

**TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF
DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT
(FROM *NOVA REVILJA* TO THE CENTER-RIGHT
GOVERNMENT OF JANEZ JANŠA)**

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I.

In 1980, when Lech Walesa started the Solidarnost¹ movement in Poland, a group of Slovenian dissident writers² published the “Initiative for a New Review.” This was the beginning of *Nova revija*, the critical cultural journal that later, in 1987, became famous for its “Contributions to the Slovenian National Program.”³ Despite its difficult and somewhat Aesopian language, the authorities interpreted it as an open challenge to the Yugoslav Communist system, and removed its editors.⁴

Nova revija soon became a distinguished forum for critical political analysis: a platform for the democratic opposition rejecting the monopolistic and centralist policies of the Yugoslav (and Slovenian) governments. In 1988, the Yugoslav authorities arrested four young journalists for possession of a “confidential” document revealing the internal conflicts in the Yugoslav Communist Party and army establishment. A trial before a military court in Ljubljana followed. The most prominent among the prosecuted and imprisoned four was Janez Janša, who in 1990 became defense minister, and who since December 2004 heads the new center-right government of the Republic of Slovenia.

¹ The establishment of the Polish workers' syndicate Solidarnost was a prelude to fundamental political changes and served as an inspiration to dissident and opposition movements in Central and Eastern Europe.

² The editorial board led by Niko Grafenauer and Dimitrij Rupel included dissident intellectuals like France Bučar, Tine Hribar, Boris A. Novak, Jože Snoj, Ivo Urbančič, and others.

³ *Nova Revija* 57 (1987).

⁴ Grafenauer (editor-in-chief) and I (executive editor) were invited to a tribunal-like plenary meeting of the Slovenian communist leadership where *Contributions to the Slovenian National Program* and our editorial activities were (correctly!) defined as “anti-socialist” and “anti-Yugoslav.” We lost our positions as editors, and procedures were started to find a new editor-in-chief and executive editor.

In 1989, the groups that were close to *Nova revija* established new parties⁵ and published the “May Declaration,” which proposed the dissolution of Yugoslavia and formation of a democratic and independent Slovenian state. 1989 and 1990 were years of mass protest rallies and dramatic electoral campaigning. In 1990, the anti-communist Demos coalition won a parliamentary majority, while the post of the president went to the former head of the Slovenian Communist Party, Milan Kučan.

It seems that the cautious Slovenian voters wanted a balanced result: on the one hand, they embraced and understood the importance of the Central European democratic revolution; on the other, many wanted to keep at least a partial connection with a traditional and familiar reality. Among the reasons for this “conservative” choice were the swift conversion of Communists into nationalist “Social Reformers,” and fear of the unknown, particularly in relation to Yugoslavia. The independence movement was attractive and popular, but many commentators, at home and abroad, also spread skepticism regarding the viability of the small state and the chances of its international recognition. As we now know, a great deal of negative propaganda was disseminated by Yugoslav “internationalists,” especially by the Yugoslav secret service and by Communist officials who had influence in, or even dominated, the media.

Immediately after their electoral defeat (which spared President Kučan), the Communists started to regroup and reorganize. They managed to retain substantial power, primarily in banks, insurance and other larger companies, in courts and in the media. They moved one part of their political operations to the “NGOs” and to the so-called civil society sector, and they enjoyed the protection of the president. The Demos government was too busy preparing for independence—and avoiding creating additional tensions with Belgrade—so it practiced cohabitation with the Communists. In Slovenia, no “lustration” or restriction laws against Slovenian Communists were adopted.

⁵ The newly and at the time illegally established parties united into an anti-communist coalition called *Demos*—standing for “Democratic Opposition of Slovenia.” Their names were the Slovenian Farmers’ Union, Slovenian Democratic Union, Social-Democratic Union of Slovenia, Slovenian Christian Democrats, Liberal Party, and Greens.

II.

The Demos government achieved a monumental result: in its time, between June and December 1991, Slovenia fought and won a very short war with the Yugoslav People's Army, and achieved international recognition. The chief goals of Demos were independence and democracy. While independence was a complete success, some caution is recommended regarding the evaluation of democratic achievements. These may have been incomplete due to the cohabitation with the reformed Communists. Many Slovenians were unaware of the depth and intensity of their reformation exercise—that is, adaptation to the new conditions. Former Communists transformed, divided, merged, and changed names. They participated in practically all the coalitions between 1993 and 2004, but their main strength was in their economic and media background. This development had its negative effects, but it certainly provided for a smooth transition, which—in the vicinity of the explosive Balkan region—was no small accomplishment.

One of the main problems of Slovenia was and remains its weak interaction with foreign economic actors. Slovenia did not open up as much as most other new democracies, and has attracted relatively little foreign investment. One of the reasons for this policy was the concentration of Slovenian capital in the hands of conservative (former Communist) elites that feared competition. They have even developed a special economic “theory” that recommended observation of “the national interest” in Slovenian economic life.

Despite the fact that Slovenian democrats wasted much energy examining the closets of the *ancien regime* and fighting its ghosts, the overall Slovenian record has not been bad. In fifteen years, Slovenia has managed to develop from a Yugoslav Federal Socialist Republic to a democratic and rather successful nation that is a member of NATO and the European Union, chairing the OSCE in 2005 and expected to assume the Presidency of the EU in 2008.

I have served as foreign minister in five Slovenian governments: in the Demos (center-right) government,⁶ in three liberal-led (center-

⁶ The Demos Government, led by Alojz Peterle, survived from May 1990 to January 1993.

left) governments,⁷ and in the new center-right government led by Janez Janša. My disagreements—especially with the leftist Prime Minister Rop (2002–2004)—that led to my exclusion from the cabinet in July 2004, consisted mainly of two elements: my insistence on Slovenian membership in NATO, and my concern regarding economic nationalism. I advocated openness and criticized restrictions on foreign investments. Even if economic development has been generally positive, Slovenia could have achieved more had it been more open and had it not restrained interaction in the international business environment. Restraining economic growth was one of the serious mistakes of the previous government. One of the most prominent tasks and promises of the new Janša government was economic relaxation and liberalization.

III.

The progress of Slovenia was a part of the overall transformation of European political and social systems. Slovenia has changed at the same time and in the same direction as other former socialist countries, from Estonia to Bulgaria. Dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact, and Yugoslavia had positive effects, but also brought serious problems. The processes revealed strengths and weaknesses of previously unknown, neglected, or intentionally obscured nations. Due to different “ulterior motives,” some were “hidden” under foreign names and difficult to identify in larger state or federal contexts. In the times of Soviet Union, only a few people appreciated the potential and the beauty of the Baltic states. Most foreign dignitaries and also analysts of the Yugoslav system rarely visited Slovenia or Croatia, while they based their perceptions on their experiences with Belgrade. The fall of the Berlin Wall opened the treasure box—and also the Pandora’s box—of the socialist empires.

Here, one should add an important observation. Socialist empires, including Yugoslavia, were closed systems that reduced and simplified national complexities into falsifications and myths like international solidarity, socialist harmony, brotherhood, unity, etc. Liberated from these myths, most Central and Eastern European nations opened up, showed their inner riches, developed their talents, spoke their

⁷ I served as Janez Drnovšek's foreign minister in the first half of 2000 and from 2001 to 2002. From 2002 to mid-2004—when I was removed—I served under Anton Rop.

original languages. Previously, these colors and flowers were parts of larger systems that did not protect and preserve them, but reduced and repressed them. Delicate growth needs protection, not reduction by larger, stronger systems. The European Union is a system that integrates European nations by promoting variety and affirmative action for minorities. European integration is a continuous exercise in reconciliation and respect for differences. From its beginning, the EU was an instrument of overcoming old conflicts and divisions in Europe. It is a framework for understanding and cooperation between large and small European nations. The EU is a project of multinational and multicultural coexistence.

The demise of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia has revealed weaknesses. The Communist emperors have repressed tender plants, but they have occasionally also repressed local dictators. The liberation unfortunately freed some dictators (in places like in Yugoslavia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgistan) who were free to reproduce the former system on a reduced, often quite primitive level.

IV.

Slovenia has achieved maturity and international reputation that twenty-five years or even fifteen years ago were unimaginable. Slovenia is appreciated in organizations and institutions that make decisions of global importance.

In its foreign policy, Slovenia supports activities and decisions that contribute to world peace, stability, prosperity, respect for human rights, and democratic processes. Slovenia certainly attaches most importance and gives priority to principles and values agreed upon in NATO and the EU. Slovenes advocate these principles in organizations like the UN and in the OSCE, but also in relations with neighboring countries—Austria, Croatia, Hungary, and Italy.

Slovenia is expected to play a special role in the Western Balkans. Slovenia advocated early accession of the Balkan countries to the EU. This will not be an easy operation, since the EU itself is in the process of reflection.⁸ The Balkan region lacks investments, financial

⁸ I am referring to the difficult situation with the Constitutional Treaty rejected by France and The Netherlands, to the recent disagreements regarding the next Financial Perspective (2007–2013), and the problems

discipline, and entrepreneurial skills. Today, many people are still skeptical about the prospects of Kosovo, Bosnia and Hercegovina, and Montenegro, countries with difficult ethnic histories and with little economic activity.

I conclude this short review of Slovenian accomplishments on a provocative note. After the dissolution of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the new countries have accepted the recommendations of the commission led by the French legal expert Robert Badinter. He recommended that the borders between former federal units should become state borders. He did not decide maritime borders, so the their resolution remained with the successor states. This was also the case of the sea border between Slovenia and Croatia. In 2001, after a decade of negotiations, the governments of Slovenia and Croatia concluded and simultaneously accepted an agreement regarding the state border.⁹ Prime Ministers Drnovšek and Račan confirmed the initialed document,¹⁰ but the Croatian side later declared that the agreement was not acceptable. To resolve the problem, Croatia now proposes arbitration. Slovenia does not reject the idea, but believes that this (in fact minor) problem, often dramatized by local fishermen and the media, could be resolved in the process of Croatian accession negotiations with the European Union, in which Slovenia will be one of the countries around the negotiating table. This is another good reason why Slovenia supports early accession of Croatia, and why it is in favor of a continued enlargement of the EU. The European Union itself will continue to be a successful player on the world stage, if it continues to grow.

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with enlargement. Neither Croatia nor Turkey has been an undisputed candidate. The debates within the EU reflect opposing views regarding the Common Agricultural Policy, the European Social and Economic Model, and the chances of a new orientation of the EU regarding global technological challenges.

⁹ The agreement satisfied two essential conditions: Slovenia preserved its territorial access to international waters, which it possessed throughout its life in Yugoslavia, while Croatia insisted on obtaining a maritime border with Italy. Slovenia made concessions on land, while Croatia allowed a minor concession on the sea.

¹⁰ The Croatian prime minister literally stated that he “stood strongly in favor of the agreement.”