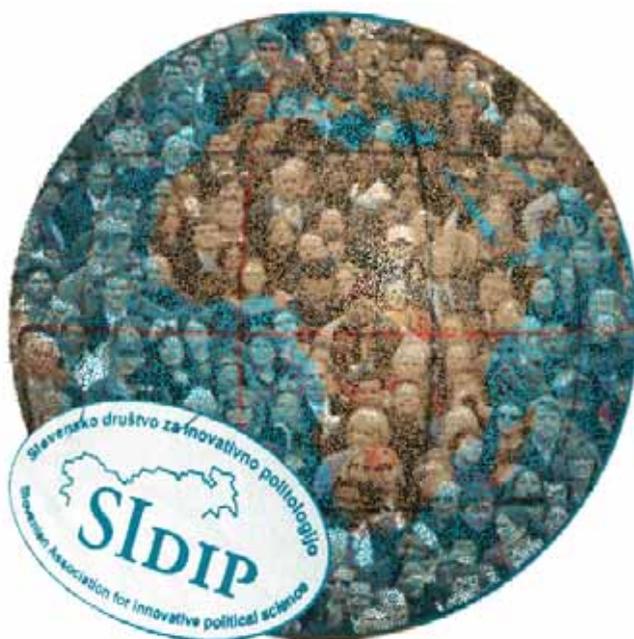


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Historical Development of Slovenian Political Elite

Matevž Tomšič¹

Abstract

This article deals with the ways in which political space in Slovenia is formed and with the nature of its main actors from the beginnings of political life in Slovenia, focusing primarily on the analysis of political configuration and on the nature of political elites in the post-communist Slovenia. Its primal concern deals with the power relation between the two main political and ideological wings. The author discovered three political constants in the development of the Slovene political space that represent an analogy between the political life prior to the World War II and the circumstances following the transition into a democratic system. These constants are: strong ideological polarisation, domination of one political camp, and aspiration of political elites to other spheres of society. They all hinder development of polyarchic democracy.

Keywords: elites, politics, democracy, communism, Slovenia.

Introduction

Similar to the remaining states in Eastern and Central Europe, which were determined by a socialist type of society for almost half a century, Slovenia found itself in a period of major social changes. One of the key issues within the problem of the social-system transformation is the following: who are the main actors, the ones with the power to influence the nature of social change? Furthermore, who can influence the constitution of institutional relationships that define the principles of the society? Nevertheless, a successful constitution of a democratic system is not merely an automatic product of certain cultural, historical and material circumstances. Different "requisites of democracy" (Lipset 1959; 1994), such as high levels of economical development and general education of the population, a numerous middle class, a tradition in mutual respect for differences and reaching compromises, etc., have a significant impact on

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the ability to constitute democracy, but must be “chosen, implemented and perpetuated by “agents”, real live political actors with their distinctive interests, passions, memories and – why not – fortuna and virtu”, as stated by Schmitter (Schmitter, 1993: 425).

Given the specific circumstances of the transition from an authoritarian (totalitarian) social order to a democratic one, the role of the political subsystem, i.e. the political elites as its main holders, is particularly important since it holds the responsibility to execute the so-called “triple transition” (Offe, 1993), meaning a change of political, economic and social systems – the key of which is above all the reestablishment of structural conditions (system infrastructure, legislation frame) for a “normal” functioning and autonomous development of other social areas (Adam, 1994). Therefore, in order to understand the transition process in Slovenia, an analysis of the character of political elites is necessary. This analysis includes considering the historical perspective, with the different factors that influenced the structuration of the political environment and formed political elites during its historical development. It is thus important to define the main characteristics that ruled the development of Slovene politics; i.e. decide whether it is possible to define specific historical constants in the relations between different political groups as well as in the relationship between politics and other segments of society. The thesis of the article is that there are some principles related the relations and conduct of political elites that are constants in Slovenian political space, hindering the development of polyarchic democracy.

Formation of politically-ideological orientations and the polarisation of the political environment prior to the WWII

The national and political constitution of the Slovene nation took place within the frame of the Habsburg Monarchy, within which its position was subordinate in political as well as social life. Furthermore, its situation was defined by the absence of its own governing class or a constituting tradition. As most Eastern and Central European states, Slovenia was a part of the European (semi)periphery (Janos, 2000; Berend, 2001) which was distinctive for its traditional social structure with a relatively low rate of functional differentiation and autonomy of individual parts of society.

In a sense of forming modern political institutions, political modernisation began relatively late in Slovenia, for political parties started to form only at the end of the 19th century. After a relatively short period of Slovene national spokesmen's united political appearance (the period of "concordance"),² three political blocs were formed, as it is typical for the modern European society: catholic-conservative, liberal and social-democratic. The differences between the catholic and liberal orientation were the key to separation. "The separation of spirits", as named by Anton Mahnič, the leading catholic ideologist at the time, was based on a deep ideological division and generated a distinctive conflict in political relations. Conflict relations of this kind are marked by the terms of cultural struggle. The latter exceeds the Slovene circumstances since it relates to the situation in the entire Habsburg Monarchy during the mid-19th century, characterised by the struggle for the predominance in society between the liberal (secular) and catholic (church) groups and above all the aspirations of the former for the elimination of the church monopoly over the educational system. Important was also the relationship towards other issues of cultural nature, such as autonomy of arts, science, etc. (Dolenc, 1996). The cultural struggle in the sense of value and ideological conflicts was particularly intense in Slovenia, for it continued even after the collapse of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire.

At the formation of Yugoslavia, a new dilemma was added to the old form of cultural struggle. This dilemma referred to the new position of the Slovene nation and its culture: whether to assimilate with the remaining Yugoslavs or to strive for the preservation of its own cultural identity and autonomy. The political status of the nation was thus in question as well as its cultural identity and language. The pro-Yugoslav liberals were proponents of cultural unitarism and political centralism. They relied upon the possibility that the minority position of the Catholic Church in the new state will diminish its cultural and political influence. On the other side, the catholic camp, politically organised around the Slovene popular party (Slovenska ljudska stranka, SLS), stood by the opinion that the Slovene

² The period of concordance ("slogaštvo") began in 1874 when Slovene liberals (along with the conservatives) entered the delegate club which supported the conservative government of president Taaffe; it lasted a decade and a half. Yet, during that period, hidden misunderstandings between the two groups were already present (Prunk, 1992; Grdina, 2003).

nation is a separate ethnical entity with its specific cultural identity and thus an autonomous cultural development should be ensured. From a political point of view, the catholic party also decisively stood for some specific form of autonomy in which the solving of specific Slovene matters would be in the hands of the Slovene nation (Prunk, 1992). Defending the autonomy was probably one of the most significant reasons for the majority support gained by SLS within the Slovene voting body (SLS gained the absolute majority of votes at all elections except for the first elections into the assembly in 1920) and thus its dominant position in Slovene society.

The political culture and practice that were marked by an intense conflict and unwillingness to communicate or co-operate with the political opponent (usually seen as an enemy) represented a considerable impediment to the democratic development. Ideological exclusivity, more or less characteristic for all political options, was visible also in the attitude of politics towards the civil society. Various professional or interest based organisations were not seen by the political elite as autonomous spheres with which co-operation and equal dialogue would be possible in order to solve the problems within the society. Rather, the elite tried to make them subordinate in order to maintain their political power. The consequence of such an attitude was politicization of civil society, in which each political orientation had its own professional organisations (teachers' associations, various student and youth organisations) and its own sport associations (the liberal *Sokoli* and catholic *Orli*). Even the media was explicitly politically divided – all three daily newspapers were partially declared (*Jutro* and *Slovenski narod* were liberal and *Slovenec* was catholic). Under such circumstances, little space was left for any surpassing of the ideological polarisation, for new political groups with no previous political burden, or for organised actions of independent civil groups.

Relations of domination under communism and the emergence of anti-elites

Although the social circumstances that led to the establishment of communism varied within individual Eastern and Central European states and thus resulted in different regimes, each having its own specialities, a bunch of characteristics common to all the states under a communist social vision could still be defined. For one, all of these societies were based on the domination of the political system over all other segments of society.

This was expressed by the state or politically controlled economy (owned by the state) and by the governing political nomenclature's control over the so-called civil sphere. All of this prevented autonomous activities of various social areas that would be coherent with one's beliefs. The process of social change conducted by the communist government could also be named inorganic modernisation directed from above (Bozoki, 1994: 68), since it was based on a vision of a homogenous and disciplined society and thus stifled the free development of various social potentials. The result was far from true modernity, therefore some authors write about "blocked" (Eisenstadt, 1992) or "fake" modernity (Sztompka, 1993).

In Slovenia (and entire Yugoslavia, of course), the socialist revolution was autochthonous, accomplished without any direct help from the Soviet Union. Therefore, the communist power take-over was carried out faster and more thoroughly than in other Eastern and Central European states where communists were forced to share the power with some non-communist parties during the first years after the war (Rothschild, 1993; Schöpflin, 1993). Immediately after the war Yugoslavia was firmly ruled by communists, without any attempt of organising any sort of political opposition being nipped in the bud and severely sanctioned (Vodušek-Starič, 1992; Drnovšek et al., 1996). This way the conflict of the pre-war political space, which was often a burden to various social relations, was annulled, only to be exchanged for a communist dictatorship that violently suppressed all autonomous forms of political (and other) organisation.

Following the break-up between Yugoslav and Soviet communist party leaders and the 1948 Informbiro resolution, Yugoslavia opened towards the West and started with gradual changes in its social order. Gradually, an "authentic" Yugoslav socialist system was built and named "The System of Socialist Self-government". Certain characteristics were formed that distinguished it from the systems of "real socialism". In economy, the development moved in the direction of greater independence of enterprises and the introduction of market mechanisms, and in various parts of social life, ideological pressure and party supervision were reduced. The system opened also towards other states. However, at this point it should also be mentioned that this was not a one-way development in the direction of democratisation and openness, since, the periods of liberalisation (second half of 1960's and in 1980's) and repression (the beginning of 1960's and in 1970's) alternated.

The most powerful centre of non-conformist and social criticism in Slovenia could be found within the cultural elite, which concentrated around certain journals that dealt with cultural and general social problems. Since the mid-1950's, the journals *Beseda*, *Revija 57*, *Perspektive* and (later) *Nova revija* represented a permanent, more or less open criticism of the society and regime and were therefore in a constant conflict with the party authorities. Considering the issues that concerned the existence of the Slovene nation in the context of a socialist system and the state of Yugoslavia, the engagement of the group of contributors within the review *Nova revija* (founded in the beginning of 1980's) should be pointed out in particular. That circle of writers and intellectuals was most determined and far-sighted in its arguments for the need for national independence and democratisation of society as the basic conditions for successful functioning of the Slovene nation. This was most clearly stated in the 57th issue of *Nova revija* (published in 1987) which contained articles that were actually some sort of a political anti-program, an alternative to the governing elite.

Generally speaking, the 1980's brought forth the final inveteracy of the autonomous public sphere, a swing of different non-conformist social practices and the expansion of possibilities for critical views of the situation in society. Individual professional societies were activated, the most active of which was the Slovene Writers' Association, which actively encroached upon public life with their initiatives for solving various social problems. The thesis of the so called "writers' constitution" presupposed Slovenia as a sovereign state of the Slovene nation that is founded on its permanent right of self-determination, including the right to ally itself with other states or secede from them, the right to independently decide as regards its political system, foreign affairs and defence matters.

Beside this, some new social groups were formed. They engaged in various public areas according to their specific interest (environmentalist, peace, feminist and other groups) and were known under the name "New Social Movements". In contrast to cultural workers whose operations were distinctively political and grounded in some sort of a social or political vision, the above-mentioned groups and movements acted in a sense of "anti-politics" (Konrad, 1988), with the intention to protect social spaces from state/political penetration. Nevertheless, number of intellectuals who were at first active in these groups afterwards switched to politics.

The common point of all the various opponent groups was, in spite of numerous disagreements, their opposition to the ideological monism and power monopoly of the party elite. They were joined in their struggle for basic human rights and freedom of thought and action, and they condemned any repressive encroaching upon these rights. The single event that unified all Slovene democratic forces into massive movements called "The Committee for Protection of Human Rights" was the so-called "process against the four" in 1988 which was an attempt to prevent democratic development in Slovenia.³ Otherwise, the differences between individual opponent groups could not only be found in their conception of public engagement but also in other basic issues of the moment (e.g. concerning the status of Slovenia towards Yugoslavia). This resulted in a political differentiation that ended up in the formation of various opposition political subjects, which were later on transformed into political parties. Politically engaged intellectuals, above all those from Nova revija, mainly supported the new political parties that were connected with the DEMOS coalition, while a number of protagonists from the "New Social Movements" joined their forces with the official youth organisation (ZSMS) which was under reformation and was the main predecessor to today's Liberal Democracy of Slovenia – (LDS).

Political elites in post-communist Slovenia

With its first multi-party elections, the Slovene political space undoubtedly showed a new face. After forty-five years of communist government the power came into the hands of political forces that were not bound with the state and communist-party structures. They formed the DEMOS coalition, which was a heterogeneous association of political powers that were joined by the struggle to re-establish political pluralism and to form an independent Slovene state. Actually, if we conclude from the names of the participating parties, the coalition represented all major ideological options typical for modern democratic politics (social-democratic, liberal, and

³ That spring, the Yugoslav army arrested four Slovene citizens because of their supposed disclosure of a national secret. In fact, this was a political trial started in order to intimidate the Slovene independent public. The effect was the exact opposite – it launched a revolt of the Slovene society and severely undermined the faith in the communist regime and convinced the Slovene nation to no longer persist within Yugoslavia.

Catholic-conservative). Amongst the votes given to DEMOS, the greatest share was given to the Christian Democrats, in spite of the fact that its main representatives did not play an important role in “the struggle for democracy” during the second half of the 1980’s. Nonetheless, the key positions in the new government were occupied by the Slovene Democratic Alliance (Slovenska demokratična zveza – SDZ) since it had the most competent people at its disposal.⁴ Soon, friction appeared within the coalition, thus the minority liberal fraction (the democrats) with relatively great power and the conservative part (Christian democrats) with the majority support started to separate. The separation transferred into the Slovene Democratic Alliance which was also very heterogeneous, so the party broke up into the more liberal Democrats and the more conservative National Democrats. This actually represented the beginning of an end for DEMOS, which in spite of its great contribution to Slovenia’s independence (achieved during its short government) fell apart at the end of 1991.

When discussing the democratic transition, the role of the communist partial elite should by no means be overlooked. In Slovenia, the majority of the elite that was in power at the end of 1980’s succeeded to maintain relatively successful on the political scene even after the first democratic elections. Compared to other parts of Yugoslavia and the other states of the Socialist Bloc, the Slovene communist regime was more open to various forms of social self-organisation and at the same time less repressive to its opponents. The party, alias its reformation fraction that gradually prevailed, started to drop its orthodox ideology and party-power principles of governing, although primarily under the pressure by democratic groups and movements. Through time, it transformed its organisation and cadres and this actually contributed to the democratisation. What is more, Slovene party leadership had been – under the intense pressure of public discontent – increasingly determined to revolt against the centralised pressures, although it refused to form an independent state to the very end. Because of all this the party leadership enjoyed a reputation of the struggler for an independent state amongst the considerable part of the population. Therefore, we can say that in Slovenia, the transition from the old regime to the new was a contractual one, i.e. achieved through compromise (Karl and Schmitter, 1991), or a

⁴ This party was the intellectual core of the DEMOS coalition with many members who played a key role in bringing down the “old regime”.

“transplacement” as Huntington calls it (Huntington, 1993), i.e. a joint (more or less co-ordinated) action of the actors in opposition and in power.

The differentiation that took place within the regime political structures played an important role in the formation of the Slovene political space. In the late 1980's the official youth organisation that normally played the role of party transmission in the sense of controlling the young population (it was also the source of new cadre) started to act independently and represented views that were distinct from the policy of the “older brother”. After many individuals, who were at first active in civil-society movements, joined the organisation, it managed to lose the image of the regime organisation, thus it transformed into an independent, liberally oriented party. Yet the party, in spite of its civil-society ideology and certain democratic affinities, organisationally continued to lean upon the structure of the communist regime (local organisations, material infrastructure, co-operation within the structures of power, etc.). Gradually, it attracted many holders of key positions during the communist period, so that it actually became a patron to their interests. Following the decline of DEMOS and the fall of the first democratic government, this very party – under the name Liberal-Democratic Party (Liberalnodemokratska stranka) and later Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (Liberalna Demokracija Slovenije, LDS) – became the main political force within the state for the most of the post-communist period.

In order to determine the relationships within the Slovene political space, the most common distinction is the one between “the left” and “the right”, or the distinction between “old” and “new” political powers. The latter is formally justified since it relates to the origin of particular parties, meaning that on one hand, there are parties that were transformed from organisations existing in the former regime, and on the other hand, there are parties that were formed during the democratisation period. The first have therefore inherited numerous resources – the organisational structure and the apparatus were already formed, material sources were at hand (offices for example) – but even more importantly, they had informal resources, meaning greater number of personal contacts and acquaintances with the key people in various fields of social life, as well as access to information and capital, which was supposed to be the greatest advantage of “the old” elite. On the other hand, it is difficult to distinguish between “the old” and “the new” political forces in the sense of economic

and political bonds that bind them to the prior regime since at least formally all political parties consent to the system of parliament democracy and market economy. The political practice still contains numerous phenomena that originate in the former regime and are in contradiction to the principles of a democratic society (ideological exclusivity, politically selected cadres, disrespect for the principles of a legal state, etc.). However, it could be said that such practice is more or less common for all political options. Additionally, it should be pointed out that members of the former communist party are not gathered only within the “parties of continuity” but can be found also within “the new” parties. This fact somehow “disperses” the communist legacy – though, on the other hand, we cannot talk about “ex communists” in general, because their role under the former regime was very heterogeneous.

The distinction between “the left” and “the right”, which is supposed to be of the same content as the above-mentioned (thus, the term “left” would refer to “the old” and the term “right” to “the new” parties), is – compared to a similar distinction that represents political relations in Western European countries – even less appropriate. Thus, the common belief is that among the prominent parties, the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS) and the United List of Social Democrats (ZLSD) belong to “the left” while the Slovene Democratic Party (SDS), the Slovene People’s Party and New Slovenia belong to “the right”. Yet, one has to be aware of the social and economic relations that were formed in the period of post-communist transition, mostly through privatisation of the former state property in which the main economic power was transferred to the existing management structure that held leading positions within the old regime; the described structure mainly belongs to the proponents of “the left”, mostly LDS. On the contrary, many among those who consider themselves de-privileged (which is often described in terms of injustices suffered under the communist regime) support “the right” parties. We are thus confronted with the phenomenon of the so-called “left-wing conservatism” where left-wing parties actually represent the interests of the capital owners (since their electoral body mainly rejects economic equality); while the right or conservative parties support economically subordinate social classes (Makarovič, 1993: 195).

The dominant (or at least the most explicit) conflicts in Slovene post-communist politics were the ones of symbolic or ideological nature, and

they led to a strong political and even general social polarisation, thus the situation is in some features similar to the one before WWII (for example, the issues concerning the attitude towards the role of religion and the Church in society). Slovene historical legacy, meaning both pre-war clericalism and post-war forced atheisation of society, plays a key role in the state of ideological fanaticism and inflexibility, which can be noticed on both sides.

One of the key factors of ideological and political polarisation is also the attitude towards the past, meaning both the period between the two world wars and the communist period. The former is, due to numerous tragic events (occupation, civil war, post-war killings and court show trials, dispossessions and persecution of political opponents), the source of numerous trauma and resentments among the Slovenes. In the evaluation of the not so distant history with its most neuralgic points, such as collaboration with the occupying forces during the war, the communist revolution and the following overtaking of power, we are dealing with diametrically opposing views over which nobody wants to even consider any kind of consent. On one side, "the right", anti-communist wing severely disapproves of the communist revolution and communism in general, justifying the pre-war parties' and the collaboration of the Catholic Church with the occupier (saying "they were forced to do so due to the danger of communism"). On the other side, "the left" or "post-communist" wing remains to condemn the collaboration during the war, having an ambivalent attitude towards the communist regime or even approving of it (saying "it was not all that bad", "there were certain negative aspects, but there were many good sides to it", etc.). The picture presented is somewhat caricatured since also less extreme and dogmatic points of view exist, however it seems that they are less distinctive amongst the public.

Such circumstances – their existence is largely "owed to" the present political elite who are the main generator of symbolic-ideological conflicts – represent a huge problem in a successful social transformation because, on one hand, the energy needed to solve the burning economic and social issues is being wasted, and on the other hand, the split between the holders of the opposing ideological options is on the increase, diminishing the possibilities to reach compromises. However, it should be pointed out that given the post-communist transitional circumstances in Slovenia (and probably also in other countries), the symbolically and economically

dependent interests are often bound very tightly. Ideologically based struggles that in a way represent the continuation of “the cultural struggle” (Adam, 1999) are often conditioned by the interests of their protagonists and can thus serve as the means to (de)legitimise existing relations of powers and organise material resources. The conflicts that are a result of the diversified understanding and assessment of the communist past and the nature of the former regime can to a great extent be understood in the sense of the efforts made by various factions of the political elite to prove how entitled they are to their leading position in society. In doing so, “the old” or “the left”-wing demonstrates the positive aspects of the socialist system (or at least relativises its missed points) and shows its own positive role in the social reform, while appealing to its positive historical heritage, above all its role in the National Liberation War. All this lays the ground to justify the conservation of their leading positions in various social areas. On the contrary, “the new” political parties or “the parties of Slovene spring” characterise the old system as wrong from the very beginning and in opposition to the basic norms of civilisation, thus arguing the need for radical changes in all leading positions and all key institutions of society, demonstrating that the old garniture is not capable of appropriate functioning within the changed social circumstances.

While this “cultural war” still has some potential for political mobilisation (although it has declined in the last few years), the issue of a socio-economic regulation is gaining in importance and is becoming the main point of controversy since the new government, mostly comprising parties of the “right”, launching a comprehensive programme of social and economic reforms directed at liberalisation and deetatation that should enhance the competitiveness and innovativeness of the Slovenian economy and society at large. These reforms are encountering considerable reluctance on the part of the opposition (especially the LDS) which warns against an increase in social inequality and the impoverishment of a considerable share of the population – meaning it is demonstrating its “leftist nature” in terms of its social orientation and scepticism of “unleashed” capitalism.

The Slovene political space is characterised by a bipolar division into two political blocs, the first being the so-called “left-liberal” and the second the so-called “spring” or “centre-rightist” bloc, none of them being fully internally homogenous. The victory of the “right” in the last parliamentary elections (in

2004) brought a major change in the constellation of political forces. For the most of the post-communist period, the Slovenian political space was dominated by a “left-liberal” bloc in which the LDS played a central part. From the first parliamentary elections in the year 1990 onwards, there were five “political turns” (including the establishment of the first non-communist government in 1990, and the current one), in other words, changes of political options in power (and five different heads of government, including the current one). However, in this (14-year) period governments not dominated by “left-liberal” parties were in place for just two and a half years. Although all LDS-led governments were composed of parties from different camps, this party dominated them and “spring parties” only played a marginal role in these coalitions.

The political domination of the “left-liberal” bloc was strongly related to the configuration of the general elite in post-communist Slovenia. A research, conducted in 1995 on Slovenian functional elites in politics, culture and the business sector,⁵ provided some data on the relations between the old (people who occupied high positions before 1988 and were able to preserve them) and the new elites (those assuming elite positions after 1988). In fact, this showed a fairly high level of reproduction in all elite sectors (the highest in the business sector);⁶ much higher than in other comparable Central European states (Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland) where the regime change resulted in fundamental changes to the elite positions and thus the circulation of elites was higher. Consequently, the vast majority of the elite gravitated (regarding its voting preferences) towards the political part of the retention elite, represented by the LDS and SD. This faction of the political elite had much better connections with various strategic groups within society, above all the management, business and academic sphere, the social sciences circles and the media. Its advantage thus laid in its intellectual and cadre potential as well as financial resources, which led to its disproportionate influence and informal

⁵ It should be stated that, regarding the research on elites in Slovenia carried out in 1995, a positional determination of the elites was performed. In this context, individuals are part of an elite, if they occupy key positions in three main social areas: in politics (e.g. ministers, representatives in parliament, high state administrators, party leaders), in the economy (managers in leading companies) and in the cultural sphere (leading staff in cultural and scientific institutions, media establishments and professional associations).

⁶ The rate of reproduction amounts on average to 77%, with the highest individual level being in the business sector (84%) and the lowest in politics (66%), while in culture it reaches 78% (Kramberger 1998, 1999; Iglič and Rus, 2000).

power within society. This informal power contributed to the dominance of “the left” more than their legitimate power, i.e. support among the population, since the both blocs were more or less in balance until the parliamentary elections in 2000 (when LDS and left bloc won with high majority).

The composition of Slovenian elites and dynamics of the political space has been the subject of dispute among scholars. Some consider this situation to be unproblematic, stressing the benign effect of elite reproduction, especially political and social stability – Slovenia experienced less social turbulence than any other transition state – while at the same time relativising the significance of the data indicates a high level of elite continuity (Iglič and Rus, 2000; Kramberger and Vehovar, 2000) or attributing that to the positive role of the old communist elite in the democratisation process (Miheljak and, Toš 2005). However, also other more critical interpretations exist, including those advocated by the authors of this article (Adam and Tomšič, 2000; 2002; Tomšič 2002). A distinct domination of the political elite that is tied to the former regime and is therefore striving for the conservation of certain relations and privileges can severely hinder the democratic and market transformation of the social system. First of all, a great domination of a single political side by itself hinders the democratic development since the lack of effective control – the main problem is the weakness of mechanisms of a so-called “horizontal responsibility”, i.e. independent control institutions of political or power elite (O'Donnell, 1998) – facilitates various misuses of power and obstructs the necessary social changes that could threaten the positions of the present elites. Secondly, given the criteria for recruiting to elite positions that were in use during the former regime and had, nonetheless, required political suitability and loyalty, it is not self-evident at all this elite is qualified for a successful implementation of its role. Besides, “the old” elite (more or less secretly) contributed to the conservation of certain value presumptions that were characteristic for the former regime⁷ with which it impedes the founding of democratic values and principles.

However, it should be stressed that “the right” bloc, or “the spring” parties, also bore a great deal of responsibility for the situation, particularly for its

⁷ For example, it prevented the reception of the delegation that would undoubtedly condemn non-democracy of the communist regime and the delays in the reparation of the wrongs caused by the regime.

own weakness and subordination. Its politics was much too often based on the traditional patterns of functioning, mainly on ideological exclusivism and voluntarism in its political actions and on the persistence on conflicts of ideological or symbolic nature which usually result in an objective advantage of the opposite side (the one that controls most of the resources of symbolic (re)production, above all mass media).⁸

One of the major problems of post-communist Slovenia (as well as other transitional states) is a distinctive weakness of the civil society compared to the political elite or political partners.⁹ This means that the state, or political institutions that are under control of the political elite, has an explicit initiative in forming and reaching key social decisions.¹⁰ Such a situation is formed due to the manipulation of the political elite that uses various mechanisms to ensure control over various segments of society, such as the economy, finances, media, etc. We are thus dealing with politics woven in various social areas which provides a fertile ground to grow clientism, which is in turn a great impediment to social transformation in terms of the autonomy of individual social subsystems.

Continuing principles in the political lives of Slovenes

We can discover that there are certain constants in the political development of Slovenes that occur through the entire period of modern Slovene political history and thus continuously determine the political environment and consequently also the character of political elites. We can identify certain analogies between the political life prior to WWII when some sort of political pluralism already existed (although in a limited range and with numerous deformations), and the situation following the end of the communist regime.

⁸ However, it has to be mentioned that in last parliamentary elections campaign, this political camp refrained from the participation in culturally related conflicts what was one of the factors that contributed to its victory.

⁹ It has to be stated that dominant position of the state *vis-à-vis* civil society is characteristic for all post-communist countries (Korkut, 2005).

¹⁰ Attila Agh (Agh, 1996: 55) defines such a situation in terms of "over-parliamentarization" which means that the parliament becomes not only the central, but practically the only place of party activities. The other term he uses is "over-particization" which refers to the aspiration of political parties to exclude all other actors from political participation, while they focus on the ideological and political struggles.

The most distinct constant is represented by the strong polarisation of political space (this transfers also into other areas) which is based on value and ideological conflicts. Just as the pre-war political scene was characterised by the conflict between the catholic (conservative) and liberal party, the post-communist period was noted for the separation between the left-liberal and “spring” bloc – even certain conflict topics are similar, e.g. the role of the Church within society.

For the Slovene political space, the disproportion of power and domination of one political bloc (or its political elite) was always characteristic. Between both world wars, it was the catholic-oriented SLS that was in power, while in the post-communist period, it was the left-liberal bloc, mostly LDS.¹¹ The period of the communist regime when the political elite and social monopoly of the communist party formed the basis of the system represents a chapter of its own. The difference is that the predominance of the catholic political elite was based on the support of the majority of the population and was linked to the position of the Catholic Church in the society of the period, while the predominance of today’s left-liberal elite was linked mainly to the possession of key resources (capital, opinion leaders, etc.).

In the relationship between political elites and other social areas, elements that are a part of the Slovene political tradition can also be observed. Above all this means the continuity of aspirations of politics or parties for the control over various social systems, mostly the ones that could contribute to the conservation or obtaining positions of power. Therefore, various methods of political interventions into (in principle autonomous areas) are being used – although less extensively and open than in the past – and this leads to the division of interest spheres. The overall consequence can be found in the politisation of various areas and their weak capacity to act autonomously and in concordance with their principles. This can be particularly well-observed in the media that is supposed to be one of the strongest mechanisms of control over the leading elite. Instead, a distinct unbalance can be seen (especially in the printed media) since most of them more or less openly favour “the left”, the dominant bloc, which often leads to political instrumentalisation.

¹¹ Although the victory of the centre-rightist parties at the 2004 parliamentary elections brought some balance in the power relations between political blocs.

Concluding thoughts

It is possible to identify certain characteristics that define the Slovene political environment and elites and can impede the development of a stable polyarchic type of democracy. Certain oligarchic tendencies can be seen as the consequence of the present situation characterised by the strong domination of a single political party or elite. Therefore, it is necessary to build structural conditions that would ensure political equilibration and circulation and mutual control of political elites. The transitional political elites will have to adjust its patterns of thoughts and actions in order to ensure an adequate combination of competition and co-operation in mutual relations. This is also necessary to build the partner relationship with other strategic social groups when making strategic plans and forming the needed foundation for successful social development.

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