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M.Sc. Mišel Pavlica¹

**JOVAN RASKOVIC
THE SILENCED VOICE OF AGREEMENT AND REASON
IN SERBO-CROATIAN RELATIONS**

Abstract: Jovan Raskovic was a significant scientific and political figure in the years preceding the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). He is best remembered for his advocacy for the rights of Serbs in Croatia and as a founder of the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS). Raskovic attempted to secure Serbian (minority) rights in democratic and institutional manner, emphasizing moderation and dialogue as the primary means of his political action.

This paper explores the political and intellectual legacy of Jovan Raskovic, a prominent psychiatrist, academic, and political leader whose role during the dissolution of the SFRY remains both significant and often contested. Focusing on his efforts to prevent wider conflict between Serbs and Croats during the turbulent period of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the paper situates Raskovic within the broader context of post-communist transition, rising nationalism, and ethnic polarization in the former Yugoslavia.

Drawing on a range of historical, political, and other sources, the paper critically assesses claims that Raskovic contributed to the escalation of ethnic conflict. It argues instead that his political marginalization, brought about by hostile Croatian nationalism and the rise of more radical forces within the Serbian political sphere, undermined his vision and his efforts to secure peaceful coexistence. Through an analysis of his writings, public speeches, and available articles, this paper contends that Raskovic represents a suppressed voice of restraint whose failure to influence the course of events marks a missed opportunity for a more peaceful resolution to the Serb-Croat conflict. Ultimately, the study

¹ PhD student at the Faculty of Political Sciences University of Banja Luka

contributes to a nuanced understanding of Raskovic as both a product of his time and a potential alternative to the path that led to war.

Keywords: *Jovan Raskovic, Yugoslav disintegration, Serbs in Croatia, human rights, peaceful resistance*

Introduction

Jovan Raskovic was one of the central figures on the political scene of the SFRY during the 1980s and early 1990s. His political engagement intensified during the period of political changes in the SFRY, in the lead-up to and at the beginning of the conflict. As a Serbian political leader, he primarily advocated for the rights of Serbs in Croatia.

He was born in Knin, in an area where the Serbian Orthodox population lived, which profoundly influenced his attitude, both generally and politically. He graduated medicine at the University of Zagreb, specialized in psychiatry in the field of mental disorders and human behaviour and became a university professor.

During his education, Raskovic studied political and social movements in SFRY, a complex federation made up of several ethnic and religious groups with a history of unprecedented antagonisms and conflicts. This environment contributed to his growing interest in politics and social justice, particularly in minority rights.

The living word and memory about the atrocities committed against the Serbs during World War II, as well as a thorough psychiatric education, provided Raskovic with a strong base for shaping his role as an advocate for the rights of the Serbs in Croatia. His scientific background also strongly influenced his approach to understanding ethnic and social tensions and conflicts in the region.

During the 1980s, the situation in the SFRY became complicated due to economic challenges, the awakening of national consciousness and the consequent separatist aspirations of certain national communities within the Yugoslav federation. *“The issue of human, civil, and national rights was gaining sense and meanings that became increasingly difficult to relate to the value and normative aspects of Yugoslav socialist self-management”* (Roksandic D. 2011).

Deeply concerned about the discrimination and marginalization of Serbs under the nationalist regime of Franjo Tudjman and the Croatian Democratic Union – HDZ², Raskovic gradually rose as an advocate of Serb rights,

2 HDZ was formed in 1989 as the first party in the former Yugoslavia with a clear national identity.

articulating and bringing forward the voice of significant part of Serbs in Croatia. Raskovic founded the SDS as a political response to new threats and growing political tensions, in February 1990. Its activities focussed on the protection of the political, cultural, economic and other rights of Serbs in Croatia, as well as on advocating for greater autonomy within the Croatian political system. Under Raskovic's leadership, SDS mobilizes the Serb community in Croatia, strengthening national cohesion and raising awareness of the coming dangers.

Tensions continued and culminated with the abolition of the constituent status of Serbs in Croatia and the declaration of Croatian independence in 1991. Soon, an armed conflict begins between Croatian paramilitary formations and Croatian and Serbian police forces. After the outbreak of conflict, Raskovic found himself aside of the main events while advocating for the use of a peaceful approach in the fight to preserve the rights of Serbs in Croatia. The key role was taken over by radical political forces who, in response to the unilateral and uncompromising behaviour of the new Croatian authorities, have started to gain growing support among the Serbian population.

With the intensification of the conflict and the escalation of political struggle and violence, in the middle of 1991, Raskovic's role has become unappreciated. His political activity started to become less acceptable to the extremists on both sides. His advocacy for a peaceful, compromising, institutional and political way of problem solving begun to enjoy less and less support, and the leading word was gradually taken over by the militaristic approach.

Jovan Raskovic's life was tragically cut short on July 28, 1992, under circumstances that have never been fully explained. News of his death was received as a tragedy by his supporters and has remained the subject of speculation and conspiracy theories to this day, although at the time it went relatively unnoticed by a public preoccupied with the ongoing war events in the territory of the SFRY.

Childhood and education

Raskovic was born in Knin in a prominent family of Serbian intellectuals who suffered a traumatic experience during World War II, on July 5, 1929. Raskovic talks about this experience in his book "Crazy Land" (Raskovic J. 1990). To save themselves from the atrocities against the Serbs, which had been carried out by the authorities of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), the Raskovic family, like many other Serb families, was forced to flee from Sibenik in 1941, where Jovan's father Dusan worked as a lawyer. The family fled to the town of Kistanje near Knin which, at the time, was under Italian

administration. Jovan spent the war with the abbot Father Nikodim in a relatively peaceful environment in the Krka Monastery in Dalmatia. Still, he witnessed a plethora of Ustasha's crimes against Serbs that took place in the immediate vicinity.

After World War II, he passed the lower grades of high school in Zadar and Knin, and then moved to Zagreb, where he graduated in 1948. He graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in 1956, and passed the specialist exam in neuropsychiatry in 1962. He defended his doctoral dissertation at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Zagreb in 1975. In the professional field, he worked as the director of the General Hospital in Sibenik from 1959 to 1961, and then as the director of the medical centre. He participated in founding of and conducted neurophysiological research within the Institute for Clinical Neurophysiology of the Faculty of Medicine in Ljubljana³.

Raskovic worked as a professor at the universities in Ljubljana and Zagreb and as a visiting professor at many international universities, among others, in London, Houston and Rome. He was the director of the Centre for Scientific Research of the "St. Sava" Hospital in Belgrade, a member of the Croatian Medical Academy, as well as an honorary member of the Association of Psychiatrists of Italy and Czechoslovakia. At the end of 1988, he became a non-staff member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU). Raskovic is the author of more than a hundred medical publications, professional and scientific works, and several monographs. In addition to the book "Crazy Land", which depicts his political plans and preoccupations, a book of his texts "Soul and Freedom" was published posthumously in 1995.

Raskovic's Serbian origin combined with growing up during the whirlwind of war dominantly determined his future national and political attitudes. In his later works, he talks about the genocide against the Serbs during World War II in the Independent State of Croatia as the strongest element of the identity of the Serbian people, especially the Serbs in Krajina. In the paper "Crime and Guilt" published in the magazine "Srpska Zora", he looks at the non-acceptance of the genocide by the Croat Ustashes, and considers the conditions for the tolerable coexistence of these different collective characters. In his essay "On Epidal, Castrative and Rectal Character", he tries to interpret the collective psychological character of Serbs, Croats and Muslims (Bosniaks).

It can be said that Raskovic's academic and scientific career gave the final form to his political activism, which was at the same time national – Serbian,

3 Source: Croatian encyclopedia, online edition (2013 - 2024) - <https://www.enciklopedija.hr/clanak/raskovic-jovan>

but also universal and cosmopolitan. Dobrica Cosic stated that Raskovic brought soul into soulless politics (Cosic D, "Srpsko pitanje" 2004, p. 15), and humanism into national ideology, while academic Matija Beckovic described him as a unique political value, saying that Serbian history will hardly be able to find in one man a more thorough, extensive, selfless, noble and respectable humanist and servant of the Serbian people.

Political carrier

After a multi-decade period of "brotherhood and unity" which, among other things, was characterized by the inability to openly express national aspirations in the former SFRY, at the end of the 1980s, the national consciousness started to awaken, and the old antagonisms regained their manifest dimension. The multi-party system enabled the formation of political parties, which acquired a predominantly national character. Rather than gradually introducing the revived national consciousness into the democratic flows, political changes and the transition from a one-party to a multi-party system lead to the flaring of nationalism and the complication and radicalization of relations in the society.

On its way to independence from SFRY, in 1990 Croatia changed the constitution of 1974, according to which the Socialist Republic of Croatia was defined as "*the national state of the Croatian people, the state of the Serbian people in Croatia and the state of other peoples and nationalities living in it.*" "*The Republic of Croatia is established as a national state of the Croatian people and a state of members of other nations and minorities, who are its citizens: Serbs, Muslims, Slovenes, Czechs, Slovaks, Italians, Hungarians, Jews and others, who are guaranteed equality with citizens of the Croatian nationality and realization of national rights in accordance with the democratic norms of the OUN⁴ and the countries of the free world.*"

"*The status of Serbs in Croatia de facto is reduced to minority, without changing the fundamental provision of the Croatian Constitution in this regard: first, violating the linguistic equality of Croats and Serbs in Croatia from 1974, i.e. excluding the Cyrillic alphabet from equal official use; secondly, excluding special provisions on the manner of decision-making in the Parliament, "when a proposal for an act or another issue of interest for the equality of peoples and nationalities is on the agenda of its councils"; third, redefining the "conditions" and "other issues of interest for the regional connecting of municipalities and for the establishment of communities of municipalities."* (Roksandic D. 2011). From

4 Organization of the United Nations

the nation who historically, together with the Croats, shaped this Country, the Serbs in Croatia were placed at the level of national minorities⁵.

As one of the most respected Serbs from Croatia, Raskovic decided to politically articulate the aspirations and fears of the Serbian people, and in 1990 he founded SDS and led it until his death. In his work "The Serbian Democratic Party, from its foundation to the constitution of the multi-party Parliament", Domagoj Knezevic writes about the context of the establishment of the SDS: „*The founding of the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) in Knin heralded a new form of political organization for Croatian Serbs. The main initiator of the founding of this political option was the long-time head of neuropsychiatry and director of the Medical Center in Sibenik, Jovan Raskovic. According to the testimony of Borisav Jovic, Raskovic was encouraged to do this by his long-time friend, academician of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) and writer Dobrica Cosic. This friendship began in the early seventies at a round table on psychiatry in Belgrade, in which Raskovic participated. Through Cosic, Raskovic developed friendships with other SANU academics. Raskovic later claimed that his candidacy for a professorship at the Medical Faculty in Zagreb was rejected because of those associations, and he also became a person of interest of the Croatian State Security Service, probably along the lines of Serbian nationalism. At the founding session of the Democratic Party from Serbia, held in Belgrade on February 4, 1990, Raskovic and Cosic attended as guests.*” (Knezevic D, 2010).

Raskovic used his political involvement as a mean to defend the national interests and sovereignty of the Serbs in Croatia. He had no previous experience in politics, nor was his primary intention to gain power. He strived to lead an independent and responsible national politics excluding violent means as a way to achieve political goals, which is why he was also called the “Serbian Gandhi”.

In the first multi-party elections in Croatia, Serbs overwhelmingly chose the option of the reformed communists of Ivica Racan, within the party Union of Communists of Croatia - Party of Democratic Changes (SKH-SDP). Raskovic's SDS entered the Croatian Parliament, but the tightening of relations between Croats and Serbs resulted in the withdrawal of its representatives from Croatian institutions. Raskovic was offered the position of vice-president of the Croatian government, but he refused it, saying that it cannot “*compensate for the equality of the Serbian people*” (Knezevic D, 2010).

The new Croatian politics was unreservedly attempting to reawaken the traumatic memories of the Serbs on the atrocities committed during World

5 In 1997, the rights of the Serbs were further reduced by the adoption of the Constitutional Law on Amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, thus completing the formal and material removal of the Serbs from Croatia.

War II, to force them to resist, to accuse them of disobedience and to draw them into the conflict. *“Ethno-nationalization of Croatian politics after the constitution of the multi-party Parliament significantly eased the up till then marginal influence of official Serbian politics among Serbs in Croatia, thereby inevitably accelerating their self-marginalization in Croatian politics”* (Roksandic D, 2011).

After unsuccessful attempts to restore Serbo-Croatian relations on a new basis by operating in a multi political party environment within the framework of SKH-SDP, Serbs in Croatia increasingly turned to the national option – SDS, led by doctor Raskovic. They accepted him as a leader, and he answered: *“I am not your leader, but a servant!”* Raskovic never behaved like a classic politician, admitting his own lack of political pragmatism. His insistence on non-violent politics and peaceful resolution of conflicts was a thorn in the side of the new Croatian authorities, for whom radicalization was a primary political interest and simultaneously a mean for independence and a solution to the Serbian question in Croatia. His politics also bothered the radical centres of power in Serbia, so they began to look for ways and coordinate efforts to remove him from the political scene.

Amid the radicalization of political relations, and under significant pressure, Raškovic moved to Belgrade in early 1992 in an effort to secure a safe livelihood for his family. Instead of continuing to base their political struggle on non-violent and democratic means, which Raskovic established and propagated through his political activism, the new Serbian political leaders allowed Serbs in Croatia to be drawn into an armed conflict.

At the given moment of global geopolitical changes which emerged with the fall of the “iron curtain”, the balance of forces on the ground was not suitable for solving the Serbian national question. Seeing an opportunity to get rid of the Serbs once and for all, something they failed to achieve during World War II, the new Croatian political leaders pushed for the war option, provoking the situation and gladly accepting the radicalization in which Krajina Serbs were eventually dragged under the patronage of political Belgrade. From a chronological distance, it is clear that this was a case irresponsible politics, not up to the historical challenge, and of politicians who were ready to gamble with the lives and destinies of hundreds of thousands of Serbs in Croatia.

They key achievements and contribution

Even before his political career, Dr Jovan Raskovic was a well-known neuropsychiatrist, university professor, scientist and academic. He is the author of many professional and scientific publications in the area of human behaviour

and psychiatry, as well as texts in which he tries to penetrate into the background and get to the essence of antagonisms in the Balkans, primarily those between Serbs and Croats. His most important works include: *Narcissism* (1988), *Crime and Guilt* (1990), *Crazy Land* (1990) and *Depersonalization* (1991).

The renewed fear of atrocities of which the Serbs were massively exposed during World War II, in connection with the newly gained Croatian independence, the deprivation of constitutional rights and the growing anti-Serb politics in Croatia, put Raskovic in the centre of political events – in the position of the leader of the Serbs in Croatia. As a response to the turbulent events of the late 1980s and early 1990s, he used a scientific basis to shape his political views and founded the SDS in Croatia in 1990.

Under the conditions of increasing radicalization of relations in Croatia, through his political involvement, Raskovic articulated the voice, fears and wishes of the Serbian people, also striving to understand the Croatian side and constantly believing in a power of compromise. He was trying to bring the spirit of agreement and reason into the Serbo-Croatian relationship, which is why he was a unique example in both Serbian and Croatian politics. Over time, Raskovic's approach became a nuisance and a challenge, both for Croatian and Serbian extremists, so he was forced to withdraw from the political scene.

Challenges and controversies

Raskovic's political activities are considered controversial by some due to his significant influence among the Serbs in Croatia and his political role in the events that preceded the start of the war in the former SFRY. Although he primarily advocated for the protection of the rights and greater autonomy of the Serbs in Croatia in the parts where they represented majority within the framework of the Croatian political system, critics accuse him of strengthening Serbian separatism in Croatia and consequently contributing to the growth of tensions and the start of armed conflict. Likewise, his more radical compatriots resent him for his efforts to conduct politics separate from the influence of Belgrade, as well as for his countless attempts to find a compromise with Croatian political leaders.

Raskovic's atypical openness and honesty was used against him at an opportune moment in an extremely compromising way. The meeting between Raskovic and the newly elected Croatian president Franjo Tudjman in Zagreb in 1990 was secretly recorded without Raskovic's knowledge. On that occasion, Raskovic told Tudjman not to provoke the Serbs, not to take away their rights and not to expel them from the Constitution, because the Serbs are a proud,

brave and crazy people who are ready to sacrifice and suffer. The recording was edited and presented in such a way that it looks as if Raskovic told Tudjman that Serbs are crazy people.

Also, the new Croatian authorities have indicted Raskovic for “*encouraging and organizing activities aimed at endangering the territorial integrity of the Republic of Croatia*”, demanding a fifteen-year prison sentence. On a personal and human level, Raskovic found it very difficult to accept the indictment, especially considering his sincere and constant peace-making efforts.

His death continues to cause controversies, primarily because of the circumstances, time and place. He died suddenly and prematurely in Belgrade in 1992, officially as a result of a heart attack, although there were no indications of his critical state of health⁶. Because of this, many supporters of his politics believe that he was actually the victim of an assassination by his political opponents. This controversy shaped his legacy as a political figure and Serbian leader. Debates about his role and the possible different outcome of events, had he lived longer, continue.

Political influence

Profiling as the leader of the Serbs in Croatia in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Raskovic strived to articulate an autochthonous Serbian politics on the territory of Croatia, separated from external interests and influences, and in this way to ensure return for the revoked rights of the Serbs in Croatia. His political influence dates back to the establishment of the SDS in 1990 and extends to the role of a kind of national protector of the rights of Serbs in Croatia, but also in the wider area, outside the motherland of Serbia.

Given the fact that he represented a significant political figure during the years preceding the breakup of the SFRY, some authors attribute to him a role in the radicalization of relations and the dissolution of SFRY⁷, although it is

6 Regarding the context of Rašković's death, his daughter Sanda says: “He had high blood pressure and (had suffered) some changes at his heart, but it absolutely did not endanger his life. With such a heart he could live for a long time. My father was killed by something else. That absurd accusation of a war crime was, I believe, the final straw. He simply could not bear that. He could not believe that human hatred, malice and blindness could be so strong. Well, he helped others all his life, as a man and a (medical) doctor. It is not hundreds, but thousands of people. And he never looked at who was of what religion and nationality and how deep his pocket was.” Source: Kesar, J. (2007) Feuilleton about Jovan Raskovic

7 Knezevic, Domagoj (2010) „The Serbian Democratic Party from its founding to the establishment of a multiparty Assembly“, pg. 21-22

possible to dispute the arguments that Raskovic through his political activities contributed to the escalation of the conflict and the breakup of the common state. Such a role can rather be attributed to his political opponents and successors in the SDS, who after his retirement from politics, and especially after his death in 1992, began to lead a more radical and rigid politics, which can be characterized as suicidal in the given circumstances.

There is a coincidence between the moment when Raskovic left the political scene and the commitment to the war option as the primary solution to political and national issues in the territory of the former SFRY. This kind of policy ultimately proved to be wrong for the Serbs, effectively leading them to military defeat and to the consequent exodus and complete political, cultural, economic and every other possible marginalization in the territory of modern Croatia.

Raskovic's political influence can be characterized as significant, not only among Serbs in Croatia, but also in Bosnia and Herzegovina. To this day, he keeps living indirectly through the reformed SDS in Republika Srpska and Bosnia and Herzegovina, to which formation Raskovic significantly contributed.

Comparative Reflections: Raskovic and His Political Contemporaries

To understand Jovan Raskovic's political role and the uniqueness of his vision, it is important to compare his approach with other prominent figures from the same historical period. While Raskovic consistently emphasized non-violence, dialogue, and institutional struggle, many of his contemporaries in the Yugoslav political landscape pursued more radical, assertive, or even militarized strategies. Among the most notable political contrasts stand the figures of Slobodan Milosevic and Franjo Tudjman, whose rise to power in Serbia and Croatia, respectively, coincide with Raskovic's political engagement.

"While Raskovic sought compromise and peaceful coexistence between ethnic groups, Milosevic mobilized Serbian nationalism through mass rallies, emotional appeals, and control of state media" (Bijelic J. 2010). Raskovic's psychiatry-informed belief in the psychological and historical trauma of the Serbian people, as elaborated in his book *Crazy Land* (1990), led him to advocate for healing and understanding. In contrast, Milosevic exploited these traumas to fuel national and political consolidation. While both recognized the historical suffering of Serbs, particularly during World War II, their responses to that history diverged radically: Raskovic aimed for reconciliation through dialogue and institutional action, while Milosevic often encouraged confrontation and division.

The contrast between Raskovic and Franjo Tudjman is equally sharp. Tudjman, a former member of (Yugoslav) Partisan movement and historian, became the face of the Croatian independence movement, while his leadership was marked by strong nationalist rhetoric, policies that marginalized Serbs, and an insistence on redefining Croatia as an ethnically Croatian state. Tudjman's political strategy was aggressive and unilateral, leaving little room for compromise. Raskovic, by contrast, repeatedly appealed for mutual respect and caution, warning that the deliberate exclusion of Serbs from the new Croatian identity would inevitably lead to unrest.

If viewed through an international lens, Raskovic's politics show some resemblance to global figures such as Mahatma Gandhi or Václav Havel, both of whom advocated for peaceful resistance and moral leadership in times of national turmoil. However, unlike Gandhi or Havel, Raskovic operated in an environment where his conciliatory tone was often perceived as weakness by both sides, and where armed conflict quickly overpowered dialogue. His voice, though reasoned and humane, struggled to break through the accelerating radicalization of the political context.

Ultimately, Raskovic's failure to preserve wide support, despite his moral clarity, speaks to the tragic conditions of the Yugoslav collapse, in which voices of moderation were drowned out by the more immediate pull of ethnic fear, historical grievance, and opportunistic power plays. His legacy, in contrast to many of his contemporaries, is one of restraint and ethical consistency, but also of missed potential for a more peaceful alternative.

Private life

Jovan Raskovic was married to doctor Tanja Stipisic (of Croatian-Italian origin), whom he met while studying in Zagreb. Their daughter, Sanda Raskovic Ivic, was the ambassador of the Republic of Serbia in Italy (2008-2011) and the president of the Democratic Party of Serbia (2014-2016). Under strong pressure due to Raskovic's political activity, the Raskovic family was expelled from Croatia in 1991 to Belgrade, where it is still based today.

Even at the time of great political popularity, Raskovic's humane character dominated his role as a politician. As an excellent connoisseur of the history and mentality of the peoples who lived in the territory of the SFRY, Raskovic had a great reputation among his compatriots, while at the same time enjoying the respect of a part of the Croatian population, which is why many Krajina people called him "the Father".

The writer Momo Kapor spoke about Raskovic: *„His very appearance and character, which united the personality of a scientist of world renown, and at the*

same time a good-natured village doctor, whose worn leather bag in itself instilled trust in patients, reminded of some ancient Slavic god. (...) No one noticed that year after year he was filled with that unspeakable pain from the injustices he had inflicted, until, filled to the last bit of his being, he was brought out without his will to be for a while the leader of that unfortunate nation. (...) He entered that arena for the sake of his people, sacrificed everything, lost everything and in the end, as the last robber and bandit, he was expelled from his native land.” (Kesar J. 2007)

Raskovic built a special relationship with the Serbian Orthodox Church, which he considered the foundation of Serbian statehood, what may be linked with upbringing in a monastery. He considered SPC the foundation of Serbian statehood because it managed to preserve the Serbian identity during the Ottoman period, when the Serbian state did not exist. Speaking about the Serbian Orthodox Church, Raskovic stated: *“The Serbian people are returning to their church to the extent that they are becoming nationally aware. The injustice that the Serbian people, under the dictatorship of Bolshevism and the cult of personality, did to their church is enormous. The Serbian Orthodox Church has been an endlessly lonely being for the past fifty years. I don’t hesitate to say that she was the loneliest creature not only in this region, but perhaps on the whole planet”*.

Raskovic died in the special hospital in Belgrade “St. Sava”. He was buried in the Alley of meritorious citizens at Belgrade’s New Cemetery. After his death, his book of texts “Soul and Freedom” (1995) was published in Novi Sad. In his award-winning novel “Trifuneja” (third book), published by IP Matica srpska (2003), Stojan Berber also describes Raskovic.

As a sign of gratitude, the Health Center in Mrkonjic Grad, as well as streets in Prijedor, Trebinje, Bijeljina, Banja Luka, Novi Banovci and Smederevo, were named after Raskovic. The people of the village of Maricka under Kozara Mountain erected a bust of Raskovic at the place where he gave a speech in front of more than ten thousand people in August 1989.

Conclusion

Raskovic’s legacy lives on through the memory of the leading contemporary fighter for the rights of Serbs in Croatia, regardless of his premature departure, as well as the controversies that continue to follow his political activity. His contribution to the development of Serbian political consciousness, numbed by decades of communism, and his consistent advocacy for the national rights of Serbs in Croatia, remain the most outstanding aspects of his biography.

Raskovic occupies a unique position in the historical narrative of the late 20th-century Balkans, a position that is not defined by success in the

traditional political sense, but by moral integrity, intellectual foresight, and an unwavering belief in nonviolence and peaceful coexistence. His legacy transcends immediate political consequences and resonates as a moral compass during turbulent and divisive period in the region's modern history.

The story of a man, a friend and a peacemaker, a sincere patriot, who did not fall into the trap of a militaristic approach to solving the Serbian national question at a very unfavourable historical moment, continues to live on in the collective memory. He continues to live on as a tradition about: "the Father of Krajina", "Serbian Gandhi" and "Servant of the People" who, even at the cost of his own political and even physical end, did not want to allow the Serbs to be drawn into the war conflict. This narrative, which speaks of the path not chosen, is a reminder of the human cost of silencing the voices of moderation and reconciliation in favour of radicalism and violence. Rašković's refusal to join extremist forces, even under enormous pressure, positions him as a political exception, which gives his figure a special moral authority in retrospect, as well as in perspective.

In the years after his death and through the war that continued to shape political and social relations in the region, Raskovic remains remembered as a symbol of resistance to oppression and injustice. Although his ideas did not prevent the escalation of conflict, nor did his political stance survive the pressure of rising nationalism and militarism, his vision provided a clear and compelling alternative. It was a vision founded on the principles of compromise and respect for distinct identities, values that were largely absent from the dominant political discourse of the period. While the majority pursued political maximalism, territorial expansion and sought to address issues through violent means, Raskovic championed dialogue, the protection of minority rights, and political participation, anticipating what would later be recognized as essential for fostering post-conflict trust and reconciliation.

With the defeat of his political vision, following the atrocities of World War II and the outcome of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, the Serbian people from Croatia faced a new great tragedy on the threshold of the twenty-first century, being forced to abandon their historic lands to avoid physical extermination once again. The exodus of Serbs from Croatia, particularly during operations Flash and Storm, became the tragic final act of earlier persecutions and atrocities. In a broader context, the failure of Rašković's policy was not merely a personal defeat – it symbolized the retreat of reason in the face of nationalism and populism. His political downfall marked the silencing of all moderate voices, not only within the Serbian national body but across the former SFRY.

The uniqueness of Raskovic's intellectual background as a psychiatrist and professor further shaped the uniqueness of his political engagement, why he approached national identity not as a static or essentialist concept, but as a psychological and sociocultural construct shaped by history and collective memory. His writings and public speeches reveal a deep concern with the emotional and existential dimensions of identity politics, what many political actors of the time misuse for the purpose of escalating relations and spreading conflict in order to implement their own political agendas. In contrast to the rigid ethno-political frameworks that dominated Yugoslav dissolution, Raskovic advocated for a nuanced understanding of identity that allowed space for plurality and mutual recognition. His emphasis on dialogue was not merely rhetorical and tactical but grounded in his philosophical and ethical commitment to nonviolence. This commitment places him in a distinct category of people who sought to balance political action with moral responsibility, so that somewhat romantically, but not without grounds, Raskovic is compared with figures such as Mahatma Gandhi.

Of course, no assessment of Raskovic's legacy would be complete without acknowledging his limitations. While he possessed moral clarity and intellectual rigor, he often lacked the political pragmatism necessary to operate within turbulent and often hostile environment. His failure to galvanize sufficient political and institutional support ultimately rendered his political program vulnerable, regardless of the grassroots support he enjoyed from compatriots, as well as other citizens. His academic manner and cautious rhetoric were ill-suited to the media-driven, populist currents of the time. Furthermore, his insistence on negotiation and compromise was perceived by radical elements as weakness or betrayal. Even within the Serbian community, his moderate stance was met with suspicion and, at times, outright hostility. His political marginalization reflects a pattern that has recurred in various historical and geographical contexts and a wider trend in which conciliatory voices are deliberately drowned out during the periods of turmoil.

The importance of studying and remembering Raskovic may serve as a case study in the challenges faced by moderate politicians in polarized environments, while professional and scientific papers offer a valuable theoretical lens for understanding the intersection between trauma and identity. Future research on Raskovic could benefit from a comparative perspective, comparing his work with other leaders who sought nonviolent solutions in divided societies and turbulent times. Raskovic's psychiatric insights into group psychology and collective behaviour deserve further academic exploration, particularly in the fields of political psychology and conflict studies, while his legacy invites

to reconsider the role of emotion, collective memory, and interpersonal dynamics in shaping political outcomes.

Rašković's sincere advocacy for Serbs in Croatia to assert their rights within a democratic and pluralist framework stands in stark contrast to the unrealistic and opportunistic 'all or nothing' approach that ultimately prevailed. His legacy calls for a re-examination of entrenched binary narratives: defender or conqueror, protector or traitor, patriot or nationalist, victim or perpetrator, human or politician, resistance or occupation. The historical irony lies not only in the fact that his vision was rejected, but also in the fact that, in its absence, a tremendous human tragedy unfolded. This tragedy did not affect only one side; it destroyed communities across ethnic lines, leaving behind a bitter legacy of mistrust and fragmentation that future generations must challenge. It obliterated a specific local tradition and subculture of the Serbs from Croatia, which cannot be equated with the broader Serbian or Croatian national cultures. In this sense, Rašković's politics were not solely about the Serbs, but also about the very possibility of coexistence in a multi-ethnic society. His defeat is thus the defeat of a certain political ethos grounded in dialogue, legalism, and human dignity.

In the broader context of post-Yugoslav historiography, Raskovic remains a contentious but necessary figure, which will gain more and more significance over time. His insights into the consequences of psychological traumas rooted in past conflicts, and his efforts to articulate a framework for peaceful coexistence between Serbs and Croats, remained overshadowed by loud and aggressive nationalist discourses. In retrospect, however, they are gaining renewed relevance and becoming increasingly recognized, especially in the context of ongoing efforts toward regional reconciliation.

For Serbs who hail from the Serbian regions in modern-day Croatia, persists a deep and lasting regret for Raskovic's peaceful approach to the protection of Serbian rights and for his politics of compromise and agreement. Today, that sense of regret is intertwined with sorrow for a lost homeland. The regret for missed opportunities and lost positions is also felt by all those who embraced his vision of dialogue, understanding, and compromise. It is not merely mourning for a man and his fate, but for the road not taken, a road that might have led to a more just and humane resolution to the complex issues, serving the interest of all parties in the conflict.

Dr Jovan Raskovic, unfortunately, did not succeed in preventing the descent into war, nor did his political ideas survive the pressures of rising extremism. However, his life and work continue to offer an essential counterpoint to the dominant narratives of the Yugoslav conflicts. His commitment to peace,

intellectual depth, and moral courage render him a vital figure for any comprehensive understanding of the region's late 20th-century history. Remembering Raskovic today is not an exercise in nostalgia, but an invitation to critically engage with the past in order to envisage a better political future, one in which moderation is not dismissed as weakness, but recognized as a form of profound strength and deep wisdom.

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