

German exploitation of Yugoslav mines in the Second World War (1941-1945)

Summary

After the breakdown of the April War in 1941, Yugoslavia was divided between Germany and its allies. In addition to the undoubted strategic importance for further penetration to the East, Yugoslavia, according to the plans of the German strategists, has been of substantial economic significance. The Nazi idea of *Lebensraum* assigned, once the territory of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, role of supplying the economy of the Reich mainly with raw materials and cheap labor. Since Yugoslavia was rich in minerals which were vital for the German military industry, it soon became one of the most significant complementary spaces for the economy of the Third Reich. Because of the commitments to allies, Germany could not count on direct territorial occupation of the whole Yugoslavia. Besides that, Germany has managed, at the conference in Vienna in late April 1941, to provide an absolute monopoly on the exploitation of economic resources in the whole Yugoslav space.

During military operations, the German military and economic institutions, through coordination with the Wehrmacht, managed to successfully and without damage take vital industrial plants, mines and roads. During the four years of German occupation, institutions specially created for the management of the economy in the occupied territories, have implemented diligently exploitation of mineral resources. Such agencies were the lowest link in highly militarized German economy and they were fulfilling, according to the directives of the central economic authorities of Reich, tasks on the field. The pace of exploitation has decreased over time, and the occupation authorities, with more or less success, had managed through strict administrative measures to stabilize the economy. However, after the catastrophic defeat on the Eastern Front during 1943, there was a drastic fall in production in mines, and in the last phase of the war, with the advance of the Red Army and Yugoslav partisans, Germany was forced to gradually reduce economic activity.

In this paper we will consider the German economic policy and practice towards the mines in Yugoslavia. During the four years of German occupation methods were changing in accordance to the circumstances and depending on the region of the country where the mines were positioned. By analyzing archival materials of the Archives of Yugoslavia, Archives of

Serbia, Historical Archives of Belgrade and the Archives of the National Bank of Serbia we will try to shed more light on the achievements and mechanisms of the German exploitation, and then by using comparative method, we will, on the case of several major mines, show differences in their functioning. Whole story will be complemented through relevant older as well as newer literature.