

**BROTHERHOOD AND UNITY:  
LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE POLITICS IN THE SOCIALIST  
FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA (1945-1991)**

**Maria Rita Leto**

(Università 'G. D'Annunzio' Chieti-Pescara)

In Old Church Slavonic, the word *jezikŭ*, which in modern Slavic languages means only 'language', encompassed the meaning of both 'language' and 'people'. This connection between people and language can also be found in later texts, such as the Croatian manuscript of 1495 in which the priest Martinac describes the Christian defeat of Krbava in 1493 saying that "[the] Turks tormented the Croatian language/people". In Slavic languages characterized by a great similarity, this overlapping of meanings can create some embarrassment in the case of 'fluid' situations, thus accounting for the crucial position of the linguistic issue in the Slavic area in general and in the Serbo-Croatian area in particular. The problem lies in the fact that this area saw the growth of two populations – the Serbs and the Croats – who speak the same language, albeit with two standard variants, but have seen a different development in terms of religion, culture, politics, and economy. A further complication is that this language is also spoken by other peoples, such as Montenegrins and Muslims,<sup>1</sup> who do not identify, or only partly or temporarily identified, with the Serbs or the Croats. Moreover, about twenty-seven languages were spoken in Socialist Yugoslavia, on which this essay focuses, with extremely complex interconnections between language and national identity. With respect to

---

<sup>1</sup> The Muslim nationality, acknowledged as such in 1968, includes the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but does not include all followers of the religion, since Muslims can be of several other nationalities such as Turkish or Albanian. Today, the Muslims of Bosnia are usually referred to as Bosniaks in official discourse.

the linguistic minorities, the Socialist government adopted a ground-breaking policy, which other nations would later take as a model, as it included the protection of all the nationalities in the country (particularly with the 1974 constitution).<sup>2</sup> However, the insurmountable stumbling block that played a critical role first in the conception and then in the dissolution of the idea of Yugoslavia was its main language, starting from the very name it should bear. Consequently, the present essay focuses on this aspect of the linguistic policy adopted in the second Yugoslavia. In order to understand this intricate linguistic situation and the difficulties that socialist Yugoslavia had to face in this field, though, we need to start by briefly retracing the path that led these peoples initially to Yugoslavism and then to their dramatic separation during the 1990s.

## I. An imagined language

The national awareness of Serbs and Croats is largely determined by the fact that the former belong to the Orthodox-Byzantine sphere of influence, while the latter are part of the Latin-Catholic area. Unlike the Croats, the Serbs had a strong medieval kingdom and an equally strong nineteenth-century State structure. Their Byzantine-influenced cultural tradition is uniform, unlike that in Croatia, and their language developed into only one of the dialects of the Serbo-Croatian area, *štokavian*, albeit in the *ekavian* and *ijekavian* variants.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, they traditionally use the Cyrillic alphabet. In contrast, the Croats did not have an autonomous State until 1991 (with the exception of the short-lived reign of King Tomislav in the tenth century, and the infamous years of the Independent State of Croatia),<sup>4</sup> were separated into different States, and spoke different dialects. This possibly explains why they have concentrated their fears regarding

---

<sup>2</sup> August Kovačec, "Jezici narodnosti i etničkih skupina u Jugoslaviji", *Kulturni radnik*, 39, 1 (1986): 83-96, see 84.

<sup>3</sup> The Serbo-Croatian linguistic area is traditionally divided into three dialects that are named after the interrogative pronoun 'what?': the *štokavian* dialect, far more common than the other two, spoken in Serbia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro and in a large part of today's Croatia; the *čakavian* dialect spoken in Istria, Dalmatia (from the north to the Pelješac peninsula and, on the islands, from the north to the island of Lastovo, which also features *štokavian* elements), and the *kajkavian* dialect spoken in the Zagreb area. The latter has many traits in common with Slovene (whether it should be considered a Croatian or Slovene dialect has long been debated). Another dialect classification results from the ancient Slavonic vowel *jat*, so that *štokavian* can have an *ikavian*, *ijekavian* or *ekavian* accent (according the sound *i*, *je* or *e* of the *jat* vowel), whereas *čakavian* is basically *ikavian*, while *kajkavian* is basically *ekavian*. Over time, these dialects have developed their own literatures.

<sup>4</sup> King Tomislav reigned around 925; the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, NDH), a satellite of the Axis, was established on 10 April 1941 and ceased to exist in May 1945.

their national identity onto language. There is the fear of being Italianized, Magyarized, Germanized and, lastly, of being incorporated into the stronger, much more compact, linguistically and ethnically so similar Serbian nationality.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, however, in the wake of the Pan-Slavic enthusiasm of Austrian Slavs, the Croats did promote the Illyrian Movement, aiming to unite all the Slavs of the Balkans into a multi-ethnic State in which each constituent part could keep its identity.<sup>5</sup> In 1850, leading Croatian and Serbian personalities co-signed the Vienna Literary Agreement that established a joint literary language based on the *štokavian ijekavian* dialect. With the goal of advocating the much wished-for cultural and linguistic unification, the Croats dropped the Zagreb dialect, *kajkavian*, in favour of the *štokavian* dialect, as it was the most widespread and the only variant that they could share with the Serbs. The latter, though, did not renounce the *ekavian* dialect spoken in the capital city, Belgrade, and in Vojvodina. *Ekavism/ijekavism* thus became an insurmountable obstacle to the creation of a unified language, even if behind this, other problems were lurking. The Illyrian Movement, which was successful only among the Croats, thus marked the beginning of a linguistic, cultural, ideological, and political misunderstanding that, *mutatis mutandis*, has persisted to the present day. The Serbs saw a possible union with the other South Slavs as a way to expand their borders and to restore their medieval 'great Serbia'. The Croats, on the other hand, with their experience in the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual Habsburg empire, were firmly determined to preserve their national and linguistic characteristics. This misunderstanding between Serbs and Croats on the terms and goals of their union continued not only during the first Yugoslavia (1918-1945), but also throughout the socialist period (1945-1991), with heightening tension and mutual reproaches whose pivotal point was language.

In the first Yugoslavia, which was initially called the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians (*Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*), the national and linguistic problems were clearly underestimated, probably due to difficulties in cross-cultural mediation between the parties. For example, the Corfu Declaration, signed on 20 July 1917 and considered the first step in the creation of Yugoslavia, stated that this people with three names is actually

one and the same, by blood, by written and spoken language, by the feelings of their unity, by continuity and integrity of the territory they inhabit undividedly, and by common vital interests.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Egidio Ivetić, *Jugoslavia sognata. Lo jugoslavismo delle origini* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> *Krfska deklaracija 1917. saradnja Jugoslovena na internacionalizaciji jugoslovenskog pitanja*, [http://www.znaci.net/00001/138\\_7.pdf](http://www.znaci.net/00001/138_7.pdf), last accessed 2 May 2019.

The unitary spirit of this statement held the germ of future clashes, as it could not but displease the weaker peoples of the nation, particularly the Croats. Then, with King Alexander's coup in 1929 and the transformation into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (*Kraljevina Jugoslavija*), unitarism was strengthened and underlined in the new motto of the country: 'one King, one language, one people'. Political unitarism was matched by linguistic unitarism: the official language of the first Yugoslavia, in both the 1921 and 1931 constitutions, was Serbo-Croatian-Slovene (*srpsko-hrvatsko-slovenački*). This name was chosen as a compromise. It acknowledged Serbo-Croatian as the official language and attributed Slovene the status of a local dialect. However, several other linguistic minorities were not considered at all. In 1930, following the directives of the Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians,<sup>7</sup> a manual was published with the aim of unifying Serbian and Croatian orthographic rules. Based on a work written by the Serb Aleksandar Belić in 1923, this new manual was strongly opposed by the Croats, because they saw it as a way to 'Serbianize' their language. It is possible that the Serbs – the largest and strongest people in the Kingdom unified under their rule and with Belgrade as the capital city – considered imposing their norm as the natural and legitimate standard. However, they did not do this. In fact, there was not a true unitarism, as this would have required the imposition of one variant over the other. In Croatia – as Snježana Kordić has pointed out – newspapers, schoolbooks and literary works were not in *ekavian*, and neither courts nor the Parliament were forced to use it. The two variants continued to coexist and the "two main centres of codification, Zagreb and Belgrade, continued codifying their variants".<sup>8</sup>

The Yugoslavia born out of the ashes of World War II,<sup>9</sup> a socialist and federal State, inherited the unresolved issue of the language from the first, monarchic and centralized Yugoslavia.

Right from the outset and repeatedly, the Central Committee of the Yugoslavian Communist Party<sup>10</sup> addressed the issue of Serbo-Croatian as 'one' (*jedan*) but not a

<sup>7</sup> "Pravopisno upustvo", *Prosvetni Glasnik* (15 June 1929): 747-771.

<sup>8</sup> Snježana Kordić, *Jezik i nacionalizam* (Zagreb: Durieux, 2010), 287.

<sup>9</sup> The so-called 'second' Yugoslavia had several names: Democratic Federative Yugoslavia (*Demokratska Federativna Jugoslavija*) from 1943 to 1946, Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (*Federativna Narodna Republika Jugoslavija*) from 1946 to 1963 and Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (*Socijalistička Federativna Republika*), from 1963 to 1991. It consisted of six republics (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Macedonia) and two autonomous provinces (Vojvodina and Kosovo) that belonged to Serbia.

<sup>10</sup> Making reference to Marx's *Manifesto* of 1848 and following the 6<sup>th</sup> conference of YCP held in Zagreb on 2-5 November 1952 that declared the split with the Soviet model, the Yugoslavian leaders changed the name of the Yugoslavian Communist Party into the League of Communists of Yugoslavia.

'unitary' (*jedinstven*) language spoken by about 75% of the population.<sup>11</sup> The decisions taken in this regard were mostly contradictory and harbingers of further complications, as they were determined by contingencies. From an initial stance that acknowledged – at least formally – the existence of Serbian and Croatian as two separate languages, the situation changed and increasingly more noticeable attempts were made to create a single national language – Serbo-Croatian or Croatian-Serbian. At the same time, however, the equality of variants and alphabets was underlined, thus implicitly contradicting the intention of creating a unified norm. In fact, socialist Yugoslavia also continuously oscillated between unitarism and separatism without being able to define a consistent and shared policy.<sup>12</sup> From the federal constitution of 1963 onwards, the decision regarding the choice of the official language/languages was delegated to each republic,<sup>13</sup> with the result that the Federation ended up without really having an official language. In the case of Serbo-Croatian, this represented a further complication: if Serbian and Croatian were considered different languages, it would be necessary to protect the linguistic rights of the Serbian minority in Croatia, as well as those of the Croatian minority in Serbia.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Serbo-Croatian, Slovene (the mother tongue of about 8% of the population) and Macedonian (6%) were the languages of the 'nations' (*narodni*) of Yugoslavia, that is, those who belonged to States within Yugoslavia (Serbs, Croats, Muslims, Montenegrins, Slovenians and Macedonians). Albanian (8%) and Hungarian (2%) are the two main languages of 'nationalities' (*narodnosti*, as minorities were called) whose country of reference was outside Yugoslavia, but which enjoyed various rights, along with the languages of other nationalities (Turkish, Slovakian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Ruthenian, Italian, Czech, Ukrainian). Finally, there were some ethnic groups (Roms, Vlachs and small minorities such as Germans, Poles, Russians and Greeks) who were not granted any language rights. As nationality was declared and not conferred, it is possible to see fluctuations from one census to the other. Over the years, for example, the number of people who declared to be Yugoslavian increased. For further details on the linguistic situation of Yugoslavia in general, see *Language in the Former Yugoslav Lands*, ed. by Ranko Bugarski and Celia Hawkesworth (Bloomington, Indiana: Slavica Publishers, 2004) and Ranko Bugarski, "Jezička politika i planiranje jezika u Jugoslaviji", *Jezič u kontekstu*, ed. by Ranko Bugarski (Beograd: Čigoja štampa, XX vek, 1997), 30-57; about the Yugoslavian linguistic policy towards Romani, see Grattan Puxon, "Romanēs and Language Policy in Jugoslavia", *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 19 (1979): 83-90.

<sup>12</sup> A compelling metaphor used by Ranko Bugarski is the 'fire-fighter policy', Ranko Bugarski, "Nekoliko napomena o našoj jezičkoj politici", *Jezička politika i planiranje jezika u Jugoslaviji*, ed. by Vera Vasić (Novi Sad: Institut za južnoslovenske jezike, 1990), 81-85, 83.

<sup>13</sup> For example, in the autonomous Province of Vojvodina, five official languages were recognised: Serbo-Croatian, Hungarian, Slovakian, Romanian and Ruthenian; in Kosovo four: Serbo-Croatian, Albanian, Turkish and Romani. In Vojvodina, the need for equality was the subject of more than twenty laws.

<sup>14</sup> The problem mainly affected the significant Serbian minority in Croatia (about 15% of the population), also considering the fact that Tito's Yugoslavia had just suffered a bloody war and that the Croatian Serbs still remembered the slaughters perpetrated by the Ustashi.

## II. What's in a Name

The second Yugoslavia was founded on 29-30 November 1943 in Jajce, Bosnia, when most of the territory was still occupied by the Germans. During the second session of the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ),<sup>15</sup> a provisional parliamentary assembly was established and Josip Broz, also known as Tito and the undisputed leader of the resistance, was appointed Marshal and became Prime Minister. The session outlined the guidelines of the future Yugoslavia based “on democratic, federal principles, as a state community of peoples with equal rights”.<sup>16</sup> A major principle of the new country is distilled into the slogan ‘Brotherhood and Unity’ (*Bratstvo i jedinstvo*),<sup>17</sup> which occurs three times in the founding act of the People’s Federal Republic of Yugoslavia dated 29 November 1945. Destined to become the most popular political slogan during the fifty years of existence of Yugoslavia,<sup>18</sup> this claim is much more complex than it may at first appear. The concept of ‘Brotherhood’ can refer to ethnic and social categories,<sup>19</sup> thus generating an ideological ambiguity that was useful when the communist partisans were supported by Great Britain, but would backfire later on. In fact, this principle of legitimation, which aimed to create internal cohesion between the various nations of the federation, failed when the ethnical aspect began to prevail over the social element. On the other hand, the notion of ‘Unity’ underscored the importance of the fact that the remodelled Yugoslavia should stay united by virtue of a voluntary agreement among parties that were given equal status and equal rights, including the right to self-determination and even secession. Moreover, the slogan ‘Brotherhood and Unity’ also met the needs of the most disadvantaged peoples in the Federation, as ‘Brotherhood’ implies equality within the unity of the State, which is what the Croats had been asking for since the time of Illyrism.

---

<sup>15</sup> Even if during the first AVNOJ meeting held in Bihać a year earlier the majority was in the hands of the communists, a moderate political programme was presented to gain the backing of the western supporters and non-communist political forces.

<sup>16</sup> *Ustavi i ustavna dokumenta socijalističke Jugoslavije 1942-1981*, ed. by Ratko Marković and Milutin Srđić (Beograd: Naučna knjiga, 1987), 15.

<sup>17</sup> For the story behind the slogan, see Drago Roksandić, “‘Bratstvo i jedinstvo’ u političkom govoru jugoslovenskih komunista 1919-1945. godine, *Tito – videnja i tumačenja*, ed. by Olga Manojlović Pintarić, Mile Bjelajac, and Radmila Radić (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2011), 28-43.

<sup>18</sup> The other pillars of SFRY were self-management, promoted in the 1950s in opposition to the Soviet centralized-State model; non-alignment with the two cold-war blocks, the Soviet and the American organisations, which from its formulation between 1956 and 1960 gave Tito and Yugoslavia a key role among the non-aligned countries; and the myth of Tito that began to emerge from the years of the partisan war.

<sup>19</sup> Dejan Jović, “Yugoslavism and Yugoslav Communism: from Tito to Kardelj”, *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea 1918-1992*, ed. by Dejan Djokić (London: Hurst & Company, 2003), 157-181.

As proof of the crucial role of the linguistic issue, on 15 January 1944, less than two months after the Democratic Federative Yugoslavia had been proclaimed, the AVNOJ deliberated on which languages would be used for the official resolutions and notices issued by the National Liberation Committee. With express reference to the “federal principles of Yugoslavia founded upon the right of self-determination and national equality granted to the peoples of Yugoslavia by the decisions taken during the second session of AVNOJ”,<sup>20</sup> the Committee decided that all official documents be published simultaneously in Serbian, Croatian, Slovene and Macedonian, and that these four languages be considered equal throughout the Yugoslavian territory.

This document marks a surprising and significant break with the past. The new Yugoslavia was based on principles that were completely different from those of the first Yugoslavia, as it claimed to be a voluntary unification of equal peoples (initially three – Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians – and subsequently also Macedonians, Montenegrins and Muslims). Right from the start, the political, cultural, and linguistic equality of the peoples and nationalities was acknowledged and almost obsessively stressed. Moreover, the AVNOJ resolution of 15 January 1944 mentioned a new language for the first time: Macedonian. This had not existed in the monarchic Yugoslavia because the Macedonian nationality was not recognised. Up to that moment, the Macedonians had in fact been considered as Serbs, just like – at other times in their history – they had been identified as Bulgarians (who still today consider the Macedonian language as western Bulgarian). The national liberation movement, largely controlled by the communist party, took its strength from the people’s support: it was only thanks to this that it achieved incredible successes, and was acknowledged and helped by Great Britain and the United States. However, in order to gain the people’s support, the movement had to find a way to reach out to and be understood by the people. Thus, as early as 1941, the communist party addressed the Macedonians and Slovenians using their own languages. Just as the German language (as well as Slovene) was born to facilitate understanding of the Bible and Luther’s preaching, so, during World War II, the Macedonian language was born and codified as the official language of the Republic of Macedonia immediately after the end of the war.<sup>21</sup>

The other innovative aspect of this resolution is that it identified Serbian and Croatian as two separate languages. This decision was probably made as an understandable reac-

---

<sup>20</sup> *Odluka o objavljivanju odluka i proglašavanja Antifašističkog vijeća narodnog oslobođenja Jugoslavije, njegovog Predsjedništva i Nacionalnog komiteta na srpskom, hrvatsko, slovenačkom i makedoskom jeziku*, <http://hjp.znanje.hr/?show=povijest&chapter=27-odluka>, last accessed 2 May 2019.

<sup>21</sup> The codification of the standard Macedonian language is mainly connected to Blaže Koneski (1921-1993), author of the Macedonian orthographic manual, grammar and dictionary, and founder of Macedonian Language Studies at the University of Skopje, as well as a writer and poet.



tion to the unitary attempts of the old Yugoslavia, and also to dispel suspicions – always around the corner among Croats and Slovenians – of again falling under Serbian dominance. The explanation put forward by Milan Šipka<sup>22</sup> that the authors of the document were not expert linguists and that the state of war did not grant the time or conditions for sophisticated sociolinguistic analyses is not very satisfactory. Indeed, the decisive role played by the linguistic issue in the previous Yugoslavia and the sensitivity of both Croats and Slovenians to this question were well known to Tito (a Croatian born at the border with Slovenia) and the other leaders of the party who throughout the existence of Yugoslavia had to strike a very difficult balance between unitarism and separatism. The complex maneuvering between the two sides was significantly reflected in the language issue, particularly in the majority language, Serbo-Croatian, whose very name – variously written as a compound, with inversion of the terms, hyphenated, as one or two separate words, or separated by an ‘or’ – highlights the political tendencies of the moment.<sup>23</sup> On the one hand, the Serbs did not want to renounce their function as majority nation and leader of the Federation (a sort of Piedmont of Yugoslavia, a term commonly used around the end of the nineteenth century), on the other, the Croats and Slovenians felt that their national identities were being threatened. In the delicate initial stage of the establishment of the new country, the balance between the various constituent parts had to be managed with great care. Thus, in order not to displease the Serbs, it was decided that Kosovo, the cradle of their nationhood, would not become the seventh republic of the Federation<sup>24</sup> as Tito had initially intended. Similarly, Albanian was not considered the fifth official language, even though the number of Albanians in Kosovo would have justified such a decision. At the same time, the document issued on 15 January 1944 seems aimed at reassuring the Slovenians and Croats, as shortly after the second AVNOJ session, Tito met the two delegations separately and promised Slovenians that they could use their language even in the army.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Milan Šipka, *Književnojezička politika i jezička kultura* (Sarajevo: NIŠRO ‘Oslobođenje’ OOUR Izdavačka djelatnost, 1987), 25.

<sup>23</sup> A need, bordering on paranoia, for equality is also proven by the fact that, at some point, the name of the language became ‘Serbo-Croatian/Croatian-Serbian, Croatian or Serbian’ (*srpskohrvatskihrvatskosrpski, hrvatski ili srpski*). The same tendency seems to be at work also in recent times. In 2011, in Montenegro – in order for any student to have their nationality mentioned – the teaching subject was called ‘Montenegrin-Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian language and literature’, Marko Samardžija, *Politika, zakonodavstvo i jezik* (Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, 2013), 29.

<sup>24</sup> The Serbs hardly accepted the autonomy of the provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina, as the events following Tito’s death in 1980 and up to their suppression by Slobodan Milošević in 1989 indicate.

<sup>25</sup> Tito reassured the Slovenian general Jaka Avšič, while asking him to be patient until Yugoslavia established itself at an international level (Tito’s main concern at that time), but that promise was never kept: the language of the army, throughout the duration of Tito’s Yugoslavia, was only Serbo-Croatian



If for the Slovenians and the Macedonians the matter was seeing their language rise from nothing more than a dialect to a literary language in its own right, the situation for the Croats was more problematic, since the same *štokavian* dialect base they shared with Serbs, Montenegrins, and Bosnians opened up the possibility of a shared language. Indeed, the term Serbo-Croatian had a long tradition<sup>26</sup> which, in the years of war, the Independent State of Croatia was working hard to eradicate. The four years of the NDH (1941-1945) were characterized by a sort of obsessive ‘linguistic patriotism’ directed at ‘purifying’ the Croatian language from Serbisms and making it as different as possible from Serbian.<sup>27</sup> In mentioning the two languages separately, the AVNOJ document could not avoid taking into consideration what was happening in Croatia at that time, and therefore sought to reassure Croats that language would not operate as a Trojan horse for a return to Serb political and national hegemony.

It was no accident that in the following years, various Croatian linguists made repeated appeals to the principles that had guided the linguistic policy of AVNOJ, underlining how some leaders of the communist party were perfectly aware that they were dealing with two different languages.<sup>28</sup> To this end, they mentioned a letter written by Tito to the Executive Committee of the Communist International in 1941 in which he observes that the Soviet constitution was translated into three languages (Serbian, Croatian, Slovene). They also called attention to a resolution of 14 December 1944 signed by Tito, which reaffirmed decisions of 15 January 1944 and stated that the *Official Gazette of the Democratic Federative Yugoslavia (Službeni list Demokratske Federativne Jugoslavije)*<sup>29</sup> would be printed in Serbian, Croatian, Slovene and Macedonian.

---

(Novica Veljanovski, “Titove dileme o AVNOJ-u i o ustavnom uređenju Jugoslavije 1943-1946). Sa posebnom osvrtom na Republiku Makedoniju”, *Tito – viđenja i tumačenja*, 293; Aleš Gabrič, “Slovenian Language and the Yugoslav People’s Army”, *Between the House of Habsburg and Tito. A Look at Slovenian Past 1861-1980*, ed. by Jurij Perovšek and Bojan Godeša (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino/Institute of Contemporary History, 2016), <https://hdl.handle.net/11686/file19369>, last accessed 2 May 2019.

<sup>26</sup> Jacob Grimm was the first, in 1824, to use the term Serbo-Croatian, which was then spread by the Slovenian slavist Jernej Kopitar.

<sup>27</sup> The Independent State of Croatia immediately addressed the problem of a national language by creating the Croatian State Office for Language (Hrvatski državni ured za jezik) in April 1941. In charge of supervising the correctness and purity of the Croatian language in public use, the office published lists of words to be banned and to be replaced with ‘authentic’ Croatian words, Marko Samardžija, *Jezični purizam u NDH* (Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, 1993).

<sup>28</sup> Stjepan Babić, “Iz bliske prošlosti našega jezika (I)”, *Jezik*, 35 (1987): 13-17.

<sup>29</sup> The *Official Gazette of the DFY* – later renamed *Official Gazette of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (Službeni list Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije)* – printed laws and regulations which came into effect on the eighth day after their publication.

On 10 August of the same year, however, the cultural section of the State Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Croatia (ZAVNOH) organized a Conference on literary language that contradicted the above-mentioned position of AVNOJ in taking a markedly unitary stance. The conclusions of this conference were surprising but, as we will see later, came to nothing. Looking back to the Vienna Literary Agreement of 1850, which had established that the basis for the literary language of Croats and Serbs was to be *štokavian* in its *ijekavian* variety, the concluding document of the conference states that “if there are any differences in the writing of *ijekavian* Serbs and Croats, these must be regarded as local and not national”. Real differences were to be ascribed to Germanisms, Turkisms, Gallicisms – foreignisms that ought to be removed.<sup>30</sup> This actually meant considering the Serbian use of the *ekavian* form as exclusively ‘local’. However, the document granted freedom to choose between orthographic variants and the use of the Latin or Cyrillic alphabets, which had equal status, while both had to be used in schoolbooks. The name of this language was quickly settled with its designation as the ‘Popular/National’ language (*narodni jezik*) and the suggestion to eliminate all previous names. It cannot be overlooked that this document mentioned neither the Montenegrins (who at that time and up until recently believed that they spoke Serbian) nor the Muslims (who were not yet recognized as a ‘nation’ and therefore felt discriminated).

At the end of the war, the coalition government (twenty members of AVNOJ, three of the Royalist Yugoslav Government in exile in London, and five of the pre-war parties) broke up and the subsequent formation of the Popular Front favoured the consolidation of the Communist Party. The 1946 constitution,<sup>31</sup> modelled on the 1936 Soviet constitution, centralized all power, greatly reducing the sovereignty of the republics of the Federation, without any mention of the individual languages. Article 65 stated: “Laws and other general prescriptions of the federative people’s republic of Yugoslavia are published in the languages of the people’s republics”.<sup>32</sup> The constitutions of the member republics, promulgated immediately afterwards, defined the name of the official language differently: Serbian in Serbia and Montenegro; Serbian or Croatian in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatian or Serb in Croatia, Slovene in Slovenia, and Macedonian in Macedonia. In the 1953 constitution, in which the Yugoslav Communist leadership

<sup>30</sup> *Zemaljsko antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Hrvatske. Zbornik dokumenata 1944 (od 10. svibnja do 31. prosinca)*, ed. by Hodimir Sirotković (Zagreb: Institut za istoriju radničkog pokreta Hrvatske, 1975), 237-238.

<sup>31</sup> The Constitution of 1946 was published in the *Službeni list FNRJ* n. 10/46 of 31 January 1946. Eloquently, during the proclamation of the constitution at the constituent assembly, articles 1-43 were read in Serbian, articles 44-76 in Croatian, articles 77-114 in Slovene, and articles 115-139 in Macedonian.

<sup>32</sup> *Ustavi i ustavna dokumenta socijalističke Jugoslavije*, 42.

sought an alternative path to socialism following the split from the Soviet Union in 1948, the same pattern of language definition can be found.

The third constitution of 7 April 1963 stressed the socialist orientation of the country, starting from its very name. The Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia became the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, "in a move which demonstrated that the ideological character of the State became more important than its territorial (and thus also ethnic) structure".<sup>33</sup> This constitution guaranteed "freedom of the press and other media of information, freedom of association, freedom of speech and public expression", but with the admonition that nobody should use "these freedoms and rights [...] to overthrow the socialist, democratic order determined by the constitution".<sup>34</sup> In addition, article 41 affirmed that "the citizen shall be guaranteed the freedom to express his own nationality and culture, as well as the freedom to speak his language";<sup>35</sup> while article 42, confirming the equality of the languages and alphabets of the peoples of Yugoslavia, ensured that everyone was entitled to school instruction in their own language, even in the territory of a republic other than their own. The only exception was for the Yugoslav People's Army, in which commands, military drill and administration had to be in the Serbo-Croatian language (JNA).<sup>36</sup> The constitution did not specify the official language of the Federation, but article 131 makes it clear that the previous four languages had become three:

The federal laws and other acts of the federal organs shall be made public in the official Gazette of the Federation, in the authentic texts in the languages of the peoples of Yugoslavia: in Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian, Slovene and Macedonian. In official communication, the organs of the Federation shall abide by the principles of equality of languages of the peoples of Yugoslavia.<sup>37</sup>

In the constitutions of the four republics, promulgated immediately after the federal text, the name of the official language becomes Serbo-Croatian and Croato-Serbian (in the Croatian version). Whereas Bosnians and Croats had called their language with the double name since 1947, Serbs and Montenegrins modified their own constitutions by replacing Serbian with Serbo-Croatian.

<sup>33</sup> Dejan Jović, "Yugoslavism and Yugoslav Communism: from Tito to Kardelj", 166.

<sup>34</sup> *Ustavi i ustavna dokumenta socijalističke Jugoslavije*, 98.

<sup>35</sup> *Ustavi i ustavna dokumenta socijalističke Jugoslavije*, 98.

<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the language of YPA was the Serbian variant of Serbo-Croatian, but this was the only case of actual imposition of the majority variant, due to understandable practical reasons related to the good functioning of the army.

<sup>37</sup> *Ustavi i ustavna dokumenta socijalističke Jugoslavije*, 117.

The AVNOJ policy of separating Serbian and Croatian had thus been discarded and a common linguistic norm using Serbo-Croatian for all the four republics was now under discussion with the goal of turning this norm into a sort of *lingua franca* of the Federation, a language that would be spoken throughout a whole area rather than in some individual nations. However, it should be noted that even when unitarism was at its peak, the two variants were treated as two different languages at official level.<sup>38</sup> In fact, all the documents published in the *Službeni list SFRJ* were printed in both variants (Croatian and Serbian), as well as in Macedonian and Slovene. Likewise, parliamentary documentation was made available to delegates in both variants. From 1948, the party newspaper, *Borba*, was also published in a Zagreb edition with the required linguistic adjustments. All four languages were used on banknotes and passports. The only difference with respect to Slovene or Macedonian was that no interpreters between Serbs and Croats were provided in official meetings, which, in my opinion, would have been and would still be costly and ridiculous.

However, it soon became clear that the creation of a common linguistic norm was a questionable and controversial matter. The 1950 publication of a new edition of the orthographic manual written by the Serbian linguist Aleksandar Belić<sup>39</sup> that sought to unify the two linguistic and orthographic norms raised complaints and grievances among Croats. In particular, in an interview published in *Borba* on 21 December 1952, the Serbian linguist invited people to consider his manual as a possible point of departure for a common orthographic norm. This resulted in an angry reaction from Croatian linguist Ljudevit Jonke. In reviewing Belić's manual, Jonke went straight to the heart of the matter when he argued that not so much the unification of the spelling rules was a stake, as the strengthening of 'the brotherhood and unity' between the two Yugoslavian peoples.<sup>40</sup>

In an attempt to put an end to this controversy, the party prompted a meeting in Novi Sad that was attended, among others, by *Matica hrvatska* (the Croatian cultural society) and *Matica srpska* (the Serbian cultural society), the major cultural institutions of the two republics.<sup>41</sup> The conference, which took place from 8 to 10 December 1954, is a milestone in the long series of arguments and discussions regarding the language issue that had started a century earlier with the Vienna Literary Agreement. As in the past, the possibility of creating a unified norm, in which both variants would relinquish

<sup>38</sup> Šipka, *Književnojezička politika i jezička kultura*, 27.

<sup>39</sup> It was a second, revised, and extended edition of the 1923 *Pravopis srpskohrvatskog književnog jezika* which now also included the *ijekavian* variant of the language.

<sup>40</sup> Ljudevit Jonke, "Aleksandar Belić: Pravopis srpskohrvatskog književnog jezika; Beograd 1950, str. 546", *Jezik I* (1953): 124-127, 126.

<sup>41</sup> Jože Pirjevec, *Tito e i sui compagni* (Torino: Einaudi, 2011), 452.

something in favour of the unity of the language (for example, the Serbs would abandon the Cyrillic alphabet and the Croats the *ijekavian* pronunciation) was again taken into account. Although the majority was in favour of maintaining the two variants, an attempt was nonetheless made to bring them closer together. Signed by twenty-five writers and linguists, seven Croats and eighteen Serbs,<sup>42</sup> the conclusions reaffirmed the unity of the language (implemented when the Croatian patriots dropped the *kajkavian* dialect of Zagreb and the *čakavian* dialect of Dalmatia – which had developed their own literature over the previous centuries – in favour of the *štokavian* dialect), and reaffirmed the absolute equality of the *ekavian* and *ijekavian* pronunciations, the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets, and the two constituents of the name of the language (Serbian and Croatian), both of which were to be used officially. They also decided to compile a joint orthographic manual (published in 1960) and a dictionary in six volumes. Of the latter, only the first three volumes appeared in both variants (Cyrillic alphabet and *ekavian* variant; Latin alphabet and *ijekavian* variant), while the last three volumes were published only in Cyrillic with *ekavian* variant, as the Croats had in the meantime withdrawn from the project, believing that some positions were too unitary and threatened their linguistic (and therefore national) identity. The decisions made in the main town of Vojvodina represented yet another attempt to strike a difficult balance between separatism and unitarism, but ended up by displeasing everybody because from the outset, each party interpreted the issues in a different way, while the conclusions were disowned even by some of the signatories.

### III. Language and Politics

From this moment on, the controversies over language became more intense and started appearing not only in linguistic journals, but ever more frequently also in party newspapers, as the disputes were interpreted as an exacerbation of nationalistic tensions. In the 1960s, the linguistic issue catalysed protests of almost all the constituents of the Federation: the Slovenians and Macedonians due to the dominance of Serbo-Croatian;<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> This difference in numbers was censured by Jonke who declared that “the crucial mistake was attending a conference and drawing up the *Conclusions* with an unbalanced number of Croats and Serbs (seven and eighteen)”, Ljudevit Jonke, “Teorija i praksa Novosadskog dovogora”, *Hrvatski književni jezik 19. i 20. stoljeća* (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1971), 210-221, 216. The belief that the results depended on the numbers of the forces on the ground reveals that the participants felt that this event represented a clash between two opposing perspectives – unifying (the Serbian view) and separatist (the Croatian position) – and also the risk of possible dangerous political and social consequences.

<sup>43</sup> In 1964, Miha Marinko, secretary of the League of Slovenian Communists brought up the question of equality between Slovene and Serbo-Croatian, complaining that Serbo-Croatian was studied

the Bosnian Muslims because their language was not granted a distinct standard nor was their nationality recognized (up to January 1968, when they were formally listed as a founding people of the Federation); the Montenegrins who claimed their own nationality as distinct from that of the Serbs; the Kosovo Albanians, whose language was not mentioned at federal level and who, eager to emancipate themselves from Belgrade, protested violently in 1968 for the recognition of their national identity; the Serbs, because they deemed that, to their own detriment, too many concessions had been made to Kosovo Albanians; the Croats who, after the Novi Sad Agreement, felt even more threatened in their linguistic and national identity.<sup>44</sup>

In March 1967, the Croats delivered what Tito described as a stab in the back of the State<sup>45</sup> when the Zagreb newspaper *Telegram* published the *Declaration on the Name and Status of the Croatian Literary Language*<sup>46</sup> signed by one hundred and forty personalities of Croatian culture and eighteen cultural institutions. In the ten theses of the *Declaration*, the Croats reaffirmed the right to use the name ‘Croatian’ for their language, as they did not speak the Croatian variant of a standard Serbo-Croatian language, but simply Croatian, just as the Serbs spoke Serbian and not a variant of a non-existent Serbo-Croatian language. Addressed to the Parliament of the Socialist Republic of Croatia (SRH) and to the Federal Parliament of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ), this *Declaration* ultimately demanded a change to art. 131 of the Constitution, meaning a return to the four official languages, as the AVNOJ session had decreed in 1943.<sup>47</sup> Reactions to the *Declaration* were heated. Prompted by

---

from primary school in Slovenia (since 1948) and Macedonia (since 1950), while the same did not apply to Slovene and Macedonian in the other republics of Yugoslavia, Vanya Ivanovna, “Language Policy and National Equality in Socialist Yugoslavia (1945-1974)”, *European Studies*, 29 (2012): 81-111, 103.

<sup>44</sup> During the Eighth Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia held in Belgrade from 7 to 13 December 1964, the problem of the relationships among the nationalities of the Federation was taken up by Tito himself. On the one hand, he criticized the “assimilation and bureaucratic centralization, unitarism and hegemony” of those who “mistake the unity of the peoples with the destruction of nations and creation of something new, artificial, that is, a single and unified Yugoslavian nation”; on the other hand, he condemned nationalism and chauvinist declarations. The discussion was reported in a special section of *Naše teme*, a monthly student magazine that was published by the Central Committee of the Young Communist League of Yugoslavia, “Međunacionalni odnosi u našoj Federaciji, iz referata druga Tita na VIII Kongresu SKJ”, *Naše teme*, 8-9 (1965): 1159-1167, 1160.

<sup>45</sup> Cited in Josip Pavičić, “Hajka bez premca. Kronologija”, *Deklaracija o nazivu i položaju hrvatskog književnog jezika, 1967-1997*, ed. by Jelena Hekman (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1997), 85-94, 93.

<sup>46</sup> Literary language is the translation of *književni jezik*, a term that includes both the concept of ‘standard language’ and ‘literary language’ (meaning a language that has developed its own literary tradition).

<sup>47</sup> Forty-two Serbian writers, some of whom were members of the party, supported the *Declaration* and signed the *Proposal for Consideration (Predlog za razmišljanje)*: they also wanted to go back to the decisions of AVNOJ and their language to be renamed as only Serbian, see Ivanovna, “Language Policy

party organizations, harshly critical articles appeared in a number of newspapers and magazines in the various republics. The signatories of the *Declaration* were accused of undermining ‘the brotherhood and unity’ of the country and, therefore, the very principles of the Yugoslav idea itself. An article published in *Borba* on 1 April 1967 reports the disapproval of the *Declaration* voiced the day before the meeting of the Educational-Cultural Council of the Croatian Parliament, together with an appeal by representatives of cultural institutions to disclose the names of the signatories in order to punish them.<sup>48</sup> The *Declaration* was also censured by the Central Committee of the Communist League of the various republics,<sup>49</sup> because it was considered a deeply political and counter-revolutionary action and an attempt to return to the previous antagonistic relations between Serbs and Croats. The signatories, members of the party, were expelled from the League of Communists.<sup>50</sup> Some of them were fired, and if they did not suffer imprisonment it was only thanks to the intervention of the Croatian politician Vladimir Bakarić, one of Tito’s most influential collaborators, who initially had seemed to support the *Declaration*.

Once again, the language issue was connected to a much broader problem. The *Declaration* was seen and read as the first step in a process resulting in 1971 in the *Croatian Spring* (*Hrvatsko proljeće*) or *Maspok* (*Mass Movement/Masovni pokret*), a Croatian reform movement formed in the wake of 1968 that called for greater economic, cultural and political autonomy and attracted some of the most nationalist fringes.<sup>51</sup> Requests were partly granted and amendments were made to the Constitution, which in recognizing the equality of nations and nationalities also implicitly included the equality

---

and National Equality in Socialist Yugoslavia (1945-1974)”, 92. The *Proposal* was seen as an expression of Serbian linguistic nationalism, which had already previously surfaced in the attempt of insisting on Serbo-Croatian unitarism thus implicitly denying the existence of variants, Slavko Vukomanović, “Zablude i sporovi oko jezika”, *Novosti* (4-16 March 1983).

<sup>48</sup> “Sjednica Prosvjetno-kulturnog vijeća Sabora Hrvatske. ‘Deklaracija’ je nanijela ogromnu štetu ugledu hrvatskog naroda i kulture”, *Borba* (1 April 1967), 4. Many of the articles related to the debate following the publication of the *Declaration* are collected in the volume *Deklaracija o nazivu i položaju hrvatskog književnog jezika*, ed. by Jelena Hekman.

<sup>49</sup> The Central Committees’ statements, reported on the newspapers, were also picked up by the Croatian magazine *Jezik*: “Izvršni komiteti CK SKH i CK SKS o suvremenoj jezičnoj problematici”, *Jezik*, 15, 3 (1967-1968): 65-69. After the controversies ensued from the Novi Sad Agreement the publication of magazine *Jezik*, which had made them widely-known, was suspended from 1960 to 1961. When it resumed its activity, its subheading *Periodical for the Culture of the Standard Croatian Language* was changed into *Periodical for the Culture of Croato-Serbian Language*.

<sup>50</sup> These included writer Miroslav Krleža, a personal friend of Tito, who resigned from the party as he did not want to withdraw his signature from the document.

<sup>51</sup> *Maspok* was also infiltrated by the most extremist fringes of nationalists who had migrated abroad and undertaken several attacks on Yugoslav embassies and consulates.



of the languages.<sup>52</sup> However, since the protests continued and greater autonomy was demanded, the now elderly Tito together with the more conservative area of the party summoned the Croatian leaders and at a dramatic meeting held in the *Karadorđevo* royal hunting lodge in Vojvodina forced them to resign, threatening to send the army to Zagreb if the protests were not stopped. Tito also attacked *Matica hrvatska*, which in April of the same year had publicly repudiated the Novi Sad Agreement, as “it had turned into a means to justify linguistic discriminations and to impose the Serbian literary language (*ekavian* variant)”.<sup>53</sup>

#### IV. The Deconstruction of a Language

Despite the repression of *Maspok* and the replacement, also in Serbia, of the more liberal leaders who had been open to collaboration with other republics, the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution – with 406 articles one of the longest and most complicated – took account of the separatist tendencies and granted considerable autonomy to the republics. Just as in the previous texts, this fourth and final constitution left the decision regarding the official name of the language to the constitution of each republic. Furthermore, it specified that the federal laws and norms would also be issued in Albanian and Hungarian. The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia promulgated on 22 February 1974, the day after the introduction of the new federal constitution, ambiguously acknowledged a request made in the *Declaration*, as article 138 stated that “in the Socialist Republic of Croatia there is in official use the Croatian literary language – the standard form of the national language of Croats and Serbs in Croatia, to be called ‘Croatian’ or ‘Serbian’”.<sup>54</sup>

The 1980s were characterized by an escalation of measures taken by the party on the language issue. Unlike in the past, politicians now intervened personally through the press and by arranging official meetings. They repeatedly underlined that all public insti-

---

<sup>52</sup> Amendment 19 recognized the national minorities’ “right to use their language in the exercise of their rights and the performance of their duties, and in proceedings before state agencies and organizations exercising public power”, in *Ustavi i ustavna dokumenta socijalističke Jugoslavije*, 156.

<sup>53</sup> “Novosadski dogovor odbačen. Izjava Matice hrvatske”, *Jezik*, 18 (1970): 5, 138. The Institute for the Language of the Yugoslavian Academy (Institut za jezik JAZU) also officially rejected the Novi Sad Agreement, linking the “unification and Serbization of the language” to “the economic exploitation and alienation of the values that workers in Croatia had built”, “Institut za jezik o JAZU o nosadskom dogovoru”, *Jezik*, 18 (1970): 5, 139.

<sup>54</sup> “Ustav socijalističke Republike Hrvate”, *Narodne novine*, 22 veljače 1974, <http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=povijest&chapter=30-ustav-SRHrvatske>, last accessed 2 May 2019.

tutions should aim to sanction separatist as well as unitary tendencies in the language.<sup>55</sup> On 4 May 1980, Tito died and the Federation was deprived of its symbolic father. Since there was no suitable successor, a complex government system devised before Tito's death came into effect, whereby a collective presidency consisting of representatives of the six republics and two autonomous provinces would govern alternately with a strict rotation of offices. Predictably, this solution did not work. The recession – the worst since the existence of Yugoslavia – the worsening of relationships between the peoples, the lack of an authoritative central government, and the interests of various international actors were all factors that concurred in the shattering of Yugoslavia. Likewise, for the language, the obsessive search for equality, the lack of central planning, and the decision to delegate the issue to the various republics created an extremely complicated mechanism that finally led to paralysis.<sup>56</sup> When awareness of these implications became widespread, it was already too late to find a remedy.

The Croatian politician and sociologist Stipe Šušar expressed particular concern about what he defined 'linguistic nationalism'.<sup>57</sup> As Croatian Minister of Education, Šušar prevented the publication of a grammar of the Croatian literary language and made several appeals to the Communist League against the consequences of Croatian nationalism.<sup>58</sup> However, it was an article by Franjo Butorac, published on 5 July 1985 in *Komunist* (the party weekly), that provoked a parliamentary interpellation and stirred up an endless series of reactions. A young party official in Rijeka, Butorac claimed that Croatian nationalists who had been defeated in 1971 were active again, well organized, and using the linguistic issue as a pretext to brainwash young people as early as in primary school. Indeed, from one edition to the next, the language of schoolbooks changed, as it was infiltrated by an ever-increasing number of old Croatian words retrieved from dusty books dating back to the beginning of the century or coined during the NDH. Little by little, these words replaced those that Croats had in common with the Serbs in order to educate the youth to nationalism. Thus, instead of being a nursery of 'brotherhood and unity', schools increased the linguistic distance between the Croatian youths

---

<sup>55</sup> This is what can be found in a series of articles published in the newspaper *Politika* between 20 and 22 April 1986, titled "Current problems of the Serbo-Croatian language" ("Aktuelni problemi srpsko-hrvatskog jezika").

<sup>56</sup> Bugarski, "Jezička politika i planiranje jezika u Jugoslaviji", 50.

<sup>57</sup> Stipe Šušar (1936-2004) was a member of the Presidium of the League of Communists of the Socialist Republic of Croatia and, later, also of the Presidency of the Federation. He promoted a controversial school reform in Croatia and inspired the so-called 'white book', which blacklisted intellectuals and artists whose statements or works were considered dangerous for the Federation.

<sup>58</sup> Such as the appeal he made during the 27<sup>th</sup> session of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Croatia held on 10 June 1985 (reported in *Vjesnik*, a Zagreb newspaper, on 11.6.1985).

and those of the other republics. Butorac's article ends with a plea to the Communist League and the party organs to probe the legitimacy of his fears, because

the nationalism of the language is only the forefront of nationalism in general – directed against the foundations of the existing system and therefore also against the historical interests of the Croatian people and all the other peoples and nationalities of Croatia and Yugoslavia.<sup>59</sup>

Following the publication of this article, a commission was established with the task of examining schoolbooks. The commission's response was that notwithstanding the presence of linguistic exclusivism in a limited number of words, there were no particular signs of nationalism. This conclusion did not satisfy the Central Committee of the LCC, and a meeting of the Communist Leagues of all four republics and two autonomous provinces, together with linguists and representatives of the institutions was arranged in Zagreb to discuss the topic. Unlike the meeting in Novi Sad, the party intervened directly, making clear how the problem was explicitly and alarmingly political. The resulting document, known as the Zagreb Agreement, was the last important official attempt to find a solution to this long-standing issue. Without exaggeration, the agreement can also be seen as an effort to save Yugoslavia, whose disintegration was symbolically evidenced in the language question.

After criticizing both linguistic separatism and unitarism as harmful for the affirmation of the 'brotherhood and unity' of Serbs, Croats, Montenegrins and Muslims and for the success of a policy aiming at the 'harmony' of the Serbo-Croatian language and its variants, the conclusions of the Zagreb meeting underline the need to take whatever measures necessary to achieve the equality of the variants. As in Novi Sad, the meeting in Zagreb underscored the requirement for an orthographic manual, a dictionary and a grammar, and encouraged Yugoslavian linguists to work in an atmosphere of mutual trust. Linguists were also invited to help spread a deeper knowledge of Slovene and Macedonian, as well as of the other languages of the peoples. Finally, the meeting recognised that the federal constitution must clearly identify the names of the languages of the peoples of Yugoslavia, analysing and standardising "practical ways of achieving the equality of the variants, that is to say standard linguistic expressions within the framework of the standard (literary) Serbo-Croatian/Croatian-Serbian, Croatian or Serbian language".<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Franjo Butorac, "Nacionalizam i jezik", *Komunist* (5 July 1985): 18-19.

<sup>60</sup> The conclusions of the Zagreb Agreement were published in the *Vjesnik* issue of 9 December 1986 and then reprinted in Stjepan Babić, *Hrvatski jezik u političkom vrtlogu* (Zagreb: Ante Pelivan i Danica Pelivan), 177-185, 182.

Literary Croatian was never mentioned, but the procedure to amend article 138 of the Croatian Constitution – which was considered unconstitutional – had already been started. Amendment 41 proposed to the Croatian parliament intended to replace the definition of ‘Croatian literary language’ with ‘Croatian or Serbian language’. This proposal generated a series of protests among Croats, while it was supported by the Serbian minority in Croatia and the Orthodox Church. In the end, the amendment was rejected by the Croatian parliament, but this rejection should be interpreted in the light of opposition to the ever more pressing nationalism of Belgrade.<sup>61</sup>

The League of Yugoslavian Communists broke up during the 14<sup>th</sup> Congress held in Belgrade from 20 to 22 January 1990. Four languages have emerged out of Serbo-Croatian/Croatian-Serbian: Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian. Judging from the controversies, debates, discussions, and public forums devoted to this topic, we are still very far from any agreement regarding this pluri-centric language which, now that the centres are no longer within the same State, could be linguistically comparable to English, German, or Portuguese if only it would cease to replicate the seemingly unresolvable dilemma of the name(s) used for its designation. Should this be BCMS, that is, Bosnian-Croatian-Montenegrin-Serbian, as if they were different languages? Or should the much criticised, but linguistically sanctioned, double name Serbo-Croatian/Croatian-Serbian be maintained? How should the teaching of this language be named abroad? The question is still open, but the issue is much more political than linguistic.

---

<sup>61</sup> In those years, the Serbian press – now subservient to Slobodan Milošević – worked to portray the Serbs as the main victim of socialist Yugoslavia: see Davor Pauković, “Diskurs o ustavnoj formulaciji jezika u Hrvatskoj 1989. godine u hrvatskom i srpskom novinstvu”, *Srpsko-hrvatski politički odnosi u 20. veku – zaštita identiteta*, ed. by Darko Gavrilović (Novi Sad: Grafo finiš, 2014), 125-134.