

THE CHOICE OF CITIZENS OR THE REGIME?
LOCAL (SELF-) GOVERNMENT
IN THE KINGDOM OF YUGOSLAVIA 1929–1941:
A CASE STUDY OF THE SLAVONSKI BROD DISTRICT

IVAN MILEC, JOSIP JAGODAR

ABSTRACT. During the period of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, urban and rural municipalities were the lowest administrative units and closest to the needs of the ordinary population. The aim of this paper is to determine the level of self-government, whether the leadership of municipal administrations was an expression of the political will of the majority of the population or an instrument of the regime that ensured loyalty through various restrictions, pressures and direct nominations. This case study is spatially limited to the area of the Brod district, which was composed of one city and 18 municipalities. It is limited in period from the proclamation of the dictatorship of King Alexander in 1929 until the collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1941. During the 1920s, central government limited local self-government in various ways, and immediately after the proclamation of the dictatorship, it was legally abolished. However, it should be recognised that the Law on Municipalities was adopted in 1933 and the Law on City Municipalities a year later in which the regime proclaimed self-government in the municipalities, but in reality, it limited it to a great extent. The situation in cities and rural municipalities is very different. Elections for the rural municipalities were held three times (1933, 1936, 1940), while in the cities, despite announcements, these were not held until the collapse of the state. The appointment procedure adopted during the dictatorship period was retained, although the parliamentary elections of 1935 and 1938 showed that the imposed concepts did not have significant support from the electoral base.

Authors:

Ivan Milec, Croatian Institute of History, Opatička st. 10, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia, e-mail: ivan.milec1203@gmail.com, **ORCID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2275-6007>

Josip Jagodar, University of Slavonski Brod, Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, Slavonski Brod, Ivana Gundulića st. 20, 35000 Slavonski Brod, Croatia, jjagodar@unisb.hr

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6382-0768>

Keywords: Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Brod district, self-government, urban and rural municipalities, interwar period

Balcanica Posnaniensia. Acta et studia, XXX, Poznań 2023, Wydawnictwo Wydziału Historii UAM, pp. 187–206, ISBN 978-83-67284-33-2, ISSN 0239-4278. English text with the summary in English.

<https://doi.org/10.14746/bp.2023.30.12>

INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The local authority, particularly in earlier periods when communication was not at today's level, was the most direct and for many residents their sole contact with the state (as a system). The population created an image about the state and its policies precisely through the actions of the local authority. The lowest level of government in the period of Kingdom of Yugoslavia were city municipalities and rural municipalities.

Based on the available archival materials, periodicals and relevant literature, the paper will determine the extent of freedom of the lowest (self-)governing units in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia using the most direct example — the election of the leadership and the local leaders of city and rural municipalities. The paper is period-limited to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, from the termination of parliamentarism and the introduction of personal dictatorship in 1929 to the disappearance of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the April War of 1941.

For this case study, the area of the Slavonski Brod¹ district was chosen, which consisted of one, under Yugoslav conditions, medium-sized city and 18 rural municipalities. The city of Brod was inseparably connected with the villages in the Brod district, representing the centre of gravity for the more than 50,000 inhabitants of the surrounding villages. Furthermore, the city itself was a centre of gravity for the area of Northern Bosnia, that is Bosnian Posavina, primarily for the cities of Derventa and Bosanski Brod and their respective surroundings.²

Although the city and the surrounding municipalities were particularly connected, economically and politically interdependent, they also differed significantly, primarily demographically (heterogeneous national composition of the population in regards to villages) and socially (in the villages a predominantly agrarian population, in the city a significant share of craftsmen, traders and state officials, and with the development of industry, workers and state clerks predominate). As a result, they also differed politically because several civic parties were active in the cities and there were also workers' parties (socialists and communists), while the villages were almost plebiscitary with the opposition gathered around the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS) from the first election. Cities also differed from rural municipalities legislatively because urban and rural municipalities functioned according to different laws and had a differently organised administration and different jurisdiction.

¹ The name of the city up to 1934 was "Brod na Savi" (Brod-upon-Sava) when it was changed to "Slavonski Brod". The name Slavonski Brod was used in some documents even before the official renaming of the city. The paper will use the abbreviated and most commonly used name in the sources — Brod.

² I. Rubić, *Slavonski i Bosanski Brod — Studija o ekonomsko-geografskoj strukturi grada i okoline*, Slavonski Brod 1953, p. 20–43.

THE PERIOD OF THE KINGDOM OF SERBS, CROATS AND SLOVENES (1918–1929)

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Kingdom of SHS), from 1929 the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, was created in 1918 from several different state and administrative units that had different historical, political, administrative and economic development. During most of the 1920s, these units maintained most of their administrative peculiarities, and the laws from earlier systems continued to be valid until new ones were passed, which they were often not. Croatian political scientist Tihomir Cipek showed in his study that the Kingdom of SHS was a typical *ancien régime*, an empire with a centre that dominated the periphery, which included all Croatian areas.³ The areas of Croatia and Slavonia inherited from the Austro-Hungarian period, when they had a certain degree of autonomy, relatively good foundations for the further development of local self-government. Nevertheless, during the 1920s, the new state moved in the direction of complete centralisation and the crushing of local autonomies.⁴

The Croatian opposition, led by the HSS as the strongest party, had already won power in the elections in the majority of municipalities in Croatia and Slavonia during the 1920s. Nevertheless, due to the republican orientation and the non-recognition of the 1921 Constitution, which was voted on without Croatian representatives, during the first half of the 1920s the elected councillors refused to take the oath to the king. To the greatest extent, the municipalities were administered by appointed commissioners, mainly from the ranks of the ruling parties, who did not have widespread electoral support at the local level, or by politically appointed officials.⁵ With the HSS's entry into government in 1925, conditions also stabilised in the municipalities on the territory of Croatia. In the autumn of the same year, new municipal elections were held, where the HSS won an absolute majority and took power. In the next municipal elections in 1927, the HSS confirmed its supremacy in the area of Croatia proper, but also spread to other parts of the country, primarily Dalmatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁶

In the cities the situation was somewhat different from the first city elections in 1920, with most elected city representatives taking an oath to the king. In Brod, this was done even by the communists who won an absolute majority in the first elections, which left them in positions within the city administration for the entire mandate.⁷ The HSS, as the main opposition party, made significant breakthroughs into the cities only from the mid-1920s.

³ T. Cipek, *Nacija, diktature, Europa*, Zagreb 2015, p. 75–82.

⁴ S. Grgić, *Između režimske ideologije i potreba građana: Savska banovina 1929–1939*, Zagreb 2020, p. 51, 71–78.

⁵ S. Leček, *Selo i politika. Politizacija hrvatskog seljaštva 1918–1941.*, Zagreb 2011, p. 125–127.

⁶ H. Matković, *Povijest Hrvatske seljačke stranke*, Zagreb 1999, p. 213–229.

⁷ A. Milušić, *Izbori za Gradsko zastupstvo i Ustavotvornu skupštinu 1920. godine u Slavonском Броду*, Slavonski Brod 1965, p. 243–299. Communists from Brod were soon expelled of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and joined the Socialist Party of Yugoslavia.

The entry of the HSS into government in 1925 is an important milestone in the political history of the Kingdom, and to a large extent it was reflected in Brod. Namely, Dr Nikola Nikić, a lawyer and civil law notary, joined the coalition government as the Minister of Forests and Mines at that time.⁸ Using the favourable political situation and state authority, Nikić managed to lead the Brod HSS to its first victory in the city elections of 1925 and 1926. In 1926, construction entrepreneur Vjekoslav Tauchmann, the president of the HSS city branch, was elected mayor, which ended the two-year period of forced administrations dependent on politics.⁹ However, this solution turned out to be rather short-lived. At the national level, there was a conflict within the government, but also within the HSS itself. The most prominent role in the aforementioned party split was played by Nikić, who broke away from Radić and tried to create a group of HSS members loyal to the court and the radicals. His individual actions led to a split in the city branch of the HSS, which resulted in the loss of power in the city and the introduction of a new commissariat for more than a year. It was similar in the district organisation of the party; Nikić was approached by all the elected members of parliament from the Brod district as well as many municipal officials. Nikić became the most famous HSS dissident, and with his influence and ties to the court, he tried to take over the city administration in several consecutive elections, in which he failed. After the defeat in the regional and assembly elections in 1927 and considerable failure in the municipal elections of the same year, he began to lose political significance.¹⁰ The situation with Nikić will be important for the further development of the situation in the period covered in this paper, because the introduction of dictatorship and the collapse of the previous political system will be fertile ground for people similar to Nikić.

The period of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which is the focus of this work, can roughly be divided into three segments. The first lasted from the introduction of the dictatorship in 1929 until the assassination of King Alexander in the autumn of 1934 and the collapse of the dictatorship regime in early 1935, and was characterised by centralisation, suppression of political freedoms and an attempt to create a one-party dictatorship. The second lasted from the appointment of Milan Stojadinović's government in 1935 and the creation of a new regime party (the Yugoslav Radical Union) until 1939, which can be conditionally described as a period of certain liberalisation of the political conditions in which the opposition was *de facto* allowed to operate. As for the third, we can take the period of existence of the Banate of Croatia, that is, from the creation of the Banate in August 1939 until the collapse of the state in the April War of 1941. This period, at least in the territory of Croatia, was marked by additional

⁸ H. Matković, op. cit., p. 192–199.

⁹ S. Leček, *Izbor ili imenovanje — problem gradske (samo)uprave u Slavonskom Brodu 1918.–1941.*, Zagreb 2013, p. 19–20.

¹⁰ M. Biondich, *Stjepan Radić, the Croatian Peasant Party, and the Politics of Mass Mobilization, 1904–1928*, Toronto–Buffalo–London 2000, p. 207–211; H. Matković, op. cit., p. 209–211; D. Jović, *Politički odnosi u Slavonskom Brodu srpanj 1925. – srpanj 1927.*, Slavonski Brod 2001, p. 267–278.

liberalisation of political and social life, but also by partial mobilisation due to World War II, restrictions in the economy and the transition to a war economy.

THE DICTATORSHIPS OF KING ALEXANDER 1929–1934

After the assassination in which a ruling majority delegate shot two fatally and wounded three more HSS delegates in the hall of the National Assembly, the political situation in the Kingdom of SHS intensified to the extreme. The leader of the Croatian opposition, Stjepan Radić, was only wounded in the assassination attempt, but died on 8 August 1928 as a result of his injuries.¹¹ At his burial, several hundreds of thousands of citizens gathered, showing his political significance and influence, as well as dissatisfaction with the situation in the country. The king rejected the possibility of calling new elections in the atmosphere of psychosis caused by the assassination and created a new government headed by the Slovene Anton Korošec, president of the Slovenian People's Party (SLS), with the support of the previous parliamentary majority. The political crisis and stratification within the coalition nevertheless led to the collapse of that government in December 1929, after which the king convened consultations of the parliamentary parties. The Croatian opposition, gathered around the HSS and the Independent Democratic Party,¹² refused any continuation of the work of the compromised assembly, demanding new elections and a revision of the 1921 constitution.¹³ Finally, on 6 January 1929, King Alexander issued the proclamation "To my Dear People" by which he dissolved the assembly, abolished the constitution and appointed a nominally non-political government headed by the commander of the royal guard, General Petar Živković.¹⁴ In the following weeks, all political parties and organisations with a "tribal character" were banned, and integral Yugoslavism and the denial of national distinctions were proclaimed. At the end of the same year, the country was renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and extensive administrative reform was carried out, districts were abolished and banates were created. This reform certainly aimed to erase the former "historical provinces"; the new banates did not follow the previous provincial borders, but largely crossed them, and were named after the largest rivers in order to further distance them the earlier provincial names.¹⁵

¹¹ *Krv je pala*, "Jutarnji list", 21.06.1928, p. 1–2; H. Matković, op. cit., p. 251–260; M. Jareb, *Pregled političkih zbivanja 1918–1945.*, Zagreb 2022, p. 30.

¹² To a large extent, the party gathered Serbian politicians from the former Austro-Hungarian territories and part of the Yugoslav-oriented intelligentsia. More in: H. Matković, *Svetozar Pribičević i Samostalna demokratska stranka do šestojanuarske diktature*, Zagreb 1972.

¹³ C. Axboe Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs — Identity in King Aleksandar's Yugoslavia*, Toronto–Buffalo–London 2014, p. 79–97.

¹⁴ *Proklamacija Nj. Vel. kralja*, "Hrvatski list", 7.01.1929, p. 1; *Raspust Narodne skupštine i obustava Vidovdanskog ustava*, "Hrvatski list", 7.01.1929, p. 1.

¹⁵ *Nova upravna podjela države*, "Hrvatski list", 4.10.1929, p. 2.

The new regime immediately proclaimed the depoliticisation of all levels of administration, including the lowest urban and rural municipalities. The earlier parliamentary, and generally political, system was accused of bringing the entire country to the brink of collapse. Among the first laws passed with the proclamation itself and in the following days were also laws that abolished self-government at all levels, including in the municipalities.¹⁶ Commissioners were appointed instead of mayors and heads of municipalities, elected municipal committees were dissolved and new members of municipal committees were appointed. At the local level, however, a semblance of legality and continuity was desired, so the previous officials were largely appointed to the municipal committees and to the positions of prefects, with the condition of taking an oath to the king and focusing on purely communal issues.¹⁷ In his study, Grgić shows that a year after the introduction of the dictatorship in the majority of the municipalities of the Banate of Sava, the positions of municipal prefects were held by persons legally elected in the 1927 elections.¹⁸

The reality, however, was significantly different from the proclamations. The new government mainly consisted of former politicians from all parties who were previously close to the court and were often perceived as the king's men by their parties. It was similar at the local level, where mayors, municipal prefects and committee members who agreed to cooperate with the dictatorship regime were re-appointed to their posts, and where they refused to show loyalty, new ones were appointed.

The situation in the Brod district is somewhat different compared to the rest of the Banate of Sava. Here, the regime did not have to ask for cooperation and loyalty from former HSS members who held positions in municipal administrations, because Nikić was already close to the royal court and a network of local collaborators was created during Nikić's split with Radić. In addition, Brod's city administration had already been dissolved in the months preceding the dictatorship, thus Brod met the declaration of dictatorship without a mayor and city council and the regime only had to fill the vacant positions.¹⁹ The political developments enabled Nikić to use his closeness to the court and the network of existing collaborators to become the chief political cadreman in the Brod area. Thus, as many as eight municipal prefects appointed immediately after the establishment of the dictatorship previously belonged to Nikić's political group, and in the following months three more municipal prefects were replaced by his close associates. Furthermore, following his proposal both Banate councillors for the city and district were appointed, as well as the mayor of Brod along

¹⁶ *Zakon o izmeni Zakona o opštinama i oblasnim samoupravama*, "Politika", 6.01.1929, p. 3; *Zakon o ukidanju zakona o izboru organa oblasne, sreske i opštinske samouprave*, "Politika", 15.1.1929, p. 3.

¹⁷ S. Grgić, *Općinske uprave u vrijeme šestosiječanjske diktature*, Zagreb 2013, p. 101–104.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 559–560.

¹⁹ *U Brodu je uveden komesarijat*, "Hrvatski list", 6.01.1929, p. 8; *Veliki je župan imenovao novo gradsko zastupstvo u Brodu*, "Hrvatski list", 6.01.1929, p. 8.

with the entire city council.²⁰ Nikić himself was the only candidate in the parliamentary elections of 1931, which the opposition boycotted so that only the government's list was published.²¹ By being elected as a member of the parliament, that is, an assembly delegate, Nikić formally confirmed his position as the most important politician in Brod.

The National Assembly elections held in November 1931 were also a good opportunity for the regime to test the loyalty of local authorities. The regime did not only demand solidarity from the leadership of municipal administrations, but also active participation and propagation of state policy. Thus, immediately after the elections in the district of Brod, there was a wave of dismissals of those municipal councillors who did not vote in the National Assembly elections.²² An interesting and indicative example of *preventive dismissal* before the election of the municipal prefect was in the municipality of Velika Kopanica. Namely, during the preparations for the assembly elections, the regime closely monitored the behaviour and engagement of all municipal prefects. In October 1931, the head of the Brod district reported to the Banate administration that Matić, the municipal prefect in Velika Kopanica “performs his duties accurately and conscientiously”, but does not show enough “agility” in the preparation of the elections, and proposed his dismissal.²³ The Banate administration accepted the aforementioned proposal and instructed the head of the district to appoint a new prefect. However, immediately after the elections, the head of the district sent a new letter to the Banate administration in which he withdrew his earlier proposal for dismissal. Matić allegedly, after learning about the replacement proposal, fully devoted himself to the parliamentary elections and, as a result, proved that he had the support of the majority of the population behind him. The Banate administration also accepted this proposal and revoked the previous sacking.²⁴ This may be the most tangible description of the dependence of the municipal prefects on the will of the regime and the uncertainty of their positions.

Shortly after the constitution of the new assembly, a parliamentary club was created which all the newly elected delegates joined — the club of the Yugoslav Radical Peasant Democracy.²⁵ It is evident from the very name itself that the regime wanted to unite the names of the three most important pre-dictatorial parties — the People's

²⁰ Hrvatska. Hrvatski državni arhiv [HR-HDA] 144, SB UO, box 180, 893/32, *Izvešće Okružnog inspektorata Osijek*, no. 802-1932-Pov., 22.05.1932; I. Milec, *Politika i općinske (samo)uprave u razdoblju Šestosiječanjske diktature — primjer kotara Brod na Savi*, Slavonski Brod 2019, p. 74–81.

²¹ *Izborni sastanak u Brodu*, “Brodsko tribuna”, 10.10.1931, p. 1; *Dr. Nikola Nikić nema protukandidata, jer su izbornici sreza brodskog listom uz njega*, “Brodsko tribuna”, 31.10.1931, p. 1.

²² I. Milec, op. cit., p. 84–85.

²³ HR-HDA-144, SB UO, box 116, 8884/31, *Dopis Kotarskog predstojništva*, no. 1551 Pov./1931, 12.10.1931.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, *Dopis Banske uprave*, no. 8884-1663/31 Pov., 4.12.1931.

²⁵ *Sastanak nove Narodne skupštine*, “Hrvatski list”, 8.12.1931, p. 1; *Osniva se vladina politička stranka*, “Hrvatski list”, 15.12.1931, p. 6.

Radical Party, the Croatian Peasant Party and the Democratic Party. The club became the core from which the regime started organising the party, as it wanted to expand the base of support for the regime, but also to show that the regime would not allow the renewal of the old parties. In the spring of 1932, an extensive campaign to establish and spread local branches of the new party across the country began.²⁶ At lower levels, the party organisation was left to the new delegates and senators elected and appointed during January 1932. In addition, an important role was intended for mayors, municipal prefects and Banate councillors, who were expected to engage in the establishment of local branches in their area. The situation in Brod was complicated by the fact that Nikić, probably due to his unfulfilled aspiration to enter government, refused to engage in the party organisation and in the spring of 1932, he became a kind of opposition to the regime. Some of the local officials appointed to positions due to his efforts followed suit. In addition to the member of assembly, the mayor of Brod, both Banate councillors and a number of the municipal prefects did not join the founding of the party. As a result, the process of forming the party was led by Nikić's former close associate Tomo Kovačević, the newly appointed royal senator and prefect of the Sibirj municipality. Some of Nikić's former associates gathered around him, as well as former members of other political parties who until then were not active regime supporters, and the establishment of party branches began. From the beginning, the process of forming the party was marked by the existence of two factions in the city itself, and this conflict gradually spilled over into the area of the district. One faction gathered a number of regime supporters, which immediately joined the dictatorship and was connected to the city administration, but did not have significant support in the city itself. The second faction mainly gathered civil politicians from previous periods who stayed on the side-lines during the initial years, but with the return of party life, albeit limited to one regime party, they decided to reactivate. In the beginning, Kovačević also supported them, but after the appointment of Henrik Duffek as mayor, they distanced themselves from him and came into open conflict. The root of the conflict can partially be seen in the relationship between the village and the city, because a large number of the city's politicians stated that Senator Kovačević, as a villager from Sibirj, should not decide on the city's politics. The conflict was finally resolved in September 1933 when internal party elections were held, but the factions in the district did not disappear because separate lists were visible in the municipal elections in the district.²⁷

It was the party formation process that once again deeply politicised the nominally depoliticised, municipal (self-)governments. Thus, from the very beginning, a process is visible in which many municipal prefects, often reluctantly, led the organisation of local branches of the party just to secure their prefectural position. The

²⁶ C. Axboe Nielsen, op. cit., 213–221; I. Dobrivojević, *Državna represija u doba diktature kralja Aleksandra 1929–1935*, Beograd 2006, p. 127–134.

²⁷ I. Milec, *Organiziranje i djelovanje Jugoslavenske radikalne seljačke demokracije u gradu i kotaru Brod na Savi do općinskih izbora 1933.*, Slavonski Brod 2018, p. 348–367.

reverse process is also visible, the one in which individuals approached the organising the regime party by becoming presidents of local branches, after which, through political pressure, they successfully obtained the sacking of the previous leaders by higher authorities and are appointed to their positions by the Ministry of the Interior.²⁸ A similar situation is visible in the city of Brod, where the mayor and the majority of the city council did not partake in the founding of the party. For this reason, in the spring of 1932, one of the regime party factions in the city, supported by Senator Kovačević, launched its own local weekly magazine, *Jugoslavenska sloga* (*Yugoslav Unison*), and through it and other informal political pressures, campaigned for the dismissal of Mayor Djanješić. The city police also agreed with the dismissal because the current city administration was seen as Nikić's branch which, due to his oppositional stance, could become a hindrance to the regime. The change took place in the summer of 1932, when the president of the city organisation of the regime party, Dr Henrik Duffek, was appointed as the new mayor, while almost all the members of the regime party were appointed as vice-mayors and city representatives.²⁹

PASSING OF THE LAW ON (CITY) MUNICIPALITIES AND THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS OF 1933

At the beginning of 1933, the first unified Law on Municipalities was adopted, followed by the Law on City Municipalities the following year.³⁰ Up to that time, there were as many as ten different laws in force inherited from earlier states by which local administrations and self-governments functioned, thus the new unified legislation at the level of the entire state can be considered a step forward. Nevertheless, the new laws represented an additional limitation of self-administration and its almost complete submission to the central authority.³¹

After passing the legislation that once again provided for elections for self-administrations, in the autumn of 1933, elections for rural municipalities were announced. Voting, as in the assembly elections of 1931, was public. This election ended the period of appointed prefects and committees, and self-administration was nominally returned to rural municipalities, albeit limited. The opposition gathered around HSS boycotted this election as well, but before the elections they issued a leaflet, of course illegal. It was distributed among the Croatian peasantry and from it the view of the Croatian opposition on the issue of the municipality is visible. It is stated that the municipality is:

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 87–91.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 348–353.

³⁰ *Zakon o opštinama*, Beograd 1933; *Zakon o gradskim opštinama izglasan u Narodnoj skupštini Kraljevine Jugoslavije 6 jula 1934, u Senatu Kraljevine Jugoslavije 13 jula 1934*, Sarajevo 1934.

³¹ S. Grgić, *op. cit.*, p. 574.

the closest to the moral, material and social interests of the peasant people [...] but only for the case when voters can vote freely. And that the election was not called to give the people municipal self-government, but to gaslight the world with apparent voting.³²

Due to the opposition's boycott, only different regime lists were registered for the municipal elections, while the Brod district was an exception because Nikić's lists, which can be characterised as *loyal opposition*, were also registered. According to later HSS's statements, the turnout for the 1933 elections in Croatia was miserable, between 70% and 80% of voters allegedly abstained. Official data showed a turnout of around 50%, similar to the assembly elections.³³ These figures are, of course, questionable, but it should still be said that participation in the election was probably higher due to the fact that municipal issues are closer to common population. In the municipal elections of 1933, all the heterogeneity of the supporters of the regime could be seen, because in some municipalities different lists were registered for the elections, all claiming to belong to the regime party. Should one analyse the registered lists, one can see a large number of nominally non-party candidates, from which it can be concluded that the regime party in the area of Brod district failed to create a solid structure that would guarantee success in the elections. The regime itself, through heads of districts, encouraged the candidacy of several different lists, both to create the semblance of pluralism and to encourage local and personal rivalry, and consequently a higher voter turnout.³⁴ As a result of the HSS abstention in the elections, if several prefects loyal to the opposition around Nikić are ignored, the pro-regime municipal administration was elected in the Brod district. The district head was also present at the constitutive sessions as a representative of the Ministry, who also asked nominally non-party administrations to commit to cooperation with the regime party.³⁵

The administrations of rural municipalities elected in such way continued to function until 1935. Although the new Law on City Municipalities also provided for elections for city councils, calling these was the discretionary right of the Minister of the Interior, who had to judge for himself when the people were *mature enough* for the introduction of self-government.³⁶ During 1934, the possibility that the regime would call elections for city councils was mentioned several times in the local Brod press, and individuals had already started a campaign of sorts, but nothing came of it.³⁷ One

³² HR-HDA-1356, *Građanska stranke i društva*, doc. 451 (*Letak Hrvatska seljačka stranka pozivlje hrvatski seljački narod, kolovoz 1933*).

³³ HR-HDA-1364, *Izbori u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji* [Izbori], doc. 273 (*Izješće kotarskog predstojnika o rezultatima izbora*), 1208 Pov./1933, 8.10.1933.

³⁴ I. Milec, op. cit., p. 95–98.

³⁵ HR-HDA-144, SB UO, box 212, doc. 4572/33 (*Izješće kotarskog predstojnika o uvođenju u dužnost općinskih odbora*), 1245 Pov./1933, 5.11.1933; *Izbori najbolje govore*, "Jugoslavenska sloga", 14.10.1933, p. 2.

³⁶ *Zakon o gradskim opštinama izglasan u Narodnoj skupštini Kraljevine Jugoslavije 6 jula 1934, u Senatu Kraljevine Jugoslavije 13 jula 1934*, Sarajevo 1934, §145.

³⁷ *Predizborna agitacija u Slav. Brodu*, "Jugoslavenska sloga", 29.9.1934, p. 3.

can agree with Grgić's conclusion that the regime did not allow elections for city municipalities because it was aware of the need for firm control over cities as centres of the political, administrative and economic power of its regions.³⁸

FROM THE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS OF 1935 TO THE CREATION OF THE BANATE OF CROATIA IN 1939

The assembly elections of 1935 were a significant milestone in the period of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. After the assassination of King Alexander in Marseille in 1934 the dictatorial regime was rapidly disintegrating. The regency headed by the king's cousin, Prince Pavle (Paul) Karađorđević took over the government. The prince appointed a new government headed by the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bogoljub Jeftić due to his departure from the regime's party.³⁹ In the parliamentary elections of 1935, the government's list was nominated, not the party's list, although at the local level it was filled mainly with members of the regime party. Due to electoral law, the Croatian opposition had to create a broad coalition with the Serbian opposition, so that the government list was opposed by the opposition list led by the president of HSS, Dr Vlatko Maček.⁴⁰

Electoral law greatly favoured the winner during the distribution of mandates, thus the relative winner would receive two-thirds of the mandate and proportionally participated in the distribution of the rest.⁴¹ In the electoral district of Brod, the opposition candidate, lawyer Dr Filip Markotić achieved an overwhelming victory, winning twice as many votes as his opponent. Even in the city itself, where the regime had significantly more supporters than in rural municipalities, Markotić won convincingly. However, thanks to electoral law, the government's candidate, Dr Dragan Damić, manager of the Banate hospital in Brod, was elected to the new assembly.⁴²

After the election, Jeftić was sacked due to failure and the new government, with the blessing of Prince Pavle, was formed by the former Minister of Finance, Dr Milan Stojadinović. In addition, a new regime party was created — the Yugoslav Radical Union (JRZ) — which brought together former members of the banned parties, the People's Radical Party, the Slovenian People's Party and the Yugoslav Muslim Organisation.⁴³

³⁸ S. Grgić, op. cit., p. 626–627.

³⁹ C. Axboe Nielsen, op. cit., p. 242–247. I. Dobrivojević, op. cit., p. 82–94.

⁴⁰ M. Jareb, op. cit., p. 33–34; S. Ramet, *Tri Jugoslavije — Izgradnja države i izazov legitimacije 1918.–2005.*, Zagreb 2009, p. 136–138.

⁴¹ B. Balkovec, *Izborna zakonodavstvo prve jugoslavenske države (1918.–1941.)*, Zagreb 2010, p. 210–211.

⁴² *Statistika izbora narodnih poslanika za Narodnu skupštinu Kraljevine Jugoslavije izvršenih 5 maja 1935.*, Beograd 1938, p. 47.

⁴³ A.N. Dragnich, *The First Yugoslavia — Search for Viable Political System*, Stanford 1983, p. 103–104; I. Dobrivojević, op. cit., p. 93–94.

In addition to these, locally, the membership of the former regime's party was mostly aligned with the ranks of the JRZ. The new regime moved in the direction of a certain liberalisation of political life, primarily in the territory of Croatia, where new bans were soon in place and the opposition was *de facto* allowed to operate, although not *de jure*.

The new regime formed after the election continued a similar practice when it came to the city municipalities. Thus, already in the summer of 1935, Brod's new member of the assembly began to lobby the Ministry and the Banate for the removal of the previous mayor because he had "lost his authority and all his supporters" and propagated a failed political concept.⁴⁴ Before allowing the reconstruction of the city administration, the Banate administration discreetly inquired about the political situation in the city. Finally, in September of the same year, a new city administration headed by the mayor Dr Emanuel Kovačić was appointed. Along with him, the entire city council was proposed for appointment. Before the actual appointment, the Banate administration asked the city police for details on the political stance of all the proposed candidates for the city council. One of the most important conditions for appointment to the city council was voting for the regime candidate in the 1935 election.⁴⁵ Immediately after the announcement of the officially appointed city councillors, some of the proposed ones refused the appointments, which shows that the authorities did not even contact the majority of the proposed candidates beforehand. Vacant positions were soon filled with loyal staff, so that on 26 September, the constituting session of the city council was held and the new administration was inaugurated.⁴⁶ Not even this administration was the choice of the citizens of Brod because, except that they could not elect it in the elections, it also did not align politically with the mood in the city, which was undoubtedly shown in the recently held assembly elections. While the opposition candidate received the largest number of votes in the city itself, only those who voted for the regime candidate were appointed to the city administration.

The situation in rural municipalities in the second half of the 1930s was much different compared to the cities. The mandate of the municipal administrations elected in the 1933 elections formally lasted until the autumn of 1936, but soon after the parliamentary elections held in May 1935, was the beginning of what will be known in the historiographical literature as the "HSS's struggle for municipalities". Namely, the opposition gathered around the HSS called on the municipal committeemen elected in 1933 who voted for the opposition in the parliamentary elections to resign shortly after the elections of the same year. The majority of committeemen, although elected from regime lists, voted for the opposition in the assembly elections and readi-

⁴⁴ HR-HDA-144, SB UO box 352, doc. 3596/35 (*Dopis sekretara Narodne Skupštine dr. Dragana Damića podbanu Savske banovine*, 4.08.1935).

⁴⁵ Ibidem, *Dopis Gradskog poglavarstva SlavonSKI Brod BANSKOJ upravi*, Pov. 86/1935, 26.9.1935.

⁴⁶ Ibidem, *Izvjješće kotarskog predstojništva o uvođenju u dužnost gradske uprave*, 2900 Pov/1935, 30.09.1935; *Promjena gradske uprave u Slav. Brodu*, "Istina", 21.9.1935, p. 2; *Definitivni sastav gradskog zastupstva*, "Istina", 28.9.1935, p. 3.

ly accepted the call to resign and paralysed the work of municipal administrations.⁴⁷ An example from Brod makes it evident that the HSS was behind this action. Thus, in the Brod weekly magazine *Istina*, at that time the semi-official newspaper of the Brod HSS branch, the most prominent Brod HSS member, Dr Markotić called on the municipal committees to just paralyse the work of the municipal administrations with their resignations, but not yet to take power.⁴⁸ The first resignations in Brod district were recorded in August 1935, only three months after the assembly elections, and by September of the same year, the district head reported to the Banate administration that most of municipalities in the Brod district were not functioning due to resignations.⁴⁹ Through various pressures and threats, the regime tried to convince some of the committeemen to withdraw their resignations and remain in the municipal administrations, but such successes of the regime were not recorded in the district of Brod. Although the head of the Brod district suggested that, in order to “normalise political life”, resignations be accepted and new elections called, the regime refused, so that the municipal administrations continued to function in a truncated composition or under the commissariat of officials.⁵⁰ Regular elections were only announced in the second half of 1936, and due to the regime’s fear of potential unrest, they were held at different times, in the Banate of Sava they were held in August, September and October.⁵¹ In the Brod district, elections for two municipalities, Slavonski Kobaš and Trnjani, were announced for the last scheduled date, 11 October 1936. The situation there was further complicated by the ethnic composition of the population, as the majority of committeemen of Serbian nationality refused to step down. The mayor of the district pointed out that in those municipalities, Serbs were strongly overrepresented in the previous committees because, although they were a minority of the population, they had the absolute majority of committee seats.⁵²

The opposition also participated in the new municipal elections, while the regime participated only in a smaller part of the Croatian territory where it had certain supporters. Dr Maček, the HSS president, gave an interesting view on the issue of municipal administrations and elections:

⁴⁷ S. Leček, *Borba Hrvatske seljačke stranke za općinsku samoupravu 1936.–1939.*, Zagreb 2008, p. 1002–1004.

⁴⁸ *Na znanje seoskim općinskim odborima*, “*Istina*”, 7.9.1935, p. 1; *Na znanje pristašama bivše HSS*, “*Istina*”, 14.9.1935, p. 2.

⁴⁹ HR-HDA-144-SB UO, box 272, doc. 74/35 (*Izvjeshće Kotarskog načelstva Slavonski Brod o lektivnim ostavkama općinskih odbora*), 2337 Pov./1935., 10.9.1935.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, box 271, doc. 20/36 (*Tromjesečno izvješće Kotarskog predstojništva*), Pov.br. 341-1936., 8.4.1936.

⁵¹ *Raspis općinskih izbora*, “*Hrvatski list*”, 19.8.1936, p. 3; *Općinski izbori u Savskoj banovini*, “*Hrvatski list*”, 1.9.1936, p. 2; *Raspisani općinski izbori još u 110 općina Savske banovine*, “*Hrvatski dnevnik*”, 16.9.1936, p. 5.

⁵² HR-HDA-1364, *Izbora*, doc. 297 (*Dopis kotarskog predstojnika o situaciji u općinama Trnjani i Kobaš*), 1893 Pov./1936, 25.8.1936.

It is clear that today's municipal election cannot have any particularly political character. We are going to the elections only to prevent the worst and most unscrupulous people from getting to the administration of the municipalities, as has been the case so far.⁵³

The HSS leadership called on its local organisations to go into the elections with a single list in each municipality if possible and not to form a coalition with the regime's parties. Former municipal committeemen elected in 1933 who did not accept the HSS's call to submit their resignations on time in 1935 should not have been admitted to the election lists. In addition, it was emphasised that in municipalities with significant national minorities this should be taken into account and a proportional number of candidates from each national minority should be placed on the lists. Especially emphasised was the need to depoliticise local administrations, which were "poisoned" by politics during the dictatorship, and the most prominent local party leaders were urged not to run in the elections, which was respected to the greatest extent in the Brod district.⁵⁴ In the area of the Brod district, the HSS announced official lists in all 18 municipalities, in the Oriovac municipality two official HSS lists were announced, while in the Sibirj and Brodski Varoš municipalities, HSS dissident lists were also present. The case of the Bebrina municipality can be indicative, where the former regime party tried its chances in the elections, which, despite 18 candidates for the municipal committee, received only nine votes, so not even all the candidates voted for themselves.⁵⁵ In the municipalities of Slavonski Kobaš and Trnjani, a remarkable "abstention of Orthodox voters" was recorded, so that only Croats were elected to the committees and municipal administrations.⁵⁶

The HSS won a majority in all municipalities, and owing to the old electoral law, also a majority in all committees, so that their supporters were elected as municipal prefects. The opposition did not see the seizure of power in the municipalities as a goal, but as a means, because it finally got into positions of power from which it could implement its programme. The new municipal administrations soon started with attempts to financially recover over-indebted municipalities, and expenditures for state officials, which had swollen in the dictatorship, were reduced, but this brought them into conflict with higher authorities. The strained relationship between the opposition-held municipalities and the state authorities had lasted un-

⁵³ *Dr. Maček općinskim izborima*, "Istina", 8.8.1936, p. 2.

⁵⁴ *Dr. Maček o općinskim izborima*, "Hrvatski list", 7.8.1936, p. 1; *Pripreme za općinske izbore*, "Hrvatski list", 11.8.1936, p. 2; *Pripreme za općinske izbore — Sastanci dra. Filipa Markotića*, "Hrvatski list", 25.8.1936, p. 3.

⁵⁵ HR-HDA-1364, Izbori, doc. 297 (Iskaz o izborima), Pov-II-Number:6649/36, 11.10.1936; *Općinski izbori u kotaru Slav. Brod*, "Hrvatski list", 14.9.1936, p. 1; *Rezultati općinskih izbora u brod. kotaru*, "Istina", 19.9.1936, p. 1.

⁵⁶ HR-HDA-1364, Izbori, doc. 297 (*Izviješće kotarskog predstojnika o izborima u Trnjanima i Kobašu*), 2222 Pov./1936, 12.10.1936; J. Jagodar, E. Berbić Kolar, *Kultura pamćenja Slavonskoga Kobaša u povijesno-jezičnom kontekstu*, Osijek 2020, p. 154.

til the creation of the Banate of Croatia.⁵⁷ Shortly after winning the municipalities, the opposition organised the Association of Administrative Municipalities within the framework of the *Gospodarska sloga* (Economic Concord), through which the HSS coordinated the work of the new prefects and municipal administrations, creating an almost parallel government structure in Croatian areas.⁵⁸ Despite different pressures and limitations imposed by higher authorities, it should be highlighted that after the 1936 municipal elections, the political will of the majority of the population was expressed for the first time at the lowest levels of administration. Only after the municipal elections of 1936 can one talk about the real return of self-administration to the municipalities, even though the state authorities in the following period tried in every way to make it difficult for the opposition to operate in the municipalities.

In the cities, despite the collapse of the dictatorial regime, the old model of appointing city administrations continued to function and the elections were only occasionally mentioned in the opposition press.⁵⁹ After the assembly elections in 1935, the opposition continued to build its parallel organisations in charge of education (*Seljačka sloga*) and the economy (*Gospodarska sloga*). Especially important for the cities was the reactivation of the Croatian Workers' Alliance (HRS) as a labour union organisation through which the HSS tried to bind workers to itself as an important element in the cities. Despite not having formal positions within the city government, in 1936, the Brod HSS members successfully forced the city administration to make certain concessions related to city taxes through informal pressure by their mass organisations, thus showing their real political power.⁶⁰

A new important defining moment in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia's history were the assembly elections held in December 1938. The opposition went into the elections again led by Dr Vlatko Maček, and, despite the regime's various intrigues and pressures on the state-dependent officials, won a tremendous number of votes.⁶¹ The opposition's supremacy was particularly visible in Croatian areas, where it received the support of over 90% of the voters in many districts. Despite this, due to the old electoral law, the regime won the majority of parliamentary mandates in Croatian territory as well. In the Brod district, the opposition candidate Dr Markotić achieved almost plebiscite support and was elected as a member of the assembly.⁶²

⁵⁷ S. Leček, op. cit., p. 1009–1022.

⁵⁸ I. Šute, *Slogom slobodi — Gospodarska sloga 1935.–1941.*, Zagreb 2010, p. 315–325.

⁵⁹ *Interes za gradske izbore u Slav. Brodu*, "Istina", 16.1.1937, p. 4; *Gradski izbori — ili priča o ranju i zecu u šumi*, "Istina", 30.1.1937, p. 2.

⁶⁰ *Seljaci su odlučili da ne dolaze na brod. tržište*, "Istina", 7.3.1936, p. 2; *Gospodarska SLOGA i sniženje gradskih dadžbina*, "Istina", 14.3.1936, p. 3–4; I. Šute, op. cit., p. 203–204.

⁶¹ S. Ramet, op. cit., p. 150–152; D. Djokić, *Elusive Compromise — A History of Interwar Yugoslavia*, New York 2007, p. 186–188; H. Matković, op. cit., p. 386–388.

⁶² T. Jančiković, *Hrvati u izborima 1938*. Zagreb 1939, p. 35.

Immediately after the assembly elections in the city and the Brod district, an increase in tension between the state authorities and opposition was observed. In the city itself, the HSS's leadership increasingly demanded the city administration's dismissal, as it was already clear that the administration did not represent the will of the majority of the citizenry, which the assembly elections once again confirmed. At the beginning of 1939 there was a strike at the Wagon and Bridge Factory, the largest factory in the city, which was led by the HSS's labour union.⁶³ It is interesting that, in addition to the classic workers' demands related to material rights, there was also a demand for restitution due to the policy of dismissing workers and the removal of prominent regime loyalists from factory management. At the end of March, the strike turned into a general strike when around 1,300 workers joined. Through a network of its organisations, the HSS established a kitchen for feeding the striking workers, and the most prominent representatives of the HRS, the HSS's labour union, arrived in Brod from Zagreb.⁶⁴ On the following day, 30 March, the entire city council, headed by Mayor Kovačić, resigned. The text of the resignation, which is presented here, was read at the plenary session of the city council by Deputy Mayor Dr Antun Pandak:

The city council has tried to lead the city municipality as well as possible in the interests of the citizens and the state. However, since it believes that its work must be based on the understanding of the citizens themselves, the residents of the municipality, in order to allow current understanding to come to the fore in the city council, the city council together with the city mayor [...] hereby submits a collective resignation on the duty of all its members and asks for their dismissal.⁶⁵

The opposition managed to use its influence to force the city administration to resign, but the resignation was not accepted by the Ministry, thus Kovačić continued to govern the city until the summer of the same year. It is hard not to notice the change in the rhetoric of the mayor and the city councillors, who justified their resignation with the need for the city leadership to rely on the understanding of the citizens themselves. The fact they were all appointed in the autumn of 1935 despite the clearly expressed oppositional alignment of the absolute majority of citizens did not bother them then.

THE PERIOD OF THE BANATE OF CROATIA (1939–1941)

The assembly elections held in December 1938 showed that Milan Stojadinović's regime had less support than expected. Shortly after the elections, Prince Pavle removed Stojadinović from the post of prime minister with a skilful manoeuvre. Due to his ties to Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, he became a threat to Pavle himself. Dragiša Cvetković, a minister until then, was appointed as the new prime minister in

⁶³ *Radnički pokret u Tvornici vagona*, "Posavska Hrvatska", 18.3.1939, p. 3.

⁶⁴ S. Leček, *Slavonski Brod i uspostava Banovine Hrvatske 1939.*, Slavonski Brod 2005, p. 231–234.

⁶⁵ *Ostavka gradskog zastupstva*, "Posavska Hrvatska", 1.4.1939, p. 4.

February 1939, and tasked by Prince Pavle, as a Crown representative, to come to an agreement with the Croatian opposition and resolve the “Croatian question”. After several rounds of negotiations, often interrupted due to disagreements, an agreement was finally reached at the end of August 1939 between Prime Minister Cvetković and Croatian opposition leader Maček. The agreement known as “Cvetković–Maček” created a coalition government in which Maček assumed the position of vice-president, and four more Croatian ministers joined the state government. In addition, the fundamental demands of the Croatian opposition were fulfilled, the Banate of Croatia was established as an autonomous region within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which to the greatest extent included the area inhabited by the Croatian population.⁶⁶ Brod and the district of Brod became part of the new province.

Immediately after the Banate of Croatia’s creation, the new government accepted the city administration’s resignation submitted in January and Ivan Mahin, a senior retired administrative official, was appointed as a temporary commissioner. A novelty compared to the earlier periods of appointed commissioners was the creation of an advisory board that was supposed to help the commissioner in his work, but also to control him. Prominent representatives of Brod’s HSS were appointed to the advisory board, including Dr Markotić. The new commissioner soon held a meeting with the representatives of the city’s most important vocational associations, which were invited to participate in the co-creation of city policy now “when the opportunities for democratisation of the administration have been acquired.”⁶⁷ Problems quickly arose because a commissioner, who was not from Brod, in the local HSS members’ opinion, began to rely too much on some compromised city officials, notorious since the time of the dictatorship. Some of the members of the advisory board therefore resigned, upon which the Banate authorities dismissed commissioner Mahin in early 1940 and in his place appointed Franjo Marinić, a bank official and secretary of the HSS city organisation.⁶⁸

Despite announcements about democratisation and certain steps taken in that direction, the new Banate authorities decided not to call elections. This is partly understandable, because by time World War II had begun in Europe, and Yugoslavia itself had already started to carry out partial mobilisation and switch to a war economy. In May 1940, on the basis of the Law on City Municipalities in force at the time, the Banate authorities appointed a new city administration headed by the former commissioner Marinić. In addition to Marinić, 24 city councillors were appointed. Representatives of the most important vocational associations in the city, as well as national minority representatives, were appointed to the new city council. The em-

⁶⁶ Lj. Boban, *Sporazum Cvetković–Maček*, Beograd 1965; K. Regan, *Sporazum ili nesporazum? Srpsko pitanje u Banovini Hrvatskoj (1939.–1941.)*, Zagreb 2019, p. 39–43; S. Ramet, op. cit., p. 149–155; D. Djokić, op. cit., p. 188–196.

⁶⁷ S. Leček, op. cit., p. 241.

⁶⁸ HR-HDA-157, BH OUP, box 60, doc. 2501 (*Izvjješće Kotarskog predstojnika o izmjeni povjerenika*), Pov.broj 70/1940, 12.01.1940.

phasis was nevertheless placed on workers, as the largest part of the population was made up of workers and clerks, so several prominent representatives of the HSS's labour union were appointed to the council.⁶⁹ The newly appointed city administration largely aligned with the political will of the citizens expressed in the assembly elections in December 1938, but this will still could not be expressed in free elections. In addition, the composition of the city council was influenced by the intra-party conflict within the local HSS branch taking place at the end of 1939 and the beginning of 1940. In this conflict, Markotić was removed from all party positions, so it is no wonder he was not appointed to the city council.⁷⁰

Regular elections for rural municipalities were held in May 1940. Through its organisations, the HSS continued to propagate the need for depoliticisation and focusing on communal issues, which is why they were not given much publicity in the party press.⁷¹ In the invitation that the president of the HSS, Dr Maček, sent to his supporters through the press, it was stated that:

This election has no political significance. We did not attach any political meaning to the last municipal elections [held in the autumn of 1936, author's comment], and especially not today, when the participation of the municipality as such in the political struggle is not in the least necessary.⁷²

There was no classic opposition to the HSS in the Brod district, but the period before the elections itself was marked by internal party conflicts, which at the beginning of 1940 resulted in the dissolution of the city and district party organisation and the election of a new leadership. Of course, this was also reflected at the municipal level, so that in some municipalities the left-oriented or right-oriented factions produced their own lists, but the centrist mainstream achieved an overwhelming victory in the elections.⁷³

CONCLUSION

In this case study, the focus was on issues related to the election of the leadership of city and rural municipalities in the period of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. City and rural municipalities represented the lowest administrative units, and the situation in them differed greatly during the observed period.

⁶⁹ HR-HDA-157-Banovina Hrvatska, Odjel za unutarnje poslove, box 60 (*Banska uprava Banovine Hrvatske — Postavljenje*), no. 44.501.-I-2-1940, 24.4.1940.

⁷⁰ S. Leček, *Brodski odvjetnik Filip Markotić — „desni“ haesesovac?*, Slavonski Brod 2006, p. 417–420.

⁷¹ S. Grgić, T. Kardum, *Općinski izbori u Banovini Hrvatskoj*, Zagreb 2021, p. 109–121.

⁷² *Poruka predsjednika dr. Mačeka*, “Brodsko riječ”, 11.5.1940, p. 1.

⁷³ HR-HDA-157, *Banovina Hrvatska, Odjel unutarnjih poslova*, vol. 2, (*Podaci općinskih izbora 1940*); *Rezultati općinskih izbora u našem srezu*, “Brodsko riječ”, 25.5.1940, p. 2.

In that period, four mayors and city administrations changed in the city of Brod, all being formally appointed by higher authorities. The city administration appointed immediately after the declaration of the dictatorship had almost no contact with the real will of the citizens of Brod. Despite the fact that the Law on City Municipalities adopted in 1934 provided for elections for city councils, the state authorities refused to conduct the elections until the state's disintegration. The 1935 assembly elections, with all their shortcomings, showed that the city administration led by the regime party had no legitimacy. The new city administration appointed in the autumn of the same year was also appointed despite the fact it represented a political concept that was defeated in the said elections. Only the last city administration, appointed in the spring of 1940 during the period of Banate of Croatia, can we undoubtedly say represented the political will of the majority of citizens, because such will was expressed in the 1938 assembly elections. This does not change the fact that this will could not be expressed in free local elections. On the contrary, the administration, like the previous ones, was appointed by higher authorities.

In rural municipalities, the situation was somewhat different. Thus, the period from 1929 to 1933 represented a period of municipal administrations directly appointed by the regime, and the will of the citizens played almost no role. With the adoption of the Law on Municipalities and the election announcement in 1933, self-government was nominally restored to rural municipalities, but the new mayors were primarily the choice of the regime, as they had to formally commit to cooperation with the regime party. Only from 1936 and the municipal elections in which the opposition participated can we talk about the return of real self-government to the municipalities. The leaderships of rural municipalities elected in those elections, as well as in the municipal elections of 1940, represented the real will of the majority of the inhabitants.

Offering an answer to the question in the title of this paper, we can say that the city administrations throughout this time were primarily the "choices of the regime", while the administrations in rural municipalities were the "choices of the regime" until 1936, and the "choices of the citizens" from 1936 to 1941.

REFERENCES

- Axboe Nielsen C., *Making Yugoslavs — Identity in King Aleksandar's Yugoslavia*, Toronto–Buffalo–London 2014.
- Balkovec B., *Izborno zakonodavstvo prve jugoslavenske države (1918.–1941.)*, "Časopis za suvremenu povijest" 2010, no. 1, p. 197–216.
- Biondich M., *Stjepan Radić, the Croatian Peasant Party, and the Politics of Mass Mobilization, 1904–1928*, Toronto–Buffalo–London 2000.
- Boban Lj., *Sporazum Cvetković–Maček*, Beograd 1965.
- Cipek T., *Nacija, diktature, Europa*, Zagreb 2015.
- Djokić D., *Elusive Compromise — A History of Interwar Yugoslavia*, New York 2007.
- Dobrovojević I., *Državna represija u doba diktature kralja Aleksandra 1929–1935*, Beograd 2006.

- Dragnich A.N., *The First Yugoslavia — Search for Viable Political System*, Stanford 1983.
- Grgić S., *Između režimske ideologije i potreba građana: Savska banovina 1929–1939*, Zagreb 2020.
- Grgić S., *Općinske uprave u vrijeme šestosiječanjske diktature*, “Časopis za suvremenu povijest” 2013, no. 1, p. 89–117.
- Grgić S., Kardum T., *Općinski izbori u Banovini Hrvatskoj*, “Historijski zbornik” 2021, no. 1, p. 105–135.
- Hrvatska. Hrvatski državni arhiv, 144.
- Jagodar J., Berbić Kolar E., *Kultura pamćenja Slavenskoga Kobaša u povijesno-jezičnom kontekstu*, Osijek 2020.
- Jančiković T., *Hrvati u izborima 1938*. Zagreb 1939.
- Jareb M., *Pregled političkih zbivanja 1918–1945* [in:] *Prijelomna vremena — Hrvatske zemlje nakon 1918.*, ed. Suzana Leček, Zagreb 2022, p. 23–46.
- Jović D., *Politički odnosi u Slavenskom Brodu srpanj 1925. – srpanj 1927.*, “Scrinia Slavonica” 2001, no. 1, p. 254–279.
- Leček S., *Borba Hrvatske seljačke stranke za općinsku samoupravu 1936.–1939.*, “Časopis za suvremenu povijest” 2008, no. 3, p. 999–1032.
- Leček S., *Brodski odvjetnik Filip Markotić — „desni“ haesesovac?*, “Scrinia Slavonica” 2006, no. 1, p. 402–447.
- Leček S., *Izbor ili imenovanje — problem gradske (samo)uprave u Slavenskom Brodu 1918.–1941.*, “Časopis za suvremenu povijest” 2013, no. 1, p. 9–33.
- Leček S., *Selo i politika. Politizacija hrvatskog seljaštva 1918–1941* [in:] *Hrvatska politika u XX. stoljeću*, ed. Lj. Antić, Zagreb 2006, p. 119–143.
- Leček S., *Slavonski Brod i uspostava Banovine Hrvatske 1939.*, “Scrinia Slavonica” 2005, no. 1, p. 229–253.
- Matković H., *Povijest Hrvatske seljačke stranke*, Zagreb 1999.
- Matković H., *Svetozar Pribičević i Samostalna demokratska stranka do šestojanuarske diktature*, Zagreb 1972.
- Milec I., *Organiziranje i djelovanje Jugoslavenske radikalne seljačke demokracije u gradu i kotaru Brod na Savi do općinskih izbora 1933.*, “Scrinia Slavonica” 2018, no. 1, p. 333–372.
- Milec I., *Politika i općinske (samo)uprave u razdoblju Šestosiječanjske diktature — primjer kotara Brod na Savi* [in:] *Prilozi za povijest Broda i okolice*, ed. Dinko Župan, vol. 4, Slavonski Brod 2019, p. 71–102.
- Milušić A., *Izbori za Gradsko zastupstvo i Ustavotvornu skupštinu 1920. godine u Slavenskom Brodu*, “Zbornik Historijskog instituta Slavonije i Baranje” 1965, no. 1, p. 243–299.
- Ramet S.P., *Tri Jugoslavije — Izgradnja države i izazov legitimacije 1918.–2005.*, Zagreb 2009.
- Regan K., *Sporazum ili nesporazum? Srpsko pitanje u Banovini Hrvatskoj (1939.–1941.)*, Zagreb 2019.
- Rubić I., *Slavonski i Bosanski Brod — Studija o ekonomsko-geografskoj strukturi grada i okoline*, Slavonski Brod 1953.
- Šute I., *Slogom slobodi — Gospodarska sloga 1935.–1941.*, Zagreb 2010.