

Jasenovac – Holocaust promoted by Vatican

Пише: Ari Rusila
среда, 03 фебруар 2010 11:50

(Europe's World, 1/27/2010)



Jasenovac was third biggest extermination camp during WWII and probably the cruelest. The brutality may be explained with its more religious aspect than others. Vatican played important role during events involving afterwards money laundry and covering up war criminals.

The UN General Assembly chose January 27 as the official day for the commemoration, as it was on this day in 1945 that Soviet troops liberated the Auschwitz extermination camp, the last such camp still functioning. Throughout Europe, tributes will be paid to the 53 million people who died during World War II, of whom 31 million were civilians. Commemoration has linked usually also to International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Auschwitz-Birkenau was the largest extermination center created by the Nazis. It has become the symbol of the Holocaust and of willful radical evil in our time. Few people know that 3rd biggest extermination center was Jasenovac. Two reasons maybe explain this: 1st it is located in Croatia and 2nd the main part of victims were Serbs. The death tolls in extermination centres vary but rough estimations are following (source Wikipedia):

Auschwitz II 1,400,000

Belzeg 600,000

Chelmno 320,000

Jasenovac 600,000

Majdanek 360,000

Maly Trostinets 65,000

Sobibor 250,000

Treblinka 870,000

Background

Upon the occupation of Yugoslavia, the German Nazis and the Italian Fascists formed an "independent" state in Croatia, which was basically a Nazi puppet state. Immediately upon the establishment of its puppet government, the Ustashe set up militias and gangs that slaughtered Serbs, Jews, Romas and their political foes. Catholic priests, some of them Franciscans, also participated in the acts of slaughter. The cruelty of the Ustashe was so great that even the commander of the German army in Yugoslavia complained. The partisans, led by the Croat Communist Josip Broz Tito, and the Chetniks - Nationalist Serb royalists - fought the Ustashe.

Under the leadership of the Ustasha leader Ante Pavelic's right-hand man Andrija Artukovic, who earned the nickname "the Himmler of the Balkans," the Ustashe set up concentration camps, most notably at Jasenovac. According to various estimates, about 100,000 people were murdered at the camp, among them tens of thousands of Jews (it is interesting to note that some of the heads of the Ustashe were married to Jewish women). Throughout Croatia about 700,000 people were murdered.

Jasenovac

Located in Croatia 62 miles south of Zagreb, Jasenovac was Croatia's largest concentration and extermination camp. Jasenovac, was a network of several sub-camps, established in August 1941 and dissolved in April 1945. Jasenovac was not the only place where Serbia's neighbour Croatia ran several concentration camps where Jews, Serbs and Roma have been murdered. Bosnian Muslims and Kosovo Albanians were allies of Hitler as well. (More about Jasenevac in my document library under headline Croatia)

In April 1945 the partisan army approached the camp. In an attempt to erase traces of the atrocities, the Ustaša blew up all the installations, killed most of the internees and tried to hide all evidence about brutalities in Jasenovac, all material evidence disappeared as if there had not been any camp in that place. Later – during Tito's time – the state and the authorities tried to implement "Brotherhood and Unity" motto, with the aim of creating tolerance between the nations and the crime had to be forgotten as soon as possible.

Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, edited by Yisrael Gutman, vol. 1, 1995, pp. 739-740 gives following description about problems to find exact numbers:

"It is difficult to establish the number of victims killed in the Jasenovac concentration camp, since many documents were destroyed. The prisoners' files were destroyed twice (at the beginning of 1943 and in April, 1945) and even if they had been preserved, they would have been of little help discerning the truth, because the Ustasha often killed the newly arrived prisoners immediately, without putting their names into the files. This is particularly true of those who arrived from Slavonia, Srem and Kozara, because it was only noted down that 9,830, or 155 wagons had arrived. For instance, a very small number of Gypsies was filed, only a few hundred, while it is known that all 25,000-35,000 of them from the NDH were killed in Jasenovac. The Jewish community in Yugoslavia has established the number of 20,000 Jews that were killed in Jasenovac. The numbers of killed Serbs are truly varied. The sources from abroad mention numbers from 300,000 to 700,000. Be that as it may, most of the people killed in Jasenovac were Serbs. Exact number being still unknown, but it surely amounts to several hundreds of thousands. The National Committee of Croatia for the investigation of the crimes of the occupation forces and their collaborators stated in its report of November 15, 1945 that 500,000-600,000 people were killed at Jasenovac."

The Yad Vashem center claims that over 500,000 Serbs were killed in the NDH (now Croatia), including those who were killed at Jasenovac, where approximately 600,000 victims of all ethnicities were killed. [\[1\]](#)

Religious aspect

While for Nazi-Germany Jasenovac was more a tool for ethnic cleansing for Ustashe religious aspect played crucial role. The aim and its implementation efficiency is described differently by people who actually were in Balkans during that period. Ustashe leaders declared they would slaughter a third of the Serb population in Croatia, deport a third and convert the remaining third from Orthodoxy to Roman Catholicism. Anyone who refused to convert was murdered.

One may claim that the religious motivation and the brutality of butchers were leading principles in Jasenovac. The fact that 743 Roman Catholic priests were members of the Ustashi and personally murdered Serbs, Jews and Gypsies. Jasenovac was for a time, run by Fr. Filipovic-Majstorovic, a Catholic priest who admitted to killing “40,000 Serbs with his own hands.” So at one point, a Franciscan monk was camp commandant of what the second largest concentration camp of the war.

The Jasenovac system of Croatian camps also included a camp for children run by Catholic nuns who used toxic soda to save bullets.

Roman Catholic priests who participated in the killing of tens of thousands of Serbs, Jews and Gypsies and the running of Jasenovac escaped Europe through the “Vatican Ratline” run by Fr. Draganovich, a Croatian Catholic priest who helped morons like Clause Barbe escape from Europe. Those Catholic priests escaped to Argentina where they also escaped justice.

Vatican connection

In 1999 a class action law suit was filed at a court in San Francisco against the Vatican Bank (Institute for Religious Works) and against the Franciscan order, the Croatian Liberation Movement (the Ustashe), the National Bank of Switzerland and others to recover \$100 million in damages for the Vatican’s participation in these war crimes and money laundering the proceeds from their Serb, Jewish and Roma victims. The suit was filed by Jewish, Ukrainian, Serb and

Roma survivors, as well as relatives of victims and various organizations that together represent 300,000 World War II victims. The plaintiffs demanded accounting and restitution.

Franciscans in Rome helped smuggle the Ustasha Treasury and assisted Ustasha war criminals in escaping justice. The Vatican Bank is alleged to have laundered a portion of the Ustasha Treasury. The Vatican not only hoarded the gold the Croats looted, it also helped them escape - with a nod and wink from the OSS and MI6. In 1986 for example, the US government released documents that revealed the Vatican had organised the Ustasha leader Ante Pavelic's safe-flight from Europe to Argentina, along with 200 senior officials of his regime. Pavelic was given refuge by the Vatican, fascist Spain, and Peronist Argentine. The Ustasha Minister of the Interior, Artukovic, lived openly in California from 1949-1986 when he was finally deported to Yugoslavia and convicted of murder. Thousands of Ustasha escaped justice for their crimes due to their wealth and influence and the backing of the Roman Catholic Church and who along with certain rogue elements in the US and UK governments portrayed these war criminals as anticommunist freedom fighters.

As the war ended, it is now known that the Vatican Bank and other world banks helped to launder and transfer funds out of the Reich, and helped many war criminals to escape justice in what is now nicknamed the "Vatican Ratline"

The Vatican Bank has claimed ignorance of any participation in Ustasha crimes or the disappearance of the Croatian Treasury. The Vatican has refused to open its wartime records despite requests from the US government, Jewish and Roma organizations. [\[2\]](#)

A class action law suit against the Vatican Bank to recover \$100 million in damages for the Vatican's participation in these war crimes and money laundering the proceeds from their Serb, Jewish and Roma victims is still ongoing. Vatican lawyers have three times tried to get this case thrown out of court. The Supreme court has rejected their claims.

In US District Court the case against the Vatican Bank (but not the Franciscan Order) was dismissed on grounds the Vatican Bank is an organ of a sovereign entity, the Vatican, which is immune from lawsuits. The just filed appeal however argues that the Vatican Bank is not sovereign and engages in commercial activity in the United States and therefore should be held accountable in a United States Federal Court.

Memory today

On Summer 2008 Israel's ambassador to Croatia, Shmuel Meirom, harshly criticized the funeral given to a head of a WWII Jasenovac concentration camp in Zagreb, saying also that it insulted the memory of those killed in the camp run by Croatia's Nazi-allied Ustasha regime. "I'm convinced that the majority of the Croatian people are shocked by the way the funeral of the Jasenovac commander and murderer, dressed in an Ustasha uniform, was conducted," ambassador Meirom said in a written statement. "At the same time, I strongly condemn the inappropriate words of the priest who served at the funeral and said that Sakic was a model for all Croats" Meirom said. [3]

Yearly commemoration is important remainder for fair picture of history. At least one day per year is good to think what ultra nationalism can be at its worst level, what kind of interests, power game, attitudes and hidden motivations are creating possibilities for murdering civil populations or ethnic groups.

Ari Rusila is a development project management expert and freelancer from Finland with a special interest in the Balkan region.

http://www.europesworld.org/NewEnglish/Home_old/PartnerPosts/tabid/671/PostID/1087/Default.aspx

[1] A documentary film "Jasenovac - the cruellest death camp of all times" can be found here:
<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=4506666011464565164&pr=goog-sl#>

[2] My main source about Vatican connection has been <http://www.vaticanbankclaims.com/>

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[\[3\]](#) More about this in my article “Nazi’s Funeral shadows Croatia’s past”