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GENDARMERIE UNITS IN THE TERRITORY OF THE MORAVA BANOVIINA (1929–1941)

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Abstract. This paper examines the formation, structure, and functioning of gendarmerie units in the territory of the Morava Banovina, within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, during the interwar period. It highlights the main issues faced by this military police force, which played a significant role in maintaining order and peace, as well as suppressing communist propaganda. The paper is based on archival materials and relevant literature.

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This study of the Gendarmerie of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia focuses on its distinctive role as a military-police force. Its uniqueness stemmed from its organization and structure, tailored to the duty of enforcing public order and maintaining peace, as well as combating infiltrated spies and terrorists. From its establishment in 1861, the gendarmerie attracted attention due to its specific organization and operational responsibilities. As an elite unit carrying out police duties, it frequently served as a key instrument of the ruling regime and was associated with repression and remembered negatively by parts of the population. The aim of this paper is to show how the unit was organized and what role it played in daily life in the territory of the Morava Banovina. The gendarmerie was a significant formation, especially considering the relations between the Banovina authorities and the army. This formation often represented a repressive force in the hands of district chiefs and was mostly remembered by the population in a negative context. The facts about the purpose of this unit suggest a broader understanding of its role and organization; therefore, there are justified reasons why the gendarmerie in the territory of the Morava Banovina is described in detail.

Literature on this topic provides a solid foundation for in-depth research, with a focus on the local level. In addition to published sources such as laws, regulations, and official bulletins, we had access to works by Žarko Braković and Tomislav Radović on the Gendarmerie in Serbia, as well as the work of Vladan Jovanović, which focuses mainly on the activities of the Gendarmerie against *komitadji* rebel units in southern Serbia. Valuable information can also be found in the chapter on the Gendarmerie in Mile Bjelajac's book on the Army of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Predrag Vajagić's work on the security bodies of the Danube Banovina is also noteworthy as a good example showing the relationship between the state and the Banovina authorities.

Taking the above into consideration, this paper seeks to address, first and foremost, the question of the organization of the Gendarmerie in the Morava Banovina, as well as the status of its members. Next, we examine the role of this formation in maintaining public order.

The Gendarmerie served as an auxiliary body of the state authorities for maintaining public order and peace and for safeguarding public interests.

A distinctive formation, it was an integral part of the standing army. In terms of its duties and professional training, it was subordinated to the Ministry of the Interior, while in terms of supply, discipline, personal relations, and military training, it was under the auspices of the Ministry of the Army and Navy.

In peacetime, as noted, the duties of the Gendarmerie included maintaining public order and peace and ensuring law enforcement. In the event of war, it was foreseen that the required number of gendarmes would be made available to the Minister of Defence (СВЈ, 1922, pp. 817–819; Закон о жандармерији, 1932, pp. 5–6).

Considering issues related to the organization and functioning of law enforcement services, it is necessary to briefly address the structure of the police in the territory of the Morava Banovina. A police administration body was established in the Banovina by order of the Minister of the Interior, with its headquarters in Niš, and its head responded directly to the ban. The police administration was divided into departments, and the departments, as needed, into offices.³ There were six departments: Administrative Department (administration secretariat, personnel office, administrative office, and archives); General Police Department (political office, office for travel documents, citizenship, and foreign nationals, issuing permits for various events, and registration); Criminal Police Department (investigation office, crime prevention office, petty crimes punishment, technical office, traffic, social hygiene office, public morality, special office, and prison supervision); Commercial Department; Accounting (accounting, executive office, and treasury); and State Police Guard and Agents (commander of the police guard, disciplinary officer, instructor, quartermaster, cavalry detachment, traffic detachment). In addition, there was an independent health office in the police administration, whose task was to provide health care to police officers.⁴ By a special decree, police substations were established in larger cities, with the task of maintaining order and peace, ensuring personal and property safety, suppressing anti-state propaganda, as well as handling police responsibilities concerning the press, enforcing weapons laws, overseeing inns and taverns, combating alcoholism, prostitution, and immoral behavior, supervising the implementation of health regulations, etc. In the district seat, vested with general administrative authority of the first degree, the head of the city police was directly subordinated to the ban, while in other towns these tasks were carried out by the district chief as the authorized body.⁵ A city police substation was formed in the Morava Banovina,

³ Уредба о устројству и делокругу управе полиције. *Службене новине Краљевине Југославије*, 1930, 18. март, р. 7.

⁴ Пропис о подели и унутрашњем уређењу полицијске управе у Нишу. *Службени лист Моравске бановине*, 1938, 3. март, pp. 1–2.

⁵ Уредба о устројству и делокругу предстојништва градске полиције. *Службене новине Краљевине Југославије*, 1929, 17. октобар, р. 3.

with its headquarters in Pirot. Additionally, railway police commissariats were established in Vrnjci, Niš, Prahovo, Senjski Rudnik, and Caribrod.⁶

Following the reassignment of veteran soldiers of the Kingdom of Serbia from the active army and the enlistment of 15,000 individuals from the territories of the former Austria-Hungary after the end of the First World War, a consolidated gendarmerie was formed, which—starting in 1920—numbered 20,000 people, and became the main pillar of the state authorities (Bjelajac, 1994, pp. 73–74). Initially, the Gendarmerie consisted of four brigades, one for each military district (CBЛ, 1922, p. 820). The brigades differed in terms of composition, ranging from two to four battalions. The First Gendarmerie Brigade, whose headquarters were in Belgrade, consisted of four battalions that covered the territory of Serbia and Vojvodina until the war of 1912 (CBЛ, 1922, p. 820). The battalion headquarters were located in Belgrade (1st Battalion), Novi Sad (2nd Battalion), Kragujevac (3rd Battalion), and Niš (4th Battalion). Each battalion was composed of companies; companies were divided into platoons, which had both permanent and temporary stations. Battalion commanders were subordinated to brigade commanders in terms of supply, training, discipline, and military service. However, regarding public safety duties, they answered to the heads of civilian administrative authorities. Similarly, company commanders carried out the orders of district chiefs, and platoon commanders operated under the direction of supervisors of the districts in which they were stationed (CBЛ, 1922, p. 834). In addition to their regular duties, district chiefs also supervised the work of the police and the gendarmerie, with many abusing their prerogatives, carrying out repression, and consciously breaking the rules of service. The gendarmerie was often used by district chiefs for forced tax collection and for suppressing protests within districts, leading to the gendarmerie building a very negative reputation among the general public (Вајагић, 2013, p. 414).

As the Gendarmerie developed, nine regiments were intended for deployment in the banovina capitals, and one in the state capital (Уредба о формацији жандармерије, 1930; Браковић & Радовић, 2011). The headquarters of the Morava (6th Gendarmerie) Regiment was located in Niš, and it commanded seven companies, one for each Banovina district. These companies consisted of the prescribed number of platoons (23), divided into stations and deployed across the districts. Available data on the number of personnel in gendarmerie stations suggest each station had five gendarmes, including a non-commissioned officer as commander.⁷ The 6th Gendarmerie Regiment included the Niš, Zaječar, Pirot, Čuprija, Kruševac, Podujevo, and Petrovac companies (Велојић, 2014, p. 147).

⁶ *Алманах Краљевине Југославије, Ойшїиа државна уїрава Бановине*, 1931, p. 327.

⁷ АЈ-74-78-380, Молба жандармеријског каплара Антуна Баруновића од 10. априла 1933.

Table 1. Formation of the Morava gendarmerie regiment⁸

Gend. regiment	Gend. company	Gend. Platoon	Gend. station		
Morava Gendarmerie Regiment	Niš	Niš	Niš		
			Malča		
			Donji Dušnik		
			Niška Banja		
			Gornja Toponica		
			Gadžin Han		
			Svrljig		
			Lalinac		
			Guševac		
		Prokuplje	Aleksinac		
			Bovan		
			Soko Banja		
			Čitluk		
			Žitkovac		
			Tešica		
		Aleksinac	Prokuplje		
			Toplička Vel. Plana		
			Blace		
			Beloljin		
			Žitni Potok		
			Oblačina		
	Kočane				
	Žitoradja				
	Barbatovac				
	Pirost	Pirost	Pirost		
			Temaska		
			Kalna		
			Sukovo		
			Krupac		
			Prisjan		
			Bela Palanka		
			Crvena Reka		
			Babušnica		
			Strelac		
			Morava Gendarmerie Regiment	Pirost	Caribrod
	Dobroševo				
	Smilovci				
	Kamenica				
	Rakita				
	Visočka Ržana				
	Knjaževac				
	Knjaževac	Knjaževac			
Balinac					
Donja Kamenica					
Vina					
Andrejevac					
Ošljane					
Zaječar		Zaječar			Zaječar
	Bor				
	Krivelj				
	Vražogrnac				
	Veliki Izvor				
	Vratarnica				
	Zaječar			Negotin	Negotin
Bračevac					
Salaš					
Jabukovac					
Brza Palanka					
Štubik					
Dušanovac					
Donji Milanovac		Donji Milanovac			Donji Milanovac
					Rudna Glava
					Majdanpek
					Tekija
	Kladovo				
	Velika Kamenica				
	Miroč				
	Klokočevac				
	Gornjane				

⁸ ВА, П 17, к. 12, ф. 1, д. 25, Шема формације Моравског жандармеријског пука; АЈ, 14 Министарство унутрашњих послова Краљевине Југославије, ф. 254-142, Распоред жандармеријских команди и станица.

Gend. regiment	Gend. company	Gend. Platoon	Gend. station		
Morava Gendarmerie Regiment	Zaječar	Boljevac	Boljevac		
			Zlot		
			Šarbanovac		
			Lukovo		
	Ćuprija	Ćuprija	Ćuprija		
			Paraćin		
			Donja Mutnica		
			Ravna Reka		
			Varvarin		
			Senje		
			Donji Krčin		
			Potočac		
			Jagodina		
			Dragoševac		
			Bagrdan		
			Rekovac		
			Despotovac	Despotovac	Despotovac
	Stenjevac				
	Veliki Popović				
	Panjevac				
	Rudnik Bare				
	Jezero				
	Svilajnac	Svilajnac			Svilajnac
			Bobovo		
			Jasenovo		
			Đurinac		
	Kruševac	Kruševac	Kruševac		
			Jasika		
			Velika Vrbnica		
			Gornji Stepoš		
			Dvorani		
			Veliki Šiljegovac		
			Ražanj		
			Vitoševac		
			Stalać		
			Brus	Brus	Brus
					Aleksandrovac
	Pleš				
	Dubci				
	Brzeće				

Gend. regiment	Gend. company	Gend. Platoon	Gend. station		
Morava Gendarmerie Regiment	Kraljevo	Kraljevo	Kraljevo		
			Bogutovac		
			Drakčići		
			Kamenica		
			Podunavci		
			Vitanovac		
			Trstenik		
			Velika		
			Drenova		
			Stopanja		
			Ladjevci		
			Vučitrn	Vučitrn	Vučitrn
					Bare
	Karača				
	Gornji Stanovci				
	Priluzje				
	Balinci				
	Stari Trg				
	Kuršumljija	Kuršumljija			Kuršumljija
					Merčez
					Banja
			Rača		
			Dobri Do		
	Podujevo	Podujevo	Podujevo		
			Kačikol		
			Prepolac		
			Palatna		
			Kraljevica		
			Lešnica		
	Petrovac	Petrovac	Petrovac		
			Šetonje		
			Melnica		
			Ranovac		
Rašanovac					

Gend. regiment	Gend. company	Gend. Platoon	Gend. station
Morava Gendarmerie Regiment	Petrovac	Kučevo	Kučevo
			Duboka
			Blagojev Kamen
			Neresnica
			Lešnica
			Golubac
			Dobra
			Klenje

Gend. regiment	Gend. company	Gend. Platoon	Gend. station
Morava Gendarmerie Regiment	Petrovac	Žagubica	Žagubica
			Veliko
			Laole
			Krepoljin
			Izvorica
			Krst Karaula
			Milanovac

The recruitment of candidates into gendarmerie units was carried out on a voluntary basis. All gendarmes were professionals (CBЛ, 1922, p. 824), required to serve for at least three years. In exceptional cases, when there was a shortage of professional gendarmes, soldiers completing their mandatory military service were also accepted, as stipulated by law. To remain in armed service, soldiers were often recruited into the gendarmerie immediately after completing their military service, following a procedure whereby they submitted a request to the gendarmerie regiment in the area where they had served. According to the Minister of Defence, previous practice showed that the best gendarmes turned out to be soldiers recruited immediately following their military service:⁹

“The conditions for admission to the gendarmerie were as follows:

1. The candidate must have completed military service in the regular forces of the main branches of the army and navy.
2. The candidate must be physically and mentally healthy, with a minimum height of 164 centimeters.
3. The candidate must be unmarried, a widower without children, or divorced by court decision without children.
4. The candidate must be of impeccable conduct and have a clear record.
5. The candidate must be under the age of 30.
6. The candidate must be able to read and write.
7. The candidate must provide a written statement confirming that he will remain in the gendarmerie for at least three years and serve wherever he is deployed.”¹⁰

⁹ ВА, П 17, к. 574, ф. 1, д. 7/8, Саопштење министра војног команданту V армијске области о пријему у жандармерију Ћ. Бр. 20388 од 5. августа 1931.

¹⁰ ВА, П 17, к. 574, ф. 1, д. 7/8, Саопштење министра војног команданту V армијске области о пријему у жандармерију Ћ. Бр. 20388 од 5. августа 1931.

Therefore, the authorities sought healthy and able-bodied individuals who were also literate, under 30 years of age, single, and childless, so they could dedicate themselves fully to the service. They also had to agree to serve in the location to which they were assigned. Consequently, unlike commissioned military officers, it was impossible for a gendarme to serve in his hometown or in the territory of the regiment to which he had submitted his application for acceptance. A case in point is that of Gendarmerie Corporal Anton Barunović, a native of Hrvatska Dubica, who served for eight years with the Pirot company, and was then transferred to Kruševac. Interestingly, there is evidence showing that transfers were carried out within the Morava Gendarmerie Regiment, which indicates its autonomy.¹¹ Officers were recruited from the military, after which they all underwent a preparatory period of one year before beginning their service in the gendarmerie (CB/I, 1922, p. 829). After ten years of service, permanent gendarmes were entitled to a pension, while temporary ones could be dismissed as soon as their unit was filled with suitable candidates in accordance with the organizational structure.

For their service, gendarmes received a salary and allowance payments. The base salary depended on the category and ranged from 2,100 to 8,500 dinars annually. The position salary ranged from 960 to 4,200 dinars per year, while the cost-of-living allowance was between 700 and 950 dinars per month. All permanent gendarmes and non-commissioned officers received an active service allowance in the gendarmerie, which, regardless of rank, amounted to 600–960 dinars. Commanders of special platoons also received an additional 500–800 dinars per month.¹² The salary of a probationary gendarme was 2,760 dinars per annum.¹³ One might assume that the salary of gendarmes deployed at stations was higher—due to exposure to potentially greater risks—than that of those stationed at the headquarters. However, the data show exactly the opposite. For example, here is the allowance for non-commissioned officers in various roles within the regiment: Sergeant Class II Petar Vukelić, serving at the school of the Morava Gendarmerie Regiment, received a monthly salary of 660 dinars, plus an additional 160 dinars for service and 990 dinars for living costs; Sergeant Jevđenije Stojanović, deployed at the Kočane station, had a base salary of 445 dinars, with an additional 130 dinars for service, 860 dinars for living expenses, and a family allowance of 140 dinars per person for four family members; Sergeant Obrad Milenković, serving at the regimental headquarters, received a base salary of 545 dinars, a service allowance of 130 dinars, and a cost-of-living allowance of 870 dinars.¹⁴

¹¹ AJ-74-78-382.

¹² AJ, 14-228-19, Правилник о припадљеностима жандарма специјалних водава; Закон о жандармерији 1929, p. 34.

¹³ ВА, П 17, к. 574, ф. 1, 7/8, Саопштење министра војног команданту V армијске области о пријему у жандармерију Ђ. Бр. 20388 од 5. августа 1931.

¹⁴ ИАН, Градска болница Ниш, к. 12, 74/4994.

In line with the intention of the state authorities to ensure that their officials, especially members of the military and gendarmerie, were regarded as part of the social elite, marriages were given special consideration. In this regard, the Regulation on Marriage for Members of the Gendarmerie was adopted in 1931, establishing the conditions under which a marriage could be concluded. According to the regulation, gendarmerie officers, as well as officers of other branches of the military serving in the gendarmerie, were not permitted to marry until they had been promoted to the rank of lieutenant. Additionally, officers were prohibited from marrying while undergoing advanced training. Reserve officers holding the rank of lieutenant were allowed to marry immediately upon activation.

Marriage decisions were made by the Minister of the Army and Navy for high-ranking gendarmerie officers, and by the Commander of the Gendarmerie for all others.¹⁵ The quote below illustrates the concern of superiors with social status:

“Every officer or military official, when submitting a report for the final approval of marriage with his chosen person, is required to provide information about that person, including details of her conduct and that of her parents, in order for the superior to assess whether she is suitable for the officer’s position and whether they can be admitted into officers’ society. Officers or military officials seeking final approval to marry the person in question must not have any outstanding debts, whether on their salary or otherwise, except for debts owed to the officers’ mutual aid society.”¹⁶

Non-commissioned gendarmerie officers, corporals, and permanent gendarmes were only permitted to marry after completing eight years of service. They were required to submit a written request to their superior, accompanied by evidence attesting the moral qualities of their prospective spouse. Interestingly, there was a provision stating that married non-commissioned gendarmerie officers could not be promoted to officer rank, which reveals a deep divide not only in the relations between commissioned and non-commissioned officers, but also between their wives.¹⁷ Moreover, these regulations were particularly strict, as any violation resulted in immediate dismissal from service.

The headquarters of the Morava Gendarmerie Regiment were located in a building in the Palilula neighbourhood of Niš until 1939, when a purpose-built

¹⁵ ВА, П 17, к. 79. ф. 2, д. 6/1-3, Уредба пов. бр. 3025 о женидби жандармеријских официра, официра других родова војске на служби у жандармерији, војних чиновника, жандармеријских подофицира, каплара и жандарма од 8. фебруара 1931.

¹⁶ ВА, П 17, к. 79. ф. 2, д. 6/1-3, Уредба пов. бр. 3025 о женидби жандармеријских официра, официра других родова војске на служби у жандармерији, војних чиновника, жандармеријских подофицира, каплара и жандарма од 8. фебруара 1931.

¹⁷ ВА, П 17, к. 79. ф. 2, д. 6/1-3, Уредба пов. бр. 3025 о женидби жандармеријских официра, официра других родова војске на служби у жандармерији, војних чиновника, жандармеријских подофицира, каплара и жандарма од 8. фебруара 1931.

facility for personnel accommodation was constructed near the engineering unit and the “Књаз Mihajlo” Barracks (Велојић, 2023, p. 104). The construction of the building, completed in 1939, cost 3,980,000 dinars.¹⁸ The gendarmerie barracks housed the regiment headquarters, as well as the Niš company, platoon, and station. The school that trained Morava Regiment recruits and patrol leaders was also located in the same building. The school commander held the rank of gendarmerie company commander, and the teaching staff included one officer and the necessary number of non-commissioned officers (СВЛ, 1922, p. 837).

Gendarmes of the Morava Regiment were primarily engaged in uncovering Bulgarian spies and komitadji rebel groups, as well as in suppressing communist propaganda. Their foremost duty involved securing the border area and preventing subversive activities launched from Bulgaria. In particular, Italian support¹⁹ had emboldened Bulgarian terrorists to intensify their activities along the border. In 1931, there were frequent incidents involving Italian spies sent to the Yugoslav-Bulgarian border area, about which the authorities of the Morava Banovina were informed through their district chiefs.²⁰ Additionally, intelligence agents operating in Bulgaria made a significant contribution to the prevention of Bulgarian terrorist activity (Миленковић, 2018, pp. 158–159; Ристић, 2019, pp. 133, 141–144). According to reports, plots were uncovered to assassinate prominent individuals and sabotage key infrastructure on Yugoslav soil, with potential targets including the railway line from Caribrod to Niš and international trains.²¹

At the VMRO congress held in April 1932 in Ćustendil (near the border, where the organization had its strongest foothold), it was decided to continue terrorist activity not only in southern Serbia, but throughout Yugoslavia, targeting both buildings and prominent individuals. Plots for assassinations in Greece were suspended since, as stated, only 120,000 Bulgarians remained there, making it easier to infiltrate assassins into Serbia via Greek territory (Извештаји МИП, III, 2008, pp. 132–133).

Accordingly, there were numerous assassination attempts and illegal crossings by komitadji rebels into Serbia. In September, several terrorists were arrested in Zaječar for planting a bomb on a train from Niš, with additional bomb attacks occurring in the Kratovo region. Several groups originating from Bulgaria were prevented from jeopardizing the railway lines from Niš to Vranje and from Caribrod to Niš (Извештаји МИП, III, 2008, pp. 309–310). The following year,

¹⁸ ИАН, Градско поглаварство Ниш Технички одсек (ГРАПО ТО), 3/32. Грађевинска дозвола за подизање зграде жандармерије бр. 5129 из 1939. године.

¹⁹ According to intelligence data, Italy actively supported both the VMRO-Mikhailovist and Protogerovist wings (Мићић, 2018, p. 81).

²⁰ ИАЗ, Општина Књажевац, ф. 1, А/12, Начелство среза Заглавског пов. бр. 17 од 12. јануара 1931.

²¹ ИАЗ, Општина Књажевац, ф. 1, А/12, Начелство среза Заглавског пов. бр. 156 од 25. фебруара 1931.

bombs were planted in the courtyards of the Officers' Club in Niš and a private house (Извештаји МИП, IV, 2009, p. 194). These and similar incidents, common in the border region during this period, demonstrated the helplessness or lack of seriousness on the part of the Bulgarian authorities in maintaining order along the border. The activities of the gendarmerie and military units resulted in numerous casualties among border soldiers, gendarmes, and civilians. Research by Vladan Jovanović lists several hundred gendarmes killed in the period leading up to 1935 (Јовановић, 2007, pp. 15–19).

At the outset of the Second World War, especially after the fall of France, official Bulgarian authorities, along with the public and the press, began to express increasingly open pro-German sentiments. King Boris himself showed growing interest in states pursuing territorial revision (Попов et al., 2008, pp. 323–324).²² The Yugoslav embassy in Sofia reported in 1940 that

“Bulgarian officials have stated that the issue of revision is crucial and that Bulgaria will seek understanding from those who may support it. This stance, which marks a departure from the previous cautious restraint, arose from the general belief in Bulgaria that German victory was now definitively assured. By aligning with Germany, Bulgaria expects to achieve its national claims.”²³

The German side expressed satisfaction with Bulgaria's stance; relations between the two countries improved, leading Bulgaria to join the Tripartite Pact on March 1, 1941. Despite officially vowing to adhere by the pact with Yugoslavia, Bulgaria served as a German base during the April War. Detailed reports sent by the command of the Morava Gendarmerie Regiment to their superiors contained news about the movement of primarily German units through Bulgaria and their deployment. Immediately after the coup of March 27, 1941, gendarmerie units started receiving reports about cargo trains loaded with German military equipment moving towards the border, as well as patrols of German and Bulgarian military units along the border.²⁴

²² Stevan Pavlović points out the economic factors that led Bulgaria to align more closely with Germany: “The depression brought Bulgaria closer to Germany than was the case with other Balkan countries. Clearing, introduced shortly after the arrival of the Nazis, favored Bulgarian exports. In 1929, Germany was already buying 30% of Bulgarian exports and providing an almost equal share of its imports. Ten years later, the then larger Reich bought almost 68% of its exports and provided 65.5% of its imports. Germany was its largest trading partner and weapons seller” (Павловић, 2001, p. 419). This was supported by Germany's efforts in the 1930s to destabilize the Little Entente by interfering in the situation in the Balkans and fostering closer ties with revisionist Bulgaria and Hungary” (Ristović, 1991, pp. 13–14).

²³ AJ-37-28-207.

²⁴ “Today, at the Dragoman station, located 18 km from our border, a freight train with 30 railcars carrying German soldiers in full military gear was observed. The train included 10 railcars loaded with armed vehicles. Upon arrival, the train remained at the station; only a soldier was seen getting off and then returning to the car. The locomotive was immediately

Given Bulgaria's conduct, the Morava Gendarmerie Regiment received special orders, as outlined in the mobilization instructions. The deployment of this unit was intended to prevent sabotage by agents operating on behalf of Bulgaria. Special attention was paid to the movement of foreign military deserters, foreign officers, engineers, railroad workers, and civilians residing near the border. Special emphasis was placed on preparedness to conduct intelligence and security operations:

“Even in peacetime, the gendarmerie command ensures that the gendarmerie is capable and ready, among other things, to perform the following tasks:

1. Gathering military intelligence on the armed forces of neighbouring countries, while adhering to the guidelines for intelligence service. All gendarmes must be familiar with the methods of gathering such information.
2. Preventing surveillance conducted by agents and representatives on behalf of neighbouring countries and, in general, foreign countries. In this regard, all gendarmes must be trained to quickly and efficiently track down such agents and representatives.
3. Exercising special control over cross-border traffic and the border crossings between our country and neighbouring countries, with all border gendarmerie stations being instructed in this task.”²⁵

In the event of war, gendarmerie companies were placed under the command of relevant military units and participated in defending the border until the arrival of the operational forces.

The fight against communists was also a high-priority task for the gendarmerie. A well-known operation involved the arrest of 11 students from the teachers' school in Aleksinac for distributing and reading books and letters with communist content. The report states that there was no danger of communism spreading among the peasants, as the focus shifted to unemployed workers and students, so too did the focus of the Gendarmerie:

disconnected at the station entrance. Along the border of the Caribrod sector, in the direction of Mount Stara Planina, the movement of small detachments of German and Bulgarian soldiers was observed. According to reports received from Bulgaria, there is public dissatisfaction over the arrival of German troops” (BA, П 17. к. 6. ф. 23d. 3–1. Извештај Министарства унутрашњих послова Главном генералштабу пов. бр. 11573 од 28. марта 1941). “At 4 o'clock this morning, the movement of 36 railcars was observed in Bulgaria, of which 24 headed to Belogradchik and from there to the village of Rajinovac (about 18 km from the border), and 12 to the farm (4 km from Kadibogaz). A Bulgarian financier informed our patrol that Bulgaria was mobilizing, but this has not been confirmed. A gendarmerie train conductor who was in Dragoman yesterday saw 30 railcars with fully equipped German soldiers. The railcars had two rows of beds (BA, П 17. к. 26a, ф. 4, д. 2–1. Извештај Команде жандармерије Начелнику генералштаба пов. бр. 1395 од 29. марта 1941).

²⁵ АЈ-14-228-14, Упут за рад жандармерије, полицијских и општинских власти у мобилно и ратно доба.

“The peasantry is not inclined towards communism, nor is there any likelihood that it could be implemented in the villages. The greatest support for communist action comes from unemployed intellectuals and workers. The fact that these students of the teachers’ school in Aleksinac began to warm up to communist ideas is the fault of their teachers, who provided weak supervision over their students and did not point out the harmfulness of reading literature written in the communist spirit.”²⁶

It further states that

“Communist ideas are promoted by a small number of university students from big cities, but their influence is minimal, because citizens, peasants, and workers are property owners, and are punished even for the smallest piece of land or livestock. Moreover, the people are politically aware that only a strong and well-organized state can defend against the external enemy, and that introducing communism would create disarray leading to the downfall of both the state and the individual.”²⁷

At these posts, the gendarmerie closely cooperated with the police, as well as with the Sokol societies, through joint events and lectures. In its report, the Pirot company emphasized the influence that Sokol societies had in the surrounding villages and suggested that this influence should be utilized. To that end, it was deemed necessary to provide both material and moral support to the Sokol units, and teachers were encouraged to take a more active role:

“In the villages, there are Sokol societies and rural Sokol units, which could be used to fight communism directly. These organizations are highly nationalistic and enjoy strong influence among the people. By organizing educational courses and lectures, festivals, and activities during the winter months, much could be done for the national and socio-cultural uplifting of the people in the fight against communist and, more broadly, extremist propaganda. There are opportunities to develop such organizations in all places where schools exist and where teachers are intellectually capable of leading them and organizing educational lectures and courses. The organization of Sokol societies and groups in villages should be encouraged both by Sokol officials from towns and by the authorities themselves. It should be the duty of every teacher to organize a Sokol society in their village and to work actively with the population to promote education, culture, and national awareness, not only with children in schools. The most effective fight against communism is the cultural and material upliftment of the people and the reduction of unemployment. For this, a well-thought-out educational campaign is needed, led by teachers and supported through agricultural and household courses in the villages, raising

²⁶ BA, II 17, к. 80, f. 17, 1/7.

²⁷ BA, II 17, к. 80, f. 17, 1/7.

prices for agricultural and livestock products, and launching public works in all underdeveloped areas.”²⁸

In the introductory part, we outlined the issue and set the task of determining the organizational and structural framework of the Gendarmerie in the territory of the Morava Banovina, its position and status, as well as its role in the life of a large part of central Serbia. In conclusion, we can state that, as a specific military-police formation, the Gendarmerie in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia represented, on the one hand, a security factor, but that on the other it was also remembered as a repressive force, particularly when operating under the authority of district chiefs. In addition to its role in preventing terrorist actions originating from Bulgaria, the Morava Gendarmerie Regiment was primarily used to suppress political opponents, especially communists. This function could not have been carried out without cooperation with local authorities, schools, and Sokol societies. We also examined the position of Gendarmerie members, which, due to the specific nature and purpose of their duties, was regulated through normative and legal acts. Focusing in particular on its institutional status and the status of its members, the paper shows that the Gendarmerie was an indispensable component of the security system of the Morava Banovina in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

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Жандармеријске јединице на територији Моравске бановине (1929–1941)

Резиме

Као специфична формација, жандармерија је представљала саставни део сталне војске, док је у погледу своје употребе била потчињена министру унутрашњих послова. У мирнодопским условима, задатак ове јединице био је одржавање реда и мира, као и спровођење закона. Према организационој подели, жандармерија се састојала од пукова, који су одговарали административној подели земље на бановине. На територији Моравске бановине био је стациониран Моравски (6.) жандармеријски пук, који је обухватао седам чета. Задаци са којима се ова јединица сусретала укључивали су заштиту граничних подручја од деловања агената и комитских побуњеничких група из Бугарске, као и борбу против комунистичке пропаганде. Жандармеријске јединице често су представљале репресивну силу у рукама окружних начелника, који су, занемарујући службене прописе, преузимали улогу полицијских органа.

Кључне речи: Моравска бановина; жандармерија; Војска Краљевине Југославије; комунистичка пропаганда.



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