

## **THE SLAVIC-ITALIAN BROTHERHOOD. ASPECTS OF THE ROLE THE ITALIANS HAD IN THE SLAVIC-ITALIAN ANTI-FASCIST UNION**

**Nevenka TROHA**

Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, Ljubljana

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*The author discusses the attitudes and shifts in the political orientations of Italian (and Slovene) workers in the zones A and B of the Free Territory of Trieste (FTT). The author addresses crucial questions such as the workers' support for the Free Territory of Trieste or for the annexation to Yugoslavia and the policy of the Slavic-Italian brotherhood in both Trieste and Istria from the end of World War Two to the Cominform Resolution.*

If the ideological and political differences emerging among the Slovenes of the Littoral in the period of the peace treaties after the WW II were diminished by a sense of their nation being under threat, this was not the case among the Italians living in that area who, at this turning point in time, made other choices as well. Already during the war there had been two issues present, which defined relations among the political parties and movements in the *Venezia Giulia* (Julian March), and alliances were made on the basis of these two issues. These were the borderline issue which included a decision on whether to preserve the Rapallo border or change it in line with the "Slovenian ethnic border", and the issue of the people's authority, i.e. the Communism. The Slovenian leadership succeeded in achieving influence among the leftist Italian Anti-Fascists within the Slavic-Italian brotherhood policy. Many Italian workers placed their choice of class

above the national issue, and saw a better future in the Communist Yugoslavia. The support in Zone A of the Free Territory of Trieste (FTT) was preserved even after September 1947. The split took place after the release of the Cominform Resolution in June 1948, when, in Zone A, not only did the Italians who had, up to that point supported Yugoslavia, turn away from it, the same was done by a great majority of the Slovenian leftists. This policy of the Slavic-Italian brotherhood was much less successful in Zone B, which were under Yugoslavian occupation, because it was planned to be applied in Trieste and Monfalcone who had strong proletarian communities, but was finally implemented in Istria, an area that was populated mostly by peasants and the little bourgeois. The standpoint of those Italians, who supported the idea of annexation to Yugoslavia, deviated from the “normal” decisions one would take for their nation and country. In terms of records known so far, this standpoint cannot be narrowed down merely to views expressed by communists who had internationalism “in their blood” as much more people decided to support the annexation in a relatively long period of time. Historiography still has to produce a thorough study of causes and inclinations that led people to make such decisions (persecutions in the Fascist era, common fight against the Slovenian partisans, having faith in a “better future” etc.?).

In the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, European nationally mixed territories witnessed political battles mainly in the form of battles fought among national blocks. In territories inhabited by Slovenians, the battle between the Italian and Slovene as well as the Slovene and German political forces took place at the forefront, while the Slovenes and Croats were allies within the Slavic community and also due to their weakness and similar national threats they were facing. Naturally, this does not mean there were no severe political conflicts among individual parties within the national blocks on the one hand and that, on the other hand, there were no political alliances concluded between individual parties belonging to different blocks.<sup>1</sup>

In Venezia Giulia, a region of mixed nationalities (Slovenians, Croats, Italians and others), the Italian fascist authorities, ever since they rose to power in 1922, implemented violent measures in the context of the border fascism policy against the political left as well as against certain nations – a cultural genocide of the Slovenian and Croatian minorities, as their actions are referred to by the best experts on the fascist denationalisation policy in the Venezia Giulia, the recently

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1 *Slovenska novejša zgodovina: od programa Zedinjene Slovenije do mednarodnega priznanja Republike Slovenije 1848-1992*. Jasna FISCHER et al. (ed.), Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino – Mladinska knjiga, 2005, 1, 30-43 (hereinafter *Slovenska novejša zgodovina*).

deceased Trieste historian Elio Apih and the Slovenian historian Milica Kacin Wohinz.<sup>2</sup> The Italian left was the political and ideological opponent of fascism, while the minorities were automatically its opponents, because by being born and identifying themselves as Slovenians or Croatians they could not understand that it was a special “mercy” to be allowed into the world of high culture, that it was a special “favour” to be able to become a part of a historical nation, that it was actually salvation from one’s “barbaric” uncultured origins as a nation without history. Thus one of the founders of the cultural genocide policy, the fascist hierarch Livio Ragusin in his work *Politica di confine (Border policy)*, published in 1929, maintained that there are no national minorities at the Italian eastern borders, that there are only foreign groups without history, civilization, national awareness or intellectual class. These people were supposedly an inferior Slavic race, which should be, according to historical rules, assimilated by the superior Italian civilization by “colonization based on the example of the Roman Empire”.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, Slovenians and Croatians, with the exception of individuals who agreed to the cooperation with fascism out of opportunism or necessity,<sup>4</sup> were also ideological and political opponents of fascism. Many Slovenians, including those in the countryside, joined the Communist Party of Italy (after 1943 Italian Communist Party, Partito Comunista Italiano, PCI) because they believed in the principles of social justice and national equality. This combination resulted in the fascist neologism “slavocomunismo” or “slavobolscevismo”, which brought together the ideological as well as racial stereotype and was used by the fascism at the border for the fight against two enemies at the same time.<sup>5</sup> So the denationalization pressures the authorities inflicted on national minorities during the Fascism era unified these minorities, resulting in internal ideological

2 Elio APIH and Milica KACIN WOHINZ also used this term in their discussions of the Slovenian-Italian cultural and historical commission; while in the report of this commission the term “etnična bonifikacija” (“ethnic improvement”) is used. *Slovensko-italijanski odnosi 1880-1956: poročilo slovensko italijanske zgodovinsko-kulturne komisije = I rapporti italo-sloveni 1880-1956: relazione della commissione storico-culturale italo-slovena = Slovenian-Italian relations 1880-1956: the report of the Slovenian-Italian historical and cultural commission*. Ljubljana 2001, 39 (hereinafter *Slovenian-Italian relations*). Milica KACIN WOHINZ, Jože PIRJEVEC. *Zgodovina Slovencev v Italiji 1866-2000*. Ljubljana 2000 (hereinafter KACIN, PIRJEVEC, *Zgodovina Slovencev*), 62.

3 KACIN, PIRJEVEC, *Zgodovina Slovencev*, 62. *Slovenska novejša zgodovina*, 1, 539.

4 To date just a little partial research has been carried out about the people who agreed to the collaboration with the regime, for example by Ervin DOLENC, “Naši Fašisti”, *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 1 (2000), 113-122.

5 *Slovenska novejša zgodovina*, 1, 529.

and political differences being pushed to the side, and in the some time they found their allies in the Italian antifascists.

During the war – the Italian occupation of the so-called Ljubljana province and the Governorate of Dalmatia, and then the German occupation of the Operation Zone of the Adriatic Littoral the violence and suffering reached its peak. The sense of national threat remained present among the Slovenes of the Littoral and Istria Croats during WWII and immediately afterwards when the peace talks held with Italy, which also involved the issue of the new borderline. For the majority of Slovenians and Croats from the Venezia Giulia, their liberation movement fought a struggle to preserve their nation, whose goal was not only liberation, brought about by the defeat of the German occupiers, but first and foremost liberation from Italy, which meant the change of the border. One of the most prominent Slovenian Christian socialists from the Venezia Giulia, Engelbert Besednjak, wrote in his letter sent from Belgrade to his political ally in Venezia Giulia, father Virgil Šček, in the end of 1944: “All personal gains, factional aspects and considerations should be subordinated to this goal (liberation from Italy)”.<sup>6</sup> Thus many Slovenians and Croats in the Venezia Giulia, who otherwise opposed the “godless” communism, joined the side they believed would be capable to bring about this liberation - the “communist” Liberation Front of the Slovenian Nation or the Croatian liberation movement, and thus also the change of the border. So they supported the forces, that managed to organise a strong resistance movement which became a part of the allied forces.

Anti-communist Slovenes and Croats who could have established their own parties and organisations (which would have been more than welcomed by the occupying British-American military administration) in Zone A of the Venezia Giulia were present during the post-war peace negotiations with Italy. However, in order to prevent threats to the position of Yugoslavia during these talks, they did not openly contradict the new Yugoslav (communist) authorities.<sup>7</sup> The Slovenian Democratic Union, which opposed the Communists and the Slavic-Italian Anti-Fascist Union, was established only as late as January 1947, only some days before the Peace Treaty with Italy was signed, in Gorizia and in December 1947 in

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6 Arhiv Republike Slovenije (Archives of the Republic of Slovenia, ARS), AS 1277, collection Edvard Kardelj, box 75. The letter of Engelbert Besednjak to Virgil Šček, 31 December 1944 (published in *Goriški letnik*, 3 (1976), 258-267).

7 ARS, AS 1589, Centralni komite Zveze komunistov Slovenije (Central committee of the League of Communists of Slovenia, CK ZKS), box 52. The report of A. Vratuša to E. Kardelj, 29 March 1946. Alojzij NOVAK. *Črniška kronika*. Boris Mlakar (ed.), Gorica: Mohorjeva družba, 1992, 241–243.

Trieste, while the Association of Slovenian and Croatian Socialists was established in Trieste in July 1947.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand for many Slovenians and Croats from Venezia Giulia the resistance during the war and their battle for the “Slovenian ethnic border” in the post war period also meant the struggle for social class liberation, since the Italian state in the context of the aforementioned policy of ethnic improvement severely interfered with their social structure. Therefore they supported the political option they believed would bring a better life for them and their families.<sup>9</sup>

Already during the war there had been two issues present, which defined relations among the political parties and movements in the Venezia Giulia, and alliances were made on the basis of these two issues. These were the border issue which included a decision on whether to preserve the Rapallo border or change it in line with the “Slovenian ethnic border”, i.e. the annexation of the whole Venezia Giulia to Yugoslavia, and the issue of the so called people’s authority (*narodna vlast*), i.e., Communism. Since the Slovenian ethnic border included several cities with an Italian majority, the Slovenian/Yugoslavian border-related requirements dictated that part of the Italian population had to be won over as well.

If the ideological and political differences emerging among the Slovenes and Croats from the Venezia Giulia Littoral were diminished by a sense of their nation being under threat, this was not the case among the Italians living in that area who, at this turning point in time, made other choices as well. A part of the Italian anti-fascists chose class before nation and saw the hope of a better future in the communist Yugoslavia. The leadership of the Communist Party of Slovenia gradually took over the Italian partisan organisations in Venezia Giulia through the policy of the Slovenian-Italian brotherhood, and after the leaders of the Trieste federation were arrested in the autumn of 1944, it also took over the local PCI, which already in October 1944 entirely supported the pro-Yugoslav standpoints.<sup>10</sup> In December 1944 a joint communist party committee was established in Trieste, which actually functioned entirely in accordance with the directives of the

8 Nevenka TROHA. *Komu Trst : Slovenci in Italijani med dvema državama*. Ljubljana: Modrijan 1999 (hereinafter Troha, *Komu Trst*), 139-148. Nadja MAGANJA, *Trieste 1945-1949: nascita del movimento politico autonomo sloveno*, Trst: Krožek Virgil Šček, 1994.

9 For the information on the standpoint of the Slovenian communists and the Slovenian Liberation Movement leadership about the question of the Slovenian Western border see Bojan GODEŠA: *Slovensko nacionalno vprašanje med drugo svetovno vojno*. Ljubljana: INZ 2006 (hereinafter GODEŠA, *Slovensko nacionalno vprašanje*), 165-197. Nevenka TROHA, “Slovensko osvobodilno gibanje in slovenska zahodna meja”, *Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje*, 1-2 (2003), 63-85.

10 ARS, AS 1487, ae 1851. The letter of L. Šentjurec to CK KPS, 26 October 1944.

Slovenian party.<sup>11</sup> The Workers' Unity, formed in the great worker's centers as Trieste, Muggia and Monfalcone, at the beginning of 1945 had more than ten thousand members of both nationalities. They took part in the uprising organised in Trieste at the end of April 1945 by the Slovenian Liberation Movement leaders.<sup>12</sup>

Before the end of the war the leadership of the Slovenian liberation movement also planned to establish a single mass political organisation, which would function on the same premises as the Slovenian Liberation Front. This did not happen; however, in the middle of April 1945 a joint Slovenian-Italian anti-fascist executive committee was established in Trieste, which functioned as a joint leadership of Slovenian and Italian organisations.<sup>13</sup> After the liberation this committee assumed power; on 7 May 1945 it was transformed into the City Liberation Council Trieste, and it continued functioning as joint political leadership.<sup>14</sup>

In the end of the war the Yugoslav Army units liberated and occupied all of Venezia Giulia, and also the parts of the Udine province with Slovenian population (valleys of Natisone, Resia and Torre, Canale valley). They were the victors who wanted to change the state borders and at the same time introduce socialism (communism), and simultaneously they were the avengers for all the suffering brought about by fascism and war. A great majority of Slovenians and those Italians, which supported the Slovenian liberation movement, greeted them enthusiastically. Edvard Kardelj reported to Josip Broz Tito that Slovenians in Trieste, Gorizia and elsewhere in the Venezia Giulia "literally went crazy with enthusiasm about Yugoslavia" after the liberation.<sup>15</sup> The priest and Christian socialist Virgil Šček described the arrival of the Yugoslav partisans to Lokev near Sežana: "29 April 1945. At 5pm the first tanks showed up, Yugoslav soldiers sitting on them: they stopped in the village. People were surprised, ecstatic. They ran into their houses where they already had the flags prepared, they waited for

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11 ARS, AS 1487, Centralni komite Komunistične partije Slovenije (Central committee of the Communist Party of Slovenia, CK KPS), ae 630. The letter of E. Kardelj to the direction of PCI, 9 September 1944; ae 1876. The report of L. Šentjunc to M. Marinko, 19 October 1944; ae 1851. The report of M. Marinko to CK KPS, 26 October 1944; ae 1902. The letter of CK KPS to L. Šentjunc, 19 December 1944. GODEŠA, *Slovensko nacionalno vprašanje*, pg. 161-164.

12 ARS, AS 1487, ae 42. The note of V. Tomšič, 24 February 1945; ae 91. The telegram of CK KPS to the KPS Committee for the Primorska region, 13 February 1945; TROHA, *Komu Trst*, 20-27.

13 ARS, AS 1487, ae 3467. The letter of the KPS Committee for the Primorska region to R. Uršič, 9 April 1945. AS 1529, collection Boris Kraigher, box 1. The dispatch from B. Kraigher to B. Kidrič, 29 May 1945.

14 ARS, AS 1529, box 1. The dispatch from B. Kraigher to B. Kidrič, 29 May 1945.

15 ARS, AS 1277, box 29. The dispatch from E. Kardelj to J. Broz Tito, 5 May 1945.

the soldiers, yelling: Long live our boys! Women and men distributed cigarettes, flowers, drink. We saw eight boys and one girl on the first tank. They were shining with happiness because of the unexpected reception. A woman asked them: Where are you going? And they answered: To liberate Trieste!”<sup>16</sup>

The Yugoslav authorities managed to preserve the support of the Italian leftists in Zone A of the Venezia Giulia even during the border negotiations. A large part of the Italian worker population in centres like Trieste, Monfalcone and Muggia supported the Yugoslav demands concerning the border, meaning the annexation of the whole Venezia Giulia to Yugoslavia. They believed they would be annexed to a country which would become a part of the great communist family, led by the Soviet Union that they saw as a shining example. Naively, they expected that Yugoslav authorities themselves meant communism. They often saw the Slovenians as nationalists, partly also because of the propaganda of the opposite side, but partly also because Slovenians as “more reliable” held almost all key positions, but the hope in the realisation of the communist society prevailed over the fear of being oppressed because of their nationality.<sup>17</sup> Most of the Italian worker population in that region thus thought along the same lines as an important Italian communist from Monfalcone, Leopoldo Gasparini, who at the Gorizia region meeting on 3 July 1945 stated: “We are called upon to bring about a new order, not only in the Venezia Giulia, but also in Europe. /.../ We – Tito’s partisans, Slovenians and Italians – achieved a military victory, but now we also have to secure a political victory”.<sup>18</sup> In September 1945, the statement on annexation to Yugoslavia was signed by 51,848 Italians in Zone A,<sup>19</sup> with 85,744 employees from that area being members of the pro-Yugoslavian United Syndicates (*Sindacati unici*, *Enotni sindikati*) of which 43,360 were from Trieste.<sup>20</sup>

The support in Zone A of the Free Territory of Trieste was preserved even after September 1947, which was not through a demand to change the borderline

16 Virgil ŠČEK. *Lokavske starine*. Part III, manuscript, 196 (Kept in Lokev parochial office).

17 ARS, AS 1584, ae 99. The report of the 3<sup>rd</sup> OZNA sector Trieste, 12 May 1945; ae 109. The report of the 3<sup>rd</sup> OZNA (Organization for the people’s defense), sector Trieste, 14 May 1945; ae 114. The report of the 3<sup>rd</sup> OZNA sector Trieste, 18 May 1945. TROHA, *Komu Trst*, 218-235.

18 ARS, AS 1571, Okrožni komite Komunistične partije Julijske krajine za Goriško (District Committee of the Communist Party of the Venezia Giulia for the Gorizia, OK KPJK za Goriško), file 7. The report of the Gorizia district assembly, 3 July 1945.

19 ARS, AS 1589, dispatches for the federal government, box 1. The dispatch from B. Kidrič to E. Kardelj, without date. In the Zone B under the Yugoslav occupation government only 4439 Italians (23,9%) signed this statement, but also 89.211 Slovenians (95 %).

20 ARS, AS 1581, Glavni odbor Enotnih sindikatov (Central Committee of the United Syndicates, GO ES), file 2. Organization of the United Syndicates, August 1946.

but rather through having participated in organisations under which were the Yugoslavian influence, namely in the Communist Party of the Free Territory of Trieste (CP FTT), the Slavic-Italian Anti-Fascist Union and the United Syndicates. The split took place after the release of the Cominform Resolution in June 1948, when, in Zone A, not only did the Italians who had, up to that point supported Yugoslavia, turn away from it, the same was done by a great majority of Slovenian Communists, workers, farmers and leftist intellectuals who had previously been supporting the Soviet Union in the name of proletarian internationalism. Two Communist parties were formed, one led by Branko Babič and the other by Vittorio Vidali, but the former remained virtually without influence as only a tenth of previous members remained in it. In the pro-Yugoslavian United Syndicates remained only 900 members.<sup>21</sup> At the municipal elections held in June 1949, this party received only 2.35% of all votes in the municipality of Trieste, while most of Slovenes voted for the “Vidali’s” CP FTT. The class policy of pro-Yugoslav organisations thus turned against its founders, which also signified the end of the Slavic-Italian brotherhood policy.<sup>22</sup>

This policy was much less successful in Zone B of the Venezia Giulia and, later, in the Zone B of the Free Territory of Trieste which were under Yugoslavian occupation and where the civil authorities were organised the same way as in Yugoslavia, within people’s committees, while the only party that could actually function was the Communist Party.<sup>23</sup> In his article entitled *Foibe ed esodo* Raoul Pupo finds that the policy, as he uses the term the Yugoslav-Italian brotherhood (instead of the Slavic-Italian, used by the Yugoslav leadership), in that territory was unsuccessful, as it was planned for an entirely different group of Italians than the one for which the policy was then actually introduced. The policy was originally planned to be applied in Trieste and Monfalcone who had strong proletarian communities being interested in a country such as Yugoslavia that was

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21 ARS, AS 1574, City committee of the SIAU, file. 1f, box 7. The report of the City committee of PS FTT, after the October 1950.

22 Nevenka TROHA, “Volitve v coni A”, *Zbornik Janka Pleterskega*. Oto LUTHAR (ed.), Jure PEROVŠEK, Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana 2003, 475-490.

23 Nevenka TROHA, “Oris položaja v coni B Julijske krajine v letih 1945-1947”, *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 1-2 (1996), 67-93. Nevenka TROHA, Ukrepi jugoslovanskih oblasti v conah B Julijske krajine in Svobodnega tržaškega ozemlja in Italijani na Koprskem. *Annales: anali za istrske in mediteranske študije = annali di Studi istriani e mediterranee = annals for Istrian and Mediterranean studies*. Series historia et sociologia, 1 (2000), 203-216. Nevenka TROHA, “Volitve v Okraju Koper cone B Svobodnega tržaškega ozemlja”, *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 3 (2002), 61-74.

going through the Bolshevik revolution, but was finally implemented in Istria, an area that was populated mostly by peasants and the petite-bourgeois.<sup>24</sup>

Naturally Yugoslav authorities viewed the position of the Italian leftists with approval, which tore apart and weakened the Italians in the region. The pro-Italian parties and the Italian government accused the Italians supporting the annexation to Yugoslavia of committing treason against the national interests and of supporting Slovenian nationalism, and tried to dissuade them from the Communist -Yugoslav connection: “Workers of Trieste, if you are pleased with communism, you can scream ‘Communism for ever, you can scream Hail Lenin, Hail Stalin, Hail Togliatti or Ercoli, you can also scream Hail Tito. But if you are communists, why are you screaming Hail Trieste in the Yugoslav federation??? This is not a communism, but pure Slavic nationalism. Everybody knows, including Tito, that Trieste in the great portion of Istria is Italian. Why are you rather not screaming: Throw off the mask!?”<sup>25</sup>

This pressure was mostly unsuccessful as, according to the opinion held by the leadership of the Communist Party of the Venezia Giulia, this was the clashing point of two political forces where “one embodied people’s progress and the defeat of capitalist conservatism, while the other encouraged the return to parliaments which were unable to do anything that was not in the interest of the ruling capitalism”.<sup>26</sup> Before the arrival of the international border demarcation commission in February 1946, it was reported to Edvard Kardelj from Trieste that the “enthusiasm of both our working masses as well as the Italian ones which support us is rising daily in both zones”.<sup>27</sup> During the commission’s visit, the dividing line between both camps – the “italofascisti” and the “slavocomunisti” – became even more pronounced, and the propaganda on the Italian side became not only increasingly anti-Slovenian but also anti-Communist.<sup>28</sup>

24 Raoul PUPO, “Foibe ed esodo: un’eredità del fascismo?”, u: *Il confine scomparso. Saggi sulla storia dell’Adriatico orientale nel Novecento*. Trieste: Istituto regionale per la storia del movimento di liberazione nel Friuli-Venezia Giulia, 2007, 115, 116.

25 ARS, AS 1584, ae 173. The public proclamation of the Committee of the national liberation of Venezia Giulia: *Lavoratori triestini, se vi piace il comunismo, gridate pure Viva il comunismo, gridate pure Viva Lenin, Viva Stalin, Viva Togliatti o Ercoli e magari Viva Tito. Ma se siete comunisti, perché gridate Viva Trieste nella federativa Jugoslavia??? Questo non è comunismo, bensì nazionalismo slavo bello e buono. Che Trieste e gran parte dell’Istria siano italiane, lo sano tutti, Tito compreso. Perché dunque non gridate piuttosto: Giù le maschere!!!*

26 ARS, AS 1584, ae 213. The decisions of the reunion of the Central committee of the Communist party of the Venezia Giulia, 11 January 1946.

27 ARS, AS 1277, box 74. The dispatch to E. Kardelj, 26 February 1946.

28 TROHA, *Komu Trst*, 104-108.

The opinion that the actions of Italians favouring Yugoslavia was a treason of national interest is also shared by most Italian historians who dealt with the “Trieste question”, from the time of Diego de Castro onwards. Even after becoming fully accessible after 1990, they paid almost no attention to the extensive archival materials of the Communist Party of the Venezia Giulia and the Slavic-Italian Anti-Fascist Union kept by the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia, even though many documents are in Italian.<sup>29</sup>

If the standpoint of Italian democratic parties was unambiguous, the Italian Communist Party was in a much more difficult position. The leadership of the Italian Communist Party found itself in a severe situation as it was torn between the requirements of the Yugoslav Communist Party which dictated loyalty to the communist idea and, in the name of this idea, also support the annexation of the Venezia Giulia to Yugoslavia, and between the requirements posed by the coalition partners. They demanded that the “Wilson line”<sup>30</sup> should be realised on the border, which meant that Italy would preserve the western part of Istria, that is also some of the Slovenian territory annexed to Yugoslavia with the Peace treaty in 1947. Although expressing reluctant standpoints initially, the PCI leadership demanded the communists from the region to respect the national interests especially after the Communist Party of the Venezia Giulia and the Slavic-Italian Anti-Fascist Union, both being led by the Central Committee of the Slovenian Communist Party, adopted the idea of annexation to Yugoslavia in their programme in September 1945.<sup>31</sup> The PCI Secretary General, Palmiro Togliatti, condemned the conduct of the Italian communists in Zone A, among other places also at the 5<sup>th</sup> PCI Congress held in late December 1945. In spring 1946, the PCI leadership founded its information bureau in Trieste.<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, one of the most prominent Italian communists in the region, Leopoldo Gasparini, emphasised on 30 September 1945 that Italianism

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29 The majority of this documents is in the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia, in the records AS 1569 to AS 1581. See: *Vodnik po fondih in zbornik Arhiva Republike Slovenije*, Ljubljana: Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 1999; [http://www.arhiv.gov.si/en/use\\_of\\_archival\\_records/guide\\_to\\_the\\_records\\_and\\_collections/](http://www.arhiv.gov.si/en/use_of_archival_records/guide_to_the_records_and_collections/) (12 March 2012).

30 The line, proposed by the president of the USA Woodrow Wilson, in 1919, during the peace treaty after the World War I.

31 “Primorski dnevnik”, 28 September 1945; ARS, AS 1573, Central Committee of the Slavic-Italian Anti-Fascist Union, box 2. The minutes of a meeting of the CC SIAU, 30 September 1945.

32 ARS, AS 1569, ae 401. The report of Palmiro Togliatti at the 5th congress of the PCI; Nevenka TROHA. *Politika slovensko-italijanskega bratstva. Slovansko-italijanska antifašistična unija v coni A Julijske krajine 1945-1947*, Ljubljana: Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 1998 (hereinafter TROHA, *Politika slovensko-italijanskega bratstva*), 105-118.

can only be defended through a democratic government elected by the people, which existed in Yugoslavia but not in Italy. That same day, another prominent Italian communist, Marina Bernetič, said: “We want Trieste to be annexed to the more progressive part where democracy rules. And that part is Yugoslavia. /.../ We, who live here, we are proud to be Italians. But we are being declared anti-nationalists, the same as we were declared during the war.”<sup>33</sup>

An agreement between Togliatti and Tito was reached in November 1946. According to this agreement, the city of Trieste would remain a part of Italy, while Yugoslavia would get Gorizia. The Italian Government instantly refused this proposal. Those who supported the pro-Yugoslav solution in the Venezia Giulia were outraged. In the first days after the refusal, the activists were reporting great disappointment, revolt against the idea of staying under the Italian rule and the sense of being sold out and outplayed, which was allegedly the position expressed by both Slovenians and Italians.<sup>34</sup>

This issue has been treated by several Italian (among them also Marco Galeazzi<sup>35</sup> and Roberto Gualtieri<sup>36</sup>) and other historians. In 2010 Patrick Karlsen, published his book about the PCI and the Italian eastern border.<sup>37</sup> He provides a good analysis of the relations between the leaderships of the three/four parties and partly agrees with the estimates that the conduct of Italian communists in Zone A presented a betrayal of national interests.<sup>38</sup>

However, taking into account that the Communist Party of the Free Territory of Trieste counted 4,000 members in Zone A in 1948 – even less before those events had taken place, and also that many of these members were Slovenians, the issue of Italians who supported the annexation to Yugoslavia should be considered within a broader context rather than lingering on the exclusive issue of the behaviour shown by the Italian communists. In line with the Yugoslavian pattern, a public welfare of the Slavic-Italian Anti-Fascist Union was established in the Venezia Giulia in June 1945. The purpose of this union was to reinforce the brotherhood and unity of all “truly popular, democratic, anti-fascist and free-

33 ARS, AS 1573, box 2. The minutes of a meeting of the CC SIAU, 30 September 1945.

34 TROHA, *Politika slovensko-italijanskega bratstva*, 168-171.

35 Marco GALEAZZI, *Togliatti e Tito. Tra identità nazionale e internazionalismo*, Roma: Carocci Editore, 2005.

36 Roberto GUALTIERI, *Togliatti e la politica estera italiana. Dalla Resistenza al Trattato di pace*, Roma: Carocci Editore, 1995.

37 Patrick KARLSEN, *Frontiera rossa. Il PCI, il confine orientale e il contesto nazionale 1941-1955*, Gorizia: Libreria Editrice Goriziana, 2010 (hereinafter Karlsen, *Frontiera rossa*).

38 KARLSEN, *Frontiera rossa*, 114-142.

minded forces in this territory”. In Zone A of the Free Territory of Trieste, SIAU had more than 75,000 members before the release of the Cominform Resolution. Taking into account that, according to the most favourable estimates, there were only about 60,000 Slovenians in Zone A at that time, we can also say that many of these members were Italians.<sup>39</sup>

What was also significant in that time was the reaction of the Monfalcone workers, who began mass preparations to move to Yugoslavia once the French demarcation line was adopted according to which Monfalcone would remain in Italy. When the border was clearly defined in winter 1946/47, party and union organisation started to appeal to people to go to Yugoslavia. According to some data, around 3,500 workers left by July 1947, most of them communists or their supporters.<sup>40</sup> However, when they supported Stalin after the release of the Cominform Resolution, they were threatened by expulsion or jail and some of them were even sent to the political prison at the Goli otok island.<sup>41</sup> But after their return to Italy, they were often treated as traitors of national interests as, in the eyes of the Italians, they had compromised their integrity by having supported Yugoslavia.<sup>42</sup>

The standpoint of those Italians who supported the idea of annexation to Yugoslavia deviated from the “normal” decisions one would be expected to make for their nation and country. In terms of records known so far, this standpoint cannot be narrowed down merely to views expressed by communists who had internationalism “in their blood” as much more people decided to support the annexation in a relatively long period of time. Besides, this conduct was so much easier to condemn. Namely, to sustain conduct of Yugoslav communists meant to give support to the authorities who carried out a number of arrests and death

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39 ARS, AS 1573, box 1. The protocol of the 1st congress of the SIAU for FTT, 26 and 27 October 1947; TROHA, *Politika slovensko-italijanskega bratstva*, pg. 102.

40 Pokrajinski arhiv Koper (Provincial Archives of Koper, PAK), rec. FTT, box 1. The letter of the federation of the PCI of Gorizia to the CK KPS, CK KPH and CC CPVG, 5 July 1947. Andrea BERRINI, *Noi siamo la classe operaia: i duemila di Monfalcone*, Milano: Baldinin Castoldi Dalai, 2004.

41 For example Alfredo BONELLI, *Fra Stalin e Tito. Cominformisti a Fiume 1948-1956*, Trieste: IrsmgI-Fvg, 1994. Giacomo SCOTTI, *Goli otok. Italiani nel gulag di Tito*, Trieste: Lint, 2006. [http://intranet.istoreto.it/esodo/parola.asp?id\\_parola=10](http://intranet.istoreto.it/esodo/parola.asp?id_parola=10) (12. 3. 2012).

42 Archivio storico diplomatico del Ministero degli affari esteri. (ASDMAE), Affari politici 1946/1950, b. 72. The letter of the consulate general of the Italian Republic in Zagreb to the foreign ministry: The repatriation of the elements, compromised during the Yugoslav occupation of the Gorizia region, 17 March 1949. The letter of the Representation of the Italian Republic in Belgrade to the foreign ministry, 14 February 1950.

sentences in May 1945.<sup>43</sup> Historiography still has to produce a thorough study of causes and inclinations that led people to make such decisions (persecutions in the Fascist era, common fight against the Slovenian partisans, having faith in a “better future” etc.?). Furthermore, why did people stick to their decisions even though they were very well informed about the conduct of Yugoslavian authorities in Zone B? Perhaps they considered such information to be nothing but enemy propaganda?

Finally, here is something to reflect upon. Even Italians who had chosen not to move from territories which were, at different points in history, annexed to Yugoslavia, were marked traitors. The irony in this situation is that Italy should be grateful to those people for having preserved Italianism in Istria and that this Italianism would be even stronger had there been more of these so-called traitors of the national interest.

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43 At the end of the WW2 the Yugoslav military unit occupied the entire Venezia Giulia. Their arrival was accompanied by a wave of violence, manifested in the arrests of several thousands, mostly Italians, and also the Slovenes who opposed the Yugoslav communist political plan. Some of the arrested were released at intervals; the violence was further manifested in hundreds of summary executions – victims were mostly thrown into the Karst chasms (*foibe*) – and in the deportation of a great number of soldiers and civilians, who either wasted away or were killed during the deportation; in prisons and in the prisoner-of-war camps in various parts of Yugoslavia. These events were triggered by the atmosphere of settling accounts with the fascist violence; but, as it seems, they mostly proceeded from a preliminary plan which included several tendencies: endeavours to remove persons and structures who were in one way or another (regardless of their personal responsibility) linked with Fascism, with the Nazi supremacy, with collaboration and with the Italian state, and endeavours to carry out preventive cleansing of real, potential or only alleged opponents of the communist regime, and the annexation of Venezia Giulia to the new Yugoslavia. The initial impulse was instigated by the revolutionary movement which was changed into a political regime, and transformed the charge of national and ideological intolerance between the partisans into violence at the national level. See: *Slovenian-italian relations*; Roberto SPAZZALI, *Foibe: un dibattito ancora aperto: tesi politica e storiografica giuliana tra scontro e confronto*, Trieste 1989. *Foibe. Il peso del passato*. Giampaolo VALDEVIT (ur.), Venezia: Marsilio / IRSMLFVG, 1997. Raoul PUPO, *Il lungo esodo. Istria: le persocuzioni, le foibe, l'esilio*. Milano: Rizzoli 2005. Jože PIRJEVEC, Darko DUKOVSKI, Nevenka TROHA, Gorazd BAJC, Guido FRANZINETTI, *Fojbe*, Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2012.

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Jan HYRAT

*Kontakti/Contacts:*

Vanni D'ALESSIO  
dalessio@ffri.hr  
tel +385(0)51/265-638

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