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CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS OF THE ETHNIC-GERMANS

The bourgeois society as created in the course of the 19th century brought about more massive association of people for various purposes than ever. Cultural-educational societies were very numerous in the process. This was quite understandable in a century which set high store by science, progress and moral and esthetic betterment of the individual. In ethnically mixed areas these associations had also special tasks, which became increasingly important as nationalism grew, which was often detrimental to culture.¹ All this was continued into the 20th century: national cultural and educational associations and organizations continued playing an important role in the society, and especially in minority communities where they often tried to be the mainstay of national life, not only in the field of education and culture.

According to the official data of the Yugoslav authorities, there were some 700 minority cultural, educational, fun and humanitarian societies in the kingdom. Out of that 415 were German, 190 Hungarian, 25 Italian, 48 Romanian etc.² To be sure, these were only the permitted associations. Although the possibility can't be ruled out that the total was somewhat inflated, the number is quite remarkable nevertheless. At the same time, one should keep in mind that even if the numbers are true, they are also deceitful. Many societies, due to the chicanes on part of the authorities or apathy of the members, didn't work, or evinced only minimal activity. On the other hand, there were associations which were active although they were not approved or were even clandestine.³ The objective of this chapter can't be to deal with all associations and organizations; we shall confine ourselves to mention the main direction of their work, kinds of associations and the conditions under which they worked. More attention will be paid to the main cultural-educational organization which aspired not only to centralize the whole cultural life of the German minority, but developed also other activities (social, economic and even political), striving to embrace the whole national.

Great regional differences in civilization were already mentioned on several places in this work, and they have to be kept in mind also when one speaks about cultural and educational associations and organizations. Better economic and cultural development of the Northern parts of Yugoslavia which had belonged to Austria-Hungary until 1918, produced an incomparably better development of cultural-educational societies⁴ and organizations, as compared to the former Ottoman territories. In the former Habsburg territories, there were

¹ As a relevant example for our topic see a survey of Hungarian and German associations in Southern Hungary at the turn of the century, in: I. Senz, pp. 36, 60-65. About the rivalry between German and Slovenian cultural societies in Celje cf: HWBGAD, II, p. 57.

² AJ, 38, 93/225.

³ For a while, the largest Volksdeutsche cultural association, the Kulturbund, had to operate illegally, as we shall see.

⁴ In Ljubljana alone there were over 30 different German associations. (HWBGAD, III, p. 329.)

German associations which could boast of a history longer than 200 years in 1918.⁵ In that way, German associations were the oldest in the region.

However, it turned out the new authorities were awed not at all by the antiquity of some cultural institutions. In the territory of Slovenia, almost all German associations, cultural and others, were given short shrift and either shut down or “nationalized.”⁶ The property of many was confiscated.⁷ Theatres in Maribor, Celje and Ptuj passed into Slovenian hands by 1923.⁸ The situation in other parts of the former Habsburg Monarchy was similar. The activities of minority societies was halted also by large drain of intelligentsia which had led them before the war, and it took several years before these associations obtained the necessary permits, filled the gaps in personnel and started working again. This held true especially for the German societies in Slovenia, since the minority was considered irredentist in those areas.⁹

The Vojvodina Swabians, had a considerable number of cultural-artistic societies (mainly male choirs),¹⁰ and they utilized connections of their leaders and cultural climate that was propitious for them, to establish an umbrella national cultural association – the Swabian-German Cultural Union (Schwäbisch-Deutscher Kulturbund).¹¹ Before the permission was granted, some changes had to be introduced into its programme (the possibility of founding private schools was dropped, as well as the possibility of enrolling juridical persons or foreigners.)¹² The foundation was eventually realized in Novi Sad on June 20, 1920, and the

⁵ Thus for instance, the Philharmonic Society of Ljubljana was founded in 1702. (Lenz, p. 65.) The Männergesangsverein of Maribor was founded in 1846, and the second of the three German choirs, the Liedertafel in 1865. (AJ, F. 398, f. 1.)

⁶ Dolenc, pp. 47, 55, 57; Morocutti, pp. 39-41. This hit particularly the local branches of the Schulverein, the Südmark and other associations whose centres remained abroad. Their property was sequestered and then sold. It was done in accordance with the Law on Abolishing Germanizing Associations. (Hartmann, p. 236; Lenz, p. 47.) Only in the Kočevje these two associations had 22 branches each. (Jubiläums-Festbuch, p. 15.) Otterstädt adduces 20 branches of the Schulverein and 22 of the Südmark. (Otterstädt, Gottschee. Verlorene Heimat, p. 38.) The Slovenian memorial book of the 500th anniversary of the Kočevje describes the events in autumn 1918 thus: «The new state authorities quenched quickly all their schemes [i.e. of proclaiming Kočevje's independence], disbanded almost all their societies, achieving thus that the situation was *stabilized and normalized*.” (emphasized by this author) (500 let, p. 42.) The Germans from Slovenia complained in a memo for the Yugoslav government and political parties that some 200 German associations of various kinds were disbanded. (PA, Abt. Iib, Deutschtum in Jugoslawien, Politik 25, Jugoslawien, Bd. 1.)

⁷ Lenz, p. 65; Franz Hriber, Das Vereinswesen in Gottschee, in: Jubiläums -Festbuch, pp. 217-219; Otterstadt, Gottschee. Verlorene Heimat, p. 8. Ein Notschrei, p. 8.) The greatest kick-up was started over confiscation of the German House (Deutsches Haus) in Celje. The case passed courts of several levels in Yugoslavia and reached the Council of the League of Nations, so that in early 1930s Yugoslavia agreed to pay 500.000 dinars to the School Foundation of the Germans in Yugoslavia as indemnification for confiscation of the German House. (Cf. Ein Notschrei; PA, abt. Iib, Deutschtum in Jugoslawien, Politik 25, Jugoslawien, Bd. 1; Abt. Iib, Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker, Politik 6, Jugoslawien, Bd. 5; Dolenc, pp. 60-61.)

⁸ Dolenc, pp. 15, 47. The authorities shut down the German theatre in Ljubljana after Slovenian demonstrations, although it was mainly attended by the Slovenes. (Ibid., p. 45.) Negotiations with the owners ensued, and it was eventually nationalized.

⁹ German associations in Slovenia were mostly singing societies. (Zorn, Dve poročili, passim.)

¹⁰ The oldest was the one in Bela Crkva, founded in 1854. The rest of them were founded in the second half of the 19th century and in the first years of the 20th. (Plauz, p. 7.)

¹¹ Thanks to their connections in political circles, the Volksdeutsche leaders managed to be received by the ruling politicians of the day, Protić, Davidović and Drašković, and even Pašić later on. None of these was against founding of a German cultural organization in principle, but at first they deemed it not oportune for fear Hungarian irredentism would spread within it, or that the Magyars would demand to establish a similar organization. (Altgayer, p. 13.) The fear turned to be justified: until the end of the inter-war period the Kulturbund remained the desired ideal of Hungarian minority leaders.

¹² Altgayer, p. 13.

statues envisaged that the organization would have national, cultural and economic goals.¹³ The organization came into being on the model of the cultural organization of the Sudeten-Germans (Deutscher Kulturverband, est. 1919), and the statues were mostly copied from the Serbian Cultural Society “Prosvjeta” which was active in Bosnia-Herzegovina before the First World War.¹⁴ The writing of a German school programme was set as the first task,¹⁵ showing thus at the very beginning the aspiration of the German elite to cultural autonomy.

At the same time, the Kulturbund had the most turbulent history and the greatest importance among the cultural-educational organizations of the national minorities. Numerous Volksdeutsche economic, humanitarian and other organizations which gathered individuals or associations evolved from it over time. From the beginning the Kulturbund strove to be more than its name suggested – not only a cultural, but a general national organization.¹⁶ For that reason it was no chance that the fateful struggle between the old minority leadership and the young, pro-Nazi “Renewers” was waged within it and around it. It ended with the victory of the latter, and turning of the Kulturbund into the “Folk Group”, organizationally, if not ideologically too, straitjacketed according to the taste and the needs of the German Reich. Because of its universality, the Kulturbund became the model for other national minorities in the Northern parts of the country, most of which tried to achieve something similar,¹⁷ but, due to many factors, not nearly so successfully.

The difficulties which other cultural minority associations passed through, were experienced by the German ones too. Their situation was particularly difficult in Slovenia where many of them had to start from scratch – to be reestablished or to acquire property again. The possibility of foreign aid was significantly reduced in the process by abolition of local branches of the Südmark and the Schulverein and by confiscation of their property. Founding of affiliations of the Kulturbund was efficiently prevented for a long time.¹⁸ Firemen societies proved to be one of the most durable bulwarks of German culture, because in Slovenia they didn’t fulfill only their basic duty, but served as village brass-bands too.¹⁹ A

¹³ Annabring, *Volksgeschichte der Donauschwaben in Jugoslawien*, p. 40. The member of the Union’s Committee of the Kulturbund, Dr. Georg Grassl, summarized it thus:” Under culture one shouldn’t understand only the spiritual, but also the material and above all, the moral one.” (Plautz, p. 30.)

¹⁴ Plautz, p. 26; J.V. Senz, *Das Schulwesen*, p. 51; Idem, *Politische Aktivitäten*, p. 300. This was no coincidence: one of the founders, Dr. Georg Grassl was the head of the Educational Department of the Provincial Government of Bosnia-Herzegovina before the First World War. (J.V. Senz, *Das Schulwesen*, p. 52.)

¹⁵ Plautz, p. 34.

¹⁶ In the beginning this seemed rather difficult, especially since larger part of the Roman-Catholic clergy was not nationally conscious or mistrusted the Kulturbund as a Protestant and Anti-Catholic organization. (Bešlin, *Nemačka katolička štampa*, p. 110; HWBGAD, I, 283; Anthony Komjathy, Rebecca Stockwell, *German Minorities and the Third Reich. Ethnic Germans of East Central Europe Between the Wars*, New York, London 1980, p. 127; Grentrup, pp. 93-94; Haltmayer, p. 240.) The claim almost whole leadership of the Kulturbund was Protestant (Peter Menzel, *The German Minority in Inter-War Yugoslavia*, Nationalities Papers, XXI, 2, 1993, p. 134.) has to be checked out.

¹⁷ The Hungarians showed this most overtly. Such desires were supported by Budapest. (Sajti, *Hungarians*, p. 69.) The journal of the Yugoslav Hungarians, the *Kalangye* wrote in October 1935 that the Magyar minority wanted to organize an educational institution like the Kulturbund. (AJ, 66 (pov.), 71/184.) *Pesti Hirlap* also deemed on May 10, 1940, there would be no successful Hungarian cultural life if it wasn’t centralized, like in the Kulturbund. When the Hungarian Cultural Community was allowed to organize in the Province of Croatia in March 1940, the authorities believed it would be similar to the Kulturbund. (AVII, pop. 17, k. 21, f. 3, d. 6.) Following the example of the Kulturbund, Hungarian cultural associations introduced taxation of their members in summer 1940. (AVII, pop. 17, k. 528, f. 1, d. 46.) When the Hungarian Cultural Union was finally approved, Magyar leaders deemed the Hungarians finally became equal in rights with the Germans (who were in a more favourable position throughout the decades because of the Kulturbund that was the model for the Hungarian Cultural Union.) (AJ, 74, 9/17.)

¹⁸ This was the case in Slovenia. (Grentrup, p. 329.)

¹⁹ The Slovenes managed to “nationalize” them only after 15 years of Yugoslavia’s existence. (Slovenec, November 25, 1933.)

few singing societies survived or were refounded too, and they managed to continue working in an atmosphere of administrative, but also physical, pressure.²⁰ They were suffered by the authorities as necessary evil and seen as a provocation by Slovenian nationalists.²¹

As we have seen, together with a number of local choirs, reading rooms and other institutions, the Kulturbund featured as the main German cultural organization which tried to include as many places, people and associations as possible as would join it by becoming its branches. This is how its development looked like, seen through the establishment of local affiliations: 67 in 1921, 108 in 1922, 111 in 1923, 128 in 1924, 29 in 1927, 51 in 1928, 64 in 1929, 13 in 1931, 82 in 1932.²² The figures are bouncing because the Kulturbund was banned twice: officially in 1924, and practically in 1929, when its work was to all intents prevented after the royal dictatorship had been imposed. The first prohibition ensued in April 1924 because the German Party joined the opposition.²³ It was suspended in October of the same year, but local authorities sabotaged it almost everywhere, so that legal resumption of work was possible only in a few places.²⁴ The official permission to continue work was granted in January 1927, and for the second time only in late August 1930.²⁵ The second pardon should be seen within the framework of measures for rapprochement between Yugoslavia and Germany, which provided the Volksdeutsche with the school decrees too that alleviated their educational situation. The prohibitions of the Kulturbund, coupled with confiscation of its property, awoke insecurity among the German population and repelled it from the organization, i.e. made its renewal more difficult.²⁶

Until the early 1930s the Kulturbund was engaged in all sorts of cultural activities: lectures, organizing musical and folklore festivals, championing German classes, exchange of stamps, telling children fairy-tales, etc.²⁷ Moreover, it started developing social work, as well as economic activities – for which special organizations were established that evolved from the Kulturbund – to be discussed in the next chapter. For their part, some representatives of the authorities accused it of meddling into politics,²⁸ and sometimes searches of offices and even arrests occurred.²⁹

²⁰ HWBGAD, III, p. 81. On occasion of the anniversary of the male singing society in Ptuj on May 20, 1923, the MP of the German Party Franz Schauer was wounded by a stone thrown by Slovenian nationalists. (Plautz, p. 18.) A bomb attack in Ptuj prevented the performance of the German choir for the New Year's Eve 1924. (PA, Abt. IIB, Deutschtum in Jugoslawien, Politik 25, Jugoslawien, Bd. 1.)

²¹ Thus for instance, the German orchestra wanted to give a concert at the same evening, on April 6, 1940, when the "Sokol" evening was foreseen too. The authorities put off the concert for April 13. (AJ, 37, 22/177.)

²² Biber, Nacizem, p. 35. Plautz adduces only 123 branches for the period until April 1924: 109 in the Bačka and in the Banat, 13 in Syrmium and 1 in Slovenia (in the Kočevje). (Plautz, p. 35.)

²³ Ibid.; J.V. Senz, Politische Aktivitäten, p. 312; Annabring, Volksgeschichte der Donauschwaben in Jugoslawien, p. 41. Some branches continued operating despite the prohibition. (AJ, 14, 27/71; Altgayer, p. 15.)

²⁴ Many branches worked illegally, i.e. without permission. (AJ, 14, 118/430.) However, that couldn't be an appropriate substitute for legal activities.

²⁵ Suppan, Jugoslawien, p. 722; Biber, Nacizem, p. 34; Plautz, pp. 35-39.

²⁶ Scherer, Die Donauschwaben, p. 15. There were 95 affiliations with 12.000 members in late 1933. (Josip Mirnić, Nemci u Bačkoj u Drugom svetskom ratu, Novi Sad 1974, p. 33.)

²⁷ HWBGAD, I, p. 284.

²⁸ AJ, 14, 135/479; 144/502; 105/405. Maybe this was true for some branches. On the other hand, the lower authorities sometimes mixed the Kulturbund and the German Party (which was probably due to personal overlapping too). (Cf. AJ, 14, 109/413.)

²⁹ In Pančevo one of the leaders of the local affiliation and the vice-chairman of the district court, Dr. Simon Bartmann was arrested, because he was thorn in the flesh of part of the Serbs because of his post at the court. (PA, Abt. IIB, Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker in Jugoslawien, Politik 6, Jugoslawien, Bd. 1.) The Kulturbund wasn't allowed in Croatia in early 1920s, because the authorities insisted that the statues be approved individually for each local branch, although they had already been approved for the whole country. (Ibid.; Plautz, p. 35.)

For all these reasons, the success of the Kulturbund was only partial. At the times of its greatest upswing at the eve of the prohibition of 1924, it managed to embrace only small part of the Volksdeutsche.³⁰ Furthermore, until its abolition in 1924 the territory in which it operated was perceptibly smaller than the territory in which the Volksdeutsche settlements were scattered: Slovenia, Slavonia as well as the dispersed German villages in Bosnia were included in the Kulturbund organization only after 1927.³¹ In Slovenia the tough regime prevented the organization,³² whereas in Slavonia, apart from the ill-will of the authorities, a role was played by the dormant national consciousness of the local Swabians which was even less developed than with their brethren in the Vojvodina.³³ For these reasons, the leaders of the Kulturbund confined their action realistically to the Bačka, the Banat and Eastern Sirmium. Like the cultura-educational societies of other minorities, this organization also enjoyed some assistance from the mother-country. Despite its considerable importance for national awakening of the Swabians during the 1920s, the Kulturbund remained an organization of a minority among the Yugoslav Germans in that period. Its would achieve the real importance for the whole national minority only gradually during the 1930s, but establishment of certain sub-associations already in the 1920s laid foundations for all-embracing inclusion of the German population.³⁴

The royal dictatorship of 1929 didn't only hit the political life of the national minorities, but the work of their cultural-educational associations and organizations too. The first consequence was further limitation of cultural life because of the bans of societies and performances.³⁵ Many associations had to revamp their statues in accordance with the demands of the new regime, and insertion of the clause that a society would work in the »state language«, or at least that greater part of its performances had to be in that language were often one of the conditions for approving the statutes.³⁶ To be sure, such demands met with the resistance of representatives of the minorities and of their mother-countries.

Since it is impossible to sit on bayonets for long, the dictatorship was of short duration – both in purely political sphere and in the field of cultural activity of minority associations. It may be said that attempts were made at unifying cultural (and national in general) activities of certain minorities. The Germans were partly an exception in this: after starting to unify their forces before all other minorities, during the 1930s they had to undergo long and fierce ideological and generational struggles before reaching final unity, which was not confined to their cultural activities and organization.

Their attempts at unity were spurred by greater forthcoming of the authorities which allowed the establishment of the private German teachers' training college. This led to the establishment of the School Foundation that has already been mentioned.³⁷ The Foundation³⁸

³⁰ After just one year of work, Georg Grassl stated at the first annual congress that the organization had 30.000 members. (Mirnić, p. 30.) Plautz adduces 30.000 "if family members are counted too." (Plautz, p. 35.) Such reckoning doesn't make sense and is obviously demagogical. If reduced to realistic size, the number of members in 1924 wouldn't surpass 10.000, i.e. cca. 2% of the Yugoslav Germans.

³¹ Mirnić, p. 30.

³² A branch of the Kulturbund was founded in the town of Kočevje in 1929, but it was inactive. (Otterstädt, Gottschee. Verlorene Heimat, p. 43.)

³³ With some of the Volksdeutsche there a linguistic barrier existed, since some of them no longer spoke German. (Beer, p. 78; AKB, Osijek II 1.1.4.)

³⁴ Thus the Association of the German Graduate Students (Landesverband deutscher Akademiker), and the Association of Singers (Sängerbund) in 1928. (Plautz, p. 43; Mirnić, p. 30.)

³⁵ Ammende (ed.)m p. 351.

³⁶ PA, Abt. IIb, Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker, Politik 6, Jugoslawien, Bd. 4 and 5; ASANU 14530-XIV 2; Kasaš, O jednoj predstavi, p. 188; Ammende (ed.), pp. 351, 371; Zorn, Dve poročili, p. 93; Sajti, Hungarians, p. 133. The same was claimed by Imre Prokopy in his complaint to the League of Nations from May 1930. (AJ, 305, 8/18.)

³⁷ Plautz, pp. 78-79.

was important because it managed through the press and live agitation, to spur a large number of the Volksdeutsche to educational activity. By starting a wide action, the leaders of the Foundation (mostly the experienced minority leaders headed by Kraft) managed to awake the community feeling among the increasingly broader circles of the German minority.³⁹ Parallely with the approval of the foundation of the private teachers' training college and educational improvements, the Kulturbund was also officially approved again – for the whole of Yugoslavia – although the statutes had to be revamped once more before the final approval on April 14, 1931,⁴⁰ and although many local authorities refused to acknowledge this. The Union of German Popular Libraries (Verband deutscher Volksbüchereien) was founded in 1931 too, with the aim to unify, further and direct the work of the Volksdeutsche libraries and to help readers find good books.⁴¹ The Union comprised 171 libraries by April 1940.⁴²

In the remaining part of this chapter we shall deal briefly with ideological clashes within and around the Kulturbund which led to the victory of the young Nazis in it and in bringing of the Kulturbund and all Volksdeutsche minority organizations under the control of the Reich. The process (which started in an organization which, to be sure, had ambitions of uniting all the Volksdeutsche, but encompassed only a comparatively small number of members of the German national minority until the late 1930s)⁴³ was of great importance not only for that minority, but also for other minorities, and partly even for the country as a whole. The importance of that process laid in the fact it was going on within the second largest national minority (according to the 1931 census), backed furthermore by the increasingly powerful mother-country. The Germans in Yugoslavia served as a model in many ways to other minorities, and sometimes even to the majority peoples, so that many phenomena and processes among them were reflected in wishes, expectations and strivings of other national minorities, and, together with other factors, influenced the general minority policy of the Yugoslav state.

We have seen that the first heralds of Nazi ideas among the Yugoslav Germans had been the Volksdeutsche returning from studies in Germany and Austria. Even before Hitler's accession they started criticizing the old leaders of the German minority organizations demanding an end to the accumulation of political, economic and cultural offices in few

³⁸ The Foundation was officially established in Novi Sad on June 29, 1931, in the presence of representatives of 73 communes. According to Plautz, all communes in which the Germans lived without exception, participated in money-raising. (Plautz, p. 80; J.V. Senz, *Das Schulwesen*, pp. 97-98; Mirnić, p. 34.) For the founding charter cf.: J.V. Senz, *Das Schulwesen*, pp. 221-227; *Deutsches Volksblatt*, June 30, 1931.

³⁹ Although the money-raising action was very successful, the local authorities made difficulties in some communes. (*Deutscher Volksfreund*, June 11, 1931; *Deutsches Volksblatt*, June 26, 1931.) The money-raising action was not organized only among the Swabians, but among the Germans in Slovenia too (*Deutsche Zeitung (Celje)*, February 8, 1931.), and the success was particularly noteworthy if one takes into account the proverbial thriftiness, and even niggardnes of the Swabians when it came to spending on culture. (Cf. Hermann Rüdiger, *Die Donauschwaben in der südslawischen Batschka*, Stuttgart 1931; Komjathy, Stockwell, p. 127; Grentrup, p. 25; AVII, pop. 17, k. 21, f. 3, d. 24; AJ, 66 (pov.), 70/183; *Deutsches Volksblatt*, November 25, 1931.) Over one million dinars was collected. (*Die Woche (Odžaci)*, July 19, 1931.) Apart from the subsidies from the Yugoslav government, throughout its existence the Foundation received financial aid from Germany too. (Suppan, *Jugoslawien*, p. 720.) In the early 1940s the Foundation became the maintainer of other private German schools, and in February 1940 a five-year plan of the development of private German education was made. (J.V. Senz, *Das Schulwesen*, pp. 120-121.)

⁴⁰ Plautz, p. 39.

⁴¹ *Deutsches Volksblatt*, November 13, 1931.

⁴² *Tätigkeitsbericht der Bundesleitung des Schwäbisch-deutschen Kulturbundes*, Novi Sad 1940, p. 19.

⁴³ Until 1938 the Kulturbund couldn't unite more than 10% of the Volksdeutsche. (Dimić, *Kulturna politika*, III, p. 50.) According to its own data, it had 12.000 members in 1933. (Mirnić, p.33.) An estimate from the same year said the Kulturbund didn't include more than 6% of the Volksdeutsche. (AJ, 66 (pov.), 70/183.) Furthermore, during the first years of the dictatorship, many of the surviving branches didn't evince great activity. (Komjathy, Stockwell, p. 130.)

hands.⁴⁴ It was the understandable desire of young intellectuals for jobs in keeping with their education, which they couldn't fulfill in state or communal service that was hardly accessible to members of the minorities, to say the least.⁴⁵ According to Altgayer, in the beginning it was not the matter of ideological differences, but a struggle for posts.⁴⁶

The Nazi youths, who took over the name of the "Renewers" from the Nazis in Romania, put forward their demands publicly for the first time at the main assembly of the Kulturbund on December 3, 1934, at which they received over one third of the votes. In order to fend off this menace, the Union's Direction (Bundesleitung) expelled the leader of the "Renewers" Dr. Jakob Awender and a few of his myrmidons in mid-January 1935. The "Renewers" enjoyed the strongest support from the youth organized in the Kulturbund's youth groups.⁴⁷ They didn't enjoy the support of the German diplomacy which always favoured a more moderate and a more cautious approach,⁴⁸ but they did have the support of the Nazi party and other Nazi or Nazified organizations in Germany – above all of the Popular Union for the Germans Abroad (Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland – VDA)⁴⁹ which earlier helped the Kulturbund a great deal in books, magazines scholarships etc.⁵⁰ In order to put an end to the activities of the youth, the Union's Direction reorganized the Kulturbund in late October 1935, sharpening the discipline, disbanding the youth groups and expelling the youth leader Jakob Lichtenberger. The Kulturbund branches from Slovenia demanded extraordinary elections in the organization the next month.⁵¹ The "Renewers" being done away with, the annual assembly of the Kulturbund on December 21-22, 1935, adopted the reorganization of the Union and approved the right of the Union's Direction to disband local, district and regional organizations.⁵²

⁴⁴ Biber, *Nacizem*, p. 43.

⁴⁵ According to an undated document, initially the "Renewers" managed to win over only the poor and "losers with communist leanings". (ASANU 14530/XIV 2)

⁴⁶ Biber, *Nacizem*, p. 43. Josip Mirnić doesn't share this opinion. He believes the conflict started as an ideological one, and that it was only later on that different conceptions of tactics, strategy and organization of the Kulturbund occurred, and that eventually the struggle became also a clash of generations and the struggle for power. (Mirnić, p. 36.) The later leader of the Kulturbund and of the whole German national minority, Janko, claimed in his memoirs the Kulturbund had been the organization of only the rich Germans, and that the »Renewers« wanted to make of it an organization for all Volksdeutsche. (Janko, *Weg*, pp. 22-24.)

⁴⁷ PA, *Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker, Politik 6, Jugoslawien*, Bd. 5; Mirnić, p. 37.

⁴⁸ PA, *Nationalitätenfrage, Fremdvölker, Politik 6, Jugoslawien*, Bd. 5; Shikizu, p. 42.

⁴⁹ Biber, *Nacizem*, pp. 44-50, 60-62; Suppan, *Jugoslawien*, p. 729; Shimizu, p. 52. Such attitude of the organizations and agencies from Germany was typical also concerning other German national minorities throughout Europe. (Cf. Hans von Rimscha, *Gleichschaltung der deutschen Volksgruppe durch das Dritte Reich*, *Historische Zeitschrift*, 182, 1956; MacAlister Brown, *Germany's Mobilization of the German Fifth Column in Eastern Europe*, *Journal of Central European Affairs*, XIX, 2, 1959; Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries. The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe 1933-1945*, London 1993; Hans-Adolf Jakobsen (ed.), *Hans Steinacher, Bundesleiter des VDA 1933-1937. Erinnerungen und Dokumente*, Boppard am Rhein 1970; Idem, *Nationalsozialistische Aussenpolitik*; E. Ritter, *Das Deutsche Ausland-Institut in Stuttgart 1912-1945*, Wiesbaden 1976.) The VDA helped the Kulturbund financially (directly and indirectly) and in books, so that it had a means of pressurizing it. (Suppan, *Jugoslawien*, p. 905; Biber, *Nacizem*, p. 61.) The VDA aided the „Renewers“ against the Union's Direction. (Biber, *Nacizem*, p. 60.)

⁵⁰ Altgayer, pp. 66-67; Komjathy, *Stockwell*, p. 130. After the expulsion of the "Renewers" the financial aid from the VDA was discontinued. (J.V. Senz, *Politische Aktivitäten*, p. 325.) According to Jakob Lichtenberger, the financial aid of the VDA to the leadership of the Kulturbund was significant, but he doesn't say precisely what time he meant. (Cf. his writing *Gedankensplitter über die Beziehungen des Südostdeutschtums zu Deutschland von der Ansiedlung bis 1945*, in: AIDGL, *Nachlass Lichtenberger*.)

⁵¹ Biber, *Nacizem*, pp. 54-55.

⁵² Annabring, pp. 67-71; Altgayer, pp. 23-24; Biber, *nacizem*, p. 56. The Union's Direction made ample use of this right: cca. 180 branches were disbanded, 18 in the first wave. (Mirnić, p. 38.) The Kulturbund affiliations were disbanded also by the state authorities for their own reasons. Several branches were disbanded in the Vojvodina. (Biber, *Nacizem*, pp. 56-58; Suppan, *Jugoslawien*, p. 728.) Within the framework of removing

Disbanding of the local branch in Osijek on December 11, 1935, led to the foundation of the “Renewers” Cultural and Humanitarian Association of the Germans (Kultur- und Wohlfahrtsvereinigung der Deutschen - KWVD)⁵³ that became the awakener of national consciousness of the nationally dormant Slavonian Volksdeutsche.⁵⁴ It had to fight not only apathy or even resistance of the Croatized Germans, but also the rival groups of the Kulturbund which existed in some places.⁵⁵ The leader of the KWVD became Branimir Altgayer, the expelled leader of the Osijek Kulturbund branch. Parts of the ruling YRC lent their support to the KWVD in order to weaken the Kulturbund, and even more to weaken the CPP for which considerable part of the Germans in Slavonia voted.⁵⁶ Taking in consideration all the difficulties, the new organization was fairly successful, so that it had 86 branches by mid-1938. With the help from the Bačka and the Banat, the KWVD managed comparatively quickly to awaken the national consciousness of the Germans in Eastern Slavonia who had been Croatized to a large extent. The authorities were aware it was not only a cultural or humanitarian association, but an organization with plainly political and ideological goals, so they kept an eye on it, even though the KWVD distanced itself from the ties Awender’s adherents established with the “Zbor”- Movement of Dimitrije Ljotić.⁵⁷

The struggle between the Union's Direction and the »Renewers« which was carried on in local branches of the Kulturbund, in various cultural societies, in streets of the Swabian villages, in pubs, in the Volksdeutsche press and even within families, lasted unremittingly until 1938 when a »reconciliation« was achieved, that was, to all intents, the withdrawal of the majority of the old leaders (who had also split in the meantime). It came about under the direct influence from the Reich and tallied with its increasingly radical domestic and foreign policy.⁵⁸ In the autumn of that year, the representatives of the VoMi managed to force all the quareling Volksdeutsche fractions to vote for the government ticket at the upcoming elections. Eventually Altgayer agreed on October 31, with the Kulturbund leaders that the KWVD join that organization, and the Union's Direction decided on its session of November 20 to readmit the »Renewers« who had been expelled on January 13, 1935. These decisions were approved by the annual assembly on December 18.⁵⁹ The Kulturbund was reorganized in three regions (Gau): the Banat, Eastern Bačka and the Western Bačka with Baranya, Bosnia, Srem and Slavonia. (The last mentioned was headed by Altgayer.) As for Slovenia, since the Kulturbund was almost completely prohibited there, an organization of a separate region there was put off.⁶⁰ The “reconciliation” in the Kulturbund was completed in Graz (!) between June 22 and 24, 1939 when, again under the pressure from the VoMi, the moderate young

potential hubs of resistance, organizational independence of some sub-unions (graduates, libraries, singers) was abolished. (Mirić, p. 38.)

⁵³ Altgayer, p. 26; Biber, Nacizem, p. 67.

⁵⁴ There were many Germans in Croatian cultural and other societies in Slavonia both before and after the First World War. (Cf. Zlatko Virč, Vinkovački Nijemci u hrvatskim društvima, VDG Jahrbuch-Godišnjak Njemačke narodnosne zajednice, Osijek 2002.)

⁵⁵ The young adherents of the Kulturbund in Velimirovac reviled Hitler in their street war against the KWVD, saying he would be their swine-heard. (AKB, Osijek II, 1.1. K (KWVD).

⁵⁶ Biber, Nacizem, pp. 67-68.

⁵⁷ Suppan, Jugoslawien, p. 727; biber, nacizem, p. 69.

⁵⁸ This radicalization was mirrored in personal changes in Germany and within the German minorities throughout Europe. Already in mid-1937 Hans Steinacher, a comparatively moderate chief of the VDA was removed (Jakobsen, Nationalsozialistische Aussenpolitik, p. 249.); the finance minister Hjalmar Schacht resigned in August of the same year; the defense minister von Blomberg was dismissed in January 1938, and the commander of the Army von Fritsch and the minister of foreign affairs von Neurath – all of them moderate representatives of the old regime. (William Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich. A History of Nazi Germany, London, Sydney 1976, pp. 328-393.)

⁵⁹ Mirić, p. 46.

⁶⁰ Biber, Nacizem, pp. 189-190.

“Renewer”, Dr. Sepp Janko, was “elected” chief of the Kulturbund. The main assembly co-opted him into the Union’s Committee and “elected” chairman.⁶¹ In that way a para-state institution from the Reich interfered in a most direct manner with the functioning of the main cultural institution of the Yugoslav Germans. However, the Kulturbund had long stopped being just a cultural association.⁶² Its work revolved increasingly more around ideological indoctrination and increasingly less around furthering of national culture.⁶³ In some places the authorities noticed the Kulturbund branches exercise some kind of military drill⁶⁴ as well as that some members were collecting military and other information.⁶⁵

Under the new leadership⁶⁶ in the two years preceding the April War, the Kulturbund started the action in order to enroll all Germans, so that it experienced tremendous increment (both in number of branches⁶⁷ and members), encompassing greater part of the German national minority – either directly or through its sub-associations⁶⁸ – and declaring itself

⁶¹ Mirnić, pp. 49’50č Biber, Nacizem, pp. 207-210. In his memoirs Janko insisted he had been elected “democratically”. (Janko, Weg, p. 38.) Senz claims similarly the Volksdeutsche representatives had „agreed“ to elect Janko. (J.V. Senz, Politische Aktivitäten, p. 327.)

⁶² Some Serbian observers ascribed to it more political than cultural intentions already in 1934. (AJ, 66 (pov.), 70/183; ASANU 14530-XIV 2.) In early 1938 an initiative was launched that all German associations join the Kulturbund. The action went well, but not too fast, since many associations had a tradition several decades long. (Deutsche Zeitung (Novi Sad), March 3, 1938.)

⁶³ AJ, 38, 93/225; 37, 22/177; 66, 70/183; Zbirka A. Cincar-Markovića, fas. II; AVII, pop. 17, k. 1, f. 3, d. 10 and 26; k. 21, f. 7, d. 23; f. 3, d. 23; k. 32, f. 1, d. 43; HAD, grupa XI, kut. 28, inv. br. 2881, SB ODZ, 5793/1939; ASANU 14530-II 9; Živko Avramovski, Britanci o Kraljevini Jugoslaviji, III (1939-1941), Beograd 1996, p. 607; Mirnić, pp. 47, 58’59; Dimić, Kulturna politika, III, p. 52. Indoctrination was reflected in the choice of songs for the Kulturbund performances. Thus, at a dancing party in Kovin on January 19, 1940, mostly military and morbid songs about soldierly death were sung. (IAP, 12/855.) Some leaders of the Kulturbund started declaring in public they were National-Socialists and gave other provocative public statements. (Aprilski rat, p. 253.) The claim of existence of a para-military youth organization Hitler Jugend Kammeradschaft is based on a single document from a source that was not quite unbiased, so that it should be taken with a grain of salt. (Cf. Mirnić, p. 60.) The news about preparation of armed groups before the April War of 1941 are also poorly documented. (Mirnić, pp. 70-72.) The news from June 1940 about foundation of terrorist groups on instructions from the Reich, seem not to have been confirmed in practice during the April War. (Cf. Sandor Vegh, Le System du pouvoir d’occupation allemand dans le Banat Yougoslave 1941-1944, in: Les systemes d’occupation en Yougoslavie 1941-1945, Beograd 1963, p. 498.) However, it is indisputable that some Kulturbund performances differed little from those in the Reich. (Biber, Kočevski Nemci, p. 37.)

⁶⁴ This was said of the affiliations in Marenberg, Osijek, Kolut, Sekić and Feketić in the first months of 1941. (AVII, pop. 17, k. 11, f. 5, d. 9; k. 26, f. 4, d. 24; k. 1, f. 4, d. 34; k. 22, f. 3, d. 39.) Military exercises were noticed in Hajdučica, Maribor and (maybe) Zagreb in May 1940 (AVII, pop. 17, k. 32, f. 1, d. 40 and 48.), and in August 1940 it was observed that they allegedly organized military drill at Fruška gora. However, it is not clear from the report if the latter were organized by the Kulturbund. (AVII, pop. 17, k. 528, f. 1, d. 23.) It was said of the adherents of the “Renewers” that they had been importing weapons from Hungary already between autumn 1936 and spring 1937. (Shimizu, p. 50.)

⁶⁵ AVII, pop. 17, k. 528, f. 2, d. 31; k. 36, f. 2, d. 36; AJ, 38, 240/387; 200/347. The news of organization of para-military groups was heard also by the German ambassador von Heerne in February 1941. (PA, R 29662.)

⁶⁶ The leaders of other Volksdeutsche organizations were also exchanged. (Biber, Nacizem, p. 217.) Although the inter-German squabbles didn’t stop altogether, due to the dissatisfaction of radical Nazis who had been short changed when the spoils were divided, they were nothing like so big as in 1934-1938. (Mirnić, p. 51.)

⁶⁷ During this period some affiliations were founded in places one wouldn’t expect to find them at first glance, such as Kosovska Mitrovica (Spasoje Đaković, Sukobi na Kosovu (2nd ed.), Belgrade 1986, p. 122.) or Zenica (where members of the all three Yugoslav peoples jointly attacked the initiators.) (AJ, 14, 27/71.)

⁶⁸ AJ, 71, 3/8; AVII, pop. 17, k. 528, f. 1, d. 46; Mirnić, p. 47. The leadership of the Kulturbund claimed the organization had 305.000 members in October 1940. (Biber, Nacizem, p. 219; Mirnić, p. 53.) Dimić (Kulturna politika, III, p. 50.) adduces 30.000, but this must be a typo. From July 1, to November 15, 1940, a pause in recruitment of new members (except for Slovenia) was ordered. Then it was continued under the dominant slogan that whoever wanted to be recognized as German, had to join the Kulturbund. (AJ, 74, 9/17; 38, 93/225; 8/58; AVII, pop. 17, k. 11, f. 5, d. 9; k. 22, f. 3, d. 37; k. 1, f. 4, d. 59; k. 528, f. 1, d. 36; Aprilski rat, p. 254; Baš, Slovenski Nemci, p. 23; Nikica Barić, Njemačka manjina u dokumentima banskih vlasti Banovine Hrvatske, 1939-1941, Časopis za suvremenu povijest, XXXIV, 2, 2002, p. 439.) This clearly showed the totalitarian

unnoticeably the “Folks Group”⁶⁹ in spring 1940, without giving up formally the form of the cultural organization.⁷⁰ Similar tendencies were noticeable with other national minorities in the North of the country, but they couldn’t be led to the utmost consequences as in the case of the Volksdeutsche organization, because totalitarian trends didn’t get completely the upper hand in their mother-countries, because these were not that influential, and because the Yugoslav authorities were not willing to make so great concessions to other minorities as to the Germans.⁷¹ Such totalitarian trends tending at uniting of whole national minorities in umbrella organizations were partly a consequence of the corporatist way of organization in vogue during the inter-war period, and especially during the 1930s, and were partly the consequence of the impossibility for the national minorities to organize politically in Yugoslavia. Partly responsible for such trends was the lack of minority cadres for various

ambitions of the revamped former cultural organization. The recruiting action was finished on December 31, 1940, when, according to the Volksdeutsche newspapers, 95% of the German minority was enrolled. (Mirnić, p. 58.) Obviously, such a result should be regarded with considerable deal of scepticism, although one thing was certain: the Kulturbund became what it hadn’t been until 1938 – a mass organization. It is interesting to note that already the old leadership made an appeal that all Germans join the Kulturbund and show in that way they were Germans in heart too, not only in speech. Membership in the Kulturbund was declared a duty toward the German people. (Deutsches Volksblatt, september 2, 1932.)

⁶⁹ Janko started styling himself the *Volksgruppenführer*, and since February 1941 the leadership of the Folk Group started issuing its journals of announcements and orders. (Mirnić, pp. 52, 73; Komjathy, Stockwell, p. 136.) A new *Dienstordnung* (Rules of Service) were introduced in February 1941 that imposed the duty of all members of the Folk Group to obey the Leadership of the Folk Group and the government in Berlin. (Shimizu, p. 66.) How serious the leaders of the Kulturbund took the *Führerprinzip* is testified by the fact they ordered resettlement of the Germans from Bosnia in early March 1941. (AVII, pop. 17, k. 1, f. 4, d. 60.)

⁷⁰ For Janko and his collaborators the Kulturbund was equated with the Folk Group. (Janko, Weg, p. 40.) Officially it was put thus: “The Kulturbund is the embodiment of our Folk Community“, from which followed that every Volksdeutsche had a duty to strengthen the Folk Community by joining the Kulturbund. (Deutsches Volksblatt, March 27, 1940.) Tacitly the Yugoslav authorities agreed to see in the Kulturbund the representative of the whole German national minority, and in that way de facto aided its leaders. (PA, Unterstaatssekretär, Akten betreffend Besuch Prinzregenten Paul von Jugoslawien). The main factor attracting the Volksdeutsche was the success of the Reich in foreign policy (AVII, pop. 17, k. 22, f. 3, d. 53.), but people joined also for opportunism or under pressure of aggressive Kulturbund propagandists, who didn’t shrink even at threats. (The leader of the Kulturbund, Janko, was no exception in this.) (AVII, pop. 17, k. 528, f. 1, d. 46.) In the process, a certain number of German-friendly Slovenes, or Slovenes economically dependent of their German employers, also joined in Slovenia. (AVII, pop. 17, k. 528, f. 2, d. 4; k. 32, f. 1, d. 48; k. 21, f. 3, d. 23; Baš, Slovenski Nemci, pp. 33-34.) Similar cases occurred already earlier. (Žnidarič, p. 223.) In branches in Slovenska Bistrica, Studenci, Sv. Lovrenc na Pohorju and Pobrežje most of the members were Slovenes (»Nemčuri«) (AJ, 14, 27/71.) A report from Apatin noted that two colonist families from Lika joined the Kulturbund in this predominantly German little town, which was at variance with its status. (AVII, pop. 17, k. 21, f. 3, d. 25.) Since the summer of 1940 the payment of the membership fee was enforced by coercive measures if needed. (Shimizu, p. 67.)

⁷¹ When talking about making concessions, one should mean permissions to organize and perform, but they changed depending on time and place. Thus for instance, foundation of a number of branches was allowed in Slovenia in 1935 before the elections, but a large number of them was closed again the next year. The authorities in Ljubljana allowed their reopening only in autumn 1939 when the statutes of the Slovenian Educational Union of the Slovenes in Carinthia were approved. (Biber, Kočevski Nemci, pp. 30-32, 37.) Nevertheless, although officially disbanded, many branches of the Kulturbund in Slovenia continued operating. (AVII, pop. 17, k. 21, f. 3, d. 26.) It seems the Germans (the Volksdeutsche and Germans from the Reich), being active in propaganda, and sometimes as spies, bore the brunt of the authorities, just like members of other minorities and foreigners. (Cf. Biber, Nacizem, pp. 175-178; Žnidarič, p. 226.) Stojadinović's minister of the interior, Korošec particularly persecuted the Volksdeutsche and their associations in Slovenia. (Frensing, pp. 13, 18; HWBGAD, III, pp. 77, 81; Suppan, Jugoslawien, pp. 707, 918.) The formal reason for disbanding some branches of the Kulturbund was that Slovenes too were cooperating in them. (Suppan, Jugoslawien, p. 705; Börsenzeitung, June 16, 1935.) This was the continuation of the Slovenian national struggle with the Germans inherited from Austria-Hungary, and at the same time the reaction to the strengthening of Nazism in Germany and Austria and among the Volksdeutsche in Slovenia too. (Cf. Žnidarič.)

minority organizations:⁷² the unification of various minority organizations under the guise of cultural associations was to a large degree the corollary of personal union of leaderships of diverse minority associations. The Volksdeutsche also suffered from this, and it was one of the grievances that triggered off the “Renewers’” rebellion.

⁷² In an undated document it is stated Hungarian associations were small and led by the same people. (AVII, pop. 17, k. 76, f. 9, d. 47.)