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## Confronting the past: The Slovenes as subjects and as objects of history

*POVZETEK: Slovenska izkušnja z jugoslovansko realnostjo je bila precej specifična in se razlikuje od izkušenj drugih narodov te države, prav tako pa je poseben tudi način, kako se Slovenci – kot se kaže npr. v zgodovinskih učbenikih za osnovne in srednje šole – spominjajo preteklosti. Slovenski nacionalizem se je osredotočil bolj na jezik in na kulturo kot na ozemlje. Slovenci imajo zemere v zvezi z drugo svetovno vojno predvsem med seboj, do nekdanjih domobrancev in njihovih potomcev ter do nekdanjih partizanov in njihovih potomcev. V članku je analiziran način, kako se Slovenci spominjajo preteklosti, predstavljen je pregled dogajanj v obdobju 1988-1991 s slovenskega zornega kota, analizirane pa so tudi še nerazrešene kontraverze med Slovenci in njihovimi sosedi v povezavi z vojno v okoliščinah razpada Jugoslavije 1991-1995.*

*KLJUČNE BESEDE: Slovenija, zgodovinski spomin, kontroverze, razpad Jugoslavije, strah*

There is an old joke from the communist era which holds that the past is constantly changing, but the future remains forever fixed. This joke points rather poignantly to the persistent presence of historical revisionism and alternative narratives of the past. It also reminds us that alternative narratives arise not only within a given society, whether at the beck of the elites or as a result of scholarly debates and arguments, but also among different nations. Just as the Spanish, the Cubans, and the Americans remember the Spanish-American War of 1898 differently, or, alternatively, as Germans and French even today remember World War One differently, so too do we find that Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Bosniaks, and Albanians of Kosova have different recollections of their common past, emphasizing different things, interpreting the same events and figures in different ways, forgetting or ignoring those events which are either irrelevant or uncomfortable

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for their particular self-identity, and – especially in history textbooks for elementary and secondary schools – endeavoring to remember the past in such a way as to remember one’s own nation in a favorable light.

For a historian, however, it is not enough to ascertain the fact that there are rival accounts of the past. Events happened in a certain way, and it is the duty of the historian to strive to write an account which is true to the events – which may entail noting ambiguities in the past, admitting that the motivations of actors often cannot be known for sure, and conceding that, in some conflicts, both sides may feel that they are fighting a defensive war. The slippery issue of actors’ motivations is one which historians too often treat rather lightly, denying the self-representations of the actors themselves and claiming to know what the “real” motivations of actors were, in spite of a complete lack of evidence or documentation. And yet, even admitting that ambiguities, uncertainties, and ambivalence are part of history, I am inclined to believe that the motto hoisted on the television program *X-files* which ran from 1993 to 2002 – “The truth is out there” – may nonetheless serve as a summons to integrity for all historians.

In the article which follows, I shall endeavor, in the first part, to outline some of the principal elements in the way in which Slovenes understand their “Yugoslav” past, 1918–1989, and, in the second part, to undertake a review of developments during 1988–1991, from the Slovenian perspective. In the third part of this article, I propose to examine some persistent controversies involving the Slovenes and their neighbors, which have arisen in connection with the Yugoslav dissolution and the War of Yugoslav Succession.

## 1 The Slovenian Narrative

It is resentment which keeps historical memory alive. Nothing illustrates this maxim so well as the Slovenian case, where the ‘Slovenian historical narrative’, already by the 1980s, was marked by some telling lacunae. Although Slovenian nationalism has tended to be more focused on language and culture, Slovenes from time to time expressed support for a Slovenian national program to unite all Slovene ethnic territory into one state where Slovene would be the official language. Moreover, while some Slovenes have reconciled themselves to the decision taken by their ethnic kin in Carinthia, in a referendum conducted at the end of World War One, to remain in Austria, other Slovenes continue to view the vote as having come out “wrong”. Yet, for all that, in the early 1980s, immediately after Tito’s death, and again in the early 1990s, Slovenian university students could sometimes be heard singing the strident patriotic song, ‘Od Vardara do Triglava’. In history textbooks for elementary and secondary schools in Slovenia, the interwar kingdom (1918–41) has been presented as undemocratic and characterized by Serb hegemony “over Slovenes and Croats who were economically and culturally more developed” (Dolenc, Gabrič, and Rode 1997: 57. See also Nešović and Prunk 1993: 59). Slovenian history textbooks also point out that Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović (who served in that office from 1935 to 1939) admired the Nazi and fascist systems (Dolenc and Gabrič 2002: 91). Although Slovenes could celebrate the opening of the University of Ljubljana in 1920/21 (it had been officially proclaimed in 1919) and

other achievements, the perception took hold that joining the kingdom had subjected Slovenes to assimilatory pressures and relegated them to ‘minority’ status (Rizman 2006: 34). Moreover, as Rizman notes, citing Peter Vodopivec, “...many Serbian and Slovene negative stereotypes had emerged as early as 1920 and persist to this day...[F]or example,...Slovene papers stigmatized Serbian Balkanization, hegemonism, militarism, and their [Serbs’] inclination toward authoritarianism” (Rizman 2006: 35). Yet, for all that, Slovenes held some ministerial posts in the interwar kingdom, a few ambassadorial posts, and some lesser posts in the administrative hierarchy, and Slovenian economic, cultural, and scientific life developed rapidly in these years (Prunk 1997: 24). As was the case with other non-Serbs, Slovenes were underrepresented in such positions.

Memories connected to World War Two are more complex because, as in the case of the Serbs and the Croats, there are alternative narratives where this period is concerned (see Prunk 1996: 127–135; Harriman 1977; and Griesser-Pecar 2003). Those more to the left identify with the Partisan tradition and reject the collaboration of Gen. Leon Rupnik and the Home Guards (*Domobranci*), among others; for example, Jože Pirjevec draws attention to the program of denationalization of Slovenia implemented by the Axis occupation authorities, as well as the forcible deportation of around 60,000 Slovenian priests, teachers, and other intellectuals to Serbia, Croatia, and lower Silesia, and the use of torture to crush resistance (Pirjevec 2008: 28–31). Those more to the right deprecate the Partisans and embrace the wartime collaborators. Perhaps curiously, one elementary school textbook published in Ljubljana in 1993 argued that “During both wars [i.e., both World War One and World War Two], although without political independence or constitutional autonomy, Slovenia felt more autonomous in economic matters and especially in educational and cultural life” (Nešović and Prunk 1993: 70). Where interethnic dynamics in socialist Yugoslavia are concerned, what should be stressed is that Slovenia’s experience in World War Two did not involve resentments against any other Yugoslav people; on the contrary, resentment was directed largely either toward Nazi Germany or Italy or toward each other, i.e., with the Partisans and their offspring (whether literal offspring or ideological offspring) engaging in polemics with the collaborators and their offspring. Indeed, for Slovenes, the most traumatic events associated with the war were the massacres at Kočevje and Teharje.

Slovenian schoolbooks estimate that some 65,000 Slovenes lost their lives as a result of World War Two (Dolenc and Gabrič 2002: 162). This does not count the 7,000–12,000 *Domobranci* killed by the Partisans immediately after the war’s end (Dolenc, Gabrič, and Rode 1997: 109). As for judgments about Chetnik leader Draža Mihailović and Archbishop of Zagreb Alojzije Stepinac, the Slovenian historical narrative coincides here with the Croatian narrative, which is to say that Slovenian textbooks find Mihailović guilty of collaboration with occupation forces (Nešović and Prunk 1993: 120; also Repe 1995a),<sup>1</sup> while noting that Zagreb’s archbishop Stepinac kept his distance from

1. Chetnik collaboration with the Axis, although denied by prominent figures in Serbia’s post-Milošević regime, has been extensively documented, including in works published in Belgrade. See, for example, Branko Latas 1999.

the Ustaša regime and “protested in the name of persecuted Jews and Serbs from time to time” (Repe 1995a: 157).

Unlike the Albanians of Kosovo, the Slovenes returned to Yugoslavia at war’s end voluntarily – but not blindly. Edvard Kardelj and Boris Kidrič, Slovenia’s two most influential politicians at the time, were concerned about the dangers which they associated with centralism, with Kidrič telling the Third Session of the Central Committee of the CP Slovenia (29 March 1945) that centralist politics was potentially “...dangerous, because strong tendencies towards hegemonism still exist within the Serbian middle-class bourgeoisie” (Repe 1995b: 143). Kardelj and Ranković soon began a sparring match which ended only with Ranković’s removal from office in 1966; Slovenes may or may not remember the attempted assassination of Kardelj in 1959 (not mentioned in any of the seven schoolbooks which have been in use in Slovenia which were consulted in connection with this article<sup>2</sup>) – an attempt which Kardelj’s wife, Pepca, blamed on Ranković personally (Krivokapić 1988: 55). But whatever Slovenes may still remember of that era, the frictions between Kardelj and Ranković contributed to sowing the notion that Serbian politics could be dangerous for Slovenes.

Perhaps the noisiest ‘affair’ – to use the favored Yugoslav term – was the Slovenian ‘road affair’ of 1969, when the Slovenian assembly, in a rather unusual move, publicly protested the allocation of World Bank funds for road construction. Nearly two decades later, the issuance of the famous ‘Memorandum’ by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Art (SANU) sent ripples through Slovenia, where local intellectuals decided to respond with their own national program. The result was the famous issue 57 of the journal *Nova revija*, in which contributors expressed their fears of “cultural extinction and [Serbian] political domination” (Rogel 1998: 20) Released in February 1987, the issue was devoted to the ‘Slovenian national program’, “which included, among other things, a protest against the second-class status of the Slovenian language in Yugoslavia. The issue was quickly subjected to attack in other republics in Yugoslavia, where some people expressed concern that the Slovenes were sliding in the direction of secessionism” (Ramet 2006: 313–314; see also Kasapović 1988: 771–786). In fact, there was a growing sentiment among Slovenes that they did not belong in Yugoslavia, that this was not their country, that the cultural icons, music, and patterns of thought which they found elsewhere in the country were not their own (see Bertsch and Zaninovich 1974: 219–244).

In summer 1988, four young Slovenes (among them, Janez Janša, who would be elected prime minister in 2004) were put on trial in Ljubljana on charges of having purloined a secret document from the Ljubljana Military District with the intent to publish it (Janša 1994: 13). Slovenes were enraged by the trial and began to protest on the streets. Slovenes believed (as they do today) that the JNA was discussing a possible coup in Slovenia, in which liberals were to be arrested and were outraged that the four

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2. In addition to those schoolbooks cited in the text, these include also: Ana Kern, Dušan Nečak, and Božo Repe, *Naše stoljete* (Ljubljana: Modrijan, 1998); and Stane Berzelak, *Zgodovina 2 za tehniške in druge strokovne sole* (Ljubljana: Modrijan, 1998).

young men who had done their best to expose this conspiracy were put on trial. To add insult to injury, the JNA held the trial, which was taking place in Ljubljana, in Serbo-Croatian, even though the official language of Slovenia was Slovenian. This was widely interpreted as a violation of Slovenia's sovereignty and Slovenes circulated petitions in support of 'the Four'. A Committee for the Defense of Human Rights was set up, with the Slovenian government's implicit acquiescence, and on 22 June 1988, at least 40,000 persons from around Slovenia jammed onto Ljubljana's Liberation Square in a massive protest against the trial. The outrage felt by Slovenes generally at this trial is hard to overestimate and generated a tidal wave of political change as political parties were quickly formed on local initiative.

During the years 1988–90, fear became the dominant theme in Slovenian discourse. Slovenes watched in dread as Milošević and his cohorts pushed for changes to the constitution which would have weakened republican autonomy (under the slogan, "one man, one vote"). That same year, Serbian authorities asked for Slovenian support for amendments to the Serbian constitution, but the Slovenes demurred, claiming that even offering their support would be tantamount to interference in Serbia's domestic affairs (Smole 1988). The Serbs pushed ahead with their amendments anyway, granting the government in Belgrade the right to change the status of the autonomous provinces unilaterally; in the view of Janez Drnovšek, who would become president of the SFRY presidency in May 1989, this change to Serbia's constitution was inconsistent with the SFRY constitution, and therefore illegal (Kadijević 1993: 104; Drnovšek 1998: 222). Slovenia crossed swords with Serbia over a third issue in 1988, viz., an amendment backed by Serbia to change the mechanism for funding the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA). But there was a more fundamental, even visceral, reason why Slovenes began to feel deep foreboding in regard to Serbia at that time, and that had to do with the growing cult of the personality sponsored by Milošević's people in Serbia. Talking about Serbs' glorification of Milošević in an interview in 1988, Janez Stanovnik, then president of Slovenia, commented: "This Stalinist concept of 'democratic centralism' unavoidably leads to extolling the central figure [and transforming him] into a living god. When you start worshipping a leader, you no longer have a population that is able to act democratically" (quoted in *New York Times* 1988: 4).

## 2 The Slovenes and the Yugoslav Breakup

By the end of 1988, Slovenian and Serbian leaders were engaging in polemical exchanges. Serbs started to boycott Slovenian products and citizens of Belgrade began to withdraw their savings from the Bank of Ljubljana. These developments also contributed to a charged atmosphere in which Slovenes felt under growing threat. In the course of 1989, Milošević took steps to bring Kosovo under his firm control, suppressing its assembly and stationing some 15,000 army troops in the province under measures called a "state of exception" (a euphemism for a "state of emergency"). When Albanian miners went on strike at the Trepča mine complex in a show of defiance of Belgrade's repression, the Slovenian Association of Writers organized a public meeting

at Cankarjev Dom in Ljubljana, in a show of solidarity with the miners. The Serbian Association of Writers responded by breaking off institutional contacts with its Slovenian sister organization (Seligo 1989). The conflict escalated to the level of the political leaderships of the two republics. Then, on 23 May 1989, Milošević gave a speech in Novi Sad in which he called Slovenia a “lackey” of Western Europe and declared that it had no right to speak out concerning Kosovo (see Borba 1989: 3; Delo 1989: 3). The following day, Drnovšek, who had assumed the post of president of the presidency barely a week before, criticized the repressive measures being applied in Kosovo at a session of the presidency, and demanded an end to the incarceration of Albanians in conditions of solitary confinement, among other things. He also let it be known that, in his view, the question of the legality of Serbia’s suppression of the Kosovar assembly should have been (indeed, should be) referred to the Constitutional Court for adjudication. For Drnovšek, Kosovo was the arena in which the system’s respect for and ability to protect human rights were being tested. As he told *Oslobodjenje* in the course of an interview the following year, “If the question of the protection of human rights, for example of individual persons in Kosovo, is posed, that is immediately treated as interference in the internal affairs of Serbia, and in this way the essence of the protection of individual human rights is ignored” (Drnovšek 1998: 224).

On 6 September 1989, Dimitrije Rupel – then a professor of sociology at the University of Ljubljana and the founder of the fledgling Slovenian Democratic Union, but later foreign minister of the Republic of Slovenia – granted me an interview. In the course of our conversation, Rupel admitted that there were stirrings for independence among the Slovenes. “In 1987,” he recounted,

*an opinion poll among Slovenes found that 57% of Slovenes felt that Slovenia would be more prosperous if it were independent of Yugoslavia. We interpret that as an expression of a sentiment for secession. The figure has risen enormously this year; it is 70% in 1989. If you talk to people in the street, they will say, yes I think we should secede, and leave the country in its mess. But obviously it is not such an easy thing to do, and the most dangerous thing would be to be carried away by feelings. Still I think – and this is also the position of my party – that sometime in the not so distant future, Slovenia will become an independent state, maybe in 20 years, maybe in 10 years...I myself think that what we should strive for at the present moment is a proper confederation (Rupel 1989: 85).*

What should be emphasized in this declaration by Rupel is his conviction that Yugoslavia was in a “mess” – a mess which, in his view, did not admit of any easy remedies.

In September 1989, Slovenia passed a package of amendments to its own constitution, which Slovenes generally viewed as defensive measures against Serbia. As if to confirm that it did in fact constitute a threat, the Serb Committee for the Organization of Public Meetings, a body operating under Milošević’s influence, announced its intention to bring some 30,000–40,000 Serbs and Montenegrins to Slovenia in order to “explain” to Slovenes what was “really” going on in Kosovo. Taking note of the role played by that same committee in destabilizing and overthrowing the governments of Vojvodina, Montenegro, and Kosovo, the Slovenian government decided that the proffered “ex-

planation” was a threat and arranged with the Slovenian and Croatian railway unions to stop the trains carrying the would-be protesters and turn them back (see Nešović and Prunk 1993: 243). When Serbia replied by declaring a full-scale boycott of Slovenian products, cutting off all cooperative economic links with Slovenia, the Slovenian Assembly terminated payments to the federal Fund for the Accelerated Development of the Underdeveloped Republics and Kosovo (FADURK).

Subsequently, when, in spring 1990, the JNA took steps to confiscate the weaponry which had been purchased by Slovenia for its territorial defense system, the sense of threat among Slovenes increased exponentially. What they may not have known at the time was that the Milošević regime, although largely consentaneous with the JNA, had its own objectives and strategies, which departed radically from those of the JNA when it came to Slovenia. This became clear on 24 January 1991 when then-President of Slovenia Milan Kučan met in private with Milošević; as Kučan told me in 1999, in exchange for Milošević’s assurances that Belgrade had no territorial pretensions vis-à-vis Slovenia, he assured Milošević of his “understanding” for Milošević’s interest in uniting all Serbs in a Greater Serbia (Kučan, 1999). Milošević confirmed this in private conversation with Borisav Jović, the Serbian member of the SFRY presidency who served as its president between May 1990 and May 1991, telling the latter in February 1991, for example, “Slovenia should be left in peace,” and reiterating in June 1991, “What is it to us to defend the Slovenian borders – that is temporary. We should defend what will last” (as quoted in Jović 1995: 281, 343).

But there were two final shocks for the Slovenes before they left the dying federation. The first was connected with the effort by Milošević, Jović, and the two Kostićes to block the supposedly routine rotation in the SFRY presidency. The rotation was effected finally only as a result of direct pressure from the European Community (Mesić 2004: 90–92). In Kučan’s view, the blockage of Mesić’s succession amounted to nothing less than “a camouflaged coup d’etat” by the Serbian leaders (The Guardian 1991). The second shock came when Franjo Tuđman, Croatia’s president, who had signed a mutual defense agreement with Kučan, “opposed action to help Slovenia during the aggression by the YNA [i.e., JNA]” (quoted in Janša 1994: 250).

Yet of all the peoples discussed here, the Slovenes have had by far the easiest exit from the SFRY. Although the 10-day war inflicted some \$2.7 billion worth of damage on Slovenia and cost the republic 17 dead and 149 wounded (Janša 1994: 203; Janigro 1993: 21), it has entered into Slovenian lore as a heroic struggle for independence in which an underarmed but courageous republic stood up to the much mightier JNA and won (see Grafenauer 1991). At the same time, the Slovenes were well aware that the conflict was the result of a decision taken by Defense Minister Veljko Kadijević and Prime Minister Ante Marković to send in the troops, and that the deployment of the JNA did not reflect the intentions of either Milošević or Borisav Jović. For all that, however, Slovenes blamed Milošević and Jović for pushing Yugoslavia along a path where meltdown was the eventual result.

In spite of the confiscation of as much of the weaponry of the Slovenian Territorial Defense forces as the JNA could manage, in spite of the trial of ‘the Four’ and the

outrage which they provoked among Slovenes, in spite of the theft by the Republic of Serbia (behind the screen of an unsecured 'loan') of 28 billion dinars (about \$1.8 billion) from the National Bank of Yugoslavia, in spite of Borisav Jović's illegal 'pocket veto' of the Slovenian-Croatian proposal (of October 1990) to transform Yugoslavia into a confederation (which, under Yugoslav law, he was obliged to forward to the Federal Assembly for debate), in spite of the various violations of the SFRY constitution and laws by Serbian authorities, and in spite of the establishment and arming, at federal expense, of Serbian militias in Croatia and Bosnia, militias intended to figure in a war to expand Serbia's borders – in spite of all of these rather uncomfortable conditions, some observers continue to insist that the Slovenes should have remained in Yugoslavia to 'assist' the other republics in resolving their issues, as former US Ambassador Warren Zimmermann suggested to me in 2001, (Zimmermann, 2001; see also Zimmermann, 1999) while others have gone so far as to suggest that the Slovenes must share some of the blame for the sanguinary war which broke out in the course of 1991.

### **3 Unresolved Controversies About the Yugoslav Meltdown**

The field of Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav studies remains as divided as ever, and, even if one can establish some consensus about the facts (and even that, not always), one is hard pressed to establish any consensus concerning the weight to be given to one or another fact, or what they mean. For example, where facts are concerned: why did Croatian President Tudjman stop paying the salaries to the Serb police in Knin in 1990? Was it out of prejudice against Serbs, as Serbian authorities and media alleged throughout the 1990s, or was it, rather, because the Serb police had joined the anti-Croat insurrection and were thus in active rebellion against the government which was paying their salaries, as Nikica Barić has argued (Barić 2005: 78–79, 81, 126). Or again, did Slovenian President Milan Kučan really give Milošević a green light to pursue his Greater Serbian project, in exchange for Milošević's assent to Slovenian independence, as is sometimes claimed, or is this just rumor? Or again, was there actually a plan known as "Operation Horseshoe" designed by Milošević's people to drive the Albanians out of Kosovo, as Louis Sell alleges (Sell 2002), or was this plan rather, as Jürgen Elsässer has alleged (Elsässer's chapter in Elsässer 1999), a concoction of German and Austrian intelligence services? Or again, were the bodies of the dead Albanians found in the village of Račak in January 1999 those of civilians, as William Walker, head of the Kosovo Verification Mission alleged at the time, or rather, at least in part, those of KLA rebels who had been killed in battle, as Belgrade pathologist Dušan Dunjić alleged soon after the event (Elsässer 2001: 55–57)?

Where disagreements about the weight to be given to certain facts are concerned, one may cite the following: Even allowing that the checkerboard coat of arms used in Croatia since 1990 was the same (red-square first) as that checkerboard used through the socialist era and different from the checkerboard used by the Croatian fascists during World War Two (white square first), was this suddenly important enough to Serbs that the Croatian government should have abandoned a symbol dating back more than

1,000 years? And again, if the use by Croatian fascists of some form of the checkerboard disqualified that symbol for all time, so that it should never again have been used, how important is the fact that the Serbian coat of arms even today retains the double-headed eagle and the quadruple “S” used by the collaborationist regime of Milan Nedić during World War Two? Or again, how much weight should one place on the fact that the Serbian constitution adopted in 1990 declared that the president of Serbia was the commander-in-chief of Serbian armed forces, in violation of the federal constitution still in force? Or again, how much weight should one place on the fact that Serbs living in Croatia declared the creation of autonomous provinces within that republic several months before Croatia declared its disassociation from the already dead socialist Yugoslav federation, or that Serb militias were set up in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, armed, and trained by JNA instructors beginning in 1990, months before Croatia would declare independence and a year and a half before Bosnia-Herzegovina would do so?

In the remainder of this section, I should like to focus on five unresolved controversies related to the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the first two of which relate directly to Slovenia and the third of which relates indirectly to Slovenia.

**1. Who had the most complaints against whom?** One may readily acknowledge that not only Serbs, but also other non-Slovenes, felt a resentment toward the Slovenes in general as the wealthiest people in socialist Yugoslavia some of whom, nonetheless, complained that they were contributing too much money to support people in the other republics. But it would be a serious distortion to imagine that it was only against Slovenes that Serbian leaders and media were complaining in the years leading up to the war or to pretend that no one had complaints about the behavior of Serbian leaders and media. On the contrary, one could find, in the Serbian media, allegations that Muslim physicians were mistreating Serb patients in Bosnia-Herzegovina, claims that Tito had removed certain factories and other installations to Slovenia and Croatia after the Cominform Resolution of 28 June 1948 not in order to get them from the lowlands which could be quickly overrun by Soviet tanks to higher ground but specifically in order to fatten Slovenia and Croatia at Serbs’ expense, and unfounded charges that Albanians were committing “genocide” against Serbs living in Kosovo. In other words, Serb complaints about the Slovenes have to be situated within the context of more general Serb complaints (not by all Serbs, of course, but by influential media and leaders) about most of the other larger national groups in socialist Yugoslavia. In addition, the Serbian media, controlled by the nationalist regime and its allies, reported with sympathy the demands registered in 1989 by Serbs living in Croatia that they be granted an autonomous province with Croatia – a feature not stipulated in the federal constitution which was then in force – even though, just a few months prior, Serbian authorities had snuffed out the autonomy of the provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina, in open violation of the federal constitution.

The non-Serbs also had their own complaints and, strikingly, their concerns and complaints were mainly about the behavior of the Serbian leaders and media. Among the concerns was the fact that the Serbian constitution passed in 1990 ignored the Yugoslav federation in asserting (in Article 51) that “the defense of the Republic of Serbia is the

right and duty of every citizen,” in referring (in Article 72) to the “independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia and its international position and relations with other states,” and in its claim (in Article 83) that the President of Serbia would “command the Armed Forces in peacetime and in war” (Constitution of the Republic of Serbia). What was so striking was that this constitution, passed three months before the Republic of Croatia passed its first post-communist constitution and 15 months before the Republic of Slovenia did so, already represented Serbia as an independent state; the Serbian constitution was, thus, the first secessionist constitution passed among the six constituent republics of the Yugoslav federation.

At least some non-Serbs were, of course, also concerned about the fact that Milošević had seized power within the Serbian party organization illegally, about the Serbian Republic’s unconstitutional suppression of the autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina in 1989, about the use of organized mobs to bring down governments unfriendly toward Milošević in Kosovo, Vojvodina, and Montenegro, about the establishment and arming of illegal Serb militias in Croatia and Bosnia in the course of 1990, and about the general frenzy being stirred up within Serbia. For that matter, on 23 October 1990, the Serbian government imposed customs duties on goods imported from Slovenia and Croatia (Hoare forthcoming). All of these factors, alongside others, stirred considerable fear among non-Serbs and lay behind the Slovenian-Croatian proposal to redesign the Yugoslav federation as a confederation.

## **2. What was the contribution of the Slovenes to the breakup of Yugoslavia?**

As I have already mentioned above, Dimitrij Rupel, who was to become Slovenia’s first foreign minister, admitted in 1989 that he anticipated that Slovenia would become independent “maybe in 20 years, maybe in 10 years.” In addition, one may recall that, in December 1988, Milan Kučan had contributed an article to *Komunist*, in which he claimed that Slovenia retained the right of secession (Kommunist 1988: 53). But these statements in themselves do not constitute a “proof” that Slovenia bore any special responsibility for the breakup of Yugoslavia, as has sometimes been alleged.

There have been different interpretations offered of the confederal proposal put forth by Slovenia and Croatia in October 1990. For Dejan Jović, the proposal was intended not to create a stable confederation but as a first step toward independence. Although he admits that Slovenes and Croats feared what Milošević was doing, this is not where he places his stress. He further speculates about Slovenian and Croatian motivations, claiming that the politicians in “Slovenia and Croatia did not whole-heartedly believe that the confederal arrangement had a realistic chance of succeeding” (Jović 2008: 252). Moreover, in Jović’s view, what the Slovenian and Croatian political elites had done in the 1980s had isolated the pre-Milošević government of Ivan Stambolić, stifling his program of gradual reform, and thereby “contributed to the rise of Slobodan Milošević” (Jović 2008: 255). In this way, Slovenian and Croatian politicians are indirectly held responsible also for Milošević’s policies.

Rudolf Rizman offers an alternative – and, in my judgment, more convincing – interpretation. According to Rizman, Slovenia found itself in a “vulnerable” position after the death of Tito in 1980 and, in the course of the 1980s, was forced to

resist “Belgrade’s constant pressures for it to relinquish its autonomy and commitment to political pluralism” (Rizman 2006: 40, 64). Viktor Meier urges that Slovenian and Croatian advocacy of confederation cannot be understood except in the context of the army’s illegal confiscation of essentially all of the weaponry of Croatia’s territorial defense (TO) forces and of some 70% of the weaponry of Slovenia’s TO forces (Meier 1999: 148–149). The TO system had been set up after the Soviet Union’s invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the disarming of the TO forces in Slovenia and Croatia was obviously intended to strip them of any ability to resist such military action as was being planned by Milošević and Borisav Jović in consultation with other actors in the system. Meier adds that, insofar as Slovenia and Croatia were being subjected to “barbed attacks from Serbia’s state leadership and the army, it was logical that they would try to engage in close cooperation” and, in his account, the confederal proposal subsequently generated was the Slovenian-Croatian response to the Yugoslav presidency’s announcement in June 1990 that it wanted to start “a dialogue concerning a new political order for Yugoslavia” (Meier 1999: 157). In Meier’s account, the confederal proposal was a sincere proposal to transform Yugoslavia into a common market with some form of monetary union, with the relative independence which Slovenia and Croatia would have won through such an arrangement being intended to provide some protection against the Republic of Serbia. How long such an arrangement could last was not being discussed publicly. But Borisav Jović, then serving as chair of the state presidency, decided not to forward the Slovenian-Croatian proposal to the State Assembly – a legally problematic move on his part – and instead forwarded a counterproposal generated by Serbia (Jović 1995: 157–158).

Ultimately, interpretations of the intentions of those Slovenes who came to favor independence (and as Janša (1994) reminds us not all Slovenes supported the drive for independence even as late as spring 1991) divide into three groups: those who believe (for example, Zimmerman 1999) that the Slovenes were motivated by selfishness and self-absorption, those (such as this author) who believe that concern about the unconstitutional and illegal actions being taken by Milošević and his people and fear of what that would mean for Slovenia were more important factors, and those (such as Bojko Bučar) who place their emphasis rather on the right to self-determination which had been anchored in the Yugoslav constitution itself (Bučar 1997: 34–35).

**3. What was the Serbian contribution to the initiation of the war?** Although scholarly accounts are unanimous in acknowledging that variously Milošević or Milošević and his allies or „the Serbs“ bore some responsibility for the outbreak of the war, there are several positions which have been taken on this question. To begin with, there are those such as Louis Sell who assign central blame to Milošević for having produced the breakup of the country, those such as Branimir Anzulović and Lenard Cohen who broaden the scope and trace Serb behavior at the end of the twentieth century to cultural and historical roots deep in the past, and those such as V. P. Gagnon who see Milošević as the chief sorcerer, albeit assisted by his apprentice, Borisav Jović, and a conservative bloc, who collectively „actively created rather than responded to threats to Serbs by purposefully provoking and fostering the outbreak of conflict along ethnic lines,“ as Gagnon wrote in 1994 (Gagnon 1994–1995: 132). Srdja Popović seconds Gagnon’s approach,

arguing that „Milošević not only wanted war, but also needed it in order to be able to dictate the agenda“ in Serbia (Popović 2006: 49). For Popović, Milošević was „the main culprit, instigator and executioner“ whose pursuit of war briefly „created among the Serbian population a feeling of omnipotence and triumph“ (Popović 2006: 52, 53). Dubravka Stojanović goes even further, referring to „the strengthened totalitarianism in Serbia after 1987“ and referring to Milošević’s „attack on the constitutional system of Yugoslavia” (Stojanović 2000: 451, 457). Without arguing with this approach, however, Eric Gordy asserts that it is “not entirely clear... whether... Milošević had decided to... try to ‘create a Greater Serbia out of the wreckage [of Yugoslavia],’ or whether... to form a third Yugoslavia without Slovenia and Croatia” (Gordy 2008: 292, quoting Sell).

At a second level, there are different versions who else might be assessed to have played a role. Among the versions which have been offered are: Milošević and „the Slovenes“ (Zimmerman’s position), Milošević and Tudjman (Fine 2003), and Milošević and the CIA (a version which without a shred of documentation would cast Milošević as a CIA agent installed in power by the CIA for the express purpose of bringing about the breakup of Yugoslavia).<sup>3</sup> When it comes to those who have been alleged to have worked for the CIA, there have also been allegations that Yugoslav Prime Minister Milan Panić,<sup>4</sup> Montenegrin politician Milo Djukanović (Chislov 2008), and Miroslav Tudjman (Franjo Tudjman’s son)<sup>5</sup> were CIA agents, while Milošević claimed, in the course of his trial in The Hague, that Momčilo Perišić, chief of staff of the Yugoslav Army from 1993 to 1998, SPO leader Vuk Drašković, and Vojvodinan politician Nenad Čanak were all CIA agents.<sup>6</sup> Although most, if not all, observers have noted the important role played by the Yugoslav People’s Army in the breakup of the country, Matjaž Klemenčič and Mitja Žagar have given this particular emphasis, noting that „once they [the army generals] sided with the Serb position, this reduced the space for a compromise“ (Klemenčič and Žagar 2004: 289).

3. Although it is not the original source where I encountered this claim, this is repeated at *Illyria Forums (Balkans/Mediterraneans/World)*, at [illyria.proboards19.com/index.cgi?action=display&board=srbijaserbia&thread=1196952161&page=1#1196969183](http://illyria.proboards19.com/index.cgi?action=display&board=srbijaserbia&thread=1196952161&page=1#1196969183) [accessed on 9 March 2008]. See also Bogdan Maglič, “Slobodan Milošević je bio američki agent”, in Srpska Di-jaspورا, *Internet Novine Serbske*, at [www.srpskadijaspورا.info/vest.asp?id=6528](http://www.srpskadijaspورا.info/vest.asp?id=6528) [accessed on 9 March 2008].
4. Charles Rosenberger, “Serbian tightrope – fraudulent December 1992 elections in Serbia”, in *National Review* (1 February 1993), summarizing a broadcast on Serbian national television at [findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1282/is\\_n2\\_v45/ai\\_13518604](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1282/is_n2_v45/ai_13518604) [accessed on 9 March 2008]. The allegation was also repeated in Serbian newspapers. On this point, see the report by Stephen Kinzer, “Conflict in the Balkans”, in *New York Times* (18 December 1992), at [query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9E0CEFDE143DF93BA25751C1A964958260](http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9E0CEFDE143DF93BA25751C1A964958260) [accessed on 9 March 2008].
5. “Bandić: I Worked for SDB to Feed My Daughters”, in *javno.org* (Zagreb), at [www.javno.com/pr.php?id=26965&l=en](http://www.javno.com/pr.php?id=26965&l=en) [accessed on 9 March 2008].
6. Regarding Perišić, see Slobodan Milošević in testimony at his trial, *International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia*, 23 August 2005, page 42970, at [www.un.org/icty/transe54/050823IT.htm](http://www.un.org/icty/transe54/050823IT.htm) [accessed on 9 March 2008]; regarding Drašković and Čanak, see *Ibid.*, 6 September 2004, page 43756, at [www.un.org/icty/transe54/050906IT.htm](http://www.un.org/icty/transe54/050906IT.htm) [accessed on 9 March 2008].

**4. Did Franjo Tuđman agree to a partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina at the meeting with Slobodan Milošević at Karadjordjevo in March 1991?** The standard account, which originated with Stipe Mesić (president of Croatia since 2000) is that Tuđman and Milošević really did agree on a partition of Bosnia at their famous meeting at Karadjordjevo; this is the version which Mesić has given in various interviews with journalists as well as with the present writer. An alternative version, offered by Dunja Melčić (forthcoming), holds that Mesić's account is pure fiction since any such agreement would have required an alliance between Serbian and Croatian forces and this was lacking. On the contrary, as Melčić has pointed out, Milošević and his proxies behaved as if there was no understanding with Tuđman at all. Moreover, had there been a real understanding achieved there, then there would have had to have been follow-up meetings of experts. In fact, there was one such follow-up meeting. I spoke with one of the members of the Croatian "expert team" in 2002; he told me that the Croatian team was seriously divided between those wanting to annex parts of Herzegovina to Croatia and those opposed (my source claiming to have been opposed to annexation), that the meeting of Croatian and Serbian experts did not produce any results, and that there was no follow-up meeting. Given all of this, it seems most likely that the meeting at Karadjordjevo served chiefly to allow Tuđman and Milošević to appraise each other, and gauge each other's weaknesses.

**5. Did any Western power believe that it would benefit from the breakup of Yugoslavia?** There have been allegations from time to time, e.g., by Veljko Kadijević, that various Western powers believed that they would benefit from the breakup of Yugoslavia and, therefore, actively promoted it. Yet, at the time that Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence, all the major powers – including the United States, the Soviet Union, China, Great Britain, Germany, and France – declared their refusal to recognize the newly declared republics and their commitment to the unity of the Socialist Federated Republic of Yugoslavia. Most of these powers waited until December 1991, by which time 30% of Croatian territory was occupied by Serbian insurgents backed by the Yugoslav Army, to recognize the two republics and it was only the realization that the war signified that there was no going back that brought the EU states to a consensus (see Major 2000; and Both 2000) to extend recognition. The United States waited until the following April to recognize the two republics, because it continued to believe, until early 1992, that preserving the unity of Yugoslavia, within its SFRY borders, was in the best interests of the USA.

Yet, at least in the USA, Germany, and other countries, there were serious differences of opinion among policy-makers and opinion-makers about how to respond. In the United States, for example, President George Bush and the State Department remained opposed to recognition of Slovenia and Croatia even as support for such recognition was building in both houses of Congress (Ramet, 2008, 249–266). In the case of Germany, the support for diplomatic recognition came above all from the Christian Democratic Party, which was acting in coordination with Christian Democratic Parties elsewhere in Europe. Accounts which portray these states as monoliths can, at best, be described as simplifying a more complex picture.

## 4 Conclusion

To some extent, the differences of interpretation which one can find among those who study the history of Yugoslavia and its successor states are healthy and reflect different points of view and, to some extent, different experiences and sources. But there have also been some unhealthy tendencies in the field of Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav studies recently. Political motivations have crept into the work of some historians, while others who undertake to write about history have such sloppy and lazy methods of work that they can scarcely be credited as historians. Most writers come to their work with certain philosophical frameworks, whether favoring human rights or preferring conservative religious values for example. But that is something quite different from political motivation, by which I mean choosing sides without reference to the facts on the ground, choosing to favor the aggressor in a war not because one does not understand the situation but because one identifies with the aggressor nation. Politics is not philosophy, and giving in to political preferences is not a path to writing the truth.

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