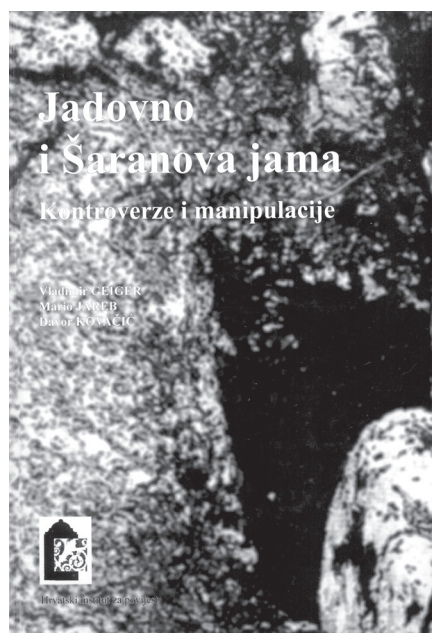


Vladimir Geiger, Mario Jareb, Davor Kovačić, *Jadovno i Šaranova jama: Kontroverze i manipulacije* [The Jadovno Concentration Camp and the Šaran Pit: Controversies and Manipulations] (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2017)

Summary

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the destruction and human toll wrought upon the territory of Yugoslavia, including Croatia, was extremely high. According to all indications, in the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska - NDH) the human loss was particularly high and tragic in the Jewish and Roma communities, as well as for the Serbs. The NDH used racial laws to determine how to deal with the Jews and Roma, while the Serbs were exposed to various forms of discrimination, persecution and violence. Furthermore, some victims of these persecutions and restrictive measures were Croats who were declared enemies of the New Order of Europe and violated the interests of this model for the Croatian state. As shown by varied and numerous evidence, the repressive measures and sowing of terror among the enemies and adversaries of the NDH and the German Reich resulted in high levels of human loss, numerous individual and mass murders, forced labour and concentration camps. Investigations have revealed different, and for many events and places relevant, indicators, with possible minor deviations, concerning the scale of the systematic repression enacted against Jews, Roma, and Serbs, and also those who were considered to be enemies of the NDH's "new order". The question of fatality statistics from World War II in Yugoslavia, including Croatia, became one of the most important political issues in the conflict's immediate aftermath and has remained so until today. Most discussions concerning human losses in Yugoslavia, including Croatia, during the Second World War have not been academically grounded and are clearly motivated by ideology and promotion. However, despite numerous estimations and calculations, these human losses remain one of the most controversial and sensitive topics of daily politics, particularly concerning the number of deaths and the national/ethnic, age and gender composition of those held in NDH concentration camps.



One contentious issue concerning World War II deaths in the NDH is the number of the victims from the so-called Gospić group of concentration camps (Gospić, Jadovno and Pag). The various estimates, calculations and name lists are ranged widely, from 1,794 to 7,000, 7,500, 10,502, 15,000, 24,000, 30,000, 35,000, 37,660, 40,123 deaths, and then even up to 62,000, 72,000 and 120,000 deaths. These figures significantly differ and were markedly conditioned by the changing political climate when they were produced.

The Lika region was until the end of May 1941 under Italian occupation, and the Italian armed forces had full military power over the area, which meant they were fully in charge of the civil administration bodies. The Rome contracts signed on the 18th of May, 1941 defined the border between the NDH and the Kingdom of Italy, while the area of Lika was recognised as a part of the NDH. In the first months of the NDH establishment, Gospić was the main reception or “selection” station and administrative centre of the Gospić group of concentration camps. From there, the captives were deported off to Velebit, the location of Jadovno, or the island of Pag, while some were retained in Gospić. The Gospić group of concentration camps was under the direct jurisdiction of the Gospić County Police Department (*Župsko redarstveno ravnateljstvo*). At the beginning, the Gospić concentration camp was receiving captives from all around the country by the order of Eugen Dido Kvaternik, who was at the time the commissioner for public order and security in the NDH. The first captives were mostly former Yugoslav police officers and members of the Chetnik movement. A bit later, from the start of July 1941, Kvaternik ordered every county and city police department to deport all the arrestees who were Jewish and “of the eastern Greek religion” (that is, Orthodox Christians) to Gospić, to be sorted out by the Gospić County Police Department. They were no longer sent to the Danica concentration camp in Koprivnica. The reason for this decision was that the Danica concentration camp became too small for the growing number of prisoners. By the end of July, 1941, all Jews from Danica were transferred to Gospić, with the exception of the few who were released and sent back to their homes. Likewise, the most of the captured Serbs were brought to Gospić, with the exception of those who were deported to Serbia, mostly Orthodox priests. The Serbs and Jews who were directed to Pag came from the prison or transit camp in Gospić. The Pag concentration camp complex consisted of two camps: the Slana concentration camp for adult men and the Metajna concentration camp for women and children. According to all available and substantiated data, both camps were established at the end of June 1941. The first prisoners were brought to Gospić on 18 June 1941, many of who were soon transferred to Jadovno on Velebit. They were around two hundred Jews from Zagreb, who arrived to Jadovno on 24 June 1941. Soon after, groups of other prisoners started arriving one after the other, mostly Serbs and occasionally Jews. At the same time, the Ustashe started exterminating the captives in the vicinity of the concentration camp. In this way, Jadovno was used as a transit camp where the Ustashe deported prisoners from various selection camps, such as the Gospić prison camp, the Danica concentration camp in Koprivnica, as well as other concentration camps and reception stations. From there, the prisoners were taken to extermination sites on Velebit. Apparently,

the Ustashe often simply sent columns and of prisoners directly to the extermination site. The Slana concentration camp at Pag started operating with the arrival of the first prisoners on 25 June 1941, and it was closed on 21 August, 1941. According to the available information, the Jadovno camp was closed a few days before the Pag camp, most probably between the 15th and the 20th August 1941. This means the Gospić and Slana camps operated for around two months, while Jadovno was closed a bit earlier than that. The Gospić concentration camp was, however, established earlier, at the end of May of 1941, but in the period between its founding and the second half of June, 1941, it also served as a prison accepting large transports of captives. From 20 May 1941, the NDH government began taking full civil and military power in the areas which had by then been occupied by the Italians, so it is unlikely that the Gospić prison, or concentration camp for the unsuitable people, would have been established before that time. Although several localities, concentration camps and extermination sites are in question here, their activities were linked into some kind of a joint concentration camp system, which included the Gospić camp, the Jadovno camp on Velebit and the camps Slana and Metajna on the island of Pag. In the literature, the mentioned concentration camps are listed under different names, which is why they are referred to as the Gospić group of concentration camps. The establishing, running and closing of the Gospić – Jadovno – Pag concentration camp group was very well documented in historiography, fiction and memoirs, but determining at least an approximate number of the fatalities still remains indisputably problematic.

All descriptions of the activities in these concentration camps state that they were places of horror, suffering and death. Almost all of those who did not adhere to the Ustasha regime in the NDH because to their ethnic/national, religious or political affiliations were murdered. Women and children were also killed, which says enough about the wrongdoings which took place in these concentration camps. However, the research into this issue has not yet yielded substantiated, undisputed and satisfying answers to the important and unavoidable question concerning the number of prisoners and deaths in the Gospić concentration camp group. The statements of the former Gospić-Jadovno prisoners concerning the number of the murdered captives are arbitrary and they vary considerably. Sometimes they are even conflicting, while the number of deaths soars up to 120,000. Numerous historiographical works, articles and memoirs about the Gospić-Jadovno concentration camps have been published, most often based on roughly estimated human losses, including graphic accounts of individual and group experiences and incredible descriptions of the atrocious crimes which took place there.

The Yugoslav lists of the Second World War death toll do not confirm that hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives in the NDH concentration camps, or over million people, as some claimed or still persistently claim. According to the most systematic Yugoslav World War II casualties list compiled by the Bureau of Statistics for the 1964 Yugoslav State Census of War Victims, as a part of the Federal Executive Council of Yugoslavia, 134,464 persons were killed in concentration camps in total, of who 89,851 died on the territory of Yugoslavia, while the rest lost their lives in the concentration camps established by the Nazi Germany and other Axis powers. The

Bureau of Statistics for the 1964 Yugoslav State Census of War Victims listed the names of 1,794 people killed in Jadovno. Since the Bureau's results of the casualty lists were placed under embargo and were not made public, the alternative lists which followed, and persisted throughout decades, have been prone to considerable exaggeration concerning the death toll estimations, mostly with Serb casualties. Furthermore, during the 1960s, the 1970s and the 1980s, the most common allegation about the Jadovno concentration camp, which was considered official and encyclopaedic, counted around 35,000 victims, and climbed to even 72,000, including "several thousands" in the Slana concentration camp on Pag. These encyclopaedic figures of death count at the Gospić group of concentration camps have been frequently quoted throughout the decades by various historians and authors, such as Mirko Peršen, Fikreta Jelić-Butić, Antun Miletić, Milan Bulajić and Vladimir Dedijer. These arbitrary and imprecise estimations of the Jadovno concentration camp casualties were even published internationally (for example in *Lexikon der Völkermorde*, Hamburg 1999).

The first attempt at calculating the number of the Jadovno victims was done by Franjo Zdunić Lav and presented in his article "Ustaški zločini na Jadovnom i u nekim drugim logorima smrti" ["The Ustasha crimes in Jadovno and other death camps"]. The article was published in the 1989 anthology *Kotar Gospić i kotar Perušić u narodnooslobodilačkom ratu 1941.-1945* [*The Districts of Gospić and Perušić in the People's War of Liberation 1941-1945*]. Zdunić lived in Gospić in 1941 and he allegedly carefully observed everything that was going on. Later on, he started investigating the Ustasha crimes in Jadovno and collecting eyewitness testimonies and former captives' accounts. He based his estimation on various collected materials, mostly reports, claiming that between the 1st and 24th of June 1941, in twenty-four days, two lorries transported approximately forty people each night, which amounts to 960 people. From the 24th of June, 1941, when the concentration camp was established, until the 20th of July, 1941, the prisoners were transported to the extermination site in two lorries and one part of the way on a bus, and then they had to continue to the site on foot. Furthermore, the prisoners came either from the concentration camp or directly from the railway station and moved in columns, two to four columns in the morning and two to three in the afternoon, which together amounted to 100, 200, 300, and even 400 people. The columns, the lorries and the bus on average numbered 450 people per day (the average of 450 was taken as the smallest figure, whereas, according to Zdunić, from the 24th of June until the 20th of July, 1941, in twenty-six days, 11,700 people were actually transported to Jadovno. According to Zdunić's eyewitnesses, without counting in those who were taken to the extermination site directly from the railway station, around 25,000 people arrived in the camp in the period between 20 July to 19 August 1941 (in thirty days), which is in total 37,660 people. However, Zdunić emphasises that the figure is "approximate and cannot be considered entirely accurate and final".

In his article "Prešućena istina – žrtve rata na području bivše Jugoslavije 1941.-1945. prema popisu iz 1964. godine" ["The Untold truth – war victims on the territory of former Yugoslavia 1941 – 1945 according to the 1964 list"], published in 1993 in *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* [*Contemporary History Journal*], Mihael Sobolevski

warned about the closely guarded list of the victim's names held by the Bureau of Statistics for the 1964 Yugoslav State Census of War Victims. The information from the list leaked anyway at the time, and Sobolevski published the information about the number of victims from the Gospić group of concentration camps, that is, Gospić and Jadovno, which amounted to 1,794 deaths. He emphasised that this figure was "very difficult to compare with what was stated in the literature (between 35,000 and 72,000), since the calculations were not based on scientific research but were the results of arbitrary estimations." Nevertheless, although approximate, the calculations of human losses from the Jadovno concentration camp entered international circulation.

According to the oversimplified estimation made by Slavko Goldstein in book *Holokaust u Zagrebu* [*The Holocaust in Zagreb*; edition in English was later published under the title *The Holocaust in Croatia*], published in 2001, which he repeated in his later books, there were at least 24,000 deaths in the Gospić-Jadovno concentration camps. This calculation is based primarily on the document issued by the Ustasha disciplinary and criminal court in the investigation and court proceedings which took place between October 1941 and February 1942 against Stjepan Rubinić, the chief of the Gospić County Police Department, due to the alleged closure of the Jadovno concentration camp. However, the document did not reveal any statistical indicators as to how many people were killed at Jadovno; there is only Rubinić's statement made on 29 October 1941 and recorded at the Ustasha Police Department prison in Zagreb, that there were "around 4,000 people" in Jadovno during its closure. Furthermore, the alleged estimation is based on Rubinić's previous statement to the writer Ilija Jakovljević in the Stara Gradiška concentration camp. According to this claim, which Goldstein took for granted, the Gospić Police Department kept an accurate count of the arrivals, which means that between 18 June and 23 August 1941 the concentration camp received around 28,700 people, with the following remark: "Hardly a few hundreds survived. The rest were slaughtered. Then add those who were not even registered in the books [...]". The remark is possibly Jakovljević's opinion because it is contradictory to both Rubinić's claim to Jakovljević that the Gospić Police Department kept an accurate count of the prisoner arrivals and his statement made on 29 October 1941 at the Ustaše Police Department in Zagreb, that there were around 4,000 prisoners in the Jadovno concentration camp when it was shut down. At the end of August 1941, after Jadovno was closed, the remaining Gospić prisoners were deported to other concentration camps (Jasenovac, Jastrebarsko, Loborgrad, Krušćica), and a few hundreds were released. Since there are no preserved lists of captives from the Gospić – Jadovno – Pag concentration camps, it is difficult and impossible to judge the credibility of Rubinić's testimony, or Jakovljević's allegations. However, some Croatian historians did quote Goldstein's death toll. After the English publication of his book 1941. *Godina koja se vraća* (*The Year That Keeps Returning*, New York Review of Books, New York 2013.) and the book *Holokaust u Zagrebu* (*The Holocaust in Croatia*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Published in Association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 2016.), by Ivo and Slavko Goldstein, the claim that there were at least 24,000 people killed in the Gospić-Jadovno concentration camps entered international circulation.

It might seem to the uninformed that the publication of Đuro Zatezalo's two-volume book in 2007, *Jadovno: Kompleks ustaških logora 1941*. [*Jadovno: The Ustasha concentration camp complex in 1941*] and *Jadovno: Zbornik dokumenata* [*Jadovno: The collection of documents*], published by the Serbian Museum of Genocide Victims, made the largest step in the investigation of the activities of the Gospić group of concentration camps. However, this never happened, regardless of the fact that the book's almost two thousand pages pay special attention to the number of victims. Zatezalo based his claims and conclusions on lacking and even dubious sources, and he used a methodology of questionable authenticity. He considerably increased the number of Gospić victims, mostly Serbs, supplying lists of names, according to which there were 10,502 deaths (9,663 Serbs, 762 Jews, 55 Croats, and 22 others), while using his calculations he estimated that 40,123 people were killed. Without hesitation, Zatezalo claims that 32,103 people lost their lives at Jadovno, and 8,020 people in the concentration camps Slana and Metajna on the island of Pag. Moreover, he is absolutely sure that the Gospić group of concentration camps saw the extermination of 38,010 Serbs, 1,988 Jews, 88 Croats, 11 Slovenes, 9 Muslims, 2 Czechs, 2 Hungarians, 1 Russian, 1 Roma and 1 Montenegrin. However, if we look at Zatezalo's calculations, ten victims are in fact missing, although his list of the victim's names numbers 10,502 persons. Finally, Zatezalo claims that 42,246 men, women and children were transported to the Gospić-Jadovno concentration camps. What is more, he is trying to convince his readers that the following is true: "I have come to the number of the people deported to the Jadovno concentration camp by relying mostly on the original NDH archive documents, which state the dates and the number of Serbs and Jews which had been transported to the Gospić-Jadovno concentration camp. These documents are: the warrants issued by the Ustasha Main Police Department, the orders of the Ustasha police to the Gospić Police Department, the receipts issued by the railway stations about the transports and the numbers of special cargo railcars, which show the dates and the numbers of the transported prisoners, the reports of the districts addressed to the NDH Directorate of Public Order and Safety (Ravnateljstvo za javni red i sigurnost - RAVSIGUR), which also list the number of arrested Serbs and Jews who were transported to the Jadovno concentration camp." However, this quote is contradictory to the claim which this author made in his books' introductory notes: "The traces of the crimes were destroyed at the time when they were committed. Since the Serbs and the Jews were outside of the legal system, the Ustashe killed them without any charges, trials or records, and, therefore, of course, lists of the executed did not exist. In places where they did have some sort of lists, they made sure to destroy as many as they could before it was too late." It remains unknown how exactly, "relying mostly on the original NDH archive documents" which he used in his research, Zatezalo got the information that the Gospić concentration camp held 42,246 men, women and children.

The investigations undertaken so far yielded a list of names for around 3,300 persons, mostly men, who were deported to the Danica concentration camp in Koprivnica, which was established on 15 April 1941, and which was operating until September of 1942. The above given figure comprises 2,260 Serbs, 600 Jews, 430 Croats and a few others, arrested in different parts of the NDH. A large number of these people were

sent to Danica because they were under suspicion of belonging to the Chetniks or the communists. There is no accurate information about how many of them arrived in Danica and how many were deported further, although a person who worked as a cashier at the camp's administration centre after the war said to the Yugoslav government that 5,600 persons went through the camp. On 30 June 1941, the relevant authorities in Zagreb decided that the most of Danica prisoners, obviously Serbs and Jews, would be transferred to Gospić. Finally, on 8 July 1941, the NDH Directorate of Public Order and Safety (RAVSIGUR) in Zagreb ordered that the recently arrested Srbs and Jews would instead of Danica be sent directly to Gospić. So, from 30 June and during July of 1941, almost all Serbs and Jews imprisoned at Danica were deported to Gospić. The Ustasha commander of the Danica concentration camp Nikola Herman allegedly said that he sent between 2,500 and 2,700 Serbian captives to Gospić. It was found that of around 3,300 Danica prisoners evidenced in the records, mostly Serbs and Jews, 2,167 were killed at the Gospić – Jadovno and the island of Pag concentration camps. According to the minutes taken on 15 July 1941 at the Danica concentration camp registry office, until that date the camp received 2,656 prisoners in total, and 1,960 prisoners were by that same date transported from Danica to Gospić. According to some information, the deportation occurred in six railway transports, on the 4th, 9th, 14th, 18th, 21st and 24th of July, 1941. It is possible to assume that after the 15th of July, 1941, a relatively similar number of prisoners were taken to Gospić, although the number of the captives in those transports could have been either larger or smaller. The total number of the persons transported from Danica to Gospić could have been around 4,000. This figure also includes the 2,500 – 2,700 Serbs mentioned by Herman, while the others were probably mostly Jews, and according to the gathered information, there were at least 600 of them at Danica. If on 8 July 1941 RAVSIGUR in Zagreb ordered that the recently arrested Serbs and Jews were to be deported to Gospić instead of Danica, it is questionable as to how much the number of 2,656 prisoners of Danica, who arrived until 15 July 1941, could have increased with the new arrivals of Serbs and Jews. It is possible to assume that the number of the prisoners deported from Danica to Gospić could have been less than 4,000.

In the first volume of his book *Jadovno: Kompleks ustaških logora 1941*. [*Jadovno: The Ustasha concentration camp complex in 1941*] Zatezalo published the copies of 11 (eleven) documents concerning the transport of Serbs and Jews to Gospić from various parts of the NDH. However, out of these eleven documents, 8 (eight) also mention the number of prisoners who were deported to the Gospić concentration camp. In the second volume of his book *Jadovno: Zbornik dokumenata* [*Jadovno: The collection of documents*] Zatezalo published in total 16 (sixteen) NDH documents, which mention the number of prisoners who were transported to Gospić. Therefore, since some documents were published both as copies and transcripts, the total of 21 (twenty-one) documents mention the number of prisoners sent to the Gospić concentration camp. The NDH documents which Zatezalo published in his book were known from before and had already been published elsewhere, primarily in anthologies of documents prepared by Antun Miletić, which Zatezalo actually mentioned in his book. In both the book's volumes, *Jadovno: Kompleks ustaških logora 1941*. [*Jadovno: The Ustasha*

concentration camp complex in 1941] and *Jadovno. Zbornik dokumenata* [*Jadovno: The collection of documents*] Zatezalo published none of the large number of previously unknown documents issued by the NDH government which would possibly mention the number of prisoners deported to the Gospić concentration camp. Since he never mentioned them, Zatezalo obviously knew nothing about them, or about any specific unpublished documents referring to the Gospić camp which mention the number of people deported there.

Speaking of the people sent to the Gospić prison, or concentration camp, there is enough information showing that not all of them were Serbs and Jews, and that the arrests were not non-selective, as Zatezalo suggested. There were also the communists or those who were suspected of supporting communism, which of course does not excuse the extent of repression and crime committed. The Gospić – Jadovno – Pag concentration camps primarily had to deal with Jews and communist Serbs, that is, wealthy and educated Serbs. The rest of the Jews were later deported to different concentration camps, while the Serbs were either exiled from the NDH or converted from Orthodox Christianity to another religion, etc.

The imposing question is how Zatezalo got the information he used about the total number of victims from the Gospić concentration camp group and about their ethnic or national background. According to his estimations, 40,123 persons were killed in these camps. Out of that number, according to what his claims, 38,010 were Serbs. Still, it is hard to believe that in the summer of 1941, during the consolidation of NDH, the Ustashe killed, buried and (or) threw into pits approximately 333 prisoners per day, which is in total 30,000 people. Zatezalo attempts to persuade the readers that he came to this estimation “by relying mostly on the original NDH archive documents”, such as “the orders of the Ustasha police to the Gospić Police Department, the receipts issued by the railway stations about the transports and the numbers of special cargo railcars, which state the dates and the numbers of the transported prisoners, the reports of the districts addressed to the NDH Directorate of Public Order and Safety [RAVSIKUR], which also list the number of arrested Serbs and Jews who were had been deported to the Jadovno concentration camp.” Apparently, based on these materials, Zatezalo came to the conclusion that in the period between “11 April and 21 August [1941], in the one hundred and thirty-two days of its existence, the Jadovno concentration camp complex received 42,246 men, women and children.” Out of that number Zatezalo claimed to have “deducted the number of those who the Ustashe did not have time to exterminate before the arrival of the Italian army, which was 2,123 people”. In this way he calculated the number of people killed in the camps Jadovno and Slana on the island of Pag, which he claims “could not have been less than that.” However, one of the main problems in researching the NDH is the lack of relevant documentation from the main organisations of the Ustasha movement and the NDH government, for example the Main Ustasha Headquarters, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Armed Forces, and similar institutions. With regard to volume, there is a relatively large collection of materials from the above mentioned institutions, but it largely holds less important content. It should be pointed out that a part of the documentation was destroyed by the NDH government itself before their fall. Besides, in 2010, after

Zatezalo's book *Jadovno: Kompleks ustaških logora 1941*. [*Jadovno: The Ustaše concentration camp complex in 1941*] and *Jadovno. Zbornik dokumenata* [*Jadovno. The collection of documents*] and his "convincing" numbers, Antun Miletić says: "How many innocent people were killed at the Gospić concentration camp and its extermination site at Jadovno by 21 August 1941, that is, until it was closed, is difficult to determine accurately, since many of the relevant documents were destroyed. Therefore, the estimations of the number of casualties usually differ." It is indisputable that the sources used by Zatezalo are scarce and lacking, and they cannot lead to either the exact number of prisoners or the number and national composition of the people killed in this group of concentration camps.

In cases of many victims, it is impossible to reliably claim what was the exact time and place of their death. Authors should be careful when making name lists for the Second World War human losses, as well as the victims of its aftermath. They were mostly based on people's statements instead of official documents; those who gave the statements about the victims, for example family members, relatives and locals, most often knew neither the circumstances, the time, the place of a certain death, nor the executioner or perpetrator of the crime. Since the reports about the victims, the circumstances, and the time and place of their execution are often different, and even contradictory, manipulations and the multiplication of the number of human losses in the NDH's concentration camps are quite possible. Furthermore, the death toll lists in Yugoslavia after the Second World War, especially the lists of the NDH concentration camp victims, often reveal nonexistent persons, or persons who could not have possibly lost their lives in the stated time and place. Among the victims from the Gospić group of concentration camps, it is possible to find people who were killed at the time when the camp did not even exist. Both Gospić and Jasenovac have had such cases. Meaning, the Gospić lists of victims, as well as the Jasenovac lists, often reveal a considerable number of the same people. Furthermore, there is a large number of the Second World War victims who were listed as killed in various places, at different times and under different circumstances.

Đuro Zatezalo's two-volume book *Jadovno: Kompleks ustaških logora 1941*. [*Jadovno: The Ustaše concentration camp complex in 1941*] and *Jadovno: Zbornik dokumenata* [*Jadovno: The collection of documents*] reveals nothing new and was in fact written in the wake of the idea that the Croats and the Independent State of Croatia carried out genocide against Serbs and that the Croats are collectively responsible for the war crimes committed in the NDH. Zatezalo came to an astonishing and incorrect conclusion that the crimes committed by the Ustasha were not talked about during communism for the sake of preserving the brotherhood and unity, and he is not the only one in claiming this. In short, and in conclusion, it is impossible to consider Zatezalo's book as a reliable work which could serve as a basis for studying the activities of the Gospić group of concentration camps. The difference between the list of names, counting 10,502 victims, and the calculation of 40,123 victims, which Zatezalo presents, is too large. It is unclear as to how he obtained the estimation that there were 42,246 Gospić concentration camp prisoners and victims in total.

Furthermore, due to Raphael Israeli's book *The Death Camps of Croatia: Visions and Revisions, 1941-1945*, published in 2013 in the United States (translated into Serbian as *Logori smrti Hrvatske: Vizije i revizije, 1941-1945* and published in Banja Luka in 2015 by the Association of the Descendants and Appreciators of the Victims of the Gospić – Jadovno – Pag 1941 Death Camps) Zatezalo's figures of 42,246 prisoners and 40,123 victims of the Gospić camps entered international circulation.

For a number of years, the Yugoslav post-war historiography, fiction, memoirs and publications which dealt with the Gospić group of concentration camps, that is, the Jadovno concentration camp, never mentioned the Šaran pit by name. The place was mostly referred to as: the Jadovno pits, the pits, the deep sinkholes, the karst pits, the chasms, the abyss, the dark abyss or the dark pit. In the 1980s, the Šaran pit finally became unavoidable when mentioning and writing about the Jadovno concentration camp. Historiography, fiction and memoirs during the 1950s, the 1960s, the 1970s and the 1980s listed different numbers of those killed at Jadovno, as well as of the victims thrown in the Šaran pit, mostly ranging from 7,500 – 10,000 up to 30,000 – 35,000. Tihomir Pajalić, the first speleologist who went into the pit in 1962 and published a short article about it, and about what he found there, in the magazine *Naše planine* [*Our Mountains*]. He wrote that the dimensions of the pit's opening are 1.5×4 metres, and that it is located on the elevation of 890 metres. Fifteen metres into the pit, the width increases by ten metres, and narrows down to 4×6 metres towards the bottom. The pit is 42.5 metres deep. According to Pajalić, the layer of human bones found on the bottom was 1.35 metres thick. The sectional drawing of the pit, also published by Pajalić, and later by others, such as Milan Bulajić, Srećko Božičević and Jovan Mirković, included the existence of a layer of human bones. Pajalić noted that the bones were covered with a layer of gravel, which was thrown in the pit probably during the construction of the stone wall for the memorial. However, with time, more frequently in the 1980s and the 1990s, Serbian authors started considerably increasing the number of people being killed in the Jadovno concentration camp, that is, people who were thrown into this karst pit in the vicinity of the camp. Today, some Croats minimise or negate entirely the number of victims in the Gospić group of concentration camps, including the existence of the Šaran pit victims.

Another unresolved issue is the number of victims from the Pag concentration camps (Slana and Metajna). The findings of the Yugoslav State Commission for Investigation of Crimes of Occupiers and Their Allies listed the names of only 35 victims from the Pag concentration camps, while their calculations show that Slana and Metajna saw the deaths of 8,000 people, which was, and still is, the most frequently quoted figure in historiography and other publications. In the supplement entitled "Pakao u kamenoj pustinji: Ustaški koncentracioni logor Slana na Pagu" ["Hell in a rocky desert: The Ustasha concentration camp Slana on Pag"], published in July, August and September of 1985 in the Rijeka newspaper *Novi list*, Borislav Ostojić and Mihael Soboleviski presented an overview of various numerical but unspecified indicators concerning the victims of the Slana and Metajna concentration camps on Pag. They noted the following: "Nobody mentions less than several thousand human losses, while there

are some who claim that there were between 10,000 and 20,000 deaths in Slana and Metajna, as well as the coastal area around it, and the area between Karlobag and Pag, who were either killed there or taken to Velebit, where they were exterminated.” They also warn about a mass of information, either vague or contradictory, to be found in the literature and testimonies of various individuals, contemporaries and eyewitnesses. Based on the available information, Ostojić and Sobolevski made an approximate calculation of the number of prisoners and victims from the Pag concentration camps: “The Slana concentration camp existed for around 70 days. [...] several ships took part in transporting the prisoners, while some carried the prisoners from Karlobag to Slana up to twenty times. As a rule, the ships carried more passengers than they would have in normal conditions, which was often up to 150 prisoners. Occasionally, there were several ships operating at the same time, also when they were not transporting the prisoners. If it is assumed that only one group of 150 prisoners was shipped to Pag per day, in the period of 70 days this would amount to around 10,500 prisoners, including both Slana and Metajna. However, these are only assumptions, since it is not possible to corroborate the estimation with any other sources.” Nevertheless, some are of the opinion that the numerical indicators which should be considered as “at least approximately accurate” are the ones determined by the Primorsko-Goranska County Commission for Investigation of Crimes of Occupiers and Their Allies. In their 1947 study entitled “Zločin okupatora i njihovih pomagača na području Primorsko-goranskog okruga” [“The Crime of the Occupiers and Their Allies on the Territory of the Primorsko-goranska County”] they claim that there were “over 6,000 prisoners held in the Slana concentraton camp, whereas around 400 people were sent to other concentration camps while Pag was being shut down. According to this information, in the period of 70 days, around 6,000 prisoners were killed in the Slana concentration camp or in Baške Oštarije (vicinity of Karlobag) [...]” In his book *Haron i sudbine* [*Charon and Destinies*], published in 1988, Ante Zemljarić brought forth his estimation concerning the number of the Pag concentration camp victims: “According to the grave sites around Furnaža bay, as well as Slana, and Karlobag across the bay, and according to the selected testimonies and other documents, between 8,000 and 13,000 men, women and children could have been killed on the north-west side of the concentration camp, close to the lighthouse, at Slana, at sea and on the nearby Velebit mountain, where they were taken for extermination”. He also believes that “the number cannot be accurately determined”.

The issue concerning the number of victims from the Gospić concentration camp group has not yet been resolved, because both Croatian and Western European historiography, and the most recent papers, still mention and consider substantiated the number of victims issued by the Bureau of Statistics for the 1964 Yugoslav State Census of War Victims, which estimated 1,794 deaths, as well as Goldstein’s estimations of around 24,000 losses and Zatezalo’s calculations of over 40,000 deaths.

It is evident that Croatian and Serbian historians, the media and politicians have recently adamantly promoted Zatezalo’s unfounded number of around 40,000 casualties of the Jadovno concentration camp, that is, the Gospić group of concentration camps. The numbers of the NDH concentration camps victims, including the victims

from Gospić, are found to be arbitrary in historiography, fiction and memoirs. Often some of the earlier unfounded estimations are quoted, or “the suitable” numbers of victims are presented. Simply said, most often it is about who and (or) which side, barricaded in its own determined point of view, fabricates evidence and tells lies more persistently and persuasively.

The conclusion is indisputably the following: the research undertaken so far, as well as numerous publications which bring up the outdated and the repeated quotes and statements have not resulted in substantiated answers concerning how many prisoners were held in the Gospić group of concentration camps, and, more importantly, how many people were actually killed there.

After the Second World War in Yugoslavia, the number of losses was deliberately exaggerated, while the origin and ethnic composition of the victims was suppressed and obscured, which made the manipulation with this number easier. The result was an extreme case of multiplication of the deaths on the territory of Yugoslavia, including Croatia, especially the Serbian victims killed in the NDH. Despite the evident indicators concerning the human loss lists in Yugoslavia after WWII, the long and persistent campaign of proving that hundreds of thousands of people were killed in NDH’s concentration camps, where some academic and mostly historian circles were used as transmitters of the numbers of concentration camp victims, has reached its escalation point.

The largest and most dishonourable manipulation of the Yugoslav politics and science, especially historiography, was precisely the mystification of the losses in Yugoslavia after the Second World War and the people killed by the occupants and their allies in the NDH. The supporters of these mystifications and obscure facts about the WWII deaths in Yugoslavia did not give up even after the fall of SFR Yugoslavia. The proponents of the argument that Croats committed genocide gladly dismiss the fact that during the Second World War, a considerably large number of Serbs were on the territory of the NDH killed as members of the Partisan and the Chetnik movements, and that the German and Italian occupational forces were responsible for the deaths of a large number of Serbs. Furthermore, a substantial number of Serbs were collateral victims of the epidemics of infectious diseases, most commonly typhus. However, it seems that the Serbs were solely or mostly the victims of the Ustashe, with a special emphasis on the concentration camp victims in the NDH, including the concentration camp Jasenovac.

This enormous numbers of the concentration camp victims in the NDH have in some Serbian circles, in spite of everything, remained the omnipresent and the only accepted option until this day. Moreover, as a response to the Serbian outdated and repeated interpretations of the crimes committed in the NDH, especially concerning the concentration camps Jasenovac and Gospić – Jadovno – Pag, Croatians have produced numerous more or less scientifically substantiated, as well as revisionist, publications against the genocide claims and the Jasenovac myth. The number of the NDH concentration camp victims has been vastly increased by the Serbian nationalists, while the Croatian nationalists have entirely minimised it. Equally uncomfortable are the

Serbian nationalist exaggerations about the number of the Serbian losses in the NDH, especially the deaths in concentration camps, followed by the Croatian nationalists minimising of these numbers. Despite frequent and fierce discussions concerning the method used for determining the number and ethnic background of the NDH concentration camp victims, this issue has also remained open in historiography. There are still persistent proponents of specific indicators and figures, who rely on either name lists or calculations, or certain estimations, while ignoring some other numeric indicators. It is evident that historiography has mainly been recycling this information, without producing any new research results.

The issue of the death toll in Yugoslavia, during and immediately after the Second World War, is for numerous reasons one of the most complicated research subjects and it surely requires additional examination. Determining these deaths cannot be based on improvisations, but on very specific and real indicators, so as to gain the most accurate information possible concerning the number and the names of the victims. Therefore, despite numerous supplements in historiography, fiction, demography and victimology, there are still many open issues and counter-issues regarding the concentration camp victims in the NDH. Due to a lack of systematic research, many people today, both left and right wing, produce arbitrary information, either maximising or minimising some categories of the WWII losses in Yugoslavia. This increasing and reducing, or even suppressing, some casualty categories, complemented with a lack of knowledge regarding the facts, is most often the result of personal, nationalistic or political reasons.

In researching the number and names, the ethnic/national background and the religious, social, native, gender and age composition of the NDH concentration camp victims, the problem is primarily the lack of original archived materials. However, in researching the Second World War human losses in Yugoslavia, including even the number of the NDH concentration camp victims, the problem is most often not only the lack of authentic documentation, but also the lack of good will and common sense in properly studying these issues.