

**SLOVENE-ITALIAN RELATIONS
1880-1956**

**REPORT OF THE SLOVENE-ITALIAN HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL
COMMISSION**

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Period from 1880 to 1918

1. Slovene-Italian relations in the Adriatic region have their origins in the period of crisis which followed the collapse of the Roman Empire, when, on the one hand the Italian identity developed from the Roman foundations, while, on the other, the territory was settled by the Slovene population. Following several hundred years of neighbourhood and co-existence we are dealing here with a period which began around 1880, marked by conflict relations and the Slovene-Italian national dispute. The conflict developed in the state and political framework of the Habsburg Monarchy. **Several areas of the Austrian littoral were gradually annexed to the Habsburg Monarchy between the second half of 14th century and the year 1797.** In the second half of 19th century, the multinational Habsburg Monarchy was not able to give life to a political system whose state structure would completely reflect its multinational society. Therefore it was tormented by the national issue which the Monarchy could not resolve. The Slovene-Italian conflict is a part of the Habsburg national issue, which was affected by the processes of modernisation and economic changes which permeated all Central Europe as well as the area along the Adriatic.

Slovene-Italian relations are marked - following the pattern which also appeared in the then Habsburg society in other cases - by the dispute between Italians, who advocated the preservation of the politico-national and socio-economic state of possession (*Besitzstand*), and Slovenes, who endeavoured to change the existing situation. The issue became even more complex due to the cultural and emotional, albeit not always political response among the Italian population in Austria, encouraged by the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy, and perhaps even more by the inclusion of the neighbouring territories of Veneto and Friuli into its state framework. While Italians looked beyond the borders of the Monarchy, Slovenes tried to break the political and administrative borders, since they were divided among several *Länder* (apart from three *Länder* of the Austrian Littoral region, there were also the Kranjska-Carniola, the Koroška-Carinthia and the Štajerska-Styria, since this hindered their mutual relations and politico-national cooperation. The annexation of the Veneto to the Kingdom of Italy also raised a question which directly concerns Slovene-Italian relations. In 1866 the Valleys of Natisone, Torre and Resia (Venetian Slovenia) became part of the Italian state. The policy conducted by Italy in that part towards the Slovene population directly reflected the difference between the old provincial state of the Venetian Republic and the new national state. Since the Kingdom of Italy strove to achieve uniform conditions all over the state, it resorted to suppressing the linguistic particularities, and took no account of the loyalty of the population for whom the measures were intended.

2. Around 1880, Slovenes had quite solid foundations of political and economic life in those Austrian administrative units in which they lived. In the Austrian littoral, the political movement of the Slovenes of Trieste, Gorizia and Istria was a part of the political movement of Slovenes in general.

The assimilation of the Slovene (and Croatian) population which moved to city centres, to Trieste/Trst in particular, therefore diminished and subsequently ceased almost completely. Greater political and national awareness and economic strength created a phenomenon which upset elite circles of the Italian population and forced them into the frequently narrow-minded national-defence policy typical of this

environment until 1915 and contributed to the straining of relations between the two national communities, also due to the opposing Slovene-Italian tendencies to delimit national territories.

3. In all three parts of the Austrian littoral (Trieste, the Gorizia and Gradisca county, Istria) Slovenes and Italians were living side by side. In the County of Gorizia-Gradisca the national delimitation was the most clear along the dividing line running in the direction north-south. Gorizia was the only ethnically mixed town, in which the number of Slovenes grew to such an extent that prior to World War I, the Slovene politicians believed that Slovenes would soon be the majority population in this town by the Isonzo river. In Trieste the majority population was Italian while in the surroundings the Slovene population prevailed. In this case the size of the Slovene population also increased. Slovenes lived in northern parts of Istria, mostly in the surroundings of coastal towns in which Italians prevailed. In the entire Iстриan peninsula the national and political movement of Slovenes merged with the Croatian one, which sometimes hindered separate discussion of both south Slav components of the peninsula. The characteristic feature of Italian and Slovene settlements on the Austrian littoral consisted in Slovenes forming mostly the rural population, and Italians mostly the urban population. This phenomenon is not to be considered as absolute. One should not forget the Italian rural areas in Istria and the County of Gorizia-Gradisca, the so-called East Friuli, as well as the Slovene population in the towns of Trieste and Gorizia which grew in number as already mentioned.

Although a too strongly marked distinction between the urban and the rural reality should be avoided, the relation between the city and the country was in fact one of the basic focal points of political struggle on the Littoral (the Primorska); it introduced a mixture of national and social elements to the Slovene-Italian conflict, thus impeding its settlement. The focal point of the relation between the town and the country was at the same time the centre of the ongoing political and historiographic debate on the real national image of the Littoral. The Slovene side considered that the town belonged to the country, since rural areas should preserve their intact original identity of the given environment, free from cultural and social processes, and since the national image of towns was considered to have been a consequence of assimilation processes which impoverished the Slovene nation. Slovenes suffered the loss of national identity in the process of assimilation after several decades of still painful and dramatic experience which should not be repeated. The Italian side rejected this by referring to the principle of national affiliation as the consequence of a free cultural and moral choice, and not of an ethnic-linguistic origin.

According to the Italian interpretation of the relation between the town and the country, the cultural and civilian tradition of towns should create the image and the character of the surrounding territory. Such a different formulation later stirred up the conflict about the concept of an ethnic border and about the significance of statistics on the nationality of the population in border areas, which - according to Slovenes - were presumably distorted by the presence of mainly Italian urban centres.

4. Although there are some common characteristics of the national issue in the Habsburg Monarchy, the conflicting relations in certain areas and consequently also on the Littoral differ in their specific features. The Italian side also attributed the rapid development of the Slovene political and economic movement, as well as demographic growth of Slovenes in towns, to the activity of the Austrian state authorities which allegedly provided political support to the Slovene population (they

considered it more loyal than the Italian one, as witnessed by the statements of the Austrian authorities) to make a stand against the Italian autonomy and nationalism.

Since it was considered that the level of Slovene development was artificially achieved, the natural relation - linking urban centres to the country - was not taken into consideration; this applies particularly to the relation between Trieste, the prospering metropolis in full swing, and its surroundings. Such a relation corresponds to economic rules and not to political plans as already then stressed by Angelo Vivante and Scipio Slataper.

The Italian nationalist and liberal circles often reproached the Catholic Church and the government authorities for treating Slovenes more favourably, thereby referring to the active involvement of the clergy in the Slovene political movement.

In the politico-administrative field, the burning national issue prevented or impeded the agreed harmonisation of institutions and linguistic relations with the constitutional principles and liberal ideas. The modifications of the local election legislation maintained the principle of census: in such a manner that the composition of provincial and city councils did not reflect the real numerical proportion between the two nations (for example in Gorizia-Gradisca, Italians prevailed in the provincial council, although Slovenes constituted two thirds of population in the area). The evolution of the language and education was impeded by the regional authorities in areas with an Italian majority, since they prevented consistent equality of the two languages spoken on the Littoral, two in the Gorizia and Gradisca county and Trieste, and three in Istria.

5. In the decades prior to World War I, Slovenes and Italians did not establish political links. The only exception was the Assembly of the County of Gorizia-Gradisca in which unusual alliances were formed between Slovene Catholics and Italian Liberals. Such links at times encouraged alliances between Slovene Liberals and Italian Catholics in the Assembly. The latter had power in the County of Gorizia-Gradisca particularly in the Friuli countryside where the Friuli People's Party was active and whose leaders were later accused of Austrianism. An attempt to establish Slovene-Italian Catholic associations in the beginning of the seventies failed; nor did the subsequent Christian-social movement in both nations encourage such links. It is evident that the reference to national affiliation prevailed over ideological reasons. This tendency was even more evident in Istria where the Italian People's Party was closer to nationalist positions and where the political life was permeated with contradictions between the Italian block – which tried to maintain power of Italians in political institutions and in the educational system – and the Slovene-Croatian block, which tried to change the existing situation. On the Littoral the Liberal and the Catholic block had in their midst their own “national” parties opposing each other. Instead, solid links were established within the socialist movement which was oriented towards internationalism, although it was organised on the basis of national principles at the 1897 Vienna Congress. According to the implementation of this principle the assimilation of the Slovene workers was restrained. It is evident that there were frictions between the socialists of both nations. The difference of views was manifested at the end of World War I, both in the course of discussions as to which country Trieste should belong, and in debates on its national identity.

The Croatian idea on common resistance to the alleged germanisation of the Habsburg Monarchy could have given life to the “Adriatic Pact” among the nations living by the Adriatic, but according to Slovenes, it would attribute to Italians extensive areas of influence which would harm the Slovene interests.

6. The lack of Slovene-Italian dialogue and cooperation prior to the outbreak of World War I profoundly influenced the atmosphere in Trieste and, to a lesser extent, in Istria and Gorizia-Gradiška. Slovenes and Italians were overwhelmed by the feelings of their own national identities and were not able to develop a feeling of common affiliation to the environment in which both national communities had roots. Slovenes pursued the idea of Trieste as a centre of Slovene economic growth; they underlined its central role in the development, and although the Slovene population in Trieste was in the minority, there were more Slovene inhabitants in Trieste than in Ljubljana due to the different demographic composition of the two towns.

The demographic expansion they experienced led them to believe that Slovenes in Gorizia would soon prevail in number. In the long-term, a similar result was expected also for Trieste. The majority of the Italian population resorted to the policy of intransigent national defence striving to preserve the unchanged Italian image of the town. While Slovenes were attached to the immediate hinterland, Italians were attached to the inner hinterland of the Monarchy, and also to the Kingdom of Italy.

Ruggero Timeus developed extreme and radical nationalism in the Italian block, which remained in the minority and based its ideas on the cultural and national mission of the city and on the imperative of economic expansion of the Italianism to the Adriatic. The most representative political force of Italians in Trieste was the Liberal-National Party, in which the minor part was connected to the idea of "Mazzinianism", while the majority considered that the direct role of irredentism was the defence of the Italian identity of the town and its institutions.

In this tense and charged atmosphere, there began to emerge the ideas of people who belonged to the world of culture and were active in the same field as the contributors to the magazine *La Favilla* from the period of 1848. This was the group gathering around the Florentine magazine *La Voce*, which published initiatives for coexistence between nations and wished to recognise the pluriethnic reality of Trieste and its surroundings. Some young people from Trieste collaborated with this magazine, among others Scipio Slataper and the brothers Carlo and Giani Stuparich. In opposition to political irredentism they defined their position as cultural irredentism, and intended to develop Italian culture through dialogue and cooperation with South Slavic and German cultures. Trieste should, according to their view, become a place in which different peoples and civilisations would meet; until 1914 their political opinions were similar to the opinions of the Trieste socialists. Indeed, the most mature result of socialist thinking was published in the magazine *La Voce* - the book by Vivante on Adriatic irredentism.

There was no proper response from the Slovene side, and no reaction to Vivante's book was noted. Slovenes were still deeply involved in searching for their own identity, therefore they were not able to decide on searching for other identities. Rare were those who were able to overcome nationalist barriers, as for example some judgements on the issue of the establishment of the Trieste university. The tensions were too acute, and the South-Slavic solution of the basic problems which stirred the Austrian Monarchy at the outbreak of World War I seemed closer and more accessible to Slovenes.

7. With the outbreak of World War I, the programme of irredentism became a constituent part of the Italian national policy programme, although the conviction prevailed (at least until spring 1918) that the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy –

considerably reduced in terms of its territory – would survive the war despite everything. Even before Italy entered into war, the Italian diplomat Carlo Galli, on the assignment of his Government, met with Slovene representatives during his mission in Trieste. For the Slovene leadership these were the first official contacts with a foreign state. But already by signing the London Pact (1915) the Italian Government had adopted the programme of expansionism which, apart from the national principle, also considered geographic and strategic reasons. The general loyalty of Slovenes to the Austrian State drew from the publishing of the first news on the imperialistic aspect of the London Pact and from the solutions contained in the Pact with respect to the eastern border of the Kingdom of Italy, as well as due to the attitude of the Italian military authorities in the first occupied zones. The defeat of Italians at Kobarid brought about a switch in relation to Slovenes, since it gave place to the policy of dialogue between the nations under the Austro-Hungarian yoke, which culminated at the Rome Congress in 1918 and in the agreement with the Yugoslav Committee. While loyalty to the Habsburg Monarchy seemed increasingly contradictory to the processes of the internal disintegration of the Austrian State, the right to self-determination and the idea about South Slavic solidarity started to spread. During the final stages of war and after it, the contrast between the Slovene and Yugoslav thesis on the “ethnic” border and the Italian thesis advocating a geographic and strategic border became perfectly clear. The first one was based on the conception that the towns belonged to the countryside, and that the “ethnic” border substantially coincided with the Italian-Austrian border from 1866. The Italian thesis prevailed in the peninsula thanks to the most radical flows of the politico-psychological need to offer to the public opinion the tangible signs of territorial gains in order to ensure for the towns and for the Istrian coast, which were mostly Italian, a safe border as a compensation for the enormous sacrifices of war.

Period from 1918 to 1941

1. Italy, the winner of World War I, had thus concluded the process of national unification and, in addition to Slovenes in towns and smaller centres with an Italian majority, simultaneously also encompassed within its borders entirely Slovene areas, even those situated outside the borders of the former Austrian littoral and which had not been covered by the concept of the Italian Venezia Giulia formulated over the last decades. Among different nations living in the occupied and subsequently annexed territory, this fact gave rise to controversial reactions: Italians accepted the new situation with enthusiasm; Slovenes, however, who were striving to achieve national unification and who opted for the newly emerging Yugoslav state at the end of the war, suffered a severe trauma upon inclusion into the Italian state. The new frontier in the northern Adriatic, fixed by the London Pact of 1915 and largely confirmed by the Treaty of Rapallo (1920), running along the watershed between the Black and the Adriatic Sea, tore away from their country of origin one fourth of the national body (327,230 people according to the Austrian census of 1910, 271,305 people according to the Italian census of 1921, 290,000 people according to the estimates of Carlo Schiffrer), but the larger number of Slovenes in Italy did not affect the status of the Venetian Slovenes (about 34,000 according to the 1921 census), who had already

been living under Italy, and who were treated by the authorities as a completely Italianised group, and were therefore recognised no rights as a nation whatsoever.

2. The Italian administration, first military and then civil, did not cope with sensitive national and political issues of the occupied territory in which the Slavic population was firmly anchored; in vast areas it even formed the majority population and it strove for unification with “the country of origin” (for Slovenes and Croatians of Venezia Giulia this was the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes), and, in addition this community was formed culturally and politically in the Habsburg multinational state. The lack of preparation of the Italian authorities and the recent war experience, according to which Italians regarded Slavs as a hateful vanguard of the Austrian oppression, provoked extremely contradictory conduct on the part of the authorities. On the one hand, the occupation authorities wreaked their anger upon Slovenes who opted for annexation to Yugoslavia even prior to the determination of the Yugoslav-Italian frontier in the years 1918-1920, partly also because they were incited by local nationalists. The authorities adopted numerous restrictive measures – dissolved municipal administration and national councils, limited freedom of association, sent people to court-martials, imprisoned prisoners of war, sent intellectuals to internment camps and expelled them, thus undermining the recovery of cultural and political life of the Slovene community. At the same time the occupation authorities also supported manifestations of Italianism in order to prove to the negotiators who were to define the new frontier that the country was Italian.

On the other hand, Italian liberal governments – although within the general plan of the Italianisation of the annexed territory – were generous in making promises to the Slovene minority and allowed for the restoration of its national representative organisations, revival of education in Slovene and the activities of organisations which were urgently needed by the Slovene national community for its development. The plan of the preservation of partial autonomy, following the example of that enjoyed by the annexed territory during the Austrian rule - which was supported by political representatives of Venezia Giulia and Trento and respected by pre-fascist governments - could contribute to better relations between the minority population and the state. In addition, the Italian Parliament voted in favour of the protection policy towards the Slovene minority.

3. The insistence of the Italian and Yugoslav delegations on the original positions concerning the defining of the new border at the Paris Conference postponed political stabilisation in the territory under the Italian occupation regime and aggravated national conflicts. Although the myth about the “mutilated victory” and D’Annunzio’s march to Rijeka did not directly concern the territory populated with Slovenes, the feelings were nevertheless running high and soon enabled “frontier Fascism” to break through to power; it proclaimed itself as an ensign of the Italian interests along the eastern border and, assuming an anti-Slavic attitude combined with antibolshevism, united a large part of local Italian forces. Many Slovenes joined the socialist movement because of their faith in its principles of social justice and national equality, turning it, by their presence, in a revolutionary direction: for this reason the fascists forged the notion of “Slavo-communists” and further stirred up the feelings of extreme nationalism. The burning down of the Narodni dom (National Centre), the seat of Slovene organisations in Trieste in July 1920 - under the pretext of a retaliatory measure on account of the riots in Split, claiming victims among the Italian and Slavic population – was just the first

harbinger of long-lasting violence: the crisis of a liberal state – instigated fascist persecution in Venezia Giulia and elsewhere in Italy, in which the state apparatus was even more deeply and openly involved than anywhere else in Italy due to deeply-rooted anti-Slavic hatred. The so-called “new provinces” came into existence in a period of fierce controversies involving the national principle, state interest and the policy of power which in their foundations undermined the possibility of co-existence between the different national communities.

4. The Treaty signed by the Kingdom of Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in November 1920 in Rapallo completely satisfied the Italian requirements and tore off more than a quarter of the territory which Slovenes considered to be their ethnic territory. Italy achieved this because it had a more favourable position in the negotiations since it emerged from the war as a victor with the confirmed status of a “great power”. The Treaty did not bind Italy to respect the Slovene and Croatian minority, but ensured full protection to the Italian minority in Dalmatia; despite that, several thousands of Italians moved to the Kingdom of Italy from that area.

The subsequent Yugoslav-Italian agreements of 1924 and 1937, by which Yugoslavia wished to improve the relations with its powerful neighbour, did not contain any provisions on the protection of minorities. The Treaty of Rapallo should, according to the plan of the Italian and Yugoslav negotiators, have paved the way for mutual friendship and cooperation between the two states. This however was not the case since the fascist foreign policy soon followed the way of Adriatic hegemony and revision of the post-war order, taking increasingly an anti-Yugoslav course. This direction received support by the capitalist circles, not only those from Trieste, but also from the entire region, striving for a breakthrough to the Balkans and the Danube Basin. It was also approved by a great part of the Italian population of Venezia Giulia. Plans were made to destroy the Yugoslav state; these were only temporarily suspended by the agreement between Ciano and Stojadinović in 1937, which for a short time announced Yugoslavia’s entry in the area under Italian influence. The outbreak of the world war unveiled these plans as an accurate aggressor’s project.

5. Despite the difficult situation in Venezia Giulia, Slovene and Croatian representatives, particularly deputies in Parliament, also opted for the policy of loyalty to the Italian state after the appearance of Fascism; *inter alia*, they did not join the legal Aventine opposition which in 1924, out of protest against the murder of Matteotti, withdrew from Parliament. Despite that, they were not successful in the struggle in Parliament for the protection of national rights of Slovenes and Croats, undertaken together with deputies of the German minority in Alto Adige; on the contrary, Fascism undertook the policy of assimilation of all national minorities also by adopting legislative measures. All Slovene and Croatian national institutions which had been revived following World War I, were banned one after the other. All schools were italianised, teachers were mainly retired, transferred to the central part of the state, or were dismissed and forced to emigrate. Slovenes had limited access to employment in public service, several hundreds of cultural, sports, youth, social, and professional associations as well as dozens of business co-operatives and financial institutions, national centres, libraries, etc. were closed down. Political parties and periodicals were prohibited, any representation of national minorities was abolished and the use of the language in public was prohibited. The Slovene and Croatian minorities ceased to exist as political entities. Their representatives continued their

endeavours in exile within the Congress of European Nations under the presidency of Josip Wilfan, thus assisting in the formulation of a general European political platform in the settlement of minority issues.

6. Assimilation pressure exerted by the fascists in the efforts to achieve an “ethnic improvement” of Venezia Giulia was not limited to political suppression. In addition to the italianisation of place names or mandatory use of the already existing Italian names, the italianisation of surnames and first names, the authorities encouraged the emigration of Slovenes, their assignment to the central part of the country and to colonies, and planned an internal agrarian colonisation of the Littoral by settling Italians there. Through economic measures they endeavoured to transform the structure of the Slovene community in its foundations in order to bring it into line with the stereotype of an uncultured and provincial Slav who, following the removal of higher classes, would fall an easy prey to assimilation into the “superior” Italian culture. These comprehensive plans were accompanied by the utmost brutal political persecution. It is true that the majority of European countries at that time paid almost no regard to the rights of ethnic minorities in their own territory, if they did not actually try to oppress them in one way or the other; despite that, the fascist policy of “ethnic improvement” was also unscrupulous because national intolerance, sometimes combined with real racism, was accompanied by totalitarian measures taken by the regime.

7. Fascist assimilation did not spare the Catholic Church either, since following the dispersion and expulsion of leaders and intellectuals, the clergy took the leading role in preserving national identity among Slovenes in accordance with its own tradition from the Habsburg era. Persecution directly affected the lower clergy since it was a constant target of attacks and police measures; the church hierarchy in Trieste and Gorizia was under severe pressure, since in the eyes of Italian nationalists higher clergy had in the past decades gained the reputation of being loyal to Austria and of having a favourable attitude towards the Slavic population. The principal turning-point on the path of subordination of the Church along the borders – which, thanks to Fascism, followed new relations between the state and the Church – were the removal of Archbishop Frančišek Borgia Sedej of Gorizia and of Trieste Archbishop Luigi Fogar. Their successors applied the instructions of the Vatican on “romanisation”, similarly as in other Italian provinces with communities speaking other languages, and elsewhere in Europe where similar phenomena existed. These instructions were aimed at preventing totalitarian and other national governments from being involved in church matters and at uniting the religious believers around Rome for a joint protection of catholic principles since, in the opinion of the Holy See, they were threatened by modern society.

Romanisation measures in Venezia Giulia in principle contained a ban on the use of the Slovene language in religious ceremonies and in religious instruction, but particularly in the country, clergy belonging to the Christian-social movement insisted on the use of Slovene although this was illegal. Such a situation caused great tensions among Slovene religious people and clergy on the one hand, and new archbishops on the other; the difficult situation was further aggravated because of the differences in understanding the role of the clergy, since Slovenes attributed to them the prime role in preserving national awareness and national identity, while episcopal dignitaries considered it to be a nationalistic aberration. Slovenes and Croatians

developed a belief that the Italian ecclesiastical hierarchy actually collaborated with the regime in assimilation activities, comprising all areas of life.

8. For the annexed territory, the twenties and the thirties were the time of economic crisis. The latter did not subside until the policy of autarchy was introduced. The overall problems of European economy were made worse by the negative effects of restructuring and fragmentation of the Danubian and Balkan Regions which was of vital importance for the Trieste economy. The substitute intervention of the Italian state could not control the unfavourable economic tendency resulting from the broken ties with the hinterland. Neither Italy nor the border economy were in a position to check this tendency. This proved the absurdity of the imperialistic theories of Italian nationalism about Trieste and Venezia Giulia being Italian bases for a breakthrough into Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Furthermore, the prospects for development were limited, and often the standard of living – in particular that of lower social classes to which Slovenes mostly belonged – was affected.

During the period between the world wars, the economic crisis and oppressive political atmosphere created a strong migration flow from Venezia Giulia. The sources do not allow an assessment of the Slovene role in this phenomenon which also included the Italian population; however, it was certainly considerable and, according to reliable estimates, included tens of thousands of people. According to the Yugoslav estimates, 105,000 Slovenes and Croats had emigrated. While in the overseas emigration it is difficult to distinguish between economic and political reasons, it is quite evident that there was a direct connection with fascist political and national persecution, especially in the emigration of younger people and intellectuals to Yugoslavia.

9. In Venezia Giulia, Fascism attempted to realise a programme of total destruction of the Slovene and Croatian national identity. The success of these endeavours was only moderate, not due to a lack of will, but to the fact that neither in this field nor in any other were there enough resources available; consequently, the totalitarianism of the fascist regime often lagged far behind its intentions. The assimilation policy had decimated the Slovene population in Trieste and Gorizia, the intellectuals and the middle-class representatives were scattered and the rural population turned into a working class. Nevertheless, the latter were united and stubbornly persisted on their own land.

The most lasting effect of the fascist policy was that it had instilled the idea into the minds of Slovenes that Italy stands for Fascism and, with rare exceptions (some Slovenes accepted Fascism), made them reject almost everything that seemed to be Italian. Slovenes in Yugoslavia, too, showed a hostile attitude towards Italy, although in the thirties, the idea of fascist corporatism seemed attractive to some Catholic political circles. Slovenes showed their interest in Italian literature in particular by translating and spreading works by Italian authors, whereas the interest of Italians in Slovene literature was very moderate, although there occurred some initiatives, in particular for translation. In personal and neighbourly relations and also in the fields of culture and the arts, in many a milieu, coexistence and cooperation between Slovenes and Italians continued. Thus, a solid foundation for the development of anti-fascist and democratic endeavours was formed. Nevertheless, in general, the disagreements between the two nationalities were aggravated, and in Venezia Giulia various forms of resistance against fascist oppression were formed. In

particular the Slovene youth, adherents of the nationalist movement, were gathered in the organisation TIGR (abbreviation for Trst-Trieste, Istra-Istria, Gorica-Gorizia, Rijeka) and – connected with Yugoslav, and, before the beginning of World War II, with English services – decided to respond to violence with violence. They resorted to demonstrative and terrorist methods, which provoked severe repression. In view of the merciless fascist repression, the Slovene illegal organisations, in cooperation with the organisations of the Littoral emigrants in Yugoslavia in the thirties, gave up the claim for cultural autonomy within the borders of the Italian state and endeavoured to achieve the secession from Italy of the territory which they considered to be Slovene or Croatian ethnic territory. For these rebellious activities, a Special Tribunal for the Protection of the State passed many prison sentences and fourteen death sentences, ten of which were executed.

10. Only gradually did the Communist Party of Italy realise that the Slovene irredentist movement was their ally; whereas before, it was for a long time considered to be part of the bourgeois camp. The shift in the positions of the Communist Party occurred in the thirties under the influence of the Comintern, which realised that the support of national revolutionary forces also had to be gained for the struggle against Nazism and Fascism to form movements of the people's front. Since 1926, the Communist Party of Italy had acknowledged to the Slovenes and the Croats living within the borders of Italy the right to self-determination and secession from the Italian state. Nevertheless, it insisted on the principle that the right to self-determination had to apply to Italians as well. In 1934, in a special declaration on the settlement of the Slovene national issue, the Communist Party of Italy – together with the Communist Parties of Yugoslavia and Austria – committed itself to fight for uniting the Slovene nation within a state of its own.

Obviously, this decision was interpreted controversially, in particular during World War II, when the Slovene national liberation movement found itself in the position to be able to realise the programme of national unification. The Action Pact, signed in 1936 by the Communist Party of Italy and the National Revolutionary Movement of Slovenes and Croats (TIGR), led to the formation of a wide-spread anti-fascist front. While the liberal and resurgence wing of the Italian anti-Fascism in Venezia Giulia had always been weak, one should not overlook the cooperation developed towards the end of the twenties between the illegal Slovene national movement and the Italian democratic and anti-fascist forces in exile (in particular the movement *Giustizia e Libertà*). Within the scope of this cooperation, the Slovene side committed itself to spreading anti-fascist activities further into the hinterland of Italy, and the Italian side acknowledged to Slovenes and Croats the right to autonomy, and in some cases to revision of the border. This cooperation was interrupted, when the tendency towards secession from the Italian state prevailed on the Slovene side.

Period from 1941 to 1945

1. Following Germany's attack on the Soviet Union, the war, particularly in Eastern Europe, became total, aimed at complete destruction of the enemy. In those years, the opposing sides with remarkable frequency violated international law and the fundamental ethical standards. Even the north Adriatic region was not spared the wave of violence.

World War II was sparked off by the Axis and introduced a new dimension to Slovene-Italian relations, by which these were marked decisively ever since. On the one hand, both the attack on Yugoslavia in April 1941 and the occupation strained the relations between the two nations to the extreme, on the other hand, the war period brought about drastic changes in the relations between Slovenes and Italians. In 1941, with the occupation of Yugoslavia, Italy had reached the peak of its political power; the occupation and fragmentation plunged Slovenes into the abyss. At the end of the war, the Slovene nation celebrated victory, and in 1945 most Italians in Venezia Giulia feared ruin of the nation.

2. The destruction of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was accompanied not only by the fragmentation of the state, but also of Slovenia: a nation of one and a half million people, which was divided among Germany, Italy and Hungary, and which was under threat of becoming extinct, therefore Slovenes decided to fight against the occupying forces.

Italy's attack on Yugoslavia was the peak of the long-term fascist and imperialist policy directed at the Balkans and the Danube Basin. Contrary to the provision of military law, which does not allow for annexation of a territory occupied by military force before a peace treaty has been signed, Italy annexed the Ljubljana Province to the Monarchy. About 350,000 inhabitants of the Ljubljana Province were granted national and cultural autonomy by a statute; however the occupying forces were determined to achieve fast integration of the country into the Italian fascist system and to subordinate its institutions and organisations to their Italian counterparts. Influenced by the political, cultural and economic attraction of Italy, the local population were to be gradually made fascist and italianised. At first, the fascist occupier was confident that Slovenes would be subjugated by the supposed superiority of Italian culture, therefore the Italian occupation policy was milder at the beginning.

At first, Slovenes saw a lesser evil in the Italian occupation regime compared to Nazism, therefore some political forces collaborated with Italians, although they did not welcome Fascism. After initial uncertainty, the majority of Slovenes trusted in the victory of the Allied Forces and saw the future of the Slovene nation in the anti-fascist coalition camp. Furthermore, two basic strategic views had been formed among the Slovene political factors. The first was a demand for immediate resistance against the occupier, advocated by the OF (Liberation Front). The latter formed the first partisan units and started with military operations against the occupying forces. The response of the liberation movement to the Italian plans for cultural cooperation was "cultural silence". Members of all social classes regardless of their political and ideological beliefs joined the OF. Another option was entertained by the representatives of liberal and conservative parties, who directed Slovenes towards gradual illegal preparations for liberation and the settlement of accounts with the occupier at the end of the war. It is certain that the OF and the opposing camp headed by the London-based royal emigrant government had the common goal of establishing a United Slovenia, which was to include, within the scope of the Yugoslav federation, all regions which were considered to be Slovene.

3. As a response to the increasing success of partisan fighting and strong opposition of the population against the occupier, Mussolini transferred competence from civilian authorities to military commands, so that the latter could introduce brutal repression. The occupation regime was based on violence expressed by various

prohibitions, deportations to, confinement and internment in many camps all over Italy (Rab, Gonars and Renicci), in proceedings before military courts, confiscation and destruction of property, burning down of homes and villages. There were thousands of dead: fallen in battle, sentenced to death, shot as hostages, killed as civilians. About 30,000 people, mostly civilians, women and children, were deported to concentration camps. Many of them died of suffering. Plans were made for a mass deportation of Slovenes from the Ljubljana Province. The violence reached its peak during the four-month Italian military offensive launched by the Italian occupying forces in the summer of 1942 in order to regain control over the entire province.

In the spirit of the “divide and rule” policy, the Italian authorities supported the Slovene anti-Communist forces, in particular Catholic political forces, which at that time, out of fear from a communist revolution, considered the partisan movement to be a greater threat and thus agreed to collaborate. As a result, MVAC (“village guards”) were formed, which were organised by Italian commands into voluntary anti-Communist militia and engaged successfully in the fight against the partisans, although they were not trusted completely by Italians.

4. The struggle for liberation soon spread from the Ljubljana Province among the Slovene population on the Littoral, who had lived under Italian rule for a quarter of a century. Thus, the issue of national affiliation of the greater part of this territory was reopened, revealing not only the total inefficiency of the fascist regime policy towards Slovenes, but also the general defeat of Italian policy on the eastern border. Already at the beginning of the war, the authorities had adopted a series of precautionary measures against the Slovene population on the Littoral: internment and confinement of leading personalities, mobilisation of national conscripts in special battalions, removal of population along the borders, death sentences, pronounced by a special tribunal for the protection of the state at the Second Trieste Trial (1941).

The liberation struggle headed by the Communist Party was welcomed in particular by the Slovenes from the Littoral, since it accepted their insistent national claims for uniting with Yugoslavia the entire territory populated by Slovenes, including the towns populated mostly by Italians. Thus, the Communist Party of Slovenia secured the leading role in the mass movement and, due to armed struggle, also the chance to carry out both national liberation and social revolution.

In suppressing the liberation movement, the Italian authorities used similar repressive methods as in the Ljubljana Province, including burning down villages and shooting civilians. For this purpose, a Special Inspectorate for Public Safety and two new army corps of the Italian army were established. Thus, military operations also spread to the territory of the Italian state.

5. In the days following 8 September 1943, members of the Italian armed forces and of the Italian civil administration were able to leave the Slovene territory unhindered, even with the help of the local population. The capitulation of Italy certainly meant a decisive turning point in Slovene–Italian relations. The concept of Italians as the conquering or ruling nation and Slovenes as the subjected or repressed nation, which had predominated till then, underwent a fundamental change. Psychologically, but also in reality, the scales were tipped in favour of Slovenes. The adherence of the Slovenes from the Littoral to the partisan movement and the operation of military units and people’s government bodies showed the wish of the local population that this territory be annexed to a United Slovenia. This decision was

adopted by the leadership of the Slovene liberation movement in autumn 1943, and it was also confirmed at the Yugoslav level. Thus, Slovenes became a political factor on the Littoral as well; this fact was partly taken into consideration by the German authorities, which by recognising the actual national situation endeavoured to insinuate themselves into the role of mediators between Italians and Slovenes.

6. When assuming control over the occupied territory, Germans used extreme violence and also engaged the subordinated Italian and Slovene collaborating military and police units. In bigger towns in the country, the German occupier made use of the existing Italian administrative apparatus and established additional bodies for this purpose. These bodies continued to act in the spirit of the “divide and rule” principle, and deliberately accepted some Slovene educational and linguistic claims, and even ceded certain administrative functions to Slovenes. However, the common anti-Communist and anti-partisan goals of different collaboration forces could not outweigh reciprocal national distrust, therefore armed conflicts broke out between them. Due to the spread of resistance against the German occupation, the Nazis established in the abandoned *Risiera* (rice factory) near San Sabba in Trieste a mass destruction camp, in particular for Slovene and Croatian antifascists, but also Italians, and they used it as a collective centre for Jews during deportation to extermination camps.

The liberation movement spread particularly among the Slovene population; the Italian population was held back by the fear of Slovenes assuming the leading role in the partisan movement, since their national claims were unacceptable to the majority of the Italian population. They were also deterred by the news of the killings of Italians in the autumn of 1943 in Istria where the Croatian liberation movement was active (the so-called “Istrian *foibe*”). The killings were motivated not only by national and social factors, but also by a wish to strike at the local ruling class; therefore the majority of the Italians living in this area were concerned whether they would survive as a nation and whether their personal safety was in danger.

7. During World War II, the Slovene–Italian conflict reached its peak, and at the same time, cooperation against Fascism existed between the nations, based on the decades of unity of the workers’ movement. It culminated in the cooperation of both Communist Parties; of Slovene and Italian partisan units which were also joined by Italian soldiers; in committees of workers’ unity and partly also in the contacts between the OF and the CLN (National Liberation Committee). On the whole, the cooperation between the Slovene and Italian liberation movements was close and developed successfully.

Despite the new forms of cooperation between the two nations, there were considerable differences between their origins, structure, power and influence and their aims and political traditions were not concerted. There were disagreements between the leaderships of the Communist Parties and between the CLN of Venezia Giulia and the OF leadership, although both sides concluded many important agreements. In Venezia Giulia, resistance proved to be a plurinational rather than an international phenomenon, since, despite the fact that both liberation movements were motivated by the values of internationalism, they were subjected to the need to defend their own national interest. The Slovene liberation movement placed great importance on the annexation to Yugoslavia of the entire territory settled by Slovenes in the past. In view of the nature of the movement, this was justified not only by national motives, but also by revolutionary goals. The control of Trieste was very

important, not only for its strategic economic position for Slovenia, but also for the numerical strength of the working class and its role as a stronghold of the communist camp against western influence and the starting-point for the expansion of communism to the West, especially to northern Italy.

8. By the end of summer 1944, the Communist Party of Italy at both local and national levels opposed the annexation of nationally mixed or predominantly Italian areas to Yugoslavia and advocated postponement of the settlement of the border issue to the post-war period. Subsequently however, in changed strategic circumstances when the Communist Party of Slovenia gained control over the Garibaldi partisan units and the Trieste federation of the Communist Party of Italy, the Italian communists in Venezia Giulia accepted the OF positions, while the orientation of the leadership at the state level was vacillating: Yugoslavia's claims were neither officially accepted nor rejected. Togliatti proposed a tactical differentiation between the annexation of Trieste to Yugoslavia – it had to be kept in confidence – and the Yugoslav occupation of Venezia Giulia, which should have been supported by the Italian communists. In addition to the Soviet support for Yugoslavia's claims and an internal discussion on direct objectives of the liberation struggle in Italy, the line of the Communist Party of Italy was further influenced by the position of a considerable part of the Italian workers in Trieste and Monfalcone, who, in accordance with the internationalistic key, accepted the Yugoslav solution as integration into a socialist state backed by the Soviet Union. This decision had grave consequences in the ranks of the Italian resistance and, *inter alia*, resulted in the massacre of the Osoppo partisans by a unit of communist partisans on the Porzus mountain.

9. Different were the positions of the CLN of Venezia Giulia (after it was abandoned by the communists at the end of summer 1944, except for Gorizia); it represented that part of the Italian anti-fascist population who wished to maintain Italian sovereignty over the country. In addition, the CLN strove to be recognised by the Anglo-Americans as a representative of the majority of the Italian population to gain their support when defining the borders. Thus, the CLN and the OF represented opposing and incompatible border claims; when the border issue came to the fore, strategic cooperation became impossible. In terms of tactics, the last chance of cooperation disappeared during the preparations for the uprising, since it was impossible to reach an agreement on who was to assume political control of Trieste after the expulsion of the Germans. At the end of the war, both sides in Venezia Giulia welcomed their own liberator, the 4th Yugoslav Army with the 9th Corps operating in Slovenia, and the 8th British Army, regarding the army of the other as the conqueror.

10. At the end of April 1945, the Workers' Unity and the CLN both organised parallel uprisings, but the expulsion of Germans from Venezia Giulia was mostly to the credit of the large Yugoslav military units, and partly also of the Allies. Their areas of operation therefore overlapped without being adjusted. The issue of transition from war to peace went beyond the relations between the Italians and Slovenes in this area, and also beyond those between Italy and Yugoslavia, to become one of the issues of the then European policy, although not the most important one.

Most Slovenes and Italians in favour of the Yugoslav solution welcomed enthusiastically the expansion of Yugoslav military control from the already liberated partisan territories to the entire Venezia Giulia. Slovenes experienced double

liberation: from the German occupation and from the Italian state. At the same time, the population of Venezia Giulia in favour of Italy experienced Yugoslav occupation as the darkest moment in their history due to the fact that in the areas of Trieste, the Gorizia and Koper, it was accompanied by a wave of violence, manifested in the arrests of several thousands, mostly Italians, and also the Slovenes who opposed the Yugoslav communist political plan. Some of the arrested were released at intervals; the violence was further manifested in hundreds of summary executions – victims were mostly thrown into the Karst chasms (*foibe*) – and in the deportation of a great number of soldiers and civilians, who either wasted away or were killed during the deportation; in prisons and in the prisoner-of-war camps in various parts of Yugoslavia (Borovnica should also be mentioned).

11. These events were triggered by the atmosphere of settling accounts with the fascist violence; but, as it seems, they mostly proceeded from a preliminary plan which included several tendencies: endeavours to remove persons and structures who were in one way or another (regardless of their personal responsibility) linked with Fascism, with the Nazi supremacy, with collaboration and with the Italian state, and endeavours to carry out preventive cleansing of real, potential or only alleged opponents of the communist regime, and the annexation of Venezia Giulia to the new Yugoslavia. The initial impulse was instigated by the revolutionary movement which was changed into a political regime, and transformed the charge of national and ideological intolerance between the partisans into violence at the national level.

Period from 1945 to 1956

1. In Venezia Giulia and in the Valleys of Natisone, Torre and Resia (Venetian Slovenia) and the Canale Valley, where the Slovene and Italian nations live side by side, many borders were established in the course of history, however, never so many as in the post-war decade. From May 1945 to September 1947, two Anglo-American military administrations with their headquarters in Trieste and Udine, and a Yugoslav military administration operated in this area. Venezia Giulia was divided into two zones of occupation: Zone A under the AMG (The Allied Military Government - the 13th Corps Venezia Giulia), and Zone B under the VUJA (the Military Government of the Yugoslav Army). The Venetian Slovenia was under the AMG with its headquarters in Udine.

After 1945, international relations were evolving into a global confrontation between the East and the West. Although new standards in the diplomatic relations between the superpowers were only gradually established, the political behaviour of people living at the border between Italy and Yugoslavia was soon predominated by the atmosphere of conflict between the two civilisations. While at the end of World War I, due to the disturbance of the balance of power in Europe, the border dispute between Italy and Yugoslavia was concentrated at the eastern boundary of the disputed territory, the shift in the balance of power between the two countries after World War II transferred the aspirations to the border on the western-most part of the territory. With this new frontier, Yugoslavia, a state invaded by Italy, was rewarded for its contribution to the victory of the Allied Forces. It also to a large extent satisfied the expectations inspiring the struggle of Slovenes and Croats on the Littoral for victory over Fascism and for national liberation. The endeavour to draw the state frontier along the lines of the national border, however, proved ineffective,

due to the prevalence of the policy of power and also to the characteristic settlement features of the Littoral population, together with the differences in the population's understanding of national affiliation. As was the case after 1918, and as is typical of the time of nationalistic movements, the fulfilment of a nation's national programme (even if in the case of Slovenes it was incomplete) was achieved to the detriment of the neighbouring nation.

Soon after the Treaty of Peace – which established the Free Territory of Trieste (FTT) – as a compromise solution entered into force, the logic of the cold war also prevailed in the Yugoslav-Italian relations. This period reached its peak in 1948 when, on 20 March, due to the upcoming parliamentary elections in Italy, the western governments issued a trilateral note, in which they advocated the return of the whole Free Territory of Trieste to Italy.

After the break with the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia had not aligned itself with any military or political bloc, which the western forces rewarded with economic and political concessions, despite the fact that it was governed by a totalitarian regime. When bilateral negotiations on the fate of the FTT came to a halt, and the crisis which was brought about by the issue of the bilateral note of 8 October 1953 was overcome, a Memorandum of Understanding was adopted in London on 5 October 1954 on the initiative of the Atlantic superpowers.

The delineation determined by the Treaty of Peace and finalised by the Memorandum of Understanding was more to the benefit of Yugoslavia, since it acquired the majority of the territory claimed, excluding Gorizia and a part of the Gorizia Province, Monfalcone area with its surroundings, and Zone A of the never realised Free Territory of Trieste, which were also inhabited by Slovenes. Despite the Yugoslav claims, the Valleys of Natisone, Torre and Resia and the Canale Valley were not subject to negotiation.

The population concerned experienced the resolution of the border conflict in a different manner. While the majority of the Italian public enthusiastically welcomed the decision that Trieste, which gradually became the symbol of the long-lasting diplomatic border conflict between Italy and Yugoslavia, would be returned to Italy, the loss of Istria left a deep scar on the collective memory of Italians in Venezia Giulia. Slovene satisfaction with the acquisition of the Slovene rural areas on the Karst and in the Valley of Isonzo was, however, spoilt by the rejected historical claims to Trieste and Gorizia, although they were partially compensated by the annexation of the coastal area around Koper – where there was a considerable Italian presence – which granted Slovenia exit to the sea.

While after the negotiations the Croatian population of the then disputed area was entirely assigned to the Republic of Croatia, a constituent part of the Yugoslav federation, some of the Slovene population, living in the provinces of Trieste, Gorizia and Udine, remained within the borders of Italy. On the other hand, some of the Italian population remained within the borders of Yugoslavia, although at the time of the Memorandum of Understanding it had already to a large extent moved from those areas which were assigned to Croatia by the Treaty of Peace.

2. In the areas where the Italian administration was re-established after 1947, the restoration of the normal state of affairs was impeded by persistent adherence to the nationalistic stance, which arose partly from the resentment about the developments during the Yugoslav occupation in 1945. The return of the Italian authorities to the area of Gorizia was accompanied by a wave of violence against the Slovenes and individuals favourably disposed to Yugoslavia. The Italian authorities treated

Slovenes with general mistrust; although they respected their individual rights, they, nevertheless, did not support their national development, and in some cases even tried to assimilate them. The new frontier, dividing the former province, was a great setback for the Goriško, since it cut off the mountainous hinterland of the Valley of Isonzo from its centre in the lowlands and greatly affected the Slovene inhabitants, who were thereby separated from their countrymen. The new circumstances brought about the decision by Slovenes to build Nova Gorica; later in a more favourable atmosphere this new town, despite many obstacles, succeeded in establishing contacts with the city centre, which remained within Italy and recovered with great difficulty only at the end of the fifties.

3. More difficult was the situation for Slovenes in the Valleys of Natisone, Torre and Resia and the Canale Valley, since they were never recognised as a national minority by the authorities; therefore, they were refused the right to instruction in their mother tongue and to the use of the mother tongue in their dealings with the authorities. Following the last years of war, the Slovene national awareness had been experiencing a revival, but the rise of political tendencies favouring Yugoslavia among the population which had always demonstrated loyalty to the Italian state made the Italian side suspect – also due to the prevailing atmosphere of the cold war – that they were a manifestation of a political movement spreading from the other side of the border and not the result of an autonomous development. Advocates of such tendencies were intimidated, imprisoned and in some cases also physically assaulted by members of the far-right and paramilitary groups. Also the Slovene clergy had problems with the civilian and church authorities, mostly because the authorities saw them as pillars in the struggle for the preservation of the identity of the Venetian Slovenes, starting with the use of the Slovene language in the pastoral activities.

There is no doubt that in these areas the Italian authorities persistently evaded their responsibility to carry out the protection policy, which should have corresponded to the spirit of the democratic constitution. Delays were also due to the international situation and to the political controversies arising from it. That is also why the region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia was established relatively late, since the constituent assembly required its autonomous statute to pay more attention to the minority needs.

4. Zones A and B of Venezia Giulia and – from 1947 – Zones A and B of the FTT were under two provisional occupation administrations, which differed in some essential aspects. While the AMG was in fact merely an occupation authority, the Yugoslav military administration simultaneously represented the country which claimed this territory for itself, and this influenced its operation. The Anglo-Americans, who had established a liberal and democratic order in Zone A and kept total political and military control over their territory all along, tried at first to involve all political movements in the administration. However, because the organisations in favour of Yugoslavia refused to take part, and the cold war took an ever greater toll – until 1948 the area of the north Adriatic was one of its focal points – subsequently only pro-Italian and anti-Communist forces were engaged in the administration. The AMG took measures to guarantee the Slovene population the right to use their mother tongue in public and in schools, nevertheless, at the same time it tried to hamper its contacts with their state of origin. Although local self-government was established rather late, the free elections of 1949 and 1952 enabled Slovenes to elect their

representatives after more than two decades of isolation from public life. In those years, part of the Slovenes who fled the country during both wars returned to Trieste and Gorizia. Among them there were several intellectuals, who subsequently took on responsible tasks in the fields of politics and culture.

5. Until 1954, the issue concerning the state to which Zone A belonged was more important than all other issues. It was connected with the disputes of the cold war, brought polarisation into the political struggle and badly hampered the revival of democratic relations. The dividing line between the pro-Yugoslav and pro-Italian camps was neither of national character, nor of class or ideological nature only, since all these factors were intertwined. Until 1947, both camps witnessed the fading of political differences, whereas nationalistic passions were flaring up. In time, their inner diversity revealed itself, and although the national dispute still caused differences of opinion, the Italian democratic forces, which took the command of politics in the zone, tried in their actions to fence themselves off from the far-right movement. Similarly, the so-far blurred ideological differences among Slovenes also became publicly visible, and parties and groups opposing the new Yugoslav authorities were established. Furthermore, aspirations for autonomy arose, which joined some Slovene and Italian circles advocating the idea of the FTT finally gaining its full status.

Until the issuing of the Informbiro's resolution, everyday coexistence on the common land continued and was enriched by close cooperation between Slovenes and Italians in the province, based mainly on sharing the same class and the experience of the partisan struggle. In some circles, this dispelled many a myth, including that of natural aversion between the two nations. Solidarity between the Italian and Slovene Communists, which lasted until the rift between Yugoslavia and the Informbiro (June 1948), derived – in particular in Zone A – from the decision of the majority part of the Italian working class to favour annexation to Yugoslavia, a state which was building Communism; the ties between them, however, became weaker due to the growing differences in understanding internationalism, the role of the Party and other key issues, e.g. to which state Venezia Giulia belonged. Despite different positions with respect to some issues, cooperation – established between the Communist Parties of Italy and Slovenia (Yugoslavia) during their joint fight against Fascism and the occupier – remained close.

Differences revealed themselves, however, when the Informbiro resolution was issued which was supported by the majority of the Italian Communists. This was followed not only by the long-lasting severing of contacts, but also by open hatred between the supporters of the Informbiro and those of Tito. Consequently, many Italian Communists – regardless of the fact that they were native Istrians or workers who had moved there in order to “build socialism” – were imprisoned, deported or forced into exile. The Informbiro generated a fatal friction among Slovenes in the zone A of the FTT, since also the majority of the leftists declared themselves in favour of the Soviet Union and against Yugoslavia. Consequently, Slovenes were for a long time divided into three opposing and often hostile camps: the democrats, the Informbiro supporters and the followers of Tito.

6. Although in 1945 Zone B of Venezia Giulia encompassed the vast territory between the frontier established by the Treaty of Rapallo and the Morgan line, the Italian population on the territory administered by the Slovene authorities was dense only along the coast, whereas the population in the hinterland was prevalently

Slovene. In 1947, from the coastal area at Koper and the Buje region that was under Croatian administration, Zone B of the FTT was formed. In this zone, the VUJA transferred part of its competencies to the civil bodies of the people's rule and tried to strengthen the political structure of the Communist authority, which did not respect the rights of individuals. In contrast to its mandate to provisionally administer the occupied territory – which was not supposed to influence the future decision to which state it would belong – the Yugoslav authority tried to force its annexation by the policy of *fait accompli*. Apart from granting Slovenes national rights, which they had not enjoyed so far, they tried to force Italians – also by way of intimidation and violence – to consent to the annexation to Yugoslavia.

At the same time, the new legislation and the severing of contacts between the neighbouring zones undermined the economic basis of the Italian population, which had so far played the leading role in society. The social hierarchy was established anew also due to the disintegration of the Italian higher classes. Apart from that, the authority strove to do away with the natural strongholds of culture of the Italian community. The establishment of new cultural institutions under strict supervision of the authorities, for example the Italian radio station, however, did not amount to much, since the authorities gradually expelled teachers and – after 1948 – undermined the system of education in the Italian language and its substance. This led to the weakening of ties between the Italian national minority and its country of origin and to denigration of Italy. Furthermore, the regime's persecution of religion as in the case of the Italian clergy – which was one of the key elements safeguarding national identity – unintentionally acquired the characteristics of assimilation.

Since the first post-war days, some local activists, who wreaked their anger over the acts of the Istrian Fascists upon the Italian population, had made their intention clear to rid themselves of the Italians who revolted against the new authorities. However, expert findings to-date do not confirm the testimonies of some – although influential – Yugoslav personalities about the intentional expulsion of Italians. Such a plan can be deduced – on the basis of the conduct of the Yugoslav leadership – only after the break with the Informbiro in 1948, when the great majority of the Italian Communists in Zone B – despite the initial cooperation with the Yugoslav authorities, against which more and more reservations were expressed – declared themselves against Tito's Party. Therefore, the people's government abandoned the political orientation towards the “brotherhood of the Slavs and Italians”, which within the framework of the Yugoslav socialist state allowed for the existence of the politically and socially purified Italian population that would respect the ideological orientation and the national policy of the regime. The Yugoslav side perceived the departure of Italians from their native land with growing satisfaction, and in its relation to the Italian national community the wavering in the negotiations on the fate of the FTT was more and more clearly reflected. Violence, which flared up again after the 1950 elections and the 1953 Trieste crisis, and the forceful expulsion of unwanted persons were accompanied by measures to close the borders between the two zones. The national composition of Zone B was also altered by the immigration of Yugoslavs to the previously more or less exclusively Italian cities.

In the Koper district, this caused a constant, although not numerous, emigration of the population, with the number of departures and flights growing especially at the beginning of the fifties. When, after the conclusion of the Memorandum of Understanding in 1954, Italians gave up hope that their situation might improve, members of the Italian national community began to depart in large numbers. The reasons were that despite the obligations imposed by the Memorandum

of Understanding, the authorities persisted in their previous conduct, and that the Memorandum set a deadline by which it was still possible to opt for Italy.

In the post-war period, the Istrian territory which came under Slovene sovereignty, witnessed the departure of over 27,000 persons, more or less the whole Italian population. Furthermore, several thousands of Slovenes joined the crowd of essentially Italian refugees from Croatian Istria and Dalmatia, which were under Croatian sovereignty (200,000 to 300,000 refugees according to the new estimates). Among the Italians who did not emigrate (8% of the total population), the majority were elderly workers and farmers, left-wing intellectuals and post-war political immigrants.

7. Among the reasons for emigration, one should above all mention the oppression by the regime, which with its totalitarian nature made it impossible for people to freely express their national identity, oppose the redistribution of the leading national and social roles in Istria, and refuse major changes in the economy. The oppressed and frightened people were not so much attracted by the propaganda of the local Italian agencies, spread without any special instructions from the Italian government, but more by the neighbouring democratic Italian nation state, although the Italian government more than once exerted its influence to stop or at least restrict immigration. One should also not ignore the deterioration of the living conditions, which was typical of socialist societies, and the break of contacts with Trieste, which made Italians in Istria fear that they would find themselves on the wrong side of the “iron curtain”. The Italian population recognised the impossibility of retaining its national identity – with the conglomerate of the living habits and feelings, exceeding the mere political and ideological dimension – in the situation offered by the Yugoslav state, and experienced emigration as the choice of freedom.

8. Within the broader historical framework, the special features of the Italian emigration from Istria belong to a more general process of the formation of nation states on ethnically mixed territories, which led to the disintegration of the multilingual and multicultural reality in Central- and South Eastern Europe. The fact that Italians emigrated from a federal state, based on the internationalist ideology, demonstrates that national differences and discrepancies within the framework of the Communist social and political systems continuously and profoundly conditioned the political developments.

9. The conclusion of the London Memorandum of Understanding did not solve all open bilateral issues, not even the issue of minority treatment; however, it did put an end to one of the most tense periods in Slovene-Italian relations and – on the basis of the Udine and the Rome Agreements (1955, 1962) – brought about a new period of gradual establishment of border cooperation and steady growth of cultural and economic relations. As soon as the Treaty of Peace was concluded, Italy and Yugoslavia, despite the unsolved problems, started to establish ever closer contacts, so that in the late sixties the border between them was considered to be the most open border between two European countries with different social systems. The credit for this goes mostly to both minorities. Consequently, after decades of heated discussions, and despite periodic deadlocks, the neighbouring nations finally found their way towards promoting fruitful cooperation.