

Illyrian provinces



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The Illyrian Provinces was an autonomous province of the Napoleonic French Empire, founded by Napoleon on the north and east coasts of the Adriatic Sea between 1809 and 1813. The creation of the Illyrian Provinces raised great expectations among adherents of the Serb and Croat movements in Dalmatia, and the Slovene cultural movement in Carniola. Founding of the Provinces, Territory and Population After the battle of Wagram, which took place from the 5th to the 6th of July 1809, the Illyrian provinces were founded on 14. October 1809.

With the Treaty of Schonbrunn, Austria was forced to abdicate large portions of its territory to France. Among those territories were Istria and Trieste, part of Croatia (south west from the river Sava), the Croatian Military Frontier, the western part of Carinthia, and Carniola. The former Republic of Ragusa, Dalmatia and the Bay of Kotor were excluded from the Kingdom of Italy and included in the Illyrian provinces on their founding day. A part of east Tyrol, including the town Lienz was additionally included in 1810.

In all, the Provinces covered 55, 000 km² and had a population of around one and half million, including Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Germans and Italians. Reasons for Creation Napoleon had strategic and economical reasons to form the Provinces. Firstly, France cut of Austria from the Mediterranean and formed a boarder with the Ottoman Empire on land. Secondly, they gained military and economical control over both coasts of the Adriatic Sea, and thirdly, the Provinces were formed as a defense line of Italy, by which the French south-east boarder was protected, and it also secured the Alpine crossings towards Germany.

Administration The Provinces were formally not part of the French Empire, still they were completely subjected to it. Ljubljana (Leibach) became the capital. The provinces had a special status among the territories conquered by Napoleonic France: their inhabitants held Illyrian citizenship, though the French flag was flown on their territory and the imperial coat of arms was used. The French administration, led by a governor, carried the French civil law (Code civil a. k. a. Code Napoleon) in effect all over the territory.

The capable marshal A. -F. -L. Viesse de Marmont was placed in charge of the provinces on 8. October 1809, he remained governor until January 1811, when he was succeeded by Henri-Gratien Bertrand, followed by Jean-Andoche Junot – all of the governors of the territory with the exception of the last, Fouche, were soldiers. Administratively, the Illyrian Provinces were divided into “intendancies”, ruled by “intendants” with similar powers to those of French departmental prefects.

With the exception of Military Croatia, this was the only military region alongside six civil jurisdictions. The Provinces were administratively divided into districts, cantons and municipalities; the head of the civil administration was the chief intendant, who was subordinate to a governor. French Reforms Between 1809 and 1813, the French introduced equality before the law and a general military service for all citizens, simplified the tax system, and abolished tax privileges.

They brought the judiciary under state control, abolished the patrimonial courts and stripped territorial nobles of their public law function, while introducing a modern bureaucratic administration, and modernizing education. In accordance with the Napoleonic Code, peasants were no longer

bonded or unfree, but equal citizens. The landlords (seigneurs) lost their administrative and judicial rights. Personal duties and services from peasants to landlords were also put out of practice. However, they were still required to pay taxes and carry out duties for the land that they cultivated.

The French administration removed supervision of education from the Church, replaced the three forms of Austrian primary school (Trivialschule, Hauptschule and Normalschule) with a single, four-year primary school. It also expanded the network of lower gymnasium schools, and founded higher secondary schools (lyceums) in Trieste, Koper and Gorizia, as well as a central school in Ljubljana, which was renamed as an “ academie” in 1811. The capital of the Illyrian Provinces became an important centre of education, with over a thousand students being educated.

Yet the new education system did not have a sound financial basis, and many schools closed soon after being opened. Economy The new Franco-Austrian border had a major impact on the economic situation, because it interrupted the north-south route of traditional transport and trading routes, and divided inner Austria between two states, which affected inhabitants on both sides. The crisis was deepened by the French blockade known as the Continental System, which was crippling Trieste and Istrian ports.

The French planned to construct new roads that would allow the transport of goods from Turkey through the Illyrian Provinces into Italy and France, but work on their construction was slow, and the burden of the construction was supposed to be borne by inhabitants of the Illyrian Provinces. Legacy The armies of France began to withdraw from the Illyrian Provinces in the summer of 1813, the territory was reoccupied by Austrian troops in the fall of

1813. The majority of the population was left with negative impressions of French administration.

Many of the measures introduced during the French rule did not produce any short-term benefits, and a considerable number had negative consequences. High tax burden was also typical, and it strengthened anti-French feelings. Peasants were particularly disappointed by the French authorities. Although their status improved, they were not equal with the peasantry of France, since they did not become landowners. The provinces did however contribute to a greater national self-confidence and awareness of freedoms especially in Slovene lands.