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From Total War to Independent State[1]

Igor Grdina

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia that was founded in 1918 as a joint Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian project did everything in its power to muddle through the Second World War as a neutral party. But when, in preparation for his invasion of the Soviet Union, Adolf Hitler decided to secure his southern flank against any surprises that might emerge from the Mediterranean, he began exerting strong pressure on the government in Belgrade to ally itself with the Axis. In March 1941, the Kingdom of the Karadjordjević dynasty accepted his demand, but only on certain conditions that would have virtually guaranteed its neutrality. The Yugoslav leadership thought they were buying themselves time—"Qui habet tempus, habet vitam," as Slovene statesman Franc Kulovec said at the time—but in the early morning hours of 27 March 1941, a coup d'état carried out by a pro-British cohort of military officers put Yugoslavia squarely in the ranks of the Third Reich's enemies. In the course of a brief war in April, Yugoslavia was wiped off the political map of Europe. Its government fled to the Middle East and then to London and its territory was divided up and parceled out.

One of the massive changes affecting the Slovene lands at their forced incorporation into the totalitarian world was the occupation of the north of the country by the Third Reich. There, the new authorities soon began to implement Hitler's order to "make this land German for me, as German as the rest of Styria." The Nazi leader had taken an active interest in the Alpine-Adriatic region known as Lower Styria ever since his youthful support for the Südmark Society, whose aim had been to Germanize it. Deportations of the Slovene population to Croatia and Serbia began and reached such massive proportions that they were cited among the indictments of Adolf Eichmann at his trial in Israel in 1961. The educational system and

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public administration were Germanized in their entirety and more than two and a half million Slovenian books that the German occupiers managed to confiscate from public institutions and private homes were promptly burned. Still, the territory was never formally annexed to the Great German Reich, even though—as in Alsace-Lorraine—the Nazi authorities undertook to mobilize the local population into military formations and labor brigades. Lower Styria also became the site of huge new industrial installations intended to serve the German armaments industry.

Despite their brutal treatment of the Slovenes living west of the Yugoslav-Italian border established in 1920, the Italians treated the inhabitants of the Slovene lands occupied in April 1941 less harshly than did their German counterparts to the north. Although they annexed the newly formed Province of Lubiana (Ljubljana) to Italy, they did not require the male population to serve in the military. They also allowed a degree of cultural autonomy. The Hungarians, by contrast, were harsher in their occupation of Prekmurje in the east, where they immediately proceeded to Hungarianize the population. The Independent State of Croatia, which under the rule of its Ustaša fascist government was an Axis satellite, was awarded a handful of villages along the Sava River near its border with what had been Slovenia.

Had the Axis powers prevailed in Europe, however, the fate of the Slovenes would have been sealed. Indeed, even the Italian occupiers soon assumed a much harsher stance. Aldo Vidussoni, the secretary of the Fascist Party, told Italian Foreign Minister Count Galeazzo Ciano on 5 January 1942 that all of the Slovenes under Italian rule would eventually have to be killed, even if that did amount to more than a million people. In June of that year Mussolini delivered an incendiary speech in Gorizia in which he threatened the peoples of the Balkans with annihilation. This was no empty rhetoric. The concentration camp that the Italians established on the Dalmatian island of Rab, to which many inhabitants of the Province of Lubiana were deported, was notorious for its high death rate.

In the spring of 1941, the communists and their political allies—left-leaning liberals and Christian Socialists—together formed an organization that proceeded to permeate all of the occupied Slovenian lands. Initially named the Anti-Imperialist Front, after Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June, it was rechristened the Liberation Front. As early as September 1941, the communists and their fellow travelers tried to assert a monopoly on all resistance to the occupiers and then proceeded to eliminate potential competitors. At the same time, they created the first Partisan formations, to which the German forces of occupation in particular dealt some heavy blows. Even so, the communists failed to achieve the monopoly on armed resistance against the country's foreign conquerors that they wanted. Since 1927, members of the liberal underground TIGR organization (an acronym for Trieste-Istria-Gorizia-Rijeka) had been attacking the fascist

forces of occupation throughout the greater Julian March, and after the breakout of WW II even began conducting acts of sabotage within the Third Reich. Because TIGR regularly coordinated its operations with the British secret service, Slovenia's Marxists viewed them as an enemy.

Advocates of a legalistic approach also lost no love for the occupiers, although some of them thought that living conditions might be alleviated if they participated in the Joint Council of the Ljubljana Region. The most significant among them soon realized that this step achieved nothing and in fact only served to distance them still further from any public function. In 1942 the Italians withdrew from the countryside into the larger urban centers, thus allowing the Partisans to extend their control over most of Lower and Inner Carniola. The communists, who had created their own intelligence gathering service—the nucleus of the later one-party state's secret police—immediately began settling accounts with all of their potential adversaries among the Slovene population, thereby provoking widespread hostility that, for lack of any local armed force to back it up, was unable to exert any effective resistance. The countryside was simply too poor to be able to support the two domestic armies, both independent of the forces of occupation, that now began to battle each other in what was essentially a civil war. In summer and fall 1942 a major Italian offensive dealt some heavy blows to the Partisans but fell short of destroying them. In fact, acts of terror carried out by the occupiers strengthened popular resistance. By contrast, the Partisans had scant success carrying out operations in the German-occupied zone, though not for want of trying. In 1942 and then again in 1944 they shifted substantial forces from Lower Carniola to Lower Styria, but both times incurred heavy losses.

By early 1943, the communists, who had secured the top military positions in the Partisan army for themselves, coerced the Christian Socialists and other center-left groups collaborating with them to disband their own organizational structures. From that point on the Liberation Front was a monolithic organization, ruled by communists Boris Kidrič and Edvard Kardelj with the help of their relatives, who controlled the movement's military and security forces, with Kidrič at the head of the Partisans' political structure in Slovenia, while Kardelj emerged as chief ideologist of the entire Yugoslav Communist Party.

The ceasefire between Italy and the Allied forces of September 1943 greatly strengthened the Partisans' hand. As they allowed the region's former occupiers to return home, they were able to intensify their offensive against their domestic enemies. The communists tried to portray their initiatives as backed by the entire nation and began holding summary trials of individuals they declared to be traitors. In the depopulated forested region of Kočevje (Gottschee) they even held a congress of deputies sympathetic to them representing most regions of Slovenia, at which they talked of both national

sovereignty and incorporation into Yugoslavia and resolved to annex the Slovene-populated regions of the Adriatic Littoral that had been under Italy since 1920. This latter resolution, however, would long remain a mere declaration of intent. The border with Italy would not be decided until well after the end of WW II—beginning at the Paris Peace Conference (1947), then with the London Memorandum of 1954, and finally in the Treaty of Osimo of 1975.

During September 1943, a general uprising erupted throughout the Littoral, limiting what the newly arrived German forces were able to seize control of to just the principal transportation links connecting the region to the Italian peninsula. In the region's towns the new occupiers' policies were a far cry from what they had been in 1941 when they seized the northern part of Slovenian territory. In the Ljubljana region and the Littoral they tried to give the impression that the times of the Habsburg monarchy had returned. Still, they were unable to win the support of a majority of the population. In order to fill the ranks of the local units that they hoped to engage in the war against the Partisans they had to resort to conscription, since there were not enough volunteers. These Slovenian Home Guard (Domobranci) units, formed under German oversight, would continue to engage the Partisans militarily until the end of the war in May 1945. But it was the Partisans that, over time, the principal Allied powers came to recognize as the legitimate anti-Axis military formation in the region and that ultimately became the core of the Yugoslav regular army.

In 1942 and 1943, the communists managed to establish effective operational control over their units throughout the various regions of Yugoslavia. The entire territory of the pre-war kingdom, as well as a number of contiguous regions beyond it (such as the Littoral and Carinthia) now became the stage for a guerilla war in which the Germans began alternately to use methods from both the Eastern and Western fronts. In the Slovene lands, draconian methods such as the round-up and shooting of hostages and internment in concentration camps alternated with attempts to raise production, employment, and working-class living standards. But after the German defeat at Stalingrad even the occupation forces' top brass began to realize that precious few people still believed in Hitler's ultimate victory.

Under the leadership of Yugoslav Communist Party Secretary Josip Broz-Tito, the Partisans began creating regional and national power and leadership structures as well as a nationwide political representative body, which in June and November 1944 concluded two agreements with the royal government in exile. The result was to transfer the monarch's prerogatives to a triumvirate of proxies and to create a joint Yugoslav cabinet under Tito's leadership in which the communists—first and foremost among them Tito, followed prominently by Edvard Kardelj as vice-president and minister of the constitutional assembly—had the final word. The Partisan leaders also gained

control over whatever top leadership positions they didn't manage to occupy through the communists they had working in the administrations of various ministries. Thus, Yugoslavia found its way into the Soviet orbit, even though it had no particular need of relations with Moscow, since it managed to expel the forces of occupation and their collaborators out of the vast majority of the country on its own.

At the end of the war, which had cost Slovenia some 100,000 lives, conditions in the Littoral reached a crisis point. The Yugoslav army arrived in Trieste before the Allies did, but neither Great Britain nor the U.S. was prepared to relinquish the large Adriatic port city at the foot of the Karst Plateau to Marshal Tito's control, since they needed it as a logistical base for their occupation of northeast Italy and the Austrian lands. Moreover, the conflict that erupted in Greece following the Germans' retreat had shown that the cooperation of communist and democratic forces that had prevailed in wartime would by no means remain a given in peacetime. The revolutionary Marxists didn't even bother to conceal their opposition to parliamentary government—which for them, now as before, remained a synonym for rule by debate club—let alone their ambition to rule the whole world. This led to the establishment of new borders permitting the least possible intellectual osmosis.

In April 1945, Marshal Tito issued directives to his innermost circle for reclaiming the Littoral and the far northwest of the country. In the course of May, Yugoslav detachments either subdued and detained or had delivered into their hands by the British forces in southern Austria nearly all remnants of the occupying German and Slovene collaborationist forces. Simultaneously, vast purges began that not only eliminated captured enemy troops, but also swept up potential political opponents and ethnic minorities. Concentration camps were set up for them that in some instances—particularly at Teharje on the outskirts of Celje and in the classical gymnasium (high school) in Šentvid near Ljubljana—became sites of inconceivable suffering. May and June of 1945 thus became the bloodiest two months in all of Slovenian history. This blood vengeance as orchestrated by the Communist Party was responsible for fifteen percent of all the deaths caused by WW II and its immediate aftermath in the Slovenian lands. Tito's forces left more than five hundred concealed mass graves behind them, often bombing their opponents' last resting place as a final indignity. They were frequently arbitrary in exacting their revenge. While they murdered most Slovene Home Guards who had been drafted into service, they left most Slovene draftees into the German Wehrmacht and labor service alive. Notoriously, relatively well-to-do fellow citizens became a major target, even those who had clandestinely provided material support to the Partisans during the war.

This frenzied settling of accounts succeeded in terrifying the populace. Press censorship and restrictions on freedom of movement made any organized political opposition impossible, leaving a boycott of the election of representatives to the constitutional assembly the only available expression of dissent. The Communists and their close allies, who set up separate ballot boxes in the polls of each precinct—one for depositing ballots in favor of their candidates and the other for dissenting ballots requiring all write-in candidates—were thus doomed to complete and utter victory, even though they were unable to gain even a majority of votes in two Slovenian districts—the ones that the Soviet Red Army had passed through at the end of the war. At first Marshall Tito and his confederates had envisioned creating a Union of People's Republics, which would have been an emulation of Stalin's Soviet Union, but by November 1945 they decided to build on Yugoslav tradition, introducing a federal structure.

After WW II, the position of the Slovenes began to improve significantly. They got their own government, which however lacked portfolios for foreign affairs or defense, and they were far from the ultimate arbiters in all their affairs. Many families suffered enormous losses as a result of the communists' forced nationalization of property. Women were given the right to vote, but then of course had no choice of candidates. As a result, they assumed political roles primarily as party activists and sympathizers who distinguished themselves more by their obedience to the party elite than by personal initiative.

The new regime particularly demonstrated its loyalty to Marxist dogma with respect to the peasants, who more than anyone else during the war had been responsible for keeping the Partisans fed. People who tilled the soil were viewed as a petit bourgeois element and subjected to constant pressure. A maximum allotment of acreage was set for each farmstead, which was further reduced over time, and the scientific genetics of Gregor Mendel was replaced in the high school curriculum with the doctrine of Soviet pseudo-geneticist Trofim Lysenko. The new regime, which in the course of reorienting the country toward the east, introduced Russian language instruction in schools, which however was only rarely taught competently, for want of qualified teaching staff. Longstanding contacts with Central Europe were to be curtailed; as an example, one of the tracks on the railway line connecting Maribor to Austria was dismantled. A distancing from widely accepted civilizational norms also took place in higher education: as a result of politically and ideologically driven purges, both the University of Ljubljana and the Academy of Sciences saw the dismissal of numerous distinguished professors and scientists. The university's School of Theology was excluded from the academic community on a day that doesn't even exist on the calendar: 31 June 1952. Hard times awaited the discipline of sociology, whose very right to exist the communists at first refused to recognize,

although over time they did begin to rediscover and acknowledge it, albeit structured along Marxist principles.

Slovenia, which had received its own constitution in 1947, fashioned after the Yugoslav federal precedent, became a people's republic. Due to the quick consolidation of Eastern Bloc borders, the relative isolation it had experienced since before WW II became even greater, located as it was at the far western extreme of the Communist world. The Iron Curtain separated it from Italy and the fellow Slovenes who wound up on that side of the border. Economic recovery was inefficient and slow. Living standards did not begin to surpass the levels of 1939 until sometime after 1955.

As a result of its persistent foreign and domestic policy failures, the communist regime concentrated its full attention on its enemies, both real and imaginary. Alongside collaborators and political dissidents who might turn into political opponents, the Catholic Church was viewed as one of the most dangerous. It was endlessly accused of having collaborated with the country's wartime occupiers, despite the fact that the Germans had driven the vast majority of priests out of its zone of occupation as early as 1941. In Novo mesto in 1952, a mob of demonstrators was incited to douse visiting Bishop Anton Vovk of Ljubljana with gasoline and set him on fire. A number of his Catholic confreres were murdered. Catholic priests were perceived by Marxists to be particularly dangerous, given how difficult it was to isolate them from their ubiquitous, worldwide organization.

Eventually the authorities turned against certain former communists. Older party members who had remained critical of Marshal Tito and his inner circle drew the brunt of this ire. From 1947 to 1949 they were prosecuted in a series of show trials that ended in numerous death sentences. Many communists who had not been part of the ruling party structures during WW II had often ended up in Nazi or fascist prisons and concentration camps and Tito's prosecutors accused many of them of having survived thanks to collaborating with the occupiers. By conducting a series of purges of its ranks the ruling party became the right hand of the Politburo. Nor did the communists need non-communist allies anymore. In 1952, for instance, they rid themselves of any association with the poet, prose writer, and personalist thinker Edvard Kocbek, who since the summer of 1941 had held at least outwardly high positions of leadership in the wartime Partisan and postwar leadership.

Slovenia was distinct from most other republics of the Yugoslav Federation in having control over its own secret police. Formally it had been included in the federal police structure, but thanks to its devotion to Edvard Kardelj, who as Tito's "Talmud scholar"—the colorful term that Solzhenitsyn used for him in his novel *The First Circle*—was considered infallible within Yugoslavia's taxidermically preserved power structure all the way up until his death in February 1979, it was able to function

independently. Slovenia was not administered differently in any significant way from the other parts of Yugoslavia, except for the fact that its communist elite held full control over the republic. Because Kardelj's people were in control of the key sector of the power structure in the northwest of the country—which in Marxist regimes is usually held by the secret police, which maintains control over both the lower—i.e., state structure as well as the higher, party-level of decision-making—the titular head of the all-Yugoslav repressive apparatus Aleksandar Ranković could only prevail temporarily as the number two person in Tito's regime, and this despite the fact that Tito largely had Ranković's talent and competence to thank for the fact that he survived his feud with the international workers' movement as led by the Soviet Union.

Until 1948, Yugoslavia had the reputation of being the Soviet Union's most loyal satellite. Significantly, Belgrade had been chosen as the seat of the Cominform, which was conceived as the successor to the Third International, which had been dissolved in May 1943. But despite its exalted position within the system of Soviet satellites, the Tito regime pursued an absolutely breakneck course. Even after the proclamation of the Truman Doctrine, Yugoslavia continued to support Greece's communist partisans in what seemed an outright provocation of the West. Stalin, who periodically used purges to air out his team in the corridors of power—elections did not serve that function in the communist world—wanted to have a more cautious and foresightful Politburo in Belgrade. Because the U.S. at that time was still the only world power with an atomic bomb, the communist bloc had to take extreme care in realizing its expansionist ambitions. But following their success in carrying out a revolution in the midst of a world war, Tito and his comrades were acutely "dizzy with success." When criticism from Moscow arrived at their doorstep, they simply exploded, but they knew that the struggle for their very survival was on. Although at first they tried to prove that the Soviet leadership's claims were unjustified—significantly they had begun collectivizing agriculture, although widespread, bitter opposition that sometimes erupted in actual uprisings soon forced them to pause—they just as immediately began settling accounts with Yugoslav advocates of Stalin's positions. They also went after the fence sitters in their own ranks. Soon the concentration camp on Goli Otok, the central fixture of Yugoslavia's version of the Gulag, became a symbol of the anti-Stalinist communists' cruelty.

Yugoslavia's dispute with Moscow exposed the fragility of the independence that its communists proclaimed. Without help from the West, Yugoslavia could not have survived. But because the support that came from the U.S. and its allies was unconditional, life in Tito's federation continued unaltered for some time to come. Shocked by Yugoslavia's nearly inconceivable poverty at the time of its dispute with Stalin, Lawrence Durrell wrote from Belgrade that capitalism was something worth fighting for, after all. Even later, after the new policy of worker self-management was

implemented nationwide with all pomp and circumstance, very little actually changed. Backed by the unconditional loyalty of a majority of the country's top communists, whose role in governing the country did not become legal until the promulgation of a new constitution of 1974, Tito was always able to have his way. The periodic purges that served to sweep away Milovan Djilas in 1954, Aleksandar Ranković in July 1966, and the formidable next generation of leaders in Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Macedonia in 1971 and 1972 provide ample evidence to that effect. The Communist Party never really became the League of Communists, as it was formally renamed in 1952. Although Edvard Kardelj may have taken to writing about a plurality of interest groups, he never stopped insisting on a socialist economic structure. Sporadic attempts at domesticating the essence of certain non-Leninist concepts—for instance, the notion of *united labor*, about which Giuseppe Mazzini had written in the previous century, and of an *ongoing revolution*, which concealed the Trotskyite notion of permanent revolution—figured mostly as window dressing. Hence the claim by Yugoslav communists that self-management was a particular variety of dictatorship of the proletariat was not just a rhetorical defense against criticism from various foreign Marxist political parties, but also an empirically verifiable fact.

After 1955, when Slovenia entered a phase of accelerated economic development, its leadership opted for an attitude of complete subordination to Belgrade, despite the fact that it was politically self-contained and had control over the secret police on its own territory. This drove many ambitious people who were able to find work abroad to emigrate, mainly to West Germany. Even the process of decentralization, which the champions of the regime chose as a way of maximizing popular participation in national politics—a ploy deliberately undertaken to skirt pressures for democratization—yielded problematic results. Extra leeway for the exercise of initiative was granted only to an elect number of citizens, but by no means to everyone, and in Marxist societies efforts at modernization were strictly limited to particular sectors of the economy—industrial, for the most part. This led to a disproportionate dissipation of the work force. The constituent parts of Yugoslavia closed in on themselves.

Only after an extended period of increasingly cordial relations with the West, on whose borders the Iron Curtain was already beginning to disappear, did a situation emerge in Slovenia that was distinct from what predominated in the rest of Yugoslavia. The local secret police concentrated its attention on the economy and in so doing magnified its presence in all aspects of life. Every now and then the ruling elite made a point of being tolerant of writers and intellectuals, who had a tradition dating back to the times of the Austrian Empire's black eagle and the white eagle of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, when politicians had been obliged to acknowledge the reality of their times, of describing the ideal shape of Slovenia's future. The party bosses in Ljubljana even permitted the publication and production

of dramatist Dominik Smole's play *Antigone*, which with its evocation of ancient themes in existentially tinged dramatic exchanges alluded to Slovenia's recent civil conflict and post-war massacres. But when critical thoughts not veiled in literary metaphors began to appear from the pens of some of Slovenia's foremost writers who had refused to join the ranks of the pro-communist intelligentsia, the reaction was merciless. Thus, when Jože Pučnik expressed harsh condemnation of one of the sore points of Yugoslav communism—the lamentable state of the peasantry—he was immediately imprisoned, his work banned, and his university diploma was even revoked. After his subsequent emigration to the Federal Republic of Germany and a new round of studies, Pučnik made a name for himself as a university professor. The Yugoslav authorities reacted with similar touchiness at the 1964 premier of Marjan Rožanc's play *Topla greda* (The hotbed), which was shut down because of a staged protest by workers of the Grosuplje Agricultural Collective.

The limited modernization that communist dogma did allow, facilitated in Yugoslavia's straitened circumstances by material assistance from the West, significantly changed the average person's relationship to the regime. Though Marshal Tito's impetuosity may have made him quite unpopular at first—at a 1954 mass rally of some 350,000 in Ostrožno on the outskirts of Celje he scolded his subjects for eating too much bread and thus threatening the country with famine—he later gained a reputation as the most beloved of all possible statesmen. At the time of the unrest that followed the European demi-revolutions of May 1968, Tito readily managed to win Yugoslavia's students to his side and turn their fury against targets that served his own ends. In the area of foreign policy his leadership of the non-aligned bloc suited both East and West, since otherwise the far more powerful People's Republic of China could have asserted its domination over the third world. But Tito's recalcitrance in not allowing even the relatively independent growth of the next generation of Yugoslav leaders and his system of non-meritocratic career advancement based strictly on loyalty was in large part responsible for paving the way to the ultimate self-destruction of the Federation he personified.

The 1980s exposed Yugoslavia's structural flaws, both governmental and administrative. The absence of an authoritarian leader—Tito died after a protracted illness in May 1980 just days short of his eighty-eighth birthday—led to the disjointed exercise of power. A rapidly accelerating economic crisis whose two most prominent hallmarks were (hyper-)inflation and ever worsening shortages of basic consumer goods led to noticeably disparate survival strategies in different parts of the country. By introducing a mandatory cash deposit for exiting the country, the Marxist regime put a brake on its citizens' travel abroad.

In Slovenia, the response to these worsening conditions was twofold: its rapidly developing civil society began demanding complete modernization and democratization, while the party structures that controlled the economy and the secret police began paying less attention to the Yugoslav federal context, since it no longer provided either certainty or support. The rise of Slobodan Milošević in Serbia with his increasing demands for control over the entire federation further complicated things for the ruling elite in Ljubljana, whom the increasing pressures from Belgrade forced to depend on their own population for the first time since WW II. The notion of an independent Slovenia, which until then—both in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and later in emigration, not to mention socialist Yugoslavia—only a few individuals had dared to articulate in public, became more and more realistic. After the oppositionist journal *Nova revija*, founded in 1982 by Slovenian advocates of parliamentary democracy and intellectuals critical of the communist regime, devoted its famous 57th issue in January 1987 to "Contributions to a Slovene National Program," the prospects of Slovenia's carrying on within the federal structure began to evaporate.

At first the Communist Party structures forcefully rejected these unwelcome dissident views, but the act of doing so only served to make an even wider public aware of them and the alternatives they put forward. Many communists were fiercely indignant over the contents of *Kocbekov zbornik* (Essays on Kocbek), which was long blocked from publication due to an article in it by philosopher Spomenka Hribar about post-war Slovene national reconciliation, but finally appeared in 1987. Even to its final days the Marxist regime remained incapable of admitting its guilt for the massacres it carried out at the end of WW II. The idea of a national reconciliation dissolving the society's polarization which, in Hribar's account, arose in the second half of the nineteenth century as a direct result of the Catholic Church's policies—a thesis at odds with historical fact, which shows the Slovenes firmly united at the end of WW I—ultimately led to still further efforts at self-immunization. Catholics began to picture reconciliation in the context of their own faith tradition, while in time the communists began to see it as a brilliant opportunity for imposing an intellectual ban on their crimes after WW II. Debates about the need for Slovenia to participate in broader European networks were somewhat more moderate and productive. The republic's post-war economic orientation toward the third world was found to be fruitless. Since 1980 a wide-ranging debate about the mission and legacy of Central Europe and Slovenia's need to realign itself, both intellectually and administratively, towards the north remained limited to intellectual circles.

Opposition to the communist regime strengthened when the Slovenian secret police arrested the dissident journalist Janez Janša in May 1988 and handed him over to the Yugoslav Army. A court martial which took place in Ljubljana and made a point of conducting its proceedings in Serbo-Croatian found Janša and his three Slovenian co-defendants guilty and

sentenced them to humiliating prison sentences. The arrogance of the federal army infuriated Slovenes and sent large numbers of them out on the streets to protest. From this point on, the political opposition's agenda and movement began to crystalize and make rapid advances. The so-called May Declaration that was announced at a huge rally in Ljubljana in 1989 called for a sovereign state of the Slovenian nation. As the political chaos within Yugoslavia widened, these demands grew more insistent.

At the end of 1989, faced with outright threats to replace the Communist leadership in Ljubljana with marionettes controlled out of Belgrade, the Slovenian political elite at last discovered a pragmatic rationale for joining the movement toward sovereignty, even though they never embraced the goal of an independent state. Thus, in January 1990 they demonstratively walked out of the national congress of the ruling party during its session in Belgrade, making a huge impression on the entire Yugoslav public.

It was in this atmosphere that the first multi-party parliamentary election took place in Slovenia in 1990. The winner was the democratic opposition, joined in a coalition called Demos, which immediately demonstrated its openness and determination to pursue integral politics in the composition of its new government, which was led by the Christian Democrat Lojze Peterle. A number of ministerial seats were entrusted to experts from the ranks of the previous establishment. Key ministries were of course assigned to confirmed advocates of independence: Janez Janša was put in charge of defense, Igor Bavčar was assigned the Ministry of the Interior, and Dimitrij Rupel the previously insignificant portfolio for foreign affairs. In the race for the five-member presidency of the republic the result was different: three of its members represented the new parliamentary (i.e., communist) opposition, the most prominent among them being Milan Kučan, who led the presidency. As the leader of Slovenia's communists he had a virtuosic gift for appropriating the ideas of others—even of Demos when it came to foreign affairs—and was a master of backstage maneuvers, a skill he had used to gain control of networks established in the early days of the post-war Marxist regime. This made it possible for him to go down in history as the representative of two different states and regimes. With respect to the success with which Kučan changed the flags to which he swore allegiance as a public servant, he is second perhaps only to George Washington and Joseph Fouché.

After a long process of testing every possible connection and seeking solutions within the federal framework, a majority of Slovenia's population, which was then approaching two million, opted for independence at the time of the most radical (in-)conceivable shifting of the old continent's borders as the only possible way of having a decisive impact on its own fate. Thus, at the time of the triumph of freedom and the collapse of the totalitarian Eastern Bloc, which had only ever granted its members limited sovereignty,

Yugoslavia turned into the complete opposite of the great hope that had given it birth at the end of WW I. The joint statehood of Serbs and Croats and after it the communist federation had in the best case allowed the Slovenes only internal autonomy, while genuine equal rights for them remained out of the question. Throughout that time their language had been thoroughly marginalized and disadvantaged. Yugoslavia, which in its last years at the communists' initiative had launched an initiative to achieve an almost inconceivable leveling of the educational system throughout the federation, had succeeded in destroying every illusion of a guarantee of freedom for all that the country's idealistic grandfathers and fathers had dreamed of. Just as significant was the disarmament of Slovenia's defense structures that the federal army conducted at the creation of the republic's new democratic government in May 1990.

The events of 1988–90 created a whole new situation in Slovenia. The constellation of internal and external political force fields that had formed Yugoslavia and maintained it as a part of Europe's structural order drifted off into history upon the reunification of Germany and the collapse of Eastern Europe's communist regimes. People whose life options had for long decades been dictated by external demands were now finally able to devote themselves to their own priorities. It wasn't until the push for independence that the notion of Dušan Pirjevec, Partisan hero of WW II and, later, an influential professor of comparative literature, could come to fruition, that the most important thing for Slovenes is what they do with and for themselves. Previously their inclusion in Yugoslavia, where they represented less than ten percent of the population, and before that in Austria-Hungary, where they were a scant 2.4%, had at most allowed them to react nimbly to the initiatives of others.

At the end of 1990 Slovenia conducted a plebiscite in which 88.5% of those eligible to vote supported the option to declare independence, a mandate that the government was then obliged to carry out within six months. According to that time frame, Slovenia became an independent state on 25 June 1991 and was immediately attacked by the Yugoslav Army. However, the military action directed by Belgrade, which was intended to have a deterrent effect, failed thanks to resistance from the new defense force that the democratic government had had the foresight to establish. Much of the West was at first ready to tolerate a lightning quick intervention by the Yugoslav authorities, which initially resembled an intensified police action. But as the battles intensified and dragged on, and the effects of an intensive information campaign by the new state and its advocates around the world began to be felt, the opinion began to take hold amongst the European public and in the corridors of power that this drama in the heart of Europe urgently needed a political solution. The Brioni Accord, concluded between Slovenia and the Yugoslav Federation with the good offices of the European Union on 7 July 1991, imposed a three-month moratorium on independence, during

which time the two sides were to engage in intensive negotiations. But because a majority of Serbia's ruling elite believed they would be better able to achieve their goals—namely, an expansion of Serbia's borders—within a smaller state, Slovenia's path to independence was in fact reopened sooner than that. The armed forces controlled by Belgrade withdrew from Slovenia on 25–26 October 1991. By that time the federal armed forces were committed to pursuing the Serbian leadership's political goals.

In early 1992 the existence of independent Slovenia, which had introduced its own currency on 8 October 1991, was recognized by the member states of the European Union with Germany as its chief advocate in the forefront. But the slow process of ratifying a constitution, which had originally been intended as Slovenia's formal farewell to Yugoslavia but in the event did not take place until 23 December 1991, gave proof that the popular unity that had characterized the country during its defense against Belgrade's armed aggression against it was more a result of the enemy's actions than a natural state. The same also applied to politics in general and the Demos coalition, which underwent mounting upheavals as the prime minister, Lojze Peterle, tried to replace his successful foreign minister Dimitrij Rupel. In April 1992 the coalition that had been at the forefront of the push for independence was dissolved.

Center stage in the political sphere was now claimed, alongside centrist elements of what had been Demos, by Janez Drnovšek, who had distinguished himself in the reformist wing of the late communist regime as Slovenia's member of the last collective Yugoslav presidency and now became Slovenia's prime minister. The status of his coalition strengthened after the murder of populist politician Ivan Kramberger in June 1992, which a majority of Slovenes thought was insufficiently investigated. From that point on internal affairs and the judiciary were widely perceived to be only superficially beholden to the country's democratic constitutional order. For many, Slovenia began to resemble the Weimar Republic, strongly influenced as it was by deeply rooted structures that had taken shape under the *ancien régime*. According to this view, during the drive for independence certain structures that had their roots in the entrepreneurial wing of the secret police—for which the term *udbomafia* soon gained currency, derived from the acronym of the organization charged with defending the communist hierarchy (UDBA) and the name of the Italian criminal organization—waited for various critical moments to launch campaigns to distort and diminish the space available for legitimate democratic processes to take place. Famously, Milan Kučan even made public mention of these increasingly overt political machinations on 23 February 1994, when he summed them up with the apt formula: First discredit, then eliminate—physically, if need be.

The following month the forces operating in the background along these lines managed to ignite a public dispute between the ministries of

defense and the interior which served as the pretext for dismissing Janez Janša from the government. The celebrated champion of independence who for his supporters had become the very personification of freedom and democracy was perceived by the country's underground structures as its greatest threat, since he had not forgotten the abject role the Slovene secret police had played under the Communist regime. But thanks to prime minister Drnovšek's dedication to a pluralistic society, the forces that put their interests and goals above the law were not able to achieve everything they wanted. Never the less, the power of the structures that saw democracy as just a new environment in which they would have to realize their communist ideas by different means continued to grow. Their symbol was Milan Kučan, who at the time the first democratic constitution was ratified became president of the republic and, thanks to two more electoral mandates, remained in that position until 2002. On the international stage he tried in vain to promote the cause of reconciliation between democrats and communists and, in the process, was instrumental in formulating the notion that the collapse of the Berlin Wall had left rubble cluttering the landscape on both sides. His success was greater on the home front. After his official retirement in 2002 he founded the *Forum 21* network in 2004, which benefited from a massive financial base. Its public relations arm saw to it that Kučan began to be celebrated as the country's "first president," while his earlier role as its last communist dictator apparently evaporated, leaving scarcely a trace.

During his mandates as prime minister (from May 1992 to June 2000, then again from November 2000 to December 2002), Janez Drnovšek managed to limit the impact of Slovenia's underground forces, witness to which were the decisively positive outcomes of referendums on the country's accession to membership in the European Union and NATO in March 2003, which were followed in 2004 by Slovenia's full membership status in both organizations. He failed, however, in his efforts to form a stable liberal political party. It proved impossible to bridge the gulf between those who joined as former members of Demos and those whose careers had their origins in the structures of the communist regime. To top it all off, the voice that emerged as the philosophical advocate of the party fashioning itself as liberal democratic was that of Slavoj Žižek, who had never bothered to conceal his Marxist views. Many perceived him as a kind of party ideologue, perfectly in keeping with the old communist model.

After Drnovšek's election as president of the republic in December 2002, the country's political scene proceeded to polarize as a large share of the electorate got fed up with the rapid proliferation of self-appointed forces of continuity. The liberal democratic party veered to the left, leaving the center open for Janez Janša, who succeeded in transforming the previously weak social democratic organization into a moderately right-wing political movement, which then rapidly proceeded to gain ground, thanks to its new, solid organizational structure and dense network of operatives throughout

Slovenia. With that base of support, he celebrated the party's victory in the fall 2004 parliamentary election and formed a government that saw Slovenia through a period of economic growth during which the standard of living approached the EU average. In January 2007 the country adopted the euro as its currency and in December of the same year entered the Schengen zone.

The major successes of the Janša government's policies triggered a ruthless media campaign on the left, which helped the boundlessly ambitious Danilo Türk to victory in the autumn 2007 presidential election. Once in office, Türk proved to be the most publicly partisan incumbent of the otherwise non-partisan presidency in the history of independent Slovenia. His performance in office, which didn't shy away from expressions of disdain at citizens with different priorities from his own, confirmed U.N. secretary general Kofi Anan's critical assessment of him.

Even before it began, Slovenia's successful term during the first half of 2008 as president of the Council of Europe became the target of a mudslinging campaign by politically partisan journalists. But the media companies they represented eventually began to lose market share due to the one-sidedness of their reporting, which created an opening for media advancing contrary viewpoints. In this way the media landscape also became sharply polarized, much to the detriment of a healthy political dialog and exchange of ideas. Once its endless besmirching of its competitors' undeniable achievements proved fruitless, the left resorted to yet more extreme measures. After the left-leaning media began predicting "Kučan's big bang**"** and shortly before the September 2008 parliamentary election, news of a huge scandal involving the purchase of armored vehicles broke in the press. Although the people most directly responsible for concluding the deal were never accused of anything, following a trial whose verdict was voided on subsequent appeal, the prime minister was sentenced to a short term in prison. The scandal and show trial had been designed to intimidate the public by showing them that the shadowy forces permeating the country would stop at nothing and no one in their quest for power. Behind this maneuver was a sly calculation that provoking the radicalization of the right would make it unpalatable to most of the population, thus smoothing the way for untroubled rule by the left.

But the government that Borut Pahor formed after a sweeping victory of the left in the 2008 election had few successes to show for itself. It began its work amid a rapidly worsening economic crisis which it proposed to solve with additional public debt, but the depression went on for too long for that remedy to work. The ideological aggression of the leftist regime revealed itself in intrusions into the creative sphere by two government ministers—for culture and internal affairs—that returned Slovenia to the days of the communist-directed production and valorization of literature which even reform-minded communists had renounced in the last years of the old

regime. This marked the start of a repoliticization of the cultural sphere that had a deleterious effect on critical standards. Science was confronted with a similar threat when the advocates of left ideology began to practice what would prove to be permanent eliminationist interventions against advocates of apolitical research. As disastrous for the government was their attempt at a settlement with Croatia on the disputed southwestern border, which ultimately did nothing to resolve the problem it had been designed to address.

Ultimately, no less a figure than Milan Kučan had to speak out against the failed leadership of prime minister Pahor, who to the end remained unable to find his equilibrium as the standard-bearer of antagonistic policies that were alien to his temperament, and the tensions within the left coalition only worsened after that. The various liberal factions within the government took to blaming each other, with the result that Gregor Golobič, the most capable protégé of Janez Drnovšek, who had died in 2008, left politics for good. The left tried to fill the void in the center with the hyperactive mayor of Ljubljana, Zoran Janković, whose populist political party Positive Slovenia had won a plurality of votes in the early parliamentary election of December 2011 but proved incapable of forming a new ruling coalition. As a result, Janez Janša succeeded in forming a cabinet, although his party had shifted much farther to the right than it had been during his 2004–2008 mandate. With ample help from the media, the leftists, who by now were shameless in their exercise of canceling tactics, organized violent demonstrations against him and the mayor of Maribor, Franc Kangler. The unrest spooked the Citizens' Slate, one of the Janša coalition's smaller parties, which left Janša's second government along with the party of pensioners and in early 2013 joined the government of Alenka Bratušek. The new prime minister also assumed the leadership of Positive Slovenia when its founder, Janković, proved incapable of explaining the source of his personal fortune to anyone's satisfaction. Although the new ministerial team was able to ward off the threat of EU intervention in the management of Slovenia's finances, they didn't succeed in coaxing an upturn out of the country's failing economic indicators. When Janković returned to lead his party in May 2014, Bratušek stepped down as prime minister. However, in the parliamentary election that followed in July, the newly formed Party of Miro Cerar (PMC) outperformed expectations and only later, once in power, declared itself to be a centrist, free-market political formation (Party of the Modern Center). Its name aside, the party pursued a left-leaning agenda marked by distancing the country from NATO and curtailing involvement in European affairs. That this was no short-term anomaly grew evident with an upsurge of initiatives to expand relations with the Russian Federation, a turn that suited the influential members of Kučan's Forum 21. By contrast, the dynamic former prime minister Borut Pahor hewed a genuinely centrist, Europe-oriented agenda that brought him a decisive victory in the 2012 election for president of the republic against the hide-bound leftist Danilo

Türk. In 2017, thanks to his gift for transcending Slovenia's traditional divisions, Pahor won a second term, despite Milan Kučan's energetic opposition. His symbolic normalization of relations with neighboring Italy, the result of the relationship of trust that he developed with the country's president Sergio Mattarella, was particularly significant.

Throughout the time of the court trials of Janša and Kangler, during which it was all but impossible for either politician to fulfill the duties of office or conduct an electoral campaign, it took relatively little for the left to rack up successes. At the same time, the left faced no imperative to renew itself and the banner of European social democracy grew tattered from the party's incessant pursuit of the old Communist regime's eliminationist tactics. This had a disastrous effect on the norms of political behavior. People who were genuinely concerned about the future grew disillusioned with and abandoned careers in public life amid the left's incessant enforcement of its intellectual orthodoxy and harping on divisions from the past. Many also emigrated from Slovenia, since everything of any importance was obviously being decided by people whom Borut Pahor and the left-leaning but otherwise independent minister of agriculture Dejan Židan would refer to as the "sugar-daddies in the wings," though they themselves because of the limited scope of their powers could do little to counteract them.

The government of Miro Cerar, whose time in office coincided with an international economic boom, was unstable and did not survive its full term. In the 2018 election, Cerar's party was trounced by Janša's Slovenian Democratic Party and the newly formed Marjan Šarec Ballot. The latter's namesake, a popular radio actor, comedian, and impressionist who could boast neither the decisiveness nor the charisma of a Ronald Reagan, at length managed to patch a fragile government together. His cabinet consisted mainly of minority party members and was dependent on help from the far left, which pushed many ideas of the non-democratic Communist regime. As a result, the government pursued ideologically contradictory policies. Companies partly owned by the government were openly called on to refuse to advertise in media outlets critical of the regime. In science, research proposals that didn't suit the government's ideological preferences were routinely rejected.

But with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caught the ideologically racked country unprepared, the far left withdrew its support, causing a political crisis. On 27 January 2020, Marjan Šarec stepped down as prime minister, assuming that an early election was inevitable. But not all parliamentary members of his coalition went with him. The looming health crisis demanded decisive leadership. The party founded by Miro Cerar, now under the leadership of the proven economist Zdravko Počivalšek, steered a pragmatic course and joined the party of pensioners in forming a coalition under the leadership of Janez Janša. The ever more right-leaning orientation of his party had opened enough space for its new moderate partners to

distinguish themselves, although propagandistic media outlets ferociously attacked them for abandoning what until then had been their foregone allegiance to the political left.

With characteristic energy, Janša, the first politician in Slovenia's history to form three governments at widely spaced intervals, began dealing with the hardships facing ordinary people while simultaneously intercepting the flak directed at him by hostile propaganda outlets and openly countering them. Despite the constant protests that leftist members of parliament and, later, even Milan Kučan participated in, under Janša's leadership the state effectively managed the first wave of the pandemic. Once it subsided, the government also launched some large-scale infrastructure projects and brought the country back into alignment with the EU, something that the Cerar and Šarec regimes had neglected. Unemployment gradually dropped to historically low levels. This success buoyed the Janša government through to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of independence and a second half-year term presiding over the Council of Europe. In this capacity it also successfully revived Europe's dialog with the more southerly countries of ex-Yugoslavia, though it was unable to reduce tensions between a majority of the EU's member states on the one hand and Poland and Hungary on the other.

Multiple times the parliamentary opposition overtly pushed back against attempts to limit the spread of COVID-19. Despite the extremes of the rhetoric they employed, the essence of which was that the political forces supporting the government's methods were in violation of the constitution and verged on fascist and Nazi, those efforts proved ineffective. Although they projected their message in a media style that even the Hollywood dream factory would have approved, and determinedly tried to exert influence through their representatives in the European Parliament, they were unable to form an effective front against Janša's ministerial team. Opponents of COVID-19 vaccinations protesting on the streets had a far greater impact, as did the constitutional court—the majority of whose members were jurists elected to their seats under left-wing regimes—which invalidated one after the other the government's measures, even though they were identical to those adopted in other EU member states. By November 2021 the absolute death toll in Slovenia had reached 5,000, in some months leading to a net decline in population and clearly demonstrating that in thirty years the country's mentality was still far from converging with that of Western Europe. Amongst many Slovenes, science, which under communism had been subject to heavy ideological constraints, still did not command the least respect, but was viewed as just one of many other domains that were subject to political whims. In this respect Slovenia resembled many other countries to the east of the classical European West in which Marxist ideology had been treated as science. A number of academics also adhered to that same epistemological legacy, finding ample time in a national emergency to

publicly politicize the issue, but none to actually contribute to solving it. Similarly partisan intellectuals and jurists showed no apparent qualms about the endless threats and incitements to murder health care workers who carried out their duties in accordance with government-issued precautions.

On the other hand, despite the atmosphere of panic and distrust sown by the media, the crisis caused by COVID-19 led to an upsurge of non-political cooperation amongst people irrespective of ideological divides. Many people refused to succumb to the televised talking heads constantly straining themselves to exhaustion about one and the same thing and found ways to actively help their fellow citizens. In doing so they repeatedly crossed even the most obdurate barriers between people in initiatives that were for the most part deliberately ignored by the media's politicized outlets. Others stuck to the old formulas of polarization, the struggle for power and self-aggrandizement in the midst of a misfortune that affected all.

Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts

translated by Michael Biggins

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