

*Bojan Godeša\**

**“Theirs We Do Not Want, Ours We Do Not Give.” The Slovene Resistance Movement and the Question of Borders During the Occupation 1941–1945\*\***

Contemplations on the extent of territorial claims made by the resistance movement can be defined by way of a maxim that became best known after Tito’s speech at the ceremony marking the second anniversary of the formation of the 1st Dalmatian Brigade on Vis on 12 September 1944, when he addressed the territorial claims for the first time:

“We are approaching a time when we will have to speak about the borders of our state. We have not addressed this subject throughout the war; but, I must say a few words about it. Our people have fought for freedom, for independence, for a better and happier future. However, the people have been fighting also for the freedom of our brothers that have suffered under a foreign yoke for decades. Our brothers in Istria, the Slovene Littoral and in Carinthia must and will be liberated through this fight and will live in freedom with their brothers in their homeland. This is the wish of us all and the wish of those over there. Theirs we do not want, ours we do not give. I have had to touch upon this question because we were too modest in this regard throughout the war.”<sup>1</sup>

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1 Izvori, XIX, 122. Titov govor na proslavi ob drugi obletnici ustanovitve I. dalmatinske NOV brigade 12. septembra 1944 na Visu.

It has long been clear that Tito was not original in his speech, at least from 1966 onwards, when Janko Pleterški drew attention to the words of Boris Kidrič spoken at a conference of the Communist Party of Slovenia on Cink in the summer of 1942<sup>2</sup> regarding the principle about the border question (“We do not want to give away anything that is ours and we do not want anything that belongs to others”).<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Prežihov Voranc concluded his text in a brochure entitled *O slovenskih mejah* (On Slovene Borders), which was written in 1942, with the wording “I do not want what is not mine – I will not give what is.”<sup>4</sup>

More recently Igor Grdina has pointed out that the motto “Theirs we do not want, ours we do not give” was used even before the war by the Serbian politician Milan Stojadinović.<sup>5</sup> This leads us to believe that this is probably a universal motto and that we should go further back in history to look for its origin. Naturally, this does not alter its fundamental message and underpinnings, on which the resistance movement substantiated its national claims.

“The question of the borders is probably more pressing to us than it is to the British Empire. This is a specifically Slovene sensitivity that we have attempted to avoid with our general statements for a long time; however, this is becoming less and less possible. Having been divided for more than 1,000 years, Slovenes now feel that the old slogan ‘United Slovenia’ will be realized at last,”<sup>6</sup> wrote Edvard Kardelj in a rather dramatic tone in December 1942 in his letter to Josip Broz Tito, outlining the importance of the border question for Slovenes.

His statement reflects the optimistic atmosphere that was present in Slovene society as to the possibility of realizing a “United Slovenia”, irrespective of the society’s political and ideological division. As repeated in his paper entitled *Aktualna poglavja iz mednarodnega prava* (“Topical Chapters in the International Law”), Lojze Ude, who was otherwise very cautious, said the following in a rather rapturous mood in a lecture held at an assembly of Slovene jurists in the liberated territory, at Suhor, on 11 October 1943:

“I think about our most sensible historical and political aspirations for united and free Slovenia. Now or never! Namely, such splendid alignment of political powers, which drive in their fight the final result of the war towards our goal of the free United Slovenia, is not likely to appear ever again.”<sup>7</sup>

2 DLRS, II, 98. Zapisnik partijske konference na Kočevskem Rogu 5. do 8. julija 1942.

3 Pleterški, *Osvobodilna fronta slovenskega naroda*, 241.

4 Godeša, Prežihov Voranc in reševanje mejnega vprašanja, 107–117.

5 Grdina, *Moda za vas*. *Dnevnik*, 10 May 2014. <https://www.dnevnik.si/1042657028/mnenja/kolumne/moda-za-vas->

6 Jesen 1942, 207: Poročilo Edvarda Kardelja dne 14. decembra 1942 J. B. Titu.

7 Ude, *Moje mnenje*, 116.

In line with the great expectations for the post-war expansion of the Slovene territory after the victory of the anti-Nazi coalition, in which lay the hopes and beliefs of an increasingly large number of people after Germany had attacked the Soviet Union, and after the initial shock following the occupation and partitioning of Slovene territory, numerous national programmes produced by various political groups or individuals began to pop up like mushrooms. Their fundamental characteristic features were immoderation and a complete lack of realism with regard to territorial claims that Slovenes would present before the Allies or at a peace conference. Subsequently, Fran Zwitter argued that, in terms of the struggle for realizing territorial claims, these suggestions did more harm than good.<sup>8</sup> Some of these programmes extended as far as Udine and the Tagliamento in the west or even as far as the river Piave,<sup>9</sup> in the north as far as Hohe Tauern – e.g. in the announcement *Vsem Slovencem* (To All Slovenes), which was published in Jerusalem by the emigrated members of the Slovene People’s Party (SLS) on 20 April 1941<sup>10</sup> – and, possibly, via Semmering (Slovenized as Čemernik) as far as Wienerwald,<sup>11</sup> in the east as far as Lake Balaton and in the south as far as Varaždin and entire Istria.<sup>12</sup> Ljubo Sirc commented on these aspirations as follows:

“Had these demands materialized, future Slovenia would have had more Italian and German inhabitants than Slovenes. However, many addressed this issue by speaking about the need to resettle the foreign population across the border, in Germany and Italy.”<sup>13</sup>

In essence, this was an expression of (a lack of) political understanding of the international system and the Slovene role within it. They believed that the decision-making bodies, particularly the Western Allies, would have a complete understanding with regard to righting the historical wrongs that had been inflicted upon Slovenes in the past, or the events that they understood as such. Sirc described the atmosphere at the time with the following words: “As soon as Slovenes recovered after the defeat, they began to expect miracles from the Allied victory.”<sup>14</sup> Stemming largely from poor knowledge of objective circumstances, this logic of complete trust in the fairness (naturally, as it was understood by Slovenes!) of the Western Allies (particularly after the publication of the Atlantic Charter) was naïve and acted as a form of psychological release after the initial

8 Zwitter, *Priprave Znanstvenega inštituta*, 258–276.

9 Sirc, *Med Hitlerjem in Titom*, 34–35.

10 SI AS 1660, sk. 6.

11 Sirc, *Med Hitlerjem in Titom*, 34–35.

12 Godeša, *Slovensko nacionalno vprašanje*, 297–305.

13 Sirc, *Med Hitlerjem in Titom*, 35.

14 Sirc, *Med Hitlerjem in Titom*, 34.

shock of the occupation, and from which a few euphoric moments that strengthened the otherwise dilapidated and downtrodden national consciousness could be made out.

However, as the international reality became clear, the subject at hand presented itself in a very different light. Franc Snoj, an émigré politician, wrote on 23 October 1941:

“United Slovenia appears to be obtainable now, with all our hereditary opponents being part of the hostile camp. However, London is filled with Italians, and Dr Krek may not say anything against the Italians, Hungarians or possibly even Austrians. All this is censored. He says that a mere handful of Englishmen are willing to speak about Trieste, which is regarded as an Italian city by everyone. [...] As to us and our demands, anti-Fascists are not much better than Fascists. There will be considerable problems with Italy, especially if it chooses to negotiate a separate peace, which is not excluded. As to Carinthia, the trouble is that we do not have a legal footing because we had lost the plebiscite, which had been led by the British delegate.”<sup>15</sup>

These realizations resulted in disillusionment and then more realistic territorial claims. As a minister in the Yugoslav government-in-exile, who strove to make the question of the border one of the priorities of the exiled government, Krek had to significantly relax the original maximalist demands, when he wrote that “it does not pay off to ask for more to get the minimum. We must take a realistic stand in the negotiations, defend it 100% and not give way.”<sup>16</sup>

More realistic territorial claims dominated the resistance movement at all times, and were based primarily on the ethnic principle, although even in this regard, initially at least, there was a “competition” with the domestic opponents as to who would turn out to be more “national”. Naturally, the importance of this “rivalry” with the anti-communist camp became less and less important and, subsequently, inconsequential because the resistance movement gained prominence and became the only legitimate body able to make demands before the international Allied community in terms of changing the border in favour of Slovenia or Yugoslavia.

The Slovene communists built their original position on the ethnic principle to delineate the territory of United Slovenia (based on the 1910 Austrian population census<sup>17</sup>) using the treatises produced by the experts in the Border Commission of the Executive Committee of the Liberation Front, which operated in 1941 and in early 1942 and included experts such as Fran Zwitter, Anton Melik, Črtomir Nagode and perhaps a few others. They pointed out in their treatises, *inter alia*, that the national structure of

15 SI AS 1660, šk. 6. Pismo Franca Snoja 23. oktobra 1941 Izidorju Cankarju.

16 Mlakar, Problem zahodne meje, 314.

17 Zgodovinski pogledi na zadnje državno ljudsko štetje.

the (rural) hinterland that surrounds a city is the deciding factor in the delimitation of nationally mixed areas (referring to Lenin, even though this principle precedes him), which was important, first and foremost, in the substantiation of Trieste’s inclusion in United Slovenia. Concurrently, in a statement about Slovene borders the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovenia publicly expressed its position for the first time on 1 May 1942. The position that “along with the territory populated by Slovene inhabitants, the territory that was forcibly denationalized in the most recent imperialistic period” belongs in the liberated and united Slovenia as well” was substantiated by the border committee.<sup>18</sup> Lovro Kuhar (whose pen name was Prežihov Voranc) maintained in his text entitled *O slovenskih mejah* (About Slovene Borders) that this formulation was of utmost importance, mostly from the point of view of territorial claims in Carinthia, because the inclusion of Klagenfurt/Celovec and Villach/Beljak was based on this.

In early 1942, experts in the Border Commission did not agree with the initiative of the Slovene Communists who believed that the Slovene-Croatian border would have to be outlined as well, leaving the question at hand open at the time. It was only in 1944 that this question became a more pressing one – naturally, not in terms of delimiting the national border, but in the scope of defining the control of the Slovene and Croatian resistance movements.<sup>19</sup>

The position of the resistance movement on national and political goals was formed on the basis of findings presented by experts in the Border Commission and defined in a communique of the Executive Committee of the Liberation Front on 1 December 1942, which was written by Kardelj:

“The Slovene nation shall not enter the new Yugoslavia as it did in 1918, as a nation with no merits or rights, as a nation whose fate and constitution was created by others. With its struggle and victims, the contribution of the Slovene nation to the common cause, the liberation, was matched by few nations in Europe. ‘Free and United Slovenia’ extending from Trst/Trieste to Špilje/Spelfeld, from Kolpa to Celovec/Klagenfurt shall join the new Yugoslavia with all rights that will make sure that the Slovene nation will be the only master on Slovene soil.”<sup>20</sup>

In line with this and following Italy’s capitulation, on 16 September 1943 the Supreme Plenum of the Liberation Front issued a decree and “proclaimed the integration of the Slovene Littoral to the free and united Slovenia within the free and democratic Yugoslavia.”<sup>21</sup> A similar decree also was issued by the Croatian resistance movement. These

18 DLRS, II, 18. Proglas CK KPS za 1. maj 1942.

19 Godeša, *Slovensko-hrvaški odnosi*, 117–164.

20 Jesen 1942, 193. Komunikacije IO OF dne 1. decembra 1942 o prvem zasedanju Avnoja.

21 DOONGS, XI, 75. Zapisnik seje vrhovnega plenuma OF 16. septembra 1943.

documents were confirmed by the highest body of the Yugoslav resistance movement, the Presidency of the AVNOJ, at the AVNOJ session held in Jajce. In doing so, the national and political goals of the Liberation Front (and at the same time also of the Croatian resistance movement) were recognized as one of the key goals of the Yugoslav resistance movement as a whole, and as a part of its official political orientation. Following the conclusion of the second session of the AVNOJ, during his meeting with the Slovene delegation in Jajce on 1 December 1943, Tito – who had been made marshal following a proposal put forward by Josip Vidmar – pointed out that “it was not only the Slovene Army that was behind the liberation of Primorska and Carinthia, it was the entire Yugoslav Army.”<sup>22</sup>

Systematic scientific work for the preparation of materials to lay the foundations for territorial claims at the peace conference began in January 1944, after the establishment of the Scientific Institute with the leadership of the Slovene National Liberation Committee. This scientific institution was specific and unique in many respects in the European context of the period. However, concerns that it was too early to engage in the scientific study of the borders were still present, as maintained by the Institute’s president Fran Zwitter after the war:

“At the time nobody thought that the question of the border was not important; but there were many illusions that we would get everything we wanted or everything that would be occupied by our army and that the scientific work was thus not needed. These were naive illusions that we did not have at the Scientific Institute.”<sup>23</sup>

Several papers were written in this context, such as Lojze Dular’s *Gospodarske pripombe k referatu o mejah* (Economic Remarks about the Borders), Ivo Pirkovič’s *Donesek k vprašanju Trsta* (A Contribution to the Question of Trieste), and Lojze Ude’s *Nekaj načelnih pripomb k vprašanju o mejah* (A Few Remarks about the Question of the Borders), with Zwitter’s *Problem bodočih slovenskih meja* (The Problem of Future Slovene Borders) being of key importance. All these papers were discussed at a meeting of the Scientific Institute in March 1944, but were still of an internal nature. This changed in the summer of 1944, when Kardelj demanded that materials be prepared for the international public as well. Almost concurrently with Tito’s statement that the question of borders must be addressed, it was decided at a meeting in Kočevski Rog that Zwitter would write a paper entitled *Meje Jugoslavije A. Meje slovenskega ozemlja* (The Borders of Yugoslavia A. The Borders of Slovene Territory). In 1944 this study was sent to the

22 DOONGS, XI, 93. Zapisnik sestanka slovenske delegacije na zasedanju Avnoja z maršalom Titom 1. decembra 1943 v Jajcu.

23 Zwitter, *O slovenskem narodnem vprašanju*, 494–495.

Yugoslav leadership in Slovene, as well as in English and in Russian. His text begins with a discussion of the relations between cities and the countryside and highlights the ethnic principle as a basis, whereby small corrections are required for economic and transport-related reasons. In the west, on the border with Italy, the study demands the integration of parts of valleys of the rivers Fella/Bela, Dogna/Dunja and Raccolana/Reklanica because of the connection between Resia and the Canal Valley, the integration of Tarcento/Tarčent, Nimis/Neme, Attimis/Ahten, Faedis/Fojda, Torreano/Torjan and Cividale del Friuli/Čedad to connect the Venetian Slovenes with the rest of Slovenia, as well as the integration of Dolegna del Collio/Dolenje, Prepotto/Praprotno and the railway between Cormons/Krmin and Gorizia/Gorica, whereupon the border would run along the bed of the river Soča as far as its mouth. In the chapter about the border with Austria, the study addresses the border with Carinthia, highlighting the ethnic principle, which is disregarded near Lavamünd/Labot and in the line Magdalensberg/Magdalenska Gora–Hoher Gallin/Golinje. As regards Villach/Beljak, two variants were prepared and the entire Hermagor/Šmohor court district, extending as far as its western border, was demanded. Three corrections were demanded in Steiermark/Štajerska according to the ethnic principle (Soboth/Sobota, Leutschach/Lučane, Bad Radkersburg/Radgona) and one due to traffic-related reasons (the railway between Bad Radkersburg/Radgona and Spielfeld/Špilje). The study calls for a correction on the border with Hungary, in the Rába region with Szentgotthárd/Monošter. By and large, the Yugoslav representatives used this study as a basis for substantiating their territorial claims at the Paris Peace Conference.<sup>24</sup>

Along with a significantly more balanced position on territorial claims, the resistance movement differed from their domestic opponents considerably in the belief that their active involvement in the shared struggle with the Allies against the Axis powers was of vital importance for materializing their national and political goals. This would ensure, along with their moral rights, an important starting point for negotiations at the peace conference, where the new borders would be defined.

In the autumn of 1944, when the question of the post-war regime began to come to the foreground, Kardelj wrote:

“The problem of these borders is thus becoming a general European political question and will have to be addressed in a manner that will not allow for a considerable discussion. In short, Italians must be faced with an inconvertible fact. [...] Considering the practice observed thus far, we can say that what is at the hands of our army will remain ours. You should strive to liberate as much territory as possible.”<sup>25</sup>

24 Zwitter, *Priprave Znanstvenega inštituta*, 258–276.

25 Izvori, XX, 21. Pismo Edvarda Kardelja dne 1. oktobra 1944 CK KPS.

In line with this belief, the Yugoslav troops liberated Trieste in May 1945, well as the territory extending as far as the river Soča and arrived even in Carinthia. United Slovenia thus became a reality, even if only for a few days in May. Following the conclusion of the Trieste Crisis, the Yugoslav Army had to retreat from Trieste on 12 June 1945 and from Carinthia a few days before that. The Treaty of Peace with Italy was signed by representatives of 21 states (one of which was Yugoslavia) in Paris on 10 February 1947 (it came into force on 15 September 1947), the delimitation line between Yugoslavia and Italy (the 1920 Rapallo border was in force up to that point) was altered to the benefit of Yugoslavia (Croatia obtained the bulk of Istria, the islands, Zadar and Rijeka) and, consequently, Slovenia, with parts of Primorska and Notranjska being integrated into Slovenia. The Free Territory of Trieste was established as an independent state at the conference; however, the administration remained at the hands of the Allied military administration in Zone A and the Yugoslav People's Army in Zone B because an agreement about appointing a governor could not be reached by the UN Security Council. After the London Memorandum had been signed by the USA, United Kingdom, Yugoslavia and Italy in October 1954, the Free Territory of Trieste was divided between Yugoslavia and Italy. Subsequently, the final change of the border was confirmed with the Treaty of Osimo in 1975.

Unlike World War I, when several nation states came into being on the ruins of empires, including Finland, the Baltic states, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which is referred to as "Versailles Europe", the end of World War II in Europe did not result in a radically changed socio-political cartography.<sup>26</sup> This was not the purpose and goal of the Allies, who pointed out that in this regard they differed significantly from the Axis powers that sought to introduce a "new order" by drastically changing state borders. The Allies' plans for post-war Europe, first and foremost, strove for the formation of compact nationally homogeneous states that would ensure post-war stability in the space between the Soviet Union and Western Europe. Up to that point, this space was justifiably regarded as a source of various conflicts that had a significant impact on Hitler's rise and, consequently, on the beginning of World War II. The formation of nationally homogeneous states was, in accordance with the Allied goals, realized after the war by means of the migration of the population, not by moving the state borders. The consequence of this decision, which had been made by the Allies during the war, was the expulsion of national minorities from the states in this space, particularly the German minority and partly the Hungarian minority. Additionally, the "narrative" concerning the departure of the Italian population from areas that were integrated into Yugoslavia belongs, in essence, to this context.

In accordance with this philosophy only two radical changes of the borders came into being in Europe after the war (barring a few minor corrections); namely, the territorial expansion of the Soviet Union (naturally, with all related significant changes) and the

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26 Calvocoressi et al., *Total War: Causes and Courses*.



change of the Yugoslav-Italian border, with the integration of a large part of Primorska. However, we have to draw attention to the difference that – in terms of changing the Rapallo border to the benefit of Yugoslavia – the Allies in the anti-German coalition were in principled agreement at all times. Even before 6 April 1941 the British government promised post-war support for Yugoslav territorial claims towards Italy at the peace conference if its representatives fought alongside the Allies. The Soviet Union was also favourably disposed towards a revision of the existing Yugoslav-Italian border in the early stage of the war, when the issue of who would rule Yugoslavia after the liberation was not yet relevant. In this regard, irrespective of their different post-war positions on the extent of the territory that was to be integrated into Yugoslavia, this attests to the shared belief that this position was justifiable, in contrast with the recognition of the Soviet Union’s post-war borders (without recognizing the integration of the Baltic states in 1940) and the related Polish “shift” towards the west, on the borders on the rivers Oder and Nysa and Germany’s territorial shrinkage. Namely, in this case, with respect to the situation at the time, this was actually more or less a confirmation of the existing state of affairs. In light of such structure of Europe’s post-war organization, the integration of a large part of Primorska into Yugoslavia (Slovenia) is all the more important. A unanimous decision of the Big Three about the justification of shifting the Yugoslav-Italian border to the benefit of Yugoslavia after World War II – despite their principled policy of the unchangeability of European borders – is to be understood in this context, first and foremost, as a remarkable exception or, better, as a unique decision in the scope of the agreed principled Allied policy in post-war Europe. It was based on the principle of unchangeability of borders and the recognition of the pre-war status quo, with the year 1938 as a starting point, i.e. before the beginning of Germany’s territorial expansion with the annexation of Austria.

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## Summary

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### **“Theirs We Do Not Want, Ours We Do Not Give.” The Slovene Resistance Movement and the Question of Borders During the Occupation 1941–1945**

The way in which the Slovene/Yugoslav resistance movement based its territorial demands on the ethnic principle was best expressed by Josip Broz Tito in his speech during the celebration of the second anniversary of the founding of the 1st Dalmatian National Liberation Brigade on 12 September 1944, in Vis, when he first publicly spoke about territorial demands: “Theirs we do not want, ours we do not give”, although it should be noted that this sentiment was not exactly original, and had been used before in different contexts by others. It can thus be seen as a universal slogan, which, of course, does not alter its basic message and the underpinnings on which the resistance movement based its national demands.

In December 1942, Edvard Kardelj described the significance of the border issue for Slovenes in a letter to Josip Broz Tito: “The question of the borders is probably more pressing to us than it is to the British Empire. This is a specifically Slovene sensitivity that we have attempted to avoid with our general statements for a long time; however, this is becoming less and less possible. Having been divided for more than 1,000 years, Slovenes now feel that the old slogan ‘United Slovenia’ will be realized at last.”

The statement reflects the optimistic mood that prevailed in Slovene society at the time about the possibility of achieving “United Slovenia”, regardless of the political and ideological obstacles. In accordance with the great expectation of the post-war expansion of Slovene territory after the victory of the anti-Nazi coalition, many national programmes of various political groups, as well as individuals whose basic characteristic was immoderation and complete lack of realism regarding territorial demands expressed to the Allies at the peace conference, began to grow like weeds.

The resistance movement, however, had always been dominated by substantive territorial requirements based primarily on the ethnic principle, as justified by experts in the Border Committee operating within the Liberation Front. Although in this respect, at least in the initial period, there was a certain “competition” with domestic opponents of who would prove to be more “national”. Of course, this “rivalry” with the anti-communist camp was becoming increasingly, and then completely irrelevant, since the development of events went towards enforcing the will of the resistance movement, which at the end of the war became the only legitimate carrier of demands regarding the change of the borders in Slovenia’s or Yugoslavia’s favour with the international Allied community.

The peace treaty with Italy, signed in Paris on 10 February 1947 (and which entered into force on 15 September 1947) changed the border between Yugoslavia and Italy significantly,

favouring Yugoslavia and thus Slovenia by annexing parts of Primorska and Notranjska. Following the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding by the United States, United Kingdom, Yugoslavia, and Italy in October 1954 in London, the Free Territory of Trieste was divided between Yugoslavia and Italy. The definite change of the border was confirmed in 1975 by the Treaty of Osimo.

World War II in Europe – unlike World War I, when several nation-states emerged from the ruins of empires, from Finland and the Baltic States to the Kingdom of SHS, known as “Versailles Europe” – did not result in radical changes in socio-political cartography. It was not the purpose and the objective of the Allies, who particularly emphasized that in this respect they differed from the Axis powers, which sought to create a “new order” with a radical change of national borders. The Allied post-war plans for Europe were primarily aimed at creating compact, nationally homogeneous states, which would provide post-war stability in the buffer zone between the Soviet Union and Western Europe, which was rightly considered the root of numerous conflicts that significantly influenced Hitler’s rise and, consequently, the onset of World War II. The formation of nationally homogeneous states was, in accordance with such Allied assumptions after the war, carried out by relocating the population rather than moving national borders.

According to such a philosophy, there were only two radical changes to the borders after the war, namely the territorial expansion of the Soviet Union and the change of the Yugoslav-Italian border, including the annexation of a large part of Primorska. The unanimous decision of the Big Three on the justification of moving the Yugoslav-Italian border in favour of Yugoslavia after World War II, despite their principled policy on the immutability of post-war European borders, must therefore be seen as a major exception in this context, or even as a unique decision within the agreed Allied policy on post-war Europe.