

The Ideological Transformation of Milan Kučan in 1986-1988: Views on Socialism and the Coexistence of Nations in Yugoslavia

This study examines Milan Kučan's ideological transformation from 1986 to 1988 by making use of his addresses to the Slovenian communist leadership. At the beginning of that period, Kučan advocated for maintaining the vanguard role of the communists, albeit with a democratising accent. He also accepted the transfer of certain powers to the federation in order to increase its efficiency. By contrast, during the course of 1987 Kučan absorbed the radicalised autonomist stances that had become widespread among the Slovenian public in those months. Connected to that, Kučan observed that the communists were losing control over society and feared acquiring the stigma of a national traitor. Still, he continued to defend self-management socialism, believing that it gave the communists an advantage over the opposition in public opinion. Kučan's political identity lost ground during 1988, when the Yugoslav communists initiated radical economic reforms. Kučan adapted to this development by gradually becoming Slovenia's non-ideological national leader.

Introduction

The opinions and activities of political leaders in socialist Slovenia underwent profound changes in the latter half of the 1980s. At the turn of the subsequent decade, the Slovenian (already reformed) communists advocated for the independence of their republic and also for the *de facto* transition to a capitalist economy. By contrast, only slightly earlier they had been defending the socialist system and the republic's participation in federal Yugoslavia. Unlike the situation in many other East European countries, the ideological transformation of communist leaders vis-à-vis the national question and socio-economic system transpired rather early, completely and without any larger rifts within the party. This helped Milan Kučan, a long-term top communist politician and chairman of the League of Communists of Slovenia (LCS) in 1986–89, get elected to the highest state office in 1990 and to remain there for the next 12 years. Comparable success in

the new system was achieved by only a handful of communist party leaders in East European countries or their former federal units.¹

Slovenian historiography provides detailed accounts of the republic's democratisation and disassociation from Yugoslavia in the late 1980s (e.g., REPE 2002 and 2015; PESEK 2007; LUSA 2012; ČEPIČ, 2020). On the national question, Slovenian scholars have shown that communist leaders usually hardened their stances toward the federation only after hearing clear calls to do so from the broader Slovenian public, especially from the cultural circles, youth activists, and alternative media. However, the role of the communists in this process is portrayed as more or less passive and the change in their opinions in the 1980s has not been the subject of specific scrutiny. The historians often implicitly assume that these changes naturally stemmed from the prior sympathies of Slovenian communists for liberalisation and antipathy toward the (re)centralisation of Yugoslavia, while the matter of the economic system has largely been left out in these accounts (Ibid.). The reader may thus be given the impression that there was static polarisation between the stances of Slovenia and the federal leadership and Serbia as its alleged opponents. For example, Božo Repe believes there were more or less permanent differences in opinion between Slovenia and the centralists "on Yugoslavia – a union of autonomous states or a unified state that would gradually turn into a mono-ethnic one thanks to the creation of a Yugoslav nation;² on the societal system – a democratic parliamentary system with multiple parties or preservation of one-party dominance (...); on the economic system – implementing market laws and pluralism of ownership or maintaining a dysfunctional, formally self-managing but in fact state-directed economy with undefined social ownership" (REPE 2003: 175). Repe further notes that that "all three of these questions had appeared in various forms already in previous decades but (...) surfaced in the 1980s" (Ibid.). The differences between the two alleged concepts are thereby assumed to have endured for a very long time, only waiting to be expressed. Consistently, Repe places Kučan's ideological transformation in some early but unspecified periods, as he, without elaborating, says

¹ Only three other cases are known, two of them in other former Yugoslav republics. The chairman of the Serbian communists in 1986–89, Slobodan Milošević, continued as the chairman of the republic's Presidency, then as president of the republic and finally president of the entire Serbo-Montenegrin Yugoslavia, until 2000. In Montenegro, the last communist party chairman (1989–1991), Momir Bulatović, continued as president in 1990–98. Lastly, the general secretary of the Communist Party of Lithuania in 1988–89, Algirdas Brazauskas, served as a deputy prime minister immediately after the regime change and then in 1992–98 as the president of the republic. Unlike in Europe, it was common for former top communist officials to continue in the highest state functions in the Caucasian and Central Asian republics of the former USSR in the 1990s.

² This is also suggested by Čepič (2020: 179–180), who without any details says that Serbian politicians wanted Yugoslavia to be "as centralised as possible, including in the ethnic sense."

that Kučan's orientation in the latter half of the 1980s was already "typically social-democratic" (REPE 2015: 577).

In this way, it is implied that the Slovenian communists: 1) did not alter their attitudes very much because they had not identified with communist ideology throughout the 1980s, and 2) led Slovenia away from Yugoslavia either due to pressures for centralisation and even ethnic assimilation or because they had always wanted to transform Yugoslavia into a confederation. Such assertions, however, do not seem persuasive when one considers how the Slovenian communists spoke about Yugoslavia and socialism prior to 1989. We can set forth from the idea of Marko Zajc (2015) that the separation of Yugoslavism from Sloveneness in the 1980s was a gradual, unplanned and emergent process. This can be applied not only to the general Slovenian public but also to the communist elites, and not only to Yugoslavism but also to communist ideology.

Despite its early departure from the Soviet bloc (1948), Yugoslavia remained a socialist state with the communists holding a monopoly over political power. Therefore, communist rule in Yugoslavia shared many features with the rest of Eastern Europe. Communist elites denied the possibility of legitimate social conflict and therefore lacked the capacity for conflict management. That and conformist pressure on society by the communists made any incidences of social dissatisfaction a threat to the regime's stability (KOTKIN 2009: 15–16). All ruling communist parties employed coercion and indoctrination and proclaimed themselves the vanguard of society with the exclusive right to set the course for development based on their supposed knowledge of historical dialectics. They nonetheless needed some form of legitimacy among their populations, in the very least as consent for the political and socio-economic system. Even in countries where the communist rule was introduced under the Soviet Union's decisive influence, the communists initially had significant public support thanks to their anti-fascist engagement, the failures of the inter-war regimes and the attractiveness of their promises to establish a just and harmonious social order (TARIFA, 1997). Until the early 1970s, communist governments successfully maintained rapid socio-economic development that in some countries exceeded the pace in the West (SZELENYI & SZELENYI 1994). Afterward, however, the East began lagging behind and became economically dependent on Western loans and technology. The unfulfilled promise of economic superiority over the capitalist world and the inability to meet the increasing material needs of their populations further undermined the legitimacy of the one-party communist rule that had been weak in any case (TARIFA 1997). Moreover, the communists themselves were changing. They developed an inferiority complex in relation to better-performing Western economies and technologies (SZELENYI & SZELENYI 1994: 225). During the 1980s, they began to publicly signal uncertainty in their ability to

lead society (YURCHAK 2005). Thus, the legitimacy of communist regimes was diminishing in the 1980s, both among the general public and inside the establishment, as the verifiable pledges of the communist secular utopia were not being fulfilled (SCHÖPFLIN 1995). This also applied to Yugoslavia, even if its communist regime initially had greater internal legitimacy than those in most other Eastern European countries, largely thanks to the successful domestic communist-led resistance to fascist occupation during World War II, the subsequent ability of the Titoist leadership to pursue an independent foreign policy, and the democratising aspect of the self-management model. Unlike single-party rule, socialism as a socio-economic system associated with a guaranteed basic living standard retained significant popularity in Eastern Europe until the system's very collapse or even later (WHITE 2001: 43; VANĚK 1994). The people only had to accept capitalism as the price of democracy (SZELENYI & SZELENYI 1994: 218–219).

The efforts of the communists to legitimate their rule interacted with nationalism. On one hand, the Leninist principle of self-determination of (oppressed) nations never disappeared from communist theory. This was reflected in the federal organisation of the three East European multinational states, the USSR, Yugoslavia and (after 1969) Czechoslovakia. Federalism seemed to be a natural communist solution to the national question, as it was supposed to eliminate the hegemony of the large nations (Russians, Serbs and Czechs), while making room for “proletarian internationalism”. In practice, though, centralised state and party administration were maintained in these federations, with the notable exception of Yugoslavia since the late 1960s. The communist ideology considered the issue of national autonomy subordinate to the socio-economic system, and nationalism a threat to the universalist goals of the communist movement. Even though the communist establishments leaned on patriotism and national feelings to a significant extent (MEVIUS 2009), they were still widely deemed nationally ignorant (SCHÖPFLIN 1995). Such a reputation, along with the legitimacy deficit of their power monopoly, contributed to the outburst of nationalism in Eastern Europe when communist rule was eroding: ethno-national consciousness felt itself being suppressed, as Schöpflin (1995: 87) puts it. Beissinger (2009) argues that nationalist emotions had much greater power to mobilise popular discontent than pro-democratic demands in the late 1980s. Some of the local communist elites, including the Slovenian, Serbian and partly the Baltic, understood this dynamic and survived regime change on a nationalist platform. At the same time, the emotional appeal of nationalism affected the minds of politicians who themselves had been experiencing an ideological vacuum when they had lost their faith in communist ideology. The grasp of the national question by many of them therefore cannot *a priori* be deemed as purely Machiavellian or inauthentic and deserves individual

examinations.³ After all, the communists had often considered themselves defenders of their nations against external oppressors (MEVIUS 2009). Therefore, when burgeoning nationalism knocked on the door of the central committees in the late 1980s, it often found nationally receptive communist elites.

In the 1980s, one-party communist rule in Yugoslavia was under pressure due to a protracted economic crisis, changing economic power relations in the world in favour of Western capitalist states and new nationalist and liberal political alternatives, especially in Serbia and Slovenia. All of these factors undermined the fragile legitimacy of communist rule and ideology among the populace and also among the communist elites themselves. One result was the loss of self-confidence by the communists and their increasing receptiveness to nationalism (RAMET 2002: 125). This study explores how the Slovenian communist establishment perceived the future of Yugoslavia and socialism in 1986–88 and how their attitudes began to change in the context of their efforts to maintain their political legitimacy in a profoundly changing political environment. For this purpose, the speeches delivered by Milan Kučan (*1941), the chairman of the League of Communists of Slovenia (LCS) and the most prominent Slovenian protagonist of the departure from communist ideology and Yugoslavism, will be analysed.

Paul Chilton's (2004) approach to political discourse analysis will be used. According to Chilton, it is possible to identify three dimensions of "discourse worlds" communicated by political speakers: time, space, and modality (here reduced to rightness), where elements are placed around the "deictic centre", i.e., me/us here and now. This makes it possible to show what persons, ideas, or events Kučan represented as close or distant, right or wrong (good or bad) and past, current or future, in relation to his own viewpoint from the deictic centre. The analysis will focus on these three dimensions. Diagrams will be used for some of the periods where a plus or minus sign will indicate the rightness dimension, while time will have a horizontal axis leading from the past (left) to the future (right). The spatial dimension will be placed on a vertical axis ordered (from the bottom up): Slovenia – deictic centre – Yugoslavia – Europe and the world. This corresponds to Kučan's feeling that the Slovenian communists were under opposing pressures: "On one side, under rightist or (...) liberalist pressure [from within Slovenia], on the other side, under dogmatic pressure [from Yugoslavia]. The struggle on both wings is a reality."⁴ However, the positioning of elements on both axes, especially

³ Even though the link between the fall of communist regimes and the steep rise of nationalism is widely acknowledged, it should be kept in mind that weakening of multinational states has also been a long-term trend in the West, as we can see in the Belgian state reforms (1970–2011) and in the growing autonomist and separatist tendencies in Scotland and Catalonia.

⁴ Arhiv Republike Slovenije, Ljubljana. Fund 1589, Centralni komite Zveze komunistov Slovenije (further on as ARS 1589).. Magnetogram 16. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 14. 11. 1986, p. 5/1.

the spatial one, is only indicative. The main purpose of the use of diagrams is to schematically depict Kučan's representations of protagonists, ideas and events, which are analysed in detail in the individual sections of the study.

Political circumstances in Yugoslavia in the 1980s and Kučan's career

The Yugoslav constitution of 1974 and the subsequent "Associated Labour Act" were the most comprehensive expressions of the long-term efforts made by the Yugoslav leaders, especially Edvard Kardelj from Slovenia, to find an alternative version of socialism to that espoused by the Soviet bloc. The economy rested on self-management of enterprises under "social ownership" and regulation based on agreements and contracts between economic and political entities, with only a limited role for market forces (MENCINGER, 1989). Regarding the state's structure, the constitutional reforms in 1971–74 transferred many powers from the federation to the republics and provinces. Consensual decision-making was widely introduced in federal political forums, the members of which were nominated by the republics. The cohesion of the federation thus depended on the ability of the elites, who acted more or less openly on behalf of their respective republics or nations, to find common ground (BURG 1983). Even so, Yugoslavia remained a state, constituted not only by its nations as collectives, but also, at least in theory, by individuals ("working people and citizens")⁵ Unlike regarding self-management and federalism, the Yugoslav communists were not so confident as to how political power should be exercised. They retained their own leading role in the society and promised a withering away of the "remains" of the party monopoly only as a hazy distant perspective (KARDELJ 1978: 70–72, 203–213).

After the death of President Tito in 1980, Yugoslavia struggled with an economic crisis that included sharp rise in inflation and, outside of Slovenia, unemployment as well. From the early 1980s onward, modest attempts were proposed to make the economy more effective within the self-management and social ownership framework and to give the market more leeway in production and services. Yugoslav leaders, though, still opposed capital and labour markets (JOVIĆ 2003: 245–250; BILANDŽIĆ 1986: 53–65). While there was at least a declaratory consensus on the general direction of economic reforms, deeper differences arose on whether to change the relations in the federation. The leaderships of Croatia and Slovenia in particular defended the 1974 constitution, fearing the "unitarism" that had been stigmatised by official doctrine since the 1960s. Nevertheless, in the 1980s even Slovenian politicians, as the most stalwart defenders of the then still valid constitution, acknowledged

⁵ The SFRY was defined by the first article of the 1974 constitution as "a federal state (...) of voluntarily united nations and their socialist republics (...) and a socialist self-managing democratic community of the working people and citizens and of equal nations and nationalities"; *Ustav SFRJ* 1974.

that the extent of decentralization was causing problems. In 1984, Ciril Ribičič, the Slovenian communist leadership's constitutional expert, did not have "any doubt that the constitutional conception of the federation (...) is being implemented one-sidedly" and called for "decisive action against decentralised etatism" (RIBIČIČ 1984: 230). Therefore, at the turn of 1986–87, all of the republics agreed to transfer some of their powers to the federation. Slovenian communists, however, soon changed their minds and withdrew their consent with a number of prepared amendments, so that only cosmetic changes in competencies were ultimately adopted. In addition to pan-Yugoslav discussions about the economy, federalism and growing ethnic tensions in Kosovo, the Slovenian communists – more than their colleagues in the other republics – had to deal with the blossoming activities of alternative political forces, especially youth activists, associations of intellectuals and the related media. Nationalism and criticism levelled at the ruling communists were growing throughout the Slovenian society, and notably accelerated in 1987–88. This was reflected in the fierce public responses to the drafting of federal constitutional amendments in September 1987 and the arrest of four Slovenians for the theft of classified documents in June 1988 (ZAJC 2015; REPE 2000: 18-22; VURNIK 2005).

By the mid-1980s, Milan Kučan had passed through a series of high posts in the communist establishment. Already during the years of so-called Slovenian liberalism at the turn of the 1960s into the 1970s, he proved pragmatic and capable of keeping doors open for the various potential outcomes of power struggles. This allowed him to persist in high-level politics despite his contacts with the later displaced liberal group around Slovenian prime minister Stane Kavčič (REPE 2015: 67–81). Kučan later headed the Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Slovenia (1973–78) and the Slovenian parliament (1978–82). During his subsequent term as a member of the presidium of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) in 1982–86, he attracted broader attention particularly by dealing with Serbia's constitutional position. The conclusions of his commission endorsed the demand of Serbia to enhance the republic's authority inside its provinces, Kosovo and Vojvodina (REPE 2015: 105–106; Jovič, 2003: 458).

In 1986, Kučan was elected chairman of the LCS. Kučan's opinions did not deviate significantly from the mainstream of the Slovenian communist establishment, although he was less willing to repress growing opposition than his more conservative colleagues, notably Andrej Marinc, France Popit, and Stane Dolanc.⁶ As to relations within the federation, Kučan was rather more coopera-

⁶ Marinc was Kučan's predecessor as the LCS chairman and then remained a member of the Slovenian party and state leaderships. Popit had been a long-term chairman of the LCS (1969–82) and later (1982–88) the chairman of the state Presidency of Slovenia. Dolanc was a key ally of President Tito in intra-party struggles in 1971–72. In 1984–89, he was a member of the state Presidency of Yugoslavia.

tive with Belgrade than some of his Slovenian colleagues, especially Popit and Jože Smole.⁷ As a consequence, he got into occasional disputes with them. At the beginning of 1988, Kučan preferred Marinc, who had a relatively good reputation in Yugoslavia, to become the next chairman of the Presidency of Slovenia, over Janez Stanovnik, who was by contrast popular among supporters of expanding Slovenian autonomy.⁸ Kučan also maintained good relations with Dolanc, who, as the “last federal Slovenian” (REPE 2002: 23–24), was becoming increasingly isolated among his Slovenian colleagues because of his pronounced Yugoslav orientation. In all of these matters, Kučan was adopting, and in the end actively promoting, ideas which initially had not suited him but which he came to like or find useful. He therefore became the ideal protagonist of the Slovenian communist establishment’s ideological transformation and the transition of society as a whole into a system that he had once opposed.

Kučan’s speeches provide valuable material for studying the ideological shift of the entire Slovenian communist establishment in the late 1980s. Namely, Kučan’s rhetoric was strongly influenced by the broad spectrum of opinions which he encountered both within and outside of political institutions. Kučan was furthermore an *ex officio* member of the presidium of the Central Committee (CC) of the LCY. He commuted to its sessions in Belgrade every week and was therefore quite well-apprised of the situation in federal politics. This analysis will use transcripts of sessions of the presidium of the CC LCS in Ljubljana, held in the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia (ARS). The sessions were attended by the 13 presidium members and about 10 executive secretaries. They were sometimes joined by the remaining two Slovenian members of the central LCY presidium and by certain other Slovenian officials. Furthermore, several journalists from the ‘official’ Slovenian media more or less allied with the LCS leadership, were usually present. Discussions of important topics with a Yugoslav dimension were also attended by the Slovenian members of the LCY central committee. By contrast, members of the LCY leadership from other republics were invited only exceptionally. The atmosphere of the LCS presidium sessions was therefore intra-Slovenian and intimate. There was a high degree of homogeneity among the participants regarding relations in the federation and economic system, while somewhat greater differences sometimes emerged in approaches to Slovenian alternative forces. Kučan was active at the sessions and concluded the discussed topics by arriving at a synthesis that

⁷ By then the chairman of the Socialist Alliance of Working People of Slovenia.

⁸ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram s sestanka sekretarjev MS ZKS in predsednikov MK in UK ZKS Ljubljana in Maribor, 1. 2. 1988. Stanovnik was proposed when Marinc, the “official” candidate, came under attack by Slovenian opposition activists for his role in the 1970s. Marinc ultimately withdrew from the election.

reflected the previously expressed opinions of other participants together with his own opinions. The analytical component of the study will be mostly based on these talks by Kučan.

Period 1 - latter half of 1986 and early 1987: Mobilisation of Slovenian politics, fear of centralism and dissatisfaction with the defiant youth

Milan Kučan became the chairman of the presidium of the LCS after its congress in April 1986 as the choice of the preceding period's party leadership. By the mid-1980s, party chairman Andrej Marinc probably felt that the "firm hand" model of societal rule had been played out, and so wanted to make room for a slightly more liberal approach, as represented by Kučan (REPE 2015: 109-126; ROTER 2013: 341-350). By that point, the atmosphere in both Slovenian and general Yugoslav society was becoming increasingly tense. In Slovenia, the congress of the Socialist Youth Union signalled a clear departure from this organisation's previous fealty to the party leadership, as it put forth a number of radical proposals that disrupted the status quo. These included abolishment of verbal offences, the possibility of civilian instead of military service, direct rather than indirect elections, and looser ties inside the Yugoslav youth union (VURNIK 2005: 79-89). Economic indicators in 1986 showed that the economic crisis was continuing to accelerate at an even greater pace.⁹ In this situation, a congress of the entire LCY was held in June. Political tensions throughout the country continued to intensify thereafter. While Serbia, together with Slovenia, had already been a hub of non-conformist stirrings from both the liberal and nationalist corners since Tito's death (DRAGOVIĆ-SOSO 2002), this turmoil was raised to a new level in September 1986. A group of intellectuals in the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (*Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti*/SANU) compiled an emotionally-charged nationalist treatise, the so-called SANU Memorandum, which was seen as a political scandal in Yugoslavia. Events in Serbia and Slovenia caught the attention of Yugoslavia's central authorities. In the autumn, the SFRY Presidency and the presidium of the CC LCY denounced the activities of these "bourgeois rightist forces".¹⁰ Although these debates were prompted by the SANU Memorandum in particular, calls by Yugoslav leaders for

⁹ In March 1986, LCY presidium chairman Vidoje Žarković warned about a drastic increase in real wages and consumption at the expense of capital accumulation, which was at odds with efforts to stabilise the economy. Archives of Yugoslavia, Belgrade, Fund J Beograd 507, SKJ (hereinafter AJ, 507). Neautorizovane magnetofonske beleške sa 159. Sednice Predsedništva CK SK Jugoslavije 18. 3. 1986, p. 9/3-10/3.

¹⁰ ARS, 1589. ŠK. 845. Predsedništvo SFRJ i Predsedništvo CK SKJ. "Ocene i stavovi o osnovnim karakteristikama političko-bezbedonosne situacije u zemlji sa posebnim osvrtom na aktivnost građanske desnice i drugih antisocijalističkih snaga." Beograd, 12.11.1986.

a country-wide offensive against the “bourgeois right” led to resistance among the Slovenian communists.

After the LCY congress, the Slovenian communists discussed the situation in the LCY in detail. They were especially interested in finding out how much support there was for Slovenian positions in the party. Kučan’s assessment of the congress was ambivalent. In his view, the primary struggle was occurring between efforts to introduce market mechanisms and maintenance of the state’s dominant role in the economy. Kučan identified with the first orientation, although he did not suggest that he preferred the move from socialism to capitalism. On the contrary, he was satisfied that the “system of socialist self-management was reaffirmed” at the LCY congress.¹¹ The Slovenian communists wanted the economic role of the state to diminish not only by “recognition of market laws”¹² but also by developing self-management in enterprises under social ownership, while privatisation was not even on the agenda. Implementation of market mechanisms was increasingly supported throughout the LCY and was even mentioned in congress resolutions, to Kučan’s satisfaction.

Besides the economy, the LCY congress also discussed the political system’s functioning, notably from the standpoint of relations within the federation. This was a continuation of previous debates on whether decentralisation from the 1970s had gone too far, fuelled by fears of the country’s possible disintegration (JOVIĆ 2009: 25-309). As the Slovenian communists focused on the defence of their republic’s autonomy, Kučan was concerned by the declarations of certain congress delegates had spoken in favour of a stronger role for the state and had in fact targeted Yugoslavia’s exceptionally decentralised political life. When speaking about “etatism”, Kučan and his Slovenian colleagues often blended the economic sphere with the political. The latter furthermore encompassed the issues of federalism and (in)tolerance for non-communist political activities. This is clear not only in Kučan’s satisfaction with the congress resolutions on the economic system, but also in the way he characterized Army representatives, who had called for greater unity in the political leadership at the congress, as the main ideological opponents of the Slovenian standpoints.¹³ Kučan was also concerned about of the upcoming procedures to amend the federal constitution. He underscored the idea of introducing a new federal parliamentary “chamber of associated labour” as a particular threat.¹⁴ Its delegates were supposed to be elected in proportion to the

¹¹ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 8. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 7. 7. 1986, p. 48/2.

¹² Ibid., p. 49/1.

¹³ The Army had its own communist organisation within the LCY together with the republican and provincial branches. That gave rise to an ironic nickname for the Army as the “seventh republic”.

¹⁴ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 8. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 7. 7. 1986, p. 48/1.

population of a given territorial unit, which would weaken the principle of parity among the republics in both of the existing parliamentary chambers (the federal chamber and the chamber of republics and autonomous provinces). Kučan knew that the prevailing moods in the LCY regarding organisation of the federation differed from those in Slovenia. Giving more powers to the federation was favoured by a considerable number of communists from the other republics. Kučan could thus only hope that “Yugoslavia will avoid a crisis on the issue of constitutional changes.”¹⁵ By contrast, he called for a confrontation in the LCY about introducing market mechanisms to the economy,¹⁶ obviously expecting a favourable outcome.

Besides Yugoslav issues, at the turn of 1986–87 the LCS presidium was also pre-occupied by criticism of the system from within Slovenia. There were two primary epicentres of the push for alternatives: the liberally oriented Socialist Youth Union of Slovenia (*Zveza socialistične mladine Slovenije/ZSMS*) and the intellectuals who were inclined to nationalism and rightist views (*ZAJC*, 2017 and 2020). ZSMS was clearly departing from its earlier role as a lever for transmitting communist policies. Kučan accused the youth of irresponsible and provocative behaviour and therefore not helping the communists. He believed the conduct of the ZSMS was rooted in an excessively broad understanding of democracy, possibly leading to anarchy. Kučan instead insisted on keeping democratisation within the existing constitutional order, without the possibility of rupturing the socialist system and its class doctrine: “The boundary of discourse (...) is the socialist self-managing class nature of production relations and societal relations in general.”¹⁷ Although Kučan did not deny the need of democratisation, he considered the communists responsible for guiding the process. By contrast, the “initiative [taken] by others leads to chaos, putting the nature and content of the society into question.”¹⁸ Kučan’s idea of political democratisation was limited to refraining from repression against critics of the system, while he did not clearly elaborate any mode for separating the League of Communists from power. Only later, in the spring of 1988, did the Slovenian communists promise to “step down from power.” Rule by the party was, however, meant to be replaced by non-party pluralism (REPE 2000: 62). Speaking at internal meetings held as late as the end of 1988, Kučan unambiguously opposed any move to a multi-party system and distanced himself from Western social democracy because it was not rooted in “socialist self-management and its prospects.”¹⁹

¹⁵ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 21. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 22. 1. 1987, p. 17/3.

¹⁶ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 8. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 7. 7. 1986, p. 49/1.

¹⁷ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 21. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 22. 1. 1987, p. (II) 1/2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1/3.

¹⁹ “We as communists cannot accept a[nother] political party. A political party means organising people outside of the Socialist Alliance [of Working People].” Kučan made this statement after the establishment of the first non-LCS political party in Slovenia was announced. ARS, 1589. Seja republiškega aktiva, 8. 12. 1988, pp. 1–3.

However, the Slovenian communists were not willing to intervene against non-conformist activists by 1986. When anti-system forces were placed on the agenda of the federal state and party forums of Yugoslavia in the autumn, the LCS leaders targeted the LCY presidium and Stipe Šušteršič from Croatia specifically. For some time Šušteršič had already been known for his confrontations with non-conformists. In 1984, he led a campaign against nationalist and liberal intellectuals, resulting in the so-called 'White Book', a compilation of what he deemed unacceptable texts, particularly those by Serbian and Slovenian writers. Although Šušteršič did not propose police measures, it turned out that his views were considered excessively orthodox by most Yugoslav communist leaders and they did not back him (KLASIĆ 2019: 166-172; MARIJAN 2021). In the autumn of 1986, provoked by the SANU Memorandum in particular, Šušteršič became one of the LCY leadership's main exponents of rhetoric about fighting the "bourgeois right".²⁰

Kučan demanded that the Yugoslav central authorities to redirect their attention from confrontations with the opposition to overcoming the economic crisis. He believed that the anti-opposition and pro-development concepts competed with each other in the LCY at that moment. Distancing himself from the former, Kučan favoured securing communism by encouraging the broader public's engagement: "Is communist society something that the communists will bring about or should they involve everyone in the struggle for the communist vision (...), as long as the positive, socialist, communist orientation exists in everyone?"²¹ With regard to the rhetoric of the LCY presidium, Kučan did not restrict himself to mere theoretical discourse. He initiated coordination talks between the Ljubljana party headquarters and Slovenian officials in federal bodies²² and even meetings with ordinary federal bureaucrats from Slovenia "who do not have information, because no one is taking care of them."²³ These proposals were soon implemented in practice. The clear objective of such a "coordination" was to further strengthen the already significant dependence of Slovenian officials in Belgrade on their home republic and prevent their any potential deviation from official Ljubljana's positions. He additionally wanted to safeguard himself against potential accusations from within Slovenia of illegitimate consent for federal policies.

²⁰ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 16. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 14. 11. 1986.

²¹ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 8. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 7. 7. 1986, p. 50/1.

²² ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 16. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 14. 11. 1986, p. 6/1 and 77/2-3.

²³ Ibid.

Period 2 – February-April 1987: Stabbed in the back, a green light for federal constitutional amendments and losing the power to change the world

In March 1987, a framework for amendments to the federal constitution was completed by the SFRY Presidency and forwarded to the parliaments of the republics. This framework included the transfer of some powers to the federation. These new powers mostly accorded the federation the right to set the guiding principles in certain systems such as education, infrastructure (railways, postal service and energy sector) and tax policy. The authority of the federal judiciary was also modestly increased, with priority granted to federal laws in the event that they collided with those of the republics (but only until the constitutional court ruled as to which law prevailed over the disputed matter). All pillars of Yugoslavia's highly decentralised decision-making mechanisms were, however, left untouched by the proposal. This also meant maintenance of the parity principle in central bodies, the nomination of federal officials by the republics and each republic's control over its own economy.²⁴ Some modifications of the economic system were also proposed. These were initially only cosmetic, but became quite radical in the later phase in 1988. Already at the beginning of the process, the Slovenian Writers Association denounced the proposed framework as a threat to Slovenian autonomy. Despite that, Slovenian communist leaders endorsed the proposal and so with a nearly unanimous vote the Slovenian parliament approved it (REPE 2000: 47) as a starting point for the procedure.

Kučan desired as few changes as possible to the key principles of the 1974 constitution with regard to both federalism and production relations.²⁵ He opposed potential ideas to create "a different constitutional system".²⁶ In Kučan's opinion, as of March 1987, the Slovenian demand to refrain from any significant intervention in the existing system was met by the proposed framework. He was satisfied that the feared "unitarist or centralist" manner of reinforcing the federation was absent because consensual decision-making was left intact.²⁷ Kučan instead appreciated that the framework consolidated the federation through an acceptable number of new federal powers and improved enforcement of federal laws: "The demand to reinforce the role of the federation and its constitutional functions is unquestionable and in our interest."²⁸ Such an assessment and Slovenia's initial consent for

²⁴ Predlog, da se začne postopek za spremembo ustave SFRJ. 1987. In: *Poročevalec Skupščine SR Slovenije in Skupščine SFR Jugoslavije za delegacije in delegate*. Letnik XIII, štev. 4. Ljubljana, 12. 2. 1987.

²⁵ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 25. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 9. 3. 1987, p. 12/2.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 14/2–15/1.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 14/1.

the proposal made it clear that even if Kučan and the other Slovenian leaders were unwilling to significantly reduce their republic's autonomy, they were still prepared to grant some more authority to the federation so that the entire system could function more efficiently. For Kučan, the federation's competencies were legitimate because they reflected the collective interests of the Slovenian nation: they are "our functions, the functions of the Slovenian nation and the Slovenian nation-state that are implemented at the federal level in the interest of joint life" in Yugoslavia.²⁹ Consequently, the Slovenian attitude toward federal laws should be "the same as our stance on our own laws. (...) For us, laws enacted by the Slovenian parliament and the federal parliament have equal status."³⁰ This understanding of the federation somewhat differed from the one presented by the valid Yugoslav constitution, where, alongside nations, individuals were also treated as subjects of the federation.

Kučan was quite optimistic about the forthcoming steps in the constitutional procedure, which he saw as an opportunity for integration across the LCY and Yugoslavia. Kučan's notion of Yugoslavia's integration at that time concerned ideological aspects, especially the alignment of opinions on how Yugoslavia should be organised, and its economic system reformed. In Kučan's view, such integration contrasted with the unilateral orientation to cede more powers to federal bodies.³¹ He also expected constitutional discourse in Slovenia to have an integrative and, moreover, "homogenising" impact,³² clearly hoping that constitutional changes would be accepted by the Slovenian public despite the proposed transfer of certain powers to the federation. As the procedure commenced, Kučan was not troubled by the planned changes in favour of the federation and did not anticipate the enraged public resistance that broke out only a few months later.

Satisfaction with the framework for constitutional changes, however, did not make Kučan less wary of "Yugoslav unitarism". He thought that the centralists could exploit a fresh display of burgeoning nationalism in Slovenia as a pretext. In February 1987, the journal *Nova revija* published a collection of essays by critical Slovenian intellectuals who elaborated on the national question in great detail. The key message of most of these "contributions to a national programme" was that the Slovenes could not fully develop their identity within Yugoslavia. Consequently, they should expand their national autonomy and possibly even secede.³³ Kučan

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ "Reinforcement of an efficient role for the federation and effective performance of its functions (...) is not possible only (...) by expanding the competencies of the federation." ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 25. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 9. 3. 1987, p. 14/1-2.

³² Ibid., p. 15/2.

³³ This event is sometimes interpreted as a reaction of Slovenian intellectuals to the Serbian nationalistic SANU Memorandum (REPE 2000: 35). However, *Nova revija* had initiated writing the Slovenian national programme already in 1985, well before the SANU Memorandum

warned that such a “national programme” could encourage federal intervention against the republics. By this stance, he indirectly accused the intellectuals of a betraying national interests: “The notorious national programme is a knife in the back of everything that Slovenia has done in recent years.”³⁴ Besides the *Nova revija* group, Kučan also targeted the activities of other “uncontrollable” media³⁵ and the youth union which at that very moment was disrupting the preparations for the Youth Relay, an annual Yugoslav ritual commemorating the birthday of late President Tito. Kučan particularly criticised the youth, *Nova revija* and the media in general for threatening the Slovenia’s position in the federation and for promoting anti-socialist ideas.³⁶ In the absence of journalists, he also accused the leading *Nova revija* authors, France Bučar and Dimitrije Rupel,³⁷ of “economic nationalism and chauvinism” and “inciting passions” in relation to the federal constitutional changes.³⁸ Nevertheless, the presumption of pan-Slovenian unity, including anti-socialist forces that were supposed to watch the back of the Slovenian communists in their struggle against Yugoslav (communist) unitarism, suggests that Kučan felt closer to the Slovenian anti-communist and nationalist intellectuals than to communists from the other Yugoslav republics. Unsurprisingly, then, he did not want a member of the LCY presidium, Montenegrin “[Vidoje] Žarković or someone else” in Belgrade to interpret the *Nova revija* case.³⁹ Among of the other LCY presidium members, Kučan again targeted Stipe Šušvar. An earlier prediction by another Croat official, Mika Špiljak, that Šušvar would become a headache for the Slovenes had, in Kučan’s view, been proven true.⁴⁰ Šušvar was particularly stances troublesome to Slovenian politicians because of his resolutely anti-nationalist, while at the same time they could not really denounce him as a unitarist nor, of course, as a greater-Serbian hegemonist. Slovenian leaders also

became public (OMERZA 2015: 179–182). Later, the authors themselves made it clear that the endeavour had been motivated by the wish to achieve Slovenian independence regardless of events elsewhere in Yugoslavia (HRIBAR 2009: 17; JAMBREK 2014: 140).

³⁴ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 23. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 26.2.1987, p. 22/4.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 23/1.

³⁶ “The difference between us and Bučar, if I may use him as a personification of the other side, is that (...) we want a different kind of socialism, while they don’t socialism.” ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 25. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 9. 3. 1987, p. 11/2.

³⁷ The leading protagonists of the anti-regime intellectual circles in Slovenia in the 1980s. Bučar (1923–2015) was a lawyer and former communist who was expelled from the party in the 1960s and later also dismissed from Ljubljana University for his criticism of the political system. Rupel (b. 1946) was a sociologist of the younger generation who, together with Bučar, co-founded *Nova revija* in 1982.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 18/1.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 23/1.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 25/2.

disliked his orthodox views on the role of the League of Communists in society. Šušvar was, moreover, a sociologist, capable of making insightful observations as well as theoretically well-grounded arguments, as Slovenian leaders were forced to admit at one of their internal consultation sessions.⁴¹

Speaking about the economy, Kučan pointed to the increasing lag behind the developed world. In his view, the reasons for this rested in the mistaken attitudes traditionally present among Yugoslav and Slovenian communists. Since “low ambitions” were among these errors, it was clear that Kučan focused on Slovenia’s desire to catch up to neighbouring Austria and Italy, while he did not deem the existential problems of people in other parts of Yugoslavia urgent. It was already understood that Kučan regarded state planning another cause of economic stagnation. Newly added to Kučan’s blacklist were “class myths” about social equality, indicating his critical stance on the communist doctrine as such. At the Namely, the attitudes of Slovenian (but also many other Yugoslav) communists were rather anti-egalitarian. They were rooted in a struggle against an inefficient economic system and opposition to the less-developed Yugoslav republics balance development across the federation.⁴² Kučan’s visions of a future socialist society included elements reminiscent of the West: technological progress, openness to the world, and a path to an as-yet unspecified “political democracy.”⁴³ However, he still exhibited certain beliefs typical of orthodox communist ideology. For example, Kučan hoped that the communists would recover “the ability to change the world,” for which more ideological unity throughout the entire LCY would

⁴¹ Ciril Ribičič, a member of the LCS presidium, told his colleagues in the autumn of 1986: “If we mention Šušvar’s name more than anyone else’s today, then we have to acknowledge that this is partly because he is one of those rare individuals who is able to express his views in a theoretical manner.” ARS, 1589. Razgovor članov in izvršnih sekretarjev P CK ZKS, 13. 11. 1986, p 5/15-5/16.

⁴² A few months later, when an anti-inflation programme was announced by the federal government, Slovenian leaders criticised it for redistributing finances to the less developed republics. They simultaneously opposed the proposed introduction of a progressive individual income tax. As Stane Dolanc, the Slovenian member of the federal Presidency, put it, such a proposal was based on the egalitarian idea that “we can all go forward equally.” ARS, 1589. Sestanek poličnega aktiva 13. 10. 1987, magnetogram, p. 19/1.

⁴³ “The [upcoming] CC session has to clearly delineate how the LC envisions an exit from the crisis, with a proposed course and alternative. Either back to what we wanted to leave a few years ago, especially at the time when the economic stabilisation programme was being drafted, i.e., from a society with an expansive, low-performing, state-planned economy that is driving us to stagnation, lagging behind with low ambitions, lagging behind our own goals and behind global development, with many societal and class dogmas and myths, especially about social equality (...). Or the alternative that would propel us forward with great effort to a modern market, an intense, highly-productive, technologically developed and high-information socialist society open to the world (...). ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 29. seje Presedstva CK ZK Slovenije 23. 4. 1987, p. 3/1.

the 1974 constitution remained intact. Notably, the concept of Yugoslavia as a federal state based on voluntary integration of its nations, responsibility of the republics for their own development and that of the whole federation, parity in the composition of federal bodies and consensual decision-making in many of them were all retained. The proposal thus did not include the establishment of a federal parliamentary chamber elected by the one person/one vote principle or any other interventions of similar magnitude. Nevertheless, an uproar broke out in Slovenia not only in the media but also in official political institutions. The first to publicly denounce the proposal was the chairman of the Slovenian state Presidency France Popit.⁴⁸ A wave of rejections of the planned transfer of authority followed at local meetings of the Socialist Alliance of the Working People during the official public debate.⁴⁹ The Slovenian communist leadership swiftly adopted such stances and rejected many of the previously agreed amendments. This was an unpleasant surprise for federal officials.⁵⁰

Another contentious issue in relations between Slovenia and the federation at the end of 1987 was economic policy. In November, the federal government launched an anti-inflation programme.⁵¹ While the need to counter soaring inflation was apparent,⁵² the Slovenian leadership attacked these measures as they regarded them too bureaucratic (as opposed to the desired market orientation), centralist and biased in favour of the country's least developed federal units.⁵³ This dispute continued in December, when Slovenia qualified its approval of federal economy policy for the subsequent year with changes in foreign exchange legislation that would suit the republic. Consequently, economic policy had still not been adopted when the new year began, and some members of the federal leadership blamed their Slovenian colleagues for causing a political crisis in Yugoslavia.⁵⁴ On both the anti-inflation programme and the economic policy resolution, Slovenian institutions (the republic parliament and CC LCS, respectively) issued direct instructions to Slovenian delegates in Belgrade not to vote in favour of the federal proposals.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ "Razhajanje med besedo in dejanjem večje kot kdaj prej." *Delo*, 5. 9. 1987, p. 3.

⁴⁹ *Delo*, 5. 9. 1987, 16.–19. 9. 1987, 23. 9. 1987, 25. 9. 1987.

⁵⁰ AJ, 507. Neautorizovane magnetofonske beleške sa 50. sednice Presedništva CK SK Jugoslavije 29. 9. 1987, p. 1/2-19/6.

⁵¹ *Delo*, 20. 10. 1987, p. 4.

⁵² Inflation that autumn was approximately 100%, and projected to exceed 180% by the end of the year. ARS 1589. Sestanek političnega aktiva 13. 10. 1987, magnetogram, p. 4/1-6/.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ AJ, 507. Neautorizovane magnetofonske beleške sa sednice Presedništva CK SK Jugoslavije 30. 12. 1987.

⁵⁵ Poročevalec Skupščine SR Slovenije in Skupščine SFR Jugoslavije za delegacije in delegate. 10. 11. 1987. Letnik XIII, štev. 32, p. 4. ARS Ljubljana 1589. 45. seja Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 16. 12. 1987. Usmeritve in stališča CK ZK Slovenije o nalogah komunistov pri oblikovanju in uresničevanju razvojne in ekonomske politike za prihodnje leto, p. 4.

At a closed consultation in Ljubljana, Kučan characterised the atmosphere in Slovenia in the autumn 1987 as “nationalist euphoria,”⁵⁶ but simultaneously adopted the arguments against the constitutional amendments. In sharp contrast to his statements from only a few months prior, he saw in the proposed amendments a threat to the overall philosophy of the federation: “All but we are fleeing from this philosophy, aren’t they? It is a notion of the federation as a classical state.”⁵⁷ Slovenia was then, in Kučan’s opinion, completely isolated in perceiving Yugoslavia as “a modern multinational state formation” resting on the interests of its nations.⁵⁸ Specifically, Kučan levelled particular criticism against the amendments concerning infrastructure systems and education. As an argument against the proposed partial unification of the railways, postal services and energy industry systems at the federal level, he endorsed the so-called technological standardisation (as opposed to organisational unity) of such large systems as in the European Economic Community (EEC).⁵⁹ In this comparison to the loose economic association of capitalist Western European countries, the socialist specificity of the Yugoslav federation was absent. Unsurprisingly, the same argument was used by a rightist and nationalist opponent of the regime from the Nova revija circle, France Bučar (BILANDŽIĆ, 1986: 160–161). In a striking twist, in January 1988 Kučan explicitly aligned himself with the latter’s views on infrastructure systems, because Bučar “is quite knowledgeable about railways.”⁶⁰ Thus, in just a few months, a prominent anti-communist moved from being an “inciter of passions” into Kučan’s potential ally against Belgrade.

While in earlier years there had been debate about the partial introduction of a common curriculum (which failed due to Slovenian resistance),⁶¹ the proposed constitutional amendments now only envisioned the alignment of the education system’s structure.⁶² This is why Slovenian leaders and the republic’s parliament

⁵⁶ “We are facing (...) nationalist euphoria in Slovenia, populist nationalism.” ARS, 1589. Magnetogram posveta članov CK ZKS in CK ZKJ iz Slovenije, 21. 11. 1987, p. 2/1.

⁵⁷ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 44. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 18. 11. 1987, p. 28/2.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ “[Systems in the West] are based on material interest. For the EEC, the unified system is, in a way (...) in everyone’s economic interest, including the private components of railways in certain countries, so they can function as a consolidated technological system.” ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 46. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 11. 1. 1988, p. 30/2–31/1.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ WACHTEL, Andrew and Predrag MARKOVIĆ, “A Last Attempt at Educational Integration. The Failure of Common Educational Cores at the early 1980s.” In: COHEN, Lenard J. and Jasna DRAGOVIĆ-SOSO (eds.), 2008. *State Collapse in South-Eastern Europe: New Perspectives on Yugoslavia’s Disintegration*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, pp. 203-220.

⁶² “A federal law determines levels of education and the basic criteria for acquiring knowledge and vocational training at all levels of education, in all types of schools and in other educational institutions.” Osnutek amandmaje v k ustavi SFRJ, Amandma XXIII.

initially did not reject it.⁶³ However, in autumn 1987, after public opinion had turned against the amendments, it became one of the main points of contention for the Slovenian communist establishment. Kučan struggled to explain a solution he had recently accepted was now being rejected, and so put forth arguments against the partial unification of curricula that was not at all on the table at the moment. As an alternative to the proposed amendment, he suggested voluntary agreements between the republics concerning their common interests in education: the valid constitution “allows, let’s say, five federal units that speak Serbian or Serbo-Croatian to organise common content of schooling if they wish.” The observation that “three federal units, or if we are speaking solely about Slovenia, one federal unit with a different language” would not prevent the others from doing so⁶⁴ showed that Kučan was in fact well aware that language was not the cause of differing opinions on the constitutional amendment governing the education system. Namely, Slovenia, as the new opponent of the amendment, was not joined either by Macedonia or Kosovo.

The impression of escalating antagonism between Slovenia and the federation was echoed in Kučan’s observation that the attitude of the Slovenian communists toward Belgrade was not quite friendly at that time: “I can see that we read all the papers, especially those coming from Belgrade, with a great ire.”⁶⁵ Elsewhere in Yugoslavia, in turn, Kučan saw aversion towards the Slovenian vision of “affluent socialism”.⁶⁶ Despite this feeling of isolation, Kučan did not announce any effort to reach compromises with the other republics – on the contrary, he pointed out that the Slovenian communists were responsible to their own, Slovenian, “working class”.⁶⁷ This ideologically conformist expression, in fact, here referred to the entire Slovenian public. Kučan paid increasing attention to public opinion, as reflected by his fear of being accused of national betrayal: “Those [critics of the regime] in Slovenia who attacked the [1974] constitution are now defending it from, supposedly, us, who want to discard it on behalf of a betrayal of the interests of the Slovenian nation.”⁶⁸

Kučan spoke about the Western world more than previously and almost exclusively in a positive light. Besides having direct experience with the unsuccessful attempts to overcome the protracted economic crisis in Yugoslavia, Kučan was also

⁶³ In March 1987, the Slovenian parliament only asked that this amendment not impinge upon the content of curricula. “Stajališča Skupščine SR Slovenije do ustavnih sprememb,” *Delo*, 19.3.1987. p. 7.

⁶⁴ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 44. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 18. 11. 1987, p. 27/2.

⁶⁵ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 51. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 24. 2. 1988, p. 17/1.

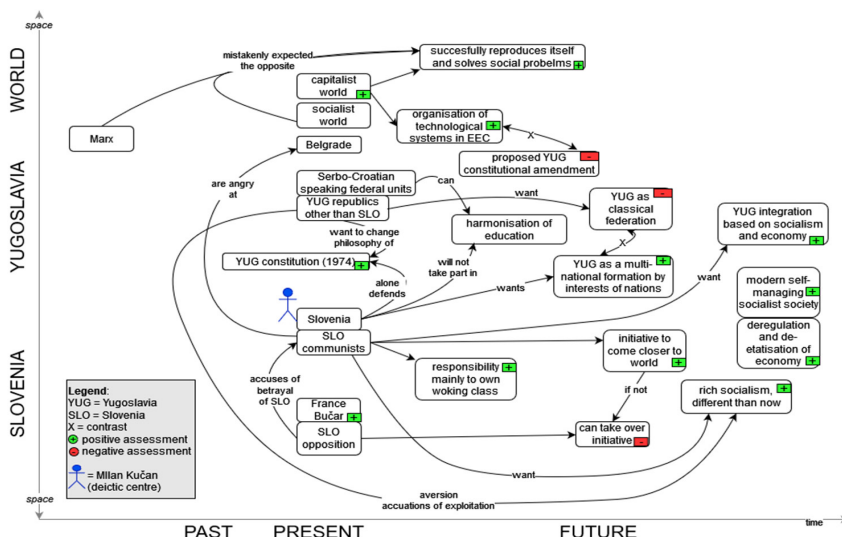
⁶⁶ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 46. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 11. 1. 1988, p. 30/1.

⁶⁷ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 51. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 24. 2. 1988, p. 20/1.

⁶⁸ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 44. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 18. 11. 1987, p. 28/1.

a perceptive observer of developments outside the country and was well aware of the economic problems troubling many Eastern Bloc countries. In his opinion, capitalism was successfully reproducing itself and tackling social problems. Socialist countries and even Marx himself had therefore been wrong: “Since Marx, the socialist world has been living under the conviction that the world of capital has been in crisis and would collapse, but it simply fails to collapse.”⁶⁹ Following such a positive view of Western economies, Kučan called for a rapprochement with “the world”, by which he meant the West. If the communists did not go this way, Kučan warned, the opposition could take the initiative: “If we are not able to provide answers, (...) then others will have to. The Slovenian press is full of diverse responses to these questions.”⁷⁰ Kučan now enhanced his traditional calls for de-etatisation of the economy with the term “deregulation” and retained worker self-management and social ownership as the last explicitly defended fortifications of socialism. At the end of this address that was otherwise imbued with praise for the West, he suddenly felt the need to remind his listeners, the members of the Slovenian party presidium, of his communist identity: “I’m referring to a modern society because here in this circle, if I had to assure you that it is necessary to say ‘socialist’ and ‘self-managing’, I would stop talking and leave. (...) We have never spoken about a modern society without the attribute ‘socialist and self-managing’.”⁷¹

Picture 2: November 1987 – February 1988⁷²



⁶⁹ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 51. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 24. 2. 1988, p. 17/2.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 18/1.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 21/2–3.

Period 4, June 1988 – Pluralism of ownership, the Yugoslav economic reform agreement and the dilemma of trust from the Slovenian public or the federal leadership

In February and March 1988, the weekly magazine *Mladina* and other Slovenian periodicals issued a series of articles that targeted the Yugoslav People's Army. These directly targeted Defence Minister Branko Mamula, criticising him for selling weapons to Ethiopia and using army personnel to construct a villa on the Adriatic coast. These articles received broad support in Slovenian opposition circles (LUSA 2012: 172-177). Federal officials blamed the Slovenian communists for their failure to stop this media campaign and the army issued a public political statement about alleged counter-revolution in Slovenia. In late March, Kučan complained about the statement at a session of the LCY presidium. He further alleged that an army official had discreetly asked Slovenian politicians if they could control the situation if some of the initiators of the media campaign were arrested.⁷³ Kučan then gave a classified transcript of his speech to members of the Slovenian leadership. From one of them, an employee of the Socialist Alliance of the Working People Igor Bavčar took it and, handed it over to Janez Janša, an anti-regime journalist working for *Mladina* (REPE 2002: 221). Referring to the transcript, *Mladina* then claimed that the army had been preparing a military coup in Slovenia. At Janša's workplace, Slovenian investigators found not only the Kučan's transcript but also a secret army order to increase readiness in Slovenian barracks (JANŠA 1992: 13). Following an order issued by a military investigating judge, at the end of May the Slovenian police arrested Janša and three other participants in the leak of these documents and handed them over to the army. The event sparked mass protests in Slovenia and led to the formation of organisations supporting the accused. Slovenian leaders conveyed the protesters' demands to the federal institutions, whose actions they publicly criticised, and so they largely took the side of the outraged public. Their conflict with Belgrade thus escalated. These events overshadowed a conference of the LCY in the days preceding the arrests, where a programme of market-oriented economic reforms was adopted. These reforms even included the introduction of pluralism of ownership.

In his addresses to the LCS presidium in June 1988, Kučan drew a picture of fierce confrontations between Slovenian communist leaders and both Belgrade and the local opposition. He considered relations inside the federation quite poor

⁷² ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 44. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 18. 11. 1987, p. 27/1-29/1; Magnetogram 46. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 11. 1. 1988, p. 30/1-33/2; Magnetogram 51. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 24. 2. 1988, p. 17/1-23/1.

⁷³ AJ, 507. Neautorizovane magnetofonske beleške sa 72. sednice Predsedništva CK SK Jugoslavije 29. 3. 1988, p. 9/5.

and burdened by mutual distrust. The LCY presidium, according to Kučan, had been attacking the Slovenian party since autumn of the previous year, when Slovenia had opposed the constitutional amendments and the federal government's economic policy. Due to these clashes, in which Slovenia had no allies, Kučan said he was overcome by apprehension whenever he entered the session chamber of the LCY presidium in Belgrade.⁷⁴ The rift between the federation and Slovenian communists now deepened further because of the Janša case. Concerns about a possible alliance between the Slovenian communists and the emerging national movement grew in the federal centre. The Slovenian leadership reacted indignantly to such suspicions, fearing that federal bodies may intervene by force. Kučan saw "different truths"⁷⁵ in the opinions of Ljubljana and Belgrade about the new situation. However, he did not seem to personally question the reasons for the prosecution. As he put it, "it is completely normal that based on valid laws and the constitution, the crime would lead to such a prosecution,"⁷⁶ the instigators would be charged "in any country."⁷⁷ Kučan anticipated the beginning of the trial in Ljubljana with trepidation, and warned against potential pressure on the court.⁷⁸ Kučan made it clear that he did not consider himself responsible for the matter ("it was not cooked in this house"⁷⁹; "I did not give" the transcript to *Mladina*⁸⁰). He further speculated that someone in Slovenia "who wanted Janez Janša to get elected chairman" of the Slovenian youth could have caused the whole problem.⁸¹

On the Slovenian scene, Kučan drew a distinction between opposition activists and the broader public. He perceived the former, especially those with anti-socialist views (such as France Bučar), as opponents, against whom the communists were fighting for public support. In order to "neutralise" such forces, the communists had to prove that they were not betraying the national interests.⁸² Hence, even though Kučan portrayed the shift by the communists to the position of defenders of Sloveneness as forced, continuing in this direction was precisely what he proposed to win over the opposition. Speaking to guests

⁷⁴ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 61. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 21. 6. 1988, p. 68/1.

⁷⁵ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 58. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 6. 6. 1988, p. 42/2.

⁷⁶ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 59. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 14. 6. 1988, p. 47/2.

⁷⁷ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 58. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 6. 6. 1988, p. 34/2.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 34/1.

⁸⁰ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 61. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 21. 6. 1988, p. 69/1.

⁸¹ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 58. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 6. 6. 1988, p. 34/2.

⁸² "I am not pleased that we have been forced into a situation in which we must prove that we are not betraying the interests of the Slovenian nation (...) But such polemics are here. We have to respond to them, not for Bučar's sake, but rather to make his assertions safe in the political sphere." ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 61. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 21.6.1988, p. 67/1.

from the LCY presidium, Kučan even stated that if the LCS had to choose between the trust of the (“so-called”) federal leadership and the Slovenian public, it would choose the latter.⁸³ On a scene so defined, there was no room for the public in the rest of Yugoslavia, making Belgrade a purely coercive authority or at best an abstract bureaucracy. The preference for Slovenian public opinion was then a logical result. At the same time, the role of the Slovenian communists was also dramatically diminishing in such a situation. Kučan characterized public opinion as an imperative regardless of its prevailing moods. The communists thus moved from their earlier status as vanguard to executors of the public will. The latter, in turn, was mobilised in the late 1980s by opposition intellectuals, youth activists and the associated media on a wave of resistance to the federal centre. Kučan, however, still underscored the distinction between the communists and non-socialist forces,⁸⁴ and further maintained that he counted on the future of Slovenia within Yugoslavia.⁸⁵

Despite the dominance of the Janša case in Slovenia’s political life, in June 1988 Kučan also spoke about changes to the socio-economic system. The conclusions of the just concluded LCY conference included a clear orientation toward a market economy, including establishment of a capital market and, partially, also a labour market. Furthermore, cooperative and private ownership were supposed to complement social ownership, and labour was not considered the sole source of income anymore, as it could now be joined by “social capital” (Konferencija SKJ, 1988: 31–34). While calls for market mechanisms had been a fixture in the Slovenian branch of the party for some time already, explicit support for plurality of ownership and capital and labour markets was a novelty. Even the LCS adopted such an orientation at its own conference only a few weeks before the federal one. It was a clear sign that both the Slovenian and Yugoslav communists had just begun the departure from their key ideological tenets.

Kučan assessed the LCY conference very positively and considered it a turning point. In his view, the opinions of Yugoslav communists on the reasons for the economic crisis and the transition to a market economy came together at the conference.⁸⁶ Aware that the agreed economic reform would cut to the very core of communist ideology, he devised a hasty Marxist interpretation: plurality of ownership, sources of income other than labour and (completely unspecific) “socialist entrepreneurship” were “historically necessary forms”, while the attempts by communists to “bypass” them had been “voluntaristic” and could not lead to

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 59. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 14. 6. 1988, p. 24/1.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 23/2.

⁸⁶ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 61. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 21. 6. 1988, p. 67/1.

communism.⁸⁷ This indirect reference to the vision of communism only specified how *not* to come achieve it, in contrast to earlier months. Kučan did not explain whether nor how the path towards communism would continue after the restoration of private ownership and the capital and labour markets.

Period 5 – autumn 1988: Fear of Serbia, the crumbling self-management alternative and the search for a connection to the civilisation train

In summer and autumn 1988, Yugoslavia was shaken by mass rallies of Serbs and Montenegrins provoked by tensions in Kosovo. The protesters demanded the resignations of any political leadership that did not support the radical reduction of the autonomy of both Serbian provinces. These gatherings were from the outset openly supported by Serbia and its leader, Slobodan Milošević. In October, the leaders of Vojvodina were forced to step down, while their Montenegrin counterparts temporarily managed to resist the pressure of the mobs (RAMET 2006: 350-354). This unprecedented phenomenon was frightening politicians in the other republics, who called on Milošević to end the campaign, without success (JANIČKO 2021: 134-136). In September 1988, Kučan became aware of threats that Serbia intended to organise a rally in Slovenia to express solidarity with the Kosovo Serbs and also put pressure on the local leadership.⁸⁸ Serbia assumed a distinctly negative role in Kučan's public statements. Kučan's disapproval of Serbian policies even led him to praise Stipe Šušvar, the notorious "villain" in the eyes of the Slovenians, for his own opposition to Serbia.⁸⁹ A compliment to Šušvar was possible only after Serbia had suddenly become, in a way, a common enemy for both Šušvar and Kučan. Kučan, however, still called for a compromise between the interests of the local Albanian population and reinforcement of Serbia's territorial integrity. This was consistent with his long-term stances. He even supported constitutional amendments that would increase Serbia's authority in Kosovo: "Our joint responsibility for coexistence in Yugoslavia surely encompasses the constitutional situation in Serbia. (...) There is a need to correct it at some points (...) so Serbia is not automatically reduced to its extra-provincial territory and, on the other hand, to keep what belongs to the provinces."⁹⁰

The rise of Serbian nationalism prompted Kučan to theorise about the public and citizens.⁹¹ As usual, Kučan declared that the Slovenian communists needed

⁸⁷ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 59. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 14. 6. 1988, p. 18/1-2.

⁸⁸ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 63. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 1. 9. 1988, p. 16/3, Magnetogram 64. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 12.9.1988, p. 25/1.

⁸⁹ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 66. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 3. 10. 1988, p. 30/1.

⁹⁰ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 65. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 29. 9. 1988, p. 58/2.

⁹¹ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 66. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 3. 10. 1988, p. 27/2-28/1.

support among the Slovenian public on vital issues. However, he stressed that the communists could not and in fact did not want the support of those groups that were too ideologically different from them. The LCS therefore had to strive to attract popularity among “citizens and the working people” rather than the public or the nation. Kučan believed that the latter approach would create space for manipulation, which he indirectly accused Serbian leaders of doing in their subversion of their Vojvodina counterparts. By drawing a distinction between a homogenous public and a heterogeneous aggregate of citizens, Kučan was attempting to downplay the obvious similarity between the Serbian and Slovenian communist leaderships in their reliance on rising ethno-national sentiment.⁹² At that moment, Milošević was indeed more receptive to extreme nationalists than Kučan and more active in mobilising the public. Nevertheless, Kučan’s dichotomy of the public vs. citizens had weak grounds. Namely, “the public” and even more homogenising such as “the nation” or “the people” (*narod*) were otherwise common in his vocabulary and they even appeared in other parts of Kučan’s same address.⁹³ Kučan, however, was not happy with certain forms of mass support for their leaders by Slovenians. During that period, letters of support to himself and the entire Slovenian leadership literally flooded the LCS headquarters. Over the course of three weeks in October, as many as 920 of these came from various organisations, labour collectives and individuals. Their writers, often pathetically, encouraged Slovenian leaders and Kučan personally in their struggles for Slovenian sovereignty.⁹⁴ Kučan characterized such support as “irrational”.⁹⁵ But despite his reservations, Kučan in fact accepted and adroitly coped with the role that had been assigned to him by the sudden national homogenisation.

Kučan’s fear of the stigma of national traitor had earlier pertained primarily to the matter of amendments to the SFRY constitution. However, during 1988 almost all significant transfers of authority to the federation were removed from the amendments, following categorical demands put forth by Slovenia. As a result, there was no alignment of the education and infrastructure systems, nor the interim precedence of federal laws over those of the republics.⁹⁶ This made Kučan very

⁹² Kučan was well aware of the similarity. In March 1988, responding to the assertion made by Serbian leaders that the party and the people speak the same language in Serbia, Kučan said that the same was true in Slovenia. “In Slovenia, the party and the people speak the same language as well,” concerning the confrontation between Slovenian leaders and the Yugoslav People’s Army. ARS, 1589. Magnetogram razgovora v Predsedstvu CK ZKS, 28. 3. 1988, p. 51/1.

⁹³ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 66. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 3. 10. 1988., p. 29/2–30/1.

⁹⁴ ARS, 1589, Predsednikova dejavnost, šk. 2647/7 – podpore, oktober 1988. Odmevi na sedanje razmere v SR Sloveniji in Jugoslaviji.

⁹⁵ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 66. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 3. 10. 1988, p. 28/1.

⁹⁶ Amandmaji k ustavi SFRJ. 1988. In: *Poročevalec Skupščine SR Slovenije in Skupščine SFR Jugoslavije za delegacije in delegate*. Letnik XIV, šte. 32. Ljubljana, 28.10.1988, 3–14.

confident, in that the LCS could not be accused of betraying Slovenia any longer despite threats that had already appeared in the media to prosecute Slovenian communist leaders on precisely those grounds.⁹⁷ He told his party colleagues that he had fought for the curtailment of the amendments in order to fulfil the will of the Slovenian public and parliament, with which, he claimed, the communists were not entitled to dissent.⁹⁸ However, he kept a personal distance from “the abstract fear that someone [had] wanted to seize sovereignty from us.”⁹⁹ These reflections on the constitutional procedure recalled his original agreement with the amendments that were later rejected in Slovenia. At the same time, though, he again proved his ability to take the demands of the Slovenian public opinion as his own. As in the preceding year, he argued that Slovenia was not interested in aligning educational systems because of its different language. Although it is unclear what the relationship between language and educational levels could have been, Kučan went to ironically comment on Macedonia’s consent for this amendment: “If I deem the Macedonians ready to become a part of the Serbo-Croatian linguistic sphere, then seven federal units can (...) align the principles of the education system if they wish.”¹⁰⁰

Until 1987, Slovenian leaders staunchly defended the 1974 constitution both in terms of the vast autonomy it granted to the republics and the system of socialist self-management. However, the attitude of Yugoslav communist elites on economic reforms changed rapidly over the course of 1988. These developments led to very radical interventions in the economy, such as, for example, the endorsement of plurality of ownership, allowing the acquisition of a part of an enterprise by another and the introduction of the concept of profit.¹⁰¹ At the same time, fierce debate about the organisation of the federation were proceeding at both the Yugoslav level and inside Slovenia.

In the end of 1988, Kučan acknowledged the need to write a new Yugoslav constitution. His realization that the 1974 constitution had indeed been impacted by “ideological and normative idealism”¹⁰² signalled a willingness to revise the principles of social ownership and worker self-management in enterprises. Kučan counted “the future of socialism” among the newly opened questions in the LCY,

⁹⁷ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 66. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 3. 10. 1988, p. 28/1.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 27/2, 28/2. Kučan also said that the Slovenian parliament, as opposed to himself, had demanded a resolute “no” to all amendments that were problematic from Slovenian standpoint.

⁹⁹ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 68. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 24. 10. 1988, p. 30/2.

¹⁰⁰ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 66. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 3. 10. 1988, p. 28/3.

¹⁰¹ Amandmaji k ustavi SFRJ. 1988. In: *Poročevalec Skupščine SR Slovenije in Skupščine SFR Jugoslavije za delegacije in delegate*. Letnik XIV, šte. 32. Ljubljana, 28. 10. 1988, 3–14. Amandma X, XIII.

¹⁰² ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 66. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 3. 10. 1988., p. 30/1.

along with coexistence in Yugoslavia and the national and language issues.¹⁰³ His answer to the coexistence question was to adhere to the principles of the AVNOJ¹⁰⁴ that had set forth the foundations of federal Yugoslavia in 1943. This emerging element in Kučan's rhetoric referred to the initial agreement to create a joint state and so highlighted the sovereignty of the Yugoslav nations. Most notably, Kučan later referred to AVNOJ when speaking at a joint gathering with the Slovenian opposition in February 1989. On that occasion, he publicly accused Serbia of attacking the AVNOJ's principles with its pressure on Kosovo¹⁰⁵. However, AVNOJ defined Yugoslavia as a federal state and that is the most likely the reason why Kučan had retreated from this rhetoric later in 1989, when Slovenia moved towards clearly confederal demands. In autumn 1988, though, Kučan was still partly trying to pacify emotions in Slovenia, as illustrated by his opposition to a potential referendum in Slovenia about the (already diminished) amendments in the Yugoslav constitution.¹⁰⁶ Besides, he did not yet advocate for changes in the Slovenian constitution that would unilaterally reinforce the republic's autonomy, but rather spoke in favour of incorporating the reforms agreed upon at the Yugoslav level into the Slovenian constitution.¹⁰⁷ Kučan also still identified himself with the concept of Yugoslavia as a state. This was reflected in his view of the SFRY Presidency as "a manifestation of the sovereignty of the republics and the federation."¹⁰⁸

Remarkably, the nationalist and anti-communist opposition lost its former negative prominence in Kučan's speeches by autumn 1988, not only because he was, along with the opposition, searching for "a connection to the culture and

¹⁰³ "In Yugoslavia, public debate has been objectively opened over three key issues (...). [The first concerns] the national question (...) in general and of each nation separately. Another closely related debate has been opened over the content and forms of future common life in Yugoslavia (...) And thirdly, debate has been opened about the content and nature of socialism in Yugoslavia." ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 63. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 1. 9. 1988, p. 15/2–16/1.

¹⁰⁴ Anti-fascist Council of People's Liberation of Yugoslavia (*Antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Jugoslavije*) – an assembly led by the communist Partisans that declared itself the supreme legislative body in Yugoslavia during World War II.

¹⁰⁵ In the Stari Trg mine, where Kosovo-Albanian miners were staging an occupation strike, "the AVNOJ-based Yugoslavia is being defended and so is the equal status of each, including the Slovenian republic and nation within it"(KUČAN 1989).

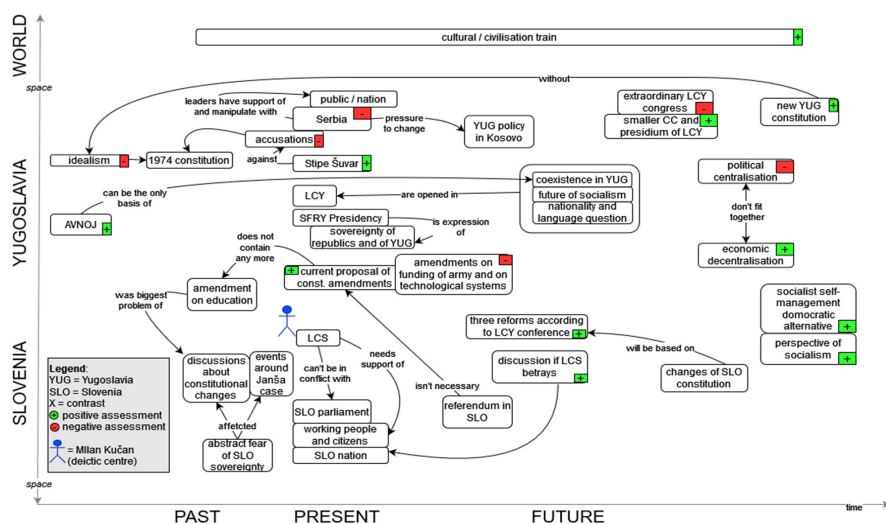
¹⁰⁶ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 64. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 12.9.1988, p. 13/2; Magnetogram 68. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 24. 10. 1988, p. 30/2.

¹⁰⁷ "I believe that we should take such an approach, so that the constitutional amendments eliminate any barriers in the federal and Slovenian constitution that stand in the way of the three reforms." The three reforms (of the economy, political system and the LCY) were accepted at the LCY conference in May 1988. ARS. 1589. Magnetogram 64. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 12. 9. 1988, p. 14/1.

¹⁰⁸ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 66. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 3. 10. 1988, p. 31/1.

civilisation train”.¹⁰⁹ He also recognised that it was the national question that had filled the Slovenes with a new energy or, as one of the leading intellectual protagonists of the “Slovenian Spring”, writer Rudi Šeligo, later put it, with an ecstasy and “societal Eros.”¹¹⁰ Clearly, the platform of a “socialist self-management democratic alternative,”¹¹¹ which Kučan was still hoping would be the trump card for the communists in the struggle with the opposition for the hearts and minds of Slovenians, could not really compete with such a weighty concept. After all, Kučan had less and less to offer in the socio-economic field as his identity as a proponent of self-management socialism was losing its content at an accelerated pace. By the end of 1988, after he (and the Yugoslav communists as a whole) had rejected communist “idealism”, only the façade of this identity remained, while the “societal Eros” of the national movement strongly affected Kučan. Regardless of his objections against the nationalist euphoria in Slovenia, Kučan ultimately did not have many options other than to accept the role of defender of national interests.

Picture 3: September – October 1988¹¹²



¹⁰⁹ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 66. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 3. 10. 1988, p. 29/2.

¹¹⁰ Televizija Slovenije, 26.6.2018. Slovenska pomlad (TV documentary), 30:30–31:03. Available online: <https://365.rtvslvo.si/arhiv/dosje/174548123>

¹¹¹ ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 65. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 29. 9. 1988, p. 54/2.

¹¹² ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 63. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 1.9.1988, p. 14/2-17/3; Magnetogram 64. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 12. 9. 1988, p. 12/1-14/1 a 25/1-25/2; Magnetogram 65. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 29.9.1988, p. 54/1-62/1; Magnetogram 66. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 3. 10. 1988, p. 27/1-31/1; Magnetogram 68. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 24. 10. 1988, p. 28/1-32/1.

Conclusion

In 1986, the chairman of the Slovenian communists, Milan Kučan still conducted himself in line with the idea of the vanguard role of the communists, believing that the party was supposed to decide on how the society should change. However, events did not adhere to this scenario, as the communists gradually lost “the ability to change the world” under mounting pressure caused by adverse economic trends and public opinion. On the other hand, Kučan became increasingly adept at detecting signs of major changes in the environment in which he operated and adapting to them. Once Kučan realised that the Slovenians were no longer willing to accept directives from the communists, he began implementing the popular will regardless of what attitudes prevailed in it and regardless of whether these were consistent with his own (initial) convictions. Even though Kučan had tried to distance himself from radically anti-regime forces, in each case of mobilisation of Slovenian public opinion he proved ready to assume the stances of the anti-communists if he deemed this necessary to maintain popular support.

The deficit of legitimacy of monopolist communist rule played a considerable role in Kučan’s actions. The Yugoslav communists had long been aware of this problem but had never come up with a solution. Indeed, they had not been compelled to do so in previous decades when global competition between socialism and capitalism was ongoing, the living standard in Yugoslavia was improving, and the anti-fascist pride of the communists, personified in the still living President Tito, was still vigorous. When he died and the economy took a downward turn after 1980, doubts in the vanguard role of the communists began to spread in the Slovenian public sphere, and then within the party itself. A true mobilisation of the Slovenian public took place in 1987–88, filled with the ardour of national emotion. In response, Slovenia’s communist leaders took action to avoid being treated as national traitors later, which worried Kučan a great deal, especially after the autumn of 1987. Under such circumstances, the monopoly over power turned into a disadvantage for the communists. As they could not be removed from power by institutional competition, they were forced to follow the demands of mobilised public opinion or risk forceful displacement. This came to a head during the Janša prosecution and trial. While Kučan personally regarded the wave of national emotion in Slovenia groundless, in public he supported the demands of the national movement and, moreover, sometimes actively contributed to the overriding atmosphere.¹¹³ It is

¹¹³ In July 1988, Kučan openly incited the national movement by publicly stating that the decision to lead the trial in Serbo-Croatian “breaches the constitution of the SFRY and SR Slovenia and the equal status and sovereignty of the Slovenian nation” and that “the Slovenians cannot regard any state that does not ensure free use (...) of the Slovenian language as their own.” Kučan said so despite previously acknowledging at a closed LCY presidium meeting that the military court in Ljubljana had routinely conducted trials in Serbo-Croatian up to that point. “Ni mogoče

clear, though, that the views of the Slovenian communists themselves in the late 1980s were also affected and changed by national euphoria.

An example of this development was the procedure surrounding the amendment of the federal constitution. By early 1987, the views of the Yugoslav “unitarists” and Slovenian communists on how the federation should function were not sufficiently divergent to make compromise impossible. Kučan was willing to accept a transfer of some authority from the republic to the federation in the interest of the federation’s efficiency, and for the sake of compromise with the wishes of the other republics.¹¹⁴ Kučan’s rhetoric changed dramatically when it became clear that the amendments led to vehement resistance not only in the narrow circle of nationalist intellectuals but also in the broader Slovenian public. In autumn 1987, he began to oppose the centralising amendments, employing some arguments assumed from the nationalist alternative. During 1988, Yugoslav institutions, faced with the threat of a Slovenian veto of the entire package, were left with no other option than removing many amendments that were opposed by Slovenia. After that, Kučan strove to get the reduced package adopted without further radicalisation in Slovenia. However, following the rise of the Slovenian national movement and later the Serbian rally campaign, Kučan signalled his future willingness to adopt more of the Slovenian national movement’s goals. Namely, the public to which he was appealing was confined to the borders of Slovenia, while he did not consider the remainder of the Yugoslav public a source of his own political legitimacy. In that regard, Kučan and the Slovenian communists acted similarly to many of their colleagues in the other Yugoslav republics, especially in Serbia, of which Kučan was well aware. On the other hand, the Yugoslav idea had in the meantime become too abstract for the Slovenians to create a barrier to national euphoria, which claimed to have been suppressed for too long.

The socio-economic system aroused far fewer emotions in Slovenian political life than the national question. During the protracted economic crisis of the 1980s, the Slovenian communists, including Kučan, had in common with their counterparts in the rest of the LCY the aim of maintaining socialism, based on social ownership and self-management, while allowing more room for the market. In this respect, the Slovenians complained about resistance from the federal centre despite a declaratory consensus. Even though the crisis had impacted Slovenia less seriously than the other Yugoslav republics, Kučan knew that the absence of existential problems was not enough to satisfy the Slovenian public and felt the

zahtevati zaščite ali arbitraže, ko gre za pravico in suverenost naroda.” *Delo*, 28. 7. 1988, p. 4. AJ, fund 803 – Predsedništvo SFRJ. 210. sednica, 12. 8. 1988. Translation of the address by Milan Kučan delivered at the session of the CC LCY Presidium from 26./27. 7. 1988, pp. 2–3.

¹¹⁴ “I believe in political action it would be good to take into account that many do not feel good in the federation such as it is now, with its current efficiency.” ARS, 1589. Magnetogram 25. seje Predsedstva CK ZK Slovenije 9. 3. 1987, p. 12/1.

need to offer the prospect of catching up to the developed West. A breakthrough came in spring 1988, when a radical programme of market and even ownership reforms was adopted at the Yugoslav level. Kučan had not advocated for such radical changes up to that point but swiftly assumed them as his own. He welcomed the alignment of views in the LCY on the reforms as a fulfilment of Slovenian demands and also as hope for the future of Yugoslavia.

However, even after the demise of the economic component of the previously compact “etatism” opposing the Slovenian orientation, the clashes between Slovenia and the rest of Yugoslavia continued to escalate. Namely, the central controversy in Yugoslavia near the end of its existence rested in statehood and national issues, while not even an agreement on profound economic change could halt the downward spiral of the political crisis. For a time, Kučan attempted to maintain his image as a proponent of self-management socialism, knowing that the concept still sounded good to the people, probably better than an explicitly capitalist alternative. However, it turned out that the perceived importance of self-management socialism could not compete with national emotions and the desire for a better living standard. Kučan got the point. He capitalised on his sensitivity to public opinion during his smooth transition to the post of head of state in the 1990s and continued in this vein afterwards. Not only did he, like many other top regime officials in other East European countries, cease declaring himself a communist, but he moreover immediately cut ties with the reformed social democratic party and no longer even declared a leftist orientation. The reward came in the form of long-term support by the Slovenian public up to the voluntary end of Kučan’s political career in 2002.

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Ideološka transformacija Milana Kučana 1986-1988. Pogledi na socijalizam i suživot naroda u Jugoslaviji

Kada je 1986. godine Milan Kučan preuzeo mjesto predsjednika slovenskih komunista, želio je što manje promjena federalnog državnog uređenja i onoga što su komunisti smatrali temeljnim načelima socijalizma, a to su “društveno vlasništvo” i radničko samoupravljanje. Stoga su Kučan i većina njegovih kolega u slovenskom vodstvu i dalje bili vjerni komunističkoj sekularnoj utopiji u njezinoj jugoslavenskoj samoupravnoj inačici. Bio je vrlo kritičan i prema slovenskom nacionalizmu kad je imao otvoreno separatističke stavove, čak se slagao i s prijenosom određenih ovlasti na federaciju. Zalagao se za društvene promjene u dva smjera: 1) davanje više prostora tržišnim mehanizmima u gospodarstvu nauštrb državne regulacije i 2) politička demokratizacija koju bi kontrolirali komunisti, iako s potpuno neodređenim ishodima. Obje su orijentacije bile zajedničke jugoslavenskom komunističkom establišmentu tih godina, iako je slovenski ogranak predlagao brži tempo od većine ostalih. Jugoslavenski su komunisti u proljeće

1988. dogovorili koherentan program gospodarskih, a donekle i političkih reformi. Kučan je na takav razvoj događaja reagirao s nadom. No, ta su pitanja odmah i daleko bila nadmašena onima o naciji i državnosti.

Već 1987. događaji u Sloveniji i Jugoslaviji postali su previše dinamični da bi se Kučanovi planovi mogli održati. Nacionalna mobilizacija javnog mnijenja, koja je 1980-ih započela u Sloveniji i Srbiji, potaknula je duboku transformaciju u svjetonazorima slovenskih komunista. U jesen 1987. došlo je do bujice prosvjeda protiv predloženih amandmana na savezni ustav, a zatim ponovno u lipnju i srpnju 1988. zbog suđenja Janši, kada se s foruma i novina prelila se na ulice i trgove. U oba slučaja Kučan se naposljetku pridružio nacionalnom pokretu unatoč početnom nedostatku razumijevanja za tvrdnje njegovih protagonista. Postalo je jasno da je jugoslavenska orijentacija slovenskih komunističkih vođa već bila previše apstraktna da bi izdržala izazov koji je postavila nacionalna mobilizacija. Štoviše, komunisti se nisu pozivali na jugoslavenski demos i vidjeli su ga isključivo na razini nacija, dok se moć federacije temeljila na pregovorima i konsenzusu među nacionalnim elitama. Njihovo je jugoslavenstvo stoga moglo brzo nestati tijekom krize legitimiteta komunističke vladavine, poput one u Sloveniji nakon 1987–1988. Nadalje, nacionalni elan koji se proširio s nižih slojeva društva utjecao je i na same komuniste. Kučan se izvrsno nosio s promjenjivom situacijom. Potkraj 1988. već je djelovao kao nacionalni vođa u borbama s federalnim centrom. Također je otišao prilično daleko na mukotrpnom putu odbacivanja osobnog komunističkog identiteta, zacrtavajući put prema svojoj budućoj dužnosti nestranačkog predsjednika neovisne Slovenije.

Ključne riječi: Slovenija, Jugoslavija, socijalizam, komunisti, Milan Kučan

Keywords: Slovenia, Yugoslavia, socialism, communists, Milan Kučan

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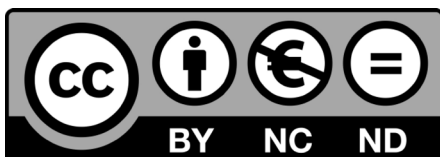
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