

## Croatian Political Refugees Living in Emigration in the Interwar Period: The Case of the Croatian Political Refugees in Hungary

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After the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the successor states also had to face the old problem of the “nationality question”. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (which in 1929 became the first incarnation of Yugoslavia) was the most multi-ethnic or multinational state in the region, and this led to conflicts, in particular between Serbs and Croats. When Alexander I introduced the dictatorship (January 6, 1929), many Croats decided to leave Yugoslavia. Most of them emigrated to Latin America, but Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, and Italy, as neighboring states, were also popular directions.

Many of the refugees left Yugoslavia for political reasons. Most of them emigrated to states that were interested in or actively sought the disintegration or at least weakening of Yugoslavia, such as Hungary and Italy, but many of them chose Austria, Belgium, and Germany.

In this essay I focus primarily on the Croatian political refugees living in Hungary. The most important sources on these refugees are found in the Sate Archives of Italy (Archivio Centrale di Stato di Roma, ACS) in the material entitled “Carte Conti,” which includes the list of Croats for whom warrants had been issued and who were followed continuously by the Zagreb police and the Yugoslav authorities for political reasons. I also use primary sources to assess the role that the Croatian camp Jankapuszta, and the house in Nagykanizsa bought by the Ustaše leader Gustav Perčec played in the lives of migrants and in diplomatic calamities. In addition to the sources in the Sate Archives, I also draw on the documents of the Archives of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, ASMAE) and the National Archives of Hungary (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára, MNL OL).

Keywords: Croatian refugees in Hungary, Jankapuszta, Ustaše

Although migration is often considered a problem more prominent in recent times, it has been existing for many centuries. In the late 1800s, political migration became more and more frequent, and this trend continued after World War I, as certain political parties were prohibited in their homeland and members of certain minority groups tried to organize themselves in abroad.

In this essay, I present an example of this special type of migration, sketching the activity of the Croatian separatists who emigrated in the interwar period. After presenting briefly the main characteristics of Croatian separatism and the main directions of migration among Croats in the period, I focus on the Croatian political refugees living in Hungary, both in the refugee camp Jankapuszta and in the house bought in Nagykanizsa, which was maintained thanks to Hungarian–Italian collaboration in support of the Ustaše Movement.

### *The Organization of Croatian Separatism – Aims and Principles*

After World War I, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy collapsed and the successor states were born. One of them was the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which was founded to unify the South-Slavic population of Europe. The new kingdom counted more than a dozen different nations among its inhabitants, and tensions between them emerged from the beginning, as these nations considered themselves different not simply because of their ethnicities, but also their confessions, cultures, and histories. Since the dominant Serbian nation formed only 40 percent of the total population and Croats comprised 24 percent, the conflicts between the Serbian and Croatian national agendas were by far the most prominent and the most influential in political life.<sup>1</sup>

The tensions became graver after the parliamentary session of 20 June 1928, when a member of the Serbian People's Radical Party, Puniša Račić, shot at deputies of the Croatian Peasant Party (Hrvatska Republikanska Seljačka Stranka). Some Croatian politicians were killed immediately, while the leader, Stjepan Radić, was mortally wounded (he died on 8 August in Zagreb).<sup>2</sup>

The Croatian separatists searched for support abroad, and they found it in Hungary, Italy, Germany, Austria, and South America. Hungary and Italy collaborated in providing support for Croatian aspirations, as both sought the disintegration of the Yugoslav state.<sup>3</sup> In the late 1920s, the two states campaigned

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1 Ormos, *Merénylet Marseille-ben*, 16.

2 Hrvatski Državni Arhiv (HDA). 1451 – Hrvatska Seljačka Stranka. Kutina 4. Without number. Nepoznati – Stjepanu Radiću. fol. 4.

3 Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (ASMAE). Affari Politici, AA. PP. 1919–1930. Jugoslavia. Busta 1341. Fasc. Rapporti politici. Telegramma n. 5801. Galli to Mussolini, September 24, 1928.

for an independent Croatia in the press in an effort to win sympathy for the Croatian cause in global public opinion.<sup>4</sup>

Why Hungary and Italy? In order to understand this, one must know a little bit about Hungarian and Italian foreign policy aspirations concerning Yugoslavia in the interwar period.<sup>5</sup> Italy had two reasons to be anxious about Yugoslavia's existence. On the one hand, Italy was persuaded to enter the First World War as an Entente ally because of the territorial promises made in the secret Treaty of London, which was signed on April 26, 1915. After the war, however, these promises could not be kept. The territories promised to Italy in the treaty included the middle part of Dalmatia and the Eastern part of Istria, and this, in particular, led to conflicts between Italy and Yugoslavia,<sup>6</sup> since these territories were given to the South-Slavic kingdom. On the other hand, Italy wanted to get more influence in the Balkans and the Carpathian Basin, and it aimed to establish hegemony in the Adriatic as well. Yugoslavia was an obstacle to this merely because of its geographical position,<sup>7</sup> so Italy aimed to encircle and ultimately dissolve Yugoslavia by intensifying its inner ethnic and national conflicts. The Italian plan, which took the name of General Pietro Badoglio, depended on the assistance of Hungary, and also Albania, Bulgaria and Romania,<sup>8</sup> because these states also had territorial conflicts with Yugoslavia.

The Hungarian aims were less complicated than the Italian ones: after World War I, Hungary lost two thirds of its territory in accordance with the terms of the Peace Treaty of Trianon, which was signed on June 4, 1920. These territorial losses meant the loss of important economic, industrial and cultural centers, and one-third of the population of pre-war Hungary found itself living outside the new frontiers. Yugoslavia was given the region of Vojvodina from Hungary, which meant the loss of the most significant agricultural territory of the country. It is hardly a surprise that treaty revision became Hungary's main political aim.<sup>9</sup> As treaty revision was blocked primarily by the Little Entente, formed in 1920/21

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4 *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani. Settima serie, vol. 7.* A cura di Rodolfo Mosca. Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1953. Document 41. De Astis to Mussolini, October 16, 1928.

5 On the reasons for Italy and Hungary to collaborate in the support of Croatian separatism see my earlier paper: Hamerli, "The Hungarian–Italian Support," 51–70.

6 *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani. (DDI.) Quinta serie, vol. 3, Document 470.* The text of the secret Treaty of London, April 26, 1915.

7 Carocci, *La politica estera dell'Italia fascista*, 13–14, and L. Nagy, "Itália és Magyarország a párizsi békekonferencia idején, 1919," 83.

8 Hornyák, *Magyar–jugoszláv diplomáciai kapcsolatok*, 27.

9 Ormos, "Bethlen koncepciója," 133–56.

by Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia with the goal of maintaining the status quo established after the war, Hungary wanted to weaken the stability of this organization. Thus, Hungary constituted an excellent partner for Italy in its efforts to support Croatian separatism: Hungarian politicians thought that the collapse or breakup of one of the Little Entente states could weaken the alliance against Hungarian revisionism.<sup>10</sup>

These common political interests led to the signing of the Italian–Hungarian Treaty of Friendship on April 5, 1927, in a secret clause of which the signatories agreed that they would give political and diplomatic support to each other to further the solution of the questions in which they were interested.<sup>11</sup> In other words, Italy would provide support for Hungarian treaty revision and Hungary would make efforts to weaken Yugoslavia.

The Hungarian–Italian support of Croatian Separatism became significant after the introduction of the dictatorship in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes on 6 January 1929. When King Alexander I made this decision to resolve the inner ethnic conflicts which had plagued the state, in October 1929 the name of the state was changed to Yugoslavia in order to express the unity of its nations.<sup>12</sup> As a response, Ante Pavelić emigrated to Italy, where he founded the Ustaše movement (Ustaša Hrvatska Revolucionarna Organizacija, Ustaše Revolutionary Movement of Croatia), which aimed to create an independent Croatia at whatever cost, including armed conflict.<sup>13</sup> On June 1, 1933, Pavelić summarized the Ustaše principles in 17 points, according to which the Croatian nation looked back on 1400 years of history, which was why it could not be a second factor in a foreign state. According to the document, the Independent State of Croatia would unify all of the territories inhabited by Croats. To be a good Croat, citizens of the independent Croatia imagined by Pavelić had to follow some principles in their everyday life, such as having a balanced family life, following the Catholic religion, having military virtues, and paying attention to the cultural development of the Croatian nation. Pavelić thought that Croats with these qualities could establish an independent state, and he thought the peasantry would be able to maintain control of this territory by working on it.

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10 Hornyák, *Magyar–jugoszláv diplomáciai kapcsolatok*, 213.

11 Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (MNL OL), Külpolitikai Osztály Reservált Iratai (K 64), 24. csomó, 23. tétel, 1927. 73 res. pol. 1927. Note on the conversation of Barcza and Durini, February 19, 1927. Transl. from French by Bálint Gergely Kiss.

12 Sokcsevits, *Horvátország a 7. századtól napjainkig*, 492.

13 *Ibid.*, 494.

This according to his vision, the lands (along with other elements of the material and cultural heritage of the country) were the property of the state, and the Croats, whose individual will was ideally subordinated to national interests, could only use them for the benefit of the Independent Croatian State.<sup>14</sup>

These ideas were welcomed warmly both by Hungary and Italy, since they were an expression of the aspiration for the secession of Croatia from Yugoslavia and, thus, the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Italian Prime Minister Benito Mussolini not only welcomed warmly the Croatian politicians who had emigrated to Italy and the foundation of their movement, but also promised war materials to support its development.<sup>15</sup> After the Ustaše was founded in 1929, or, according to some sources, in 1931, it carried out approximately one hundred assassinations and bombings until its most famous act, the regicide in Marseille (October 9, 1934). Nearly the half of these attacks were launched from Italy, Hungary, or Austria.<sup>16</sup>

On April 20, 1929, Pavelić and Gustav Perčec, one of his most faithful peers, traveled to Sofia, where they met the leader of the radical wing of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO, Vatrešna Makedonska Revolucionerna Organizacija – VMRO), Ivan Mihailov. The three politicians agreed on the collaboration of Croatian and Macedonian separatists to gain their independence.<sup>17</sup> That summer, Pavelić met with the Hungarian diplomat Gábor Apor in Vienna, who also promised moral and financial support for the Ustaše.<sup>18</sup>

On September 19, 1932, the Ustaše attempted to organize an uprising, which failed. That autumn, Mussolini and Gyula Gömbös, who became Prime Minister of Hungary in October 1932, met in Rome and decided to devote more attention to and provide more support for the movement to increase the chances Yugoslavia disintegrating. The two prime ministers agreed to create Croatian refugee camps for political refugees in the territory of their states. In Italy, these camps were coordinated by the inspector of Pisa, Ercole Conti,<sup>19</sup> and the most important ones were in Lipari, Bovigno, and Brescia.<sup>20</sup> In Hungary, there was only one Croatian camp, near the Hungarian–Croatian frontier, in

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14 Krizman, *Pavelić i ustaše*, 117–19.

15 DDI, Settima serie, vol. 8, Document 129, Grandi to Mussolini, (n.d.), October 1929.

16 Ormos, *Merénylet Marseille-ben*, 70.

17 ASMAE, AA, PP, 1919–1930, Bulgaria, B. 927, Fasc. Questione macedone, Telegramma n. 2010/94. Piacentini to Mussolini, April 24, 1929.

18 Ormos, *Merénylet Marseille-ben*, 67.

19 Gobetti, *Dittatore per caso*, 47.

20 Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, 21.

Somogy County. The land where the camp was located was called Jankapuszta, and it was bought in 1931 by Perčec, who lived in Hungary under the name Emil Horvát. Perčec also bought a house in Nagykanizsa, a nearby city, for the Ustaše functionaries. As Perčec succeeded in establishing good relations with some of the authorities in Nagykanizsa, he was able to buy other possessions for the Croatian separatists, too.<sup>21</sup>

Henceforward, I will focus on the Croatian (Ustaše) migrants living in Hungary in the interwar period. I will give an overview of the circumstances they had to face. First, I offer a brief analysis of the social situation of the Croatian political refugees, based on the catalogue in the National Archives of Italy on Croats for whom warrants had been issued for political reasons by the Yugoslav authorities. I also attempt to reconstruct what really happened in Jankapuszta, where the only Hungarian-based Ustaše camp was found.

### *Croatian Political Refugees Living in Hungary*

After King Alexander I introduced a dictatorship in his empire, many Croatian citizens decided to emigrate. A list of migrants in the National Archives of Zagreb includes the names of all of the Croats who chose the emigration after the dictatorship in 1929. According to this list, the favored destinations were South America (especially Argentina and Uruguay) and, within Europe, Austria, Hungary, Germany, and Italy.<sup>22</sup> The migrants had a diverse array of social backgrounds; students, intellectuals, land owners, ex-soldiers, and workers decided in equally significant proportions to leave the new proclaimed kingdom of Yugoslavia. Generally, whole families emigrated together, so along with the men who left, women and children also began new lives in another country.<sup>23</sup> This list shows a general picture of the prevailing pattern of migration, which can be considered a typical case of people leaving their homeland primarily in the hopes of finding better living conditions.

The Statistic Yearbook of Yugoslavia shows the exact number of people who emigrated from the country. I examined the period between 1927 and 1934, when Hungarian (and the Italian) collaboration with the Croatian separatists was the most intense. These data show a large number of emigrants (187,550

21 Ormos, *Merényilet Marseille-ben*, 79.

22 HDA, 1355, VIII, Emigracija, Kutina 1, Očevidnik. (This is a list of people who emigrated from Yugoslavia in 1929.)

23 Ibid.

people), who chose European and non-European countries in roughly the same proportions (European: 53.13 percent; non-European: 46.87 percent). The most popular European destination was France, where 18.89 percent of the total number of emigrants decided to live. Turkey was in second place. Regarding the non-European countries, most of the emigrants departed for Argentina (14.88 percent), 13.2 percent went to the USA, and 10.41 percent to Canada. The data suggest that these destinations were popular because of economic reasons, as most of the emigrants who arrived in these countries settled down in 1929/30, just as the Great Depression was beginning (Table 1). Unfortunately, the Statistical Yearbook does not provide exact data on how many of the emigrants were Croats, but it has data from the ten provinces (*banovina*) created by Alexander I in 1929. The Croats constituted a majority in *Banovina Dravska*, *Moravska* and *Savska*, and, according to the statistics, most of the emigrants came from these regions and from *Banovina Vardarska*, where Macedonians formed a majority.<sup>24</sup>

Country	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	Altogether	percent	Political emigrants from total	percent
Albania	0	0	0	594	210	289	880	653	2626	1.40	11	0.42
Austria	695	980	1309	739	606	360	104	418	5211	2.78	39	0.75
Belgium	255	1380	4349	1660	49	31	52	34	7810	4.16	28	0.36
Bulgaria	698	366	41	74	125	179	560	463	2506	13.36	3	0.12
Czechoslovakia	588	731	524	724	499	498	416	1103	5083	2.71	7	0.14
France	437	1728	8064	13593	4722	1947	2305	2629	35425	18.89	9	0.025
Germany	184	811	1198	2614	1482	507	6	448	7250	3.87	5	0.07
Greece	1085	1470	255	922	604	320	313	285	5254	2.80	0	-
Hungary	155	353	102	398	178	114	49	54	1403	0.75	367 (or more than half of the political emigrants)	26.16
Italy	190	219	302	140	97	37	33	37	1055	0.56	92	8.72
Luxembourg	358	467	948	62	10	6	0	0	1851	0.98	0	-
Netherland	267	534	546	400	51	40	153	8	1999	1.07	0	-

24 *Statistički godišnjak Kraljvine Jugoslavije 1934–1935*.

Country	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	Altogether	percent	Political emigrants from total	percent
Romania	226	1383	938	1312	991	795	662	524	6831	3.64	0	-
Switzerland	0	30	38	235	24	15	3	10	355	0.19	1	0.28
Turkey	1024	1369	618	1911	877	1433	1931	4123	13286	7.08	1	0.008
Other European Countries	398	717	193	31	35	71	41	215	1701	0.90	5	0.29
Argentina	7127	7484	6688	4759	883	249	281	442	27913	14.88	12	0.04
Australia	1138	436	205	193	87	83	144	152	2438	1.29	0	-
Bolivia	7	76	20	12	7	18	10	13	163	0.09	0	-
Brasile	2527	499	636	294	39	10	38	59	4102	2.18	2	0.05
Canada	4656	5921	4030	2745	604	491	537	543	19527	10.41	1	0.005
Chile	425	375	279	184	99	97	37	48	1544	0,82	0	-
Latin America	56	75	72	40	15	11	2	14	285	0,15	0	-
New Zealand	130	88	78	89	49	38	16	40	528	0,28	0	-
Peru	184	36	154	37	5	3	2	6	427	0,23	0	-
South Africa	62	93	57	51	26	7	21	44	361	0.19	0	-
Uruguay	905	1892	1168	934	495	44	27	57	5522	2.94	2	0.04
USA	4759	4796	4792	4215	2499	1403	1106	1328	24898	13.28	8	0.03
Other Non-European Countries	0	18	10	7	0	0	0	161	196	0.10	0	-
Europe altogether	6560	12538	19425	25409	10560	6642	7508	11004	99646	53.13	568	0.57
Other continents altogether	21976	21789	18189	13560	4808	2454	2221	2907	87904	46.87	0	-
No data	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	113	-
Altogether	28536	34327	37614	38969	15368	9096	9729	13911	187550	100	706	0.38

Table 1. Croatian Emigration between 1927 and 1934

The number of political refugees can be reconstructed according to another catalogue found in the National Archives of Rome. On April 14, 1934, Inspector Ercole Conti got a long list from the police of Zagreb. It contained information concerning people for whom warrants had been issued by the



Yugoslav authorities for political reasons.<sup>25</sup> According to this catalogue, of the 706 people on whom warrants had been issued for political reasons, 367 were living in Hungary by then, and 60 of them had collaborated with Gustav Perčec in Jankapuszta, Nagykanizsa, or Zákány.<sup>26</sup> This catalogue contains very interesting information on the Croatian political refugees in Hungary.

Comparing the data in the Statistic Yearbook and the catalogue, the number of the political refugees was insignificant as a proportion of the total number of emigrants. They constituted only 0.38 percent of the emigrants. It is surprising and significant, however, that more than a half of them chose Hungary as their destination (367 of 706), while Italy came in second place with 92 people (Table 1).

### *The Main Characteristics of the Activity of Croatian Political Refugees Living in Hungary*

The catalogue sent by the Yugoslav authorities to Ercole Conti contains information concerning 706 people altogether on whom warrants had been issued. It contained all of the information that was known about them.<sup>27</sup> The information in the catalogue includes:

Name

Father's and Mother's Names

Place of Birth

Date of Birth

Date of Issue of the Arrest Warrant

In Case of ex-Soldiers: Function in the Austro-Hungarian Army

Occupation

Direction of Emigration

Membership in Separatist Organizations

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25 Archivio Centrale dello Stato di Roma (ACS). Ispettore Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza. Carte Conti. Busta 3. Fasc. 19. Elenco dei sudditi jugoslavi fuorusciti croati schedati presso la R. Direzione del Banato della Sava a Zagabria come emigranti e come membri dell'Organizzazione bandita terrorista "Ustasa".

26 Ispettore Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza. Carte Conti. Busta 3. Fasc. 19. Elenco...

The catalogue mentions both the camp of Jankapuszta as the center of the Ustaše members living in Hungary and their house in Nagykanizsa, as well as real estate owned in Zákány. The people who were living in these three places are mentioned in the catalogue as associates of Gustav Perčec.

27 Ispettore Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza. Carte Conti. Busta 3. Fasc. 19. Elenco...

Actually, the catalogue lists 726 names, but on the basis of the number of the registration, which is always mentioned among the information, some of the people are actually listed twice. There are 706 different people on the list.

## Reason for Issue of Arrest Warrant

## Function in the Foreign State

Naturally, not all of this information was known for every person. Unfortunately, as the place and date of birth was not known in the majority of cases, one cannot venture generalizations concerning the average age of the refugees, but the date of the issue of the arrest warrant is a valuable piece of information. Fortunately, the destinations that were chosen by the emigrants can be identified, as can the reasons for which the arrest warrants were issued, and there is also information concerning the causal membership of the emigrants in separatist organizations. The catalogue also reveals whether or not the people mentioned were ex-soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian Army. As arrest warrants were issued against many of the registered people simply because they were considered members of the Ustaše or deserters, very little information

Country	Number of emigrants for whom arrest warrants had been issued for political reasons	Percent of the total number of emigrants for whom arrest warrants had been issued for political reasons
Albania	11	1.56
Argentina	12	1.70
Austria	39	5.52
Belgium	28	3.97
Brazil	2	0.28
Bulgaria	3	0.42
Canada	1	0.14
Czechoslovakia	7	0.99
France	9	1.27
Germany	5	0.71
Hungary	367	51.98
Italy	92	13.03
Poland	1	0.14
Switzerland	1	0.14
Turkey	1	0.14
Uruguay	2	0.28
United States of America	8	1.13
Yugoslavia (stayed at home)	4	0.57
No data	113	16.01
Altogether	706	100.00

Table 2. Direction of Political Emigration

is available concerning their social backgrounds, analysis nonetheless reveals interesting interconnections.

In order to arrive at a better understanding for the nature of Croatian emigration to Hungary, it is useful to compare the data on the political refugees living in Hungary with the data concerning the other people registered on the list.

Regarding destination (Table 2), more than half (51.98 percent) of the political refugees chose Hungary, while Italy was in second place (1303 percent). These choices were influenced probably not simply by the fact that Italy and Hungary were neighboring states, but also by the fact that they welcomed Croatian political refugees warmly. Furthermore, Hungary and Italy supported the Ustaše Movement, and, although the living place of the Ustaše members in 1934 was unknown, the statistics based on the catalogue clearly show that members of this organization often emigrated for Italy and Hungary. Political refugees from Yugoslavia moved to Austria and Belgium as well. While Austria was, together with Hungary and Italy, a popular destination for Ustaše members, Belgium was chosen by people who wanted to establish an independent Croatia with a campaign in the press. Some of the emigrants, such as Svetozar Pribičević, decided to emigrate to France, and some Croats moved to Albania, Argentina, and Czechoslovakia. An insignificant number of emigrants chose Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Germany, Poland, Switzerland, Turkey, or Uruguay as their destinations.<sup>28</sup>

With regards to the 367 Croatian political refugees living in Hungary, they were dispersed in the country. They lived in Budapest, Hódmezővásárhely, Szeged, Gyékényes, Kaposvár, Pécs, and Zalaegerszeg, i.e. in cities not far from the Yugoslav–Hungarian frontier, and, of course, in the three aforementioned places where Gustav Perčec resided: Jankapuszta, Nagykanizsa, and Zákány. In these three latter settlements, records indicate that there were altogether 60 people<sup>29</sup> who organized the political activity of the Ustaše Movement and its members with the intention of fostering separatism. As the catalogue says, they did not remain continuously at the same place, as the political activity necessitated a lot of traveling. For this reason, there were no more than 50 political refugees in the Jankapuszta refugee camp at the same time.<sup>30</sup>

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28 Ispettore Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza. Carte Conti. Busta 3. Fasc. 19. Elenco... I made the tables on the basis of the catalogue in ACS.

29 Ispettore Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza. Carte Conti. Busta 3. Fasc. 19. Elenco...

30 Ormos, *Merényilet Marseille-ben*. 79.

Reason for the Issue of an Arrest Warrant	Altogether (number)	Hungary (number)	Jankapuszta, Nagykanizsa, Zákány (number)	Altogether (percent)	Hungary (percent)	Jankapuszta, Nagykanizsa, Zákány (percent)
Deserter	110	102	-	15.58	14.44	-
Dissident	78	39	2	11.04	5.52	0.26
Collaboration with radical separatists	36	24	18	5.09	3.39	2.54
Member of Ustaše Movement	119	9	8	16.85	1.27	1.13
Organizing assassinations	31	16	8	4.39	2.26	1.13
Political activity	125	47	10	17.70	6.65	1.41
Propaganda	35	6	1	4.95	0.84	0.14
Spying	116	102	4	16.43	14.44	5.26
Terrorism	28	9	7	3.96	1.27	0.99
Trafficking weapons	6	4	-	0.84	0.56	-
Other	14	5	-	1.98	0.71	-
No data	8	4	2	1.13	0.56	0.26
Altogether	706	367	60	100	51.98	8.5

Table 3. Reason for the Issue of Arrest Warrant

Separatist Organizations	Altogether (number)	Hungary (number)	Jankapuszta, Nagykanizsa, Zákány (number)	Altogether (percent)	Hungary (percent)	Jankapuszta, Nagykanizsa, Zákány (percent)
Croatian Legion	84	84	1	11.89	100	0.14
ÉME	3	3	-	0.42	100	-
Honvédség	15	15	-	2.12	100	-
Hrvatski Domobran/ Obrana	31	16	1	4.39	2.26	0.14
Milizia Croata	8	-	-	1.13	-	-
Ustaše	169	26	21	23.94	3.68	2.97
Other	8	-	-	4.39	-	-
No data	396	223	37	56.09	31.58	5.24
Altogether	706	367	60	100	51.98	8.5

Table 4. Members of Separatist Organizations

The catalogue clearly indicates why the individual arrest warrants were issued by the Yugoslav authorities (Tables 3 and 4).

As Table 3 shows, most of the people who were followed by the Yugoslav authorities because of political reasons were deserters,<sup>31</sup> members of the Ustaše, suspected of being spies, or suspected of engaging in continued political activity. Some people were followed by the Yugoslav police simply because they were dissidents and the Yugoslav state had little knowledge of their activity in emigration. Naturally, there were refugees who were not members of any of the separatist organizations, but who collaborated with them. Some of the political refugees spread propaganda in support of Croatian independence in the press. They usually lived in a country in South America or in Belgium. 4-5 percent of the politically suspicious people registered in the catalogue were followed by the Yugoslav authorities because they were suspected of having been complicit in the organization of assassinations or terror acts, and an insignificant number of them attempted to traffic weapons or were followed because they had committed other serious acts, such as murder or an attempt to escape from prison.<sup>32</sup>

In many of the cases, being a member of the Ustaše Movement was considered a crime. Naturally, there were Ustaše members who had committed other crimes, in addition to this, such as spying, engaging in political activity, organizing assassinations, organizing or committing acts of terrorism, or being deserters. In this case, the catalogue identifies the second crime as the reason for the issue of the arrest warrant. As a consequence, there were more Ustaše members (169) according to the number indicating membership in a separatist organization than based on the reason for the issue of an arrest warrant (119).

Other Croatian separatist organizations were founded, in addition to the Ustaše. About 44 percent (310 persons) of the registered refugees belonged to one of them. The majority of these 310 refugees (169) belonged to the Ustaše, and the Croatian Legion, which, according to the catalogue given to Ercole Conti, was formed in Zalaegerszeg after World War I, counted 84 members. The people who were pursued by the Yugoslav police for being members of the Croatian Legion were usually considered deserters, as 29 of them had been soldiers (28 of them had been officers) in the Austro-Hungarian Army before.

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31 I use the term “deserters” to refer not only to people who left the Yugoslav Army, but also to people who left Yugoslavia and joined paramilitary organizations in Hungary (the Croatian Legion, ÉME) or in Italy (Milizia Volontaria). Naturally, I also refer to people who joined the Hungarian army after World War I as deserters.

32 ACS. Ispettore Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza. Carte Conti. Busta 3. Fasc. 19. Elenco...

The Hrvatski Domobran (sometimes written Obrana), which literally means Croatian Defense Force, was not a military corps, but a political organization that was originally formed in 1928 by the Croats within Yugoslavia and later had strong connections with the Ustaše. According to the catalogue, this organization counted 31 members. In addition to these larger organizations, other Croatian groups were founded in the countries of South America. Some of the Croatian political refugees were registered by the Yugoslav police because they joined the armies of other states (Hungary, Italy).

Based on the catalogue, the deserters and the spies were over-represented in Hungary. Of the 110 deserters, 102 emigrated to Hungary, and most of them (84) joined the Croatian Legion, which was a Croatian organization found only in Hungary. Some Croats decided to enter *Ébredő Magyarok Egyesülete* (ÉME, Association of Awakening Hungarians), which was an extreme right-wing paramilitary corps which, though it was prohibited in 1922, remained an influential movement in Hungary in the 1920s. Some of the Croatian émigrés joined the Hungarian army.<sup>33</sup> The data show that the majority of the Croatian political refugees living in Hungary emigrated earlier than 1929, probably after the creation of Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.

There were also some Croatian intellectuals who emigrated to Hungary because of their political activity, such as Ivo Frank, the ex-deputy of the Croatian Party of Rights. He was living in Budapest as of 1918, where he began a campaign for Croatian independence with the approval of the Hungarian Government.<sup>34</sup> Frank, who wanted to attract the attention of the world to the efforts to find supporters for Croatian independence,<sup>35</sup> wrote a memorandum with Pavelić in which they summarized the claims of Croats and promised Hungary and Italy particularly good relations and made offers to collaborate.<sup>36</sup> They promised that an independent Croatia will respect Italy's priority in the Adriatic.<sup>37</sup> The individuals who are noted in the catalogue as members of the Hrvatski Domobran/Obrana usually had connections with Ivo Frank.<sup>38</sup> This probably verifies that the Hungarian office of this separatist organization was led by Frank.

33 ACS. Ispettore Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza. Carte Conti. Busta 3. Fasc. 19. Elenco...

34 DDI. Settima serie, vol. 7. Document 41. De Astis to Mussolini, October 16, 1928.

35 ASMAE. AA. PP. 1919–1930. Jugoslavia. Busta 1341. Fasc. Rapporti politici. Telegramma in arrivo 6257. 16 October 1928.

36 Pino–Cingolani, *La via dei conventi*, 48–49.

37 Gobetti, *Dittatore per caso*. 23.

38 ACS. Ispettore Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza. Carte Conti. Busta 3. Fasc. 19. Elenco...

The other Croatian emigrants, who had no ties to (para)military organizations, often worked for Hungary as spies, secret agents, or interpreters. Spies were also over-represented among the refugees in Hungary, as 102 of 116 registered spies registered worked for the Hungarian intelligence service. Probably, the most prominent among them was Josip Metzger, who emigrated to Budapest in 1919, where he got in touch with Ivo Frank. Metzger served in the intelligence section of the Hungarian Defense Ministry, and, according to the catalogue, he spied in the service of Hungary.<sup>39</sup> Later, he moved to Jankapuszta and took part in the political activity organized in the camp.<sup>40</sup>

Regarding the 169 registered Ustaše members, in most cases their destinations remained unknown. Those whose place of residency was identified by the Yugoslav authorities lived in Italy, Hungary, Austria, and Belgium (though only in smaller numbers in the case of the last two). According to the catalogue, 26 Ustaše members were active in Hungary, and 21 of them lived in Jankapuszta/Nagykanizsa/Zákány, where about 60 Croatian émigrés were active at some point between 1932 and 1934.

### *Jankapuszta*

In 1932, when Mussolini and Gömbös agreed to establish camps for Croatian migrants in their countries, Gustav Perčec, who earlier had served in the Austro-Hungarian Army as a military officer and had connections with some Hungarians, thought that land near to the Yugoslav–Hungarian frontier would be optimal for organizing acts of terrorism against Yugoslavia.<sup>41</sup> Originally, he searched for property near Sopron, but in the end he found farmland that was inconspicuous enough to hide the Ustaše members and their associates in the neighborhood of Nagykanizsa. The farmland was the property of Gyula Szájbély, and Perčec rented it under the name Emil Horváth.<sup>42</sup> As the first refugees arrived in 1931, from that moment the Hungarian inhabitants near the land were prohibited from trespassing on it,<sup>43</sup> which suggests that the refugees did not come into contact with the “simple” Hungarian people. Rather, they only had connections with certain Hungarian individuals, who had the approval of the government.

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39 Ibid., 111–12.

40 Šadek, *Ustaše i Janka-puszta*, 46.

41 Ibid., 23.

42 Ormos, *Merényilet Marseille-ben*, 79.

43 Ibid.

According to the catalogue of the Yugoslav authorities on the Croatian political refugees, 60 people were active at some point in Jankapuszta or on the other pieces of real estate purchased by Perčec,<sup>44</sup> and the largest number of people living in Jankapuszta at the same time was approximately 50.<sup>45</sup> When the decision was made on April 26, 1934 to liquidate the camp, there were roughly 30 people living in it.<sup>46</sup>

Following Perčec's orders, the members of the group living in Jankapuszta carried out several bombing attacks using arms hidden on the trains that departed from Hungary for Yugoslavia. The Hungarian authorities found this activity very embarrassing, since they had allowed for the creation of a refugee-camp, but not a terrorist training ground, and the situation became more awkward in November 1933, when Jelka Pogorelec, Perčec's former lover, confessed to the existence of the camp.<sup>47</sup> The inspector of the Secret police of Yugoslavia, Vladeta Miličević, helped Pogorelec publish her booklet in a Yugoslav daily paper entitled *Novosti*.<sup>48</sup>

After it was published in *Novosti*, the booklet, entitled *Tanje emigrantskih zločinaca* ["The Secret of the Wicked Emigrés"], was translated into many languages.<sup>49</sup> Pogorelec's aim, as she herself wrote, was to make the activity of the Ustaše evident to the public, as she found herself unable simply to watch in silence the cruelty and the terror that she had to experience when she had been in relationship with Perčec.<sup>50</sup>

According to Pogorelec, life in Jankapuszta was very hard for the refugees living there. Perčec ordered them to maintain the camp and take responsibility for its operations, and migrants were collected to work on it. Those who would have preferred to choose their family instead of the fight for an independent Croatia were terrorized by the commanders. According to the booklet, these people had to live under continuous threat, and they were forced to do hard agricultural work in the morning, while in the afternoon they were taught how to use the weapons sent from Italy. Pogorelec was desperate not only because of the terror to which she bore witness, but also because of the attempts made by

44 ACS. Ispettore Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza. Carte Conti. Busta 3. Fasc. 19. Elenco...

45 Ormos, *Merénylet Marseille-ben*, 79.

46 Gobetti, *Dittatore per caso*, 53.

47 Sokcsevits, *Hornátország a 7. századtól napjainkig*, 496.

48 Pino-Cingolani, *La via dei conventi*, 108.

49 Ormos, *Merénylet Marseille-ben*, 79.

50 MNL OL. K 63. 130. cs. 16-7. t. 6267 pol/1933. The booklet of Jelka Pogorelec.



some of the emigrants to escape and the suicides which, according to her, were not infrequent.<sup>51</sup>

Colonel Tattay, one of the soldiers who was in contact with the Croats in Jankapuszta, submitted a report to the Hungarian Government on his impressions of Pogorelec's confession.<sup>52</sup> According to his account, it was true that she had been Perčec's lover, but she had not lived in Jankapuszta, but in Budapest. Sometimes Perčec had taken her with him to the camp, but she had never handled his correspondence. According to Tattay, the woman had visited the camp simply as Perčec's lover, but this had been little more than a mistake on Perčec's part, as it had given her a chance to gather information about the camp,<sup>53</sup> which functioned in secret.

Perčec, however, was not the only person who made a serious mistake. While trying to give an explanation that contradicted important parts of Pogorelec's account, Tattay actually revealed the truth about Jankapuszta. He explained that guns were not manufactured in the camp, but it was true that the refugees living there were taught how to use pistols, and they were obliged to take part in military exercises in addition to doing their daily work in the field.<sup>54</sup> Tattay's report confirms that there was a military training camp in Jankapuszta. This is confirmed by the catalogue, as well, since according to the data it contains, 21 of the 60 people living on Perčec's real estate possessions were members of the Ustaše. Regarding the reasons for the issue of arrest warrants, 18 people were pursued simply because of this fact (i.e. that they were members of the Ustaše), and at least 8 other people collaborated with them. 7 of the 60 people were considered terrorists, and according to the catalogue, 8 had organized assassination attempts. 10 of the 60 people were wanted because of their political activity, and 4 of them were pursued by the Yugoslav authorities because they were accused of spying. Two ex-military officers also lived at Jankapuszta: Gustav Perčec and Vjekoslav Servatzy.<sup>55</sup>

Naturally, after Pogorelec's booklet was published, the Yugoslav Government expressed its disapproval of the existence of Jankapuszta, and the Hungarian Government, which originally supposed that a refugee camp had been established, ordered its liquidation on April 26, 1934, i.e. before the assassination of King

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51 Ibid.

52 MNL OL. K 63. 130. cs. 16-7. t. 170 pol/934. The report of Tattay.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 ACS. Ispettore Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza. Carte Conti. Busta 3. Fasc. 19. Elenco...

Alexander I in Marseille on October 9, 1934. The Hungarian government also promised Belgrade that Hungary would expel Croatian emigrants who had done anything which, according to Hungarian penal law, could be considered a crime.<sup>56</sup> After these events, Pavelić immediately ordered Perčec to leave Hungary, and he sent Vjekoslav Servatzy to replace him. Servatzy was put in charge of the Croats who could remain in Hungary as real refugees.<sup>57</sup>

### *The Most Significant People at Jankapuszta*

In 1931, when the Ustaše got the approval of the Hungarian Government to establish a refugee camp in Hungary, Pavelić appointed Gustav Perčec to be its leader. Perčec was born in Valpovo, and he had a residence in Zagreb. He served in the Austro-Hungarian army, and he had several false names (Emil Horvát, Lajos Horvát, etc.), which suggests that he was in the intelligence service as well. The Yugoslav authorities (the Zagreb Police Directorate) began paying attention to him in 1921, as he was suspected of having connections to the Croatian migrants who had been exiled for political reasons and were living in Hungary. He got in touch with Pavelić in 1928, and one year later he traveled to Sofia as a member of the Croatian committee to negotiate with the representatives of IMRO. Because of his participation in the organization of terrorist acts, he was sentenced to death by the Belgrade court in 1929, so he fled to Vienna, where he lived for several years until he moved to Jankapuszta. There, he held military training exercises for other Croatian refugees with the help of some Hungarian military officers.<sup>58</sup> After the existence of Jankapuszta was revealed, Pavelić ordered Perčec to leave Hungary, and later (probably in 1935), Pavelić ordered his execution.<sup>59</sup>

Among the people who were later implicated in the assassination of Marseille, Mijo Bžik, Mijo Kralj, Ivan Rajić, and Zvonimir Pospisil all had lived in Jankapuszta at some time.<sup>60</sup> Mijo Bžik was born in 1907 in Koprivnica. He was sentenced to 18 months in prison for having taken part in the commission of terrorist acts, so he fled to Hungary. He arrived in Jankapuszta in February

56 Hornyák, "A kettősirtokosság intézménye," 71.

57 Sokcsevits, *Hornátország a 7. századtól napjainkig*, 496.

58 ACS. Ispettore Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza. Carte Conti. Busta 3. Fasc. 19. Elenco..., 137–41.

59 Ormos, *Merénylet Marseille-ben*, 83.

60 Šadek, *Ustaše i Janka-puszta*, 48.

1933, together with Mijo Kralj.<sup>61</sup> Pospíšil escaped to Hungary in 1929, having been sentenced to death by the tribunal of Belgrade, as he was implicated in attempts to commit political assassinations. In April 1934, he lived in Budapest, and he had good relations both with the Ustaše group of Perčec and with some Hungarian authorities who were involved in the existence of Jankapuszta.<sup>62</sup> No information is available on Ivan Rajić, who was supposed to be the fourth person among the participants in the Marseille assassination who had lived in Hungary for a while.

As of 1929, a well-known Ustaše member, Mijo Babić, was also living in Hungary. When the camp in Jankapuszta was opened, he moved there, and he had close connections with Pošpisil and Perčec. Babić had to flee to Hungary because he had been sentenced to death by the tribunal of Belgrade for having organized terrorist acts and assassination attempt. Originally, he had been a chauffeur.<sup>63</sup> As he managed to escape in 1941, after the proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia, he became an officer in Pavelić's army.

According to the Croatian secondary literature, for a brief period, Dr. Mile Budak also visited the camp.<sup>64</sup> If this was the case, than his visit must have been before 1933, as according to the police catalogue in 1933 he traveled to Czechoslovakia and became an active member of the Croatian émigré community there.<sup>65</sup>

Emil Lahovsky was another significant person among the Croats living in Hungary. He was pursued by the Yugoslav authorities for spying. He also worked for the Ministry of Agriculture in Hungary. After the liquidation of Jankapuszta, he was invited to Italy to be one of the leaders of the Ustaše's military corps.<sup>66</sup> He was born in 1896 in Donji Miholjac (which at the time had been in Hungary; its name in Hungarian is Alsómiholjác). He came to Hungary in 1921. In April 1934, according to the catalogue in the National Archives of Italy, he lived in Budapest, but he often traveled to different destinations, and he worked for the intelligence service.<sup>67</sup>

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61 ACS. Ispettore Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza. Carte Conti. Busta 3. Fasc. 19. Elenco... Mijo Bzik, 22; Mijo Kralj, 87.

62 Ibid., 152–53.

63 ACS. Ispettore Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza. Carte Conti. Busta 3. Fasc. 19. Elenco...

64 Šadek, *Ustaše i Janka-puszta*, 46.

65 ACS. Ispettore Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza. Carte Conti. Busta 3. Fasc. 19. Elenco...p. 20.

66 Gobetti, *Dittatore per caso*, 53.

67 Ibid., 98.

*The Consequences*

The existence of Jankapuszta became very awkward for Hungary not while the camp was actually in operation, but after its liquidation, as it became the foundation for accusations against Hungary for having participated in the organization of the assassination in Marseille, in which King Alexander I was assassinated and Louis Barthou, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, was killed, along with their chauffeur and two bystanders. The regicide was executed by a terrorist group consisting of seven people.<sup>68</sup> The supposed murderer of the king was Vlado Černožemski, born Velichko Dimitrov Kerin, named also Kelemen. He was an expert assassin, but there is no information concerning him after 1932, so in the Hungarian historical writing it is supposed that he was already dead by 1934 so he may not have been the murderer.<sup>69</sup>

The assassination was not unexpected, since in December 1933 there had already been an attempt to murder the king during his visit to Zagreb. The would-be assassin was a young man named Petar Oreb who lived in Italy but held a Hungarian passport.<sup>70</sup> Oreb and his two accomplices confessed that they had started training in an Italian Ustaše camp where the Croatian inhabitants had been given arms to start revolutions and assassinate prominent figures in Yugoslavia.<sup>71</sup> Bogoljub Jevtić, the Yugoslav Minister of Foreign Affairs, confronted Carlo Galli, the Italian ambassador in Belgrade, with these confessions, so Galli warned Mussolini that the Yugoslav political elite knew about the Italian support given to Pavelić and Perčec.<sup>72</sup>

When the assassination took place in Marseille, photography was already in widespread use, so witnesses were able to take photos of the assassin. The photos revealed that the murderer was a Bulgarian Macedonian who had lived in Jankapuszta with the Croatian refugees before the fateful events.<sup>73</sup> The contention that King Alexander's murderer came from Jankapuszta appeared on the day after the assassination in the French press.<sup>74</sup> It was probably based in no small part on the confession made by Pogorelec, according to which assassinations

68 Iuso, *Il fascismo e gli ustascia*, 67.

69 Ormos, *Merénylet Marseille-ben*, 125–26.

70 Ibid. 53.

71 DDI. Settima serie, vol. 14. Document 551. Galli to Mussolini, January 12, 1934.

72 Ibid.

73 DDI. Settima serie, vol. 16. Document 60. Galli to Mussolini, October 15, 1934.

74 ASMAE. AA. PP. 1930–1945. Jugoslavia, Busta 55. Telegramma. 3976. Without author or publication data.

were organized and guns were manufactured in the Jankapuszta Camp.<sup>75</sup> The French press, which used Pogorelec's booklet as a basis for accusations against Hungary, probably utilized this point to underpin the French theory concerning the manufacture of guns in Jankapuszta. Hungary tried to defend itself before the delegates of the Great Powers. Zoltán Baranyai, the permanent Hungarian delegate in the Council of the League of Nations, contended that the accusations against Hungary had to be treated carefully since they were being made in the French and Yugoslav press. In reality, he claimed, Hungary could only be blamed for having failed to keep a closer eye on the meetings which took place in coffee houses and articles printed in the press of the Croatian refugees. Baranyai denied that Hungarians had trained refugees living in Jankapuszta or had given them guns.<sup>76</sup> Naturally, he was simply making the remarks that he had been ordered to make by the Hungarian Government, since the assassination of the king made the approval Hungary has early given the Ustaše to establish a camp in Hungarian territory embarrassing for Hungarian politicians.

Within a few days, Mussolini and Gömbös had had a conversation on the Marseille assassination and its consequences. Gömbös tried to argue that Hungary had only given shelter to the refugees, but had not been involved in the assassination. He contended that the support that had been provided for the refugees and the murder of the king were two completely different things which had to be treated separately.<sup>77</sup> Kánya Kálmán, the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, also met with Mussolini to discuss the embarrassing case. Kánya informed Mussolini that Hungary and Yugoslavia had reached an agreement concerning the liquidation of the Croatian camps in Hungary's territory a few months before the assassination, and Jankapuszta had been liquidated, though it seemed that some Croats may have remained in the country.<sup>78</sup> As we have seen, this was true, since after April 1934 Jankapuszta closed its doors, and the Croatian emigrants who had taken part in or were organizing terrorist acts were supposed to have left Hungary, where only genuine refugees who had come to Hungary because their lives were in danger in Yugoslavia were entitled to remain.

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75 MNL OL. K 63. 130. cs. 16-7. t. 6267 pol/1933. The booklet of Jelka Pogorelec.

76 ASMAE. AA. PP. 1930–1945. Jugoslavia, Busta 55. T. 1261/1114. November 2, 1934.

77 DDI. Settima serie, vol. 16. Document 112. Note on the meeting of Gömbös and Mussolini. November 6, 1934.

78 Pino-Cingolani, *La via dei conventi*, 109.

## *Summary*

In this essay, I have given a brief overview of the main characteristics of Croatian political refugees on whom records were kept by the Yugoslav authorities. The catalogue found in the National Archives of Italy provides information concerning the destinations chosen by the emigrants, the reasons for which arrest warrants were issued against them, and their membership in separatist organizations, thus offering an interesting picture of the Croatian political refugees living in Hungary.

60 of the 367 Croatian political refugees in Hungary lived at one of the properties owned by Gustav Perčec, the leader of the Ustaše group in Hungary. Most of these 60 refugees were members or supporters of the Ustaše, and many of them organized terrorist acts and assassinations. However, most of the Croatian political refugees living in Hungary were not terrorists or Ustaše members, but deserters or spies, who pursued a less radical form of political activity in support of Croatian independence.

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