PRESS RELEASE

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DNA analysis identified victims of executions committed by WWII Yugoslav Partisans in Slovenia

ZAGREB – A study published in the new thematic issue of Croatian Medical Journal reports of the first instance of using DNA analysis in identifying victims of executions committed by the Yugoslav Partisans at the and of the World War II.

Among the authors of the study is the Croatian minister of science Prof Dragan Primorac. The study was lead by a young scientist Damir Marjanović from the Institute for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Ruđer Bošković Institute in Zagreb, Croatia.

Mortal remains of 27 persons were recovered from two small collective graves uncovered in the vicinity of the Slovenian town of Škofja Loka in October 2006. According to the testimonies of surviving witnesses, the larger of the two graves contained the bodies of Slovenian home guardsmen shot by Partisans in the spring of 1945. The smaller grave most probably contained the remains of 7 German war prisoners, who buried the Slovenians and dug out another grave where they themselves were buried after execution.

The remains were recovered and processed by local archeologists and anthropologists. Samples for DNA analysis were collected, labeled and sent to the Laboratory of Forensic

Genetics at the Institute for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology in Sarajevo, where further analysis was done. Buccal swabs from potential living relatives were collected for the analysis and comparison of the genetic material. The researchers found that the genetic profile of victims was strongly matched with the living relatives in four cases.

“The study demonstrated that the experience gathered over the last almost fifteen years through the identification projects of missing persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia could be successfully used to identify skeletal remains not only 10-15 years old, but also much older remains”, conclude the authors of the study. “The introduction of the most recent methods allows forensic science community to achieve results that were unimaginable just a few years ago.”

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