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Review article

Serbian Nationalism and Reforms in Yugoslavia 1980–1990: From Covered Benefit to Open Hostility

This paper examines the mutual relationship between reform efforts in Yugoslavia from 1980 to 1990 and the ideology of Serbian nationalism, which progressed in a kind of “march through institutions” during those years. Yugoslavia was a “country of constant reforms,” which was especially evident during its last decade. In the conditions of turbulent changes in the world, Yugoslavia also faced numerous attempts or at least proposals to reform the system or its parts. Serbian nationalism used the crisis to impose its solutions on the citizens, but it also had to reckon with the reform proposals. Nationalism was able to use some of the reforms such as proposals for strengthening the central government and for more efficient functioning of federal bodies. Other proposals, primarily on the democratization of relations in the country, were natural enemies of the ideology of nationalism. In both cases, promoters of the new ideology had to reckon with reforms, with actors who advocated or opposed them, and with structures that acted accordingly. Together, this made the social environment even more dynamic and contributed to an intense ideological struggle, the result of which ultimately affected the fate of the country.

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KEYWORDS:

nationalism, reforms, unitarism, League of Communists, 1980s, Serbia, Yugoslavia

Socialist Yugoslavia was, as described by the Slovenian scientist Zdenko Čepič, a “reform country.”¹ Reforms were an indispensable companion to the state’s development from its inception. Created in the whirlwind that was the Second World War, on the wings of the socialist revolution, which encompassed a complete transformation not only in economic and political relations but also in culture—understood in the broadest sense as a way of life—Yugoslavia embarked on constructing its system from scratch. Short-lived attempts to emulate the Soviet model failed quickly, and since the split with Stalin and the Eastern Bloc in 1948, the country found itself caught between two antagonistic political, military, and economic blocs, practically in the middle of the front line of a potential Third World War. In such circumstances, the Yugoslav leadership chose to formulate and implement its path, both in politics (external and internal) and in the economy and other areas of society. As early as 1949, a comprehensive liberalization of social relations began concurrently in the political, economic, and cultural spheres. The Yugoslav third way involved finding specific solutions for almost every area of social, political, and economic life. The most important goal was to move away from the previous model designed after Stalin’s USSR.

An important turning point in culture was marked by the Third Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in December 1949, where Edvard Kardelj addressed the “Soviet model of culture.”² His speech on the occasion of admission to the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts in the same month marked a formal break with state-directed culture, promoting the autonomy of creativity.³ Reflecting on this event, along with the exhibition of the painter Petar Lubarda in 1951 and Miroslav Krleža’s report at the Third Congress of the Writers’ Association of Yugoslavia in 1952, Radina Vučetić observes a breakthrough in culture on three levels: “political (Edvard Kadelj and the Third Plenum), creative (Peter Lubarda’s exhibition), and theoretical-aesthetic (Miroslav Krleža’s report),” and notes that they were experienced as synchronized, giving them additional strength.⁴ The pendulum, swinging from autocracy to democracy, moved out of the imposed framework and shifted too much to one side or the other, causing sharp reactions and even open party repression, as seen in the case of the dismissal in 1954 and later the arrest of one of the leading communist officials, Milovan Đilas. However, reform attempts were never completely halted. Milivoj Bešlin concluded: “Yugoslav socialism was structured as reformist in the period when its foundations were laid (1949–1953), so a certain degree of dynamism always existed, even in periods of the absence of major changes.”⁵

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¹ Zdenko Čepič, “Jugoslovske reforme v šezdesetih letih,” in *Slovenija – Jugoslavija, krize in reforme 1968/1988*, ed. Zdenko Čepič (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2010), 44.

² Predrag J. Marković, *Beograd između Istoka i Zapada 1948 – 1955* (Beograd: Službeni list SRJ, 1996), 326.

³ Dušan Bošković, *Stanovišta u sporu – Stanovišta i sporovi o slobodni duhovnog stvaralaštva u srpsko-hrvatskoj periodici 1950 – 1960* (Beograd: SSO Srbije, 1981), 3–5.

⁴ Radina Vučetić, *Monopol na istinu, Monopol na istinu. Partija, kultura i cenzura u Srbiji šezdesetih i sedamdesetih godina XX veka* (Beograd: Clío, 2016), 75.

⁵ Milivoj Bešlin, *Ideja moderne Srbije u socijalističkoj Jugoslaviji – knjiga 1* (Novi Sad/Beograd: Akademski knjiga/IFDT, 2022), 175.

Serbian nationalism easily and readily aligned with centralist tendencies. As defined by Marko Nikezić, president of the League of Communists of Serbia (LCS) from 1969 to 1972: "Serbian nationalism would fit into that unitarism as if it were at home, no matter where we started from. Because Serbian nationalism tends to manifest itself predominantly in this way due to a series of real circumstances, some of which are subjective, but most of them are objective. There are probably unitarians and bureaucrats in other nations who would also accept Serbian nationalism. But all Serbian nationalists would accept unitarism immediately."⁶ It was precisely these subjective and objective circumstances that had to be taken into account when considering any solution to the Yugoslav crisis.

Due to the confluence of historical circumstances, the Serbian people lived across the country, mixed with members of all other nations. The national movement from the 19th century oscillated between the unification of all Serbs and the unification of South Slavs into a common state. The second variant had a practical advantage due to the almost impossible separation of the mixed South Slavic peoples and the enormous cultural closeness (including a common language for a large part of the South Slavs). However, in the plans of Serbian nationalism, this variant could only be carried out alongside Serbia as Piedmont, around which all others would gather. Since during the 19th century, there was already a formation of national consciousness among the South Slavic peoples (to varying extents and intensities, due to specific historical circumstances), this unification caused a sharp conflict, primarily between the Serbian and Croatian national movements.

Since the 1950s, the struggle between unitarians and federalists permeated every field of social reality in Yugoslavia, from politics and the economy to education and culture. The fall of Aleksandar Ranković, the powerful head of the secret police and a key member of the party, perceived by the public as the leader of the unitarist current, marked an important turning point in this struggle. Decentralization and democratization in the late 1960s and early 1970s were experienced by Serbian nationalists as a defeat in the fight for unitarization but also as an opportunity to organize themselves within cultural institutions and to continue acting as an organized opposition.⁷ They had at their disposal institutions such as SANU, the Writers' Association of Serbia, and the Serbian Orthodox Church, along with their media network, from where they would join the discussion on reforms and changes in Yugoslavia during the 1980s. In the end, thanks to the

⁶ Marko Nikezić, "Iz izlaganja na sastanku sa rukovodstvom SK Hrvatske, 23. mart 1972," in *Marko Nikezić: Srpska krhka vertikala*, ed. Latinka Perović (Beograd: Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, 2003), 285. The case of the most famous Croatian unitarian from the Maspok era, Miloš Žanko, who joined Milošević's party in 1990, testifies to how accurate and far-reaching this statement was, M. Pešić, "Prišao sam SPS jer sam za socijalizam", *Politika*, October 24, 1990, 11.

⁷ More about this in: Latinka Perović, *Dominantna i neželjena elita - Beleške o intelektualnoj i političkoj eliti u Srbiji (XX - XXI vek)*, (Beograd: Dan Graf, 2015); Olivera Milosavljević, *Upotreba autoriteta nauke - javna politička delatnost Srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti (1986-1992)*, *Republika*, 119-20, July 1-31, 1995, 1-30.

alliance with Milošević's authoritarian regime, they had a decisive influence on the fate and reforms of the country itself.

The attitude of Serbian nationalism towards reforms was highly utilitarian; reforms were deemed acceptable only to the extent that they could serve nationalist goals. Everything else, including the essence of reform efforts—almost always geared towards greater societal liberalization, democratization of relations, and openness to the world—directly opposed the theoretical foundations of Serbian nationalist ideology. When the country faced a severe crisis in the late 1970s and early 1980s, solutions were urgently sought in almost all directions. Advocates of a firm course, unitarians who nostalgically yearned for the times of Aleksandar Ranković, demanded a reduction in the autonomy of the republics and the introduction of over-voting in various decision-making structures. Whether they liked it or not, they found themselves aligning with Serbian nationalists, affirming the widespread notion that unitarism was thinly veiled Serbian nationalism.⁸ In his diary entry from January 27, 1989, the writer Aleksandar Tišma noted a split between East and West in Yugoslavia, asserting that “in the name of the crisis, the East is looking for a return to Ranković's, Serb-centric Yugoslavia.”⁹ Historian Sima Ćirković elegantly described the intentions of Serbian nationalists regarding socialist Yugoslavia: “either a federation tailored to Serbia and Serbs or Serbia as a national state in the territories where Serbs live.”¹⁰

44 Even when formally supporting proposals for the reform of the state system because they led to greater centralization, nationalism played a destructive role in the reforms themselves. The transformation of Yugoslavia into a more unitary state, similar to the pre-war monarchy, was a key theme of Serbian nationalism throughout the existence of this state. Therefore, the support for individual proposals for greater centralization did not stop at subtle solutions that enabled a better life for citizens but instead demanded a radical change of the system, along with the demolition of the existing constitutional order. This, naturally, caused fear in other circles and strengthened resistance to any changes because the status quo was considered a lesser evil concerning the centralization of the state.

The key target of Serbian nationalism was the federal Constitution of 1974, which was also a regular topic of debate among people who proposed or at least thought about system reforms. On the one hand, this Constitution guaranteed the preservation of a fine balance between the independence of the republics and the functioning of the common state, but with a very complicated process of mutual coordination and agreement. On the other hand, the Constitution was bulky, full of unique legal solutions unknown in the world, and was an excellent expression of what Mitja Velikonja called Yugoslav “exceptionalism.”¹¹ This artificially cultivated “specialness” was accompanied

⁸ Stipe Šuvar, *Svi naši nacionalizmi* (Valjevo: Milić Rakić, 1986), 75–79.

⁹ Aleksandar Tišma, *Dnevnik 1942 – 2001 III. Prestajanje* (Novi Sad: Akademska knjiga, 2020), 126.

¹⁰ Sima Ćirković, *Srbi među evropskim narodima* (Beograd: Equilibrium, 2004), 297.

¹¹ Mitja Velikonja, “Yu-retrovizor,” in *Jugoslavija u istorijskoj perspektivi*, ed. Latinka Perović et al. (Beograd: Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, 2017), 488.

by linguistic stunts where, as Vojin Dimitrijević states, attempts to find an original Yugoslav name for each thing were brought to a paroxysm, so schools became educational centers, salary - personal income, deputies - delegates, farmers - agricultural producers, etc.¹²

A special target of dissatisfaction was the political system. Elections for deputies to representative bodies were organized according to the delegate system, i.e. they were not direct, which contributed to the almost complete loss of the connection between the voters and the deputies. This situation further deepened citizens' mistrust of politicians and state structures and made the political elite a separate group with which hardly anyone in the country identified. Vladimir Goati called this "multiple mediation of elections" and cited an example of the election of delegation to the Council of Republics and Provinces of the Assembly of the SFRY.¹³ First, "working people and citizens" in their collectives elected delegations that would elect delegations to all councils of municipal assemblies, then those councils elected their delegation to councils of provincial and republican assemblies, and finally, the councils of these assemblies elected their delegations to Councils of Republics and Provinces.¹⁴ The party structures, and after them, the state structures, used bureaucratic, incomprehensible language that further separated the management layer from the citizens.

In the discussions on reforms, the starting point was that the existing Constitution (and the system of self-management agreement based on it) should not be changed, but obstacles should be removed to implement it as prescribed. In the starting points for the analysis of the political system, carried out in the framework of the working group led by Josip Vrhovec from 1983 to 1985, it is clearly stated that "the goal of the analysis is not to change the political system established by the Constitution" but that it should be seen where the problems are in the implementation of the Constitution and laws.¹⁵ In December 1983, some members of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the LCY additionally warned against this starting point, complaining that there were controversies in the press about changing the Constitution. Andrej Marinc, the Slovenian representative in that body, warned that the national element must be highlighted more when discussing the reform of the political system because "underestimating inter-ethnic relations in our community is always fatal for that community, history has taught us that."¹⁶ During one of the discussions on the dangers of LCY federalization at the session of the LCY Central Committee presidency in 1984, Josip Vrhovec agreed with his Serbian colleague Čkrebić that one should fight against the federalization of the party, but that the goal of that fight must be known, i.e. that it should be done "because in order to further affirm federalism in the

¹² Vojin Dimitrijević, "Sukobi oko Ustava iz 1974," in *Srpska strana rata: trauma i katarza u istorijskom pamćenju*, ed. Nebojša Popov (Beograd: Republika, 1996), 450.

¹³ Vladimir Goati, *Izbori u SRJ 1990 - 1998 - volja građana ili izborna manipulacija* (Beograd: CESID, 2001), 13.

¹⁴ Ustav SFRJ, *Službeni list SFRJ*, 9/1974, članovi 291-92.

¹⁵ Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), fond 507, f. 403, 57. sednica Predsedništva CK SKJ, materijali za sednicu, Decembar 27, 1983.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, neautorizovane magnetofonske beleške.

country.¹⁷ Even the very names of the two groups – “constitutional defenders” and “reformers” caused dissatisfaction among the political elite who stood in positions of defence of the Constitution.¹⁸

Political scientist Jovan Mirić caused great attention with the publication of the book *System and Crisis* in 1984. It was a response to the invitation of the already mentioned Vrhovec’s working group for scientists to contribute to proposals for reform. Mirić described the political system in the country like this: “Bulky, expensive and complex bureaucratic apparatuses at nine points and levels of state organization and at countless levels and forms of so-called self-governing organization and delegated decision-making wrap and tighten the social organism with thousands and thousands of parasitic arms. These devices multiply spontaneously, creating a chaotic system of incompetence, inefficiency, and irresponsibility.”¹⁹ Mirić proposed solutions whose common denominator was a complete change of the system based on the Constitution of 1974. He was one of the scholars who saw this Constitution, due to its confused and cumbersome arrangement somewhere between a federation and a confederation, as an insurmountable obstacle for more serious political and economic reform. According to Mirić, Yugoslavia was based neither on a democratic nor a class principle but on a national principle because the republics received full sovereignty as national states of their peoples.

In addition to Mirić, many other scientists also proposed the correction of some illogicality or changes in the country’s constitutional, legal, and political system. It was characteristic for them that they did not do so driven by nationalistic reasons. This is especially true for scientists who did not deal with inter-ethnic relations but proposed solutions from their expertise. Some experts looked for a solution to strengthen the uniqueness of the market, as well as in the reunification of large companies at the level of Yugoslavia (such as electrical, post, or railroad companies). Vojislav Stanovčić cited the grotesque example of the electricity industry where 619 OURs agreed to finance the technical management system at the level of the entire Yugoslavia, but one of them, *HPP Perućica*, blocked the entire process and work worth 360 million dollars with its veto for two years.²⁰ However, what scholars forgot was the complexity of relations in the Yugoslav community and the constant threat of disrupting the delicate balance between efforts not to jeopardize the independence of the republics and to make the joint state efficient. Pedro Ramet warned as early as 1985 that Yugoslav stability is based on a sensitive equation whose members include national independence and economic efficiency and liberalism in society and culture, and that a change in one member entails a change in the equation itself.²¹

¹⁷ AJ, fond 507, f. 404, 58. sednica Predsedništva CK SKJ, neautorizovane magnetofonske beleške, January 10, 1984.

¹⁸ “Neprihvatljiva podela na ‘ustavobranitelje’ i ‘reformatore’,” *Politika*, March 2, 1984, 6.

¹⁹ Jovan Mirić, *Sistem i kriza* (Zagreb: Cekade, 1984), 57.

²⁰ Vojislav Stanovčić, *Federacija/konfederacija* (Nikšić: Univerzitetetska riječ, 1986), 180.

²¹ Pedro Ramet, “Contradiction and Reform in Yugoslav Communism: a Conclusion,” in *Yugoslavia in the 1980s*, ed. Pedro Ramet (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), 326–27.

The experts, who certainly had no bad intentions, and their opponents, who were justifiably afraid of centralization at any level, did not sufficiently understand each other, and this further led to the deepening of the crisis. The bottom line was that every question inevitably had to be read in a national key in such a complex community burdened by different legacies of the past. The economic crisis and proposals for reforms have always been linked to the struggle between the republics regarding social wealth redistribution. As Anton Vratuša defined in an article from 1971: "Any problem of economic development has special political connotations; willy-nilly it is viewed also (and sometimes primarily) from the angle of the equality of the nations which comprise it."²² Dennison Rusinow even claimed that it was the economic reforms and the conflict over the distribution of resources that were managed from the central level that opened up the national question in Yugoslavia in the 1960s.²³ Economist Aleksandar Grličkov complained in 1984 that due to the protection of national interests, mistrust is created, so that behind every opinion "evil intent is sought," advocating for an end to "extreme polarization" towards constitutional defenders and reformers.²⁴ He was one of those who warned that the existing constitutional arrangement should be preserved "in the specific conditions of our multinational community," but also that the blockages in decision-making should be removed, and the integration of the Yugoslav market should be increased.

Dissatisfied with the existing situation and demands for establishing order, Serbian nationalism immediately recognized its chance. Stane Dolanc rightly warned in 1983 that "he who would offer order, discipline, and a firm hand today would win a good part of the population on his side."²⁵ At the same time, the ideal of Serbian nationalists was a unitary state under Serbian rule, something like the first Yugoslavia. In the words of one of the most agile nationalist intellectuals, Vasilije Krestić: "We are only looking for what belongs to us: the Serbian ethnic space. Whether that area will be called Serbia or 'Greater' Serbia, or a third Yugoslavia, is a completely secondary issue."²⁶ Critical Serbian intelligentsia had already openly raised the issue of Yugoslavism and relations in Yugoslavia in the early 1980's. The main newspaper of the informal opposition to the regime, Belgrade's *Književne Novine*, already in 1982 launched a large survey on the meaning of Yugoslavism, comparing the term with "togetherness" and stating at the start that for them "Yugoslavism refers to a historical and ideological context of deeper significance than the term that has current political and communicative importance."²⁷ In those years, togetherness became a hated

²² Anton Vratuša, "Jugoslavija, 1971." *Foreign Affairs*, 50, no. 1 (Oct. 1971): 153.

²³ Dennison Rusinow, "Reopening of the 'National Question' in the 1960s," in *State collapse in South Eastern Europe. New Perspectives on Yugoslavia's disintegration*, eds. Lenard J. Cohen and Jasna Dragović-Soso (Chicago: Purdue University Press, 2007), 132-33.

²⁴ Aleksandar Grličkov, *Kriza i izlazi* (Beograd: Radnička štampa, 1987), 122-23.

²⁵ AJ, fond 507, f. 397, 46. sednica Predsedništva CK SKJ, neautorizovane magnetofonske beleške, September 30, 1983.

²⁶ Vasilije Krestić, *Istoričar u vremenu prelomnih i sudbinskih odluka - intervju i izjave 1985 - 2010* (Novi Sad: Prometej, 2011), 104.

²⁷ "Kulturni smisao jugoslovenstva danas," *Književne novine*, June 10, 1982. Overview of the responses to survey see in: Aleksandar Puškaš, "Saradnici Književnih novina o jugoslovenstvu

term among the advocates of greater centralization of the country, especially among the Serbian nationalist intelligentsia, who saw in the term a deliberate emphasis on the particular versus the Yugoslav identity.²⁸

In the following years, the topic of defining the very concept of Yugoslavia, which inevitably led to questioning the previous organization based on the primacy of the republics as national states of their peoples, was often raised in *Književne Novine*. The members of the editorial board defended Yugoslavism, as well as their vision of Yugoslavia, which for them was, as Milorad Vučelić pointed out, “nevertheless something much more than an ordinary state creation.”²⁹ Intellectuals recognized in other circles as Serbian nationalists also acted in this direction. Veselin Đuretić claimed that “in the transitional period towards some higher form of community, there must be pillars of the community that reconcile or relativize inherited differences.”³⁰ In this “higher form of unity,” others saw the restoration of unitarism and Yugoslavia under Serbian domination as it was before the Second World War. Metaphorically speaking, both Grlićkov and Đuretić were in favor of system reforms, but the political and cultural elites of all the other nations in Yugoslavia except the Serbs were too afraid of Đuretić to support Grlićkov, regardless of his good intentions.

A wide circle of consultations, patient agreements, and negotiations that began in 1987 and 1988 yielded the first results. In February 1988, a new arrangement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was signed, which provided for “shock therapy,” and this inevitably implied changes in the economic part of the Constitution.³¹ After many negotiations and reconciliations, the federal constitution was amended in November 1988 with the adoption of 39 amendments. The changes were extensive (including the amendment or deletion of 135 articles, constituting a third of the Constitution), but they only related to the parts on which an agreement was reached. Therefore, the changes were much more radical in the economic sphere, less radical in that of political organization, and much less when it came to the relationship between republics and provinces and the federal organization of the country.³² Journalist Zdravko Huber wrote in *Borba* that it was a great success that all the republican-provincial assemblies agreed at such a political moment and that “the delegate bodies of these, so to speak, warring parties, adopted an identical document concerning their common future.”³³

However, the reforms collided with a political event that completely changed the political situation at that moment and the country’s fate. The current in LC Serbia, led by the authoritarian leader Slobodan Milošević, took

1982. godine – prilog istraživanju.” *Ksio*, 1, 1(2018): 114–31.

²⁸ See, for example: Milorad Vučelić, “Nacionalne strasti kao zamena za demokratiju,” *Književne novine*, May 1, 1986; Miodrag Perišić, “Razulareni jezik,” *Književne novine*, November 15, 1986.

²⁹ Milorad Vučelić, “Rodoljubljem protiv države,” *Književne novine*, October 15, 1984.

³⁰ Dragan Tanasić, “Zašto se istorija ponavlja?,” *Književne novine*, March 1, 1985.

³¹ Susan L. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy – Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War* (Washington D.C: The Brookings Institution, 1995), 82–83.

³² Odluka o proglašenju amandmana na Ustav Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije, *Službeni list SFRJ*, 71/1988.

³³ Zdravko Huber, “Amandmani nade i otrežnjenja,” *Borba*, November 28, 1988, 6.

over the republican party at the 8th session of the Central Committee of the LCS in September 1987 and consolidated it in the first half of 1988, primarily with purges in the party and the media.³⁴ Milošević took power relying on the ideology of nationalism, above all in connection with the issue of Kosovo, along with the populist offer of a firm hand and a replacement for Tito.³⁵ The alliance with nationalism, alongside autocratic tendencies, conditioned the Serbian leadership's attitude towards reforms. The greater centralization of the country, euphemistically labeled as unity, became the official goal of both opposition nationalists and the Milošević regime. Negotiations on the new Constitution of Serbia between the republican and provincial leaderships progressed in the period 1987-88, and it even seemed that an agreement had been reached.³⁶ However, the Serbian government could not be satisfied with the changes that could be negotiated. Their goal was a centralized Yugoslav state, and from 1988 they used the discontent of the Serbs from Kosovo to launch a mass national movement of Serbs that led to the overthrow of the leaderships in the provinces and Montenegro, known as the Anti-Bureaucratic (AB) Revolution.³⁷

Recentralization of Yugoslavia was one of the basic themes of the AB revolution. Among the slogans written on the banners were: "We want a united Yugoslavia," "We condemn the attacks on the JNA," "A strong Serbia is an even stronger Yugoslavia," "Whoever is against Serbia is against Yugoslavia," "We do not want a confederation, divisions, nor migration," "The Constitution of Serbia - the salvation of Yugoslavia," "We are looking for a unified Yugoslavia," "Exit: Yugoslavia without internal borders," etc.³⁸ Parallel to the national movement that was rolling in the streets, there was also an offensive by representatives of the Milošević government to fight for the most radical changes in the constitutional arrangement of the country possible. In the parliamentary debate during the adoption of the amendment, representatives of Serbia insisted on changes that would centralize the state, including the introduction of joint labor councils (which would be elected by workers directly, independently of the republic to which they belong), then the introduction of unique foundations of the education system, the election of the presidency of the SFRY in the Assembly of Yugoslavia instead of the republican assemblies electing their representatives, and the like.³⁹

Milošević's government had the full support of the Serbian nationalist opposition in its demands for greater state centralization. In the period March-April 1988, when it seemed possible to reach a compromise, as many as five

³⁴ VIII sednica CK SK Srbije – Nulta tačka "narodnog pokreta", eds. Slaviša Lekić and Zoran Pavić (Beograd: Službeni glasnik/Status team, 2007).

³⁵ See in more detail about the connection between Milošević's rise to power and the ideology of nationalism in: Dragan Popović, *Rat sećanja u Srbiji 1980-1990. Uspon nacionalizma i otpor* (Beograd: XX vek, 2024).

³⁶ Boško Krunic, *Decenija zamora i raskola* (Novi Sad: Prometej, 2009), 61-62.

³⁷ *Kako se događao narod: „Antibirokratska revolucija“ 1987 - 1989*, eds. Bojana Lekić et al. (Beograd: Službeni glasnik i Status team, 2009).

³⁸ Sava Kerčov et al., *Mitinz i u Vojvodini 1988. godine - rađanje političkog pluralizma* (Novi Sad: Dnevnik, 1990), 61-62.

³⁹ Dragan Bujošević, "Iz Ustava nisu uklonjene odredbe koje razjedinjuju Jugoslaviju," *Politika*, October 22, 1988, 5.

scientific gatherings were held in Belgrade, organized by SANU, the Faculty of Law, the Marxist Center of the LCS, the Cultural and Educational Community of Serbia, and the Association of Lawyers of Serbia. All of them received enormous publicity in the Serbian media, and the message was almost in unison – that the proposed changes to the Constitution are not enough, that they must be more radical, and that their goal must be the constitution of Serbia as a state in its entire territory and the abolition of the unequal position of this republic in the federation.⁴⁰ The most important issue was the unity of Serbia, i.e. the annulment of the constitutional principles from 1974 and the creation of a more unitary Serbian and Yugoslav state.⁴¹ In March 1989, the Writers' Association of Serbia officially demanded the abolition of the "authorized Constitution from 1974," calling it a condition for the salvation of Yugoslavia.⁴² The Committee for the Defense of Freedom of Thought and Expression, an informal body composed of prominent Serbian intellectuals who represented the intellectual opposition to the regime and advocated greater freedoms in society, sent an official proposal to the Assembly of the SFRY and the Yugoslav public in February 1988. In the proposal they argued for the establishment of a council of citizens based on the principle of one man – one vote, as well as for the protection of the national rights of Yugoslav nations living outside their republic, stating that the existing borders of the republics "are not ethnic borders" and that they prevent the "political, cultural and spiritual integration" of the people.⁴³

50 Very quickly, the efforts of the government in Serbia, as well as the nationalist opposition with which it was allied, focused on winning power in the entire country through the representation of the principle of one man, one vote. This principle was completely unacceptable for everyone else, and especially for Slovenia, which had its national movement, also a specific alliance between the party in power and the nationalist opposition.⁴⁴ The recentralization of the party was on the agenda, i.e. the Serbian leadership's attempt to turn things back as far as possible, but at least to the state before the changes from the early 1970s.⁴⁵ For Milošević and his people, the crowning effort to take over power in the country was the extraordinary 14th congress of the LCY in January 1990. For them, it was an opportunity to change the character of the state through the party, i.e. to overthrow the Constitution from 1974.⁴⁶ Ratomir Vico, a speaker at the session of the Central Committee of the LCS in April 1989, explained the position of the LCS Central

⁴⁰ Slobodan Bjelica, *Sporovi oko autonomije Vojvodine – knjiga druga: 1974 – 1988* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2021), 440–41.

⁴¹ See, for example, discussions of Ratko Marković, Balša Špadijer, Budimir Košutić, Pavle Nikolić and others at the public hearing organized by Marxist Center of Serbia 1988: "Šta menjati u Ustavu SR Srbije," *Marksistička misao*, no. 6 (1988): 3–142.

⁴² Zaključci sa skupštine UKS, *Književne novine*, March 15, 1989, 1.

⁴³ *Odbor za odbranu slobode misli i izražavanja. Saopštenja i drugi dokumenti*, ed. Kosta Čavoški (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2009), 208–16.

⁴⁴ See about the Slovenian national movement from the late 1980s: Božo Repe, *Jutri je novi dan – Slovenci in razpad Jugoslavije* (Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2002).

⁴⁵ Dejan Jović, *Jugoslavija – država koja je odumrla*, (Zagreb/Beograd: Prometej/Samizdat B92, 2003), 474.

⁴⁶ Borisav Jović, *Poslednji dani SFRJ* (Beograd: Politika, 1995), 25.

Committee presidency on the need to introduce the principle of one man - one vote. He was clear by drawing a direct parallel between the AB revolution and the upcoming congress: "As happened to the people last fall, there are conditions for the membership to take place in the preparations and at the congress, that is, expressing the will and opinion of the membership, the delegates could demand deeper and more radical changes than the current management is ready to accept."⁴⁷

In June 1989, a session of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the LCS was held, where inter-ethnic relations in the country were discussed, and a document titled "Positions of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the LCS on current issues of inter-ethnic relations and the tasks of the LCS in the fight for Yugoslavia and socialism" was prepared, which was then adopted at the next session.⁴⁸ Slobodan Milošević personally dictated the conclusions of this session, which testifies to the importance of the wording chosen to go to the party "base" and the public. He stated: "The working class of Yugoslavia is disintegrating to unite according to republican criteria. That is the fastest way to collapse both Yugoslavia and socialism".⁴⁹ This formal commitment "for Yugoslavia and socialism" was an effective slogan that ensured the broad support of Serbs in Yugoslavia, as the events of 1989 showed. Everyone, both in Serbia and in other republics, recognized without fail what was hidden behind the advocacy of "putting the class before the national." After all, even at the session of the LCS Central Committee presidency, Milošević considered "class above national" only for others, not for Serbs: "The Serbian people solved their national question in Yugoslavia because only in this way can Serbs live together in Serbia, as their national state and Serbs in other republics. This practically means that jeopardizing Yugoslavia is directly against the vital interest of the Serbian people."⁵⁰

In addition to proposals for reforming the system that strengthened the state and stabilized the economic and political situation, more radical proposals appeared very early in the 1980s aimed at dismantling authoritarian socialism and establishing a multi-party democracy. In the 1980s, the public scene of Yugoslavia was flooded with analyses of problems and proposals for solutions, as well as polemics about the direction of development and the depth of the necessary changes. There is no doubt that some of the causes and reasons for the disaster of the 1990s can be found in this decade, but it is also possible to see numerous alternative solutions and proposals that offered a completely different direction of development in the future. Olga Manojlović Pintar notes that later these alternative concepts "were sometimes deliberately hidden from arguments that confirmed the theses about the inevitability of the disintegration and predestined failure of the

⁴⁷ Arhiv Srbije (AS), Đ2, k. 509, Uvodno izlaganje Ratomira Vica, 15. sednica CK SKS, April 10, 1989.

⁴⁸ AS, Đ2, k. 538, „Stavovi predsedništva CK SKS o aktuelnim pitanjima međunacionalnih odnosa i zadaci SKS u borbi za Jugoslaviju i socijalizam“, 86. sednica predsedništva CK SKS, June 22, 1989.

⁴⁹ AS, Đ2, k. 538, Izlaganje Slobodana Miloševića, 85. sednica predsedništva CK SKS, June 9, 1989.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Yugoslav state.⁵¹ Sabrina Ramet states that after 1980, all institutions, except the JNA, were faced with fierce criticism and accusations that they were working unconstitutionally, that they were ineffective, that they did not meet the needs of citizens, that they were corrupt, etc.⁵² The general crisis in the early 1980s could no longer be denied and has led to, as Ramet says, “an astonishingly wide range of reform proposals.”⁵³ Jovan Mirić stated: “When society is faced with a crisis, it usually returns to its foundations: it questions and reconsiders its original principles.”⁵⁴ The proposals went in the direction of decentralizing the League of Communists (Branko Horvat, one of the most respected Yugoslav economists, even proposed abolishing all parties, including the LCY), then establishing the SSRN as a separate party, or at least strengthening its position, greater inclusion of non-communists in the leadership of the SSRN, and the like.⁵⁵ In 1984, Slovenia proposed that members of the SFRY presidency be elected in direct elections, but this was quickly rejected.⁵⁶

Demands for greater democratization were not primary for the carriers and promoters of the ideology of Serbian nationalism. Nationalism is an ideology that immanently tends towards autocracy because it requires the suppression of political pluralism in the name of national unity and constant mobilization against external enemies that prevent internal democratization. Yet, part of the nationalist opposition, together with liberal-oriented individuals, demanded the introduction of a multi-party system and a break with the legacy of authoritarian socialism.⁵⁷ The other part, on the other hand, consistently opposed the introduction of multi-party systems, such as academician Mihail Marković.⁵⁸ Whichever of these positions they espoused, the common thing for nationalist intellectuals was that national themes were always ahead of the issue of internal organization and the development of democracy in Serbia. This was especially evident when the new Serbian Constitution was adopted in 1990. Many liberal intellectuals advocated in the middle of 1990 that multi-party elections should be held first so that the elected, legitimate assembly would adopt a new Constitution. However, Milošević easily refused, hiding behind the alleged popular will. At his suggestion, a referendum was organized on whether to adopt the Constitution first, and only then go to the elections.⁵⁹

For its plan, the government had the unison support of the nationalist opposition, which, from the pages of the pro-regime press, continuously

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⁵¹ Olga Manojlović Pintar, *Poslednja bitka – Španski borci i jugoslovenska kriza osamdesetih* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2019), 22.

⁵² Sabrina P. Ramet, *Balkan Babel: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to Ethnic War* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 8.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁴ Mirić, *Sistem i kriza*, 15.

⁵⁵ Ramet, *Balkan Babel*, 13 – 14; Jović, *Jugoslavija – država koja je odumrla*, 312.

⁵⁶ Pedro Ramet, “Apocalypse Culture and Social Change in Yugoslavia,” in *Yugoslavia in the 1980s*, ed. Pedro Ramet (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), 18–19.

⁵⁷ Jasna Dragović-Soso, *Spasioci nacije. Intelektualna opozicija Srbije i oživljavanje nacionalizma* (Beograd: Fabrika knjiga, 2004), 292–99.

⁵⁸ Dragan Barjaktarević, “Kritična masa umnosti”, *Duga*, August 5, 1989, 14–18.

⁵⁹ “Neka građani Srbije odluče o Ustavu,” *Politika*, June 26, 1990, 1.

campaigned for a referendum and for the Constitution to be adopted first, and then for elections to be held.⁶⁰ Dobrica Ćosić, a famous writer and one of the champions of the Serbian national movement of the 1970s and 1980s, called for voting in a referendum and for the Constitution to be adopted first, and then to go to the elections, challenging the legitimacy of the opposition parties to even declare themselves on this matter with the words: "in what democratic elections did they get the right to represent their supporters in these the fateful days of the Serbian people."⁶¹ In this way, the nationalist intelligentsia and the government, hand in hand, achieved their main goal – they put the national question before the democratic one and determined the fate of Serbia for a long time. Novak Kilibarda, a writer from Montenegro and in the early 1990s the leader of the pro-Serbian option in that republic, said that "justified democratic affinities should be silenced until major issues of national and state importance are resolved."⁶²

Another important example was the attitude of Serbian nationalism towards the reform attempts of federal Prime Minister Ante Marković and his team. From the beginning, Marković and his team were associated with large-scale reforms; most often in the press, they were called the reform government, and the party they founded in 1990 was called the Union of Reform Forces of Yugoslavia (URFY). After the establishment, the reformists entered the election race in the republics that had not yet finished with the elections (all but Slovenia and Croatia).⁶³ Thanks to the still strong institution of the federal government, this party had both resources and the support of the federal newspaper *Borba* and the newly founded federal television station YUTEL.⁶⁴ Also, polls conducted in 1990 showed the enormous popularity of Ante Marković, and the good results of the economic reform benefited him. All this made the URFY look like a dangerous competitor to the ruling communists in the republics, as well as to their nationalist opposition. Of course, the republics themselves realized this, so in 1990 a campaign against Ante Marković was launched, mostly in Serbian, but also in other media.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ See the statements of prominent intellectuals: Antonije Isaković, Aleksandar Despić, Ivan Maksimović, Petar Džadžić, "Neka narod odluči," *Politika ekspres*, June 27, 1990, 7; then Nikša Stipčević, Predrag Palavestra, Ljubomir Simović, Miroslav Pantić, Mira Alečković, "Najvažnija srpska državnost," *Politika ekspres*, June 28, 1990, 5; Mihailo Marković, Ljubiša Samardžić, Čedomir Mirković, *Politika*, rubrika "Odjeci i reagovanja," June 29, 1990, 7; Milutin Garašanin, Vasilije Krestić, Olja Ivanjicki, Miloš Žutić, *Politika*, rubrika "Odjeci i reagovanja", June 28, 1990, 9.

⁶¹ Simonida Simonović, "Dobrica Ćosić: kraći i bolji put od referenduma ne vidim," *Politika*, 1. jul 1990, 7.

⁶² Božidar Milošević, "U čemu se slažem sa dr Raškovićem," *Politika*, July 23, 1990, 8.

⁶³ Marković's government, despite the widespread belief, did not advocate reforms only in the field of economy, but also actively got involved in promoting political reforms, including entering the political arena, more about this in: Alfredo Sasso, "The Political Dimension of Ante Marković's Reform Project – 'We must develop democracy and a Third Yugoslavia,'" *Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, 7, no. 1(2020): 25-48.

⁶⁴ For more on the activities of these two media at the end of the 1980s, see: Mark Tompson, *Proizvodnja rata – mediji u Srbiji, Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini* (Beograd: Medija Centar/ Radio B92, 1995), 31-50.

⁶⁵ Marković's government and its reforms bothered the authorities in Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia, so that all three of the most powerful republics led their own campaigns against the federal government, Jasminka Udovički and Ivan Torov, "The Interlude: 1980 – 1990,"

The entire propaganda machinery of the Milošević regime was engaged to destroy both Marković and the UFRY, and it largely succeeded.⁶⁶

The basic message was that it was a Trojan horse of the anti-Yugoslav forces since the UFRY was founded only after the elections in Croatia and Slovenia. Just a few days after the announcement of the founding of the new party (July 29, 1990, at a rally in Kozara), Borisav Jović wrote in his diary that he had written three articles about Marković and gave them to Milošević to pass on to *Politika*, to be published under fictitious names, adding: "We have to debunk him because the people are greatly mistaken about who he is and what he is. Many see him as a savior, but he is just a fraud and an enemy of the Serbian people."⁶⁷ In the attack on the federal prime minister, the Serbian government again had a strong ally in the nationalist intelligentsia. Right at the beginning of August, *NIN* published, and *Politika* reported, attacks on the idea of the formation of the UFRY by Dobrica Ćosić, Milorad Ekmečić, and Ljubomir Tadić, well-known Serbian intellectuals, under the title that left no room for the dilemma: "The new trick of the anti-Serb coalition."⁶⁸ Ljubomir Simović wrote in September 1990 that the greatest danger for Yugoslavia lies with the reformists because they act only where "they will not compete with the HDZ," adding about that party: "On the one hand, it does not tempt the Croats' HDZ orientation, and on the other hand, he uses the Yugoslav emotions of the Serbs for solutions that are not certain to be truly Yugoslav."⁶⁹

Serbian nationalists behaved the same towards reforms, regardless of whether they were in power or the opposition. They viewed reforms as a tool to achieve their goals or as an obstacle to be removed. That is why they were ready to support reform efforts aimed at strengthening the central government. Their support often came at a cost to the proponents of such reforms, as their proposals were rejected without discussion due to the fear of Serbian nationalism wrapped under the cloak of unitarism. On the other hand, reforms leading to democratization, the dismantling of the authoritarian system of government, and the strengthening of Yugoslavia as an alliance of equal republics were treated as hostile by Serbian nationalists. The vision of Yugoslavia as a centralized country gathered around Serbia as Piedmont was the undisguised main goal of both Serbian nationalists and part of the party gathered around Milosevic. When both recognized this, they became allies. Thus, the reformist attempts to solve the crises and strengthen the federal state acquired a powerful enemy that would ultimately defeat the reformists and then destroy Yugoslavia.

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in: *Burn this house, The Making and Unmaking of Yugoslavia*, eds. Jasminka Udovički and James Ridgeway (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2000), 100-01. See also concrete examples of the obstruction of Marković's reforms in: Predrag Tašić, *Kako sam branio Antu Markovića* (Skoplje: NIP, 1993).

⁶⁶ See numerous examples of this campaign, as well as its effects in: Srbobran Branković, "Media interpretation of war as an Instrument of National Homogenisation," in *Media and War*, eds. Nena Skopljanac Brunner et al., (Zagreb/Beograd: Centre for Transition and Civil Society Research/Argument, 2000), 148-50.

⁶⁷ Jović, *Poslednji dani SFRJ*, 173.

⁶⁸ "Novo lukavstvo antisrpske koalicije", *Politika*, August 4, 1990, 12.

⁶⁹ Ljubomir Simović, *Galop na puževima - Srbi u jugoslovenskom ratu*, Beograd: Prosveta, 1994, 51.

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