

## THE NAZIS, GERMAN NATIONALISM, AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY: THE ADRIATIC COASTLAND UNDER FRIEDRICH RAINER<sup>1</sup>

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In September 1943 Adolf Hitler appointed Friedrich Rainer High Commissioner of the Operation Zone Adriatic Coastland (OZAK). For the next year and a half Rainer, who was also *Gauleiter* of nearby Carinthia and Chief of the occupied territories of Upper Carniola (presently the northwestern part of Slovenia), ruled this region as the Führer's deputy. He was a remarkable official and an uncommon personality who became an important survivor of and witness to the Third Reich's collapse. Tried in Ljubljana and supposedly executed by the Yugoslavs in the summer of 1947, Rainer in fact lived and worked for his captors until 1950 and possibly later. He wrote hundreds of pages of history, political analysis, and personality assessments. Among these pages is a striking document which deals with the Adriatic Coastland. It offers a wealth of information on the region's Nazi government. It depicts a remarkable contrast between Rainer's approach to the occupied territories and the neighboring OZAK. Further, it sheds considerable light on the personality and character of Rainer. It shows how he altered his rule from intense German nationalist in Slovenia to advocate of ethnic diversity in the Adriatic.

Rainer's extensive treatise on the OZAK was written sometime after January 1948. He probably wrote it in German as he spoke no foreign languages, although the only copy to survive is in Croatian. Why it was translated into Croatian is a mystery, since this ninety-three-page account is the only one of his numerous documents in that language. Usually his articles were translated into Slovene from the original German. In this particular treatise Rainer showed an amazing

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recall of names, positions, and people; only occasionally does he not remember some of the particulars.<sup>2</sup>

The general tone of the paper is anti-Italian and pro-ethnic diversity. Rainer stresses that his ultimate goal in the OZAK was peace, order, and efficiency. But in order to do this, aside from dealing with the growing partisan threat, he had to fend off the national animosities of the three groups living there—the Slovenes, the Croats, and the Italians. To temper their hatreds and lessen their rancor, Rainer argued that it was crucial to end Italian domination and stop the activities of the para-military groups sponsored by the Italian Fascists. Second, in conjunction with curbing Italian influence, he planned to introduce balanced government and evenhanded authority. This strategy meant he had to acknowledge and accept the Slovenes and Croats. These two approaches then, reducing Italian domination and introducing a stable administration, became his immediate objectives in the Adriatic Coastland.<sup>3</sup>

Such a multi-ethnic approach in the OZAK was a dramatic shift from the course he had previously followed in Upper Carniola. There, Rainer wrote, he pursued a threefold policy: (1) include the area in the general territory of the Reich, (2) Germanize the people, and (3)

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<sup>2</sup> F. Rainer, "Osnivanje i djelatnost organa vrhovnog komesara u operativnoj zoni 'jadranska obala'" (Ljubljana: Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve [MNZ], n.d. [after January 1948?]), INV 761, 80-4, II-30.

I am indebted to Eddie Truden from Hamilton, Ontario, now living in Ljubljana, for providing the working translation of this document.

Rainer also wrote a variation and shorter version as: "Die 'Operationszone Adriatisches Küstenland' [OZAK] unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Verhältnisse in Triest" (MNZ, n.d.), Inv 761, 80-4, III-8.

<sup>3</sup> Rainer, "Osnivanje" 1601. See also Erich Roethel, "Die weisse Stadt am Meer," and Roethel, "Susak und Fiume," *Deutsche Zeitung in Kroatien* 9 May 1944: 1 and 11 May 1944: 1.

Another key objective—really more important than Rainer's twin goals—was the defeat of the partisans. While he proposed that he take control of this campaign the task was conducted ruthlessly by the military and police. See Claus Gatterer, *Im Kampf gegen Rom* [Vienna: Europa, 1968] 807; F. W. Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship* [London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962] 613.



relocate the local population where necessary, replacing them with immigrant Germans.<sup>4</sup> His methods in Upper Carniola were decidedly nationalistic. But for the OZAK he advocated something quite different. To understand this change and to appreciate the new policy Rainer promoted, some background on the region's geography, Rainer himself, and his Germanism is important.

## GEOGRAPHY

The area from the northeast corner of the Adriatic, including Istria, through present Slovenia and Italian Friuli-Venezia Giulia and into the Austrian provinces of Carinthia and Styria is a region of mixed and complex ethnicity—Germans, Slovenes, Italians, Friulians, and Croats. Until the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy it was composed or was part of the duchies of Carniola, Carinthia, and Styria, the county of Gorizia, the Margravate of Istria, and the city of Trieste. On the western and eastern peripheries there were also Italian and Hungarian jurisdictions (figure 1).<sup>5</sup> An idea of the diversity of this region comes from population statistics compiled shortly after the beginning of this century. In Carniola 94% of the population was Slovene and 5% German, although along the border with Carinthia—where a plebiscite was held after the First World War to determine whether the area would go to Austria or Yugoslavia—the mix was 67% Slovene and 33% German. In all of Carinthia the mix was closer to 75% German and 25% Slovene. The Adriatic Littoral was the most diverse area—Slovene, 32%; Croatian, 20%; Italian, 43%; and German, 3.5%.<sup>6</sup> With the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy the region was divided between Italy, rump Austria, and newly created Yugoslavia. The ethnic diversity, however, did not disappear.

Slovenia, which plays a large role in this study, was created in 1919 largely from territories acquired from old Austria. It included the lower portion of Styria, most of Carniola, three small districts of

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<sup>4</sup> Rainer, "Osnivanje" 1602.

<sup>5</sup> Carole Rogel, "In the Beginning: The Slovenes from the 7th Century to 1945," ed. Jill Benderly and Evan Kraft, *Independent Slovenia: Origins, Movements and Prospects* (New York: St. Martin's, 1994) 4.

<sup>6</sup> Helga Harriman, *Slovenia under Nazi Occupation, 1941–1945* (New York: Studia Slovenica, 1977) 11; C. A. Macartney, *The Habsburg Empire 1790–1918* (New York: Macmillan, 1969) 676.



Carinthia, and a small strip from Hungary. After the First World War it formed, along with Croatia and Serbia, the Kingdom of the South Slavs, which later became Yugoslavia. In April 1941, with the collapse of Yugoslavia, the Italians and the Germans split Slovenia. The southern portion, including Ljubljana, went to the Italians, who called it the Province of Ljubljana, while the northern section was occupied by the Germans. In the north the Germans further divided the area into two civil administrative units: the northeast portion, Lower Styria, administered by the Nazi authorities in *Gau Styria*, and a western part directed by officials in *Gau Carinthia*. The western portion was referred to as the Occupied Territories of Carinthia and Carniola, although Hitler also ordered that it be called South Carinthia. Officially the two regions were not attached to the Third Reich as the Nazis wanted to pacify the area first. De facto, in April 1941, they were annexed (figure 2).<sup>7</sup>

In 1943, when Mussolini's Italy collapsed and the Germans occupied that country and its appendages, Hitler created two "operational zones" on the northern Adriatic. One was the *Alpenvorland* under the *Gauleiter* of Tyrol, consisting of Bolzano (Bozen), Trento and Belluno. The second, the Adriatic Coastland, included the seven Italian, Slovene, and Croatian districts of Friuli, Görz, Trieste, Istria, Fiume, Laibach (Ljubljana), and Quarnero (the Croatian Littoral). It was directed by the *Gauleiter* of Carinthia.<sup>8</sup> The political direction had again changed, but not the ethnic diversity.

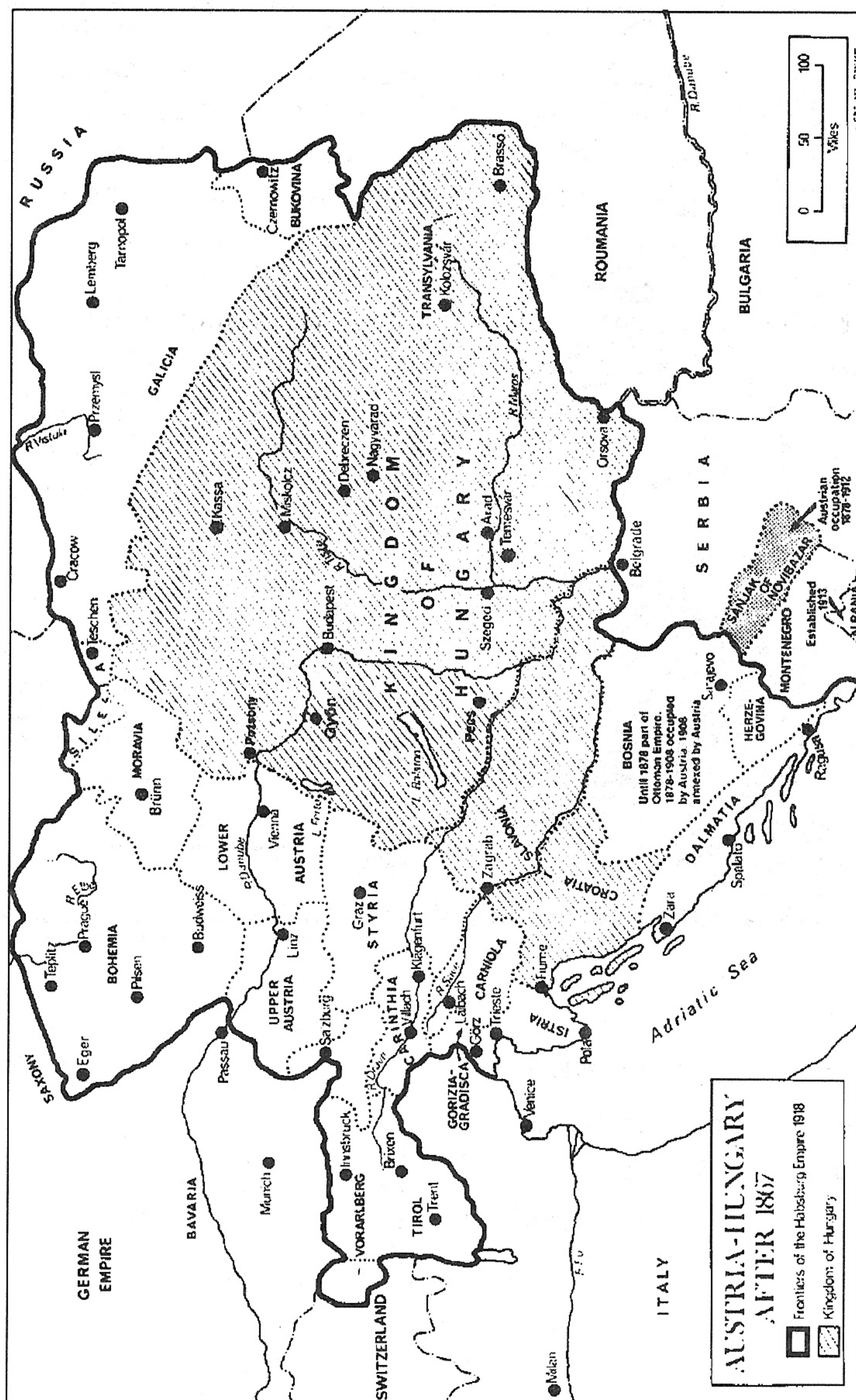
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<sup>7</sup> Office of Strategic Services (OSS), "The German De Facto Annexation of the Northeastern Italian Provinces," 1 September 1944, United States National Archives (USNA), RG 226, R & A 2208, Microfiche Pub 1221; Helga Harriman, "Slovenia as an Outpost of the Third Reich," *East European Quarterly* 5.2 (1972): 223; Tone Ferenc, "The Austrians and Slovenia during the Second World War," ed. Fred Parkinson, *Conquering the Past: Austrian Nazism Yesterday and Today* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1989) 210–15.

<sup>8</sup> Der Reichsminister und Chef der Reichskanzlei (Lammers) an die Obersten Reichsbehörden, Berlin, 11.09.1943, Karl Stuhlpfarrer, *Die Operationszonen 'Alpenvorland' und 'Adriatisches Küstenland' 1943–1945* (Vienna: Brüder Hollinek, 1969) 137–39.



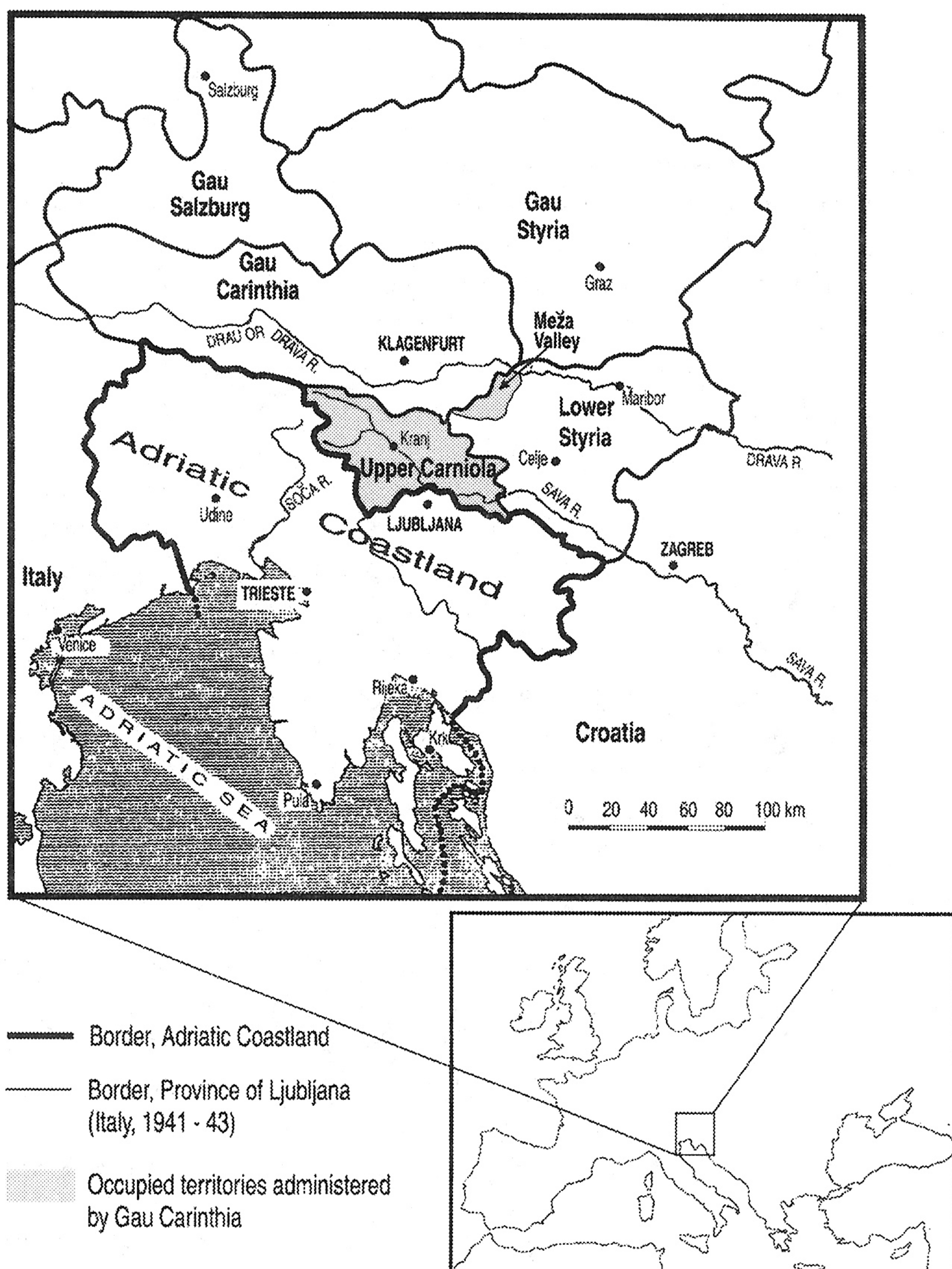
Figure 1: The Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>9</sup>



<sup>9</sup> Arthur Banks, cartographer., from C. A. Macartney 572–73. Copyright © 1969 by C. A. Macartney. Courtesy Scribner, a Division of Simon & Schuster; and courtesy of Weidenfeld and Nicolson.



Figure 2: Areas of activity—F. Rainer, 1938–45.





## RAINER AND GERMANISM

Born in Carinthia on the fringes of Germanic culture, Friedrich Rainer grew up in an intensely German environment. His family traced its national heritage back several centuries. His father, a middle school teacher, was an enthusiastic German nationalist, an official of the German-Democratic Party, and later a strong supporter of the Greater German People's Party. As a school boy Rainer's favorite teacher was Martin Wutte, a historian who taught him about the so-called Germanic mission of Carinthia. Wutte was one of the most outspoken, scholarly, and active proponents of this mission. In 1919 and 1920 Rainer participated in the "Stop the Slav" movement in the Klagenfurt Basin. He joined his father and brother as a member of the local paramilitary unit. Later, as a student, he took part in the traditional embodiment of German nationalism, a dueling fraternity. He continued his fraternal association as a member of an alumni group in Klagenfurt, a chapter typically called the "Wartburg." An athlete, he helped organize the Carinthian *Wehrturnbewegung*, a gymnastic organization in the tradition of the nineteenth-century founder of German nationalism and father of gymnastics, *Turnvater* Jahn.<sup>10</sup> After 1923, as a National Socialist he supported the Führer in the belief that the Third Reich was, as he wrote, "a German nation state, in which there is no foreign minority."<sup>11</sup> In short, he typified the fervent German nationalist who found a home in Hitler's movement.

Following the 1938 *Anschluss* Rainer became one of the Führer's key subordinates in old Austria and an active proponent of the "German only" policy. First he served as *Gauleiter* of Salzburg. In late 1941, however, he returned to Carinthia as *Gauleiter* and governor

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<sup>10</sup> Dr. jur. Friedrich Rainer, 8 Jan. 1942, Archiv für publizistische Arbeit, Arbeiterkammer für Wien (AKW); "Die Ahnenheimat unseres Gauleiters Dr. Rainer," *Wochenblatt der Landesbauernschaft Kärnten* (Klagenfurt), 22 July 1944: 1, 61 Re1 Reichslandbund, Pressearchiv #356, Rainer, Bundesarchiv, Abteilung Potsdam; Vernehmungsniederschrift (Rainer's interrogation before his 1947 trial), MNZ, Inv 761, 80-4, II-8, 549, 683-86; F. Rainer, "Über die Kärntner Slovenen-Frage," (MNZ, n.d. [after January 1948?]), Inv 761, 80-4, II-18, 1376, 1378, 1389; F. Rainer, "Die Wehrturnbewegung in Kärnten," (MNZ, n.d.), Inv 761, 80-4, 1204, 1209.

<sup>11</sup> Rainer, "Über die Kärntner Slovenen-Frage" 1405.



(*Reichsstatthalter*). Concurrently he became Chief of the civil administration in South Carinthia, the occupied territories. The inauguration ceremonies marking his arrival in Klagenfurt epitomize his advocacy of Germanism. The tone was set by Robert Ley, the Reich Organization Leader, who installed him as *Gauleiter*. Ley spoke of the region's thousand-year role as protector of Germanic culture. "The heart of the nation" he said, "lies not in the middle, but on the border.... There is the greatest love." Carinthia, the border *Gau*, was the purest building stone of the Reich.<sup>12</sup>

Rainer took up this theme when it was his turn to speak. He promised to lead in the best old Carinthian tradition, a heritage which was deeply German in character. Carinthians had lived and died to preserve that legacy. As for the newly returned lands of South Carinthia, he announced that the Führer had ordered him to take them firmly in hand and make them once again purely German.<sup>13</sup>

This same theme was repeated two weeks later when Rainer was installed as the first *Reichsstatthalter* of Carinthia by Interior Minister Wilhelm Frick. "Your principal task, Party Member Rainer," Frick implored, "will be to include in the German Reich the entire new areas of Southeast Carinthia and Upper Carniola... Make this district entirely German again."<sup>14</sup> Young people must be taught only in German and the German language must be given first priority in public life. "When not only the outward appearances, such as official signs ... are German, but when also all the young people ... speak German, and when in the family circle the Slovene language is replaced by German—only then will we be able to speak of the Germanization of the Upper Kranj [Upper Carniola]."<sup>15</sup>

Rainer may not have been the originator of this policy to germanize the Slovenes who lived there, but he clearly endorsed and acted upon it. He inherited a number of institutions and practices set up

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<sup>12</sup> "Dr. Ley in Klagenfurt: 'Der Führer hätte Kärnten keinen besseren Gauleiter geben können als Dr. Rainer,'" *Kärntner Grenzruf* 1 December 1941.

<sup>13</sup> "Dr. Ley," *Kärntner Grenzruf*.

<sup>14</sup> Wilhelm Frick, testimony, *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal* 20 (Nuremberg, 1947–49) 363.

<sup>15</sup> Frick 107.



to this end. There was already an active deportation program in place and a busy office of the Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of the German Race in Bled. New bureaucrats, native Germans or Slovenes loyal to the occupying authorities, had earlier replaced local officials from the old Yugoslav regime. The Slovene language had been displaced as the language of school instruction. Rainer continued these efforts and extended them. Deportation of Slovenes began in April 1942 and was supplemented by efforts to re-populate the land with *Volksdeutsche* from Italy and Eastern Europe. Only the expanding war coupled with vigorous partisan campaigns stopped the full implementation of the resettlement plans. Meanwhile, assimilation pressures intensified. Signs were set up ordering everyone to "speak German." Family and first names were to take German spellings and pronunciations. Societies, youth organizations, literary groups, and other cultural associations had to abandon the Slovene language and adopt German. There were, of course, arrests and imprisonments for those who did not comply.<sup>16</sup>

Rainer made no secret of his germanizing intentions. On 30 April 1942, the first anniversary of the Reich take over of South

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<sup>16</sup> OSS, "German Military Government over Europe: Yugoslavia," 1 December 1944, USNA, RG 226, R & A 2500.5, Microfiche 1221; Ferenc, "The Austrians and Slovenia" 211–14, 216; Valentin Sima, "Die Kärntner Slowenen unter Nationalsozialistischer Herrschaft," ed. E. Talos et al., *NS-Herrschaft in Österreich, 1938–1945* (Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1988) 371; Thomas Barker, *The Slovene Minority in Carinthia* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1984) 194–96; Tone Ferenc, "Nacistični raznarodovalni program in Slovenci (Das nationalsozialistische Entnationalisierungsprogram und die Slowenen)," ed. A. Malle and V. Sima, *Der "Anschluss" und die Minderheiten in Österreich / "Anslus" in manjšine v Austriji* (Klagenfurt: Drdava, 1989) 65; Stefan Karner, *Kärntens Wirtschaft 1938–1945* (Klagenfurt: Magistrat des Landeshauptstadt Klagenfurt, 1976) 124; F. Rainer, Verordnung über die deutsche Schreibweise von Vor- und Familiennamen in den besetzten Gebieten Kärntens und Krains, Klagenfurt, 10 February 1942, *Verordnungs- und Amtsblatt des Chefs der Zivilverwaltung in den besetzten Gebieten Kärntens und Krains*, Arhiv Republike Slovenije, Ljubljana; Dietmar Laracher, "The Slovenes in Austria," *Razprave in gradivo—Treatises and Documents* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, 1986) 383.



Carinthia, he wrote in the daily paper: "The land up to the Karawanken and south of the Karawanken is German and will be German again."<sup>17</sup> In September 1942 he reminded the people of Krainburg of their thousand years of common history with the Germans and expressed his pleasure that this land had come home to the Greater German Reich.<sup>18</sup> A month later, he proclaimed that the party goal for 1943 was to assimilate the lands to the south, making them one with the rest of Carinthia.<sup>19</sup> The German nationalist apparently moved with determination toward his goal.

### THE ETHNICALLY DIVERSE NAZI

These statements, however, hid an anomaly. Sometime in the spring of 1943 Rainer began to change his mind and grew increasingly skeptical of reaching his goals. It became abundantly clear to him that germanization was unattainable because the methods of implementation were unworkable. He recognized that the best efforts in the war against the partisans were proving fruitless. There was no growing germanization, only an expanding, ever more active partisan movement. He saw that German military and administrative resources were stretched to the limit. He noticed that a general dislike of Germans by the Slovenes was obvious and growing.<sup>20</sup> Rainer later wrote of this in his postwar treatise on the Adriatic Coastland. Tough germanization measures, he said, in the end brought only destabilization and disorder. Activities like collective repressions against the population, were viewed as unbelievable acts of injustice. They drove even otherwise law abiding citizens to join the resistance." I have to admit publicly that our methods in Upper Carniola were against basic rights," and even more important, "inefficient" and "politically obsolete." Instead, what had

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<sup>17</sup> Gauleiter Rainer, "Die Aufgabe des Reichsgaues Kärnten," *Kärntner Grenzruf* 30 April 1942: 1.

<sup>18</sup> Rede und Proklamation des Gauleiters und Reichsstatthalters Dr. Rainer gehalten bei der Grosskundgebung am 27. September 1942 in Krainburg, Carton 33, #6/1, Yugoslav Military Institute, Belgrade.

<sup>19</sup> "Entgültige Lösung der kärntner Frage," *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* 6 (November 1942). Presse Archiv, Arbeitskammer für Wien [AKW].

<sup>20</sup> Rainer, "Osnivanje" 1602–1604; Alfred Elste, "Das Bild der Kärntner Slowenen in den nationalsozialistischen Presse und Wissenschaft," diss., Universität Wien, 1981, 216–17. See also Harriman, "Slovenia" 228–29.



been needed was to offer a more "friendly hand" toward the Slovene people. With this in mind Rainer began to develop a new position—"minorities have basic national rights," a quite different approach.<sup>21</sup> Since he could not at first make his new position known—Hitler would have been opposed—he concentrated on the basic goal of pacifying the southern border for the Reich.<sup>22</sup>

As support for his more friendly attitude toward the Slovenes, Rainer argued that early in his tenure he met Hitler and Himmler and convinced them that the term South Carinthia was historically and geographically inaccurate. He suggested instead a better expression, Upper Carniola (*Oberkrain*) because it had some foundation in past nomenclature. Rainer employed the term publicly for the first time in the fall of 1942. He claimed that he even altered this name, moving from references to Upper Carniolians instead to "Slovene-Germans" and then to "Slovenes." He also argued that he reintroduced the use of the Slovene language, at first as an aid in understanding German but eventually as a second language.<sup>23</sup> Further, he maintained that even before the capitulation of Italy in 1943, he resolved that Laibach (Ljubljana), Istria, and Fiume should be united with Upper Carniola. "I came to the conclusion that it would be wise to unite the lands of the former duchy of Carniola, and to grant them cultural and administrative freedom." His plan, of course, did have a rider: it would occur "only in union with the Reich... German police and military forces would remain in the country."<sup>24</sup>

In pursuit of his plan Rainer met with Himmler after Mussolini's fall in July 1943. He sketched out his proposal for recreating the old duchy as a fully autonomous unit. "In the main, Himmler

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<sup>21</sup> Rainer, "Osnivanje" 1603–1604. See also Rainer, "Über die kärntner Slovenen-Frage" 1417 ff.

<sup>22</sup> Rainer, "Osnivanje" 1602.

<sup>23</sup> Niederschrift Dr. Friedrich Rainer, Nürnberg, 30 November 1945, reproduced in Wilhelm Neumann, *Martin Wutte (1876–1948) zum Gedächtnis* (Klagenfurt: Verlag des Geschichtsvereines für Kärnten, 1988) 42–43.

<sup>24</sup> Rainer, Vernehmungsniederschrift 571. See also Bogdan Novak, *Trieste 1941–54* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1970) 75; Galliano Fogar, personal interview, 1 December 1995, Trieste.



agreed," he wrote.<sup>25</sup> The *Reichsführer* discussed the plan with Hitler who also acquiesced so long as the population remained peaceful. However, in the end the Führer decided against any territorial changes because he did not formally want to dismantle Fascist Italy and provide Japan with a reason to re-negotiate the Tripartite Pact of 1940. A re-created duchy was not established.<sup>26</sup> But Rainer did persuade the Führer and Himmler to accept the notion of cultural and political autonomy for the region. It was time to be practical and to admit that a German-only policy would not carry the day, that advocating ethnic diversity, at least for the time being, was more effective.<sup>27</sup>

Although Rainer did not obtain his first choice—a duchy for Carniola, a separate region for Görz, and an Istria with headquarters in Trieste—he did bring these lands under his control as the Operation Zone Adriatic Coastland.<sup>28</sup> In September 1943 he became High Commissioner of this diverse ethnic region. How would he approach the territory? Based on his experiences in Upper Carniola, Rainer realized that it would be impossible to pursue germanizing objectives in the largely Slovene, Italian, and Croatian region.<sup>29</sup>

What Rainer also realized was that recent history in the area made the Slovenes, if properly treated, into possible collaborators, or at

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<sup>25</sup> Rainer, Vernehmungsniederschrift 572.

<sup>26</sup> Rainer, Vernehmungsniederschrift 588; Rainer, OZAK 4484.

A strong case also argues that there were no formal changes because of "Mussolini's residual influence over Hitler." (Dennison Rusinow, *Italy's Austrian Heritage, 1919–1946* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1969] 300).

<sup>27</sup> Rainer also received some unsolicited advice from his old teacher, Martin Wutte. On 19 September 1943 Wutte wrote Rainer, advising him to act carefully in the new portions of Slovenia. The policies in Upper Carniola in 1941 and 1942 had been dangerous and should not be repeated in the newly occupied regions. The advice to move cautiously, however, did not mean abandoning the long range desire to make the region German in its culture, economy, and outlook. (Wutte an Rainer, Klagenfurt, 19 September 1943, reproduced in Neuman 30–32.)

Rainer did not reply to Wutte until after the war. (Niederschrift Rainer 42–43).

<sup>28</sup> Rainer to Ribbentrop, Klagenfurt, 9 September 1943, reproduced in Stuhlpfarrer 143–45.

<sup>29</sup> Rainer, "Osnivanje" 1602–1603.



least passive participants of the Third Reich. He knew that following the First World War, large numbers of Slovenes (and Croats) lived within the eastern borders of an expanded Italy.<sup>30</sup> The Fascist government of Mussolini, building upon the notion of an uninational state, adopted a policy of narrow nationalism and repressed these new minorities. The Fascists especially sought to assimilate the Slovenes by introducing compulsory use of Italian in schools, forcing italianization of names, prohibiting Slovene newspapers and books, and disbanding Slovene cultural and economic organizations. They forbade the use of the Slovene language at all public meetings and in the law courts, expelled Slovene-speaking bishops and clergy, and prevented Slovene-speaking doctors from practicing medicine. They engaged in the arrest, imprisonment, deportation, and not infrequently, murder of any opposition to this harsh policy.<sup>31</sup> A. J. P. Taylor wrote, "Italian rule over these South Slavs had no parallel in Europe."<sup>32</sup> In the end, however, the program of forced assimilation accomplished little beyond an impressive number of public works projects and a few colonies of Italians. It left instead a legacy of hatred toward Italians and their rule.<sup>33</sup> It was this loathing that allowed Rainer and the Germans to coerce many Slovenes into supporting National Socialism as the lesser of two evils.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The Slovenes came primarily from Primorska and Istria. Collectively this region was called the Julian March or Venezia Giulia. The Slovenes here numbered at least 250,000. Other accounts placed the figure (including Croats) somewhere between 400,000 and 500,000. (Robert Rabel, *Between East and West: Trieste, the United States, and the Cold War, 1941–1954* [Durham: Duke UP, 1988] 2; Rainer to Ribbentrop, 9 September 1943; Harriman, *Slovenia* 13.)

<sup>31</sup> "Political and Military Situation in Venezia Giulia," G-2 intelligence report, Combined Mediterranean Forces, Rome, n.d. (January 1945?), Public Record Office (PRO) WO 202/317; Margaret Carlyle, "Italy and the Yugoslav Minority in Venezia Giulia and Trieste," Research Department, Foreign Office, 9 September 1949, PRO FO 371/78658; Rabel 14–15; Rusinow 18; Anthony Klancar, "Slovenia and the Slovenes," *Journal of Central European Affairs* 6 (1946): 17; OSS, "De Facto Annexation."

<sup>32</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, "Trieste," n.p., n.d. (after May 1945?) 18. (Copy at the Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, Ljubljana.)

<sup>33</sup> Rusinow 3, 374.

<sup>34</sup> It was also the Nazi image of championing anti-Communism that



In his approach to the OZAK Rainer also turned to the Austro-Hungarian empire for guidance. He saw there the notion of basic national minority rights. For the Austro-Hungarians this approach had meant that wherever officials or representatives of authority operated, it was advisable to use local people. This policy had theoretically allowed an equal distribution of power between different ethnic groups. The Austro-Hungarians, however, had made one major mistake, Rainer wrote. They had given the Italians too great an advantage. He would not make that mistake, opting instead for another way, one which was less Italian and more Slav.<sup>35</sup>

Rainer especially emphasized his Slav (Slovene) sympathies. He claimed that a book by Dr. Josef März, *Die Adriafrage*, greatly influenced him in the 1930s.<sup>36</sup> Up to that time Rainer had taken an Italian perspective on the Adriatic. März, on the other hand, had taken a pro-Yugoslav position and presented a different historical, geographical, and ethnographical viewpoint. Rainer discovered from reading the book that the fascist policy in the region had not built up trust. Upon his appointment as High Commissioner Rainer re-read the book.<sup>37</sup> He became convinced that by ending the Italian pressure of forced assimilation, the Slavic inhabitants of the coastland could, to a large extent, be pacified. Since the Italian Fascist party was responsible for the unsuccessful policy of assimilation, its members should be excluded from all public offices.<sup>38</sup> Rainer claimed that even his English

attracted many others. See Rainer, OZAK 4498; Rainer, "Osnivanje" 1625–1627; "Wiederaufbau der Provinz Laibach," *Donauzeitung* (Belgrade) 23 February 1944: 3; Novak 85.

<sup>35</sup> Rainer, "Osnivanje" 1602–1604; "Political and Military Situation in Venezia Giulia"; Rusinow 4; Michael Koschat, "Das Polizeilager in der Risiera di San Sabba und die deutsche Besatzungspolitik in Triest 1943–1945," *Zeit Geschichte* 19.5–6 (May/June 1992): 161; Fogar interview.

<sup>36</sup> Published by Kurt-Vowinkel-Verlag.

<sup>37</sup> Rainer, OZAK 4490.

Rainer wrote that the German policy in old Yugoslavia since 1941 had also not established much trust (Rainer, OZAK 4490).

<sup>38</sup> F. Rainer, "Der deutsche Nachrichtendienst im Adriatischen Küsteland vor der Besetzung durch die deutschen Truppen," n.d. (late 1947?), MNZ, Inv 761, 80-4, II-33, 1744; see also OSS, "De Facto Annexation."



interrogator after May 1945 acknowledged that the English had long believed he favored the Slav over the Italian.<sup>39</sup>

What specifically did Rainer do as the new High Commissioner for the OZAK? According to his account he completely reversed the Italian policy toward minorities by restoring their national rights. Slovenes and Croats were allowed to create autonomous regions, the Slovenes around Ljubljana and the Croats in Susek and Krk. In the old Italian province of Ljubljana the government was separated from contact with Italy and from the other parts of the OZAK. Technically the area was still under Mussolini's new Fascist Republic, but practically this link disappeared as did all Italian officials. Rainer appointed the mayor of Ljubljana city, a Slovene and a former Habsburg officer, president of an autonomous zone and generally left the running of that area to him. Unlike Trieste, where Rainer regularly worked, he did not visit Ljubljana. For him Ljubljana province was a special case, and a first step toward restoring the old duchy of Carniola.<sup>40</sup>

Throughout the remainder of his new territory Rainer held that he followed a tolerant policy. Slovene and Croatian schools were opened while native teachers, whom the Italians had removed, were brought back. In addition, "all my co-workers were strictly educated along the lines of national rights and equality."<sup>41</sup> The head of the Trieste Fascist Party was identified as too racist. "He preached the Roman-German racial struggle against the Slavs; that was not only false, but for the present situation exactly wrong."<sup>42</sup> He and other Italian officials were replaced by new officials from the dominant nationality in the district, men who had a good reputation, were generally older and did

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<sup>39</sup> Rainer, "Osnivanje" 1603–1604.

<sup>40</sup> Rainer, "Osnivanje" 1596–1598, 1625, 1674; Roethel, "Die weisse Stadt am Meer"; "Die Slowenen und das Reich," *Donauzeitung* (Belgrade) 4 May 1944: 3; OSS, "De Facto Annexation"; Gatterer 741.

Rainer was realistic enough, however, to acknowledge that in Ljubljana Slovene cooperation came only because of the common battle against Communism. Had that factor been missing, Rainer knew the pressure for creating an independent Slovenia would have been much greater (Rainer, "Osnivanje" 1666).

<sup>41</sup> Rainer, "Osnivanje" 1601. See also Roethel, "Die weisse Stadt am Meer."

<sup>42</sup> Rainer, OZAK 4498. See also Rainer, "Osnivanje" 1601.



not show tendencies of extreme nationalism. Further, the language of local government reflected the local majority.<sup>43</sup> Finally, Rainer said, he encouraged the creation of cultural clubs and groups—and not just associations for Slovenes and Croats. He helped the Friulians as well. "I supported the Renaissance culture of Friuli just as I did in Carinthia."<sup>44</sup>

At the time Rainer had many discussions about this theme of "multicultural, friendly relations" and "basic minority rights" with German political and military figures. He felt he had generally convinced them of the usefulness of his program. Further he believed he was increasingly successful in his push for a lawful approach, that is, until the assassination attempt on Hitler in July 1944. After this date, German policy in Italy and elsewhere took its direction from Hitler's more extreme measures.<sup>45</sup>

Rainer was very much a Hitler loyalist, but on this topic, he disagreed with the Führer. Hitler's approach—that against force (resistance and the partisans) one can only use force—was not correct. The practice had developed in the eastern campaigns that terror was to be met with even greater terror. In Italy and the two operation zones, Hitler ordered the radical cleansing of all partisans from the area. Terror again begat terror. As Rainer observed it was thus very difficult to gain the trust of the population. But did he do anything to counter the harsh directives? Rainer explained that he could not publicly or even privately disagree with Hitler. Orders were orders when they came from

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<sup>43</sup> Rainer, "Osnivanje" 1625–1627; "Activities of the Partisans and Četniks in Croatia," Italian Minister in Zagreb, in the possession of the British Political Intelligence Department, 20 June 1944, PRO FO371/44273; "Umbruch in Triest," *Donauzeitung* (Belgrade) 16 March 1944: 1; Review of the Foreign Press, Series A, Memo 244, 31 October 1944, PRO WO204/9672A; OSS, "De Facto Annexation"; Rusinow 307–9, 326.

<sup>44</sup> Rainer, "Osnivanje" 1652. See also Review of the Foreign Press; Fogar interview; Rusinow 301–2, 309.

Rainer wrote Ribbentrop that there were 150,000 Friulians living in the old *Grafschaft* Görz and Gradišča. The Friulians were Italians, but with a separatist culture and language. See Rainer to Ribbentrop, 9 September 1943.

<sup>45</sup> Rainer, "Osnivanje" 1605–1607.



the Führer and it was impossible to have any influence over them. Even though he personally disagreed at times, what Hitler and Himmler directed could not be stopped. Instead of directly challenging the orders then, Rainer argued that he attempted to soften them. He continued to pursue a more friendly approach to the population of his area.<sup>46</sup> As evidence, he maintained that he prevented the continuation of national animosities and promoted ethnic diversity by providing good government and by listening to the needs of the population. He appointed local nationals, placed a German advisor nearby as liaison, and sought out the best specialists from the Nazi Welfare Organization (*NS Volkswohlfahrt*), the German Labour Front, and other similar groups to help. Together these people gave him the good government that was lacking. He planned for self-administration for the region and the city of Trieste. He acknowledged the needs of the people and gave them special privileges. Military service was strictly voluntary, he argued, while those who did volunteer for local units were freed from work obligations. He addressed the economic problems in the OZAK, especially the difficulties which arose because of the high inflation spilling over from the Duce's neighboring republic. Instead of raising wages to increase buying power, as others might have done, Rainer sought to lower prices, especially on food and clothing, and he attempted to lower taxes. He contended that real wages did increase. In addition, he met with groups of workers and then with employers to explain his action and to listen to their needs. He ensured that laborers were hired close to where they lived and fought against the notion of moving industry from the OZAK. Not one factory, he argued, was taken to Germany or the Duce's Italy. In a summary statement, Rainer

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<sup>46</sup> Rainer, "Osnivanje" 1604–1605. See also Report on conversation between F. Rainer and S. Uiberreither, English 8th Army, Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre (CSDIC) Austria, 2 August 1945, 1 SC/CSDIC/X 1, PRO WO 204/11505; Elio Apih, "Tre documenti sulla politica nazista nel litorale adriatico," *Movimento di Liberazione in Italia* 23.106 (1972): 57–58.

Rainer excused himself from any of the atrocities that occurred in the OZAK by saying that the orders came from Hitler, not from him. In fact, Rainer made a strong point that it was Hitler who ordered Rommel to cleanse the area of partisans, not him as many have said (Rainer, "Osnivanje" 1589).



asserted that no other occupied territory had such good officials and such a good administration.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, he claimed that his support and promotion of cultural, intellectual, and civil activities was real. He helped the university in Trieste retain its autonomy. He paid special attention to museums, archives, historical buildings, and artifacts, forbidding the removal of relics from the OZAK and recovering those that had been taken by the Italians. He built bomb shelters for the populace in marked contrast to the Italians, who had not bothered, thinking that the Allies would not bomb their cities. He thus saved numerous lives in Reijeka, Pula, Trieste, Udine, and other cities and prevented high air raid casualties as in Germany. He gave large subsidies to theatres and musical companies and encouraged special performances. He established a symphony for Trieste and broadcast the new works of local composers. Even as the war was ending he continued to support the arts. A new performance of *Carmen* had been scheduled for 1 May 1945. Further, he encouraged sports, but not competition based on nationalities. Instead he endorsed events which focused on clubs. He created a special soccer prize, the Adria Cup. He supported radio broadcasts in Slovene, Italian, Croatian, as well as German. He declared that there were no strikes during his tenure. He asserted how he amnestied half the people sentenced to death in the courts. And he maintained that he alone saved the ports of the Adriatic from destruction by delaying the implementation of Hitler's orders.<sup>48</sup> To the very end then, Rainer argued that he stubbornly followed a tolerant policy and insisted on national minority rights. The harsh germanization measures carried out in

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<sup>47</sup> Rainer, "Osnivanje" 1621, 1629–1630, 1637; Rainer, OZAK 4496–4498. See also Roethel, "Die weisse Stadt am Meer"; Roethel, "Adriatische Perspektiven: Gespräche mit Gauleiter dr. Rainer," *Deutsche Zeitung in Kroatien* 16 May 1944: 1; Activities of the Partisans and Četniks in Croatia; "Für Europas Kriegsproduktion," *Donauzeitung* (Belgrade) 30 March 1944: 3; Walter Schneefuss, "Sozialpolitik im Küstenland," *Donauzeitung* (Belgrade) 24 April 1944: 3; Review of the Foreign Press; Rusinow 301, 308–9, 331–2; OSS, "De Facto Annexation."

<sup>48</sup> Rainer, "Osnivanje" 1634–1636, 1642, 1646–1647, 1650–1654. See also Rainer, OZAK 4503; "Für Europas Kriegsproduktion"; Novak 73; OSS, "De Facto Annexation"; Gatterer 811.



Upper Carniola had been wrong and he tried to prevent any repeat in the OZAK.

For the most part he did carry out the activities and programs as he claimed. He did lessen Italian fascist influence. He did introduce a different, if not better administration. He did support diverse ethnic groups. He did grant autonomy to many Slovenes. He did lessen Italian influence in the areas not clearly Italian. He did promote his version of peace and orderly affairs.<sup>49</sup> But it is crucial to put his alledged accomplishments into the proper context. In fact he was the chief administrator of a police state in which extreme barbarity was practiced against partisans, dissidents, and not infrequently, innocent bystanders. His close friend, Police Chief and SS General Odilo Globocnik helped direct this repression, plus he managed the elimination of the small Jewish and dissident population in the OZAK.<sup>50</sup> Police spies were everywhere and there were frequent capricious arrests. Rainer did nothing to stop any of this activity. He clearly accepted and worked in a system which asserted the right to illegitimate and arbitrary use of violence. In addition, his German advisors did not help the indigenous administrators so much as direct them, frequently with his specific orders. He forced tens of thousands of workers to build a massive defence barrier from the Adriatic to the Alps. He used other conscripted labour from all over Europe to build a major tunnel through the mountains. For young men his definition of volunteering meant joining either the military or the labor battalions. Finally, he ruled over an area, not at peace, but one at war, which meant military needs took precedence over civilian administration. There was an overwhelming presence of the army whose task was to protect Germans and defend Greater Germany. In the end then, Rainer did not really abandon German predominance and his German nationalism. He just introduced temporary modifications.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Schneefuss, "Umbruch in Triest"; Fogar interview; OSS, "De Facto Annexation"; Rusinow 301–2, 338–9.

<sup>50</sup> For more information on the close friendship between Rainer and Globocnik and their work see the author's article, "Friedrich Rainer e Odilo Globocnik. L'amicizia insolita e i ruoli sinistri di due nazisti tipici," *Qualesoria* (Trieste) 35.1 (1997): 141–75.

<sup>51</sup> Apih 60; BdS in der OZAK an Rainer, Triest, 31 January 1944, Arhiv



Yet his approach of "basic minority rights" in the Adriatic Coastland stood in marked contrast to the strict German nationalism he had practiced earlier in Upper Carniola. Why did he change? The answer is not complicated. He was an adroit, pragmatic politician. He recognized that the Nazis in Upper Carniola had reached "the limits of Germandom."<sup>52</sup> If they could not germanize there, they certainly could not in the Adriatic region. The tiny German population was dwarfed by the other three ethnic groups. Rainer also recognized that two of the three groups in the OZAK were Germany's allies, the Italians under the Duce and the Croats. Allies should have, at least, basic national rights. In addition, he read the reports that showed a situation unfavorable to the Germans. In September 1943, when he arrived in the OZAK, the western part of Istria was occupied by the partisans, the communists were very strong in Trieste and neighboring Monfalcone, and parts in the north were controlled by Italian guerrillas.<sup>53</sup> Rainer was astute enough to see that a temporary multi-ethnic approach suited the Nazis in the region. For very practical reasons then he turned from an advocate of intense germanization to supporter of ethnic diversity.

Although many of the particulars in Rainer's account need more investigation, and frequently refutation, his postwar document is an important discovery. Here is the Nazi apologist, the chief of the OZAK, offering valuable information on the region's National Socialist government. Even if Rainer was opportunistic, placing himself in the best possible light—he was after all writing for Slovene jailers—he has provided the insider's perspective. He confirms the contrast between policy in Upper Carniola and methods advocated further south in the Adriatic Coastland. In addition, he shows that his efforts were the mirror image of republican Austria before the second war. Like Austria which did not know how to define itself, so with Rainer. Did he look to

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Republike Slovenije, F227/II; Review of the Foreign Press; Gatterer 805–13; Rusinow 297 ff, 302–5, 333–9; August Walzl, *Die Juden in Kärnten und das Dritte Reich* (Klagenfurt: Universitätsverlag Carinthia, 1987) 286–93; August Walzl, *Kärnten 1945* (Klagenfurt: Universitätsverlag Carinthia, 1985) 49

<sup>52</sup> Tim Kirk, "Limits of Germandom: Resistance to the Nazi Annexation of Slovenia," *Slavonic and East European Review* 69.4 (1991): 646–67.

<sup>53</sup> Rainer, OZAK 4489; Felix Kraus, "Bericht über eine Reise nach den Adriatische Küstenland," 8 December 1943, USNA, T71, R52, 447722.



Germany or the Habsburg heritage for direction and identity? Rainer spent most of his life advocating the German way but when faced with geographic realities and cultural strengths he practiced the Habsburg legacy. However, it was not that he believed strongly in the other nationalities and the notion of ethnic diversity. He was still a German supremacist. He advocated the other concepts so he could divide his opposition and ensure the dominance of his side. That he failed was obvious. But that he promoted ethnic diversity, even if for the wrong reasons, is an auspicious factor, especially in this region.

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## POVZETEK

### NACISTI, NEMŠKI NACIONALIZEM IN ETNIČNA RAZNOLIKOST: JADRANSKA OBALA POD FRIEDRICHOM RAINERJEM

*Ob pregledu nove, pred kratkim odkrite dokumentacije, katere avtor je Friedrich Rainer, nacistični poveljnik Koroške, Kranjske in Istre, naletimo na izrazit kontrast. Gre za primerjavo Rainerjeve politike do okupiranega ozemlja Gorenjske s politiko do operacijske cone Jadranska obala. Dokumentacija kaže, kako je Rainer spremenil svojo dejavnost od strogega nemškega nacionalista v Sloveniji do zagovornika etnične raznolikosti ob Jadranu. Medtem ko je Rainer preživel večino svojega življenja zavzemajoč se za nemški nacionalizem, pa se je ob soočenju z geografsko realnostjo in kulturno raznolikostjo ob jadranski obali obnašal bolj po habsburško—podpiral je etnično raznolikost.*