An Analysis of the Index of Civilian Casualties in Vojvodina 1941–1948

Preliminary research results of the records of civilian casualties in Vojvodina from 1941 to 1948 by the Inter-Academy Commission

- Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

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ABSTRACT

This research brings the latest results of the Joint Serbian and Hungarian Academy Commission on numbers and breakdown by selected criteria of civilian casualties in Vojvodina between 1941 and 1948. This research is the result of the most comprehensive research project undertaken so far to produce an accurate report on WWII and post-war casualties, and is a revision of all individual research attempts conducted by the state institutions.

The history of the twentieth century Serbia is a history of Calvary of one nation. Yet, a nation whose history is marked with five wars during this century alone and is a society with most war casualties per capita has no comprehensive and accurate account of them. After World War I., the state authorities in Yugoslavia had no interest to complete casualty accounts and build war cemeteries and memorials. Irrespective of the importance of the liberation movement in Yugoslavia and more than half a century of peace time in the country, there is still no complete account

of even WW2 casualties. However, there are some efforts and initiatives by individuals and certain institutions for an accurate account of war casualties, or at least to give a more objective estimate than the 1.7 million given by the post-war Yugoslav authorities. Official recordings of war casualties which commenced in the 1960s were obstructed by political prejudice, national war casualties' symmetries and unrealistic projection of their numbers.³ In the absence of quality research methodologies demographic methods and estimations were used instead. The most accurate methods used were the ones during the 1980s by Bogoljub Kočović and Vladimir Žerjavić.⁴ After the fall of the Communist regime in Serbia, during the decade of battle for Yugoslav heritage, no serious attempts to index war casualties were made. Some historians, including Dr. Aleksandar Kasaš and Dr. Enikő Šajti, gave partial estimates of Hungarian casualties as the results of their individual research or the estimates of the Folksdeutscher casualties in Vojvodina given by Dr. Zoran Janjetović.⁵

The Inquiry Committee of the Assembly of Vojvodina (further on referred to as 'Inquiry') was the first institution that attempted to give an overview and index of all war casualties, though of limited geographic coverage. During the period from 2003 to 2008, the Inquiry indexed around 90 000 casualties. However, the research had significant methodological loopholes resulting in inaccurate (duplicate entries) and regretfully inconclusive accounts. It was a failed attempt to index all WW2 and post-war casualties following the one done in the 1960s.

Almost seventy years later, the mere mentioning of the death toll of the Communist regime is still a taboo. The Serbian State Commission in charge of the location of concealed graves of the victims killed by the Communist regime after September 12th, 1944 had a difficult task to annul uncertainties and assumptions about the number of people killed in communist purges during and immediately after the WW2. The Commission was established in 2009. By 2015 its researchers indexed 59 525 people who were either executed or died in camps across Serbia in Communist purges after the end of the war. Out of this number, more than 40 000 killed were from Vojvodina. This database of the casualties, compiled from the State Security Archive documentation, military archives and other relevant sources, is the most accurate and the first electronic index of the victims available to the public in the region to this date.

Many estimates of the death toll in Vojvodina under the Communist regime in the past decade were often given under political pressure and by politicians. Terms like "genocide of Hungarian minorities" in Vojvodina were often used and the number of people killed was exaggerated to as much as 40,000. The indexing of the killed Folksdeutscher made by the Folksdeutscher associations in Germany and Austria was also done in a similar manner and concluded 50,000 civilian war casualties together with those killed at the end of the war.

The Inter-Academy Commission (further on referred to as 'Commission') set up by the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences and Hungarian Academy of Sciences was thus established to eradicate doubts and accusations by politicians, to eliminate

manipulations and the misuse of the number of casualties. The Commission's mission was to index civilian casualties in Vojvodina between 1941 and 1948, to continue research and to give an accurate number of civilian casualties at the end and after WW2. Besides its scientific significance the Commission had a clear political importance in the process of international reconciliation, which was initiated by the presidents of Serbia and Hungary.⁸

WORK ORGANIZATION, METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH IN ARCHIVES

The Commission was established in 2010 following discussions of the representatives of the respective top level institutions of the republics of Hungary and Serbia. It was agreed that the states' academies should work together on the joint project to establish the number of civilian casualties in Vojvodina during and after WW2 (1941–1948).

The Commission's main aim was to give an accurate and objective insight into the casualties in Vojvodina which would also contribute to international reconciliation, to improve and intensify relations between the two countries, which in the recent history had several vexed questions. The Commission had a well-designed project plan and research methodology with concrete tasks. The Serbian side was responsible for the conduct and research of indexing all casualties during this period (1941–1948) in Vojvodina regardless of nationality. The research team was divided in the following manner: (1) Regional Archive of Vojvodina, (2) Research team Novi Sad, (3) Research team Belgrade.

In nine regional archives of Vojvodina twelve researchers were engaged and their work was coordinated by archivist Ištvan Fodor. The research team included: Slobodan Stanić (Historical Archive of Kikinda), Tibor Molnar (Historical Archive of Senta), Miljan Garčević (historian, Historical Archive of Srem), dr. Zoltan Mesaroš and Stevan Mačković (Historical Archive of Subotica), Jugoslav Veljkovski (Historical Archive of Novi Sad), Ilija Jovanović (Historical Archive of Bela Crkva), Nada Boroš (director, Historical Archive of Zrenjanin), Rozalija Nađ (archivist, Historical Archive of Pančevo), Milka Ljuboja and Tatjana Stevančev (Historical Archive of Sombor).

The research team of Novi Sad included seven archivists employed by the Archive and the Museum of Vojvodina whose work was coordinated by Dr. Agneš Ozer.

The Belgrade research team of four researchers coordinated by Dr. Srđjan Cvetković was responsible for work in the Historical Archive of Serbia, the Military Archive and the Historical Archives of Belgrade.

Coordination of the research in Srem was conducted by Dr. Drago Njegovan. Each research team had a designated person for data entry into Excel tables or direct entry into the online indexing register. They were also responsible for the indexing of the researched archival materials.

Due to good relations with many regional archives and museums across Serbia members of the Commission and researchers enjoyed undisturbed and assisted work. During its initial sessions, the Commission members agreed on the following rresearch methodology and indexing principles:

- 1. Indexing only of civilian casualties with place of residence on the territory of the autonomous region of Vojvodina (according to the borderlines of 1945).
- 2. A basic indexing model was also adopted. To facilitate the comparison with the data of other European countries, for each victim the following data was collected: name, surname (family name), year of birth, place of residence (after April 6th, 1941), place and location of death, nationality, political and class affiliation, age and gender. Notes of source reference, testimonials and literature details for each casualty were taken.
- 3. Concerning means of death: civilians in extrajudicial executions, those convicted to death penalty, persons who died in camps, prisons and casualties of bombing and other way were indexed.
- 4. Members of military formations and prisoners of war are also included who were killed by firing squads their number can easily be extracted from the index (only 2–3%).
- 5. The number of those persons who were killed in battle is excluded.
- 6. Main sources of reference are:
 - all available primary archival sources from state and local archives,
 - registers of the persons sent to camps and evidences of their death,
 - research studies of the state institutions (The Inquiry Committee of the Assembly of Vojvodina 2003–2008, The Serbian State Commission in charge of the location of concealed graves of the victims killed by the Communist regime after September 12th, 1944) and many other studies done by individuals and researchers,
 - personal testimonies,
 - various publications including newspapers, memoirs, literature etc.
- 7. Table indexes of soldiers killed during bombings were also examined and could be used for further specific scientific study of all war casualties. These can be added to the existing database and studied at a later stage.
- 8. Researchers faced many dilemmas regarding marginal, complex and dubious cases which were noted and could be further examined. However, this is only the case with a small percentage of casualties and has no real significance concerning the final results of the research.
- 9. The indexes and databases of civilian casualties in Vojvodina are methodologically accurate and transparent. Records are available to public and institutions via the internet site, which was established in 2012. The website's easy administration enables fast updates and corrections, therefore, in time, its accuracy will be heightened making it a reliable and resourceful source.

RESEARCH IN ARCHIVES

From June 2010 until mid-September 2015, the Belgrade research team focused on archival materials in Belgrade. The Secret Police files (BIA) in the Archives of Serbia (including collections: "Hostile activities of the Hungarian citizens in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia during the Second World War"; "Political circumstances, political parties, movements, population structure, economy and industry in Hungary 1918–1945"; "Activities of the Fascist organization »Hungarian Cultural Association of the South Land«" etc.), the archival material of the State Commission for crimes of the occupation forces and their collaborators in the Archives of Yugoslavia, BDS archive files and the Special police files in the Historical Archive of Belgrade, and the Military Court files of the Military Archives, and also the Chetniks' and NDH files are worth mentioning.

Research teams in Novi Sad and Vojvodina focused their research on the *Historical Archive of Vojvodina*, the *Museum of Vojvodina* and a network of local archives and funds. Among the most interesting and worth mentioning are the following:

- the list of those who were executed by firing squads and convicted as collaborators and war criminals, and the archival material of the Commission for crimes of the occupation forces and their collaborators in Vojvodina (Historical Archive of Vojvodina);
- registers of persons sent to camps and registers of those who died in the camps of Gakovo, Sremska Mitrovica, Bački Jarak; military court archival files from 1944-1945; regional courts files from 1945–1946, and funds of the Inquiry Committee for truth and the Calvary of citizens of Vojvodina between 1941–1945 (Museum of Vojvodina);
- local, district and city archival files of the national liberation committees; command posts files; district and regional civil and military court files; local commissioners' files of the Commissions for war crimes (local archives in Vojvodina).

Compared to previous research reports from individual researchers and institutions, the novelty of this research is in its reach and data collection from archives that were unavailable to researchers for decades for political reasons.

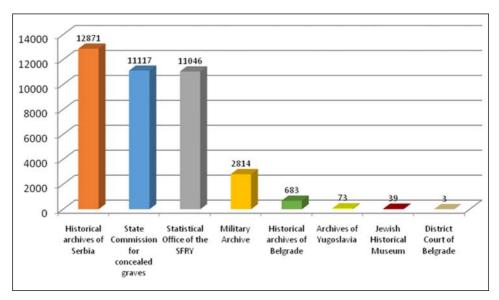
Some state institutions previously dealt with the issue of mass killings of civilians in Vojvodina and Serbia during WW2, and their research findings were of great interest to the Inter-Academy Commission. Therefore to rationalize the resources and speed the research an agreement was made between these institutions and the Inter-Academy about the takeover of the existing database, and the analysis and systematization of the findings.

More than 13 000 names of killed and missing persons in Vojvodina, and casualties of the post-war purges were obtained from the database of the Serbian State Commission in charge of the location of concealed graves of the victims killed by the Communist regime after September 12th, 1944, which was founded by the Government of Serbia.

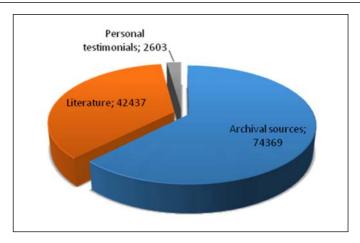
The database of victims indexed during the recent research activities in local and state archives in Vojvodina and Belgrade were added to the database of casualties from the Inquiry Committee of the Assembly of Vojvodina compiled during 2003–2008. However, the newly compiled database required the systematization and careful revision of 90 701 entries (names of the killed) some of which containing incomplete information about method, time and place of execution. In the final death toll breakdown there are 50 099 newly acquired entries, 4341 updates, 20 647 victims killed during battle, 6740 duplicates and 5441 unclassified. There are also 4641 casualties with place of residence outside Vojvodina.

Table 1. Classification of entries from the database of the Inquiry Committee of the Assembly of Vojvodina

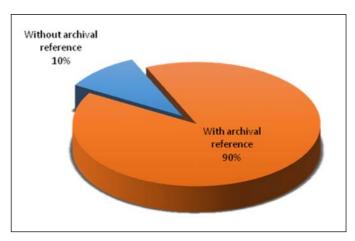
Category	Total: 90 701
New entries (names of killed or dossiers)	50 099
Killed in battle or died of consequences	20 647
Duplicates	6740
Unclassified (insufficient information, etc.)	5441
Place of residence outside Vojvodina	4641
Updates	4341



Graph 1. Breakdown of entries from archives by archive / database



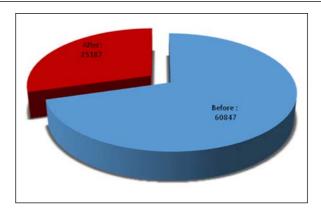
Graph 2. Entries by source



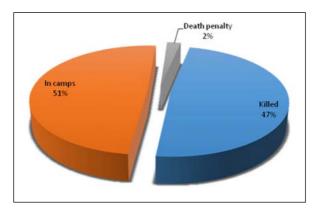
Graph 3. Percentage of entries with archival source

Preliminary indexing results of civilian casualties in Vojvodina 1941–1948

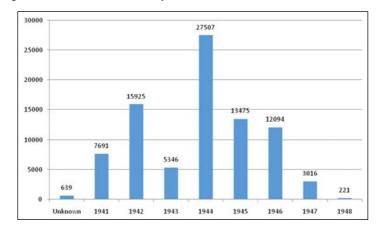
Total number of civilian casualties or persons killed during the Communist regime in the Inter-Academy database for Vojvodina is *86 492* (as of September 15th, 2015). Out of that number *79 369* persons are presumed *killed* and *6853 missing*. This means that 51% died in camps, 47% in extrajudicial executions and 2% was sentenced to death. So the number of victims until the formal end of WW2 (May 15th, 1945) is *60 847*; 25 187 died after that date and for 458 persons it was not possible to ascertain the exact date of death.



Graph 4. Casualties until May 15th, 1945 and between May 15th, 1945 and 1948

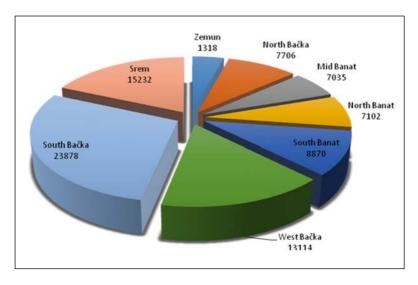


Graph 5. Civilian casualties by "means of death" criterion 1941–1948

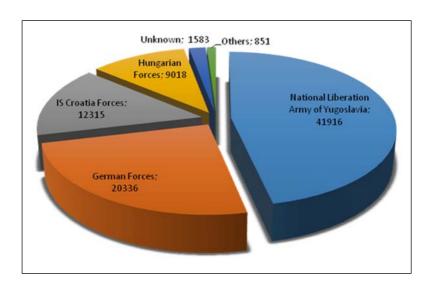


Graph 6. Casualties by years

Most civilian casualties were during 1944, then during 1942 and in 1945. According to territorial representation of the victims, the greatest numbers were on the Hungarian administrative territories of Bačka (South-Bačka district), followed by Srem and South Banat.

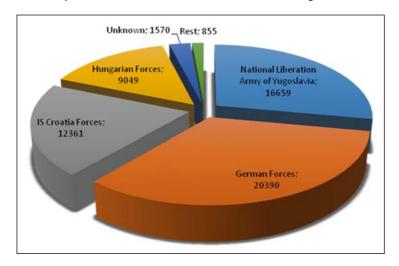


Graph 7. Casualties in Vojvodina, 1941–1948 by nationality according to present territorial division

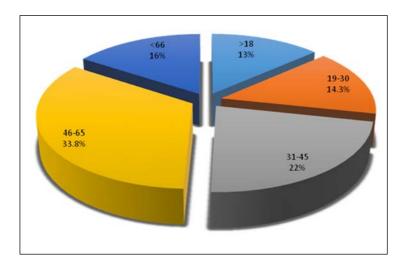


Graph 8. Breakdown of civilian casualties by the "killed by" criterion, 1941-1948

Until 1948, the majority of the victims were killed by the National Liberation Forces of Yugoslavia (NOVOJ), most of which were the Folksdeutschers who died in camps. Following them were those who were killed by the German Occupation Formations (NOF), then by military formations of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) and by the Hungarian occupation forces (MOF). However, until the formal end of the war (May 15th, 1945) the majority of the casualties were killed by the German occupation forces followed by NOVOJ, then the Ustasha and the Hungarian forces (MOF).

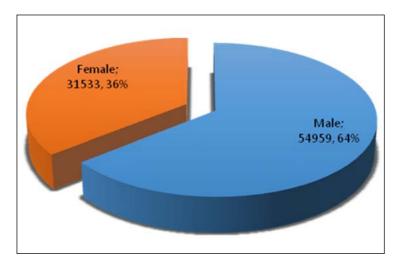


Graph 9. Breakdown of casualties by the "killed by" criterion, 1941-1945

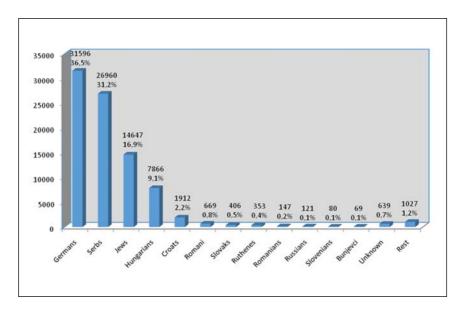


Graph 10. Breakdown of civilian casualties by age, 1941-1948

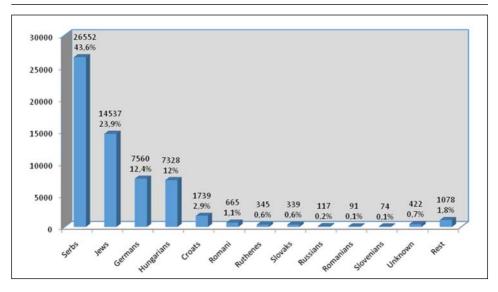
Age breakdown statistics indicate that the majority of casualties were those between 46–65 year of age, then those between 31–45, and a great number of people were over 66 years of age (16%) and finally, children under 18 years of age (13%). According to gender statistics, 64% were male casualties versus 36% were female. Women, children and older than 66 years mostly died in camps and were rarely executed.



Graph 11. Breakdown of civilian casualties by gender, 1941–1948

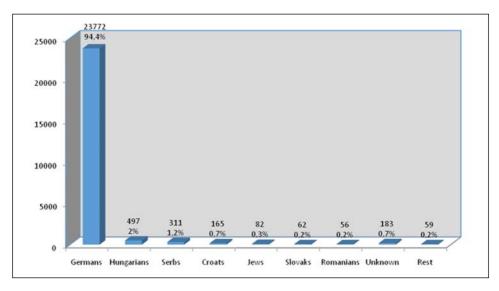


Graph 12. Breakdown of number of casualties by nationality, 1941-1948



Graph 13. Breakdown of number of casualties by nationality, 1941-1945

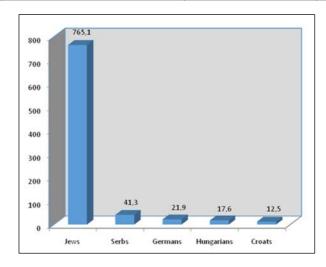
Statically, until the end of WW2, most casualties were Serbian nationals (26 552), then Jews (14 537), followed by Germans (7560), Hungarians (7328) and Croats (1739). However, until 1948 due to deaths in camps, the number of Folksdeutschers (Germans) is the highest (31 596).



Graph 14. Breakdown of number of casualties by nationality, 1945-1948

Table 2. Casualty index by nationality 1941–1945

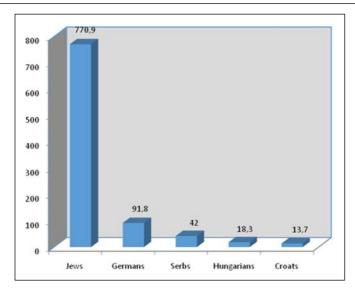
Nationality	Estimated number of inhabitants in Vojvodina in 1941°		
Jews	19 000	14 537	765.1
Serbs	642 000	26 552	41.3
Germans	344 000	7560	21.9
Hungarians	429 000	7560	17.6
Croats	139 000	1739	12.5



Graph 15. Comparative analysis of indexed civilian casualties in Vojvodina, 1941–1945 per thousand

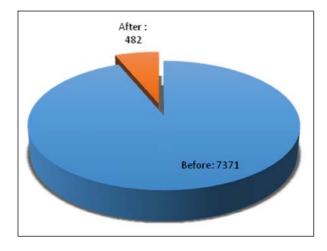
Table 3. Casualty index by nationality in Vojvodina, 1941–1948

Natioanlity	Estimated number of inhabitants in Vojvodina in 1941 ¹⁰	Civilian casualties 1941–1948	Number of killed per 1000
Jews	19 000	14 647	770.9
Serbs	344 000	31 596	91.8
Germans	642 000	26 960	42
Hungarians	429 000	7866	18.3
Croats	139 000	1912	13.7

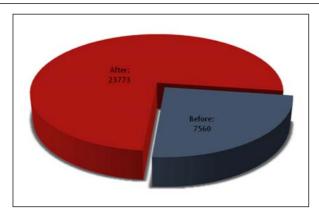


Graph 16. Comparative analysis of indexed civilian casualties in Vojvodina, 1941–1945 per thousand

As the above diagram shows, the breakdown of casualties by nationality varies significantly depending on the analysed period i.e. until May 15th, 1945, the formal end of WW2, or the entire war period inclusive of 1948. Enormous number of civilian Folksdeutschers died in camps (40 across Vojvodina), out of which as much as 150 000 civilians have been killed during 1944–1948.



Graph 17. Scale of Hungarian civilian casualties by the end of the war and later



Graph 18. Scale of German civilian casualties by the end of the war and later

Table 4. Casualties by nationality and by year, 1941-1948

Natioanlity	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	Unknown
Serbs	4686	11 665	4333	5184	938	148	50	9	27 013
Germans	45	62	25	5794	11 110	11 311	2870	203	31 420
Hungarians	172	93	62	6454	670	286	32	3	7772
Croats	144	88	79	1216	296	102	15	2	1942
Jews	2290	3274	677	7954	227	51	11	1	14 485

During 1941, 1942 and 1943 victims were mostly Serbs and Jews. However, in 1948, the majority of casualties were German.

Table 5. Casualties by nationality and by means of death, 1941–1948

Natioanlity	Missing	Death sentence	Died in the camps	Killed	Rest
Jews	179	10	9047	3819	1592
Hungarians	879	538	482	5617	350
Germans	225	161	24 211	5569	1430
Serbs	664	450	5890	19 199	757
Croats	100	362	114	1104	232

According to the above statistics, during WW2 most casualties lost their lives in camps (Jews, Serbs and Germans). However, most of the Hungarian casualties were killed in extrajudicial executions or were sentenced to death.

Table 6. Casualties by nationality and by "killed by" criteria, 1941-1948

Natioanlity	Yugoslav Army in the Homeland	Hungarian Forces	IS Croatia Forces	National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia	German Forces
Jews	17	2210	828	131	11 168
Hungarians	24	200	35	7038	157
Germans	265	265 27		31 042	160
Serbs	98	5746	10 566	1294	7936
Croats	54	264	102	1229	120

Jews and Serbs were mostly killed by Germans; Serbs and Croats by Hungarians; Germans and Hungarians by National Liberation forces; and in the Independent State of Croatia among the highest number of killed were Serbs and Jews.

Table 7. Serbian casualties by "means of death" and year

	Missing	Deathsentence	Died in the camps	Killed	Rest
1941	175	18	741	3516	138
1942	135	18	2740	8543	120
1943	117	6	929	3003	138
1944	152	238	910	3497	245
1945	36	127	380	304	60
1946	4	15	69	32	18
1947	1	13	12	19	3
1948	0	3	0	6	0

According to the statistics, the most Serbs were killed during 1942, followed by 1941, and then 1944.

Table 8. Jewish casualties by "means of death" and year

	Missing	Deathsentence	Died in the camps	Killed	Rest
1941	73	4	372	1257	573
1942	29	0	699	2239	301
1943	29	0	90	61	493
1944	20	5	7571	185	173
1945	4	1	174	32	16
1946	1	0	43	4	9
1947	0	0	6	0	5
1948	0	0	0	0	1

As figures show, Jewish casualties were highest in camps during 1944, then in 1942, followed by 1941.

Table 9. German casualties by "means of death" and year

	Missing	Deathsentence	Died in the camps	Killed	Rest
1941	2	0	1	35	4
1942	3	0	4	53	1
1943	1	0	2	20	2
1944	114	76	657	4880	53
1945	48	59	10 690	232	49
1946	17	8	9886	246	1130
1947	1	8	2660	14	181
1948	0	3	184	8	6

German death toll was highest during 1945, followed by 1946 and then 1944 in camps due to famine, disease, and lack of medical treatment.

Table 10. Hungarian casualties by "means of death" and year

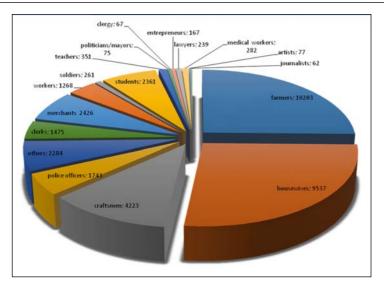
	Missing	Deathsentence	Died in the camps	Killed	Rest
1941	11	2	2	131	17
1942	3	0	1	77	9
1943	4	0	16	21	20
1944	753	294	123	5068	209
1945	36	212	231	173	18
1946	24	10	81	99	66
1947	0	13	16	0	3
1948	0	2	0	0	1

Hungarian death toll was highest during the mass executions in 1944, followed by high number of death sentences in 1944 and 1945.

Table 11. Croatian casualties by "means of death" and year

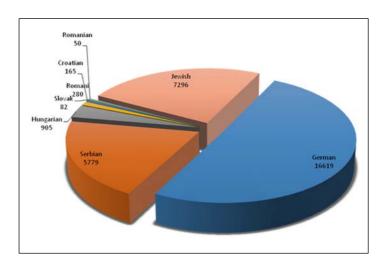
	Missing	Deathsentence	Died in the camps	Killed	Rest
1941	4	1	11	107	14
1942	2	0	11	67	4
1943	10	0	3	42	18
1944	65	140	22	821	146
1945	15	191	29	44	20
1946	3	20	32	19	25
1947	0	6	6	1	1
1948	0	1	0	0	1

Most Croats were killed during 1944 and then in 1945. They were mainly sentenced to death.



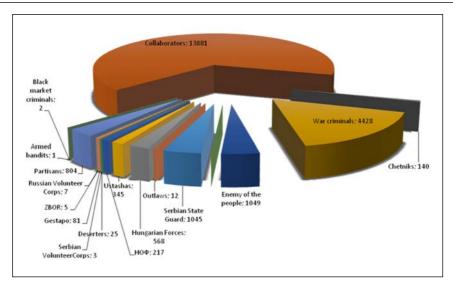
Graph 19. Social structure of casualties 1941-1948

Above results show that the most dominant social category among the killed were craftsmen, students, tradesmen, policemen, clerks, housewives etc.



Graph 20. National structure of female casualties 1941-1948

Out of total number of casualties, 31 533 or 37% make women; 16 619 were German nationals, 5799 Jewish, followed by 5779 Serbian and 905 Hungarian.



Graph 21. Original affiliation of casualties

The victims had the following affiliations based on original documents: collaborators, war criminals or "enemies of the state", members or sympathizers of various military formations etc.

Conclusion

According to preliminary Inter-Academy research results 86 492 people were killed during 1941–1948. Out of this total number 60 847 people were killed before the formal end of WW2. 45 575 were killed during the war, and 41 916 people lost their lives after the liberation. 16 659 people were killed before May 1945, and 25 257 people died in camps during the period of retaliation against German and Hungarian nationals between 1954 and 1948. Final results include all previous works of relevance for this study, and additional sources that were formerly unavailable (Secret Service files, Military Archives, Historical Archive of Vojvodina and some from several local archives) are also included. The most important findings of this research are newly discovered books and execution registers by OZNA, the department for the protection of people, and camp books for Bački Jarak, Molino, Sremska Mitrovica, Zrenjanin and some others.

The nationalities who had most casualties during the war are beyond any doubt the Jews and Serbs. However, after the war, the Folksdeutschers and the Hungarians were the dominant nationals who died in camps after May 15th, 1945. Serbs and Jews constituted the majority of casualties in camps during 1941–1945 (Serbs during

1942 and Jews in 1941). However, among those who died in camps in 1945–1948 were most of the Folksdeutschers. The majority of Hungarians and Croats were killed by firing squads or in extrajudicial executions after the war. In general, German forces were responsible for killings of Jews and Serbs, Hungarian forces for Serbs and Croats, national liberation forces for killing Germans and Hungarians, forces of the Independent State of Croatia for killings of Serbs and Jews.

All in all, compared to the size of the population, the greatest human losses were during 1941–1945. Among the most affected nationalities were Jews (765.1%), Serbs (41.3%), Germans (21.9%), Hungarians (17.6%), Croats (12.5%) and some other in smaller proportions. During 1941–1948, compared to the size of the population, the greatest death toll was by far among the Jews (770.9%), Germans (91.8%), Serbs (42%), Hungarians (18.3%), Croats (13.7%) and others in insignificant number.

It is important to stress that the results reached are not final and are subject to some modifications and change. They can be accessed on the Commission's site for indexing civilian casualties in Vojvodina 1941–1948 (http://vojvodinakom1941.org.rs/lt/).

NOTES

- ¹ Historian, Senior Research Associate, Institute for Contemporary History, Belgrade
- ² Associate Researcher, Institute for Contemporary History, Belgrade
- ³ Seventy volume index of war casulaties, published in 1992. However, in 1966 Feredral Bureau for Statistics published results for internal use. According to those results, total mumber of casualties in Vojvodina were 41 370; 26 426 Serbs, 1266 Croats, 91 Slovenisans, 29 Macedoninas, 208 Montenegrins, 16 Muslims, 9488 Jews, 1748 Hungarians, 734 Slovaks and 1305 other natioanlities. *Casulatis od war 1941–1945. Index results*. Belgrade, 1966. pp. 22–23.
- ⁴ Bogoljub Kočović: War casulaties in Yugosalvia. London, 1985; Vladimir Žerjavić: Loss of population in Yugosalvia during WW2. Zagreb, 1989
- ⁵ Aleksandar Kaszas: Maðari u Vojvodini 1941–1946. Novi Sad, 1996; Enike Šajti: Maðari u Vojvodini 1918–1947. Novi Sad, 2010; Zoran Janjetović: Nemci u Vojvodini. Beograd, 2009
- 6 Ljubivoje Cerović Dragoljub Živković Milan Micić Tibor Pal Enike Šajti Dušan Vuletić Nenad Maurić Đorđe Spernjak: Na putukaistini. Novi Sad, 2008
- ⁷ http://www.otvorenaknjiga.komisija1944.mpravde.gov.rs/#10
- 8 http://vojvodinakom1941.org.rs/lt/articles/o-nama/
- ⁹ Bogoljub Kočović: Sahranajednogmita. Žrtve Drugogsvetskog rata u Jugoslaviji. Novi Sad, 2005. p. 166.
- ¹⁰ Bogoljub Kočović: Sahranajednogmita. Žrtve Drugogsvetskog rata u Jugoslaviji. Novi Sad, 2005. p. 166.
- ¹¹ More in Nemci u Vojvodini by Zoran Janjetović (Beograd, 2009).