INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY
IN POST-COMMUNISM

Philosophical, Anthropological and Social-Theoretical
Presuppositions for Understanding Social Change

1.

The last decade of the 20th century has been marked by radical and thoroughly consequential social change whose explanation and understanding pose a serious challenge to philosophy, anthropology and social theory. The collapse of „real socialism“ as a social system, and its federal state forms, comprises a focus of social theoretical interest all around the world. Within this general thematic framework, the „Yugoslav case“ occupies a special place; our social theory, naturally, is more directly challenged by the task of explaining the dramatic breakdown of Yugoslavia and understanding war on its territory. However, in addition to thematizing our recent past, and more importantly, our social theory needs constructing a theoretical-conceptual framework that would enable an understanding of current and future transformations of post-communist societies. The nature of these societies, their socio-economic stratification, possibilities and directions of their economic and technological development, the establishment of a new political system, post-communist ideologies, and the relation of these societies to the international environment – here are some open questions which social theory, if it is to keep pace with the times, must attempt to answer adequately.

2.

The cluster of problems outlined above, complex as it is, transcends the capacities of distinct scholarly disciplines and
theoretical-methodological approaches taken separately. Similarly, the vast number of thematic fields involved undermine any claim to constructing one single theory to answer all the various questions posed by the collapse of communism and post-communist developments. Hence the choice of *Individual and Collective Identity in Post-Communism* as the topic of the research Project of the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory rests on two basic assumptions. Firstly, we believe that by thematizing the problem of individual and collective identity in post-communism one is provided with a fruitful hermeneutic device for understanding diverse, mutually connected aspects of the collapse of "real socialism" and the transformation of post-communist societies. The second assumption, starting from the idea of multi-disciplinarity as a necessary prerequisite in studying post-communism, implies the conviction that this topic precisely makes it possible to combine philosophical, anthropological and social-theoretical approaches to social change, which suits the established physiognomy of the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory and corresponds to the intellectual profile of its members. The successful intellectual output of the Institute to date is the best evidence to the advantageousness of multi-disciplinary research programs. Furthermore, in terms of contents the suggested topic continues the previous research project *Yugoslavia at the Turn of the Century*, and the core part of the project *Language and Rationality*, which dealt with "social functions of discourse".

3.

The first preliminary assumption of this research Project concerning hermeneutic fruitfulness of the proposed topic demands further argumentative elaboration, to be briefly sketched below.

The collapse of the "real socialist" systems resulted from a long-standing crisis which was not merely, nor primarily, economic in nature (implying irrational production and technology, and lagging behind the capitalist world), but had also been perpetuated by the loss of self-certainty of the existing collective identity of these societies, even within the consciousness of the ruling ("socialist") elite. The very act of implosion of the "institutional network" of these societies presumed a long-lasting internal destruction of the concepts "individual", "community", "state", "ideology", "legality", and "legitimacy", as well as weakening of socialist integrative mechanisms and solidarity principles. Available analytical findings concerning this aspect of the collapse of "real socialism" (above all in SFRY, but in other East European countries as well) are planned to be presented in a synthetic form so as to supply a firm basis for understanding post-communist reality and directions of future developments. If we start then from the thesis that post-communist societies are characterized by an "identity deficit" (of the global society, social groups, and individuals), the possibility is opened to inquire into the genesis, dynamics and character of various collective identities which arise as responses to the crisis and collapse. Further, by studying various types and constitutive principles of the newly-emerging collective identities, one can thematize the position of the individual within new collectivities, i.e. various concepts of individual identity. Since social actors express and reflect personal and collective identity (answering the question: "who are we-- as individuals, various social groups, society as a whole; in what kind of community do we live, and what ought it to be like... etc.) at a symbolic level, our research effort will first of all concentrate on the dominant forms of social self-consciousness (philosophy, ideology, value system, religion, culture, etc.). The next step is to relate the analyzed "subjective perspective" of social actors to either completed or ongoing scientific studies at the "object-level" (socio-economic structure). These two steps are expected to suffice for creating foundations for a fruitful discussion of various global theoretical concepts (e.g., "modernization theories") which are lacking in our social theory after abandoning the Marxist paradigm.

Since students' attention until now has been mainly directed to the dominant collectivist ideas -- from traditional patriarchalism through classical populism to new populism and nationalism -- this Project will devote due attention to examining the development of personalist ideas, both within the Yugoslav tradition and in our current social thought. This perspective is indispensable if one wishes to ascertain to what extent in post-communist societies there exist potentials for the development of citizens as free personalities which form the basis of a democratic order.
theoretical-methodological approaches taken separately. Similarly, the vast number of thematic fields involved undermine any claim to constructing one single theory to answer all the various questions posed by the collapse of communism and post-communist developments. Hence the choice of Individual and Collective Identity in Post-Communism as the topic of the research Project of the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory rests on two basic assumptions. Firstly, we believe that by thematizing the problem of individual and collective identity in post-communism one is provided with a fruitful hermeneutic device for understanding diverse, mutually connected aspects of the collapse of „real socialism“ and the transformation of post-communist societies. The second assumption, starting from the idea of multi-disciplinarity as a necessary prerequisite in studying post-communism, implies the conviction that this topic precisely makes it possible to combine philosophical, anthropological and social-theoretical approaches to social change, which suits the established physiognomy of the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory and corresponds to the intellectual profile of its members. The successful intellectual output of the Institute to date is the best evidence to the advantageousness of multi-disciplinary research programs. Furthermore, in terms of contents the suggested topic continues the previous research project Yugoslavia at the Turn of the Century, and the core part of the project Language and Rationality, which dealt with „social functions of discourse“.

3.

The first preliminary assumption of this research Project concerning hermeneutic fruitfulness of the proposed topic demands further argumentative elaboration, to be briefly sketched below.

The collapse of the „real socialist” systems resulted from a long-standing crisis which was not merely, nor primarily, economic in nature (implying irrational production and technology, and lagging behind the capitalist world), but had also been perpetuated by the loss of self-certainty of the existing collective identity of these societies, even within the consciousness of the ruling („socialist”) elite. The very act of implosion of the „institutional network” of these societies presumed a long-lasting internal destruction of the concepts „individual”, „community”, „state”, „ideology”, „legality”, and „legitimacy”, as well as weakening of socialist integrative mechanisms and solidarity principles. Available analytical findings concerning this aspect of the collapse of „real socialism“ (above all in SFRY, but in other East European countries as well) are planned to be presented in a synthetic form so as to supply a firm basis for understanding post-communist reality and directions of future developments. If we start then from the thesis that post-communist societies are characterized by an „identity deficit” (of the global society, social groups, and individuals), the possibility is opened to inquire into the genesis, dynamics and character of various collective identities which arise as responses to the crisis and collapse. Further, by studying various types and constitutive principles of the newly-emerging collective identities, one can thematize the position of the individual within new collectivities, i.e., various concepts of individual identity. Since social actors express and reflect personal and collective identity (answering the question: „who are we— as individuals, various social groups, society as a whole; in what kind of community do we live, and what ought it to be like?... etc.) at a symbolic level, our research effort will first of all concentrate on the dominant forms of social self-consciousness (philosophy, ideology, value system, religion, culture, etc.). The next step is to relate the analyzed „subjective perspective“ of social actors to either completed or ongoing scientific studies at the „object-level“ (socio-economic structure). These two steps are expected to suffice for creating foundations for a fruitful discussion of various global theoretical concepts (e.g., „modernization theories“) which are lacking in our social theory after abandoning the Marxist paradigm.

Since students’ attention until now has been mainly directed to the dominant collectivist ideas — from traditional patriarchalism through classical populism to new populism and nationalism — this Project will devote due attention to examining the development of personalist ideas, both within the Yugoslav tradition and in our current social thought. This perspective is indispensable if one wishes to ascertain to what extent in post-communist societies there exist potentials for the development of citizens as free personalities which form the basis of a democratic order.
The thesis of the necessity for multi-disciplinarity in studying individual and collective identity in post-communism derives from the importance and complexity of the problematic involved in the suggested topic. The most general research framework (e.g. the interrelation of communitarianism and liberalism), as well as the conceptual apparatus (concepts such as: "identity", "individual", "community", "solidarity", "legitimacy", etc), are philosophical topics par excellence. On the other hand, philosophy itself, as one of the symbolic forms in which collective identity is constituted and the problem of the individual articulated, is a subject-matter encompassed by the Project. (For example, the study of the problem of individual and collective identity in the Yugoslav society must include various conceptions of this identity in the Yugoslav philosophical thought and the effects of this thought on constructing and deconstructing social self-consciousness.) Anthropological themes occupy the central part of the Project: it is within social and cultural anthropology that global theoretical topics are mediated and synthesized with issues of lower, sociological order of generality. (For example, questions: how is the problem of the relation personality – society solved, and which approach is selected in defining the new model of society – sociologic or personalistic; how are new collectivities constituted and is the process of collective identification unfolding at the expense of, or in harmony with personal identification, and so on.) Finally, within social theory understood in broadest possible terms (including anticipated studies on topics ranging from general sociology to the sociology of everyday life; from political-legal to economic sphere) the focus would be on topics related to our primary cognitive interest: the problem of individual and collective identity in Serbia and Yugoslavia.

Research interests of Project contributors are centered on problems of the post-communist transformation of Serbia and Yugoslavia. A wider framework for our research is provided by comparative studies on post-communism in general and the problems of crisis, transformation and constitution of collective and individual identity in those post-communist societies which bear the most direct relevance for understanding our situation (such as former SFRY republics, Russia, some East-European countries). But, apart from studying recent past and today of the Yugoslav society, special attention will be devoted to studying its future, i.e. to possible directions of its peace-time reconstruction. Along these lines, the study of collective and individual identity should uncover possibilities and preconditions for a democratic reconstruction of the Yugoslav society.

According to the plan, the research will be carried out within four distinct thematic units which in their synthetic form exhaust the basic areas and theoretical approaches delineated in the Project Outline.

The first unit includes a study of general philosophical concepts, categories and theoretical-methodological approaches for analyzing problems of collective and individual identity. In the second thematic group ideas, ideologies, cultural patterns and mentalities will be analyzed within which social self-consciousness is expressed and the consciousness of various types of identity is shaped. Within the third thematic unit the subject-matter is social structure – socio-economic and political reality of a society in the process of crisis and post-communist transformation. Finally, the fourth unit is devoted to researching political projects, legal and cultural presuppositions of building future society.
4. The thesis of the necessity for multi-disciplinarity in studying individual and collective identity in post-communism derives from the importance and complexity of the problematic involved in the suggested topic. The most general research framework (e.g. the interrelation of communitarianism and liberalism), as well as the conceptual apparatus (concepts such as: "identity", "individual", "community", "solidarity", "legitimacy", etc), are philosophical topics par excellence. On the other hand, philosophy itself, as one of the symbolic forms in which collective identity is constituted and the problem of the individual articulated, is a subject-matter encompassed by the Project. (For example, the study of the problem of individual and collective identity in the Yugoslav society must include various conceptions of this identity in the Yugoslav philosophical thought and the effects of this thought on constructing and deconstructing social self-consciousness.) Anthropological themes occupy the central part of the Project: it is within social and cultural anthropology that global theoretical topics are mediated and synthesized with issues of lower, sociological order of generality. (For example, questions: how is the problem of the relation personality - society solved, and which approach is selected in defining the new model of society - sociologistic or personalistic; how are new collectivities constituted and is the process of collective identification unfolding at the expense of, or in harmony with personal identification, and so on.) Finally, within social theory understood in broadest possible terms (including anticipated studies on topics ranging from general sociology to the sociology of everyday life; from political-legal to economic sphere) the focus would be on topics related to our primary cognitive interest: the problem of individual and collective identity in Serbia and Yugoslavia.

5. Research interests of Project contributors are centered on problems of the post-communist transformation of Serbia and Yugoslavia. A wider framework for our research is provided by comparative studies on post-communism in general and the problems of crisis, transformation and constitution of collective and individual identity in those post-communist societies which bear the most direct relevance for understanding our situation (such as former SFRY republics, Russia, some East-European countries). But, apart from studying recent past and today of the Yugoslav society, special attention will be devoted to studying its future, i.e. to possible directions of its peace-time reconstruction. Along these lines, the study of collective and individual identity should uncover possibilities and preconditions for a democratic reconstruction of the Yugoslav society.

6. According to the plan, the research will be carried out within four distinct thematic units which in their synthetic form exhaust the basic areas and theoretical approaches delineated in the Project Outline.

The first unit includes a study of general philosophical concepts, categories and theoretical-methodological approaches for analyzing problems of collective and individual identity. In the second thematic group ideas, ideologies, cultural patterns and mentalities will be analyzed within which social self-consciousness is expressed and the consciousness of various types of identity is shaped. Within the third thematic unit the subject-matter is social structure - socio-economic and political reality of a society in the process of crisis and post-communist transformation. Finally, the fourth unit is devoted to researching political projects, legal and cultural presuppositions of building future society.