

REPORT

Commemorating victims of the Italian Fascist concentration camp Kampor,
presenting video narratives about Kampor and
exhibition opening of “The Last Witnesses” and “Fabrics of Resistance: Women's Voices”

On Saturday, **5 September 2020**, the City of Rab organized a commemoration marking the 77th anniversary of the liberation of internees from the Italian Fascist concentration camp Kampor at the Memorial Cemetery, which was for the first time attended by the presidents of Croatia and Slovenia. Italian Fascists interned around 15,000 Croats, Slovenes and Jews in the camp and left them there to die of starvation and disease. The camp was founded in July 1942 and remained active until September 1943 when it was liberated after the capitulation of Italy. The exact number of people who lost their lives in the camp is not known, however, the surviving witness Herman Janež composed a list naming 1490 of the victims.



Wreaths laid during the ceremony at the Memorial Cemetery Kampor

Following the wreath-laying ceremony and the introductory address, the President of the Rab-Gonars Camp Committee, Herman Janež Jr., held a touching speech about the sufferings of the internees and called for an urgent renovation of the cemetery. Mayor Nikola Grgurić emphasized that any kind of repression should be condemned and that we should focus on creating a more tolerant society.

President of Croatia Zoran Milanović said in his speech that Kampor was the perfect example of Hannah Arendt's concept of the banality of evil since none of the Italian guards overseeing the internees were neither Fascists nor Blackshirts. He added that the Italian authorities had organized camps on the territory of Croatia with the aim of oppressing the local population in the context of which he also mentioned the concentration camp on the island of Molat. He emphasized that the Fascists interned the Jews as well but were in that way actually saving them. The president spoke about how little it takes for a man to become inhumane overnight and that we all carry that potential within us. Therefore, it is important to remember such events and come to the places of suffering to honor the victims. Finally, he expressed his hope that next time the President of Italy would join them in paying tribute to the victims.

Borut Pahor, President of Slovenia, emphasized the responsibility to cherish the memory of the camp victims and the need to pay respects to them personally and on behalf of the Republic of Slovenia. He warned that intolerance and hatred begin with words and small deeds, but can subsequently grow into destructive evils as was the case with Italian Fascism which was at the root of great human suffering in Kampor. He expressed his desire to continue the cooperation and friendly relations between the two countries in a wider European context. Both presidents and Herman Janež Jr. emphasized the importance of the site itself and called for preserving the memory and the memorial cemetery itself. What all speakers agreed on was that in places like this and on such occasions, one should not talk about politics, but focus on keeping the memory of the victims alive and on creating a more just and tolerant society.

The reading of Jure Kaštelan's poem "Chains on the hands" a performance on the guitar and mandolin by two students from Rab contributed to the solemn atmosphere.



Solemn commemoration marking the 77th anniversary of the liberation of Kampor

Following the commemoration, two related exhibitions dedicated to keeping the memory of internment in Italian Fascist camps alive were opened in the Rab City Library, entitled "The Last Witnesses" and "Textiles of Resistance: Women's Voices". The exhibition was organized and supported by *Documenta* - Center for Dealing with the Past, Rab Open University, Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia in Croatia, Apis Institute and Conflict Textiles. Presidents Borut Pahor and Zoran Milanović, who showed a special interest in the exhibition during the tour with the hosts, attended the opening.



President Milanović attending the exhibition opening

The exhibition "The Last Witnesses" includes photographs of people who were interned in the camp as children or even born there and those of their families who hold on to rare items from the camp and in that way preserve the memory of their loved ones and their unfortunate fates. This is a traveling exhibition that is shown in schools in the effort to remember the victims and inform young people about little-known historical events.

The exhibition "Textiles of Resistance: Women's Voices" consists of two canvases, the so-called *arpilleras*, which are the work of a Chilean textile artist whose parents were interned in Kampor. The first piece depicts the fate of children in the Warsaw Ghetto using darker tones, while the second one is characterized by a contradictory use of vivid colors in depicting the equally unfortunate fate of Chilean mothers whose children disappeared during Pinochet's regime.

The exhibitions "The Last Witnesses" and "Textiles of Resistance: Women's Voices", prepared with support of EVZ Foundation, were previously held in Rijeka.



Canvases exhibited as part of the exhibition

These two exhibitions are part of a joint project of several Slovenian authors, journalist Saša Petejan, photographer Mance Juvan and historian dr. Urška Strle. It is also part of a broader educational program called "Guardians of the Spoon" that combines photographs and memories of survivors.



President of Croatia Zoran Milanović, President of Slovenia Borut Pahor, Saša Petejan and Vesna Teršelič

For this occasion, the Apis Institute, in cooperation with *Documenta*, with the support of the EVZ Foundation, prepared a video narrative about the Kapor camp in five languages so that the information would be available not only to the visitors of the memorial cemetery but also to anyone interested in the topic. The content of the information board at the location of the memorial cemetery has thus been enriched with QR codes that direct the visitor to the video. The codes have also been made available as part of the exhibition at the Rab City Library. A supplement to the existing educational program related to the video narrative has been proposed to primary and secondary schools. In this way, active steps have been taken to preserve the memory of the Fascist camp victims and to make the general public aware of the unhealed wounds from the past with the aim of healing them and working together on a more just and tolerant society.



Information board with QR codes in front of the Memorial Cemetery Kampor

Events within the closing days of exhibitions on the island of Rab

On Friday, **October 2, 2020** at 11:00, guided tours were organized for the principal, history teachers and high school librarians from Rab and Varaždin who showed interest in teaching about fascist camps on the Adriatic coast, as well as other teaching content related to innovative teaching of history.

On Friday, **October 2, 2020** at 18:00, a conversation with Nikola Petković, professor at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka, and the author of the award-winning book "Trip to Gonars" was held in the lobby of the Rab Cinema. In his book Petković presented the small histories of the City, which is, in a unique way, also the main character. Taking the main motif of the camp, changing narrative strategies and perspectives, the author builds a chronicle of Bakar in World War II, whose characters, stories and legends are on the edge of grotesque and phantasmagoria, while in the same time it is a kaleidoscope of individual destinies, sufferings, futile and incredibly ironic stories and events on the ruins of one world. Based on his grandfather's writings, the novel by this contemporary Croatian author is an intimate family chronology whose narrative moves between autobiography and fiction. Through the story of Nikola Luzer, whose wife Jelena was taken to the fascist concentration camp Gonars, and was left alone with his four-year-old daughter Jasna, the history of Bakar during the Second World War is told. The story is told from several different angles, which blur the boundaries of fiction and reality, but the ideologies of several regimes that cruelly play with human destinies are being crystallized. For this work, the author received Tportal's literary award for the best Croatian novel in 2018.



Witnesses of the time with Rab Deputy Major Denis Deželjin and Director of Public Open University Rab Katarina Ribarović

On Saturday, **October 3**, 2020 at 10:30 in the City Library of Rab a conversation "Memories of the fascist camp Kampor on Rab - a conversation with witnesses of the time" was held. This event was dedicated to the memories of the interment witnesses, their children, grandchildren and others interested in contacts with internees. After visiting the exhibition, we started a conversation with witnesses of the time.

The exhibition "The last Witnesses" in the City Library in Rab was opened with a photograph of Mimi Perc, born Vesel (1925, Loški Potok), who was arrested as a partisan in Kočevski Rog and interned in Rab. Along with her portrait in the photo there is a little bag, sewn from stolen tent canvas, as well as embroidered handicraft with the signatures of co-workers from the sewing room, made from threads obtained from local women. In addition to the exhibition "Textiles of Resistance: Women's Voices", objects from the collection of curator Roberta Bačić were also on display. A dozen gathered witnesses of the time, their children and grandchildren evoked memories of the period of the fascist occupation, of communication and support for the internees in the camp in Kampor. We arranged to record several video interviews to preserve the memories for the younger generations.

The final events were organized by *Documenta*, the Apis Institute, the City of Rab, the Library of the City of Rab, the Public Open University and the Association of Antifascists of Rab, with support of EVZ Foundation and International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

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