

REVIEWS

Erika Harris. *Nationalism and Democratisation: Politics of Slovakia and Slovenia.* Aldershot, Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 2002. 237 pp., £45.00 [= \$72.00] (hardback). ISBN: 0-7546-1890-0.

It is probably fair to say that almost everyone that studies Slovenia has, at one time or another, had to say, “No, not Slovakia, *Slovenia*.” Perhaps to the chagrin of Slovenia’s officials that actively try to differentiate their country from the other Central European “Slo,” Erika Harris’s recent work presents a side-by-side comparison of Slovenia and Slovakia. Like Slovenes and other scholars that study Slovenia, she also makes a strong differentiation between the two.

Concentrating on nationalism’s impact on the promotion of democracy since the development of their respective independent states, Harris analyzes the different paths, successes, and failures of both states. Starting with interesting reflections on nationalism and definitions of democracy, moving on to well-thought-through case studies, and ending with the implications of nationalism to the formation of democratic regimes, *Nationalism and Democratisation: Politics of Slovakia and Slovenia* contributes positively to the slim body of English-language academic publications on Slovene and Slovak politics.

The first two of Harris’s eight chapters are devoted to setting the stage for her subsequent research. The first chapter, on the end of communism in Eastern Europe, will not hold much new for experts that study the region. Harris’s intent, though, is not so much to provide an end-all treatise on nationalism (a voluminous area of study), but rather to

limit her coverage to areas that promote her thesis that the very process of democratizing spurred ethnic nationalism (15). Harris's discussion of nationalism becomes most interesting when she elaborates on communism's legacy as manifested through increased nationalism. She presents a solid argument that communism's attempt to end nationalist sentiment in fact only intensified it. Democracy—communism's East European successor—sometimes served to amplify the pernicious facets of nationalism. The concise chapter 2, entitled "How Compatible are Nationalism and Democracy?", seeks to answer that million-dollar question. I found Harris's discourse engaging and enlightening as she seeks to address this most salient of issues that vexes scholars of both nationalism and democratization. Harris has done a good job in laying out the main foundations of both fields, while ably converging them into a cogent chapter. I would consider strongly using this chapter in any future course on democratization or nationalism, because of its strength and all-encompassing nature. After laying out the conceptual and analytical foundations, Harris applies them fully to Slovenia and Slovakia.

Reading Harris brought back my memories of a graduate history seminar taught by a visiting Slovak supreme court justice, in which Slovak history until the end of the twentieth century was one of a small nation tied to the vicissitudes and whims of other, larger nations. Harris's presentation follows this line of thought. After an overview of the origins and development of the Slovak nation, she concentrates her chapters 3 and 4 on the making of the modern, independent Slovak state. If they were not already apparent, the reader now begins to see some of the obvious parallels between Slovakia and Slovenia that make their pairing interesting: small states, junior partners in a marginally federal system, relative ethnic homogeneity, similar geographic positioning, and a Slavic ethnicity.

Harris asserts that former Slovak president Vladimír Mečiar *per se* was not the cause of Slovakia's political woes of the 1990s, but rather that he was symptomatic of a deeper malaise. Nationalism, in Harris's view, was the root of Slovakia's political cancer in the country's early years of independence. Chapter 3 emphasizes the historical roots of modern Slovakia. Aside from the details included in the chapter, it also provides coverage of the broadest, most relevant historical events. Those already familiar with Slovak history could skim this chapter, perhaps with a closer perusal of the section on Czech and Slovak elites (85–90).

chapter 4 holds the most interest for political scientists. Bolstering her argument that identity-related issues hindered Slovakia's post-communist transition to democracy (97) with interesting evidence and a series of tables, chapter 4 lays out Slovakia's early fumbling with democracy. The chapter's conclusion, though, may leave the reader in doubt as to whether nationalism's influence over Slovak politics is over, or merely in a hiatus in a post-Mečiar honeymoon.

In a logical sequencing from negative to positive, chapters 5 and 6 focus on Yugoslavia and Slovenia, respectively. I found Harris's assertions interesting that the nature of Yugoslavia's breakup was replete with paradox. In an effort to stem nationalism in communist Yugoslavia, policies aimed to increase republican autonomy led to a desire for independence that otherwise might not have manifested itself. Differing levels of development, in turn—in a professed socialist state where all were "equal"—also led to a sense of resentment and increased nationalism. Harris paints a convincing picture demonstrating that the breakup of the Yugoslav federation was inevitable. Harris then enters more familiar territory for scholars of Slovenia. Mirroring the format of her second chapter on Slovakia in this discussion of Slovenia, Harris allows for a fairly easy comparison of the two most relevant sections of her case studies. I found her study of the development of Slovene nationalist sentiment interesting and compelling, but was still left with the nagging question of why nationalism was a positive force in Slovenia's democratization period, and yet had the opposite impact in Slovakia. Harris's final chapter sums up her findings nicely, though, helping explain the differences in development between the two countries (217–18). Her conclusions in chapter 5 on the link between nationalism and democratization in Slovenia present well her overall findings on Slovenia, and her cautionary note on the potential for democracy to suffer future setbacks in Slovenia rounds out her otherwise positive conclusions.

Harris completes her study by discussing the contemporary challenges facing political leaders in moving beyond nationalism's early influences and moving toward a more mutually reinforcing idea of statehood. As states move into an increasingly interdependent world, they no longer have the luxury of complete sovereignty. Nowhere is this more the case than for EU aspirants. Although this is not an observation unique to Harris, her statements are another incentive for Central and Eastern European leaders to stay on their course toward democratic

consolidation. Her compact final chapter on reconciling post-communism, nationalism and democracy is worth a second read. If nationalism can be a universal positive force for change as Harris contends and as Slovenia attests, policymakers can learn from this recent history of transition. If we can mitigate the negative side of nationalism, as was seen in the case of Slovakia, while promoting its positive aspects as witnessed in Slovenia, then there remains a foundation for solid democratic change.

In *Nationalism and Democratization: Politics of Slovakia and Slovenia*, Erika Harris skillfully takes the reader from a broad beginning of a discussion of nationalism and democracy, moves through a theoretical application to Slovakia and Slovenia, and ends with a solid, thoughtful piece on what it all means. I recommend this work to scholars of these countries, but also to those that study the promotion of democracy. Nationalism will be an issue on the world stage for decades to come. With the EU, the United States and the UN all touting democracy as a central policy pillar, Harris helps to point the way to how nationalism can be handled in relation to democratic change.

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The first six issues of *The Slovenia Times*, which bills itself on its website (<http://www.sloveniatimes.com>) as “the first independent English-language newspaper in Slovenia,” have appeared, establishing the paper as a stable element in Slovenia’s media landscape. Launching a new newspaper—even one appearing biweekly, such as this—is a significant endeavor demanding the coordination of editors, reporters, photographers, printers and other persons. Such a project is doubly significant when the result fills a hitherto unoccupied niche in a country’s media culture.

The Slovenia Times falls among the growing number of locally published English-language newspapers that have appeared in the newly