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THE “SAVAGE PURGES” IN SERBIA IN 1944-1945, WITH A BRIEF CONSIDERATION OF YUGOSLAVIA AS A WHOLE¹

Srđan CVETKOVIĆ*

ABSTRACT: At the end of the Second World War and immediately thereafter, a powerful wave of repression and revolutionary terror ensued in all countries in Eastern Europe, including Yugoslavia and Serbia, by exploiting antifascism for the purpose of eliminating opponents of the revolution. This violence was only partially dictated by the war, the “ethos of retaliation” and even the personal motives which inevitably accompany virtually every armed conflict in history, while the major part constituted the first phase in a well-planned communist revolution which eliminated its class and political adversaries in stages. This was initially accomplished by extra-judiciary liquidations organized by the secret police, but then the primacy was assumed by show trials generally based on accusations of war crimes or some form of collaboration.

Key words: *Yugoslavia, Europe, Serbia, Second World War, communist revolution, savage purges, repression*

Already in the first years after the Second World War, Europe confronted new challenges. On the one hand there was the genuine need to sanction the war crimes of pro-fascist and collaborationist regimes, while on the hand there was the peril that this process would be exploited by Bolshevik parties to eliminate enemies of the revolution. Thus, post-war justice was not uniform even in the countries of Western Europe. While just a subscription to a Nazi newspaper could be grounds for a prison sentence in the Netherlands or Bel-

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* Srđan Cvetković, Ph. D., Institute for Contemporary History, Belgrade, Serbia

gium, in Austria even a confirmed Gestapo officer could not be tried unless perpetration of specific crimes were proven, with the explanation that he was only carrying out orders. Denazification encountered less resistance and was much more vigorously implemented in the countries in which the Nazi and fascist ideologies had not been generally accepted. Several decades had to pass for awareness to be raised and for a general social condemnation to ensue. In France, a powerful resistance movement but also numerous instances of collaboration (and the burden of the historical heritage) led to a more drastic confrontation with collaboration than in other Western European countries, with some examples of political and personal abuses.² Nonetheless, all of these were deviations: rather intense immediately after liberation only to gradually subside with the passage of time and then processed within the system of a democratic state governed by laws. Since revolutionary movements were unable to assume authority there, there was no mass misuse of antifascism to crush ideological and class adversaries, which was typical in Eastern Europe, where there were aspirations to establish totalitarian governments.

In Eastern Europe the process of punishing collaborators and war criminals at the end of the war corresponded to the first phase of the revolution, so the number of those killed on these grounds was, generally speaking, immeasurably higher than in the West. Besides elements of justice, the process also assumed the tone of wartime reprisals and personal vendettas, but the ideological/revolutionary hue was nonetheless dominant, although at places

² Vichy apologists claimed that 100,000 people were executed in the “savage purges” of 1944, while other historians asserted that between 30,000 and 40,000 were killed in the “savage purges”. De Gaulle’s government established the Historical Committee on Investigation of the Second World War, which in the 1950s initiated research into the victims of the “savage purges”. It arrived at figures of 9,000 persons who were executed under charges of collaboration with the occupying powers, most often without any form of trial. These persons were killed in the period prior to and immediately after liberation from Nazi occupation. The high court which tried high officials of the Vichy regime handed out 18 death sentences, of which 10 were pronounced “*in absentia*”. Out of the eight death sentences, only three were actually carried out. The courts of justice, which tried the remaining collaborationists, issued 3,910 sentences “*in absentia*” and 2,853 with the accused “*in praesentia*”. Out of these 2,853 sentences, De Gaulle reformulated the sanctions in 73 per cent of the cases, and only 767 death sentences were carried out. In France, over 311,000 trials based on collaboration charges were filed. Since these indictments sometimes encompassed several persons, approximately 350,000 French citizens found themselves facing trials. In 60 per cent of these cases, the charges were dropped. In something over 171,000 cases, sentences were pronounced and in three quarters of the cases they were such that the defendants were declared guilty. Over 40,000 persons were sentenced to prison or internment, while 50,000 persons were subjected to “*dégradation nationale*”. Additionally, various institutions had their own purge committees. The functioning of these committees led to the reprimand or dismissal of 20,000 to 28,000 persons. Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years 1940-1944* (New York: 2003), pp. 577-579; Valter Laker, *Istorije Evrope 1945-1992* (Belgrade: Klio, 1999), pp. 45-54; Ivan Janković, *Na belom hlebu – smrtna kazna u Srbiji i Jugoslaviji 1804-2002* (Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, Klio, 2012), pp. 402-404; Vladimir Geiger, *Tito i likvidacija hrvatskih zarobljenika u Blajburgu*, at: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/253542969/Vladimir-Geiger-Tito-i-likvidacija-hrvatskih-zarobljenika-u-Blajburgu#scribd>.

difficult to discern from the other aspects. Institutions were instrumentalized by the communists, and they were given precise instructions for elimination of opponents of the revolution and stabilization of the new authorities. Frequently “the baby was thrown out with the bathwater.” As opposed to France and other Western democracies, extra-institutional “purges” and violence in Eastern Europe, including Serbia and Yugoslavia, generally were not the outcome of excesses or a “state of emergency”, but rather part of a meticulously worked out revolutionary plan. Political violence here was conducted in stages (“salami tactics” as the practice was picturesquely characterized Mátyás Rákosi). In the first phase, this was done under the pretence of a reckoning with war criminals and collaborationists, in the second under the guise of persecution of “spies and traitors”, while in the third phase under the pretext of eliminating traitors in the Party’s own ranks. Having enclosed the circle of terror, with time this grew into a permanent, comprehensive and ideal system of repression that endured for decades. This does not mean there was no “ethos of retaliation” as in Western Europe. Quite the contrary was true, although this only partially explains the phenomenon.

Nonetheless, in Eastern Europe the intensity of post-war purges had differing intensities depending on historical and social circumstances. They were thus more extensive in Poland, Greece, Bulgaria and, especially, Yugoslavia, as opposed to, say, Romania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. They were more intense in countries in which there was greater social polarization, conflicting resistance movements, and considerably stronger communist movements, although matters of mental outlooks and pre-war historical legacies were also not without significance. The terror in Yugoslavia was naturally also conditioned by notable nationalist rivalries, mass casualties and crimes during the war, powerful and opposing resistance movements, a bloody civil war and strong collaboration forces. All of this proceeded while a war against fascism was being fought on the ground, while the salvos from the Srem Front were echoing, while the stragglers of the vanquished civil war opponents and collaborationists were being pursued. On the other hand, everything was done according to plan, with very little uncontrolled mayhem, conducted by institutions which had a clear ideological and political objective. Thus, among those executed, certainly many were eliminated as political and class enemies of the revolutionary authorities, members of pre-war political, cultural and social elites, members and even just sympathizers of the defeated side in the civil war (recruited soldiers who did not deserve death, the most benign forms of collaboration, etc.).³

³ For more on post-war purges in Eastern European countries, see: Karol Bartošek, “Srednja i Jugoistočna Evropa – žrtve komunizma?” in: *Crna knjiga komunizma* (Zagreb: Globus, 2001); Richard & Ben Crampton, *Atlas of Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London: Butler & Tanner Ltd., 1996); Jelena Lilić, *Comparison between Serbia, Greece and Bulgaria - Trials of Collaborators 1944-1948*. Master’s thesis manuscript (Hugo Valentin Center, Uppsala University, 2013); Ričard Klog, *Istorija Grčke novog doba* (Belgrade: Klio, 2000); Valter Laker, *Istorije Ev-*

Revolutionary justice in Serbia and Yugoslavia

As in all countries with “people’s democracies” at the close and conclusion of the Second World War, the judiciary, viewed through the prism of Leninist ideological notions as the “sword of the revolution”, suffered from similar shortcomings: broadly defined collaboration, excessive punishments, direct dependency on the executive authorities, and so forth. Here, repression and crimes at the end of the Second World War assumed the traits of anarchic wartime reprisals, but a careful analysis of the sources on the high number of slain civilians, members of the urban citizenry and the critical intelligentsia compels one to notice the organized efforts of the communist party to free itself of many political and class opponents of the revolution in the years following liberation under the veil of antifascism. In the first days after liberation, the punishment of those accused of collaboration was primarily in the hands of the OZNA (People’s Protection Department) and military bodies, although later, as of mid-February 1945, the switch was made to trials (courts martial, civilian courts and tribunals of honour). During these first months, most of the apprehended were executed without a court ruling or in farcical trials which often concluded with death sentences. Civic politicians, clerks in the former administration, as well as merchants, factory-owners, priests, the “deceitful intelligentsia”, wealthier peasants (“kulaks”) and others were the primary targets, which gave this violence a potent *class revolutionary* tone. By the same token, there were elements of mass collective persecution and reprisals against domestic German, Hungarian and Italian populations due to crimes perpetrated during the war. The precise number of victims of the savage purges, due to the decades of inaccessibility of official security and police sources, is still being determined. Even so, thanks to a partial opening of the state security archives in Serbia and the wider region in recent years, extensive research has been conducted and sufficient documents have been released, so the methodology and intensity of the terror at the end of the war and immediately after the liberation can be reconstructed with precision and on a factual basis.

The technology of the “savage purges” in Serbia, September 1944 – March 1945

On the basis of the thus far researched materials from various institutions (mainly from the State Commission on Concealed Burial Sites of Persons Killed after 12 September 1944), and from many other scholarly researchers from Serbia and the wider region, it may be asserted that a similar scenario of

rope 1945-1992. (Belgrade: Klio, 1999); Andzej Packovski, *Pola stoleća povjesti Poljske* (Zagreb: Globus, 2001); Ljubomir Ognjanov, *Državno političeska sistema na Blgarija 1944-1948* (Sofija: Blgarskata akademija na naukite, 1992); Dimitrij Šarlanov, *Istorija na komunizma v Blgarija*, tom 1. (Siela: 2009).

repression and liquidations was more or less present in all Serbian cities and towns, while its actual intensity depended on local circumstances and the personalities of the individuals in the local organs of repression. What follows are only brief descriptions and observed regularities in the methods for executions and concealment of secret burial sites based on the research done so far.

Organisation. The purge process was mostly administered by the People's Protection Department (*Odeljenje za zaštitu naroda* – OZNA). From its very inception in Drvar on 12 May 1944, the OZNA was methodologically patterned after the Soviet model as a political police managed from a single centre and organizationally structured to uniformly cover all of Yugoslavia. It was directly subordinated to the People's Defence Commission of the People's Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia (NKOJ), the first revolutionary government, which was created at the second session of the Antifascist Council for the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ). The chief of the OZNA for all of Yugoslavia was Aleksandar Ranković, a member of the Supreme Command of the People's Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (NOVJ) and the organizational secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, while his deputy, at the proposal of the Soviet mission, was Svetislav "Čeća" Stefanović. The OZNA for Serbia was formed on the island of Vis in June 1944, and Svetozar "Krcun" Penezić was appointed its first chief. The bodies of the new security service were set up parallel to the seizure of individual territories, with the creation of a network of authorized functionaries, commissioners, agents and informants, thus establishing comprehensive control over Serbia's population. After the service's functional network was established, the executions ensued – of both war crimes suspects who had failed to flee and political adversaries, i.e., "people's enemies".⁴ A special OZNA station was formed in Belgrade, as a vital centre, immediately after liberation, and it handled operations for the entire city. The organization was divided into precincts (16) with special sections, authorized agents and military envoys, a network of commissioners and auxiliary units, and fixed procedures and an operating plan. A reporting section was also formed to take care of enemy document archives and to receive reports from citizens against "enemy elements". Improvised investigative jails were formed in the precincts, whence the arrested were sent to central detention facilities (Glavnjača and Đušina prisons and the Banjica camp).⁵

⁴ The chief of the first section was Mile Milatović; of the second Radovan Grković, of the third Slobodan Krstić Uča and of the fourth Svetolik Lazarević. Kosta Nikolić, Bojan Dimitrijević, "OZN-na protiv narodnih neprijatelja u Srbiji – dva dokumenta", *Naša prošlost*, 10 (Kraljevo 2010): 153-161.

⁵ Due to the importance of the task, the first OZNA chief for Belgrade was Slobodan Penezić, but he remained at this post very briefly. He chose Miloš Minić as his successor, and the latter assumed this post at the beginning of November 1944. When he was elected to serve as the republic's public prosecutor, his place was taken by a Montenegrin, Veljko Mićunović, while Radovan Grković became his deputy. Since Mićunović was appointed to head the Montenegrin

Besides the documents and reports of the OZNA, confirmation of the existence of revolutionary violence and mass executions without trials with the knowledge of and organized by the highest political and security officials upon the liberation of Serbia and Yugoslavia can be found in the documentation produced by the leading protagonists of the revolution. Vladimir Dedijer cited Tito's letter to Peko Dapčević, dated as early as 16 October 1944: “Urgently send me one of the best strong brigades, possibly from Krajina, through Bela Crkva to Vršac. I need them to clean out Vršac of German inhabitants”.⁶ In this regard, the polemics between Milovan Đilas and Dedijer surrounding the various roles in these events is interesting. Đilas confirmed that there had been extrajudicial persecution: “Even we entered Belgrade, we instituted the criteria by which the followers of Nedić and Ljotić would be killed on the spot. This had already been made public even though the majority of the followers of Ljotić and Nedić had withdrawn with the Germans. Certainly there were among the slain those who would have been spared by even the harshest and most biased court”. However, Đilas denied that he and Ranković were the iron hand as Dedijer claimed, countering that Tito was pulling all of the strings, asking about even the minutest details: “...but Ranković was just an extension of Tito's hand, sometimes strict, sometimes lenient, as needed...”.⁷ In this regard, a dispatch sent from Ranković to the OZNA for Croatia on 15 May 1945 is quite interesting, as in it he said: “Your work in Zagreb is unsatisfactory. Over 10 days, only 200 bandits have been shot in liberated Zagreb. You are defying our orders, for we told you to act rapidly and energetically and to get everything done in the first few days”.⁸

Slovenian historian Mitja Ferenc cited a dispatch dated 25 June 1945 which was sent by the deputy prime minister of the Yugoslav government at the time, Edvard Kardelj, to the Slovenian prime minister, Boris Kidrič, in which he orders him to accelerate “purges”, meaning the execution of military and civilian captives, but also political adversaries: “... Not later than in the course of three weeks, the Tribunal of National Honour will be dissolved. Courts martial

OZNA in September 1945, another Montenegrin communist, Jovo Kapičić, was appointed to this post. The first informational section was administered by Vasilije Kovačević, and he was assisted by a certain Bogovac and Vidak Popović. The second section was in charge of interrogations, and it was headed by Jefto Šašić, while the third, executive section was staffed Pavle Pekić and Stole Kovačević. A certain Simić was in charge of accommodations and provisions. The OZNA (UDBA) for Belgrade was directly subordinate to the OZNA (UDBA) for Yugoslavia until January 1948. Kosta Nikolić and Bojan Dimitrijević, “OZNA protiv narodnih neprijatelja u Srbiji – dva dokumenta”, *Naša prošlost*, 10 (2010): 153–161; Arhiv Srbije (AS), Fond BIA, Knjiga pritovrenika OZN-e Belgrade 1–3.

⁶ At the time, several hundred German captives and civilians were executed, Vladimir Dedijer, *Novi prilozii za biografiju druga Tita III*, (Zagreb: 1983), p. 145.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 722; Milovan Đilas, *Vlast* (London: 1983), p. 14.

⁸ “Depeša Vrhovnog štaba JA – A. Rankovića upućena OZN-i za Hrvatsku”, Vladimir Geiger, ed., *Partizanska i komunistička represija i zločini u Hrvatskoj 1944–1946, Dokumenti* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2006), pp. 17–20, 113.

will only try military personnel, so everything else will be assumed by regular courts. A new amnesty will be proclaimed. You therefore do not have any reason to be as slow in purges as you have been so far. Kardelj”. In another document, the treatment of officers is mentioned: “Officers are to be purged without exception, unless you receive notification from the OZN or the Party that an individual is not to be liquidated. In general, no mercy is to be shown in purges. Momčilo Dugalić (signed-S.C.)⁹ In another document, the same officer reiterated: “During purges of captives, fascist elements must be mercilessly executed, and in this you must aspire, if possible, to ensure that not one slips through”.¹⁰ The objective was obviously to execute as many people as possible before the amnesty was proclaimed, despite official bans on executions which came from Tito himself, but which, as became apparent, were more declarative in nature. Based on available sources, it can be concluded that executions in Slovenia were done according to the system whereby “everyone executes his own”. The leadership continued to see to it that the truth about mass executions of captives remained a strictly protected secret: “There were cases in which individual officers spoke to others about liquidations, i.e., that they were done in their presence. We spoke with the division command so that such cases, or rather personnel, be called to account and sanctioned. Now the campaign is being conducted according to the party line on vigilance and confidentiality.”¹¹

Arrests and interrogations. After reports from citizens, the OZNA’s agents would bring in the suspects, and officers would take their statements and compile their card (file). There were cases when members of Nedić’s guard, traffic police, river guards, gendarmes, mail carriers, firefighters and similar uniformed individuals turned themselves in, believing that they did not violate the law and “bloody their hands” in the war and thus did not retreat with Milan Nedić and Drago Jovanović. In the initial months, trials were, as a rule, secret and fictitious. In Belgrade, for example, those registered in all files and lists went to Maglajska street (Dedinje neighbourhood), where people from the OZNA’s main headquarters inspected the execution lists.¹² People from the 16 “precinct OZNAs” were generally sent to the camp in Banjica, where their fate was decided. The pencilled-in comments next to the names in the ‘Log of OZNA Detainees’ most often consisted of one of two words: “Banjica” or “shoot” (initially, it was mainly the latter word, insofar as they were in uniform

⁹ Vojni Arhiv (VA), Fond Vojno-bezbednosne agencije (VBA), K.5, sv.3, list 79, br.1175, 6.5. 1945.

¹⁰ VA, Fond VBA, K.5, sv.3, list 79, br.1175, 30.4.1945.

¹¹ That this was a serious threat and a strictly confidential state secret is also reflected in the fact that later, in 1947, due to excessive talk about executions in Slovenia’s territory and under accusations of espionage, Elza Premšak, aged 32, was sentenced to death. Mitja Ferenc, *Zle(Huda) jama. Zločin u rudarskom oknu Barbara u Hudoj jami kod Laškog* (Belgrade: Heretikus, 2011), p. 51.

¹² Arhiv Srbije (AS), Fond BIA, F. br. 53, Knjiga streljanjih.

or designated as a "notable enemy").¹³ To be removed from the list on which people were placed in category 'S' and marked for the firing squad was, according to statements from those involved, quite difficult.¹⁴ Particularly meticulous records were maintained about representatives of civilian authority: village elders, private sector managers, municipal chief officials, police officers and others from the bureaucracy and white collar class. The class motive was foreshadowed by the fact that the documents often also contained, next to the names of executed individuals or those who were on the execution list, precise data on title to land, real estate and other property. Persons in investigative custody were often subjected to the most diverse and unbelievable forms of torture and abuse, as recounted in the testimony of survivors (pulling out fingernails, rape, mutilation, beatings, etc.).¹⁵ Attempts and initiatives by citizens and local authorities just ahead of liberation in 1944 (such as the Appeal of Citizens in Vlasotince) to end the fratricidal war, to have potential suspects tried before courts after liberation and to halt all repression with the oversight of Allied missions, as well as many petitions signed by citizens in order to save individual respected public figures generally did not produce any results. Often those making the appeals were also jailed.¹⁶

¹³ Arhiv Srbije (AS), Fond BIA, Knjiga pritovrenika OZN-e Beograda 1-3.

¹⁴ „Oslobađanje Dedinja“, *Krug* (1999), no. 8: 64; Srđan Cvetković, *Između srpa i čekića* (Belgrade: Institut za savremnu istoriju, 2006), p. 173.

¹⁵ Testimony of Dobrivoje Tomić from Belgrade; Testimony of Klodet Todorović from Belgrade; Testimony of Petar Jelenković from Zagrađe. The chief of OZNA's third section, Jefto Šašić, described the atmosphere immediately after the entry of Partisan units in Belgrade: "We went with a certain picture of the enemy elements that had to be arrested. Obviously there were no criteria yet. The operating method had not been sufficiently verified, so that sometimes we managed to pack the jails with too many people, who normally should not have been in jail. I only know one thing, when they were already being put into cellars, I was given an assignment from Ranković, to go directly and with his full authorization investigate everyone who is in jail and to release all of those who I believed should not be in jail. Namely, even the army had largely taken some initiatives, these cellars were packed with masses of people, which could only compromise us. So we were apt to intensify our vigilance, but sometimes, in a bout of excessiveness and rigidity, also deviate and remedy such oversights. The third problem that imposed itself on us was the question of criteria. In this sense, the situation was not sufficiently clear to us, how to orient ourselves toward the Chetniks, meaning who to treat as criminals, and who to recruit, and just pass over this type of past... The Serbian State Guard. It had the character of a professional army, something between an army and a gendarmerie. What kind of attitude to adopt toward them, to what extent were the members of these enemy formation a typical fascist police army, and on the other hand, as a security organ, how much did they carry out certain tasks which any organized community has to normally perform. This was, say, the question of traffic in Belgrade and a series of other functions which any regime must normally perform. We always had to be prepared to correct ourselves around this criterion and to approach it differentially and cautiously...". Kosta Nikolić, Bojan Dimitrijević, "OZNA protiv narodnih neprijatelja u Srbiji – dva dokumenta": 153-161.

¹⁶ Most signatories of the Appeal for Truce in Vlasotince were taken before firing squad, including the municipal chief Svetozar Stojanović Budić, who was publicly sentenced to death in Leskovac in December 1944. A DK ZTG, *Inicijativa građana Vlasotinca od 13. septembra NOVJ-ua za uspostavljanje primirija*; AS, Fond BIA, F 53, Knjiga streljanih - jug Srbije.

Executions. Even ahead of the liberation of Belgrade and other cities and towns, the shootings of people's enemies had already begun in many places in Serbia. Taking a broader perspective, even the so-called "leftist errors" of 1941-1942 were only the harbinger of this process, which were halted at the time but then once again became an official directive after liberation. Thus, already by 2 October 1944, 13 persons had been shot and 52 imprisoned in Jablanica, while in Zemun 57 had been shot and orders had been issued for the execution of 187 more, and approximately 90 persons were in jail.¹⁷ The executions were implemented on the basis of a previously prepared and well-conceived plan. The directives from the top were precise. The greatest secrecy and unflinching resoluteness was sought to confront *reactionaries and collaborators*, and those harbouring them. Thus, one document reads as follows:

"In order to accomplish the tasks put forth by our people and our Party, we must heartily set to our work and become masters of our craft. One of the most vital tasks in general today is the destruction of domestic reaction – traitors – their elimination from the very root, and the conferral of power to the people. In order to succeed in this, we must above all elevate and reinforce the organization – the OZNA. The organization of the OZNA will be elevated and reinforced only if we appoint as commissioners people who merit this by their conduct, loyalty and work. It must be recalled that the commissioners must not know of each other, and that they prove themselves as constructive as possible in their work. [...] I have noted and I have had delivered to me information that shootings are not being conducted properly, meaning that they are not being conducted in secrecy. To ensure that there are no mistakes in the future and that no criticism can be raised, I hereby notify you that shootings must not be conducted by the army, in your unit. Should the need for a shooting arise, you will forward the data at your disposal to me, and after I give you permission, you will shoot. The shooting itself must be conducted in the utmost secrecy, so that even the brigade's command staff remains unaware. I emphasize once more that this applies to everyone who is in your unit. Keep this in mind, for if you do not adhere to this, you shall be held to full accountability... If, during the course of purges, you come across cases of individual families maintaining contacts with the Chetniks in the forests, shoot the one who is suspected of maintaining to those contacts in the greatest secrecy, and prohibit the family from leaving the village and inform them that the one who was shot has been sent to a prison camp".¹⁸

After what was normally a brief stay (only a few days or a week) in the OZNA's investigative jail, without any form of court trial, the prisoners were taken – tied with telephone wire and in their undergarments (or, more rarely,

¹⁷ Kosta Nikolić, Bojan Dimitrijević, "OZNA protiv narodnih neprijatelja u Srbiji – dva dokumenta": 153-161.

¹⁸ VA, Belgrade. Fond VBA, građa Odeljenja zaštite naroda, K-11, F-1. Depeša opunomoćenika 47. Divizije, Čuprija, 15. novembar 1944.

entirely naked) – to an execution site, most often in groups of 30 to 50. They were shot at locations on the peripheries of cities, on the grounds of barracks, in nearby groves, on the banks of rivers and other places, usually during the night. According to the OZNA's 'Log of the Executed', during just a single night, on 31 October 1944, 81 persons were taken to the Lapotince site near Leskovac. The firing squads usually consisted of 15-30 soldiers of the KNOJ, among whom not all had ammunition in their weapons. As a result of these shootings, the executioners often had nervous breakdowns and endured severe mental anguish.¹⁹ There were instances of persons being taken to other towns to be shot (e.g., from the vicinity of Leskovac and Vlasotince to Pirot!!), possibly to fill local "quotas" but also to ensure that nobody recognized each other. This is why shootings were often done by persons who were not from the same area.²⁰ There are examples, not frequent to be sure, of shootings of minors, school-age children, such as Žvo Kovanović from Kragujevac (16 years of age), while something of a curiosity was the shooting of several ethnic Albanians who were born in 1933 and even 1935.²¹ Individual cases of the execution of wounded prisoners of war, who were directly taken before firing squads from hospitals (Vlasotince, Valjevo, Belgrade..) have also been recorded. Initially, families were allowed to bring food and firewood to prisoners. Just before their execution, families were then told not to come because the detainee had been "taken to Russia" or to some other camp. At certain times, lists of those shot were read out daily (Banjica-Belgrade) or confirmations from the OZNA on those shot were occasionally released (Obilićev venac, Belgrade).²²

Besides authorized OZNA contingents, often executions were performed by actual military units in territories under military administration. In such cases, there are only summary reports containing general data on the number of those shot. These were characterized by a more mass character, but quite often by a certain anarchy as well, with examples of wartime reprisals, excesses in

¹⁹ AS, Fond BIA, F 53, Knjiga streljanih jug Srbije.; Izveštaj Državne komisije za tajne grobnice ubijenih posle 12. septembra 1944. , Belgrade 2011; Hugo Klein, a neuropsychiatrist and advocate of Freudian psychoanalysis, wrote an intriguing study in October 1945 based on a wealth of experience in the Military Hospital in Kovin, entitled "Wartime neurosis of Yugoslavs" which remained long forgotten in a drawer. In it, he spoke about several thousand patients – shock troopers – in the Partisan army and that this illness was partially a result of wartime trauma but also a deep-seated national mentality. For more, see Hugo Klajn, *Ratna neuroza Jugoslovena* (Belgrade, 1995).

²⁰ In Pirot, for example, approximately 300 persons, mainly from Vlasotince and Leskovac, were shot, and the shootings ensued after the death of the OZNA chief in Pirot, Pavle Bošković, under unexplained circumstances. AS, Arhiv BIA, Knjiga streljanih br. 53.

²¹ Sulja Adin, born in 1935, shot because he was caught "carrying ammunition for Shaban Poluzha's band", AS, Arhiv BIA, f. 101, 46.

²² Testimony of Dobrivoj Tomić from Belgrade, Testimony of Dragan Babić from Belgrade, Testimony of Milica Veselinović from Belgrade, Potvrda OZN-e o streljanju Mihaila Veselinovića, Potvrda OZN-e o streljanju Nićifora Babića.- Arhiv Državne komisije za tajne grobnice ubijenih posle 12. septembra 1944 (ADKZTG), F1, Belgrade.

the shootings, beatings when the prisoners of war were being taken and similar incidents.²³ Often the bodies of the executed were displayed for the purpose of intimidation (public hangings) and there were also cases when civilians were allowed to participate in the beatings and torture.²⁴ There were many irregularities in the OZNA's operations. It was only at the beginning of 1945 that the highest OZNA officials began to suggest that such practices had to be abandoned and that there should be a transition to a more institutionalized approach to repression against the people's enemies and collaborators. On 25 December 1944, Aleksandar Ranković, followed by Slobodan "Krcun" Penezić, called for an end to the practice of killing opponents without trials. Statements from the victims in Serbia correspond to the stance that the frenzied shootings ceased in the latter half of February 1945, after which trials before courts martial and then civilian courts began to increase.²⁵ Even the relevant sources specify an OZNA directive for Serbia dated 9 February 1945 issued by Penezić to all operatives in Serbia, on which basis the previous anomalies were clearly indicated and new priorities were instituted.²⁶

Concealment of sites and records of the executed.

Up to the end of 2012, on the basis of archival documents, reports from citizens and witnesses, the Commission on Concealed Burial Sites recorded 211 such sites in the territory of Serbia. Thus far, a total of 33 sites have been recorded and meticulously researched, and dozens of witnesses in the districts of Zaječar, Raša, Valjevo, Šumadija and Mačva, Belgrade and the northern Bačka district in Vojvodina have been interviewed. During 2011, only two official exhumations were conducted, in Potok Zmijanac (Boljevac) and on the grounds of the Fiat factory (Kragujevac) – which was found by chance after demolition works in the parking lot. At both sites, experts ascertained that they involved the shooting of several dozen civilians from the nearby towns or surrounding communities.

The locations of secret burial sites were normally in the immediate vicinity of settlements, nearby parks and wooded groves near towns, on the grounds of

²³ AS, Arhiv BIA, Pregled uhapšenih, prošlih kroz zatvor i streljanih od oslobođenja do 20.06. 1945 godine na terenu Vojvodine; Izveštaj o ubijanju ratnih zarobljenika, p 1.

²⁴ AS, Fond BIA, Izveštaj o ubijanju ratnih zarobljenika OZN-e za Vojvodinu 20. jun 1945; For more on the forms of executing death sentences, see Ivan Janković, *Na belom hlebu* (Belgrade, 2011), pp. 399-462. Srđan Cvetković, *Izveštaj Državne komisije za tajne grobnice ubijenih posle 12.septembra 1944.* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2011).

²⁵ "At the beginning of February 1945, three days had passed and no one had been taken out to be shot, which had not happened before that" – as recorded by the priest Sava Banković in the OZNA jail in Niš. Sava Banković, *U predvorju pakla* (Vršac: 1991), p. 26.

²⁶ The strictly confidential document no. 345 of 9 February 1945 is cited in the relevant literature. Marko Lopušina, *Ubij bližnjeg svog, vol. I* (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga 1997), p. 58.

military barracks and prisons, in neighbouring villages which served as transit camps (Krupac, near Niš, Lapotince and Slavnik near Leskovac, etc.) and on the banks of rivers (the bridge on the Sava River near Šabac, the banks of the Gročica and Danube at Smederevo, etc.). An order on the amelioration of the land ensured that such burial sites of "fascists" and "people's enemies" remained well concealed even later. Playgrounds, schools, stadiums, parks, parking lots, residential buildings, etc. subsequently emerged on top of these sites. The bodies of the slain were often shallowly buried in several rows and covered with stone slabs (e.g., Potok Zmijanac at Boljevac or Guvnište near Vlasotince) in order to prevent access and animals from carrying away the bones. As in the case of the lists of persons executed by firing squads, it is possible that somewhere in the archives there was or still is a detailed study with a precise map of the locations of undisclosed burial sites, since this was deemed some form of state secret.²⁷

Initially, before the system had been entirely established, at places such as Zaječar and Kragujevac, the families of the executed were allowed to visit the sites, whence they were later dispersed by force.²⁸ At the site on the grounds of the Fiat factory in Kragujevac, below the parking lot where the secret burial ground was discovered, in December 2011 forensic investigators first came upon half-burned candles, which proves that people knew about the burial site and that initially family members visited it.²⁹ The proper interment of bodily remains by family members was later strictly forbidden, as well as any access to the execution grounds. The exhumation of those killed and buried at secret burial sites was considered a serious criminal act. Very soon, the federal authorities issued to the republic bodies order no. 1253 from the Internal Affairs Ministry of Democratic Federal Yugoslavia on 18 May 1945, stipulating that all burial sites of "people's enemies and fascists" had been proclaimed confidential, that they had to be concealed and "all traces [of their existence] removed" and that relatives were not to be allowed access to these locations.³⁰

In contrast to the until now established opinions held by much of the public, detailed and precise documentation was maintained on those who had

²⁷ For more see Srđan Cvetković, *Izveštaj Državne komisije za tajne grobnice ubijenih posle 12. septembra 1944.* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2010), pp. 15-21.

²⁸ Testimony of Dobrivoj Tomić from Belgrade, Testimony of Petar Jelenković from Zagrađe.

²⁹ Srđan Cvetković, *Izveštaj Državne komisije za tajne grobnice ubijenih posle 12. septembra 1944. za 2011. godinu*, pp. 15-21.

³⁰ There were cases around Serbia when some relative would decide on the bold step of "illegal exhumation", generally with the tacit support of the local OZNA (cases in Vlasotince, Zaječar, etc.); Arhiv Državne komisije za tajne grobnice (ADZTG), *Depeša br. 1259 Saveznog ministarstva za unutrašnje poslove od 18. 05. 1945.* i ponovljena depeša str. pov br.63 od 9. avgusta 1946. o uklanjanju fašističkih grobnica - Dokumentarni materijal slovenačke Komisije za rješavanje pitanja prikriivenih grobišta ustupljen od strane predsednika komisije istoričara prof.dr. Mitje Ferencu 25.6. 2009; *Zakon o sahranjivanju i grobljima Republike Srbije*, Službeni glasnik RS, br 53/93, 48/94, 101/ 2005.

been executed and or who fled the country, and hence there are many preserved lists, files and entire bound books of the executed and anti-people's elements. Normally the executed were first recorded by local people's liberation committees and branch offices of the OZNA, while later this information was forwarded to superior instances in the security services. The names of the executed were most often only accompanied by a terse description: *DM* (Movement of Draža Mihailović), *SDS* (Serbian Democratic Party), *ZBOR* (fascist movement of Dimitrije Ljotić), *people's enemy*, *enemy of the present*, *accomplice*, *collaborator*... For women, these descriptions often included terms such as *spy*, *accomplice*, *prostitute*... There were cases in which persons with the same names and surnames were shot by mistake, and then the report would contain a statement such as "no matter, because he was also an enemy of the present".³¹

Later, during 1946, and especially after the Cominform crisis in 1948, OZNA offices were given the task of bringing order to all lists and registers of the executed and submitting reports to higher levels.³² An order bearing the designation "strictly confidential, no. 54/5" was issued in Vojvodina during Military Administration by the Commission on the Investigation of the Crimes of the Occupiers and their Collaborators, which sought from each local commission the compilation of lists of the executed to be submitted to the Commission. At places this was no simple task, because no really precise records were maintained, so reprimands were handed down.

The OZNA in Vojvodina maintained a special card-file of "war criminals and enemies" with the following classification: *convicted*, *sentenced* (i.e., executed without trial) and under *investigation*. The discovered registers and lists of the executed (South Serbia, Vojvodina..) contain the names of thousands of individuals who were executed mostly from liberation in 1944 until the beginning of 1945. A specific feature of the "Register of Executed" is that its entries generally indicate that the OZNA made life and death decisions rather than the courts martial, which ran counter to even the effective regulations of the time.³³

³¹ Arhiv Srbije (AS, Fond BIA), f. 154, Spisak likvidiranih antinarodnih elemenata, 9.

³² Milutin Popović, the OZNA's authorized agent for the Sava-Tamnava district cited strictly confidential Instruction 1439/1948 which sought from the OZNA leadership the delivery of orderly and complete files on persons who had been convicted or shot from 1941 to 1948. Luka Dragojlović, the authorized agent of the Rača district for Bajina Bašta referred to Instruction no.1851 of 9 Sept. 1948, while the authorized office of the Ljubić district also had the same demands from the Local People's Committee in Rošci, etc. AS, Arhiv BIA, fasc 140, Zbirka dokumenata o aktivnostima četnika, *16 spiskova četnika DM koji su likvidirani po oslobođenju*; Međuopštinski istorijski arhiv Čačak (MIAČ), NOO Rošci, K-1, reg. br. 1134\46.

³³ AS, Fond BIA, F 53, Knjiga streljanih –jug Srbije; Žužana Mezei, "Dokumenti arhiva Vojvodine o atrocitetu u Vojvodini", *Heretikus 1-2*, 2011, Belgrade 2011, 133. Just one "Register of the Executed" in Vojvodina contains the names of 1,006 Hungarians, 468 Croats, 211 Serbs and 65 others.

Pressure on the families of people’s enemies.

For better known and wealthier citizens alone, later than 1945 and up to 1948, court judgements or more often rulings on confiscation of assets (which often cited a non-existent judgement and the minutes of a court martial!) were drafted for the purpose of legalizing executions, confiscation and nationalization of assets. Thus, one OZNA memorandum from January 1945 reads, “For one part of those executed, our courts were asked to draft judgements for the purpose of publication of what had been done”, while another indicates that of 102 persons, “most were executed without a trial”.³⁴ Often the case was that falsehoods were spread about those who had been executed by the secret police in order to alleviate the impact of mass shootings, while families were given false hope: “Gone to Russia”; “Contacted us from Voroshilov”; “Located in the Borsky Mines”; “Contacted us from Trieste”; “In a camp in Siberia”, etc.³⁵ The families of “people’s enemies” were long stigmatized by the new authorities and deprived of monetary allowances and other social income. Their assets were confiscated and they were condemned to survive in any way they could. For a long time, the fate of executed family members could not even be discussed privately within that family in order to protect the children. There were examples of coerced movement of the families of people’s enemies in Belgrade during 1948 and 1949, but this was, in fact, rapidly halted.³⁶ Those suspected of aiding those who did not turn themselves over to the communist authorities often ended up imprisoned themselves, and in many cases they were subjected to extortion and then paid for this indiscretion with their lives.³⁷

How many were killed in the “savage purges” in Serbia?

The number of those killed in either extrajudicial or court-sanctioned post-war purges in Serbia has long been the subject of speculation by scholars and the broader public. Even foreign researchers made controversial estimates of the number of victims of the “savage purges” in Yugoslavia. Count Nikolai

³⁴ Vladimir Geiger, ed., *Partizanska i komunistička represija i zločini u Hrvatskoj 1944–1946, Dokumenti* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2006), pp. 55, 57.

³⁵ Testimony of Branislava Pržić from Belgrade, Testimony of Dušanka Šterić from Belgrade, Testimony of Dobrivoje Tomić from Belgrade, Testimony of Višeslav Kostić from Leskovac, Testimony of Slobodan Đurić from Belgrade.

³⁶ One of several hundred cases of persecuted “bourgeois” from Belgrade was that of the family of the slain Law Faculty professor Ilija Pržić. This trial garnered more attention in Bulgaria and, of course, in the first country of socialism, the USSR. For more on the persecution of bourgeois families, see Nataša Miličević, *Jugoslovenska vlast i srpsko građanstvo* (Belgrade: Institut za noviju istoriju, 2009).

³⁷ Examples of extortion and execution as accomplices and close family members were particularly numerous in the peripheral mountain districts (Stara Planina, Kopaonik, Rudnik,...). AS; Arhiv BIA, Operacija hvatanja Dušana Petrovića Boroša.

Tolstoy, for example, cited an unbelievable number of 350,000 persons killed in Yugoslavia during 1944-1945. Michael Lees, a British historian with an affinity for the movement of Dragoljub Mihailović, estimated approximately 250,000 victims in Yugoslavia and roughly 100,000 in Serbia. Ljubo Sirc, Ph.D., a professor of political economy at the University of Glasgow and the director of the Centre for Research into Communist Economies, who had been a member of the Partisans himself, estimated as many as 300,000 victims during 1944-1945. As opposed to them, Mark Wheeler made a much more modest estimate of only 40,000 throughout Yugoslavia, while in his memoirs, Fitzroy Maclean cited only a little over 2,000 victims in Belgrade.³⁸

The self-aggrandizing debates on the number of victims in Serbia was in many ways dictated by the opposing ideological views of the researchers, since this was matter of a very highly politically charged topic, a very high number of victims, and a time when it was difficult to verify any statements due to the inaccessibility of the relevant police and security service sources. The number of victims was subject to public speculation, and depending the political standpoint, the numbers were either exaggerated or minimized, or even denied altogether. Perhaps the closest estimate in the light of the most recent precise research was provided by Swiss historian Michael Portman. After consulting numerous and diverse sources and estimates, he concluded that the closest approximate number of those killed in the political retaliations in 1944-1950 was 180,000 for all of Yugoslavia, out of which the number for Serbia is nearly 75,000, consisting of approximately 20,000 Serbs (10,000 in Belgrade alone), as well as 50,000 German civilians (mostly killed in camps) and approximately 5,000 Hungarian civilians. He added to this number close to 3,000 of those legally executed.³⁹ This estimate, with its slightly exaggerated number of Volks-

³⁸ Nikolaj Tolstoj, *The Minister and the Massacres* (London: 1991); Majkl Liz, *Silovanje Srbije* (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1994), p. 334; Mark Wheeler, "Yugoslav matters to the West", *The Daily Telegraph*, London, March 9, 1991.

³⁹ Historian Veselin Đuretić estimated over 100,000 victims of the "red" terror. The most comprehensive journalistic research into this theme, involving interviews with hundreds of participants, victims and witnesses throughout Serbia, was conducted by the pro-Chetnik magazine *Pogledi* in 1991. The total number was estimated at 150,000 in Serbia alone, and an estimate for individual cities based on scarcely credible and not always reliable testimony was also given. In his book on the OZNA, *Ubij bližnjeg svog*, the controversial current affairs writer Marko Lopušina, closely associated with the intelligence community, estimated over 50,000 killed by the OZNA in Serbia. Participating in a discussion on this topic in a television broadcast, Stevan Mirković, one of the participants and a former high-ranking army officer, said the number was not higher than 10,000 in Serbia and that these were mainly people who were "responsible for war crimes and traitors", and he additionally claimed that 2,000-3,000 trials were conducted. Historian Goran Davidović from Čačak published 6,667 names of those killed in Čačak and its immediate vicinity from 1941 to 1958, and out of these 2,300 after October 1944. M. Trešnjić, a high-ranking OZNA functionary and the head of the twelfth precinct in Belgrade, a participant in the execution of people's enemies, claimed for the magazine *Krug* that according to his estimate from his own precinct (over 800 executed), the number of victims of the "savage purges" in Belgrade was certainly several thousand, while in Serbia as a whole not more than 30,000.

deutsche and underestimated number of Serbs and others, has to some extent been confirmed in the most recent archival research.

Many different estimates could also be found concerning the number of slain German Volksdeutsche and Hungarians in the retaliations of 1944-1945. Virtually the entire domicile German civilian population in Vojvodina and a part of the Hungarians were either interned or expelled under accusations of collective collaboration. Over 150,000 people certainly passed through the approximately 75 camps (although they were not all active at the same time) in Vojvodina. Due to the severe conditions (starvation, lack of medical care, disease, poor sanitation) in the camps, the mortality rate was high, certainly over 20%. Some German sources associated with victims associations initially spoke of over 100,000 Volksdeutsche who died in the 1944-48 period, which has never been backed by sources. According to data from associations of missing persons, newer and better-grounded research indicates 8,049 killed, missing or suicides upon being interned, and 47,654 who died in the camps. According to incomplete research conducted by the Survey Committee of the Vojvodina Provincial Assembly, only 21,000 Vojvodina Germans have been recorded. An accurate number of interned and deceased is today almost impossible to determine with complete precision. According to some research, in May 1945, over 70,000 Germans and 30,000 Hungarians were residing in camps or settlements under an extraordinary regime. Simultaneously, it was noted that at the end of 1944 and the beginning of 1945 between 20,000 and 30,000 domicile Germans (mainly women) were deported to the Soviet Union for forced labour, and according to newly published Russian sources, there were between 10,935 and 12,364 of them.⁴⁰ According to an OZNA report,

The calculations by demographers Vladimir Žerjavić and Bogoljub Kočović were close to these estimates, as they estimated up to 10,000 Serbs alone after the liberation of Belgrade and a little over 10,000 in the rest of Serbia. A member of the OZNA in Belgrade, B. Tomašević estimated that just under 7,000 were executed in Belgrade. In a monograph on the death penalty, Ivan Janković estimated approximately 5,000 executed only as a result of death penalties issued by courts during 1944-45. "Partizanski zločini u Srbiji 1944-1945", *Pogledi* (1991), no. 2; Lopušina, *op. cit.*, 119, 126; Statement by Stevan Mirković, *Utisak nedelje* television programme, Studio B, 21 January 2003; "Fantomске cifre", *Politika*, 2 September 2003; Goran Davidović, *Zatamnjena prošlost III* (Čačak: Međuopštinski istorijski arhiv Čačak, 2004), p. 462; *Pogledi*, special edition, no. 1, 2004; Izveštaj Anketnog odbora Skupštine Vojvodine za utvrđivanje istine o stradanju stanovništva 1941-1948, Novi Sad 2005; "Intervju M. Trešnjića - Oslobođenje Dedinj", *Krug*, no. 8, 1999; Ivan Janković, *Smrt u prisustvu vlasti* (Belgrade, 1983), p. 195; M. Portman, "Communist retaliation and persecution", *Tokovi istorije*, 1-2 (2004), p. 74; Vladimir Žerjavić, "Demografski i ratni gubici Hrvatske u II svetskom ratu i poraču", *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 3 (1995), ?

⁴⁰ Zoran Janjetović, *Nemci u Vojvodini* (Belgrade: Institut za noviju istoriju, 2009), pp. 358-360; Zoran Janjetović, "Disappearance of the Ethnic Germans From Yugoslavia: expulsion or emigration?", *Tokovi istorije*, 1-2 (2003): p. 66; Zoran Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito, Disappearance of the ethnic Germans from the Vojvodina* (Belgrade, Institut za noviju istoriju, 2001), p. 247; Vladimir Geiger, *Josip Broz Tito i ratni zločini: Bleiburg - Folksdojčeri* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2013); Udruženje nestalih i ubijenih Nemaca, "Projekat suočavanje sa totalitarnim nasleđem", *Crveno doba* television programme, 29 February 2004, RTS 2.

there were 130,380 Germans in Yugoslavia at the end of 1945, and out of this number, 117,485 were interned, mostly in Vojvodina (105,740; 30,745 men, 54,099 women and 20,896 children). Another OZNA document states that this department had shot 6,763 Germans in Vojvodina. A consolidated OZNA overview for Vojvodina of all of those executed in the period from liberation in October 1944 until 20 June 1945 shows 14,069 persons who passed through investigative jails, of whom at least 10,360 were shot in the first days by the OZNA and military units – roughly 2,000 by the OZNA and 5,000 by military units.⁴¹

Initially the same policy enforced against the Germans was also enforced against the Hungarians, but very soon, already in early December 1944, this was halted due to political considerations. The process of retaliation was controlled, but there were also local anarchic incidents. Aleksandar Kasaš stated that during the 103 days of Military Administration in 1944-1945, over 5,000 Hungarians in Bačka had fallen victim to reprisals, largely due to unselective justice. Portman's data are similar: approximately 30,000 Hungarians passed through the camps, and approximately 5,000 were killed.⁴² According to an OZNA document, the OZNA alone executed 1,776 persons of Hungarian ethnicity in Vojvodina, while another cites a number of 2,240 executed by the OZNA by 20 June 1945. The incomplete research conducted by the Survey Committee of the Vojvodina Provincial Assembly has recorded slightly less than 5,000 Hungarians, while more recent and more complete research by the mixed Commission of the Serbian Academy of Science and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences has yielded numbers of approximately 7,000 Hungarians and 28,000 Germans according to still preliminary results.⁴³

⁴¹ AS, Fond BIA, 75, Pregled uhapšenih, prošlih kroz zatvor i streljanih od oslobođenja do 20. 06. 1945. godine na teritoriji Vojvodine; Izveštaj II odseka OZN-e za Vojvodinu o broju uhapšenih i likvidiranih na teritoriji Vojvodine, *Partizanska i komunistička represija i zločini u Hrvatskoj 1944–1946, Dokumenti*, pp. 312, 325, *Izveštaj II odseka OZN-e za Vojvodinu o broju uhapšenih i likvidiranih na teritoriji Vojvodine*.

⁴² Aleksandar Kasaš, *Mađari u Vojvodini* (Novi Sad, 1996), p. 326; Portman, "Communist retaliation and persecution", p. 65.

⁴³ *Iz izveštaja II odseka OZN-e za Vojvodinu o broju uhapšenih i likvidiranih na teritoriji Vojvodine, Partizanska i komunistička represija i zločini u Hrvatskoj 1944–1946, Dokumenti*, p. 324; AS, Fond BIA, 75, *Pregled uhapšenih, prošlih kroz zatvor i streljanih od oslobođenja do 20. 06. 1945. godine na teritoriji Vojvodine; Na putu ka istini - Izveštaj Anketnog odbora Skupštine Vojvodine za utvrđivanje istine o stradanju stanovništva 1941–1948*, (Novi Sad: 2008); Zoran Janjetović, *Položaj Mađara u Vojvodni na kraju Drugog svetskog rata i njegovi uzroci*. [_polozaj_madara_u_vojvodini_na_kraju_drugog_svetskog_rata_i_njegovi_uzroci.pdf](#); The online database of the Commission of the Serbian Academy of Science and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences on the investigation of civilian victims in Vojvodina in 1941-1948 can be found at: <http://www.vojvodinakom1941.org.rs/lt/>.

The “bloody spring” in Slovenia in 1945.

There are also certain disagreements surrounding the mass executions of extradited prisoners of war in Slovenia during May-June 1945, but even the more modest estimates of researchers are excessive. The relevant literature and research most often mention figures of over 200,000 prisoners of war (most of them members of the military formations of the Independent State of Croatia, NDH – over 100,000) extradited by the Allies at the end of the war, while the number of civilians has been estimated a roughly 50-60,000. Although researchers more or less agree that the number of victims slain at Kočevje, Taharje and Kamnička Forest in May 1945 was an estimated 15,000, they differ on the number of victims who were Ustasha, Home Guardsmen (*domobran*) and civilians at Bleiburg. Dušan Bilandžić, similar to writers from certain émigré circles, initially spoke of as many as 200,000 Ustasha, Home Guardsmen and civilians, a figure also supported by the pro-Ljotić émigré Borislav Karapandžić. On the other hand, Milovan Đilas acknowledge that over 20,000 but less than 30,000 people had been shot. A more moderate estimate grounded on research was provided by Michael Lees, who wrote about 60,000-80,000 killed in Slovenia, while the most recent serious research and demographic estimates indicate approximately 50,000 “victims of Bleiburg and the Ways of the Cross”. Martina Grahek and Vladimir Geiger, however, mentioned a rough total of 80,000 killed in Slovenia in this context, of whom 12,000 were Slovenian Home Guardsmen, 6,000 were Montenegrin Chetniks and about 3,000 were Ljotićists, former members of the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland (JVuO), Nedićists, Chetniks and civilians from Serbia. The intensity of these executions is lucidly shown by the following dispatch sent by Major General Rade Hamović (under his pseudonym ‘Miki’): “The brigade arrived on the 20th at 6 a.m. We were connected to the OZNA. Our brigade’s mission was to liquidate Chetniks and Ustasha, of whom there are two and a half thousand. Yesterday the commander of our second battalion, comrade Moma Divljak, was killed in an accident. Today we continued with the killings. The brigade is stationed in the town”.⁴⁴ The Slovenian State Commission and a special department in that country’s Internal Affairs Ministry have recorded approximately 600 sites at which mass executions were conducted, while the number of those killed has been estimated at 80,000. The largest mass graves, containing thousands of victims who have only been partly exhumed are Brabarin rov near Celje and Tezno near Maribor. Among those executed, there are approximately 13,900 registered Slovenes (12,587 Home Guardsmen, several hundred Slovenian members of JVuO and 1,200 civilians).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *Iz knjiga depeša 15. majevičke brigade upućenih štabu XVII divizije o streljanju zarobljenih četnika i ustaša*, 20. maj 1945. Miki (general-major Rade Hamović), *Partizanska i komunistička represija i zločini u Hrvatskoj 1944–1946, Dokumenti*, p. 130.

⁴⁵ The first to publicly speak about the mass killings in Slovenia which occurred after the Second World War (May-June 1945) was Simo Dubajić, who was the Partisan commander in Lika

In the territory of Croatia itself, it would appear that, due to various circumstances (mass emigration of the population and army to Slovenia, a relatively brief period for the state of war...) the revolutionary purges had a somewhat lesser intensity. Published documents, besides showing that everything proceeded under the direction and knowledge of the OZNA, also confirm the mass cross-over of Home Guardsmen into Partisan units. Based on recently published materials, it is possible to identify approximately 6,800 slain soldiers and civilians, disregarding vague allegations of executions and shootings based on court rulings.⁴⁶ Based on preserved rulings, in Croatia alone the courts pronounced 5,200 convictions by August 1945, and of these, over 1,500 (nearly 30%) entailed death sentences. Ivo Banac, however, claimed that in Zagreb alone after the establishment of communist authority, close to 5,000 persons were executed, mostly in the foothills of the mountain overlooking the city, while other sources assert as many as 16,000 arrested, of whom a part were executed in the territory of the forest at Maksimir on the city's eastern periphery.⁴⁷ In Croatia, the list of individual names of victims of "the Second World War and immediate post-war period" is still in the process of being compiled and systemized. Additionally, the exact number of Italians killed from 1943 to 1945 and thrown into the karst caverns in the Istrian hinterland known as *foibe* has still not been ascertained. Besides Slovenia and Croatia, there has been no systematic research on this topic in the remaining former Yugoslav republics. Only the "We'll Discover the Truth" Association in Montenegro has identified

at the time and participant in these crimes. Speaking for the magazine *Svet* in 1990, he said that he had participated in the execution of people in Slovenia, and that he had received an order to kill over 30,000 domestic traitors in Kočevski rog. Dubajić said that this was done by the Dalmatian brigade, in which the commissar was Milka Planinc, who selected about 90 of the most trusted communists for these shootings; Martina Grahek Ravančić, "Međunarodne konvencije i ekstradicija Srba iz savezničkih logora u Austriji u svibnju 1945.", *Hereticus*, 1-2 (2011), 75; Martina Grahek Ravančić, *Bleiburg i križni put 1945* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest 2009), pp. 317-333; Vladimir Geiger, *Tito i likvidacija hrvatskih zarobljenika u Blajburgu*, at: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/253542969/Vladimir-Geiger-Tito-i-likvidacija-hrvatskih-zarobljenika-u-Blajburgu#scribd>; Vladimir Žerjavić, *Opsesije i megalomanije oko Jasenovca i Blajburga* (Zagreb, 1993), p. 75; Ivo Goldstein, *Povijest Hrvatske 1945-2011*, vol. I (Zagreb: EPH Media, 2011), p. 17; Dušan Bilandžić, *Moderna hrvatska povijest* (Zagreb, 1999), p. 187; Borivoje Karapandžić, *Jugoslovensko krvavo proleće* (Belgrade, 2001); Liz, *op. cit.*, p. 334; Milovan Đilas, *Vlast* (London: Naša reč, 1983); *Poročilo komisije Vlade Republike Slovenije za rešavanje pitanja prikritih grobišč 2005-2008*, (Ljubljana, 2009).

⁴⁶ Particularly interesting is the dispatch from Aleksandar Ranković to the OZNA for Croatia dated 15 May 1945 in which he demands that they more resolutely engage in "purges of the enemy". *Depeša Vrhovnog štaba JA – A. Rankovića upućena OZN-i za Hrvatsku*, Partizanska i komunistička represija i zločini u Hrvatskoj 1944–1946, Dokumenti, 17-20, 113; *Ibid.*, 46 and 73-87.

⁴⁷ Ivo Goldstein, *Povijest Hrvatske 1945-2011*, (Zagreb: EPH Media, 2011), 47; Ivo Banac, "Antifašizam bez antikomunizma ne može biti demokratski stav", *Večernji list*, 8 Sept. 2007; Mirko Vidović, "The Fate of Tito's Prisoners of War", in: *Human Rights in Yugoslavia*, Los Angeles 1986, 107.

5,214 slain civilians and soldiers in the "Great Refugee Column" and 10,000 to 20,000 people who withdrew with Pavle Đurišić toward Slovenia and were then largely shot there.⁴⁸

Research by the State Commission on Concealed Burial Sites of Persons Killed After 12 September 1944

By the end of May 2015, the Commission on Concealed Burial Sites of Persons Killed After September 1944 had gathered data on over 56,000 persons killed in post-war purges, primarily on the basis of state security archival materials (Archives of Serbia, Security and Intelligence Agency Fund), as well as many previously inaccessible collections of the Military Archives and of other institutions: Archives of Yugoslavia, Historical Archives of the City of Belgrade, local archives, and mostly from the provincial archives and other local archives for the territory of Vojvodina. Additionally, the Commission was provided with a database of approximately 27,000 persons slain after September 1944, which had already been compiled by the Survey Committee of the Vojvodina Provincial Assembly (2003-2008), which was processed, incorporated and refined into a consolidated database, accessible to all citizens at the website of the State Commission on Concealed Burial Sites. The base also encompassed a wealth of new facts, previously unknown documents and photographs from private archives, oral testimonies, etc.⁴⁹ It is noteworthy here that these data account for only a preliminary cross-section of the research and that a considerable portion of the documentation for individual districts and cities (Belgrade, Šabac, Kragujevac...) is lacking. Over and above all of the anomalies, both subjective and objective, which accompany such immense research and lists, this is thus far the most extensive and accurate online list of individual victim names released in Serbia or the wider region.

⁴⁸ Savo Gregović, *Pucaj rat je završen* (Budva: Udruženje „Otkrićemo istinu“, 2005); Bojan Horvat, "Fojibe očima povjesničara, a ne političara", access date: 16 March 2016 (<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:hEsrpFDuEIJ:https://regskordinator.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/3-horvat-bojan-fojbe-ocima-povjesnicara-a-ne-politicara.pdf+&cd=3&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=rs>).

⁴⁹ As of November 2011, the Serbian Government's State Commission on Concealed Burial Sites of Persons Killed after 12 September 1944 has launched a project to develop a modern database which would present to the public, interested parties and institutions the data which the Commission had gathered in a cutting-edge and effective form. This online register of individual names (with all available personal data on the victim), the first of its kind in Serbia, also supports attachments with photographs and documents and facilitates the simultaneous development of high-quality, rapid statistics of executions in various categories. For more, see the Serbian Justice Ministry's "Open Book" Register of Victims site: <http://www.otvorenaknjiga.komisija1944.mpravde.gov.rs/>.

Structure of victims based on manner of death.

Out of the total number recorded in the database, 49,913 lost their lives, while 6,095 are listed as missing. According to available data, which are not yet final, only slightly more than 2,800 persons in Serbia were actually sentenced to death by a court, while all of the rest were executed extra-judicially or they died in camps. In terms of percentages, based on archival sources approximately 50% of the victims in the individual name database were shot without being tried (over 25,000), approximately 6% (2,876) received death sentences, and 44% (22,371) were killed in camps or prisons. Based on the data on 6,500 missing persons (to a large degree potentially killed!) and on the basis of information on absent documentation, the total number of those killed without trial during 1944-1945 may therefore be objectively estimated at roughly 35,000. Additionally, using these same parameters, the number of civilians who died or were killed in camps (mainly Volksdeutsche in Vojvodina) may be estimated to a minimum of 35,000.

Structure of victims based on districts in Serbia.

Based on place of residence classified by districts in Serbia, thus far most of the data on executed individuals was gathered for Belgrade, southern Bačka, southern Banat, northern Banat and Morava. Those sentenced to death or those who received a court verdict are for now the most numerous in the southern Bačka, Srem and Belgrade districts. In the total sum of those killed after 12 September 1944, if civilians who died in camps are also counted, then by far the largest number can naturally be found in districts in Vojvodina (western Bačka and southern Bačka with over 10,000 and southern Banat with over 5,000), while based on the number of those shot without trial in Serbia, the highest number is from the district of Belgrade (ca. 3,500), followed by the districts of Morava (1,500), Zlatibor (1,200), Jablanica (ca. 1,000), Timok (900) and others. It is certainly worthwhile to recall that larger cities such as Belgrade largely do not have registers and lists of the executed as were found for most other settlements, so the expected number of victims is considerably higher.⁵⁰

Structure of victims based on ethnicity. According to the database, broken down by ethnicity most of those who were shot or sentenced to death were Serbs (over 15,048), Germans (6,500), Hungarians (ca. 4,500) Albanians (1,400), and Croats (976), followed by others and those whose ethnicity was unknown. However, among those who died in camps as a result of harsh conditions, disease or deliberate refusal to render medical care, the vast majority

⁵⁰ Using the example of Belgrade, only three of 16 registers of the executed and registers of detainees have been found among the precincts in the city. Individual registers for Šabac, Kragujevac and several other settlements are absent – *author's note*.

are Volksdeutsche (ca. 22,000) which also makes them the most numerous category **in the total sum of victims** (27,654), followed by Serbs (15,500) and Hungarians (ca. 7,000) and then others. It should be noted, however, that the names in the sources are often not accompanied by ethnic designations, so these figures are not entirely precise, although they are certainly suitable for an initial analysis.

Structure of victims based on social class and political affiliation.

Based on political affiliation in the territory of central Serbia, among the killed most of the civilians were designated as sympathizers, collaborators and people's enemies, followed by members, sympathizers and accomplices of the Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland (JVuO), and collaborators with and members of Albanian and Bosniak Muslim militias. In Vojvodina, German and Hungarian civilians were the most numerous among those accused of collaboration, and more rarely for participation in various occupation formations and political organizations, with a surprisingly high number of Serbian "people's enemies" and JVuO members, primarily in Banat, given the passivity and rather meagre size of this organization in that area. In Kosovo, most were accused of collaboration with or participation in the Ballists or other Albanian militias, while among the Serbs most were sympathizers and members of the Kosta Pećanac's Chetnik movement or the JVuO.

The structure of the victims according to social status perhaps best illustrates and statistically reinforces the class and political motivations underlying the repression. First and foremost, it bears emphasis that among the executed contained in the database, almost 90% were civilians. This data significantly overturns the established picture of a so-called "Chetnik-Partisan confrontation" that prevails among the general public. According to the statistics on the victims, the following categories predominate in terms of their position in the social structure: skilled tradesmen (2,775), retailers and inn-keepers (924), housewives (3,809), gendarmes (2,052), attorneys and judges (119), clerks (1,052), pupils and students (449), teachers, professors, engineers (367), village elders, municipal chiefs and prefects (286), officers and soldiers (857), priests (162), industrialists and entrepreneurs (151), actors/artists (79), blue collar workers (828), physicians and pharmacists (102), and journalists (68). Of course, in absolute terms, most were farm labourers, 9,713, on average well-to-do smallholders, so-called "kulaks".

Serbia has, besides many similarities to Yugoslavia and Europe as a whole, many specific traits. Hundreds of unusual executions are noticeable. Examples of executions without trial of a type unseen in the broader European or even general Yugoslav framework include: actors (Aleksandar Cvetković, Jovan Tanić, members of the Čika Duško theatre troupe from Čukarica...), Red

Cross secretary Petar Zec, comic-strip artist Veljko Kokcar, cartoonist Dragoslav Stojanović, academy-trained painter and dean of the Technology Faculty Branko Popović, law professor Ilija Pržić, etc. In Belgrade, even some traffic and river patrol police officers were shot. Many ordinary clerks who served in the Nedić government's economic and social ministries (e.g., Milan Horvatski, a financial expert employed in the ministry since 1935) were shot without trial, while in France and Germany, even the actual finance ministers (e.g. Hjalmar Schacht) and officials in other social ministries received only prison sentences, while lower-level clerks were generally not even prosecuted.

Taking into account the overall share of certain categories of the population, it is notable that in the social sense the wealthier and better educated layer of the population was targeted. Among the executed, the share of the "bourgeois" city and town population, as well as the "kulaks" in rural areas (village elders, municipal chiefs, priests, etc.) was higher. According to the structure of the executed based on the materials thus far examined, it may be noted that a specific aspect of Serbia in comparison to those executed in Slovenia is the immeasurably higher share of the civilian victims (in Slovenia only about 10-15% civilians was registered, while in Serbia less than 20% were members of any military formations!). In Serbia, the executed persons generally had residence in the same district or in surrounding settlements and very accurate records of the shooting were kept, so identification of the victims is much easier, as opposed to Slovenia. In Serbia, the executions were conducted by the OZNA and special units of the KNOJ, while in Slovenia this was mainly done by the army. The secret burial sites in Serbia's territory are generally smaller and according to available data most often contain 100-200 persons (an exception is probably Lisičiji potok in Belgrade, and perhaps several other sites in Serbia).

Structure of victims based on sex and age.

Data from the Commission's base indicate that among the victims there were a considerable number under the age of 18, 4,636 (11%), with an exceptionally high number of woman as well as elderly persons aged 66 and over: 8,611 (20%). This is primarily due to the high mortality of the population least resistant to the weather, starvation, disease and other harsh conditions in the camps in Vojvodina. According to the camp registers, most died during the winter of 1945/1946. The most numerous was the 46-65 age group, 13,911 (33%); followed by the 31-45 age group, ca. 8,401 (21%), and the 18-31 age group, 6,812 (11%). As to sex, nearly 17,000 women are listed in the database (which is approximately 30%), and most of these were German women who died in camps in the territory of Vojvodina (ca. 14,500, almost 90% of all women who died). A shocking fact is that, even though this was a result of their internment in camps, the sum of women (ca. 17,000), children (4,600)

and elderly (8,600) reaches a number of roughly 30,000, which is almost 54% of all of those who died at the hands of the NOVJ after 12 September 1944.

What is not contained in the database?

Finally, it is necessary to state that according to our estimates, roughly 20-25% of the persons are missing from the database of the executed. Why? Partially due to the already mentioned incompleteness of the reviewed state security archival materials for individual districts and cities in Serbia. Second, it was due to the specific aspects of the retaliations in the territory of Slovenia, Bosnia, Kosovo and Vojvodina under military administration in the final months and the mass executions of prisoners of war which are impossible to register by individual names. The research conducted by the State Commission on Concealed Burial Sites of Persons Killed after 12 September 1944 therefore does not entirely encompass the killings of soldiers and civilians from Serbia's territory who withdrew toward Bosnia and partially Slovenia at the end of the Second World War and immediately thereafter (May-June 1945). The most extensive mass and unselective retaliations against prisoners of war, members of various anti-communist and collaborationist formations, occurred in Slovenia. Among the killed, there were certainly about 3,000 soldiers (Ljotićists, Nedićists, remaining members of the JVuO) and civilians from Serbian territory. Besides numerical reports on executions sent from the field (dispatches by military commanders), there is no precise list of persons killed in Slovenia (registers and lists of the executed) of the type found in the OZNA archives in Serbia in 1944-1945. The executions were conducted in line with a different method and no records of individual names were maintained.

There has also been no sufficiently precise research nor are there archival documents on the execution of prisoners of war from the JVuO at Zelengora in May 1945. In the sources and relevant literature, only the total number of at least 6,000 persons killed, wounded and captured (and then mostly executed) members of the JVuO are cited, and it is impossible to discern an entirely precise number of executed prisoners and those who were slain in combat. It is known that out of the entire Yugoslav army together with Draža Mihailović only about 400 of them made their way out of encirclement.⁵¹ We have seen that the OZNA documents for Vojvodina summarily state that approximately 5,000 persons were shot by the army in Vojvodina during Military Administration (October 1944 – February 1945).⁵² The situation was similar concerning

⁵¹ Milan Terzić, "Gubici četnika Draže Mihailovića na Zelengori i Sutjesci", *Vojno-istorijski glasnik*, 2 (2011): 74-82; Đilas cited a somewhat higher number in his memoirs, i.e., that approximately 7,000 were killed at Zelengora, while only about 400 survived; Milovan Đilas, *Revolucionarni rat* (Belgrade, 1990).

⁵² AS, Fond BIA, 75, *Pregled uhapšenih, prošlih kroz zatvor i streljanih od oslobođenja do 20.06.1945. godine na teritoriji Vojvodine*.

events in the territory of Kosovo during the Albanian rebellion (“Shaban Poluzha’s Revolt”) at the end of 1944 and early 1945, where entirely precise data on how many were killed and on what basis, how many soldiers and how many civilians, are still lacking. Generally, several thousand rebels (up to 5,000), as well as civilian supporters, are said to have been eliminated. In the scholarly literature, only numerical data are cited on the basis of field reports, but thus far no precise lists and registers have been found. Under the circumstances of a genuine “little war” that was conducted in the territory of Kosovo, Bosnia and Slovenia, about which no records of individual names were maintained, it would appear unlikely that a completely accurate list of executed prisoners of war and civilians will ever be compiled, much less a differentiation between the innocent and the actually guilty, as well as their degree of guilt and the suitability of the punishment.⁵³

Based on many years of archival research, and taking into account that many persons were left out of the State Commission’s census for objective reasons, the number of those killed in various types of “purges” after Serbia’s liberation in 1944-1945 cannot be less than 70,000. Out of this figure, approximately 35,000 were directly shot, less than 3,000 were sentenced to death by courts and over 35,000 died in camps and in other ways, while in Yugoslavia as a whole the equivalent total is 150,000, of whom approximately 100,000 were executed prisoners of war and civilians, 5,000 were sentenced to death and roughly 50,000 died in camps and in other ways.⁵⁴

⁵³ In Kosovo’s territory after 24 January 1945, a genuine small-scale war was waged involving approximately 40,000 NOV troops against 20,000-30,000 rebels under Shaban Poluzha’s command. The army’s losses were not insignificant. There were accounts of 650 slain, 1,360 wounded and 1,256 missing. The total number of killed on the rebel side is unclear. K. Nikolić, S. Cvetković, *Srbi i Albanci na Kosovu i Metohiji u 20 veku*, Belgrade 2014, 273. B. Dimitrijević, *Građanski rat u miru* (Belgrade 2003), 94-108.

⁵⁴ The official census of victims of the Second World War that was conducted with the assistance of veterans’ organizations in 1964 arrived at a figure of up to 147,000 wartime victims throughout Serbia, while Kočović’s estimate indicates 227,000. The reason for this difference was politically motivated, i.e., the reluctance to acknowledge the victims who lost their lives after Serbia’s liberation. If one takes into consideration the deaths on the Srem front, our estimates of the victims of the “savage purges” and the estimates of the total number of wartime victims of 227,000 for all of Serbia by Kočović, this leads to the conclusion that almost 30% of all wartime victims in Serbia fell after October 1944, while at the level of Yugoslavia this percentage would be far lower, at 15-20% (i.e., approximately 150,000 out of the roughly one million total victims). According to these death statistics, the number of victims of post-war Partisan purges comes immediately after the victims of the Ustasha, and stands shoulder to shoulder with victims of the Germans, with the note that in Kosovo the vast majority of those killed were Albanians, while in Serbia proper they were Serbian non-communists and in Vojvodina they were Germans. For more see D. Vrućinić, *Demografski gubici Srbije prouzrokovani ratovima u XX veku* (Belgrade 2007); B. Kočović, *Demografski gubici u Drugom svetskom ratu*, (London, 1985); Vladimir Žerjavić, “Demografski i ratni gubici Hrvatske u II svetskom ratu i poraču”, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, (1995), no. 3, Zagreb 1995.

The number of persons convicted of war crimes and collaboration before the courts in Serbia and Yugoslavia.

In the institutional sense, the purging of society after the period of *mass executions without trials* (in Serbia from mid-February 1945, in the western parts of Yugoslavia only as of May 1945) was relinquished to institutions: courts and commissions. They had largely been instrumentalized and were under complete Party control. By exploiting antifascism in the first years after liberation, the authorities, through the State Commission for the Prosecution of War Criminals and Occupation Collaborators and the monopoly over the judiciary and the law enforcement apparatus, not only punished actual criminals and collaborators, but also eliminated political and class opponents of the revolution. It is difficult to ascertain an entirely precise number of the persons who were tried for war crimes and collaboration before the courts; there were certainly tens of thousands of them in Yugoslavia. It is even more difficult to distinguish the genuine criminals who merited death sentences and convictions from those who were subject to show trials for ideological or other reasons.

At the beginning of 1945, the tribunals of honour, courts martial and civilian courts began functioning in Yugoslavia. By 1953, the courts martial had convicted tens of thousands of persons for collaboration and war crimes. Internal statistics indicate that during the 1945-1948 period, the courts martial alone convicted approximately 79,949 persons throughout Yugoslavia, and an estimated half of the latter were from Serbia's territory. Of course, one should add to this number the tens of thousands of those convicted before civilian courts and the tribunals of honour in Yugoslavia and Serbia, in which case precise statistics are lacking for the time being. The tribunals of honour prosecuted lesser forms of collaboration, pronouncing sentences not longer than 10 years in prison, with expulsion from public life and confiscation of assets.⁵⁵ According to an internal military document, from 1945 to 1976, the courts martial meted out a total of 6,685 death sentences, of which 6,663 were pronounced up to 1953 (98%). More precisely, in 1945-1946 alone, 5,996 or approximately 90% of all death sentences in the post-war period were pronounced. 1945 was without precedent, as 5,484 were sentenced to death (of whom 4,864 were civilians). How many were actually carried out cannot be known with any accuracy, but based on a tendency observed in a smaller sampling, roughly 70-80%, or at least 4,000.⁵⁶

There are exact data in the archives on the number of the State Commission's decisions declaring persons war criminals or collaborators, but there are

⁵⁵ Srđan Cvetković, "Politička represija u Srbiji i Jugoslaviji", *Istorija 20. veka*, 2 (2008): 272-314.

⁵⁶ The percentage of death sentences immediately after the war, when only courts martial were active (until August 1945), was over 35%; *Interna brošura bivšeg predsednika Vrhovnog vojnog Suda Jugoslavije general potpukovnika Marka Kalođere Istorijat Vojnog pravosuđa u JNA*, unpublished, in this author's possession.

no precise data on the number of those convicted. This commission, working with republican and local bodies, was conceived as a sort of investigative arm to gather evidence for prosecutors and the OZNA. According to incomplete data, 938,828 reports of war crimes and criminals were forwarded to the State Commission, the territorial commissions and all other investigative agencies. Approximately 550,000 transcripts from the interrogations of witnesses and suspects were compiled, approximately 20,000 original documents from enemy sources and several thousand photographs of crimes and their perpetrators were found, extensive informative/documentary materials (the press, posters, other publications...) of the occupiers and their collaborators were gathered, numerous exhumations were conducted, and other activities were carried out. Based on the foregoing, the State Commission and its subordinate territorial commissions made decisions whereby individuals were designated as war criminals or occupation collaborators. The commissions made approximately 120,000 decisions which proclaimed and registered 66,420 war criminals and occupation collaborators. Out of this number, 17,175 were occupiers and 49,245 were domestic persons. In the State Commission's archives, there are 25,875 registered war criminals, of whom 8,700 are domestic persons. Out of this latter figure, approximately 8,000 were proclaimed so by decisions of the State Commission at the federal level, while the rest were received from the territorial commissions.⁵⁷

The decisions were first forwarded to the court martial and prosecutor's office with jurisdiction, which launched criminal prosecution until the formation of the public prosecution and the people's courts. There was very close cooperation between the commissions and the OZNA (later the UDBA) in the investigation and initiation of criminal prosecution, as well as in pre-trial preparations. Certain decisions were forwarded to the *Tribunals for Prosecution of Crimes and Violations of National Honour*. Trials against present war criminals were also held before circuit courts which then sent reports to the Commission. However, this task was not quite diligently performed, so a rather modest number of convictions can be found in the list of convictions. Even though this documentation is terse, after careful analysis it proved sufficient to demonstrate the instrumentalization of these institutions.⁵⁸ Besides clear cases of war crimes, a broad and vague interpretation of the law led, however, to trials for even the most banal transgressions (the most trivial forms of economic cooperation, the telling of jokes, singing songs lauding the occupation authorities, etc.). The concealed objective was to intimidate and even eliminate political opponents (by seizing their property) but also people who simply did

⁵⁷ Momčilo Zečević and Jovan Popović, *Dokumenti iz istorije Jugoslavije I, Izveštaj koji je podneo predsednik D. Nedeljković o radu Državne komisije 1943–1948*, (Belgrade: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1998), p. 44.

⁵⁸ Srđan Cvetković, *Između srpa i čekića*, (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2006), pp. 252–253.

not like the authorities, which is clearly reflected in many of the verdicts in this body of documents.⁵⁹

Immediately after Serbia's liberation, while the war was still ongoing during 1944 and the beginning of 1945, the courts martial applied much greater rigor against war crimes suspects than in the subsequent period. Up to the beginning of 1945, almost 70% of all trials concluded with a death sentence, while during 1945 this figure fell to 28%, and in the following years it came down to less than 20%. Individuals accused of war crimes in the initial months were executed for even inconsequential matters, while only a year or two later they would have received only a brief term in detention for the same violations. The number of proclaimed war crimes by individual republic in Yugoslavia also differed considerably, so in a certain sense one may speak of the *territorialisation of guilt, strained national symmetry* and political subjectivism, which were reflected in the uneven application of criteria by the territorial commissions which proclaimed war crimes.⁶⁰ Trials were often conducted under a general media harangue, often with falsified evidence, pressure against defence attorneys and failure to observe procedural law and the right to defence. In these public trials, an effort was made to level the differences between blatant collaborationist movements and those that were anti-communist and anti-Nazi.⁶¹

⁵⁹ The State Commission, as well as the territorial commissions, were not regularly apprised of trials, so that entirely accurate statistics on the number and character of trials of those accused of war crimes and collaboration cannot be derived on the basis of the State Commission's register. The State Commission's register does contain the “List of Indictments and Convictions” in which records by district were maintained. Here we found slightly more than 900 indictments and 838 convictions from districts in the Republic of Serbia, the Vojvodina Autonomous Province and districts in Kosovo; AJ, DK-110, fasc. 826, 827, 828 and 829.

⁶⁰ For example, the Serbian Territorial Commission forwarded 11,911 cases to the public prosecution, the Vojvodina commission 8,812, and the Montenegrin commission 2,329, while the Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatian commissions forwarded an incomparably lower number (just over 1,000), even though the most massive war crimes during the Second World War were perpetrated there. At places, as in Serbia, even reasonable doubt was sufficient for someone to be proclaimed a war criminal, while in the territory of the most massive collaboration, i.e., where there was open support for the Ustasha-led NDH, even grave offenses were concealed in order to establish “brotherhood and unity” in the territory infected by nationalist chauvinism after a horrifying civil war. It is indicative that a smaller number of Croats than Serbs was registered, and only 300 Albanians, even though it is known that the most massive genocidal crimes were perpetrated in the territory of the NDH by the Ustasha regime against Serbs and that the collaboration and crimes of the Ballists in Kosovo assumed immense proportions. Momčilo Zečević and Jovan Popović, *Dokumenti iz istorije Jugoslavije I, Izveštaj koji je podneo predsednik D. Nedeljković o radu Državne komisije 1943–1948*, Belgrade 1998,44; Srđan Cvetković, *Između srpa i čekića* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2006), 252–253.

⁶¹ This could be seen in many trials, and it came to the fore mostly in the trial against Dragoljub Mihailović from 10 June to 15 July 1946, in which the same indictment encompassed the former prime minister of the government-in-exile, Slobodan Jovanović, its foreign minister Momčilo Ninčić, and Mihailović as the war minister, together with Milan Nedić's ministers (Tanasije Dinić, Drago Jovanović) and Ljotičists (Kosta Mušicki), even though it was well known that a veritable “little war” was being waged between them, and that many Nedićists and Ljotičists

Concluding comparisons

The aforementioned facts, testifying to the number of those executed without trial in the first months after liberation by the revolutionary authorities in Serbia and Yugoslavia, point to the conclusion that the regime was incomparably more repressive than anywhere else in Eastern or Western Europe. The hypothesis on the exceptional nature of the Yugoslav case within the European framework is backed by the data provided above concerning the number of those sentenced to death, i.e. those who were executed at the end of the war on charges of collaboration and war crimes. In terms of the number of executed without trial, if even the most cautious estimates and censuses in Serbia are considered, one arrives at the fact that in France approximately 225 persons per million were killed, while in Serbia this figure was approximately 5,000 (and over 5,8000 for Yugoslavia as a whole), which is twenty times more. A similar ratio can be seen in the number of those sentenced to death: in France it was 39 while in Serbia it was approximately 400 persons per million.

Among other European countries, it may be said that something similar occurred only in Bulgaria, where there was a considerable number of those sentenced to death (219 persons per million), while based on more modest estimates over 2,000 persons per million inhabitants were executed (or not even half as many as in Serbia!). In Poland the equivalent figure is roughly 450, while in all other countries the situation is considerably different, and the equivalent figures run from 4 to 30 sentenced to death per million inhabitants, while extra-judiciary mass executions were entirely unknown. Thus, according to all indicators, the number of those killed in Serbia is at least twice as high those killed in the country with the second highest number, Bulgaria, while in comparison to France, and particularly the rest of Europe, the number of those killed at the end of the war runs from twenty to even several hundred times higher. If the number of those killed indirectly is also counted, i.e., the civilians who were killed in camps and prisons (approximately an additional 35,000 in Serbia), the share of those killed per one million inhabitants would grow to over 10,000, which is an infamous European record. It is possible that the number of those killed in Serbia is only comparable inside Yugoslavia with Slovenia (13,000 per million) and Croatia (roughly 12,500 per million) if one takes into account the aforementioned rather well-founded estimates in the absence of an entirely accurate census. Based on research conducted thus far, in Montenegro the proportion is similar to those in Croatia and Slovenia, although more precise lists are still expected, while in the other former republics

were designated with the letter "Z" (for *zločinac* – criminal) by the government in London. A member of the pre-war Democratic Party, Kosta Kumanudi, and a member of the pre-war Radical Party, Lazica Marković, were added to this already diverse group, probably to complete the spectrum of "reactionaries and traitors". Out of these 24 individuals, 11 were sentenced to death, and 9 were shot on the night of 17 July 1946, deprived of the right to appeal and the right to a marked grave. See Kosta Nikolić, *Dragoljub Mihailović* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2005).

of Yugoslavia no serious research exists, although their equivalent numbers are certainly far lower.

Besides the exceptional nature of the repression in Serbia and Yugoslavia at the end of the war, the data also indicate that within Yugoslavia the repression was generally not ethnically motivated, because a considerable number of Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Montenegrins, Hungarians, Albanians, etc. were killed. In my view, two factors stood above all others: retaliation by the wartime victors and ideological reasons, but not ethnic vengeance. The sole exception and example of collective punishment of an ethnic group is probably the German minority, which, besides Vojvodina, was collectively punished and expelled from territories throughout Eastern Europe.⁶²

To return to the beginning: these estimates and comparisons are supposed to underscore the phenomenon of mass abuses of antifascism at the end of the war in Serbia and Yugoslavia and to place the Yugoslav experience in its European context while taking into consideration its specific aspects. Based on the data provided concerning the methodology and intensity of executions, the experience of Yugoslavia and Serbia cannot be compared to the purges in Europe (especially not with France – with which it is most often compared – nor even the experiences of most communist countries, with the exception of Bulgaria to some extent). Due to specific historical and social circumstances, the revolutionary forces here were far more brutal and repressive, carrying out more systematic executions, so the number of those killed was incomparably higher than elsewhere. This work naturally cannot and need not provide a precise response to the question of how many of those executed and sentenced to death actually deserved such a fate. This is an entirely different question that can only be answered in each individual case in a rehabilitation process conducted by courts of law. The only certain thing is that the published documents and numerical data show that the regime in Yugoslavia at the end of the war and even later was one of the most repressive in Eastern Europe, just as it became the most liberal after the political shift and renouncement of the Stalinist legacy at the beginning of the 1950s.

⁶² According to estimates, approximately 15 million Germans were expelled in the first post-war years: 7 million from Silesia, Pomerania and Eastern Prussia, 3 million from Czechoslovakia, 2 million from Poland and the USSR, and 2.7 million from Romania, Hungary and Yugoslavia; Crampton, *op. cit.*, p. 142; Janković, *op. cit.*, p. 404.

“Wilde Säuberungen“ in Serbien 1944-1945 mit Berücksichtigung Jugoslawiens

Zusammenfassung

Gegen Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges und unmittelbar nach dessen Ende kam es in allen osteuropäischen Ländern sowie in Jugoslawien und Serbien zu einer starken Welle der Repression und des revolutionären Terrors mittels Instrumentalisierung des Antifaschismus mit dem Ziel, Gegner der Revolution zu eliminieren. Diese Gewalttätigkeit war nur teilweise durch den Krieg, das “Rachenethos“, ja sogar durch persönliche Gründe, von denen fast alle bewaffneten Auseinandersetzungen in der Geschichte begleitet wurden, verursacht. Der größte Teil dieser Gewalttätigkeit stellte aber die erste Phase einer gut geplanten kommunistischen Revolution dar, in der ihre Klassen- und politischen Gegner etappenweise eliminiert werden sollten. Zuerst wurde das durch Liquidationen ohne gerichtliche Urteile in der Regie der geheimen Polizei gemacht. Im Prozess der Eliminierung aller Gegner übernahmen später den Vorrang montierte politische Gerichtsprozesse, überwiegend aufgrund von Klagen wegen Kriegsverbrechen oder einer Art Kollaboration.

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