

THE USTAŠA MOVEMENT AND EUROPEAN POLITICS, 1929-1945

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Ever since its creation in 1918 Yugoslavia has been beset by serious national problems, which often threatened its survival. From the beginning the most serious disputes concerned the Serb-Croat relationship. Separatist tendencies among Croats were rooted in a peculiar strain of their political tradition, based on the notion of Croatia's 'Rights of State' and on an insistence on the allegedly insurmountable differences between them and the Serbs.

Such tendencies found their most extreme manifestation in the Ustaša ('Insurgent') movement, founded by lawyer and politician Ante Pavelić (1889-1959). Its history began with Pavelić's exile in 1929, and ended - to all intents and purposes - with the collapse of the Axis-sponsored 'Independent State of Croatia' (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, NDH) in May 1945.

Besides tracing the origins of the Ustaša movement, both in the body-politic of Croatia and in the events surrounding the establishment and early years of the Yugoslav state, this thesis seeks to place that movement in the European political context of its time (particularly with reference to the 'native Fascisms' of Central-Eastern Europe in the 1930s), and to Pavelić's contacts with Italy and other foreign factors.

The complex and ambivalent relationship between Rome and Berlin is the key to understanding their curious condominium established in Croatia after the collapse of Yugoslavia in April 1941. At the same time, anti-Serb genocidal zeal of the Ustašas had the effect of fanning insurgency all over the country. It also contributed to the progressive alienation from Pavelić of the Italians and (to a lesser extent) the Germans. The Ustašas' chief contribution to the European political and military scene in the early 1940s was, ironically, to disrupt the cause of the Axis by pursuing a course detrimental to any lasting consolidation of their country. However, there was also a constant strain in Hitler's Balkan policy which sought to prevent any such consolidation.

External relations of the NDH are also examined, asking whether Pavelić could be regarded as an autonomous actor in terms of foreign policy analysis. Only brief attention is paid to the last twenty months of the war: by that time Pavelić was reduced to a mere satellite, irrevocably tied to the doomed Nazi bandwagon. Accordingly, his movement's impact on 'European politics' was totally marginal after September 1943.

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I - HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND ORIGINS OF THE USTAŠA MOVEMENT

1. Illyrism and Rights of State

It is not easy to determine a point of departure in discussing the phenomenon of Croat separatism, and the embodiment of its extreme form, the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, NDH). Should we start with the Germans' entry into Zagreb on 10 April 1941? Or twelve years earlier, when Ante Pavelić went into self-imposed exile and founded the Ustaša movement? Then again, it may seem necessary to go back another decade, to the events surrounding the creation of the Yugoslav state; or even better, to the second half of the nineteenth century and the development of two distinct schools of political thought in Croatia, one embodied in Bishop Strossmayer, another in Ante Starčević. And it could be argued, perhaps, that the events of 1941- 1945 cannot be properly understood without some reference to the entire history of Croatia from, say, 1102 onwards.

That was the year when the Croatian realm reluctantly entered a *personal* union with the crown of Hungary, thus ending its independent existence over the previous three centuries. That was also the year to which the cult of Croatia's continuity of statehood was subsequently backdated. This continuity was reiterated in 1527, when the crown of Croatia was offered to the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand, following the defeat of the Hungarians at Mohacs: the representatives of Croatia's clergy and nobility emphasized that they were coming to their new sovereign of their own free will.(1)

Although the successive Austrian monarchs duly proceeded to curtail Croatia's self-rule and disintegrate the land from within, the legal entity of "Croatia" had never ceased under the Habsburgs. At one level, the notion of continued statehood acted as a myth; and myths have a great potency in helping create a nation's consciousness (Kosovo being one in the case of the Serbs).

But the notion of "Croatia's rights" - meaning "rights of state" - also remained a potent factor of current political life well beyond the period of Croatia's national awakening. The fact that the King of Hungary was separately crowned as King of Croatia in 1102, that the Diet (Sabor) and internal judiciary, religious and administrative autonomy were preserved, must have been considered very important some nine hundred years ago. Five or six centuries later it made little difference to the daily life of a peripheral province of the Monarchy. Nevertheless, the vague, yet resilient notion of Croatia's "rights" (pravice) remained carved into the Croats' collective subconscious.

During the period of national awakening in the 19th century, two different strands of political thought and self-perception were eventually articulated in Croatia. Its political and cultural integrity was threatened at that time by the centralistic tendencies of the Hungarians. Even after Hungary became part of the Habsburg Monarchy, its political class continued to regard Croatia as a land subject to the Hungarian Crown of St Stephen. With the rise of nationalism, the idea of a unitary national state from the Carpathians to the Adriatic became the leit-motif in Hungarian politics.

The increasingly aggressive Hungarian nationalism fostered the rise of the "Illyrian" idea in Croatia - a misnomer for the ideal of wider South Slav unity, based on common background and language. The Catholic Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer, the most prominent champion of this idea, entertained a notion that the Serbs and the Croats should be drawn together. But in order to do so, Strossmayer thought, they would have to develop their nationalisms first, separately of each other. It was only by truly understanding their roots (and, incidentally, by truly understanding their Catholicism and Orthodoxy) that they would understand how close they were to one another.

From its inception, this brand of Yugoslavism - native to Croatia - has had a defensive character. It was born out of the perception of a segment of Croatia's elite that their "Croatness" needed the broader South Slav context in order to assert itself, and thus to withstand the onslaught of stronger, more dynamic nationalisms to the north and west.

The historicist notion of Croatia's "rights" and its uninterrupted statehood inspired a very different ideology articulated by Ante Starčević in the 1860s and 1870s. His was a liberal, yet fiercely chauvinistic set of views, partly (and belatedly) influenced by the French Revolution, partly by the Italian Risorgimento. His "liberalism" was also Romantic, as in Germany, Italy, or indeed Hungary. Starčević's Party of Rights, as it was called, may be connected in a direct line of development with the Ustaša movement. The original ideology underwent considerable change along the way, shedding its liberal element, and the end-product was a distortion of the original. The two salient features, which remained, were an obsession with statehood, and an extreme antagonism - which turned into an obsession - towards the Serbs.

The Serbs in Croatia had settled along the old military frontier of the Habsburg Monarchy, along the western borders of the Ottoman Empire, after the fall of Bosnia and Serbia to the Turks. Some Croat historians have denied that many of those Eastern Orthodox warriors and herdsmen were really of the Serb stock, and Starčević seriously argued that the Serbs did not really exist at all, that they were a geographic term but not a people. (2) The point would have remained academic had it not also acquired far-reaching political significance.

The Serbs in Croatia were settled into largely depopulated areas, poor and devastated by constant Turkish intrusions. They were rewarded for their military services to the Emperor by being relieved of all tribute to the Croat nobility as far back as 1630. They had never been serfs, and lacked the reverence for neo-feudal institutions and social structure, deeply implanted into their Croat neighbours' psyche. From the time of their arrival, the Serbs in Croatia were subjected to the jurisdiction of the imperial Austrian military authorities and of their own, Orthodox church.(3) Even though there had been some (mainly before ^{the} mid-19th century) who had regarded themselves as Orthodox Croats, by the time of the Ausgleich in 1867 most of them could not identify with the Croat cause of resisting Magyar domination. On the contrary, they were willing to accept continued guarantees of their special status from the Hungarians. In this they were strongly encouraged by Budapest.*

This provoked an antagonism between the two communities, greatly fanned by Starčević - whose pronouncements in any event could not have given the Serbs any other option but to strive for national self-preservation. Starčević's successors turned anti-Serbism into a central tenet of their ideology, a determining feature of their very Croatness. This was most notably the case with the Party of Pure Right. Its virulent, Serbophobic brand of chauvinism was nurtured by its founder, Josip Frank - a Jewish immigrant from Hungary whose mother tongue was German. Unlike Starčević, Frank was an Austrophile and tied his brand of Croat ultra-chauvinism to the black-and-yellow Habsburg loyalist mast. His "Pure Party of Rights" was an instigator of the persecution of Serbs in Croatia before 1914; and "Frankists" (Frankovci) came to denote extreme chauvinists, typified by the lower-middle-class shopkeepers of Vlaška street.

* There was another political grouping in Croatia even more willing to support the Hungarian designs at that time. Most of Croatia's nobility, large landowners and bureaucrats supported the Unionist Party, which sponsored the idea of Croatian-Hungarian unity as a means of common defence against Vienna. A century earlier the nobility saw in an alliance with Buda the guarantee of the maintenance of its privileges, and of the political and social status quo.

In the two decades before the Great War the salient feature of Croat politics was the predominance of the proto-Yugoslav idea. Except for Frank and his "Pure Rightists", the notion of national unity between the Serbs and the Croats was accepted by all (the National Party, the old Unionists; the Independent National Party, the Strossmayerists; the rump of the old Party of Rights, soon to join the Independents into the Croat Party of Rights; the Croat People's Peasant Party, etc). The prevailing notion was "proto-Yugoslav" since most political groupings still advocated an autonomous Croatia under the Habsburgs, rather than a separate, unitary state in which ALL Serbs and Croats would join.* Even the Croat-Serb Coalition, the leading political force in Croatia in the years before and during the Great War, did not go beyond the demand for the unification of "Croatia-proper" with Dalmatia in its programme. It certainly did not call itself a "Yugoslav" or "South Slav Coalition".

Admittedly, the Coalition could have hardly done otherwise, since it would have meant advocating at best a change in the constitutional structure of the Monarchy, if not its outright disintegration; but to both sides - and to Croats in particular - it was important to retain a separate identity.

Croatia's political spectrum, dynamic and diverse as it seemed, was limited to a very small social base. The urban intelligentsia, lawyers, civil servants, possibly some wealthier merchants and prosperous farmers, could vote under the system of limited franchise. Politically as well as socially, the vast majority of Croatia's population - its peasantry - did not participate in the political life.

* "Croat" and "Serb" relate to the nation; "Croatian" and "Serbian" relate to those lands and to their Croat and Serb inhabitants.

Exclusion from politics, archaic social structure and institutions ensured that the views of Croatia's peasants on the subject of common ethnicity with other South Slavs were not known at the time. Contemporaries, nevertheless, made many assumptions. Yugoslav intellectuals, regardless of their nationality, are prone to an elitist streak which is especially apparent in Croatia. In 1918 (no less than today) they were not too interested in what "the people" thought. They tended to express what in their opinion the people ought to think.(4) When external military-political developments suddenly presented the unification of most South Slavs as an immediate prospect, the decision-makers in Croatia could rely only on a narrow social base and could legitimately claim but a limited mandate. The political maturing of Croatia's peasantry and the final development of Croatian national consciousness took place only after 1918, in a unified Yugoslavia.

In Serbia too, the peasantry constituted by far the largest social stratum. Its role and status was different, however. The Serbian peasant fought for and won independence in bloody battles against the Turks. He fought under accepted leaders, whose autocratic tendencies were stubbornly resisted in subsequent decades. He tended to distrust authority and titles, inherited privilege and priestly sermons. By the end of the 19th century Serbian politicians were accountable to an electorate of all adult males, and Serbian kings were titled "by the grace of God and the will of the people". The country was relatively homogeneous, ethnically and socially. After 1903 it had a firmly established constitutional monarchy. National dynamism was chiefly directed at liberating all Serbs from foreign rule. The wider South Slav issue was perceived as an extension of that task. The Serbians did not need a wider context (Illyrianism) to protect and assert their identity. Even less did they need historicist notions and external hate-objects to define that identity (Pravaštvo). The traditions of Serbia and Croatia were based on two different sets of values, two distinct philosophies and experiences.

2. The Creation of Yugoslavia

The European powers went to war in 1914 for deeper reasons of their own, but the direct cause was the crisis between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, resulting from the murder of Archduke Francis Ferdinand by a young Serb in Sarajevo. Regardless of whether Serbia's dynamism had for its objective the unification of all Serbs or the "liberation of all South Slav brothers", the Monarchy perceived it as a threat and sought to neutralize it at source. With a blank cheque from Berlin it decided to attack Serbia, and by doing so it activated the system of European alliances which duly ignited the continent.

The Entente in the First World War did not envisage the creation of Yugoslavia. Until the very end, there was no intention to dismember the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy. Secret treaties (with Italy 1915, or with Romania 1916) certainly provided for the Monarchy's reduction in size, but the British prime minister, Lloyd George, said as late as January 1918 that the Allies did not intend to break it up. Even President Wilson's Fourteen Points envisaged autonomy for the Monarchy's nationalities, rather than sovereignty outside its framework. (5)

Serbia's war aims provided for two solutions, a "big" one and a "small" one. The "big" solution implied the "liberation and unification of all our brothers Serbs, Croats and Slovenes", as was officially stated in Niš in December 1914. The proclamation was made in the heady days after Serbia's initial victories over Austria-Hungary. The "small" solution, as a fall-back position, would simply aim to create a greater Serbia by adding predominantly Serb populated areas of the Monarchy (above all Bosnia) to the Kingdom.

In 1915 a "Yugoslav Committee" came into being in London, composed of Croat, Serb and Slovene political émigrés from Austria-Hungary who made their way to Western Europe when the war broke out. It was supported mainly by contributions from South Slavs in North America and aided by some influential British and French sympathisers. It propagated the idea of dismemberment of the Dual Monarchy and the emancipation of all South Slavs from it. Its emergence was in large part due to the news that the Treaty of London promised large territorial gains on the eastern Adriatic coast to Italy. This infused new energy into the Yugoslav movement, and provided a focus of activity.*

The members of the Committee did not represent political parties or, indeed, any other organisations, but they soon began claiming to represent all South Slavs in Austria-Hungary. The credibility of the Committee in the West was undermined by this claim, since until at least the death of Francis Joseph (1916) most South Slavs in the Monarchy appeared to be doing their duty for the Emperor-King (including many Serbs from the old Military Frontier, whose tradition of loyal service to the trans-national Crown was still in evidence).

The Committee established contact with the Serbian government, which went into exile to the Greek island of Corfu after the fall of Serbia in the winter of 1915-1916. However, the two sides did little to coordinate their efforts, and their relations were often strained. The Serbian prime minister, Nikola Pašić, was thought to be increasingly inclined to settle for the "small" solution as the war went on, in contrast to Prince Regent Alexander (to whom the royal prerogative had been transferred in 1914). The ensuing negotiations between the Committee and the Pašić government resulted in the signing of a declaration in 1917, which proposed the creation of a unitary state headed by the Serbian ruling house. It was to be called the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. (6)

* The Adriatic preoccupation was reflected in the Committee's composition. Initially it consisted of twelve Croats (eight of them from Dalmatia), three Serbs and a Slovene.

The decision of the Serbian government to sign the Declaration and to present it to the Allies as its official programme, even though it could have had the "greater Serbia" on a plate, prompted Ante Trumbić, the president of the Yugoslav Committee, to pay a handsome tribute to Serbia:

"As a state she has made the greatest sacrifice for the union of our three-named people. She announces that she is ready to sacrifice her state individuality in order that one common state of all Serbs, Croats and Slovenes be created. With that she begins the greatest of her works and attains the absolute right to be called the Yugoslav Piedmont.(7)

Before long, parallel with the tendency of some Committee members to seek decision-making powers in the Serbian cabinet and their increasingly vocal advocacy of some form of federalism, Pašić appeared to be having second thoughts. He seemed to speak of the Corfu Declaration merely as a declaration of intent, in contrast to the Committee, which treated it as a firm commitment. The rift between Pašić and the Yugoslav Committee (supported by the Serbian opposition) was an early indicator of the shape of things to come.

Things were complicated by the fact that both Britain and France preferred the "small" solution, which would result in a vastly enlarged Serbia united with Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and given an outlet to the Adriatic. This solution could be accommodated with the secret Treaty of London, which promised Dalmatia and other parts of the predominantly Slav-inhabited northern Adriatic coastline to Italy. Such a solution would have left Croatia squeezed between two enlarged, victorious neighbours, devoid not only of its coastline (promised to Italy) but also of friends and future.

In the final year of the war, with the deteriorating internal situation in Austria-Hungary, the openly Yugoslav sentiment was gaining strength in its South Slav-inhabited lands. The May (1917) Declaration of South Slav deputies in Vienna reflected the trend. In early 1918 their political representatives started considering the creation of a grouping of all forces aimed at the establishment of a "democratically-based state of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs". The new wave, coupled with the fear of Italy's aspirations if the collapse of the Monarchy caught them alone, induced even those Croat politicians of the nationalist frame of mind to join the apparently unstoppable bandwagon: the "Yugoslav" solution was perceived by them as a means of preserving and protecting Croat interests. As the Monarchy started crumbling in the autumn of 1918, the Croat-Serb Coalition was the driving force behind the establishment in Zagreb of the National Council which proclaimed the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs. The vote in the Sabor to sever all links with Hungary and Austria (29 October 1918) came amidst general euphoria, and even those diehard Schwarz-Gelbers, the Frankists, voted for the emergency resolution tabled by the leader of Croatia's Serbs, Svetozar Pribičević.(8)

The events of the ensuing five weeks form the basis of the Ustašas' later argument against Yugoslavia:

- that it was created "illegally";
- that the Croat people were not consulted; and
- that the continuity of Croatia's statehood was interrupted.

Strictly speaking, those allegations were not without foundation. They were the result of unique circumstances: with events threatening to overtake their efforts to negotiate unification terms with the Serbian Government, the Zagreb Council had its scope for action severely limited.

The new "state" of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs was effectively reduced to the old territory of Croatia-Slavonia plus Slovenia (Bosnia-Herzegovina and Vojvodina soon declared unconditional union with Serbia). Italy proceeded to take possession of Dalmatia, and its units even took positions beyond the Treaty of London lines. From the city of Split appeals were sent to Zagreb to request the speedy action of the Serbian army to protect the Croat people. There were signs of turmoil at home too: military deserters (zeleni kader) and dissatisfied peasants, hungry cities and collapsing currency created a situation which had the makings of a revolution. In the general turmoil, the National Council started taking ad hoc decisions without reference to the Sabor. It acted, strictly speaking, not as a constitutional, but as a revolutionary body. As its delegates were despatched to Belgrade to offer unification, there was no time or will to observe legal niceties and sign a new Facta Conventa in the best tradition of Croatia's "State Rights". The new state might have had a happier start in life if things had not been rushed, but at the time of confusion and fear Croatia's political leaders could see no alternative to an urgent union with Serbia.

The sole dissenting voice was that of Stjepan Radić, the leader of the small Croatian People's Peasant Party. Radić expressed opposition to monarchy and warned the delegates (prior to their departure for Belgrade) that they had no mandate for what they were about to do, adding: "You are roaming like geese in the fog".(9) Prophetically, he warned that the test of what was being done would come at the first elections. Radić remained totally isolated, however, and even rebuked by other Council members for "rabble rousing". The delegates from Zagreb duly informed Regent Alexander of the National Council's decision in favour of the union. Their only requests concerned the transition period leading to the elections for a constituent assembly. On 1 December 1918 the Regent accepted the offer and proclaimed the establishment of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

The collapse of Austria-Hungary, which came as a consequence of the war, suddenly presented the South Slavs with their unification as a fact of practical politics which did not allow any delay. All concerned were forced to improvise, which created a problematic legacy for the new state's internal development, just as its territorial disputes created a potential for conflict with its revisionist neighbours. Neither internal solutions - embodied in the centralist Constitution of St Guy's Day (Vidovdanski ustav) - nor external settlements, embodied in the Peace of Paris, proved effective in providing stability at home and security abroad, which is the fundamental objective of every state.

Given Serbia's full century of independence, its role in the First World War, and the Serbs' superior numbers, some degree of Serb predominance in the power structure of the new state was to be expected. However, very early on the Serbian establishment was perceived by many Croats as the manipulator of the Yugoslav idea, using it as a vehicle for the achievement of its hegemony in the new state. Although there is no evidence of a grand design to seek such objectives on the Serbian side, a clumsy and heavy-handed approach was often taken when subtlety and fine tuning were required. Things were made worse by the zeal with which Pribičević, in his new role as ultra-unitarist minister of the interior, proceeded to deal with any manifestation of discontent and "anti-state activity". The Serbian establishment erred not by design, but by default. Problems of establishing a national currency, regulating economic, educational and judicial systems, solving issues of multinationality and minorities, demanded new thinking and a departure from the established prewar approaches. And yet, such old approaches prevailed in the first ten years of the new state.

3. The Croat Question

The legacy of different cultural, political and religious traditions, most obvious in the case of Serbia and Croatia, of uneven economic development and different aspirations, could not be overcome by a centralistic constitution and slogans. Such differences were at the root of the political conflict in the country, which appeared to revolve around the issue of centralism. Most Croats were interested in preserving the identity of Croatia. Some of them talked of federal solutions, but no one in Yugoslavia had a clear idea what federalism was. The experience of Austria-Hungary was not a reliable guide, since the Monarchy was a complex, not a federal, state.

The Yugoslav dilemma was really an issue of the Jacobin state versus ^{the}old Habsburg constitutional complexity of historic units. The Serbs were inclined to view the new state as a continuation of pre-1914 Serbia, and advocated centralism on the premise of national unity ("three names - one nation", "three tribes of the Yugoslav nation"). The Croats knew pacts, agreements and contracts, Ausgleich and Nagodba, the very opposite of the centralist concept. There were advocates of the integral Yugoslav idea among all ethnic groups, including Croats (especially in Dalmatia). However, already by the end of 1919 public opinion in Croatia was largely opposed to centralism. This opposition ranged from "soft", autonomist, to "hard", separatist.(10)

The forces of Croat separatism were at work as soon as the Yugoslav state was proclaimed. Only one day later, on 2 December 1918, the Frankists issued a proclamation calling for action against unification. Demonstrations broke out in Zagreb, and in the ensuing clashes with the National Council authorities several people died.

The Frankist action may have attracted greater attention, but the activities of Stjepan Radić had more significance in the long run. His was the sole dissident voice against unification in the National Council, where he advocated a "neutral peasant republic of Croatia" instead. After 1 December he continued to oppose the union and insist on Croatia's right to self-determination. In later years Radić grudgingly accepted the state, the king and the Vidovdan Constitution, while the Frankists were reduced to a fringe which rejected any Yugoslavia a priori. Until the mid-1920s, however, both parties belonged to what may be termed "Croat separatism".

Already in December 1918 Radić attempted to involve foreigners in support of his cause. He sent messages to President Wilson and other representatives of foreign states, seeking help in the creation and recognition of a Croat republic. Ironically, Radić's appeal was sent through the Italian military representative in Zagreb. (In view of the situation in Dalmatia, the Italians were only too pleased to oblige.) In subsequent years Radić appealed to, or otherwise attempted to involve, Lloyd George, the League of Nations, France, Austria, Italy and the Soviet Union. His attempts to internationalize the Croat problem - though unsuccessful - aggravated the internal situation. The Serbs were dismayed: the state had just been formed, very much on "the Croats'" insistence, and "they" were already trying to tear it apart.(11)

The bewilderment grew after the Constituent Assembly elections of November 1920, when Radić's emerged as the strongest party in Croatia and duly refused to have anything to do with the drafting of the constitution. The sense of betrayal and anger grew on the Serb side, whose chief political representatives proceeded to push through the constitutional framework which did not allow for any expression of regional and national differences.

Increasing Serb exasperation was reinforced by Radić's alignment with the Peasant International in Moscow, and culminated in his arrest for anti-state activity in 1925. The deadlock was broken by the intervention of King Alexander, who acted through intermediaries and induced Radić to make a radical turn, accept the legitimacy of the state and recognize its institutions (the Crown and Constitution), and to join Pašić's Radicals in a new coalition government. This event had a great impact on Yugoslavia's politics. (In a way, its parallel seven decades later would be the entry of the official Sinn Fein into Mrs Thatcher's government and its acceptance of the Union.)

Radić's shift was at least partly a result of his failure to attract foreign support. Furthermore, the public talk in Belgrade of an "amputation" of Croatia from the Kingdom coincided with Mussolini's rise to power in Italy. The defensive considerations in face of external danger, not for the first time, strengthened the Yugoslav cause in Croatia: when all was said and done, Radić preferred the Yugoslav solution (even a monarchist and centralist one) to a weak, small Croatia, adjacent to an expansionist Italy to the West. Although the Croat Peasant Party (Hrvatska seljačka stranka, HSS; it dropped its "Republican" prefix in 1925) followed an uneven course in subsequent years, after 1925 it was not an a priori separatist party.

This did not mean that the Croat question was solved. In fact, the Yugoslav political system was entering a period of acute crisis in the late 1920s. The coalition between Radić and Pašić collapsed after a year. Having gone into opposition, Radić entered into another unlikely alliance - this time with Pribičević, the leader of the Serbs in Croatia and a leading advocate of radical centralism in the first years after unification, but by that time in opposition both to Pašić and to King Alexander.

Virulent recriminations and scenes of mayhem in the Skupština (Parliament) were a depressingly frequent spectacle thereafter. They culminated in June 1928, when a deputy from Montenegro, Funiša Račić, shot five HSS deputies, including Radić. Two were killed on the spot, and Radić died two months later. The carnage caused shock and revolt, not only among Croats, but among all Yugoslavs who did not allow passions to blur their judgment. By the end of the year a sort of political paralysis had set in. In January 1929 King Alexander suspended the Constitution and assumed personal rule, thus effectively acknowledging the failure of a decade-long attempt to devise a workable political system within the framework of parliamentary democracy.

The institution of parliamentary democracy, well known to Serbia prior to 1914, did not provide an adequate venue to those Croat politicians whose early political grooming, under the Habsburgs, had been in the art of obstructionism. They tended to assume an "us and them" posture in all dealings with the state authority, and seek to exact concessions from "them". After 1918 the inheritance of times past became apparent in an instant, almost reflexive, treatment of Belgrade as if it were Budapest or Vienna. The decision Radić made in 1920 not to send representatives to the Constituent Assembly was an early symptom, in the new state, of that same negativist, ultimately unproductive obstructionism which exasperated even Croatia's best foreign friends (such as Seton-Watson).

The response of the Serbian establishment failed to take into account the differences and difficulties, and continued to behave as if the Croat storm would be somehow weathered all by itself, as if Radić were merely an opposition politician in pre-1914 Serbia. Both sides were hostages of responses learned in earlier times and under different circumstances. In the end, as Radić put it cryptically, shortly before he died, there were just "the King and the people".

4. International Environment

The boundaries of the new Yugoslav state, determined in Paris after a long and arduous dispute with Italy, provided it with a viable basis for existence.(12) At the same time, they did not bring longed-for stability to the Balkans region. As a "beneficiary" of Versailles, Yugoslavia eventually had to cope with an alliance of the discontents within (Croat separatist, Macedonian "autonomists") with the revanchists abroad (Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria).

It is an irony of the 20th century that the territorial settlements of 1919 eventually proved to be a major source of weakness for those who appeared to have gained most. Poland's eastern territories beyond the Curzon Line and its corridor to the sea, or Romania's doubling in size in Transylvania, Bukovina and Bessarabia, created a constant source of revanchist malevolence among the "losers", who exacted their revenge two decades later.

The newly-created South Slav state found itself in a similar position. In December 1918, of its seven neighbours only one definitely did not have any territorial claims against it.* The most acute problem concerned Italy and its aspirations on the eastern shore of the Adriatic. The Italians were unwilling to give up what had been promised to them in London in 1915 as the reward for their entry into the war on the side of the Allies: Dalmatia with ^{its} hinterland and most major Adriatic islands. To their dismay, in December 1918, the Italians found that what had been enemy territory suddenly became an "Allied" land.

* This was Greece. Although Macedonia was regarded as "Greek" by some pan-Hellenic romantics, such views were not expressed in a formal sense by the government in Athens. Romania agreed to the partition of Banat in Versailles, and Austria recognized the plebiscite results in Slovenia and Carinthia, which were in any case favourable to the Austrians. Thereafter, Yugoslavia's neighbours with irredentist claims or aspirations were Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Italy.

Subsequently, from the beginning Rome came to regard the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as a successor to Austria on the eastern Adriatic shore, as a rival and potential enemy. The peace conference of 1919 could not resolve the Adriatic question, which the great powers eventually passed on to Belgrade and Rome for direct negotiations. Although both sides made some compromises, the resulting Treaty of Rapallo (1920) can now be seen as relatively more of a success for the Italians than for the Yugoslavs. Unsettled internal conditions and French and British pressure combined to make the Belgrade government of Milenko Vesnić ready to make extensive compromises.

The rise of Mussolini was welcomed by many Italians because it seemed to offer solutions to two specific problems: the "red menace" and the "mutilated victory". Yugoslavia was seen as a leading culprit for the latter. Although both problems were blown out of proportion, the "injustice" meted out to Italy in 1919 was a potent sentiment, as was vividly illustrated by D'Annunzio's Fiume episode. This event also reminded Mussolini that if he did not play the nationalist hero, someone else would. From the outset Italy's international status was perceived as the criterion by which the Fascist experiment would stand or fall, and Mussolini freely acknowledged this.

Initially, Mussolini insisted on his friendship for Serbia as a means of securing a sympathetic audience in Belgrade. At the same time, he made a sharp distinction between Serbia and Yugoslavia.*

* He made this distinction quite openly, eg:

"I have been an admirer of Serbia and her army for a long time... During the Great War you will find in my articles so much admiration for Serbia and the heroic Serbian Army... Towards Serbia [we shall keep] always the same, friendly policy. As for Yugoslavia, our relations will be good. We shall try to clear up all that separates us, especially if Serbia takes the correct road, which history has determined. Geographically, it takes her not to the Adriatic, but to the Aegean Sea. In the history of Serbia there has been no other direction but towards Macedonia."(13)

Yugoslavia continued its policy of appeasement of Italy after Mussolini came to power, and accepted the fait accompli of Fiume in the Rome Treaties of January 1924. However, "the Serbs" were reluctant to follow the "road determined by Destiny". The Belgrade government soon learned that concessions were not likely to bring about long-term stabilization of relations with Italy. This resulted in the renewed emphasis on friendship with the traditional ally, France. When Yugoslavia subsequently initialled a treaty of friendship and cooperation with France in 1926, Mussolini was indignant and reacted with a "friendship and security" treaty with Albania (the First Tirana Pact, 27 November 1926). This touched a raw nerve in Belgrade, which regarded Albania as something of a client state and certainly a zone of prime strategic importance to Yugoslavia's security. Momčilo Ninčić, the Yugoslav foreign minister identified with the policy of friendship with Italy, had to go.

Ninčić's successor Vojislav Marinković (1927-1932) personified the new, strongly Francophile orientation. The friendship treaty with France was signed on 11 November 1927, together with a secret agreement on military cooperation. Simultaneously, attempts to reach an understanding with Italy continued. King Alexander and the foreign minister, Marinković, sought this through their confidential emissaries, but to little avail.*

* Secret emissaries of the Belgrade court were also employed later, in 1940-1941, in an attempt to reach an understanding with Mussolini (and Hitler). Since such extra-diplomatic channels do not appear to have been typical of Yugoslavia's pre-war foreign policy, there may have been a conscious attempt to immitate Mussolini's style in order to gain his confidence. He often used secret agents for diplomatic intrigues, and sometimes Italy's career diplomats were in the dark about Rome's policy on certain issues (notably Grandi, the Fascist who had "gone native" at the foreign ministry, as Mussolini's ambassador in London during the Ethiopian crisis was embarassingly ignorant of what his government was up to).

Although eager to reach an understanding, King Alexander could not accept the predominance of Italian influence in Albania.(14) As for Mussolini, when indirect negotiations clearly indicated that on this issue the Yugoslavs could not and would not give way, he finally embarked on the policy of subversion. In this he eventually came to utilize the Ustaša movement of Ante Pavelić.

The immediate reason for the deterioration in relations between Belgrade and Rome for a full decade (until 1936) was the Albanian issue. But the deeper, more permanent, reasons were in the territorial settlement of 1919. The signing of the Nettuno Conventions with Italy (1925), the swansong of Ninčić's policy, coincided with the entry of Stjepan Radić into the Belgrade cabinet. The Croats were determined opponents of the policy of friendship with Italy, which was suppressing Croat schools, churches, press and language in Istria. Mussolini was aware of the danger of the gradual ascendancy of Croat and Slovene Italophobia over "traditional Serb affection" for Italy.(15)

Radić's fiery rhetoric against the Conventions and against the entente with Italy found an echo in a press campaign in Croat lands along the same lines. Violent anti-Italian demonstrations in Croatia and Slovenia later in that year, followed by Ninčić's almost abject apologies to the Italian government, seemed to some Croats and Slovenes a further proof of the Serbs' insufficient regard for their interests. The Croats' action in the Belgrade parliament, in the press and on the streets was analogous to the role of Italian Slavophobe nationalists from Venezia Giulia in Rome.(16)

Just as Ninčić was trying to resist pressures and maintain friendship with Italy, some influential Italians (especially in the Foreign Ministry) thought that the conflict between Rome and Belgrade would inflict harm on Italian interests. One such diplomatic official was Raffaello Guariglia (later Republican Fascist foreign minister), who attributed Mussolini's Albanian policy - the chief cause of the cooling of relations - to "a mysterious spiritual process".(17) Another contemporary observer commented on the

"... coterie [of] Triestines, Istrians and Dalmatians - men of the frontier - who, blinded by their parochial hatred of the Slavs, preferred Italy to have her eastern frontier a mosaic of little states, open to German influence, instead of a country like Yugoslavia, strong enough to defend itself against Germany in collaboration with Italy".(18)

In the years prior to Hitler's emergence on the scene, Yugoslavia was forced to gravitate to France. Mussolini found himself during this period in the contradictory role of supporting and sponsoring Yugoslavia's enemies on the one hand, and remaining staunchly anti-revisionist on the other (on the issue of the Brenner frontier, Austrian independence). His Albanian policy and the apparent increase in the influence of the Julian lobby at the Italian foreign ministry from April 1926 on, marked the end of a potentially fruitful phase in Italy's foreign policy, when it could hope to expand and cement its influence in the Danubian basin. The ensuing policy of pro-revanchist restlessness

"... ran contrary to almost all of Italy's true interests and inexorably led to the Axis and a German triumph in the Balkans that could not stop short of Trieste." (19)

While relations with Italy preoccupied successive governments in Belgrade to a great extent in the first decade of the new state's life, another major foreign policy concern was the containment of revisionism and the connected issue of the prevention of a Habsburg restoration. Even before the end of the Great War, the project of drawing Balkan and Danubian nations together to secure peace and the new order had been on the agenda.(20) After 1918 it was narrowed to the three states which had most to fear from Hungarian revanchism and a Habsburg revival: Yugoslavia, Romania and Czechoslovakia. Those three countries also had some reason for concern in France's policy in the region, which in the early 1920s displayed^a certain benevolence towards Hungary and the idea of a Danubian confederation. Unsuccessful attempts by the former emperor and king Charles to return to the throne in Hungary speeded up the creation of the Little Entente, as the alliance between Belgrade, Prague and Bucharest came to be known.

The third major foreign policy concern of Belgrade in the 1920s was security in the Balkans. This aspect gained in prominence following the deterioration of relations with Italy, and some progress had been made; but the four Balkan Conferences (1930- 1933) and the "Balkan Pact" fell short of creating a firm entente in the region which would also embrace Bulgaria, as its most revisionist-minded country.

Increasing links among Central European and Balkan states caused further resentment in Rome. Italy responded by the Rome Protocols (17 March 1934) on "future coordination" of foreign policy between Italy, Austria and Hungary. Mussolini thus became more closely identified with the revisionist camp in the Danubian Basin.(21) It is probable, though, that his move was much inspired by apprehension of the newly-arrived revisionist par excellence: Hitler. From that time on, neither Yugoslavia, nor Italy, nor - indeed - any European country could omit the German factor from its foreign policy considerations.

5. Yugoslavia in Crisis

The Ustaša movement of Ante Pavelić, which came to power in Axis-occupied Croatia in 1941, was the product of two sets of circumstances in the inter-war period. One was the complex internal and international situation of Yugoslavia, the other was the rise of Fascism in Europe. The collapse of the parliamentary system in Yugoslavia (1929) coincided with the period of growing political radicalism throughout Europe and the beginning of a world-wide economic crisis which provided an impetus to extremism. Each development was the necessary condition, but neither by itself sufficient, for the rise of a separatist movement which was at the same time anti-democratic, racist and violent.

The collapse of the attempt to nurture a political consensus in Yugoslavia was marked by the shots in the Skupština and the proclamation of King Alexander's personal rule. The king did so in the name of safeguarding "national unity and the integrity of the state", and - echoing Radić - added that "there cannot and must not any longer be any intermediary between the people and the king". He thus suspended the Vidovdan Constitution, abolished political parties and dismissed the Skupština. For almost six subsequent years, Yugoslavia was run on authoritarian lines in an effort to develop from above a feeling of national unity which would transcend ethnic particularism. In the process, many civil liberties were suspended, the press (exceptionally free from control until that time) was subjected to censorship, and numerous actual or potential opponents of the régime were arrested or interned. The king's power was exercised principally through the civil service, with the army not too far in the background.

In its first two years Alexander's dictatorship resembled the absolutist regime of prince Miloš in Serbia a century earlier. It also reflected something of Europe's Zeitgeist in the stress on order, discipline, state authority and anti-Communism. It was hardly Fascist, though (contrary to the "monarcho-Fascist" label attached to it by some post-1945 Communist historians in Yugoslavia). There was no mass movement to force the king to act in 1929. The crisis was that of the political system, not of the class structure. There was no ideology to provide the basis for the dictatorship, and a return to a parliamentary system was stipulated as the final goal from the beginning. Yugoslavia's democratic allies, France and Czechoslovakia, would have been sensitive to any hint of Fascist tendencies in Alexander's design. Both Paris and Prague supported him, however, accepting that the country's unity was threatened and that the king acted in what he perceived to be the best national interest. The only "ideology" Alexander tried to develop was that of integral Yugoslavism, and not an "ism" of his personal rule per se. The dictatorship was self-avowedly temporary, and corporativism - as a salient Fascist feature at the time - was not hinted at, nor included in the new constitution of 1931. (Mussolini called it "a dictatorship of porcelain" and "a shame for all us dictators".) Externally, Yugoslavia's policy remained broadly Francophile, while relations with Italy made a sharp turn for the worse.

Initially, Maček and the HSS seemed to view the King's decision in a favourable light; after all, he had abolished the Constitution and dismissed parliament, which had been Maček's demands anyway. By mid-1929 he started having doubts, though, and sent two emissaries abroad (Radić's son-in-law, August Košutić, and the HSS general secretary, Juraj Krnjević) to seek support for the party in European capitals and the League of Nations. Not unlike similar attempts by Radić a decade earlier, these efforts ended in total failure.

Increasing HSS opposition to Alexander was invigorated by his formal change of the name of the state to "Yugoslavia" and the introduction of the administrative system of nine banovinas, which cut across traditional historic lines. All this and a renewed insistence on the concept of the "Yugoslav nation" were seen as further steps away from the form of federalism which would respect the individuality of Croatia. Even though some HSS members (including one of its vice-presidents, Karlo Kovačić) entered the cabinet of Alexander's premier, General Živković, in 1930, there was no hint of a real split within the party ranks. This was in sharp contrast to the political parties in Serbia, which - although generally antipathetic to Alexander's régime - were in a state of disarray, divided among themselves and unable to find a common language with Maček. The leader of the HSS kept aloof from them anyway. All approaches sounding him over ^{the} possible formation of a united opposition front were met with the demand that prior commitments be made about the extent of the future Croat unit in the reorganised state, and an indication of the powers of its autonomous institutions. (22)

There was a fundamental discrepancy at work between Maček and the rest of the opposition. To him, the Croat question was the alpha and omega. All links with other parties, or - indeed - with the Crown, had to be examined through that prism. Politics was but a means of achieving national objectives. On the other hand, to the fragmented Serb opposition (and to the Slovene People's Party of Mgr Korošec) the chief issue was political, rather than national. The re-establishment of democratic institutions and parliamentary life was seen as a prerequisite of any long-term reform of the state. (To confuse things further, Maček's ally Pribičević also argued that the struggle against "absolutism" was primary to any debates on future internal arrangements). To put it briefly, "the Croatian opposition was national, while the Serbian opposition was political". (23)

6. The Fascist Connection

If King Alexander's chief objective had been to enhance the unity of the state, the attempt ended in failure. It disoriented the Serbs and consolidated the Croats. To both sides' credit, though, in spite of the crisis-laden potential for extremism, the country remained relatively free of totalitarian tendencies, rampant throughout Europe at that time. The Yugoslav Communists were on the fringe, constantly ridden by factionalist squabbles and reduced to a few thousand Party members. For all their post-war myth-making, their influence in the country was marginal.

As for the other end of the totalitarian spectrum, there were two organisations which were generally branded "Fascist". One was a small political party founded by Dimitrije Ljotić (Zbor), pro-Yugoslav in programme and mainly Serb in membership. It was strongly anti-Marxist, with a stress on a Christian world outlook (an unusual feature for Serbian politics), and authoritarian. Its closest spiritual kins were not in Germany or Italy, but in France. Never stronger than a few thousand members, it was a decidedly peripheral force in the country's politics. During the war its members were to organise a militia force (never exceeding 4-5,000 men) which was active in suppressing resistance. Although represented in the German-controlled administration in Serbia, Zbor would never come close to taking and keeping power.

The Ustaša movement of Ante Pavelić was a much more full-blooded manifestation of Fascism in Yugoslavia, although it would have been difficult to give it a clear Fascist label in its early days. Its evolution, though, and in particular its final manifestations, put it firmly into the group of political phenomena in Central and Eastern Europe known as "native Fascism".

THE USTAŠA MOVEMENT AND EUROPEAN POLITICS, 1929-1945

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THE USTAŠA MOVEMENT AND EUROPEAN POLITICS, 1929-1945

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Ever since its creation in 1918 Yugoslavia has been beset by serious national problems, which often threatened its survival. From the beginning the most serious disputes concerned the Serb-Croat relationship. Separatist tendencies among Croats were rooted in a peculiar strain of their political tradition, based on the notion of Croatia's 'Rights of State' and on an insistence on the allegedly insurmountable differences between them and the Serbs.

Such tendencies found their most extreme manifestation in the Ustaša ('Insurgent') movement, founded by lawyer and politician Ante Pavelić (1889-1959). Its history began with Pavelić's exile in 1929, and ended - to all intents and purposes - with the collapse of the Axis-sponsored 'Independent State of Croatia' (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, NDH) in May 1945.

Besides tracing the origins of the Ustaša movement, both in the body-politic of Croatia and in the events surrounding the establishment and early years of the Yugoslav state, this thesis seeks to place that movement in the European political context of its time (particularly with reference to the 'native Fascisms' of Central-Eastern Europe in the 1930s), and to Pavelić's contacts with Italy and other foreign factors.

The complex and ambivalent relationship between Rome and Berlin is the key to understanding their curious condominium established in Croatia after the collapse of Yugoslavia in April 1941. At the same time, anti-Serb genocidal zeal of the Ustašas had the effect of fanning insurgency all over the country. It also contributed to the progressive alienation from Pavelić of the Italians and (to a lesser extent) the Germans. The Ustašas' chief contribution to the European political and military scene in the early 1940s was, ironically, to disrupt the cause of the Axis by pursuing a course detrimental to any lasting consolidation of their country. However, there was also a constant strain in Hitler's Balkan policy which sought to prevent any such consolidation.

External relations of the NDH are also examined, asking whether Pavelić could be regarded as an autonomous actor in terms of foreign policy analysis. Only brief attention is paid to the last twenty months of the war; by that time Pavelić was reduced to a mere satellite, irrevocably tied to the doomed Nazi bandwagon. Accordingly, his movement's impact on 'European politics' was totally marginal after September 1943.

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Among the many varieties of Fascism in Europe between the wars, a salient feature common to all was their celebration of a glorious past of a particular nation, and the promise of a correspondingly glorified future, based on its alleged particular qualities and its "divine mission". There was also the virulent opposition to Marxism, and the reliance on the dynamism of violence and direct action. Those three general features may help us avoid the difficult task of accepting any one single definition of Fascism, in order to match the Ustaša movement against it.

Fascism came into being at the time of the deepest crisis of European liberalism, when traditional political forces in many European countries were shaken by war, internal conflicts and the revolution in Russia. Fascism was born out of the Great War, and its first stormtroops consisted of the veterans who wanted to defend their aims and ideals allegedly betrayed by the "establishment" in their own countries or "mutilated" by various conspirators abroad (eg. the Fiume episode and D'Annunzio).*

The forerunners of the Ustašas were a small group of Croat officers, Habsburg loyalists, who refused to accept the creation of Yugoslavia in 1918 and went to live in Vienna or Budapest as émigrés. They could not be compared in numbers or influence to those German or Italian veterans who provided the backbone of the black or brown shirts in the early days. The group around their leader, General Sarkotić, was "bourgeois" and "reactionary" (in the literal sense of wishing for the return of ^aprevious order) rather than revolutionary; it was conservative, not radical; and neither activist nor populist. Even though this group provided the initial means of communication between Pavelić and the Italians as early as 1927, its impact was limited before and after 1941.(24)

* The class structure, psychological motivation and political role of the Arditi could be compared to the Freikorps in Germany. They shared the psychology of an elite body of men, the cult of death and sacrifice, and the tendency to develop the cult of the Leader.

The group around Sarkotić were too closely identified with the old world to be anything but part of it. Those people were too bourgeois to be Fascist. In relation to the bourgeoisie, however, Fascism was in the ambiguous position of "unidentical identity".(25) It placed itself in the forefront of the resistance to revolutionary Marxism, determined to fight it - if necessary - by means and forces alien to the bourgeois mentality and values. The assault of Italian Fascism on the most elementary rights in the 1920s was justified by the bourgeois establishment (eg. Corriere della Sera) as the only alternative to anarchy. Many middle-class Italians held that Fascism would grow tame with time and with the responsibility of government.* Many expected that there would be a world of difference between a Fascist movement and a Fascist government.

Furthermore, the Italian establishment in the 1920s (not unlike Germany in the 1930s), could live with a dictator who employed odious methods as long as he achieved certain national goals. In a similar vein, many middle-class Croats who had supported the HSS mainstream, and who claimed to find the Ustašas repulsive, would passively accept the Pavelić regime (initially at least) as a means of achieving desired outcomes without being tainted with the methods employed along the way. (Thus the HSS theme in 1943 and 1944, at home and abroad, was "the undeniable fact of the Croat state" which "had to be taken into account" in all future decisions.**)

* This paternalistic view was especially prevalent in the Foreign Ministry, still dominated by upper-class career diplomats, many of whom were aristocrats. The theory that Fascism could be made "civilised" also provided comfort to many Italian intellectuals, who had been reluctant at first to take a stand against it. While success is the worst enemy of Fascism's authenticity, it does not necessarily end in a bourgeois sort of mellowing.

** The phenomenon of "unidentical identity" is also present among the English-speaking Whites in South Africa, who profess opposition to the racial system in the country, while continuing to benefit from it. Their dilemma is "resolved" by the fact that the army, police and civil service are traditionally dominated by the Afrikaners.

In Germany and Italy, by its abandonment of the traditional codes of behaviour in the struggle against the threat of proletarian revolution, Fascism came close to its chief opponent - Communism - using not only its ideas (social justice) and its vocabulary of simplified cliches, but also its social base (urban industrial proletariat). This tendency was obviously less apparent in the case of the national-Fascism of southern and eastern Europe because of those countries' different social structures. What made German Nazism and Italian Fascism fundamentally different from Communism was their nationalism.

In central and eastern Europe there were also political groups whose proposed solution to the problem of governance resembled German and Italian models. But their nationalism was more than a component of Fascist ideologies - it was their essence. The tradition of the community generally taking precedence over the individual in those societies allowed for the most extravagant and exclusivist chauvinist "ideologies" to find an echo among small and insecure nations with recently developed consciousnesses. Such collectivist notions were regularly present in an idealized concept of the extended family of the patriarchal type (zadruga). This form of social organisation was hailed as inherently superior, and as an actual model for the future, by a leading Ustaša ideologue in 1938:

"Communism and Capitalism are two opposing world outlooks, two opposite systems, two opposite forms of slavery of the human soul, liberty, pride and dignity. Both are equally alien to the soul of the Croat people. It is in the nature of every man, especially of every Croat, to have his own home... Both Communism and Capitalism seek to take it away from him, each in its own way, and so to enslave him. The leaders are always the same, the same blood, the same origin, the same race, which has been following its objectives for centuries... The difference is that some

Rockefeller or Stern is replaced by some Trotsky who used to be called Bernstein... Our old family zadruga offered a better, happier and richer life than today's households... [In the future Croat state] the owner of the land is the zadruga, all who belong to the same hearth. No individual, not even the head, will be able to mortgage or sell it... One family or several families may prosper or fail, but the essence of the zadruga will be secured in perpetuity."(26)

The author of this pamphlet, Mile Budak, became known as a writer of plays and novels which glorified the blood-and-soil variety of Croatness. He and most other Ustašas (both leaders and rank-and-file) came from the poor, mountainous Dinaric villages of Lika, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Dalmatian hinterland. In those ethnically-mixed areas the patriarchal brand of collectivism went hand-in-hand with a mystical sense of one's nationality, inseparable from one's religious affiliation, and largely defined in terms of antagonism towards other national groups. Even today, those parts of Yugoslavia are the breeding grounds of extreme nationalism.

In Italy and Germany the cult of the nation had its origins in liberalism and romanticism of the previous century. However, West European Fascism did not take over the mantle of nationalism from its liberal predecessors; it kidnapped it, and brought nationalism to a paroxysm. Mazzini's nationalism with a universalist humanistic streak produced the chauvinism of Enrico Corradini, who refused to see any Germans, Slovenes or Croats in South Tyrol or Istria, and who called the whole Mediterranean il mare nostro. Further east, the prophets of exclusivist chauvinism emerged much earlier and left a legacy which could be easily attached to a Fascist banner.

The virulence of the Croat variety, created by Starčević well before the advent of the Fascist era, is fascinating. The word "genocide" was not a part of the political vocabulary of Europe in 1869, when Starčević wrote the following of the Serbs:

"They are the race of slaves, beasts worse than any. There are three levels of human perfection: that of the animal, that of comprehension, and that of reason. Slavo-Serbs have not quite reached the first level, and cannot rise above it... Some call a magnitude of Croat populace 'Serbs', and a piece of Croat land 'Serbia' all on the basis of a name which they do not understand nor do they know how it came about."(27)*

The need to dehumanize one's hate-object, the prerequisite of any "final solution", is obvious. Commenting on such texts, a leading Croat anthropologist remarked half a century ago:

"Never before had a tribal, atavistic urge entered with such irrational force into the world of political formulae and programmes as it did with Starčević's all-Croatness. At a time when two Serb states had been already in existence, his notion of Croatizing all South Slavs and his "denying" of the Serbs and Slovenes was truly nonsensical."(28)

Cherished by the Frankists (but not only them) both before and after 1914, Starčević's opus earned him the title of "the Father of the Nation". His views on the Serb issue were followed half a century later by a thoroughly "modern" treatment in the hands of Milan Šufflay, a historian and sociologist assassinated by the police in 1931.**

* "Slavosrbi" (Slav Serbs) being, in Starčević's scheme of things, "doubly slaves"; with the customary total lack of evidence he claimed that both names were derived from Latin for "slave" (sclavus and servus).

** He was killed by one Branko Zwerger, in the aftermath of the murder of newspaper editor Toni Schlegel by the Ustašas. Schlegel's murder unleashed a period of terror against suspected Ustaša sympathizers by the Zagreb police chief, Janko Bedeković, which included an attempt on Mile Budak's life.

Šufflay's main thesis was that there could be no lasting union between Croats and Serbs due to the huge biological and racial inherent differences between them.* Writings of this sort were the order of the day in many parts of Europe. Any ideology based on the belief in national solidarity needed an "out-group". Whether the scapegoat was the Serb, the Slav, the Jew, the Czech, "evidence" was collected to dehumanize him and subsequently remove moral inhibitions in the treatment of him when the time came. However, while to a Nazi "the Jew" was a necessary social and political concept, to a Frankist or an Ustaša "the Serb" was more than that: he was an integral part of his Croatness. Without him, Croatdom could not be defined, let alone practised.

Just as twentieth century Communism was "the treacherous heir of the liberal internationalism of the previous century", Fascism was the "culmination and bankruptcy of the mystical patriotism which animated the political movements of the time".(30) However, Fascism (unlike Communism) was not a trans-national creed adapted to local conditions. It was a trans-national experience that found particular national expressions. A peculiarly Central-East European feature was the marriage between chauvinism - exclusivist by definition - and Christianity, which is supposedly universalist. The Fascist phenomena in Central and Eastern Europe included - almost without exception - the creation of a "Christian" state among the movement's goals. This trait made Fascism in, say, Croatia or (much more so) Slovakia different from the German or Italian model.

* Twelve hundred years of divergent development were supposed to have turned Croatia into a Western nation, by virtue of its religion, culture, and modes of thought, while Serbia leaned to the East, to Orthodoxy and to Russia, as Byzantium's successor in world politics.(29) Šufflay claimed that such differences were genetically insurmountable and rooted in racial differences, Croats being a "fair race with some Mongolian blood" and Serbs being a "darker race of paleo-Balkan origin". Paradoxically, however, as soon as a Serb accepted Croat national consciousness such differences would no longer matter. In a similar vein, Starčević both included Serbs in the Croat nation and branded them an inferior race. In both cases this ambiguity reflected the authors' implicit admission of the fundamental similarity of the two peoples.

Even though neither Orthodoxy nor Catholicism have ever been the crucial moulding forces in the mainstream political movements in South Slav lands, the old schism created the first and by far the strongest means of differentiating the Serb from the linguistically and racially similar Croat. In the highlands south of the Sava river, to say that so-and-so was "Orthodox", "Catholic" or "Muslim" conveyed all that one wanted to know about that person. His age, looks, social status, temperament, likes and dislikes came^a poor second. To the Slovaks and Poles, Catholicism was almost synonymous with national identity; to the Dinaric Croats of the zadruga culture, it WAS their national identity.

Obligatory religious instruction in the Successor States and the close connection between church and state even after 1918 (with the notable exception of Czechoslovakia) had continued to inculcate in the young the belief in a divinely sanctioned and highly structured sense of values. This affected a person's Weltanschauung even when the original religious feeling was no longer present. Some authors have commented on what appears to be a strong spiritual connection between a traditional religious attitude - Roman Catholicism in particular - and the receptiveness to Fascist phenomena.* Such perceptiveness was enhanced among Dinaric Croats by the irrational "intuitive" hatred of the Serb, hatred which was a "proto-Fascist" sentiment.

* As an Austrian scholar put it,

"A look at the map of Europe makes it apparent that secular totalitarian movements and authoritarian governments have been successful in countries with an uninterrupted Catholic tradition... [P]eople who have gone through an unbroken Catholic tradition developed a certain habit of thinking, a certain pattern of human affairs, which made it possible, once the contents of the religious tradition were lost, to replace them with concepts equally unquestionable. The belief in an absolute truth, the belief in the infallibility of a leader, the belief in authority and a preestablished order, the belief that social and political activity has to be based from above and not on requests from below, the hierarchical organisation, the demand that the revealed truth be accepted without question or doubt... made possible the organisation, once the belief in the transcendental religion was lost, of a new secular religion along similar lines."(31)

The Ustaša movement came into being in 1930 primarily as an ultra-nationalist, revolutionary-terrorist secret organisation dedicated to separating Croatia from Yugoslavia. As such, it belonged to the Balkan, rather than European tradition, and resembled the Macedonian VMRO. It sought the CREATION of a nation-state, not its "salvation" from the "red menace" or "plutocracy". While an Ustaša perceived the nation-state as his supreme goal, a Nazi or a Fascist regarded it as an instrument of his Wille zur Macht. While Fascism and Nazism were permanently dynamic movements, the Ustašas were essentially static: they aimed for a "stable" situation, i.e. the creation of a nationally homogeneous Croat state.

By virtue of conspiratorial action and exiled leadership the Ustašas would also fall outside mainstream Fascism, which relied on publicity and street action to a very great extent. The class context was also different. Totally lacking a strong popular base until it came to power, the Ustaša movement did not carry out a "national revolution" in 1941, which would demand cooperation with older, established, traditional political forces (such as sought by both Mussolini and Hitler in their early years in power).

The state from its inception was to be the Ustaša state: Pavelić did not feel he needed allies among the non-Ustaša conservative forces to stay in power; he sought to absorb them (the right wing of the HSS) or silence them. Thus the movement lacked the class basis provided elsewhere in Europe by the coalition between the traditional Right and Fascism in the struggle against Communism. To the Ustašas propaganda was a substitute for ideology, and forced mobilisation a substitute for participation. Therefore, the Ustaša movement can be classified as a part of European Fascism of the 1930s only with some reservations. It underwent final Fascisation only under coming to power, which happened due to external factors. Prior to that time, "ideological" aspects were largely neglected, or at least subordinate to nationalist obsessions.

7. The Slovak Experience

The closest parallel to the situation in Croatia between the wars existed in Slovakia. Both Slovaks and Croats were small Central European nations, with no history of independent statehood in modern times. In both cases insecure - and therefore virulently aggressive - nationalism was the decisive factor in shaping movements which eventually took power due to external intervention, not internal collapse.

Czechoslovakia was entirely, and Yugoslavia partly a successor state to the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy. Both new states inherited certain internal weaknesses from the Habsburg legacy: they were not nationally homogeneous, and sought integrating principles which would provide the cement of cohesiveness. After 1918 neither the Croats nor the Slovaks were recognized as separate nations. In Prague the official line asserted the "Czechoslovak nation", while in Belgrade the Yugoslav nation was supposed to have "three names", but only one identity. In both Slovakia and Croatia ^{the} unification of 1918 was supported by the majority of ^{the} local intelligentsia, but was not immediately subjected to the test of popular will. This created later discord. As time went on, in both Bratislava and Zagreb the notions of ethnic, historical and linguistic unity with the more numerous nation encountered increasing resistance. (32)

Already in 1919 centrifugal tendencies were set in motion: by Rev. Adrej Hlinka's Catholic nationalists in Slovakia and by Stjepan Radić's peasant republicans in Croatia. Over the ensuing two decades those tendencies grew. The important difference was in the fact that Fascist symptoms developed within the Hlinka party and eventually imposed their mark on it, while in Croatia the HSS not only avoided the Fascist mantle, but ultimately came to act as a defender of Yugoslavia after the Sporazum of 1939.

In both Slovakia and Croatia the influx of Czech and Serb civil servants and military officers created early resentment.* Those disputes resulted in the ultimate defeat of centralist solutions. In the mutilated "Czecho-Slovakia" this happened after Munich, and in Yugoslavia less than a year later, with the creation of an autonomous Croat Banovina. However, while Slovak Fascism emerged directly from the ranks of the leading nationalist opposition party, in Croatia the HSS had retained both its leading role and its non-Fascist integrity until the end, when the Ustaša movement came to power only with the Axis troops.

The Hlinka movement underwent its final Fascisation after the proclamation of full independence in March 1939, with the rise to prominence of people like Bela Tuka and Durčanský. Their HSS counterparts - the Peasant Party's right wing - far from taking the Party over, came into the open only in April 1941 and joined the Ustašas (Janko Tortić). In the end, both Slovakia of Tiso and Croatia of Pavelić had for their salient features a blend of racism, ultra-chauvinism and Catholic corporatism, with an emphasis on authority, family, and supposed class harmony.

* In both countries this resentment was exploited by the Communists. At the Fifth Congress of the Comintern (June-July 1924) both states were dealt with in the same breath when the "right of nations to self-determination" was asserted explicitly as an antithesis to those creations of "French imperialism".(33) The ambiguity of Czechoslovak and Yugoslav Communists to Slovak/Croat separatism was only resolved in the mid-1930s, when even such "Versailles creations" were decreed to be a lesser evil than the growing threat of Nazi-Fascism. In spite of earnest efforts by Yugoslav Communists to win over individual Ustašas in various Yugoslav prisons in the early 1930s, the results were poor. This is especially striking if one takes into account that the Communists were better organised, disciplined and educated.

The Ustašas correctly perceived that the Communists were only using the national question for different ultimate goals, and that the structure of the Party was more significant than its proclaimed policy. The mere fact that Serbs and Croats were cooperating in the CPY was enough to make it a priori suspect in the eyes of the Ustašas. Eventually, anti-Communism acquired an important place in Ustaša rudimentary ideology, as a total antithesis of all they cherished as "healthy" in the Nation.

II - IN EMIGRATION

1. Pavelic's Early Foreign Contacts

After 1941 some Ustaša propagandists started claiming that the movement had come into being before its founder, Ante Pavelić, went into self-imposed exile in January 1929; this was subsequently repeated by various Croat émigré publicists after 1945. While there is no evidence to support the claim, it is certain that Pavelić established contact with the Italian government circles as early as 1927. He did so not independently, but for and on behalf of his party, the small and largely uninfluential Croat Party of Rights, which carried the Frankist tradition into the 1920s. As one of the party's only two deputies, Pavelić represented the city of Zagreb at the Congress of Cities in Paris in 1927. En route to the French capital, he stopped in Vienna and met two Croats, former Austro-Hungarian officers, whom he informed of his wish to visit Rome on the way back from Paris and - if possible - talk to the Italian officials.(1)

The initial contact was simultaneously organised on two tracks. On one hand, the Italian minister in Vienna, Auriti, informed Mussolini on 22 June 1927 of Pavelić's request, which was passed to the Italian military attaché in Vienna by a Croat, a former Austro-Hungarian officer.(2) At the same time, a former deputy of the Croatian Sabor, Ivica Frank - who lived in Budapest as an émigré - sent a memorandum for Mussolini to the Italian minister in Hungary. It contained an appeal for Italy to support the cause of Croat independence, while Frank's covering letter to the envoy stated: "It is our axiomatic conviction that Italy is the only salvation for the Croats".(3) The Italian minister also informed Mussolini of Pavelić's prior attempt to establish similar contact with the government of Hungary, which the latter refused fearing a provocation.

On his return from Paris, Pavelić stopped in Rome and met Roberto Forges Davanzati, a prominent Fascist journalist, member of the Grand Council and former Fascist Party secretary. According to Davanzati's lengthy note on his talks with Ante Pavelić, the latter handed him an identical memorandum to the one which had already arrived from Frank in Budapest. The salient feature of both the memorandum and of Pavelić's statements made on that occasion, Davanzati summarized as follows:(4)

a) Deep contradictions between Italy and the Yugoslav state give hope to the Croat people that it may soon be possible to get rid of the "Serb yoke".

b) Italian support for the Croats' struggle would not only be of great importance for European culture, but it would also be important for the development of Italy as a great power.

c) The Croat people lost its autonomy "against its will" at the time of the collapse of Austria-Hungary. It demands the renewal of its state, independent "of Serbia or Yugoslavia", sovereign in every respect. On the basis of their thousand-year state rights and the principle of ethnicity, the Croats demand all lands "where they have a majority", namely 1) Croatia and Slavonia; 2) Dalmatia [in the frontiers "indicated below"; (unfortunately, the map which Pavelić had evidently enclosed could not be found); 3) Bosnia and Herzegovina; 4) the area between the Mura and Drava rivers known as Medjimurje (in accord with Hungary); and 5) those Quarnero islands presently belonging to Yugoslavia.

d) Although such a Croat state, envisaged as an agent of peace and Western culture, would seek accord with all its neighbours, it would seek particularly close ties with Italy and Hungary.

e) The Croats unreservedly recognise Italy's predominance in the Adriatic and condemn any attempt to weaken that right of Italy or to put it in doubt. They also recognise Italy's right to exploit the natural wealth of the Balkans through peaceful exchange of its industrial products.

f) The Croats are prepared to "adapt" to the Italian sphere of influence politically, economically and militarily.

On the basis of the above principles, the Croats "have decided to refrain from having a navy, if Italy undertakes to protect the Croatian coast." The Croats would "cede" Cattaro and surrounding heights to Italy for strategic purposes; they would recognise Italy's right to use military installations on shore and islands; they would grant Italy all economic concessions and privileges in line with the above principles; and finally, the Croats would refrain from building a commercial port so as to maintain the role of Fiume.

In case of war between Italy and Yugoslavia, the memorandum promised active Croat sabotage and armed action against the Serbs, as well as provision of important information to the Italian military command.

Finally, Pavelić (Frank) requested the Italians to strengthen their propaganda (and weaken that of the Serbs) by refraining from any statements alluding to the acquisition of Croat territory.

The memorandum of 1927, the first formal approach by Croat separatists to Mussolini, is of cardinal importance for the understanding of later events. It is a clear sign that Pavelić was ready and willing to accept limited sovereignty under Italian tutelage in order to get rid of the "Serb yoke". Both the tone and contents of the memorandum were to find their logical conclusion in the Rome Treaties fourteen years later, when Pavelić accepted amputation of Dalmatia and Italian predominance in the NDH.

On the territorial issue two details are significant. First, Pavelić mentions Dalmatia "in the frontiers indicated below". That suggests that there was a map attached to the original memorandum. Such qualification strongly indicates that Pavelić intended to cede some areas to Italy, or else he could have simply said "Dalmatia", or "Dalmatia presently belonging to Yugoslavia" (i.e. excluding Zara and Lagosta), which was the formulation applied to the Quarnero islands. Secondly, Pavelić requested that the Italians "refrain" from irredentist statements in order to "strengthen their propaganda", and not because they would give up irredentist claims.

When he met Davanzati in Rome and presented him with the above document, Pavelić did not have any mandate to talk on behalf of "Croatia" and "the Croat people". The party to which he belonged was a marginal force in Croatia, where Stjepan Radić and his HSS were the acknowledged representatives of the majority of people. There is no hint that Radić knew of Pavelić's action, let alone condoned it. In any event, Radić was a staunch opponent of Italian ambitions in the Adriatic, as was manifested in his opposition to the Nettuno Conventions in the Belgrade Skupština in 1927. The feeling against Italy among most Croats was so strong that it resulted in violent anti-Italian demonstrations and tension between Belgrade and Rome. Furthermore, the apprehension over Italy's designs was one of the factors which influenced Radić's decision to seek accommodation with Belgrade, to recognise the state, the Crown, the Constitution and join Pašić's cabinet. There can be no doubt that both Radić and his party, and the Croat people as a whole, would have rejected Pavelić's initiative out of hand had it become known. Even to those Croats unhappy with Yugoslavia the alternative of an Italian satellite would not have been acceptable.

Pavelić's memorandum vividly illustrates the difference between the HSS, the mainstream force in Croatia's politics, and the extreme separatist fringe. Both Radić and later Maček sought reconciliation with Belgrade and a place for Croatia within the Yugoslav framework when they concluded that external dangers (the rise of Mussolini in 1925, the approaching European war in 1939) might leave Croatia lonely and vulnerable if it was on its own. They accepted the Yugoslav solution not out of conviction, but as the least of all evils. In its pragmatism, the HSS fitted into the tradition of those "Yugoslavs" in Croatia whose Yugoslavism was a means of protecting particular Croat interests. For all their rhetoric, in the final analysis the HSS leaders proved that at heart they knew "the Serbs" did not really aim to extinguish Croat identity. "The Serbs" were often insensitive to Croatia's peculiarities; they were heavy-handed, corrupt, boastful of their glorious past and their recent sacrifices, maybe even "primitive", but as Radić once exclaimed:

"You can do without everyone but a Serb. You can quarrel with a Serb, you will insult one another, maybe you will even fight, but afterward he will slap you on the shoulder and ask you to drink with him. Do not all brothers do that among themselves?"(5)

The Frankists and Ustašas, on the other hand, postulated a demonic concept of the Serb as the cornerstone of their entire outlook, and above all of their very Croatness. The Serb was a beast (Starčević), racially different (Šufflay), a scheming Byzantine oriental, "an alien thorn in Croatia's flesh" (Pavelić). Since such a view made any compromise impossible by definition, every alternative (including amputation of territory and limitation of sovereignty) appeared feasible. Pavelić's distorted perception of Croatia's national interests was at least consistent with his basic assumptions.

2. Founding of the Movement

After he left Yugoslavia for self-exile in January 1929, Pavelić initially chose Vienna for the centre of his activities. It was a convenient place, favoured by assorted conspirators, anarchists and spies from many parts of Europe (including the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, which had its centre there, and the Macedonian VMRO). In Vienna Pavelić could also rely on his previously established Croat contacts (Perčević, Sarkotić), and the secretary of the Party of Rights, Gustav Perčec, soon joined him there.(6) The leader of the Party's youth wing, Branimir Jelić, also emigrated and initially settled in Graz, with Perčević's help.

Pavelić's first public action, with which he effectively burnt his bridges, did not take place in Vienna but in Sofia, where he went with Perčec in April 1929. Enthusiastically greeted by pro-Bulgarian Macedonian émigrés there, they exchanged strongly anti-Serb and anti-Yugoslav speeches with the president of a "Macedonian National Committee" Stanišev. They signed a declaration on the joint struggle against Belgrade.(7) Pavelić also visited the leader of VMRO "revolutionarists" Ivan-Vančo Mihajlov, who subsequently provided assistance to Pavelić in terrorist training and actions (culminating in Marseilles in 1934).

The Belgrade authorities responded with a protest to the Bulgarian government, which replied that it regretted the events surrounding Pavelić's and Perčec's visit and that it would prevent their repetition.(8) In July 1929 Pavelić and Perčec were sentenced in absentia to death. The Court for the Protection of the State in Belgrade found them guilty of sedition and high treason. (It was the first such sentence; Pavelić would be sentenced to death again after the assassination of King Alexander.)

As a result of diplomatic pressure from Belgrade, on his return from Bulgaria Pavelić was denied further hospitality by the Austrian government. After an unsuccessful attempt to obtain a visa for Hungary, whose government was initially reluctant to support Pavelić's action, he went to Germany, which declined to assist him in any way. In Munich Pavelić obtained an Italian passport from Mussolini's diplomats, went to Italy and settled in Verona. For the first time, Pavelić encountered open support of the host country, and funds were put at his disposal. From Italy he proceeded to organise extensive political action in the cause of Croat independence (although not yet under the Ustaša name). Special attention was paid to the setting up of recruiting points and front organisations in Western Europe and the Americas. Since there were few potential recruits in the only countries where Pavelić could expect support (Italy and - less openly - Hungary), the initial activity was taking place under the label of mutual assistance and cultural organisations, in areas with large Croat expatriate communities (Belgium, France, Germany, Argentina and the USA).(9) Simultaneously Pavelić's sympathisers commenced a publishing campaign, with newspapers and brochures in Serbo-Croat and host-country languages.

In the meantime, Perčec - as a former Austro-Hungarian officer - was charged with the preparation of "military" action. Even before leaving Vienna, he started to build a network of Frankist youths able and willing to carry out terrorist actions in Yugoslavia. The first such action was the murder of newspaper editor Toni Schlegel (22 March 1929). In August a bomb exploded outside a gendarmerie barracks in Zagreb, and two police agents were killed while attempting to arrest the suspects. Perčec also had to leave Austria, and went to Hungary, where he rented an estate (Janka Fuszta), not far from the Yugoslav border, with Hungarian government money. This was to be the training camp and base for "attacks" (which over the ensuing four years amounted to about a dozen explosions on trains and public places in north-west Croatia, and about a half-dozen assassinations).(10)

Pavelić's initial activity was not carried out within the framework of a centralized organisation. He and his assistants shared the broad Frankist outlook and mostly belonged to the Party of Rights, which ceased to exist in Yugoslavia as a legal organisation - along with other political parties - in January 1929. It was only after two years that Pavelić embarked on the codification of Ustaša ("insurgent") principles and the setting up of an organisation based on them. The first formal Ustaša camp in Italy was established in late 1931 in the province of Brescia. It was there that Pavelić created his Ustaša Headquarters (Glavni Ustaški Stan, GUS) and promulgated a series of rules and codes of the "Ustaša - Croatian Revolutionary Organisation" (Ustaša - hrvatska revolucionarna organizacija, UHRO).

The UHRO Statute of 1932 and the Ustaša Movement Principles (Načela Ustaškog pokreta) of 1933 gave the already existing (albeit rudimentary) movement its formal structure.(11) The Principles had 17 articles, which - in a somewhat abbreviated form here - proclaimed the following:

1. The Croat people is a separate ethnic unit, a people by itself, not the same as any other, nor is it a part or tribe of any other nation.
2. The Croat nation came under its ancient name to its present homeland 1,400 years ago and no other name can replace it.
3. The Croat people turned its present land into its home in ancient times and called it "Croatia"; this name cannot be replaced with any other.
4. Various provinces inhabited by Croats through the history have different names, but they are all part of the one, inseparable Croatia.
5. The Croat people arrived in its homeland Croatia as a free people, conquered that land and made it its own for ever.

6. The Croats arrived there fully organized, militarily and socially, and immediately founded their own state with all attributes of statehood.

7. The Croat people has never given up its right to statehood, nor transferred that right to anyone else. Only at the end of the war in 1918, alien force prevented it from exercising its sovereign rights over its state.

8. The Croat people have the right to realize its sovereign power in the entire ethnic and historical area of Croatia. It is not bound by any present or past international legal or other obligations contrary to this principle.

9. The Croat people is entitled to happiness as a whole, and individual Croats as parts of that whole; this can be realized only in the completely independent Croat state.

10. The Croat people is sovereign, and only it can rule in its state.

11. In the affairs of state and in affairs of interest to the people, no-one can take part in the making of decisions who is not a Croat by blood.

12. While peasantry is the foundation and source of the Croat people, all social strata of the Croat people form one national entity, for as long as their members have Croat blood.

13. All material, spiritual and natural resources are owned by the Croat people, which is solely empowered to use them.

14. The source of all value is labour, and the source of all right is duty. Labour will be the criterion of value of each individual in the Croat state, and his duty to the state.

15. All holders of public office are accountable by their life and estate. Duty and responsibility to the whole are to be the basis of all activity in every person's private life.

16. Good life for honest work, and not wealth for capitalists.

17. The goal of the state is harmonious growth of all national parts.

The key features of this document are: assertion of continued statehood, claim on sovereignty over the entire "ethnic and historical" territory, denial of legal and property rights to non-Croats in the future state, patriarchal collectivism and organic nationalism. The "Principles" remained substantially unchanged until April 1941. (After the proclamation of the NDH Pavelić made slight alterations and took an oath on the Principles in lieu of the constitution of the NDH). The Statute of 1933 which dealt with the hierarchical structure of the organisation, and the Ustaša oath both postulated complete obedience to the leader (Poglavnik). The ensuing Military Regulations (Službovnik ustaške vojske, 1933) sought to provide a manual of service to the Ustašas organised into military formations. In its first article, the Regulations reiterated that the objective of the Ustaša organisation was

"... to liberate Croatia from the foreign yoke by armed insurrection, so that it is independent in all its ethnic and historic territory... When that objective is achieved, the Ustaša organisation will defend by all its means the state independence of Croatia and the individuality of the Croat people, and struggle to ensure that only the Croat people will ever rule in the Croat state, and that it will be the sole master of all actual and spiritual wealth in the country".(12)

Over the years there had been various addenda, alterations and deletions of some of the above documents. In their essence they remained unchanged, and constituted the normative basis of the Ustaša movement, and the closest it had ever come to a codified ideology. Their chief practical value to Pavelić at that time was in the proclamation of the Fuehrerprinzip attached to him personally (the Poglavnik). The impression created by the spirit of these documents - in spite of a few legalistic phrases - is more reminiscent of a secret nationalist society in the tradition of pre-1914 Bulgaria, Serbia or Greece, than of a mass movement of the 1930s bent on taking power by force.

3. The "Military Nucleus"

The Italian government formally approved Pavelić's "militarily organised" centre (thereafter referred to in Italian documents as the "Ustaša military nucleus") in 1932. The response to Pavelić's recruitment efforts were relatively scant, though. At first his camp had 40-50 men, while at its peak (1935) the number reached approximately five hundred.(13) They were recruited mainly from among the peasantry which had left underdeveloped areas in the Dalmatian Hinterland and Western Herzegovina in search of work abroad. Besides having a long tradition of national and religious atavism, those areas have relied on emigration for centuries to ease the pressure of expanding population on very limited resources. In the early 1930s the Depression combined with other pressures (political situation under royal dictatorship, worsening terms of trade between agriculture and industry, high interest rates and taxes, as well as chronic agricultural overpopulation) to create a degree of latent political dissatisfaction among the Croats in the Dinaric area.(14)

A look at the comprehensive list of Ustašas from 1935, which gives place of birth and occupation for each of them, shows that over 70% came from the Dinaric mountains of the Adriatic hinterland.(15) About 20% were from the coast (Dalmatia and Croatian Littoral), and barely ten percent came from the most populous and most highly developed areas of Croatia-proper and Slavonia. As for the class structure of the group, its members were overwhelmingly peasants (over three quarters), with only a handful of students and professionals. In many ways, this pattern repeated itself on a much greater scale even after 1941: while the Panonian plains remained largely loyal to Maček, and while Dalmatia was (understandably) the breeding ground of Yugoslavism, the régime could count on the "Dinarites" to a considerable extent until the end.

Pavelić's recruiting efforts were aided by the economic crisis in Western Europe, which caught many expatriate Croat workers in the dilemma between unemployment and return to their homes in Yugoslavia. Their response to Pavelić, while undoubtedly based on a certain perception of their Croatness, often had a lot to do with their personal economic predicament. Their latent radicalism was illustrated by the fact that in the main recruiting centre for Pavelić's organisation, among the large Croat community in Seraing near Liège, the Communists recruited almost two hundred volunteers for the Republican cause in Spain.(16)

Even among those who joined him in Italy, the loyalty to Pavelić was far from absolute. The influence of Maček and the HSS tended to linger on in many minds, and the claustrophobic life of regimentalized émigrés proved conducive to factionalism and internal squabbling.(17) At the same time, the changing fortune of the Ustaša group under Italian tutelage enabled Pavelić to test the endurance and devotion of his followers. Those who proved most single-mindedly faithful and fanatical, Pavelić trusted in later years more than anyone. In a sense he was right: his veterans from the early days, people like Lisak, Herenčić, Moškov and Boban, having thrown their lot in with Pavelić even when the attainment of his objectives seemed very distant indeed, were unlikely to desert him thereafter. Not unlike many dictators, Pavelić valued personal loyalty to him above all other qualities. An enduring trait of his personality, this characteristic eventually caused deep divisions within his regime as well as tensions with his allies.*

* The coterie of old émigrés around Pavelić eventually turned into the major centre of power in the NDH. They behaved like feudal warlords, unaccountable to noone but their chieftain, and were accordingly nicknamed Rasovi by the people. The struggle against the "Ras" influence turned into a salient feature of various Axis representatives' daily life in the NDH after April 1941.

In order to understand later events in the relations between Pavelić and the Italians, it is important to note that already by 1931-1932 he was completely dependent on Rome. From the Italian police he was receiving money and logistic support (camps, weapons, equipment etc), through Inspector Ettore Conti who remained in charge of his group until the end of its stay in Italy. Instructions concerning policy and organisational matters came from the Foreign Ministry in Rome. Conti's equivalent in the Ministry was the head of a special "Croatian Department", Paolo Cortese, to whom all Pavelić's requests had to be addressed. Actual Italian expenses for the whole Ustaša operation amounted to 100,000 Lire a month.(18)

Even before the assassination of King Alexander in Marseilles, the Italians moved the Ustaša camp whenever the Yugoslav authorities obtained information about its location: from Bovegno to Borgo Val di Taro, and on to Vischetto (in Emilia) and to Oliveto in Tuscany. Transfers usually followed increased Yugoslav sensitivity after Ustaša actions, eg. after the attack on a gendarme outpost in Lika, or after the capture of King Alexander's would-be assassin Oreb in Zagreb.(19)*

* The action against the gendarmerie outpost at Brušani (not far from the Italian frontier near Zara) on the night of 6-7 November 1932 was carried out by ten Ustašas infiltrated from Italian territory, and aided by four local sympathisers. The attack itself ended in failure (with one Ustaša killed), and the group immediately withdrew to Italy. Subsequently the Yugoslav authorities carried out an extensive search of the area, using methods which left a lasting legacy of bitterness among the local population. This overreaction did rather more to promote Pavelić's cause among the local people, than the attack itself (quite inappropriately labelled "the Lika Uprising" by the Ustašas).

Petar Oreb was recruited in the summer of 1933. After training in Borgo and Vischetto, he was sent to Yugoslavia with a Hungarian passport in December 1933 with orders to kill King Alexander, who was coming to Zagreb on 17 December to spend his birthday there. Oreb and two of his aides were captured shortly before they could carry out the action, thanks to the information supplied by the Yugoslav police specialist for Ustaša affairs Vladeta Miličević. (On both actions see AJ, Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova, fasc. 33).

The Italians were sensitive about Ustaša presence on their territory because in the same period (early 1930s) Mussolini reestablished contact with the Yugoslav sovereign through his confidential envoy Guido Malagola Cippi. A lengthy exchange of messages between the two leaders went on for almost three years, but the breakthrough could not be achieved because of Mussolini's insistence that King Alexander accept the predominance of Italian interests in Albania. Oreb's capture infuriated the King. The would-be assassin told the police every detail of his stay in Italy, and the duplicity of Rome prompted the Yugoslav sovereign to sever further contacts.

In his memoirs published posthumously, Italy's under-secretary for Foreign Affairs at the time (1932-1936), Fulvio Suvich, maintained that Mussolini did not intend to use Pavelić and his Ustašas for separatist and aggressive purposes, but rather as a means of pressure on Yugoslavia.(20) This is confirmed by Guariglia, who wrote that both the Croatian and Albanian issue were utilized by Rome as "instruments of pressure to coerce Belgrade to accept faits accomplis".(21) This may have been the intention at first, but the attack on the person of King Alexander - which Pavelić would not have been able to launch without prior approval from his paymasters - went far beyond the original design. On balance, it seems more likely that Albania was an objective, rather than just a tool of policy; and it was the sticking point over which the two sides could not agree. King Alexander's firmness on this issue probably cost him his life in the end.

* The King was shaken by the conspiracy to kill him, and personally watched Oreb's interrogation from behind a screen. To Ivan Meštrović, the famous sculptor, he expressed premonition that he would be killed in the end, and that "in all probability Italy would be involved". Three weeks later he composed his last will and testament.

One further transfer awaited Pavelić's group between January 1934 (when it arrived in Oliveto) and the assassination of King Alexander in Marseilles. In the summer of that year the Italians suspected that Yugoslav diplomats at the Vatican had obtained information on the camp at Oliveto. They hurriedly split the group in three and placed it in isolated locations in the heart of the Appenines (San Demetrio ne'Veitini, Fontecchio and San Lorenzo), taking its arms in store first.(22) The conflict between the Ustašas from Dalmatia (suspicious of Pavelić's long-term arrangements with his Italian sponsors regarding their province) and "others", which was a regular feature in various camps, continued in the new locations.(23) Even with his "nucleus" split, and far out of sight, Pavelić could not rest assured that his group would not be dispersed. He kept receiving information that the Italians allegedly intended to disband it in order to effect a policy of reconciliation with Yugoslavia.

The life in Pavelić's camps was hard. Many of his men subsequently commented that their daily lot was not different from the life of ordinary prisoners. Hundreds of young men were spending years together in a confined space, often arguing and squabbling. They were supposedly bonded by Pavelić's ideology of radical Croatism, but for the most part remained in a state of enforced idleness. Their military training was curtailed, in order to make the group's presence less conspicuous. Even the highlight of Ustaša activity before the war - the assassination of King Alexander in Marseilles - was carried out mainly by the Janka Puzsta group, more experienced in various forms of "direct action"; the trigger was pulled by one of Vančo Mihajlov's VMRO professionals.*

* The literature on the King's murder is extensive, and the conspiracy which led to it is outside our scope.(24) Of concern to us in subsequent chapters will be the effect it had on the fortunes of the Ustaša movement, and on the relations between Yugoslavia and Italy.

4. The Hungarian Connection

Even before Gustav Perčec established his training base at Janka Puszta, Hungary already had the reputation among the Frankists of a country sympathetic to "the Croat cause". In the 1920s this was reflected in the help given to Croat émigrés, such as Ivica Frank, and in the existence of several nationalist Hungarian organisations devoted to the revision of the Treaty of Trianon. In 1921 one such organisation ("Awakened Magyars") included the "liberation of Croatia" in its programme, and counted among its members several Croat officers who remained in the Hungarian service after 1918 (Metzger, Balenović).⁽²⁵⁾

The initial support for the émigrés linked to Pavelić and Perčec was also provided by the military, at a time when official government circles were still reluctant to be directly involved (and refused to issue Pavelić a visa in 1929). In early 1931 several Ustaša émigrés who were to gain notoriety in later years were quartered at the barracks in Pecs. When Perčec was expelled by Austria in 1931, he also went to Hungary. After a few weeks in Sòpron, supplied with money and documents by Hungarian military intelligence, he leased the estate at Janka Puszta in the autumn of 1931 under the name of Emil Horvath. The location was selected for its proximity to the Yugoslav border, and for its relative inaccessibility to undesirable visitors. His group eventually grew to about forty men, who were subjected to strict régime and discipline.

The Yugoslav authorities were well informed about the existence and activity of Perčec's group. The counter-intelligence centre in Vienna, headed by the Yugoslav police expert on Ustaša affairs Miličević, obtained information from Perčec's mistress Jelka Pogorelec. She eventually returned to Yugoslavia and published her memoirs from Janka Puszta, which were very damaging to the Ustašas. Subsequently, from 1931 onwards, the Yugoslav government lodged a series of protests against such activities to Hungary, but to no avail.

The degree of involvement of senior Hungarian officials is apparent in the fact that Yugoslav complaints against Hungary at the League of Nations were answered by the Hungarian delegate in Geneva Tibor Eckhardt. At the same time, Eckhardt was president of the Hungarian Revisionist League; in this capacity he signed an agreement on cooperation with Pavelić in July 1933.(26) In this document Pavelić agreed to a plebiscite in the area of Medjimurje to decide whether it would belong to Croatia or Hungary, and to the annexation of predominantly Croat-inhabited southern Baranja by Hungary. As in his initial contact with the Italians in 1927, Pavelić proved ready to trade parts of the "ethnic and historical" territory of Croatia for foreign support.

A few months earlier (March 1933) the Hungarian Foreign Ministry arranged a meeting between Pavelić and the leader of the "Kosovo Committee", Hasan-bey Frishtina. They signed an agreement on cooperation between Croat and Albanian separatists "against the common enemy".(27) Pavelić also suggested to Frishtina the signing of an agreement between him and VMRO Macedonians.

There was nevertheless an important difference between Italy and Hungary in the treatment of the Ustaša movement. In Italy Pavelić and his group were supplied and controlled through a clear-cut system of foreign ministry and police officials, which went from Inspector Conti to the top of the state authority. Evidently, the Ustašas were meant to be an instrument of Italian policy, and their autonomy of action was limited to such activity as was within the limits of that policy. In Hungary, however, help and encouragement to Perčec and other Croat separatists was more diffused, decentralised. The army, and its intelligence service in particular, appears to have acted independently of other organs - not unlike its Serbian equivalent under Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijević-Apis in relation to the "Young Bosnians" and comitadjis before 1914.

III. YUGOSLAV - ITALIAN RECONCILIATION

1. Fascist Foreign Policy

The new course of Italian diplomacy after 1926 was the product of Mussolini's consolidated hold on both internal and external policy. He did not need to rely on the old liberal elements any more, and heralded the one-party dictatorship in his notorious speech of 3 January 1925. In his foreign policy he was no longer subjected to the tutelage of the career diplomats who had helped his early steps (to the point of grooming him in the finer points of table manners). The old-school aristocrats at the foreign ministry were only too keen to oblige in the first few years: all but two top diplomats agreed to serve Mussolini in 1922. His early steps were in accordance with Italy's long-term nationalist, rather than specifically Fascist goals (Fiume, Albania, the Mediterranean), and this could be supported by the Foreign Ministry which generally subscribed to the theory of "mutilated victory".

The resumption of a hard-line approach to Yugoslavia symbolised the new, "Fascist" course at the Palazzo Chigi. The appointment of Dino Grandi, the former squadrista leader from Bologna, as under-secretary for foreign affairs was also meant to reflect the new course.* Mussolini's introduction of new men, new policies, activism, reflected a limited grasp of foreign affairs which went beyond his lack of patience with traditional diplomacy:

* In the event Grandi proved prone to take over the patterns of thought and habits of Italy's gentlemen-diplomats. Mussolini tolerated this until Grandi turned so "un-Fascist" as to promote the cause of international disarmament through the League of Nations. Somewhat dismayed, Mussolini packed him off to the London embassy, where Grandi duly turned into an avid Anglophile. His is an interesting case-study of Kissinger's "politics of the bureaucracy", the ability of the civil service to provide for the continuity of policy by imposing its value system on the decision makers. (Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957) Despite the subsequent years of Fascistisation, the Foreign Ministry had succeeded in retaining a measure of self-identity even as late as 1943. In this it represented a microcosm of the Italian power structure at large. The shocks of a "truly Fascist" ministry were suppressed by the "shadows" until they opted, almost to the man, for Badoglio.

"The fault lay deeper... [He] substituted strategy for policy. To define a policy is to define an end; to define a strategy is to define means. His emphasis on means, in fascist parlance on "action", packed together ends and means in semantic imprecision until the means, the acquisition of strength, became an end in itself... At the moment the rhetoric of the régime became identified with a statement of ends, Italian policy became the prisoner of that rhetoric."(1)

Mussolini's simplistic, all-or-nothing approach was well reflected in the case of Yugoslavia. To the career diplomats of Palazzo Chigi, dispute with Belgrade over Albania (or with France over Tunisia) did not preclude equitable relations. Not so to the Duce. Accordingly, his new, "activist" foreign policy got him linked to a motley ^{band} of European discontents, from German right-wingers to Hungarian revisionist diehards and Croatian separatists. The old guard at the Foreign Ministry began leaving the stage (starting in 1926 with the veteran secretary-general of the Ministry, Salvatore Contarini). Reduced foreign service entry requirements in 1927 were meant to bring the Fascist young blood into Italy's diplomacy. Most of them were initially dispatched to the wilderness of the consular service, but those "twenty-eighters" increased their influence in later years.

The worsening relationship with Yugoslavia after 1926 was connected with the problem of Italy's relationship with France. (The link was apparent in the fact that periods of closeness between Belgrade and Paris coincided with chill in Yugoslav-Italian relations.) In a 19th century diplomatic environment Italy and France probably would have been allies. Both shared an interest in maintaining the system codified at Versailles, since any upset could work to their detriment, more than to their advantage. Both had reason to fear a resurgent Germany, on the Rhine, the Brenner, or in the Danubian Basin.

And yet, the common ground could be maintained only as long as Italy's policy recognised and went along with France's obsession with security, its system of alliances (with Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia) as a substitute for the pre-1914 French policy of alliance with Russia as the safeguard against Germany. Mussolini's change of approach to the Adriatic "problem" (which was by 1926 only of his own making), and his parallel courting of revisionist forces in Central Europe were an example of the confusion of ends and means, goals and strategy. Excuses to pick a quarrel with France were numerous: the position of the Italian minority in Tunisia (outnumbering the French colons) was one. The French appeared excessively good hosts to anti-Fascist Italian émigrés, the fuorusciti, and generally reluctant to take Italy seriously as a power with aspirations and ambitions no less legitimate than France's own.

Mussolini's support for revisionist tendencies in the Danubian basin was reflected in the Rome Protocols (17 March 1934), which also had the objective of keeping Austria and Hungary under Italian influence at the time of the rise of Hitler. But he soon found himself in a contradiction: by achieving its ends in Central Europe, Italy unwillingly acquired the status of a satisfied power in the region - by having to take, ipso facto, a defensive posture in the Danubian basin in relation to Germany's undiluted revisionism. The Dollfuss assassination and abortive Nazi coup in Vienna only confirmed the new role of Italy as a defender of the European status quo (despatch of four divisions to the Brenner). This created the basis for Laval's pact of January 1935. It could have been the turning point in Italy's foreign policy, making it a guardian of Versailles and an accepted great power. Everything changed on account of Ethiopia. Planned as an old-fashioned colonial expedition, this conflict escalated into a major crisis affecting Europe's balance of power. Mussolini responded in his fashion: by changing the substance of his foreign policy, and thus the political map of Europe.

2. Aftermath of Marseilles

King Alexander was killed in Marseilles on 9 October 1934. Before long it was shown that the Yugoslav state rested on stronger foundations than the personality of its monarch. International outcry and the results of French police investigations compelled Hungary to liquidate the Janka Puzsta camp, and transfer the remaining dozen or so Ustašas to Italy. There was a general clampdown on Pavelić's supporters throughout Europe, most notably in Belgium where their front organisation was disbanded and its activists expelled.

More importantly, Mussolini decided to intern the entire Ustaša group on the island of Lipari (the place of banishment for his political opponents too), except for Pavelić himself and his aide Eugen Kvaternik: having rejected the French and Yugoslav extradition requests, the Italians had them imprisoned in Turin.* Subsequently, as a result of the overall improvement of relations between Italy and Yugoslavia under the premiership of Milan Stojadinović, the Ustaša camp was liquidated and its members dispersed throughout the peninsula. Adding insult to injury, the Italians also accepted a special Yugoslav police representative in Rome - Vladeta Milićević - whose task was to monitor the execution of the agreed policy.

Some thaw in Italo-Yugoslav relations had its beginnings even before the death of King Alexander. As a part of a^a general reaction to Hitler's ascent to the scene the two sides maintained contact through intermediaries. This was cut off after Dreb's attempt on the King's life, and two more events in the following year (Italian mobilisation in response to the July Putsch in Vienna, and the assassination of King Alexander in Marseilles) kept relations at a low point. Nevertheless, both sides were aware of the need for an improvement.

* The prison governor observed that Kvaternik was the most cheerful prisoner ever to have been under his roof. Both he and Pavelić felt confident that they would not be extradited to France, even less to Yugoslavia, and expected to go back to Croatia before long. Pavelić kept saying "[Dur] turn will come. They will need us yet, you will see!" (Kvaternik in Hrvatska Revija, 1961, 239-63).

Mussolini was compelled to realise that the foundations of the Yugoslav state were more solid than he had supposed. The country demonstrated an unexpected sense of unity in the autumn of 1934, even in the non-Serb areas. Coupled with the memory of the failure of the Ustaša "uprising" in Lika in 1932, it must have thrown a different light on the premise of "Croat uprising", ever present in Rome's different scenarios for Yugoslavia's destabilisation.*

Mussolini's motives for returning to a policy of friendship with his Adriatic neighbour is to be sought in his understanding of the menace which the new régime in Berlin posed to Italy's position in the Danubian Basin in general, and in particular to its long-term hold on the former Austrian lands in the north-east of the country. The associated objective could have been to detach Yugoslavia from her traditional alliances (France, the Little Entente), and thus alter the political map of South-East Europe in Italy's favour.

The shift in Italian attitudes coincided with the appointment of Milan Stojadinović as Yugoslavia's prime minister in June 1935. Even as finance minister - a year earlier - Stojadinović had displayed eagerness for closer economic ties with Germany. Eventual dependence on Germany as the chief trade partner turned out to be an important feature of Yugoslavia's strategic position in the ensuing years. In his overall shift to a policy of neutrality and equidistance vis-à-vis Yugoslavia's traditional allies and totalitarian neighbours, Stojadinović acted in accordance with the ultimate mastermind of the country's foreign policy in the aftermath of King Alexander's death, Prince Regent Paul. It was Paul's firm belief that "good relations with Berlin are an insurance policy against the restless and ever dangerous neighbour Italy".(2) After a period of indignation after Marseilles, Yugoslav diplomacy also sought improved relations with Italy. In this it was encouraged by France.

* The British Consul in Zagreb reported: "With peasant men and women, many of them bitterly opposed to the late King's political actions, sobbing in the churches, the only thing parallel I can remember is my memory of Queen Victoria's funeral... People are mourning for a King for whom they had a strong personal affection". (PRO, FO 371/18458: Macrae to Henderson, 12 October 1934)

Both Yugoslavia and France amassed solid evidence of Italian official involvement with the Ustašas. However, French diplomacy under Pierre Laval pressured Belgrade not to accuse Italy alongside Hungary at the League of Nations for the murder of King Alexander; furthermore, Laval went out of his way to impress on Stojadinović the need for reconciliation with Italy, when the new Yugoslav premier visited Paris in September 1935.(3) At that time France sought support in Rome in face of the rising threat on the Rhine. An agreement had been reached between Paris and Rome on the status of Italian subjects in Tunisia, and Laval even vaguely hinted at his encouragement for Mussolini's ambitions in Abyssinia.*

The emergence of Stojadinović as the strong man in Belgrade, able and willing to undertake bold new foreign policy initiatives, impressed the Italians. Furthermore, ironically, just as France advised the Yugoslavs to seek accommodation with Italy, Hitler for his part advised Ciano at Berchtesgaden in October 1936 to improve relations with Yugoslavia.(4) For once, everyone seemed to be interested in peace between Belgrade and Rome. The French were worried about Germany, and wanted to reconcile their old ally Yugoslavia with Laval's newly-won friend Italy. The Germans were eager to offer Mussolini a compensation for and a distraction from Austria, and pointed at the Balkans as his "sphere of influence". The Italians were apprehensive of German ambitions in the South-East and sought to establish links designed to block an eventual German advance; if this were to be accompanied by a weakening of Yugoslavia's traditional links, so much the better. As for the Yugoslavs, they understood that Anschluss was merely a matter of time, after Mussolini had announced the creation of the Rome-Berlin Axis in Milan on 1 November 1936. To them, enhanced security on the western border was an urgent necessity.

* Orme Sargent at the Foreign Office advised a course similar to Laval's: "If any foreign country is to be implicated in the assassination it is better on the whole that it should be Hungary rather than Italy". (PRO, F.O. 371/18458: minute of 16 October 1934).

3. The Yugoslav-Italian Treaty

The Yugoslavs attached great importance to the liquidation of the Ustasa organisation in Italy, and regarded it as a sine qua non for improved relations. In a policy paper prepared for Stojadinović by the Foreign Ministry in Belgrade on the future relationship with Italy, this is stated in no uncertain terms: "Definite liquidation of terrorist action directed against our country is to be regarded as a precondition for normalized relations with Italy." (5) Having received encouraging Italian signals, Stojadinović despatched two negotiators to Rome in December 1936. One of them, Milivoj Prlja, was to conduct negotiations on economic and trade issues. The second envoy was an experienced diplomat and Yugoslavia's delegate at the League of Nations, Ivan Subbotić. He had a far more important task spelled out in an agenda which included four crucial points: the proposed treaty, Albania, South Slav minorities in Italy, and the Ustaša problem. (6)

While in Rome, Subbotić had five negotiating sessions with two high-ranking Foreign Ministry officials, Gino Buti and Leonardo Vitetti. In his second report to Stojadinović on the course of his negotiations, Subbotić stated that Buti would advise Ciano of the need to deal with the Ustaša issue BEFORE the agreement was signed, and INDEPENDENTLY of that agreement. (7) Buti added that the text of the political agreement could contain a clause obliging both sides not to tolerate on their territory any activity directed against the security of the other party.

Ciano, the Italian foreign minister, received Subbotić at Palazzo Chigi on 16 January 1937, when he was even more emphatic about the Ustasa issue:

"Don't worry about this, leave it to us, we shall find the best way. We shall remove some of them from the country: we shall send them to Africa or let them go far away from Europe, while others will be kept under strict police surveillance in the country. In brief: we shall disband them and make their action impossible! (8)

In his further talks with Subbotić, on 3 March 1937, Ciano said of Pavelić:

"I am not interested in him or his likes. I've had enough of them. They keep arguing among themselves."(9)

In his fifth and final report from Rome, Subbotić informed Stojadinović of Ciano's readiness to do serious business.* At their meeting on 3 March Ciano appeared positively eager to reach a major agreement with the Yugoslavs, which would go well beyond the draft previously suggested by Subbotić. The Yugoslav diplomat's final report contained a perceptive characterisation of Ciano's personality, and of the style of Fascist diplomacy:

"I have the impression that Ciano is very keen to come to Belgrade and create a sensation. It looks to me he wants to perform that visit in a 'hussard' style: he'll fly in and out, he'll stun the whole world."(12)

* He was willing, Subbotić reported, to offer the following verbal note to the Yugoslav government through Indelli, the minister in Belgrade:(10)

1. Now and in the future there is a ban on all organisations and activities of persons whose activity is directed against the territorial integrity and established order of the Yugoslav state; this [will apply] in any event, and independently of the outcome of current negotiations.

2. Pavelić, E. Kvaternik and other leaders will be interned.

3. They as well as others will be prevented from developing any activity, and leaders will be prevented from maintaining contact with other persons or foreign countries.

4. Some of those people could be despatched as labourers to Italian colonies, either individually or in groups.

5. Italian police will inform the Yugoslav police of place or places where the above mentioned persons are interned or confined.

6. Italian police will inform the Yugoslav police of names of those who wish to return to Yugoslavia.

7. A Yugoslav police official will be able to liaise with the Italians.

Ciano added that the first item of the above verbal note was to be used confidentially and discreetly, while the rest had to remain absolutely secret.

There was some dispute on the meaning of the term "established order", which the Yugoslavs wanted to replace with the term "public order", embracing crimes against "high-ranking personalities". It was eventually agreed that "established order" was to embrace any activity against the heads of the two states, members of the two royal families, government members or public officials. Ciano reiterated that this was to be a verbal note, rather than a public statement.(11)

As for the minorities, the two sides agreed to accept the solution which the Italians had previously reached with Austria regarding South Tyrol (benevolent consideration of requests for private tuition in minority languages and worship, in accordance with the laws on public order). The only area without an agreement remained Albania, where the Italian side remained determined to demand recognition of the supremacy of its interests.

Before the end of March, Ciano indeed went to Belgrade, where he and Stojadinović signed (on 25 March 1937) the Italian-Yugoslav Treaty. The negotiations were kept discreet, and the treaty came as a surprise to world opinion, just as Ciano seems to have desired. As previously agreed, the treaty consisted of the political agreement and the supplementary trade agreement.

The gist of the political agreement was as follows:

1. Common frontiers will be respected and if one side were to become a victim of unprovoked attack by one or more third parties, the other side would refrain from any action favouring the aggressor.

2. In international disputes the two sides confirm to agree on measures aimed at protecting their respective interests.

3. The two sides reiterate their determination not to resort to war in bilateral relations, and to resolve all and any disputes which may occur between them by peaceful means.

4. The two sides undertake not to tolerate on their territory nor to aid in any manner any activity which would be directed against territorial integrity or established order of the other contracting party, or which would be of such nature as to prove detrimental to the friendly relations between the two countries.*

* The remaining four clauses of the treaty were as follows:

5. A new impetus will be given to existing trade relations, in line with the established friendly relations between two sides; accordingly, new trade agreements will be signed as soon as possible.

6. The two sides agree that nothing in this treaty will be regarded as contradictory to the existing international obligations they have, obligations which are in any event public.

7. This Treaty is to remain valid for five years; unless it is invalidated at six months' notice, it will be extended on a year-to-year basis.

8. The Treaty will be ratified, and will come into force on the day instruments of ratification are exchanged. The exchange will take place in Belgrade at the earliest opportunity.

4. The "Rome-Belgrade Axis"

The Italians made no secret to their Yugoslav counterparts that their readiness to compromise was partly based on their apprehension of Germany. This sounded like a far cry from the Axis principles, announced by Mussolini only four months previously.* This illustrated the fundamental - and ultimately fatal - contradiction in Italy's foreign policy in the 1930s. Germany had arrived, and was on the march. Hitler's categorical and repeated renunciation of Alto Adige (even if taken at face value) demanded Italy's acceptance of the Anschluss, and the removal of the Schuschnigg buffer to the Brenner.

But what if Hitler's hands-off approach to South Tyrol was just a tactical manoeuvre to disarm Rome's opposition to the Anschluss? And even if South Tyrol was safe for Italy, what about the Danubian area and the Adriatic? Hitler, the German ultra-nationalist, had forgone the South Tyrolese in the name of an alliance with Italy, and held to his commitment with unprecedented consistency. It was an open question whether the same applied to his views on the Adriatic part of Italy's gains from 1918. The bleakest possibility for Italy was that

"... Hitler the anti-Habsburg and the anti-Marxist was ready at the same time to hazard [the Italian] alliance by sponsoring a German drive on Trieste which could only be based on Habsburg tradition and economic determinism."(14)

* Ciano was very blunt in the way he spelled out this motive to Subbotić on 6 March 1937:

"I am a friend of Germany, but - between us and confidentially - Germany is not only a dangerous adversary to her enemies, but also a difficult friend to her friends. I do not think that we need to organise against Germany now, but a man must bear in mind that your and our position in relation to Germany will be improved if we stick together. Our 42 million and your 15 million will mean more together than apart. Do not understand me wrongly. I don't think we should turn against Germany, but we must - between ourselves - organise our cooperation with her."(13)

By assuming sovereignty in Austria, Hitler could not escape the inheritance of the strategic interests of the old Monarchy.* As his Gauleiters and commanders in the Adriatic Operations Zone proved after September 1943, the logic of that inheritance functioned even regardless of Hitler's will. And all that followed with inescapable logic from the fact of the Anschluss, which the Italians came to accept as inevitable! This had far-reaching consequences in Croatia after April 1941: Hitler's longed-for alliance with Italy postulated the expulsion of Italian influence from the Danubian basin and Italy's compensation in the Mediterranean, but his "Danubia" included the Adriatic.(17)

By finding itself compelled in early 1937 to try and make a friend, and even an ally, of Yugoslavia - previously regarded as an inferior heir to the Austrian heritage as Italy's rival in the Adriatic, Mussolini's Italy ostensibly reverted to the policy of the pre-1926 Ninčić period. Unlike in the previous decade, there was also the looming Teutonic colossus to reckon with, which made the reversal more palatable and positively attractive to both sides. As Ciano put it,

"Once the Anschluss is an accomplished fact, all those countries who must oppose the German descent towards the Adriatic or along the Danube valley will polarise around the Rome-Belgrade axis. This bloc which will arise will be such as to dissuade the Germans from any mad attempt."(18)

* Three years before coming to power, Hitler was supposed to have told Prince Starhemberg, the Austrian Heimwehr leader, that Germany would demand settlement of other claims in return for the renunciation of South Tyrol:

"One of these is an outlet to the Adriatic. Trieste must become a German port. I blame the Habsburgs for not having been able, in spite of centuries of rule, to Germanise Trieste and the Adriatic coast. The result is that Germany has no outlet to the Mediterranean. That outlet must be obtained, peacefully, or otherwise."(15)

As Rusinow points out, there was a "sinister" logic in this conclusion. It could not be avoided unless Hitler's brand of German nationalism were to exclude Deutsches Oesterreich from the German Reich (as Bismarck had done). In his very early days, Hitler seemed ready to take the Iron Chancellor's mantle by renouncing Trieste as well as South Tyrol.(16)

In the context of such a contradictory, yet important and bold move by Mussolini and Ciano, Pavelić and his five hundred Ustašas paled into total insignificance. They were not even truly negotiated upon by Subbotić and his Italian counterparts: Ciano offered the assurances on their neutralisation in advance, and regardless of the outcome of any negotiations. Especially evident was Ciano's contemptuous disdain for the Ustašas; he would have them shipped to Italy's colonies "as labourers", or simply "far away from Europe".*

Less than a week after the signing of the Yugoslav-Italian Treaty, on 1 April 1937, Pavelić was forced to issue an order releasing all his followers from "active duty". He also announced that all Ustaša camps on the territory of the Kingdom of Italy would be dispersed, and all activity would cease in certain countries.**

The authorities immediately proceeded with the dispersal of Pavelić's group from the island of Lipari. The leaders (about 60 in all) were confined in pairs in various small towns of Southern Italy, except for Pavelić and three of his closest aides (Vjekoslav Servatzy, Mile Budak and Eugen Kvaternik), who were kept alone in different Northern Italian towns. A delegate of the Yugoslav interior ministry arrived in Rome, and was given a complete file of all Ustašas in Italy. He proceeded to establish initial contact with some Ustašas, especially the "dissidents" (Gabor Jovanović and two dozen others). They had asked to be separated from the main group in Lipari because of internal disagreements, which flared up shortly after confinement.

* This distaste is increasingly evident in his later diary entries, eg. "Pavelić... and his band of cutthroats", 25 April 1941.

** Trying to put a brave face on what was obviously the low point of his movement, he said:

"Ustaša brothers! The struggle for freedom of the Croat people is not complete. Therefore, none of us is released from his duties as an individual; neither is /the organisation/ as a whole. From now on we shall continue to be prepared to do our duty, even at the price of our lives, when the moment comes and the homeland calls. That moment will come, and we shall respond to the call, wherever any of us may be." (19)

At first the Yugoslav delegate was Sava Ćirković. The Italians soon requested the despatch of a higher-ranking person - equivalent to Ettore Conti - to assist with the final solution of the problem, i.e. the processing of applications for return to Yugoslavia.(20) Ćirković reported from Rome that the Italian side appeared particularly keen to have as many Ustašas as possible repatriated to Yugoslavia without delay. Conti told him that this could be done "without any fear". Ćirković seconded this opinion, as the rank and file was "demoralised and leaderless". At the same time, increasing numbers of Ustašas themselves were demanding to be returned home.

Ćirković's place in Rome was subsequently taken by Vladeta Milićević, a Yugoslav government expert on Ustaša affairs. Prior to his posting in Rome he was based in the "Delegation of the Interior Ministry" in Vienna, the chief centre for gathering intelligence on Croat separatists abroad. Skillful and ambitious, Milićević established regular personal contact with many Ustašas. He made it clear to those who requested repatriation that their return would be conditional not only on a promise of future good behaviour and co-operation with the authorities, but also on their readiness to give Milićević signed statements with every minute detail they knew about the organisation. In this way Milićević was able to compose a comprehensive picture, and at the same time compromise those who signed the statements.

Milićević's coup was to arrange the return of Mile Budak, one of the most prominent members of Pavelić's group. Milićević apparently expected Budak's return to be the final death blow to Pavelić's organisation, and an important impetus to the solution of the Croat question at home.(21) In his reports to Stojadinović he hinted that Budak's presence might have a bearing on Maček's posture, making the HSS leader more flexible. The Italians also looked favourably on Budak's return, hoping that it would weaken the position of Maček (whom they regarded as a "democrat" and a threat to their friend Stojadinović).

Having used the Ustašas as an auxiliary card, the Italians discarded them (albeit temporarily) without hesitation, in favour of broader strategic interests in the Danubian-Balkans area. As Mussolini said to the Yugoslav minister in Rome, Hristić, in May 1938: "The Croats cannot do anything any more".(22) This in itself indicated the extent to which the Ustaša organisation had neither the autonomy of action, nor alternative sources of support, which would make it a viable actor in the Balkans in the 1930s.

On balance, Stojadinović's agreement with Italy should be viewed as favourable to Yugoslavia. It settled disputes which had been on the agenda, to a greater or lesser degree, for almost two decades. The main concession from Belgrade was to accept (at least implicitly) Italy's dominant role in Albania.*

Italy could derive satisfaction from the undeniable fact that the agreement implied a shift in Yugoslavia's foreign policy, away from France and the Little Entente.** Ciano's own impression was that the Belgrade agreement represented but a first step towards the alliance "which Stojadinović considers natural and inevitable".(24) Echoing Ciano's openly stated apprehensions of Germany, the Yugoslav premier started talking in terms of the Belgrade-Rome Axis which would halt the German descent to the south.***

* The issue was dealt with through an exchange of letters between Ciano and Stojadinović, reiterating general principles of respect for the independence of Albania, which fell short of the Yugoslav initial demand for an undertaking that neither side would seek the dominant position there. By March 1937, such Yugoslav concession was no more than the recognition of the status quo.

** This greatly alarmed the French diplomats and military staff in mid-1937 and led to visits by General Gamelin (September) and by Foreign Minister Yvon Delbos (December 1937) to Belgrade to try to halt the drift in Yugoslav Foreign policy. As for Stojadinović, he explained the shift to the French chargé d'affaires in Belgrade in openly Realpolitical terms:

"France in particular could not do a great deal for the Little Entente as she has no means of communication, in view of the fact that Italy - by definition - would be at war with her."(23)

*** When Stojadinović proceeded to express his misgivings about Geneva, his hopes for expanded trade with Italy and his contempt for England's "bluffs", Ciano delightedly concluded that "Stojadinović is a Fascist", and "Yugoslavia now had a profound knowledge of the Italian language and culture"; "Italy will shortly be able to take the place in Yugoslavia of France herself".(25)

IV. YUGOSLAVIA, GERMANY AND THE USTAŠAS

1. Hitler's Yugoslav Policy and Ban on Ustašas

German diplomatic documents give the impression that King Alexander of Yugoslavia was not hostile to Hitler's rise to power, apparently regarding it as a possible counterweight to Italy's ambitions in the South-East. For instance, talking to the German minister in Belgrade, Dufour, on 1 June 1933, he said that he would prefer a German-Austrian customs union, and Germany as a neighbour, rather than Italy.(1) He went on to express hope that economic co-operation between the two countries would be expanded.*

The King's apparent benevolence, and especially his implicit support for the Anschluss, can only be explained in terms of his problems with Italy: the new Germany, openly bent on revising the Versailles order, could hardly be regarded as a natural friend of Yugoslavia.

By the early 1930s, however, the post-war honeymoon between France and Yugoslavia had turned into something of a marriage of convenience, maintained primarily by Italy's volatility. Undoubtedly, there was a strong Francophile streak among the Serb decision-making elite, based on cultural affinity and the memories of wartime alliance. And yet, the Yugoslav side had some reason to feel the special relationship with Paris as a burden too. Critical articles about Yugoslavia's internal affairs were frequent in the French press during the years of Alexander's dictatorship. The inflow of the French investment capital came to a halt during the depression, and there came demands for repayment of earlier loans.

* Even though the contemporary rumour of King Alexander's incognito trip to Germany to meet Goering in 1933 is not supported by documentary evidence, there are indications that on the eve of his fateful trip to Marseilles the sovereign passed a message to Berlin with his assurances that Yugoslavia would never enter into any agreement which would attempt to solve Central European issues without German participation.(2) Nevertheless, there is no indication that he planned a major shift in the foreign policy of Yugoslavia.

King Alexander's signals to Berlin may have had the objective of enhancing his position vis-a-vis France, to obtain concessions from her, and to prevent such French-Italian agreement (inspired by the need to contain Germany) which would be obtained at the cost of French appeasement of Italy's aspirations in the Adriatic basin. His readiness to accept the Anschluss was not surprising because it would cut away one link in Italy's attempt to encircle Yugoslavia from the north and north-west (Italy-Austria-Hungary). It would also put an end to the perennial fear of a Habsburg restoration.

For his part, Hitler wanted to break up the Little Entente and to exclude French influence from Central Europe. He also appeared willing, from his earliest days in power, to woo Yugoslavia, rather than to seek its destruction. This was in contrast to his policy towards other "Versailles creations", Czechoslovakia and Poland. He correctly perceived that the cement keeping the Little Entente together, and its members close to France, was fear of Hungarian revisionism. Therefore, Budapest needed to be restrained, and its energy channelled in the desired direction.*

Accordingly, German ministries were instructed to regard Italy's policy of the subversion of Yugoslavia as detrimental to Germany's interests. This was to be countered by the policy of friendship with Yugoslavia, which would act "as a stroke of a sword" against Italy's designs in the Danubian Basin. The theme of a strong Yugoslavia, friendly to Germany, as the key to Berlin's policy in south-eastern Europe, was a salient feature of German diplomatic documents in the 1930s.(4)

* Already in 1933 Hitler made his position clear to the visiting Hungarian prime minister, Gyula Gombos, when he stated that Hungary could count on Germany's support in its revisionist designs only in one direction, i.e. against Czechoslovakia.(3) Hitler added that Germany's foreign policy was based on the premise that Yugoslavia and Rumania should be brought into Germany's sphere of influence - primarily by economic means - and thus isolated from France and Czechoslovakia. An especially strong supporter of a pro-Yugoslav policy was Hermann Goering, who was regarded among the Nazi leaders as something of an expert for the area.

As Hitler had indicated, stronger links were initially forged in the economic sphere. A trade agreement was negotiated with great speed and signed in the spring of 1934, ensuring a market for Yugoslav farm produce at prices above world markets, in return for German industrial goods. This agreement, favourable to Yugoslavia, represented an instance of Germany's readiness to subordinate its short-term economic expediency to longer-term foreign policy objectives. The agreement with Yugoslavia (and a similar one with Hungary) should have provided the foothold in the Danubian basin, initially directed against both Italy and France. Against such strategic consideration, anything that could upset Hitler's relations with Belgrade had to be regarded by him as a nuisance and embarrassment.

There was an Ustaša organisation in Germany since about 1931, when one of Milićević's reports from Vienna mentioned "the activity in Berlin" for the first time.(5) The leading members of the group were Branimir Jelić (the Frankist youth leader who emigrated shortly after Pavelić in 1929), Mladen Lorković (German-educated son of a prominent Zagreb politician), Josip Milković (editor of Croatia Press) and Stijepo Perić.* There is some evidence of a sympathetic attitude to the Ustašas by some elements in the Reichswehr and in the foreign department of the Nazi Party in the early days (1933). As soon as it became aware of such tendencies, the Foreign Ministry clamped down on them very energetically, explicitly supported in this by Hitler himself. All available Wilhelmstrasse documents show that the pro-Yugoslav policy, based on the Nazi leaders' perception of national interest, precluded any form of support for the Ustašas.

* They were financed by one Mijo Gavranović, a self-made man with no education, who exercised great influence on many Croat workers in Germany. On 30 May 1933 Milićević reported that

"[T]his group has succeeded in establishing links with some prominent Hitlerites and obtaining asylum in Germany for its work... [They] tour unhindered all the colonies of our workers, organise them against us, recruit 'Ustašas' and take them to Italy or Hungary."(6)

The early discrepancy between the Foreign Ministry and other instances is illustrated by two episodes. In November 1933 the Reichswehr Ministry sought to provide a modicum of support for Branimir Jelić and his associates, in their efforts to start publishing some pro-Ustaša papers and pamphlets.(7) The military proceeded from the assumption that in the event of a future European war Yugoslavia would side with Germany's opponents and that therefore the organised Croat émigrés hostile to the "present" Yugoslavia should be welcomed as German allies. As visualised by the Reichswehr Ministry, Croat expatriates who could be used against Yugoslavia would mobilize their co-nationals within Yugoslavia for a rebellion.

The Foreign Ministry replied very sharply that German diplomacy steered clear of Croat matters and sought smooth relations with the Yugoslav state, "whose collapse could not be counted on";

"... Through the existence of the two Croatian papers in Germany, however, these relations were being injured. We were anxious, therefore, that a final ban should be declared... A paper by the name of The Independent Croatian State... was quite impossible..."(7)

Only two weeks later the Foreign Ministry reacted in a similar manner when Jelić attempted to present a memorandum on the situation in Croatia addressed to Hitler. While reiterating the need to ban Croat émigré papers, the Ministry stressed that this was entirely in line "with the special wish of the Reich Chancellor" that relations with Yugoslavia be given "especially careful treatment".(8) Furthermore, a letter expressing concern over Croat emigre activities sent to the Prussian Ministry of the Interior on 29 November 1933 noted confidentially that "the Reich Chancellor has given special instructions personally to this effect [i.e. the need to maintain and improve relations with Yugoslavia] to Herr von Heeren, our newly appointed Minister to Belgrade".(9) Obviously, such frequent references to the highest instance in the land could not have come without specific instructions from the top.

Even sharper was the reaction of the Foreign Ministry to an attempt by the NSDAP Foreign Policy Department (Alfred Rosenberg) to save Croat émigré papers from the ban. The Party department was apparently interested in Jelić's usefulness as a source of intelligence and a means of ensuring publication of pro-German articles in the Croat press, rather than in strategic support for Croat separatism. It is also possible that some Party activists felt a natural affinity for a movement which professed similar ideological tendencies (especially since Jelić and Lorković were avid Germanophiles).

The issue was additionally sensitive, because the Foreign Ministry needed to assert its authority over the Party "hotheads". It sought - and obtained - support from Hitler personally.*

* "By order of the Reich Chancellor", State secretary Lammers conveyed the following letter to the head of the NSDAP Foreign Policy Department, Alfred Rosenberg:(10)

"Dear Herr Rosenberg:

Berlin, November 30, 1933.

I have been informed by State Secretary von Buelow of the conflict concerning the treatment of the former Yugoslav national, Dr Jelic, which has arisen between the Aussenpolitisches Amt headed by you and the Foreign Ministry.

On the instructions of the Reich Chancellor I have the honour to communicate to you the following:

'The policy of the Reich Government, especially as it applies to the Balkans, aims at the maintenance of normal and amicable relations with the existing states, insofar and as long as our own interest demands this, and not to undertake or encourage anything that could be interpreted as active intervention in the domestic policy of these states. The activity of the Croatian emigre, Dr Jelic, is directed against the existence of the Yugoslav state. With respect to foreign policy we have no interest whatsoever in tolerating or indeed encouraging this activity in any way.'

The Reich Chancellor, as you know, is also for ideological reasons opposed to overrating the political influence of emigres.

I should therefore like to ask you to bring your influence to bear on your subordinates in such a way that measures against the journalistic activity of Dr Jelic, which have been recommended by the Foreign Ministry, will not be resisted. With German greetings and Heil Hitler, Yours etc, Dr Lammers."

The minister in Belgrade, Heeren, was duly informed of the developments in the Jelić case (on 14 December) and received a copy of Lammers' letter to Rosenberg. On 25 January 1934 the Gestapo notified the Foreign Ministry that Croat papers had been suppressed as of that day (6065/E448822). The Foreign Ministry informed the Yugoslav Legation in a note verbale of 7 February (6065/E448826).

Such firm instructions, coming from Hitler himself, could not be resisted. Rosenberg's department duly revised its policy. The result was obvious a year later, when the NSDAP Foreign Policy department prepared a lengthy memorandum, coloured by a strong anti-Italian sentiment.(11) In Rosenberg's document, Italy was viewed as the main opponent, not only in Austria, but also in Hungary, Yugoslavia and Greece. Belgrade was stressed as the pivotal point of any South-Eastern policy, in view of Yugoslavia's central position, and its participation in all meaningful regional treaties.* The economic advantage to Germany was stressed yet again, together with the absence of open issues between the two countries. Stronger links were not only possible, but also necessary, concluded Rosenberg's bureau, starting with economics and ending with politics.

Thus by 1934 there was in Germany a clearly defined set of principles guiding her policy towards Yugoslavia. To the Foreign Ministry it represented a continuation of the Weimar line. The Wilhelmstrasse had it strictly imposed on other organs, who duly accepted it as their own. It was Hitler's policy, and the Fuehrer went to the trouble of issuing precise instructions even over a dispute concerning an emigre and his fringe publications. It was so much Hitler's policy that any deviation from it could only come from the lower echelons of various layers of the state and Party bureaucracy.

* King Alexander's death changed little, the document added, since Prince Paul's policy should be equated with that of his predecessor. Internally, "the country is firm", the Croat issue does not threaten its survival, Croatia is not a state within the state and the Croat people feels an equal member of that state. [emphasis added] It was further asserted that the Yugoslav soldier, "regardless of national origin", was by education and training an offspring of the same "branch" and a guarantee of the state's firmness without and within. The Nazi Party document further acknowledged the role of French capital in developing Yugoslavia's economic resources, but also saw an opportunity in the cooling of relations between Belgrade and Paris, owing to France's attempts to arrive at an understanding with Italy.

Following the assassination of King Alexander, Germany went out of its way to dissociate itself from the event. The Foreign Ministry sent a circular to its legations abroad on 25 October 1934, describing any possible claim that Germany tolerated or even promoted the activities of Croat émigrés as "utterly tendentious", calculated to create a diversion and cause bad blood.(12) In support of this, the Ministry quoted the following: 1. Suppression of two Croat émigré papers (Croatia Press and The Independent Croat State). 2. Surveillance of Croats living in Germany at the request of the Yugoslav Legation, in connection with an earlier attempt on the life of King Alexander; and 3. Help extended to the Yugoslav side following its request that police enquiries be made as to the whereabouts of certain Croats after the assassination.*

All subsequent Yugoslav official requests for surveillance of Croat émigrés in Germany were forwarded to the Gestapo, and results of enquiries were communicated to the Yugoslav Legation. In order to expedite investigations, the Yugoslav side asked the Germans on 27 October that the Legation be allowed to communicate directly with the German police authorities. A Foreign Ministry official (Koepke) asked Goering "exceptionally" to grant this request. Goering not only agreed, but promised to the Yugoslav Minister, Balugdžić, his personal support in facilitating the task of the special Yugoslav police delegate (Ivan Mogorović).(14) Furthermore, Goering personally demanded the arrest of two prominent Croat emigres (Lorković and Cihlar). They were released in February 1935, but the Foreign Ministry asked the Gestapo to obtain written statements from them that while in Germany they would refrain from any political activity, especially if it was directed against the existence and security of Yugoslavia.

* On 10 October the Yugoslav Legation in Berlin had given the names of five Croats suspected of taking part in the Marseilles plot (Dr Mile Budak, Eugen Kvaternik, Josip Milković, Mladen Lorković and Branimir Jelić); two further notes verbales requested specific information on the whereabouts of Kvaternik, Milković and Stijepo Perić between 25 September and 10 October (7827/E568190, 7827/E568238 and 7827/E568247). German authorities could not establish any link between those persons still in Germany and the regicide of which the Yugoslavs were informed on 22 October 1934 (7827/E568280-83). In the meantime, Neurath was urging the Hungarians to improve relations with Belgrade.(13)

This was duly effected by the Gestapo. Finally, in March 1935 the Foreign Ministry instructed its consular representatives in Italy not to issue a visa to Branimir Jelić for his return to Germany, since this would be "undesirable for political reasons".(15)

The link between Pavelić - imprisoned in Turin throughout 1935, or subsequently (spring 1936) confined to Salerno - with his followers in Germany was practically non-existent until mid-1936. During this time there was little Ustaša activity anywhere (the period of "great silence" after Marseilles). The "guest-workers" in different West European industrial centres were mindful of the possibility of deportation, which was both real for those engaged in anti-Yugoslav activity, and serious in its personal consequences for those affected. Sometimes the support for Pavelić's organisation was less than voluntary. A number of workers in the Ruhr Basin continued making discreet financial contributions to "the cause" through Gavranović, who was able to proffer precious work permits in return.(16) The suspected Ustašas were under police surveillance and subject to preventive arrest whenever German authorities deemed it necessary (eg. prior to Stojadinović's visit in 1937). When two of them, Mladen Lorković and Andrija Artuković, evaded "tails" and disappeared in June 1937, the chief of Section III at the State Security Directorate, Heinrich Mueller, was involved in the search.

Such activity as there was consisted chiefly of maintaining contact by mail with like-minded people in other countries, exchanging information on the situation in Yugoslavia. (Extensive correspondence with other émigrés was uncovered in Lorković's lodgings after his arrest and presented to Mogorović for examination.(17) The material was of only marginal interest.) It was a kind of existence familiar to most political émigrés everywhere, filled with gossip, financial problems, uncertainty and hope, and above all marginalized.

2. Pavelić's Memorandum to the Wilhelmstrasse

Confronted with the persistent refusal of the German authorities to lend a sympathetic ear to his cause, let alone offer him support, Pavelić attempted a direct approach. He prepared a lengthy memorandum, On the Croat Question, and addressed it to the German Foreign Ministry.* In his memorandum Pavelić went out of his way to stress his ideological affinity with National Socialism, and to prove the community of interests between the Croats and Germans, as well as their shared cultural traits.(18) He went on to list the usual Ustaša arguments: Serbs and Croats were worlds apart, and the latter did not want to be in the same state with the former, since the Croats were culturally superior and even racially different (being "Goths" rather than Slavs by origin). The Yugoslav state was created illegally in 1918, and "it has never had a mandate from the Croat people". Geopolitically and economically, the area which Pavelić claimed for Croatia (about two thirds of Yugoslavia) was crucially important in Europe. "Non-Croat ethnic groups" in this area [i.e. the Serbs of Croatia, Dalmatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina] came as "intruders" during Turkish rule, and partly "in the most modern times" [after 1918].

Obviously tailoring his argument to his intended German audience, Pavelić listed Croatia's chief enemies (besides the Serbian authorities) as being "international Freemasonry, Jewry and Communism". The masons were "in charge" in Yugoslavia, having "invented" it in 1918. The Jews, alleged Pavelić, held almost all trade and banking.

* Although this document was sent in October 1936, it was not even received at the Wilhelmstrasse until early April 1941, by which time the Germans were already busily preparing their attack on Yugoslavia. The memorandum was probably sent to Mladen Lorković in Berlin. Mindful of his written undertaking to the Gestapo not to engage in politics, Lorković forwarded it to Professor Carl von Loesch, head of an institute for the study of south-east European affairs in Munich.(17) Loesch eventually had it published over four years later.

The "Jewry", he added, had eagerly greeted the creation of Yugoslavia, since they really controlled it.* According to Pavelić, Yugoslavia was fertile ground for Communist agitation too, and the authorities in Belgrade were only half-hearted in their attempts to quell it. The Serbs, having been "a long arm of tsarist Russia" in the past, were depicted as naturally prone to Bolshevism. Besides, Serbia - as a traditional enemy of Germany - was alleged to have passed that animosity on to the new state, but "Belgrade tried to hide this because it was threatened by the Croat problem".

Finally, Pavelić asserted that Yugoslavia was opposed to any change in the condition created in Versailles, and therefore it was bound to remain a permanent ally of France. On the other hand, a free Croat state would look to those to whom it felt close culturally and economically. At this point Pavelić paid handsome tribute to the Reich and its Fuehrer, asserting "those" would be:

"... the German nation as a whole, with the German Reich at its centre, embodied in its greatest and best son Adolf Hitler. In its struggle for freedom and independence against the imposed peace treaty, the Croat nation asks for the support of Hitler's Germany, in which it sees the mightiest warrior for natural rights, true culture and higher civilisation.

Pavelić's memorandum, as we have noted, did not even reach the Reich Foreign Ministry until April 1941. Therefore, it could not have influenced the official German attitude towards him until after the decision to attack Yugoslavia had been made. The memorandum is significant merely as an early statement of intent - fully realized only after Italy's collapse - to bring Croatia into Germany's orbit.

* "In the chaos of nationalities is the Jew's empire; in it, Jewry - as a financially strong and seemingly loyal element - may bow to the authorities and gain their support. A Croat national state was not to the Jews' liking because the founder of modern Croat nationalism Dr Ante Starčević was an enemy of Jewry and an anti-Semite. And indeed, Yugoslavia has developed just as the Jews had predicted, as a veritable Eldorado for Jewry..."

Most probably, the Italians had no knowledge of this document. In view of its tone and contents, Pavelić had every reason to keep it well concealed from his paymasters, who in subsequent years displayed great sensitivity to every sign of German interest in Croat affairs.

Even if Pavelić had cherished some hopes of inducing the Germans to change their attitude, he was quickly disappointed: 1937 was a year of continued strict Gestapo surveillance and periodical imprisonment of those few Ustašas still "active" in Germany. Such measures reached a climax by December, prior to Stojadinović's visit to Berlin.* That visit was a success from the German viewpoint. On 17 January 1938 he told Hitler that Yugoslavia would not join any bloc or accept any obligations against Germany. This could only please Hitler, who had sought for years to break up the Little Entente by "unequal treatment" of its members (isolation of Czechoslovakia).** Germany's economic penetration of the Balkans was also proceeding vigorously and swiftly.*** With such success for his policy objectives, Hitler had no reason to jeopardize his achievement by any encouragement to Croat separatism.

* The Yugoslav press attaché in Berlin, Miloš Crnjanski, wrote to Stojadinović that "everything still remaining here is interned, and even [Croat] street peddlers are confined to their places of residence, where they have to report to the police three times a day".(19)

** The symptoms of its disintegration were visible already at the Little Entente annual meeting in Bratislava in 1936, shortly after the fall of Titulescu in Romania. On that occasion the Czechs found themselves isolated in their attempt to induce Antonescu and Stojadinović to broaden mutual treaty obligations. The Bratislava meeting was the beginning of the end of the Little Entente. The Yugoslavs and Romanians included in the final communiqué a statement to the effect that member states may enter into treaties with third parties without informing their allies first. Stojadinović firmly resisted the signing of a treaty with France, as suggested by Prague (ménage à quatre). When this issue resurfaced at the Permanent Council meeting in Belgrade in 1937, it was shelved indefinitely. Stojadinović sarcastically described the event to the Italian minister as "a first class funeral". (Krizman, 1975, p. 90)

*** Already in 1936 it was taking a greater share of the Balkan countries' exports than all other great powers taken together. Since Germany traded on the basis of barter arrangements, those countries had to increase their imports from Germany in order to equalize the balance (Yugoslavia's surplus in 1936 was 21 million Reichsmarks). The trend was irrevocably confirmed with the absorption of Austria and Bohemia-Moravia in February 1938 and March 1939, for both were important trading partners of Yugoslavia.

3. The Italian Factor

The policy of wooing, rather than destroying Yugoslavia was not the only reason for Germany's cold-shouldering of Croat separatists. There was also the policy of friendship with Italy, which was made possible (and in a sense unavoidable) by the Abyssinian war. This affair preoccupied both the Western powers and Italy for more than a year, and it helped conceal the nature of the real threat to peace in Europe. Unwittingly, Italy did a favour to Hitler by drawing attention away from him. In the end, the split between Italy and her former allies was beyond repair. Germany was the chief benefactor:*

Mussolini's visit to Germany, Italy's accession to the Anti-Comintern Pact and withdrawal from the League of Nations marked the final abandonment of the Europe of Versailles. Not only the style of Italian foreign policy was changed, but its substance too, which was reflected in Mussolini's (not Hitler's) invention of the Rome-Berlin Axis. Last but not least, the civil war in Spain infused an ideological element into the picture. By pitting Germany and Italy against both the Left and non-interventionist democracies, it created an impression of ideological solidarity. But the shift to Berlin was not totally wholehearted (as we have seen), and fear of Germany's rising power necessitated the definition of an exclusively Italian sphere of influence. By becoming reconciled to the Anschluss, Italy fell back on a zone of influence south of the area soon to become part of the Reich.

The fall of Stojadinović in February 1939 placed Mussolini's line of retreat in doubt; his "Belgrade-Rome Axis" hinged too much on one man. Germany's seizure of the rump of Bohemia and the proclamation of an independent Slovakia (only one month later) were received in Rome with alarm.

* "And when Germany afforded Italy an opportunity to weaken France, Mussolini seized it. His refusal to see in the German reoccupation of the Rhineland the casus foederis stipulated by Locarno was gratuitously matched by a relaxation of the vigilance on the Brenner." (20)

It was feared that Croat separatists, not necessarily from the ranks of Pašelić's followers, could turn to Germany for help in engineering a Slovak "solution" in Zagreb. (This could only be reinforced by a "private" visit of Maček's deputy to Prague and Bratislava before the end of March.) After a sleepless night, Mussolini decided to accept Hitler's fait accompli provided that his sphere of influence in the Balkans was guaranteed.(21) Ciano duly told Mackensen of "rumours" that Maček intended to proclaim Croat autonomy under German protection, and asked for reassurance.

Hitler was only too pleased to oblige. His often stated respect for the Brenner frontier was reiterated in the strongest possible terms in March 1939 ("This decision will never be placed in doubt or challenged".) He perceived that, to Mussolini, Italy's status as a big power was at stake. Hitler accordingly also restated his disinterest in Croatia: it was imperative to flatter the Italian leader and reassure him. Ribbentrop's letter to Ciano dated 20 March 1939 was worded with this objective in mind, including an unequivocal statement that "in all Mediterranean questions the policy of the Axis is to be determined by Rome".(22)*

While acknowledging that unnamed Croat representatives had approached the Germans, Ribbentrop stressed that they were left in no doubt that Germany's position on the issue depended on Italy. A few days later Ribbentrop sent an express circular to the same effect to domestic institutions (eighteen bodies in all, including all ministries) and representatives abroad.**

* Ribbentrop added:

"Just as the Duce declared his desinteressement in Czechia, we ourselves are disinterested in the Croat question and, if we acted at all in this matter it would only be in the closest cooperation with Italian wishes."

** "CONFIDENTIAL

Berlin, March 25, 1939 (Kult.A 1368 g.)

Germany's relationship with Italy in the Rome-Berlin Axis requires that, in political questions in the Mediterranean countries and particularly in the case of national community and minority problems in these countries, Italy's intentions should exert a decisive influence on Germany's attitude. Only in the Foreign Ministry is it possible to make a complete survey and decide in what instances relations with the aforementioned national and minority groups are appropriate and, if so, how these are to be developed. [ctd. on p.81f]

Judging by Ciano's records, the effect of German gestures was achieved.

Whereas immediately after Prague the Italians had grave doubts about the German alliance (and Ciano referred to Hitler as "disloyal and untrustworthy"), Ribbentrop's letter induced Mussolini to declare "We are not whores, we cannot change our policy".(23) Hitler's reiteration of Italy's Mediterranean primacy thus averted the crisis in Axis relations, but it also acted as a substitute for comprehensive long-term analysis of the two powers' common interests.

The strategic community of interests remained unclarified, with far-reaching consequences later on. The events of 1935-1939 created ideological solidarity between two totalitarian regimes, while their will to expand drew them together against forces devoted to the maintenance of the existing order. The long-term objectives remained different, however, although this difference was never spelt out. Mussolini was prepared to fight a battle in his mare nostrum to secure a resurrected Roman Empire and gain access to the oceans; but Hitler ultimately strove for nothing short of Weltmacht. Italy's aims were formulated by Mussolini at a meeting of the Grand Council on 4 February 1939:

"States are more or less independent according to their maritime position... [Italy] is really a prisoner in the Mediterranean, and the more populous and powerful she becomes, the more she will suffer from her imprisonment. The bars of this prison are Corsica, Tunisia, Malta and Cyprus. Its sentinels are Gibraltar and Suez."(24)

[ctd from p. 85]

I would therefore request you to observe the following principles in future:

1. Our attitude regarding all national community and minority problems in the Mediterranean countries must be adjusted to meet the wishes of the Italian Government.

2. Any relations with national community and minority organizations in these countries may only be obtained if the assent of the Foreign ministry thereto has been obtained in writing. [...]

3. In the interests of German-Italian relations, connections with Croat organisations must on no account be maintained in the future. [cursive added]

I would request you to bring the above at once to the notice of those of your subordinate authorities, official departments, organizations, etc., which are concerned, and make it incumbent on them to conform unconditionally to the same issue. Ribbentrop."(22)

Mussolini concluded that the goal of Italy's policy, "which has not and never can have as objectives continental European territory except Albania, is in the first place to break the prison bars". After that, "the march to the Ocean". Whether it turned out to be the Indian Ocean or the Atlantic, Italy needed to secure its rear on the Continent. That was "the historic necessity" answered by the Rome-Berlin Axis.

This statement, made at the beginning of 1939, was a mark of the success of Hitler's policy over the previous three years. Mussolini in effect admitted Italy's abdication as an European power, with his interests reduced to the Mediterranean littoral. This was precisely in line with Hitler's postulate that the alliance with Italy had to be accompanied by the expulsion of its influence from the Danubian basin to the south, with compensation in the Mediterranean.

On the same day when Mussolini made his statement, Stojadinović fell from power. Italy's subsequent return to the policy of subversion of Yugoslavia and territorial expansion along the eastern Adriatic could be interpreted as "an attempt to secure the rear", rather than a part of long-term strategy of territorial expansion. The issue of Yugoslavia - insofar as it did not touch on the Italian interests in Albania - was a distraction even from the limited task Mussolini had set for himself: to remove those prison bars that kept Italy confined to the Mediterranean.

In pursuit of his relatively limited and relatively rational objectives, the Italian dictator was frequently erratic and inconsistent. He eventually cut off his manoeuvring space to the point where his only road was to an alliance with the infinitely stronger German dictator, whose goals were practically unlimited - therefore irrational - but who displayed great skill and "rationality" in their pursuit. Shrewdly perceiving the need for flexibility in adjusting the two unspoken premises of his Italian alliance, Hitler had no qualms in continuing his strict hands-off policy to Croat separatism.

V - EUROPEAN CRISIS AND THE CROAT QUESTION

1. The Fall of Stojadinović

Four events in the first half of 1939 had a major impact on the Croat question, turning it into more than a major Yugoslav domestic issue. They were the fall of Prime Minister Stojadinović, the final break-up of Czechoslovakia (and the proclamation of Slovakia's independence), the Italian occupation of Albania and the signing of the Pact of Steel.

Milan Stojadinović acquired a fairly bad name after his fall.* Initially, when he was appointed by Prince Paul in 1935, Stojadinović was regarded as an opponent of the dictatorship and the person likely to reintroduce normal political life. Indeed, the press grew considerably freer, and reported statements unfavourable to the government. The HSS was the chief benefactor of the more liberal climate. More than any of its Serbian counterparts, Maček's party had remained fairly homogeneous and coherent throughout the years of dictatorship and "guided democracy".

At first Stojadinović made statements which indicated his readiness to solve the Croat question. After almost four years in office he had not succeeded in doing so. His freedom of manoeuvre, he later claimed, was limited by Prince Paul's decision not to change the 1931 Constitution until young King Peter II came of age.(1) Besides, Maček was not ready to compromise yet. He expected the rising tension in Europe to work in his favour by making Belgrade readier to grant concessions. Within the HSS, extremist voices were heard with greater frequency, accusing Maček of "softness" and insufficient radicalism; he responded to such pressures by making inopportune or unreasonable demands.

* To the Communists he was a reactionary exponent of "big capital", and a friend of the Axis powers; to the Croats he was an inflexible greater Serb and a proponent of the centralist idea; to the West he was painted as little better than a common Fascist by Prince Paul (and was treated accordingly by the British during the war); while to his Serbian opponents he was apparently deserving of every indignity and - in the end - the sort of treatment which he had never applied against them. Milan Stojadinović was guilty of a sin not easily forgiven in the Balkans: he grew too big for his boots. He aroused envy among his opponents, and seemed not to care, regarding himself as invincible.

The Croat leader had reason, political and constitutional, to regard Prince Paul as a more suitable partner for negotiations than the premier: Maček had stated on more than one occasion that he only recognised the Crown and the state, while everything else was open. (When the Prince accepted this role in 1939, Maček had no qualms about making a deal over the heads of his Serbian opposition partners.) The Stojadinović years have to be seen as a period of stagnation in the resolution of the Croat question.

Maček did not seem to be in a hurry, but Stojadinović was not too eager either. He was not impressed by the pressures of international events, because the treaty with Italy seemingly neutralised the only power which could offer some hope and comfort to the Croat cause. Wooed by Germany, friendly with Italy, still (nominally) allied with France and the Little Entente, the Yugoslav premier believed he was building a fairly strong external position. He could also expect Maček to feel uncomfortable about the return of some leading Ustaša luminaries (Budak, Lorković), as Vladeta Milićević had hinted in his reports from Rome.

The total silencing of Pavelić and his supporters in Italy after the treaty of 1937 and the voluntary return of about a half of his followers to Yugoslavia moved the focus of Ustaša activity to their home country. Within Yugoslavia, the number of sworn Ustaša members probably was not much greater than 1,000, and even Ustaša sources do not put it above 2,000. While many returnees refrained from any political activity (or even co-operated with the police), some - notably Mile Budak - gradually established contact with the "home Ustašas" who had stayed in the country throughout.*

* This group (Ivo Oršanić, Slavko Kvaternik, Mirko Puk, Jozo Dumandžić) focused their attention around the "mutual assistance society" Uzdaniča (Support). (2) This was in reality a front for lively political activity along Ustaša lines, including lectures, collection of subscriptions for the ultra-nationalist newspaper Hrvatski narod (Croat People), and organising pro-Ustaša students. Slightly apart was a smaller group around Stjepan Buč, which had its own paper, Nezavisnost (Independence). The two factions did not always see eye to eye. (3)

The focus of their activity was to create a counterweight to Maček's claim to undisputed leadership of the Croat people. It was also aimed to create an informal, but tightly-knit network of pro-Ustaša people not only in Croatia proper, but also in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Vojvodina and Dalmatia. There appeared to be an unprecedented degree of official tolerance for such activity in 1938, which aroused suspicion among the HSS leaders. They suspected that Stojadinović wanted to use the Ustaša movement to make Yugoslavia more pro-Fascist, while weakening their own party in the process. (If this was indeed in the back of Stojadinović's mind, it was a dangerous gambit, not unlike Whitehall tacitly supporting the IRA in order to make the SDLP more flexible.)

Maček must have been sensitive to such tendencies, because he was already under pressure from the more separatist-minded elements within the HSS. Throughout the mid-1930s Maček maintained the position that the constitution of 1931 had to be abolished. The HSS insisted that it had to be told in advance of any formal agreement with the Serbian opposition what would be the territory of the future Croat unit within Yugoslavia, and what would be its constitutional status. Maček suspected that his tactical alliance with the opposition ("United Opposition", whose electoral list was headed by himself) would not produce quick results in case of success at the polls, unless such details were settled in advance. The Serbian opposition parties' leaders, as always, gave primacy to the victory over Stojadinović; unlike Maček, who pursued a national policy, they were simply politicians. The only known meeting between Stojadinović and Maček (January 1937) also ended without results.* Little progress to resolve the Croat problem was made in Stojadinović's last two years in power.

* Although the two leaders continued to maintain indirect contact until mid-1938, the sticking point was Maček's insistence that the Constitution be abolished, entirely and immediately. Maček's private secretary at the time, Branko Pešelj, acted as intermediary. Stojadinović repeatedly offered to form a coalition with Maček and to sign a provisional agreement with the Croats on the basis of Article 116 of the Constitution, which provided for emergency measures in case of a threat to the country. (Mr Pešelj to the author, Washington D.C., 1988) Two years later this was the basis for Maček's agreement with Cvetković.

If Maček had to contend with increasing radicalism in his ranks, Stojadinović was similarly targeted from the Serb side, as became obvious in 1937 with the dispute over ratification of the concordat with the Holy See. Although the concordat was King Alexander's brainchild, Stojadinović's opponents claimed that it would give undue privileges to the Roman Catholic Church at the expense of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and that Stojadinović was pushing for its passage at the Skupština in order to score points with the Italians.

The dispute over the Concordat was a sign of deeper restlessness among the Serbs. Stojadinović's instincts increasingly smacked of Fascism as the years went by (green-shirted youths, shouts of "Leader, Leader"), which could not impress a people devoted to their democratic traditions and tired of a decade of dictatorship and authoritarianism. The new, increasingly neutralist foreign policy orientation, for all its pragmatism, was unappealing in Serbia, which less than a generation earlier had fought a bloody war against the Austro-Germans, and where Francophile affinities remained strong.

Prince Paul's decision to replace Stojadinović shortly after the election of December 1938 (which the ruling government party, made up of Radicals, Bosnian Muslims and Slovenes won, albeit narrowly) was due to several factors.* The Prince was probably genuinely concerned that Stojadinović's policy of friendship with the Axis powers went too far, illustrated by events such as the premier's confidential tête-à-tête with Ciano in January 1939 when the division of Albania was on the agenda.(4)

* Two reasons given by Stojadinović himself seem less plausible than others: that Prince Paul had regal ambitions and saw in Stojadinović an obstacle to his plans, and that the Prince's wife, Olga, was rumoured to have had an affair with Stojadinović, which allegedly made Paul jealous of his premier.

There have been similar rumours in Belgrade concerning Stojadinović and the wife of the German Minister, Frau von Heeren, who contributed to the stories by her un concealed admiration for Stojadinović. Ulrich von Hassel commented on this in his diary (11 November 1940), adding that the lady in question "dreams daily" of Stojadinović and hinted that Prince Paul was aware of the situation.

On balance, the more important reason was Stojadinović's inactivity on the Croat question, or worse, his growing conviction that it should NOT be solved by an agreement with Maček. Stojadinović's self-confidence seems to have increased after the electoral victory in December 1938. Shortly after the election he wrote to the Prince:

That which now gives me the greatest concern is the situation in the Savska and Primorska Banovina (Croatia), where Maček is not only master in the majority of districts, but is, in addition, now beginning to command the state civil servants. To elevate the authority of the state in those regions, it seems to me, becomes [italics in original] the first order of business in the future program..."(5)

In order to reach an agreement with Maček, which he regarded as ultimately inevitable, Prince Paul knew he needed to find someone other than Stojadinović (not least because Maček demanded Stojadinović's removal as his conditio sine qua non). On the clumsiest pretext possible (a parliamentary debate which could have been construed as reflecting some differences of opinion within the governing party), Prince Paul demanded the resignation of Stojadinović's government (4 February 1939). He then selected Dragiša Cvetković, a government minister, but nationally little-known, as Stojadinović's successor. While Cvetković was reputed to be an advocate of agreement with Maček, his lack of authority and independent power base promised to Prince Paul that his new premier would not be too much his own man.

Unfortunately for the Prince and for his new premier, it also meant that the government lacked credibility among most Yugoslavs, and especially among the Serbian people. Without undisputed legitimacy, and without a clear mandate, its many and difficult tasks ultimately became impossible.

2. Spring 1939: Maček Looks Abroad

The fall of Stojadinović was expected to arouse suspicion in Berlin and Rome. It created a stir within HSS ranks, since outside support for the Croat "cause" appeared feasible once again. Such expectations were not groundless. The German minister in Belgrade, Heeren, hinted at the possibility of a different look at the Croat issue in a report to his ministry after the fall of Stojadinović.(6) The latter's removal meant the departure of the only person capable of maintaining an authoritarian régime, opined Heeren, who added that Stojadinović's demise had the additional aim to appease those Croats who were opposed to such a regime. Forecasting challenging times for Yugoslavia, Heeren came to the point:

"The new situation created by the fall of Stojadinović's government gives us back complete freedom of action to use such favourable circumstances to regain the Croats' friendship."

Official Germany did not follow this course, for a variety of reasons discussed in Chapter V, but the Croats were not to know this. If even Heeren regarded a change of policy as reasonable under the circumstances, it was not surprising that similar expectations existed in some Zagreb quarters.

Already on 12 February 1939 a man claiming to be Maček's envoy paid a visit to an official of the Fuehrer's headquarters in Berlin and asked for German help in solving the Croat question along separatist lines.(7) The official German record of this encounter lists his arguments as more or less identical to those presented by Pavelić in his attempts to solicit German support (including the promise that Croatia would establish closest possible cooperation with Germany, join the Axis and the Anti-Comintern Pact). In line with the strict German policy (reiterated in Ribbentrop's circular a few weeks later), the Germans remained reserved.

The mysterious visitor's credentials to speak on Maček's behalf are unknown. However, this incident was followed by numerous appearances of Maček's envoys in European capitals; this reflected heady expectations in some HSS circles. There were rumours in Zagreb of secret contacts between Maček and Hitler, and of Germany's alleged readiness to assist the cause of Croat autonomy, if not outright independence.(8) Various HSS publications added to this atmosphere by publishing articles which were favourable to Germany, and in particular praised Hitler's proclaimed support for the "self-determination" of peoples.(9) This was in contrast to the previous HSS "line", and Maček's own often expressed disdain for totalitarian régimes.

In a message to Heeren of 22 February 1939 the State Secretary at the German Foreign Ministry, Ernst von Weizsaecker, warned against any encouragement of similar expectations in Croatia. However, German entry into Prague and the proclamation of an independent Slovakia fanned hopes of just this sort. Maček's deputy Košutić immediately travelled to Bratislava and Prague, formally "on private business", but it was widely interpreted as a strong signal that the HSS was interested in following the Slovak example.(10) Such impression was reinforced by press articles and broadcasts all over Europe which drew a parallel with Yugoslavia. According to Hermann Goering, Maček's representatives tried to talk to him at the time of the Czech crisis in March 1939, but he gave them short shrift.(11) Refusing to see them, the Reichsmarshal sarcastically remarked that if they thought they had to discuss political issues with foreign governments rather than their own, they should go to Rome, not Berlin. And to Rome they did go.

The fall of Stojadinović came as a surprise to the Italians, and it was perceived as a blow to their policy; "with the removal of Stojadinović", Ciano wrote, "the Yugoslav card has lost for us 90 percent of its value".(12)*

* Mussolini and Ciano made the same error of basing their policy on one man in the case of Pavelić, to whom the Duce once referred (in 1941) as "the only trump card we have in Croatia".

New circumstances induced Rome to accept overtures by Croat envoys which would have been unthinkable only a few months previously. On 9 March 1939 Count Josip Bombelles, a Croat "country gentleman", presented himself to Ciano, claiming to be Maček's secret envoy.(13)* At first Ciano thought that this was a courtesy call, since the two had met at a hunt with Prince Paul in Yugoslavia. Bombelles talked of the "gulf" between Serbs and Croats and the impossibility of an agreement. As the Croats' ideal he presented an independent state headed by an Italian prince, or a personal union with Italy. Without presenting any demands, he warned Ciano of the policy of Belgrade, which - he alleged - was becoming increasingly pro-Western after the fall of Stojadinović. Ciano cautiously replied that Italy's policy was in the spirit of the Belgrade Treaty of 1937, but nevertheless agreed to retain contact with Bombelles: "whenever the situation changes we might listen to the Croat point of view in deciding our political attitude".

The situation did change with the German liquidation of the rump of Czechoslovakia, but in an unexpected direction. Mussolini's initial reaction to the news from Prague was to postpone his planned occupation of Albania. It was feared that by shaking up Yugoslavia, such Italian action could finally result in the proclamation of Croatia's independence under German protection. Mussolini appeared genuinely concerned about the possibility of German intervention, and the Italians even decided to send a telegram to Prince Paul, advising him of the need to speed up negotiations with Maček.(14) Ciano's suspicions about German intentions in Croatia induced him on 19 March to write some of his harshest lines about Hitler ("unfaithful and treacherous").

* The 1946 American edition of Ciano's Diary quite wrongly translated his entry: "Invece e entrato appieno nella politica e mi ha dichiarato la sua qualità di agente segreto di Macek" as "Instead he went directly into the political situation and revealed himself to be the secret agent of Ustasci". Only a few days later, Ciano's entry [concerning Mussolini's apprehensions after Prague] quoted Mussolini as saying "Il che vorrebbe dire i prussiani a Susak"; while the American edition had "the Prussians" translated as "the Ustasci", totally altering the sense of Ciano's entry.

The following day another person claiming to be Maček's secret envoy made an appearance in Rome. This was Amadeo Carnelutti, a Croat of Italian origin. He had first met Ciano in late 1938, when - according to one source - he had presented the Italian foreign minister with a memorandum asking for help in the Croats' desire for independence.(15) This time Carnelutti went further, asserting that the Croats were enemies of Germany, but would nevertheless ask for her help if rebuffed by Rome.(16) If negotiations with Belgrade did not result in autonomy for Croatia, Carnelutti suggested that within six months there would be an uprising and an appeal for Italy's help, ultimately resulting in an alliance between Croatia and Italy, and a customs and monetary union. In the second phase Croatia would enter into personal union with Italy.

In his diary entry of 9 March Ciano did not mention any reference to the HSS negotiations with Belgrade during the encounter with Bombelles. On 20 March however, he wrote that Canelutti "repeated what had been said by Bombelles: negotiations to obtain concessions toward autonomy from Belgrade" [would be tried first]. Besides, while Bombelles did not ask for anything specific, Carnelutti came with concrete proposals. Whereas Ciano was very reserved with Bombelles, he sounded a little more forthcoming to Carnelutti, when he gave Mussolini's answer the following day:

"I had a conference with Carnelutti and told him: first, seek an agreement with Belgrade if for no other purpose than to gain time; second, if this should fail, and you revolt, we shall intervene at the call of the Croat Government; third, abstain from any contact with Berlin, and forewarn us of your actions."(17)

In the aftermath of Prague, Italy was not willing to risk any major immediate change of the Yugoslav status quo, hence the recommendation to continue negotiations. If an uprising in Croatia were to take place, Italy would respond to an appeal for help, if only in order to preempt the Germans. Rome retained its sensitivity to any contact between the Croats and Berlin.

When Carnelutti returned to Rome on 18 May, the situation had become less favourable to the Yugoslavs. Italy had occupied Albania in early April - an event of greater immediate consequence to Yugoslavia's security than the liquidation of Czechoslovakia three weeks previously. Closeness between Germany and Italy had been re-established, and Ciano was about to depart for Berlin to sign the Pact of Steel. During Prince Paul's visit to Italy in mid-May, which bore little fruit for either side, it was made plain to him that Yugoslavia was expected to draw closer to the Axis. This time, both Carnelutti's proposals and Ciano's reaction to them were totally uninhibited, as Ciano recorded:

"1. Macek no longer intends to come to any agreement with Belgrade; 2. He will continue his separatist movement; 3. he asks for a loan of 20,000,000 dinars; 4. within six months, at our request, he will be ready to start an uprising. I make an appointment with him following my return from Germany, in order to continue our negotiations."(18)

Ciano went to Berlin, and Carnelutti to Zagreb. On 26 May they met again and (according to Ciano) Carnelutti stated that Maček had decided to reject any agreement with Belgrade. They prepared a memorandum with the following points:

"1. Italy will finance Maček's Croat revolt with 20 million dinars; 2. he undertakes to prepare the revolution within four to six months; 3. he will quickly call in the Italian troops to insure order and peace; 4. Croatia will proclaim itself an independent state in confederation with Rome. It will have its own government but its ministries for foreign affairs and of national defense will be in common with Italy; 5. Italy will be permitted to keep armed forces in Croatia and will also keep there a lieutenant general as in Albania; 6. After some time we shall decide on the possibilities for union under a single head."(19)

Mussolini approved the memorandum, and was generally "taken up with the idea of breaking Yugoslavia to pieces and of annexing the kingdom of Croatia".

Only four days later, however, Ciano learned of Maček's refusal to sign the memorandum which Carnelutti had taken to Zagreb. This information reached him from both Carnelutti and Bombelles, but it did not dissuade Mussolini from talking about the future Italian protectorate over Croatia as an objective to be attained some time in the future.(20)

From March 1937 until the fall of Stojadinović Italy had regarded Yugoslavia as a friendly country and discouraged any Croat separatist activity, most of all by Pavelić and his group. By late May 1939 the pendulum in Italy's attitude to its eastern neighbour had made another swing. For the final twenty two months of Yugoslavia's existence the attitude of Italy remained inimical.

In his memoirs and statements after the war Maček denied that he had given any initiative for contacts with Rome.(21) He also denied that he had authorised Carnelutti to negotiate on his behalf. In a letter to Cvetković written after 1945, Maček explained the episode in a slightly different vein. He insisted there was "nothing conspiratorial" in his indirect contacts, which were a way of seeking information. The Ciano-Carnelutti draft did not contain any reference to an uprising or to financial assistance, Maček added, but stated that in case of war the Croats would invite the Italian army.(22)

It is difficult to take either of Maček's explanations at face value. At that time (spring 1939) he was despatching envoys all over Europe. Even if the role of Bombelles was dubious, nobody disputed Carnelutti's bona fide HSS credentials. Ciano and Mussolini would have been unlikely to enter into potentially very compromising arrangements with him had they not been assured of his credentials.* It is inconceivable that an anonymous building contractor, who also seemed frightened at first (Ciano), should delude the foreign minister of a great totalitarian power without a mandate from Maček.

* In his report dated 31 May 1941 the German envoy in Zagreb Siegfried Kasche stated that Maček's original letter of credentials for Carnelutti was found in 1941 and that Pavelić kept it. The credibility of Kasche's information is enhanced by a full translation of the Carnelutti memorandum, which Kasche also conveyed to Berlin. (A-VII, Mikrofilm London 11, frames 35239-35240)

Both sides had an interest in contacts. The Italians were apprehensive of German intentions in March, and aggressive towards Yugoslavia in May. In either case they naturally welcomed an approach from the party which was infinitely more credible than their own Ustaša captives.

For their part, HSS envoys attempted to sound Berlin first, and encountered a firm rebuff there. The information of Germany's firmly negative position to any Croat approaches reached Maček from several sources.(23) Having concluded that, in Axis relations, Croat issues were under Italian guidance, Maček wanted to explore Mussolini's intentions.

Just how far he went in those probings, and how serious he was about some of the implications, is not certain. Prima facie evidence suggests that the leader of a major Yugoslav party, and that country's soon-to-be Deputy Premier, came perilously close to what could only be described as high treason in May 1939. The Cernelutti episode by itself could make Maček and his party appear essentially not different from Pavelić and the Ustašas with regard to their methods and ultimate objectives. There was one major difference, though: while Pavelić rejected any Yugoslav solution a priori, and ultimately consummated his Italian connection, Maček seems to have allowed at least for a possibility of accord with Belgrade; separatist alternatives were meant as an option if no agreement proved possible.

Maček's contacts with foreign powers, above all with Italy, during the spring of 1939 cannot be properly understood outside the context of his negotiations with Prince Paul and the government, which were proceeding at that time. Both the final outcome of those negotiations, and Maček's decision to sever contact with the Italians, indicate that his primary goal was internal: to strengthen his positions in relation to Belgrade.

3. Agreement Cvetković-Maček

Cvetković formally announced his intention to negotiate with Maček in his speech in the Skupština on 10 March. He recognised the individuality of Croatia as a fact predating Yugoslavia, and declared he was ready to go to Zagreb and negotiate with Maček immediately. Cvetković arrived in Zagreb on 3 April, not only as the Premier, but also as Prince Paul's envoy. His talks with Maček proceeded smoothly, and on 22 April a tentative agreement was reached, amended on 27 April, and sent to Prince Paul for approval. It was short and simple: an autonomous Croat province (Banovina) was to be created, embracing the Savska Banovina, the Primorska Banovina and the district of Dubrovnik. The final borders of this unit would be decided by a plebiscite in Srem, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The new Banovina of Croatia would enjoy wide autonomy; defence and foreign affairs would remain in Belgrade with the Crown. A joint government would be formed to see the agreement (Sporazum) through. The agreement was to be legally based on Article 116 of the 1931 Constitution (it provided for emergency measures in case of a threat to the country's security). The draft was not approved by Prince Paul, however. He was under intense pressure from several quarters (not all of them Serb) to reject it in the given form.*

During his visit to Berlin in June 1939 Prince Paul became convinced that the war in Europe was unavoidable and imminent. He therefore resolved to revive the talks. Some contact between Cvetković and Maček had been maintained through intermediaries, and formal negotiations resumed by the end of June. The agreement was reached very quickly, and resolution of several finer points was entrusted to a team of legal and financial experts of both sides.

* The sticking point concerned areas to be subjected to plebiscite, and the way it would be carried out.(24) The strongest resistance came from the Bosnian Muslims, led by Mehmed Spaho, and from the military which regarded the proposed solution as detrimental to the defence capability of the country. Any further negotiations were temporarily discontinued. On 8 May 1939 a convention of HSS deputies convened in Zagreb and granted Maček full powers "to make the necessary decisions commensurate with the attitude of the Serb people and political situation in Europe", and to undertake all actions in domestic and foreign policy which he found necessary for the solution of the Croat question.

After some last-minute snags (notably on the control over the gendarmerie), agreement was finally reached and the text submitted to Prince Paul for approval on 24 August.(25) He signed it immediately.

It is hard to tell whether Maček finally decided to seek the agreement because he was advised to do so by Paris and London, rebuffed by Berlin and half-drawn into dangerous and unpredictable commitments by Rome; or whether those foreign contacts were a means of pressure to obtain the best possible deal from "the Serbs". It was probably a matter of overlapping motives. On the other side, Prince Paul was convinced by June 1939 that he had to overcome any resistance to such an agreement, because the situation in Europe left no room for delay. There is no evidence, however, that Maček's envoys - despatched to various European capitals earlier in 1939 - prompted the Prince in any way. If anything, he could be only reassured by their reception in Paris, London and Berlin. Those European powers were too busy elsewhere to contemplate trouble in a new area. As for Italy, if the Prince had learned of Canelutti's memorandum and Maček's refusal to sign it (as he could have learned from his confident Count Bombelles), he would have known that in Maček's eyes Rome did not offer an attractive alternative to an agreement with Belgrade.

The Agreement itself opened with the statement that "Yugoslavia is the best guarantee of the independence and progress of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes". Such a declaration of principle by the HSS, the undoubted representative of the Croat people, reaffirmed its acceptance of the Yugoslav state. The Banovina of Croatia included rather more territory than originally envisaged in the provisional agreement of 27 April, by including several districts of Bosnia and Herzegovina inhabited by Croats. The new unit was given extensive autonomy; the central government (which the HSS joined as a coalition partner) retained control over national security and defence, foreign affairs, and (partly) finance.

Ivan Šubašić became Ban (governor). He was a HSS leader known for his strong pro-Yugoslav, even monarchist views.* He was to be responsible to the Crown on the one hand, and to the Sabor (yet to be elected) on the other. Laws and decrees pertaining to the Banovina of Croatia would be signed by the King and counter-signed by the Ban.

As the only Banovina constituted on the principle of nationality, and named after the nation which comprised a majority within it, the new unit came close to resembling a nation-state. The Sporazum which created it was similar in spirit to the Austro-Hungarian Ausgleich of 1867. As such it represented a belated victory for that strain of Croatia's body politic which was not against Yugoslavia in principle, but wanted it to be based on a clear agreement which would guarantee Croat individuality. It was the sort of deal which would have most probably satisfied Radić two decades earlier. In the event, it was too little (or too much!) too late. To the separatist-minded Croats the Agreement was a sellout by Maček, nothing short of treason. Many Serbs thought that by "solving" the Croat question Prince Paul helped create the Serb question.

As everybody realised, the Agreement was imposed on Prince Paul and Maček by the pressure of external events. It was an emergency political measure based on an article of the constitution which dealt with "war, mobilisation and rebellion", meant to unify and strengthen the country on the eve of a new European war. For that it was too late.

Far from strengthening Yugoslavia, King Alexander's dictatorship had disrupted political life and created disorientation in Serbia, without breaking Croat national identity at the same time. In 1939 the HSS, led by Macek, could still legitimately claim the leadership of the Croat nation. On the Serb side the authoritarian figure of Stojadinović was replaced by a government that was perceived as weak and without authority.

* "Ban" was a historical title in Croatia, designating the highest executive office representing the Crown. It was also the designation of provincial governors under King Alexander's administrative division of the country.

On the whole there had been no "Serb" (or even narrowly Serbian) political line on the central issue of the state - the Croat question - either before or after 1929. Throughout the same period there existed a constant Croat line, embodied in the HSS. After the signing of the agreement this line was twofold. On the one hand Maček expressed his devotion to Yugoslavia and - especially - to the person of Prince Paul. While he did not conceal his conviction that the Banovina jurisdiction and territory ought to be eventually increased, in the months after August 1939 he made several public pronouncements which indicated that he had accepted the Yugoslav solution as the framework for the achievement of this objective. On the other, HSS field activists and the party-controlled press often talked of the agreement as but "a bare minimum", "the first step", and hinted that the final objective was nothing short of full independence.(26) Such a two-track approach reflected genuine differences of opinion within the HSS, with Šubašić, Jukić and probably Maček himself being more moderate than Košutić, Krnjević and many rank-and-file party members. It could have also represented an attempt to counter the strong reaction of the Ustašas to the Sporazum.

The Ustaša organisation within Yugoslavia was a marginal factor in Croat politics in the summer of 1939, no less than it had been before. It violently opposed the Sporazum, and perceived in its opposition an opportunity to gain ground against Maček. In this it scored some success, and "the dissent of the Croatian nationalists marked the end of the political monopoly of the HSS in representing the Croatian people [...]"(27) The Ustašas contended that the deal obtained very little, if anything, for the Croats, and that it represented Maček's capitulation to Belgrade, rather than a compromise. Their real opposition was not to the particular Sporazum, but to any agreement with Belgrade which would leave Croatia within Yugoslavia in whatever shape or form.

Especially virulent was the attack on Maček on grounds of his failure to take advantage of the "unique" international situation, ally the Croat cause with the victorious Axis forces and work for an independent Croatia within the new European order. The insistence that "Croatia must not be on the losing side in another war" was often heard among pro-German Frankists in 1939-1940.(28)

Pavelić's role as the leader of the Ustaša movement in the aftermath of the Sporazum was based on his reputation rather than his deeds. His remaining followers in Italy were still dispersed, isolated and inactive. From his "Headquarters" he sent an announcement with his "analysis" of the agreement which was, for all its militant rhetoric, indicative of his impotence.*

In conclusion, there were three types of reaction to the Sporazum among Croat nationalists: the "mainstream" HSS, which regarded it as an imperfect and incomplete, but nevertheless important step towards solving the Croat question within Yugoslavia; the HSS separatists, who could stomach the Sporazum only if it was to be the first step towards the ultimate objective of total independence outside any Yugoslavia; and the Frankist-Ustaša rejection of any agreement even as a tactical measure, which was linked with the demand that an explicitly pro-Axis national policy be adopted at once.

* "Over twenty years the Croat people has endured a lot, but has never lost hope in liberation. But many of those who spoke and acted in its name, sought its confidence and assumed its representation, had not been saying or doing what the Croat people demanded of them. They betrayed the confidence of the people. Instead of struggle and achievement of national and state liberation, they accepted the agreement [...] The Ustašas had been in the forefront of the struggle, and they finally brought down the royal dictatorship in blood. When the Greater Serbs realised that such methods would not bring about their objectives.[...] they returned to their favourite Byzantine method, to fraud and lies. The politicians fell for this, and they signed the agreement with the greatest enemy of the Croat people, with the slyest Belgrade types."(29)

Pavelić proceeded to attack the Sporazumaši ("Agreementers") also for their unwillingness to support "the two greatest and most powerful nations" (Germany and Italy) and asserted that the failure only served the "Masonic capitalist policy of the international Jewry": "Today, when England and France, and together with them the Jewish democracy are decisively beaten, and when there is no doubt at all that Germany and Italy will decide the new order in Europe, those short-sighted politicians think that they can fool someone. In agreement with the Belgrade cliques [čarsija] they offer themselves to the victor in the futile hope that they can save Yugoslavia and their power - as if we did not know who they were only yesterday, on whom they relied."(30)

4. Yugoslavia and the Axis, 1939

Although the fall of Stojadinović was an unpleasant surprise for both Hitler and Mussolini, they initially agreed that their posture would remain friendly if Yugoslavia accepted a clearly pro-Axis policy.* Yugoslav diplomacy attempted to give suitable assurances to Berlin and Rome. The foreign minister, Aleksandar Cincar-Marković (former Yugoslav minister in Berlin), went to Rome on 22-23 April, and told Ciano that in case of war Yugoslavia would be neutral, while continuing to provide economic support to Italy and Germany. Yugoslavia also accepted the fait accompli of the Italian occupation of Albania, which used to be such a major issue between them.(32)

From Rome Cincar-Marković proceeded to Berlin, where he conferred with Ribbentrop and Hitler on 25 and 26 April. While the German side stressed the importance of good relations between Rome and Belgrade, the Yugoslav foreign minister repeated Yugoslavia's desire to remain neutral under all circumstances and her determination to avoid any arrangements directed against the Axis.(33) Cincar-Marković's efforts may have helped Yugoslavia at the meeting between Ciano and Ribbentrop in Milan on 6 and 7 May, when they agreed on their countries' joint interest in preserving the status quo in Yugoslavia.(34) Ribbentrop expressed the opinion that in case of war Yugoslavia would remain neutral and provide help to the Axis; Italy's interests were reaffirmed.

The following week Prince Paul visited Italy (10-15 May). His visit does not seem to have been particularly satisfying for either side. His overriding impression was that the alliance between Hitler and Mussolini was unbreakable, and that Mussolini was not to be trusted.(35)

* When Goering met Mussolini in Rome in April 1939, he remarked that internal conditions provided room for pressure on the foreign policy of Yugoslavia: if Belgrade were to lean too far in the direction of Paris and London, it would be enough to encourage the Croats and the country would be paralysed.(31) Goering added that the Yugoslavs should be told that, in the event of war, the Axis powers expected their benevolent neutrality. For his part, Mussolini also remarked that Yugoslavia's position was precarious because of the Croat question, and that the country's foreign policy should be monitored very closely if an agreement between Cvetković and Maček was eventually reached.

When Ciano went to Berlin in the second half of May to sign the Pact of Steel, he touched on the issue of Yugoslavia and expressed some distrust of Prince Paul.(36) He expressed the view that during the Prince's forthcoming visit to Berlin the Yugoslavs should be asked to leave the League of Nations and join the Anti-Comintern Pact. A few days later (30 May) Mussolini prepared a confidential memorandum for Hitler outlining Italy's political strategy.(37). He wrote that the Axis powers should not be satisfied with professions of neutrality, but should occupy the entire Danubian basin and the Balkan peninsula as soon as war broke out.

Ciano's comments in Berlin and Mussolini's memorandum to Hitler heralded a new phase in Yugoslavia's relations with the Axis powers, which would last almost two years. During this period Italy reverted to its anti-Yugoslav posture of pre-Stojadinović years, while Germany restrained Mussolini and effectively vetoed any action against Yugoslavia.*

In his memorandum of 30 May Mussolini talked of war as an imminent prospect, but not before the end of 1942. Hitler did not reply, and for a couple of months the Italian leader may have been under the impression that silence from Berlin was a sign of approval. Far from this being so, Hitler was deliberately and systematically preparing to attack Poland, and to this end he was bringing the Danzig crisis to boiling point. He and Ribbentrop assumed that England would not go to war over Poland - but of this Mussolini was not at all certain. Aware of his Axis partner's apprehensions, Hitler had kept him in the dark until finally he informed Ciano of his intentions on 12 August.

* There was one apparent exception to this German posture, and in a way that exception confirmed the rule. On the eve of the attack on Poland the Germans actually encouraged immediate Italian action against Yugoslavia. This happened during Ciano's visit to Ribbentrop and Hitler in Salzburg and Berchtesgaden, 11-13 August 1939.(38) Since such a posture by Germany was completely out of character if we look at her policy in the entire period until March 1941, it is reasonable to assume that Hitler did not expect Mussolini to follow this "advice". It was probably a German ploy to overcome any possible Italian objections to the forthcoming German attack on Poland.

. During their visit to Berlin in June, Prince Paul and Cincar-Marković were treated to an impressive display of Teutonic might, including a parade that entailed an entire tank division. Hitler was obviously determined both to impress and to intimidate his visitors. The French foreign minister, Georges Bonnet, later described the visit as a truly regal occasion:

"... worthy of the mightiest of monarchs. Nothing was missed to create the impression of popular enthusiasm and to provide evidence of value that the Reich attached to Yugoslavia's friendship... But the Prince remained true to his promises, given to our Minister prior to the trip to Berlin, and he refused to make any concessions to Germany."(39)

Prince Paul resisted German pressure to quit the League of Nations, or to accept the replacement of the Balkan Pact with some other arrangement which would be anti-Turkish in character.(40) Germany put a brave face on the slim results of the Prince Regent's visit, and the Foreign Ministry in its circular telegram dated 9 June called it "mutually completely satisfactory".(41)

For Prince Paul the most enduring impression from his trip was that the war could not be avoided. His subsequent visits to France and Britain were aimed at explaining to the Western allies (with whom, it is generally assumed, his heart had truly lain all along) why it was inevitable and essential that Yugoslavia should remain neutral in case of war.

The outbreak of war in September 1939 was immediately followed by Yugoslavia's declaration of neutrality. However, the long-term prospects for such a status depended less on the Yugoslav government than on the course of war and the designs of the great powers in the Balkans area.

VI PAVELIĆ REACTIVATED

1. Precarious Neutrality

In the first months of the war Yugoslavia's neutrality was accepted by both belligerent sides with some satisfaction. Germany's focus was elsewhere, and her supplies of food and raw materials needed for the war effort continued to arrive as before. Even though many decision-makers in Belgrade were intimately sympathetic to Britain and (especially) France, Germany had little reason for concern. Her quick victory over Poland, while the Allies remained passive, created a deep impression on the ruling circles in Yugoslavia and on the country's public opinion.(1) Talking to Ciano on 1 October 1939 Hitler calmly said "for the time being nothing new is going to happen in the Balkans". At the same time he repeated the usual assurances of his lack of political interest in the area.

The Western allies were satisfied by Yugoslavia's neutrality for the simple reason that they could not expect more.(2) An understanding for his position had been expressed to Prince Paul in Paris and London in July.

Italy's position was more ambiguous. In August 1939, after Ciano's visit to Ribbentrop and Hitler, Mussolini briefly toyed with the idea of following Hitler's advice and attacking Yugoslavia.(3) In the end, he decided to see the Allies' reaction to Hitler's attack on Poland first. Since they duly (albeit reluctantly) declared war, Mussolini settled for the improvised policy of "non-belligerency". He was caught between "the fear of war and the fear to reveal his fear of war".(4) The crucial period immediately before and after 1 September displayed to what extent Italy's "Fascist" foreign policy had lost its sureness of touch and its freedom of action. In his prevarications, Mussolini was torn between his ever-deeper commitment to the alliance with Germany, and his close aides who tried to dissuade him from following Hitler (Ciano, Attolico, Badoglio).

2. Pavelić Back in Favour

Even though Mussolini decided against attacking Yugoslavia in the summer of 1939, his overall posture had changed with ^{the} beginning of the war. He subsequently wanted to change the official Axis policy towards Yugoslavia - something that the Germans had indicated on so many occasions was in his power to do. Thus the issue of Yugoslavia appeared on the agenda of all subsequent Axis top-level meetings until April 1941. It was high on the agenda especially in 1940. At the same time, Mussolini reactivated the Ustaša organisation in Italy, after almost six years of inactivity and isolation.

It is significant that the Italians decided to "revamp" Pavelić only after their attempts to strike a firm deal with Maček through Carnelutti had failed to produce results. The HSS leader abruptly changed his mind in May 1939, if he had ever had his mind seriously in this project. Had Maček approved the agreement with Italy, the Italians would not have needed Pavelić. Their ambitions would have been satisfied just the same, and backed by the authority of the real leader of Croatia, not of an émigré with marginal influence. In the end Maček chose to give another try to negotiations with Cvetković. His refusal to become an Italian protégé disappointed Ciano, who wrote that there could be more to Maček's decision than met the eye; he alluded to possible arrangements between Maček and the Germans (an unfounded fear), and to Maček's democratic convictions, which made him reluctant to get closely involved with Fascism.(5)

After Maček cut off his links with Ciano, Carnelutti disappeared from the scene. The ubiquitous Count Bombelles stepped in again, though no longer "on behalf of Maček". In his new capacity, Bombelles claimed to represent the Ustaša movement within Yugoslavia; it was in this capacity that he also established contact with Pavelić, and was given some Italian funds.(6) After a couple of meetings, by the beginning of 1940 Bombelles apparently succeeded in impressing on Ciano that conditions in Croatia were ripe for action.

Ciano replied that the possible course of action would be: uprising, taking of Zagreb, return of Pavelić, appeal for Italian intervention, establishment of the Kingdom of Croatia, offer of crown to the King of Italy. Bombelles agreed, recommending a meeting between Ciano and Pavelić.* The following day, 22 January 1940, Mussolini accepted the need for Ciano's meeting with Pavelić.(7) (Ciano also noted that the ground had to be prepared in Paris and London for Italy's intended action in Croatia, or else the price could be too high; but Mussolini would not listen, his son-in-law added with resignation.) Finally, on 23 January 1940, Ciano summoned Pavelić for talks. After six years of Italian-imposed inactivity (and occasional complete disgrace), Pavelić was back in the game; and it is with the meeting of 23 January that the story of the Ustaša foreign policy truly begins.

Ciano's Chef de cabinet Anfuso kept minutes of the meeting. [see Appendix] Two things are immediately apparent. One is the similarity of the spirit of these talks with Pavelić's first memorandum addressed to the Italian government in 1927, even before his émigré days. The other is the similarity between Italian expectations as expressed by Ciano, and proposals forwarded through Cernelutti to Maček: monetary and customs union leading to personal union, effectively placing Croatia in a position similar to that of Manchukuo.

* The role of Bombelles remains unclear. He appears to have enjoyed Maček's confidence, acted on Pavelić's behalf, and informed Prince Paul of what went on. It is probable that his allegiance was primarily to himself, then to Prince Paul. Krizman asserts with certainty that Bombelles was in Prince Paul's service. (8) Undoubtedly, Belgrade seems to have been well acquainted with the events in Rome in connection with Pavelić. Ciano's last reference to Bombelles was on 10 May: "We have evidence that Bombelles is in Belgrade's pay. He will experience the merciless Ustaša justice". In November 1940 there was an attempt on Bombelles's life by three Ustaša youths in Zagreb, and he hurriedly left for Belgrade in a blaze of press publicity.(9) It was rumoured that he had taken some Italian money meant for the "home Ustašas". Shortly before the attack on Yugoslavia Bombelles returned to Zagreb, and - inexplicably - stayed on after 10 April. He was duly arrested by the Ustašas and killed in the Gradiška camp. Slavko Kvaternik testified after the war that some Italian officer had attempted to intervene on Bombelles's behalf, but Pavelić turned him down very sharply, saying that Bombelles was a quadruple agent.

Bombelles also prepared an aide-memoire for Anfuso, and in his covering letter said that it was intended "to avoid any misunderstanding and to explain his understanding of Ciano's words".*(10) It does not appear, however, that the meeting between Ciano and Pavelić was followed up by any concrete preparations. There is little mention of Croatia in Ciano's diary entries in February and March 1940, and there is no specific reference to Italian designs in diplomatic documents. It is reasonable to assume that Ciano was not terribly serious about action in Croatia at that particular moment, but wanted to have the terrain prepared with Pavelić for circumstances in which action was finally decided upon. Such^a conclusion is reinforced by the second meeting between Ciano and Pavelić, on 10 May.(11) They discussed the location of Pavelić's followers and their needs prior to the Italian intervention, the date of which was left open. In the event, Pavelić's men remained dispersed and inactive until April 1941.

Although he was finally received by the Italian authorities and promised a role, Pavelić's position had not changed fundamentally. The proposals put to him by Ciano on that occasion were hardly different from those passed to Maček (through Carnelutti) seven months earlier. Yet Pavelić, unlike Maček, was in no position to say "no" to anything. He had to be aware that his chances, however slim they appeared at times, depended totally on his compliance with his hosts' and paymasters' demands.** Contacts with the "home Ustaša" organisation were still scant, and although they regarded Pavelić as their Foglavnik, the activities of the "home" organisation were not directed or controlled by him.

* There are some slight differences between the two versions. According to Anfuso, Slovenia would be incorporated into Croatia, while Bombelles also mentioned "autonomy to the extent desired by the Slovenes within the boundaries of Croatia". There are some differences concerning the position of the future Montenegrin state, as well as the extent of Albania's territorial enlargement. Finally, there is no mention in Bombelles' aide-memoire of the "islands facing Zara" which should be ceded to Italy. It does not appear that Bombelles' minutes were intended to cloud the issue of what had been said. More probably Bombelles simply acted in accordance with the agreement on the maintenance of contacts between the two sides.

** Pavelić lived in an eminently comfortable style, in a villa in Florence and with a monthly allowance of 5,000 Lira, "more than a Corps commander in the Italian army or a provincial prefect"(12)

At the same time, Pavelić's remaining followers in Italy had no choice but to look to Pavelić as their only hope. So, while Pavelić's position among the Ustašas at that time was entirely built on his reputation, rather than his deeds, his lack of contact with the "home Ustašas" - paradoxically - enhanced his position of "the Leader" in so far as his followers could ascribe to him those views and intentions dear to themselves.* Among the separatists in Croatia the Pavelić myth was enhanced by the very absence of the hero himself: by not being on the spot, he could not get involved in disputes, factionalism, and he could not make mistakes.

Those who see in the conversation with Ciano on 23 January 1940 the cornerstone of Pavelić's obligations to Italy, and the event which eventually resulted in the Rome Agreement of May 1941, are only partly right.(14) The general framework was already established in Pavelić's initial memorandum of 1927, while the extent of actual territorial concessions ultimately went far beyond "a few islands facing Zara".

The event had its importance as an indicator of the relationship between Pavelić and the Italians. He was summoned when it was deemed suitable, he was subsequently forgotten in his Florentine comfort for months on end, suddenly reactivated... and put "on ice" yet again, until after the coup in Belgrade. When summoned, he was not there to negotiate, but to listen to Ciano's proposals and endorse them. He might express opinions, raise a point or two, but when it came to the crucial part (post-independence arrangements in Croatia, including customs and monetary union, personal union with Italy,

* According to one of his closest aides at that time,

"confidence in him and devotion to him knew no bounds. Any thought that he may not properly represent Croat interests [vis-à-vis the Italians] was a priori excluded... We regarded the allegations of Belgrade propaganda concerning Pavelić's promises to the Italians as usual Serbian slander."(13)

To draw a parallel with another totalitarian secret organisation, Tito's reputation among Yugoslav Communists was greatly enhanced during his spell in prison, chiefly because he could not be involved in bitter factionalism riddling the Party at that time.

Italian control over crucial ministries such as defence and foreign affairs), Pavelić could only feebly point out that the eventuality of the personal union should be kept secret "at first", for public relations reasons.

From the outset, Pavelić's reliance on Fascist Italy was a marriage of convenience. There was no natural proximity between Croat ultra-nationalism and Italian ultra-nationalism. They needed each other only because they expected to get something from each other. This obvious fact remained implicit in all of Pavelić's dealings with the Palazzo Chigi, and because of that implication Pavelić preferred to deal with the Italians on his own.

This arrangement had an advantage and a disadvantage to the Italians. By dealing with Pavelić alone, they admittedly ensured that deals could be struck behind the backs of his followers. However, the danger was in the fact that Pavelić alone was the guarantee of their designs. It is remarkable that from among several hundred Ustaša émigrés who spent some time in Italy during almost one full decade, the Italians had not recruited OTHER Ustaša leaders to work for them. Unlike other totalitarian powers, which actively promoted and trained one or more teams of potential collaborators in different countries (recruited for ideological or more mundane reasons), the Italians actually alienated most Ustaša émigrés and turned them into their sworn enemies.* The end result was that they could presumably rely on Pavelić - and Pavelić alone - only on the basis of what they could offer in return: to install him in power.

This promise must often have appeared rather remote to Pavelić prior to the coup in Belgrade of 27 March 1941; but it was the only promise open to him. When it was eventually fulfilled, and when he duly completed his part of the deal with the Rome Treaties, there was nothing left to bind him to Italy, or the Italians to him... but all that was still some time off.

* Deep animosity towards Italy and all things Italian is present in most later statements and writings by the members of Pavelić's group. There was no "pro-Italian faction" in the Ustaša leadership - except for Pavelić himself.

3. Italy's Balkan Restlessness

Apparently informed of what went on in Rome (probably by Bombelles), the Belgrade government reacted accordingly. The Yugoslav minister in Rome, Hristić, visited Ciano on 7 March 1940 and expressed the concern of the Yugoslav government over renewed Ustaša activity. Ciano gave him "at once the most ample assurances".(15) Information about the meeting between Ciano and Pavelić could have also reached Belgrade by an indirect route. The Yugoslav minister in Washington, Konstantin Fotić, reported on 1 March about an intercepted letter sent by Pavelić to his supporters in the United States, in which he announced Italian intervention in Croatia soon, with Hitler's alleged agreement.(16)

Suspicion in Yugoslavia of Italy was fuelled both by the evidence of Pavelić's renewed rôle, and by Italy's overall policy in the Balkans after the outbreak of the war. That policy was inconsistent and unpredictable, and increasingly expansionist. In the autumn of 1939 Italy briefly assumed an air of benevolence. The desire of Yugoslavia and other countries in the region, especially Romania, to remain neutral prompted Rome to try to assume the mantle of the protector of a proposed neutral regional bloc.* After another "nein" from Berlin, all that remained of this episode was an increase in the self-assertive Italian propaganda, which sought to present Italy as a self-appointed guardian of the Balkans against Communism.

New suspicions of Italy were aired by Hristić in April 1940, when he visited his German colleague in Rome.(18) Hristić did not conceal his concern over rumours that Italy was preparing some kind of action against Yugoslavia.

* Nothing came of this, chiefly because Germany opposed the idea. First of all, it was possible (although not probable) that such a neutral bloc would come under the influence of the Western powers. Secondly, for all its assurances of the primacy of Italian interests in the region, Germany did not want political groupings which would be a vehicle for the extension of Italian influence in the Balkans. Finally, it was also conceivable that Italy herself could be drawn away from Germany by the Western allies - the war was young. In any event, having encountered opposition in Berlin, Italy soon lost interest in the Balkan neutral bloc.(17)

The Yugoslav minister had called on Ciano a few days earlier (for the second time in six weeks), and had to listen to a series of Italian objections to certain events in Yugoslavia of a rather banal nature: an anti-Italian demonstration in Ljubljana, boeing of an Italian ship in a Yugoslav port, building of fortifications along the border with Albania... Mackensen tried to reassure Hristic by saying that "it is in the fundamental interest of Germany - as well as Italy - that there is peace in the Balkans".

It was not surprising that the Yugoslavs voiced their concern to Germany; this was the only power which had BOTH an interest in the peace in South-Eastern Europe, and a great deal of influence on Italy's foreign policy. In subsequent months Germany was to exercise a restraining influence on Italy vis-à-vis Yugoslavia.

Hristić's suspicions were well founded. On 9 April 1940, after a lengthy pause, Ciano returned to the theme of Croatia: Mussolini's "hands fairly itch". Yet again, however, nothing specific was said, and nothing definitely decided. A month later came Ciano's second meeting with Pavelić:

"The Croatian situation is getting ripe and if we delay too long the Croats will line up with Germany. Now I shall prepare a map to indicate the precise positions of the forces and their most urgent needs. Then we shall pass to the phase of execution. I have not fixed any particular moment; in fact, I have recommended that we avoid any premature explosion..."(19)

On this occasion Mussolini appeared more determined to take specific steps. He ordered that General Gambarra be recalled from Spain, so that he could take command of Italian troops which would march into Croatia. Ciano's diary entry also mentions that the Duce circled "a day in early June" in his calendar.(20)

Italy's entry into the war on the side of Germany in June 1940 resulted in yet another postponement of any action in Croatia. Only three days after "circling a day in June", on 13 May 1940, Mussolini was sufficiently impressed by the German offensive in the West to confide to Ciano that he would not be attacking Yugoslavia after all, for the time being anyway. Settling the scores with Yugoslavia, the Duce said, would be "a humiliating fallback".(21)

Mussolini's decision to go to war on Hitler's side had been long in the making. The Duce seems to have felt uncomfortable with his "non-belligerency", but even less comfortable about fighting for most of that time. In early 1940 there was some aloofness in Mussolini's attitude to Germany, coupled with his apparent desire to see the war somehow ended.* The response from Berlin left no room for doubt or hope: Germany would be on the march in the West.(24) (The Duce had to wait two months for this reply.) During the spring of 1940, as Germany scored one success after another, the caution so apparent in Rome over the previous eight months melted as quickly as the French divisions. Even Ciano's Germanophobia seems to have been pushed aside. Not even the King and the armed services could stem the tide.** German victories in France, and his fear that the spoils would be all Germany's, forced Mussolini's hand.

* His private letter to Hitler dated 5 January 1940 was an extraordinary manifestation of the fundamental divergence of views.(22) While Hitler was contemplating a spring offensive in the West, Mussolini suggested a compromise peace, and described the hopes of the Western allies' defeat as illusory. While Hitler's rear was secured by the pact with Moscow, Mussolini was emphasising his anti-Communism and providing support to the Finns in their struggle against the Soviets. This letter represented Mussolini's last-ditch attempt to prevent the expansion of the war to the West, not because he was converted to pacifism or friendship for the democracies, "but for the more egotistical reason that enlargement of the conflict in that direction, regardless of the outcome, would relegate him and Italy to a permanent inferiority".(23)

** The Italian chiefs of staff admitted their inability to conduct a war even on the limited scale on 6 April; on 9 April Badoglio said "Merely to think of taking the offensive... is ingenious". A few days later the Navy submitted a memorandum indicating its inability to engage in any action beyond submarine attacks. Finally, Badoglio took the line that Italy's intervention could only be considered "if the enemy was so prostrated to justify such audacity".(25)



4. Hitler Restrains Mussolini

The spoils proved meager. Extravagant Italian demands of France (Nice, Corsica, Tunisia, plus Savoy for good measure) were quickly toned down at Mussolini's meeting with Hitler and Ribbentrop in Munich on 18 June. Hitler wanted to offer terms which would make it easier for France to break with Britain and end her own resistance, while also sending a signal to London that there could be peace. Italy was allowed only to occupy a symbolic 30-mile belt of French territory, while her ambitions in French North Africa were not satisfied at all. With such an outcome in Munich, Mussolini was left in no doubt who was calling the shots in the West. Therefore, he turned his attention to the Balkans yet again. The South-East appeared the only area open to further penetration where he could enjoy some freedom of action, and where he could at least symbolically compensate for the success of his dominant, brutal friend.

On 4 July 1940 Mussolini ordered his General Staff to prepare plans for a simultaneous attack on both Yugoslavia and Greece. To this end an appeal for Italian intervention was procured from Zagreb and signed by a "Croat National Committee".(26) This document [see Appendix III] represents a clear statement of the Ustaša case in the aftermath of the Sporazum of 1939. In the summer of 1940, however, Yugoslavia's neutrality still suited German interests. The Italians were left in no doubt of this fact. Such dissuading efforts often took the form of agreeing with Italian designs in principle, but saying that "the time was not right", or that strategic conditions did not favour such action.*

* When Ciano expressed belligerent intentions towards Yugoslavia in a conversation with Hitler on 7 July, he received a firm rebuke:

"The Fuehrer replied that the decisive question... was whether it was a matter of indifference to the Duce and Italy which country had the possession of the Dardanelles and Constantinople. If Italy should attack Yugoslavia, Hungary would immediately fall upon Romania... [and] the Russians would also no doubt bestir themselves again, cross the Danube, and seek to establish a connection with the Straits."(27)

Hitler added that the Yugoslav issue should be resolved "in the Italian sense" when the time came. This attitude was shared by the military. Already on 27 May, at the height of operations in the West, General Walther von Brauchitsch made an appeal to Ribbentrop to ensure "that chaos did not develop in the Balkans owing to Italy's attitude".(28)

Hitler was even more explicit in his pronouncements on this subject to his own aides. On 9 July the German military attaché in Rome, General Emil Rintelen, reported his talks with General Roatta, the chief of Italian army intelligence. (29) Roatta said that the Italian General Staff was given the task of preparing plans for an attack on Yugoslavia which would entail attacking Yugoslavia's NORTHERN border as well, i.e. using the territory of the Reich to launch the attack. (The General Staff in Rome was "under the impression" that this had been politically cleared in Berlin.) Hitler reacted by saying that he was totally disinterested in any attack on Yugoslavia, that he wanted peace on his southern border, and that "the English" should not be given an opportunity to create bases for their air force in Yugoslavia. Therefore, he concluded, German-Italian staff talks on the subject were not necessary.*

Accordingly, Ribbentrop spoke to the Italian ambassador in Berlin, Alfieri, on 16 August, and spelled out the German position: the struggle against England should come first; the Serbs are good soldiers, and Italy would need considerable forces to defeat them; British bombers would undoubtedly come to help Yugoslavia; this would inevitably involve the Luftwaffe too, at a time when it needed both to protect Europe and to attack Britain. (30) Ribbentrop concluded that not only the military, but also the political consequences of Italy's attack on Yugoslavia would be complex and problematic - including even possible Soviet involvement.

* By this time Hitler was already contemplating Barbarossa, even though the Battle of Britain was at its peak. On 21 July he spoke for the first time in some detail about his plans in the East to his aides. Ten days later he ordered the OKH (Army High Command) to examine the necessary conditions for such an operation and to report on its findings soon.

Although Mussolini and Ciano seemingly accepted German admonitions, Hitler was still alarmed about Italian intentions. By the end of the summer he sent Ribbentrop to Rome to calm Mussolini. Talking to him on 19 September, Ribbentrop repeated the familiar German line: Greece and Yugoslavia were in the Italian sphere of interest, and it was up to Italy to decide how to deal with them.(31) However, it would be better to leave such matters aside and concentrate on England. The Germans in effect put a veto on Italian plans, and Mussolini gave assurances that he had no aggressive intentions against either Greece or Yugoslavia.

Two weeks later Hitler and Mussolini met at the Brenner (4 October). Hitler talked of his plans concerning Spain, France and Britain.(32) However, he concealed from Mussolini that he had already issued orders for the entry of German troops into Romania (which took place less than a week later). Not for the first time, and certainly not for the last, Mussolini said "Hitler always faces me with a fait accompli".(33)

This event infuriated Mussolini for three reasons: for weeks the Germans had been telling him not to undertake any action in the Balkans; Germany sent in the troops without prior consultation with Rome, although Italy was a co-arbiter in Vienna where the new frontiers between Romania and Hungary were decided; and finally, the German action made mockery of often repeated assurances that the Balkans belonged to the Italian sphere of influence. Therefore, Mussolini decided to take action unilaterally too, without giving Hitler an opportunity to frustrate him again. On 28 October 1940 Italian troops in Albania attacked Greece. Italy had brought the war to the Balkans.

VII - PROCLAMATION OF THE NDH

1. Beginning of German Pressure on Yugoslavia

The Italian attack on Greece made the geostrategic and political position of Yugoslavia ever more precarious. The Yugoslavs were concerned about the reaction of Germany, and about the status of Salonika, whose strategic importance was enhanced by the memories of the Great War.*(1) Before making its position clear, the Yugoslav government waited to see whether the new conflict would remain localised. When this appeared to be the most likely prospect after the first few days of fighting, Belgrade issued a statement on 2 November 1940, obviously aimed at Italy, affirming its policy of neutrality, and stressing the hope that this policy would be respected.(4) Yugoslav reliance on Germany in restraining Italian aggressive intentions during the summer of 1940 also gave rise to expectations in Belgrade that similar German benevolence would continue.(5) This was not to be.

Germany was not pleased with Mussolini's action in Greece; it had no choice but to accept his fait accompli, however. Two factors subsequently played a decisive role in shaping German policy: British commitment (which started with the establishment of bases in Crete) and Italian military defeats. When Hitler talked to Ciano on 18 November he asked directly what Italy was prepared to offer to Yugoslavia in order to neutralise it, and immediately added that Salonika would be an appropriate inducement. The new German assertiveness in the matter was apparent in the way Hitler brushed aside Ciano's remark that this would be difficult for Mussolini to accept.

* The following day Heeren reported to Berlin that the issue of Salonika figured very prominently in Belgrade as the result of the Italian attack on Greece.(2) As instructed by the war minister, General Milan Nedić, and foreign minister Cincar-Marković, the Yugoslav military attaché in Berlin, Colonel Vladimir Vauhnik, paid two visits to the German Army High Command.(3) He brought up the issue of Yugoslav interests in Salonika, and hinted that Germany could ask certain favours of Yugoslavia if it supported Yugoslav interests.

In his letter to Mussolini on 20 November Hitler stressed the need to avoid a change of posture in countries such as Yugoslavia. He concluded that Yugoslavia must be made to change its policy and enter into real cooperation with the Axis. Hitler expressed determination to prevent any entrenchment of the British in Thrace, but added that no military action was possible before March. Therefore, he concluded, it was necessary to win Yugoslavia over "by other means". (In his reply of 22 November Mussolini declared readiness to let the Yugoslavs have Salonika and to guarantee their frontiers if Yugoslavia joined the Tripartite Pact and if it demilitarized the Adriatic Coast.)

Italian setbacks in Greece forced Germany not only to become more directly involved in the Balkans, but also to have a more explicit final word in this nominally Italian zone. Italy had no choice but to accept the further erosion of its role within the Axis. As usual, Italy's weakened position was the result of a self-inflicted wound. From November 1940 Germany took the initiative in the Axis dealings with Yugoslavia.* Once its hand was forced by the Italian action in Greece, Germany proceeded with great determination not to woo Yugoslavia to its side, but to bully it into submission.

* Germany started putting pressure on Yugoslavia to commit itself more explicitly to the New Order in Europe even before Mussolini's Greek adventure. Initially this pressure took the form of demands that the government of Yugoslavia take under firmer control anti-German papers and publications (which were conspicuous in Belgrade). Increasing signs of impatience with the "ambivalent" position of Yugoslavia were apparent by June 1940, shortly after the Wehrmacht triumphed in the West. The new German posture was obvious in a report Heeren sent soon after the fall of France:

"Yugoslav interests, in the unanimous opinion of all political groups which are to be taken seriously, would require an unconditional and candid adjustment of Yugoslav policy to the situation created by the German victory in the West." (6) Heeren added that it would be useful for the German press to express dismay at Yugoslavia's slowness in adopting a definitely pro-Axis policy.

In July Heeren reported with some indignation that the arrival of the new Soviet minister in Belgrade had stimulated pro-Russian and pro-Communist circles, as well as Francophiles. (7) They were convinced that a Soviet-German conflict sooner or later was inevitable, he added, and that it would ease the situation for the Balkans in general and Yugoslavia in particular. The first Soviet Minister in Belgrade, Plotnikov, arrived soon thereafter; the first Yugoslav Minister in Moscow was the leader of the Serbian Agrarian Party Milan Gavrilović. (8) Enthusiasm for the Soviet Union as the saviour from Axis threats was naturally great among left-wingers, but also among other Serbs who were more susceptible to the notions of "Mother Russia" than Croats or Slovenes.

At the end of August Prince Paul had a lengthy talk with Heeren in the Prince's Slovene residence, in which he indicated that Yugoslavia would increase its reliance on Germany.(10) Prince Paul did not conceal that this was a choice imposed by the threat of Italy. He added that the awareness of the need for such orientation had not penetrated broader Yugoslav circles. Prince Paul ascribed this partly to the lack of confidence in Germany caused by her alliance with Italy. The Prince reflected a mood of deep shock which the fall of France caused in Yugoslavia, especially among the traditionally Francophile Serbian élite. To many people the final predominance of Germany in Europe seemed assured: the liberal democratic idea was nearing the end of its era, and a new order was emerging. Its pillars were to be two totalitarian states, Germany and Italy.

The growing pressure from Germany was not only political, but also economic.(11) By the summer of 1940 Yugoslavia's trade was totally dependent on Germany. Partly because of such pressures, and as a result of the sheer weight of events and the feeling that a new era was approaching, a debate commenced within Yugoslavia about the need for internal adjustment which would bring the country more in line with this anticipated new order. Prime Minister Cvetković himself aired such views. In June 1940 he talked of the need to reform social policy in line with "the experiences of other great states".(12) He indicated that Italian experiences would be applied in carrying out labour and social reforms.(13) Cvetković also encouraged debate on the introduction of planned economy.(14) The Government daily Vreme wrote frequently in this vein in 1940.

Such views were also present among the HSS and the Slovene People's Party. For instance, a few weeks after the fall of France Maček declared: "It is thus obvious that the peasant democracy which we promote has nothing in common with the bourgeois democracy of Western Europe".(15)

2. The Croat Question After the Sporazum

After August 1939 there was an increasing divergence of views between the HSS mainstream, now firmly in power within the Banovina, and the advocates of separatism. Within the HSS there was a strong separatist streak, which viewed the Sporazum as a means to the goal of total separation. Among the Ustaša sympathisers there was a feeling that for once they had a chance to challenge Maček more effectively than before by attacking his "capitulation to the Serbs". The Ustašas claimed that Maček had betrayed the idea of an independent Croat state, which had been - they alleged - the shared aspiration of both the HSS and the Ustaša movement.* Contemporary Ustaša leaflets and papers claimed that Maček's "betrayal" was a product of his "lust for power" and that his "autonomy" could be taken away by those who had given it to him "by a stroke of the pen".(16)

Maček was attacked not only for being "pro-Yugoslav", but also for not being Fascist - and as Stjepan Buć warned, "it should not be emphasised what this means for our great and powerful neighbours, who are determining the fate of Europe today". On the basis of this two-pronged attack Ustaša activity in 1940 aimed at penetrating local HSS branches, recruiting members and fanning internal party rifts. Such activity had some success among students and in the urban middle class. Maček's supporters were aware of the rift, but stressed that he remained "the master in the villages, while he never ruled the cities anyway - which follows from the Party's principles".(17)

* Two decades later Franjo Nevistić, an émigré publicist, wrote in Hrvatska Revija the following of the Sporazum:

"We think, it is the weakest link in the defence of the Croat cause. An attempt was made to turn two decades of hard and bloody struggle into one great legal and political nothing. Modest autonomy in return for the recognition of an illegal state and an alien dynasty; legalisation and legitimisation of all Serb illegalities, an argument in the hands of our enemies for our 'treason'! We cannot understand [the Sporazum] either from the purely internal, Croat, nor from the international standpoint. This is the darkest spot in the history of the HSS".

The reaction of the HSS - synonymous with the state authority in the Banovina - was ambiguous. Maček was reluctant to acknowledge a permanent schism in the Croat front which was solidly united behind him prior to August 1939. There was also the threat of the Left, with an increase in Communist activity. The treatment of the "Frankists" could be monitored by the Axis powers (above all Italy) and interpreted as a signal to them. Finally, there was the uncertainty about the extent of infiltration of the party by the separatist Right - especially of its paramilitary organisations, the Village Guard and the Citizens Guard (Seljačka zaštita i Gradjanska zaštita). (18)

As the separatists' agitation turned violent, the Banovina authorities (i.e. the HSS leadership) decided to clamp down both on Communists and on Frankists/Ustašas. In early 1940 a group of fifty known Ustašas and their active sympathisers were arrested and interned to the camp at Kruščica near Travnik (in the part of Bosnia incorporated into the Banovina). * Two leading separatist newspapers, Hrvatski narod (edited by Mile Budak) and Nezavisnost (edited by Stjepan Buć) were banned. Ustašas responded by printing illegal leaflets branding ever more vehemently Maček as a traitor who was "destroying Croatia in order to save Yugoslavia, which is always tantamount to Greater Serbia". (20)

* The list of internees read like a Who's Who of the subsequent Ustaša régime: Mladen Lorković, Ivan Oršanić, J. Frković, Juco Rukavina etc. Some internees were "Croatian Hitlerites", i.e. national-socialists, led by Slavko Govedić. In later years they were treated with extreme suspicion by Pavelić. (19)

The relative Ustaša strength (or, rather, less evident weakness) among the urban lower-middle class (especially lawyers and students of law) can be partly explained by the fact that the study of law in Central Europe often had for its purpose social advancement, rather than "education". The graduate's traditional career path very often was in the state service. In this respect, many lower-middle-class Croats were at a disadvantage in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, not least because of the need to identify with the values of the state in order to serve it. (The bourgeoisie proper did not have that problem.) The Ustašas bore the promise of restating traditional "Croat" values in an expanded, more meritocratic, but still hierarchical state bureaucracy. Social advancement, political participation, job security and an explicitly "Croat" label on top formed ^{an} alluring package for many.

The ambivalence of the HSS also could be felt in its attitude to Belgrade. On the one hand, the HSS papers and pronouncements kept repeating that the Banovina was not the final solution of the Croat question, but only the first step toward such solution. There were constant reminders that many areas were left ill-defined, that territorial and financial arrangements remained to be finalized. This gave rise to rumours that the Sporazum itself was a cunning ploy by Maček, whose objectives were no different to those of Pavelić.(21) The mystery of what Maček really wanted in his heart of hearts has never been fully resolved. His memoirs did not resolve the ambiguity about what was he finally for: whether for a Croatia within a reformed Yugoslavia, or for a Croatia separated from any Yugoslavia.

At the particular time (1939-1940) Maček seems to have made the firm strategic decision to accept the Yugoslav solution of the Croat question as preferable (or the least unacceptable), when compared to its alternatives. He heaped extravagant praise on Prince Paul during the latter's visit to Zagreb in January 1940. In April he gave the following statement to a French journal:

"Twenty years after the war, within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia our demands were recognised. Last year the agreement was concluded which has a great importance on the road to final understanding between Croats and Serbs... We are rejoicing that our aspirations encountered a cordial response with HRH Prince Paul. Foreign propaganda seeks to frustrate fulfilment of our ideals, but we, as well as our kinsmen Serbs, will not fall for any intrigues."(22)

Even his deputy Juraj Krnjević, known for more radical views, spoke in the same vein to the French journalist.

The impression that Maček and the HSS wanted to extend their autonomy internally, while providing broad support to the government in its foreign relations, was supported by foreign observers. The British consul in Zagreb, Rapp, reported that Ilija Jukić, Maček's *chef de cabinet* at the latter's Office of Deputy Premier, confirmed that his boss was "a totally loyal Yugoslav", who had "special confidence in Prince Paul" - a confidence which seemed mutual - and who would not engage in any intrigues with other countries.(23)

In December 1940 the Italian minister in Budapest, Vinci, reported that the Hungarian foreign minister, Csáky, informed him of Maček's conversation with a visiting Hungarian dignitary (probably Eckhardt). On that occasion Maček is supposed to have said that the Croats would fight "to the last man" if Italy intervened in Yugoslavia in any way.(24)

The HSS press promoted the view that Maček had a special rôle in preserving the neutrality of Yugoslavia. Simultaneously, it stressed the link between the deteriorating international situation and internal developments (i.e. the need for speedy application of the Sporazum).(25) Significantly, the accent in foreign affairs was on claiming credit for government policy, which was approved of, rather than attacking it.

Broad agreement and mutual confidence between Prince Paul, Cvetković and Maček on most domestic and foreign political issues remained until the end. As the undisputed architect of Yugoslavia's foreign policy, Prince Paul could count on Maček's support in presenting a united Yugoslavia to the outside world. In this sense, at least one objective of the Sporazum had been achieved. In view of Yugoslavia's geopolitical situation in the autumn of 1940, Prince Paul was in need of all the support he could muster.

3. The Tripartite Pact

By the end of November 1940 there was a curious reversal of rôles in the relationship between Yugoslavia and the Axis. For the best part of the previous two years Italy was adopting an aggressive posture towards its eastern neighbour, while Germany exercised a moderating influence. As the year drew to its close, German pressure on Belgrade became increasingly apparent, while Italy was - yet again - far from contemplating any aggressive action against Yugoslavia. Boggled down in Greece, it welcomed the establishment of discreet contact between the two countries offered by a Belgrade lawyer and legal advisor of the Italian Legation there, Vladislav Stakić.* (26) Stakić spoke to Ciano, who recorded on 11 November that Mussolini supported the idea of an Italo-Yugoslav entente. Ciano added a personal thought:

"I always considered an attack on Yugoslavia a difficult undertaking and not useful for the future equilibrium of Europe. Instead of bringing under our roof a mass of nervous and untrustworthy Croats, I believe it is better to create a solid basis of understanding with Yugoslavia." (27)

The prospects for Pavelić started looking bleak yet again. His status as a supplementary tool of Italian policy, and a tool of dubious value at that, was strikingly underlined by Ciano's words.

In the meantime Cincar-Marković left for ^{the} Berghof and was received by Hitler on 28 November. Hitler suggested that Yugoslavia sign a non-aggression treaty with Germany and Italy. (29) He promised German backing for a consolidated Yugoslavia if it agreed to enter the new European order, and also mentioned Salonika as an inducement. Hitler hinted that the future relationship could go further, alluding to Yugoslavia joining the Tripartite Pact.

* While Stakić went to Rome, another Yugoslav secret emissary was sent to Berlin. This was Danilo Gregorić, a relatively young Slovene and editor of a right-wing Belgrade daily. (28) His first visit bore no fruit, since it took place prior to Hitler's talks with Ciano and exchange of letters with Mussolini (18-22 November). On his second visit Gregorić arranged for the foreign minister, Cincar-Marković, to come for talks with Hitler and Ribbentrop.

Assuming that Hitler would be satisfied with the Yugoslav acceptance of the non-aggression treaty - especially since it was HE who had proposed it - the Yugoslav government replied on 7 December that it was prepared to sign such a treaty, "based on the Italian-Yugoslav Treaty of March 1937".(30) However, Hitler suddenly altered his demand. After two weeks' silence he sent a reply to Cincar-Marković which stated that the non-aggression treaty would not satisfy demands for closer links between Yugoslavia and the Axis, since it would still leave open the issue of its accession to the Tripartite Pact.(31)

Not surprisingly, the Yugoslavs were taken aback. Hitler's response may have been a calculated ploy designed to wear out the Yugoslavs psychologically; or he may have simply changed his mind - which he had in his power to do anyway. At the same time, Germany's combined diplomatic and military pincer movement had continued: one by one, Yugoslavia's neighbours to the north and east were joining the Pact and accepting German troops on their territory.* The primary objective of Germany was to prepare Operation Barbarossa; the secondary to reach Greece from the north-east. In the process, Yugoslavia found itself physically encircled. Most of Germany's new Balkan allies had some potential irredentist claim against Yugoslavia, which left the country vulnerable militarily and psychologically. In South-Eastern Europe in the winter of 1940-1941 it was not easy to enjoy the distinction of being the last "Versailles state" to have its 1919 frontiers still intact.**

* Hungary joined the Tripartite Pact on 20 November 1940; Romania on 23 and Slovakia on 24 November. Bulgaria signed on 1 March 1941.

** The Baltic states and Poland were wiped off the map altogether in 1939-1940; Finland lost territory (Karelia, Vyborg) to the Soviets in 1940; Czechoslovakia finally ceased to exist in March 1939, having already lost much of its original territory to Germany (Sudetenland), Hungary (southern Slovakia, Ruthenia) and Poland (Teschen, or Ciesynski Slask); Romania was mutilated by its "friends" in Vienna in 1940, ceding most of Transylvania to Hungary and south Dobruja to Bulgaria; in addition it lost Bessarabia and Bukovina to the Soviets.

It is ironic, and indicative of the predicament of Prince Paul and his aides, that a respite was sought in closer relations with Rome. Sensing that the difficulties in Greece had rendered Italy relatively harmless to Yugoslavia and sensitive to Germany, the Belgrade government hoped to win Mussolini over to the idea of a bilateral or trilateral treaty based on the March 1937 model. Stakić went to Rome again in early 1941 and encountered Mussolini's encouraging response.(33) The Duce suggested that an alliance between Rome and Belgrade would suffice as far as the demand for Yugoslavia's drawing closer to the Axis was concerned.* Prince Paul thus reversed the pattern of Yugoslav dealings with the Axis in the post-Stojadinović period. Instead of appealing to Germany to restrain Italy, he now turned to Italy to moderate German demands, and to provide a less painful form of linkage to the Axis.

The Italians duly informed Berlin of their talks with Stakić. Hitler would have none of this, of course. He had serious business on his mind: getting Greece out of the way and settling scores with Stalin. There was no room for ambiguities and combinazioni any more, and Gregorić was told that Cvetković and Cincar-Marković should come to Berghof to clarify the issue.

The meeting opened on 14 February 1941 with the Yugoslavs outlining their proposal to form a bloc of Balkan neutrals (Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Turkey) which would keep the British out by pressuring the Greeks not to rely on them. In view of the circumstances, such proposals were probably a desperate attempt to gain time, rather than to arrive at a long-term solution. Ribbentrop and Hitler duly gave them short shrift: the dispute with Greece was a matter for Italy to settle; Germany was only determined to keep the British influence out.

* According to Stakić, Mussolini also said that he wanted Salonika to go to the Yugoslavs, regardless of whether they joined the Pact; he suggested an exchange of the Albanian minority in Yugoslavia for the Slavs of Istria and Venezia Giulia; finally, if Yugoslavia was willing to accept Italy's dominant role in the Adriatic, Mussolini promised to get Hitler to agree to the above.

Mussolini's readiness to offer the Yugoslavs a way out of their dilemma was a result of his desire to clarify their posture vis-a-vis Greece. The treaty he proposed would have also offset German gains at least to some degree. Finally, the treaty by itself would not have precluded Yugoslavia's signing the Pact.

For Yugoslavia it would be best to join the Tripartite Pact, the Fuehrer advised, and so ensure her position in the New Europe. Hitler's tone left no doubt in his visitors' minds that joining the Pact was the only road open to their country. On their return to Belgrade Cvetković and Cincar-Marković conveyed to Prince Paul Hitler's wish to meet him soon. Heeren followed up with a formal invitation. Aware that he was going to face a determined German assault, Prince Paul tried the Italian card once again.(35) This time the Germans intervened, asking the Italians not to accept Yugoslav overtures, and to let Berlin know of all eventual Yugoslav proposals.(36) When Prince Paul presented himself at the Berghof on 4 March 1941, he was alone in every sense.

What followed was a five-hour "massage" (in Prince Paul's own words to Ran Šubašić).(37) In the end the Regent still evaded a definitive answer, saying that he could not make a decision of such magnitude as joining the Pact without consultations. This was really a way of saying he was unwilling, rather than unable to do it alone. The Prince returned to Belgrade on 5 March, undecided and deeply worried. For the following day he called a session of the Crown Council, which consisted of all three regents and key government ministers. This was an ad hoc body not provided for in the Constitution. Most probably he wanted to have a suitable body endorse the seemingly inevitable acceptance of German demands. At the Council, after hearing bleak reports from Prince Paul and Cincar-Marković on the foreign political situation, and from the war minister on the country's desperate military position, it was unanimously decided to sign the Pact - with certain provisos.

A day later (7 March) Cincar-Marković informed Heeren of the Council's decision, and asked for written assurances from Germany and Italy on three points: that Yugoslavia's sovereignty and territorial integrity would be respected; that no military assistance or troop transfers in time of war would be sought; and that Yugoslav interests in Salonika would be considered.(38)

On 10 March the Crown Council endorsed those points. When Ribbentrop reluctantly accepted Yugoslav demands Cincar-Marković asked that the assurances be made public. Berlin rejected this, and the Crown Council agreed (12 March) to keep the clauses on Salonika and on military stipulations secret.*

In the meantime, British and American diplomats in Belgrade were making last-minute efforts to dissuade the Yugoslavs from signing the Pact. Both ministers (Arthur Bliss Lane and Ronald Ian Campbell) went out of their way to induce Prince Paul to reject German demands.(39) The British also suggested military consultations between Yugoslav, Greek and British staff officers which took place in Athens on 8 and 9 March 1941.(40) On that occasion the Yugoslavs definitively established that they could expect no meaningful help from the British; they were in need of help, rather than able to offer any. They were expected to make a sacrifice, and could not be promised anything in return.** All this was coming from Britain, which in any event did not - and could not - automatically take over the role of France in the perceptions and sympathies of Yugoslavia's ruling elites.***

* In the end, the clause on the passage of troops was also made public, to placate the Yugoslav public opinion. Although Salonika figured in almost all combinations between Yugoslavia and the Axis at this time, its significance was symbolic rather than strategic. If the Germans were to conquer Greece and to control the Aegean, Yugoslavia's outlet would have been rendered meaningless. The Germans were willing to display some generosity in this respect because they were less interested in the eastern Mediterranean than in making their right flank secure for the spring. Italy preferred to take Yugoslavia's attention away from the Adriatic, which Rome wanted demilitarised by the Yugoslavs.

** Yugoslav General Staff Major Milisav Perišić conveyed the following questions from his war minister, General Petar Pešić: could the British hold a front in northern Greece to secure an eventual Yugoslav withdrawal? Could they supply retreating troops, as well as those still resisting in the north which would retreat to the Adriatic? Could they evacuate the latter from the coast? Vague British answers centered on the point that Yugoslavia should attack the Italians in Albania to obtain supplies and to avoid the need for naval evacuation. (On the British-Greek relations during this period see Procopis Papastratis, British Policy Towards Greece during the Second World War, Cambridge University Press 1984; and Robin Higham, Diary of a Disaster: Britain's Military Aid to Greece, 1941, 1987.)

*** Prince Paul was an exception, but he was hardly typical of any stratum of the Yugoslav society. Among the Serbs there still persisted a lingering memory of philo-Turkish posture when the Eastern Question was on the European agenda, and the reaction in London to the May plot of 1903.

A perception of the British as cold, calculated and devious - fuelled by Nazi propaganda - could not yet be offset by the respect many felt for them*

After an agonising fortnight of discussions and numerous messages exchanged between Belgrade and Berlin, the final decision to sign the Pact was made at the Crown Council on 20 March, and confirmed at the Council of Ministers the following day. On 23 March Prince Paul cut the knot, and sent Cvetković and Cincar-Marković to Vienna to sign the Pact. Prince Paul's policy of neutrality, pursued as long as possible, ostensibly ended at the Belvedere on 25 March 1941.** This was not an expression of the Prince's political will. The leaders of Yugoslavia hoped that the watered-down version of the Pact (grudgingly accepted by Hitler) would calm public opinion at home. This failed because the government of Cvetković and Maček, and above all the Prince himself, did not enjoy the confidence of Serbian public opinion, which felt that the régime did not have the mandate to take such a decision.

In the early hours of 27 March 1941 a group of officers took power in an almost bloodless coup in Belgrade.*** The coup directly resulted in Hitler's immediate decision to destroy Yugoslavia, starting with a furious, vengeful bombing of Belgrade, and in the military and moral collapse of the country. Unconsolidated Yugoslavia - or, rather, disoriented Serbia - may have "found its soul", but it also opted for "the Kingdom of Heaven" in the best mythical tradition of Prince Lazar, martyred at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389.

* Furthermore, one has the impression that British understanding of Yugoslavia had been rather superficial in the inter-war period, and tended to be shaped by tenuous comparisons with other parts of the world which experienced internal strife. Perceptions of the "Serb-Croat issue", of "pan-Slavism", of the role of Communists and Agrarians, all tended to neglect the complexities of Yugoslavia's multidimensional polity.(41)

** The signing ceremony was in effect a shotgun wedding, described by one participant as reminiscent of a funeral.

*** The Communists unconvincingly attempted to claim 27 March as an event of their own making. Some historians see it as an event which, for all its awful consequences, enabled Yugoslavia to avoid the otherwise allegedly inevitable slide into the Axis war camp.(42) This view was echoed in the streets of Belgrade and other Serbian cities in the slogan of "Better grave than slave" (Bolje grob nego rob) and "Better war than pact" (Bolje rat nego pakt). It was an explicit rejection of political "realism" for transcendent goals.

4. Germans Woo Maček

In Berlin the news of the coup in Belgrade caused shock.* Hitler had an attack of fury, treating the coup as an act tantamount to the declaration of war on Germany, and as a personal blow. Without waiting to hear of the new government's composition or intentions, he decided to smash Yugoslavia.(43) He would do it with assistance from Italy, Bulgaria, and later Hungary.**

The sudden turn of events forced Hitler to improvise. Having avoided contact with - let alone support for - Croat separatists in the years prior to March 1941, he could not rely on contingency alternatives prepared in advance. Already at the conference on 27 March, Hitler mentioned that Croatia would be granted "autonomy" in due course. His thoughts on the subject seem to have been rather vague at first. In his letter to Mussolini of 28 March, informing the Italians of the decision to attack Yugoslavia, Hitler did not mention Pavelić and his Ustašas at all.(44)

In his immediate reply Mussolini hastened to remind Hitler that "besides Bulgarian, and above all Hungarian cooperation, we should count on the Croats' separatist tendencies, which are represented by Dr Pavelić. Pavelić himself is located in the vicinity of Rome."(46)

The ensuing ten days proved that the posture of Mussolini (and, needless to say, Pavelić) had much less bearing on the future of Croatia than the intentions of Germany and the posture of the HSS leader, Maček.

* The one place in Berlin which seems to have reacted surprisingly calmly to the news was the Abwehr headquarters, where its chief, Admiral Canaris, was supposed to have declared to General Beck: "Because of the Serbian war, the Day X in the East will have to be postponed for some weeks, at least until June. If the Black Hand people keep Hitler busy for more than a month, the war in the East is not on..." (Erich Kordt, Nicht aus den Akten, Stuttgart, 1950, p. 98).
** Only a few months previously Hungary had signed a "Pact of Eternal Friendship" with Yugoslavia (December 1940). Troubled by this, Prime Minister Téliki opposed Regent Horthy's proposal that Hungary join the attack on Yugoslavia ("Are we robbers of corpses?"). On the night of 2-3 April Téliki shot himself; Horthy informed Hitler that Hungary would join the attack after the anticipated proclamation of Croatia's independence, since "by this the other party to the Pact, i.e. the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, would cease to exist".(45) Subsequently, Hungary was the first country to recognise the NDH; after that it could march into Bačka with its "honour" intact.

The Germans hoped that Maček could prove instrumental in their plan to 'attack' and dismember Yugoslavia. After all, it was he who exclaimed "We are Yugoslavia's Sudeten Germans!" only three years previously.(47) Their desire to obtain his support and bypass Pavelić (in spite of Mussolini's pleas and Italy's nominal predominance in the region) was probably due to the following:

a) Maček was the undisputed leader of the Croat people; any scenario concerning Croatia's future would have far better prospects with him than without him, let alone in spite of him;

b) Pavelić's stock in Germany had never been high. He was regarded as an Italian puppet, and his movement as far too weak either to make a significant contribution to Yugoslavia's collapse, or to form a viable government;

c) Maček's initial reaction to the news of the coup in Belgrade may have given Germany some reason to believe that he could be won over.

Maček's attitude to the government of General Simović depended on two questions: what would be its relations with the Axis powers, and what would be its position on the Sporazum of 1939.

The coup brought to the fore pent-up dislike of Prince Paul's regime, which had existed in Serbia, with its overall policy, both external and internal. As such, it could have been interpreted as a revolt against the Sporazum as well as against the Tripartite Pact. The military were reputed to take a dim view of the Sporazum, and Simović's government included some of its well-known opponents, such as the second deputy-premier, Slobodan Jovanović.

The new government, in spite of the instincts of some of its members, attempted to provide continuity on both fronts. This attempt focused on the inclusion of both Maček's HSS and the Slovene People's Party in its ranks. Those two parties had favoured the signing of the Pact very energetically in the weeks prior to the coup. Their inclusion would help preserve the unity of the country, and also send a signal to Berlin and Rome that the coup was not directed against them.

Desperate to gain time, and unaware that the decision in Berlin had been made anyway, the new Yugoslav government gradually shifted from the initial decision to remain silent on the subject of the Pact to its formal statement of respect for international treaties, including the Pact.(48) Uncertain of the way the situation would develop, Maček gave his approval from Zagreb that HSS ministers join the new government on the morning of 27 March.*

At the same time he decided to remain in Zagreb himself, and to sound out the Germans on their intentions. On 28 March he spoke to a German geologist, Michael Derffler, on a business assignment in Yugoslavia. He was also working for the Abwehr Centre in Vienna. Maček asked Derffler to travel to Germany and find out what were Germany's intentions towards Yugoslavia in general, and towards Croatia in particular.(50)

Maček's decision to seek information from foreign contacts was essentially similar to that in early 1939, when he got in touch with various European powers in order to clarify his position vis-a-vis Prince Paul and Cvetković. Simultaneously Maček instructed Ban Šubašić and another senior HSS figure, the finance minister, Šutej, to talk to Heeren in Belgrade. On 28 March Heeren reported that they assured him of Maček's desire not to change the foreign policy course of the country, and asked for German patience.(51)

* HSS minister Šutej called Maček by telephone from Belgrade at 6 am to tell him about the coup and ask for his approval that HSS ministers join the new government. Maček replied that he would have to consult his aides, and called Krnjević and Košutić to come to him. All three were soon visited by the chief of Zagreb police who informed them that Prince Paul's train was at the station and that the Prince wanted to confer with Maček. When they reached the station, General Nedeljković (Commander of IV Army District with HQ in Zagreb) was already there. Maček informed Prince Paul of the events in Belgrade. From the station they all went to Banski dvori. The three HSS leaders and Prince Paul conferred, while General Nedeljković waited in the anteroom. Maček suggested to Prince Paul to act as Commander-in-Chief, have Nedeljković arrested, and appoint General August Marić (a Croat, Nedeljković's deputy) as IV Army District Commander. Then, Maček continued, action against the coup perpetrators could be taken with the help of the HSS paramilitary units. Prince Paul rejected this proposal. A telephone call from General Simović to Maček followed. Simović announced that the representatives of all other parties had joined the government and asked Maček to do the same. After some hesitation Maček agreed, but reserved the right for himself, as deputy premier-designate, to wait and see how things would develop.(49)

On 31 March Ribbentrop instructed the German consul-general in Zagreb, Alfred Freundt, to give Berlin's reply to Maček.* It boiled down to an unconditional appeal to Maček and other Croat leaders not to co-operate with the Belgrade government, but to maintain contact with Germany.(53) On the same day, Freundt was asked to inform the Croats that "provision would be made for an independent Croatia within the new order" if Yugoslavia collapsed.(54)

Freundt replied on 1 April that one of his officials had informed Maček of the warning not to participate in the new Yugoslav government.(55) Maček also told the official (Otto Mitterhammer, press officer at the Consulate-General) of his conditions laid down to the Simović government, which included the recognition of the Tripartite Pact and adherence to its spirit.

In the evening of 31 March Maček also received explicit German warnings from Derffler, who later described Maček's reaction as that of a completely broken man.(56) The following day Derffler visited Maček again, and pressed the Croat leader not to go to Belgrade under any circumstances. On that occasion, according to Derffler, Maček appeared hesitant and complained that many people came to him claiming to be German emissaries, with all sorts of vague offers.**

Maček was in the impossible situation of trying to preserve peace with Germany and trying to save Yugoslavia. This he presented to the Germans as the policy which served their interests as well.*** As subsequent events proved, it certainly served the interests of Pavelić and the Ustašas.

* By that time all other German consulates in Yugoslavia had been closed on instructions from Berlin, and Heeren was recalled to report. In Belgrade only four diplomats remained, under a chargé d'affaires who was instructed "to maintain complete reserve".(52)

** It seems that Derffler's and Mitterhammer's efforts were not coordinated; there is no evidence of any other German emissaries talking to Maček on those two days, i.e. 31 March and 1 April.

*** Talking to a Consulate-General official (probably Mitterhammer) on 1 April, Maček indicated that he would go to Belgrade and join the new government if his conditions were accepted:

"He thinks that he can best serve the interests of the Reich as well if he goes there. He still enjoys the unconditional support of Croatian peasants... After that he intends to travel from Belgrade to Berlin, on instructions from Government. If he were to leave for Berlin now, it would be an open insult to Belgrade..."(57)

5. Germans Approach Croat Separatists

Evidently, by 1 April the Germans realised that it was far from certain whether Maček would heed their advice and stay away from Belgrade. Then - and only then - they decided to establish contact with the extreme, pro-Ustaša elements in Zagreb. At the same time they continued to maintain contact with Maček. On 1 April Freundt was informed that two German officials were coming to Zagreb to get in touch with influential Croat personalities.(58) Freundt was also told to keep track of the Croat leaders' comings and goings, especially their trips to Belgrade. The two officials were Walter Malletke of the NSDAP Foreign Policy Department (Rosenberg) and SS-Standartenfuehrer Edmund Veesenmayer, seconded to the Special Operations unit of the Foreign Ministry.* Malletke was supposed to keep pressure on Maček, while Veesenmayer's task was to create links with the "radical" nationalist elements.

The leading figure among the "radicals", as German documents referred to the Ustašas within Croatia, was Slavko Kvaternik. He was very active in the days after the coup, and had numerous meetings with HSS deputies (Tomašić, Berković, Kuvedžić), trying to find out whether Maček intended to go to Belgrade or not. As the chief exponent of the Ustaša movement within Yugoslavia, Kvaternik also attempted to influence Maček: through intermediaries he warned Maček against joining the Simović government.(59) The first contact between Kvaternik and the Germans was established through a German consular official. According to Kvaternik's own account, their conversation was limited to mutual exploration of intent.* While Kvaternik, unsurprisingly, recommended the Ustaša solution, the German said that they had confidence in Maček, who could, "if he wanted, save the country [Croatia] from occupation".(59)

* Malletke was empowered to talk on behalf of Rosenberg only; Veesenmayer had a wider brief, and went as Ribbentrop's special envoy. Ferdo Čulinović (Okupatorska podjela Jugoslavije) confused the roles of the two, calling Veesenmayer "Rosenberg's special envoy"(p. 297). It is not clear whether Veesenmayer's assignment vis-à-vis the Ustašas had been determined prior to his departure, or whether it was assigned to him after his arrival in Zagreb.

The rôle of Kvaternik and his group apparently became more important in German eyes on 3 April. On that day Maček spoke to Malletke, and rejected the idea of an independent Croatia.(60) By that time Maček had already made up his mind to go to Belgrade. On this occasion Maček appeared much more determined and self-assured than during his earlier meeting with Derffler. He reiterated his readiness to assume personal responsibility for negotiations with the Reich on any outstanding issues if Germany so desired. Maček's decision was based on successfully completed negotiations with General Simović, in which August Košutić played the role of Maček's representative. Not only was the autonomy of the Banovina recognised, but its authority was increased in administrative, financial, legal, and law enforcement areas. Again, there was some similarity with Maček's posture in 1939: when the agreement with Belgrade was imminent, possible reliance on Axis powers was discontinued.

Also on 3 April, apparently after being informed of the failure of Malletke's efforts, Veessenmayer was introduced to Kvaternik. Veessenmayer did not conceal his distaste for Pavelić. He repeated to Kvaternik that only Maček enjoyed some confidence in Berlin, and made disparaging remarks about the Ustašas and Pavelić, to the effect that he was completely in Mussolini's hands and that even his mental health was in doubt.(61) It seems either that Veessenmayer was not fully aware of Kvaternik's allegiance to Pavelić, assuming him to be an independent separatist leader, or that he wanted to induce Kvaternik to start acting on his own account - in which case the Germans would finally have "their own" man in Croatia.**

* Kvaternik talked to Yugoslav interrogators about his talks with the Germans, especially Veessenmayer, on two occasions, on 23 October 1946 and 7 February 1947. There were no discrepancies between those two statements, and they tally with the evidence from German sources.

** However, Kvaternik replied that Pavelić could not be bypassed in any combination, because Mussolini trusted nobody but Pavelić, and it was well known that Germany and Italy had an agreement which left Croatia in the Italian sphere of interest. At the same time Veessenmayer was told that "the radicals" lacked strength to start any action on their own, and saw the only solution in the Germans' entry into the country.(61)

Veesenmayer's talks with the "radicals" also convinced him of the deep schism between them and Maček, whom they regarded as a traitor to the Croat cause. In view of Maček's refusal to accept Derffler's and Malletke's advances, Veesenmayer informed his direct superior, Ribbentrop, that further attempts with the HSS leader made no sense.(62) Accordingly, Veesenmayer requested approval of his efforts to unite "all important Croat groups who reject Maček's conduct of affairs".(63) The next day, 5 April, Veesenmayer reported success in creating a broad front of nationalists, including right-wing HSS dissidents, with a written programme.(64) Veesenmayer also indicated that a collection of signatures was under way for an appeal addressed to the Reich government.*

* The enclosed full statement read as follows:

"At a meeting of a great number of deputies and representatives of the Banovina of Croatia government, representatives of Croat cultural and commercial institutions, representatives of all strata of the people from all historical Croat provinces without difference or party allegiance, held in Zagreb on 31 March, a detailed discussion of the political situation took place and an analysis of the position of people in Yugoslavia after the coup perpetrated in Belgrade on 27 March. Unanimously the following was concluded: the Croat people, after that event, can no longer believe that its peaceful life is possible within Yugoslavia, its national expansion and development; that within the Serb nation there is a strong will to take Yugoslavia to war with Germany, while the Croat nation wants peace with Germany and cooperation with it; that the Serb nation is opposed to the new order in Europe, while the Croat people has understanding for the new, more just European order and wants that order; that the Serbian people's representatives are in the service of British policy, which out of its own self-interest wishes to instigate disorder, chaos and war in the Balkans, while the Croat people does not want to serve the interests of England, which had always supported Serb hegemony over Croatia. It is therefore concluded

That the Croat people has maintained a strong political, cultural and economic link with the German people for centuries;

that the Croat people has lived its life of statehood for centuries, and the Serb mastery, imposed and aided by Western democracies, had never been accepted

that within the Croat nation there are firm belief and hope that it can count on the full support of Germany in the creation of a free and independent Croat state, [whereas Germany] had declared as one of her war aims: to each... people in Europe free national development and expansion should be secured.

Thus the following conclusion was unanimously accepted:

- 1 Yugoslavia has ceased to exist. An independent Croat state is being created and it embraces historical and ethnic Croat lands: Croatia with Medjimurje, Slavonia, Dalmatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, and the Croat part of Vojvodina;
 - 2 Until the constitution, or the law on state authority is enacted, legislative power is in the hands of the new Croat people's government in Zagreb;
 - 3 This conclusion is forwarded to the Government of the Reich, with the request that the recognition of the Croat state by other Axis states be effected;
- [continued on p.135f]

From Veesenmayer's cable it is obvious that the signatures for the above statement were hastily collected on the day of its despatch to Berlin, i.e. 5 April. And yet it is dated "31 March". There are two possible explanations: either it had been written in advance, or its date was changed in order to suit the needs of the moment.* However, various statements and appeals had been addressed by the "home Ustašas" to Rome or Berlin on different occasions in the past, and therefore such activity could not be seen as out of the ordinary. The date (31 March) is not important as such. A group of separatist-minded Croats could have written and signed such a proclamation a month, or a year earlier.

The only interesting thing about this appeal concerns German intentions. If the Germans were serious about the principle that Croatia belonged to the Italian sphere of interest and influence - as they had been repeating ad nauseam for years - then it would not have been necessary for their many agents to be involved. Least of all would it be necessary to get appeals addressed to the Reich Government. If Yugoslavia was to be destroyed, that was Hitler's decision based on the grounds of strategic grand design and the need to vent his anger. But the details of internal arrangements to befall the defeated country - presumably - should have been left to the Italians.**

[continued from p.134] 4 In order to protect independence and self-reliance of the newly-created Croat state, representatives of the Croat people, on behalf of the entire people, request from the government of the Reich its immediate protection and help. In the capital city of Zagreb on 31 March 1941. Plenipotentiary signatories." According to Veesenmayer's cable, the statement was to have been signed by seven people (S. Kvaternik, M. Lorković, J. Tortić, J. Dumandžić, V. Košak, Š. Debelić and M. Lamešić). Mile Budak was in bed after an operation. Kvaternik wanted to sign on Budak's behalf, assuring Veesenmayer that he was empowered to do so. In the end the statement was signed by only five people, two HSS "rightists" (Tortić and Lamešić) and three "nationalists" (Kvaternik, Lorković, and Edo Bulat, who was belatedly included).

* Edo Bulat later claimed it had been written in advance, and he was belatedly included because he could be seen as a representative of Dalmatia. Two draft versions of the document had been prepared some days earlier in the home of a legal assistant, apparently on Kvaternik's initiative. Bulat made the point of remarking that on that occasion the German addressed them as "Exzellenz".(65)

** After all, Mussolini was quick to remind Hitler of his own candidate for the Croat solution, Pavelić, as soon as the German ambassador woke him up with the news of the Fuehrer's decision to attack.

There are several possible explanations for the German behaviour:

1. The statement was simply meant to be used as a formal reason, or one of the reasons, for German attack. It may not have carried much conviction as such (especially its assertion that "Yugoslavia has ceased to exist"), but it could be used in the same way the "attack" on the Goerlitz radio station by "Polish" units on the night of 31 August 1939 provided an auxiliary casus belli then.
2. The statement was meant to justify German involvement to the Italians. Hitler habitually applied the practice of presenting the Italians with a fait accompli and justifying his action by the need to act rapidly, to exploit the given situation, which "made consultation impossible".
3. The statement was meant for public opinion in Croatia, as a means of making it more susceptible to Axis propaganda once the attack started; it did not imply an intention by Germany to be an active participant on the Croat scene after the collapse of Yugoslavia.

There is no evidence that Maček was aware of the radicals' action, let alone that he had condoned it.* Maček's overall actions in the years before April 1941 and in those fateful days for Yugoslavia between the coup and capitulation indicated that he was, above all, a skillful politician with a somewhat limited vision, which precluded him from becoming a statesman. Understanding politics as the art of the possible, he realised in 1939 that the Yugoslav solution was, in the end, the least of all evils for Croatia.

* Some authors have expressed suspicion that Maček may have known of the statement, and may have condoned it. The pre-war Yugoslav army officer, Tito's war-time aide and post-war general and amateur historian, Velimir Terzić, wrote a book on the April War in 1963 and enlarged it substantially over a decade later.(66) Terzić accused Maček of complicity in the proclamation, but did not provide documents to support the claim. While Terzić's attempts to furnish evidence of Croat duplicity and collaboration with the Axis are certainly impressive, his method is often unscholarly and even occasionally fraudulent. It is difficult to see why Maček should have condoned the proclamation of an independent Croat state, and only days later rejected Malletke's offer of Croatia's independence, and then left for Belgrade to join the Simović government! Furthermore, there is no evidence to support the claim of Maček's knowledge, let alone advocacy, of the statement.

While keeping his lines of communication to different external and internal interested parties open, he nevertheless displayed a degree of steadfastness in this principled stand; only when Yugoslavia all but collapsed would Maček adopt a more ambiguous line. As for Kvaternik and the "radicals", their position was also ambiguous. Culturally and temperamentally they undoubtedly preferred Germany to Italy as the dominant factor in Croatia.

On the other hand, the Germans appeared less likely than the Italians to treat them as viable contenders for power. Veessenmayer approached them only as second best, after Maček's refusal to cooperate, and even then he could hardly conceal his disdain for Pavelić and his movement. Finally, Pavelić himself had no part in the proceedings. With events unfolding at an ever faster pace, the contact between the group around Kvaternik and their Poglavnik was completely severed.* Since Italy relied on Pavelić, and him alone, no approach had been made by Italian agents to any of the "home Ustaša" group.

By proceeding on their own initiative, Kvaternik and his group could play the Italian card (by pointing out to the Germans that Pavelić could not be by-passed, since "Germany accepted that Croatia was in the Italian sphere of influence"). At the same time they could also entertain hope that if Germany turned out to be the dominant party after all, keeping the Italians (and Pavelić) out, Hitler still might give power to THEM, and not to Maček, the "traitor of the Croat cause", who snubbed the Germans anyway.

From various post-war memoirs by Croat émigrés, and from events which occurred only weeks later, it seems that many separatists in Croatia at that time had some difficulty in squaring the circle of supporting Pavelić on the one hand, and fearing or despising Italy on the other.

* Eugen Kvaternik, who was with Pavelić in Italy most of this time, described the severance of links with Croatia as total, adding "Those links had been always the weakest point of the Ustaša organisation in Italy". Kvaternik also noted that occasional letters from supporters in Croatia contained information, but no requests for instructions from Pavelić. (67)

6. Interregnum in Zagreb

All players seem to have realised the contradiction of Pavelić's endeavour from the beginning: that the marriage between Croat and Italian chauvinisms could only be temporary and one of convenience. Many separatists pretended it was not there. Most of them tended to brush such fears aside because they trusted Pavelić. There was an implicit, unspoken belief among the Ustašas that he would use the Italians to get installed in power, and then turn his back on them and enjoy the protection of Berlin.

This view was reinforced by the sight of German agents actively urging separatists to get organised and sign appeals addressed to Berlin, without any reference to Italy. Well aware of Italy's position of the junior Axis partner, the Ustašas in Zagreb could quite reasonably assume that Germany was preparing to turn Croatia into its own satellite just as it had done with Romania and Bulgaria, two Balkan states which should have been in Rome's zone of interest.

The first four days of the war were the time of curious interregnum in Zagreb. Life was relatively normal, newspapers were published, all essential services were functioning, but the apparatus of state authority was gradually disintegrating. Veessenmayer's "radicals" were in hiding, confidently waiting for the speedy arrival of German troops.* There were signs of military collapse along the borders, and disorder behind the lines. The only major military operations were taking place in Macedonia, where General List's XII Army was making a determined push from Bulgaria to cut off Yugoslavia from Greece and prevent the link-up of Yugoslav troops with the Greeks and the British. In this the Germans were successful: after three days they established contact with the Italians near Ohrid. Militarily, Yugoslavia was already defeated on 9 April.**

* Slavko Kvaternik went underground probably just prior to 6 April, having been warned of the imminent German attack. Although his hiding place in the house of his lawyer friend Šenoa was known to his "wife and maid only", as he told his interrogators, he remained in touch with fellow conspirators.

** On that day German tanks also entered Salonika, eliminating the danger of a new Salonika Front as in 1916.

Maček retreated with Simović's government from Belgrade on 6 April, leaving the capital in ruins and flames after particularly intense and destructive bombing raids by the Luftwaffe. The following day he presided at a meeting of the Council of Ministers, at which a working cabinet was appointed. Maček suggested that Juraj Krnjević be co-opted as a minister without portfolio, to represent Maček in the latter's absence or incapacity. The proposal was inspired by the decision already made some days earlier that in case of war and retreat of government Maček would not leave the country and Krnjević would take his place.(68)

On 7 April in the evening Maček left the town of Sevojno (near Užice, in western Serbia), and arrived at his farm in Kupinec, near Zagreb, the following morning. Back in Zagreb Maček issued a proclamation appealing for calm and discipline.* However, the collapse of Yugoslavia was well under way. In Croatia pro-Ustaša activity undoubtedly contributed to defeatism and desertion, but it was not the cause of it. The one "mutiny" on record (of an infantry regiment in Bjelovar), claimed by the Ustašas as their achievement, was at least as much, if not more, due to Communist agitation.**

* The full text of Maček's proclamation was as follows: "Croatian people! Brothers and sisters! I am back among you, and on that occasion I wish to tell you the following: we have the greatest misfortune that can befall any nation, and that is war. This evil can be mitigated only through unity and discipline. You have listened to me until now in all the difficult moments, and I am certain you will do so now. I shall stay with you and share good and evil as before. Naturally, in each particular instance I shall give instructions in the usual way, either through our organisations or through special envoys, deputies or other generally well known leaders of the party. At this moment I demand from you complete order and discipline, be it at home or in the military."(69)

** The 106th infantry regiment in Bjelovar (not 108, as was erroneously reported by Hrvatski narod of 15 April) was composed mainly of Croats, along with some Slovenes and very few Serbs. There are conflicting eyewitness accounts of what happened, but there is little doubt that Communist agitation was at least as strong as that of the Ustašas. Far from rebelling (like the Austrian sailors at Kotor or Soviet ones at Kronstadt), the regiment melted off in defeatism, with no shots fired. This enabled a small core of Ustaša mutineers to take over its remains and march on Bjelovar on 8 April.(70) A pro-Ustaša administration was established in the city. Maček despatched the commander of his paramilitary Zaštita units, Djuka Kemfelja, to Bjelovar on 8 April to quell the rebellion. Kemfelja failed to do so, returned to Zagreb and handed his command to Colonel Zvonko Kovačević.(71)

Ustaša propagandists subsequently made claims to the effect that the "revolution" of the Croat people "contributed considerably to the speedy fall of Yugoslavia" (Lorković at the Sabor, 1942). This claim is greatly exaggerated. Undoubtedly it was a contributing factor, but even the Bjelovar incident fell short of a shooting rebellion. The primary cause of the speedy fall of Yugoslavia was the overwhelming military-strategic superiority of the Reich. Even if the country had been united in the will to resist and politically consolidated, the defence would have been hopeless. In the event, with or without Ustaša action, in April 1941 there were no military, economic, geographic, political or psychological foundations for a sustained defence of the Yugoslav state. The Ustaša activity was a symptom, rather than a cause, of the deep internal divisions which turned military defeat into a collapse.

Maček's proclamation of 8 April calling for order and discipline was a further proof that he would not change his mind on the refusal to accept German offer of an "independent" Croatia headed by him. The question of who would take over in Zagreb therefore remained open. On 8 April this issue was supposed to be definitely resolved at a conference called by Consul-General Freundt (who was also in hiding). * Unable to come up with an alternative, Veessenmayer finally accepted that the proclamation of independence would be effected by S. Kvaternik, acting on behalf of Pavelić. The outcome was an improvisation, caused by the Germans' lack of contingency plans. In itself, this uncharacteristic unpreparedness indicated that Germany had not intended to destroy Yugoslavia before 27 March - at least not in the immediate future.

* The conference was acrimonious because both Tortić and Veessenmayer were still most reluctant to accept Pavelić as the future leader of Croatia. Veessenmayer repeated that Pavelić was an Italian tool, with precise obligations to Mussolini. It was attended by three other Germans (Veessenmayer, Hermann Proebst on behalf of the Wehrmacht, and Schuster of the Consulate), two HSS right-wingers (Tortić and - in his first appearance after May 1939 - Cernelutti), and Slavko Kvaternik. There are no records of this conference in German archives. An account of the proceedings was given by Kvaternik to the interrogators; more detailed account by Krizman and Kiszling.(72)

7. Tenth of April

Early on 10 April 1941 General Maximilian von Weich's Second Army started its final push along the entire northern Yugoslav front. Before the end of the day its 14th Armoured Division entered Zagreb, without encountering any resistance.(73) The German high command had received prior information that Croat nationalists were ready for the coup, and that German forces would be cordially greeted in the city.(74) The paralysis of any remaining Yugoslav forces in the area was aided by the activity of a Croat officer in the Yugoslav Army, Colonel Franjo Nikolić. As chief of staff of the First Army Group he went to Zagreb on the morning of 10 April, found Slavko Kvaternik in his hideout, and offered help.(75) Kvaternik told Nikolić to go north and meet advancing German units, to help disperse remaining Yugoslav soldiers by telling them that an armistice was in effect, and to prevent the demolition of bridges on the Sava.(76)* Nikolić added to the confusion among retreating Yugoslav units when he returned to his post and announced that talks with the Germans for an armistice had begun, and that all action would therefore cease. He then ordered the last remaining units of the Fourth Army to be moved away from Zagreb, which enabled Kvaternik to go ahead with his proclamation of independence free from any danger that could be presented by the retreating Yugoslav troops. The actions of this one man probably had greater practical effect on the chaos and confusion among the already beaten defenders than any other recorded pro-Ustaša activity in the Yugoslav rear, the Bjelovar "mutiny" included.

Between 8 and 9 in the morning Kvaternik felt secure enough to proceed with the coup. Around that time he arrived at the office of the Hrvatski radiša workers' co-operative, his provisional headquarters.(77) From there he called by telephone the commanders of gendarmerie (General Tartalja), police (Josip Vragović), HSS Zaštita (Colonel Kovačević) and the boy scout chief [!] (Grgić).

* In his statement Kvaternik said he was surprised that Nikolić - whom he had never met before - had found his hiding place (at around 7a.m.). Nikolić took the Ustaša oath on the spot, before actually talking to Kvaternik.

The first two said that they had no instructions from their superiors about the future, and that Ban Šubašić had left Zagreb by car.* Kvaternik indicated that major events would take place and told them to come to his office. As they arrived he asked them to take an oath of allegiance to the Croat state, "which would be proclaimed later in the day", which they duly did. He ordered them to maintain law and order, to take control of radio stations in Zagreb and Velika Gorica, of electricity and waterworks, railway stations, post and telegraph offices, and the Sava bridges.

This was really a classic coup d'état, except that there was no "état" to oppose it. The officials accepted Kvaternik's command knowing that the city would be overrun by the Germans soon, and having no instructions from their superiors (this apparently applied also to the commander of Maček's Zaštita). Of the four people invited by Kvaternik one was largely irrelevant (Grgić), and one may have already been an Ustaša sympathiser (Vragović).(78) However, Kvaternik described them as "initially frightened" on arrival at his office, which would suggest that they had not been parties to the plot.

Kvaternik proceeded to the Ban's Palace (Banski Dvori), where he "proclaimed the independence of Croatia around 1 p.m."(79) This proclamation was, according to Kvaternik, more or less identical to the one he read on Zagreb radio later that same day. It had much less effect than the second, though, because it was an impromptu affair: Kvaternik read the proclamation without microphones in front of the crowd of passers-by outside the palace. This event is insisted upon as the moment of actual proclamation of the NDH mainly by émigré authors who are keen to stress that the proclamation had occurred before first German units entered the city.

* Šubašić managed to catch up with the retreating Yugoslav government. On 13 April he attended the government session at Pale, near Sarajevo; two days later he left the country from Nikšić. His brief moment of controversial prominence was to come three years later in London.

At the Palace, Kvaternik met Veesenmayer, and noticed a significant change in the German's posture: "Impatient and arrogant before, he was polite and forthcoming then". From the Palace - according to Kvaternik - they proceeded to Maček's home, to ask him to make a statement which would contribute to the maintenance of "unity, law and order".*

Veesenmayer's account is somewhat different at this point. In his report to Ribbentrop on 11 April, Veesenmayer said that he took the initiative on the tenth, "before noon", when he talked to Kvaternik about the plan for takeover, and ordered complete readiness.(81) Veesenmayer did not mention Kvaternik's "proclamation" at 1 p.m. at all.

Subsequently, first reliable news of the advance of German troops reached Veesenmayer, which prompted him to proceed without delay. He went to see Kvaternik again at 3 p.m. and told him the time was ripe to go ahead with the proclamation, and that he (Veesenmayer) would visit Maček and ask him "to resign". This delighted Kvaternik, added Veesenmayer, "since this issue was his greatest concern and he did not feel quite up to dealing with it". Therefore, according to Veesenmayer, Kvaternik did not go with him to Maček straight away, but joined them later. The German's by all accounts acrimonious conversation with Maček took place between 3:30 and 4 p.m. (according to Veesenmayer), and it finally achieved its objective:(82)

"After a long argument during the meeting we reached conditions under which Maček agreed to withdraw, while Kvaternik would take over state authority in person. Maček gave his word of honour to observe this.

* The last surviving NDH government minister, Vjekoslav Vrančić, mentioned in his memoirs that there was another centre of Ustaša activity that day: the "Ustaša Headquarters (Glavni ustaški stan, G.U.S.), which was set up at the Uzdanica office in Ilica 8; there are no other records of this detail.(80) No serious conspiracy would have chosen such an obvious venue for its centre while the activity still demanded secrecy. If the "G.U.S." was set up when such secrecy was no longer necessary, it could not have been an important focus of activity.

I met Kvaternik immediately afterwards, told him of the decision, which created great delight among the nationalists, and he went to see Maček immediately. At their meeting they formulated Maček's withdrawal and his handing of power to Kvaternik with a signed statement, the original of which is in my possession. In order not to waste time and to prevent sabotage due to premature publication of this decision, urgently and with great difficulty I managed to get to the radio station with Kvaternik. There it was solemnly broadcast at around 5:45 p.m. that Maček had resigned and handed over state authority to Kvaternik..."*

Maček's account does not mention Veesenmayer by name.(83) He wrote that two Germans visited him in the afternoon, as he was preparing to leave Zagreb for his farm in Kupinec. One of them was Michael Doerffler, while the other's name he could not remember (this was obviously Veesenmayer). They came to tell him that "the German Army" had entrusted all power in Croatia to Kvaternik, who had duly proclaimed the Independent State of Croatia. They asked Maček to relinquish the leadership of the HSS and of the Croat people, which he refused to do. After long argument, they agreed that Maček would issue a proclamation to the Croat people, appealing for the acceptance of the new situation, because there was no alternative. This having been decided, the two telephoned Kvaternik to come to Maček's flat and take the text of the proclamation.

Maček did not mention it, but Košutić was also there. Košutić made two statements about the events of that afternoon, both essentially identical.(84) Their main features were: 1. Veesenmayer arrived to see Maček without Kvaternik

* Veesenmayer ended on a vain note: "The execution of the decision at this historic moment was carried out by me in person. Thus I succeeded that everything happened without bloodshed, and that German troops enter without any losses, which was to Kvaternik's credit, since he as a soldier prepared all that was needed."

at around 4 p.m. 2. Kvaternik came after an agreement on the statement had been reached; 3. Maček refused "to hand over the leadership of the people".*

The debate on the precise time of Kvaternik's proclamation of the NDH and Maček's proclamation to the people is of peripheral importance. It has been indulged in mainly by pro-Ustaša émigré publicists, who regarded the precise timing as crucial to their argument that the proclamation of independence occurred spontaneously, and prior to the arrival of German troops in Zagreb.

The really important fact is that there would have been no proclamation of any kind, were it not for the German troops which attacked Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941, and had her on her knees by the tenth. Furthermore, the German rôle was indispensable not only in providing the basic precondition (attack), but also the practical framework of Ustaša takeover. All along since his arrival in Zagreb, and even after the collapse of state authority in the city on 10 April, the role of Edmund Veesenmayer was crucial in effecting the change.

 * "I was with Dr Maček at his apartment when around 4 p.m. the Reich Government envoy Veesenmayer, presently German Minister in Budapest, arrived. As it was established later, he had been waiting clandestinely in Zagreb for over a week and with the Frankists and other fifth-columnists was arranging the takeover of power. Veesenmayer stated to Dr Maček that the supreme authority in Croatia was being assumed by Colonel Kvaternik, on behalf of Croat nationalists, who enjoy the Reich Government's confidence, adding that any resistance would be futile.

The former Habsburg Colonel Kvaternik was then invited. He was hiding in the cellar of the German Consulate (the former Czechoslovak Consulate) awaiting the entry of German troops. Having arrived, he said he wanted everything to happen without bloodshed and asked Dr Maček to advise the people, as a great authority, not to resist the new order. Dr Maček then started writing the following proclamation: 'Today the German Army arrived in Zagreb and handed power to Colonel Slavko Kvaternik...' Kvaternik interrupted: here it should be added 'the leader of Croat nationalists in the homeland who has proclaimed the NDH in the entire historical and ethnic area of the Croat people'. This he translated into German for Veesenmayer, who said that it must not be stated that the German Army handed power to Kvaternik, but that Colonel Kvaternik had proclaimed the NDH and taken power.

Asking people not to resist the new authority by force, and calling on elected local officials to remain at their posts and to cooperate sincerely with the new authority (meaning obviously to enable them to protect the people, as in the last war under Austria-Hungary), Dr Maček finally said that he was still the HSS president. To this Kvaternik replied that it could not be published, since there would be no political parties any more. When everything was translated to Veesenmayer, he asked Dr Maček to hand over the leadership of the people, to which Maček replied, No, I will not do it!"

Veesenmayer got the "radical elements" together and stage-managed Kvaternik's activity. While Kvaternik was able to organise forces to step into the power vacuum and occupy strategic points in the city, Veesenmayer's efforts were needed to induce Maček to sign his proclamation with the appearance of his endorsement. In any event, some time between 4 p.m. (Kvaternik) and 5:45 p.m. (Veesenmayer) the two arrived by car at the radio station in Vlaška Street and Kvaternik read in front of the microphone the following proclamation:

"Divine providence and the will of our ally, the hard centuries-long struggle of the Croat people and the great self-sacrifice of our Poglavnik Dr Antun Pavelić, and the Ustaša movement in our country and abroad: have determined that today, on the eve of the Resurrection of the Son of God, our independent Croat State also be resurrected.

I invite all Croats, wherever they are, and especially all officers, NCOs and men of the armed forces and public order, to maintain complete order and to report immediately their present location to the Command of the Armed Forces in Zagreb; and that all members of the armed forces immediately take the oath of allegiance to the independent Croat state and its Poglavnik. Today I assumed the state authority and command over the entire armed forces as the Poglavnik's plenipotentiary. God and Croats - For Homeland On Guard! Slavko Kvaternik"(85)

After this proclamation by Kvaternik, the announcer read Maček's statement:

"Croat people! Colonel Slavko Kvaternik, the leader of the nationalist movement in the country, proclaimed today the free and independent Croat state in the entire territory of the Croat nation and thereupon as of today he assumes power.

I call on all Croats to obey the new authorities. I enjoin all members of the Croat Peasant Party to remain calm, and all members of district administrations to remain at their posts and sincerely to cooperate with the new government."(86)

Maček's statement merits some attention. Why was it made, and why in this form? Some of Maček's supporters have claimed that it had been made under duress, that Maček was forced to sign it. (87) Various accounts of the events of 10 April (including Maček's own) do not support this thesis. Veesenmayer went to Maček to ask for a statement. Neither Veesenmayer nor Kvaternik were in the position to order him to do so, and they did not. Maček could have flatly refused to make any statement, without any immediate personal consequences.

Obviously, Maček felt that some statement was necessary, in view of his position of the leader of the nation and the party, and the vice-Premier. He returned to Croatia "to be with his people", and being "with his people" entailed communicating, if it were to mean anything at all. Maček would have probably made some statement even without Veesenmayer's intervention; its form and its mode of delivery would have been different, but essentially it would have been a call for the passive acceptance of the new situation. On 8 April Maček called on his followers to do their duty and obey orders on military service and at home. Two days later he essentially told them the same thing.

Some sort of address from Maček was to be expected. He could hand over authority to the Ustašas, or resist it. He did not want to resist, since it would be tantamount to resistance to the Germans. However, the impression created by Maček's statement and its far-reaching consequences went way beyond the mere acceptance of the new situation, created by the occupying power. In the minds of Maček's ordinary followers, his statement sounded more or less as his direct identification with the new order. Even regardless of contents, the form of the message - right after Kvaternik's proclamation - gave the impression of Maček's stamp of approval.

Maček had agreed to Veesenmayer's demand that the formulation concerning the Germans "handing over" power to Kvaternik be dropped. The issue of whether Maček was still the leader of the HSS and of the nation was not even mentioned in his statement. The rest contained Maček's own thoughts - this much clearly followed from all participants' accounts. Above all, it is significant that Maček voluntarily asked his followers not only to accept the fait accompli, but also "sincerely to cooperate with the new government".

This invitation, Maček's own, provided enormous assistance to the Ustašas in the first few weeks, when they could rely on the HSS apparatus, on its Zaštita units and local administrators while establishing their order. In this sense, it is not particularly relevant whether Maček's statement reflected his opportunism, admission of weakness in the face of debacle, or his identification with the new order. The actual consequences of Maček's statement were independent of Maček's intentions. The Ustašas initially exploited advantages thus offered to them by Maček, but soon afterwards were no longer satisfied by "cooperation". They wanted complete eradication of the HSS as an independent entity, and its dissolution in the Ustaša state. By that time, Maček was neither willing nor able to alter his initial stand:

"When the Ustaša authorities increased pressure on the HSS too, Maček became totally passive and he personally had no rôle in resisting it. In that way, he took care of the HSS and Croat people by leaving them to their destiny. He spent the war under greater or lesser surveillance of the Ustaša authorities, which apparently suited him. By not confronting them, he did not invite repercussions against himself. This secured his personal comfort, and also suited his ideological orientation."(88)

Maček's role reflected the predicament of those forces he represented and led. The peasantry and small town folk of Panonian Croatia, relatively prosperous farmers and artisans, have never been given to the feats of epoch-making audacity. The leaders reacted, one could say instinctively, in the same way as most rank-and-file. Admittedly, some HSS members and supporters went over to Pavelić enthusiastically. Others (mainly after September 1943) joined Tito's Partisans. Most remained passive and went into "waiting". This attentisme was based on one fundamental premise: that the Western Allies would eventually land in Dalmatia, and that Germany would lose the war. It was hardly surprising that so many wanted to remain seated on the fence. After May 1941, none of the internal actors that mattered in Croatia, i.e. none of the armed actors (Ustašas, Partisans, Četniks) appealed to the great majority of Croats.

By deciding in advance not to resist anyone or anything, Maček abdicated his ability to influence events and let the history of his country be made by others. Maček had many qualities required of a politician, but he was no man for fateful times. He was not a statesman.

Such considerations were yet to come on the evening of 10 April 1941, when Slavko Kvaternik formally received the instruments of power from a legal official of the Banovina administration, at the Ban's Palace. True to form, he subsequently greeted Veessenmayer by inviting the assembled audience to chant "Heil!"(89) Close to midnight, as Kvaternik was driven home after a long day, everywhere he could find peace and quiet, perfect law and order. Joint sentries - policemen and Zaštita activists - guarded public buildings, post offices, railway stations... The effect of Maček's address on the radio was bearing fruit.

VIII. NDH IN NEW EUROPE

1. Pavelić's Return from Italy

Dramatic events in Zagreb in the first half of April 1941 were unfolding without any direct participation of Ante Pavelić and his two hundred followers still left in Italy. At the time of the Belvedere ceremony on 25 March 1941, Ustaša émigrés were in a position similar to that during Stojadinović's honeymoon with Italy in 1937: politically passive, physically dispersed throughout the peninsula, and demoralised. In early March, acting foreign minister Anfuso's chef de cabinet, de Ferraris, reiterated the need for total political and organisational inactivity of the Ustašas, in view of the impending signing of the Tripartite Pact by Yugoslavia.(1)

Scant news from the "home Ustašas" indicated that they tended to look more and more to Germany as the key to the future of Croatia, while Italy was discounted both because of its military weakness (which was made so blatantly obvious in Greece) and because of Italy's unspoken, but suspected, territorial designs on the eastern Adriatic shore. Warned of such sentiments at home, Pavelić is supposed to have reacted impatiently: "What do they know; we belong to the Italian sphere!"(2)

At the same time, Pavelić's standing with his remaining supporters in Italy remained high. Having devoted over a decade of their lives to the ever more elusive goal of Croat independence, cut off from the outside world and even from one another, they clung on to the only hope they had - their Foglavnik. Even if a suspicion of Italy was privately expressed among them, it was brushed aside by the belief that Pavelić would find the best solution, and that Italy would not have the last word anyway.

Already on 28 March, learning of Hitler's decision to attack Yugoslavia, Mussolini decided that he would talk to Pavelić straight away; he informed Mackensen of his intention (p. 154 above). After twelve years, the Ustaša leader would finally meet his mentor.

There were two meetings between Pavelić and Mussolini in the two weeks between the coup in Belgrade and Pavelić's departure for Croatia. The first meeting took place on 29 March 1941 in Mussolini's private residence in Rome, Villa Torlonia. Acting foreign minister Anfuso was the only ^{other} person present (Ciano was with his air force unit at that time), and he gave an account of the meeting in his memoirs. This account is important because Anfuso had been intimately involved in the Croat issue and he attended all key meetings the Italians had with Pavelić in the period March-May 1941. Of the first meeting between Pavelić and Mussolini (29 March) Anfuso wrote:

"He [Pavelić] confirms earlier obligations to Italy; he guarantees that he will carry them out; he dispenses any doubts about his loyalty. Although he enjoys Germany's support, he knows how much he owes to Italy, which has tried to make him acceptable to Germany until now. The essence of the problem is Dalmatia. Will Pavelić be able, and how far, to restrain the aspirations of his compatriots against Italian irredentism? Pavelić does not conceal that this will be difficult."(4)

Anfuso's remark that "Pavelić enjoys the support of Germany" is somewhat puzzling, and may indicate that Anfuso confused the first and the second meeting between Mussolini and Pavelić. At the time of the first meeting several German envoys were in Zagreb or preparing to go there, with the objective of securing Maček's cooperation. Only at the time of the second meeting - a fortnight later - was Berlin reluctantly forced to accept the Ustaša option.

Anfuso registered that Pavelić suggested Italo-Croatian union as a means of bypassing the Dalmatian problem. He also noted that the issue of political power appeared more pressing to Pavelić than any other consideration:

"To Pavelić the most important thing is to get to Zagreb before other solutions materialize, which would deny power to the Ustašas. Although the Ustaša solution enjoys Hitler's support, Pavelić is afraid that some unforeseen changes in German mood may cost him the throne of the leader. Mussolini is at the verge of solving the Adriatic issue, which does not come to him unexpectedly, since it has been on his mind for years. But this solution is too enticing and radical to disperse fears that behind guarantees given by Pavelić there may be a postponement of the Dalmatian issue or total transfer of 'independent' Croatia to German authority which would make void all agreements reached with the Croat agitator."(5)

According to Anfuso, the first meeting between Mussolini and Pavelić ended with the agreement to press for an eventual union, but also with the agreement that Dalmatian cities "with a strong Italian, i.e. Venetian character" would come under the sovereignty of Italy straight away. At the very end of the meeting Mussolini told Pavelić that, as soon as the Ustaša leader was established in Zagreb, negotiations would begin to conclude a formal treaty on the basis of their talks.

Anfuso's account left no doubt about the Italian diplomat's overall impression of the event:

"Of these two men of politics, who are discussing their national problems, one is fatally returning to his home country as a traitor".

Furthermore, Anfuso's memoirs indicate that Pavelić was well aware of the reaction which his agreement with Mussolini would produce among his followers, and that his concern was "to avoid the impression of being a renegade". Indeed, Pavelić was unwilling to disclose much about his talks with Mussolini even to his closest collaborators. On his return to Florence he told Eugen-Dido Kvaternik that there was accord between Italy and Germany over Croatia. Specifically asked about Dalmatia, he replied that there was no mention of it during the talks in Rome.(6) Instead, Pavelić talked at some length about purely technical matters agreed in Rome, such as concentration of Ustašas in a camp in northern Italy and forthcoming propaganda broadcasts to Croatia on Florence Radio.

The ensuing days brought several disappointments to Pavelić and his group. All lines of communication with Croatia were severed. Concentration of dispersed Ustašas at Pistoia was very slow. Above all, Pavelić was worried because of uncertainty regarding German intentions. All of this resulted in an atmosphere of nervous tension and occasional depression in his household.(7) The tension was increased after the news of Germany's attack on Yugoslavia: Pavelić was making broadcasts and issuing communiques on Florence Radio ostensibly "from the battlefield", while his only source of information about the course of the campaign came from Italian newspapers and foreign radio news.*

* Ustaša "historiography" painted this period quite differently:

"The Poglaynik was making last preparations for the great moment. He was kept informed from hour to hour about developments on the front and about the activity of Ustaša units, to which he kept sending instructions and orders. He was precisely informed about the advance of German units and the time of their entry into Croatia and Zagreb. He sent all necessary instructions about the proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia..."(8)

The news of Slavko Kvaternik's proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia and of the Germans' entry into Zagreb apparently caught Pavelić by surprise. He spent the day (10 April) on a trip to Pistoia, where he met his followers - finally gathered from their various places of confinement - for the first time in many years. In Pistoia he was told that two "home Ustaša" activists (Jozo Dumandžić and Jozo Marković) had taken control over the municipal authority and railroads in Zagreb. While the news, supposedly broadcast on Zagreb radio, produced jubilant excitement in the group, Pavelić was in a pensive mood and apparently irritated by a question concerning the likelihood of the entry of German troops into Zagreb.(9)

That evening, when Pavelić and Eugen Kvaternik returned to Florence, Pavelić's wife Mara told them that Slavko Kvaternik had proclaimed independence. The news, immediately confirmed on the radio, produced "an icy atmosphere in the room"; a German broadcast, announcing the entry of "victorious German Panzer units" into Zagreb, produced an even more shattering effect on Pavelić. Very pale, without a word, he went to the telephone and immediately called Ettore Conti, informed him of the news and asked to talk to Anfuso.(10) When Anfuso called back some minutes later, Pavelić repeated the news (Kvaternik's proclamation, German communiqué) and arranged to come to Rome the following morning.

Kvaternik-fils accompanied Pavelić to Rome, but was not present at any of his meetings with Anfuso or Mussolini: as before (29 March) and later (during negotiations leading to the Rome Agreements) Pavelić was the only Croat present - and no minutes of his talks would ever be presented to any of his aides.

The only available testimony again comes from Anfuso, who wrote that Pavelić's chief concern was to get to Zagreb as soon as possible, and thus to preempt other possible outcomes. The Italians shared this concern:

"Although Hitler had given us repeated assurances that all actions in the Mediterranean and - with much more justification - in the Adriatic concern only Italy, the campaign waged by the Germans in the Balkans altered the situation and created fear that they would change their position."(11)

Apparently, this second meeting confirmed the agreement on "Dalmatia's Italianate cities" reached two weeks earlier, and was mainly devoted to the logistics of getting Pavelić and his group into Zagreb as soon as possible. This was becoming increasingly urgent to both sides, neither of which had any control over events in Croatia.(12)

Pavelić travelled to Trieste on the same day (11 April) and arrived there at 11 p.m. His followers were also brought there from Pistoia. The following day he talked (alone, as usual) with General Ambrosio, commander of the Second Army, who provided transport for Pavelić and his group - requisitioned buses of the Trieste Municipality. With his two hundred-odd men Pavelić left Trieste on 12 April at 10 p.m. and crossed the old Italian-Yugoslav border at Sušak shortly after 2 a.m. on 13 April. After more than twelve years Pavelić was back in Croatia.(13)

The group passed through the area of Gorski Kotar and on to the east without firing a single shot or encountering any resistance. The war - in that part of the country anyway - was over. The mood of the returning émigrés was jubilant. It is significant that most of them seemed convinced that they were the true creators of the NDH. Pavelić himself tended to reinforce that view, thus sowing early seeds of discord between the émigrés and the "home Ustašas".(14)

In the first town on their way, Delnice, they were greeted less than enthusiastically by the inhabitants.(15) From the local post office Pavelić called Slavko Kvaternik in Zagreb by telephone, and this was their first direct contact since well before the coup in Belgrade. They agreed to meet in Karlovac, a city some 40 miles south-west of Zagreb, at 4 p.m. that same day (13 April).*

The progress later in the day was slow due to the increasingly cordial reception accorded to Pavelić in several cities and villages along the route (Vrbovsko, Ogulin, Oštarije, Gornja and Donja Dubrava, Duga Resa). In the village of Srpske Moravice, the first settlement with a Serb population (as its name implies), Pavelić ordered his entourage to seize some two hundred inhabitants. They were lined up, threatened, and eventually set free: this was only the first day.

Finally at Duga Resa a German officer appeared, approached Pavelić and asked him to proceed to Karlovac immediately, because German envoys were expecting him there. It was already 8 p.m. Pavelić arrived in Karlovac about an hour later, accompanied by Lt Col Saltzer, former German assistant military attaché in Belgrade. After a brief speech in the city square he went to the barracks of the former Austrian officer school. Several German, Italian and Croat officers greeted him there, including Slavko Kvaternik and Edmund Veesenmayer.

* The Italian liaison officer attached to Pavelić, Lt Col Sangiorgio, kept repeating throughout the day that "the Germans will be in Karlovac and everything will go wrong" ("... ma vedrete a Karlovac saranno i Tedeschi e tutto andra a rovescio").(16) Such remarks probably only added to Pavelić's concern about his status with the Germans.

Kvaternik-père took Pavelić aside and immediately asked him if he had any outstanding obligations to the Italians. Pavelić assured Kvaternik that he did not have any, and that Rome had no territorial designs in Croatia. On Kvaternik's request, Pavelić confirmed this with his solemn word of honour.(17) Kvaternik appeared satisfied and relieved. Immediately thereafter Pavelić was introduced to Veesenmayer. The latter's initial impression was favourable. Pavelić indicated that he hoped for an early formal recognition from Hitler, which Veesenmayer for his part supported.(18) Well used to tuning his pitch depending on the audience, Pavelić talked of the Croats' admiration for Hitler, and of their link to the German people "by blood and race".(18)

Everyone expected Pavelić to continue his trip to Zagreb - which was only an hour's drive away - immediately the following morning. In anticipation of his return, an enthusiastic welcome was being prepared for him at the entry into the capital. Instead, Pavelić behaved like someone who was in no hurry to consummate his success. He got up rather late and went for a solitary walk in the city park; at lunch he complained of a slight cold, and gave it as the reason for his hesitation to complete the journey. His entourage was baffled and increasingly impatient, but nobody dared point out to Pavelić that his behaviour was somewhat eccentric under the circumstances.

Eugen Kvaternik was in Pavelić's immediate vicinity throughout. In his published account he discounted the "slight cold", and claimed that Pavelić's reluctance to leave Karlovac was caused by the news that Anfuso was coming to see him. There seems to be no other explanation for Pavelić's reluctance: he preferred to await Mussolini's chief diplomat, rather than proceed to the position of power apparently secure for him.(19)

2. The Karlovac Episode

It may appear strange that Anfuso was hurrying to meet Pavelić again, only three days after the latter's meeting with Mussolini in Rome. Apparently, the Duce was becoming restless and suspicious of what was going on. As usual, he was worried about the Germans, rather than his Croat protégé:

"Once Pavelić and the Ustašas had left, we had little or no news about them. The first question Mussolini put to me during the morning report [on 14 April] was 'What do you know about Pavelić?' I answered that I did not know much beyond the fact that he had returned to Croatia without difficulty and that the Wilhelmstrasse was willing to recognise his government. Mussolini then changed his question. 'Dalmatia?', he asked, not mentioning Pavelić by name. I really did not know what to answer, and only repeated what I had heard from the [Italian] Dalmatians gathered in the ante-rooms of Palazzo Chigi. But this was not what Mussolini wanted to know."(20)

Anfuso attempted to reassure Mussolini, by stressing that even prior to the meeting at Villa Torlonia (29 March) Pavelić had made precise and specific promises regarding Italy's Adriatic aspirations. Mussolini nevertheless remained nervous*, and responded:

"The issue [of Dalmatia] must be placed on the agenda and resolved before the Germans create an irreparable situation. I can trust Pavelić's word, but what will he do if faced with a German veto himself? Pavelić is the only pawn we have on the Balkan board, and we must not allow them to take it away from us."(21)

* The lack of reliable information from Zagreb was such that Anfuso was not certain even whether the airport at Zagreb, where he was heading later that day, was in German, Croat or hostile Yugoslav [sic!] hands. From Anfuso's own account and other sources it is not clear precisely how Pavelić was informed that Anfuso was on his way.

Mussolini's instructions for Anfuso were clear: "to obtain from Pavelić - before Italy officially recognises his government - a public and solemn statement which would oblige him to determine the new state's frontiers, taking into special account Italian interests in Dalmatia".(22) To Mussolini such "public" statement apparently seemed important in order to preempt any claim by Pavelić that he could not keep his prior promises (made in private) because of the pressure from his own supporters, or from the Germans, or both.

Far from offering resistance, or presenting the Italians with a fait accompli by virtue of his apparently secure position (which would have been enhanced by his "triumphant" entry into Zagreb), Pavelić remained in Karlovac. He categorically rejected urgent appeals from Slavko Kvaternik and Veessenmayer to proceed to Zagreb at once.(23) When Anfuso finally arrived at 2 p.m. Pavelić even asked Veessenmayer and both Kvaterniks to hide from him.(24) When they were seated in a room, alone, Anfuso immediately started talking about Dalmatia and Mussolini's concern. Pavelić appeared surprised that the Italians had any doubts about his loyalty to them:

"He gave me a surprised look from head to toes and swore that nothing had changed in his intentions. Busy establishing the first contact with the Croat population, he did not have time - he told me - to carry out in a concrete form his obligations to Mussolini; but he said he would not be late doing so."(25)

That would be the second time in two days that Pavelić swore - to two entirely different things.

Both Kvaterniks stated that Veesenmayer was furious at the arrival of Anfuso, and made no attempt to conceal his feelings for Germany's principal ally. He and the two Kvaterniks were waiting for the end of Pavelić's talks with Anfuso in the atmosphere of some tension. After about half an hour, Pavelić emerged with the text of a telegram. It was addressed to Mussolini and written in Italian:

"The Croat people expresses its deepest gratitude to the glorious Italian forces for the liberation of Croatia. Croatia will enter the new European order under the care and protection of Fascist Italy. When determining the frontiers of the new state, attention will be paid above all to the Italian rights in Dalmatia."(26)

Seeing this, Veesenmayer immediately rejected the styling, saying "This is impossible; what about us, and we took the heaviest burden?" The German special representative promptly drafted another telegram (together with Slavko and Eugen Kvaternik), addressed to both Hitler and Mussolini, and requesting both governments' recognition.(27) This draft was given to Pavelić and Anfuso in the other room. After a few minutes Pavelić reappeared again, sullen, and said that Anfuso could not accept the new draft (which made no mention of "Italy's rights in Dalmatia") without consulting Mussolini first. Therefore, he was waiting for a telephone call to Rome. Upon hearing this, Veesenmayer jumped and literally ran to the post office, manned by German Army telephone operators. He ordered them to disconnect all lines immediately.*

* In the end it took Ribbentrop's intervention to get Veesenmayer to provide telephone connection to an increasingly tense Anfuso (see PA, Buero RAM, Kroatiien, note dated 14 April). Veesenmayer justified the delay by saying that he had only one line open, to Berlin, and had to keep it free all the time for himself.

According to Anfuso, the draft of the telegram which was in line with his instructions could only be prepared when he was left alone with Pavelić again (though they were occasionally interrupted by the comings and goings of various Ustašas keen to greet Pavelić on his return). The result was "a message which blended irredentist zeal, fanned in Palazzo Venezia, and reserves, imposed on Pavelić by the tutelage of Germany and her Croat admirers".(28) It is notable that Anfuso does not blame Pavelić for any "reserves" about Dalmatia, but stresses that they were "imposed" on him. In any event, the request from Pavelić to Mussolini for recognition, containing due reference to the frontiers, was conveyed to Rome some time before 9:30 p.m. on 14 April.(29)*

The Karlovac episode is significant as the first manifestation of two sources of conflict which would become a salient feature of the NDH later on. One was the conflict between Germany and Italy. It was manifested in this instance as Italy's chronic mistrust of Germany, based on a long history of German disregard for Italy's wishes or interests even in those regions which were formally recognised as the Italian zone of interest. Mussolini's fear of yet another fait accompli by Hitler prompted him to despatch Anfuso to Karlovac so soon after their meeting with Pavelić at Palazzo Venezia. By this time the Italians may have learned of German attempts to win over Maček in the days just prior to the attack on Yugoslavia; there could have been no doubt that the Germans would have presented Rome with their own decision regarding Croatia's future had they succeeded in winning over Maček, and not with a request for consultations.

* At least one source indicates that Anfuso never got his line and that the telegram was taken by car to Fiume and sent from there (PA, Buero RAM, Kroatien, 14 April). It is possible that Anfuso had despatched a driver with the telegram to Fiume before getting through to Rome on the telephone and that both versions are essentially correct.

3. First Signs of Axis Rivalry

Italian apprehension is also justified in the light of Veesenmayer's activities and other developments in Zagreb. Veesenmayer obviously did not think that his mission was over with Kvaternik's proclamation of 10 April. He wanted to secure German influence in the new state regardless of the Italians (and, as the episode in Karlovac indicated, in spite of them if necessary). In this endeavour he enjoyed the support of Kvaternik and the "home Ustaša" group, who were Germanophiles to the man and extremely suspicious of the Italians. As we have already indicated, this group regarded Pavelić's dealings with Italy as a matter of expedience and temporary necessity, which would not mark the long-term future of Croatia.

Already on 10 April Kvaternik-senior requested German recognition of the NDH and conveyed this request to Berlin through Veesenmayer.(30) No such request was sent to the Italians, and the telegram to Hitler made no mention of Italy. Instead, it contained extravagant praise for the German army and Hitler personally, and ended with a bombastic "Heil to the Fuehrer of the German people!"

Unaware of this request from Kvaternik, Pavelić sent a message to Hitler from Rome on 11 April, expressing his gratitude to the Germans, but also taking care to mention both dictators and both Axis powers.(31) This was not a request for recognition, since the Italians were obviously keen to avoid any German recognition of the NDH until after Pavelić was secure in his position of power. Evidently oblivious of his nominal boss's actions, two days later Slavko Kvaternik sent yet another recognition request to Berlin (and again none to Rome). This request was routed through German military channels.

Kvaternik was obviously acting under Veesenmayer's guidance. In his report to Ribbentrop on the proclamation of the NDH dated 11 April, Veesenmayer described accurately, if somewhat less than modestly, the events of that day.(33) He concluded the report in the manner of a budding Reichskommissar:

"The initiative and execution during the hours described were exclusively in my hands.[...] Since Kvaternik took over the Government I have been at his side constantly and I am assisting him inconspicuously. I intend to continue to do this so that existing elements of danger can be overcome more easily. However, I have not committed myself in any way as regards interpretation of the concept of freedom."

In his reply Ribbentrop approved of Veesenmayer's action, but warned him to leave further measures "entirely up to the Croats" and to remain aloof himself. The following sentence is especially significant: "In the further treatment of the Croatian question we now intend to let the Italians have precedence entirely".(34)

The issue of whether the Germans were really serious in the spring of 1941 in their intention to let Croatia become an Italian satellite is still alive only among a dwindling number of Croat emigre publicists. Pavelić's apologists among them claim that this was indeed Hitler's policy, and that their leader therefore had had no choice but to obey Mussolini.(35) Both German and Italian sources suggest, however, that Germany paid lip service to Italy's precedence in Croatia while seeking to undermine it at the same time.

Mussolini's alarm was understandably increased when Mackensen told him early in the morning on 14 April that in the opinion of Hitler and Ribbentrop the time had come to recognise the new Croat state without delay. This proved especially irksome to the Duce because it was only then that he learned of Slavko Kvaternik's two requests for recognition sent to Berlin. Furthermore, Mackensen claimed to have with him a copy of ^{the} telegram Pavelić had sent to Mussolini the previous night from Karlovac. (36) This was apparently done through Veesenmayer. The telegram made no reference to the frontiers in general, or Dalmatia in particular.*

Mussolini's decision to despatch Anfuso to Croatia without delay only hours later was accompanied by the Germans' attempt to frustrate Anfuso's mission. Ribbentrop thus instructed Veesenmayer to tell Anfuso that his mission was unnecessary, since Pavelić's telegram had been already transmitted to Rome through German channels. As it happened, this instruction was sent from Berlin at 5:30 p.m. By that time both Anfuso and Veesenmayer were already in Karlovac (see p. 193).

At the same time, Ribbentrop asked Mackensen to request another meeting with Mussolini - the second that day - to press for simultaneous recognition. During this meeting Mussolini complained that he could not establish telephone contact with Anfuso in Karlovac (this thanks to Veesenmayer, but he did not know that). He resisted German pressure for immediate recognition, explaining that he first needed formal commitment on the territorial issue from the Croats. (38)

* "As Chief of the Croat State, desired and chosen by the Croat people, I take the liberty of informing Your Excellency, the Duce of the Italian Empire, most respectfully, that I have today proclaimed Croatia an independent state to the Croat people. In accordance with the wish of the Croat people, I request that the newly established Croat State be recognised by the Government of His Majesty the King and Emperor of Italy. Dr Ante Pavelić." (37)

The gist of this conversation with Mussolini was conveyed by Mackensen to Berlin: Italy wanted Pavelić's telegram in which he requested recognition to include a sentence to the effect that the new state's frontiers would be determined in agreement between the government of Croatia and the Axis Powers; Mussolini wanted to publish not only his telegram to Pavelić, but also Pavelić's telegram to him, and would like the Germans to do likewise; in his reply to Pavelić Mussolini was going to stress that Italy was looking forward to the agreement on the new state's frontiers through "a free exchange of views".

The primary reason for German haste in trying to hasten the recognition of Pavelić's government was probably military, rather than political. After all, the war in Yugoslavia was still going on, although its outcome was clear. OKW assumed that the act of recognition would induce even the last Croat soldier to throw away his rifle.(39) Besides, both Germany and Italy were nearing the date set for a meeting of foreign ministers, with the partition of Yugoslavia on the agenda. While Germany ostensibly supported Italian claims of predominance in Croatia, it attempted at the same time to induce Mussolini to grant an official recognition to the NDH without any prior acknowledgement of those claims by the new state. Therefore, Mussolini felt that he needed additional assurance (beyond that given by Pavelić on various earlier occasions) which would preempt any hidden German intentions. Pavelić, for his part, not only proved accommodating to Anfuso's requests (and even ostensibly surprised that further guarantees were asked for), but also eager to provide simultaneous assurances to the Germans (Veesenmayer) and to his own followers (Kvaternik) about the innocuous nature of Italian demands.(40)

4. The Proclamation of the NDH and International Affairs

In the end, both German and Italian notes recognising the Croat state contained a clause asked for by Mussolini, that they were looking forward to reaching an agreement on frontiers "in a free exchange of views with the Croat Government". The announcement was made in Berlin on 15 April at noon, in Rome two hours later. Some hours earlier, at the crack of dawn, Pavelić finally drove through the deserted streets of Zagreb and took possession of the Ban's Palace. The NDH thus had come into being as the latest addition to the "new order" in Europe.

The legal status of the NDH had been extremely dubious from the beginning. The attack on Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941 was undoubtedly an illegal use of force, and the creation of the NDH was a direct outcome of that attack. Therefore, the NDH was not qualified for recognition within the terms of the Stimson Doctrine.⁽⁴¹⁾ During a war a belligerent does not acquire sovereignty of enemy territory under enemy occupation. The action of Germany and Italy in carving up Yugoslavia and setting up the NDH could not acquire legal status for as long as the resistance of the parent state continued - as it evidently did continue from without (Cairo, London) and from within (Mihailović, Tito). Since full recognition was extended only by Germany, Italy and their allies, the general (or even only prevalent) formal recognition by other states - as a constitutive factor of the new state - was also lacking. It was at all times clear that the existence of the new state was conditional on the victory of the Axis. Ustaša sources attempted to bypass this objection by stressing the unequal position of different parts of the territory of Yugoslavia after 17 April 1941:

"But the question is to what areas of former Yugoslavia did the occupation extend in its true sense (occupatio bellica). Depending on whether we look for facts or fiction, we may have two differing

- viewpoints: 1. disintegration of Yugoslavia, with each part having its separate fate; and 2. occupation of Yugoslavia in its pre-war form. For the birth or end of a state of greatest importance are facts, and legal consequences follow.[...] Croatia was [after 10 April 1941] the subject of international law, while Serbia was not - it was an occupied territory; while Croatia had territory, people and authority as its elements of statehood, Serbia had only the first two.[...] Croatia signed international treaties on its own behalf, it was recognised by other states and recognised them, it received and sent diplomatic representatives, it had its own army, which obeyed only its state leadership."(42)

Not a single argument quoted above is valid. Indeed, Croatia was recognised by some states, but their number fell far short of universal - or at least prevalent - recognition called for by international law. The number of states (including non-belligerents and neutrals) which continued to recognise Yugoslavia was much greater throughout the war, and it included the Vatican. The territory of Croatia was occupied (or at least one half of it was occupied) by the Italian army regardless of the state leadership's wishes or opinion: no Ustaša could pretend that the Second Italian Army garrisoned huge tracts of the NDH territory because Pavelić's government so desired. There were other large areas of territory under the NDH "sovereignty" which were controlled by insurgents (Četniks, Partisans) and in some instances the state authority felt compelled to reach accommodation with such insurgent groups and to formally recognise their control over certain areas (eg. the Četniks in several areas of Bosnia in 1942). Finally, already in 1942 the armed forces of the NDH were placed under German supreme command.

Although it is difficult to conclude anything other than that the NDH was not a state in terms of international law, de iure, in a study of the rôle of Croat separatism in the European pandemonium of 1941-45 it is far more important to establish whether the NDH possessed certain attributes of de facto statehood, which would qualify it as an actor in terms of foreign policy analysis.

It is no longer possible to maintain the traditional distinction between foreign and domestic policies. Such distinction is especially blurred in the case of the NDH. Most facets of its brief existence included some sort of relationship with various German or Italian military or civilian authorities. Such relationships were often outside the sphere of diplomacy in its conventional sense. To take such ambiguities into account, we suggest to define foreign policy as a formulation of desired or expected outcomes to be subsequent upon decisions, made by those in command of the state apparatus and its resources, in relations with other states; such decisions are made on the basis of what decision-makers perceive as their country's "national interest".

This definition implies that the legal status of an entity ("state") may influence the course of its external relations, but not the fact of it engaging in such relations. In this looser sense, we need to know whether the NDH was a state de facto, i.e. capable of engaging in such relations. On balance the answer is affirmative. Its "quantity" of statehood kept diminishing as the war went on, but the NDH nevertheless cannot be regarded as a mere extension of the foreign policy of either Italy or Germany. Furthermore, the very existence of divergent interests of Italy and Germany enabled the NDH to be a "state" a little more than would have been the case without that rivalry.

The argument in favour of the existence of the "NDH foreign policy" in this broader sense is enhanced if we conceptualise foreign policy as a form of adaptive behaviour, i.e. adaptation by the decision-making group (who have certain state resources at their disposal) to that state's environment. Unlike countless forms of informal adaptation, which mainly (though not necessarily) take place outside the government apparatus, foreign policy decisions are of necessity goal-oriented. A decision may have unintended consequences which affect the degree of adaptation, but regardless of the eventual outcome, that initial step was made consciously and with some objective in mind.

This view of foreign policy as a process of adaptation is a useful descriptive framework which enables us to perceive Pavelić and his men as "actors". An illustration of such adaptive behaviour is Pavelić's course in the first few days following his return to Croatia. Immediately upon meeting Veesebmayer in Karlovac, Pavelić went out of his way to give his assurances of admiration for Hitler, Germany and the Wehrmacht. According to Veesebmayer, furthermore,

"[Pavelić] did not intend to conduct any foreign policy at all - Adolf Hitler was doing that - and he only wanted to raise up his people and to prove that the Croats were not Slavs, but profess themselves, in the last analysis, as being German by blood and race."(43)

To Anfuso only a day later Pavelić offered categoric assurances of his loyalty and determination to keep his promises about Dalmatia; he even appeared surprised that any concern existed about his sincerity.

* To his followers throughout this period Pavelić continued giving assurances about Italy's benevolence, and to Slavko Kvaternik he gave his word of honour to that same effect. Similar assurances Pavelić also gave to Veesenmayer; and as for Pavelić's solemn oaths and words of honour, they were liberally proffered whether asked for or not.

The accommodating attitude of Pavelić to the Italians was not due to his "loyalty" to Italy, but to his concern for his own position. Over the ensuing four years, Pavelić's priorities were to indicate a similar pattern of personally functional, but organisationally dysfunctional motivation pattern, dysfunctional from the viewpoint of Croatia's national interest. Such motivation pattern is typical of many dictators.* In this case it induced behaviour which sought to promote Pavelić's personal power within the shifting political-military environment he was operating in. His range of options was limited and his resources modest, but Pavelić nevertheless was an autonomous actor. His policy was neither Germany's nor Italy's (nor for that matter Croatia's), but Pavelić's own.

The Foglavnik never shared his innermost feelings and thoughts with anyone, during this period or later on. Both during his émigré years and later in Zagreb there was no heir apparent, no single trusted aide who would be privy to Pavelić's inner world. The decision-making process was structured so that Pavelić was undisputably in control of his "diplomacy", which for a long time he conducted literally single-handed.

* This trait would become especially obvious in 1944, when Pavelić stopped all attempts to seek a way out for Croatia from the losing Nazi camp after he realised that this would necessarily include his removal from power.

5. Internal Consolidation of Power

Pavelić's predominant role in external affairs was an extension of the overall power structure which he promptly established in the NDH. Largely thanks to Maček's implicit (and possibly unintended) endorsement of the new régime - contained in his call for "sincere cooperation" - Pavelić could rely on the extensive local authority and paramilitary apparatus of the HSS. Swift establishment of state authority would have been much more difficult if the HSS rank and file had remained indifferent, let alone hostile, to the new regime.

At the same time, in the first weeks following 10 April 1941 there existed a degree of popular enthusiasm among many Croats, which was reflected in the tremendous welcome given to German troops in Zagreb. This wave of support was short-lived (for many Croats it ended with the signing of the Rome Agreements in May), but it proved sufficient to enable Pavelić to consolidate himself in the initial period. It also enabled him soon to dispense with the HSS and disregard or even persecute its leaders.

Although Pavelić lacked the charismatic personality of a Hitler or a Mussolini (or even of such lesser Fascist/populist figures as Codreanu or Franco), he emerged as the undisputed leader of his movement - on which he relied to the exclusion of all other forces. An attempt to equate "Croat" and "Ustaša" was the salient feature of the NDH propaganda throughout the war, and it postulated the Fuehrerprinzip from the outset. The Ustaša cult of peasantry made many political institutions, and above all political parties, suspect and unnecessary. Furthermore, glorification of peasant "natural" justice produced a cult of unbridled aggressiveness, vengeance and pure hatred. This mix of Nazi brutality and racism, Fascist irrationality and oriental primitivism quickly turned into a pandemonium of anarchy and genocide. Thanks to Pavelić and his followers, the Balkan heart of darkness was exposed in all its tragic awfulness.

The NDH was as far from being a Rechtstaat as it could be. It never had a constitution. Instead, on 16 April 1941 Pavelić reworded the "Ustaša Principles" (see pp. 46-48), swore an oath on them and proclaimed them the supreme law of the state. Numerous "laws" introduced in the first weeks were not legislated through an assembly, because no such body was allowed (the Sabor, or Diet, was convened briefly in 1942 and existed for a few weeks as a talking shop). Legislation was effectively reduced to a series of decrees and ordinances, issued by Pavelić or on his orders. From the beginning he took the exclusive right of appointing and dismissing ministers, secretaries of state and heads of state directorates (the "Law" of 24 June 1941). In this way, Pavelić tried to legitimate his personal power and created a quasi-constitutional framework which enabled him to combine total executive and legislative power in his hands.

All ministers were directly responsible to Pavelić, and the cabinet never developed as a coherent body in its own right. Cabinet sessions were extremely rare, and Pavelić preferred to deal with his ministers tête-a-tête. Furthermore, he had the habit of creating separate "directorates" in charge of certain affairs, which would be taken away from the ministry originally responsible for them. The heads of such "directorates" were even more directly under his command than ministers.* All this was going on without a recognisable coherent programme of what the Croat society ought to look like. For the Ustašas, the State was the highest goal to such an extent, that its achievement displayed their lack of a global view or even a quasi-philosophical concept of man and society.

* The most notorious example being that of Eugen-Dido Kvaternik: he became the Director for Public Order and Security (Ravnatelj za javni red i sigurnost, RAVSIGUR, an institution separate from the interior ministry), and as such unleashed an unprecedented reign of genocidal terror against Serbs and Jews, as well as against any real, potential or imagined opponents of the régime.

From the beginning, an attempt was made to turn the NDH into an Ustaša-state, even though this objective meant different things to different people. Pavelić took it to mean primarily his total personal power; he sought to carry out his Gleichschaltung in all spheres of social, political and economic life. The press and media, schools, youth, cultural institutions, professional bodies were all brought under state, i.e. Ustaša control. Because of the small initial number of activists, this provided a haven for careerists, opportunists and all manner of corruption. There were short-lived attempts to introduce a corporate economic system, limit ownership rights and mimic some "socialist" notions present in Fascism and Nazism.*

The first NDH government, appointed by Pavelić on 16 April 1941, was an all-Ustaša affair.** Pavelić resolutely rejected suggestions that it would be wise, at least initially, to seek some sort of partnership with the HSS. Such course was advocated by Slavko Kvaternik, who suggested that three or four ministerial portfolios should be set aside for the HSS in the interest of national unity and peasant support.(45)

* In his speech on 21 May 1941 Pavelić stated:

"In the Independent State of Croatia we must establish such social order which would not lead to the gap between the rich and the poor, those who work and those who enjoy the fruits of others' toil, those who rob and those who sweat [...] Croat peasant people, according to the Ustaša principles, is not only the source of all good for itself, it is also the subject and bearer of all power and authority in the Croat state. Croatia's Independent State is, and will remain, the edifice which serves Croatia's peasants and working people.(44)

** Premier and foreign minister: Ante Pavelić; Vice-Premier: Osman Kulenović (the only Muslim in Pavelić's first government); commander of the armed forces and minister of the home guard (Domobranstvo, i.e. defence): Slavko Kvaternik (already in Karlovac Pavelić conferred on Kvaternik the title of Vojskovođa, or Marshal; Kvaternik was also supposed to take over Pavelić's duties in the event of the latter's absence or incapacity); justice: Mirko Puk; interior: Andrija Artuković; health: Ivan Petrić; national economy: Lovro Sušić; religion and education: Mile Budak; forestry and mining: Iviča Frković; labour: Jozo Dumandžić; and legislative commission: Milovan Žanić.

Pavelić's government did not hold regular meetings, and occasional sessions were called mainly to rubber-stamp decisions already made by him. The Fuehrerprinzip was spelled out by Pavelić in no uncertain terms:

"I shall bear responsibility to the entire Croat people for all [government] acts, while all state organs, officials and employees will be responsible to me - and you know that I am not joking."(46)

To disperse any doubts about Pavelić's seriousness, an elaborate apparatus of internal control and oppression was swiftly established. Already on 10 May the Ustaša organisation was formally renamed "Ustaša - the Croat Liberation Movement" (Ustaša - hrvatski oslobodilački pokret), with the Militia (Ustaška vojnica) as its muscle. Independent of the Militia was the Ustaša Supervisory Service (Ustaška nadzorna služba, UNS) as the security service similar in organisational structure and methods to the Gestapo in Germany. Independent of both stood Kvaternik-junior's dreaded Directorate for Public Security, with its own network of agents and armed units. Yet another body was the Ustaša police (Ustaško redarstvo), which - among other things - carried out frontier checks. The speed with which those bodies were set up and the resources set apart for them were indicative of the shape of things to come.

The first weeks of the NDH were a period of intense consummation of various outward attributes of statehood. Flags, coats of arms, titles, administrative rearrangements with the creation of medieval-sounding "counties", initially blurred the fact that the question of frontiers remained unsettled. This was an issue which Italy wanted to settle as soon as possible.

IX - FROM VIENNA TO ROME

1. Hitler's Croatian Strategy

Immediately following the successful completion of operations in the Balkans Hitler apparently paid relatively little importance to the military and strategic significance of the newly-conquered area. Initially he envisaged Croatia in some sort of union with Hungary, or as an "autonomous" state, probably under Hungarian influence. (1) A few days later (12 April) the OKW Provisional Guidelines (on the partition of Yugoslavia) mentioned an "independent Croat state", but with the specific exclusion of Bosnia.

Relatively limited interest in the area in general, and in Croatia in particular, was also apparent in Hitler's instructions given to his newly-appointed plenipotentiary military representative in Zagreb, General Edmund Glaise von Horstenau. Suave, erudite and eloquent, and already well known as a military historian, Glaise belonged to that breed of Austrian officers who had managed to combine an intense nostalgia for the old Habsburg Monarchy with Nazi sympathies. As time went on, his views grew increasingly divergent from Hitler and Nazism.(2)

On 14 April 1941 Glaise reported to Hitler at the special train in Southern Austria to receive instructions, and recorded his impressions:

"The general situation for the emerging Croat state, in relation to the needs of an Axis policy, is exceptionally difficult. The Fuehrer respects the Croats far more than he respects the Italians, and they are racially far more valuable than their western neighbours. But on the other hand, from the beginning of the Axis policy there has been an arrangement between Germany and Italy that only Hungary and Romania belonged to the German sphere of interest, while everything

further south belonged to the Italian sphere... As for Croatia, the task is to get it as a state consolidated as soon as possible, so that German troops can withdraw at the earliest opportunity. I will need the Second Army in another place soon, the Fuehrer remarked significantly, and he did not even need to explain where that could be. This would be the only political objective of Germany in Croatia, and everything else the country would have to do by itself, naturally taking into account Italy and her aspirations."(3)

Asked by Glaise about the future frontiers of Croatia, Hitler indicated the Drina river in the east, the Drava-Danube line in the north, the traditional boundary between Croatia and "Southern Styria" (i.e. part of Slovenia annexed by the Reich) in the north-west, while the coastal strip remained an open issue pending the extent of Italy's aspirations.(4)

Broadly similar instructions were given to the newly appointed German minister in Zagreb, SA-Obergruppenfuehrer Siegfried Kasche. He was a newcomer to diplomacy, drafted by Ribbentrop into the Foreign Ministry to infuse it a little more with the Nazi spirit.(5) Kasche was warned on the eve of his departure for Zagreb that the Croats and Italians were not likely to get on well, and that the former would probably appeal to Kasche, attempting to turn him into an arbiter in such disputes.* As long as the war was going on, the German side was obliged to respect Italian sensibility without reserve. Thus any mediation would have to result in support for Italy, which would only alienate the Croats. Therefore, the German Minister should keep aloof and allow the Italian predominance in Croatia to be as strongly felt as was in line with the Reich's interests.

* Kasche received his instructions from Ernst von Weizsaecker. There is no record of Kasche's conversation with Hitler prior to his departure.

The occasion to settle the "open issue" of Italy's aspirations and to coordinate Axis policy came in Vienna on 21 and 22 April 1941, at a meeting between Ciano and Ribbentrop. The meeting was arranged on German initiative. In his telegram to Mackensen which contained instructions for an invitation to Ciano, Ribbentrop indicated that the talks on dividing spoils in the Balkans would also cover "the frontiers of the newly created Croat state"; "With respect to the Dalmatian question", he added, "we were, of course, thinking of a solution in accordance with Italian interests".(6)

The Germans undertook thorough preparations for the meeting in Vienna, in order to coordinate the views of military, political and diplomatic circles. At a conference in Vienna on 18 April to prepare the ground, ~~an~~ ~~ambassador~~ at the Foreign Ministry Karl Ritter said that an overriding interest Germany had in the Balkans was to receive no less raw materials from the Yugoslav lands than before. Ritter expressed ignorance of Italy's territorial demands, but correctly predicted that they would extend to Dalmatia and the port complex near Fiume, at Sušak. Finally, Ritter said that the recognition of Croatia "as a sovereign state" did not preclude the possibility of Germany's future involvement in order to influence the political course of the new state.(7) In the ensuing discussion, participants expressed preference for territories with raw materials to be given to countries other than Italy. Especially important to Germany were bauxite mines near Mostar (in Herzegovina) and lead and zinc mines at Trepča (in Kosovo).* It was concluded that the coming talks should lead to the provision of guarantees of continued long-term deliveries from those areas to Germany.

* Trepča was duly taken away from Mussolini's "greater Albania" (which included Kosovo) and left to the rump Serbia under German occupation.

Glaise, the newly appointed German general in Zagreb, also learnt that the talks between Italy and Germany would take place. After only three days in his new post he returned to Hitler's headquarters with an agenda quite different from that elaborated by Ritter's group. Already during his first audience with Hitler, on 14 April, Glaise had expressed his opposition to Italy's territorial aspirations in Dalmatia, and urged Hitler to let Croatia have the same coastal strip as Yugoslavia. (8) On 17 April Glaise apologised for his reappearance so quickly and for the strictly political character of his report. He went on to describe ^{the} strongly pro-German sympathies he encountered everywhere in Zagreb, which were in sharp contrast to the Croats' antipathy towards Hungary and their great hatred of Italy.

Glaise then came to the point and asked Hitler if Germany had already accepted certain obligations regarding Italy's plans on the eastern shore of the Adriatic. (9) Hitler interrupted him and, according to Glaise's diary, said that no specific promises had been given, but there was the standard policy of giving priority to Italian interests south of the Drava river. Glaise recorded a significant afterthought of Hitler's:

"If the Italians were clever, they would accept the policy he had suggested to them, which would be the only suitable course for them! But this is a matter which concerns primarily the Italians and the Croats. South of the Drava Germany has only purely economic interests. He personally did not want in the deepest corner of his soul to be lured to the Adriatic coast. If he were to allow that, and then went to the Mediterranean, only then would he really be stuck in a local sea. The nation, however, needed to be oriented to the North Sea".

Then Hitler turned to Dalmatia and said that its handing over to Italy could be useful, because it created

"a permanent basis for conflicts between Italians and Croats, whereby Germany could always reserve the role of an arbiter for itself."

This remarkable statement was in direct contradiction to the instructions given to Kasche by Weizsaecker on the eve of Kasche's departure for Zagreb. The Foreign Ministry specifically warned him AGAINST accepting the role of an arbiter. Hitler's statement to Glaise was a reflection of his real purpose: to prevent long-term stabilisation of Croatia as an Italian client state by letting Italy follow its annexationist course, which would inevitably cause resentment among the Croats and thus leave the door open for German meddling. Furthermore, Hitler also envisaged internal conflict between Serbs and Croats, which would prevent permanent stabilisation of the new state, with the same effect on the future role of Germany.(10) He said to Glaise that "the racial character" of the Croats was different, which was "the best guarantee of a permanent schism between nations which had been within one state until now".*

This theme Hitler was to repeat often in later years, to the chagrin of German generals who regarded the Ustašas' anti-Serb policy as a major cause of permanent turmoil in the NDH. Such a policy of letting Italy make enemies of Croats and letting Croats make enemies of Serbs may have seemed a clever ploy to Hitler in April 1941. Ultimately it turned into a major liability for Germany's position in south-east Europe.

* Oddly enough Hitler concluded his conversation with Glaise by saying that he had not intended to destroy Yugoslavia, but "the Italians" made him do so! Glaise was despondent with the entire approach, most of all because he could not stomach such squander of old Habsburg lands for the sake of what he regarded as dubious friendship with Mussolini and Italy.

2. The Vienna Meeting

In accordance with Ribbentrop's invitation (which sounded more like an instruction, with a detailed itinerary enclosed), Ciano went to Vienna on 20 April 1941. His visit to Hitler on that day - Hitler's birthday - was of a preliminary and largely courteous nature.(11) The following day Ciano met Ribbentrop at the Imperial Hotel.

According to the official German minutes, Ribbentrop opened the meeting by saying that the chief objective of the new order in the Balkans was to prevent once and for all the repetition of a betrayal such as Serbia perpetrated in March 1941.(12) He proceeded to ask Ciano for Mussolini's views on the reorganisation of the former Yugoslav lands. Ciano produced a note - apparently written by Mussolini himself - and a map. He said that parts of Slovenia not annexed by Germany would be annexed by Italy, but with a sort of administrative autonomy. The whole of Dalmatia and the rest of the Adriatic coast from Fiume to Cattaro [Kotor] would also be annexed. Montenegro would be resurrected as a state in personal union with Italy, while parts of Macedonia and Kosovo would go to Albania. Croatia was likewise to be tied closely to Italy by a personal union.

Ribbentrop started his reply by stressing that both Germany and Italy had recognised Croatia's independence. He went on to elaborate on territorial arrangements, also using a map. Regarding Croatia, he said the Fuehrer had already determined the northern border (with the Reich). As for the personal union with Italy, Ribbentrop said that - in Hitler's view - the shaping of Croatia's future system of government should be left to the Croats themselves. The Reich Foreign Minister added that "Germany had not talked to the Croats so

far, but had merely heard of certain demands raised among the Croatian people". Ribbentrop thereby outlined on the map boundaries of Croatia which encompassed all of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as a very wide strip of the Dalmatian coastline.(13) Ciano replied by stressing Italy's claim to the whole of Dalmatia, to which Ribbentrop "replied that Germany considers it Italy's right to negotiate the fixing of the frontiers with Croatia directly, but he easily saw the advisability of creating territorial continuity between Italy and the region of Montenegro and Albania". This detail is missing from the German minutes of the meeting. Also missing is Ciano's version of Ribbentrop's comments concerning the plan for a personal union between Italy and Croatia. According to Ciano,

"Ribbentrop gave no details on the relations between Croatia and Italy, but he did not conceal his personal, although disguised, opposition to a project for personal union between the two States [... Croatia] to Ribbentrop's mind is a State very near to, even if it is not already actually a part of, the political and economic system of the Reich."(14)

There is less discrepancy between ^{the} two sources about the contents and tone of the talks which continued the following day, 22 April. After consulting Hitler, Ribbentrop informed Ciano that Germany confirmed her political disinterestedness with regard to Croatia, and therefore had no objection to a personal union. This question, however, had to be settled directly between Rome and Zagreb. Hitler also raised no objection to the Italian annexation of Dalmatia, and conveyed through his foreign minister the suggestion that Pavelić should be made to come to Rome immediately to fix with the Duce the frontiers and political-constitutional issues.(15)

According to German minutes, Ciano was evidently pleased with Ribbentrop's approach on the second day of the meeting in Vienna, and readily accepted German demands regarding deliveries of bauxite from Dalmatia. However, the German foreign minister had another surprise in store for Ciano, when he announced that Berlin had decided to maintain an occupation force in "a strip of Croatia running from north-west to south-east in order to safeguard the railroad communication with Serbia". Until that moment the Italians were made to believe that the whole of Croatia was their sphere of interest from which Hitler intended to withdraw all German troops at the earliest opportunity.

The talks in Vienna were significant as yet another illustration of the nature of Germany's relationship with Italy. Even though the topic was an area formally in the Italian sphere, the Germans called all the shots: from the date and venue of the meeting itself, to the way in which the agenda was discussed. Disagreements of the first day were resolved, but thanks to Hitler's decision. Hitler gave Italy a free hand regarding territorial settlement in Dalmatia - something he had intended to do anyway. The demand for German control over ore deposits was mentioned almost as an afterthought - and that was the real concern of Berlin! Finally, Ciano was simply INFORMED of the continued German troop presence in the NDH.*

The Vienna talks did not bring anything new to the political map of Europe, but they confirmed what had been expected: that Germany would let Italy enlarge itself on the eastern Adriatic shore. They also confirmed that Italy could do so only thanks to German acquiescence. Hitler was going to let Italy fall into the trap of its own making - and even make himself look magnanimous for doing so!

* In achieving its objectives, the German side was helped by the gross tactical ineptitude of the Italians. Unlike Ribbentrop, Ciano went to Vienna without a clear agenda. There was poor diplomatic/political/military coordination in Rome, resulting in sloppy policy-making, and even technical staff performance left a lot to be desired.

3. The Ljubljana Meeting

Having obtained Germany's carte blanche in Vienna, Ciano decided to talk to Pavelić immediately and set the meeting for 25 April in Ljubljana. A day earlier, he recorded in his diary that he was going there "to find out what the Croats thought", not to conclude anything final. Nevertheless, in his entry he outlined two alternatives: either an uninterrupted coastal strip all the way from Fiume to Montenegro, which would be annexed to Italy outright, or annexation of historical Dalmatia only, but in conjunction with a political treaty which would place Croatia under Italian control.

The first solution corresponded precisely to what Ciano presented to Ribbentrop in Vienna as the scope of Italian aspirations. The second alternative was not known to the Germans. Therefore, on the eve of his departure for Ljubljana, Ciano summoned Mackensen and briefly outlined his (and Mussolini's) thoughts. The German envoy was given a draft treaty with six clauses, which Ciano intended to present to Pavelić:

1. Italy guarantees political independence of the Croat state and inviolability of its territory within mutually agreed frontiers;
2. The government of Croatia will not accept any international obligations which are incompatible with the obligations of the treaty with Italy, or opposed to the spirit of the treaty;
3. Croat armed forces are to be developed in close cooperation with the government of Italy;
4. Croatia will join the Italian-Albanian customs union, whereby all three will become one single area regarding customs and currency;
5. (Clause concerning transport, citizenship, legal affairs); and
6. The treaty would remain in force for 25 years.(16)

Ciano told Mackensen that the proposed treaty was supposed to be a substitute for personal union between Croatia and Italy, which could present "too great a burden for Pavelić's position in the country right now". The Italians did not want to put pressure on Pavelić, and thus the Duce decided to propose the above treaty as a means of "making his friend's life easier". Ciano added that the proposed treaty would place Croatia's links with Italy on a footing similar to Slovakia's links to the Reich, albeit "not quite so close". Conveying the above to his ministry, Mackensen commented that the Italians had more or less given up the idea of personal union, and that they were even uncertain whether Pavelić would - or could - accept the proposed treaty.

Obviously worried about German sincerity, Ciano took further steps to secure Berlin's cooperation in the matter of Croatia. On 24 April Alfieri visited Weizsaecker in Berlin and requested that Ribbentrop send a general message to Pavelić to the effect that Germany would agree to whatever he (Pavelić) concluded with the government of Italy.(17) The Italian envoy stated that Ribbentrop had "promised" to send such message at the meeting in Vienna.* An hour later Ciano telephoned Alfieri in order to modify his request to the German foreign minister as follows: Ribbentrop should not regard this step as an official note, but as a request that Pavelić be told of Germany's hope that Croatia and Italy would find a friendly solution which would satisfy both sides.

* On that same day (24 April) Ciano confided to his diary: "L'atteggiamento dei tedeschi è, in tutto ciò, ambiguo. A Vienna hanno dato a noi la mano libera. Ma fino a quando sono sinceri?"

Of course, both sides knew that there had been no "promise" made in Vienna by Ribbentrop to send any such message to Pavelić. Aware of this, Ciano altered his request. Weizsaecker noted in his memorandum for Ribbentrop that Ciano wanted them "to pull the Italian cart", because he was afraid he could not get what he wanted from Pavelić. Therefore, the Germans decided to wash their hands yet again: they sent a message to Pavelić which explicitly indicated that Berlin would not get involved in any Italian-Croat talks.*

Ciano's behaviour on 24 April indicates three things: the Italians were mistrustful of the Germans in spite of Vienna; they were equally mistrustful of Pavelić and therefore wanted German pressure to be added to their own; and finally, they were not certain - even at that late moment - which option to pursue. Especially puzzling is Ciano's apparent readiness to give up, rather lightly, the idea of personal union, the mainstay of all Italian trans-Adriatic combinations since at least January 1940.

Admittedly, the political treaty outlined by Ciano to Mackensen would have established such degree of Italian predominance in Croatia that personal union would be quite unnecessary. Its value as an additional guarantee of the link with Italy would pale in comparison to the customs union, armed forces tutelage and 25 years' treaty.

* Kasche informed Berlin that he handed Ribbentrop's message to Pavelić on 24 April in the evening.(18) According to Kasche, Pavelić was "quite prepared, but determined to prevaricate, rather than accept large territorial losses". An Ustaša source attributed to Kasche a remarkable anti-Italian statement on this occasion, which allegedly gave hope to the Croats that they could count on Germany's support in resisting Italian demands.(19) It is most unlikely that Kasche would have allowed himself another anti-Italian indiscretion within a week; his ministry had already warned him against such gaffes, following his speech on the occasion of handing his credentials to Pavelić.(20)

Ciano and his entourage went to Ljubljana with a fairly open mind as to the final form of links between Croatia and Italy. Even on the territorial issue there seems to have been a distinct lack of enthusiasm on Ciano's part to pursue annexationist policy on the eastern Adriatic shore advocated by the "Dalmatians" in Rome ("usual agitators", he called them in his diary; "to be pro-Dalmatian is a profession for many"). Of the meeting between Pavelić and Ciano in Ljubljana on 25 April 1941 there are accounts by Ciano (diary), Pavelić (Hrvatska, Buenos Aires, 10 April 1953), his aides E. Kvaternik and Bulat, as well as German diplomatic representatives in Zagreb and Rome.

Ciano's reference to the meeting in his diary entry for 25 April was brief:

"I see Pavelić, surrounded by his band of cutthroats. He declares that the solutions proposed by us would have him thrown out of his job. He makes a counterproposal: the Dalmatia of the London Pact, with Traù added, goes to us. Spalato and Ragusa, in addition to some islands, would remain Croatian.* His followers are more radical than he. They invoke statistics to prove that in Dalmatia only the stones are Italian. On the contrary, Pavelić is favourable to the political pact. He doesn't even exclude the eventuality of a union under one head, or a monarchy under an Italian prince. He asks for time to think about it for a few days, then we shall meet again."

Pavelić's account of 1953 was written in response to a series of articles by Eugen Kvaternik questioning his integrity during various negotiations with the Italians. According to Pavelić, Ciano put two proposals to him. The first would have given the entire coastline to Italy.

* Traù=Trogir; Spalato=Split; Ragusa=Dubrovnik

The second proposal placed the frontier further west, but entailed a military alliance:

"I immediately replied that I could not talk on this basis. I asked whether they valued Dalmatia better than the Croats' friendship... Then Ciano asked me for my solution. I replied that I was not in a position to make territorial demands and therefore could not ask for the return of Zadar, but knowing the situation of Zadar I was only prepared to cede a little territory around that city and Trogir."(21)

Pavelić claimed that Ciano agreed with this proposal, but could not accept it without consulting Mussolini. Pavelić suggested that Ciano talk to him by telephone, which Ciano did. Mussolini was supposed to have answered Io non posso essere rinunciatore - "I cannot be the one who gives up" - alluding to the advocates of the controversial Rapallo Treaty between Belgrade and Rome of 1920. Pavelić was told of Mussolini's answer and said to Ciano that in that case they could not talk any further; it was agreed to continue negotiating through diplomatic channels.

Eugen Kvaternik wrote that there were two separate sessions in Ljubljana.(22) During the first (10:30-12:30) Pavelić was alone with the Italians, while his aides and ministers had to wait in the ante-room of the Ban's palace. After that, Pavelić gave them a five minute account of the talks, and mentioned that he had even threatened an Italian general with war over Dalmatia.*

* Bulat's account is essentially the same: after waiting in an ante-room while Pavelić was in conference with the Italians, the Croats were ushered in and immediately saw an ominous-looking map with the coastal zone marked as Italian territory. Pavelić briefed them on Ciano's demands, and they were taken out again.

Having been briefed by Pavelić, Kasche reported from Zagreb on 26 April that the meeting in Ljubljana was inconclusive, that Pavelić had rejected both Ciano's proposals, and that government consultations in Zagreb were continuing.(23) Alfieri's account of the Ljubljana meeting, given to Weizsaecker, was quite different in spirit: the meeting was described as cordial, Pavelić displayed "good will" towards Ciano's demands, but stressed that because of his great responsibility he needed to consult his closest aides.(24) Finally, Mackensen reported from Rome (also on 26 April) that the talks went well in Ciano's opinion, that an agreement nevertheless had not been reached and that negotiations would be continued through usual diplomatic channels, i.e. through the Italian envoy in Zagreb, Casertano.(25)

The only direct participants who left accounts of the meeting were Ciano and Pavelić. Pavelić's was written as a polemical defence following very serious charges against him from within the Croat émigré community, from his former followers and aides. Ciano's diary, on the other hand, has the advantage of being free from such pressures and of an immediacy which comes with the recording of events as they occur.

On balance, the probable course of the meeting was much less dramatic than Pavelić's description would suggest. Ciano's description of Pavelić as "favourable to the political pact" is recognisable in all the previous negotiations between the Poglavnik and the Italians (with Anfuso in Karlovac, with Mussolini in Rome etc). It is nevertheless remarkable that Ciano, the only credible witness, attributed to Pavelić the counterproposal of "the Dalmatia of the London Pact" and "a monarchy under an Italian prince". According to Ciano's diary, Pavelić even mentioned the possibility of "a union under one head" (i.e. personal union), even though Mussolini had previously decided not to press Pavelić on that point.

In the end, as it happened, Italy was given Dalmatia more or less in the same boundaries as those offered in 1915, and one of its royal princes became Croatia's "King who never was". This outcome, far from being an Italian Diktat reluctantly accepted by Pavelić, seems to have been the solution HE SUGGESTED ALREADY IN LJUBLJANA - in preference to Ciano's proposals (customs union, military links etc). This interpretation is confirmed by the first sentence of Ciano's diary entry for 26 April:

"Except for Spalato, Mussolini is in agreement with Pavelić and justly maintains that it is better to attract Croatia into our political orbit than to gain a little more territory populated by hostile Croats."

From this it is obvious that Pavelić did not offer just "a little territory around Zara and Trogir", because in that event the disagreement between him and Mussolini (who could not be a rinunciatore!) would have been much greater than just "Spalato". Finally, from Zara to Trogir there is over fifty miles, and any attempt to create a single Italian belt of territory linking the two would have necessarily included the major Dalmatian city of Šibenik - which Pavelić somehow did not mention in his recollection.

A defiant Pavelić, who even talked of war with Italy over Dalmatia and refused to negotiate, would have caused much greater consternation than is apparent in either Italian or German sources. In the event, Ciano finds "his followers more radical than he", and "Mussolini is in agreement with Pavelić". Not for the first time, Pavelić's chief concern was the effect that Italian demands would have on his followers, and thus on his position.

4. Italian-Croat Negotiations

After the meeting in Ljubljana there followed ten days of intensive negotiations between Pavelić and the Italian envoy in Zagreb Raffaello Casertano.* It seems that Casertano's job was not all that difficult, considering that Pavelić had already apparently agreed to give up "the Dalmatia of the London Pact". On 28 April Ciano noted in his diary that Casertano had telephoned to inform him of significant progress with the Croats in regard to the frontiers in Dalmatia and the possibility of the offer of the crown to a Savoy prince. That same day Kasche reported from Zagreb that "Pavelić wants a solution which would avoid the loss of Dalmatia by offering the crown of Croatia to an Italian prince, who would have no political rights".(26) The following day (29 April) Mackensen reported from Rome of Casertano's expected arrival there, and of Ciano's statement that the idea of a personal union was no longer in the forefront, but the project of "an independent monarchy with a Savoy prince at its helm".(27)

On 29 April Casertano arrived in Rome to report to Mussolini. Ciano's diary entry on that day indicates that the question of Split remained the only stumbling block: "Pavelić declares that if he were to relent on Spalato he would have to resign, and with him would collapse all his pro-Italian policy". To Ciano's chagrin, Mussolini remained stubborn on this point, while - significantly - Roatta and the General Staff "warmly" advocated a political solution in Croatia and considered as dangerous any "extremist" step regarding Dalmatia.

* He signed his name as "Raffaello", not the more common "Raffaele" as is wrongly spelled in various sources (including Italian ones). Casertano arrived in Zagreb as a special plenipotentiary of the Italian government on 23 April. He was subsequently appointed chargé d'affaires and finally minister, following his success in negotiations with Pavelić. Casertano was one of the few leading career diplomats to remain in the service of Saló (as minister in Budapest, 1943-1944).

On 30 April Ciano visited the King to inform him of Pavelić's offer of the crown to a member of the Italian royal house (which seemed to make the monarch happy). The King was even more blunt than Ciano or Roatta about Dalmatia: were it not for certain "understandable sentimentality", he told Ciano, he would be in favour of relinquishing Zara!*

Apparently faced with such singular lack of enthusiasm over Dalmatia in general (and Split in particular) among many diverse circles (Ciano, the King, Roatta and the general staff), Mussolini decided to soften his instructions to Casertano. On 30 April, while giving him a letter for Pavelić with the acceptance of the offer of the crown, Mussolini told him to "insist on Spalato, but not to the point of creating a break".**

In the ensuing days the news from Casertano in Zagreb grew increasingly encouraging for Mussolini. Ciano's diary entry for 2 May 1941 thus read: "Casertano telephones that all hope for Spalato is not lost".

* Ciano also noted in his diary that the King said he would choose the Duke of Spoleto to be the king of Croatia. For a complete story of Italy's "failed dynastic export venture" see Stevan K. Pavlowitch, Unconventional Perceptions of Yugoslavia, Chapter IV: "The Duke of Spoleto: The King Who Never Was". New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, p 107 on.

** Ciano gave to Casertano a letter of his own for Pavelić, which read:
"Dear Pavelić, Rome, 30th April 1941 - XIX

In his letter of yesterday's date, the Duce has informed you of His Majesty's acceptance of the Crown of Croatia for a prince of the House of Savoy.

I wish to tell you how happy I am at this decision, which is the best augury for the formulation of the agreements which will establish close and fruitful bonds between Italy and Croatia.

I shall be very glad to meet you as soon as possible, whenever Dr Casertano has concluded with you the negotiations relating to the Treaty and the frontiers.

The Government of the Reich has been informed by me of the acceptance of the Crown of Croatia by His Majesty, of the designation of His Royal Highness, the Duke of Spoleto, as well as of the conversations at present in progress.

Accept meanwhile, dear Pavelić, together with my cordial good wishes the renewed expression of my sincere friendship. Ciano."(28)

Two days later Ciano recorded: "Casertano reports that Spalato might also be given to us with some reservations on the administration of the city. The Duce is satisfied".* The distinct impression one gets is that the Italian side had more or less given up Split, while Casertano managed to wrestle it back. In view of Mussolini's instructions to Casertano of 30 April, it is evident that in order to do so Casertano did not need to go to "the breaking point". His success was more indicative of Pavelić's lack of determined resistance, than of the Italian diplomat's consummate negotiating skill.**

Rather than confront Casertano with a determined threat of resignation if Split were annexed by Italy (a possibility at which he had hinted earlier), Pavelić attempted to soften Italian demands with German help. He did this initially on 3 May by asking Kasche for support in resisting Italian demands for customs union. On the same day Pavelić told Veesenmayer - who was still in Zagreb at that time - that he could not make any further territorial concessions.(30) Pavelić's requests were duly transmitted to Berlin by Kasche and Veesenmayer, and filed without any action apparently having been taken.

* The rest of the entry relevant to Croatia:

"It now seems that Pavelić wants to have some preliminary talks with the Duce. I should prefer that we arrive at a quick conclusion, especially since the German attitude towards us with reference to Croatia is anything but clear. Alfieri, for what he is worth, continually sounds the alarm from Berlin, and considers that a meeting between Hitler and Mussolini is necessary to settle on the principal points of our claims."

** At the same time Mackensen was reporting from Rome that the Italians had correctly interpreted Ribbentrop's warning of 21 April (Vienna) on the need for moderation, since they were displaying "wise moderation" above all in the matter of Split!(29)

Also on 3 May the newly appointed Croatian minister in Berlin, Branko Benzon, made a much more heavy handed attempt to enlist German support.* Benzon suddenly called on Weizsaecker at 11 p.m. on that day, having previously attempted to talk to Ribbentrop himself.(32) Benzon justified such a late call by a message he had just received from Pavelic about an "ultimatum" presented by Italy, to which the NDH had to reply the following day (Sunday, 4 May). The conditions, allegedly conveyed by the Italian Chargé d'Affaires in Zagreb to Pavelić, were as follows: 1. a Croatian-Italian customs union; and 2. a prince of the House of Savoy to become the king of Croatia.

* Benzon was a Zagreb physician of Dalmatian origin (born in Split in 1903), not known for any strong political views prior to 1940. In that year he surprised his friends by emigrating, first to Slovakia and then to Berlin. In exile he became politically active along Croat separatist lines, and was reputed to have established good connections in the capital of the Reich. After 10 April 1941 Benzon returned to Zagreb, apparently expecting to be given an important government post. However, Pavelić told him that "the fate of Croatia was being decided in Berlin" and promptly sent him there.(31)

On Benzon see: Luka Fertilio, "Poslanici NDH u Trećem Reichu: Branko Benzon", in Hrvatska revija, Vol. XXV, No. 1, March 1975, pp. 48-54. Fertilio authored a series of articles on NDH ministers in Berlin (Benzon, Budak, Ratković, Košak), having served under all of them as press attaché. According to Fertilio, Benzon was a somewhat aloof person with "more enemies than friends" in Zagreb. An avid Germanophile, he was thought to harbor suspicions toward Pavelić (not unlike many other Dalmatians). In Berlin during his brief émigré period he established contact with two young high-ranking SS officers attached to the foreign ministry, Brigadefuehrer Walter Stachlecker and Standartenfuehrer Edmund Veessenmayer (later so active in proclaiming the NDH). They were both involved with the "adventurous arm" of Ribbentrop's ministry, fuer besondere Verwendung, and initially seem to have been worried that their new Croat friend was of Jewish origin (i.e. "Bensohn" rather than Benzon). After returning to Berlin as minister, Benzon retained contact with a group of energetic, action-hungry "SS intellectuals" who openly admitted that they intended to conquer the world and that the Croats were to be Germanised.(Fertilio, p. 50) It is entirely possible that Benzon assumed he could communicate with the German foreign ministry along the same lines as with his SS friends, i.e. as a quietly acknowledged partner in Germany's bid for Weltmacht, rather than as a diplomat from a small client-state of Italy.

In early 1945 Benzon reappeared in Berlin, very much a private person on the run, and succeeded in procuring the valuable exit visa to Spain. He died in Caracas in 1970.

Benzon proceeded to paint in dramatic terms the consequences of such Italian demands for Croatia and for Pavelić's position, adding that "all the hopes of the Croats were placed on the Fuehrer... The Croatian government could not imagine that the Italian ultimatum had been laid down in agreement with the German government". Therefore, concluded Benzon, he had to inform Pavelić by 10 a.m. the following day of the position Berlin was taking regarding this communication.

Weizsaecker attempted to calm Benzon, questioning the term "ultimatum" and reiterating Germany's well-known position that Italy and Croatia should negotiate directly and in a friendly manner a settlement advantageous to both.(33) In his memorandum to Ribbentrop, describing the whole episode, Weizsaecker calmly added: "Perhaps the matter was after all not so acute as the Minister had represented to me".*

While Benzon was trying to create the impression of an emergency to Weizsaecker, and further messages from Kasche and Veesenmayer spoke of a deadlock in Pavelić's negotiations with the Italians (34), the Reich embassy in Rome (Bismarck) reported the following day, 4 May, that a deal between the NDH and Italy was practically all wrapped up and that Mussolini and Ciano were on the point of leaving for a meeting with Pavelić.(35)

* To this Ribbentrop added a marginal note: "Yes. R. Intimate that we do not know anything about it." In a memorandum the following day Weizsaecker recorded that he had spoken to the Croatian minister on the telephone.

Footnote (3) of the same document records that on 4 May Veesenmayer informed Ribbentrop that the Italian Chargé d'Affaires had again presented to Pavelić "the well-known demands in the form of an ultimatum". Pavelić had rejected them and was urgently requesting Germany to let him know whether his negative attitude was approved. (see also PA, Buero RAM, Kroatien, note of 4 May 1941). As for Benzon, he was subsequently involved in several major gaffes, culminating in a rowdy party at the Adlon Hotel in Berlin (temporary headquarters of the NDH legation). The damage to furniture, mirrors, plates etc. amounted to US\$ 10,000 and was paid by the Wilhelmstrasse. Some time after Benzon's final departure from Berlin he was briefly mentioned in a conversation between Ribbentrop and Ciano in November 1941, in the context of attempts by some Croats to play Germany and Italy against each other.

German inaction and aloofness to Croat requests for help in softening Italian demands was comparable to the aloofness displayed by Berlin to the Italian attempt to enlist German support in putting pressure on Pavelić. While Weizsaecker told Alfieri on 23 April that it was not the business of the German government to force Croatia into a personal union with Italy, ten days later he poured cold water on Benzon's appeals for help.

The German position was true to the letter of the talks in Vienna between Ribbentrop and Ciano. It also tallied with the spirit of Hitler's admission to Glaise that he aimed to prevent long-term stabilisation of Croatia as an Italian client state, and that this was to be done by letting Italy follow its heavy-handed course which would inevitably cause resentment among the Croats and ultimately frustrate Italian designs (see p. 179 above).

In view of Mussolini's political experience it is curious that he nevertheless fell into the trap of territorial expansion across the Adriatic. He seems to have allowed emotions to prevail over prudence (as Ciano noted on 1 May in his diary: "The Duce is aware of our real interest, but is stubborn about yielding on the question of Spalato"). Mussolini's insistence on the "Dalmatian stones" was probably due in part to the pressure of events in Africa, which were turning from merely disastrous to catastrophic for the Italians. In the early part of 1941 Italy lost its entire East African empire; in Libya it suffered a series of heavy defeats (Bardia, Tobruk, withdrawal from eastern Cyrenaica). Less than a year earlier its aspirations against France (Nice, Savoy, Corsica, Tunisia) were frustrated by Hitler, who also upstaged Italy in Greece.

It is possible that Mussolini counted to some extent on the morale-boosting effect of substantial territorial gains in Dalmatia, and the Tricolor raised above Diocletian's Palace as their tangible symbol. A generation earlier this might have worked: Italy went to war in 1915 in order to obtain borders promised her by the Entente Powers in London, which included Dalmatia. Throughout the nineteenth century Dalmatia was regarded as a legitimate aspiration by Italian irredentists, and as late as 1920 it was a hot political issue in Italy.

In 1941, however, the public at large seems to have been singularly indifferent to the Dalmatian question. Such scepticism was primarily based on the facts of geography and demography: less than one in twenty inhabitants of Dalmatia regarded himself as Italian, and the province was divided from Italy by three hundred miles of the Adriatic Sea. In his diary Ciano mentioned the Dalmatian lobby on several occasions with undisguised contempt (1 May 1941: "the grumblers who... are now extremists in the matter of Dalmatia"; 5 May: "the usual overzealous people, many of them acting in bad faith"). At the same time he also commented on the conspicuous lack of popular enthusiasm for Italy's trans-Adriatic venture.

Imbued with a healthy common sense in the matters of politics, in the spring of 1941 most Italians apparently regarded as more significant the lack of basic foods in shops, or the surrender of the Croatian King-designate's brother, the Duke of Aosta, to the British at Amba Aladji in northern Ethiopia. (This latter event coincided with the ostensible culmination of Mussolini's venture in Croatia, the signing of the Rome Agreements.)

5. The Monfalcone Meeting

The treaties between the NDH and Italy were finally agreed upon by Mussolini and Pavelić on 7 May 1941 in Monfalcone, in north-west Italy. The decision to hold talks was made by Mussolini two days earlier; the venue was selected apparently bearing in mind the need for Pavelić not to go too far away from his capital.

The talks were supposed to proceed on the basis of Ciano's draft treaty submitted in Ljubljana and subsequent talks between Pavelić and Casertano in Zagreb. However, in Monfalcone Pavelić made an attempt to avoid two clauses of the draft treaty - on customs union and on military cooperation - by his "appeals to the generosity of the Duce", as Ciano put it in his diary on 7 May ("and the latter naturally agrees...", added Ciano in exasperation). On both points a formulation was devised which did not bind Croatia to anything specific, as Veessenmayer was quick to spot in his report on the talks to Ribbentrop.(36)

Both Ciano and Casertano were dismayed by this outcome. There is a hint of resigned cynicism in Ciano's diary entry, while Casertano gave a more detailed account.(37) Casertano was an advocate of "a firm customs union" in preference to territorial gains "of some barren islands which have no economic value to us". At the beginning of the meeting, at the railway station in Monfalcone, Pavelić asked Mussolini for a private talk, continued Casertano in his account:

"[A]fter twenty minutes, Ciano - who was growing impatient - went to the lounge. A little later he got out, angry, and said to me: 'Everything will be spoilt, Casertano!' He dragged me to the lounge where I found Mussolini lecturing Pavelić, which [the Duce] enjoyed doing. He started talking about the customs union, but then got entangled in some of his theorising, started mentioning an Austrian

economist and saying that the [institution of] customs union was actually an invention of plutocratic democracies. As such, he went on, it could never be the basis of relations between two essentially Fascist countries. That is how my idea was ruined."

Casertano's account seems credible. Until the meeting itself, Pavelić's direct resistance to the Italians was not very strong, and mainly concerned territory. His attempts to obtain German support for the softening of Italian demands proved fruitless. Ciano and Casertano had both thought they had everything more or less wrapped up, but Mussolini's ad hoc improvisation produced a very different outcome.

From the viewpoint of objectives set before the meeting, and results achieved, Mussolini would have served his own cause better had he not gone to Monfalcone at all. He could have sent Ciano with clear-cut instructions to come back with the initialled treaty which included the original clauses on customs union and military cooperation; and Ciano would not have been susceptible to Pavelić's "appeals to generosity".

Mussolini missed the opportunity in Monfalcone to establish a system of more thorough penetration of Croatia (by economic and fiscal means) than that accorded by the proposed dynastic link or vague statements about future cooperation. At the same time, the territorial arrangement which he obtained from Pavelić guaranteed that the reaction in Croatia to the treaty would be extremely negative to Italy. Simultaneously, Pavelić's loss of credibility - because of the surrender of those territories - would undermine the consolidation of his régime. The only benefactor was again Hitler.

Pavelić expressed some satisfaction to the Germans with the outcome of his talks with Mussolini in Monfalcone. To Glaise he confided that even the issue of the king he did not take too seriously, since the king would be just a figurehead.(38) To his own closest aides, however, he seems to have concealed the extent of actual territorial concessions. Even to his secretary of state for foreign affairs and future foreign minister Lorković (who had been waiting in the station hall during the meeting in Monfalcone) Pavelić seems to have told all about the concessions made by Mussolini, but nothing about the final frontier.(39) What had to be kept secret to his own aides Pavelić did not conceal from others; he briefed Kasche in some detail about the territorial arrangement too. The German minister informed Ribbentrop on 8 May that Italy would get Sušak with a surrounding strip, the island of Krk, and the cities of Šibenik, Trogir, Split and Kotor with a wide hinterland to the east of them.(40)

Remarkable as it may seem, there is no evidence that any of Pavelić's aides knew about the precise provisions of the agreements initialled in Monfalcone until ten days later, when they were officially signed in Rome. Even on the train taking the Croat party to Rome for the occasion there was a lot of guessing and speculating.*

* See Matija Kovačić, Od Radića do Pavelića. Munich-Barcelona: Knjižnica Hrvatske revije, 1970. Kovačić was an Ustaša journalist who went to Rome with the Croat delegation. Later he became the head of propaganda of Pavelić's government, but eventually grew disenchanted with his policies and methods. Kovačić's book is one of the heavy indictments of Pavelić from the Croat émigré side.

As for Eugen Kvaternik (reference 39, above), he had no doubt that Pavelić's secrecy was due to his desire to present his entourage with a fait accompli. In all of Pavelić's actions Kvaternik detected reluctance to confront the Italians, and determination to fulfil promises and obligations from the émigré period, regardless of Croatia's interests.

6. The Rome Agreements

Pavelić went to Rome at the head of a sizeable delegation on 17 May 1941, and arrived there the following morning.* At the Quirinal Palace the crown of Croatia was formally offered, and King Victor Emmanuel presented the king-designate.** The agreements initialled in Monfalcone were signed by Mussolini and Pavelić at noon. In the evening Pavelić and the Catholic members of his entourage were received in a private audience by the Pope.*** An official dinner for two hundred guests followed, and that same evening the NDH delegation left Rome by train.

In contrast to the enthusiastic tone of the official press and the formal speeches, there prevailed perceptible coolness between Italians and Croats. As for the mood in Rome, Ciano remarked in his diary on 18 May:

"It now remains to be seen if what we have built will be lasting. Maybe I am mistaken in my personal impression, but there is a feeling in the air that Italian domination in Croatia is to be temporary. And this is why the public is indifferent."

* The official delegation had 36 members, including fourteen peasants from different areas of the NDH in their national costumes (including - ironically - one from Dalmatia) and five clerics (Catholic, Muslim and Protestant, but no Orthodox). The formal offer of the crown to the Italian royal house was thus supposed to reflect the will of the Croat people as a whole.(41)

** Three days earlier Pavelić issued a decree to the effect that the sovereignty of the NDH would be symbolised by "the Crown of King Zvonimir" (along the lines of Hungary's Crown of St. Stephen; unlike the Croats, the Hungarians did have the actual crown).

*** Careful not to create the impression of implicit recognition of the NDH, the Vatican agreed to the Italian demand that both Pavelić and the king-designate be received by the Pope, but insisted on private and separate audiences. For the same reason, the Duke of Spoleto was received on 17 May, i.e. as an Italian royal prince, and not as the king-designate.(42)

There were four documents collectively known as the Rome Agreements. They were officially known as:

- a) Treaty on the fixing of frontiers between the Kingdom of Croatia and the Kingdom of Italy;
- b) Agreement on military issues related to the Adriatic coastal zone;
- c) Treaty of cooperation and guarantee; and
- d) Closing protocol.(43)

The territorial arrangement was the most important part of the agreements in terms of political consequences. It gave Italy most of Dalmatia, as well as Sušak in the north and the bay of Kotor in the south.*

The military agreement had three parts. The first was related to the demilitarisation of the coastal area left to the NDH (the Croat side undertook not to construct or maintain any fortifications or installations, bases or military factories in a wide area between the coast and approximately 50 miles inland).** The second part made reference to the NDH navy (or, rather, it contained Pavelić's undertaking not to have any). The final, third part made provisions for the transport of Italian military units across the NDH territory; it obviously related to a future situation when there would be no Italian troops left in the NDH.

* Italy gained: Sušak with surrounding boroughs (Kastav, Sušak, Čabar, part of the borough of Delnice); northern Adriatic islands of St Marco, Krk, Rab and others to the line of Jablanac; all islands in the region of Zara; mainland cities of Šibenik, Trogir and Split and hinterland on average 60 miles deep; mid-Dalmatian islands of Čiovo, Drvenik, Šolta, Vis, Biševo, Sveti Andrija, Jabuka and a few smaller ones; southern Dalmatian islands of Korčula and Mljet; and the area of the Bay of Kotor south of Cavtat. The area thus annexed (about five and a half thousand square kilometres) by Italy had a population of about half a million, some 5% of them Italians.

** This demilitarised zone included Plitvice, Duvno, Livno, Mostar, Nevesinje and Gacko. It was subsequently known as the Second Zone (the first being the area annexed by Italy). The Third Zone included the area between the Second Zone and the demarcation line between Germany and Italy.

The Treaty of Guarantee and Cooperation concerned issues on which Pavelić had obtained significant concessions from Mussolini in Monfalcone. Its main points were:

1. Italy guarantees political independence and territorial integrity of the Independent State of Croatia;
2. The government of the NDH undertakes not to accept obligations contrary to the spirit of the Treaty;
3. Military cooperation between the parties is limited to the advisory role of the Italian armed forces with regard to organisation and training of the NDH forces, and on the request of the Croat side;
4. The two countries will establish "comprehensive and firm" customs and monetary links.

The agreements did not provide Italy with the means of controlling the NDH. For instance, the most important clause of the military agreement was negative, i.e. the Croat undertaking not to maintain a navy and to keep the coastal zone demilitarised. This measure illustrates the shift in the Italian approach, from regarding the NDH as a client state to regarding it as a successor to Yugoslavia and a potential threat.*

Had Italy obtained control over Croatia's armed forces and economy as originally envisaged (by means of "military cooperation" and "customs and monetary union"), demilitarisation of the Adriatic region would not have been necessary. (To draw a parallel with another client-state, Germany had no need for such provisions in its dealings with Slovakia.) Mussolini the Fascist could not grasp the essentially liberal notion that physical control is the least effective means of controlling a country.

* Demilitarisation of the Adriatic coast was also mentioned to the Yugoslav special envoy, Stakić, by Ciano in 1940 as a condition for Italy's renewed friendship with Yugoslavia.

By letting Pavelić off the hook on what should have been two central means of control (military cooperation and customs union), and simultaneously annexing most of Dalmatia, Mussolini got the worst of all worlds. By failing to secure control, he left open the possibility that the NDH could turn to Germany (or, indeed, become more truly independent). By alienating Croatia's public opinion (including those very Ustašas which he had sponsored for so long) Mussolini made both the shift to Germany and the desire for greater independence from Italy much more likely.

Finally, a predictable consequence of the Agreements of 18 May was a rapid erosion of Pavelić's internal base; and the Italian leader was fully aware that Pavelić was his "only pawn on the Balkan board".(44) If the Poglavnik was no longer securely in the saddle, Mussolini could not count on a replacement. (It is remarkable that the Italians had failed to recruit, bribe or blackmail another alternative leader or group of leaders from among the Ustašas, and even had no reliable informants from among them.)

It was Mussolini himself who told the Grand Council in 1939 that Italy had no territorial interest in Europe besides Albania. His subsequent diversion to the policy of territorial expansion in Dalmatia was an aberration of the central policy. Even worse, it was a substitute for coherent, long-term policy, at a time when Italy's original objectives were increasingly at odds with the means of achieving them. Instead of a client-state, the NDH was perceived as yet another rival across the Adriatic, a successor to Yugoslavia.

This same reflex induced Italy to perceive Yugoslavia as a successor to Austria-Hungary two decades earlier. In the event, perceptions turned into reality because they were treated as reality. The problem of Italy's relations with Croatia was formally solved, but it was really just beginning, and the Rome Agreements - far from being the solution - were the major part of the problem.

With the Agreements, the marriage of convenience between Italian irredentism and Croat ultra-chauvinism was finally consummated. The two could not be permanently reconciled, but they needed each other in order to achieve their separate objectives. Subsequently, by design or default, Mussolini exacted lump-sum payment (territory) rather than a permanent deed (personal union, customs union, military "cooperation"). Pavelić kept his side of the bargain, and achieved what had been the one consistent motive of his actions prior to and after April 1941: to take power and to stay in power. After that, there was nothing to keep the two parties together.

18 May 1941 is an important threshold in the history of the Ustaša movement. During the first month after the proclamation of the NDH there existed a wave of nationalist euphoria among wide segments of the Croat population. Many people who did not owe their allegiance to the Ustašas were initially carried along with this wave, which promised to broaden the very narrow popular base of Pavelić's movement. The Rome Agreements, and above all their territorial provisions, had a devastating effect on the credibility of the régime.⁽⁴⁵⁾ From this early blow it could not recover until the end.

X - THE TERROR

1. Pavelić at Berghof

The Rome Agreements solved the problem of Dalmatia and of Croatia's relationship with Italy in a formal diplomatic sense. At the same time, they were an important mark in the increasing estrangement between the Italians and Pavelić's government. Although ostensibly belonging - after 18 May even formally - to the Italian sphere of interest, Croatia started looking more and more like Slovakia, with German soldiers on the streets of its capital, German companies exploiting its mineral wealth, German-speaking Habsburg officers in command of its budding regular army, and the German minority granted special privileges by the regime.

The system of occupation, hastily created and presumably temporary, was weakened from the outset by intra-Axis differences, and by the consequences of their decision to install the Ustašas in power. Besides, Hitler wanted to impose a "Carthaginian peace" on the Serbs (whom he singled out for special punishment after 27 March 1941) without allocating sufficient resources to the maintenance of such^a new order. The apparent willingness of Mussolini's reluctant clients, the Ustašas, to get drawn closer to Berlin was a very dubious substitute for the inherent instability of the area the Wehrmacht was preparing to leave for the East.

Pavelić expressed his desire to visit Hitler in a talk with Kasche on 9 May.⁽¹⁾ The Ustaša leader said that he did not want to make any political demands, but simply to express his personal feelings and his country's strong links with the Reich. Kasche realised that such^a visit would have a domestic political objective: Pavelić was due to sign his agreements with Italy later that month, and hoped that such visit could help avert the anticipated popular backlash against the deal.

The predictions of a negative reaction to the Rome Agreements were correct. Already on 19 May Glaise reported to the OKW that the effect in Croatia was shattering, and that many people put all their hope in Germany and Hitler.(2) The Ustašas' six-week honeymoon period was over.* Three days later Pavelic attempted to rectify this by delivering a major speech, in which he sought to explain the loss of Dalmatia ("...we had to make some sacrifices, but a nation unable to make sacrifices is unable to live.").(3) He concluded it with a threat against the Serbs, in an attempt to shift the focus away from the Rome Agreements onto the "enemy within".**

On 2 June 1941, after yet another telegram from Kasche with Pavelić's request for an audience, Ribbentrop informed his minister in Zagreb that Hitler would receive Pavelić on the sixth at the Berghof.(4) Although still "an Italian satellite", Pavelić apparently did not inform Mussolini either of his request, or of the response. On the same day Hitler and Mussolini met at the Brenner. Their foreign ministers conferred separately, and Ciano received the usual assurances that Germany approved of everything done so far in Croatia, which belonged to the Italian sphere.(5) To stress that point, Ribbentrop indicated that as far as he was concerned Croatia should sign the Tripartite Pact in Italy, and not in Germany, as Pavelić had signalled he hoped to do during his proposed visit. (Pavelić eventually signed it in Venice on 15 June 1941.)

* Some people vented their frustration with jokes such as "Lijepa naša domovina, od Zagreba do Šestina" (a parody of the Croat national anthem, suggesting that Pavelić's realm extended from Zagreb to a nearby village), or the "NDH" turned into "Nebum Dugo Hrvatskoj" (Croatia won't last long) in the Kajkavski dialect of Zagorje and working class Zagrebians.

** "We shall not allow enemies of the Croat people to work against [the NDH], to poison it from within.[...] The times when the Croat people was but an object are over. The Croat people is the master now, and everything else will be ITS object. These are clear indications of our intentions which are being applied and will be carried out. I shall carry them out! And everyone knows that until now I have fulfilled all my promises."

On Pavelić's arrival in Salzburg on 6 June he was first taken to Ribbentrop's estate at Fuschl. At the beginning of their talks Ribbentrop expressed concern about the remaining "conspiratorial cliques" in Serbia which have always spread unrest from that country.(6) He even indicated that such people, "from military and Church circles", should be resettled somewhere in Eastern Europe. Pavelić eagerly responded that the Croats could offer valuable help in uprooting such "cliques" in Serbia. He added that he had at his disposal experts familiar with the conditions in Serbia as well as certain relevant documents.

Having expressed his satisfaction with the agreement reached between the NDH and Italy, Ribbentrop returned to the Serb question and asked Pavelić about the problem of the sizeable Serb minority in the NDH [which even according to Ustaša sources came to almost 1.9 million (7)]. Pavelić coolly replied that there had been no Serb question until 60 or 70 years earlier, when the influence of Orthodoxy imbued them with the "mistaken" feeling of Serb identity. He added that they would be expelled anyway, and the Slovenes from the Reich accepted instead.*

* Pavelić also pledged to deal resolutely with the Jewish question and pointed out that anti-Jewish legislation was already enacted. He then dismissed Maček as a spent force, and said that his followers were joining the Ustašas. Asked by Ribbentrop about the internal order of the NDH, Pavelić said the Ustašas would be the only party; as for the religious circles, the Muslims would not present a problem, and the lower Catholic clergy was solidly behind him. Only the higher clergy and Archbishop Stepinac were not pro-Ustaša, not because they were pro-Serb, but because they reflected the "international orientation of Catholicism". On cooperation with the Italian armed forces Pavelić said that it existed at the level of general staffs only; as "the Croats are good soldiers", there was no need for any instructors. He then indicated to Ribbentrop that the NDH would hope to get the Sanjak of Novi Pazar [an area between Serbia and Montenegro with a sizeable Muslim population, but never part of Bosnia-Herzegovina] - a request which he repeated to Hitler later.

For his part, Ribbentrop painted a glowing picture of prospects on various fronts, and expressed hope that the decisive victory against England would be won before the end of 1941. He added that Italy was an ally of Germany in the life-and-death struggle, and was given primacy "in the area" [of Croatia]. Therefore, Germany wanted a relationship of full confidence between Rome and Zagreb.

From Fuschl Pavelić proceeded to Berghof, where he was received by Hitler at 3 p.m. on 6 June.(8) When Pavelić first thanked Hitler for independence, the latter replied that the course of events had made him an unwilling instrument of Croatia's liberation, since he had not intended to act against Yugoslavia. Hitler added that he attached greatest importance to economic relations between Germany and the Balkan countries.

The key part of ^{the} conversation concerned national policy. Hitler mentioned plans to transfer Serbs from the NDH to Serbia, and Slovenes from the Reich into Croatia, as a momentarily painful operation, but preferable to permanent suffering. Then he added the key sentence:

"After all, if the Croat state wishes to be strong, a nationally intolerant policy must be pursued for fifty years, because too much tolerance on such issues can only do harm."

Hitler went on to express his sympathies for the Croat people, but also to stress the importance of the alliance with Italy and his own feeling of loyalty to Mussolini. Germany wanted nothing for itself in the area, he added, since it did not see itself as the legal heir to Austria-Hungary. It stood by Croatia as a sincere friend, ready to offer mediation and advice in case of difficulties.

Pavelić thanked Hitler for his offer to mediate should problems arise. He talked of his government's excellent cooperation with the "German national group" in the NDH (Volksdeutsche). According to Pavelić, this was to be expected, as the Croats were not Slavs, but Goths [sic!]; the pan-Slav idea was imposed on them as something artificial. The rest of the talks was of a purely conventional nature*

* The following morning, when leaving Germany, Pavelić sent a telegram to Ribbentrop in which he stated that "The unforgettable 6 June stands as a cornerstone in the history of the Croat people, which is happy to serve with all its strength the idea of the New Europe".(9)

2. "Intolerance" at Work

Pavelić's visit to Hitler did not have much political significance, except for Hitler's explicit endorsement of the policy of mass persecution of the Serb minority in the NDH. This was entirely in line with his intention, openly stated to Glaise on 17 April, to encourage internal Serb-Croat conflict as "the guarantee of a permanent schism between nations which had been within one state until now" (see p. 214 above). Bringing the formula of divide et impera to its final conclusions, Hitler let the Italians make enemies of Croats; and he was going to let the Croats make enemies of Serbs. In the event, both Mussolini and Pavelić eagerly did what was expected of them.

Hitler's advocacy of "fifty years of intolerance" did not make any difference to the thousands of Serbs already slaughtered in the NDH before 6 June.(10) But it is inconceivable that the wave of bloody terror which engulfed the Ustaša state in the summer of 1941 would have been possible had Hitler wanted to put a stop to it. His encouragement to Pavelić therefore had major long-term impact not because it induced the Poglavnik to do something he had not intended anyway, but because it gave him a carte blanche to go all the way in his intentions.* In Berchtesgaden Hitler made Pavelić "feel authorised" to proceed with his attempted genocide of the Serb population.(11)

* As early as 17 April Pavelić enacted a fiat called "The Law on the Protection of the People and the State". It was an all-embracing piece of pseudo-legislation which literally made it possible to kill anyone the regime wanted killed, and to do so "legally". Capital punishment was made mandatory for all those who "offended the honour and vital interests of the Croat people" and who "in whatever way" (if only "by attempt") threatened the NDH. There was no appeal, and each sentence had to be carried out within two hours. The "law", furthermore, had retroactive powers, in blatant contradiction with one of the basic principles of all civilised legislation. "Special popular courts" were immediately established to apply the "law", followed by "mobile court martials" (see Krizman, 1978, pp. 120-121).

Our century has witnessed a departure in the conduct of European states away from a concept of transcendent morality, prevalent until the First World War. The rise of totalitarian ideologies marked the end of the framework which implicitly recognised that physical elimination of an adversary is not a legitimate way of resolving the conflict. Until the rise of Lenin, it was not mere political expediency which had prevented states from resorting to mass extermination as a means to some end. The limitations on the behaviour of states at that time derived from an absolute moral principle, which implicitly subordinated perceived national interest to the continued membership of an international community.*

In the NDH the shift from the universal concept "Thou shalt not kill" to the call of the "blood and soil" was extreme. The Ustaša glorification of the Dinaric peasant, who was "naturally" just, created a cult of aggressive instincts, revenge and uninhibited hatred. The most salient feature of Ustaša "ideology" - and of the state based on it - was the morbid hatred of the Serb. To a Nazi, the Jew was a necessary political, social and psychological concept. To an Ustaša, the Serb was much more: he was an integral part of his Croatness, and without him it could not be defined, let alone practiced.

* "Pure" expediency could have led Bismarck to occupy the whole of France in 1870, to bring its resources under German control, to disband its army and to keep its government under German tutelage. This would have ended the "encirclement" and made war on two fronts in 1914 unnecessary.

The discrepancy between two eras and two world outlooks was well illustrated by Churchill in Teheran. Upon hearing Stalin's suggestion that 50,000 German officers be shot after the war, so as to prevent another militaristic revival, Sir Winston replied: "I would rather be taken out into the garden here and now and be shot myself than sully my own and my country's honour by such infamy".

The NDH was the kind of place where no legislation of any kind was needed for the prosecution to begin, and no formal orders from the centre were required. With total power in the hands of Pavelić and his followers, or at any rate with total control over armed units of Ustaša ad hoc volunteers, they could do literally as they pleased. Local Ustaša commanders and officials could pick up a village, have it surrounded, order all inhabitants to gather in the local Orthodox church or school, tie them two by two and either kill them on the spot or throw them down a nearby mountain crater. The method of killing was typically very savage: slit throat, or a blow with an axe or a heavy club in the head were the most common. Or else, the Serbs could be taken to a concentration camp and killed there, or converted to Roman Catholicism by the local Franciscan friar, or packed off to Serbia. In any event, in their public statements, Pavelić's luminaries followed their leader's cue and left no doubt what was in store for the Serbs: "This land can only be Croat land and there is no method we would hesitate to apply in order to make it truly Croat and to cleanse it of Serbs..."(12) "Destroy them wherever you see them, and the blessing of the Foglavnik and myself are guaranteed."(13)

In the many speeches and propaganda articles preparing the ground for the pogrom, the Serbs were depicted as alien people who had come to Croatia uninvited and had always been its enemies. Even their nationality was depicted as suspect, and the term "Vlachs" liberally applied. On the other hand, paradoxically, they were also depicted as traitors, who had betrayed "their country" to alien, i.e. Serbian interests. The implication here was that they were really Croats who had converted to Orthodoxy and thus accepted the Serb name by default. In either case, Serb national consciousness in any shape or form was to be uprooted.

It is noteworthy that in the first weeks of the NDH the Serb population displayed complete passivity and at least an implicit readiness to accept the new regime. Some perceived it, fatalistically, as a re-enactment of the old Austria-Hungary, which, while certainly not loved, was well respected by most. As they were soon to learn to their peril, however, in the NDH there was no rational correlation between a Serb's thoughts or deeds, and the state's attitude to him:

"The Ustašas refused to acknowledge that having a Serbian national consciousness was not a political act or in any sense something one [did not] intentionally choose. Such an admission would have made their anti-Serbian policies look like a campaign against innocent people. They therefore insisted that being a Serb was in itself a political act and that those 'who wanted to be Serbs' and 'insisted on being Serbs' could justly be punished for that."(14)

Even when the bloodbath began in earnest, after the departure of most German units for Russia in late June 1941, many Serbs were too dumbfounded to believe what was happening; there were cases of people who, having survived a massacre by mere chance, went to the Ustaša authorities to report what had happened and to seek protection!

While in Germany the "final solution" was mainly carried out far away in the East, by a small number of specially selected units, Ustaša terror was open and calculated to involve as many Croats and Muslims as possible (with civilians this took the form of distribution of Serb land and property). By making their terror public more or less everywhere outside Zagreb, and especially in the Dinaric regions, the Ustašas also probably hoped to instill such fear in the remaining Serb population that their flight to Serbia or conversion to Catholicism would be facilitated.

Finally, by going beyond the pale, the Ustašas expected to create the feeling of irreversibility in Serb-Croat relations, which would make any thought of a revived Yugoslavia literally unthinkable. Terror and genocide were to be pursued even if this endangered vital state interests and played into the hands of real enemies, eg. by causing mass uprisings of Serbs and by creating favourable conditions for the rise of insurgency, under Serb nationalist or Communist banner.*

There is a sizeable body of literature on Ustaša atrocities, and to dwell on the subject in great detail is beyond the scope of this study. Suffice to say that the Ustaša terror was certainly without precedent in the history of that part of Europe; it was also the first attempted total genocide in the Second World War. What concerns us is the effect of terror on the broader issue of the NDH's relations with its Axis allies, and on the experience of Ustaša political power in a European context.

* "The terror actually helped the real enemies of the 'NDH' and the Third Reich. This disregard for their own survival proved that the Ustaša and Nazi leaders considered genocide a fundamental duty, something which even surpassed the importance of victory in war. Such commitment to genocide distinguishes [the NDH and the Third Reich] from most other despotic and violent regimes in history." (A. Djilas, op. cit. p. 253) Djilas also makes a distinction between Ustaša and Nazi terror: Nazi terror and genocide adopted the "style" of a developed industrial state (complex equipment, intricate administrative network), while Ustaša terror was "primitive" and "traditional". While Nazi terror included plans, orders, reports, lists of victims, statistics, Ustaša orders were mostly oral and the apparatus of terror functioned without precise plans, in an arbitrary manner and with a random selection of targets and methods of killing. Nazi terror was for most part depersonalised and bureaucratic, it was "cold", "abstract", "objective" - just like Nazi hatred, while the Ustašas were direct, "personal" and "warm" (their terror was at first often directed against their own neighbours; it was "passionate" and "subjective"). Nazi terror (with its somberness, military discipline, bureaucratic pedantry etc) was "puritanical", while the Ustašas indulged literally in orgies of violence. Finally, Nazi terror was "modern" (in its ideology, technology etc), it was a part of the twentieth century even in its negation of the heritage of European civilisation; the Ustašas were terrorists first - their "Fascism" only came poor second, undeveloped and unabsorbed.

In 1942 Eugen-Dido Kvaternik told his old classmate Branko Pešelj that regardless of the outcome of the war, "there would be no more Serbs in Croatia"; that would be "the reality of any post-war situation", which would have to be taken into account by whoever turned out to be the victor. (B. Pešelj to the author, Washington D.C., summer 1988)

3. German Reactions to Terror

There is a great wealth of German sources on Ustaša massacres. One of the first documents on "the increasing anti-Serb terror by the Ustašas" reached Berlin on 2 July 1941. It was a report by Veesenmayer, who was still the special representative of the German Foreign Ministry in Zagreb (a post soon to be abolished). He stated that "authoritative representatives of the regime" looked on the presence of Serbs in Croatia as a problem "which is under the exclusive competence of Ustaša police and court martials".(15)

Glaise von Horstenau was among the first ranking Germans in Croatia to become convinced that Pavelić actually wanted to kill all Serbs. From his first day in Zagreb he worked hard on the establishment of an efficient intelligence network, which provided him with detailed information about all aspects of life in the NDH, including Ustaša crimes.* Glaise was collecting all those reports in a separate file, bound in red, and wasted no opportunity to raise the issue of atrocities with Pavelić, Kvaternik and other NDH officials. Typically he would hit a brick wall, or get promises which were never to be carried out.(16)

* Glaise's chief information gatherer was Captain Haeffner, his assistant, who had lived in Zagreb for many years, spoke the language faultlessly, and had excellent contacts throughout Croatia. Haeffner's reports on eyewitness accounts of Ustaša slaughters should not be read by people with weak stomachs. According to Haeffner's meticulous computations, the number of Serbs "who have fallen as victims of animal instincts fanned by Ustaša leaders" exceeded 200,000 by the beginning of August 1941.(17) As the terror grew, so did Haeffner's disdain for its perpetrators. Thus he wrote of "the strong inferiority complex of Ustaša leaders and their flock vis-a-vis the Serbs, who are more numerous and superior in terms of life energy". Haeffner's numbers, while probably accurate, would probably be regarded as too low by most Serbs and too high by most Croats.

The numbers game is still political dynamite in Yugoslavia; a methodologically immaculate and reliable study of the subject is provided by Bogoljub Kočović (1985). According to Kočović, about one in every six Serbs living in the NDH in April 1941 was killed by the end of the war.

As an essentially decent officer of the old school, Glaise was genuinely horrified with what was going on; but his particular alarm was triggered when he realised that many people blamed the Germans for Ustaša crimes.* In early July he decided to take advantage of the temporary absence of the blindly pro-Ustaša German minister, Kasche, from Zagreb. Glaise agreed with the much more realistic Heribert Troll-Obergfell, a former Austrian diplomat and counsellor at the German legation in Zagreb, that they should raise the issue of Ustaša atrocities in Berlin on two fronts. Troll-Obergfell sent on 10 July 1941 a report to the Foreign Ministry which was restrained, yet alarming, in its implications:

"The Serb question has become more acute during recent days.

Brutality with which deportations are carried out, as well as many ominous incidents and numerous terrorist actions in the provinces give reason for concern even to realistic Croat circles."(19)

Troll concluded his report with the accurate prediction that cruel resettlement and numerous crimes committed previously were creating an explosive situation wherever Serbs lived - a situation which could soon erupt into hotbeds of unrest which would be hard to quell.

* In his report to Glaise dated 18 July 1941 Haeffner wrote:

"Croat population does not think any longer that German troops are present only to provide peace and security, but that they are here to support the Ustaša regime.[...] Such view has its roots in the fact that the Ustašas have managed to convince the Croat population that they do not only act in agreement with German instances, but actually on their orders. Even among intellectuals, who have been pro-National Socialist for years, this view is prevalent, because otherwise they cannot explain the totally passive posture of Germany.[...] For [us] Germans it is in any event sad that the policy of the Reich in Croatia has totally diminished that enthusiasm with which the Croat people greeted German troops. There is here today a deep mistrust of Germany, because in this country it is supporting a regime which has neither moral nor political right to existence, and which is regarded as the greatest calamity which could have happened to the Croat people. That regime is based entirely on the recognition by the Axis powers, it has no roots in the people and it is supported by the bayonets of robbers who do more evil in one day than the Serbian regime had done in twenty years."(18)

Also on 10 July Glaise sent his own report to the OKW.* Its tone was similar to Troll-Obergfell's, and it sounded an alarm about the effect of Ustaša atrocities on German units in Croatia and the future possible challenges those units would have to face.** The two reports, together with the Foreign Ministry report of 2 July, were the first official information to reach Berlin about the seriousness of Ustaša crimes. In this first phase those reports tended to express concern about the effect such crimes would have on the reputation of the German army and the Reich in general. Genuine security concerns would come later, with the uprising.

Glaise also spoke on several occasions during the month of July with Slavko Kvaternik, who - as an old colleague of Glaise's from the Austrian-Hungarian Army - appeared amenable to open discussion. On one such occasion Glaise told Kvaternik that "the Croat revolution was by far the bloodiest and most awful among all I have seen first hand or from afar in Europe since 1917", and warned that not only Serbs, but also Croats did not feel secure any longer.(21) Kvaternik appeared to agree with Glaise, although he tried to justify certain measures by saying that "only they have saved Croatia from a Serb revolution".[sic!]

* Obviously determined to grant it maximum attention, ^{he sent} its copies to the Supreme Commander South-East, to the Military Commander in Serbia, to the Abwehr Headquarters, and - privately - to his friend Wilhelm Hoettl at the SD).

** "From the Military Commander in Serbia, as well as from the occupation troops in Croatia and their services, I have been receiving for some time strong complaints of worrying conditions in many parts of the country, which were caused by the illegal acts of Ustaša regulars and irregulars, who do not spare either property or life. Our troops have to be mute witnesses of such events; it does not reflect well on their otherwise high reputation... I am frequently told by [our] army, as well as by some Croat circles, that German occupation troops would finally have to intervene against Ustaša crimes. This may happen eventually. Right now, with the available forces, I could not ask for such action. Even if we overlook the fact that Croatia is an independent state, also that it is in the Italian sphere, [our] occupation forces - only six infantry battalions - are too weak to assume adequate police control. Ad hoc intervention in individual cases could make the German Army even more responsible for all those countless crimes which it could not prevent in the past..."(20)

Glaise expressed scepticism, adding that he was fearing exactly the opposite effect of such policy. He nevertheless succeeded in convincing Slavko Kvaternik that they should go to Pavelić together, and impress on him the need to stop the slaughter of Serbs. Kvaternik had promised to support Glaise's views. However, once they were with Pavelić he changed his tune completely and talked in "such radical tones" that Glaise grew irritated and said "Dear Slavko, I am happy that you are at least letting me stay alive!"(22) Pavelić appeared more amenable to Glaise's arguments, but nothing had changed: if anything, the terror grew worse by the day.

With Kasche still absent, Troll-Obergfell also spoke to the newly appointed Ustaša foreign minister Mladen Lorković on 11 July, and warned him of the numerous reports of Ustaša excesses (which he even supported by photographic evidence).(23) He asked Lorković to tell Pavelić personally of the problem. He also requested resolute measures to stop any "tendentious rumours" that anti-Serb actions were being carried out on the request of the Reich government.

Requests for intervention to stop Ustaša massacres kept pouring in from different German quarters: from the Military Commander South-East, General-Fieldmarshal Wilhelm List, as well as from among the Volksdeutsche in the NDH.(24) Until August 1941 such requests were regularly motivated by the desire to preserve the reputation of Germany (and avoid any suggestion that the atrocities were being German-inspired), by the fear that Ustasa crimes could cause instability and disorder, and by simple revulsion. All German approaches went unheeded by the Ustašas: in the matter of "resolving" the Serb question Pavelić and his men displayed a remarkable determination to preserve their autonomy of action. Besides, Pavelić realised that he could afford to ignore such interventions for as long as there was no pressure from the top, from Berlin, to do otherwise.

4. Uprising

The Ustaša anti-Serb terror is inseparable from any consideration of the NDH. It profoundly influenced all facets of its life, including its external relations. This "domestic" issue affected foreign policy considerations primarily by fanning Serb uprisings - which turned into a major guerrilla war - and thus drawing Germany and Italy ever deeper into a tangled web of military and political involvement.

It could be argued that the Serb uprising would have occurred even without the massacres. There were uprisings in the summer of 1941 in both Serbia and Montenegro. However, the insurgents there took to arms for different reasons, and not as "Serbs". Besides, by the end of 1941 both Serbia and Montenegro had been largely pacified, and remained so - in the case of Serbia - for almost three years. No such pacification could be expected in the NDH because of the constant threat of massacres. The Ustašas' attempt to exterminate the Serbian peasant and small town "establishment" (with teachers, priests, merchants and intellectuals always the first target) created a political vacuum and opened the way for the Communists to gain an early foothold, and - later - to reestablish themselves in a new area after the defeats of the winter^{of} 1941-42 forced them out of Serbia and Montenegro.

The degree of insurgent activity in the NDH was in direct proportion to the intensity of anti-Serb terror in a given area. In eastern Herzegovina there was a spontaneous Serb uprising already in June, in response to a wave of savage slaughters the Ustašas carried out throughout the area (Gacko, Stolac, Nevesinje, Trebinje etc).*

* This episode was long ignored by the Yugoslav Communist historiography, because it went against the official thesis that the uprising throughout Yugoslavia was organised and led by the Communist Party.

The regions of Bosanska Krajina, eastern Bosnia, Lika, Kordun, Banija and northern Dalmatia, which were also the scene of mass slaughters, were up in arms by early August. At the same time, even those areas with a Serb majority (Srem, Semberija, parts of Slavonija and Podravina) remained remarkably quiet for as long as they were relatively little affected by terror. (Srem would become a hotbed of insurgency only after a particularly bloody Ustaša "cleansing action" in 1942.)

In the upheaval that followed the first wave of pogroms there was no ideological background to Serb resistance, which was in the early phase purely a struggle to preserve bare life. This was to change soon, however. The attack on the Soviet Union enabled the Communist Party of Yugoslavia to present itself as a legitimate national force.* In the months of June, July and August the Serbs in the NDH desperately looked eastwards for deliverance. Atavistic trust in "Mother Russia" transcended all ideological reservations and offered a ray of hope in the veritable nightmare of Pavelić's Final Solution. This almost religious veneration of the great Slav ally was common both to those who were traditionalists free from ideological prejudice, and to the minority of activists who loved Russia first and foremost as "the first country of Socialism".

* The CPY had followed an uneven path both before and after the collapse of Yugoslavia. In the spring of 1941 the position of some leading Croatian Communists was ambiguous. They seemed ready to accept the new order, and even contemplated seeking legalisation as a "CP of the NDH" (see Vjenceslav Cenčić, Enigma Kopinič, Beograd: Rad, 1983). Kopinič's action directed at the replacement of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Croatia was a direct result of the new situation created by the attack on the Soviet Union. The separatist wing of the Croatian CP finally lost any possibility of asserting itself when the three great allies came out in favour of reestablishing independence and territorial integrity of Yugoslavia. Tito's leadership had followed the Comintern instructions all along, which (after 22 June) were clear on the Yugoslav issue.

Initially the two were hardly distinguishable, united as they were by the pressing business of fighting the Ustašas. Besides the veneration for Russia (based, as it happened, on different motives), they also shared a broadly negative attitude to previous régimes in Yugoslavia, although this rejection was also based on different ideological and political premises. Such distinctions certainly did not appear crucial to the uprooted mass of Serb peasantry, blinded with grief, which took to the hills in many parts of the Ustaša state in the summer of 1941. The Serbian tricolor and the Communist red banner flew side by side, and ^{the} five-pointed red star could be seen alongside the traditional cockade on caps and hats.

In the initial stage the uprising was a purely Serb affair. Croats and Muslims among the insurgents were few, almost all of them disciplined Communist cadres sent by the CPY after 22 June. Those cadres were in an awkward position. For years they were being indoctrinated in the spirit of extreme antagonism to "greater Serbian hegemony", and took the Party rhetoric for reality - regardless of ^{their} national origin. Until the late 1930s they had been ^{te} determined and principled opponents of the very existence of the Yugoslav state, to the point of supporting the Ustašas and trying to woo them into the Party fold.*

* A notorious example is the Party official organ's leading article on the "Lika uprising" of 1932:

"The Communist Party salutes the Ustaša movement of the peasants of Lika and fully backs them. It is the duty of all Communist organisations and of every Communist to help this movement, to organise it and to lead it. At the same time the Communist Party points out this movement's present shortcomings and mistakes, which can be explained by the fact that a considerable role is played by Croat Fascist elements (Pavelić - Perčec), who have no interest in developing a broad mass movement against Serbian dictatorship; they fear that such movement could turn out to be not only against the Yugoslav dictatorship, but also against their own Italian masters."(25)

Just as the CPY hoped "to organise and to lead" the Ustašas in the early 1930s, it sought "to organise and to lead" the victims of those same Ustašas a decade later - but with considerably greater success.

Only belatedly the Communists were instructed to defend Yugoslavia after all, because even the despised "Versailles creation" was deemed preferable - from the viewpoint of Soviet state interests - to the peril of triumphant Nazi-Fascism. Such somersaults were initially possible after 22 June, given the legitimacy granted them by the Russian factor. This also entailed preaching the "brotherhood and unity" of Serbs and Croats in freshly burnt Serb villages, or advocating incessant struggle against all occupiers - even if that meant endless new losses and explicit denial of any pragmatism. In effect, the CPY sought to exploit for its revolutionary ends the Calvary of the Serb population of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, by imposing itself on the leaderless peasantry and manipulating it. The Ustaša atrocities were condemned by the Party for tactical reasons,

"But even this could not prevent some Communist intellectuals from cynically observing that the Ustašas (no matter how cruel and unacceptable their methods were) had 'done the job' for the Communists by liquidating the Serbian 'establishment'. By its brutality the 'black' revolution was destroying the 'old order' and helping the 'red' revolution."(26)

Left without traditional leaders, and long before 1941 without a national programme (let alone a strategy for its fulfilment), the Serbs were going to pay an additional price for their own incoherence. Within the insurgent movement the principle of "revolutionary realism" of the CPY inevitably clashed with the "existential realism" of the "nationalists", i.e. non-Communists.(27) The ensuing three-cornered civil war rounded up the truly Hobbesian drama without precedent even in the Europe of 1941.

5. Italian Response

Italian military commanders in the NDH were aware of the tension between different nationalities in the area well before the flare-up of insurrection. In early May deputations of Muslims from western Bosnia were already asking the Italians to extend their occupation zone, and Serb community leaders made similar approaches to the Sassari division.(28) As the Uštasa terror flared, resulting in the Serb uprising, the Italians faced a dilemma. They could either help their Croat "allies", or act in some other way to restore order, or simply remain on the sidelines.

In some areas, notably eastern Herzegovina, armed Serb bands soon made it clear to the Italians that they did not have a quarrel with them, but only with the Ustašas. Furthermore, on several occasions during the June insurgency, village heads approached Italian garrisons to request food and protection.(29) As Italian units moved into the area of unrest to secure the lines of communication between Dubrovnik and its hinterland, they encountered almost no opposition from the insurgents. Both sides soon realised that they had a common interest: restoration of peace. If this objective demanded the removal of the cause of unrest - the Ustašas - the Italians had no qualms about acting accordingly.

It is fascinating to observe the political and diplomatic skill with which individual Italian military commanders acted to achieve their primary objective - pacification. General Dalmazzo, who commanded the Sixth Army Corps in the region of Dubrovnik (which included the rebellious eastern Herzegovina), had no doubt that the Ustašas and local pro-Ustaša Muslims were guilty of causing the uprising - and he supplied the Second Army headquarters with detailed reports to that effect.(30)

Dalmazzo did not seem too keen to observe the niceties of NDH "sovereignty" if it clashed with his task and with what he perceived as the elementary prerequisites of civilised living. He duly took matters into his own hands by seeking to establish a modus vivendi with the insurgents. The Italians promptly disarmed the remaining sixty Ustašas in Trebinje, and armed Serb rebels entered the city on 1 August without the slightest incident.(31) They subsequently undertook not to attack Italian troop movements by road or rail, provided that such transports carried no Croats. The victims of recent Ustaša massacres were exhumed from mass graves and buried with proper Orthodox religious rites (which were allowed once again by Dalmazzo). Normality had returned, at least temporarily, to that part of the NDH, at practically no cost in lives to the Italians.

As this episode illustrates, in the early summer of 1941 Italian commanding officers in the NDH had to cope with tasks totally different from Italian operations in other theatres of war, and - on the whole - fulfilled them better than in other places. In the NDH they faced a challenge potentially even more serious than their German counterparts. The slaughters on their side of the Demarcation Line were worse, and the reaction to them more violent. While Glaise was agonising over the dilemma posed by the Ustaša-instigated uprising, worrying about the "reputation of the German Army" and its inability to prevent the massacres, Italian officers evidently enjoyed much greater autonomy of action in matters which definitely crossed the boundary between military and political issues. Furthermore, by acting in a conciliatory manner, the Italians made it more difficult for the Communists among the insurgents to advocate total war against "all enemies", as instructed by their centre in Moscow.

Such approach caused differentiation within the Serb insurgent ranks quite early on, most notably in Lika and northern Dalmatia. This enabled local Italian commanders to know where they stood with the local insurgent leaders.* However, in a large area previously evacuated by Italian troops (Zones 2 and 3) Ustaša terror was continuing unabated. Mostar, Glamoč, Gospić and Duvno are but some places south of the demarcation line where thousands of people were killed during the months of July and August. All in all,

"Nothing less than a determined effort by the Italians to reduce Ustaša influence drastically throughout the area and a concomitant willingness to expand the Second Army's occupation zone and crush the growing Partisan movement offered any hope of pacifying the Serb rebel movement."(32)

An extension of the occupation zone would also serve the additional purpose of consolidating ^{the} Italian strategic position in the heart of the Balkans, and provide a springboard for further expansion into the Danubian basin should such opportunity arise while the Germans were preoccupied in the East. To an Italian political leadership increasingly disenchanted with their nominal protégés in Zagreb this was an attractive option.

* In Lika and western Bosnia some Serb insurgents approached Italian military commanders, stated that they were only fighting against the Ustašas, that they had no links with the Communists, and that they would not enter the Italian-occupied zone. This helped divide the insurgents, with the intransigent wing coming under Communist influence. In northern Dalmatia a similar process of differentiation resulted in the permanent expulsion of the radical, pro-Communist minority from the insurgents' ranks. Eventually, all such groups would become known as the Četniks. Huge differences existed between different Četnik groups throughout the war: eg between those in Serbia, more or less under Mihailović's control, those in Montenegro where ^{the} local warlord Pavle Djurišić was really a double agent who cooperated with the Italians to achieve ends directed by Mihailović, and an array of local Serb non-Communist groups throughout the NDH, which were left to their own devices and had no contact of any kind with Mihailović until well into 1942.

6. Reoccupation of Zone Two

By the middle of August, the disdain and contempt of Italian military commanders and soldiers for the Ustašas turned into an articulate anti-Ustaša stand of the army as a whole. As such, it was indicative of the relative independence of the Italian army from Fascist ideology and politics. Mussolini had never brought his officer corps to heel as thoroughly as Hitler had done in the late 1930s. Much more than its German counterpart, the Italian army was a political factor in its own right, and on the issue of Croatia it acted as an autonomous pressure group with considerable decision-making power. The army exercised its influence on Mussolini to such extent that by mid-August he decided to remove the Ustašas, politically and militarily, from the entire coastal area of the NDH (Zone 2). It was decided that Italian units would reoccupy the area, taking control of its civil administration as well.

Pavelić was merely informed of Mussolini's decision by Casertano on 16 August 1941.(32) Mussolini's instructions to Casertano did not allow for any consultations, let alone negotiations between Rome and Zagreb on the issue.* The measure was explained to the Croats by the need to secure the coastal area against a sudden British attack, and to prevent further inflow of insurgents into it. Casertano said that it was in the interests of the successful conduct of the war in general, and of the NDH in particular, to secure Italian protection of the coast against any surprise and end uncertainty. Therefore, it was necessary that the NDH civilian and military authorities transfer full responsibility to the Italians.

* The General Staff of the Italian High Command (Com ando Supremo) issued its order to the Second Army to reoccupy immediately the "Demilitarized Zone" already on 15 August, i.e. one day before Pavelić was to be informed of the move.(33) As a prelude, the Italians decided already by 5 August to take control over the railroad Knin-Gospić.(34)

Casertano's note caused great excitement in Zagreb. Pavelić at first rejected the note, saying he could see no need for such ^a move. He asserted that Croat forces were able to deal with the situation, and expressed unease about the effect of Italian action on further spreading of unrest. Within hours, Pavelić, Lorković and Kvaternik-senior all spoke to German representatives, Kasche and Glaise, urging them to seek help and intervention from Berlin.* This they did, though for different reasons. Kasche was pro-Pavelić (probably the only ranking German official in the Balkans to be so) and believed in the "state-building strength" of the Ustaša movement, while Glaise was anti-Italian to the bone and distressed at the spectacle of their increasing control over old Habsburg lands.

Croat demands for German intervention prior to the signing of the Rome Agreements in May were relatively discreet, and (with the exception of Benzon's) restrained. Pavelić was still in the process of consolidating his position in which he could not feel secure until his debt to Italy had been repaid. He could seek German assistance in reducing the payment, but he could not hope to avoid it altogether. In August 1941, however, all Ustaša pretense of the community of interest with the Italians was gone. In their appeals to the Germans, some Croats went so far as to suggest that "the strategic position which the Italians intend to acquire in the Croat area could under given circumstances serve objectives which are not in the spirit of Axis policy".(36)

* On 18 August the NDH chargé d'affaires in Berlin visited State Under-Secretary Woermann at the Foreign Ministry and informed him of the Italian note to Pavelić. He said that the Poglavnik was resolutely in favour of rejecting it, and requested German help. He added that Benzon was on his way back from Bratislava to Berlin.(35) The following day Benzon spoke to Weizsaecker. Benzon advocated a condominium formula, with the NDH authorities retaining their presence; he said that even this was painful to accept, but the NDH would do so not because it was afraid of Italy, but because it respected the overall interests of the Reich.

Kasche went out of his way to secure some support for Pavelić in Berlin. On 17, 18 and 19 of August he sent a veritable flood of telegrams to his ministry on this subject, invariably critical of the Italian decision. Finally, on 20 August he addressed a lengthy letter to Ribbentrop, which warned of the long-term damage to the Reich resulting from the Italian decision.(38) (It ended with Kasche's rather self-indulgent remark that the issue of Italo-Croatian relations did not require a meeting between Ciano and Ribbentrop, or between the Fuehrer and the Duce, for the time being.)

A day later Ribbentrop had to remind Kasche yet again of the principled instruction, already reiterated during negotiations between Croatia and Italy on the frontiers, that the alpha and omega of German policy in the entire Mediterranean area was its alliance with Italy.(39) Consequently, Germany should avoid the role of arbiter which the Croats may try to impose on it. Therefore, Kasche was instructed not to accept any such appeals, but from the beginning to advise Croats to resolve all issues in direct friendly dialogue with Italy. (Virtually the same warning Kasche received from Ribbentrop again on 1 September 1941).

Also on 21 August Ribbentrop instructed Weizsaecker to tell Benzon (in connection with the latter's intervention of 19 August) that there was no need for the government of the Reich to take any position on an issue which concerned bilateral relations between Italy and Croatia.* This Weizsaecker duly did on 22 August, indifferent to Benzon's continuing anti-Italian outbursts and indignation.

* Also on 21 August Ribbentrop asked for Kasche's intervention, because a correspondent for the German news agency DNE in Zagreb had filed a story (on 19 August) that the NDH was going to reject Italian reoccupation of the Second Zone "after a thorough consultation with the German Minister in Zagreb".(40) Ribbentrop called such reporting unacceptable: "Obviously the correspondent has allowed his Croatian environment to influence him so much that he had lost sight of other, incomparably more important principles of the foreign policy of the Reich". It is evident that such lengthy reprimand of an anonymous reporter by the Reich Minister had the purpose of reminding Kasche himself of those "important principles"!

The official Croatian reply was given in a long verbal note by Lorković to Casertano on 18 August.(41) Unable to reject Italian demands, the Ustaša government stated that it could not "accept responsibility" for their consequences.* Sensing defeat, and probably recalling his successful personal appeal to Mussolini in Monfalcone, Pavelić decided to approach the Duce directly. On 19 August he sent him a telegram, in which he stressed that General Ambrosio, the commander of the Second Army, should not assume full civilian authority in the demilitarised zone. Instead, Pavelic tried to suggest an Italian-Croatian condominium in the area. He proposed the creation of a Croatian "General Administrative Commissariat" ("Obce upravno povjereništvo") attached to the Second Army headquarters.

* The preamble to the note stressed Croatia's adherence to the New Order and its resolute struggle against all its enemies. The "political unity of the Croat people and resolute action of its government" was effective, and subversive activity in decline. The reasons quoted for rejecting "responsibility" for Italian demands were:

1. Withdrawal of Croatian troops from the coastal area would imply that such forces were an obstacle to peace, whereas they had secured law and order in the entire area except for a small strip between Knin and Gračac;
 2. Such withdrawal would make complete pacification of the area, and consolidation of the NDH more difficult, because: a) it contravened sovereignty and territorial inviolability of the NDH; 2) Croatian authorities know local conditions and people better than Italian military authorities; c) certain Italian authorities provided direct and indirect protection to Communist and Četnik elements, "exactly because of their ignorance of local peculiarities and real situation"; d) withdrawal, even only partial, would result in real and material difficulties; e) economic consolidation of the NDH would be shattered by making its south-western border wide open, with adverse effect on the Axis war effort; f) Italian military control would have inestimable consequences in the area of jurisprudence, education and other areas of public life; g) such consequences would be most serious in the moral and political sphere, at a time when the annihilation of Communists and Četniks was "imminent"; the reoccupation would give Communist propaganda a boost.
 3. The NDH felt obliged to state openly its views, and rejected all responsibility for consequences; it acted so on the basis of the Tripartite Pact and because of its friendship with Italy.
- The note ended with a glowing account of the development of Italian-Croatian relations, and a promise of their further advancement.

It would "coordinate" the activities of the NDH officials with the Italians. All Croatian civilian authorities would remain in place and would be subordinated to the Commissar. Finally, Pavelić asked that "battle tried" Croatian units remain in the area too, as they would be "proud" to take part in joint military actions against the rebels.(42) (As a sop to Mussolini, Pavelić fully agreed to the [Italian] military control over the railroad from Rijeka via Ogulin to Split.)

This was a desperate attempt by Pavelić to soften the blow to his régime; but both Mussolini and the military remained firm in their anti-Ustaša course. In his reply Mussolini accepted the appointment of a Croatian administrative commissar, to be attached to the Second Army, but "it would be left to the Italian Army" to determine the precise forms of any such cooperation.(43) He thanked Pavelić for the offer of troops, but again Mussolini left it to the Italian military to consider this question with the NDH military, "so that the latter could be instructed on the ways of establishing liaison with the Second Army Headquarters". In reality, Mussolini was letting Pavelić know that General Ambrosio would have a free hand in the NDH, while adjusting his language to the PR needs of Pavelić.*

* On 23 August Ustaša newspapers published Pavelić's proclamation which attempted to present the new measures as a result of HIS decision, made in consultation with the Italians. The impression was created that civilian authority would be transferred to the administrative commissar, rather than that he would only have an advisory role. It was stressed that the measures would be temporary, "for as long as there is a need for military securing" of the area. The proclamation ended with the remarkable assertion that the "cooperation today is the best guarantee of friendship and alliance between our two nations and states in the future, when after victory we reestablish peace. Such cooperation will also be the best guarantee of independence and territorial integrity of the Independent State of Croatia". (Hrvatski narod, Zagreb, 23 August 1941; Novi list, second edition, Zagreb, 23 August 1941)

When it became clear that the Germans would remain aloof, the Second Army swiftly proceeded to undo the legacy of four months of Ustaša misrule. On 26 August Ambrosio went to Zagreb and received Ustaša official representatives in the Italian legation to discuss reoccupation.* The meeting rubber-stamped decisions Ambrosio had intended to carry out anyway.(44) All "irregular" Ustaša units (in reality local bands guilty of many atrocities) were promptly disarmed and disbanded. The regular Ustaša militia were given until 1 September to leave the Zone and the NDH government was informed that the Second Army would take over all administrative responsibilities a week later.

Only a few scattered units of Domobrani (the conscript Home Guards), without heavy weapons and under operational control of the Second Army, remained as token NDH military presence in Mostar and a few other places.** Any doubt about the meaning of Ambrosio's measures was dispelled by his proclamation to the people of the Second Zone on 7 September, which stated that he was taking military and civilian authority in the area.

* All Italian documents referred to "occupazione" or "rioccupazione" of "the Second Zone". Post-1945 Ustaša sources sought to deny that either of those terms was appropriate. Confusing Pavelić's propaganda fiction for reality, Vrančić (45) asserted that it was "an agreement that Italian troops, which were in Croatia as an allied army, take over the security of an area and perform some state functions within it... [S]urrender of those functions and the resulting limitations are based on the state's own will, they have the meaning of self-limitation of authority and therefore do not reduce its sovereignty". The head of the Italian military mission in Zagreb, General Oxilia, evidently was not bothered by such legal niceties when he informed the Supreme Command in Rome on 23 August:

"It is possible that [the Foqlavnik] as well as those around him cherish sympathies and admiration for Germany. It is also possible that, pressured by his ministers, he intends to manoeuvre between two great powers, thus securing greater independence for Croatia. It certainly seems to me that this is the most suitable moment for pressure on the Croatian government, so that it fulfils its treaty obligations with greater loyalty and sincerity... [and] that the powerful trump card which we are holding, will induce individuals and the government to act accordingly".(46)

** In the whole of the NDH at the end of August 1941 there were about 10,000 regular soldiers (Domobrani). The number of Ustašas organised into permanent units was 6,000; gendarmerie (oružništvo) numbered also 6,000. These numbers were to increase at least tenfold by the end of the war.(47)

Having made sure that no Ustašas would get in the way of their new course, the Italians proceeded with a series of administrative measures aimed at restoring Serbs' rights. In areas with a Serb majority they were reinstated at local administrative posts, while Serb property confiscated by the NDH was returned to its original owners. Following the example of Trebinje, Orthodox churches were reopened and some contact established with local leaders of insurgent groups. If one of Ambrosio's objectives had been to isolate the extremist wing of the insurgent movement, his strategy appeared to be working in northern Dalmatia and in Herzegovina.

Not all went well, however. In some places, notably around Drvar, Communist-dominated groups managed to strengthen their position at the expense of the vacillating "nationalists". They did so with the help of numerous young recruits from the part of Dalmatia annexed by Italy, most of them apparently Croats, whose Marxist zeal was only matched by their hatred of the Italians.(48) In the extreme north-west corner of Bosnia (Bosanska Krajina) Partisan influence was generally strong.

Elsewhere, while armed Serb groups were friendly enough to the Italians, their dominant sentiment was that of revenge against the Croats and Muslims. In some cases - for instance in Gračac in mid-September - local Croats reversed the pattern by seeking Italian military protection against revenge by the Serbs.(49) Finally, in some places the Ustašas were still active within the Second Zone, and staged sporadic anti-Serb actions.(50) This they did probably behind the back of Pavelić, and rather ineffectively, but even a hint of Ustaša comeback was sufficient to convince most Serbs that they should stick to their guns. A myriad of such detachments went under the name of Četniks, but they were not under unified military command or political guidance.

If the Pax Italiana was to be complete and permanent, it was necessary to rid the area under occupation of ALL Partisans and Ustašas. It was also necessary to fill the vacuum between Zone Two and the demarcation line, which was turning into a haven both for Partisans and Ustašas expelled from the reoccupied area. Ambrosio's grand design thus had to be completed by the reoccupation of Zone Three - another huge chunk of NDH territory, some of it the most wild, rugged and desolate mountain landscape in the whole Balkans.

By mid-October 1941 the Italian occupation was extended all the way to the demarcation line, and covered about a half of NDH territory. It was effected with the usual disregard for the government in Zagreb, which fatalistically accepted the fait accompli. It had to field off another crisis only a fortnight earlier: on 26 September Ambrosio unilaterally proclaimed ^{the} inclusion of the reoccupied territory into the Italian customs zone. Only urgent appeals by Lorković, who happened to be in Venice discussing various aspects of cooperation with Italy, resulted in the formal withdrawal of Ambrosio's proclamation.(51) However, in practice all customs barriers between Italy and the Italian zone were removed. The NDH was in effect divided into two separate economic, administrative, military and political halves. Only the merest pretense of sovereignty remained in the Italian-occupied half.

In the longer run it turned out that, far from solving the problem of insurgency, the extended occupation area became a part of the problem. It was an area where even topography and climate sometimes represented as great obstacles to successful performance of tasks as enemy action. This compelled Italian commanders to confine their units to the towns, and to expend great effort just to keep their lines of communication open.

The infernal and deep internal divisions, Orthodox-Muslim, Orthodox-Catholic, Četnik-Partisan, Partisan-Ustaša and Četnik-Ustaša, set the stage for the multi-cornered conflict which was at its worst in the newly-enlarged Italian zone.* Initially the Italians believed they could manipulate different parties, and early results were encouraging. By the end of 1941, however, the Italians found themselves drawn into a tangled web of temporary alliances with local Serb leaders, who put their regional interests first, and who were easily swayed by the mood of their men:

"At this point the 'Četniks' had no organisation; the Italians barely had policy. Mussolini had intervened in early November to restrain the Second Army's openly pro-Serb posture, informing Ambrosio that all measures were to be carried out in conjunction with the Croatian civil authorities and that the Italians were at all costs to avoid creating the impression that they favoured the Orthodox population. Frustrated by continuing disorders, Cavallero wavered between giving Ambrosio full powers to suppress the revolt militarily by declaring the whole area a zone of war and the far more defensive strategy of pulling the Italian troops back to the cities and along the major lines of communication."(52)

With the situation in North Africa deteriorating again, no fresh troops could be allocated to the Balkans. At the same time, in the winter of 1941-42 numerous Communist units routed in Serbia and Montenegro were coming into the Italian zone of the NDH and challenging Ambrosio's precarious balance. With the Germans having a crisis of their own in Russia, the Ustašas the cause of disorder in the first place, and the Četniks volatile and unreliable, the inadequacies of the occupation system in Yugoslavia were becoming glaringly obvious.

* Once again, the name Četnik is used here and later as a generic term to describe Serb non-Communist guerrillas; in 1941 most Serb nationalist insurgents in Zones 2 and 3 had no contact with Mihailović.

XI - CONDOMINIUM

1. German Reaction to Uprising

German representatives in the NDH initially reacted to Ustaša anti-Serb atrocities primarily out of concern for the "reputation" of the Reich in general - and of the Wehrmacht in particular - if the Germans were perceived as the underwriters of Pavelić's genocidal course. However, in the late summer of 1941 came the news of unrest in various parts of "former Yugoslavia", including the NDH. With the notable exception of Kasche's, German reports from the NDH almost invariably stressed that the Ustaša policy was the chief cause of unrest. Among diplomats, this was the firm conviction of Troll-Obergfell*, who reported on 10 August 1941:

"[C]ontrary to Croatian assertions that the fault for unrest lies exclusively with the Serbs, German military commands and sober Croatian circles are of the opinion that the uprising was essentially caused by the wild and bloody Ustaša conduct."(1)

The Nazi Party Auslandsorganisation chief in the NDH Rudolf Epting shared this view, and in a later report to Hitler he unambiguously named the Ustašas as the main culprits.(2) This was also the opinion of Walter Schellenberg of the Reich Security Service (RSHA) foreign department.(3)

The RSHA had an extensive network in the NDH and was particularly thorough in its reports of Ustaša atrocities and the effect they had on the unrest. Its agents sent literally hundreds of such reports, on the basis of which the Service reached its considered opinion that the Ustašas bore the brunt of blame for the spread of Partisan movement in the NDH.

* Frustrated by Kasche's posture, Troll-Obergfell regularly used periodical absences of his pro-Ustaša boss from Zagreb to send reports to Berlin which were highly critical of Pavelić's regime.

Such^a conclusion was presented to Reichsfuehrer SS Heinrich Himmler on 17 February 1942 in a Gestapo report which categorically stated:

"As the chief cause of increased activity of the bands one must name atrocities carried out by Ustaša units in Croatia against the Orthodox population. The Ustašas committed their deeds in a bestial manner not only against males of conscript age, but especially against helpless old people, women and children. The number of the Orthodox that the Croats have massacred and sadistically tortured to death is about 300,000."(4)*

The most consistent and thorough German critic of Pavelić's regime was undoubtedly Glaise von Horstenau. He was the first among ranking Germans to express doubts about the viability of the regime, to publicise its atrocities, and he was remarkably consistent in pointing at the Ustaša anti-Serb policy as the root cause of unrest. His views on the subject fully coincided with a host of his military colleagues (Loehr, Rendulic, Weichs etc) who had a direct experience of conditions in the south-east.

* The same report mentioned forced conversions as major contributory factor to unrest, "especially as they are accompanied by terror. The Catholic Church has instigated Ustaša crimes even by the very use it has made of them in its conversion drive." Finally, the report recommended a radical change of course in the NDH, where the Ustaša régime "should no longer be allowed full freedom of action, especially in rebel areas".

German foreign ministry's plenipotentiary representative in Belgrade Felix Benzler joined the chorus by reporting to Ribbentrop:

"From the founding [of the NDH] until now the persecution of Serbs has not stopped, and even cautious estimates indicate that at least several hundred thousand people have been killed. The irresponsible elements have committed such atrocities which could be expected only from a horde of rabied Bolsheviks..."(5)

Faced with a veritable barrage of constant critiques of the Ustaša régime, and with a sudden increase of insurgent activity in the NDH in late-1941, Hitler had three alternatives. One was to wash his hands of Croatia altogether, and let the Italians sort out the mess in the country (which was, after all, in their "sphere"). The other was to try and replace Pavelić with a more credible political force (above all the HSS), or at least with a politically neutral government of civil servants. Finally, he could try to muddle through with Pavelić, but seek to place him and all his resources under tighter German control.

The need to find a solution for the NDH naturally imposed itself. In the autumn of 1941 Hitler's two well-equipped divisions cleared Serbia of most rebels, carrying ^{out} dreadful reprisals in the process. For the OKW and Hitler both the Partisans and Četniks, regardless of their mutual ideological antipathy, represented but two sides of the same coin: the dreaded "Serbian conspiratorial clique" was rising its head again and had to be smashed.* While Mihailović went more or less underground, Tito withdrew to the NDH. This was a move dictated by necessity, but eventually it proved advantageous: the Ustaša state, by its policies, continued to provide recruits which could no longer be found in Serbia and Montenegro.

The first German option - to pass the hot potato completely to the Italians - gained in prominence towards the end of 1941, with the military crisis in the East obviously concentrating Hitler's mind. The OKW considered the possibility of withdrawing German forces from Serbia and the NDH and replacing them with Italian, Bulgarian and Hungarian forces (as General Warlimont told Ambassador Ritter of the foreign ministry).(6)

* Both German and Croatian propaganda used the term "Četnik-Communist bands" until well into 1943. Ustaša publications in particular sought to establish that both movements were but expressions of the same basic greater-Serb conspiracy to destroy the NDH.

Upon hearing of the proposal that the German zone of occupation in the NDH be given to the Italians, General List suggested that one German division should remain (and Glaise be retained at his post), while Italy would secure the railroad between Zagreb and Belgrade.(7) The OKW directed the Commander South-East on 16 December to free forces in both Serbia and Croatia for the East Front, replacing them with Bulgarian, Italian, and if need be Hungarian and Romanian troops.(8) The Italians promptly declared their readiness to move the Second Army even further north.(9)

The news produced a veritable panic in Zagreb. Both Kasche and Glaise were deeply indignant, the former because he was worried about the fate of "his" Ustašas, the latter because he perceived any German retreat to the Italians as a personal tragedy. Besides, both were upset because they had not been consulted. Kasche immediately cabled to the foreign ministry that continued presence of German troops was essential for the maintenance of order, and that the Italians were not able to control the situation in their zone as it was, let alone in an area twice that large.(10) Kasche added that an Italian occupation of the whole of Croatia would cause unrest to spread to the Croat population.

Only a few days previously (still not knowing what was brewing in Berlin) Glaise had warned that some Croats felt a complete surrender of the whole of Croatia to the Italians would be preferable to the state of constant disappointment caused by the Reich's lack of interest.(11) Now he had the unpleasant task of letting those Croats know of the latest German decision.* The reaction was predictable: Kvaternik-senior called it "a catastrophe", said that he would resign and go to the front, and warned that German prestige and interests would suffer.(12)

* Actually, only a very narrow Croat circle were in the know. True to his manner of foreign policy decision making, Pavelić kept the whole thing totally secret from anyone but himself, Kvaternik, and Kvaternik's deputy Laxa. (Vrančić, II, p. 193) . . .

In a further report on 24 December Glaise described once again the deep impression of the new OKW directive on the Croat military, and renewed suspicion of the Italians (who, "contrary to all custom, had not informed the Croatian army of their new task").(13) Pavelić was "very indignant".* The new course, Glaise opined, would cause more difficulties for the Ustaša régime, "considering the avarice which is characteristic of our allies, which will affect our economic interests in the country".

On the same day Hitler suddenly reversed his decision and rejected any entry of Italian troops into the German occupation zone. The directive of 16 December was void, after only six days. It was an episode which most probably resulted from a bad case of weak nerves caused by the situation in Russia. It was totally out of step with German policy in the Balkans in general, and in the NDH in particular. Its execution undoubtedly would have increased Italian influence in Croatia, and reduced both the presence and the credibility of the Germans.** German policy since well before the attack on Yugoslavia had been exactly the opposite: to pay lip service to Italian predominance in the area, but to subvert it quietly, and continually to seek an ever greater dependence of the NDH on the Reich.

* When the crisis broke out Pavelić was in Venice, talking to Ciano (who noted in his diary on 14 December that Pavelić would ask for many things, all of which would have to be rejected). Indeed, Pavelić asked for gradual return of authority in the Italian zone to the NDH, but to no avail.(14) (He also paid a purely courtesy visit to the king-designate of Croatia, but Ciano informed Mussolini that the question of monarchy had been put aside for the time being.) The Italian posture was entirely "re-active": the news of Hitler's change of heart - according to Ciano's diary entry of 28 December - was simply acknowledged, without comment!

** Their economic interests would have been safeguarded anyway: the provisional Wehrmacht suggestions of 20 December provided for the economically vital areas in both Serbia and the NDH to remain under German military control; however, "Should this commitment of forces appear too high, the handing over of the whole Croatian territory to the Italians is recommended, because the German forces in Serbia are more important".(15)

2. The Dangić Affair

Hitler must have realised that one infantry division and a few additional local defence battalions (so easy to lose in the snows of Russia) was not too high a sacrifice in order to preserve some continuity of his Balkan policy. The first option in Croatia - to pass the bothersome creation to MUssolini altogether - was discarded for good.

The second possible alternative was to seek a political solution to the Ustaša problem, or at least to develop a modus vivendi with other non-Communist forces in the NDH in conjunction with the planned military operations. While the fanatic Nazi, Kasche, kept saying that Pavelić was the only German ally in the whole area, his was an isolated voice. Much closer to the mood of most German representatives was Glaise's opinion that there was widespread "aversion against the Ustaša movement felt by everyone who did not directly profit from it", that the NDH was "scarcely able to function in its present hybrid composition", with the "attack and resistance capacity of the Croatian soldier [falling] from week to week".*

Glaise and many other German officers correctly perceived that the guerrilla problem was not only military - not even primarily military - but political. The resistance movement in the NDH was a national reaction against the occupier, with strong social impulses, but constantly fed and inordinately strengthened by the threat of biological extinction.

An opportunity to test their political acumen and exercise pragmatism on the ground was offered to the Germans in early 1942 in eastern Bosnia, where they carried out a fairly extensive mopping-up operation as a follow up to the successful anti-insurgent drive in Serbia. This was an area along the eastern border of the NDH, with a slight Serb majority over Muslims, and no Croats at all.

* "All this reflected weariness and lack of training, but also the refusal to engage in a struggle regarded, in wide circles of the Croatian people, as a civil war, whose outbreak and expansion was blamed on the hated Ustaša."(16)

Early slaughters in the summer of 1941 plunged the area into chaos and armed resistance. A strong personality soon emerged to lead the insurgents: ex-gendarme major Jezdimir Dangić, in his prime at 45, a law graduate and, as a native Bosnian, well acquainted with local conditions. His case deserves some special attention as an example of the restraints which German military commanders on the ground faced from their political masters, and of the influence - waning, but nevertheless still present - which the Croat government attempted to exercise on their Axis mentors.

Dangić realised as early as September that his primary objective - to preserve as many Serb lives as possible - inevitably clashed with the Communists' strategy of "the worse - the better". (His pre-war experience as a gendarme officer and as a district commissioner [sreski načelnik] was undoubtedly more helpful in understanding Communists than ^{that of} a professional *army* officer background would have been.) While always ready to fight the Ustašas, Dangić scrupulously avoided conflict with the Germans, whose presence in the area was in any event weak until the end of 1941.

Unlike Mihailović in Serbia, Dangić did not feel constrained to seek accommodation with the Communists: their organisation in eastern Bosnia was initially weak, and - again, unlike western Serbia - there was no immediate common threat to keep the two sides together.* Most local Serbs were suspicious of the Party's "brotherhood-unity" slogans while their presumed Croat and Muslim "brothers" were out to kill them. Dangić recognised Mihailović's nominal authority, but he acted of his own accord and soon established contact with the Nedić administration in Belgrade.

* In early September, having established primacy over other Serb Četnik leaders in eastern Bosnia, Dangić issued anti-Communist proclamations which advocated the creation of a "united national Serb front" against the Partisans.(17) At the same time, he was obviously following Mihailović's lead in negotiating with them (throughout the autumn), but refused to contemplate joint action against non-Croat forces. Dangić avoided fighting the Partisans for a long time, and maintained an uneasy truce with them long after the civil war had broken out in Serbia.

Had Dangić acted in the Italian zone, he would have been a prime candidate to reach an arrangement with General Ambrosio to have the Serbs' rights to life and property restored in return for an engagement against Partisans. Instead, Dangić had to deal with the Germans, who took a much dimmer view of "the bands" than the Second Army. He approached them at first through Nedić at the end of 1941, when ^{the} Serbian minister-president informed the Germans that Četnik leaders in eastern Bosnia were keen to "arrive at an understanding with the German authorities".(18)

This became obvious to the Wehrmacht too; during operations in eastern Bosnia field commanders reported that "it was apparent that Dangić's Četniks avoided combat with German troops and did not fire on them". As the official OKW record, prepared some months later, stated:

"This was for a special reason. In Belgrade, negotiations had taken place with the Dangić Četniks by the Germans in an effort to save German blood. [cursive added] On 30 January the Chief of the General Staff of the Commander in Serbia, Colonel Kewisch, and Dangić met. The Serbian insurgent leader was prepared to subordinate himself with all his people to the German command in order to destroy the Communists in East Bosnia and to maintain order. On 31 January and 1 February further discussions took place between Dangić and the Minister President of the Serbian Government, Nedić, as well as with the Commander in Serbia... The German General in Zagreb was requested to report to Belgrade on the 2nd with an authorised representative of the Croatian Government.

General Glaise, Ambassador [...] Kasche, the Croatian State Secretary Vrančić and [Croatian] Colonel Low arrived in Belgrade for discussions. The limitations of the occupation rights of the Croats in East Bosnia and the formation of an administration in this territory under insurgent control demanded by Dangić, was refused by the Croat representatives. The continuation of the discussions on the 3rd was without result. Dangić therefore declared that there was nothing left for him but to take up the fight against the Croats, for he felt himself duty bound to prevent a destruction of the Serb elements living in Croatia by the Ustašas. Dangić was escorted back over the border to Zvornik on 4 February."(19)

What Dangić wanted was very similar to what his counterparts in Herzegovina and northern Dalmatia had obtained from the Italians: a local autonomy, expulsion of Ustaša civil and military authorities, complete truce with Axis forces, and resolute anti-Communist action in return, with a guarantee of pacification of the area under insurgent control.*

Croatian representatives attached to the Wehrmacht group in east Bosnia quickly learnt of Dangić's attempts,(21) and did their best to frustrate them. Having alerted Pavelić to the possibilities contemplated by German field commanders, they also sought to involve the top authority of the Reich - rightly perceived as their ultimate protector.

* Apparently it took Colonel Kewisch a great deal of persuasion to get his superiors to meet Dangić in the first place.(20) It is intriguing to reflect on the willingness and ability of colonels to take resolute action in the face of their superiors' feigned or genuine resistance - be it in the Balkans in 1941-42, in Greece in 1967 or in Washington DC (Ollie North) in 1986.

At first, Pavelić seemed prepared to go along with what German generals were proposing. On 23 January the Wehrmacht commander in Serbia, General Bader, signed a provisional agreement with Pavelić in Zagreb, whereby the area between the Drina, Sava and Bosna rivers in eastern Bosnia would be until further notice under direct German military authority, with a Croatian civilian commissar attached to the German military command (who would also act as liaison officer, similar to the post created at the Italian Second Army headquarters). Dangić's men would be subordinated to the Germans but Croatian sovereignty would be retained.

It was on this basis that German military representatives negotiated with Dangić (in Nedić's presence) on the night of 31 January - 1 February 1942. Dangić was also told that the separation of eastern Bosnia and its inclusion into Serbia was not possible, and it was an issue beyond Bader's competence anyway. However, while purely nominal Croatian sovereignty would remain, all "decisive power" (Entscheidungsgewalt) would be in the hands of the Wehrmacht.(22)*

Dangić declared his readiness to cooperate with the Wehrmacht and to obey Nedić. He said he could cleanse the area (between the Drina, Sava and Bosna rivers) of Communists, and secure communications and industrial objects. However, after all that had been done by the Ustašas and Croats, he could not cooperate with them; otherwise he would be seen as a traitor by his own men. His struggle was that of "an honest nationalist" for the freedom of the Serb people. As an opponent of the failed Yugoslav idea, he added, he rejected both the Yugoslav Government in London and Mihailović.

* Kewisch suggested that native Serbs, "Croatian citizens", could be appointed to local administrative posts in areas with a Serb majority, but Dangić rejected this, saying that any Serb bonded to Pavelić with an oath would be killed by his own men, "if not by his own wife in bed first". On this point it was agreed that Dangić would form his militia and cooperate directly with the Germans, bypassing any NDH administrative structure.

Kewisich informed Bader of the talks on 1 February. Bader agreed that the only possibility of pacification in eastern Bosnia demanded putting Dangić under his command. He therefore arranged for talks with Dangić in the presence of Benzler, hoping to reach a formal agreement. In the evening on the same day, at a meeting with Dangić and Nedić, the only sticking issue again was that of formal NDH authority, with Dangić still rejecting any possibility of cooperation with the Ustaša government. It was only then that General Bader decided to invite Kasche, Glaise and NDH representatives to Belgrade to find a solution.

Talking with Kasche and Glaise (without any Croats in attendance) on 2 February, Bader obtained their principled agreement to the transfer of authority in eastern Bosnia to Dangić, with the formal retention of NDH sovereignty. However, Kasche expressed doubts that such^a solution would be acceptable to the NDH government. When state secretary Vrančić of the NDH foreign ministry was invited to join them later in the day, supposedly to sign the formal agreement, General Bader apparently tried to present the Croatian side with a fait accompli. According to Vrančić, General Bader spread a map in front of him and other German and Croatian officials, pointed at a shaded area of eastern Bosnia (encompassing Bijeljina, Zvornik, Vlasenica, Rogatica and Višegrad) and stated:

Gentlemen, please acknowledge that my command has decided to hand over military and civilian authority in these districts of eastern Bosnia to the Četniks commanded by Major Dangić. I hereby request the Croatian Government to withdraw its military and gendarme units from this area, as well as all civilian officials."(23)

Vrančić - totally oblivious of the agreement reached in Zagreb ten days earlier - initially expected Kasche or Glaise to say something, but, encountering silence, said that such ^a decision was unacceptable to the NDH government. He warned that this would be a dangerous precedent which other rebels would seek to emulate "from Caribrod to Ljubljana". He added that General Bader would have difficulty justifying his decision in Berlin. Vrančić correctly sensed that the general lacked authorisation from the top for his plan. Bader - according to the Ustaša delegate - subsequently gave up his idea and tore up the draft treaty in front of Vrančić, to the delight of both Kasche and Glaise.

The real cause of the failure of negotiations with Dangić and the NDH government was in the fact that General Bader did not enjoy ^{the} political support of his superiors. His was an imaginative action undertaken on his own initiative. However, in early 1942 it was still far too early for the German high command, let alone Hitler, to accept the need for political solutions to military problems in the Balkans. It was sufficient for the Croatian representative to hint at repercussions in Berlin,

and Bader rescinded. This was less an expression of the power of Ustaša government to influence German decisions than a reflection of the powerlessness of field commanders to act against the grain of official thinking in Berlin.*

* This thinking was best illustrated already on 2 February by Keitel's rejection of Italian methods in seeking a *modus vivendi* with the Serbs: "Passive endurance of the intrigues of the Pan-slavs [sic!], Četniks and Communists strengthens those forces in view of the limited powers of the Croatian government and can suddenly become a danger to the whole Balkan situation. Therefore, everything must be accomplished both militarily and politically in order to strengthen the Croatian government to support energetically its measures against the insurgents." (24)

As a footnote to the abortive German-Četnik arrangement, it is worth mentioning that Dangić's representatives had no difficulty negotiating with the Italians in December and January, during the period when both Dangić and Italian officers seemed convinced that the Second Army would still move north and occupy the rest of the NDH. (25) Dangić's personal fate was tragic. He was eventually taken prisoner by the Germans, escaped from the POW camp and made his way to Poland, where he fought heroically in the Warsaw uprising. However, the advancing Russians arrested him and extradited him to Tito, who duly had him shot in Sarajevo in 1945.

3. German-Italian Military Discord

The OKW persisted in its view of the insurgency in the NDH as an uprising (Aufstand), and the designation of the insurgents as "rebels" and "bandits". While Italian and even German field officers quickly perceived the schism between the Četniks and the Partisans, the Dangić affair made it plain that only Italians were free to exploit the possibilities. They virtually stopped fighting the Četniks throughout their occupation zone.

Italian general disenchantment with the insistence of Berlin on a strictly military solution to the war in the Balkans was reflected in the scant support offered by the Second Army to the Germans during operations in eastern Bosnia in January 1942. Latent intra-Axis rivalry and growing jealousies over influence in the NDH acted^{as} an additional impediment to the creation of an effective united front, and threatened to compromise the entire war effort in the area.

The need to devise a common Axis anti-insurgent strategy in the NDH was obvious to German field commanders. On^{the} one hand they were prevented from making allies of Četniks. On the other they had to contend with the Ustaša regime, which they grew to detest and regard as the cause of their problems. Besides, the OKW assigned much lower priority to the Balkans than to "real" war theatres (Russia, Africa) and German forces in the NDH were weak, amounting to hardly more than one division. If on top of it all their Italian allies were to sabotage operations, the task of the German Commander South-East and his subordinates would be impossible. Therefore, on 21 January List asked the OKW to exercise "a corresponding political influence" on the Italians; significantly, he also requested "the appointment of a leader in Croatia who would be made responsible for the maintenance of ordered conditions in Croatia".(26) On 29 January and 5 February he renewed his call for a unified high command in the NDH.

On 4 February Keitel wrote to his Italian counterpart,^{He} chief of the general staff, Cavallero, and suggested "unified and energetic measures" in the former Yugoslav territory in order "finally to break the backbone" of the insurgent movement.* Stressing the need for coordinated political and police action in conjunction with military operations, Keitel came to the crucial part of his letter:

"[T]he military-political methods which have been applied until now in Croatia are in need of scrutiny. In my opinion the prerequisites for arriving at an amicable agreement with the enemy do not exist. The continuation of the present uncertain situation prevents any consolidation of the Croatian state and must in the long run lead to its dissolution."(27)

The Germans must have thought that the change of command at the Italian Second Army, which occurred at this time, was a good omen. General Ambrosio, who was seen as a chief advocate of the pro-Četnik policy, was replaced. (However, he went to the influential position of Army Chief of Staff.) The new appointee, General Mario Roatta, very quickly dispelled all hopes that his thinking was more in line with Keitel's.

* "With the present straining of its forces on the East Front, Germany can only establish limited fighting forces in the Balkans, and must lay greater value on the fact that peace reigns in the area important for the war economy and that transport lanes remain secured. This end can only be attained however if an offensive mopping up operation, according to unified points of view, is carried out now in the whole of Croatia, since experiences up until now have shown that in view of the expanse and the difficulties of the terrain only unsatisfactory results can be achieved with independent actions. The military power for the carrying out of such a mopping up operation would be available with the concentration of the Italian, Croatian and German forces and would guarantee certain success if measures were taken militarily and politically according to unified points of view.[...] Italian, Croatian and German command authorities in question [should] receive instruction to work out by personal discussion a joint basis for their further action."(26)

On 26 January Roatta told the chief German liaison officer with his army, Colonel Rohrbach, that he favoured a joint and simultaneous action to destroy the centres of revolt by concentrated attacks.(27) This sounded like the OKW line. More worryingly for the Germans, however, Roatta also hinted at the possibility of withdrawing most Italian units to a line closer to the Adriatic coast and leaving behind just a few strongly fortified garrisons similar to medieval castles, with defence limited to the main roads. As he went on, Roatta sounded more and more like his predecessor: he calmly mentioned "a further possibility" of an even more extensive cooperation with the Serbs, if necessary at the expense of the Croatian state. He thought that only in this way had it been possible - especially in Herzegovina - to maintain small exposed Italian garrisons without fighting. However, the NDH government would seek to obstruct such policy, added Roatta, saying that it had been a mistake to create Croatia, "a state basically hostile towards Italy". It would have been better to have regarded the whole of the Balkans as enemy territory for the duration of the war, he concluded, and to have acted accordingly.

Roatta's statements, made almost immediately after he had assumed command at Sušak, indicate that by the beginning of 1942 there existed a clear Italian army view of the Croatian problem - a view which Roatta evidently brought with him from Rome, rather than acquired on the spot.* That view boded ill for German plans for the spring.

* In the best tradition of Machiavelli, he openly told the German that he had no scruples about influencing the peoples concerned with generous promises which one did not need to keep. To the shock of his visitor he casually said that, for example, one could easily have promised Graz and Klagenfurt to Croatia, or hired gangsters to carry out political assassinations of Italians in France, if it was deemed expedient.

German apprehensions were growing in subsequent weeks, with reports of evident unwillingness of the Second Army to fight reaching Salonika and Berlin. The news of further negotiations between Italian officers and Četniks also kept coming throughout February.* Furthermore, as a result of Hitler's about-face in December (concerning occupation of the whole of the NDH by the Italians) Mussolini was growing more suspicious than ever of Ustaša-German intrigues. His misgivings were probably one of the reasons for near total lack of Italian support during German operations in eastern Bosnia in January.

In the meantime Cavallero replied to Keitel. He expressed agreement with the proposed joint mopping-up operation, but - reflecting both Mussolini's suspicions and hurt pride - made the proviso that the action should be carried out under Italian overall command. He proposed that the discussions be held in the headquarters of the Second Army in Susak. In his reply Keitel said he was ready to accept "a temporary Italian high command... provided that the guarantee exists for an energetic military operation, previously agreed upon in detail".(29) He immediately (23 February) sent directives to List:

"The talks are to be limited to the discussion of military measures and political questions are to be avoided. The main imperative is to bring the military directives of the Italian Second Army into agreement with those of the Wehrmacht Commander Southeast."(30)

* General Dalmazzo was pursuing talks with a group of Bosnian Četniks (some of them from the German zone) through a number of Serbs from Herzegovina acting as intermediaries. The chief among them were Dobroslav Jevdjević and Ilija Trifunović-Birčanin, who had established ties with the Italians months earlier. Subsequently, "nationalists" in the Foča-Goražde sector swung to a firm anti-Partisan line, and Dalmazzo was urging Roatta to turn the numerous local agreements with Serb non-Communists into a full-fledged alliance with Četnik officers.(28)

4. Abbazia and "Trio"

The Germans proceeded with characteristic thoroughness to prepare for the talks. On 27 February, after preliminary consultations in Belgrade, the acting Wehrmacht Commander South-East, General Kuntze, conferred in Zagreb with Glaise, Kasche, Bader, Benzler and Veessenmayer (who was attached as a political adviser on Ribbentrop's request). On this occasion Kasche advocated the interests of Pavelić's government yet again, by stressing that "with regard to the cooperation of the Italians no tasks or demands may be given to [them] for the occupation of any [additional Croatian] areas".(31) However, nobody else raised the issue of eventual extension of areas under Italian control.

The following day the Croats were included in the talks (Slavko Kvaternik and General Laxa). The Germans suggested a common approach to the military aspects of ^{the} mopping up operation, which the Croats accepted.* It is noteworthy that German generals exercised complete influence over Croatian ones, and that both sides regarded the Italians as very much the third party. Step by step, the last vestiges of Italian pretenses in the NDH were being removed.

* "1. German forces around Sarajevo were to occupy the mountain passes around Sarajevo and Tarčin and at the same time to safeguard the industrial plants. The Italians were to be asked to reach these mountain passes simultaneously from their zone, and in such a manner that they advance with strong forces along the existing roads in order to mop up from north to south, the region through which they had advanced. For this operation the support of 10 to 12 Croatian battalions was needed.

2. Operation Banja Luka. In addition to the Sarajevo operation, the insurgent area in the region of Banja Luka was to be mopped up of insurgents at the same time. For this purpose only the regional defence battalion in Prijedor was available for German forces. The support for this operation by 10 to 12 Croatian battalions was also deemed necessary. The Italians were to be asked for support in the same manner as in the Sarajevo operation.

[...] Unconditional cooperation of the German-Croatian command and troops was secured. Croatian command prepared, in a few insurgent areas, to subordinate itself also to the Italian high command. The Croats also recognised the importance of police actions which had to follow up immediately the regaining of insurgent territories..."(32)

Apparently, Croatian generals believed that THEY would be the ones to proceed with the "police actions" in the reconquered territories. As it turned out, this was not what the Italians intended to do.

The first round of talks in Abbazia (which was the final venue, rather than Sušak) took place on 2 March, and included only Germans and Italians. Kuntze elaborated in some detail on his proposed plan of operations, more or less along the lines agreed in Zagreb two days earlier. However, General Ambrosio - in his new role of the army chief of staff - had somewhat different ideas. Symptomatically, he started by saying that "only Croatia will be considered" - meaning by "Croatia" only the German zone of occupation! To even ^{the} greater surprise of Kuntze and other Germans, he added that according to an agreement between Keitel and Cavallero, the Italian Second Army would have command of the joint operation.(32) This was not how the Germans understood the final decision on the question of command.* Ambrosio then suggested that the focus of operations should be on eastern Bosnia (Sarajevo) in the first instance, so that Axis forces should not be split. He then came to the crucial part:

"After the operation it will be necessary to leave rather large and also smaller Italian garrisons as police in the insurgent territory until Croatia can provide sufficient police forces. Because of this the demarcation line will be discontinued. An eventual shifting of the demarcation line must, if the occasion arises, remain reserved for a later ruling."(33)

Kuntze avoided answer to these proposals, but insisted on the need for simultaneous operations in both east and west Bosnia, which he thought possible if the Italians could secure three or four divisions.

* In the OKW directives for talks with the Italians of 23 February Kuntze was informed that "A subordination of German troops under Italian command is not contemplated". However, Keitel subsequently agreed to Cavallero's request on this issue (see p. 293), but was then overruled by Hitler, who agreed only to "a subordination, limited in time, of the committed [German] units under the Italian Second Army", provided that "The right of disposition over German units in Serbia and Croatia, the designation of the extent and time of their commitment... is incumbent only on the Wehrmacht Commander Southeast".(Hehn, op. cit. p. 109)

The following morning, 3 March, Croatian General Laxa joined the talks. The Italians stuck to the position that sufficient forces were not available for simultaneous operations around Sarajevo and Banja Luka, so the two operations would be taken in succession ("Trio I" and "Trio II"). The Germans reluctantly accepted this. The starting points and forces for the east Bosnian operation were also agreed; however, while the Germans and Croats wanted an early start, the Italians said they could not be ready until 15 April, "when the snows have melted". The Germans asked that the final decision on the change in demarcation line be left to a later ruling. Eventually an agreement was reached, which was very much in line with Italian demands, and a 12-point protocol signed.(35)

The protocol assigned the NDH troops a secondary role, and - unlike German and Italian units - they were not even listed by name, but within the German 718 division, as its reserve. The key politically sensitive issue in this protocol concerned the authority in the pacified areas:

"After the pacification of the individual zones the Croatian civilian authorities will be appointed for administration according to the decision of the Commander in Chief of the Italian Army."

The potential significance of this provision was not spotted by the politically less-than-astute General Laxa, who duly signed the Protocol without complaint; but State Secretary Vrančić spotted the problem on the train back to Zagreb and alerted Lorković and S. Kvaternik immediately on his return there.(36) Point 8 awakened the Croats' fears that once the Italians had moved into east Bosnia they would not leave it any more, and especially the key city of Sarajevo. On 4 April S. Kvaternik told Kuntze that any sojourn of Italian troops in Sarajevo and the Tuzla-Zenica basin was unthinkable. He also deemed unacceptable that operations be carried out without any influence of the NDH government.

Kvaternik addressed a protocol to Keitel with these objections, and asked that they be brought to Hitler's notice.* He subsequently asked Kuntze not to give it to Keitel; but among German officials in Zagreb the objections raised by Kvaternik caused some rethinking. In his report to Weizsaecker in Berlin on 6 March Veessenmayer warned that the Italians' operation could extend a long way beyond the demarcation line, with the territory concerned coming under Italian permanent administration.(38)

Kasche suggested a supplement to the Abbazia Protocol, which would guarantee return of administration to the NDH authorities "as soon as possible".(39) Glaise was also worried about Italian intentions, which was in his case a permanent state of mind anyway. In the end, Weizsaecker suggested to Ribbentrop a diplomatic solution: since Germany should not be seen as an advocate of the NDH in its relations with Italy, the Croats should be asked to place a proposal before the German and Italian high commands, which would be subject to further discussion.**

* "... We had a terrible experience in the II Zone, in which nine Italian divisions not only could not carry out the pacification, but the condition there became 100 percent worse and almost brought about the ruin of our administration and our economy... Where and when operations are to be carried out cannot be determined in advance en bloc but only in agreement with the Croatian Government... The whole police and administrative power [in the occupied areas] must remain in the hands of the Croats. If military administrative authorities are preferred, then we will militarize the civilian authorities and place them under the command of experienced Croatian officers... The operational troops of our allies who are committed outside of their demarcation line during the operations remain in those areas only as long as the Croats wish and no longer. The maintaining of the demarcation line is the question of life and death for the Croatian Government. [cursive added] The advance of the Italians on the Sava river would even lead to serious unrest in the region north of the Sava, and thereby threaten the whole economy..."(36)

** Weizsaecker also noted - quite appropriately - that Croats were present in Abbazia and could have suggested changes to the Protocol if they so desired; therefore, he thought that Germany should not insist on additional clauses (which were suggested by Kasche).

On 14 March Troll-Obergfell was given a verbal note by the NDH foreign ministry which formally stated earlier objections.* However, there is no record of any subsequent diplomatic action by Germany. Instead, both the OKW and the Italian Supreme Command approved the Abbazia Protocol in its original form by 17 March, whereby it became final.(41)

When Bader, Roatta and Laxa met in Ljubljana for final talks on 28 March, the Italians once again brought up the moot question of passage through Sarajevo, Croatian administration of the occupied zone, and the "disturbing question" of negotiations with the rebels.(42) At the very beginning of the conference Roatta startled all by saying that Vrancic had informed him that the NDH government intended to provide the Četniks in Herzegovina with weapons, in exchange for which they would fight against Communists and secure the border with Montenegro. Laxa somewhat red-facedly admitted that his government was indeed talking to insurgents, to which Roatta eagerly added that he therefore considered that the German and Italian authorities were also authorised to negotiate with them. He thus confirmed that as far as he was concerned, Article 10 of the Abbazia Protocol, which prohibited such negotiations, was void.

* Its thrust was contained in points 2, 3 and 4: "sovereignty and the exercise of sovereign rights by the Croatian state apparatus" were to be unaffected by operations; exercise of administration by the NDH apparatus was not to be prejudiced by the military actions; in the affected areas the rebuilding of administration was to be carried out by Croatian administrative headquarters, and relieved by regular civil administration as soon as possible.(40)

The Ustašas allowed themselves to be very effectively embarrassed by Roatta, who had in fact arranged the meeting between Četnik spokesmen and Vrančić.* The whole German strategy appeared in ^ashambles again, just a little over two weeks before the planned beginning of "Trio": instead of unity of purpose and policy there was disagreement; instead of a division of military tasks from political issues the two were more intertwined than ever. On 30 March, obviously in some despair, Kuntze telegraphed Rintelen in Rome, asking his intervention with Cavallero to stop Roatta's plans, "to avoid endangering the success of the joint operation".(44) He alerted the OKW three days later, but - significantly - instead of seeking a ban on Roatta's negotiations with the non-Communist rebels, Kuntze stated:

"Should General Roatta adhere to his decision, which he considers tactically absolutely necessary, then Combat Group Rader must also be empowered to negotiate with the national Serb bands, otherwise the Roatta plan would be endangered..."(45) [cursive added]

This seemed to be an attempt by Kuntze to obtain clearance from Berlin for something he had secretly wanted to do anyway, but could not (especially after the way the Dangić affair had ended). The reply from Berlin, however, was predictable: no negotiations with "the bands", regardless of their colouring.(46) Similar instructions were passed on from the Com^uando Supremo in Rome.(47) In the event, neither Roatta seemed to regard them as binding, nor ^{did} his German colleagues expect that he would.

* A few days earlier, Vrančić was appointed administrative commissar attached to the Second Army. While still in Zagreb he unexpectedly received invitation for talks from Dobroslav Jevdjević, a leading Četnik personality from Herzegovina. Since Jevdjević's close relationship with the Italians was common knowledge, Vrančić went to Sušak and informed Roatta of the invitation; the latter apparently expected this, and offered to arrange a meeting already the following day in Split. Roatta even provided his airplane to Vrančić, and the meeting took place in General Dalmazzo's headquarters. In the event, the meeting was not productive; Roatta undoubtedly dramatised its implications in order to discredit the Croats and also to score points for his intention to continue the existing policy towards the Četniks.(43)

In the end, there was no "Trio"; at best, there was a "Duo". Roatta kept postponing the planned commencement date, complaining of transport difficulties (the threat of submarines in the Adriatic), of climate ("deep snow in several regions of north Herzegovina"), or of the inadequacy of roads and railroads leading to the take-off area.(46) Exasperated, Bader decided to go it alone. He exploited an unexpected advance by two Ustaša battalions under Lt.Col. Francetić in the region of Rogatica-Srebrenica (8-11 April) and ordered 718. German division into action on 14 April, without waiting for the Italians. A week later Bader reported: "Joint German-Italian operation miscarried due to the absence of Italians... A subsequent fitting in of Italian forces no longer possible."(47)

By the time his "Combat Group Bader" was dissolved on 28 May, its combing operations had been completed with a mixed success: while it was possible for German-Croatian units to penetrate eastern Bosnia (with Francetić's "Black Legion" indulging in the customary orgy of slaughter in the process), most Partisan units managed to escape south, towards Sanjak and the area of the Italian zone where Bosnia, Herzegovina and Montenegro meet. Dangić and a large number of his men were taken prisoner.

The ensuing anti-Partisan operation in the region of Banja Luka (Kozara mountain, June-July), was also a purely German affair with Croatian support. Roatta was obviously not interested in shedding ^{the} blood of the Second Army* unless he could be assured of tangible political gains. Contemporary German military documents indicate that on the Wehrmacht side there was no doubt of this: "A political aim, the occupation of Sarajevo and east Bosnia, was probably the motive of their tactics".(48)

* By the decision of the Italian Supreme Command of 9 May 1942, the Second Army had its name changed to Comando Superiore Forze Armate Slovenia - Dalmazia, abbreviated: Supersloda.

5. Roatta's Retreat from Zone 3

With their confidence in their chief ally badly shaken, the Germans were in for another unpleasant surprise in June and July 1942. General Roatta withdrew from most of Zone 3 and parts of Zone 2 in a hasty manner, and thus created^a virtual power vacuum in a large corridor from Bosanska Krajina in the north-west to Sanjak in the south-east. With the war in Russia and North Africa entering the decisive phase, Ambrosio's motives for reoccupation of a year earlier were apparently outweighed by the need for Roatta to save his force fairly intact, and have it at hand - if need be - for more serious business than a seemingly endless game of bloody hide-and seek in the Dinaric wilderness.

The Ustaša government was delighted by Roatta's sudden readiness to give them back a foothold south of the demarcation line.(49) On 19 June 1942 an agreement was signed in Zagreb by Pavelić and Roatta, which provided for the return of Croatian civilian administration, although with some limitations in places where the Italians still remained.(50) Pavelić was even ready to swallow the undoubtedly bitter pill of legalising Četniks under Italian patronage, under the label of "anti-Communist armed groups".* The Italians also promised to give timely notice of the intention to leave certain places. The key limitation stated that local Italian commands could veto larger actions by the NDH security forces.

* The key provisions of Section 5 of the Agreement read:

"A: In 2. and 3. Zones, the establishment of organised "anti-Communist armed groups" will be continued under the supervision of Italian military authorities, or under the supervision of Croatian military or civilian authorities, or under joint supervision. Such groups, whose formation is currently satisfactorily under way, may be mobile or charged with local defence, and will be composed of reliable elements."

Paragraph B provided that those groups [in Italian "banda", with a different meaning to the German usage of "Bande"] were to respect the sovereignty of the NDH, while paragraph C provided for their subordination to the Italian military wherever Italian units were present.

Apparently, neither Pavelić nor his aides involved in preparing the agreement (government minister Vladko Košak and the representative with Supersloda, Vrančić) suspected that the deal was too good to be true. In reality, the NDH forces were hardly able to cope with the insurgency north of the demarcation line (where they could also rely on the Germans who did not shun action). Garrisoning large additional areas would have been a challenge even under relatively peaceful conditions. While ostensibly presenting Pavelić with a "gift", Roatta was contributing - consciously or not - to yet further destabilisation of the NDH.

This danger was not lost on the Germans; the OKW was first alerted to the dangers inherent in Roatta's plan only three days after the signing of the agreement in Zagreb.(51) On 2 July a new warning came from Salonika that it would be difficult to establish cooperation between "national Serb bands" and Croats, and that clashes were unavoidable. Since the Croats were equal neither to the "national Serbs" nor to the Communists, the area evacuated by the Italians would become "a continuous insurgent centre".(52) In his report, Kuntze also expressed concern for the crucial bauxite mines near Mostar, and ended on an exasperated note with the hope that - after the suppression of insurgents in Bosnia - there was not going to be yet another flare-up, now in the Italian-evacuated area.

That this was an idle hope was confirmed already on 4 July, when Partisans attacked several points on the railroad connecting Sarajevo with Mostar. Besides, in many places (eg. Bihać, Ključ, Bosanski Petrovac, Drvar, Glamoč, Kupres, Livno, Prozor etc) the ^{Italian} withdrawal occurred without prior notification to the Croats, enabling the Partisans to take advantage of the situation. This prompted some Germans to suspect deliberate Italian policy of creating difficulties for Pavelić's government.(52)

With unconcealed alarm, the Germans registered ^{the} steady advance of Tito's "proletarian brigades", battle-hardened shock units several thousand strong, along the newly vacated corridor just south of the demarcation line.(53) Such alarm was justified, because this "long march" of Tito's units gave a new impetus to the Partisan activity throughout the evacuated area. It enabled Tito in the second half of 1942 to establish sizeable territory under his control, to recruit new men, and to recover from the crisis-ridden months of the previous winter and spring.

The main benefactors of Roatta's partial retreat to the coastal belt were the Partisans. Pressured from all sides, they surged in the direction of least resistance. Had Italian garrisons remained, it is doubtful that Tito's penetration of the corridor to western Bosnia would have been accomplished so successfully and swiftly. Being outside German reach had become an obvious prerequisite for Tito's survival, but avoiding combat with entrenched Italian garrisons was also a must, as was amply proven in Pljevlja in December 1941. Italian soldiers often did not have their heart in the long offensive operations, away from their barracks, but they were tenacious defenders of fortified positions. Numerous and well publicised cases of Partisan atrocities over Italian prisoners in Montenegro certainly provided additional motivation. The Partisans were an unusually audacious and resolute force, but it was mainly in combat with the regular NDH units (unsupported by the Germans) that they could expect to maintain an upper hand even when outnumbered.*

* For all their post-war myth-making and attempts to denigrate ^{the} fighting qualities of the Italians, it is a matter of historical record that the Second Army/Supersloda always managed to retain control over areas which it deemed essential.(54) In all the key points in the Italian-held area and in important urban centres, from Ljubljana, Karlovac, Knin, Šibenik and Split to Dubrovnik, Mostar, Kotor, Podgorica and Cetinje, this control remained firm until September 1943; also the coastal road along the Adriatic, the Rijeka-Ogulin-Split and Mostar-Dubrovnik-Zelenika railroads remained in Italian hands throughout.

6. The Četnik Dilemma

The salient feature of Italian occupation policy was its support of the Serbs and its tolerance (gradually turning into patronage) of their armed groups broadly known as Četniks. While the Supreme Command and even the Second Army headquarters nevertheless expressed occasional suspicions of them, the Sixth Corps Commander, General Dalmazzo, was an enthusiastic supporter of the policy in his area (Dubrovnik and Herzegovina) which would split the insurgents and make Četniks part of the solution, rather than part of the problem of occupation.

Increasingly hostile to the Ustaša régime and jealous of the Germans, and yet unable to devise a *modus vivendi* with the intransigent Communists, Italian commanders were sometimes guilty of reading too much into the Serb nationalist movement, seeing more strength, discipline and leadership than was justified. They also expected that by establishing a relationship based on dependence (on arms and supplies) they could contain the Četniks' anti-Croat and anti-Muslim revanchism, and turn them primarily into an effective anti-Communist force. While in the summer of 1941 the goal was to reassure Serb insurgents and make them lay down their arms and go home, a year later the objective was to strengthen them for deployment against Tito's men.

Finally, by building up credibility of local leaders such as Jevdjević, Djujić, Samardžić and Trifunović-Birčanin, the Italians wanted to increase their stature among their rank and file, and thus prevent any attempt by Mihailović to bring them to heel. Mihailović was seen as an enemy by the Italians, who offered half a million lire for his capture and carried out the last operation directed specifically against his units as late as June 1943, only weeks before Mussolini's fall.(55) He avoided any direct contact, although the British were encouraging him to be in touch with the Italians, and to take advantage of their possible withdrawal, collapse or surrender.(56)

On the whole, however, both sides seemed keen to avoid clashes; Mihailović operated mainly outside the Italian zone in 1941-1942 anyway. The semantic confusion over the term "Četnik" was especially helpful to Partisan propagandists, determined to demolish the "Mihailović myth" at home and abroad: they could point at the thousands of bearded armed men with royalist cockades, ostensibly indistinguishable from their Ravna Gora compatriots, fraternising with Italian soldiers all over Herzegovina and northern Dalmatia.

The departure of Italian troops from large areas of their zone of occupation in the summer of 1942 was accompanied by Pavelić's undertaking to recognise those very units which had been vilified by the Ustašas for a year as the source of all evil in the NDH. The Germans certainly regarded any Croatian-Četnik detente as impossible, but for a brief while in the summer of 1942, and in some areas, it appeared to be in both sides' interest to try and reach an agreement.

The first ranking Ustaša official to establish direct contact with senior Četnik representatives was Vjekoslav Vrančić, but his meeting with Jevdjević and Grdjić in Split was unsuccessful (see above, p. 292). The whole thing was probably organised by Roatta to compromise and embarrass the Croats on the eve of final discussions in Ljubljana about "Trio"; but Vrančić at least indicated some willingness of Zagreb to restore the Serbs' religious and property rights.

By early April there were rumours that Pavelić was thinking of creating a "Croatian Orthodox Church", and that, besides the three options with regard to the Serb population until then (killing, converting to Roman Catholicism or expelling), he was prepared to experiment with the fourth: to label the Serbs in the NDH "Orthodox Croats". (57)

At the end of April a local Serb commander in western Bosnia, Uroš Drenović, non-Communist but definitely non-collaborationist until that time, established contact with the Domobrans in the area of Varcar Vakuf. The Partisans from Drvar had started hunting him and his men down with superior forces, and the Croatian garrison was also hard pressed. The result was a remarkable agreement between the two perennial adversaries signed on 27 April 1942.(58) It was in effect an armistice which not only recognised religious and civil rights of local Serbs, but also legalised Drenović and his men, and even limited access of NDH units to the area held by his battalion "Petar Kočić". The Serbs in return recognised the sovereignty of the NDH and agreed to a common anti-Partisan struggle. This agreement was sanctioned by the NDH Armed Forces Ministry, and approvingly referred to by Glaise.(59)

As if waiting for the cue, all over Bosnia local Četnik commanders and NDH representatives entered negotiations and signed agreements similar to the one reached by Drenović.* The salient feature of all ^{this} was that the NDH government formally recognised the Četniks as a legal entity, and thus in effect acknowledged further erosion of its sovereignty. To both sides it was undoubtedly clear that this was a temporary expedient.

* After Drenović, similar agreements were signed by:

- Lazar Tešanović, commander of Četnik battalion "Mrkonjić", on 23 May;
- the commander of Četnik detachments of the Ozren and Trebava mountains, on 28 May in the village of Lipac;
- Radoslav Račić, commander of Četnik detachment "Borja", on 9 June in Banja Luka;
- also with Račić, for the area of Prnjavor, on 14 June;
- Borivoje Keserović, commander of the Četnik detachment in the Majevisa mountain, on 15 June in the village of Lopare; and by
- Radivoje Kosorić, for the area of eastern Bosnia, on 16 January 1943 in the village of Kovanje.(60)

The last of the above, Kosorić, managed to carry on his lonely struggle in the mountains around Pljevlja well into the 1950s. He was eventually killed by a booby-trapped radio. (Kosorić's niece to the author, 1983)

There was no love lost between the Četniks and the NDH officers then, before or after. However, in the multi-cornered war all things are possible (as the Partisans were to prove a year later on a much higher plane). With the proletarian brigades' "long march" in full swing, both Domobran units and Četnik detachments in their path were in a similar predicament. As may have been expected, however, enthusiasm for such agreements never existed among Ustaša units in the field, while Četniks also preferred to deal with the regular Croatian troops. Subsequently a broader agreement was concluded, which literally divided Bosnia into spheres of influence between the Četniks and the Croat state. It not only gave Četniks local autonomy and a guarantee that no Ustašas would bother them, but also obliged Croatian forces to provide them with supplies.(61)

Even so, actual joint anti-Partisan combat was extremely rare. The two sides preferred to get out of each other's way, and take advantage of even just a few weeks' respite. The fragility of the armistice was only emphasised by the news of fresh Ustaša atrocities in other parts of the NDH.* To an Ustaša, the very notion of "loyal Serb" was a contradiction in terms, and the spectacle of extensive treaties with them an insult.

* In the summer of 1942 Glaise deluged the OKW with fresh reports of anti-Serb atrocities, with hair-raising details. In the spring of 1942, on his own initiative, for the first time he ordered German units into action to disarm a company belonging to Francetić's "Black Legion" who were caught (literally) red-handed in a Serb village near Sarajevo.(62) To illustrate the tone of Glaise's reports, it is worth giving an extensive quote about a camp near Slavonska Požega:

"The commander of this K.L. is the former Catholic priest, and now famous Ustaša Klajić... On 27 August [1942] 378 Serbs from Bosnia were brought and put into a barrack. They were tortured en route and covered in blood. From some higher authority an order came to kill 20 among them each day... The others were beaten by the Ustašas every day for no reason with rifle butts. Each day twenty men were taken out. Ten were killed with clubs, while the other ten had to dig graves, throw bodies into them, and lay down themselves, to be shot. During a regular round of torture, one prisoner tried to grab the torturer's rifle. When Klajić was told of this, he ordered that all prisoners be machine-gunned with dum-dum bullets. Firing went on for an hour. The spectacle afterwards cannot be described. The walls were covered with blood, and pieces of flesh and spilt brains hanged from them, with mutilated bodies on the floor..."(63)

As the unhappy year 1942 went on, the occupation system established in Yugoslavia after April 1941 was in tatters. Most of the NDH was in a state of utter chaos, with the effective Ustaša authority reduced to less than half its territory. German attempts to devise a common military strategy had failed, due to Italian unwillingness to fight a war on German terms for the sake of the Ustašas who had caused it in the first place. Italian attempts to maintain peace in their occupation zone had also failed, although this failure became glaringly obvious only with the push of Tito's brigades from the south-east. The myriad of "Četnik" units throughout the NDH had failed to consolidate themselves as a viable military force in their own right, and had to rely on the Italians for arms and supplies in Zones 2 and 3, or to negotiate with the detested NDH north of the demarcation line. Mihailović - virtually troopless after the defeat in Serbia - had failed to bring under his centralised command, and for a long time did not even know who was who among the Serb units and commanders in the NDH. Even later, he was recognised as their leader only nominally, while local war leaders went on doing as they (or the Italians) pleased, and hoping for a British landing. The Ustašas had failed to exterminate the Serbs and to quell the unrest even locally without German support. They had failed to consolidate the state, which looked less "independent", less "state-like" and less "Croatian" every day. On the eve of Stalingrad and El Alamein the role of the Ustašas in European politics was, as usual, marginal. At best, with their irrational and bloody policy they helped create a minor nuisance for Hitler and a focus of added interest for the British and the Soviets, in the form of Tito's Partisans. And yes, the Partisans were the only ones who could say, by the end of the summer of '42, that they were not doing too badly under the circumstances.

XII - GERMANY TAKES THE INITIATIVE

1. Longer-Term Plans in Croatia

As 1942 was drawing to its close, Germany was beginning to play an ever increasing role in Croatian military and political affairs. This was happening almost by default, as a result of internal developments in the NDH (growing insurgency) and external threats, which for the first time included the possibility of an Allied landing on the Adriatic coast. In the process the Germans made a mockery of Italian claims to precedence in the NDH. This did not happen as a result of any elaborate design, but more or less *incrementally*, "spontaneously". There was no German master plan, in the Balkans or beyond, for the post-war New Order.

Contrary to the initially accepted post-war wisdom, which tended to read in all of Hitler's actions a systematic premeditated quest for hegemony in Europe or even world domination, more recent evidence suggests that his notions of "global power" and "eastern empire" should be taken as metaphors or "utopian figures of speech".(1) As the war went on, various expanding German organisations, from the SS to certain segments of the foreign ministry or the economic ministry's Suedosteuropa-Gesellschaft (SOEG), embarked on the drafting of projects. Post-war planning was a major theme in various key elements of the Nazi power structure; but all they had in common was only a vague notion of the "rings" of control, radiating from the centre and mainly extending east- and southeastwards.*

* Sometimes piecemeal projects caught Hitler's imagination. One such was to turn the city of Belgrade and the area around it into a "Reich fortress", from which all Serbs would be removed and German settlers brought in.(2) Already in April 1941 a top secret Wilhelmstrasse memorandum pointed out the strategic importance of Belgrade, whose possession would "secure the Reich from Asiatic and Slav peoples". Other projects envisaged extending the area to be annexed to the copper mine in Bor (in eastern Serbia) and to the Iron Gate on the Danube, or establishing direct control over the entire Danubian basin.

When discussing German plans it is important to stress that none of them had ever attained the status of official policy. The ultimate arbiter of all such plans was to be Hitler, a man of inconsistent ideas and unsystematic approach to their execution. He had only held steadfastly to a hard core of principles, which were the pivotal point for a wide array of possible final outcomes. Competing ideas and designs for a New Order only had to fit into the Fuehrer's overall framework, which was in any event beyond dispute. Within that framework one could encounter rather moderate and relatively sensible ideas which allowed for a degree of "partnership" with the states which fought on the side of Germany.(3) More common were some brutally frank ravings about the Herrenvolk and military-style colonisation of the East, emanating from the circles of Rosenberg's foreign department of the party and Himmler's SS.*

Sometimes the tension between different visions of the future held by different German agencies came to the fore in a blatant manner. The Slovak minister in Berlin recalled a characteristic episode which occurred at a dinner hosted by him.(5) A young German officer, an "intellectual", got up, rather drunk, and delivered an impromptu oration about his exploits on the Russian front from which he had just returned. He enthused about the destruction of the "Slav Untermaensch" and the imminent realization by the German Reich of the "holy and eternal laws of Life, desecrated by Christians, Jews and Slavs".**

* Croatian minister Benzon's Berlin friends included a group of "SS intellectuals", among whom the most prominent was Brigadefuehrer Walter Stahlecker. These people openly talked of conquering the world.(4) They spoke of "half a billion Germans by the year 2,000", and talked of Germanising smaller nations (Croats, as "Goths", naturally included) in a matter-of-fact manner.

** The speaker was abruptly cut short by a high-ranking official from the ministry of propaganda who was present. He took the officer away from the table and then proceeded to assure the horrified Slovak minister and other guests that the Reich was going to create a New Order in which each European nation would have its function and its place according to merit.

As far as can be deduced from Hitler's ad hoc and fragmentary comments, neither Croatia nor Slovakia were included in the "first ring" of German power.* This area, under direct German administration, comprised the Greater Reich, the annexed and acquired areas (to include the Channel coast of France, the Czech Protectorate, Serbia, the General Government of Poland), the entire Danube valley (with the status of Hungary very much a moot point) and "the eastern territories".(7) Beyond was the loosely defined "second ring":

"Between this iron core of the enlarged Reich and a type of Militaergrenze guarding the approaches to the Grossraum lay the parts of Europe that could not escape German domination but would not feel the Reich's control as directly as the East or the protectorate. These states would be serflike (hoerig) components of the New Europe. In this same vein yet a third gradation of German control... consisted of Italy and her group of satellites. It is readily apparent that such an arrangement would not affect the Reich's position in its plenitude of ultimate power to control the affairs of the New Europe; the Italian sphere would exist only at the sufferance of the Reich."(8)

The implications of such ^aview were not lost on various German military and civilian officials further down the line. It explains the gap between often-repeated professions of Italian "primacy" in the NDH, and the way it was simultaneously disregarded and undermined in practice.

* Only later in ^{the}war Hitler stated talking of the need to abolish the small states of Europe altogether.(6) In the post-Stalingrad period his views were growing more extreme just as his power to see them through decreased.

2. Economic Penetration

In relation to Croatia the most specific aspects of German "New Order" planning - which were also partly translated into current policy decisions before the war was over - concerned economics. German economic domination in the Balkans, largely well established even before the war broke out, was regarded in Berlin as sine qua non REGARDLESS of the final shape of future "New Order" arrangements. Italian zone of interest or not, the NDH was treated as an integral part of the "South-East" by the economic experts of the foreign ministry and of the ministry of economics, including specialised agencies (especially the SOEB). This stemmed from Goering's specific instructions, which he issued as head of the Four Year Plan in the summer of 1940, that preliminary plans should be drawn to establish an all-continental economic system (Grossraumwirtschaft) under German leadership.(9)

The subsequent fall of Yugoslavia changed little in the applicability of these principles to the Southeast, which had found a practical model in the German-Romanian economic treaty of 1939 (the Wohltat Pact). This treaty had been negotiated by an official whom Alfred Rosenberg approvingly described as a man who really understood National-Socialist economic principles.(10) The economic development of each state in the Southeast was to be restricted to the sectors in which Germany had a particular interest, such as agricultural products, exploitation of mineral wealth and energy resources. Gearing these countries' primary and semiprocessed goods to the German market would also make them irreversibly dependent upon Germany for most manufactured and finished goods.

Already on 16 May 1941 the Germans signed a "confidential protocol" with the NDH government, which was 100% in line with the above principles.(11) Bilateral committees were to be established, and their guidelines were as follows: special economic interests of the Reich would be taken into special account; the Reich was to enjoy the right of unlimited exploitation of industrial raw materials, above all ores, and would be given preference if new concessions were granted. Even before the signing of the Rome Agreements Croatia was on the way to becoming an economic satellite of Germany.

In carrying out their plans in the NDH so swiftly the Germans enjoyed two advantages: Mussolini had clumsily spoiled Ciano's and Casertano's plan to tie the NDH to Italy through a customs union, and German economic interests were granted extraordinary rights at the foreign ministers' meeting in Vienna in April 1941. Both instances were indicative of the more fundamental Italian problem: lack of policy. The Germans lacked a detailed master plan, but at least their individual agencies had an idea what overall direction they were taking. What was envisaged in Rome was not one all-continental Grossraum, but two separate albeit allied spheres. Each was supposed to be self-contained, with separate financial centres and currencies.(12) And yet, when it came to execution (as in the case of the NDH) the lack of coherence became obvious. Most of all, one is left with the feeling that the cult of power in its theatrical/martial sense had left Mussolini oblivious to the importance of subtler, more "boring" but deeper-penetrating devices.

It is most unlikely that Italy's claims to parity in the shaping of the New Order would be accepted by Germany in the long run, although an Italian sub-sphere in a Reich-dominated Europe could well have fitted into Hitler's broad picture. In either case, it is obvious that the Germans regarded the NDH as a "second ring" nation for economic purposes. Italian attempts to counter them were incoherent and ineffective.

The Italians established a permanent Italian-Croatian economic commission on the basis of Article 4 of the Rome Agreements. It was founded during a visit to Zagreb by the former finance minister and governor of Tripolis, Giuseppe Conte Volpi di Misurata, on 28-30 May 1941. Volpi subsequently headed the Italian side of the commission. His Croatian counterpart was Vladko Kořak, an economic expert who was regarded (together with Lorković) as one of the more capable men in Pavelić's largely mediocre team. The commission held three plenary meetings in 1941, in Rome (June), Venice (September), and Abbazia (November).

At the first meeting the Croats preempted any Italian pressure for closer customs and monetary links by a very narrow interpretation of Article 4 ("the two parties will establish strong and firm customs and monetary links"). A trade and payments agreement were signed, but its validity was only three months.(13) The subsequent two sessions were deliberately used by the Croatian side to present any meaningful economic cooperation as impossible because of General Ambrosio's policy in the extended occupation zone.(14) Subsequently, economic penetration of the NDH by Italy occurred only in the zone held by the Second Army, in an area vastly less developed than the other half.* Even that was a crude and unsystematic affair, which consisted mainly of exporting large quantities of timber, tobacco and foodstuffs across the non-existent customs boundary into Italy.**

* The key industries in the NDH were in Zagreb itself, in the central Bosnian basin Sarajevo-Zenica-Tuzla, and in the Sava river valley - all of them in the German zone. The most important resource in the Italian zone - bauxite - was also in German hands, in accordance with the Vienna agreement between Ribbentrop and Ciano.

** The chief beneficiaries of such^a situation were some of the more corrupt local Italian officials, such as the prefect of Fiume, Temistocle Testa, who made a small fortune on Croatian timber deals.(15)

By the spring of 1942 the Italians realised that their nominal predominance was bringing them few tangible economic benefits. This led to renewed pressure on Croats. When Pavelić's trade minister Dragutin Toth went to Rome in April, he was told by Volpi that "the demand for a customs union" had not been discarded in Rome.(16) Particularly irritating to the Italians were several German-Croatian joint monopolies, founded in the preceding months (most importantly for the manufacture of chemicals and explosives). The Croats were energetically told that the NDH belonged to the Italian greater economic zone; however, the meaning of this term was left vague, and Volpi's strong opening was not accompanied by a concrete set of specific proposals. In the end, everything boiled down to a demand that Zagreb should not sign any new far-reaching economic agreement without informing Rome first. Once again, the Italians applied verbal pressure which was not followed by any tangible gains.

Things looked a little more serious in July, when Košak was invited to come to Venice - alone, without technical staff - for "principled talks" with Volpi and foreign trade minister Riccardi on the long-term Italian-Croatian economic cooperation. Simultaneously a press campaign got under way in Italy, led by Virginio Gayda, which sought to show that the interests of "the dominant power" - that is Italy - in its Balkan sphere of influence ought to be respected above any other.(17)* Luca Pietromarchi of the Italian foreign ministry frankly warned Košak that all those articles were written at the instigation of his ministry, and that the Croats had better adopt a cooperative posture at the forthcoming meeting.

* In Giornale d'Italia one Marinelli wrote a series of articles about the allegedly slow work of the Italian-Croatian economic committee, which was supposedly not taking into account the fundamental economic interests of Italy. (18) Hrvatski narod on 15 August 1942 carried an article from the Italian monthly Gerarchia, which stated that it was decisive for the NDH "to entrust itself to the Italian might", which Pavelić had agreed to do anyway, and to "ensure the future and progress of his country by entering the Roman Imperial community".

Košak, evidently worried, asked Kasche (who happened to be in Berlin) to have a confidential talk with Claudius, the German economic strategy supremo, on the issue of Italian-Croatian economic relations. (19) This would, it was hoped in Zagreb, result in the latter's exercise of influence on his Italian colleagues to lower their demands.* The sequence was familiar: the Italians exercised pressure, the Croats sought to resist it by trying to involve the Germans.

Whereas in political matters Berlin was careful not to be drawn into the role of an arbiter, and especially not to be seen as supportive of Croatian demands, in economic issues such inhibitions were far less pertinent. This enabled Košak and Lorković to go to Rome in the second week of August apparently determined to resist. In his account of the talks, Lorković made it clear to Kasche that German quiet support and encouragement enabled the Croats to stand firm and turn the meeting into another inconclusive episode.(22) Košak was even emboldened to remark to Volpi that he had seen Italian press articles, but that he would never accept the drawing of Croatia into the spazio vitale.

After August 1942 there followed further tensions between Italy and Pavelić's government in the political and military sphere. In the key field of economy, however, the Italians lacked the strategy and effective means of ensuring a strong presence in Croatia, let alone domination. The unacknowledged but very real German preponderance in all areas of the NDH economy continued unchallenged until the end.

* Seeking encouragement and guidance, Košak and Lorković asked Berlin whether it would be wise to give way on the German-Croatian monopoly in chemicals, if such concession could stave off renewed Italian demands regarding customs union and currency reform.(20) A week later Košak repeated his request for advice and support, stressing that compared to German presence, Italian economic influence in the NDH was negligible.(21) Pavelić's minister asked that the whole matter be treated in strictest confidence, since "even the NDH government is not informed" of the problem.

3. German Generals and the NDH

By the early autumn of 1942 the Balkans had become a regular topic of discussion at the OKW. The growth of Tito's Partisans in the NDH was the chief cause of increased concern for an area which until that time was regarded as peripheral to the war effort. The existence of over one hundred thousand armed men under Communist command within speedy reach of the possible Allied landing points on the Adriatic was understandably regarded as intolerable. At the same time, events in the East and in northern Africa precluded engagement of sizeable German forces, which even with some reinforcements in 1942 only amounted to two and a half weak divisions in the whole of the NDH (718, 714. and parts of 717. division, all of them composed mainly of reservists in their late twenties and early thirties). The Dobrobranstvo was unreliable and undisciplined, and the imposition of German operational command over NDH units north of the demarcation line was seen as the necessary immediate remedy by an increasing number of German officials.* This was the clear message from the commanders in the field, and it was repeatedly echoed in Zagreb by Glaise, who suggested that all NDH units from the size of battalion upwards should be controlled by German local battle group commanders.(26)

* In the town of Livno, in the Italian zone, a group of about a dozen German civilians working for the company Hansa-Leichtmetall organised strong resistance when the Partisans attacked in August 1942. They were eventually overwhelmed, but engineer Hans Ott - the leader of the group - suggested to the Partisans that they should be exchanged for Tito's men held by the Ustašas. The proposal was accepted and the result was the first successful exchange of prisoners between the two sides.(23) In his subsequent report, Ott stated that most Croat soldiers ran away as soon as the attack had started. Some were forced back to their positions literally at gunpoint by the handful of Germans. Subsequently they were "quite useful" defenders but German determination and guidance was needed to make them so.(24)

More importantly, during the Kozara operation Brigadier General Stahl, who commanded the West Bosnian Combat Group, constantly had to intervene to prop up "the unsteady Croats", who were often "seized by panic", he reported to the OKW, to the point where "[t]wo Croatian battalions lost all their ammunition, all their machine guns and their whole equipment".(25)

All along, Glaise also maintained that a rational solution to the Serb problem was the political prerequisite without which no military answer was possible.(27)

The feeling among German soldiers was best illustrated by the Wehrmacht Commander Southeast, General Alexander Loehr's attitude.* Loehr very quickly came to share Glaise's views (which the latter frankly presented to his fellow Austrian). Already on 7 September Glaise presented to Pavelić Loehr's demand that, on top of their military prerogatives, German commanders in Croatia should also be able to exercise their authority over NDH civilian authorities.(29) However, for such action Loehr had not obtained prior political clearance from Berlin; Kasche and the foreign ministry cried murder, and Pavelić rejected it.(30) The reaction of Slavko Kvaternik on that occasion was particularly vehement, and strengthened Glaise's conviction that the "Marshal" would have to be replaced. By that time, the difference between the OKW and the Wilhelmstrasse in the treatment of Croatia had become obvious. Largely due to the reports supplied by Kasche, the foreign ministry tended to lend some credence to the view that the NDH was "life-capable", and the Ustašas "state-creating".**

* Loehr was unexpectedly appointed on 1 August 1942, and was very unhappy about it.(28) An ethnic German on his father's side, he was born in Romania, and baptised and brought up as an Eastern-Orthodox. He fluently spoke Serbian, Romanian and Hungarian. Loehr got his subaltern's star at the "factory-place" at Wiener Neustadt and fought in Serbia in 1914-15 with distinction (he was wounded four times). His officer career was continued in Austria after 1918, and at an advanced age of 48 he completed the pilot training school. Sympathetic to the Nazis from before the Anschluss, Loehr commanded the IV Luftwaffe fleet which bombarded Warsaw in 1939 and Belgrade in 1941.

** Besides, even if he was often forced to chastise Kasche for excessive pro-Ustaša sympathies, Ribbentrop was also eager to prevent military encroachment of what he regarded as his ministry's sphere of competence; only by insisting on the "sovereignty" of Croatia could he make a convincing case for its role in the area.

Barely six weeks after taking his post Loehr reported to Hitler and vented his views about the Ustašas in full. He said that "Croatian troops are disintegrating", that the officers were "reluctant to conduct joint operations with the Wehrmacht", and that "the Ustaša government itself is on the verge of chaos".(31) Loehr then came to the point, and expressed the view that the entire attitude to the Ustašas and Pavelić needed reexamination, especially since their crimes enabled the Partisans to grow strong.

All of this Hitler dismissed with a wave of the hand, and cynically remarked that the Ustašas should be allowed "to let their steam off" with the Serbs, that Pavelić was faithful to him, and that he did not want to be in the way of his none-too-numerous friends. Nevertheless, Loehr went back to Salonika hopeful that a stricter course with Pavelić was possible, and told Glaise that "the Fuehrer was leaning towards such views".

Glaise was less optimistic. All the same, when he heard that Pavelić was invited to visit Hitler in the second half of September he guessed that he would go too, and promptly drew up a list of issues that needed to be raised.(32) The key points were: fundamental reorganisation of the NDH armed forces (removal of Marshal Kvaternik, decisive German influence at all levels, "if necessary without [the Croats'] own general staff); and the removal of Eugen Kvaternik, followed by reorganisation and disciplining of the Ustaša militia with an obligatory German participation at all levels. Glaise's performance at the forthcoming meeting was especially important since Loehr's staff had informed him that he would be appointed commanding general of all German troops and services in Croatia, as well as all Croatian units in the German-held part of the country.(33)

4. Second Meeting Hitler-Pavelić

On 23 September 1942 Pavelić flew to Vinica, in the Ukraine, and visited Hitler at his operational headquarters there.* Having made the customary remark about his "political disinterestedness" in Croatia, Hitler emphasised the strategic importance he attached to the lines of communication to Greece. But then he said that Germany had a general interest in stabilising the regime in the NDH. In his view, it was the best guarantee against the resurgence of Yugoslav programmes by "young Serb fanatics" which would threaten to block - yet again - Germany's passage to the southeast. He also mentioned great economic interest of the Reich in Croatia, "which does not affect Italian interests at all".

Hitler concluded his introductory remarks by saying that he would gladly withdraw "the last German soldier" from the NDH only if the safety of crucial communications could be guaranteed. However, this was impossible also because of the need for German assistance in building up the NDH armed forces. Pavelić could only feel encouraged by such statements; for as long as Hitler talked of the need to support his regime, the Poglavnik could afford to overlook pressures from other sides (German generals et al). Pavelić seized on this opportunity and painted a rosy picture of successful pacification in areas

* The meeting was attended by Ribbentrop, Keitel, Kasche, Glaise, and the foreign ministry representative at Hitler's headquarters Hewel. The minutes were taken - as usual - by Paul Schmidt.(34) Also accompanying Pavelić (but not present at the meeting) were the chief of his military office Ferčević, Ustaša colonels Francetić and Prebeg (the latter was his aide-de-camp), his personal physician Dr Mile Budak (the nephew of the minister in Berlin) and his driver, warrant officer Reberničak.(35) Slavko Kvaternik, who was notably excluded from the entourage and whose star was on the rapid wane, thought that Pavelić intended to promote Francetić to the commander of Domobranstvo and therefore wanted to introduce him to Hitler.(36)

The Croats were told earlier that according to the latest ordinance foreign personalities were not to address Hitler any longer as "Hei~~tr~~ Reichskanzler", but by his title, which was "the Fuehrer". (It was not specified whether the actual form of address was to be "mein Fuehrer", but that was certainly the form used by Slavko Kvaternik already when he visited Hitler in July 1941.)

After the meeting at Vinica Pavelić flew to the front and met some of the Croat "legionnaires".(37)

under his control, while the remaining trouble spots, he alleged, were in the Italian zone. Well aware of Hitler's soft spot, he added that the Ustašas had also "evacuated" all Jews from the area under their control, but in the Italian zone they could not do so.

The rest of the conversation concerned almost exclusively military issues - how to fight insurgency, how to develop and improve the NDH armed forces, how to get Roatta to disarm "his" Četniks. That Germans would take into their hands full control over NDH troops was mentioned by Hitler almost as a matter of course.* The action against insurgents, he thought, was not energetic enough! There was no discussion of the fundamental political issues previously raised by Loehr and contained in the notes prepared by Glaise. More could not have been expected even from the otherwise very outspoken Glaise: to question the role of the Ustašas at that moment would have been tantamount to contradicting the Fuehrer.

Glaise was unhappy with such ^{an} outcome, but it appeared he would be given a chance to even the score somewhat when Hitler asked him to prepare a memorandum on the situation in Croatia, which - the Fuehrer said almost threateningly - had to be 100% reliable. True to form, Ribbentrop then intervened fearing that his ministry was being left out, and it was agreed that Glaise would prepare a military, and Kasche a political report; in the end it was decided that there would be only one, joint document.

When he saw which way things were moving, Glaise decided to have as little to do with the project as possible. The memorandum for Hitler was written by Kasche, with Glaise in the role of a consultant.(38)

* "For as long as German divisions are taking part in combat in the area of Croatia, noone can expect that the leadership will be in any but German hands, since Germany - in line with its martial traditions and great experience - is best equipped for the leadership role, to the benefit of all... That it should take military leadership in Europe makes him [Hitler] almost somewhat embarrassed..."

The end-product embodied the Kasche view of Croatian affairs. Its key line was that in the interest of the successful conduct of the war Pavelić's government should be supported and "everything should be done to secure that the population follow and respect it".(39) A touch of Glaise was detectable only in the acknowledgement that the Ustašas were "filled with a blind destructive will against real and imagined enemies of the state, above all Serbs, and have carried out excesses which, due to their unruliness and lack of any restraint, have seriously shaken the development of the state and the confidence of the people".

However, the thumb of Kasche was evidently there too, and the paragraph continued: "Nevertheless, on the Ustaša side there are active forces without which no Croatian cooperation can be imagined... It is in the joint interest of the war effort to help the Ustašas' positive forces, and uproot the destructive ones. Therefore, it is necessary to cultivate the relationship with the Ustašas and assist them to attain this objective".* Obviously, Kasche was completely missing the point. In the autumn of 1942 he could still not perceive Pavelić and his movement as a (major) part of the German problem. This he would not do until the bitter end. Hitler's demand for "one hundred percent objectivity" was defeated by a victory, in this particular round, of the Auswaertiges Amt over the Wehrmacht.

* However, even Kasche felt that Hitler went too far in advocating ever more rigorous anti-insurgency measures. In a letter to Weizsaecker he said that even as it was those measures exceed all limits: "Slaughters of women and children, atrocities which even Russian Bolsheviks would not be able to beat, are a regular occurrence here on both sides. The Croats themselves think that more than half a million Orthodox have been expelled or liquidated in battle.[sic!]"(40)

. Even in its watered-down version, the memorandum for Hitler resulted in an unusual note from the German legation in Zagreb to Pavelić - a note which would not have been possible had it not been approved from the highest authority. (41) It was the only official German government statement to Pavelić about Ustaša excesses until that time.* It was also the last time that Kasche had to lend his name to such undertaking. The Ustaša practice did not change to any significant degree as its result, and the discrepancy between Kasche's views and those of practically all other German ranking civilian and military men in the Balkans subsequently grew deeper.

* The document had four key points:

"1. German military instances and the Legation have pointed out on several occasions in the past that the Ustaša militia is partly unusable for planned military operations because of the lack of military rearing and discipline. Proposals to create military courts and carry out decisive purge to establish discipline and thus to improve the ability of those units have been applied in the [regular] armed forces, but not in the Ustaša ranks. (Several such instances are quoted in Appendix 1).

2. German military instances and the Legation have often stressed that the struggle against insurgent bands has to be not only unsuccessful, but even conducive to a further spread of insurgency, due to the methods of Croatian, primarily Ustaša units. The issue is that those units are not fighting against insurgent bands, but against villages and peaceful population. Since other peaceful inhabitants thus reach conclusion that it is more dangerous to stay at home than join the insurgents in the forests, the bands gain new reinforcements, while villages and fields, on which the survival of the state and its food depend, remain ruined. (Several key cases listed in Appendix 2.)

3. On the basis of an agreement with the Government, the Legation has forwarded several requests for information to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the NDH and other bodies, but it has received no reply, or it was insufficient. Appendix 3 lists such instances.)

4. The NDH Government has placed at the disposal of the Reich 150,000 workers... Last spring Marshal Kvaternik promised to make available Orthodox refugees from evacuated villages as labour. They were partly recruited, but the action was frustrated because of the lack of a transit camp for them. Attempts with the existing camps were unsuccessful, because Ustaša authorities kept bringing new men of their own accord into them, and refused to provide food. Therefore the impression was gradually created that those camps are to be used only for the systematic destruction of their inmates. This is, however, a grave danger to a modern state's survival. Destroying a man destroys labour force and the readiness to work in an ever wider circle. This causes immediate damage to the state and with today's military situation can hardly be justified.

Finally, the Legation notes with indignation that in recent months there have been numerous reports that Ustaša instances which carry out violent measures in the field often claim that their action was ordered or requested by Germany."

5. Wehrmacht Takes Command

After Pavelić's meeting with Hitler at Vinica, German military commanders in the Balkans gathered to lick their wounds on 31 October 1942 at Loehr's headquarters. (42) Glaise's introductory remarks, which were derogatory of Pavelić in the extreme, stated that he was insincere to the Germans and no longer on top of the situation. Loehr said gloomily that the Fuehrer "for the time being" was not contemplating Pavelić's removal.* Therefore, something had to be done to improve the situation under the existing, Ustaša government. General Bader said the Germans' predicament was in that after a year of action they could not see any tangible result of their activity. In spite of Loehr's resigned remark about Hitler's pro-Ustaša course, he repeated the standard view of the generals, that military means alone were inadequate for the task, and that a change of course in Zagreb was required. It was agreed that the best they could do was to subject Croatian military units to an ever stricter German control: by preventing their autonomous action, putting them under German command when action was approved, and eventually even inspecting their combat readiness at the barracks.

* By this time Glaise had been appointed "plenipotentiary German general in Zagreb", with the rank of a commanding general and the authority of a military district commander. General Rudolf Lueters became the commander of German units in Croatia, with headquarters in Slavonski Brod, half way between Zagreb and Belgrade. This was another concession which Pavelić obtained from Hitler at their meeting in the Ukraine; for a year he had been complaining that German units in the NDH were subordinated to the command in Belgrade, which "fed Yugoslav memories". He therefore asked Hitler to establish a separate command for German units in Croatia. Hitler strongly agreed and added that for this very reason he had separated German commands in Belgium and the Netherlands.

At first it seemed that Glaise would get the command over German units, and Loehr submitted a formal proposal to such effect (while Roatta even rushed to congratulate his "dear colleague" in writing). However, Glaise did his best to avoid this appointment, saying that he had not had any operational experience since 1918. The final solution well pleased Glaise: he retained responsibility for all political, economic and managerial-technical issues concerning the German military in the NDH, while Lueters had to cope with the ugly business of actually fighting a war which Glaise regarded as unwinnable under the circumstances. (He often referred to the Partisans as "poor devils" - arme Teufel - who, far from being Communists, were forced into the hills; in this Glaise was essentially right.)

Determined to make the best of a poor deal, the generals proceeded to secure not only greater control over Croatian units, but also increased drafting of Croats into "Legionnaire" regiments which would be officered by Germans and formationally part of the Wehrmacht. When Pavelić's finance minister Košak was in Berlin he asked for fresh deliveries of arms and for lines of credit to finance such purchases.*(43) The OKW told the foreign ministry that no such deliveries were possible, but at the same time it expressed readiness to equip and supply 40,000 Croats who would be drafted into German ranks. Košak agreed to this! The outcome unsurprisingly "caused some disappointment in Zagreb".(44)

When on 2 February 1943 Glaise presented Pavelić with the new OKW line on the recruitment of Croats for three German legionnaire divisions, Pavelić only requested that the men wear Croatian uniforms!(45) It was also envisaged that even those newly created units which would remain part of the NDH armed forces (two brigades of two regiments each) would be subordinated to the Germans for training and use.** But the main success for the OKW line was contained in the Fuehrer's Instruction No.47 of 28 December 1942 for the conduct of war in the southeast (47), which prepared the ground for the biggest anti-Partisan action of the whole war.

The Instruction stated that the situation in the Mediterranean (Rommel's retreat and the Allied landing in North Africa) increased the danger of an attack on Crete, on German strongholds in the Aegean and on the Balkan Peninsula. It had to be expected that in such case the attack would be supported by insurgents in "western Balkan states".[sic!]

* Košak presented a memorandum from the NDH general staff, with a request for 70,000 rifles, 5,000 machine guns, 2,000 mortars and a number of guns.

** Another victory for Glaise's views was a reorganisation of the NDH administrative and command structure. The ministry of Domobranstvo was abolished, and on 21 January 1943 the armed forces ministry was created in its stead (Ministarstvo oružanih snaga, MINORS). It was to be responsible for Domobranstvo, Ustaša militia (except for Pavelić's bodyguard units, PTS), air force and gendarmerie (oružništvo). (46)

Hitler therefore entrusted the armed forces commander southeast, who had under his command Army Group "E", to do three things: 1. prepare defence with the focus on Dodecanese, Crete and Peloponnesus; 2. finally pacify the rear and destroy bands of all kinds in cooperation with the Italian second army; and 3. prepare for all eventualities should Turkey be drawn into war.

The fourth paragraph of Hitler's instruction gave Loehr all authority of a territorial commander in the parts of Croatia, Serbia and Greece possessed by German units; those were the areas of operations and Loehr was to exercise "executive authority" in them through subordinate commanders. Significantly, "[t]he parts of Croatia held by German units, or in which German units operate, are also to be treated as areas of operations". The OKW duly (and one suspects gleefully) informed Ambassador Ritter, Ribbentrop's liaison officer, that for the duration of military operations in Croatia all authority would pass to the German forces' commander.(48) He was asked to pass the news "cautiously" on to the Croats, and to obtain their agreement for the same principle to apply in any future operations.

Ritter passed the news to Kasche the following day.(49) Kasche was told that the forthcoming military action had to be kept strictly secret, and therefore neither he nor the Croats could be told any details at that time. He was then informed of the decision concerning German military authority in the area of operations. The telegram offered a rather thin sugar coating for Pavelić: Loehr would "always inform the military leadership of the NDH in good time about the area of planned operations and the time of their execution".

Kasche was obviously reluctant to be the bearer of bad tidings to Pavelić, and avoided it altogether because Glaise also received similar instruction at the same time, and wasted no time in going to Pavelić with the news.(50) Instead, the German minister - apparently oblivious that the source of the instruction was Hitler himself - proceeded to question its wisdom. In short, Kasche was arguing the case for the sovereignty of the Croatian state, "which we have recognised and had to reckon with all the initial difficulties".* He concluded his long telegram with a plea for the continuation of the old system of Croatian (civilian) administrative authority in the zone of operations, in conjunction with German military commanders who would have NDH liaison "commissars" attached to their staffs.

But this time Kasche's remained a lonely voice. The generals had won the day: they could get on with anti-insurgency preparations assured that their work - at least for the duration of operations - would not be undermined by the meddling Ustašas following in their wake. By having their armed forces finally brought under formal as well as real German control and their territory under German commanders' jurisdiction, the Ustašas lost some of the few remaining vestiges of NDH sovereignty.

* Kasche presented in rosy terms past cooperation between German units on the ground and NDH civilian representatives attached to them; the lack of lasting success he ascribed to other factors than the weaknesses of the NDH civilian authorities: "If one were to deny cooperation to the Croatian civilian authorities now, that would mean the Germans were denying their past contribution and releasing Croats from political responsibility. That would confirm enemy propaganda and justify Italian political demands".

Ten days later Kasche was reduced to pleading for the acceptance of Pavelić's suggestions "which would create the optical impression that the NDH is an equal partner in cooperation with the Germans and the bearer of sovereignty".(51)

6. Planning for Weiss

The combined operation against Tito's Partisans in the NDH, known as Plan Weiss, was the most serious and determined anti-insurgency drive in the Yugoslav lands during World War II. It was carried out on Hitler's personal initiative in response to the new strategic realities in the Mediterranean. The guiding principles for the action were supposedly agreed between Germany and Italy during Hitler's meetings with Ciano and Cavallero on 18-20 December 1942.(52) In the preliminary round of talks with Ciano, following Hitler's strategic review, Goering stated that Pavelić was weak, but he was "still a man of the Axis" and therefore they had to help him - although they did not need to make any great concessions. Hitler added that Pavelić alone was able to prevent the NDH from becoming Communist and pan-Slav, which would be a catastrophe. Under the circumstances there was no alternative to destroying all Četniks and dealing with the bands in the most brutal manner possible.*

The following day Ribbentrop spoke to Ciano. The foreign minister of the Reich said that the Croats occasionally tried to play Germans against Italians, but added that he would have none of it: personally he always advised them to resolve their problems directly with Ciano. Turning to the insurgency in the NDH, Ribbentrop spoke as if Mihailović and the Četniks were the only real threat: it was crucial to prevent him from establishing roots in Croatia. The real enemy, to Ribbentrop, were the Serbs with whom Roatta was making deals - they were more dangerous than the Communists against whom Roatta wanted to use those nationalists.

During the second session with Ciano, to which Keitel and Cavallero were also invited, Ribbentrop made renewed anti-Serb and anti-Četnik statements, and said that the Italians' cooperation with them had to stop.

* Hitler mentioned only the Četniks, but from the gist of his statements it is obvious that he meant all insurgents, including the Partisans. According to Glaise, for a long time he remained convinced that there was no great difference between the two, as both were Serbs who fought for "the Greater Serbian idea".(53)

Roatta was constantly attacked on this score. Cavallero agreed in principle, but added that the German commander of the operation (Loehr) would need to come to Rome for a joint drawing up of plans.* At the final session Hitler reiterated that he had "no political interest in Croatia" - he had met Pavelić only twice, and had purely formal talks with him. But Pavelić's régime had to opt for Germany and Italy if it wished to survive, and therefore was a lesser evil than the rising tide of Yugoslavism. He finally expressed satisfaction with the agreement reached on the forthcoming military actions.

Hitler's assumptions about the "agreement" were too optimistic. Ciano certainly was not impressed with Hitler's plan.(55) Although Cavallero halfheartedly accepted it, Roatta told him - even as Loehr was about to begin the talks in Rome with Italian generals - that the Četniks were his only trump card in the area, and should not be discarded.** Loehr, as expected, demanded redeployment of Italian units to occupy the areas held by the Četniks, and to prepare for their eventual disarmament.(56)

Already on 11 January, that is nine days before the operation was due to begin, Roatta issued his final instructions to SUPERSLODA units without making any reference to Cavallero's undertaking to halt arms deliveries to the Četniks. On the contrary, he gave orders which were, it seems, deliberately vague on this point, and allowed for the possibility that M.V.A.C. units be actively used against Tito.(57) While the arrangements made in Berlin obviously made it difficult for Roatta to plan openly any large-scale involvement of Četnik forces against Tito, he was most certainly not going to disarm them or fight them either.

* It is characteristic of Hitler that he simply informed the Italians that Loehr would command the joint operation, without even asking for the Comando Supremo's approval.(54) It was also characteristic of Cavallero to accept this decision without a comment, let alone protest.

** He actually used the term "white ball", from the favourite Italian village green sport ("...i cetnići sono l'unica pallina bianca che abbiamo in quel settore ed occorre tenerli dalla nostra...").

Oblivious of Roatta's schemes, Loehr outlined his plan. The action would consist of three phases. "Weiss I" called for the encirclement and destruction of Partisan units in western Bosnia and Lika. "Weiss II" would push those Partisan forces which managed to escape encirclement into the trap further south, where they would be destroyed. Simultaneously, "Weiss III" was to take place in the Italian zone, and had for its objective the complete disarmament of all Četniks. Broadly speaking, while four German divisions and assorted NDH units were to advance from the north, three Italian divisions were supposed to block Tito's retreat south.*

* 7.SS Division "Prinz Eugen", 714, 718 and 369. Only the "Prinz Eugen" was up to full strength and top combat readiness (it was composed of the Volksdeutsche from Yugoslav lands, mainly Vojvodina). 369. division was in reality a reinforced-brigade strength unit composed of former Croat volunteers for the Russian front, with German officers and NCOs.

Loehr himself looked at "Weiss" as "an experiment with several question marks". The tempo and scope of operations came from above, he told Glaise, and he was only allowed to fill in the preconceived framework.(58)

Besides the disarming of Četniks, another aspect of Hitler's original plan encountered resistance. It was his order of December 1942 that extremely brutal measures be applied against the civilian population in the zone of operations, including the shooting of women, children and old people. Only Hitler's chief of operations Jodl dared remark that such measures could prove counterproductive, but the top secret instruction to that effect was nevertheless sent on 16 December 1942. It also stated that "no German, engaged in fighting bands, can be held responsible for his acts during combat against the bands and their helpers".(59)

When Loehr's chief of staff Foertsch announced this at the conference which Loehr called in Belgrade on 30 December 1942, Glaise jumped from his chair, grabbed his uniform with both hands, and - all red in the face - shouted: "Gentlemen, this tunic cannot stand any such thing".(60) Five days later Glaise wrote to Loehr that "everything was clear" in the case of adult males who were found in the insurgent areas and could not prove their local permanent residence. However, many civilians in those areas were reluctant accomplices who had no alternative but to obey the Partisans. He also warned that with the policy of hostage-taking one should be careful and selective, as Pavelic may be only too glad to see a few more thousand Orthodox necks broken on his behalf. In his inimitable ironic style Glaise remarked that "one of the characteristics of this land... is that everyone is especially glad when the wrong kind of hostages are shot".(61) In his reply to Glaise, only nine days before the beginning of operations, Loehr admitted that he was still full of doubts: "I have written to Keitel yet again that even a very radical military solution does not achieve the objective if a political solution does not follow on its heels; and as a rule [such political solution] must come first. Will it have any effect?"(62) Loehr also supported Glaise to a degree, and both advised Lueters accordingly. The final orders to troops, issued by Lueters, were rather different from Hitler's original intentions: all men aged 15-50 were to be taken to camps, while only actual Partisans and persons suspected of being Partisans would be summarily executed.(63)

7. Fresh Disputes over Četniks and "Schwartz"

In total contradiction to what Cavallero ostensibly agreed with Hitler in Berlin in December and with Loehr in Rome in January, the Italians speeded up their deliveries of arms and equipment to the assorted groups of Četniks in their occupation zone right before "Weiss". Roatta was obviously determined to play his "white ball" in full. Cavallero was aware of this, and even authorised the inclusion of "volunteers" from Montenegro in operations in the NDH, 50 long as they went back after fighting.(64) At the same time, both Roatta's commanders and Četnik officers were forced to improvise at the last moment. They were supposed to manoeuvre often unruly groups, inexperienced in major combined operations, into place on the anticipated route of retreating Partisan brigades. Only very late in the day did it dawn upon Četnik leaders that they were assigned the crucial role of stopping the main body of Tito's battle-hardened shock troops. Roatta expected those Četnik units to bear the brunt of the fighting, which would save his own men and widen the gulf between Tito and Mihailović.(65)

On top of everything, both Roatta and the Četniks had to keep an eye on the Germans and Pavelić, and to avoid political and military fallout because of such blatant breach of Hitler's "agreement".* As if all that were not enough, Mihailović's chief of staff, Major Ostojić, attempted to exercise a degree of authority over the "M.V.A.C." units, while Roatta had no intention of allowing any such thing. He wanted to use the "Četniks", but he did not want to cooperate with Mihailović as such, and even less to share authority with him.

* Montenegrin Četniks in particular were a problem, because of their known propensity to engage in "revenge" against Catholic and Muslim civilians (eg. in the Foča area during winter 1941-1942). They were given orders by the Italians to avoid such excesses and to avoid contact with German or Italian troops.(66)

The end result was that the Četniks were squarely beaten by Tito's forces (which due to greater manoeuvrability always managed to enjoy local superiority) east of of Knin and in Prozor. As was expected by the Germans, the Partisans were overwhelmed in the north, after some of the heaviest fighting seen in the Balkans that far in the war.(67) However, instead of three Italian divisions blocking Tito's way south there were only parts of one ("Murge" at Prozor) and some thousands of uncoordinated Četniks. By the beginning of February the Partisans - in full retreat, but as yet unbeaten - threatened to break out of the pocket across the Neretva river, in which case the entire German plan would be compromised, and the Četnik heartland in eastern Herzegovina threatened.

Simultaneously, the Germans had become aware of what was going on, and complained bitterly.(68) As Loehr's staff gathered further evidence of Italian combinazioni, the OKW asked its counterparts in Rome for an explanation.(69) But by that time the pliant Cavallero was gone, and ^{the} anything but pro-German Ambrosio headed the Comando Supremo instead. This boded ill for Hitler's plans. Ambrosio was the very embodiment of the Italian army "line" in the Balkans, and he duly frustrated (once again) the German strategy of dogged pursuit of all guerrillas. He replied to the OKW that "if" the disarming of Četniks was to be carried out, it had to be done "with caution, not in haste".(70) Even the transfer of Roatta from Sušak in the first week of February did not help from the German/Ustaša standpoint: just as Roatta had continued Ambrosio's policies a year earlier, so the new SUPERSLODA commander, General Mario Robotti continued Roatta's. On 8 February at a meeting in Belgrade he flatly refused continuation of joint action due on 15 February (Weiss II and III).(71) He was acting on Roatta's advice, to whom a key consideration had been to keep the Germans out of Herzegovina.

The renewed intra-Axis dispute over Četniks had little to do with the actual strength of Serb nationalist forces. In spite of Hitler's and Ribbentrop's suspicions, "Weiss" was turning to a large extent into an episode of the civil war in Yugoslavia in which the Partisans were getting the better of it.* Both adversaries were also on the lookout for a British invasion fleet, and sought to eliminate each other first. Nevertheless, in Berlin the Četniks' apparent weakness was regarded as immaterial:

"The Germans saw the whole problem as a function of an expected Allied operation in the Balkans...[which] would revive the Četniks, giving the officers a clear advantage over Tito, or what was worse, would bring Tito and Mihailović together."(73)

Deeply worried about the Balkans and upset by the policy of Italian officers there, Hitler sent a letter to Mussolini, which was delivered by Ribbentrop on 25 February 1943. In it he pleaded for Italian support in the continuation of "Weiss".(74) Emphasising that "strong" Italian forces were indispensable for the completion of the task, Hitler stressed the danger presented by the Četniks and requested that all supplies to them be halted immediately:

"If we do not succeed to disarm the Communists and Četniks in the same measure, and to pacify the land completely, then at the moment of invasion disorder will break out, all links with Pelopponesus cut off or interrupted, the few German divisions will be busy fighting the Communists and Četniks, and Italian troops will no longer be able to halt the invasion..."

* Lueters admitted in his final report on the operation that Tito's forces were well organised, skilfully led and possessed of a high combat morale; they compensated for the lack of heavy arms by exploiting dark, fog and rain and imposing close-range combat "when they showed themselves to be fanatical... and tough fighters".(72)

Hitler was essentially right. The Četniks were unreliable. Their symbiosis with the Italians was one of necessity, not choice, and it would have ended with the landing of the first British company in Dalmatia. Some Četnik commanders even admitted that much to the Italians, as if they did not suspect it anyway. As for the Italian army, its amazingly persistent policy of support for the Četniks (even to the point of defying Mussolini's orders) by 1943 may have had a different motivation to 1941 or 1942. In the past one could cite among Italians' motives their sympathy with the persecuted Serbs, the general disillusionment with the Ustašas, the need to have local allies, the wish to drive a wedge between Communists and "nationalists", or the desire to preserve Italian forces by fighting Tito to the last Četnik.

After Stalingrad and El Alamein, however, Mihailović's links with the British could have been a source of attraction, rather than repugnance, to Ambrosio, Robotti et al. If Italy was to get off Hitler's doomed bandwagon, then it had to cultivate those who could (or so the generals hoped) facilitate such transition. Obviously there is no trace of such tendencies in the official documents, but there are strong and numerous indications that an active policy to that effect existed both among some Italian diplomats and in the Army.(75)*

* According to the testimony of Guido Lucich-Rocchi, an Italian officer who spoke Serbo-Croat fluently and served in Knin and Split during the war, the command of the Second Army was very Anglophile, and hoped for a link with Mihailović and the British through their Serb "nationalists". (Lucich-Rocchi to Stevan Pavlowitch, 25-26 March 1974) The same impression was shared by General Umberto Salvatores, who - then still a Colonel - commanded 6. Bersaglieri Regiment in Lika and Bosnia. (Salvatores to St. Pavlowitch, 24 February 1973)

The Italian military governor of Montenegro, General Alessandro Pirzio-Biroli probably went further than any other Italian commander in the Balkans when he sent a message to Mihailović already in late 1942 to the effect that he wanted a separate peace with the British. Mihailović passed this on to London, but Eden subsequently wrote: "I have decided against pursuing any of these contacts". (PRO, FO 371, R 8802/3700/22, minute from Eden to Churchill, 2 December 1942) Pirzio-Biroli also maintained a link with the Partito d'Azione through his nephew.

Obviously determined to clarify the ambiguities, Hitler instructed Ribbentrop and Warlimont to get Mussolini's renewed and unequivocal assurances on the Četnik issue. Contrary to the received wisdom in Italian circles, Ribbentrop declared that the issue of Mihailović, and of the pacification of Croatia in general, was not a political, but a purely military question; this he reiterated during discussions the following day. (76)

Mussolini stated that Italian commands in the Balkans were certainly not getting instructions from Rome to aid and abet the Četniks. He speculated that there may have been such initiatives by subordinate local commands, which sought to support one side against another in order to achieve overall pacification. Ambrosio added that it was not possible to defeat both sides [Četniks and Partisans] at once; the Partisans had to be beaten first. However, encouraged by Ambrosio's intervention, Mussolini went on to blame the Pavelić government for the rise of insurgency, which it caused, he thought, by its policy of extermination of the Orthodox minority. This, he added, was amply documented. Ambrosio rounded up the Italian reply to Hitler's and Ribbentrop's points by saying that the fear of an Allied landing in Dalmatia was exaggerated, because the passage of a large invasion fleet through the Gate of Otranto would be risky, and the Dinaric Alps hard to break through.

Warlimont then suggested that the ensuing tasks were 1) joint German-Italian action to destroy Communist forces north of the Neretva; 2) thorough pacification of the area; 3) breaking up of Mihailović's movement. After Warlimont's account Ambrosio expressed renewed scepticism, primarily because - he thought - the problem in Croatia was political, rather than military. This was sharply contradicted again by Ribbentrop, who said that it would be easy to solve political issues once the war was won. Mussolini cut the argument by agreeing with the broad outline of the German plan; he asked Ambrosio to work out the details with Warlimont.

To Ribbentrop's amazement, the letter from the Comando Supremo which was supposed to confirm the agreement contained major discrepancies from what the Germans thought had been agreed; above all, there was no mention of Draža Mihailović. This induced Ribbentrop to comment to Alfieri, who visited him at his Rome residence on 28 February, that in the Italian high command there were at work certain forces which could not be called Fascist.(77) Above all, he went on, the Fuehrer was interested in destroying Mihailović and his men. Alfieri promised to sort out the problem, went away and returned two hours later with Mussolini's handwritten instructions to Comando Supremo on how to reply to the German high command. The letter, written in French for the Germans' benefit, stated 1) that Mihailović was a great potential danger to the Axis; and 2) that his group had to be attacked and destroyed when (quand) possible, for which purpose both sides would assign appropriate units.*

During the final talks, on 29 February, Mussolini spoke much more in line with Hitler's and Ribbentrop's train of thought. He said that Mihailović was a dangerous foe who had to be eliminated, and promised that Ambrosio would act resolutely. Ribbentrop departed from Rome ostensibly reassured, but in fact Mussolini did not have his heart in the German plan to disarm all Četniks. His ambiguity was confirmed on 9 March 1943, when he wrote to Hitler that he had ordered Generals Robotti and Biroli to halt further arms deliveries to the Četniks "as soon as the Partisans ceased to be a dangerous armed movement".**

* Simultaneously, Warlimont reported back to the OKW the problems he was encountering with the Italian generals. Jodi instructed Warlimont to tell the Comando Supremo that Hitler himself had ordered German troops, under German command, to press their attack on the bauxite area around Mostar until those bands - regardless of whether they were Četniks or Partisans - were destroyed. (78) The combination of Ribbentrop's pressure through Alfieri and the OKW conveying Hitler's personal orders finally swayed Mussolini.

** Almost gleefully, Mussolini added that he had "just received the news that the German forces, which have established contact with the Četniks in the upper Neretva area, had cooperated with them in order to conduct joint operations" and have apparently given them some ammunition.(79)

As the German high command had suspected all along, "Weiss II" was also effectively sabotaged by the Italians. Even though German units (7th SS division "Prinz Eugen") entered the Italian zone of occupation for the first time, it proved well-nigh impossible to carry out Hitler's orders in practice. Italian commanders warned their Četnik protégés of the Germans' advance in time, and sometimes evacuated them under the Germans' noses. When Tito's shock troops broke out of their pocket north of the Neretva, it was through Četnik lines south of the river that they attacked in force. In the ensuing chaos the Partisans' military superiority over their chief domestic rivals was clearly demonstrated. Nevertheless, the OKW did not alter its overall plan. Even though Tito was not captured, his loss of manpower and territory was deemed irreparable, and Mihailović was considered to be the chief remaining enemy.

The Germans therefore decided to pursue their attack primarily against Mihailović. After Tito's "defeat" the OKW instructed its commands in the NDH to prepare for the new action on their own, code-named "Schwarz" and even to conceal any such plans from the Italians.* Unknown to the Germans, however, the Partisans had entered the area of north-west Montenegro and south-east Herzegovina where the brunt of ^{the} German attack was to take place. After a full month of some of the most desperate fighting of the entire war in Yugoslavia, the Germans failed - yet again - to capture or deal a decisive blow to either Tito or Mihailović. In spite of such unsatisfactory military outcome, both "Weiss" and "Schwarz" were important landmarks in the shifting political situation in the Balkans. German troops started operating in the Italian zone at will, even without giving prior notification to their allies, and conducting operations without any expectation of Italian support. The first half of 1943 was thus marked by the final German predominance in the entire area of the NDH, even before the fall of Mussolini.

* "In view of the close links between Mihailović and the Italians, the Fuehrer attaches great importance to the strictest concealment of both the intention and the preparations. The Commander Southeast should report where and when preliminary arrangements [with the Italians] are unavoidable, while the right to authorise such contacts remains with the OKW." (80)

XIII - USTAŠA DIPLOMACY

1. NDH Foreign Ministry

So far we have examined various aspects of the NDH external and internal "environment": the Germans, the Italians, the Partisans, the Četniks... But in order to gain a more comprehensive picture of what may be termed "the NDH foreign policy-making", one needs to look at the formal tool of its diplomatic effort, the foreign service and the foreign ministry of the Croat state.*

By the time World War II broke out, European diplomacy was in near-terminal decline. With the appointments of Ciano, Ribbentrop and Molotov it was not the sensitive, versatile and flexible mind of the diplomat, but the rigid, relentless and single-track mind of the uncompromising and often treacherous ideologue that held sway. Diplomatic discourse was seen and used as a temporary expedient, not as the normal and permanent way of carrying on relations with other states.** For the newly-recruited members of Hitler's "New Europe" project, diplomacy was largely reduced to the functions of symbolic and legal representation devoid of substance. By December 1941 Hitler had them under control to such an extent that he could simply decree that all of them should declare war on Britain and the United States on a given date.

The Independent State of Croatia was the product of the New Order par excellence. From the outset it was clear to its supporters and to its foes alike that it stood or fell depending on Hitler's fortunes. Pavelić acknowledged this already in Karlovac, in April 1941, when he told Veessenmayer that "he did not intend to conduct any foreign policy at all - Adolf Hitler was doing that".(1)

* This regardless of its formal status as a state, or state sui generis: the NDH, for all its pathetic state-making efforts, was an autonomous, or at least a semi-autonomous "actor" - see Chapter IX above.

** One of the old-school diplomats, Kosta St. Pavlowitch, told the author that what particularly worried him in the late-1930s was the apparent inability of "all those seemingly civilised Germans and Austrians" to establish a rapport with their non-likeminded colleagues independently of the Berlin foreign ministry's instructions.

Undoubtedly, there was an element of toadying in Pavelić's statement, understandable at a time when he was still uncertain of his standing in Berlin; Pavelić was well capable of adjusting his pitch to the anticipated expectations of his audience. His words, which pleased Veessenmayer, nevertheless reflected the fundamental truth that Germany's "allies" were not partners, but vassals.

Bearing in mind the omnipresent Fuehrerprinzip pervading all its institutions, the formal diplomatic arm of the new state (its foreign ministry and its foreign service) could be no more than an extension of its power structure. The NDH was meant by those in power to be an Ustaša State. This goal was opposed for various reasons by the myriad of mutually non-aligned forces (from Ambrosio or Roatta in Sušak and Dalmazzo in Dubrovnik to Glaise in Zagreb, Jevdjević in Trebinje, Tito in Bihać, Himmler in Berlin, or Mihailović on Ravna Gora). Indirectly it was also opposed by every nation at war with the Axis.

The two restraints of internal structure and external environment left little room for diplomacy from the outset. This was best reflected in a German article on the NDH written in October 1941:

"The Poglavnik's state has given up taking part in grand politics. Foreign policy must reflect in a healthy manner the actual power of the state. Taking part in grand politics had been a sick phenomenon and a madness of the Versailles era, it is emphasised in authoritative places in Zagreb... [Croatia's foreign policy] is no longer entrusted to an incidental play of Cabinet members, it is no longer based on personal talent and relations of a foreign minister; now it represents an organic part of the entire order of the state. It is, so to say, conditioned by natural-legal, geopolitical, biological and ideological circumstances."(2)

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Independent State of Croatia was created by Pavelić's decree on 16 April 1941, when the first government was appointed by him. Pavelić kept the foreign ministry resort nominally for himself, and on 18 April appointed Dr Mladen Lorković as State Secretary in charge of day to day running of the budding Ustaša external relations. After the signing of the Rome Agreements Pavelić's outstanding obligations were settled, and he could delegate more of his authority to Lorković, who became the foreign minister.

Lorković had to start from scratch. Most Ustaša ministries could at least initially rely on the existing administrative structure of the Banovina of Croatia (jurisprudence, health, forestry and mining, education etc). The only other ministry which had not had an equivalent in the Banovina was that of defence, but Pavelić and Slavko Kvaternik could rely on a large number of former Habsburg officers untainted by Yugoslavism to provide the initial backbone of Domobranstvo. Furthermore, in subsequent weeks hundreds of Croats who had been active Royal Yugoslav officers asked for and obtained transfer to the newly created Croatian Home Guard.

There were relatively few Croats in the Yugoslav diplomatic service before 1939, and they were almost invariably Karadjordjević loyalists and adherents of the integral Yugoslav idea (eg. the minister to the Holy See, Niko Mirošević - *Sorgo*)

The number of Croat diplomats and foreign ministry officials was increased after the Sporazum, but the newcomers were either political appointees and faithful Mačekists (eg. Ilija Jukić, deputy foreign minister under Cincar-Marković), or utterly unreliable to the Ustašas (eg. later eminent historian Bogdan Krizman, who came from a family of liberal "Yugoslavs" with strong Masonic links).

Furthermore, the prevailing esprit de corps of the Yugoslav foreign service had a strong pro-Western slant. This was manifested in ^{the} later determination of Yugoslav diplomats - regardless of national origin - to leave Axis-occupied territories whenever possible, and to offer their services to the Yugoslav government in exile. For all these reasons, Pavelić could not and evidently did not count on the support of Croats in the Yugoslav foreign service to help him develop his own diplomacy.*

Mladen Lorković was a young, well educated and energetic Germanophile. He had spent over ten years in Germany prior to April 1941, first as a student and then as an emigré and Ustaša activist. His organisational ability and dedication to Pavelić's cause attracted ^{the} attention of the Yugoslav authorities, which intervened in Berlin to have him silenced (see above, p. 84). Pavelić's choice of Lorković was a rare success of his personnel policy, which often rewarded reliability (i.e. personal loyalty to the Foqlavnik) to the exclusion of all other criteria. In Lorković's case loyalty and ability were not mutually exclusive.

Lorković's first task was to create a skeleton staff of aides who possessed the necessary skills to draft the order of battle of the newly created ministry. They were mostly lawyers, and with a few exceptions they were not sworn Ustašas before April 1941. To Lorković it was apparently more important to gather efficient bureaucrats than politically committed zealots. This proved to be the right strategy: most permanent officials appointed in 1941 remained at their ministry posts throughout the ensuing four years, and - unlike politically appointed diplomats - did a fair job within the narrow limits prescribed by Pavelić.

* According to information supplied to the Yugoslav minister in Madrid, Ljubiša Višacki, only three former Yugoslav diplomats or foreign ministry officials (Šišić, Rudolf Šalek and Zorislav Dragutinović) offered their services to Pavelić.(3)

By appointing and promoting bureaucrats without previous Ustaša "reputation", Lorković could also count on their initial dependence on him personally, and ultimately on their complete obedience to whoever happened to be the political master. For instance, Vjekoslav Vrančić was virtually unknown in Ustaša circles, and observed the events of 10 April from the sidelines. However, he was made head of the political department of the foreign ministry purely on the basis of his administrative ability displayed in his previous business career. (In the early 1930s, while in Argentina, Vrančić was even on the payroll of King Alexander's ministry of social welfare). Already by August Vrančić was promoted to state secretary and deputy foreign minister. He was routinely engaged in various missions involving Germans, Italians, Četniks and, at the very end, even Western Allies, but he always remained excluded from substantial decision making. Eventually, although hand-picked and promoted by Lorković, Vrančić accepted the former's fall from grace with total sang froid. He proved himself a good bureaucrat and remained a loyal servant of Pavelić to the bitter end - and beyond.

Lorković's approach, which was evidently functional from the systemic viewpoint, inevitably caused some dissatisfaction among other Ustašas, who expected the foreign ministry to provide sinecure (and if need be occasional glamour) for the deserving veterans of the movement.*

* This is well illustrated by a letter, sent to Lorković by Pavelić's cabinet, enquiring why the head of the foreign ministry's personnel department, Vlaho Buško - apparently not yet a sworn Ustaša at that time - "had not been replaced by Ustaša Juraj Položnjak in accordance with the Poglavnik's instructions".(4) In reply, Lorković wrote that he had already explained to Pavelić that Buško should remain at his post because of his expertise and personal qualities, to which Pavelić "had agreed". Lorković added that Položnjak had been appointed supervisor at the cyphers room of the ministry. Obviously, there was pressure on Lorković to accept "a good Ustaša", which he did, but he gave him a far lower position than the one originally demanded. This same problem was well known to the managers of enterprises in the countries of "Real Socialism", who were forced to take dead wood on board and then try to place it where it could do least harm.

By the end of July 1941 a group under Vrančić had completed its task of preparing organisational blueprints.(5) The foreign ministry of the NDH was divided into five departments: 1) general; 2) political; 3) legal; 4) press, publishing and cultural relations; and 5) consular-economic affairs.* By the end of 1941 it had opened a total of eight legations, three consulates- general, six consulates, one "consular agency" (Belgrade), one "cultural delegation" (Vichy) and one "trade delegation" (Zurich). A total of about sixty people were working at the foreign ministry in Zagreb, and about one hundred diplomats and support staff were sent to the twenty posts abroad.

* 1) General department (headed by the foreign minister, M. Lorković) was divided into seven sections: minister's cabinet, protocol, personnel, cyphers, accounting and management, and library.

2) Political department (headed by V. Vrančić) consisted of three sections: for Romance countries, for Germanic countries, and for the Danubian area, the Balkans and the East.

3) Legal department (headed by Tihomil Drezga) had four sections: for international law, for legal aid, for international treaties, and for certifications and translations.

The remaining two departments (for press, publishing and cultural relations, which was headed by Ivo Huehn, and for consular-economic affairs, headed by Marko Tarlé) were subdivided as their names implied. All of the above officials had doctorates in law, and - except for Lorković - none seems to have been an active Ustaša before April 1941.

The section chiefs of the ministry were: Antun Bonifačić (cultural relations); Ivo Kolak (Lorković's chef du cabinet); Oskar Turina (Germanic countries); Captain Vilim Bačić, KUK navy, rtd. (Romance countries); Jaša Rankl (consular affairs); Vlaho Buško (personnel); Mehmed Alajbegović (international law).

The rank of ministry secretary was held by Milan Blažeković, Andjelko Belić, Josip Zappalorto, Ernest Bauer, Olinko Delorko, Ivo Omrčanin, Vladimir Šulek, Ivo Škrobot, Ivo Donadini, Milovan Vučko, Ivan pl. Salaj, Vladimir Paskijević, Vatroslav Witner, Vladimir Mintas.

Vilko Rieger, Baron Alfred Rukavina and Baron Sjepan Bogat held the rank of counsellors, while Milorad Stražnický was a minister (he was apparently the only former Yugoslav diplomat drafted into Pavelić's service). There were about two dozen clerks and other officials whose rank is not mentioned in various documents and memoranda (Nada Kesterčanek, Mladen Gligo, Juraj Položnjak [see ff. previous page], Digović, Jakov Pavelić etc). Diplomatic couriers were, among others, Milanović, Čubelić, Marian Mašek, Petri, Mijo Gavranović; officials were also used as couriers (eg. Donadini, Omrčanin). Finally, there were "security personnel" and "bodyguards" at legations and consulates, and their "reliability for service" was the subject of background checks.(6)

The appointment of heads of legations abroad was much more politically coloured. Ustaša background was crucial for mission chiefs in Rome and Berlin.* Although movement affiliation counted elsewhere too, several ministers and consuls without any long Ustaša pedigree were appointed apparently just on the strength of an aristocratic background, probably in an attempt to "raise the tone" of the service.

The upper crust of the NDH foreign service was thus a curious mix of titled Habsburg nostalgists (Pejacsevics, Vuchetich), Germanophile "New Europe" activists (Benzon), self-serving egomaniacs (Židovec) and old-guard Pavelić loyalists (Perić, Bulat). Subsequently, unlike the ministry in Zagreb - which included a core of fairly solid bureaucrats - the foreign service was a much more mixed bag of political appointees without any obvious qualities for the service, diplomatic dilettantes and near-bankrupt descendents of the Croatian-Hungarian nobility.

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- * There were eight NDH legations by the end of 1941, and this number remained unchanged until the summer of 1944. Their initial complement was:
1. Berlin. Minister: Branko Benzon (Benzon was recalled before the end of 1941, and one of Pavelić's closest aides from the emigre days, Mile Budak, was appointed instead); counsellor: Mladen Meštrić; secretary: Halid Bahtijarević; press attaché: Luka Fertilio; personal secretary to the minister: Eugenio Monti; officials: Drago Matković, Čubelić.
 2. Rome. Minister: Stijepo Perić (an old Ustaša, by profession a dentist); counsellors: Ante Sugja and Nikola Rušinović; secretaries: Ante Vrdoljak and Vera Košak; press and cultural attaché: Antun Nizeteo (replaced by Z. Cihlar later in 1941); secretary to the minister: Srećko Pšeničnik.
 3. Budapest. Minister: Ivo pl. Gaj (an aristocrat; the title "plemeniti", abbreviated "pl.", denoted nobility); secretaries: Ivo Bilić and Karlo Kostelac; clerks: Ivan Zajc, Katica Šimunović, Nada Belošević.
 4. Bratislava. Minister: Dragutin Toth (replaced by Josip Berković in December 1941); counsellor: Vilko Rieger; secretary: Zvonimir Malvić; press attaché: Božidar Albrecht.
 5. Bucharest. Minister: Edo Bulat (an old Ustaša); first secretary: Daniel Crljen; second secretary: Mladen Jiroušek; cultural attaché: Ernest Bauer; counsellor: Karlo Kostelac (moved to Budapest before the end of 1941).
 6. Madrid. Minister: Count Petar Pejacsevics (who always signed his name in Hungarian transliteration); counsellor: Mateo Jeličić; cultural attaché Branko Kadić; secretary: N. Fuxa.
 7. Sofia. Minister: Vladimir Židovec (an old Ustaša, and - judging by his reports - an avid anti-Semite, in spite of the name); counsellor: Silviije Celebrini; secretaries: Milovan Mocnaj and Antun Fabris; cultural and press attaché: Stjepan Mosner.
 8. Helsinki. Minister: Ferdo Bošnjaković; secretary: Marijan Andrašević.

The result was an uneven and generally indifferent performance. Reports were despatched without any apparent schedule, sometimes frequently (eg. Židovec in Sofia was a veritable scribomaniac), sometimes almost never (Pejacsevics, Bulat). Their quality was rather low; they consisted mainly of dinner party gossip, press summaries and records of conversations with various officials and private individuals.

The form and tone of reports by ministers, consuls and other officials suggests that they were unwilling to risk indulging in speculation which smacked of "high politics". There were hardly any strategic estimates of the developments in their country of residence, and rare situation reports of that kind were prone to be presented with undue optimism (eg. regarding the effects of Allied bombing in Germany, or Italy's "determination to continue the war" in the summer of 1943).

It could not have been otherwise, since Pavelić never intended his foreign ministry to be more than (at best) a technical support service. Even at that level many difficulties emerged due to the inexperience of his diplomats and personal rivalries among them.

[footnote continued]

The consulates-general were: in Vienna (consul: Edvard Jurek; Secretary: Pavlović), Munich (Mikulić) and Milan. The NDH had consulates in Prague (consul: Vuko pl. Vuchetich), Graz (secretary: Puhljak), Fiume (consul: Z. Čaleta), Zara (consul: Dr. Gliga), Ljubljana (consul: Antun Ivanić; vice-consul: Kazimir Lelas; official: Nikola Badurina-Rumešić) and Maribor. In Belgrade there was a "consular agency" headed by Ante Nikšić (a rather prominent "old Ustaša"), while the "cultural delegation" at Vichy was headed by Dušan Žanko. The "trade delegation" in Switzerland was led by a state secretary, Josip Milković, following the conclusion of an agreement on trade and payments (however, the Swiss Confederation never recognised the NDH and a Yugoslav legation remained in Berne throughout). Finally in the Vatican Prince Erwin Lobkowitz was an unofficial NDH representative from mid-1942. In its ambivalent relationship with the NDH the Holy See never extended full diplomatic recognition to the Croat state, and a Yugoslav legation remained within the walls of the Vatican even when the Italians expelled it from their territory.

2. Benzon and Other Gaffes

The greatest embarrassment to the NDH diplomacy in its early months was caused by the minister in Berlin, Branko Benzon. Haughty and brimming with self-confidence, he was not a popular figure either as a schoolboy or in later life.(7) Barely a fortnight after his arrival in Berlin, Benzon attempted to raise alarm with Weizsaecker about Casertano's supposed ultimatum to Pavelić.(8) Already on that occasion Weizsaecker indicated, between the lines of his note for Ribbentrop, that Benzon should not be taken too seriously. Then came the rowdy party at the "Adlon", hosted by Benzon, with thousands of dollars' worth of damage in broken mirrors, furniture and crockery.(9) The Wilhelmstrasse agreed to foot the bill, but Benzon's star was rapidly fading both in Berlin and in Zagreb.

Much more serious from the Germans' viewpoint was Benzon's single-handed attempt to sow seeds of doubt in the reliability of no less a personality than their chief ally, Mussolini. Benzon perpetually tried to act in his contacts with German officials as their (unacknowledged) confidant, who was "aware" of their secret disdain for the Italians, and who felt that - since such disdain was mutual - there was no need for pretences. In this approach he was frequently rebuked, but persisted to the point of saying to Weizsaecker in the aftermath of Pavelić's trip to Rome to sign the Agreements with Italy that Mussolini had expressed doubts about the prospects for an Axis victory in the war. Weizsaecker carefully intervened by saying that Pavelić must have ^{mis-}heard Mussolini. (10) This indiscretion caused a great deal of interest in Berlin, and went all the way to Hitler, so that Weizsaecker had to provide a more detailed account of Benzon's story three days later.(11)

Benzon repeated his story to Walter Stahlecker (of Ribbentrop's cabinet) in a meeting subsequently arranged for the specific purpose of hearing it again.(12) According to Benzon's account, Pavelić - on his return from Rome - suddenly asked Benzon in private whether he really believed in the victory of the Reich. When Benzon asked how could he even ask something like that, Pavelić first evaded the answer, but then told him confidentially that Mussolini had said he did not believe in ultimate German victory. For this reason - Benzon went on - Pavelić had decided to accept a Savoy prince to be king of Croatia, since "the defeat of Italy would not necessarily mean the defeat of the House of Savoy".

Stahlecker listened politely, but then asked a little less than diplomatically whether Pavelić may have invented the statement attributed to the Duce. Benzon, apparently non-plussed at the implication that his head of state was a liar, simply replied that he thought that improbable. As could be expected, Stahlecker remained incredulous and excluded any possibility that Mussolini had really said anything of the kind; he concluded that it must have been a misrepresentation.*

* It is difficult to establish the truthfulness of Benzon's story. There is no evidence to support it, and it is highly unlikely that Mussolini - who was by no means free of doubts about the prospects for an ultimate victory - would have confided such thoughts in Pavelić. It is possible that Pavelić "planted" the story to Benzon expecting him to tell it to the Germans, but it is more probable that Benzon had thought the whole thing up because of his deep spite and hatred of Italy, and because of his desire to present himself as a valuable source of information to the Germans.

The Germans had their agents in the NDH foreign ministry anyway (Ernest Bauer, who worked until April 1941 for a German bogus news bureau in Zagreb) and in the diplomatic service (Theodor Albert, counsellor at the NDH legation in Bratislava). While Bauer provided information about behind-the-scenes events at the ministry to the Germans on an impromptu basis, Albert was a "real" old-fashioned agent: he supplied formal written reports about his ministry and various events in the NDH to the German minister in Bratislava, H. Ludin. (13) Eventually Albert was found out due to Kasche's indiscretion, and fired; he was told that had he not been a German he would have been shot.

This incident was a first-class indiscretion on Benzon's part. First of all, he had no authority from Pavelić to disclose the contents of their confidential conversation. Secondly, he implied that Pavelić had shared Mussolini's alleged doubts, and for that reason offered the crown to the Duke of Spoleto. Finally, he was told by Stanlecker that someone was lying, and that - as far as the German side was concerned - it was not Mussolini. Benzon's attempt to act as a voluntary informant on both his boss and the third most powerful dictator on Earth was thus roundly scorned by the Germans.

Shortly thereafter Benzon complained to Lorković that he was a victim of "slanderous and malicious gossip" about both his lifestyle and his qualifications for the post.(14) Benzon obviously realized that his credibility in Berlin and Zagreb was as low as it could get, and asked to be relieved of his duties. Pavelić did not allow this, possibly because Benzon's withdrawal after only two months would have reflected poorly on the NDH's shaky reputation in Berlin. It is also possible that Pavelić wanted to give Benzon a little more rope to hang himself, in order to demolish completely the credibility of the man who had entertained very high ambitions in the early days of the NDH. After Benzon's scandalous "Adlon" party had become public knowledge in Zagreb, his troubles were compounded by the investigation of the financial wheeling and dealing of his trade attaché, Marko Jurinić.(15)

Finally Benzon wrote a personal letter to Lorković denying that he was a squanderer, requesting recall, and openly admitting incompetence.*

* "... and therefore I warn you again, begging that this does not remain a voice in the wilderness, to allow me to come to Zagreb and be released of duty here in Berlin. Otherwise, I shall be forced to do so of my own accord, without your permit, even if this means the most severe punishment in Zagreb. This cannot go on, and I do not understand why I - by all accounts very capable in my own profession - must perform another duty with which I am unfamiliar, and which I perform so poorly as to cause dissatisfaction of those to whom I am accountable for my actions".(16)

Benzon's letter indicated that he was indeed very much a spent force. He remained at his post for another three humiliating months, during which he managed to draw German ridicule with at least two more gaffes. In September he complained to the undersecretary of state at the German foreign ministry, Ernst Woermann, that his legation's negotiations with the German ministry of labour on the status of Croatian workers in the Reich were stalled.(17) Benzon said that he would address a verbal note to the Wilhelmstrasse, requesting clarification of the procedures to be followed in deciding on the status of Croatian workers. Woermann calmly replied that it would have been far better had the NDH legation communicated with the foreign ministry on this issue from the beginning, rather than starting direct negotiations with the ministry of labour "on its own".

Benzon also wanted to talk to Woermann "at some length" about the Zemun area, which the NDH wanted brought under its control from the authority of the German military commander in Serbia. Woermann informed Benzon that his information was old, and that an agreement on that issue had been reached; to the Croatian minister this news obviously came as complete surprise.

Finally, just a few weeks before Benzon's departure from Berlin, the NDH Consul-General in Vienna Jurak informed Lorković that he had severed all contact with Benzon, then still his nominal superior. He simply added "you, Mr Minister, know best why", without further explanation.(18)

This Dr Jurak had different problems of his own. Before the clash with Benzon, he had already threatened to resign because of a personal clash with Vjekoslav Vrančić. (19) In view of Vrančić's strong position at the ministry, it is unlikely that Lorković had given him much comfort.

A rather farcical incident involving Pavelić's daughters could not have helped his career.* Evidently, the impressions of the Pavelić sisters and Vrančić were not an exception. An internal foreign ministry memo on the tour of the Reich by a group of Croatian journalists contained their very poor impression of the work done by the consulate in Vienna: it maintained "weak contact with German institutions" and enjoyed^a low reputation among Croats there.(20)

Quite different to Benzon, but just as eccentric was Vladimir Židovec, the NDH minister in Sofia. A lawyer with pre-war Ustaša affiliations, he was a compulsive writer of reports on all, including the most trivial aspects of his daily existence, on lunches with Slovak press attachés, on visits to Bulgarian historical sites by German journalists, and on his chance meetings with various Sobranie deputies. The man was evidently a morbid pedant too: in a superbly self-confident letter to Lorković he even suggested "the best method" of filing his reports. At great length he explained how his reports should be bound into a separate book and marked.(21)

But what made Židovec truly remarkable was his evident inability to get on with people, most of all with his staff. He was on poor terms with the military attaché, Lt.Col. Adam Petrović. In a letter dated 30 October 1941 Židovec accused him of writing reports based on unreliable information, and asked that Petrović's reports should be submitted to him for approval before being despatched.(22)

* In a separate letter to Lorković, Jurek described an incident at the Vienna railway station, where he and his consulate staff waited in vain for the anticipated arrival of Pavelić's daughters. They had apparently arrived at the far end of the platform, left by another exit oblivious of the greeting party, and had to find accommodation on their own. Evidently upset about the incident, he wondered how could they have failed to spot the car with a Croatian flag outside, and remarked dejectedly that "everything would have been right had they only phoned the Consulate".

On the same day, in a separate letter to Lorković, Židovec requested that the legation secretary, Celebrini, be withdrawn and replaced by someone "actively linked to our Ustaša movement".(23) Shortly before Christmas 1941 Židovec complained that Lt.Col. Petrović's assistant, one Sgt Hajek, secretly and "craftily" had read Židovec's reports and told the military attaché of their contents.(24)

On 22 December 1941 Židovec prepared detailed "end-of-year reports on staff performance" (apparently his own invention, since no such reports were received from any other post abroad) in which he was either merely negative or coldly sarcastic in his estimate of everyone in the legation except press attache Mosner.(25) Barely a week later there came a personal letter from Židovec to Lorković, containing a vicious attack on Vlaho Buško, head of the personnel department at the ministry. According to Židovec, Buško had informed all legation staff in Sofia of the minister's unfavourable comments about their work and personalities.(26)

Židovec also demanded ^{the} replacement of another legation secretary, Milovan Mocnaj. When this was eventually done, the increasingly paranoid NDH minister discovered that the new secretary, Škrobot, was "even worse" - he allegedly was in the habit of "disclosing official secrets to unauthorised persons", for which reason Židovec had the man officially interrogated.(27) This case is a lot clearer in the light of yet another conflict in Sofia, a month later. The newly-arrived chief clerk (perovodja) at the NDH legation there, Ferek, asked to be moved to another post because of a conflict with the minister. Apparently, Židovec was trying to test Ferek's integrity "by planting supposedly confidential material which should not be there on my desk, in order to clandestinely observe what I was going to do".(28)

True to form, Židovec for his part complained of Ferek and requested that he be relocated "at his own cost".(29) Židovec also sent a total of four requests for the replacement of Lt.Col. Petrović in 1941-42.(30) He also complained that the Bulgarian minister in Zagreb, Mečkarov, was able to obtain some documents directly from the Domobranstvo thanks to Petrović.(31) Židovec seems to have had a grudge against Mečkarov, and informed Lorković of his alleged Masonic connections and a supposed appetite for gossip.

Židovec was nutty but gloomy. Among the more comic episodes from the NDH diplomatic history is the occasion when the consul in Prague Vuchetich went drinking with a couple of officials and female secretaries "in a Dalmatian tavern" and their official car - left outside - was stolen; or the case of diplomatic courier Mijo Gavranović who was caught by the Ustaša police trying to smuggle Reichmarks into the NDH in the pouch.(32)* Less funny was the behaviour of the Ustaša Youth representative in Rome, Mate Suić, who insisted on a room in the legation and got it. He apparently behaved with such insolence and audacity to everyone, including the minister, Perić, that the latter simply "had no choice" but to ban Suić from the building altogether and to cease all contact with him.(35)

* Illustrative of the problem of discipline is Lorković's circular of 14 October 1941, forbidding all diplomatic personnel to travel without prior permission from the Ministry and announcing the establishment of a regular courier service ("thus removing the most common excuse for unauthorised travel").(33) On several occasions he had to issue individual warnings and admonishments because of unauthorised travel to ministers, either because of their own or their staff's transgressions. In November 1941 the NDH consul in Prague reported disciplinary measures against three consulate officials [i.e. all but himself!] because of their fraudulent claims for duty-free goods.(34)

3. Areas of Activity

In the NDH foreign ministry files there may be a lot of trivia, but there is a conspicuous absence of material relating to the key issues of the state's external relations, eg. on negotiations with Italy prior to the Rome Agreements, on preparations for Pavelić's meetings with Hitler, on the emergency over German intention to withdraw from Croatia in December 1941, on the Abbazia talks ("Trio"), etc. With most countries' diplomatic documents it is often possible to reconstruct the path from policy conception through formulation to execution. In the NDH papers none of the above steps are discernible. In particular there seem to have been no policy planning/review meetings of department heads and the minister. It is also impossible to trace the lines of communication between Pavelić and the ministry, and it is reasonable to assume that they consisted of ad hoc oral instructions from the Poglavnik. In any event and at all times, Pavelić reserved all substantive diplomatic activity for himself.

The areas of activity left to the foreign ministry were in the main twofold: 1) consular work and 2) the maintenance of relations with other Axis satellites. Consular activities concerned two groups of people: Croat prisoners of war who were in German and other camps and awaited repatriation, and many thousands of workers in Germany from the NDH.

In April 1941 the Wehrmacht was instructed not to imprison Croats in the Yugoslav army, but to release them as "friendly nationals". In the general confusion following ^{the} capitulation of Yugoslavia's ^{armed forces,} many Croats were nevertheless taken prisoner and transported to Germany, as it was impossible for German field commanders to check their national origin. They were taken to transit camps (the largest of which was Traiskirchen near Vienna, later used for ^{the} training of Croatian troops bound for the Russian front), and thence to permanent camps all over Germany.

The NDH foreign ministry instructed local authorities to gather data on imprisoned Croats and fill in preprinted cards on each POW. Those cards were then sent to the NDH legation in Berlin, which passed them on to the OKW. A total of 25-28 thousand Croats were taken prisoner in April 1941, and by February 1942 the foreign ministry had sent some 20,000 personal cards to Germany.* However, the legation in Berlin was instructed to double-check that "no Serbs slip through". ("... da se ne provuče po koji Srbin").(36)

The same discriminatory attitude was applied to the many thousands of Serbs from the NDH who were drafted or deported to work in Germany. On 14 November 1941 Vrančić sent a letter to the legation in Berlin and to the consulates in Munich, Vienna, Graz and Maribor, in which he stressed that no Serbs domiciled in the NDH should be issued with proper passports. They were to be issued only with one-way passes to return to the NDH. However, this was to be done in secret:

"They should be formally treated as Croat citizens in communication with German authorities, but privately urged to accept Catholicism before being issued with proper documents."(37)

The Germans gradually became aware of what was going on, and opposed such policy. To them it was important to retain every foreign worker at his post, and the idea of one-way tickets to the NDH for Serb workers - while quite in line with Pavelić's own brand of Endloesung - could not have suited Speer's manpower planners.

* It is possible that fewer than that number had actually returned by that time. According to the reports from Berlin, throughout 1942 and even 1943 there continued an ongoing search for POWs who had been transferred to other camps, or whose cards had not arrived from their home boroughs.

For instance, in November 1942 Glaise made an unscheduled visit to the Ustaša camp at Sisak, where - as he had been informed by Haeffner - many Serbs were being held under appalling conditions. Having described the usual scenes of horror at some length in his diary*, Glaise noted that "even workers employed in Germany were in the hands of these criminals. I ordered that they and the members of their families be immediately set free".(38) He and other Germans had repeatedly advocated sending Serbs from the NDH to Germany as labour - a prospect which many Serbs also found vastly preferable to the alternative of remaining at the mercy of the Ustašas.

German displeasure at the discriminatory Ustaša policy against Serb workers in German factories was obvious from a cable sent by the NDH legation in Berlin, which urged the foreign ministry to ensure - on German request - that all workers who went home on leave should be allowed to return to the Reich.(39) At the same time, the German legation in Zagreb sent to the NDH foreign ministry detailed instructions on the procedure for granting work and residence permits to workers coming from the NDH. It made a point of stressing that no workers of Aryan descent (i.e. Serbs included) were to be discriminated against.(40)

* "Terrible picture. Very few men, many women and children, poorly clad, sleeping on bare stones. Naked skeletons... Camp commander - a criminal. I ignored him. To my Ustaša escorts I said: 'When a man sees this, he can only spit - only spit, my gentlemen!' The worst of all: in a separate room, no doubt because of my 'inspection', along the wall there were some fifty naked children laying on thinly spread straw. Some of them were already dead, some were dying! Concentration camps were invented by the English in the Boer War; but these houses of horror in Croatia, under the Poglavnik enthroned by us, are the culmination of abhorrence. It seems that Jasenovac is even worse, but no mere mortal can even have a glimpse of that place." Glaise proceeded to the Serb-inhabited village of Crkveni Bok on the Sava river, where a day earlier he had despatched a German tank platoon to protect the remaining inhabitants from the Ustašas: "On two separate occasions, five hundred cutthroats commanded by two Ustaša lieutenants burst into the village. They killed all in sight, they raped the women and tortured them to death, they killed the children. In the Sava I saw a woman's body with the eyes gauged out and a piece of wood pushed into her genitals. Poor creature could not have been more than twenty years old when she fell into the hands of these beasts..."

Judging by the names of people who appear in consular records and related correspondence, it seems that after the winter of 1942-1943 the Serbs from the NDH working in Germany were granted access to more equal consular services. An instance of this was the case of Aleksandar Djurić, a Serb from Bosnia, who was a lecturer at the university in Prague. He and his two Czech brothers in law were sentenced to death by ^{the} Germans in 1944 for subversive activity. The legation in Berlin intervened to have the sentence postponed, pending appeal.(41) Djurić was in the end nevertheless executed.

Politically more sensitive was the case of scores of Muslims from Bosnia, former volunteers from the SS "Hanjara" Division, who were sent to labour camps near Berlin in the aftermath of a rebellion at Villefranche-de-Rouergue. Some of them started escaping from the camp and making their way to the NDH legation, seeking assistance and repatriation. At first NDH consular officers attempted to assist them, went to their camp, and even presented a verbal note to the Auswaertiges Amt supportive of their case, but the Germans responded simply by tightening security at the camp and denying access of any Croatian officials to the "deserters".(42)

On the subject of consular activities it should be mentioned that there is no record of any guidelines regarding the issuance of NDH visas to foreigners. Visas were often approved on the spot if accompanied by an official letter from the host country's government; otherwise, requests were referred to Zagreb. To quote one curious example, in April 1942 the minister in Bulgaria informed the ministry that a trainload of French refugees from Iran were requesting NDH transit visas in order to return home.(43)

4. Croatian-Hungarian Dispute

The only area in which the NDH foreign ministry was able to indulge in some conventional diplomacy, in appearance if not substance, was in its relations with other Axis satellites. Ministerial visits, cultural exchange conventions, consular protocols and trade agreements with Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria or Romania were performed, or negotiated and signed, undoubtedly with Pavelić's blessing, but without apparent direct supervision or guidance from the Poglavnik's headquarters. Very soon these relations became reminiscent of the pre-war Little Entente pattern. Until 1938 Belgrade, Bucharest and Prague had been united in their opposition to Hungarian revanchism. In 1941 Croatia, Slovakia and Romania also established close links, united by the disputes and problems each of them had had with Hungary.

Slovakia was bitter about the Hungarian annexation of Slovak southern border areas in 1938. Romania was still shell-shocked after the Vienna arbitration, which practically reduced it to its pre-1914 borders. The return of Bukovina and Bessarabia in the east, which eventually was to cost Romania half a million soldiers lost in the Russian steppes, could not allay fears that Hungary still coveted southern Transylvania and other "lands of the Crown of St. Stephen" which were left under the sovereignty of Bucharest in 1940.

In the case of the NDH the problem concerned an area between the Mura and Drava rivers inhabited predominantly by Croats known as Medjimurje (in Hungarian Muraköz). It was occupied by Hungarian troops in April 1941, when they also marched into the Yugoslav parts of Bačka and Baranja.*

* Horthy was willing to take part in all German ventures - starting with Czechoslovakia in 1938 - provided that Hungary got a share of the booty. By April 1941 he had obtained parts of southern Slovakia, the Carpathian Ukraine and northern Transylvania. Therefore, Hitler confidently counted on Hungarian participation in action against Yugoslavia as well. Horthy accepted Hitler's offer without consulting his prime minister, Count Tèleki, who had signed a pact of friendship with Yugoslavia only four months previously. (44) Tèleki, true to a Hungarian nobleman's form, committed suicide on 3 April, saying in his farewell note to Horthy that "we have thrown away the nation's honour", and "We shall become the robbers of corpses! the basest of nations."

Horthy gave them the order to advance only after he had hastily extended his recognition to Pavelić - the first head of state to do so. The proclamation of the NDH was interpreted by the Regent as proof that Yugoslavia had ceased to exist. Hungary was therefore - in his view - no longer bound by its "Pact of Everlasting Friendship" with Belgrade.*

The advance of Hungarian troops into Medjmurje alarmed the Croats, who already by mid-April suspected that the Honveds' intention was to stay there for good.(45) It was also no secret that Hungarian irredentism coveted an outlet to the Adriatic.** Such ambitions were bound to clash with Croat nationalism, and Medjmurje could be seen as the first step on the road to Sušak. At the very least the Hungarians initially regarded Medjmurje as a bargaining chip, which could be used to induce the Croats to grant them extraterritorial rights on the railroad connecting the Hungarian border and Fiume/Sušak.(47) This was the solution also favoured by Germany, and Ribbentrop seemed to think that the Hungarians would evacuate Medjmurje if granted extraterritorial transit rights.(48) Hungary at first hinted that, besides transit, it would also demand formal sovereignty over the area, while the NDH would be allowed to administer it (the "Bosnian solution" of 1878). By the end of May, however, it had become clear that negotiations between Zagreb and Budapest were bogged down. The Croats wanted Medjmurje without preconditions, while the Hungarians appeared increasingly unwilling to give it up without much greater concessions by the NDH.(49)

* Romania, on the other hand, extended its recognition to Pavelić only after the Yugoslav government in exile had broken diplomatic relations with Bucharest in May 1941 because its territory was used to attack Yugoslavia.

** Conveying Hitler's offer to Horthy to attack Yugoslavia, the Hungarian minister in Berlin, Döme Sztójay, hinted at this: "Yet he [Hitler] knows that your heart draws Your Highness also to the Adriatic, and that Hungary is in need of a free seaport. Although Fiume belongs to Italy, Hitler held out the prospect that he would throw in his influence in this question."(46) (Sztójay was born to Serb Orthodox parents as Dimitrije Stojanović in 1883. He briefly headed the Hungarian government in 1944; in 1946 he was executed.)

After a month's break in negotiations, Lorković accepted the broad terms set by the Hungarians in May. On 30 June 1941 the NDH suggested that Medjmurje be returned to Croatian administration even without recognition of the NDH sovereignty over the area. Lorković offered to go to Budapest and negotiate on the basis of an agreement to disagree on the issue of sovereignty and added that Croatia "acknowledged" Hungarian historical pretensions.(50) Only a day later both Lorković and the Hungarian minister in Zagreb, Marossy, told Kasche that the offer was not accepted in Budapest.(51)

This was soon confirmed at a higher level. The Hungarian prime minister, Bardossy, told the German minister in Budapest, Erdmannsdorff, that he had advocated speedy negotiations with Croatia on Medjmurje, on customs free transit and on a possible exchange of minorities, but that the Croats were slow to respond, and dragged their feet hoping to enlist support from other Axis powers.(52) In the meantime, numerous deputations from Medjmurje went to Budapest to lobby against giving it to the NDH, and Hungarian public opinion - in Bardossy's words - turned against any territorial concessions. Finally, the Hungarian premier said that any return of Medjmurje to Croatia would have to be accompanied by major further concessions - eg. the transfer of close to 200,000 Catholic Slavs from Bačka (Bunjevci and Šokci, "ethnically akin to Croats") to the NDH.*

* Although the Croat national consciousness had made significant inroads among most Bunjevci in Bačka by the beginning of this century, the Hungarians insisted on classifying them as a separate ethnic group. As for the Serbo-Croat speaking Medjmurci, it was sometimes claimed in Budapest that they were ethnically totally different from Croats, that they were Hungarian by blood and culture, if not language. This contention was not totally groundless: a number of them apparently felt that way, and Hungary claimed to possess lists (prepared in Zagreb) of people who would be persecuted for their pro-Hungarian sympathies when the NDH took over.(53)

An even more emphatic "no" to Lorković came on 9 July from the Hungarian deputy foreign minister, Vörrle. He told Erdmannsdorff that Hungary regarded Lorković's offer of 2 July as a trap, calculated to get something (Medjimurje) for nothing.(54) Significantly, Vörrle added that Hungary did not believe Croatian protestations of friendship, because it had reliable information that the NDH had not rejected a Slovak proposal to create a new Little Entente which would be directed against Hungary just like the old one.

The Hungarian anti-Croat agitation also proceeded in Berlin, but ^{there} it was Romania, rather than Slovakia, ^{that} was presented as the villain of the piece. Minister Sztojaj told Weizsaecker on 8 July that the Hungarians had deciphered a document according to which Slavko Kvaternik declared himself in favour of a joint Croatian-Romanian frontier.(55) Sztojaj added that for this reason Kasche had allegedly declared in Zagreb his opposition to the return of Banat to Hungary; this Weizsaecker flatly denied, saying that Kasche must have been misquoted.*

* In fact the Germans had no intention of giving the Yugoslav part of Banat to either Hungary or Romania. While nominally a part of Nedić's Serbia, this rich agricultural province was administered by the local Volksdeutsche, over one hundred thousand strong, in conjunction with Himmler's SS.

In another episode typical of the intrigues between Hungary and her "allies" in the Axis camp, Hungarian defence minister, General Bartha, passed a message to Glaise in August 1941 to the effect that Hungary would like good relations with both Croatia and Slovakia, but that Romania was trying to prevent this. "In case of war with Romania, which is certain to take place, Hungary wants to secure its back", the message went on, and Medjimurje could be given to the NDH after all if it proved cooperative.(56) The foreign ministry told Kasche that the message passed to Glaise was not at all in line with the news from Budapest, which indicated increasing antipathy to the Croats.(57) Lorković expressed to Kasche his opinion that the Hungarian general staff was less annexationist-minded about Medjimurje than the politicians. This was confirmed in early September, when Bartha repeated to the Germans his view that Medjimurje should be given to Croatia.(58) The general claimed that Horthy and the circle around him were chief advocates of keeping the province. (The apparent discrepancy between the views of Bartha and Horthy broadly corresponded to the differences between Italian generals and Mussolini over Dalmatia.)

A month later the ubiquitous Benzon told Weizsaecker that the Hungarians plotted with Italy against Croatia. Benzon claimed that Bardossy had presented a memorandum to Italy purporting, among other things, that he (Weizsaecker) had told Sztojaj that Hungary could count on Germany's support over Medjimurje. (59) Yet again, the calm but exasperated Weizsaecker had to point out to the excitable Croatian envoy that Germany hoped for a solution of the dispute between the NDH and Hungary, but had no intention of taking sides in the dispute. But Ribbentrop's secretary of state evidently grew tired of such intrigues, and for once appeared determined to get to the bottom of the matter. On 20 August he warned Sztojaj to refrain from conveying misleading information to Budapest, hinting that he knew about the memorandum sent to Rome. (60) Sztojaj denied any knowledge of such ^a document, but Weizsaecker succeeded in getting a copy through Kasche, and found out that for once Benzon was right. (61)* After receiving the memoranda from Kasche Weizsaecker called Sztojaj again on 2 September. (62) This time the Hungarian envoy was embarrassed, and passed Bardossy's apologies to Weizsaecker. He claimed that the "misunderstanding" had been caused by the unauthorised action of the allegedly ill-informed Hungarian minister in Rome, Villanyi, who had retired in the meantime.

Hungary's attempts to solicit Italian support against their mutual Balkan neighbour bore an uncanny semblance to the Versailles era, which was allegedly consigned to the scrapheap of history by the emerging New Order.

* One of the two Hungarian memoranda on Medjimurje ("L'isola della Mura") addressed to the Italian government contained a clear statement that "the Secretary of State at the Reich Foreign Ministry has admitted that the Hungarian side could not have gone any further in its patience and consideration, and said that he had understanding for the position of Hungary".

Just as Italy soon came to regard the NDH as an heir to Yugoslavia, a rival on the eastern Adriatic shore, mutual perceptions of Hungary and its non-Germanic neighbours followed the same pattern.* In the case of Croatia, Horthy even lacked the dose of grudging respect which he felt for the Serbs.**

On 9 July 1941, on Horthy's instructions, the Hungarian military commander at Čakovec (in Medjmurje), Colonel Timar Zsigmond, proclaimed the introduction of full military administration in the province.*** This was done without any prior warning or subsequent formal notification to Zagreb, while the negotiations between the two sides were still going on. Lorković reacted the following day, 10 July, with a protest note to Hungary, the first such document drafted by the Ustaša foreign ministry. He asked for an explanation of the military commander's action, and asserted that the NDH would never accept amputation of Medjmurje.(66) Marossy replied a day later with a personal note to Lorković in which Medjmurje was called "an undoubtedly Hungarian territory".(67) Pavelić was a step further and told Glaise that he would lodge a protest with all member-countries of the Tripartite Pact. If Hungary persisted, he said, he would close the frontier with Hungary and send the Hungarian minister packing.(68)

* For instance, the Hungarian press reacted furiously to the speeches of the NDH minister in Bratislava, Dragutin Toth, and the Slovak president, Mgr Tiso, made on the occasion of the former's presentation of credentials. It was pointed out that the tone and the anti-Hungarian slant were hardly different from the atmosphere which had prevailed in the contacts between Belgrade and Prague a decade earlier.(63)

** In a memorandum drawn for his discussions with Hitler in 1936 Horthy wrote that "the Serbs are those adversaries within the Little Entente to whom one could hold out a hand without blushing. Before the War they were our enemies with a vizor held open, and they fought courageously in the War... [T]he Serbs are the best soldiers within the Little Entente..."(64)

*** The proclamation stated that "Muraköz has finally and eternally rejoined Hungary", and invited the population to celebrate by displaying flags of "mother Hungary". All Croat civil servants were summarily dismissed, and the colonel left them in no doubt that the issue of Medjmurje was thus finally resolved.(65)

Until that time Germany had remained aloof on the issue, and preferred to let her two small clients sort out their differences on their own. However, Pavelić's threat of strong diplomatic action at a time when Barbarossa was in full swing could not be tolerated. Therefore, State Undersecretary Woermann prepared a memorandum on 11 July which suggested that the Croatian government should be dissuaded from the measures contemplated by Pavelić.(69) This was conveyed to Zagreb, and Lorković duly assured Kasche that the relations would not be severed.(70) Instead, they were downgraded, and instead of a minister, Pavelić despatched to Budapest only a chargé d'affaires (Ivo pl. Gaj).

In subsequent weeks the cold war between the NDH and Hungary escalated. On 26 July Lorković had a conversation with the Hungarian chargé d'affaires, who threatened that Hungary would close the entire Hungarian-NDH frontier if the crossing point at Petrovaradin was not immediately reopened.(71) Lorković expressed surprise at such overreaction over what he called a temporary measure, caused by the exodus of Serbs from Bačka across the NDH territory to Belgrade. He then complained that "the treatment of Croats in Medjimurje is similar to the treatment of Serbs in Vojvodina".* At the same time the Hungarian press started a concerted anti-Croatian campaign, led by the Magyar Nemzet, and echoed in various government-sponsored publications.

* Lorković was evidently not bothered by the Hungarians' treatment of Serbs, but by the fact that Croats were treated no better. Even though Hungarian army units and gendarmes killed several thousand Serbs in Novi Sad and southern Bačka in January 1942, this was an isolated episode and it caused considerable controversy and an investigation in Budapest. On the whole the Hungarians' treatment of the Serb minority was infinitely better than the Ustašas'. Serb civilian losses in the Hungarian occupied areas during the war were lower than the average for Yugoslavia as a whole.(72) This must have been disappointing to Slavko Kvaternik, who in 1941 enthusiastically told a Hungarian general staff representative, Kalman Köry: "We shall throw the Serbs into the Sava, and you into the Danube!"(73)

By mid-September¹⁹⁴¹ the tension had escalated to the point of troop concentrations and military exercises on the Hungarian side of the border. (74) At the same time, Hungarians carried their anti-NDH agitation to other satellite capitals. (75) By mid-October Lorković instructed all NDH posts abroad to collect information "on any anti-Croat propaganda by the Hungarians". (76)*

The Hungarian agitation was especially strong in Sofia, which was unsurprising as Bulgaria had its own reasons for unease about any regional grouping which included Romania. The Bulgarians expressed their apprehension to Židovec about an alleged Romanian offer of a pact to Slovakia and Croatia. (79) Lorković hastened to reply that no such Romanian offer had been made, and that the NDH would never join any anti-Bulgarian combination. The Bulgarian ex-premier Tsankov subsequently urged Lorković to seek improved relations with Hungary, especially in view of the fact that both Croatia and Bulgaria had their problems with Italy. (80)**

* A couple of days later Department Balkans-East of the NDH foreign ministry reported to the head of the cultural and press department, Ivo Huehn, about the "anti-Croat Hungarian propaganda by Hungary in several European capitals" and suggested appropriate reaction in the press at home as well as a response abroad. (77) By the end of October the NDH legation in Budapest was instructed to lodge a new protest because of the arrest of two prominent Croats in Medjmurje as hostages following the murder of a pro-Hungarian village mayor, and the ending of local border traffic. (78)

** The Bulgarians had an ongoing tug-of-war with Italy over western Macedonia, which the Italians^{had} included into their Greater Albania. Židovec's conversation with politicians in Sofia frequently turned into anti-Italian tirades. But in November 1941 he had a "tense" conversation with the Hungarian minister-counsellor in Sofia, Allain de Paikert. To Židovec's horror, the Hungarian drew a parallel between Croatian rights in Medjmurje and Serbian rights in Bosnia, saying that both provinces belonged to their present masters [i.e. Hungary and the NDH] on the basis of historical, rather than ethnic considerations. (81) (Adding insult to injury in Židovec's view, Paikert denied that there was any "Croatian nobility", saying that their peerage charters were all granted by Hungarian kings, and that most such families which had left a mark in history were regarded as Hungarian in Hungary - eg. Zrinjski/Zrinyi.) The Hungarian intransigent attitude was also apparent to Židovec when he spoke to the Hungarian minister in Sofia, Arnothy. (82)

Throughout November Židovec also reported a series of pro-Hungarian (and implicitly anti-Croatian) articles in several Bulgarian papers. (83)

Finally, on 16 December 1941 the Hungarian parliament voted in favour of a government-sponsored draft law, which included Medjmurje in "the southern lands" reannexed to Hungary. On that occasion Bardossy hailed "the faithful people of Medjmurje" who had returned to "the Hungarian motherland". (84) The Hungarian unilateral annexation of Medjmurje was followed by a Croatian protest, (85) but it was an empty gesture. December 1941 was the month of grave crisis in the East, and Germany was as unwilling as before to intervene in any way in the dispute. It even contemplated pulling out of the NDH altogether at that very time. Without German intervention, there was no way for Pavelić to change the Hungarian fait accompli. Romanian and Slovak papers published articles supportive of Croatia, but those countries could not and would not go any further. Bulgaria kept quiet, Italy was gleefully expecting to march north of the demarcation line, and Pavelić's modest resources were overstrained by the raging insurgency in that half of his state still left under his jurisdiction.

The dispute with Hungary indicated the narrow limits of Ustaša foreign policy making even in an area where they were allowed some autonomy of action. Those limits were primarily dictated by the perception of the power of Croatia by other actors; and Horthy himself had no doubt that it was negligible. This accurate perception of weakness was coupled with Horthy's deep scorn and contempt for the Croats in general, and the Ustašas in particular.*

* In early 1942 he wrote:

"The Croatians who for 800 years as a part of Hungary were never exploited, and could live continually subsidised and without care, want to lay the foundations of an independent state... an endeavour in which in my opinion they will never succeed, because they are not an element on which a state can be built." (86)

and in a letter to Hitler on 10 January 1942 the Hungarian leader categorically stated:

"The majority of the population of Croatia is disaffected, and even hostile to the rootless Ustaša régime, and is on the outlook to shake off this system. Bolshevik ideology is spreading not only among the Serbs in Croatia, who have every reason to hate the present Croat domination, but also among the Croat population..." (87)

In a long letter to Hitler Horthy gave full expression to the Hungarian view of politics in the Danubian basin in early 1942:

"Now we Hungarians are living with, so to speak, open doors towards the Balkans, surrounded by peoples whose hatred is directed in the first place against us. This hatred manifests itself clearly even today. The reason is mainly that these peoples would not readily forfeit the valuable stretches of Hungarian lands adjudicated to them in Paris. In the form of an alliance and cooperation of Romanians, Croats and Slovaks we are again witnessing the birth of a second Little Entente which does not even try to conceal its hostile intentions."(88)

In subsequent months Pavelić had to come to terms with the Hungarian decision on Medjmurje, and in this he did not really have any alternative. Internally totally unconsolidated and on the brink of chaos, externally unsupported except for two other satellites with whom it even did not share a frontier, the NDH had no clothes and everyone knew that.

Subsequent normalisation of relations commenced with the promotion of Gaj to the rank of minister in early 1942. Trade talks, interrupted in December, were resumed, and although Medjmurje still appeared on Croatian maps as NDH territory, the subject was taken off the agenda. By mid-1943 the relations had improved to such an extent that the Hungarian foreign ministry characterised them as "good-neighbourly and normal. The two countries are separated by natural frontiers. Ethnic mixing is insignificant".(89)

Hungary's traditional antagonism towards "the profiteers of Trianon" had remained, but Croatia was no longer regarded as negatively as Slovakia and Romania.(90) The NDH diplomacy in its dispute with Hungary learned the fundamental lesson of foreign policy making: in order to effect a desired outcome, a state needs to have the resources to alter its environment in accordance with that objective. Devoid of such resources, the NDH also proved devoid of all ability to conduct foreign policy in any substantive sense.

5. Accomplices in Tailcoats

The example of a hundred-odd non-Ustaša intellectuals, mainly jurists, who put their services at the disposal of the régime and enabled its foreign ministry to function, invites some questions about the nature of Croatia's body-politic. Both in Croat historiography within Yugoslavia and among non-Ustaša Croat émigrés abroad, the prevailing theme is that four years of Pavelić were an anomaly and a temporary aberration which superimposed itself on the Croatian body-social and was easily shaken off.

While it is undoubtedly true that the Ustašas were less successful than the Nazis in permeating their country's social life with their political norms, the scope of moral issues raised by Pavelić's régime is similar to that confronting a student of the Third Reich. Without participation of a sizeable segment of the urban middle class, Pavelić's project would not have functioned even in its ramshackle form. If a régime so exceeds the bounds of previously conventional morality as to put one third of its population outside the law, and to devote resources to the brutal murder of some hundreds of thousands of them, then anyone on its payroll cannot avoid being tainted. Of course it is incorrect to claim that Vlaho Buško or Count Pejacsevics were deliberately and personally evil; they, and thousands of people like them in Zagreb, Osijek, Varaždin or Karlovac were "normal" men whose work aided and abetted a régime of institutionalised evil and immorality.

The essence of totalitarianism - even in its underdeveloped Ustaša form - was not in the persons of Pavelić, Lorković and Luburić. In a way it was far more tangible in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Independent State of Croatia, in the "decent", God-fearing, educated bureaucrats who knew that nasty things went on in the provinces, but who would have undoubtedly fainted if shown the tangible results of a day's work at Jasenovac.

Describing one such bureaucrat (the NDH delegate to the German food
director^{ex-}ate in Berlin), one of Pavelić's diplomats wrote in the late 1970s:

"Matko Mašeg was not a 'disappointed Ustaša'... He was above all a man, honest and religious, who - like many others - could not partake in the methods of political struggle prevalent at that time in the Balkans. That is why he asked for another assignment. He remained a supporter of Croatian statehood and he retained respect for Dr Ante Pavelić until his death... He was socially withdrawn, sentimental and given to philosophising..."(91)

It was hardly remarkable that a "religious" and "sentimental" man could not stomach the "methods of political [sic!] struggle" in the NDH. It is much more interesting to note that he resolved the problem by making sure that he did not have to see, and therefore to "know".*

The paradox of the banality of evil is that Matko Mašeg's office work (in procuring foodstuffs for Pavelić's besieged and shrinking domain) probably had more disastrous longer-term effects on the fate of Serbs in the NDH than the work of any single cutthroat in the Black Legion flying squads. At its essential level, the control by the centre of power - Pavelić - consisted simply in the acceptance by all those on the state payroll (from the undersecretaries of state to the notaries-public in local boroughs) of the inviolability of the régime's goals and norms of behaviour. Someone could go to Berlin in order "not to know", but even there, the reality of the "methods of political struggle" back home occasionally caught up with them - like when they were instructed that the Serb workers should be given only one-way passes back to the NDH; and nobody among them could pretend not to know why.

* To this day there are people in Zagreb who claim they did not know what was happening fifty miles downstream at Jasenovac, and since they didn't know then "it probably did **not** happen, or wasn't quite that bad, and even if it was, the other side was no better". The difference between a Croat who had internalised and emotionally accepted Pavelić's Endloesung, and his next-door neighbour who had refused to acknowledge that it was taking place at all, was that of degree rather than kind.

XIV - The Turning Point: 1943

1. German-Partisan Contacts

The summer of 1942 was the critical period of the war for the Allies on all fronts. The autumn of that year saw the dramatic reverses of the Axis, and as 1943 began Germany was on the strategic defensive. In January Roosevelt and Churchill met in Casablanca and decided that the focus of their immediate action would be in the Mediterranean area. Aware of the threat to his overall position in the south-east, Hitler engaged in relentless pursuit of insurgent in the NDH in the first half of the year, determined to secure his rear in case of an Allied landing. The shifting military environment also opened possibilities for political realignments in the Balkan area, including the NDH. On the German side four different projects directly concerned the Ustaša state. Broadly speaking, one was supportive of Pavelić, three were not:

1) Sensing that Mihailović and the Western Allies were a threat to Tito's plans no less than they were to the Germans', the pro-Ustaša German minister in Zagreb, Siegfried Kasche, advocated an understanding with the Partisans, which would also help the ever-elusive consolidation of Pavelić.

2) The German generals in the Balkans, above all Glaise and Loehr, but also Luetjens and the newcomer to the area, Lothar Rendulic, continued their attacks on the Ustaša régime with considerable vigour.

3) Also vigorously opposed to Pavelić, but acting on his own and for long time behind the scenes, was Heinrich Himmler, who had far-reaching ambitions in Croatia and energetically proceeded to carry them out in 1943.

4) An unexpected reinforcement to the anti-Ustaša camp came from the Foreign Ministry in the person of Hermann Neubacher, who was given wide power in the second half of 1943 to organise "national anti-Communist forces" in the Balkans. Neubacher sought to do this by conducting a strongly pro-Serb policy.

However, the outcome of such plans was fundamentally influenced by the fall of Italy, which profoundly affected the strategic position of the NDH.

Hard pressed and in danger of annihilation, the Partisans established contact with the Germans in early March 1943, ostensibly in order to renew the exchanges of prisoners.* The talks involving a captured German officer, one Major Strecker, soon evolved into political negotiations which went well beyond the objectives described by Tito shortly before his death.** Actually, it was already in November 1942 that Tito put out his first feelers to find out if the Germans would let him concentrate all his forces against the v Cetniks in return for a truce south of the Sava and an end of attacks on the key Zagreb-Belgrade railroad north of the river.(2) Although both Kasche and Glaise supported the idea, it could not be pursued because at that very time Hitler decided to deal a mortal blow to all insurgents (his "Directive 47").

At the height of "Weiss II" three high-ranking Partisans went to the 717 Infantry Division headquarters to negotiate an exchange for Strecker.*** In line with Tito's later account of the event, they said that they wanted recognition as belligerents. However, according to German records, they also stated that they did not want to fight against the Croat state, and certainly not against the Germans, but only against the v Cetniks.(3) According to Colonel Pffaffenroth, Lueters's chief of staff, they even said that they would also fight the British if they landed on the Adriatic Coast.

* The first such contacts were established in the summer of 1942 through Hans Ott in Livno (see p. 273 above), and resulted in the first recorded exchange of prisoners between the Germans and the Partisans, on 5 September 1942. Such exchanges continued until the end of the year, and included captured Ustašas as well as Germans.

** "During the battle of the Neretva... we had a number of German and Italian prisoners. Among them was [the] SS battalion commander Strecker. We did not know what to do with them. We did not have enough food even for ourselves. Of course, we did not want to liquidate them, because we adhered to the Geneva Convention on POWs.[sic!]... Three of our comrades went to negotiate on the exchange of prisoners, whereby our forces would be granted the status of a belligerent side in the spirit of the prevailing norms of the law of war. We only succeeded in exchanging prisoners..."(1)

*** They were Koča Popović, Milovan Djilas and Vladimir Velebit, the first under his own name, the other two under aliases "Marković" and "Petrović".

Already on 11 March in the evening Glaise obtained the information from Bosnia (Gornji Vakuf) about the Partisans' offer. Just like Lueters earlier in the day, Glaise also felt that he did not have the authority to authorise explicitly political talks which the Partisans were suggesting. He therefore telephoned his friend Wilhelm Hoettl at the RSHA.(4) The latter immediately contacted the RSHA man in charge of foreign intelligence, Walter Schellenberg, who passed the information to Ribbentrop. When Ribbentrop approached Hitler with the news, the Fuehrer cut the whole thing short by saying that "one does not negotiate with the rebels, one shoots them".

Initially unaware of Hitler's principled stand, Kasche reported on 17 March that Ott's negotiations with Tito's plenipotentiaries had opened the possibility that the Partisans would halt all combat against Germans, Italians and Croats, and - if this was agreed - retreat to the Sanjak to deal with the Četniks.(5) Kasche also indicated the Partisans' alleged readiness to accept pacification of the NDH, and added that both Lorković and Casertano viewed the proposal favourably.* A few days later, Kasche enthusiastically reported that - "in the context of the Partisans' earlier statements" - their heavy fighting against Četnik forces in Herzegovina was "quite useful".(6)

The Partisans, too, had not realised that Hitler rejected a priori their bold schemes. So when Djilas (a Politbureau member) went to Zagreb on 26 March, accompanied by Velebit, he offered a truce provided that the Partisans be left alone by the Axis forces to deal with Mihailović in the area of Sanjak.(7) This offer tallied with Kasche's earlier message of 17 March, which suggests that the truce with the Germans and Ustašas, followed by a showdown with Mihailović, was the consistent Partisan line, approved from the top.

* It is sometimes wrongly claimed that Hitler's famous comment ("Mit Rebellen wird nicht verhandelt, Rebellen werden erschossen") was prompted by Kasche's telegram; in fact, he had made it a few days earlier, commenting on the information originating from Glaise.

Djilas was disappointed to find out that the Germans conducted talks at a relatively low level.(8) This was soon explained by their lack of authority to indulge in any far-reaching political negotiations. Glaise and Kasche saw eye to eye on an issue for once, and - unhappy about what they regarded as a wasted opportunity - decided to urge for substantive negotiations with the Partisans on their respective fronts (the foreign ministry and the OKW). They recommended to the Partisans to stop, as a token of good will, all attacks on the key railroad connecting Belgrade and Zagreb, which could provide some basis for eventual negotiations.* This the Partisans immediately accepted, and the attacks were halted. (They were renewed only when Tito realised that the Germans would not reciprocate.)

On 29 March Ribbentrop poured cold water on Kasche's combinations, forbade any further official contact with the Partisans, and sharply asked for Kasche's explanation of his undue advocacy of unauthorised talks.(10) The following day Kasche justified his attempts by his conviction that a political solution was needed to a problem so hard to solve by military means.(11)** In essence his argument was similar to that of the Italian generals, except that he advocated an understanding with the Partisans in order to crush Mihailović. This was also the solution infinitely preferable to the Ustašas, to whom even the Communist enemy in all likelihood was more palatable than the "greater Serbian" one. As for the Italians, by early 1943 they were in the mood to support any combination which promised pacification, and allowed them to keep their forces more or less intact and undispersed, close to the Adriatic coast

* It seems that both Kasche and Glaise made this same suggestion, the former through Ott, the latter directly to Velebit.(9) Kasche added that Tito's men would "have to accept the relationships established in Croatia by the Axis".

** Once again, Kasche came out strongly in favour of different treatment of the rival insurgent forces. Undeterred by Ribbentrop's rebuke, he wrote that the Partisan question was not treated properly in the Reich and that it would not be possible to destroy the Partisans completely by military means. He also asked Ribbentrop not to sever the link with Tito's forces through Ott.

The common ground that the Germans "objectively" had with the Partisans in the spring of 1943, their opposition to Mihailović, seems to have given Tito great hopes. Even without waiting for the outcome of talks in Zagreb, he issued instructions to the effect that the struggle against German, Italian and NDH forces should be stopped; this was reiterated even after Djilas's and Velebit's return from Zagreb.*

Kasche was not the only one to be rebuked from a distant command centre. Moscow also reacted with some dismay to the news from Tito.(15) It came at a time when the Soviet Union was fully engaged in the demolition of Mihailović's reputation in the West because of his alleged collaboration, and any leak of what Tito was up to would have been highly embarrassing.** Last but not least, it could not have suited Moscow - long-term political goals in the Balkans notwithstanding - to give Hitler too much respite in the Balkans while he was recovering after Stalingrad and preparing for the summer round.

* The Partisan First Bosnian Corps was told that the delegates had "succeeded in detaching the Germans from the Italians and Četniks", and stressed:

"You must take this into account and concentrate all your combat activities against the Četniks in central Bosnia. Against the Ustašas you go into defence and fight them only if you are attacked by them, or if they support the Četniks. This is the provisional order, until further notice."(12)

On 29 March Tito and his aides ordered the Bosnian CPY Provincial Committee to move one brigade to Sanjak and "cleanse of all Četniks" the area en route:

"On your way do not engage the Germans, do not take any actions on the railroad, because this is in the interest of our current operations... Our most important task right now is the destruction of the Četniks of Draža Mihailović and of their command apparatus, which is the greatest danger for the continuation of the people's liberation struggle. Everything else you will be told when we meet.(13)

(According to the Yugoslav historian Vladimir Dedijer, the message was taken to its destination by a Partisan courier travelling under German protection.)

Totally at odds with Tito's "respect for the laws of warfare" was an instruction from the same period to shoot all captured Četnik officers "without mercy" and "on the spot", while rank-and-file were to be "liquidated, but secretly" if they refused to join the Partisans.(14)

** Only a month earlier Mihailović had made an impromptu statement at a village fête near Kolasin, to the effect that his domestic enemies were worse than the occupiers. It caused a furore in London and caused him much damage with the Allies. In essence the Partisans thought the same of him, but were much more circumspect: the full extent of their offers to the Germans had not become known until almost three decades after the war.

Persistent to a fault with his pet project, Kasche addressed Ribbentrop again on 17 April with the proposal to talk to the Partisans and play them against the Četniks.(16) Ribbentrop's new "nein" came four days later; the foreign minister also pointed out that the Germans had succeeded in convincing Mussolini of the need to destroy both insurgent groups simultaneously, and that it would be difficult for the German side to start advocating a policy not all that different from the previous Italian position.(17)

It was only in early May that Tito finally realised the Germans were unlikely to change their mind. He reluctantly sent a message to his units throughout the NDH to resume the acts of sabotage which were suspended in late March. Once again, however, the Četniks were named as the chief enemy. Nevertheless, the lull in fighting in April coupled with Tito's hopes of a deal with the Germans slackened his guard and probably contributed to the shock and confusion in his ranks when "Schwarz" hit his forces in mid-May.

When Italy capitulated, four months later, Kasche immediately seized the opportunity to renew his pleading for a deal with the Partisans.(18) He claimed that many Croats had joined Tito's forces for "national reasons", due to the Italian behaviour, and - obviously acting in accord with Pavelić - he added that the NDH government would grant them an amnesty. Significantly, Kasche's ultimate objective this time was to "demolish the political and moral base" of the Partisan movement by detaching Croats from the movement and somehow drawing them to the Ustašas.

This was ^a more serious and realistic approach than Kasche's earlier expectation that Tito would accept a permanent truce and withdrawal to the mountains of Sanjak.* It also resulted in some extensive talks with a leading Croat in the Partisan ranks, Marjan Stilinović, through the ubiquitous Ott.

* The old cynic Glaise remarked in his diary: "Kasche is engaged in high politics and wants to split Tito's men in two camps. As if they were waiting just for this ass to do so".

The full story of Kasche's contacts with Stilinović is yet to be told. From Kasche's papers it appears that they resulted in several agreements (eg. on the purchase of horses and on the export of timber and chemicals from Partisan-held territories) which - while falling short of a strategic breakthrough - nevertheless kept the door ajar for further possibilities if and when Kasche obtained the green light from Berlin.*

It is still remarkable with what persistence, even to the point of endangering his career, Kasche kept urging a deal with Tito's Partisans in the spring of 1943. Admittedly, he was supported on this one issue by Glaise, but theirs was not a strategic alliance: Glaise took a broader view than Kasche and realised that any truce with Tito or any victory over Mihailović would be temporary for as long as the root political cause for their movements - the Ustaša régime of Ante Pavelić - remained in power.

In contrast, Kasche seems to have genuinely believed that Tito was ready for a permanent truce and a lasting withdrawal to Sanjak. Much more importantly, Kasche expected subsequent improvement of the position of the Ustaša régime, with which his own career had become so closely linked. At that time Loehr had come forward with an energetic demand not only for the removal of Pavelić and the Ustašas from power, but also for the replacement of Kasche from the post in Zagreb. A coup of letting Tito wipe out the Četniks, and then allowing him to stay out of the way in the middle of nowhere (Sanjak) - and all that with no loss of German blood - would have made Kasche's position invincible and the debate about Pavelić's régime superfluous.

* The most comprehensive account to date of this episode was published by Kazimirović (1987), pp. 185-192. A particularly intriguing detail concerns the meeting between Kasche's agent Ott and one of Tito's top Croat assistants, Andrija Hebrang.(19) Hebrang also seems to have maintained contacts with Glaise.(20) The mystery of Hebrang (who committed "suicide" in Tito's jail in 1948, having been allegedly unmasked as an Ustaša agent in Partisan ranks since his exchange for Ott's group in 1942) is still the subject of controversy in Yugoslavia. While the official version is unconvincing, there are indicators that Hebrang was a Croat "national-Communist" sui generis.

2. The Generals Strike Again

Glaise and Loehr had never become fully reconciled to the victory that Pavelić and Kasche scored in the autumn of 1942, when Hitler decided to keep the Ustašas in power. They subsequently attempted (and succeeded) in gaining full control over Pavelić's armed forces and administrative authority over the zones of operations. This resulted in a significant reduction of atrocities by the Ustašas from November-December 1942 on. (This did not apply to death camps such as Jasenovac and Gradiška, however, in which Luburić's mass killings went on as before.) But what eluded them was a commitment at the very top to make a radical switch in Croatia; and only such fundamental change of course, they thought, could remove the political roots of the insurgency.*

In February 1942, at the height of "Weiss", Glaise frankly presented his views to General Warlimont, one of those at the OKW with whom he appears to have had a particularly good rapport.⁽²²⁾ He explicitly stated that giving the state "to a clique of émigrés without any roots" was a worrying experiment but, he added, Germany nevertheless had had an opportunity to change things for the better before the reverses in Africa and Russia. They made any constructive action by the military more difficult, but the solution could be found if Germany took power in Croatia in the form of military administration supported by "an auxilliary apparatus of non-Ustaša Croats".**

* Aware of the mood in German military circles, Pavelić coolly asked Glaise in January 1943 whether it was true that the Wehrmacht intended to remove him from power! Glaise attempted to give a good-humoured reply, and said that "the present conditions are not, after all, conducive to such experiments".⁽²¹⁾

** Glaise drew a parallel with the Central Powers' administration of Poland in 1916-1918, when there was a military governor in Warsaw and Lublin and "a shadow of a national government" in Warsaw. Such a political role could only be filled by Maček's peasant movement; but Glaise wondered whether its leaders could be won over for cooperation "at this advanced time": "A stabilisation of the East Front would be certainly desirable in that context". When Loehr above all advocated getting rid of the Ustašas - Glaise went on - "he is certainly pointing at the putrid abscess on the state organism of Croatia". What was the use of the Poglavnik's "friendship", when he was the cause of the problem, rather than its solution? Glaise concluded that the alternative to Pavelić's removal was to continue "scraping along" [fortwurlsten], with an increase in German influence, which was already very thorough in the military sphere.

The most heavyweight attack on Pavelić from within the German military establishment until that time came on 3 March 1943, when the Wehrmacht Commander South-East, Alexander von Loehr, handed to Jodl at the OKW his memorandum (dated 27 February) on "The Necessary Political, Administrative and Economic Reforms in Croatia After Military Operations".(23) The sharply-worded document was addressed personally to Hitler, and categorically demanded not only the removal of Pavelić and the Ustašas from power, but also the urgent, unconditional replacement of Minister Kasche, "who, as an ideologue, does not see the reality".* Thanks to Glaise's constant reports, and particularly to his long letter to Warlimont of a fortnight previously, Loehr's memorandum did not come as a great surprise at the OKW, but the bluntness of its tone and the scope of changes it advocated were nevertheless remarkable.

It seems that Loehr's action was prompted by the demand of Pavelić's government that the areas taken from the Partisans during "Weiss I" be given to the NDH authorities to administer.(26) Loehr was determined to resist any such demand, and stated in his memorandum that the aftermath of "Weiss" demanded radical reforms. He said that the Croats were not able to rule themselves, the government had no credibility, and the NDH armed forces were in disarray. The police and gendarmerie were reduced to passive observers of Ustaša terrorism against the Orthodox, which - according to the Ustašas' own count - resulted in the death of 400,000 people.

* The demand by a commanding general that the head of a diplomatic mission be removed was certainly without precedent. It was the culmination of a dispute between Loehr and Kasche, whom the Austrian general could not stand either personally (as the embodiment of an arrogant Prussian) or politically (because of his pro-Ustaša policy).(24) Personal animosity was reinforced by Kasche's denunciation of Loehr's friend Colonel Diakow, for alleged defeatist remarks at a gathering of former Habsburg officers in Zagreb in 1942. The differences of policy first came to the fore in connection with the drafting of the joint memorandum for Hitler on the situation in Croatia in September 1942, which was imbued with Kasche's own political views (see Chapter XII above). Kasche complained that Loehr had subsequently reduced all contacts with the Legation to a bare minimum; he also accused Loehr of wanting to adopt a conciliatory policy towards the Četniks, which was anathema to the German minister.(25)

Loehr's solution envisaged Pavelić's replacement by a government of "Maček's followers and experts" (although Loehr did not anticipate Maček's own participation). Kasche's replacement would be followed by Glaise's appointment as the "special plenipotentiary of the Reich and commander of German troops" with a staff empowered to exercise executive authority in the NDH. The Ustaša movement would be disbanded altogether, and the Croat population "purged of unreliable and corrupt elements". A strong propaganda campaign against Tito's Partisans would be developed, and the anti-Serb course abandoned.

Loehr's memorandum never reached Hitler, however. In a remarkable coincidence, Loehr prepared his memorandum at the same time when Hitler paid renewed attention to the vexed problem of Pavelić and the NDH. As a result, he entrusted Himmler with extensive powers to establish order there.* Aware of this, Keitel decided to send Loehr's memorandum to Himmler instead.**

* On 10 March Hitler signed an order which stated:

"In order to achieve definite pacification of the liberated area of Croatia which had been taken by Communists, I order:

1. Parts of the Croat State affected by Operation Weiss and in connection with it... remain German operational areas until further notice.
2. Reichsfuehrer SS will establish in the combed areas police forces, in line with Point 4, with the task to definitely secure and pacify the liberated area. Domestic forces may be engaged to that end.
3. Delimitation of the zones, within which the organs of the Reichsfuehrer SS will be active within the operational areas, will be determined by the Commander of German Forces in Croatia, always bearing in mind that the units had to be freed for other tasks as soon as possible.
4. 'Plenipotentiary of the Reichsfuehrer SS with the Commander of German Forces in Croatia' receives instructions for tasks from Point 2 only from the Reichsfuehrer SS.

If the situation demands renewed combat engagement of units in the given area, all police instances in it would be obliged to carry out the orders of the commander of German units."(27)

** In his covering letter of 15 March 1943, Keitel wrote to Himmler:

"The Supreme Commander South-East handed me the memorandum during his visit to WEHRWOLF on 3 March. When writing it, he did not know of the task which the Fuehrer had given to you, Reichsfuehrer. Therefore, I have not given the memorandum to the Fuehrer. However, since many points of Colonel-General Loehr coincide with the conclusions we have reached during the discussion, I think that this memorandum, which I would like to have returned, will be of interest to you."(27) In his letter Keitel emphasised that, according to Hitler's wishes, Himmler's task in Croatia had to be camouflaged "to the outside", above all in relation to Croatian and Italian instances, as a part of military measures for the establishment of peace in operational areas.(28)

3. Himmler and the NDH

Hitler's special assignment to Himmler was the culmination of a long and dogged struggle by the Reichsfuehrer to turn the Croat state into an SS sphere of interest. His ambition was inseparably connected with the constant attempts by the Schutzstaffel chief to have an exclusive authority over the Volksdeutsche of south-eastern and central Europe.* The domestic, "non-ideological" cause of Himmler's ambition was in the constant refusal of the Wehrmacht to recognise Waffen SS service as the performance of Reich military service; this severely limited the pool of available Reichdeutsche volunteers. To meet the growing needs for manpower in his empire-building, Himmler started recruiting the Volksdeutsche from the Balkans and Central Europe clandestinely even before the war. As German influence and direct control over those areas spread, so did the degree of SS control over their ethnic Germans.** The fall of Yugoslavia - which had a German minority of over half a million - provided the first opportunity for unbridled SS recruitment and control over ethnic Germans, not only in the German-occupied Serbia (Banat) but also in the NDH.

* A significant milestone in the process was the establishment of the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (VoMi) in 1935 as the centre entrusted with the coordination of all state and Party activities related to the German minorities. In 1937 Himmler succeeded in having one of his most trusted aides, Werner Lorenz, appointed OS VoMi chief, and from that moment it had become, in practice if not in name, an extended arm of the SS.

** "Only open, officially sanctioned recruitment in these lands could satisfy SS manpower needs, but securing permission for open recruitment proved a difficult task. No sovereign nation could tolerate recruitment by the military of another state among a segment of its citizenry. But wartime conditions would alter the relationship between the Reich and these states, and their increasing dependency upon the Reich compromised their sovereignty and forced them to assume a more flexible position on the recruitment issue. As their dependency grew, what began as requests for limited recruitment eventually escalated into demands for the comprehensive transfer of the military obligation of the Volksdeutsche from their own states to the Reich."(29)

The first to give up some sovereignty over their German citizens were the Slovaks, who already in 1939 granted their 130,000 Volksdeutsche complete autonomy, approved direct links between them and Germany, and created purely German units within the Slovak army. Concessions escalated until, by mid-1944, the Slovaks totally relinquished their authority over the Volksdeutsche to the Reich and the SS. The Hungarians were forced to follow a similar path, albeit with much greater resistance to German demands, while in Romania Himmler had never obtained full jurisdiction over local ethnic Germans.

Unlike Serbia (Banat), the NDH was recognised by the Reich as a sovereign state, which necessitated formal negotiations on the status of the Volksdeutsche. This did not present a problem, as the NDH owed its existence to the good will of the Reich no less than Slovakia, regardless of Italian pretensions. The remarkable concessions granted to the German minority in the NDH already in the summer of 1941 turned the Volksgruppe virtually into a state within the state in political, administrative and military affairs. Besides compromising the sovereignty of the Ustaša state even further (and on the heels of the Rome Agreements), the concessions were an additional proof of the entrenched dominant position of the Reich in Croatian affairs; as such, they were a constant source of irritation to the Italians.* On 16 September 1941 a bilateral treaty defined the military obligations of the NDH German subjects, notably allocating ten per cent of each annual levy of Volksdeutsche for voluntary enlistment with either the Wehrmacht, or the Waffen SS:

"This ten per cent allotment was the first concession of its kind granted by the Reich to another state. By virtue of this measure Croatia was surrendering authority over a segment of its citizenry in regards to their military service. Furthermore, service in the Reich military would fulfill the Croatian military obligation."(31)

Himmler's next step was to eliminate the Wehrmacht option still left to the "ten per cent", to transfer the German units in the Domobranstvo to the SS, and to expand recruitment without restrictions. Uncoordinated resistance to his plans from the mutually antagonistic Kasche (Ribbentrop) and Glaise (OKW) ensured Himmler's victory even before the end of 1942.

* Already in September 1941 Kasche reported from Zagreb:

"The Italians see in the Volksgruppe legislation acts which limit Croatian sovereignty. Casertano and Italian military representatives have therefore intervened with the NDH Government, using exceptionally far-reaching statements. It was said that, if the NDH became a German protectorate, the Croatian-Italian frontier would naturally have to run differently."(30)

In May 1942 the OKW finally admitted defeat and conceded all military matters related to the Volksdeutsche in the south-east to Himmler; while in July Ribbentrop instructed Kasche (who had, as usual, espoused the cause of "Croatian sovereignty" in the matter) to inform Pavelić that the SS would launch an extensive recruitment campaign which would aim at enlisting all NDH Germans in the 17-35 age group.(32) This was duly effected, and "legalised" by an exchange of diplomatic notes in September and October 1942.* But it was Hitler's decision of 10 March 1943 that finally completed Himmler's triumph in the intra-German struggle for predominance in the NDH.

Himmler immediately appointed his plenipotentiary in Croatia, SS Brigadefuehrer Konstantin Kammerhofer. The latter came to Zagreb already in late March, brimming with self-confidence and money.** The Ustašas were told that Kammerhofer's projected police apparatus would be merely an "extended arm" of the German forces in Croatia; but Pavelić immediately realised what was going on. In a conversation described by Glaise as "very difficult", he told Kammerhofer that the setting up of German gendarmerie in the NDH was an infingement of his state's sovereignty.(35)

* "Although the Volksdeutsche of Croatia were obligated to serve with the Waffen SS, the exact nature of that service was not resolved... since Reich authorities later noted that even though the individuals had no choice in the matter of enlisting, towards the outside world the induction must appear as a voluntary enlistment. The individual, however, would be spared the trouble of making his own voluntary decision to enlist, for the minority leadership offered a collective declaration on behalf of the membership which was binding for all."(33) This did not help the Yugoslav Volksdeutsche after the war: they were held collectively responsible and subjected to wholesale terror and deportations, although their proportionate share of genuine volunteers for Hitler's war effort was probably no greater than that of the Albanians in Kosovo, the Muslims in Bosnia, or, indeed, the Croats.

** "I know from a perfectly reliable source that the Reichsfuehrer SS has instructed Gruppenfuehrer [sic!] Kammerhofer to win over senior Ustaša leaders with money. To that end he was supposedly given two million Marks at his disposal...", Kasche reported. As an old SA activist, he was deeply opposed to Himmler's "SS Empire" and suspicious of the latter's designs. Therefore he added that the Ustašas were faithful to Germany anyway, and hinted that with bribery Himmler wanted to create an exclusive dependence on the SS, "which is not in accordance with the all-German policy".(34)

Realising that Himmler's action originated in Berlin, and aware of Kasche's opposition to it, Pavelić tried to solicit Ribbentrop's support.* This was a fruitless venture, however, as Himmler's gains were for the time being irreversible. Kammerhofer proved this when he met Kasche on 27 and 31 March, 1943.(36) On both occasions the newly appointed Hoeherer Polizeifuehrer spoke and acted as if he were a Reichskommissar despatched to bring a subject territory to heel. Quite unperturbed by Kasche's dismayed insistence that Croatia was an "allied and sovereign country", Kammerhofer indicated that he would extend the territory under his control beyond the zones of operations, to the entire northern part of the country. He also said that he would recruit 2,500 Volksdeutsche into his gendarmerie, as well as thousands of Croats.

Glaise and Loehr seized the opportunity to take advantage of the SS course; on 4 April they discussed the situation in the NDH and agreed that the time had come to extend the "executive authority" north of the Sava.(37) They also agreed that the NDH armed forces should be brought under an even tighter Wehrmacht control, and its police and gendarmerie under Kammerhofer's control. For once, the Wehrmacht and the SS acted in broad unison.**

* His minister in Berlin, Budak, gave a note to Weizsaecker on 12 April which stated: "1. The placement of Croatian gendarmerie under the Germans, even if seen in the most flexible form, is incompatible with state sovereignty and for that reason alone it would have to cause the gravest crisis of the Croat Government; 2. such subjugation would be welcome to the enemy propaganda, which would see it on the one hand as an end to Croatian independence, while on the other it would hold the German Reich responsible for all measures aimed at the maintenance of the public order and security". The note also warned, 3., of the potentially serious foreign policy implications for the NDH, as Italy could "bring into question yet again the frontiers between Croatia and Italy".(38) Weizsaecker could only promise that the note would be "considered by the appropriate instances".

** This was also confirmed by Glaise's confidential telegram to Himmler of 10 April (second anniversary of the NDH) in which he informed the SS chief that the "somewhat difficult" talks with the Poglavnik and his government so far have shown that there was no obstacle to carry out "our plans" south of the Sava, where the Germans had "executive power" anyway. About the rest, the NDH minister in Berlin Budak would like to talk to Himmler directly. Glaise added that the full subjugation of public security throughout Croatia to the Germans was desirable, while one could talk about certain "optical" issues.(39)

Such^a coalition was more than a match for Kasche, and Pavelić admitted defeat. On 24 April he signed a protocol which formally provided for the establishment of^a German gendarmerie in the NDH.(40)* Himmler proceeded to consolidate his gains. He had already prepared the ground for Kammerhofer's action by ensuring the transfer of the 7th SS division "Prinz Eugen", composed mainly of Yugoslav Volksdeutsche, to the NDH; now he produced another bitter pill for Pavelić: the establishment of an SS division composed exclusively of Muslims from Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The claim that Bosnian Muslims were Croats was one of the basic tenets of Ustaša ideology. It was also a sine qua non of practical politics, as only by asserting the Islamised Slavs' "purest Croatness" could Pavelić lay some sort of claim to Bosnia-Herzegovina.** Therefore, any attempt to assert Muslim particularism and a separate Bosnian identity was tantamount to an attack not only on the ideological foundations of the NDH, but also on its practical existence. Heinrich Himmler proceeded to do this very thing.

* This was a remarkable document for the head of an "independent" state to sign. The NDH government was given a purely advisory role in Kammerhofer's action, but at the same time it was obliged to cooperate in the execution of his final decisions. Pavelić also agreed that Kammerhofer would be free to recruit his security forces "by voluntary enlistment, drafting and transfer from other Croatian units". Service with Kammerhofer's gendarmerie would be recognised as the fulfilment of NDH military obligation. The uniform of the new force would be German, with a Croatian badge "if possible on the left sleeve"; Pavelić even accepted the proviso that the members of the new force would swear their allegiance first to Adolf Hitler, and only then to him. Finally, the areas of engagement would be determined by the Plenipotentiary German General in Croatia (Glaise) or the Commander of German Units in Croatia (Lueters); the NDH government would be "informed" of any such decision.

** A discussion of the historical rights in that province and of the Muslim question is beyond the scope of this analysis. Suffice to say that the Ustaša claim was at best tenuous, based on the "argumentation" of hypertrophied nineteenth century national romanticism. This claim had never been taken too seriously even by Pavelić's allies, as Hitler himself hinted during their first meeting; his "fifty years of intolerance" was also meant to encourage Pavelić's "re-Croatisation" of Muslims.(41) Glaise was well familiar with the issue; he wholeheartedly agreed with Metzger's assessment that "the Muslims would follow the Croats because they have power... but they would certainly always seek to protect their special Muslim interests. Assimilation of Muslims by Croats is out of the question, because a Muslim remains a Muslim, and just as he was not a Serb when he passed himself for one, he will not become a Croat now".(42)

The Muslim obsession was a typically Himmlerian idiosyncrasy. He regarded Islam as a masculine, martial religion, in contrast to the "soft" Christianity. By creating an SS division composed of Bosnian Muslims he hoped to forge the links between the SS and the Islamic world.* At the same time he would gain an undisputed foothold in Bosnia, an area which he eventually intended to turn into the new SS military frontier.(46)

In his drive to recruit Bosnian Muslims Himmler enlisted the support of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, El Hussein (who had been "on the SS leash for a long time", as Glaise remarked). The Muslim spiritual leader visited the NDH in April 1943 under SS auspices, and the visit gave a boost to Muslim autonomist tendencies.** In spite of some resistance from within Ustaša ranks, Himmler's recruitment was a success: by the end of 1943, more than twenty thousand Muslims had enlisted in the newly created 13. SS Volunteer Division, which in May 1944 got the name "Hanjar" (Turkish sword).***

* Himmler insisted that Islam as a whole was sympathetic to National-Socialism and that the Muslims in the NDH had developed an awareness of Bosnian particularism.(43) One of Himmler's closest aides, Obergruppenfuehrer Gottlob Berger, explained: "With the establishment of a Muslim SS-division a link is created for the first time between Islam and National-Socialism on an open, honest basis, as it will be directed in terms of blood and race from the North, and in the ideological-spiritual sphere from the East".(44) Himmler regarded Bosnian Muslims as excellent soldiers, who hated "the common Jewish-English-Bolshevik enemy" and were enthusiastically pro-Hitler. Such sentiments were shared by Hitler, who once told Loehr, with a smile, that he would gladly establish Islam as the SS religion, and on another occasion indicated that he would "abolish" Christianity after the war.(45)

** While Pavelić refrained from making any comment about El Hussein's visit to Sarajevo and Zagreb, a leading Ustasa among the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Professor Alija Šuljak, told Kasche that the visit "gave more encouragement to the Yugoslav-oriented Muslim groups [sic!] or those seeking autonomy, than to those who are unreservedly declared in favour of the Croat state".(47) The "Yugoslav" label was probably calculated to discredit the autonomist tendencies, which were admittedly strong among the leading Muslim families in Bosnia ever since the first wave of atrocities in 1941.

*** In fact, after some early difficulties, the total number of Muslim volunteers in Himmler's units (the Hanjar Division and Kammerhofer's police) reached 46,000 by September 1943.(48) This was more than the total number of Muslims in all the NDH forces (Ustaša Militia, Domobranstvo, gendarmerie etc), and certainly far more than the number of Muslims with Tito's Partisans.

Especially irksome to Pavelić and to Kasche was Himmler's reluctance to give the designation "Croatian" to the new SS unit, his refusal to accept Catholic volunteers into it, and his methods of recruitment.* By July 1943 Lorković complained that the Croatian state was prevented by SS officers from exercising authority over its own citizens; that the aggressive recruitment for Waffen-SS and Kammerhofer's police was creating havoc in NDH units, insubordination and desertions; and finally, that Kammerhofer was extending his activity way beyond the areas of operations, with his offices appearing all over the country.(50)** Kasche also attempted to intervene directly with the SS through Berger, when he visited Zagreb as Budak's guest in July, but to no avail.(51) By the spring of 1944, the "Hanjar" Division was returned to the NDH. The area it held under its control was practically excluded from any Croatian authority and even local administrative officials took the SS oath.

* The "Croatian" designation was finally removed for good in October 1943. The Muslim fez (albeit of a Moroccan variety) was adopted immediately as the division's headwear. As for the methods of enlistment, Glaise recorded: "The recruitment of volunteers is turning into a farce. In eastern Bosnia an SS subaltern from Banat has unfurled the green banner of the Prophet... From the Poglavnik's own bodyguard a dozen obedient Ustašas have deserted, only to appear that same evening with a mocking sneer, dressed in ganz-new SS uniforms, in front of their former superiors. In Bosnia the [SS] recruiters have proclaimed autonomy similar to that which existed once under Austria, and of which the Bosnians have always dreamed. Outside Croatian barracks SS agents are waiting in ambush... The Fuehrer is especially greedy about the new Muslim-Germans. Behind this all is a great idea, Himmler's propaganda babbled on. In the East [i.e. Russia] also the 'Turkish peoples' are to be gathered under the black SS banner, which should certainly gratify the Great Mufti".(49)

The new division had its moment of crisis in the early days, when a detachment of sappers rebelled against mistreatment by German officers at Villefranche-de-Rouergue, where the Bosnians had been sent for training. Five particularly hated officers were killed; in reprisal, one out of ten sappers were randomly selected, tortured and executed. However, this was an isolated incident: when Himmler inspected the division in November in Silesia he was well pleased, and his enthusiasm was proved justified in combat.

** Lorković acted in his new capacity of the interior minister. Casertano had carried out a relentless campaign against the arch-Germanophile Lorković, and Pavelić replaced him at the foreign ministry with Mile Budak (the minister in Berlin) in April 1943. This was the last, and largely meaningless, demonstration of Italian influence in Zagreb. Shortly thereafter Casertano also departed (June), and his post was briefly taken by a career diplomat, Luigi Petrucci (12 July 1943).

The creation of an SS state-within-the-state was accompanied by unbridled propaganda favouring Bosnian (Muslim) autonomy. But the final extent of Himmler's plans can be gleaned only from a long report on the NDH prepared for him personally by SS-Brigadefuehrer Ernst Fick, and based on the views expressed by Standartefuehrer Bayer - who was in charge of "ideological education" for both "Hanjar" and "Prinz Eugen" divisions.(52)*

Even if Frick's views belonged to the fringe, they reflected the train of thought of the anti-Pavelić coalition. Himmler's motives in opposing Pavelić were different to those of the Wehrmacht, however. They were less pragmatic, more "ideological", and also connected with the internal power politics of the Nazi hierarchy. The stories of Kammerhofer's police and Waffen SS recruitment among Bosnian Muslims and the Volksdeutsche of Croatia are typical examples of Himmler's empire-building. Such action was not necessarily conducive to the overall German war effort, or was so coincidentally.

Regardless of actual motives, the cumulative effect of Himmler's efforts and those of the OKW was yet further reduction of Pavelić's authority, as well as some increase in the fighting ability of Croat and Muslim youths under German command. The decline of Pavelić could have been terminal but for the fall of Italy, which suddenly restored his fortunes in Berlin.

* Recounting the Ustašas' record (slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Serbs and others, lack of discipline, unreliability), Fick concluded that Pavelić's authority was reduced to that of "the mayor of Zagreb, but without suburbs". To change all that, bring order to the country, and secure the rear in case of an Anglo-American landing, it was suggested that all males aged 12 to 70 should be removed from the NDH and sent to the Reich as labourers. This would include the Ustašas and Domobrans; of the former one third could be drafted into the SS, of the latter "not more than 10 percent". The Četniks could also volunteer for the SS, and those failing to do so would be sent to Germany as workers. The man in charge of indoctrination of Muslim and ethnic German novices suggested that Pavelić should be taken to Germany together with his entire government for "observation and reeducation"; the same treatment was recommended for Kasche and the staff of the German legation in Zagreb.

4. Third Meeting Hitler-Pavelić

In the spring of 1943 Hitler had a series of meetings with his increasingly reluctant allies (Mussolini, Horthy, Antonescu), most of whom were in need of some morale-boosting after the disasters in Russia and North Africa.* Pavelić also was invited (on 23 April), and met Hitler on 27 April at Klessheim near Salzburg. Before lunch Pavelić and his entourage were treated to a lengthy monologue by Hitler on the inevitability of an Axis victory, supported by statistics and maps of the world.(54) The afternoon round began with Hitler's statement that there was "no urgent need for the meeting [since the cooperation between Germany and Croatia functions so well]** Hitler emphasised his desire to see Croatia pacified, which would free German troops for other tasks, and to secure the supplies of bauxite and communications.

Pavelić replied that "Croatia would have to be mad to think that it could possibly build up its armed forces without the [German] moral help", and stressed the need for German military instructors. Pavelić painted the NDH internal political-military situation in rosy colours: the resistance of most of Tito's "bands" was broken and only some sporadic hotbeds of unrest remained which, the Poglavnik added, needed to be crushed by joint police and military methods. He also said that there was "no need to negotiate about any raw materials needed for the conduct of war", such as bauxite, copper, iron and timber; if they were needed, they were at Germany's disposal. He concluded (rather optimistically) that there were "practically no unresolved internal political issues" in the NDH: party-political difficulties existed only among the intelligentsia, while the "masses" were only interested in the victorious conclusion of the war, and would not create any difficulties.

* This was especially obvious in Mussolini's case. The Italian dictator was deeply demoralised, and in a letter to Hitler urged separate peace with Russia ("which no one can conquer or hold"); after three days of Hitler's harangues at Klessheim (7-10 April) he returned to Rome empty-handed again.(53)

** The bracketed parts of Schmidt's minutes were considered unsuitable for the Duce, and were not included in the copy sent to him!(55)

In connection with the operations against "remaining" bands, Pavelić asked for greater autonomy of units in the NDH from distant command centres (Salonika). * Hitler decided that the issue should be resolved by Keitel, Glaise and NDH generals. Pavelić then said that Četniks, Partisans "and all adherents of political parties from the Left and from the Right" ** were united in their hatred of both Germans and Croats. The Croats would never do anything detrimental to the joint struggle; "for instance, there can be no talk of some deliberate persecution of Serbs", he went on, claiming that any persecution followed "only because Croatia could not allow that on its territory armed bands celebrate King Peter and receive written orders from Draža Mihailović".

The meeting between Hitler and Pavelić at Klassheim was the least important of the three meetings they had had until that time. Pavelić did not raise the issues which bothered him most (Himmler's activities, NDH authority in the zones of operations), and only gingerly touched on the sore topic of the total Wehrmacht control over the deployment of Croatian units. Hitler, for his part, steered clear of the substantive issues too.

* His request did not go so far as to imply the return of autonomy to NDH units from German command, however; he would be satisfied with unified command and an increase in Glaise's authority to approve speedy deployment of units.

** Pavelić presumably meant "all Serbian parties", which is obvious from the context. Kasche's own minutes (FA, Nachlass S. Kasche, file 10) contained the following paragraph: "The Fuehrer described the Serbs as old troublemakers. He knew very well that this fact would have to be reckoned with in the future, just as it had to be in the past. Germany cannot have any interest in helping again such plots and chaos."

In Schmidt's minutes Hitler also said that he had appeased Yugoslavia as much as possible, but to no avail. However, to Pavelić's remark that Belgrade was "opposed to everything which is not pan-Slav", Hitler retorted that the Serbs would oppose even pan-Slavism if it were triumphant, because they were habitual oppositionists and plotters. Pavelić then added that people in Belgrade cafes had always indulged in excessive discussion of foreign policy issues, and that this was continuing "even today, instead of devoting themselves to cultural work [sic!] in their own country". He said such tendencies were also present in Croatia. Hitler added that there were such people in Germany too, "who delve on world politics over a cup of tea because they have nothing else to do". Schmidt ended his minutes on an unconsciously sarcastic note: "Tea was served next, and then Hitler bade farewell and left."

The only immediate effect of Pavelić's visit - to the chagrin of the Wehrmacht commanders - was a new increase in the incidence of Ustaša anti-Serb terror. Such outrages had been reduced after November 1942, thanks to the tight leash on which German commanders held all Croatian units. However, it seems that Hitler's fresh anti-Serb remarks encouraged Pavelić to try again.* This was noticed by General Lueters, who complained in a letter to Glaise of the fresh Ustaša outrages, "especially after the Poglavnik's visit to the Fuehrer's Headquarters".(56) Lueters listed several incidents and said that the Wehrmacht could not sit back and passively observe what was happening. To the contrary, German soldiers were forced (in the areas of operations) to prevent, even with arms, people of criminal disposition such as Gutić from occupying important posts and from subverting, consciously and systematically, the action of pacification. Lueters finally asked Glaise to draw attention of the government in Zagreb to such incidents, or else the Germans would have to countermand its orders and to prevent their execution.

A little earlier Glaise had a clash with Pavelić over an incident at Ivanić Grad, when a German officer (Captain Holeczek) intervened to stop an Ustaša unit which went on a rampage and terrorised the surrounding villages. When Pavelić complained, Glaise coldly but energetically replied that the German officer was right to stop Ustaša activity detrimental to the public order. He added that in any event the Croatian side was obliged to inform him of all its intended police actions.

* Prior to Hitler's fresh anti-Serb tirade Pavelić appeared even somewhat defensive about the issue of "persecution" and its negative effect on the Axis war effort.

5. Mussolini's Fall: Ustaša Hopes and Fears

The crisis of Italian morale, obvious by the beginning of 1943, did not escape ^{the} attention of Ustaša officials. Reports on rumours of the possible toppling of Mussolini by Badoglio and the royal family started reaching Zagreb already in January. (57) The government reshuffle and Ciano's departure in February at first were interpreted by the NDH foreign ministry as a sign of Mussolini's greater resolve. (58) However, the continuation of ^a pro-Četnik policy in the Italian occupation zone and Casertano's increasingly hostile attitude to the NDH government (and to Lorković in particular*) indicated that the change in Rome would not affect Italian policy ⁱⁿ Croatia. (60) Roatta had given up Ambrosio's policy of expanding the Italian occupation zone, but both he and his successor Robotti continued cooperating with the Četniks in Herzegovina and Dalmatia, sheltering thousands of Jews, avoiding large-scale combat against ^{the} Partisans, carrying reprisals against Croats in the insurgent areas, obstructing ^{the} establishment of the NDH authority in their zone, and generally doing all sorts of things which were odious to the Ustašas.**

By March the Zagreb foreign ministry mentioned for the first time, in one of its circulars, the real possibility of an Allied invasion of Italy. It even admitted that "If [the Allies] were to succeed in knocking out the second Axis partner, it would also represent a great political success". (62)

* Finally on 21 April 1943 all NDH legations received the following circular:
"On the Foreign Minister's personal instruction I inform you as follows:
Mr Minister, Dr Mladen Lorković, has had the impression for some time that his person was regarded by the Italian side as unsuitable for the cultivation of good relations with Italy. He therefore offered his resignation to the Poglavnik some time ago, and this has now been accepted. Very soon, on 22 or 23 April at the latest, he will be released from his duties as foreign minister and appointed to another suitable post at home. The new foreign minister will be Doglavnik [a largely ceremonial title of "next-to-Poglavnik"] Dr Mile Budak. The foreign policy of the Independent State of Croatia will not change in any way as a consequence of this. Dr V. Bačić." (59)

** In a report to Loehr (20 April 1943), Glaise expressed the view that the NDH was above all a political question which could not be answered for as long as the "condominium" with Italy remained unresolved. (61) He thought that the increasing animosity to the "Italian mortgage" was one reason why it would be hard to talk Maček's HSS into cooperation on a project to replace Pavelić.

Before the end of the month Zagreb was echoing rumours emanating from Rome, created by the visit of Archbishop Spellman from the United States; and for the first time a confidential foreign ministry circular spelled out a theme which would become an obsession of Pavelić's diplomatic analysts in the last two years of war: the possibility of a separate peace between Germany and the Anglo-Americans in the face of ^{the} Bolshevik menace.(63)*

By May Glaise could report from Zagreb that "as regards our allied comrade [Italy], nobody asks 'if', but only 'when'..."(65) At the same time, there came sporadic symptoms of renewed Italian assertiveness in Croatia: on the heels of Casertano's campaign against Lorković, Alfieri told Weizsaecker's successor, Gustav Adolf Baron von Steengracht, that Rome was unhappy with the cooperation between Italian and German instances in Croatia.(66) This prompted Steengracht to remind Kasche of the need to display maximum understanding for Italian sensitivities; Ribbentrop had given a similar warning to Kasche some weeks previously.(67) Glaise ascribed the Italians' renewed insistence on the right of primogeniture in Croatia to their need to make some amends for the loss of Tripoli.(68) However, he commented accurately, it had been certain from the very beginning that the Croatian state and its regime depended on German bayonets for existence. Although the Germans were fully aware of this, and behaved accordingly, it was diplomatically necessary to go on pretending otherwise. In early June the Italians were given (for the last time, as it happened) renewed German assurances of the primacy of their interests in Croatia.(69) By that time such ^a gesture echoed even more hollow than before.

* Some weeks later the newly-appointed Croatian administrative commissioner with the Italian army at Sušak, David Sinčić, reported on his trip to Rome:

"I learned in Rome that Italian opposition was negotiating with the English at the Vatican, i.e. with the [British] minister [to the Holy See], and that some Fascists like Ciano and others were joining such action and helping it.[... On return to Zagreb] I told what I had seen, that changes were indeed imminent in Italy, and that in the opinion of people I had spoken to there was going to be British action not only in Italy, but also in the Balkans..."(64)

Only the politically less-than-astute German minister in Zagreb, Kasche, raised his voice against such renewed German protestations of Italian "primacy". On 22 June he told his ministry that the "special" position of Italy in Croatia was difficult to achieve if the Wehrmacht were to train and develop the Croatian armed forces; if the Croatian economy were to be adjusted to the German programme of war economy; if the Volksdeutsche in Croatia were to maintain their special status; and if the German war propaganda were to keep its control over the NDH propaganda effort.(70)

Strictly speaking, Kasche's remarks were correct, and what he listed were also some of the causes of Italian displeasure.* However, he alone seems to have been bothered by the formalities. He seemed unaware that, after the collapse in Africa and the Allied landing in Sicily, it was necessary, more than ever before, to tell the faltering ally what he wanted to hear. Such protestations were empty gestures; even if they had been allowed real scope for increased control and influence, by early summer 1943 the Italians would not have known what to do with it. Even in 1941-42, when they had the will and the resources, the Italians lacked a coherent strategy for achieving real control in Croatia. Two years later both the will and the resources were gone.

* Kasche could have added several more items to his list: if the SS was to have its own police network and recruitment centres throughout the NDH; if German troops were to operate freely in the Italian occupation zone; if the Wehrmacht were to retain control over deployment of Croatian troops...

Illustrative of Kasche's frame of mind was his insistence that only Ustasa sources of information should be used when making assessments of situation in the NDH. This was connected with the fact, irksome to Kasche, that the reports of all other German high-ranking officials in the NDH differed fundamentally in their views of the Ustaša régime from his own. For instance, he would often transmit police attache Helm's reports (frequently critical of Pavelić) with some derogatory remarks of his own about Helm's sources and conclusions. In a long letter to Loehr (25 June 1943) Kasche complained that the military and police intelligence in Croatia used suspect and unreliable people as agents (V-Leute), including Croats who indulged in "political speculations", and - what was in Kasche's view even worse - many "particularly crafty Serbs".(71) "Do such people have greater weight than those from the state leadership, recognised by us? Are their estimates more reliable, are they more politically trustworthy and agile than those in the Government?", asked Kasche, bemoaning the lack of "trust in and camaraderie with" the Ustašas.

The full extent of Mussolini's demoralisation and depression was evident at his meeting with Hitler on 19 July. By that time the atmosphere in Croatia was nearing the verge of panic, as Glaise reported on 16 July.(72) He mentioned some hope, however, that ("in case of an undesirable outcome on the other side of the Adriatic") the return of coastal territories to the NDH could raise the faltering Croat morale. He added that "the Croatian army cannot be counted upon at all seriously". While most Ustašas would be only too happy to see the Italians go, reports were also reaching Berlin of unease in some Zagreb circles that their departure would create scope for increased Partisan activity in the evacuated area.(73)

Such ambivalence was increased by the news from Rome of Mussolini's fall.* On 26 July Pavelić conferred with Kasche twice and said that on the one hand he was glad, because he expected favourable developments regarding Dalmatia, but that he was afraid, on the other, of a rapid enemy landing and other new dangers.(74) Quite justifiably, Pavelić expressed concern that Tito's units could obtain large stocks of weapons as a result of developments in Italy. For a brief while, Glaise shared Pavelić's optimism about the effect of the "liberation" of Dalmatia; but by the end of July he had also received news that Italian officers were in contact with Tito in order to surrender to his forces their arms and the important places such as Split, and "thus lay the ground for the Yugoslav revolutionary army to greet the British".(76) For all his political astuteness, even Glaise seems not to have realised that Tito wanted a British landing on the Yugoslav coast no more than the Germans did.

* Helm reported that the news from Rome spread "incredibly fast" through Zagreb on 25 July; since on that day the only source could have been the BBC, that alone was a sign how many people listened to enemy broadcasts.(75) Helm and other German instances also reported deep shock which the news caused among several hundred Fascist militiamen posted in Zagreb, many of whom said that they would volunteer for the SS.

The Germans did not believe Badoglio's assurances that he would fight on. They proceeded to prepare for every eventuality in Italy itself (by infiltrating troops, securing mountain passes), in the south of France, and in the Balkans. From Salonika Loehr sent detailed instructions to Lueters - based on the assumption that Italy would drop out of the war - already on 25 July.(77) Loehr's swift reaction to the news was followed a day later by formal sanction from Berlin, where Hitler signed his "Directive No. 48" on the disposition of German forces in the Balkans.(78) The NDH was privy to German estimates of the situation and plans, and Budak informed Croatian legations abroad that Italy was "certainly on the road to a separate peace".(79)

The collapse of Mussolini and the imminent breaking up of the Axis should have made Pavelić and his followers deeply worried rather than jubilant: such events boded ill for the prospects of Germany, on which their own survival so obviously depended. Nevertheless, the likelihood of large territorial gains along the coast (however ephemeral under the circumstances) blurred the Ustašas' judgment and created a near-jubilant mood in some ruling circles.* Pavelić's leading Dalmatian activist, Edo Bulat, was suddenly back in prominence, and spoke to Kasche in enthusiastically irredentist terms.(81) In a similar vein, Lorković asked Kasche to ensure the inclusion of Croatian units into German forces which would eventually move in to secure the coastal area. (This request Kasche supported, but was uncertain of its acceptance because of the negative attitude of ^{the} German military instances to the Croats.)

* Helm reported only days after Mussolini's fall that "within the Ustaša leadership the view is now prevalent that Italian troops must not be allowed to leave Croatian territory with their arms [...] The demand 'Trieste to Germany, Rijeka to Croatia' will be put forward as the slogan for demonstrations. The liberation of Dalmatia, in the opinion of Ustaša circles, will provide for the full rehabilitation of the Poglavnik by proving that he was forced to conclude treaties which were in essence contrary to the interests of Croatia. As an internal-political success, the liberation of occupied areas will help create a broad popular base for the Ustaša movement, while in the field of foreign policy the growth of confidence in Germany is emphasised".(80)

6. NDH and Italian Armistice

Aware of the significance of Croatia in case of anticipated Italian desertion, Hitler issued an order on "the increase of Croatian fighting strength" on 7 September 1943.(82) This document was, yet again, a compromise between the radically opposed viewpoints of Kasche on one side, and the OKW on the other. Politically, it reiterated recognition of Croatia as an independent state, but militarily it insisted on the "energetic and positive cooperation" of the NDH government in enhancing^{the} German war effort.* The Germans in Zagreb also prepared contingency plans for immediate action if and when^{an} Italian armistice was announced.

On 8 September at 9:30 p.m. - having received confirmation of the news from Berlin - Kasche conferred with Lorković, Kammerhofer and Glaise's representative Pott (Glaise was attending a conference in Belgrade), and by midnight some 500 Italian soldiers in Zagreb were disarmed without a fight.(84) During the night, NDH units disarmed an entire Italian division in Karlovac and Jastrebarsko. Also during the night, German units were already advancing towards the Adriatic coast.

To Pavelić, the most pressing issue was to advance his territorial claims, not only to the pre-war Yugoslav lands annexed in 1941 (Dalmatia and the islands), but also to Fiume and Istria. At a cabinet meeting at 11 p.m. Kasche told Pavelić and his ministers of Hitler's and Ribbentrop's decision that "Croatia has the right to recover lost areas along the Adriatic".(85)

* This was preceded by yet another controversy between the generals and Kasche. General Lothar Rendulic, commander of Second Armoured Army transferred from Russia to the Balkans in August 1943, immediately concluded that Pavelić and the Ustašas were a major impediment to the fulfilment of his brief from Hitler - to pacify and control the area with relatively few German troops. Obviously ill informed about the state of play, on 19 August Rendulic confided his thoughts to Kasche! He suggested to the dismayed German minister that the NDH government be replaced by a German military administration, "with only a pretense of regard for the Ustaša state".(83) Following alarm raised by Kasche Rendulic was reprimanded, but his relationship with the German minister was practically non-existent until his departure from the Yugoslav theatre a year later. His animosity with Kasche was mutual, and Kasche often made sarcastic remarks about Rendulic's unwillingness to admit his South Slav background.

Kasche gave a written notification to the same effect to Pavelić on 9 September in the morning, and at 1 p.m. the Poglavnik read a proclamation on the radio.(85)* However, the Germans were careful to mention only "territories taken away from Croatia", and Kasche avoided answer^{ing} Pavelić's question about Istria. Leaving the issue open for the moment, Pavelić signed a decree on 10 September annulling the offer of the Crown of Tomislav to the Duke of Spoleto.** He also delivered a speech outside Banski Dvori, in which he called on all Croats who had left their homes because of "Italian brutalities" to return to their hearths and surrender^{their} arms.(88) Finally, also on 11 September, he signed a decree on the abrogation of the Rome Agreements.*** The stage was set for his attempt to derive some political capital from the events.

* Pavelić thanked Hitler with the following telegram:

"Fuehrer! It is two and a half years now since the Croat people, at the moment of victorious advance of your gallant units, saw its hard struggle for freedom crowned by the creation of the Independent State of Croatia.

Today, once again, the Croat people expresses its gratitude to you, deeply moved, [gratitude] for the recovery of its passionately loved coastal lands, and for the generous recognition of the right of the Croat people to recover lost Croatian territories along the Adriatic.

United Croatia stands in defence of its highest national values, in gratitude and legendary Croat faithfulness, firmly with you, Fuehrer, and with your invincible armed forces. Ante Pavelić."(86)

** "In view of the fact that, from 18 May 1941 until this day, the King-designate of Croatia has not made any acts subsequent upon such designation, I hereby state that for the Independent State of Croatia both the offer and the designation are null and void."(87)

*** "On 18 May 1941 the governments of Croatia and Italy signed the Rome Agreements [...] The Italian government had not complied with any of the obligations subsequent upon those agreements, and especially not with regard to the frontiers, to the guarantee of political independence and territorial integrity [of Croatia], and to the administration of the city of Split and the island of Korčula. Therefore, those agreements had never come into force. To the contrary, all those interests of the NDH which were meant to be protected by the above agreements, were constantly violated by the Kingdom of Italy.

Those agreements were signed with the specific reference to the membership of the contracting parties in the new European order.

Since Italy has signed an armistice with the enemy without knowledge and agreements of its allies, and therefore detached itself from its former allies, there is no real or legal possibility for the Kingdom of Italy to adhere to the above agreements in the future.

For those reasons, as a signatory of the agreements, I state that they are no longer binding upon the Independent State of Croatia."(89)

In his speech on 10 September and in his radio addresses, Pavelić called on "all Croats" to bury their differences and rally around the idea of independent statehood, in the wake of the "liberation" of Dalmatia. Both he and Kasche seem to have believed that the Croats in Tito's ranks - especially those from the Italian-annexed areas - would desert their units and go home. He also made some moves which were supposed to demonstrate his readiness to broaden the base of his régime. A few days before the fall of Italy, he appointed a veteran politician from Bosnia, Nikola Mandić, as prime minister. Of course, Pavelić remained the head of state, and it was obvious that Mandić, an unknown man in his seventies, would not be allowed to exercise any major influence. Of some significance was also the simultaneous appointment of General Miroslav Navratil, an avid Germanophile, as armed forces minister. Navratil was a strong supporter of the view that professional soldiers, and not Ustaša "colonels", should have the decisive influence in the Domobranstvo.

Pavelić also put out feelers to the HSS right after the Italian armistice. Confidential talks involved Mandić and Lorković on the Ustaša side, and HSS politicians Košutić, Pernar and Andres. The latter three were allowed - for the first time since April 1941 - to see Maček, interned in Kupinac and guarded by 200 Ustašas. Pavelić even hinted that he would appoint Košutić as prime minister if the HSS agreed to join the government.(90) In the end those talks came to naught, as Košutić and his party colleagues realised that Pavelić did not intend to give up any real power, but simply to exploit the HSS as a means of gaining greater legitimacy and popular support for his régime. Besides, their policy of wait-and-see entirely relied on an eventual Allied landing on the Adriatic Coast, and precluded any move which would leave them open to the charge of collaboration with the heavily compromised régime totally dependent on the obviously losing side in the war.

At the same time, some leading figures within the Ustaša movement regarded the prevailing mood of national emergency in early September 1943 as an opportune moment to seek political reforms within the NDH. Their primary objective was to limit Pavelić's power and eventually increase the role of non-Ustaša factors (i.e. the HSS). This was a group of young and relatively able men (the most prominent among whom were Mladen Lorković and Vladko Košak, but which also included Mile Starčević, Vjekoslav Vrančić and Matija Kovačić) who had never been on good terms with the "Ras" clique of former émigrés. They were distressed that Pavelić selected Mandić as his prime minister, and regarded such a move as a sign that the Poglavnik did not want to go beyond the purely cosmetic change of his régime. They accordingly tendered their resignations, which Pavelić refused to accept. Furthermore, Pavelić retreated to an insistence on a radical Ustaša course, on total reliance on Germany, and on endless accusations against the HSS as Anglophiles, Freemasons and enemies of Germany.(91) In this way he made it impossible for Lorković's group to pursue a "moderate" course without making a break with him. Lorković was not prepared to go that far at that time.

One last attempt to bring about a real change of government in Zagreb in the aftermath of ^{the} Italian armistice was made by Herman Neubacher, who was made Ribbentrop's special plenipotentiary in the South-East in August 1943.*

* "[Neubacher] was extremely well acquainted with the situation in the Balkans, and in Hitler's eyes enjoyed the reputation not only of an able and talented man, but also of a brilliant person, the most talented Austrian National-Socialist.

'Blond, with the profile of a weary eagle', Neubacher was a born man of the world, generous, but fearless, very decisive and, as a real child of fortune, used to success. Unlike other German or Austrian Nazis, he was truly superbly educated, well read and superbly acquainted with a broad range of issues, from economics to literature [...] According to the instructions given to him by Hitler personally, Neubacher's primary task... was to 'politically organise national anti-Communist forces and guide them politically in their struggle against Communist bands'. Only he was empowered, among other things, to negotiate with the leaders of the bands, accept or reject them."(92)

Indeed, no German political (let alone military) representative in the Balkans during the war enjoyed such wide powers as Herman Neubacher.

Neubacher very soon joined the burgeoning ranks of Pavelić's enemies. In his own words, he soon prepared a plan "aimed against the continued existence of Pavelić's regime in the NDH". However, "this was not unknown to the government circles in Zagreb", in which "he was regarded as Enemy of the State No 1".(93) Small wonder, considering that he proposed the creation of a greater-Serbian federation, to include Montenegro, the Sanjak and an outlet to the Adriatic, with Nedić at its helm.

Neubacher expected far-reaching pacification in this area, which would drive a wedge in the Communist "zip" (Reisverschluss) which threatened to tear apart the Balkans from Slovenia in the north-west to Greece in the south-east. Hitler liked the idea in principle, but he thought that Germany should not allow a nation with "the sense of political mission" to become predominant in the Balkans, "and the Serbs are" - in Hitler's words - "one such nation. They have shown that they possess great state-creating energy... so I have serious reasons not to encourage this nation in its ambitions".(94)*

* Nevertheless, Neubacher was instrumental in effecting a much more conciliatory German attitude towards the Serbs in general, and the Cetniks in particular. He also developed extensive contacts in Belgrade, which he chose as his headquarters, not only with Nedić's circle, but also with various emissaries and shady representatives of different nationalist groups.(95) He renewed his insistence in Berlin on the need to reach some accommodation with Mihailović in late-1943, but such proposals were rejected by Ribbentrop in early 1944:

"Germany waged the war in the Balkans in order to destroy, once^{and} for all, the Serbian hotbed of unrest... We therefore have no interest in re-igniting the greater-Serbian spirit..."(96)

Neubacher's efforts were heartily supported by many German political and military circles. Especially the SS, both in Germany and in the South-East, persistently advocated support for Nedić's Serbia against Pavelić's Croatia. Neubacher also enjoyed full support of Rendulic and Loehr. Thanks to them, the German press during one period received instructions not to use the word 'Ustaša' at all.(97) In early 1944 Kasche strenuously protested against articles (such as the one published in the Berliner Echozeitung of 6 January 1944) which implied that Croats were predominant in the Partisan leadership; at the same time, there were numerous German intelligence reports from Zagreb about deep concern in Ustaša ranks about German benevolence towards Serbia.

Sickened by the way in which all initiatives to unseat Pavelić seemed to founder, Neubacher sent his confident Robert Kronholz to Zagreb. Kronholz, former Austrian consul-general in Belgrade, was to get in touch with the HSS and explore the possibility of establishing an alternative government.

Kronholz had two illicit meetings with prominent HSS representatives, August Košutić and Bariša Smoljan, in the flat of General Pero Blašković.(98) Kronholz initially suggested that the HSS should form a government, but this was rejected by Košutić outright. Košutić proposed the formation of a non-party "government of civil servants" instead, which would naturally entail the removal of Pavelić and the Ustašas. Kronholz appeared unconvinced by such possibility, insisting that "everyone in Croatia is aligned by now". Košutić and Smoljan countered this by quoting several names of various public figures, university professors, lawyers and Domobran generals (Prpić, Marić) who could be considered. During the second meeting they even produced a written list, with about twenty names, of persons free of political party affiliations which could be considered.*

Kronholz returned to Belgrade and reported to Neubacher. Also present was "Staatenbilder" Edmund Veessenmayer (then based in Budapest).(100) However, far from supporting Neubacher's initiative, Veessenmayer alerted Pavelić's minister in Budapest, Vladko Košak, to Neubacher's plan. Košak promptly sent a courier to Zagreb with the news - and Košutić's list. Pavelić naturally alerted Kasche, who raised hell in Berlin, yet again, on the Poglavnik's behalf.** Neubacher's initiative was thus killed even before it got off the ground due to Veessenmayer's indiscretion. Pavelić was safe, yet again.

* During post-war investigation, both Košutić and Smoljan tried to shift responsibility for composing the list on to the other. It was probably more due to Košutić than to Smoljan, who may have done the actual writing.(99)

** It is possible, however, that Veessenmayer wanted to sound out Košak, who was by that time in "semi-opposition" to Pavelić.

XV - DECLINE AND FALL

1. Operationszone Adriatisches Kuesterland

On 12 September 1943, in a daring commando raid, Otto Skorzeny freed Mussolini from Gran Sasso. The Duce's return, and the activity of Austrian Gauleiters in the area of the northern Adriatic, had a profound effect on the German attitude towards Pavelić's territorial appetites. Even before this change of heart in Berlin, it had become obvious that the expected political advantage to the NDH from the Italian armistice would not materialise.

As German units advanced to the coast, large areas of Bosnia and continental Croatia - cleared of Partisans in the first half of 1943 - came under Tito's control yet again.(1) The situation was particularly alarming in the economically important mining areas of northern Bosnia (with Lukavac and Kreka falling to the Partisans), and in Slavonija, where most of that year's bumper harvest could not be collected by the NDH authorities.(2) The failure of political initiatives aimed at limiting Pavelić's power, or even removing him altogether, had a deeply demoralising effect on the middle classes which had opted for waiting in 1941. Finally, the enormous strengthening of the Partisan movement by large stocks of captured Italian arms and supplies totally eliminated any hope that Croats among Tito's men could be induced to accept Pavelić's offer of amnesty.(3) In fact, it was after 9 September 1943 that they started joining Partisan ranks in large numbers for the first time.

On 5 October Glaise communicated to Weichs the request of the NDH government that its troops be deployed along the coast, especially in the cities.* He also passed ^{on} the NDH authorities' complaint that the Germans were using the Italian Fascist militia in areas outside Zara and Fiume: "this the Zagreb government sees as a grave infringement of its national interest".(5)

* German-Croat tensions over the coastal area were apparent almost at once: Ustaša minister Edo Bulat sent a telegram to Pavelić while on his way to Split under German protection, claiming that the Germans had abandoned his group, which was suffering casualties. He pathetically warned that all guilty for his predicament "would be responsible before history"!(4)

The first Croatian territorial demand which was directly rejected by the Germans concerned the area of Boka Kotorska (the Bay of Cattaro). * Alarmed by the trend, the Ustaša foreign ministry instructed its representatives in Germany to embark on a lobbying campaign aimed at securing all coastal areas from Istria to Budva for the NDH. ** However, the next blow to Ustaša hopes came from Ribbentrop himself, who told Kasche on 9 October to warn Pavelić against Croatian propaganda about Fiume. (8) Ribbentrop also asked Kasche to convey to Pavelić the German view that the whole coastal area was an insurgent area in which German forces had to fight very hard; that the entire area was thus a German zone of operations, with anti-insurgent action and prevention of an Anglo-Saxon invasion the first priority; and that therefore the Fuehrer could not devote himself to the "state-legal issues" while fighting was going on. Ribbentrop added that it would be more useful for the Croats to concentrate their energy on regaining "predominantly Croatian areas" (i.e. former Zone I), than on propagating precise additional territorial demands.

* The OKW informed Ribbentrop that it was categorically opposed to the transfer of that militarily vital area to the Croats, stressing that until the end of the war military considerations had to take precedence over political ones. Neubacher wholeheartedly seconded this view, commenting that "the introduction of the present incurable Croatian disorder" into the area of Kotor was also politically undesirable. His view was that the Bay had to remain a "one hundred percent German military-administrative area", and it was immediately treated as such by all German instances. (6)

** Pavelić's foreign minister Budak instructed NDH Consul-General in Munich Rušinović as follows in a telegram dated 9 October:

"Give my regards to Werlin and thank him for his friendly readiness to help. I request him to obtain from the Fuehrer a general order to all German officers in our area, that Kotor, all islands, Zadar and Rijeka belong to Croatia and that there is no way Italy could have any business there. Least of all, however, can German officers of their own accord talk about Zadar and Rijeka remaining under Italy, or Kotor being given to Montenegro. Such acts force our people to join Partisans out of fear from the Italians, and to fight against German and Croatian liberating units. A lot of blame is with the ill-informed German officers." (7)

An almost identical telegram was sent to the NDH minister in Berlin, Ratković, except that the opening sentence read: "Tell Funk, Steengracht and other friends that it is extremely urgent to obtain from the Fuehrer..." etc.

However, German field commands did not allow even token NDH units to show the flag in any coastal sector, initially at least, Zone I included. When Neubacher talked to Lorković in Zagreb on 13 October, this was one of the chief Ustaša complaints to Ribbentrop's plenipotentiary.(9) At the same time, as Lorković pointed out, German commands deployed Italians and Četniks alongside their own units throughout the area "liberated" for Croatia!*

Apparently still unaware of Ribbentrop's instruction to Kasche, Ratković spoke to Steengracht on 15 October in accordance with Budak's instructions.(10) He also presented an aide mémoire, addressed to the German foreign ministry and dated 14 October. It opened with a reference to Hitler's "generous decision" to transfer "Croat areas along the Adriatic" to the NDH, and repeated the request that German military authorities "be instructed from the highest instance" that the entire coast with all islands, including Fiume, Zara and the Bay of Kotor, was definitively incorporated into the NDH.

The issue came to a head when a group of over 400 NDH police officers and administrative personnel, headed by an assistant secretary of state at Pavelić's interior ministry, Kamenarović, attempted to reach Fiume via Trieste. Their journey in mid-October had the objective to establish formal as well as practical NDH authority in Fiume. It coincided with the establishment of the "Zone of Operations Adriatic Coastland" (Operationszone Adriatisches Kuesteland) by the Germans in ^{the} northern Adriatic. This zone embraced extensive areas of north-eastern Italy (Belluno, Venezia Giulia, the former "Provincia di Lubiana", Istria, Fiume with Sušak and all surrounding areas, and the islands of Krk, Rab and Pag). It was placed under the political authority of the Gauleiter of Carinthia, Rainer, who was appointed its high commissioner.

* It is remarkable how quickly German field commands started treating Četniks in a manner similar to that of their Italian predecessors. Lorković's complaint to Neubacher was to no avail, however. Already by that time Neubacher had plans of his own about Četniks, plans which were radically different from the Ustašas' desires.

The incident with Kamenarović's group, who were flatly turned back, finally opened the Ustašas' eyes to what was going on. When Lorković and Mandić spoke to Kasche on 19 October, the latter reported, "Minister Lorković, normally calm and always totally constructive, used uniquely sharp language", saying that if the areas under Rainer's control were not to be given to the NDH, then Italian annexation would merely be replaced by the German one.(11) The Croats went out of their way to stress that their authority would in no way hinder the Wehrmacht military control and activity in the area of northern Adriatic. Kasche - not surprisingly - recommended acceptance of the Croatian demands. However, he was unaware that the initiative in the former Habsburg lands taken by Italy in 1918 was firmly in the hands of Austrians: Gauleiters Rainer and Hofer were only its most visible executors on the ground.(12)*

Foreign minister Budak sent a long letter (in German) to Kasche on 21 October, making an appeal to the German minister to work towards the inclusion of all Croat-inhabited coastal territories into the NDH.(14) Budak recalled Hitler's promise of 8 September, and in an almost desperate tone urged Kasche, "a ~~tested~~ friend of Croatia and the Croat people", to seek a solution which would be in line with that promise. Budak warned of "the gravest consequences" of disappointment which German measures would cause among most Croats.

Finally, the NDH minister in Berlin, Ratković, made a formal démarche in the same tone to Steengracht on 22 October.(15) This time the Croats were given short shrift in no uncertain terms. Steengracht stated that he regarded Croatian complaints as inappropriate: Croatia was an insurgent area, and military considerations had absolute precedence. It was not done to raise the issue of frontiers in an area where the Wehrmacht was currently trying

* Increasingly appreciative of the Habsburg heritage as the war went on, and especially after the Italian armistice, Hitler confided to Glaise that Trieste and Fiume should eventually become the Reich's commercial ports, while the Bay of Cattaro[Kotor] would be the key German naval base in the Mediterranean.(13)

hard to establish peace and order. Steengracht told Ratković that Kasche had already been instructed from Berlin to inform the NDH government accordingly.

Kasche's reluctance to convey bad news from Berlin to his Ustaša hosts had already earned him another warning from Ribbentrop that his duty in Zagreb was to represent the interests of the Reich, and not those of the NDH, and that considerations of whether something was just or not could not play any role: "The Croatian government is not allowed in any way to make any demands of us, or to make its desires known to us, even if they are justified. The situation is such that the Croatian government must be satisfied with whatever it gets, as even that will be entirely thanks to the force of German arms".

[cursive added](16) As far as the Germans were concerned, the issue was finally resolved by Ribbentrop's "Note for the Fuehrer" of 26 October 1943, which in effect annulled Kasche's promises to Pavelić of 8 September.(17)

All this was too much for Budak to stomach, and he sent a telegram to Ratković which marked the end of Budak's ministerial career, as it was intercepted and deciphered by the Germans (or possibly obtained from one of their men within the NDH legation in Berlin). In his telegram Budak asked Ratković to talk immediately and in person to foreign ministry officials Funk, Schwering-Krosigk, Meissner, Steingracht and Berger, and to tell them that "the new Serbophile course of German policy is catastrophic not only for Croatia, but also for Germany, and a mortal blow, for ever, to political morality and to Croatian-German relations".(18) Budak stated that Hitler's decision on territories of 8 September was communicated to Pavelić, who duly made it public - only to see some of those lands returned to Italian sovereignty, albeit under firm German control. In Budak's words, "such action against us can hardly find precedent in political history".

Mile Budak's melodramatic tone apart, one could see his point. It was truly humiliating for Pavelić to declare, with as much fanfare as he could muster, the inclusion of all Croat-inhabited coastal areas, only to have some of them denied to him a month later. However, Budak's reaction was also a sign that the Ustaša foreign minister had failed to grasp the fact that, after September 1943, the Independent State of Croatia was in every respect a satellite of the Reich.

This gap between the reality and the Ustašas' pretences did not go unnoticed in Berlin. Commenting with characteristic sarcasm^{on} the Ustašas' tendency to take themselves too seriously, Glaise told Hitler on 5 September 1943:

"Mein Fuehrer, the Croats are a primitive nation. They are not able, as we Germans are, to penetrate the deeper meaning of things.

Therefore, they look at a situation not by its substance, but by its outside appearances...";

to which Hitler (according to Glaise's diary) "smiled with understanding".(18)

As for the treatment of the Croats by Germany over Operationszone, however, even Glaise admitted that it was degrading in the extreme:

"[It] passes, in my view, every boundary of what can be expected even from the most miserable 'ally' we still want to keep with us".

This did not concern anyone in Berlin. As Ribbentrop noted in his telegram to Kasche a month earlier, the NDH owed everything (including its continued existence) to the force of German arms, and was not to be allowed to ask for anything at all. It was not allowed even to make its "desires" known.

Previously, the NDH could enjoy a limited autonomy of action for as long as there was German-Italian rivalry to exploit. At the critical moment of Badoglio's armistice the Germans were prepared to promise Pavelić anything, just to make sure that his reliability remained unquestionable. Kasche was only too glad to convey Hitler's generous offers, and possibly to amplify them a little in the process.

However, Mussolini's return to the scene and the creation of the Fascist republic made it impractical for Germany to sanction any formal adjustments to Italy's pre-1941 borders. Such sanction was especially unlikely as Mussolini was himself at the mercy of the Germans, who could no longer pretend to take "no political interest" in Croatia. Any territorial and administrative adjustment was going to be seen as the will of the Germans, both in Zagreb and at Saló.

Finally, to the Carinthian Gauleiter Rainer and his aides, who effected de facto annexation of the "Zone of Operations" to the Reich, it was preferable to retain existing Italian administrative structure, than to risk the introduction of the Ustašas with their "incurable chaos". In any event, Hitler was determined by early October to allow no such thing. With the disappearance of the Axis, Germany could give up even the pretence of "partnership" with the Ustašas.

The creation of Operationszone Adriatisches Kuesteland was a clear sign that by the autumn of 1943 the NDH, and the movement which ruled it, had ceased to be even a semi-autonomous actor on the political scene of occupied Europe.

2. Another Croatian Policy Review in Berlin

Tito's fortunes took a lasting turn for the better after September 1943. Swiftly reacting to the Italian armistice - and greatly aided by the attitude of Italian field commanders - his forces captured arms and equipment enabling the Partisan army to grow to some 200,000 men. By late November he felt confident enough to convene the "Anti-Fascist Council of National Liberation" in Jajce (north-west Bosnia), a legislative body under Communist control with the clearly stated ambition of taking control over post-war Yugoslavia. Assured not only of Soviet, but also of British support, Tito thought that he could finally give up his hitherto effective tactic of constant movement. He established his high command at Drvar, in Western Bosnia, where he could feel relatively secure from any sudden intrusion amidst the gorges and passes of the Dinaric Alps.

By the end of 1943, Field Marshal Maximilian von Weichs, since the end of August Oberbefehlshaber Suedost (OB SD), argued that "Tito is our most dangerous enemy".* Simultaneously, Kasche kept sending his optimistic reports about "consolidation" of the Ustaša state. They were totally at odds with the views of Weichs and Neubacher (in Belgrade), Glaise (in Zagreb), Rendulic (at Vrnjačka Banja, in Serbia), and a myriad of SS, police, labour, NSDAP and other German officials throughout the Balkans. Yet again, Hitler decided to have this "double-track" reporting ended, and ordered a policy review of the entire Croatian issue. To clear the Balkan mist, in the NDH and elsewhere, Jodl's deputy, Colonel-General Walter Warlimont, was sent to the South-East in January 1944.

* "[H]e was finding his duties as Supreme Commander in the Balkans beyond his powers to fulfil, and was fearful of losing control of the 750-mile long railway upon which his troops depended for present sustenance and future retreat. His predicament became still more awkward early in 1944, when first two of his divisions were sent to help Kesselring in Italy and then four more were called away to occupy Hungary in March, in order to stem the Russian advance. During these same months he mounted a series of 'special operations' (which together made up the Sixth Offensive) with the object of wiping out the Partisans in particular areas, but each time guerilla activity flared up again with renewed vigour once the storm-wave had passed." (19)

Shortly before Warlimont's visit to Zagreb, Pavelić decided to replace his armed forces minister Navratil, whose appointment - five months earlier - met with wholehearted German approval. Glaise and Weichs were shocked by the news, which they regarded as a sure sign that the Poglavnik was determined to weaken Domobranstvo and return to the policy of favouring the Ustaša militia (Vojnica). * Glaise acted very energetically against Pavelić's decision, and (initially at least) even Kasche thought it inappropriate to remove a man who left an excellent impression on Hitler. However, Pavelić soon won over Kasche with the assertion that Navratil was "neglecting the Ustaša militia", and that he had "surrounded himself at the Ministry with a clique of pro-Yugoslav oriented officers". On 29 January Navratil was replaced by Ante Vokić, a little known Ustaša officer from Bosnia. Glaise's defeat in the dispute over Navratil marked the beginning of a new phase in his relations with Pavelić, which was to culminate with Glaise's departure from Zagreb eight months later.

Warlimont arrived in Zagreb at the height of the controversy over Navratil, on 17 January. He stayed at Glaise's villa, and received a thorough briefing from his host. Warlimont also had an ad hoc meeting with Pavelić (whom he described to Glaise as "a perfidious Oriental"); also present were the new foreign minister, Stijepo Perić, Lorković and Navratil. They presented three specific requests: the setting up of "village guards" to be armed by the Germans; the creation of a unified German command with the headquarters in Croatia for all Wehrmacht units in the NDH [which were, then as before, under the Command South-East in Belgrade]; and the abandonment of German support for the Cetniks in Dalmatia. (21)

* Navratil was opposed to the existence of two separate armed formations, and sought to include Ustaša units into the Domobranstvo. He was received by Hitler in November 1943, and left an excellent impression. An Abwehr assessment of Navratil from this period stated the following:
"A typical soldier, very well read. Fully devoted to Croatian national tasks within Europe under the leadership of the Reich [...] he often stressed how important it was for him to be supported by the Reich, to have a firm footing. Superbly informed about the internal situation in his own country and in the Balkans. Fully committed to cooperation with Germany..." (20)

Only the first of those requests was eventually accepted, but with the proviso that "village guards" had to be closely linked with Kammerhofer's organisation and under control of local German commanders. The perennial Ustaša complaint that the command of German troops in Croatia was in Serbia (Weichs in Belgrade and Rendulic at Vrnjačka Banja) was rejected yet again on grounds of strategic necessity. As for the Četniks, Weichs later commented that the figures mentioned by the government in Zagreb (30-35,000) were hugely exaggerated, and he also rejected Ustaša claim that officers from Serbia were among the Četnik commanders in Dalmatia.(22)

Warlimont returned from the Balkans totally committed to the views of Glaise with regard to Croatia. Already on 22 January he presented his preliminary findings to Hitler, who expressed his agreement with the views of Jodl's deputy. On 9 March 1944 he attended a conference at Hitler's headquarters, and - in the presence of Ribbentrop and Kasche - sharply contradicted Kasche's assertion that conditions in the NDH were improving. Warlimont outlined the activity of Tito's forces, unbroken and even strengthened in spite of large operations against him; the catastrophic transport situation, with 30% of railways in the NDH permanently out of use and the rest subject to ambushes and raids; and the collapse of Croatian agriculture, so that the country had to import foodstuffs from Germany.(23)

Warlimont compared Pavelić's government unfavourably to Tito's ability to administer territories under Communist control. He also said that the combat value of both Ustaša and Domobran forces was negligible: along the Adriatic coast they could not be used at all, and against the "bands" only if their units were permeated with German officers. Warlimont strongly opposed any increase of Ustaša influence in military matters, and especially any "spoiling of German-Croatian units" [i.e. Legionnaires] by Ustaša elements and the proposed creation of autonomous Croat village guards.(24)

Hitler supported Warlimont's assessment. When Kasche tried to intervene, he cut him short and summarised as follows: the temporary lull in Partisan activity must not be interpreted as a sign of real pacification; to the contrary, the flaring up of insurgent activity was to be expected soon. Some increase in the number of recruits for Ustaša and Gendarmerie units was also no sign of an increased consolidation of the regime, but only a temporary fluctuation of unreliable elements (Maerzgefallenen). Hitler also warned against the "unlimited and disorganised" setting up of village guards, which would simply turn into Tito's arms suppliers. All of the above was duly communicated to Weichs on 18 March. The spring of 1944 was Kasche's low point: his "line" was, it seemed, rejected at the top.* He also received yet another admonition from Ribbentrop that he tended to look at the Croatian situation too much through Ustaša eyes and take for granted what they told him.(24)

The NDH authorities were deeply concerned about the thrust of German policy in the Balkans in early 1944, and the Zagreb foreign ministry addressed several verbal notes to the German legation during this period which sought to influence policy making in Berlin.** In a long memorandum dated 5 February 1944, the NDH government warned that Croatia could soon become, yet again, the antemurale of Europe, and that therefore "the Croatian citizen, and especially the Croatian soldier, must not be used so that he starts doubting not only in himself, but also in the new European order within which his state should take the sovereign position which is due to it".(27)

* A day before the meeting with Hitler, Kasche prepared a memorandum in which he sharply attacked different Wehrmacht instances in the Balkans which "have not adjusted themselves to the line of German policy". This entire line of reasoning was rejected by Hitler out of hand. (Cf. Fricke, pp.157-158)

** One was exclusively devoted to the tendency of many German papers and magazines to write about "Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina of Islamic faith" without mentioning their Croat nationality, but calling them "Muslims", "Bosnians", and in some cases even "Serbs".(25) Another complained that Germany allowed the NDH railway network to deteriorate, while huge bills for transit through Croatia remained unpaid.(26)

The specific complaints in the memorandum were as follows:

1. The fact that the commander of all Croatian and German units operating in Croatia, Rendulic, still had his headquarters in Serbia;
2. The inability of NDH authorities to exercise control over their own units ("It is nevertheless incomprehensible that the command of a sovereign state does not extend even to its own armed forces within its boundaries, but that it remains with foreign commanders, even though they are allies and friends").
3. The tendency of many German commanders to carry out reprisals against Croat civilians and property, which sometimes caused "dismay and shock".
4. The abandonment of Croatian towns and whole sectors by the Wehrmacht without prior notice to the NDH authorities or regard for consequences.
5. The arbitrary setting up of units recruited from the local population, and the parallel prevention or disruption of local recruitment by the NDH.
6. The establishment of new, and the reliance on old, Četnik units within the NDH, as "the continuation of the notorious policy of the Second Italian Army".
7. The unsettled demands for deliveries of arms and supplies to NDH forces.

Finally, on 10 February two more memoranda addressed to the government of the Reich were sent from Zagreb. The first was a summary of Ustaša complaints in connection with the 13th SS Volunteer Division, and in particular its designation as ^a "Bosnian-Herzegovinian", rather than Croatian, division. (28)* The second memorandum was a long and comprehensive round-up of Ustaša complaints against the creation of the Zone of Operations "Adriatic Coastland" and - in particular - the inclusion into the Zone not only of predominantly Croat-inhabited areas which were taken by Italy in 1918-23, but even of some areas (Krk, Sušak, Bakar, Čabar) which belonged to Yugoslavia (Banovina of Croatia) before April 1941. (29)

* "This created the danger that political and national unity of the Croat people could be undermined, and regional and religious autonomist thoughts and tendencies be awakened."

The Ustaša "diplomatic offensive" in Berlin did not yield any tangible results. There is no record of a formal reply to any of the verbal notes and memoranda, and there was certainly no change in actual German policy on any of the issues raised by Zagreb. It seems that the sole purpose of those efforts was to prepare the ground for a visit, which NDH prime minister Mandić and foreign minister Perić paid to Hitler at Klassheim on 1 March 1944.

The guests went out of their way to create the impression that their country was finally well on the road to consolidation and pacification.(29) They proceeded to raise, one by one, almost all of the issues discussed with Warlimont in Zagreb and elaborated in the verbal notes and memoranda presented to Berlin.(30) However, the visit was a comprehensive failure from the Ustaša viewpoint. It reflected well Hitler's thinking about Croatia, which manifested itself only eight days later, at the key conference on 9 March with Keitel, Jodl, Warlimont, Ribbentrop and Kasche (see above, p. 366).*

* As Glaise informed Weichs on 3 March, after Mandić's return from Salzburg, a follow-up meeting between German and Croatian representatives was held at the German legation in Zagreb on that day. Its conclusions were as follows:
1. Hitler turned down the request to move the Second Panzer Corps Headquarters [Rendulic] from Serbia to Croatia. He approved the creation of a "Croatian liaison command" with Headquarters.
2. Hitler approved the delivery of 20,000 rifles and some light machine-guns for the new Croatian "auxilliary gendarmerie" (village guards), but its setting up was to proceed only in close liaison with the Reichsfuehrer SS Plenipotentiary in Croatia [Kammerhofer], while the distribution of arms would be entrusted to Glaise.
3. Any strengthening of Ustaša militia units - of which the Croats wanted to establish seven new brigades - could proceed only provided that this was not done at the expense of regular Domobranstvo brigades (Lovački i gorski zdrugevi). The Inspector-General of the NDH armed forces, German General Juppe, was instructed accordingly.

Croatian complaints about Wehrmacht reprisals were heard, as well as those against the Cossack division. It was nevertheless decided that the Cossacks would remain in the NDH (in Hitler's words, "because they would fight against the British"!). As for the complaints concerning the 13th SS ("Hanjar") Division, Ribbentrop merely instructed Kasche to prepare a report about the case.(31)

Interestingly, territorial issues were hardly mentioned during Mandić's visit. It was Kasche, rather than the Croats, who brought it up, but "Hitler remained sceptical".(32)

Only a month later, the NDH government was reminded once again that, as far as Berlin was considered, Croatia was no longer considered a sovereign state in any accepted sense of the term. Following reprisals against civilians by German units in the area of Sinj (Dalmatia), during which several hundred Croat villagers were killed, Perić, the NDH foreign minister, instructed his chargé d'affaires in Berlin, Tomislav Sambugnach, to lodge a protest with the German foreign ministry.* Sambugnach composed a rather clumsy note, which described the incident, demanded punishment for all German participants in the crime, and further demanded ("Des Weiteren wird verlangt...") public punishment of the culprits on the spot of the massacre.(34)

* The full text of Perić's telegram to Berlin was as follows:

"Today I summoned the German minister and verbally stated the following protest of the Croatian government:

Around Sinj (Cetina) and in Poljice, Četniks in German uniforms and with active participation of the SS Division 'Prinz Eugen', have slaughtered over the past few days an as yet undetermined number of Croat inhabitants, men, women and children, but certainly over 400 persons. Understandable and justified Croatian countermeasures German authorities in Split have attempted to prevent by threat of force." [The next paragraph uncyphered:]

"On this the Croatian Government received the following telegram from the minister for liberated areas, Edo Bulat, in Split: 'In Split we heard of the slaughters, carried by Četniks dressed in German uniforms in Poljice and Cetina. I conferred with Domobran, gendarmerie and Ustaša officers in this connection. I ordered the police to arrest all Četniks and their sympathisers in Split. The order has been carried out. Seventy persons arrested so far, and the action is continuing. Gestapo unconditionally demanded release of all with a German Ausweis, threatening to use force against guards within 10 minutes. We placed three hundred people with machine guns outside the building immediately. The German authorities subsequently agreed to the arrests, providing that we hand over to them three Četnik liaison officers of Mikočić [?] whom they promised to transfer to Serbia immediately. Please demand resolute action against the commander and soldiers of German units, who have allowed, attended or participated in the massacre, and immediate handing over of all Četniks in their ranks. If we are to secure some degree of our authority among the people, then sentences against the culprits should be carried out in public, and on the site of the crime." [The rest cyphered:]

"With reference to the Fuehrer's categorical statement made on the occasion of the Croatian statesmen's visit to ... Headquarters on 1 March that Četniks in Croatia would be disarmed because they are not only our, but also German enemies, the Croatian Government hereby lodges the most energetic protest and stands behind Minister Bulat's demands. The German minister has been given a translation of Bulat's telegram and photographs of the massacre.

Following further steps after the arrival of detailed reports, compose a note, signed by the chargé d'affaires, and hand it soonest personally to the State Secretary Steengracht. Cable on execution. Minister Dr Perić."(33)

When Ribbentrop was shown the note, he went into a fit of rage. He ordered his ministry to return it, to warn Pavelić that this was no way to talk to the Greater German Reich, and to seek satisfaction. Kasche personally handed to the Poglavnik Ribbentrop's message that it was no longer possible for him to communicate with Perić. Pavelić had his foreign minister duly dismissed immediately, without telling or consulting anyone.(35) Sambugnach was also recalled from Berlin. Furthermore, although it eventually transpired that the massacre of some 700 unarmed Croat civilians near Sinj was not carried out by any "Četniks", but by German soldiers (mainly belonging to the Seventh SS Division "Prinz Eugen"), the whole affair was turned upside-down: the Germans were angry and upset, the Croats defensive. Perić's successor Mehmed Alajbegović, a little known lawyer from Bosnia, sent an abjectly apologetic letter to Ribbentrop, which marked the end of the affair.*

Throughout the spring of 1944 it seemed that Kasche's days in Zagreb were numbered; Glaise even warned Jodl in early May that such change at the German legation was imminent.(37) The ascendent Wehrmacht line was also apparent during a visit which the new NDH armed forces minister, Ante Vokić, paid to the Fuehrer's Headquarters on 16 April 1944.(38) In line with Hitler's decision of 9 March, the OKW Operations Department reiterated that when considering individual Croatian requests - largely already known to the German side - there was no room for any concessions or understanding.

* Alajbegović expressed the hope that he would be enabled to develop even further the centuries-long close co-operation which has existed, in war and in peace, between the German and Croat peoples. He stressed that the action of the recalled Croatian chargé d'affaires [Sambugnach] did not, in its form, in any event correspond to the intent of the NDH government. The sole intent was to inform the government of the Reich of the incident at Sinj and Cetina, and to let it know of the steps subsequently taken in Zagreb.(36)

3. L'Affaire Lorković-Vokić

During 1944 all German satellites in eastern-central Europe made attempts to get off the doomed Nazi bandwagon. The least successful, and the most half-hearted attempt of all was made in the NDH by interior minister Mladen Lorković and armed forces minister Ante Vokić. There is a sizeable body of literature about this episode, which has been extremely controversial among Croat émigrés ever since 1945. However, the sources in this case are largely eyewitness accounts, rather than documents, and many details remain unclear.⁽³⁹⁾ On the basis of available evidence, it is nevertheless possible to reconstruct the salient features of the affair.

The first signs of discord between Lorković and Pavelić were apparent already in the summer of 1943. Lorković was disappointed by Pavelić's lukewarm response to his efforts to forge informal links with the HSS, and possibly to broaden the base of the regime after Mussolini's fall (see above, p. 354). It was then that Lorković established contact with three key HSS figures who remained at large after Maček's internment: the party vice-president, August Košutić, a former parliamentary deputy Ljudevit Tomašić, and Ivanko Farolfi. This group, which was probably representative of the majority of HSS rank-and-file, until the fall of Italy scrupulously avoided anything that could compromise them in the eyes of ^{the} Western Allies, on whom they counted as the ultimate arbiters of the fate of Croatia. Therefore, they were especially wary of public contact, let alone collaboration, with the Pavelić régime.

At the same time, however, in the summer of 1943 the Partisan movement in the NDH was ceasing to be an overwhelmingly Serb affair. Its rise among Croats threatened to undermine the base of HSS support and created the mood of "the need to do something".

This sense of urgency was shared by Lorković. Although the initiative to draw the HSS into government came to naught, he continued to display much more concern about the final fate of Croatia than his colleagues, who seemed reconciled to the Croat state's sharing the ultimate destiny of Germany. Their fatalistic assessment was essentially correct, but such^a passive posture was at odds with Lorković's temperament.

When Vokić was made armed forces minister early in 1944, the two soon became^{the} best of friends. Vokić, by all accounts a handsome and dynamic newcomer from the provinces, and Lorković, the well-educated offspring of an old and greatly respected Zagreb family, both still in their early 30s, were an outstanding tandem among the mediocre and often plainly criminal Ustaša top leadership. They began to think of a possible Allied landing on the Adriatic not as a threat, but as an opportunity to follow somehow in Badoglio's footsteps and thus save an independent Croatia - with or without Pavelić and the Ustašas. The role of the regular army - Domobranstvo - quite naturally appeared crucial in such a scenario, and Vokić carefully developed and cultivated his contacts with the officer corps. In the late spring and early summer of 1944 he embarked on a series of confidential conferences with senior regular officers to probe their views through a series of hints, allusions, and eventually quite frank discussions about such an eventuality. It all boiled down to a warning to officers to be prepared for a signal from him to act against German units in the NDH if and when the time for action came.

While Vokić was busy preparing the ground with the military, Lorković sought outside political connections. The Allies were unwilling to respond, however, and British intelligence operatives in Istanbul supposedly passed the message to Zagreb that their support for Tito and the reestablishment of Yugoslavia was beyond doubt after the Teheran Conference; therefore, that any action in Croatia was exclusively the business of those planning it.(40)

The response from Rome, Switzerland and Madrid, other points of probing by Lorković's men or his HSS liaisons, was hardly more encouraging.* More forthcoming were, surprisingly, some Germans, and certainly Glaise von Horstenau. Some time in July 1944 he was supposed to have said to Lorković "The German ship is sinking, Germany has lost the war. What are you Croats waiting for?"(43) Even earlier, Glaise seems to have had little qualms about expressing scepticism as to the probability of Endsieg. It is probable that he was acquainted with some aspects of the attempted Putsch of 20 July and at least tacitly sympathetic to its perpetrators. According to one source, in case of an Allied landing Glaise was willing to transfer the command of German units composed of Croats (Legionnaires) to Croatian command.(44)

The summer of 1944 was marked by a series of German military disasters: Normandy and France, Rome, the Byelorussian collapse, the loss of Finland, Romania and Bulgaria, all indicated that the days of the Reich were numbered. Remarkably, however, Lorković still believed in Pavelić's integrity when it came to what he perceived as the fundamental national interests of Croatia. Accordingly, he kept Pavelić informed of what he, Vokić et al. were up to. In that sense, there was no "conspiracy", and most certainly no "coup attempt", as some Croat émigré sources suggest. While ostensibly going along with their plans, Pavelić in the end used the information loyally supplied to him to arrest most "plotters" (many were later killed by Luburić's Ustašas), to denounce Glaise with the Germans, and to consolidate his own position.

* No record could be found in British or US documents of an approach by Croat dissidents or of an Allied reply to them. Shortly before the fall of Rome, a former HSS activist turned NDH official, David Sinčić, was sent by Lorković's circle to probe the ground in the Vatican and with the Allied agents there.(41) In Switzerland a key contact was supposedly the famous sculptor, Ivan Meštrović, but his once great credibility was compromised (even a well-known friend of Croatia, Professor Seton-Watson of London University, was weary of contact with him.)

Other contacts were attempted through NDH trade officials in Zurich Josip Cabas and Mirko Lamer. In Madrid the NDH minister, Count Petar Pejacsevics, carefully cultivated the image of an Anglophile opposed to the Ustašas and ready to consider any offer.(42)

According to Košak, who was very close to Lorković and privy to his plans, Pavelić's feigned support for the project aimed at "saving" Croatia had the sole purpose of extracting as many details as possible, which could be used against Lorković's group in due course. There is no indication that Lorković and Vokić suspected what Pavelić was up to. In fact, Pavelić's game reached its end-play on 21 August, when he asked Kasche to come urgently:

"[O]n that occasion the Poglavnik informed me that he had heard from the statements made by Ministers Lorković and Vokić, as well as from other reports in his possession, that those two ministers no longer believed in a successful outcome of the war for Germany, and that they sought an abandonment of the alliance with Germany by the Croatian Government. As his desire was to remain faithful until the end as an ally, he would have to part ways with those ministers. He would entrust the matter to a competent Ustaša court without making a sensation. He added that the same suspicion existed with regard to the Minister in Berlin, Košak, whom he would replace and start identical proceedings. I acknowledged this, but I also asked him to examine the basis of suspicion about Košak, as another change of Minister in Berlin would have an adverse impact on the Government of the Reich. In further conversation the Poglavnik told me that he would have to ask me to request the replacement of General Glaise, as the latter, in his conversation with Vokić and Lorković, had indicated that there was doubt about the felicitous outcome of the war for Germany. I informed my government of this. In the matter of General Glaise I travelled personally to see the Reich Foreign Minister, since this matter, out of personal consideration for the meritorious General, could only be discussed orally."(45)

Evidently, Pavelić was determined to exploit the situation to the fullest extent, and get rid both of his domestic detractors, whose conflict with the "Ras" coterie of old Ustaša émigrés was almost as old as the NDH itself, and of General Glaise, whose opinion of the Poglavnik was common knowledge both in Zagreb and Berlin. In this he found a willing accomplice in the person of the German minister. Pavelić did not conceal from Kasche that both "conspirators" had reported to him their moves and contacts. He indicated that the day of reckoning with the "defeatists" would be at the end of the month, and requested that the border of the Reich be sealed for three days, primarily to stop any Croats trying to make their way to Switzerland.

Having prepared everything with Kasche and with his own faithful Ustaša Colonels*, Pavelić called a cabinet meeting at his villa on 30 August 1944. In front of all ministers he accused Lorković and Vokić of high treason:

"Among you there are some who are contemplating treason. Two ministers have exceeded the sphere of their competence. I have been told by Ante Štitić of Lorković's and Vokić's endeavours aimed at changing the government of the NDH. I cannot and will not tolerate this, and I am taking all their responsibilities away from them herewith."(46)**

* Pavelić often said that "one Luburić is more valuable to me than a hundred university professors!"

** Štitić, an Ustaša officer, was a friend of Vokić who got frightened as preparations progressed. Both "traitors" were deeply shocked and dismayed by Pavelić's accusation. However, Lorković soon regained his composure, behaving with a touch of irony, obviously well aware of the score; not so his friend and fellow "plotter":

"[Vokić] kept asking with tears in his eyes: 'Why now this, when he [Pavelić] was in the know all along?' When I mentioned the rumour that the Germans may have learned of everything, he kept saying that this was impossible, and that Pavelić would have been the first to warn him [sic!], rather than act like this, in front of the Government and with the tribunal. He kept repeating 'I don't understand, I don't understand', and several times he mentioned that he would not have got . . . into the whole thing had Pavelić not given his approval."(47)

An Ustaša special tribunal was quickly convened, at which both accused claimed again that they were not guilty, because Pavelić had been told of their every step. The new interior minister, Mate Frković, who presided at the tribunal, went to Pavelić to check the claim. The latter confirmed that he had been told everything, but - in his own words - he merely "wanted to see just how far those gentlemen would go".(48) In the end, both Lorković and Vokić were first interned in two provincial towns (Koprivnica and Novi Marof, respectively), and later taken to the prison at Lepoglava.*

In effect, the dispute boils down to the question of Pavelić's motives and integrity: if he knew what the two ministers were up to - as he certainly did - then he acted in bad faith at a time when the country was in mortal danger (from the Ustaša viewpoint, anyway). If his primary motive was to keep personal power until the bitter end (or victory, thanks to a German "secret weapon" about which he kept talking until March 1945), then the systemic disfunctionality of his motivation pattern is finally confirmed. He would rather have the NDH sliding to its doom with himself at the helm, than an alternative - however slim its chances of success - which entailed his ouster from power.** Such "systemically disfunctional" motivation pattern, common with many dictators, provides a splendid clue to Pavelić's actions before and during the war, but particularly to his unusual behaviour in April and May 1941, during the negotiations with Italy over frontiers and other issues covered by the Rome Agreements.

* They, and dozens of other actors in the "conspiracy" (Farolfi, Tomašić, several high-ranking officers), were killed just before the fall of Zagreb in 1945, most probably by Luburić's men acting on Pavelić's orders. Their graves are unknown, but the whole episode is a nasty skeleton in^{the} Ustaša cupboard. It has been haunting the Croat émigré diaspora to this day.

** In Moškov's assessment, the first among possible reasons for Pavelić's behaviour was "his personal question, i.e. that he could not reconcile himself to the thought that he could be left aside, with uncertain fate for himself (this is an explanation which should be considered very probable)."(49)

Unlike Finland, Romania, Bulgaria, or even Hungary and Slovakia, the Ustaša state lacked basic political and geo-strategic prerequisites for an action comparable to that of Horthy in the spring, or King Michael in the summer of 1944. The reasons for this were threefold:

1. The very existence of the Croatian state totally lacked legitimacy in the eyes of the Allies, who were - by mid-1944 - firmly committed to Tito, and who engineered a "coalition" between Tito and the Yugoslav government in exile. Any attempt to seek Western political support for a Croatian solution outside Yugoslavia was a priori doomed by that time.
2. The strategic prerequisite for any Croat action which could prove even remotely interesting to the Allies, was an Anglo-American landing in Dalmatia, or anywhere else along the eastern Adriatic coast. Indeed, as the war neared its end, such^a landing had become a conditio sine qua non for the survival of most non-Communist groups in Yugoslavia, from Mihailović to the Slovene Home Guards. As no invasion of the Balkans was seriously contemplated (much to Churchill's chagrin), the pivotal point in most non-Communist "strategies" in Yugoslav lands, including that of Lorković and Vokić, was absent.
3. Pavelić's self-rule, his attempt to turn the NDH into an Ustaša state by means of attempted genocide (against Serbs and Jews) and totalitarian terror (against all other opponents, real, imagined or potential) had created deep inhibitions in all associated with his régime against acting on their own, "conspiring" against the Poglavnik. Those free from such restraints were outside the decision-making circle. This meant that psychological conditions for a successful "coup" were also lacking.

In the event, the "affair" of Lorković and Vokić was an internal political episode in the final phase of the NDH. Although it was intended by its perpetrators to be an action of strategic, European significance, its external effect was negligible - so much so that it is not even mentioned in the Great Powers' contemporary archives.

4. Glaise Defeated

Both Pavelić and Kasche had strong reasons for wanting to remove Glaise from his post. Ever since the summer of 1941, both were aware of the suave Austrian's personal, as well as professional, antipathy for everything that the Ustašas stood for in Croatia. Glaise's deep contempt and loathing for Pavelić was common knowledge not only in Berlin, but also in Zagreb. As for Kasche, Glaise was an arch-rival, the key obstacle to the single-minded Nazi minister's attempts to promote an unreservedly pro-Ustaša line in Berlin. The "affair" of Lorković and Vokić provided both Pavelić and Kasche with an excellent opportunity to get rid of the turbulent general, with Pavelić taking the lead and Kasche eagerly following.

Glaise's idiosyncratic nature, his ability to get away with a degree of independent thinking even in Hitler's presence, is truly remarkable in the annals of the Third Reich. Nevertheless, the coalition which Pavelić and Kasche set in motion in the last week of August 1944 was no match for him. It commenced with Pavelić's "confidential" remark to Kasche on 21 August that Glaise had been making defeatist remarks to Lorković and Vokić. Glaise, fully informed after the event, recorded in his diary:

"Kasche, being equally stupid and evil, reacted in an impossible manner: he asked for a written statement of accusation against a German General! This was immediately done. The Poglavnik simultaneously requested that Hitler be informed of everything. Instead of informing me immediately of accusations against me, Kasche put the written denunciation in his pocket, bid a cordial farewell to me and went to Berlin to submit the accusation against my person. It goes without saying that he had previously forwarded a written report of appropriate length..."(50)

Immediately after his conversation with Pavelić on 21 August, Kasche asked for an urgent audience with Hitler. The following evening (22 August), Ribbentrop replied that he, rather than the Fuehrer, was expecting Kasche at his wartime headquarters, "Westfalen". Before leaving, on 23 August, Kasche conferred with Pavelić again. The two acted, in spirit and in fact, like two conspirators against Glaise. Kasche suggested that it might be useful if he took with him a written document about the whole affair, and especially about the alleged rôle of Glaise. Pavelić was only too happy to oblige.*

When Kasche arrived at Ribbentrop's headquarters, things did not go smoothly for him. Ritter, who held the position of ambassador at the foreign ministry, and who was Kasche's immediate superior, was the first to express doubts about the whole affair. Ritter told Kasche that, in his opinion, the minister should have spoken to Glaise before leaving Zagreb. Kasche replied that he wanted, above all, to avoid any rumours about the affair going round Zagreb. He also wanted to avoid any disruption of Glaise's current negotiations with the Croats on German-Croatian military links.(53)

* In Kasche's recollection, "The Poglavnik duly penned a draft letter. He asked that this letter should under no circumstances get into the hands of the men at DKW, because he was afraid that this could have unpleasant consequences... for him personally and for his country."(51) The letter, in Pavelić's handwriting and in German, went as follows:

"From statements made by the Interior Minister, Dr Lorković, I have learnt that over the past few weeks he had had confidential conversations with General Glaise. During these conversations General Glaise expressed himself very negatively about the overall situation, and even asked Minister Lorković what would be the orientation of Croatia thereby. Among other things, General Glaise specifically told Minister Lorković that the war was lost, that an entire army in France could no longer be saved, and that it could not be replaced because of the lack of manpower.

When he was told that we had received an optimistic report from our Minister, he still continued to assert that he did not believe in victory. I must convey the above to you, Excellency, since I have noticed that these statements have had an extremely negative influence on some of my ministers, and I shall be forced to take appropriate measures against them."(52)

In the evening of 25 August Ribbentrop received Kasche. When told of the details of the case, Ribbentrop commented that he had always regarded Glaise as a "café politician", who enjoyed talking around as he pleased, which the Croats used for their ends.(54) Nevertheless, Ribbentrop also enquired if Pavelić had political objectives of his own in mind; Kasche reiterated that he was convinced of the authenticity of the information supplied by Pavelić. Ribbentrop took Pavelić's letter and told Kasche that he would inform Hitler.

The following day (26 August) Kasche was asked to come and see Ribbentrop again. He went with Ritter, but was left to wait while the foreign minister and Ritter had a brief conversation on their own. When Kasche joined them, Ribbentrop flatly stated that he could not present the matter to Hitler without hearing Glaise's side first. He said that otherwise Hitler would see the whole thing as an impropriety and denunciation. Kasche contradicted this view, stressing that he wanted to avoid normal official routes, and hoped for a decision by the Fuehrer which would take into account the personality of General Glaise and his reputation outside Germany [as a historian].

Ribbentrop interrupted very sharply at this point and said that it was not up to Kasche to worry about the policy of the Reich, because it was conducted by the Fuehrer and himself. Kasche simply had to carry out orders:

"Within the framework of world politics Croatia is an entirely insignificant matter, and Kasche must get used to this. He [Ribbentrop] is sick and tired of arguing with Kasche over such issues, and standing behind Kasche's stubbornness."(55)

Ribbentrop was losing self control more and more, literally shouting at Kasche, who replied that further co-operation on such basis was impossible. In the end, both sides calmed down, and it was agreed that Kasche would hear what Glaise had to say and report back. (When Ribbentrop left, Ritter expressed his embarrassment to Kasche because he had to witness the scene).

When Kasche returned to Berlin, he found Pavelić's message, urging him to return to Zagreb as soon as possible. Immediately on his return, 29 August, Kasche went to Pavelić, who presented extensive materials to support earlier claims about Lorković and Vokić, including a four-page handwritten statement by Štitić.* Pavelić stated that he would have to act against Lorković and Vokić, in order "to concentrate all forces at the task of joint struggle".

The following day (30 August) Pavelić invited Kasche again, to inform him that the action would get under way later that evening, and that some 60 arrests were to be carried out. On 31 August, at 5 a.m., the SD representative in Zagreb, SS-Obersturmbannführer Hermann called Kasche and informed him that Pavelić's plan had been carried out smoothly: while Lorković and Vokić were dealt with at the cabinet session, various HSS and military "fellow conspirators" were simultaneously apprehended all over Zagreb. Only then did Kasche finally invite Glaise, to confront him with Pavelić's accusations.**

* "Štitić reported that minister Lorković invited him on 24 August to his apartment, where he found Lorković, his wife and the director of RAVSIGUR [Directorate for security], Milutin Jurčić. Lorković was doing the talking, from the assumption that Germany would lose the war, and he was considering what preliminary steps Croatia could take for its future development. In this connection there was talk of establishing links with the enemy. According to this letter, Lorković mentioned Pavelić, and said that he could go to Germany and await further developments there. Štitić further reported a visit by his friend, armed forces minister Vokić, on 25 August 1944. Vokić, according to the letter, somewhat less emphatically suggested that he would propose to Pavelić the merger of Ustaša militia into the Domobranstvo, so that at the end of the war [Croatia] would have strong armed forces at its disposal, because the enemy would not recognise an army of the [Ustaša] political party." (56)

** Glaise recorded in his diary that in the last week of August, while Kasche was in Germany, "[Pavelić] behaved in an extraordinarily cordial and pleasant manner towards me, so that I could imagine anything but the fait accompli of a mean stab in my back, which he had engineered with the help of his friend Kasche [...] On Monday, 28 August, I went - with Metzger - for the last time in three and a half years, to visit the Croatian 'head of state' in his quarters at Tuškanac [...] On 29 August Kasche returned from Berlin. Towards me he adopted a cool and distant posture. He spent both morning and afternoon with the Poglavnik, and finally telephoned to fix a meeting with me for 31 August at 12 noon". (57)

When Glaise went to Kasche, the conversation initially focused on the dramatic events in Zagreb during the previous night. Very soon Kasche went to the crux of the matter. In Glaise's recollection:

"He gave me a personal memorandum with accusations which the Poglavnik had made against me in connection with my talks with Lorković. Certain points in Kasche's note were identical with the Poglavnik's letter, which Kasche had provoked [Pavelić] to write, [The] only thing missing was the last paragraph, which talked of my negative influence on both ministers, which rendered cooperation with them impossible. Maybe Kasche was a bit embarrassed to repeat that too. Of Pavelić's letter - also a proof of Kasche's deviousness - I only heard at the OKW.(58)

Glaise denied Pavelić's accusations ("which were based 100 percent on tête-a-tête conversations"), and - deeply indignant - added that Kasche could not talk with a grown-up man in such manner. Glaise left rather abruptly, but returned the following day to tell Kasche that it was impossible for him to discuss the matter with the minister any further, and that he would have to use official channels. Glaise reiterated his indignation at Kasche's role in the affair, and said that - after Pavelić's grossly improper behaviour - it would be impossible for him to continue at his post of representative of German armed forces in Zagreb.

Also on 1 September Glaise sent a telex to Weichs and Loehr, informing them of "an apparently unbridgeable schism" which had developed between him and Pavelić ("unfortunately, not without the fault of the German Minister"). This had made it impossible for him to represent the interests of the Wehrmacht, either personally or through Kasche. He also asked to be allowed to report to Keitel in person.(59)

On 7 September 1944 Glaise left Zagreb, "with a raised head and a broken heart", as he put it.* Just before departure he sent a courier to Kasche with a handwritten letter, warning against the danger of rekindled "prime Ustaša terror".(61) This Glaise feared in view of the evident triumph of the old "Ras" clique; an early symptom was the murder of Lorković's friend Milutin Jurčić, who was dragged out of his apartment before dawn and butchered by Luburić's "Ustaška obrana".

Keitel greeted Glaise cordially, but indicated that he did not want to be too involved in "an eminently political affair". Glaise said that there were only two alternatives: either Hitler would inform Pavelić that Glaise enjoyed the Fuehrer's fullest confidence, in which case he would stay in Zagreb; or Glaise was to be sacrificed, in which case care should be taken of his dignified departure. Keitel agreed, while Ribbentrop stated that he did not want to get involved in a matter of interest only to the OKW.(62)

The final decision on Glaise came on 26 September, about a week after Pavelić's fourth and final visit to Hitler. Weichs informed all German instances in the south-east that, commencing on that day, Glaise was removed from his post in Croatia and transferred to the Fuehrer's reserve.**

* Kasche earlier reported to Ribbentrop the outcome of his talk with Glaise: "General Glaise came to see me as he is travelling to the OKW. He declared that he would certainly not come back. At first he will be represented by General Juppe. Regarding accusations against him, he said that the Poglavnik wants to eliminate him in a dishonest manner. He selected this moment to avoid involvement of German military circles with the appointment of new men to high command posts in the Croatian armed forces.[...]"(60)

** "Having lost the battle, but having saved his face, as he put it, Glaise von Horstenu soon obtained full satisfaction, from Hitler personally. This was in November 1944 (after Keitel's statement that he should be 'happy that, by leaving Zagreb, [he] would not have to witness the shameful end of that miserable state'. For his merits Hitler awarded him the Ritterkreuz with swords. Keitel gave him the decoration, saying that he hoped 'the unpleasant aftertaste was thereby removed' which Glaise may have felt about departure from Zagreb. 'I replied - JAWOHL', Glaise recorded, 'but that was not true. I could not get over it that Kasche was still down there, and even played a great man and victor, in spite of his displayed bad faith, not only towards me, but also towards the German Army.'"(63)

5. The Last Ally

Pavelić's belated success in disposing of both Lorković's group and Glaise coincided with a strategic shift in the Balkans, which also contributed to the strengthening of Pavelić's position in Berlin. With the loss of Romania and Bulgaria, and the arrival of the Red Army into the Panⁿonian Plain, the importance of Croatia to the defence of the heartland of the Reich increased rapidly. This precluded any further search by the Germans for an alternative to Pavelić, who in August-September 1944 won the final victory in his fight to obtain full, unreserved support from Hitler.*

Pavelić sealed his domestic victory with a speech at the Chamber of Labour (Radnička komora) in Zagreb, on 7 September 1944. He explicitly stated that the Croats should devote themselves to the defence of their homeland, and leave broader issues, such as the conduct of the war, to the Germans.** Any hope of further combinations with the Allies were dispelled explicitly, when Pavelić said that he would greet the British with guns. In his closing remarks he charted the course that the NDH was to follow until the very end:

"The Croats have never blemished their honour in their history. We will not do so either. Our road is determined. We chose it not three, but thirty years ago, since 1918. We shall endure with our ally, and we shall win with our ally [...] The Croat people will not betray itself, and therefore it will not betray its ally either." [66]

* "[T]o the German leadership, the NDH turned from a bothersome child into the last remaining ally in the area. This resulted in the final abandonment of any policy based on the removal of the Ustašas, their regime and methods[...]" (64)

** In a key passage of his speech, Pavelić said:

"A few days ago a gentleman came to see me. As we talked, he asked me: 'What is going on in the Carpathians?' 'You ask me too much; all I can say is that I don't know'. 'And what is going on along the Seine?' To this I replied: 'Listen! The area of my concern is between the Drava and the Drina!'

My duty is to look after what is going on here, in our country, to make sure that everything goes the way the Croat people wants and needs. And what is going elsewhere, there must be someone who is looking after that too. And we know that there is, and if I were to bother about events on the other side of the Carpathians, woe unto our fatherland." ["...valjda imade netko, tko se i za to brine. A mi znamo da doista i ima, i ako bih se ja brinuo, što se događa s onu stranu Karpata, jao si ga našoj domovini."] (65)

Hitler's decision to sacrifice Glaise, and to end discussions about possible alternatives to Pavelić, was the result of necessity, rather than choice. An episode at Hitler's East Prussian headquarters (on the eve of Pavelić's last visit) shows that he had no illusions about Kasche's assessment of the situation in Croatia or about his diplomatic ability.* However, Hitler's scope for manœuvring was limited by events which were increasingly outside his control. This was confirmed by Pavelić's fourth, and, as it turned out, last visit to Hitler, at the Wolfschanze on 18 September 1944.

Hitler opened by describing the difficult position of Germany in the Balkans, which would necessitate evacuation of southern Greece and the Aegean islands.(67) It was crucial, however, to defend positions in Hungary, and the Iron Gate-Vardar valley line. Asked about Croatia, Pavelić stated that the country had gone through a period of crisis recently, under the impact of the collapse of Romania and Bulgaria.

* An extract from the evening conference (Abendlage) on 17 September 1944:
"[Foreign ministry official, Ambassador] Sonnleithner (reports on the situation in Croatia): Unfortunately, it regularly happens that people who stay somewhere become victims of the local psychosis.

The Fuehrer: Exactly so; Kasche is a fantast! [...] Only Kasche does not know that everyone is deserting to Tito's side. Kasche is convinced that it is the other way round (from Tito to Pavelić). Kasche nevertheless maintained that large numbers have come across. But where are they now?

Sonnleithner: He has already corrected the figures.

The Fuehrer: Of those coming over to us!

Sonnleithner: Kasche also recently admitted that there are opposite movements. He quoted some reasons. We have already...

The Fuehrer: It must be admitted: I can be wrong (in a matter) 10 degrees, 20, even 50 degrees. When a man is 90 degrees wrong, something is badly out of order. However, when he is immediately 180 degrees wrong, totally wrong - well, that is a masterpiece.

Sonnleithner: As for Minister Kasche, mein Fuehrer, the Foreign Minister suggested to you recently that you replace him, because the Foreign Minister regards Kasche as a very decent man, but in a way inflexible.

The Fuehrer: He is decent. However, when merely decent men get into the diplomatic service, they fail to perform completely.

Sonnleithner: They are not up to the task.

The Fuehrer: Kasche used to be a first-rate Draufgaenger [...] By the way, our soldiers have assessed the situation correctly. In any event, he must pass on all of that objectively.

Sonnleithner: Among soldiers one such was Glaise..."(66)

The Lorkovic-Vokić "affair" he explained as follows: Croatian intellectuals, including members of ^{the} NDH government, had lost faith in final victory, and advocated the view that something had to be done to enable the British to get into Croatia before the Russians. Pavelić stressed that those people wanted to disband the Ustaša militia, as the British would supposedly refuse to deal with an armed Party formation. There was a lot of enemy propaganda in Zagreb, rumours about the fall and arrest of the Poglavnik, and some weakening of morale among Domobrans, especially those officers who had belonged to the old Yugoslav army. This caused some units, misled by such officers, to go over to the enemy.*

As domestic enemies Pavelić named Partisans and Četniks. However, he claimed that the Partisans were much weaker than before, as 30,000 of them ^{had} accepted the offer of amnesty and returned to their homes.[sic!] He also claimed that the mood of the Croat people was absolutely positive: the faith in victory had not diminished, it was only weakened among intellectuals. The people were not interested in their intellectual speculations, but followed their instinct for preservation and wanted to continue the struggle. The best way to fight Tito, Pavelić continued, was to strengthen the organisation and arming of the Ustašas. However, to disarm Domobranstvo in order to give arms to the Ustašas was politically impossible. Therefore, Pavelić asked Hitler to supply more arms to the NDH. Hitler explained that this was not possible in view of the demands posed by the crises in the east, west and south-east, but praised Pavelić's ability to rely on his Ustašas at all times. Although Hitler again refused to establish a separate command for German units in the NDH, he reiterated that Croatia was the only place in the Balkans which had a national government which enjoyed the full support and confidence of the Reich.

* In fact, what motivated many deserters was Tito's deadline of 15 September 1944 to Domobrans to change sides, after which time they would be treated as traitors and enemy collaborators.

Pavelić subsequently talked to Keitel and reiterated his determination to rely completely on the Ustašas. He said he would gradually merge the Domobrans into Ustaša units. He also said that he would renew "energetic" treatment of the Orthodox population, and to this end he requested Keitel's help for the arming and training of two Ustaša divisions.

Just how fully the new course prevailed was evident from a circular, signed by Keitel, which the OKW sent to field commands on the day of Pavelić's departure from Germany, 19 September 1944. (68) He conveyed Hitler's latest instructions for co-operation with the NDH armed forces and state institutions. Its chief points were as follows:

1. The Ustaša movement is the political foundation of the Croat state, and thus of the armed forces of Croatia. All instances of German armed forces in Croatia have to adapt, uniformly and unconditionally, to the Ustaša course and have to support it.
2. The state leadership of Croatia sees in Četniks a danger to the survival of the NDH, and it is determined to solve the problem by disarming them. The consequence to the Wehrmacht is in mandatory halting of all co-operation with the Četniks in Croatia, which is to be done systematically and gradually. All support for the Četniks, in any form, must stop. Wherever necessary, the Ustašas are to be assisted in disarming the Četniks. The commander south-east is to report on the execution of this order.
3. The build-up of Ustaša units is to be helped with arms, equipment and training by German personnel. The intention of the Croatian side to establish two new Ustaša divisions from among especially selected men is to be supported. The disbanding of Domobran units may prove necessary.
4. Positions which are garrisoned, and are not essential to the war, are to be evacuated in agreement with the Croatian state leadership. For political reasons, Banja Luka is to be reinforced by Croatian units.

The new course was immediately felt on the ground.* Glaise's worst fears were coming true, and the clique of Ustaša colonels was no longer just a shadowy force. They also acquired formal posts which were beyond their reach for as long as the OKW and SS "line" held sway.** Internal security (RAVSIGUR) was entrusted to Erih Lisak, the gendarmerie to Vilko Pečnikar, while the post of the chief of staff of NDH armed forces was given to Tomislav Sertić. All were hardened old Ustašas in the same league as Luburić, Herenčić, Moškov, Servatzy and Boban, and those eight - together with Pavelić - held real power in the NDH (or what was left of it) until the end.***

* Military-Economic Staff South-East reported from Belgrade already on 19 September as follows: "Reconstruction of government in Croatia has resulted in an intensified Ustaša course, which the German side approves. A consequence of this is, moreover, renewed total animosity towards the Orthodox population, and corresponding posture of the Četniks [...]"(69)

** Having won his battle with the OKW, Kasche turned his guns on Himmler's plenipotentiary in Croatia, Konstantin Kammerhofer. In the first detailed report following Pavelić's return from Germany and the official endorsement of the new pro-Ustaša course by Hitler, Kasche hastened to enclose scathing attacks on Kammerhofer's reluctance to cooperate with the Croatian police and armed forces. He proposed that Kammerhofer be appointed police attaché at the German legation (besides his other duties), which would make him Kasche's subordinate.(70) Although his proposals were not accepted, Kammerhofer's role in the final months of the NDH was totally inconspicuous.

*** The NDH government, "reconstructed" after the affair of Lorković and Vokić did not change until May 1945. Its members were:

1. Dr Nikola Mandić, prime minister since 2 September 1943;
2. Dr Džafer Kulenović, deputy prime minister since 7 November 1941;
3. Dr Andrija Artuković, minister-State Prot0-notary since 11 November 1943;
4. Dr Mehmed Alajbegovic, foreign minister since 5 May 1944;
5. Vice-Admiral Nikola Steinfl, armed forces minister since 30 August 1944;
6. Dr Mate Frković, interior minister since 30 August 1944;
7. Dr Pavao Canki, minister of justice and religious affairs since 11.11.1943
8. Dr Dragutin Toth, minister of state treasury since 11 November 1943;
9. Dr Vjekoslav Vrančić, industry and commerce minister since 3 April 1944;
10. Dr Stjepan Hefer, minister of agriculture and food since 11 November 1943;
11. Dr Josip Balen, minister of forestry and mining since 11 November 1943;
12. Dr Julije Makanec, minister of education since 11 November 1943;
13. Janko Tortić, minister of health and social policy since 11 November 1943;
14. Dr Jozo Dumandžić, minister of transport since 30 August 1944;
15. Dr Meho Mehičić, minister of care for devastated areas since 5 May 1944;
16. Dr Lovro Sušić, minister of Ustaša organisation since 30 April 1944;
17. Dr Edo Bulat, minister without portfolio since 20 May 1944;
18. Dr Sava Besarović, minister without portfolio since 11 November 1943;
19. Živan Kuvedžić, minsiter without portfolio since 11 November 1943.

Pavelić's fatalistic course was also reflected in the Ustaša foreign ministry. Periodical "Foreign Political Reports" prepared by the Ministry no longer contained references to the stories of possible separate peace between Germany and the Allies. Instead, the salient feature of NDH diplomats and analysts after September 1944 was their insistence on the "inevitable" and "imminent" clash between the Anglo-Americans and the Soviet Union, as well as officially sanctioned optimism about the overall situation, which bordered on the absurd.* The somewhat subdued manner in which Goebbels talked of the new secret weapons was described in an NDH foreign ministry report as a sure proof that "this is no sign of scepticism, but of self-confidence and assurance which does not require any propaganda"; and the typical conclusion was that "Germany certainly will not lose this war, but on the contrary it will win, which is to say it will force both enemy camps to a favourable peace.(73)

At the same time, German troops started evacuating large tracts of NDH territory, which were immediately taken ^{over} by the Partisans (central and southern Dalmatia, eastern Herzegovina). This inevitably caused the morale of the Ustašas to waver, especially when in some instances local German commanders failed to provide sufficient prior notification to the Croats.(74)

* Eg. a report dated 23 October 1944, which contained the following summary:
"Germany seeks to maintain the existing position, in order to gain time - as is stressed by German sources - to manufacture new weapons in sufficient quantities, and to use them to reverse the situation on the battlefields.[...]"

An outline of the dispute among the allies is increasingly clear. This is especially apparent in the Balkans (the dispute over Thrace and the placing of the Bulgarian army under Soviet command), as well as in connection with the Polish question, which is growing ever more acute.[...]"(71)

On 4 November 1944, the former NDH minister in Sofia, Vladimir Židovec, prepared a report on foreign political affairs which, inter alia, stated:
"Contrary to any thought of capitulation, which is out of the question, there are considerable real prospects for Germany. First of all, while the fighting is going on, anything is possible. [F]urther struggle will inevitably bring to the surface ever more sharply the weaknesses in the enemy camp, which surely exist due to fatigue and great losses. [Furthermore,] mounting enemy losses on a daily basis will convince the enemy that further struggle does not make sense, especially on German territory.[sic!] Another important factor is the increasingly difficult relationship between the so-called Allies, i.e. between Anglo-Americans on one side and Russians on the other."(72)

The official "line" in Zagreb claimed that this was unfortunate, but a temporary measure, which would be reversed in due course. In the same vein, by early November 1944 the Ustašas allowed for the possibility that the entire country be overrun.* To calm their allies, the Germans even offered to accept and accommodate a number of Croats who would be threatened by the enemy. The NDH government promptly prepared a lengthy memorandum for the government of the Reich on the subject. The Croat side intended to move "the national and state core"; not only the armed forces, but government members and officials, civil servants and their families, war invalids, members of the Ustaša movement (including the youth), former state officials, "national creators and intellectuals", "persons that in the opinion of the government of Croatia need protection", etc.(76) The Zagreb government was unpleasantly surprised when the Germans indicated that the evacuees belonging to the government, civil servants and their families could not exceed 300, and asked that it be at least doubled.(77)

By the end of 1944, with Tito firmly entrenched in Belgrade at the helm of the "new Yugoslavia", the atmosphere of doom descended on Zagreb. It was only strengthened by extensive evacuations of entire Volksdeutsche communities from the eastern areas of the NDH, for which Kammerhofer was responsible. Even Kasche was forced to remark in a report to Ribbentrop:

"The government [of the NDH] must be kept on course. Its understanding of the situation is fatalistic, rather than optimistic."(77)

Even though the main fronts were temporarily stabilised in the last three months of 1944, there were few grounds for any "optimism" as 1945 approached.

* "Even if it happens that Croatia is attacked, or even temporarily occupied by the enemy, it is clear that the decision about the outcome of the war will not come here, and that such events would not have any great significance for the overall decision. [It is also clear] that after the anticipated successful conclusion of this war Croatia will be reestablished with all its rights and in its entirety, and this is precisely what the Croatian nationalism, embodied in Ustašism, is seeking and struggling for."(75)

One straw which the Ustašas attempted to grab in late-1944 and early-1945 was the idea of a Danubian confederation or that of a Central European Catholic bloc. Old Habsburg legitimist notions were suddenly revived, and the initial impetus to such plans was apparently given by Lorković himself, during his "conspiratorial" contacts in the spring and summer of 1944.* However, Lorković's contacts never went beyond the low-level field operatives of Allied intelligence services; and, in any event, in the last phase of World War Two there were about a dozen different projects for a "Danubian Federation", all of them doomed because they depended on acceptance by the Allies.(80)**

While Lorković was disgraced and finally killed by Pavelić, a series of articles broadly supportive of the idea of confederation, which appeared in Zagreb in the winter of 1945, had at least tacit approval of the régime.(82) Such articles discussed at length the importance of Croat-inhabited lands to the West, of ancient links between Croatia and Western Europe in various fields, and similar geopolitical considerations. They all aimed at promoting the thesis that Croatia was too valuable (especially to the British) to be abandoned to Tito's Communists. In some clerical circles the preferred plan envisaged a Catholic bloc of nations, which would serve as a new cordon sanitaire between the Soviets and the West.(83)

* According to Lorković's friend L. Toncic-Sorin, post-1945 foreign minister of Austria, Lorković's plan to take Croatia out of the Nazi camp was closely linked with the Danubian solution:

"He was concerned about the future. In such case, Croatia would have a chance to get onto the side of the Allies, like Badoglio's government in Italy, to save its independence and to become a partner in a Danubian federation, which would include Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia."(79)

** Such plans were a regular feature of proposals by conservative-oriented émigrés from what used to be Austria-Hungary, who found themselves in Britain and the United States when the war broke out. The pretender to the throne, Archduke Otto von Habsburg, even succeeded in making President Roosevelt pay some attention to his ideas of a revived KuK Monarchy.(81) Groups of Slovaks and Hungarians were also active with different combinations; what they all shared was utter fright at the prospect of the Red Army marching into the heart of Europe and staying there, as it seemed, for good. Although Churchill also had a lot of sympathy for such ideas in principle, the Moscow Conference put an end to much speculation in October 1943, when the Allies came out in favour of an independent, re-established Austria.

For all their eloquence far superior to most Ustašas, the authors of such articles were really talking to themselves. They obviously went to a lot of trouble to say things between the lines that formally could not be thought of, let alone written. There is no indication, however, that their efforts had any impact outside the NDH, or - indeed - outside the narrow circle of people in Zagreb who read them. The Allies were certainly unaffected.

The only people apparently untouched by the doomsday atmosphere of early 1945 were the hard-line Ustašas like Luburić. Their renewed policy of terror and anti-Serb zeal excluded any notion of even tactical truce in order to fight the almost-victorious common enemy. In pursuance of such policy, Ustaša units from the concentration camp at Jasenovac and from the railway brigade at Zagreb even embarked on armed confrontations with the Germans, while trying to get hold of Serbs in German or German-controlled units, and kill them. (The posture of Ustaša veterans was strongly reminiscent of Eugen Kvaternik's statement to Branko Pešelj, three years earlier: "We may lose the war, but there will be no more Serbs in Croatia, and whoever comes after us will have to take it from there"; see p. 213f above.) Such incidents between Ustašas and Germans, literally unthinkable only a few months earlier, resulted in a sharply worded note from Ribbentrop to the Poglavnik in December 1944.*

* On 16 December 1944 Ribbentrop sent a telegram to Kasche ("most urgent"), asking him to convey, immediately and to the letter, the following note to Pavelić:

"The Government of the Reich has learnt with greatest surprise of a host of incidents involving members of the Ustaša militia who had committed unprecedented transgressions against members of the German armed forces. The matter concerns, among others, the following incidents:

1. For some time now, the Ustaša brigade from Jasenovac has been searching trains and columns in the area Novska-Dubica. On such occasions soldiers and military escort of non-German [i.e. Serb] nationality in Wehrmacht uniforms and with German travel documents have been arrested and forcefully taken to the camp at Jasenovac. To objections by German officers and railway station commanders, the Ustaša side has partly responded with the threat of arms (bringing armoured scout cars etc.). [ctd. on p. 394]

Indeed, it could be said that while in the past there had been a two-track German policy towards the Ustasas (that embodied in Glaise, and that embodied in Kasche), in this final period there was a two-track policy of the Ustašas towards the Germans. Officially, the country embarked on a "total war" when Prime Minister Mandić announced on 11 December 1944 a "general people's mobilisation", and the papers were filled with articles pledging every last ounce of energy for the war effort.

----- [ctd.]

2. On 23 and 24 November 1944, near Jasenovac, the Ustaša brigade searched a German transport of wounded soldiers belonging to Field Hospital 615. In a brutal manner, they took away members of [Ljotić's] Serbian Volunteer Corps, threatening to use arms in the process. They also mistreated wounded Germans.

3. On 3 December 1944 a transport of German soldiers - consisting of soldiers convicted by the Divisional Court to various sentences to be served in the Reich, and which included five Croats - had the accompanying guard removed by force. A protest by the German military-judicial officer was unsuccessful. An Ustaša lieutenant, who did not give his name, stated that the Ustašas from Jasenovac would liberate every Croat Legionnaire sentenced by German military organs and sent to serve his sentence in the Reich.

4. Not far from the railway station at Zagreb, and at the station itself, on 7 December 1944, heavily armed members of an Ustaša unit - in spite of the protest by a German NCO accompanying the group - dragged out of a train 36 officers and men belonging to the Serbian Volunteer Corps and shot them on the spot. [They] were on their way to Rijeka, having taken part in combat on the side of a German army group.

The Commander South-East has already protested most vigorously with the Poglavnik through military channels and asked that the culprits be punished. [He also asked] that a special order be issued to prevent repetition of such incidents in the future. The Government of the Reich is prompted to tell on its part the following to the Poglavnik:

The Government of the Reich cannot regard acts, such as those committed by the members of Ustaša militia, as soldierly actions. In its estimate, this is undisciplined and irresponsible behaviour by criminal elements. The fact that participating Ustaša officers and soldiers dared, in one instance in Zagreb itself, to break into German military transports and to threaten even members of the Wehrmacht with arms, is so unprecedented that the Government of the Reich will under no circumstances tolerate such outrages. On the contrary, it must expect that now, in a country which owes its state existence exclusively to the blood of German soldiers, its leader will immediately undertake most effective measures to end such incidents once for all.

The Government of the Reich must further expect that its demands for an exemplary punishment of all culprits will be fulfilled as rapidly as possible, as already demanded by the Commander South-East, and that the Croatian side will acquaint the German Legation in Zagreb and the Commander South-East with the sentences and all relevant details." (84)

As a result of this note Pavelić was forced to order on 21 December an unhindered passage of Djujić's Cetniks from northern Dalmatia to Istria. (85)

By the end of the year Pavelić reorganised the armed forces, and merged Ustaša and Domobran units, amidst unprecedented propaganda among the conscripts (Domobranstvo) in order to imbue them with the Ustaša spirit. There was a marked increase in the exaltation of the Poglavnik as "the leader of the people", at the head of the "armed Croat people". However, most key command posts in the reorganised force - which numbered between 150,000 and 200,000 men in early 1945* - were given to Ustaša officers. At the same time, papers were filled with frightening notices of executions of those Domobrants, men and officers alike, who were caught deserting or trying to cross to the Partisans.

The events of late-1944 indicate, however, that the terrorist element within the Ustaša leadership regained most of the ground lost in 1942, and returned to its old agenda of fighting an anti-Serb, rather than a pro-German war. This fact was apparent as late as March 1945, when some elite Ustaša units were withdrawn from the front in Srem in order to destroy a large group of typhoid-plagued, demoralised and exhausted Montenegrin Četniks who were trying to make their way to the West across the NDH.

* The final order-of-battle of the reorganised NDH land forces, presented here as reconstructed from a variety of sources, was as follows in early 1945:
I. Poglavnikov tjelesni zbor (Bodyguard Corps of the Poglavnik); commander Ante Moškov; located in the area Koprivnica-Varaždin consisting of three divisions (Udarna divizija [shock division], General Ante Nardelli, with three regiments; 2nd Ustaša division, General Mirko Gregorić, with three regiments and motorised corps; 5th Ustaša division, General Rafael Boban, with three regiments of two battalions each, made up of the remnants of the Black Legion and fifth Ustaša brigade).

II. Corps, commander General Vjekoslav Luburić; located in the area Sunja-Sisak-Petrinja; consisting of two divisions (1st division, General Julije Fritz, three regiments; 17th division, Colonel Desković);

III. Corps, General Artur Gustović; located in the area of Ivanić-Grad, with four divisions (3rd division, General Stjepan Peričić; 7th division, General Stjepan Mifek; 8th Division, General Domanik; and 9th Division, General Bajd);

IV. Corps, General Josip Metzger; located in the area Dvor na Uni-Dubica, and consisting of three divisions (4th division, Colonel Andro Grum; 6th division, General Vlado Metikos; 15th division, General Milan Čudina);

V. Corps, General Ivo Herenčić; located in the area Ogulin-Karlovac, and consisting of two divisions (10th division, Colonel Branko Rukavina; 13th division, General Ivan Brozović).

Outside those five corps there was Battle Group "Lika" under Colonel Josip Aleksić, two divisions strong; and 16th division, General Slaviša Cesarić.

6. In Search of a Miracle

The Yalta Conference (4-11 February 1945) should have ended the illusions of even the most stubborn optimists in the Ustaša camp. Most details were known to the NDH foreign ministry immediately from the Allied press, including a recommendation to Tito and Šubašić to form a joint provisional government.(86) At the same time, the collapse of German fronts was in full swing. The situation was especially critical on the most vulnerable sector, east of Berlin, where a massive Soviet offensive in the second half of January brought the Red Army to the Oder, only 50 miles from the capital of the Reich. The fall of Budapest opened the road to Vienna. A lull in the West, after the Ardennes offensive by the Germans (December 1944), was obviously temporary, and devastating air raids on Germany culminated in the destruction of Dresden (13-14 February). The end was obviously near, and NDH consuls in the Reich reported on the signs of collapsing of German morale.*

The NDH foreign minister, Alajbegović, accurately briefed his chief that Tito was empowered by the Allies to liberate the entire territory of Yugoslavia, with their material assistance, but without their direct intervention. Pavelić nevertheless refused to accept this assessment:

"Pavelić expressed an opposing view, saying that difficulties were already apparent in Belgrade [...] which he saw as the result of the agreement between Tito and Šubašić. With this detail Pavelić wanted to belittle the importance of the agreements at Yalta with regard to Yugoslavia, or the NDH."(88)

* Eg. the NDH consul in Essen, Gredelj, reported on 26 February: "The morale of the population is weakening, but people are cautious in their statements, being afraid of persecution. There is increasing shortage of coal in spite of a mild winter, and timber is being cut in the forrests. The same with petrol. Party members are saying that they were forced to join. The leadership is attacked, among the military too[...]" The consul in Munich, Machiedo, stated in his political report for February that "among the population one notices deep depression, and there is a lot of talk of dissatisfaction in the armed forces, of the threat of famine, and so on".(87)

By the beginning of March, however, Pavelić was under considerable domestic pressure -primarily because of rampant rumours and weakening morale even among his supporters -to respond to the decisions at Yalta (which were common knowledge thanks to the BBC). On 8 March 1945 the NDH government issued a proclamation, which rejected the Allies' agreement about Yugoslavia.* On the same day Pavelić convened the largely ceremonial Ustaša council (Doглаvničko vijeće), which issued a brief statement in full support of the principles stated in the government proclamation.(90)

As it was obvious that statements and proclamations by the NDH government and Ustaša elders would not have much impact on anyone, Pavelić tried to enlist the support of the Catholic Church in Croatia. In the early days of the NDH Pavelić enjoyed the almost undivided support of the lower clergy, and the clerical laity was overwhelmingly pro-Ustaša.** His relations with Archbishop Stepinac were somewhat strained at first, however, mainly due to the refusal of the Holy See to extend de jure recognition to the NDH.

* The key sections of the statement were as follows:

"It is a fundamental right of every civilised nation to live in its independent state. On the basis of no principle, including even those formally accepted by the participants of the conference at Yalta, can anyone deny the right to self-determination to the Croat people, to its freedom paid with heavy losses and a people's uprising [sic!], and to its independence in its own state [...] The Croat people with its ancient culture, and Croat statehood in terms of its longevity, are among the oldest in Europe. Like very few nations in Europe, the Croats have an uninterrupted continuity of its millenium-old statehood, which was interrupted, by force, only between 1918 and 1941, creating an illegal situation for the Croat people [...] The decisions and advice coming from the conference at Yalta, insofar as they concern the Croat people and state, are in total contradiction with history, with law, and with the will of the Croat people. Therefore, the Croat people, as a developed and politically developed nation, reject them resolutely. An attempt to carry them out, therefore, must be made with brutal force only, accompanied with attempts to falsify the will of the Croat people."(89)

** Prominent clerical journalists and publicists immediately joined the press and propaganda apparatus of the NDH (eg. Franjo Dujmović, Dušan Žanko), and some advanced to high government posts (Ivo Bogdan, Ivo Oršanić). Clerical lay organisations joined the Ustaša movement en masse, especially the "Crusaders" (Križari: Veliko križarsko bratstvo, Veliko križarsko sestrinstvo), while the chief of Križari, Feliks Niedzielsky was appointed commander of Ustaša Youth.

Me

The relationship between Pavelić and Stepinac warmed considerably in subsequent years, although the Archbishop was nevertheless careful not to extend anything that could be interpreted as his explicit endorsement to the Ustašas until March 1945.* Following the government statement, Pavelić made an all-out effort to demonstrate to the world that his regime enjoyed the full support of the Catholic Church in Croatia. In this he was successful.

The campaign started with a grand commemorative assembly devoted to "Catholic priests killed by the hand of the enemy".(91) Then followed an Easter student assembly, during which Stepinac delivered a sermon in which he finally declared his sympathies:

"If all nations have the right to secure their life and independence, then it is impossible to impose a solution contrary to the popular will to the Croat people either, because it knows best what it wants and what it does not want [...] We do not hesitate to declare that the Croat people will reject a limine any regime, be it of the extreme left or right, which does not take into account and respect in the fullest possible sense its thousand-year-old Catholic tradition. Such a regime would represent no one among the Croat people, or just an insignificant minority imposed by force."(92)

* The role of Stepinac is still a very contentious issue in Yugoslavia. While most Serbs see him as a war criminal, an accomplice in the genocide, to many Croats he is a near-saintly figure beyond reproach. However, available evidence (including his own diary published in the Zagreb weekly Danas in 1989-1990) indicates that the truth is, as usual, somewhere in the middle. Stepinac lacked intellectual and moral qualities required of the head of the Catholic Church in Croatia at a time when countless atrocities were committed in its name. He was not an accomplice in such atrocities in any accepted sense of the term, and from a strictly legal viewpoint, he was condemned unjustly by the Yugoslav court after the war. Nevertheless, he failed to take a resolute stand against the bloodbath and terror, and especially for a half-hearted and reluctant attitude to those members of the clergy who openly identified with the regime, or even became its officials and active participants in the genocide (Bishop Šarić and Rev. Bralo of Sarajevo, Fr Dionizije Jurcev, don Ilija Tomas, Dr Dragutin Kamber, Dr Radoslav Glavaš and many others).

The climax of Stepinac's belated engagement in support of Pavelić's crumbling edifice was the message to the faithful by the Catholic episcopate of 24 March 1945. This is a remarkable document in its tone and contents, because it came as close as it could not only to the endorsement of the NDH as such, but also in its entire interpretation of the "Croat problem".*

The initiative for the bishops' message undoubtedly came from Pavelić, and the remaining resources of the state were engaged to the full to bring all bishops still in Ustaša-controlled territory to Zagreb.(94) That this document was intended for external consumption is apparent from the fact that it mentions "the world community" twice, while its translations into German, French and English were immediately sent to the remaining legations in the NDH and the Reich.(95) The effect was negligible yet again: the Holy See did not follow up with an action of its own, and "the world community" - i.e. the Allies - were not affected in the least, even if they had registered the views of Stepinac and others.

* "[...] There are false witnesses, who are accusing us that Croatian church leaders, together with the priests and best believers, are guilty for the present bloody reckoning in our Fatherland. But there is a witness who sees better, and that is God, who knows what we [...] have done and what sacrifices only over the past twenty years we have endured to preserve peace and active Christian love in the Croat people. The whole world community knows this. Love of peace was the basic character trait of the Croat soul, which, especially since 1918, both secular and spiritual leaders of Croatia cultivated with greatest difficulty and attention.

But our efforts were frustrated by those who, through political murders of Croat popular leaders and looting of Croatian land, rendered Croatians' pacifism impossible and fanned unrest and dissatisfaction among them [...]

Enemies of the Catholic Church, and followers of materialist Communism which has been massively rejected by the Croat people (any other claim would be an attempt to mislead the world community), have started exterminating priests and prominent believers in accordance with a deliberate plan. [...]

History testifies that the Croat people, throughout its thousand-year history, has never stopped proving with an overwhelming majority that it does not give up its right to freedom and independence, which it also wishes to all other peoples. And when during the Second World War this thought was even more strongly expressed and realised in our own State, Croatia's Catholic bishops respected the will of the Croat People. Therefore, nobody has the right to accuse any citizen of the State of Croatia, including the bishops, because they respect this immutable will of the Croat People, to which it has the right both by God's laws and those of men. [...]"(93)

7. Finis

The battle of Berlin was coming to a close, Americans and Russians had met in the heart of the Reich, but Pavelić's intentions were still unknown to his subordinates. All his "initiatives" in the spring of 1945 amounted to the Ustašas and their sympathisers talking to themselves. A flood of refugees and troops kept pouring in Zagreb and its vicinity, following the collapse of the front in Srem (17 April). No serious attempt was made, however, to regroup at the "Zvonimir Line", a half-finished network of fortified points east of Zagreb. Only on 28 April, at 2 a.m., Pavelić summoned his senior military commanders and high-ranking Ustašas, and told them that further resistance was impossible if German troops were to withdraw from the NDH.(96) There was no mention of any contact with the Allies at that point, Pavelić merely saying that the objective was "to withdraw to the line where we can lay arms under honourable conditions and await further developments".

It appears that literally until the last moment Pavelić hoped for the "imminent and inevitable" clash between Western allies and the Red Army, in which case the remaining German forces would side with the Anglo-Americans - and the Croats would join them.(97) Even those who doubted such a scenario nevertheless expected that the British would accept the surrender of Croatian troops, place them in camps, and basically keep them as a compact entity. According to some accounts, Maček also appeared confident that this would be the case, and that those soldiers could subsequently become a potential trump card to be taken into account in all political combinations.(98) In the last days Maček was allowed contact with his followers, and after consulting several leading HSS figures he decided to leave the country with the retreating NDH units and government.(99)

The final decision to evacuate Zagreb and retreat to Austria was made - amazingly - only on 5 May 1945 in the evening.(100) The withdrawal was completed by 9 May, when Tito's troops entered the city without firing a shot.

On the eve of their departure, the Ustaša government addressed a lengthy memorandum to Allied Headquarters Mediterranean, signed by all ministers, with the usual arguments in favour of the continued existence of the Croat state.(101) Furthermore, in a covering letter attached to the memorandum, Prime Minister Nikola Mandić requested the Allied General Staff to send a military mission to Zagreb "to ascertain the military and political situation now prevailing here". Vjekoslav Vrančić was despatched in search of Alexander's headquarters, but never got there: he was taken prisoner by the British and his memorandum seized.(102)

In terms of sheer ineptitude, this episode - the Ustaša memorandum itself, and the manner in which it was sent - was the culmination of a "diplomacy" devoid of coherence, strategy, and even down-to-earth logistics. The Allies were suddenly invited to send, in effect, a fact-finding mission as the NDH government was packing to leave, and the area under its control was reduced to the capital city. The long-winded memorandum (very badly translated into English) only reiterated those same points contained in several previous propaganda exercises of the NDH regime, which were totally ineffective. Finally, the man selected to hand the memorandum to Alexander, Vrančić, left Zagreb in his Ustaša uniform. No prior communication with the Allies existed - and the Ustašas nevertheless (apparently) believed that Vrančić could get through to the unknown place where the Allied headquarters was situated!

The despatch of Vrančić with the Memorandum was the last "diplomatic" act of the Independent State of Croatia. Within days, most of its retreating soldiers, civil servants, government ministers and public figures would be refused surrender to the British at Bleiburg, in Carinthia, and turned back to Tito. Pavelić and many of his inner circle got away, however, and provided the core of the second, post-1945 Ustaša emigration.

The "Bleiburg tragedy", as the finis is known among Croats outside Yugoslavia, was the logical outcome of Pavelić's policy throughout the war. He was probably correct in assuming that a German victory (or negotiated peace) was the only chance for the survival of the NDH. However, he stuck to his guns single-mindedly even beyond the point of no return, prompting even his former followers and supporters to conclude that Pavelić's fundamental motives concerned his personal power to the exclusion of all other considerations.

Vrančić's "mission" and the Memorandum for Alexander provided a suitable backdrop for the dusk of the Ustašas. An appropriate comment was pencilled in at the end of the Memorandum by two British officials:

"The signatures of all the members of the Croat puppet Govt. on one document will be something of a curiosity for the future historians.

There seems to be nothing of interest in the long memorandum.

JMAddis

May 18th

F.O.R.D.

[...] Croatia may be heard of again some day, but for the present it is finished.

R.G.D.Laffan

24.5."

CONCLUSIONS

The range of moral and political issues raised by the Ustaša movement and the NDH regime is similar to that confronting a student of the Third Reich. If a political group, organised into a régime, so exceeds the bounds of previously conventional morality as to devote extraordinary resources to the brutal murder of some hundreds of thousands of people simply because of their creed or nationality, the question why becomes both unavoidable and difficult to answer. While this question is inevitably lurking in the background of any attempt to throw light on the Ustaša movement, instead of seeking to answer it directly it is probably more useful to examine the hows: how did the Ustaša movement and "ideology" develop? how did they fit into the European political scene of the 1930s and early 1940s? how did Pavelić take power? and how did his régime survive for four years...

The problem of Croat separatism was coeval to the birth of Yugoslavia. The Serbs perceived the new state as the fulfilment of a long process of liberation and unification, and sought to base it on the Jacobin model of nation-state, the "nation" being supposedly one, with three names (Serbs, Croats and Slovenes). This concept of integral Yugoslavism had some adherents among the Croat intelligentsia too, especially in Dalmatia, where "Yugoslavism" was perceived as the only effective defence against Italian aspirations. Most Croats, however, perceived Yugoslavia as a modified, but not substantially different re-enactment of the dualist system of Austria-Hungary. Their chief political force, the Croat Peasant Party (HSS) was accordingly much more a national movement than any of its Serb counterparts. Both sides followed patterns of thought and reactions learned in the pre-1914 period. Nevertheless, after 1925 the HSS could no longer be regarded as a separatist force; and only the extremist fringe, nurtured on the Serbophobe traditions of Starčević and Frank, would turn both uncompromisingly separatist and violent.

The Ustaša movement was an anti-Serb and anti-Yugoslav fit of rage, rather than a coherent elaboration of the Croat national identity and "mission". Its roots went back to that strain in the land's body-politic which insisted on Croatia's "rights of state" and on the continuity of the "Crown of Croatia", but - far from respecting the legalistic overtones of such notions - the Ustašas' initial modus operandi and outlook initially resembled the Black Hand, the VMRO and other Balkan nationalist-conspiratorial organisations.

The Ustaša phenomenon was the product of two sets of circumstances in the inter-war period. One was the complex internal and international situation of Yugoslavia, the other was the rise of Fascism in Europe. The collapse of the parliamentary system in Yugoslavia (1929) coincided with the period of growing political radicalism throughout the continent and the beginning of a world-wide economic crisis which provided an impetus to extremism. Each of those developments was a necessary precondition, but neither was by itself sufficient, for the rise of a Croat separatist movement which was at the same time anti-democratic, racist and violent.

Although it would be difficult to give a clear "Fascist" label to Pavelić - at least in his early days - the evolution and final manifestations of Ustacism place it firmly into the group of phenomena known as "native Fascism" of Central-Eastern Europe. The salient features of all such movements (in Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Croatia) was their celebration of the glorious past of a particular nation, based on its alleged particular qualities and "divine mission". There was also the virulent opposition to Marxism and the reliance on the dynamism of violence and direct action. While both Fascism and Nazism were predominantly dynamic movements, the Ustaša movement was essentially static. It aimed for a "stable" situation, i.e. the creation of a nationally homogeneous Croat state, and "ideology" was subservient to

nationalist obsessions. But what really set the Ustašas apart was the degree to which their anti-Serb animosity was the key ingredient of their self-perception, of their very "Croatness".

Pavelić attempted to establish foreign links even before he founded the Ustaša movement, following King Alexander's proclamation of dictatorship in 1929. In 1927 he addressed a memorandum to the Italian government in which he clearly indicated his readiness to accept limited sovereignty for Croatia under Italian tutelage in order to get rid of the "Serb yoke". Both the tone and contents of this document were to find their logical conclusion in the Rome Agreements, fourteen years later, when Pavelić accepted the amputation of Dalmatia and Italian predominance in the NDH.

It was this readiness to compromise fundamental national interests in pursuit not of real independence, but of the separation from "the Serbs", that set the Ustašas completely apart from the HSS, the mainstream force in Croatia's politics. Both Stjepan Radić and his successor at the HSS helm, Vladko Maček, sought reconciliation with Belgrade and a place for Croatia within the Yugoslav framework when they concluded that external dangers could leave Croatia isolated and vulnerable if it was on its own. They accepted the Yugoslav solution not out of idealist conviction, but as the least of all evils. The Ustašas, on the other hand, postulated a demonic concept of the Serb as the cornerstone of their entire outlook, and above all of their very Croatia. This made any compromise impossible by definition, and every alternative (including limited sovereignty and amputation of territory) was feasible. Pavelić's distorted perception of his land's "national interest" was at least consistent with his basic assumptions.

Pavelić was finally reduced to being the pawn and prisoner of Italy; but the fact that his "nucleus", however small and ineffective, could survive anywhere at all was indicative of a deeper European malaise of the time.

The European system established in 1919 was inherently unstable. The key ingredients of stability of any international system are a balance of power among its participants and a generally accepted principle of legitimacy. The former makes any violent change of the given order difficult because a challenge is deterred before it becomes a threat. The latter inhibits such challenge in the first place. Periods of stable peace in Europe, for instance between 1815 and 1870, bear witness to the effectiveness of a combination of physical and moral restraints. The European system of 1919 possessed neither pillar of stability. Of the five pre-1914 powers, Russia was engulfed in revolution, Austria-Hungary had disintegrated, Germany was humiliated and without a stake in the new order. In effect, the only "European power" left was France. (Britain had rarely committed itself permanently on the Continent, and was even less likely to do so on the side of the strongest power there - ostensibly France.) And yet the French - bled white in the trenches - lacked the means and the will to be the arbiter of Europe.

It was the inherent instability of this Fax Gallica that created some manoeuvring space for an array of European malcontents to seek a place for themselves. The circumstances that turned Italy from an Entente victor into a revanchist power who felt cheated of the fruits of victory ultimately ensured the survival - however precarious - of Pavelić's movement. This happened in the years that followed Mussolini's "new course" in foreign policy in 1926, in effect his shift to an emphasis on means rather than ends, on "action" rather than a defined strategy. His simplistic, all-or-nothing approach was well reflected in his increasingly antagonistic attitude to Yugoslavia, which was an extension of Mussolini's problematic relationship with France.

Pavelić was offered a haven in Italy, but on terms which precluded any thought of independent action (especially after the assassination of King Alexander in Marseilles in 1934), of being "our Balkan pawn", in Mussolini's words.

Already by 1931-1932 Pavelić was receiving money and logistic support (camps, weapons and equipment) from the Italian police, while instructions concerning policy and organisational matters came from the foreign ministry in Rome. However, in the aftermath of King Alexander's death Mussolini was forced to conclude that the foundations of the Yugoslav state were more solid than he had supposed. His return to a more conciliatory approach to Belgrade was also linked to the rise of Hitler, whom Mussolini initially regarded as a menace to Italy's position in the Danubian basin.

The softening of Italy's position coincided with the appointment of Milan Stojadinović as Yugoslav Prime Minister. Stojadinović embarked on a policy of friendship with Italy, which was crowned with the signing of a treaty of friendship in 1937. The low esteem in which the Italians held their "Balkan pawns" was illustrated by the fact that Ciano offered assurances on the Ustašas' total neutralisation in advance of the treaty, and regardless of the outcome of subsequent negotiations.

There followed a total curb of Ustaša activity in Italy in 1937-38. This period was the low point of Pavelić's pre-war fortunes. Many of his followers (numbering up to 500 in the mid-1930s) decided to return to Yugoslavia, under the watchful eye of a Yugoslav police inspector sent to Rome to oversee them. The remaining Ustašas were interned throughout the peninsula, and kept under the eye of the Italian police. Demoralised and inactive, they had no choice but to look to Pavelić as their only hope. His followers in Croatia (probably only several hundred strong, and certainly never numbering more than two thousand) were totally cut off, and although they regarded Pavelić as their Poglavnik, their activities were not directed or controlled by him. Pavelić's position among the Ustašas at that time was entirely based on his reputation, rather than his deeds.

His lack of contact with Croatia - paradoxically - enhanced his position as "the Leader" in so far as his followers could ascribe to him those views and intentions dear to themselves. This seemed scant comfort to Pavelić in the late-1930s, deprived of all autonomy of action and alternative sources of support which would make him a viable actor in European politics.

However, the fall of Stojadinović, which coincided with German successes in Czechoslovakia in early 1939, made Mussolini both suspicious of Yugoslavia again, and apprehensive of possible German designs in the South-East. To allay such fears, Hitler reiterated his disinterestedness in the Mediterranean in general, and in the Balkans in particular. Such assurances were often repeated in subsequent years, only to be disregarded in practice. From the beginning, the Axis meant fundamentally different things to Rome and Berlin, but - remarkably - such ambiguities remained unclarified until the end.

A small group of Pavelić's supporters tried to become active in Germany following Hitler's rise to power, and at first they enjoyed some support in the Nazi Party foreign department (Rosenberg). However, already by 1934 the foreign ministry line - hostile to the Ustašas - prevailed with Hitler. Ustaša publications were banned, and their activists expelled or placed under strict police surveillance. Such strongly hostile policy towards the Ustasas continued in Germany until the military coup in Belgrade in 1941.

The policy of wooing, rather than destroying Yugoslavia was not the only reason for such an attitude. Hitler was also keen not to upset Mussolini by nurturing his "pawns", especially when the friendship with Italy was made possible (and in a sense unavoidable) by the Abyssinian war. On the other hand Hitler also sought to pacify Mussolini when, after May 1939, the pendulum in Italy's attitude to its eastern neighbour had made another swing in the direction of animosity.

German victories in the spring of 1940 threw Mussolini completely off his balance, and made him obsessed with the notion of a "reckoning" with Yugoslavia. Energetically opposed by the Germans there, he turned to Greece and presented Hitler with a *fait accompli*. Within Yugoslavia, in the meantime, Maček's sporazum with Stojadinović's successor (and Prince-Regent Paul's choice for premiership), Dragiša Cvetković, turned Maček into a defender of the Yugoslav state. The Agreement opened with the statement that "Yugoslavia is the best guarantee of the independence and progress of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes", and such a declaration of principle by the HSS - the undoubted representative of the Croat people - pitted it more sharply than ever before against Pavelić and the Ustaša movement. However, in 1939 no less than a decade earlier, Maček could legitimately claim the leadership of his nation. On the Serb side King Alexander's dictatorship had disrupted political life and created disorientation, and paved the way either for authoritarian figures (like Stojadinović) or for leaders who were perceived as weak and devoid of authority (like Cvetković). Both of them, and especially Cvetković, were nominees of Prince Paul, who lacked full credibility among the Serbs.

The Ustaša organisation within Yugoslavia was a marginal factor in Croat politics in 1939-40, but somewhat less so than before. It violently opposed the Sporazum, and perceived in its opposition an opportunity to gain ground against Maček. In this it scored some success, and the dissent of Croat nationalists against the agreement with Belgrade marked the beginning of the end of the political monopoly of the HSS mainstream in representing the Croat people.

Even though Mussolini decided against attacking Yugoslavia in the summer of 1940 (largely due to German pressure), his overall posture was so different that he decided to reactivate the Ustaša organisation in Italy - after almost six years of inactivity and isolation.

This was manifested by the meeting between Ciano and Pavelić in January 1940, during which Pavelić's obligations to Italy, although left largely undefined, were taken for granted. When finally summoned, Pavelić was not there to negotiate, but to listen and accept. From the outset, Pavelić's reliance on Italy was a marriage of convenience on both sides. There was no natural proximity between two chauvinisms, which needed each other only because they expected to gain something from each other. This fact remained implicit in all of Pavelić's dealings with Palazzo Chigi, and because of that implication, Pavelić preferred to deal with the Italians always on his own.

As 1940 drew to a close, and Italy suffered grave reverses in its war against Greece, there was a curious reversal of roles in the relationship between Yugoslavia and the Axis. Instead of Germany exercising a moderating influence on an Italy hostile to Yugoslavia (after May 1939), there was an increase in German pressure on Belgrade to join the Axis camp, while Italy was far from contemplating any aggressive action against its Adriatic neighbour. The prospects for Pavelić started looking very bleak again as Ciano wrote in his diary (November 1940): "Instead of bringing under our roof a mass of nervous and untrustworthy Croats, I believe it is better to create a solid basis of understanding with Yugoslavia".

After an agonising period of arduous negotiations with the Germans - whose demands kept escalating - Prince Paul finally decided that Yugoslavia should sign the Tripartite Pact, albeit with several provisos which were supposed to guard a modicum of Yugoslavia's independence vis-a-vis the Axis. Such ^{an} exercise in pragmatism, however justified under the circumstances, was too much to stomach for a Serbian public already suspicious of the Prince-Regent and his government, and reluctant to extend to them a stamp of legitimacy. The military coup of 27 March 1941 was the culmination of such misgivings, and the turning point in Hitler's attitude to Yugoslavia too.

Hitler decided to attack Yugoslavia as soon as he heard of the coup in Belgrade. He promised territories to Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, and to Croatia "autonomy in close liaison with Hungary". He did not contemplate a fully independent Croatia at first, and most certainly the Ustašas were not his preferred choice for the government of Croatia. The Germans tried to woo Maček, and only after his decision to go to Belgrade after all, did Ribbentrop's plenipotentiary in Zagreb Veesenmayer reluctantly establish contact with the "home Ustaša" leadership.

The extraordinary German efforts to win over Maček as the future leader of Croatia, regardless of Mussolini's "Balkan pawn" Pavelić and of the oft-stated Italian precedence in the area, indicated that German policy in practice disregarded officially proclaimed principles whenever this served the interests of the Reich. The final outcome - Kvaternik's proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia on the day German troops entered Zagreb, 10 April 1941 - was an improvisation, caused by the Germans' lack of contingency plans. In itself, this uncharacteristic unpreparedness indicated that Germany had not intended to destroy Yugoslavia prior to 27 March, at least not in the immediate future.

Ustaša propagandists subsequently claimed that the "revolution" of Croat people "contributed considerably to the speedy fall of Yugoslavia". This is a gross exaggeration. The cause of the quick defeat of Yugoslavia was the overwhelming military-strategic superiority of the Reich. Even had the country been united and politically fully consolidated, the defence would have been hopeless. With or without Ustaša action, in April 1941 there were no military, economic, geographic, political or psychological foundations for a sustained defence of the Yugoslav state. The Ustaša activity was merely a symptom, rather than a cause, of the internal divisions which turned military defeat into a collapse.

Already as Pavelić was on his way to Zagreb there appeared the first signs of strains which would plague the Croat state from its birth. One was the conflict between Germany and Italy, officially glossed over, but rooted in Italy's chronic mistrust of Berlin, based on a long history of German disregard for Italian wishes or interests even in those regions which were formally recognised as the Italian zone of interest. The second was the tension between Pavelić's group of emigres and the "home Ustašas", the former wielding power (as far as it went), the latter being politically more astute and - on balance - more pragmatic.

The NDH was not a legally recognisable state in terms of international law, but it possessed certain attributes of de facto statehood, which would qualify it as an actor in terms of foreign policy analysis. It was capable of engaging in external relations; although the "quantity" of its statehood kept diminishing as the war progressed, the NDH was nevertheless more than a mere extension of the foreign policy of either Germany or Italy. The existence of divergent interests between the Axis powers in itself enabled the NDH to be a "state" a little more than would have been the case without such rivalry.

Even Pavelić's extremely accomodating attitude to Italy during negotiations over Dalmatia and other issues (April-May 1941) was not due to his "loyalty" to Italy, but to his concern for his own position. Over the ensuing four years, Pavelić's priorities were to indicate a similar pattern of personally functional motivation which was disfunctional from the viewpoint of Croatia's national interests. His range of options was limited and his resources modest, but Pavelić nevertheless was an autonomous actor; his policy was neither Germany's nor Italy's (nor, for that matter, Croatia's) but Pavelić's own. The decision-making process in his "Ustaša-Staat" was structured so that Pavelić was undisputably in control of his "diplomacy" as well as of all other institutions and functions of the state.

Largely thanks to Maček's implicit (and possibly unintended) endorsement of the new régime (contained in his call for "sincere cooperation" with it), Pavelić could rely from the beginning on the extensive local authority and paramilitary apparatus of the HSS. In the first few weeks he could also exploit a degree of popular enthusiasm among many Croats, which was reflected in the tremendous welcome given to German troops on their entry in Zagreb. For many people the honeymoon ended already with the signing of the Rome Agreements between the NDH and Italy (May 1941), but it proved sufficient to enable Pavelić to consolidate himself in the initial period. It also enabled him to dispense with the HSS and disregard or persecute its leaders.

Although Pavelić lacked the charismatic personality of Hitler or Mussolini, he emerged as the undisputed leader of his movement - on which he relied to the exclusion of all other forces. With a nucleus of two hundred followers returned from Italy and maybe five times as many "sworn" members within the country, he proceeded to equate "Croat" and "Ustaša" in all spheres and to promote his own variety of the Fuehrerprinzip. His glorification of peasant "natural" justice and values, rooted in the Dinaric karst of the Dalmatian hinterland, Lika and western Herzegovina, produced a cult of unbridled aggressiveness, vengeance and pure hatred. The Ustašas' mix of Nazi brutality and racism, Fascist irrationality and oriental despotism quickly turned into a pandemonium of anarchy and genocide, exposing the Balkan heart of darkness in all its tragic awfulness. The worst manifestation of this was Pavelić's systematic and premeditated attempted genocide of Serbs within the NDH borders (about two million people), as well as that of Jews, Gypsies and all real or perceived enemies of the régime. The numbers of people killed are uncertain, and still a matter of considerable dispute within Yugoslavia, but contemporary Ustaša and Axis sources, as well as methodologically impeccable post-war statistical studies indicate 400-500,000 civilian victims of Pavelić's Ustašas, about four fifths of them Serbs.

Hitler encouraged Pavelić in his anti-Serb pogroms, and he also did not dissuade Italy from its territorial ambitions along the Adriatic. His purpose was to prevent long-term stabilisation of Croatia, either as a state in its own right, or as an Italian client-state. By letting Italy follow its annexationist course, he knew that there would follow resentment among Croats, which would leave the door open for German meddling.

By encouraging Pavelić in his "nationally intolerant policy", Hitler envisaged a chronic state of instability in the NDH, with the same effect on the future role of Germany. He stuck to this policy for years, to the chagrin of many German generals who regarded the Ustašas' anti-Serb genocidal zeal as the chief cause of turmoil in the NDH. A policy of letting Italy make enemies of Croats and letting Croats make enemies of Serbs may have seemed a clever ploy to Hitler in April 1941; ultimately it turned into a major liability for Germany's position in south-east Europe.

In view of Mussolini's political experience it is curious that he fell into the trap of territorial expansion in Dalmatia. He may have allowed emotions to prevail over prudence, but the disasters in Africa may have played a part too. However, the Tricolor raised above Diocletian's Palace left the Italian public singularly indifferent. Furthermore, the marriage of convenience between Italian Fascism and Croatian ultra-chauvinism having been consummated, there was nothing to bind the two any longer. Mussolini missed the opportunity to bring Croatia into a customs and monetary union with Italy, and got the worst of both worlds. By failing to secure control of the NDH he left open the possibility that it could turn to Germany, or - at any rate - draw away from Italy. By alienating Croatia's public opinion over Dalmatia (including those very Ustašas which he had sponsored for so long), Mussolini made both Pavelić's shift to Germany and his desire for greater independence from Italy much more likely.

Mussolini told the Grand Council of Fascism in 1939 that Italy had no territorial interest in Europe (besides Albania). His subsequent diversion to the expansion in Dalmatia was an aberration of that central principle. Worse still, it was a substitute for coherent, long-term policy, at a time when Italy's original objectives were increasingly at odds with the means of achieving them. Instead of a client-state, the NDH was perceived as another rival across the Adriatic, a successor to Yugoslavia, just as Yugoslavia had been perceived as a successor to Austria-Hungary in Rome in the post-1918 period. In the event, perceptions turned into reality because they were treated as such. The problem of Italy's relations with the Ustasas' state was formally solved by the Rome Agreements, but it was really just beginning. The Agreements, far from being the solution, became a major part of the problem.

The system of occupation, established in the Yugoslav lands after April 1941, was largely an improvisation, hastily contrived and weakened from the outset by intra-Axis differences. Besides the problematic Pavelić régime, the most destabilising factor was Hitler's desire to impose a "Carthaginian peace" on the Serb nation, without allocating sufficient resources for the purpose. In the summer of 1941 a series of Serb rebellions, under different banners and induced by different circumstances, shook the entire area. They were fuelled, within the NDH, by the wave of bloody terror, for which Pavelić felt authorised by Hitler after the talks at Berchtesgaden on 6 June 1941. In the many speeches and propaganda articles preparing the ground for the first (and bloodiest) wave of slaughters of June-August 1941, the Serbs were drawn as alien people and perennial enemies of "all things Croat". Even their very nationality was disputed, and the term "Vlachs" used. On the other hand they were, paradoxically, branded traitors of "their country", Croatia, to alien, Serbian, interests. In any event, in the NDH there was no rational correlation between a Serb's thoughts and deeds, and the state's attitude to him.

Most German authorities in the Balkans were horrified by the massacres and deeply antagonistic to the Pavelić regime, none more so than the German Plenipotentiary General in Zagreb, Edmund Glaise von Horstenau. The Italian army was even more strongly hostile to the Ustašas, and - by virtue of its greater autonomy from the centre of political power - it succeeded in having the zone of Italian occupation in the NDH successively extended all the way to the demarcation line between Italy and Germany (roughly dividing the NDH along a north-west - south-east line). NDH authorities, and especially Ustašas, were pushed out of the Italian zone, effectively making^a mockery of Pavelić's claims of sovereignty.

Within the German zone the situation was more complex. The fanatically pro-Ustaša German minister in Zagreb, Kasche, was alone in advocating support for Pavelić, and he was opposed by a wide array of German generals (Glaise, Loehr, Weichs, Rendulic et al), as well as Himmler's SS and other organs of the Nazi state. This dual-track policy resulted in some curious situations: Pavelić's nominal sovereignty was constantly reiterated in German foreign ministry cables, but at the same time the Wehrmacht assumed full operational and logistic control over the NDH armed forces, and German generals exercised civilian authority too in the zones of operations. Hitler's unwillingness to get rid of Pavelić was initially probably inspired by the desire to maintain an institutionalised chaos, which the Ustašas guaranteed. Later on, however, it turned out that there was no alternative to Pavelić. The only possible candidates, Maček's HSS, were unwilling to compromise themselves in the eyes of the Allies and the people, when Pavelić finally approached them (on the eve of the fall of Italy) with an offer to form a coalition cabinet - albeit with himself still occupying the highest post in^{the} land. Prior to that time the HSS were not even considered worth talking to by the Ustašas.

Hitler nevertheless approved a wide array of measures which turned the NDH into a German puppet par excellence during the final years of the war: Himmler's plenipotentiary Kammerhofer organised his own police force, the SS freely recruited not only among the Volksdeutsche, but also among Bosnian Muslims and Catholic Croats, and the Wehrmacht maintained a firm grip on the NDH armed forces. After September 1943, even the limited degree of Ustaša "policy-making", made possible by the intra-Axis rivalry, was no longer allowed. As Ribbentrop clearly put it, "the Croats are not to make even their wishes known to us". The ultimate humiliation for the NDH was the Germans' refusal to let Pavelić reincorporate areas "liberated" from Italy. The NDH lingered on, fatally dependent for its survival on the dwindling fortunes of the Third Reich, a marginal force in "European politics" no less than Tiso's Slovakia or Szalasi's Hungary. Even the end was humiliating: the British refused to accept surrender of the NDH armed forces in Carinthia (13 May 1945) and turned them back to Tito's Yugoslav Army. There was no "last stand", there was not even a shot fired as Pavelić's soldiers were unceremoniously marched back, to an uncertain fate and in many cases death.

On balance, there is no end of negative "isms" that the Ustaša experience contributed, in its minor way, to the European political scene of the 1930s and early 1940s: chauvinism, anti-Semitism, collaborationism, despotism, terrorism, "native Fascism"... Croat nationalism, small and insecure, underdeveloped both in terms of language and national ideology, was brought to paroxysm by Pavelić and turned into a grotesque caricature of itself. The fact that it came to power, however briefly and however ingloriously, tells us more about the Europe of half a century ago than about the Ustašas. The most sobering lesson for today is that Europe has changed, for better and beyond recognition, but within Yugoslavia the same, awful, heart of darkness still keeps beating...

APPENDIX I

Anfuso's minutes of a conversation between Ciano and Pavelić, 23 January 1940 (see Chapter VI, p. 105). IDDI, 9, III, pp. 162-164

Minutes

Rome, 23 January 1940

Count Ciano met Pavelić on 23 January 1940 in the presence of Marquis Bombelles and Anfuso. He asked Pavelić detailed questions on the possibility of uprising in Croatia, the spread of his movement, Dr Pavelić's intentions regarding the form of government that can be given to Croatia, as well as possible Serbian reaction to the planned Croat uprising.

Pavelić said that he was certain of the uprising's success. He confirmed the need that Italian troops, 30 thousand strong, enter Croatia as soon as the uprising takes place in Zagreb, in smaller urban centres and villages. He added that in such situation the Serbs would have no alternative but to withdraw to the area of the old Kingdom of Serbia. Pavelić thinks that the uprising will inevitably lead to the collapse of the Yugoslav system created by the treaties of 1919. If that process is not to be accelerated, it may be necessary that Italian troops enter Belgrade and install a government, headed if possible by Stojadinović, which would negotiate with Italy and determine Serbia's new frontiers.

Asked by Count Ciano, Pavelić says that in his opinion Italian troops could successfully enter Kosovo and extend the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Albania over that area. Pavelić confirms what Count Ciano says, that the Serbs have always feared the Albanians' armed action and irredentism. As for the fate of Slovenia, Pavelić accepts Count Ciano's opinion that it is necessary for this province to adapt to the new régime which the Croat people will set up together with Italy. Slovenia is needed by Croatia's economy, its people have always lived in harmony with the Croats, and it will not be able to do otherwise but accept the situation created by Italy.

Pavelić thinks that an eventual cession of Maribor to Germany may represent natural compensation to German interests in Slovenia. He does not conceal that the proclamation of an independent Croatian state in union with Italy would represent a blow that would halt Germanic designs, but he finds Italy's support indispensable to Catholic Croatia if German intentions in the Adriatic are to be frustrated. Pavelić also points out the importance to Italy of the major Slovene coal mine at Trbovlje.

Count Ciano agrees with Pavelić on the terms of the insurgent movement and approves the tactic of Croatian national-Fascists, but he also asks Pavelić not to hurry with his action because of obvious international reasons, and to wait for a signal from Rome, so that the uprising does not start prematurely. On Count Ciano's demand, Pavelić formulates the following points:

1. Croatia will be an independent state;
2. The Croat State will be in a monetary and customs union with Italy;
3. The Croat State will have its national Croat army, "Domobranstvo" (what the Austrians used to call Heimwehren, and the Hungarians Honved);
4. The Croat State will establish an eventual "personal union" with the Kingdom of Italy.

In connection with the last point Dr Pavelić expresses agreement with Count Ciano on the desirability of the personal union between the Kingdom of Italy and the Kingdom of Croatia, but also thinks it necessary to keep the eventuality of such personal union secret at first, so as not to provide Serbian propaganda with its material. Realisation of this union will be easy when Italy is definitely established in Croatia.

[At this point Count Ciano mentions what could be the state profile of Croatia linked to Italy by personal union: ministries..., administrative autonomy, Italian minister of foreign affairs..., part of the Government Croat and, conversely, joint Supreme Military Committee.

Pavelić agrees.

Insurgent action is agreed in following stages:

1. Proclamation of Croatian independence in Zagreb by... Pavelić, creation of Croatian government, call on Italian troops to intervene to preserve Croatia's independence.
2. Entry of Italian troops into Croatia led by the Ustašas presently in Italy. First objective - Zagreb; final objective, in case of Serb resistance, the confluence of the Sava and the Danube, or the Iron Gate.]*
3. Complete possession of Croatia, proclamation of personal union.

The situation that may emerge in Yugoslavia as a consequence of Croatia's independence is considered, and probable future of other provinces is mentioned: Montenegro, because of its Slav character, could be constituted as a separate state, Slovenia would stay Croatian [sic!], while Italy would get islands facing Zara so that the city may gain free access to the sea.

It is agreed that Count Bombelles personally reports to Ciano at the end of the following month, while Dr Pavelić will intensify his contacts with the Foreign Minister, who will continue to provide him with all the means for successful direction of his movement which has so far scored real political successes.

(The document bears Mussolini's signature)

* Part of the original in brackets missing/reconstructed.

APPENDIX II

Croat Appeal to the Italian Foreign Minister, June 1940. IDDI, 9, VI, No. 848

Croatian National Committee to the Foreign Minister Ciano

Appeal

Zagreb, 10 June 1940

Undersigned members of the Croatian National Committee for Liberation and Establishment of the Independent State of Croatia, as representatives of the Croat national organisation, address the following APPEAL to Your Highness:

In 1918 the Croat people was forcibly included into the so-called Yugoslav state without its agreement, indeed contrary to its often expressed desire for independence and autonomy.

The Croat people is aware of its millenium-old state and national individuality, since its state independence dates from the seventh century. The Croats have maintained their national identity and state independence through the centuries in a more or less clear form until the end of the world war. In 1918 Serbia, aided by Western democracies, completely eradicated any state or national identity by annexing our territory and holding the Croat nation under the hegemony of Belgrade.

From 1918 onwards, the Croat people has fought by all available means to rid itself of the foreign yoke. After cruel acts of violence and persecution, known to the whole world, which the Belgrade government committed against the Croat nation, the regime in Belgrade was forced to grant the Croats some sort of autonomy, but even that only under the pressure of international events and the threat of war.

However, this autonomy is only formal, since after a year it has not fulfilled a single promise, and the constitutional agreements have not been carried through. This autonomy, purely formal as it is, has no lasting importance, since the Belgrade regime can revoke it at any moment, as soon as the international situation is changed. Furthermore, this false autonomy does not embrace the whole Croat territory, but only a part of it. Finally, this false autonomy is not what the Croat people aspires to; for it wants a more complete national and state independence.

The Croat people is no longer willing to endure such state of affairs, but it has decided to reestablish its sovereignty over its entire historical and ethnic territory.

The Croat nation belongs to the Western civilisation and owes such progress to the centuries of cultural contacts, to its orientation towards the Appennine Peninsula and the Italian nation, with which it links its own fate, physically by the Adriatic Sea and spiritually by the community of culture, civilisation and religion.

Before this wealth is completely destroyed, both spiritual and material, in which our country is so rich, the Croat nation has decided to cut off decisively all links with Serbia and to cede from so-called Yugoslavia, which is nothing but an extended Serbia created by the dictate of Versailles.

With this decision, the Croat people addresses its great neighbour, Fascist Italy, and asks for help in the struggle for liberation. Therefore we, the undersigned delegates of the Croat national organisation from all Croat regions, gathered within the National Committee for the Liberation and Establishment of the Croatian State, independently address Your Highness and ask that you interpret our desires to the Duce of the great and glorious Fascist Italy, to which we appeal for help. [We appeal that] Italy sends her tried and invincible army to defend the holy and just cause of the Croat nation against the barbaric Serb intrusion and that of their allies, so that we can, under Italy's auspices, reestablish the thousand-year-old Independent State of Croatia, which had always been and will always remain the first barrier of Western culture and civilisation in this area of eternal struggle against the barbarian penetration from the East [and] to establish here the true peace and secure civilised life not only for the Croat people, but also for the neighbouring nations which are equally suffering in this part of Europe from the imposed, unjust and artificial political situation.

The Croat nation expects with complete confidence the great act of liberation truly worthy only of the great Duce and the mighty nation of Fascism, which is the first to point to all the nations of the world the new path of justice and of a new life.

Obedient to our Leader and ready to carry out his orders, we address this Appeal to Your Highness, and express to the Duce and to yourself our admiration and our gratitude.

(Publisher's note: follow 66 signatories of the Committee members from the city of Zagreb, from upper Croatia, Lika, Slavonija, Dalmatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.)

APPENDIX III

Pavelić's speech at the Ustaša rally in Zagreb, 21 May 1941 (as reported by the daily newspaper Hrvatski narod, Vol. III, No. 99, Zagreb, 22 May 1941)

When in 1918 the enemy, due to then prevailing circumstances, stepped in to subjugate the Croat people, we all know that the people consciously put up resistance, that the whole Croat people defended its existence with such means as were then available. When the enemy realised that its methods were not sufficient and strong enough, then 12 years ago he applied new means of force and violence to sweep the Croat people from the face of the Earth, to eliminate the last trace of its national individuality and its statehood. And then the Ustaša movement emerged among the Croat people. It was clear to me that we could not fight the tyrant with a prayer-book in our hands. Therefore, I started the movement which would apply the painful medicine to the painful wound. Violence, meant for the Croat people and used against it, was stopped by violence. It was clear to us that no people in history had achieved liberty with folk songs, but with blood and deadly weapons. It was clear to us that a captive and disarmed people could never achieve liberty without assistance and support of another friendly people. Therefore, preparations for liberation followed those two paths.

The new world war broke out, because it had to, because Europe and the world cannot live on the basis of paper peace treaties, but only on the basis of living needs and a balance of forces among individual nations. And today, there is no trace in Europe of those paper treaties! Ustaša brothers! We have been waiting for such moment. It has arrived and brought us liberation [assisted] by our will, our awareness, our faith, our sacrifices, our struggle, our organisation, our great - we can confidently claim - war feats, carried out in the last days of the sinister Yugoslavia. Liberation of the Croat people and the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia have been brought about by the two great Axis nations, led by two great leaders. For this, we are grateful to them. For this, the Croat people will be eternally grateful to them.

Ustaša brothers! Not only that the great act of liberation is complete, but the other great act, vitally important, has been performed. In its first days of existence, our state was recognised by our great friends. Our fatherland was immediately recognised as the Independent State of Croatia. It was recognised as such by our great friends and by a large number of European nations.

Ustaša brothers! Following its recognition, the Croatian state had to have its frontiers determined. And again thanks to the leaders of the two great friendly peoples, the Croat people today has already roughly determined frontiers in two most important parts of the country.

Brothers! In this area we had to make some sacrifices. But a nation unable to make sacrifices is unable to live. I am certain, and all of you can be certain, and the whole Croat people can be certain, that every Croat who remains outside the frontiers of the Independent State of Croatia will have his name preserved, his language, his nationality, his culture and household!

It was different when there had been no Croat state. But the very existence of the Independent State of Croatia, her sovereignty, her friendly relations with her great neighbours, those very facts are the guarantee that those Croats who remain outside our frontiers, and whose number, thank God, is not great, that those Croats will be saved and will remain an integral part of the Croat people. I am openly telling you that this is completely in accordance with the intentions of our great friend Benito Mussolini.

When we were concluding treaties on frontiers, we were not striking bargains - that used to be done by those politicians who were not representatives of the free people and of an Independent State. We concluded international treaties as representatives of a free and sovereign people and representatives of the Independent State of Croatia.

I can tell you that other frontiers will be determined soon, to the great satisfaction of the entire Croat people. Croatia's Independent State is already greater than it had ever been in history!

Something new and hitherto unseen has happened here: from a ruin, this Independent State of Croatia has risen. We were faced with conditions such as can be hardly found anywhere in the world. We must turn a stinking swamp into a garden. I am telling you: this we shall do. Independent State of Croatia will have an internal order which the Croat people needs, which it deserves, and which will bring it happiness and material well-being. The times of political deals behind closed doors, of attempts by would-be politicians to outwit each other in pursuit of their personal interests, are over in Croatia, over for ever. In Croatia, order and labour will rule! The Croatian State will be set up on the basis of traditions of the Croat people, and on the most modern principles pursued by our great friends and allies. In their case, such principles demonstrated that they alone are capable of providing order, work, bread and normal life.

Ustaša brothers! Our internal political order will be such and already is such, that people can decide by itself, in a sovereign manner, on all its vital issues, without so-called democracy or political speculations.

We must give a form and a shape to our state. Otherwise there can be no proper life. I have established the Crown of Zvonimir. It is today the symbol of Croatia's state sovereignty. The glorious Croat past has thus been resurrected, but not only because of the past glory, also because of Croatia's national and state liberty!

While the Crown of Zvonimir shone above Croatia, in distant past, our people were sovereign and our state independent. And for as long as that crown exists, it will be the symbol of Croatia's independence to the whole world. While it exists, Croatia will not and cannot be part of any other state, in any form, however loose, and the Croat people will not be reduced to a tribe, or to an integral part of any other nation. The Crown of Zvonimir is for ever our greatest guarantee of sovereignty of the Independent State of Croatia, the guarantee of our complete national and state independence.

I have offered it to a Savoy Duke, because I knew him to be most worthy of it. Of that, everyone will be a witness. [The offer] is accepted.

This is the first act which I was able to perform. The second act will be performed by the Croat people, in a sovereign manner, legally and according to its traditions, as soon as the time is ripe. The law establishing the new Croatian dynasty will be passed, and the glorious House of Savoy will provide the Duke who will step on the throne as the Croatian King Tomislav II.

When this happens, the King will be Croatia's and nobody else's! In the Valley of Duvno, the great and glorious Croatian Kingdom will be resurrected, the greatest Croatian State that history has known until now. Independent State of Croatia, of the Ustašas and peasants!

Ustaša brothers! All this would not be enough. In the Independent State of Croatia we must establish such social order which would not lead to the gap between the rich and the poor, those who work and those who enjoy the fruits of others' toil, those who rob and those who sweat.

In the Independent State of Croatia there will be no cliques, no masters, no robberies; but the people who work, and the Ustašas who fight, will come first. Our old Ustaša slogan is: the plough feeds us, the Ustašas defend us! The Croat peasant people, according to the Ustaša principles, is not only the source of all good for itself, it is also the subject and bearer of all power and authority in the Croatian state. Croatia's Independent State is, and will be, only the organ which serves Croatia's peasants and workers.

I am telling you all that very soon we shall establish authority in all Croat lands, in the whole of our State we shall replace administration which had been demoralised and corrupt, with rare honourable exceptions. When we do so, I shall bear responsibility to the entire Croat people for all the acts [of that administration], while all State organs, all officials and employees will be responsible to me - and you know that I am not joking!

Our great friends and allies have performed a great service to us, by the force of arms. But, Ustaša brothers, the Croat people throughout our Fatherland has performed a great and gallant military feat and in just a few days it disarmed that shameful and pitiful army which was in our country. That was done by you, Ustašas, by Croat peasants, by Croat workers, in a word by the entire Croat people as the whole Croat people is but one great Croat army.

We are eternally grateful to our great friends and allies, who arrived at our frontiers with their great, gallant and invincible armies, who then proceeded to smash the enemy with greatest soldierly vigour and military skill. But we are also happy that we could contribute what we were able to contribute, saving precious blood of our great allies and friends, the blood which they still dearly need to defend their states and nations against enemies in a struggle to the end. We are proud of this and it gives us the right, not only the duty but also the right - which we certainly exercise - that we find our place in the New European Order as a free people and as the Independent State of Croatia. [This] order was initiated and created by the two great leaders of friendly nations, and they will, God willing, soon complete it to the well-being and happiness of all European nations.

Ustaša brothers! The Croat people has had enemies, and it will always have them. But we were not afraid of them even when we had no freedom and no weapons; we are even less afraid of them now that we are completely free, and when there is the Croat rifle on the gallant Croat shoulder!

Ustaša brothers! We shall defend our national and state freedom with our lives, always. We shall not allow enemies of the Croat people to work against it, to poison it from within. We shall not allow them to spit on the spilt blood of Croat martyrs, we shall not allow them - and as you know we are not allowing them - to exploit and squander the fruits of labour of Croat peasants and workers.

The times when the Croat people was but an object are over. The Croat people is the master now, and everything else will be its object. These are not promises, but clear indications of our intentions which are being applied and will be carried out. I shall carry them out! And everyone knows that until now I have fulfilled all my promises!

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Microcopy T-501, Records of German Field Commands, Occupied Territories and Others. Of special interest are Rolls 250, 256, 264-268, 351 and 352, dealing with various aspects of the occupation and resistance movements. Some of the rolls do not relate exclusively to Croatia, but also to other areas under the Armed Forces Commander South-East (Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Suedost) and the Plenipotentiary General in Serbia (Bevollmaechtiger Kommandierender General in Serbien). Also contained are the documents of the German General in Zagreb (Deutscher General in Agram) which are especially interesting in conjunction with Glaise von Horstenau's private papers, deposited in Vienna.

Microcopies T-311...T-315, Records of Army Groups "E" and "F" (Heeresgruppen E, F in rolls 175, 176 and 197, mainly relevant to the closing stages of the war) and Records of German Field Commands, Armies, Corps and Divisions, are of much more limited use.

2. Records of the Foreign Ministry of the Reich in the Political Archive in Bonn: Politisches Archiv, Auswaertiges Amt, PA/AA: Office of the Minister (Buero RAM, i.e. Reichsaussenminister - Kroatien); Office of the Secretary of State (Buero Staatssekretaer - Jugoslawien Bd 3, Kroatien Bd 1-4). The above are on NA Microfilm T-120, Rolls 120, 197, 199, 200, 208 and 212. (See George D. Kent, A Catalog of Files and Microfilms of the German Foreign Ministry Archives, 1920-1945. Stanford, California: Hoover Institution of Stanford University, 1966, Vol. 3)

Of special interest to the study of the NDH are Kasche's papers (Nachlass Kasche, PA/AA, NAK), consisting of:

- general correspondence
- correspondence with the NDH Government and officials
- correspondence with Glaise and other military organs
- correspondence with the Special Plenipotentiary of the Reich in the South East /Neubacher/.

The above are on NA T-120, Rolls 1025, 1026, 1077 and 1088.

3. The War Archive in Vienna (Kriegsarchiv Wien, KAW) contains the papers of Glaise von Horstenau, including most of his Zagreb diary (B/67). Also of some interest are the papers of military historian Rudolf Kiszling who has written about Croatia (B/800) and of General Alexander Loehr, Army Group "E" commander (B/521).

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12. PRO London, FO/371. Foreign Office documents pertaining to Yugoslav affairs during the Second World War.

13. Arhiv SSIP, Royal Yugoslav Government in Exile, Ministry for Foreign Affairs (Ministarstvo inostranih poslova, F-1, F-2, F4); and Presidency of the Council of Ministers (Predsedništvo Ministarskog saveta, F-1, F-2) contain reports on Croatia from Yugoslav diplomats (especially in Madrid) and other sources. The files are relatively ordered and well preserved for the period until mid-1943. Thereafter the files get rather chaotic, and the reports from legations abroad irregular.

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Only the file for 1941 is apparently complete, and very well preserved. Although most documents do not even remotely merit the "Top Secret" designation, some of them are genuinely interesting. The prevailing impression is that of the lack of substance in the NDH foreign policy-making (no documentary hint of policy formulation, definition of alternatives etc).

15. Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ). Fond Milana Stojadinovića (the Stojadinović Papers). Valuable insights on the relations between Yugoslavia and Italy in the late 1930s and on the Croat question at home.

"Fond izbegličke vlade" (Royal Yugoslav Government in Exile) deposited in the Yugoslav Archive in Belgrade (AJ) is extensively covered in: Krizman, Bogdan, and Petranović, Branko. Jugoslovenske vlade u izbeglištvu. 2 vols, 1941-43 and 1943-45. Belgrade/Zagreb: Arhiv Jugoslavije/Globus, 1981. Collection of the Yugoslav Government in Exile documents, of limited use on the NDH or the Croat issue. Very useful introductory essays, especially by Bogdan Krizman in the first volume.

16. Institute of Military History, Belgrade (Vojnoistorijski institut JNA, fond VII/NDH). Abundant material on the NDH in boxes (kutije), including foreign affairs, military matters and statements by captured ustasa leaders after the war. The latter provide for fascinating reading, but since they were given from memory, as personal recollections, and possibly under pressure, they are of limited value as source material.

The Institute also has an extensive microfilm collection of German military and political documents (Bonn and NA).

17. Jugoslovenska narodna armija, Vojnoistorijski institut. Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o Narodnooslobodilačkom ratu naroda Jugoslavije. 13 volumes in 128 parts. Belgrade: Vojnoistorijski institut 1949 - . The series is organised regionally and to some extent topically. The basic source for the Partisan side of war in Yugoslavia. Also contains numerous Ustaša documents and Serbo-Croat translations of German and Italian ones.

18. The Confidential Papers of Admiral Horthy. Budapest: Corvina Press, 1965. A collection of documents, mainly correspondence, of the Hungarian leader from 1919 until 1944. It contains some revealing insights on the relations among Axis satellites, including the NDH.

B. SECONDARY SOURCES

(Consolidated list of the printed sources - books and articles - referred to in the footnotes and/or used in research, except for the documentary sources listed above).

Anfuso, Filippo. Roma, Berlino, Salò (1936-1945). Milan: Edizione Garzanti, 1950

Memoirs of Ciano's closest assistant who was directly involved in the creation of the NDH and negotiations with Pavelic.

Avramovski, Živko. Balkanske zemlje i velike sile 1935-1937. Belgrade 1968.

A standard textbook in Yugoslavia on the country's foreign relations in the first half of Stojadinović's tenure.

Banac, Ivo. The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1984.

An eloquent case for the Croat romantic-nationalist version of the creation of Yugoslavia.

Basta, Milan. Agonija i slom NDH. Belgrade, 1971.

An account of the rush by Tito's forces to prevent the NDH forces' retreat to Austria. Written by an "old guard" regime historian and retired Partisan general, it makes no reference to the "Klagenfurt Conspiracy" (the "Bleiburg Tragedy" to the Croat diaspora): neither the role of the British nor the fate of the prisoners are discussed.

Bauer, Ernest. "General Glaise v. Horstenau i Hrvatska 1941-1944", in Hrvatska Revija, Munich, Vol. 23 (1973), No 1 (89), pp 66-77.

A review of Fricke's book on Glaise. Written by a former official of the NDH foreign ministry, it is critical of Glaise's antipathy for the Ustasa regime and his attempts to have Pavelić replaced.

Hrvatska Revija is a Croat émigré quarterly published at various times in Buenos Aires, Barcelona and Munich. Edited by a former Ustaša (Vinko Nikolić), its self-avowed objective is to be the "broad church" of Croat nationalist intellectuals of different persuasions. The bulk of articles from Croat émigré sources used in this paper come from the Hrvatska Revija, which is a cut above other émigré publications both in contents and style.

Berlin, Sir Isaiah. Four Essays on Liberty. New York: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Biber, Dušan. "Ustaše i Treći rajh. Prilog problematici jugoslovensko-nemačkih odnosa 1933-1939", in Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis, No 2, 1964, pp 37-56.

Traces attempts by the Ustasa organisation to establish itself in Germany and records different reactions of the Foreign Ministry (negative throughout), the Party (occasionally sympathetic) and other instances.

Bićanić, Rudolf. Ekonomska podloga hrvatskog pitanja. Zagreb: Dr Vladko Maček, 1938.

Widely used for the HSS party-political purposes at the time, it attempted to use selective statistics to prove that Croatia was economically exploited in Yugoslavia. Replies by Prica (1937) and Drašković (ed., 1940).

Blažeković, Milan. "NDH u Stepinčevu procesu", in Hrvatska Revija, Vol 10 (1960), pp 670-683.

The author, a former secretary at the NDH Legation in Berlin, used the review of a French book about the trial of Archbishop Stepinac to argue the legality of the NDH in international law.

---- "Kvaternikovo proglašenje NDH u Banskim Dvorima", in Hrvatska Misao Buenos Aires, Vol. 22, 1957.

Describes the "proclamation before proclamation" of Croatia's independence a few hours before the "official" one was broadcast.

---- "Poslanstvo Nezavisne Države Hrvatske u Berlinu 1944-1945", in Hrvatska Revija, Vol. 29, No 3 (115), September 1978, pp 552-560.

The author attempted to refute accusations from another Croat émigré publicist (Ante Ciliga) that he (Blažeković) was a "fanatical Ustaša" who, as chief of personnel at the NDH Legation in Berlin, had persecuted Ciliga because of the latter's alleged "lack of commitment to the Ustaša cause".

Boban, Ljubo. Maček i politika Hrvatske seljačke stranke, 1928-1941. Two volumes. Zagreb: Liber, 1974.

The first comprehensive attempt in the Yugoslav historiography to provide an overall picture of the Croat Peasant Party and its leader in a crucial period of Yugoslavia's history. Well researched and documented.

--- Sporazum Cvetković-Maček. Belgrade: Institut društvenih nauka, 1965
A scholarly treatment of the agreement between the HSS and Prince Paul's government in Belgrade on the eve of World War Two.

Broszat, Martin. "Soziale Motivation und Fuehrerbindung" in Vierteljahrhefte fuer Zeitgeschichte, 1970. A convincing case for the view of Hitler as a day-to-day opportunist, whose notions of "Weltmacht" and an eastern empire were "metaphors and utopian figures of speech". (See also Hory, Ladislaus.)

--- "Hitler und die Genesis der Endloesung", in VfZg, 1977.

A strong case for the view that the "final solution" was not the product of a programme, but was based on a number of ad hoc decisions made on the spot, which in the course of time became institutionalised.

Brockdorff, Werner. Kollaboration oder Widerstand. Munich-Wels: Verlag Welsermuehl, 1968.

The book deals with collaboration with the Germans in the occupied countries during World War Two. Brockdorff's conclusions about the ustasa regime are extremely negative; they are "a destructive, disruptive, crime-prone element" guilty of horrible mass murders. The book is sympathetic to Mihailovic and the Cetnik movement in general. Brockdorff wrote approvingly of Neubacher's mission in Serbia in 1943-1944.

Brouček, Peter. Ein General im Zweilicht. Die Erinnerungen Edmund Glaise von Horstenau. Vienna-Cologne-Graz: Boehlhaus Nachf., 3 Vols (1980, 1983, 1988).

The story surrounding the "disappearance" and redesccovery of Glaise's papers, and especially his Zagreb diary, reads like a detective story. Only in 1978 it was decided to publish them, and the editing was entrusted to Brouček, a senior archivist at the War Archive in Vienna. The first volume covered the period until 1936, the second until spring 1941. As such, they are not directly relevant to the NDH, but certainly provide a vivid picture of Glaise, an interesting and complex personality. The third volume (April 1941- April 1945), including the Zagreb diary and related papers, was published in 1988.

Bulat, Edo. Kroz borbe i izkušnja, memoirs serialized in Hrvatska Misao, Buenos Aires, Vols 23 and 24, 1957-1958.

Bulat was the leading Pavelić supporter in Dalmatia, where he attempted to preempt the Italians and establish an Ustaša administration immediately following 10 April 1941. He subsequently accompanied Pavelić to negotiations in Ljubljana. In 1943 Bulat was in charge of the attempted Ustaša "reconquest" of Dalmatia following the capitulation of Italy.

Bzik, Mijo. Ustaška pobjeda: u danima ustanka i oslobodjenja. Zagreb, 1942

Bzik was one of Pavelić's two hundred followers who returned from Italy with him. This pamphlet is a wholly fictional attempt to present the role of Pavelić's group during the April war as that of front-line troops, battling the odds to break through enemy lines. Useful only as an illustration of the Ustaša propaganda effort.

Cannistraro, Philip (ed.). Historical Dictionary of Fascist Italy. Westport, Connecticut - London: Greenwood Press, 1982.

Very useful work of reference for personnae, institutions and events.

Ciano, Galeazzo. Diario 1937-43. Edited by ^{Renzo} De Felice. Milan: Rizzoli, 1980

The English edition (1947) was riddled with translation errors and ambiguities. Wherever quoting from that edition, it is necessary to check the text against the original.

---- Ciano's Diplomatic Papers. London: Oldham Press, 1948.

Several documents of interest to the Croat question (eg. the Vienna talks with Ribbentrop, talks with Pavelić in Venice).

Clissold, Stephen. "Britain, Croatia, and the Croat Peasant Party, 1939-1945." Paper presented at the Yugoslav-British historians' seminar, Kupari 1978.

Colić, Mladen. Takozvana Nezavisna Država Hrvatska. Belgrade, 1973.

The first attempt in Yugoslavia to give a complete history of the Ustaša state. Mainly based on domestic sources. Many details regarding administration, but little insight on the NDH relations with the Axis.

Čović, Marko. "Uspomene diplomatskog predstavnika N.D.H. u Finskoj: sjećanja i svjedočanstva dra Ferde Bošnjakovića", in Hrvatska Revija, Vol. 27, No. 3 (107), September 1977, pp. 321-335.

Written from memory on the basis of conversations with the NDH Minister in Finland. Some information on the way Croatia's fledgeling diplomatic service was being set up.

Čulinović, Ferdo. Okupatorska podjela Jugoslavije. Belgrade, 1970.

Extensive data on the occupation system in Yugoslavia throughout the war. Useful reference work.

Deakin, William. The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.

A study of the relationship between Germany and Italy. Even after almost thirty years the book provides a solid background picture for any study of particular issues involving the Axis partners.

--- The Embattled Mountain. London - New York - Toronto, 1971.

A key work of uncritical pro-Partisan apologia, by one of the leading representatives of the British Titophile academic establishment.

Djilas, Milovan. Wartime. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977.

Excellent background reading by one of Tito's top wartime aides. For all their subsequent differences, Djilas has retained a degree of admiration for the man.

Djuretić, Veselin. Saveznici i jugoslovenska ratna drama: Izmedju nacionalnih i ideoloških izazova. Two volumes. Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, 1985.

One of the most controversial works of history in post-war Yugoslavia, Djuretić's book is essentially an attempt to rehabilitate the Četnik movement as fundamentally anti-Fascist and patriotic, and to explore the complex set of circumstances which created conditions for its abandonment by the British. Djuretić sees the attempted genocide of the Serbs in the NDH as the seminal event which everyone but the Četniks wanted to "pass over" for different reasons, leaving the Serb policy of "national realism" isolated and ultimately defeated.

Dobriničić, Vjeko. "Tko je sve želio "hrvatskog kralja"?, feuilleton serialized in Fokus, Zagreb, October-November 1973.

Written in journalese, for a general audience. Contains an interview with R. Casertano, Italy's minister in Croatia, on his negotiations with Pavelić in April-May 1941.

Dragnich, Alex N. The First Yugoslavia: Search for a Viable Political System. Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1983.

A unique general survey in English of Yugoslavia's complex politics between the two world wars. Balanced, brief (152 pp) and well documented, it seeks to dispell the myth of "greater Serb hegemonism", often attached to "the First Yugoslavia". The author argues that Croat intransigence and obstructionism greatly contributed to the failure of the first Yugoslavia to find a "viable political system".

Dražković, Slobodan (ed.). Istina o ekonomskoj podlozi hrvatskog pitanja. Belgrade: Sloboda, 1940.

A series of articles, mainly by economists, answering Bićanić's thesis point by point and seeking to establish that his charges of economic exploitation of Croatia did not stand.

Drezga, Tihomil. "Postanak i priznanje NDH", in Spremnost, Zagreb, Nos 163-164, 1945.

----- "Razrješenje "Rimskih ugovora", in Spremnost, Zagreb, No 83, September 1943.

Spremnost was a journal which acquired something of a reputation for "pro-Western" views towards the end of the war. Some of its contributors belonged to the younger generation of Zagreb's nationalist intelligentsia, not necessarily linked to the old guard Ustašas.

Drezga was the Director of the Legal Department at the NDH Foreign Ministry. Both his articles (The Abrogation of the Rome Treaties and The Creation and Recognition of the NDH) dealt primarily with the international-legal questions involved in those events. (Drezga's statements to the Yugoslav interrogators are in: A-VII, NDH, Kut. 310b, Br Reg. 44/3-1-4 and 55/3-16-17).

Fertilio, Luka. Poslanici NDH u Trećem Reichu. A series of four articles on the four NDH Ministers in Berlin:

"Branko Benzon", in Hrvatska Revija, Vol. 25, No. 1, March 1975, pp. 48-54.

"Mile Budak", in Hrvatska Revija, Vol. 24, No. 2, June 1974, pp. 143-153

"Stjepan Ratković", in Hrvatska Revija, Vol. 25, No. 3, September 1975, pp. 396-401.

"Vladimir Košak", in Hrvatska Revija, Vol. 26, No. 2/3, June-September 1976, pp. 212-218.

A highly personal account by Fertilio, who served under all of the above as the NDH Press Attaché in Berlin (1941-1945). Useful biographical data but little reliable new information.

Fricke, Gert. Kroatien 1941-1944: Die "Unabhaengige Staat" in der Sicht des Deutschen Bevollmaechtigen Generals in Agram, Glaise v. Horstenau. Freiburg/i. Breisgau: Rombach Verlag, 1972.

Published four years before Glaise's private papers and diary were made public, Fricke's book is based on Glaise's reports and official correspondence kept in the Federal Archive in Bonn and the Military Archive of the Federal Republic in Freiburg. It is supplemented by the documents originating with other German representatives (Kasche, Weichs, Loehr etc).

The Goebbels Diaries 1939-41 (London 1982); also previous volumes (1942-43 and 1945) contain occasional references to Croatia and, more importantly, to Hitler's plans for the South-East.

Hagen, Walter. Die Geheime Front. Wien: Niebelungen Verlag, 1950.

(in English: The Secret Front - the Story of Nazi Political Espionage). London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1953.

"W.H." is the pseudonym of a former Abwehr officer, Wilhelm Hoettl. Chapter 4 is devoted to Yugoslavia. After a brief historical survey, the author gives an account of the war years. He is deeply contemptuous of the Ustašas and convinced that things would have been different had Maček agreed to cooperate. The book contains an early account of Tito's contacts with the Germans, cut short by Hitler, which was subsequently verified by Roberts.

Hassel, Ulrich von. The von Hassel Diaries. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1948.
Written 1938-1944 by a leading conspirator against Hitler (executed after the failed coup attempt). Several diary entries relate to Yugoslavia (Croatia), with a lot of information supplied by Glaise (Hassel's friend and confidant). Hassel's comments are accordingly intoned.

Hlinicka, Karl. Das Ende auf dem Balkan 1944/45: Die Militaerische Raeumung Jugoslawiens durch die Deutsche Wehrmacht. Goettingen: Musterscheudt, 1970. (Studien und Dokumente zur Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges, herausgegeben vom Arbeitskreis fuer Wehrforschung in Stuttgart, Bd. 13.)

Meticulous record of the "orderly retreat, not flight" of the German Army from the Balkans in the closing stages of the war, with plenty of documents about the German attitude to the Serbs and Croats during the entire 1941-45 period. Documents indicate that Serbia was far more important to the Wehrmacht strategic planning, while the military in general had an attitude to the NDH broadly similar to that of Glaise, Rendulic, Loehr et al.

Hory, Ladislaus, and Broszat, Martin. Der kroatische Ustascha-Staat, 1941-1945 Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1964.

A pioneering and still unsurpassed semi-definitive study of the NDH by a Hungarian eye-witness diplomat and an eminent German historian.

Hoptner, Jacob B: Yugoslavia in Crisis, 1934-1941. New York: Columbia University Press, 1962.

At attempt to analyse the attempt by a small state to adjust to the superior strength of its totalitarian neighbours at a time when its allies were unwilling, and later unable, to offer any real help. Also a sympathetic, but objective and well-researched review of Yugoslavia's efforts to maintain internal stability at a difficult time.

Jarausch, Konrad H. The Four Power Pact 1933. Madison, Wisc.: Wisconsin University Press, 1965.

A monograph about Italy's involvement in Central European politics in the early 1930s. Contains passing references to the relations with Yugoslavia.

Jareb, Jere. Polja stoljeća hrvatske politike. Buenos Aires: Knjižnica Hrvatske Revije, 1960.

A study of the trends in Croatia's politics in the first half of our century, the book traces the divergent paths of thought and action embodied in Radić and Pavelić. The author was a leading Croat émigré historian, deeply anti-Yugoslav but critical of Pavelić. Jareb has also published several articles based on various documents concerning the recent history of Croatia, all of them published in Hrvatska Revija:

- "Tri dokumenta o dodirima Stjepana Radića s Talijanima" (Vol 18/1968);
- "Razgovor Ciano-Pavelić 23 siječnja 1940" (Vol 13, No 4 [52], 1963);
- "Sudbina posljednje hrvatske državne vlade" (Vol 28, No 2 [110], 1978);
- "Šest dokumenata o dodirima Pavelića s Talijanima" (Vol 20, Dec. 1970);
- "Hrvatski apel talijanskom ministru vanjskih poslova iz lipnja 1940" (1974, pp. 572-574).

Jelić-Butić, Fikreta. Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941-1945. Zagreb: Globus, 1977.

A study characteristic of the "neopositivist" trend in the contemporary Croat historiography of World War Two, rich in detail, but short on analysis and evaluation.

Jelinek, Yeshayahu. The Lust for Power: Nationalism, Slovakia and the Communists, 1918-1948. East European Monographs. New York: Boulder - Columbia University Press, 1983.

A study of the Slovak case interesting because of the striking parallels with the situation in Croatia.

--- "An Authoritarian Parliament: The Croatian State Sabor of 1942", in Canadian Slavonic Papers, 1980, pp. 260-273.

The account of Pavelić's experimenting with a rubber-stamp legislature.

Jukić, Ilija. The Fall of Yugoslavia. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1974

Memoirs of a leading HSS personality of pro-Yugoslav leanings. As deputy foreign minister, Jukić left the country with the government in 1941. His book provides an account of the difficult relationship between the Serb and Croat politicians in exile during World War Two.

Kazimirović, Vasa. NDH u svetlu nemačkih dokumenata i dnevnika Gleza fon Horstenau 1941-1944. Belgrade: Nova Knjiga - Narodna knjiga, 1987.

The most complete portrait of Glaise published in Serbo-Croat so far, largely based on his private papers (KAW-Vienna) and interviews. The author also gives a wealth of evidence on the anti-Ustaša attitude of practically all senior German military commanders in the Balkans.

Kiszling, Rudolf. Die Kroaten: Der Schicksalweg eines Suedslawenvolkes. Graz-Cologne: Verlag Hermann Boehlhaus, 1956.

Born in Serbia, the author started research on Croatia as a Wehrmacht officer. After 1945 hired by US intelligence to continue his work on the subject. Written for the general public, the book is based on limited primary sources and its value is only marginal today.

Kočović, Bogoljub. Žrtve Drugog svetskog rata u Jugoslaviji. Harrow: Naše delo, 1985.

A monograph trying to establish the number of casualties in Yugoslavia during World War Two. Using computer analysis of pre- and post-war census returns and demographic indexes, the author provides an estimate of the losses for different national groups, which is at odds with various nationalist and Communist myths.

Kovačić, Matija. Od Radića do Pavelića: Hrvatska u borbi za svoju samostalnost. Munich and Barcelona: Knjižnica Hrvatske Revije, 1970.

A brief survey of Croatia's recent political history by an Ustaša activist who became disillusioned by Pavelić. Kovačić was a typical "home Ustaša": very pro-German, opposed to the unbridled power of Pavelić's former émigrés. As a former journalist, during the war he became Pavelić's propaganda minister.

--- "Posljednji čin drame Dra Mladena Lorkovića", in Hrvatska Revija, Vol. 18 (1968), pp. 443-457.

Kovačić's account of the failed conspiracy which was supposed to take the NDH out of the doomed German camp in 1944, and of the end of its chief protagonists in the hands of retreating Ustaša units in 1945.

Krizman, Bogdan. Ante Pavelić i ustaše. Zagreb: Globus, 1987.

--- NDH između Hitlera i Mussolinija. Zagreb: Globus, 1980.

--- Ustaše i Treći Reich. Two volumes. Zagreb: Globus, 1983.

Krizman is the leading authority on the Ustaša movement. The above four volumes - which are conceived of as a trilogy - are a massive compilation of documents covering practically every aspect of the NDH. Unfortunately, the author was insufficiently critical in his selection, so that a good third of his material is of rather marginal interest. Krizman also "lets the documents speak for themselves" too much, so that his books lack evaluation of the significance of individual events and the way they related to a wider whole. Such "positivism" results in an irritatingly disjointed narrative, especially in the last two volumes.

A lot of NDH-related material gathered by Krizman over the years has been published in separate articles before his trilogy, eg:

--- "Pavelićev dolazak u Zagreb 1941", in Zbornik historijskog instituta Slavonije, No. 1, 1963.

--- "Odnosi Jugoslavije s Njemačkom i Italijom 1937-1941", in Historijski zbornik, Zagreb, Vol. 17.

--- "Italija u politici kralja Aleksandra i kneza Pavla", in Časopis za suvremenu povijest, Zagreb 1975, Vol. 7, No. 1 (17), pp. 33-58.

--- "Vodstvo Trećeg Reicha i raskorak u ocjenjivanju situacije u Hrvatskoj (1941-1944)", in Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis, Belgrade, No. 3-4 (1975).

A popular, yet concise and authoritative introduction to the diplomatic history of pre-war Yugoslavia is given by Krizman in:

--- Vanjska politika jugoslavenske države 1918-1941. Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1975.

Kvaternik, Eugen-Dido. "Ustaška emigracija u Italiji i 10 travnja 1941: jedan prilog našoj najnovijoj povijesti", in Hrvatska Revija, Buenos Aires, Vol. 3 (1952), pp. 206-244.

A scathing attack on Pavelić's policy by one of his closest aides from the émigré days. Kvaternik (himself a leading instigator of the policy of terror in 1941-42) in effect accused Pavelić of betraying Croat interests to the Italians for the sake of taking and keeping power. This and other articles by Kvaternik (all of them in Hrvatska Revija) are the basis of the case against Pavelić from within the Croat émigré community; see also:

--- "Još nešto o Rimskim ugovorima", No. 2, Vol. 3 (1953), pp. 225-258.

--- "Riječi i činjenice: Prilog povijesti hrvatsko-talijanskih odnosa u Drugom svjetskom ratu", No. 1, Vol. 5 (1955), pp. 56-75.

--- "Talijanska politika spram N.D.H. 1941 i 1942: Prigodom smrti generala Vittoria Ambrosia", in No. 2, Vol. 9 (1959), pp. 164-187.

All of the above were well written and convincingly argued. They have provoked numerous articles in defence of Pavelić by his loyalists, eg Vjekoslav Vrančić, Marko Sinovčić, Daniel Crljen et al.

Lederer, Ivo. Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963

Describes early problems encountered by the new Yugoslav state in the international arena, especially in relation to Italy. In spite of several errors of fact still the major work on the first Yugoslavia's frontier-making.

Lowe, C.J. and Marzari, F. Italian Foreign Policy, 1870-1940. London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975.

Relevant chapters on the relationship between Mussolini and Hitler and on Mussolini's emphasis on "action" as a substitute for strategy.

Lumans, Valdis O. "The Military Obligation of the Volksdeutsche of Eastern Europe Towards the Third Reich", in East European Quarterly, Vol. 23, No. 3, September 1989, pp. 305-325.

A record of an aspect of Himmler's empire building, which entailed "the complete transfer of jurisdiction regarding the Volksdeutsche" from Germany's allies in Central Europe and the south-east (including the NDH) to the SS.

Maček, Vladko. In the Struggle for Freedom. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1957

Memoirs of the leader of the Croatian Peasant Party. As most such works, leaves many questions open (eg. about Maček's contacts with foreign powers in early 1939, and his role in the events of April 1941).

Meštrović, Ivan. Uspomene na političke ljude i događaje. Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1969. Memoirs of a world famous Croat sculptor, whose personal contacts (from King Alexander down) read like a Who is Who? of Yugoslavia's pre-war politics and society.

Milazzo, Matteo J. The Chetnik Movement and the Yugoslav Resistance. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975.

Rich in Italian documents, the book is very strong on the relationship between Italian occupation forces and Serbian nationalist forces in the NDH.

Milićević, Vladeta. A King Dies in Marseilles: the Crime and its Background. Bad Godesberg, 1959.

Written by the pre-war Yugoslavia's police expert charged with the monitoring of Pavelić's organisation abroad. Occasionally self-serving, but good on the intricacies of Pavelić's network.

Neubacher, Hermann. Sonderauftrag Suedost 1940-1945. Bericht eines fliegenden Diplomaten. Goettingen: Muster-Schmidt-Verlag, 1957.

Memoirs of an adventurous Wilhelmstrasse operative who was an advocate of a "Great Serbia" which would include parts of the NDH. In 1943-1944 this brought him into conflict with Siegfried Kasche.

Nevistić, Franjo. "Još o Hagenovoj knjizi" in Hrvatska Revija, No.1 (1956), p.15
A critique of "Hagen's" book by a diehard Croat nationalist.

Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, Ministarstvo vanjskih poslova. Medjunarodni ugovori 1941. Zagreb: Hrvatska Državna Tiskara XXIX.

Integral texts of foreign treaties signed by the NDH in 1941, including the Rome Treaties.

Nikolić, Vinko. "Dr Ante Pavelić: 14.VII 1889 - 28.XII 1959", in Hrvatska Revija, Vol. 10 (1960), No. 1, pp. 47-55.

Pavelić's obituary by the Revija editor and his former follower.

Nolte, Ernest. Die Faschistischen Bewegungen. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1966.

A classic study of fascism (also available in English).

Novak, Viktor. Magnum Crimen: Pola vijeka klerikalizma u Hrvatskoj. Zagreb: 1948.

An attack on the role of the Catholic Church in Croatia, which Novak saw as the moving spirit behind the Ustaša atrocities. A new edition, published in Belgrade in 1988, was a huge best-seller in spite of the book's high price. The book is regarded by B. Krizman as "a prominent Freemason's settling of scores with the clericals" (Bogdan Krizman to the author, 1984).

Omrčanin, Ivo. Dramatis Personae and Finis of the Independent State of Croatia. Bryn Mawr, PA: Dorrance & Co, 1983.

This and other books by Omrčanin (The Pro-Allied Putsch in Croatia in 1944, Sacred Crown of the Kingdom of Croatia, Economic Wealth of Croatia, Diplomatic and Political History of Croatia, etc) belong to the far fringe of the Ustaša émigré politics-fiction. During the war Omrčanin was a diplomatic courier for the NDH foreign ministry.

Orlow, Dietrich. The Nazis in the Balkans: A Case Study of Totalitarian Politics. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1968.

A study of German plans for economic exploitation of south-eastern Europe, told through the history of SOEG, an agency of the Reich Ministry of Economics specifically charged with the task of integrating the Balkans into the projected Grossraumwirtschaft.

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Sundhausen, Holm. Obaveštajna služba i policijski aparat Hajriha Himlera u "Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj" 1941-1945, in Vojnoistorijski glasnik, No. 3 (1972), pp. 89-133.

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8. AJ, Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova, fasc. 33
9. One such elaborate front was Hrvatski savez in Belgium, which as its first task proclaimed "struggle against illiteracy". Krizman, 1978, p. 73
10. A full list of actions by the Ustaša group based at Janka Puzsta is given in a document submitted by Yugoslavia to the League of Nations accusing Hungary of terrorist activity, and published by the Yugoslav foreign ministry. Requête du gouvernement yougoslave en vertu de l'article 11, paragraphe 2, du pacte de la Société des Nations, relative aux responsabilités encourues par les autorités hongroises dans l'action terroriste dirigée contre la Yougoslavie. Actes et documents (22 novembre - 10 décembre 1934). Belgrade, 1935, pp. 5-6
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23. On continuing squabbles between the factions, cf. Moškov, same as (19)
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25. same as (10)
26. A-VII, NDH, Kut. 233, Br. Reg. 17/8. In early December 1934 Eckhardt represented Hungary when the League Council met to debate the Yugoslav complaint. The proceedings were brought to an end by Anthony Eden, with words of mild censure for the Hungarian authorities who "may have incurred, at any rate through negligence, certain responsibilities relative to acts connected with the preparation of the Marseilles crime". The Council subsequently adopted a resolution deploring the whole affair, and recommended that the government of Hungary report back after completing its own investigation. (League of Nations Official Journal, December 1934, pp. 1959-1960)
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2. See Bogdan Krizman, "Odnosi Jugoslavije s Njemačkom i Italijom 1937-1941", in Historijski zbornik, Vol. 17, Zagreb, pp. 235-236
3. Heeren's report; PA, Buero Staatssekretaer, Jugoslawien, Band 1, No. 796, 3 November 1940
4. Minutes on Vauhnik's visits: DGFP, D, 11, No 320, 11 November 1940
5. Eg. Hristić's conversations with Mackensen in Rome (see VI-5 above); also, Prince Paul's and Cincar-Marković's expressions of concern to Heeren: DGFP, D, 10, Nos 232 and 395.
6. Heeren's report of 21 June 1940. DGFP, D, 9, No. 517
7. Heeren's report of 23 July 1940. DGFP, D, 10, No. 215
8. Krizman (1975), pp. 111-112
9. Campbell's report from Belgrade of 13 August 1940. F.O. 371, f-25030, R7069
10. Heeren's report of 26 August 1940. DGFP, D, 10, No. 395
11. On economic pressure, cf. eg. Director of the Reich Foreign Ministry Economic Policy Department to Heeren, 15 June 1940. DGFP, D, 9, No. 442
12. Politika, Belgrade daily, No. 11511 of 21 June 1940
13. Politika, 28 June 1940
14. Politika, 6 July 1940
15. Hrvatski dnevnik, No. 1495, 26 June 1940
16. Nezavisnost (Frankist paper edited by Stjepan Buć), No. 1, 12 January 1940
17. See Boban (1974), Vol. 2, pp. 187-188
18. *ibid.* pp. 188-189
19. See Fikreta Jelić-Butić, "Prilog proučavanju djelatnosti ustaša do 1941", in Časopis za suvremenu povijest, Zagreb 1969, Vol. 1, No 1-2, p. 84
20. Eg. undated leaflet of spring 1940 in A-VII, Pop. 17, Kut. 32, Reg. 31/1-8
21. On the alleged Okružnica see Boban (1974), Vol. 2, pp. 217-227
22. As reported in Hrvatski dnevnik and Politika on 20 April 1940
23. F.O. 371, f-24884, R 617. Shone's report to Nichols of 7 January 1940; Rapp's report to Shone (enclosed) was dated 6 January.
24. DDI, 9, II, 595, Vinci to Ciano, 30 December 1939

25. See Boban (1974), Vol. 2, Chapter 3
26. See Vladislav Stakić. Moji razgovori sa Musolinijem. Munich: Iskra, 1967. Mussolini was supposed to have said that Italy needed "a strong and powerful Yugoslavia" (pp. 86-87).
27. Ciano, Diary, 11 November 1940.
28. Record of Gregorić's approaches: DGFP, D, 11, No. 324 of 12 November.
29. Record of Hitler's talks with Cincar-Marković: DGFP, D, 11, No. 417
30. DGFP, D, 11, No 467. Heeren's report dated 7 December 1940.
31. Ribbentrop to Heeren, 21 December 1940. DGFP, D, 11, No. 549
32. DGFP, D, 11, No. 551. Heeren to the Foreign Ministry, 23 December 1940.
33. Stakić, op. cit. pp. 92-100.
34. Record of talks at Berghof: PA, Buero Staatssekretaer, Jugoslawien, Bd 1, 56
35. See PA, Buero Untersekretaer, Jugoslawien, Band 1, No. 129; Stakić, op.cit.
36. PA, Buero Untersekretaer, Jugoslawien, Band 1, No. 133 of 28 February 1941.
37. Krizman (1976), p. 145; Prince Paul to Ban Šubašić on return to Belgrade.
38. DGFP, D, 12, No. 131; Heeren to the Foreign ministry, 7 March 1941.
39. See Winston S. Churchill. Second World War, Vol. 3; Dragiša Cvetković. Istina o 25 i 27 martu. Paris, 1951, p. 31; also F.O.371, f-30207, R 2926
40. Krizman (1975), p. 128
41. See Veselin Djuretić. Savezici i jugoslovenska ratna drama: između nacionalnih i ideoloskih izazova. Vol. 1. Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, 1985, pp. 18-22.
42. Eg. Stevan Pavlowitch. The Improbable Survivor. London: Hurst, 1988
43. Cf. DGFP, D, 12, No. 217. Minutes of a Conference Regarding the Situation in Yugoslavia, 27 March 1941.
44. Hitler to Mussolini, letter of 28 March. DGFP, D, 12, No. 224
45. The Confidential Papers of Admiral Horthy. Budapest: Corvina Press, 1965, p. 176.
46. Mackensen to Berlin. DGFP, D, 12, No. 226.
47. At the HSS Congress in Zagreb, 15 January 1938. Boban (1974), Vol. 1, p.
48. On various Yugoslav signals cf. DGFP, D, 12, Nos 225 (28 March), 234 (29 March) and 235 (30 March); PA, Buero Unterstaatssekretaer, Jugoslawien, Band 1, No. 317 of 30 March 1941.

49. See Boban (1974), Vol. 2, pp. 388-389; Maček, op. cit. pp. 216-218.
50. Canaris to Ribbentrop, ADAP, 12, 1, p. 349; A-VII, mikrofilm Bonn 1/1032-34
51. A-VII, mikrofilm Bonn 2/168-169, cable No 301.
52. Ministry to Legation in Belgrade. DGFP, D, 12, No. 236 of 30 March 1941.
53. Ribbentrop to Freundt, 31 March 1941. DGFP, D, 12, No. 238.
54. Ribbentrop to Freundt, 31 March 1941. DGFP, D, 12, No. 239.
55. Freundt to Berlin, 1 April 1941. DGFP, D, 12, No 241.
56. Malletke's report quoted in Hoptner, op. cit. p. 272.
57. A-VII, Bonn 2/231, cable received in Berlin 2 April at 8 p.m.
58. Ministry to Freundt, 1 April 1941. DGFP, D, 12, No 243
59. Kvaternik's statement to interrogators, 1946-47. A-VII, NDH, I.O. 9 6/9-104
60. Report from Zagreb dated 4 April 1941, referring to 3 April. DGFP, D, 12, No. 262
61. A-VII, mikrofilm Bonn 2/259-260, cable No 33 of 3 April 1941
62. Veessenmayer to Ribbentrop, 3 April 1941. FA, Buero Staatssekretaer, Jugoslawien, Band 2, No. 34
63. Freundt to the Foreign Ministry, 4 April 1941. DGFP, D, 12, No. 263
64. Consulate-General in Zagreb to the Foreign Ministry, 5 April 1941. DGFP, D, 12, No. 270
65. Edo Bulat. "Deseti travanj," in Hrvatska misao, Buenos Aires 1957, Vol. 23, p. 13.
66. Velimir Terzic. Jugoslavija u aprilskom ratu. Titograd, 1963
67. See Eugen-Dido Kvaternik. "Ustaška emigracija u Italiji i 10 travnja 1941", in Hrvatska Revija, Buenos Aires, Vol. 2 (1952), No. 3, p. 217
68. See Ljubo Boban (1974), Vol. 2, pp 397 and 409
69. Hrvatski dnevnik and Jutarnji list, 9 April 1941
70. Cf. Stevan K. Pavlowitch. Unconventional Perceptions of Yugoslavia. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, p. 145 (f.10)
71. Cf. Dragan Mirković. "Sudjelovanje HSS u vladavini NDH i njezinom režimu", in Hrvatska misao, Buenos Aires, No. 32, pp. 27-41

72. Bogdan Krizman. "Pavelićev dolazak u Zagreb 1941 g", in Zbornik Historijskog instituta Slavonije, 1/1963, p. 166; Rudolf Kiszling. Die Kroaten. Graz-Cologne, 1956, pp. 170-171; E. Kvaternik (1952), pp. 227-228
73. Krizman (1978), p. 382
74. A-VII, mikrofilm Bonn, II, Hans Kramarz's notes, Berlin 9 April 1941
75. A-VII, Kvaternik's statement to interrogators 1946-47, I.O. 9 6/9 1-104
76. Nikolić's own story in Hrvatski narod, No. 238, 10 October 1941
77. Kvaternik's statement - same as (75)
78. In his final report on the Ustaša movement, submitted to the Yugoslav government in exile (London, 15 July 1941) Vladeta Milićević expressed his conviction that Vragović had been an Ustaša, or at least sympathetic to Pavelić (A-VII, I.O.10, Reg. 3/3-1-32)
79. Kvaternik's statement - same as (75)
80. Vjekoslav Vrančić. Branili smo državu. Vol. 1. Barcelona: Knjižnica Hrvatske Revije, 1985, p. 196
81. Veessenmayer's report to Ribbentrop, 11 April. DGFP, D, 12, No 311
82. *ibid.* According to Krizman (1978, p. 385f), a complete file on Veessenmayer's activities in Zagreb is in the German Central Archive in Potsdam, East Germany: Nuremberg Trial Papers, Case 11, Band 892
83. Maček, *op. cit.* pp. 228-229
84. Košutić's first statement of 1944 in: Boban (1974), Vol. 2, p. 411-412; for Košutić's second statement, essentially the same, see Jere Jareb, *op.cit.* p.400
85. Narodne novine, Zagreb daily, 11 April 1941; Hrvatski narod (special evening edition), 10 April 1941; Krizman (1978), p. 386; Vrančić, *op. cit.*, Vol.1, p. 197, etc.
86. Hrvatski dnevnik, No 1781, Easter 1941; Jere Jareb, *op. cit.*, p. 85
87. Boban (1974), Vol. 2, p. 412
88. *ibid.* p. 414
89. Hrvatski narod, Vol. 3, No. 58, 11 April 1941

REFERENCES TO CHAPTER VIII

1. Eugen-Dido Kvaternik, op. cit. (1952), p. 209. Kvaternik's article is the most comprehensive first-hand account of Pavelić's actions before his return to Zagreb. Like most memoirs, it should be treated with some caution, especially since by the time of writing the author had become Pavelić's political opponent and adherent of the view that Pavelić had badly compromised Croatia's national interests in his dealings with Italy. However, for this view Kvaternik makes a convincing case, and later attempts by Pavelić's loyalists to refute Kvaternik were largely ineffective. His is the only first-hand account of Pavelić's last émigré days in Florence.
2. *ibid.* p. 210
3. Filippo Anfuso, Roma Berlino Salò (1936-1945). Milano: Edizione Garzanti, 1950.
4. *ibid.*, p. 186 on
5. *ibid.*
6. Kvaternik (1952), p. 217
7. *ibid.* p. 218
8. Mijo Bzik, Ustaška pobjeda, Zagreb 1942, p. 83; quoted by Krizman (1978), p. 392 ff.
9. Kvaternik (1952) p. 223
10. *ibid.* p. 232
11. Anfuso, op. cit. pp. 189-190
12. Kvaternik (1952) sees the clue of Pavelić's concessions to the Italians in his constant fear that the Germans would not accept and recognise him.
13. Krizman (1978), p. 403; of Ambrosio Pavelić is supposed to have remarked "One just cannot talk politics with that man!".
14. Kvaternik (1952) p. 235
15. *ibid.*
16. *ibid.* p. 236
17. A-VII, Statement by Slavko Kvaternik, I.O. 9 6/9, 1-104.
18. Kvaternik (1952) pp. 238-243
20. Anfuso, op. cit. p. 190
21. *ibid.* p. 191
22. *ibid.*

23. Krizman (1978) p. 409.
24. E. Kvaternik (1952), p. 239. According to his father's testimony, S. Kvaternik and Veesenmayer arrived in Karlovac after Anfuso, and were asked to wait while Pavelić and Anfuso conferred (A-VII, NDH, I.O. 9 6/9, 1-104).
25. Anfuso, op. cit. p. 193.
26. Krizman (1978) p. 409.
27. Kvaternik (1952) p. 240.
28. Anfuso, op. cit. p. 197.
29. DGFP, D, 12, No 348.
30. DGFP, D, 12, No 311. Veesenmayer to the Foreign Ministry, 11 April
31. DGFP, D, 12, No 317. Memorandum by the Chief of Protocol, 12 April
32. DGFP, D, 12, No 324. The Consulate General at Zagreb to the Foreign Ministry. Kvaternik also requested approval for the establishment of a Croat armed force.
33. DGFP, D, 12, No 313. Veesenmayer to the Foreign Ministry, 11 April.
34. DGFP, D, 12, No 328. Ribbentrop added in his hand ganz on the draft.
35. Eg. Marko Sinovčić in Hrvatska, Buenos Aires, 10 April 1953.
- 36. See DGFP, D, 12, documents 336, 337 and 338.
37. DGFP, D, 12, No 343. Dateline was "Zagreb, 14 April", although Pavelić was still in Karlovac.
38. DGFP, D, 12, No 345. Mackensen to the Foreign Ministry, 14 April 1941.
39. Ohlhausen, op. cit. p. 164.
40. PA, Buero RAM, Kroatien. Note dated 14 April, containing Veesenmayer's report that Pavelić assured him that "Anfuso had not requested any unilateral change of the telegram", but was in full agreement with Pavelić and Kvaternik on the wording!
41. Charles Rousseau. Droit international public, Paris 1953; the author mentions the NDH in the context of "premature recognition", along with Georgia and Armenia (1918-1921) and Manchukuo.
42. Milan Blažeković. "NDH u Stepinčevom procesu". Hrvatska revija, Vol 10 (1960), pp. 677-678
- 43. DGFP, D, 12, No. 341. Veesenmayer to Ribbentrop, 14 April 1941.
44. As reported by Hrvatski narod, Zagreb daily, Vol. 3, No. 99, 22 May 1941.
45. Izjava Slavka Kvaternika. A-VII, NDH, I.O. 9 6/9, 1-104.
46. Hrvatski narod, 22 May 1941.

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1. DGFP, D, 12, No 291. Unsigned memorandum, date unknown, initialled by Foreign Ministry officials Ritter and Woermann on 6 April 1941.
2. Glaise's diary is an invaluable primary source on German policy in Croatia during the war. Together with other papers from his tenure in Zagreb it is kept in the War Archive in Vienna (KAW B/67). It was published in 1988 as the final volume of Broucek's trilogy; see Bibliography.
3. Glaise's diary, 14 April 1941. Also see Vasa Kazimirović, NDH u svetlu nemačkih dokumenata i dnevnika Gleza fon Horstenau. Belgrade: Nova knjiga/Narodna knjiga, 1987.
4. Rudolf Kiszling, Die Kroaten, Graz 1956, p. 172.
5. See Hory and Broszat, op. cit. pp.60-61; Nachlass S. Kasche, PA, Nachlaesse.
6. DGFP, D, 12, No. 368. Ribbentrop to Mackensen.
7. Krizman (1978), p. 447.
8. Kazimirović, op. cit. p. 88.
9. *ibid.*
10. *ibid.*
11. DGFP, D, 12, p. 591. Memorandum on Ciano's visit to Hitler.
12. DGFP, D, 12, No 378. The memorandum of the talks between Ciano and Ribbentrop was prepared by the chief interpreter at the Foreign Ministry, Dr Paul Otto Schmidt.
13. Ciano's telegraphic summary to Mussolini of 21 April, in Ciano's Diplomatic Papers, Odham Press Ltd, London, 1948.
14. *ibid.*
15. Ciano's telegraphic summary of 22 April, *ibid.* Also: DGFP, D, 12, No 385
16. PA, Buero Staatssekretær, Italien, Bd 4, No 895 of 24 April. Mackensen to Ribbentrop, 24 April 1941.
17. ADAP, 12-2, pp 520-521. Minute on Alfieri's visit to Ribbentrop, 24 April 1941.
18. PA, Buero RAM, Kroatien, No 123. Kasche to Ribbentrop, 25 April 1941.
19. See Edo Bulat, "Pregovori u Ljubljani" (chapters 22 and 23 from his memoirs "Kroz borbe i izkušnja"), in Hrvatska misao, Buenos Aires, Vol. 24 (1958), p. 11.

20. PA, Buero RAM, Kroatien, No 109. Foreign Ministry to Kasche, 23 April 1941.
21. Hrvatska, Buenos Aires, 10 April 1953.
22. "Još nešto o rimskim ugovorima", Hrvatska revija, Buenos Aires, Vol. 2 (June 1953).
23. PA, Buero Staatssekretaer, Kroatien, Bd 1, No 126. Kasche to the Foreign Ministry, 26 April 1941.
24. PA, Buero Staatssekretaer, Italien, Bd 4. Weizsaecker's telegram to Ribbentrop of 26 April 1941.
25. PA, Buero Staatssekretaer, Italien, Bd 4, No 933. Mackensen to the Foreign Ministry, 26 April 1941.
26. PA, Buero RAM, Kroatien, No 128. Kasche to the Ministry, 28 April 1941.
27. PA, Buero Staatssekretaer, Italien, Bd 4, No 946 of 29 April 1941. Ciano also told Mackensen that Pavelić had adopted "a positive attitude" in Ljubljana to the ideas contained in Ciano's draft treaty (a copy of which Ciano had given to Mackensen before departing for Ljubljana). As for the offer of the crown, Mackensen could not find out whether this was an Italian or a Croat initiative.
28. Ciano's Diplomatic Papers, p. 439.
29. ADAP, 12, 2, pp. 566-568. Mackensen to the Ministry.
30. PA, Buero Staatssekretaer, Kroatien, Bd 1, Nos 140 (Kasche to the Ministry) and 141 (Veesenmayer to the Ministry) of 3 May 1941.
31. On Germany's agrément for Benzon, see note of 30 April 1941. PA, Buero RAM, Kroatien.
32. DGFP, D, 12, No 440. Weizsaecker's note on Benzon's visit dated 4 May.
33. *ibid*, footnote (4).
34. PA, Buero Staatssekretaer, Kroatien, Bd 1, No 149 of 4 May 1941; also PA, Buero RAM, Kroatien, Bd 1, No 300 of 4 May 1941. The second document also mentions that Benzon was due to fly to Zagreb in the morning on 5 May, since by 12 noon on that day Pavelić had to give his reply to Casertano. However, Benzon only arrived in Zagreb on 9 May (i.e. after Pavelić's meeting with Mussolini), as was reported by Hrvatski narod on 10 May 1941 (Vol. 3, No 87; see also Krizman, 1978, p. 469). This would suggest either that the Germans prevented Benzon from getting to Zagreb in time and thus let Pavelić go ahead with the talks on his own, or that Pavelić had decided that it was no longer necessary for Benzon to come (in view of his unsuccessful approach to Weizsaecker).

35. PA, Buero Staatssekretaer, Kroatien, Band 1, No 1007. Bismarck to the Ministry, 6 May 1941. The meeting with Pavelić was supposed to take place "in the vicinity of Ljubljana", according to Bismarck.
36. PA, Buero RAM, Kroatien, No 170. Veessenmayer to Ribbentrop, 8 May 1941.
37. Casertano interviewed by Vjeko Dobrinčić ("Tko je sve želio 'hrvatskog kralja'"), Fokus (Zagreb weekly), No 11 of 31 October 1973, p. 21.
38. AJ, T-501, roll 264.
39. Eugen Kvaternik, Još ponešto o rimskim ugovorima (op. cit.) p. 229.
40. PA, Buero RAM, No 170, 8 May 1941.
41. A detailed account of the ceremonies on 18 May is given in hrvatski narod of 19 and 20 May 1941. See also Vrančić, Branili smo državu (op. cit.), Vol 1, pp. 314-322.
42. Pavlowitch (1978), p. 469
43. Full Croat text of the Agreements: Ministarstvo vanjskih poslova NDH, Medjunarodni ugovori 1941, Zagreb: Hrvatska državna tiskara, XXIX, p. 49 etc. They were also published in Hrvatski narod on 19 May 1941.
In addition, Mussolini and Pavelić exchanged letters expressing agreement on the Croat local administration for the city of Split and the island of Korčula.
44. Anfuso, op. cit. p. 191.
45. For immediate reaction of the people in Croatia, see Glaise's report to the OKW of 19 May: PA, Buero Staatssekretaer, Kroatien, B0 1.
General observations are based on numerous eyewitness accounts given to the author.

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1. PA, Buero Staatssekretaer, Kroatien, Bd. 1, No. 192. Kasche to Ribbentrop, 9 May 1941.
2. PA, Buero Staatssekretaer, Kroatien, Bd. 1, No number. Counsellor Kramarz to Ambassador Ritter, Berlin, 22 May 1941,
3. As reported by Hrvatski narod, Zagreb, 22 May 1941 (Vol. 3, No. 99).
4. PA, Buero RAM, Kroatien, No. 400. Ribbentrop to Kasche, 2 June 1941.
5. Minutes of meeting between Ciano and Ribbentrop, 2 June 1941.
6. PA, Buero RAM, Handakten Schmidt, Aufzeichnungen: 1941 (Teil II).
7. Hrvatski narod, Zagreb, 19 May 1941 (Vol. 3, No. 96).
8. DBFP, D, 12, No.. Minutes of Hitler's talks with Pavelić, 6 June 1941.
9. PA, Buero RAM, Kroatien, no number. Pavelić to Ribbentrop 7 June 1941.
10. The first recorded mass murder of Serbs occurred in Bjelovar on the night of 27-28 April 1941, when between 180 and 190 perfectly peaceful inhabitants were shot. See Fikreta Jelić-Butić: HSS. Zagreb 1983, p. 47.
11. Hory-Broszat, op. cit. p. 15.
12. From a speech by Pavelić's minister Milovan Žanić, as reported by Novi list, Zagreb, 3 June 1941.
13. From a speech by the Ustaša Commissioner in Banja Luka Viktor Gutić. Kazimirović, op. cit., p. 111.
14. Aleksa Djilas, PhD Thesis, p. 245.
15. PA, Buero Staatssekretaer, Kroatien, Bd. 1, No. 290. Veessenmayer to the Foreign Ministry, 2 July 1941.
16. See Kazimirović, op. cit. pp. 112-117.
17. *ibid.* p. 114.
18. Haeffner's report dated 18 July 1941, *ibid.* p. 113.
19. PA, Buero Staatssekretaer, Kroatien, Bd. 1, No. 307. Troll-Obergfell to the Foreign Ministry, 10 July 1941.
20. BA/MAF, No. 178/41 (Deutscher General). Glaise to OKW/Ausland, 10 July 1941.
21. BA/MAF, No. 207/41. Glaise's report to the OKW, 19 July 1941.

22. BA/MAF, No. 192/41. Glaise's telex to the OKW, 12 July 1941.
23. PA, Buero Staatssekretaer, Kroatien, Bd. 1, No. 726. Troll-Obergfell to the Foreign Ministry, 11 July 1941.
24. Gert Fricke, op. cit. pp. 39-40.
25. "Ustaški pokret u hrvatskim zemljama", Proleter, No. 28, December 1932
26. A. Djilas, PhD Thesis, p. 250.
27. See Veselin Djuretić, op. cit. (1985), for extensive elaboration of the two concepts of "realism".
28. T-821, roll 232, frame 6: 6th Corps Command to the Second Army Command, 10 May 1941. Same roll, frames 8-9: 6th Corps Command to the Second Army Command, 11 May 1941. Same roll, frame 27: 6th Corps Command to the Second Army Command, 17 May 1941.
29. See eg. three reports by the Sixth Corps to the Second Army Command: T-821, roll 232, frame 78 (31 May 1941); frame 116 (9 June 1941) and frame 120 (11 June 1941).
30. T-821, roll 232, frame 163. Sixth Corps to the Second Army Command, 19 June 1941. Same roll, frame 279: Sixth Corps to the Second Army Command, 10 July 1941.
31. There are numerous reports to that effect from the Sixth Corps to the Second Army Command, eg. of 3, 10 and 18 August 1941. T-821, roll 232, frames 414, 454, 502.
32. T-120, roll 208, frames 1005 and 1006. Kasche to the Foreign Ministry, 16 August 1941.
33. VII, Zbornik, 12/1, No. 118, p. 312. Roatta to the Second Army Command, 15 August 1941.
34. *ibid*, No. 101, p. 263.
35. T-120, roll 208. Buero Unterstaatssekretaer, Pol. No. 786 of 18 August 1941.
36. T-501, roll 264. Glaise's report to the OKW, 17 August 1941.
37. CA Potsdam, AA, PA, 61142, Bd. 1, Pol. 2, No. 3 A-131/41. Kasche to Ribbentrop, 20 August 1941.
38. T-120, roll 208, frame 875. Ribbentrop to Kasche, 21 August 1941.
39. PA, Buero RAM, Kroatien, No. 882. Rintelen to Weizsaecker, 21 August 1941.

40. T-120, roll 208, frame 877. Ribbentrop to Kasche, 21 August 1941.
41. T-120, roll 208, frame 1008. Kasche to the Foreign Ministry, 18 August 1941. Also: T-501, roll 263, Glaise to the OKW, 18 August 1941.
42. AVII. Zbornik, 13/1, p. 333. Pavelić to Mussolini, 19 August 1941.
43. As quoted in Krizman (1983), pp. 164-165.
44. VII, Zbornik, 13/1, No. 130, pp. 345-353. T-821, roll 474, frame 535. Second Army Command, Operations Department, "Occupazione zona demilitarizzata", 30 August 1941.
45. Vrančić, op. cit. (1985), Vol. 2, pp. 134-135.
46. VII, Zbornik, 13/1, No. 128, pp. 335-342. Oxilia to the Supreme Command, 23 August 1941.
47. Vrančić, op. cit. (1985), Vol. 2, p. 122.
48. T-821, roll 232, frames 691 and 735. 6th Corps reports to the Second Army Command dated 16 and 22 September 1941.
49. T-821, roll 232, frames 635-639. 6th Corps to the Second Army Command, 8 September 1941.
50. T-821, roll 232, frame 684. 6th Corps to the Second Army Command, 15 September 1941.
51. For a view of the customs episode from the Ustaša side, see Vrančić, op. cit. (1985), Vol. 2, pp. 140-142.
52. Milazzo, op. cit. p. 60.

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2. Hory-Broszat, op. cit. pp. 129-131
3. ibid. p. 132
4. PA, Buero RAM, Kroatien, 1941-42, 442-449. IV/D/4 RSHA (Gestapo) to Himmler, 17 February 1942.
5. PA, Buero Staatssekretaer, Jugoslawien, Bd. 4. Benzler to Ribbentrop, Belgrade, 16 February 1942.
6. Krizman (1983), p. 230, quoting AJ, T-120, roll 208.
7. Paul Hehn (ed.). The German Struggle against Yugoslav Guerrillas in World War II. [Wehrmacht document] East European Quarterly, Boulder. Dist. by Columbia University Press, New York 1979, pp. 77-78.
8. ibid.
9. T-821, roll 64, frame 993. Unsigned account of the meeting in Rome ("Riunione giorno 30 dicembre") with Ciano, Roatta, Ambrosio, Casertano and Magli in attendance. Ciano on extending Italian occupation: diary entry for 17 December 1941.
10. T-120, roll 208, No. 1634. Kasche to the Foreign Ministry, Zagreb, 16 December 1941.
11. Gert Fricke. Kroatien 1941-1944: Die "Unbehaengige Staat" in der Sicht des Deutschen Bevollmaechtigten Generals in Agram, Glaise v. Horstenau. Freiburg/i. Breisgau: Rombach Verlag, 1972, p. 62.
12. T-501, roll 264. Glaise to the OKW, Zagreb, 22 December 1941. Krizman (1983), p. 232.
13. Hehn, op. cit. p. 82.
14. On Pavelić's visit, see Krizman (1983) pp. 246-247.
15. Hehn, op. cit. p. 80.
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44. SS HQ circular of 19 May 1943. BA/MAF, NS/19/279.
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98. For eyewitness accounts of Kronholz's mission, see Krizman (1983), Vol. I, pp. 272-274.

99. Their statements to Yugoslav Communist investigators are contained in a report prepared in 1948 (Put izdaje dr Mačeka i družine), A-VII, NDH, I.O.10, No. reg. 1/3-1-580.

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