Slovenia: The Early Success Story

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Introduction

This chapter deals with the modern political history of Slovenia. It starts with the last decade of the communist regime and continues to survey the political institutions and their changes and the party politics in Slovenia. In the context of the 1980s, Slovenia was the most developed part of Yugoslavia at a time in which Yugoslavia faced a significant economic and political crisis. With the situation growing increasingly difficult, it became apparent that the structural divergences of the Yugoslav constituent parts were too great to be held together by a single state. Slovenia and Croatia were first to seek independence and with time, other republics followed suit. The dissolution of Yugoslavia was accompanied not only by the democratisation processes and a turn to market based economic systems, but also by a series of protracted conflicts, most notably in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, Slovenia was spared the debilitating effects of a protracted conflict and turned to a virtuous cycle in which economic stability and early consolidation of democracy went hand in hand in producing what was widely considered one of the quintessential transitional success stories. However, the aftermath of the 2008–2009 global crisis substantially destabilised the Slovene economy and in combination of several high-profile political scandals, undermined the party politics, as well. The last few election cycles were dominated by person-based and ephemeral parties, which is a symptom of a loss of trust in the political system. This is a crucial issue that will need to be solved to secure the bright future of Slovene politics.

The Last Days of Communism: Incipient Transition in the 1980s

Slovenia entered the 1980s as one of the eight federative units in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, alongside five other republics (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro) and two autonomous provinces (Vojvodina and Kosovo). Yugoslavia was a very complex political-economic entity, which unified areas with vast differences in productivity, development and institutional history (with centuries of Austro–Hungarian rule in the northwest and centuries of Ottoman rule in the southeast). The adhesive that held these areas together was multifold: a common language project was intended to bring most of the population together (but excluded Slovenes, Macedonians and Albanians), a federal army (Yugoslav People's Army/YPA) which was to defend Yugoslavia mingled the recruits with various cultural backgrounds together, and the ideology of worker self-management

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(samoupravljanje) sought to bring legitimacy to the governing Communist Party.[1] However, these centripetal forces largely depended on a combination of the persona of the President for life Josip Broz Tito, an overall effective growth model and the polarised Cold War foreign political situation. All of these began to unravel in the 1980s, both exposing and exacerbating the unresolved structural instabilities in Yugoslavia.

Tito was a political symbol of mythological proportions, having successfully led the WWII communist resistance and carved out a significant place for Yugoslav exceptionalism in the post-war international arena. Tito is today often considered a controversial political figure, but his crucial role in personalising the Yugoslav regime is indisputable. Marshall Tito died in May 1980 at the age of 87. His death was first met by a wave of pro-Communism, evident in rising Party membership in Slovenia,[2] and the Party continued propagandistically identifying with Tito even after his passing.[3] However, with the cult of personality invested specifically in Tito, the members of the rotating Presidency that replaced him could not hope for the same allure. Whereas Tito was beyond reproach as a political figure, his successors and their policies could be targeted more easily by the media which became increasingly liberal in the mid- to late-1980s, nowhere more so than in Slovenia. The rising tendency of criticism and interpretations uncomfortable to the ruling party was felt in a number of media (*Pavliha, Tribuna, Delo, Nova Revija, Mladina, Radio Študent* etc.). The response of the authorities was sometimes to confiscate all copies of a particular issue or to fire troublesome editors, but it soon became apparent that such actions created considerable backlash, including condemnations of the Association of Socialist Youth of Slovenia, which was itself becoming increasingly critical of the governing structures.[4] The atmosphere that was cultivated was one of increasing lenience to critical media by the Communist Party in Slovenia. However, when the journal Mladina began criticising the federal army, it became evident that this lenience was not to be shared by the YPA. In 1988, Mladina panned the Yugoslav arms trade with the third world and the use of army resources and soldiers to build a villa for the Secretary of Defence Branko Mamula, and divulged a secret document discussing the possibility of a military intervention in Slovenia. This was the last straw and the four persons involved (including the columnist Janez Janša) were brought to trial before a military court. This trial polarised the public opinion with Slovenia increasingly at logger-heads with the federal structures.[5]

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[1] Socialist countries in general claimed they supported a truer democracy than that found in Western pluralist political systems as they embodied the will of the working people, which engendered some conceptual issues. E.g. the 1974 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (the Republics had their own constitutions in line with the Federal Constitution) defined socialist worker self-management democracy as a type of a dictatorship of the proletariat (SRS Constitution, 1974, Chapter 2, Article 4). This definition is certainly a curiosity from the standpoint of political theory as democracy was defined to be dictatorship. The answer to this puzzle is of course the perceived role of the class struggle, as the socialist revolution and the regime it embodies can be considered emancipatory and democratic for workers and at the same time conceptually exclude others by establishing a dominance of the workers' party (for more on the problem of political subject in socialism see Đinđić 1988 and Prpić 2016, 133–157).

[2] See Lusa 2012, 125.

[3] With slogans like „I poslije Tita, Tito" – "Tito even after Tito".

[4] Lusa 2012, 128–132.

[5] Lusa 2012, 179–183; Štih et al. 2008, 508–509; Ramet 2009, 391–393.

In terms of foreign politics, Yugoslavia was in a unique position amongst European socialist countries in that it successfully sought a path between the West and the Warsaw Pact countries. Following the Tito–Stalin split in 1948, Yugoslavia seemed an interesting partner for the West, even though it remained a socialist country. Yugoslavia, uniquely among European socialist countries, remained a member of the IMF throughout the Cold War,[6] and was the first socialist country to formally engage with GATT.[7] This interest in West-led institutions was also a result of the fact that Yugoslavia had a relatively liberalised economy when compared to other socialist countries, somewhat surfing between worker self-management and markets. It also had an important position in the Non-Aligned Movement, joining India and Egypt in denouncing both Western and Soviet imperialism. This evident international importance also contributed to domestic stability of the governing Communist Party. However, with the collapse of communism in Europe in the late 1980s, these external contours also weakened, with the bipolar structure turning into a unipolar one, and with liberalisations in socialist countries becoming the norm, eradicating Yugoslav exceptionalism in the process.

The growth model also visibly suffered in the 1980s, and the governing Party was not able to offer a solution. While Yugoslavia maintained very high (investment led) growth rates throughout the 1970s (some 9% as late as 1979), growth remained sluggish in the 1980s with real GDP contractions in 1983 and post-1987. The government commissioned an expert committee to produce a stabilisation plan in the early 1980s which was supposed to outline the measures needed for recovery, but the measures were never fully implemented and no significant economic shift manifested. These were crisis years for Yugoslavia and the economic structural divergence of its constituent parts became obvious. The unemployment rates among federal units show evidence of an asymmetrical shock. The developed parts of the country maintained low unemployment rates. In the 1980–1987 period, Slovenia (as the most developed and most productive federal unit) maintained it at 1.4–2% climbing to 4.8% only by 1990. In sharp contrast, Kosovo (as the least developed unit) started at 39% in 1980, climbing steadily to 57.8% in 1988. The unemployment of other units mostly reflected the specific levels of development.[8] Socialist Yugoslavia began and ended its 1945–1990 run as a country harbouring deep developmental rifts. Comparing the Gross Social Product per capita as a socialist equivalent to GDP per capita, we can see that Slovenia was continuously the most developed unit, and the developmental differences to the underdeveloped parts of the country only deepened with the passing of decades. In 1952 Kosovo was at

[6] Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were original signatories of the IMF, both members since December 27, 1945, while Poland followed suit very quickly, admitted on January 10, 1946. However, Czechoslovakia ceased to be a member on December 31, 1954 (and readmitted only on September 20, 1990), while Poland exited on March 14, 1950 (readmitted on June 12, 1986). Other socialist countries became members much after the original constitution of the Fund: Romania on December 15, 1972, Hungary on May 6, 1982, Bulgaria on September 25, 1990 and others only at later dates, mostly following the border and statehood reformulations. Yugoslavia was unique among the socialist countries in remaining a member from 1945 to 1992, when its end was already an undeniable fact (IMF 2017).

[7] Some joined GATT soon after, with Yugoslavia being admitted in 1966, Poland in 1967, Romania in 1971 and Hungary in 1973 (Davis–Wilf 2017).

[8] Croatia maintained its unemployment in the 5.7–8.6% in the 1980–1990 period, Serbia proper 15.6–18.9%, Macedonia 21.9–29%, Montenegro 17.5–26.3%, Bosnia-Herzegovina 16.6–24.4% and Vojvodina in the 13.6–16.6% range (Petak 2003).

25.7% of the Slovene product per capita, Bosnia-Herzegovina at 52.6%, Montenegro at 48.5%, Macedonia at 39.2% and Serbia at 56.7%. By 1989, these figures grew even further with Kosovo at 12.6%, Bosnia-Herzegovina at 34.3%, Montenegro at 36.9%, Macedonia at 33.3% and Serbia at 52%. Croatia and Vojvodina stood out as the Croatian output (though weaker) was closest to the Slovene one, starting at 66.7% in 1952 and ending with 64.1% in 1989, and Vojvodina (uniquely) actually demonstrated some catch-up ability starting at 48% in 1952 and ending at 59.6% in 1989.[9] The productivity as measured by social product per worker employed was also far higher in Slovenia than in the underdeveloped parts of Yugoslavia (and growing), with Slovenian figures 31% higher than the Yugoslav average in 1955 and 38% in 1988.[10] At the same time, the management of economy was becoming less centralised starting with the constitutional amendments in 1971 with fiscal decentralisation leading to the public income share of the federal level falling to 21.9% in 1986 (mostly spent on the military, military/veteran pensions and federal administration), with the federal units (six republics and two provinces) having a 28.7% share and local governments having a 37.2%.[11]

These differences manifested latent issues in the structures of the vastly different federal units with different types of economic policies being favoured by different parts of the state. Slovenia and Croatia would benefit from further liberalisation while Serbia favoured a more centralised and protectionist approach. In this, the political and economic interest became intertwined. The 1974 Constitution both enabled a decentralised political solution, with wide-sweeping rights for the federal units and cemented it by preventing a change to this solution in absence of consensus. The differences in interests of specific federal units in the context of an asymmetric economic shock and waning party legitimacy brought about a political crisis. A new populist star was rising in the east of the country, with an "anti-bureaucratic revolution" led by Slobodan Milošević painting the discussion in nationalist tones. Milošević consolidated his power via massive rallies and subversions of governing structures in federal units of Kosovo, Vojvodina and Montenegro.[12] In response to the situation that was rapidly divergent politically, a "Meeting of truth" was planned by Milošević for Ljubljana in December 1989. When it was prevented by Slovene and Croatian authorities, he called for Serbia to boycott Slovene companies, drastically diminishing trade between the two republics.[13] The next step towards solidifying power in Belgrade could have been a constitutional change enabling further power-consolidation by removing the consensus rule and enabling democratic centralism (one-person-one-vote scenario). Democratic centralism could have enabled further centralisation of power along authoritarian lines and the continuation of antiquated development models. This issue became the central question leading up to the fateful 14th Congress of the Communist Party in January 1990.

[9] Gligorov 2004, 15–31.

[10] Croatia was 4% more productive than the Yugoslav average in 1955 and 8% in 1989, Serbia (with Vojvodina and Kosovo) was 7% below average in 1955 and 10% below average in 1989. Industrial production per worker employed also showed a pronounced advantage of Slovenia over the Yugoslav average (29% in 1955 and 26% in 1989), a less pronounced advantage in Croatia (4% in 1955 and 5% in 1989) and underperformance in Serbia (8% below average in 1955 and 2% in 1988) (Sirotković 1993, 7).

[11] Petak 2013, 212–227.

[12] Štih et al. 2008, 509–510; Ramet 2009, 428–453.

[13] Štih et al. 2008, 514.

This Congress would clearly demonstrate the differences between the parties in various republics. At stake was the democratic transformation that could take place in Yugoslavia in recognition of the loss of legitimacy by the Communist Party. Slovene and Croatian communists argued for free multi-party elections and the consensual decision making among the republics, while Milošević argued for a socialist democratic platform with the individual vote and further political centralisation at its basis. This view was supported by the delegates from Serbia, Montenegro, Vojvodina and Kosovo.[14] The Slovene delegates led by Milan Kučan felt marginalised with their suggestions defeated at every turn and have left the Congress. They were supported by the Croatian delegates led by Ivica Račan and the Congress could not continue its work. This essentially meant that the formal political structure of Yugoslavia could not mitigate the economic and political differences that formed and strengthened between the republics. In this precarious political situation, Ante Marković, essentially the last prime minister of Yugoslavia[15] was attempting to stabilise the economic situation and bring the rampant inflation to heel. With help from Jeffrey Sachs, a stabilisation program was formulated, ameliorating inflation but harming output. Market reforms began to be enacted encompassing trade liberalisation and an early privatisation program in 1990 which enabled workers and citizens to purchase stocks at a discount of up to 60%.[16] However, these attempts were occurring at a time of other transformations which sped up the unravelling of Yugoslavia. The first multi-party elections in Slovenia took place in April 1990 and saw a victory of a democratic opposition to communism. In a few months, an independence referendum was held in late December 1990, with an overwhelming majority voting in favour of a sovereign Slovenia. There was still a possibility of a transformation of Yugoslavia into a confederation on the basis of Slovene sovereignty (this was a solution favoured by Slovenia and Croatia[17]), but negotiations in this direction were becoming increasingly difficult. Slovenia formally declared its independence on 25 June 1991, which was followed by the *Ten-Day War* following the YPA intervention on 27 July.[18] The war brought few casualties, compared to the bloody conflicts waged by Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina for their independence. However, it solidified the resolve to secede and underscored the national solidarity within Slovenia, symbolically emphasising its newfound sovereignty.

Political Institutions and Their Changes

All of these changes required a legal basis, starting with a constitution geared towards pluralism and markets. 1989 was the year of the first constitutional changes in preparation for a transition, as the assembly of Socialist Republic of Slovenia began to add amendments to the constitution in September. Even though these amendments were created in a socialist context, the changes were already gearing towards a new system with political pluralism

[14] Pauković 2008, 21–33.
[15] Or formally, the President of the Federal Executive Council.
[16] Zapp 1998, 122–133.
[17] For more on the confederation option see Jović 2007.
[18] Ramet 1993, 869–886; Repe 2017, 194–197.

and democracy recognised as human rights as well as a guarantee of the right to freely form political organisations and trade unions (Amendments IX and XLV) and with an emphasis on the right to secede from Yugoslavia (Amendment X). Further amendments followed in March 1990 with the adjective Socialist formally removed from the name of the republic and September 1990, when the Slovenian Constitution was effectively placed above the Constitution of Yugoslavia (as the amendment XCVI postulated that the federal constitutional elements not aligned with the Constitution of Slovenia are not valid in Slovenia). The amendments continued in the context of an increasing drive towards secession, most important of which was in February 1991, when Amendment XCIX revoked any transfer of sovereignty from Slovenia to Yugoslavia and declared the position of Slovenia towards international organisations and other states to be one of an independent country. Finally, a new Constitution of Slovenia has been ratified by the parliament on 23 December 1991 providing a modern constitutional foundation for a fledgling state.

The key tenets of the political system that was instituted in 1991–1992 has largely remained unchanged to the present day. Slovenia is a parliamentary system with a proportionate electoral law. There is a president, who is directly elected for a period of five years, but the presidential powers are very limited (appointing ambassadors, issuing pardons, nominally leading the armed forces, etc.). The real political power is vested in the government, which forms according to the elections to the lower chamber of the parliament (Državni Zbor – National Assembly), and the distribution of its 90 seats. Its functioning is legally defined by the Law on elections to the National Assembly (adopted in September 1992 and undergoing only minor changes since[19]). Two of these 90 seats are reserved for the Italian and Hungarian national minorities and 88 are distributed via direct elections through a combination of the D'Hondt method on the national level and Droop quota[20] on the level of electoral units. This combination makes the outcome unpredictable for many candidates, producing relatively high rates of alteration from incumbents to new candidates.[21] There is also an upper chamber (Državni Svet – National Council), with 40 seats, of which 22 represent the interests of local communities and 18 represent interest groups like trade unions and employer organisations. Its powers are small and rarely used, in practice contained to requesting the lower chamber to reconsider a piece of legislation. This low level of power of the upper chamber has led to descriptions of the Slovene political structure as a "one-and-a-half" parliamentary system.[22]

[19] A significant change might have happened as a result of a 1996 referendum according to which the voters opted for a two-round majority electoral system. However, the National Assembly ignored this result (despite a Constitutional Court ruling the results to be valid) and opted instead for the 2000 Constitutional reform which also brought a change to the electoral system (Toplak 2006; Hardman s. a.).

[20] A notable minor change has been the institution of the Droop quota in 2000 in place of the Hare quota that was in place since 1992 (see Hardman s. a.). Both are largest remainder methods, requiring a certain number of votes to allocate a seat. The Droop quota is slightly less generous to small parties, but the actual effects of this change in Slovenia would have surely been infinitesimal.

[21] Toplak 2006, 825–831.

[22] See Fink-Hafner 2010, 239–240.

The Constitution has been amended on seven occasions since its ratification. None of these changes were a major change to the political system of Slovenia, although some would have tangible effects. In July 1997, a stipulation heavily restricting the possibility of foreign citizens owning land was significantly relaxed. In July 2000, a 4% electoral threshold was instituted (an increase over the hitherto *de facto* threshold of approximately 3% – stemming from the requirement of a minimum three seat party presence in the National Assembly), while the control of parties over candidates was diminished by instituting an open-list system. In March 2003, Slovenia was preparing for the EU accession and the Constitutional part of these preparations included an explicit possibility of a transfer of some sovereign rights to an international organisation provided a 2/3 majority of the parliament ratified such a treaty, as well as other minor EU related stipulations. A change in June 2004 explicitly recognised equality before the law of the disabled, formulated a general guarantee of pensions as a part of social security and a recognition of the need for a legal incentivisation of gender equality in elections for public positions. In June 2006, the constitution was changed through several stipulations in preparation for a greater regionalisation of Slovenia. In May 2013, the otherwise plentiful referendums were restricted through numerous types of laws which a referendum cannot decide on and a need for a minimum of 20% of all voters to vote against a law for a referendum to be valid. This change also introduced a fiscal rule in the Constitution, with a need for all budgets to be balanced in the mid-run. Finally, in November 2016, a constitutional change recognised the right to potable water and a non-commodity status of water sources.[23]

Generally speaking, much of the Slovene political system was set up in the 1989–1992 period which included the amendments of the socialist constitution of 1974 in preparation for a transition and secession and the institution of a modern constitution and electoral law in 1991–1992. This period was notably successful with Slovenia being praised for its early institution of a very proportionate parliamentary system and elections which were held regularly and without electoral rules being broken.[24] The most significant subsequent changes to the political were the increase of the electoral threshold for parties and restrictions on referendums, both of which could be viewed as measures which increase political stability.

Party Politics and Elections

On the basis of generally sound political institutions, a relatively stable pattern of centre-left domination emerged in the 1990s and early 2000s, but has since been replaced by scandal-ridden and personalised electoral politics. Some important elements seem to be economic as Slovene politics were often in the shadow (or basking in the glow) of economic developments. This section will survey the development of parties and the changing dynamics of Slovene politics since 1990. However, it is useful to keep in mind the macroeconomic context of these developments. Figure 1 shows real GDP growth and inflation and unemployment rates since 1993.

[23] For more on the various changes see www.uradni-list.si/.

[24] Ramet 1993; Boduszyński 2010.

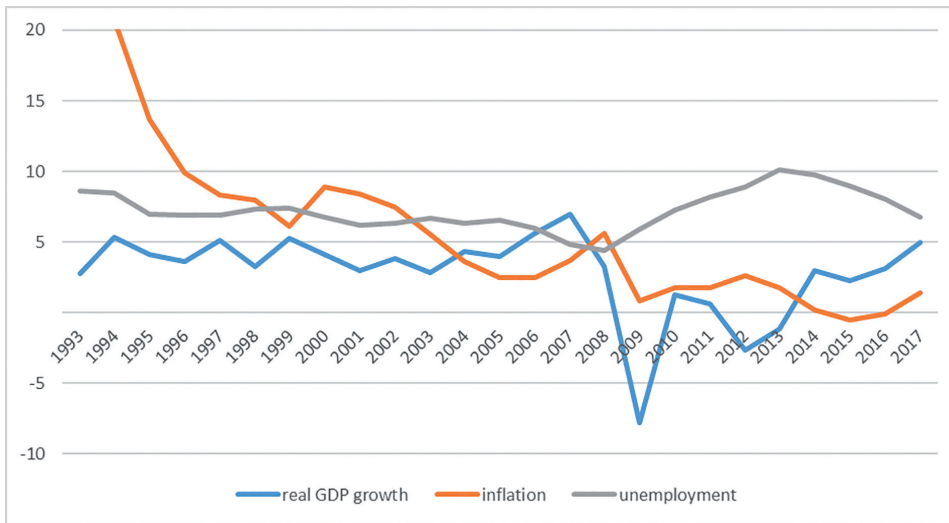

Figure 1.

Macroeconomics of Slovenia

Note: The graph was capped at 20% for better visibility – this obstructs the view of the high inflation in 1993 – at 32%.

Source: IMF 2018

The political transition that occurred in Slovenia was initially organised by the Communist party in coordination with the nascent opposition.[25] The wave of party creation began in the late 1980s with the Communist party allowing it and providing a type of organisational incubator for the earliest political parties that were to spearhead the process of pluralisation.[26] In this wave of new party creation, the most important parties were SKZ (Slovenska kmečka zveza or Slovene Peasant Union), SDZS (Socialdemokratska zveza Slovenije or Social Democratic Union of Slovenia), SDZ (Slovenska Demokratična Zveza or Slovene Democratic Union), SKD (Slovenski Krščanski Demokrati or Slovene Christian Democrats) and Zeleni Slovenije or the Slovene Green Party. These banded with other, smaller parties in the centre-right DEMOS coalition (Democratic Opposition).

The Communist party renamed itself to Zveza komunistov Slovenije – Stranka demokratične prenove (League of Slovene Communists – Party of Democratic Renewal). There were two parties which were newly independent offshoots of the old Communist Party of Slovenia. Socialistična zveza delovnega ljudstva Slovenije or Socialist Union of the Working People of Slovenia changed its name to Socialistična Stranka Slovenije or Socialist Party of Slovenia. Zveza socijalistične mladine Slovenije or Union of the Socialist Youth of Slovenia

[25] This makes it an example of Linz's *ruptforma,* Garton Ash's *revolution* or Huntington's *transplacement* (NORKUS 2012, 89–93).

[26] LUSA 2012, 187–188.

played an increasingly oppositionary role throughout the 1980s and would prove to be a sort of a centre between the right-wing DEMOS and left-wing newly democratic block.

The first pluralist elections in Slovenia were held in April 1990. These were still conducted in the socialist institutional framework, meaning that the newly founded parties were elected to positions in the still valid tri-cameral parliament structure. The three houses of the socialist assembly were the Sociopolitical Chamber, the Chamber of Communes and the Chamber of Associated Labour (each with 80 mandates). Perhaps to the surprise of the left side of the new party field, DEMOS won the field in the Sociopolitical Chamber and provided the effective basis for the first Government of Slovenia headed by Alojz Peterle. This government was in an unenviable position in which it had to resolve the major transition questions of establishing a constitution, privatisation and Slovene independence. In other words, it needed to navigate the triple transition[27] of democratisation, marketisation and statehood. These were controversial issues and they produced disparate results. On the one side, this mandate saw the conclusion of armed conflict, the international recognition of the Slovene independence and the institutionalisation of a stable political system. On the other, the privatisation issue saw a conflict between the Keynesian-minded Minister of Finance Jože Mencinger and the free-market-oriented Jeffrey Sachs, who was invited to consult. Mencinger resigned in protest[28] and the privatisation plan that was eventually implemented was a compromise between free distribution and stock-buying schemes.[29] Another controversial issue of this period was the phenomenon of the erased *(izbrisani).* These were some 25,000 registered citizens from other republics which lived in Slovenia and were unlawfully erased from the population registry in 1992 – and therefore prevented from enjoying various benefits. This issue was to haunt the Slovene state for decades, resolved only recently by compensations to those afflicted. Driven mostly by discord in economic policies, the DEMOS coalition crumbled in mid-1992. A new centre-left coalition was built by Janez Drnovšek and during his mandate, the structure of future parliaments was accepted. The bicameral system with a weak upper house had been a compromise, with the right-wing parties arguing for a pure unicameral arrangement and left-wing parties preferring the bicameral structure.[30]

The first elections in the new political architecture were held in December 1992. A thin lead in the National Assembly was carried by LDS (Liberal Democracy of Slovenia, formerly known as the Union of the Socialist Youth of Slovenia) – with just 22 out of 90 seats.[31] Janez Drnovšek became the prime minister in the second government of independent Slovenia and presided over a very diverse government coalition which also included the Christian Democrats, the United List of Social Democrats (which was the once more renamed former Communist Party), and SDSS (newly renamed Social Democratic Union of Slovenia, which will become the most important right-oriented party in the years to come). This was effectively a grand coalition of most important left and right parties, or a "small political miracle"[32] which had large tasks in front of it, including the finalisation of the privatisation

[27] Offe–Adler 1991, 865–892.
[28] Ramet 1993, 877.
[29] Zapp 1998.
[30] Ramet 1993, 879.
[31] Fink-Hafner 2010, 242.
[32] Gašparič 2016, 22–41.

plan. This mandate was marred by the 1994 Depala Vas Affair in which members of the military arrested a journalist for illegally assembling materials. The effect was the removal of Janez Janša from his post as the Defence Minister, causing his party (SDSS) to quit the coalition. When another party quit the coalition over economic policy issues in 1996, the government was further destabilised just in time for elections in November 1996.[33]

The 1996 elections also produced a win for LDS, with a slightly improved result of seats.[34] The prime minister was once more Janez Drnovšek, but the governing coalition formed along completely different lines with the conservative SLS (Slovenska Ljudska Stranka – Slovene People's Party – this was the rebranded Slovene Peasant Union) and the pensioners' party of DeSUS (Demokratična stranka upokojencev Slovenije – in the intervening years, this party will have become one of the most influential pensioners' parties in Europe). The government experienced a crisis through a notable shift in conservative parties, with the government party SLS merging with the opposition party SKD – and the SLS ministers quitting their posts in the government. The parliament had a negative vote of confidence on the continuation of the Drnovšek Government, and a new government formed under Andrej Bajuk, combining the new SLS + SKD with SDS (renamed from SDSS) into a right/conservative leaning government that was to last for the several brief months before the regular elections in October 2000.[35]

The 2000 elections saw LDS at its apex, with 34/90 seats won in the parliament.[36] Drnovšek formed another government spreading over a large ideological spectrum and combining the conservative SLS with the ZLSD as the successor of the former Communist party and the pensioners' party DeSUS with the youth party SMS.[37] Drnovšek quit his mandate having won the presidential elections in 2002, and Tone Rop assumed leadership of the same coalitional government. In the 12 years preceding the 2004 elections, Drnovšek was displaced only in the 6-month Bajuk period, but the Drnovšek–LDS era was slowly coming to an end. In May 2004, Slovenia had fulfilled its major foreign policy goals of joining EU and NATO, and Drnovšek was now on a less influential function of the President of Slovenia. The European Parliament elections in June 2004 did not bide well for the centre-left LDS as it managed to secure only 2 of the available 7 seats. The parliamentary elections in October indeed brought a reversal, with the lead won by the centre-right SDS with 29 seats compared to 23 for the LDS.[38] Janša became the prime minister and assembled a coalition with NSi (Nova Slovenija, which was formed by a more conservative fraction of SLS + SKD branching off), SLS (SLS + SKD renamed to SLS after NSi formed) and DeSUS. This mandate was a notable success in some areas as it remains the only instance of a full government stability throughout the period between two regular elections and this was also a period of Euro introduction[39] (January 2007) and Schengen area membership (December 2007). However, this mandate was also notable for some

[33] Kustec Lipicer 2016, 39–52.
[34] Fink-Hafner 2010, 242.
[35] Boduszyński 2010, 124; Kustec Lipicer 2016, 43.
[36] Državna volilna komisija 2000.
[37] Štih et al. 2008, 535; Kustec Lipicer 2016, 44.
[38] Državna volilna komisija 2004.
[39] This made Slovenia the first among the ten new members to introduce Euro. The notable economic stability led to the 2007 invitation to OECD, finalised in 2010.

of the most resounding political affairs in Slovene history including the high-level bribes in return for military procurement favouritism uncovered by the Patria affair.[40]

Figure 2 shows the context of the following years as the real GDP collapsed in 2009 and surpassed the 2008 level only in 2017, meaning a loss of at least 8 years of possible economic growth. This alone suggests a volatile political situation. Unsurprising in an era of falling GDP and decreasing tax revenue, the public debt to GDP ratio exploded, nearly quadrupling 2008–2015.

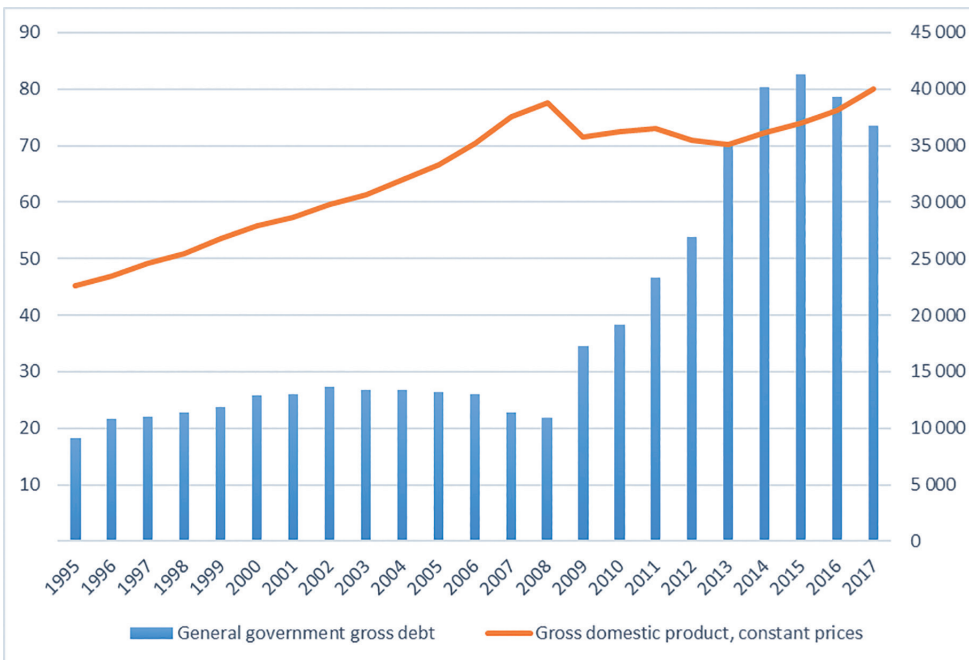

Figure 2.
Real GDP and public debt

Source: IMF 2018; Eurostat 2018 – public debt as a percentage of GDP (left), GDP at constant prices (right)

The 2008 elections brought a very close result with Social Democrats (rebranded ZLSD) winning 29 seats and SDS winning 28. The once mighty LDS fell to only five seats, as even its splinter group Zares overtook it with seven seats.[41] The governing coalition was essentially left-centre oriented and was composed of SD, LDS, Zares and DeSUS with Borut Pahor as Prime Minister. This mandate was primarily influenced by the global crisis which hit Slovenia's economy particularly hard with the 2009 real GDP contraction reaching –7.8%, and the recovery of the next two years being underwhelming with a 1.2% growth

[40] Kustec Lipicer 2016, 45.
[41] Državna volilna komisija 2008.

in 2010 and 0.6% in 2011.[42] This context brought bankruptcies of several large companies and numerous political affairs resulting in ministerial resignations and DeSUS and Zares leaving the governing coalition and early elections announced for December 2011.[43]

The 2008 elections changed the political landscape, but December 2011 brought a fresh upset, with both LDS and Zares not qualifying for parliamentary seats, SD severely dropping to 10 seats and two new parties appearing as forces to reckon with. The Gregor Virant citizens list won 8 seats, while the Zoran Janković list – Positive Slovenia appeared in parliamentary politics to become the largest party with 28 seats. SDS ranked second with 26 seats.[44] These election results heralded a new era in Slovene politics as each further election cycle is to bring another newly organised party identifying with and banking on the political appeal of its leader. The post-2011 period proved particularly politically troublesome with Janković unable to assemble a governing coalition and ceding the mandate to Janša, who formed a centre-right coalition which was to last for little over a year (late January 2012 – March 2013). This mandate was influenced by an adverse economic situation with another real GDP downturn in 2012 at –2.7%, and unemployment reaching its apex having steadily risen from 4.4% in 2008 to 10.1% in 2013.[45] Even more importantly, the Anticorruption Committee issued adverse opinions on both Janša and Janković, fuelling massive protests in Ljubljana and Maribor and causing a vote of no confidence in the Parliament against Prime Minister Janša and the removal of Janković from the party which bore his name.[46] Alenka Bratušek assumed the leadership over Janković's party and successfully formed a coalition with Social Democrats, Virant's list and DeSUS, becoming the first female prime minister of Slovenia in the process. Her government also lasted little over a year, as Janković was voted back into the leadership of the Positive Slovenia party. Bratušek resigned from the position of prime minister in protest, and yet another early elections were announced for July 2014 – and Bratušek prepared by forming her own party – Zavezništvo Alenke Bratušek (ZAB – Alenka Bratušek Alliance).

However, the 2014 elections saw Bratušek barely return to the parliament with the legal minimum of 4 seats. The winner of this election was yet another new party revolving around Miro Cerar (SMC or Miro Cerar Party) which won 36 seats. SDS remained the largest party with 21 seats and the pensioners party of DeSUS achieved a remarkable success with 10 seats while a new left party Združena Levica (United Left) achieved 6 seats. In sharp contrast, LDS once more failed to enter the parliament, as did SLS, while Social Democrats shrunk by 4 further seats.[47] Cerar formed a relatively stable coalition with SD and DeSUS, and enjoyed an improving economic environment with real GDP growth at 3% in 2014, 2.3% in 2015, 3.2% in 2016 and 5% in 2017 and unemployment rates slowly dropping to 6.8% by 2017. Cerar nevertheless called for an early election, boldly moving the election schedule forward by several days.

[42] IMF 2018.
[43] Kustec Lipicer 2016, 45–46.
[44] Državna volilna komisija 2011.
[45] IMF 2018.
[46] Kustec Lipicer 2016, 47–48.
[47] Državna volilna komisija 2014.

The June 2018 elections saw Cerar's seats shrink to 10, while most seats were won by Janša and SDS with 25 seats. Yet another new person-based party appeared as Lista Marjana Šarca (Marijan Šarec List), which won 13 seats and SD returned to 10 seats, with other parties achieving even fewer seats.[48] This left Slovenia in a precarious situation as Janša's unpopularity meant very few parties were prepared to enter into a coalition with the election winner (insufficient for the 46 seats needed for a majority government to form). All other parties had secured relatively low numbers of seats, and this suggested a large (and probably unstable) coalition.

While the political and economic stability of pre-EU Slovenia made it stand out among other post-socialist countries, the last decade saw corruption affairs and adverse economic conditions contribute to an erosion of trust in political elites and the political system. According to Eurobarometer surveys, the trust in the government has plummeted in recent years with the number of Slovene respondents who tend not to trust the government increased substantially from 55% in October 2004 to 88% in May 2014 and then slightly improved to 79% by November 2017. The tendency to distrust the parliament mirrored this trend with 53% in October 2004, growing to 93% in May 2013 and then slightly improving to 78% by November 2017. The trust in political parties was never high, and followed the same negative tendencies with the percentage of respondents tending not to trust parties at 76% in October 2004, reaching a high point at 95% in May 2013 and slightly improving to 87% in November 2017.[49] As we have seen, these tendencies were mirrored by the normalisation of early elections and many triumphs of the one-off new parties[50] with the percentage of votes for new parties increasing dramatically to almost 50% by 2014.[51] With unemployment rates subsiding (Figure 1) and real GDP finally surpassing the 2008 levels in 2017 (Figure 2), the economic outlook is certainly improving. The political instability trends also seem to be improving with the 2018 elections being barely early and the new parties receiving a far smaller portion of votes.

Conclusions

Among the post-socialist countries of Europe, Slovenia certainly stands out as one of the most notable transitional success stories. We have shown the conflux of factors that contributed to this outcome. Firstly, Slovenia was the most economically developed and most export-oriented part of Yugoslavia, and its press was arguably the most free, engaging in open political criticism through the 1980s. Secondly, unlike other former republics, Slovenia managed to avoid a protracted war which would have sapped its resources and burdened its society. Thirdly, its continued economic success prior to the 2008–2009 global crisis with reasonably high growth rates and low unemployment provided the context for relative political stability and legitimacy. Slovenia managed to design a parliamentary democracy with proportionate elections which remained stable and consolidated fairly early, fostering peaceful transitions of power among governing parties. A brief centre-right government

[48] Državna volilna komisija 2018.
[49] Eurobarometer 2018.
[50] Krašovec – Haughton 2014, 48–53.
[51] Kustec Lipicer – Henjak 2015, 84–104.

in the early 1990s was followed by a long period of centre-left domination with Drnovšek's LDS at the helm. This period was followed by two thresholds. In 2004, Slovenia fulfilled its main foreign policy goals by joining EU and NATO, and this was to be followed by further recognitions of its economic stability in its Eurozone and OECD memberships. In 2009, the Slovenian economy spiralled into a recession and its recovery was slow and underwhelming. On the domestic political plane, the 2004–2011 period brought the waning of LDS's political star and an increase of influence of Janša's SDS and Pahor's SD. However, the economic downturn was eventually accompanied by massive political protests in response to various corruption affairs. Consequently, in every election since the crisis, Slovene politics were dominated by ephemeral and person-based parties mostly taking turns on the left side of the political spectre. The right-wing side is still dominated by Janša's SDS, but this party remains delegitimised and isolated. This creates substantial issues for Slovenian politics as the lack of continuity in parliamentary parties point to a significant legitimacy-gap. However, a seeming return to stable growth rates and an ending to the economically lost almost-decade point in the likely direction of an improving political situation. The challenges that remain are an emergence of a centre-left party which can stand the test of elections after having led the government and a reinvention of the centre-right which can move beyond the delegitimising moments of the past.

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