

Racial legislation, propaganda and measures in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and in the German, Italian and Hungarian occupational zones in Slovenia during the WW II¹

Yugoslav state was created in the wake of World War I from parts of the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy and of some lands that were in the 19th Century part of the Ottoman Empire. In 1929 King Alexander suspended the constitution and the parliament and proclaimed a royal dictatorship. In 1934 Croatian and Macedonian extremists organized the King's assassination in Marseille. Polarized country with huge nationalistic quarrels and authoritarian regimes in the second half of the thirties was more and more under the influence of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Anti-Semite legislation was introduced, Concentration camp in Bileća for the opponents of the regime established and Parliament was dissolved at the end of thirties.

The war in Yugoslavia began on April 6th 1941 with bombing Belgrade. Yugoslavia was quickly defeated, surrendering in Belgrade on April 17. The government fled into exile. When the Axis powers in April 1941 invaded Yugoslavia, Ustasha regime seized power in Croatia and "Independent Croatian State" under German and Italian control was set up. Other parts of Yugoslavia were divided among occupiers.

In Slovenia all of three occupying forces wanted to include the occupied territories into their respective states permanently, extending their administration to the Slovenian territory and including it into their social order.

Illustration:



Occupying zones in Slovenia.

¹ Repe, Božo. *Racial legislation, propaganda and measures in the German, Italian and Hungarian occupational zones in Slovenia during the WW II: prispevek na 20th International Congress of Historical Sciences, Sydney, 3-9 July 2005*. Sydney, 2005.

The Hungarians annexed Prekmurje by a law adopted by Hungarian Parliament on December 1941. They also annexed other territories of former Yugoslavia: Baranja, Bačko and Medmurje). Prekmurje was not governed as a single administrative district. One of them (Murska Sobota with its broader surroundings) was annexed to the district Vas (Vasvármegye), with the centre in Szombathely and the second one to the Zala district (Zalamegye) with the centre in Zalaegerszeg. This administrative division dates back to Austro-Hungarian times. The Hungarians namely regarded the occupied territories as the return of the territory, which they had lost with the Trianon treaty after World War I. Hungarians regarded the people of Prekmurje as being Vends, a special nation with its own language, which adopted Hungarian culture during the long centuries of living together. According to them, the only missing element for complete assimilation was the replacement of the "Vend language" with the Hungarian. Former Yugoslav officials and teachers, colonists and other immigrants (about 600 of them), who moved to Prekmurje between the two Wars on the basis of racial measures were confined in the camp Sárvár. Influence of members of the Hungarian fascist party - the Arrow Cross Party (so called "nyílas") raised. After the German occupation of Hungary and Prekmurje, most of the Prekmurje Jews (452 persons) were imprisoned in concentration camps. 328 of them were then killed in Auschwitz-Birkenau in April 1944.

The territories occupied by Germans were given the same status as Alsace, Lorraine and Luxembourg. The plan was to annex them formally to Germany as quickly as possible and thus become the southern border of the German Reich. This would have meant a complete elimination of Slovenians as a nation (ethnocide). A special civil administration introduced in 1941 was supposed to be of a temporary nature. According to German plans, the territory was to be annexed to the Reich on October 1, 1941. Until then, the administration of the occupied territories was to be adapted to the one in the neighbouring districts of Štajerska - Steiermark and Koroška – Carinthia (which was actually carried out) and thus the Slovenian question "permanently" solved.

The German leadership assigned the responsibility for the solution of the "Slovenian question" to various offices under the leadership of Heinrich Himmler, the state secretary for reinforcement of germanness. The plan for the elimination of Slovenian nation was based on three basic elements: mass deportations of the Slovenians (between 220 000 and 260 000), the settlement of Germans (about 80 000) and a complete assimilation of the people who stayed in their homes because they could meet the required political and racial criteria.

First they brought people to collecting camps from where they were shipped to Germany, Croatia and Serbia. The deportation was to be carried out in several waves: the first to come were the nationally feeling Slovenes who were followed by those who moved to Slovenian territory after 1914, and finally by those whose estates and property were needed for the German colonisation. This plan was intended to be carried out in five months. Due to the problems of transportation, the uprising of the population² and because

² Resistance was organized by Slovene Liberation Front (first named Anti-Imperialist Front), established on April 27th 1941 in Ljubljana. Slovene Communists took the initiative. Christian Socialists, the liberal Sokol (Falkon) patriotic gymnastic society members and group of intellectuals were founders of Liberation Front. The actual uprising extend after German attack on Soviet Union to most Slovene lands. The partisan movement liberated Slovenia, coordinating operations with Tito's National Liberation Struggle in Yugoslavia, which was since 1943 a part of allied Antifascist Coalition. During the war Communist Party in Slovenia, which organized and operationally controlled the resistance, began articulating revolutionary goals. In March 1943 it persuaded non - Communists in the Liberation Front to submit to unity under Communist leadership. Liberation Front had the support of the majority of Slovenian population, but not all in Slovenia joined to it. Former middle - class parties and leadership of Catholic Church in Ljubljana Province (Provinzia di Lubiana)

Croatia and Serbia were unable to accept as many deportees as planned, about 80 000 Slovenians were deported (about 17 000 of them fled to Italian occupation territory). 12 000 Germans from Slovenia (Gotschee Deutsch) were settled, mostly to the borderland with the Independent State of Croatia, along the rivers Sava and Sotla in agreement with the Italian occupational authorities.

The Nazi order, including the mobilization into the German army was introduced. Next to the so-called Volksdeutscher (German minority), also a part of Slovenian population was granted - though only conditionally and after a political and racial assessment – German citizenship. The use of the Slovenian language was forbidden, geographical and personal names were germanized, and the occupied territories looked like as if they were German.

Illustrations:

a) A FRAGMENT FROM THE REPORT OF A FEDERAL OFFICIAL OF THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR WITH THE HEAD OF THE CIVIL ADMINISTRATION FOR LOWER STYRIA DATED MAY 30, 1941 ABOUT THE MASS EVICTIONS OF THE SLOVENIANS³

The most difficult problem to be solved within the Lower Styria is to cleanse the lower Styrian national body from the foreign Slav element, which cannot be submitted to the Germanising process. If the regermanisation of the lower Styria is to succeed at all, and this south-eastern end of the German Reich is to become a reliable barrier against the ever tumultuous Balkans, the local population has to be freed of every substance which either racially or behaviourally sabotages germanisation. The task of the Styrian Patriotic Association can only succeed if the ground is accordingly cleansed.

Therefore a deportation (removal) of the population is planned, which will be carried out in four stages and in a way which has proved successful in similar activities in other regained territories of the Reich (especially in the east).

The deportations to Serbia and partially to Croatia will be carried out in trains containing about 1000 persons. The time of its beginning and its extend (for the time being one or two trains daily are planned) have not been determined yet....

in collaboration with occupiers organized the resistance (counterrevolution) to the Liberation Front. First in 1942 the Village Guard (Milizia Volontaria Anticomunista) and later (after Italian capitulation in September 1943) the Home-Guard (Landeswehr) mounted armed opposition to the leftist character as well as the excesses of the Partisan resistance. This led to a civil war in a part of Slovenian territory. The partisan movement won, middle – class politicians and Home-Guardists after unsuccessful attempt to establish their own parliament and government in May 1945, mostly fled to Austria together with German Army. They were sent back by the British and majority of them, treated as traitors, were executed without a trial.

In September 1943 a wartime assembly had already come to represent Slovenians in Partisan – held areas. Delegates were sent to Antifascist Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ), the central political and representative body of the National Liberation Struggle of Yugoslavia (established in November 1942 in Bihać, Bosnia). AVNOJ on his second meeting on November 29th, 1943 in Jajce, Bosnia, proclaimed itself supreme legislative and executive body under Tito's leadership. Royal government in exile later accepted the Jajce provisions. In 1945, the participants of Yalta Conference requested that AVNOJ include also representatives of other political parties outside the liberation movement (those who had not collaborated with Axis powers). At its third meeting, held in Belgrade in August 1945, AVNOJ officially became a provisional Parliament of Yugoslavia. In Slovenia, on May 5th, 1945 the Liberation Front established a Slovene government. In November 1945 a federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia was proclaimed and Slovenia became one of the six republics. The settlement of borders at the Paris Peace Conference in September 1947 was - due to active resistance during the war – quite favourable for Slovenia. It was unable to obtain Carinthian Slovenian lands in Austria (Austria was considered a victim, not an aggressor in WWII) and also not some territories in Italy, including port Trieste, but it did acquire most territories that had belonged to Italy between both of World Wars.

³ Tone Ferenc: Okupacijski sistemi na Slovenskem (Occupational Systems on Slovenian Territory), Modrijan, Zgodovinski viri, Ljubljana 1997.

According to the plan, the deportations will take place in four waves.

b)



Unknown girl, waiting for the deportation, near Celje.

c) Fragment from the interview with Cveto Kobal⁴

“After a few days they crowded us together for transport. About 1000 people were transported in one single train. The drive took two days. On the way some people already died in our wagon. There was terrible heat, unbearable conditions. The wagons were cattle trucks, without any possibility to use toilet. Then we carried the dead bodies from the railway station to the top of the hill, where concentration camp was. Just before we came to Mauthausen, one prisoner was shot only because he picked up green apple from the ground...”

Speaking from my experience, I would like to say to the younger generations how necessary it is to fight against any violence. No violence, even with the best of intentions, can't be justified...”



⁴ Cveto Kobal was born on 15.12. 1921. He became a member of resistance movement in Slovenia in 1941. In January 1941 he was arrested and sent to the concentration camp in Auschwitz, and afterward to Mauthausen. In the spring of 1944 he escaped from working camp in Linz (Austria) and joined partisans in Slovenia. In June 1944 illegal partisan printing works published his brochure on Mauthausen, which is first known published text about one of the most horrible concentration camps.

Front page of the brochure on Mauthausen, written by Cveto Kobal in June 1944, first known published text about one of the most horrible concentration camps.

d)



Poster with the names of killed hostages in German occupying zone.

After a short military administration, the Italian occupiers transformed their occupied territories into the so-called Province of Ljubljana (Provincia di Lubiana), which became one of the Italian provinces. It was led by the High Commissioner (first this was Emilio Grazioli who was later followed by Giuseppe Lombrosa and finally by general Riccardo Moizo). Annexation of the Italian occupational zone to Italy was based on the King's order dating from May 3, 1941 the so called Province of Ljubljana The Chamber of Fascies and corporations confirmed his order on June 10, 1941, whereas the legislative commission for internal affairs and legislation within the Senate did not acknowledge it until June, 10, 1943, whereby the King's order became a law. Mussolini hastened to with the annexation because he feared Hitler could further reduce the territory previously allotted to him. Provincia di Lubiana gained in some areas an autonomous status which manifested itself in a different name for the person in charge (High Commissioner as opposed to Prefect as called in other parts of Italy), in bilingualism, in formal co-administration by the advisory committee for the Province of Ljubljana whose members were Slovenians and finally by the fact, that Slovenian citizens did not have to serve the army.

In the legal field, the former Yugoslav legislation was preserved to a high extent. Italians were appointed as the heads of local districts, whereas the lower ranks (mayors) could also be occupied by the Slovenes, after they had sworn to the Italian King. In the areas of economy, finances, banking and insurance the Italian fascist corporate system was introduced. Parallel to Yugoslav, Italians gradually set up their own administration, however, due to lack of Italian staff, there were more Slovene than Italian officials in the Province of Ljubljana. Apart from the army, there were four other types of units responsible for peace-keeping: the police, gendarmerie (the "carabinieri"), financial guards and on the frontier with the German occupational zone and along the former Rapallo border, the frontier police, which was preserved and which thus separated the Province of Ljubljana from Italy. All those units were Italian, however, the carabinieri and the police also included former Yugoslav policemen (of 1350 members of the police, 322 were Slovenians; a further 204 were given a salary although they were not on duty). Along with that, Italian court-martials responsible for the offences perpetrated or only planned against the Italian army or its members started to operate. In practice this meant that they were responsible for any form of opposition towards the Italian occupation; the law-court in Ljubljana

handled 13 186 persons until the capitulation of Italy, out of which 8737 were found guilty and sentenced.

The fascist party introduced all the organizations, which existed in Italy, to Slovenia, as well. Membership of those parties was restricted to Italian officials; however, young people attending schools and universities as well as the members of some women's and workers' organizations, were also accepted in order to speed up the process of assimilation. After hesitating for some time, the Italians also allowed the so-called Voluntary Anti-communist Militia (*Milizia volontaria anticommunistica*) to be formed; its main task was to fight the partisans.

The Italians, being so sure of the predominance of their civilization and the fascist ideology (according to the well-known diary of Galeazzo Ciano, the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs) planned to carry out ethnocide over the Slovenians over a longer period of time than the Germans. In the Italian occupational territory similar plans as in German were made in spring 1942: there were planned mass deportations of the Slovenians and Italian colonisation of the emptied Slovene territories. However, Italy surrendered before the above plans could be implemented. Yet, the Italians succeeded to deport about 25 000 thousands Slovenes into Italian concentration camps. The preserved documents let us believe that in case of their victory, the Italians would have introduced the same denationalising regime as the one that was carried out in the Slovenian coastal area and Istria during both World Wars.

Illustrations:

a) Report of the high Commissioner for the Province of Ljubljana, August 24, 1942 on a Programme of activities in the region⁵

The Kingdom of Italy

High Commissioner for the Province of Ljubljana; The Office: personal secretariat

*No 1387/2 confidential
To the Ministry of Interior
The Cabinet*

*August 24, 1942/XX
Highly confidential*

Regarding the confidential document No 1362/2, dated August 16, I allow myself to give an outline of the programmes of activities I intend to carry out in this province.

- a) *The problem of the Slovenian population could be solved in three ways:*
- 1) *By its destruction;*
 - 2) *By deportations;*
 - 3) *By removal of opposition elements, which could be reached by carrying out a hard, yet fair policy of bringing together, with the purpose of laying*

⁵ While Italian "soft" occupational policy was unsuccessful, military and civil authorities, following the instructions of Mussolini, took the same measures as Germans in their occupational zone: shooting of hostages and mass executions of captured partisans, illegal activists of Liberation Front, inhabitants of places suspected of allegiance to the liberation movement but also completely innocent persons (in the total period of the Italian occupation of the Ljubljana Province the Italian armed forces shot at least 416 individual persons and 238 groups with 1153 persons, a total therefore of 1569 persons, not taking into account those convicted by the military court in Ljubljana, and mass deportation. Final goal was to "clean" Slovenian national territory and prepare it for Italian settlement after war.

the foundations for a useful and fair cooperation. This would give us a possibility for assimilation, which could be achieved only with time. Thus we have to decide which way we want to choose.

- b) For mass deportations of the population we would have to follow a programme prepared in advance, which would have to be carried out within the entire province. It would be better to set up work camps instead of internment camps in which people do nothing but idle.*
- c) For the purpose of replacing Slovenian population with the Italian, the following has to be determined:*
 - 1) Where Slovenian population should be moved;*
 - 2) Where suitable Italian population should be found in which case it has to be considered, that the people from the northern and the central areas are the most appropriate ones to be settled in Slovenian territories;*
 - 3) If the area along the border is to be completely Italianised, its width is to be determined (20 to 30 km);*
 - 4) If the entire Slovenian population is to be moved, the process should be started in the areas along the border, where Slovenians live under Italy.*

It is my opinion that a complete or even a partial relocation of the Slovenian population would hardly be possible during the war.

b) Don Pietro Brignoli⁶: Holly mass for my shooting dead (fragment from diary)

“25. August. Desperate women. One of them is asking for justice. In the village, we just come in, we imprisoned all men, as elsewhere. At the beginning of the operations people didn't get anxious when we imprisoned adult men, because they knew nothing about what to expect. As news about what was going on spread around,⁷ some kind of desperation wave rose. The same was in this “liberated” village. Because they took men and guarded them in the meadow, women gathered not far away, they plead for the men and cried with such emotions, that even less sensitive soldiers were struck by that. From time to time someone scold this miserable group and threatened that all of man will be shot if women would not pleading. For a moment, all became silent, than we heard restraint sobbing and in the end they cried even more desperately than they did before...”

After Italian capitulation, the former Italian occupational territory was taken over by the Germans. Due to their military weakness, the Germans were forced to acknowledge the existence of the Slovenians and introduce an occupying policy, which differed from the one, which they applied on the territories, which were planned to be annexed to the German Reich.

The Germans promised to the Slovenians within the Province of Ljubljana a kind of autonomy and restoration of the former Austro-Hungarian district of Krain. A step in this

⁶ Don Pietro Brignoli was curate in Italian occupation army in Slovenia and Croatia. During the war he was writing a diary, which was published in the sixties. He was loyal to Italy, but he also described and condemned the cruel treating of Italian soldiers with civil population during the Italian offensive in summer and autumn of 1942: burning of villages, shooting hostages, deportations in concentration camps, robbery... Brignoli for all the horrors he saw, blamed the war itself and he was somehow searching for the answer of his distress in war as the universal culprit.

⁷ Shooting of hostages or sending people to the concentration camps (remark B.R.)

direction was the appointment of the district administration, which was led by a president. After a consultation between the Nazi officials and the Ljubljana bishop (an unusual case of cooperation), Leon Rupnik was appointed for the president. Rupnik was an aging general of the Austro-Hungarian and Yugoslav army who under Italians served as the Ljubljana mayor. Fascinated by the power of Germans, his ideas were highly pro Germanic and conservative, based on the mottos of mother, homeland, God. His orientation being expressively anti-communist and anti-Jewish, he established collaborationist units called Home-guard, which were fighting against the partisans. The Germans did formally acknowledge Italian sovereignty, yet they prevented the effective take-over of administration, they disarmed the gendarmes and the fascists and fired Italian officials. They supported Rupnik who refused a renewed arrival of Italian officials. The regional administration assumed a similar form to the one it had as the former ban's dominion within Yugoslavia. The administration was in fact a "controlled head" since a great deal of the territory was controlled by the partisans who set up their own administration. The district authorities thus only controlled Ljubljana and the most important railway and roadside posts. In spite of the formally Slovene management, the German superiority could be seen everywhere. So, the judiciary system in Ljubljana was controlled by the High Commissariat in Trieste (the seat of the Adriatic coastal region). The police was German, led by the SS general Erwin Rösner who was under the immediate command of Himmler. Slovenian uniformed police did exist along with the German, yet it was supervised by the German officer for connections. It also had its political section that had a task to deal with the members of the resistance movement. As the president, Rupnik was supported (similarly as the Italian Prefects in other regions) by German advisors whose task it was to make sure that German policy was carried out. The welfare state Italy had no competences (though the territory formally belonged to Italy). For the reasons of rationality, the Germans preserved lira as the currency, and also the postal and banking system remained to be Italian. Such concept was preserved till the end of the war. Before the withdrawal of the Germans, the Slovenian middle-class politicians tried to take over power from Rupnik (whom they previously supported), set up their own parliament, renamed the Slovenian Home-guard into Slovene National Army and then awaited the Allies. Due to the superiority of the Partisans their plan failed and they withdrew along with the Germans and the Home-guard.