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Research Article

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The Political Dimension of Ante Marković's Reform Project. "We must develop democracy and a Third Yugoslavia."

Alfredo Sasso*

This article focuses on the political dimension of Ante Marković's attempt to reform the federation of Yugoslavia during his mandate as prime minister between 1989 and 1991. While the literature about the crisis and dissolution of Yugoslavia has usually depicted Marković as the initiator of crucial reforms in the economic domain but having limited action outside of those measures, here the attention is devoted to his agency in the political domain, namely: 1) the attempt to redesign the institutional framework to restore the fundamentals of Yugoslav statehood, 2) the introduction of a state-wide multiparty system that would recreate a supra-national demos, and 3) the reanimation of the historical and symbolic principles of democratic Yugoslavism. These initiatives brought the federal government and the political party led by Marković to overt conflict with substate republican leaderships and with nationalist forces.

Keywords: Ante Marković, Yugoslavia, multiparty system, 1989 transitions, Yugoslavism

Introduction

As the prime minister of the federal government between March 1989 and December 1991 and the founder of the Alliance of the Reformist Forces of Yugoslavia (*Savez Reformskih Snaga Jugoslavije*, SRSJ, a political party established in August 1990) Ante Marković sought to restore and re-legitimize the fundamentals of Yugoslav statehood, which had been heavily contested since the prolonged socio-political crises of the 1980s. When it comes to Ante Marković's historical role, the existing literature has usually confined its attention to the economic reforms introduced during his mandate, which curbed the inflation and sped up liberalization. This focus is understandable, as the economy was a priority for the prime minister for reasons of temporal strategy, personal background, and the jurisdiction of his powers. However, the plans and

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actions of Marković's government and the SRSJ in the political sphere have remained generally overlooked and sometimes openly neglected in the literature. The blueprint for a comprehensive political reform was launched in January 1990 and included an attempt to redesign the country's institutional framework, the introduction of a state-wide multiparty system, and the reanimation of the principles of supra-national Yugoslavism. This brought the federal government, and afterwards the SRSJ, to overt conflict with sub-state republican leadership and nationalist opponents.

This article intends to fill these gaps and to grasp the multi-dimensional re-imagination of Yugoslavia envisioned by Marković, which can be interpreted as a further attempt of "triple transformation," as Claus Offe conceptualized the 1989 transitions in Central Eastern Europe.¹ The triple transformation encompasses three systemic dimensions: nation building (identity, citizenship, and territory), constitution making (rules, procedures, and rights), and economic order (allocation and redistribution; property and price system). While in most historical examples this three-tiered process was "mastered over a centuries-long sequence," the post-1989 transformations in Central Eastern Europe were at hand nearly simultaneously, occasioning "gigantic decision-making burdens" as well as "mutual effects of obstruction" among the different levels of problems.² Both interdependencies and antinomies arise in process of carrying out political and economic reforms: while the property reforms and the guarantee of political individual liberties usually stand with each other in a harmonious relationship, price (and property) reforms and democracy reforms are usually in mutual antagonism. All of these issues forced the decision makers to carefully handle the temporal sequence of the process in order to achieve a successful transformation and to not affect popular support in their favor.³ These guiding concepts help to reappraise Marković's agenda and to understand how and why the plan for political and institutional reform was launched *after* the economic reform yet not excluded nor undermined.

The paper is structured in two sections. The first re-examines and categorizes the major types of arguments in the existing literature about the role of Ante Marković during transition in Yugoslavia. While some authors define his approach as merely technocratic and economic-centred, or assess his relevance in the political arena as rather marginal, this article argues that the federal government and the Reformists' leadership took on the critical aspects of statehood, such as the model of state, democratic consensus, and legitimacy, and engaged themselves into ideological visions and media representations.

The second section focuses specifically on examining the plan conceived by Marković and his associates to redraw the federal competencies and to hold state-wide multiparty elections that aimed to reanimate statehood and a supra-national demos. It also explains the conflicting interaction with republican representatives and leaderships. This section draws mainly on press accounts from Yugoslav-wide outlets—including speech transcripts, excerpts from

¹ Offe, Claus. 1991. Capitalism by Democratic Design? Democratic Theory Facing the Triple Transition in East Central Europe. *Social Research* 58(4), 865-92.

² Offe, *Capitalism by Democratic Design*, 873.

³ Offe, *Capitalism by Democratic Design*, 885-87.

parliamentary sessions, drafts of constitutional amendments, and laws—as well as research interviews, referring to a time span that covers the year 1990.⁴

Archetypes and myths: A reassessment of Ante Marković's role during the Yugoslav crisis

Many leading figures of the Yugoslav crisis have been the object of extensive studies and usually occupy a place in official narratives of the post-Yugoslav states. This is not the case for Ante Marković: his reformist Yugoslavism, after being quickly marginalized from the power scene, became fully incompatible with nation-centred historical accounts that emerged from the conflicts of the 1990s. No systematic study on the upsurge and failure of Marković's project has seen the light in scholarly or journalistic works on dissolution. Even so, there are some recurring analytical approaches, which are categorized below in three macro-arguments. While each argument has some grain of truth, they all undermine the complexity of the reformist project and need to be discussed critically.

The "technocracy" argument

This argument portrays Marković's approach as focused essentially on economic themes with a technocratic logic, while allegedly neglecting aspects such as political decision-making, collective memory, ideological battles, and media involvement. Such a recipe was allegedly inadequate to engage with the identity-related, existential, irrational implications of the Yugoslav crisis.⁵ As a motive for this attitude, some authors recall the Marković's personal career and his relatively late entry into active politics: born in 1924, an engineer by training and a long-time director of the Rade Končar electrical firm, he had only started to ascend to the top-echelon ranks in the republic of Croatia in the early 1980s.⁶

These kinds of arguments require clarification and can be accepted only in part. It appears unquestionable that, at least during the first year in office, Marković's cabinet identified economic stabilization as its priority, which was expected to overcome the super-structural (national, social, and intra-party) problems. However, to argue that Marković escaped from political problems grossly overlooks the staunch endeavor for institutional reform that the federal government undertook beginning in early 1990, once the inflation had been kept under control. The bid for reforming the federal constitution and for establishing a multiparty framework through state-wide elections aimed to lay the ground for

⁴ The time span is motivated by the article's claim that the year 1990 represented the ultimate window of opportunity for the Marković's plan of political reform. It was opened in January, following the implementation of monetary stabilisation measures and the dissolution of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (see section 2) and got closed in December, when the defeat of the SRSJ in the sub-state republican elections decisively undermined the prime minister's power and legitimacy.

⁵ Radošević, Slavo. 1999. *The Collapse of Yugoslavia. Between Chance and Necessity*, in *Yugoslavia and After. A Study in Fragmentation, Despair and Rebirth*, edited by Dyker, David and Ivan Vejvoda. 1996. London: Routledge, 79; Meier, Viktor. 1999. *Yugoslavia. A History of its Demise*. London: Routledge, 9.

⁶ Meier, *Yugoslavia*. 34.

a new political system. This was epitomized, in press jargon and in the discourse of Marković himself, as the “Third Yugoslavia.”⁷

Moreover, to dismiss Marković’s project as over-rational means to neglect the multi-faceted complexity of its political party, the Alliance of Reformist Forces of Yugoslavia. The SRSJ sought to preserve the unity of Yugoslavia through reanimation of the elements of a common past and common culture that lay at the base of Yugoslav (supra-)national identity. Such re-authentication necessarily encompassed emotional aspects such as the evoking of origin myths, collective symbols, and common aspirations. The historical principles of anti-fascism, anti-Stalinism, and Yugoslav exceptionalism were reaffirmed in the SRSJ’s narrative. Reformists’ representatives frequently recalled the original path opened by the Yugoslav Partisans in World War II, which, in their view, had derailed from its initial progressive and emancipatory content after being corrupted by bureaucratic and authoritarian tendencies. Marković’s project of modernization and democratization was thus charged with a historical mission.⁸

The argument of technocracy also overlooks the experience of Yutel, which was established in October 1990 as the first state-wide TV channel in the Yugoslav broadcast system, which had consisted only of sub-state, republican-based channels until then. Yutel originated from a direct initiative of Ante Marković, who in early 1990 gathered a group of media professionals and intellectuals to make the channel’s management and editorial staff and offered financial support from the federal government.⁹ Yutel’s aim was to rebuild a pan-Yugoslav public sphere and to retrieve a sense of imagined supra-national community through recreating common frames of reference, which would actively counteract the republican-based media machineries while pledging to high pluralist and professional standards. As Yutel’s editor-in-chief Goran Milić said, Marković envisaged the TV channel’s project in terms of a “wider Yutel movement, in the sense of Yutel culture, Yutel publishing, [and] a Yutel reformist party.”¹⁰ Likewise with the SRSJ, Yutel’s role proves Marković’s involvement in the fields of media, ideology, popular culture, and social imagery and reveals the political features of his reform project.

The “austerity” argument

According to this argument, Ante Marković’s government had little agency of its own since he answered to the IMF’s austerity guidelines, which dismantled the

⁷ The title sentence of this article (“We must develop democracy and Third Yugoslavia”) was pronounced by Marković in the founding session of the SRSJ in Macedonia. Janković, Đorđe. 1990. *Reforma nekima smeta*, *Vjesnik*, 5 October 1990.

⁸ The most notable examples of the Reformists’ discursive strategy of re-authentication is the speech of Ante Marković in the founding SRSJ’s mass meeting in Kozara, in Bosnian Krajina, on the place of a highly glorified Yugoslav Partisans’ battle in 1942 (fully transcribed in Grubić, B. and R. Preradović. 1990. *Glas za reforme, glas za budućnost*. *Oslobodjenje*, 30 July 1990, 3.

⁹ Memories of Nebojša Bato Tomašević, Yutel’s co-founder and director, in Tomašević, Nebojša B. 2009. *Montenegro. Attraverso una saga familiare, la nascita e la scomparsa della Jugoslavia*, Trieste: Lint Editoriale. 507-11.

¹⁰ Thompson, Mark. 1992. *A Paper House. The Ending of Yugoslavia*. Indiana: Pantheon Books, 41. On the Yutel’s project see also Spaskovska, Ljubica. 2012. *Landscapes of Resistance, Hope and Loss. Yugoslav Supra-Nationalism and Anti-Nationalism*, in *Resisting the Evil. (Post-)Yugoslav Anti-War Contention*, edited by Bojan Bilić and Vesna Janković. Baden Baden: Nomos, 37-61.

social protection, and, as an ultimate consequence, eroded popular support while serving—whether intentionally or not—the Western actors’ interests.¹¹

This explanation should be taken with a grain of salt as well. It is indeed undebatable that the measures adopted in 1989-90 represented a bold leap towards a market-based system and that some of them were informed by the IMF-driven “Washington Consensus” principles, similar to what happened with previous Yugoslav governments since the early 1980s. However, some landmark reforms introduced by Marković were more heterodox than they have usually been depicted.

In the Law on Social Capital adopted in summer 1990, a milestone measure was “privatization from below,” namely the preferential and discounted sale of companies’ shares to employees who would be allowed to retain a part of their ownership rights as a compensation for the loss of their self-management rights.¹² Forms of mixed property, such as state-private, private-social, or even social property itself, were still formally left in place. In the SRSJ’s 1990 electoral program, the “privatization from below” was presented as a continuity with the socialist legacy, rather than a rupture: “Let’s use what is good in the experience of self-management and extend economic possibilities and labor security, thereby making a million people become shareholders – owners of the enterprises in which they worked and contributed. [...] Thereby we will create an ownership democracy.”¹³

Jeffrey Sachs and Steve Hanke, the main foreign advisors of Marković’s economic program (the former in particular usually presented as the brains behind the reforms) who were solidly committed to hard-line neoliberal ideas, both staunchly disapproved and tried to prevent these measures. Warning that any “lingering ideas about the third way” or “workers’ claims to ownership” should be rejected in any form, Sachs recommended that privatization “should begin by establishing that central government owns the enterprises and alone has the power to privatize them.”¹⁴ Hanke warned that Marković’s policy statement would “end in failure as did the pseudo-reforms of the past,” paralleling these “fake, illusory changes” with the wave of gradualist reform experiences in 1980s Hungary.¹⁵

It was only following the political crisis in Yugoslavia that the privatization from below envisaged by Marković was delayed and ultimately overturned by the post-

¹¹ For well-grounded explanations of this kind, see Woodward, Susan L. 1995. *Balkan Tragedy. Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press, chapter 4-5; Štiks, Igor. 2015. *Nations and Citizens in Yugoslavia and the Post-Yugoslav States. One Hundred Years of Citizenship*. London: Bloomsbury, 115; Becker, Joachim. 2017. In the Yugoslav Mirror: The EU Disintegration Crisis. *Globalizations* 14(6), 840-50; Cvek, Sven. 2017. *Notes on “Command of Money” and the End of Socialism*, in *The Errant Labor of the Humanities: Festschrift Presented to Stipe Grgas*, edited by Cvek, Sven, Knežević, Borislav and Šesnić Jelena. Zagreb: FF press. 143-57.

For a more radical and somehow conspiracy-based argument, see Chossudovsky, Michel. 1997. Dismantling Former Yugoslavia, Recolonising Bosnia. *Development in Practice* 7(4), 375-83.

¹² Uvalić, Milica. 1992. *Investment and Property Rights in Yugoslavia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 185-87.

¹³ *Programska deklaracija Saveza Reformskih Snaga Jugoslavije*. 1990. Sarajevo, 8.

¹⁴ Sachs, Jeffrey and David Lipton. 1989. How Yugoslavia can save itself. *Washington Post*, 31 December 1990; Sachs, Jeffrey. 1990. What is to be done. *The Economist*, 13 January 1990.

¹⁵ Hanke, Steve H. 1990. *Reflections on Yugoslavia’s Transition to a Market Economy*. Paper at the Camara de Comercio e Industria de Madrid, 13 November 1990.

Yugoslav republics in the 1990s, which would pursue different models of transformation: while some of them would keep some aspects of decentralized “employee ownership,” others rather opted for a recentralization of assets, which were placed under state-controlled funds before undergoing privatization. Most of them erased the feature of social property that Marković’s government had left formally in place.¹⁶

This complex variety of proposals and outcomes of privatization can be considered through the lens of Johanna Bockman’s interpretation of the 1989 events as a “time of possibility.” Decision makers in Central-Eastern Europe, Bockman claims, contemplated a wide range of alternative models for property models: from diffused to centralized and from spontaneous to hierarchical. It was only after 1989 that a sudden acceleration took place globally in favor of neoliberalism through radical measures, such as recentralization of ownership and reprivatization under state control. The intensification of the neoliberal trend completely eradicated what Bockman defines as the “liminal spaces” of alternative between state socialism and liberal capitalism.¹⁷ It is precisely within those liminal spaces that the Marković’s plan of privatization from below sought to operate, as part of its overall political project to revive the Yugoslav federation.

The “irrelevance” argument

This explanation portrays the role of Ante Marković during the 1989-1991 crisis in Yugoslavia as ineffective and insignificant. In this view, a leading cause of this irrelevance was the structurally marginal position of the President of the Federal Executive Council (i.e. the prime minister), as the 1974 constitution and institutional practice had consistently reduced the decision-making at state level, leaving it mostly in the hands of the federal collective presidency rather than in those of the government. Some authors notice how the Western powers surprisingly put faith on Marković despite his lack of *de facto* power.¹⁸ Supporters of this argument recall the failure to foster social mobilization in favor of a reformed and united Yugoslavia and the poor outcome obtained by the SRSJ at the republican elections in autumn 1990 as further proof of Marković’s insignificant role in history, which was likened to a mere “footnote.”¹⁹

The argument of irrelevance makes a good point when it emphasizes the limited powers of the federal government. However, the potential of a political option that could have matched the “growing sense of Yugoslavism” among the population in the 1980s requires further consideration. This phenomenon had broad socio-cultural implications, which, according to some observers at that time, were expected to further increase.²⁰ Chances for such an option can be

¹⁶ Estrin, Saul and Milica Uvalić, 2008. From Illyria towards Capitalism: Did Labour-Management Theory Teach Us Anything about Yugoslavia and Transition in Its Successor States? *Comparative Economic Studies* 50(4) 687-93.

¹⁷ Bockman, Johanna. 2011. *Markets in the Name of Socialism. The Left-Wing Origins of Neoliberalism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

¹⁸ Ramet, Sabrina P. 2005. *Thinking about Yugoslavia. Scholarly Debates about the Yugoslav Breakup and the Wars in Bosnia and Kosovo*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 129; Meier, *Yugoslavia*, 9.

¹⁹ Kanin, David. 2010. ‘Yugoslavia in 1989 and after’. A Comment. *Nationalities Papers* 38(4), 551-56.

²⁰ Jović, Dejan. 2001. The Disintegration of Yugoslavia. A Critical Review of Explanatory Approaches. *European Journal of Social Theory* 4(1), 107.

safely dismissed today, *post hoc*. However, one could hardly discard them at that time, in a context of uncertainty and expectations of volatility as typically happens in a period of founding elections, when a multiparty system—and, in the case of Yugoslavia in 1990, territorially asymmetric, which added further unpredictability—is being introduced.

Nationalist political actors mobilized considerable resources to contrast Marković in the course of 1990.²¹ They identified the Reformists' Yugoslavism as a threat in terms of popular consensus, as a challenge to the republic-based centres of power, and even as a dangerous ideological contender. Slobodan Milošević and his associates, who still sought to claim themselves as the exclusive bearers of Yugoslavism—albeit in a centralist fashion—while overtly turning to Serbian nationalism, saw the supra-national Yugoslavism advocated by Reformists as a rival. Likewise, the pro-independence parties in Slovenia and Croatia, which presented themselves as the only viable pro-European option, distrusted the plans of integration into the international market and of convergence towards the European Community, which Marković's federal government was putting forward for Yugoslavia as whole.

Several party leaderships and the ruling elites in Serbia, Montenegro, and, starting in the spring of 1990, Croatia and Slovenia, attacked Marković through well-elaborated discursive tools of discredit, usually relaunched by their related media. Throughout 1990 the prime minister was labelled initially on political-ideological grounds as a “bolshevik” and “unitarist,”²² a “Titoist,”²³ “AVNOJ-builder,” “money stealer,”²⁴ “fascist,”²⁵ “usurper of Yugoslavism,”²⁶ and “Führer-like.”²⁷ when the socio-political crisis worsened, Marković received blame in identity-based terms, such as “the highest Bosnian politician”²⁸ or “a Croatian politician,”²⁹ a way to undermine his state-wide legitimacy and essentialize ethnic criteria for representation. Systematic media campaigns were also orchestrated against the prime minister. In an unprecedented act on November 15th 1990, the Belgrade and Zagreb public-owned TV stations refused to broadcast the prime minister's conventional speech to the federal parliament.³⁰ In his memoirs, Borisav Jović, then Serbian representative in the state presidency and one of the closest of Milošević's proxies, candidly describes that he wrote under pseudonym a series of three derogatory articles about Marković;

²¹ For a similar development of this counterargument, see V. P. Gagnon Jr. 2010. Response to David Kanin. *Nationalities Papers* 38(4), 557-60.

²² Rikard Guzmej (HDZ, Croatia) in Pavić. Drago. 1990. I u Herceg-Bosni pobjeđuje HDZ! *Vjesnik*, 4 November 1990.

²³ Slaven Letica (Franjo Tuđman's advisor) in Berić, G. 1990. Marković protiv svih. *Vjesnik*, 10 november 1990.

²⁴ Jože Pučnik (Demos, Slovenia), in Pjević, Jovan. 1990. Demos protiv Markovića. *Borba*, 28 January 1990. 3.

²⁵ Slobodan Ignjatović (journalist of *Politika Ekspres*, Serbia) quoted in N.N. 1990. Od psovki do aplauza. *Borba*, 28 May 1990. 5.

²⁶ Vuk Drašković (SPO, Serbia) quoted in N.N. 1990. Markoviću želimo da što pre vidimo leđa. *Vjesnik*, 8 June 1990. 3.

²⁷ Vlado Gotovac (HSLŠ, Croatia) in N.N. 1990. Na uvrede – ćutanjem. *Borba*, 27 March 1990.

²⁸ Gregor Golobić (ZSMS, Slovenia) in Đurić, Dragan and Đenada Kučković. 1990. Marković kao najveći bosanski političar. *Vjesnik*, 1 August 1990. 5.

²⁹ Veljko Guberina (NRS, Serbia) in Dragan Đurić and Đenada Kučković. 1990. Marković kao najveći bosanski političar. *Vjesnik*, 1 August 1990. 5.

³⁰ Tašić, Predrag. 1993. *Kako sam branio Antu Markovića*. Skopje: NIP, 38-43.

following Milošević’s approval, they were published on August 5-7 by the Belgrade-based daily *Politika*. “We must expose him, because the people are seriously mistaken about who he is, and what he is. Many see in him a sort of savior, but he is a true imposter and an enemy of the Serbian people,” he commented,³¹ as further proof of how political opponents identified Ante Marković as not irrelevant at all.

Redesigning institutions and rebuilding demos for a Third Yugoslavia

The constitutional amendments

In the course of the 1980s, the dispute regarding the form of the state, which was already well rooted in intra-institutional and intellectual disputes, became salient in Yugoslavia’s public debate. The structure formally in place was still the semi-confederal system granting extensive power to the republics, which had been established by the 1974 Constitution. It was modelled on Edvard Kardelj’s interpretation of the Marxist concept that the state should be weakened and “wither away” through decentralization of power and economic self-management: in Kardelj’s concept, this would have paved the way to both the resolution of the national question and the realization of the socialist project.³² But the decade-long political and economic crises and the effects of fragmentation increasingly sparked the debate between those who defended post-1974 *status quo* and those who questioned it, often with mutually different and sometimes opposed visions and objectives about its overhaul.

Throughout the year 1990, the public debate had become heavily polarized around two ideological-strategical blocs, the “confederalists” and the “federalists.” “Confederalism” included those who advocated further sovereignty for the republics, while “federalism” encompassed any option to maintain a united state and to grant some statehood to Yugoslavia. The categorization was vague and confusing on theoretical grounds, but still pervasive, triggering emotive reactions and establishing apparently clear-cut cleavages in public space. Both categories embraced many varieties, even including extreme ones, as those who sought independence in short or medium terms (such as nationalist parties in Slovenia and Croatia) all fell under the label confederalist, while federalists spanned from hard-line nationalist communist centralists (such as Milošević’s party in Serbia and his allies) to *status quo* supporters (such as the Bosnian and Macedonian communists), and to liberal reformists supporting cross-national power sharing.

Ante Marković persistently refused to take side on this debate issue and insisted that polarization should be deescalated on pragmatic grounds. In an internal meeting with representatives of the republican presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina in October 1990, he said:

“The relations in the country are politicized to a boiling point. The absolute proof of that is the question of whether we are for federation or confederation. But in this phase of our transitional period from one system to another, this is

³¹ Jović, Borisav, 1996. *Poslednji dani SFRJ. Izvori iz dnevnika*. Beograd: Politika, 173.

³² Jović, Dejan. 2009. *Yugoslavia. A State that Withered Away*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1-12.

absolutely inadequate, and at the same time counter-productive and dangerous to the extreme. [...]

Declaring whether we are for a federation or a confederation is a totally fictitious and politicized dilemma. On one side, [there are] those who say they want a federation, but what they really want is a unitary Yugoslavia and to establish their own power. On the other side, [there are] those who struggle for a confederation, since in their piece of territory they have conquered, they want to reinforce and secure their power, and it is evident that they are already carrying out some state-building.

We think that, if we want to save Yugoslavia, we, as the federal government—and I personally—will commit ourselves only to Yugoslavia.”³³

During 1989, Marković had remained focused on the economy and had only made sporadic and vague mentions of political democracy.³⁴ But once the watershed measures for financial stabilization were adopted in mid-December 1989, the federal government became aware that the systemic institutional deadlock and the asymmetric moves towards multi-party system—Slovenia and Croatia being the first in calling elections—could quickly undo the economic achievements. On December 19th, the federal government sprang into action on the constitutional issue, submitting to the state parliament a draft of five amendments that would revise the state competencies in Yugoslavia.

The draft would establish a united fiscal system under the exclusive control of the federal government, which would gain financial autonomy from the republics. The tools of macroeconomic policy and social planning in the hands of the executive would be reinforced, to the detriment of the Chamber of Republics and Provinces.³⁵ This initiative was in its essence similar to the proposal for constitutional change, which the federal presidency had made, and then dropped, in 1987.³⁶ The proposal immediately met the staunch opposition of the MPs from Slovenia, who criticized the reform as a “recentralization” and prompted the intervention of the Slovenian Parliament, which submitted a counterproposal grounded on confederal principles.³⁷ On the opposite side, some MPs from Serbia and Vojvodina, who typically advocated centralism, complained that the draft would undermine the role of the federal Parliament. The representatives from the other republics generally supported the amendments.³⁸

Marković’s amendments were envisaged as an adjustment of the post-1974 structure, though not as its complete eradication. They were meant as a

³³ Ante Marković in *Magnetofonski snimak. Razgovora sa predsjednikom SIV-a Antom Markovićem vođenih u predsjedništvu SRBiH*, Document of the Presidency of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia Herzegovina, T3/1 S/S, 3/2, 12 October 1990.

³⁴ Federal Executive Council. 1990. *Yugoslav Changes. Addresses and Statements by Ante Marković*. Belgrade: Jugoslavenski Pregled.

³⁵ Radovanović, Jovan. 1989. Bitno izmjenjena uloga federacije. *Borba*, 21 December 1989, 5. The Chamber of Republics and Provinces was the upper house of the Federal Parliament. Its members were elected by the chambers of the single republics and provinces and were intended to represent their specific interests.

³⁶ Dragović-Soso, Jasna. 2004. Rethinking Yugoslavia. Serbian Intellectuals and the 'National Question' in Historical Perspective. *Contemporary European History*, 13(2). 178-80.

³⁷ Simonović, V. and D. Drašković. 1990. Vraćen SIV-ov paket. *Borba*, 12 January 1990; Radovanović, Jovan. 1990. Slovenija nije daleko od Srbije, *Borba*, 9 January 1990, 5.

³⁸ Radovanović, *Slovenija nije daleko*; Kesić, Đoko. 1990. Ustav nose podzemne vode, *Borba*, 17 January 1990, 5.

preliminary step in order to restore some basic statehood to the federal sphere, reinstating the government’s capacity to exercise essential instruments of control and decision-making. In other words, the federal government aimed to take back the functions of coordination and execution that had been considerably limited under the Kardelj’s concept. Marković wanted this shift to be reflected in official terminology: as a symbolic and performative act to shape the new reality, his organ would have been renamed the “Federal Government.”³⁹ This would have replaced the formal term of “Federal Executive Council,” which had been established in 1953 in order to emphasize its subsidiary role vis-à-vis the political-ideological power—namely the Party—as well as its undermined relevance within the decentralized and de-etatized structure of socialist self-management.

However, these measures were not conceiving recentralization or re-etatization *tout court*. The amendments were conceived to set the benchmark for a further and more comprehensive reform for territorial competencies, tackling the core aspects of federal vs. republican jurisdictions. This task was left to the future Constitutional assembly, which, in Marković’s intentions, would have been formed through the first democratic elections to take place within the year 1990.⁴⁰ It must be recalled that some elements of decentralization and non-statism would also survive in Marković’s economic reform, which was based on so-called “privatization from below,” also defined as “ownership democracy,” namely the employees’ shareholding. In privatization from below, the central agents of transition are workers and managers in each workplace or enterprise, while in the opposite model of “privatization from above” or centralized privatization—which most Yugoslav republics would follow after 1991—it is the state or sub-state governments who play the major role, centralizing assets and then deciding how to sell or distribute them. Hence, Marković’s program still kept some elements of continuity with the intrinsic logic of self-management and decentralization contained in the 1974 Constitution, albeit in new context of integration into the world market and under completely different ideological and systemic conditions.

The foreign policy agenda was also a crucial part of Marković’s quest to restore statehood. While the prime minister’s attempt to secure diplomatic and financial support from the United States—with the official visit to Washington in October 1989 as pivotal moment—has been well documented and debated,⁴¹ the effort to reinforce the bonds with the European Economic Community is less well known. In as soon as 1989, the federal government sought to extend its political sphere to include cooperation with the EEC—which had remained cautiously focused in the commercial domain established by the 1980 Agreement—and envisaged the

³⁹ N.N. 1990. SIV postaje – Savezna vlada, *Borba*, 14 March 1990, 1.

⁴⁰ For the attempt of electoral reform, see the section above.

⁴¹ See in particular: Zimmermann, Warren. 1999. *Origins of a Catastrophe. Yugoslavia and its Destroyers*. New York: Times Books; Woodward, Susan L. 2000. *Costly Disinterest. Missed Opportunities for Preventive Diplomacy in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina*, in *Opportunities Missed, Opportunities Seized. Preventive Diplomacy in the Post-Cold War world*, edited by Jentleson, Bruce W. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 143-45.

long-term possibility of a full membership into the Community within the next one or two decades.⁴²

On November 27, 1989, during a meeting of the Yugoslavia-EEC Cooperation Council in Brussels, the Yugoslav foreign secretary Budimir Lončar announced the opening of negotiations for an association agreement with the Community.⁴³ Prompted by this initiative, in February 1990 the federal parliament adopted a “European Declaration” that recognized the integration into the EEC as a cornerstone of the Yugoslav policy and diplomacy.⁴⁴ The application to the Council of Europe (submitted in February 1990) and the ongoing talks for joining the EFTA and the OECD were run and proudly presented by Lončar as preparatory steps of the larger European integration process of Yugoslavia.⁴⁵

Beyond the interest for deepening economic integration in order to bolster the ongoing market transition, the new approach towards EEC had evident ideological and strategic motives, affecting both international and internal factors. The sudden wave of events in 1989 in Central Eastern Europe urged a quick redefinition of Yugoslavia’s position in the world arena, as the nonalignment policy, which had already been in decline in the 1980s, was doomed to further lose relevance. Countries such as Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia were about to become the primary focus of Western interests, overshadowing Yugoslavia’s traditionally privileged position as a balance between the blocs. In the internal sphere, European integration offered a prospect of modernization, through achievable results and desirable objectives which Marković could present to the domestic public opinion and political stakeholders, serving as a much-needed tool to reinforce his own legitimacy. Both Marković and Lončar were committed to convince their fellow citizens that Yugoslavia would still “have precedence” over the other Central Eastern European countries in the European integration process, while at the same time trying to prove to the western actors the credibility of the government’s economic reform and its ability to guarantee the unity of the federation. Lončar remarkably affirmed that the integrity of Yugoslavia was “the starting point and the pre-condition for the democratization of society,”⁴⁶ rather than vice versa.

However, in 1990 the international representatives raised growing concerns about political instability in Yugoslavia; in particular, they identified the issues of the tensions in Kosovo and the lack of state-wide multiparty elections—the former being a requirement for membership in the Council of Europe, which, in turn, was considered as a necessary step for inclusion in the EEC that was conditional for the integration progress.⁴⁷ Pressure from international actors was

⁴² Mihailo Crnobrnja (then Yugoslav ambassador to the EEC), interview by author. Belgrade, 20 June 2019.

⁴³ Klarin, Mirko. 1989. Zahtev za 'pridruživanje'. *Borba*, 28-29-30 November 1989, 1.

⁴⁴ Klarin, Mirko. 1990. Nema besplatnog ručka. *Jugoslavija i Evropska zajednica. Borba*, 7-8 April 1990, 3; Crnobrnja, Mihailo. 1996. *The Yugoslav Drama*. Montreal: McGill-Queen University Press, 149.

⁴⁵ Budimir Lončar in N.N. 1990. Sve pretpostavke za evropski vozni red, *Vjesnik*, 3 November 1990, 5.

⁴⁶ Budimir Lončar in Drobnjak, Vladimir. 1990. Program novog socijalizma, *Vjesnik*, 1 February 1990, 1-2.

⁴⁷ Čučić, Ljubomir. 1990. Podrška reformi, ali..., *Vjesnik*, March 9, 1990, 1; Peruničić, Vesna and Ratimir Petković. 1990. Izbori, uvjet za Europu, *Vjesnik*, 14 November 1990, 5.

among the various factors that incited the federal government to speed up the plan for federal elections.

The plan for federal elections

The argument that the absence of elections at a state-wide level was a decisive factor in Yugoslavia’s failed transition is frequent in scholarly analyses and popular memory. According to this explanation, the fact that Yugoslav elections in 1990 were only held at the level of republics further reinforced power and popular legitimation of sub-state units and undermined the federal state. In a famous and often quoted article, Linz and Stepan theorized that agreements on what they define as the “stateness problem,” which arises when the boundaries of the political community become disputed, are “prior to agreements about democracy.”⁴⁸ They argued that “elections, especially ‘founding elections,’ help create agendas, actors, organizations, and most importantly, legitimacy and power.”⁴⁹ In this view, electoral sequences are crucial. Holding elections at an all-union level first can reconstitute the legitimacy of the state, as happened in post-Franco Spain in the late 1970s, whereas holding sub-state elections first makes incentives for anti-state contestation and ethnic issues, as was the case in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia after 1989.⁵⁰

This argument has been often debated in theoretical, factual, and counterfactual terms. Susan Woodward goes along the same line affirming that Yugoslav federal elections in late 1990 “could well have made the democratic transition possible. The experience of the rest of Eastern Europe and of Russia strengthens this assessment.”⁵¹ Dejan Jović, though acknowledging that the Linz and Stepan’s argument “has its validity,” questions that constitutional arrangements “rarely ever are the main cause of political events” and should be instead treated as “direct consequences of the climate produced by the political elite.” The attention should be rather placed on the processes and actors involved in writing constitutional arrangements, Jović claims.⁵² Igor Štiks argues that the highly fragmented political space in the 1980s owing to the federalization of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia made the formation of state-wide actors hardly possible.⁵³ The scope of this section does not include reopening this discussion at large and on theoretical grounds, but rather to examine how Ante Marković and the federal government tackled the issue of founding elections and democratic legitimation as political actors that were involved in constitutional arrangements.

It was a watershed moment in the history of Yugoslavia that urged the government to speed up the reform plan. The breakup of the League of Communists, following the walkout of the Slovenian branch’s delegation from the 14th Congress on January 22, 1990, caused the definitive dissolution of the ruling party as the centre of decision-making. Ante Marković became convinced that such a power vacuum could provide him with both momentum as the agent

⁴⁸ Linz, Juan J., and Alfred Stepan. 1992. Political Identities and Electoral Sequences. Spain, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. *Daedalus* 121(2), 123-24.

⁴⁹ Linz and Stepan, *Political Identities*, 126.

⁵⁰ Linz and Stepan, *Political Identities*, 123-39.

⁵¹ Woodward, *Costly Disinterest*, 148.

⁵² Jović, *Yugoslavia*, 32-33.

⁵³ Štiks, *Nations and Citizens in Yugoslavia*, 113-14.

of regime change, and an opportunity to further his own political project. Marković's ambition was exhibited through his often quoted (and, with hindsight, unfortunate) comment released immediately after the congress in an improvised press session, with a smiling face and a comforting tone: "Regardless of the party, the State [of Yugoslavia] must function, and it will."⁵⁴

It is much less remembered that in that same press session, Ante Marković announced that setting up a multiparty system and free, democratic elections at the federal level would be included in the package of constitutional amendments, becoming the next major goal of the government.⁵⁵ On February 2nd, the federal government submitted the draft proposal of amendments to the Federal Chamber and then the drafts of the complementary laws at the federal level—parties and associations, electoral system, and media system. A series of articles by the Minister of Justice Vlado Kambovski in the government-owned diary *Borba* illustrated the principles of political reform: "The society has reached a proper political plurality as the result of economic reforms [...]. The peaceful parliamentary transition into a new, reformed society of a new-type socialism represents one of the main features of the Yugoslav answer to the crisis of socialism in general."⁵⁶

Ante Marković acknowledged in hindsight the importance of all-Yugoslav elections in his program, as well as the obstacles that he faced from some republics. In 2003, during his testimony at the Slobodan Milošević trial before the ICTY, he said:

"Within the framework of the program put forward by my government [there] were necessary changes to be made, new laws to be drafted—and the constitution, too—for general Yugoslav elections to be held, and we wanted to go to the polls generally, for a general Yugoslav election straight away; but certain points in the constitution had to be changed and the representatives of the two republics came out emphatically against that, that is to say, of Serbia and Slovenia."⁵⁷

The plan of calling federal elections was certainly ambitious and against the clock for many reasons. Since the four-year-mandate of the Parliament in office would expire in April 1990, the government wanted the amendments to be approved at the latest by March, so that the state-wide elections would be held within the new rules.⁵⁸ The procedure required the approval of the Federal Chamber and of the parliaments of each of the eight federal units, which was not an easy achievement at all, given the structural and contextual circumstances.

The constitutional reform inevitably led to a competition with the republics about who should be the agent and regulator of the multiparty process. In December 1989, the Parliament of Slovenia had scheduled the republican

⁵⁴ N.N. 1990. Rasplet – stvar SKJ. *Borba*, 23 January 1990.

⁵⁵ Oprijan-Ilić, B. 1990. Vlada kao menadžer. *Borba*, 23 January 1990; N.N. 1990. Vlada opet na potezu. *Borba*, 26 January 1990.

⁵⁶ Kambovski, Vlado. 1990. Pogled kroz jednopartijski monokl. *Borba*, 8 March 1990, 2.

⁵⁷ Ante Marković. Testimony at the ICTY, The Hague, 23 October 2003, (accessed: 18 August 2020).

⁵⁸ N.N. 1990. Novi Ustav već u ožujku? *Vjesnik*, 26 January 1990.

elections for April 8th, 1990 as had the Parliament of Croatia in February for April 22nd. Debates on how and when multi-party transition would occur were taking place in the other four republics, too, although the voting date there would be finally postponed to autumn. All the main issues of institutional design at the state level—the structure of parliament in terms of representation system and functions, the electoral system, and the law on parties and associations—had to be resolved quickly and raised highly polarized views in the public. Each of these issues was ruled differently in the republics, causing further concerns about how they could be implemented and accepted at the state level.

Various members of the cabinet and some external experts behind the scenes were involved in the process of institutional design. Žarko Puhovski, a philosopher and one of the founders of the Association for Yugoslav Democratic Initiative (UJDI),⁵⁹ recalls that in December 1989 Marković invited him and some other UJDI members to the prime minister’s office in Belgrade, asking for advice about the institutional reform.⁶⁰ The UJDI had previously conceived its own plan of constitutional change, which combined citizen-centred and territorial-centred principles of representation, and was presented as the only model that would couple democratization in the federation with the recognition of sub-state interests and identities. The parliament designed by UJDI was composed of a Chamber of Citizens, elected through a simple one-person-one-vote principle, and a Chamber of Republics, elected indirectly on the principle of equal representation via the republics, to which veto powers for some limited vital issues would be accorded.⁶¹

Marković’s entourage accepted the UJDI’s plan in general terms, but their views differed in some aspects. Regarding the electoral system, Puhovski suggested adopting the single transferable vote,⁶² while Rodoljub Šabić, then undersecretary for legislative affairs and a member of the internal staff working out the electoral law, claimed that his group favored a first-past-the-post-system; Marković ultimately instructed them to work on a proportional system.⁶³ Whether he chose thus for tactical or principled reasons remains an open question.⁶⁴ Although different models were considered, the final versions of the amendments left the structure of parliament almost untouched, with a Federal

⁵⁹ The UJDI was a reform-minded, pro-Yugoslav and non-nationalist organization, mainly composed by intellectuals. Founded in 1989, the UJDI had branches in all the eight federal units. On the UJDI, see: Spaskovska, *Landscapes of Resistance*; Abram, Marco. 2009. L’UJDI. Un’esperienza alternativa nell’89 jugoslavo. *Diacronie*. 2009(1); Orlić, Mila. 2011. Od postkomunizma do postjugoslavenstva. *Udruženje za jugoslavensku demokratsku inicijativu, Politička misao*, 48(4), 98-112.

⁶⁰ Žarko Puhovski, interview by author, Zagreb, 10 April 2017.

A remarkable paradox is that the UJDI, as an oppositional organisation, was not fully legalised when the meeting with one of the highest state authorities took place. At that time the UJDI’s registration in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and at the state level was still denied. For this reason, Puhovski recalls, they had been formally invited as “experts”, not as UJDI representatives. The meeting was scheduled as semi-informal and kept at low profile in public.

⁶¹ Puhovski, interview by author; N.N. 1989. Kojim putem do novog ustava. *Republika*, 3 July 1989, quoted in Spaskovska, *Landscapes of Resistance*, 50-51. See also Orlić, *Od postkomunizma do postjugoslavenstva*, 107.

⁶² Puhovski, interview by author.

⁶³ Rodoljub Šabić, interview by author. Belgrade, 6 May 2016.

⁶⁴ In Šabić’s opinion, Marković was not optimistic about his own chances in the electoral arena, so he preferred the proportional system for reasons of opportunity. Another possible explanation is that Marković considered the proportional system as more appropriate for a multi-national country in terms of principle.

Chamber organized around equal representation—hence rejecting the principle of one-person-one-vote—and a Chamber of Republics and Provinces with identical numbers of deputies and only slightly modified jurisdictions.⁶⁵ This lack of innovation was due to time constraints and the increasing difficulties that the federal government faced in making its proposals recognizable and acceptable for a public sphere hegemonized by republic-centred actors. Even so, the government’s proposal clashed with the interests of the republics.

Allied rivals against the reform

Since the very beginning of the long-lasting debate in the federal parliament, the reform package met the adamant opposition of the representatives from Slovenia. While the republican delegates in Belgrade staunchly demanded to call off the Yugoslav elections,⁶⁶ the Parliament in Ljubljana rejected the amendments and formally deadlocked the whole process. The Slovenian Communists were engaged in domestic competition with pro-independence opposition parties and consolidated their confederal and system-blame approach towards Yugoslav statehood; they put forward counterproposals such as the abolition of the Federal Chamber, which would have left in place only the Chamber of Republics and Provinces, elected indirectly, and even hinted at abolishing the federal government.⁶⁷ The only compromise they offered was to “unpack” Marković’s amendments by discussing them one by one instead of all at once, which had been the ordinary procedure for constitutional changes in socialist Yugoslavia until then. In this vein, the amendments to economic reform, on which Slovenian representatives generally agreed, would have been released while those dealing with political reform could remain at a standoff.⁶⁸

The federal government seemed inclined to accept this compromise in order to break the impasse, but then reverted to the instrument of the entire package.⁶⁹ In his speech to the parliament on 29 June, Marković reaffirmed that the reform of the political system should be indivisible from economic reform, as it would be based on “the citizen as the political subject with a dominant interest in the decision-making.” He explained that the adoption of a new electoral system and of a law on parties and associations at the federal level would be crucial factors of the overall process.⁷⁰

Then, obstacles came from delegates and parliaments of Serbia—including those from Serbia proper and those from the autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo—which had initially showed some mild support for the plan. Many of their reproaches were on opposite grounds than their Slovenian counterparts, as the Serbian delegates opposed the principle of equal representation and persistently advocated “one-person-one-vote.”⁷¹ This argument became paramount and somehow obsessive both for its supporters and for its detractors,

⁶⁵ Following the 1974 Constitution, The Federal Chamber was composed by 220 members: 30 from each of the six republics, plus 20 from the two autonomous provinces. The Chamber of Republics and provinces was composed by 88 members: 12 from the six republics, 8 from the autonomous provinces.

⁶⁶ Ninčić, R. 1990. Do ustava tri puta. *Borba*, 30 January, 1990, 1.

⁶⁷ N.N. 1990. Neuspjio pokušaj usvajanja amandmana. *Vjesnik*, 26 July 1990, 1.

⁶⁸ Petković, Ratomir. 1990. Zarobljenici Skupštine. *Vjesnik*, 26 February 1990.

⁶⁹ Kesić, Đoko. 1990. Novi korak u deset koraka. *Borba*, 20 June 1990, 1.

⁷⁰ N.N. 1990. Drugi korak u budućnost. *Borba*, 30 June 1990.

⁷¹ Popović, S. 1990. Jedan građanin, jedan glas. *Borba*, 14 June 1990.

who constantly evoked the specter of “majorization,” i.e. being politically outnumbered by the largest national community in Yugoslavia. However, on other issues the Serbian delegates shared a position with their Slovenian counterparts, as they both frantically opposed the enlargement of the government’s functions and, especially, the federal law on parties and associations, arguing that there was “no constitutional base” for it.⁷²

It is remarkable that the stances of the Serbian leadership were plainly incongruent with the traces of the Yugoslavist and unitarist approach that Milošević and his associates still evoked in public discourse.⁷³ To them, Serbian-only interests mattered more than Yugoslavism, and were expressed through retaining the strategic assets of sovereignty on fiscal revenues, macroeconomic policies, and the control of the production of norms in the political system. The increasing hostility of the Belgrade leadership towards the government’s economic policies, which allegedly favored the more developed republics while damaging Serbia’s agriculture, metallurgy, and heavy industry, increased the leverage of the Serbian representatives about the reform package. Marković recalled in his testimony at the Milošević trial:

“From the information I received from several deputies from Serbia, talks were held with the deputies, and they were given the task of toppling the program put forward by the federal government. They said, ‘If we don’t topple Ante Marković now, we won’t be able to do it in the next four years, and he is not favorable to us, so everything has to be done to topple him.’ [...] A sufficient number of deputies were found to have done everything to try to impede this process of reforms to make it more difficult and to slow them down.”⁷⁴

The constitutional reform remained at a standstill during the majority of the year 1990, the same period when Marković reached his climax in popularity according to various polls.⁷⁵ There is good reason to believe that this support was motivated not only by the positive economic trend temporarily provided by price stabilization and restored purchasing power for some social sectors, as it is commonly assumed. The expectation that the federal government could be a real agent of political change, with the option of state-wide elections on the horizon, was likely playing a role as well. Government members, political actors and state-wide media continued to envision a date for federal elections in 1990, although it was systematically adjourned, first from April to June, then to July, then to September, and finally to a generic “end of the year,” each time more outdated in respect to the elections in the republics.

The events could still have taken an unpredictable turn on August 8th, when the package of amendments, after undergoing some adjustments from the

⁷² N.N. 1990. Protiv – Srbija i Slovenija. *Borba*, 29 June 1990, 1; Radovanović, *Slovenija nije daleko*; Protić, M. 1990. Zazor od YU stranaka. *Oslobođenje*, 21 June 1990, 3.

⁷³ About Milošević’s self-claimed Yugoslavism, see Jović, *Yugoslavia*, chapters 6-7; and Bilić, Bojan. 2012. *We Were Gasping for Air. [Post-]Yugoslav Anti-War Activism and its Legacy*. Baden Baden: Nomos, 95.

⁷⁴ Ante Marković. Testimony at the ICTY, The Hague, 23 October 2003, 28004-5.

⁷⁵ According to a poll conducted by the Belgrade-based newspaper *Borba* in May 1990, 72% of Yugoslavs considered Marković as the most preferred personality in Yugoslavia, largely ahead of any other politician. Bakić-Golubović, Slobodanka. 1990. Borbin barometer. Ante vodi za tri koplja. *Borba*, 21 May 1990, 7; see also Jajčinović, Milan. 1990. Lideri ograničena suvereniteta, *Danas*, 9 January 1990, 22-23.

Constitutional Commission, was unexpectedly approved by a quasi-unanimous vote in the Federal Chamber.⁷⁶ The ball now was in the court of the republican and provincial parliaments, which had two and a half months to approve, amend, or reject the package. By then, the assemblies of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro approved it entirely, and those of Macedonia and Croatia did it in part. But it was again from Slovenia and Serbia—plus Vojvodina—that the blows came, as their assemblies did not even put the amendments on their agendas.⁷⁷

The deliberate obstruction of Slovenian and Serbian representatives—who exploited all the powers and procedural tricks offered by the 1974 Constitutional framework, the very thing that they themselves were struggling to break at all costs—was the crucial factor bringing a definitive end to Marković’s plan. This being said, contextual events also had some impact. The wave of inter-community clashes that broke out in Krajina in August 1990 raised serious existential concerns throughout Yugoslavia, exposing the federal government as unable to handle security issues and ineffective in controlling institutional actors involved, especially the Yugoslav Army. The beginning of electoral campaign in the republics contributed to associating pluralism with the sub-state level, in which salient actors, goals, and frames of reference were being articulated.

The SRSJ, a government party in the opposition

The asymmetric deployment of multi-party system deeply affected Marković’s involvement into the electoral arena. Speculations about “Marković’s party,” which sometimes the prime minister himself indulged in, had been circulating since early 1990. However, the Alliance of Reformist Forces of Yugoslavia was formally established only in late July 1990 and therefore missed the elections in Slovenia and Croatia held in spring, being able to run only in the four republics where the vote was scheduled in autumn. This delay was primarily due to Marković’s commitment to complete the constitutional reform and to schedule state-wide elections before launching the party, which would be ideally designed as a truly pan-Yugoslav force, not limited to republican-only arenas. But this never became possible, as the reform remained at a standstill.

On the other hand, Marković still showed some reluctance to act as a proper party leader and expose himself in the electoral campaign, something that was noticeable to his fellow party members. Nada Ler Sofronić, then member of the Bosnian SRSJ presidency, recalled that Marković seemed “not enthusiastic” about launching the party, but nevertheless “he felt that he had to do it. [...] He did not like that kind of political marketing.”⁷⁸ This wary attitude was likely inspired by the Marković’s solid background as a manager and long-time member of the institutional elite within the Yugoslav socialist structures, which had been commonly detached from the intellectual-political elite active within

⁷⁶ Vučinić, Dara and Đoko Kesić, Dragica Pušonjić, Jasna Kesić. 1990. Amandmani prošli u paketu. *Borba*, 9 August 1990, 1; Petković, Ratomir. 1990. Amandmani u paketu. *Vjesnik*, 9 August 1990. Press reports described the approval as surprising and un hoped at the time, given the political situation. It may be well supposed that the delegates who had previously opposed the package, finally accepted to unfreeze it not because of second thoughts about political reform, but because they wanted the republican parliaments to take charge of amendments concerning economic reform - particularly those which regulated the types of property.

⁷⁷ N.N. 1990. Umjetna dilema. *Vjesnik*, 2 November 1990.

⁷⁸ Interview to Nada Ler Sofronić. Sarajevo, June 28, 2012.

the Communist party, and therefore had remained unconcerned by issues of ideology and public consensus. The prime minister often boasted about such an approach. Even years later his retirement, he fiercely remembered: “I have always been a pragmatic person. In the [Communist] party, I was known as a liberal, and the ideologues constantly attacked me. I was always at war with them.”⁷⁹

There was also a generational issue that might have hampered Marković, as he was one of the few members of the ruling elite born before World War II—and even a former member of the Partisan movement—who were active in the 1990 electoral campaign. In a founding election, in which anti-establishment preference and perception of renewal are normally expected to be a value, this could be an important factor, which the SRSJ, as a force ideologically committed to modernization, had to handle carefully. Most of the party leaders who dominated the political scene in 1990 were either under fifty—as were all six leaders of the republican post-communist parties, as each of them had experienced massive turnover in the top-echelons of the late 1980s, which had mainly set aside the old guards—or, if older, belonged to anti-communist parties such as Franjo Tuđman in Croatia or Alija Izetbegović in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The SRSJ’s opportunities differed widely across the territory. In Serbia and in Montenegro, the Reformists met the open hostility of the ruling republican authorities and had very limited access to media and to resources to deploy its infrastructure, being forced to self-relegate into a narrative of principled “anti-regime” opposition. As Marković acutely acknowledged, the SRSJ was experiencing the paradoxical fate of being a “government party,” which “is in the opposition, is treated as an opposition, and has all the problems of the opposition.”⁸⁰ It was in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia where the Reformists met the most favourable conditions, both in terms of ideology and organization, and therefore raised the highest expectations. The democratic Yugoslavism advocated by SRSJ was potentially attractive in the two republics, where various pieces of its constitutive concepts were seen as popularly appreciated: the allegiance to the multi-ethnic character of society, the attachment to antifascism and Partisan legacy (particularly in Bosnia), and the “third-way” approach to the status of Yugoslavia, advocating a pro-federal alternative to the dominant and conflicting tendencies represented by Slovenia (plus Croatia, later) and Serbia-Montenegro.

However, such expectations were thwarted. The huge differences across the republican contexts fragmented the SRSJ both in terms of infrastructure and ideological elaboration. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the SRSJ’s leadership was comprised of a diverse assortment of former communist representatives, leftist intellectuals, neoliberal businessmen, and eccentric artists, who hardly managed to build a common narrative around the “Third Yugoslavia” and the socio-economic objectives behind it. Moreover, the lack of cooperation between the

⁷⁹ Ante Marković, interviewed in Malić, Gordan. 2003. Moja istina o smrti Jugoslavije, *Danas*, 13-28 November 2003. This was the first authorized interview since his resignation as prime minister in 1991.

⁸⁰ Petrović, Dražena. 1990. Ante Marković - intervju. *Dar*, 6 November 1990, 5-9.

Bosnian SRSJ and the local League of reformed communists—for mutual issues of tactics and animosity between the two leaderships, while their platforms were remarkably similar—severely damaged both the forces. This rivalry made any progressive, pro-Yugoslav option appear confused and unreliable, and significantly favored the ethno-national parties. In Macedonia, the Reformists maintained some cooperation with the post-communists, and then managed to obtain barely better results, though far below anything that would make it a key player. As an apparent paradox, it was in Montenegro where the SRSJ obtained the largest vote, acting as an umbrella-coalition of all the liberal anti-nationalist and anti-(republican) establishment forces.

Table 1: The SRSJ's electoral score in the 1990 elections

	Parliamentary elections			Presidential elections
	% votes (first round)	% seats	Seats	% votes
Bosnia Herzegovina	8.5	5.4	13/240	10.9
Macedonia	13.3	9.2	11/120	-
Montenegro	14.1	13.6	17/125	16.4
Serbia	1.5	0.8	2/250	5.5

Source: Own elaboration. The score for presidential elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the average score of the seven presidential candidates.

Battlegrounds of narrative constructions

The SRSJ's failure must also be interpreted as a projection of how the Yugoslav public received the government's conduct. The government undoubtedly invested massive efforts in the inter-institutional procedures and negotiations. However, it was unable to spend as many resources to explain to the public in a timely fashion what was going on with political reform, why it mattered, and what was envisioned. Political actors involved in the crisis were active performers in the battlefield of narrative constructions, in which problems and solutions were quickly codified into words and slogans that became automatic associations with acceptable—or unacceptable—ideas and principles. Ante Marković, his cabinet, and his party appeared unable to produce a recognizable discourse of their own; rather they remained entrapped in the conceptual and linguistic frames created by rivals.

The “federal vs. confederal” question provides a notable example of such a discursive battleground. This refusal to take a stance on such a polarizing issue was the expression of the typical compromise-inclined *modus operandi* of a prime minister in the socialist Yugoslavia system. However, in the context of a chaotic and asymmetrical multi-party competition in which virtually every political actor took side in all-pervasive cleavages, it nourished a public image of Marković as isolated from the political competition, unable either to redefine the existing models of statehood and to re-symbolize the values connected to them, or to produce alternative discursive markers which would help the public to distinguish his proposal from those of his opponents. An account of a SRSJ candidate to the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina about a campaign event in Vareš illustrates well how difficult was to create space for a neutral position in entrenched polarized frames:

“We were explaining that it does not matter whether [we are for] a federation or a confederation, that what really matters is to secure peace, an economic space

and the state framework, that the European Community has promised that we will be once accepted as members [sic]. This discourse was totally rational, but since the issue of federation or confederation was highly debated on the streets, it turned out that, when we were concluding and the others were satisfied with our intervention, a man stood up clapping slowly and said ‘This was fantastic, the debate was interesting, all was clear. But please, tell me: are we for a confederation or for a federation?’ (Laughs).

This question was crucial, and we had a weird stance on that. It could be accurate to say that it was not the essence of the content that we had to secure first a common market, an economic space etc. But once we were forced to explain the question in public, then our discourse was, I would say, inappropriate for that campaign.”⁸¹

This prudent strategy also led the government to exclude the chance to organize any sort of state-wide referendum about Yugoslavia’s constitutional asset. Various supporters of Yugoslav statehood, ranging from the ruling, unitarist and autocratic Serbian Communists led by Milošević to the oppositional reformists-federalists of the UJDI, on multiple occasions advocated some form of popular and all-Yugoslav vote on constitutional reform.⁸² Marković’s government always firmly rejected holding a referendum,⁸³ which would have been a hazardous move by all evidence. First, it would likely raise discontent and potential insubordination in Slovenia—and, after the HDZ’s rise to power in May 1990, in Croatia as well. A referendum could have thus exposed the executive’s poor authority over administration and public security, particularly given the deteriorating relations with the Yugoslav Army and the lack of control over republican-based polices. Moreover, a referendum would have raised issues of constitutional legitimacy.⁸⁴ The government would have been involved in a political competition based on confronted legalities and plebiscitary mobilizations, something that Marković had staunchly avoided. But on the other hand, a state-wide referendum on the reform could have brought a perspective of democratic legitimacy and mass involvement which was urgently needed to cement the project of Third Yugoslavia; it would have offered an alternative to *status quo* and an active challenge to republican leaderships, which, while extensively resorting to referendums, were channelling the post-1989 transitional euphoria into mass mobilization.⁸⁵ Such a step could have fulfilled the requirement coming from UJDI intellectuals that “the center of legitimacy

⁸¹ Sejfudin Tokić, interview by author. Sarajevo, 5 July 2012.

⁸² The UJDI envisioned that any change of constitution would be confirmed at a federal referendum by double majority – by Yugoslav citizens, and by a majority of federal units – *Kojim putem do novog ustava? Republika*, 1989, quoted in Spaskovska, *Landscapes of Resistance*, 50-51.

In early 1990, some Yugoslav deputies of the Federal Chamber, mainly from Serbia, urged Marković to hold a referendum on his own constitutional amendments. In September 1990, the Serbian member of state presidency Borisav Jović advocated a referendum between a confederal and a federal model (Rajić, Vlado. 1990. Igra oko referenduma. *Vjesnik*, 13 September 1990, 1).

⁸³ Petković, Ratimir. 1990. Polemika Šale-Šuković. *Vjesnik*, 2 November 1990.

⁸⁴ The 1974 constitution made no direct mention on statewide referendums. However, press accounts at the time presented the chance of a constitutional referendum which would require two alternative majorities (either two thirds of total Yugoslav population, or two thirds of federal units). Radovanović, *Slovenija nije daleko od Srbije*.

⁸⁵ Besides the independence referendums in Slovenia and Croatia, and local referendums in Croatia, one must recall the referendum on the new republican constitution held in Serbia on July 1990, and the attempt of the Bosnian Communists to hold a referendum on whether allowing or banning parties on parties on ethnic grounds - which seemed imminent, but was ultimately aborted in June 1990 due to an intra-institutional conflict.

should be shifted from the past to the present and the future. [...] If our goal is democracy, then only democratic means suit such an aim.”⁸⁶

Conclusion

Ante Marković’s attempt to reform Yugoslavia had an important political dimension that accompanied the economic transition and was articulated through three mutually connected processes: the proposal of constitutional amendments, the attempt to introduce state-wide elections, and the involvement in the party system.

The amendments were aimed to reinstate to the Yugoslav federal sphere some basic function of statehood, in terms of capacity in decision-making and control of economic and political processes, which the 1974 Constitution had consistently attributed to the sub-state units. However, Marković’s amendments did not question the core principles of decentralization and non-statism, which were still seen as compatible, and even necessary, to implement multiparty pluralism throughout the country and to introduce economic liberalization through the model of diffused ownership or “privatization from below.”

The relevance of state-wide elections as an instrument that would contribute to recreate a democratic *demos* and reanimate the grounds of Yugoslav supra-national unity were well understood by Ante Marković and his staff. The plan to hold all-Yugoslav elections led to a competition with the sub-state leaderships from Serbia and Slovenia who, from opposite views and objectives about the form of the state in Yugoslavia, equally saw the founding elections as an essential source of democratic legitimation and power and claimed for themselves the agency of the multiparty process. These leaderships identified in Marković an ideological rival and a credible threat for consensus. They employed considerable resources in order to halt the federal-driven reform and install a meticulous obstruction in institutions and a careful echoing of narrative constructions. In response, the prime minister maintained a compromise-oriented, accommodating, and sometimes non-assertive approach in the discourse battleground. This was consistent with his institutional profile, but unsuitable for the need to create new paradigms and to reach public consensus in a context of sharp political and societal polarization.

The lack of progress in the constitutional reform and state-wide elections affected the international legitimization of Marković’s program. The approach of western European countries and the US towards the federal government became increasingly conditional on the latter’s capacity to implement democratization in the whole country. Besides turning down the requests for financial assistance, the western actors’ conditionality jeopardized the government’s efforts to push through the integration into the EEC. Since the European path had occupied an increasingly relevant place in Marković’s domestic narrative of modernization and inclusion of Yugoslavia into the post-fall-of-the-wall international trends, its interruption further hurt the premier’s public reception.

The foundation of the SRSJ and the establishment of the state-wide TV channel Yutel came as a further, though belated, attempt to reanimate, re-express and re-elaborate the principles of history, culture, and shared vision for the future

⁸⁶ Kojim putem do novog ustava?, *Republika*, quoted in Spaskovska, *Landscapes of Resistance*, 51.

laying at the base of the Yugoslav supra-national identity. However, the highly fragmented and asymmetric development of pluralism in 1990 Yugoslavia limited the chances of an all-state party, affecting its ideological and organizational cohesion. In the end the SRSJ was, at the same time, an establishment and an anti-establishment party according to the context, and was unable to exploit each other’s status and the material and symbolical advantages which derived from them.

Despite his political defeat and almost permanent disappearance from the public scene, Ante Marković has not disappeared completely from popular memory in the post-Yugoslav region. His legacy from the transitional, limbo-like 1989-91 period raises vivid and contentious memories, which are echoed in the media and by intellectuals, common people, and popular culture. On the one hand, there are negative remembrances. Some class-based, left-oriented arguments identify Marković as the initiator or the final executor of privatization and industrial closures that brought pauperization to the working class, particularly to blue-collar sectors. In nation-centred remembrances, Marković is often portrayed as someone who served, deliberately or not, the interest of the others to their detriment, betraying either his own state or his own people.

On the other hand, there are symptoms of a peculiar nostalgia, which we define as *Ante-stalgija*, with both a material and immaterial dimension. The *Ante-stalgija* is, first of all, a melancholic glorification of a short period of restored purchase power, consumerism, and saving capacity that was particularly enjoyed by some social sectors such as the urban middle class, retail businesspeople, and public employees. Beyond the material benefits, the *Ante-stalgija* represents a typical feature of Yugo-nostalgia proper. Yugo-nostalgia has been properly described as “less a longing for a real past than a kind of longing for the desires and fantasies that were once possible.”⁸⁷

The *Ante-stalgija* appears as a somehow idealized projection of what a democratized Yugoslavia could have become. It is based on a post-hoc selection of the more virtuous legacies of the Yugoslav past, combined with the range of possibilities allegedly offered by the illusion for a post-1989 wave of political and technological innovation. In this sense, Marković represents still today to some former citizens of Yugoslavia the imaginary embodiment of a fictional scenario in which a peaceful transition for the united country, with a growing integration into the European Union (and even full membership in a not so distant future) had been a viable and realistic possibility for some—although narrow and limited—window of time and opportunity. This is how the project of the Third Yugoslavia is still reimagined, re-questioned, and ultimately revived today, even though it has been poorly formulated and easily defeated in the past.

⁸⁷ Volčič, Zala. 2007. Yugo-Nostalgia. Cultural Memory and Media in the Former Yugoslavia. *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24 (1), 27.

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