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## **The Establishment of the Hungarian Occupation Authority in Prekmurje\*\***

### **Introduction**

On the day of the coup d'état in Yugoslavia, Adolf Hitler, leader of Germany, issued an order to prepare an attack on its southern neighbour, which is known as *Weisung Nr. 25* (Directive 25). Owing to Yugoslavia's accession to the Tripartite Pact, General Dušan Simović conducted a coup d'état on 27 March 1941; the pact had been signed two days before, i.e. on 25 March, by Prime Minister Dragiša Cvetković and Foreign Minister Aleksandar Cincar-Marković. By attacking Yugoslavia and Greece, Germany sought to secure stability in the south of the Balkans.<sup>1</sup>

Having won over Italy and Bulgaria, Germany also demanded Hungary partake in the military intervention against Yugoslavia. In exchange, Germany offered the so-called Southern Provinces (Délvidék) that Hungary had lost in Trianon after World War I. The Hungarian leaders were in a difficult position. If they had accepted the offer, they would have obtained territories populated by half a million Hungarians, but would have violated the Treaty of Eternal Friendship with Yugoslavia, which was signed in December 1940, and lost the sympathies of the West (the UK and USA). If they had not accepted the offer and had thus stood up to the

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1 Fischer (ed.), *Slovenska novejša zgodovina*, 407–414, 579–581.

powerful ally that prior to that had helped Hungary partly materialize its revisionist goals, Hungary would have risked being occupied by Germany.<sup>2</sup> Weighed down by the burden of responsibility, the Hungarian Prime Minister Pál Teleki committed suicide and Regent Horthy and other ministers agreed to cooperate with Germany. However, they waited for the proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) on April 10 and thus Yugoslavia's formal discontinuance. The Hungarian Third Army crossed the Hungarian-Yugoslav border the following day.<sup>3</sup>

### **From the Attack on Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941 to the Arrival of the Hungarian Troops in Prekmurje**

The attack on Yugoslavia began on 6 April 1941 with early-morning bombings of Belgrade and other cities, as well as military and other infrastructure. The German 2nd Army penetrated the Drava Banovina from the north and the troops of the Italian 2nd Army from the west. Two divisions of the Yugoslav 7th Army and a few garrison battalions and border guards stood up to the attackers in the Drava Banovina. The 183rd Infantry Regiment of the 51st Army Corps, which was part of the aforementioned 2nd Army, was tasked with penetrating the eastern part of the Drava Banovina. The 219th Bicycle Battalion penetrated towards Prekmurje and crossed the German-Yugoslav border near Zenkovci in the early morning of 6 April, catching the 601st Garrison Battalion by surprise near Strukovci and capturing over 100 Yugoslav soldiers. The soldiers of the 219th Bicycle Battalion arrived in Murska Sobota at half past eight in the morning.<sup>4</sup> They were received by the mayor of Murska Sobota, head of the *srez* (governor) and other representatives of the city.<sup>5</sup> In the afternoon of that same day, a part of the 219th Bicycle Battalion headed towards Lower Prekmurje, which was in the evening reported by the leader of the troops: "A motorized scout unit of the bicycle battalion advanced via Beltinci, Hotiza, Dolnja Lendava, where it reached the Hungarian border."<sup>6</sup> It is evident from this report that the bridges over the river Mura were blown up between Veržej

2 In the years 1938 and 1939, with the help of Germany and Italy, Hungary obtained the south-eastern parts of Czechoslovakia (the southern part of modern-day Slovakia, the majority of whose population was Hungarian, as well as Ruthenia or Carpathian Ukraine, populated mostly by Ukrainians or Ruthenians), and in 1940 the northern part of Transylvania from Rumania, also with the help of Germany and Italy.

3 On the Hungarian war-time politics and revisionism, as well as on Hungary's activities in the attack of Yugoslavia in Slovene, see Kontler: *Madžarska zgodovina*, 292–309; Göncz, *Zgodovina Madžarov*, 156–160. On the telegram sent from Budapest to Berlin on 5 April 1941, regarding the reasons for Teleki's suicide and Horthy's contact with Germans on 11 April 1941 about the pending occupation of the Yugoslav territories see: PAB, No. 351 and No. 383.

4 Ferenc, *Nemška zasedba Prekmurja*, 108–111.

5 Godeša: *Odmevi o razmerah v Prekmurju*, 188.

6 Ferenc, *Nemška zasedba Prekmurja*, 112.

and Mursko Središče and that only weak, scattered units of the Yugoslav Army remained in Prekmurje.<sup>7</sup> Along with the aforementioned 219th Bicycle Battalion, other German units penetrated Prekmurje on the first day of the attack of Yugoslavia. They were positioned between Radgona and the German-Yugoslav-Hungarian tripoint. These units crossed the German-Yugoslav border in three sections and began their penetration to Prekmurje's interior, as far as the river Lendava. A portion of these units turned southwards the following day, i.e. on 7 April, and marched to Murska Sobota. Following the 183rd Infantry Division's occupation of Mura's right bank (Čakovec, the centre of Međimurje, had been occupied the day before), the remaining German troops in Prekmurje were tasked with occupation- and protection-related assignments. Two days later, on 10 April, the Germans introduced the military administration for the districts of Murska Sobota and Lendava, which was only short-lived because as early as 16 April the Germans transferred authority over the region on the left bank of the river Mura to the Hungarians.<sup>8</sup>



Fig. 1: The arrival of the Hungarian troops in (Dolnja) Lendava on 16 April 1941.

7 Ferenc, *Nemška zasedba Prekmurja*, 112.

8 Ferenc, *Nemška zasedba Prekmurja*, 113–115.

The arrival of the German troops in Prekmurje was received with gratitude by the local members of the German minority.<sup>9</sup> They lived predominately in three villages along the north-western border, in Ocinj, Kramarovci and Fikšinci, and a small portion of members of the German community lived in towns of Prekmurje or in settlements along the north-western border.<sup>10</sup>

The Germans were also supported by many seasonal labourers, who worked in Germany, many of whom became members of the Kulturbund in the hope of having a better chance of finding jobs in Germany. According to the data of the District Governor's Office, there were 232 members of the Kulturbund in Murska Sobota in early 1941, of whom just 17 were Germans and the rest of them were mostly Slovene seasonal workers.<sup>11</sup> Teleki Béla, head of Zala County, reported about the sympathies of the young Prekmurje Slovenes for Germans in his letters to the Hungarian prime minister, and a large number of these young people did seasonal work in Germany in the year before the occupation (1940). In a letter dated 19 April, Teleki reported, *inter alia*, that German flags featuring a swastika hung in Slovene-populated settlements in the proximity of Beltinci when the Hungarian troops marched in the Dolnja Lendava district and in Međimurje and that it was mostly young Slovenes, who did seasonal work in Germany, who were in favour of the integration into the German Reich.<sup>12</sup> In his next letter to the prime minister, dated 26 April 1941, the county head informed him about the aggressive propaganda of the Swabian-German Cultural Association (Schwabisch-deutscher Kulturbund) from Murska Sobota. He pointed out that Jožef Pollak (Pollak József), leader of the Kulturbund in Murska Sobota, collected signatures in support of the area's integration into Germany and that he was supported by the German gendarmes who were still present in the Murska Sobota district.<sup>13</sup> In his report to the prime minister of 6 May, the county head writes about the Greater-German propaganda that was being coordinated in Murska Sobota and had already spread to the Slovene-populated villages

9 Two eyewitness testimonies given by German soldiers who participated in the military operations during the occupation of Prekmurje show how well the German troops were received. More on this topic in: Ferenc, *Nemška zasedba Prekmurja*, 115.

10 In the first Yugoslav population census in 1921 there were 91,244 people recorded living in Prekmurje, of whom 1,903 identified as Germans or German as their mother tongue. The majority of people who identified German as their mother tongue, i.e. 1,743 people, lived in the Murska Sobota district; most of them lived in the settlements of Fikšinci (364 Germans out of a total of 381 people), Kramarovci (248 Germans out of a total of 253 people), Ocinje (321 Germans out of a total of 321 people) and Serdica (267 Germans out of a total of 739 people). Census takers recorded a total of 160 people identifying German as their mother tongue in the Dolnja Lendava district, most of whom lived in Dolnja Lendava (67 people out of a total of 2,529 people). More on the subject in: *Prekmurje, Seznam občin*.

11 Fujs, *Izbodišča madžarske okupacijske*, 181.

12 MNL ZML, IV. 401. b, 50/1941.

13 MNL ZML, IV. 401. b, 50/1941.

in the Dolnja Lendava district. He maintained that Hungarian district notaries<sup>14</sup> that were sent to Prekmurje after Hungary's occupation were successful in their effort to stand up to this agitation.<sup>15</sup>

Members of the Hungarian minority were reported to have met the Germans' arrival in Prekmurje with a cold response.<sup>16</sup> "They showed their national belonging by hanging out Hungarian flags."<sup>17</sup> With the proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia in Zagreb on 10 April, Hungary was no longer bound by the friendship agreement with Yugoslavia, which had been signed in December of the previous year, because formally Yugoslavia no longer existed. The following day, on 11 April 1941, units of the Hungarian 3rd Army began to penetrate Bačka and Baranja.<sup>18</sup> The population of Prekmurje's eastern part responded to this news. On 13 April, a delegation of 32 settlements, including all settlements with a Hungarian majority along the Yugoslav-Hungarian border and 10 Slovene settlements, signed a minute in the headquarters of the district governor (*főszolgabíró*) in Lenti, asking Hungary and its leader Horthy to order the Hungarian Army and officials to occupy Prekmurje. They enclosed a list with 835 signatures.<sup>19</sup>

As evident from the previous paragraphs, some of the Prekmurje population looked forward to the arrival of the German or – after 16 April – Hungarian troops. However, the majority of Slovenes in Prekmurje "met Hungarians with hostility or distrust, at least, when the Hungarian authorities addressed them as their former compatriots."<sup>20</sup>

The distrust that the Prekmurje Slovenes felt towards the Hungarian authorities can be gathered from a letter addressed by the head of the Zala County to the prime minister, when he wrote that the Hungarian Army had been received with a lack of enthusiasm.<sup>21</sup>

The Germans or the German Army transferred Prekmurje to the Hungarian Army on 16 April 1941, at a ceremony held in Murska Sobota. The Hungarian advance force arrived in Murska Sobota the day before, and the 2nd Körmenđ Battalion of the 5th Infantry Regiment from Szombathely marched through the city the following day.<sup>22</sup>

14 It was pointed out in county head's letter that these were mostly district notaries (*körjegyző*) who had already held posts here in the period of Austria-Hungary and that they were mostly natives of Prekmurje.

15 MNL ZML, IV. 401. b, 50/1941.

16 Members of the Hungarian minority were concentrated in the settlements along the Yugoslav-Hungarian border, in the east of Prekmurje. According to the 1921 population census, they represented upwards of 15% (14,064 people) of Prekmurje's population (91,288 people). More on the subject in: *Prekmurje, Seznam občin*.

17 Godina, *Prekmurje 1941–1945*, 26.

18 Sajti, *Impériumváltások, revízió, kisebbség*, 156–157.

19 MNL ZML, IV. 401. b, 50/1941.

20 Fujs, *Izbodišća madžarske okupacijske*, 183.

21 MNL ZML, IV. 401. b, 50/1941.

22 Fujs, *Značilnosti madžarske okupacijske*, 65.





Fig. 2: A triumphal arch with an inscription that reads “Welcome to the celebration of our liberation” was erected in Murska Sobota to mark a ceremony held on 29 June 1941.

The periodical *Slovenec* wrote about the ceremony in Prekmurje:

“The ceremony marking the transfer of authority took place in the main square and was particularly cordial. Military and civilian representatives were gathered on a decorated platform. Mr Hartner, the mayor, and Mr Krantz, the dean, and others held speeches on behalf of the Prekmurje public. Hungarian red-white-green tricolors hung on houses and public buildings and many locals adorned their buttonholes with them.”<sup>23</sup>

However, the periodical *Jutro* reported about the transfer of authority in Prekmurje in a different tone:

“A week after the occupation the Germans retreated from Prekmurje, leaving it to the Hungarians. People had no appetite for their Easter meals. There

23 Godeša: *Odmevi o razmerah v Prekmurju*, 188.

were no bonfires on Holy Saturday. Easter Sunday was quiet, as was Good Friday. The Hungarians came to Lendava and Sobota. Immediately, they made a proclamation in Hungarian and in Štefan Kuzmič's Prekmurje language. The old overlords, whose land was divided among peasants by the agrarian reform, arrived in Prekmurje."<sup>24</sup>

The "old overlords" were greeted with great enthusiasm in settlements with a Hungarian majority, which is evident from preserved photographs that show a large number of people with Hungarian flags in Dolnja Lendava. We know from eyewitness testimonies that triumphal arches were erected in a few Hungarian villages (Dolga Vas, Domanjševci). Along with Dolnja Lendava and the surrounding settlements, the 9th Infantry Brigade of the Hungarian Army, which was responsible for the occupation of settlements in Lower Prekmurje (the so-called Zala County), marched also through Međimurje on 16 April.<sup>25</sup> However, it should be pointed out that, unlike Prekmurje, where the Hungarians immediately introduced the military administration, Međimurje did not see its introduction until 11 July 1941. Up to that point Međimurje witnessed some type of diarchy; along with the Hungarian Army, offices were also held by Croatian officials from the period of Yugoslavia.<sup>26</sup>

### **New Political Borders and the Impact of Occupation Borders on the Population's Lives**

During the military operations in Yugoslavia, the German *Führer* Adolf Hitler decreed its partition among the three occupying forces on 3 and 12 April. Italy obtained the south-western part of the Drava Banovina, Germany obtained Slovenia's central part and Hungary its eastern part, i.e. Prekmurje. Intergovernmental delimitation commissions immediately began their work and defined the border on 11 June 1941. In effect, the border between Hungary and Germany was outlined on the former border between the Hungarian and Austrian part of the Habsburg Monarchy, the difference being that the settlements of Krmarovci, Ocinje and Rottenberg (part of Serdica), the majority of whose population were Germans and that were part of the Murska Sobota district in the interwar period (as well as in the period of Austria-Hungary), were integrated into Germany.<sup>27</sup>

24 Godeša: *Odmevi o razmerah v Prekmurju*, 188–189.

25 Göncz: *Felszabadulás vagy megszállás*, 18–33.

26 Sajti, *Impériumváltások, revízió, kisebbség*, 163.

27 *Slovenska novejša zgodovina*, 579–581.; Fujs, *Značilnosti madžarske okupacijske*, 65.



Fig. 3: The Hungarian and German gendarmes with civilians on the German-Hungarian border in 1942.

When defining the border between the German and Hungarian parts of the territory they did not consider the populations affected, as indicated by the cases of the settlements of Gerlinci and Fikšinci, where the border separated houses from their auxiliary buildings.<sup>28</sup> An interview with Rudi Gaber entitled “*Nacist je s škornjem potegnil mejo v Serdici*” (“the Nazi drew the border with his boot in Serdica”) is telling.<sup>29</sup> The disregard for the

28 Alojz Grah, Jože Gomboc, *Mama je hodila v štiri osnovne šole*, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyn-2JrIC\\_k&t=6s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyn-2JrIC_k&t=6s), 2:30–4:15.

29 Rudi Gaber, *Nacist je s škornjem določil mejo v Serdici*, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j\\_1QrWi2Nbc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_1QrWi2Nbc), 0:10–1:04.



local populations<sup>30</sup> when defining the border culminated as early as in December 1941. At that time a few families – mostly Slovenes from Serdica or Rottenberg, which were integrated into Germany – demanded from Regent Horthy himself that Rottenberg be annexed to Hungary. They substantiated their request with the fact that Rottenberg had road connections only with that part of the settlement of Serdica which became part of Hungary, and that only a few forest roads connect them with German settlements, and also noted that all cultural and municipal institutions (school, church, cemetery, the municipal office, the state road) remained on the Hungarian side of the border. In August 1942 the Central Investigation Command of Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie (Magyar Királyi Csendőrség Központi Nyomozó Parancsnoksága) informed the Ministry of the Interior that the German head of Rottenberg had visited 24 pro-Hungarian individuals and notified them that they had to express in writing to which state they wanted to belong by 27 July 1942. At the same time, he threatened that if they opted for Hungary, they could share the fate of Karl Búcsék and Alojz Gaber. Búcsék – who signed the request addressed to Regent Horthy and Gaber were imprisoned by the authorities in the spring of 1941 because they were suspected of having engaged in anti-German activities.<sup>31</sup> The German appetite for Prekmurje was greater than that, as along with the previously mentioned four settlements they also wanted to appropriate Petanjci (the spring of the eponymous mineral water) and an area near Krog, to the west of Murska Sobota.<sup>32</sup> The questions of Serdica (Rottenberg), Petanjci and the area near Krog, as well as that of the agitation of members of the Kulturbund from Radkersburg among the Slovenes in Prekmurje with regard to annexing the left bank of the river Mura to Germany, were also raised in the subsequent years.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the border-related questions could not be solved until the end of the war.

The border between the Hungarian- and German-occupied areas became a state border. It was outlined, fortified and protected on maps and on location. Border crossings were built at certain spots, e.g. near the settlements of Petanjci–Radenci, Cankova–Zelting (Zenkovci) and Cankova–Goritz (Slovenska Gorica).<sup>34</sup> However, despite the border crossings, protection and control, the interviewees pointed out that the border regime was not harsh.<sup>35</sup> That said, the new border cut sharply into the Slovene national fabric because it separated

30 According to Hungarian archival sources, Rottenberg was populated by about 800 people. MNL OL, K-64, 98 csomó, 1942. 41. tétel, Seregháza.

31 MNL OL, K-64, 98 csomó, 1942. 41. tétel, Seregháza.

32 Sajti, *Impériumváltások, revízió, kisebbség*, 163.

33 MNL OL, K-64, 98 csomó, 1942. 41. tétel, Seregháza.

34 A border pass for crossing the Hungarian-German border (Határszéli utiigazolvány magyar-német viszonylatban). It was issued on 31 December 1943 in Murska Sobota to Pálfay József jr. It is kept in the Lendava Unit of the Institute for Ethnic Studies.

35 Alojz Grah, Jože Gomboc, Mama je hodila v štiri osnovne šole, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ly--n2JrIC\\_k&t=6s,3:50-5:00](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ly--n2JrIC_k&t=6s,3:50-5:00).

the Slovenes in Prekmurje from their compatriots on the right bank of Mura. The situation was aggravated by the fact that the Slovenes in Prekmurje and in the east of Štajerska could only make contact along the river Mura, where the retreating Yugoslav troops blew up bridges. Although the bridges were repaired by the occupying forces at a later date, it was considerably easier to control a border that ran in the middle of the Mura than on the land. On top of that, on the mainland section of the border between Hungary and Germany, in the north-western part of the region, along the stream Kučnica, and in the north, in the direction of the former tripoint, the Slovenes in Prekmurje had Germans as neighbours, which made contacts with their compatriots in Štajerska or central Slovenia significantly more difficult.

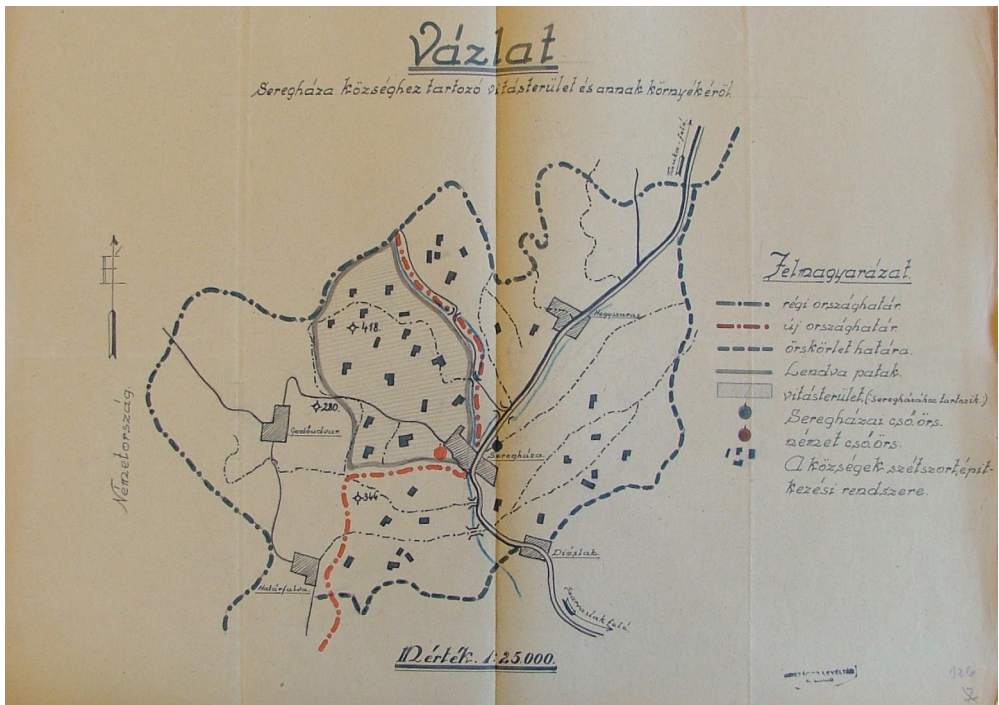


Fig. 4: A sketch of the German-Hungarian border near the settlement of Serdica (Seregháza) with the disputed area (vitás terület).

The integration of Prekmurje into Hungary removed the political border between the Slovenes in Prekmurje and in the Rába region. Consequently, “Slovenes in Hungary” were reunited in one state after having been separated by the Paris Peace Conference. Naturally, the nature of the border between the Rába region and Prekmurje was reflected in the everyday lives of the population, because familial, economic, cultural and other contacts were revitalized. This is also evident from the number of marriages between Prekmurje Slovenes and those from the Rába region. Solely in the area of the Gornji Senik/Felsőszölnök district

notary's office (körjegyzőség) – part of which were, politically and administratively speaking, the Prekmurje settlements of Trdkova and Čepinci – seven people from Prekmurje got married to Slovenes from the Rába region.<sup>36</sup> The new political situation united in one country the Prekmurje Hungarians with their compatriots, which was reflected in different realms of life, much like in the case of the Slovenes in Prekmurje and in the Rába region.<sup>37</sup>

10	4	Állomások	1	15	
—	—	i. Budapest déli pu. Máv (30)	é.	20.35	—
—	—	i. Nagykauizsza Mávaut (1420)	é.	13.45	—
—	11.15	i. Alsólendva Mávaut (1421)	é	8.50	—
—	c	i. <b>Murszombat</b> Korona-szálló	é.	c	—
—	14.20	Kisszombat	↑	7.35	—
—	14.25	Vaspolony	↑	7.30	—
—	14.29	Rónafő	↑	7.26	—
—	14.33	Vasnyires	↑	7.22	—
—	14.37	Lehonér	↑	7.19	—
—	14.41	Zoltánháza	↑	7.15	—
—	14.49	Bodóhegy	↑	7.07	—
—	14.56	Vaskorpád	↑	7.00	—
—	15.01	Radófa	↑	6.54	—
—	15.07		↑	6.48	—
X	15.15	é.	i.	6.40	X
4.05	15.20	i. <b>Felsőlendva</b>	é.	6.35	17.55
4.17	15.32	Utelágazás f. m.	↑	6.23	17.43
4.25	15.40	Magasfok	↑	6.15	17.35
4.38	15.53	Felsőszőlők	↑	6.05	17.25
4.52	16.07	Alsószőlők	↑	5.49	17.09
4.56	16.11	Szakonyfaivi bej. út	↑	5.44	17.04
4.59	16.14	Rábatótfalu	↑	5.41	17.01
5.05	16.20	<b>Szentgotthárd Központi szálló</b>	↑	5.35	16.55
5.15	16.30	<b>Szentgotthárd pu.</b>	i.	5.25	16.45
7.09	18.00	é. Szombathely Máv (10)	i.	—	14.05
—	22.47	é. Budapest k. pu. Máv (10)	i.	—	8.00

X = csak hétköznap közlekedik.  
c = Felsőlendva-Szentgotthárd között csak hétköznap közlekedik.

Fig. 5: Bus timetable from Murska Sobota to Szentgotthárd via four villages in the Rába region during World War II.

### Hungarian Military Administration and the Introduction of Civil Administration in Prekmurje

Having taken over the authority in Prekmurje, the Hungarians introduced the military administration on 16 April 1941. The military administrative commands in Murska Sobota and Lendava were tasked with creating the conditions for the introduction of civil administration. Formally, the administration was in the hands of the military, but in practice the Murska Sobota district and that of Dolnja Lendava operated from the

36 M. Kozár, *Holtomiglan – holtáiglan*, 167.

37 Kovács, *Dobronaki életképek – Podobe iz življenja Dobrovnika*, 217.



very beginning as constituent parts of the Vas County and Zala County. With a decree of 22 July 1941, the occupied territory was integrated into both border counties, whereby they sought to restore the situation from the period before the end of World War I. Consequently, the settlements of Budinci, Čepinci, Dolenci, Hodoš, Šalovci, and Trdkova, which were previously part of the Murska Sobota district, were annexed to the Szentgotthárd district. The settlements of Gödörháza, Magyarszombatfa, and Velemér, which were part of the so-called Trianon Hungary, were integrated into the Murska Sobota district. The situation with the Dolnja Lendava district was different. Settlements that were before World War I part of the Dolnja Lendava district and remained in Hungary after the war stayed in the scope of the district whose administrative centre was in Lenti. The district that had Dolnja Lendava as its seat had a branch office in Beltinci. The districts were divided into notary's offices (*körjegyzőség*) and were helmed by district notaries (*körjegyzők* or *jegyzők*) with wide powers.<sup>38</sup> The process of integrating the occupied territory in the Hungarian administrative system was legalized by the civil administration, which was introduced on 15 August, and finalized by the Hungarian parliament on 16 December 1941, when the Reintegration of Southern Provinces (*Délvidék* or *Bačka, Baranja, Prekmurje* and *Međimurje*) Act was passed.<sup>39</sup>



Fig. 6: Anna Koltai, a secretary, in front of the District Notary's Office in Prosenjakovci during World War II.

38 Göncz: *Felszabadulás vagy megszállás*, 64–71.

39 Fujs, *Izbodišća madžarske okupacijske*, 179.

As stated above, the military administration was to “create conditions for the introduction of civil administration, which implied that all traces left by the Yugoslav state in the past 22 years had to be erased as soon as possible.”<sup>40</sup>

The implementation of this policy could be seen in all spheres – political, social and economic. The first to be affected by the new authorities’ occupation policy were incomers from central Slovenia that arrived in Prekmurje after 31 October 1918. Most of them were officials, teachers, and colonists, and the Hungarian authorities deemed them unreliable.<sup>41</sup>

“Consequently, the first measure implemented by the occupying authorities was the dismissal of all Slovene officials and teachers. [...] When the cleanse was completed, the occupying authorities began to employ them selectively.”<sup>42</sup>

It was stated in a previously mentioned letter that the county head addressed to the prime minister on 19 April 1941 that “the Hungarian population<sup>43</sup> awaits patiently the integration into the economic life and observes calmly the proceedings that were aimed at immigrants who do not belong here.”<sup>44</sup>

The periodical *Jutro* also wrote about the dismissal of officials:

“All officials, including native ones, lost their jobs. The Hungarian authorities employed Hungarian officials in the post office, in the municipality [...] All mayors and municipal secretaries will be deposed and new ones will be appointed by the military authorities.”<sup>45</sup>

An analysis of the newly appointed municipal officials in the District of Murska Sobota shows that not all state officials who worked for the Kingdom of Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941 lost their employment. Out of a total of 67 “Yugoslav” officials in municipal offices in the Murska Sobota district the Hungarian military authorities employed eight people on 18 or 22 April 1941, including Ferdinand (Nándor) Hartner, the former mayor of Murska Sobota. All eight were natives of Prekmurje, but they were employed only after they had sworn an oath before the new authorities.<sup>46</sup> As a rule, officials who came from

40 Fujs, *Značilnosti madžarske okupacijske*, 65.

41 On how the Hungarian occupying authorities treated the Slovene intelligentsia, see Godeša, *Madžarski okupator v Prekmurju*, 193–201.

42 Godeša, *Madžarski okupator v Prekmurju*, 194.

43 This refers to the Hungarian population of the Dolnja Lendava district.

44 MNL ZML, IV. 401. b, 50/1941.

45 Godeša, *Madžarski okupator v Prekmurju*, 194.

46 MNL VaML, IV. 401. b. 797/1941.



central Slovenia or were originally not from Prekmurje did not get hired. Consequently, many of them left the region on the left bank of Mura. This was indirectly reported by Slovene periodicals: “The railway station in Pragersko is filled with people. It seems that the entire Prekmurje intelligentsia is here.”<sup>47</sup>



Fig. 7: A signpost with Hungarian place names standing next to the fork towards Nedelica near Turnišče.

As mentioned before, the Hungarian authorities initially dismissed all teachers, whereupon they re-employed the locals, the Prekmurje Slovenes and Hungarians. Only a few Slovenes, newcomers who taught here, were re-employed, and only in the Murska Sobota district. In the Lendava district they only employed locals, and teachers who were newcomers were made redundant without exception. Some of the teachers who were originally from central Slovenia and held teaching posts in Prekmurje until 6 April 1941 were part of the Educational-Administrative Branch in Murska Sobota (Muraszombati Tanügyigazgatási Kirendeltség) that covered Međimurje as well. They were transferred to Međimurje because the bulk of Croatian teachers had left for the NDH. Along with teachers, natives of Prekmurje, the new school system was set up also by an older generation of teachers from Prekmurje, who had completed their education in Hungary before World War I. Standard Slovene was removed as a medium of instruction, and replaced with Hungarian and the Prekmurje dialect, which was referred to as Wendish by the Hungarian authorities. As to

47 Godeša: *Odmevi o razmerah v Prekmurju*, 193.

the medium of instruction, legally and formally speaking, there were three models in force in Prekmurje during the Hungarian occupation. In Hungarian-populated areas, Hungarian was the only medium of instruction. In schools in Slovene-populated areas, lessons were held in Hungarian and the Prekmurje dialect (Wendish) was used as an auxiliary language. The second group of schools, which was numerically smaller, included those in Slovene-populated areas, where six lessons a day were held in the Prekmurje dialect at the parents' request.<sup>48</sup> In secondary schools in Murska Sobota Hungarian was the only medium of instruction and the Prekmurje dialect (Wendish) was only taught as a subject.<sup>49</sup>

Sor- szám.	Név.	Lakhely.	Családtagok száma.	Származási hely.	Nemzetiség.	Ingatlan- nyergés.
41./	Pehor Iván	Bonice	4	Zgorice	Slovén	9.- kh.
42./	Marusics Iván	"	7	Görs	"	9.- "
43./	Miklós Olga	"	1	Kanal-Gorisa	"	9.- "
44./	Coerno Anton	"	2	Spollán	"	4,25 "
45./	Klino Iván	"	4	Pottau	"	8,75 "
46./	Valentinesics Lujza	"	3	Porine Görs	"	8,75 "
47./	Szobogár József	"	5	Bánica	"	8,75 "
48./	Podbersek Stefan	"	3	Görs	"	8,75 "
49./	Serpán Miklós	"	2	Bilje	"	2,50 "
50./	Peric Leopold	"	7	Ssant-Andor	"	8,75 "
51./	Peric Franc	"	5	Opati	"	8,75 "
52./	Polencsics Viktor	"	2	Bilán	"	8,75 "
53./	Obldik Mária	"	6	Ssan-Florian	"	8,75 "
54./	Benkó Franc	"	4	Csepvan	"	8,75 "
55./	Petrovosics Franc	"	8	Báta	"	8,75 "
56./	Arletics József	"	5	Opati-sselo	"	8,75 "
57./	Okretics Lujza	"	8	Kosztanjovica	"	8,75 "
58./	Kolenc Rafoel	"	5	Lakve	"	8.- "
59./	Lorbok Mária	"	3	Ssv.Tome	"	84.- "
60./	Trak Teréz	Pince	2	Tröbolje	"	7,75 "
61./	Bonsics Anton	"	4	Istria	"	8,75 "
62./	Bonsics Dinka	"	6	Salun	"	8,75 "
63./	Jelasics Iván	"	6	Jarenines	"	8,75 "
64./	Alexis Gasparo	"	6	Dragoseti	"	5,75 "
65./	Iván Romar	"	7	Kobarito	"	8,50 "
66./	Sirok István	"	2	Görgan	"	8,75 "
67./	Krisztics Lujza	"	3	Volkonöla	"	8.- "
68./	Borsics József	"	6	Salun	"	8,75 "
69./	Bonsics Antonio	"	5	"	"	11.- "
70./	Ciserl Jakob	"	2	Jesovec	"	8.- "
71./	Antonovics Mariko	"	6	Herak	"	8,75 "
72./	Kolenc Viktor	"	5	Görs	"	4,50 "
73./	Susanik Martin	"	3	Csaraki	"	8,75 "
74./	Aszkovics Franc	"	5	Trieste	"	8,75 "
75./	Legán Alojs	"	4	Vergál	"	8,75 "
76./	Anton Jelasics	"	2	Linsgán	Horvát	8,75 "
77./	Raje Simon	"	4	Kringu	"	- "
78./	Paics Bosko	"	5	Ssv.Peter	Slovén	8,75 "
79./	Krisztics Tomo	"	3	Botornya	Horvát	- "
80./	Szobogár Sztankó	"	4	Spollán	Slovén	- "
81./	Mersics Mattia	"	11	Vidöci	Horvát	9.- "
82./	Marelja Blássa	"	10	Zemin	"	8,75 "
83./	Maretics Otilio	"	5	Marburg	Slovén	8,75 "
84./	Possödel Anton	"	4	Salin	Horvát	- "

Fig. 8: Page 2 of the list of colonists produced by the Hungarian authorities in January 1942.

48 Kokolj – Horvat, *Prekmursko šolstvo*, 384–392.

49 Kokolj – Horvat, *Prekmursko šolstvo*, 400–410.

Colonists who relocated in the vicinity of Dolnja Lendava in several waves in the interwar period were targeted by the authorities. All colonists and other immigrants who obtained land on the Esterházy estate through the Yugoslav agrarian reform were dispossessed by the Hungarian authorities as early as the summer of 1941. Following the unsuccessful negotiations with the Italian authorities about the transfer of colonists from Primorska and Istria, 587 people (or 589 if we add two children who were born shortly after their mothers' internment in the camp) were sent to the Sárvár internment camp on 22 and 23 June 1942.<sup>50</sup>

Unlike newcomers, whom the Hungarian occupier regarded as unreliable, their attitude towards the locals was tolerant and friendly.

“Prekmurje Slovenes and their ancestors who were born in the area before 31 October 1918 were considered to be loyal citizens by the authorities. They had been subject to false propaganda and education for 22 years; however, they could be persuaded once again that they were Wends, which was considered to be the first step to their realization that they were, in fact, Hungarians. Education and propaganda were on the agenda, not repression.”<sup>51</sup>

The Hungarian Educational Society of the Wend March (Vendvidéki Magyar Közművelődési Egyesület – VMKE) was entrusted with the education and propaganda. Soon after its establishment, this society published the first issue of the periodical *Műrasszombat és Vidéke (MÉV)*, which was published weekly until the end of the war. It was written in Hungarian, and a few articles were translated into the Prekmurje dialect or Wendish. Along with publishing the periodical *MÉV*, this society organized the political and cultural life and sought to improve the area's economy.<sup>52</sup>

In order to enable Prekmurje's swift integration into the Hungarian economy, infrastructure had to be built to connect Prekmurje with the Hungarian hinterland and the country's interior. A bus line on the route Nagykanizsa–Dolnja Lendava–Murska Sobota was thus introduced by the end of April 1941, and in early May Murska Sobota was connected with Szentgotthárd via the Rába region.<sup>53</sup> Following a request made by the leadership of Murska Sobota, in the second half of May 1941 the district centre was connected by bus with Gornja Lendava,<sup>54</sup> Rogašovci and Dolnja Lendava.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, the area was also connected with Hungary's interior with railway lines. Murska Sobota was already

50 Kovács, *Represszija v Prekmurju*, 186–195.

51 Fujs, *Značilnosti madžarske okupacijske*, 69.

52 Fujs, *Značilnosti madžarske okupacijske*, 68.

53 Göncz: *Felzabadulás vagy megszállás*, 22.; *MÉV*, Year XXXV, No. 1, 4.

54 Modern-day Grad na Goričkem.

55 MNL VaML, IV. 401. b. 441/1941.

connected with the Hungarian interior via Hodoš in the period of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and Dolnja Lendava via Dolga Vas. In the period of Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav authorities removed the railway tracks between Hodoš and the state border, as well as between Dolga Vas and the state border. Initially, the employees of the Hungarian State Railway (MÁV) connected Murska Sobota with Körmend and the county centre Szombathely. In Murska Sobota, multiple-unit trains operating four times a day were introduced on 5 May 1941.<sup>56</sup> In early July Dolga Vas was integrated into the Hungarian railway system,<sup>57</sup> and by October 1941 Čakovec had been connected with Zalaegerszeg via Dolnja Lendava.<sup>58</sup> The infrastructural connections with the state's interior were built relatively quickly, but factories in Murska Sobota still faced with difficulties due to the changed economic situation. As evident from the article published in the weekly *MéV* on 17 October 1941, all four factories in Murska Sobota, Benko's meat processing plant, Dittrich's metal and tin factory, and Cvetič's and Šiftar's textile factories worked at half capacity.<sup>59</sup> Due to the April War and, consequently, the altered geopolitical situation, many seasonal labourers from Prekmurje had difficulties finding work. This problem was immediately addressed by the Hungarian military authorities, which sent some seasonal workers to large Hungarian estates.<sup>60</sup>



Fig. 9: Laying railway tracks near Hodoš in 1941.

56 MNL VaML, IV. 401. b. 441/1941.

57 Göncz: *Felzabadulás vagy megszállás*, 46.

58 *MéV*, Year XXXV, No. 21, 4.

59 *MéV*, Year XXXV, No. 22, 3.

60 MNL VaML, IV. 401. b. 389/1941.



Through its operation the Hungarian occupying authorities sought to attract the indigenous Prekmurje population to their side; however, led by Štefan Kovač and in the scope of the Liberation Front, some of the left-oriented locals conducted several acts of sabotage in Prekmurje in the summer of 1941. The resistance movement had been crushed by the autumn of that same year, capturing the majority of activists, few of whom managed to avoid getting arrested and left Prekmurje. Consequently, "... the anti-occupation activity was quelled in this area until 1944".<sup>61</sup>



Fig. 10: The hanging of Evgen Kardoš and Štefan Cvetko in the courtyard of Murska Sobota Castle on 31 October 1941.

As previously mentioned, the introduction of the civil administration was officially confirmed on 16 December 1941 with the adoption of the act on the integration of occupied territories into Hungary. This meant that Prekmurje (as well as Međimurje, Baranja and Bačka) were officially no longer occupied territories, and became constituent parts of Hungary. In effect, the period of the introduction of the occupying authority in the region on the left bank of the river Mura was thus concluded.

61 *Slovenska novejša zgodovina*, 620.



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### Abbreviations

MNL OL - Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára  
 MNL VaML - Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Vas Megyei Levéltára  
 MNL ZML - Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Zala Megyei Levéltára  
 MéV - Muraszombat és Vidéke  
 Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin (PA AA)

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## Summary

*Darja Kerec, Attila Kovács*

### **The Establishment of the Hungarian Occupation Authority in Prekmurje**

On the first day of the invasion of Yugoslavia, the German Army occupied the Prekmurje region. However, it did not stay there long, since on 16 April 1941 the province on the left bank of the river Mura (barring Kramarovci, Ocinje, Fikšinci, and a part of Serdica (Rottenberg) with a German majority) came under Hungary at a ceremony held in Murska Sobota.

The new border cut sharply into the Slovene national body, separating the Slovenes in Prekmurje from their compatriots on the right bank of the river Mura. On the other hand, the annexation to Hungary removed the political border between the Slovenes in Prekmurje and in the Rába region, as well as between the Prekmurje Hungarians and their compatriots, who were then reunited in one country, which was reflected in different areas of life.

With the takeover of authority in Prekmurje on 16 April 1941, the Hungarians introduced a military administration with military-administration commands in Murska Sobota and Lendava. Their mission was to create the conditions for the introduction of civil administration, which meant erasing all traces left by the Yugoslav state in the past 22 years. The implementation of this policy was reflected in all areas, from political and social to economic. All institutions were abolished and replaced with new ones, Slovene inscriptions were removed, and the Hungarian alphabet was introduced. Immigrants who came from central Slovenia to Prekmurje after 31 October 1918, were among the first to feel the occupational policy of the new authorities. Hungary deemed those people, who were mainly officials, teachers, and settlers, as unreliable. These settlers were the most exposed among the immigrants, as the Hungarians took them by force in the summer of 1941, and interned them at the Sárvár internment camp in June 1942.

In contrast to the immigrants, the attitude towards the locals was tolerant and friendly. The Prekmurje Slovenes, who were born before 31 October 1918, were considered to be loyal citizens by the Hungarian administration. They were considered to have been subjected to false propaganda and education for 22 years, but could be re-educated into believing they were Wendish, which was the first step towards accepting they were Hungarians. Although the Hungarian occupation authorities tried to win over the indigenous people of Prekmurje with their actions, part of the left-leaning locals carried out several acts of sabotage within the Liberation Front as early as the summer of 1941. The resistance movement was broken up by the Hungarians in the autumn of the same year; most of the activists were captured, while only a handful of them managed to evade arrest and flee Prekmurje.

Despite the relatively quick establishment of infrastructural connections with the homeland, which was one of the conditions for a speedy integration of Prekmurje into the Hungarian economy, the factories in Murska Sobota faced difficulties due to the changed economic conditions, while many seasonal workers found it difficult to find a job. The process of integrating the occupied territory into the Hungarian administrative system was legalized by the civil administration introduced on 15 August, with the adoption of the law on the re-annexation of Southern Provinces (Délvidék) – namely Bačka, Baranja, Prekmurje, and Međimurje – to Hungary on 16 December 1941.