

# The role of the Yugoslav Communist Party leading up to the dissolution of Yugoslavia

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**“I am the leader of one country which has two alphabets, three languages, four religions, five nationalities, six republics, surrounded by seven neighbours, a country in which live eight ethnic minorities.”**

— Josip Broz Tito

## Table of contents

Chapter 1 – Preface .....	4
1.1 Introduction of the topic .....	4
1.2 Research question and sub-questions .....	4
1.3 Demarcation .....	5
1.4 Methodology .....	5
Chapter 2 – Yugoslavia before the communist rule .....	6
2.1 Introduction .....	6
2.2 The foundation and functioning of the first Yugoslav state .....	6
2.3 The communist view on the first Yugoslav state .....	7
2.4 Answering the sub-question “What problems existed in Yugoslavia before communist rule?” ..	8
Chapter 3 – The Communist Party’s rise to power .....	8
3.1 Introduction .....	8
3.2 The Communist Party: from exile to acceptance .....	8
3.3 The rise to power of the Communist Party .....	9
3.4 Answering the sub-question “Did the Communist Party's changed views on state leadership contribute to its ascension to power?” .....	10
Chapter 4 – Yugoslavia under Josip Broz Tito .....	10
4.1 Introduction .....	10
4.2 Political stability under Josip Broz Tito .....	10
4.3 The pitfalls of decentralization .....	12
4.4 Answering the sub-question “Did Josip Broz Tito’s policies destabilize Yugoslavia’s unity?” ....	12
Chapter 5 – Yugoslavia after Tito .....	13
5.1 Introduction .....	13
5.2 The start of Yugoslavia’s political crisis .....	13
5.3 The role of the Communist Party in the economic crisis .....	14
5.4 Answering the sub-question “Did policies of the Communist Party after Tito’s death set Yugoslavia up for dissolution?” .....	15
Chapter 6 – Milošević and the revival of nationalism .....	16
6.1 Introduction .....	16
6.2 The debate on nationalism .....	16
6.3 Milošević’s power trip .....	17
6.4 The rise of nationalism in the other republics .....	18
6.5 Answering the sub-question “Did Milošević’s exploitation of nationalist sentiments push Yugoslavia toward dissolution?” .....	19
Chapter 7 – Constructivism and Yugoslavia’s disintegration .....	20
7.1 Introduction .....	20

7.2 Constructivism .....	20
7.3 Application of constructivism on Yugoslavia’s disintegration .....	20
7.4 Answering the sub-question “Can constructivism be applied to explain the dissolution of Yugoslavia?” .....	22
Chapter 8 – The dissolution of Yugoslavia .....	22
8.1 Introduction.....	22
8.2 The dissolution of Yugoslavia .....	22
8.3 Answering the sub-question “Did communist politicians play a role in the final stages of the dissolution of Yugoslavia?” .....	23
Chapter 9 – Conclusion and discussion .....	24
9.1 Introduction.....	24
9.2 Answering the research question “What was the role of the Yugoslav Communist Party in the dissolution of Yugoslavia” .....	24
9.3 Discussion, societal relevance and further research.....	25
Bibliography.....	26

## **Chapter 1 – Preface**

### **1.1 Introduction of the topic**

When we look at the map of Europe today, we see a patchwork of countries situated in the Western Balkans: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Kosovo, with the last one being only partially recognized as an independent country. There was a time when the people living in these countries took a leap of faith and formed a multi-ethnic state, one that had to be reckoned with by the rest of the world. This state was named Yugoslavia, which existed in various forms from 1918 to 2003. The leaders of Yugoslavia have attempted different state forms and different strategies to unify the Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Bosniaks, Albanians and other ethnic groups, but living together in a common state proved difficult. In the end, the state did not last, and from 1992 onwards, it disintegrated in violent conflict. (Leonard, 2013, p. 1747) The reasons for Yugoslavia's dissolution are manifold and are still topic of scientific debate to this current day. Some mention nationalism as the most important factor for the state's disintegration, while others argue that the influence of foreign powers should not be understated. (Stojanović, 1997, pp. 117, 121) This thesis investigates yet another contributor, namely the leadership of Yugoslavia. Since the Second World War, Yugoslavia was ruled by its Communist Party which has acted under different names, most notably the League of Communists. (Djokić & Ker-Lindsay, 2010, p. 121) Intentionally or unintentionally, their policies must have influenced these events. This thesis will investigate exactly what the policies of the communist leaders were, why they implemented them and how they influenced the disintegration of Yugoslavia. To guide the research in the right direction, this thesis works with a research question, and is supported by several sub-questions. These will be set out in section 1.2.

### **1.2 Research question and sub-questions**

The research question of the thesis sounds:

- What was the role of the Yugoslav Communist Party in the dissolution of Yugoslavia?

The answer to this main research question will be investigated by means of several sub-questions. Each chapter of this thesis will answer one sub-question, giving all chapters an important function within the thesis. The sub-questions that this thesis addresses are the following:

- Were there already problems that could threaten Yugoslavia's existence before the communist rule? (Chapter 2)
- Did the Communist Party's changed views on state leadership contribute to its ascension to power? (Chapter 3)
- Did Josip Broz Tito's policies destabilize Yugoslavia's unity? (Chapter 4)
- Did policies of the Communist Party after Tito's death set Yugoslavia up for dissolution? (Chapter 5)
- Did Milošević's exploitation of nationalist sentiments push Yugoslavia toward dissolution? (Chapter 6)
- Can constructivism be applied to explain the dissolution of Yugoslavia? (Chapter 7)
- Did communist politicians play a role in the final stages of the dissolution of Yugoslavia? (Chapter 8)

### **1.3 Demarcation**

The disintegration of Yugoslavia is a broad topic and is caused by a long list of contributing factors. It is, however, not in the interest of answering the research question to discuss every aspect of Yugoslav history in detail. Therefore, the foundation of Yugoslavia is discussed in short, as well as the history of the first Yugoslav state, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, filtering out only those developments and events which are necessary in understanding the later dissolution. The main focus of the thesis is the era of Communist Party rule over Yugoslavia from 1945 to 1992, because this is when the Communist Party could determine Yugoslavia's political course. When describing the events, the names of two important politicians are omnipresent: Josip Broz Tito and Slobodan Milošević. Both have made their mark on history, and their policy decisions were partly responsible for the state's eventual dissolution. The break-up itself was a tragic event, which culminated in the bloody Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s. (Jović, 2009, p. 1) These conflicts, however, demarcate a distinct period in Yugoslav history, and are not included in the thesis either.

Besides the policies of the Yugoslav Communist Party, there is a myriad of factors that contributed to the dissolution of Yugoslavia. First of all, Yugoslavia was founded as a multi-ethnic state. It was difficult for its leaders to mould all these different identities into one coherent identity. This was one of the problems that the Communist Party had to face as well. (Cohen & Warwick, 2019, p. 1) Although the multi-ethnic character of Yugoslavia is one big contributor to the dissolution of Yugoslavia, this topic does not form the central theme of the thesis, and will mainly be discussed in relation with Communist Party policy. Belan (2011, p. 138) mentions yet two other contributors to Yugoslavia's dissolution. The first is the re-emergence of nationalism, which is practically Yugoslavia's ethnic problem at its most ominous. The second is Yugoslavia's economic downfall, which may have contributed not only to the downfall of Yugoslavia itself, but also led to the re-emergence of nationalism. Here, too, the principle holds that they are not the main topics of the thesis, but are chiefly discussed in relation with policies of the Communist Party. Besides internal factors, there were also external factors which contributed to Yugoslavia's dissolution. These external factors, as Glaurdić (2011, p. 307) mentions, were the fall of the communist bloc, Germany's support for Slovenia and Croatia to secede from Yugoslavia, and British and French efforts to curb these Germany's intentions, to name a few. The involvement of foreign powers is a research topic of its own and will not be covered in this thesis. It forms, however, yet another piece of the complex puzzle that is the break-up of the Yugoslav state.

### **1.4 Methodology**

To explore the role of the Yugoslav Communist Party in the dissolution of Yugoslavia, this thesis builds on the research that has already been conducted by scholars. This thesis uses literature review as a research methodology to combine the existing knowledge and create a comprehensive look at the historical events. Besides the use of historiographic sources this thesis applies international relations theory, most notably constructivism, to put the events in a more theoretical perspective. The databases of Tilburg University, Google Scholar and Internet Archive were consulted to find the corresponding information. On Google Scholar's search engine, the options 'related articles' and 'cited by' were also used to find more relevant articles. The search was limited to English, peer-reviewed articles. For every author was evaluated if they were an authority in their field, and often if the book or article was published by an academic publisher. Search terms in these databases to find information about Yugoslav history included 'Yugoslavia', 'Yugoslavia dissolution', 'Yugoslavia creation', 'Balkan Wars',

'League of Communists', 'Josip Broz Tito', 'Titoism', 'SANU Memorandum', 'Slobodan Milošević' and 'Ustaše'. These searches generated articles written by important scholars on Yugoslav history, such as Sabrina Ramet, Marie-Janine Calic, and Lenard Cohen. Search terms to find political theories to provide the historical events with a theoretical framework included 'constructivism', 'realism' and 'international relations theory', and generated articles by prominent scholars on international relations theory, not least Alexander Wendt, one of the fathers of constructivist theory. The articles that were gathered using these search terms were then critically analysed to answer the aim of the thesis. Different sources are used from various authors, in order to avoid outcome bias.

## **Chapter 2 – Yugoslavia before the communist rule**

### **2.1 Introduction**

To understand some of the policy decisions that the Communist Party took during its reign, it is important to understand what kind of state the communists inherited. Section 2.2 will describe the years before the communist rule, to find out what problems already existed in Yugoslavia. Besides the functioning of the first Yugoslav state, this thesis also delves into the views of the communists on the state of affairs in section 2.3. Did the communists condone the Yugoslav state or did they condemn it? What would they do differently once they would rise to power? An answer to these questions will answer the sub-question for this chapter, namely: "Were there already problems that could threaten Yugoslavia's existence before the communist rule?"

### **2.2 The foundation and functioning of the first Yugoslav state**

In the nineteenth century, the idea of Yugoslavism was taking shape among South Slavic intellectuals. According to this idea, the Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, and originally even the Bulgarians, all belonged to one and the same South Slavic tribe. Not only did they share a common ethnicity, but they spoke similar languages as well. These were the incentives of the south Slavic tribes to come together and form a union. However, before this could be established, the south Slavs had to get rid of two foreign powers which were occupying their lands: the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary. (Djordjević, 1980, pp. 2-3) The Ottoman Empire would be first to face the wrath of the south Slavs. In the First Balkan War of 1912-1913, Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Montenegro formed an alliance to free themselves from Ottoman rule. The outcome was a considerable victory for the Balkan alliance over the Ottoman Empire, which lost almost all of its territories on the European continent. (Hall, 2000, pp. 1, 69) It is important to note, however, that although the Ottoman Empire was defeated, its former occupation had long-lasting consequences. The south Slavic population had been Christian up until that moment, but during Ottoman rule, part of the population converted to Islam, particularly in Bosnia. It is believed that they became Muslims because this gave them greater social status. The Bosnian Muslims, or Bosniaks, would later come to see the Muslim faith as an ethnic distinction, and would receive the status of separate ethnicity in 1969. (Friedman, 2004, pp. 8, 25) This will further complicate ethnic affairs, and in turn contribute to the dissolution of Yugoslavia many decades later, as we will see later in the timeline.

After the Serbs had defeated the Ottomans, they went on to accomplish many more of their expansionist aspirations, adding Kosovo and parts of Macedonia to their territory. Ultimately, the Serbs came into conflict with Austria-Hungary in the Third Balkan War. Curiously, this war quickly transformed into something much bigger when Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip shot the Austrian heir to the throne, Franz Ferdinand: the First World War, but

going into any detail about the course of this war would distract from the aims of this thesis. Important to note is that Austria-Hungary lost the war. The south Slavs came out victorious and went on to form a new state on the ruins of the former dual monarchy. (Pavković, pp. 17, 19-21)

The birth of Yugoslavia - officially the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes – happened on 1 December, 1918, when the Serbs, Croats, Slovenes and other ethnic communities decided to form a common, multi-ethnic state. (Djordjević, 1980, p. 45) Although forming such an ethnically diverse state was a risky undertaking, it was reasoned at the time that this was not a problem, but a solution. For when so many people joined forces, a strong state would emerge that should be reckoned with within Europe. For Serbia, the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes had the additional advantage that finally, all Serbs were united in one and the same state. (Judah, 1997, pp. 136, 139-140)

The Serbs, Croats and Slovenes began to see themselves as one people with one language, who had been divided in the past but had finally corrected this mistake. Despite this initial optimism, the south Slavs soon learned that sharing a common state was easier said than done. The dilemma that the new state faced from the start was - characteristically, as we will see in this thesis – one between centralism and federalism. The voices arguing for a federalized system were most common in Croatia and Slovenia. On the other hand, there were the centralists most prominent in Serbia. The Constitutional Assembly ultimately voted in favour the centralist approach in the Vidovdan Constitution of 28 June 1921, despite heavy opposition from predominantly Croats. (Radan, 2003, p. 138)

After the Vidovdan Constitution of 1921 was in effect, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes became an ill-functioning parliamentary democracy. The fallible system came to an illustrative ending when Puniša Račić of the Montenegrin Radical Party shot five members of the Croatian Peasant Party during a parliamentary session. King Alexander I then dissolved the parliament and turned Yugoslavia into a royal dictatorship on 6 January 1929. His main goal was to strengthen Yugoslav unity through the abolishment of all ethnic and confessional institutions and the suffocation of the free press. However, rather than bringing the people closer together, King Alexander's royal dictatorship further ruptured the country. (Benson, pp. 38, 45-46, 53)

### **2.3 The communist view on the first Yugoslav state**

For the purpose of this research, it is useful to look into the views of the communists on Yugoslav government in the early days of the state's existence, long before they would rise to power after the Second World War. Did the communists envision centralism or federalism for the new-born Yugoslav state? The answer is that the Communist Party was likely the strongest advocate for federalism out of all political parties. After all, the communists were the only ones at the time who argued that not only the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes should be recognized as full-fledged ethnicities, but the Montenegrins, Muslims and Macedonians as well. By constructing even more ethnic divisions, the communists reinforced their standpoint that federalism was indeed the most favourable political system for the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. However, the federalists had not won the vote and the new Vidovdan Constitution was instead designed to mould the many different ethnicities into one South Slavic identity. (Calic, 2019, pp. 76-77, 82)

The Communist Party heavily criticized the kingdom for being ruled by the Serbian bourgeoisie and for being exploited by the Western imperialist powers, forces which both oppressed the other ethnicities. For these reasons, the authorities considered the Communist Party a great threat to their power, and they banned the party in 1921. From then on, the Communist Party had to continue its activities outside of Yugoslavia. During the Communist

Party's Fourth Congress in Dresden in 1928, tellingly, the explicit goal was to dissolve Yugoslavia and found an independent republic for every ethnicity. (Bataković, 2014, pp. 2-3) Even when they were in exile, the communists were still planning for the decentralization or even dissolution of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. However, it must be noted that the Communist Party followed instructions from the Comintern, the overarching organization of all communist parties across the world, and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. In the period between 1924 and 1934, the Comintern rejected King Alexander's royal dictatorship over Yugoslavia, and actively encouraged Slovenia, Croatia and Macedonia to secede. (Štiks, 2018, pp. 43, 45-46)

#### **2.4 Answering the sub-question "What problems existed in Yugoslavia before communist rule?"**

The first Yugoslav state, named the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, was founded in 1918. In three Balkan Wars, the south Slavic tribes defeated the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary and formed their own multi-ethnic state. Right from the start, a debate existed within the Yugoslav state between centralism and federalism. The different ethnic tribes were hesitant to give up their full identity and autonomy in favour of the common state, but in the end, the centralists won the vote. After King Alexander I put an end to the ill-functioning parliamentary democracy and turned it into a royal dictatorship in 1929, he tried to establish unity within Yugoslavia by means of repression, but this further divided the country. From this can be concluded that keeping the multi-ethnic state united was no easy feat, even before the communist rule. Problems that could threaten Yugoslavia's unity already existed, but remarkably, the Communist Party wanted to exploit these problems in order to effectuate the state's dissolution. The Communist Party, which was not yet in power, dismissed the kingdom as a bourgeois creation which oppressed the people living in the state. For these views, the Communist Party was banned in 1921, but it continued activities outside of Yugoslavia. There, the communists went on to plot the dissolution of the state, with the aim to give every ethnic group its own independent republic. These ideas would form the blueprint for communist policies after the Second World War.

### **Chapter 3 – The Communist Party's rise to power**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

As was described in chapter 2 of this thesis, the communists threatened the existence of the first Yugoslav state. As a result, the Communist Party lost popular acceptance and was banned in 1921 by the authorities. Given the fact that the communists were in a beaten position before the Second World War, how could they work their way up to become the ruling party after the war? Section 3.2 will elaborate on the shifting views of the communists, which then led to their comeback on the Yugoslav political stage. Subsequently, section 3.3 describes the communists' ascension to power. This will lead to the answer to the sub-question of chapter 3, namely "Did the Communist Party's changed views on state leadership contribute to its ascension to power?"

#### **3.2 The Communist Party: from exile to acceptance**

In the period between 1924 and 1934, the Communist Party had copied the views of the Comintern regarding Yugoslavia, attempting to realize the dissolution of the 'bourgeois' state by encouraging the different ethnic nationalities to secede. However, the turmoil during the

interbellum made the Comintern suddenly revise its strategy. Fascism was on the rise all throughout Europe, and from 1934 onward, the Comintern began to call for a strong anti-fascist coalition. No longer did the organization envision a break-up of Yugoslavia, but it began to favour federalism instead. The Yugoslav Communist Party obediently adopted the Comintern's new standpoints during its Fourth National Conference in December 1934. During the conference, it was furthermore decided that the Communist Party would establish separate party branches in Slovenia, Croatia and Macedonia. (Štiks, 2018, p. 46) Later in history, these separate party branches would go on to rule the increasingly more autonomous provinces of Yugoslavia.

The Communist Party had been illegal in Yugoslavia since 1921, but regained acceptance after the Comintern encouraged communist parties to seek alliance with other antifascist parties, including the social democrats. This gave the Communist Party the reputation of being a strong voice against fascism. Furthermore, the communists had changed their position on the dissolution of Yugoslavia into multiple independent republics for every ethnicity. Now, they envisioned Yugoslavia to become a federal state, modelled after their great example, the Soviet Union. This effectively meant that the Communist Party was now in favour of the preservation of a unified Yugoslavia, making a name for itself as a somewhat patriotic force, even. On top of all that, the communists offered a hopeful view on the future, aiming to establish a more humane and egalitarian world order. (Calic, 2019, pp. 110, 114-115)

### **3. 3 The rise to power of the Communist Party**

Meanwhile fascism, while never having been very popular in Yugoslavia, revealed its true, ugly face. In Croatia, the Ustaše movement led by Ante Pavelić was a fascist organization which wanted to establish an independent and ethnically pure Croatia. This movement did not gain much popularity, but it did not need to: during the Second World War, Nazi Germany placed the Ustaše movement into power in Croatia. With German and Italian support, the Ustaše regime committed severe atrocities against Serbs, Jews, Roma, Orthodox Christians, and political dissidents. In their concentration camp Jasenovac, at least 120,000 men, women and children were murdered, among them especially Serbs and Jews. (McCormick, 2014, pp. 74, 78, 84, 184) Although this does not directly involve the Communist Party, it would later play a crucial role in the way the communist ruler of Yugoslavia after the Second World War, Josip Broz Tito, handled domestic politics.

Josip Broz Tito, son of a Croat father and a Slovene mother, was born in 1892, in a village named Kumrovec in modern-day Croatia. He had fought as a soldier in the Austria-Hungarian army in the First World War. Thereafter, he moved to Russia, where he witnessed the Russian Revolution and became acquainted with Marxism. Tito was a communist activist in Moscow until 1939, when he finally returned to Zagreb and was given the function of leader of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. There, he led a guerrilla force, calling themselves Partisans, who fought against the Germans and Italians. Tito's main political rival in these days was Dragoljub Mihailović, who was the leader of a similar guerrilla force called the Četniks. Although Tito's Partisans and Mihailović's Četniks were fighting the same enemy, Tito and Mihailović had very different political beliefs. Whereas Tito was a communist, Mihailović was a royalist with ambitions for a Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia. (Rogel, pp. 103-104) The British government had supported Mihailović's Četniks initially, but switched sides to Tito's Partisans. This was remarkable, as Tito championed communism, an ideology which the British normally opposed. However, the British government observed that the Partisans were more effective in counteracting the Germans than the Četniks led by Mihailović, who saw his power-base crumble as a result. Tito's Partisans indeed went on to celebrate great victories over the Italians, who surrendered in 1943, and over the Germans. Because of these great accomplishments, Tito

and the Partisans would come to decide over Yugoslavia's fate after the Second World War. (Lampe, 1996, pp. 213, 216)

### **3.4 Answering the sub-question “Did the Communist Party's changed views on state leadership contribute to its ascension to power?”**

As demonstrated earlier in the thesis, the communists were in a beaten position before the Second World War, being banned by the Yugoslav authorities and having to resume their activities outside the country. During the Second World War, however, the fascists committed severe atrocities against the population. The communists presented themselves as a strong anti-fascist force, wanting to collaborate with other anti-fascist parties. They abandoned their objective to dissolve Yugoslavia, instead opting to transform the Yugoslav political system into Soviet Union-style federalism. These revised positions gained the Communist Party popular acceptance. When the Partisans, a communist guerrilla force led by Josip Broz Tito, proved themselves successful at combatting the Nazi and fascist occupiers, the communists placed themselves in a prime position to inherit the rule over Yugoslavia. From 1945 onwards, it was upon the communists to guide Yugoslavia through the next stage of its existence.

## **Chapter 4 – Yugoslavia under Josip Broz Tito**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Although some of the problems already existed before the communists ruled over Yugoslavia, the Communist Party certainly influenced the course of Yugoslav history, ultimately leading to the state's violent dissolution. Before getting to that point, however, section 4.2 of this thesis describes the relatively peaceful reign of benevolent communist dictator Josip Broz Tito. Section 4.3, on the contrary, sheds a light on the less positive aspects of Tito's rule. These two sections combined will lead us to the answer to chapter 4's sub-question, namely: “Did Josip Broz Tito's policies destabilize Yugoslavia's unity?”

### **4.2 Political stability under Josip Broz Tito**

The Yugoslav population had suffered tremendously during the Second World War. Many people have had their relatives killed by other ethnic groups, which made it difficult for the different ethnicities to continue living together in the same state. The tension was palpable and could already have culminated in ethnic hatred and conflict. Based on these considerations, Tito opined that it was best to leave the past for what it was. He decided to deny people the opportunity to mourn, as to prevent that ethnic groups would blame one another for their crimes. However, this meant that people who had lost relatives in the war were left with open wounds. Even the atrocities committed in the Jasenovac concentration camp by the Ustaše were not remembered as a symbol of Croat atrocities against Serbs, but instead as fascist atrocities against any types of victims. A possible crisis was averted and an era of relative political stability was ushered in. Nevertheless, this did not mean that the frustration about the war had disappeared. On the contrary, the feelings of grief and hatred kept brewing under the surface. Later, once the chance arose, those feelings would re-emerge perhaps like never before. (Judah, 1997, pp. 132-133)

Soon after the communists had assumed power, they also established a new governmental system. In January 1946, they drafted a new constitution in which Yugoslavia would consist of six republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro,

and Macedonia. It had been a priority for the communists that all peoples could live in their own state and that they had a significant degree of self-determination. The communists declared that Yugoslavia was now a multi-ethnic state, in which all ethnicities were equal. (Crampton, 2002, pp. 21-22)

This is a clear departure from previous attempts by King Alexander I to flatten over all differences between the Yugoslav peoples. Tito opined that moulding the different languages and cultures into one would be unfeasible and lead to friction. From then on, cultural diversity was allowed to exist, and multi-ethnicity was promoted as one of the core features of the Yugoslav identity. Effectively, the start of the decentralization process sewed the seeds of division between the republics, as it stimulated them to focus inward and highlight their own cultural features. Increasingly, they would serve their own interests rather than those of the Yugoslav federation. (Wachtel, 1998, pp. 173-174)

There were some discrepancies in the newly-devised system which led to dissatisfaction, most notably in Serbia. Unlike other republics, Serbia was further divided into three: Kosovo and Vojvodina became autonomous regions within Serbia and enjoyed a limited degree of self-rule. Kosovo had an Albanian majority and Vojvodina had a considerable Hungarian minority. By contrast, the Serbian-dominated region in Croatia did not become an autonomous region. The Serbs saw this as proof that Tito had disadvantaged them. (Radan, 2003, pp. 148, 153)

Whether or not people agreed with these borders was of no importance, however, because criticism of Tito's decisions was not allowed. Furthermore, Tito had envisioned these borders as merely marking administrative units within Yugoslavia, meaning that they did not have any further consequences. Although the 1946 Constitution had decided that the republics had the right to self-rule, Tito was effectively Yugoslavia's dictator, and it was Tito who decided what was best for all these 'self-ruling' republics. (Judah, 1997, pp. 136-139)

Certainly, in these times, nationalism and feelings of hatred toward other ethnic groups existed within Yugoslavia. The most notable example of this is the Croatian Spring, which started roughly in 1967, when Croatian linguists openly criticized Yugoslav officials for promoting the Serbian language and discriminating against the Croatian language. What started as a dispute on linguistics developed into ethnic hatred between Croats and Serbs, and a Croatian desire for greater autonomy from the federation. Perhaps, these struggles could already have culminated in civil war or even the dissolution of Yugoslavia, were it not for the strong leader Tito, who would not tolerate such nationalist sentiments and suppressed them by purging the dissenting voices. (Batović, 2017, pp. 72, 81, 213)

Tito's autocratic leadership was the main cause for stability in the period after the Second World War. He initially looked up to Stalin and ruled the country in a Stalinist style, complete with arrests of 'bourgeois' politicians, restrictions on the free press, forced collectivization of farms, and forced industrialization. During the first years of communist rule, heavy industry became the backbone of the Yugoslav economy. (West, 1995, pp. 194-195) After a quarrel between Tito and Stalin, which saw Yugoslavia get expelled from the Communist bloc, Tito chose his own, independent path. Yugoslavia, once a firm ally of the Soviet Union, now positioned itself in between the two ideological blocs. Along the way, Yugoslavia reconstructed its own identity, and the Tito-led federation would become one of the founders of the non-aligned movement in 1961. Economically, too, Yugoslavia would no longer follow the communist Soviet model, but charted its own, more socialist course. Although Yugoslavia was everything but economically stable, it managed to survive for several decades, albeit with considerable financial aid from the West. (Rogel, pp. 104-105)

### **4.3 The pitfalls of decentralization**

Since the foundation of Yugoslavia, the country's leaders had advocated a centralist approach. Even the Communist Party, a staunch supporter of federalism, and at times even dissolution, had tried to strengthen Yugoslav unity during the first two decades of its reign. During the Eighth Congress of the Communist Party in December 1964, however, Tito abandoned this strategy of Yugoslavism, claiming that the system generated "bureaucratic centralism" and "Great Serbian hegemony". Tito was likely influenced by the ideas of his right-hand man and ideologue Edvard Kardelj, who, in his book *The Development of the Slovenian National Question* had written that Slovenia only entered Yugoslavia under the condition that it should benefit the Slovene nation. If in any case it would be more beneficial for Slovenia to secede, it should have the right to do so. Kardelj was the main initiator of a series of decentralizing policies starting from the mid-1960s onward. In 1968 and 1971, amendments to the constitution were made to decentralize both the Communist Party and Yugoslavia itself. (Bataković, 2014, pp. 5-6) On 11 February 1969, the Communist Party granted the republics the right to form their own militias, which Slovenia would use decades later to secede from Yugoslavia. Perhaps, the Communist Party gave the republics more autonomy than they desired at the time. Although the communists had plotted for the dissolution of Yugoslavia before they rose to power, it is unlikely that they still had these intentions once they governed Yugoslavia, because it is counterintuitive that they would choose to destroy their own power base. Yet, the central government continued its policies of decentralization and kept implementing laws that weakened its own authority. Gradually, the republics began to appreciate the freedoms they had received and began to exploit them. In the end, the republics actively steered toward the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Had the central Communist Party not chosen this path of reform, then Yugoslavia may not have broken up as soon or as easily as it did. (Ramet, 2002, p. 6)

Udovicki & Ridgeway (2000, p. 72) state that Tito was aware of the risks that decentralization could pose for Yugoslavia's unity in the long term. Yet, he decided not to act on these inclinations. His propaganda machine was in full force, and one of its core points was that no-one should ever deviate from the course set out by Tito; not even Tito himself. He knew that as long as he lived, Yugoslavia's unity would remain intact. Should things fall apart after his death, others should take the burden on themselves to change Tito's system.

### **4.4 Answering the sub-question "Did Josip Broz Tito's policies destabilize Yugoslavia's unity?"**

The first of Tito's policies that is worth mentioning is related to Yugoslavia's war-torn past. The Second World War saw the Croat Ustaše regime commit severe atrocities against other ethnic groups, most notably the Serbs. This had the potential to cause fierce ethnic hatred and conflict in the aftermath of the Second World War. Instead, Tito chose to flatten over the disagreements in favour of the continued unity of the state. The result was that traumas were suppressed, but these would remain underneath the surface, waiting for the chance to re-emerge. In the short term, however, Tito's policies had stabilized Yugoslavia's unity.

When in power, the communists soon began to realize the plans they had envisioned for Yugoslavia. They drafted a new constitution in 1946, in which Yugoslavia was federalized into six republics and two autonomous regions. The borders between these republics were not drawn according to ethnic boundaries, which would later prove to be one of the causes that accelerated and complicated the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Furthermore, the Serbs felt disadvantaged by this new division, because Serbia was the only republic that was split into three. Later in history, these decisions would turn out to be destabilizing Yugoslavia's unity.

The 1946 constitution marked the start of the extensive decentralization process, but initially, the republics only had authority on paper. In reality, Tito ruled Yugoslavia as a dictatorship. After adopting a Stalinist style during the beginning years of his rule, Tito then developed his own style of government after a fallout with Soviet leader Stalin. This so-called Titoism provided Yugoslavia with a new identity as a socialist and non-aligned country. As Yugoslavia wavered somewhere between the two ideological blocs, it fared relatively well both economically and politically. Yugoslavia's unity was strengthened by Tito's policies in the short term, but at the same time, the decentralization process initiated by Tito and Kardelj threatened Yugoslavia's unity in the long term.

## **Chapter 5 – Yugoslavia after Tito**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Yugoslavia had developed into a strong and unified state during Tito's reign, but after the dictator's death, things began to change, as will be described in section 5.2. Subsequently, section 5.3 will describe how the Communist Party handled the economy after Tito's death. This will lead to the answer to chapter 5's sub-question, namely: "Did policies of the Communist Party after Tito's death set Yugoslavia up for dissolution?"

### **5.2 The start of Yugoslavia's political crisis**

Although things seemed to go fairly well for Yugoslavia in the 1970s and a sense of Yugoslav identity existed among the population (besides a Serbian, Croatian or Slovene identity), the Communist Party did not cease to implement new laws to decentralize the country and put Yugoslav unity to the test. With the 1974 Constitution, the central Communist Party gave away even more of its power, granting the republics the right to veto federal decisions. The republics could also veto decisions by other republics, which caused much frustration. This system still functioned properly as long as there was a strong leader who resolved conflicts between republics as soon as they arose. Tito managed to fulfil this role successfully until his death in May 1980. In the political system he had devised for Yugoslavia after his death, such an arbiter was absent, which meant that conflicts between republics would remain unresolved. Furthermore, the 1974 Constitution granted ordinary citizens political involvement. Tito reportedly devised this new political system because he could not find a proper successor for his position, and instead opted for a system of 'collective leadership'. Thus, Tito has possibly initiated the decentralization process to establish the withering away of the state and have the people take over after his death. (Ramet, 2002, pp. 6, 8-9) This was in accordance with Marxist doctrine, which stated that a dictatorship is required to guide a state through its transition from capitalism to communism. After the transition has been fulfilled, the state becomes superfluous and withers away. (Asirvatham, 1995, p. 155) More concrete, this self-management or collective leadership would mean that workers would co-manage the enterprise or factory for which they worked. These enterprises would function independently from the state. The state itself was no longer centrally led, but consisted of many political institutions which represented a specific region or handled a specific political task. (Djokić & Ker-Lindsay, 2010, p. 144)

After Tito's death, however, it became apparent that this system was not at all feasible. The citizens who became the new local party members often abused their positions to enrich themselves. They were supposed to represent the interests of their fellow citizens, but instead acted as yet another layer of bureaucracy. The general population lost confidence in the state institutions and they had every reason: when Josip Broz Tito died in 1980, he left a Yugoslavia

that had no king, no president, and in fact no powerful central government at all. The most important governmental bodies, such as the state presidency, had a rotating chairmanship. This meant that every year, a different republic was in charge of the state presidency. The state presidency itself had limited authority, as power had been transferred from the central party to the eight regional branches. The problem was that, due to conflicting interests, the eight republics could not work out a common strategy. As a logical consequence, Yugoslav government came to a stalemate. (Ramet, 2002, pp. 7-9)

One explanation for this unwillingness to cooperate was given by Djokić & Ker-Lindsay (2010, p. 145). They write that around the year 1980, many long-serving politicians, including Edvard Kardelj, either died or retired, and were replaced by young politicians. Whereas the old-guard politicians had always been loyal to Tito, the new generation did not have such personal ties to the centre. They often did not wish to be managed by the central government and instead were inclined to make their own political decisions.

At the Twelfth Party Congress in 1982, the ineffectiveness of the new system was discussed. A programme of economic recovery had been formulated during the congress, but due to major political disagreements about what kind of socialist course Yugoslavia should follow, most of the plans were not implemented. The Communist Party would organize several more congresses afterward, none of which would bring about any concrete results. (Magaš, 1993, pp. 95, 99, 101) Likewise, when the Kraigher Commission, an advisory organ for the federal government, came with a proposal for very limited liberalization of the market in 1983, it was heavily criticized for being too far removed from socialist values. Even as inflation kept rising and confidence in the economy was on the decline, no action was taken to change the dysfunctional economic system. (Lampe, 1996, pp. 321-322)

### **5.3 The role of the Communist Party in the economic crisis**

Thanks to socialist planning, Yugoslavia's economy had grown steadily during the first years under communist rule. Under the banner of 'self-management', workers had a voice in the policy of their factories through referendums and they could elect workers' councils. This had initially stimulated production and between 1952 and 1965, Yugoslavia was one of the fastest growing economies in the world. However, the prosperity induced Yugoslav citizens to live above their means, whereas industry could not keep up with the growing demands. The workers were more interested in their personal interests than in those of society, and became demotivated. Furthermore, the truly important managerial decisions were still taken by Yugoslav politicians. The councils which the workers could elect were in fact mostly irrelevant, and the workers demonstrated for higher wages and better working conditions ever more frequently. (Liotta, 2001, pp. 131-132)

Another culprit for the economic downfall was, according to Sekelj (1993, p. 3), once again the 1974 Constitution, as its exaggerated decentralization had also obstructed the functioning of Yugoslavia's unified market. The costs to run one Yugoslav economy were now replaced by the costs to run eight republic economies. To pay for these expenses, the republics made large debts to foreign banks.

West (1995, p. 319) also notes Tito's imprudence as a contributing factor, which West describes as a personal shortcoming of Tito rather than a defect of the communist system. Tito had never been particularly interested in economic affairs, and especially during the later years of his rule, Yugoslavia fell deeply into debt to the international banks.

On top of that came the second oil crisis of 1979, which affected global economy. However, the socialist countries were hit hardest of all. The Yugoslav economy relied on heavy industry, and was as such neither diversified nor adaptive. This meant that in comparison with the economies of capitalist countries, it could not recover as easily from disturbances of the

market. Furthermore, Yugoslav products did not have the quality of Western products, and were therefore competed out of the market. (Calic, 2019, p. 252) As Benson (2001, pp. 133-134) writes, consumer prices rose by 36% per year between 1980 and 1983, and by 67% in 1984. Approximately 25% of Yugoslav families fell below the poverty line in 1984, and there was a shortage of goods like coffee, cooking oil, soap, and petrol. One of the few economic activities that still functioned particularly ‘well’ was the black market.

The problem was that Yugoslavia had gotten stuck somewhere between the failed utopia of Marxism and a post-industrial economy, which the federation was unable to adapt to. In the 1980s, the lowest class constituted 20% of the population, but accounted for only 6.6% of the federation’s wealth. The middle class, which constituted 60% of the population, earned 54.7% of the national income. Then the richest 20% of the population owned 38.7% of Yugoslavia’s wealth, and their share rapidly increased as the economic malaise continued. These numbers may or may not seem shocking at first, but in fact they were very similar to those of Western European countries like France or Great Britain. This meant that the wealth distribution of Yugoslavia, a communist country, was comparable to those of capitalist countries. Because of the economic crisis, income differences further increased, meaning that Yugoslavia drifted further away from communist ideals like a classless society and equal pay for everyone. Could Yugoslavia, ruled by the League of Communists, still be considered a communist country? (Calic, 2019, pp. 267, 282)

#### **5.4 Answering the sub-question “Did policies of the Communist Party after Tito’s death set Yugoslavia up for dissolution?”**

It seems that, as Tito grew older, he gradually prepared Yugoslavia for a future without him. Reportedly, the state was supposed to be governed by the people themselves in a system of ‘collective leadership’ after his death in May 1980. Perhaps, Tito had reckoned that a strong and centralized state was no longer needed and could wither away according to Marxist doctrine. For these purposes, power was transferred from the central Communist Party to the regional party branches, especially after the 1974 Constitution. Now that the republics could determine their own course, disagreements between them arose. The republics were to be supervised by the state presidency, which had a rotating chairmanship, but this effectively meant that no-one was designated as Tito’s successor. The central party could no longer impose its will on the increasingly independent republics, because the regional party branches had the leeway to ignore decrees from the central government.

Because of the indecisiveness of the post-Titoist system, the economic crisis that started around 1979 could not adequately be solved either. The economic downfall was the result of the second oil crisis of 1979, along with the destruction of the unified Yugoslav market as per the 1974 Constitution. Furthermore, the Yugoslav socialist system still relied mostly on heavy industry, which had generated economic growth in the early years of communist government, but could not keep up with the economies of Western capitalist countries in the 1980s. Last but not least, the Communist Party, due to its high expenses, had fallen deeply into debt to foreign banks. The Communist Party was unable to renovate and diversify the Yugoslav economic system, which prolonged the economic misery. At the same time, the wealth distribution among the population was comparable to that of Western capitalist countries, which generated opinions that the Communist Party had failed to live up to the communist ideals. The general population lost confidence in the party officials, which further destabilized Yugoslavia. However, more catastrophe would have to ensue to truly put Yugoslavia on the verge of disintegration.

## **Chapter 6 – Milošević and the revival of nationalism**

### **6.1 Introduction**

As mentioned previously, nationalism is often cited as a contributing factor to the downfall of Yugoslavia. Section 6.2 of this thesis will elaborate on the re-emergence of nationalist tendencies, and section 6.3 will analyse Slobodan Milošević's role in the affairs. Lastly, section 6.4 will describe the reactions of the remaining republics to Milošević's actions. This will then lead to the answer to this chapter's sub-question, namely "Did Milošević's exploitation of nationalist sentiments push Yugoslavia toward dissolution?"

### **6.2 The debate on nationalism**

The new political leaders eased the repressive censorship regulations that Tito had imposed, which enabled public discussion. People were now allowed to criticize their government. (Djokić & Ker-Lindsay, 2010, p. 146) Especially Serbian and Croatian intellectuals wrote about the illegitimacy of Tito's reign over Yugoslavia, which had hardly been possible when Tito was still alive. The intellectuals often argued from nationalist standpoints, trying to prove that the ethnic group to which they belonged was being suppressed by the Yugoslav communist system, and that other ethnic groups were plotting against them. In their works, they emphasized the atrocities that other ethnic groups had committed in the past, implying that they could not live together and that their common state should be dissolved. (Lampe, 1996, p. 6)

Yugoslavia became fixated on the past, in particular the Second World War, and the different republics used history as a stick to beat each other with. Especially the Croatian atrocities in the Jasenovac concentration camp became a matter of conflict. In the Second World War, the Croatian Ustaše government had sided with Nazi Germany, and they had brutally murdered tens of thousands of people in their Jasenovac camp. Now, however, Serbian intellectuals inflated this number to 700,000 Serbs, and even later to 1.1 million, with the aim to prove that Croats were always attempting to genocide Serbs. This created even more hostility between Croats and Serbs, who were now bolstered in their convictions that they did not want to live in the same nation any longer. The League of Communists, and Tito in particular, had previously attempted to erase the war atrocities from the collective memory, but it appeared that this strategy had failed in the long run. Instead, suppressing these memories left many unable to heal from the traumatic experiences. Nationalist politicians managed to play into these long-suppressed emotions using rhetoric to mobilize support. (Goldstein, 1999, pp. 187, 200-201)

On top of debates on Yugoslavia's troubled past came present struggles, especially regarding Kosovo. There, the ethnic Albanian majority had harassed the Serbian minority for years, violating their personal property, their monuments and even their graves. This led many Serbs to flee Kosovo. Between 1961 and 1981, a number of 85,000 Serbs had taken part in the 'exodus'. (Vladislavljević, 2008, pp. 84-86) In the work *Memorandum*, written by members of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the events were exaggerated and even labelled 'genocide'. In an attempt to stir up Serbian nationalism, the writers argued that firm action had to be taken to stop the catastrophe, but they did not stop there. The *SANU Memorandum* also called for restoring Serbian hegemony over Yugoslavia and for taking revenge on other ethnic groups. The ideas by the Serbian intellectuals caused much backlash in Yugoslavia, even from Serbian communists. However, it was exactly these ideas that Slobodan Milošević, the later president of Serbia, would try to realize. (Morus, 2007, pp. 143, 159-160)

### **6.3 Milošević's power trip**

Slobodan Milošević was born on 20 August 1941 in Požarevac, Serbia, as the son of Montenegrin immigrants. Both Milošević's parents committed suicide, tragedies of which one can only guess what effects they had on Milošević's mental state. As he went to the University of Belgrade, Milošević befriended Ivan Stambolić. Ivan was the nephew of the influential Serbian politician Petar Stambolić, and these family ties enabled Ivan to embark on a political career. As Ivan Stambolić ran through the political institutions, he took Milošević with him as his sidekick. By 1986, Stambolić served as the president of Serbia, and Milošević, through the help of his friend, wound up being head of Belgrade's Communist Party branch. In these roles, both Stambolić and Milošević condemned the aggressive nationalist tone of the aforementioned *SANU Memorandum*. (Sell, 2002, pp. 11, 16, 20, 31, 46-47) Their agreement on the issue is probably why Stambolić entrusted Milošević to go to Kosovo in April 1987 and discuss the turmoil with Kosovo's local leaders. At the time, Serbs who lived in Kosovo were protesting the harsh treatment they were receiving from the Kosovar population and clashed with the Kosovar police. Unexpectedly, Milošević grabbed the opportunity to step out of Stambolić's shadow and tell the Serbian crowd that the Kosovar police was not allowed to beat them. He cunningly presented himself as being concerned with the oppression of the Serbian people in Kosovo, as opposed to all other politicians. This speech alone propelled Milošević to mass popularity among the Serbs, which he used to consolidate his power at the expense of his former friend Stambolić. This was characteristic of the way Milošević handled politics. He was an ice-cold career-politician, an opportunist who was prepared to betray his friends and abuse nationalist sentiments for his own benefit. On 8 May 1989, he assumed the presidency of Serbia in a coup, and his inaugural speeches were full of nationalist implications. Although Milošević had initially criticized the ideas of the *SANU Memorandum* for being too patriotic, he made them state policy after he rose to power. Due to Milošević, nationalism, being suppressed previously, had made an ominous and full-fledged comeback. (Judah, 1997, pp. 162-163)

As the president of Serbia, Milošević would abuse these nationalist sentiments lingering in Yugoslav society for his own political benefit. Serbia was still the only republic within Yugoslavia that was not a unity, but split into three parts. Even more so, Kosovo and Vojvodina each had the right to veto, which meant that they could overturn any Serbian proposals in the federal government. Milošević wanted to put an end to this and cunningly used his own supporters to do the job for him, in what he labelled 'anti-bureaucratic revolutions' against the elites. These rallies appeared communist at first glance, but in reality, they had a very nationalist character. By framing his political opponents as 'bureaucrats', Milošević could persuade the workers to try and topple the leaderships of the autonomous provinces. (Vladislavljević, 2008, pp. 1, 56, 173)

First, Milošević sent his supporters to the government building in Novi Sad to demand the resignation of the Vojvodinian government. The Vojvodinian party leaders were so overwhelmed by the protests that they declared their resignation from office on 5 October 1988. Vojvodina, a province where only half of the population was ethnically Serbian, was now effectively under Serbian control. (Gallagher, 2003, p. 261) Already on 7 October, Milošević turned his attention to Montenegro and employed the same strategy there. He sent his supporters to Titograd (modern-day Podgorica) in a surprise move, to demand the resignation of the Montenegrin leaders. The reaction of Montenegrin president Marko Orlandić was different, though, as he sent the police to knock down the protest. In the end, however, Milošević also managed to force the Montenegrin leadership to step down from office in January 1989, and installed Momir Bulatović, one of his loyalists, as the new leader of Montenegro. (Sell, 2002, pp. 59-60, 63-64) Then, Milošević applied the same strategy in Kosovo, and he managed to topple the Kosovar leadership on 17 November 1988. This caused the Kosovar population to

start five days of demonstrations against Milošević's power grab, but ultimately to no avail. (Vladislavljević, 2008, pp. 182-183) The reactions in the other republics were averse. They argued that Milošević had used the street protests for his own political benefit. Outside of Serbia, Milošević was harshly condemned as being a 'dangerous demagogic leader'. (Cohen, pp. 55) However, the fact was that no-one could reverse Serbia's annexations, and that Milošević now controlled four out of eight Yugoslav republics.

#### **6.4 The rise of nationalism in the other republics**

In the late 1980s, the process toward democratization was finally initiated in Slovenia, where the Communist Party had lost confidence in communist ideology and broke itself apart. After Slovenia had held its first elections, Croatia and other republics soon followed suit. The system was pluralized and other political parties than the Communist Party were allowed to enter the elections. The outcome of these elections contributed to the downfall of Yugoslavia, because the electorate in the republics voted along ethnic lines. (Sekelj, 1993, pp. 3-4) Milošević's exploitation of ethnic affairs had encouraged ethnic groups in the other republics to focus on their ethnic identities as well. As a result, nationalist parties received major electoral victories in most republics. These nationalist parties would compete in the elections against centralist politicians, such as Prime Minister Ante Marković, who represented the federal government of Yugoslavia. In Croatia, for example, the Croatian Democratic Union led by Franjo Tuđman won the elections with a nationalist campaign. In Slovenia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia, too, nationalist parties won the elections, making a case for anti-federalism and separatism. (Hayden, pp. 2-3, 7) In Bosnia, the parties which represented the Bosnian Muslims, the Serbian minority and the Croatian minority all won a considerable part of the votes and were forced to form a tripartite coalition. Although Alija Izetbegović, the leader of the Bosniak party, became head of state of Bosnia, he had to deal with the nationalist tendencies of both the Serbian and Croatian parts of the population. Throughout his government, Izetbegović lost nearly all support from the Bosnian Serbs and Croats, who were rather focused on the interests of their own ethnic groups. (Crnobrnja, 1996, pp. 146, 187)

By late 1989, Yugoslavia had ceased to function as a unified state. All that was left now were four blocs: Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, and Serbia, which now included Kosovo, Vojvodina and Montenegro. Bosnia was internally divided between Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats, of which the latter two supported their respective ethnic blocs. The four blocs primarily served their own interests and no longer those of Yugoslavia, often at the expense of one another. Slovenia and Croatia, for example, had developed strong anti-Serbian sentiments. Croatian politicians condemned Milošević as being Stalinist and unitarist, and Serbian politicians and writers accused the Croatian leaders of being pro-Ustaše and suppressing the Serbian minority in their country. (Ramet, 2002, p. 27)

The animosity between Slovenia and Serbia was even greater. When Serbia had annexed Kosovo, Slovenians demonstrated in solidarity with the Kosovars. The Slovene demonstrators even compared the victimhood of the Kosovars to that of the Jews in the Second World War. The Serbs saw this as harsh Slovenian provocations and Serbian-Slovenian relations were at an all-time low. Slovenian president Milan Kučan accused Milošević of creating a Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia, in which Serbia controlled four out of eight votes in the Yugoslav Federal Presidency. This fuelled a Slovenian and Croatian desire to leave the federation. (Silber & Little, 1996, pp. 63, 65-66)

Besides Milošević's power grab, Slovenia and Croatia also had economic reasons to secede. Slovenia and Croatia were the richest Yugoslav republics, but they were supposed to give away a share of their wealth to poorer republics like Kosovo, Bosnia and Macedonia in a system of wealth redistribution. Slovenia and Croatia's contribution to the redistribution fund

had risen to 60%, but due to mismanagement in the poor republics, wealth differences between the republics only increased. Due to such large discrepancies, Slovenia and Croatia wanted to stop subsidising the poor provinces, and sought to distance themselves from the rest of the federation in other domains as well. (Goldstein, 1999, pp. 190-191)

Slovenian leader Milan Kučan was a firm advocate of asymmetric federalism, a system in which some republics had a greater degree of autonomy than others. In this system, the republics would have to negotiate their relations with the federal republic. Because the Slovenian plan met with harsh criticisms from Milošević, the Slovenian parliament added an amendment to its own constitution in September 1989, which permitted self-determination and even secession. The federal government declared the amendment unconstitutional, but was again powerless. In the aftermath of this decision, Serbian leaders sent protesters to Ljubljana to destabilize the Slovenian government. The Slovenian leaders could stop this scheme however by refusing the Serbian protesters from entering Slovenia. When the Serbian leaders saw that their plan had failed, they stopped all trade relations with Slovenia. (Cohen, 1993, pp. 62-63, 65)

At the Fourteenth Party Congress of January 1990, Slovenia once again tried to gather support for more decentralization, but the proposal was blocked. The Slovenian delegates were so furious that they walked away from the meeting. When the Croats then followed their example, the meeting was suspended. With both the Slovenes and Croats gone, all that was left was a Serbian-dominated League of Communists, which the Bosnians and Macedonians did not want to be part of either. The League of Communists, once the force that held Yugoslavia tightly together, had broken itself apart. (Meier & Ramet, 1999, pp. 133-134)

Somewhere around the same time, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev had voiced his desire to end the Cold War. Now that the rivalry between East and West had finally ended, Yugoslavia's non-alignment had lost all its meaning as well. Therefore, Yugoslavia, while it was being torn apart and in economic crisis, had also lost a crucial part of its identity. (Crampton, 2002, pp. 141-142)

### **6.5 Answering the sub-question “Did Milošević’s exploitation of nationalist sentiments push Yugoslavia toward dissolution?”**

Intellectuals who had been dissatisfied with the state of affairs were responsible for the renewed debate on nationalism. In the articles they published they focused on history, and particularly on past crimes committed by other ethnic groups. Especially a work called the *SANU Memorandum*, in which Serbian intellectuals described and exaggerated the Kosovar crimes against the Serbs, is notorious in this regard. These nationalist sentiments found fertile ground among the population, because the people could finally vent their frustration at the other ethnic groups for the atrocities they had committed in the Second World War and were committing in the present. Slobodan Milošević, a career politician from Montenegrin origin, took the ideas of the *SANU Memorandum* by heart. He condemned the Kosovar atrocities against the Serbs in public, which gained him massive popular support.

Milošević rode the wave of Serbian nationalism to its fullest extent and used it to get rid of his political opponents and install himself to power. As the president of Serbia, he aimed to ‘correct the wrongs’ of the 1974 Constitution, which had weakened Serbia and had given Kosovo and Vojvodina almost full autonomy. Milošević mobilized his supporters and sent them to the government buildings of the Vojvodinian, Montenegrin and Kosovar ruling parties. These staged protests had the purpose to topple the leaderships of these provinces, at which they proved successful. Thereafter, Milošević annexed them into Serbia, which led to averse reactions from the remaining republics. They no longer wanted to be part of a Serbian-led Yugoslavia and started to push harder for secession from the federation. Nationalist parties were

founded in these republics, which placed the interests of their respective ethnic groups above Yugoslav interests, and came out victorious in the elections. Tensions between Serbia, which wanted to keep Yugoslavia together, and Slovenia and Croatia, which wanted to leave the federation, rose so high that at the Fourteenth Party Congress of 1990, the League of Communists imploded. Around the same time, the communist bloc fell, which made Yugoslavia lose its non-aligned identity.

The answer to this chapter's sub-question is that the intellectuals who stirred up nationalist sentiments as well as Communist Party official Slobodan Milošević pushed Yugoslavia one step closer toward dissolution.

## **Chapter 7 – Constructivism and Yugoslavia's disintegration**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The dissolution of Yugoslavia is a complicated and impactful event in international relations. Besides looking at the events from a historical standpoint, it might be helpful to see the developments through the lens of international relations theory for a change. There are several theories in the field of international relations, constructivism being perhaps the most applicable to explain Yugoslavia's disintegration. Section 7.2 first explains what constructivist theory is and section 7.3 explains how it can be used to shed a new light on Yugoslavia's transformation from centralism to decentralization. Section 7.3 includes a part without citations, which is because this part draws on observations and conclusions made in previous chapters of the thesis, which will help to apply constructivist theory to Yugoslavia's disintegration. These sections together will lead us to the answer to chapter 7's sub-question, namely: "Can constructivism be applied to explain the dissolution of Yugoslavia?"

### **7.2 Constructivism**

Constructivism places great emphasis on the identity of the state, for this identity determines what the leaders of a state want to achieve in politics. Constructivist theory states that the leaders of a state are the most influential in constructing this identity. The ideas in their heads are what determine states to act in the world in a certain way. (Grieco et al., 2015, pp. 92-94) Their ideas often come from a desire to come to or remain in power, but they can also be ideologically driven. The way the leaders of a state implement their ideas into state policy determines what kinds of political events happen, from wars and coup d'états to revisions of national or regional borders. In short, the ideas of leaders generate actions, and through these actions, they construct the identity and behaviour of a state. (Flere & Klanjšek, 2019, p. 234) The identity and interests of states are not givens, but instead are socially constructed and therefore subject to change. It is through social interaction that the leaders of states construct their own identities and interests as well as those of other countries. Through practice of social interactions, they learn how they relate to each other and what common or conflicting goals they might have. From this follows whether they will cooperate or compete. (Zehfuss, 2002, pp. 39-40)

### **7.3 Application of constructivism on Yugoslavia's disintegration**

Perhaps the main take-away is that constructivism views elite individuals, namely the leaders of a state, as the most important actors to determine a state's identity and interests. From this can be concluded that when the ideas in the heads of leaders change, or when old leaders are replaced by new leaders with new ideas, a state's identity and interests change. This has

certainly been the case for Yugoslavia, which has gone through many significant identity changes throughout its existence, as the result of the changing views and actions of the Yugoslav leaders. To apply constructivist theory to the case of Yugoslavia, this thesis will draw on observations and conclusions from previous chapters on the state's history. Starting with Yugoslavia's foundation, the state's leader King Alexander I saw it as his core task to unite the many different ethnic groups into one nationality. Similarly, communist leader Tito chose to maintain the unity of Yugoslavia after the Second World War by sweeping the atrocities of ethnic groups against one another under the carpet. Perhaps Tito's decisions to give the republics more autonomy was a strategy to keep them satisfied and enhance the longevity of Yugoslavia as well. However, this decentralization process turned out to have the exact opposite effect, marking a turning point in the identity of the Yugoslav state. On top of that, its identity as a socialist state got under pressure when the Yugoslav economic system proved incapable of solving the economic downturn. Lastly, when the international communist bloc fell, Yugoslavia's non-alignment suddenly lost all its meaning as well. Constructivist theory can be used to argue that as a result of losing all the core features of its identity, Yugoslavia and its leaders did not have clear political interests and ambitions. Milošević seized the indecisiveness of the Yugoslav leaders as an opportunity and came with an entirely new paradigm: he wanted to establish a Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia. Whereas Tito had kept Serbia weak in order to keep Yugoslavia together, Milošević did the opposite and strengthened Serbia's position at the expense of the federal state. This encouraged other ethnic groups, such as the Slovenes, Croats, Bosniaks and Kosovars, to place their own interests over those of Yugoslavia as well. The previously suppressed memories of the Second World War came at the forefront again, but they were used to demonize others. Ethnic groups used these historical memories as arguments for why they should gain power, independence and even territory at the expense of others. Many years before the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the respective republics increasingly started to act as autonomous states that looked after their own benefits first and foremost. Therefore, one could speak of semi-international relations between the republics, on which constructivist theory can once again shed a light.

As mentioned before, when it comes to relations between states, or autonomous provinces in this case, constructivists believe that they are socially constructed. Just like social interactions in everyday life, international relations are guided by social norms. Leaders of states have the option to develop friendly relations with one another by adhering to these social norms. At the same time, constructivists acknowledge the realist assumption that international relations are anarchic, but apply it differently. Realism is yet another international relations theory, which this thesis will discuss because the view that international relations are anarchic is originally a realist position. According to realism, anarchy means that states are engaged in a struggle for survival, because their interests clash. Realists claim that states can never be certain whether other states will attack them and that war is possible at all times. This would mean that weaker states are conquered by stronger states all the time, but according to constructivists, these views are too pessimistic. Alexander Wendt, one of the main proponents of constructivist theory, admits that wars are a possibility, but that this does not make them a probability. Instead, he argues that anarchy is 'what states make of it', meaning that the leaders of states have to figure out their relations with one another as they engage with each other. (Wendt, 1995, pp. 72, 77-78) Besides clashes between states, Grieco et al. (2015, pp. 93-94) point out that this can result in friendly relations as well. Whereas friendly nations can develop the common goal to preserve each other's safety, the Yugoslav republics did the opposite. The republics identified themselves according to their ethnic nationality and no longer as part of a unified Yugoslavia. They became competitive and hostile to one another, which then led to the dissolution of the loosely organized federal state. In the anarchical structure that is international relations, apparently this was what the leaders of the Yugoslav republics 'made of it': their

relations with one another became spoilt to the point where they did not only break apart their own common state, but engaged in ethnic warfare in the process. This can be viewed as either a very realist outcome, or as the most negative scenario in constructivist thinking.

#### **7.4 Answering the sub-question “Can constructivism be applied to explain the dissolution of Yugoslavia?”**

Constructivism’s core point is that the ideas of the leaders of a state construct a state’s identity and interests. When the ideas of the leaders change, the identity and interests of a state change as well. At first, Yugoslav leaders opined that Yugoslavia should be a unified state, which is why the leaders attempted to mould all the different south Slavic ethnicities into one. Communist leader Josip Broz Tito adopted this approach, but added socialism and non-alignment to the features that made up Yugoslavia’s identity. Curiously, Tito initiated the long process of decentralization, but this might not have worked out the way he had envisioned. After his death, the republics abused the autonomy they had received and instead of cooperating, they competed with one another. The leaders of the respective republics saw themselves as proponents of their ethnic group and acted as autonomous leaders looking to strengthen their position at the expense of the federal state and other republics. In the end, the republics wound up fulfilling their nationalist aspirations by attacking one another, which led not only to the dissolution of Yugoslavia, but also to the Yugoslav Wars. The scenario in which all states are at war with one another because of conflicting interests is described by both realist theory and the most negative outcome of social interaction between states in constructivist theory.

This is how constructivism can be applied to illustrate how Yugoslavia went from a stable unity to dissolution: because the views of the leaders changed from favouring centralism to favouring federalism and decentralization. At the final stages of Yugoslavia’s existence, the decentralization process which had started under Tito was pushed to another limit to serve the nationalist agendas of the republics. As a result of the changing ideas in the heads of the leaders, Yugoslavia broke apart. One can only wonder whether Yugoslavia would have survived, or how much longer it would have survived, had the ideas of the leaders not changed from favouring federalism to favouring secession.

### **Chapter 8 – The dissolution of Yugoslavia**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

The factors that led to the dissolution of Yugoslavia are now largely discussed, but the events that constituted the actual dissolution have not yet been described and explained in this thesis. Section 8.2 describes the dissolution, which did not come about in a day, but was accompanied by a series of bloody ethnic conflicts, known as the Yugoslav Wars. The role of communist politicians will also be investigated, leading to the answer to this chapter’s sub-question, namely: “Did communist politicians play a role in the final stages of the dissolution of Yugoslavia?”

#### **8.2 The dissolution of Yugoslavia**

Slovenia and Croatia presented a common proposal in October 1990 to transform Yugoslavia into a confederation of independent states. This confederation would function as a monetary union and a common market, but it would have no central government and not even a capital

city. This confederation would be comparable to the European Community, which was the predecessor of the European Union at the time. However, this proposal was shoved aside in favour of a Serbian counterproposal, which opted for a more cohesive federation. Slovenia and Croatia argued that with this action, Serbia had squandered the last chance to save the unity of Yugoslavia. Slovenia then decided to exercise its right to form its own militia, which all republics had received all the way back in 1969. From then on, the Slovenian Territorial Defence replaced the Yugoslav People's Army as Slovenia's armed force. Croatia then did the same by forming its own state police force. This brought both Slovenia and Croatia in conflict with the Yugoslav army, which viewed itself as the only legitimate defence force of the federation. The Slovenian government countered that the Yugoslav army, with its outspoken communist positions, could no longer represent the democratic and non-communist values Slovenia. (Meier & Ramet, 1999, pp. 151-154)

The Slovenian government translated words into deeds by organizing a referendum on 23 December 1990, in which Slovenians could vote for independence from Yugoslavia. The result was that 88.5% of Slovenians voted in favour with a turnout of around 85%. The overwhelming choice for independence in the referendum can partially be explained due to the (correct) assumptions of the Slovenian population that Milošević would not back down from his Greater Serbian ambitions. In fact, Milošević had strengthened his position by means of his electoral victory of December 1990 in Serbia. (Meier & Ramet, 1999, pp. 154-155)

As Yugoslavia was breaking apart, Serbia was suddenly threatened with the prospect that millions of Serbs would end up living in other countries than Serbia. The Serbs in Croatia, for example, feared they would become a minority in Croatia, vulnerable for oppression. Their fears were even further ignited by Croatian president Franjo Tuđman's anti-Serbian comments and his endorsement of the Ustaše movement, which had ethnically cleansed Serbs in the Second World War. Milošević predicted that a war would be necessary to keep all Serbs within Serbia. In case any republic seceded from Yugoslavia, Milošević was prepared to fight. (Doder & Branson, 1999, pp. 75, 82)

On 25 June 1991, both Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence. The next day, the Yugoslav army intervened in Slovenia, which led to military conflict. After a short war, the Slovenian Territorial Defence Force came out victorious. It was apparent to most that the Yugoslav army had not combatted Slovenia with full force. The reason for this is that the army effectively functioned as an extension of Serbia's political power. It had been Belgrade's objective to have all Serbs live in one common nation state. Due to the fact that few Serbs lived in Slovenia, Slovenian independence was not as big of an issue as Croatian, and later Bosnian independence would turn out to be. When the Yugoslav army pulled out of Slovenia, Milošević essentially accepted its independence. However, Serbia did not want to lose the Serbian populations living in Croatia, and soon, armed conflicts between the Yugoslav army and Croatian armed forces broke out. This resulted in more than 10,000 deaths in the first six months of the conflict. When Bosnian president Izetbegović also took steps toward secession from Yugoslavia in 1992, 1.3 million Serbs were threatened with the prospect that soon, they would be forced to live outside of Serbia. Milošević wanted to prevent this at all cost, and in early 1992, the bloodiest episode of the Yugoslav Wars had begun. (Anderson, 1995, pp. 10-13) This thesis will, however, not investigate the course of these Yugoslav Wars in much detail, because this does not serve the aims of the research.

### **8.3 Answering the sub-question “Did communist politicians play a role in the final stages of the dissolution of Yugoslavia?”**

Slovenia and Croatia submitted a proposal to transform Yugoslavia into a confederation, which was the last concession they were willing to make to keep Yugoslavia united. When the Serbian

communist elite was unwilling to take the proposal into consideration, the writing was on the wall for the federation's existence. Both Slovenia and Croatia exercised their right to create their own militias, bringing them into conflict with the communist Yugoslav People's Army, which backed Serbia in its centralist position. The start of Yugoslavia's dissolution was on 25 June 1991, when both Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence. Subsequently, ten long years of bloody ethnic Yugoslav Wars followed, which effectuated the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

It can be concluded that the actions of communist politician Slobodan Milošević had ignited a Slovenian and Croatian desire to leave the federation. When both nations declared independence, Milošević encouraged the Yugoslav army to intervene, in order to keep all Serbs within Serbia, which led to bloody conflict. From this can be concluded that Milošević is not only partially responsible for Yugoslavia's disintegration, but also for the violent manner in which this happened.

## **Chapter 9 – Conclusion and discussion**

### **9.1 Introduction**

In section 9.2, the main research question of this thesis will be answered, which was the following: "What was the role of the Yugoslav Communist Party in the dissolution of Yugoslavia?" Section 9.3 will be the discussion, which includes the societal relevance of this thesis and of future research.

### **9.2 Answering the research question "What was the role of the Yugoslav Communist Party in the dissolution of Yugoslavia"**

The Communist Party inherited a state which had its fair share of problems. Yugoslavia was a multi-ethnic state, which put forward the question how much of their autonomy and identity the ethnic groups were willing to give up for the sake of Yugoslav unity. The debate between centralism and federalism existed from the start, but the Communist Party had always been a proponent of the federalist approach. The communists emphasized the distinctions of the ethnic groups and advocated for their self-rule. When the Communist Party, led by Josip Broz Tito, assumed power over Yugoslavia, it divided Yugoslavia into six republics and two autonomous regions. Especially Serbia was severely weakened in order to establish a power balance in which no ethnic group could dominate others. Even though the constitution had decided for a decentralized approach, Tito's autocratic rule initially held the federation tightly together. During his rule, there was no room for dissenting voices and existing hatreds between ethnic groups were suppressed. Tito's rule brought stability to Yugoslavia, but his policies were not continued because he did not appoint a successor. Instead, a system of Marxist collective leadership was designed, but this led to widespread corruption and stagnation. Without a strong leader who solved problems as soon as they arose, the respective republics began to grow increasingly further apart. The central Communist Party tried to pressure all republics to implement the same policies, but the republics had the leeway to ignore these decrees. Because the republics were unable and unwilling to cooperate, the economic crisis which started in 1979 could not adequately be solved. The communists were partially responsible for this crisis, because they made large debts to the international banks and their unwillingness to change the failing socialist system prolonged the crisis. All in all, Tito had strengthened Yugoslav unity during his reign, but the system that he devised for Yugoslavia after his death, put the federation on the road toward crisis and an eventual disintegration.

Times of economic misery usually go hand in hand with political unrest, which was the case for Yugoslavia as well. Intellectuals argued for a change in direction and stirred up nationalist sentiments. Tito had previously suppressed these emotions and hatreds, but now that people had the freedom to vent them, they would prove more destructive than ever. Serbian president Slobodan Milošević put the ideas of a group of Serbian nationalist intellectuals, as they had written down in their work *SANU Memorandum*, into practice and tried to build a Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia by annexing Vojvodina, Kosovo and Montenegro. The remaining republics opposed this Serbian domination and feelings of nationalism and separatism gained popularity, which ultimately led to the dissolution of Yugoslavia. During Slobodan Milošević's rule, the federation had gone from economic crisis to a situation of inter-ethnic hatred and ethnic cleansing.

The multi-ethnic state may have been fragile from the start, but in the end, the Communist Party destroyed both itself and the state it had ruled. One communist leader, Josip Broz Tito, had left Yugoslavia in a vulnerable position after his death, and the other, Slobodan Milošević, abused the crisis to create a Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia, which instead pushed Slovenia and Croatia towards the exit.

### **9.3 Discussion, societal relevance and further research**

This thesis focused on the role that the Communist Party had in the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Their policies may have contributed to the state's downfall, but the question remains whether Yugoslavia would have survived with 'better' policies by the Communist Party. Besides, the question arises what these 'better' policies would look like. Answering these question in future research may give us some insight in how to govern similar multi-ethnic states, such as modern-day Bosnia. Because certainly, the multi-ethnic character of Yugoslavia has complicated the government's task to keep Yugoslavia together. As mentioned before, Bosnia is facing some of the same problems that Yugoslavia was facing. Bosnia was already internally divided between Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats when it was still a republic within Yugoslavia. During the Yugoslav Wars, neighbouring state Serbia attempted to annex all territories inhabited by Bosnian Serbs, a scheme which ultimately failed. However, Bosnia is still ethnically and religiously divided. It is not without reason that Bosnia is sometimes nicknamed 'little Yugoslavia'. (Crnobrnja, 1996, pp. 22, 24) Furthermore, Serbia and Croatia may still have the desire to annex the Bosnian regions inhabited by 'their' peoples. Can we draw any lessons from the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia and be sure to prevent a similar fate for Bosnia? Or can Bosnia simply not exist, because the centrifugal forces that are inherent in multi-ethnic states will inevitably pull Bosnia apart?

Besides the intentions and actions of the Communist Party and the multi-ethnic character of Yugoslavia, there are other factors that have contributed to the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Glaurdić (2011, pp. 100, 307) mentions several ways in which foreign powers have influenced the dissolution of Yugoslavia, one of them being Germany's support for Slovenia's and Croatia's secession. Even more so, he points out that European and American neglect towards Slobodan Milošević's destabilizing policies may have strengthened Milošević's position, which was in turn detrimental for Yugoslavia's existence. Were these foreign influences a deciding factor? Research on the disintegration of Yugoslavia usually focuses on internal processes, but future research could further investigate such external factors.

Besides historical approaches, research about this topic might benefit from some additional theoretical approaches as well. This thesis has used constructivist theory to explain certain developments in Yugoslavia, but it would be worthwhile to see what insights other political or international relations theories have to offer.

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