

National holidays (Slovenia)¹

In the 20th century the Slovenians lived within three states: Austro-Hungary (until 1918), the Kingdom Yugoslavia (until 1941) and the socialist Yugoslavia (between 1945 and 1991). After the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991, they attained their individual, independent state. The national celebrations were influenced by the respective conditions and the political system within which they were living at the moment. In the times of Austro-Hungarian monarchy people used to celebrate birthdays of the respective emperors (particularly Franz Joseph whose reign extended itself over a very long period between 1848 and 1917), and the Catholic religious celebrations. In the period between the two world wars, the Habsburg Monarchy was replaced by the Dynasty of the Serb kings Karadjorjević, whereas the religious celebrations remained untouched. During World War II the celebrations depended on the occupier. There were three of them in Slovenia: the Germans, the Italians and the Hungarians. Within each occupation territory the occupiers determined the holidays that were to be celebrated. They used to be connected to the fascist and the nazi ideology and to the national holidays of Germany, Italy and Hungary respectively. Though limited and controlled, the Slovenian collaborationist authorities used to celebrate some of their own holidays, whereas the partisan resistance movement established its own holidays, which were based on the resistance, the Yugoslav state tradition and the Slovenian culture, but also on the Soviet Union and the October Socialist Revolution, since the resistance movement was led by the Communists. After World War II, the national holidays were set anew and they were based on important dates associated to the resistance, the setting up of the new socialist Yugoslavia and the international Communist and Socialist movement. A very important role fell to the leader of the Resistance and the new Yugoslavia Josip Broz - Tito.

After Slovenia had gained its independence the holidays were completely changed again: the only two that remained from the previous period were the Day of the Resistance and the 1st May - the Labour Day, all others were changed or abolished. The newly introduced holidays are connected to the attainment of independence of Slovenia and the Catholic Church holidays.

Another typical feature of Slovene holidays is a strong link to artists, particularly poets and authors. This can be referred to a lack of statesmanship tradition, whereas writers were seen as the upholders of the Slovene language and identity. The most famous Slovene poet France Prešeren who lived in the first part of the 19th century has been celebrated by the Slovenians of all generations, strata and beliefs, regardless of their political orientation. Prešeren rewards, which have been awarded to the artists in different fields for the past fifty years, are considered to be the most prestige cultural awards in Slovenia.

Thus the main celebrations in the 19th and the 20th century in Slovenia were the following: the birthdays of the members of the Habsburg dynasty, particularly Franz Joseph and later the Serb dynasty of Karadjordjević; further celebrations in the memory of the merited personalities from different fields of activity, anniversaries of important military victories (however few the Slovenians themselves had reached till World War II- moreover the victories of Austro-Hungary and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia were celebrated), and diverse political celebrations. Since Slovenia had a rather strong socialist movement, other dates like the 1st of May (Labour Day) and the 8th of March (International Women's Day) - though not official holidays - were celebrated. After Slovenia had become occupied people were

¹ National holidays. For: Nations and States in Southeast Europe. Workbook 2. Teaching Modern Southeast European History. Alternative Educational Materials. Theassaloniki: Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe, 2005, p. 104-105.

forced to celebrate days like the birthday of Adolf Hitler or Benito Mussolini, further the annexation day of parts of Slovenia (Štajerska and Gorenjska) to Germany, of Prekmurje (over Mur region) to Hungary or the central part of Slovenia (the Province of Ljubljana) to Italy. These holidays were then replaced by the socialist holidays, the most important being

- the Veterans' Day (4th July) which stood for the beginning of the armed resistance against the occupiers of Yugoslavia;
- 29th November as the day when the representatives of resistance movements from different parts of Yugoslavia adopted a resolution on setting up a new, federative Yugoslavia in the Bosnian town of Jajce in 1943;
- 25th May as the Youth Day and at the same time Tito's birthday (it turned out to be one of the most cult celebrations)
- 8th March (Women's Day)
- 22nd December (the Day of the Yugoslav National Army)

as well as some other holidays.

The holidays used to follow a certain ritual. So for example, a relay was organized for the Youth Day: young people used to carry a relay baton all over Yugoslavia; the Women's Day used to be celebrated in companies - women were given carnations and other gifts, whereas the occasion used to be intensively "celebrated" by men in diverse inns and restaurants.

During the process of attaining independence, a kind of "holiday mess" used to govern Slovenia: nobody really knew whether the old holidays were still valid or not. After fierce discussions, the parliament adopted a new calendar of celebrations. The former Catholic Church holidays were reintroduced and added to them was the 31st October as the Protestant Day. This is the day when Martin Luther publicly announced his theses in 1517 (Protestantism had a strong cultural tradition in Slovenia; the first Slovenian book was namely written by the Protestants in the mid 16th century); 27th April remained in the holiday calendar as the Resistance Day (on this day the Liberation Front of the Slovenian Nation was established in 1941). Another holiday that was preserved was the 1st May. However, new holidays associated to the Slovenian independence were introduced: 26th December (the day when in 1990 the results of the plebiscite for Slovenian independence were announced) and the 25th June, the Day of the State (to commemorate the day when the independence of Slovenia was declared in 1991).

Fierce political debates regarding the celebrations in Slovenia have been going on during the past years. Politicians attend the celebrations, which suit them: a lack of statesmanlike attitude can be observed. Only the cultural holidays, above all the formerly mentioned Prešeren's Day manage to unite the politicians. However, even here the poet's death is celebrated - a fact, that seems to be in accordance with the Slovenian introvert character and its tendency to self-pity and even suicide.

