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HEADING TOWARDS THE WEST. YUGOSLAV ASYLUM
SEEKERS IN ITALY (1955–1968)*Francesca ROLANDI*

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with Yugoslav asylum seekers in Italy between 1955 and 1968, a time span particularly meaningful, due to the deep entanglement of political and economic push factors. In fact, even if Yugoslav asylum seekers were usually not characterized by a strong political background, they obtained a “political status” when applying for asylum, and often entered into contact with anti-Yugoslav organizations. For Yugoslav asylum seekers Italy – officially a country of first asylum, together with Austria – represented a stop over in their transnational migration paths before embarking for overseas destinations or crossing the border illegally into other European states.

Key words: Italy, Yugoslavia, asylum seekers, transnational migrations, Cold War

DIRETTI A OCCIDENTE. I RICHIEDENTI ASILO JUGOSLAVI
IN ITALIA (1955–1968)

SINTESI

Questo articolo affronta il tema dei richiedenti asilo jugoslavi in Italia tra il 1955 e il 1968, un decennio particolarmente significativo per la profonda interconnessione tra fattori di espulsione politici ed economici. Infatti, sebbene i richiedenti asilo jugoslavi non fossero in genere caratterizzati da un forte profilo politico, acquistavano uno “status politico”, quando facevano domanda di asilo e non di rado entravano in contatto con le organizzazioni anti-jugoslave. Per i richiedenti asilo jugoslavi l'Italia – ufficialmente paese di primo asilo, insieme all'Austria – rappresentava una sosta nel loro percorso migratorio internazionale prima di imbarcarsi per destinazioni oltremare o attraversare il confine illegalmente per raggiungere altri paesi europei.

Parole chiave: Italia, Jugoslavia, richiedenti asilo, migrazioni transnazionali, guerra fredda

In the post war decades thousands of Yugoslavs claimed asylum in Italy, which acted, together with Austria, as an intermediate step for Eastern refugees and migrants before heading to other Western European countries or overseas destinations. This article focuses on the period between 1955 and 1968, which provides a case study representative of the interconnection between the political and economic migration in the Upper Adriatic area. On one hand, in October 1954 the city of Trieste, which was the main entrance to Italy for Eastern refugees, was handed over by the Allied Military Government to Italy. In the same year the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees was ratified, turning Italy into a country of first asylum for refugees entering from its Eastern door. On the other hand, in the second half of the 1960s, when Yugoslavia opened its borders to economic migrants and signed the first bilateral agreements for the recruitment of labour force with Northern European countries (the most important being the one signed with Germany in 1968), the proportion of Yugoslavs among asylum seekers in Italy dramatically decreased.

THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT OF POST-WWII DISPLACEMENT

WWII caused a displacement never seen before with around ten million individuals scattered across Europe, fleeing the new Communist political systems or the uncertain situation in their home countries. The first attempts to coordinate and administrate the relief activities on the international plan were made by UNRRA (United Nation Relief and Rehabilitation Administration), founded in 1943, during a 44-nation conference held at the White House, and reflected the pre-Cold War balance, drawing on the old alliances: the citizens of the defeated countries (including millions of German nationals expelled from Eastern European countries) were not supposed to receive any help whereas Soviet citizens had to be returned to the Soviet Union. One and a half year later, thanks to the activities of the international organizations three quarters of all the refugees had been resettled but around one million civilians was still unsettled (Marrus, 2002, 319-320).

Civilians uprooted by the war, victims of the Nazi and Fascist regime, members of former collaborationist forces, Spanish republicans, prewar emigrants, displaced persons (DPs), deportees and forced labourers, “dangerous foreigners” often shared the same spaces and conditions. Even if in the aftermath of WWII the majority of those individuals were supposed to return to their countries, as time went by, it turned out that they would hardly have repatriated voluntarily. In particular some of them, such as the Baltics and Ukrainians, refused to go back home stating that their former countries were under Soviet occupation (Wyman, 1998). Whereas at the very beginning they were forcefully repatriated, as soon as the tensions increased, leading to an open confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, the aim of the Western policies turned from the repatriation of the Eastern European refugees to their resettlement. Moreover, in addition to humanitarian reasons, the liberality in awarding the status of refugee became a tool to delegitimize socialist regimes. However, the same generosity did not characterize resettling activities and refugees spent years in waiting in camps to emigrate (Salvatici, 2008, 55). This was particularly true for *hard core cases*, individuals – and big families with

many members – unable to work, old, sick or undesirable for political or security reasons. The camps were usually located in facilities which had been previously used as barracks, workers' houses, internment camps and also concentration camps. Whereas individuals who were going to be resettled in a reasonable time were hosted in Assembly Centers, residual camps were devoted to those foreigners who would hardly have been resettled (Salvatici, 2008, 103). The inactivity in terms of repatriations became a matter of tension in the relations between the Soviets and their Western former allies (Salvatici, 2008, 138-143). Also, the presence of a huge number of hard core cases was a target of criticism of the Soviets, who accused the West of skimming the cream of the refugee population and leaving the others (unable to work) behind (Gartlett, 2011, 136).

In 1947 IRO (International Refugee Organization) entered into force, taking care of the so-called "last million" refugees, out of which 750,000 were hosted in the camps. Mainly supported by the US instead of being – at least formally – a United Nation branch as UNRRA, it worked as an international employment agency dealing with resettlement procedures to those countries needing foreign labour force (Marrus, 2002, 341-344). When it started its activity, among the other nationalities, it took care of around 30,000 Yugoslavs in European refugee camps. According to the data provided by IRO two years after the beginning of its activities, the number of young males (around 54%) among the refugee population increased. However, whereas more and more people were resettled, among the increasing number of hard core cases, the percentage of women and elders grew strictly higher (Salvatici, 2008, 49-50).

A legal framework for the refugee issue was finally provided by the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, signed in 1951 by twenty-six countries – including Yugoslavia, as the only socialist country – and ratified in 1954. It awarded protection to those who, "owing to (a) well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country". The most basic principle, or core obligation, of signatory states was that of "non-refoulement", stating that nobody should be sent back to a situation where he or she might face persecution¹.

In 1950 UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) was founded but, since its beginning, was involved mostly in extra-European countries, with the exception of Hungarian crisis in 1956. In 1951, when the IRO mandate expired, ordinary resettlement activities in Europe were handled by other international organizations – such as ICEM (Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration), founded in 1952 and dealing both with labour migration and resettlement issues, USEP (United States Escape Program), the International Committee of the Red Cross –, and charities – such as the Lutheran World Federation, Caritas, the Tolstoy Foundation, the World Council of Churches (Gatrell, 2011, 20-21). The flow of refugees from the socialist countries never stopped throughout the Cold War but, due to the strict control over the borders, never reached high

1 Text of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>, accessed on December 15, 2014.

numbers, with the exception of the harshest crisis in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968) when, respectively, 194,000 and 170,000 left their countries. The total number of asylum applications in Europe almost doubled in the 1980s, from 77,000 in 1979 to 150,000 in 1980, and it steadily grew in the next decade, resulting in 690,000 applications in 1992 (Bade, 2001, 398-401).

In the same period other migration flows started connecting Northern and Southern Europe. Since the mid 1950s, the economic recovery catalyzed an increased request for foreign labour force in France, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria and above all the Federal Republic of Germany. Initially Italy was the European country that contributed the most to the economic migration flows, especially after 1955, when an agreement for the recruitment of labour force with Federal Germany was signed (Bade, 2001, 345). In fact, Western Germany attracted a huge number of foreign workers, especially after 1961, when the Berlin wall was erected, cutting it off from its natural source of labour force.

ITALY AS A COUNTRY OF FIRST ASYLUM FOR FOREIGN REFUGEES

Since the aftermath of the WWII and during the Cold War several waves of refugees from Eastern European countries left their countries in order to escape persecutions, political turmoils or misery and reached Italy, which became one of the principal collection points for displaced persons in Europe: former nazis or members of collaborationist forces, Jews coming from extermination camps in Germany and Eastern Europe willing to reach Israel, civilians reluctant to go back to the People's Republics, Italian nationals from Istria, Greece and the former colonies merged in the Italian peninsula, sometimes sharing the same space in the camps (Marrus, 2002, 302-303). For them reaching Italy or Zone A of the Free Territory of Trieste (under Anglo-American administration until 1954) meant getting closer to the main ports of embarkation for the coveted overseas destinations, such as United States, Australia and Latin America. As some recent studies have noticed, the power of attraction of overseas emigration as a pull factor has usually been underestimated in the bulk of the research on migration in the Upper Adriatic area, which has focused primarily on national reasons (Panjek, 2006, 10-11; Sluga, 2001, 157). However, especially in the 1950s Trieste was an open door towards Australia, which embodied the dream of starting a completely new life in a new country.

Since 1952 ICEM, which took over some of IRO's tasks, supervised the embarkment operations of a large number of the Balkan refugees previously settled in the camps in Zone A of the Free Territory of Trieste – an average presence of 4,000 to 5,000 individuals (Panjek, 2006, 71). The camps located around Trieste had to be emptied in order to host the Italians from Istria who were supposed to arrive after the upcoming settling of the Italo-Yugoslav border²; such a decision was supported by security issues as well as by the concerns about the “ethnic balance” of the city. Since Trieste was going to be allocated back to Italy, the percentage of Slavic population in the area was better kept

2 ACS, MI, DGAP (1949-1977), AAII (1945-1982), b. 85 IRO profughi accordi e rapporti 1945-1970, Riunione del comitato misto governo italiano – Alto commissariato delle NU per i rifugiati del 6/8/1954, p. 4.

at its possible lowest. Moreover, even the international events and fluctuating policies had an impact on the mood of the refugees. The majority of the Yugoslavs, who were hardline anti-Communist, felt betrayed by the American-Yugoslav rapprochement and mostly gave up with political active opposition. Whereas some of them, who were less compromised, started considering the idea of stressing their loyalty to the Yugoslav new government in order to obtain a passport, the majority just hoped to succeed to emigrate as soon as it was possible³.

Since 1954, when Trieste was allocated back to Italy, the question of ethnic balance in the city ceased representing a vital issue and Italian nationals started being allowed to emigrate to Australia and massively left for the other hemisphere, thus opening a new migration path (Purini, 2010, 338). Even if detailed data is lacking, between 1952 and 1962 ICEM provided assistance to 24,659 individuals leaving from Trieste, and, since 1955, emigrants were mostly Italians (Panjek, 2006, 115-116).

In 1951, when the IRO mandate expired, the Italian government – in collaboration with international organizations and charities – took charge of the 9,000 foreigners belonging to different categories still populating Italian camps. The governmental aid to refugees was managed by the authority *Amministrazione attività assistenziali italiane e internazionali* (AAAI) which was in charge of the tasks of taking care of the refugees within and outside of the camps and to organize the emigration operations in co-operation with ICEM (Ciampani, 2002). Being overpopulated and itself affected by a high unemployment rate, Italy acted as a “country of first asylum”, where the asylum seekers were not supposed to integrate but to wait to be resettled. Therefore their stay in Italy represented just a stop over in their – often years-long – migration path.

Since the end of WWII until the second half of the 1960s, the Yugoslavs represented the far largest number among foreign refugees in Italy. Whereas in the first postwar years many members of former collaborationist forces and other anti-Communist fighters managed to escape through Italy (Adriano, Cingolani, 2011), already in the mid 1950s the average profile of the Yugoslav refugees had changed: they were not usually characterized by a strong political background and the great majority of them had not been engaged in politics before. The main push factor seemed to be the extreme poverty of the areas they came from which fostered a form of embryonic opposition to the Yugoslav system as it was not able to provide nor basic standards to its citizens. However, they were used to claiming political asylum, which represented the easiest way to legally sojourn in Italy and later embark to extra-European destinations or to look for a job in another country. Yugoslavs were leaving their country escaping across the border or, since the early 1960s – when passports became available to a growing number of Yugoslav citizens –, crossing it legally without coming back. At that time, nonetheless, Yugoslavia was still opposing labour migrations and, considering anyone who had emigrated illegally as an “enemy of the state” (Novinščak, 2009, 125; Zimmerman, 1987, 74), labelled them with a political status.

After the mid 1950s the majority of the Yugoslav asylum seekers were regarded by both Italian and Austrian authorities as economic migrants searching for a better life in

3 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1950-52, b. 81, 2248/102 del 6/12/1951

the West, an opinion shared by several officials of the international organizations⁴. However, because of the pressure of both international charities and public opinion, Italian authorities acted very liberally and a high number of asylum applications was successfully accepted⁵. Their percentage fluctuated throughout the years. In 1959 the Italians were regarded as more indulgent than the Austrians, with around 70% successful applications⁶. However, as time went by, this number decreased – it was 47% in 1963⁷. Asylum seekers were also supported by international campaigns, such as the one led by the millionaire Harold Zellerbach, who questioned the interpretation of Yugoslavs as economic migrants, claiming that the mere decision of emigrating was a political act (Gatrell, 2011, 54).

Soon after their arrival in Italy, asylum seekers were interviewed by the Parithetic Commission and, if regarded as eligible, resettled by the international organizations dealing with migration issues. Nevertheless, it often happened that hard core cases, being rarely accepted by any country, spent a time much longer than expected in Italian refugee camps. Since 1955, Yugoslavs whose applications were refused were the only foreign migrants repatriated by the Italian authority because they were not supposed to face serious sanctions back home. However, the majority of them still succeeded in emigrating further, especially if they were young males able to work; throughout the second half of the 1950s Australia became their main destination, playing the role of a labour force collector⁸. Other Yugoslavs crossed the border into France even before their application was proceeded in order to look for a job there. The only category of Yugoslav citizens who could not be repatriated were applicants coming from former Italian areas⁹. Still, an exception was possible whenever their behavior was regarded as undesirable: prostitutes, alcoholics or individuals of “anti-Italian feelings” were handed over to Yugoslavia¹⁰.

THE NATIONAL AND SOCIAL PROFILE OF YUGOSLAV ASYLUM SEEKERS

Between 1955 and 1968 an average of 4,500 Yugoslavs crossed the border into Italy yearly. When we look at the migration trend, we can notice a peak of 11,040 individuals in 1957, probably related to the Hungarian crisis and the flow of Hungarian refugees through Yugoslavia but also to the relaxation of border controls which occurred in Yugoslavia in the previous two years (Gatrell, 2011, 110)¹¹. As the renewed controls over the

4 ACS, MI, DGAP (1949-1977), AAII (1945-1982), b. 83, fasc. Nuovo programma, Profughi stranieri del 28/10/1958.

5 ACS, MI, DGAP (1949-1977), b. 84, Promemoria per l'on. Presidente Montini del 24/6/1959.

6 ARS, 1931, šk. 1440, Poročilo Državnega sekretarijata za notranje zadeve za leto 1959 (zap. št. 12), 24.

7 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1957-1960, b. 425, Clandestini dalla Jugoslavia. Sondaggio statistico gennaio-maggio 1963 del 10/7/1963.

8 ACS, MI, DGAP (1949-1977), AAII (1945-1982), b. 83, Stranieri “ineleggibili” e profughi “rifugiati politici” del 10/09/1959, 2-3.

9 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1957-1960, b. 425, Profughi jugoslavi appartenenti alle terre cedute del 10/2/1957.

10 PCM, UZC, sez. II, FVG Trieste, b. 56 vol. 1, fasc. Afflusso clandestini dalla Jugoslavia. Respingimento profughi ineleggibili.

11 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1957-1960, b. 425, Promemoria sul problema dei rifugiati stranieri in Italia del 17/1/1958.

border contributed in keeping the number of migrants stable during the following years, a decrease in the number of Yugoslav asylum seekers became visible in the second half of the 1960s. In 1969 the number of Yugoslav applications for asylum were 994 and in 1974 only 194¹². This was combined with a parallel increase in the number of refugees from Eastern European countries who had obtained tourist visas to visit Yugoslavia and then crossed the border further into Italy in order to claim asylum in a Western country: they were 151 in 1961 but already 3,275 in 1969¹³. Moreover, Yugoslavia, having signed the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, acted as “country of first asylum” for refugees from Eastern Europe, mostly Albanian, whose next destination, before leaving Europe, was Italy¹⁴. These numbers represented just the successful escapes whereas a higher number of people were arrested when trying to cross the border: still in 1963 in the Koper territory the People’s militia and the Yugoslav National Army were arresting 10 to 20 persons daily who had tried to escape or had come back illegally¹⁵.

The reports of the Italian police registered the foreigners entering Italy from Yugoslavia according to the nationality they declared themselves as belonging to. These documents can provide us with an interesting insight in the national composition of the refugee population but they should also be approached critically. Comparing data from two years, 1958 and 1963, one can notice that the percentage of Slovenians decreased from 5.27% to 4.4% as well as the percentages of Croats (from 46.18% to 27.50%) and Serbs (from 15.12% to 13.12%). The presence of Macedonians, Muslims and Montenegrins slightly increased but their percentage remained around 1%. The Southern Yugoslav republics gave a low contribution to these migration flows proving that in those years poor living standards and unemployment were not push factors if they were not combined with a direct contact with the outside world which would have led to a comparison¹⁶. The radical increase in the number of Italians (from 24.71% to 34.50%) and of members of other minorities – such as Romanians and Hungarians (from 4% to 14.75%)¹⁷ – can be regarded as an evidence of the fact that the members of the minorities started feeling more and more uncomfortable and were the first ones to be fired with the rising unemployment. However, the number of people declaring themselves as Italians could be misleading because they likely included also Slovenes and Croats coming from a multilingual region such as Istria where national boundaries were blurred; declaring themselves as Italians was more convenient since they would have been allowed to integrate in Italy and obtain the Italian citizenship¹⁸. Again, the migrants were mainly

12 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1971-1975, b. 432, Stranieri giunti nei centri A.A.I. Richiedenti asilo 1963-1974, s.d.

13 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1967-1970, b. 428, Relazione sull’afflusso degli stranieri richiedenti asilo nel 1969 del 13/2/1970.

14 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1961-63, b. 390, fasc. Trieste. Profughi stranieri, s.fasc. Profughi albanesi.

15 ARS, 1931, šk. 1172, d. 3221-3, p. 1

16 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1957-1960, b. 425, Afflusso di clandestini dalla Jugoslavia – Elaborati statistici per il triennio 1955-1956-1967 del 26/3/1958, p. 3; 1964-1967, b. 465, Afflusso di clandestini dalla Jugoslavia Elaborati statistici per l’anno 1963, 311/85 del 6/7/1964

17 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1964-1966, b. 465, Clandestini dalla Jugoslavia. Sondaggio statistico gennaio-maggio 1963 del 10/7/1963.

18 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1953-56, b. 328, Appunto per l’on. Ministro del 11/4/1956.

coming from those areas which already had a strong migration tradition, located in the former Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Bordering and coastal areas historically connected with Italy suffered a dramatic drain of population, especially affecting the youngest generations, which resulted in a deep concern for local authorities. According to the data of the League of the Communist of Croatia, in July 1956 in Zadar 150 people were in prison for having attempted to cross the border illegally and 300 were about to do it (Vojnović, 2010, 205-206). In the first eleven months of 1956 in Buje district 237 people – mostly young men who were about to serve in the army – illegally emigrated, in addition to people who had legally opted for Italy according to 1954 London Memorandum¹⁹. In the Slovenian town of Pivka the emigration rate was so high that for a couple of years the Office for National Service was unable to work²⁰. According to 1955 Udine agreement, the inhabitants of the Yugoslav border areas – nine municipalities in Slovenia (Jesenice, Tolmin, Nova Gorica, Ajdovščina, Sežana, Postojna, Koper, Izola, Piran) and three in Croatia (Buje, Umag, Novi Grad) – were provided with a permit allowing them to cross the border into Italy four times monthly (Šušmelj, 2005, 311-314). Unlike the other citizens fellows, they had the opportunity to enter Italy with documents and not coming back, avoiding the dangerous practice of crossing the border illegally, which resulted in an increased power of attraction of the borderland, where also individuals from other areas, willing to emigrate, moved in order to obtain a cross-border permit²¹. Whereas until the mid 1960s the majority of fugitives were still escaping across the border or reaching Italy by boat, as time went by more and more Yugoslavs crossed the border with passports and did not come back: in 1958 they were 13.58%, in 1963 36.68%²². Gradually the Adriatic migration path – the most dangerous one – was abandoned.

According to the reports of Italian prefectures, the majority of the refugees, who had a poor educational background and came from modest economic situations, were not ideological opponents of the Yugoslav government but were rather looking for a better life and a major well-being in the West; even if they rarely mentioned any case of individual persecution, they stated that in Yugoslavia there were no democratic freedoms as sanctioned by the Italian Constitution. Out of 30 Yugoslavs (coming from Zadar, Dubrovnik and Ulcinj) claiming asylum in Bari, just 7 of them declared they had suffered a persecution at home²³. Moreover, whereas migrations from neighboring areas had involved both the cities and the countryside, migrations from the other more faraway areas were mainly coming from industrial centers and ports.

The profile of the fugitives described by the Italian authorities basically corresponded to the one depicted by Mika Tripalo during a Ideological Commission session in 1960

19 DA, Italija, 1956, f. 39, 420352.

20 ACS, MI, PS, Affari riservati, 1954-1956, b. 19, 294 del 25/2/1956.

21 ARS, 1931, sk. 1440, Poročilo Državnega sekretarijata za notranje zadeve za leto 1959 (zap. št. 12).

22 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1964-1966, b. 465, Clandestini dalla Jugoslavia. Sondaggio statistico gennaio-maggio 1963 del 10/7/1963

23 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1957-1960, b. 424, Profughi jugoslavi entrati clandestinamente in Italia. Relazione trimestrale Gennaio/Marzo 1958 del 4/4/1958; Profughi jugoslavi entrati clandestinamente in Italia. Relazione trimestrale aprile-giugno 1958, 2/7/1957.

when tackling the question of escapes across the border. In fact, “the ones who fled are mostly younger than 30, and in this context skilled and unskilled workers. Secondly, they are peasants from areas where we have not managed yet to offer any economic perspective, such as islands and passive littoral zones”²⁴.

Tripalo also mentioned the negative influx of Western pop culture “which creates illusions about how life is easy abroad when compared to life in our country” and the amount of material goods available there. Therefore, the question of economic standards was still to blame as a main argument for emigrating.

EVERYDAY LIFE IN ITALIAN REFUGEE CAMPS

Even if in post war decades refugee camps spread across the Italian peninsula, according to temporary needs and urgencies, a couple of them were landmarks in the Italian immigration system. This was particularly true for San Sabba camp, located close to Trieste in a former rice-husking which during WWII, when the city was part of the Operation Zone of the Adriatic Littoral under German occupation, served as the only extermination camp in nowadays Italian territory. This sinister memory was still well present even when it was used as a refugee camp since all the spaces around the “cell of death”, which was empty, were used for everyday life activities. Eastern migrants were sent to San Sabba reception camp as soon as they entered Italy or when stopped by the Italian police. Here, after spending a certain number of days in an internal temporary prison, were questioned by the Italian police and after interviewed by the Parithetic Commission, including two officials of the Italian Ministries of Internal and External Affairs and two members of the United Nation delegation in Italy²⁵. They were asked to fill in the Resettlement Registration Form and to state the reasons according to which they left their country.

Characterized by extremely bad living conditions and national tensions due to the presence of opposing nationalist organizations, San Sabba camp was mentioned as “a particular bad reception centre” and became – together with other three camps in Europe – the target of a campaign of camp-clearance promoted during the World Refugee Year (1959-1960) (Gatrell, 2011, 100). It was finally cleared in 1965 and its residents moved to the new Padriciano camp.

Trieste became a crossroad for several categories of refugees, both foreign (mainly Yugoslavs) and Italian. Apart from the camps, due to pre-existing relations, Trieste was the only Italian city where Yugoslav migrants resettled in a large number, creating a parallel world, a Yugoslav city within the Italian one. Friuli Venezia Giulia was the Italian region which was mostly impacted by migration flows, hosting 53% of the foreign refugees who stayed in Italy²⁶. The “ethnic balance” of the population in that area remained a constant worry throughout the years for Italian authorities, who were actively engaged

24 AJ, fond 507, k. 8, II-2-b. 132, Sednica o omladini od 9/1/1960, pp. 6-7.

25 ARS, 1931, šk. 1172, d. 3221-3 bis, 20.

26 ACS, MI, DGAP (1949-1977), AAAII (1945-1982), b. 86, Relazione del Ministero dell'Interno (AAI) sull'afflusso durante il 1969 degli stranieri richiedenti asilo in Italia del 20/4/1970.

in resettling the highest possible number of Italian refugees around Trieste, with a special attention for those areas regarded as mostly “Slavic” or left-wing oriented, turning them into reserves of votes for the ruling Christian Democracy (Volk, 2004, 313-331; Ballinger, 2003, 21). Moreover, the presence of suspicious migrants whose real identity did not often appear to be clear – some of them suspected to be spies just pretending to be opponents of the Communist regime – raised some concerns in such a sensitive area. However, despite several attempts to keep Trieste clear of camps for foreigners, it turned out to be unfeasible, due to the need for a reception camp close to the border²⁷.

Once their status was defined, migrants and refugees who had reasonable perspectives to emigrate were moved to Latina camp where they could be visited by international commissions and finalize their embarking procedures before leaving from Naples port. In the only 1962 1,800 migrants coming from Yugoslavia passed in Latina camp before emigrating. Being the last stage before emigration, several international and charitable organizations were active in the camp. Slovenian and Catholic priests visiting the camps were connected through Pontificia Opera di Assistenza, a relief organization founded by Pope Pio XII after WWII, to the Pontifical Croatian College of St. Jeronimus, the epicenter of Croatian emigration in Italy²⁸.

Individuals whose applications took more time to be processed, the residuals (refused by numerous countries), hard core cases and foreigners who went back to Italy after having previously emigrated, were sent to the Capua or Aversa camp. At the beginning of 1964 Capua camp hosted 1,200 foreigners and was home to very active *ustaša* organizations, with established connections with France and Germany²⁹.

Some other camps, such as Fraschette di Alatri (Frosinone) and Farfa Sabina (Rieti), hosted migrants regarded as suspicious, undesirable or undocumented, alleged petty criminals or informers of foreign secret services. Just one third of them were political refugees, resettled there because they were “quarrelsome elements considered potentially dangerous coming from other camps”, whose perspectives of further emigration were minimal (Di Sante, 2011, 123-135). Those camps were often characterized by extreme squalor, degradation and marginalization. For example, in the early 1960s in the camp of Farfa Sabina – the one with the worst reputation – out of 232 migrants supposed to be hosted in the camp, just 102 people were really living there whereas all the others were missing, in hospital or in prison³⁰.

Besides those main camps, plenty of smaller ones were often improvised in different facilities. In the eyes of the British immigration officer Peter Kirchner, still in 1961 the situation in Italian camps was one of the worst in Europe: “Italy, insofar as the camps and their inhabitants is concerned, is all tragedy. We saw there the only really desperate poverty we were to see” (Gatrell, 2011, 214). The camps were particular microcosms whose inhabitants lived isolated from the external world. Even if residents were allowed to go in

27 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1957-1960, b. 425, Finanziamento spese profughi stranieri in transito del 21/1/1958.

28 ARS, 1931, šk. 1172, d. 3221-2, 8, 18.

29 ARS, 1931, šk. 1172, d. 3221-3.

30 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1961-1963, b. 390, Eliminazione campi profughi gestiti dalla Direzione generale della Pubblica Sicurezza del 26/11/1961.

and out during the day, the segregation of a large number of people on fringes of society brought about specific problems such as alcoholism, prostitution and smuggling. In all the refugee camps protests against authorities were frequent especially when the departure was repeatedly delayed.

Even if, according to the guidelines of the Italian authorities, the “ethnic geography” of the camps should have been cleared³¹, keeping different national communities separated, this turned out to be hardly feasible, due to the lack of facilities. Therefore migrants and refugees coming from different – often conflicting – nationalist groups happened to share the same spaces. Clashes often broke out due to national reasons, opposing Yugoslavs and Albanians coming from Yugoslav camps³², or Serbs and Croats³³. Anti-Yugoslav émigré organizations were extremely powerful within the camps: for instance Krunoslav Draganović, regarded as the *éminence grise* of the Croatian emigration, was used to visiting the camps and, according to the Yugoslav sources, was involved in the selection procedures for emigration thanks to his good relations with some international organizations³⁴. Some anti-Yugoslav émigré leaders such as Dragoljub Vurdelja, the president of the Serbian-Orthodox Community in Trieste, were accused by the Yugoslav diplomats of being actively involved in people smuggling from Yugoslavia to Italy and then to France³⁵. As we have seen, especially Capua’s camp was home to radical *ustaša* organizations, whose leaders spent many years there; some of them used to go around armed and wearing a *ustaša* cap³⁶, whereas in the barracks Ante Pavelić and Alojzije Stepinac pictures were hanging on the wall. The president of the Croatian Liberation Movement, known as Pero, openly propagandized this organization among the refugees, stating that “in Germany and Spain there was a *ustaša* army just waiting to occupy Croatia”³⁷.

Several problems arose also between the residents of the camps and the locals living in their proximity³⁸. A campaign against the foreigners broke out in Latina, where both the biggest transit camp for foreign refugees and a settlement of Italian refugees from Istria – Villaggio Trieste – were located; the newspapers “Il Tempo” and “Il Messaggero” not just supported but even fomented the protests of the inhabitants, depicting in the press the foreigners as “undesirable guests, terror for the citizens, shame for the city”³⁹.

The population of the camps was fluctuating and official numbers were often distant from the real ones, since a huge number of the official residents were missing, having

31 ACS, MI, DGAP (1949-1977), AAII (1945-1982), b. 83, fasc. AAI II, Gruppi etnici serbo e croato del 31/1/1959.

32 ACS, MI, Gabinetto 1953-1956, b. 328, Rissa al Campo profughi di via Pradamano del 11/8/1956

33 ACS, MI, Gabinetto 1953-1956, b. 424, fasc. 17370/10 Bari profughi stranieri, s. fasc. Bari Centro profughi stranieri S. Chiara 17370/10/5.

34 ARS, 1931, šk. 1172, d. 3221-3, 63, 96.

35 DA, Italija, 1964, f. 76, d. 13, 448399.

36 ARS, 1931, šk. 1172, d. 3221-3, 37-43.

37 ARS, 1931, šk. 1173, d. 3221-4, 37-43.

38 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1957-1960, b. 424, Gargnano: istituzione Centro Sosta Stranieri del 4/3/1958; Latina: disordini provocati dai profughi del 20/7/1960.

39 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1957-1960, b. 424, Latina Centro di Emigrazione AAI-CIME “Roberto Rossi-Longhi” del 12/5/1960.

probably tried to find their way to reach France and then Germany or Switzerland, defined in a document from the Yugoslav consulate in Milan as “the real West” in migrants’ mental map⁴⁰. According to Italian sources, the Italo-French border was very porous and the French police were used to rejecting only old people or individuals unable to work, whereas the majority of Yugoslav migrants, mostly young, immediately started working as day laborers in the Southern French countryside or were enlisted in the Foreign Legion⁴¹. In the only 1958 French police came across 920 Yugoslavs who had claimed asylum in Italy⁴².

The attempts to emigrate illegally were not just spontaneous movements of people but also the result of human trafficking networks supporting the migrants in their attempts to cross the Italo-Yugoslav border and to reach the French one. According to the Yugoslav sources, some asylum seekers were often going back to Yugoslavia in order to pick up people and smuggle them into Italy⁴³ or even into France⁴⁴. According to international agreements, illegal Yugoslav migrants arrested in France could be sent back to Italy if it could be proven that they had spent more than six months in Italy⁴⁵. So there was a game of cross-border ping-pong, which could remind us of a nowadays common practice even within the Schengen area.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE ITALIAN AUTHORITIES

The Italian authorities never dropped their diffidence towards the presence of such a huge number of foreigners in the country but agreed in offering them a temporary protection just because pressed by the international organizations, the Catholic Church⁴⁶ or other – often anti-Communist – organizations and political parties. One of the main concerns regarded security issues connected with the presence of such a large number of foreigners who, despite declaring themselves as opponents of their governments, could collaborate as informers with Eastern informative networks and represent a fifth column within Italy. On the eve of 1948 Italian elections, the majority of the camps were moved to Southern Italy due to security reasons (Sanfilippo, 2006, 847).

The suspicious attitude of Italian authorities was already clear in the correspondence occurring in 1949 between the Minister of Internal Affairs, Mario Scelba, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Carlo Sforza, regarding 100,000 refugees from Eastern Europe supposed to enter Italy, staggered in small groups, in order to embark from Naples. Scelba expressed his concerns about the fact that, during their stay in Italy, foreign refugees

40 DA, Italija, 1963, fasc. 43, d. 10, 42007, p. 3.

41 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1957-1960, b. 424, Centro smistamento profughi di Cremona – Assenze arbitrarie del 10/06/1957.

42 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1957-1960, b. 424, Afflusso di clandestini dalla Jugoslavia – Elaborati statistici relativi alle migrazioni del 25/8/1959.

43 ACS, MI, Gabinetto 1953-1956, b. 328, Fughe organizzate del 12/7/1956.

44 ARS, 1931, šk.1172, d. 3220-2, 85-86.

45 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1957-1960, b. 425, Appunto per il gabinetto dell’on.le ministro del 15/2/1960.

46 ARS, 1931, šk.1172, d. 3220-2, 45-46.

would have been awarded freedom of movement and proposed to settle them in closed camps. The Minister of Defence Randolfo Pacciardi shared the same opinion because:

Besides a modest percentage of political refugees, the majority of them were adventurers of various nationalities, devoted to shady activities that very often turned out to be a real military espionage, certainly connected with paramilitary subversive organizations and espionage and sabotage networks. The most serious threat is provided by the presence of individuals from the Balkan Slavic group⁴⁷.

Sforza rejected this proposal stating that, according IRO criteria, nobody could be imprisoned if he had not been previously convicted. Moreover, he explained, Italy had to act according to IRO guidelines for both political and economic reasons. Firstly, IRO was one of the “main weapons deployed by the Western nations against communism”, a goal shared by Italy, too. Last but not least, the flow of refugees would have brought money and some compensation: for instance IRO was supposed to provide ships for Italian emigrants. The Minister of Foreign Affairs also hoped that IRO would have evolved in an organization dealing with international migrations which would have helped the Italian government to resettle its surplus labour force abroad⁴⁸.

As time went by, the Italian authorities kept complaining with international officials about the economic burden represented by asylum seekers and demanded a higher economic engagement of the international community and a faster resettlement of the refugees in other countries. In unofficial discussions Yugoslav and Italian diplomats agreed on the fact that the majority of the applications for political asylum were submitted by economic migrants but due to the pressure of public opinion and the Catholic Church they were compelled to accept a much larger number of applications. At the same time, the officials of the Italian government dealing with migration issues were heartily recommending the Yugoslavs to establish contacts with the countries of emigration in order to sign agreements for the recruitment of labour force and they even offered themselves to help the Yugoslavs thanks to the experience Italy gained with emigration⁴⁹.

OPENING UP THE YUGOSLAV BORDERS

The question of emigration represented a major challenge for the Yugoslav authorities throughout the post-war years. In the early 1950s, the changes in economic organization, including the Law on Self-Management, resulted in a rate of unemployment around 6-7% already in 1952 (Woodward, 1995, 4-5). Even if it started to be considered as the price of allowing a workers' participation in workplaces, a pragmatic solution had to be found. The Yugoslav authorities deployed different strategies in order to come to terms with the drain of people represented by illegal emigration, which could have delegitimized the

47 ACS, Mi, Gabinetto, 1950-52, b. 105, Transito 100.000 profughi dall'Europa centrale del 7/4/1949.

48 Ibidem

49 DA, Italija, 1966, fasc. 69, 414162; 414169.

system from its foundations. The first reaction was repression. As we have seen, until the early 1960s everyone who had illegally left the country was regarded as an “enemy” of the state even if they had never been involved in politics before.

The State security administration, widespread both within and outside the country, engaged itself in preventing escapes across the border. The security forces collected information and started patrolling trains and buses in the border area. However, according to the Italian sources, the population living close to the Italian border was not so ready to collaborate with the Yugoslav police in order to stop illegal migration⁵⁰, as was the population living close to the Austrian border. If all those measures proved to be ineffective, border guards were supposed to stop people who tried to escape in different ways, exceptionally even using weapons. Sometimes there were scuffles at the border, in at least one case border guards shot at a refugee’s arm and it happened to be that a Yugoslav soldier, running after a fugitive, entered into Italian territory with a watch dog⁵¹. Especially in the early 1950s the documents testify a certain number of casualties, shot by the border police when trying to cross the border⁵².

According to the 1951 Penal Code, whose practical application fluctuated throughout the years, Yugoslav citizens arrested by the border police when attempting to cross the border illegally could be condemned to imprisonment or to pay an administrative fine. We have notices of hard punishments still in the 1950s but criteria became less strict throughout the decade. Moreover, since 1955 Italian authorities started repatriating Yugoslav migrants who had not been awarded the status of eligibility. Edvard Kardelj tackled this topic in a discussion with some established Slovenian personalities from Trieste, held in Brijuni in the same year. They informed him of a discussion which occurred between a local priest and a representative of the United Nations Office for Refugees in Rome. The international official agreed with the new policy of the Italian government about repatriations but it stressed it could have continued only at the conditions that Yugoslavia did not punish people who were repatriated or did punish them but not in a harsh way. Kardelj briefly explained the official position of the Yugoslav government on that topic:

In the majority of the cases we are talking about people who go abroad convinced that they will live better there, we are talking about people who could be given passports if we had more foreign currency. All our restrictions come from our problem with foreign currency. As much as comrade Kardelj knows, even now our position is not to punish people who voluntary come back and, if he is not wrong, not to punish nor people who are repatriated by Italy. However, comrade Kardelj agrees with the idea that we should not punish too harshly those transgressors⁵³.

50 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1957-1960, b. 425, Afflusso di clandestini dalla Jugoslavia – Elaborati statistici per il triennio 1955-1956-1967 del 26/3/1958, 10.

51 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1957-1960, b. 424, fasc. Gorizia profughi stranieri 13730/36, 1468/102 del 3/4/1957, Fonografica a mano riservato urgente del 1/2/1957. ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1957-1960, b. 425, fasc. Profughi stranieri. Affari generali 17370/93, s. fasc. clandestini jugoslavi afflusso 17370/93.

52 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1950-52, b. 81, 206/86 del 23/10/1952.

53 DA, Politička arhiva strogo pov., F II, 1955, d. 7, 191 p. 5.

In the documents from the Italian Ministry of Internal Affairs, there are references to the lack of punishment for migrants caught when trying to cross the border in 1956, a liberalization which was interpreted as an expression of the fact that the Yugoslavs were intentionally letting people cross the border in order to use emigration as a safety valve for their rising unemployment. In fact, the relaxation resulted in a much larger flow of migrants⁵⁴. The borders seems to have been porous and documents refer to migrants who reached Italy and, while their applications for asylum were processed, went back and forth to Yugoslavia.

However, since the second half of 1957, probably due to the need of facing such a huge drain of people, border control measures were tightened again, even deploying weapons and dogs⁵⁵. However, at the end of that decade imprisonment was still regarded as an extreme measure. Since the early 1950s more and more Yugoslav politicians – especially from the areas particularly affected by emigration – started reflecting upon an effective strategy to come to terms with this illegal flow of people across the border. At the same time in international meetings federal authorities usually maintained that Yugoslav emigration flow was a *longue durée* phenomenon related to economic reasons, but avoided mentioning that they were limiting it⁵⁶.

The first step towards the liberalization of migration flows was 1962 Law on amnesty, which de-criminalized previous economic migration. According to it, former Yugoslav citizens who had previously illegally left the country – with the exception of war criminals and anti-Yugoslav emigrants – were allowed to regularize their position. Three years later, in 1965, already 13,395 migrants had visited Slovenia⁵⁷, even if the same measure proved to be less successful with more radicalized communities such as the Croatian one. However, Law on amnesty contributed in depriving the topic of external migration of the subversive meaning connected to illegal practices.

The main reasons for such a sudden change in Yugoslav attitudes toward migrations were economic. Since the early 1960s the theories on full employment were definitely abandoned and in 1963-64 the restrictions to labour migrations were abolished, opening the borders to everyone who was eager to look for a job abroad. Yugoslavia, affected by emerging difficulties in its labour market, turned its opposition towards the external emigration of its citizens – perceived as an impoverishment of its human capital – into a more favorable and pragmatic approach: the remittances back to Yugoslavia were introducing foreign currency in the country and their departure contributed in reducing unemployment. The supporters of the idea of opening the border to labour force were presenting this topic as an internationalization of the labour market (Zimmerman, 1987, 77). In 1965 Tito's speech pragmatically admitted that it made no sense forcing someone in Yugoslavia if there were not enough jobs (Novinščak, 2009, 126).

54 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1957-1960, b. 425, Afflusso clandestini dalla Jugoslavia (Quest. Trieste) 1957 del 25/8/1957

55 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1957-1960, b. 425, Afflusso di clandestini dalla Jugoslavia – Elaborati statistici per l'anno 1958 del 9/5/1959.

56 ACS, MI, Gabinetto, 1957-1960, b. 425, Afflusso di clandestini dalla Jugoslavia. Elaborati statistici per gli anni 1955-1956-1957, del 26/3/1958, 9.

57 ARS, 1931, šk. 1440, Poročilo Državnega sekretariata za notranje zadeve za leto 1965 (zap. št. 18).

Turning their contrariness towards external migration in an exploitation of the phenomenon, the Yugoslav authorities were just accepting mere facts: that in the previous years more and more Yugoslavs had gone abroad to work illegally and more and more passports had been refused with the explanation they were planning to go to work abroad. Nevertheless, according to data from the League of the Communist of Croatia just in 1962 8,000-9,000 people illegally and other 10,754 legally had gone abroad to look for a job (Brunnbauer, 2009, 45). According to the Slovenian sources, in 1960 633 individuals legally obtained a permission to go to work abroad, in 1961 they were already 3,113 and in 1965 they were 7,533, usually heading to Austria or Germany⁵⁸. This flow seemed unstoppable, even because since the early 1960s the number of people crossing the border with documents and not coming back was increasing: even a stricter control of the border would not have proved to be effective. In the second half of the 1960s the number of applications for asylum in Italy dramatically decreased, a fact that even contemporaries put in relation with the liberalization drive in Yugoslav migration policies⁵⁹.

In the second half of the 1960s Yugoslavia signed bilateral agreements for the recruitment of labour force with France (1965), Austria, Sweden and, above all, Germany in 1968, leading to the transfer of hundreds of thousands of Yugoslav citizens abroad, reaching a peak of 860,000 Yugoslav workers in 1973 (Zimmerman, 1987, 81). Due to the growing flow towards Germany and Austria, the word *gastarbajter* entered the Serbo-Croatian language in order to refer to all the Yugoslav workers abroad. The official definition of “workers on a temporary stay abroad” stressed the references to a final return to Yugoslavia, an idea which met the expectations of the German policies (Novinščak, 2009, 127). Yugoslavia became the only socialist country allowing its citizens to emigrate abroad, a flow which was just slowed down by the 1973 economic crisis (Zimmerman, 1987, 81). As we have seen, in the same years the number of Yugoslav citizens claiming asylum in Italy decreased dramatically.

Looking back at this phenomenon in the early 1970s, one of the members of Slovenska izseljenska matica (Slovenia Emigrant Society) summed it up in one sentence: “we legalize departures abroad because people were escaping across the border” (Drnovšek, 2010, 284). However, opening Yugoslavia’s doors was not just a mere question of containment, but also a matter of political convenience. Previously, the fact that claiming asylum was the only legal way to stay abroad, turned Yugoslav migrants, mostly just eager to go to work abroad, into – officially – asylum seekers, a status which implied a political connotation of opposition towards the Yugoslav government⁶⁰. Moreover, in refugee camps where they were settled, Yugoslav asylum seekers were likely to come into contact with members of the numerous and active anti-Yugoslav émigré organizations, that often helped the newcomers. Providing legal channels to be recruited and a network of governmental organizations seemed to be the only solution to keep economic migrants

58 ARS, 1931, šk. 1440, Poročilo Državnega sekretariata za notranje zadeve za leto 1961 (zap. št. 14), 18; Poročilo Republiškega sekretariata za notranje zadeve za leto 1965 (zap. št. 18), 22.

59 DA, Italija, 1966, f. 69, d. 3, 426466; Italija, 1970, f. 81, d. 6, 429165.

60 AJ, SSRNJ, f. 492, Problematika iseljenišva, 9-10.

loyal to their homeland and to weaken the subversive potential of political emigration. The dramatic events of the 1990s, with the dominant role played by radicalized diasporas, would have proved how optimistic this vision was. However, on a short term the legalization of labour migration provided a solution for internal problems and enhanced the external image of Yugoslavia, as the only socialist country whose citizens could enjoy some freedom of movement.

POT NA ZAHOD. JUGOSLOVANSKI PROSILCI ZA AZIL
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POVZETEK

V obdobju 1955–1968 je vsako leto na tisoče Jugoslovance zaprosilo za azil v sosednjih zahodnih državah. Italija je delovala kot država prvega azila za jugoslovanske državljane, ki so jih mednarodne organizacije kasneje premestile ali ki so odšli naprej proti severni Evropi. Ta migracijska pot, ki je bila do odprtja Jugoslavije za delovne migracije edina možna, je pomembna za preučevanje prepletenosti političnih in gospodarskih dejavnikov, ki so spodbujali odseljevanje. V prispevku, ki temelji na – povečini svežih – arhivskih virih iz italijanskih, slovenskih, srbskih in hrvaških arhivov, je obravnavanih več tem: od evropskega konteksta razselitve po drugi svetovni vojni do italijanske migracijske politike, od vsakdanjega življenja v italijanskih begunskih taboriščih do stikov s protijugoslovansko politično emigracijo. V zaključnem delu avtorica raziskuje odnos tako italijanskih kot jugoslovanskih oblasti do omenjenega migracijskega toka, upoštevajoč preplet ekonomskih in političnih vprašanj kot tudi vpliv mednarodnih dogodkov. V prvi polovici šestdesetih let prejšnjega stoletja se je v Jugoslaviji uveljavil pragmatični pristop, ki je privedel do liberalizacije politike mobilnosti in legalizacije delovnih migracij, zaradi česar je število jugoslovanskih prosilcev za azil v Italiji dramatično upadlo. Čeprav je jugoslovanskemu vodstvu uspelo vzpostaviti pravne in neposredne poti za delovne migrante, pa izseljevanju v tuje države ni moglo odvzeti političnih protijugoslovanskih konotacij.

Ključne besede: Italija, Jugoslavija, prosilci za azil, meddržavne migracije, hladna vojna

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ARS – Arhiv Republike Slovenije (Ljubljana)

DA – Diplomatski Arhiv (Beograd)

DGAP – Direzione Generale Assistenza Pubblica

fond 1220 – Centralni Komitet Saveza Komunisti Hrvatske

fond 1931 – Republiški sekretariat za Notranje Zadeve

fond 507 – Ideološka Komisija

HDA – Hrvatski Državni Arhiv

MI – Ministero dell'Interno

PCM – Presidenza Consiglio dei Ministri

PS – Pubblica Sicurezza

SSRNJ – Socijalistički Savez Radnog Naroda Jugoslavije

UZC – Ufficio Zone di Confine

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