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SLOVENE HISTORIOGRAPHY ON THE 20TH CENTURY

The Mayor of Ljubljana and the leader of the Slovene Liberal Party Ivan Hribar argued in 1899 that the beginning of the 20th century should, as in many western European countries, be celebrated on January 1, 1901 and not on January 1, 1900 as was the case at the time in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the German Empire. Mayor Hribar was a great admirer of technological and scientific progress and agreed with the expert horologists, who claimed that the new century began on January 1, 1901 and not with January 1, 1900. His view, though, that the new century began a year later than it was officially celebrated in the Habsburg Monarchy and in the German Reich also had a political and national background. Hribar was deeply convinced that aggressive German nationalism and German national pressures were a great danger for the future of the Austrian Slavs, and this was also his way of demonstrating his opposition to the government and court in Vienna and to what he deemed their one-sided pro-German and anti-Slav policy.¹

1 *Slovenska kronika XX. stoletja* (Slovene Chronicle of the 20th Century). Ljubljana: Nova revija, 1995, p. 17.

Slovene historians (just like historians elsewhere in former Yugoslavia) have traditionally focused on the history of their own national community in their research and only rarely have they discussed matters in a wider Yugoslav or European context. This also was (and still is) the norm in their research and publications dealing with the 20th century, resulting in their assessment (both in the past and the present) of also both Yugoslav states (i.e. the post WWI Yugoslav Kingdom and the post WWII communist Yugoslav Federation) above all from their own national perspective. However, the historical traditions and experiences of the nations united in 1918 in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes differed significantly, and so did their national historical perspectives and narratives. Subsequently, there were as of 1918 numerous controversial and conflicting historical views and interpretations of the national and common past of the Kingdom, causing a rift between the Serbian, Croatian and Slovene historians and their respective national communities.

One such divisive topic was WWI, which from 1918 onwards presented an unpleasant problem for the Slovene and Croatian historians. While the Serbian historians could proudly point out the resistance of the Serbs against the Austro-Hungarian, German and Bulgarian aggression, as well as the Serbian military activities on the side of the Entente, the Slovene and Croatian historians were confronted with the problem of Slovene and Croat soldiers fighting in Galicia, along the river Isonzo (Soča in Slovene) and partly in Serbia on the Austro-Hungarian side. As early as the autumn of 1914, around 33,000 Slovenes were involved in Austro-Hungarian military operations in Eastern Galicia, which was the most massive Slovene military engagement outside the territory populated by the Slovene speaking population ever. Many Slovene soldiers lost their lives on the battlefield and many of them became Russian prisoners. There were of course also Slovene volunteers, who joined the Serbian Army and fought on the Serbian side, but they were relatively few, while the Slovenes who were Italian citizens had fought in the Italian Army along the Italian-Austro-Hungarian border since 1915 – also against the Slovenes on the Austrian side.² At the same time, during the war, some Slovene politicians were secretly in touch with the powers of the Entente, and a few of them even migrated to Western Europe, where they joined the Yugoslav Committee in London. What's more, the idea of the reorganization of the Habsburg Monarchy into a federal state and the unification of the South Slavs in an autonomous Yugoslavia within it received massive popular support

2 Luthar, Oto. Men Who Marched Away. WWI in the Memories of the Slovenian Soldiers. In: Luthar, Oto (ed.). *The Great War and Memory in Central and South-Eastern Europe*. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2016, pp. 18–38; Svoljšak, Petra. The Social History of the Soča Region in the First World War. *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für soziale Bewegungen*, 41, 2009, pp. 89–91.

in 1917–1918 in the Slovene regions and the collapse of Austria-Hungary on 29 October 1918 was welcomed in Ljubljana with huge celebrations.

WWI, the demise of the Habsburg Monarchy and the formation of the Yugoslav Kingdom in 1918 were radical turning points in Slovene history, yet in the interwar period, Slovene historians paid nearly no attention to the First World War and to their recent past. The first and founding publications of the Slovene scientific historiography and the first large-scale synthesis of Slovene history were only published at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century, respectively, as in the 1920s and 1930s, Slovene historiography was still a young academic discipline, which mainly dealt with medieval and early modern Slovene history. In the interwar period, WWI was presented as a Yugoslav unifying experience by the official Yugoslav war memory, which focused mainly on the Serb military resistance against the German and Austro-Hungarian aggression, the heroic withdrawal of the Serbian Army over the Albanian mountains to the Greek island of Corfu, and the activities of the South Slav volunteers in the Serbian Army. Most of the Slovene articles and publications dedicated to WWI and published in the 1920s and 1930s were thus written by Slovene volunteers who had joined the Serbian Army during the war, or by Slovene war prisoners in Russia, who had joined the South Slav volunteer groups there. Some authors also discussed the Slovene parties' politics during the war, the Yugoslav movement in 1917–1918 and the uprisings of the Slovene soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian Army, while life stories representative of the majority of the Slovene population and the often very tragic destinies of the Slovene soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian Army and on the Isonzo (Soča) front³ were mostly marginalized and overlooked.⁴

The official and public memory of WWI in Slovenia and Yugoslavia did not change significantly after 1945, either. Rather the opposite. The post WWII Yugoslav and Slovene communist politics regarding historical memory focused on revolutionary movements and events in the Yugoslav and Slovene past, while the memory and narratives of the WWI military and the political confrontations of that time were overshadowed and replaced by the much closer wartime

3 The Isonzo (Soča) front was the crucial 90 kilometers long southern part of the front between Italy and Austro-Hungary, which cut through the mountains the territory populated by the Slovene and Italian speaking population in 1915–1917.

4 Svolfjšak, Petra. Prva svetovna vojna in Slovenci, 1. del (The First World War and the Slovenes, Part 1). *Zgodovinski časopis*, 47, 2, 1993, pp. 263–287; ---. Prva svetovna vojna in Slovenci, 2. del (The World War I and the Slovenes, Part 2). *Zgodovinski časopis*, 47, 4, 1993, pp. 547–562; Svolfjšak, Petra. Prva svetovna vojna in Slovenci 1994–2014 (The First World War and the Slovenes 1994–2014). *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 15, 2, 2015, pp. 143–171. In English: Svolfjšak, Petra. The Slovenian Remembrance of World War I (www.konferencija2014.com.ba/wp-content/uploads/Petra-Svolfjsak-paper.pdf)

experiences of WWII and the victorious communist narratives of the Partisan resistance against the occupying forces and the social revolution during 1941–1945. Until 1968, when the first original Slovene book dedicated to the Isonzo (Soča) front⁵, along which 250,000 Italian, German and Austro-Hungarian (among them 2,000–3,000 Slovene) soldiers had lost their lives between 1915 and 1918, was published, the First World War had indeed been a much overlooked and neglected topic in Slovene historiography. This was followed two years later by the first book presenting and discussing the politics of the Slovene political parties and the Yugoslav movement in the Slovene regions during WWI.⁶

Starting in the 1970s, a growing number of articles and books dealing with the Isonzo (Soča) front and its consequences for the population of the nearby Slovene regions were published. These were at first prevalently based on war memoirs and their authors were non-professional and mainly local historians. From the 1980s onwards, however, they were increasingly often written also by professional historians and based on the systematic research of the military activities and living conditions at the front, and the life stories of the war refugees from the region and of the Slovenes fighting in the Serbian and Italian armies.⁷ In 1988, to mark the 70th anniversary of the end of WWI, the first Slovene exhibition dedicated to the Isonzo (Soča) river battlefield was organized. Two years later, the first Slovene WWI museum opened its doors at Kobarid in the Upper Isonzo (Soča) Valley and in 1998, the first Slovene history student, today a leading Slovene WWI expert, Petra Svoljšak, completed a PhD thesis on the history of WWI at the Department of History of the University of Ljubljana. With the establishment of the National Committee for the Commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of WWI in 2012, Slovene historians joined the Pan European Commemoration of the Centenary of WWI. Since 2014, there have been numerous exhibitions, book presentations, public lectures, commemorations and other events organized on the topic of the First World War. Today, WWI themes are well researched and popular subjects of Slovene historiography, yet Slovene historians continue to focus on Slovene national experiences and topics: on the war experiences of the Slovene soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian Army, on the life stories of the war prisoners and refugees, and on the political orientation of the Slovene political parties and Slovene population in the years 1914–1918.⁸

5 Hmelak, Ivan (Janez Mesesnel). *Soška fronta* (The Isonzo – Soča front). Koper: Lipa 1968.

6 Pleterski, Janko. *Prva odločitev Slovencev za Jugoslavijo* (The First Decision of the Slovenes for Yugoslavia), Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1971.

7 More about recent and contemporary Slovene historiography regarding WWI in: Svoljšak, Prva vojna in Slovenci, 2. del, pp. 547–561; Svoljšak, *Prva vojna in Slovenci 1994–2014* (The First World War and the Slovenes 1994–2014), pp. 149–170.

8 Most recent publications by the Slovene authors dealing with these themes: Lukan, Walter. *Iz "črnozlate kletke narodov" v "zlato svobodo": Habsburška monarhija in Slovenci v prvi svetovni vojni*

In the first two decades of the socialist Yugoslavia, Slovene historians paid only a limited amount of attention to the interwar period and to the Yugoslav Kingdom. The official communist views and interpretations of the first Yugoslavia and its history were rather dark, and such were also the historians' presentations in the historiography. The prevailing opinion was that the Slovene decision in favor of Yugoslavia had been massively supported by the Slovene population in 1918, which, despite the disappointments and dissatisfaction with centralism and the national-unitarist policies of the Serbian parties, had remained loyal to Yugoslavia during the entire interwar period. However, the centralist state system gradually became a straitjacket for all non-Serbian ethnic groups (as well as for the Vojvodina Serbs and the federalist Montenegrins) and the main reason for the political instability and national antagonisms in the Kingdom. The main focus of the post WWII Slovene (and Yugoslav) historians dealing with the interwar period was primarily on topics related to the communist and labor movement, the political activities of the trade unions, and the social position of the laboring classes. Subsequently, until the 1970s and the 1980s, there was nearly no serious research on the interwar Slovene middle-class political parties or on the political orientation and views of their political leaders, and there were only a few and partial research projects carried out on the interwar Yugoslavia, which mainly presented its negative aspects with a focus on the economic and cultural history conducted at the time.⁹

In the mid-1980s however, under the influence of the new historiographic approaches, socio-anthropological research in Western Europe, and the aggravated political situation in Yugoslavia, important changes occurred also in Slovene historiography. Mostly younger scholars applied themselves to the study of the less researched or heretofore un-researched political, social, cultural and economic historical issues of the recent and more distant past in a more politically, ideologically and nationally relaxed and open way than previous generations had.¹⁰ Those who dedicated themselves to the research of the Yugoslav Kingdom continued to see the main reason for the interwar Yugoslav antagonisms and misunderstandings in the authoritarian centralist state system and Yugoslav national unitarism, but at the same time, they also pointed out the

(From the "Black-Yellow Prison of Nations" into the "Golden Freedom"? The Habsburg Monarchy and the Slovenes in the First World War). Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta, Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije, 2014; Svobljak, Petra, Antoličič Gregor (eds.), *Leta strahote. Prva svetovna vojna in Slovenci* (The Years of Horror, The First World War and the Slovenes). Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2018.

9 Dolenc, Ervin. Slovensko zgodovinopisje o obdobju 1918–1991 po razpadu Jugoslavije (Slovene Historiography of the 1918–1991 Period after the Disintegration of Yugoslavia). *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 44, 2, 2004, pp. 114–115.

10 Vodopivec, Peter. Historiography in Slovenia Today. *Slovene Studies, Journal of the Society for Slovene Studies*, 25, 1–2, 2003, pp. 6–7.

positive sides of the development and the great progress which the Kingdom of Yugoslavia had brought to the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs in all aspects (national, political, economic and cultural).

In the Yugoslav state, the Slovene regions which until 1918 had been part of the poorly developed southern territory of the Habsburg Monarchy, became a part of the developed West of the new Yugoslav kingdom virtually overnight – as demonstrated by the economic historian Žarko Lazarević.¹¹ In the 1920s and 1930s, as Ervin Dolenc and other Slovene cultural historians noted, despite their dissatisfaction with the authoritarian and centralist political system, the Slovenes also experienced a dynamic cultural development open to Europe, which they had not known before.¹² Both major Slovene political parties, the Liberals and the Catholics, actively cooperated in Yugoslav political life, albeit following different strategies. The Liberals supported centralism in association with the Serbian Democrats, fearing that the transformation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (after 1929 the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) in the federation would lead to the dominance of the much stronger Catholic Party in the Slovene part of the country, while the autonomist and anti-centralist oriented Catholic Party adapted to the short term political conditions and traded for various concessions – in part by means of its frequent alliances with Serbian radicals, as through most of the interwar period and with only some short breaks in between, well-known Slovene Catholic politicians lobbied in Belgrade and in the court. Their leader Anton Korošec was twelve times minister, twice deputy prime minister and once (the only non-Serbian) prime minister of the royal government.¹³ A modest result of such a policy was also a short term extended

11 Lazarević, Žarko. Od regionalnega k slovenskemu narodnemu gospodarstvu (From a Regional to the Slovene National Economy). In: *Slovenija 1848–1898: Iskanje lastne poti* (Slovenia 1848–1898: Looking for Its Own Way). Ljubljana: Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije 1998, pp. 278–281; Lazarević, Žarko. *Plasti prostora in časa: Iz gospodarske zgodovine Slovenije prve polovice 20. stoletja* (The Layers of Space and Time, From the Economic History of Slovenia in the First Half of the 20th Century). Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2009.

12 Dolenc, Ervin. *Kulturni boj: slovenska kulturna politika v Kraljevini SHS 1918–1929* (“Kulturkampf”, Slovene Cultural Policy in the Kingdom of SHS 1918–1929). Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1996; Dolenc, Ervin. *Med kulturo in politiko: Kulturnopolitična razhajanja v Sloveniji med obema vojnama* (Between Culture and Politics, Cultural and Political Confrontations in Slovenia in the Interwar Period). Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino 2010.

13 Perovšek, Jurij. *Liberalizem in vprašanje slovenstva: nacionalna politika liberalnega tabora v letih 1918–1929* (Liberalism and the Slovene National Issue, National Politics of the Liberal Party in the Years 1918–1929). Ljubljana: Modrijan, 1996; Rahten, Andrej. *Slovenska ljudska stranka v beograjski skupščini* (Slovene People’s Party in the Belgrade Parliament). Ljubljana: ZRC SAZU, 2002; Perovšek, Jurij. “V zaželeni deželi”: *slovenska izkušnja s Kraljevino SHS/Jugoslavijo 1918–1941* (“In the Desired Land”, Slovene Experience with the Kingdom of SHS/Yugoslavia 1918–1941). Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2009; Gašparič, Jure. *Slovenska ljudska stranka pod kraljevo diktaturo* (Slovene People’s Party under the Kings Dictatorship), Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2007.

Slovene regional autonomy from 1927 to 1929, which had a beneficial influence on Slovene economic and cultural development.¹⁴

It may be surprising, but there has been much more interest in the research of the history of the first Yugoslavia and the Slovene position within it in the last two to three decades than in the period of the socialist Yugoslavia, and the picture of the interwar period painted in Slovene historiography today is much more complex and less nationally biased than thirty or forty years ago. New, politically and ideologically balanced research was done on the Slovene opposition against the Serbian and Yugoslav centralist and authoritarian political pressures, on the Liberal and on the Catholic People's parties and their political strategies, on the People's Front and Communist movement and on the political orientation of the Catholic Church during the interwar period. Economic and social historians published innovative studies on the economic modernization, industrial development, banking system and social conditions in the Slovene part of the Yugoslav kingdom.¹⁵ Cultural historians studied the political orientations and ideological divisions of the intelligentsia more extensively than before. And at the same time, political historians continued and still continue to argue that the unsolved national issues and what was until 1939 a rigid centralist system were the main reasons for the quick Yugoslav defeat and disintegration in 1941.

Political and national passions, as is well known, did not calm down even during the war. At the fateful moment, when WWII spread into Yugoslav territory, there was only very little understanding to be found anywhere for the idea expressed by the Slovene poet Edvard Kocbek in 1941, that a "free person who wants to act reasonably in today's world, must first take up a historical and only then an ideological position". This fact, upon which most of the historians agree, tragically marked the course the Second World War was to take on the territory of Yugoslavia and has had a long term influence on post-war Slovene and Yugoslav development.

The greatest discord in Slovene historiography and amongst the public is still caused by differing views on the situation in Slovenia and Yugoslavia during WWII and on the resistance against the German and Italian occupying forces in the years 1941–1945. In socialist Yugoslavia, only one single interpretation of the developments during WWII on Yugoslav and Slovene territory prevailed

14 Stiplovšek, Miroslav. *Slovenski parlamentarizem 1927–1929* (Slovene Parliamentarism 1927–1929). Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta, 2000.

15 Lazarević, Žarko. Kontinuitäten und Brüche: Der lange Weg zu einer slowenischen Wirtschaftsgeschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts. *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für soziale Bewegungen* (Bochum) 41, 2009, pp. 51–69. Fischer, Jasna, Lazarević, Žarko, Prinčič Jože published also a review of the history of the economy on Slovene territory in English (*The Economic History of Slovenia (1750–1991)*). Vrhnika: Razum, 1999).

from 1945 onwards, and this was drawn from the communist victor's point of view. There were thousands of books and articles written and published describing and glorifying the Partisan resistance which was organized and led by the Communists. The majority of these works was produced by non-professional historians as well as authors who had actively participated in the Partisan resistance, but there were also professional historians producing valuable and credible works based on facts and doing more or less positivist research on the organization, strategies and activities of the Partisan units, on the system of the German and Italian occupation and on the politics and violence of the occupiers. Much less or nearly no attention was paid to the opposition to the resistance and to the collaboration with the occupiers, which had also had large public support in some parts of Yugoslavia and Slovenia.¹⁶

In the late 1970s, evaluations of the developments in Slovene regions during WWII began to diverge noticeably. In the 1980s, the first politically and ideologically balanced studies of the collaboration and deteriorative consequences of communist radicalism and violence during the war were published, and starting with the 1990s, the picture and the interpretations of WWII in Slovenia were extensively and essentially broadened by research conducted mainly by the then younger generation of historians. They demonstrated in a persuasive way that the political conditions in Slovenia during WWII were much more complex than presented since 1945. Their focus was (and still is today) on the national, political and revolutionary strategies of the communists and their seizure of power; the relations between the communists and the other political groups that formed the Liberation Front in 1941; the relations between the resistance leadership in Slovenia and Yugoslavia; the traditional political parties, their policies and strategies; and the reasons for the collaboration with the occupiers.¹⁷

16 Godeša, Bojan. Social and Cultural Aspects of the Historiography on the Second World War in Slovenia. *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für soziale Bewegungen* (Bochum), 41, 2009, pp. 111–125.

17 Among the first historians to engage in the systematic research of the anticommunist groups and collaboration was Boris Mlakar, who published many articles and several books, among others also the comprehensive monograph *Slovensko domobranstvo 1943–1945* (Slovene Home Guards 1943–1945) (Ljubljana: Slovenska Matica, 2003). Jera Vodušek Starič analysed in his book *Prevzem oblasti 1944–1946* (The Seizure of Power 1944–1946) (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1992) the principal stages of the communist seizure of power in the last two years of the war and the first years after the war. Bojan Godeša, today a leading Slovene expert on the conditions in Slovenia during WWII, produced numerous articles and several books on the political development and ideological confrontations in Slovenia in the years 1941–1945, among them: *Kdor ni z nami, je proti nam, Slovenski izobraženci med okupatorji, Osvobodilno fronto in protirevolucionarnim taborom* (Whoever is not with Us, is Against Us. Slovene Intellectuals between the Occupiers, the Liberation Front and the Antirevolutionary Side) (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1995), *Slovensko nacionalno vprašanje med drugo svetovno vojno* (Slovene National Question during the WW II) (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2006), *Čas odločitev* (Time of Decisions) (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2012). More about other authors and publications on WW II was written by Bojan Godeša in Social and cultural aspects of the historiography of the Second World War in Slovenia, see note 14.

Although there are still substantial interpretive differences, the prevailing Slovene historians' views of the situation during WWII in the Slovene regions can be summed up as follows: after the German and Italian occupation of the Slovene part of Yugoslavia in 1941, the Slovene middle class parties (the Liberal and the Catholic Party) underestimated the determination of the population to resist the occupiers. Therefore, instead of organizing an anti-occupation resistance themselves, they attempted to establish a *modus vivendi* with the occupiers, which allowed what was still a very small group of communists to take the initiative in organizing the resistance against the occupying forces, which they subsequently turned into a social and political revolution during the war. This led to a ruthless internal Slovene conflict between communists on the one side, who violently eliminated their political and ideological opponents, and militant, prevalently Catholic anti-communists on the other, who with the assistance of the occupying forces organized anti-communist (which, however, were in fact also anti-resistance) armed units, thus collaborating with the occupiers.

The consequences of the conflict between the resistance and the collaborationists (some authors speak and write about a civil war in this case) were additionally tragic, because most of the people who joined the resistance were not communists and the anti-occupation movement had, from the very beginning, much wider popular support than the communist revolution. Both sides entangled in the conflict – the one supporting the resistance and the other opposing it – also tried to establish contacts with the Allies in the hope that they would win the war. The price of the violent political and military struggle, the repression of the occupying forces and the post-war communist retribution against the opponents of the resistance and communism was very high. According to the latest research carried out by the Institute of Contemporary History in Ljubljana, between 1941 and 1946, around 100,000 people living on the territory of the present state of Slovenia in 1941¹⁸ lost their lives because of the war and the communist retribution after the war (about 15,000 real or alleged opponents of the resistance and communism were executed secretly and without any trial whatsoever by the communist authorities from May 1945 to January 1946).¹⁹

These interpretations of developments in Slovenia during and immediately after WWII have their opponents, although – at least among the historians – they are a minority. Some researchers still object to any critical assessment of the communists' co-responsibility for the intra-Slovene fighting, whereas another,

18 The population of this territory was about 1.4 million people in 1941.

19 Deželak-Barič, Vida. Smrtne žrtve druge svetovne vojne in zaradi nje na Slovenskem (Victims of World War II in Slovenia). In: Troha, Nevenka (ed.). *Nasilje vojnih in povojnih dni* (The Violence of the War and Post-War Years), Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino 2014, pp. 11–48. *Smrtne žrtve druge svetovne vojne – Zgodovina Slovenije*, www.sistory.si

smaller group attribute all the responsibility exclusively to the communists, insisting that from the very outset, the Slovene and Yugoslav Partisan resistance was a communist manipulation and an instrument of the communist revolution. At the same time, though, there is also a greater unity at least among the historians, in their evaluations of the communist mass killings of the opponents of the resistance and communism in 1945, since the majority of them agree that this was an incomprehensible and unjustifiable crime, which should be investigated in detail. The communist authorities succeeded in keeping the post WWII mass killings secret until the mid-1970s, when the poet Edvard Kocbek, the leading figure among the Slovene Catholic intellectuals, who had joined the resistance during WWII, publicly admitted that he had known about the mass killings as early as 1946. However, the systematic research of the post WWII communist violence and the secret mass executions in 1945 could nevertheless only begin after the collapse of Yugoslav communism and Slovenia's achievement of independence in 1991.²⁰

At the center of the historical debate on the developments during WWII in Slovenia and Yugoslavia – as evident from what has been said – lie mainly political, ideological and military questions, while methodological and conceptual issues of research and interpretation have been pushed to the background. Modern methodological and conceptual approaches, more than in political and military history studies, have been established in the study of economic, demographic, migrational and cultural developments and everyday life during and after the war, which have become the subject of more intensive and methodologically innovative research in the last two or three decades.²¹

Critical historical research of the period of socialist Yugoslavia could only start in Slovenia and the other successor states of Yugoslavia after the fall of the communist regime. Naturally, this caused public disagreements among historians, who had and still have very different opinions on how authoritarian the Yugoslav communist regime was in the different post WWII periods and how to assess it in general. For the majority of researchers, it was and still is clear, that after the break of the Yugoslav communists with Moscow, i.e., from the early 1950s onwards, the regime in Yugoslavia was very different from that in other communist countries and in the Soviet Union. However, there were and still are

20 Vodopivec, Peter. Slovenia in 1945. *Slovene Studies, Journal of the Society for Slovene Studies*, 28, 1–2, 2006, pp. 53–56.

21 Godeša, Social and Historical Aspects, pp.122–125. There were also a number of politically balanced and methodologically innovative regional and local studies conducted, which demonstrated the diversity of the conditions and developments in different parts of Slovenia during the war. An important achievement in English, based on a detailed study of sources and historical literature, is a critical survey of the history of WWII on the territory of Slovenia by Gregor J. Kranjc, *To Walk with the Devil, Slovene Collaboration and Axis Occupation*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013.

continuing disagreements regarding the assessments of the degree of authoritarianism and political repression in Yugoslavia, everyday political practices, the functioning of the federation, the role of the Slovene politicians in it and their reform initiatives and goals. In the recent studies of the actual functioning of the Yugoslav federation, there has been an increasingly prevalent opinion that efficient decision making in socialist Yugoslavia was hindered not only by national misunderstandings and ongoing conflicts between centralist and federalist tendencies, but above all by communist politics, which was fully committed to the principles of democratic centralism and ideological unity.

This is believed to be a convincing confirmation of the belief that “true federalism is not compatible with authoritarian power”. Besides, some authors also argue that the Slovene leaders, headed by Edvard Kardelj, one of Josip Broz Tito’s closest collaborators and post WWII Yugoslav politicians, had in fact been active co-creators of the Yugoslav political and economic system and were therefore co-responsible for its successes and failures. In this sense, the decade-long process of the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the period of 1980–1990 was not only the result of economic crises and obviously insurmountable national tensions, but above all of a deep crisis of the communist system, whose “useful term” literally “expired” two decades after the so-called “liberal” communist reform had been violently suppressed in the early 1970s. The tragic break-up of the Yugoslav federation was at the same time accelerated by the differences between the democratization processes in various parts of the country and an irreconcilable nationalism which spread through Serbia after Slobodan Milošević seized political power in 1986.²²

Nevertheless, the picture of the socialist Yugoslavia in modern Slovene historiography is not just one-sided and dark. Slovene historians mostly agree that in the four and a half decades of Yugoslav communism, the more authoritarian periods were interspersed with less authoritarian ones and that after 1965, when it opened its borders, Yugoslavia was far more open to Europe and the world than any other communist state. The 1960s and 1970s in particular were marked by relatively favorable social and economic conditions, and Slovenia is believed – despite the dissatisfaction of its politicians and population with federal economic and financial policies – to have developed into a modern industrial society precisely in the time of the second Yugoslavia. Systematic analyses of the

22 Repe, Božo. *Slovenci v osemdesetih* (The Slovenes in the 1980s). Ljubljana: Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije; 2001; *Slovenska novejša zgodovina 1848–1992* (The Recent History of Slovenia 1848–1992), Volume II. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2005, pp. 930–1219; Vodopivec, Peter. *Od poskusov demokratizacije do agonije in katastrofe* (From the Democratization Attempts to the Agony and Catastrophe). In: Čepič, Zdenko (ed.). *Slovenija – Jugoslavija, krize in reforma* (Slovenia and Yugoslavia, Crises – Reforms). Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2010, pp. 15–28.

development of the Slovene economy and its inclusion in the Yugoslav economy since 1945 are among the most important achievements of recent Slovene historiography.²³ Moreover, it was also in the period of the socialist Yugoslavia that Slovenes experienced diverse and comprehensive cultural development. Studies of Slovene and Yugoslav cultural and educational policies show that cultural and intellectual life progressively opened to Western Europe starting at the beginning of the 1950s and particularly from the 1960s onwards.²⁴ This development was accompanied by the recurring attempts of (still scarce) groups of critical intellectuals to expand the margins of freedom and democracy, which, however, were not widely accepted by the public.

The communist regime in Slovenia did not have any serious opposition until the 1980s. Throughout the communist period, the opposition intellectuals had been victims of political pressures and persecution, which is why their life stories have been given special attention in the recent decades. Since the beginning of the 1990s, a large number of well-received works have been published, which deal with the bloody post WWII communist settling of accounts with real and imaginary opponents, the political trials in Slovenia, the violent communist policy towards the Catholic Church and priesthood and the functioning of the Slovene and Yugoslav secret police.²⁵ At the same time, particular attention has been paid to the repeated attempts of reforming the Yugoslav economy and political system, including the question of whether the reforms that the so-called communist liberals in Ljubljana, Zagreb and Belgrade proposed in the second half of the 1960s would have succeeded in prolonging the life of communist Yugoslavia, or at least enabled its more peaceful dissolution.²⁶ The Slovene departure from Yugoslavia and the latter's disintegration have been discussed and presented by several authors, who observed that Slovene independence was

23 Prinčič, Jože. *Kapitalna, ključna kapitalna in temeljna investicijska izgradnja v Sloveniji 1945–1956: slovenska industrija v jugoslovanskem primežu* (The Development of Capital Importance and the Investments in Slovenia: Slovene Industry in the Yugoslav Vice 1945–1956). Novo mesto: Dolenjska založba; 1992; Prinčič, Jože. *V začaranem krogu: slovensko gospodarstvo od nove ekonomske politike do velike reforme 1955–1970* (In the 'Circulus Vitiosus': Slovene Economy from the New Economic Policy until the Great Reforms 1955–1970). Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1999; Prinčič, Jože, Borak, Neven. *Iz reforme v reformo: slovensko gospodarstvo 1970–1991* (From Reform to Reform, Slovene Economy 1970–1991). Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, 2006; Borak, Neven. *Ekonomski vidiki delovanja in razpada Jugoslavija* (Economic Aspects of the Functioning and Demise of Yugoslavia). Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče, 2002.

24 Gabrič, Aleš. *Slovenska agitpropovska kulturna politika 1945–1952* (Slovene Cultural and Agitprop Policy 1945–1952). Ljubljana: Mladika, 1991; Gabrič, Aleš. *Socialistična kulturna revolucija: slovenska kulturna politika 1953–1962* (Socialist Cultural Revolution: Slovene Cultural Policy 1953–1962). Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1995.

25 Ivanič, Martin (ed.). *Dachauski procesi: raziskovalno poročilo z dokumenti*, (The Dachau Trials, The Research Report with the Documents). Ljubljana: Komunist, 1990; Jeraj, Mateja, Melik, Jelka. *Criminal Suit against Črtomir Nagode and the co-Accused*. Ljubljana. Arhiv Slovenije, 2015; Griesser Pečar, Tamara. *Cerkev na zatožni klopi* (The Church in the Court). Ljubljana: Družina, 2005.

26 Repe, Božo. "Liberalizem" v Sloveniji ("Liberalism" in Slovenia). Ljubljana: RO ZZB NOV, 1992.

a result of the Yugoslav government's inability to find a way out of the deep economic, social and political crisis in which Yugoslavia found itself in the 1980s and, simultaneously, of Serbian nationalism and the highly strained relations between Serbia and Slovenia that had ensued by the end of the 1980s.

In researching the period of 1945–1991, the center of attention of Slovene historians has continued to be the position of Slovenia and its development within Yugoslavia rather than Yugoslavia as whole. The only original Slovene history of the two Yugoslavias was thus published in 1995 by Jože Pirjevec, a Slovene historian from Trieste.²⁷ Pirjevec did not doubt the long term allegiance of Slovenia to Yugoslavia, but presented Yugoslavia as an explicitly controversial formation, more prone to division than to cohesion from the very start. Although his book received favorable reviews, it did not provoke any particular professional discussion or ambition to follow his example. Pirjevec's second book, *The Yugoslav Wars 1991–2001* (2003), in which he analyzed the military confrontations and wars in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s, shared the same fate.²⁸ In contrast, though, Pirjevec's third book, *Tito and His Comrades* (2011)²⁹, became a real literary success, although yet again, it did not excite any more lively discussion or interest among Slovene historians. An important Slovene contribution to the post WW II history of Yugoslavia is also the book *Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik and Yugoslavia (1963–1969)* by Dušan Nečak, professor of history at the University in Ljubljana, published in 2013.³⁰

The first comprehensive synthesis of 20th century Slovene history was published by the researchers of the Institute of Contemporary History in Ljubljana in 2005.³¹ 20th century Slovene development has also been extensively presented in the history of Slovenia from the end of the 18th until the end of the 20th century, written and published by the author of this presentation in 2006.³² This work was translated in an abridged form into German in 2008 and included in the overview of Slovene history *Slowenische Geschichte (Gesellschaft-Politik-Kultur)* by Peter Štih, Vasko Simoniti and Peter Vodopivec. It has been accessible

27 Pirjevec, Jože. *Jugoslavija 1918–1991* (Yugoslavia 1918–1991., Koper: Lipa, 1995.

28 Pirjevec, Jože. *Jugoslovsanske vojne 1991–2001* (The Yugoslav Wars 1991–2001). Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2003.

29 Pirjevec, Jože. *Tito in Tovariši* (Tito and His Comrades). Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga 2011. In English: *Tito and His Comrades*. University of Wisconsin Press, 2018.

30 Dušan Nečak, *Ostpolitik Willyija Brandta in Jugoslavija*, Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta 2013. In Croatian translation: *Ostpolitik Willija Brandta i Jugoslavija*, Zagreb: Srednja Evropa 2015.

31 Fischer, Jasna et al. *Slovenska novejša zgodovina, Od programa Zedinjene Slovenije do mednarodnega priznanja Republike Slovenije 1848–1992, 1. in 2. del* (Slovene Recent History, From the Program of the United Slovenia until the International Recognition of the Republic Slovenia 1848–1992). Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2005.

32 Vodopivec, Peter. *Od Pohlinove slovnice do samostojne države, Slovenska zgodovina od konca 18. do konca 20. stoletja* (From the Pohlin's Grammar until an Independent State, Slovene History from the End of the 18th until the End of the 20th Century). Ljubljana: Modrijan 2006, 2007, 2010.

in its English version on the web portal of Slovene historiography since 2009.³³ The first concise history of Slovenia in English, produced by Slovene historians and covering the history of the “territory of the Eastern Alps and Pannonian Plain” from the earliest historical periods until the end of the 20th century, was published under the title *The Land Between* a year before that (in 2008).³⁴

There are also detailed topics related to 20th century Slovene history in the *Historical Dictionary of Slovenia* by Carole Rogel and Leopoldina Pregelj (first published in 1996, the authors of the third edition, published in 2018, being: Leopoldina Pregelj, Gregor Kranjc, Žarko Lazarevič and Carole Rogel).³⁵ The two volumes of the *Slovene Chronicle of the 20th century* (written by a large team of authors³⁶), published in 1995 and 1996 were also well received in Slovenia, as was also the illustrated Slovene history from prehistoric cultures until the beginning of the 21st century by Peter Štih, Vasko Simoniti and Peter Vodopivec published two decades later (in 2016).³⁷ Another important recent contribution to the history of Slovenia in the second Yugoslavia is the collection of articles *Slovenia in Yugoslavia*, presenting the Slovene position in communist Yugoslavia from the political, economic, cultural, demographic, everyday life and public opinion aspects. As the editor of the book Zdenko Čepič claims in the introduction, Slovene history since WWII cannot be discussed and understood without Yugoslavia.³⁸

Despite the efforts of historians for critical, ideologically and politically balanced historical interpretations of the “recent past” and the Yugoslav and Slovene communist regime, they have failed to have any visible influence on the still very emotional and politicized public and political discussions on “what actually happened in Yugoslavia and Slovenia in the 20th century”. In the mid-1990s, there were some successful efforts to include post-communist historical interpretations in the school curricula. The modernized curricula strove for a politically impartial history of the past century, which, during the communist era, had been politicized to the very extreme. They focused more on social and cultural-historical topics and, in a balanced way, included also a presentation

33 Štih, Peter, Simoniti, Vasko, Vodopivec Peter. *Slowenische Geschichte, Gesellschaft – Politik – Kultur*. Graz: Leykam, 2008; Štih, Peter, Simoniti, Vasko, Vodopivec, Peter. *A Slovene History, Society – Politics – Culture*, www.sistory.si

34 Luthar, Oto (ed.). *The Land Between: A History of Slovenia*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang 2008, 2013, 2017.

35 Rogel, Carole, Plut Pregelj, Leopoldina. *Historical Dictionary of Slovenia*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1996, 2007; Plut Pregelj, Leopoldina, Kranjc, Gregor, Lazarevič, Žarko, Rogel, Carole. *Historical Dictionary of Slovenia*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2018.

36 Drnovšek, Marijan (ed.). *Slovenska kronika XX. stoletja, 1. in 2. del* (Chronicle of the Slovene History of the 20th Century), Volume I and II). Ljubljana: Nova revija, 1995, 1996.

37 Štih, Peter, Simoniti, Vasko, Vodopivec, Peter. *Slovenska zgodovina: od prazgodovinskih kultur do začetka 21. stoletja* (Slovene History, From the Prehistoric Cultures until the Beginning of the 21st Century). Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2016.

38 Čepič, Zdenko (ed.). *Slovenia v Jugoslaviji* (Slovenia in Yugoslavia). Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2015, p. 7.

of the history of the South Slav nations. The textbooks were a bigger problem, since, in their desire for political and ideological impartiality, their authors had resorted to historicism, piling up often contradictory facts. This was contrary to the ambitions of the initiators of the modernized curricula, who believed that the goal of school history is to present to students the past reality not just from political or superficial social perspectives, but also from the bottom-up perspective and the perspective of everyday life.

In 2008, however, the history curricula were changed again; this time under the influence of the then ruling government coalition headed by the right wing Slovene Democratic Party (SDS). The scope of the history of the South Slav nations, as well as the history of the two Yugoslavias and Eastern Europe was reduced, and the history of communism was only mentioned briefly within the framework of the subject “totalitarianism in the 20th century”, which was supposed to include a (rather short) description of all the three major “isms” of the 20th century: Fascism, Nazism and Communism. In the school curricula adopted in 2008, the prevailing aspect of 20th century history was thus more Slovene-centric and Western European than ever before.³⁹

The public polemics concerning WWII and Slovene and Yugoslav communism, which have divided Slovene political parties since the early 1990s and have uncompromisingly continued on into the 21st century, have in general had little influence on public opinion. According to a public opinion poll carried out during Slovenia’s process of accession to the European Union (2003), by the Faculty of Social Sciences in Ljubljana, more than 45% of those polled believed that the resistance during WWII was massively supported by the population, as many as 35% agreed with the statement that collaboration with the occupiers was an act of national treason and only 15% agreed that collaborationist units justifiably opposed the communist resistance, although, in their opinion, they should not have collaborated with the occupying forces. More than 43% of the respondents agreed that Slovenia’s accession to the Kingdom of SHS in 1918 was actually a decision of the great powers and 38.5% believed that it would have been better to establish an independent Slovene state already then; while at the same time, more than 43% had good memories of socialist Yugoslavia, more than 53% agreed on the “predominantly positive contacts” with the populations of other Yugoslav nations and republics and more than 73% agreed that they had lived (relatively) well in Yugoslavia before it broke apart.⁴⁰

39 Vodopivec, Peter. History Education and History Textbooks in Slovenia since 1991. In: Shiba, Nobuhiro, Gabrič, Aleš, Suzuki, Kenta, Lazarevič, Žarko. *School History and Textbooks: a Comparative Analysis of History Textbooks in Japan and Slovenia*. Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2013, pp. 9–28.

40 Toš, Niko (ed.). *Vrednote v prehodu III, Slovensko javno mnenje 1999–2004* (Values in Transition, Slovene Public Opinion 1999–2004). Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede 2004, pp. 468–477.

This did not, however, convince those who called and still call for a radical “revision” of history, insisting on the exclusive guilt of the communists regarding the Slovene internal conflict during WWII and demanding decisive public condemnation of the post-war Slovene and Yugoslav political regime on the whole. Nevertheless, according to the results of the most up-to-date public opinion polls, the attitude of the respondents concerning recent history has not changed markedly in the last decade and a half, either. The percentage of respondents who, in the current social and economic conditions, believe that communist Yugoslavia, despite its numerous deficiencies, was in fact a fairly nice country, has even increased. Some research has also revealed the phenomenon of the uncritical idealization of life in the former federation by the young. Although they could not remember Yugoslavia and communism from their own experience, they attribute some qualities to the “recent past” that they miss in the insecure conditions of the present day. At the same time, a large part of the public is fed up with the interminable disputes about the past. There has thus been a visible decline in interest in the recent past among literary writers. After a number of very famous novels dealing with WWII and the post-war violence of the communist authorities which were published in the 1970s and 1980s, the number of literary works dealing with this subject has declined. Moreover, young authors seem to be completely uninterested in themes related to the communist and Yugoslav period. According to various surveys, the prevailing public opinion is that people should come to terms with the fact that various interpretations of the past exist in people’s memories, and any more complex assessment of recent history should be left to the historians and history books.

Like elsewhere in Europe and in the world, and in particular in the ex-communist countries, the history of the 20th century in Slovenia thus also continues to divide politicians, the public and the researchers. All theses on the collective or even predominant Slovene memory and historical discourse, at least as regards the 20th century, are fairly unconvincing. The formation of a critical but nationally and ideologically balanced post-communist and post-Yugoslavia interpretation of recent history is a multi-layered, plural and conflicting process, which has so far not showed any signs of reconciliation of the opposing and often strongly contradictory perspectives present in public memory or in historiographical interpretations. This is the case both in Slovenia and in other countries of the former Yugoslavia. To some extent, reconciliation could perhaps be accelerated by a more ambitiously devised comparative study that would place the national-historical experience within a wider Yugoslav, Central European and European context, for which, however, Slovene historians have not yet shown any great interest.