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TEN-DAY INDEPENDENCE WAR IN SLOVENIA

School: Gimnazija Vič

Class: 4th Year

Learning Unit: 20th Century and the Beginning of the 21st Century

Learning Topic: Development of the Slovenian Nation in the 20th Century

Learning Objectives:

- Students identify the progress in the status of the Slovenian nation within Yugoslav nations.
- Students justify the factors that led to the birth of an independent state.
- Students analyze changes in life during the period of the joint Yugoslav state and in the time of independent Slovenia, forming opinions on positive and negative changes.
- Students find monuments that commemorate Slovenia's independence.

Teaching Methods:

Teacher's Methods: Explanation method, discussion method, analysis of visual material (photographs, maps).

Student's Methods: Discussion method, analysis of visual material (photographs, maps), taking notes, making a video.

Teaching forms:

Teacher's Form: Frontal and individual form

Student's Form: Frontal and individual form, group work

Key Question: What were the reasons that Slovenia succeeded in gaining independence, and why did the war last only ten days?

Time Plan: 6 hours (3 hours in the Museum of Contemporary History – guided tour and workshop; 3 hours of group work in the elective history course and video preparation).

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Introductory Part or Preliminary Events:

In the 19th century, Slovenes strove to unite all the lands where they lived into a single state unit within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This period saw the emergence of the first ideas for the unification of Slovenes. The program "United Slovenia," presented at the Slavic Congress in Prague in 1848, was the first to publicly articulate political goals. However, the idea remained just that—an idea. Before World War I, Slovenes began aligning themselves with the South Slavs, recognizing that they were too weak on their own and needed to connect with other related nations. According to the concept of trialism, another entity—a third unit—would be established within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, similar to Hungary since 1867. However, this idea was not supported by Franz Joseph, the Austrian Emperor. His successor, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was somewhat more receptive to this idea, but history had its own plans. On June 28, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated, and a month later, the world found itself in World War I. Towards the end of the war, when the defeat of the Central Powers, including Austro-Hungary, seemed imminent, a group of Slovenian politicians in exile formed the Slovenian Committee and began discussions with politicians from the Kingdom of Serbia about forming a common state. Another group of Slovenian politicians, following the revival of parliamentary life, advocated for the third unit within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, supporting the idea through the Declaration Movement under the May Declaration. After the collapse of Austro-Hungary, Slovenes decided to unite with Serbs and Croats in the State of SHS (Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs), established on October 29, 1918. Post-war, Slovenes faced border issues with Austrians, Italians, and Hungarians. Being part of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, which had lost the war, and lacking both an army and international recognition, Slovenes joined the Kingdom of Serbia to form a new state entity, the Kingdom of SHS. In the newly formed state, Serbia became the hegemon, introducing centralism and promoting the idea of unitarism. In 1929, the state was renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, but conflicts among different nations within the common state persisted. These nations temporarily united during World War II. After the war, the Communist Party, which won the elections under the People's Front, established a political monopoly. In November 1945, the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia was established, beginning the reconstruction of the homeland with a planned economy, collectivization, agrarian reform, and nationalization. In the 1950s and 1960s, due to the Informbiro conflict, Yugoslavia began aligning more with the West while being part of the Non-Aligned Movement. In 1963, it was renamed the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and in 1974, a new constitution was adopted, enhancing the autonomy of the republics. This meant that decisions of the Federal Assembly required the consensus of all republics and provinces. Over the next two decades, several economic reforms were implemented, but they did not yield significant results. Economic instability, energy crises, the problem of building a modern transportation network, and rising agricultural product prices became increasingly

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apparent. The state began accruing foreign debt. In the 1980s, imports exceeded exports, deepening the economic crisis. Austerity measures, such as fuel coupons, were introduced. Economic non-competitiveness and the overall crisis in the state due to debt accumulation further fueled ethnic disputes, particularly due to differences in development among them. These disputes noticeably intensified after the death of Josip Broz Tito.¹

Working with Students: Utilizing Notes from the Museum of Contemporary History, Textbooks, and the Internet

1. Who connected the republics and how did he succeed?

Josip Broz Tito, as the president of the SFRY, promoted the policy of "brotherhood and unity," emphasizing solidarity and cooperation among the various nations and republics within Yugoslavia. This policy aimed to overcome ethnic, religious, and regional differences. He also implemented a policy directed towards the balanced economic development of all republics in Yugoslavia, which included investments in infrastructure, industry, and education across the country. Additionally, he supported the development of culture and arts in all republics and promoted the idea of Yugoslav identity, fostering a sense of belonging to a common nation regardless of ethnicity. Tito was a key figure in uniting the nations, even during World War II. His status, charisma, and leadership were crucial for the country's cohesion.

2. Why did Slovenia want to gain independence?

After the death of Josip Broz Tito, who led the SFRY for 35 years as its lifelong president, unity among the republics waned. Tito was the binding force that kept the republics together despite their differences. Without him, the sense of unity or Yugoslav identity diminished. An economic, social, and political crisis ensued in full force. Yugoslavia faced three conflicting fundamental orientations. The first was advocated by representatives of the underdeveloped parts of Yugoslavia (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Macedonia), who supported centralism due to economic aid. The second was advocated by Slovenia and Croatia, which sought greater autonomy. The third, hegemonic orientation, was supported by Serbia. Tensions and ultimately the desire for independence were particularly pronounced in Slovenia and Croatia, which were economically more

¹ Zgodovina na kratko, priručnik za maturante in ljubitelje zgodovine. Mladinska knjiga. Ljubljana, 2023, str. 245-254; Valič Zver, Andreja, Slovenija 30 : stali smo in obstali. 30. obletnica razglasitve in obrambe samostojne in neodvisne države Republike Slovenije. Ljubljana : Urad vlade RS za komuniciranje, 2021, str. 6-23.

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developed and were frustrated by financing the other republics within the state while not advancing economically themselves. Cultural and economic disparities were evident, for example, the ratio between Slovenia and Kosovo was 7:1.

3. What was the difference between older and younger generations regarding the drive for independence?

There was no unity even among the conservative older politicians and the younger, more liberal politicians within the League of Communists of Slovenia. The older generation had an emotional attachment to Yugoslavia and could not envision a future outside of it, while the younger generation was more radical and demanded faster changes. These changes included the right of individual republics to establish international relations and take out international loans, greater autonomy in the form of territorial defense, the right to serve military duty within their own republic, the use of the national language in the military, and more. Both groups advocated for Slovenian interests. Among the younger generations and the general population, the sense of Yugoslav unity was primarily felt in sports and music, particularly Yugoslav rock. However, there was an increasing orientation towards the West, and many had never even seen the capital, Belgrade, or had any particular attachment to it as the older generations did. In Slovenia, consumerism and the desire for modernization were increasingly prevalent. Slovenia was aware of its level of development and wanted to leverage this advantage to increase competitiveness in other capitalist markets. This growing skepticism about the viability of Slovenia remaining within Yugoslavia, especially in its unchanged form, became more pronounced.

4. How did the crisis manifest in the 1980s?

In the 1980s, repression from the Yugoslav authorities increased, for example, through restrictions on movement, violations of fundamental rights and freedoms, and similar measures. The value of the Yugoslav dinar declined, and inflation rose. There were restrictions on electricity use and driving. Unemployment increased. Austerity measures were introduced, such as reducing television broadcast time and freezing wages and prices. The problems extended beyond oil supply issues to shortages of other commodities, such as laundry detergent, fruit, and coffee. Slovenians eagerly shopped for these goods in neighboring Austria and Italy and smuggled them across the border. National conflicts in Kosovo, driven by Serbian nationalism, also escalated. Slovenians supported the Albanians in these conflicts, leading to an economic blockade of Slovenian goods. Cultural workers, university professors, and youth organizations increasingly highlighted the crisis in the country and the weaknesses of the socialist system.

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5. With which magazines did the political spring in Slovenia begin?

The political spring in Slovenia began with articles on the Yugoslav crisis appearing in the magazines Mladina and Nova revija. In its 57th issue titled "Contributions for the Slovenian National Program" in 1987, Nova revija stated that Slovenia must become a democratic multi-party state. Additionally, the Slovenian Writers' Association drafted a new Slovenian constitution, also known as the Writers' Constitution. This constitution named the new state the Republic of Slovenia, omitting the term "socialist." The state's leadership under Slobodan Milošević, of course, rejected such positions.

6. Why was it possible to consider a different state arrangement or even the secession of Slovenia?

The 1974 Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) was a significant turning point in the political structure of Yugoslavia. This constitution confirmed the federal nature of Yugoslavia, granting substantial autonomy to the republics in managing their internal affairs. It also ensured the equality of all republics within the federation, meaning that all republics had equal rights and status regardless of their size and population. Most importantly for Slovenia's independence, the constitution recognized the principle of self-determination for nations, which included the right of the republics to decide their political future, including the right to secede.

7. Which significant events garnered widespread public support?

The JBTZ Affair. The Yugoslav authorities attempted to suppress those who were more rebellious in Slovenia. In 1988, they accused journalists Janez Janša, David Tasić, Franci Zavrl, and military officer Ivan Borštnar of revealing military secrets and tried them in a military court in Ljubljana in a foreign language. This led to the establishment of the Committee for the Protection of Human Rights, which defended the so-called JBTZ four. Various protests, gatherings, and the formation of independent political organizations and movements occurred throughout Slovenia. In 1989, the May Declaration was formed, demanding a sovereign Slovenian state, the right to independently decide on associations with other nations, a multi-party political system, and respect for human rights and freedoms. On September 27, the Slovenian national anthem, "Zdravljica," was adopted. Another significant event occurred in January 1990 when the League of Communists of Slovenia left the 14th Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, leading to the breakup of the unified Yugoslav communist party. This split had another important consequence: it prevented a potential civil conflict during the war for independence.

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8. How did the path to a multi-party system begin?

In 1989, the democratic coalition DEMOS was established under the leadership of Jože Pučnik. It included the Slovenian Democratic Union, the Social Democratic Union of Slovenia, and the Slovenian Christian Democrats, and later the Slovenian Peasant Union, the Greens of Slovenia, the Slovenian Craft Party, and the Grey Panthers. The newly formed DEMOS won the first multi-party elections since World War II in April 1990. The coalition advocated for an independent, sovereign, legal, and democratic Slovenia. Lojze Peterle became the head of the new Slovenian government, and Milan Kučan became the president of the state.

9. How did military preparations for Slovenia's independence unfold?

In mid-May 1990, the Yugoslav People's Army (JLA) and the Republican Headquarters of Territorial Defense disarmed the Slovenian Territorial Defense (TO), moving the weapons to their own storage facilities. Slovenia subsequently took all necessary measures to ensure that the newly established Maneuver Structure of National Protection (MSNZ) could take over the responsibilities of the Slovenian Territorial Defense. The MSNZ operated in 13 regions and all Slovenian municipalities, comprising around 22,500 members who were prepared to intervene militarily in support of Slovenian independence. In September 1990, the Slovenian TO came exclusively under Slovenian jurisdiction, integrating the MSNZ into the new TO RS (Territorial Defense of the Republic of Slovenia). The formation of the Slovenian army, or its first assembly, took place on December 17, 1990, in Kočevska Reka, positively influencing the decisive plebiscite a week later. In March 1991, Slovenia ceased sending young men to serve in the JLA. By April 1991, the first generation of Slovenian conscripts was called up. The first serious confrontation between the JLA and the Slovenian Territorial Defense occurred on May 23, 1990, at the Pekre training center near Maribor, where the JLA deployed armored vehicles and fired at unarmed civilians.

10. How did the domestic political preparation for Slovenia's independence proceed?

In November 1990, all political parties agreed to hold a plebiscite on Slovenian independence and sovereignty. The plebiscite took place on December 23, 1990, with 93.2% voter turnout, and 88.5% voting in favor of independence. The Slovenian political leadership committed to implementing the plebiscite decision

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within six months, while the Yugoslav authorities sought to prevent this. Intensive preparations for independence ensued. Presidents of other Yugoslav republics were not supportive of Slovenia's secession, offering solutions unacceptable to Slovenia. Talks on a confederation in the spring of 1991 also failed.

After the Pekre incident, the Slovenian government accelerated the preparation of independence legislation. Laws on citizenship, travel documents, border protection, economic independence, a new currency unit (SECU) to replace the dinar, and banking regulations were adopted. The Declaration of Independence, formally establishing the independent state of Slovenia, was adopted on June 25, 1991, alongside the Basic Constitutional Charter on the Sovereignty and Independence of the Republic of Slovenia, which set the conditions for implementing the former. New administrative institutions were formed, and certain rights and assets previously under federal jurisdiction were assumed by Slovenia. Slovenian police secured the borders. The official declaration of the independent Republic of Slovenia took place on the evening of June 26, 1991, in front of the Slovenian Parliament. The first symbols of the new Slovenian state—the flag, coat of arms, and the national anthem "Zdravljica"—were unveiled. President Milan Kučan delivered the iconic statement, "Today dreams are allowed, tomorrow is a new day." The Slovenian linden tree, another national symbol, was also blessed. Amidst the joy and celebration of the new state, there was also fear of potential aggression from the JLA.

11. How did the international community view Slovenia's independence?

International politics strongly favored the survival of the Yugoslav state. The United States, in particular, supported a unified Yugoslavia. Nonetheless, the Slovenian government persisted, explaining its reasons for a peaceful separation from the Yugoslav federation.

12. Briefly outline the ten-day war for Slovenia?

The Yugoslav People's Army (JLA) immediately began incursions into Slovenian territory. Their objectives included all strategically important points such as border crossings, radio antennas, and military barracks. Slovenian banks were also prohibited from drawing loans from the National Bank of Yugoslavia, selling foreign currencies, and fuel supplies were halted. The Republic of Slovenia perceived JLA's use of force as aggression and vowed to resist it by all means. The ten-day war between the Republic of Slovenia and the SFRY began on June 27, 1991. In the early hours, JLA armored units advanced from Croatian territory towards Brnik airport and the border areas. Croatia did not respond with its own armed forces, but Croatian residents used tanks to block JLA's paths with barricades. As stated, Slovenia responded to JLA's aggression, and clashes

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between JLA and Slovenian Territorial Defense (TO) and police forces ensued. Battles took place at Trzin, Šentilj, and Medvedjek. Over the following days, TO seized several border guard posts, and an increasing number of JLA soldiers surrendered to Slovenian forces. Many JLA soldiers did not know exactly what they were fighting for, leading to their surrender. Throughout the war, air raid sirens sounded frequently, and civilians were evacuated to shelters. Various meetings were held during the aggression. Federal government president Marković insisted on releasing prisoners and unblocking barracks, while the Slovenian side demanded a ceasefire and withdrawal of JLA units. As they could not reach an agreement, hostilities continued. JLA attacked all television and radio transmitters, e.g., on Nanos, Boč, Krvavec, Pohorje, and Kum. Nevertheless, by July 3, border crossings and guard posts were under Slovenian control, and an increasing number of JLA soldiers surrendered. On July 5, Lojze Peterle traveled to Brussels for talks with representatives of the European Community. On the last day of the war for independence, July 7, 1991, the ranks of the Slovenian army swelled, and their equipment was better due to seized weapons and gear

13. Why was the Brioni Conference important?

At the initiative of the European Community, a conference was held on July 7, 1991, on the Brioni Islands, where representatives of the Republic of Slovenia, the Republic of Croatia, and the federal representatives gathered. During the conference, they agreed that in exchange for a ceasefire, the Republic of Slovenia would suspend further independence procedures for several months. On the other hand, the Yugoslav Presidency committed to fully withdrawing all its military units from Slovenia within three months. This withdrawal indeed occurred on October 25, 1991, when the last JNA soldier boarded a ferry.

14. Which countries first recognized the Republic of Slovenia and why?

Internationally, Iceland was the first to recognize the Republic of Slovenia, followed by Croatia, Germany, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia (June 26, 1991), Lithuania (June 30, 1991), Georgia (August 14, 1991), Latvia (August 29, 1991), Estonia (September 25, 1991), and Ukraine (December 12, 1991).

The main reasons for the swift recognition of Slovenia's independence were political support for the principle of self-determination, backing for democratic processes, and recognition of the legitimacy of the Slovenian people's will for independence. Some of the aforementioned countries were also undergoing their own processes of independence from the Soviet Union and thus swiftly accepted Slovenia's decision for statehood. The international community was also aware of increasing tensions within Yugoslavia and the possibility of

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its dissolution. Recognizing Slovenia as an independent state was part of a broader process of adapting to new political realities in the former Yugoslavia.

The United States recognized Slovenia's independence on April 7, 1992.

15. Write some important milestones in the coming years for the Republic of Slovenia.

Additional milestones in subsequent years for the Republic of Slovenia include joining the European Union in 2004. Three years later, Slovenia adopted the euro as its currency, replacing the tolar (1€ = 239.64 SIT).

16. Find some monuments commemorating Slovenia's independence.

The independence of Slovenia in 1991 is a significant event in its history, and some monuments and memorials throughout the country commemorate this period.



Picture 1: Monument to the war of independence in 1991 in Brežice.

Source: <https://www.posavskiobzornik.si/novice/v-brežicah-svecano-odkritje-pomnika-osamosvojitveni-vojni-obelisk-zmage-1991-94887>.

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Picture 2: Commemorative plaque in Cerknica.

Source: <https://obelezja.wordpress.com/category/vrsta-obelezja/osamosvojitve/>.



Picture 3: Monument to the victims of the war for Slovenia in Dornava.

Source: <https://www.kamra.si/it/elemento-multimediale/spomenik-zrtvam-vojne-za-slovenijo-v-dornavi/>.

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Picture 4: To those who fell in the war for Slovenia, a cenotaph was discovered in Novi Žale in 1992, designed by arch. Marko Mušič. In the stone of the cenotaph, there is a fire trapped forever, which the architect placed along the roadside in an artificially shaped landscape, intended for the scattering of ashes. Source: <https://spomeniki.blogspot.com/2014/02/ljubljana-kenotaf-padlim-v-vojni-za.html>.



Picture 5: Memorial park to the struggle for independence on Medvedjek. Established in 1993.

Source: <https://www.kamra.si/mm-elementi/spomenik-osamosvojitvenemu-boju-na-medvedjeku/>.

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