

Zoran Janjetović

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE GERMANS FROM YUGOSLAVIA: EXPULSION OR EMIGRATION?

The German national minority in the former Yugoslavia, counting some 500 000 people, used to be the largest national minority in the country in the period between the two world wars. It was also the richest, the most civilized and best organized one.¹ A smaller part of this ethnic group was settled in Slovenia in the Middle Ages (Kočevje -Gottschee), as well as throughout the almost 1100 years of Germanic domination. The larger part of the *Volksdeutsche* came as government and private colonists in the course of the 18th century to the present-day province of the Vojvodina, from whence they spilled over to neighbouring Slavonia during 19th century. Finally, a small group came to Bosnia after 1878.

Having been given privileges and tax exemptions in the beginning, and being possessed of more advanced agricultural techniques, they prospered more rapidly than their less skillful, less diligent and less thrifty Slavonic neighbours. This earned them respect but also the envy of the indigenous population. Furthermore, the Germans having been the leading ethnic group in the multinational Habsburg Empire, the *Volksdeutsche* had to bear the brunt of odium for the oppressive government policies. These facts shaped their relations to their Slovenian, Croatian and Serbian fellow-countrymen.

The attitude of these three Yugoslav peoples toward the Ethnic-Germans was dependent on the conditions prevailing in various settlement areas. In Slovenia, a ferocious nationality struggle evolved during 19th century, although the number of the nationally indifferent or German-friendly Slovenes remained considerable until the Second World War². In Croatia, the Germans were exposed to quiet assimilation through school and the Roman-Catholic Church.³ As for the Serbs, their relations with the local Swabians (as the German colonists were called in the Vojvodina) were fairly good, except in the times of great upheavals (1848/49, 1918, 1933-41) when the diverging goals of the two peoples caused conflicts.⁴

The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (since 1929 Yugoslavia) was founded in the autumn of 1918 on the debris of the Habsburg Monarchy. Although the new state claimed to have been a nation state on the western European model, it was in fact as multinational as

¹ For the best general survey on the Yugoslav *Volksdeutsche* see: Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Nationalitaetenpolitik in Jugoslawien. Die deutsche Minderheit 1918-1978*, Goettingen 1980.

² More about intricate relations of these two ethnic groups in Slovenia see in: Arnold Suppan, Helmut Rumlper (eds.), *Geschichte der Deutschen im Bereich des heutigen Sloweniens 1848-1941*, Wien, Muenchen 1988; Janez Cvirn, *Nemci na Slovenskem (1848-1941)*, in: Du{an Ne}ak (ed.), *“Nemci” na Slovenskem 1941-1955*, Ljubljana 1998.

³ About the Germans in Croatia see: E. Meynen (ed.) *Das Deutschtum in Slawonien und Syrmien. Landes- und Volkskunde*, Leipzig 1942; Hermann Haller, *Syrmium und sein Deutschtum*, Leipzig 1941; Valentin Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen in Syrmien, Kroatien und Bosnien. Geschichte einer deutschen Volksgruppen in Suedosteuropa*, Stuttgart 1989.

⁴ Zoran Janjetović, *Odnosi Srba i Nemaca u Vojvodini (XVIII-XX vek)*, Tokovi istorije, 1-2, Beograd 1996.

the defunct Austria-Hungary. The “state-peoples”⁵ were at loggerheads with one another, but all of them had a fairly uniform attitude toward national minorities. These were perceived as intruders and cats paws of the former oppressors. The official doctrine was also that the majority of the national minorities consisted not of people of foreign stock at all, but of Yugoslav renegades. For these reasons, the treatment of national minorities in the inter-war Yugoslavia was unsatisfactory, and at times even harsh.⁶ The Ethnic-Germans were no exception to this general rule, although due to the Minority Convention of 1919, their numbers and wealth, and last but not least, because of a powerful mother-country, the treatment of them was somewhat better (except for Slovenia) than that of other national minorities.⁷

1930s witnessed the spread of National-socialism among the Yugoslav Germans.⁸ This was nothing particular to the *Volksdeutsche* of Yugoslavia - it was Europe-wide phenomenon.⁹ As was the case in other countries, the main victims of Nazi propaganda were the young who were less willing than the older generations to put up with infringements of national rights and discrimination.¹⁰ After several years of struggle, the youthful nazified leaders managed to prevail thanks to the support from the Reich. Germany’s ascendancy coupled with the economic crisis was the decisive factor which helped bring the majority of the Ethnic-Germans round. This caused tensions and even conflicts with the Yugoslav population.¹¹

The suspicion that the Germans were the fifth column grew daily, and not without reason too. Weapons were found and clandestine para-military groups discovered.¹² However, it is only fair to say that these groups were rather enterprises of hot-heads than branches of a well organized conspiracy.¹³ Nevertheless, their very existence seemed to warrant the fear of the *Volksdeutsche*.

⁵ i.e. the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

⁶ For general surveys on particular national minorities, together with the works already quoted, see also: Gligor Popi, *Rumuni u jugoslovenskom Banatu izme/u dva rata (1918-1941)*, Novi Sad 1976; [andor Mesaro{, *Polo`aj Ma|ara u Vojvodini 1918-1929*, Novi Sad 1981; the same, *Ma|ari u Vojvodini 1929-1941*, Novi Sad 1989; Ali Hadri, *Nacionalno ugnjetavanje [iptarske narodnosti i stav i borba KPJ za nacionalna prava [iptara za vreme stare Jugoslavije*, Gjurmimr albanologjike, 2, 1965; Muhamet Piraku, *Kulturno-prosvetni pokret Albanaca u Jugoslaviji (1919-1941)*, Jugoslovenski istorijski ~asopis, 1-4, 1978; C.A. Macartney, *Hungary and her Successors. The Treaty of Trianon and its Consequences 1919-1937*, London, Toronto 1937. Many other works on national minority problem in Yugoslavia exist, but they are often propagandistic or they take over unproved data from hostile propaganda of Yugoslavia’s neighbors.

⁷ However, the conditions of the *Volksdeutsche* were far from satisfactory nevertheless. For certain aspects of their minority existence see the following works: for education possibilities: Josef Volkmar Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben in Koenigreich Jugoslawien*, Muenchen 1969; Hans Rasimus, *Die deutsche Schulnot im ehemaligen Koenigreich Jugoslawien*, Muenchen 1969; Ljubodrag Dimi}, *Kulturna politika u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji 1918-1941*, III, Beograd 1997, pp. 8-55; for land reform: Nikola Ga}e{a, *The Germans in the agrarian reform and land ownership patterns in the Vojvodina province during the period from 1919 to 1941*, in: *The Third Reich and Yugoslavia 1933-1945*, Belgrade 1977.

⁸ The process was thouroughly described in: Du{an Biber, *Nacizem in Nemci v Jugoslaviji*, Ljubljana 1966.

⁹ MacAlister Brown, *The Third Reich’s mobilization of the German fifth column in Eastern Europe*, Journal of Central European Affairs, XIX, 2, 1959, p. 103.

¹⁰ Richard Grunberger, *The 12-Year Reich. A Social History of Nazi Germany*, New York 1971, p. 293.

¹¹ Biber, 52; Kosta Mitrovi}, *Pod kulom vr{a~kom. Hronologija doga|aja iz redvolucionarnog pokreta Vr{ca i okoline od 1926. do 1945*, Novi Sad 1969, pp. 53-54, 67-68; @arko Atanackovi}, *Zemun i okolina u ratu i revoluciji*, Beograd 1962, p. 43.

¹² Biber, 251; Arhiv Jugoslavije (further: AJ), 74, 9/17; Arhiv Vojnoistorijskog instituta (further: AVII), pop. 17, k. 22, f. 3, d. 39; k. 26, f. 4, d. 24.

¹³ Sandor, Vegh, *Le system du pouvoir d’occupation allemand dans le Banat Yougoslave 1941-1944*, in: *Les systemes d’occupation en Yougoslavie 1941-1945*, Belgrade 1963, p. 498.

These groups were not only existing, but were active too. Secret radio-stations of the Ethnic-Germans transmitted information about the Yugoslav army dispositions.¹⁴ When the Yugoslavs repudiated the accession of their government to the Tripartite Pact on March 27, 1941 and Nazi attack was imminent, the para-military groups of the *Volksdeutsche* were ready for action.¹⁵

During the attack on Yugoslavia by Germany and her allies in April 1941, the *Volksdeutsche* para-military bands joined the aggressors taking over villages, disarming the disintegrating Yugoslav army units, serving as guides and interpreters for the *Wehrmacht*, guarding bridges and other strategic objects etc.¹⁶ Their major success was the capture of the Belgrade military air-field.¹⁷ The *Wehrmacht* units were enthusiastically greeted in all German villages.¹⁸

The German takeover was coupled with plundering and murders under various excuses. Several mass shootings took place. Part of the Ethnic-Germans participated in all these goings on, which embittered the Slavonic population.¹⁹

After the occupation of Yugoslavia, Ethnic-Germans were divided together with the conquered country's territories. The Germans of Carinthia and Lower Styria were annexed to the Reich;²⁰ those in Slavonia, Syrmium and Bosnia fell to the puppet state of Croatia; those of Bacska and Baranya were allotted to Hungary. The *Volksdeutsche* of the Yugoslav Banat remained in theory Yugoslav i.e. Serbian subjects: the Banat remained a part of the occupied Serbia, Hungary and Romania not having been able to make good their conflicting claims to this region for German fear of a possible clash of their allies over the province. This territorial division was not just geographical but had serious practical consequences later on.

The Ethnic-Germans in the newly-founded quisling *Independent State of Croatia* were granted a far-reaching autonomy in their national affairs, as well as legal equality with the ruling Croats.²¹ The *Volksdeutsche* of Bacska and Baranya were less fortunate: to their dissatisfaction, the territories which they inhabited were given (back) to nationally not overly tolerant Hungary. Their organization was joined to the *Volksbund* of the Hungarian Germans, who living under less propitious circumstances than their brethren in Yugoslavia, were much more moderate and law-abiding. In their new environment the *Volksdeutsche* of the Yugoslav Bacska and Baranya were the most radical among Hungary's Germans.²² The western

¹⁴ Josip Mirni}, *Nemci u Ba~koj u Drugom svetskom ratu*, Novi Sad 1974, pp. 76-77.

¹⁵ C.A. Macartney, *October Fifteenth. A History of Modern Hungary* I, Edinburgh 1957, p. 479.

¹⁶ Wehler, 42; Mirni}, 78; Vegh, 498.

¹⁷ Petar Ka~avenda, *Nemci u Jugoslaviji 1918-1945*, Beograd 1991, p. 26; @arko Atanackovi}, *Zemun...*, 78.

¹⁸ *Heimatbuch der Stadt Weisskirchen im Banat*, (further: WK) Salzburg 1980, p. 174; Philip Sandles, *Sekitsch, erlebte Heimat*, Sensheim 1977, p. 269; Berta Sohl, *Heideschuetz 1809-1945*, Freilassing 1960, p. 48; Nikolaus Hefner, Franz Eger, Josef Braschel, *Franztal 1816-1944. Erinnerungen an Franztal/Semlin. Heimat an der Donau. Ansiedlung, Dorfleben, Flucht, Neubegin*, Salzburg 1984, p. 164; Hans Volk, *150 Jahre Karlsdorf. Geschichte der Gemeinde Karlsdorf im Banat*, Freilassing 1958, p. 39; Anton Zollitsch, *Filipowa. Entstehen, Wachsen und Vergehen einer donauschwaebischen Gemeinde in der Batschka*, Freilassing 1957, p. 175.

¹⁹ @arko Atanackovi}, *Srem u narodnooslobodila~kom ratu i socijalisti~koj revoluciji*, Beograd 1968, p. 80; Branislav Popov Mi{a, *Nema~ki zatvori i koncentracioni logori u Banatu 1941-1944*, Beograd 1992, pp. 10, 13, 15, 17, 20, 23, 24, 25; Ka~avenda, 30; Vegh, 498-503; Bo{idar Ivkovi}, *Uni{tenje Jevreja i plja~ka njihove imovine u Banatu 1941-1944*, I, Tokovi revolucije, I, 1967, p. 392.

²⁰ Tone Ferenc, *Le system d'occupation des nazis en Slovenie*, in: *Les systemes d'occupation en Yougoslavie*.

²¹ More about the *Volksdeutsche* in the ISC see in: Wilhelm Sattler, *Die Deutsche Volksgruppe im Unabhaengigen Staat Kroatien. Ein Buch von Deutschen in Slawonien, Syrmien und Bosnien*, Graz 1943; Oberkersch, 367-472; Zdravko Krni}, *The German Volksgruppe in the Independent State of Croatia as an Instrument of German Occupation Policy in Yugoslavia*, in: *The Third Reich and Yugoslavia*. Ka~avenda, pp. 48-50; Branimir Altgayer, *Elaborat o njema~koj narodnoj skupini*, I dio, s.l. 1947 (AVII, k. 40-D, f. 3, d. 1.); Wehler, pp. 45-48.

²² On Ethnic-Germans under Hungarian rule 1941-1944, see: Mirni}; Wehler, pp. 50-51; Ka~avenda, pp. 54-56; Lorant Tilkovszky, *Zeitgeschichte der Ungarndeutschen mit einer Vorgeschichte*, Budapest 1991, pp. 139-172.

(Yugoslav) part of the Banat was the only place where the *Volksdeutsche*'s dreams of large autonomy came true. As in Croatia, they were made equal to the formally leading people - the Serbs, but were in fact the ruling nation in the Banat - the Serbs being always treated as conquered foes not to be trusted. Although the ultimate power rested with the *Reichsdeutsche* military commander of Serbia and the German agencies, it was the Ethnic-Germans of the Banat who held that power in their name, using it to settle accounts with the Serbs, and above all with the Jews. Thus they were made accomplices in many crimes including mass murders, roundings-up, plundering and manhandling of the civilian population. To be sure, not all the local Germans soiled their hands: here, as well as in other regions, there have been instances of *Volksdeutsche* helping their persecuted neighbors,²³ but such deeds have always been done quietly, whereas the crimes have been committed publicly. This put the *Volksdeutsche* in the Yugoslavs' bad book.²⁴

As volunteers or forcibly inducted, the Germans of Yugoslavia fought in the military and para-military units, police forces or in auxiliary troops of Germany and her allies. The Nazi hotspurs were joining the *Waffen-SS* or the *Wehrmacht* on their own accord already before the German aggression on Yugoslavia. The dismemberment of the state started a flood of volunteers. However, as the war progressed and the bad news started coming in, the *Volksdeutsche* enthusiasm cooled perceptibly. Coercive measures had to be resorted to with ever increasing frequency.²⁵

The crimes committed during the struggle against the partisans, massacres of civilian population,²⁶ service as concentration camps guards etc.²⁷ enraged a considerable portion of the Yugoslavs against the Ethnic-Germans.

The main elements of the background of the disappearance of the German national minority from Yugoslavia to be kept in mind are: pre-war conflicts and tensions with the Yugoslav peoples; the nazification of the *Volksdeutsche* leadership and willingness of the rank and file to obey them; participation of the *Volksdeutsche* para-military units in the fifth column actions during the German attack on Yugoslavia; participation of a portion of German population in the occupation apparatus, military and police units and crimes thereby committed. The post-war Communist authorities after the war pinned on them yet another crime, which in their eyes, was by far the worst: struggle against the Communist partisans.

²³ Slobodan Marić, *Susedi, d'elati, `rtve. Folksdoj-eri u Jugoslaviji*, Beograd 1955, pp. 201, 208; Arhiv Centra za dokumentaciju o vojvođanskim Nemcima, Pančevo, fond svedočenja, dok. 9-2008994, 9-0610993; AJ, F 398, f. 1; Tone Ferenc, *Nemci na Slovenskem med drugo svetovno vojno*, in: Dušan Nežak (ed.), "*Nemci*" na Slovenskem 1941-1955, Ljubljana 1998, p. 111; Atanacković, *Zemun...*, 88-89; the same, *Srem...*, 240.

²⁴ On the *Volksdeutsche* in the Banat 1941-44 see: Mića, o.c.; Kačavenda, 29-42; Vegh, o.c.; Božidar Ivković, *Zatvori, koncentracioni i radni logori u Banatu 1941-1944. (Primena fašističkih metoda genocida)*, Zbornik Matice srpske za društvene nauke, 39, 1964; Ekkehard Voelkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944. Die deutsche, die ungarische und andere Volksgruppen*, Muenchen 1991; Wehler, 48-50.

²⁵ On the active military service of the *Volksdeutsche* see: Vladimir Geiger, *Vojne i poluvojne postrojbe njemačke narodne skupine u NDH*, Godišnjak Njemačke narodne zajednice, 1, 1995; Slobodan Milošević, *Kvislinške snage u Banatu u službi njemačkog okupatora 1941-1944 godine*, Vojnoistorijski glasnik, 1, 1979; Holm Sundhausen, *Zur Geschichte der Waffen-SS in Kroatien 1941-45*, Südost-Forschungen, XXX, 1971; Valdis O. Lumans, *The Military Obligation of the Volksdeutsche of Eastern Europe Towards the Third Reich*, East European Quarterly, XXIII, 3, 1989; Otto Kumm, "*Vorwaerts Prinz Eugen!*" *Geschichte der 7. SS-Freiwilligen-Gebirgs-Division "Prinz Eugen"*, Osnabrueck 1978; Josip Mirnić, *The Enlistment of Volksdeutsche from the Bačka Region in the Waffen-SS*; Antun Miletić, *The Volksdeutsche of Bosnia, Slavonia and Srem Regions in the Struggle Against the People's Liberation Movement*, both in: *The Third Reich and Yugoslavia*; Wehler, 56-68.

²⁶ Sundhausen, 194; *Europa unterm Hakenkreuz. Die Okupationspolitik des deutschen Faschismus (1938-1945). Achtbändige Dokumentenedition. Bd. 6. Die Okupationspolitik des deutschen Faschismus in Jugoslawien, Griechenland, Albanien, Italien und Ungarn (1941-1945)*, Berlin, Heidelberg 1992, pp. 240-242.

²⁷ Mića, *passim*.

However, the dismemberment of the country at the hands of the Germans and their allies has also created other prerequisites for the disappearance of Ethnic-Germans. They were inherent in the new division of the Yugoslav territory as well as in the Nazi plans for transfers of German and non-German populations throughout Europe.²⁸ As for Yugoslavia, such schemes were particularly ment for Slovenia²⁹, which being an adjacent territory was earmarked for greatest population changes.³⁰ It envisaged a mass expulsion of the Slovenes and settlement of German colonists from abroad, as well as resettlement of the Ethnic-Germans from the Italian-occupied parts of Slovenia. To this end an agreement was reached with the Italians to move out the 600 years old enclave of Kočevje/ Gottschee and the scattered Germans of Carniola and to reestablish them in German-occupied Lower Styria. The whole action was executed from November 1941 to February 1942.³¹ For greater part these Germans did not leave the (occupied and annexed) Yugoslav territory, but they had left their homeland, where the Italians burned down most of their houses and villages, making thus the eventual return to all intents impossible. Since the vast majority had given their consent to emigration, it is difficult to regard their going away as an expulsion. Indeed, it turned out that their removal from Kočevje and Carniola was but a mid-stage between the resettlement executed by the Nazis and the flight and expulsion at the end of the war and after.

Similar was the fate of the scattered Ethnic-Germans in Serbia proper. Some 3000 people were sent to Lublin in December 1941 and January 1942, in order to prevent their assimilation by the Serbs. This then was migration from the country altogether.³²

Bosnia was another part of former Yugoslavia which contained smaller nonviable groups of Ethnic-Germans. Perceived by the partisans as aiders and abettors of the hated Ustaša regime, their weak villages had to bear the brunt of the partisans' rage. For that reason, some of them had to move from the north-western Bosnia to the safer Slavonia and Syrmium in the first half of 1942.³³ In the second half of 1942 the bulk of 18 000 Bosnian Germans were transferred to Lodz by the Reich German agencies. Those previously moved to Slavonia and Syrmium, were also sent to occupied Poland with them.³⁴

Although these migrations were explained, and partly executed as safety measures, they had a strong ideological underpinning in the Nazi theory of homogenous German ethnic territory in the East of Europe. Partisans' actions only forced the issue.³⁵

Practical, i.e. security reasons were decisive for the migration of the *Volksdeutsche* from Slavonia. For ideological (and power politics) reasons, this was the pet idea of the *Reich*

²⁸ More about Nazi population transfers see in: Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries. The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe 1933-1945*, Chapel Hill, London 1993; Robert L. Koehl, *RKFDV: German Resettlement and Population Policy 1939-1945. A History of the Reich Commission for the Strengthening of Germanism*, Cambridge 1957. For a more general survey of population transfers see: Eugene M. Kulischer, *Europe on the Move. War and Population Changes 1917-1947*, New York 1948; Joseph B. Schechtman, *European Population Transfers 1939-1945*, New York 1946.

²⁹ For a survey of German plans regarding Yugoslavia see: Wehler, pp. 68-76.

³⁰ About these plans and their ultimate failure see: *Nacisti-ka politika denacionalizacije u Sloveniji u godinama od 1941 do 1945*, Ljubljana, Beograd 1979.

³¹ Hans Hermann Frenssing, *Die Umsiedlung der Gottscheer Deutschen. Das Ende einer suedostdeutschen Volksgruppen*, Muenchen 1970; Wehler, 73-74; Slobodan Milo{evi}, *Izbeglice i preseljenici na teritoriji okupirane Jugoslavije 1941-1945*, Beograd 1981, pp. 343-347; Tone Ferenc, *Nemci na Slovenskem med drugo svetovno vojno*, in: Du{an Ne}ak (ed.), pp. 106-111; Ferenc, *Nacisti-ka politika...*, 476-630.

³² Wehler, 73.

³³ Zdravko Krni}, *O iseljavanju pripadnika njema-ke narodne skupine (Volksdeutschera) iz NDH za vrijeme II svjetskog rata*, Zbornik historijskog instituta Salvonije, 4, 1966, pp. 77-78.

³⁴ Krni}, *O iseljavanju...*, 78-80; Wehler, 74-76; Milo{evi}, 188-203; Enver Red'i}, *Bosna i Hercegovina u Drugom svjetskom ratu*, Sarajevo 1998, pp. 54-56; Antun Mileti}, *Preseljenje i evakuacija folksdoj-era iz Srijema i Slavonije 1942-1944*, Zbornik Historijskog instituta Slavonije i Baranje, 12, 1975, p. 16.

³⁵ Wehler, 75.

Commissary for the strengthening of the German nation, Heinrich Himmler, already by the time of the emigration of the Bosnian Germans in 1942. By the end of the year, some 400 families were transferred from Central to Eastern Slavonia.³⁶ As the situation for the Germans deteriorated, the necessity to move the *Volksdeutsche* from more vulnerable villages of Western and central Slavonia became increasingly more pressing. The Ethnic-Germans from these regions were moved together with the last remnants of the Bosnian *Volksdeutsche* in the spring of 1943. The rest of the Ethnic-Germans from Central Slavonia were transferred to Eastern Slavonia and Syrmium on April 1, 1944.³⁷

Thus by autumn 1944 a considerable portion of the Yugoslav Ethnic-Germans was moved from their home-villages and resettled on other German-occupied territories or in Eastern Slavonia and Syrmium. By that time the tide of war has decisively turned; from then on migration became not a matter of political and ideological planning coupled with security precautions, but of dire necessity. It was no longer the German supremacy in South-East Europe that was threatened, but the very survival of the Ethnic-Germans compromised by their identification with the Reich and all things Reich German.

So far we had to deal with population transfers triggered off by ideological considerations or by needs of policy or safety. The autumn of 1944 marks a beginning of an era of massive *evacuations* which were necessitated by the Red Army advance and looming disaster of Hitler's Germany. Whereas the population transfers described thus far were meant to be permanent solutions to nationality problems of scattered ethnic enclaves, the evacuations of the autumn 1944 were meant to be *temporary security measures*, intended to save the populace and the goods, as well as, to clear the deck for military operations.

The first to be jeopardized by the Soviet advance were the Germans of the Banat. The dropping out of Romania on August 23, 1944 enabled a speedy incursion of the Red Army into the Yugoslav Banat. A detailed evacuation plan was knocked together by the local *Volksdeutsche* leadership.³⁸ However, although carefully designed, the evacuation plan for the Banat was never put to practice. The reasons are still not quite clear. Nevertheless, it is obvious that more factors which thwarted the execution were at play: i.e. the Russian advance was unexpectedly swift; Hitler for political and ideological reasons delayed giving permission; the *Wehrmacht* was opposed to evacuation fearing possible congestions along its supply routes; Himmler, who was in charge of the *Volksdeutsche* affairs was not willing to accept so many refugees to the Reich; police chief Behrends from Belgrade wanted to earn military kudos by recapturing Timisoara; there was widespread opposition to leaving homes even on temporary basis (as the propaganda claimed) among the Ethnic-Germans; the German Foreign Ministry was afraid of scaring the Hungarians and the Croats, the only remaining allies in the region etc. Some authors blame Hitler³⁹, some Behrends⁴⁰ and some Himmler⁴¹. Be that as it may, the fact is that 90% of the Banat Swabians did not manage to escape in time. They fell into the merciless hands of the Red Army and Communist partisans. Together with the Ethnic-Germans of the Bacska they were to constitute the largest portion of the German population left in Yugoslavia once the military operations and evacuations were over.

³⁶ Krni}, *O iseljavanju...*,78.

³⁷ Milet}, *Preseljenje...*,18.

³⁸ Sepp Janko, *Weg und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppen in Jugoslawien*, Graz, Stuttgart 1982, p. 240. The plan itself see in: AVII, Nema-ka arhiva, k. 27-A, f.2, d. 6.

³⁹ Johann Wuescht, *Ursachen und Hintergruende des Schicksals der Deutschen in Jugoslawien*.

Bevoelkerungsverluste Jugoslawiens im Zweiten Weltkrieg, Kehl am Rhein 1966, p. 34.

⁴⁰ Janko, 255; Josef Beer in WK, 207.

⁴¹ Janko, 243-244.

In the Bacska, no precise plans for evacuation were prepared so as not to upset “the last allies”, the Hungarians.⁴² Not only Hungarian authorities, but also Werner Lorenz, the chief of the *VoMi* (*Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*), the main German agency in charge of the *Volksdeutsche*, was against evacuation.⁴³ Technical and psychological obstacles hindered a successful evacuation. At long last, the Hungarian commander of the Szeged military district ordered evacuation to begin on October 4. The opportunity was seized also by the Germans and a partly organized, partly harum scarum withdrawal of the population and goods, such as could be salvaged, began.⁴⁴ Some 60 000 to 70 000 Ethnic-Germans managed to leave the Bacska in time, which was less than expected. Some 60 000 to 70 000 could not or would not flee.⁴⁵ The evacuation of the Bacska was more successful than that of the Banat, but the lack of time and transportation, the obstruction on the part of Hungarian officialdom, and pro-Magyar sentiments on the part of the Swabian population, as well as natural peasants’ attachment to the soil prevented its complete success. However, the people who had left thought that it was only for several weeks, until the military operations were over or until the victorious return of the *Wehrmacht*. The more westerly position of the Bacska enabled the Germans to execute the evacuation in a somewhat less helter skelter manner and to save almost one half of the Bacska Germans. However, the **Reich German agencies had meant the *Volksdeutsche* exodus to be only temporary.**⁴⁶

The migration of the *Volksdeutsche* from the *Independent State of Croatia* was pending almost throughout the war.⁴⁷ Partial migrations and resettlements were already described. When the front-line started approaching Syrmium in September and early October 1944, it was only from the ISC that a really organized evacuation was possible thanks to its geographic position. The bulk of the Ethnic-Germans living in this puppet state lived now in Syrmium and adjacent Eastern Slavonia. Although the preparations for evacuation were already under way for some time, the *Volksdeutsche* leadership was convincing the rank and file that nothing of the kind was contemplated.⁴⁸ Despite these assurances, from October 3 until November 7, the majority of the *Volksdeutsche* from East Slavonia and Syrmium were evacuated in an orderly manner, as well as a considerable quantity of goods.⁴⁹ Coercive measures were used against those unwilling to go,⁵⁰ so in the event, the whole operation was a complete success. This action was also meant to be a temporary measure, not a resettlement scheme.⁵¹ The rest of the *Volksdeutsche* (very few of them) of the *Independent State of Croatia* were evacuated only in early May 1945 when the breakdown of the ICS and Germany was imminent.⁵²

These then were the resettlements, migrations and evacuations of the Ethnic-German population of Yugoslavia undertaken by the Reich German agencies. Some of these measures were executed with a definite goal of resettling the *Volksdeutsche* in the newly acquired

⁴² Wehler, 78.

⁴³ *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa. Bd. V. Das Schicksal der Deutschen in Jugoslawien*, (further: Dok.) Bonn 1961, p. 134.

⁴⁴ Mirni}, 326-329; Lorant Tilkovszky, *Ungarn und die deutsche “Volksgruppenpolitik” 1938-1945*, Budapest 1981, pp. 328-330.

⁴⁵ This figures include the *Volksdeutsche* from (much smaller) Hungarian part of the Bacska. A total of some 40 000 German men who were serving in various military units outside of the Bacska, should also be added. (Mirni}, 331.)

⁴⁶ AVII, Microfilm London-N-4 / 299309.

⁴⁷ Oberkersch, pp. 387-397.

⁴⁸ Valentin Oberkersch, India. *Deutsches Leben in Ostsyrrien (1825-1944)*, Stuttgart 1978, p. 322.

⁴⁹ Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, 432-441; Krni}, *O iseljavanju...*, 81-86; Milo{evi}, 211-220.

⁵⁰ Krni}, *O iseljavanju...*, 85-86.

⁵¹ Oberkersch, *Die Deutschen...*, 434.

⁵² Krni}, *O iseljavanju...*, 84.

territories in or outside occupied Yugoslavia (Kočevje, Bosnian Germans, scattered Germans from Serbia and other parts); the other part of the Ethnic-Germans was taken on to the Reich only grudgingly in the autumn of 1944 necessitated by a deteriorating military situation.⁵³ This latter group was far larger. The precariousness of its stay in the Reich and the lack of intention to resettle it defies the Yugoslav description of the process as “migration”. On the other hand, neither of these groups were expelled either by the Communist partisans, or by the “bourgeois” pro-western nationalist forces, but were resettled or evacuated through Reich German agencies. Partisan activities however were at least partially direct or indirect cause for their resettlement and evacuation.⁵⁴

The *Volksdeutsche* were perceived and used by the Nazis as a political and military cat’s-paw all over Europe. That was the case in Yugoslavia too. By Hitler’s authority Himmler and his associates assumed the right to use the Ethnic-Germans as they thought fit.⁵⁵ Resettlements and evacuations were the logical consequences of this attitude. Although the ascent of the people in question was formally asked for, in practice coercion and “persuasion” played a considerable role. It turned out later that by removing these people from their original abodes (even though for greater part of them it was meant to be temporarily), the Nazis made them unwittingly lose their homeland for good. Although the exact numbers are not known, it is certain that the Ethnic-Germans who left Yugoslavia during the war as resettlers, refugees or within military and labour units, formed the greater part of the former national minority. By the time military operations were over, some 200 000 Ethnic-Germans fell into the hands of the new Communist rulers of Yugoslavia.⁵⁶

What were their plans for the future of the remnants of the German minority? It seems that the Communists, unlike the bourgeois forces⁵⁷, started making plans about what was to be done with the *Volksdeutsche* comparatively late in the war. The Communists were lagging behind, partly because they long hoped to win over the Ethnic-Germans for the partisan movement. Due to the historically created situation in which the Yugoslavs and the Germans were on the opposite sides of the barricade, they failed. The incontrovertible proofs are lacking, but it seems the decision to expel the *Volksdeutsche* was reached in late 1943 or at the beginning of 1944.⁵⁸ It seems there were no dissenting voices in the Communist leadership and that the decision was made without discussion.⁵⁹ The reasons which were proffered as explanation were that the people and leadership were enraged by the Ethnic-Germans’ behavior during the war. No doubt, this was partly true, but even more true was the confession that the new regime needed the land and houses of the *Volksdeutsche* to reward the

⁵³ For more exhaustive German reports on the evacuation of the *Volksdeutsche* from South-Eastern Europe see: Anton Scherer (ed.), *Unbekante SS-Geheimberichte ueber die Evakuierung der Suedostdeutschen im Oktober und november 1944 sowie ueber die politische Lage in Rumaenien, Ungarn, der Slowakei, im serbischen Banat und im “Unabhaengigen Staat Kroatien”*, Graz 1990.

⁵⁴ It would be impossible to say if the Swabians’ fear of the partisans was greater than their fear of the Red Army in the Vojvodina.

⁵⁵ Valdis O. Lumans, *The Military Obligation of the Volksdeutsche of Eastern Europe Towards the Third Reich*, East European Quarterly, XIII, 3, 1989, p. 308.

⁵⁶ Wehler, 79.

⁵⁷ The anti-Communist nationalist forces made their plans as to what was to be done with national minorities almost at the beginning of the war. The unloyal behavior on the part of almost all national minorities, provoked a wave of xenophobia and a series of expulsion plans which tallied nicely with the pre-war intolerance of the minorities by these nationalist politicians and ideologues. More about these bourgeois plans see in: Milan Vesovi}, Kosta Nikoli}, *Ujedinjene srpske zemlje. Ravnogorski nacionalni program*, Beograd 1996, pp. 64, 70, 77, 80, 131, 134, 167; Jozo Tomasevich, *The Chetniks*, Stanford 1975, p.169-173; Ferenc, *Nemci na Slovenskem...*, 115-119.

⁵⁸ Bo`o Repe, “*Nemci*” na Slovenskem po Drugi svetovni vojni, in: Ne}ak (ed.), 146.

⁵⁹ Milovan }ilas, *Revolucionarni rat*, Beograd 1990, p. 242.

partisan combatants who more often than not stemmed from the poorest and most devastated parts of the country.⁶⁰

Thus we came to the term “expulsion” that the *Volksdeutsche* always use. Having depicted the previous transfers of the German population of Yugoslavia, which (be it said, comprised three fifths of the total Yugoslav *Volksdeutsche*), carried out by the Nazi agencies, we shall now turn to the unhappy 200 000 odd Ethnic-Germans who could not or would not flee.

They passed through the crucible the enormity of which surpassed by far their worst fears. They were randomly shot en masse, subjected to pillaging, maltreatment, incarceration and abasement. As early as November 1944 began the process of internment into concentration camps that was to last until mid-1945. By that time, to all intents, all but few of the remaining Germans were incarcerated. The camps were set up in former German villages or parts of them, and in abandoned barracks or factories. The living conditions were appalling: the inmates (comprising mainly women, children and the elderly) died daily in their thousands of sickness, starvation, manhandling, hard labour or wanton murders which occurred occasionally until the camps were disbanded in the spring of 1948.⁶¹ This tremendous suffering spurred the *Volksdeutsche* authors to accuse the Communist authorities of genocide.⁶² However large the number of victims was⁶³, no *intention* of exterminating the Ethnic-Germans existed. Thus, although the consequences were almost as bad as a genocide, the whole deplorable affair cannot be called by that name.⁶⁴

What the new Yugoslav leaders had in mind was an *ethnic cleansing* of the remaining German population. They made no secret of that. As early as the end of 1944 and beginning of 1945, they dutifully handed over some 20 000 to 30 000 Ethnic-Germans (mostly women) to the Soviets for forced labour.⁶⁵ As soon the opportunity for outright expulsion presented itself, they started expelling smaller groups. This was particularly true of Slovenia⁶⁶, and to lesser extent of Croatia⁶⁷: these two provinces being closer to Austrian border and the number of the *Volksdeutsche* in them being much smaller than in the more remote Serbian Vojvodina which harbored the largest portion of the Yugoslav *Volksdeutsche*. The western allies, but the Soviets too, were usually not willing to increase the number of DP's in their occupation zones, so the transports from Yugoslavia were often refused entrance. Indeed, the British and the Soviets often tried to send the refugee *Volksdeutsche* from their zones back to Yugoslavia,

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ We need not here enlarge on the plight of these poor people. Their sufferings were vividly described in number of publications, the most voluminous and noteworthy being: *Dok.; Leidensweg der Deutschen im kommunistischen Jugoslawien*, I-V, Sindelfingen 1991-1995; *Verbrechen an den Deutschen in Jugoslawien 1944-1948. Die Stationen eines Voelkermordes*, Muenchen 1998.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Not even the *Volksdeutsche* authors are unanimous on this point. (See for example: *Verbrechen an den Deutschen...*, 308-311.) Due to the lack of precise data, the exact number of victims will never be known, which is acknowledged even by some Ethnic-German authors. (See for instance: Hans Sonnleitner, *Aktion Intelligencija in Karlsdorf. Tatsachen und Hintergruende. Reflexion zur Sinnfrage ueber Mord und Tod. Gedenkschrift 1944-1984 ueber die Ermordung von 36 Karlsdorfer*, Muenchen 1986, p. 77.)

⁶⁴ In order to call a massive loss of human lives a genocide, the premeditate intention to exterminate an ethnic, racial or religious group must exist. (See for example fairly unanimous definitions of the term in leading world dictionaries: Webster, Duden, Zingarelli, Oxford etc.) Thus for example, although Serbia lost 1,2 mil people (25% of the total population, which is more than the Ethnic-Germans in Yugoslavia suffered during the Second World War) at the hands of Austria-Hungary, Germany and Bulgaria during the First World War, such a massive loss of human life cannot be termed a genocide, because Serbia's enemies *had no intention of exterminating the Serbs*.

⁶⁵ Zoran Janjetovi}, *Deportacija vojvo/anskih [vaba na prinudni rad u sovjetski Savez krajem 1944 i po~etkom 1945 godine*, JI^, 1, 1997.

⁶⁶ Ferenc, *Nemci na Slovenskem 1941-1945*, 129-130, 135-136; Repe, 166-167.

⁶⁷ Vladimir Geiger, *Nijemci \akova i \akov{tine nakon Drugog svjetskog rata*, Zbornik mMuzeja \akov{tine, 1997, pp. 113-114.

and the Yugoslavs, on their part, tried whenever possible to refuse admittance to these transports.⁶⁸

The Potsdam conference gave go-ahead for the wholesale expulsion of the German population from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.⁶⁹ Yugoslavia was not mentioned, but the Yugoslav leadership adduced the Potsdam decisions as legal basis for the expulsion they themselves wanted to execute.⁷⁰ Already in January 1946 the Yugoslav government asked the American embassy in Belgrade to put in a good word with the Allied Control Council in Berlin so as to enable Yugoslavia to have her Germans resettled in Germany. The same request was repeated in May the same year. The demand for permission to expel the remaining *Volksdeutsche* was repeated several times with the Control council too, but always to no avail.⁷¹ The request was therefore repeated in a memo to the preliminary peace conference of the deputy foreign ministers in London in January 1947. But this asking too went unanswered.⁷² There are indications that some sort of agreement on expulsion was reached with the British and the Russians in Austria,⁷³ but judging by later developments, it too came to naught. Meanwhile the Ethnic-Germans were left to tender mercies of Tito's regime. Being dissatisfied with the pace of their dying off, the Communist rulers facilitated their escape abroad in the course of 1947.⁷⁴ The number of people who availed themselves of this opportunity will forever remain in the realm of guesstimates.

This policy was then changed in the late autumn of that year, and in spring next year, the camps were disbanded.⁷⁵ The Ethnic-Germans who had survived the concentration camps emigrated legally from Yugoslavia in course of next 20 years, often overcoming major bureaucratic difficulties.⁷⁶ They did not have to go: after their release from concentration camps no one was forcing them to migrate any more. Indeed, the authorities went out of their way to prevent this valuable labour force from leaving the country. However, the majority of the survivors did not wish to remain in a country which, in their opinion completely unjustifiably, had deprived them not only of their human rights, goods and chattels, but as often as not, of their nearest and dearest. Although they could have started a new life as equal and full-fledged citizens of Yugoslavia, they preferred to leave⁷⁷: the memories were too fresh, the new beginning too hard and bitterness insurmountable.

The official Yugoslav thesis was (and still is) that the *Volksdeutsche* ran away at the end of the Second World War "for fear of just punishment." According to this reasoning, the remainder left after 1948 "out of sense of shame for the crimes committed." On the other hand, the former *Volksdeutsche* are firmly convinced of their absolute innocence. The corollary of this attitude born out of unjustified suffering of all and sundry, is their perception of their fate as of an *expulsion* comparable to that undertaken in other East European countries. Which of these two approaches contains more grains of truth?

⁶⁸ AJ, F 97, 3/35; F 110, 2, dok. 450; *Franzta*, 610; *Dok.*, 177, 179, 190; *Leidensweg der Deutschen in kommunistischen Jugoslawien*, Bd. II (further: LW), Sindelfingen 1993, p. 279; Ferenc, *Nemci...*, 130; Repe, 166.

⁶⁹ Geza C. Paikert, *The German Exodus*, The Hague 1962.

⁷⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States 1946*, Vol. V, Washington 1969, p. 134.

⁷¹ *Dok.*, 435.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 468.

⁷³ Repe, 167.

⁷⁴ *Dok.*, 113E; WK, 286; LW, 74, 82, 411.

⁷⁵ Wehler, 92-94.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁷⁷ After 1948 the Yugoslav government was willing to provide the *Volksdeutsche* with the same facilities enjoyed by other national minorities. However, the new Ethnic-German institutions and organizations gradually died out as their membership left the country. (Goran Nikoli}, @ivot nakon skidanja sa krsta, in: Nenad Stefanovi} (ed.), *Jedan svet na Dunavu*, Beograd 1997, pp. 221-226.)

We have seen that (a small) part of the Ethnic-Germans was resettled by the Nazis themselves, either as part of their resettlement schemes, or necessitated by the war situation. Yugoslavs can be only indirectly guilty in this case, i.e. only as a force pressurizing the scattered German villages. However, this should not be regarded out of the historical context of the previous Yugoslav-German relations. The same is also true of the massive evacuations of 1944. As for the German men inducted who were often fighting somewhere far away, the Reich German agencies alone can be blamed. By luring or pressing them into service they made them traitors to their country. This took them away from home and brought ruin to their relatives left behind.

Yugoslav Communists had plans of getting rid of the *Volksdeutsche* through expulsion, but as we have seen they could have been put to practice only on a small scale. Thus only a small number, at present yet precisely unknown, of the Ethnic-Germans were actually expelled. So from a formal point of view, the Yugoslavs are guilty only of premeditating expulsion, and only to a small extent of its execution. However, the treatment allotted to the *Volksdeutsche* can be seen as means of indirect expulsion. The basic preconditions for life in Yugoslavia of the Ethnic-Germans were destroyed, many of them were actually killed or starved, and many encouraged to flee the country. For these reasons, the Communist regime can be held responsible also for departure of the surviving *Volksdeutsche* after 1948, although that was not the state policy any more. Strictly formally speaking, the term “emigration” which the Yugoslav always use when speaking of the German minority, is more applicable to the situation of this last group. However, since the emigration was spurred by former iniquities, it can be regarded as the consequence of expulsion plans and inhumane practices of the previous period.

Having applied the collective guilt principle to the whole German minority, the Yugoslav Communist leaders have not only violated human rights and justice, but have made it impossible for the former *Volksdeutsche* to come to terms with the darker side of their own past. Therefore these persist (and not without reason too) in using the term “expulsion” for a very complex process. For the same reason their attitude can be deemed understandable, albeit one-sided. As for the Yugoslavs, they use the facts of Ethnic-German fifth columnist activities to justify the harsh and unjust treatment of the *Volksdeutsche*. The common Ethnic-Germans do not want to know the whole truth about their role in the Yugoslav history, which in turn, prevents them from understanding the Yugoslav point of view. The Yugoslavs on the other hand, usually know also only their part of the story, or as often as not, perfectly nothing about what had happened to the *Volksdeutsche*. For these reasons the two parties keep using disparate terms for one and the same process. Both terms are encumbered with political overtones and self-righteousness. This paper tried to show how complex the things actually were and to plead for a subtler approach to the research of the problem, as well as for greater terminological precision in defining the phenomena once they are better explored and clarified.

If one was to put the gist of this paper into the nutshell, one might say that the Ethnic-Germans of Yugoslavia, were partly resettled by Nazi agencies, partly evacuated but then prevented from returning, partly ousted and partly migrated of their own free will, but as a consequence of the rough treatment they had received from the post-war Yugoslav authorities. Only a very small fraction of the *Volksdeutsche* was actually expelled. For the greatest part, one may speak of *indirect expulsion*. Thus Yugoslavia was, as was often the case, the exception to the rules obtaining in other East European countries (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary).