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YUGOSLAV-ITALIAN BORDER AND THE ISSUE OF SLOVENIAN ACCESS TO THE SEA

The area of Slovenian settlement along the sea stretches more or less continuously from Duino to the Savudrian Peninsula, whereby the coast from Duino to Trieste was virtually Slovenian until the mid-20th century. A study written by Marjan Mašera prior to the implementation of the provisions laid down at the peace conference with Italy on 15 September 1947 thus envisions the Free Territory of Trieste divided into the Trieste municipality, which would be given special status, and five other districts (Aurisina/Nabrežina, Muggia, Koper, Piran and Buje). According to Mašera's data, the planned district of Aurisina with municipalities of Duino (Devin), Aurisina and Sgonico (Zgonik) that would extend between the municipality of Trieste and the border between the Free Territory of Trieste (FTT) and Italy had 6,043 inhabitants at the time, 5,227 of

whom were Slovenes, 808 Italians, 7 Croats and 1 other.⁶⁰⁰ According to the same data, the population of the planned district of Muggia with municipalities of San Dorligo della Valle (Dolina), Muggia (Milje) and Škofije that would encompass the territory east of the municipality of Trieste and all the way to the border of Zone B or the Koper district, numbered 15,981, of whom 10,736 were Slovenes, 5,219 were Italians, 15 were Croats and 11 were of other nationalities.⁶⁰¹ Let me just add that in February 1948, the Yugoslav authorities counted the population of the then Koper district of Zone B of the FTT to number 20,905 Slovenes and 23,993 Italians (and 363 Croats).⁶⁰²

The rule that Italians lived in the cities, while Slovenes (and Croats) lived in the countryside, was true for the cities of the part of Istria that is now Slovenian, but not for Trieste or Muggia. If official data put the number of Italians in Koper in 1910 at 7,909, or 88 % of the population, in October 1945 at 5,362, or 87 %, and in February 1948 at 6,695, or as much as 96 % of the population – and similar data could be provided for Izola or Piran – Trieste with its surroundings was home to 59,319 Slovenes in 1910, or as much as a third of the population, while the Yugoslav estimates still put their number at 46,469 or slightly less than a fifth of the population in October 1945.⁶⁰³ Furthermore, Italian historian Carlo Schiffrer estimated the Trieste region to be home to 45,000 Slovenes, or 20 % of the population, in 1946.⁶⁰⁴

After 1918 (or, rather, after the November 1920 signature of the Rapallo Treaty between the Kingdom of Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes), as the border separated Littoral Slovenes (and Istrian Croats) from the core of their nation within the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia), the “Yugoslav Slovenia”, if I may call it that for the sake of simplicity, was separated from the sea by a wide band of territory belonging to the Kingdom of Italy but densely settled with Slovenes, except for the coast. While the Treaty of Peace between the Allied and the Associated Powers and Italy signed on 10 February 1947 and implemented on 15 September of the same year annexed

600 The municipality of Duino had 1,884 inhabitants, 1,593 of whom were Slovenes, Aurisina had 2,587 inhabitants, 2,072 of whom were Slovenes, and Sgonico had 1,572 people, 1,562 of whom were Slovenes. – SI AS 1529, box. 2, Marjan Mašera: *Krajevne oblasti v STO-ju z vidika teritorialne razdelitve*.

601 The municipality of San Dorligo della Valle had 3,949 people, 3,866 of whom were Slovenes, Škofije had 3,240 inhabitants, 3,126 of whom were Slovenes, and Muggia had 8,792 people, 3,744 of whom were Slovenes. – SI AS 1529, box 2, Marjan Mašera: *Krajevne oblasti v STO-ju z vidika teritorialne razdelitve*.

602 SI AS 1589, box 54, *Elaborat Statistični pregled prebivalstva Istrskega okrožja STO*, 12 February 1948.

603 *Cadastre national de l'Istrie*. Sušak, 1946. SI AS 1589, box 54, *Elaborat Statistični pregled prebivalstva Istrskega okrožja STO*, 12 February 1948. Data of the 1910 census have been published multiple times, e.g. in Novak and Zwitter (eds.), *Okro Trsta*, pp. 141–152.

604 Carlo Schiffrer: *La Venezia Giulia. Saggio di una carta dei limiti nazionali italo-jugoslavi*. Roma, 1946, p. 122.

much of this territory to the People's Republic of Slovenia (based on census data from 1910, the annexed territories were home to 182,474 Slovenes and only 222 Italians), the latter did not reach the sea.⁶⁰⁵ The reason for this was that the area of Slovenian coastal settlement was included in the Free Territory of Trieste, an independent country under the protection of the Security Council of the UN, which was also supposed to appoint its governor. However, this did not happen, and in accordance with the Instrument for the Provisional Regime of the FTT, an annex of the peace treaty with Italy, the FTT remained divided into Zone A under British-American military government and Zone B under Yugoslav military government.⁶⁰⁶ This provisional arrangement was resolved with the signature of the Memorandum of Understanding on 5 October 1954 (called also the Memorandum of London), when the former zones were, with minor border corrections to Yugoslavia's benefit, assigned to the two countries.

From the perspective of national interests, the People's Republic of Slovenia was cut off from the sea until 1954. However, the actual situation was different. In early May 1945, the Yugoslav units liberated and occupied the whole of Venezia Giulia, setting up a temporary military government in accordance with the 5 May 1945 agreement between General Peter Drapšin, commander of the IVth Army of the Yugoslav forces, and General John Harding, commander of the British XIII Corps, while the British-American forces remained in Trieste and within a corridor towards Austria. The military administration transferred some of their powers to civilian authorities; in the Slovenian Littoral and Trieste, such a civilian body was the Regional National Liberation Committee for the Slovenian Littoral and Trieste (PNOO). In practice, this meant that the PNOO, together with local authorities with Italian participation, exercised civilian authority in the whole coastal region between the mouth of the Soča (Isonzo) river and the Savudrian Peninsula.⁶⁰⁷

The Slovenian civilian authorities remained in charge of part of Zone B of Venezia Giulia even after the Yugoslav forces left Trieste on 12 June 1945. The reason for this was that an agreement between the Allied forces and Yugoslavia was signed in Belgrade on 9 June 1945, dividing Venezia Giulia, the region whose future national affiliation was the subject of the peace talks, into two occupation

605 Novak and Zwitter (eds.), *Oko Trsta*, pp. 141–152. The territory in question is located between the Rapallo border between the Kingdom of Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes from November 1920 and today's border between the Italian Republic and the Republic of Slovenia, but without the Koper District which was part of Zone B of the FTT from September 1947 to October 1954.

606 The creation and government of the FTT were governed by the Treaty of Peace between the Allies and Italy, signed on 10 February 1947, specifically by Articles 4 and 21 and Annexes VI (Permanent Statute) and VII (Instrument for the Provisional Regime).

607 Nevenka Troha: *Uprava v Slovenskem primorju 1918–1954 (Pregled)* [Administration in the Slovenian Littoral Region 1918–1954 (Overview)]. *Arhivi*, 1997, No. 1-2, pp. 88–102.

zones.⁶⁰⁸ In Zone A, located between the Austrian-Italian border from 1915 and the demarcation (Morgan's) line, administration was taken over by the British-American Allied Military Government, while Zone B, located between the demarcation line and the Rapallo border, was governed by the Military Government of the Yugoslav Army (VUJA) for the Slovenian Littoral, Istria and Rijeka, which was established on 25 June 1945 based on Marshal Josip Broz Tito's Order No. 218. In his Order, Tito emphasized that the local civilian powers of the national liberation committees should remain fully intact and that the committees should keep exercising them in close collaboration with the military administration.⁶⁰⁹ As early as 1945, Zone B thus saw the implementation of the Yugoslav system, albeit adjusted to the exceptional circumstances, with Yugoslav laws and regulations not being enforced directly but, rather, if permitted under the provisional administration status (there were some exceptions), re-adopted by the VUJA and civilian authorities. In the east, the border between Zone B and Yugoslavia was the still legally valid Yugoslav-Italian (Rapallo) border that could only be crossed with special permits.

From the very creation of Zone B of the Venezia Giulia, its division into Slovenian and Croatian areas was clear. The Slovenian part of Zone B – Zone B of the Slovenian Littoral – encompassed all of the Trieste and Gorizia provinces, which came under Yugoslav military government pursuant to the provisional treaty. The Eastern Littoral District with its supreme governing body, the Commissariat of PNOO, was established in this area. Although the governments of the two federal units (future people's republics) had no formal powers in the territory, which international law still recognized as part of Italy, they had actual power, as local bodies of the people's government as well as the military administration acted in accordance with their instructions. This also means that the People's Republic of Slovenia, or its Koper District, had de facto access to the sea from as early as June 1945 onward.⁶¹⁰

Even before the war ended, on 13 March 1945, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovenia sent Boris Kraigher, one of the most capable Slovenian Communists, to the Slovenian Littoral with broad powers in order to be able to fully direct and manage the operation of all the local pro-Yugoslav organizations.⁶¹¹ Until his return to Ljubljana in July 1946, when he became Slovenian Minister of Internal Affairs, Kraigher was the key figure of the

608 *Dokumenti o spoljnjoj politici FLRJ, 1945*. Belgrade, 1984, pp. 81–82.

609 Troha, *Uprava*, p. 100.

610 For details on the operation of the Commissariat of PNOO, see France Perovšek: *Moja resnica* [My Truth]. Koper, 1997, pp. 13–146.

611 SI AS 1487, CK KPS, box 1: Zapis seje CK KPS, 13 March 1945, 42, Beleške Vide Tomšič, zapis okrožnega posvetovanja KPS, 23 March 1945.

Slovenian government and the Party in the whole of Venezia Giulia, both in Zone A and in Zone B. Kraigher coordinated his decisions with the Slovenian government, especially with Slovenian Prime Minister Boris Kidrič. However, the most important decisions were only adopted by senior Slovenian Party officials once they had been approved by Edvard Kardelj, a top member of the Yugoslav government as well as the head of the Yugoslav delegation at the peace conference with Italy.⁶¹²

At the peace talks, Yugoslavia demanded its border with Italy to be drawn along the Slovenian western ethnic border,⁶¹³ with minor adjustments that were supposedly justified by economic reasons and were generally consistent with the old Austrian-Italian border from 1915. The Slovene-populated coastal region would thus become part of Yugoslavia, but not necessarily of the People's Republic of Slovenia, as the September 1945 London conference of the council of foreign ministers saw Yugoslav negotiators proposing that Trieste should become a separate, seventh federal unit of Yugoslavia. Such a solution would ensure the people of Trieste would retain their right to self-determination and provide for normal development of the city and its port as the international port of the countries in its hinterland.⁶¹⁴ Slovenia would also have obtained access to the sea with the Soviet demarcation proposal, which was almost identical to the Yugoslav one, except for the Grado area, but not with the proposals of two of the western powers, the U.S. and Great Britain, which assigned the whole of western Istria to Italy, nor with the French proposal, which stipulated the creation of the Free Territory of Trieste. The latter proposal was the one that was ultimately adopted.⁶¹⁵

Throughout the negotiations regarding the new Italian borders, the issue of Slovenia's access to the sea was continually pointed out, particularly by Littoral Slovenes. Before the arrival of the international border commission⁶¹⁶ in February 1946, priest and Christian Socialist Virgil Šček thus wrote in a letter to Boris Kraigher: "Should the commission propose a border that would more or less cut Slovenes from the sea /.../ and should their counterparts claim that Yugoslavia

612 For details, see Nevenka Troha: *Politika slovensko-italijanskega bratstva. Slovansko-italijanska antifašistična unija v coni A Julijske krajine* [Slovenian-Italian Brotherhood Policy. Slavic-Italian Anti-Fascist Union in Zone A of Venezia Giulia]. Ljubljana, 1998.

613 In accordance with the theory that states cities belong to the hinterland, the Slovenian ethnic border runs along the border of compact Slovenian settlement. The border also encompasses cities with majority foreign populations, specifically Italian populations in the west.

614 SI AS 1277, box 29, Annex 2, The future status of Trieste in the view of the government of Democratic Federal Yugoslavia (DFJ), 27 September 1945. Janko Jeri: *Tržaško vprašanje po drugi svetovni vojni* [The Trieste Question after World War II]. Ljubljana, 1961, pp. 133–136.

615 *Ibid.*, pp. 144–153.

616 The commission of experts from the four major powers that was supposed to study the national distribution in the field. The commission was created by a decision adopted on 19 September 1945 at the London Conference and was present in Venezia Giulia between 7 March 1946 and 4 April 1946. Author's note.

had plenty of sea in Istria and Dalmatia, is the Slovenian government in Ljubljana prepared to protest: Yugoslavia is a federal state, and the Istrian and Dalmatian sea belongs to Croatia. We Slovenes are a nation, we are next to the sea and the sea is ours.”⁶¹⁷

Demands that Slovenia have access to the sea were not met by the peace treaty of 1947 and would have remained unmet to this day if the FTT actually developed as planned in the Permanent Statute. The question of the election results in the FTT and the subsequent forming of the government remains the subject of hypothesis. However, in light of the fact that data obtained by the Yugoslav government in 1947 indicate that the FTT was populated by 249,280 Italians, 82,645 Slovenes and 10,799 Croats,⁶¹⁸ it is justified to believe that the election would have been won by Italian national parties. As the Yugoslav authorities were well aware of this problem in the time of the preparation activities for the creation of FTT, they instructed pro-Yugoslav organizations, whose membership included Italian Communists, to try and form ties with other left-leaning Italians, particularly the Socialists and the “independents” who had advocated establishing an independent country between 1945 and 1947.⁶¹⁹ Parts of the Italian left centre argued for reconciliation between pro-Italian and pro-Yugoslav organizations as well, however, they still interpreted it in a way that would result in their domination. According to their data, Italians represented as much as 80 % of the FTT population, so they did not consent to bilingualism as determined by the peace treaty, specifically one of its annexes, the Permanent Statute of the FTT.⁶²⁰

In accordance with the provisions of the provisional statute, the division into two zones and two military administrations continued, albeit in a much smaller area of the FTT. The Military Government of the Yugoslav (People’s) Army for the Yugoslav Zone of the FTT as the government transferred powers regarding local administration to civilian authorities. 20 February 1947 saw the creation of the Regional People’s Committee of Istria (RPCI) and the District People’s Committees of Koper and Buje, associated with the Slovenian and Croatian authorities respectively.⁶²¹ The division was made even more apparent on 15 May

617 Pismo Virgila Ščeka Borisu Kraigherju, undated, before 17 March 1946. – Marko Tavčar, Egon Pelikan and Nevenka Troha: *Korespondenca Virgila Ščeka 1918–1947* [Virgil Šček’s Correspondence 1918–1947]. *Viri 11*. Ljubljana, 1997, p. 158.

618 SI AS 1529, box 3, Svobodno tržaško ozemlje, statistika prebivalstva.

619 Nevenka Troha: *Komu Trst. Slovenci in Italijani med dvema državama* [Who Gets Trieste. Slovenians and Italians between Two States]. Ljubljana, 1999, pp. 261–264. SI AS 1277, box 30/5, Politično poročilo s posebnim ozirom na bližnje občinske volitve v anglo-ameriški coni STO, 31 March 1949.

620 Archivio storico diplomatico del Ministero degli affari esteri. Affari politici 1946–1950, Italia, box 135, Lettera di Edmound Puecher al ministro degli esteri Carlo Sforza, 28 February 1947.

621 *Uradni list Istrskega okrožnega ljudskega odbora*, No. 1, 1 September 1947, Odlok o ustanovitvi Istrskega okrožja.

1952 when the commander of the VUJA issued an order transferring the powers of RPCI to the District People's Committees in Koper and Buje.⁶²²

The Cominform resolution of late June 1948 turned the situation on the local political left on its head, with the great majority of Italian workers as well as the majority of left-leaning Slovenes in the Zone A opting for proletarian internationalism and the Soviet Union. The post-war policies of the Communist Party of Slovenia, which often left the national question by the side and focused on class issues in order to retain the support of the local Italian workers, now started to work against the Party itself. "What the reaction was unable to accomplish in three years, Vidali⁶²³ did in three days when he trampled on the workers' religious loyalty to the Soviet Union. He turned the Party and the masses into two fronts fighting each other instead of imperialism," reads a report composed by Franc Hočevcar, head of the Yugoslav economic delegation in Trieste.⁶²⁴

The Cominform resolution also transformed the international power relations. Because Yugoslavia was gradually turning from an adversary into an ally, the U.S. and Great Britain, who no longer needed to keep their forces in Trieste, were interested in the normalization of relations between Italy and Yugoslavia; however, this was impossible without a resolution of the question of Trieste. The two powers also tried to resolve the Trieste issue because the Soviet Union was linking it to the question of Austria from May 1950 onward. From late 1949 onward, the U.S. and Great Britain thus pressured Italy and Yugoslavia to come to an agreement which, in their opinion, would be simplest to reach based on the current state of affairs, by assigning Zone A to Italy and Zone B to Yugoslavia, with some minor corrections.⁶²⁵

While Yugoslavia constantly emphasized the importance of FTT's preservation in talks with western diplomats, it also considered the territory, organized pursuant to the Permanent Statute, to be unacceptable. In such a case, the Yugoslav military government would have had to retreat from Zone B, in which a regime identical to the one used in Yugoslavia was becoming increasingly

622 *Uradni list Vojne uprave JA jugoslovanske zone na STO in Istrskega okrožnega ljudskega odbora.*

623 Vittorio Vidali: Secretary of the pro-Cominform Communist Party of the FTT. (Author's note).

624 SI AS 1277, box 30/5, *Politički izvještaj naročito u vezi pretstojećih opštinskih izbora u angloameričkoj coni STT*, 31 March 1949.

625 Fearing that the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 would be followed by the Soviet Union provoking another incident in Europe, the Western powers reinforced NATO by extending it to Greece and Turkey and provided military aid to Yugoslavia. – SI AS 1277, box 31/6, *Zabeležka razgovora med jugoslovanskim veleposlanikom v Rimu Mladenom Ivekovičem in italijanskim zunanjim ministrom Carlom Sforzo*, undated, 1950; *Telegram Mladena Ivekoviča ministru za zunanje zadeve*, 18 January 1950; *Zabeležka razgovora med Titom in veleposlanikom ZDA v Beogradu Georgom V. Allenom*, 9 August 1951. SI AS 1277, box 32/8, *Elaborat Diplomatski razvoj tržaškega vprašanja*, 1 September 1952. Yugoslav diplomats also had information according to which the Soviet Union, using Socialist Pietro Nenni as an intermediary, offered the FTT to Italy in early 1952, with the condition that Italy withdraw from the Atlantic Treaty.

well-established. In July 1952, Edvard Kardelj said: “The Slovene and Italian proletariat in Zone B would only lose, while the proletariat in Zone A would gain nothing and would sooner or later end up as Italy’s dominion. We have not been implementing such nationalist policies and do not intend to do so in the future. If this should happen, a division of the zones would be preferable.”⁶²⁶ At the same time, those associated with the Yugoslav government would lose any election held in the whole FTT by a large margin. If chances were realistic for the pro-Yugoslav forces together with the independents to win the election if it were held prior to the Cominform resolution, the municipal elections in Zone A in 1949 saw the pro-Yugoslav Slovenian-Italian People’s Front only winning 5,344 votes, while the pro-Cominform Communist Party of the FTT won eight times as many and pro-Italian parties won over 60 percent.⁶²⁷

During the negotiations regarding the fate of the FTT, the Yugoslav government had to mind the demands of Slovenes in the Trieste region who rejected the return of Italy to Trieste. Yugoslavia tried to lessen their resistance by having the Special Statute be adopted as an annex to the Memorandum of Understanding of October 1954, containing provisions dealing with the protection of minorities, both the Italian minority in Yugoslavia and the Slovenian minority in Italy, but only in the territory of the former FTT.⁶²⁸ At the same time, Yugoslavia had to remember the fact that the question of Trieste was subject to significant exploitation in propaganda both in Yugoslavia and in Italy. With the Yugoslav and Italian governments thus unprepared to forfeit an area that each of their peoples considered their own, a provisional resolution had to be found that would eventually become permanent. Or as Tito told the British ambassador in Belgrade Sir Charles Peake in August 1951: “Italians will not declare a waiver of further demands of territory, and we will never give up Trieste. But at the moment, as we cannot do otherwise without allowing the Soviet Union to exploit the situation, we’re giving Trieste to Italy.”⁶²⁹

All proposals submitted by Yugoslavia after April 1950 paid heed to the demands of the People’s Republic of Slovenia for access to the sea. In April 1950, the Yugoslav negotiators thus proposed that Italy should get Trieste, while Yugoslavia should get Zone B as well as a part of Zone A based on ethnic compensation.⁶³⁰ In August 1950, Tito held separate discussions with the U.S. ambassador George V.

626 SI AS 537, box 1303, Zapisnik seje o problemih tržaškega gibanja, 4 July 1952.

627 SI AS 1569, 172, Zapisnik zasedanja partijskega aktiva, 14 June 1949. Nevenka Troha: Volitve v coni A Svobodnega tržaškega ozemlja [Elections in the Zone A of the Free Trieste Territory]. In: Luthar and Perovšek (eds.), *Zbornik Janka Pleterškega*, pp. 475–490.

628 The Special Statute is published in Jeri, *Tržaško vprašanje*, pp. 363–368.

629 SI AS 1277, box 31/7, Zabeležka razgovora med Titom in Charlesom Peakom, 12 August 1951.

630 SI AS 1277, box 32/8, Referat Naši predlogi za rešitev vprašanja STO in italijansko reagiranje nanje, 1 September 1952.

Allen and the British ambassador Sir Charles Peake, setting the status quo as the starting point, but also proposing, as one of the alternatives, that Yugoslavia would make Zone B an autonomous region similar to Kosovo and Vojvodina, that Italy would get Trieste and that the rest of Zone A would be given to Yugoslavia. And the worst possibility still acceptable to Yugoslavia would have been the division of the zones with some border corrections so that Italy would get Koper and a narrow corridor to Trieste, while Yugoslavia would get the villages next to the railway in Zone A. Additionally, Tito demanded an autonomous statute for both minorities.⁶³¹

According to the next Yugoslav proposal made in December 1951, Yugoslavia would get the area around Servola (Škedenj, eastern Trieste) and Aquilinia (Žavlje) and the Muggia Peninsula, while Italy would get Trieste, Koper and Izola with their immediate environs. The two Istrian cities would thus become an Italian enclave with a road and maritime connection to the parent country regulated according to a special regime. At the same time, Italy would also get the Slovene-settled corridor with a road and a railway in Zone A, stretching from the border between Italy and the FTT valid at the time to Trieste. The swap was justified by the ethnic principle as the demanded area in Zone A was mostly Slovene while Koper and Izola were mostly Italian. The Yugoslav government stressed that the annexation of Servola and Aquilinia was also important for the economic development of the entire Istria, the Slovenian Littoral as well as Slovenia as a whole, as it would have compensated the loss of the coast and Trieste. A port was supposed to have been constructed in this area, connecting to the Yugoslav hinterland.⁶³² The official Yugoslav explanation claimed that such a proposal was favourable to Italy as the annexed territory would have contained more Yugoslavs (about 48,000) than Yugoslavia Italians (about 29,000). However, looking at the ethnic shares of the minorities, Italy would be home to about 50,000 Slovenes more than Yugoslavia would be home to Italians. The Yugoslav negotiators submitted data indicating that the 1910 census of the area annexed to Yugoslavia in 1947 found 114,076 Italians living there, the 1948 census found 67,856 and the 1951 census found about 40,000. According to the Yugoslav government, the number of Italians dropped dramatically due to the voluntary emigration of 114,000 Italians (over 30,000 in 1948 alone). The emigration supposedly confirmed that the Italians

631 SI AS 1277, box 31/7, Zapisnik razgovora med Titom in Georgem V. Allenom, 9 August 1951; Zapisnik razgovora med Titom in Charlesom Peakom, 12 August 1951.

632 SI AS 1277, box 32/8, Zabeležka razgovora med Edvardom Kardeljem in Georgem V. Allenom, 28 January 1952. Among other things, Kardelj explained to Allen that there are Slovenian settlements with great economic weight located next to the Italian cities of Istria (Servola, Aquilinia). One notable fact of this discussion is that the border Kardelj indicated as the one masses would interpret as the result of extreme concessions given to Italy was the demarcation line, which was actually implemented in 1954 with only minor adjustments.

living there were not an “indigenous ethnic element attached to this place”, but, rather, immigrants. According to the same source, about 80,000 Slovenes lived within Italy’s borders in 1951.⁶³³

As the relations between Yugoslavia and Italy again became strained, Tito used the 6 September 1953 gathering in Okroglica near the Italy-Yugoslav border organized to celebrate the 6th anniversary of the annexation of the Slovenian Littoral to Yugoslavia (some sources claim the gathering was attended by about 200,000 people) to denounce Italian policies and make a propaganda-serving demand that Trieste become an international city while all its surroundings are annexed to Yugoslavia.⁶³⁴

The turning point for the resolution of the Trieste question was the decision made by the two western powers on 8 October 1953 to retreat their troops from Zone A and hand it over to Italy, whereby no date of retreat was set. One of the reasons for the decision were the newly strained relations between Italy and Yugoslavia. As the western powers had not notified the Yugoslav authorities of this measure, the reaction was severe. The Yugoslav government organized mass protests and responded to Italian military reinforcements arriving at the border by sending their own. However, Tito’s speeches in Leskovac and Skopje on 10 and 11 October 1953 scaled down the demands from Okroglica, with Tito proposing Italy to get Trieste and Yugoslavia to get the rest of Zone A and the whole of Zone B.⁶³⁵

On 15 October 1953, the situation that had arisen was discussed by the Federal Executive Council of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia (FPRY). Chief reporter Edvard Kardelj presented the genesis of the Trieste question and the Yugoslav proposals for its resolution. He noted that the latest measures taken by the U.S. and Great Britain were actually humiliating towards Yugoslavia as the Yugoslav government had always counted on the West taking into account at least a minimal share of Yugoslav demands, i.e. that Italy should not get the whole Zone A, that minorities would be allowed an autonomous statute and that Yugoslav interests in the port of Trieste be recognized. Yugoslavia could thus not acquiesce to the solution that was being forced upon it. The Yugoslav citizens had reacted swiftly and spontaneously as what had happened, according to Kardelj, “was not merely the loss of our territory but an insult to our independence and international equality – the pride of our nations”.⁶³⁶

Pro-Italian protests broke out in Trieste, turning into bloody unrest on 3

633 SI AS 1277, box 32/8. Memorandum 1952. According to some estimates, a total of 200,000 to 250,000 Italians emigrated from the territories that were annexed to Yugoslavia.

634 Trst naj postane internacionalno mesto, vse slovensko ozemlje pa priključi k Jugoslaviji. – *Slovenski poročevalec*, 7 September 1953, p. 1.

635 *Slovenski poročevalec*, 11 and 12 October 1954. In Skopje, Tito also uttered his famous words: “I declare that we will always be vigilant of any Italian soldiers entering Zone A. At the moment they do – we will march on the zone ourselves.”

636 SI AS 1277, box 30, Zabeležke Edvarda Kardelja za tajno sejo ZIS, 15 October 1953.

November, the anniversary of Italy's entrance into Trieste in 1918. At the same time, diplomatic talks began, primarily due to Yugoslavia's resolute reaction. The Yugoslav government instructed its negotiators to try and prevent the peace treaty from being implemented, although they were formally not allowed to renounce it as it represented a legal foundation. The negotiators were supposed to make various demands regarding the border that they anticipated to be rejected. However, they were also allowed to negotiate a division along the demarcation line with some adjustments. The treaty was supposed to be formed so that Italy would not formally forgo Zone B and Yugoslavia would not do so for Zone A, while the Western powers would publicly state that they would not support the demands of either side after the agreement on the temporary demarcation of the zones.⁶³⁷

This was followed by a period of negotiations at which the Yugoslav government appended its fundamental demands with an autonomous statute that would ensure the equality of the Yugoslav population in Zone A (as well as the Italian population in Zone B). At the same time, Yugoslavia was no longer ready to accept substitutions in Zone B not tied to substitutions in the Gulf of Trieste.⁶³⁸ In the concluding phase of the negotiations in June 1954, representatives of the Federal Secretariat of Foreign Affairs notified the leaders of pro-Yugoslav organizations in the Trieste region of their progress, including the fact that the Statute of the FTT would *de iure* continue existing but that the provisional situation would automatically become final. The pro-Yugoslav organizations were also notified of a minor border adjustment on the Muggia Peninsula in order to give Koper, which was to become the centre of the Slovenian Littoral, a larger hinterland. The U.S. and Great Britain undertook to try and influence Italy to guarantee that Trieste would remain autonomous due to its great economic import.⁶³⁹

The progress of diplomatic negotiations was closely monitored by Slovenes living in the Trieste region⁶⁴⁰ who were most shocked by the information that Yugoslavia would give up Trieste and be compensated with funds for the construction of a port in Koper and a railway connection to Ljubljana.⁶⁴¹ The only bright spot was the hope that the parent country would ensure Italy would compensate for the injustices of Fascism and provide Slovenes with effective minority protection. In the countryside, people were concerned that, should they

637 SI AS 1277, box 33/9, Pismo Edvarda Kardelja ambasadi v Washingtonu, 21 October 1953.

638 SI AS 1277, box 33/10, Zabeležka razgovora med Edvardom Kardeljem in britanskim veleposlanikom v Beogradu Ivom Malletom, 8 March 1954.

639 SI AS 537, box 1303, Zapisnik seje pri oddelku za zamejstvo, 15 June 1954.

640 SI AS 1931, Engelbert Besednjak: Pismo Engelberta Besednjaka, 9 July 1954. Besednjak wrote: "For Slovenes, the entrance of Italy into Trieste will be a day of sorrow, anger and despair."

641 SI AS 1931, Engelbert Besednjak: Pismo Engelberta Besednjaka, 18 May 1954. The people were supposedly saying: "We're being sold off! Yugoslavia will receive aid from the U.S. in the form of weapons and funds, and we're to be eaten up by the Italians."

be annexed to Yugoslavia, they would be cut off from Trieste with which they had economic ties.⁶⁴² The only solution that would have been at least partly acceptable to the local population would thus have been one that would include a very permeable border, which would alleviate the economic crisis as well as bolster the Slovene community in Trieste that would thus be able to keep in contact with their compatriots.⁶⁴³

The negotiations concluded with the adoption of the Memorandum of Understanding of 5 October 1954, which divided the two zones of the FTT between the two countries, with some minor adjustments in Yugoslavia's favour. The Yugoslav civilian administration (military duty, legislation, regulations, organization of government, etc.) thus extended to Zone B. In 1975, the provisional treaty was further built upon by the Treaty of Osimo signed between Italy and Yugoslavia.

In his speech upon the publication of the Memorandum of Understanding, Boris Kraigher stressed that the treaty was very clear regarding Yugoslavia's rights in this area. In this regard, he emphasized the Western powers' statement that they would no longer support Italian demands. It was imperative to create such relations between the two countries as to make the border as irrelevant an issue as possible, and Kraigher believed this could be achieved through the creation of socialist relations in Yugoslavia and Italy. Kraigher continues: "The Yugoslav policy regarding the western border has long been based on the motto: We'd give our lives – we won't give Trieste! /.../ However, if we wanted to consistently stick to the motto, we should have given our lives back in 1945 when our troops were forced to leave Trieste. That's when this issue was decided." Kraigher further stressed the importance of the fact that Yugoslavia withdrew its demands regarding Trieste based on an agreement, "that we have forced the Italians to recognize the specificity of our interests in Trieste, to recognize the existence of our national minorities, to recognize our economic interests. /.../ I do not believe that this is the only solution for Trieste, however, it is the only one possible at the moment. We will help uplift Koper, but not as competition to Trieste but rather as a centre that would be able to replace Trieste for us. /.../ We will not receive any direct aid from the Allies to build up Zone B, and we haven't requested it either. This is our own undertaking. With regard to our aid to Trieste and our organizations based in the city, we will help according to our abilities."⁶⁴⁴

642 SI AS 1931, Engelbert Besednjak, Pismo Engelberta Besednjaka, 18 May 1954.

643 Ibid.

644 SI AS 1529, box 22, Govor Borisa Kraigherja, undated, after the adoption of the Memorandum of Understanding in October 1954.