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A Short Survey of the Relations between the Yugoslavs and Ethnic Germans

The contacts between the Yugoslav peoples and the Ethnic Germans were pretty ancient in Slovenia. In other parts of the newly-formed Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, they were not so long, but they were also very important in many respects. For that reason we shall deal shortly with these relations here, however, without making an attempt to depict the fullness of their diversity. Due to the lack of space, many things which testify to cohabitation, common cultural patterns, mutual intermixing, intermingling and transfers of ideas or inventions will have to be omitted.

The Yugoslav people which first fell under foreign rule were the Slovenes. Asking the Bavarians for help against the Avars, they soon fell under the rule of the first, and then that of the Franks. This was the epoch-making event in their history that would determine its course for the next 1100 years, until the foundation of Yugoslavia. The land was carved up by German nobles who gradually assimilated the Slovenian ones. In the territory which remained predominantly Slovenian, the ethnic difference gradually overlapped with the social.¹ Furthermore, the settlement of German peasant and town populations led to the disappearance of the Slovenians in large part of the Slovenian lands, shrinking the Slovenian ethnic territory to the half of its scope from the early Middle Ages.² As we have seen, the Slovenian towns have retained their German character until the second half of 19th century, and sometimes beyond; however, until mid-19th century this caused no offence to anyone.³

The Serbs came into a more significant contact with the Germans when the latter started arriving to Southern Hungary, where most of the local Serbs also only immigrated during the so-called Great Migration of the Serbs in 1689/90. At first conflicts with German colonists developed in many places – over pastures, because of ousting of the Serbs from their villages, because the Serbs had to build houses and till the land for the Germans, as well as because of the privileges the Swabian colonists were granted which the older Serbian settlers

¹ This remained so until 19th century, when the greatest Slovenian poet France Prešern said: "In this country, German is usually spoken by the gentlemen and ladies who give orders, and Slovenian by those who serve them." (Herman Vendel, *Borba Jugoslovena za slobodu i jedinstvo*, Beograd s.a., p. 200; Janez Stergar, *Njemački nacionalizam i protivoslovenska djelatnost u austrijskoj Koruškoj*, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, IX, 1, 1971, p. 137.)

² Kos, pp. 9-17; Kraft, p. 123.

³ Ferdo Geatrin, Vasilj Melik, *Slovenska zgodovina od konca osamnajstega stoletja do 1918*, Ljubljana 1966, p. 6. Until mid-19th century, the national consciousness of both Germans and Slovenes was undeveloped which enabled a peaceful coexistence. (Ibid, pp. 83, 105.) As a proof of tolerance, one can adduce the fact that during the first half of 19th century the local German magazines were furthering Slovenian culture, publishing translations of Slovenian poems etc. (Smilja Amon, *Nemško časopisje na Slovenskem*, *Teorija in praksa*, XXV, 9-10, 1988, p. 1332.) Furthermore, the German nationalists did not deem the Slovenian movement dangerous. (Robert A. Kann, *The Multinational Empire. Nationalism and National Reform in the Habsburg Monarchy 1848-1918*, II, New York 1950, pp. 297-298.)

did not enjoy, or at least not in such a degree.⁴ However, conflicts, with colonists of other nationalities also appeared for similar reasons.⁵ In other words, they were not primarily ethnic, but social squabbles over resources. There was hardly an ideology behind them.

The conflicts of the settling days gradually died down, and the Serbs and the Germans started to learn from each other and to contribute jointly to the welfare of the Monarchy - each in their own way. The relations were somewhat cooled during the First Serbian Uprising against the Turks in Serbia (1804-1813), when the Serbs in the Banat Military Frontier planned an uprising of their own aimed at unification with Serbia. The movement had also a distinctly anti-German tinge, most probably due to the fact that the majority of the officers and bourgeoisie was German or German-speaking. The attempt was soon quenched, and the peaceful coexistence continued for next 40-odd years.⁶

During the Hungarian Revolution the Germans usually sided with the Magyars – bent on material welfare, they had interest in liberal reforms, unaware that the Hungarians were endangering their ethnic survival.⁷ The revolutionary Serbian authorities in Southern Hungary were nationally not overly tolerant, and their units were often undisciplined, which brought them on collision course with most other nationalities – including the peace loving Germans. Almost every non-Serbian village had to be taken by force or threat of force. The Hungarians, for their part, knew well how to use the Germans for their own national ends, so that the battle for the small German town Bela Crkva (Weißkirchen) in the Banat, went down in history as one of the greatest Hungarian victories in the course of the whole revolution.⁸ It was only during the revolution that unbridgeable gaps between nationalities came to being in the ethnically mixed places.⁹

The defeat of the Hungarian revolution brought about a temporary rapprochement between the Serbs and Magyars, and cooling of relations between the Serbs and the

⁴ Zoran Janjetović, *Die Konflikte zwischen Serben und Donauschwaben*, Südost-Forschungen, 58, 1999, pp. 120-122. Naive and obviously opportunist is the claim of Ljubomir Kosijer that Serbs and Croats had greeted the German colonists friendly, as well as, that the latter had founded their villages as extensions of Serbian villages or often named a street after Serbs out of sympathy for them! (Ljubomir St. Kosijer, *Großdeutschland und Jugoslawien (aus der südslawischen Perspektive)*, Berlin, Wien 1939 (3rd ed.), p. 43.) A. Belić and St. Mihadžić adduce places from which the Germans had dislodged the Serbs. (La question du Banat, de la Batschka et de la Baranya. La Baranya, Paris 1919, p. 11.) The Yugoslav Franciscans were not spared the eviction either. (Ibid.)

⁵ On conflicts with the Ruthenians cf.: Slavko Gavrilović, *Prilog istoriji Rusina u Bačkoj sredinom XVIII veka*, *Zbornik Matice srpske za društvene nauke*, 48, 1967, p. 113; Idem, *Rusini u Bačkoj i Sremu*, in: *Iz istorije*, pp. 39-43; Sima Tomović, *Šid. Monografija*, Šid 1973, p. 36.

⁶ Felix Milleker, *Geschichte der Stadt Pančevo*, Pančevo 1925, p. 76; *Heimatbuch der Stadt Weißkirchen im Banat* (henceforth: WK), Salzburg 1980, p. 61-66.

⁷ Böhm, *Geschichte des Temeser Banats*, pp. 338-358; ISN, V/2, pp. 45-78; Mihovil Tomandl, *Prilog istoriji Okružnog narodnog odbora u Pančevu 1848-1849*, *Zbornik Matice srpske za društvene nauke*, 40, 1965; Zrenjanin, pp. 48-49; Gavrilović, *Privredne i društvene prilike*, pp. 158-159; Janjetović, *Die Konflikte*, pp. 124, 126; Slavko Gavrilović, *Zapisi o Vršcu XIX veka*, *Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju*, 1, 1970; Leger, p. 237; Vendel, p. 241; Felix Milleker, *Geschichte der königlichen Stadt Werschetz*, II, Budapest 1886, pp. 4-67; Jan Siracki, *Slovaci u Vojvodini kao istorijsko-etnografski fenomen*, *Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju*, 5, 1972, p. 116. The number of nationally conscious, or at least for Hungary dangerous Slovaks, according to a list of the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior, remained pretty small until October 1918. R. Seton-Watson estimated their number between 750 and 1000. (Gogolak, o.c. III. *Zwischen zwei Revolutionen (1848-1919)*, München 1972, p. 148.) During the Revolution of 1848/49, Serbian conflict with the Ruthenians in Šid was taken up again. (S. Gavrilović, *Iz istorije*, p. 44.)

⁸ Herman Vendel, *Borba Jugoslovena za slobodu i jedinstvo*, Beograd s.a., p. 241; Kapper, *Die serbische Bewegung*, pp. 133-134; Šteger, *Bela Crkva*, 54-57; WK, pp. 61-70; Vendel, *Borba*, p. 241; Subotić, *Bela Crkva*, pp. 101-105; Felix Milleker, *Geschichte der Banater Militärgrenze*, 205-206.

⁹ Wolf, p. 60.

Germans¹⁰ - although considerable part of “Bach’s hussars” (perceived by many as the cutting edge of Germanization and absolutism) were actually Czechs, Poles and Slovenes.¹¹

After the Austro-Hungarian Compromise in 1867, Hungarian relations with all non-Magyar nationalities came to a head.¹² More correctly put, their relations with nationally conscious parts of these peoples and their national leaders, deteriorated. Since a large number of assimilated Germans and Jews were to be found among the executors of this policy, it only exasperated the minority population (the Serbs, Croats, Romanians), not only against the Hungarians, but also to a degree against the Germans and Jews,¹³ without achieving its goals in minority regions.¹⁴ The Hungarians and Germans, and partly Slovaks were not only disliked as representatives of the authorities, but, as we have seen, also as colonists in Slavonia¹⁵ and economic rivals who were supplanting the Serbs in the Vojvodina.¹⁶

In Slovenia, national awakening began bashfully only in 1848, to reach its highest pitch in the second half of the century. The Slovenes fought (as maximum) for the unification of all Slovene lands, or (as minimum) for the equality of languages in administration, education and judiciary within the then existing crownlands. Although their national rights were much more respected in Austria than was the case with those of “nationalities” in

¹⁰ Especially cultural ties were strengthened. (ISN, V/2, pp. 120-123; Katus, Istorija, p. 74; Paményi (ed.), p. 359; Kann, I, p. 85; Vasilije Krestić, Srbi u Vojvodini za vreme Bahovog apsolutizma (1849-1860), Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju, 13, 1976; Zwitter, Šepić, Bogdanov, p. 85.)

¹¹ Macartney, The Habsburg Empire, p. 442; Vendel, p. 328.

¹² The Hungarians began to behave increasingly exclusively ever since the fall of absolutism in 1861. (Vendel, p. 329.)

¹³ The Jews assimilated willingly and together with other assimilants, they were perceived as the greatest Hungarian jingoists. (Oscar Jászi, The Dissolution of the Hapsburg Monarchy, Chicago 1961, pp. 174-175, 324, 443; Bogumil Hrabak, Dezerterstvo, zeleni kadar i prevratna anarhija u jugoslovenskim zemljama 1914-1918, Novi Sad 1990, p. 21.) Odium against the Jews was on the rise also for economic reasons. (Lebl, Slovačka narodna stranka, p. 144.) Slovakian assimilants were also very numerous, but they were chiefly making career in the Church, where they were presumably less exposed to hatred. Furthermore, the number of their assimilants in Southern Hungary was much smaller than in Northern – thanks to their much smaller total number there, and their better national preservation in a region they shared with nationally conscious Serbs. (C.A. Macartney, Hungary and her Successors. The Treaty of Trianon and its Consequences 1919-1937, London, New York, Toronto 1937, p. 398.) It is not by chance that the first nationally conscious Swabians appeared in South Hungary, mostly in the territories that would fall to Yugoslavia later on. (Cf. Gottas, pp. 372-374, 395-398, 401-402, 407-410; Wolf, p. 139.) Among the prominent Hungarian politicians it was only Lajos Mocsary who managed to establish friendly contacts with the Serbs; for this he was kicked out of his own 1848-Party. (Gabor G. Kemenj, Lajoš Močari i Srbi, Zbornik Matice srpske za društvene nauke, 21, 1958.)

¹⁴ Katus, Die Magyaren, p. 433; Macartney, The Habsburg Empire, p. 726.

¹⁵ Gujaš, o.c.; Oberkersch, Die Deutschen, pp. 35-42, 62-65; Milan Krajčovič, Slovaci u političkom životu Trojedne Kraljevine u drugoj polovini XIX veka, Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju, 14, 1976, p. 196.

¹⁶ Marković, Pravoslavna srpska parohija, pp. 22-23, 47, 62-65; Wolf, pp. 139-140; Toša Iskruljev, Raspeće srpskog naroda u Sremu 1914. godine i Mađari. Sa mađarske granice. Bajski trokut. Sent Andrija, Novi Sad 1936, pp. 309-314, 318-324, 368-370, 434-443; Siracki, Saradnja, p. 456. This trend was partly stopped before the First World War thanks to co-operative societies, banks and the money of the returnees from America. (Simonović, pp. 10, 12, 23; Vendel, p. 503; Marković, p. 48; Aleksandar M. Stanojlov (ed.), Petrovgrad, Petrovgrad 1938, p. 56.) Sporadic political cooperation with the Slovaks and Romanians began only in 1860s. (Siracki, Saradnja, pp. 458-462; Idem, Mesto i značaj jugoslovenskih Slovaka u istoriji čehoslovačko-jugoslovenskih odnosa, Zbornik Matice srpske za društvene nauke, 48, 1967, pp. 43-48; Lebl, Slovačka narodna stranka; Idem, Građanske partije, pp. 224-227, 234, 249-251; Milan Krajčovič, Slovački političar Milan Hodža u političkoj istoriji Vojvodine početkom XX veka, Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju, 6, 1972.) Cooperation with the Germans began only in 1890s when their national movement started, and with the Hungarians, except for occasional party flirting it never materialized. (SBNS Kraljevine SHS, Redovan saziv za 1927/28, knj. IX, Beograd 1928, p. 198; Ingomar Senz, Die nationale Bewegung der ungarländischen Deutschen vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg. Eine Entwicklung im Spannungsfeld zwischen Alldeutschum und ungarischer Innenpolitik, München 1977, pp. 185, 245-247; Lebl, Građanske partije, pp. 88, 118.)

Hungary,¹⁷ the struggle was here probably even fiercer. Already before the Compromise Croatia possessed basic institutions for preservation of its nationhood,¹⁸ and even for assimilation of parts of the non-Croat population;¹⁹ the Serbs were protected from Magyarization by confessional difference institutionalized in their ecclesiastical and educational autonomy. The Slovenes, on the other hand, had nothing comparable, and “Germanness” permeated much deeper all spheres of their national culture and economic life. They did not have to fight the Germans alone, but also numerous “nemčuri” (derogatory name for Germanized or German-friendly Slovenes), and indeed Germanness in themselves.²⁰ This struggle in Carniola gradually yielded fruit,²¹ but in ethnically mixed crownlands, the Germans not only managed to keep their supremacy,²² but also, spontaneously or by applying indirect or direct pressure, to Germanize a certain number of Slovenes.²³ Their political,

¹⁷ Non-German languages were much more in official and semi-official use than was the case in Hungary, where Hungarian was the sole official language. However, the supremacy of German remained unchallenged, especially in higher administrative, judiciary and educational spheres. (Cf. Peter Burian, *The State Language Problem in Old Austria (1848-1918)*, *Austrian History Yearbook*, Vol. VI-VII, 1970-1971; Kann, pp. 308-309; Jászi, pp. 252-253.)

¹⁸ This however, does not mean it was spared the penetration of the Magyar language into schools and offices, coupled with colonization of Hungarians with concomitant opening of schools for them – at the time 40% of children in Croatia did not attend any school at all. (Vendel, p. 423.)

¹⁹ Hans Schrekeis, *Donauschwaben in Kroatien. Historisch-demographische Untersuchung*, Salzburg 1983, pp. 10, 12; Krajčovič, Slovaci, p. 196.

²⁰ The best and most detailed survey see in: Janez Cvirn, *Trdnjavski trikotnik*. Probably the best example of the difficulties the Slovenian national movement had to overcome was represented by the personage of Dragotin Dežman (Karl Deschmann) (1821-1889) who started as a nationally conscious, albeit German-friendly Slovene in his youth, but turned into the leader of the German Party in Carniola later in his life. He believed only German culture can show the Slovenes the way to progress. He became separated from the Slovenian national movement by its conservatism and ultramontanism. (*Biographisches Lexikon zur Geschichte Südosteuropas*, I, München 1974, p. 395; Vendel, p. 331; Ferdo Gestrin, *Vasilj Melik, Povijest Slovenaca 1813-1914*, Zagreb 1952, p. 151.) Conservatism of the Slovenian national movement pushed many a liberal Slovene into the German camp since 1870s. (Hartman, *Kulturni tokovi*, p. 234; Thomas Barker, *The Slovene Minority of Carinthia*, New York 1984, p. 72; Tone Zorn, *Pogled na položaj koruških Slovenaca u prošlosti i sadašnjosti*, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, IX, 1, 1971, p. 71; Stergar, p. 141.) Many Slovene intellectuals were corresponding in German in mid-19th century and the majority of books meant for them was in German. (Vasilj Melik, *The Representation of Germans, Italians and Slovenes in Ljubljana, Trieste, Maribor and Other Neighbouring Towns Form 1848 Until the Second World War*, in: Richard Georg Plaschka, Karlheinz Mach (eds.), *Die Auflösung des Habsburgerreiches. Zusammenbruch und Neuorientierung im Donaauraum*, München 1970, p. 126; Gestrin, *Melik, Slovenska zgodovina*, pp. 15, 83; Idem, *Povijest*, p. 38.) The greatest Slovene poet of all times, France Prešern, used to write German verses too. (Boris Zihlerl, *Predgovor*, in: France Prešern, *Pesmi*, Beograd 1951, pp. XIV-XV; Barker, p. 54.) For these reasons, the journal “Triglav” was stirring Slovenian national consciousness in 1865-1870 in German! (Vendel, p. 332.) It is typical for part of Slovene historiography that it does not manage to come to terms with such (too) big role the Germans used to play in the Slovene culture and economy. Unable to face the facts, it seeks refuge in keeping mum about it altogether. (Cf. Janko Prunk, *Slowenien. Ein Abriss seiner Geschichte*, Ljubljana 1996.) On the other hand, it is only fair to point out that many of the creators of „German“ culture (which was synonymous with high, non-folk, culture) in Slovenia were of Slovenian descent. (Macartney, *The Habsburg Empire*, p. 84.)

²¹ Vendel, pp. 332, 336. However, not even there were the Slovene successes continuous. (Marija Lah, *Borba ljubljanske občine za slovensko uradovanje*, *Kronika*, V, 3, 1957; Vendel, pp. 427-428.)

²² The Slovenes remained underrepresented in all the crownland Diets and their school system remained rudimentary. (Vendel, pp. 491, 494.) Furthermore, the Germans retained power in major towns. (Antoša Lsovec, *Upravni in gospodarski razvoj Maribora u XIX stoletju*, *Kronika*, XXXI, 2-3, 1983, p. 170; Orožen, II, 43; Kovačič, *Slovenska Štajerska in Prekmurje*, pp. 345-385.)

²³ Klemenčič, *Germanizacijski procesi*; Fran Zwitter, *Etnična struktura in politična vloga mest v slovenskih deželah od srede XIX. do začetka XX. stoletja*, *Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis*, 3-4, 1973; Arnold Suppan, *Zwischen Assimilation und nationalpolitischer Emanzipation. Die Kärntner Slowenen vor und im Ersten Weltkrieg (1903-1918)*, *Österreichische Osthefte*, 20, 1978. Especially the Slovenes in the industrial towns within the German ethnic territory were an easy prey to Germanization. (Cf. Fran Zwitter, *Prva štajerska narodnostna statistika*, in: Franjo Baš, Janko Glaser (eds.), *Kovačičev zbornik*, Maribor 1937, p. 193.)

cultural and economic preponderance,²⁴ coupled with their increasingly intransigent nationalism of an imperialist, sometimes even of a racist stamp,²⁵ was responsible that the relations in 1918 were extremely tense.²⁶ National conflicts from the last decades of its existence would spill over into Yugoslavia – those between the Yugoslav peoples themselves, as well as those between them and peoples which would become national minorities.

In Slavonia, anti-German feelings started to rise with the increased influx of German settlers in the last third of the 19th century. The reason was above all economic envy, since the scattered German settlers and their villages were no national threat to the majority Slavic population which retained its firm numerical supremacy. Dispersion and comparatively small number of the German colonists led to their large assimilation which the autonomous Croatian authorities (including the Roman-Catholic Church there) encouraged with all means. Gradual assimilation and social integration in turn, led to gradual easing of tensions, although in some places, particularly in Syrmium where the Swabian settlements were bigger, older and economically more powerful, they remained perceptible until 1918.²⁷

On the whole, the relations of the Yugoslav peoples with the Ethnic-Germans ranged from tense to friendly at the beginning of 20th century. They were pretty bad between the Slovenes and the Germans in Slovenia. In Croatia, Bosnia and the Vojvodina they ranged from friendly and good-neighbourly, to tense – due to economic rivalry, conflicts from the days of settlement or nationalism. Centuries of living together have done their part – not only by creating gaps, but by building bridges too.²⁸ Life within common empires entailed often common culture, knowledge of the official language (at least among the upper classes), economic ties,²⁹ occasional political cooperation in some places, and even personal acquaintances and friendships, which would survive into the inter-war period and from which, the Germans would benefit. The reasons why the post-war powers-that-be started building their minority policy predominantly on the bad experiences of the centuries-long common existence are numerous, and (except in Slovenia) they had to do more with other national minorities than with the Germans themselves. They partly lie in the depth of changes to the detriment of the Yugoslav peoples caused by the settlement and activities of the minority populations (particularly German, Magyar and Albanian ones), partly in the oppressive policies of the defunct empires for whose cat's-paws the Southern Slavs (not quite without a

²⁴ Gestrin, Melik, *Povijest*, pp. 170, 175.

²⁵ Cf. Janez Cvirn, *Trdnjavski trikotnik*; Idem, *Nemci v Celju (1861-1914)* (Msc. of the Ph.D. thesis), Celje 1990; Idem, *Celjski Nemci in jugoslovansko vprašanje pred prvo vojno*, *Zgodovinski časopis*, XLIV, 4, 1990; Idem, *Nemštvo in poskus demokratizacije občinskega volilnega sistema na spodnjem Štajerskem*, *Zgodovinski časopis*, XLIV, 1, 1990; Gestrin, Melik, *Povijest*, p. 203.) Inter-ethnic conflicts were sometimes so severe, as to cause physical violence and even victims in Celje, Ptuj and Ljubljana. (Ivan Stopar, *Celje*, Motovun 1986, p. 108; Gestrin, Melik, *Povijest*, pp. 153-159, 270; Slovenec, September 20, 1931.)

²⁶ The aversion of the Slovene leaders was leveled against the local Germans and not against the Habsburg Monarchy, to which they generally remained loyal almost until the end of the First World War. (Cf. Janko Pleterški, *Prvo opredeljenje Slovenaca za Jugoslaviju*, Beograd [1976].) Indeed, the Slovenes remained loyal to the Habsburg Empire even as German nationalists cared only for their national interests, and not for those of the state in the last decades of Monarchy's existence. (Andreas Moritsch, *Deutsche und Slowenen in Kärnten. Das nationale Bewußtsein in Kärnten in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, *Österreichische Osthefte*, 12, 1970, p. 243.)

²⁷ Valentin Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen in Syrmien, Slawonien, Kroatien und Bosnien. Geschichte einer deutschen Volksgruppe in Südosteuropa*, Stuttgart 1989, pp. 56-61; Marković, pp. 15, 34, 64.

²⁸ Cf. Erdeljanović, pp. 60-70; Martinov, o.c.; Rittig-Beljak, o.c.; INJ, II, pp. 138, 349-351, 364-367.

²⁹ The first savings bank in Novi Sad was multi-national; however one should note that it had been founded as early as 1864. (Boris Kršev, *Bankarstvo u Dunavskoj banovini*, Novi Sad 1998, p. 31.) Later banks in the Vojvodina were usually founded on ethnic basis. (Ibid, pp. 33-34.)

reason) had held the non-Yugoslavs,³⁰ and partly in the surging nationalism and (not always admitted) feeling of cultural or/and economic inferiority in comparison with the minority populations. The Ethnic-Germans also had to bear the brunt of such minority-unfriendly policy due to their numbers, economic strength and identification (except in Slovenia not at all justifiable) with the defunct Habsburg Empire which in the last years of its existence did its best to remain in bad memory to the Yugoslav peoples. At that, valuable contributions of the Germans and other minorities were often forgotten and no-one seems to have been aware that an unjust policy of revenge harmed the interests of the state and the majority people.

³⁰ The nationalist German author Reimund Friedrich Kaindl considered the Germans of Hungary as bulwark of Germanness and a stepping-stone for German (economic) penetration into the Balkans. (I. Senz, pp. 276-277; Schödl, p. 118.)