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SLOVENIAN LANGUAGE AND THE YUGOSLAV PEOPLE'S ARMY

Slovenian language was used in the military units already in the Austro-Hungarian period – by the regiments consisting mostly of Slovenians during World War I, and, naturally, by the Slovenian volunteers in the struggle for the borders after World War I. After the establishment of the Kingdom of SHS, in the military ranks of the new Yugoslav state the Serbian command and Serbian language, used for all military matters, prevailed over all other languages spoken by the citizens of the new state. The “uniform” language became an important instrument of centralisation and aspirations to eliminate the national and cultural diversity and form a single nation with a single language. During World War II, the promises of greater equality of the Slovenian language were eagerly accepted by Slovenians, traditionally attached to all Slovenian distinctive characteristics, especially their own language. Slovenians massively joined the ranks of the Slovenian Partisans, also because they listened to commands in their mother tongue during the battles and the Slovenian language was used in all military matters.

The leaders of the Slovenian resistance movement relied on the promises, given during the transformation into a federal state, that Slovenian military units with Slovenian language of command would also be preserved after the war. At the 2nd session of the AVNOJ (Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia), where the foundations for the future federation were laid, the Supreme Commander and future state leader Josip Broz Tito received the Slovenian delegation, which wanted to know what would be the actual benefits of the federation for Slovenians. General Jaka Avšič, a member of that delegation, described the difficulties experienced by Slovenians due to the exclusive use of a foreign, non-Slovenian language in the old Yugoslav Army, and inquired if the Slovenian language of command, which had asserted itself during the war, would be retained in the Slovenian military units after the war. According to the notes of Marijan Breclj, a member of the Slovenian delegation, Tito answered: “This is perfectly clear; you are the Slovenian Army, therefore you should use Slovenian language at all levels, from the superior command posts to the most basic units.”⁶⁴⁵

However, the post-war reality was completely different from the promises given to the citizens of Yugoslavia by the communist leaders. When they took over the leading positions in the state, they began to shape it according to the example of the Soviet Union, defined by the intense centralisation and transformation of the army into an instrument for the protection of the existing state regime with the monopoly of the Communist Party. Immediately after the war, Tito and his associates “forgot” that they were supposed to preserve the mono-national military units and the various mother tongues as the languages of command. Instead, the exterritorial principle of conscription was introduced and Serbian (or Serbo-Croatian) was inevitably chosen as the uniform language of command – like in the First Yugoslavia.

Federalisation of the state was only partial, and the matters related to the language policy remained especially unclear. Four languages – Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian and Macedonian – were legally equal, but the legislative provisions did not specify the actual implications of language equality. Yugoslav Army was one of the state institutions with almost no regard for language equality. It started to implement the policy of complete linguistic uniformity regardless of the fact that the language of command was incomprehensible for many citizens and reminded them of the inconveniences from the period of the First Yugoslavia.⁶⁴⁶

645 Jaka Avšič: O poveljevalnem jeziku NOB Slovenije [On the Language of Command in the National Liberation Struggle of Slovenia]. *Jezik in slovstvo*, 1969, No. 4, pp. 102–103.

646 For more information see: Aleš Gabrič: Uveljavljanje slovenščine kot uradnega jezika po drugi svetovni vojni [Assertion of the Slovenian Language as the Official Language after World War II]. In: Zdenko Čepič (ed.), *Slovenija v Jugoslaviji* [Slovenia in Yugoslavia]. Ljubljana, 2015, pp. 213–240. Aleš Gabrič: Slovenščina in Jugoslovanska ljudska armada [Slovenian Language and the Yugoslav People’s Army]. *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, 2014, No. 2, pp. 155–177.

The abolishment of the republican commands and subordination of all units to the Supreme Headquarters of the Yugoslav Army were followed by the introduction of the uniform conduct of all military affairs in the language of the largest nation. Military units, consisting mostly of Slovenians, were relocated to other parts of Yugoslavia. Consequently – as well as because they lost the right to use the Slovenian language – many Slovenian officers decided to demobilise. The Slovenian political leadership did not react to the changes, dictated from Belgrade, and referred to the promises from the 2nd session of the AVNOJ. The reputation of the Yugoslav Army (later the Yugoslav People's Army – JLA) soon started to crumble in the eyes of Slovenians, proud of the successful organisation of the Slovenian Partisan Army with the Slovenian language of command.

The Yugoslav Constitution, adopted in April 1963, was a clear proof that the state leadership also separated the question of language equality in the Army from other questions of language equality. This Constitution recapitulated the loose provisions of the previous Constitution from 1946, stating that all languages are equal; that minorities have the right to receive education in their own languages; and that the members of other nations are entitled to translation and translators in their communication with state institutions. However, Article 42 of the Constitution provided for an exception to the aforementioned provisions: “By way of exception, Serbo-Croatian language shall be used in the Yugoslav People's Army for command, military education and administrative purposes”.⁶⁴⁷

The disregard for the Slovenian language in the Army was first mentioned in public by the retired Lieutenant Colonel General Jaka Avšič during his lecture in the cultural workers' club in Ljubljana, on 13 December 1966. Based on the manuscripts for this lecture, Avšič later wrote a short contribution, published next year in the *Jezik in slovstvo* magazine under the title *Za enakopravnost slovenskega jezika* (For the Equality of the Slovenian Language). In the introduction Avšič mentioned that the unequal position of the Slovenian language in comparison to Serbo-Croatian was most clearly revealed by the “exclusive use of the Serbo-Croatian language in the administration of the Yugoslav central government authorities and organisations as well as in the Army; disregard of the provisions of the Republican Constitution (Art. 74) on the Slovenian language of administration in the Republic of Slovenia; and the unequal treatment of the Slovenian and Serbo-Croatian languages as mandatory subjects in our schools”.⁶⁴⁸

647 *Uradni list SFRJ*, No. 14, 10 April 1963, p. 269.

648 Jaka Avšič: *Za enakopravnost slovenskega jezika* [For the Equality of the Slovenian Language]. *Jezik in slovstvo*, 1967, No. 3, pp. 96–97.

Avšič therefore mentioned the areas which had been the basis of the Slovenian national-political programme of the United Slovenia already in the 19th century – administration and education – and added language in the military matters. By exposing the inequality of languages in the Yugoslav People's Army, Avšič suggested that the situation a hundred years later – in the second half of the 20th century – was even worse than in Austria, where, before its dissolution, Slovenian was self-evidently used in the regiments where Slovenian soldiers were in the majority. The publication of Avšič's article was definitely a novelty, considering that previously the (more or less) public criticism of the inconsistent use of the Slovenian language had focused on problems in Slovenia and in communication with the Slovenian state bodies. With Avšič's contribution, the public debate expanded from the previous areas to the military institutions under the jurisdiction of the Yugoslav federal authorities, operating in the whole territory of Yugoslavia. These opinions encouraged a lively debate already after the lecture in the cultural workers' club. However, after the article was published in the magazine dedicated to the development of the Slovenian language in all areas, the consequent debates and discussions were unprecedented since World War II in Yugoslavia.

The leadership of the League of Communists of Slovenia was the first to react. Its Commission for the Relations between Nations and Republics prepared an expert analysis entitled *Several Issues of Relations between Nations in the Yugoslav People's Army* based on the data collected until 1967. The analysis stated that the below-average share of Slovenians among officers was problematic. Approximately two thirds of Slovenian officers had been promoted to their rank already during the war and would fulfil retirement conditions in the following years. In order to replace them and match the share of Slovenian officers with the share of Slovenian citizens in Yugoslavia, approximately 1500 officers had to be trained in the next few years. Nevertheless, since 1961 only 106 candidates from Slovenia had been admitted to military schools, and after 1964 less than ten Slovenians per year enrolled in these schools. In order to balance their numbers with the national structure in Yugoslavia, at least 200 Slovenians per year should enrol in military schools. Consequently the share of Slovenians (and members of other smaller nations) among officers decreased, while the share of the largest nation swiftly increased: "Without any intention to discuss the actions, undertaken or planned by the Army to draw applicants to military schools, it is a fact that these actions have not been successful so far, at least not in Slovenia. It is a well-known fact that among the officers from the war 25 % are Serbian, while their share amounts to as much as 65 % of the total number of the post-war officers in the Yugoslav People's Army." In their search for potential causes,

the authors of the expert analysis drew the attention to different problems. In line with the preceding official doctrine they unexpectedly wrote: "The language issue, at least as far as the language of command in the Army is concerned, is not problematic." In continuation they mentioned that, on the contrary, "language is an important factor in the demand to constantly move from one language area to another, which implies forcible adaptation to new circumstances";⁶⁴⁹ it was difficult or impossible for wives to find a job, children had problems with schooling in other language environments, etc. The authors of the analysis saw the solution in augmenting the share of soldiers who would serve their duty in their native territory. Slovenian officers would supposedly be allowed to serve in the units in Slovenia, at least in the first few years. Furthermore, after finishing military school, cadets would return as interns to the military units in the territory of their respective republics, while the exterritorial principle of conscription would only be considered with regard to the needs for special technical expertise.⁶⁵⁰

The Commission for the Relations between Nations and Republics of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Slovenia was reserved in its position, even though Jaka Avšič had presented very concrete proposals. In his contribution *Praktično izvajanje načel enakopravnosti* (Practical Implementation of Equality Principles), published in 1968 in the double summer edition of the *Teorija in praksa* magazine,⁶⁵¹ he focused exclusively on the use of language in the federal administration and did not pay any real attention to the issue of language in the Army. He identified the practices of the socialist Yugoslavia as the continuation of Serbian political achievements in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, therefore his ideas from this contribution definitely failed to agree with the communist ideologists. They saw the Second Yugoslavia as something new and obviously better than the First Yugoslavia in every regard.

In 1969 Avšič assumed a more concrete approach to the language issue in the military affairs in his second contribution for the *Jezik and slovstvo* magazine, entitled *O poveljevalnem jeziku NOB Slovenije* (On the Language of Command in the National Liberation Struggle of Slovenia).⁶⁵² This approach stemmed from the position that language equality had always been a part of Slovenian political demands; that Slovenian language was especially threatened during the occupation in World War II; and that the demands for the equality of mother tongue were the very motive for joining the Partisan ranks for many Slovenians who were favourably inclined towards a federal transformation of the state. "One of the

649 SI AS 1589, IV, box 188, 434, Nekatera vprašanje mednacionalnih odnosov v JLA, p. 3.

650 Ibid., pp. 4–6.

651 Jaka Avšič: *Praktično izvajanje načel enakopravnosti* [Practical Implementation of Equality Principles]. *Teorija in praksa*, 1968, No. 8/9, pp. 1212–1217.

652 Avšič, *O poveljevalnem jeziku NOB Slovenije*, pp. 97–103.

proofs of Slovenian statehood (sovereignty) is the establishment of Slovenian command in the Partisan and regular units of the Slovenian Liberation Army. At that time, Slovenian language was used exclusively in all Slovenian military units,⁶⁵³ wrote Avšič and added that this was also the only possible way. In his opinion, one of the reasons for the rapid downfall of the First Yugoslavia's Army was that it was "detested, because officers and junior officers despised people of non-Serbian nations and languages,"⁶⁵⁴ and it failed to recognise languages of a large part of its citizens, which accounted for the lack of patriotism and combat preparedness. Avšič's approach was convincing and well-argued since it was based on primary sources to describe the development of the national and language policy in the Communist Party before the war and in the Partisan units. The mother tongue, i.e. Slovenian, was soon being used consistently in these units in the Slovenian territory, although men with experience from the Yugoslav or even the old Austrian Army and the Spanish Civil War were among the officers. "Slovenian fighters were proud of their language, which prevailed entirely in the National Liberation Struggle. Slovenian language of command was precisely what characterised the army as Slovenian,"⁶⁵⁵ wrote Avšič and mentioned the Yugoslav leadership's promise that such state of affairs would be preserved also after the war. He emphasised that there had not been any operative issues due to the Slovenian language of command because the Slovenian units had easily cooperated with the units from other parts of the state, operating in different languages.

Avšič's contribution was published in April 1969 – in the same month that the Federal Assembly adopted a resolution on implementing the constitutional principles of the equality of languages and alphabets of Yugoslav nations and nationalities in the federal regulations and functioning of the federal bodies. The resolution was based on the position that constitutional principles already ensured the absolute equality of languages and alphabets, and that only a more detailed specification of particular sections and introduction of consistent implementation of constitutional provisions were needed. The section on the language issues in the Army was written in a rather general context of the demands that "the principles of the equality of languages and alphabets of Yugoslav nations and nationalities should be implemented in the organisation and functioning of the national defence and in the Yugoslav People's Army". The position with regard to the constitutional provision on the uniform language of command was that "the possibilities for a more extensive implementation of the

653 Ibid., p. 97.

654 Ibid., p. 98.

655 Ibid., p. 100.

principles of the equality of languages and alphabets of Yugoslav nations and nationalities in a certain part of the Yugoslav People's Army should be examined" and "specific regulations should be adopted accordingly".⁶⁵⁶ The adoption of the resolution brought a clear message to the citizens: that the equality of languages in Yugoslavia had not yet been accomplished, and that debates about this issue could not be deemed as politically controversial or chauvinist acts. While the discussions about the language issues in certain other fields had already been on the agenda earlier, the publication of the Federal Assembly's resolution opened the door also to the previously overlooked area – the equality of languages in the military matters.

The retired Lieutenant Colonel General Jaka Avšič quickly reacted to the novelty, provided by the resolution, and got ahead of all the official institutions. He had drafted his extensive expert analysis entitled *Nekaj pripomb k mnenjem o rabi jezikov v JLA* (A Few Comments on the Opinions about the Use of Languages in the Yugoslav People's Army) already before the adoption of the resolution in the Federal Assembly. He finished it on 14 January 1969 and sent it to the leadership of the League of Communists of Slovenia and to some acquaintances in the Army. He hoped for the competent authorities to consider the material as soon as possible and successfully solve the problems, indicated in the resolution of the Federal Assembly. Avšič also added that, if necessary, he was prepared to provide corrections or explanations to the presented material.⁶⁵⁷ He also sent this material to Edvard Kardelj and asked for his comments and concerns regarding "what would, in your opinion, prevent the implementation in the Yugoslav People's Army".⁶⁵⁸

Avšič wrote this 23-page contribution regarding the use of languages in the Army⁶⁵⁹ with resolve and determination, without resorting to the misleading and embellished political rhetoric. Subsequently he provided a detailed and substantiated explanation of the eighteen introductory theses. His attitude towards the language of command was completely clear: "The claim that modern warfare demands one language of command cannot withstand critical analysis. The equality of languages of the Yugoslav nations would enhance the capability and fighting efficiency of the Army. The speed of executing the actions is not affected by using the languages of the nations."⁶⁶⁰ Instead of obliging the majority to learn a foreign language, the same could be expected of the commanding

656 *Uradni list SFRJ*, No. 20, 8 May 1969, pp. 610–612.

657 SI AS 1589, IV, box 188, 434, Pismo Jake Avšiča – Danici Jurkovič, 16 May 1969.

658 SI AS 1277, box 10, 22/69 (1924), Pismo Jake Avšiča – Edvardu Kardelju, 26 March 1969.

659 SI AS 1589, IV, box 188, 434, Jaka Avšič: *Nekaj pripomb k mnenjem o rabi jezikov v JLA*, 14 January 1969.

660 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

minority: “Only officers should learn the required language and the team could be given commands in their mother tongue.” Contrary to the official name – Serbo-Croatian or Croatian-Serbian language – he occasionally used the expression Serbian language, indirectly pointing to the privileged position of one nation with regard to military matters: “By using one language – Serbian – only formal, superficial unity is achieved. The Yugoslav People’s Army needs a substantive unity, which can only benefit from using the mother tongue.” Historical experiences with imposing the use of one language were too painful, mentioned Avšič, and harshly criticised the policy of perpetuating the old patterns: “The motives of certain people who argue for maintaining one language are centralist and unitarian in their nature and point to a lag in the society’s development.”⁶⁶¹ He believed that nationally homogenous military units could also be assigned in the exterritorial manner, and especially that officers should learn the language of their soldiers. In Avšič’s opinion, the opposition against introducing language equality also stemmed from the fact that “officers currently speak only one language – Serbo-Croatian”. He concluded the contribution by severely criticising officers: “It seems that they are not able to fathom how smooth the transition to language equality would be, if only the system of manning the units would be changed. What seems to prevail is some kind of incomprehensible mentality about the inequality of nations and the entitlement of the Serbian language and people to privileges.”⁶⁶²

Avšič was pleased with the first reactions to his positions “as nobody expressed any negative opinions – quite the opposite – I noticed only positive reactions and the Croats and Slovenians are, naturally, all in favour”.⁶⁶³ Therefore next month, in June 1969, he also sent around a supplement or the so-called *Drugi del pripomb k mnenjem o rabi jezikov v JLA* (The Second Part of the Comments on the Opinions about the Use of Languages in the Yugoslav People’s Army). In these comments he already explicitly referred to the federal resolution on the use of languages. He argued for the “territorial” allocation of conscripts in the vicinity of their home, in the nationally-uniform military units where the language of command would be their mother tongue. The potential lack of officers, proficient in military expressions in the mother tongue, would be resolved with additional measures, while military schools would introduce lessons in the languages of different Yugoslav nations in order to also attract more nationally-diverse candidates.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., p. 2.

⁶⁶² Ibid., p. 3.

⁶⁶³ SI AS 1277, box 10, 22/69 (1924), Pismo Jake Avšiča – Edvardu Kardelju, 21 November 1969.

⁶⁶⁴ SI AS 1589, IV, box 188, 434, Jaka Avšič: *Drugi del pripomb k mnenjem o rabi jezikov v JLA*, 25 June 1969.

Discussions about Avšič's positions were not limited to the narrow circles of the superior political and state authorities and were soon made public. They were published in the *Sodobnost* magazine in April 1970 with some non-substantive changes, so that the severe criticism of the "Serbian" military centralism was revealed to anybody who could read Slovenian.⁶⁶⁵ In the autumn of 1970 Avšič's positions were also presented in an extensive interview in the *Teorija in praksa* magazine. Once again he argued for the formation of nationally homogenous units where the language of command would be the mother tongue, and insisted that, in case of mixed units, it would be far more sensible to require of one person instead of two hundred to learn a foreign language. He added another very clear demand: to change the Constitution in the article providing for the advantageous use of one language in the Army: "The part of Article 42 of the Federal Constitution, referring to the exceptional position of the Army, should be deleted."⁶⁶⁶

In 1971 Avšič published a few further contributions dealing with this issue, but gradually he started suspecting that the search for solutions had taken a wrong turn. For example, in March 1970 the *Delo* newspaper refused to publish his response to the article where the official information about the radical shortage of Slovenians among the Yugoslav People's Army officer staff was published for the first time. Avšič's opinions with regard to this issue were only published in July 1971 in the *Sodobnost* magazine. Once again he underlined the extreme importance of the mother tongue when it came to choosing the military profession: "Enough high-quality personnel existed for the Slovenian units until the very end of the war as well as in 1945 in the central institutions. Then the number of Slovenians started decreasing. When the Slovenian units were abolished, reassigned to every location, and the Army started using the Serbo-Croatian language, Slovenians lost their enthusiasm to serve in the military units."⁶⁶⁷

Generally speaking Avšič was most prolific and insightful in the discussions about the issue of languages in the Army, following the release of the federal resolution on the equality of languages and alphabets in Yugoslavia at the end of the 1960s. He was most direct and stern, and certain other Slovenian intellectuals joined him in his criticism as well. In the autumn of 1970, psychologist Janez Rugelj mentioned the issue of language as one of the key factors of the poor relations as well as the discontent of senior staff and soldiers with regard to their position in the Yugoslav People's Army.⁶⁶⁸ In his next response, Rugelj defended himself from

665 Jaka Avšič: Nekaj pripomb k mnenjem o rabi jezikov v JLA [A Few Comments on the Opinions about the Use of Languages in the Yugoslav People's Army]. *Sodobnost*, 1970, No. 4, pp. 408–427.

666 Jaka Avšič: Nekatera odprta vprašanja vseljudske obrambe [Certain Open Questions about the General People's Defence]. *Teorija in praksa*, 1970, No. 8/9, p. 1217.

667 Jaka Avšič: Nekaj o slovenskem vojaškem naraščanju [On the Slovenian Military Recruits]. *Sodobnost*, 1971, No. 7, p. 774.

668 Janez Rugelj: Še enkrat: zakaj slab odziv v vojaške šole in akademije? [Revisited: Why the Lack of

the attacks of the military circles, claiming that his insistence that the Slovenian language was being neglected revealed “his *destructive* views which can only be welcomed by the elements hostile to our state and Army”.⁶⁶⁹ Rugelj rejected the imputations and referred to the findings in Avšič’s articles and statements of certain politicians from the ranks of the so-called Party “liberals” from Croatia and Serbia, who supported the demands for a greater equality of languages in all aspects of human activities. He reiterated the standpoint, already noticeable in Avšič’s articles, that the reproaches with regard to the insinuated demands for republican or national armies were fabrications, and that “nobody demanded any republican and national armies, but only the unification of fighters of the same nationalities in the basic units (companies, battalions, etc.), which can also be deployed exterritorially if needed”.⁶⁷⁰

The military circles criticised Avšič and Rugelj, insinuating that the demands for a greater equality of languages in the Army only implied the formation of a nationally homogenous Slovenian army. Such an opinion was also noticeable among Slovenian officers, who may have merely been adhering to the official doctrine of the military leadership or had been a part of the military way of thinking for so long that they were not even able to register the atmosphere of their native, Slovenian environment. For the first time the discussions mentioned the fates of the Slovenian officers who had completely lost every contact with their native environment and mother tongue due to the years of working in the Yugoslav People’s Army. When he familiarised himself with such stories, in the end of 1970 the poet Ciril Zlobec wrote that the stories had shaken him and that he, as a Partisan in the Slovenian Littoral, could only be thankful that he “barely managed not to stay in the Army”.⁶⁷¹

At the end of the 1960s and in the beginning of the 1970s the Slovenian “liberal”-communist politics allowed for the publication of very controversial responses to the social reality. Thus Avšič and other likeminded commentators could publish severe criticism on account of language inequality, which had been quite impossible only a decade ago. Slovenian politics familiarised itself with these positions, information and argumentation, and used it to formulate its own standpoints. However, it did not possess Avšič’s clarity and the political severity of his words. Above all, it often had to defend itself from Belgrade due to the reproaches of Slovenian nationalism.

Interest in the Military Schools and Academies]. *Teorija in praksa*, 1970, No. 10, pp. 1442–1454.

669 Janez Rugelj: “Polemika o stanju in razmerah v JLA” – še enkrat [“Discussion about the Situation and Conditions in the Yugoslav People’s Army” – Revisited]. *Teorija in praksa*, 1971, p. 102.

670 Ibid., p. 105.

671 Ciril Zlobec: Slovenščina in Slovenci [Slovenian Language and Slovenians]. *Sodobnost*, 1970, No. 12, p. 1279.

After the adoption of the resolution on the equality of languages, the State Secretariat for People's Defence came up with a plan of how to fulfil its demands with regard to the use of language in the Army. In December 1969 State Secretary Colonel General Nikola Ljubičić ordered that the competent state and military institutions should draw up analyses and compile the necessary information, which they obviously did not have at their disposal yet, and study the issue of languages from the viewpoint of peacetime and wartime circumstances before finally sending their findings to the competent authorities at the State Secretariat.⁶⁷² Thus the military leadership should have information on the use of languages and alphabets in all military matters at its disposal in 1970. As far as the education of officer staff was concerned, attention should be paid to the "need and possibilities of learning the Slovenian and Macedonian languages in the military schools" as well as to the organisation of language courses for officers, where the basics of other languages would be taught. Additionally, it should also be stated what realistic obstacles may prevent the achievement of the complete equality of languages and alphabets.⁶⁷³ The majority of the analysis regarding the ways of ensuring the equality of languages in the military would supposedly be complete in 1970, and other proposals for changes should also be outlined. The order refrained from revealing any concrete information, but as far as the demands for the increased equality of the Slovenian and Macedonian languages were concerned it was usually stated that the "needs and possibilities" in that regard should be explored. This formulation was occasionally omitted, and thus equality was apparently definitely possible. For example, the demands also noted the assurance of equality during the military court proceedings.⁶⁷⁴

The military circles' reluctance to implement changes was obvious from the manner of their statements: that they would implement changes "where possible", under certain conditions, etc. The Ministry of Defence also wrote that the share of officers serving in their native environment would be increased, and that smaller mono-national units would be established ("where possible", of course). Senior officers would not be obliged to learn the languages of their surroundings. However, they would be encouraged to do it with a system of rewards, and in so far as possible the written letters of certain bodies would be responded to in the language of the original letter. However, most of the training, command and coordination activities in the Yugoslav People's Army were listed as tasks where the use of a single language would not be possible to avoid." The national languages,

672 SI AS 1589, IV, box 189, 435, Ukaz (Nikola Ljubičić, 26 December 1969).

673 SI AS 1589, IV, box 189, 435, Plan rada na realizaciji obaveza koje proizilaze za oružane snage i JNA posebno iz Rezolucije o ostvarivanju ustavnih načela o ravnopravnosti jezika i pisama naroda i narodnosti Jugoslavije u saveznim propisima i u radu saveznih organa.

674 SI AS 1589, IV, box 189, 435; *ibid.*, p. 4.

aside from the uniform language” could only be used in the units dominated by soldiers of a single nationality. Furthermore, this principle was also applied in the territorial defence, the elaboration of the Ministry of Defence stated. Already the use of the term “uniform language”, which Yugoslavia had never known, indirectly indicated that the military leadership did not possess much understanding for the demands for a greater equality of languages in the Army. The argument used by the State Secretariat for People’s Defence to support the need for the use of Serbo-Croatian language was misleading as well. The competent authorities stated the following fact as the reason for this: that “90 % of all senior officers currently employed in the Yugoslav People’s Army belong to the nations speaking Serbo-Croatian”.⁶⁷⁵ The cause and consequence were obviously reversed here, because the high percentage of Serbian (and Croatian) speaking officers was the consequence of using only one language in the Army, not the reason for the use of this language.

It was characteristic of such statements, coming from the military circles, that during the preparation of plans of how to meet the demands for a greater equality of languages in the Army references were only made to the demands of the Federal Assembly resolution. The absence of any arguments associating the greater equality with an improved atmosphere in the Army and its enhanced battle efficiency was obvious. At least a hint of the good will of the military leadership was displayed in the plan signed in January 1970 by Colonel General Ivan Dolničar, the Slovenian Assistant State Secretary of People’s Defence at the time. The plan mostly listed what should be analysed, how soon it should be studied, and in what cases a greater equality of languages in the operations of the Yugoslav People’s Army could be implemented. However, Dolničar, well-aware of the actual situation in the officer circles, added that a certain dose of inertness, conservatism and traditionalism, as well as appeals to the Constitution which nevertheless prescribed the extraordinary position of the Serbo-Croatian language in the Army, should be expected.⁶⁷⁶

While the increasingly open debates about the linguistic issues in other fields of public life gradually asserted themselves, the documents about the issue of language in the Army were still tagged as confidential or even top secret by the military and state leadership. The willingness of the military leadership to implement any significant changes dwindled with every passing month, and after the showdown with the Party “liberals”, more favourably inclined towards decisive steps forward in Yugoslavia, the military leadership simply started disregarding

675 SI AS 1589, IV, box 189, 436, Informacija o uporabi jezikov narodov in narodnosti v Jugoslovanski ljudski armadi.

676 SI AS 1589, IV, box 189, 435, Državni sekretariat za narodnu odbranu, Politička uprava – Komisiji predsedništva SKJ za razvoj društveno-političkih zajednica i medjunacionalne odnose, 24 January 1970.

any initiatives. When in the beginning of 1971 the military magazines published that an exception with regard to the language of command would supposedly be maintained, Jaka Avšič saw this as an attempt to “preserve the status quo of the earlier denationalisation practice in the Army”.⁶⁷⁷

In the politically tense situation at the beginning of the 1970s, the concern that things might be heading in the wrong direction was becoming increasingly well-founded. As the republican leaderships from the ranks of “Party liberals” were replaced one after the other by the communists from the older, more dogmatic generation, the willingness to embrace changes disappeared. The wheels of Yugoslav politics turned in the opposite direction, back to the time when open debates and controversial ideas were pushed into the realm of private affairs. To prevent this from happening after all, Jaka Avšič kept sending letters tenaciously, reiterating and additionally elaborating on the viewpoints he had presented publicly in numerous published contributions. When the discussion about the proposed amendments of the People's Defence Act took place, Avšič wrote to the Presidency of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, President Josip Broz Tito and Edvard Kardelj in the end of 1972, suggesting that the article on the privileged position of one of the languages be deleted from the legislation.⁶⁷⁸ He underlined that the term “Serbo-Croatian” or “Croatian-Serbian” language was very ambiguous as it was, so he preferred to make matters clear and simply wrote about the privileged position of the Serbian language. In November 1972, in his letter to Kardelj, he evaluated the “practice that even Slovenian officers had to use Serbian when speaking to other Slovenians at a well-attended lecture, simply because of this unacceptable law” as completely senseless.⁶⁷⁹ A month later he brought the linguistic inequality to the attention of President Tito, reminding him of the promises made a long time ago: “29 years have passed since you assured us – Slovenian delegates at the 2nd session of the AVNOJ (i.e., during the National Liberation Struggle) – that after the war Slovenian soldiers would enjoy the right to military instruction and command in the Slovenian language.” The promise of the Supreme Commander, Avšič continued, was spread among Slovenian fighters, who accepted this as a natural right that they were entitled to.” This promise could remain unfulfilled, because the Yugoslav People's Army has prepared such a proposal of the National Defence Act (...) as to prevent this,” Avšič reminded the Supreme Military Commander, calling upon him to do something about the promise made all those years ago.⁶⁸⁰

677 Jaka Avšič: Problemi slovenske družbe [Problems of the Slovenian Society]. *Sodobnost*, 1971, No. 5, p. 511.

678 SI AS 1277, box 14, 7/73 (2388).

679 SI AS 1277, box 14, 7/73 (2388), Pismo Jake Avšiča – Edvardu Kardelju, 7 November 1972, p. 8.

680 SI AS 1277, box 14, 7/73 (2388), Pismo Jake Avšiča – Predsedniku SFRJ, Josipu Brozu Titu, 21

Avšič did not receive any response to his initiatives. In February 1974 – in the time when the new Yugoslav Constitution was adopted – the media only published praise about the broad possibilities for the further development of the country. Admittedly, the new Yugoslav Constitution no longer referred to Serbo-Croatian as the exclusive language of command, as Article 243 stated the following: “In accordance with the federal law, one of the languages of the Yugoslav nations may be used as the language of military command and instruction in the Yugoslav People’s Army, while the languages of nations and nationalities may be used in some of its parts.”⁶⁸¹ The formulation “one of the languages” was not much else but a pleonasm, expressing the wish to preserve the previous state of affairs in the Yugoslav People’s Army. Self-evidently, Serbo-Croatian remained the language of command, and no practical changes were implemented in light of the lively discussions where a wide range of beneficial initiatives for the improvement of the relations between the nations were mentioned.

Slovenian military terminology still strengthened, though, but this was mostly because of the Territorial Defence, while much less was achieved in the Yugoslav People’s Army. This was also apparent at the most well-attended and resounding discussion about the public role of Slovenian after World War II, prepared by the Society for Slavic Studies of Slovenia and the Socialist Alliance of Working People of Slovenia. In the diverse range of topics, the question of Slovenian language in the military affairs was only a minor issue, despite the fact that this had been one of the most critical issues in the debates a decade ago. Ivo Bajt, the representative of the Command of the Ljubljana Army Area, was the one to address this question most extensively. He painted a picture of the ideal language policy in the Army and stated that “this consultation should not be making any conclusions about how to perfect the linguistic practice in the Yugoslav People’s Army.”⁶⁸²

In contrast with the idealism of the Yugoslav People’s Army representative (even if of Slovenian descent), Viktor Majdič addressed the problem of the military approach to the linguistic (in)equality. He mentioned that it was true that nobody opposed the use of Slovenian in the military matters, but, on the other hand, nobody encouraged its use either. However, he restricted himself to the position of Slovenian in the Territorial Defence, where the situation was not quite ideal, either, and concluded that “the situation, as it is, will have to be improved sooner or later.”⁶⁸³

December 1972, p. 1.

681 *Uradni list SFRJ*, XXX, No. 9, 21 February 1974, p. 241.

682 *Slovenščina v javnosti. Gradivo in sporočila. Posvetovanje o jeziku, Portorož, 14. in 15. maja 1979* [Public Use of the Slovenian Language. Materials and Messages. Linguistic consultation, Portorož, 14 and 15 May 1979]. Ljubljana, 1983, p. 168.

683 *Ibid.*, p. 170.

The situation could only change when the generation of the communist leaders that had governed Yugoslavia ever since World War II was replaced. At this notable consultation the demands – at least as far as military matters were concerned – were far more unclear as those stated in Avšič's articles. His contributions became more topical during the crisis in the 1980s, when Slovenian magazines once again started publishing more decisive demands for the protection of the Slovenian national rights in Yugoslavia. However, this was already the time leading up to the disintegration of the Army. When Janez Janša and Veljko Namorš published their first articles in order to address the issue, returning to the question of the inequality of languages in the Yugoslav People's Army after more than a decade of disregard, they included a lot of new information. However, in terms of contents they remained in the framework of what had already been outlined clearly and convincingly by Jaka Avšič, whom they also referred to quite often.⁶⁸⁴ When the discussions about amending the Yugoslav Constitution yet again were rekindled, Avšič's letter to the federal constitutional commission about the language issues in the Army was also published, still very topical thirteen years after it had been written and eight years after its author's death.⁶⁸⁵ The publication proved that Avšič was ahead of his time when he made his well-argued and resolute demands, which would not be surpassed until the very dissolution of Yugoslavia.

684 Janez Janša: Vprašanje slovenskega jezika v JLA [Question of the Slovenian Language in the Yugoslav People's Army]. *Problemi Literatura*, 1986, No. 263, pp. 62–70. Janez Janša: Enakopravnost jezikov v JLA [Equality of Languages in the Yugoslav People's Army]. *Časopis za kritiko znanosti*, 1986, No. 91–92, pp. 7–22. Namorš, Tradicija NOB in enakopravnost jezikov v JLA.

685 Jaka Avšič: Pismo zvezni ustavni komisiji [Letter to the Federal Constitutional Commission]. *Časopis za kritiko znanosti*, 1986, No. 91–92, pp. 23–41.