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**POLITICAL POSTERS AND SLOGANS IN THE STATE IN TRANSITION:  
THE CASE OF YUGOSLAVIA 1981–1991**

Alexandra Serbina

Russian State University for the Humanities  
6 Miuskaya Pl., Moscow 125993  
Post-graduate student  
E-mail: alex\_serbina@yahoo.com

In this article author deals with such specific sources of information as political posters and newspapers article titles considering them as a reflection of communication channels between state and society.

**Keywords:** political poster, political culture, Yugoslavia, SFRY, state in transition, communication channels, nationalism, yugoslavism.

O flames that glowed! O hearts that yearned!  
They were indeed too much akin,  
The drift-wood fire without that burned,  
The thoughts that burned and glowed within.

The Fire of Drift-wood  
Henry Longfellow (1807–1882)

In this paper author deals with such specific sources of information as political posters and titles of political articles during the transition period in Yugoslavia (SFRY) in 1981–1991. This combination of the sources provides getting an objective and clear vision of political culture issues in SFRY and clarifies some peculiarities of the communication channels between the Yugoslav government and civil society.

Speaking about reflection of the politics in Yugoslavia during the transition period one should be very careful in understanding of what was the transition period for the Socialistic Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. In the XX century (and possibly the whole previous history) the socialist state established by Iosip Broz Tito constituted the only peaceful and stable period in the regional history. Throughout the history of the past century the Balkans experienced all three „waves“ of state collapses (after the 1st and 2nd World Wars and then during the collapse of socialistic camp). However the times of Yugoslavia are still perceived by mass consciousness of the former citizens as the times of prosperity. This paper does not concern the political structure, social and ethnic tensions of SFRY but it deals with the reflection of the state (its power and loss) in the most vivid and symbolized area – the political posters and article’s titles. On the other hand, the sources used in this paper are irrelevant without the understanding of some specific features of political structure, social environment and peculiarities of SFRY.

As it’s written in the book „Yugoslavia – my country and it’s political poster“: „Any standard book on graphic design will tell you that the logo and the symbol are more than

just a descriptive illustration. Every symbol gains a life of its own in a specific context that lends it a specific meaning” [1]. Mutual perception and misperception in a visual dialogue between power and civil society can provide researchers with new range of information helpful for investigation both on legitimacy of governing power and loyalty/rejection of society towards it. Being a part of a political culture the instruments of communication between politicians/ state and society help to analyze not only the political issues but the reasons why the ideology actually failed to adjust to the new political conditions? Why the particular society that demonstrated loyalty and openness to ideas provided by the state in the past becomes rejective and even aggressive towards any notions coming from the government? And of course which new ways of communication the state designed in order to achieve social support?

Indeed, the highlights of this paper (the visual images and slogans of former Yugoslavia) are usually misperceived by the foreign observers and treated as a typical communist and then nationalist art and intersected with the Soviet one which is totally wrong. That’s why visual art can’t be pulled out of the time context.

The core idea of the state established after the World War I (The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes 1918 -1941) and the World War II(SFRY 1945 – 1991) was the idea of „yugoslavism“ – the specific ideology of unity for all the southern balkan folks implying the common state without any religious or ethnic discrimination. At the same time the yugoslav identity didn’t presume the national one. It’s important to understand that the fact of invention of that identity has nothing to do with communist ideology – it was just used as one of the principles of SFRY. This was the upper-identity employed as consolidating one due to its implication of elimination of cultural, religious and historical differences and even tensions as for example between Serbs and Croats over the Croatian support for Nazis or between Christians and Muslims. It also provided an illusion of common problems and brotherhood of the republics: in comparison with the others Croatia and Slovenia were always more economically and socially developed. However, after communist ideological collapse every conflict turned out to be a national one (adhering to the local ethnicity) and the guilty party was sought in the other republics or other ethnic groups.

Economical issues also had their impact on social and political development. The conflict between Iosip Broz Tito and Iosif Stalin turned out to be a pure benefit to the new state. It resulted in relative economy liberalization, appearance of private property, decreasing of ideological pressure and the last but not least, citizens were finally permitted to go and even work abroad. Thus, citizens of the former Yugoslavia always had a sight of the Western European way of life, social and political conditions.

The basis for the transition period in a broad sense was rooted in the Constitution of SFRY (1974) that contained two models of state structure. The first one enabled Tito to be an irremovable president of the republic and enjoy the full scope of power with the following abolition of this position after his death. The second model came into power after his death and instead of one irremovable president Yugoslavia got one rotated every year, picked out from among the presidents of the national republics and regions.

Tito died in 1980 and the same time the first massive ethnic riots in Kosovo began. In 1983 country experienced an economical crisis with Kosovo and Bosnia as the most dramatically affected regions. An economic revival program (including the concrete steps against corruption) was launched but in few years led to nothing. The same year future president of Bosnia and Herzegovina Alija Izetbegović published a political program of establishing an Islamic state in BiH. In 1986 the group of Serbian intellectuals from the Serbian Academy of Sciences published a Memorandum with criticism of the Constitution demanding Kosovo to be part of Serbia and not an autonomous region. The same year Slobodan Milošević became a leader of the Serbian League of Communists and supported

the Memorandum. This consequently entailed tensions amongst leaders of the regional League branches. In 1987 Yugoslav foreign debt reached \$19 billion with an inflation rate of 16,7%. The same period marked the beginning of political liberalization in country, however in the context of nationalist movements rising. The last attempt to save the country by approving a new Constitution was made in 1990. This year also marked with the first free democratic elections resulted in every republic by nationalist parties triumph. New joint state constitution thus wasn't approved by republic governments. Since leaders of the republics failed to negotiate for a new constitution it led to a state disintegration and collapse.

Thus, crucial points of this article are settled between the two most important dates in Yugoslav history: Tito's death and the state collapse. However, these eleven years also should be considered as inhomogeneous, vulnerable and fast-changing period. For the purpose of discussion these years were divided into two unequal periods. The first one lasted from 1981 till 1989 and can be distinguished with relatively strong state position, economical and social stability. The second one started in 1990 and lasted less than a year, until the success of secession movements in Yugoslavia. During this period a new pre-war reality was constituted which provided a fast rise of nationalistic and secession movements, political pluralism, decrease and collapse of communist ideology, etc.

The sources used in this paper are the political posters and titles of the major official newspapers' articles. This requires some additional explanations. Analyzing the visual images that reflect state and politics one always think about particular political posters or slogans and promoting videos. Predominantly because of they were designed to be perceived as such. On the other hand newspapers are usually interpreted as a textual reflection of the politics and society and examined as a distinct source of information. In this paper those sources are combined and analyzed jointly due to four main reasons:

1. Molding of the state's image. Political media to a wide extent are the communication channels and representation tools, providing political trademark to the existing society. They should be persuasive and clear to the audience. When speaking about the posters they use clear symbols either textual or graphical. Investigating newspapers much of the researches focus on the content of the articles rather than the titles of those particular articles. But that's exactly the titles, that usually capture an eye of the readers. During the transition period titles obviously raise some "hot topics" crystallized day by day into the same slogans as the political posters. The specific genre of comic strips and their captions is one of the most symbolized and determinant when speaking about the reflection of state. It deals with some symbols defining the issues in an ironic and sometimes cynical dimensions. When those different sources of images and "messages" are combined together one can get more objective and crosscutting portrayal of the epoch.

2. Such materials constitute the developing a measures of sense of belonging. There can be various purposes but the audience should be aware of the problems.

3. Poster much like any other media, reflects not the reality of a society, but its aspirations. It co-creates and simulates a society rather than reflects it [2].

4. Message-making purpose. Various approaches to the topic prove the potential of the media to arouse feelings of loyalty or anger. However, in any event, the common thread that runs through all political media is persuasion.

Alan Gowans defined political posters as "the arts of persuasion and conviction, deliberately employing all other types of art to create visual metaphors symbolizing values and fundamental beliefs, thereby attacking or defending ideologies and establishments, reforming or stabilizing social institutions, as circumstances may dictate ... Posters are a branch of advertising specifically and of persuasive arts generally" [3]. However, the usage of this political instrument differs depending on such issues as time context and inner

relations between the addressing and receiving party. Political posters play a role of direct communication channel between civil society and political powers, or better say between elector and electee. The electee should inspire electors with the recognizable and clear message and at the same time it should demonstrate its strength in comparison to the opponents.

Considering the first period there can be easily distinguished some particular highlights of the political poster. One of the most common features was that the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) was the only addressing party in political life of the country. And the receiving party was the united Yugoslav nation. Such homogenous political environment created a specific, universal language of political communication. It provided artists with the number of common, clear and approved symbols that were used regarding the particular event or celebration. At the same time it provided society with the illusion of stable and universal political strategy. Government chose topics to be displayed and thus celebrated, characters and people to be portrayed and social groups it addressed (e.g. youth for the celebration of the Day of Youth or workers for the 1<sup>st</sup> of May). Society as a receiving party played a passive role in this relation. Society couldn't reject the ideology, it could only approve it, even if the LCY created posters claiming some problems (e.g. environment pollution or military aggression) society had to approve government policy.

After detailed examination of political posters typical for the first period there could be highlighted some major features that pinpointed social function of this media. The pragmatic adjustment of visual image into the verbal form was made in order to understand the structure of communication between state and civil society without any intention of generalization.

Even after his death in 1980 Tito played an important role in political life of the country, he became a symbol of the state. Posters that portrayed him were used as a unifying pattern showing that dead or alive but the leader is Tito (Pic.1 [4]). However, such pictures demonstrated a lack of a strong political power that could be common for the whole country. After Tito's death and implementation of the new governing model SFRY stayed without any possible overarching leader who would be approved by every republic.



*Pic. 1. Freedom's Name is Tito. 1981. Đorđe Ristić*

As a part of propaganda political posters should evoke certain feelings of the receiving party and during the first period the main purpose of the poster was to evoke positive feelings towards everything that is connected with the state and negative towards state's enemies. Forming of positive image of the state lead to the dominant usage of bright colours, positive symbols as flowers, smiling people, workers, white doves, etc. What is

more, the favorite colours used by the artists were the colours of the flag and the beloved symbol was a red star. It also led to a situation, when the state tried to show that neither politicians nor political institutions are important but the citizens play the main role in the country. Citizens became the symbols of the state along with its flag and leader (Pic. 2, 3, 4).



*Pic. 2. Young Worker-Manager. 2nd half of 1970s. Dragović Bord*



*Pic. 3. Gathering of the People's Freedom Front 1936–1986. 1986*



*Pic. 4. Week of disarmament UN. 24-30.10.1986. Yugoslav League for peace, independence and equality of people*

Stability and steadiness of life became one of the most attractive advantages of SFRY. Such living conditions influenced the genre of political posters: the whole nation knew what, when and why it should celebrate and when to await renewed posters on the streets. There were no accidental events or spontaneous posters, everything was planned and approved (Pic. 5, 6).



*Pic. 5. Youth Day 1987. Jani Bavčer*



*Pic. 6. May 1st. Let's Live, Live with Labour. 1978. Vlastimir Kusik, Šepič*

During the second period the most common feature became a clear intention of the poster's creators to avoid any similarities with the others and especially any likeness with the previous art style. Rapid-changing political situation, pluralism, communist ideological collapse, private funding of political parties provided chaotic environment in which society for the first time started playing an active role, it became active elector and could enjoy a wide range of political motions. Thus, addressing party had to offer real political programs and personalities instead of symbols and common events. The form or a structure of political poster lost its prior importance; consequently, the sense, idea and political message gained importance and became the central highlight of the poster. Private initiative in creating posters received a new impulse. Everybody had a right to make one either negative or positive. This process resulted in creating rather negative posters demonstrating rejection of any political power or ideology (Pic. 7, 8 [5]).



*Pic. 7. Turn off the TV and Open your Eyes! Students of Belgrade*



*Pic. 8. Elections' Poster for Abstainers. Your Leader is Nobody. Your Representative is Nothing*

Appearance of new politicians and political parties entailed attention of the receiving party and thus formatted a new feature of the political posters a personal attitude. People wanted to see their potential representatives instead of disembodied symbols and dead leaders (Pic.9).



*Pic. 9. The Man of Changes. Ezdimir Vasiljević – Independent Candidate for President of Serbia with his Son Stefan and Wife Karmela*

Considering newspapers of the former Yugoslavia there was chosen “Borba”. It was established in 1922 by the Communist party and throughout its history was the most pro-governmental one. There is a funny fact about this media connected with a Soviet-Yugoslav conflict: Iosif Stalin called journalists that worked for the newspaper “political acrobats” [6] meaning their political loyalty towards Tito. However, national background of the place of publishing becomes one of the main features of the press in Yugoslavia. Every republic of SFRY not to speak of the cities had its own newspaper or magazine. The central place in each of those media had the local news. Perception of the news throughout the country and other republics was influenced by the local point of view. Moreover, on the mass consciousness level locals used to identify the rest of the country as “The other republics” or “Other parts of the country”. Newspaper “Borba” was published in the capital of SFRY and at the same time Serbia – Belgrade. That’s why it was first the ideology guide of communist ideas and than it became a guide of pro-Serbian ideology. It’s important to notice that rhetoric, terms, and issues considered in the newspaper are typical for every part of Ex-Yugoslavia.

Location of Belgrade, the federal centre of the Yugoslavia, in the Republic of Serbia makes more and more obvious the interconnection between project of centralized Yugoslavia and Serbia itself. On the other hand there was a vague in Serbian ideology –

whether it's national or integrative entity. If there could be any doubts on the matter in the 1990, none of them have left by 1991. Serbian ideology decisively prevailed and constituted itself as one and only that can preserve the state from the collapse and re-establish centralized Yugoslavia. During the first half of 1991 the major space in the newspaper was devoted to the interviews with Yugoslav dissidents of Tito's times and the western analytical reviews regarding the state issues. Western non-communist journalists were permitted to be printed in Yugoslav official press. Political and economical crisis was not the only point discussed. Western journalists carried out explanatory work among population, trying to relay the understanding of such notions as democracy, its basic principles, liberty and freedoms etc. However, in the second half of 1991 took place a radical change in newspapers' political rhetoric. It becomes more demanding, populist, harsh in definitions used and pro-Serbian (Pic. 10).



Pic. 10. Titles of the article in „Borba“ 1991:

How the “Right Croats” are Being Taught for War. “Silent Murder of Serbs”. Is It True that Croatia has Already Bought 600 of Special Cars for Army? Laser Weapons and Gases for Silent Night Murder of Serbs.

Union “Hungarians for Motherland Serbia and Yugoslavia”: “Europe doesn’t see Ustashes’ Regime”

Yesterday Took Place a Meeting of Organization of Unity Serbs from Croatia. Enemies of All Colours. Participants Supported Yugoslavia, Serbia, Serbs in Croatia, and Protested against Fascism, Nazism, Neonazism, Tuđman, Mesić, Lončar, Marković, Kol, Genšer and Antiserbism.

All parts of SFRY are defined as the integrated and united commonwealth, the secessionist movements and statements of local politicians are claimed to be illegal and non-constitutional. At the same time the other parts of SFRY predominantly speak in the name of republic as the local politicians oppose themselves to a centralized and dominant Serbia. “The Serbs wanted, and that is a popular slogan of opposition, to see themselves in Europe and Europe with them. But the nationalism of Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian, or Albanian origin has provoked a lot of different groups of opposition, so the “European values” in the meantime became just an instrument – they were a surrogate that could reestablish the communist power. All over Yugoslavia the intellectuals concerned about the individual rights and freedoms and the destiny of their nation” [7].

For the last century media became a main source of information for the majority of population. News are changing every hour, the most important events become “breaking news”, however new day brings new events and the amount of information people obtaining sometimes prevent them from getting an objective view on some processes. When reading newspapers or observing political posters that were treated previously as an essential part of routine life a new sense of political culture can be perceived. Visual image constitutes a vivid image of society and state needs and meanwhile reflects these two parties, their weak and strong sides their aspiration and their loyalty to each other.

**Notes:**

1. Jugoslavija – moja dežela in njen politični plakat. moja zemlja i njen politički plakat. my country and it's political poster: 1969–1989 / Urednica kataloga Saša Kerkoš. Ljubljana: KD CODE.EP: Tretaroka, 2006, P.43.
2. Jugoslavija – moja dežela in njen politični plakat. moja zemlja i njen politički plakat. my country and it's political poster: 1969–1989/ Urednica kataloga Saša Kerkoš. Ljubljana: KD CODE.EP: Tretaroka, 2006, P.23.
3. Gowans, A. Posters as Persuasive Arts in Society / A. Gowans // Art Journal. 1984. Vol. 44, No. 1. P. 9–10.
4. Pictures NN 1-6: Jugoslavija – moja dežela in njen politični plakat. moja zemlja i njen politički plakat. my country and it's political poster: 1969–1989 / Urednica kataloga Saša Kerkoš. Ljubljana: KD CODE.EP: Tretaroka, 2006.
5. Pictures NN 7-9: Archives of Narodna biblioteka Srbije.
6. Сталин И.В. Сочинения / И.В. Сталин: собр. соч. в 18-ти т. Тверь: Информационно-издательский центр «Союз», 2006. Т. 18. С. 512, 514.
7. Serbien nach den Kriegen / Herausgegeben von Jens Becker und Achim Engelberg. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008, S. 112.

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**ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ ПОСТЕРЫ И СЛОГАНЫ ВО ВРЕМЯ ПЕРЕХОДНОГО ПЕРИОДА: ЮГОСЛАВИЯ 1981–1991 гг.**

Александра Сербина

Российский государственный гуманитарный университет  
125993, Москва, Миусская площадь, 6  
аспирант  
E-mail: alex\_serbina@yahoo.com

В статье автор анализирует такие специфические источники информации, как политический плакат и заголовки газетных статей, рассматривая их в качестве наглядного примера функционирования коммуникации между государством и обществом.

**Ключевые слова:** политический плакат, политическая культура, Югославия, СФРЮ, переходный период, средства коммуникации, национализм, югославизм.