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AFTER THE CIVIL WAR: Social Divisions and History

The following discussion will focus on the perception and interpretation of WWII in Slovenia. Even though the war ended seventy years ago, it still makes for a very topical issue with numerous connotations in the public discourse. Due to the civil war that took place in that period of time, the memories of WWII are still very divergent, with no indications that the differing views might reach a consensus any time soon. My presentation builds on the social process of facing the recent traumatic past in the period after 1990, following the transformation from the communist into a liberal democratic system and the attainment of independence. WWII or the civil war and the communist period are pressing and complex social issues. The Slovenian example of the division with regard to WWII/the civil war and communism is a local illustration of the historical identity redefinition that took place in the former communist countries. In these states, a historical identity vacuum occurred after the fall of the communist regimes. In order to ensure a more suitable understanding of the Slovenian situation, the discussion opens up three additional dimensions. First it presents the various regimes of historicization, then the use of history, and finally, in the conclusion, it presents a comparison with the situation in Spain.

In historiography, the 20th century is deemed an extremely important period and it was characterized by profound geopolitical, economic and social changes. Countries as well as political, economic and social concepts were reshaped in the processes of transformation; and new forms of economic and social development gained prominence. In the case of the 20th century, we can distinguish between two groups of events; two dividing lines that had a thorough impact on historical development. Both global conflicts (WWI and WWII) as well as the post-war reality represent the first group. The second group is characterized by the end of the Cold War (transition) with the fall of the communist regimes in Europe. Each of these events had substantial consequences for the formation of new historical identities at the level of societies and interest groups, as well as individuals. As it happened, changes in the field of geopolitics, statehood, as well as political and economic regimes, were extensive and far-reaching. The establishment of a new identity framework, allowing societies, individual groups or individuals to legitimize their positions in the new reality, was a long-term process and an integral part of the historical development at this time. The identity redefinition established itself in dynamic circumstances that had to be adapted to. In this process, history was extremely important. Identities are defined by two processes: memory and the historicization of life experiences. The historical backgrounds of the formation of new political, cultural, social, and economic identities become exceedingly relevant in the social sense. After each of the turning points that we have underlined, societies had to face the reinterpretation of history due to the changed systems of social values, priorities and perceptions. In a way, we can state that a “battle for history” began – a “struggle” for the interpretation of history in accordance with the social positions of states, groups, or individuals, with the aim of legitimizing their existing positions.

In the outlined context, the 20th century has also left behind, apart from other things, a painful and complicated heritage of mass trauma, large-scale crime, radical social engineering, and individual/collective guilt. More than anything else, the past resembles a devastated landscape littered with corpses, lost illusions, fallen myths, broken promises, and unappeased memories. Almost two decades after the end of the 20th century, the historical experience of the previous era still largely defines our conception of the 21st century – the current world – on the personal, local, national and global level. The burden of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes always results in extensive national as well as international discussions about their character and history.¹

1 Tismaneanu, Vladimir, Iacob, Bogdan. *Rememberence, History, and Justice: Coming to Terms with Traumatic Pasts in Democratic Societies*. Budapest-New York: CEU Press, 2015, p. 1.

All of this is also reflected in the memorial and historical discourse of societies in the processes of democratization. Studies show that the changes in the historical discourse are slow and that they are not characterized by abrupt turning points. A variety of memorial discourses exist simultaneously in a particular period of time, intertwined in various ways or even in conflict with each other. It is also important to underline that different variations may exist within a single discourse. Thus a single discourse may even provide different perceptions of the past.² The construction of narratives about the past and the competition between them are political processes, based on the wider pertaining linguistic and cultural environments.³

The debates about the importance of the “negative” past, for example WWII, civil war, or repression under communism, are much more closely related to political interests rather than the existence of the “traumatic events” themselves. Small groups that have experienced traumatic events can directly influence the historical discourse only if their narrative corresponds to or is compatible with the social and political goals of the important social groups (for example political parties, associations, the Church, etc.). Past events may enter the collective memory only if they are placed in the context of contemporary interests. Individual interpretations of the past having a dimension of public significance may be such only if they are institutionalized at the level of social, political, and other institutions that promote such perceptions of the past.⁴

By referring to the Cold War and its conclusion with the collapse of the Eastern European communist countries, we also open the question of the memory and history of this period, especially at the national but also at the international level. Difficulties with the integration of the authoritarian as well as the totalitarian character of this part of the past or the traumatic memories from this period into historical memory are evident. On the one hand, researchers have registered a lack of memory or excess of oblivion, which is supposedly characteristic of the European West. On the other hand, Eastern Europe is often seen as overburdened with memories and the weight of history. The events in this part of Europe, characterizing the “famous past” or the status of the “victims of history”, simply refuse to drown in the comfort of forgetfulness.⁵

2 Lebow, Richard Ned. The Memory of Politics in Postwar Europe. In: Lebow Richard, Ned, Kansteiner, Wulf, Fogu, Claudio (eds.). *The politics of Memory in postwar Europe*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006, p. 15.

3 Ibid., p. 27.

4 Fogu, Claudio, Kansteiner, Wulf. Politics of Memory and the Poetics of History. In: Lebow, Richard Ned, Kansteiner, Wulf, Fogu, Claudio (eds.). *The politics of Memory in postwar Europe*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006, pp. 290–291.

5 Ricoeur, Paul. Memory, Forgetting, History. In: Rösen, Jörn (ed.). *Meaning and Representation in History*. New York – Oxford: Bergham Books, 2007, p. 9.

In the process of the historicization of traumatic experiences in the 20th century, Henry Rousso distinguishes between four steps. He defines the first step as “**the stage of reparation**”, when societies attempt to mitigate the consequences of traumatic past events with reparations (financial compensation, restitution of property, judicial processes against the perpetrators of repression) or, at the symbolic level, with the adopting of declarations by the highest state authorities. The second step includes the “**legal approach**” (judicialization), when attempts are made to deal with the traumatic past by means of legal regulations. The third stage of historicization according to Rousso is “**victimization**” – understanding history from the viewpoint of the victims and by means of memories or interpretations formed on this basis. With the fourth and final stage, Rousso also introduces the category of the “**denationalization of history**”. At this point he is referring to the interactions between the national and international environment, or how the international environment and its conceptions influence the attitude towards history at the national level.⁶ The examples he presents include the typical cases of the European Parliament’s resolution on European conscience and totalitarianism of 2009⁷ and the publication of the socialist group in the European Parliament.⁸

Slovenia is a society where the problems with history as well as various and even opposing interpretations and memories are frequent and persistent. The process of the public divergence of interpretations and memories began towards the end of the 1980s. The process of undermining the declared unified image of history went hand in hand with the establishment of political pluralism. The establishment of the new social and economic system and new social values also called for the redefinition of the nation’s historical identity. With this concept we have arrived at the question of the politics of history in Slovenia. Schematically, we can distinguish between two types. We can discern between formal as well as informal types of the politics of history. The formal or institutionalized politics of history are apparent in the school curricula, textbooks, monuments, museums, and memorial speeches. The informal politics of history, which our analysis will focus on, are more peripheral and encompass the categories of monuments, media discourses, family legacies, personal experience, etc. Within both types of history politics, the following forms of the public application of history

6 Rousso, Henry. History of memory, Politics of the Past: What for?. In: Jaraush, Konrad, Lindenberger, Thomas (eds). *Conflicted Memories, Europeanizing Contemporary Histories*. New York – Oxford: Bergham Books, 2007, pp. 31–32.

7 <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+TA+P6-TA-2009-0213+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN>.

8 Swoboda, Hannes, Wiersma, Jan Marinus (eds). *Politics of the Past: The Use and Abuse of History*. The Socialist Group in European Parliament, 2009.

are in use, whereby I refer to generalized characteristics, i.e. analytical forms of historical discourses among various publics.

1. **The existential use of history** is based on the need to remember or forget in order to support historical identities in a society that is uncertain due to rapid changes. Memory is a retrospective, selective process, which we can use to compare or connect the reconstruction or representation of the past with contemporary circumstances.
2. **The moral use of history** is based on feelings of neglect. This type of use originates from the perception that the public does not pay adequate attention to certain historical periods. The goal is to recognize the importance of or socially rehabilitate the so-called overlooked chapters of history and certain untold traumatic events.
3. In case of **the ideological use of history**, we can state that this is an extension of the approaches taken by the moral use of history. This sort of use usually takes the form of a certain judicial process with historical protagonists, or of historical commissions tasked with discovering “what has in fact happened in history”.
4. **The political use of history** can be defined as the intentional, comparative, metaphorical, or symbolic use of history in political actions. The goal is indisputable: selective historical argumentation serves to justify current political conceptions, demands, or standpoints.
5. **The scientific use of history** is based on professional standards and methodological approaches. The evaluation of the past takes place based on expert foundations, taking into account the broad contexts and complexity of the historical period under consideration. Professional historical expertise is a prerequisite for carrying out this sort of intellectual work.⁹

In order to understand the divergence of interpretations and historical memory, it is crucial that we take a look at the time of WWII and define the basic historical dimensions of these events. The “Liberation Front”, as the resistance organization called itself, organized the resistance against the occupying forces (Germans, Italians, Hungarians) in the form of the Partisan military units. Communists ensured their domination in the Liberation Front. From 1943 onwards, the Slovenian resistance movement, a part of the Yugoslav resistance movement under the leadership of the communists, was counted among the members of the Allied anti-fascist coalition. Through the resistance movement,

9 Karlsson, Klas Goran. The Uses of History and the Third Wave of Europeanisation. In: Pakier, Malgorzata, Str ath, Bo (eds). *A European memory?: Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*. New York – Oxford: Bergham Books, 2010, pp. 46–54.

the Communist Party started pursuing revolutionary goals. The Liberation Front enjoyed the support of the majority of the Slovenian population, but not everybody joined it. In the territory occupied by the Italians, a part of the former bourgeois political parties and the leadership of the Catholic Church organized, in cooperation with the occupiers, their own military units in order to fight against the resistance movement, arguing that this movement in fact represented communist revolutionary violence. Thus they crossed the line between passive and active collaboration. This led to a bloody civil war in a part of the Slovenian territory. The Partisan Movement was victorious in the conflict. Therefore, after the end of the war, the collaborating military units and a part of the population (approximately 6% altogether) retreated to Austria together with the German Army. There they surrendered to the British armed forces. The British occupation authorities in Austria returned the members of the quisling units to Slovenia. The Slovenian communist authorities stigmatized these people as traitors, and executed approximately 14,000 of them without any judicial processes. After the liberation in May 1945, Slovenia was transformed into a typical communist state, a copy of the Soviet model, in just a few months.¹⁰

The transformation into a communist state also brought about a new historical narrative as well as a new historical identity. The formal and institutionalized discourse was based on four points. The main emphasis was placed on the leading role of the working class and the Communist Party as a political avant-garde, a driving force of history. The second point was the introduction of the Marxist/class-oriented approach into the explanation of historical processes. With the third point, however, WWII and the leading role of the communists in the resistance movement was established as the foundation for the legitimacy of the communist authorities after 1945. The fourth argument of the new historical discourse strengthened the role of the Communist Party in the transformation into an industrial society and credited it with the merits for the social restructuring of Slovenia.

WWII and the communist resistance became a historical period of extraordinary importance. In the ideological and historical imagery, both of these events represented the foundation for the legitimacy of the communist authorities in the historical perspective. At the symbolic level, the continuity between the past and the existing communist authorities was established. WWII and the resistance movement became a source of inspiration for the political and ideological activities during peacetime. The discourse was based on the idealized heroism of the Communist Party members, who sacrificed their lives for

10 Fischer, Jasna et al. *Slovenska novejša zgodovina*. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2005.

freedom and the communist future. Thus the historical discourse of the communist authorities was very simple, reductive, and mostly decontextualized. The civil war was a typical example. It was defined by the concept of the political and military collaboration of a minor percentage of the population. The stigma of national traitors served as a cover for their merciless punishment. The mass execution of 14,000 members of quisling units after the war was a taboo, and it was not allowed to be discussed in public.

The following turning point in the construction of the various historical narratives, interpretations or public articulations of memories came to the forefront at the end of the 1980s and in the final decade of the 20th century. Discussions about history took place during the process of diminishing the legitimacy of the communist authorities. Slovenia, just like the other post-communist states, could not avoid a historical identity vacuum. With democratization, a number of repressed historical experiences, frustrations, groups or individuals were revealed and became public. The change was obvious. In the communist period history was simple, as the single correct interpretation was specified. With the democratization of Slovenian society, everyone had to face pluralism, up to and even a cacophony of various interpretations of experiences from WWII or the communist period. Numerous explanations of the past and their authors competed for public attention in the media as well as for inclusion in the various forms of the formal politics of history.

The process of pluralization undermined the foundation of the historical legitimacy of the communist authorities. Historical discourses started diverging as the interpretative conclusions changed. The political intervention in the field of historiography was obvious, especially with regard to the work of the right-wing political parties, which based their ideological profiles on anti-communism – on the foundations of the anti-communist historical heritage. The leftist political spectrum was more favorably inclined towards a modified outlook on WWII and the communist period, where both elements gained the character of an essential condition for Slovenian statehood within the existing territorial borders. Some professional historians supported such platforms by providing suitable empirical foundations on the left as well as the right side of the political spectrum.

We should distinguish between two stages in the process of the transformation of the historical discourses. The first stage began by asking questions about the mass executions in 1945. A new historical narrative started taking shape. The discussion was encouraged by the media as well as individual journalists, who wrote about the killings with the passion of revealing the concealed aspects of history. Their approach was sensationalist, lacking a suitable historical context, and they mostly relied on testimonies. Later the state established a commission in order to uncover hidden grave sites and bury the remains of the victims.

The new democratic authorities officially acknowledged the mass executions of 1945 by organizing a memorial event at one of the relevant locations. The commemoration, organized in cooperation with the representatives of the Catholic Church in Slovenia, was supposed to contribute towards reconciliation with regard to the controversial past. The purpose was clear: to ensure a break with the communist past at the symbolic level. The event received considerable media attention, but the results fell considerably short of the expectations. In the second attempt, the Speaker of Parliament established a special historical commission. The commission, consisting of renowned historians, published a joint report towards the end of the year.¹¹ It was written in such a way as to allow for sufficient interpretative space for the coexistence of different historical discourses, but the efforts were in vain: the report was soon forgotten.

In the second stage, the idea of communism and its “totalitarian character” was underlined as problematic from the ideological and political points of view. As the resistance movement was led by communists, the whole liberation movement became questionable. For a certain part of the public, especially the rightist political wing, WWII acquired a different character. It was impossible to deny the existence of the resistance movement, its success, and the international recognition by the Western Allies it had gained. Thus, the focus changed, accompanied by a linguistic shift. It may have been true that the communists had led the resistance against the occupiers, but this was only a means to ensure the takeover of power after 1945, merely the first stage of the revolution. Thus the concept of the resistance was replaced by the revolution. The next step followed in logical sequence. With a revolution on one side, there should also be a counter-revolution on the other side. And so the concept of the civil war spectacularly burst upon the stage of the public discussion on recent history. The concept of the civil war once again became the contextual framework for the consideration of WWII. Naturally, the reduction pushed the sensitive position of the Slovenian nation during WWII – when it was subject to the genocidal policies of the occupiers – into the background. The decontextualization and reduction of WWII to merely the local level was obvious: it was as if the international context had not existed.

The re-evaluation of wartime collaboration took place as well. Thus, for a part of Slovenian society, collaboration became a generalized necessity, a means of survival in the wartime circumstances, forced upon the people due to the communist and revolutionary character of the resistance movement. It was not a question of priorities or an optional choice, as Gregor Kranjc, for example,

11 *Ključne značilnosti slovenske politike v letih 1929–1955: znanstveno poročilo*. Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 1995.

points out.¹² According to this concept, in which communism is defined as a totalitarian ideology related to or even equated with Nazism, the anti-communist armed resistance was not only legitimate, but also morally justified, especially from the viewpoint of the communists' revolutionary goals, without any moral dilemmas about the fact that the counter-revolutionary units were approved and armed by the Italian and German occupation forces as well as operating in close cooperation with them. Active political and military collaboration became a counter-revolutionary act; merely a response to the communist violence. The concept logically concludes with a theory equating anti-communism and democracy. At this point, the past and present become organically intertwined, allowing for a change of the historical identity in the present. It is interesting that in this case, as Bojan Godeša puts it, a thesis already circulating during WWII is being reapplied, for it was in this manner that the political and military leaders at the time justified their collaboration – first with the Italian and then with the German occupation forces – in front of the Western Allies.

Like in the other former communist countries, in 2008 the rightist government founded a special historical institution for the research of the totalitarian past: The Study Centre for National Reconciliation. Its task is to study all the totalitarian regimes in the Slovenian 20th century: fascism, nazism, and communism. The totalitarian character is the common aspect of all three of these regimes. Nevertheless, the work of this Centre mostly focuses on the period of communism; more precisely on revealing the examples of the communist violence from the beginning of WWII until the declaration of the independent Slovenian state.¹³

The matter also involves a distinctive understanding of the concept of multiple perspectives that these groups strive to assert in the public discourse on history. Multiple perspectives in this context do not originate from the supposition of history as a human experience from the viewpoint of the various social roles of individuals and groups in a society, like the history of gender, childhood, old age, the working class, everyday life, and so on. In the case under consideration, we are once again dealing with the reduction to the political and ideological level. Another perspective is anti-communism itself, which is intended to represent the foundation for a modern historical identity, a modern historical memory. In order to achieve this, the political discourse, school curriculum and textbooks must be completely changed and the support of the media must be ensured.

Today's historiography on WWII is defined by modern approaches and professional standards. In the period of transition, the image of WWII and the

12 Kranjc, Gregor. *To Walk with the Devil: Slovene Collaboration and Axis Occupation, 1941–1945*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013.

13 <http://www.scnr.si/sl/publikacije/>.

communist period was subject to critical consideration. In the modern historical monographs and articles, the time of the war is presented as a tragic experience, which involved several simultaneous processes, for example the occupation, the resistance movement, the civil war, revolution and counter-revolution, and so on. WWII is deemed a complex, traumatic and controversial period with long-term effects. As such, it cannot be presented in a one-sided manner, from a single ideological or political viewpoint. The majority of historians endeavor to assert history as a science; a discipline that should analyze and explain the traumatic past in the form of a coherent narrative.¹⁴

The various discourses stem from the three practical uses of history defined in the introduction. The moral use of history originates from the feelings of offense and victimization as a strategy of historical thinking. This sort of history use coincides closely with the political and ideological uses of history. These types of historical thinking make for typical examples of revisionism in historiography. In this sense, we can note the interesting fact that the so-called “victorious side” attempts to overcome its criticized communist character with the linear dependence between the WWII resistance movement and what is today Slovenian statehood. Meanwhile, the other side compensates for the accusations of active collaboration by transforming the quisling units into fighters for democracy based on anti-communism. Both sides therefore associate the time of WWII with the present, by means of abstraction, transformation and one-sided reduction, also without any suitable contextualization.

Thus, the Slovenian example confirms the statement that history is more than just the past, as it always includes the dimension of the present. On the one hand, history is seen as a temporal sequence of events, while on the other hand, its symbolic dimension is being emphasized. The latter is underlined as an interpretation that gives meaning and importance to the sequence of events with various cultural connotations, rules, and values. Memories are what connects the present with the past: they are a category that co-shapes history. Memories and historical thinking steer us towards the path of experience. At the same time, they transform the past into a meaningful part of the present, which also affects the time beyond the present.¹⁵

14 Vodopivec, Peter. The Conflicting Politics of History and Memory in Slovenia since 1990. *Slovene Studies*, 37, 1–2, 2015, pp. 45–66; Hančič, Damijan (ed.). *Refleksije – zbornik prispevkov*. Ljubljana: Študijski center za narodno spravo, 2012, pp. 29–86; Godeša, Bojan. Social and Cultural Aspects of the Historiography on Second World War in Slovenia. *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für soziale Bewegungen*, 41, 2009, pp. 111–125; Godeša Bojan, Mlakar Boris, Storia della resistenza e della guerra mondiale: La Slovenia e l'ex Jugoslavia. *Contemporanea*, 9, 1, 2006, pp. 123–132; Godeša, Bojan. Reconciliation instead of History. *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 56, 3, 2016, pp. 101–117.

15 Rüsen, Jörn. What does “Making sense of history” mean?. In: Rüsen, Jörn (ed.), *Meaning and Representation in History*. New York – Oxford: Bergham Books, 2006, pp. 1–5.

The transitional period in Slovenia was without doubt also characterized by heated discussions on history. History became one of the aspects of the political struggle. In this case, one cannot help but to be under the impression that the confrontation of various historical interpretations and the of memories attests to an unstable society that has difficulties reaching a consensus when it comes to the most fundamental questions like the principles of cohabitation of various ideological orientations together with their own historical narratives. The basic question is which conditions need to be fulfilled in order to ensure a successful transition to democracy? Is a radical social confrontation with the traumatic past the right way to go about it, or should history be put to rest in order to focus solely on the future? Just as in the case of many other questions, the opinion of Slovenian society about this is divided. A part of the society and the political space cannot envision any successful development without a radical confrontation with the past. To ensure this, lustration proceedings are supposed to be used – more symbolically today than on any realistic level – as was proposed at the beginning of the transition period. The opposite side of Slovenian society is hard to define as a single bloc, as it is quite dispersed in its ideological preferences. The only thing it has in common is the conviction that successful democratization is possible, even without facing the past radically. This thesis states that the perception of the past is a dynamic category in a constant process of evolutionary transformation. The traumatic past has to be regretted, but society has to reach a consensus about its future and unify behind a new developmental model. History should be left to historians. It is interesting that both sides are “demanding” unification. The right wing calls for the unification of outlooks on the past as the foundation for the future. Meanwhile, the left wing wants to ensure unification with regard to the future in order to clear up the past.

As this discussion nears its conclusion, the comparative dimension has to be introduced as well. The Slovenian disagreements are easier to understand in the context of the international space. Thus a more comprehensive evaluation of the circumstances can be ensured as well, especially if we wish to evaluate the effects of disparity with regard to the connection between successful democratization and a clear-cut distancing from the traumatic past. Therefore we will resort to the Spanish example, as Spain has also experienced a civil war, a transition from dictatorship to democracy, and a re-evaluation of history, especially the period of its civil war.

The Spanish path towards democratic transition began with a consensus of the political forces. As the renowned historian Santos Julia put it, the Amnesty Act of 1977 was of key importance. It was a result of negotiations between the political forces, intended to ensure that the past would be “forgotten” in order

to form a new political system on the basis of tolerance and mutual respect. However, at the same time, Santos Julia wrote that “amnesty” did not also mean “amnesia”, nor did he equate “forgetting” with “ignoring” the past.

In the Spanish case, the transition to democracy was based on a “pact of silence” when it came to the past, preventing apolitical taking to task of those responsible for the dictatorship and crimes – those who at the same time denied the public acknowledgement of violent acts and victims of these acts. The agreement gave rise to the “*myth of collective responsibility*”, which supported the transition to democracy. However, this did not entail any censorship, nor did it mean that public discussions were non-existent or that historians did not analyze the civil war and the period of Francoism.¹⁶ It turned out that memory and oblivion were not mutually exclusive concepts. As the Uruguayan poet Mario Benedetti wrote, “oblivion is full of memories” (*El olvido está lleno de memoria*, 1995),¹⁷ or if we reverse this thought, “memories are full of oblivion”.

At the level of political correctness, the agreement on the “pact of silence” persisted until the end of the 20th century. As it became exhausted, public discussions on the civil war and the characteristics of Francoism exploded. On the one hand, this was due to the political division into the left and the right, while on the other hand, it was caused by the influence of the international space. It was a direct reflection of the discussions taking place at the international level about how democratic societies or societies in the process of democratization should face their difficult or traumatic pasts. The issue was all the more topical in the post-communist Eastern European countries, the South African Republic after the official abolition of the apartheid system, and during the transition of South American countries to democracy after the end of their various dictatorships.¹⁸ It was a sort of a “denationalization of the past”, a confrontation with the generally applicable dilemmas. The victims of repression in the aforementioned countries called for justice and public recognition of their suffering. The revision of the “official historiography” and memorial landscape, achieved by including the narrative about victims and repression – i.e., by including the memories of individuals or groups of populations whose recollections and experiences had been silenced or outlawed – was supposedly of critical importance. Allegedly the process was vital as the first step towards ensuring reconciliation and strengthening the democratic system. Supposedly, democratization and a “clear-cut attitude

16 Boyd, Carolyn. The Politics of History and Memory in Democratic Spain. *Annals of the American Academy of Political Sciences*, 617, 2008, p. 135.

17 Colmeiro, José. Nation of Ghosts?: Haunting, Historical Memory and Forgetting in Post-Franco Spain [online article]. *Electronic Journal of theory of literature and comparative literature*, 4, p. 25. [Consulted on: 15/05/2018], <http://www.452f.com/index.php/en/jose-colmeiro.html>.

18 McDonough Peter. Identities, Ideologies, and Interests: Democratization and the Culture of Mass Politics in Spain and Eastern Europe. *The Journal of Politics*, 57, 3, 1995, pp. 649–676.

towards the past” were mutually dependent. At the turn of the century, various civil society organizations or local authorities, supported by the leftist part of the Spanish political space, initiated numerous searches for concealed grave sites.

In 2004, the social democratic government established a commission, tasked with preparing the foundations for the reparation of injustice and the moral as well as legal rehabilitation of the victims of Francoism. The public discussion that followed deepened the ideological disagreements in Spanish society and threatened the already achieved political stability. The proclamation of the year of historical memory in 2006, on the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, resulted in the official duty to commemorate the fallen republicans and other victims of Francoism.¹⁹ In 2007, the socialist government adopted an act on historical memory, providing aid for persecution victims. At the same time, this act ensured the resources for the maintenance and excavation of grave sites, the identification of victims, and the placement of their memorials. The 2007 government was aware of the social sensitivity of this issue. Thus the new legislation did not provide for any official interpretations of history or memory: it merely created the conditions for the pluralism of memorial practices. The division of the society was confirmed in 2011, when the People’s Party government stopped financing the excavation of grave sites with the justification that these activities only deepened the division in Spanish society.²⁰

The Spanish democratization process counts as a successful example of the transition from dictatorship to democracy – as an example of a consensual approach that ensured social cohesion as a precondition for significant economic progress and integration into the international community. In this sense, I find a thesis by Omar Encarnación interesting: that the Spanish transition to democracy after Franco’s death in the middle of the 1970s attests to the fact that radical distancing from the past is not a crucial precondition for successful democratization. He claims that the democratic transition was successful precisely because Spain gave priority to democratization and social stability before clearing up the traumatic past. Encarnación finds the confirmation of this assumption in the discipline of the political actors, who were willing to lay their disagreements with regard to the past aside in order to strengthen the democratic institutions in the society. As the third point of the successful democratic transition

19 Boyd, *The Politics of History and Memory in Democratic Spain*, p. 144; Aguilar, Paloma. *Justice, Politics and Memory in the Spanish Transition*. In: De Brito, Alexandra Barahona, González-Enriquez, Carmen, Aguilar, Paloma (eds). *The Politics of Memory: Transitional Justice in Democratizing Societies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 92–118; Shevel, Oxana, *The Politics of Memory in Divided Society: A comparison of Post-Franco Spain and post-Soviet Ukraine*. *Slavic Review*, 70, 1, 2011, pp. 137–164.

20 Vodopivec, Peter. O zgodovinoepisju o španski državljanski vojni. *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 56, 1, 2016, p. 18.

in Spain, he underlines the fact that the historical reconstruction had priority before searching for those responsible for the traumatic past.

Omar Encarnación concludes his article on facing the past very effectively. He writes that the reconstruction of history could not protect Spain from the profound differences in the evaluation of the Spanish Civil War and the subsequent decades, as no consensus exists regarding the nature of what should actually be remembered. Consequently, the Spanish past has remained disputable for many decades. Various interpretations compete for inclusion in the collective (national) memory. For Encarnación this is a major step forward, as the coexistence of the various interpretations thoroughly corrects the Francoist one-sided version of history, which had persisted in the public space due to the agreement to the “pact of silence”.²¹

Slovenia as well as Spain have both been through a traumatic civil war experience, which represents one of the main points of division in the evaluation of their recent histories. The examples of the two countries differ in their historical contexts, social structures, as well as the political culture of regulating social life and the politics of history. The examples may represent opposing viewpoints, but they coincide in the very method of facing the past. The auto-victimization strategies of the sides defeated in the civil wars and the moral use of history represent a counterpoint to the victorious sides in their persistent adherence to the concepts of social stability.

Both historical experiences point out the urgency of reaching a consensus on the manner in which the various memories, historical experiences and interpretations can coexist – a consensus on the ways of cohabitation, if not respect for the various perceptions of the sides that opposed each other during the civil wars. We can safely assume that an agreement on the conditions for the coexistence of various interpretations of traumatic history is required in order to ensure social cohesion and stable social development.

21 Encarnacion, Omar. Reconciliation after Democratization: Coping with the Past in Spain. *Political Science Quarterly*, 123, 3, 2008, pp. 435–459; Encarnacion, Omar. *Democracy without justice in Spain: Politics of forgetting*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014.