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Genocide over the Serbian People in the Independent State of Croatia (1941–1945)

Summary: From its very establishment in 1918, the Yugoslav state strived to be the state of “reconciliation”. That is why the crimes over Serbs perpetrated by Austria-Hungary were not largely emphasized in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes / Yugoslavia, particularly not the crimes by Croats in occupation units, but conscientious researchers have still left their testimonies about them (see Reiss, 2019). For the sake of “reconciliation”, nothing was said about the genocide over the Serbian people in WW2 in the territory of the ISC. Because of the strategy of “keeping silent about the genocide”, crucially and for years, in the name of brotherhood and unity of Yugoslav nations, the topic did not have its place in the primary and secondary school curricula; the genocide crime perpetrated over the Serbian people was not discussed in history textbooks; for decades, it was not the topic in literature, while historians did not research the genocide crime or wrote substantially about it. However, if several generations of the representatives of the historian profession have an “alibi” for such behaviour, the generation of those writing in Serbian culture today must also take an attitude towards that sensitive topic. “To speak up” about the genocide over the Serbian people in the 20th century primarily means to write critically about the past times, with no passion, rationally and based on historical sources, “the way it really occurred”.

Keywords: genocide, Independent State of Croatia, racial laws, Serbs, Jews

Genocide, as defined by the Resolution of the General Assembly of the OUN, No. 96 of 11 December 1946 and adopted on 9 December 1948 as the Genocide Convention that came into force on 12 January 1951,^[2] **has constantly accompanied wars and been the undesired part of the history of Serbs in the 20th century.** The “crime under

international law”, which means “killing members of the group”, “causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group”, “deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part”, “imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group”, “forcibly transferring children

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[2] There are essential differences between the understanding of genocide in the 1946 Resolution and the 1948 Genocide Convention, which, according to Smilja Avramov, practically reduces it to the “biological destruction of the group” (see Avramov, 2008, p. Avramov, 2008, p. 78).

of the group to another group” etc., was present in all 20th century wars that affected the Serbian nation. By its tragic scope and bestiality, the crime of genocide over the Serbian nation in the years of the Second World War (1941–1945) in the territory of the Nazi creation of the Independent State of Croatia (ISC), was definitely the most devastating one. Silence about that crime has prevailed for decades.

42 | Genocide over a nation is never a phenomenon exclusively determined by the time of its occurrence, but a social phenomenon with a long previous history. Therefore, the suffering of the Serbian people in the territory of the ISC was preceded by decades-long destruction of its name, Orthodox Christianity it confessed, the alphabet it used. In the last decades of the 19th century, Serbs were labelled as the “disruptive factor” in the Croatian society, considered “traitors”, bearers of “Byzantium” unknown to Europe, opponents of “West European culture”, “bandits”, an element dangerous “in its thoughts and in its racial composition”, a “breed” that is prone to “conspiracies, revolutions and ousting from power” ... The researchers of this phenomenon state that Serbs are rarely called by their real name – Serbs – by the Croatian press and influential Croatian politicians, but many other names or even more often derogatory words are used for them: “Gypsies”, “Wallachians”, “Byzantines”, “so-called Serbs”, “brood”, “Serbians”, “muddy bastards”, “horrendous slave creatures”, “slave breed”, “trash”, “brood to be killed by the axe”, “dogs” ... (Krestić, 2014, pp. 11–12). In that manner, they are deprived of human dignity, given animal features and dehumanized.

This hard-to-understand hatred towards Serbs was encouraged by Croatia’s political thought that

had no tolerance towards others. The realization of that exclusive and restrictive politics actually meant “opening” the conflict with Serbs, labelled by the representatives of political parties and religious prelates as “Orthodox schismatics” whose presence in the territory considered solely Croatian by Croatian politicians was contentious. After the destruction of the name, political annihilation inevitably led towards systematic attempts to displace Serbs from the environment in which they had lived for centuries. It was equally supported by forced displacement, physical liquidation, conversion to Catholicism, annihilation of religious and cultural identities, change in the national awareness, and erasure of memories...

Within the context of shaping exclusive ideas about the nationally clean, predominantly Catholic Croatia that covered the entire ethnic and socio-historical space in which the Croatian nation lived in the past (Greater Croatia), politically advocated first by Eugen Kvaternik and Ante Starčević, and subsequently by other political followers (Josip Frank, Ante Pavelić and others), Serbs were denied the right to national distinctiveness and were threatened by extermination. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, anti-Serbian and anti-Orthodox feelings continued to expand further. It was also contributed to by the fear of conservative structures in the Croatian society from liberal ideas, pan-Slavism, Yugoslavism, and the spirit of the new era indicating the possibility of Serbs and Croats becoming closer. The ideas of Greater Croatian chauvinism and ideology of militant clericalism were not disseminated only by the representatives of the extreme right wing (“Pure Party of Rights”, subsequently “Party of Rights”) and clericalists (Franco-Furtimas), but

also by all those who thought that Serbs were in the way to the realization of the idea of Greater Croatia.^[3] Those who expressed fear from Orthodox Christianity were afraid of cultural, economic and political rise of Serbs (see Krestić, 2007). In such a society, a significant influence was gained by exclusive anti-Serbian, anti-Orthodox, anti-Yugoslav and anti-Slav “racial nationals” that expressed racial, religious and national intolerance. Its ideal – “pure Croatism” – was equally advocated by the followers of the Party of Rights (*Frankovci*) and cleric. From their cooperation, the “racial concept” was formed, which, in the second half of the 1930s and particularly in the Second World War, will be manifested in clerical Nazism (Novak, 1989, pp. 3–5).

In Croatia’s state territory, according to the political attitudes founded in the utterly fictitious “Croatian state and historical right”, which was advocated by the largest and most influential part of Croatian political parties, politicians and reputed intellectuals, there could be only one nation – Croatian “political” nation.^[4] According to the political and legal interpretations, it was composed of all the inhabitants of Croatia, regardless of their ethnic and religious affiliation^[5] (Krestić, 2007, pp. 36–85).

Those were political ideas aimed at making the multinational territory into, ethnically speaking, unique, nationally homogeneous Croatia. Others, who insisted on preserving their own national, cultural and religious identities, were not recognized political individuality and national particularity and, in certain historical situations, even the right to live. Political and clerical propaganda marked resistance to the conversion to Croatism as the dissemination of the idea of “Serbian nationalism” and the aspirations of Serbs to obtain political and other privileges that did not belong to them. In that manner, among the conservative population of the Croatian village and the masses living in towns, the feeling was created that even the mention of the name, the confession of Orthodox Christianity, the use of national symbols, economic life and the very existence of Serbs were a “political offense” that should be sanctioned (Krestić, 2007, pp. 25–66).

With time, in political life, an increasingly present “belief” was spread that there were no Serbs whatsoever, but that those were Orthodox Croats, “traitors of their homeland and blood”, who should be forced to accept the Croatian state idea and return to the religion of “their fathers” (Krestić,

[3] The geo-political position of the Triune Kingdom (Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia) which, according to many, without Bosnia and Herzegovina as the specific “belly” and “core” of the future state, did not fulfil the basic conditions for political, economic and strategic survival and progress, caused further conflicted between Croatian politicians and religious dignitaries with Serbs as the largest nation in that territory and a potential threat to the achievement of the goals of the Croatian politics. In fact, the Orthodox population accounted for 43% of the population in Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the beginning of the 20th century, under the influence of Catholicization and migratory movements, the percentage of Catholic population rose from 18% to 23% while that of the Muslim population dropped from 39% to 32%.

[4] The series begins with E. Kvaternik, A. Starčević, F. Supilo, J. Frank and continues with V. Maček, A. Pavelić etc.

[5] Before the 1848 revolution, the “political” nation had been composed only of the noblemen, and afterwards the term included all Croats and other inhabitants of Croatia who obtained the Croatian national-political identity, regardless of their nationality.

2007, pp. 78–85). For these reasons, the historical moment for the actual clash with the Serbian people had been awaited for decades, while for the realization of the plans that essentially meant the “solution” of the Serbian issue in the territory of Croatia, Dalmatia, Slavonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, a creditor was sought in the circle of great powers.^[6] In the propaganda, the destruction of the Serbian people was regarded as the “natural right” of the Croatian people, while the outbreak of the wars (the First World War and later the Second World War) were welcomed as a moment when Croatia will free itself from Serbs (Krestić, 2007, pp. 119–134). Therefore, the cohabitation of Serbs and Croats in the Yugoslav state (1918–1941) was not a reason but only a potential pretext for the crimes perpetrated during the Second World War. A rational explanation for the genocide crime perpetrated against the Serbian people may be found only in the attempts of Croatian Ustasha authorities to realize their politics of “Croatian state and historical right” in the war circumstances, which implied either assimilation or destruction of the Serbian people (the requests were as follows: entire Croatia within ethnic and state-historical boundaries should be formed; it should be ethnically clean Croatia; it should be Roman-Catholic Croatia). In the Croatian political thought, everyday practice of the Ustasha movement, and in the state politics

of the ISC, the Serbian people were marked as the mortal enemy of the Croatian state, while the suppression of Serbs was declared an act of patriotism (Krestić, 2007, pp. 135–159).

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The Independent State of Croatia was declared on 10 April 1941.^[7] It was the “state”:

- created in the war conditions and contrary to international law;
- constituting an expression of the new Nazi order in Europe (existing equivalently to Adolf Hitler’s order itself);
- totalitarian in its character, and close to the Third Reich by its ideology and political organization.

Its Supreme Leader Ante Pavelić was simultaneously:

- the leader of a Fascist-type extremist and terrorist organization;
- the head of a totalitarian state with “racial laws”, which “raised” the perpetration of genocide crimes to the level of a legal obligation and enabled the formation of specific “bureaucratic instruments” (institutions) for its implementation;
- the creator of the racist ideology that constituted the foundation for destroying Serbs, Jews and Roma;

[6] In the First World War, it was the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy, while in the Second World War it was Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

[7] The declaration of the ISC was initiated by the personal envoy of Joachim von Ribbentrop, Colonel Edmund Veesenmeyer. This Nazi creation was ceremoniously declared on 10 April 1941 by Slavko Kvaternik (more in: Čulinović, 1970; Jelić Butić, 1977; Požar, 1995; Dimić, 2017).

– the person who held the overall power (dictatorial authorities) in his hands).

The ideological basis of the Ustasha movement was made by the synthesis of the teaching about “Croatian state and historical right” of A. Starčević and J. Frank and the “peasant ideology” of S. Radić. In its foundations, an extremely nationalist and racist policy strived towards the formation of “purely Croatian living space” where the existence for the “purely Croatian nation” would be ensured. The prerequisite for fulfilling these goals was the biological destruction of the “greatest enemies” of the Croatian people and the Croatian state – Serbs, Jews and Roma. Because of the “non-Croatian behaviour”, many Croats were also persecuted due to being considered “a stain on the body of the pure Croatian nation” (Principles of the Croatian Ustasha Movement, in: *Požar*, 1995, pp. 57–90; J. Mirković, 2014, pp. 48–48; Živković and Kačavenda, 1998).

The character of the ISC was convincingly supported by the legislation. Immediately after its declaration, the Croatian state enacted the Legal Decree on the Oath of Allegiance to the State of Croatia” (10 April 1941); “Legal Decree on the Defence of the National and the State” (17 April 1941); “Legal Decree on the Preservation of the Croatian National Property” (18 April 1941); “Decision on the Elimination of the Street Names with Nothing in Common with the Croatian metropolis and the Croatian People” (19 April 1941), and “Legal Decree on the Prohibition of Cyrillic” (25 April 1941). By the end of April 1941, the following legislation was adopted: “Legal Decree on the Establishment of the Croatian State Department for the Language (28 April 1941); “Regulation on the Harmonization of the Work of the Ustasha Organization with Govern-

ment Authorities” (29 April 1941); “Legal Decree on the Citizenship” (30 April 1941); “Legal Decree on the Racial Affiliation” (30 April 1941), and “Legal Decree on the Protection of the Aryan Blood and Honour of the Croatian Nation” (30 April 1941) (Mirković, 2017, pp. 45–74). In the days when the recognition of the ISC by the Vatican was expected and the meeting of A. Pavelić and Pope Pius XII was prepared, the Independent State of Croatia adopted the “Legal Decree on the Conversion from one Religion to Another” (3 May 1941), “The Supreme Leader’s Statement about the Foreign Politics Implemented in Line with the Politics of the Axis Arch-authorities” (6 May 1941), decisions about the movement regime of Serbs and Jews, their displacement from the northern parts of Zagreb, the obligation of wearing “Jewish signs” (7 May 1941) and “blue bands” that marked Orthodox Christians (Požar, 1995, pp. 133–220). It was racial legislation that enabled the genocide over Serbs, Jews and Roma to become part of the state politics. Warped Catholicism, which too often cited morality, law, justice and piety, permitted crime against those categories of population that had previously been marked as church enemies and all those against whom the “crusade war” was waged.

The analyses of the ISC legal order show that it does not even exist in the Quisling creation, i.e. that it manoeuvres between the „order of force”, which is designed for the categories of population including Serbs, Jews and Roma, and the incomplete “order of law”, that applies only to the privileged categories of population. A large number of the laws and regulations was, as perceived by the legal experts, “to an unbearable extent” unjust and it did not ensure the survival of the whole nations

living in the territory of the ISC o (Zdravković, 2017. pp. 21–44). In other words, the laws and bylaws of the ISC legalized terror exposed entire nations to annihilation and planned genocide, while ensuring the formation of the ethnically clean territory. With the same aim, all measures and actions were organized and implemented by the Ustasha authorities regardless of the enacted laws and the created “legalist framework” (so-called Ustasha wild terror)^[8] (Goldstein, 2012, p. 50).

In many segments, the Ustasha regime resembled the Nazi regime in Germany. “The Legal Decree on the Defence of the National and the State”, as well as other regulations deriving from it, completely disenfranchised and placed Serbs, Jews and Roma outside the legal framework and left them without protection. At the same time, those legal acts established the institutions of the Ustasha power and reign of terror (police, army, secret police, special courts, concentration camps etc.). “Nationally intolerant politics” was recommended to the ISC authorities by Adolf Hitler himself (see Đurić Mišina, 2002, p. 24). In addition, Germany supported all those measures leading towards the “national reorganization of the territory” with the use of force (Avramov, 1992, p. 174). Crimes against Serbs were accompanied by the statements of the Supreme Leader and Croatian high officials, openly saying “there would be no tolerance” or “mercy” towards that nation and its religion. Serbs were threatened by “extermination”, “devastation” and

“destruction”.^[9] It was indicated that everything Serbian would be turned into “fire and ashes”, and the use was mentioned of the methods of “cleansing” Croatia from Serbs and doing everything to make them “disappear” or become just a “bad memory”.^[10] Genocide was conducted through numerous forms of physical and psychological violence. It was the most absurd expression of the program that had been prepared and supplemented for decades.

First arrests of Serbs by the previously made lists began in the night between 10 and 11 April 1941. Individual crimes against Serbs began on the same day. Massacres of Serbian civilians began in the vicinity of Petrovo Selo on 17 April 1941. Mass crimes may be registered as early as the end of April 1941. The first of them was committed in the village of Gudovac, near Bjelovar, when about 200 wealthier Serbs were shot to death. First camps for Serbs and Jews were established at the end of April and the beginning of May 1941. The quotas according to which 50 respectable Orthodox Serbs should be killed for each killed Croat were determined as early as 25 May 1941. The rewards to Ustasha for killing Serbs were introduced at the beginning of June 1941. The activities of “wild cleansing of the field”, which turned into mass liquidations of Serbs, became part of everyday life in the ISC as of June 1941. They were followed by mass slaughter in Sanski Most, Ključ, Bosanski Petrovac, Bihać, Ljubinje, Drvar, Glina etc. (see J. Mirković, 2014; J. Mirković, 2006; Jelić Butić, 1977; Bulajić, 1988).

[8] More about the legal order in the ISC in: *Legal Order of the ISC*, 2017 (papers by M. Zdravković, Z. Mirković, T. Mladenović, M. Davinić, I. Vuković, I. Krstić, M. Jovanović, D. Popović, D. Đukić and N. Kršljanin).

[9] The statements of the Supreme Leader Ante Pavelić, the Minister of Interior A. Artuković, the Minister of Justice M. Puk, the Ustasha Director J. Rukavina and others.

[10] The statements of M. Lorković, M. Budak, M. Žanić, D. Jurčev and others.

Serbs were burnt in their places of worship. They were thrown into the ravines throughout the ISC. They were liquidated in numerous camps: “Stara Gradiška”, “Gospić”, “Jadovno”, “Slana” and “Metajna” on the island of Pag, “Daruvar”, “Jastrebarsko”, “Slavonska Požega”, “Vinkovci”^[11] Only the Jasenovac camp complex, which is called “the planet of death” by many, “swallowed” several hundred thousand Serbian lives. Special legislation regulating the functioning of the camps was also in force.^[12] Approximately 400.000 Serbs went through the collection and concentration camps in the territory of the ISC. According to German sources, more than 750.000 Serbs were killed in the territory of the ISC (Ekmečić, 1999, p. 144). It was an attempt of the Ustasha authorities, as German high officers noted, to force the solution of the “Serbian issue” in the territory of the ISC, i.e. by physical liquidations, forced displacement and conversion, so as to destroy the population that accounted for almost one third of the ISC population (about 1.9 million people).^[13] Out of the registered victims in the territory of the ISC, Serbs accounted for 63.95%. The largest number of them were civilians (76% of all victims)

died in the camps (30.92%) and in direct terror (34.68%). In the ISC, 74,981 Serbian children were killed. It was the only state in war-stricken Europe with exclusively children camps (see J. Mirković, 2014, pp. 47–69; Petešić, 1990; Bulajić, 1988).

The number of Serbs in the ISC was also reduced through forced displacement or, as the Ustasha propaganda referred to it, by “returning” Serbs to the territories they had come from.^[14] The statements of the Ustasha officials, spreading fear and the application of terror also encouraged self-initiated emigration. The displacement from Zagreb began as early as 5 July 1941. According to available data, about 250.000 Serbs were forced to move out of the territory of the ISC. It was part of the plan of “ethnic reorganization” of Europe, which was insisted on by the Nazis. Within Germanization of the annexed parts of other countries, it was planned to displace about 260.000 Slovenes as well (Maribor, 6 May 1941). The possibility of settling them instead of Serbs in the territory of the ISC encouraged Archbishop Stepinac to condition it with the deportation of the same number of Serbs to Serbia. His “wish” came true and he

[11] In the territory of the ISC, more than 20 concentration camps were established.

[12] We will list some of the legal acts: “Legal Decree on the Establishment of the State Directory for Renewal” (24 June 1941) and, on its basis, the “Prohibition Order of the Government’s Presidency” of 26 June 1941 and “Circular Decision of the State Directory for Renewal” of 2 July 1941 on the establishment of the Department for Displacement, its organization and tasks, describing the conditions for the establishment of the collection centres; “Extraordinary Legal Regulation and Order” of 26 June 1941 and the Order of the Minister of Interior about its Publication; “Legal Decree on the Internment of Undesirable Persons to Forced Stay in Collection and Labour Camps” of 25 November 1941.

[13] The data about the number of Serbs in the territory of the ISC range from 2.4 million (according to the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and 2.2 million, according to Germans) to 1.25 million (official sources of the ISC). Most authors state the number of about 1.9 million Serbs (see Đurić Mišina, 2002, pp. 16–18).

[14] On 24 July 1941, the legal regulations about the displacement of Serbs were adopted – “Instructions for the Displacement of Two-Religion Families”; “Legal Decree on the Formation of the State Directory for Renewal” of 24 June 1941; secret Circular Order on the Displacement of Serbs of 29 June 1941.

confirmed the arrangement made at the meeting in Zagreb on 4 June 1941, when it was decided to expel 205.000 Serbs from the territory of the ISC to Serbia in the following four months. Thus, the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia became most directly responsible for the perpetrated genocide crime (AJ, 110–617, hearing of S. Kasche; N. Kisić Kolanović, 2011, pp. 773–800).

A particular target of the Ustasha authorities was the Serbian Orthodox Church. According to the data of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, 171 priests were killed in the territory of the ISC, including three bishops (Petar Zimonjić, Platon Jovanović and Sava Trlajić). Many outstanding priests later died of the consequences of torture and maltreatment. In the war years, the Ustasha destroyed 450 Orthodox temples and damaged another 800. According to the data of the Serbian Orthodox Church, 639 priests fled from the territory of the ISC, while 599 were exiled. Mass and individual crimes against the Serbian people took place in 48 temples. The paradigm of crime is the slaughter in Glina, where at the end of July and the beginning of August 1,564 people were killed, while some of them were burnt in the Orthodox Church. Together with the places of worship and parish homes, archives, libraries and treasuries were destroyed, property was robbed, and relics, church bells, paintings and artefacts were taken away. Such destruction of the Serbian Orthodox Church has a pronounced economic dimension as well. It was a spiritual and cultural genocide, the erasure of the trace of existence of Serbs in this territory (Mirković, 2016, pp. 5–7).

In the activities of forced conversion, about 250.000 Orthodox Serbs were converted to Roman Catholicism. In that form of genocide, the Ustasha authorities had the unlimited support of the Vatican and the Roman Catholic Church in the ISC, whose prelates advocated conversion to Catholicism, i.e. “returning” Serbs to the “faith of their forefathers” (see Đurić Mišina, 2002, pp. 43–79; Cvitković, 1986). In that process, the starting point was the falsification of history, and the attitude that Serbs used to be Catholics and should be returned under the wing of the Roman Catholic Church. There was even mention of as many as 230,000 Croats who had been converted to Orthodox Christianity between 1918 and 1941. All research shows that it was the falsification of history and that all those people, probably born in mixed marriages between Croats and Orthodox Serbs, who in the agrarian society of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia had accepted the religion and nationality of their fathers, and were thus considered by the Roman Catholic Church as converts into Orthodox Christianity. The point of everything, however, was concealed in the tendency to use conversion in order to make Orthodox Serbs disappear from the territory of the ISC. For that sake, the very term “Orthodox” was changed into “Greek-Eastern”. Another term, “schismatics”, was widely used (Simić, 1990, p. 58). In any case, conversion of Serbs to Roman Catholicism “opened” a road towards the loss of not only religious, but also of national identity, and towards denationalization. “Religious unity”, advocated by the Roman Catholic Church, coincided with the intentions of the Ustasha authorities to use violence in order to

realize “ethnic unity” of the ISC inhabitants.^[15] In the whole process of conversion, the representatives of the Roman Catholic Church in the ISC had the support of the Holy Congregation for the Eastern Church from Rome and Pope Pius XII himself.

A particular strike against the Serbian Orthodox Church occurred at the beginning of 1942 by the formation of the “Croatian Orthodox Church”. It was the move of the German military structures in the ISC, which insisted on it under the pretext of allegedly “calming down” and “mitigating” the politics of annihilation of Serbs. With this act, Serbs were temporarily reduced to a confessional community. They were deprived of their name, Orthodox Christianity was reduced to a “pseudo-church” established in the Roman Catholic spirit, and the process of conversion of the Serbian people to Catholicism was intensified (Đurić, 1990).

The robbery of the Serbian property was one of the motives and measures of the Ustasha authorities designed to suit the creation of living conditions leading to partial or total destruction of Serbs. In the beginning, the measure of property confiscation was “spontaneous” and accompanied other forms of genocide over the Serbian people in the territory of the Independent State of Croatia (liquidations, displacement, and conversion to Catholicism). With time, the Ustasha regime strived to enact special regulations and laws, thus creating the impression of the legal state. The foundation for that “legal order” was the Austrian General Civil Code, which, during the war year, was “amended” by numerous

legal regulations with the “practical meaning” for the authorities, but with the worst “discriminatory character” for Serbs and Jews. The aim was to confiscate their property, and thus the means for life (survival). There were also regulations that were not discriminatory themselves, but relied on other legal regulations and legal practice, thus referring only to certain categories of citizens. Outside the legal framework, reality was filled with “wild chaos”, bare violence and the absence of any safety for Serbs. Those measures and everyday forcible actions of the Ustasha authorities in the confiscation of property destroyed the imposed impression of “Draconian legality”. The “right” to real estate in the ISC was granted only to those citizens considered desirable by the Ustasha regime. There were neither Serbs nor Jews in that category of citizens. The Independent State of Croatia was not a legal state because in it, just as in its German model, the essence of justice, i.e. “equal treatment with equals” was avoided. The value of the property confiscated from the Serbian people in the territory of the Independent State of Croatia has never been precisely determined. However, it is more important to state the fact that discriminatory regulations about the confiscation of the Serbian property led to complete or partial physical destruction of the Serbs in the territory of the ISC (Kršljanin, 2017, pp. 291–333).

The Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia were persecuted because they were:

- Serbs (nationally);
- Yugoslavs (nationally and politically);

[15] About the legislation enabling and encouraging religious conversion, see: “Circular Decision” and “Instructions for Religious Conversions” of 14 June 1941; “Legal Decree on the Conversion from One Religion to Another” of 3 May 1941; “Instruction on the Occasion of Conversion from One Religion to Another” of 27 May 1941.

- Orthodox Christians (religious reasons);
- Liberals or communists (ideologically);
- Opponents of the Croatian state and renegades (political crime);
- Wealthy people whose property should be confiscated (economic reasons).

Overall criminalization of Serbs is underway. The genocide policy was implemented and accompanied with propaganda like any other bureaucratic measure and action (without considering the

consequences). The crime has been legalized and begins by destroying cultural and spiritual values of the Serbs. It is the state with no rule of law and legal security of citizens, in which there were racial and discriminatory laws, in which the right of force prevailed over the force of law, in which terror over the population of a different religion and nation was legalized and made constituent part of the state project whose final aim was the “final solution” of the Serbia, as well as the Jewish and Roma question.

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Photo 1: This map shows the territory of the Independent State of Croatia. From 1941-1943 the ISC had a population of 6.3 million. During World War II in the Ustasha state 74 762 children lost their lives, of which 60 643 were murdered or tortured. Taken, with the permission of the author, from the book *Jasenovac, Auschwitz of the Balkans* by Gideon Greif (Teper LTD, Garey Tikva, Israel, 2021)