

Final report on the research project “Yugoslav Energy Wars: How Development of Energy Strategy Contributed to the Collapse of Yugoslavia

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Summary of the research

This book project focuses on the ‘Yugoslav Energy Wars’ as a specific battlefield between regional political elites on which the future of the Yugoslav federation was being decided, with the aim to provide an additional perspective that could potentially change our understanding of the Yugoslav conflict and the history of Yugoslavia in general. One of the main results of my research at the OSA is that the process of the country’s disintegration was far advanced already in the early 1970s, although many other related topics emerged as significant findings that require further research.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, energy strategy was a hotly debated topic in Yugoslavia, the center of which were projections for the energy infrastructure construction up to the beginning of the 21st century. This grand strategy was supposed to guarantee the country’s energy security and independence for decades to come, but it turned into a fight for federal funding among regional political elites whose visions ended at the border of their own republics. The tensions were further heightened by the ongoing process of the country’s federalization, the global energy crisis of the 1970s, and the Yugoslav debt crisis of the 1980s. In such an environment, the ‘nuclear lobby’ (Slovenia and Croatia) and the ‘coal lobby’ (Serbia) emerged as economic and political pressure groups, supported by respectful and already deeply antagonized political elites. The victory of the

Serbian-led ‘coal lobby’ by the end of the 1980s deeply undermined the country’s federal unity, eventually leading to the Wars of Yugoslav Succession.

On a broader level, the conflict between regional political elites about the Yugoslav energy strategy reflected the existing Cold War divisions, with Slovenia and Croatia leaning toward cooperation with the West, while Serbia gradually became dependent on the support of the Soviet Union. These energy divisions are significant not only for a deeper understanding of the Yugoslav political position in the Cold War but also for the position of contemporary Serbia and its political elites in relations with Russia and the war in Ukraine.

Description of the research conducted at the OSA

The importance of the OSA collections I have consulted during my research on this topic cannot be overestimated. Before my application for the Visegrad Scholarship at the OSA, my initial research idea was dedicated to one important event, an environmental disaster that happened in Yugoslavia in 1989, and the original plan was to publish a journal article. Following that lead, I visited the OSA in October 2022 with the idea of exploring the archival collections related to this topic. This four-day research not only provided answers to my initial research questions but also helped me understand that a much broader and more complex phenomenon lay in the backdrop. This is why I expanded my research to the book project on the ‘Yugoslav Energy Wars’ and was lucky enough to have received support from the Visegrad Scholarship at the Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives.

My main research at the OSA focused on the Yugoslav energy sector (please find the list of the archival collections investigated in the Appendix of this report). The initial plan was to understand how the general conflict between different political pressure groups, namely the

‘nuclear lobby’ and the ‘coal lobby’ evolved within the country, how these groupings were gradually established, what were their main agendas and how much this conflict contributed to the collapse of Yugoslavia. The results were remarkable. Starting with these broad research questions, I have managed not only to find the origins of these ‘energy wars’ but also to narrow my research further and focus on more elaborate related phenomena. This also included one of the accidental findings, the fact that up until the late 1970s, in the field of production of electricity Yugoslavia heavily relied on what is now known as ‘renewable energy’ sources, or more precisely, hydroelectric energy. Considering the fact that it proved to be highly problematic to be so dependent on this energy source, the analysis of how it functioned in Yugoslavia, what the challenges were, and what were the eventual solutions will be beneficial in understanding both how Yugoslavia gradually shifted toward what was considered as more reliable energy sources (coal and uranium), and what lessons can be learned for the contemporary push toward the green energy. This finding will be included in my research about the ‘Yugoslav Energy Wars,’ as solutions to it formed the basis on which the ‘nuclear lobby’ and ‘coal lobby’ were eventually developed and operated since the early 1970s. The topic will be first presented at the **15th Annual International Conference: Environmental and Energy Economics**, organized by the Institute of Economic Sciences in Belgrade, Serbia (October 9-10, 2023).

The research at the OSA also helped me to expand my research focus on the oil industry in Yugoslavia. While this topic is not directly related to the original structure of my research project, it proved to be highly significant in understanding the inner workings of different political pressure groups within Yugoslavia. The fact that the oil industry and related problems were developed during the 1960s, at least a decade before ‘energy wars’ became an open conflict between different Yugoslav republics, helped me to grasp the depth of the problem better and to formulate better my

additional questions regarding the main topic of my research. Understanding this problem also helps me to put my analysis of the reasons behind the collapse of Yugoslavia in a broader chronological perspective. The roots of this problem allow me to push the beginning of the ‘energy wars’ in the early 1960s and further investigate if Yugoslavia ever managed to function as a unified country. This is the question I cannot fully answer at this point and will require more research. However, focusing only on the electricity production in Yugoslavia, the answer would be NO.

This leads me to another important finding I managed to fully investigate during my research at the OSA. The lack of an internal electric power grid in Yugoslavia that would connect different regions and help with sharing of electric energy between republics was a known fact. However, the reasons behind this problem were a new discovery and are once again beneficial in understanding how and why different political pressure groups were created in the Yugoslav energy sector. Connecting Slovenia with Italy and Austria and Serbia with Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania via electric cable already during the early 1970s were both symbolic representations of the lack of Yugoslav unity but also proved to be the beginning of the country’s ideological and political division. Besides my main research topic, it also proved to be significant for understanding the position of contemporary Serbia and its political elites in relations with Russia and the war in Ukraine. I will present my initial findings on this topic during my lecture at the *Znanstveno-raziskovalno središče Koper, Inštitut za zgodovinske študije* [Scientific Research Center Koper, Institut for Historical Studies], between September 10-20, 2023 (the exact date is yet to be determined), as a part of the lecture series of the **ERC project Cold War Europe Beyond Borders. A Transnational History of Cross-Border Practices in the Alps-Adriatic Area from World War II to the Present** (Grant no. 101054963).

The Visegrad Scholarship at the Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives provided me the opportunity to discover and fully develop my research project on the ‘Yugoslav Energy Wars.’ The results collected at the OSA are crucial for my better formulating and focusing my further research in the archives of Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The main result of this project is going to be a historical monograph, but several articles in academic journals, conference papers, media appearances, and other related results are to be expected in the near future, some of which I have already mentioned earlier in this report. Finally, I wish to extend my gratitude to the OSA staff and their support in my research, and I would particularly like to thank the director István Rév, Katalin Gádoros, Bianka Horváth, and my supervisor during the research Robert Parnica for inspiring conversations and advice that made my stay at the OSA more productive.

Appendix: Archival collections consulted during my research at the OSA

During my research, I focused on the [Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute](#) and Yugoslav Subject Files I and II (HU 300-10-2 and HU 300-10-3).

HU OSA 300-10-2 box 34

HU OSA 300-10-2 box 42

HU OSA 300-10-2 box 76

HU OSA 300-10-2 boxes 106-9

HU OSA 300-10-2 box 110

HU OSA 300-10-2 box 112

HU OSA 300-10-2 box 117

HU OSA 300-10-2 boxes 140-142

HU OSA 300-10-2 box 183

HU OSA 300-10-2 boxes 216-218

HU OSA 300-10-2 boxes 300-301

HU OSA 300-10-2 box 334

HU OSA 300-10-2 boxes 336-7

HU OSA 300-10-2 box 432-3

HU OSA 300-10-3 box 7

HU OSA 300-10-3 box 51

HU OSA 300-10-3 box 57

HU OSA 300-10-3 boxes 68-69