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*Illusions of a 'Final Victory'  
and the 'Fate of Small European Nations'.  
Media and Propaganda of the Independent State  
of Croatia in 1945*

This paper deals with the media and propaganda generated by Nezavisna Država Hrvatska (the Independent State of Croatia) or NDH in 1945.<sup>1</sup> The NDH media and propaganda system was created in 1941.<sup>2</sup> Although it followed the basic organizational patterns established by the propaganda system of the Third Reich,<sup>3</sup> NDH did not have its own independent propaganda ministry. In 1945,

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<sup>1</sup> Research on NDH propaganda and media is still in its nascent phases. There are a number of interesting books and articles published, but no single monograph that would deal with the entire NDH media and propaganda system. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Fadil Ademović published a book entitled *Novinstvo i ustaška propaganda u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj. Štampa i radio u Bosni i Hercegovini (1941–1945)* [Press and Ustasha Propaganda in the Independent State of Croatia. Press and Radio in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1941–1945)], Sarajevo 2000. The author collected various documents, published articles, and other contributions but failed to write a consistent, well-structured, and scholarly monograph. His book is more a collection of essays on different topics related to various aspects of NDH media and propaganda. There is no doubt that Ademović's book contains useful data. However, it also contains many factual errors and those who use it for research should be cautious.

<sup>2</sup> The foundation and organizational development of the entire NDH media and propaganda system is described and explained in the brief text entitled "*Državni izvještajni i promičbeni ured kod Predsjedništva vlade*" [The State Information and Propaganda Office in the Presidency of the Government], in *Spomen-knjiga prve obljetnice Nezavisne Države Hrvatske 10. IV. 1941.–10. IV. 1942.*, Zagreb, 1942, pp. 37–48. The NDH propaganda system was briefly described by Snježana Pavičić in the catalogue of an exhibition entitled *Hrvatski politički plakat 1940–1950* [The Croatian Political Poster 1940–1950], Zagreb 1991, pp. 31–33.

<sup>3</sup> There is no doubt that German propaganda had a strong influence on the organization and content of NDH propaganda. Various German institutions and their propaganda offices were active in NDH. German propaganda was delivered directly (by German institutions, press, film, radio, etc.) and indirectly (through Croatian media and NDH propaganda institutions) to the Croatian public. More on German propaganda and media in NDH can be found in three of my articles, "Njemačko novinstvo i periodika u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj 1941–1945" [German Press and Periodicals in the Independent State of Croatia from 1941 to 1945], *Godišnjak Njemačke narodnosne zajednice / VDG Jahrbuch 2000*. Osijek 2000, pp. 139–172; "Njemačka promidžba u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj od 1941. do 1945. godine", *Godišnjak Njemačke narodnosne zajednice / VDG Jahrbuch 2001*. Osijek 2001, pp. 171–197. "Pro-

the Main Propaganda Directorate of the Ministry for Popular Education was responsible for the entire media and propaganda system.<sup>4</sup> Its general director, Ivo Bogdan, was a professional journalist and a dedicated member of the ruling Ustasha Movement. The comments he published in the press and in speeches he gave at mass meetings and on radio broadcasts served as guidelines for the creators of NDH propaganda.<sup>5</sup> Propaganda material was disseminated to the Croatian public through newspapers, magazines, books, pamphlets, posters, fliers, radio broadcasts, and newsreels.<sup>6</sup>

At the time, the leading newspaper in NDH was Zagreb's daily *Hrvatski narod, Glasilo Hrvatskog ustaškog pokreta* [Croatian People, Herald at the Croatian Ustasha Movement].<sup>7</sup> War conditions and limited transportation capabilities prevented distribution of *Hrvatski narod* throughout the country. Consequently, the daily and weekly newspapers and magazines of other cities remained of great importance to the spread of public propaganda in other regions. The most important regional newspapers were *Hrvatski list* in Osijek and *Sarajevski novi list* in Sarajevo. They were continuously published until mid-April 1945 when Tito's partisans liberated both cities.

During the period from 1941 to 1943, Hrvatski krugoval (Croatian Radio) created a network of five radio stations on the territory of NDH. (Only Radio Zagreb existed in 1941). In 1945, there were four radio stations under the control of Hrvatski krugoval.<sup>8</sup> All film production in NDH was controlled by

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midžba Njemačke narodne skupine u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj" [Propaganda of the German Volksgruppe in the Independent State of Croatia ], *Godišnjak Njemačke narodnosne zajednice / VDG Jahrbuch 2005*. Osijek 2005, pp. 207–223.

<sup>4</sup> The Main Directorate for Propaganda was founded in October 1942. In reality, the new directorate merely continued the activities of the State Information and Propaganda Office.

<sup>5</sup> Most of his 'important' speeches were also published in the NDH press or as separate booklets.

<sup>6</sup> NDH political posters are well known to the Croatian public and to scholars. This is due to the fact that two exhibitions of Croatian political posters were held in Zagreb at the beginning of the nineteen nineties. Many of the posters were described and analyzed by Snježana Pavičić in *Hrvatski politički plakat* [The Croatian Political Poster]. Zagreb 1991, and by Predrag Haramija in his catalogue of one of the exhibitions entitled *Stoljeće političkog plakata u Hrvatskoj 1940–1950* [A Century of Political Posters in Croatia 1940–1950]. Zagreb 1992.

<sup>7</sup> The first issue of the daily *Hrvatski narod* in NDH was published on April 10, 1941. However, it was presented to the public as the resurrected prewar pro-Ustasha weekly of the same title. In spring 1939, Mile Budak, a leader of pro-Ustasha elements in Croatia, began to publish *Hrvatski narod*, which soon became a leading pro-Ustasha paper in Croatia. Due to its harsh criticism of the ruling Croatian Peasant Party and the conditions in the Banovina region of Croatia, the Banovina authorities banned *Hrvatski narod* in 1940. More on *Hrvatski narod* during the period from 1939 to 1940 can be found in Mario Jareb: *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja 1941. godine*. Zagreb 2006, pp. 525–538.

<sup>8</sup> 'Hrvatski krugoval' started to build the network by renovating and expanding the technical and human capabilities and resources of Radio Zagreb. Soon thereafter, radio stations in Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Dubrovnik, and Osijek were established and joined the 'Hrvatski krugoval' system. Reporters and journalists from *Hrvatski krugoval* magazine closely followed the growth of the Hrvatski krugoval system. Any researcher interested in NDH media and propaganda

Hrvatski slikopis (Croatian Film).<sup>9</sup> In 1945, its activities were limited to the production of the newsreels entitled *Hrvatski slikopisni tjednik* (Croatian Weekly Movietones).<sup>10</sup>

NDH media and propaganda in 1945 provides a unique and important example of Axis propaganda. Military operations during 1944 forced many German allies to surrender: Romania, Bulgaria and Finland surrendered to the Soviets; the Vichy regime in France collapsed soon after D-day; advancing Soviet and Yugoslav Partisan troops destroyed the Serbian regime of General Milan Nedić in October of 1944.<sup>11</sup> At the beginning of 1945, active propaganda and media systems were still operating in countries occupied by the Third Reich, including Norway, Denmark, southern Slovenia, and the Netherlands. Some domestic

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machine cannot avoid that magazine. It was launched in 1940 when it was published as a bi-weekly magazine with the title *Radio Zagreb, Hrvatski radio list*. After the establishment of NDH, it continued to be published as a weekly magazine with the title *Hrvatski radio list*. In the summer of 1941, its title was changed to *Hrvatski krugoval*. Dubrovnik Radio stopped working in October 1944 when the city was liberated by Tito's partisans. Other stations continued to air into April and May 1945. The cities of Sarajevo, Banja Luka, and Osijek were liberated in April 1945. It was Zagreb Radio Station who remained the sole radio station under the control of *Hrvatski krugoval*, operating until the very end in May 1945.

<sup>9</sup> At the moment, the most comprehensive book on 'Hrvatski slikopis' and its film production is a memoir by Marijan Mikac entitled *Film u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj* [Film in the Independent State of Croatia], Madrid 1971. He was general director of *Hrvatski slikopis* during the period from 1941 to 1945.

<sup>10</sup> *Hrvatski slikopis* primary task was the production of newsreels. Its first newsreel entitled *Hrvatska u riječi i slici* [Croatia in Word and in Image] was released at the end of August 1941. Newsreels were released bi-weekly through December 1941, a total of 100 newsreels during the period from August 1941 to December 1943. These newsreels were composed of shots and reports from Croatia, about Croatia, and about Croats. German and Italian newsreels were also shown to the Croatian public. *Hrvatski slikopis* started the production of weekly newsreels entitled *Hrvatski slikopisni tjednik* in December 1943. They were composed of both Croatian and German footage and reports. Croatian cinemas ceased showing German newsreels after the conclusion of an agreement between 'Hrvatski slikopis' and *Deutsche Wochenschau*. Italian newsreels were abandoned after the surrender of Italy in September 1943. Copies of *Hrvatska u riječi i slici* and *Hrvatski slikopisni tjednik* can be found in the Hrvatska kinoteka Hrvatskog državnog arhiva (Croatian Film Archives of the Croatian State Archives) in Zagreb.

<sup>11</sup> The Serbian puppet government of General Milan Nedić was formed on August 29, 1941 and included a propaganda department. As far as I know, there have been no monographs or studies dedicated exclusively to Serbian war propaganda. However, newspapers (*Novo vreme* and *Srpski narod*) and numerous books, booklets, posters, and fliers have been preserved. Drawing on these, it would be possible to analyze the content of Serbian propaganda and to compare it to NDH propaganda. In Croatia, numerous Serbian war propaganda booklets can be found in Zagreb's Hrvatski povijesni muzej (Croatian Historical Museum), Dokumentarna zbirka II. (Documentary Collection II). Serbian propaganda products can be found in other institutions as well, but primarily in Zagreb's Nacionalna i sveučilišna knjižnica (National and University Library).

The German propaganda in Serbia during the WWII was presented and analyzed by Kosta Nikolić: *Nemački ratni plakat u Srbiji 1941–1944* [The German War Poster in Serbia 1941–1944]. Beograd 2001.

propaganda and media activities were present in what was left of Tiso's Slovakia, Szalasi's Hungary, and in the Mussolini's Republic of Salò. The only fully operational pro-Axis media and propaganda system was in the Independent State of Croatia. NDH had already lost almost half of its territory, and Tito's partisans were operating on territories still under its control. However, the capital of Zagreb and other major cities remained firmly in the hands of NDH authorities. Though Allied bombers occasionally targeted them, these cities had been mostly spared the ravages of war. Propagandists in these cities continued conducting their activities until the end of the war in May 1945. Consequently, the NDH media and propaganda system represents the most intact example of pro-Axis media and propaganda in 1945, and an analysis of its activities and propagandists should prove interesting to researchers interested in World War Two media and propaganda. The 'blindness' of the NDH propaganda of the time is striking. In April 1945, only a month before Germany's surrender, NDH was still predicting an Axis victory. It would be interesting to study the impact of these predictions on the public, and to establish the extent to which NDH propaganda was responsible for loss of life in combat during the last month of the war. It would also be interesting to compare the content of NDH propaganda with its German counterpart in 1945, and the latter's impact on the German public.

The basic elements of NDH propaganda were similar to those produced by other Axis states. Above all, praising the 'virtues' of Ante Pavelić (the *Poglavnik*, the head of state and leader of the ruling Ustasha Movement) was a daily theme of NDH propaganda.<sup>12</sup> During the period from 1941 to 1945, Pavelić was celebrated as the figure whose wisdom and charisma would 'save' the Croatian nation from all perils. The establishment of the NDH in April 1941 had been presented as the natural outcome of Pavelić's strength and vision. The media portrayed him as a 'visionary' who, long before the outbreak of the World War Two, 'predicted' German victory and was determined to ally the fate of the Croatian nation with the 'victorious' side. The ruling Ustasha Movement was presented to the public as the backbone of the Croatian nation, the only path that

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<sup>12</sup> There are numerous articles in NDH press, posters, books, and fliers that glorified the virtues of the 'Poglavnik'. Probably the most interesting propaganda product of this kind was a short film titled *Poglavnik i narod* [The Poglavnik and his People], produced by 'Hrvatski slikopis' in 1943. A copy of the film can be found in the Hrvatska kinoteka Hrvatskog državnog arhiva in Zagreb. Pavelić is depicted in the film as the 'father of the nation', dedicated to the protection of his people. He stands with the people and works with them in good times and bad. He is portrayed as a wise, determined, and beloved ruler that the entire nation adores. The printed equivalent of the film is a book titled *Narod i njegov vođa* [The People and its Leader], Zagreb 1943?. It contains a short introductory text titled *Poglavnik i narod* The Poglavnik and his People (pp. 1–3), and 60 large photographs, each published on a separate page. Still, the best known propaganda book on Pavelić is the one by Danijel Crljen entitled *Naš Poglavnik* [Our Poglavnik], Zagreb 1943. That book contains Crljen's essays on Pavelić, on his role in the past, and the 'bright' future he would bring to Croats.

could guarantee a 'bright future'.<sup>13</sup> NDH propagandists were 'fighting' for a 'New European Order', the victory of the Axis against 'Bolshevism'.<sup>14</sup> Anti-Semitic elements were also prominent,<sup>15</sup> as well as the rejection of the Western Allies. There were also several unique elements. In 1941 and 1942, hostility towards the former Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav idea, and Serbs was dominant. From the very beginning of the campaign, concern for the fate of small European nations was an important issue.

The German armies began a retreat on all fronts in 1943; by early 1944, it was clear that the Allies would win the war. Axis propaganda indirectly expressed concern over the outcome of the war, and NDH propaganda warned that should 'barbaric Bolshevism' prevail in Europe, it would bring small European nations to the edge of extermination. The solution was a simple one – only a victory of the Third Reich would 'save' Europe and European culture. Ignoring the dire situation on the battlefields, NDH propaganda continued to preach the victory of the 'New Europe, if anything becoming even more enthusiastic in promoting its themes. For NDH press outlets, the beginning of 1945 appeared promising. Hitler's optimistic New Year's proclamation was published in leading newspapers, and the upbeat spirit prevailed in several articles that predicted the future of the 'New Europe. The weekly *Novine* published a proclamation under the title "Rat će biti dokrajčen njemačkom pobjedom" [The War Will End

<sup>13</sup> Some writers, for example Franjo Bubanić: *Seljaštvo i ustaški pokret* [Peasantry and the Ustasha Movement]. Zagreb 1942, p. 91 even equated the Ustasha Movement and Ustashas with the Croatian nation: "(...) this is a Movement that is closely connected to the Croatian consciousness and the term Ustasha is now identical with the term Croat". The following sentence can be found on page 98 of the same book: "By founding the Independent State of Croatia (...), Ustasha became bearers of the Croatian state, guarantors of its existence and eternity".

<sup>14</sup> Since NDH sent its volunteers (legionnaires) to fight on the Eastern Front alongside the German Wehrmacht, Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine, NDH propaganda focused on them. Their presence on the battlefields was presented as the Croatian contribution to the all-European struggle against Bolshevism and for the New Europe. There were many books and articles in newspapers and magazines about the Croatian legionnaires. The title of M. Zvonimirović's book *Hrvatski junaci na Istoku* [Croatian Heroes on the East]. Zagreb 1942, shows how the legionnaires were treated in the NDH. The fate of legionnaires that fought in Stalingrad was a special concern of NDH propaganda.

<sup>15</sup> Anti-Semitic elements were present in NDH media and can be detected in papers, magazines, posters, books, and booklets of the time. Probably the most important example of NDH propaganda regarding the "struggle against Jewry" was the exhibition organized in Zagreb in May 1942 under the title "Židovi – Izložba o razvoju židovstva i njihovog rušilačkog rada u Hrvatskoj prije 10. IV. 1941. – Rješenje židovskog pitanja u NDH" [Jews – Exhibition about the Development of Jews and their Destructive Activities in Croatia before April 10, 1941 – The Solution to the Jewish Question in the Independent State of Croatia]. The State Information and Propaganda Office organized the exhibition and published a small booklet and special poster. Preparation of the exhibition was shown to the public in the documentary film produced by Hrvatski slikopis under the title *Kako se stvaraju izložbe* [How to Create Exhibitions]. A copy of that film can be found in the Croatian Film Archives of the Croatian State Archives in Zagreb.

with German Victory].<sup>16</sup> NDH propaganda also preached German optimism. Ivo Bogdan, director of propaganda, announced that "after two years of retreat and defense, Germany has shown such strength under the leadership of the genial Führer that good luck is deserting the West and moving to the German side. We are deeply convinced that this is just the beginning and that the new battles and sacrifices of the future will be crowned with meritorious success".<sup>17</sup> He also reminded the Croatian public of Pavelić's statement that: "Croatia must not take the path of treason and surrender".

Numerous articles published in NDH press outlets at the very beginning of 1945 provided analyses of the situation on the battlefield. Following the official enthusiastic line, the authors of these articles attempted to convince readers that the German army had reorganized and strengthened its ranks in order to stop the advance of Allied forces. According to them, 'fortress Germany' was ready to fight back and bring the war to a victorious end. Terms such as 'fanatical will' and 'ultimate determination' were employed to illustrate German readiness to fight and its will to triumph. In January and February 1945, several minor local German successes were used to illustrate the alleged German recovery and success. But even to the readers of NDH newspapers, it became obvious in February 1945 that there would be no more news of German success on the battlefield. Still, NDH propaganda continued to talk about the 'iron will' of German fighters and the 'persistence that would bring victory'. Even at the beginning of May 1945, it was still trying to conceal the obvious defeat of the Axis. Fantastic stories about 'new German secret weapons' and the 'bravery of European fighters against Bolshevism' aimed to convince those still loyal to NDH and to keep them fighting.

The victory of the Axis was presented as the *conditio sine qua non* for the existence of the Croatian state and for the survival of the Croatian nation. Propaganda aimed to convince the Croatian public that the 'wise' Poglavnik knew how to solve these problems and to save Croats and Croatia. Following German patterns, NDH propaganda persistently presented the internal NDH situation as optimistic. There were numerous articles the authors of which strive to convince their readers that the profound crisis that brought NDH to the edge of extinction in 1944 was past. In January 1945, one of the leading Ustasha propaganda officials, Danijel Crljen, wrote that by autumn 1944 "Bolshevik hordes had opened the road to the Balkans, and it was a general conviction that the extermination of the 'satellite' Independent State of Croatia was the order of the day".<sup>18</sup> Crljen acknowledged that a devastating crisis had occurred but insisted that "its enemies underestimated the strength" of "Ustashism". Therefore:

<sup>16</sup> *Novine*, January 2, 1945, No. 168, pp. 1–2, "Rat će biti dokrajčen njemačkom pobjedom".

<sup>17</sup> These quotes are from Bogdan's speech on Radio Zagreb, January 1, 1945. The entire speech was published in *Novine*, January 2, 1945, pp. 3–4.

<sup>18</sup> Danijel Crljen: Ustaški put Hrvatske [The Ustasha path of Croatia]. In: *Hrvatski narod*, January 6, 1945, No. 1228, p. 7.

"Croatia will cure the crisis with unimaginable ease and Ustasha thought will become an unbreakable defense against defeatism and panic".

Although official optimism and courage persisted in propaganda messages, numerous articles were published warning Croats of what would happen in the case of a 'Bolshevik' victory. During the previous years, the Croatian public had been regularly frightened by stories of the cruelty and bestiality of the Soviet Army and Tito's partisans. The 1943 Katyn Forest massacre and the victims of Vinnitsa in Ukraine were used as examples to illustrate the horrors that would become reality for the small nations of Europe.<sup>19</sup> Tito's partisans were described both as a menace to the existence of the Croatian nation and as Stalin's puppets. Consequently, an Allied victory was equated with the extinction of Croats and their certain subjugation to 'barbaric Bolshevism'. The United States and Great Britain were accused of the 'betrayal of Europe' because they had allegedly agreed to hand over all of Eastern Europe to the Soviet Union and the 'Bolsheviks'. In 1945, these accusations were not so resolute, and in the last days of war some media expressed the hope that Western countries would act to stop the 'spread of Bolshevism'. The main proof that Anglo-Americans had 'betrayed Europe' came with news of the Yalta conference. Stalin was depicted as the winner, while Churchill and Roosevelt were uninterested and ignorant. Numerous articles also warned of 'secret' arrangements made at Yalta.<sup>20</sup> Though most of these arrangements were reportedly oriented towards the subjugation of small nations to the Soviets, hopes remained that the Allies might intervene on their

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<sup>19</sup> NDH media and propaganda did not present these two crimes exclusively due to the fact that German propaganda also exploited them. Croatian pathologists (forensic experts) participated as members of international expert committees for both incidents. Images and other materials provided by German propaganda services were presented to the Croatian public. Professor Ljudevit Jurak from the University of Zagreb was the Croatian member of the Vinnitsa committee. Professor Eduard Miloslavić from the same university participated on the Katyn committee. A Croatian-American born in California, he succeeded in leaving Croatia at the end of the war and returned to the US. In spring 1943, when he returned from Katyn, Miloslavić published an article titled "Znanstvena izraživanja grobova u šumi kod Katyna" [The Scientific Research of Graves in the Forrest near Katyn] in *Hrvatski narod*, May 16, 1943, No. 733, p. 3. In 1951, he testified in Chicago about the massacre before the Congressional Select Committee to Conduct an Investigation and Study of the Facts, Evidence and Circumstances of the Katyn Forest Massacre. His testimony was published in *Hearings before the Select Committee to Conduct an Investigation of the Facts, Evidence and Circumstances of the Katyn Forrest Massacre, Part 3* (Chicago, Ill.), March 13 and 14, 1952, (United States Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, n. d.), pp. 310–334. I also analyzed how NDH authorities and propaganda personnel exploited the Katyn Forest massacre in an article entitled "Odjek zločina u Katynskoj šumi u tisku Nezavisne Države Hrvatske od travnja do lipnja 1943" [Reactions to the Katyn Forrest Massacre in the NDH Press from April to June 1943]. In: *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, 1998, No. 1, pp. 117–130.

<sup>20</sup> For example, insinuations that the United States and England secretly promised to annex Poland to the Soviet Union can be found in an article entitled "Sporazum o pripojenju Poljske SSSR-u?" [Was an Agreement on the Annexation of Poland to the USSR Concluded?], *Hrvatski narod*, February 24, 1945, No. 1269.

behalf. These hopes mostly came from the Anglo-American refusal to accept the pro-Soviet Polish government as the representative of Poland in San Francisco, as well as ongoing disputes about the organization of the United Nations. Still when news of Yalta reached NDH, the authorities and propaganda agencies reacted with fury. On March 9, 1945, the Croatian Government issued a statement in which it condemned and rejected the restoration of the Yugoslav state.<sup>21</sup> As mentioned earlier, Tito's partisans and a Communist Yugoslavia were regularly described as a threat to the survival of the Croatian nation. Pavelić himself characterized the partisans as an integral part of the Red Army. He said that the NDH was the only bulwark against the 'Bolshevik Army.'

The Bolshevik horde is standing in our neighbourhood, on our eastern borders, though it bears the official name and title of the 'Yugoslav Army'. Brothers and sisters, these Bolshevik hordes are an integral part of the same Bolshevik hordes that are standing on the battlefronts from the Northern Sea to the gates of Istanbul.

Against these heartless and inhuman hordes, against these hordes of the worst kind that have ever arrived from the East, we are now standing with our ally, the Greater German Reich (...). Our Croatian Army is standing shoulder to shoulder with the German army and our other allies to fight and defend Europe, to defend Germany and Croatia, to defeat these hordes from the East (...).<sup>22</sup>

However, this was not enough to convince soldiers and officials still loyal to NDH to persist and keep fighting. What was needed was the presentation of the 'true character' of the 'Bolshevik menace' to the Croatian public, which is why numerous articles containing horror stories about communist crimes in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina were published in NDH press outlets during 1945 (with titles such as "Croatian Territories Temporarily Occupied by Partisan Gangs"). All of them dealt with actual events, but, since these were primarily propaganda products, their main intention was not to provide facts but to manipulate the feelings of ordinary people. Generally, the largest part of each article presented the alleged bestiality of Tito's partisans. There were two kinds of victims: most were Croats loyal to NDH<sup>23</sup> that were persecuted for their patri-

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<sup>21</sup> The entire statement was published under the title "Hrvatski narod za svoju državu" [The Croatian Nation for its Own State], *Hrvatski narod*, March 9, 1945, No. 1280, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> This quotation was part of speech Pavelić gave at a mass meeting in Zagreb on March 10, 1945. The speech and a detailed report from the meeting were published under the title "Hrvatski narod borit će se svim sredstvima za svoju samostalnu Hrvatsku Državu" [The Croatian Nation Will Use all Means in the Struggle for its own Independent State], *Hrvatski narod*, March 11, 1945, No. 1282, pp. 1–4.

<sup>23</sup> A good example of such an article is one by Dragutin D. Došen entitled "Sedlarica – Podravsko slavonski Katyn" [Sedlarica – The Katyn of Slavonian Podravina], *Hrvatski narod*, January 11, 1945, No. 1231, p. 3. It is interesting to note that Došen equated partisan rule in Sedlarica with Soviet crimes in the Katyn Forest. He presented testimony of a Croat, K.V., from Podravina who spent several weeks in partisan captivity. According to his testimony, partisans blamed prisoners for their loyalty to NDH.

K.V. reports that partisans shot Croats for membership in the Hrvatska Seljačka Stranka (the



otism by 'Communist, greater-Serbian and Yugoslav' partisans. The intention of such stories was to convince the Croatian public that partisans were not fighting against the NDH regime but against all Croats in order to establish a 'greater Serbian' and Communist Yugoslavia. These stories were also intended to warn all those 'seduced by Communist propaganda'. In some stories, the Croats who supported partisans were actually portrayed as their victims. They were depicted as naive innocents who nursed the illusion that the partisans and Soviets would bring freedom and prosperity. One such Croat from Virovitica, propagandists reported, even joined partisans in 1944, leaving his pregnant wife and old mother at home.<sup>24</sup> When the partisans and Soviets entered Virovitica in the fall 1944, he returned home with great optimism only to discover that the 'Bolsheviks' had looted everything of any worth in his house, and, worse, had raped his wife. The 'Bolsheviks' cared nothing for the fact that he was their ally and partisan fighter. At the end of the article, readers were advised to take note of how the example "reveals what the Bolsheviks and partisans are capable of doing even to their sympathizers, and anyone can foresee what are they capable of doing to Croats who are 'politically suspicious'". This is why: "the town of Virovitica, free again, (...) and proud in its pain and suffering, (...), continues to fight with the rest of the Croatian nation to the final victory!"

In most of these stories, Ustasha troops defeated the communist 'beasts' and Croats in 'liberated' areas were joyous and determined to fight for NDH. It is difficult to know with any certainty, but it seems reasonable to assume that at least some of the consumers of this propaganda recognized that many of the stories were untrue. Still, partisans did commit war crimes in Croatia and Bosnia-

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Croatian Peasant Party). HSS had been the major Croatian party before the foundation of NDH in April 1941. NDH authorities banned the HSS in the spring of 1941 and soon thereafter imprisoned its president, Vladko Maček. Though he was an ardent anti-Communist, he also opposed the NDH Ustasha regime and spent the entire war as a prisoner of the Ustasha. From the fall of 1941 to the spring of 1942, he was an inmate at the notorious Jasenovac concentration camp. Most former HSS members remained opposed to the Ustasha regime. Many of them were also ardent anti-Communists and opposed the partisan movement as well. Because they were not corrupted by association with NDH, the Communists viewed them as politically dangerous and many of them became victims of communist terror. NDH authorities anticipated this and attempted to attract some HSS members. This is why, during the last months of the war, NDH media outlets also tried to present HSS members as victims of partisan terror.

It is interesting to note that even some of the HSS members who joined the partisan ranks during the war were imprisoned or killed. Most of these had joined the partisans to fight against Italians and Germans, but were against the introduction of a communist regime. More on the HSS during World War Two can be found in Zdenko Radelić: *Hrvatska seljačka stranka 1940–1950* [The Croatian Peasant Party 1941–1950], Zagreb 1996.

<sup>24</sup> *Hrvatski narod*, March 20, 1945, No. 1289. p. 2, Kamilo Domović: "Ruska 'braća'" [Russian 'Brethren']. The descriptive title of this article is interesting as well: "The Suffering of the Virovitica Citizens during the Bolshevik and Partisan Reign of Terror – The Rape of Women – How the Brief Joy of Seduced Citizens Ended with Resentment".

Herzegovina, and in many cases the victims had no link to the NDH regime.<sup>25</sup> Some of them escaped and found refuge in places under the control of NDH authorities and armed forces. They, as well as numerous refugees from earlier periods of the war, told their stories of suffering. This close contact with the misery of refugees must have had a strong impact on those who lived under the control of NDH authorities. Therefore, they were more amenable to NDH propaganda messages and some remained determined to support and even fight for the Ustasha regime. Some of those civilians and common soldiers, impressed by the stories created by NDH propaganda, decided to follow Pavelić and his regime into exile.

As noted above, Tito's partisans were portrayed as part of a 'Bolshevik horde' whose intention was to conquer Europe. In contrast, the NDH alliance with Germany was portrayed as a Croatian struggle for a 'New Europe' and the survival of small nations. Therefore, NDH propaganda sought to show what would happen to Croatia and Croats if the Soviet Union and its Yugoslav allies won the war. Numerous articles analyzed the situation in countries already 'betrayed and handed over to Bolsheviks'. They were portrayed as small nations, whose future under 'Bolshevik slavery' would be uncertain and miserable. Stories about the bestiality of Soviet soldiers in Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and other Eastern European countries were numerous and were frequently equated with crimes committed by Tito's partisans. Both Soviets and partisans were charged with attempting to annihilate all patriotic elements in these small nations, Croatia among them. There were two groups of 'Bolshevik' victims in these countries, just as there were in Croatia. The first group was composed of anti-Communist and nationalist elements, usually former German allies and collaborators. But there were also many 'naïve' and 'corrupted' members of leading elites, the ones who handed their countries over to the 'Bolsheviks'. According to NDH propaganda, they naively hoped that they could save their countries by reaching an agreement with Soviets and that they would be able to retain their privileged positions within society. Of course, the 'Bolsheviks' ended up turning against them and subjecting the whole of the 'betrayed' countries to their communist dictatorship. In January and February 1945, *Hrvatski narod* published a series of articles on all of the former German allies that had 'betrayed' the Axis and surrendered in the fall of 1944.<sup>26</sup> NDH propagandists paid special attention to the Polish case. During the entire war, NDH propaganda presented the mar-

<sup>25</sup> As noted above, some were members of HSS.

<sup>26</sup> *Hrvatski narod* and other newspapers published articles on Bulgaria, Romania and Finland. For example, in January 1945, *Hrvatski narod* ran a series of articles entitled "Boljševici u Finskoj" [Bolsheviks in Finland]. Conditions in Italy were also presented in a series of articles published in *Hrvatski narod* in January 1945 under the common title "Sjaj i bieda Bonomieve Italije" [The Glance and Misery of Bonomi's Italy]. The major part of Italy was then in the hands of Western Allies. Still, NDH media attempted to convince the Croatian public that Italians were suffering from poverty and miserable living conditions.

tyrdom of the Polish nation. Poles were taken as an example of a state and a nation opposed to Germany and the Axis from the beginning of the war that was then 'betrayed' by the West.<sup>27</sup> The intention was to reveal how the alliance of an East European country with the West could only harm the interests of small nations. Those who shaped NDH propaganda clearly hoped that a majority of the people would agree that only by supporting Germany could Europe could remain 'free'. They persisted in this effort until the very end.<sup>28</sup>

Only the collapse of NDH in May 1945 silenced its propagandists. NDH leadership, including Pavelić and his family, along with hundreds of thousands of soldiers and civilians, attempted to leave Croatia and surrender to the Western Allies. Pavelić and many of his associates were well aware that the new communist authorities would punish them for their roles during the war. But while many in the Ustasha hierarchy escaped, others were less fortunate. Thousands of common soldiers and civilians perished after May 1945. It is reasonable to assume that at least some of them accepted the stories created and disseminated by NDH propaganda as true, and therefore decided to leave their homes. I hope that future researchers will find the answers to these and other questions related to the nature and consequences of NDH propaganda.

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<sup>27</sup> Numerous articles about the fate and miserable future of Poland were published in *Hrvatski narod* from January to May 1945.

<sup>28</sup> In fact, the content of the final issues of Zagreb's daily newspapers *Hrvatski narod* and *Nova Hrvatska* (May 6, 1945) was completely different from everything that had been published during the period from April 1941 to May 5, 1945. For the first and last time, democracy and the Western Allies were given a positive treatment. On the other hand, the foundation and existence of NDH was also described in some articles as an act of democracy. The most important article published on May 6, 1945 was the one by the general director for propaganda, Ivo Bogdan, entitled "Na kraju Drugoga svjetskog rat" [At the End of the Second World War]. This article appeared in both *Hrvatski narod* (pp. 1–2) and *Nova Hrvatska* (p. 3). In it, the Ustasha movement was presented as the true representative of the Croatian people in the democratic sense of the word.

The Soviet Union and Tito's Yugoslavia continued to be portrayed as enemies, that is as a menace to the existence of Croatia and other small European nations. The main difference was that the Western Allies replaced the Third Reich as the external force that would protect small nations from Bolshevism and extinction.

## Povzetek

### *Iluzije o "dokončni zmagi" in "usodi malih evropskih narodov" – mediji in propaganda v Neodvisni državi Hrvaški v letu 1945*

Prispevek obravnava medije in propagando v Neodvisni državi Hrvaški (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* – NDH) v letu 1945. Sistem medijev in propagande je bil v NDH vzpostavljen v letu 1941, in sicer je sledil osnovnim organizacijskim vzorcem propagandnega sistema v Tretjem rajhu. Na splošno so bili elementi propagande podobni tistim v drugih silah Osi. Propagandisti v NDH so se zavzemali za "Nov evropski red", za zmago Osi nad "boljševizmom". Prav tako pomembni so bili tudi elementi anti-semitizma in zavračanje zahodnih zaveznikov. Propaganda pa je vsebovala tudi nekaj specifičnih elementov. V letih 1941 in 1942 je prevladovala predvsem sovražnost do nekdanje Jugoslavije, jugoslovanske ideje in Srbov. Pomembna značilnost pa je, da je bila od vsega začetka skrb za usodo malih evropskih narodov eno najpomembnejših vprašanj. Leta 1943 je nemška vojska na vseh frontah začela s postopnim umikom. Že do začetka leta 1944 je bilo jasno, da bodo zavezniki dobili vojno. Propaganda sil Osi je izražala zaskrbljenost nad izidom vojne. Propaganda NDH pa je govorila predvsem o strahu pred prevlado "barbarskega boljševizma" v Evropi, ki naj bi male evropske narode pripeljal na rob izumrtja. Masaker v gozdu pri kraju Katyn se je prikazoval kot primer grozot, ko bi za male evropske narode lahko postale realnost. Rešitev, ki so jo predlagali, je bila enostavna – zmaga Tretjega rajha bi "rešila" tako Evropo kot evropsko kulturo. V nasprotju z precej slabimi rezultati na bojiščih je propaganda NDH še naprej pridigala o zmagi "nove Evrope", pri promoviranju svojih idej je postala še celo bolj zagnana. Še do konca maja 1945 so si prizadevali prikriti informacije o neizogibnem porazu sil Osi. Izmišljene zgodbe o "novem nemškem orožju" in "hrabrosti evropskih borcev proti boljševizmu" so bile namenjene tistim, ki so še ostali zvesti NDH in ki naj bi nadaljevali boj proti boljševizmu. Titovi partizani so predstavljali nevarnost za obstoj hrvaškega naroda in so veljali za Stalinove marionete. Zmaga zaveznikov pa se je enačila z izumrtjem Hrvatov in njihovo podreditvijo "barbarskemu boljševizmu". Združene države in Velika Britanija so bile obtožene "izdaje Evrope", saj naj bi pristale na predajo celotne Vzhodne Evrope Sovjetski zvezi in boljševikom. Te obtožbe v letu 1945 vendarle niso bile tako dokončne in pojavilo se je upanje, da bi zahodne države lahko preprečile "širjenje boljševizma". Propaganda NDH pa se je kljub temu osredotočala na t. i. "križev pot" tistih malih narodov, ki so že bili "izdani in predani Boljševikom". Krožile so zgodbe o domnevni zverinskosti sovjetskih vojakov v Romuniji, Bolgariji, na Madžarskem in v drugih srednje evropskih državah. Enačili so jih z nekaterimi zločini Titovih partizanov. Tako Sovjetsko zvezo kot partizane so obtoževali poskusa zadušitve patriotskih elementov pri teh narodih in na Hrvaškem.