

## THE LANGUAGE TRIBUNAL DEBATE IN 1982: PERCEPTIONS OF SLOVENIAN LANGUAGE AND “YUGOSLAV” IMMIGRANTS IN EARLY 1980S

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The article deals with a public debate on the institute of Jezikovno razsodišče (Linguistic Tribunal) after the Cankarjev dom incident that occurred on 22 March 1982. The first public pan-Yugoslavian debate about the nature of the Slovenian nationalism in 1980s merged the problem with the use of the Slovenian language and that of the position of immigrants who had come to the Socialist Republic of Slovenia from other Yugoslavian republics into a dangerous blend of linguistic, cultural, economic and political disagreement.

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### The context of the citizenship, language and migration in socialist Slovenia

In post-1945 Yugoslavia, already the first law on citizenship established a two-tier or bifurcated citizenship. Every citizen of individual republic was simultaneously a citizen of Yugoslavia and every citizen of Yugoslavia was in principle a citizen of individual republic. Yugoslav citizens were allowed to have only one, clearly established republican citizenship. The republic-level citizenships of the constitutive republics were established on the basis of municipal membership. On the other hand, every citizen of any Yugoslav republic enjoyed in every republic the same rights as the citizens of that republic.<sup>1</sup> These principles were – in general – adopted also by constitutions to follow (1963, 1974).<sup>2</sup> According to the last Yugoslav constitution (1974), every citizen auto-

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<sup>1</sup> Igor Štiks, *Nations and Citizens in Yugoslavia and the Post-Yugoslav States, One Hundred Years of Citizenship* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 64, 65.

<sup>2</sup> *Ustava Socialistične federativne republike Jugoslavije* (Ljubljana: Center za samoupravno normativno dejavnost, 1974), article 249, p. 108.

matically acquired dual citizenship (federal and republican), whereby federal citizenship derived from republican citizenship. According to the 1976 Law on Citizenship of SFRY, the citizenship of Yugoslavia was determined on the basis of republican citizenship. Every citizen of SFRY was automatically also a citizen of one of its constituent republics. The conditions, under which one could acquire citizenship of a republic were laid down by individual republics.<sup>3</sup>

What did this mean in practice? The citizenship status of a newborn child was regulated either according to the citizenship laws valid in the republic of which the child’s parents were citizens or, if the parents did not have the same citizenship, according to the citizenship laws of the republic where the child was born. Parents were allowed to agree on the citizenship of their child. There was also an option (if the parents could not agree) for naturalization of the child in the republic of his or her birth.<sup>4</sup> These legal nuances that were not felt by the Yugoslav internal migrants in the period of socialist Yugoslavia, proved crucial after the dissolution of the federation. Soon after the independence, the Slovenian authorities unlawfully erased 18,305 residents of Slovenia who had had the citizenship of other Yugoslav republics from the register of permanent residents.<sup>5</sup>

According to the then researcher of migrations to Slovenia, Silva Mežnarić, Slovenia became a “receiving country” regarding the migration from other parts of the federation relatively late. In the period 1962 – 1973 the emigration – not immigration – was typical for the Slovenian society (in 1970 more than 13.000 Slovenians left the country). Slovenians were – like other Yugoslavs – in this period migrating mostly to Western Germany and other parts of Western Europe. After the economic crisis of 1973, the access to the West narrowed for Yugoslav workers. Slovenia experienced an increasing immigration from other republics already in 1974. The immigration reached a peak in 1978, when more than 13.000 individuals from other parts of SFRY immigrated to Slovenia.<sup>6</sup>

Language use is another category, important for the social status of migrants from other republics in Slovenia. Slovenian constitution in Yugoslavia determined that the language of all bodies, organizations and individuals performing a “social function” in the socialist Republic of Slovenia was Slovenian. On the other hand, everyone had the right to “cultivate and express his culture and use his language and script.” Furthermore, “the lack of knowledge of Slo-

<sup>3</sup> Jasminka Dedić, “Discrimination in Granting Slovenian Citizenship” In: *The Erased, Organised Innocence and the Politics of Exclusion*, Vlasta Jalušič, ed. (Ljubljana: Mirovni Inštitut, 2003), 25-92.

<sup>4</sup> Igor Štiks, *Nations and Citizens in Yugoslavia and the Post-Yugoslav States*, p. 66.

<sup>5</sup> Jasminka Dedić, “Discrimination in Granting Slovenian Citizenship”, p. 64.

<sup>6</sup> Silva Mežnarić, *Delavci iz drugih jugoslovanskih republik in pokrajini v Sloveniji* (Ljubljana: Raziskovalni center za samoupravljanje RS ZSS, 1982) pp. 15, 16.

venian cannot be an obstacle hindering anyone's defense, exercise of rights or justified interests." Article 213 stated that "members of other Yugoslav nations and nationalities have, in accordance with the law, the right to education and schooling in their own language."<sup>7</sup> This constitutional demand was rarely implemented. Only couple of schools in Slovenia were providing classes in Serbo-Croatian language, usually in urban centres.<sup>8</sup> According to the empirical research of the Slovenian and migrant workers (1981), migrants were not keen on enrolling their children in schools with the Serbo-Croatian Language.<sup>9</sup> Slovenian League of Communists interpreted this fact as an expression of migrant's intentions to integrate their children into the Slovenian society.<sup>10</sup>

The increase flow of people from other parts of Yugoslavia was "captured" also by the Yugoslav census of 1981. The census instructions presupposed all "usual" Yugoslav national categories, including Serbo-Croatian speaking Muslims from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sandžak. Censuses have since 1971 included the category of Yugoslavs, but only as an option for those, who did not want to identify themselves in any given national category.<sup>11</sup> The comparison of the two censuses (1971 and 1981) in Slovenia clearly shows the increase of Slovenian population with a non-Slovenian national affiliation. Slovenia had a total population of 1.727.137 in 1971 and 1.891.864 in 1981. The percentage of Slovenians in Socialist republic of Slovenia was 94% in 1971 and 90,5% in 1981. The number of people with only Yugoslav affiliation increased the most between 1971 and 1981 (6.744 in 1971 and 26.263 in 1981). The number of Muslims (3.231 in 1971 and 13.425 in 1981) and Serbs (20.521 in 1971 and 42.182 in 1981) also increased significantly. Nevertheless, the most numerous non-Slovenian national group in both censuses remained neighbouring Croats (42.657 in 1971 and 55.625 in 1981). Yet, as the Yugoslav statistical journal *Jugoslovenski pregled* stated in 1983, "Slovenia has a least-differentiated national structure (which could be defined as monolithic, according to the Yugoslav situation)."<sup>12</sup>

The 1981 Census results were endangering the established perception of Slovenia as a "nationally homogeneous" republic. If the trend would continue – Slovenian communist authorities argued – could in Slovenia in the near future the share of non-Slovenian population exceed 10%. After the struck of eco-

<sup>7</sup> Brankica Petković, "The Erased Language" In: *The Scars of Erasure, A Contribution to the Critical Understanding of the Erasure of People from the Register of Permanent Residents of the Republic of Slovenia*, Neža Kogovšek, ed. (Ljubljana: Mirovni inštitut, 2010), p. 224.

<sup>8</sup> Stefano Lusa, *Razkroj oblasti, slovenski komunisti in demokratizacija države* (Ljubljana, Modrijan: 2012), p. 64.

<sup>9</sup> Silva Mežnarić, *Delavci iz drugih jugoslovenskih republik in pokrajin v Sloveniji*, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Stefano Lusa, *Razkroj oblasti*, p. 65.

<sup>11</sup> Popis prebivalstva 1971, metodološka pojasnila, Statistični urad Republike Slovenije, URL: [http://www.stat.si/publikacije/popisi/1971/1971\\_T\\_MET.pdf](http://www.stat.si/publikacije/popisi/1971/1971_T_MET.pdf) (Accessed on April 18, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> "Nacionalni sastav stanovništva", *Jugoslovenski pregled* 23, no. 3 (1983): 103.

conomic crisis in Yugoslavia (after the Tito’s death in 1980) the economic experts realised that Slovenia already reached the borders of full employment and that there is no need to open more jobs, as planned before the crisis. In theory, the “working organisations” were obliged to provide the decent housing for the migrant workers, which was in crisis often not the case - the workers were in many cases put in miserable hostels. Since the migrants often ended at the bottom of the social ladder, they had a better chance of obtaining a social housing than the locals. According to the information of the Slovenian Communist organisation, this increased resentment of the local population, especially in Ljubljana, where the housing problem was particularly acute.<sup>13</sup> But was the stereotype that the migrant workers were predominately unskilled and poorly educated true? According to Silva Mežnarič’s research, not entirely. The differences between the Slovenian and immigrant workers were the highest regarding vocational education. On the other hand, regarding the university education, the differences were negligible. “Is this already the result of the brain drain of the less developed areas of Yugoslavia”, asked herself Silva Mežnarič.<sup>14</sup>

In the case of socialist Slovenia, we can follow an important indicator of the public mood. Slovenian Public Opinion Survey was conducted regularly since 1968. In 1971 the relative majority of respondents thought that immigration from other Yugoslav republics into Slovenia was “mainly bad” (42,5%). In 1980, before the outbreak of the economic crisis, “only” 35,4 percent of respondents supported the claim. After that, the percentage of those who saw immigration as a predominantly negative phenomenon steadily rose, and in 1990 it amounted to 53 percent.<sup>15</sup> The research conducted by Silva Mežnarič in the period 1975-1982 showed the rise of “latent” reactions of Slovenians regarding the immigrant’s competition on the labour market. In 1982 Mežnarič concluded that collected data do not support “open nationalist” orientation of Slovenians or immigrants, but she also warned that the trend should be taken seriously. In the conditions of the economic crisis, Slovenians are becoming increasingly worried about the possibility of employment. This could increase traditional Slovenian feelings of endangerment when it comes to language and culture. All weaknesses and injustices of the society become visible through a group that is apparently different. Immigrant countries – such as Slovenia - can solve problems of immigrant groups only if they solve their own problems.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Stefano Lusa, *Razkroj oblasti*, pp. 61-63.

<sup>14</sup> Silva Mežnarič, “Delavci iz drugih republik v slovenskem gospodarstvu” In: *Društveno-ekonomski aspekti medunacionalnih odnosa u Jugoslaviji*, Danilo Domanjko, ed. (Ljubljana: Delavska enotnost, 1982), p. 377.

<sup>15</sup> Jelka Zorn, “Registered as Workers, Erased as non-Slovenes: The Transition Period from the Perspective of the Erased People” In: *The Scars of Erasure, A Contribution to the Critical Understanding of the Erasure of People from the Register of Permanent Residents of the Republic of Slovenia*, Neža Kogovšek, ed. (Ljubljana: Mirovni inštitut, 2010), p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> Silva Mežnarič, “Delavci iz drugih republik v slovenskem gospodarstvu”, p. 378

## The Political moment

The public debate under consideration took place between the Kosovo Crisis<sup>17</sup> (April 1981) and the dispute regarding the Yugoslav Core Curriculum in the field of education<sup>18</sup> (August 1983). The events in Kosovo pushed the question of nationalisms back into the centre of the (more or less) public discussions, the sensitivity for the “negative nationalist trends” increased, while, on the other hand, the federal authorities (the state as well as the Party authorities) started intensely promoting the Yugoslav “unity”. What were the circumstances at the time? This was a period when the basic postulates of the political system and the relations between the republics (as Božo Repe stated it) were not yet under consideration.<sup>19</sup> The late workers' self-management in the form of the delegate system, implemented with the 1974 Constitution, was deemed as the only “true path”. The League of Communists may have had its position as the “leading ideological and political force of the working class”<sup>20</sup> guaranteed with the Constitution, but in the systemic sense it was not superior to the other four recognised socio-political organisations. According to the principles of the main architect of the Yugoslav system Edvard Kardelj, the League of Communists was a minority that was not supposed to force its authority monopoly on the society. The communist organisation was supposed to be an “integral part of the democratic pluralism of self-management interests”, not “a sort of a political power above or outside of those interests.”<sup>21</sup> However, the most important decisions were still in the hands of the leadership of the League of Communists. The newspapers reveal a dynamic and, up to a point, stratified consumer society that the leaders attempted to steer towards the withering away of the state and towards the “real”, socialist democracy in a modernist-socialist manner. By the beginning of the 1980s, the system, designed as the best solution to prevent statism and bureaucracy, had become completely non-transparent and bureaucratised.

<sup>17</sup> For a short yet informative overview of the events in Kosovo at the beginning of the 1980s see: Jurij Hadalin, “Odnos varnostno-obveščevalnih služb do albanske manjšine v Jugoslaviji po izbruhu demonstracij na Kosovu leta 1981”, *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 51, no. 1 (2011): 313–328.

<sup>18</sup> Aleš Gabrič, “Kulturniška ‘opozicija’ podira tabuje” In: *Slovenska novejša zgodovina 1848-1992*, Jasna Fischer, ed. (Ljubljana: INZ, Mladinska knjiga, 2006), pp. 1153-1158; Lepoldina Plut-Pregelj, “Slovenia’s Concerns About the proposed Yugoslav Core Curriculum in the 1980’s” In: *The Repluralization of Slovenia in the 1980’s, New Revelations from Archival Records*, Lepoldina Plut-Pregelj, Aleš Gabrič and Božo Repe, eds. (Washington: University of Washington, 2000), pp. 58–78.

<sup>19</sup> Božo Repe, *Slovinci v osemdesetih letih* (Ljubljana: ZZDS Slovenije, 2001), p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Ustava Socialistične federativne republike Jugoslavije, p. 25 (Temeljna načela, Article VIII).

<sup>21</sup> Edvard Kardelj, *Smeri razvoja političnega sistema socialističnega samoupravljanja* (Ljubljana: ČGP Komunist, 1977), p. 179.

Furthermore, the political and social climate in this period was already defined by the increasingly strained economic circumstances: in 1982 the International Monetary Fund (IMF) exacerbated the conditions for the reprogramming of loans. It demanded macroeconomic stabilisation and economic reforms, aimed at encouraging the exports. After 1982 the Yugoslav leadership was forced to implement austerity measures, restricting the national consumption and exporting goods to the convertible West, which worsened the living standard of the citizens significantly. For example, in 1982 food subsidies were abolished. In 1983 the prices of petrol, heating, food, and transportation increased by a third. Almost all economic indicators after 1982 were negative,<sup>22</sup> and already at the beginning of the 1980s the inflation had amounted to approximately 45 percent.<sup>23</sup> Due to its development and integration into the Western trade flows, it was easier for Slovenia than the other republics to alleviate the consequences of such a policy.<sup>24</sup> It is important for our topic that the economic situation influenced the discussions about changing the constitutional system in order to strengthen the federation. Even though the Slovenian leadership supported the orientation towards exportation and adaptation to the West, it nevertheless opposed resolutely the centralist constitutional reforms, supported by the IMF. It argued for the standpoint that republican autonomy was not the main cause for the economic crisis, and that the cause should be sought in the federal restrictions imposed on the republics and companies.<sup>25</sup> Susan Woodworth commented on the Slovenian standpoint: she stated that “those (Slovenians – author's note) whose views might seem more liberal and Western were in fact the most conservative about change, the most anti-reform, and the most nationalistic. They insisted on exclusive priority to what they defined as the national interests (and therefore national rights) of their republic.”<sup>26</sup> Was the Slovenian position truly the most nationalistic? The least we can claim is that the individual republics would attempt to solve the crisis with regard to their position and internal structure. That is also confirmed by Susan Woodworth when she underlines the catastrophic state of the Serbian economy and the aspirations of the Serbian leadership to address the issues by means of centralist reforms.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Susan L. Woodworth, *Balkan Tragedy* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1995), pp. 51, 52.

<sup>23</sup> Zdenko Čepič, “Gospodarska Kriza” In: *Slovenska novejša zgodovina*, Jasna Fischer, ed. (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, Mladinska knjiga, 2005), p. 1152.

<sup>24</sup> Jože Prinčič, Neven Borak, *Iz reforme v reformo, slovensko gospodarstvo 1970-1991* (Ljubljana: FDV, 2006), p. 519.

<sup>25</sup> Jože Prinčič, *Pot do slovenske narodnogospodarske suverenosti 1945-1991* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2013), pp. 38, 139.

<sup>26</sup> Woodworth, *Balkan Tragedy*, p. 62.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 65, 66.

The importance of economic reasons for the spreading of the nationalist debates in the multi-national state is indisputable, yet the way in which these aspirations are channelled is not insignificant. We must take into account the existing differences between the Yugoslav republics at the level of national ideologies, discourses, and academic/cultural/literary structures. The most obvious example is the different outlook on the national question, which had been “opened” and “closed” several times in Yugoslavia before the beginning of the 1980s. At the beginning of the 1980s, the memory of the “Croatian Spring” (or the rise of Croatian nationalism, depending on the perspective) as well as the purges in the Croatian politics (and society) in 1971 and 1972<sup>28</sup> was still very much alive. The political and academic discussions about the relations between nations/languages/cultures/religions, which had earlier mobilised merely the involved cultural-political circles, now became a channel for the dissatisfaction of the people in the circumstances of the generally declining living standard. The economic crisis of the 1980s provided additional weight to the debates about nationalism and pushed them into the focus of the public life. This created an explosive mixture of cultural and economic-political arguments that presented Yugoslavia as a misunderstanding. The relations between Serbian and Slovenian nationalism were one of the most important fuels for these misunderstandings at the time. As Jasna Dragović-Soso stated, “The dialectical relationship between Slovenian and Serbian nationalism in the 1980s, characterised by a radicalisation of the intellectual oppositions' respective demands, produced a spiral that eventually led to their adoption of irreconcilable national programmes which would suit their—uncompromisingly defined—national interests.”<sup>29</sup> Slovenian nationalism in Yugoslavia was allowed to express Slovenian “national sovereignty” more freely than Croatian and Serbian nationalism. Perceiving Slovenia as a “state of the Slovenian nation” was a part of the official ideology, while similar mottoes in Croatia or Serbia would provoke at least disgruntlement, if not an outright repression of the authorities. These features of Slovenian public sphere were not unknown to Serbian press.<sup>30</sup>

## The Linguistic Tribunal

In the time of the worsening living standard, shortage of the basic life's necessities, and rampant discussions about centralism and federalism, the Slovenian public often focused on the questions of the use and role of the Slovenian language, although this is an issue which had stirred up the Slovenian public

<sup>28</sup> Zdenko Radelić, *Hrvatska u Jugoslaviji 1945. – 1991.: od zajedništva do razlaza* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2006), pp. 379–462.

<sup>29</sup> Jasna Dragović-Soso, *Saviours of the Nation, Serbia's Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism* (London: Hurst & Company, 2002), p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> Krste Bijelić, “Moja dežela (ni)je ugrožena”, *Duga*, 26 December 1987 – 8 January 1988, p. 67.

many times after World War II.<sup>31</sup> The main responsibility for the public debates on the position of the Slovenian language should be sought with the Slovenian authorities themselves. On 14 and 15 May 1979, the Socialist Alliance of the Working

People of Slovenia (hereinafter SZDL) and the Society for Slavic Studies of Slovenia organised a consultation entitled *Public Use of the Slovenian Language* in the city of Portorož, where many prominent participants (politicians, journalists, writers) focused, among other things, on the issue of the relations between the Slovenian and Serbo-Croatian language. At the initiative of the Portorož consultation, on 15 October 1980 the Slovenian SZDL established a permanent section named the *Public Use of the Slovenian Language*, which was divided into several working groups. One of the working groups was called the *Linguistic Tribunal*. The latter was supposed to focus predominantly on the pressing and current questions of language use. In 1981 and 1982 the renowned members of the Linguistic Tribunal communicated with the wider public through their publications in the central Slovenian newspaper *Delo*. In these contributions they would publish individual letters from ordinary citizens, comment upon them, and teach the public what sort of use of the Slovenian language was correct and what was incorrect.<sup>32</sup>

As Ksenija Cvetković-Sander established, the Linguistic Tribunal treated the behaviour of the speakers of Serbo-Croatian in Slovenia as problematic and demanded that the immigrants from the other republics learn Slovenian.<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile, the Linguistic Tribunal clearly based its standpoint on the Yugoslav Constitution and self-management. The members of the Tribunal (Matjaž Kmecl, Janez Gradišnik, Janko Moder, Janez Sršen and Jože Toporišič) conceived their outlooks as a carefully considered combination of Slovenian protectionism and openness for the Serbo-Croatian language in the circumstances of the Yugoslav federalism. Although they largely based the “fundamental principles” on the Yugoslav constitutionality and Kardelj's standpoints, they nevertheless explained the relations between Slovenian and Serbo-Croatian languages by means of history: “Slovenian and Serbo-Croatian are kindred, yet independent languages. They had already departed from each other a thousand years ago.” Both languages had a geographical basis, as they were spoken by permanently-settled populations, while the literary languages in their modern form had developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was therefore the natural state of affairs, and the Yugoslav self-management socialism could not enforce the

<sup>31</sup> Aleš Gabrič, “Uveljavljanje slovenščine kot uradnega jezika po drugi svetovni vojni” In: *Slovenija v Jugoslaviji*, Zdenko Čepič, ed. (Ljubljana: INZ, 2015), pp. 213–240.

<sup>32</sup> Janko Moder, *Jezikovno razsodišče, 1980–1982* (Trst, Celovec: Založništvo tržaškega tiska, Založba Drava, 1984), pp. 7–10.

<sup>33</sup> Ksenija Cvetković-Sander, *Sprachpolitik und Nationale Identität im sozialistischen Jugoslawien (1954–1991)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011), pp. 368–370.



change of the natural linguistic circumstances, as this would be against the humanist principles. The Linguistic Tribunal explained the differences between “natural” and “unnatural” standpoints with regard to the relations between these two languages: it is natural that a member of one language community, located in the area of another language community, does not demand that the latter adapt to the former; but that he or she should adapt to the local community instead. On the other hand, it was also natural that the development of one's own language should be allowed (books in libraries, cultural associations, schools where Serbo-Croatian is used as a teaching language). The demands that immigrants learn Slovenian were supported with the argument that immigrants should have “sufficient command of our language as well, lest they should remain isolated in the Slovenian community.” The knowledge of the Slovenian language was not merely the demand of the Slovenian environment – it was also the best way to avoid ghettoisation and ensure the advancement of the immigrants in the Slovenian society.<sup>34</sup>

The first responses of the Serbian media to the Linguistic Tribunal were devastating: the very name itself bothered them (in Serbia the name of this body was initially translated as the “Language Court”). In the *NIN* magazine, Aleksandar Tijanić placed the Slovenian Linguistic Tribunal in the wider Yugoslav context. He underlined that all of this was happening in the time when Macedonia implemented a regulation pursuant to which all the company names should be written in the Cyrillic alphabet and in the Macedonian language. Allegedly it also happened that the Macedonian courts refused to accept submissions and appeals in the Latin alphabet. In Zagreb the debates about the new “orthography of the Croatian literary language” continued. At the same time the Belgrade television partly introduced the Cyrillic alphabet after a long consideration. Why had the Slovenian public been so explicitly interested in preserving the purity of the Slovenian language and protecting it from the expansion of Serbo-Croatian and English already for a year or two? Was this due to “linguistic nationalism” and the aspirations to “conserve” the language? Or was this simply a continuation of the many hundreds of years of care for the Slovenian language? Tijanić illustrated the Slovenian sensitivity for linguistic rules with the information according to which *Delo* was the only Yugoslav newspaper that employed a special expert in the purity of language besides the usual proofreader.<sup>35</sup>

Tijanić did not overlook the fact that many of the Linguistic Tribunal's remarks dealt with immigrants from the other republics. It is interesting for the subsequent development of events that an unnamed Linguistic Tribunal advocate, in his communication with Tijanić, indirectly named Miodrag Bulatović

<sup>34</sup> Sekcija “Slovenščine v javnosti” pri RK SZDL Slovenije, Jezikovno razsodišče, “Slovenski in Srbohrvaški jezik pri nas”, *Sobotna Priloga Dela*, 16 January 1982, p. 25.

<sup>35</sup> Aleksandar Tijanić, “Šta smeta slovenačkom jeziku?”, *NIN*, 31 January 1982, p. 18.

as an example of bad practice: supposedly so many workers from the other republics were in Slovenia that they felt no need to learn Slovenian, and yet there were allegedly few misunderstandings with them. “It is the intellectuals who are the problem. For example, a well-known Serbian writer, who has lived and worked in Ljubljana for many years, refuses to speak Slovenian.” The Slovenian correspondent of the *Borba* newspaper published an open letter in the *Delo* newspaper, claiming that the workers from the other republics were interested in learning Slovenian as well as in joining the social life in the Slovenian environment. However, he found it unacceptable that the Linguistic Tribunal defined these people as immigrants and newcomers, regardless of what these people did and how long they lived in Slovenia. In this way they were being labelled “eternal guests”, a “minority that threatens the majority”. Tijanić concluded his article with Kmecl's remark, stating that the Tribunal invested much effort in translating certain Serbo-Croatian terms into Slovenian: “We have deliberated and discussed the issue for a long time, until we have finally found a suitable Slovenian word for – 'zajedništvo'! The translation would be – 'sožitje' (cohabitation).”<sup>36</sup>

Even the Slovenian communist leadership established that linguistic discussions could be problematic in the contemporaneous political circumstances. The leadership of the Central Committee of the League of Communists (CCLC) of Slovenia tackled the issue head on and adopted a document on the Slovenian language in the beginning of February 1982. It may have supported the efforts of the Linguistic Tribunal, but it also stated clearly that the workers from the other republics were by no means newcomers, but rather equal labourers in the context of associated labour as well as citizens in the Socialist Republic of Slovenia. In accordance with its doctrine, the Slovenian communists underlined that the attitude of immigrants in Slovenia towards the local culture and language depended on their socio-economic position. They explained the difference between the care for the language and the intolerance based on the difference between self-management socialism and unitarianism or nationalism. The latter were, naturally, merely two aspects of the same problem. Nevertheless, the Slovenian communists emphasised the unitarian aspect much more than the nationalist aspect. It is interesting that the secretary of the Presidency of the CCLC of Slovenia Franc Šetinc ascribed the aspirations for “cohabitation” exclusively to unitarianism. In view of the numerous discussions on the significance of “cohabitation” in Yugoslavia, such a standpoint could merely come across as scandalous outside of Slovenia.<sup>37</sup>

The recordings of the discussion reveal, on the one hand, the “Slovenian” fear of unitarianism, while on the other hand the participants in the debate

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, pp. 19, 20.

<sup>37</sup> Marjan Kunej, “O idejni problematiki aktualnih razprav o slovenskem jeziku, Pravi smisel in pomen”, *Komunist*, 5 February 1982, p. 3.

were also critical of the Slovenian sensitivity with regard to the Serbo-Croatian language as well as the Slovenian provincialism and purism. The president of the CCLC Commission for the Relations Between Nations Jože Smole, for example, believed that the theory of how the Slovenian language was threatened by the Serbo-Croatian language was completely preposterous. Furthermore, he did not find it necessary that every Slovenian in the federal institutions should always speak Slovenian exclusively. He also warned that a certain sort of nationalism nevertheless appeared in Slovenia, related to immigrants as well as to the perception of the economic issues. Furthermore, Smole was most critical of the way in which the Linguistic Tribunal operated: it behaved as if “it wants to be the authority that is already making threats when its viewpoints are not observed”. The president of the CCLC of Slovenia France Popit agreed with this critical evaluation of the Linguistic Tribunal's activities.<sup>38</sup>

The linguistic politics of the Slovenian communist leadership turned out to be unsuccessful. Already a month later (on 22 March 1982), an incident took place in the Cankarjev dom culture and congress centre (the Cankar Hall), which had a strong impact in the Slovenian as well as in the Yugoslav public. What happened, actually? The Linguistic Tribunal prepared a discussion on the public use of language, also attended by Miodrag Bulatović, a Montenegrin writer who lived in Ljubljana. The *Delo* newspaper reported that Bulatović attacked the Tribunal, in Serbo-Croatian, with insults (“inconsequent linguists”). Bulatović reproached the Tribunal with inciting the lowest passions in the readers of its linguistic criticism, and claimed that all the nationalist movements since the beginning of time had resorted to similar methods. The journalist of the *Delo* newspaper added that the (otherwise justified) reaction to the discussion was not well-argued and calm, but rather quite intolerant.<sup>39</sup>

### **Public discussion on Slovenian nationalism in 1982: Slovenian language and immigrants**

It is not as important for us how the incident took place and who insulted whom. What we are interested in are especially the public discussions that followed the bickering in the central Slovenian cultural institution. These, in turn, are not interesting due to the disagreement itself, but because of their different outlooks on the relations between languages. First the Cankar Hall incident was exploited by the Belgrade media – as it was, the dispute was followed by the cameras of the Belgrade television, and critical reports were published by the Ljubljana correspondents of the *Politika* (Slobodan Žikić) and *Politika*

<sup>38</sup> AS 1589/IV, box 472, a. e. 3972, Recordings from the 105<sup>th</sup> session of the Presidency of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Slovenia, 1 February 1982

<sup>39</sup> Marjeta Novak, “Jezikovna vprašanja v razburljivem ozračju”, *Delo*, 24 March 1982, p. 8.

*ekspres* (Aleksandra Pavlevska) newspapers. The *Politika* newspaper wrote that the Slovenian dramatist Ivan Mrak called Bulatović a foreigner and demanded that he spoke Slovenian.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, the editorship of the *Politika ekspres* newspaper, which also painted Bulatović’s remarks in the best light, made a “balanced” assessment that “language can become a very fruitful ground for nationalist incidents.”<sup>41</sup> Tijanić was somewhat more balanced in the *NIN* magazine: he characterised Bulatović’s provocations as well as Mrak’s reaction as nationalistic and unacceptable, and he placed the quarrel in the Cankar Hall in the context of the language policy in Serbia.<sup>42</sup>

The majority of the public debate in Slovenia took place on the pages of the *Mladina* magazine of the Socialist Youth League of Slovenia, which did not yet enjoy the reputation of an “alternative” medium at that time. The *Mladina* magazine’s editor-in-chief Srečo Zajc primarily attacked what was (according to him) the basic postulate of the Linguistic Tribunal: “The Slovenian language was threatened, and therefore it had to be defended.” Of course, languages and nations cannot be threatened by default – an attacker should be identified. “And they found one: those 200,000 workers who had arrived to Slovenia during the great workforce shortage in order to fill the job vacancies.” The discussions about language (or punk music) were marginal debates that concealed the actual social conflicts. The editor took a clear Marxist standpoint: “Covering up one’s own nationalism with foreign nationalisms is an anti-Marxist, nationalist move, which does not only lead towards isolation within one’s own borders, but also within one’s own narrow-mindedness.”<sup>43</sup> In the same issue, the *Mladina* magazine published Miodrag Bulatović’s defence arguments, showing clearly that as far as this discussion went it would primarily underline the Slovenian nationalism. Bulatović’s arguments might not have been completely clear, but we can at least discern a few basic assumptions: all Yugoslav languages were safe, every language was cared for by everyone in Yugoslavia, and the Slovenian language was not losing ground when it was instead enjoying a well-deserved expansion. Slovenia should ensure that all of its workers’ children could attend kindergartens and schools in their own language. Bulatović especially resented the statements of the Slovenian linguists, claiming that immigrants in Slovenia should be assimilated, as well as their tirades on how the Slovenian language was threatened. In his characteristic style, Bulatović reproached the members of the Tribunal with having “hummingbird brains” and characterised them as linguistic purists, political pettifoggers and manipulators.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Jaša L. Zlobec, “Še in še o jezikovnem razsodišču”, *Mladina*, 8 April 1982, p. 35.

<sup>41</sup> Janez Menart, *Slovenec v Srboslaviji* (Ljubljana: Knjižna zadruga, 2001), p. 75.

<sup>42</sup> Aleksandar Tijanić, “Planiranje jezika”, *NIN*, 4 April 1982, pp. 24, 25.

<sup>43</sup> Srečo Zajc, “Menjava zlata za medenino”, *Mladina*, 15 April 1982, p. 8.

<sup>44</sup> Miodrag Bulatović, “Za resnico, za svobodo...”, *Mladina*, 15 April 1982, pp. 6–8.

The reaction of the Slovenian cultural circles, supported by the Slovenian politics, was almost immediate. Matjaž Kmecl responded personally, as did the Council for Culture with the Presidency of the Republican Conference of the Socialist Alliance of Working People.<sup>45</sup> Rather than criticising Bulatović, Kmecl gave vent to his anger with the editorship of the *Mladina* magazine. He defined the Bulatović incident as well as the sensationalist articles in the Belgrade press as an obvious provocation, a “Sarajevo assassination” that served as a moral excuse for an “unitarian offensive”. Kmecl resolutely rejected the thesis of the *Mladina* magazine's editor, according to which the Linguistic Tribunal argued that the Slovenian language and nation were threatened by the immigrants from the rest of Yugoslavia. Somewhat patronisingly he reproached the editorship of *Mladina* with youth naivety, as their writing mostly supported the “Ljubljana circle of journalists from Belgrade under Bulatović's spiritual leadership”.<sup>46</sup> As expected, the editor stood up to Kmecl. He reminded him that the purpose of the socio-political organisations was to allow for the voicing of different opinions. Should Bulatović truly support unitarianism, then the *Mladina* magazine was right on the mark. As far as unitarianism was concerned, the editor claimed, all that was known was that it existed, but it was completely unclear what it was like and who argued in its favour. “Let's say that Bulatović and the circle of Belgrade correspondents are unitarianists. If that is the case, then they revealed themselves with their publication in the *Mladina* magazine. They were caught red handed, and therefore we have uncovered the corpus delicti of unitarianism.”<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the editor accused Kmecl of using the adjective “youth” in the pejorative sense, and that he threatened the *Mladina* magazine with the leadership of the League of Communists of Slovenia and the Socialist Alliance of Working People of Slovenia.

The sort of the political support that the Linguistic Tribunal enjoyed in Slovenia is attested to by the fact that in the time when the discussions about it were at their peak, Matjaž Kmecl was appointed as the President of the Committee of Culture of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia. The controversy did not end after all the publicity in *Mladina*: instead it spilled into the Yugoslav media space. *Danas*, a Croatian weekly, placed the debate on the Slovenian nationalism in the context of the heated discussions about “cohabitation” and “new” Yugoslavs, i.e. about more than a million of Yugoslav citizens who had opted for Yugoslav affiliation during the population census of 1981.<sup>48</sup> The *Danas* weekly interviewed Kmecl, and he repeated the familiar standpoints. Among other things he claimed that the immigrants to Slovenia were well taken care of in the cultural sense and that they did not live in ghettos.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Mitja Rotovnik, “Sporočila posvetovanja o slovenščini v javnosti”, *Mladina*, 6 May 1982.

<sup>46</sup> Matjaž Kmecl, “Posebna pot Mladine v komunizmu”, *Mladina*, 6 May 1982.

<sup>47</sup> Srečo Zajc, “Spoštovani”, *Mladina*, 6 May 1982.

<sup>48</sup> Jovan Mirlić, “Novi sporovi oko novih Jugoslovena”, *Danas*, 25 May 1982, pp. 4–8.

<sup>49</sup> Braco Zavrnik, “Čudna hajka”, *Danas*, 18 May 1982, pp. 65–66.

In the next issue of the weekly, the *Mladina* journalist and former editor Nikola Damjanić responded to the interview, and he was much harsher than Srečo Zajc. Damjanić had written at length about the national issues in Yugoslavia in the *Mladina* magazine back in 1981. Regarding the dilemmas in connection with the 1981 population census, he clearly argued that the term “Yugoslav” should be used without any quotation marks as an option for nationality.<sup>50</sup> In his open letter, Damjanić criticised Kmecl's opinion on the organised “campaign” of Bulatović and the Belgrade correspondents. He underlined that the statements of the Linguistic Tribunal's members and sympathisers were often unusual, for example the ones about assimilation and how the Serbo-Croatian language was more harmful than English. He found the fact that the cleansing of the Slovenian language coincided with the period of a difficult economic situation suspicious, and doubted Kmecl's claim that there was no fertile ground for nationalism in Slovenia. After all, the same sort of statements had already been used in Kosovo... Furthermore, Damjanić continued in his harsh tone, where had Kmecl found the courage to claim that workers from the other republics had been well taken care of? Where were the institutions and societies where the immigrants allegedly gathered? Was Kmecl thinking of the Officer's Club of the Yugoslav People's Army, the Slamič tavern, or the medical nurses' home, nicknamed Stud Farm? How much did a guest appearance of the Belgrade Opera in Ljubljana mean to these people? Many workers were barely literate, and they lived in resident halls and wooden sheds. It was not unusual, Damjanić concluded, that the immigrants to Jesenice did not demand a special school – the only way to overcome the obstacles separating them from the native population was to integrate their children into the local cultural environment.<sup>51</sup>

Besides the “official” commentators and youth critics, in Slovenia the Cankar Hall incident was also commented on by the nascent cultural opposition, gathered around the (newly established) *Nova revija* magazine. The well-known nonconformist intellectual Taras Kermavner published an open letter to Bulatović in the first issue of the new magazine. Kermavner expressed a clear distance towards the Linguistic Tribunal. He also claimed that he was a zealous opponent of nationalisms (especially the Slovenian nationalism), but that he was at the same time a patriotic Slovenian.<sup>52</sup>

The opinions of Darko Štrajnc, one of the most prominent commentators of the *Mladina* magazine, attested to the fact that the critical attitude towards the

<sup>50</sup> See for example: Nikola Damjanić, “Jugoslovan ali ‘Jugoslovan’”, *Mladina*, 5 February 1981, pp. 14–15.

<sup>51</sup> Nikola Damjanić, “Čudna hajka (broj 13, str. 65)”, *Danas*, 25 May 1982, p. 44.

<sup>52</sup> Taras Kermavner, “Odprto pismo Miodragu Bulatoviću”, *Nova revija* 1, no. 1 (1982), pp. 119–121.

Slovenian “linguistic” nationalism was a part of the *Mladina* magazine's editorial policy. In the summer issue of *Mladina* in 1982, Štrajn summed up the fundamental theses of Zdenka Veselič-Pajk and added a few original ideas about the Slovenian “linguistic Tarzanism”: “The so-called care for the language, forced upon us as a constituent element of our nation, has by no means come to fruition at the 'right moment'. It is not a coincidence that it has allowed for any kind of feeling of endangerment to be reduced to a single common denominator: babbling as such.” Naturally, Štrajn admitted, *Mladina* had contributed to the “scope of the mystical cloud” in connection with the Linguistic Tribunal as well, when it had published Bulatović's defence arguments. Every “corner and pub” resounded with the accusations about how the *Mladina* magazine had sold out to the Serbian nationalism, even though it was completely clear that the Serbian nationalism “scored its points” even without the magazine's services. The bureaucracy that had rekindled the “care for language” in its efforts to more easily extend its reach in Slovenia, started calling upon everyone to keep a lid on their passions after the Cankar Hall incident. “The belligerent national intelligentsia” went even further in its populism than the local bureaucracy wanted it to.<sup>53</sup>

So what does Tarzan have to do with all of this? Edgar Rice Burroughs had come up with Tarzan as a savage who turns out to be the noble Lord Greystoke. Tarzan did not only possess physical strength: he also had the language from the books, which had remained in the cabin after the mob of monkeys had killed his parents, at his command. Tarzan comprehended language “in its perfect grammatical purity”, without the detrimental effects of “economic situations” and “class impurities”. It is not unusual that Tarzan's sweetheart Jane described his face as “unspoiled by debauchery or any low, animalistic passions” – as animal passions were not rampant in nature, but rather in the civilisation. To make matters worse, they ruined the grammar. According to the Tarzan analogy, in the periods of socio-economic stagnation a need surfaces to define the “very essence” of the nations' resilience. “Thus the Slovenian Tarzanism manifests itself as a search for some kind of an original national language, even though it is clear that quite a large number of different national languages appear in a variety of texts from different periods.” Just like Tarzan ruled the monkeys and killed lions and crocodiles, the speakers of the Slovenian language had to go back to the roots that their language had been based on – and annihilate the enemies of Slovenian while they were at it.<sup>54</sup>

The controversies with regard to the Linguistic Tribunal persisted in the autumn as well, although the Linguistic Tribunal stopped “entertaining” the Slovenian public in the newspapers. In September the *Mladina* magazine pu-

<sup>53</sup> Darko Štrajn, “Jezikovni tarzanizem”, *Mladina*, August 1982, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 4.

blished partial shorthand records of the incriminating incident in the Cankar Hall. The *Mladina* editorship decided to publish the records because the controversy always became “topical again, as soon as Slovenians learned the name and surname of at least a single authentic compatriot who rejected the basic principles of the harmony between our nations and nationalities.” The editorship of the *Mladina* magazine was most likely referring to Ivan Mrak, who (which is obvious from the shorthand records) demanded a translator and suggested that Bulatović speak Slovenian. According to the *Mladina* editorship, the fact that Mrak's name had become public knowledge served a double purpose: “For Slovenians, in order to demonstrate how any heresy should be nipped at the bud; and for the members of the other nations, who keep trying to prove that we Slovenians are truly similar to the Germans – in so far as the expulsion of the Turks is concerned.”<sup>55</sup>

The publication of the shorthand minutes concerning the “adventures” in the Cankar Hall did not reveal much that had not already been known. It was true that Bulatović's provocation was intentional. Mrak in fact said what he had been accused of saying. For this article it is especially interesting how Kmecl explained why the name “Linguistic Tribunal” had been chosen: “We have had enough of expert advice, this is a question of our moral attitude to our mother tongue.” Kmecl emphasised expressly that the Linguistic Tribunal had no ambitions “beyond the self-management negotiation”. However, the aforementioned body of the Slovenian Socialist Alliance of Working People had considerable (and open) ambitions to assert itself as a Slovenian moral authority.<sup>56</sup>

Meanwhile, the journalists of the *Mladina* magazine tackled the matter at the other end: they “attacked” Kmecl's statement for the Zagreb *Danas* magazine, claiming that the workers from the other republics, working in Slovenia, did not live in ghettos. The shrewd *Mladina* journalists knew that sheds for workers had existed for many years in Tomačevo, Žale, and Vrhovci. The living standards in the sheds were catastrophic, but increasing numbers of new tenants kept moving in nevertheless. Two years before, the people in charge in the Bežigrad municipality had evicted the sheds in Tomačevo, torn them down immediately, and relocated the inhabitants to the remote single-storey apartment blocks in Črnuče.<sup>57</sup>

Mentioning immigrants in connection with the endangerment of the Slovenian language provoked a response of the sociologist Silva Mežnarić in the Croatian weekly *Danas*. Unlike most other commentators, Silva Mežnarić was very familiar with the issue of workers from the other republics in Slovenia. Between the years 1975 and 1983 she systematically researched the immi-

<sup>55</sup> “Cankarjev dom, konec marca”, *Mladina*, 2 September 1982, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 3, 4.

<sup>57</sup> Vesna Vaupotič, Nikola Damjanić, “Geto je, geta ni...”, *Mladina*, 9 September 1982, pp. 2–4



grants to Slovenia in the context of the Institute of Sociology in Ljubljana and the Research Centre of the Association of Trade Unions of Slovenia.<sup>58</sup> The sociologist reacted especially to the *Danas* interview with Kmecl, in which the journalist as well as the interviewee ingenuously associated immigrants with language. She asked herself what was the relationship between the “immigration policy of a certain republic” and the questions of language. Naturally, it is not necessary to discuss this at the intuitive level, but “at the level of argumentation in a publication” one would nevertheless expect that this connection would be defined more carefully: “Because this is the very crux of the matter, related to common sense.”<sup>59</sup>

Kmecl, the Linguistic Tribunal, as well as others in Yugoslavia kept forgetting that the workers from the other republics were not an unformed national and religious mass: they were Albanians, Montenegrins, Croats, Macedonians, Serbs, and members of the Yugoslav nationalities. The sociologist compared the Slovenian immigration policy with the policy of connecting migrant workers with their homeland. In this case the Yugoslav state supposedly made a big mistake, as it mostly supported the folklore association with the homeland (“frulica i lulica”), but it did not pay any attention either to educating the migrant workers' children in their homeland or to their social mobility. The “identity policy” could therefore not be successful: instead the concrete social problems of immigrants should be addressed on the basis of social sciences.<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless, Silva Mežnarić remained optimistic. It was her opinion that such problems could not arise in case of the internal Yugoslav migrations: the normative system defined migrants as citizens, and, furthermore, Yugoslavia adhered to the principles of brotherhood, unity, and individual self-management responsibility. In this example this means that the immigrants and Slovenians were equally responsible for the development and welfare of Slovenia. Silva Mežnarić claimed that this simple fact was often overlooked: “for the benefit of some very peculiar interests” the population of workers from the other republics was depicted as an “underprivileged” and “marginalized” mass, while Slovenians were shown as a threatened nation. Linguistic disputes are an indicator of the fundamental discord in the society, projected to the level of the language, as many reasons for not “showing the actual hand” exist. The fact that this was a “hot topic” was attested to by a large number of “moralists” on the side of the Slovenian language as well as on the side of the workers from the other republics. Yet none of these “Ljubljana-Belgrade-Maribor-Sarajevo caretakers” asked themselves any of the two basic questions: a) what price would in-

<sup>58</sup> Silva Mežnarić, “Bosanci”, *A kuda idu Slovenci nedeljom?* (Ljubljana: KRT, 1986), p. 12.

<sup>59</sup> Silva Mežnarić, “Frulica i lulica, a domovina praznica”, *Danas*, 8 June 1982, pp. 42, 43.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*.

dividual people pay due to the manner in which the issue was addressed; and b) what was the social price that a republic with two million inhabitants would pay due to the intensive immigration into a relatively confined geographical, economic, and symbolic space.<sup>61</sup>

## Conclusion

The main thesis of the contribution can be illustrated with a reference to the apologetic publicist work, written by the Slovenian historian Janko Pleterški in 1985, where he underlined the “nations – Yugoslavia – revolution” triangle as the basis for the existence of the socialist Yugoslavia.<sup>62</sup> If Pleterški saw the essence of Yugoslavia in the aforementioned triangle, then we can, on the other hand, identify three points that the discussions about the Slovenian nationalism attempted to address at the beginning of the 1980s: Yugoslavia – Slovenian language – immigrants from the other republics. In the background of this issue – we could call it the Slovenian literary and cultural complex – the political and economic discussions revolved around three axes: workers' self-management – republic/federation – developed/underdeveloped. The literary-cultural and political-economic complexes were intertwined inseparably in a multinational and federal state, which was ideologically based on Marxism. The dominant ideology (in its various versions) addressed the national question merely in its socio-economic context. The solving (or management) of the national question in Yugoslavia depended on the success of the Yugoslav socialism.

### **Eine Debatte über das Sprachgericht 1982: Die Wahrnehmung der slowenischen Sprache und „jugoslawische“ Zuzügler Anfang der 1980er Jahre**

#### **Zusammenfassung**

In diesem Artikel ist von einer öffentlichen Debatte über das Institut Sprachgerichtshof nach einem Zwischenfall im Kultur- und Kongresszentrum Cankarjev dom in Ljubljana am 22. März 1982 die Rede. Die erste öffentliche panjugoslawische Debatte über den Charakter des slowenischen Nationalismus in den 1980er Jahren steht im Zusammenhang mit dem Problem des Gebrauchs der slowenischen Sprache und der Stellung der Zuzügler, die aus anderen jugoslawischen Teilrepubliken in die Sozialistische Republik Slowenien zugezogen waren. Daraus entstand eine gefährliche Mischung sprachlicher, kultureller, wirtschaftlicher und politischer Unstimmigkeiten.

<sup>61</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>62</sup> Janko Pleterški, *Narodi, Jugoslavija, revolucija* (Ljubljana: Komunist, 1986), p. 3.

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