

Serbian/Yugoslav-Romanian Relations and Interactions in the 20th Century

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The Image of the Iron Guard in Yugoslavia and Reflections of the Crisis in Romania 1934–1941

Abstract: In 1927 in Romania, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu founded the Legion of the Archangel Michael, later known simply as the Legion or Legionary Movement, or most frequently as the Iron Guard after 1930, named after its military wing. His movement eventually became arguably the third largest fascist organization in interwar Europe, surpassed only by Hitler's National Socialists and Mussolini's Fascists. The Iron Guard was committed to achieving (Orthodox) Christian and racial renovation of Romania and thrived on anti-Semitism and mystical nationalism. It was remarkable for its fanaticism and propensity for violence of its members (they assassinated two Romanian prime ministers). This paper examines what the image of the Iron Guard was in Yugoslavia, primarily in the press where it started to attract attention after late 1933 because of the sensational assassination of prime minister Ion Duca. Although the Yugoslav press was expected to echo the official stance of the Bucharest government in view of Yugoslavia's close relations with Romania within the framework of the Little and Balkan Ententes, its coverage was insightful. Particular attention is given to the views of Dimitrije Ljotić, the leader of ZBOR, something of a Serbian equivalent of the Iron Guard in ideological terms but incomparably weaker in terms of its actual strength. Finally, the paper analyses the Yugoslav government's treatment of ZBOR, arguing that their motives in suppressing Ljotić's movement were similar to those of the Romanian King Carol II in dealing with the Iron Guard – and tacitly informed by his experience with the Romanian fascists.

Keywords: fascism, nationalism, Iron Guard, Corneliu Codreanu, The Legion of the Archangel Michael, Romania, Yugoslavia, ZBOR, Dimitrije Ljotić

In 1927, „Captain” Corneliu Zelea Codreanu founded the Legion of the Archangel Michael in Romania. It later became known simply as the Le-

gion or Legionary Movement; it was committed to the (Orthodox) Christian and racial renovation of Romania and fed on anti-Semitism and mystical nationalism. Codreanu established the Iron Guard, a military wing of the Legion, in 1930, and its name became the one commonly applied by outsiders to the movement as a whole. The Legion was dissolved by government fiat in December 1933, but it reappeared as *Totul Pentru Ţară* (All for the Fatherland) and flourished thereafter. Considered the largest fascist organization aside from Hitler's National Socialists and Mussolini's Fascists, and possessing some extraordinary features – a particularly fanatical and violent following – it is no surprise the Iron Guard has received much attention in historiography.¹ This paper will examine how the Iron Guard was viewed in the press of the neighbouring Yugoslavia, by its Serbian ideological counterparts embodied in Dimitrije Ljotić's ZBOR (but not the Croatian and much stronger Ustasha organization) and how the example of the Romanian government's struggle against Codreanu's supporters affected the Yugoslav government's treatment of ZBOR.

The Iron Guard drew the attention of the Yugoslav press for the first time in the early 1930s in connection with the ban on its antisemitic raid in Bessarabia and its refusal to submit to the will of the government.² But generally, its activities were not covered by the press in the early years of its existence. Stanislav Krakov, the editor-in-chief of the daily *Vreme* - second only to *Politika* in circulation - a prominent writer and outspoken radical right-wing figure, called for the creation of a „People's Iron Guard” in his articles published in May and June 1932. This was a call to Yugoslav nationalists to close their ranks in the face of the external threat to their country, largely posed by Italy, and internal enemies such as communists and separatists, drawing on the heroic example of the wartime generation to which Krakov himself belonged. The name he used has led to a claim that he sought „to establish Serbian version of the Romanian Legion of the Archangel Michael, a South Slav „Iron Guard” in which the members of the wartime generation such as himself could teach the younger post-war generation about the sacrifices of liberation and unification.”³ Very little is known about Kra-

¹ Radu Ioanid, *The Sword of the Archangel: Fascist Ideology in Romania*, (Boulder: Columbia University Press, 1990); Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others: A History of Fascism in Hungary and Romania*, (Iaşi, Oxford, Portland: The Center for Romanian Studies, 2001); Constantin Iordachi, *Charisma, Politics and Violence: The Legion of the Archangel Michael' in Inter-War Romania*, (Trondheim: Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures and Societies, 2004); Ilarion Ţiu, *The Legionary Movement after Corneliu Codreanu: From the Dictatorship of King Carol II to the Communist Regime (February 1938 – August 1944)*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

² „Борба против антисемита у Румунији”, *Време*, 19. јула 1930; „Твездена гарда’ пркоси влади”, *Време*, 12. јануара 1931.

³ John Paul Newman, *Yugoslavia in the Shadow of War: Veterans and the Limits of State Building, 1903–1945*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 230.

kov's ideas and intentions with regard to the Yugoslav Iron Guard that never came into existence, but from what we know it is clear that it was envisaged as a conservative rather than a revolutionary movement of the fascist type such as Codreanu's organisation.⁴

It was in 1933 that the Romanian Iron Guard came into the limelight in the Yugoslav press. Early in that year the clashes of its supporters among students in Iași with the police made the news.⁵ These conflicts spread to a number of other cities in Romania, leading to the Iron Guard being characterized as behaving like a fascist party.⁶ With the parliamentary elections approaching, there was much talk about the government securing peace and order, banning the Iron Guard and Alexandru Cuza's antisemitic league. The legionaries again refused to accept the ban which led to clashes with the police across the country.⁷ After a period of relative inactivity, they attracted the attention of the Belgrade press by launching a major anti-Jewish campaign at the University of Cluj, demanding the expulsion of Jewish students from the institution and demolishing Jewish-owned shops. For these offences about 150 legionaries were arrested.⁸ The level of their violence reached such proportions that two months earlier the daily *Jugoslovenski dnevnik* analysed the danger of Hitlerism in Romania. It came to the conclusion that the danger was not substantial as there were four Hitlerite parties (National-Christian Defense League, Iron Guard, National Socialist Party and National-Socialist Party of Romanian Germans)⁹ which were at loggerheads. Only the

⁴ Svetlana Šeatović, „Radical Right-Wingers among Men of Letters: Vladimir Velmar-Janković and Stanislav Krakov”, *The Serbian Right-Wing Parties and Intellectuals in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 1934–1941*, ed. Dragan Bakić, (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies SASA, 2022), 424–426. A biographic study of Krakov also rejects a fascist character of his „Iron Guard of the people”. See Ljubodrag Dimić, „Kontroverza Krakov. Život i sudbina čoveka na Balkanu”, *Naši savremenici o Krakovu*, ed. Aleksandar Gatalica, (Beograd, Službeni glasnik, Univerzitetska biblioteka „Svetozar Marković”, 2020), 80–81.

⁵ Archives of Yugoslavia [Archives of Yugoslavia] (AJ), Fond 38, Centralni Presbiro Predsedništva Ministarskog Saveta Kraljevine Jugoslavije, box 1264, folder 1476 (hereafter 38-1264-1476), Аноним, „Сукоб полиције и омладинаца у Јашију”, *Време*, 28. 2. 1933.

⁶ AJ, 38-1264-1476, Anonim, „Viharne volitve v Romuniji”, *Slovenec*, 30. 2. 1933; Anonim, „Predizborna agitacija u Rumunjskoj vrlo je burna”, *Jutarnji list*, 28. 2. 1933;

⁷ AJ, 38-1264-1476, Аноним, „Румунска влада обезбеђује мир за парламентарне изборе”, *Прага*, 24. 2. 1933.

⁸ AJ, 38-1265-1477, Аноним, „Крваве антисемитске демонстрације у Клужу”, *Време*, 14. 12. 1933.

⁹ Beside the Iron Guard, the most important far-right political organization listed in the article was the National-Christian Defense League (Liga Apărării Național Creștine) founded in 1923 by the influential professor Alexandru C. Cuza, which adopted a viscerally antisemitic political discourse. Particularly influential in universities, it attracted violence-prone and fanatical Romanian nationalists. The most radical amongst them led by Corneliu Codreanu would leave the LANC in 1927 and later create the Iron Guard. The other two parties were much less important and openly Nazi organizations. The National Socialist Party (Partidul Național-Socialist din România) was founded in 1932 by Colonel Ștefan Tătărescu, the brother of prime minister Gheorghe Tătărescu, and the National-Socialist Party of

Iron Guard was important among them. The anonymous journalist thus reported on the building of the „Green House” in Bucharest, its headquarters, and pointed out the fanaticism and ascetism of its members – they showed more rigour than Hitlerjugend. Their newspapers made for an „interesting” but also a „dangerous” reading.¹⁰

But it was the assassination of prime minister Ion Duca by members of the Iron Guard that caused a sensation. Duca was assassinated for banning the activities of the Legionaries, and the Yugoslav press expressed considerable sympathy for him, portraying him as a political leader of an allied nation (Romania and Yugoslavia, together with Czechoslovakia, were members of the anti-Hungarian alliance known as the Little Entente.)¹¹ Conversely, the legionaries were presented in an unfavourable light and specifically dubbed fascists.¹² *Politika* reported that their leader „Odreanu” ordered the murder of Duca, an error that was perhaps an indication that the Yugoslav journalists did not know much about him at that point.¹³ The Yugoslav readers were falsely informed that Codreanu was killed.¹⁴ More detailed reports spoke of a conspiracy to take over the government of Romania in which General Gheorghe Cantacuzino was involved.¹⁵ A more discerning reader could note the fear of King Carol II himself from the information that he did not attend Duca’s funeral because he had caught a cold.¹⁶

In line with the pro-French orientation of Yugoslav foreign policy, it is not surprising that reports from the French press were given prominence. And for the French press the real culprit for Duca’s assassination was Hitle-

Romanian Germans (Partidul Național-Socialist al Germanilor din România) was founded in May 1933 by a German politician Fritz Fabritius. Both parties were outlawed in 1934.

¹⁰ AJ, 38-1264-1476, Аноним, „Хитлеровске странке у Румунији”, *Југословенски дневник*, 25. 10. 1933.

¹¹ AJ, 38-1265-1477, Аноним, „Убиство претседника румунске владе г. Дуке”, *Време*, 30. 12. 1933; Аноним, „Ђон Дука”, *Југословенски иласник*, 31. 12. 1933; Аноним, „Убијен претседник румунске владе”, *Jugoslovenski Lloyd*, 31. 12. 1933; RYS, „Убијен румунски премијер”, *Hrvatska straža*, 1. 1. 1934.

¹² AJ, 38-1265-1477, Аноним, „Синоћ је убијен претседник румунске владе Дука”, *Jugoslovenska pošta*, 31. 12. 1933; Аноним, „Вој Ромуније с фашизмом”, *Mariborski večernik*, 2. 1. 1934.

¹³ AJ, 38-1265-1477, Аноним, „Ноћас је у Синаји убијен председник румунске владе Јон Дука”, *Полиџика*, 30. 12. 1933.

¹⁴ AJ, 38-1266-1478, Аноним, „Сензационална открића о терористичком раду Гвоздене гарде”, *Правда*, 3. 1. 1934.

¹⁵ AJ, 38-1266-1478, Аноним, „Атентат на претседника Дуку био је знак на устанак револуционарне завјере”, *Jugoslovenska pošta*, 2. 1. 1934; Аноним, „Послије убиства румунског министра председника Дуке”, *Jugoslovenska zastava*, 4. 1. 1934; Аноним, „Одлука о убиству Дуке донесена је у кући генерала Кантакузена”, *Jugoslovenska pošta*, 4. 1. 1934; Аноним, „Гвоздена гарда организовала је Легију смрти за атентате на политичаре”, *Правда*, 7. 2. 1934; Аноним, „Планови румунске Гвоздене гарде у вези са атентатом на пок. Дуку”, *Време*, 24. 1. 1934.

¹⁶ AJ, 38-1266-1478, Др. Св. Петровић, „Прваци Гвоздене гарде умешани су у атентат на претседника владе”, *Полиџика*, 3. 1. 1934.

rism; the rationale behind it was to remove Romania from the Little Entente and the Iron Guard was but a weapon of Nazis.¹⁷ In contrast, the Italian press tacitly condoned the assassination on grounds that the King and Duca were at the head of a „Slav state”, a singularly negative reference for the viscerally anti-Yugoslav Italian government.¹⁸ There were also rumours that the legionaries would make an attempt on the life of foreign minister Nicolae Titulescu, an ardent Francophile.¹⁹ Reacting to the shocking murder, Bucharest introduced press censorship and arrested many members of the Iron Guard.²⁰ Duca’s spectacular funeral and the expressions of popular support for the late prime minister received much coverage,²¹ and determination of the government to „exterminate radically all terrorist fascism” was underscored.²² An alternative interpretation of Duca’s assassination was given in the Skoplje-based *Vardar*. Duca was said there to have been killed by „a mental patient” and „anarchist”, causing a great loss for Romania. His murder was attributed to the actions of an individual, rather than to a conspiracy or the hostility of the opposition.²³ Another analysis depicted the Iron Guard as a mixture of Fascism and Hitlerism that took root primarily among the youth with strong antisemitic sentiment and a murderer Codreanu at the helm – the murders he had committed as a student in Iași were recalled. However, the core of its platform was defined by anti-Jewish sentiment, which partly explains the movement’s notable success in regions of Romania with sizable Jewish populations. Duca banned it because he established that the Iron Guard had nothing to do with the true Romanian nationalism and was financed from abroad.²⁴

In connection with the trial of Codreanu and other conspirators, certain news from Romania were undoubtedly inspired by considerations of foreign and domestic policy. Such was the alleged revelation that the clande-

¹⁷ AJ, 38-1266-1478, Anonim, „Gvozdena Garda bila je u službi hitlerovaca i fašista”, *Novo Doba*, 2. 1. 1934; Anonim, „Kdo je moralni krivec romunskog atentata ?”, *Slovenac*, 2. 1. 1934; Anonim, „Zalet in polom romunskog fašizma”, *Mariborski večernik*, 3. 1. 1934; Anonim, „Politika Romunije ostane neizpremenjena”, *Slovenski narod*, 3. 1. 1934; Anonim, „Pozadina atentata u Rumunjskoj”, *Novi list*, 4. 1. 1934.

¹⁸ AJ, 38-1266-1478, Anonim, „Gvozdena Garda bila je u službi hitlerovaca i fašista”, *Novo Doba*, 2. 1. 1934.

¹⁹ AJ, 38-1266-1478, Anonim, „Atentatori vrebaju na Titulesca”, *Jugoslovenski list*, 4. 1. 1934; Anonim, „Spreman atentat na Titulescu”, *Hrvatska straža*, 4. 1. 1934.

²⁰ AJ, 38-1266-1478, Anonim, „Vojna cenzura u Rumunjskoj”, *Novosti* 2. 1. 1934; К. К, „Ванредне мере у Букурешту и већим градовима у провинцији”, *Политика*, 1. 1. 1934; Anonim, „Oštre мере u Rumunjskoj”, *Novosti*, 1. 1. 1934; Anonim, „Energičan boj proti železni gardi”, *Slovenac*, 20. 1. 1934.

²¹ AJ, 38-1266-1478, Anonim, „200.000 људи испратило је до гроба покојног румунског државника Јона Дуку”, *Време*, 3. 1. 1934; Anonim, „Veličanstven pogreb pretsjedniku Duki”, *Jadranska pošta*, 3. 1. 1934; Anonim, „Sahrana dr. Johna Duke”, *Novo doba*, 3. 1. 1934;

²² AJ, 38-1266-1478, Anonim, „Romunski obračun s teroristi”, *Jutro*, 2. 1. 1934.

²³ AJ, 38-1266-1478, Anonim, „Румунија и њена будућност”, *Варпаг*, 2. 1. 1934.

²⁴ AJ, 38-1266-1478, Anonim, „Garda de Fer”, *Jutro*, 2. 1. 1934.

stine leader of the Iron Guard was, in fact, a certain Hungarian who fled to Hungary after the assassination.²⁵ It was also noted that Nae Ionescu, the director of the newspaper *Cuvântul* and a supporter of the legionaries who had been arrested following the assassination, was mysteriously released from prison. It was suspected that someone from the government freed him, and the opposition accused Titulescu of helping him.²⁶ Naturally, the highlight of the trial was the testimony of Codreanu, who had turned himself in after three months in hiding. He denied any involvement in Duca's murder and claimed that the assassins had acted independently. Codreanu claimed that a former prime minister, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, and others asked him to destroy communism in Bessarabia in 1928, which proved that the Iron Guard was not hostile to the state. He also defended General Cantacuzino from the charges of taking part in the conspiracy.²⁷ Despite Codreanu's attacks on the elite at his trial in 1934, a number of respected politicians like Gheorghe I. Brătianu, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod and Constantin Argetoianu appeared as character witnesses in his defense. Codreanu was acquitted. This trial remained controversial and two years later some students desecrated the plaque in Sinaia placed in Duca's honour. Then followed rumours that there would be a revision of the trial in order to incriminate the instigators of the crime, Codreanu, Cantacuzino and Ionescu.²⁸

The Yugoslav Central Press Bureau correspondent from Bucharest, Milan Petrović, who played a significant role in shaping coverage of Romania, held an unfavourable view of the Iron Guard. In June 1935, he portrayed it as a major danger for the cabinet of Gheorghe Tătărescu, whom he praised and who successfully „suffocated” it in consequence.²⁹ In March 1936, Petrović relayed the reports in the British press to the effect that the Germans were spending large amounts of money for Hitlerist campaign in Romania and that the Romanian ministry of internal affairs was investigating such allegations.³⁰ The far-right newspaper *Porunca Vremii*, which typically supported the Iron Guard though it was not its official organ, alleged that a Freemason conspiracy was behind the assassination attempt on Yugoslav Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović in the National Assembly. Those associated with the attempt on Stojadinović's life such as former pri-

²⁵ AJ, 38-1266-1478, Аноним, „Хапшење заменика вођа румунске Гвоздене гарде”, *Правда*, 7. 2. 1934.

²⁶ AJ, 38-1266-1478, Аноним, „Румунски парламент одбија оптужбе против г. Титулеска да је утицао на истрагу о убиству Дуке”, *Штампа*, 8. 3. 1934; Anonim, „Glasovi o diktaturi u Rumunjskoj”, *Jadranska pošta*, 9. 3. 1934.

²⁷ „703 сведока на суђењу убици покојног Дуке”, *Време*, 20. 03. 1934; AJ, 38-1266-1478, Аноним, „Одбрана шефа Гвоздене Гарде Кодреануа”, *Правда*, 22. 3. 1934.

²⁸ AJ, 38-1273-1485, Аноним, „Опет се говори о ревизији процеса саучесницима у убиству бившег премијера”, *Време*, 3. 4. 1936.

²⁹ AJ, 38-52-120, Izveštaj dopisnika Centralnog presbiroa iz Bukurešta, 8. 6. 1935.

³⁰ AJ, 38-52-120, Izveštaj dopisnika Centralnog presbiroa iz Bukurešta, 13. 3. 1936.

me minister Bogoljub Jevtić and his followers were labelled freemasons and communists, but Petrović recommended that the writings of that paper should be ignored as it was subsidised by Germany.³¹ He professed that German influence on the Romanian public was conspicuous, which facilitated the growth of radical right-wing parties. He was constantly forced to react to the claims in the far right press that Yugoslavia was moving away from the Little Entente and closer to Italy and Germany. Such claims produced results insofar as the attitude towards Yugoslavia changed, since there was fear that that country would betray Romania and settle with Hungary and Italy behind Bucharest's back.³²

In February 1937, the funeral of two members of the Iron Guard, Ion Moța and Vasile Marin, the leaders of a group of legionaries who had fought on the side of General Franco in the Spanish Civil War and had been killed there turned out to be a major event. Their coffins were transported across the country, hundreds of thousands of people paid them respect at town squares and the funeral procession was something of a spectacle. It was an electrifying demonstration of the power of the Iron Guard, immensely important for the growth of the movement, which in turn infuriated King Carol II.³³ It is interesting that the presence of German, Italian and nationalist Spain's diplomatic representatives at the funeral caused a diplomatic incident and that reports emerged falsely stating that the Yugoslav minister was also present and about to be expelled from Romania in consequence.³⁴ However, the rising support for the Iron Guard following Moța's and Marin's funeral accentuated a difficult relationship between the crown and that movement. The *Morning Post* correspondent from Bucharest posited that the conflict between Carol II and the Iron Guard was inevitable – either the King would impose his own dictatorship or the legionaries would seize power in the streets just like Hitler had done.³⁵ One could infer the extent of the Iron Guard's growing popularity from the news that in April 1937 Carol II expelled his own brother Nicholas from the country because of his association with Codreanu's organization.³⁶

³¹ AJ, 38-52-120, Izveštaj dopisnika Centralnog presbira iz Bukurešta, 23. 3. 1936.

³² AJ, 38-52-120, Polugodišnji izveštaj o radu dopisnika, 8. 12. 1936.

³³ Valentin Săndulescu, „Sacralised Politics in Action: the February 1937 Burial of the Romanian Legionary Leaders Ion Moța and Vasile Marin”, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2007, 259–269; Rebecca Haynes, *Romanian Policy towards Germany, 1936–40*, (London: Macmillan, 2000), 31–33.

³⁴ AJ, 38-1268-1480, Anonim, „Carol Sends for Premier”, *The Morning Post*, 16. 2. 1937; Аноним, Изъ Бухареста будутъ отозваны посланники Германии, Италии, Польши, Японии, Португалии и Югославији”, *Сегодня*, 18. 2. 1937.

³⁵ AJ, 38-1268-1480, Anonim, „King Carol and Rumania”, *The Morning Post*, 5. 3. 1937.

³⁶ AJ, 38-1268-1480, Anonim, „La Garde de Fer veut remplacer le Roi Carol par son frere Nicholas”, *L'Humanite*, 19. 4. 1937; Anonim, „Iron Guard Chief Defies King Carol”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 18. 4. 1937; Anonim, „Threat to Throne of Carol”, *Daily Herald*, 18. 4. 1937; Anonim, „King Carol Exiles his Brother”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 10. 4. 1937.

The 20 December 1937 elections, however, showed the rise of the Iron Guard in no uncertain terms. The mainstay of Romanian politics, Tătărescu's National Liberals and Iuliu Maniu's National Peasants, failed to obtain the necessary majority and the All for the Fatherland, which was the legal cover name for the legionaries, won the impressive 15.58 per cent of the vote and became the third strongest parliamentary party. In a flagrant violation of the principles of parliamentary democracy, Carol II turned to the leaders of the National Christian Party, Octavian Goga and Alexandru Cuza, who came only fourth with 9.15 per cent, to form a cabinet.³⁷ Goga and Cuza were also ardent antisemites and nationalists but, unlike Codreanu, they were conservatives and monarchists rather than revolutionaries. Thus, Carol II utilized the Goga-Cuza cabinet to ride the tide of Romanian nationalism and isolate the Codreanu movement which was inimical to the king, and perhaps, in the longer run, to prepare the ground for royal dictatorship.³⁸

The Yugoslav press covered the election campaign with much interest. As Maniu concluded a pre-election non-aggression agreement with Codreanu, in the main contest between Tătărescu and Maniu it was the latter who lost most, while the Iron Guard leader profited.³⁹ As the rumours of the formation of the Goga government emerged, the editors of *Vreme* did not believe it.⁴⁰ Once it had been formed, the same paper reported on it in a favourable light: the motto was „Christ, King and the Fatherland” and in foreign affairs it was intent on struggling against the Soviet Union while there was also talk of forming the bloc consisting of Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia.⁴¹ One of the best Romanian poets and an irredentist leader from Transylvania, Goga was known for his fighting against the Hungarians and he was made an object of attack in the French press (conversely, he disliked French prime minister of Jewish origin, Leon Blum).⁴² The Goga government was expected to be authoritarian and „well-nigh fascist”.⁴³ Most enthusiastic for the Goga government was Milan Popović, a senator and the leader of the Yugoslav Anti-Marxist Committee. He argued that without a great patriot and the leader of Romanians from Transylvania there would not have been the alliance

³⁷ Paul A. Shapiro, „Prelude to Dictatorship in Romania: The National Christian Party in Power, December 1937-February 1938”, *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, VIII, 1 (Spring 1974), 45–88; Philippe Henri Blasen, „De la nomination du cabinet Goga au coup d'État du roi Carol II (28 décembre 1937-10 février 1938)”, *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai - Historia*, vol. 63, no. 2 (December 2018), 111–157.

³⁸ For a discussion of Carol II's motives, see C. A. Macartney and A. W. Palmer, *Independent Eastern Europe: A History*, (London, New York: Macmillan, St Martin's Press, 1966), 375–376; Shapiro, „Prelude to Dictatorship in Romania”, 66–69.

³⁹ AJ, 38-1268-1480, Аноним, „Румунски избори”, *Време*, 24. 12. 1937.

⁴⁰ Аноним, „Преокрет у Румунији”, *Време*, 28. 12. 1937.

AJ, 38-1268-1480, Тел. Комп, „Шта значи нова влада г. Горе?”, *Време*, 30. 12. 1937.

⁴² AJ, 38-1268-1480, Аноним, „Политички догађаји у Румунији”, *Правда*, 30. 12. 1937.

⁴³ AJ, 38-1268-1480, Аноним, „Romunija na poti v autoritarni režim”, *Jutro*, 30. 12. 1937; Аноним, „Romunija je dobila novo, poldiktatorsko vlado”, *Slovenski dom*, 29. 12. 1937.

between Romania and the Entente Powers in the Great War. „Our people have good reason to believe that that noble and superior spirit, which Mr. Goga brings into the new political course of brotherly Romania, will not just further strengthen our mutual relations but also create security and permanent peace in this part of the world through his statesmanlike vision,” Popović wrote.⁴⁴ In contrast, estimates of the Iron Guard and its political prospects were not that favourable. It was said that the legionaries had no clear programme and their political messages were rather abstract. The Iron Guard was foremost antisemitic and then antidemocratic and unwilling to form a coalition with any other political party.⁴⁵ On the other hand, it was thought that the government’s aim was to contain the Iron Guard.⁴⁶

An important insight into Codreanu’s political outlook was provided in the rare interview he had given to the *Daily Herald* correspondent in his „Green House” full of swastikas, Hitler’s photos and photos of the „martyrs” from the legionary movement in early January 1938. Codreanu stated that he was for the King, but that the latter was an „arbitrator” rather than an absolute monarch. He regarded the Jews as the main problem and was in favour of their elimination, „complete and without exception.” He was also in favour of an alliance with Germany and Italy, and not a believer in the League of Nations, France, the Little Entente and the Balkan Entente. He rejected both democracy and dictatorship, but did not consider the German regime a dictatorship because it enjoyed an overwhelming popular support. Codreanu refused to cooperate with Goga.⁴⁷ At about the same time, Petrović noted in his analysis of political situation in Romania that most political parties did not support the government.⁴⁸

Indeed, the Goga-Cuza government was unsuccessful and short-lived. On 10 February 1938, Carol II replaced it by the one formed by Patriarch Miron Cristea as part of his effective coup d’état. Codreanu did not cause any trouble, since he was concerned that Carol II could install another cabinet still less inclined to the Iron Guard. The monarch, in fact, formed a coalition government headed by the Patriarch in order to prevent considerable support among priests to the Iron Guard.⁴⁹ According to Petrović’s analysis, Patriarch Miron was aware that the King and Tătărescu manipulated him to serve as a ruse for their unpopular measures, as Carol II lacked courage to take responsibility for imposing his own dictatorship. The monarch had opted for Goga earlier to pre-empt the electoral success of the Codreanu-Maniu coalition, but his cabinet had not resolved anything during its 55 days. Hen-

⁴⁴ М. Л. Поповић, „Октавијан Гога”, *Време*, 30. 12. 1937.

⁴⁵ АЈ, 38-1268-1480, Аноним, „Политички догађаји у Румунији”, *Правда*, 30. 12. 1937.

⁴⁶ АЈ, 38-1268-1480, Аноним, „Преврат у Ромунији”, *Јутро*, 31. 12. 1937.

⁴⁷ АЈ, 38-1267-1479, А. L. Easterman, „Rumania’s `Film Star` Hitler Reveals his Plans”, *Daily Herald*, 7. 1. 1938.

⁴⁸ АЈ, 38-52-120, Извештај dopisnika Centralnog presbiroa iz Bukurešta, 10. 1. 1938.

⁴⁹ АЈ, 38-875-1060, Аноним, „Nova era obnove u Rumunjskoj”, *Hrvatski list*, 12. 2. 1938.

ce, he was forced to bring into power Patriarch's government. The Iron Guard stuck to its decision not to conduct public propaganda, but well-informed circles claimed that it carried out an active underground agitation with the estimated around a million of supporters. In fear of repression, it hid the entire archive and closed down the party's premises. Codreanu sent a circular to his followers warning them that the government was preparing his murder and swearing them to revenge him. A special unit of legionaries called „Corpul Moța-Marin” (The Moța-Marin Corps) was formed consisting of 10,000 people divided into groups of 700. On the other side, a number of repressive measures was introduced and revision of the constitution was envisaged with a view to strengthening the power of the crown; suffrage was reduced from 21 to 30 years of age „because nearly all the youth is in the Iron Guard, which the King wants to destroy.”⁵⁰

Soon, on 17 April, Codreanu and a large number of his legionary commanders were arrested. Not surprisingly, the Belgrade dailies relayed the official explanation of the Romanian government for this action: the Iron Guard was incriminated for preparing for a violent takeover of government, the evidence of which was provided in their captured correspondence and a large amount of printed material and arms found in the course of police searches.⁵¹ But Codreanu was, in fact, indicted and sentenced to six months of prison for the offensive content of a letter he had sent to a former cabinet member, famous historian Nicolae Iorga.⁵² The following day, reports emerged indicating that the ongoing investigation had uncovered evidence of the Iron Guard's terrorist inclinations, specifically linking Codreanu to the 1933 assassination of Prime Minister Duca.⁵³ Finally, the special Easter issue of the Belgrade dailies relayed the official statement issued after the meeting of the Romanian cabinet, which announced the permanent dissolution of the Iron Guard and the prosecution of its leaders; importantly, a claim was made that the organisation had spent over 40,000,000 million leis in a short period of time and that Codreanu's connection with certain foreign organisations had

⁵⁰ Ај, 38-52-120, Centralni presburo Ministarstvu inostranih poslova, 21. 2. 1938.

⁵¹ Л. Наста, „Гвоздена гарда' припремала је побуну у Румунији”, „Хапшења Корнелиуса Кодреана и 200 шефова одреда 'Гвоздене гарде’”, „Претреси у становима чланова 'Гвоздене гарде’”, *Полиџика*, 18. 4. 1938; М. М, „Кодреану вођа Гвоздене гарде ухапшен”, *Време*, 18. 4. 1938; „Пронађене велике количине прапагандистичког материјала и оружја код чланова 'Гвоздене гарде' у Румунији”, *Правда*, 18. 4. 1938.

⁵² Л. Наста, „Војни суд у Букурешту осудио је шефа 'Гвоздене гарде' Корнелијусу Кодреану на шест месеци затвора због увреде министра г. Јорге”, *Полиџика*, 20. 4. 1938; М. М, „Кодреану осуђен на шест месеци затвора”, *Време*, 20. 4. 1938; „Суђење вођу 'Гвоздене гарде' за клевету нанесену г. Јорги”, *Правда*, 20. 4. 1938.

⁵³ Л. Наста, „Истрага о превратничком раду Корнелиуса Кодреана довела је до интересантних открића”, *Полиџика*, 21. 4. 1938; М. М, „Гвоздена гарда у Румунији припремала је 200 убистава”, *Време*, 22. 4. 1938; „Вођа 'Гвоздене гарде' Кодреана оптужују да је знао за припремање убиства претседника владе Дуке”, *Правда*, 21. 4. 1938.

been established.⁵⁴ This was a clear reference to the often repeated allegation that the Iron Guard had links with Germany and Italy. However, there is no evidence that Codreanu ever received financial support from Germany, unlike Goga prior to becoming prime minister and unlike Horia Sima, his successor as the Iron Guard leader.⁵⁵

It is hardly surprising that the Yugoslav press aligned its reporting with the foreign policy stance of the Yugoslav government. Romania was an ally and, in addition, a dim view of the Iron Guard was necessitated by considerations of Yugoslavia's internal policy of which more will be said later. It was indicative that the Yugoslav minister in Bucharest, Jovan Dučić was quite contemptuous of Codreanu, "a man of mediocre spirit, poor education, a fanatic and mystic, but also a conspirator and murderer, who personally shoots down people with a revolver." More importantly, he found that the royal dictatorship cut the ground from under his feet not just because the activities of his movement had been suppressed, but even more so because the new regime had taken over his political program. Codreanu „preached a dictatorship idea, the persecution of Jews, punishment for corruption, agrarian justice, and now dictatorship has come into being and the legal authorities have appropriated all those attributes. Thus, there is nothing left to place his own word as a new truth, a new suggestion, a new promise.”⁵⁶ In Dučić's opinion, the government had no other option than to incarcerate Codreanu unless they were prepared to allow that „maniac” to emerge as the master of the situation with the foreign assistance.⁵⁷ The Yugoslav minister – and probably his government – also suspected the Iron Guard of being subsidized from Berlin.

In early November 1938, General Cantacusino was arrested (he had been arrested earlier but had managed to escape) and thus the entire leadership of the Iron Guard was behind bars. However, it seemed that someone was still directing the activities of the movement as evidenced by the

⁵⁴ „Г. Кодреану утрошио је за кратко време 40 милиона леја на своје Легионаре са којима је припремао преврат у Румунији”, *Полиџика*, 23, 24, 25 и 26. 4. 1938; М. М., „Потпуна и одлучна ликвидација 'Гвоздене гарде'”, *Време*, 23, 24, 25 и 26. 4. 1938.

⁵⁵ Rebecca Haynes, „Corneliu Zelea Codreanu: The Romanian 'New Man'”, *In the Shadow of Hitler: Personalities of the Right in Central and Eastern Europe*, eds Rebecca Haynes and Martyn Rady, (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2011), 169–187; Alex Mihai Stoenescu, *Armata, Mareşalul şi Evreii*, (Bucureşti: RAO Distribuţie, 2012), 206.

⁵⁶ Quoted in D. Bakić, „The First Yugoslav Ambassador: Jovan Dučić in Romania, 1937–1940,” *New Cultural and Political Perspectives on Serbian-Romanian Relations*, eds Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović, Jovana Kolundžija, Mircea Măran, Otilia Hedeşan, and Christene D' Anca, (New York: Peter Lang, 2023), 155–156. The newspaper of the ruling Yugoslav Radical Union echoed this reflection of Dučić: „The government's basic mission will be to channel right-wing currents to the detriment of the 'Iron Guard', the recent success of which evidently perturbed the policy makers.” See AJ, 38-1268-1480, Аноним, „Решење кабинетске кризе у Румунији”, *Самоуправа*, 30. 12. 1937.

⁵⁷ Bakić, „Dučić in Romania,” 160.

ongoing protests – especially massive protests were those in Chernivtsi (today in Ukraine, Cernăuți in Romanian) and Cluj after which a series of arrests followed.⁵⁸ While King Carol II was on official visits to London and Paris, significant unrest and anti-Jewish pogroms were unfolding at home. In Reșița and Alba Iulia, synagogues were bombed, while in Chernivtsi and Bucharest, the police intervened to prevent similar attacks. The German and Italian press presented these events as the Iron Guard's success, whereas the government press in Romania depicted it as actions of German agents provocateurs for the purpose of sabotaging the King's trip to friendly countries. The Iron Guard itself issued a communique to the effect that it had nothing to do with actions against the peaceful population. The government was, however, convinced that there was connection between the Germans and the Iron Guard, and they carried out constant police searches and arrests.⁵⁹

On December 1, 1938, while the Yugoslav press was primarily focused on the twentieth anniversary of the creation of Yugoslavia, the most sensational news was the death of Codreanu and thirteen other members of the Iron Guard, including Duca's assassins and the perpetrators of another high-profile murder of the renegade Iron Guard member Mihai Stelescu in 1936. Yugoslav readers were informed about the circumstances of this event by an official communique issued by the Romanian military authorities: it claimed that they were killed during an attempted escape while the prisoners were being transferred from one facility to another. Equally important was the connection drawn in Romanian reports between the deaths of Codreanu and other legionaries and a series of recent terrorist acts widely attributed to the Iron Guard, such as the assassination attempt on the rector of the University of Cluj, the massacre at the theatre in Timișoara, and the arson attacks on Jewish shops in Timișoara and Chernivtsi. It was discovered that the members of the Iron Guard established secret tribunals that issued death sentences against high-ranking state officials and others deemed hostile to the organization. In addition, it was reported that General Ion Antonescu was relieved of his duties, an implicit (and a little later explicit) reference to his association with Codreanu's movement.⁶⁰ Subsequently, foreign correspondents and news agencies informed the Yugoslav public about the suppressi-

⁵⁸ AJ, 38-52-120, Izveštaj dopisnika Centralnog presbiroa iz Bukurešta, 3. 11. 1938.

⁵⁹ AJ, 38-52-120, Izveštaj dopisnika Centralnog presbiroa iz Bukurešta, 26. 11. 1938.

⁶⁰ Ливије Наста, „Убиство Корнелија Кодреану и његових 13 присталица,” Ђ. Бељански, „Страшно крвопролиће у темишварском позоришту није усамљено,” and other news agency and telephone reports, *Полиџика*, 1. 12. 1938; „Пред сломом Гвоздене гарде: Кодреану убијен”, Шокчић, „Реорганизована Гвоздена гарда спремаља је велику терористичку акцију у Румунији,” „Ухапшено је неколико стотина чланова Гвоздене гарде” поводом убиства Кодреана, „Убиством Кодреана уништена је Гвоздена гарда – сматра се у Букурешту,” *Време*, 1. 12. 1938; „Румунски листови објављују да се Гвоздена гарда” спремаља да изврши државни удар”, *Правда*, 6. 12. 1938.

on of the Iron Guard and further evidence of its terroristic actions. But there were also veiled references, without any editorial comments, on the dissatisfaction in Germany caused by Codreanu's death and the massive support for the legionaries among students and peasantry, for the benefit of which the government introduced certain measures in an attempt to win them over.⁶¹ German dissatisfaction was rapidly expressed in no uncertain terms as the press in the Third Reich openly expounded its opinion that Codreanu and his supporters were plainly killed and reproached the Romanian government.⁶² It is clear that the Yugoslav press could neither discuss the official version of events from Bucharest nor German accusations levelled against the Romanian government out of regard for maintaining friendly relations with both countries. But an observing reader could understand from the latest news of assassination of the president of a military court in Chernivtsi committed by the legionaries⁶³ that their organisation was far from being terminated as Bucharest would have everyone believe.⁶⁴ To further discredit the Iron Guard, the Romanian press claimed that its action centre was located abroad – professor Iorga specifically mentioned Hungary.⁶⁵

The Iron Guard after the Death of Codreanu

In September 1939, the Yugoslav press had some sensational news: the Romanian interior minister, Armand Călinescu, who had masterminded the suppression of the Iron Guard, was assassinated. Six legionaries shot him; they and their associates were caught, executed and their corpses were on display in the street on the exact spot where they had killed Călinescu (two culprits committed suicide rather than allowing to be arrested). Dučić

⁶¹ „Убиством Корнелија Кодреану, у Букурешту се сматра да је уништен терористички покрет 'Гвоздена гарда'”, *Полиџика*, 3. 12. 1938; „После Кодреана, у покушају бекства убијени су и атентатори: у Черновицу адвокат Фагадару, а у Клужу студенти: Пика Ананије и Андреј Петре”, *Полиџика*, 4. 12. 1938; „Похватани атентатори у Клужу открили су терористички центар 'Гвоздене гарде' у иностранству?”, *Полиџика*, 5. 12. 1938, „Румунске власти извршиле су многобројна хапшења”, *Правда*, 3. 12. 1938; „Румунска полиција открила да су чланови 'Гвоздене гарде' одржали и 'историску' седницу”, *Правда*, 4. 12. 1938.

⁶² „Немачки листови мисле да је Кодреану убијен по наредби”, „Ангриф“ сумња у румунски званични извештај о погибији Кодреана”, *Полиџика*, 5. 12. 1938; „Немачка штампа о убиству Кодреана”, *Време*, 6. 12. 1938.

⁶³ „Нов атентат Гвоздене гарде у Румунији”, *Време*, 6. 12. 1938; „После атентата на пуконика Кристескуа румунска влада енергично угушује све организације 'Гвоздене гарде'”, *Правда*, 7. 12. 1938. The latter article provided a historical account of Codreanu's Iron Guard, but passed in silence over his death.

⁶⁴ „Румунска влада сматра да више неће доћи до оживљавања акције 'Гвоздене гарде'”, *Правда*, 5. 12. 1938; „Румунски листови данас наглашују да је сваки рад у будуће онемогућен 'Гвозденој гарди'”, *Правда*, 8. 12. 1938.

⁶⁵ „Румунски листови објављују да се 'Гвоздена гарда' спрема да изврши државни удар”, *Правда*, 6. 12. 1938.

and the prime minister, Dragiša Cvetković, sent telegrams of condolences to the Romanian government.⁶⁶ Călinescu's murder was a clear sign that the Iron Guard was still a considerable force in the country. Moreover, it benefited from the international situation dominated by Nazi Germany on the eve of and in the wake of the outbreak of the Second World War. Consequently, the Iron Guard was gradually rehabilitated as a political force. For example, 333 legionaries were released from prison in March 1940.⁶⁷ Although censorship was relentless and distribution of secret leaflets and brochures was forbidden, the aim was no longer the suppression of the weakened Iron Guard but rather of Maniu's National Peasants. A special ministry of state propaganda was formed.⁶⁸ Especially telling of the changed circumstances was an audience that Carol II granted to the leaders of the Iron Guard and disbanding of concentration camps in which the legionaries were held.⁶⁹

In the summer of 1940, Romania suffered devastating blows when large parts of its territory were annexed by the Soviet Union and then Hungary through the German-Italian arbitration. This development produced two important consequences. First, it swung the country further to the right as evidenced by a series of antisemitic incidents – students were reported to have attacked their Jewish colleagues at Bucharest and a Jewish hotel owner in Sinaia was murdered. This was excused on grounds of the alleged mistreatment of Romanians by the Jews in the Soviet-occupied Bucovina and Bessarabia.⁷⁰ The news of the alleged „Jewish atrocities” in Bessarabia made their way into the Serbian Orthodox Church's press.⁷¹ Second, Carol II was dethroned as a result of his complete discreditation over the dismemberment of Romania. This led to the creation of the so-called Legionary state in September 1940, a coalition between General Antonescu, who was granted extraordinary powers as the leader of the country, and the Iron Guard, which had become the sole legally permitted political party.

A Central Press Bureau correspondent from Bucharest made a detailed report on the change that had taken place in Romania. „Objective circles” considered, he wrote, that the Iron Guard was „an obedient instrument of German policy”. The aim of the overthrow in Romania was to install Antonescu in power, get rid of Carol II and his court camarilla and thus cement Romania's siding with the Axis Powers. Antonescu was the preeminent person

⁶⁶ AJ, 38-1267-1479, Аноним, „После стрељања атентатора румунска влада донела је нове мере за потпуну ликвидацију Гвоздене гарде”, *Време*, 23. 9. 1939. For a detailed reconstruction of the assassination and photos of the dead legionaries, see AJ, 38-1276-1488, Аноним, „После убиства Армана Калинеска”, *Полиџика*, 23. 9. 1939.

⁶⁷ AJ, 38-1276-1488, Izveštaj agencije Avala, 28. 3. 1940.

⁶⁸ AJ, 38-1276-1488, Аноним, „Унутрашњи фронт у Румунији”, *Правда*, 9. 3. 1940.

⁶⁹ AJ, 38-1276-1488, Izveštaj agencije Avala, 18. 4. 1940.

⁷⁰ AJ, 38-1276-1488, Izveštaj agencije Avala, 8. 7. 1940.

⁷¹ Аноним, „Јеврејска зверства у Бесарабији”, *Браничевски весник*, август–октобар 1940.

in the country and new King Michai was young, whereas other politicians did not count for much. Although relations between the Iron Guard and General Antonescu were initially strained due to differences between Antonescu and Horia Sima, Codreanu's successor, the Iron Guard ultimately expressed full confidence in his leadership. Sima was fully under German influence and all radical measures aimed at establishing a legionary Romania were pursued hastily, before the arrival of the Queen Mother, who was receptive to Iuliu Maniu and the democratic circles around him. The new government's objectives included the suppression of the Jewry, an anticorruption campaign, assistance to refugees from the annexed Romanian territories and purging of the military leadership from those loyal to Carol II. Overall, Romania became a second-rate country that could not decide its fate. The Romanians could do nothing about the bloody persecution of their compatriots in Transylvania, aside from scathing and useless attacks on Hungarians in the press and on the radio. There was much talk about the necessity for the Romanian people to prepare to fulfil their "high mission" without ever spelling out what that mission was. The press argued for a rapprochement with Italy and spoke of the inevitable war against the Soviet Union.⁷²

According to the Yugoslav Avala news agency report, the Iron Guard conditioned its participation in the government on the abdication of Carol II. Antonescu was not in favour of it, but he could not prevent it, and he made an arrangement for his son Michai to ascend the throne. Carol II left for Yugoslavia and Antonescu emerged as the most important figure in the country.⁷³ He sought to consolidate a country that was torn apart by internal strife. Sima professed that the regime was based on the ideas of the Iron Guard which would bring about a spiritual revolution of Romania.⁷⁴ The legionary movement was the sole legally permitted political organization, ostensibly to prevent „struggle among brothers.”⁷⁵ Conversely, a number of the opponents of the Iron Guard was imprisoned,⁷⁶ and a series of anticorruption measures undertaken targeting former cabinet members and state functionaries.⁷⁷

A Yugoslav right-wing extremist, Omiljen Milić, writing for the daily *Vreme*, at a time when his ideological fellow-travellers had much sway over that paper, made a link between the formation of a legionary Romania and the fall of France two months earlier. He saw both events as the fall of the „Jewish-masonic-plutocratic system”. Developments in Romania were playing out under the influence of Germany and Italy. „Codreanu and the Iron Guard were the apostles of fascism in Romania in their faith and their work.” The move-

⁷² AJ, 38-52-120, Izveštaj dopisnika Centralnog presbiroa iz Bukurešta, 16. 9. 1940.

⁷³ AJ, 38-1274-1486, Izveštaj agencije Avala, 9. 9. 1940.

⁷⁴ AJ, 38-1274-1486, Izveštaj agencije Avala, 13. 9. 1940.

⁷⁵ AJ, 38-1274-1486, Izveštaj agencije Avala, 15. 9. 1940.

⁷⁶ AJ, 38-1274-1486, Izveštaj agencije Avala, 19. 9. 1940.

⁷⁷ AJ, 38-1274-1486, Izveštaj agencije Avala, 24. 9. 1940.

ment aimed to have a totalitarian state, a healthy Romanian race and to expel all that smacked of „Jews, masons and communists”. Milić provided a number of quotes from Codreanu’s writings about the bad aspects of democracy, the harm done by Jews, city dwelling and Romanian schools. The Jewry and their helpers had prosecuted Codreanu for twenty years and presented him as unstable and religious fanatic. „How much Romania needs the spirit of Cornelius Codreanu today, the Romanians know that best,” he concluded.⁷⁸

Reports from Romania showed that the Iron Guard seized its moment. The widow and daughter of the late Codreanu returned to Bucharest from Germany, along with 28 other legionaries.⁷⁹ Another interpretation of Codreanu’s death from German sources was now voiced in the press to the effect that Călinescu personally ordered his murder. It was detailed that he and thirteen other legionaries had been first strangled, then shot, and finally their bodies were doused with sulfuric acid.⁸⁰ Moreover, calls for commemoration for the legionaries killed in 1938 were published in the papers, while General Gheorghe Argeșanu, a former prime minister, who had ordered their execution, was shot. It is noteworthy that the leading liberal daily in Belgrade published a historical overview of the Iron Guard, but in a markedly different tone compared to 1938, portraying the legionaries not as doctrinaires, but as men of action who responded with terror to the repression of the authorities, particularly that of Călinescu. The regime had believed that the murder of Codreanu would have brought about the destruction of the Iron Guard, but that had proven to be wrong. More than 300 legionaries were killed after Codreanu’s assassination. The main ideas of Codreanu’s movement were suffering and sacrifice, and it stood for extreme nationalism, anti-Marxism and antisemitism.⁸¹ The next day, it was reported that Codreanu was officially rehabilitated.⁸² He and the thirteen legionaries who died alongside him were buried in the “Green House” in a ceremony attended by delegates from Italy and Germany, who laid wreaths. The funeral included a church requiem and a street parade.⁸³ The Romanian press praised a sympathetic account of Codreanu’s funeral given in *Vreme*.⁸⁴

The Central Press Bureau correspondent Petrović, however, made an important report on internal dissensions within the new Romanian regime. Although Horia Sima was expected to make some aggressive move at the time

⁷⁸ AJ, 38-1276-1488, O. Милјић, „Рехабилитација Корнелија Кодреана”, *Време*, 6. 9. 1940.

⁷⁹ AJ, 38-1276-1488, Izveštaj agencije Avala, 16. 9. 1940.

⁸⁰ AJ, 38-1276-1488, Anonim, „Kako su poubijani vođa Željezne garde Codreanu i drugovi”, *Hrvatski list*, 6. 10. 1940.

⁸¹ AJ, 38-1276-1488, H, „Сутра се навршава двогодишњица смрти Корнелија Кодреана, оснивача Гвоздене Гарде”, *Полиџика*, 29. 11. 1940.

⁸² AJ, 38-1276-1488, Izveštaj agencije Avala, 30. 11. 1940.

⁸³ AJ, 38-1276-1488, Izveštaj agencije Avala, 30. 11. 1940.

⁸⁴ AJ, 38-1276-1488, Anonim, „Ziarul `Vreme` despre funerarile Căpitanului”, *Universul*, 3. 12. 1940.

of Antonescu's visit to Rome, that did not come to pass. But a coup d'état was attempted at that time within the ranks of the legionary movement. Gheorghe Ciorogaru, a prominent legionary intellectual, and his supporters tried to exploit the confusion caused by earthquake that hit Bucharest and take control over the „Green House”. They intended to proclaim Codreanu's father Ion as the new leader – they had his support as well as that of Codreanu's brother, Horia. Ciorogaru was placed under control of the legionaries loyal to Horia Sima. Conflict between Ciorogaru and Sima had been brewing for a while, the former calling the latter a self-styled leader who had sold himself to Antonescu and betrayed the legionary cause. Antonescu tried to reconcile their differences but to no avail. During the attempted coup d'état, the army remained reserved. Sima arrested the rebels and had them expelled from the Iron Guard, but he refrained from publicly attacking Codreanu's family. The affair revealed that the Iron Guard was internally divided, split into two distinct factions. Sima headed the stronger one; he was not an undisputed authority such as Codreanu had been, but Antonescu and Germany supported him.⁸⁵

The major upheaval took place in January 1941 after the murder of Major Döhring, a member of the German military mission in Romania, which saw the conflict erupt between Antonescu and the Iron Guard. A Greek assassin was arrested and the interior minister resigned. Then followed the protests of the Iron Guard which claimed that the British Intelligence Service had been behind the assassination and sought to take over the government entirely.⁸⁶ Armed clashes broke out between the legionaries and the army. A report from *Politika* claimed that Antonescu would remain in power because Berlin supported him.⁸⁷ The police joined the Iron Guard protestors and the legionaries took control over several important buildings. They tried to raid into the office of the prime minister and arrest Antonescu. Heavy fighting ensued in which some 500 people were killed, mostly legionaries, including a number of their leaders. They also demolished the Jewish quarter of the city. Sima was aware of the fact that they were defeated and called on his followers to disperse.⁸⁸ The legionaries captured a radio station in the city of Braşov and reported themselves on their fighting against the authorities, claiming that they were winning. But Antonescu remained in full control and was supported by Berlin.⁸⁹ Indeed, Anto-

⁸⁵ AJ, 38-52-120, Izveštaj dopisnika Centralnog presbira o iz Bukurešta, 19. 11. 1940.

⁸⁶ AJ, 38-1276-1488, Аноним, „Последице атентата у Букурешту”, *Полишика*, 22. 1. 1941.

⁸⁷ AJ, 38-1276-1488, Аноним, „После убиства немачког официра у Букурешту”, *Полишика*, 23. 1. 1941.

⁸⁸ AJ, 38-1276-1488, Аноним, „Како су се развијале борбе на улицама Букурешта”, *Полишика*, 25. 1. 1941. According to the *Universul*, 490 people lost their lives as a consequence of the rebellion. Amongst them were 144 Jews, all of which were killed by the legionaries. More than 600 Jewish stores and 550 Jewish homes were looted and burned, as well as 25 temples and synagoges. See Alex Mihai Stoenescu, *Armata, Mareşalul şi Evreii*, 238–239.

⁸⁹ AJ, 38-1276-1488, С. Л, „Генерал Антонеску је сачувао власт у својим рукама”, *Полишика*, 24. 1. 1941.

nescu's troops recaptured Braşov on 26 January and arrested a number of legionary leaders, and there were even rumours that Sima himself was under arrest.⁹⁰ In fact, the truth was that he managed to escape.⁹¹ Antonescu emerged from the clash as a clear winner.⁹²

An interesting analytical article on the situation in Romania appeared in *Politika* penned by its correspondent from Bucharest, Djordje Nikolić. He found that the end of the legionary revolution was „miserable” which begged the question whether the Iron Guard still constituted a serious political movement or it was finished. The papers brought photos and news of the legionaries who had taken advantage of the confusion to plunder, thus discrediting them further. Nikolić pointed out that although having been brutally attacked by Carol II and Călinescu, the Iron Guard had grown in strength. However, Antonescu waited for the Iron Guard to discredit itself before delivering a decisive blow to the movement. „I am of the opinion that the legionary movement has failed definitely and has been irreversibly compromised in the eyes of the whole [Romanian] people and foreigners.” No alteration in international situation could change that. Nikolić observed that Antonescu attacked Sima and his entourage, but not the memory of the late Codreanu whom he considered honourable. Not even the greatest enemies of the Iron Guard dared to say that Codreanu had been an unworthy personality. Although not an intellectual of particular distinction, he possessed a magnetic ability to attract young people and inspire a sincere fanaticism among them. But the new leaders of the Iron Guard after his assassination had betrayed his idea.⁹³

Dimitrije Ljotić's View of Codreanu and the Iron Guard

The ZBOR movement led by Dimitrije Ljotić was in many respects something of an equivalent of the Iron Guard in Yugoslavia. Initially reserved towards Nazi Germany and its ideology, Ljotić's movement became increasingly fascist in outlook with the growing insistence on anticommunism, antisemitism and admiration to Hitler's social policy from 1936 onwards.⁹⁴ Ljo-

⁹⁰ AJ, 38-1276-1488, Аноним, „Догађаји у Румунији”, *Полиџика*, 27. 1. 1940.

⁹¹ AJ, 38-1276-1488, Аноним, „Неизвесност у погледу стања у Румунији”, *Полиџика*, 25. 1. 1941.

⁹² AJ, 38-1276-1488, Аноним, „Генерал Антонеску извршиће реорганизацију Гвоздене Гарде и ставиће се сам на њено чело”, *Полиџика*, 25. 1. 1941; Аноним, „После угушења побуне у Румунији”, *Полиџика*, 28. 1. 1941.

⁹³ AJ, 38-1276-1488, Ђ. Николић, „После пропасти легионарске револуције”, *Полиџика*, 2. 3. 1941. Djordje Nikolić is said to have been forced to return to Belgrade, presumably temporary, in January 1941 out of fear of the Iron Guard's violence. See Слободан Гиша Богуновић, *Људи Полиџике: Лексикон сарадника (1904-1941)*, (Београд: Политика, 2019), 367-369.

⁹⁴ Младен Стефановић, *Збор Димитрија Љоџића*, (Београд: Народна књига, 1984); Мрко Војић, *Jugoslavenski narodni pokret Zbor, 1935-1945: Jedan kritički prilaz*, (Beograd: Na-

tić, like Codreanu, infused ZBOR with a strong sense of religious fervour (his opponents derided him by calling him *Mita Bogomoljac* – Mita the God Worshiper) and devotion to the traditional rural values and form of social organisation encapsulated in his Triade „God-King-the householder”. He was respected, even by his detractors, as an honourable and honest individual, which helped his political standing in a country rife with corruption.⁹⁵ Unlike the Iron Guard, however, Ljotić’s ZBOR remained a fringe group in Yugoslavia’s political life. For all its organization, discipline and dedicated membership, it failed to win more than one percent of votes at the elections of 1935 and 1938 and, consequently, never won any seats in the Parliament or had the opportunity to influence the governance of the country. The cabinet of Milan Stojadinović suspected ZBOR, just like the official Bucharest suspected the Iron Guard, of being associated with the Third Reich. As has been demonstrated, the controversy over the Technical Union, the Zagreb-based corporation founded by ZBOR members for the purpose of clearing exchange of Yugoslav agricultural products for the German industrial goods, in early 1937 was launched by the government with a view to discrediting ZBOR, accused in the Belgrade press of being financed from Germany.⁹⁶ It is noteworthy that this political confrontation with ZBOR occurred around the same time as Regent Miklós Horthy’s authoritarian regime in Hungary was suppressing the fascist Arrow Cross movement, and as King Carol II of Romania was taking measures against the Iron Guard, constituting yet another instance of the conservative right confronting the fascist opposition.

Unsurprisingly, Ljotić and his followers took a keen interest in the fate of the ideologically akin political movement across the border. Ljotić’s journal *Novi put* presented an analysis of the developments in Romania following Goga’s demission. It praised the Iron Guard which had been ridiculed and underestimated for years, but had grown into a strong political force. Codreanu was a great „fighter”. The Iron Guard was primarily a national Christian movement that placed the struggle against the Jews (who numbered two million in Romania) at the forefront of its political platform. It was thought that Goga’s coming into office would weaken the Iron Guard because of his antisemitic credo. But the opposite turned out to be the case: the Iron Guard was on the rise, Goga was dismissed and Patriarch Miron replaced him in order to restore as much of the government authority as possible. The government undertook measures against the Iron Guard, particularly aimed at

rodna knjiga, 1996); Растко Ломпар, *Учишљели или фарисеј: Димијтрије Љојић, хришћанство и верске заједнице, 1935–1945*, (Београд: Catena mundi, 2021); Василије Драгосављевић, *Друја Европа и Краљевина Југославија: ЈНП Збор (1934–1941)*, (Нови Сад: Прометеј, 2021).

⁹⁵ Милан Јовановић Стоимировић, *Дневник 1936–1941*, прир. Стојан Трећаков и Владимир Шовљански, (Нови Сад: Матица српска, 2000), 328, 389–390.

⁹⁶ Rastko Lompar, „Afera ‘Техничка унија’ i veze JNP Zbora sa nacističkom Nemačkom 1935–1941”, *Istorija 20. veka*, 38, 2 (2020), 89–100.

curbing its influence over the clergy. The Iron Guard had already endured persecution, which only appeared to strengthen the movement; now, its supporters argued, „the Jews and their stooges” would not succeed in suppressing it, as it continued to inspire great enthusiasm among the youth. The news that Codreanu would leave for Italy was dismissed. „In the near future this movement will play the redemptional and historical role in the life of the Romanian people,” as the article predicted.⁹⁷

In May 1938, Ljotić penned a review of developments in Romania from the fall of Tătărescu after the election to the appointment of Patriarch Miron. He was rather non-committal in his commentary on Goga. But he did not believe that Codreanu would drop politics and dissolve the Iron Guard as the press announced (Codreanu did, in fact, dissolve the All for the Fatherland party in anticipation of Carol II’s repressive measures). Ljotić shared the fact that he had read Codreanu’s interview given to a French paper. Codreanu had stated on that occasion that he could disband a legal party, since it was legally banned, but that he could not do that with the legionary „nests” which were „organic”, i.e., that the Iron Guard would effectively continue to exist. Ljotić criticised the Codreanu trial as the Iron Guard leader was convicted without any evidence. He stressed Codreanu’s great influence on the people which could be seen in the courtroom.⁹⁸ „I read these ‘proofs’ and I laugh and I have to laugh because such evidence could be found in our works as well, although we are no ‘terrorists’ indeed, but we observe the national life realistically and point out that such and such causes must bring about such and such consequences.”⁹⁹ This case demonstrated, according to Ljotić, that changes of legislature, constitution etc. were entirely worthless if there were no change of a „spirit” and that the idea of the Iron Guard was the only right one as it sought to change everything. This was true for Romania and indeed for the whole world.¹⁰⁰

Conversely, he criticised the crown for not understanding that it should strive to provide incentive for the best elements of society to undertake “a patriotic constructive action”, which made Romania the weakest state in the Balkans.¹⁰¹ On another occasion his criticism was more truculent: „When the Iron Guard initiated a moral restoration of the Romanian people’s life (we admit we would not ourselves approve of the Iron Guard’s every act, but it should be borne in mind that the Iron Guard was forced to do many things on account of the struggle imposed on it)”, Ljotić argued, “instead of taking that powerful current under its wing, with eventual corrections, the crown placed itself at the helm of a merciless struggle against the most patriotic and

⁹⁷ Аноним, „Шта се догађа у Румунији?”, *Нови џуш*, 27. 2. 1938.

⁹⁸ Димитрије Љотић, *Сабрана дела, књ. 5*, (Београд: Задруга, 2001), 103–105.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 105–106.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁰¹ Димитрије Љотић, *Сабрана дела, књ. 8*, 152–153.

the most willing-to-sacrifice element in Romania".¹⁰² Especially appealing to Ljotić was that the legionaries „fought for order and rectitude” and that „their entire work is based on [...] faith in God, which inspires them and provides the basis of people’s and Christian worldview and outlook on life”¹⁰³ In fact, he described the Iron Guard in similar terms as he depicted his own ZBOR – as an „organic extension” of its people.¹⁰⁴ The ideological affinity he felt with Codreanu’s movement was unmistakable.

In Ljotić’s view, Romania’s debacle in foreign affairs and the loss of substantial amount of territory in the summer of 1940 resulted from the fact that it presented “a picture of weakness and chaos” to Germany.¹⁰⁵ In September that year, Ljotić scrutinised Romania’s disaster from the standpoint of its internal policy. King Carol II did not act as a proper householder and he made a mistake of coming to blows with the Iron Guard. In that struggle he tried to change everything except the „spirit”, made the Romanians a people of „lackeys, sycophants and cowards”, he persecuted men of character and rewarded wretches. It might have been a mistake for the Iron Guard to „immediately start a bloodshed”, not to be patient enough, but the legionaries were persecuted for years instead of being supported from the highest office. In the end, the King was unsuccessful and had to acquiesce to the Iron Guard’s demands, appointing Antonescu to power. He killed the „Captain” as a „villain” on the basis of lies and slanders. This led to his own authority becoming completely formal and illusory.¹⁰⁶ In general, Ljotić lamented the events after Carol II’s coup d’état which resulted in Codreanu’s murder in November 1938 and, in retrospect, concluded that the failure of the Iron Guard was, in fact, the failure of Romanians as a nation. „Romania had no other path except the path of the Iron Guard,” but Carol II tried to tread all other paths. „The path of chaos, the path of corruption, the path of cowardice was hundred times dearer to it [Romania] than the pure and heroic path of Captain Cornelius Zelea Codreanu.” The whole case demonstrated that only the Iron Guard could save Romania. Ljotić used it to show what was bound to happen when the King was not up to the task and how an unfit ruler, seeking to maintain his position and promoting servility, brought about not just the demise of a society and a country but also the end of his own dominion.¹⁰⁷ One is tempted to suspect that these words were also a subtle warning to Prince Regent Pavle of Yugoslavia not to make the same mistakes.

In October 1940, Ljotić struggled to rationalise the presence of German troops in Romania which at that point had a nationalist govern-

¹⁰² Димитрије Љотић, *Сабрана дела*, књ. 8, 153

¹⁰³ Димитрије Љотић, *Сабрана дела* књ. 9, 194–195.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁰⁵ Димитрије Љотић, *Сабрана дела*, књ. 10, 286.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 308–310.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 310–311.

ment.¹⁰⁸ Antonescu was „a soldier, a patriot and an honourable man” whose connection with the Iron Guard was „natural”. It was a few key ideas rather than a detailed programme that mattered: wealth was harmful (ascetism), solidarity of the people was essential, the Legion had to be defended from all compromises.¹⁰⁹ „Therefore, we hope that Romania will find its way and that Antonescu’s firm hand and the Legion’s radiant apostleship will save it from the doom,” Ljotić concluded with a touch of optimism.¹¹⁰ It is important to note that for Ljotić and his ZBOR the convergence of the army and an ideologically clearly profiled political party – an ideal mixture of radical right-wing extremism and authoritarian principles inherent in the military – was a highly desirable model often propagated as a way of taking over the government.

The Yugoslav Government versus the „Yugoslav Codreanu”

From all that has been discussed above it is self-explanatory why the Yugoslav government was concerned about the activities of ZBOR despite its electoral feebleness. The authorities thus obstructed the activities of ZBOR; for example, they banned a rally in Smederevo, Ljotić’s home town and stronghold, which he duly announced to the police for mid-May 1937, under the pretence of legal formalities.¹¹¹ Prime minister Stojadinović also facilitated a rift in the ZBOR ranks. In November 1937, some of its most prominent personalities (Dimitrije Subotin, Đorđe Perić, Danilo Gregorić and Velibor Jonić) came into conflict with Ljotić and were excluded from the party. After the split, Ljotić remained an undisputed leader of ZBOR, whereas Jonić, Gregorić, Perić and some others went over to Stojadinović’s Yugoslav Radical Union where they were given appropriate positions in government propaganda in keeping with their background in journalism and the roles they had played in Ljotić’s party.¹¹²

Ljotić hit back and portrayed Stojadinović, just when the latter was about to pay an official visit to Germany in January 1938, as an imitator of foreign doctrines, „a fascist apprentice,” steeped into corruption and without the qualities necessary to impose an authoritarian regime.¹¹³ In mid-June 1938, some dozen members of ZBOR were arrested on charges that they

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 387.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 388–389.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 390.

¹¹¹ AJ, Fond no. 37, Milan Stojadinović Papers, 74-465, Odluka Načelstva sreza podunavskog, broj 1080, 28. IV.1937.

¹¹² Dragan Bakić, „Danilo Gregorić: A Case Study of Fascistization in Interwar Yugoslavia,” *Right-Wing Politics in Interwar Southeastern Europe: Between Conservatism and Fascism*, eds. Dragan Bakić, Dušan Fundić and Rastko Lompar, (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies SASA, 2023), 339–341.

¹¹³ AJ, Fond 102, Zbirka Stanislav Krakov, 7-17, brochure entitled *Poruka fašističkom šegrtu*.

were preparing an assassination of Stojadinović and Korošec, minister for interior affairs.¹¹⁴ Ljotić's attacks on Stojadinović, including the more wild ones such as that he plotted to murder the late King Alexander, led to his arrest on 26 October 1938, in the midst of campaign for parliamentary elections.¹¹⁵ ZBOR's candidate list was one of just three submitted for the 11 December 1938 election. Ljotić was released from prison some two weeks before the election at which his party suffered a fiasco having won just around 30,000 votes, not enough to enter the parliament. It is noteworthy that of all political parties and people Ljotić and his followers alone were subjected to police repression during Stojadinović's premiership. This had to do, at least in part, with the impression that the ZBOR leader could be dangerous, especially if the circumstances favoured him. Milan Jovanović Stoimirović, Stojadinović's main propagandist, recorded in his diary in mid-February 1938: „Ljotić divides people and today he is the only man for whom people are prepared to spill blood and for whom his own friends do not shrink from spilling blood. [...] He will be a great peril, if Stojadinović makes any major mistake.”¹¹⁶ Some were concerned about Ljotić's popularity in the army and were mindful of the fact that General Nedić, the minister of army and navy, was his cousin, and mused that the crown could reach out to him as a last resort.¹¹⁷ After Ljotić had been released from prison prior to the elections, some of his former friends, defectors from ZBOR, believed that he might resort to political violence playing the role of a „Yugoslav Codreanu”.¹¹⁸

Stojadinović's successor as prime minister, Dragiša Cvetković, handled ZBOR in a manner that was far more drastic than the harsh measures Stojadinović sometimes used against Ljotić's movement. It was no accident that this took place following Horia Sima's joining the General Antonescu government in mid-September 1940 and the formation of the National Legionary State in Romania. On 24 October 1940, as acting minister of the interior, Cvetković banned ZBOR, although that decision was never publicized or even communicated to the movement's leadership.¹¹⁹ The direct incentive for the ban was an organized attack of the White Eagles, the militant youth organization of Ljotić's supporters, on the pro-communist and left-wing students at the Faculty of Technology of the University of Belgrade – a fairly common yet unusually large-scale and aggressive incident of

¹¹⁴ Vasilije Dragosavljević, „Teror jugointegralističkih snaga kao faktor destabilizacije i dekompozicije prve jugoslovenske države”, *Leskovački zbornik*, LXI (2021), 26.

¹¹⁵ Stefanović, *Zbor Dimitrija Ljotića 1934–1945*, 52–53; Lompar, *Dimitrije Ljotić – učitelj ili fa-risej: Zbor, hrišćanstvo i verske zajednice, 1935–1945*, 215.

¹¹⁶ Јовановић Стоимировић, *Дневник*, 170.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 222.

¹¹⁹ Бранислав Глигоријевић, „Напад љотићеваца на студенте Техничког факултета у Београду у октобру 1940. и растурање Љотићевог 'Збора'”, *Историјски гласник* 2 (1963), 68.

that kind.¹²⁰ Some members of ZBOR were arrested, the party offices were searched, and all party organs were shut down.¹²¹ Ljotić was placed under strict supervision but he managed to escape the police agents and take refuge at the Kovilj Monastery, where he remained until the coup d'état on 27 March 1941. The investigation started to focus on ZBOR's alleged preparations for a coup in cooperation with the recently dismissed minister of the army, General Milan Nedić (his chief of staff, Colonel Miloš Masalović, was a member of ZBOR), who advocated a policy of alignment with the Axis Powers and seeking financial support from Germany. However, when the ministry of the interior eventually released a statement on the banning of ZBOR on 16 November, it stated that the movement had not met the legal prerequisites for political activity and did not include the heavy charge of high treason. At the beginning of the following year, the majority of the arrested supporters of Ljotić were interned in the town of Brus, with some forcibly relocated to different places.¹²²

The true reason for the political liquidation of ZBOR seems to have been the regime's fear that Ljotić's movement might try to forcibly come into power and, due to their ideological affiliation, might be supported by Berlin in such an endeavour. In that sense, the Yugoslav regime's motives to neutralize ZBOR were similar to the motives that led King Carol II of Romania to clamp down on the Iron Guard,¹²³ although the strength of Ljotić's movement could by no means rival that of Codreanu's organization. Consequently, it is unlikely that ZBOR would have posed a serious threat, but the fears of Cveticović's government are understandable, especially in light of the movement's militancy. Cveticović claimed that he had „irrefutable evidence” about the ZBOR members' dangerous intentions and categorically declared that he would not „allow irresponsible factors and illegal movements, whether they come from the left or right.”¹²⁴ A piece of evidence that could support such a claim was an intercepted letter from a Zagreb-based lawyer to Ljotić, in which the former urged the latter to decisively deal with Prince Pavle following in the footsteps of the Iron Guard.¹²⁵ Even without such a direct reference, the Romanian government's experience with the Iron Guard must have exerted some influence on the official Belgrade's views on and treatment

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 61–65; Стефановић, *Збор Димитрија Љотића*, 81.

¹²¹ АЈ, Фонд 63, Министарство правде Кралевине Југославије, 43-132, Starešina Glavnog Državnog Tužioštva [nečítak potpis] Министарству правде, Број К.Р.186/1940, 7. 11. 1940.

¹²² Глигоријевић, „Напад љотићеваца”, 67–76; Стефановић, *Збор Димитрија Љотића*, 84–97.

¹²³ Cf. Marija Bukur, „Karol II, kralj Rumunije”, *Balkanski diktatori: Diktatori i autoritarni vladari jugoistočne Evrope*, priredio Bernd J. Fišer, preveo Mirko Rajić, (Beograd: IPS Media i Prosveta, 2009), 119–127.

¹²⁴ Mihailo Konstantinović, *Politika sporazuma: dnevničke beleške 1939–1941, londonske beleške 1944–1945*, prir. Radomir Konstantinović, (Novi Sad: Agencija Mir, 1998), 623–626, prilog 66.

¹²⁵ Драгосављевић, „Терор југоинтегралистичких снага”, 26–27.

of ZBOR. The international situation also played a role in doing away with ZBOR because it took place shortly before and during the first phase of the Italian military campaign in Greece, an event that brought the war to the very borders of Yugoslavia and significantly added to the government's unease. Any concerns about ZBOR's ties with Germany proved superfluous because the Nazi regime, just like in the case of the Iron Guard in Romania, prioritized its realpolitik requirements over ideological sympathies and was in no mood to jeopardize its relations with the conservative government in Belgrade for the sake of supporting Ljotić's politically marginal movement.

Summary

In 1927 in Romania, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu founded the Legion of the Archangel Michael, later known simply as the Legion or Legionary Movement, or most frequently as the Iron Guard after 1930, named after its military wing. His movement eventually became arguably the third largest fascist organization in interwar Europe, surpassed only by Hitler's National Socialists and Mussolini's Fascists. It became synonymous with fanaticism and eagerness to resort to violence. The Legion launched a campaign of terror eliminating and intimidating all their enemies. Two Romanian Prime Ministers (Duca and Calinescu) fell victim to the blood-thirsty legionaries. Yugoslavia and Romania were allied for almost the entirety of the interwar period. Therefore, the violent „troublemakers” from the Iron Guard were not seen favourably by the Yugoslav government and its representatives. The Legion was seen as a vessel of Germany, created and financed by Berlin in order to steer Romania away from the Little Entente and its traditional allies. Both the envoy to Bucharest, Jovan Dučić and the representative of the Central Press Bureau Milan Petrović were quite critical of Codreanu and his movement in their reports. These stances were echoed in the majority of Yugoslav press, both pro-government and oppositional. However, the Yugoslav National Movement Zbor, a fringe fascist organization, adopted a radically different stance. Sharing many ideological tenets with the much stronger Romanian organization, like the highly religious understanding of politics, the willingness to embrace violence as a regenerative force and the readiness to sacrifice for the high goals, Zbor supported the Iron Guard in its newspapers. Besides ideological affinity they were both in a similarly precarious position. They could somewhat count on German support, yet they were under pressure by their conservative authoritarian governments, which feared the rising German influence within their countries. Ultimately, this would lead to the downfall and outlawing of the both movements.

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