

Passive Revolution in Contemporary Slovenia From the 2012 Protests to the Migrant Crisis¹

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RESUMEN

Dos secuencias han impactado la formación de la clase dirigente eslovena en el último lustro: las protestas de 2012-2013 y la crisis de los refugiados de 2015. En ambos casos, la respuesta de las élites implicó cambios en su propia composición y matices en su formulación ideológica. Aspectos centrales en esta dinámica fueron el papel de la derecha en el sistema, la integración parcial de nuevos actores, la asunción de algunas de sus demandas y la introducción de nuevos aspectos en la proyección de la relación amigo-enemigo que enmarca la vida política de ese país. En ningún caso, las variaciones propiciaron un cambio sustancial en la formulación de las ideas básicas del régimen post-socialista, incluyendo el papel de Eslovenia en el proceso de integración europea, su posición jerárquica en relación a sus vecinos del sur, la tendencia hacia la desregulación de la economía y la inclusión progresiva de restricciones en los procedimientos democráticos. Esas continuidades atravesaron varios procesos electorales y el nacimiento y debilitamiento de partidos políticos de vocación mayoritaria. Para explicar los mecanismos de reproducción de la clase dirigente eslovena en ese período se recurre a la noción gramsciana de *revolución pasiva*.

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Palabras clave: Eslovenia, élites polítiques, protestes eslovenas (2012-2013), crisis de los refugiados (2015), periferia de la Unión Europea.

RESUM

Dues seqüències han impactat la formació de la classe dirigent eslovena en l'últim lustre: les protestes de 2012-2013 i la crisi dels refugiats de 2015. En tots dos casos, la resposta de les elits va implicar canvis en la seva pròpia composició i matisos en la seva formulació ideològica. Aspectes centrals en aquesta dinàmica van ser el paper de la dreta en el sistema, la integració parcial de nous actors, l'assumpció d'algunes de les seves demandes i la introducció de nous aspectes en la projecció de la relació amic-enemic que emmarca la vida política del aquest país. En cap cas, les variacions van propiciar un canvi substancial en la formulació de les idees bàsiques del règim post-socialista, incloent el paper d'Eslovènia en el procés d'integració europea, la seva posició jeràrquica en relació als seus veïns del sud, la tendència cap a la desregulació de l'economia, i la inclusió progressiva de restriccions en els procediments democràtics. Aquestes continuïtats van travessar diversos processos electorals i el naixement i debilitament de partits polítics de vocació majoritària. Per explicar els mecanismes de reproducció de la classe dirigent eslovena en aquest període es recorre a la noció gramsciana de revolució passiva.

Paraules clau: Eslovènia, elits polítiques, protestes eslovenes (2012-2013), crisi dels refugiats (2015), perifèria de la Unió Europea.

ABSTRACT

Two episodes have impacted on the formation of the Slovenian ruling class over the last five years: the protests of 2012-2013 and the refugee crisis of 2015-2016. In both cases, the responses taken by the elites involved changes to their own composition and nuances in their ideological formulation. Central to this dynamic were the role of right-wing actors in the system, the partial integration of new actors, the assimilation of some of their claims, and the introduction of new questions into projected friend-enemy relations that frame the political life of the country. In no case did these variations lead to substantial changes in the formulation of the basic ideas of the post-socialist regime, including Slovenia's role in the process of European integration, its hierarchical position in relation to its southern neighbours, the deregulation of the economy, and the introduction of increasing restrictions within democratic procedures. These continuities went through several electoral processes and the birth and weakening of major political parties. The Gramscian notion of *passive revolution* offers a framework that explains the reproduction mechanisms of the Slovenian ruling class during that period.

Key words: Slovenia, political elites, Slovenian protests (2012-2013), refugee crisis (2015), European Union periphery.

Introduction

This article seeks to outline changes to the composition of the Slovene ruling elite, the state of its ideology, and its position in society as fostered by the 2015 humanitarian crisis. This crisis had a strong impact at the level of local communities, national societies and state authorities, on the so-called Balkan route taken by refugees. From positive and embracing reactions at first, attitudes soon became less tolerant, with proof of administrative xenophobia and racism. Turning points in this chain of events included the initial attitude of the German government, at first sensitive regarding the humanitarian catastrophe; the limited European Commission relocation and resettlement plan for asylum seekers – approved in September 2015 with harsh opposition from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, and the abstention of Poland; the closure of the Balkan route in February 2016; and the EU-Turkey agreement in March. In that context, certain discourses became prominent, including a linkage between terrorism and migration, manifestations of cultural essentialism, differentiating between ‘genuine’ refugees and economic migrants, and resorting to legal and democratic procedures for the exclusion of newcomers. The Slovene institutions, led by a social-liberal coalition with a strong attachment to the European Union, was no exception to this drift.

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In order to assess the adjustments made by and to the Slovene elites during that period, and to define the traces of the actors that shaped that outcome in Slovenia, the events preceding the migrant crisis must be considered. As will be observed below, the elites' origins can be traced back to a point even before the post-socialist transition. Nevertheless, for practical purposes, this article will consider the case of the previous political crisis, whose output – the formation of a new social-liberal government coalition in March 2013 – contributed to explaining the elite's composition before the migrant crisis. Comparing these cases will permit the drawing of an outline of general conclusions regarding elite reproduction in Slovenia.

This article contends that, through these episodes, the Slovene ruling elite deployed ideological devices and implemented administrative measures that have contributed to the construction of a more restrictive democracy and the reduction of spaces for social change, by virtue of its own capacity to assume partial changes in its own composition and ideological projection. In order to tackle this problem, the first step will consist in defining the theoretical elements that can help us to understand this process. Following this, the evolution of the ruling elites will be described in reverse, starting with the most recent crisis.

Elite reproduction: the latest stages of a passive revolution

The outcomes of the 2012-2013 protests and the refugee crisis in Slovenia may be outlined and discussed in relation to questions concerning elite reproduction in peripheral areas of the European Union (EU). In the case of Slovenia, this relates to the necessity of explaining the drift of its social-liberal dominated governing elite, which managed popular discontent and concomitantly the implementation of austerity measures. Several years later it oriented its actions and discourses towards culturally essentialist arguments, founding its actions on security approaches in a case which is fundamentally a humanitarian problem.

The Slovene post-socialist governing elite can be understood in terms of the Paretian idea, which comprises “opposing parties and allies rotating in and out of government offices and squabbling endlessly over policy matters.”³ Nevertheless, the squabbles have a limited importance in this case, attending to the “collective corporatism” that features in the political culture of the country, which is projected in the political system as the “hegemony of one political option on account of the need for unity”⁴. This has been reflected in the fact that, since independence, the system has evolved over time on the basis of a liberal-democratic consensus, even after the disappearance of the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS) – the hegemonic party during the nineties – in 2011.

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The ideological consensus and unity around strategic state questions have balanced recurring tendencies, including changes in the party system composition and party-switching. Two recent episodes of party relocation within the system are of relevance in contemporary Slovenia. First, the coalition government constituted after the 2014 elections – integrated by the newly formed Party of the Modern Centre (SMC)⁵, the Social Democrats (SD) and the Democratic Party of Pensioners (DeSUS) – represents a continuity in the evolution of the Slovene political system since independence. The outcome of the 2014 general elections represented the institutional closure of the 2013 political crisis, and featured the re-composition of the social-liberal consensus after important episodes of popular discontent. The second event consisted in the reincorporation of the right-wing, represented by the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), to the centre of institutional politics, and accompanied the country's response to the migrant crisis. This aspect provided the political system with its own counterweight in front of the growing importance of the far-right in Central and Eastern Europe.

³ Higley and Pakulski (2012): p. 113

⁴ Haček et al. (2013): pp. 6-7

⁵ The SMC initially stood for the Party of Miro Cerar. The importance of personalities is another feature of the Slovene social-liberal consensus.

These episodes can be read as stages in a wider and deeper dynamic of elite reproduction that precede contemporary developments to a great degree, and can be traced to the sovereigntist process. In fact, the Slovene elite has managed to survive and reproduce itself notwithstanding broader ideological and geopolitical changes from the decades before the country gained its independence in 1991 onwards⁶. The elitist character of the Slovene post-socialist transition and post-independence political system⁷ allows for the definition of changes at the level of the elite as a concrete form of a Gramscian "*passive revolution*", involving the implementation of top-down arrangements, the subordination of democracy and participation to the continuity of elites, and the implementation of new class reproduction mechanisms with adapted ideological justifications. These logics do not exclusively relate to the Slovene case. Trends towards social marketisation and the marginalisation of organised labour left the room, making way for the introduction of passive revolutions in Eastern European countries during the eighties and nineties. Specifically, this occurred through the limited or procedural democratisation of the system – which included preventing the emerging civil society from gaining state power, the implementation of measures relating to the neoliberal consensus, and the guidance of external forces⁸.

Passive revolution has grown over the years in Slovenia, becoming an actual political regime and a way of solving a periodic crisis in the society-state complex⁹. In this vein, this notion can be linked to Močnik's development of "fascist-like politics in post-socialism"¹⁰, which describes the general dynamics at the levels of structure and agency, and which "arise when there is a top-down transformation of the state form, [when] the transformation is carried out by the weaker fac-

⁶ Traces of the current elite structure can be found in institutional changes to Yugoslavia which occurred between 1963 and 1974, which set the basis of the socialist-contractual system, or "market socialism": Kirn (2017): p. 261. In the framework of that system, Slovenia held high rates of elite reproduction, which went beyond the process of independence. Statehood did not involve a change in the elite system, to the extent that there were rates close to 80%, between the mid-eighties and mid-nineties: Žerdin (2012): p. 111

⁷ The Slovene independence process can be conceptualised as an essentially elitist manoeuvre, in which the ideological and institutional bureaucracies of Slovenia integrated new actors and changed the strategic orientation of the republic towards the European political core: González Villa (2017). For the economic implications of this top-down process, see the article by Branko Bembič in this volume

⁸ Gill (2002): p. 63

⁹ Periodic crisis can be linked to another feature of the passive revolution, which is the absence of authentic forms of social hegemony (Gill, 2002, pp. 61-61) and, therefore, resorting to direct forms of coercion and more direct means of ideological domination.

¹⁰ Rather than looking for analogies with historical fascisms, the author seeks structural resemblances: Močnik (2017): p. 158

tion of the ruling class (or coalition), and [when] the masses have been disillusioned by the established economic and state forms, but lack the power and the organization to change them"¹¹. In the post-socialist context, this logic entails a specific appropriation of the notion of nation¹², the subordination of the comprador bourgeoisie to European Union policies, and the weakening of the labour movement and its political projections through the implementation of liberal democracy and market economy. In the Slovene case, this process was initially carried out at the level of political elites in relation to the addition of new political actors in and around initiatives led by the socialist ideological bureaucracies. These included the League of Communists, the Socialist Youth League, and the Socialist Alliance of Working People. The process was consolidated through the institutionalisation of this new situation between 1989 and 1991. Further episodes of the passive revolution involved variations on the 1989-1991 theme. Different formations within the party system, the changing shape of the system's enemies (which have always been depicted in alliance with the fifth column, or the enemy within), and related changes made with ideological justifications given have not led to the confirmation of a new state form, but to the fundamental consolidation of the precedent established in 1989-1991.

In this case, the episodes of 2012-2013 and 2015-2017 have consisted of specific political and social exclusions, the partial assimilation of alternative actors and demands, and partial changes to the composition of the ruling elite. As a result, the adoption of political hygiene measures and the aligning with the specific prospect – or illusion – of the EU's future, have promoted the reunification of the country's political elites that could, potentially, bring a reinforced right-wing back to institutional power over the next few years.

¹¹ Močnik (2017): pp. 156-157

¹² In Močnik's terms, "when socialist ideology was no longer able to dominate, i.e., to over-determine the national construction, in most post-socialist countries the vacuum was filled by illusions about capitalist ideology" (2017): p. 158. Francis Fukuyama described clearly the role of nationalism in the world after the end of history, not as a proper ideology, but as a local manager of world-wide dynamics: "[...] nationalism is not one single phenomenon but several, ranging from mild cultural nostalgia to the highly organized and elaborately articulated doctrine of National Socialism. Only systematic nationalism of the latter sort can qualify as a formal ideology on the level of liberalism or communism. The vast majority of the world's nationalist movements do not have a political program beyond the negative desire of independence from some other group or people, and do not offer anything like a comprehensive agenda for socio-economic organization. As such, they are compatible with doctrines and ideologies that do offer such agendas: Fukuyama (1989): pp. 19-20.

Responses to the migrant crisis from the social-liberal consensus

The reunification of the Slovene ruling elite is best viewed through the responses of the governing coalition – the current representative of the social-liberal consensus – to the migrant crisis, which consisted in the implementation of three sets of administrative measures between November 2015 and January 2017. These actions did not fundamentally contradict European responses. On the contrary, similar dynamics were taking place in other European countries and shaped the actions of the Slovene government, which made good argumentative use of the general context for justifying its own activity.

The first measure consisted in the construction of wire fences on the Croatia-Slovenia border in November 2015. The prime minister, Miro Cerar, stated that the action did not involve the closure of the border, but the installation of “technical barriers in the shape of a fence to direct the uncontrolled flow of refugees towards reception centres” in the country¹³. The context of this decision was shaped by a general tendency towards the restriction of movement. Hungary had already built its own fence on its border with Serbia in June. Above all, the building of the Slovene barrier began one week after Austria installed its own barrier system in Spielfeld (on the Styrian border with Slovenia) and applied a daily limit of 6,000 asylum requests¹⁴. Slovenia registered an average of 3,700 illegal border crossings during October, and 5,477 in November, but the Austrian limit was established after peaks occurred such as that on October 21, when 12,616 illegal border crossings into Slovenia took place¹⁵. For the Slovenes, the Austrian fence represented a serious concern, given the fact that the vast majority of newcomers were planning to continue their journey northwards. In fact, Slovenia only registered 255 first time asylum applications during 2015, which represented less than 0.1% of all applications received by EU countries during that period.

The installation of the fence was justified by the prime minister in terms of its alleged technical and temporary character. The government also resorted to humanitarian arguments, based on the idea that the fence would protect the integrity of migrants, so they could be taken in an orderly fashion to the border with Austria. However, weeks after building the fence, Cerar added a new justifi-

¹³ Surk (2015).

¹⁴ In Northern Europe, new border controls were set up in Germany and Sweden at the end of November.

¹⁵ According to the International Organization for Migration's data, crossings to Slovenia on October 21 constituted the record number of border crossings in a single day throughout the whole crisis in Europe.

On the pressures from Germany and Austria that led to the building of the Slovene fence with Croatia, see: Eddy, Surk, and Smale (2015).

cation, resorting to a distinction between refugees from war-torn areas and economic migrants. For these, the “technical barrier” would not represent a temporary construction for channelling the flow of refugees, but an actual obstacle for containing a “risk”¹⁶. The government made use of another ideologeme that remained after the crisis, namely the idea that Slovenia was “a responsible member of the EU” and a “guardian of Schengen”¹⁷. This argument involved a certain exemption of responsibility, if it is assumed that – from the perspective of ruling elites in peripheral areas of the EU – invoking *Europe* is equivalent to avoiding the consideration of political alternatives. This can be understood as the local explanation for a general dynamic relating to migration policies, in which, as Sassen states, the state is trapped in a wider web of actors – that includes other states, but also European institutions and far-right and xenophobic parties and movements – that restrict its sovereignty¹⁸.

The second set of coalition actions included the reform of the Act on Defence and the closure of the refugees’ so-called “Balkan Route”. The first measure – approved on February 22, 2016 – gave policing and mob control powers to the military in order to control the state border, if “required to by the security situation,” as proposed by the government and qualified by majority parliament approval.¹⁹ Less than one month later, on March 9, Slovenia effectively closed the Balkan Route by refusing entrance to those who did not seek asylum in the country.²⁰ The European context of these measures was shaped by an increase in border controls within the Schengen space, the announcement of a Hungarian referendum on the relocation and resettlement plan of the European Commission, the failure to implement the plan – which led to the quick negotiation of the EU-Turkey Refugee Agreement, and the progressive worsening of the humanitarian situation in refugee camps in Greece. In parallel, events such as the attacks in Paris and the 2015-2016 New Year’s Eve sexual assaults in Germany increased fears of a ‘fifth column’ and newcomers²¹. In this context, Merkel’s opposition to the closure of the Balkan route illustrated that her initial open borders position was becoming less important in the European context.

The justifications for these decisions were based, as in the earlier example given, on the responsibility to protect the Schengen border. At this time, the Slovene

¹⁶ Pavlic (2015).

¹⁷ Vlada Republike Slovenije (2015).

¹⁸ Sassen (2013): p. 205

¹⁹ Article 37.a.1. The assessment of the “security situation” is, in practice, a means for bypassing the “state of emergency” included in the Constitution

²⁰ This decision pushed Croatia and Serbia to do the same

²¹ Another feature of this period was the meeting of the Vienna Peace Talks for Syria in November 2015, which projected a perspective in which the war would be prolonged

government emphasised that the closure of the Balkan route was an action coordinated with other countries, including Austria, and that changes made to the Act on Defence intended to bring the law in line with Austria and Italy. Furthermore, Cerar resorted to culture based arguments for justifying the closure of the Balkan Route and the concomitant agreement with Turkey. From the prime minister's perspective, these initiatives would allow refugees to live in a cultural environment closer to their origins²².

Finally, a third action took place in January 2017, when the new Article 10 of the Act on Foreigners was approved by the Slovene Parliament. This reform implied that the government could propose the implementation of extraordinary measures in the case of a threat to the internal security and public order, including the automatic return of foreigners requesting asylum to the state from which they entered. This new provision alerted Amnesty International and the Council of Europe, whose secretary general informed them that the law violated the European Convention of Human Rights in terms of the right to due process, the consideration of individual circumstances, and the protection of all migrants and asylum seekers from ill treatment²³.

Variations on the social-liberal consensus

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In order to assess possible alternatives to the discourse and administrative action taken by the governing elite, it is necessary to take into account the manner in which this discourse was shaped and then introduced into society. Consensual elements present among the Slovene governing elite have suffered changes since the consolidation of the post-socialist system, which have ended up favouring the reproduction of the elite system. Changes at this level can be explained through Mouffe's notion of the "moment of the political"²⁴. This refers to particular episodes that shape new definitions of political identities based on the Schmittian definition of the friend-enemy relationship. During the sovereigntist process (1989-1992), which consisted of extending the ideological bureaucracies of the Slovene republic – and was accompanied by social mobilisations subordinated to elite dynamics, and the integration of new political actors in state structures²⁵ – the *political* was defined as the ultimate contradiction between the eventual integration of the republic in European institutions, on the one hand, and the depiction of *Belgrade* and a particular imagination of the Balkans as representatives of backwardness and anti-democratic stances. In addition to defin-

²² Pesek (2016)

²³ Videmšek (2017)

²⁴ Mouffe (2013)

²⁵ González Villa (2017)

ing this political arena, the independence process adopted its final shape after a subsequent process of institutionalisation, which included among its 'friends' the social movements which, during the eighties, had promoted an alternative outcome to the Yugoslav systemic crisis²⁶.

A new "moment of the political" took place between 2012 and 2014, when the system experienced a period in which there was a crisis of legitimacy which emerged in response to the double pressures of the EU, on the one hand, pushing for the implementation of economic reforms, and the anti-elite demonstrations of 2012-2013, which were triggered by dynamics such as the extension of the precariat, increased awareness of political corruption, and a drop in quality of democratic institutions, on the other.

During that period, one particular aspect that conveyed the contradictions between democracy and the new reforms promoted by the European Union related to the role of referendums in Slovene political life. At the end of 2012, signatures were collected calling for a consultation on the creation of a 'bad bank' and a public holding for the privatisation of state assets were lost while guarded by the police. Weeks later, the Constitutional Court forbade subsequent attempts to call referendums on those questions, or, more generally, on topics that could endanger the "effective implementation of government functions, including the creation of conditions for the development of the economic system"²⁷. The legality of the decision was not based on the proposed act itself, but on its resulting "unconstitutional effects." The decision angered figures like France Bučar - one of the leading figures in the writing of the Constitution and a well-known point of reference for the political establishment - who indicated that the Court was making judgments beyond its prerogatives²⁸. The importance of this decision goes beyond that particular referendum attempt, as, in Slovenia, the idea of the referendum represented more than a decision-making mechanism, but an actual foundational myth of the state and of Slovene democracy. Ultimately, the "unconstitutional effects" argument was only employed when it affected financial impositions, but not when other consultations questioned fundamental rights²⁹.

²⁶ Kirn (2007)

²⁷ *Ustavno sodišče* (2012)

²⁸ Žižek (2015): p. 22]

²⁹ In cases like the 2001 referendum on fertility rights, consultations concerning the civil rights of erased people in 2004, or subsequent referendums on the definition of marriage and the right to adopt by homosexual couples. The Court's decision in fact questioned the significance of a seminal event in the history of the state, considering that the December 1990 referendum that had allowed the implementation of independence had clearly had unconstitutional effects and affected part of the implementation of state functions – those related to the former Yugoslav administration – in Slovene territory

The resolution of that juncture involved the reform of the façade of the social-liberal consensus. It included, first of all, the introduction of corrupt political figures positioned as enemies. The leaders of majoritarian parties – Janez Janša, the prime minister until March 2013 and leader of the SDS, and Zoran Janković, mayor of Ljubljana and leader of *Pozitivna Slovenija* (PS), the number one party in the 2011 elections – were partially excluded from the system³⁰. Second, changes were promoted at the party system level. The disappearance of the LDS in 2011 was compensated by the appointment of Alenka Bratušek as prime minister, and by a takeover of Pozitivna Slovenija's leadership after Janković's fall, attempting to disassociate the patrimonialistic approach of the controversial mayor. Together with her new centrist coalition partners, the actions taken by Bratušek's government essentially entailed a continuation of the policies carried out by the right-wing, including budget adjustments, privatisation, and banking sector reform. The government also fostered a constitutional reform, which intended to *send a positive message to the markets*. From then onwards, the constitution has included a rule concerning budgetary stability, and restrictions on calling referendums. Currently, questions related to taxes, customs duties and the state budget, among others, cannot be the object of popular consultation. As Podvršič points out, successive coalition governments "succeeded in implementing reforms in line with the authoritative austerity measures programme" sponsored by Germany, which deepened the progressive peripheralisation of Slovenia within the European Union³¹.

The limits of new breaches in the system

The moment of the political of 2012-2014 proved to be a transitional period in which social-liberal elites managed to reproduce themselves after the appearance of symptoms suggesting their exhaustion – including protests and the appearance of new political actors – while applying the economic measures promoted by financial institutions and the European Union, while limiting the space for democracy.³² The social-liberal consensus managed to reinvent its position in

³⁰ Janša's exclusion was temporary, after his conviction for receiving bribes in the Patria case was overturned by the Constitutional Court. Janković returned to local politics and abandoned his position as national leader of Pozitivna Slovenija after the publication of the investigation report on parliamentary leaders of the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption in January 2013, which noted that he had not reported all of his assets. The report also pointed out Janša's undeclared funds and the purchase of a property with funds from a government contractor.

³¹ Podvršič (2015): p. 65.

³² Causes leading to the 'moment of the political' – or "populist situation" (Monereo, 2016) – cover material, ideological, and institutional aspects. In this case, these are represented by

the country despite being faced with the challenges posed by tens of thousands of demonstrators, which, in some cases, represented more than 20% of the population of the country's biggest cities³³. The epicentre of demonstrations was the city of Maribor, which had been suffering the impact of progressive deindustrialisation since independence. The mobilisations had specific institutional consequences. These included the resignation of the city mayor and, subsequently, the aforementioned changes in the national government. They also brought about the spreading of new articulations between "different social groups and individuals with different political affiliations and generations, young and old, workers and students [...] united around the same political slogans usually directed against the ruling politico-economic class: 'it is finished!' [*Gotov je!*] [...], and 'crooks!' [*Lopovi!*]," throughout the country³⁴. Thus, the demonstrations pushed for the definition of new political frontiers in terms of a redefinition of the us-them or friend-enemy relationship, in which 'the people' appeared before an illegitimate governing elite allied with financial and transnational institutions.

In this environment, new anti-establishment parties and coalitions were created in order to participate in the institutional dynamics. The coalition *Združena levica* [United Left] (ZL) was officially formed in March 2014, before the European Parliament elections. The event at which they were first presented was sponsored by the Party of the European Left, and counted on the presence of Alexis Tsipras (at that time, candidate of the European Left for the Presidency of the Commission). In fact, the coalition's antecedents go back to the period of mobilisations and the constitution of the *Iniciativa za demokratični socializem* [Initiative for Democratic Socialism] (IDS), the party that fostered the coalition, during the May Day School in Ljubljana³⁵. ZL seems to fit in with Mouffe's considerations concerning the strategy of the Left in Western democratic societies, which focus on the active enforcement of principles of liberty and equality – assuming they are not being put into practice – which "does not require a radical break." Rather, it requires what Gramsci calls 'a war of position' leading to the creation of a new hegemony"³⁶. The construction of the *trenches and earthworks* that feature in the Gramscian notion of the war of position involve the progressive consolidation of

progressive de-industrialisation and austerity, a crisis of old political identities, and gradual restrictions on democratic practices.

³³ The demonstration on December 3 in Maribor gathered more than 20,000 people, in a city with less than 100,000 inhabitants.

³⁴ Kirn (2013).

³⁵ The May Day School consists of a set of workshops, seminars, and conferences organised by the Inštitut za delavske študije [Institute for Labour Studies] – which initially gathered the founders of the IDS – in Ljubljana. The event counts on sponsorship by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, a foundation run by the German leftist party Die Linke.

³⁶ Mouffe (2013).

both institutional and civil society structures. However, Kirn³⁷ was right when he anticipated that the new parties "did not form a historical bloc"³⁸. Subsequent electoral results³⁹ revealed the new political organisations to be protest parties without a clear strategy for social, economic, and political transformation. Over time, ZL became the 'voice of a good conscience' within the Slovene political system, taking part in ad hoc coalitions formed for providing same-sex partners with the legal rights of marriage, and including water as a fundamental right in the constitution, while remaining in a minority position on questions such as economic policy and the refugee situation⁴⁰.

The reaction of ZL to the migrant crisis anticipated the arrival of newcomers. T One of its most active MPs – Miha Kordiš, channelled the clearly anti-racist and anti-xenophobic stances which the coalition assumed, and pointed out that the crisis was the result of Western imperialist policies⁴¹. The coalition also became involved with organisations assisting the arrival of refugees in the field⁴². In march 2016, ZL took a strong stance against the EU-Turkey deal, stating that it involved permitting the trafficking of human beings and violating principle of asylum and protection based on international law⁴³. Later, at the beginning of 2017, ZL clearly positioned itself against the proposed reforming of the Act on Foreigners, and its MPs demonstrated their opposition and view that the law was unconstitutional with gestures such as leaving the hall after the voting⁴⁴.

³⁷ Kirn (2013).

³⁸ The Gramscian concept of historical bloc involves "an historical congruence between material forces, institutions and ideologies, or broadly, an alliance of different class forces politically organized around a set of hegemonic ideas that gave strategic direction and coherence to its constituent elements": Gill (2002): p. 58.

³⁹ During 2014, ZL obtained 5.5% and 6% in the European and general elections respectively. Verjamen [I Believe], founded by Igor Šoltes, the prestigious former President of the Court of Auditors, managed to gain representation in European Parliament (10.33% and 1 MEP), but received less than 1% in the general election, in which Šoltes was not the candidate.

⁴⁰ The new Slovene Left, in fact, incorporated itself into the general dynamic of marginality of the parties belonging to the Party of the European Left, which, with the exception of Syriza, have a 10% voting ceiling. The drift of Syriza after the Greek government signed the third memorandum with its creditors in July 2015 also had an impact on the development of ZL (Tetičkovič, 2016), which is now closer to the positions for abandoning the eurozone (Mesec, 2016).

⁴¹ BEGUNCI IN JAVNOMNENJSKI LINČ. Komentar: Miha Kordiš (Združena levica 2015), <https://www.facebook.com/zdruzenalevica/photos/a.288341194657780.1073741830.285304408294792/561217930703437/?type=1&theater> [22.5.2017].

⁴² Poročilo s terena. Goran Milijanović, Brežice, IDS/ZL (Združena levica 2015), <https://www.facebook.com/zdruzenalevica/photos/a.288341194657780.1073741830.285304408294792/572053796286517/?type=1&theater> [22.5.2017].

⁴³ Združena levica (2016)

⁴⁴ Večer (2017)

In addition to the new political parties, civil society organisations and social movements have promoted initiatives for alleviating migrants' situation and for opposing specific measures taken by the government. An example of the former is the work of *Protirasistična fronta brez meja* [Antiracist Front Without Borders], an organisation based on the work of the Social Centre Rog, which carries out some of its activities alongside NGOs such as *Slovenska filantropija*. The movement has been operating since August 2015, when its members organised a demonstration in Ljubljana with the intention of showing that, if the Balkan route were to pass through Slovenia, they would welcome newcomers⁴⁵. The organisation has developed numerous initiatives, including offering small loans, legal aid, and practical assistance for daily life in Slovenia, help with finding jobs, medical assistance, language lessons, assistance for relations with media, the organisation of assemblies, and the setting up of a new space, a 'second home,' in which migrants in especially delicate situations are offered temporary accommodation⁴⁶. Another initiative was the attempt to call a referendum over the reform of the Act on Defence, which, according to the referendum promoters, was changing the foundations of the constitution and the role of the armed forces⁴⁷. The initiative was dismissed by parliament in November 2015, but made a significant contribution as regards the historical significance of the reform, as "the refugees and uncontrolled state border crossings are being used to militarise Slovene society and the country, which was supposedly, at the end of the 1980s, based on peaceful civil movements for democracy and human rights." Thus, the initiative demonstrated parallels between movements that had been co-opted by the system⁴⁸, and current proposals, which were quickly dismissed by the institutions.

Alternative actors – both in terms of institutional and civil society dimensions – seemed to assume their minority position in Slovene society in relation to the migrants' situation. The activist Zupančič explains this from the perspective that "Slovenia does not reflect its own colonial reality," and that, instead of assuming its own peripheral position, it was generally assumed that its role is to defend the southern Schengen border⁴⁹. Even before migrants arrived, Kordiš (ZL) had already assumed that Slovene public opinion would take hostile stances towards

⁴⁵ Zupančič (2017)

⁴⁶ The initiative was justified in relation to the government's response to the crisis. According to Zupančič (2017), it consisted in the "outsourcing to NGOs that are not capable of coping with the situation, as people in asylum homes are actually being treated as high school students in a dorm and receive only 18€ per month" for subsistence.

⁴⁷ *Proti militarizaciji* (2015)

⁴⁸ The best example of this trend is the figure of Janez Janša, who became the leader of the conservatives after being a key figure in the late eighties peace movement.

⁴⁹ 2017.

refugees⁵⁰. He therefore insisted on the struggle for eliminating the causes of misery and exile, and not on closing the doors to people in need, stating that this was a question of principles that should be defended even if it involved losing votes.

The reintegration of the Right

The moment of the political which occurred during the winter of 2012-2013 involved the erosion of the Slovene Right. The political crisis deepened when Janez Janša, leader of the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), was mentioned by the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption in its January 2013 report, which was made public when the demonstrations were reaching their peak. Together, these facts resulted in three of Janša's coalition partners abandoning his government and supporting a constructive vote of no confidence that led to the formation of Bratušek's cabinet in March. In addition, a few months later, the District Court of Ljubljana sentenced Janša to two years in prison and a €37,000 fine for collecting bribes in the Patria case⁵¹. From that moment on, until December 2014 – when his conviction was overturned by the Constitutional Court – the Slovene Right managed to survive thanks to the strong cohesion between the bases and its leadership. In fact, since the gradual reorienting of the party towards conservatism during the nineties⁵², Janša's leadership has not been challenged. While it is true that the SDS performed poorly in the 2014 elections, losing almost 40% of its votes in relation to 2011, the party remained in second place, maintaining a position of resistance by stating that the election results were illegitimate⁵³. Months before, the SDS had managed to win elections for European Parliament, in which its Christian Democratic partner, Nova Slovenija, was second.

The migrant crisis has been an opportunity for the SDS as regards its reintegration into the social-liberal consensus. Over this period, the party has contributed to the discursive framework of the Slovene response to the crisis and has provided vital support to government initiatives. Thus, in February 2016, the SDS voted with the coalition for the reform of the Act on Defence. On that occasion, Janša took advantage of the situation by requesting additional funds for the mili-

⁵⁰ *BEGUNCI IN JAVNOMNENJSKI LINČ. Komentar: Miha Kordiš. Cit.*

⁵¹ The Patria Case was a corruption and bribery plot between the Finnish military provider Patria and the Slovene Ministry of Defence, which acquired 135 infantry fighting vehicles in 2006.

⁵² The final step in this process took place in 2003, when the party dropped the 'social democratic' reference from its name.

⁵³ The vice-president of the party made this claim after the publication of the results, adding that the resulting government would be illegitimate as well. The statement included requesting that the president of the Republic repeat the elections: Žužek (2014)

tary in order to increase the number of troops protecting the border⁵⁴. At the same time, the SDS was active in organising local demonstrations against the building of migrant centres. On February 16, up to 3,000 people demonstrated against the opening of a facility in Šenčur, close to Kranj, with the support of the SDS. Actions of this kind were not a symptom of the SDS's isolation. On the contrary, the rejection of migrant centres during 2016 proved to be trans-ideological. For example, consider cases such as the mayor of Ilirska Bistrica, a Social Democrat, who showed the government his blunt opposition to the opening of a centre for migrants and refugees in his city⁵⁵, and Andrej Fištravec, the mayor of Maribor (a symbol of the 2012-2013 protests), who also demonstrated his initial concern regarding the building of an asylum seekers' centre in his city, arguing that Maribor's citizens would be concerned for the safety of their children⁵⁶.

Later, in January 2017, SDS support was essential for the government to approve the reform to the Act on Foreigners, as some MPs in the coalition parties (including all Social Democratic MPs and even part of the SMC, including the speaker of parliament) voted against it⁵⁷. During the debate, Janša's deputy in parliament congratulated the government for "leading the battle for reason," stating that the fact that the borders were closed did not entail violating the human rights of migrants, as they, in fact, would not be allowed to be on Slovene territory⁵⁸. These events, however, did not prevent Janša from displaying his most radical side by bluntly attacking Cerar's policy during the crisis, defining it as "anti-Slovene," and pointing out that Slovene nationals were being treated like second class citizens before migrants, just as was the case with the erased⁵⁹. In fact, one of the SDS's contributions during this period was its capacity for synthesising current questions with their interpretation of the past. The analogy with the erased is relevant, as Janša identifies them as enemies of the nation – "they did not take citizenship because they did not believe in Slovenia"⁶⁰, while the SDS's spokesman in the debate over the new legislation on foreigners, Franc Breznik, pointed

⁵⁴ Pavlic (2016)

⁵⁵ More generally, he also confirmed that his municipality was not ready to integrate migrants and refugees in any way: <https://www.ilirska-bistrica.si/obcina/novice/2016111713223755/lzjava-za-javnost-glede-integracije-migrantov-in-beguncev-v-ob%C4%8Dini-ilirska-bistrica/>

⁵⁶ RTVSLO (2017)

⁵⁷ Parlameter. Glasovanje. Zakon o spremembi in dopolnitvah Zakona o tujcih – Glasovanje o zakonu v celoti, <https://parlamer.si/seja/glasovanje/8940/6819> [22.5.2017]

⁵⁸ Večer (2017)

⁵⁹ Janša (2017). A recent update on the situation of the erased – Yugoslav citizens residing in Slovenia during independence who were deprived of citizenship rights after a decision made by the administration is available in Hervej (2017)

⁶⁰ Janša (2017)

out to the fifth column who were undermining the nation in favour of its enemies: "Supporters of migrants today are the same people who venerate the old regime"⁶¹.

The xenophobic and radical right stances acquired by the SDS during its transformation towards being a conservative party⁶² have not led to Eurosceptic stances. In relation to the migrant crisis, the SDS did not directly challenge prevailing approaches in Europe. Thus, at the beginning, Janša⁶³ praised the quota system described in the relocation and resettlement plan of the European Commission, which placed him and his party a long way away from the Hungarian and Polish governments as concerns their stance towards Brussels. Currently, the restrictive approaches of the SDS towards the arrival of migrants and cultural arguments for their expulsion are in line with discourses that have become hegemonic in Europe, which position migrants as being outside of the political community. Germany's initial position at the beginning of the crisis – in particular, allowing people to seek asylum not in the first safe country in which they arrived – was only clearly criticised by Janša once the German chancellor herself had started to review her position⁶⁴. Thus, the SDS leader currently holds that the European Union only has a future if it is able to protect its borders, to clear radical Islam, and to abandon political correctness and dreams of multiculturalism⁶⁵. These are no longer minority points of view in contemporary Europe, and are even defended by mainstream political parties throughout the region. In this vein, Janša received the praise of Viktor Orban at the last congress of the SDS (which took place in Maribor in May 2017) and Janša thanked him for the precedent Hungary had set when building its fence in mid 2015, as this not only involved the defence of Hungary, but also the defence of Slovenia⁶⁶.

This synthesis has favoured the SDS re-joining the social-liberal consensus at the institutional level while at the same time neutralising far-right organisations. In this vein, its position in the Slovene political system has left several characters in the margins. These include Andrej Čuš – the former leader of the SDS youth

⁶¹ Stranka SDS, Twitter account, <https://twitter.com/strankaSDS/status/824660691709784065> [22.5.2017]

⁶² Hall and Perrault (2000)

⁶³ Janša (2015)

⁶⁴ One example, in Samuel Osborne, "Angela Merkel admits she lost control of refugee crisis in Germany and would 'turn back time' if she could," *Independent*, September 21, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/angela-merkel-refugees-germany-lost-control-crisis-would-turn-back-time-a7320726.html> [22.5.2017]

⁶⁵ Demokracija (2017)

⁶⁶ Čokl (2017)

who left the party in March 2016⁶⁷ and who has sought to promote Eurosceptic stances by side-lining with the European Conservatives and Reformists, new conservative parties like GOD (*Glas za otroke in družine*, or Voice for Children and Families) – founded by the anti-gay marriage activist Aleš Primc, and far-right initiatives like *Generacija identite*⁶⁸, or small social media groups that, in fact, disseminate material in accordance with SDS discourse⁶⁹.

Concluding remarks

The Slovene response to the migrant crisis began to brew years before the actual crisis took place. The question emerged from the contestation of previously assumed ideas regarding the self-image of the country's role in Europe and the position of people who do not belong to the national community. Political turning points favoured a passive revolution, which partially affected the bases of the post-socialist system, but mostly preserved its foundations. Changes involved the integration of new political actors, but also the limiting of their effects and influence on the country's political and social life.

At the beginning of this period, the Slovene population started to put into question the idea of *Europe* and the European Union⁷⁰ in the context of budgetary adjustments and structural reforms, which initially – in 2011 – were intended to affect the pension system⁷¹. The migrant crisis set the context for a recovering of

⁶⁷ Among the reasons given for leaving the party was his denouncement that members of the SDS benefitted from the construction of a mosque with Qatari funds: Cirman and Vuković (2017)

⁶⁸ Which, in fact, attempts to imitate the aesthetics and discourse of the Identitarian Movement in Central European countries: <https://www.facebook.com/GeneracijaidentiteteSLO/> [22.5.2017].

⁶⁹ Two examples are the Facebook groups STOP Islamizaciji Slovenije and Territorialna obramba 2015, with more than 8,000 and 6,000 followers respectively. The most important Facebook group – Slovenija zavaraju meje, with more than 32,000 followers – was closed during the first half of 2017.

⁷⁰ 2013 ended with a historic minimum of citizen confidence in the system. Earlier, Slovenes were among the strongest supporters of the European Union project of all the countries involved in the 2004 Great Enlargement. Thus, the Eurobarometer showed in 2008 that more than 70% of those surveyed believed that Slovenia had benefited from its membership in the EU, and 65% stated that the Euro favoured economic stability: Eurobarometer 70, autumn 2008. Five years later, the situation changed drastically, to the extent that in 2013 only 34% of the population trusted the EU. Even so, Slovenes continued to rely more on European institutions than on their own Government and Parliament, which 87% and 93% of the population did not trust: Eurobarometer 79, Spring 2013.

⁷¹ The initiative surrounding the raising of the retirement age was declined in a referendum. The event ultimately caused the fall of the social-liberal government led by Borut Pahor and

Europe as something more than an ideological artefact used to justify measures supported by the population⁷². The idea of *Europe* was also recovered as an amalgam of the Slovene political actors; as both their compass and guide in the system. A few months after the migrant crisis – when part of the measures taken had already been consolidated – the president of the Republic closed this period of discussion, a few days after the Brexit referendum results, stating: "We have our own country today; we are included in the most integrated part of the European Union and the Western world. We were in the right place at the right time. There is no reason for us to regret the decision that we made then and all subsequent decisions, including our membership of the European Union and the NATO Alliance, or joining the Euro Zone and the Schengen Area, as these decisions led us to where we are now [...] The strengthening of the European Union is vital for us. I believe that the European Union will either be a federal union in the future or it will not exist, and our vital interest, the interest of the citizens of the Republic of Slovenia, of our country, of our homeland, is that we remain in this process, in the most integrated part of the European Union"⁷³.

Without mentioning the migrant crisis, the speech framed the decisions taken by the government over the previous few years in terms of a competition to remain in the "most integrated part" of the EU, given the ongoing debate over the possibility of launching a multi-speed model of integration⁷⁴. In order to succeed in this process, Slovenia should, according to Miro Cerar, fulfil its responsibilities as the "guardian of the Schengen border," given that "either Slovenia will protect the Schengen border, or we will no longer be in the Schengen Area"⁷⁵. During the competition to stay in the core of the European Union, good relations with southern neighbours should not be confused with protecting what is in the Slovene interest, which is equivalent to the future of the EU. Thus, when the prime minister stated in April that "if Croatia wishes to amend the current regulation, it would need to address the leaders of all Member States of the Union," he was

represented the last occasion on which the population expressed its views on state and economic issues.

⁷² According to a survey carried out by *Delo*, a large majority of the population supported the tightening of restrictions towards refugees which were taking place in certain countries, including depriving newcomers of their possessions, fast return measures, and the closure of the borders. The survey also points out that, due to the crisis, Angela Merkel lost much of the sympathy of the Slovene population Potič and Pribošič (2016)

⁷³ Pahor (2016)

⁷⁴ On the scenarios outlined by the European Commission after Brexit and its preference for a "multi-speed Europe", see the "EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S PLANS FOR A MULTI-SPEED EU," *euranet*, March 6, 2017, <http://euranetplus-inside.eu/european-commissions-plans-for-multi-speed-eu/> [22.6.2017]

⁷⁵ Vlada Republike Slovenije (2017)

making clear that, as part of their strategy of seeking to remain in that core, Slovene cooperation with Southern neighbours would be limited to the best possible management of current border crossing regulations. In this vein, relaxing border controls with Croatia would mean, according to Cerar, a "return to the Balkans"⁷⁶.

In this environment, solidarity movements and alternative discourses remain marginal in terms of their potential for social transformation following the arrival of migrants. Structurally, the Slovene social-liberal tradition, which had partially included the claims of the alternative movements of the eighties, currently only reflects a European aspiration. At the level of agency, civil society and alternative political parties which, through their actions and discourses, advocate for a different, more inclusive, notion of citizenship, are portrayed by the prevailing institutional consensus as the antithesis of the historical aspiration of the Slovene people, and, therefore, as its enemies.

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⁷⁶ Al Jazeera Balkans [2017]

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