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## **Reka Sotla kot okupacijska meja med nemškim rajhom in NDH: primer občine Rogaska Slatina**

### IZVLEČEK

Članek na podlagi arhivskega gradiva, ustnih pričevanj in raziskav na terenu (LIDAR tehnologija) analizira že več stoletij mejno reko Sotlo, kjer je bila v obdobju nemške okupacije (1941–1945) vzpostavljena južna državna meja nemškega rajha ter okupacijska ločnica med NDH in nacistično Nemčijo. Meja na Sotli (tudi skrajni vzhodni mejni krak Spodnje Štajerske) je imela zaradi ključne strateške lege izjemen pomen. Nemška oblast jo je posledično močno utrdila, zgradila z ograjo in bodečo rezilno žico ter prepredla s smrtonosnimi minskimi polji. Postavljene fizične pregrade so iznenada prekinile človeške vezi in močno zarezale v vsakdan prebivalcev na obeh bregovih reke, zato je to predvsem zgodba o preživetju lokalnega človeka. 74 let po koncu druge svetovne vojne in odpravi ožičene Sotle se ob isti reki zopet nahaja žica, ki mimo zgodovinskega spomina razdvaja republiko Hrvaško in Slovenijo.

### KLJUČNE BESEDE

*Sotla, Rogaska Slatina, nemška okupacija, Hum na Sotli, okupacijska meja, utrjevanje, mejni prehodi, tihotapljenje, 1941–1945*

### ABSTRACT

*SOTLA RIVER AS THE OCCUPATIONAL BORDER BETWEEN THE THIRD REICH AND THE INDEPENDENT STATE OF CROATIA: THE CASE OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF ROGAŠKA SLATINA*

*Drawing on archival materials, oral accounts and field research (LIDAR), the article analyses the Sotla River, which has for centuries served as a border, also forming the southern state border of the Third Reich during German occupation (1941–1945) and the occupational boundary between the Independent State of Croatia and the Nazi Germany. Owing to its key strategic position, the Sotla border (also the easternmost border section of Lower Styria) was of vital importance. Consequently, German authorities heavily reinforced it with a fence and razor wire, and by sowing it with minefields. Given that the erected physical barriers suddenly cut human ties and drove a deep wedge into the daily life on either bank of the river, this is primarily a story about the survival of local inhabitants. However, seventy-four years after the end of the Second World War and the removal of barbed-wire, the same river is again lined with the wire which, in defiance of historical memory, divides Croatia and Slovenia.*

### KEY WORDS

*Sotla, Rogaska Slatina, German occupation, Hum na Sotli, occupational border, fortification, border crossing points, smuggling, 1941–1945*

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## SPLETNE STRANI

Google maps: zračna razdalja med Rogaško Slatino in Beogradom, pridobljeno 22. 11. 2018.

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## TERENSKO DELO

Fotografije: Daniel Siter, Marko Berkovič  
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## S U M M A R Y

### **Sotla River as the occupational border between the Third Reich and the Independent State of Croatia: the case of the municipality of Rogaška Slatina**

By 11 April 1941, the German army also occupied areas along the Sotla River, which delimited the banates of Drava and Sava until the attack on Yugoslavia. In mid-May, following the swift occupation, the Sotla became a state border between the Nazi Germany and its satellite, the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna država Hrvatska, NDH), pursuant to a bilateral treaty. Spearheading the decision-making on the implementation of necessary border corrections, the central German–Croatian delimitation commission seated in Rogaška Slatina, tailored the changes in the demarcation line of the border in the initial stage of German occupation. One of the reasons for the border modification was the annexation of the Croatian municipality of Hum na Sotli encompassing slightly over 36 km<sup>2</sup> of territory to the

Third Reich. Just as in the case of Trebnje, the occupation of Hum was, for economic reasons, primarily called for by lower German authorities. With the new bilateral treaty signed in mid-June 1941, the occupational border shifted back to the Sotla, where it remained until the end of the war. The Nazi authorities commenced the first phase of reinforcing the Sotla riverbed by erecting a high wire fence, setting up border guard outposts and watchtowers, installing zinc-plated barbed wire, and laying minefields along the entire breadth of protective barriers. As shown by research, the Sotla was more permeable in the border sector under examination as previously assumed. This was also due to there being a greater number of border crossing points in the analysed section of the border than today. However, this should not mislead us. Heavily surveilled, the border only allowed passage to holders of border passes, which were not widely accessible. Another witness to the fact that the state border on the Sotla drove a wedge in the life of the border population by cutting human, economic and cultural ties is the occurrence of smuggling, which often constituted the only means of survival. Many smugglers were killed by mines.

With the Eastern Front knocking on the door of the Third Reich at the end of 1944, the Sotla, being the southernmost river in the Nazi state, obtained a key role in defending the crumbling Reich in the middle of the year. On its opposite bank was the German occupational province of Lower Styria, serving as the last buffer zone protecting the heart of Hitler's Germany. In October 1944, the German military command converted the border province along the Sotla River into a construction site of defence systems to fend off or at least hinder the advances made by the anti-Fascist (particularly Soviet) armies. However, the swift collapse of the Southern Front and the retreat of the German army towards Austria rendered all attempts at reinforcing the barriers completely in vain. At the end of the war, spruce and hornbeam pillars were pulled out, the wire was coiled up and removed, and minefields were first deactivated by prisoners of war who and subsequently by special demining teams. That history teaches us so little and that we are constantly doomed to repeat it is vividly illustrated by the current situation along the Sotla border between Croatia and Slovenia, which, more than seventy years after the biggest global slaughter, is again lined with coils of razor wire.