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SLOVENIA: FROM COMMUNISM TOWARD DEMOCRACY, 1980–2000

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Introduction: Period before 1980

The Slovene body politic is faced with two basic problems in modern history, the issue of democracy and the national issue, the latter of which political elites usually foreground. The Slovene citizenry has only partially defined democracy, the development of which has been characterized by mutual intolerance and the exclusion of those with different political opinions.[1] The position of the Slovene nation during periods of state formation was usually evaluated "in retrospect" from the standpoint of current political needs, while the new system was at the same time euphorically praised. This was how after World War I, Austria suddenly became "the jail of nations," even in the eyes of Slovene politicians and intellectuals who, only a few years prior, claimed loyalty to it. After World War II, a similar fate befell the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Naturally, after the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia, a negative thought pattern developed concerning the

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1 The Slovene political mentality developed its basic elements at the end of the nineteenth century and grew from the fact that opponents have to be either totally subjugated or forced to be part of the national enemies' camp. This remains a basic characteristic in all three political camps (Catholic, liberal and socialist, or communist) throughout the political history of the twentieth century. The exception is the period of attaining independence, during the second half of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. As far as parliamentarism is concerned, only the "fragmentary" development of particular periods from the second half of the nineteenth century onward can be discussed. The Slovene parliament, in the modern sense of the word (with a universal franchise and multi-party system), has been in operation without interruption for only a decade. This has been a time—probably the only one in Slovene history—of "absolute" independence; previously parliament had only local significance or it was subordinate to bodies above the national level. This situation will be repeated once Slovenia is incorporated into the European Union (see: Božo Repe, "Pravne, politične podlage, okoliščine in pomen prvih demokratičnih volitev," Proceedings of Kolokvij Državnega zbora Republike Slovenije: Razvoj slovenskega parlamentarizma, Ljubljana, 9 May 2000 (forthcoming).

former state; which became synonymous with "Balkanism" and "Byzantinism." It was a state that, during its existence, economically and politically limited the Slovenes, preventing political independence and keeping them on unequal cultural footing. This was easy because Yugoslavia was a communist, or rather a socialist, state and thereby an excellent target for double criticism, national as well as ideological.

A number of politicians and intellectuals today are especially concerned by the American understanding of Slovenia's position and role in the region. They see Slovenia as being "pushed" back to the Balkans. It was quite a shock when, early in 1994, President Bill Clinton's special envoy, Madeleine Albright, came to Europe to explain the Partnership for Peace initiative and classified Slovenia as a "Balkan democracy," together with Romania, Bulgaria, and even Albania.[2] Albright later became more careful in her statements, which does not, however, essentially change the global American view they convey(ed). The development of democracy does not always correspond to the current position of the Slovene nation. In fact, it often stands in opposition to progress in resolving the national issue.

Critical assessment of the two problems is slow in forming, and it is even slower in becoming a part of the historical consciousness. Here I refer to the acknowledgement that Slovenes did not only suffer negative effects, but also had historically positive experiences. For example, in the multinational milieu of the Danubian monarchy they were able to form both a regional and national consciousness; Slovenes acquired political culture and, at least in limited form, became accustomed to parliamentarism. They achieved a sort of informal cultural autonomy in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, despite it being centralistic and non-democratic. Communist Yugoslavia rendered it possible for the Primorska (coastal) region (i.e., one-third of the Slovene population and more than a quarter of the territory) to be joined with Slovenia, and Slovenes were given federal status, a constitution, their own national assembly, and other state agencies. Under the specific circumstances of the Communist Party state they also implemented the delayed processes of modernization that former elites either could or would not effect, for example, agrarian reform,

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[2] "Clintonova odposlanka Albrightova v Sloveniji," *Delo* 15 January 1984.

industrialization, separation of church and state, women's emancipation, and a more balanced social structure.[3]

1980–2000

What differentiates the 1980s and the early 1990s from the previous period is the simultaneous implementation of the two processes, the gradual democratization (which ended in the installment of a multi-party system) and the fight for national emancipation (which ended with the formation of the Slovene state).[4] Even so, there were different priorities among the political elites. The League of Communists, for example, was quick to find common ground with the opposition as regarded Yugoslavia, but much slower on the issue of democratization. The majority of alternative movements, including the League of Socialist Youths, placed democratic civil rights before the national issue. The Slovene Democratic Alliance and some other parties assigned the same importance to both issues.[5]

Differences remained even after Demos (democratic opposition) came to power in the spring of 1990. It was evident that a part of the political forces wished primarily to consolidate their position in power and thereby take control over the social capital, while independence would follow later. Nonetheless, it can be presumed that the political tendencies in Slovenia at the time were towards the simultaneous development of both processes. In Yugoslavia, generally speaking, a strong opposition to both processes was discernible. Western

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3 For more on the subject in abridged form, see Božo Repe, "Slovenci v XX.stoletju," *Katalog stalne razstave Muzeja novejše zgodovine v Ljubljani* (Ljubljana, 1999) 19–36.

4 Leopoldina Plut-Pregelj, Aleš Gabrič, and Bočo Repe, *The Repluratization of Slovenia in the 1980s: New Revelations from Archival Materials*, The Donald W. Treadgold Papers 24 (Seattle: The Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington, 2000).

5 *Koga voliti? Programi političnih strank in list na pomladnih volitvah v Sloveniji, Ljubljana, March 1990*, trans. Slavi Krušič (Ljubljana: Jugoslovanski center za teorijo in prakso samoupravljanja Edvard Kardelj, 1990). See also: Danica Fink-Hafner and Berni Strmčnik, ed., *Nastajanje slovenske državnosti* (Ljubljana: Slovensko politološko društvo, 1992).

forces, especially the U.S., supported democratization but were against secession.[6]

The independent Slovene state was a result of political and social changes in the 1980s. These took place in the context of a global crisis of communism, disintegration of the bipolar division of the world, disintegration of the Soviet Union, and a deep political and economic crisis in Yugoslavia, as well as a crisis in the relationships among the different nations within the state. Independence would not have been possible without these external changes and, likewise, the internal process of democratization would have been very different. Incorporated among the basic internal characteristics which Slovenes themselves could influence was a relatively open political scene that enabled an exchange of ideas between those in power and those in opposition, a strong civil society, supremacy of a reformist movement within the Communist Party, and a high level of consent concerning basic national issues. The processes of social democratization and of national emancipation were tightly intertwined. This situation enabled a smooth transition from the one-party to a multi-party system and provided successful grounds for attaining independence. Consensus between the socialist government and the opposition was settled upon through confederate status, a fact that is nowadays all too often forgotten. Even when Demos came to power, the idea that a confederation was the maximum achievement possible under such circumstances did not change.[7] It was only after the Yugoslav National Army attacked Slovenia that the standpoint and situation shifted.

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[6] The U.S. held this position until the final collapse of Yugoslavia, most decisively in the spring of 1991. American Secretary of State James Baker had told Slovene representatives in Belgrade on June 21, 1991, only a few days before the proclamation of Slovene independence, that the U.S. wished to retain the unity of Yugoslavia and that they would not recognize the independence of Slovenia, nor would any other country, and they wished to help with the democratization of Yugoslavia (Note of the discussion between the President of the Presidency of the Republic of Slovenia, Milan Kučan, and James Baker III, Secretary of State of the U.S., Belgrade, June 21, 1991, Arhiv Predsedstva Republike Slovenije; see also Warren Zimmermann: *Origins of a Catastrophe* (New York: Random House, 1996) 71.

[7] Slovenia and Croatia in the second half of the 1990 offered to other republics a concept of confederation, which was refused. That became clear in February 1991. Until then Slovene independence was understood in the

The new political ideology, which developed following the proclamation of independence and is shared by the majority of the political parties, could be labeled "a rush towards Europe." The phenomenon accords with the proverb "more haste, less speed." Characteristically, it presents so-called Europe as an internally undifferentiated notion which can generally be adapted to particular political interests.[8] In this "rush towards Europe" Slovene politicians are, as typically throughout history, overly compliant, even servile, and agree to—albeit questionable—smaller concessions (closing duty-free shops, instating visas for Balkan states) or larger (the so-called Spanish compromise)[9] as signs of "good will." Following the proclamation of

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form of a confederation: at Demos for practical reasons—unpleasant internal and external political circumstances (contrariety to Slovene disassociation which was taken as the secession) in the opposition (former socio-political organizations) because of so-called "yugonostalgia"—they saw in the confederation the optimal solution to preserving ties with Yugoslavia. After February, all political parties agreed that Slovenia would have to become independent from Yugoslavia, but preparations for independence were slow (with exceptions in some areas). There was fear that such a policy might provoke the center to apply repressive measures, the new government was faced with the reality of the economy and was not eager to take any radical steps. There existed the opinion that the new political elite should first consolidate power and intensify political strength by creating an economic base through privatization and denationalization. As late as the end of April 1991 even prime Minister Lojze Peterle was willing to interpret independence in terms of constitutional law instead of its actual implementation. Despite all these doubts and difficulties, on 25 June Slovenia did declare its independence. The intervention of the Yugoslav army homogenized the parties and they were no more willing to stay in Yugoslavia in any form.

8 Following a self-serving principle—for example, educational systems that correspond to a particular line of argumentation.

9 In 1993, Italy, as a condition for not impeding the signing of the Association Agreement between Slovenia and the European Union, demanded different concessions of Slovenia. The key one concerned the property issue of (World War II) Italian refugees from Istria and the Slovene Primorska (coastal) region (this issue being already resolved with Yugoslavia). The direct Italian demands were initially comprised in the so-called Aquileia Agreement, signed by Secretary of State Lojze Peterle, but rejected by the Slovene parliament. In a milder and more general version (the so-called Spanish Compromise, made after the Spanish Intervention), parliament

independence there were continuing shifts in the Slovene political sphere, polarization was re-established, and parties continued to fall apart and merge.[10] This process has been going on for more than a decade. The ten-year economic record demonstrates that, on the whole, Slovenia underwent a successful transition and continues to make progress. This progress comes at the price of increased social differences and unemployment, which results in increased numbers of people, including young educated people,[11] becoming second-rate

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passed the Italian demands in April 1996. Slovenia obligated itself to open the real-estate market after the ratification of the Association Agreement for all EU citizens who had lived in the territory of Slovenia for at least three years (at any time in the past). Even though Prime Minister Janez Drnovšek, as well as President Milan Kučan, interceded on behalf of the Spanish Compromise, they later labeled it as an example of conditioning and extortion (Kučan even did so in his speech before the European Parliament).

10 Inner conflicts between the left and the right wing, regarding primarily the transitional questions of proprietisation and denationalization, led to the disintegration of Demos in December 1991. Janez Drnovšek, as leader of the liberal party, became the prime minister. Socialists and social democrats were discussing a fusion, but Janez Janša put a stop to it. Socialists joined to liberal democracy, also "the greens" and large part of democratic party. Liberal democrats, by making different coalitions on the left and the right, remained in power for almost ten years. In 2000 Slovene Christian Democrats and Social Democrats established a coalition Slovenia and exerted pressure on the People's party to join with the Christian democrats. A merger congress took place , but the former president of the Christian democrats left the party soon and joined Andrej Bajuk's newly established New Slovenia. In the National Assembly passed a vote of no-confidence to the Drnovšek. The new government with the Prime Minister Bajuk (a Slovene from Argentina) endorsed a package of personal changes in the state administration and state companies, which was not met which much approval by the public. After five months elections were won with great advantage by the Liberal Democracy, which returned the post of Prime Minister to Janez Drnovšek.

11 It is becoming harder and harder to obtain a permanent job. One common trend is that employers use student services to employ young educated people, because that is cheaper for them. Students are trying to keep their student status (which provides social and medical insurance and other privileges) as long as possible, and prolong their studies (the average time to degree in Slovenia now is more than six years) or when they finish with one degree, they start with another. This is a way of surviving, but is putting

citizens,[12] as well as producing many other side effects, all augmenting imbalance in the social structure. One of the basic characteristics of Slovene society is the tendency towards "parti-cracy," growing ideological intolerance and, due to the small size of the country, the formation of client groups and clans. The once powerful civic movements have been sucked into the various parties and no longer play an important role.[13] Psychologically, self-assertion, a belief in self-sufficiency and prejudices towards anything different, only became stronger after independence.[14] Another discernible syndrome conditioned by history and arising from the lack of state tradition is "snitching" on the opposing political option abroad and the search for

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young people at a disadvantage: without permanent jobs it is impossible to raise loans, get credit, solve basic housing problem, etc. With the help of such tricks, unemployment in Slovenia is statistically at European levels, but social tensions are growing and social differences are becoming more and more striking.

12 Over 30,000 people from other republics who did not apply for Slovenian citizenship in 1991 were simply erased from the citizenship data basis. They lost all rights, despite the fact that they had lived in Slovenia for years or decades, had families, possessed properties, paid taxes, etc. Some of them were expelled from the country; most had (and still have) problems with jobs, because without citizenship they were not able to give proof of permanent residence in Slovenia.

13 Peace, ecological, feminist and other movements, which in the mid-1980s formed a strong civilian movement in Slovenia in the 1990s disappeared. Their leaders joined different parties. The same was true with the Committee for the Protection of Human Rights, which was formed in June 1988 to protect Janez Janša and three others on trial in the military court in Ljubljana. This committee became the strongest organization of civil society during the so-called "Slovene spring." Several hundred thousand individuals and over a thousand different organizations joined the committee. Members of the collective leadership joined different political alliances (parties) in the first months of 1989, and in April 1990 the Committee formally ceased to exist.

14 It is easy to substantiate through historiography how difficult it was for "the Carniolan mind" to get used to the "different" character of people from the Prekmurje and Primorska regions, which were integrated into Yugoslavia after World War I and II; prejudices and stereotypes about regional affiliations proved to be one of the most persistent elements of the psychosocial make-up of Slovenes.

an external arbiter for internal conflicts. Where Slovene politicians previously turned to Vienna and Belgrade, they now turn to Brussels.[15]

One consequence of the situation within the state was that Slovenes were again faced with dilemmas and situations from the turn of the century or even earlier which it had appeared that they would never have to deal with again. During these periods, such as the Yugoslav or communist periods, they were marginalized. Incorporated among these was the extraordinary persistence of regional identities, which in many ways prevented the development of a nation. At the same time there was a revival of former regional centers beyond the present Republic of Slovenia (Graz, Klagenfurt, Trieste), to which gravitated a large part of the work force from bordering regions, and which had growing importance in education and the economy. Relations between the larger neighboring nations (Germans and Austrians, Italians, Hungarians) and Slovenes, which could be characterized as having been traumatic for centuries, were being established anew (or old models in new disguise).

The transitional character of the country, its economic periphery, the influence of different cultures and a linguistic endangerment seem permanent features in the historical development of Slovenia.[16] This demonstrates that the processes experienced in this state during the last decades are superficial and that the permanent features did not in essence change after attaining independence.

An evaluation of the formation and the ten-year existence of the Slovene state, as well as the democratic processes within, are for the moment only transitional, as were the assessments of past periods. A more objective evaluation can be made once Slovenia is integrated into the European Union. What the integration process contributes and how

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15 The most recent instance, but not the only one, was the pursuit of arbitration before the so-called Venice Commission—the "Democracy through Law" commission of the European Council—concerning the election system just before the elections in October 2000. The conflict was instigated by the prime minister at the time, who did not agree with an otherwise perfectly legal decision of the parliament.

16 Peter Vodopivec, "Glavne poteze in stalnice v slovenskem zgodovinskem razvoju in poskus zgodovinarjevega pogleda v prihodnost," *Slovenija po letu 1995, razmišljanja o prihodnosti*, (Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, 1995) 30–37.

Slovenia will be able to handle the loss of a national state, still enduring its puberty, shall only then be clarified. Doubtless, the Slovene state was a tremendous and necessary historical achievement, especially considering the circumstances in Yugoslavia during the 1980s. Nevertheless, the fact remains that independence has been achieved at a time when the classic national state, based on nineteenth-century patterns of national economy, defense, foreign policy, proper currency, and other attributes ranging to a legitimate aviation company, is in decline in Europe. This is also a time when the (nation) state, at least in the West, is no longer the determining factor in protecting democratic rights. These are becoming universal (correspondingly, the criteria of "non-interference in internal affairs" of a particular country is being abandoned). New solutions are needed for these fresh challenges, although it seems that this type of realization has hardly affected the Slovene social sciences. History is still in great measure evaluated from the viewpoint of a nation state, arising from the belief that the Slovene state should be the ultimate goal of successive Slovene generations, even though historiography does not offer empirical proof for such claims. Historians critical of this sort of approach are labeled as "a-national."[17] This sort of claim is, of course, logical in a political sense, since it offers the possibility of appropriating the so-called "independence capital," be that in an historical sense (demonstrating the "far-sightedness" of particular political forces or individuals in various historical periods) or in view of the current political situation. Scientifically speaking, it is also very convenient as it limits research into the earliest possible "proofs" justifying a Slovene state-forming mentality. There is no need to take much interest in the broader historical context; various sources can be interpreted "in retrospect"; there is no need for comparisons with other and similar nations; and it is possible to avoid confrontation with the determinations of researchers concerned with the social sciences of other nations. However, this only occasions putting off a problem that will have to be faced sooner or later anyway.

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17 The evaluation that there is "an extremely loud and influential a-national movement" present in Slovene scholarship was noted by Stane Grandaš, *Zgodovinski Časopis* 53.4 (1999): 612.

POVZETEK

SLOVENIJA: OD KOMUNIZMA K DEMOKRACIJI

Razprava obravnava slovensko politiko od l. 1980 v luči glavnih zgodovinskih vprašanj za Slovence: narodnost in demokracija. Prevladujoča politična opredelitev do teh vprašanj v 80. letih in po osamosvojitvi je obravnavana glede na mednarodne odnose, posebej z ostalo Evropo in ZDA. Obstajajo različni dolgoročni izzivi slovenski neodvisnosti, ki se postavljajo nad formalno neodvisnost, ki jo je Slovenija dosegla po odcepitvi od Jugoslavije.