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RESEARCH ARTICLES

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A 'PRAGMATIC WIND OF CHANGE': THE TRANSFORMATION AND POLITICAL POTENTIAL OF THE COMMUNIST SUCCESSOR PARTIES IN SLOVENIA AND CROATIA

A b s t r a c t

The fall of communism and the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia did not lead to the inevitable disintegration of the communist parties functioning there. However, the parties' adaptation strategies and relevance on the emerging national party scenes of the former Yugoslav republics differed considerably. It was the decision of the delegations of the Slovenian and Croatian communists to leave the League of Communists of Yugoslavia at the League's 14th Congress that caused its imminent collapse, as well as that of the federal state. The Slovenian communists entered their new country's first competitive elections under the modified name of the League of Communists of Slovenia—Party of Democratic Renewal and promoted the radical slogan *Evropa zdaj!* (Europe now!). The Croatian communists opted for a similar modification of their name. However, after losing their respective elections, both parties quickly changed their profiles and embraced social-democratic-leaning programmes. Moreover, their defeat at that time did not lead to their marginalisation. In both countries, post-communist groups have maintained their status as relevant parties, forming governments or entering coalition governments several times over the last three decades.

The aim of the paper is to analyse the changes that have taken place in the communist successor parties (CSPs) in Slovenia and Croatia. It focuses particularly on organisational transformations, changes in the political programmes and their importance for the integration of the two countries

with the European Union. Another key objective of the analysis is to determine whether their organisational features, political programmes, etc., can be classified as a legacy or perhaps a relic of the communist past.

K e y w o r d s: communist successor parties (CSPs), the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, political parties, left-wing political parties, Slovenia, Croatia, post-Yugoslav countries.

INTRODUCTION

The collapse of communism in the countries of Central Europe diametrically changed the position and conditions in which communist groupings operated, questioning their leading role. In the former Yugoslavia's case, the disintegration of the supreme federal party organisation, the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (Savez Komunista Jugoslavije, SKJ), had very dramatic consequences, as it also brought about the disintegration of the federal state. In response to the changes taking place, the hitherto dominant communist parties employed various adaptation strategies to survive in the new conditions, or, as Attila Ágh vividly put it, motivated by the need to reinvent the party and the state.[1]

The objective of the article is to analyse the transformations taking place in the communist successor parties (CSPs) in Slovenia and Croatia. These parties were selected for the analysis as they had the most reformatory position during the crisis and debates on reforms to the federal state taking place in the federal party organisation—the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. From the very beginning of the process of their political transformation they were also the ones closest to the European left. The article focuses particularly on the change in their programme profile and organisational changes aligning them with Western European left-wing groupings. An important question in this context is that of the impact of political transfers influenced by or modelled on their sister social democratic parties from Western Europe. The analysis also seeks to determine whether any of their organisational or programme characteristics etc., can be classified as a kind of legacy, or perhaps relic, of the communist past, and if so which ones. The article employs a comparative analysis and process tracing,[2]

[1] A. Agh, 'The Europeanization of Social Democracy in East Central Europe', *Europäische Politik* 4, 2004, p. 7.

[2] See: D. Beach and R.B. Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods. Foundation and Guidelines. Second Edition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), pp. 2–3, 11–14.

with the aim of tracking the cause-effect mechanisms between events, in this case illustrating the changes taking place in successor parties. The research was based on analysis of the subject literature and party documents, especially programmes, manifestos, and statutes.

The article is structured as follows. The first section briefly analyses models of possible change in post-communist parties, with an important part of the analysis concentrating on the role played in this process by the Western European left-wing sister parties and their associated political foundations. The second section deals with the collapse of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia and the reported strategies for reform at the time, when the Slovenian and Croatian communists took the most progressive position. In the next two sections the author concentrates on analysing of the changes that have taken place in the CSPs in Slovenia and Croatia, describing both their position in the national party scenes and the policy and organisational transfers from Transnational Party Actors (TPA). I also try to determine whether some of the existing regulations in both CSPs can be classified as a legacy of the communist past. The final section summarises the findings of the research.

MODELS OF CHANGES IN POST-COMMUNIST PARTIES

Studies carried out by Herbert Kitschelt and John Ishiyama in the 1990s demonstrated the fundamental importance for the democratisation process of the nature and legacy of the communist regime[3] as well as the duration and scope of transformation of the communist party—accelerated by its loss of power in the first free elections. Also crucial, and a closely related phenomenon in Central and Eastern European (CEE) states, is Europeanisation. These factors also affect the later shape of the country's party scene.[4] Milada Anna Vachudova showed that such changes taking place swiftly in a communist party also make it easier and quicker to secure a lasting party-wide consensus concerning the direction of further economic and political reforms.[5] Victory of anti-liberal or nationalist

[3] J. Ishiyama, 'Strange Bedfellows: Explaining Political Cooperation between Communist Successor Parties and Nationalists in Eastern Europe', *Nations and Nationalism* 4: 1, 1998, p. 65.

[4] D. Dolenec, *Democratic Institutions and Authoritarian Rule in Southeast Europe* (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2013), p. 45.

[5] M.A. Vachudova, 'Tempered by the EU? Political Parties and Party Systems before and after Accession', *Journal of European Public Policy* 25: 6, 2008, p. 868.

groupings, on the other hand, results in very high potential costs of rejecting such reforms.[6]

Seeking differences in the trajectories of development of post--communist parties themselves, meanwhile, scholars have highlighted the type of regime in which they functioned. The best-known typology is that of Kitschelt, who distinguished three possible types, from the most oppressive—patrimonial communism, via bureaucratic-authoritarian communism, to national consensus communism, the most open type, 'where levels of contestation and interest articulation were permitted, and there was a degree of bureaucratic professionalization'.[7] Summarising Kitschelt's research, John Ishiyama wrote that '[…] the features of previous organizational legacies vitally affected the character of political party development, and hence explain to a large extent the different organizational trajectories followed by the CSPs'.[8] Furthermore, as Ishiyama and previously Samuel Huntington[9] emphasised, an important role in plotting post-communist parties' course in the transformation process is also played by the fact of which party faction is leading them. They might represent the democratic reform wing, oriented towards complete opening of the party, that of liberals, seeking moderate, controlled change, or the 'standpatters' faction of hardliners or dogmatists sticking to the Marxist orthodoxy.[10]

András Bozóki and John Ishiyama divide CSPs into two main types: unreformed groupings adhering to the communist orthodoxy (such as the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia) and reformed ones which cast off the communist ideology and transformed into social democratic parties. The latter group are often referred to as 'pragmatic-reform parties'.[11] In the post-Yugoslav states, this was how the successor parties from Slovenia and Croatia changed their profiles. As Bozóki and Ishiyama also emphasise, however, sometimes such changes are not consistent. They therefore describe some of the

[6] F. Schimmelfenning, 'Strategic Calculation and International Socialization: Membership Incentives, Party Constellation, and Sustained Compliance in Central and Eastern Europe', *International Organizations* 59: 4, 2005, pp. 835–36.

[7] Ishiyama, *Strange Bedfellows*, p. 67.

[8] Idem, *A Typology of Communist Successor Parties. An Overview*, in A. Bozóki, J. Ishiyama, eds, *The Communist Successor Parties of Central and Eastern Europe* (New York: M. E. Sharp, 2002), p. 278.

[9] See: S. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), pp. 121–23.

[10] J. Ishiyama, 'Europeanization and the Communist Successor Parties in Post--Communist Politics', *Politics & Policy* 34: 1, 2006, p. 16.

[11] A. Bozóki and J.T. Ishiyama, 'Introduction and Theoretical Framework', in A. Bozóki, J.T. Ishiyama, eds, *The Communist Successor*, pp. 6–7.

positions of groupings with communist origins as *transmuted*, as the pressure to make changes often leads them to abandon their left-wing orientation and shift to a nationalist anti-Western right position.[12] Yet this marriage is only ostensibly surprising, because, as such parties have noted, nationalism is a 'modern ideological alternative to communism, which in Eastern Europe is also historically anti--capitalist and anti-west'.[13] In the countries of the former Yugoslavia, such positions were occupied in the 1990s by the Socialist Party of Serbia (Socijalistička partija Srbije, SPS) and, in Montenegro, the Democratic Party of Socialists (Demokratska partija socijalista, DPS).

The first key factor enabling the CSPs in Slovenia and Croatian to transform rapidly, cut ties with the past and adopt the profiles of social democratic parties was the fact that their political regimes were classified as the third, most open type—national consensus communism. The remaining post-Yugoslav republics, meanwhile, were included in the first, most oppressive type—patrimonial communism.[14] Moreover, both parties in the decisive period of the late 1980s, when the reforms of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia and the future of the federal state were at stake, were ruled by the democratic reform wing. This was visible both during discussions on reforms, which are explored below, and in the extraordinary adjourned SKJ congress. In Croatia, however, it was by no means so self-evident and expected owing to the removal from the local party organisation of liberal activists during the so-called Croatian Spring in 1971.[15]

An important role in the process of changing the profiles of so--called pragmatic-reform CSPs, meaning those open to change and supporting democratisation of party and state activity, was played by their Western European left-wing sister parties and associated political foundations. Dorota Dakowska highlights the importance of such foundations in this process, calling them 'agents of change'.[16] The widespread practice of banning funding of domestic groupings by foreign parties made it beneficial for CEE parties struggling with a lack of various resources to form ties with such entities. Party foundations,

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., p. 6.

[14] Ibid., p. 7.

[15] V. Stojarová, 'Legacy of Communist and Socialist Parties', in: eadem and P. Emerson, eds, *Party Politics in the Western Balkans* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 28.

[16] D. Dakowska, 'Beyond Conditionality: EU Enlargement, European Party Federations and the Transnational Activity of German Political Foundations', *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 3: 2, 2002, p. 287.

such as the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), associated with the German SPD, and the Swedish Olof Palme International Center, offered domestic parties various training, substantive support with work on programme documents, but also help organising election campaigns as well as some technical and material assistance.[17] Collaboration with foundations therefore constituted a significant channel of political-intellectual transfers (transfers of ideas and values), but also of political and material support (transfer of funds).[18] It also made it possible to establish relations with politicians from the foreign sister parties participating in these training programmes or seminars.

The European integration process also brought with it stronger institutionalisation of relations between domestic parties and so-called transnational party actors (TPA), meaning political internationals and later also transnational parties. For some time, TPAs were wary of post-communist groupings.[19] Although a large number of CSPs began to identify with and develop similar programmes to the parties of the Western socialist or social-democratic left, significant elements connecting them to the past were their members, partly inherited infrastructure (e.g. the buildings where the headquarters of central or local party organisations were located), organisational structure or part of the electorate. On the other hand, it was in these cases that external recognition (legitimisation) played a significant role in emphasising the break with the communist past, offering a kind of 'badge of approval'.[20] An important role in the integration of CSPs was played by the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity (EFDS), established in 1993 and with ties to both the Socialist International (SI) and the Party of European Socialists (PES). Its founding was in

[17] See also: G. Pridham, 'The European Union, Democratic Conditionality and Transnational Party Linkages. The Case of Eastern Europe', in: J. Gruel, ed., *Democracy without Borders. Transnationalization and Conditionality in New Democracies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 69; G. Delsoldato, 'Eastward Enlargement by the European Union and Transnational Parties', *International Political Science Review* 23: 3, 2002, p. 281; D. Dakowska, *Beyond Conditionality*, p. 281; idem, 'German Political Foundations. Transnational Party go-betweens in the EU Enlargement Process', in W. Kaiser, P. Starie, eds, *Transnational European Union. Towards a Common Political Space* (London and New York: Routledge), p. 159.

[18] See: Dakowska, *Beyond*, p. 281; idem, *German*, p. 154.

[19] G. Pridham, *External Influence on Party Development and Transnational Party Cooperation: The Case of Post-Communist Europe. Paper for the Political Studies Association—UK 50th Annual Conference 10–13 April* (London, 2000), p. 18.

[20] T. Haughton and M. Rybář, 'A Tool in the Toolbox: Assessing the Impact of EU Membership on Party Politics in Slovakia', in T. Haughton, ed., *Party Politics in Central and Eastern Europe. Does EU Membership Matter?* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 128.

a sense the political bequest of former SI president Willy Brandt. Among its tasks was developing common adaptation strategies for the CSPs, which had previously been a contentious issue. A key role in these initiatives was also played by political foundations, including the FES, which endeavoured to convince foreign actors of the credibility of the social democratic reforms carried out by CSPs and intensify their mutual contacts.[21] It is not surprising that groupings classified as 'pragmatic-reform parties' sought relations with TPAs, because 'organizations tend to model themselves on similar organizations that they perceive to be more legitimate and successful'.[22] In this case, domestic ex-communist parties were keen to find or jointly develop solutions helping them to improve their electoral results, with parties' main objective continuing to be finding a strategy assuring them electoral success and/or seeking solutions minimising electoral failures. A common influence mechanism that we can identify in such cooperation was 'the contagion effect, involving copying the behaviour of successful parties'.[23] It is therefore often challenging to pinpoint the impact of these relations and the transfers (political or organisational) made by CSPs. They seldom result from direct pressure. In the case of post-Yugoslav states, TPAs' direct pressure on parties of the post-communist and new left concerned introduction of quotas for women or setting up internal women's organisations,[24] but the parties from Slovenia and Croatia were not affected by this demand, as they had swiftly implemented such regulations. Most frequently, however, transfers take the form of external inspiration or 'lesson drawing'.[25] 'Imported' policies, of course, must also be adapted to the local context, which plays a limiting role.[26]

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[21] See: Dakowska, *German*, p. 160, 163.

[22] W.E. Paterson and J. Sloam, 'Learning from the West: Policy Transfer and Political Parties', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 21: 1, 2005, p. 42.

[23] A. Gauja, 'Policy Transfer, Contagion Effects and Intra-Party Reform', *Policy Studies* 37: 5, 2016, p. 473.

[24] D. Mikucka-Wójtowicz and J. Wojnicki, 'How and Why Have Domestic Parties Learned from Abroad? The Europeanization of Communist Successor Parties in Selected Post-Yugoslav Countries', *Problems of Post-Communism* 68: 1, 2021, pp. 36–37.

[25] M. Zaborowski, 'Westernizing the East: External Influences in Post-Communist Transformation of Eastern and Central Europe', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 21: 1, 2005, p. 30.

[26] See: D.P. Dolowitz and D. Marsh, 'Learning from Abroad: The Role of Policy Transfer in Contemporary Policymaking. Governance', *An International Journal of Policy and Administration* 13: 1, 2000, p. 12, D.P. Dolowitz and D. Marsh, 'The Future of Policy Transfer Research', *Political Studies Review* 10: 3, 2012, p. 344.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE LEAGUE OF COMMUNISTS OF YUGOSLAVIA: STRATEGIES FOR REFORM

As Vladimir Goati, a leading scholar of parties and party systems, rightly noted at the time of the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia,

> all the most important events in the history of our state, from 1941 to contemporary times (the national liberation struggle, conflict with Cominform, the beginnings of socialist self-management etc.) were inextricably linked to the activity of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. […] One can therefore safely say that writing the history of Yugoslavia in this period largely meant writing the history of the SKJ.[27]

Researchers today also highlight the League's huge role and squandered political potential.[28] It is therefore hardly surprising that in the 1980s, at a time of a deepening political and economic crisis in the federal state following the death of Tito (May 1980), an important and contentious problem was the question of the reform of the SKJ. At first after the war, the League—until 1952 known as the Communist Party of Yugoslavia—was a uniform, strongly centralised party organisation (until the end of the 1960s, all internal party organs were subordinate to the Central Committee). Later systemic changes and increased federalisation of the state meant that the SKJ was also subject to federalisation, turning into a supreme federal party organisation. As Dejan Jović wrote, summarising these changes, although the SKJ '[…] used the slogan "national in form, socialist in content", increasingly it was becoming the opposite: "socialist in form, national in content"'.[29] During the debates taking place in the 1980s, two completely opposing visions of reforms to the SKJ crystallised. The first was endorsed by Slobodan Milošević, part of the so-called hardline faction of party activists, who in May 1986 was elected as president of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia (CK SKS—Centralni komitet Saveza komunista Srbije). Among Milošević's demands was centralisation of the state, meaning greater powers to the federation at the cost of the republics. He also called for the way decisions were taken by the federal Skupština to change from

[27] V. Goati, *Politička anatomija jugoslovenskog društva* (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1989), p. 85.
[28] See: D. Markovina, *Povijest politika, popularna kultura* (Zagreb: Jesenski i Turk, 2022), pp. 172–86.
[29] D. Jović, 'Uspesi i neuspesi Jugoslavije', *Nedeljnik. Istorija* 12: 15, 2023, p. 7.

the previous consensual method, which was henceforth to be reserved for a small group of the most important constitutional reforms, to a qualified majority system—a move criticised by Slovenia, which feared continually being outvoted. Lastly, he wanted the SKJ itself to be centralised, again acting as a uniform party organisation.[30] As a large-scale study of SKJ members from the late 1980s showed, this vision of reforms was also supported by activists from Montenegro and Kosovo.[31] An alternative vision was presented by the Slovenian communists led by Milan Kučan, and later, from 1989, Ciril Ribičić, who demanded the transformation of Yugoslavia into a confederation and further decentralisation of the party. They argued that the SKJ should be turned into a 'League of leagues' ('Savez saveza'). The other reformist camp within the SKJ was the League of Communists of Croatia (Savez komunista Hrvatske, SKH),[32] which, despite not backing all the Slovenian ideas, agreed with the need for change and democratisation of the system. The SKH, however, was characterised by a clearly marked division into the conservative (Stipe Šuvar) and reform wings. The reformists were victorious only in November 1989, when Ivica Račan became leader of the SKH, and the party subsequently indeed followed a reformist course.

There are several explanations for the fact that it was these two republics and their republic-level representations in the League of Communists that stood out from the rest of the former Yugoslavia. Firstly, in both, the 'local' type of communism was classified as the mildest version—so-called national consensus communism, in which 'the communist elites allowed for a measure of contestation and interest articulation in exchange for compliance with the basic features of the existing system'.[33] The Slovenian case seems particularly interesting in this context. As Danica Fink-Hafner has shown, the political modernisation commenced in the second half of the 1980s encompassed three main factors which ultimately brought about democratic transformation. These were the government's tolerance for numerous peaceful social protests, the influence of mobilisation of new social groups (including farmers, young people, entrepreneurs, religious people and ideological dissidents), ignored by

[30] D. Pauković, 'Posljednji kongres komunista Jugoslavije: Uzroci, tijek i posljedice raspada', *Suvremene teme* 1: 1, 2008, pp. 21–22.

[31] See I. Šiber, 'Istraživanja političkog ponašanja i društvene promjene – jesu li se mogla predvidjeti zbivanja 1990. godine?', *Politička misao* 30: 1, 2000, pp. 105–12.

[32] Ibid., pp. 107–08.

[33] Ishiyama, *A Typology of Communist*, p. 278.

the previous monistic system and making various political demands, and the top-down reform initiated by the old communist elite after the progressives within the party came to power (ZKS).[34] The changing political culture of the governing elite at the time was undoubtedly affected by bottom-up pressure—the demands of the nascent civil society. But the impact of the external zeitgeist—the spread of the so--called third wave of democratisation—should also not be disregarded. In September 1989, despite criticism from Belgrade, amendments to the Slovenian constitution were passed which gave the republic the right to leave the federation. This led to the Serbian government unilaterally deciding on a trading blockade on Slovenian products. In November 1989, both republics decided to carry out free elections, which of course met with accusations of separatism from the Serbian government. It was from this moment that it became increasingly difficult to believe that a consensus on reform to the SKJ was still possible.

Although the crisis intensified in the 1980s, the historian Dragan Markovina points out that a certain ideological conflict was in fact inherent from the outset in the functioning of the state as well as the SKJ itself. The first case involved a clash between 'emancipatory and regressive'[35] visions. Within the SKJ, meanwhile, it was libertarian (progressive) and regressive (dogmatic) elements that clashed.[36] Ultimately, 'an unwillingness to go all the way towards emancipation led to the fall of the party and collapse of Yugoslavia'.[37] An attempt to save the federal party organisation came in the form of the 14th Extraordinary Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, convened in January 1990. This congress, intended to show the unity of the Yugoslav communists and their ability to solve a multifaceted crisis, in fact revealed the true extent of the crisis. It was preceded by congresses of the communist leagues at republic level at which they prepared their positions. The Slovenians demanded free, multi-party elections. Rejecting the Serbian vision of state centralisation and its 'distancing from reforms, the European currents of the time and the idea of a multinational state',[38] as Milan Kučan later explained the decision, the Slovenian delegation left the

[34] D. Fink-Hafner, 'Political Modernization in Slovenia', *The Journal of Communist Studies* 8: 4, 1992, p. 212.
[35] Markovina, *Povijest*, p. 179.
[36] Ibid., pp. 174, 181.
[37] Ibid., p. 199.
[38] Z. Duka, *Račan. Biografija* (Zagreb: Profil, 2005), p. 48.

talks, followed by its Croatian counterpart. The Slovenians' decision was influenced by the fact that all their proposed amendments and reform proposals were voted down, often by a crushing majority.[39] During the debate, a Serbian delegate also accused the members of the Slovenian delegation of knowing very well that their proposals had no chance of acceptance, suggesting that it would be better for them to leave the deliberations, 'allowing us primitives to organise the party as we know how'.[40] An interesting idea for breaking the deadlock, generally overlooked in later analyses, was suggested by some of the delegates from the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina. They proposed dividing the SKJ into a communist and socialist party and making similar splits in the party organisations possible at republic level, as well as establishing ties between these profiled newly created republican organisations.[41] Another option for party reform, suggested by Ivo Družić, a representative of the more conservative wing of the SKH, was to dissolve the SKJ in its existing form and then create a Socialist or Social Democratic Party of Yugoslavia on the basis of the SKJ, Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia (SSRNJ) and League of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia (SSOJ). This party was conceived as operating as a union bringing together party organisations at the republic level.[42] Yet these alternative concepts for reform to the SKJ were also not accepted by the congress delegates.

According to a CIA report from the second half of the 1990s, the congress demonstrated the collapse of the SKJ as a federal party organisation and the crisis of federal leadership. The authors argued that there were no political powers capable of restoring the status of the federation.[43] Analysing the disintegration of the SKJ as well as the later political about-turns of members of the League, Markovina points to a very important issue:

> The crucial question is how and why the Communist Party, which had incredible internal strength, turned into a grouping of people without a moral backbone, opportunists and bureaucrats without vision and passion, who unashamedly fled *en masse* to the victorious nationalist camps, and this despite the presence of a still living large group of partisans.[44]

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[39] Pauković, *Posljenji*, p. 28.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Duka, *Račan*, p. 97.
[42] Pauković, *Posljednji*, p. 27.
[43] Ibid., p. 31.
[44] Markovina, *Povijest*, p. 183.

Another interesting question in this context is whether any references to the communist period appeared—and if so which—in the later functioning of the communist successor parties emerging from the rubble of the SKJ.

POST-COMMUNIST PARTIES ON THE SLOVENIAN AND CROATIAN DOMESTIC PARTY SCENES

After the collapse of the SKJ, the majority of its constituent communist organisations at republic level added a second element to their names, 'party of democratic change/reform', and it was by these names that they participated in the first free elections. The Serbian and Montenegrin communists were the exception. The former changed their name before the elections to the Socialist Party of Serbia, while the latter stood under the unchanged name of the League of Communists of Montenegro. Later, at the 1991 congress, they were renamed as the Democratic Party of Socialists. These were the only two groupings that changed their name (and not immediately their programme profile) to socialist. The successor parties from the remaining post-Yugoslav states renamed themselves as social democratic. Secondly, the SPS and DPS were the only CSPs who managed to hold onto power. The SPS clung on until the late 1990s, while the DPS was the longest--ruling post-communist party not only in the former Yugoslavia, but the whole of Central and Eastern Europe. The socialists remained in power in Montenegro right through to the August 2020 election. In fact, even then, when the DSP entered opposition, it was still the strongest grouping on the party scene, and its electoral defeat was sealed not by the result of the election (in which it secured 35% of votes) but loss of coalition potential.[45] Incidentally, the Slovenian ex-communists had lost power in a similar fashion in 1990. After the elections they dropped the first part of their name, the League of Communists of Slovenia, becoming Social Democratic Renewal (Socialdemokratska prenova).[46] Later, from 1992, they functioned as part of the United List of Social Democrats coalition (Združena lista socialnih demokratov, ZLSD),

[45] D. Mikucka-Wójtowicz, 'Demokratyczny przełom czy autorytarny zwrot? Wpływ trzydziestoletniej dominacji i wyborczej porażki DPS w 2020 roku na proces demokratyzacji w Czarnogórze', *Studia Politologiczne* 73, 2024, p. 200.

[46] L. Cabada, 'Slovenian United List of Social Democrats—Post-Communist or/and Post--Modern Political Parties?', in L. Kopeček, ed., *Trajectories of the Left. Social Democratic and (ex)Communist parties in Contemporary Europe: Between Past and Future* (Prague: Democracy and Culture Studies Centre, 2005), p. 154.

which at the unification congress in May 1993 became a political party.[47] Before the elections in 2004, the party again changed its name, to the Social Democrats (Socialni demokrati, SD).

As for the Croatian communists, a few months before the election, in November 1990, they renamed themselves as the Party of Democratic Reform (Stranka demokratskih promjena). Subsequently, at the second party congress in 1992, they added 'Social Democratic Party of Croatia' (Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske, SDP) as the first part of their name, and a year later dispensed with the previous element, keeping SDP as the abbreviation. The decision to retain the Serbian variant of the word for party (*partija*, rather than the Croatian *stranka*) proved crucial. The SDP's leader at the time, Ivica Račan, felt that this preserved the party's right to be seen as the successor of the SKH.[48] Later, however, the name caused conflict during the SDP's integration, backed by the Socialist International, with the non-communist left-wing grouping SDH (Socijaldemokratska stranka Hrvatske).[49] SDH activists wanted the united left to cut ties with the past and position itself not as ex-communists but as a modern, non-communist grouping.[50] Ultimately, however, the name was not modified, and the SDH was absorbed by the SDP. Despite this merger, a condition of further integration with the SI, it only admitted the SDP in late 1999, by which time the Social Democrats' victory in the impending election was assured. The next idea to amend the name and symbolically underline the break with the communist past (again unfulfilled) appeared after the party's loss in the 2003 elections when, after three years heading a broad pro-democratic left-liberal coalition, they lost power to the HDZ.[51]

The CSPs from Slovenia and Croatia can be seen as pioneers among groupings from the post-Yugoslav communist left switching to a social democratic party profile. As early as December 1989, even before the collapse of the SKJ, the Slovenian communists became the first to embrace the principle of political pluralism, seeing 'competition with other political actors and programmes' as an opportunity to renew their social legitimacy.[52] They were also the first to openly call for

[47] Ibid., p. 156.

[48] A. Vujić, *Hrvatska i ljevica. Prilog socijaldemokratskom gledištu* (Zagreb: Ljevak, 2014), p. 271.

[49] Duka, *Račan*, p. 68.

[50] Vujić, *Hrvatska*, p. 294.

[51] Ibid., p. 272.

[52] D. Vukomanović, *Obnova partijskog pluralizma u Srbiji krajem XX veka*, Institut za političke studije (Beograd, 2010), p. 59.

Yugoslavia's integration with the European Communities. Indeed, the programme with which they entered the first competitive elections in 1990 was titled *Evropa zdaj!* (Europe now!).

The Croatian communists, meanwhile, keen to show their break from the past, at the founding convention of the SDP in November 1990, when the party name was changed, adopted the so-called 'historic declaration'. In this document, SDP activists stressed that, as the successor party to the SKH, they were 'heirs to both the positive and the negative legacy of the former communist organisation'.[53] They cited as the communist party's main achievements above all Yugoslavia's resistance to the two strongest totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century, fascism and Stalinism. On top of this came building a federal state founded on the principle of equality of its constituent nationalities and basing the economy on the principles of socialist self-management, leading to the 'most liberal economic and political system among the socialist states'. They also pointed to Yugoslavia's exceptional position in the international arena, obtained thanks to a policy of non-alignment and creation of a movement of non-aligned states.[54] At the same time, significantly in the context of the process of democratic transformation beginning at the time, they apologised to the victims of the previous system and the party of which they were the heirs. They stressed the 'moral and political' obligation on them to make such a gesture. The document also included calls for the rehabilitation and compensation for people wrongly imprisoned.[55] Asked about the motivations for adopting the declaration, Račan usually responded that it was largely the result of his own evolution and shift towards democratic positions, influenced by the deficits of the previous system observed in the 1980s.[56] Yet not all activists supported the changes. In a protest prior to the SDP founding congress, Stipe Šuvar, the head of the conservative-dogmatic wing of the SKH-SDP, quit the party, arguing in an open letter to the party leaders that its recent policy had been inconsistent, it was organisationally inept, and its programme documents showed that it was no longer a left-wing grouping. Šuvar also maintained that he was not surprised by the exodus of disoriented and disillusioned members

[53] SDP, 'Deklaracija Prve konvencije Stranke Demokratskih Promjena. Zagreb 3.11.1990', in Plećaš, D. (ed.), *Deset godina Socijaldemokratske partije Hrvatske 1990.–2000. Dokumenti* (Zagreb: SDP, 2000), p. 150.

[54] Ibid., pp. 150–51.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Duka, *Račan*, pp. 62–63.

and voters.[57] During a speech at the congress, Račan responded to Šuvar's decisions and criticisms, defending the SDP's evolution towards being a social democratic party. He distanced himself from dogmatism, unitarism and the monism typical of communism, with a hegemonic role for the party, which was still supported by the group of dogmatists. Their supporters, he argued, should follow their own path in a different grouping. Račan emphasised the need for the SDP to follow the zeitgeist and continue the transformation towards a modern Western left, respect for individualism and human rights, democratic rules and the need to introduce electoral competition.[58] Račan explained that his decision to leave deliberations at the 14th SKJ Congress was not intended to break it up, but to 'safeguard [the SKH's] chances of survival in democratic conditions'.[59] He also denied allegations that the SDP had handed power to the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, HDZ), insisting that it had given nothing away, but merely 'restored power to the citizens', to whom it belongs on principle', and it was they who had democratically decided to whom it should be temporarily entrusted.[60] A few years later, in 1997, Šuvar founded the Croatian Socialist Labour Party (Socijalistička radnička partija Hrvatske, SRPH), classified as a radical-left grouping, which is still active, albeit a marginal force.[61]

Indeed, both CSPs experienced a dramatic decline in membership at this time. During the transformation of 1989–90, the number of members of the League of Communists of Slovenia fell from around 125,000 to just 23,000.[62] In Croatia at the same time, the SKH's membership was estimated at 298,000, only around 46,000 of whom remained in the reformed SDP. A much larger number, approx. 97,000, switched to the national-populist HDZ.[63] Ivica Račan's observation is interesting in this context. Asked about the political past and change in political perspective, he responded, 'Regarding the SKJ, both

[57] Ibid., pp. 60–61.

[58] I. Račan, 'Gorvor Ivice Račana na prvoj konvencjij Stranke demokratskih promjena', in D. Plećaš (ed.), *Deset godina*, pp. 139–46.

[59] Ibid., p. 139.

[60] Ibid., p. 143.

[61] The party is currently strongly anti-EU and calling for leaving NATO. See Stojarová, 'Legacy of Communist and Socialist Parties', p. 27; SRP, Izborni program 2020, https://www.srp.hr/izborni-program-socijalisticke-radnicke-partije-hrvatske-srp-pripremljen-za-parlamentarne-izbore-u-srpnju-2020/ (access: 1 May 2024).

[62] D. Fink-Hafner, *Party System Changes and Challenges to Democracy. Slovenia in a Comparative Perspectives* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), p. 172.

[63] P.M. Pickering and M. Baskin, 'What Is to Be Done? Succession from the League of Communists of Croatia', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 41: 2, 2008, p. 528.

Tuđman and I left the same party. Except that I became a democrat and he did not'.[64] Subsequent years brought a further decline amid conflict over the disintegration of the federal state. In 1995, the SDP was officially estimated to have 18–20,000 members.[65] Currently, at the end of 2023, the figure stands at 24,000. This means that the Social Democrats' membership base is almost ten times smaller than that of their main rival, the HDZ, with around 213,000 members according to party estimates.[66]

Both successor parties also recorded defeats in the first free elections, albeit on different scales. In the pre-election period in Slovenia, thirty-five groupings were registered, demonstrating major atomisation of the nascent party scene.[67] The ex-communists secured 17.3% of votes, which represented the best result for an individual party, but they lacked sufficient coalition potential. Crucially, they were also not the only grouping with communist roots. The Liberal Party, deriving from the Socialist Youth League of Slovenia (Zveza socialistične mladine Slovenije, ZSMS),[68] which later in the 1990s became the dominant grouping in Slovenia, won 14.5% of the vote. Meanwhile, the Slovenian Socialist Party (SSS), with roots in the Socialist Alliance of Working People, garnered 5.35%.[69]

Altogether, therefore, parties with roots in the previous regime received more than 37% of votes, but they were unable to form a government.[70] The broad centre-right democratic coalition DEMOS (Demokratična opozicija Slovenije) came to power, with its constituent

[64] Duka, *Račan*, p. 63.

[65] HIDRA, *Političke stranke u Republici Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb, 1995), p. 33.

[66] M. Filipović, *Koliko stranke imaju članova? HDZ sam ima više od cijele oporbe. Pogledajte brojke*, https://n1info.hr/vijesti/kvantiteta-ili-kvaliteta-hdz-sam-ima-vise-clanova-od-svih-oporbenih-stranaka-zajedno-evo-brojki/ (access: 1 May 2024).

[67] Fink-Hafner, *Party System Changes*, p. 162.

[68] This party, like the Slovenian social democrats, modified its name several times. In the 1990 election, is stood as ZSMS-Liberal Party, before being renamed the Liberal-Democratic party, and in 1994, after merging with the Democrats and Greens, Liberal Democracy of Slovenia. In contrast to the social democrats, however, it rapidly and radically after the beginning of the democratic transformation cut ties with the communist past. See: D. Zajc, 'Slovenski parlament – pluralizam i stvaranje koalicija', *Politička misao* 34: 1, 1997, p. 51; I. Lukšić and J. Pikalo, 'Liberalizam u Sloveniji', *Društvena istraživanja* 11: 1, 2002, pp. 100–101.

[69] Cabada, *Slovenian United*, p. 154.

[70] Support for parties with post-communist roots remained high for the next two decades. They usually received a total of more than 35% of votes (the lowest figure was in 2004, at 33%, and the highest in 2000, 48.3%). Their position only really began to weaken starting with the 2011 election (after Borut Pahor's government), when they secured just 10.52% of the vote. In the last election, the figure was as low as 6.69%. Fink-Hafner, *Party System*, p. 164.

parties supported by a total of more than 54% of voters.[71] Like many other similar so-called umbrella coalitions, however, it soon began to disintegrate, and two years later was dissolved.[72] Yet the communists did not entirely lose power: in 1990, former ZKS-SDP leader Milan Kučan became president of the collective head of state, and, after the system change and declaration of independence in 1991, the first president of independent Slovenia. After the next elections, in 1992, the post-communists, then operating as the United List, entered the coalition government formed by the Liberal Party. However, this return proved tumultuous and short-lived. They left the coalition after a crisis associated with the pensions reform pushed by the Liberals and inspired by the ideas of Jeffrey Sachs. The Social Democrats later functioned as junior partner in coalition governments on five more occasions (Table 1) and were the major coalition party between 2008 and 2011. That victory was given to them not so much by voter support as a greater coalition potential than their main rivals, the Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska demokratska stranka, SDS), which received one seat fewer—28 compared to the SD's 29.[73] Nevertheless, the government formed by Borut Pahor was unpopular owing to its rather inept response to the effects of the economic crisis and its neoliberal reforms of the pension system and labour market among other areas.[74] Despite social transfers calculated to keep voters, he did not manage to survive a full term of parliament.[75] Furthermore, the decline in support for the party in the next electoral cycles, and the disillusionment of leftist voters with SD rule had one more long--term outcome. Criticism of the governments led to the formation of a new radical-left grouping—operating firstly as the United Left coalition and later transformed into the Left party—which took away particularly young voters from the Social Democrats. In 2015, the two groupings received six seats each, while in 2018 the SD won ten, one more than the Left. In the most recent cycle, 2022, it secured seven, two more than the Left. However, despite a marked decline in support, the SD is one of two parties (alongside the SDS) which has won parliamentary seats in all electoral cycles to date.

[71] Ibid.

[72] D. Zajc, 'Political Transition and Democracy in Slovenia', 'Croatian International Relations Review', July–December 2000, p. 130.

[73] Fink-Hafner, *Party System*, p. 177.

[74] See: A. Toplišek, 'Between Populism and Socialism: Slovenia's Left Party', in G. Katsambekis and A. Kioupkiolis, eds, *The Populist Radical Left in Europe* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), pp. 73–92.

[75] Fink-Hafner, *Party System*, p. 187.

TABLE 1
Overview of CSPs in Slovenia and Croatia

Party name	Electoral results 1. MPs in first election 2. Best result . (number of MPs) 3. Worst result (number of MPs)	Period in government	Number of party members	Transnational party cooperation: current status in PES [years of entry]
SD (Slovenia)	1. 1990 – 17.1%, 14 MPs 2. 2008 – 30.5%, 29 MPs 3. 2014 – 5.9%, 6 MPs	Major coalition partner 2008–2011 Junior coalition partner: 1992–1996 2000–2004 2013–2014 2014–2018 2018–2020 2022–present	SKS, 1989– –125,000 CSPs – SDP 1990 – 23,000	Full member [1996]
SDP (Croatia)	1. 1990 – 35%, 20 MPs 2. 1992 – 5.4%, 11 MPs 3. 2003 – 22.6%, 32 MPs	Major coalition partner: 2000–2003; 2011–2015	SKH, 1989– –298,000 1991 – 46,000 1995 – 18,000– –20,000 2023 – 24,000	Full member [2004]

The total number of MPs in Slovenia is 90; two seats are reserved for representatives of the Italian and Hungarian minorities. The total number of MPs in Croatia 151; 140 MPs are elected in multi-seat constituencies; eight seats are reserved for national minorities and three for the diaspora.

Sources: Author's own elaboration based on party documents and official electoral reports.

Meanwhile, the Croatian SDP independently gained 35% of votes in the first free elections. However, owing to the unfavourable majority voting system modelled on French solutions, its share of seats was 10% lower.[76] This formula was in fact chosen by the communists, who expected it to be favourable to them because of their extensive and well-functioning local structures. In the next cycle, in 1992, the SDP suffered a crushing defeat, winning just 5.5% of the vote. This drop--in support was caused by two interacting factors. On the one hand, its origin as a CSP in a situation when the main axis of sociopolitical divisions was the communism vs anticommunism conflict. On the other hand, as Mirjana Kasapović points out, the fact that the

[76] D. Mikucka-Wójtowicz, *Demokratyczna transformacja w Serbii i Chorwacji w latach 1990–2010* (Krakow: Libron, 2014), p. 350.

military aggression against Croatia of the so-called third Yugoslavia (the federation of Serbia and Montenegro) meant that the Croatian post-communist left was treated as jointly responsible (indirectly or even directly) for this course of events.[77] In contrast to the Slovenian post-communists, the SDP only managed to return to power in the next decade. In 2000, the party led a victorious broad coalition of left-liberal forces. Despite various crises, this coalition survived until 2003. The SDP then waited almost a decade for its next success. In January 2020, supported by Ivo Josipović's Social Democrats, the party won the presidential election. To date, the SDP has been the main partner in two coalition governments (Table 1). Despite a trend of dwindling support in the last decade, it remains the HDZ's main rival and the strongest opposition party.

THE CSPS' PROGRAMME PROFILE IN SLOVENIA AND CROATIA

Looking at the intensity of changes, we can say that, as in the case of other post-communist left-wing parties in CEE, they took place faster in those that lost the first free elections.[78] It was therefore still largely electoral defeat that was the mother of party change. Analysis of the programmes of the Slovenian and Croatian ex-communists in the 1990s reveals that in the initial period there were still references to the past, such as 'recognising the value of the national-liberation struggle (NOB, narodno oslobodilačka borba)'[79] in the election manifesto of the Slovenian ZLSD from 1996. However, the same document, and even paragraph, also boasts of the party's admittance to the Socialist International. Both CSPs swiftly adopted the main aims and values of Western European social democratic groupings, such as the idea of a social and legal state, social solidarity, protection of multiculturalism, freedom of speech and the press, promotion of sustainable development and environmental protection. But their programme documents also emphasised values that, while characteristic of the Western left, were also guaranteed in the SFRJ period, such as gender equality or free

[77] M. Kasapović, 'Demokratska tranzicija i politicke institucije u Hrvatskoj', *Politička misao* 33: 2–3, 1996, p. 93.

[78] Pickering and Baskin, *What is*, p. 203.

[79] ZLSD, 'Levo zgoraj! Združeni', Ljubljana 1996, p. 3, in P. Lehmann, S. Franzmann, D. Al-Gaddooa, T. Burst, C. Ivanusch, J. Lewandowski, S. Regel, F. Riethmüller, and L. Zehnter, *Manifesto Corpus. Version: 2024-1* (Berlin and Göttingen: WZB Berlin Social Science Center/Göttingen: Institute for Democracy Research (IfDem), 2024).

education (at least to secondary-school level, and at the tertiary stage partly refunded thanks to scholarship systems).[80] Later, however, direct references to the past were increasingly enigmatic, selective and rare. In its electoral programme from 2008, for instance, the Slovenian SD begins a chapter on proposed reforms to the health service by stating that it 'inherited from the former Yugoslavia a relatively good healthcare system, maintained with a high degree of solidarity, whose effects were satisfactory with regard to GDP'.[81] Yet although a similar observation could have been made with regard to the education system, for example, the manifesto contains no such reference.

In one respect, however, the programme of the Slovenian communists did stand out somewhat compared to other post-communist groupings in CEE, and this to some extent explains their decision to cut ties with the past. Until the 1990 election, they used the extremely progressive and unique slogan *Europe now!* (*Evropa zdaj!*), in fact a reference to that used at the congress of the League of Communists of Slovenia from December 1990: *Europe now! With Yugoslavia to Europe* (*Evropa zdaj! Z Jugoslavijo k Evropi*). The programme document from this congress was titled *For a European quality of life* (*Za Evropsko kakovost življenja*), which shows that they had a clearly defined desired direction of change.[82] Nonetheless, although they were in favour of integration in a political and economic sense, they were also sceptical of NATO integration,[83] which is regarded as an essential condition on the path to the EU. Furthermore, despite the 'Euro-enthusiasm' visible in the first programme documents, the ex-communists were also aware that economic integration and the struggle with the economic crisis then taking place in line with IMF guidelines ran counter to significant accomplishments of the socialist past, such as socialist self-management, social ownership and the non-aligned policy.[84] However, they saw retaining several key achievements of socialism as one of their successes in the transformation period. These included accepting a civic definition of the state in the constitution, preserving the principle of a division of church and state, retaining the previous

[80] Združena lista, 'Slovenija je mlada, voli zanjo!', Ljubljana 1992, pp. 105–06, in: P. Lehmann et al., *Manifesto Corpus. Version*; SDP, *Izborni program SDPH. 27 lipnja 1992*, in: Plećaš, ed., *Deset godina*, pp. 262–67.

[81] SD, *Alternativni vladni program Socialnih demokratov 2008–2012 Odgovornost za spremembe Ljubljana, 5. julij 2008*, Ljubljana 2008, p. 57.

[82] See M. Balažic, 'Evropa zdaj', *Teorija in praksa* 39: 4, 2009, pp. 559–78.

[83] Cabada, *Slovenian United*, pp. 156, 162.

[84] S. Lokar, *Primer socijalnih demokrata u Sloveniji*, in: S. Pulig, ed., *Ljevica nakon opovrgnute revolucije* (Zagreb: Jesenski i Turk, 2020), p. 106.

high level of guarantees of the rights of the Italian and Hungarian minorities, protection for women's reproductive rights and the right to trade unions, but also workers' right to participate and to strike.[85] However, as noted by Sonja Lokar (a leading activist in the League of Communists of Slovenia, and from 1990 an important activist in the struggle for women's rights in the region), the Social Democrats' later desire to return to power meant that they 'began to tactically abandon many demands, step by step, surrendering to neoliberalism and moving towards the centre, and in a few tactical questions even leaning towards the right'.[86] A clear political turn took place after the party's third congress in 1997, when Borut Pahor, a supporter of the concept of the third way, was elected party leader.[87] Although adopting this path often initially seems successful, expanding the electorate to more centrist and moderate voters, Maria Snegovaya's research demonstrates that in the long term it results in a blurred party profile and loss of the support of traditional left-wing voters.[88]

A decade later, after Zoran Milanović's election as party leader, the Croatian SDP faced the same scenario. In the second half of the 1990s, however, following unification with the SDH, there was a marked tendency to move towards the centre and gradually dispense with left-wing values.[89] The rule of Milanović and his left-liberal so--called Kukuriku coalition in 2011–15 only sealed this. Although its programme documents continued to include promises to protect workers' and pensioners' rights, the SDP never involved itself in protests organised by the staff of industrial facilities failing as a result of wild privatisation.[90] During Ivica Račan's government, a pension reform based on a Chilean model was passed, and under Zoran Milanović a controversial labour law restricting workers' rights.[91] In fact, as Danijela Dolenec notes, something of a symbolic expression of the SDP cutting ties with its traditional electorate, i.e. workers, and adopting a right-wing identity narrative (and specifically replacing the traditional sociopolitical class conflict with an identity-based one), was the party's election slogan from 1992, *Workers are Croatians*

[85] Ibid., p. 107.
[86] Ibid., p. 108.
[87] Cabada, *Slovenian United*, p. 156.
[88] M. Snegovaya, 'How ex-Communist Left Parties Reformed and Lost', *West European Politics* 45: 4, 2022, p. 719.
[89] D. Markovina, *Jugoslavija u Hrvatskoj (1918–2018) – od euforje do tabua* (Zagreb: Fraktura, 2018), p. 164.
[90] Ibid., p. 165.
[91] Ibid., p. 166.

too.[92] This illustrates a very interesting situation—one in which the party seeks to rid itself both of the 'commie' label (as successor to the SKH) and of a party regarded as pro-Serbian. As Goran Čular points out, in the early 1990s the approach to the former federal state was in fact the most important axis of inter-party competition.[93] Meanwhile, the ongoing war caused by Serbian aggression led the SDP to adopt the identity rhetoric imposed by the HDZ, which was casting itself as the only true defender of Croatian interests.

A key factor resulting in a certain standardisation of the two parties' programmes was their collaboration with sister groupings from Western Europe as well as within Socialist International, and later also the Party of European Socialists (PES), which also helped them to establish relations with parties from other countries. In the initial period, this generally involved a kind of transfer of social democratic values to their party programmes. Acceptance of these then led to the parties' programme profiles becoming increasingly similar to left--wing outfits from the western part of the continent, or, to generalise somewhat, to the European mainstream. These references later also began to relate, in rather general (and sometimes vague) terms, to the process of European integration and EU membership status. Both parties cited this as their overriding objective in international policy. In this context, their party manifestos included calls to achieve European standards in specific sectoral policies or further EU expansion.[94] Later, however, transfers inspired by TPAs again went well beyond integration issues, beginning to concern such issues as protection of LGBT rights, environmental policy and renewable energy sources, or implementation of youth employment mechanisms modelled on the PES-inspired European Youth Guarantee.[95] This cooperation was also the inspiration for the passing in 2014 in Croatia (on the initiative of the SDP) and in 2015 in Slovenia (approved by the SD, albeit prepared by the radical United Left (Združena Levica) coalition, in opposition at the time), of legislation permitting registration of same-sex unions.[96]

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[92] D. Dolenec, 'Zašto SDP-ova vlada nije socijaldemokratska?', *Političe analize* 20, 2014, p. 37.

[93] G. Čular, 'Vrte stranačke kompetencije i razvoj stranačkog sustava', in M. Kasapović, ed., *Hrvatska politika 1990.–2000.* (Zagreb: FPZG, 2001), p. 131.

[94] See D. Mikucka-Wójtowicz, *Europeizacja partii i systemów partyjnych państw postjugosłowiańskich* (Krakow: Libron, 2021), pp. 101–89.

[95] Mikucka-Wójtowicz and Wojnicki, *How and*, p. 35.

[96] Ibid.

ORGANISATIONAL TRANSFERS OF SLOVENIAN AND CROATIAN CSPS

The organisational changes implemented in the two groupings also reveal not so much the influence of the past as transnational party cooperation. As demonstrated by previous research by Dominika Mikucka-Wójtowicz and Jacek Wojnicki, good examples are the establishment of internal organisations within party structures integrating women as well as introduction of quotas for women on electoral lists. A pioneer of such regulations, not only in the former Yugoslavia but the whole of CEE, was the Croatian SDP, which opted to implement quotas as early as 1994. Later, the CSPs and women's organisations in the region were also connected following the inception of the CEE Network for Gender Issues. Although the idea for the network's formation came from local politician Daša Silović (then working at the UN), sister parties provided significant support in its organisation. Meanwhile, the first seminars for women, which the Slovenian ZSLD was unwilling to finance, ultimately took place thanks to the support of the Swedish Olof Palme Foundation.[97] It is not surprising that so much attention was focused on activation of women. The former leader of the Party of European Socialists, Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, stressed that 'gender equality is a keystone of social democracy in Europe [...], because socialism and feminism have always been part of the same fight'.[98] The current leader of the Croatian Social Democrats, Peđa Grbin, argued that without such regulations 'it would be men aged 40 to 50 who would be selected for all party positions'.[99] Later, again modelling themselves on Western left-wing parties, the CSPs began to implement similar regulations for young activists (on SDP lists they must comprise 20% of candidates), and in the last decade also for senior citizens. The SDP introduced such regulations in its statute from 2012, guaranteeing 10% of spots on electoral lists to candidates aged 60 and over.[100]

The Croatian Social Democrats were also the first in the region to introduce direct leadership elections based on the 'one man, one vote'

[97] Ibid., p. 36.

[98] P.R. Rasmussen, 'Together for a Progressive Way Forward', in K. Leaković, ed., *Gender equality* (Zagreb: SDP, 2009), p. 17.

[99] Mikucka-Wójtowicz and Wojnicki, *How and*, p. 36.

[100] Art. No. 30, SDP, *Statut Socijaldemokratske partije Hrvatske usvojen u prosincu 2000* (Zagreb, 2000).

system, inspired, according to some activists, by the British Labour Party.[101] A further interesting solution introduced by the Croatian SDP, rather untypical even for left-wing groupings and also a manifestation of political transfer from TPAs, was the establishment in 2017 (during a large internal party crisis) of a trade union for people employed in the party. The idea of setting up a workers' syndicate was modelled on the practices of Labour in the UK and the German SPD.[102]

TRACES OF THE COMMUNIST PAST…

In the context of the search for traces of the communist past, it is important to note that in the countries of the former Yugoslavia this period was not equated with communism or 'comparable with the so-called "real socialism" in the countries of the Soviet camp. […] the Yugoslav […] regime before the year 1990 is named as "socialist"'. These terminological differences were meant to show that the regime was 'not fully democratic, but it was citizen-friendly'.[103]

The aforementioned references from the so-called 'historic declaration' of the Croatian Social Democrats to the past are important because contemporary researchers of the left from the region criticise post-communist parties for adopting a right-wing narrative about the period of socialism and a certain inability to capitalise on the achievements of the SKJ. In this context, Dejan Jović and Todor Kuljić emphasised particularly the CSPs' lack of reference to Tito's accomplishments, the concept of socialist self-management (in domestic policy) and non-alignment (in foreign policy). Although, as Jović points out, socialist self-management

> […] was not initially a concept of the Yugoslav communists, it was in Yugoslavia that it became the essence of the political system, which the then critical left in the West and the East, as well as North and South, perceived as a significant alternative to two systems—Eastern and Western—in crisis (especially after 1968).[104]

And although today particularly French scholars note that the idea of self-management was an important source of political transfers in

[101] Mikucka-Wójtowicz and Wojnicki, *How and*, p. 37.

[102] D. Mikucka-Wójtowicz, 'The Impact of Europeanization on Internal Party Organizational Dynamics in Selected Post-Yugoslav Countries', *Journal of Balkans and Near East Studies* 21: 2, 2019, p. 133.

[103] Cabada, *Slovenian United*, p. 154.

[104] Jović, *Uspesi*, p. 8.

a broad sense,[105] for CSPs in the post-Yugoslavian states this topic is not spoken about. Where it does appear, this is as vague slogans, such as on the SD website, where the party shows the milestones of development of the Slovenian left.[106] Interestingly, this is true even though many of the premises of self-management and community practices associated with it correspond to the concepts of degrowth, which are increasingly significant among new left-wing parties.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of the transformations of the CSPs in Slovenia and Croatia into social democratic parties reveals not so much the role and affirmation of the communist past as a rapid dissociation from it and the significance in the transformation process of transnational party cooperation. This concerned particularly their left-wing sister parties from Western Europe, but also the Socialist International and the PES, which as supreme organisations offer a good space for exchange of views and establishing inter-party contacts.[107] However, the political transfers caused by these relationships, and consequent increased alignment with the Western left, also had tangible costs. As Fink-Hafner notes, writing about the Slovenian SD, 'The Social Democrats had lost themselves in the "third way", like many European social democratic parties'.[108] This entailed acceptance of economic neoliberalism, and thus shedding some traditional left-wing tenets. The critics of such about-turns rightly pointed out that it is impossible to combine egalitarian aspirations with the demands of a neoliberal economy.[109] A further factor was the evident determination among the CSPs to integrate with the European Union. Anton Vujić, a Croatian activist and scholar of the left, went so far as to state that in the EU integration process, 'the ruling social democratic parties fulfilled all requirements of "entering Europe", treating them as gospel. Yet none of the requirements [of integration], except democracy itself',

[105] See e.g.: C. Samary, *Komunizem v gibanju. Zgodovinski pomen jugoslovanskega samoupravljanja* (Ljubljana: CF, 2017); F. Georgi, *Samoupravljanje u izgradnji – Francuska levica i jugoslovenski 'model' (1948–1981)* (Novi Sad: Akademska Knjiga Novi Sad, 2023).

[106] SD, *Zgodovina. Mejniki več kot 150 let.*, https://socialnidemokrati.si/zgodovina/ (access:10 May 2024).

[107] See: Mikucka-Wójtowicz and Wojnicki, *How and*, pp. 37–38; Cabada, *Slovenian United*, p. 158.

[108] Fink-Hafner, *Party System*, p. 194.

[109] A. Callinicos, *Against the Third Way* (London: Polity 2001), quoted in: Dolenec, *Zašto*, p. 33.

was classically social democratic,[110] but rather neoliberal.[111] These neoliberal about-turns cost the CSPs a section of their voters, but still—to refer to Giovanni Sartori's now classic concept, they are classed as relevant parties—meaning those with coalition or blackmail potential.

As the analysis has shown, in the case of CSPs which, like those from Slovenia and Croatia, quickly adopted a strategy of pragmatic-reform parties, aligning in terms of programme and image with the Western left, it is currently difficult to find references to the communist past. In recent times, more left-wing or even socialist ideas are visible in new parties classified in the radical left, like The Left (Levica) in Slovenia or the Workers Front (Radnička fronta) and We Can! (Možemo!) platform in Croatia. It is the activists from these parties who invoke the ideas of antifascism, demand a departure from the concept of the third way, listing its harmful effects for the left, and call for the introduction of more communitarian practices resembling those functioning in the so-called second Yugoslavia.

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[110] Vujić, *Hrvatska*, p. 323.
[111] Ibid., p. 287.

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