

## **THE IDEA AND PRACTICE OF THE SLOVENIAN STATE-FORMATION PROCESS AFTER WORLD WAR I<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract.** *The complex and contradictory processes of Slovenian state formation in 1918–1941 became subject of scientific research in a monograph written by Doctor of Historical Sciences Kateryna Malshyna. Chronologically, the work covered the period from the establishment of the "August" National Council in Ljubljana within the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (1918) to the completion of the legal activities of the "April" National Council (September 1941). Based on the study of a set of written sources, it proves that under the influence of external and internal factors, the process of Slovenian state formation at this time had a wave-like character. The author scientifically verified the position that in the interwar period, Slovenia lost the chance to protect its culture from Yugoslav uniformization and to gain autonomy within the authoritarian state. The German-Yugoslav April War of 1941 and the initial period of the Nazi-Fascist control over Slovenia led to its division into four zones of occupation, thus ending the Slovenian statehood.*

**Keywords:** *Slovenia, national revival, state formation, First and Second World Wars, interwar period, Central and South-Eastern Europe.*

**Rezumat. Ideea și practica procesului de formare a Statului Sloven după Primul Război Mondial.** *Procesele complexe și contradictorii legate de formarea Statului sloven au devenit subiectul cercetării științifice prezentate în cadrul volumului semnat de Kateryna Mal'shyna, doctor în științe istorice. Cronologic, studiul acoperă perioada cuprinsă între constituirea Consiliului Național din „August” în Ljubljana în cadrul Statului Slovenilor, Croaților și Sârbilor (1918) și încheierea existenței legale a Consiliului Național*

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<sup>1</sup> К. В. Мальшина, *Тернистий шлях словенського державотворення (1918-1941)* [The Thorny Path of Slovenian State-Formation (1918-1941)], Київ: ІУАД НАНУ, 2018, 565 с.

*din „August” (1941). Întemeiată pe analiza unui set de izvoare scrise, lucrarea demonstrează că, sub impactul unor factori externi și interni, procesul de formare a Statului sloven în acea perioadă a avut un caracter sinusoidal. Autoarea a verificat critic ipoteza conform căreia, în perioada interbelică, Slovenia a ratat șansa de a-și proteja cultura în fața uniformizării iugoslave și de a dobândi autonomia în cadrele unui stat autoritar. Războiul german-iugoslav din aprilie 1941 și instituirea controlului nazisto-fascist asupra Sloveniei au condus la divizarea acesteia în patru zone de ocupație, punând capăt statalității slovene.*

The centennial of the World War I and seventy-fifth anniversary of the World War II became a significant informational occasion for a new, unbiased view in the context of a retrospective analysis of the problems of war and peace, war and politics, war and diplomacy, war and society, war and culture, etc. The Great War of 1914–1918 came into history as the first global armed clash of two warring coalitions of countries, which brought about dramatic changes, including state-formation ones. These processes developed especially rapidly after the Great War of 1914–1918 on the territory of Central, Eastern, and South-eastern Europe. The territorial changes were primarily due to the national liberation aspirations of the peoples, the collapse of the powerful imperial formations, and the peaceful arrangement of the post-war world.

All factors of the process of Slovenian state formation in 1918-1941, from the creation of the "August" National Council in Ljubljana within the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs in 1918 to the ending of the legal activity of the "April" National Council in September 1941, became an actual subject of scientific analysis of historical research of Ukrainian historian and translator, an employee of the Institute of Ukrainian Archeography and Source Studies n. a. M. Hrushevsky, Doctor of Historical Sciences Kateryna Malshyna. Since the most activities of Slovenian national liberation organizations happened in the last stage of World War I, we agree that the lower chronological boundary of the dissertation is logically distinguished in August 1918, the time when the first Slovenian state body – the National Council in Ljubljana – was created. The upper chronological boundary of the work is 1941, meaning the German-Yugoslav April War (April 6-10) and the initial period of Nazi-fascist control over Slovenia directly linked to its division into four occupation zones. At this time, the last Slovenian self-governing body – the National Council of Slovenia – was created and operated. For almost

two and a half decades, the intense process of Slovenian state formation continued between the two dates.

The author of the monograph reasonably mentioned that the restoration of the formation of the Slovenian state took place in the last months of 1918, but did not end because of indecision of the Slovenian national and political program, which was caused by the split of the Slovenian Politum into two tendencies: Yugo-slavism and "Slovenism". The set of external and internal factors has developed in such a way that the process of Slovenian state formation had a wave-like nature. It recovered and accelerated in times of internal political chaos, primarily related to the collapse of the multinational state formations (Austria-Hungary, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes / Yugoslavia) in which the Slovenes lived. In other words, it was an increase in the external threat along the entire length of the Slovenian northern border by those states created by linguistically unrelated populations (Italians, Austrians, Hungarians), especially on that (greater) part of the Slovenian lands which have become component of a common political body with the related Slavonic peoples (Croats and Serbs). At the same time, the process of Slovenian state formation was slowing down under conditions of stable existence in multinational countries with authoritarian regimes.

The monograph proves that in the history of South-eastern Europe in general and of Slovenia in particular, the crucial role belonged to the interwar period. It decisively influenced the fate of the peoples of the Western Balkans who, after World War I, lived in a multinational state (First and Second Yugoslavia) for seventy years. Particular attention is paid to the fact that Slovenia, from all the small Western Balkan countries, experienced the most difficult trials after the end of the Great War of 1914-1918. On the one hand, its lands and people have been divided between four states; on the other hand, Slovenian ethnic groups in neighbouring countries are still unable to enjoy the rights guaranteed to national minorities in the European Union. It is mentioned that in the interwar period, Slovenia lost the opportunity to unite, protect its culture from Yugoslav unification, and gain autonomy in the conditions of an authoritarian state.

We note that the decision of Kateryna Malshyna to choose a political history of Slovenia during the interwar period as an object of scientific research is dictated primarily by considerations of a historiographical nature. The point is that the Slovenian historiography approached the problems of the Slovenian state-formation in the interwar period to a lesser extent, while the Ukrainian and East Slavic historiography has not addressed them at all. Communists, who

created Second Yugoslavia, also avoided a detailed study of this period, in particular, because of their minor role in the public and social life of First Yugoslavia. The bloody repression in Slovenia during and after World War II intended to change the historical memory of the people conceptually. The French historian Bernard Gene wrote: "A social group, a political community, or a civilization are determined first and foremost by their memory, that is, their history, but not by the history that was in reality, but by one created for them by historians." As a result, Slovenia's interwar political history has long been the subject of numerous twists or simplified schemes.

Only from the turn of the XX-XXI centuries the EU accession process to address the issue of borders with EU neighbours has forced the national-scientific institutes of Slovenia to immerse themselves in virtually unexplored historical times. Significant results have been achieved in recent years in the study of Slovenia's interwar history, and the publication of archival materials continues. However, it is too early to speak of a full understanding of the complex and contradictory process of Slovenian state-formation: Slovenian historians do not consider the interwar period as a significant time of genesis, evolution, and consolidation of the state aspirations of Slovenian society.

The author of the monograph thoroughly substantiated another essential point: the study of this topic opens a wide field for comparativism in many issues, in particular through the prism of the similarities of historical processes in Slovenian and Ukrainian lands during the Middle Ages, modern, and present times. In her opinion, the Eurasian civilization crossroads at which the Ukrainian people were formed has its "mini-version" in the western Balkans, where ethnic Slovenian lands lie from lake Balaton to Venice. The general historical process of strengthening nationalism and the collapse of empires after World War I became the background for the restoration of state formation by both Slovenians and Ukrainians. Obviously, there were both similarities and significant differences in character and direction between these processes. However, the solution of many urgent issues of Slovenian history, the content, orientation, and results of state-formation phenomena, the construction and mechanisms of functioning of the historical memory of the people, the essence and principal characteristics of foreign and domestic policy during the interwar decades will be useful for researchers to understand Ukrainian historians problems.

The logical structure of the work contributes to the achievement of the set goals and objectives of scientific research. The study is based on a wide variety of

sources: published and unpublished documentary, nonfiction and narrative materials created both during the mentioned period and later, within and beyond the borders of the Republic of Slovenia. The researcher offered a thoughtful and valid classification of the source materials used. Documentary sources are categorized chronologically into documents of World War I, the interwar period, and World War II. In content and origin, they can be divided into materials of the central government bodies (legislation, statistics) of the State of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes / Yugoslavia, the Slovenian authorities in 1918-1941, churches, documents regarding diplomatic battles for borders in 1919-1920, development of social and political movements and parties, different works of party figures, foreign materials.

The author reasonably noted that the documents of central and Slovenian authorities (legislation, minutes of meetings, statistical materials), parties, political figures, and the church provide an opportunity to comprehensively cover the main categorical vectors: features, stages, driving forces, the sequence of events and the results of Slovenian state formation in the interwar period. In turn, very important, foreign documents provide a multifaceted historical background for research on Slovenian state-building. First of all, these are reports written in terms of the political interests of each country. At the same time, the balanced observations and judgments contribute to a deeper understanding of Slovenia's political heritage during the period under review.

Kateryna Malshyna utilized newspapers and magazines from 1918 to 1941 that belonged to all political camps in Slovenia and published both editorial and author articles, state and party news. The information spectrum of these materials is vibrant and diverse, which is why they could solve almost all the tasks of scientific research.

The narrative group of sources from the history of Slovenia of the first half of the twentieth century is vital for the verification of scientific provisions and conclusions. By chronological criterion, it is differentiated as memoirs of the First World War and other significant events and crises in political life, including the creation of the first Slovenian authorities in the "State of the CBS" and the "Kingdom of the CBS", the dictatorship, and the Second World War. The author divided the narratives into the following complexes: memoirs of political figures on the internal situation in Slovenia and the international scene in the interwar period, memoirs of political prisoners of 1930 - 1940s, memoirs of emigrants and refugees of the early XX century and the years of the First and Second World Wars.

The content of narrative materials, on the one hand, is factually rich, and on the other, marked by sharply one-sided party orientation. Political aggression led to individual notes and diaries being published either outside the borders of socialist Slovenia or later in the 21st century. Anti-communist memoirs can be found in American and British libraries, while (with a few exceptions) they are missing from Slovenian bookstores.

The author used a collection of archival documents on the political history of Slovenia in the first half of the twentieth century, which significantly increased the scientific level of the monograph. This chronologically-meaningful collection includes documents of three essential periods: World War I, the interwar years and World War II. However, it should be noted that unpublished materials on the history of Slovenes of the interwar period are very fragmented. Depending on the state of archival sources on the interwar history of the Slovenes, the low degree of orderliness and partial inaccessibility prevents a closer examination of the individual, often minor, problems of the period. At the same time, due to the thematic work of individual researchers, the copying of sources from archives outside Slovenia, as well as focused efforts that were reflected in sophisticated scientific works, sufficient documents were accumulated to carry out in-depth studies of conflicting issues in Slovenian interwar history. The dissertation work, in particular, was built on the use of archival funds of the Slovenian authorities (1918) and self-government (1927-1929). Mainly due to the use of a robust set of sources, the findings of the historical study are well-vetted, fully scientifically sound, well-reasoned, and logical.

In conducting the research and presenting its results, Kateryna Malshyna followed the principles of historicism and objectivity. According to these, the phenomena and processes in the history of Slovenia during the interwar period are presented not from the standpoint of static, but from the perspective of analysing their dynamic development, exploring their relationship and interdependence. The author has successfully used several general, scientific, and primarily historical methods. We pay particular attention to system-structural, problem-chronological, comparative-historical, historical-genetic, historical-typological, temporal modelling, historical-retrospective, and comparative-analogue ones.

In our view, the scientific novelty of this work lies in several aspects. The reviewed study is a complex one, which means that the process of Slovenian state formation in 1918-1941 became the subject of holistic scientific research for the first time, particularly in Ukrainian historiography. The author specified the pre-

requisites for the restoration of the process of Slovenian state formation in 1848-1918. She developed, for the first time, the periodization of the Slovenian state formation in 1918-1941, determining the characteristics of each stage and distinguishing the driving forces and factors of this process. She also presented the conceptualization and definitions of the terms "Slovenism", "Yugoslavism", and "Balkanism" in the vision of Slovenians. As for the dynamics of the Slovenian state-formation process, they were studied in conjunction with the ideological aspects, through the prism of the struggle of "Slovenism" with "Yugoslavism" in the personal expression of the conservative (clerical) and liberal camps, with the fluctuations of different directions of labour (socialist/communist) camps.

In the context of a robust conceptualization of the problem of historical research, the use and development of a scientific approach to the consideration of a dynamic or "wave-like" state-formation progress through the evaluation of "windows of opportunities" is essential. Based on the involvement of source data and specific historical facts, it was proven that the crisis moments of the centralist and unitarist policies of the centralist government of Belgrade (when the "Slovenism" was favoured) opened corresponding "windows of opportunities" for the intensification of Slovenian state-formation efforts. The author considers that the dynamics of the historical events were also determined by the relations of "national" - "state" - "political" ideas. That is, they represent a way for the Slovenians to understand their full interconnection as one of the crucial criteria for identifying the stages, peculiarities, and "windows of opportunities" for the development of the Slovenian state-formation process.

Kateryna Malshyna actualized the scientific discussion around the essence and content of the theory of national revival, in the context of which she clarified several concepts. For instance, the simplistic understanding of the idea of "national revival" as a secondary consequence of the industrial revolution or as a transition to the industrial stage of production does not fully correspond to the historical reality. Ethno-processes are much more complex and far from directly dependent on changes in the material base of production or the system of social and economic relations. Ethno-evolution has more to do with cultural change than with production. Critical analysis of categories and established conceptual apparatus, however, does not imply a nihilistic denial of the earlier achievements of Slavic studies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the research of the problem. The process of Slovenian revival is rightly explored not as regional, but mainly as pan-European, pan-Slavic, as well as specific historical, cultural, and

civilizational shifts. This approach made it possible to reasonably and in chronological sequence reveal the meaning, nature, and focus of the movement for national-revival on Slovenian lands.

The processes of formation and activity of the first Slovenian national state-administrative bodies and Slovenian armed forces, the establishment of state borders and the features of the international position of Slovenia within the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs prove that the state created on Slovenian lands within the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs in August-December 1918 has all signs of full national autonomy.

The text of the monograph indicates that its author has thoroughly studied the system of actions of the Slovenian governments in the struggle against the central Belgrade authority for the preservation of national autonomy in December 1918 – June 1921. On this basis, she systematized a set of military and administrative-informational efforts of the governments in the conditions of threatened integrity of the Slovenian nation and national territory at the end of 1918 – first half of 1919, investigated the activities of the Slovenian delegation in Paris in January-September 1919, as well as the preconditions, course, and results of the Carinthia plebiscite in October 1920. She analysed the administrative and territorial status of Slovenian land according to the constitutions of 1921 and 1931, the legal frame-work for the operation of new units of government and local elections. The main features and directions of activity of self-governing bodies in 1927-1941 (in particular, the Ljubljana and Maribor regional assemblies in 1927-1929, the Banovina Council of the Drava Banovina in 1930-1941) are outlined for the respective periods. The connection between the Concordat crisis of 1935-1937, the creation of Croatia's Banovina, and the efforts of the *Slovenian politicum* to create the Slovenian Banovina were revealed. The pages of the monograph analyze the attempts to restore Slovenian national autonomy at the beginning of World War II and during the initial period of the Nazi occupation of Slovenia (April-September 1941).

The practical importance of the monograph lies primarily in the possibility and appropriateness of using the results of the study in the preparation of thematic summaries, textbooks and synthetic works on the history of South-eastern Europe and individual countries, in the development of primary and specialized courses in the social and political past of Slovenia and other Balkan states to investigate the regional section of international relations in the interwar period. Also, the Slovenian experience of building its statehood, fighting for the unification of



its people, parliamentarism, and democracy, developing strategies and tactics in achieving its goals, dedication to human values and political behaviour in the catastrophic moments of its history will be useful examples for state and public figures, historians-theoreticians and applied politicians in the context of understanding the practice of Ukrainian state formation in the XX-XXI centuries.

At the same time, we observed some aspects and subjects of the monograph, which – in our opinion – either need further elaboration or are debatable. For example, it would have been useful as a more detailed and in-depth analysis of the impact of the two global armed conflicts on the genesis and evolution of state-formation processes in Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe.

Special attention should be paid to the historical, intercultural character to strengthen the methodological tools of scientific research. Given the conceptual understanding of the process of formation of the Slovenian state in the interwar period, it would have been appropriate to present it not only through the prism of the "window of opportunity", but also from the perspective of the complex of "structural pressures". After all, according to Professor Leslie A. Pal, each country is influenced by deep structural conditions that are enshrined in history, politics, and economics or, in other words, by "a specific structural pressure that cannot be ignored".

In our opinion, the international factors of influence on the processes of Slovenian state-formation within the chosen chronological limits also deserved a separate in-depth scientific analysis. In particular, it is essential both in the context of studying their influence on the Slovenian state-formation at the stages of specific "windows of opportunities" and in terms of comparing their role in the respective processes in the adjacent territories.

The appeal of the author of the monograph to numerous biographies of statesmen, politicians, and military figures should encourage her to use the biographical method. In particular, we refer to the application of its cognitive potential through the study of the transformation of the "biographical trajectory", focusing on various aspects of the state-formation activity of individuals, groups, and organizations.

In general, the noted comments, wishes, and recommendations do not significantly affect the proper professional, scientific, and theoretical level of the historical research conducted. Kateryna Malshyna's monograph has a complete, original, complex character. A wide range of historians and anyone interested in the

problems of state formation in the countries of Central and South-East Europe under the influence of the two World Wars should read the monograph, become familiar with its provisions and conclusions.