

The place of the Second World War in the internal evolution of Post-War Slovenia and Yugoslavia¹

In Yugoslavia, as well as in Slovenia, until the beginning of the eighties, World War II was mainly discussed within the following parameters: the leading force of the liberation movement was the Communist Party which initiated revolutionary measures under the cover of the war, and carried out a revolution after the war; in Yugoslavia an (informal) civil war had been going on during World War II². The wartime was characterised by dualism of authority (the internationally acknowledged King's government in exile on the one hand, and the newly established authorities under the leadership of Tito, which arose from the liberation movement and strove to achieve international recognition, on the other). The western powers, particularly Great Britain, tried to solve this problem by dividing on the grounds of interest spheres (in the case of Yugoslavia, the principle of "fifty-fifty" was applied). Because of the Slovenian (and Croat) resistance in the ethnic territory after World War II, a possibility for revision of the western border (Julian March, Trieste, Carinthia)³, without consideration for the pre-War borders, was opened. This led to tension with the Allies (the crisis of Trieste); there was fear of a conflict between the western Allies and the Soviet Union, which would have involved Yugoslavia too, and possibly led to resumption of civil war. Slovenia — where the final military battles continued, even after the German capitulation, until mid-May — lived to see the end of the war as a part of the Yugoslav resistance movement which made it a part of the antifascist coalition. This fact made it possible for Slovenia to incorporate the coastal region to its territory (almost one third of the national territory), however, it did not succeed in uniting the complete ethnic territory.

In accordance with Tito's policy of brotherhood and unity, which was based on the explicit recognition of all Yugoslav nations and on their right of self-determination, Slovenia formally enjoyed a federal status within the Yugoslav federation. However, due to the reasons stated above, Yugoslavia became increasingly centralised (this included the abolition of the Slovenian Partisan Army, which was incorporated into the Yugoslav Army). Revolutionary measures were carried out (nationalisation, agrarian reform), opponents were eliminated (until the eighties, these events were either not discussed at all or presented one-sidedly)⁴. The so-called system of people's democracy and administrative socialism was introduced.

¹ Repe, Božo. The place of the Second World War in the internal evolution of Post-War Slovenia and Yugoslavia. V: The second world war in 20th century history, (Bulletin du Comité international d'histoire de la Deuxieme Guerre mondiale, No. 30/31). Paris: Institut d'histoire du temps présent (CNRS), 2000, p. 127-143.

² Civil War was seldom interpreted ideologically i.e. as a struggle for power between two opposing sides: the revolutionary and the counterrevolutionary, but more as a struggle between a) the powers of the national liberation movement and b) collaborators and national traitors. In Slovenia, the existence of civil war was even denied. It was not until the mid-eighties that the definition was introduced into historiography, that elements of civil war — though geographically restricted to the so-called Province of Ljubljana, the territory occupied by the Italians — had been present (since 1942). In the military since it was more a combined fight of the quisling and Italian and German forces against the partisans. However, a "pure" civil war was actually going on in the autumn of 1943, after the capitulation of Italy, when the former units of the *Milizia volontaria anticommunista* - MVAC [Voluntary Anticommunist Militia] and some few Chetnics were fighting the partisans. *Milizia volontaria anticommunista* also known as the so-called village guard, was set up by the Italian occupiers in the spring of 1942 for the purpose of protecting various territories from the partisan terror.

³ The revision of western borders was also aspired by the emigrant government which received some non-committal statements of support from Great Britain.

⁴ The post-war vengeance against collaborators and political opponents was carried out by executions without previous trial (the victims were predominantly home-guard men i.e. armed Slovenian quisling units, which were set up by the Germans in the autumn of 1943, for the purpose of fighting the partisans), through court trials, moral cleansing (the so-called Courts of National Honour), suppression of the right to vote,

A completely different evaluation of history emerged after Tito's death in 1980. To a certain extent these events could be compared to the attitude of the French toward World War II and the Vichy Regime as described by Henry Rousso⁵, the only distinction being that in Yugoslavia the problem appeared more than two decades later⁶. Due to earlier denial, ideological control and misuse of ideological issues for the purpose of political and international interests, these events were all the more intensive. Criticism was first expressed in literary works, both by the already established authors (like Dobrica Ćosić) and authors who only gained their reputation by writing about the war and post-war issues⁷. The problems associated with the treatment of the common past of Yugoslav nations were almost completely transferred to the field of politics. The political elite in the individual republics attempted to strengthen their position and their own vision of the reform of Yugoslav society. Everything related to the evaluation of the past: the works of art, memoirs, both the facile and the "real" historiographic works, became subject to polemics which led to obliteration of the distinction between professional historiography and the more popular genres; historiography became increasingly politicised and consigned to individual republics. In 1985, Dr. Dušan Bilandžić wrote: "When the entire history is written from opposing previously-determined positions, it becomes a part of the political struggle in Yugoslavia."⁸ In the eighties, a battle about the interpretation of past was fought in Yugoslavia (the Serb journalist Aleksander Tijanić wrote then: "We'll see what will happen in the past."). No other decade brought as many books, specialist discourses, publicist works, newspaper articles, diverse round tables, radio, TV and other discussions about history than the eighties, a decade that may even have exceeded that of the entire post-war period⁹. In this great precipitation, the future seemed to be completely forgotten, so it is hardly surprising that no Yugoslav historiographer predicted the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

The interest in treating historical issues started to grow about a year or two after Tito's death. Prior to that a sort of pietistic atmosphere prevailed, as if energy was to be built up for a true "historiographic thunderstorm" which gradually converted into a steady rain which didn't cease until the beginning of the nineties¹⁰. The polemics were particularly fierce between 1985 and 1988, at which time the attitudes of single nations towards the future of Yugoslavia and the national programmes were being formed (in 1986 the memorandum of the Serb Academy of Sciences and Arts, in 1987 the Slovenian National Programme, published in the *Nova Revija*).

Along with the break in communication at the political level, there was also a gradual break of ties between Yugoslav historians. Apart from some rare individual connections,

redundancies, etc. Some of these actions were induced by the nationality (the German minority whose members were mostly nazified before and during the war).

⁵ Henry Rousso, *Le syndrome de Vichy de 1944 à nos jours*, Le Seuil, Paris, 1990.

⁶ For possible parallels between France and Slovenia see Božo Repe, "France during World War II: the Issue of Collaboration, Resistance and Purge and the Possible Parallels to Slovenia", *Borec* [a journal of history, literature and anthropology], No 561-562-563, Ljubljana, pp. 5-92.

⁷ In my paper I mainly concentrate on the historiographic treatment. The issue was discussed more in detail in my article "Razpad historiografije, ki nikoli ni obstajala" [The Downfall of the Historiography that Never Existed], *Zgodovina za vse* [History for Everybody], Volume III, No 1, 1966, p. 69-78.

⁸ Dušan Bilandžić: "Predrasude povijesti" [The Prejudices of History], *Vjesnik*, 9 Nov. 1985, p. 6.

⁹ A complete survey of the Yugoslav journalistic and other historiographic production, which comprises hundreds of articles, is virtually impossible, due to insufficient bibliography and the disintegration of the state. When writing this paper, I referred to about 150 newspaper and magazine articles treating the most burning issues of that time.

¹⁰ According to Dušan Bilandžić, 426 conferences gathering historians and actors or witnesses of world war II were held on this topic in Yugoslavia between 1979 and 1982. Dušan Bilandžić: *Jugoslavija poslije Tita 1980–1986* [Yugoslavia after Tito 1980–1986], Globus, Zagreb, 1986, p. 200. In the mid-eighties the intensity of the discussions even increased, but faded gradually or became restricted to single republics towards the end of the decade.

they were virtually completely interrupted by the end of the eighties. From 1988 on, any idea of organising a significant all-Yugoslav meeting was a sheer utopia. After its final congress in Priština (1987), the Yugoslav Union of Historians unobtrusively died away, too. The last major joint enterprise in which historians took part was the preparation of the new edition of the Encyclopaedia of Yugoslavia, which was never finished due to the disintegration of the state. The last printed volume, however, did bring a new interpretation of the formation of the state in 1918 and its further development. In spite of numerous critical observations, all the republic's editorial boards adopted the new historical interpretation. However, due to the disintegration of the state, most of the copies were left unsold in the warehouse of the publishing house in Zagreb. The final attempt to publish the History of Yugoslavia was dropped as early as 1987 (two volumes treating the period before the 18th century were already published in the sixties). Yugoslav historians simply could not muster up a sufficient degree of unity.

The re-evaluation of the wartime events and the first post-war years had to be seen within a broader context of appraisal of the past and assessed also in the light of the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Numerous very diverse issues, covering different historic periods, caused controversy, especially those covering the more recent history. There were two key issues which dominated the polemics¹¹. The first one — the question of the socialist system — was argued through the criticism of revolution, and the second one — the question of the relations among the nations within Yugoslavia — through the criticism of Yugoslav (con)federalism. Both issues were directly connected to the period of World War II, the role of the Communist Party in it and the conception of the so-called Avnoj Yugoslavia, so called after the session of the Antifascist Council of the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (Avnoj), held on 29 November 1943 in the Bosnian town of Jajce. At this session, the representatives of the Yugoslav nations decided on the federal system.

In the first stage of this conflictual situation, the main topic of discussion was Josip Broz–Tito. As a leader of the national liberation movement and revolution, he also became the leading architect of the post-war Yugoslav order, and as such, the symbol of both disputed issues. Vladimir Dedijer, Tito's official biographer, was the first to start to demolishing his myth. In his second biographical book on Tito (the first one was published in 1953) entitled *Novi prilozi za biografiju Josipa Broza–Tita* [New Contributions for the Biography of Josip Broz–Tito], Zagreb, Rijeka 1981, he published a variety of documents, memoirs, but also unverified stories on both, Tito's private life and issues concerning revolutionary measures and the national relations¹². Dedijer's aim was more for self-promotion than for the development of a certain political concept. In this book, he did not broach either of the two controversial subjects with consistency (however, he did so in some of his later works). Neither did his criticism of Tito go as far as the criticism of some other authors, who simply declared Tito as an "obedient spy of the Comintern".

¹¹ Among others, the concrete issues connected to World War II that led to disagreements were the decisions made by the second session of Avnoj in November 1943 in Jajce and the formation of a federal state; the so-called Bujana conference at the end of 1943 (in which the delegates from Kosovo and Metohia voted for the annexation of Kosovo to Albania); the question whether armed resistance made sense at all; the civil war (particularly strong efforts were made towards rehabilitation of the Chetnics); further, the history of the first post-war years that were still connected to the wartime events: the vengeance upon the opponents (liquidation of the quisling units returned by the Allies); the seizure of power through the so-called system of people's democracy by the Communist Party and the implementation of revolutionary measures; the relationship between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, and arising from that, the Stalinist nature of the Yugoslav authorities, as well as the conflict with Informbiro.

¹² Critical records concerning Tito encouraged the authorities to adopt a law protecting the name and the works of Josip Broz–Tito. A special board was set up whose task was to protect the names of the deceased revolutionaries. This led the Slovenian historiographer Dr. Dušan Biber to make an ironic suggestion to set up a board for the protection of the entire revolution.

The book which actually strained the ideological structure of authority in Yugoslavia was a work by two Belgrade sociologists, Vojislav Koštunica and Kosta Čavoški: *Stranački pluralizam ili monizam* [Party Pluralism or Monism], Belgrade, 1983, in which the authors described (predominantly from the Serb angle) the post-war seizure of power by the Communist Party¹³.

The second question, the issue of regulating relations between the nations of Yugoslavia, was opened after two books by Veselin Djuretić *Saveznici i jugoslovenska ratna drama* [The Allies and the Yugoslav War Drama] appeared in Belgrade in 1985. The main purpose of the book (proclaimed a “first class historiographic provocation”) was the rehabilitation of the Chetnic movement, but Djuretić also discussed the issues of revolution and civil war. One part of the book was aimed at proving that the second session of the Antifascist Council of the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (Avnoj) on 29 November 1943 in Jajce failed to solve the Serb question adequately. According to the author, it was the misinterpretation of the Avnoj resolutions that later led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia. It was certainly not a coincidence that a demand for the so-called third Yugoslavia (a return to the former centralist order) was mentioned for the first time on the occasion of the festive promotion of Djuretić’s book in the Serb Academy of Arts and Sciences¹⁴.

There was a sort of harmony in terms of criticism (and defence) of the revolution in all kinds of environment until almost the end of the eighties; in the mid-eighties, however, the opposing positions of national historiographies had crystallised entirely. In the mid-eighties three historiographic works were published which caused a big stir. In different environments they experienced a very different reception, proving the motto “no matter how you comment upon a certain issue, be it about history or any other subject, you can tell in advance that it will be applauded in some environments and fiercely criticised in others”¹⁵. The books in question are: Dušan Bilandžić *Istorija SFRJ* [The History of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia], Zagreb, 1985; Janko Pleterski’s *Nacije, Jugoslavija revolucija* [Nations, Yugoslavia, Revolution], Belgrade, 1985; and Branko Petranović’s and Momčilo Zečević’s *Jugoslavija 1918 -1984* [Yugoslavia 1918–1984], Belgrade, 1985. Bilandžić was accused of attempting to ascribe the Serbs aspirations for a redefinition of Yugoslavia; by selecting and shortening documents, Petranović and Zečević were accused of attempting to present the Serb view on the constitution and development of Yugoslavia, whereas Pleterski was criticised for his thesis on “multinational revolution” (according to him, each Yugoslav nation conducted — under the direction of the leading political power, the working class — its fundamental political battle by itself, in its own way, with its own efforts and specific problems). Petranović opposed this thesis, which again led to a polemic between the two historians (the first time they argued was two years earlier, in

¹³ The “bourgeois” interpretation of the relations in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the assessment of the national liberation movement and the revolution, did appear in some works as early as in the seventies (before that it was characteristic of the emigrant authors, whose works entered Yugoslavia illegally). In their works, the middle-class/bourgeois authors denied the “noble” aims of the revolution; the liberation movement was presented as civil war and the activity of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia as blind obedience to the Comintern and the struggle for power. According to these authors, the Communist Party (characterised as a Stalinistic party) could only win this battle because of specific circumstances and “machiavelism”. Through the revolution, the Yugoslav society was virtually transferred back to the absolutism of the 18th century (this thesis was, among others, developed by Ljubomir Tadić (in his book *Tradition and Revolution* which was published at the beginning of the seventies). An important element of these writings was also the rehabilitation of the quisling and the counter-revolutionary forces. To a certain extent they influenced the Marxist historiography which then (at least partly) opened some controversial questions, i. e. the liquidation of quislings after the war or the so-called “left movements” (the fight against the supposed class opponents in Montenegro in 1942, but also elsewhere).

¹⁴ “Dr. Zlatko Čepo: Opake besede gospoda akademika” [Mean Words from Mr. Academics], *Danas*, 14 October 1986, pp. 25–28.

¹⁵ Dušan Bilandžić: “The Prejudices of History”, *Vjesnik*, 9 November, 1986, p. 6.

1983, when Petranović's book *Revolucija i kontrarevolucija u Jugoslaviji* [Revolution and Counterrevolution in Yugoslavia] was published). Dr. Dušan Biber (a severe critic of attempts to rehabilitate the Chetnik movement and the idea of Great Serbia), entered the polemic too, first on during a round table at the Belgrade Institute for Contemporary History, and later also in newspapers. He fiercely opposed the assertion that Chetniks were antifascists, too¹⁶.

However, the "Slovene-Serb" historiographic dispute was hardly more than warming up¹⁷. With occasional outbursts in the first half of the eighties, the Croat-Serb conflict which had been smouldering for quite some time, became a key issue, though it was mostly wrapped up as an ideological conflict. The Serb and Montenegrin historians, e.g. Velimir Terzić in his book *Slom Kraljevine Jugoslavije* [The Breakdown of the Kingdom Yugoslavia], launched a thesis according to which the Croat nation betrayed Yugoslavia in 1941. The Croat historian Dr. Ljubo Boban publicly opposed this assertion. A number of historians therefore demanded that historiography should investigate and prove the "existence of continuity between the nationalist and separatist movements and the organisations which attempted to break down Yugoslavia between the world wars on the one hand, and the present nationalism on the other"¹⁸.

In some other works¹⁹, a thesis was presented stating that the Croats were a genocide nation. Supposedly dated back to the 16th and 17th century and not just to the time of the Pavelić NDH (Independent State of Croatia). Such assertions led to an intensification of the historiographic war between Serb and Croat historians (who were of course writing respectively for their own magazines and newspapers) until the real war broke out and even after that²⁰.

"Unchaining the dog", as the Slovene historian Dr. Tone Ferenc called the cross-bombardment with historiographic themes, proved to be a double-edged matter for politics. On the one hand it pleased and even encouraged it (particularly in terms of conflicts between the republics), on the other, it became uncontrollable; it started to damage its very legitimacy, grounded in the revolution. The politicians therefore tried to make historians "chase the dog" which proved to be a rather fruitless business, since even the Marxist historians of different nationalities did not share the same ideological and political views, in spite of their membership of the communist party. In addition to that, many of them were not on speaking terms. Towards the end of the eighties, the politics of disciplining failed even at the symbolic level. The battle for reinterpretation of the past was continued within the individual republics. In Slovenia too, as in other republics in the mid-eighties, there was

¹⁶ Mirko Arsić: "Ambicije i interesi" (Ambitions and Interests), *Komunist*, Ljubljana, 27 December 1995. See also other articles.

¹⁷ The Slovene-Serb conflict was not unimportant, particularly since the Serbs associated it with the Slovenian support to the Albanians. In the eighties several books on Kosovo and Albanians were published in Slovenia. All of them were disputable for the Serbs.

¹⁸ "Agonija učiteljice življenja" ["The Agony of the Teacher of Life"], a conversation with Prof. Dr. Miomir Dašić, president of the Yugoslav Union of Historians, published in the Belgrade magazine *Duga* and reprinted in Slovenian magazine *Naši razgledi* on 21 November 1986, p. 651).

¹⁹ For example, the article by Vasilije Krestić: "O genezi genocida nad Srbima" [About the genesis of Violence over the Serbs], published in the magazine *Književne novine*, Belgrade, 15 September 1986.

²⁰ Even before that, some other issues led to polemics, i. e. the one about the communist leader Andrija Hebrang (according to official sources he committed suicide after the war, but he was probably killed). He was alleged to have collaborated with the Ustasha (the Croat quislings) and accused of nationalistic and separatist orientations. The latter was believed to be a common characteristic of all Croat communists during the war. From as early as the sixties, the number of Serbs killed in the Croat concentration camp, Jasenovac, was disputed. Because of his attempt to prove that the number of victims was smaller than officially stated Dr. Franjo Tuđman was attacked at that time. In the eighties, a polemic about the number of victims was carried out between Dr. Boban and Dr. Rastislav Petrović.

an increased interest in discussing the issues that were previously only one-sidedly, or ignored, or else plans were made for discussion in the future²¹.

This discussion comprised everything, from ideologically propagandistic stigmatisation of the national liberation movement to serious scientific debates. The prevailing themes were monopolisation of the resistance movement (the Liberation Front) by the Communist Party, execution of war time collaborators and anti-communists, implementation of the so-called second phase of the revolution (settling accounts with the big landowners and other class opponents on the liberated area), and the question as to who actually started the civil war, and finally, the elimination of the returning home-guard units at the end of the war. Emigrant authors, but also some Yugoslav historians as Dušan Biber — in his feature published in the Zagreb weekly magazine *Vjesnik u srijedu*, 17 and 24 October, 1973) — wrote about these units in their works. In 1975, an interview with the writer and one of the wartime non-communist leaders of the Liberation Front, Edvard Kocbek, was published in the Trieste magazine *Zaliv* in 1975, in which he also wrote about the post-war execution of the home-guard men and about the need for national reconciliation. This was the first time that someone's assertions triggered such a lively response in the public and such a severe criticism by Slovene politicians²². In the seventies there was an appeasement in the relations between the Catholic Church and the State (the authorities regarded the Church as the main advocate of collaboration and until the sixties, also, as the most dangerous opponent) as was conveyed in the statement of the archbishop of Ljubljana, Dr. Pogačnik, in 1977. When referring to the wartime events, he said that the Catholics "forgive everything that was inflicted upon [them] by human fault. We condemn all the wrongs done in the name of the Christian religion [...]"²³. A fierce debate broke out again in 1984, when the sociologist Spomenka Hribar wrote her text "The Guilt and the Sin" in which she claimed that the home-guard men were fighting for their country, too. She pleaded for the idea of national reconciliation and suggested the erection of an obelisk in Ljubljana as a symbol of that²⁴. Her ideas were criticised in the leading newspaper *Delo*, even before they were published. Afterwards there was also severe criticism from a part of the leadership of the Union of Communists and the Veterans' League. It was not until a few years later that her text could be published. Due to shortage of documents, the fate of the home-guard men only gradually became the subject of professional studies. In 1985, on occasion at the fourth (and last) round table in which British and Slovenian historians took part, a discussion was held about the return of the home-guard men²⁵. Apart from that, this topic was mainly treated in newspaper articles and other publications.

The question of reconciliation became a burning issue after the change in the government system in the spring of 1990. Before the change of government, the presidency of Slovenia made a statement on reconciliation, which was followed by the statement of the Slovene Bishops Conference. On 5 March 1990, the presidency of the republic published its views in a special letter and urged that the civil dispute be calmed.

²¹ One of such plans was to publish documents about national treachery, the collaboration and the counterrevolution, respectively, but this was never done.

²² "Edvard Kocbek : pričevalec našega časa" [Edvard Kocbek: a Witness of Our Time], an interview with Edvard Kocbek by Boris Pahor, *Magazin Zaliv* [The Bay], Trieste, 1961, Reprinted in *Naši Razgledi*, Ljubljana, 9 May, 1975.

²³ From the sermon of the Ljubljana Archbishop and Metropolitan Jožef Pogačnik on the Holy Thursday, 7 April, 1977, France M. Dolinar: "Resnici na ljubo" [For the Sake of the Truth], and "Statements by the Bishops of Ljubljana about the Wartime events", *Družina*, Ljubljana 1988, p. 24. In his statement to the Prime Minister of the first post-war government, regret about the mistakes committed by some priests and other Catholics was expressed as early as June 1945 by the then vicar of the Ljubljana diocese and future bishop Anton Vovk.

²⁴ Spomenka Hribar: *Krivda in greh* [The Guilt and the Sin], ZAT, Maribor, 1990.

²⁵ Dušan Biber, (ed.), *Konec druge svetovne vojne v Sloveniji* [The End of World War II in Slovenia], Borec, Ljubljana, no. 12, 1986.

The letter also expressed the view that the struggle of the Liberation Front was met with opposition from some citizens, particularly those from the Province of Ljubljana. Different reasons (ideological, political, the mistakes by the Liberation Front) led these citizens to turn against the liberation movement and seek contact with the occupiers. The presidency pleaded for the examination of the responsibility of government organs for the wrongs done and for reconciliation, which was not to be misappropriated for political purposes. The statement was submitted to the assembly (parliament) for implementation, but there was no reaction to it before the change of government. On 13 March, the bishops conference led by the reconciliation leader, Dr. Alojzij Šuštar, declared reconciliation with the dead to be a decent remembrance of all deceased, regardless of the ideology that caused their death. The conference also pleaded for the establishment of graves, the evaluation of wartime and post-war events from the perspective of the circumstances of the times; and an effort to determine correlation. According to the bishops, every wish for vengeance should be renounced²⁶. This statement was a deviation from the otherwise severely counter-communist tone of the religious press and public appearances of the majority of the church ideologists.

In his speech on the occasion of the constitution of the multi-party assembly (parliament) on 9 May 1990, its first president, France Bučar, characterised this event as the end of civil war, which had been breaking and paralysing the Slovenes for almost half a century²⁷. Even before the 1990 elections, the Party of Democratic Renovation (which succeeded to the Union of Communists) condemned the so-called Dolomiti statement. With this statement the Communist Party usurped the power and abolished the coalition principle of organisation within the Liberation Front in 1943.

In 1990 the organisation of home-guard veterans, Nova slovenska zaveza (The New Slovenian Alliance), was set up, named after the organisation created in Slovenia in 1942 at the incentive of Draža Mihajlović. Its aim was to promote the "home-guard" truth; with the help of the church they erected memorial plates for the home-guard men and sought to determine how many were killed. The New Alliance defended the viewpoint that the communist threat was more dangerous than the threat from the occupation; and thus that armed resistance by the occupiers was legitimate. After the first multi-party elections in 1990 and the subsequent change of government, a symbolic reconciliation ceremony was held in one of the places where home-guard men had been killed (Kočevski Rog). The president of the state and the archbishop of the Catholic Church also attended the celebration²⁸. Apart from its symbolic meaning, this reconciliation ceremony had no major effect on ideological disputes and viewpoints regarding World War II. The parliament set up a commission (first called the inquiring commission and after independence, the investigating commission). Its task was to investigate the post-war killings and dubious court trials as closely as possible, but the work has never been finished²⁹.

During the struggle for independence, national interests were at the forefront, and ideological conflicts regarding the evaluation of World War II and its post-war consequences seemed to recede into background. In spite of that, some overzealous local

²⁶ "Slovenska Škofovska konferenca: Izjava o narodni spravi" [Slovene Bishop Conference: The Declaration on National Reconciliation], 13 March 1990, Resnici na ljubo [For the Sake of the Truth, op.cit. p. 31.

²⁷ France Bučar: Prehod čez rdeče morje [Crossing the Red Sea], Ljubljana, 1993, p. 11.

²⁸ During the war, the Catholic Church acted differently in different occupational zones. In some of them priests supported the partisan movement, in others, particularly in the Province of Ljubljana (Italian occupational zone) it opposed the resistance (which was equated with communism) and favoured collaboration.

²⁹ The investigating commission for examining post-war mass killings, dubious court proceedings and other irregularities was set up on 5 June 1993. The commission issued a preliminary report in two parts. Poročevalec državnega zbora Republike Slovenije (The Parliament Reporter of the Slovenia Republic, no 38, 4 October 1996 and no 42, 17 October 1996).

rulers and other individuals induced some minor excesses related to the past. In some places monuments (particularly those of Tito) and other World War II and revolutionary symbols were removed. On balance however, it can be stated that the transition was highly civilised, although a dispute is still going on about the monuments in memory of the two most significant communists and national liberation movement leaders (Boris Kidrič and Edvard Kardelj) which are located in the centre of Ljubljana. Political division cropped up in 1990 when national holidays were being redetermined. As a result of the balance of power in the parliament, a compromise was found and April 27 remained a holiday, but its name was changed from “Liberation Front Day” to “Resistance Day”. The holiday was (and still is) boycotted by a part of the political spectrum. Several attempts, which all failed, were made in the parliament to abolish this holiday. A heated polemic was also carried out in 1995, on the occasion of celebrating the victory over fascism and the end of World War II.

A struggle for redefinition of the past broke out again after a relatively short polemic-free period when Slovenia was fighting for independence. The new head of the parliament, Herman Rigelnik, a pragmatic manager, asked Slovene historians to prepare a scientific report on Slovene contemporary history. The text was to be a historiographic foundation to serve the parliament for its declarations on some unsolved issues concerning the near past³⁰. Thereafter a team of twelve historians prepared a 111 pages report which provoked different reactions, but had no major influence on the decisions of the politicians.

In the mid-nineties the Catholic Church started to seek rehabilitation of the wartime bishop Dr. Grigorij Rožman. After the war he was found guilty of collaboration and treason and sentenced in absentia. The efforts of the church were strongly supported by the Attorney General Anton Drobnič, a former home-guard man. Drobnič first commissioned a historical study on Rožman which was supposed to prove that the sentence was not justified³¹, and afterwards suggested to file an appeal. So far the court has not ruled on the matter.

Shortly before his period of office was over, he demanded that the verdict be annulled, on the grounds that the trial was illegal, but his successor withdrew the motion. Rožman’s co-defendants were General Leon Rupnik (the leader of the Slovenian home-guard formations), Dr. Lovro Kacin (the wartime head of the political police), Dr. Miha Krek (an emigrant politician), Milko Vizjak (a home-guard colonel) and the nazi war criminal Ervin Roesener. The General Attorney did not demand annulment of the verdict upon Roesener, but it was obvious that he too would be acquitted if the court determined that the trial was illegal³².

In 1997 and 1998 different political parties (among which, the United Union of the Social Democrats, successor of the Communist Party) prepared several draft declarations on national reconciliation and on the assessment of wartime and post-war events. The most rigorous were the ones prepared by the right wing parties, which accused the Communist Party of taking over power and of being responsible for post-war killings. They characterised the communist period between 1945 and 1990 as being totalitarian, and the regime as criminal³³. The right wing parties proposed a bill for cleansing legislation, based

³⁰ Ključne značilnosti slovenske politike v letih 1929–1995 [Key Characteristics of the Slovene Politics between 1929 and 1995. A scientific report], Institute for Contemporary History in Ljubljana, Ljubljana, September 1995, introductory notes.

³¹ Two studies published in the book *Rožmanov proces* [The Rožman Trial], Družina, Ljubljana 1996, were separately written by Tamara Griesser Pečar and France M. Dolinar. Pečar’s text defended Rožman, whereas Dolinar’s treatment was more complex.

³² “Predlog državnega tožilstva okrožnemu sodišču v Ljubljani” [The motion of the Attorney General to the district court in Ljubljana], newspaper *Delo*, 18 November, 1994, p. 4.

³³ “Predlog deklaracije o protipravnem delovanju komunističnega totalitarnega režima” [A draft declaration on unlawful activity of the totalitarian communist regime]. “Poročevalec državnega zbora” [The Parliament

on the Czech model. Attempts to formulate a single declaration, acceptable to all parties failed; therefore the original plan, to have the declaration adopted by the Parliament and thus recognised as “the truth” about the wartime and post-war events, was not carried out.

For various reasons, historiography mostly rejected demands (to a large extent ideologically and politically determined) for the revision of history after the change of power. A new, young and unbiased generation of historians asserted itself in the eighties. After getting rid of one tutorship, it had no intention of accepting another. Apart from that, most findings of the older generation were accurate and coincided with the factual data. Some themes, however, were not researched at all or only to a limited extent. A series of monographic studies has appeared, but an authentic wartime history and the history of the entire 20th century is yet to be written. Previously, this subject was only treated in school textbooks and diverse chronicles. But now, a comprehensive history of Slovenians in the 20th century is being prepared by the Institute of Contemporary History in Ljubljana. After the disintegration of the state, no one in Slovenia seemed to be concerned with the Yugoslav history within a broader context³⁴.

Occasional critical attention is paid to the Encyclopaedia of Slovenia, a project that started at the beginning of the eighties. The first volume was published in 1987, and the last two are yet to appear. Entries regarding World War II and the post-war period were selected and often enough written in accordance with the former criteria. Some topics are therefore unbalanced; the Encyclopaedia is reproached as ideologically biased.

On the occasion of the exhibition “Slovenes in 20th Century”, which was prepared by the Museum of Contemporary History in Ljubljana, historiography was again criticised, and accused of holding to the old ideological dogmas. Writer Drago Jančar publicly criticised the exhibition as one-sided, claiming that it showed only the “bright” side of the past; he initiated a “complementary” exhibition with the title *Temna stran meseca* (The Dark Side of the Moon)³⁵. The maxim of the exhibition was the following: since the communist seizure of power, throughout the wartime and post-war revenge acts against the opponents and until 1990, Slovenia was governed by a totalitarian regime, whose true nature hardly changed throughout this whole period. The exhibition and the publication³⁶ with the same title induced fierce polemics. When defending their assertions, the authors of the exhibition also appealed to the *Livre noir du communisme* [The Black Book of Communism], although the case of Yugoslavia is only briefly treated within a broader regional context. Neither does this work present the entire post-war period. In October 1999, the Museum of Contemporary History prepared an exhibition about the home-guard men entitled “Mati, Domovina, Bog” [Mother, Homeland, God]. Along with it, an extensive publication with the same title was prepared.

The latest attempt to revise the views on World War II is the book by Aleksander Bajt (one of the best-known Yugoslav socialist economists, head of the Institute of Economics at the Faculty of Law in Ljubljana, and adviser to the last two governments of former Yugoslavia). In his book, Bajt, who spent part of the war as a member of the chetnik staff in Rome, attempts to rehabilitate the chetnik movement and accuses the partisans of being responsible for beginning the civil war, since they were the ones who first attacked the Chetniks. He claims that civil war was more important for the partisans than the resistance itself. As to resistance, Bajt thinks it was unreasonable, since occupation by the Red Army

Reporter, 23 December 1997, p.35-36]. The motion was handed in by two members of Parliament: Janez Janša, the leader of the Social Democrats, and Lojze Peterle, the head of Christian Democrats.

³⁴ One of the exceptions was Dr. Dušan Pirjevec, a Slovenian from Trieste who wrote a book entitled *Jugoslavia 1918–1922*, Koper, 1995. This book was first published in Italian.

³⁵ Upon his criticism of the exhibition, the museum offered Jančar an opportunity to present his own vision of the situation. The team he selected to prepare the exhibiton was given expert support by the museum. The exhibition was funded by the state.

³⁶ *Temna stran meseca. Kratka zgodovina totalitarizma v Sloveniji 1945–1990*. [The Dark Side of the Moon. A short history of totalitarianism in Slovenia 1945–1990], Ljubljana, 1988.

and sovietisation (Stalinisation) of Yugoslavia were unavoids, anyway. For the Slovenes (and Yugoslavs) it would have been much better to await liberation from outside and thus avoid causing victims³⁷. Part of the press and the public welcomed Bajt's interpretation as a revision of history. Some euphoric comments even introduced the thesis that the "genuine" truth had finally been written and thus historians were not needed any more. The answer to Bajt's theses arises from historical facts: during the war, the Slovenian nation was condemned to death; the Germans started a mass migration and forced mobilisation and the nation would not have survived if it had not been for resistance. Slovenia's post-war situation would have been completely different if it had not been part of the antifascist coalition (the situation in Yugoslavia would have been different if the state had been restored: the question of the borders would have been treated differently, there would have been no dispute with the Informbiro, Yugoslavia would not have become non-aligned, etc.).

The attitude of people towards World War II and resistance is generally more positive than can be concluded from the political and public polemics. The polemics are carried out between more or less the same circles, mostly through comments from a select group of authors, and readers' letters in magazines and newspapers.

Most people questioned in a representative 1995 opinion poll (carried out by the Faculty of Social Sciences and repeated in 1998), which examined the attitudes of the Slovene population towards its past, stated that the Slovene nation would have faced a peril of death and extinction as a nation if there had been no resistance, even if it was led by the communists. Only a small percentage of respondents felt that the communist revolution presented a greater risk than the occupation and that the resistance against the occupiers caused too many victims. Seven per cent of the respondents felt the role of the communists was very positive, 57%: positive, whereas 15% believed it was negative. Almost 50% felt that the post-war killings were a terrible crime, 20% believed they were a major political mistake, over 11% saw them as a tragic, yet unavoidable consequence of the civil war, and 7% thought they should be regarded as punishment for betraying their country. The majority believed the resistance movement enjoyed the support of the major part of the population. In opposition to that, the home-guard movement was judged as negative. Less than 2% judged the role of the Catholic Church as very positive, 25% as positive, over 42% as negative and 10% as very negative (according to the Catholic Church, over 70% of Slovenians declare themselves as Catholics)³⁸.

Between the years 1995 and 1998, there was a slight decline in the positive rating of the resistance, along with a more critical attitude towards the Communist Party and more understanding for the home-guard movement. This was probably the result of the gradual filling of blank spots in historiography, of a more pluralistic approach to history, which acknowledged the existence of diverse "truths", and also of a political offensive on the media .

On the whole, the period of World War II and its consequences still present a major political issue in Slovenia and continues to divide its people. Political parties abuse it in their efforts to gain political influence. People perceive it in accordance with their ideological convictions (as seen from the opinion polls, which depend far more on their own personal and family experience, than on the influence of teachers, textbooks and media). The younger generation tends to be less and less interested in the subject. Yugoslavia, as it emerged from World War II and was then gradually transformed into a

³⁷ Aleksander Bajt: *Bermanov dosje* [The Berman Dossier], Ljubljana, 1999.

³⁸ The data quoted are taken from: *Slovensko javno mnenje, podatkovna knjiga* [The Slovene Public Opinion 1998, Data Book, Niko Toš et al., University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute for Social Sciences, Ljubljana, December 1998], and Božo Repe: "Kaj Slovenci mislimo o svoji preteklosti" [What Slovenians Think about their Past], published in *Slovenian State, Society and Public* (edited by Anton Kramberger), Faculty for Social Sciences, Ljubljana, 1996, pp. 85-91.

tolerable form of self-managed socialism, is judged rather positively or at least neutrally by the majority of people³⁹. In the last decade of its existence (1980.-1990, the primary fear of Germans and Italians as prime enemies was gradually replaced by the fear of a new enemy, the Serbs, who acquired this position because of their constant internal conflict. After attaining independence, the former fears seem to grow again due to Italian and Austrian pressure. In neighbouring Italy and Austria, a revival of neo-fascist ideas can be perceived, which could be clearly seen after Haider's substantial electoral success in Austria in 1999.

Due to major changes after 1990, the re-evaluation of World War II was inevitable. Of course this also affected the Slovene people, but fortunately and fundamentally no major changes can be noted in the mostly positive attitude towards the evaluation of antifascism and resistance.

Summary

This paper treats the gradual change of attitudes towards World War II in Yugoslavia after the death of Josip Broz Tito in 1980, with special focus on the following questions: Tito's role in the contemporary history of Yugoslavia, the nature of the chetnik movement, the civil and ethnic war (struggles between individual nations), the number of victims, the formation of the new Yugoslavia, the post-war vengeance against collaborators and political opponents, the role of communists in the national liberation movement and revolution. Throughout the eighties, diverse meetings, round tables and the media, fiercely debated the subject of contemporary history, particularly World War II. The polemics became increasingly nationalistic until virtually all institutional (and to a large extent also personal) ties between Yugoslav historians were destroyed. All joint projects came to a standstill, including those on researching common history. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the debates continued within individual republics (states) and were strongly influenced by the new situation.

In Slovenia, the subjects under discussion were mainly the leading role of the Communist Party in the liberation movement, the post-war seizure of power and the totalitarian nature of the regime, wartime collaboration, the post-war killings of the home-guard men, and vengeance against political opponents. Recently the question of whether resistance made any sense at all has been hotly debated; the allegation being that it brought nothing but numerous needless victims. The question of national reconciliation between the wartime opponents has remained open since the mid-eighties. The author believes that a re-evaluation of history was certainly necessary, considering the major changes that have been going on in Europe since 1990, including the democratisation of the Slovene society, the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the attainment of independence. He ventures the opinion, however, that the majority of Slovenian people have not changed their positive views on antifascism and resistance.

³⁹ 7% of the questioned people characterised life in Yugoslavia as very good, almost 80% as good, and 6% as bad. 34% of the people questioned had mainly positive experiences, 50% had both, positive and negative experiences and a little less than 7% had only negative experiences.