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YUGOSLAVIA 1989: THE REVOLUTIONS THAT DID (NOT) HAPPEN

During the 1980s, Yugoslavia was marked by contradictions. On one side, the citizens enjoyed a greater degree of freedom than in any other communist country in Europe, including largely unrestricted freedom of travel, a modest consumer society¹ and a vibrant cultural scene. On the other hand, of all the communist countries, Yugoslavia held the highest percentage of the population as political prisoners, the vast majority of them Kosovo Albanians accused of secessionism.² But instead of being dominated by the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia was the only communist country other than Albania that retained its autonomy and it forged close ties with the United States and Western Europe, including a cooperation agreement with the European Community.

Thus it seems a paradox not only that Yugoslavia dissolved violently in 1991—leading to a brief armed conflict in Slovenia in 1991, longer wars in Croatia from 1991 to 1995 and in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995, and finally to the war over Kosovo in 1998 and 1999—but also that there was a delay in fully democratic governments being established in a number of its successor states. At first glance, the trajectory away from single-party communist rule does not appear particularly different from the other communist countries: The League of Communists of Yugoslavia held its last congress in January 1990, leading to a collapse of the party, and in the same year multiparty elections were held. But in fundamental contrast to the other countries that experienced the end of communist rule in 1989–90, Yugoslavia did not take only one path away from communism, but multiple ones. Non-communist governments came to power in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The successors to the League of Communists won in Montenegro and Serbia. And in Macedonia the anti-communist opposition won the elections, but was unable to take power. Opposition emerged *within* the republics against local communist elites, but there was no successful Yugoslav-wide opposition and elections were never held at the state level. As a result, for the most part the end of communist rule did not reflect a move toward a democratic Yugoslavia, but toward competition and often mutually exclusive visions of the

¹ See Patrick Hyder Patterson, *Bought and Sold. Living and Losing the Good Life in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Hannes Grandits and Karin Taylor, eds., *Yugoslavia's Sunny Side: A History of Tourism in Socialism (1950s–1980s)* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2010).

² Florian Bieber, *Nationalismus in Serbien vom Tode Titos zum Ende der Ära Milošević* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005).

country. This accelerated the crisis Yugoslavia had begun experiencing during the 1980s. The decentralized nature of the League of Communists and the federal state meant that political competition occurred less within the republics (and the provinces Kosovo and Vojvodina) but rather between them. The pluralization of politics in Yugoslavia was thus marked by disputes within each republic over how to reshape its role within Yugoslavia (or whether to leave the Yugoslav Federation altogether).

Due to the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia, this is what most scholarly attention has focused upon, seeking to identify its causes.³ Also when the events in Yugoslavia are compared to the other transitions from communism, this has been the main focus: the large scale aggression.⁴ Fewer scholars have explored the link between the country's dissolution and its democratization.⁵

While the crisis of the Yugoslav system coincided with the crisis of communism in Soviet-dominated areas of Europe, its causes were largely home-grown. In postwar Yugoslavia there had been no violent repression of the "Croatian Spring" democratic movement, as there had been in Hungary or Czechoslovakia, and the absence of the Red Army or Soviet influence meant that opposition against communist rule could not be (re-)directed toward external factors, namely the Soviet Union. There were various domestic sources of the crisis of communism. First was the inability of the system to allow for the liberal reforms that had been pursued by reformists in some of the republics in the early 1970s, before the repression of the "Croatian Spring." Thus, while the Yugoslav system was more open than in other communist countries, it had failed to liberalize sufficiently. Second, the economic system did not suffer from excessive formal state planning, but rather a lack thereof. A highly autonomous self-management economy had led to atomization and an excessively complicated system that made reform difficult. This type of economy was ill equipped to confront the economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s. The broad decentralization of Yugoslavia, enshrined in the 1974 constitution, sought to "resolve" the national question and promote a Yugoslav approach to the "withering away" of the state.⁶ Excessive centralization had undermined the legitimacy of the first Yugoslavia between the two world wars. The political fragmentation of

³ For good overviews of the different theories on Yugoslavia's dissolution, see Dejan Jović, "The Disintegration of Yugoslavia: A Critical Review of Explanatory Approaches," *European Journal of Social Theory* 4, no. 1 (2001): 101–20; Jasna Dragović-Soso, "Why Did Yugoslavia Disintegrate? An Overview of Contending Explanations," in Lenard J. Cohen and Jasna Dragovic-Soso, eds., *State Collapse in South-Eastern Europe: New Perspectives on Yugoslavia's Disintegration* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2007), 1–39.

⁴ Valerie Bunce, *Subversive Institutions: The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁵ V.P. (Chip) Gagnon Jr., "Yugoslavia in 1989 and after," *Nationalities Papers* 38, no. 1 (2010): 23–39.

⁶ See Dejan Jović, *Yugoslavia: A State That Withered Away* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008).

the “late socialist” Yugoslavia responded to the two demands of the early 1970s for political reforms and decentralization by denying the former and granting the latter in a manner that facilitated political competition, first along republican and later, national lines.⁷

There are few archives in the region that allow access to information about the crucial years following the death of Tito in 1980 and leading to the country’s dissolution. However, due to the dispersion of the state and party archives to the various successor states and the division of the archives of the League of Communists between state and party archives, some materials have become available. The two most comprehensive and accessible archives on this period are the Open Society Archives and the Archives of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). For the topic in question, the Open Society Archives in Budapest,⁸ some of whose holdings have begun to be available electronically, contain materials from Radio Free Europe, including catalogues, newspaper clip-

⁷ Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia, 1962–1991* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1992). Further literature about Yugoslavia and its disintegration: John Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia* (London: Hurst, 2000); Aleksa Djilas, *The Contested Country. Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution, 1919–1953* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991); Dejan Djokic, ed., *Yugoslavism. Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918–1992* (London: Hurst, 2003); John Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History. Twice there was a Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); John R. Lampe, *Balkans into Southeastern Europe: A Century of War and Transition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Norman Naimark and Holly Case, eds., *Yugoslavia and Its Historians: Understanding the Balkan Wars of the 1990s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Sabrina Ramet, *Balkan Babel: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to the Fall of Milosevic*, 4th ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002); Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia. Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias. State-Building and Legitimation, 1918–2005* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Laura Silber and Allan Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia* (London: BBC, 1996); Steven L. Burg and Paul S. Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1999); Christopher Bennett, *Yugoslavia’s Bloody Collapse: Causes, Course and Consequences* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Laslo Sekelj, *Yugoslavia: The Process of Disintegration* (New York: East European Monographs, 1993); Susan L. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1995); Dunja Melcic, ed., *Der Jugoslawien-Krieg. Handbuch zu Vorgeschichte, Verlauf und Konsequenzen* (Opladen: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 1999); Lenard J. Cohen, *Broken Bonds: Yugoslavia’s Disintegration and Balkan Politics in Transition* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995); Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Thinking about Yugoslavia. Scholarly Debates about the Yugoslav Breakup and the Wars in Bosnia and Kosovo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Branka Magaš and Ivo Žanić, *The War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina 1991–1995* (London: Frank Cass, 2001); Ivo Žanić, *Flag on the Mountain. A Political Anthropology of the War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina 1990–1995* (London: Saqi, 2007); Marie-Janine Calic, *Der Krieg in Bosnien-Herzegovina. Ursachen, Konfliktstrukturen, internationale Lösungsversuche* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995); Holm Sundhaussen, *Jugoslawien und seine Nachfolgestaaten 1943–2011. Eine ungewöhnliche Geschichte des Gewöhnlichen* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2012).

⁸ <http://www.osaarchivum.org/>

pings and RFE reports. The final location of the archives of the ICTY is yet to be decided, but the Court Records have been made available electronically.⁹ Although they do not contain everything gathered by the prosecution in the various cases, they contain an impressive amount of relevant material. Although the court is only investigating crimes committed between 1991 and 2001 on the territory of Yugoslavia, the court records contain extensive and pertinent background materials, including excerpts from memoirs, records of party and state meetings, transcripts of witness statements, expert reports, as well as other sources that shed light on the years preceding the Yugoslav wars.

Alternatives of the 1980s

Following the death of Josip Broz Tito in 1980, who had been president for life since 1963, the leadership of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) passed on to an eight-member Presidency comprised of representatives from the six republics and the two autonomous provinces.¹⁰ The chairmanship rotated annually according to an established sequence. This further weakened the state with each passing year.¹¹ The mandate was too brief for programs or reforms to be implemented, and the changing Presidency chairs failed to share a uniform vision of Yugoslavia's future. The north-south divide became evident within both the Presidency and the party, and led to the dissolution of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia at its fourteenth congress in January of 1990 over rifts between Serbian and Slovenian communists. Lost were both the political and ideological dominance of the communist system and the cohesive function of the communist ideology that had held Yugoslavia and its governmental institutions together. In the political struggle for the future of Yugoslavia, the Serbian side in particular, under Slobodan Milošević, steered toward recentralization, while the Croatian and Slovenian representatives advocated liberalizing the political and economic system. Internationally, the country also lost its former strategic position and significance for the West.

⁹ <http://icr.icty.org/default.aspx>

¹⁰ Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia, as well as the autonomous provinces Vojvodina and Kosovo.

¹¹ After Tito's death the mandate for the Presidency of Yugoslavia was held between 1980 and 1991 by Macedonia: Lazar Koliševski, 4 May 1980–15 May 1980; Bosnia and Herzegovina: Cvijetin Mijatović, 15 May 1980–15 May 1981; Slovenia: Sergej Kraigher, 15 May 1981–15 May 1982; Serbia: Petar Stambolić, 15 May 1982–15 May 1983; Croatia: Mika Špiljak, 15 May 1983–15 May 1984, Montenegro: Veselin Đuranović, 15 May 1984–15 May 1985; Vojvodina: Radovan Vlajković, 15 May 1985–15 May 1986; Kosovo: Sinan Hasani, 15 May 1986–15 May 1987; Macedonia: Lazar Mojsov, 15 May 1987–15 May 1988; Bosnia and Herzegovina: Raif Dizdarević, 15 May 1988–15 May 1989; Slovenia: Janez Drnovšek, 15 May 1989–15 May 1990; Serbia: Borislav Jović, 15 May 1990–15 May 1991; Croatia: Stjepan Mesić, 1 July 1991–October 1991.

Domestically, the Yugoslav system was based on the principle of the national brotherhood and unity (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*) of all Yugoslav nations. Upon this foundation, Tito and the party leadership had built a state promising its citizens a peaceful and prosperous future in accordance with the ideology of communism.¹² While this created a society that was able to achieve a certain degree of economic prosperity, it was also a society which was politically lethargic. Postwar generations had it better than those of the past. Rapid economic growth, at least during the first postwar decades, and a relatively liberal communism allowed a modest consumer society to develop, and by 1960 Yugoslav citizens were able to leave the country either as tourists and shoppers or to seek employment abroad. These opportunities, liberal in comparison with other communist states in Europe, mitigated social conflicts but also hindered the development of political alternatives for postwar generations. This contributed to the lack of a significant dissident movement in Yugoslavia.

Nevertheless, the 1960s were already marked by an economic and political crisis, to which the state and party responded with the 1974 constitution proclaiming the “federalization of the federation.” The constitution devolved substantial power to Yugoslavia’s six republics, giving each a central bank as well as separate police, educational and judicial systems. The result was an intensified drifting apart of the regional elites.¹³ The relationship between the federation and its constituent republics became increasingly weakened by the extensive authority of the republics. The already precarious economic situation of the 1980s (north–south divide, unemployment, high inflation, currency devaluation, foreign debt)¹⁴ continued to deteriorate. The GDP increased only slowly in the 1980s and population growth in the period from 1980 to 1985 also lagged. The number of unemployed rose to over a million and inflation skyrocketed, as did the foreign debt.¹⁵ The question of how to share the economic burden between the poorer and richer republics left no side content. The unequal economic burden additionally heated the conflicts regarding distribution as well as the smoldering national question.¹⁶

¹² This ideology was the supporting column of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia and touched all spheres. Especially following the tenth congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia from 27 to 30 May 1974, the party claimed leadership “in all areas and on all levels.” Holm Sundhaussen, *Geschichte Jugoslawiens 1918–1980* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1982), 198.

¹³ Gradually the League’s authority became limited with respect to issues of foreign and security policy, uniformity of economic and social policy, and the legal system. Marie-Janine Calic, *Der Krieg in Bosnien-Herzegowina. Ursachen—Konfliktstrukturen—Internationale Lösungsversuche* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), 32; Monika Beckmann-Petey, *Der jugoslawische Föderalismus* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1990).

¹⁴ Here also Susan L. Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment. The Political Economy of Yugoslavia, 1945–1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

¹⁵ Holm Sundhaussen, *Geschichte Serbiens: 19.–21. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2007), 379; 379; see also Dušan Bilandžić, *Jugoslavija poslije Tita (1980–1985)* (Zagreb: Globus, 1986).

¹⁶ For more on the economic aspects of the collapse of Yugoslavia, see Marijan Korošić, *Jugoslavenska kriza* (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1988).

Dejan Jović has convincingly argued that the Yugoslav state, in the last phase of its existence, that is from the second half of the 1960s, was no longer based on the unity of the southern Slavs, but rather on a shared concept of communism. In other words, the idea of an ethnic “kinship” among the southern Slavic peoples was replaced by the idea of a “Yugoslavian exceptionalism” based on a “socialist market economy” and independence.¹⁷ Holm Sundhaussen defines this “Yugoslavian exceptionalism” as “the pillar of identity upon which the mutually supportive society was based.”¹⁸ Among the pillars of identity were also the founding myths of the second Yugoslavia, which was defined as a model of independence from Soviet influence and of self-management, non-alignment and, in comparison to other communist societies, relative prosperity.¹⁹ When these pillars of identity ceased to exist, the “Yugoslavs” lost the framework that had provided them with a firm structure, leading to the erosion of the state’s governmental institutions. In this context and without security, shaken by crisis-laden discourse and without a shared vision for a common state, the citizens of Yugoslavia set out on competing routes toward democracy and a market economy. The loss of legitimacy of both the state and party enabled the emergence of autonomous and mutually conflictual authoritarian nationalisms.²⁰

The national-political elite of the late 1980s and early 1990s utilized this context for ethnic mobilization, group cohesion and, accordingly, seizure of power. The old concept of community within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which had primarily been built upon social group identity, shifted to ethnicity.²¹ Those who rose to power set themselves the task of forming a nation with a common will and national pride from the heterogeneous mass of “workers.” They created a collective identity based on the “commitment to a set of shared values, the memory of a shared history and the orientation toward shared goals. Participation in this identity and commitment to specific values is what makes people into citizens, and in the case of armed conflict, citizens into soldiers.”²² Thus, while the criticism against the “old” communist system focused on the unsolved national question, it failed to offer any alternatives in the direction of a democratization of society.

¹⁷ Dejan Jović, *Jugoslavija: država koja je odumrla: uspon i pad Kardeljeve Jugoslavije (1974–1990)* (Zagreb: Prometej, 2003), 489.

¹⁸ Holm Sundhaussen, “Staatsbildung und ethnisch-nationale Gegensätze in Südosteuropa,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, no. 10–11 (2003): 3–9, 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Laslo Sekelj, “Soziologie des Jugoslawismus und des serbischen Nationalismus,” in Eggert Hardten, André Stanisavljević, and Dimitris Tsakiris, eds., *Der Balkan in Europa* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang 1996), 3–14, 9.

²¹ Ivan Čolović, *Bordell der Krieger: Folklore, Politik und Krieg* (Osnabrück: Fibre, 1994), 140.

²² Aleida Assmann, “Zum Problem der Identität aus kulturwissenschaftlicher Sicht,” in Rolf Lindner, ed., *Die Wiederkehr des Regionalen. Über neue Formen kultureller Identität* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus-Verlag 1994), 13–35, 22–23.

The journalist and political analyst Teofil Pančić has described postwar Yugoslav society as “tender totalitarianism” and the population as “spoiled slaves.”²³ In Pančić’s view, Yugoslav society longed for prosperity, security, freedom and its associated duties, yet at the same time was despised by the population. Yugoslav society had strong authoritarian tenants.²⁴ The older generation did not possess a democratic political culture and could not conceive of democracy in any concrete terms. Younger citizens were apolitical, since they had been raised in the belief that politics was for “adults” and that their impact was limited.²⁵ Both young people and their parents thought communism would be for eternity. Most Yugoslavs believed that the system of their country was fairer than that of others, and assured themselves that there was no need to strive toward alternatives or think independently, much less rebel against the established political system. When communism began to break apart, the youth expected their parents to resolve the situation. The parental generation however did not know how.²⁶ In this void of political and ideological alternatives, nationalism emerged as a potent force.

The large protest against the nationalist parties and “democratic” government which took place in Sarajevo on 4 April 1992 provides a good example for illustrating that, even three years after the overthrow of communist regimes elsewhere in Eastern Europe, there were still no alternatives to nationalism in the Yugoslav context. The protest was organized at a time when it was clear, even to the greatest optimists, that the policies of the national parties of Bosnia and Herzegovina, victorious in the 1990 elections, would lead to war. A large number of citizens assembled in the center of Sarajevo in front of the parliament building and protested against the Presidency,²⁷ the government, the national parties, the predominantly Muslim Party of Democratic Action (SDA) with Alija Izetbegović at its head, the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) led by Radovan Karadžić, and Croat Democratic Union (HDZ). These three parties, which had come to power less than two years earlier, were taking the country to war. Examining photos of this protest in retrospect, one can recognize them as a sign of discontent and helplessness. The images of Tito, who had died in 1980, and the red flags that the protesters are waving signal their desire to return to the past. While this was an unrealistic path, there was no alternative offered. And since the protest movement was unable to present a different solution, it did not pose a serious threat to the national parties. Citizens were left without any formulated alternatives or a program that could have confronted the rising nationalism.

²³ Teofil Pančić, *Urbani Bušmani* (Belgrade: Biblioteka XX Vek, 2001), 92.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ The ineffectiveness of participatory mechanisms of the self-management system contributed to the sense of disempowerment of citizens.

²⁶ Slavenka Drakulić, “The Generation that Failed,” *The Nation*, 16 November 2009.

²⁷ The members of the first “democratic” Bosnian Presidency were Alija Izetbegović, Fikret Abdić, Ejup Ganić, Nikola Koljević, Biljana Plavšić, Stjepan Kljuić and Franjo Boras.

Protests and mass movements

The powerlessness to articulate disapproval with the communist system other than within a nationalist framework had already become apparent during the 1980s. While there had been protests and strikes directed against the economic situation, the only clear alternative to the existing political system was nationalism. During the 1980s, citizens had substantial grievances against the government of Yugoslavia as well as, more importantly, its republics and provinces, and they sought multiple avenues to express them.

The most common form of dissatisfaction was linked to the aforementioned worsening economic situation, including a large national debt, high unemployment, sinking living standards, high inflation and material shortages.²⁸ Strikes were not uncommon in “socialist” Yugoslavia, but due to the highly segmented economic system into decentralized “self-managed” enterprises, such strikes were often quite localized. Only in the late 1980s did countrywide strikes take place.²⁹ A second type of protest against the status quo emphasized national issues, that is, they confronted the status quo for disadvantaging particular ethnic communities. This included nationalist mass protests in Kosovo in 1968 and in Croatia during the “Croatian Spring” in the early 1970s. Student demonstrations in Belgrade in June 1968 spread to Kosovo in November of the same year and some of the students’ demands from Kosovo, such as greater inclusion of Albanians in both Serbian and Yugoslav state bodies, and a higher level of recognition of the Albanian language, were approved.

In the period 1966–1971, there were visible signs of dissatisfaction and attempts to reform the communist society in Croatia. These did not come solely from non-communist lines, but were also articulated within the League of Communists of Croatia (SKH). During this period demands emerged for strengthening Croatian national interests in the cultural sphere (i.e., through the Croatian Cultural Centre *Matica Hrvatska*,³⁰ and the Croatian Association of Writers with Petar Segedin), the economy (Hrvoje Šošić, Šime Đodan and Marko Veselica) and politics (The League of Communists of Croatia—Savka Dabčević-Kučar and Miko Tripalo). These demands were accompanied by student demonstrations.

After Tito’s death, new nationalist protests took place in Prishtina in 1981. These were led by Kosovo Albanian students demanding the recognition of Kosovo as a republic, demands that later escalated into calls for secession. These protests were violently repressed by the police with support from other federal institutions and led to the aforementioned high number of political prisoners from Kosovo. Five

²⁸ See Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*.

²⁹ Marko Grdesic, “Mapping the Paths of the Yugoslav Model: Labour Strength and Weakness in Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia,” *European Journal of Industrial Relations* 14, no. 2 (2008), 133–51, 137–38.

³⁰ About the role of *Matica Hrvatska* see more in Berislav Jandrić, “Uloga Matice hrvatske u događajima 1971. Godine,” in Hans-Georg Fleck and Igor Graovac, eds., *Dijalog povjesničara—istoričara*, vol. 7 (Zagreb: Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, 2003), 415–33.

years later a second protest wave originated in Kosovo, this time among Kosovo Serbs who felt marginalized in the province after having lost their political and economic dominant status in the 1970s. At first the dissatisfaction exhausted itself in petitions addressed to Serbian and Yugoslav authorities, but later took the shape of mass protests, especially in Serbia, Vojvodina and Montenegro. These protests coincided and converged with social and economic protests in Serbia and Montenegro, whereby the public agenda shifted from economic to national demands. An observer would later note during one of the large protests in 1988, when participants changed their demands from economic to national issues *during* the protests, that the demonstrators had “come as workers and went home as Serbs.”³¹ Although this movement was later co-opted by the Serbian party and the republican leadership of Slobodan Milošević, it would be wrong to downplay the grassroots origins of this movement and its resonance throughout the country.³²

The main other republic in which a strong social movement emerged was Slovenia. It articulated itself less through mass rallies but as a network of activists, particularly in the sphere of media and culture, who challenged the Yugoslav system and the League of Communists. The art collective *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (New Slovenian Art), which included the iconoclastic band *Laibach*,³³ and media such as the youth magazine *Mladina* systematically sought to break Yugoslav and communist taboos, from criticizing the personality cult of Tito, to pointing out the similarities between communism and fascism and totalitarian ideologies, to condemning the role of the army and the party. In February 1987 the journal *Nova revija* (New Review) published a new Slovenian national program. These “Contributions to the Slovenian National Program” called for the closing of national ranks and argued that the Slovenes would be better off outside Yugoslavia. In the following years, many of the authors of these contributions became active in the anti-communist parties that formed the victorious DEMOS coalition after the first free nationwide elections in 1990.

Parallel to this, other media across Yugoslavia began in the 1980s to discuss topics that until then had been off limits, including placing religious communities into a more positive light and exposing some of the crimes committed during the early phase of communist Yugoslavia, in particular Goli Otok, the internment camp on the Adriatic island to which alleged supporters of Stalin were sent following the Cominform conflict between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in 1948.³⁴

³¹ Jagoš Djuretić, cited from Slavoljub Djukić, *Između slave i anateme. Politička biografija Slobodana Miloševića* (Belgrade: Filip Višnjić 1994), 106. This shift is also well documented in Čolović, *Bordell*, 138–42.

³² Nebojsa Vladislavljevic, *Serbia's Antibureaucratic Revolution: Milosevic, the Fall of Communism, and Nationalist Mobilization* (London: Palgrave, 2008).

³³ Alexei Monroe, *Interrogation Machine. Laibach and NSK* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005). The name Laibach is the German name for Slovenia's capital city, Ljubljana.

³⁴ Oskar Gruenwald, “Yugoslav Camp Literature: Rediscovering the Ghost of a Nation's Past-Present-Future,” *Slavic Review* 46, no. 3–4 (1987): 513–28. The prison remained a taboo topic in

These challenges to the system also revealed the degree to which demands for democratization quickly turned against Yugoslavia itself and thus provided little basis for a cross-republican and cross-national social movement against communist rule. The absence of a strong Yugoslav public sphere would become even more visible when the first elections were held across the country.

Elections

The disparities among the communist Yugoslav elite and the political constellation of Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s initially enabled the development of new ideological sources for legitimizing the state.

The parliaments of the republics of the SFRY passed new electoral laws and put a process toward “political pluralism” into motion. For example, in Bosnia-Herzegovina the electoral law initially prohibited political parties along national lines. After lengthy parliamentary discussion, however, and despite public opinion polls suggesting that the majority of the population was against the formation of ethno-national parties,³⁵ the republican Constitutional Court declared the law unconstitutional.³⁶ Once the amendments to the electoral law allowed the unrestricted establishing of national parties, so-called national parties, standing primarily for the “wellbeing of their nation,” were rapidly founded. The very founding of these national parties was celebrated as their first victory. This dynamic was mirrored elsewhere across Yugoslavia.

In the new political circumstances, the nation became increasingly the focal point of political discourse: political legitimation followed national lines. Nationalism served as a substitute for communism in Yugoslavia, since the state had not only lost its founding ideology, but also the basis for its existence with the disintegration of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. The infighting among the republican elites crippled the League of Communists as the pillar of the Yugoslav system, thereby putting an end to communism and threatening the very existence of Yugoslavia. In other words, communist rule collapsed not as the result of revolution or struggle by non-communist alternatives against it, but was rather the victim of diametrical conceptions of the future and wishes within the League of Communists itself. Non-communist parties and groups played only a marginal role in the collapse of the party. Thus grass-root nationalism was actually a consequence and not the cause of the changes that led to the state’s decline, since “the ruin of the Yugoslavian

Yugoslavia until the 1980s and was only discussed after Tito’s death when the novel *Tren* (Moment) about Goli Otok by Antonije Isaković became an instant bestseller.

³⁵ Krstan Malešević, *Ljudski trag*, vol. 3 (Banja Luka: Media Center Prelom, 2005), 87. The results of this public opinion survey paint a picture of a Bosnian society that was living in fear.

³⁶ Suad Arnautović, *Izbori u Bosni i Hercegovini '90: Analiza izbornih procesa* (Sarajevo: Promocult, 1996), 11.

identity and state was not the result of a process inaugurated by the ‘nation,’ or rather ‘nations.’ The deconstruction was induced and desired from above, by the elites [...].”³⁷ At the same time, it is important not to underestimate the salience of ethno-national identity. Even though ethno-national affiliation did not play a major role and stayed in the background during the communist period, national identity mattered and most citizens knew to which group they belonged. This fact, along with unresolved and competing national demands as well as the resurgence of religion and political participation, which had long been reduced to symbolic gestures, provided resources and potential for the ethno-national mobilization. The weakness of parties and groups that pursued a non-nationalist democratic agenda and the lack of a Yugoslav alternative facilitated the success of rival ethno-national parties in 1990, when multiparty elections took place for the first time in all Yugoslavian republics.³⁸

Increasingly nationalistic propaganda, based on fear and perceived threats by other nations, thus fell on fertile ground. This dynamic, the “vertical” interplay between elites and the population, was initiated from above. The liberalization of the public sphere that had occurred in the early 1980s was used by ethno-national elites, through the media and the public domain, for homogenizing as well as radicalizing social life.³⁹ These processes were so dominant that there were only a few who were able, or wanted, to resist. At first people adapted to the new social structures and only as a second step did they influence one another. The rhetoric,

³⁷ Sundhaussen, “Staatsbildung,” 8.

³⁸ The last congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia in January 1990 marked the official end of communism in the SFRY. The first multiparty elections took place in April 1990 in Slovenia (presidential, 8 and 22 April) and Croatia (parliamentary, 22 April and 6 May) and in the period between November and December in Bosnia-Herzegovina (general, 18 November and 2 December), Macedonia (parliamentary, 11 and 25 November), Montenegro and Serbia (general and presidential, 9 and 23 December). In Slovenia the united opposition movement DEMOS (Democratic Opposition of Slovenia) led by Jože Pučnik won and Milan Kučan was elected as the first president of Slovenia. In Croatia the HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union) emerged victorious and Franjo Tuđman was elected president of Croatia. Victors of the elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina were the three large ethno-national parties SDA (Party of Democratic Action) led by Alija Izetbegović, the SDS (Serb Democratic Party) of Radovan Karadžić and the HDZ (Croat Democratic Union) headed by Stjepan Ključić. The first president of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina was Alija Izetbegović. In Macedonia the anti-communist VMRO-DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity) won the elections, but was unable form a government. The leading communist leader Kiro Gligorov was elected as new president. In Serbia and Montenegro the winners were the successors of the League of Communists. In Serbia Slobodan Milošević won the presidential elections and in Montenegro, Momir Bulatović.

³⁹ The pages of the prominent Serbian daily *Politika* served the agenda of Slobodan Milošević. A telling example is a series of attacks against the last Yugoslav prime minister, Ante Marković, written by the Serbian member of the State Presidency Borisav Jović under a pseudonym to give the impression that the critique reflected the “voice of the people.” Borisav Jović, *Poslednji Dani SFRJ* (Kragujevac: Prizma, 1996), 173. This dynamic is presented in detail in Jack Snyder and Karen Ballentine, “Nationalism in the Marketplace of Ideas,” in Michael E. Brown, ed., *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), 61–96.

slogans, central ideas and tools of mobilization were very similar among the national parties; they differed only in their labeling of the respective ethnic groups in the parties' names and public appearances. The characteristics of all the important political parties and coalitions corresponded more to the features of a movement than to political parties per se. This also includes Slobodan Milošević's Socialist Party of Serbia, as he rose to power with nationalism and remained long in power by appealing to nationalist sentiments.

The election results in the individual republics only exacerbated an already tense political atmosphere. Political discourse was reduced to ethnic categorization and agreement was a priori eliminated between political representatives, with their diametrically opposed aims and visions. Nationally oriented parties, barely capable of consensus by virtue of their incompatible positions, claimed victory in the elections, resulting in intensified efforts toward federalization and separatism, thereby further weakening the federal state. As a consequence, no republican elites were interested in holding federal elections and the Yugoslav state was thus given no opportunity to legitimize itself through democratic elections. Despite multiparty elections, de facto single party systems continued to exist in most of the republics as well as in all parts of the newly-created Bosnian-Herzegovinian state. Instead of one single-party system, "multiple single-party systems" came into being on Yugoslavian territory. Although 43 parties registered for the November 1990 elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina,⁴⁰ there was no wealth of political ideas. The similarities between the new parties were significantly greater than their differences.⁴¹ The three large ethno-national parties SDA, SDS and HDZ, which together were able to win 84 percent of the seats in the Bosnian parliament, were the clear victors of the elections in that republic.

Thus, the "democratic elections" paradoxically contributed more to the elimination of democracy, in the sense of pluralism and mutual respect, than to its establishment. Political factions and debates moved in the direction of ethnic autism. Ethnic groups increasingly shut themselves off by refusing exchange of information, and consequently no new or collective perspectives developed within the political discourse.

The global context of Yugoslavia's failed revolution

While the primary sources of the Yugoslav shift from communism to ethno-nationalist politics were domestic, the international setting did not facilitate the country's democratization. In 1990, the US National Intelligence Estimate for

⁴⁰ Rajka Tomić, ed., *BiH Izbori '90. Izborni zakon s potrebnim tumačenjima* (Sarajevo: Oslobođenje, 1990), 141.

⁴¹ Arnautović, *Izbori*, 40; Tomić, ed., *BiH Izbori*, 45–141; and *Izborni ABC* (Sarajevo: Oslobođenje 1990), 44–57.

Yugoslavia predicted that “Yugoslavia will cease to function as a Federal state within one year, and will probably dissolve within two” and “[t]here is little the United States and its European allies can do to preserve Yugoslav unity.”⁴² With the coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev as general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985 and the beginnings of perestroika and glasnost, the significance of Yugoslavia in the international system waned. It had played a pivotal role in the context of Cold War Europe by maintaining close ties yet also some distance to both blocs, best exemplified in its leading role in establishing the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961. While Western governments paid at least lip service to democratization in communist countries in the Soviet sphere of influence and sought to weaken or at least contain the influence of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia’s political system came under little scrutiny by Western governments.

With the end of the Cold War in 1989 Yugoslavia lost its strategic position, and the attention of the United States and the European Community focused on other countries of Eastern Europe. The end of the Cold War also removed the primary external threat to Yugoslavia, namely an invasion by the Soviet Union, a threat particularly pertinent in shaping Yugoslav policy in the years after the suppression of the “Prague Spring” in 1968. The leadership in different republics sought alliances with different countries as the country moved toward its collapse. Slovenia and Croatia pursued closer ties to Austria and Western Europe, whereas the Serbian leadership sought backing from the conservative wing of the Soviet leadership. But while some tried to portray the dissolution of the country as the work of foreign actors,⁴³ these tentative alliances had little impact on the trajectory of Yugoslavia before its dissolution in 1991.

By mid-1991 tensions had escalated to such a degree that external intervention could achieve little, at least in the form it was offered at the time.⁴⁴ Initially both the United States and the European Community supported a democratic and unified Yugoslavia. While this line made sense from an outsider perspective, there was no partner for such a project by 1991 except for the increasingly embattled prime minister Ante Marković.⁴⁵ Instead of being sinister destroyers of Yugoslavia, as some interpretations would have it, the countries of Western Europe and the United States were hapless bystanders whose primary role in the dissolution of the country and its flawed transition to democracy was their passivity.

⁴² National Intelligence Estimate, *Yugoslavia Transformed*, 18 October 1990, 656. http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000254259.pdf (accessed 2 July 2013).

⁴³ Most notoriously, the last Yugoslav minister of defense, Veljko Kadijević. See Veljko Kadijević, *Moje viđenje raspada. Vojska bez države* (Belgrade: Politika, 1993). He also notes his and the Serbian leadership’s efforts to secure Soviet support.

⁴⁴ Josip Glaurdić, *The Hour of Europe: Western Powers and the Break-up of Yugoslavia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 69.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 97. Officially his title was the secretary of the Federal Executive Council.

Conclusions

During the 1980s Yugoslavia lacked the close ties with the Soviet Union that strongly linked the other parts of Eastern Europe as communist rule declined. The Soviet experimentation with reform and its abandoning the Brezhnev Doctrine had little direct impact on Yugoslavia other than reducing the country's international significance. The domestic structural sources of the crisis resembled those of its northern and eastern neighbors: economic crisis coupled with declining legitimacy of communist rule and the inability of the system to successfully reform itself. The League of Communists had originally achieved greater legitimacy than other communist parties in power in Eastern Europe due to its central role in the World War II partisan movement, its differences with the Soviet Union, and the lesser degree of repression it practiced, especially in everyday life of most citizens. This relative liberalism also created high expectations from the party as well as the political system it had created and refined, expectations that over the decades it proved unable to live up to. In particular, it had been unable to address economic underdevelopment and regional inequalities. In addition, the weak federal structure produced a system with little political loyalty toward the center once the war-time generation of communists had largely died out by the late 1970s and early 1980s.

National grievances as well as demands for more democracy, economic reforms and job security were thus commonly directed toward the leadership of the republics or provinces, not the federal state. The republics became the main scene of political contestation, with the two main arenas of pluralism that emerged being within the republics and between the leadership of the republics (or the League of Communists). Political contestation did not occur within the Yugoslav public sphere at large, although scholars have argued that such a sphere began to emerge at this time. It was, however, often ignored by the political institutions and usually limited to culture.⁴⁶

The social movements that emerged in Yugoslavia were mostly confined to single republics or to representing individual national groups. The few multinational groups to emerge were very late, after republican and national parties and groups had already largely monopolized the public discourse.⁴⁷ Thus by the late 1980s

⁴⁶ Dusko Sekulic, Randy Hodson and Garth Massey, "Who were the Yugoslavs? Failed Sources of a Common Identity in Former Yugoslavia," *American Sociological Review* 59, no. 1 (1994): 83–97.

⁴⁷ One of the few groups was the Union of Reform Forces, founded in July 1990 by Yugoslav prime minister Ante Marković. However, the party was established very late and thus did not participate in the Slovene and Croat elections and was trumped by more nationalist parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. The Association for Yugoslav Democratic Initiative brought together intellectuals from a number of republics, but it too was founded relatively late, in early 1989, and remained ineffective as a political actor. See Branko Horvat, "Association for Yugoslav Democratic Initiative," in Dejan Djokić, ed., *Yugoslavism. Histories of a Failed Idea* (London: Hurst, 2003), 298–301.

Yugoslav institutions had not only become structurally weak, they had been delegitimized by the republics. When multiparty elections were scheduled in 1990, there was no interest in the republics to have these held at the Yugoslav level, nor was it possible for Yugoslav institutions to initiate such elections. As a result, the transition from single party rule—which had also varied among the republics—to a multiparty system differed from republic to republic.

