

## Slovenians and the border question<sup>1</sup>

Along with other South Slav nations, the Slovenians settled in the Eastern Alps towards the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. From the early Middle Ages on, their identity was mostly formed within European West, but also by the Eastern- and South-European civilisation circle, which was due to their geographical position at the junction point with the Eastern and Southern Europe. Geographically, the Slovenian territory comprises the Alpine, the Pannonian and the Mediterranean world. The influence of all these cultures is extremely strong, which is evident from the division of Slovenian territory into different regions, from very diverse dialects and strong regional identities. All that made it difficult to develop a unified literary language and a common national identity. In the north, Slovenian ethnical borders were formed within the relation to the Germanic world, in the east to the Hungarian, in the west to the Italian, and in the south to the Croatian world. Of course they were frequently changed (what actually meant that they were reduced): mostly in the north, a little less in the east and hardly at all in the south, where ethnical border remained almost unchanged for centuries. Due to different reasons, particularly economic ones, emigration, and the fascist oppression, the Slovenian population decreased constantly, particularly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. <sup>2</sup>Political (state) borders were never the same as the national ones. Individual Slovenian territories belonged to either German, Austrian, Hungarian or Italian state formations; during the time of Illyrian Provinces (1809 – 1813) Slovenian territories even belonged to France and from the year 1918 on also to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and Yugoslavia, respectively. There was a time, however, when all the Slovenes lived within one state; this was, when according to the Campformio Peace Treaty from 1797, Austro-Hungary got Venetian Slovenia inhabited by the Slovenes instead of Belgium, which the monarchy lost. In 1805, Napoleon annexed these territories to the Kingdom of Italy; however, Austria managed to get them back, but only to lose them permanently after the lost war with Prussia in 1866, which was later confirmed by the plebiscite. The fact that all the Slovenians lived within one state had no special influence on the formation of the national consciousness or the demands for independent national state until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Only in 1848 a group of Slovenian intellectuals in Vienna expressed a demand to form a Unified Slovenia (an autonomous country within Austria), whereby they did not take into account the Venetian and the Prekmurje Slovenians (the Slovenians living along the river Mura); the latter belonged to the Hungarian part of the monarchy. Even after the World War I, hardly anyone in Ljubljana knew that these people were Slovenians, which is also evident from the maps of the national territory dating from this time. Some other territories were also missing in these maps (Bela Krajina and the Gorjanci Mountain Ridge) – the territories bordering to Croatia. It is true, however, that that in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Illyrism according to which the Slovenians were to abandon their own language and adopt a common South Slav language did not prevail. Some historical researches show that it was a French ambition during the time of Illyrian provinces to form a uniform south Slav (Illyric) nation.<sup>3</sup>

At the turn of the century Slovenes were faced with two basic problems: the issue of democracy and the national issue (which political elites usually place in the foreground). The development of democracy was only partially determined by our own selves, in so far

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<sup>1</sup> Repe, Božo. Les Slovenes et la question des frontieres européennes. V: PÉCOUT, Gilles (ur.). Penser les frontieres de l'Europe du XIXe au XXIe siecle: élargissement et union: approches historiques. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004, str. 341-346.

<sup>2</sup> Slovenci skozi čas (Slovenians through time), Mihelač, Ljubljana 1999, Ilustrirana zgodovina Slovencev (Illustrated History of Slovenians), Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Slovenska zgodovina v besedi in sliki (Slovenian history in word and picture), Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana 2003.

as its primary characteristic was the induction of mutual intolerance and the exclusion of those with different opinions, especially in the field of so called »national enemy .<sup>4</sup> Slovenian politicians in that time saw the solution of the national question in the so called trialism: the division of Austria Hungary to the German, the Hungarian and the south Slav part, within which the Slovenians were to have an autonomous unit together with the Serbs and the Croats. With the end of Austro-Hungary this idea was dropped. After a short-term, one month long transitional phase in which Austro-Hungarian South Slav states had their own small state with the seat in Zagreb, the Slovenians became a part of Yugoslavia, within which they remained for over 70 years. The idea, according to which they were to become a part of a single Yugoslav nation with a single language, was done with at the beginning of the twenties. The Slovenians got schools in their own language, a university and a kind of non-formal cultural, yet no political autonomy. The change was not only as regards the state, but more so regarding the cultural framework: from the well organised and pedantic Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the Slovenians joined another civilisation circle with a strong Balkan tradition, a heterogeneous national and religious structure, and a specific politics, which strived to preserve the Osmanali tradition of "outsmarting". For the Slovenians, World War I proved to be catastrophic: according to the London treaty of 1915, Italy got the Slovenian coastal region and Istria for its joining the Entente forces; Slovenia thus lost a direct access to the open sea and the port of Trieste. According to the result of the plebiscite in 1920, Carinthia was granted to Austria. The only gain for Slovenia was the Prekmurje region in the east, which was mostly a result of the fear from spreading of bolshevist revolution, due to which the great powers allowed the Yugoslav Army to occupy Prekmurje.

During World War II, Slovenia was divided among three occupants: the Germans, the Hungarians and the Italians. The Hungarians and the Italians formally annexed their occupational zones to their respective states. The Germans planned that parts of Slovenia should make a southern border of the Reich; the inhabitants of the frontier regions were deported; the territory was then colonised by the so-called Gottcher Germans. The German plan was that Slovenia should officially become a part of the Reich after it was completely germanised; yet it did not come to it because of the partisan resistance and technical problems.<sup>5</sup> Due to the anti-fascist partisan movement, the border with Italy was changed after the war.<sup>6</sup> Although it was not changed to the extend the Slovenians wanted, the Paris Peace Treaty from 1947 and after that London agreement were much more favourable to them than the agreements from the time after World War I.<sup>7</sup> Due to the

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<sup>4</sup> The Slovene political mentality developed in its basic elements at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and grew from the fact that opponents have to be either totally subjugated or forced to be part of the national enemies' camp. This remains a basic characteristic in all three political camps (catholic, liberal and socialist or communist) throughout the political history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The exception is the period of attaining independence during the second half of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s. As far as parliamentarism is concerned, only the "fragmentary" development of particular periods from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards can be discussed. The Slovene parliament, in the modern sense of the word (with a universal franchise and multi-party system), is in operation without intermission for only 10 years as of yet; this is also a time - probably the only one in Slovene history - of "absolute" independence, as before, it had only local significance or it was subordinate to bodies above the national level, as will also be repeated once incorporated in the European Union (more on the subject: Božo Repe: Pravne, politične podlage, okoliščine in pomen prvih demokratičnih volitev" in: Razvoj slovenskega parlamentarizma", Državni zbor Republike Slovenije Ljubljana, 2000 page 26 - 69.

<sup>5</sup> Tone Ferenc: Okupacijski sistemi na Slovenskem 1941 – 1945 (Occupational systems in Slovenia 1941 – 1945), Modrijan, Ljubljana 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Jože Pirjevec, Milica Kacin-Wohinz: Zgodovina primorskih Slovencev (The history of the Slovenians living on the Coast), Nova revija, Ljubljana 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Pariška mirovna pogodba (Paris Peace Treaty), Peace Treaty with Italy, integral text, Ministrstvo za zunanje zadeve (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Republic of Slovenia), Ljubljana 1997. London agreement is international agreement by which the military administration was brought to an end in Zone A and Zone B of Free Trieste Territory. It was signed by the representatives of Italy, Yugoslavia, Great Britain and USA on 5 October 1954 in London. Yugoslavia and Italy confirmed the existing demarcation, the Italian civil administration was extended throughout zone A, and the Yugoslav throughout Zone B. Guarantees were

decisions of the allied forces according to which Austria was to be preserved within the borders from the time before the Anschluss, Slovenia didn't get Carinthia and nor did Trieste become the seventh Yugoslav republic, or as suggested by the French, the liberated Trieste region – a small buffer state under the jurisdiction of the United Nations.<sup>8</sup> The new border in places where it did not exist before, led to a series of tragicomic situations: in the village Miren near Gorica, for example, the border divided the local cemetery into two halves. When a burial took place the relatives took leave of the deceased in the presence of the border guards by pushing the coffin from one state into the other.

Slovenians did get the status of a republic in the new, federal Yugoslav state and along with it the right of self-determination, including the right of separation from Yugoslavia. This is what the Slovenians appealed to when they attained independence in 1991.<sup>9</sup>

In the neighbouring Italy, attainment of independence led to a wish for revision of the borders, however, the idea fortunately did not predominate. Another problem is the question of the border with Croatia – particularly at the sea – which still remains unsolved although both countries signed an agreement, according to which Slovenia was to get a free access to the open sea. For the time being the Croatian parliament rejects this agreement.

Slovenians articulated their wish for an independent state for the first time in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the socialist Yugoslavia was about to cease to exist. At that time the centuries long fear from the German and Italian oppression had disappeared. Slovenians perceived the threat of Serb predominance as more threatening than the fear from the former traditional enemies. Before that, they tried to find solution of the national question in alliance with other nations, particularly the South Slav ones. The belated process of attaining absolute independence, that is a national state in the traditional sense of the word, was lived out during the past ten years. The circumstances regarding sovereignty of the state in the fields of defence, the internal legal order, judicature, protection of human rights, protection of environment, etc. are now comprehended in a completely different manner than in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the national states came into existence. In some way this helped the Slovenians to overcome the belated national romanticism easier than they would have done it otherwise. Also the result of the referendum about entering the European Union shows that. With its strong national minorities in the neighbouring countries, Slovenia urgently needs a Europe without borders. However, joining European Union brings new dilemmas and challenges. As regards the border, Slovenia will present the southern border of the EU until Croatia becomes a member too. This is a territory, which was physically not divided by a border in the former Yugoslavia. When the border was finally set, it was - by agreement of both countries - a soft one; now it will become the hard Schengen border. By abolishing other borders, it will be much easier to maintain contact with the national minorities, but at the same time the Slovenians will be confronted with the dilemmas they already faced at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: namely, how to survive squeezed between the Germanic and the Romanic world and how to harmonize the regional identity, which will become increasingly important, with the national one and how to provide long term survival of the nation.<sup>10</sup>

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given for the unhindered return of persons who had formerly held domicile rights on the territories under Yugoslav or Italian administration, Special statute guaranteed for both sides the national rights of minorities.

<sup>8</sup> Zbornik Primorske – 50 let (The Anthology of Primorska – 50 Years) , Primorske novice, Koper 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Od sanj do resničnosti. Razvoj slovenske državnosti (From dreams to reality. The development of Slovenian Statehood). Arhiv Republike Slovenije, Ljubljana, 2001 (Božo Repe: Slovenia from Wartime federal Unit Over Post War Yugoslav Republic Until Independent State, page 121- 207).

<sup>10</sup> Božo Repe: Historical consequences of the disintegration of Yugoslavia for Slovene Society, Österreichische Osthefte, Heft.1/2, Wien, 2001, page 5 – 26.