

# MINORITY POLICY OF THE USTASHA REGIME IN CROATIA (1941–1945)



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**Abstract.** *The wartime situation in Croatia (1941-1945) afforded room for the explosion of national and religious animosities that had existed for centuries, which escalated in all their wartime brutality. The core of the Ustasha nationalism was the policy towards the minority groups, which represented approximately one-half of the population of Independent State of Croatia (ISC). One was the attitude towards the Muslims, who were declared as a part of the Croatian nation; and completely different towards the rest essential national groups – Serbs, Jews and Gypsies, who were declared for the “biggest enemies of the Croatian people”, were deprived of civil and human rights and subjected to severe persecutions and discrimination. This policy was due to the multi-national and multi-religious character of the ISC, which boundaries incorporated Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the Croats were living together not only with Orthodox Serbs, but with Moslems too.*

*The deportation and liquidation of Serbs and Jews with an aim of creation of a “pure living space” for Croats and Muslims was an important task for the new regime, but there is a difference and specifics in its ideological grounding. Unlike anti-Semitism which was external influence, anti-Serbism was bounded in the local tradition. Solving of the “Jews question” copied the racial policy of the Germans, but the “Serbian issue” was a specific problem for the Ustasha regime.*

*The Ustasha hatred towards the Serbs living in their territory was due to the fact that they were a sizable “minority” in the ISC - they represented one-third of the population of the country. It was clear that they would never accept the Croatian state as their own and would always struggle against it, claiming for separation and incorporation into Serbia. For this reason, the Ustashes directed their political energy predominantly against the Serbs. The Jews and Gypsies were fewer in number, therefore not so dangerous for the future of the ISC. They were defined as “non-Aryans” and were persecuted as racially inferior and dangerous people.*

**Keywords:** *Independent State of Croatia, Ustasha Regime, minority policy*

The minority policy of the Ustasha regime in 1941–1945 was based on the extreme Croatian nationalism of the Ustasha organization, established by Ante Pavelić and his associates in emigration in the interwar period. It was a response to the establishment of the royal dictatorship in Yugoslavia in 1929. Forced to leave their home-

land, the nationalists hoped to achieve the Croatian national ideal with the help of Germany and Italy as external revisionist powers. The Ustashes rejected any other solution to the Croatian national question than the creation of a completely free, independent and sovereign national state. They put a sign of equality between

the Croatian historical and ethnic territory, i.e. they accepted that the Croats should live in the lands that belonged to them since the Middle Ages. Thus, Croatian nationalists claimed a number of ethnically mixed regions, in which, along with Croats, a number of other nationalities lived. This is the essence of the Ustasha "Greater Croatia" idea, which led to a sharp confrontation with other ethnicities, especially with the Serbs, who fought for the creation of a "Greater Serbia." (Lyubomirova, 2001, p. 34, 96-101, 121-125).

The military intervention of the Axis powers in Yugoslavia meant victory for the separatist, i.e. Ustasha line - the destruction of the common state and the creation of the Independent State of Croatia (ISC) on April 10, 1941. The borders of the new state, however, were determined by Germany and Italy, which was the first major disappointment for the Croats, as Pavelić was forced to cede to the Italians almost all the islands in the Adriatic Sea and a large part of Dalmatia, plus Istria. At the very beginning of the war, Hungary, in turn, annexed Bačka, Baranja, Prekomurje and Međumurje. Thus, the territorial scope of the ISC was far from the idea of "Greater Croatia" and the centuries-old struggle of the Croats to unify their fragmented lands into a single state ended in failure. During the years of World War II, extreme Croatian nationalism clashed with German, Italian and Hungarian expansionism. The ISC did not receive such ethnically pure Croatian territories as Dalmatia and Međumurje, but annexed the ethnically mixed regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Srem, which it never managed to incorporate permanently and stable into its territorial complex (Lyubomirova, 2001, pp. 128-129, 136-144).

The Croatian national question was only partially resolved in 1941. Therefore, the Ustasha nationalism not only did not weaken, but was inflamed to the extreme and became a state ideology and policy in the ISC. The reason for the aggressive, xenophobic nationalism of the Ustasha was precisely the multinational and multi-religious character of the new state, which created serious problems for the government due to the constant danger of separatism and secession. The ISC ended up with a population of 6.5 million, of which Catholic Croats were only half (3.5 million), Serbs were 30% (2 million), and Muslims were 12%

(750,000). Other nationalities (Jews, Gypsies, Germans, Italians, Hungarians, Montenegrins, Slovenes and Slovaks) were only 8% (Jelić-Butić, 1978, p.106). The ethnic appearance of the ISC was significantly complicated by the accession to it of the nationally and religiously mixed region of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which Catholic Croats were a minority (only 20%) and lived together not only with other Christians (Orthodox Serbs – 43%), but also with Muslims (37%) (Jelinek, 1980, p. 195). That is why, after April 10, 1941, the Ustasha felt "called upon" to defend the freedom and independence of their already created, but constantly threatened by "external and internal enemies" new state, to cleanse it of a number of "ethnic impurities" and to transform it into a national and homogeneous state.

The Ustasha nationalism found its strongest manifestation in their policy towards the various national groups living in the ISC. One was their attitude towards Muslims (who were declared as an integral part of the Croatian nation); Germans, Hungarians, Bulgarians and Slovaks (who belonged to allied nations during the war); Slovenes and Montenegrins (whose cooperation was sought in the anti-Serbian struggle); and completely another – towards Serbs, Jews and Gypsies, who were declared "enemies", deprived of civil rights and subjected to cruel persecution and discrimination (Lyubomirova, 2001, pp. 337-338).

At the end of October 1941, Pavelić gave a speech in which he stated that there were two categories of population in Croatia, namely: "subjects of the state" (Orthodox Serbs, Jews and Gypsies) and "citizens with full rights" (Catholics and Muslims) (Pavelić, 1984, p. 3, 15). The first group was persecuted in the ISC, while the second was tolerated. The second group also included Germans, Hungarians, Bulgarians, Slovaks, Slovenes and Montenegrins.

The issue of the Ustasha policy towards Muslims during the Second World War is very interesting. After the Yugoslav capitulation in April 1941, Ante Pavelić managed to obtain from the Axis a consent for the inclusion of all of Bosnia and Herzegovina within the borders of the newly formed Croatian state. But in it, after the Croats and the Serbs, Muslims were the third important and compact ethnic element. Thus, the Muslim

question came to the fore in the new ISC, where a large part of the population practiced Islam (Rakova-Marinkyova et al. 1994, p. 142).

Bosnia and Herzegovina were incorporated in the ISC, but from an ideological point of view their accession had to be justified in order to preserve the new status quo after the end of the war. Since Croats made up only a fifth of the population of the region, the Ustashas could hardly assert their right to it without declaring the Muslims to be Croats who had converted to Islam centuries ago, and thus imposing the thesis of a Croat majority in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This led to the propaganda of the Ustasha theory of Muslims as the “purest Croats”, as the “flower”, the “backbone”, the “core” and “the healthiest and most vital part of the Croatian people” (HDA, f.227, kut.1, doc.T377/41, p. 1; NDH, br.24, 23.X.1941; HN, br.309, 24.XII.1941; Poglavnik govori, 1941, p. 13, 91).

In their desire to impose their national policy, the Ustashas needed the support of the Muslim population in their fight against the Chetniks and Partisans on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Therefore, the Muslims in the ISC were treated as “brothers” and “allies”. The Croatian rulers did everything possible to win their sympathies to their side, and to incite them to fight against “their original enemies” - the Orthodox Serbs (Rojnica, 1994, pp. 91–92).

The Ustasha government followed the policy of tolerating Muslims, granting them all the rights and privileges enjoyed by Catholics, i.e. treating them as equal citizens of the new state. The Ustasha national program provided the inclusion of Muslims in the power structures (their leaders were appointed to high civilian and military positions in the state - ministers, diplomats, state secretaries, grand prefects, etc.), and granting of religious and educational autonomy to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Many Muslims were also represented in the leadership of the Ustasha movement (Pavelić, 1988, p. 9, 18).

The Ustashas assured that the practice of Islam would continue freely in the new Croatian state. They declared it as “a state of two religions - Islam and Catholicism”, which were treated equally. This was an attempt to dispel the Muslims fears about the possible religious discrimination in one Christian, and more precisely – a Catholic state.

A huge mosque was even built in the center of Zagreb, which was opened in August 1944. Pavelić also allowed the creation of special Muslim units in the Croatian army (“Krv je progovorila”, 1942, p.91; Mužić, 1991, pp. 40–41).

The entire burden of the fight against the Chetniks and Partisans in the most turbulent region of the ISC – Bosnia and Herzegovina, fell on the shoulders of the Muslims. The entire territory was occupied by various armed forces that imposed their local authority - Ustasha, Italian, German, Chetnik, Partisan, etc. The chaos, insecurity, lawlessness, terror and fear of Serbian revenge caused widespread discontent among Muslim public circles, which grew in the course of the war (HN, br.182, 15.VIII.1941; br.201, 3.IX.1941; br. 497, 8.VIII.1942; Antonić, Z. et al., 1973, pp. 44–47, 268).

The very fact that the Ustasha regime did not recognize the ethnic autonomy of Muslims and treated them as part of the Croatian people, in itself spoke of an attempt of assimilation. The long-term Ustasha strategy was to make Muslims “real Croats”. However, they were never granted the generously promised religious and educational autonomy - mainly due to the fear of Muslim separatism. In fact, the Ustashas did not trust and had serious reservations about the Muslims loyalty (Malcolm, 1994, pp. 185–186). Muslims were also not sincere in their “friendly” relations with the authorities. Although they declared that they supported the ISC (which undoubtedly gave them much greater rights and privileges compared to former Yugoslavia), they would not want to live permanently in a Catholic state, as they did not feel like Croats and had no intention of “becoming” ones (HN, br.219, 21.IX.1941; br. 1112, 18.VIII.1944; Pavelić, 1988, pp. 5–6, 15, 39–40, 45–47, 101).

The Ustashas were forced to grant full civil rights and to tolerate all ethnic groups living in Croatia, but nationally belonging to the Axis countries, which were allies of the regime during the Second World War – Germans, Hungarians, Bulgarians and Slovaks. Due to the dominant position of the Third Reich in the ISC, many privileges were granted to the German minority. It lived concentrated in the Northern parts of the country - mainly in Vojvodina, Slavonia, Srem and Zagreb, and numbered about half a million

people (Boban, 1985, p. 64, 476). From June to October 1941, a whole series of laws were published that gave autonomy to the German minority. It had the rights to its own language, schools, courts, administration, militia, SS formations under German command, etc. The Germans in the ISC considered themselves more citizens of the Reich than of Croatia and represented something like a "state within a state" (Narodne novine, br.56, 21.VI.1941, br.166, 30.X.1941; br. 208, 20.XII.1941; Ristović, 1991, p. 101).

In Croatia, there was also a Hungarian minority in some areas of Vojvodina. However, it was placed in a less advantageous position than the German minority, because the protection from Budapest was less effective, and Croatian-Hungarian relations were quite strained because of the Međumurje region. However, the Ustasha authorities allowed the Hungarians to keep their schools and cultural organizations and to had a certain autonomy (Jelinek, 1980, pp. 203–204).

The Slovak minority in Croatia also enjoyed the protection of the Ustasha regime. It, as well as its organization (the Slovak National Unity), enjoyed freedom in cultural life and education (Jelinek, 1980, p. 204).

The Croatian government sought to resolve the issue favorably for the Bulgarians on its territory. First of all, these were the prisoners of war - mainly from Macedonia, who had served in the former Yugoslav army and were sent to camps near Zagreb, Sarajevo, Banja Luka, etc. By the end of 1941 they were returned to Bulgaria (Kochanov, 2000, pp. 65–67).

In the fight against the Serbs, the Ustashes needed all possible allies. They also looked to those South Slavic groups living on their territory who had also suffered from Serbian hegemony in Yugoslavia and on this basis were "natural" allies of the ultra-nationalist Ustasha regime. First of all, these were the Slovenes, who were Catholics. They had always been seen as "Alpine" or "mountain Croats", whose lands were expected to be included within the borders of the ISC (Starčević, 1936, pp. 108–109). However, in April 1941, Germany occupied their lands, thus the Croatian nationalists were forced to give them up. At his meeting with Pavelić in June 1941, Hitler agreed to a population exchange – to accept 260,000 Serbs expelled from the ISC in the occupied

Serbian lands, allowing the emigration of the same number of Slovenes from Styria to Croatia (Krizman, 1986, p. 117). In fact, only about 10,000 Slovenes were accepted in the ISC, who were sent mostly to Bosnia and settled in the homes of Serbs who had been evicted from there. They were treated no differently than Croats - they were accepted into civil service (even to high administrative positions) and the army, and they were allowed to practice the professions of priests and teachers (Jelić-Butić, 1978, p. 169).

The Ustashes also had a positive attitude towards the Montenegrins - as opponents of the Serbs, despite the fact that they were Orthodox. Even during the emigration period, Croatian nationalists established ties with the Montenegrin separatists, as well as with the Macedonian Bulgarians in the common anti-Serbian struggle. According to Pavelić, this was a proof that there was no religious discrimination in the ISC, nor a "crusade" against Orthodoxy. On May 14, 1941, the Ministry of the Interior declared the Montenegrins a "friendly people" who could freely live in the country and occupy high administrative positions (HN, br.78, 1.V.1941; br. 104, 27.V.1941; Pavelić, 1984, p. 105).

The Ustashes, however, excluded three ethnic groups from the Croatian nation – Serbs, Jews and Gypsies. The policy towards these minorities played an extremely important role and determined the character of the Ustasha national policy as a whole. While the Ustasha anti-Semitism and racism were largely imported from outside phenomena, anti-Serbism arose entirely on local grounds. If the "Jewish issue" copied German racial ideology, the "Serbian question" was a specific problem of the Ustasha regime and its solution proved to be much more complex (Kobsa, 1971, p. 225).

The denial of Serbism and Yugoslavism was one of the main components of the Ustasha ideological system, which was a result of the complicated Serbian-Croatian relations from 1918 onwards. The "Serbian question" was central to Ustasha ideology and politics before and during World War II. Serbs continued to be the constant image of the enemy, with the only difference that until 1941 these were the Serbs from Serbia (the "external" Serbs) who imposed their dominance over the Croats within Yugoslavia, while after 1941



the “enemy” were the Serbs living inside the ISC (the “internal” or “prechani” Serbs). In fact, the Croatian-Serbian conflict was transferred from an interstate level to an interethnic one within Croatia, due to the fact that during the war Serbia was occupied by the Germans and did not constitute an independent state entity (Marković, 1991, p. 11; Ognyanova, 2019, p. 291).

When looking for the reasons for the Ustasha anti-Serbism, attention should be paid first of all to the fact that the percentage of Serbs in the ISC was very high – they represent about one third of the country’s population. Moreover, they were not compactly settled, but were scattered over 65–75% of the territory of the ISC. This turned the “Serbian question”, i.e. the issue of the Serbian minority, into a major dilemma facing the new rulers of the country (NARA, M 1203, doc.860H.01/916, p. 6; Jelavich, 1983, p. 263).

The large Serbian minority could not accept the loss of its dominant and privileged position from the time of Yugoslavia and its remaining within the borders of a hostile Catholic-Muslim state like the ISC. It was clear to the Ustashas that the local Serbs would never accept the Croatian state as their own, and unless they were “defeated” or “melted”, they would always be “rebellious elements” and would always strive to secede from the ISC and to join Serbia. This was the main reason why the Ustashas directed all their political energy against the Serbs in the country. Muslims, Jews and Gypsies were not only smaller in number, but also much more passive and not as dangerous (HDA, f.227, kut.2, doc.T.J.140/43, p. 2; f.249, kut.4, doc. V.T. 1128-5-1944, p. 1; Krizman, 1986, p. 123; Ognyanova, 2019, p. 292).

In fact, immediately after the declaration of the ISC, part of the “internal Serbs”, frightened by Belgrade that the Croats would massacre them, organized themselves into Chetnik and Partisan detachments. Moreover, they were replenished not only by local Serbs, but also by ultra-nationalist Serbian extremists infiltrating from Serbia. According to the Chetnik plans, Croatia was to reduce its territory and population by half, with the seized lands joining Serbia. By revealing the “Greater Serbian” plans, the Ustashas promoted the idea that they had the right of “counter-reaction” and thus justified the anti-Serbian terror in the country (CDA, f.176, op.8, a.e.1153, pp.

100–101; op.20, a.e.363, pp. 181–182; Hrvatska smotra, br. 7–10, 1943, pp. 440–442; Bzik, 1944, pp. 13–14).

From the very beginning of the foundation of the ISC, the government began to implement specific measures, which were very diverse in nature and aimed at depriving Serbs of their political and civil rights. New criminal legislation came into force, which became the basis of the entire judicial system in the ISC. Thus, the Ustasha terror acquired a “normative character” and “legitimacy” (Steinberg, 1990, p. 29; Djilas, 1991, pp. 116–117). Just one week after the proclamation of the new Croatian state, on April 17, 1941 the “Law-Regulation for the Protection of the People and the State” was promulgated, which introduced the death penalty for all those who “threaten” its existence (Narodne novine, br. 4, 17.IV.1941; HN, br. 65, 18.IV.1941). On April 30, 1941 the “Law-Regulation on Citizenship” was published, and on November 26, 1941 – the “Law-Regulation on Sending of Undesirable People to Forced Stay in Labor Camps”, which laid the foundations for the system of concentration camps in the ISC (Narodne novine, br. 188, 26.XI.1941; Matković, 1994, p. 164). The new legislation had to be matched by a new judicial system in Croatia. Therefore, already in April-July 1941, Pavelić announces the establishment of the “special”, “extraordinary” and “direct” courts. Thousands of innocent people, mainly Serbs and Jews, were sentenced to death by them (Narodne novine, br.5, 18.IV.1941; br. 23, 9.V.1941; br. 32, 20.V.1941; br. 58, 24.VI.1941; Krizman, 1986, pp. 120–121).

The Ustasa extremist-nationalist plan included the following scheme: to massacre a part of the Serbian population, to expel another part to its homeland (Serbia), and to convert the remainder to Catholicism and assimilate it.

According to the Ustashas, “true Serbs” (i.e. the population from Serbia) began to settle en masse in the Croatian lands only after the end of World War I. Then the Serbian rulers began to implement a well-planned colonization policy in them with the aim of creating their “fifth column”. Thus was formed the Ustasha thesis about the unwanted Serbian population on the Croatian ethnic territory, for whom there was no place in new Croatia - it must return from where it came

(HDA, f.211, kut.39, Zapisnik IV sjednice Sabora, 25.II.1942, p. 159; Spomen-knjiga, 1942, p. 77). In addition to the 260,000 "prechan" Serbs resettled in Serbia under the agreement with the Third Reich of June 1941, many left the territory of the ISC on their own – they simply fled the Ustasha terror and crossed into the territory of occupied Serbia. It is assumed that by 1943 the number of "prechan" Serbs resettled there reached 300,000 people (HDA, f.227, kut.3, doc.2606/1941, p. 1; Jelić-Butić, 1978, p. 171).

There was also a physical repression on the Serbian population in the ISC, which took the character of ethnic cleansing. The first victims of the regime were those Serbs who had been prominent figures in the socio-political life of former Yugoslavia - members of the pre-war Serbian political parties and organizations, employees in the army, police and administration, as well as representatives of the Serbian economic, spiritual and intellectual elite (merchants, industrialists, entrepreneurs, priests, teachers, etc.). They were also removed from work in the media and the liberal professions (Tomasevich, 1975, p. 106; Trifković, 1990, p. 264). After the crackdown on them, terror also followed over the remaining Serbian population in the ISC. Serbs were expelled from certain residential areas of the cities and isolated in ghettos, where their freedom of movement was restricted. They were forced to wear a blue armband with the letter "P" (abbreviation for "Orthodox" – „pravoslavac“) on their right arm (HN, br. 85, 8.5.1941; Narodne novine, br. 9, 23.4.1941; Jelinek, 1980, p. 197).

The mass murders date back to mid-April 1941, but were carried out in full force in the summer of this year. That was the first stage in the implementation of the Ustasha terror, in which all its characteristics were outlined – mass arrests, imprisonment in camps and prisons, deportation, robbery, mass killings, burning and liquidation of entire Orthodox villages and regions (HDA, f.211, kut.3, doc.445, p. 238; Bell-Fialkoff, 1993, p. 116). It came to bloody excesses and mass massacres, in which the police and military formations also participated. They took place mainly in the mixed regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kordun, Lika, Banja, Knin, northern Dalmatia, Srem and Slavonia. An important role in the implementation of terror in the ISC was played

by the concentration camps, known as "death camps". The largest in Croatia were those in Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška. The working and living conditions there were appalling and very similar to those in Nazi camps. Some of the prisoners were also sent to the Third Reich, especially Auschwitz (Jelić-Butić, 1978, p. 30, 166, 185–186; Kazimirović, 1987, p. 111, 116, 217).

In addition to arrests, murders, deportations and economic expropriation, terror also took spiritual dimensions. After realizing that they could not liquidate 2 million Serbs, the Ustashas decided to tear them away from the influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) and assimilate them by converting them to the Catholic religion. Already in the summer of 1941, they began to spread the thesis about the „prechani“ Serbs as "Croats of the Orthodox faith", i.e. "Orthodox Croats", who, under the influence of the SOC, had succumbed to "political Serbization" and over time defined themselves as Serbs. The Ustashas believed that the Catholicization of the Orthodox would re-Croatize them and pave the way for the desired national unity. According to them, the Orthodox in the ISC had two options: either to assimilate into the environment in which they lived, or to succumb to "Greater Serbian" propaganda (Lorković, 1939, pp. 69–71; Jelinek, 1980, p. 198; Trifković, 1990, pp. 31–32).

Only after the Croatian Serbs adopted Catholicism the Ustashas promised to recognize them as "full members of the Croatian nation" with all the rights and obligations that stem from this, and anyone who did not want to recognize the new state had to leave it. By issuing the "Law on the Conversion from One Faith to Another" (May 5, 1941), the Ustasha leaders "legalized" the Conversion to Catholicism in the country. The wording of the law was general - it referred to the conversion of Orthodox Christians to one of the "recognized religions" in the ISC (Protestantism, Islam or Catholicism), but it was more than clear that it referred to their conversion to Catholicism (Narodne novine, br.19, 5.V.1941; Krišto, 1997, p. 248). The Ministry of Interior issued a circular warning local authorities not to issue permits for conversion to teachers, priests, merchants, wealthy peasants, etc. – thus the intelligentsia and the economically wealthy part of the Serbian population had to be physically destroyed.

Only ordinary Serbian peasants received consent to convert to Catholicism without any problems (Pavelić, 1984, p. 14).

In order to force the Orthodox to abandon their faith, the Ustashas launched a serious attack on the SOC. On July 18, 1941, the use of the term “Serbian Orthodox Church” was officially banned and replaced with the former (used before 1918) “Greek-Eastern Church” (Narodne novine, July 19, 1941). Most of the Orthodox churches and monasteries were looted, destroyed, burned or converted to Catholic ones. By an order of November 11, 1941, the property of the SOC was confiscated. Serbian priests were among the first to fall victims to the Ustasha terror. They were persecuted, killed, deported, and sent to concentration camps. Many of them were expelled from their dioceses and found salvation in Serbia (HN, br.80, 3.V.1941; Pavelić, 1984, pp. 195–196).

The mass conversion of Serbs to Catholicism in the ISC took place in the summer and autumn of 1941. It was associated with the application of violent measures and real arbitrariness. The majority of the population that converted did not do so voluntarily, but under fear of terror. Of course, the numerous “requests” for conversion to the Catholic Church of entire villages, spoke itself of Ustasha pressure. The change of the Orthodox to Catholic religion in the ISC was a political, not a religious act. It was carried out by the Ustasha authorities, not by the Catholic Church (Boban, 1988, p.14; Krišto, 1995, p. 465). The Archbishop of Zagreb, Aloysius Stepinac, and the highest church clergy publicly condemned the violent actions of the Ustashas. The Episcopate strictly adhered to the rules of Canon law, according to which changing one’s religious denomination was a matter of personal conviction and conscience, must be a free and well-motivated act, and could not be imposed on anyone by force (Krišto, 1997, pp. 237–238).

However, from the beginning of 1942, the Ustasha leadership gradually realized that repressive measures would not solve the problem of the Serbian minority in the Croatian lands and that it had to change the methods of “pacifying the country”. The Germans also insisted on achieving internal political stabilization. The cessation of terror would weaken the two Serbian resistance movements - the Partisan and the Chetnik ones.

Therefore, Croatian nationalists were already talking about the need to “infuse the Orthodox into the Croatian political nation”. The Ustasha terror against the Serbian population gradually began to ease. Serbs were allowed into the state apparatus, the Sabor, the Ustasha government, the army, etc. (NDH, br.10, 5.III.1942; Pavelić, 1984, pp. 1–15; Mužić, 1991, pp. 140–149, 236).

No matter how many Orthodox churches were liquidated and priests were killed, it became clear to the Ustasha rulers that Orthodoxy could not be eradicated from the Croatian lands. Then they began to look for a way to bring it under the control of the government. Instead of struggling against the Serbs and Orthodoxy, the regime directed its fight against the SOC. And since they could not leave a third of the population of the country without a church organization, the Ustashas oriented themselves towards the establishment of a national Orthodox Church in the ISC, which would not be under the direct control of Belgrade (CDA, f.176, op.20, a.e.365, p. 33; Krišto, 1997, pp. 236–237). The Poglavnik (the official title of Pavelić as a leader of the state and the Ustasha movement) repeatedly recalled that according to the Orthodox tradition, the church bears the name of the state in which it is located and it is a national church. Therefore, with the formation of the Independent State of Croatia, the Croatian Orthodox Church should also be established. Orthodox in Croatia were not only Serbs, but also Romanians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Montenegrins and some Albanians. Since they all lived in the Croatian state, they should have a common church that would unite all Orthodox, regardless of their nationality (Pavelić, 1984, p. 18, 52–53, 62–64, 66, 773 – 74, 89).

On April 3, 1942, Pavelić issued a Law-Regulation on the establishment of the autocephalous Croatian Orthodox Church (COC). According to it, the Orthodox Church in Croatia separated from the SOC. It was declared equal to all other religions in the country, and its followers from “subjects” automatically became “citizens” of the ISC (Narodne novine, br. 77, 7.IV.1942; Poglavnik, 1942, pp. 9–10). The statute of the new church was published on June 5, 1942 and did not differ from the statutes of other Orthodox churches, but it included some articles that guaranteed the dependence of the COC on the



authorities. According to it, all Orthodox clergy in the country were state officials and had to take an oath of allegiance to the ISC and personally to the Poglavnik. Pavelić participated directly in the election of the patriarch, as well as the metropolitans. By the Law-Regulation, he appointed the Russian emigrant Hermogen as metropolitan in Zagreb (Narodne novine, br.1123, 5.VI.1942; HN, br.443, 6.VI.1942; br.445, 9.VI.1942; Nedjeljne vijesti, br.27, 8.VI.1942).

Although decreasing, the Ustasha terror against the Serbs did not subside until the end of the existence of the ISC. It had consequences that A. Pavelić could not have foreseen, provoking the Serbs to resistance and rebellion. The Ustashes left them no alternative but to fight for their existence and to merge en masse into the Chetnik and Partisan movements. The Partisans gained the most serious success and controlled vast territories exactly in the regions where the ethnic war was waged. As a result, the Ustasha anti-Serbian war cleared the way for the establishment of a Communist regime in the country.

Serbs were not the only ones left outside the Croatian political nation. Jews and Gypsies in the ISC were also declared "subjects" rather than "citizens". There were many parallels in the discrimination against those three ethnic groups in the country - in their elimination from the public, economic and social life, as well as in their deprivation of personal property. The "Final Solution" was applied to all three groups.

The liquidation of Jews and Gypsies, however, was carried out mostly under direct German pressure. That is why the Ustasha attack on them was so fierce, even though these minority groups were insignificant in Croatia and there was no danger for their resistance to the Ustasha regime (such as the Serbs). They were qualified as "non-Aryans" and "enemies" of the Croatian people and were persecuted as racially "inferior" and "dangerous" people (Krizman, 1981, p. 232; Jelinek, 1980, p. 199).

Of all the Yugoslav lands, only Croatia had some anti-Semitic sentiments, and the Ustashes exploited them to the extreme, even though there were not many Jews in the country (in 1941 they numbered about 30–40 thousand) and they did not play a significant role in the economic and political life of the country. The only larger Jewish community was concentrated in Zagreb, but

even there it numbered only about 12,000 people. The Jews were successfully integrated into Croatian society, and some of them even converted to Catholicism through marriage (Antisemitizam, holokaust, antifašizam, 1996, pp. 48–51). Therefore, during World War II, "Croatian Arianism" was a foreign phenomenon in modern Croatian history. The Ustashes in the ISC made an extremely great effort to please their German patrons, especially as a counterbalance to Italian pressure, so they adopted racism and the practice of the Nazi "final solution to the Jewish question". A wide range of racist measures and laws began to be implemented against Jews in the ISC (Djilas, 1991, p. 119).

Croatian nationalists made serious efforts to create anti-Jewish sentiments in Croatian society. They tried to place all the blame for its "suffering" on the Jews. The latter became the "enemy" on whom the population had to vent its desire for revenge. The fact that they had nothing to do with the Serbian dictatorship in Yugoslavia did not matter much to the Ustashes. The very fact that they were "different", like the Serbian oppressors from the interwar period, was the main reason for the negative attitude towards them. Anti-Jewish propaganda followed the Nazi model - it denounced Jews as "killers of Christ", "causers of World War II", "bearers of Communism and Freemasonry in the world", etc., and as having a pro-Serbian and anti-Croatian orientation (HN, br.419, 7.V.1942; br.423, 12.V.1942; br.435, 28.V.1942).

The measures taken against Jews in the ISC fell into three groups: removal from the political and public life of the country; economic plunder; and physical liquidation (genocide).

The first group of measures was implemented through the introduction of racist anti-Semitic legislation in the ISC, which imitated the German and was a copy of the Nazi Nuremberg Laws of September 1935. On April 30, 1941, three laws came into force – "on citizenship", "on racial affiliation" and "on the protection of the Aryan blood and honor of the Croatian people". They laid the foundation for the legal regulation of the situation of Jews in the ISC. Jews were differentiated from Croats "by race", their civil rights were taken away, they were declared only "subjects" of the state and were practically outlawed (Romano, 1980, p. 100; Boban, 1988, p. 14).



In May-June 1941, a new wave of restrictive anti-Jewish measures followed – a whole series of decrees, also borrowed from the Nazis, were published in the press – Jews were forbidden to visit cafes, restaurants, theaters, cinemas and other public places; they were excluded from all public organizations; their societies were banned, etc. (HN, br.69, 22.IV.1941; br.78, 1.V.1941; br.88, 11.V.1941; br.94, 17.V.1941; br.106, 29.V.1941; br.164, 28.VII.1941). They were also removed from all institutions and professions of a scientific and cultural-educational nature (media, universities, institutes, etc.), and from all public and municipal services. Following the example of Germany, all Jews over 14 years of age were required to wear a discriminatory sign on their clothes – a yellow ribbon with the Star of David and the letter “ž” on it (from “žid”, i.e. Jew). Synagogues shared the fate of Serbian Orthodox churches – they were looted and burned by the Ustasas in many regions of the country. The synagogue in Zagreb was nationalized and converted into an administrative building. Already on April 14, the synagogue in Osijek was burned down, followed by those in Džakovo, Sremska Mitrovica, Slavonska Požega, Nova Gradiška, Vinkovci, Zemun and other cities (NARA, M 1203, doc.860H.911/59, p.2; HN, br.101, 24.V.1941; br.159, 23.VII.1941; br.435, 28.V.1942).

The second group of anti-Semitic measures were of an economic nature. Their aim was to seize Jewish property and to destroy the economic position of Jews in the state. Already after the establishment of the ISC, the new authorities began to expel Jews from the city centers and isolate them in remote areas - ghettos. Every Jewish shop had to have a Star of David and a sign on the window (CDA, op.8, a.e.1034, p.39; HDA, f.252, svez.1, doc.931, p.935; Narodne novine, br.43, 4.VI.1941). On October 9, 1941, a Law-Regulation was issued, which announced the nationalization of business enterprises and private property of the Jews. Although Jewish property was declared a state one, most of it passed into the hands of private individuals, mainly members of the Ustasha organization or Germans (Narodne novine, br.149, 9.X.1941; HN, br.240, 12.X.1941).

The third group of measures aimed at the physical destruction of the Jews (mainly in concentra-

tion camps). The arrests and mass murders began in May-June 1941, and on November 25, 1941, the “Law-Regulation on Sending Jews to Camps” was issued (Lengel-Krizman, 1985, pp. 6–9; Matković, 1994, p. 162). Thus, by February 1942, their mass deportation to the camps in Jasenovac, Stara Gradiška, Lobograd, Đakovo, Sremska Mitrovica and other places was carried out. Some of the camps were created specifically for Jews, while the others were “mixed” ones (for Jews, Gypsies, Serbs, political prisoners, etc.) but in them the Jews were the largest percentage. Living conditions there were unusually bad and the mortality rate was extremely high (Freidenreich, 1979, p. 191).

The decision to finally liquidate the Jews was made by the Nazis in January 1942, and in the spring of the same year, their mass deportations from various parts of Europe to Germany began. The Gestapo insisted that all Jews in Croatia to be interned and liquidated. In the summer of 1942, an agreement was reached between Germany and the ISC for the transfer of all remaining free Jews from Croatia. Most of them were sent to German camps - in Germany itself or on the territory of Poland, especially Auschwitz (according to some data, about 10,000 Croatian Jews) (Romano, 1980, p. 94, 95, 100, 103; Steinberg, 1990, p. 50, 52, 54–55, 68).

Few managed to escape the policy of the “final solution to the Jewish question” on the territory of the ISC. Those who could prove they had been sympathizers of the Croatian separatists in Yugoslavia had the opportunity to save their lives and receive Croatian citizenship. In these cases, they received the title of “honorary Aryan”. More exceptions were made for Jews closely related (mostly by kinship and family ties) to members of the Ustasha movement or for those who were from mixed marriages, i.e. “half-Jews”. To save themselves, some sought the protection of the Catholic Church, but a large number of them were also captured and executed (Freidenreich, 1979, p. 192; Kostić, 1981, p. 127).

It is undeniable that there was a real genocide against the Jews, but it is difficult to establish the exact number of Jews killed in the ISC. Various sources and studies most often cite figures from 25,000 to 36,000 people, and in the capital Zagreb – about 8,000. Thus, by the second half of 1943, almost all Jews in Croatia had been killed

or deported. Control over this mass extermination was exercised by the German police authorities, mainly the Gestapo (Jelic-Butic, 1978, p. 180; Boeckh, 1995, p. 33, 53).

Gypsies were treated no differently than Jews in the ISC. They were also seen as "foreigners" – "subjects" of the new state. From the beginning of World War II, the Germans began to "radically" solve the "Gypsy question", both in their own state, the lands they occupied, and in the satellite countries (Lengel-Krizman, 1986, 1, pp. 30–31).

The prelude to the systematic expulsions and mass liquidation of the Gypsies were the racial laws of April 30, 1941. They were directed against Jews, Gypsies and Serbs in general. The Laws-Regulations for the protection of Aryan blood and racial affiliation defined the "inferior races" and included the Gypsies. All prohibitions regarding Jews were also applied to them. Signs were placed in public places and on transport: "Forbidden for Serbs, Jews, nomads (Gypsies) and dogs" (HN, br.78, 1.V.1941; Crowe, 1994, p. 219). In the summer of 1941, many were arrested and taken to the newly established assembly points and camps, where they were liquidated en masse. The terror unfolded with new force in the summer of 1942 – this was the last wave of their persecution in the ISC. Their mass liquidation followed (in Jasenovac or in German camps - mainly Auschwitz). It is undeniable that genocide was committed against Gypsies. In 1945, they were almost completely destroyed on Croatian territory and only a small number were saved (less than 1,000 people, mainly Muslim Gypsies). Croatia was among the countries where, in percentage terms, more Gypsies were killed than in Germany (Lengel-Krizman, 1985, pp. 36–37; Huttenbach, 1991, p. 43).

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