Universities Under Pressure

Book of Abstracts

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Universities Under Pressure

Book of Abstracts

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Workshop Programme

09:00 – 09:10 | Opening Address – Prof Peter Jambrek (rector, New University)

09:10 – 09:30 | Luka Martin Tomažič

Freedom of Expression for Academics in the Socialist Republic of Slovenia: A Fullerian Evaluation

09:30 – 09:50 | Jernej Letnar Černič

Academic Freedom, Dissent and the Imperative of the Rule of Law Safeguards

09:50 – 10:10 | Ana Šela

Academic Freedom and Security Surveillance: Foreign Students at the University of Ljubljana in Socialist Slovenia

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10:10 – 10:25 | Coffee Break (15 min)

10:25 – 10:45 | Željko Oset

Social Origin in Political Character Assessments of Slovenian Scientists in the Late 1940s and Early 1950s

10:45 – 11:05 | Tomaž Ivešić

When Critique Became a Crime: The Ljubljana Student Trial (1974)

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Communist Youth Organisations as Instruments of Regime Pressure on Academic Freedom at the University of Zagreb, 1945–1948

11:25 – 11:40 | Discussion

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Academic Biographies and Upward Mobility in Postwar Poland

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The Paradoxes of Czechoslovak Academic Life in the 20th Century: Radovan Richta

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Transnational Academic Mobility in Cold War Hungary: Between Political Pressure and Professional Interests

12:55 – 13:10 | Discussion

13:10 | Closing

Abstracts

1. **Luka Martin Tomažič (***Alma Mater Europaea, Maribor*)

Freedom of Expression for Academics in the Socialist Republic of Slovenia: A Fullerian Evaluation

As a cornerstone of both the rule of law and the scholarly pursuit of truth, freedom of expression serves a crucial function in the academic environment. It not only protects individuals from the repressive apparatus of the state but enables intellectual discourse that is of benefit to broader society and humankind. In communist and socialist states, freedom of expression has been notoriously restricted or absent. This article will focus on the Socialist Republic of Slovenia within the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, despite its comparatively decentralized and supposedly liberal socialist model. The relevant normative legal environments pertaining to the academic context will be critically evaluated through the prism of Fuller's inner morality of law. This will be utilized as a rule of law test through the eight desiderata, namely generality, promulgation, non-retroactivity, clarity, non-contradiction, possibility of compliance, constancy and congruence. This framework will be applied to the Socialist Republic of Slovenia as a case study, yielding new insight into the relationship between socialist legalism and academic freedom. In this manner, the formal integrity of the legal system will be tested, particularly regarding clarity and congruence. It will be argued that in addition to typical socialist restrictions on freedom of expression, an environment of unpredictability existed that fundamentally undermined academic autonomy, revealing the inherent friction between socialist normative system and the inner morality of law.

2. **Jernej Letnar Černič (***Nova univerza, Ljubljana*)

Academic Freedom, Dissent and the Imperative of the Rule of Law Safeguards

Academic freedom is essential to the functioning of any constitutional democracy. It propels societal pluralism and reinforces the rule of law. Authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, by contrast, promote monism, where any real or potential dissent is harshly prosecuted and suppressed. Past instances of abuse within higher education institutions in Slovenia demonstrate the perils of such practices and the grave consequences of silencing dissent through prosecution and elimination. This chapter examines two of the darkest episodes in the history of higher education in Slovenia. The first concerns Boris Furlan, the first post–World War II Dean of the Faculty of Law of the University of Ljubljana, who was arrested in 1947 while serving as dean

and later convicted at the Nagode show trial by the District Court of Ljubljana. The second case involves Milan Cunder, a wartime partisan doctor and associate professor of anatomy at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Ljubljana. He suffered a similar fate, convicted in 1950 at a show trial for alleged propaganda activities against the totalitarian regime. Both Furlan and Cunder, dedicated scholars who believed in the rule of law, became victims of its distortion under the totalitarian communist regime at its height. Building on these examples, this chapter argues that academic freedom must never be taken for granted. It is fragile and can only thrive in societies grounded in the principles of constitutional democracy and the rule of law. The dark fates from the past underscore the need for strong safeguards to protect academic freedom in all of its forms, individual, collective, and institutional, especially in societies where the rule of law remains fragile, such as modern-day Slovenia.

3. **Ana Šela** (*University of Maribor*)

Academic Freedom and Security Surveillance: Foreign Students at the University of Ljubljana in Socialist Slovenia

This paper will examine the position of foreign students at the University of Ljubljana in socialist Slovenia as a particularly revealing example of the tension between academic openness, internationalization, and political-security surveillance. Yugoslavia publicly presented the presence of foreign students, especially those from Africa, the Middle East, and other parts of the non-aligned world, as proof of its international openness, modernity, and anti-colonial orientation. At the same time, these very students were often perceived as a politically sensitive group that could represent an ideological, security, or intelligence risk.

The paper will start from the question of how security logic penetrated the university space and how university structures participated in the surveillance of foreign students. Particular attention will be devoted to the relationship between the university administration, commissions for foreign students, record-keeping practices, student organizations, and the State Security Service. Through these mechanisms, the higher-education sphere became not only a site of study and international exchange, but also a space of observation, categorization, and preventive political control.

Drawing on archival materials of the State Security Service and sources related to the functioning of university structures, the paper will show that foreign students occupied a distinctly ambivalent position. They were welcomed as symbols of Yugoslavia's openness and as part of the foreign-policy strategy of non-alignment, yet at the same time they were treated as potential carriers of political conflict, undesirable influences, or international connections

that had to be monitored. The paper will therefore contribute to our understanding of academic freedom under authoritarian socialism by showing that its limitations did not derive solely from ideological pressure on professors and domestic students, but also from the securitization of international mobility, foreign contacts, and university internationalization. In doing so, it will also raise the broader question of how the socialist state understood the university: as an autonomous space of knowledge or as a sensitive institution embedded in the preservation of political stability. The case of foreign students thus offers a more precise insight into the intersection of academic autonomy, state security, and transnational contacts in late socialist Yugoslavia. At the same time, the paper will illuminate how security practices shaped the everyday experience of study and belonging at the university.

4. **Željko Oset** (*Nova univerza, Ljubljana*)

Social Origin in Political Character Assessments of Slovenian Scientists in the Late 1940s and early 1950s

This paper examines the role of social origin in political character assessments (karakteristike) of Slovenian scientists in the late 1940s and 1950s. Drawing on archival materials from university and party institutions (including party and student organizations), it analyses how references to class background - such as “working-class,” “peasant,” “bourgeois,” or “petty bourgeois” - were incorporated into these assessments. The study argues that social origin functioned as an important interpretative category in the postwar communist context, yet it was predominantly invoked with negative connotations or as an explanation for perceived asocial behavior. At the same time, the authors of these assessments in some cases sought to mitigate or reframe such labels, attempting to soften associated stereotypes. I argue that social origin was employed in multifaceted ways, but remained a far less decisive factor than conformity and participation in (semi-)political organizations in shaping academic careers.

5. **Tomaž Ivešić** (*Nova univerza, Ljubljana*)

When Critique Became a Crime: The Ljubljana Student Trial (1974)

In 1974, a politically charged trial in Ljubljana marked a significant moment in the history of student activism and the suppression of free speech under an authoritarian regime. The trial, involving a group of students accused of subversion and criticism of the government, highlighted the state's attempts to control public discourse and stifle dissent. This article explores the cultural and legal ramifications of the trial, analyzing how the regime used legal mechanisms to silence voices critical of its policies. By focusing on the events of the Ljubljana

student trial, the paper delves into the broader themes of state control over intellectual life, the manipulation of legal processes, and the impact of such trials on the political climate of the time. It argues that this trial was not merely a legal proceeding, but a symbolic effort to monopolize the narrative of critique and dissent in a society where freedom of expression was increasingly under threat.

6. **Tomislav Kardum** (*Institute of History, Zagreb*)

Communist Youth Organisations as Instruments of Regime Pressure on Academic Freedom at the University of Zagreb, 1945–1948

This paper examines the role of communist youth organisations as mechanisms for suppressing academic freedom at the University of Zagreb during the formative years of the Yugoslav communist regime. The year 1948 serves as a deliberate chronological boundary: by this point, the communist regime had consolidated its power sufficiently that meaningful opposition had migrated largely within the party itself, manifested most acutely in the Cominformist crisis. The period 1945–1948 thus represents a distinct phase of ideological entrenchment, during which informal actors, particularly student organisations, played an important role in enforcing ideological conformity. Drawing on archival sources, communist party records, and the émigré press, this paper reconstructs the multiple channels through which communist and pro-communist students, operating primarily through front and party organisations, exerted pressure on both their peers and faculty members. Two principal mechanisms of student-led coercion against fellow students are analysed: the institution of so-called "courts of honor" (sudovi časti) – ad hoc tribunals convened to confirm allegations of wartime collaboration – as well as direct physical intimidation and threats. The paper further examines methods of pressure directed at professors deemed "reactionary" or "enemies of the people", including organised press campaigns demanding the removal of certain textbooks and the deliberate disruption of lectures. The paper also addresses the question of how far these activities represented a top-down response to directives from higher party organs, to what extent student organisations collaborated with the repressive apparatus, notably the secret police, and to what degree they acted on their own initiative. Brief consideration is likewise given to attempts by anti-communist students to organise resistance against these efforts to suppress academic freedom.

7. **Agata Zysiak** (*University of Vienna*)

Academic Biographies and Upward Mobility in Postwar Poland

How do academic careers become possible and successful within institutions that claim to be socialist? How do academic institutions reproduce privilege even under conditions of Stalinist reforms?

By tracing biographies of professors from both intelligentsia and working-class origins, the paper reveals how the academic field rewards certain forms of cultural capital. Academic careers were shaped by social origin, institutional change, and the everyday reproduction of distinction. The biographical method makes visible the limits of institutional change, showing that social mobility often required adaptation to an older academic habitus rather than its transformation. Despite the reforms, the university remained governed by an entrenched habitus transmitted through family background, mentors, academic networks, and the tacit norms of scholarly legitimacy. Postwar reforms of higher education in Poland expanded access to higher education, yet did not fundamentally dissolve the cultural hierarchies that organised academic life.

8. **Jan Surman** (*Masaryk Institute and Archives of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic*)

The Paradoxes of Czechoslovak Academic Life in the 20th Century: Radovan Richta: From Hero to Traitor (or the Other Way Round)

Radovan Richta, an internationally renowned sociologist, philosopher and leading researcher of the scientific-technical revolution, is a very emblematic figure of Czechoslovak science in the second half of the 20th century. Initially considered a 'liberal' among Czechoslovak socialists, after the Warsaw Pact invasion of 1968, he became one of the faces of the normalisation and ideologisation of science and scholarship. In my talk, I will discuss this change in Richta's self-positioning and examine some of the legends surrounding his political involvement. In the second part, I will examine the impact of these changes on his international standing within the Eastern bloc and with his Western interlocutors.

9. **László Szabolcs** (*ELTE Budapest*)

Transnational Academic Mobility in Cold War Hungary: Between Political Pressure and Professional Interests

The presentation will explore the paternalistic state policy of socialist Hungary that aimed to exert a complete control over the facilitation and purpose of cross-border academic

mobility and exchange during the Cold War period. The authorities developed a complex institutional framework for managing trans-systemic relations while also enabling invasive security measures deployed to supervise – and occasionally obstruct – these interactions. Academic mobility was officially promoted for diplomatic reasons, intending to improve the country's international standing through cultural and science diplomacy. At the same time, it was also motivated by economic calculations, as officials counted on experts to acquire and transfer much-needed knowhow. However, I will argue that the centralization and vertically integrated instrumentalization of Hungary's cultural and science diplomacy proved unrealizable in practice. Due to the systemic effects of decentered, informal procedures, the rivalries between state agencies, and the failures of coordination, what emerged instead of centralized control was a dynamic heterogeneity and pluralism on multiple layers of the Hungarian state. I demonstrate that the resulting internal fragmentation and parallelism generated relatively unrestrained room for maneuver, permitting the cultural, academic, and technical elites to forge transnational cooperations for the realization of their own professional and personal agendas.