

# TESTIMONIES: INTERVIEW WITH SPOMENKA AND TINE HRIBAR

Photo by Andraž Gombač



**Spomenka and Tine Hribar on free thought, democratisation, the communist party and dissidents, the power of words and magazines once and today, the uncertain future of Europe and the world ...**

Written by **Andraž Gombač**, journalist and editor

“ *We must open our hearts to compassion and love. I don't know where the key is, but I'm sure we'll find it.* ”

**Spomenka Hribar** is a Slovene philosopher, sociologist and publicist. She was one of the key figures in the founding of the magazine *Nova revija* and served as its editor-in-chief from 1988 to 1990. She planted the idea of national reconciliation in Slovene political and social life, as continuing with the mindset “If you are not with us, you are against us!” and thus perpetuating mutual hatred from the times of World War II is nonsensical.

**Tine Hribar** is a Slovene phenomenologist philosopher. He played a crucial role in Slovenia’s democratisation and its independence movement. He started the initiative with which 60 intellectuals requested the founding of *Nova revija* in 1980 and served as the magazine’s editor-in-chief in its beginnings from 1982 to 1983. Once he felt the authorities had started to interfere with the magazine’s undisturbed and autonomous work, he resigned in 1983 shortly before he would have been dismissed.

---

Tine Hribar concluded that self-determination is not the self-determination of Slovenes as a nation, but their self-determination as individuals in his 1987 essay *Slovenska državnost* (Eng.: Slovene statehood) in the notorious, historical issue #57 of *Nova revija*, titled *Prispevki za slovenski nacionalni program* (Eng.: Contributions to a Slovene national program). Equally emboldening was Dr Spomenka Hribar in her even longer article *Avantgardno sovrašтво in sprava* (Eng.: Avant-garde hate and reconciliation): “There are paths forward! We just need to find them. There *are* many paths of our mutual – *reconciliation*.”

They have been together for over sixty years and share their private and public lives with each other ever since they first met while studying philosophy and sociology. Their first book *Človek in vera* (Eng.: Man and religion) was published at the publisher Komunist and their most recent book was published two years ago at Ciceron, meaningfully titled *Slovenski razkoli in slovenska sprava* (Eng.: Slovene schisms and Slovene reconciliation).

They do not make themselves heard often, but when they do, it is worth listening. Once they graciously agreed to a longer interview, they received their interviewer in their spacious living room in the village Tomišelj on the edge of the Ljubljana Marsh. We are happy and proud to host them as part of the international project LitMag, which is supported by the European program CERV – Citizens, Equality, Rights, Values. It connects eight partners from six EU states: Austria, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Italy and Slovenia. Together, we shed light on Eastern European literary magazines that opposed authoritarian and totalitarian regimes after World War II and heavily influenced the democratisation process and joining the EU.

We could not ask for better interview partners. Tine Hribar was the editor of the student paper *Tribuna* and the paper *Problemi* in the sixties, started the initiative to found *Nova revija* in 1980, a vital magazine in Slovenia’s democratisation and independence, and served as its first editor-in-chief two years later. Spomenka was of course involved in all of the above as well. She wrote her famous essay *Krivda in greh* (Eng.: Fault and sin) already in 1983, but it could only be published in 1987, immediately after issue #57 of *Nova revija*, after it was kept in a bunker “for safe keeping.”

Enough introductory rambling! Read more in the talk with the Hribars, which of course includes many other interesting and relevant topics and brought up our uncertainties.

---

**You were both born in 1941, shortly before the German occupation. Your first years were marred by the war and you grew up in so-called times of freedom. Do you remember when you first felt something wasn't right with the society of the time? When did the walls start closing in on you?**

**HIM:** "I don't recall any repression in the first years after the war, even though my father was in the Home Guard, he was even a prisoner in Šentvid. He was released when he was granted amnesty. The fate of the collaborators was largely dependent on the field agents – if they caught somebody giving away information or killing, they took him to Kočevski Rog and killed him. My father never did anything like that, he didn't even join the Home Guard to collaborate with the occupation. He was in the Liberation Front at first, the partisans even gave him a fancy title: economist. This however meant he had to visit farms and even pillage the wives of Home Guard members. Like some others, he couldn't bear it and fled home from the partisans in the Autumn of 1944. He was in hiding for a while, he slept in the attic, didn't leave the house nor show his face around. He ran out of bread at breakfast one morning and sent me to get my mother, who had the neighbour over for a visit, who then heard me say that my father wants bread. She couldn't keep her mouth shut and gave away that my father was home. The Home Guard caught wind of that and came to get him. He survived in Šentvid where many died, not because of torture but of diarrhoea. My father was lucky that his guard was also his brother-in-law, his sister's husband. He got him a sugar cube every day to save him from the illness. I could go on and on with these stories. My father's past never caused me any trouble, say in high school or when enrolling into university. I only saw the difference later when I compared my way with Spomenka's. Her father was killed by the Germans and her grandfather ended up in Dachau ... She received a scholarship straight away, whereas I didn't even think of applying. Although I did receive something later, when we got married ..."

**HER:** "I lost my father's pension and we were penniless. First I got my scholarship and then you got yours, without any issues."

**HIM:** "I was already a 'proper communist' in high school. They convinced me to the cause and I was also predisposed to it. My final high school essay was on Kardelj's essay Nacionalno vprašanje (Eng.: The National Question). I later published it in the student newspaper Tribuna. It's funny how some theologians ramble on how I wrote on Kardelj already at university ... Not true, I already did it in high school! You asked when we noticed something was wrong. I didn't come into conflict as a critic of communism, but as a

---

---

communist hardliner. When Tito announced the implementation of capitalism in his speech in 1962, I wrote an article and titled it with Lenin's syntagma: *New Economic Policy*, where I criticised the turn towards capitalism."

**So the leading communists were not enough communist for you?**

**HIM:** "That's right! That was my first conflict. I was a theoretician. I studied Marx' *Capital* and other books, wrote over a thousand pages and published my findings in the first issue of *Nova revija* under the title *Otok obupa* (Eng.: Island of Despair), because Marx cites Robinson Crusoe as well. After years of studying, I figured out that the worst-case scenario would be for Marx's ideas to come true: a total elimination of trade relationships, division based on labour ... We would live in the worst possible labour camp! Compared to this, even Lenin and Stalin were liberals."

“ *The printing offices would tell me  
when the UDBA was coming*

**You both were vocal in magazines and newspapers very early on, as you are still now – you recently spoke out against the war in Ukraine and the plan to send more weapons and troops there. What power did the written word use to have and how powerful is it now?**

**HIM:** "I think it's gaining power again. Like always in times of crisis."

**HER:** "And with power come threats, insults ... No matter, the written word is there for the long term. Riled up extremists on the left and right react immediately, but that's unimportant for the long-term effect of the written word. You can't stop the awareness that's spreading around the world: the weapons industry is driving our planet into a catastrophe."

**However, the authorities from times past did react differently to public protests when you were students as they react now, didn't they?**

**HER:** "You used to only have to write one wrong word or sentence and everybody was up in arms, you got a visit from the party lecturing you ... Now

---

---

you can write and publish and they don't give a damn, pardon my French ..."  
(smiles)

**HIM:** "There's one more difference: preventative censorship used to be very strong. People would think long and hard what to publish and what not to publish – and they were paid for publishing! We've been writing for free for the past twenty years or so. This is also a testament that the written word has lost its power. Words and thought!"

**As though you should be thankful to even get published.**

**HER:** "Yes, very thankful." (smiles)

**HIM:** "You were being sarcastic, but some scientists do finance publishers to get their articles out and get the necessary points for a promotion."

**Mrs Spomenka, you mentioned that critical words once caused reactions. When did you figure out everyone needs to "go up in arms"?**

**HER:** "When the government cancelled the magazine *Perspektive* in 1964. That was a step too far. I used to say at earlier and even at some later events that they'll come to their senses and realize they can't go on like this, that a different approach is needed ... I believed that communism was the best, most just system. When *Perspektive* was cancelled, it turned out I was very naive."

**HIM:** "This was towards the end of our studies. But I have to stress again that it's not all black and white. In 1963, so during the most intense prosecution against *Perspektive*, a year before it was cancelled, we organised a symposium that was the first of its kind in Slovenia. We called it *Alienacija in dezalienacija v socializmu* (Eng.: Alienisation and dealienisation in socialism). We invited university professors, people from *Perspektive*, the editor of *Sodobnost* Dušan Pirjevec ... It was a real hullabaloo at first! We were summoned to the central committee and Stane Kavčič was the chief of the ideological commission."

**HER:** "But he was someone you could talk to ..."

**HIM:** "They finally agreed to us hosting the symposium. Under one condition."

---



---

We also invited Taras Kermauner and Veljko Rus and especially Rus was quite feared, so the authorities demanded we invite someone who could go toe to toe with him. We exchanged looks and didn't know who could fit the bill, when Kavčič said: 'I'll tell you, it's Janez Stanovnik. He'll come from Geneva.' And he did, Stanovnik, a UN-employee came to our symposium."

### **What were the symposium's findings?**

**HER:** "Let me first explain why it was controversial. The official party line was that socialism does indeed have dealienisation, but not alienisation, whereas we stated right in the title that both exist. Alienisation shouldn't exist under socialism because it was the best possible system. I remained a "believer" despite our criticism, I harboured much understanding for communism. After the cancellation of the critical *Perspektive*, the biggest blow for me was Boris Pahor's and Alojz Rebula's interview with Edvard Kocbek. I didn't know about the horrific scale of the post-war killings before."

### **But that was already in 1975!**

**HER:** "Yes. Well, I was often critical of the socialist system before too, although I was quite occupied by my job, family, raising the children ... I only later found more time for writing."

**HIM:** "I had a few more opportunities as the editor of Tribuna. I remember how we were job hunting after our studies. We first went to Štefanova ulica to ... It wasn't called UDBA back then but the State Security Administration if I recall correctly. We thought, they don't have any sociologists there, maybe they could use some. We'll do research for them!"

**HER:** "And I was pregnant to boot!"

**HIM:** "We enter the building and met an acquaintance of ours by chance in the hallway. He just looked at us and asked, 'Where are you two off to?'"

**HER:** "He could see how silly we were right away!"

**HIM:** "We replied we came to ask for jobs. He answered: 'You can get into this place, but it's hard to get out.' We didn't shy away immediately, but we were cautious, we didn't stubbornly pursue a job (smiles). After *Perspektive* was

---

---

cancelled, I had the authorities breathing behind my back as the editor of *Tribuna*: two members of the university's party committee – Krešimir Petrović and Lojze Skok. Even the printing offices would tell me when the UDBA was coming and which articles were controversial and Lojze Skok provided other signals.”

**HER:** “We stayed friends with him until his death. He’s one of the best people we’ve ever met.”

**HIM:** “He was the one who told me then: ‘This won’t go through; you’ll be cancelled if you publish this ...’ He did this in cooperation with the University committee of the League of Communists, maybe even with the Central committee.”

**HER:** “No, I don’t believe you.”

**HIM:** “Of course he did! But I was thankful he kept warning me. I pulled back some of the worst things, I wasn’t that crazy to push through and risk the magazine’s entire existence. I wanted to preserve a space for publishing. After they practically hung a noose around my neck at *Tribuna*, I did what I did later at *Nova revija* as well – I resigned and let somebody else take over. Before I left, I founded a special theoretical side dish for the magazine called *Zasnove*. But I got the Humboldt fellowship soon after and went to Cologne to study. I got it because I wrote to the German offices directly, if I were to go through our university offices, I would’ve been stopped fairly quickly and wouldn’t get anything. So, I made it, went to Germany and Spomenka took over as editor of *Zasnove*, who brought our generation’s theologians to the magazine. Rudi Koncilija, Anton Stres ...”

**HER:** “... Franci Križnik...”

**HIM:** “This upset the political heads again, but they didn’t cancel the magazine. Speaking of theologians, let me say that we were the ones who invited them to write for us. They wrote for *Tribuna*, however, they didn’t call others to work with them. We opened up the space for discussion and they’re still just organising church services even today: the main guy is preaching and the others just nod. Just like at the communist party’s conference!”

**HER:** “They were already quite critical of Marxism in *Tribuna*, but didn’t say a word against the church, of course not! I remember how the university’s committee once “took confessions” of myself and Emil Milan Pintar for four

---



hours because of the theologians' collaboration. I asked the theologians to be critical of their side as well and write about the church's blemishes, but they couldn't do it. Or they weren't allowed to. These very promising beginnings alas bore no fruit."

“ *I don't blame young people today for not having a sense of statehood. We didn't have one either.*

**Flipping through the issues of Tribuna, you quickly see that its authors were also the later established philosopher Ivo Urbančič, the lawyer and sociologists Peter Jambreč, the sociologist Marko Kerševan ...**

**HIM:** "Yes, these names later became well-known either on the party's, our centrist or church's right-wing side."

**HER:** "This had the potential to become a valuable intellectual core with different worldviews, but it only lasted for a while."

**HIM:** „Then it was a similar situation as with *Problemi*, which I also edited ..."

**... the very next year, right, in 1966?**

**HIM:** "That was a funny story, and I still don't quite get it. Božidar Debenjak really wanted the position of editor-in-chief, but the then head Vladimir Kavčič chose me. I don't know if Kavčič and Debenjak were in any conflict ... I immediately attracted authors who were kicked out of *Sodobnost* and the former authors of *Perspektive* – Dušan Pirjevec, Veljko Rus, Taras Kermauner and others. Ivo Urbančič was there too. Philosophically speaking, we were heideggerians. We renamed *Problemi* to 'a magazine for poetry and thought'. This is how we protected ourselves, because we added some political criticism to the 'poetry and thought'."

**Both of you published there. Spomenka's *Samostojnost človeka* and Tine's *Čas in smisel prebivanja* were even neighbouring articles in an issue of *Problemi*.**

---

**HIM:** “We were always a team. From the beginning until today.”

**You were advocating for the independence of man then, not for an independent country.**

**HER:** “Man as a subject, not the country! Those were the sixties.”

**HIM:** “We were also young. I don’t blame young people today for not having a sense of statehood. We didn’t have one either. The only ones fighting for that were Edvard Kocbek and Dušan Pirjevec. Pirjevec arranged two ‘national’ issues of *Problemi*, one was even entirely dedicated to a national question. We did tolerate that ...”

**... but you weren’t drawn to it?**

**HIM:** “No, not yet.”

**And then the seventies came. Tougher times.**

**HIM:** “That’s right. Kocbek, the interview on the massacre of the Home Guard ... That was the focal point of it all.”

**Well, you did not have it easy yourself either.**

**HIM:** “Ah, you mean the university purge.”

**Of course, you were amongst the faculty members who were banned from lecturing by the regime’s order.**

**HIM:** “Again, there’s two sides to every story. I really enjoyed lecturing and the students were fond of me, but I enjoyed writing much more. And studying. Lectures, exams and so on, these were all burdens to me. And when I was thrown out of the teaching process, what mattered most to me was that I didn’t lose my job. Spomenka and I were still in debt for the house we’re in now. I needed my salary, but I didn’t need the lectures. On the contrary, I prepared the material for my next twenty books in the ten years I didn’t teach! I enjoyed myself.”

---

---

**Interesting. This decade comes off as hellish punishment in your biography.**

**HER:** “No, no, he never saw this as punishment.”

**HIM:** “I found something positive in everything. The system wasn’t murderous and I don’t consider myself a dissident. Pučnik was the only dissident. We also faced prison sentences many times, especially around issue #57 of *Nova revija*. Igor Omerza discovered the documents. The federal prosecutor demanded that Jože Pučnik, Marjan Rožanc, Ivan Urbančič and us are sentenced to at least ten years. Belgrade then said this was something for Slovenia to decide. Stane Dolanc, the Slovene member of Yugoslavia’s presidency was already afraid and retreated to Gozd Martuljek. A six-month manhunt across all Yugoslavia and not a peep from him! When he was called upon to give a statement, he said he planned to but that he put the material in a drawer and can’t find it anymore (laughs). In short, Slovene politics decided not to sacrifice us. If we would have been imprisoned then, there would’ve been no Demos or democratisation. I can say this because I know how it was when they imprisoned Pučnik. Finished! Not even his colleagues didn’t want to let him into their homes after his release. He was coming to us two, even though we didn’t know each other at all. He came here every year for a week or so on holiday. We don’t consider ourselves as victims of the former regime, not at all.”

**HER:** “No, but people with ties to the Home Guard and those who persisted as Christians after the war were in trouble. We were fundamentally communists, keen members of the League of Communists.”

**HIM:** “Our daughters had it worse. When we were in Portorož on holiday, our house in Tomišelj was broken into and searched ...”

**That was in 1976, if I am not mistaken.**

**HIM:** “Yes, sometime then. Times were really tough until 1980. I waited when they’ll come to get us or at least me. I often woke up in the middle of the night after a nightmare and was pulling my trousers on to escape out the window and into the woods. If anybody would turn off their car on the street, I would immediately go look what was happening and what those lights were ... Our daughters saw that, sensed it, they were afraid for our family.”

**HER:** “They only told us that fifteen years ago or so. I was in shock. I thought

---

we did a good job hiding our concern. I was sure our daughters didn't know. But it's also true we didn't send the kids out of the room right away if friends came over and we talked about current events. Our daughters knew quite a bit but never showed us."

**HIM:** "There's one more thing I'd like to say. We were prosecuted, faced accusations and much more under the former regime, but these crusades were all official and abstract, never personal, whereas right-wingers nowadays want to destroy you personally and ascribe all kinds of atrocities to you and spread lies ... The former regime at least didn't spread lies about us. Everything we were accused of was true from the authorities' point of view. They didn't abuse their power."

**HER:** "I must say I suffered heavily after publishing my essay *Krivda in greh* in 1983. Nobody asked or even notified me of anything, the most "controversial" parts were published in the daily paper *Delo*. I opened the newspaper and saw selected excerpts of my text! This lasted for a year and a half uninterrupted across all Yugoslavia. The essay was misunderstood, it was presented like this as well, as if it's a rehabilitation of the Home Guard, a monument to them ... Nothing about what reconciliation actually is. Even today, forty years later, many simplify reconciliation to the relationship between partisans and collaborators, which is too narrow. I didn't have it easy, I was wandering around this house for six months and thinking what might happen ... But as Tine said – we survived. I don't bear any ill will, I understand the partisans too, the fighters who suffered because of the Home Guard. I understand they couldn't fathom what I was trying to achieve. I understood them even then."

## “ Both extremes, the Veteran's Federation and the New Slovene Covenant, are against reconciliation

**What would you say are the principles that have connected you all this time, all those 62 years. What is in their core?**

**HIM:** "Where I'm from we would say honesty. To act on your conscience. If you think something is wrong, you say so and if you think something is good, you say so as well. We didn't let anybody tread on us. As Kocbek said: you need to protect your person. It's about human dignity! Theoretically speaking we

---

stem from the four global ethos directives. The first is the sanctity of life. Do not kill! Next is the sacredness of the dead, which is the base for our entire reconciliation program because we had to bury our unburied dead. I already mentioned human dignity and then there is the golden rule, over five thousand years old and since the times of Confucius. Even the ancient Egyptians knew it: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. We stuck by these rules our entire lives not even knowing we did so. Only after we finished our studies did we figure out our consciences always told us to behave like this.”

**HER:** “What connects us most is that we have always loved each other. That’s the foundation, life brought everything else – confidence, ethics ... The main thing is we sort of fit together (smiles). Do you agree?”

**HIM:** “Of course! Our professions are close as well, we had similar experiences, suffered some blows together, which helped us endure. We were beaten on an even keel (laughs).”

**HER:** “We published our first book together as well. *Človek in vera* (Eng.: Man and Faith). In 1969.”

**HIM:** “Another paradox – it was published by Komunist! I discussed the book *Smisel življenja* (Eng.: The Meaning of Life) by the theologian Janez Janžekovič. He was anti Nazism, pro partisans and for socialism. The book is fine and well, but what irked me was that he was prepared to basically put a man in front of a firing squad for the truth. I criticised him, but I really had Boris Zihelr in front of my mind’s eye all along. I essentially wrote against the party, which the party heads caught on to and the booklet was immediately sent to Vevče for shredding.”

**HER:** “Two books I helped write were sent to Vevče. This one and *Šolo in religijo* (Eng.: School and Religion), edited by Zdenko Roter. It had an article of mine and I don’t even know why it was problematic.”

**HIM:** “Our latest book *Slovenski razkoli in slovenska sprava* would also have been sent for shredding if either Janša’s men or the Veteran’s Federation extremist would be in charge. That’s the Slovene tragedy: both extremes, the Veteran’s Federation and the New Slovene Covenant, are against reconciliation. We at the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts were luckily able to organise a symposium and pass a statement on reconciliation. It’s problematic that two extremist organisations have the upper hand today. The

---

---

political middle that is declaratively for freedom has lots of support, around eighty percent of the voters, but it has no clear stances. This is why the public opinion is shaped by the extremes on the left and right who actually only have around ten percent in support. That's why the mood isn't right because the centre isn't really expressed. When I'm speaking about the centre, I don't mean a middle ground between the left and right but something stemming from the directives I mentioned earlier. The people feel these directives but politicians don't know how to enact them."

“ *The League of Communists was also a point of conflict. Our Serbian colleagues didn't want to abolish it.* ”

**How close were you with foreign intellectuals during the heat of democratisation?**

**HER:** "Quite close, especially with Serbian liberals. Zoran Đinđić was a colleague of ours, a friend even."

**HIM:** "He was a Humboldt laureate. We were also in touch with Dobrica Ćosić ..."

**HER:** "Well, we were friends for a long time but then parted ways once we organised a protest at Cankarjev dom against the violence towards the miners in Stari Trg, Kosovo in 1989. He flew to Ljubljana and we met at Titova cesta – Dunajska and Slovenska cesta today –, took a long walk and loudly quarrelled the entire time. We then swerved to Rimska ulica, grabbed a bite to eat at Mrak on continued quarrelling."

**Wasn't this the locale where Serbian and Slovene intellectuals used to meet?**

**HER:** "Of course, even before, in November 1985 before Milošević took over in Serbia. There was Dobrica Ćosić ..."

**HIM:** "... Mihajlo Marković, later Milošević's main ideologue, and Ljubomir Tadić."

---



---

**HER:** “Those were three Serbian academics and on the Slovene side were mainly people from *Nova revija*.”

**HIM:** “Milan Apih ...”

**HER:** “Of course, and France Bučar, Marjan Rožanc, Jože Snoj, Ivan Urbančič, us two ...”

**HIM:** “... and Taras Kermauner.”

**HER:** “We fought for eight hours, we even screamed at each other!”

**HIM:** “We even have minutes of our talks because we were wiretapped. We knew the UDBA was spying on us so I hatched a cunning plan: I collected our Serbian guests at the Hotel Union, where they were staying, saddled them in my car and performed all kinds of traffic violations. I drove on Prešeren Square and went the wrong way on Wolfova so they couldn’t follow me and then straight to Mrak. I thought we got them, but they set up listening devices in the bar a day earlier! Ha, they knew everything!”

**HER:** “The people at Mrak told them beforehand, of course, such were the times. We didn’t hold any grudge against them.”

### **So there is a record of your lengthy debate?**

**HIM:** “Of course, we could even publish it. But there are no inclinations towards this. The far left is resentful and the right is claiming all the credit for independence.”

**HER:** “Going back to Mrak, I already knew then that Yugoslavia was coming to an end. We talked about a ‘third Yugoslavia’, about democratising the country. Our Serbian colleagues saw democracy as one person – one vote. We agreed on that much, but not on our stipulation of one nation – one vote. They weren’t for the equality of nations or the option of a veto. Going by the rule one person – one vote, the most populous nation always wins in a multinational state, in our case that was Serbia. By going with one nation – one vote, we would without fault always get the short end of the stick. The League of Communists was also a point of conflict. They didn’t want to abolish it and we couldn’t make them understand that a multi-party system with an equality among parties was necessary. If there’s one pan-Yugoslavian

---

party above all, democracy inherently can't exist because this party would always get the lion's share of votes and would rule as a hegemon over other parties and nations. Those who say that we should have waited a bit with independence and democracy would reform Yugoslavia don't know what they're talking about! This concept of democracy was the basis of Serbia's political program adopted by Milošević and later supplemented by ... We also discussed the military, nation's rights to self-defence ... We couldn't find any common ground, fell out and went our separate ways. Our Serbian 'friends' returned home and wrote the aforementioned memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU), which was the starting point for the bloodbath in the Balkans later. We accelerated our work on the 'national issue', which we already planned before and which later released as issue #57 of Nova revija, subtitled Contributions to a Slovene national program."

“ *There would be no plebiscite without the reconciliation day at Kočevski Rog, at least not with so much support.* ”

**How aware were you of the events elsewhere in Europe in the late 80s, in Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia ...?**

**HER:** “We knew what was happening, of course, we talked to Jože Pučnik about that too, but we mainly wanted to propel things here. We weren't too interested in outside events, we wanted change here – first achieve democracy because there wouldn't be independence without it, and then national reconciliation. These three points were the fundamentals of every individual party and of Demos, what they formed into later. We achieved a multi-party democratic system, independence too, but not reconciliation. At least not on all fronts.”

**HIM:** “We achieved it at the highest level, at the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts. I'm sure it'll reach every single Slovene in a few years.”

**HER:** “We also saw a symbolic funeral and reconciliation day at Kočevski Rog in July 1990. This was the first visit of the massacre grounds for many. It was a big event; half of the country could show grief for their loved ones on television for the first time in public and the other half perhaps realised their tragedy for the first time.”

**HIM:** “This was right after the first democratic election. There would be no plebiscite without it, at least not with so much support. Those were the widest and deepest reaches of our reconciliation. All of Demos was there, as well as the Archbishop Alojzij Šuštar and the Slovene president Milan Kučan. Both were for reconciliation and are now badmouthed by both the far right and far left. They don’t acknowledge this reconciliation day and are just tearing apart what we already achieved.”

**HER:** “You’re probably right, we acknowledged the other side’s human dignity on that day and equal state rights for every living citizen. In the previous system, Home Guard member’s relatives, and especially Christians after the war, were harassed or at least limited in their political, societal and social roles. A public memorial service at Kočevski Rog instilled hope and even a belief that a new age had started, an age of democracy. Otherwise, there wouldn’t have been so much trust in our republic’s leaders at the time who risked and supported independence. We did it together!”

“ *It’s worrisome that anybody  
can say anything online.*

**Where would you say the space for debating that was once opened up by magazines has shifted to? To media? Or have they already been taken over by the internet where anybody can say what they think or don’t think?**

**HER:** “I think it’s one big tragedy. A great intellectual movement was going on in the late 80s among the middle-aged generation. Sixty of us signed the demand for *Nova revija!* Nowadays there’s no middle-aged or younger generation that would stand its ground and demand their magazine. There’s no magazine in Slovenia where we could publish a longer research piece. Maybe in *Delo*’s Saturday supplement and even that’s a stretch and it has to be a shorter text. As for the internet ... Who would read a long research piece online?”

**That is why it is a perfect democratic space!**

**HIM:** “Plato would call it total anarchy! There are no criteria left. I used to follow critics of my work there but then you figure out the critic has no

---

clue and doesn't know ten or even one percent of the literature and is still rambling on. If you stoop so low and talk to such people, you're just wasting your time. That's why I stopped following online posts, I see no benefit in that."

**HER:** "Come on, you're overreacting. There are relevant texts online as well, even entire books ..."

**HIM:** "I'm talking about the vast majority. Over ninety percent is useless rambling. Of course there is some valuable information in between. There's actually quite a bit of it and it's easily accessible, which is definitely extremely valuable. But it's worrisome that anybody can say anything online and you can't always check what's true or untrue. There are no criteria."

**HER:** "The truth is that we're old. The internet is a medium for young people. I would even have a hard time reading a book off a screen. I need to have it in my hands alongside a pencil to underline things ..."

“ *I've been noticing lots of depression in the public space among young people recently.* ”

**What do you miss with young people today the most? What would you wish for them?**

**HER:** "I often notice disdain, indifference towards the suffering of others. They talk about partisans and the Home Guard without any empathy ... But! On one hand it's concerning to hear they don't care about that even though people are still suffering today because of the war and the violence. I wish they would understand as soon as possible how this still affects us today ... and them as well, although they're saying they don't care. This 'we don't care' act is an attitude towards the past. I even think it's one of the ways some young people protect themselves from the violence of witness accounts from the past. Such an attitude towards the past is still controversial because we know what it such indifference can lead to. It's unsure whether these hearts will open up to the suffering of others. I don't see how the world and human relations could improve without empathy. Do you agree?"

**HIM:** "I do. But that's the depressing mood of our wider society. I've been

---

---

noticing a lot of depression in the public space among young people recently. What is depression? It's aggression, tension aimed towards oneself. The other side is outward aggression – you go shoot up a school instead of becoming depressed. There's more and more aggression in the world in different forms. The results are more depression and bloody outbursts.”

### **What is the solution?**

**HER:** “I see the solution in strengthening empathy towards our fellow man, animals, the world ... This is reconciliation as a new, different paradigm of living in the world. We must open our hearts to compassion and love. I don't know where the key is but I'm sure we'll find it. Because if we won't, I can't see a positive outlook for the world.”

**HIM:** “There are two thousand years of metaphysics behind us that culminated with Nietzsche and his will to power. His program, positive nihilism as he called it, is being misused by American ideologues today that uphold their current regime. They are advocating that not only lying and stealing, but killing as well worldwide is allowed in the name of American dominance. Such systemic violence is the worst. Hitler exerted violence from the top, just like it's being done in Russia for over a century, even today under Putin. Such direct violence is much more evident, recognisable, but capillary violence that spreads across all parts of society like it did in America is even worse. There's much more of that than in Russia. And it affects American foreign policy, which is the world's police ...”

**HER:** “Disorder!”

**HIM:** “Yes, disorder. Not the choice of resources that lead to new conflicts. And I'm not justifying Putin in the slightest. There is fault on both sides. A common fault.”

### **Do you still believe in a united Europe?**

**HIM:** “Poland declared it's becoming Europe's main military force and that it intends to compete with Germany and France. The USA's official stance is also that Eastern Europe is the real Europe, whereas Western Europe is decadent and soft. The American conservative ideologue Robert Kagan thinks Western Europe is feminised and American and Poland are manly, patriarchal, in the

---

---

sign of Mars. If the current European community can't handle that – and it's not looking good –, there is no hope left."

**HER:** "I'm sure a united Europe will only be successful if it cooperates with Russia. That's a united Europe for me, Eurasia! But the way there isn't simple. The war in Ukraine caused too deep a rift between them and us."

**HIM:** "The decision was made when Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill met in Cuba in 2016 to reach reconciliation between the Catholic and Orthodox church after nearly a thousand years. When the current world leaders caught wind of this, they of course immediately decided to thwart this plan. And that's what's happening now ... Pope Francis tried again this Spring in Hungary, where he met with the bishop of the Russian Orthodox church, but I doubt anything can be done. But it is the only answer."

**HER:** "A mutual overcoming of this internal Christian divide is absolutely important, especially for European reconciliation, but it also needs spiritual freedom from outside the Christian world, when man realised his dignity – the dignity of a mortal being. Things change on a spiritual level, even politics. That's why I hope such reconciliation is hopefully still possible, but we definitely won't be there to see it. And not just us. There probably won't be an answer for the next few decades. It's up to future generations to find it!"

---

**LITMAG**

