

*Božo Repe, Kornelija Ajlec\**

## **Occupation Borders 1941–1945 through Diplomatic Archives, People’s Lives and Remnants on Location\*\***

### **About the project**

Despite the abundant bibliography, totalling almost 13,000 units, occupation borders in the Slovene ethnic territory during World War II have only been dealt with in part. Thus far, historians have paid most attention to diplomatic decisions, and in specific segments also to on-site negotiations. In Slovenia, the question of occupation borders was most often addressed by Dr Tone Ferenc,<sup>1</sup> while in the period of Yugoslavia this subject was dealt with by several historians, including Ferdo Čulinović, who penned the first book on the question at hand and is still regarded as a fundamental work.<sup>2</sup> As evident from the sources stated in the scope of this and other articles published in this miscellany, the bulk of sources are kept in the Military Archive in Belgrade, which keeps a considerable number of valuable microfilms, particularly those originating from the German archives. Key archives for diplomacy-related issues in this context are part of the national archives of the former occupying states, whereby it should be pointed

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\* Dr Božo Repe, Full Professor, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts, Department of History, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Aškerčeva 2, bozo.repe@ff.uni-lj.si; Dr Kornelija Ajlec, Assistant Professor, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts, Department of History, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Aškerčeva 2, kornelija.ajlec@ff.uni-lj.si.

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1 Among others: Ferenc, *Okupacijski sistemi v Sloveniji 1941–1945*; Ferenc, *Nacistična in raznarodovalna politika v Sloveniji v letih 1941–1945*; Ferenc, *Aneksionistična in raznarodovalna politika okupatorjev v Sloveniji*; Ferenc, *Okupacijski sistemi med drugo svetovno vojno. 1, Razkosanje in aneksionizem*; Ferenc, *Okupacijski sistemi med drugo svetovno vojno. 2, Raznarodovanje*; Ferenc, *Okupacijski sistemi med drugo svetovno vojno. 3, Nasilje in izkoriščanje gmotnih sil za potrebe okupatorskih držav*; Ferenc, *Nacistična politika denacionalizacije u Sloveniji u godinama od 1941 do 1945*; Ferenc, *Le système d'occupation des Nazis en Slovénie*; etc.

2 Čulinović, *Okupatorska podjela Jugoslavije*.

out that in the case of Germany these archives were transferred from Bonn to Berlin after the German reunification. This transfer does not pose a problem, as the research considered in this work has shown that such documents can be traced. Naturally, some materials are kept in Slovene archives as well.

The research project entitled *Make This Land German ... Italian ... Hungarian ... Croatian! The Role of Occupation Borders in the Denationalization Policy and the Lives of the Slovene Population*, which is popularly referred to simply as *Occupation Borders* (Slovene: *Okupacijske meje*),<sup>3</sup> addressed this issue comprehensively, considering several aspects. Structurally speaking, this research consisted of several phases, as does this article.

*Phase I* included: 1. an overview of a rough division of the Slovene territory on the highest diplomatic level and the related Axis powers treaties that were based on the principle of the debellation of Yugoslavia; 2. an exploration of the territory's military occupation and marking out the occupied space on location, where occasional conflicts occurred between occupiers that were otherwise allies; 3. study of the concrete delineation of borders on the basis of border commissions; 4. a survey of modes of fortifying borders. In doing so, we were able to detect common characteristic features and differences between these borders and the respective occupiers' border regimes.

*Phase II* of the research was conducted on location. Joint historical and geographical work resulted in an exact calculation of the entire length of all borders (640 km) and in an outline of their course.<sup>4</sup> Geographers from the Anton Melik Geographical Institute at the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (henceforth referred to as GIAM ZRC SAZU)<sup>5</sup> included in the research group transferred archival diplomatic, military and other maps to the modern-day Global Positioning System (GPS). Both parts of the research group, i.e. geographers and historians,<sup>6</sup> traced these borders on site, marking them out and identifying their

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3 The Facebook page used for disseminating research procedures and results bears the same name. It contains all eyewitness testimonies and other materials gathered thus far: <https://www.facebook.com/OkupacijskeMeje/> (accessed in February 2020)

4 Repe, *Diplomatsko razkosanje Slovenije*, 188.

5 Members of the research group from the GIAM ZRC SAZU are Dr Matija Zorn, Dr Mateja Breg Valjavec, Dr Rok Ciglič, Dr Mateja Ferk, Dr Primož Gašperič, Dr Matjaž Geršič, Dr Mauro Hrvatini, Dr Drago Kladnik, Manca Volk Bahun, and the young researcher Jure Tičar.

6 Historians and members of the research group from the Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Education at the University of Ljubljana, and the Institute of Contemporary History include Dr Božo Repe, Dr Kornelija Ajlec, Dr Bojan Balkovec, Dr Jožef Božidar Flajšman, Dr Aleš Gabrič, Dr Bojan Godeša, Dr Darja Kerec, Dr Peter Mikša, and the young researcher Maja Vehar. Dr Attila Kovács from the Institute for Ethnic Studies participated in the team as an external associate. Students from the Department of History participated in the project as well, some of them in the scope of seminars in the academic years 2017/18 and 2018/19 and others more intensely as part of student part-time work. Matevž Šlabnik, Blaž Štangelj, and Daniel Siter co-created local exhibitions; Marko Berkovič, Domen Kaučič, Lea Knez, Tjaša Konovšek, Jernej Komac, Tadej Madjar, and Maruša Nartnik conducted interviews on location, and Ivan Smiljanič carried out archival research.

remnants. Geographers produced detailed maps of all occupation borders featured in our exhibitions or publications.

*Phase III* was dedicated to a systematic collection of testimonials,<sup>7</sup> their processing, preparation for publication, and analysis. The interviewees belonged mostly to the last living wartime generation that witnessed occupation borders as children. In many cases this was the last opportunity to record their memories because, sadly, a few interviewees have died in the meantime.

This structure outlined at least a rough historical picture that conveys the occupation borders’ importance for the Slovenes’ fate on the national level, as well as that of border areas and individuals. When discussing the occupation borders, the extent of the occupiers’ ethnocidal and genocidal actions, the altered demographic and national structure of the Slovene territory,<sup>8</sup> as well as the oppressors’ other activities were writ large. There was no room for Slovenes on the map of new, Nazi Europe, where the German Reich extended from Norway’s North Cape to the last Greek island, and from Moscow to the Channel Islands. Unburdened by any ideology that is otherwise typical of the exploration of World War II, the research results provide a realistic insight into the enormous effort and energy required for Slovenes’ survival and resistance.

The research follows the concept of so-called *public history*,<sup>9</sup> and paints a picture of historical narration that is different from that presented thus far in terms of context and subject matter. It focuses on the examination of history from the bottom-up, on the history of individuals whose lives were shaped by great players’ decisions and who – provided that they were not resettled – had to live along the newly established or newly fortified borders that were outlined by the occupiers, trying to sustain themselves by secretly crossing the border, working their land on the other side of the border, by smuggling, looking for a *modus vivendi* with the occupiers and their collaborators on the one hand and partisans on the other.

Life along the occupation borders brought about hundreds of tragic and comical stories, seemingly small but also representative of both the condemnable and courageous actions that mankind is capable of. With the project in question we managed to prevent at least a fraction thereof from falling into oblivion.

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7 There were 184 interviews recorded between June 2017 and February 2020; their durations ranged between 30 minutes and three and a half hours. There were 260 segments published from these interviews on the project’s Facebook page. The interviews are available on the Zgodovina.si YouTube playlist: [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLRtNtrQJTHOwr9R\\_8Rgj1KXtJo1T7nB0o](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLRtNtrQJTHOwr9R_8Rgj1KXtJo1T7nB0o) (retrieved in February 2020).

8 For instance, as a consequence of the total expulsion of the Slovene population from northern Dolenjska, the regions of Posavje and Obsotelje along the border with Croatia, as well as, in part, from areas situated along the Italian-German border. This was followed by the settlement of the German population in a strip of the territory extending 100 km in length and 25 km in width.

9 Working with people on location, publishing results in real time, interacting with the local milieu (forestry offices, local societies and interested individuals), inclusion of students of history, etc.

## The Occupation of Yugoslavia and the Diplomatic Delineation of Borders

Hitler sought to connect the Balkan states and Germany as much as possible even before the onset of the war. Romania got the worst of it: according to an oil pact signed in 1940, Romania had to sell oil to Germany at a very low, prearranged price and cede Bessarabia and northern Bukovina to the Soviet Union, a part of Transylvania to Hungary, and Dobruja to Bulgaria. The German troops controlled all Romanian strategic structures, and German instructors led the Romanian army. Romania was part of the Tripartite Pact from November 1940 onwards.<sup>10</sup> Due to its connections with Germany, Hungary also obtained territories at the expense of Slovakia, and joined the Tripartite Pact in 1940.<sup>11</sup> Economically speaking, Bulgaria was completely subordinated to Germany. Having entered into the pact on 1 March 1941, Bulgaria immediately saw a large number of German soldiers arrive in the country.<sup>12</sup>

Initially, Hitler did not regard the Kingdom of Yugoslavia as a military target, and thus did not want to attack it. On the other hand, Yugoslav politics was confusing and contradictory in this period of increased tension before the beginning of the war. This was a result of internal politics and the fact that Yugoslavia had no allies immediately before the attack of the Axis powers, only Western Allies moral support. On account of its indecisive policy Yugoslavia avoided active interference with conflicts throughout Europe for almost two years. Without the support of the great powers and due to significant pressure exerted by Nazi Germany, Yugoslavia initially declared neutrality. However, the pressures increased soon after that, and in early March 1941 Hitler tried to convince Prince Paul, the Yugoslav regent, that it was necessary for Yugoslavia to join the Tripartite Pact. Hitler even informed the regent of Germany's forthcoming attack on the Soviet Union,<sup>13</sup> hinting as to why Yugoslavia should join the pact. However, the country persisted in wavering because it was faced with an outburst of strikes in the years 1939/40, a result of a fall in wages and various economic and political crises brought about by the onset of war in Europe. The government put down these strikes by means of severe measures, banned the operation of trade unions and decided to establish a concentration camp in Bileća, in modern-day Bosnia and Herzegovina. Firearms were used against participants of the demonstrations held on 14 December 1940 in Belgrade. At the same time the government announced a rent decree, food reserves, requisition, price caps for food, and even introduced bread and flour stamps in early 1941. However, as early as in the spring of 1941 the authorities were no longer able to control the situation. Large demonstrations broke out when Yugoslavia's accession to the Tripartite Pact

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10 Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 8–27.

11 Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II*, 91–93, 137–138.

12 Miller, *Bulgaria during the Second World War*, 37, 45–46.

13 Kitchen, *British Policy Towards the Soviet Union*, 48.

on 25 March 1941 became known. Assisted by the British intelligence service, a group of officers led by the Yugoslav Air Force generals Borivoje Mirković and Dušan Simović carried out a coup, declaring King Peter II an adult, doing away with the regency and, concurrently, confirming the accession to the Tripartite Pact.<sup>14</sup>

The new government, consisting of representatives of the Yugoslav Muslim organization, the Slovene People's Party, and the Serbian Cultural Club,<sup>15</sup> gave public assurance that the Pact remained in force. At the same time, the government engaged in secret negotiations with the United Kingdom to leave the Pact. On account of the discord, confusion and conflicts among the different factions within it,<sup>16</sup> the new government was incapable of ensuring consent both in terms of internal or external policy. With the German Army having conquered most of Europe, the United Kingdom fighting for its existence, and the Soviet Union's non-aggression treaty with Germany, the new government had no room to manoeuvre. Fearing Germany, it did not even dare to order a total mobilization. This political agony was put to a stop only by the war. Enraged due to Yugoslav unreliability, Hitler decided to attack along with his military allies.<sup>17</sup> Having made territorial promises, he had no difficulty convincing neighbours of Yugoslavia and Greece to take part in the attack on both countries, giving them a relatively easy task because the Yugoslav army's weaponry was outdated, rendering it unable to offer much resistance.<sup>18</sup> The territory was split in a traditional manner, i.e. into a war zone and rear area, and the military doctrine was based on experience gained in the Balkan Wars and World War I, i.e. waging front warfare. It was unable to implement mobilization in the few days, less than a week, it was given, managing to mobilize only half of a total of 1,200,000 conscripts. The General Staff planned the defence of the entire 3,000-km long border, along which weak fortifications had been built in the pre-war years. The Yugoslav Army would gradually withdraw southwards, where it would open a new "Salonica" front together with its allies, which was easily prevented by the attackers' mobile troops.<sup>19</sup>

14 Repe, *S puško in knjigo*, 9–10.

15 The Serbian Cultural Club was a political organization. It was founded in 1937 and strove to form Great Serbia within a federal monarchy.

16 *Inter alia*, the conflicts stemmed from the fact that almost half the ministers in the new government came from the previous one that had been overthrown.

17 *Ibid.*, 10.

18 On the eve of World War II, the Royal Yugoslav Army had enough ammunition for 75 days of infantry operations, 100 days of artillery operations and up to a week of anti-aircraft defence. In total, it had 110 tanks, 60 of which were from the period of World War I and 50 of which were the state of the art and had been purchased the year before. This implied that tank units lacked experience and were poorly trained. The air force consisted of 459 aircraft of all types; meanwhile, the navy had only 32 vessels at sea and another four on the Danube. Additionally, in: Welcome to Yugoslavia, the Prekmurje Slovenes!" More in: *Vojna enciklopedija Jugoslavije*, IV, 250–252; Čulinović, *Slom stare Jugoslavije*, 162–168.

19 Terzić, *Slom kraljevine Jugoslavije*, 250–252.

The attack on Yugoslavia began in the early hours of 6 April 1941. Having been provided detailed information by informants from the ranks of the Volksdeutsche, Ustashe and other fifth columnists, the German *Luftwaffe* initially attacked airfields and other important military structures and, later on, cities. The brutal attack on Belgrade is particularly well known. Penetrating from Austria and Bulgaria, German motorized troops and infantry followed suit. The king and the government left the country, and on 17 April representatives of the High Command of the Yugoslav Army signed an unconditional surrender. The bulk of the Yugoslav army was captured and the country dismembered,<sup>20</sup> with Slovenia suffering this fate in a mere six days. The German Army penetrated from the north and advanced via the Slovene territory towards the Croatian cities of Varaždin, Zagreb, and Karlovac. When the Germans successfully completed their campaign to Zagreb and Karlovac, cutting off Yugoslavia's western part from its centre, the Italian troops, arriving from the annexed territories on the other side of the Rapallo border on 11 April,<sup>21</sup> began to advance in the direction of Ljubljana and Kočevje, continuing towards Bosnia from the northern side and towards the Adriatic from the southern one. The Italians expected to be met with strong resistance, but this did not happen. Concurrently, the Hungarian occupying troops marched to Prekmurje. Initially, the Yugoslav Army's defence fought along the border – its troops were poorly organized and only partly mobilized and they retreated to the country's interior. During their retreat, the Yugoslav troops set ablaze many military depots and intentionally destroyed the infrastructure, e.g. a railway viaduct near Borovnica, to prevent the occupiers from making use of it. The defence line consisting of fortifications and bunkers, which was referred to as the Western Front and, subsequently, popularly known as Rupnik Line, remained unused. In Gorenjska, near Gozd-Martuljek, just one group of volunteers engaged in a conflict with the Italian troops. Other volunteers, who gathered despite the opposition from the Yugoslav Royal Army and refused to collaborate with the Communists, gathered in Novo mesto. This group was about 3,000 strong, some of its members were Communists but the bulk were emigrants from Primorska who considered the war to be an opportunity to change the western border. Starting from Dolenjska, they set off towards Zagreb and partly towards the Adriatic coast. The majority of them were quick to return because the Independent State of Croatia was established as early as on 10 April by the collaborationist Ustashe movement.<sup>22</sup>

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20 Repe, *S puško in knjigo*, 12.

21 Additionally on the Rapallo border in: Ajlec, Zorn & Mikša, *Zapadna jugoslavenska granica*, 91–97.

22 Ibid., 12–13.

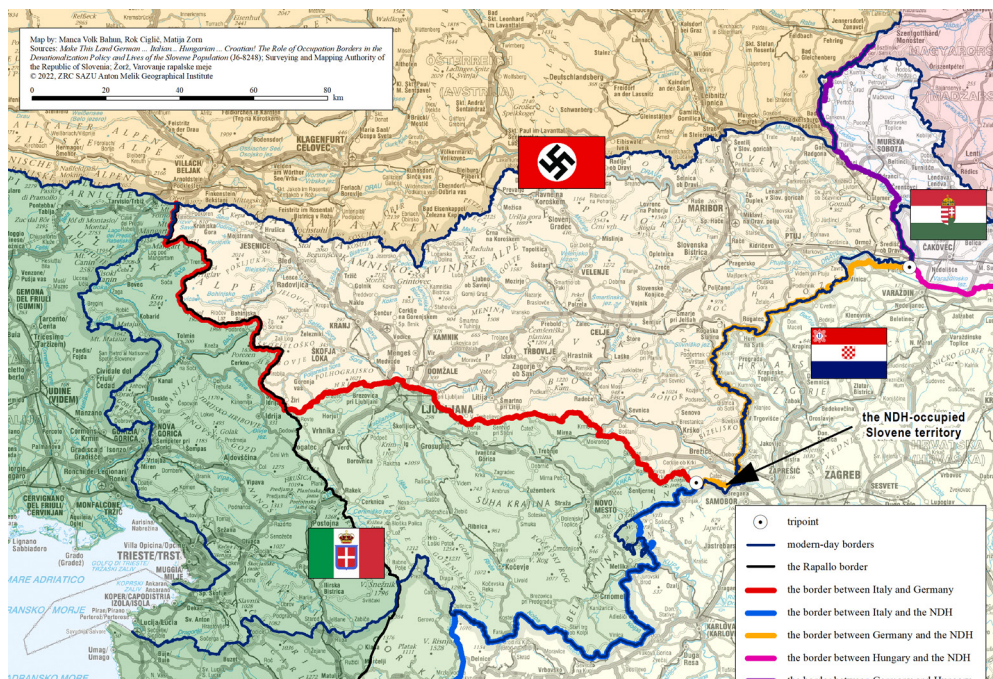


Fig. 1: A map showing occupation borders in Slovenia.

## General Characteristics of Occupation Borders in Slovenia

During World War II, four occupation regimes – the German, Italian, Hungarian and the Croatian Ustashe regimes – divided Slovenes into four state entities and, in the ethnic sense, sentenced many to death also by resorting to genocidal methods. Due to these measures used by the occupying forces, the division by four occupiers, as well as due to the growing political divide, World War II marks one of the most significant moments in the history of the Slovene nation, which managed to survive but remains deeply affected by it to this day.

The German and Hungarian occupiers regarded the occupied areas as their own national territory. Germans intended to turn the Slovene territory into the German Reich's southern border, similar to in the past, when Slovene lands were a march of the Frankish Empire and the Austrian part of the Habsburg Monarchy.<sup>23</sup> German aspirations for the Slovene territory were also present in the interwar period, when demands were made to change the borders in favour of Austria and, subsequently, Germany. Austrian and German journalists wrote that Slovenes populated “the German cultural soil” and blocked their route

23 They appropriated Koroška, Gorenjska, Štajerska, the valley of the river Meža, Obsotelje, Posavje, as well as four German villages in Prekmurje.

to the Adriatic. Failing to show the presence of the German population throughout the area of interest, they declared the majority of Slovenes to be *Windische*, i.e. people speaking a Slavic dialect who were German in spirit. The civil administration, which was introduced on 14 April 1941, would be of a temporary nature. The German occupation zone was divided into administrative units, all of which were headquartered in Klagenfurt and Graz and whose officials were exclusively Germans. According to the original plans, this territory would be integrated into the Reich on 1 October 1941. Up to that point the administration of the occupied provinces would be adjusted to the neighbouring provinces of Styria and Carinthia (which was done), and the Slovene question would be “irrevocably” solved. This implied the destruction (ethnocide) of Slovenes as a nation. The formal annexation was put off due to personnel-related issues and, subsequently, the development of the National Liberation War. The intended integration did not take place, but in practice they acted as if the area were part of the Reich. The Nazi regime was introduced immediately, racial and other laws entered into force and compulsory mobilization was introduced at a later point. The occupied provinces were given the same status as Alsace, Lorraine and Luxembourg. They were to be legally and formally annexed to Germany as soon as possible. The Hungarians regarded the occupation of Prekmurje, which was handed over to them by Germans, as a rectification of one of the injustices stemming from the Treaty of Trianon after World War I. Hitler assigned the central, economically poorly developed part of the Slovene territory to Italy. Unlike the Germans and Hungarians, the Italians did not regard their occupation zone, which they integrated into Italy and named the Province of Ljubljana (Provincia di Lubiana), as their national territory. Stemming from the period of the Risorgimento (the aspirations for the unification of Italy in the 19th century), their belief was that their national borders extended as far as the Julian Alps, which had been achieved with the Treaty of Rapallo after World War I. In the case of Italy, the empire’s expansion was modelled after the Roman example and their views were purely pragmatic, i.e. seeking to keep Germany as far away as possible from the Rapallo border. The occupied territory would become Italian in the national sense (i.e. populated by Italians) by the end of the war or soon after that.<sup>24</sup>

The Independent State of Croatia got the smallest occupation zone, even though the Ustashe had drawn the borders of Great Croatia in the Triglav mountain range before the war and expected that they would get hold of the bulk of Slovene territory.

Out of all key motives for World War II, the revision of state borders that were introduced after World War I is without a doubt the most disregarded one, as well as the most forgotten in international bibliography. The revision of borders was done to the detriment of small nations, including Slovenes, who were divided between four different state entities and who saw new state borders between the Axis powers being outlined in their territory. These borders were not drawn merely on paper, they were transferred

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24 Ibid., 20–22; additional reading, e.g.: Biber, *Nacizem in Nemci v Jugoslaviji 1933–1941*.



on site and made a deep cut in the day-to-day lives of the Slovene population. They followed solely the logic of dividing the territory, and aimed to achieve a rapid and violent annihilation of the Slovene nation. Barring the border with the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), which followed mostly the former ethnic division of the territory or (in part) former administrative borders, all the borders were new. Other borders did not have historic predispositions and were outlined arbitrarily. The border with the NDH is the only border that is still in existence.

Nazi Germany divided its part of the occupied Slovene territory into two temporary administrative units: Lower Styria and Gorenjska with the valley of the river Meža. After a few months, their respective headquarters were relocated to Graz and Klagenfurt from their original locations in Maribor and Bled. They were led by heads of the civil administration. Anticipating a swift integration into the Reich, both administrative units were reorganized according to the German principle of districts and counties, German offices were introduced, as were the German racial laws. The German border with the NDH and Italy became the southern border of the German Reich, and was regarded as its buffer zone. After the occupation forces had attacked Yugoslavia, Italy also obtained territory behind the Rapallo border: the bulk of Dolenjska and Ljubljana with its surroundings as far as the river Sava. The so-called Province of Ljubljana, which was integrated into the Kingdom of Italy, was established in the newly obtained territories. The Rapallo border remained in force because Primorska was regarded as being part of the Italian national territory and the Province of Ljubljana was yet to be Italianized. After Italy's capitulation in 1943, the entire territory remained formally part of Mussolini's Fascist republic but came, in fact, under the Nazi administration. The Province of Ljubljana became part of the so-called Operational Adriatic Coastline Zone with headquarters in Trieste. Prekmurje was handed over to the Hungarians by the Germans. Having taken over the authority, they established the military administration that was divided into two parts and subordinated to the Command of the military-administrative group of the Southern Army, which was initially headquartered in Subotica and later in Novi Sad. As early as in August 1941, the military administration was replaced by a civil one. Thus, began the process of integration of the occupied area into the Hungarian state.

Prekmurje was divided into two counties, Vas and Zala, as was the case in the period of Austria-Hungary. The Independent State of Croatia, which was established immediately after the beginning of World War II, obtained five Slovene settlements: Bregansko Selo,<sup>25</sup> Nova Vas pri Bregani,<sup>26</sup> Jesenice na Dolenjskem, Obrežje and Čedem. These villages extended over an area measuring approximately 20 km<sup>2</sup>, which was at the time populated by some 800 people.<sup>27</sup>

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25 Modern-day Slovenska Vas.

26 Modern-day Nova Vas pri Mokricah.

27 Repe et al. *Mejni kamni, bodeča žica, stražni stolpi in minska polja*, 10–11.

The extent of the ethnocidal and genocidal practice carried out by the occupying forces can be gathered from forcible migrations and crossings of borders – 58,522 Slovenes were taken to German and Italian concentration camps, 688 to Hungarian ones, around 400 to Croatian camps, almost 20,000 people were in confinement and subjected to forced labour, and 80,000 incarcerated. Additionally, 571 Jews from Prekmurje were deported, the majority of whom was murdered in Auschwitz. The Germans intended to expel between 220,000 and 260,000 Slovenes, but managed to expel only 63,000. About 17,000 people were able to escape across the German-Italian border to the German occupation zone. Some of the around 10,000 people who were expelled from the German occupation zone to the NDH managed to escape or enter legally the Italian occupation zone. Around 17,000 Gottschee (Kočevje) Germans left the Italian-occupied territory and were resettled in the Slovene areas situated along the Croatian border from which inhabitants had been deported (which makes the exploration of this border necessary, although the lack of oral sources poses a problem because there were no Slovenes there during the war, and Germans fled from the area after the war).<sup>28</sup>

The occupation of the Slovene ethnic territory in 1941 resulted in five different border areas and borders. Namely, the border between Germany and Hungary, between Hungary and NDH, between Germany and NDH, between Italy and Germany, and between Italy and NDH. Despite the formal annexation of the so-called Province of Ljubljana to Italy, the Rapallo border remained in place, separating the Slovenes in Primorska from their compatriots. Only the border with Croatia, which was based on old delimitations, is preserved to this day. Research carried out by the GIAM shows that the length of all borders totalled 640 km. They ran from the marshy river basins of Mura and Drava as far as the summit of Triglav, from the river Sotla to Peč above Rateče, from Ljubljana's suburbs via the Polhov Gradec hills and the valley of the river Sora as far as Idrija and continuing onwards.

The occupying forces outlined their respective territories with borders that separated their occupation zones. The formation of all borders was accompanied by the violence of war, deportations, and escapes from one occupation zone to another. At the same time, due to both the demands of life and the partisan resistance – which that did not acknowledge the division and fought against it – the borders were crossed illegally on a regular basis. Inevitably, all this resulted in much trauma and broke off the traditional patterns of migration, agriculture, and commerce.<sup>29</sup>

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28 Ibid., 11–12. Additionally, on the occupation policy and the consequences of the occupation in: Repe, *S puško in knjigo*, 27, 32, 39, 51–53.

29 Repe et al. *Mejni kamni, bodeča žica, stražni stolpi in minska polja*, 12.

## Individual Borders<sup>30</sup>

The nature of borders in the Slovene ethnic territory during World War II differed, as did the modes of their identification on location. However, they shared the sequence of how they were defined: generally, decisions about the course of the border were made by politicians, subsequently (sometimes contemporaneously) this was followed by a military occupation and a provisional marking of the border, where disagreements occurred between occupiers even though they were allies. The exact delimitation was done by delimitation commissions if they existed. Finally, the border was cleared and physically protected by soldiers, which was done most consistently by the Germans.

No agreements were concluded or conferences held at the highest political level. Hitler roughly outlined the borders on 27 March 1941, and ultimately defined them with his *Directive on the Partition of Yugoslavia* on 3 and 12 April 1941 in one of his headquarters in Mönichkirchen near Vienna.<sup>31</sup> Military occupations and marking the territory were followed by diplomats on location. Kurt von Kamphoener, a lower-ranking diplomat appointed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ribbentrop as his plenipotentiary, was the main German negotiator.<sup>32</sup>

30 The description of borders is adapted from the central exhibition *Mejni kamni, bodeča žica, stražni stolpi in minska polja* (Border Stones, Barbed Wire, Watchtowers and Minefields) that was produced by the research group in December 2018 and displayed at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana. Additionally, it was adapted from the following regional exhibitions: *Rogaška Slatina kot obmejno mesto nemškega rajha* (Rogaška Slatina as a Border Town in the German Reich), *Idrija in Žiri kot obmejno območje, 1941–1945* (Idrija and Žiri as a Border Area), *Vinceremo, videt ćemo* (Vinceremo, We Shall See) in Bela krajina and Dolenjska, as well as *Okupirana Ljubljana: mesto ob meji* (Occupied Ljubljana: A City along the Border). Materials displayed in the exhibitions throughout Slovenia are available online: <https://www.facebook.com/OkupacijskeMeje/> (accessed: in February 2020) and <https://www.okupacijskemeje.si> (accessed: in February 2020)

31 Discussed in detail in: Čulinović, *Okupatorska podjela Jugoslavije*, 49–78. See also: Ferenc, *Nacistična raznarodovalna politika*, 142 and Ferenc, *Okupacijski sistemi med drugo svetovno vojno. 1. Razkosanje in aneksionizem*, 72.

32 Kurt von Kamphoener (17 July 1887, Istanbul – 11 February 1983, Garmisch-Partenkirchen) was a German diplomat. As a leader of the German delegation for the border-related questions in the years 1941–1943 he dealt with the border questions with Italy, Hungary, Slovakia, the Independent State of Croatia and was active elsewhere in the Balkans as well. He had offices in Bled, Ljubljana, and Rogaška Slatina in this period. Formally, he was subordinated to respective German diplomatic representations; however, in reality he reported directly to the Minister of Foreign Affairs von Ribbentrop. His father was Louis von Kamphöener, a German officer and Ottoman marshal. He studied law at Oxford, Heidelberg and Göttingen. He worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1911 onwards. He worked in Madrid (1911–1913), Sydney (1913–14), Sofia (1916–18), London (1920–23), Liverpool (1923–26), and Madrid (1926–31). He became a member of the Social Democratic Party in 1930 and of the NSDAP in 1940 (he was probably pressured into joining). He helmed the Volksdeutsche Resettlement Commission in 1939, when *Volksdeutsche* were resettled from Polish territories that became part of the Soviet Union. Following the occupation and partition of Slovenia, he was a German representative with the High Commissioner of the Province of Ljubljana from mid-October to mid-November 1941. He was involved in the resettlement of the Gottschee Germans (PA AA, Italien. Die Umsiedlung der Deutschen aus der Provinz Laibach. Tätigkeit der Umsiedlungskommission. Pol. XII/8 vom 1941 bis 1942. R 105128). During the war, he was a communications officer of the German military-intelligence service (Abwehr) in Russia, Athens, Vrnjačka Banja and in Zagreb. Lieutenant Colonel O. J. Hale, a U.S. interrogator, described him as being “highly cultivated and critical of Nazis” in August 1945. (<https://www.ifz-muenchen.de/archiv/zs/zs-2066.pdf>). He was an U.S. prisoner of war in the years 1945–1946; however, he began teaching foreign languages in Hamburg as early as in 1946. He returned to the diplomatic service in 1950 and worked as a general

## The Border between Germany and the NDH — the Reich's Southern Border

The border between Germany and the NDH measured approximately 100 kilometres in length, with the majority of the delimitation line running along the river Sotla. By and large, the new border corresponded with the ethnic and former administrative border that demarcated former state and political formations in the area in question, with the Sotla having marked the border between Slovenes and Croats for centuries. Along with the German border with Italy, this Lower Styrian border on the river Sotla became the southernmost protective border of the proposed thousand-year Third Reich. Consequently, the German administration conducted the ethnic cleansing of the border corridor; Slovenes were deported and replaced by the resettled Gottschee Germans, and the Reich's southern border was fortified and protected by its army. The initial fortification work had been completed by the late autumn of 1941. Barbed wire was installed along the border, as well as minefields and guard posts. In March 1943 decisions about the urgent construction of watchtowers were announced. Barbed wire, up to two metres high, was attached to wooden poles that were driven into the ground at equal intervals a few metres apart. The minefields along the wire were approximately two to four metres wide.



Fig. 2: The border crossing between Germany and the Independent State of Croatia near Harine Zlake (Podčetrtek).

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consul in Istanbul up to his retirement in 1952. His biography was adapted from: Keipert (ed.), *Biographisches Handbuch*, s. v. Kamphoevener, Kurt von.

Crossing the border legally was an extremely difficult and troublesome undertaking that required a border pass. Plagued by shortages, people living along the border smuggled various goods across the border and crossed it illegally. Tobacco and meat were smuggled from Croatia and, in turn, their Slovene neighbours supplied salt, flour, sugar, coffee and even sulfate. Bread, butter, milk and eggs were exchanged between people living on both sides of the border, as were important letters.<sup>33</sup>

October 1944 saw the Germans begin with the extensive defence and fortification work along the entire border. They built trenches, pillboxes and bunkers, whose remnants are clearly noticeable on location to this day. The local population was mobilized to do manual labour, even in areas 20 kilometres away from the border. Mines that were planted along the river Sotla were still responsible for many deaths even a decade after the end of the war.<sup>34</sup>

## The Border between Germany and Italy

The border between Germany and Italy had two short branches. To the south-east of the Province of Ljubljana the border ran from Ljubljana's eastern suburbs, to the north of Stična, Šentrupert and Krmelj, past Bučka, which was located on the German side, towards Zameško, where it reached the river Krka. From there it continued along the Krka, past Kostanjevica, which was located on the Italian side, in the direction of Bušeča Vas. In front of Bušeča Vas the border crossed the river Krka and reached the tripoint of Germany, the Province of Ljubljana, and the NDH in the proximity of Gadova Peč. A large boundary stone that had marked the border between the Austrian and the Hungarian part of the Habsburg monarchy was turned into a tripoint boundary marker.<sup>35</sup> A section of the border continued towards Štajerska as a border between Germany and the NDH as far as the next tripoint, namely that of the NDH, Germany and Hungary. In this section the delimitation generally corresponded to the border between the Hungarian and Austrian part of the former monarchy, or to the border between the Austrian crown lands Carniola and Styria on the one hand and with the autonomous Kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia on the one other. The other section of the border, which ran in the direction of the Gorjanci hill range, became the border between Italy and the NDH. It ran across the river Kolpa as far as Osilnica, Čaber, along the river Čabranka as far as Osilnica, continuing to the west of Delnice as far as the Bay of Bakar.

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33 Children of the Border, <https://www.facebook.com/OkupacijskeMeje/videos/854834978194414/> (accessed: February 2020) Recorded by Dr Božidar Flajšman Script and editing by Dr Božidar Flajšman and Dr Bojan Balkovec.

34 Repe, *Diplomatsko razkosanje Slovenije*, 161.

35 The research group identified it on the basis of data from historical maps that was transferred to the GPS system by the GIAM (Dr Rok Ciglič). This border marker will be turned into a memorial. Tromejnik, [https://facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=1967256896847073&id=1964101180495978](https://facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1967256896847073&id=1964101180495978) (accessed: February 2020). Recorded and edited by Dr Božidar Flajšman. This holds true for all videos mentioned here.

In this branch, the border with Italy was a strategic (and economic) boundary. The river Sava lent itself to being a natural border, although Germans sought to control the area on the opposite bank due to its economic importance. The strategic nature of this decision is attested by the fact that the border ran along a hilly terrain that enabled the Germans to have control of the Italian border territory as well.

The second branch of the border ran to the north and west of Ljubljana via the Polhov Gradec dolomites as far as the former Rapallo border between Žiri and Idrija, reaching it near Spodnji Vrsnik. The Rapallo border ran from Peč above Rateče (present-day tripoint of Austria, Slovenia and Italy, at the time the border between Germany and Italy) across the summits of Peč, Jalovec, Triglav, Možic, Porezen, Blegoš, Črni Vrh nad Cerknim, Bevki, Hotedršica, Planina, Javornik, Biška Gora, Griž, Snežnik, Kastav and to the east of Matulji towards the sea. With the occupation, its role changed. Between Peč and the settlement of Spodnji Vrsnik the former border between Italy and Yugoslavia became the border between Italy and the German Reich. The new border, coming from the direction of Ljubljana, joined it in the proximity of Spodnji Vrsnik. That part of the Rapallo border that no longer demarcated Italy and Yugoslavia (from Spodnji Vrsnik to the territory to the east of Snežnik via Hotedršica) became Italy's "internal" border, which was still subject to control. Namely, the Slovenes in the Province of Ljubljana were in a particular position despite the province's integration into Italy. The Rapallo border remained in force in terms of police, customs and taxes. The Province of Ljubljana bordered on the expanded Province of Rijeka, the Province of Trieste and the Province of Gorizia. Travelling from the Province of Ljubljana to Italy was possible for passport holders, although not everybody was entitled to a passport. Tax and customs laws from the former state were still in force in all former Yugoslav provinces that were integrated into Italy.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, travel documents were required to travel from the Province of Ljubljana to Italy's interior. The boundary stone near Spodnji Vrsnik, which features the number 40, thus became some sort of a tripoint boundary marker identifying the border between Germany, Italy and the Province of Ljubljana.

The inscriptions on boundary stones standing on that section of the old Rapallo border that became the border between Germany and Italy were changed. Additionally, the Germans installed additional fortifications and put guards on the former Yugoslav side. Barbed wire was installed, and mines were planted along the delimitation line. To control the border, the occupier cleared large forested areas, demolished a few residential and auxiliary buildings and built watchtowers in prominent spots. These were about 30 metres high and strategically placed to control the area between two watchtowers. Additionally, both the German and Italian occupiers had troops stationed in the area to patrol the border on a regular basis. It was difficult to cross the border in order to work

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36 Ferenc, *Okupacijski sistemi med drugo svetovno vojno. 1, Razkosanje in aneksionizem*, 251.

the land, tend to meadows or see to urgent matters because border crossings were sparse, with guards or border controls often arbitrarily (dis)allowing the local population to cross the border. Consequently, the border was frequently crossed illegally, despite the risks and deaths caused by mines.

Following Italy's capitulation in September 1943 and Germany taking over the control of the Italian-occupied territory, the border was rendered irrelevant because the Province of Ljubljana, along with the neighbouring Italian provinces, became part of the so-called Operational Adriatic Coastline Zone, which was headquartered in Trieste. In part, the German army removed mines that had been placed along traffic routes and in meadows, and in some places even barbed wire that was then used elsewhere. Some sections of the border were still protected to prevent the passage or operation of partisan troops. However, it was only after the end of the war that this border area was properly cleared out. Formally, the border continued to exist because a fascist republic came into being in Italy's north (the-so called Republic of Salò), which was led by Mussolini, and the Province of Ljubljana continued to be part of it (but without Italian presence).

A peculiarity of the border between Germany and Italy is that it also ran in high mountains. This was not so much a matter of protection as it was about symbolically marking a space. It was based on the interwar Rapallo border, i.e. the border between the Kingdom of Italy and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Geographically, the border ran along the divide between the Adriatic and the Black Sea watersheds. The existing boundary stones were used, with the letter D being carved on the boundary stones' German side, which replaced the letter J that signified Yugoslavia. The boundary stones' Italian side continued to feature the letter I.

The Rapallo border ran across Triglav, and so did the occupation border. The Germans, who "lost" Triglav after World War I, appropriated it once again — also symbolically because it was soon depicted on postage stamps. In keeping with the motto "No borders on this summit ever again!", the boundary marker on the summit of Triglav was removed by partisans in August 1944. On this occasion they hung a Slovene flag there.

High mountains were not easily traversable due to the relief, they were unpopulated and trails were scarce. Consequently, the border was heavily guarded mostly on passes and saddles, across which ran trails and roads (the Vršič Pass). Mountain huts that stood on the German side of the border and were in the interwar period managed by the Slovene Mountaineering Society were at that point in the hands of the German Mountaineering Society. A few huts still operated in the summer of 1941, but were abandoned later on. Many mountain huts were destroyed because they could be used as a shelter by partisans or refugees. The German *Zoll-Polizei* was stationed in the hut Aljažev dom in Vrata Valley in the autumn of 1941, which was at the time renamed Kugy-Haus. Nowadays, few remnants of the high-mountains section of the border are identifiable. It can be gathered from second-hand accounts that, being a symbol of the occupation,

boundary stones were removed systematically after the war and many of them were destroyed due to the harsh climate. However, they are preserved in some places, as are the remnants of barbed wire and even wooden poles to which it was attached.<sup>37</sup>

### **The Operational Zone of the Adriatic Littoral (Operationszone Adriatisches Küstenland)**

The question of what would happen to the German-Italian border was raised after Italy's occupation. The German political and military leadership realized in the spring of 1943 that Italy would be faced with great political and military changes and was probably in for a military breakdown. They thus began both with military and political preparations. The basic orientation was that the German Army would occupy Italy and Italian-occupied territories; however, the question of how things would be regulated politically and in terms of borders remained open and was contingent upon the development of events.

Following the fall of the Fascist regime on 25 July 1943, the German High Command began to implement the preparatory measures. As regards politics and the borders, two tendencies collided. The first was annexationist and supported ardently by the *Gauleiters* of Carinthia and Tyrol. According to a plan devised by the Carinthian *Gauleiter* Dr Friedrich Rainer, the Canal Valley would be reintegrated into Carinthia and the remaining area would be divided into three parts: Istria with Trieste, Gorizia, and Carniola (initially only Dolenjska and Notranjska, later on also Gorenjska). Klagenfurt would be its centre, the German authority and the civil administration would be introduced, ethnic conflicts settled (playing the card of Italian-Slovene disputes). Additionally, they would organize the population's self-defence against Bolshevism and mobilize economic powers and manpower for the ultimate German victory. In doing so, they would achieve an old German goal, i.e. the annexation of the territory situated between Carinthia and Trieste to Germany and the Germanization of its population.

The other orientation, i.e. political and diplomatic, prevailed because Hitler insisted on it even though he agreed with Rainer's plans in principle.

Following Italy's capitulation on 8 September, the German Army began to disarm the Italian Army. On 10 September 1943, Hitler divided the German-occupied part of Italy into two parts, i.e. in the operational zone in the Apennines, to the south of them, as well as in coastal and Alpine regions and the remaining territory. The remaining territory was further divided into two zones: The Operational Zone of the Adriatic Littoral, consisting of the provinces of Friuli, Gorizia, Trieste, Istria, Rijeka, the Kvarner, Ljubljana, and the Operational Zone of the Alpine Foothills, consisting of the provinces of Bolzano, Trento, and Belluno. They were led by the *Gauleiters* of the neighbouring provinces, i.e.

37 Repe, *Diplomatsko razkosanje Slovenije*, 162–164; Repe et al. *Mejni kamni, bodeča žica, stražni stolpi in minska polja*, 20–24.



Dr Friedrich Rainer from Carinthia and Franz Hofer from Tyrol. Only top Nazi leaders were made aware of this decree, because they did not want to make an impression that the authority of the Fascist government had been violated, namely the new Italian Fascist government was formed on 9 September, one day after Italy's capitulation, under German auspices in Munich. On 12 September the German paratroopers rescued Mussolini from confinement in the Gran Sasso, Abruzzo. Mussolini reorganized the government on 23 September, returned to north Italy and established the Italian Socialist Republic (the so-called Republic of Salò, named after its "capital" on Lake Garda).

Italy was thus divided into four parts: its southern part was controlled by the Allies, the territory under the German military administration between the front and the Apennines, Mussolini's Italian Socialist Republic to the north of the Apennines, as well as two operational zones that were up to the end of the war, i.e. for about 600 days, in a complicated legal and political position. As for the Operational Zone for the Adriatic Littoral, this complicated position was not related solely to the relations between Germany and the Republic of Salò, but also to the relations between Germany and the NDH, as well as between Germany and the collaborationist authorities. Naturally, Mussolini and Ante Pavelić wanted to have as much authority in the operational zone as possible, and collaborationist politicians in the Province of Ljubljana had their own plans as well. This resulted in a diarchy, in places even a triarchy, with Germans having the most say. On 20 September 1943 Rainer appointed Leon Rupnik as head of the provincial administration. Mussolini followed suit a week later, when he appointed Emilio Grazioli as High Commissioner and he arrived in Ljubljana (he had previously held this post between May 1941 and June 1943).<sup>38</sup> This evoked great fear and agitation among Slovene politicians, who claimed that they would refuse to collaborate if Grazioli returned. Consequently, Germans sent him back. Due to their weak position they needed Rupnik's collaborationist authority, even though they acknowledged the Italian authority over the Province of Ljubljana. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Salò protested, but the German decision was not reversed. In this altered situation, Rainer saw an opportunity to expand German authority through the operational zone as far as the Adriatic. Meanwhile, the collaborationist politicians in Ljubljana hoped for some sort of "autonomous" Slovenia under the German protectorate. This would be achieved with the unification of Gorenjska and the Province of Ljubljana that would form some type of "Gau Slowenien" and other Slovene parts would be incorporated after the war.

The collision of two concepts, the annexationist and diplomatic, also impacted the question of the borders. In relation to the Republic of Salò, both high commissioners wanted to convert the border of the operational zones into a real border. Border guards and customs would be introduced in the first stage, and these would protect and patrol the

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38 Ferenc, *Okupacijski sistemi med drugo svetovno vojno. 1, Razkosanje in aneksionizem*, 403.

border at all times. This would be followed by an economic blockade, the administrative adjustment to Germany and the introduction of the German currency. Although both High Commissioners were under Hitler's direct authority and thus possessed great power, they did not succeed. The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs opposed the move, estimating that Mussolini's Fascist government, which was dissatisfied with the introduction of operational zones, would regard this as a new step towards the German annexation. Additionally, militarily weakened due to the Slovene (Yugoslav) and Italian resistance movements, the Germans could barely control the main communications and cities with the situation at hand. Their military power deteriorated with the approaching end of the war, although the violence that was inflicted only grew in intensity. In the event of a German victory, which was in truth impossible after Italy's capitulation and Allied victories on battlefields across the world, the annexationist policy would have become reality. The border in this space thus became subject to conflicts between Yugoslavia and the Allies, and Yugoslavia and Italy.<sup>39</sup>

### The Border between Italy and the NDH

The meandering border between Italy and the NDH turned towards the interior near the strait at the end of the Kvarner Gulf, making Bakar part of Italy and Kraljevica of the NDH.<sup>40</sup> It ran across hills and valleys to the west of Delnice (with Italy obtaining parts of Gorski Kotar and the town of Delnice remaining in Croatian hands). It did not ascend to the Rapallo border beneath Snežnik, but ran more to the south, to the benefit of Italy, where it reached Osilnica. Consequently, Italy obtained the extensive "horn" of the Rapallo border, including Čabar and its surroundings. From Osilnica the border ran along the river Kolpa as far as Božakovo, continuing on the ridge of the Gorjanci hill range/Žumberak as far as Trdinov Vrh, where it followed the former border between the Drava Banovina and Croatia in the direction of Gadova Peč. Seven Slovene villages beneath Gorjanci became part of the NDH that integrated them into its administrative system, where they were subject to forced Croatization and resettlement. The clergy were also resettled, and pastoral care was exercised only occasionally by monks from the Franciscan monastery in Samobor. To prevent the Slovene and Croatian partisans from crossing the border, the Italians intended to fortify the border in the Gorjanci hill range/Žumberak with a corridor of barbed wire and bunkers. Supposedly, no barbed wire was installed upstream of the river Kolpa, only fortified bridges and other structures. A mere six bunkers were built near Metlika in the spring of 1943 due to the capitulation. The border caused severe disruptions in the everyday lives of the local population, affecting most of all farmers who owned land

39 This entire chapter was adapted from: Ferenc, *Okupacijski sistemi med drugo svetovno vojno. 1, Razkosanje in aneksionizem*, 397–403; Stuhlpfarrer, *Die Operationszonen Alpenvorland und Adriatisches Küstenland 1943–1945*.

40 Deutsche Heereskarte. Nordwestbalkan. Blatt Nr. 38/1. (Rijeka) Fiume. Kept in GIAM ZRC SAZU. See also the map included with the agreement between the NDH and Italy: *Ugovor o određivanju granica*, 49–51.

on both sides of the border. In their eyewitness testimonies, the natives of Žumberak with an Orthodox background stated that in their opinion the border was useful, because it prevented the Ustashe from coming to the Italian-occupied territory. They were protected in this regard by the fact that the former Yugoslav and Austro-Hungarian internal borders had been taken into consideration when outlining the border between Italy and the NDH. The area faced many difficulties during the war, and saw refugees fleeing from the NDH, particularly the Jewish population.<sup>41</sup> A portion of the population was not happy with becoming part of Italy. A few attempts were made to integrate a part of the Črnomelj srez (Bela krajina) into the NDH (the Municipality of Radatovići) in May 1941,<sup>42</sup> as well as an attempt to integrate entire Bela krajina into Nazi Germany.<sup>43</sup>



Fig. 3: Sector boundary marker no. 12 on Prehodavci in the Julian Alps marking the border between the Kingdom of Italy and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which also remained in use during World War II, delineating the border between Italy and Germany. Sector markers were 1 metre tall and 40 cm wide. “D” stood for Germany. The inscription 1920 signifies the year when the Treaty of Rapallo was signed.

41 Jožef Klepec, *Žide so okradli na Kolpi*, <https://www.facebook.com/OkupacijskeMeje/videos/2075158066056955/> (accessed: February 2020).

42 SI AS 1790, škatla 5, mapa 2. Kotarska oblast u Jastrebarskom, Broj: 623, Pov.-1941. Jastrebarsko, dne 26 travnja 1941. Predmet: Radatovići općine pripojenje kotaru Jastrebarskom.

43 SI AS 1790, škatla 5, mapa 4, Žandarmerijska stanica Dol. Suhor, Br. 79, 12. 5. 1941, Prijava sreskemu načelstvu Črnomelj.



Fig. 4: The Italian Army converted a house near the bridge across the river Kolpa near Metlika into a bunker.

In 1942, the partisan movement induced the Italian Army to fortify the border with the NDH, as had the Germans before them. Initially, they planned to fortify the border in the Gorjanci hill range, but subsequently decided to fortify it at the foot of Gorjanci, which implied that Gorjanci would be encircled. In Dolenjska, the fortification was begun in the east, shifting gradually westwards. Novo mesto, Šentjernej and Metlika were encircled with barbed wire and bunkers (the Germans followed suit after Italy's capitulation, e.g. Idrija and Logatec were encircled in full, other small towns in part). This did not stop the partisan movement, and as early as December 1942 the Italians were forced to leave small outposts, particularly those standing along the border.

From that point onwards, they stayed mostly the towns of Črnomelj, Vinica, Stari Trg, and Metlika. Metlika was almost completely encircled with barbed wire and bunkers.

Following Italy's capitulation in September 1943, Bela krajina was liberated and the Main Staff of the National Liberation Army and Partisan Detachments of Slovenia was stationed here, as was the Executive Committee of the Liberation Front and other institutions. Up to the end of the war, Bela krajina saw only a few sporadic incursions by the German and Ustashe troops.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Repe, *Diplomatsko razkosanje Slovenije*, 166–167; Repe et al. *Mejni kamni, bodeča žica, stražni stolpi in minska polja*, 25–26.

## The Border between Germany and Hungary

Initially, Prekmurje was occupied by the Germans, who transferred it to the Hungarians in a ceremony held in Murska Sobota on 16 April 1941. About 90,000 people, some 15,000 of whom were Hungarians, lived in the Hungarian-occupied territory. The Hungarians regarded the territory under their occupation as a portion of their lost Southern Provinces (Délvidék). The population had mixed feelings about this, as the Hungarian minority and part of the pro-Hungarian oriented population were in favour of Hungary, while another part of the population favoured Germany. The German-populated settlements of Fikšinci, Kramarovci, Ocinje, and Rottenberg, being a part of the divided Serdica, were integrated into Germany. The border ran along the Lendava stream, and the Kučnica stream, a left tributary of the river Mura, also functioned as a line of delimitation. From the Middle Ages onwards this watercourse was seen as a natural delimitation between the German Empire and Hungary. However, during the occupation this stream identified the border between Germany and Hungary, not between the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and Austria. The tripoint thus became a border between two states.<sup>45</sup>

## The Border between Hungary and the NDH

An agreement about the border between Hungary and the NDH was never signed. This was primarily the result of disagreements over Banat and Međimurje, on which these two states had little influence, as Germany made decisions about the most important matters. In principle, Germany was more favourably disposed towards Hungary, which was an independent state and important ally, while the NDH came into being as a German protectorate. Concurrently, in terms of the NDH, Germany had to pay more attention to Italy than Hungary. Both states lobbied heavily for their interests in Berlin, with the Hungarians being significantly more successful because the Germans agreed to their demands for Međimurje as some type of substitute for Banat, which the Germans kept for themselves. Hungary obtained Međimurje and thus also a part of Slovene territory that was appropriated by the NDH (Štrigova, Razkrižje). The Croats promulgated their authority over this area after the occupation, but were unable to realize this due to the German occupation.<sup>46</sup>

## Tripoints

There were two tripoints in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, one of which stood in Prekmurje, namely that of Austria (after the Anschluss in 1938 with Germany) and Hungary.

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45 Repe, *Diplomatsko razkosanje Slovenije*, 167–168; Repe et al. *Mejni kamni, bodeča žica, stražni stolpi in minska polja*, 27.

46 Repe, *Diplomatsko razkosanje Slovenije*, 168; Repe et al. *Mejni kamni, bodeča žica, stražni stolpi in minska polja*, 28.

The other tripoint, that of Italy and Austria (Germany) was in Peč above Rateče. The former became German-Hungarian in this section, while due to the annexation of the German-populated villages in Goričko and the integration of Prekmurje into Hungary this border was outlined anew and shifted westwards. Owing to the establishment of the NDH, the tripoint of Germany, Hungary and the NDH came into being in the modern-day Croatian Municipality of Svibovac Podravski, near Središče ob Dravi. The other tripoint remained the border between Italy and Germany up to Italy's capitulation in 1943. It continued to exist as a border between two states until the end of the war, namely as a border between Germany and the Italian fascist republic in the north of Italy. Subsequently, the former German-Italian border lost its function because Germany occupied the Italian territory and annexed it to the Operational Zone of the Adriatic Littoral. The tripoint that came into being after the occupation at Spodnji Vrsnik near Žiri was specific and "internal" in one of its sections: it delineated Italy, Germany, and the Province of Ljubljana, which was formally part of the Kingdom of Italy but was still bounded by the Rapallo border as a kind of internal Italian border. This "tripoint" also became irrelevant with Italy's capitulation.

The tripoint near the village of Brvi beneath Gadova Peč was an old administrative border from the period of the Habsburg Monarchy, and separated the Austrian and the Hungarian part of the empire. Between 1941 and 1943 this was a tripoint of the Third Reich, Italy, and the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), reaching deep into the territory of former Carniola. The former Austro-Hungarian boundary stone was given a new function. The research group identified its location on the basis of calculations, unearthed and marked it.

As time passed, the tripoint located to the south of Središče ob Dravi was forgotten. It was rediscovered by our research group on the basis of calculations obtained by comparing maps produced during World War II with modern-day maps that allow location errors that do not exceed 25 metres. The tripoint in the modern-day Municipality of Svibovec Podravski – here the Hungarian-occupied territory extended across the river Drava – does not exist anymore; it stood in a river basin that is often flooded and the river changes its bed. However, a few traces of defensive trenches are preserved.

The period after World War II saw the restoration of two tripoints (Peč above Rateče and the tripoint in the Municipality of Kuzma in Goričko, near the settlement of Trdkova) and after 1991 Yugoslavia was succeeded by independent Slovenia. The tripoint of Slovenia, Croatia and Hungary, which came into being after Croatia's independence, is "hidden" in the marshy area of the confluence of Velika Krka and Mura, in an area that is difficult to access.<sup>47</sup>

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47 Repe, *Diplomatsko razkosanje Slovenije*, 168; Repe et al. *Mejni kamni, bodeča žica, stražni stolpi in minska polja*, 28–30.

## Ljubljana as a Border City

By dividing Slovenia's central part between Italy and Germany, Ljubljana became a divided border city, whose centre was cut off from some of its suburbs. The Municipality of Ljubljana, which was at the time much larger than it is nowadays, was divided between Italy and Germany as well. There were three border crossings between Italy and Germany on the outskirts of Ljubljana. One of them was situated in Ježica, on a bridge across the river Sava. The Germans shifted the border on the river Sava, which was considered to be a natural border between Germany and Italy, to its right bank. They thus connected their territory in both parts of Ljubljana. They built a road along the river Sava, modern-day ring road Obvozna cesta, which is even today is popularly referred to as Nemška cesta (German Road). In the initial stage of the occupation, the railway tracks ran across the Italian-occupied territory. Initially, the Germans transported expellees from Gorenjska to Croatia and Serbia via Ljubljana's Italian-occupied parts. Inhabitants of Ljubljana gave them food and clothes when these trains made a stop in the city. Parallel to the ring road they built a new railway branch, running from Šiška to Črnuče. From Črnuče onwards, the railway tracks followed the modern-day tracks to Kamnik and forked right, running along the northern part of the industrial zone next to the street Brnčičeva ulica. The tracks terminate at the end of this industrial zone. From the fork to the end of the current industrial zone, the tracks measure upwards of one kilometre in length and run in the south-eastern direction. From this industrial zone the tracks ran towards the east for more than 7 kilometres. There remnants of the railway tracks are no longer identifiable because their course corresponds to that of the road from Črnuče to Dolsko, nor are they visible on Lidar images. The course of the current road diverges from the railway tracks to the south of Podgora pri Dolskem. Here the remnants of the tracks can be seen on site, as well as on Google Maps or Lidar images. A brief section of the railway tracks was straight, whereupon the railway line made a right turn towards the river, crossing the Sava and joining the Ljubljana–Litija railway line at the Laze railway station.<sup>48</sup> The railway embankment between Šiška and Črnuče is still visible, and a few concrete remnants can be seen down the former course, particularly in front of the bridge across the Sava, the modern-day road bridge.

Two border crossings were situated in Šiška, one on today's Celovška cesta, in the proximity of the Žibert inn, in front of what is now Prušnikova ulica, which was at the time the old Celovška cesta and ran through the city.<sup>49</sup> The other border crossing stood nearby, on modern-day Cesta Andreja Bitenca. These border crossings were located at

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48 See more on this subject in a Facebook post: <https://www.facebook.com/OkupacijskeMeje/posts/2313451612227598> (accessed: February 2020).

49 The new Celovška cesta was built in 1977, whereupon the old one was renamed Prušnikova cesta.

a short distance apart, probably because Celovška cesta was a busy municipal street. Additionally, a tramway line ran along it, with trams operating across the border.<sup>50</sup> The operation of trams across the border was banned by the Germans in October 1941 and the line terminated at the last stop before the border, although the border crossing remained. The border crossing on the street Cesta Andreja Bitenca was probably built because at the time this road was considerably wider, and this was in fact the main traffic artery, running from Gorenjska to Trieste past Ljubljana, was used by waggons for transporting timber. However, with the introduction of the border during the war and the subsequent changes in urban planning, this road lost its importance.<sup>51</sup>



Fig. 5: The Italian-German border crossing on modern-day Podgorska cesta in Ljubljana, next to the intersection with Cesta Andreja Bitenca, along which ran the occupation border. This is a view of Ljubljana backdropped by fields and meadows, presently mostly covered with blocks of flats. Another border crossing was located nearby, near the intersection of Cesta Andreja Bitenca and Celovška cesta.

<sup>50</sup> Tram tracks in front of the border crossing are still seen on preserved photographs.

<sup>51</sup> Repe, *Diplomatsko razkosanje Slovenije*, 169–170; Repe et al. *Mejni kamni, bodoča žica, stražni stolpi in minska polja*, 30–31.



## Slovenia – A Concentration Camp

The occupation borders were part of a ramified occupying system that restricted the movement and strictly controlled the population's everyday life. Had satellite images been available at the time, they would have shown Slovenia as in effect a large concentration camp, whose borders were encircled with barbed wire, bunkers, minefields, and watchtowers. Similarly, many areas, or we could say sectors, were additionally encircled within this heavily guarded circle. The access to them was regulated by the same principle that applied to border crossings. They are symbolically represented by Ljubljana, which is the most famous example of an encircled city and is in this regard followed by Novo mesto. Encircling towns and cities with barbed wire was the *modus operandi* of Fascist Italy. The research considered in this work confirmed that Metlika, Semič, Višnja Gora, Ribnica, Kočevje, Trebnje, and Grosuplje were also encircled. These settlements were fully encircled and could be reached by using a guarded border crossing. Šentjernej was doubly fortified, and the Italian blockade of the border with Croatia was located to the south of this settlement. Črnomelj was partly encircled with barbed wire, as were a few villages in Bela krajina, where some houses were connected, fortified, turned into military posts and encircled with bunkers and barbed wire. If only one part of a town was wired, this was in the majority of cases due to the additional fortification of military or defensive posts. The research conducted thus far confirms that this was the case with the villages of Zilje, Griblje, and Podzemelj. Barbed wire surrounded the church on the summit of Trška Gora. Logatec, located on the other side of the Italian-occupied territory, was encircled by barbed wire as well. Areas were fortified with barbed wire, military posts, watchtowers, bunkers, minefields, and mines attached to barbed wire. These techniques resulted in restrictions of movement and contacts between individuals, families, and communities. People lived in a constant state of fear, and many were forced to cross the border and barbed wire secretly to secure basic necessities. Life was even more difficult in areas where the local collaborationist troops were in control, because the inhabitants knew each other very well.

Towns and cities encircled with barbed wire underwent a complete change if compared to the pre-war situation. For instance, Semič was encircled in July 1942 during the great Italian offensive. Barbed wire was installed around the city, as well as 11 defensive bunkers that were surrounded by trenches. Three border crossings led in and out of the city, protected by Spanish riders. The belfry was converted into an observation post or the highest defensive tower in town. A heavy machine gun and mortar were placed on it. According to a partisan report, 180 Italian soldiers were garrisoned in Semič, as well as 140 to 180 members of the Anti-Communist Volunteer Militia or the White Guard (Italian: *Milizia Volontaria Anti Comunista*, MVAC).<sup>52</sup>

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52 Adapted from the exhibition: *Vinceremo, videt čemo. Okupacijske meje v Beli Krajini 1941–1945*.

Following Italy's capitulation, the Germans either kept barbed-wire fencing or continued to install it. Areas that were liberated and controlled by partisans that the Germans could not reoccupy were the exception in this regard. However, they managed to reoccupy Idrija after a short-lived liberation by partisans in the autumn of 1943. In the interwar period Idrija was situated on the border between Italy and Yugoslavia, and from 1941 to 1943 between Italy and Germany. It was gradually encircled with barbed wire and fortified after the occupation, which highlights the town's importance in all state formations. Due to its position along the border and the mercury mine, the Italians built barracks in Idrija, as well as fortifications of the so-called Alpine Wall to the east and north of it. The Alpine Wall was an Italian fortification line on the Italian side of the Rapallo border.

Towns and cities were encircled with barbed wire in order to blockade them due to partisan attacks, but also to prevent contacts between the population and partisans, along with the movement of people, information and goods. However, even though it was protected by barbed wire people crossed the border on a daily basis to secure daily necessities, keep in touch with their relatives, and to find solace in religion. The partisan units crossed the border more or less successfully, leaving and entering areas that were encircled with barbed wire. The partisan movement gradually established a successful and ramified network of couriers that reached all fringes of the Slovene territory, successfully crossing all occupation borders.

Although the collective memory of barbed-wire fencing faded in the post-war decades, it left its mark on many locations, as well as in the subconscious minds of the respective communities and families.

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## Summary

*Božo Repe, Kornelija Ajlec*

### **Occupation Borders 1941–1945 through Diplomatic Archives, People's Lives, and Remnants on Location**

The three-year basic research project entitled Occupation Borders began on 1 May 2017 and will be concluded on 30 April 2020. It aims to examine the impact of borders, as well as their exact geographical delineation, with which four occupiers divided Slovenia, planning to wipe out its population. Unless they were deported, Slovenes had to adjust to the new reality of life along heavily entrenched and often deadly borders. These were mostly outlined where they had never previously existed and, consequently, cut deeply into the everyday lives of the local population, their daily relations with relatives and neighbours, while complicating the daily delivery of food and other supplies, religious observance, and other mundane tasks that are taken for granted in peacetime. The project is designed as a classic historical project, involving work in archives and libraries. However, the novelty of so-called public history is that it largely follows the bottom-up historical view. As a result, researchers focus more on interviews with individuals, the last living generation who personally experienced World War II as children. There were 184 interviews recorded in the course of the project, ranging in length from half an hour to three hours. They are complemented by extensive research on material remnants on site, ranging from boundary stones and trenches, to the remains of guard towers, bunkers, and wire fences, which were recorded and entered into GPS systems and maps. At the same time, project members ensure the regular dissemination of project results through online social networks, exhibitions, documentaries, lectures, scientific and popular articles, and by appearing in the local and national media, following the principle of exploring history for the largest public audience, as some 80 years ago these occupation borders affected almost every inhabitant of Slovenia.

Even those living far from the national borders could quickly find themselves encircled by barbed wire. The occupiers surrounded numerous Slovene towns in this manner, as they did national borders, thus transforming these towns into something similar to concentration camps. The tragic stories of secret paths of escape, many of which ended tragically, were shared by many interviewees. These stories have left a deep mark and been etched in their minds, as well as in those of their families, for decades.