

SLOVENIA AND CENTRAL EUROPE'S MARCH TOWARDS THE EU: THE RESTRICTIVE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN GREAT POWERS

Dimitrij Rupel

1.0 Problems of the European Union

1.1 Modernism and self-determination

On one hand, the modern spirit of freedom, democracy and self-determination brought an end to European empires (Austrian, German, Ottoman, for example), transformation of colonial superpowers (Great Britain and France) into "normal" European nations, and the birth of new, free nations that had been "hidden" under foreign names, foreign imperial and colonial rulers. Slovenia joined the group of free nations as recently as 1991, at the time of decline of some of the last European imperial, colonial powers (the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia).

On the other hand, modernism encouraged cultural and ideological conflicts over the establishment of new value systems. The dominant "religions" of these conflicts, the new substitutes for, or additives to, the old creed, were fascism and communism. During all this, Europe has undergone substantial loss of power and self-destruction. As Curt Gasteyger has put it, "After the First World War and even more so after the Second, Europe became the very symbol and incarnation of Oswald Spengler's somber prediction of the 'decline of the Occident.'"¹

1.2 Strength through integration

After the Second World War, the membership of the club of the great world powers changed considerably. In spite of their losses and due to their great physical (territorial, energy and human) reserves, the

¹ Curt Gasteyger, *An Ambiguous Power: The European Union in a Changing World: Strategies for Europe* (Gutersloh: Bertelsmann Foundation, 1996) 29.

U.S. and the Soviet Union were the evident winners. After having lost their great-power status and their individual memberships to the Americans and Russians, the older European powers such as Germany, France and Great Britain began their integration into the EU.

Most historians and political scientists have viewed the issue of further EU integration in the context of global economic and military domination and competition.² If the EU does not “pull itself together,” according to them, it will lag behind the other great powers, and, logically, lose its position in the world. Europe or the EU, according to this view, will be able to fulfill its leading role in the world, and be able to continue competing with the rest of the world, if it grows together, abandons internal hostilities and differences, and overcomes existing nationalisms.³

At the beginning, and naturally so, the issue of overcoming nationalism(s), and especially reconciliation of historical European antagonists Germany and France was emphasized as the ideological foundation of the EU. But economic aspects were the real determinants.

Integrated into the EU, European nations would be able to compete with the new and emerging superpowers such as the U.S., the Soviet Union, Japan, the ASEAN group and China. The strength of the European nations could compare with that of other world leaders only if they united in the EU. Only the EU as a whole, not individual European

² For example, Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers and Preparing for the Twenty-First Century: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987).

³ Paul Kennedy writes:

If Europe is to recover the relative importance in the world it possessed around 1900, it must avoid wars among its member states, harmonize economic practices, and evolve common policies, including foreign and defense policies. Much as they have tried, individual European nations have not been able to recover their former international position. Only by coming together can they create a bloc of European peoples, more prosperous and perhaps even more powerful than any other state in the world. At present Europe is a long way from such a vision...

Preparing for the Twenty-First Century (New York: Random House, 1993) 257.

countries, could play a world role. The idea of Maastricht, with its demands for a monetary union, for a common defense and foreign policy, accords with this observation.

From the beginning of the EU, the processes of integration were accompanied by debates on eventual restrictions on members' sovereignty. By the time integration reached the Maastricht level, debates grew more aggressive and critical—within the member states and in particular within newcomer states. In some cases (e.g., Norway and Switzerland) the number of Euro-sceptics prevented their countries from joining the EU. Some countries could absorb or neglect criticisms because they could somehow “trade” their sovereignty for financial support from Brussels. Others did not really expect the Maastricht system to work. Some expected a redefinition of the system. The situation was not easy because of the following contradiction:

1. The global economy, with its communications and financial revolutions has triggered social, political and economic processes such as rationalization, integration, unification, concentration and centralization. After the demise of the communist system, we could envisage the advent of a “borderless world,” to use Paul Kennedy's phrase. Under these circumstances, local and even national governments would increasingly cede control of their economic destinies. One could ask whether a nation of states, i.e., a multi-state nation (such as the United States of America) would be an appropriate and borderless enough context when the sense of national products and even economies is disappearing.⁴ Likewise, in the EU, the integration processes have produced some irreversible institutional changes and accomplishments.

2. On the other hand, Europeans have been socialized to appreciate their nationality or ethnicity and their nation-state as the primary locus of their identity. The complex and uneasy identity of individual nations has become part of the European mentality and, paradoxically, of European identity itself. Even if there seems to be no realistic alternative to a continuation of the processes of integration, no one seriously proposes that the EU follow the U.S. model. The most radical solutions might cast the EU not as a nation-state but as a multinational

⁴ Kennedy (1993) 122–134.

state. The problem here is the ignoble fate of former multinational states such as Austria-Hungary, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.⁵

1.3 “Widening” and “deepening”

The directions and mechanisms of integration raise other, related problems. Sometimes it seems that the main issue for the EU is how far—as concerns borders and membership—it should expand. Shall there be fifteen, twenty or, perhaps, twenty-five EU members? And what should be the extent of integration, interconnectedness and unification among members? These issues are popularly termed “widening” and “deepening.” Underlying these questions, other proposals and processes have developed. The German CDU platform entitled the “Schauble Paper,” foresaw and proposed separate, “fast-track” development of a core group consisting of Benelux, France and Germany, and a slower pace for nations such as Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain. On the other hand, France has a special interest in the Mediterranean countries; Great Britain insists on broader and more extensive Atlantic cooperation; while Germany, in its own supplementary policy, suggests rapprochement with the East-Central European countries and even Russia.

The EU is a very attractive option for, in particular, the Central and Eastern European countries. Most of these do not see the EU as an exclusively economic opportunity, but also as an effective guarantor and or protection against various authoritarian threats from countries farther east or southeast of them. The Central and East European countries want, *tout court*, to join Europe. While at times some member countries, like Great Britain and the Scandinavian countries, have regretted their memberships, the Eastern and Central Europeans are the true believers in the EU. One of the rare Western countries sharing this enthusiasm is Umberto Bossi’s Padania. The Northern League, too, wants to join Europe—or, rather, its Franco-German-Benelux core. Not only the Eastern Europeans, but also the Italian “Padanians” have spoken about joining Europe and about the danger of being left behind. The paradox is that Italy, which includes Padania, is already a member, while the real issue seems to be competition and differentiation within the EU.

⁵ Cf. Kennedy (1993) 122–134.

1.4 New disintegration of Europe?

The dominant topic of European discussions has been the urge and potential to fulfill the Maastricht criteria. The European countries group and divide themselves according to their actual and expected performance regarding political, economic, financial and monetary discipline.

The proclaimed "division" of Italy into its northern (Padania) and southern (Roman) parts may be one of the most important recent historico-political events on the continent, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. This is true even today, when we see that an actual separation of north and south did not take place, and when many observers believe that Bossi has failed. Some have compared the secessionist trend in Northern Italy to the independence movements in Croatia and Slovenia. Others have responded that the nations concerned were Italy, Slovenia and Croatia, that there was no Yugoslav or Padanian nation, and that therefore the Padanian attempt lacked the legitimacy of the Croatian and Slovene movements. If we wanted to draw a comparison with America, disregarding the aspect of scale, Mr. Bossi's movement has more in common with the American secession (and civil) war between North and South than with the earlier American drive for independence from England.

Different comparisons and criteria notwithstanding, in most cases the nation (Latin *natio*, Greek *ethnos*, Slovene *narod*) is the central (and not unproblematic) element, and the unit of construction and deconstruction of modern integrations and disintegrations. There are nations made up of states (e.g., the U.S.) and states made up of nations (e.g., Belgium, Bosnia, Canada, Russia, Spain, Switzerland and Yugoslavia). Stability and longevity of nations seems to exceed that of states.⁶ This conclusion should lead us to the investigation of the

⁶ See Dimitrij Rupel, *Čas politike* (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1994); Dimitrij Rupel et al., eds., *Slovenska smer* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1996), as well as Jacques Rupnik, *Le dechirement des nations* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1995) and Georg Brunner, *Nationality Problems and Minority Conflicts in Eastern Europe: Strategies for Europe*, rev. ed., trans. Gabriele Schroers (Gutersloh: Bertelsmann Foundation, 1996). Both Rupnik and Brunner write about the distinction between the "state nation" and the "cultural nation."

modern multi-state, multi-national, supra-national and international organizations.

What really happened in Italy was a dramatic act of application and also misrepresentation of the “competition-or-lagging-behind issue” mentioned at the outset. The leader of the Northern League, Bossi, has stated that Italy as a whole (with its less developed economy and criminality in the South) was not capable of joining the European “core nations.” If the North did not secede and did not become Padania, it would have to share the destiny of the “second-rate EU members” such as Greece, Portugal and Spain; it would not be able to take part in the new global race, and it would start to regress economically and politically. This line of argumentation is dangerous not only to the unity of Italy but also to the EU system as a whole.

1.5 The exceptions

On one hand, the Italian case is not unique; on the other, the EU does not fully respect its own rules regarding the rights and qualifications of European countries as far as accession to the union is concerned. Even in the EU, the national or ethnic principle has defeated the state principle. An existing German state was not allowed to continue its life separately from the German nation, and in Italy a new Italian state independent from the rest of the Italian nation could not be created. The German East (GDR) is in the same position as the Italian South, while Padania is similar to Western Germany. Likewise, Greece, Ireland, Portugal and even Spain have lagged behind EU core “regions.” Many questions arise in this respect. The GDR, the economic and political performance of which has resembled if not been inferior to that of Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia, did not have to wait in the “association waiting room” of the EU. It was not even invited to join the EU but was immediately included. Some European countries (e.g., the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia) which outperform certain EU members in meeting membership criteria are denied membership on the basis of lengthy and complicated entrance procedures.

Some have argued that the EU should not have recognized the new states of Croatia and Slovenia. By its recognition (but not yet co-optation) of these states, the EU acted logically and, consequently, it respected the national or ethnic principle, as in the cases of Germany

and Italy. (Americans, who often confuse nations and states, in 1992 recognized two nation-states, Croatia and Slovenia, and one multinational state, Bosnia-Herzegovina, which “preserved” in itself the problem that brought down Austria-Hungary and Yugoslavia; the U.S., perhaps, believed that it sued the same standard in all three cases, which is not true.)

The EU acted correctly and logically in the cases of recognition, maintenance and enforcement of the national principle, but it did not act as logically in the cases of new members.

1.6 Regionalism

The concept of region (applied in phenomena and processes such as regionalism and regional cooperation) implies a certain ambiguity: it means identity, proximity and connection of smaller or larger territories. So, on the one hand, a country can be divided into regions, but regions can also transcend country borders and, in certain cases, encompass more countries or parts thereof.

In Slovenia, for example, there is a region called Styria with its regional capital Maribor; Austria also has a region of the same name with its capital Graz. Under Austria-Hungary, these two regions with many similarities but different languages—Slovene and German—were one. Later, wars altered national borders while their nationalist and ideological fallout alienated the two parts of the region. More recently, trans-border, regional cooperation has developed between Graz and Maribor which sometimes exceeds the degree of cooperation between Maribor and Ljubljana (i.e., between different regions within the same state). The same is true of other, mainly contiguous regions of Europe, especially those that have shared important historical, cultural and economic experiences. The role of regional identities appears to be growing. In the cases of multinational states and along the borders of states that are not the exclusive domains of one national or ethnic group, the regions may be(come) substitute nations.

Regions need not be ethnically-based. They may just characterize some geographical, economic or cultural proximity; for instance, the Baltic region, the Scandinavian region, the Balkans, the Alpine region, the Mediterranean region, and so forth.

Regional identities inside the EU may develop much better because no borders will stand in the way of regional cooperation. In a borderless Europe, all cooperation will evolve within the same system. This will be of particular importance for the national minorities (e.g., Slovene minorities in Italy, Austria and Hungary; Italian minorities in Slovenia and Croatia; the Austro-German minority in Italy; the German minority in the Czech Republic, and so forth).

Regions serve not only integration but also division and categorization. Several years ago Zbigniew Brzezinski divided Europe into three "regions": Europe I, Europe II and Europe III.⁷ Of late another division, one that takes into account the fulfillment of the Maastricht criteria, has been introduced. In the first "region," the full members will differ according to their degree of adherence to the criteria, while in the second "region" the associate members will be distinguished as parties nearer or farther from full EU membership. The closest "sub-region" in this category seems to be the CEFTA group less Slovakia (i.e., the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia). Some new regions or, perhaps, zones of interest, running transversely with or without regard to the regions already mentioned, are in view depending upon the outcome of various processes, treaties, deals and combinations. The French "region" may comprise some North African countries; the Italian "region" may wish to extend itself across Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary and Ukraine; the German "region" may include Poland and the Czech Republic. With further integration of Europe and the EU, the cooperation between members and non-members could become more difficult, and "regional cooperation" might serve as a consolation for the non-members.

1.7 National and party identification

At present, the EU is still predominantly a coalition of fifteen nation-state governments. The decision makers in the organs of the EU still act in the name and in the best interests of the countries and governments they represent: The nation-state principle is yet the dominant principle of EU decision making processes, which are more or less negotiations between member states. In these negotiations, the representatives of the national governments in the European Council

⁷ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Out of Control: Global Turmoil on the Edge of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Scribner, 1993).

and in the Commission promote, protect and reconcile the interests of member states.

In the European Parliament and in several parliamentary bodies and assemblies of or close to the EU, political parties and their trans-national organizations have started to play a more important role. Party coalitions are slowly replacing the coalitions of national leaderships—in the elections of highly-placed officials, in shaping foreign and defense policy and elsewhere. One can foresee situations in which party alliances could overpower state alliances; when, for example, instead of a Franco-German or Italo-British coalition, a socialist-conservative or liberal-socialist coalition could prevail. This development does not only upset the established “regions” within the EU but also represents a further challenge to newcomers, who might consider organizing themselves according to the international and especially European party affiliations and their rules. This development would bring the EU to resemble a complex multiparty organization in which nation-states and their possible coalitions have a secondary role.

2.0 Problems of the non-EU European countries

2.1 Summary

We have observed the rational motives and mechanisms for further integration of the EU. The European nations must join forces to grow faster and to compete in the global economy. So far, the EU has, besides economic and materialist motives, asserted cultural and non- or post-materialist principles.⁸ The EU provided enough space for the assertion of distinct national identities. The EU-associated European countries such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia seem to have no reservations regarding the economic and security advantages of EU membership. The economic and security goals of the non-EU Europeans are the same as those of EU Europeans. But Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, Slovenes and other future members require special assurances that the EU will remain a safe place for their

⁸ See Ronald Inglehart, “Postmaterialist Values and the Erosion of Institutional Authority,” in ed. Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Philip D. Zelikow and David C. King, *Why People Don't Trust Government* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997); *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990).

identities—that is, the identities of smaller Slavic nations. Until recently, the EU has had no direct experience with Slavic nations and languages. At times some non-EU, Central or East Europeans give the impression that they would be prepared to trade their culture for their security and economic prosperity. This is certainly a mistaken impression; it is precisely the Central and Eastern Europeans who are sensitive about their cultures, which in the past have served as the privileged if not the only vehicles for asserting national identity. The EU treatment of these specific cultures should be especially careful.

2.2 Characteristic attitudes towards the EU in Slovenia

Article 68 of the 1991 Slovene constitution precludes foreigners from acquiring “ownership rights to land holdings, except by inheritance on the condition of reciprocity.” The logic behind this provision has been that as a rather small country, Slovenia must protect its land and especially those parts of it that are vital to the country’s safety, cultural and ethnic being. This concern was natural and evident to everybody in 1991. The foreigners Slovenes feared were not any Europeans but other Yugoslavs.

In recent years, primarily due to pressures from the Italian government of Silvio Berlusconi, the Slovene debate on this constitutional provision has been heated. At one time, it seemed that on the Italian side there was an enormous interest in purchasing Slovene lands, thereby accomplishing with money what was not possible by occupation during the Second World War. On the other hand, EU negotiators warned the Slovene leadership that the Slovene constitutional formula was an exception insofar as it discriminated against foreign citizens. Other countries protected parts of their territories but they protected them against all abuse, foreign and domestic. The EU was willing to go on with the Europe Agreement for Slovenia only if its government gave the EU assurances that it would amend article 68: Slovene legislation should regulate land ownership rights in such a way as to be compatible with the legislation of other European countries. The Slovene government promised to see to this change on 30 September 1994.

On that same date, the opposition parties, some members of the government coalition, the media, several civic organizations, some members of the constitutional court and even the Slovene branch of the

Pan-European movement started a campaign against the European policies of the government. The chief slogan of this campaign was, Let Us Protect the Sacred Slovene Land against European and Especially Italian Territorial Claims!

On 26 March 1996 the then Slovene foreign minister, Zoran Thaler, in a rather controversial address to the parliament, gave the following explanation:

European reality demands of the Republic of Slovenia that it harmonize its own property and other legislation with the European example in such a way as to introduce the principle of reciprocity and allow free movement of people, ideas, goods and capital... Only if it will respect this principle will Slovenia be able to join the EU on equal terms.⁹

The minister also rejected the prepared draft of the (parliamentary) resolution that sought to avoid clear language regarding a constitutional amendment. The text of the proposed resolution implied that the property legislation would be changed in accordance with the Slovene constitution, not European standards.

In the end, the parliament, on 11 April 1996, accepted the government's position and adopted the document called "Positions and Decisions Concerning the Relations of the Republic of Slovenia with the European Union, Italy and NATO." The document stated:

The national assembly notes that one of the essential conditions of membership in the European Union is a liberalized property market. Pursuant to this fact, the national assembly expresses its willingness to liberalize the property market of the Republic of Slovenia.

The national assembly authorizes the government to sign the European Agreement on the basis of positions of the European Union expressed in the conclusions of the Madrid

⁹ "Govor ministra za zunanje zadeve Republike Slovenije Zorana Thalerja na izredni seji Državnega zbora R. Slovenije o zunanji politiki dne 26. marca 1996," available in the minutes of the session of Državni zbor Republike Slovenije of 26 March 1996. This speech contributed to the dismissal of the minister a few weeks later.

European Council and in the respective resolution of the European Parliament.

The government of the Republic of Slovenia, by its proposal to amend the constitution of the Republic of Slovenia, already submitted to the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, has clearly expressed its readiness to harmonize Slovene legislation with the legislation of the European Union member states.¹⁰

In July 1996, very much in the spirit of the election campaign,¹¹ a group of Reform-Communist, Conservative and Nationalist members of parliament signed the "Declaration on the European Policy of the Republic of Slovenia."¹² Their text begins by "cautioning against the misguided policy whereby in securing Slovenia's early incorporation into the European Union all and any conditions will be accepted..." It contains some interesting positions:

"...V. Prior to the complete deregulation of the real estate market, the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia shall pass protective legislation.

VI. The issue of ownership rights on land holdings is particularly sensitive for Slovenia. In its negotiations over the conclusion of an agreement on full membership in the European Union, Slovenia shall endeavor to secure the possibility of applying regulations in order to protect vital interests relating to this issue.

VII. The government of the Republic of Slovenia shall consult with parliamentary parties on each step that might signify an encroachment on or interference in the existing rights and obligations of Slovenia towards the European Union...

VIII. In its incorporation into the European Union Slovenia shall devote particular attention to agriculture, since this

¹⁰ Letter from the speaker of the National Assembly (Državni zbor) of the Republic of Slovenia, Jožef Školč to the government, 11 April 1996, no. 007-01/89-1/43.

¹¹ Parliamentary elections were scheduled for 10 November 1996.

¹² Signatories included Borut Pahor, France Bučar, Jože Jagodnik, Tone Peršak, Ljerka Bizilj, Danica Simšič, Janez Jug, Leo Šešerko, Metka Karner Lukač, Dušan Bavdek, Ciril Ribičič, Polonca Dobrajc, Rafael Kužnik, Maria Pozsonec, Miloš Pavlica and Andrej Lenarčič.

cannot be dealt with simply as a component of the market economy...

2.3 The "honest and upright" men and women

Among Slovene conservatives, but also among former communists, the feeling that the Liberal-Christian Democrat government's position towards the EU was too "soft" has been widespread. Conservatives have presented their views as those of "honest and upright" [] people who defend the Slovene homeland, while they portrayed others as servants of foreign interests, unscrupulous merchants of the national heritage. There have been many sincere opponents of the Slovene approach to the EU, and there have been political manipulators; what has confused the debate is the reluctance of many participants to consider the question from the perspective of the EU. The main question, unfortunately, was whether the EU would be willing to accept new members, how many and at what pace?

2.4 The October European Declaration

On 7 October 1996, another European declaration was presented to the Slovene public. Its authors and first signatories formulated a positive, unequivocally pro-European political message which opens with the statement, "the guarantee of a successful future, development and security of Slovenia lies in the European Union."¹³ The declaration emphasizes the economic, security and also cultural advantages of Slovene membership in the EU. The declaration expresses no fear of Slovenia's sale: "Without an adequate European foreign policy," it states,

freedom, welfare and culture would be endangered in Slovenia. Our relations would become provincial, self-sufficient and

¹³ "Evropska izjava" (The European Declaration) was first presented at the National Convention of Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS), in Ljubljana. It was composed and signed by the leaders of the party and by a number of independent intellectuals: Janez Drnovšek, Dimitrij Rupel, Zoran Thaler, Davorin Kračun, Bojko Bučar, Marjan Šetinc, Jadranka Šturm Kocjan, Tine Hribar, Ivan Svetlik, Slavoj Žižek, Dušan Keber, Marko Crnkovič, Darko Štrajn, Roman Jakič and Drago Zajc.

primitive. Without excellent representatives of Slovene national interests abroad and without European standards at home, we would regress culturally and politically...

2.5 Brussels or Belgrade?

Slovenia has lived and survived in multinational arrangements. Austria and Yugoslavia have not adequately defended Slovene national interests, which was one of the main reasons for the drive for independence. The EU represents a new challenge, according to some the greatest to date. The independence Slovenes now enjoy is proof that no multinational context has so far destroyed Slovene national identity. Conservatives say that the European context under the leadership of Brussels could be the fatal blow, and that Slovenes should rather preserve what they have. Modernists, on the other hand, argue that there is no indication or danger of a demise of Slovene culture. They do not expect that Brussels could change what previous conditions have not: If Slovenes have survived a Serb-dominated Yugoslavia, they should be able to survive in the EU.

Univerza v Ljubljani

POVZETEK

SLOVENIJA IN EVROPSKA UNIJA

V članku avtor obravnava globalne dejavnike, ki spodbudajo in zavirajo slovensko vključenje v Evropsko unijo v poznih devetdesetih letih. Poglavitni dejavniki so gospodarske in narodnostne sile, ki so vplivale na evropske odnose od konca kolonialne dobe in druge svetovne vojne. Avtor ocenjuje slovensko članstvo v EU z vidika vodilnih evropskih držav in slovenskih politikov pa tudi glede na sekundarne dejavnike, kot je npr. regionalizem. Članek se končuje z mislijo, da je v slovenski politiki razpravo o članstvu v EU mogoče razložiti kot spopad med konservativci, ki se bojijo za slovensko identiteto, in modernisti, ki ne vidijo takšne nevarnosti.