

The Conflicting Politics of History and Memory in Slovenia since 1990

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The break-up of Yugoslavia and gaining of independence in 1991 are in Slovenia largely considered to be the most important milestones in Slovene history.¹ Slovene has actually been an official language in the Slovene part of Yugoslavia since 1918, and Slovenia—as one of the six Yugoslav republics of the communist federation—enjoyed cultural and, in some periods, even relatively great economic and political autonomy. However, Slovenes never had an independent state before 1991,² and their political leaders never considered Slovenia's independence, nor did they try to mobilize the population with any plans for independent statehood in the nineteenth and (for most of the) twentieth centuries. For almost 140 years—from the first Slovene national-political program in 1848 under the Habsburg monarchy, to the culmination of the political and economic crisis in communist Yugoslavia in the second half of the 1980s—unification of the territory populated by a Slovene-speaking population in an autonomous unit within a wider federal, multi-national state community (Habsburg monarchy up to 1918, and Yugoslavia after 1918) was the national-political goal of Slovene politics.

It is therefore not surprising that at the beginning of the second half of the 1980s, when Yugoslavia was already breaking up, public opinion in Slovenia was still largely supportive of finding a solution to the political and economic crisis *within* the framework of the Yugoslav state and its existing political system. In 1986, according to public opinion polls, 34% of the respondents still believed that relations among the nations in Yugoslavia were good, and a little more than 42% of them believed that they were neither good nor bad; the demands for Slovenia to leave Yugoslavia and become independent, which were expressed in 1987 and 1988 by a small group of intellectuals, did not enjoy any wider support of the population even in the spring of 1990 (Toš 1997: 509–26, 619–32). But, under the influence of aggressive Serbian nationalism, an economic and financial crisis, as well as increasingly evident differences in the dynamics of democratization processes in the various parts of Yugoslavia, the public

¹ The first part of this article was already published under the title “On Slovene Troubles with the Recent Past and Historical Memory” (Vodopivec 2010).

² The historical myth of the early Medieval “Slovene state”—the principality of Karantanija, located on the territory of today's Austrian Carinthia—which emerged in the nineteenth century and is still popular in Slovenia, did not visibly affect Slovene national and political programs and decisions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

attitude rapidly changed. In the spring of 1990, when the first multi-party Slovene parliament was elected in the first truly democratic elections after WW II, Slovenia abandoned the one-party system. At the end of December of that year, a plebiscite was held in which as many as 88% of voters voted in favor of Slovenia's independence, with a turnout of more than 93%. Thus, the history of Slovenia's move towards independence was rather short and a decisive turn-around in public opinion in favor of leaving Yugoslavia only happened in the last year before the proclamation of Slovenia's independence.

However, since the early 1990s, in an atmosphere of rising internal and foreign political insecurity and growing conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the opinion prevailed in Slovene politics and the public that a break-up was unavoidable and that Slovenia had to make a decisive cut with everything that could potentially link it to the rest of Yugoslavia. Some of the new political leaders and politically engaged intellectuals observed that for Slovenia an "exit" from Yugoslavia meant an irreversible "move from the Balkans to Central Europe, from the periphery to the center." Moreover, even for the Slovene government, there was no dilemma between "Europe and the Balkans," since Slovenia's goal could only be Europe.⁴ The earliest possible accession of the new Slovene state to the European Union, NATO, and other international political, financial, and economic organizations became the priority of Slovene policy. After the break-up of Yugoslavia, Slovenia only preserved closer links with Croatia; however, in the first half of the 1990s, Slovene-Croatian relations also started to be strained as Ljubljana and Zagreb failed to agree on their shared land and sea borders, as well as on some other unsolved succession-related issues. Ljubljana showed some interest in cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina too, because during the war there were more than 50,000 Bosnian refugees in Slovenia and, after the war, Bosnia became a market for the Slovene economy.

I

The Slovene leadership paid no significant attention to re-establishing relations with the Serbian and Montenegrin part of the former Yugoslavia before the late 1990s. In the first half of the 1990s, it seemed for a brief period that Ljubljana and Belgrade would establish diplomatic relations; however, since in the opinion of the Slovene authorities Serbian politics was the main reason for the war in Bosnia and the failure of negotiations on the succession of Yugoslavia's property, relations between Slovenia and the "internationally unrecognized" Federal Republic of Yugoslavia could not

⁴ Statement by the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Janez Drnovšek, in June 1995. (*Dnevnik* [Ljubljana], 3 June 1995).

yet normalize. Although Slovenia recognized the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia after the Dayton Accords in 1995, relations between the countries did not change even in the second half of the 1990s. For Slovenia, the main barriers to improving relations were Milošević clinging to power, international sanctions against the Serbian-Montenegrin state, and its non-cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague (Bukowski 2006). Ljubljana only decided to become more actively engaged on the territory of the dissolved Yugoslav federation in the late 1990s, when it became obvious that there were no serious barriers to Slovenia's membership of the European Union and NATO, and when America's bombing of Serbia had weakened the Milošević regime. In 1999, Slovenia acceded to the Stability Pact for Southeast Europe and, a year later (two months after Milošević's defeat in elections and seven months before he was handed over to the ICTY) it established diplomatic relations with the Serbian and Montenegrin Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

After relations with Belgrade had normalized and, in particular, after Slovenia had joined the European Union in 2004, Slovene politicians and diplomats tried to gain an international reputation in Europe and the U.S. as experts on the successor countries of the former Yugoslavia and on "the Balkans." However, the views that political leaders, the media, and also a considerable number of other authors spread at home concerning the dissolved Yugoslavia and Slovenia's position within the federation, were fragmentary and one-sided. They were formed under the strong influence of the crisis in the 1980s, the violent military intervention in Slovenia in 1991 and bloody conflicts in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo since the early 1990s. Although the opinions expressed in public discussions and media commentaries on Yugoslavia, and Slovenia's position in it, varied, the prevailing public and political discourse mostly emphasised the constant tensions among the former Yugoslav nations and political elites, and the allegedly insurmountable differences between the "north" and the "south" (or rather, the east and the west).⁶ They also highlighted disagreements between "centralist" or "federalist" views on governing the common state that had never been overcome and which prevented, according to these

⁶ An article "The Creation of the Republic of Slovenia and its development" published in 2006 on the web page of the Government Communication Office on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of Slovenia's independence even said that in "the acute crisis facing the Yugoslav communist system" in the 1980s it became clear that "the social, economic, cultural and political structure of the Slovenian nation was not compatible with the structures of the other Yugoslav nations." Although the author of the article is a university professor and historian, such positions were rather exceptional even for the right-wing sphere of Slovene politics. See: www.15years.gov.si/15-years/creation-of-slovenia/

views, true national equality and hindered Slovenia's economic, social and cultural development. In such conditions, the break-up of Yugoslavia was presented as more or less unavoidable and as a consequence of unsolved (and obviously also unsolvable) national issues. Serbian nationalism was (and is) believed to be the main reason behind the violent disintegration of the Yugoslav state, which, together with the leaders of the Yugoslav army, caused the war on its territory. Particularly critical positions on the disintegrated Yugoslavia were advocated by the Slovene political right and by some parties that had emerged during the process of Slovenia's independence. On the other hand, the leaders and followers of the parties that had emerged from communist era political organizations were more reserved in their judgments. Nevertheless, they also claimed that the Slovenes did not in fact fit in the Yugoslav "Balkan inn" and that their integration into Yugoslavia back in 1918 was a "mistake," an opinion that was even mentioned in the statement of the foreign ministry of the governing coalition led by the liberal democratic party (a successor of the former communist youth organization) in 2000.⁷

However, Slovene public opinion and political parties were not so much concerned about the issues of a disintegrated Yugoslavia and Slovenia's position in it, as they were divided upon the issues of Yugoslav communism and the events in Slovenia during WW II and immediately after the communists had victoriously risen to power in 1945. After the multi-party system had been reinstated in Slovenia, a reconciliation ceremony took place in the summer of 1990 at one of the largest post-WW II massacre sites of the adversaries of the Partisan resistance movement. While the President of the still Yugoslav Republic of Slovenia, Milan Kučan, and the Slovene Metropolitan, Alojzij Šuštar, solemnly shook hands as a sign of historical reconciliation, a true and open debate on recent history only began after political democratization and the proclamation of Slovenia's independence in 1991. There were many critics of the Yugoslav and Slovene communist regime who then for the first time openly expressed their political views and disclosed their traumatic experiences with the communist authorities. There were also those who fiercely opposed communism, described it as a criminal system, and called on the new Slovene authorities to deal resolutely with the communist past, including the events of WW II, partisan resistance, and collaboration. The most fervent advocates of the revision of the "communist past" even denied the importance of the Slovene resistance movement in the period 1941–45 and equated it with the communist movement. They claimed that the members

⁷ "Deset let samostojne slovenske zunanje politike, maj 1990-maj 2000" (Ten years of independent Slovene foreign policy, May 1990–May 2000), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia. See: www.mzz.gov.si/si/zakonodaja_in_dokumenti/dokumenti/deset_let_samostojne_slovenske_zunanje_politike/

of the Slovene anti-partisan units and their leaders were not collaborators of the occupying forces but anti-communist fighters, which triggered a fierce public and polemical debate. The controversy was further deepened by the discoveries of mass graves of Slovene, Croat, Serb, and Montenegrin members of collaborationist units, adversaries of the partisan movement, anti-communists, and other political fugitives, together with an unidentified number of members of the German minority in Slovenia and the Vojvodina region who had been fleeing to the West and whom the Yugoslav Army in 1945 summarily executed and secretly buried on Slovene territory on the orders of the communist leadership.⁸

However, in the 1990s, the Slovene government and political parties still underestimated the political dimensions of the post-war killings that had been kept secret for years. They did practically nothing to investigate them, nor did they accelerate the process of grave marking, the identification of victims and enabling them a decent funeral. The liberal-democratic party, the United List of Social Democrats (former communists) and some smaller parties mostly rejected the criticism of Yugoslav communism and the partisan movement during WW II. They claimed that the Slovene anti-fascist struggle and the striving of Slovene communists for a federal organization of Yugoslavia in fact contributed to the formation of an independent Slovene state. In addition, even public opinion was not in favor of a more radical “settling of accounts” with the recent past and even some historians still rejected the tendencies to reinterpret the history of WW II and the communist era. Indicative of this was the 1996 exhibition at the National Museum of Contemporary History entitled “Slovenes in the Twentieth Century.” Although based on concrete research, there was not a single word about post-war communist violence. This provoked the writer Drago Jančar to protest publicly and, together with a group of historians, he prepared an alternative exhibition about the dark side of recent Slovene history entitled “The Dark Side of the Moon,” which attracted great public attention.

II

After attaining independence in 1991, Slovenia, not surprisingly, witnessed no mass renaming of streets and squares, or removal of

⁸ According to the estimates of a government commission for solving the issues of the communist period secret grave sites, established in 2005, there were several tens of thousands of executions of people without any trial on the territory of today’s Slovenia after WW II (in 1945 and 1946); 14,000–15,000 had lived before the war on today’s Slovene territory, and the rest were Croats, Serbs, Montenegrins, and Germans from Vojvodina. So far, the commission has recorded more than 600 locations of the so-called hidden (or until the end of the Communist period, secret) gravesites.

monuments. Around forty streets and public areas were renamed in Ljubljana in the 1990s. Among the first was the central street—Titova cesta (Tito Street), which became Slovenska cesta (Slovene Street). In some other towns, though, even streets and squares named after Tito were preserved; for instance, in the post-war industrial town of Velenje (for some time called Titovo Velenje), where a several-meter high statue of Tito still stands today, with no major controversy. Some streets and public areas named after Slovene communist politicians and personalities and after some important events of the resistance movement during WW II have been also preserved, while the names of streets and parks named after important personalities of the international and Yugoslav communist movement have been replaced by earlier city names, traditional names, or names bearing a Slovene national connotation. The case with monuments was similar. Some monuments honoring the leaders of the communist regime, its achievements, and milestones were removed without any controversy, though quite a few of them were preserved, which in some places triggered public protests. There was, however, less controversy in the case of monuments honoring the partisan resistance and victims of fascism in the period 1941–45, since the majority of the population supported their preservation. Again, reactions (in particular of the political left and ex-partisans) to the new monuments honoring the memory of collaborators, adversaries of the partisan movement, and victims of communism during and after the war were more adverse. These monuments were erected by their former fellow fighters and supporters, relatives, local priests and other people who had been persecuted under the communist regime. The memorial services that took place at the unveiling of these monuments and at the graves of post-war victims of communism turned into open battles for the “true history” and for historical memory; statements blaming only the communists for the Slovene “civil war” during WW II and the mass violence that followed it, irreconcilably divided (and still divide) political parties and public opinion.⁹

The political parties established in 1990–91 and after Slovenia’s independence mostly did not look back into history when choosing their

⁹ According to a survey conducted on the outskirts of Ljubljana in 2002, erecting monuments to victims on the anti-partisan side and for executed en masse after the war was received with less resistance and more understanding at the local level—i.e., in the towns and villages from which these victims had come—than at the state level. In these towns and villages, the prevailing opinion was that all the victims from the local community should be given a monument, or at least a proper grave, regardless of how and on which side they lost their lives during and after the war. According to the majority of respondents, it was completely unacceptable that for all the years after the war, some of them could not even have a grave and were judged not by what they did in their lives but by their political and ideological position (Vodopivec 2002).

names and role models. However, in 1992, the leaders of *Kmečka zveza – Ljudska stranka* (Farmers' Union – People's Party) proclaimed their party to be the successor to the largest Slovene political party in the period of the Habsburg Monarchy and of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia—the Catholic *Slovenska ljudska stranka* (Slovene People's Party). Both the newly-established Slovene Social Democratic Party (SDS), which was very critical of the communists, as well as the party comprising former communists, which transformed into social democrats, *Združena lista socialnih demokratov* (ZLSĐ, United List of Social Democrats), claimed to be historically related to Slovene social democracy established back in the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the latter (ZLSĐ) also did not hesitate to mention the League of Communists as its predecessor, emphasizing in its program its anti-fascist character and the achievements of the social and economic policy of the Yugoslav and Slovene communists, the federal system of the Yugoslav state and “socialist self-management.” The communists even enjoyed the support of a substantial part of the population after the introduction of the multi-party system in Slovenia because of their resistance to Serb and Yugoslav military pressures in the last years of Yugoslavia and their support for democratization processes and Slovenia's independence in 1990–91. At the first multi-party elections in 1990, the former president of the Slovene League of Communists, Milan Kučan, was elected president of the Republic, with a convincing majority of 58.6%, and the United List of Social Democrats was and remained one of the largest political parties.¹⁰ Before the presidential elections in 1997, the Social Democratic Party (SDS) and the Christian Democratic Party submitted to the parliament a bill on lustration and a declaration on condemnation of the communist regime, which, however, failed to gain sufficient support from the deputies. Milan Kučan was easily re-elected the President of the Republic (with 55.57% of the vote). Moreover, in the second half of the 1990s, the negative image of communist Yugoslavia that had prevailed in the first years after independence also started to change in public opinion polls, with an increasing number of respondents retaining a relatively positive memory of it.

Nevertheless, heated public and political debates about more recent history continued, concentrating not so much on the reasons for the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia but more on the events during WW II and the communist era in Slovenia. As Slovenia's independence became an increasingly distant event, only contradictory perceptions of the Yugoslav communist regime remained subjects of public and political

¹⁰ At the first multi-party elections in April 1990, the ex-communists, then called the Party of Democratic Renovation, even won the most votes of all the parties (17.3%), which was—as claimed by their political adversaries—also a result of their many advantages inherited from the past, which the newly founded parties did not have.

debate. In the opinion of the fiercest critics the Social Democratic Party (SDS)—this regime did not differ much from the communist regimes in the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe, since it was incorrigibly “totalitarian” throughout the four and half decades until its final breakdown in the early 1990s. Such extreme views, however, did not enjoy wide public support. Public opinion was considerably more moderate in its views, claiming that in the evolution of communist Yugoslavia, more authoritarian periods were followed by less authoritarian ones and that the Yugoslav communist system was incomparably more open and democratic than the Soviet or Eastern European one. The claims about the unacceptable “totalitarian” nature of Yugoslav communism were most fervently rejected by the ZLSD. Members of this party also strongly objected to accusations that it was exclusively communist leaders and the revolution that were guilty of the post-war killings of real and alleged opponents of the partisan movement and communism. Although they condemned the atrocious executions of collaborators and other refugees who fled westwards across the territory of Slovenia at the end of war, they claimed that it was a consequence of the divisions that had arisen during the war and civil war—a conflict that had in fact been triggered by the support that leaders of middle-class parties and the Catholic church had given to collaboration and the anti-partisan resistance.

Any expectations that the political battle for historical memory and interpretation would ease after Slovenia’s accession to the European Union in 2004 soon proved to be unfounded. In the parliamentary elections in October 2004, the Slovene Democratic Party (SDS) (until 2003, Social Democratic Party) won by a large majority. On the initiative of the new government coalition headed by SDS, a new sector was founded within the Ministry of Justice in 2005, responsible for the Rectification of Injustices and Reconciliation (it was transformed in 2008 into the independent Study Center for National Reconciliation). One of its tasks was to investigate the crimes committed against the Slovene population by “all three totalitarian regimes” (fascist, Nazi, and communist). At first, it indeed carried out some well-founded research, but after some time it became hostage to the right-wing political parties and their pragmatic demand for uncompromising condemnation of “communist totalitarianism.” Some prominent parliamentary deputies and members of SDS even claimed that the political system in Yugoslavia had been “Stalinist” the whole time and had acquired a more “human image” only a few years before the fall of the Berlin wall. When the Social Democrats (ex-communists) came to power in 2008, disputes about “recent history” became still sharper. Eventually, the European Parliament’s Resolution on the European Conscience and Totalitarianism, adopted in spring 2009 divided Slovene political parties and the public completely. The leading opposition Slovene Democratic Party (SDS) demanded that the Slovene Parliament should also adopt a

special declaration condemning the Yugoslav communist regime. The Social Democrats and other left-wing parties opposed it and the coalition deputies holding a majority decided that no special declaration in support of the European resolution would be adopted.

III

Both the recent and more distant past caused (and still cause) considerably less adversarial debate and conflict in Slovene historiography. Slovene historiography experienced an important methodological and conceptual modernization beginning in the middle of the 1980s. Mostly younger researchers, employing research models of Western European (and especially German and French) historians, began already in the second half of the 1980s to explore social and cultural historical themes, which Slovene historians had not to date devoted particular attention. At the same time, they discussed the Slovene past (from the Middle Ages to the most recent history) in a nationally, ideologically, and politically more relaxed way than their predecessors and teachers. Peter Štih, today the leading Slovene medievalist, has thus in the last two decades convincingly de-nationalized the traditional nationally mythicized image of Medieval history, since it was clear, as he wrote, that in studying pre-national societies it is not possible to “derive from contemporary national concepts and explanations, which create boundaries where formerly they did not exist” (2009: 7). With the broadening of the previously narrow national framework of history that was restricted to the “Slovene speaking population,” investigation of the German and Italian nobility and middle class in regions with a Slovene population gained new validity. As a corollary, researchers were successfully introduced to the methods of historical anthropology. At the same time, the one-sided dark image of the Habsburg monarchy changed in the writing of history. The new position maintained that the monarchy had gradually modernized and democratized from the eighteenth century, and the Slovenes, just like other non-German and non-Hungarian nations, quickly advanced” and developed into a “fully developed nation” in the nineteenth century despite unfavorable conditions and “justifiable feelings of being threatened by the stronger German speaking co-citizens.” In this, the majority of Slovenes were undoubtedly “bound to the dynasty” and to have felt the monarchy to be their homeland, although, at the same time, they supported the idea of its transformation into a federally arranged state, which would enable the Slavs, south-Slavs, and Slovenes national equality.

Slovene historians traditionally focused on the Slovene past in their research, and they assessed and are still assessing also the two Yugoslavias (the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes [SCS] and the post-war communist federation) from the perspective of the Slovene situation and politics. Despite expansive and deep research, these historians

were (and remain) more or less of the opinion that the centralist state system and the nationalist-unitarist tendencies of the Serbian parties and the court were the main reasons for the political and national tensions in the first Yugoslavia. The Serbian parties and court strove for state and national unification as rapidly as possible, regardless of the major social, economic, and cultural disparities among the various parts of the country and its ethnic groups. However, there is also no doubt for the most recent Slovene historiography that the Slovene decision in favor of Yugoslavia in 1918 had been massively supported by the population and that the Kingdom of Yugoslavia brought Slovenes great progress in all aspects (national, political, economic, and cultural). The Slovene territory, which had been part of the poorly developed southern periphery of the Habsburg Monarchy, became after 1918, as pointed out by the economic historian Žarko Lazarević, virtually overnight a part of the developed west of the new Yugoslav state. In addition, the Slovenes experienced, as cultural historians note, a dynamic cultural atmosphere, open to Europe, which they had not known before, despite their dissatisfaction with the centralist and authoritarian political system.¹² Both major Slovene parties, the Liberals and the Catholics, at this time actively cooperated in Yugoslav political life, albeit following distinct strategies. Liberals supported centralism in association with Serbian democrats, fearing that the transformation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia into a federation would lead to the dominance of the much stronger Catholic party in the Slovene part of the country, while the autonomist-oriented Catholic party adapted to short-term political conditions and traded for various concessions, in part by its frequent alliances with Serbian radicals (Perovšek 1996).

Critical historical research of the period of socialist Yugoslavia could only start in Slovenia, as in other successor states of Yugoslavia, after the fall of the communist regime. While the consensus view for the last two to three decades has maintained that the regime in Yugoslavia was considerably different from that in other communist countries and the Soviet Union following the dispute of Yugoslav communists with Moscow—that is, from the early 1950s onwards—there was and still is disagreement in assessments of the degree of authoritarianism and repression in Yugoslavia, everyday political practices, the functioning of the federation, the role of Slovene politicians within it, and their reform initiatives and goals. In more recent evaluations of the actual functioning of the federation, there has been an increasingly prevalent opinion that efficient decision-making among the nations was hindered not by the constant conflicts between (allegedly Serb) centralist and (Croat-Slovene)

¹² These are also the assessments of the most recent monograph reviews of Slovene history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. See: Fischer et al. (2005: 177–506); Vodopivec (2006: 162–237); Vodopivec, Simoniti, and Štih (2008: 311–55); and Luthar (2008: 369–418).

federalist tendencies but by communist policy, which remained committed to the principles of democratic centralism and ideological unity. In short, such a view recognizes that “true federalism is not compatible with authoritarian power.”

In addition, some authors point out that Slovene leaders, headed by Edvard Kardelj, had in fact actively helped to shape the Yugoslav political and economic system and therefore shared responsibility for its successes and failures. The almost decade-long process of Yugoslav disintegration in the period 1980–90 was thus not just a result of economic crisis and obviously insurmountable national tensions, but also of a deep crisis of the communist system, whose “term of use” had literally “expired” two decades after the liberal reforms had been violently suppressed in the early 1970s. The tragic break-up of the Yugoslav federation was, at the same time, accelerated by differences in the dynamics of democratization processes in various parts of the country and an irreconcilable nationalism that permeated Serbia after Milošević’s seizure of political power.

In researching the most recent history of 1945–91, the position of Slovenia and its development within Yugoslavia, rather than Yugoslavia as a whole, have continued to be the center of attention of Slovene historians. The only original Slovene outline of the history of the two Yugoslavias was thus published in 1995 by Jože Pirjevec, who, as a Slovene from Trieste, had observed Yugoslavia more from outside than from inside. Pirjevec did not doubt the long term Slovene allegiance to Yugoslavia but he presented Yugoslavia as an explicitly controversial formation, more prone to division than to cohesion from the very start. His book received favorable reviews in Slovenia and sold well, but it did not provoke any particular professional discussion and even less ambition to follow it. Pirjevec’s (2003) second comprehensive book, *The Yugoslav Wars 1991-2001*, in which he analyzed military conflicts and wars in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Hercegovina in the 1990s, shared the same fate. In contrast, Pirjevec’s third book, *Tito and Comrades* (2011), became a real literary success, although, again, it did not excite any more lively comment or interest among Slovene historians.

The main attention of Slovene historians was and is, as has been said, directed at studying Slovene conditions and Slovene development in the forty-five year period that divides the end of the WW II and the creation of socialist Yugoslavia, from Slovene independence. Among the most important achievements in the study of history since 1945 are systematic analyses of the development of the Slovene economy and its inclusion in the Yugoslav economy, which reveal that Slovenia, despite the dissatisfaction of politicians and the population with federal economic and financial policies, only really developed into a modern industrial society during the period of the second Yugoslavia. Studies of Slovene and

Yugoslav cultural and educational policies, which appear increasingly lively and pluralistic, show cultural life open to Western Europe from the 1950s onwards. This development was accompanied by recurring attempts of still scarce groups of critical intellectuals to expand the area of freedom and democracy; these, however, were not widely accepted by the public. The communist regime in Slovenia did not have any serious opposition until the 1980s; throughout the period, however, opposition intellectuals had been victims of political pressure and persecution. Researchers have also devoted ever greater attention to regime violence, especially in the first decades after WW II. In the last decade and a half, a large number of well-received works have thus been published which deal with the bloody post-WW II settling of accounts by the authorities with real and imaginary enemies, the political trials in Slovenia, the violent communist policy towards the Catholic Church and priesthood, and the functioning of the Slovene and Yugoslav secret police. At the same time, particular attention has been devoted to the repeat attempts at reforming the Yugoslav economy and political system, including the question of whether the reforms that the so-called communist liberals proposed in the second half of the 1960s would have succeeded in prolonging the life of communist Yugoslavia, or at least enabled its more peaceful dissolution.

The greatest discord in Slovene historiography is still caused by differing views on conditions in Slovenia and Yugoslavia during WW II. Since the beginning of the 1990s, a series of studies has been published, which have extensively broadened the understanding of WW II on Slovene territory. They have mainly cleaved between a focus on resistance (relations among the groups participating in the Liberation Front, communist policy, and military-political strategy of the partisan struggle) and a focus on collaboration (the policy of the parties and groups opposing the Liberation Front, the activities of the dignitaries of the Ljubljana Diocese, etc.) I have discussed recent historical research dealing with these issues elsewhere (Vodopivec 2003; 2006a) and will instead focus on the historians' prevailing opinions about the causes of the internal Slovene conflict, of collaboration, and of communist supremacy in the anti-occupation struggle in Slovenia. This can be summed up as follows: internal Slovene wartime conflicts had their roots in pre-war Yugoslav and Slovene social and political instability, political cleavage, and the lack of a longer democratic tradition in Slovenia. At the time of and after the occupation of 1941, the major political parties underestimated the readiness of the population to actively resist the occupiers and thus enabled a modest group of communists to take the initiative and to organize the resistance, which they gradually turned into a social and political revolution. The civil war, to which the communists significantly contributed by increasing violence against their ideological and political opponents, erupted mostly in the central part of Slovene territory (in the so-called Ljubljana Province). Its

main initiators were, on the one side, the communists, who proclaimed the Liberation Front to be the only representative of the “Slovene nation,” and threatened with liquidation anyone who tried to organize anti-occupation resistance units outside it; and, on the other side, the militant, particularly Catholic anti-communists who, instead of organizing anti-occupation resistance themselves, sought support for their anti-communist struggle first with the Italian and then with the German authorities, and thus agreed to collaboration. This was so much more tragic because the majority of Slovenes taking part in the resistance movement were Catholics, while both sides entangled in the uncompromising conflict—one supporting the Liberation Front and the other opposing it—believed in an Allied victory and tried to establish contacts with them. The price of the ruthless war from 1941 to 1945 was extremely high. According to research carried out by the Institute of Modern History since 1996, the costs were much higher than the estimates published under the communist regime. The latest research shows that between 1941 and 1946, more than 98,000 people who lived in 1941 on the territory of the present state of Slovenia lost their lives as a result of the war, including approximately 14,600 real or alleged Slovene opponents of the partisan movement and the communists who were summarily executed by the communist victors from May 1945 until the end of that year (Deželak-Barič 2014: 11–46).¹⁸

These historiographical reinterpretations of developments during and immediately after WW II naturally have their opponents, although—at least among historians—they are a minority. Some historians still continue to reject critical evaluation of communist policy and co-responsibility for the civil war; some of them are not even willing to accept the view that a civil war raged in Slovenia between 1941 and 1945, and reject all attempts at a modified, more differentiated interpretation of the wartime conflicts and reckonings as unacceptable “revisionism.” On the other hand, there is a group of historians who are unwilling to admit that the Liberation Front and movement had fairly wide social support (including among rural, i.e., Catholic people) and insist that the Slovene resistance was a communist manipulation and an instrument of the communist revolution from the very start. Historian Tamara Griesser-Pečar, in a book entitled *Razdvojeni narod* (The split nation), published first in 2004 in German and then also in Slovene, attributed the blame for the intra-Slovene conflict during the war entirely to the communists. It is true that Griesser-Pečar mentioned that the “traditional political parties” did not succeed, either in 1941 or in 1943 (following the capitulation of Italy), in combining their forces and taking the initiative in organizing the anti-occupation resistance. However, according to her interpretation, collaboration (to which the traditional

¹⁸ Previous estimates of WW II victims on Slovene territory were much lower, around 60,000.

parties and the dignitaries of the Ljubljana Diocese mainly agreed) is primarily to be blamed on the communists and the Liberation Front, since the “Village Guards” founded between 1941 and 1943 and supported by the Italians, were the result of a defensive response of the population to communist violence, while the goal of the Slovene Home Guards, founded with German help and under German command between 1943 and 1944, was supposed to be the struggle against the “Bolsheviks.” These were more or less the views held by members of the Slovene anti-communist emigration ever since the end of WW II and were not therefore new to the historiography of 2004. Griesser-Pečar's book thus did not attract major attention or louder controversy among historians and the public, since the opinion prevailed that, without any specific new arguments, she had repeated political evaluations that were as one-sided as the former communist ones.

This was exemplarily revealed in the book by Bojana Godeša, a researcher at the Institute of Contemporary History in Ljubljana and one of the leading experts on conditions during WW II in Slovenia, which was published under the title *Čas odločitev* (Time of decisions) in 2012. As Godeša showed on the basis of extensive material, the leaders of the largest Slovene party, the Catholic People's Party, were convinced after the capitulation of France of the long-term victory of the new German order in Europe, and thus advocated Yugoslavia joining the Tripartite Pact. Indeed, even before the German occupation of Slovenia and especially in the first months after it, they tried to achieve for Slovene territory a similar position to that of Tiso's Slovakia and the Independent State of Croatia. In this way, collaboration of the traditional parties with the German and Italian occupiers occurred, as Godeša points out, immediately at the start of the occupation of Slovene and Yugoslav territory and not just when the communists in the Liberation Front called for general anti-occupier resistance. It is interesting that Bojan Godeša's book also did not attract a great deal of public attention and the proposal that it should receive a national award for scientific achievements was rejected without reasoning, while the following year the author of a work on post-war “Red violence” without difficulty received the award. A very welcome addition to Slovene history writing is also the book by Gregor J. Kranjc's *To Walk with the Devil* (2013). Its author, on the basis of a detailed study of sources and historical literature, on the one hand critically analyzes the resistance myths that are still present in Slovene works of history (e.g., the myth of the mass support for the partisans on the part of the population right from 1941 onwards) and, on the other, convincingly rejects the standpoint still present in the works of the Slovene right and among emigrants, that organizing Slovene anti-partisan units with the aid of the occupiers was an act of self-defence against the communist revolution, and not a collaboration with “deadly serious” and very tragic consequences.

There is greater unity, at least among historians, in evaluations of the mass killings of opponents of the partisan movement and communism in 1945, since historians of all persuasions and orientations agree that this was an incomprehensible and unjustifiable crime, which should be investigated in detail. Some individuals try to ascribe responsibility for the killings exclusively to the Yugoslav communist authorities and even to Josip Broz Tito personally. Some try to explain the decision of the then communist leadership to deal ruthlessly with the fugitives and Home Guards units as a result of the tense international situation, aggravated by strained Yugoslav-Western Allied relations. However, for most Slovene historians, there is no doubt that the then Slovene communist leadership was fully responsible for the mass post-war killings on Slovene territory. The editors of a collection of symposium papers published in 2005, organized by the National Council and entitled *Victims of the War and of the Revolution* (Golob et al.), therefore set out in its introduction that the extra-judicial killing of more than 14,000 former Home Guards and fugitives, who were returned from Austria to the Yugoslav authorities by the British in May and June 1945, was a constituent part of the “revolutionary, communist take-over and institutionalizing of power” in Slovenia; liquidations were organized and supervised by the Slovene communist secret police with the help of the army (Golob et al. 2005: 3–5).

At the centre of historical debate about conditions during WW II in Slovenia and Yugoslavia, as is evident from what has been said, are mainly various ideological-political interpretations, while methodological and conceptual questions of research and interpretation were pushed to the background. Modern methodological and conceptual approaches, more than in political studies are established in the study of economic, demographic and cultural history and some other themes that have become the subject of research precisely in the last two to three decades. These include the history of migrations, childhood, family life, gender relations, nutrition, and housing and material culture, as well as the Jews, anti-Semitism, and national exclusivism in Slovenia. Thus, while on the one hand, Slovene historians beginning in the second half of the 1980s visibly extended their research fields, on the other hand, Slovene history writing continues to be explicitly ethnocentric, since in comparison to the period of socialist Yugoslavia, there is now even less research that could comparatively extend into the wider South Slav or Central European space.

IV

Despite all the efforts of historians for critical and ideologically and politically unbiased historical interpretations of the “recent past” and the Yugoslav and Slovene communist period, they have failed to have any visible influence on still very emotional and politicized public and political

discussions on “what actually happened in Yugoslavia and Slovenia in the twentieth century.” In the mid-1990s, there were, however, some successful efforts to include post-communist historical interpretations in the school curricula. The modernized curricula strove for a politically impartial history of the past century, which, during the communist era, had been politicized to the extreme. They focused more on social and cultural-historical topics and, in a balanced way, included the presentation of the history of the South Slav nations. The textbooks were a bigger problem, since, in their desire for political and ideological impartiality, their authors resorted to historicism and piling up of often contradictory facts. This was contrary to the ambitions of the initiators of the modernized curricula, who believed that the goal of school history is to present to students the past reality not just from political or superficial social perspectives but also from the bottom-up perspective and the perspective of everyday life. In 2008, the history curricula were changed again, this time under the influence of the then ruling coalition headed by the Slovene Democratic Party (SDS). The scope of history of South Slav nations, as well as the history of the two Yugoslavias was extremely reduced, and the history of communism was only mentioned briefly within the framework of the subject “totalitarianism in the twentieth century,” which was supposed to include a (rather short) description of all three: fascism, Nazism, and communism. In the school curricula adopted in 2008, the prevailing aspect of twentieth-century history was thus more Slovene-centric and Western European-oriented than ever before (Vodopivec 2009). All in all, the interest of the school authorities and public in issues of history education in Slovenia has been surprisingly modest. There have been no detailed studies or data on what teachers actually teach at schools, nor have there been any views and positions expressed on the contents and manner of their presentations.

Public polemic concerning WW II and Slovene and Yugoslav communism, which has divided Slovene political parties since the early 1990s and has uncompromisingly continued into the twenty-first century, has in general had little influence on public opinion. According to a public opinion poll carried out during Slovenia’s process of accession to the European Union (2003) by the Faculty of Social Sciences in Ljubljana, more than 45% of those polled believed that the partisan movement was massively supported by the population during WW II, as many as 35% agreed with the statement that collaboration with the occupiers was an act of national treason and only 15% agreed that Home Guard collaborationist units justifiably opposed the communist resistance, although, in their opinion, they should not have collaborated with the occupying forces. More than 43% of respondents agreed that Slovenia’s accession to the Kingdom of SCS in 1918 was actually a decision of the Great Powers and 38.5% believed that it would already have been better to establish an independent Slovene state then; at the same time, more than 43% had good memories of

socialist Yugoslavia, more than 53% agreed on the “predominantly positive contacts” with the populations of other Yugoslav nations and republics and more than 73% agreed that they had lived (relatively) well in Yugoslavia before it broke apart (Toš 2004).

This did not, however, convince those who called for a radical “revision” of history, insisting on the exclusive guilt of the communists for Slovene internal conflict during WW II and demanding decisive public condemnation of the post-war Slovene and Yugoslav political regime as a whole. In 1996, the general public prosecutor, an active member of *Nova slovenska zaveza* (New Slovene Covenant), which brings together surviving members of collaborationist units during WW II and their relatives, called for a review of the trial against Ljubljana Bishop Gregorij Rožman, who was sentenced in absentia in 1946 to long imprisonment for his negative attitude to the partisan movement and support for collaboration. After lengthy and often interrupted proceedings, the court in Ljubljana ruled in 2009 that severe procedural violations had occurred during the trial in 1946 and that a retrial should take place. Since Bishop Rožman died in 1959, this was entirely meaningless, but the Slovene church authorities and *Nova slovenska zaveza* interpreted this verdict as Rožman’s rehabilitation. On the other hand, a part of the public and media took it as an intolerable changing of history and the victory of politically motivated revisionism.

According to the results of the most up-to-date public opinion polls, the attitude of the respondents to recent history has not changed markedly over the last decade. On the contrary, in Slovenia’s current conditions of social and economic crisis, the percentage of respondents who believe that communist Yugoslavia, despite its numerous deficiencies, was in fact a fairly nice country, has even increased. Some research has also revealed the phenomenon of uncritical idealization on the part of the young about life in the former federation; although they could not remember Yugoslavia and communism from their own experience, they attribute to the “recent past” some qualities that they miss in the insecure conditions of the present day. At the same time, a large part of the public is fed up with the interminable disputes about the past. There has thus been a visible decline in interest in recent years among literary writers. After a number of prominent novels dealing with WW II and the post-war violence of the communist authorities, which were published in the 1970s and 1980s, the number of literary works dealing with this subject has declined; moreover, young authors seem to be completely uninterested in themes related to the communist and Yugoslav period. According to various surveys, the prevailing public opinion is that the victims of post-war killings should be given a decent funeral as soon as possible, people should come to terms with the fact that various interpretations of the past exist in people’s memories, and any more complex assessment of recent history should be left to the historians and history books.

Like elsewhere in Europe and in the world, and in particular in the former communist countries, the history of the twentieth century in Slovenia continues to irreconcilably divide politicians, the public, and researchers. All theses on the collective or even predominant Slovene memory and historical discourse, at least as regards the twentieth century, are fairly unconvincing (Bajt 2009). Despite some recent tendencies in historiography calling for de-nationalization of interpretations of Medieval and early modern history, and disagreements on how “Slovene” the “Slovenes” were at that time, there has at least been a relative degree of consensus on the most important processes in more distant periods. On the other hand, discourses on events in Slovenia during WW II and on the nature of the Slovene and Yugoslav communist regime after the war are still far from a national consensus. The formation of a critical but nationally and ideologically balanced post-communist and post-Yugoslav interpretation of all other events in recent history is a multi-layered, pluralistic and conflicting process, which has so far not showed any signs of reconciliation of the opposing and often strongly contradictory perspectives in public memory or in historiographical interpretations. This is the case both in Slovenia and in other countries of the former Yugoslavia. To some extent, reconciliation could perhaps be accelerated by a more ambitiously devised comparative study that would put the national-historical experience in a wider Yugoslav, central European and European context, for which, however, Slovene historians have not yet shown any great interest.

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POVZETEK

KONFLIKTNA POLITIKA ZGODOVINE IN SPOMINA V SLOVENIJI PO LETU 1990

Avtor članka uvodoma ugotavlja, da slovenski voditelji – razen redkih, slabo vplivnih izjem – niso niti v 19. niti v 20. stoletju resneje razmišljali o slovenski državni samostojnosti, zaradi česar je bila slovenska osamosvojitve leta 1991 za Slovenijo radikalen zgodovinski prelom. Pri tem je v slovenski politiki in javnosti po osamosvojitvi prevladalo stališče, da je prelom dokončen in mora Slovenija pretrgati vse vezi s preostankom Jugoslavije. Del novih političnih voditeljev je glasno izjavljal, da pri vprašanju »Evropa ali Balkan« ni dileme, saj je slovenski cilj lahko le Evropa, prednostna naloga slovenske politike pa vključitev Slovenije v EU, NATO in druge mednarodne in finančne organizacije. Slovenija je po razpadu Jugoslavije ohranila živahnejše stike le s Hrvaško, vendar jih je zapletalo nerešeno vprašanje poteka državne meje, v Ljubljani so kazali več zanimanja še za sodelovanje z Bosno in Hercegovino, ki je postala po končani vojni zanimivo tržišče za slovensko gospodarstvo, za aktivnejšo ureditev odnosov s srbsko-črnogorskim preostankom Jugoslavije pa so se odločili šele konec devetdesetih let, ko za slovensko članstvo v EU in NATU ni bilo več večjih ovir, ameriško bombardiranje Srbije pa je oslabilo Miloševićev režim.

Čeprav je bilo v razpravah o razpadli Jugoslaviji slišati različna mnenja, je v slovenski javnosti prevladovalo stališče, da so Jugoslavijo vse od nastanka pretresala nerešljiva nasprotja in spopadi med centralističnimi in federalističnimi silami, kar je onemogočalo nacionalno enakopravnost in tudi Slovenijo oviralo v njenem razvoju. Razpad Jugoslavije naj bi bil tako

neizogiben in posledica nerešljivih nacionalnih razlik, glavni krivec za nasilni razkroj jugoslovanske države pa naj bi bil srbski nacionalizem.

Vseeno so javno mnenje bolj kot razprave o razpadli Jugoslaviji in slovenskem položaju v njej delila (in še vedno delijo) vprašanja o jugoslovanskem komunizmu ter o razmerah v Sloveniji med drugo svetovno vojno in neposredno po njej. Najbolj vneti zagovorniki revizije »komunistične zgodovine« slovenskemu odporniškemu gibanju v letih 1941-1945 še naprej odrekajo vsak pomen, ga v celoti označujejo za komunistično in trdijo, da pripadniki slovenskih protipartizanskih enot, niso bili kolaboranti, temveč protikomunistični borci. Javne polemike je še zaostriło odkrivanje množičnih, v času komunističnega režima prikritih grobišč po vojni skrivoma pomorjenih pripadnikov kolaborantskih enot in komunističnih nasprotnikov. V do leta 2004 vladajočih levih političnih strankah so politične razsežnosti povojnih pobojev podcenjevali in niso storili ničesar, da bi jih raziskali in pomorjene dostojno pokopali. V takšnem ozračju v Sloveniji po osamosvojitvi tudi ni prišlo do množičnejšega preimenovanja ulic in trgov ali odstranjevanja v času Jugoslavije postavljenih spominskih obeležij, saj je bila odločitev o tem večinoma prepuščena lokalnim oblastem, polemike o komunističnem nasilju med vojno in po njej pa so se le stopnjevale.

Odprta vprašanje naj bo bolj oddaljene ali bližnje slovenske preteklosti so povzročala (in še povzročajo) precej manj polemičnih razhajanj v zgodovinoisju. Avtor članka predstavlja glavne značilnosti razvoja slovenskega zgodovinoisja od srede osemdesetih let preteklega stoletja dalje ter prevladujoče zgodovinoisne ocene in razlage razmer v prvi in drugi Jugoslaviji, pri čemer ugotavlja, da povzročajo tudi v zgodovinoisju največ razhajanj različna gledanja na razmere v Sloveniji in Jugoslaviji med drugo svetovno vojno. V tej zvezi na eni strani opozarja na zgodovinoisna dela, ki so od začetka devetdesetih let kritično razširila sliko druge svetovne vojne v Sloveniji in Jugoslaviji, na drugi pa na dela in avtorje, ki so zlasti v zadnjem času s temeljito analizo razpoložljivega gradiva osvetlili tedanje dogajanje in politične odločitve z novih vidikov ali celo v povsem novi luči (med njimi posebej omenja knjigo Bojana Godeše Čas odločitev, ki potrjuje, da je prišlo do kolaboracije tradicionalnih slovenskih strank z nemškimi in italijanskimi okupatorji že takoj ob začetku okupacije in ne šele potem, ko so komunisti z OF pozvali k vsesplošnemu odporu, ter knjigo Gregorja J. Kranjca To Walk with the Devil, ki kritično analizira v zgodovinoisju še vedno prisotne odporniške mite, obenem pa zavrača stališče, da je bilo organiziranje proti-partizanskih enot s pomočjo okupatorjev dejanje samoobrambe pred komunistično revolucijo in ne kolaboracija). Avtor sklene članek z opozorilom, da zgodovinoisje nima večjega vpliva na zelo čustvene in spolitizirane slovenske razprave o drugi svetovni vojni in po njej, medtem ko v javnem mnenju – kot kažejo raziskave – trdno prevladuje stališče, da je imelo partizansko, odporniško gibanje v

letih 1941-1945 podpora večine slovenskega prebivalstva in je bila odločitev za odpor leta 1941 edina prava odločitev.