
THE KVATERNIK FAMILY: AXIS DIPLOMACY, THE HOLOCAUST, VIOLENCE, AND POWER STRUGGLES IN CROATIA (1941–1942)

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ABSTRACT: *The German and Italian authorities supported the Ustaše and played a key role in establishing the Independent State of Croatia. This paper analyses the roles and removals of Slavko Kvaternik and his son, Eugen Dido, two leading figures in the Croatian armed and police forces, and raises several key questions. First, it investigates the circumstances surrounding their dismissals. Second, it examines the Italian-German rivalry for influence in Croatia. Third, it explores how Italian, German, Spanish, and Vichy diplomats in Zagreb perceived Dido Kvaternik's involvement in the Holocaust and violence, while also assessing Slavko Kvaternik's role. The paper further considers the stance of Italian officials in Croatia, and of Benito Mussolini himself, on Ustaše violence. Finally, it addresses a notable research gap concerning the Austro-Hungarian legacy within the Croatian armed forces, as well as an insufficiently explored aspect of the Holocaust. The study draws on and cross-references Croatian, Serbian, Yugoslav, Italian, French, Spanish, and German sources and literature.*

KEYWORDS: Slavko Kvaternik, Dido Kvaternik, Ustaše, Holocaust, Independent State of Croatia, NDH.

Introduction

The dissolution of Yugoslavia during World War II led to the rise of the Ustaše regime, which took control over the newly established Independent State of Croatia (NDH). Even though the Ustaše had the support of the Italian authorities even before the outbreak of war, their relations remained strained.¹ While the Ustaše sought as

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¹ Massimo Bucarelli, *Mussolini e la Jugoslavia 1922–1939* (Bari: Edizioni B. A. Graphis, 2006), 131–153, 234–244; Nada Kisić-Kolanović, *NDH i Italija, političke veze i diplomatski odnosi* (Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak–Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2001).

much independence as possible for their newly created state, the German and Italian authorities vied for influence in Croatia, which they viewed as their puppet state.² Despite formally accepting Italian supremacy in Croatia, German authorities sought to establish their domination and act as arbiters in Italian-Croatian relations.³ Apart from the State leader Ante Pavelić (Poglavnik), the prominent Ustaše officials were Slavko and Eugen Dido Kvaternik. While Slavko Kvaternik was leading the Croatian armed forces (Domobranstvo), his son Dido was in charge of the Internal Security Service.

Given their significance, a historical analysis of the Kvaternik family's role can help address several research gaps. First, it sheds light on the insufficiently explored decline of the family and the importance of the Italian-German rivalry in that process.⁴ Although the Italian-German rivalry in Croatia has attracted considerable scholarly attention, its impact on the Kvaternik family remains insufficiently explored.⁵

Secondly, the case of the Kvaternik family provides insight into the broader context of violence in the Independent State of Croatia. The NDH operated the largest concentration camp complex outside of the Third Reich, and the Ustaše authorities pursued a policy of extermination against Serbs, Jews, and Roma, but also Croats who opposed the regime. Serbian historians have extensively documented and reasonably emphasised that the violence against the Serbs was genocidal.⁶ Apart from this,

² Luciano Monzali, "La difficile alleanza con la Croazia ustascia", in: *L'occupazione italiana della Jugoslavia (1941–1943)*, editors Francesco Caccamo, Luciano Monzali (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2009), 61–132; Срђа Трифковић, *Усташе: Балканско срце таме* (Београд: Catena mundi, 2022); Slobodan Milošević, *Nemačko–italijanski odnosi na teritoriji okupirane Jugoslavije 1941–1943* (Београд: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1991); N. Kisić-Kolanović, *NDH i Italija*; Alberto Becherelli, *Italia e stato indipendente croato 1941–1943* (Roma: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2012), 91–101. Tomislav Jonjić, *Hrvatska vanjska politika 1939–1942* (Zagreb: Libar, 2000); Davide Rodogno, *Il nuovo ordine mediterraneo. Le politiche di occupazione dell'Italia fascista in Europa (1940–1943)* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003), 124; Sabina Ramet, *Die drei Jugoslawien. Eine Geschichte der Staatsbildungen und ihrer Probleme* (München: De Gruyter, 2011); Данило Ковач, "Хрватско–италијанске несугласице лета 1941", *Војноисторијски гласник*, no. 2, (2019), 126–142.

³ Dragan Nenezić, *Jugoslovenske oblasti pod Italijom 1941–1943* (Београд: Војноисторијски институт Војске Југославије, 1999), 61–65; Amir Obhodaš, *Glava za zub: Talijansko–četnička saradnja u NDH* (Zagreb: Hrvatski državni arhiv, 2023), 9–13. For more details, see also: S. Milošević, *op. cit.*

⁴ Despite their significance a few authors addressed Slavko and Dido Kvaternik. See: Nada Kisić-Kolanović, *Vojskovođa i politika: Sjećanja Slavka Kvaternika* (Zagreb: Golding Marketing, Zagreb 1997); Nada Kisić-Kolanović, "Drama vojskovođe Slavka Kvaternika", *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, no. 3, (1996), 379–398; Jere Jareb, *Eugen Dido Kvaternik, Sjećanja i zapazanja 1925–1945: Prilozi za hrvatsku povijest* (Zagreb: Nakladničko društvo Starčević, 1995).

⁵ Among authors addressing Italian-German rivalry in Croatia are: Sanela Schmid, *Deutsche und italienische Besatzung im Unabhängigen Staat Kroatien: 1941 bis 1943/45* (Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020); S. Milošević, *op. cit.*; Srđa Trifković, "Rivalry between Germany and Italy in Croatia, 1942–1943", *The Historical Journal*, no. 4, (1993), 879–904.

⁶ Милан Кољанин, *Усташка зверства* (Нови Сад: Архив Војводине, 2020); Милан Гулић, *Страдање мостарских Срба у Независној Држави Хрватској 1941–1945* (Београд: Свет књиге, 2018); Милан Гулић, *Југословенска држава 1918–2006. Од прводецембарског акта до Мајског референдума* (Београд: Институт за савремену историју, 2023), 302–323; Радослав Гађиновић, *Насиље над Србима у XX веку. Узроци и последице* (Београд: Евробок, 2017); Борис Радаковић, *Усташка упришита под Козаром током Другог свјетског рата* (Бањалука–Приједор–Београд: Удружење архивских радника РС–Архив РС–ЈУ Национални парк Козара–Музеј жртава геноцида, 2021). Danilo Kovač, "Troubled Italian-Croatian-German

international scholars have also contributed to the historiography of the atrocities against the Serbs and Jews and have presented various, more or less accurate interpretations.⁷ Further analysis of the involvement of high-ranking Ustaše dignitaries and ministers, such as Slavko Kvaternik and his son, Eugen Dido Kvaternik, may expand existing knowledge of the violence in the Independent State of Croatia. In particular, Dido Kvaternik's role in acts of violence, as perceived by Italian, German, French, and Spanish diplomats, remains insufficiently explored. Likewise, the extent to which this violence undermined the NDH authorities' reputation among their allies has not yet been fully assessed.

Thirdly, the Austro-Hungarian legacy in the Croatian armed forces warrants examination. Given that Slavko Kvaternik served as an Austro-Hungarian officer during the First World War, it is reasonable to assume that he may have acted as a conduit through which elements of this legacy permeated the Croatian armed forces and organisational structure.

In the context of the research gaps outlined above, this paper aims to address three objectives. Firstly, to reflect on the nature of the Italian-Croatian-German alliance through the removal of the most influential family in Croatia, the Kvaternik family. Secondly, a contribution will be made to the historiography of the Kvaternik family, focusing on their insufficiently researched removal. Thirdly, to introduce a new perspective on violence in the Independent State of Croatia. Fourth, to analyse the influence of the Austro-Hungarian legacy on the Ustaše movement.

Slavko Kvaternik and the Axis diplomacy

Slavko Kvaternik was born on 25 August 1878, in Vučinić Selo, Vrbovsko district, into a middle-class family. After attending elementary school in Slunj and high school in Ogulin, he chose a military profession and graduated from the Infantry Cadet School in Karlovac. In 1904, Kvaternik enrolled at the General Staff Military Academy in Vienna. He returned to Zagreb in 1906 and was assigned to the 72nd Infantry Brigade. From 22 October 1914 to 27 February 1916, Kvaternik was wing adjutant to the commander of the 3rd Army, General Svetožar Borojević. In January 1918, he was appointed Chief of the General Staff of the 55th Infantry Division. After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, Kvaternik became the “right hand”

partnership: Italian occupation of the Third zone and Ustasha violence against the Serbs in 1941”, *Istorijski časopis* 20. veka, no. 2 (2025), 309–322.

⁷ For historiography about the Holocaust in Croatia see Jovan Ćulibrk, *Historiography of the Holocaust in Yugoslavia* (Belgrade: University of Belgrade, 2014). For violence against the Serbs among other works see: Eric Gobetti, *L'occupazione allegra, Gli italiani in Jugoslavia (1941–1943)* (Roma: Carocci editore, 2007); Edmond Paris, *Genocidio nella Croazia satellite. I crimini e i massacri degli Ustascia di Ante Pavelić 1941–1945* (Milano: Edizioni Res Gestae, 2020); Massimo Bucarelli, “Disgregazione Jugoslava e questione serba nella politica italiana (1939–1943)”, in: *L'occupazione italiana della Jugoslavia (1941–1943)*, editors Francesco Cassamo and Luciano Monzali (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2008), 34–35; S. Schmid, *op. cit.*, 50–52; 151–153; Klaus Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien 1941–1944* (Hamburg–Berlin–Bonn: Mittler, 2002), 12; Michele F. Levy, “The Last Bullet for the Last Serb”: The Ustaša Genocide against Serbs: 1941–1945”, *Nationalities Papers*, no. 6 (2009), 807–837.

of Dr Mate Drinković, the Chief Commissioner for National Defence of the Central People's Council of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in Zagreb. He was unexpectedly retired in 1920. After his military service, Kvaternik made a career in the civil administration and the banking sector. In 1934, Kvaternik was arrested and interned on suspicion of involvement in a bomb attack on the office of the Zagreb police chief. He collaborated with and appreciated Vladko Maček until the latter signed the Cvetković-Maček Agreement and founded the Banovina of Croatia. On 10 April, Kvaternik was the one who proclaimed the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia. On 14 April 1941, he was appointed commander-in-chief, and Pavelić awarded him the Marshal's baton.⁸

However, the disagreements between Ante Pavelić and Slavko Kvaternik date back to the interwar period. Among other things, Kvaternik opposed Pavelić's plan to make Croatia exclusively reliant on Italy, and he remained true to this stance until the end.⁹ The Italian authorities were aware of these disputes. As early as October 1941, the Croatian Minister Andrija Artuković informed the Italian ambassador in Zagreb, Raffaele Casertano, that Pavelić intended to take control of the military and police forces away from the Kvaternik family. Casertano conveyed this information to the Italian Foreign Minister, Galeazzo Ciano.¹⁰ Similarly, in November 1941, the Italian ambassador to Zagreb informed Minister Ciano that Pavelić's health difficulties weakened his influence, thereby strengthening the power of ministers Kvaternik and Mirko Puk. In this context, Casertano noted disregard for Poglavnik's orders and their arbitrary interpretation.¹¹ The testimony of a well-informed, but unnamed, Ustaše official confirms that Dido Kvaternik, Slavko's son, also did not obey Pavelić's orders.¹²

The disputes between Poglavnik Ante Pavelić and Marshal Slavko Kvaternik were reflected in the rivalry between different units of the Croatian armed forces. For clarity, there were two different armies in the NDH. In addition to the Home Guard (Domobranstvo) as a regular army and the Gendarmerie (Oružništvo), the Ustaše militia was created as a kind of political-military organisation. While the Domobranstvo was under Kvaternik's leadership, Pavelić strongly favoured the Ustaše militia.¹³ As early as January 1942, Poglavnik informed Casertano of his decision to replace the

⁸ N. Kisić-Kolanović, "Drama vojskovođe Slavka Kvaternika", 384–388. For more details about the Kvaternik and proclamation of the NDH see Mario Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja 1941* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2006), 574–583.

⁹ Nada Kisić-Kolanović, *Vojskovođa i politika: Sjećanja Slavka Kvaternika* (Zagreb: Golding Marketing, 1997), 22–23.

¹⁰ I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani (Hereafter: DDI) (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello stato, 1987), serie (s.) 9, volume (vol.) 7, document (doc.) 625, p. (page) 634–636.

¹¹ DDI, s. 9, vol. 7, doc. 745.

¹² Croatian State Archive (Hrvatski državni arhiv, Hereafter: HDA), Dosije Anta Pavelića (1561), 013.0.6, p. 6.

¹³ Bojan Dimitrijević, *Ustaška vojska Nezavisne Države Hrvatske* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2016), 51; A. Becherelli, *op. cit.*, 188–190; Ante Pavelić, *Doživljaji: Kako sam osnovao Nezavisnu Državu Hrvatsku*, (Ed.) Danijel Tatić (Zagreb: Despot infinitus, 2015), 110. About the structure of the Domobranstvo see also Nikica Barić, *Ustroj kopnene vojske domobranstva Nezavisne Države Hrvatske 1941–1945* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2003).

Domobranstvo with the Ustaše militia in its entirety.¹⁴ In his memoirs, Slavko Kvaternik confirmed these plans of Pavelić.¹⁵

The letter from Georges Gueyraud, a French diplomat in Zagreb, confirmed turbulence within the Croatian armed forces, caused by the rivalry between Pavelić and Kvaternik.¹⁶ The French diplomat stated that numerous officers (of the Domobranstvo forces) had been arrested on false charges of having links with the Serbs, Communists and Bolsheviks. Gueyraud also reported that the Italians, rather than the Germans, were satisfied with Pavelić's plans.¹⁷ The differing stances of the Italians and Germans regarding the Croatian armed forces were no surprise, confirming their intense rivalry in Croatia.

Besides Pavelić, Slavko Kvaternik also had an enemy in the Italian ambassador to Zagreb. In his letters, Casertano wrote that his main issue with Kvaternik was his pro-German stance. Throughout 1941 and 1942, Casertano often accused Kvaternik of favouring Germany.¹⁸ The Italians were also informed that Kvaternik repeatedly prevented the attempts of the Italian general Giovanni Battista Oxilia to influence certain divisions of the Croatian armed forces.¹⁹ These accusations seemed justified, as Kvaternik, who was bound to Austro-Hungarian tradition, aimed to organise Croatian military forces under his command on the model of the Austro-Hungarian army.²⁰ Apart from Oxilia, General Giuseppe Pièche, who coordinated and directed military police operations in Croatia, praised Pavelić in one of his reports, condemning Marshal Kvaternik's Germanophile attitudes.²¹ The German general in Zagreb and the Third Reich's military representative in Croatia, Gleise von Horstenau, confirmed that Kvaternik was pro-German.²²

Although he travelled to Italy several times, Kvaternik continued to make anti-Italian statements. Kvaternik visited the Italian capital on 12 February 1942, and met the next day with Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano, the Chief of the Italian General Staff, General Ugo Cavallero and Benito Mussolini. King Vittorio Emanuele received the Croatian Marshal on 14 February.²³ Kvaternik also visited Milan on 19 and 20 February.²⁴ The *Hrvatski Narod* (Croatian People) Journal, the journal of the Ustaše

¹⁴ DDI, s. 9, vol. 8. doc. 102, p. 103.

¹⁵ N. Kisić-Kolanović, *Vojskovođa i politika*, 221.

¹⁶ More details about Gueyraud are presented by Danilo Kovač, "Ustasha Violence against the Serbs and Jews in the summer of 1941: Insights from Vichy diplomatic documents", *Istorija 20. veka*, no. 2, (2024), 299–312.

¹⁷ Centre des Archives diplomatiques de la Courneuve (French Diplomatic Archive. Hereafter: FDA), Guerre 1939–1945, Vichy, Croatie, 946, p. 73–77. Georges Gueyraud to François Darlan, 12 January 1942, no. 1.

¹⁸ DDI, s. 9, vol. 8, doc. 617, p. 672–673; DDI, s. 9, vol. 9, doc. 211; DDI, s. 9, vol. 8. doc. 618; DDI, s. 9, vol. 9, doc. 59.

¹⁹ *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu naroda Jugoslavije* (Hereafter: Zbornik NOR-a), 13/2, (Beograd: Vojno-istorijski institut JA, 1972), doc. 54, p. 415.

²⁰ N. Kisić-Kolanović, "Drama vojskovođe Slavka Kvaternika", 385.

²¹ Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 263–264; D. Rodogno, *op. cit.*, 245–247.

²² Zbornik NOR-a, 12/2, (Beograd: Vojno-istorijski institut JA, 1976), doc. 74, p. 415.

²³ Bogdan Krizman, *NDH između Hitlera i Mussolinija*, (Zagreb: Globus, 1986), 254.

²⁴ Archivio di stato di Milano (ASM), Perfeittura di Milano, Gabinetto, Carteggio dal 1938 – Serie II, busta 212; Croazia – Visita a Milano del Maresciallo Kvaternik.

movement, reported on Kvaternik's speech and his praise for Italy, the Italian people, fascism, and the Duce, which was again mentioned in Italian diplomatic correspondence.²⁵ However, Casertano warned that Kvaternik would try to present himself as an Italian friend during his visit to Rome. The ambassador warned Ciano that Kvaternik remained a pro-German exponent.²⁶

Even though Pavelić recognised the negative Italian view of Kvaternik, he knew that he had to obtain the support of his other ally – the Germans. Pavelić's lobbying against the two Kvaterniks in German circles intensified in early 1942, when Berlin criticised his leadership and began considering a possible shift in its policy toward the Independent State of Croatia. Fearing the loss of power, Pavelić sought to undermine the Kvaterniks, whom he viewed as his most dangerous rivals.²⁷

The following section will examine in more detail the circumstances which, alongside Pavelić's lobbying, contributed to Slavko Kvaternik losing the support of both the German ambassador in Zagreb, Siegfried Kasche, and the German military representative in Croatia, General Gleise von Horstenau.

Gleise von Horstenau changed his positive perception of Kvaternik, his friend from the Austro-Hungarian army. For clarity, the Germans were constantly worried about the Croatian armed forces. While the Ustaše were more concerned with destroying the Serbs than with German strategic plans, the Domobranstvo were unreliable and of low morale. Moreover, their mutual hostility hindered Croatian military operations. For this reason, the officers of the Wehrmacht considered taking control of all Croatian forces. Von Horstenau and the newly appointed commander of the south-east, Alexander Löhr, attempted to implement aspects of this idea by requesting that Pavelić have German officers assume segments of both military and civilian control in NDH. However, with the support of Kasche, Pavelić refused Löhr's request. As Kvaternik's reaction was particularly harsh, von Horstenau decided to dismiss the Croatian Marshal.²⁸

It is clear from Kasche's 10 September letter that he also supports Kvaternik's dismissal. Kasche's letter to the State's Vice-Secretary, Martin Luter, indicated that Slavko Kvaternik was trying to profit from the connections with high German dignitaries such as Heinrich Himmler, Hermann Wilhelm Göring, and Wilhelm Keitel by bypassing Kasche and von Horstenau. It was likely that Kvaternik, who had poor relations with Pavelić, the Italian and German representatives in Croatia, was trying to improve his situation by contacting the leadership of the Third Reich. Kvaternik was likely planning to express dissatisfaction with the current German representatives in Zagreb. Kasche was informed that Kvaternik had unsuccessfully attempted to arrange a meeting with Heinrich Himmler and had spoken negatively about von Horstenau and the German diplomatic representatives. Kasche reported that the German position should be in unison, implying that Kvaternik could benefit from his personal connections and the different positions of certain levels of the German authorities. In his letter,

²⁵ *Hrvatski narod*, 13 February 1942; ASM, Perfettura di Milano, Gabinetto, Carteggio dal 1938 – Serie II, busta 212; Croazia – Visita a Milano del Maresciallo Kvaternik.

²⁶ DDI, s. 9, vol. 8, doc. 243.

²⁷ Vasa Kazimirović, *NDH u svetlu nemačkih dokumenata i dnevnika Gleza von Horstenau 1941-1944* (Beograd: Nova knjiga, Narodna knjiga, 1987), 217–218.

²⁸ С. Трифковић, *Усташе*, 262–265; B. Krizman, *op. cit.*, 403–406.

he requested that this information reach the German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, who was to inform the aforementioned German dignitaries of Kvaternik's current position. Kasche stated that both he and Gleise had changed their favourable perception of Kvaternik. In explaining why Kvaternik should be dismissed, Kasche added that the Croatian officers did not have confidence in Kvaternik and that Kvaternik had failed in the development of the Croatian armed forces. Kasche was informed that Pavelić distanced himself from Kvaternik. Poglavnik reportedly complained that Kvaternik drinks too much and attends meetings with him while slightly inebriated. He also declared that Slavko Kvaternik was responsible for the harsh policy towards the Serbs, as was his son.

Referring to Kvaternik, Kasche stated that the harsh policy of the police had contributed to the Croatian Government's loss of popularity. Given that Pavelić believed he could benefit from the current alignment of circumstances, he asked General von Horstenau about the German view of Kvaternik. Von Horstenau conveyed to Kasche the information about his meeting with Pavelić, which took place on the same day, 10 September. Croatian Foreign Minister Mladen Lorković also informed Kasche on the same day that Pavelić had decided to remove Kvaternik. Even though he argued in favour of Kvaternik's dismissal, Kasche warned that their dismissal could trigger a crisis if Pavelić did not find a suitable solution for them. These words also showed Kvaternik's strength within the Croatian state.²⁹

However, it was the meeting between Pavelić and Hitler, which took place on 23 September 1942, in Vinica in Ukraine, that had a decisive influence on the dismissal of Slavko Kvaternik.³⁰ In anticipation of the meeting, German diplomatic documents from 21 September revealed that political issues would also be addressed.³¹ Although von Horstenau attempted to persuade Hitler that violence against the Serbs was counter-productive and only served to strengthen the Partisan resistance, Hitler nonetheless supported the violence, believing that the Ustaše should take it out on the Serbs.³²

Although the old Marshal was not explicitly mentioned during the meeting, the support that Poglavnik received from Hitler likely reinforced his decision to dismiss Kvaternik. This interpretation is supported by the notes of Croatian Foreign Minister Mladen Lorković about his meeting with German representatives in Croatia. Namely, during a meeting with Lorković on 21 September, the German general reportedly insisted that both Slavko and Dido Kvaternik relinquish their positions.³³ More importantly, Lorković's notes from 27 September show that he met with both

²⁹ Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945, (ADAP), s. E, 1941–1945, Band 3, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), doc. 280, p. 479.

³⁰ More details about the meeting: A. Pavelić, *op. cit.*, 173; L. Monzali, *op. cit.*, 113; N. Kisić-Kolanović, *Vojskovođa i politika*, 229–230; S. Trifković, "Rivalry between Germany and Italy", 891; B. Krizman, *op. cit.*, 406; Sources: ADAP, s. E, Band. 3, doc. 310, p. 530–538; Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office. Hereafter: PA AA), Akten des Staatssekretärs zu Kroatien, RZ 102/29667, doc. 329; DDI, s. 9, vol. 9, doc. 158, p. 165–166; Memorial De La Shoah (hereafter: MS), The Nuremberg Trial Archives, CXXVa, – 8I; Karlo Budor, *Španjolska diplomacija i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska. Zbornik dokumenata* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2013), 86–87.

³¹ PA AA, Akten des Staatssekretärs zu Kroatien, RZ 102/29667, doc. 329.

³² С. Трифковић, *Усташе*, 265.

³³ Notes for 21 September in N. Kisić-Kolanović, *Mladen Lorković: ministar urotnik* (Zagreb: Golden marketing - Tehnička knjiga, 1998), 244.

Kasche and von Horstenau, who gave him their impressions of Poglavnik's meeting with Hitler. Lorković noted that the changes in the Croatian Government were not explicitly mentioned, but Hitler's words that the Domobranstvo had partially failed and that the Ustaše represented the courageous Croatian forces speak for themselves.³⁴ Apart from Italian sources,³⁵ the Marshal himself testified that Pavelić returned more confident after the meeting with Hitler.³⁶

The French representative in Zagreb also addressed the causes behind the dismissal of both Kvaterniks. In a letter to Pierre Laval dated 19 October, Gueyraud confirmed that the *Poglavnik* returned from his meeting with Hitler determined to reconstruct the Croatian government. He explained that this reconstruction aimed to grant Germany greater control over key state institutions, such as the army and the security apparatus. Gueyraud noted that the Reich had become increasingly disappointed with Croatia, as the ongoing chaos deprived it of a significant portion of the country's resources and required the continued deployment of German forces, forces that, in his words, were urgently needed on the Eastern Front.

Gueyraud also referred to recent Partisan victories in Bosnia and the mass execution of 10,000 Serbs in Slavonia, along with thousands of Roma and sedentary peasants. He described the situation as deteriorating, warning that it threatened to descend into full anarchy.

Unlike the sources mentioned above, the French diplomat stated that the Germans credited Edmund Veessenmayer, a Reich expert on the Balkans and one of Hitler's trusted men, with diagnosing the crisis. According to Gueyraud, Veessenmayer held the two Kvaterniks responsible for the state of near-anarchy: Slavko Kvaternik was seen as incompetent, while Dido Kvaternik's brutal policing methods and bloody excesses had further destabilised the country.³⁷

Having received support from the Germans and Italians, Pavelić suggested that Kvaternik leave Croatia for health reasons. Their conversation took place on 29 September. Kvaternik noted in his memoirs that their conversation took place several days after Pavelić returned from his meeting with Hitler. The Marshal also reported Poglavnik's argument that both Croatian allies were against him. Kvaternik further testified that Pavelić repeated his demands in the presence of Gleise von Horstenau. The general formally protested but remained silent about Kvaternik's requests for help.³⁸ Pavelić's arguments and his repeated demands in the presence of von Horstenau testify to the importance of the German role in the internal Croatian processes.

German diplomatic correspondence confirms that Kvaternik perceived Pavelić's request as an expulsion from Croatia. The letter from German dignitary Ludin, dated 5 October, showed that the Marshal would soon depart for Slovakia and that the reconstruction of the Croatian Government would take place during Kvaternik's

³⁴ Notes for 21 September in N. Kisić-Kolanović, *Mladen Lorković: ministar urotnik*, 245.

³⁵ DDI, s. 9, vol. 9, doc. 158, p. 165–166.

³⁶ Kvaternik's notes about Pavelić's visit to Hitler in September 1942 are presented by N. Kisić-Kolanović, *Vojskovođa i politika*, 229–230.

³⁷ FDA, Guerre 1939–1945, Vichy, Croatie, 946, p. 165–167. Georges Gueyraud to Pierre Laval, 19 October 1942.

³⁸ N. Kisić-Kolanović, *Vojskovođa i politika*, 230; V. Kazimirović, *op. cit.*, 224.

absence.³⁹ Similarly, in his conversation with Kasche, Pavelić anticipated Kvaternik's trip to Slovakia, emphasising that the Marshal would not retake his ministerial position. Kasche reported this information on 2 October 1942.⁴⁰

The sources from one of Ante Pavelić's dossiers confirm the sources analysed above that both Kvaterniks were dismissed at the Germans' request.⁴¹ Even though Martin Luther was soon removed from his position, negative reports about Kvaternik nonetheless reached Hitler, as evidenced during his meeting with Pavelić, as discussed above.⁴² It also appears that Kasche's accusation against Slavko and Eugen Kvaternik regarding the violence against the Serbs served more as a pretext than a genuine concern. In fact, in one of his earlier letters to Ribbentrop, sent in early 1942, Kasche acknowledged both Slavko's support for violence against the Serbs and Dido's harsh police measures, explicitly noting that these actions did not hinder German interests.⁴³

Italian diplomatic sources referred to Kvaternik's dismissal. On 4 October, Marquis Raimondo Giustiniani, the Italian Chargé d'Affaires in the NDH, sent a letter to Ciano. Giustiniani noted the link between Pavelić's visit to Hitler and his decision to remove the Marshal. However, Giustiniani learned from Croatian Foreign Minister Mladen Lorković that the Croatian authorities did not want public opinion to link the dismissal to the Pavelić-Hitler meeting.⁴⁴

The information about public opinion corresponds with the journal *Hrvatski Narod*, which reported that Pavelić had granted Kvaternik's request to leave Croatia for health reasons.⁴⁵ It is reasonable to assume that Pavelić sought to convince the public that he could make independent decisions within Croatia, without foreign influence. As argued above, however, the reality was quite different.

The Italians' hope to benefit from the removal of Kvaternik, a pro-German figure, is not surprising. In a letter to Ciano dated 12 October, Casertano stated that this change in the Croatian Government represented an opportunity to strengthen Italy's position in Croatia.⁴⁶

Kvaternik was dismissed on 6 October, but returned to Croatia in December 1942. He had two meetings with Pavelić, but they could not find common ground. Kvaternik agreed to withdraw from public life in January 1943 and retire. Furthermore, he unsuccessfully attempted to remove Pavelić from power. Kvaternik was sentenced and executed in 1947.⁴⁷

The Kvaternik family and violence

The collaboration between Pavelić and Slavko's son, Eugen Dido Kvaternik, began before the war. Both of them were sentenced to death after the assassination of King Alexander Karađorđević in Marseille on 9 October 1934. They shared a prison

³⁹ PA AA, Akten des Staatssekretärs zu Kroatien, RZ 102/29668, doc. 011.

⁴⁰ PA AA, Akten des Staatssekretärs zu Kroatien, RZ 102/29668, doc. 007.

⁴¹ HDA, 1561, 013.0.4, Dosije Anta Pavelića, p. 17.

⁴² More details about the dismissal of Martin Luther are presented by V. Kazimirović, *op. cit.*, 222–223.

⁴³ V. Kazimirović, *op. cit.*, 217–218.

⁴⁴ DDI, s. 9, vol. 9, doc. 185, p. 194.

⁴⁵ *Hrvatski Narod*, 6 October 1942.

⁴⁶ DDI, s. 9, vol. 9, doc. 211, p. 216–218.

⁴⁷ Kisić-Kolanović, "Drama vojskovođe Slavka Kvaternika", 394–396.

cell during imprisonment in Torino.⁴⁸ It is also known that, on 25 March 1935, the two of them began a hunger strike together.⁴⁹ With the Ustaše Movement in power, Eugen became the Head of the NDH's Directorate for Public Order and Security.

Before discussing the role of Eugen (Dido) Kvaternik and his undeniable involvement in atrocities, it is worth examining the differences between him and his father, Slavko, in this regard. Nada Kisić-Kolanović, who dedicated her study to Slavko Kvaternik, highlighted the differing attitudes toward violence held by Slavko and Dido Kvaternik. She noted Slavko's criticism of Pavelić, quoting his claim that the Poglavnik had turned sincere émigré youth into sadists. Kolanović also argued that Slavko Kvaternik protested to Pavelić due to the treatment of Serbian civilians at Kozara, arguing for taking care of Serbian children in Catholic homes. She also cited sources indicating that Slavko aided some Jews in remaining in Zagreb, and many of them were arrested following his dismissal. However, she also acknowledged Kvaternik's support for anti-Jewish economic measures. He reportedly equated Jewish identity with economic power and favoured the incorporation of confiscated Jewish property into the economy of the Croatian state.⁵⁰ It appears that Kisić-Kolanović partially accepts Kvaternik's defence arguments before the Yugoslav court after the war, acknowledging his inability to prevent the violence. However, the statements and historical sources listed below prove the opposite.

Firstly, the authority and prestige of Slavko Kvaternik, the second person in the Croatian hierarchy, were immense. The most essential proof of his influence was that Pavelić wanted to sack him due to their power rivalry. Apart from leading the Domobranstvo forces, Slavko's position was also reflected in his proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia. His symbolic importance was also evident at several public events. In February 1942, for example, a concert was held in honour of Ante Starčević, the so-called father of the fatherland. When explaining the symbolic meaning of Slavko Kvaternik, Goldstein argued that Slavko Kvaternik was the central figure, not Ante Starčević or Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, whose work was performed. Kvaternik was also the most influential person at the glamorous manifestation on the anniversary of the NDH proclamation.⁵¹

Secondly, an unnamed report, previously mentioned and found in the office of Hans Helm, the police attaché of the Third Reich in the Independent State of Croatia, establishes a direct link between Slavko Kvaternik and the violence against Serbs. Noting that von Horstenau and Kvaternik were close friends due to their shared service in the Austro-Hungarian army, the report states that von Horstenau criticised Kvaternik's "senseless terror" against the Serbs, which he believed had provoked the uprising.⁵²

Thirdly, the office of Hans Helm also contains a statement indicating that Slavko Kvaternik objected to Helm's appointment as police attaché due to his perceived

⁴⁸ Bogdan Krizman, *Pavelić i ustaše* (Zagreb: Globus, 1978), 190–194.

⁴⁹ Archivio centrale dello Stato (Hereafter: ACS), Segreteria Particolare del Duce, Carteggio Riservato, busta 71, doc. 056081.

⁵⁰ N. Kisić-Kolanović, "Drama vojskovođe Slavka Kvaternika", 387–389.

⁵¹ Ivo Goldstein, *Zagreb 1941–1945* (Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2011), 54–55.

⁵² HDA, Hans Helm – policijski izaslanik pri Poslanstvu Trećeg Reicha u Zagrebu (1521) 3-8-146 (Dosije Slavka Kvaternika).

pro-Serbian stance. If this report is accurate, it suggests that Slavko was blinded by hatred, especially considering that Serbs were brutally persecuted in the Independent State of Croatia.⁵³

Fourthly, the report of Sergeant Franc Bublik, translator to the German Commander in Serbia, stated that Slavko Kvaternik wanted to present himself as an honourable man and an impeccable officer who could not be linked to violence. Underlining the difference between Slavko and his son Eugen, who directly participates in the crimes, Bublik emphasises that even Slavko tolerated the fact that many government offices in Zagreb cover up and tolerate the “bloody orgies” of their subordinate bodies. Bublik believed that Slavko could use his authority to enable “a more reasonable reckoning between Serbs and Croats.”⁵⁴

Fifthly, Slavko Kvaternik himself took a villa which had been a Jewish property. Kvaternik confessed that the villa in Tuškanac was a property of an unknown Jew, who was expelled.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Kvaternik filled the villa with numerous precious objects.⁵⁶ Slavko retained his house and received a massive pension even after being dismissed from his ministerial position.⁵⁷

Sixthly, when the Ustaše terror began as early as April 1941, Kvaternik accused Chetniks of entering people’s homes and committing acts of violence, claiming they were disguised in Ustaše uniforms. However, these individuals were not Chetniks, but rather local actors who felt emboldened to commit crimes under the perceived protection of the authorities. Goldstein further explained that the terror spiralled out of control, and that Kvaternik wanted to prevent it with these words, avoiding, however, targeting Ustaše perpetrators.⁵⁸ Even if Kvaternik intended to condemn or prevent further violence, his statement must have contributed significantly to the atmosphere of anti-Serbian hatred and terror.

In addition to the sources mentioned above, Srđa Trifković cites compelling evidence pointing to Slavko Kvaternik’s more significant contribution to atrocities against the Serbs. In July, Slavko initially supported von Horstenau’s initiative to hold a joint meeting with Pavelić in an effort to persuade him to halt the executions of Serbs. However, according to von Horstenau’s testimony, during the meeting, Kvaternik changed his stance and began speaking against the Serbs in an increasingly radical tone. Furthermore, during his meeting with Hitler on 21 July, Slavko outlined the ongoing anti-Jewish and anti-Serbian measures, referring to Jews and Serbs as constant sources of unrest. He added that Croatia had a “firm enough hand” to deal with them.⁵⁹

The son of Slavko Kvaternik, Dido, was much more extreme and bore much more personal responsibility for the violence. However, Dido Kvaternik, whose mother was half-Jewish, claimed in his article published in 1952 that he enabled the rescue of

⁵³ HDA, 1521-3-8-146.

⁵⁴ М. Кољанин, *op. cit.*, 106–107.

⁵⁵ I. Goldstein, *op. cit.*, 5, 157.

⁵⁶ HDA, 1561, 013.0.6, p. 6.

⁵⁷ HDA, 1561, 013.0.4, p. 17.

⁵⁸ I. Goldstein, *op. cit.*, 67.

⁵⁹ Трифковић, *Усташе*, 219–220.

numerous Jews and that the persecution of Jews in Croatia was due to German pressure. He also referred to the statement of Rabin from Zagreb that the numerous Jews were saved due to the corruption of Ustaše officials and Jewish connections to the Kvaternik family. Dido also explained that much had been done in Croatia to save the Jews.⁶⁰

Even though some Ustaše officials could claim that they had saved a Jew, such exceptions were predominantly based on private or familial connections. They cannot be used to relativise the broader Ustaše persecution participation in the Holocaust. Likewise, it is inaccurate to argue that the Ustaše authorities persecuted Jews solely due to German pressure. Numerous documents in Italian diplomatic correspondence from 1942 and 1943 show that the Croats exerted diplomatic and political pressure to extradite the Jews protected by the Italians. The correspondence shows that the Italians knew that a tragic fate awaited the Jews if they were handed over to the Croatian authorities.⁶¹

In this context, a significant research gap remains regarding the Holocaust in Croatia. More specifically, the question of how the Holocaust affected Italian-German-Croatian relations has been insufficiently explored.⁶²

Apart from the Holocaust, Dido Kvaternik's involvement in the persecution of the Serbs raises another important question, which will be addressed below. On 27 September 1942, Kasche told Lorković that Dido Kvaternik, infamous for his excesses against the Serbs, should be removed from power, as his policy was preventing pacification.⁶³ As was the case with the old Marshal, von Horstenau, who lobbied for the removal of his son, complaining about both units of the Croatian armed forces.⁶⁴ The letter from German dignitary Ludin, dated 5 October, also confirmed that Eugen Kvaternik would be dismissed soon.⁶⁵ The Italians supported the dismissal, as in early October, Casertano confirmed that Dido Kvaternik did not enjoy Italian support.⁶⁶

Even though Kasche may have mentioned excesses as a possible reason for Dido Kvaternik's dismissal, information about Kvaternik's involvement in the excesses had been widely known much earlier. As early as September 1941, a French diplomat in Zagreb referred to Kvaternik's "sadism" and pleasure in ordering murders and killing with his hand. In this context, he referred to the information that Kvaternik's

⁶⁰ J. Jareb, *op. cit.*, 289.

⁶¹ MS, Italie, Ministère des Affaires étrangères 2, CDLI, 451; Archivio storico, Fondazione Centro di Dokumentazione Ebraica Contemporanea (Milano), Colezione archivi italiani e stranieri 1928-1972, busta 11, Croazia 1942-1943.

⁶² While many authors have examined the Italian stance on the Holocaust in Croatia, the question of how it influenced Italian-German-Croatian relations has been addressed only in passing: Džejms Bergvin, *Imperija na Jadranu. Musolinijevo osvajanje Jugoslavije 1941–1943* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2007), 165; Susan Zuccotti, *The Italians and the Holocaust: Persecution, Rescue, and Survival*, (University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 77. See also Jonathan Steinberg, *All or Nothing: The Axis and the Holocaust 1941–43* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 88–91; Daniel Carpi, *The rescue of Jews in the Italian zone of occupied Croatia*, (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1977); Léon Poliakov, & Sabille Jacques, *Attitude of the Italians to the Persecuted Jews in Croatia* (New York: Fertig, 1983).

⁶³ N. Kisić-Kolanović, *Mladen Lorković*, 245.

⁶⁴ N. Kisić-Kolanović, *Vojskovođa i politika*, 58.

⁶⁵ PA AA, Akten des Staatssekretärs zu Kroatien, RZ 102/29668, doc. 011.

⁶⁶ N. Kisić-Kolanović, *Mladen Lorković*, 247.

mother committed suicide in shame.⁶⁷ Unnamed, but reportedly well-informed Ustaše official referred to Dido as a mentally ill sadist.⁶⁸ In a similar context, Dido was labelled the “murderer of his mother” in a report by Juretić from December 1942.⁶⁹ In his letter to the Spanish Foreign Minister, the Spanish diplomat in Zagreb, de la Torre, described Dido Kvaternik as “a very dubious person, whom I have already mentioned to you several times.”⁷⁰ Casertano gave his own impression and explained that Dido Kvaternik had fallen into disrepute because of the massacres and was the main obstacle to internal normalisation in Croatia.⁷¹ In Ante Pavelić’s dossier, it is written that Dido regarded persecution as a state necessity. He protected the executioners despite knowing they posed a threat to his own circle of associates. However, Dido justified this by claiming that they would be removed as soon as they became a danger to their surroundings.⁷²

The German authorities also received information about Dido Kvaternik’s involvement in violence. On 17 November 1941, Sergeant Franz Bublik reported to the intelligence department of this commander about Eugen Kvaternik’s main role in carrying out terror against the Serbs.⁷³ Also, on 30 January 1942, the Zagreb Field Command reported on mass crimes against Serbs in Glina. The report states that trains were searched at the Gornji Grabovac railway station in July and August 1941. On that occasion, the Serbs were dragged outside and shot. It is said that Dido Kvaternik was personally present on that occasion.⁷⁴

These sources, mainly produced before April 1942, contradict the claims of Nada Kisić-Kolanović, who stated that Eugen became disreputable after 1942 when the police arrested and murdered several hundred Serbs in Srem.⁷⁵ Apart from that, the information that circulated in the German circles was that the uprising was spreading to the Northern part of Croatia due to the terror of Eugen Kvaternik in Bjelovar in the Summer of 1942.⁷⁶

Many other sources confirm that violence against the Serbs was condemned by Croatian allies, who were likely aware that this violence provoked an uprising that Croatian authorities were unable to control. The Germans must have engaged additional resources, which were also needed on other fronts.⁷⁷ Some of the sources also

⁶⁷ FDA, Guerre 1939–1945, Vichy, Croatie, 946, p. 54. Georges Gueyraud to François Darlan, 28 September 1941.

⁶⁸ HDA, 1561, 013.0.6, p. 6.

⁶⁹ Ljubo Boban, *Hrvatska u arhivima izbjegličke vlade 1941–1943* (Zagreb: Globus, 1985), 174.

⁷⁰ K. Budor, *op. cit.*, 81–85.

⁷¹ DDI, s. 9, vol. 9, doc. 211, p. 216.

⁷² HDA 1561, 013.0.4, Dosije Anta Pavelića, p. 17.

⁷³ М. Кољанин, *op. cit.*, 106–110.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ N. Kisić-Kolanović, “Drama vojskovođe Slavka Kvaternika”, 387.

⁷⁶ HDA-1521-2-2-2-234 (Dosije Eugena Kvaternika).

⁷⁷ The Ustasha violence against the Serbs were subject of reports of German soldiers. See: S. Schmid, *op. cit.*, 84; A. Bucarelli, “Disgregazione iugoslava e questione serba”, 34–35; С. Трифковић, *Устанаке*, 216–222; Ladislaus Hory, Martin Broszat, *Der kroatische Ustascha-Staat 1941–1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1964), 129–131. Sources which were not referred to by these authors but testify to the German reaction to the Ustasha violence against the Serbs are: Herman

establish a link between the excessive use of violence and the decline in popularity of the Croatian regime. Referring to the violence against the Serbs in his report, Von Horstenau emphasised the Ustaše's bloody fight against real and imaginary enemies. The German general in Zagreb explained that the Ustaše's lack of restraint and indiscipline were responsible for excesses. He emphasised that the violence seriously damaged people's trust in the regime.⁷⁸ Similarly, in his report, Georges Gueyraud referred to von Horstenau's belief that a person enjoying popular support should lead Croatia.⁷⁹ General Mario Roatta also noted the regime's unpopularity.⁸⁰ The letter from the Italian military representative in Zagreb, Gian Carlo Re, to Casertano on 16 January confirms lax security and the despair gripping the Croatian population and army.⁸¹ However, the reasons for unpopularity cannot be seen in these two reports. The French representative in Zagreb confirmed the existence of such a mood.⁸² One of Gueyraud's subsequent reports confirmed the decrease in Pavelić's popularity due to lax security in the country and excessive use of violence.⁸³

Casertano stated that even though some circles in Croatia interpreted or hoped that the dismissal of Kvaternik meant the regime's will to distance itself from the violence against the Serbs, the violence continued.⁸⁴

In his letters, Casertano reiterated that the regime failed to restore popular confidence despite Kvaternik's removal. Furthermore, Casertano explained that Pavelić's alleged attempt to moderate the Croatian Government's policy failed. His letter from 7 November 1942, among other things, testified to the growing opposition to Pavelić's Government. Casertano, who often praised Pavelić, explained that Poglavnik wanted to believe that the rebels' movement was composed solely of communists. The Italian diplomat clarified that various layers of society, forming a mass movement, were united to overthrow the regime.⁸⁵

In his subsequent letter from 4 December, Casertano explained that the rigid ideology and repression represented the critical Croatian challenge. The ambassador stated that the NDH's Government had failed to free itself from these politics. He also clarified that the Minister of the Interior, Ante Nikšić, attempted to improve the situation by punishing people participating in violence. Nikšić also promised to pardon

Nojbaher, *Specijalni zadatak Balkan* (Beograd: NNK internacional, 2018), 243–244, 249; Zbornik NOR-a, vol. 12/1, doc. 150. p. 390–396.

⁷⁸ S. Trifković "Rivalry between Germany and Italy in Croatia", 891.

⁷⁹ FDA, Guerre 1939–1945, Vichy, Croatie, 946, p. 174–176. Georges Gueyraud to Pierre Laval, 11 December 1942, no. 105.

⁸⁰ Zbornik NOR-a, vol. 13/2, doc. 23, p. 76–80.

⁸¹ A. Becherelli, *op. cit.*, 188–190.

⁸² FDA, Guerre 1939–1945, Vichy, Croatie, 946, p. 73–77. Georges Gueyraud to François Darlan, 12 January 1942.

⁸³ In this context, Gueyraud primarily had in mind the supporters of the Peasants' Party, for which he claimed to have had a massive support of ordinary people. The French diplomat stated the leading elements of the Peasants' Party distanced themselves from the regime due to insecurity and excessive use of violence. FDA, Guerre 1939–1945, Vichy, Croatie, 946, p. 82–83. Georges Gueyraud to François Darlan, 2 February 1942.

⁸⁴ For a testimony about atrocities taking place in November 1942 see M. Кољанин, *op. cit.*, 499–500.

⁸⁵ N. Kisić-Kolanović, *NDH i Italija*, 330.

the rebels if they came out of the woods and handed over their weapons. Casertano reasonably concluded that these attempts failed because the climate of mistrust was already widespread. The ambassador saw the cause of the crisis in the contradiction between the law and its application. Casertano also referred to the contradiction between Pavelić's promises and what was de facto happening. He believed that it was necessary to renounce the fundamental principles to which the old guard's people were bound.⁸⁶

Similarly, the French diplomat in Zagreb testified that the removal of Kvaternik had not brought any significant shift in Croatian policy. In his report, Gueyraud referred to the continuation of monstrous atrocities in the Jasenovac concentration camp.⁸⁷

The violence against the Serbs was a question which not only continuously but increasingly impeded Croatian relations with their Italian partners. Numerous reports attest to Italian support for the Serbs.⁸⁸ Some of the sources rightfully emphasise the human aspect as one of the reasons for Italian support for the Serbian civilians.⁸⁹ In their meeting with the Croatian authorities, the Italians constantly repeated their requests for the cessation of violence.⁹⁰ They also influenced the re-opening of Orthodox churches that the Croatian authorities had closed.⁹¹ The Italians organised exhumations of killed Serb civilians in several locations.⁹² In February 1943, Benito Mussolini himself referred to the violence against the Serbs. He relayed the following message to Pavelić via Casertano: "Tell Pavelić to desist from the fight against the Orthodox, not only for reasons of humanity but because it's a big mistake if he wants Croatia to survive and his regime not to perish."⁹³ The Spanish diplomat in Zagreb was informed about Mussolini's condemnation of the violence against the Serbs. The Spanish diplomat learned that the Italians had helped

⁸⁶ DDI, s. 9, vol. 9, doc. 376, p. 368–370.

⁸⁷ FDA, Guerre 1939–1945, Vichy, Croatie, 946, p. 171–172. Georges Gueyraud to Pierre Laval, 16 November 1942, no. 102.

⁸⁸ Italian reaction to the violence was addressed by M. Bucarelli, "Disgregazione iugoslava e la questione serba", 34, 35; E. Gobetti, *L'occupazione allegra. Gli italiani in Jugoslavia 1941–1943*, 63–64; Mila Mihajlović, *Jugoslavija: april 1941–septembar 1943. Italijanski izvori: dokumenti o masakru Srba u Dalmaciji, Lici i Kninskoj krajini*. (Beograd: Udruženje srpskih izdavača, 2012); B. Dimitrijević, *op. cit.*, 86–89; С. Трифковић, *Усташе*, 220–231; S. Schmid, *op. cit.*, 151–153; Вељко Ђурић–Мишина, *Српски народ у НДХ: Нестајање под кршом, маљом и петокраком*, vol. 1, (Удружење Мост: Београд 2025), 306–309.

⁸⁹ M. Mihajlović, *op. cit.*; Vincenzo Maria de Luca, *Il Falco e il leone. Soldati italiani al confine orientale 1941–1943*, (Rome: Edizioni Settimo Sigillo. 2010), 96–100. Potentially biased, but interesting: Mario Roatta, *Otto milioni di baionette. L'esercito italiano in guerra dal 1940 al 1944*, (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1946), 170–171.

⁹⁰ DDI, s. 9, vol. 10, doc. 62, p. 87–89.

⁹¹ HDA, Опће управно повјереништво НДХ код II армате талијанске војске (491), kutija (k). 4, Grčko–istočne crkve – otvaranje, 276/41. HDA, 491, k. 4, Bogoslužjenje u Gradačcu dozvoljeno po italijanskoj komandi.

⁹² Zbornik NOR-a, vol. 12/1, (Beograd: Vojnoistorijski institut, 1973), doc. 279, p. 765–782; Vojni Arhiv (Military Archive in Belgrade), Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, k. 281, f. 1, doc 11, T. Br. 494, (second report in the document); HDA, Ministarstvo Vanjskih poslova NDH (227), k. 5, Suradnja talijanskih vojničkih vlasti sa hrvatskim građanskim vlastima, V.Z. 96/41.

⁹³ Mussolini's words in Italian: Dite a Pavelić che desista dalla lotta contro gli ortodossi, non soltanto per ragioni di umanità ma perchè è un grave errore, se egli vuole che la Croazia viva e il suo Regime non perisca. Casertano to Bastianini, Zagreb, 15 February 1943, DDI, s. 9, vol. 10, doc. 24, p. 28.

the Serbs on several occasions, providing them with supplies. He also stated that such help irritated the Croatian authorities.⁹⁴

It is reasonable to assume that, in addition to humanitarian concerns, political motives also influenced Italian assistance to the Serbs. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the violence against the Serbs was detrimental to the Croatian state for both inhumane and political reasons, as it provided the Italians with a pretext to strengthen their position at the expense of Croatian independence. In other words, the Ustaše policy of terror ultimately backfired.

Apart from shedding light on the issue of violence, the removal of the Kvaternik family also allows for an analysis of the balance of German and Italian influence in Croatia. This episode, in particular, illustrates Germany's far greater impact in the Independent State of Croatia than that of its Italian ally. Nonetheless, Italian power in Croatia should not be underestimated. For instance, even though the Germans were unhappy with Italy's decision to reoccupy the Second Zone of the NDH in August 1941, they decided not to intervene. The German Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, instructed Kasche unambiguously not to try to prevent the Italian decision, reasoning that maintaining good relations with Italy represented a priority in German foreign policy in the Mediterranean.⁹⁵

Between 1941 and 1943, the balance of power between Italy and Germany shifted significantly in Germany's favour.⁹⁶ However, specific episodes demonstrate that Italian influence in Croatia remained strong even in 1943. The dismissal of Croatian high officials in 1943, such as Foreign Minister Mladen Lorković and Croatian Ambassador to Rome, Stjepo Perić, was primarily an Italian initiative.⁹⁷

The Kvaternik Family and the Austro-Hungarian Legacy in the Croatian Armed Forces

The question which is neglected in historiography is the extent to which the Austro-Hungarian legacy permeated the Croatian armed forces. As stated above, Gleise von Horstenau and Slavko Kvaternik were Austro-Hungarian officers through whom the Austro-Hungarian influence was possible and even expected. As noted above, Slavko Kvaternik aimed to organise the Domobranstvo Armed Forces along the lines of the Austro-Hungarian army. Croatian Civil Protection and Croatian Peasant Protection, paramilitary and later military formations of the Croatian Peasant Party operating in the 1930s, also had considerable Austro-Hungarian influence; many of these were incorporated into the NDH in 1941, further spreading Austro-Hungarian influence within the Croatian armed forces. Furthermore, Kvaternik established military schools in Croatia⁹⁸ through which Austro-Hungarian influence was possible.

⁹⁴ K. Budor, *op. cit.*, 81.

⁹⁵ B. Krizman, *NDH između Hitlera i Mussolinija*, 160; S. Milošević, *op. cit.*, 68. T. Jonjić, *op. cit.*, 702.

⁹⁶ More details are presented by S. Milošević, *op. cit.*

⁹⁷ Lorković's notes for 23 February 1943. In: N. Kisić-Kolanović, *Mladen Lorković ministar urotnik*, 272–273; L. Monzali, *op. cit.*, 124; K. Budor, *op. cit.*, 81–82; 84–85; ADAP, s. E, Band 5, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), doc. 340, p. 687; DDI, s. 9, vol. 10. doc. 189, p. 190.

⁹⁸ N. Kisić-Kolanović, *"Drama vojskovođe Slavka Kvaternika"*, 385–386.

Emphasising Kvaternik's Germanophilia or Croatian preference for Germany, Italian reports referred to their Austro-Hungarian legacy. This is evident in an Italian military report dated 14 July 1941, which noted anti-Italian sentiments among the Croatian leadership and attributed them to the spirit of the Austro-Hungarian tradition.⁹⁹ Similarly, in arguing against Kvaternik, Casertano invoked Austria-Hungary, reportedly stating: "Some gentlemen in Croatia have programs and intentions like Austria once had. Marshal Kvaternik is one of them, and that's the reason why I removed him from his position".¹⁰⁰ In the same vein, in his letter to the Italian Foreign Ministry, Casertano stated that the removal of both father and son Kvaterniks decreased the influence of the Austrophile elements in Croatia.¹⁰¹

Pavelić was aware of the negative Italian perception of the Austro-Hungarian legacy. When presenting arguments to Casertano for replacing the Domobranstvo with Ustaše units, he remarked that the Domobranstvo forces were tied to a tradition that was Yugoslav or Austro-Hungarian, not revolutionary.¹⁰² Even Dido Kvaternik referred to his father's Austrian legacy in pejorative terms, stating that Slavko "had enlisted incapable Austrian officers in his army." He seemed to view the Austrian legacy as outdated. Similarly, Kasche reported that Slavko Kvaternik favoured former Austro-Hungarian officers. He noted that Slavko was aware that these officers were advanced in age, in poor physical condition, and out of touch with modern warfare. Nevertheless, Slavko continued to strongly prefer Austro-Hungarian officers over their Yugoslav counterparts, whom he regarded as worthless and easily corruptible.¹⁰³

Conclusions

The analysis of the removal of the Kvaternik family enables several conclusions. Firstly, the consent of the Croatian allies was crucial for replacing the two leading figures in the Croatian Government. However, Pavelić aimed to persuade the Croatian public that the situation was completely different.

Secondly, the dismissal of the Kvaterniks resulted from a combination of circumstances, including Pavelić's personal wishes and German dissatisfaction with the situation in Croatia. The unsatisfactory state of the Croatian Domobranstvo, along with the chaos caused by widespread violence, significantly contributed to their removal from power.

Thirdly, even though the Germans formally recognised NDH as an Italian sphere of interest, their wish, and not the Italians', was essential for the dismissal of one of the most influential Croatian families. This episode demonstrates the hierarchy within the Axis powers, though it should not be oversimplified. Moreover, it reveals a deep level of mutual mistrust and animosity among Axis members. Italian officials lobbied against Kvaternik primarily because of his pro-German orientation and sought to capitalise on his dismissal.

⁹⁹ V. Maria de Luca, *op. cit.*, 103.

¹⁰⁰ N. Kisić-Kolanović, "Drama vojskovođe Slavka Kvaternika", 393.

¹⁰¹ N. Kisić-Kolanović, "Drama vojskovođe Slavka Kvaternika", 394.

¹⁰² DDI, s. 9, vol. 8, doc. 102, p. 103

¹⁰³ V. Kazimirović, *op. cit.*, 219.

Fourthly, some representatives of German and, much more, Italian authorities condemned the violence against the Serbs. Even though many Italian sources undoubtedly highlight the human aspect of this stance, numerous historiographical contributions, as well as German and Italian reports, attest to their awareness of the political damage that the violence might cause to the stability of Croatia and, consequently, to the political interests of their own countries. In other words, the genocidal violence against the Serbs undermined the reputation of the Croatian authorities in the eyes of many circles within their allied powers.

Fifthly, numerous foreign reports testify to the unpopularity of the Ustaše regime. Apart from that, just a few of them linked the fall in popularity of the regime and the Ustaše's policy of violence. German, Italian, Spanish and French reports noted the involvement of high-ranking Ustaše official, Dido Kvaternik, in violence. Even if foreign diplomats were not entirely sincere and some of them merely used the violence against the Serbs as a pretext to advance their own political agendas, the violence was nonetheless detrimental to the Croatian state, as it provided its partners with a convenient justification for political interference in its internal affairs. Even though Slavko Kvaternik was reasonably held responsible for acts of violence, his son appeared to be far more extreme.

Lastly, the arguments that the Croatian authorities were under pressure from the Germans and could do nothing to prevent the persecution of the Jews are not tenable. Various levels of authorities in Italy, Bulgaria and even Slovakia and Romania endeavoured to, if not prevent, at least delay the persecution of the Jews. In the Independent State of Croatia, anti-Jewish measures were vigorously applied.

The limitation of this article lies in its inability to provide a nuanced understanding of the Austro-Hungarian influence on the Croatian armed forces. Although the Italians referred to Kvaternik in pejorative terms as Austro-Hungarian, the influence of the Austro-Hungarian legacy on both the Kvaternik family and wartime Croatia remains a research gap that requires further exploration and analysis. Similarly, the impact of the Holocaust in Croatia on Italian-German-Croatian relations merits more detailed research and analysis.

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THE KVATERNIK FAMILY: AXIS DIPLOMACY, THE HOLOCAUST, VIOLENCE, AND POWER STRUGGLES IN CROATIA (1941–1942)

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Summary

The German and Italian authorities supported the Ustaše and played a key role in establishing the Independent State of Croatia. This paper analyses the roles and removal of Slavko Kvaternik and his son, Eugen Dido, two leading figures in the Croatian armed and police forces, and raises several key questions. First, it investigates the circumstances surrounding their roles, with particular emphasis on their dismissals and the foreign influences involved. In this context, it examines the Independent State of Croatia's capacity to make autonomous decisions regarding certain internal matters. Second, it explores the Italian-German rivalry for influence in Croatia as reflected in the Kvaternik family's position. Third, it considers the responsibility of both Dido and Slavko for the violence in Croatia, analysing how Italian, German, Spanish, and Vichy diplomats in Zagreb perceived Dido Kvaternik's involvement. The paper also assesses the extent to which this violence damaged the NDH's reputation among its allies and contributed to the deterioration of its relations with some of them. Furthermore, it considers the stance of Italian officials in Croatia, and of Benito Mussolini himself, on Ustaše violence. Finally, the paper identifies two key directions for further research: the Austro-Hungarian legacy within the Croatian armed forces and wartime Croatia, and an insufficiently explored aspect of the Holocaust – Italian-German-Croatian relations in the context of the fate of the remaining Jews in Croatia in 1942. The study draws on and cross-references Croatian, Serbian, Yugoslav, Italian, French, Spanish, and German sources and literature.

KEYWORDS: Slavko Kvaternik, Dido Kvaternik, Ustaše, Holocaust, Independent State of Croatia, NDH

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