. While not able to change the federal

⁸ AJ 507, III/88, 14-16.III.1962, 121-122

constitution in 1963 to allow Serbia to change its republican constitution without recourse to federal approval, the Serbian leadership nonetheless gained the right in principle to ask for the end of autonomy within the republic, a major change in comparison with the 1946 constitution. The Serbian leadership then purged the Vojvodina leadership of both its strong autonomist wing and prominent supporters of the Serbian CC from the Vojvodina leadership after getting rid of Doronjski (Kon•ar and Boarov, 2011, 365-385). Doronjski was able to pick a successor, but he, too, was under constant accusation of insubordination by the Serbian leaders, who managed to call a disciplinary committee to bear on the Vojvodina leadership for factionalism by 1965 (Popovi•, 2006c, 404-423; Bjelica, 2015, 149-171).

It was not until the federal-level defeat of Rankovi• in 1966 that the Vojvodina *autonomaši* returned to the helm in Novi Sad. During their time out of power, their top representatives continued to argue for 'free' agricultural prices, greater emphasis on processing and light industry, more investment decisions for self-managed enterprises, and a stronger export orientation of the country at the federal level, in an attempt to collude with federal allies against Rankovi• (Kon•ar and Boarov, 2011, 376-383). The Serbian preference for heavy industry, greater federal unity and more export linkages with the Soviet bloc, though initially shared by many in the leaderships of the less developed republics, found less support as time went on. Its move to appropriate previously federal banks angered many and convinced them that Serbian centralism was bad for their development (Pleština, 1992, 64-68). The change in the federal balance of power, as well as Tito's belief that the fall of Khrushchev in the USSR in autumn 1964, appeared to have tipped the balance against Rankovi•, who appeared to resist the reform course of 1965, and who consequently lost power in 1966. That, in turn, opened the way for greater decentralisation in Yugoslavia in a series of constitutional reforms, reaching their apex in the 1974 constitution (Jovi•, 2003; Jovi•, 2009, 95-140).

The fall of Rankovi• provoked an effectively federally-engineered crisis in the Serbian party. An unintended consequence of the change was the ascent of the liberal wing of the party in Serbia. Following the appointment of Marko Nikezi• to party leadership in Serbia in 1968, liberals ascended to high position in Vojvodina also. Mirko Tepavac, briefly, was the first leader, before he became foreign minister, followed by Mirko • anadanovi•. The liberal attempt to decisively change Serbia, however, led to greater leadership unity than ever, which smacked of danger to the more autonomist, conservative and self-management politicians in Vojvodina, who feared for the stability of Serbia and Yugoslavia. • anadanovi•'s success in rejuvenating the Vojvodina

leadership in 1969 in particular made him many enemies among the older generation of politicians, but it also appeared coordinated with the Serbian leadership's attempts to pass a new, more decisive round of political and economic reform (Bjelica 2015, 320-321). Sceptical of the liberal turn, and mistrustful of the commitment of • anadanovi• to autonomy, an older group with its roots in the Partisan generation, around Popovi•, who at the time headed the Novi Sad party, began to criticise • anadanovi• from leftist, quasi-‘workerist’ positions. Faced with Tito's decision to lean on conservative elements in the Serbian party against the liberals in 1972 (Ramet, 2006, 227-262), the *autonomaši* became somewhat more cautious, fearful that Serbia's old guard would be even less tolerant of autonomy. They did not support the conservative take-over of the Serbian party, but they did manoeuvre to remove • anadanovi• from leadership in Vojvodina, which they succeeded in doing by the end of 1972. They then managed to fortify their positions in the province by 1974 (Bjelica, 2015, 322-7).

Nonetheless, support from the federation appeared to be the condition of Vojvodinian autonomy. It became clear almost instantly after the passing of the new constitution that the Serbian party and republic leaderships wanted to reverse the gains made by Kosovo and Vojvodina in the preceding years. In particular they hoped to alter the fact that the constitution deemed the autonomous provinces constitutive of the federation, which meant the republic was unable to function in the same way as other republics. Petar Stamboli• and Dra~a Markovi• famously produced the Blue Book, cataloguing the ways in which Serbia was unable to reach statehood because of the blocks the two autonomous provinces could put in place against republic policies. Although these leaders allegedly met with the approval of Kardelj, they did not meet with the approval of Tito himself. After his death, moreover, and after the Kosovo protests of 1981, which led to the declaration of martial law in the province and a federal crisis, the Serbian leadership once again called a federal-level meeting and called for greater unity. Until 1984, it tried to convince the other republics in the justness of its cause (Jovi•, 2009, 171-224).

The Serbian leadership's failure to move forward through institutional channels led to increasing bitterness, especially at perceived selfishness and criticism from Slovenia. More aggressive speeches began to come from leading party members in Serbia, including from a young Slobodan Miloaevi•, who was already presenting himself as defender of the republic's unity in 1984. Somewhat later, Miloaevi• moved from institutional to extra-institutional methods of mobilisation in 1988, following his rise in the party on the back of promises that he would help the Kosovo Serbs. The latter represented apparent victims of impregnable provincial autonomy, seemingly discriminated against in their own republic by a hostile and potentially separatist entity. Famously,

Vojvodina found itself the first of several victims of the so-called ‘happenings of the people’ in which Kosovo Serbs acted as the vanguard of an anti-bureaucratic revolution that would sweep away conservative, repressive and anti-Serb governments, and centralise Serbia, and then Yugoslavia. The autonomist leaders felt that post-war colonists to Vojvodina were being used by Belgrade to pressure the provincial government to resign, but could not muster any significant counter protest. Repressive of Serb nationalism, the Vojvodina provincial government was easy prey in times of economic problems, national crisis and rising nationalist mobilisation. Its own narrative of self-management socialism and Titoist equality seemed to many who were struggling and repressed at best a relic of a bygone era, and at worst a true block on effective republican and federal decision-making. Within a few months of the July protests of the Kosovo Serbs in 1988, in October 1988, the government of the autonomous region of Vojvodina fell amid renewed protests. Milošević soon unilaterally changed the constitution of Serbia, limiting Vojvodinian autonomy to symbolic status in the process (Boarov, 2001, 211-218), which encouraged Serb nationalism and further shifts in the provinces composition at the expense of non-Serbs until the fall of Milošević in 2000 (Boarov, 2001, 219-240).

Conclusion

This article has argued that the struggle for the autonomy of Vojvodina met its peak during the Second World War. While it had been primarily a Serb national demand in the Habsburg Empire, it had become a more multinational and democratic demand in the interwar Yugoslavia, albeit that of a minority among, in particular, Serbs and Hungarians, resentful of dictatorial rule from Belgrade. The malleability of the idea, between Serb nationalism and ‘multi-nationalism’ had always existed, but it was the circumstances of the Second World War which decisively shaped the fate of the region. The activism and multinationalism of the Partisans gave them the edge over other contenders for power and probably accounted, at least in part, to their successes in Vojvodina. Nonetheless, with time, Nazi racial war policies intensified South Slav and Serb nationalism in the region, leading to reprisal ethnic expulsions of most Germans and some Hungarians. Vojvodina’s changing national map coincided with the Partisans’ relative weakness in Serbia and the need to bolster Communist power there, making Vojvodina’s claim to federal autonomy suspect, even without Serbian party manoeuvres to gain control of Vojvodina. The result was a hobbled autonomy, always strong enough to resist Serbian republic attempts to end it, but never strong enough to gain federal-level autonomy without federal-level manoeuvring against the

republic of Serbia. Ultimately, this led to the constitutional deadlock of the late 1970s and early 1980s, and facilitated the rise of nationalist politics in Yugoslavia, associated with Milošević's centralisation drive.

Was this the classic case of the 'nationalising' state confirming its own territorial gains after wartime victory in the First and then Second World Wars, shifting borders and then populations (Brubaker, 1996)? Was it, moreover, the process of Serbia becoming less Balkan and more European, as it left behind the Ottoman and Habsburg legacies of multinational complexity and, brutally, built a modern European nation-state (Todorova, 2015)? The Communist programme had promised differently, building in some ways on the Balkan Federation idea of the Balkan socialists associated with the pre-war Second International, but critical of Austro-Marxist attempts at reforming the Habsburg Empire based on non-territorial rights (Plavaić and Jivković, 2003). The Yugoslav idea had only partly corresponded with such a programme of territorial self-determination and federal equality, but it had underpinned Yugoslavia's re-emergence during the Second World War under Communist leadership. Moreover, it had clearly made Yugoslavia to a large extent domestically an exception in eastern Europe.

Nonetheless, regional dynamics were key to understanding continuities and discontinuities across the Second World War. Clearly, in Vojvodina, it was not multinational ideas that prevailed, as the Communists had to rely on an increasingly nationalistic Serbian peasantry, hemmed in by regional powers, supported by Nazi Germany. Here, classic imperial meddling from Europe certainly overcame notions of Balkan multinationalism. The radicalising effect of Nazi racial ideas also marked a turning point, or, rather, a qualitative transformation of pre-war intolerance. Nonetheless, that intolerance had been present before. The South Slav nationalism of the CPY of the 1930s, moreover, was one of several components which differentiated it from pre-war Balkan Social Democracy, and this would prove to have domestic and international implications. It accounted for the problematic treatment of Vojvodina's non-Slavs, but also of Kosovo's Albanians. This would have long-term, catastrophic consequences for domestic stability, most obvious in the 1980s and 1990s. But it would also explain why Tito's 'National Communism' failed to lead non-Slavs into a Balkan Federation in the aftermath of the Tito-Stalin split, leading it to a more precarious and dependent position than might otherwise have been the case during the Cold War (Perović, 2007). This article therefore contributes to the wider understanding of Habsburg and Ottoman legacies, Communist and Cold War studies, and explanations of Yugoslav federalism and collapse.

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