

## Did the Berlin Wall really come down on both sides?

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**Abstract** It has become fairly obvious that the EU will be able to realise its original goals in the following decades only by expanding its influence on the outside world. Some people define this influence as the ability to co-design globalisation. But it is important never to lose sight of the founding objectives of the EU. The EU exists because Europeans share basic values of personal, political and economic freedom, values that must be defended.

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### What we overlooked during the 20-year transition period

In the spring and summer of 1989, a series of fateful events heralded the end of the Cold War and anticipated the fall of the Berlin Wall. I watched it all from a prison near Ljubljana. The victory of Solidarity in the Polish elections, which were only partially free, the turbulent Congress of the People's Deputies in Moscow, the historic visits and meetings of USSR President Gorbachev in Bonn, Vatican, Beijing, Berlin and Malta (where he met with the US President), the fall of the Iron Curtain between the Hungarian–Austrian border and the protests in the cities of East Germany all had a powerful influence on circumstances both in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and in Slovenia. Two decades ago Slovenia was just one of the socialist republics of Yugoslavia, having a similar status to the republics in the former USSR. The events in Europe were partially overshadowed by the massacre at Tiananmen Square and the death of the Iranian leader Khomeini. These stirring events around the world increased the dramatic effect of the times, which I managed to observe only through prison bars.

For us political prisoners, the hopes that the winds of change might blow over the whole of Eastern and Central Europe were that much stronger. In spring of 1988, we had been

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arrested by the Communist political police and convicted before the military court in Ljubljana in a process closed to the public and in which we were denied the right to an attorney. Slovenia experienced massive protests and at that time the Committee for Protection of Human Rights led by Igor Bavčar was set up. Its membership grew to 100,000 people in just 2 months.<sup>1</sup>

The Communist authorities feared the effects of the riots, so we received relatively mild sentences entailing imprisonment from 1 to 4 years. Despite the public protests, the Slovenian Communist authorities decided to carry out our sentences, all the while hoping that the changes in Eastern and Central Europe would not deliver fatal blows to the regimes in Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. They were also counting both on the Western world, which feared the break-up of the Soviet Union, and on the subsequent rise of danger due to weak control over the nuclear arsenal of Soviet Union, and they dreaded the outbreak of ethnic conflicts should the SFRY collapse.

Much to the dismay of the Slovenian Communists, their hopes were wrong. Not only were there formal changes of authority, but the market economy and free elections in the Soviet Union and the SFRY were also introduced, followed furthermore by the collapse of both socialist empires. The collapse of the great USSR was relatively well controlled, whereas the small empire (SFRY) erupted in a rage of ethnic cleansing and a clash of arms in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and finally in Kosovo.

Despite all this, we can see from a 20-year perspective that the hopes cherished by the leaders of the Communist regime in Belgrade and Ljubljana were not entirely unfounded. Today, a closer inspection of these ideas shows that there is a difference between Ljubljana and Moscow on one hand, and the capitals of other former Communist states in Europe on the other. Just as the most severe forms of break-up of the small empire 15 or 20 years ago demonstrated this difference, so does the current recommissioning of Slovenia and the western Balkans. Certain remnants of the Communist era, however, are much more persistent in the ruins of the small empire than they are in the countries that were once a part of the large Red Empire.

The hope of the zealous activists of Ljubljana and Belgrade that Communism would survive in a particular form due to its authentic structure was based upon certain convictions. Part of the former Communist doctrine of Ljubljana and Belgrade was the prevailing belief that the Communist revolutions in the Soviet Union and the SFRY were authentic, as opposed to those of other countries into which Communism was brought on the bayonets of Red Army forces. Although under Gorbachev's leadership perestroika was in full swing in the Soviet Union, the Yugoslav Communists held firmly to this notion. It was stated in the Yugoslav People's Army (YPA) General Staff plan and named Okop (Rampart). On the basis of this concept the YPA carried out armed interventions in Slovenia in 1991 and later in Croatia. The concept of authenticity was widely promoted by

<sup>1</sup> The State Security Service, directly responsible to the League of Communists and its President, Milan Kučan, arrested Janez Janša and David Tasič in May and June 1988. Respectively a contributor to and the editor of the youth magazine *Mladina*, Janša and Tasič were both handed over to the military court of the Yugoslav People's Army. The Slovenian staff sergeant Ivan Borštnar was arrested by the military security service. In the infamous Trial of the Four, the editor of *Mladina* magazine, Franci Zavrl, was also convicted. The Communist authorities wanted to scare the public, who demanded democratic changes and respect for human rights. The youth magazine *Mladina* turned into a venue for publishing critical articles on Communism, the privileged position of the Communist and military elite and on sovereignty, supporting political dissidents throughout Yugoslavia and Europe. (After being taken over by former Communist activists, *Mladina* is nowadays, despite the same name, a weekly paper with a totally different orientation.) For the first time after the 1945 Communist takeover of Slovenia there were mass demonstrations, named the Slovene Spring, which were key to the first Slovenian democratic elections.

one of the creators of the Yugoslav Communist repressive apparatus immediately following the death of the dictator Josip Broz Tito. This individual was Stane Dolanc, Tito's former right-hand man, Secretary of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and Internal Affairs Secretary. He was a personal friend of the leading Slovenian Communist politician Milan Kučan in 1990. When Kučan gave up his role as President of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Slovenia and ran for President of Slovenia, Dolanc wrote in his publicity brochure:

We are lucky—Mr. Milan Kučan knew how to take advantage of this at the right time, at least I hope so; we had an original, autochthonic revolution that was not brought on by the power of the Soviet bayonets. So this is something completely different than in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania or East Germany.<sup>2</sup>

The leading Slovenian Communists and YPA generals were convinced that socialism as a one-party regime might survive in Yugoslavia, or at least in Slovenia, Serbia and the Soviet Union, perhaps by taking on a somewhat modernised form. Their belief was based on the concept of a thorough cleansing of the population after the victory of the Communist revolutions in both countries. The cleansings, which had physically removed any trace of political competition in Slovenia after 1945, were at least as thorough as those carried out in the Soviet Union under the harsh terrorist regime run by Joseph Stalin. After the democratic changes in Slovenia in 1990, over 600 burial places were found in an area of 20,000 km<sup>2</sup> populated by 2 million people. Many of the burial sites are considerably larger than the ones in Srebrenica (Bosnia and Herzegovina). The last massive burial ground was discovered in 2009 in the deserted mine of Huda Jama, 40 km from the capital of Slovenia. The deserted mineshafts hold thousands of partly disintegrated bodies and unburied male and female skeletons, mostly without any gunshot wounds. In 1945 the Communists simply threw their victims down the deserted mineshafts while still alive and entombed them within the walls. The actual or potential opponents of the Communist regime who were not killed right after the end of war and Communist revolution either fled abroad or ended up in concentration camps and prisons. The number of political prisoners in Slovenia rose to thousands. Throughout all the years of the Communist regime up to 1988, show trials were organised during which totally innocent people were sentenced to death or sent to prison. Since the cleansing and mass killings were done by domestic Communists, normally in their own environment, the killings were more thorough than the ones the Soviet soldiers or KGB executed in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe. Furthermore, many civilians who belonged to the Communist side also had blood on their hands. They feared being exposed for the crimes they had committed and for their complicity, so they carried out mass killings of whole families.

It was not just the terror caused by such events; it was the physical destruction of the political opposition that made it possible for the dictator Tito and his successors to rule for years to come. That is why in 1989 they presumed that any grounds for a strong opposition that could fight back had been destroyed through the decades. They presumed that they could maintain most of their power and continue to rule, even if free elections were formally carried out. They believed that the thousands of their officers who had bathed their hands in blood would do everything necessary to avoid a real change of authority.

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<sup>2</sup> Stane Dolanc, in *Milan Kučan/Igor Savič* (The Emonica Snapshot Collection; Ljubljana: Emonica, 1990). Dolanc began his political career as the founder and manager of the political journalism school in Ljubljana (now known as the Faculty of Social Sciences), which still teaches new generations of journalists without maintaining a sufficiently critical distance from totalitarian Communism.

They launched a large-scale publicity offensive, claiming that the tens of thousands, including women and children, who were killed had collaborated with the Nazi and fascist regimes. Prior to the formal changes in 1989, they had started to privatise the national and the local media, thus practically maintaining their complete influence over all media until today. Anybody who dared to ask questions regarding the Communist cleansing and mass killings was immediately considered to be a fellow of collaborationism and the Nazi regime.

It is now 20 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall and 5 years since most of the former Communist countries of both Eastern and Central Europe have joined the EU and NATO, and yet all that has just been described raises the question of whether it is appropriate today to merely hold a big celebration, or whether it would be wise to consider the warning signs, too. Have we overlooked something during this period of great change? Have we studied the reasons for the events in Srebrenica enough? Now that we are part of the EU, have we asked ourselves how it was possible for Milošević, Mladić and other former Yugoslav Communists to decide recklessly and without any hesitation on the destruction and killing of thousands of people by following exactly the same patterns that their role models used in 1945? How is it possible that the ideology of crime managed to survive to such an extent and thus cause the deaths of tens of thousands of people in the middle of the European continent?

To those of us living in Slovenia, the answers seem more obvious. Josip Broz Tito, who held up the Communist regime and was directly responsible for the mass killings of tens of thousands of people without any trials after the war and for the revolution in Yugoslavia, nowadays still enjoys a certain respect and high reputation throughout all of south-eastern Europe—this despite the fact that the public is relatively well aware of the crimes he committed. The neo-Communist propaganda nowadays is extremely powerful. Every time a new burial site was discovered in Slovenia during the last few decades, the mass media added two comments to the discovery. First, all the victims found in the burial ground were automatically proclaimed to be collaborators of the Nazi and fascist regime, even if the burial grounds were filled with women's and children's bodies. Later some strict appeals were made that the country not deal with 'digging up the bones' and wasting money, as people would not live any better as a result. In the end the propagandists created a 'rational' explanation that Josip Broz Tito was, despite the crimes he had committed, a leader of historical importance, in charge of the global Non-Aligned Movement and Yugoslav self-managed socialism, under which all the nations had lived better lives and enjoyed more equality than in today's era of capitalism.<sup>3</sup>

But of course, in a normal society it is not possible to condemn a crime and idolise the criminals at the same time. The same problem exists in Moscow; or, to put it differently, the EU has a problem with Moscow because of this same contradiction. It is not possible to condemn the crimes that Stalin and Lenin committed and at the same time idolise them as great leaders.

The denazification of Germany decades ago provided grounds for the current EU. Today we still have to deal with the decommunisation of the East, or we may face the same historical horrors we faced in Srebrenica. The two centres of the so-called authentic

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<sup>3</sup> The belief of many Slovenians that people had better lives in Communist times has of course no basis in empirical data but is largely a result of propaganda. Prior to the Second World War, which the Communists used to carry out the revolution and establish a dictatorship, the average salary in Slovenia was more than 70% of that in neighbouring Austria. In 1989, at the end of the Communist regime in Slovenia, the average salary barely reached 30% of the average salary in Austria.

Communist revolution, Moscow and former Yugoslavia, pose the biggest threat. Today's generation in the Soviet Union does not possess the knowledge about the times prior to the Communist revolution, as all members of the non-Communist intelligentsia in the time of Lenin and Stalin were exiled or physically destroyed. The cleansing, furthermore, removed a large part of the educated Communists. Nevertheless, the former Russian president Vladimir Putin has laid flowers on a mass grave of people killed during the period of Stalin's cleansing. He did this at the military testing ground near Moscow and harshly condemned the extent of the crimes committed. In August 2009, on the seventieth anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War, as Prime Minister of the Russian federation, he addressed a letter to the Polish people condemning the pact between Hitler and Stalin. Up to this day, the Slovenian Communists still have not clearly condemned this pact. When it was signed, they publicly defended it. The majority of Slovenian media today, on the seventieth anniversary of Hitler's attack on Poland, refuse to mention that Poland was attacked and partly occupied by Stalin's Soviet Union as well.

Due to thorough and massive Communist cleansing, only a small part of the former intelligentsia survived in Slovenia, as was the case in the former Soviet Union. Among all regions of former Yugoslavia, the ethnic cleansing in Slovenia was the most severe. Long after the revolution, the children of non-Communist families who survived ethnic cleansing were prevented from succeeding or from climbing the social ladder in the nationalised economy and institutions, even if they showed skills and competence. In order to gain a position that was relatively well respected, membership in the League of Communists was required.

The consequences of those conditions can be very readily observed in Slovenia even today. Let me name but a few of the most important ones:

1. In the spring of 2009, when the Huda Jama burial grounds were opened and the cameras of national TV captured the horrifying consequences of Communist crimes, the president of the Communist veterans' organisation, Janez Stanovnik, tried to deny his own responsibility by claiming that the mass killings after the end of the war were executed by direct order of Marshal Tito and that Tito was to be held exclusively responsible. After this statement the public demanded that many of the remaining monuments and the name of the former Yugoslav dictator be removed from Slovenian cities and squares. The parties of the ruling left coalition fought fiercely against this demand. The youth organisation of the ruling political party, the Social Democrats (the legal and material successor of the former Communist Party), published a press release in which they defended the actions of Tito and claimed that the time during which the mass crimes were committed was a time of progress for Yugoslavia. When the national TV asked the President of Slovenia, Danilo Turk, to comment on the discovery of the massive burial grounds at Huda Jama, he said that the question was of marginal importance and refused to comment any further. The leftist parties in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, under the authority of the Mayor Zoran Janković, adopted a decision at City Council that one of the main roads entering the city be named after Tito. The street with his name existed in Ljubljana until the free elections in 1990 and was then renamed. After 20 years the Slovenian neo-Communists managed to reach a point of return
2. At the same time that the post-Communists in Ljubljana were deciding to name the street after Tito, the European Parliament (EP) adopted the resolution on European awareness and totalitarianism, in which it condemned all totalitarian regimes,

- honoured their victims and proposed to the Member States to mark 23 August as the day to remember the victims of all totalitarian regimes in Europe. In Slovenia the resolution was received with strong opposition by the post-Communist forces, and the government declared that 23 August would not be marked in any way. The government representative then made an official statement in Parliament, saying that the government of Prime Minister Borut Pahor did not support the resolution of the EP. The representatives of the Communist veterans' organisation fought fiercely against the resolution. A smaller ceremony was organised on 23 August 2009 by the Centre of National Reconciliation that was set up a few years ago, but no member of the government or governing coalition attended the event
3. A similar resolution to that of the EP was adopted this year by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. One of the initiators of this resolution was also the deputy of the Italian minority in the Slovenian Parliament, Roberto Batelli. After the resolution—for which a large majority of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe voted—was adopted, some mild protests from Moscow followed: they did not agree with the fact that all the totalitarian regimes should be equally treated, in this case referring to National Socialism and Communism. Roberto Batelli, the Slovenian member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, was forced to face strong pressures, media attacks and even demands to resign. The Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs made an official statement, distancing itself from Batelli's actions
  4. When the leftist post-Communist coalition took up power in 2008, the Minister of Finance, Franci Križanič, took on the former agent of the secret Communist police (State Security Service), Drago Isajlovič, as his adviser at the Minister's Office. Isajlovič, a member of the Social Democrat Party, had personally arrested David Tasič and myself in 1988, and was thereafter known as someone who personified Communist repression. Isajlovič took the job of adviser even though he lacked proper qualifications and skills in the field of finance, because the Minister of Finance claimed him as a long-time friend. In the end, even Prime Minister Borut Pahor agreed to Isajlovič's employment, although there were some public protests because of it. This particular case, however marginal it may be, carries a symbolic meaning. Slovenia is the only post-Communist country that is now a member of EU in which no form of even the mildest decommunisation was carried out after the fall of the Berlin Wall and a series of democratic changes in the beginning of the 1990 s. Moreover, almost no archives of the former political police are available to public. The post-Communist parties have consistently prevented any such discoveries from being made, and in 1997 the Slovenian Parliament voted against the approval of the Resolution of the Council of Europe No. 1096 regarding the dismantling of the former totalitarian Communist regimes. Nowadays in Slovenia, many of the former employees and collaborators of the Communist secret police, who severely violated human rights in the previous regime, still hold important positions in the field of justice, prosecution services, diplomacy, economy, administration, media editorial boards and even secret services. The last president of the Communist Party in the period before free elections later became a Constitutional Court judge, and his successor was the President of the Programme Committee of the national TV for many years and is now the President of the Olympic Committee of Slovenia
  5. Such circumstances explain, in their particular way, the frequently repeated statement from the 1990 s that 'the Berlin Wall came down on both sides'. This position originated with the former President of Slovenia and the League of Communists of Slovenia, Milan Kučan, who thus substantiated his defence of the pre-democratic

regime and rejected any kind of change that might permanently destroy the Communist legacy in Slovenia, upon which the authority of the post-Communist groups is based. These are the three pillars of ideology, propaganda and financial strength. Paradoxically, today's successors and advocates of the Communist regime mostly represent the wealthiest classes of society in Slovenia. After the end of his third term in office, Kučan set up a civilian association called Forum 21, which consisted largely of individuals who had become extremely rich in the last decade and who now own some of the largest Slovenian companies. Certain people drew attention to the gap between the left-wing political orientation of Forum 21 and the extreme wealth of its members, asking Kučan why there were no lower social classes among the members. He was also asked where the workers and proletarians were, and he cynically replied: 'The proletarians are where they always were. At their workplace'.

### **What we must consider in the next 20 years**

Europe can permanently sustain itself only by being the Europe of values. Its institutions are of great importance and so is its progress in general. The European foundation, however, will be exposed to a much greater danger if its values are not strengthened than it would be without a new institutional treaty. We must always keep this in mind, particularly today on the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and before the integration of the western Balkan countries or countries from the Eastern partnership takes place. The EU must be able to demand that candidate states be able to consistently clarify all events of the past. This means eliminating both extreme nationalistic measures and ambivalent attitudes towards crime; that is, allowing the use of Communist methods to achieve the physical destruction of one's opponent.

The western Balkan countries that have yet to become EU Member States should also examine their history. Their past experiences made them fight fiercely and brought about the ideology that the end justifies the means. It is not enough to perceive the actions of Milošević and Mladić as extremely nationalistic. Something else is needed to fully explain the enormity of the brutal crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia and Kosovo. This is the junction of nationalism and Communist ideology. It is the end product of the Yugoslav Communist and military academies, which taught that the essential objective of the class struggle is the physical destruction of the opponent. This junction produced the National Socialism of the late twentieth century, at a time when we believed such a monstrosity could not be possible anymore. This is probably the reason why the horror-based ideology in the Balkans has remained somewhat in the background of studies and research. A further reason is that the mighty remains of Communism in the area of south-eastern Europe obscured the past very well and tried to keep evidence below the surface, so that the West would not start searching for deeper meanings and reasons for the horrors in Srebrenica and the Balkan tragedy in general. At the same time, it seemed that the events taking place in the western Balkans were of lesser importance, a background drama that would not have any significant impact in the main political theatre.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War also meant the beginning of globalisation, the spread of new information and communication technologies and the expansion of religious extremism; this last being just a step away from the destructive ideologies of the twentieth century. As is the case with fascism, Communism and National Socialism, the end justifies the means in religious extremism, and crime is a legitimate tool to

achieve it. Religious extremism also carries with it the fanatical willingness to directly sacrifice one's own life to achieve a certain goal. That is why it seems more dangerous at first sight, although in fact it is not. It does not seem possible that such extreme actions would cause as many casualties and such enormous destruction of civilisation as did Communism in the Soviet Union or the SFRY, or National Socialism in one part of Europe. The Communist method of destruction was applied at the time of the Communist revolution in Yugoslavia and afterwards. It was used in Srebrenica a decade and a half ago. That method mobilised the ones who executed the crimes, appealing to their belief that they and their own race would benefit immediately, not after death, from the extreme evil they brought upon other people. History has proven that it is considerably easier to attract masses to gain direct benefits than to attract those willing to sacrifice themselves. The deeper essence of the danger lurking behind the rise of totalitarian ideologies is that Communism in the Balkans can always simply be combined with extreme nationalism. That is why the events in Srebrenica took place. Crimes of such magnitude never happened anywhere else in Europe in recent times—not even in the former Soviet Union, where the great Red Empire collapsed.

The EU was created more than half a century ago and now, 20 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and 5 years after the great enlargement, it is gradually reaching the stage of clearly defining its own, or better yet, European interests. European interests have, of course, been present throughout this time, or else the EU would not have been created, let alone have reached the current stage of development and internal cohesion over its 50 years of existence. Those interests, however, were focused on the founding aims of the EU: peace and stability, and the economic development of Europe. But two more events took place during this time. The world experienced globalisation and became more interdependent than ever before. The EU today is capable of taking a stand on hundreds of matters which divided individual Member States 20 years ago due to diametrically opposing interests.

It has become fairly obvious that the EU will be able to realise its original goals in the coming years only by expanding its influence on the outside world. Some people would define this as the ability to co-design globalisation. This should be done so as to protect the core values upon which the EU was built and thus provide further development on the basis of these values. It is therefore even more important never to lose sight of the founding objectives of the EU, neither through elaborate internal dealings or in the process of enlargement. Should we fully accept the notion that the Berlin Wall came down on both sides in terms of values, and that the united EU of today represents a conglomeration of values from both sides of the Wall—both democracy and Communism—then we are open to lethal viruses that would infect the European body and, last but not least, lead to the risk of a Katyn massacre, Huda Jama and Srebrenica happening once again.

**Janez Janša** was born in 1958 in Ljubljana, Slovenia. In May 1988 he was arrested by the State Security Service for publishing several critical articles in youth newspapers that were printed in small editions. A few months later he was convicted with three others in a closed trial at the military court in Ljubljana and sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment. These arrests and the process triggered mass demonstrations, in which demands for democratic elections were made. Janša was directly elected to the new democratic parliament and in May 1990 to the first democratic Slovenian government, becoming Minister of Defence. In 1993 he became the President of the Slovenian Democratic Party, with which he won the parliamentary elections in 2004, and between 2004 and 2008 he was the Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia. In the first half of 2008, when Slovenia was presiding over the EU, he was in charge of the European Council. At the parliamentary elections in September 2008 the Slovenian Democratic Party fell short of the Social Democrats by 1% of the votes and Janša became the leader of the opposition.