

Slovenia

Luka Lisjak Gabrijelčič interviewed **Jože Pirjevec**.

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Gabrijelčič: My name is Luka Lisjak Gabrijelčič, historian and editor of the Razpotja magazine, and I have the privilege of talking to professor Dr. Jože Pirjevec, one of the most renowned historians in Slovenia of his generation and in general, an expert in broader Yugoslav post-war history, particularly in diplomatic history, and we will be talking about his life.

Pirjevec: Yes.

Gabrijelčič: Let us begin with your childhood: where were you born?

Pirjevec: Well, I was born in Trieste, on the 1st of June, 1940, and I was born with the wrong name, since I was registered at the time as Giuseppe Pierazzi. Because I was an Italian citizen and the Italians Italianised our surnames already in the thirties, and later on, they also introduced a law.

Pirjevec: Well, I mean, with a name that was not mine, since the Italians first Italianised surnames and then first names, so I was entered in the registry as Giuseppe Pierazzi. At home, of course, they always called me Jože, and only later on would I find out that I was in fact Pierazzi - I don't remember exactly when, to be honest, but ...

Gabrijelčič: When you went to school, perhaps?

Pirjevec: Well, my family did live in Sežana (near the border with Italy) at that time. Sežana is very close to Trieste and my father, who was a merchant, had connections - business connections - with Trieste: we were very attached to Trieste, but we lived in Sežana, we had a shop there and a fairly large house, and we were among the wealthier inhabitants of this square, which had a history of innkeepers, merchants who had always been liberal; the Slovenes of Trieste and the Slovenes of the Littoral in general were quite liberal in these parts; they were not interested in the Church, so to speak. Well, Sežana was where I spent my childhood. I feel that those were the most beautiful years of my life, because I felt completely independent. The war was going on; I very vaguely remember the Italian presence (the family of an Italian doctor lived in our house), but more intensely the German presence from 1943 onwards, when they occupied the Littoral after the collapse of fascist Italy on 8th September.

We also had a German officer in our house as a tenant, and one particular episode stayed in my memory which I would learn more about later on. We had a servant who stole some binoculars, a belt, a gun, and boots from this officer if I recall correctly. The servant threw all this into some slop he was taking - we had a pig in Dane, a small village near Sežana - to the Partisans, of course. Imagine an officer losing his pistol, it certainly caused quite a commotion. I remember very vividly how suddenly these German soldiers broke into the house to look for the culprits. And I don't remember if it was on that occasion, but they arrested one of my aunts to take her to Dachau, and she was luckily spared because an officer who knew her drove past and pulled her out of the line.

Gabrijelčič: A German officer?

Pirjevec: Yes. Then, I also remember my father talking to people who were sent from the Liberation Front to collect money. Traders, of course, had to help the Liberation Front financially. My father was a VERY devout patriot; he had great sympathy for Yugoslavia and hoped that we would return to Yugoslavia, or to Slovenia and Yugoslavia, but on the other hand, he also had great reservations about communism and the Stalinist regime in particular: he did not believe the

fairy tales about how beautiful life would be under communism, and therefore he cooperated with the Liberation Front - albeit with certain reservations.

I also remember a time when some Chetniks [Serbian guerrilla units that fought against the Turks and, in World War I, against Austro-Hungarian and German forces] who were fleeing from the Balkans towards the west came to our house towards the end of the war, that was in April 1945; all bearded, dirty, with ammo cartridges over their chests and so on, and they seemed quite dangerous to me, far more dangerous than the German soldiers, to be fair.

And then came the Partisans. My memory of them is more vague, I mostly remember how we were discussing which flag we should fly to greet them at home: should it have a star on it or not? They decided to place a red star in the middle of the Slovenian tricolour, and to me, as a child, that flag was very imposing, particularly because it was enormous; it spanned from the first floor all the way to the ground, practically onto the pavement. Then, soon after the Partisans, the English suddenly appeared after the twelfth of June 1945 and camped out in front of our house: we had a big yard in the front and they set up their tents there. They would whitewash their wide belts with chalk and such, and they would also give us chocolates. I was left with a good impression of them. Then, after the peace conference, when they determined the border between the Free Territory of Trieste or, rather, when the Free Territory of Trieste was established and Sežana fell to Yugoslavia, my father decided that we would emigrate. So we went to Trieste. I remember that day very well, that morning. This was in September, as the border was finally demarcated on the fifteenth of September, 1947. Of course, I would only learn of these things later on. So, we went to Trieste and found ourselves in a completely different situation: poverty. As I mentioned, we did not feel any particular scarcity during the war: we had the store, and what I remember most about it were the cod..

Gabrijelčič: Salted cod? (Bakalar)

Pirjevec: Yes. They would put them in water so they would soak it up, and I was fascinated with how a log could suddenly become a fish! I also understand now why there were so many - we had piles of cod stacked like firewood. And why was this? Because we were inside the Third Reich, which also included Norway.

Gabrijelčič: Ah!

Pirjevec: Right? I understood this after visiting the Lofoten Islands, where I saw these cod. Apparently they were very valuable as a source of protein.

Gabrijelčič: Right, right!

Pirjevec: Well, the war didn't stay in my memory as a particularly traumatic event. Of course, there were times when, for example, we had to flee at night when there was a danger of bombing: this one time I recall, we spent one night or part of the night near a cemetery under a big linden tree, but in general, I don't have any traumatic memories from the war; the post-war period, however, is a different story. After the war, we were situated in the middle of Trieste. We used to be free; in Sežana I could go wherever I wanted, you know? Trieste, on the other hand, the centre of Trieste, in the city - a meagre, destitute apartment; very poor and run-down. And, at the same time, a foreign language, Italian, and the contempt - the pressure from the Italians. I felt it quite soon, very soon I think, because the house we lived in was really this huge palace, two or three hundred years old and completely abandoned, where some refugees took shelter. They came from all over, not only from the neighbouring Yugoslavia, but also from Libya, Italians from Libya.

Gabrijelčič: Oh, really?

Pirjevec: and from God knows where else. I remember some southerners who lived near us. This one time, they called me a "sciavo". I had never heard that before. I didn't know what it meant. But I was very pained by this negative and hostile attitude towards us, just because we were different

and spoke a different language. So there was a feeling of threat that, I think, I still haven't gotten over. My attitude towards Trieste is still very ambiguous: I do like it as a city, the seaside location is beautiful, everything is great - but on the other hand, we were living in an environment that did not want us. And I can still feel this fact to this day.

Gabrijelčič: So, if I understood correctly, you came to Trieste when you were seven years old or so?

Pirjevec: Yes, right, seven years.

Gabrijelčič: That is to say, you went to school for the first time in Sežana.

Pirjevec: Yes, and the story of that school happens to be quite interesting. Namely, during the Partisans' short stay with us, they established schools and the Partisan government kept functioning for some time even after the Julian region [Julian Alps] was divided into two parts, zone A and zone B. We fell under zone A, along with Gorizia, Posočje and so on, the Anglo-Americans took over the administration, and they tolerated the parallel Partisan authority at least for some time, especially in the countryside - not so much in Gorizia and Trieste. This means that the schools were Slovenian: not only that, they were also Partisan, so they were communist in a sense, right? During that time, my last name changed without me knowing it: I suddenly became *Josip* Pirjevec. The name *Josip* was quite popular at the time: *Josip Broz Tito*, *Josip Dzugashvili Stalin* and so on. I also got my first report card with that last name written on it. As I said, I didn't have a clue about what was going on. But when we came to Trieste, I became Giuseppe Pierazzi again, since Italian legislation remained in force there. The English and the Americans were basically on the Italians' side and were very reserved, if not hostile, towards the local Slovenes. They would give us something at least - they gave us schools, they gave us radio, they allowed us to organise, politically as well, but they still viewed us as a hostile element. It should be noted that the local communist party, which was under the influence of Ljubljana and, so to speak, in the hands of the Slovene Communist Party, was very prominent at the time. Many Italian proletarians were members. But since my father was not a communist, we were not included among those Slovenes. We remained a kind of a minority within a minority. The issue was which school the children should attend. We were immediately enrolled in Slovene schools, yes, but not in Slovene societies or communist societies. But what other societies were there? Only Catholic ones. And who organised these Catholic societies? They were organised by the many refugees from Ljubljana, members of the Slovene Home Guard. And so, as a child, we lived right next to the new St. Anthony, that was the main...

Gabrijelčič: In the centre!

Pirjevec: We were given a small attic room at the top of the new St. Anthony, but we could also feel strong hostility on the part of the clergy. There was a Home Guard priest named Jože Prešeren, he was one of the secretaries of Bishop Rožman.

Gabrijelčič: Oh.

Pirjevec: Yes. And he was close to, if not a member of ... not *Stražarji*, what were they called ... well some of them were *Stražarji*, others.

Gabrijelčič: What were they called, The Youth?

Pirjevec: Yes ...

Gabrijelčič: *Mladci*?

Pirjevec: Yes. He was a very fervent clergyman and a proud man, and he was in great conflict with the local bishop, Santino, who was a staunch Italian and a philo-fascist, so to speak, or a philonationalist. And the conflict between them? Well, Prešeren would always walk around wearing a clergyman's outfit, that is, with a jacket and trousers, and not the standard monk's robe

as per the Roman-inspired fashion at the time. And he claimed that although he was in Trieste, he did not belong to the diocese of Bishop Santino, but was still somehow subject to Bishop Rožman and therefore had the right to dress as he pleased. In this school - it was not really a school, more like a children's group - I went there until I was twelve. I have to say that despite being quite small, still a child, this excessive clericalism got on my nerves. There was also the domestic influence: my parents didn't go to Church and so on, but I did, I served at Mass ... I could still do a reading now ...

Gabrijelčič: In between was the Second Vatican Council.

Pirjevec: In Latin with half an hour of practice, I could still do it. And I was religious as well, I was religious for a long time. But this excessive clericalism got on my nerves, so when I was about twelve, I rebelled and got up in the middle of Mass and left the church. And I broke off contact with that group. Then I got involved in another environment, the so-called Radio stage. These were again refugees who, under the protection of the Anglo-Americans, organised a Slovenian radio station in Trieste. As you can imagine, this radio station also had propaganda purposes. It could be heard all over the Littoral, and almost as far as Ljubljana. These refugees were, of course, still clergymen, very religious, and members of the Home Guard, but still ...

Gabrijelčič: Were they intellectuals?

Pirjevec: A little more open, a little more flexible, they wouldn't impose their ideas. We had this one professor, who mainly led this radio group and established this radio stage. These people had to earn something. We were all as poor as church mice. These people would stop in Trieste as a transit point on the journey to America. But the refugees had to make a living while they were here and so they got involved in the stage, and so plays and other shows were part of the daily programme. I must say it was a great education for me. As a child, of course, I would only get minor roles, also because my diction isn't the best. But somehow they put up with me, and I learned. I met Spanish authors there, Calderón de la Barca, Cervantes, Strindberg, this and that, the Norwegians, Ibsen. We would play it all and I would listen, and I must say that I learned a lot. But equally as important was the fact that my mother, who was from Kranj, brought with her some five hundred books, a small library of literature: by Erjavec, Jurčič ... I read everything Jurčič wrote! But also some high-quality translations published by a publishing house at that time ...

Gabrijelčič: Modra ptica?

Pirjevec: Modra ptica, yes. I read all this with great pleasure, completely neglecting school, of course: school did not interest me, but reading did. So those years were traumatic in a sense - still carefree in some ways, though marked by great poverty. For example, I didn't have a coat: I was ten or twelve and I didn't have a coat. I didn't have a bed, we slept on mattresses on the floor. Really, now that I think about it. As a child you aren't even aware of these things. It was a really difficult situation because we lost everything we had: our house, our store. Our money wasn't worth anything anymore. My father had been quite wealthy before the war; he had maybe two, three million lira, and two million lira was not a small amount at that time, but after the war, we were left with nothing.

So he started a store in Trieste, but that didn't go too well, and I don't know how the whole thing would have unfolded if it weren't for the split between Tito and Stalin. In 1948, Tito was excluded from the Cominform and Yugoslavia found itself in a dire state of isolation: they did not know how they would survive, there was famine, and Tito had to succumb to the West in many ways. He made contact with the British and Americans, who understood the importance of this split within the communist movement and immediately came to the rescue. Among other things, they also allowed many refugees who had gone to America, or even older emigrants, to send packages back home. My family were not communists and we had contacts with the Home Guard who had fled to Trieste, and there was this one lawyer, who was poor as well but had been an eminent man

in Ljubljana: see, this was the man who organised the Congress of Christ the King in Ljubljana in 1939. So he was close to Bishop Rožman, and he also received a high decoration from the Vatican. But he was quite poor at the time; he was teaching English at the secondary school and he was happy to be able to visit us for dinner every week. This man, however, had connections with the Americans, with the refugees, that is, who were looking for a merchant to start distributing packages here in Trieste, in a free port. The port was then still separate from the city, and you needed special permission to enter. There, my father opened a warehouse and we started handing out packages. He started, and after reaching twenty years of age, I helped a lot as well - I am no stranger to physical work. Thus, we recovered financially.

This went on until the end of the 1950s, after which Yugoslavia recovered in such a way that it was no longer necessary. Then another situation came about, namely that Yugoslavs started coming to Trieste to buy washing machines or jeans or coffee. But instead of my father being so clever as to switch from package handling to selling refrigerators, which would have made me a billionaire today ... Well, he was already old and ill, so the fact is, he didn't do that. So I was left in a less than enviable situation, especially in my late twenties, early thirties, when I was unable to decide what I actually wanted to study. At first I thought I would go study architecture: and where did I enrol? I enrolled in Graz, without knowing a single word of German.

Gabrijelčič: How did you come about this decision to go to Graz?

Pirjevec: Because we had an aunt in Graz. Well, and so I went to Graz ... Of course, that was a year wasted. Or rather, not completely wasted; if nothing else, I at least learned to speak German. Just barely. The only benefit was that I was introduced to German; I did manage to learn some of it, but then I realised that I couldn't do it that it didn't make sense to persist, but nevertheless, in my opinion I was really irresponsible, towards my parents, that is. That even after I came to Trieste, I didn't know where to go, where to study. Literature seemed too small for me, it would have to be either economics or law ... I tried law, I tried economics ...

Gabrijelčič: Here in Trieste?

Pirjevec: Yes, I enrolled in Trieste. A disaster! The only exam I tried to take in law school was Roman law ... and I flunked it. So then, in the end I had no choice but to take the "lettere". I then made up for these "lettere" because I managed to complete them in three years instead of four. But then I dragged my feet with my dissertation for a long time, and that was when I developed a taste for history. History engaged me very, very much, and I wrote my dissertation on the student movements in Vienna at the beginning of the previous century. I went there precisely because I knew a bit of German and I was very attracted to Austria. I should say that we lived with the myth of the old Austria: my parents, especially my father, remembered old Austria as a golden age, when Franz Joseph was still popular - today I look at him with much more criticism. But back then, that was the situation. The first trip I'd ever made on my own: where did I go? I went to Vienna. There I ended up in a hotel of prostitutes, which was very cheap ... I was twenty or so. And I started my studies and research in Vienna, at the "Haus- und Hofarchiv", in the archives of the University of Vienna, and I wrote quite a voluminous graduate thesis about the students in Vienna of all nationalities. Thinking about it now, I've always been writing thick books: I don't know why, but I can't get rid of it. So I finished the "lettere", and at the same time I started toying with the idea of writing. I wrote some poems, I started writing a novel, I wrote one longer short story about Akhenaten ... Do you know Akhenaten [Egyptian pharaoh of 18th Dynasty of the New Kingdom of Egypt]?

Gabrijelčič: Yes, of course!

Pirjevec: I was very fascinated by this man, who discovered a single god ...

Gabrijelčič: Monotheism.

Pirjevec: And this was published as well.

Gabrijelčič: Really? Where?

Pirjevec: Yes, yes. We had a paper called ...

Gabrijelčič: Most?

Pirjevec: Hold on ... At the beginning, already in secondary school, we had the Literarne vaje student paper ... But I must say this about our secondary school. I would go back a bit, if you'll allow me ...

Gabrijelčič: Yes, of course.

Pirjevec: This secondary school was really special.

Gabrijelčič: This was a Slovene secondary school?

Pirjevec: Yes, a Slovene secondary school. It was special because it included people from all over - mostly people from Slovenia, but there were also some locals of various ideologies: there were Catholics, some radical Home Guards, there were Titoists at the time of the split with Stalin, and some were Stalinists ... so it was a vivid bunch, most of whom were not even professional teachers; they worked other professions in order to make a living. This school was so plural precisely because of the diverse ideological profiles of all these people. They wouldn't spread propaganda, but they still couldn't hide their true colours. And I think this had an important effect on my life, instilling a certain sense of tolerance.

Gabrijelčič: Was there a professor who specifically left a mark on you?

Pirjevec: Yes, there was this one professor, Šavli, who taught Slovene, who was an enthusiastic Titoist, but also an extremely enthusiastic Slovene. But perhaps the one who taught me the most was not even a professor, but a painter – Černigoj [Avgust Černigoj (1898–1985), Slovene avant-garde painter from Trieste].

Gabrijelčič: He taught at the secondary school?

Pirjevec: Yes, he did; in order to earn some extra money, he taught art class.

Gabrijelčič: Wow!

Pirjevec: And he seemed to like the fact that I was quite a messy painter.

Gabrijelčič: Of course!

Pirjevec: And so I believe I do have a sort of a feel for art today thanks to him. There are flashbacks of people. Then, of course, there was Professor Rebula, from when I was a little older [Alojz Rebula (1924 – 2018), Slovenian author and classicist from Trieste].

Gabrijelčič: Oh, him as well?

Pirjevec: Yes, but that was later on, when I was already in upper secondary school. He taught Greek and Latin. Not a good professor.

Gabrijelčič: Oh?

Pirjevec: But a brilliant man ... when he wanted to be! We were all terribly frightened of him because we found him spiteful ... or grumpy. But those times when he would relax and start lecturing with that zeal of his, he was fantastic. Then there was Merku, for example, who taught Slovene, but also gave us some music [Pavle Merku (1927–2014), Slovenian ethnomusicologist]. In short, quite an interesting group. Anyway, I finished the year, and then what? I immediately started lecturing as a substitute at Slovenian schools in Trieste for a meagre salary, but at the time it was enough for myself and my family. But I could not come to terms with this. It was clear to me

that I would never be a writer, so I had to find some other way out. I persisted in learning German. I read everything I could get my hands on: I think I read all of, or a large part of, Thomas Mann's work, not all of it but a large part; a lot of Goethe and others as well. At that time, the Goethe Institute still had a branch in Trieste, they had a huge library, and that's where I would go. I was very enthusiastic about reading, almost too enthusiastic, since I would do nothing but read.

My family was quite worried about my future, but then something happened that tends to happen in life: a strange circumstance. We had a house, but as I said, we were so poor that we had to rent it out, and we rented out the top floor to a professor from Piedmont who was a Humboldtian - passionate about German culture, German literature, and so on. He introduced me to the German Romantics, he had me read Hoffmann and others. He enjoyed talking to me, and to my mother as well; he felt comfortable with us, we had very good relations. He once said to me: why don't you go to the Scuola Normale di Pisa? I had never even heard of that.

Gabrijelčič: What is it?

Pirjevec: Scuola Normale di Pisa is a school, a university founded by Napoleon on the model of the École Normale, and it is the most exclusive school in Italy, where having a scholarship is a prerequisite for enrolment. It is a part of the university: the attendees go to the University of Pisa, but they also have special courses inside the Scuola Normale, in a beautiful palace by Vasari, a sight to behold. Our Igor is actually there now, temporarily [Igor Guardiancich. Nephew of Pirjevec, political scientist and professor at the University of Padua]. And then this man, a philosopher, wrote to one of his acquaintances to help me get in.

Gabrijelčič: When was that, what year?

Pirjevec: That was ... wait, I was twenty-seven, that means nineteen sixty-seven, give or take. And I got it, they accepted me. Not for a full four years, but for a two year post.

Gabrijelčič: Postgraduate?

Pirjevec: A two-year postgraduate, yes. And so I went to this Scuola Normale with a good salary, the salary of a secondary school professor, but ... Well, I didn't really fit in. The Italian environment was foreign to me, after all. At the time, of course, I already spoke Italian, although not that well to tell the truth, since we only spoke Slovene at home. We lived, and we still live in a completely Slovenian environment. So this Italian environment was foreign to me: in fact, I was apprehensive about it. The school was very distinguished: we had dinners with silverware, with waiters wearing silk gloves, and then there were all these kids, totally out of control - so you can imagine what those dinners or lunches were like. But me, the poor sap - I wasn't rowdy, I'm not the type ... But indeed, those were the years of the student revolt.

Gabrijelčič: You arrived just in time for the "sessantotto", right?

Pirjevec: You can't imagine what Pisa was like back then. It was wild, a revolution. Every day - processions, slogans, shouting, rebellion: they wanted a revolution. And I knew that there wouldn't be one. I was maybe a year or two older than the others and I kind of felt like it was all a bunch of prattle. I'm not saying it didn't matter. Now, in retrospect, that revolt was justified and important. But they didn't get to have their revolution the way they wanted. I definitely experienced that period of youth uprising, but I just watched, I observed without getting involved. I did, however, immediately start my studies, in part because I was quite lonely and I didn't know what else to do. The school had some big name professors, for example Saitta, who was one of the most important Italian historians of the time. One day, he ...

Gabrijelčič: Saitta, that was his name?

Pirjevec: Pardon?

Gabrijelčič: Saitta?

Pirjevec: Saitta. You haven't heard of him?

Gabrijelčič: No.

Pirjevec: He was very famous at the time. So he asked me, "What are you going to write for your dissertation?" And I said, well, you know, I was thinking of writing about Trieste. And he says: "Listen, don't make this mistake. When you people from Trieste start writing about Trieste, that's all you do for the rest of your life" ... And that's true!

Gabrijelčič: It's true!

Pirjevec: "Everything you do will be about Trieste. Don't make that mistake! You, a multilingual, should tackle something broader. For example, the relations in the Risorgimento between Italians and Slavs, Slavic patriots." So that was what I started on. First, I turned to Mazzini [Giuseppe Mazzini, Genoese propagandist and revolutionary, a champion of the movement for Italian unity known as the Risorgimento]. Mazzini was a very important source. And I'll tell you: the complete works of Mazzini, a hundred books - I went through one after the other. I can't say I've read everything in them, but really a lot. I think I wrote a fundamental study, "Mazzini e gli slavi", which was published in a journal, but it could have been a whole book, or at least a very voluminous brochure. I graduated from the Scuola Normale with the highest grades, both in Trieste and here, but then the question popped up again: what now? This philosophy professor, who lived in the upper floor of our house, was still in Trieste at the time and had a very good friend named Magris, who was my age but was already very well established [Claudio Magris, famous Italian author and literary scholar from Trieste].

Gabrijelčič: He is known for his thesis, right?

Pirjevec: Yes, his book about Mitteleuropa, "Il mito asburgico." He was a lecturer. I don't recall if he was tenured or not, but he might have been, and he was looking for an assistant.

Gabrijelčič: Oh, really?

Pirjevec: And he suggested that I become Magris' assistant. I accepted since I had no other choice. But I was not terribly fond of the thought that I would spend my whole life struggling with German literature. And so I secretly sent another application to get a scholarship from the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna. I had to complete an exam of sorts at the consulate, and I received a scholarship. And then someone had to tell Magris ...

Gabrijelčič: That it wasn't going to happen ...

Pirjevec: I think Magris still hasn't forgiven me to this day. I had to, what else could I do? But that was another devastating blow to my parents because I left a guaranteed job post and salary for a miserable scholarship, in fact it wasn't even a scholarship: we got food and an apartment, and, of course, the education. However, I do feel that those years were probably the most relaxed years of my youth, because I fit in very well there, as opposed to the Scuola Normale. I was already quite old at the time, I was thirty and my peers were twenty-seven, twenty-eight, some perhaps even younger. They had just finished university, they were mostly Austrians, but not exclusively. This academy was founded by Maria Theresa, it had a great tradition. We lived on Favoritenstrasse, in that big palace with the Theresianum, and everything was very nice, very diplomatic - but we didn't have any money. What can I say? It was nice. First of all, because the programme was very diverse. There was economics, law, history, languages, everything. We also had some great professors: for example, one of the best law historians, a constitutionalist, Verosta, and also a very famous historian of Austria, named Jedlicka. So this was the big league. I was very interested in all of it: not so much economics and law, but history, languages, and so on. I graduated from there, after which I returned home - without a job, without work, with nothing. Meanwhile ... while I was in Vienna, I was also writing a thesis for Scuola Normale about Italian-Slavic relations, and one of the authors I met was Angelo Tambora. Angelo Tambora was in fact

the only specialist for Eastern Europe in Italy at the time. He lived in Rome ... One time, I went to Rome to look at some of Mazzini's writings, which were kept in an archive; it seems to me that I was the only one who saw them, because it was like some sort of notebook, but a very interesting one: imagine, I found the addresses of Serbs, Russians ... no one would even notice this because nobody knew who these people were, but I knew. Well, in any case: I went to Rome and decided to phone this professor, who wrote the *Storia dei Balcani* in the 19th century. And I called him from a bar ... these phones weren't around back then ...

Gabrijelčić: Right, right ...

Pirjevec: I called him from a bar phone, using tokens ... And that was the second stroke of luck in my life: imagine if he weren't at home, if, say, he was sleeping, if he said, no, I'm not going to waste time with this kid - but no, he invited me over! And he took a liking to me; we kept in contact after that. Suddenly it happened that they had to open the university in Pisa, since great changes took place because of the student revolution. The university wasn't quite as elite as before and there was a huge influx of students - the professors didn't know what to do, so they started to organise new subjects just to manage the students and, among other things, they also set up a department ... well, not exactly a department, rather an "insegnamento", for the history of Eastern Europe, and they were looking for the right person for the job. They asked this Tambora fellow, who was the only one, they asked him if he knew of anyone ... And Tambora said: "You've already got someone in Pisa doing just that!" "Oh, of course!"

Gabrijelčić: Fantastic!

Pirjevec: And so they called me and I got my first job, at about thirty, thirty-one years of age, of course with a very modest salary and no stability. What did they use to call us again? "Precario", I think ... Either way, I started teaching there. I was there, in Pisa, for ten years, after which I returned to Trieste, and then, when I was forty-five, I got a department in Padua. My experience as assistant professor, professor, was always very positive, the students liked going to my lessons, I was quite successful. I would always start with one student - one or two. In Pisa with two, in Padua with one, I think; but then, all of a sudden, there were forty! So I learned a lot from my teaching years, although of course they were also very demanding. Think about it, my parents were sick, my mother died early on and my father as well a few years later ... there was no choice but to make the trip every week.

Gabrijelčić: From Padua?

Pirjevec: At first, from Pisa.

Gabrijelčić: Oh, already then?

Pirjevec: From Pisa to Trieste and then back to Pisa, that's ...

Gabrijelčić: That's quite a trip, yes.

Pirjevec: It was a gruelling commute - it wasn't easy at all. So the years were difficult in a way, but precious as well, because that was when I really started writing and researching. And quite simply, I discovered the beauty of research work. Archival work in particular - I really like working in archives. First, my work was based around risorgimento relationships and I focused on an extremely interesting personality, namely Niccolò Tommaseo. Niccolò Tommaseo was a Dalmatian who was a full-blown Italian or rather one of the great Italian intellectuals of the period, the first half of the nineteenth century and also the second half, but at some point he also discovered his Slavic roots. He was a Slovene on his mother's side ... Not a Slovene, a Croat! And so, after all his misfortunes - he had to go into exile in France and so on - he returned home, started learning Croatian, a bit of which he had already picked up at a young age, and wrote a famous book in Croatian entitled "Sparks". This book was a major influence on the Croatian "risorgimento" at the time. So I studied this man very carefully. He left behind an enormous archive

in the National Library of Florence - a hundred boxes, something awful. I went through all of this archive, accumulated a lot of material, and wrote my first book: "Niccolò Tommaseo tra Italia e Slavia". But it wasn't just that. Tommaseo's discovery of his roots also helped me discover my own. Not that I was not a Slovene: we were Slovene, we spoke Slovene and we were also very ardent Slovenes in Trieste, precisely because we lived in this environment. We were such ardent Slovenes that, for example, when I was twenty, I was the president of a student society for some time, which was quite Catholic, anti-Tito - we were probably the first to celebrate the free Slovenia. When was that? In October, because that was when the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs was formed; even before the Kingdom, the one in Zagreb [with the capital in Zagreb]. We celebrated it with a Slovenian flag on the wall, no star! I have no clue how we were allowed to enter Ljubljana regardless (laughter). Maybe they turned a blind eye. But if you'll allow me to take a step back, I must mention something very important that happened back then: the Free Territory of Trieste collapsed in 1954, and Italy came to Trieste. All of a sudden, we became Italians. There was a draft.

Gabrijelčič: Oh, tell me about that!

Pirjevec: Well, there was a draft ...

Gabrijelčič: Yes, there was ...

Pirjevec: But I did everything in my power to avoid it (laughter). And I succeeded, partly thanks to this one general who was a passing acquaintance ...

Gabrijelčič: An Italian general?

Pirjevec: Italian, yes. I managed to somehow get around it. I did experience some military life, but only very superficially. The idea of becoming an Italian soldier did not sit well with me at all. So, I avoided it. But then, what happened? In 1955, the Udine Agreement was reached regarding the opening of the border, and we were given passes. Which meant that those of us living close to the border could cross it, and so could the residents on the other side. And life suddenly changed. Until then, it was very difficult to go to Yugoslavia, you had to get a visa and so on, but after that, crossing the border became much easier. Of course, we would not stop after ten kilometres - we went to Ljubljana and started establishing contacts with the Slovenian cultural space. So, when I started lecturing in Pisa, I also started writing my doctoral dissertation in Ljubljana with Professor Zwitter. And Professor Zwitter took me under his wing, we had a symbiosis, I visited him very often and he told me a lot ... I also wrote a doctoral dissertation about Tommase under his mentorship, but the book was only published in Italian, I only wrote the dissertation in Slovene.

Oh the desire for research! It led me to apply for scholarships wherever I could. I received quite a few Austrian scholarships for archive work, and some Yugoslavian ones as well. The most important, very important at that time, was the scholarship of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union. And that's because - I went to Moscow! For us, Moscow was ... we were pan-Slavist.

Gabrijelčič: When was that?

Pirjevec: That was in Brezhnev's time, I think some time in 1977 or 1978. I was tasked to write the history of 19th-century Russia with the assistance of Tambora. I knew nothing about 19th-century Russia! That collection was a great collection of world history, it included the most famous Italian names. Tambora wrote the history of the Balkans in this collection, but he was already getting older and did not feel like writing a history of Russia, so he asked me if I would do it. And I said yes (laughter). I had no choice but to go to Moscow and get some literature, copy a little from here, a little from there (laughter). And so I went to Moscow for three months.

Gabrijelčič: The Russian language, how was it?

P: Yes, well, I had already studied it a little at the University of Trieste, but just enough to be able to read. It was definitely quite an experience - fantastic! As difficult as you can imagine! Because

those years were dreadful, though my scholarship was very high, about three hundred rubles: now imagine, the normal salary was seventy rubles.

Gabrijelčić: Wow!

Pirjevec: Yes ... There were two apartment buildings on the Oktyabrskaya platform, which the academy was using as a hotel. I would go to the Lenin Library, where I found a wealth of books on Russian history. Experiencing this great culture and its rich history left quite an impression on me. It opened up my horizons. Because 19th century Russia was a fantastic subject, with all these personalities: Herzen, Bakunin, Chernyshevsky, you name it. And artists too, since I wanted to incorporate intellectual life as well.

The result is that book over there (points to the bookshelf). These books include some brilliant illustrations, and so I searched from Moscow to Washington, everywhere: in Germany, in the Vatican Library ... and I amassed a collection - in my opinion, there is no other 19th-Century Russian history as well illustrated as this one. So you can see, I was really enthusiastic about this subject. But at the same time, when I returned, I started thinking about tackling the modern history of Yugoslavia; I had a student in Pisa who wanted to write a dissertation on the Tito-Stalin Split, and when I looked further into the subject, I realised, "Well this is fantastic! Such an incredible story." So I applied for a scholarship at the Humboldt Stiftung, and I got it.

And then another significant moment in my life was when I went to Germany - when I discovered Germany. We always thought of Germany with certain reservations. The memory of the war was still present, so there was no real sympathy for Germany. But when you're in Germany and you're being paid by Germans, your attitude shifts. Then I found out what the Humboldt Stiftung meant and why it was founded - precisely in order to improve Germany's image in the world. How? By inviting intellectuals from all around the world to perform studies and research. I spent almost two years in Munich: I kept working on my Russia project because I hadn't finished it yet, I started working on the Tito-Stalin history, but at the same time, in seventy-eight, they opened the London archives for precisely that period, for 1948. And of course, I still had the scholarship - they were so liberal that they paid me even to go and do research abroad - when I went to London, to the Public Records Office, as it was then called (now the National Archives), and this was another milestone in my life. I have been exploring London almost every year since then, or England in general - sometimes Cambridge more so than London. So these experiences shaped my personality as a designer and, in general, as a person.

Note: there is a minute or so missing from the record, where he starts explaining his trips around Europe, beginning with Budapest.

Gabrijelčić: What was Budapest like then?

Pirjevec: Budapest? Charming, always charming.

Gabrijelčić: Always, right?

Pirjevec: I was, picture this ...

Gabrijelčić: Authoritarianism does it good, doesn't it?

Pirjevec: The archive is over in Buda, right ...

Gabrijelčić: Yes, I know. Where the National Library is.

Pirjevec: Yes ... I lived in a small villa, not even that small, quite lordly, just below the archives, so I had a view of Pest, fantastic! And ... what was I going to say? Yes, right: at least I knew how to navigate Budapest, because the street names, Batthyányi, Petőfi - I knew who these people were, and I quickly remembered my way around town, or at least the centre. What I wanted to say is that when you get a taste for the international, you change "per forza".

Gabrijelčič: Yes.

Pirjevec: You are not/ you look at things differently, with a certain distant perspective. Either way, you change. This, of course, also meant that it would be difficult to fit in in the Trieste environment again. Or rather, I never did really fit in at all; I had different dimensions, I read different books, and I lived differently than my peers. I wanted to emphasise this aspect, which, on the other hand, I do not actually regret - all these experiences I had which did not end. Do you mind if I continue?

Gabrijelčič: Not at all. We still have some time.

Pirjevec: I published this book, first the one about Russia, then the Tito-Stalin story: "Tito, Stalin in Zahod", about how the West reacted to this conflict. Of course, I also went to Washington, to the archives.

Gabrijelčič: When did you first go to America?

Pirjevec: Back in the late seventies.

Gabrijelčič: What was your experience of America then?

Pirjevec: At the time, I'd have to say ... uncritical. I had a scholarship from the Wilson Center, Kennan Institute, I had a small house behind the Library of Congress, up the hill. There's a large library dedicated to Shakespeare there, called the Folger Library, and they practically own a whole block, which they rent out. So there I was, working all day in the library, attending lectures organised by the Wilson Center, but basically I had no real contact with America and Americans at the time. Above all, I hadn't yet figured out my relationship with America. I would often visit America later on, and I still do, but I must admit that I am becoming more and more critical of it. While Russia, despite all its negative aspects, despite all my hardships there, when, say, there was nothing to eat; I think I went to a restaurant once or twice in all those months; everything was so disgusting and dirty in the Lenin Library that I could not eat there; I only ate those Butterbrot sandwiches ... because it was completely unpalatable. A hard life, but - Russia, Russian culture! I would go to the theatre, not every day, but almost every day. Not that I understood anything, but I had more money than I knew what to do with. It was all an incredible experience, and I am still very fond of Russia. And the same with Germany as well: I adore Germany, so to speak. England too; well, I resent the English in a way for tolerating inequality - it's still a very classist society, which irks me a bit. But America, because of the gap between the rich and poor, between white and black - I really am very critical of it. Not least because of all its politics in the following years, which I studied and knew well.

So, this brings me to my study trips. Since then, I have regularly been visiting Russia, Germany, England, America, and occasionally even France. But then, another stroke of fortune, a great enrichment - in the next decade, when I was already fifty, I received a scholarship from the Nobel Institute in Oslo. And I became a "fellow" at this institute for six months. I moved to Oslo and that was an extremely valuable experience because I got to know Scandinavia and its people. What made the biggest impression on me was the essential equality, the simplicity, the nobility of that society. So I really felt great there. In the meantime, I also planned out one of my most important books, the one on the Yugoslav Wars. I had written about the history of Yugoslavia before that, which also left an important impression, since I learned all about the tragedy of both the Kingdom and Tito's Yugoslavia, but The History of the Yugoslav Wars is truly one of my most important books, and I initially wrote it in Italian. Once again, I was lucky enough to come into contact with Einaudi, one of the most important publishing houses in Italy, through pure coincidence. Einaudi himself, who was still alive at the time, gave the green light. I was unknown, completely unknown! It was a lengthy and intensive project, let me tell you. I was at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London, where they keep international newspaper clippings for the previous forty, fifty years. I went through all of it. They also have a library there with magazines from all over the world. I also had the privilege to meet this man from Trieste who worked in Nuremberg as a

Siemens engineer. He travelled all over Europe as an engineer and was immensely interested in Yugoslav affairs, and he also collected newspaper clippings about contemporary events from 1991 to the end of the century. His archive was very impressive - and he placed it all at my disposal. Based on these two archives and heaps of documentation, I wrote a six- or seven-hundred-page book, which is probably my most successful book. Not the most translated, but still the best-selling one in Italy. But I do have another booklet, which is quite comical: *Storia dei serbi, croati e sloveni* or something like that. It was published by Il Mulino as a throwaway, but now all the tourists buy it when visiting [former] Yugoslavia, since it is a quick read. So that was how I established myself in the Italian cultural space.

Meanwhile, Yugoslavia collapsed, Slovenia became independent and for us, of course, Slovenia's independence was an extremely important event; because we truly were - we are and we were - nationalists, in the sense that we thought, I personally thought, that a free Slovenia would have the capacity and the potential to become a country like Denmark. It was going to be a huge success! Unfortunately, I was deceived. But in my enthusiasm at the time, I first of all acquired Slovenian citizenship. I was also active all these years here [in Trieste], in local Slovene organisations: I became director of the National and Study Library and kept the post for seventeen years; then I was the director of the Slovene Permanent Theatre for seven years - in fact I was the director of the two most important cultural organisations at the same time!

Gabrijelčič: A personal union, so to speak.

Pirjevec: Although they knew that I was not a Titoist, they understood they needed someone like that around, among other things because "Titoland" was falling apart. So I managed to get through this without losing either my foreign contacts or my interest in broader work. Nevertheless, I did write a book about Trieste, "Trst je naš", and several others. But I was also politically active throughout all this. I briefly joined the Italian Socialist Party because I thought that the Socialists would help the Slovenes ...

Gabrijelčič: In the eighties?

Pirjevec: That was back in ...

Gabrijelčič: Pertini?

Pirjevec: Craxi [Bettino Craxi, Italian politician who became his country's first Socialist prime minister (1983–87)], that was back in Craxi's time, in the late eighties. When I realised this Craxi was veering towards nationalism, I immediately publicly left the party. But as I said: I grew fond of Slovenia, I acquired citizenship, back then I received an invitation from Koper to participate in the establishment of the Science and Research Centre; I immediately grasped the importance of connecting cross-border academics with Slovene intelligentsia, and I started collaborating with them; later on I worked with them in establishing the university and so on. As I said, this was the start of [my] almost-national involvement, in the sense that - in the nineties and at the beginning of the new millennium, there was one huge crisis in Italy. How did the politicians try to respond to this crisis? By making a sort of "mastice" ... Do you know what "mastice" means in Italian? So, a kind of binding ...

Gabrijelčič: Link?

Pirjevec: Yes, a binding link to bring people together - nationalism. Nationalism against whom? Against the Slavs. And so they invented the foibe [Foibe: a term originating from Istrian Venetian dialect denoting Karstic cavities. In reference to the places of the summary killings perpetrated by Yugoslav resistance and later the Communist regime during and after World War Two, mostly against officials of the Italian state, supporters of the Fascist movement, and other anti-communist individuals]. I was deeply angered and upset by that, especially when they established the day of ... what was it called?

Gabrijelčič: Memorial Day.

Pirjevec: Yes, the "della memoria" day, and when Napolitano gave that horrific speech at the Quirinal in 2007, where he called us conquerors and barbarians and so on, I decided that I had to retort. And I wrote a study on foibe. That book was also published by Einaudi, and it received quite a strong reaction! The nationalists in Italy sprung up and accused me of everything they could think of: that I was a negationist, and so on. The second book, the one about Tito, explored the real reasons for the collapse of Yugoslavia. "Tito in tovariši" - understanding Tito. I was very enthusiastic about this work, since Tito is a personality who ... How to put it ... not that I'm uncritical of him, but he was incredible in a way. From then on, I've always gone in that direction. I also tried to get involved in Slovenian political life. I was so naive, I thought that if I joined the Liberal Party, I would be able to bring some socialism into it. After all, my political orientation is socialist.

So I said to myself, "Let's bring some socialism to this Liberal Party." I found out the very next day, after signing up, what kind of people I was dealing with. Because the next day, after I signed up, the man who is currently all over the TV ...

Gabrijelčič: Kacin? [Jelko Kacin, Government Spokesman during Coronavirus emergency since April 2020, between 2005–2008, he was Chairman of the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS), then the main opposition party]

Pirjevec: Yes, Kacin. He was president or secretary general or something or other ...

Gabrijelčič: Party leader.

Pirjevec: Yes, party leader. Didn't he resign?

Gabrijelčič: The next day?

Pirjevec: And he didn't tell me. Despite having courted me for so long to join the party, he didn't tell me// Basically, he sold the party to Senica for Kresal [In 2008, the chairman of the Liberal Democratic party, Jelko Kacin, stepped down in favour of Katarina Kresal, a hitherto unknown professional associated with the influential Senica law firm]. Ms. Kresal is a terribly beautiful woman, truly delightful. And intelligent as well! Classy, elegant: I really like elegant women. Elegant, charming. But she is not the type to lead a party, is she? [Katarina Kresal's political career was short-lived and plagued by scandals. It ended in 2011 when the Liberal Democratic Party, under her leadership, dropped out of parliament]. I clashed with her early on. It was because these Istrians, who discovered the foibe, started organising processions to the foibe in Slovenia [Referring to the nationalist associations of Italian exiles from Istria and Dalmatia. The village of Bazovica (Basovizza) near Trieste is a place of memory both for Slovenes and Italians, being the site of Fascist executions of Slovene activists in 1930, as well as of a monument to alleged summary killings by Yugoslav partisans in 1945]. Not only in Bazovica, but also across the border. I said, we have to prohibit this, plain and simple. We can't have them practice their fascist manifestations in our country. Specifically, one foibe was discovered near Lokve. She [Katarina Kresal] was Minister of the Interior. At that point, I was done with Kresal. So this experience was also negative.

At the same time, despite everything, and particularly because of "Tito" [the book he wrote about Tito], I became persona non grata among right-wingers. I think they had already started attacking me earlier on, but the first episode was when the president of the Slovenia-Russia Association, of which I was a member, invited me to speak at the Russian chapel [An Orthodox chapel built during WWI on the Vršič Pass in the Julian Alps by Russian prisoners of war, who were killed by an avalanche during forced labor. Since the late 1990s, the chapel has become the place of commemorations of Slovenian-Russian friendship]. He called me at the last moment and said: "Listen, do you mind if I visit? We need to talk about something." We talked in Sežana, in my house there, and he said to me: "A veto came from Janša's office. You won't be delivering a

speech. Janša will." [Janez Janša, a right-wing politician who was Prime Minister of Slovenia between 2004 and 2008 (and again in 2012–13, and since March 2020).]

After that, it was like a crusade. I did speak out against Janša at the time of his second government, if I'm not mistaken: we had all those manifestations at the beginning of 2010 where I was heavily involved [Referring to anti-austerity demonstrations which actually took place in the winter of 2012–13]. I also believed that it would be possible to muster up a smart left wing party somewhere in Slovenia. Because of this, I have strongly pleaded for the establishment of a new party, which would be called Solidarity. The name was my suggestion, among other things. A complete failure! We managed to beat Janša, but Solidarity never came to be.

That same context is addressed in my book about Tito and an article by Boštjan Turk, who was frankly really insulting, because he called me a "renegat".¹ In Slovenia, they don't even know what that word means - my lawyer didn't know. But I knew it well. For forty years, I have been writing columns every week in the *Primorski dnevnik* which stood as a beacon for Slovene national identity in this area and in general. And for someone to call me a "renegat" - that's "colmo" (the height of insulting). So I sued him. I won twice, but ultimately I lost: I lost three times. At the moment, I am in a process at the Constitutional Court, and I am losing. But a part of the reason why I sued him was to show Slovenes that freedom of speech is not absolute; that freedom of speech has certain limits and that these limits must be respected. Slovenes did not understand this, which resulted in this present-day barbarism of which I, again, am a victim. As I said, I started writing a book on the Partisans in the hopes of contributing to reconciliation.

This is because - I find that the Partisan movement is the most important event in Slovenian history, because through it, we shaped ourselves as a historical subject, internationally ranked among the European nations, delineated our borders and laid the foundations of our country. This does not mean, however, that I approve of everything that happened in connection with the Partisan movement. This is in part due to the fact that I am not from a Partisan family: I came to this consciousness of affirming Partisanship on my own, not because I inherited that consciousness from my father or anyone else. So I decided to write it all down - and be done with the post-war massacres, which I had studied very carefully. I was convinced that this would be a step towards reconciliation. It was not. The Partisan side actually agreed with me, accepted me. The Home Guard side, however, has been extremely hostile - it is difficult to imagine the malice they show, in a personal sense as well. There were other episodes during that time, of course. I was accused, for example, of having been a collaborator of Digos and Udba [Udba (acronym from the Serbo-Croatian, Administration for the Security of the State), colloquial name for the Yugoslav secret service. Digos: special unit of the Italian police dealing with organised crime and counter-intelligence]. I was neither. Udba did court me, but I avoided it. I went to Race, who was the chief of the SKGZ in Trieste [SKGZ: Slovenian Cultural and Economic Association, main left-wing association of Slovenes in Italy, with strong links to Socialist Yugoslavia during the Cold War], and I said, "If I find out anything that is a danger to Yugoslavia, I will come and tell you. Otherwise, don't expect me to be your spy; I'm in an exposed situation. Imagine if they found out at the university that I was a spy." And I personally didn't want to be a spy either! Even less so for the Italians! I had never heard of the person I was supposed to be working with, even though he did attend Slovenian events. All my friends knew him: Saša Rudolf, everyone involved in politics knew about him. But I had never heard of him: I first heard of him from Omerza [Igor Omerza, Slovenian author who does controversial research in the archives of the Yugoslav secret service. He has

¹ Boštjan M. Turk is a university professor of French literature and conservative pundit. His book review of Pirjevec's monograph on Tito in the right-wing weekly *Reporter* sparked a controversy when he accused Pirjevec of being a renegade due to his Italianised surname. All Slovenian surnames in the territories annexed by Italy after World War One were Italianised by the Fascist regime. The return of these surnames to their original form was facilitated only after the year 2000. Pirjevec changed his surname back to its original Slovene form in the 1970s.

accused Pirjevec of having been an informant of the Italian police]. Truly, a concentrated attack, which I otherwise take with a grain of salt. First of all, because I know that I have created something in life. I've always worked, I earned a little bit from it, but I was honest all the way through - and, in the end, I did have some success. I have nothing to be ashamed of and therefore I also accept this; though I am not saying I don't care at all. Being exposed to this kind of pressure certainly leaves its mark on a person. So there it is: I've told you everything - almost!

Gabrijelčič: I have a few more questions. Let's talk a little more about your cultural formation. You mentioned that you were strongly influenced by Slovenian novels and attracted to Russian culture. Tell me more about your cultural formation: about music, the fine arts.

Pirjevec: I am smitten by artistic creativity in all its forms. I also think a historian is ultimately an artist. It is no coincidence that history is one of the muses. It is important to know how to tell a story. That skill must be learned, of course. If you know how to tell stories, gain readers and establish a dialogue with them, even remotely, that is an important achievement. In that sense, I believe my work is creative as well. But as I said, I am very interested in all types of art. After all, I was a theatre director and am an avid playgoer, and everywhere I travel, I make sure to visit the theatre. And that's regardless of whether I know the language or not. I've been to India, China, Tokyo, and also to Egypt, with the cataracts; I've been to the theatre in all those places. Theatre is very important to me. And literature is important to me as well. I've neglected it a bit in recent years because I've had so much other reading: I haven't done anything other than read professionally, albeit with pleasure. Now, because of this coronavirus, and because I am currently taking a short break between books, I started reading. Our Igor reads an awful lot and has an extensive collection of books in English and other languages, and I borrow books from him. Recently, I got this one from a friend: Slobodan Šnajder [Croatian writer and publicist], do you know him?

Gabrijelčič: No.

Pirjevec: Supposedly, he is very good. Well, I'm reading his work, and I can't say I'm convinced. My friend thought he was great. Croatian writer of German origin, a Volksdeutscher.

Gabrijelčič: Oh, from Slavonia?

Pirjevec: He recounts the experience of a Volksdeutscher during World War II. Since we have been stuck inside because of the coronavirus, I have started following Igor's recommendations more (shows a book by Doris Lessing).

Gabrijelčič: I am familiar with that one, yes.

Pirjevec: This is the one that won the Nobel Prize.

Gabrijelčič: Doris Lessing, yes.

Pirjevec: So I do read a lot, especially contemporary authors. I discovered, for example, Vargas Llosa. A fascinating author! I've read quite a few of his books, and Latin American literature in general. And as for the fine arts, I am a collector, as you can see here. My collection is not as large as I'd like because I don't have that much money, but there is also the situation that my walls are already so crowded that I wouldn't know where to put any more. Above all - you would say that I am a nationalist - Slovenian authors, because they fascinate me. Here is one by Pavlovič - a landscape painter, from the fifties [Franc Pavlovič (also known as Francisco Paulovic, 1892–1981) was a Slovenian-Brazilian artist and restaurateur].

Then I have this gorgeous Spazzal, which I'll show you now [Lojze Spacal (also known as Luigi Spazzal, 1907–2000), avant-garde Slovene painter from Trieste]. The last one I bought was Mihelič - a beautiful painting by Mihelič [France Mihelič (1907–1998), Slovenian modernist painter]. And also a very nice Černigoj, which I like very much. So the house is full of art because I couldn't live without it - it tells me a lot. I tell you, if I had the money, I would be a big-time collector.

Gabrijelčič: What about music? How do you experience music?

Pirjevec: Music, well, maybe a little less so than other types [of art], but if I'm abroad, and especially in Moscow, I regularly go to concerts and just in recent years, I discovered an opera that I didn't really like before. I remember seeing a Madame Butterfly at the Kennedy Center in Washington some time ago. It's something so fantastic that it's hard to describe. And a Nabucco in Sydney: you know that aria, "Va' Pensiero" - the singers were all dressed like Palestinians, fantastic! These things are very important parts of my life: theatre, books and works of art - I could not live without them.

Gabrijelčič: Tell me something about the future: what is your take on it? You said that the hopes you had for Slovenia had crumbled, and also regarding politics ... How are you experiencing the present moment and what are your hopes and fears for the future, what do you think about it?

Pirjevec: I'll tell you: I am a part of this Kučan circle. We meet once a month for lunch, up at Kirn's, that's that inn above Barje (Ljubljana Marshes). And I am one of the youngest there. But these people are extremely bright, and interesting, too! They have such interesting life experiences. The topic of discussion is predominantly the Slovenian reality. The result of these conversations is that democracy has reached a dead end and the big issue is how to find a formula that would know how to save democracy, but would also know how to save it from populism and demagoguery, because it happens all too often nowadays that very dangerous people come to power through democracy. This is a major issue: how to find a system that would strengthen the sovereignty of the people on the one hand and at the same time bring power to people who are responsible, who know how to rule and know how to give something to their nation.

This is currently happening in Germany, for example. In my opinion, the coalition between the Social Democrats and the CDU-CSU is a very positive thing. Regardless, I find Merkel to be an exceptional woman. The last time I was with Humboldt [Stiftung], I tried to convince my colleagues to nominate her for the Nobel Peace Prize; given that I was a "fellow", I could suggest something like that. I didn't get a response though, so I gave up. But without a doubt, her policy, her motto, "Wir schaffen das!", is so important, so "bahnbrechendisch", so full of philanthropy and respect for humanity.

As I see it, the main issue nowadays, barring the problem of democracy etc., is this gap between us, those who are rich, and those who are not - mainly the south, the global south. I am proud that the Yugoslavs were the first to ask this question already in the 1950s - very clearly, very plainly. Tito said what he was told to say: but he also believed it. But those who speculated more about this, starting with Kardelj, understood that we would always be in great danger until we solve this great problem. In this sense, I feel we are stalling: instead of moving forward, we are hobbling in one place. A policy needs to be put in place here. I am in contact with some Danes, this is an organisation that works with refugees. They asked me to tell them what to do. I said: ok, clearly, we need to engage with the people who are here and who are fleeing; but more importantly, we need to consider why they are fleeing and how we will create the conditions at their home to enable them to stay where they are. If we don't do that, it seems to me that our civilisation will be going under sooner or later. Because we will not stop this influx. That's as clear as day. We can build all sorts of walls and barbed wire - we won't stop it. So these are the issues of today's world: on the one hand, that people like Trump can come to power, or even someone like Putin, who, it's hard for me to say, but he will go down in history as a poisoner. Putin the poisoner - because what he is doing now is going too far. And then there are these other characters, of course: Orban, Janša, those in Poland - but these are minor things. In my opinion, these are the problems of our world. I still think that it is crucial that we create a fairer relationship in our societies between the more and the less fortunate. So, basically, I still believe in socialism. I am just starting to write this new book, "Reševanje socializma s človeškim obrazom." I want to see exactly how our Yugoslavs, Kardelj above all, how they tried to understand, primarily also in contact with the Social Democrats

elsewhere in Europe. I'll be going- In October, I will be travelling to Vienna: I got a scholarship from the Academy to work in the archives and would like to look at the documents or "relations" of Ambassador Wodak. I don't know if you've ever heard of him. He was an ambassador in Belgrade in the 1950s, and I'm told that he was among those with the best understanding of the Yugoslav reality.

Gabrijelčič: An American ambassador?

Pirjevec: No, no, Austrian.

Gabrijelčič: An Austrian ambassador, I see.

Pirjevec: Yes, do you understand? That's what I will be doing in Vienna. And there is one problem that arises for me personally, which is the problem of God. As I said, I lost my faith. I used to be very faithful, I went to Mass for a long time, and to communion: more so the former than the latter. But then, this faith just sort of vanished. But still - how should I put this - I simply cannot give up the idea of God. I can no longer accept Catholic dogmas. If you'll allow me, I would explain very briefly why not.

Gabrijelčič: Go on, go on.

Pirjevec: Because I think that the development of humanity as we now know it, as this long process of development from a single-cell organism, has no place for mortal sin. If there is no place for mortal sin, there is no place for a saviour. So: what did Christ come to save? And even if he came to save something, why did he have to save humanity through crucifixion? Is God an Aztec deity, demanding a blood sacrifice? Quite simply, I can't wrap my head around it. I couldn't even get any answers in conversations with members of the clergy. I was talking to I don't know whom ... I was talking to Stres [Anton Stres, Slovenian theologian and former Archbishop of Ljubljana], we were having lunch together somewhere and we were discussing original sin. "Original sin occurs when a person becomes aware, when they come to consciousness." And I said, "But how can that be? If there is a God, there is absolute consciousness: is God sin, then? Does he live in sin?" It is absurd to say such a thing. But these are our Catholics. I must say that I am resentful towards them, the Slovene Catholics. Quite resentful. I'll be going to the Vatican soon. I was supposed to go already in March because the archives of Pius XII were opened, but suddenly this pandemic broke out, so I couldn't go. I will be going soon, in late November or early December. I am going there to look at Rožman in particular, of course [Gregorij Rožman, Bishop of Ljubljana during World War Two, famous for his militantly anti-communist stance]. I may learn a bit more about Pius XII., we will see. In any case, this is the first step, because I feel that our Church, which does not want to secede its power and wants to go back to the late thirties, when it held all the strings in Slovenia and saw itself as a "god of gods"; I think that it is on the wrong path and is losing the substance of Christianity. I am currently involved in a controversy over Ehrlich [Lambert Ehrlich (1878–1942) was a Slovenian clergyman, scholar and integralist Catholic organiser, assassinated by the Communist underground in Italian-occupied Ljubljana]. It was senseless on my part: in Gorizia, when I was representing the "Partisans" and talking about Ehrlich, I said that it was right that he had been killed and that I would have done the same.

Gabrijelčič: You will be criticised for that for a long time to come.

Pirjevec: Yes, it was wrong. But they are now doing everything to exploit this situation. The last one was: "Pirjevec wants to shoot Home Guard members with a golden pistol", something like that. No, but look, this Ehrlich. I also like Juhant in a way [Janez Juhant is a Catholic theologian and conservative polemicist]. But listen: regardless of the fact that he was a total fanatic, this Ehrlich went to the Italians, to the Italian command and said, "in parole povere": "You Italians are not capable of anything. The Germans are much more capable. The situation is much better in Styria than in the Ljubljana region, where you are. This is because the Germans know how to keep

the order, and you don't. If you want law and order around here, give us weapons and we will be able to quickly deal with the Partisans." So you tell me: is that treason or not?

Gabrijelčić: I'll tell you later, after the conversation.

Pirjevec: In my opinion, no quisling in Europe went that far. No one else had the courage to say to the occupier, "you are worth nothing". And the Italians were very offended indeed. That is why they let him get shot, they did not protect him. But Rožman also conducted the same policy. But listen: it's getting late, we can continue the conversation later, but I suggest we get something to eat.

Gabrijelčić: Just one more thing, if you don't mind ... You have already mentioned it during the conversation, but let's touch on that subject again: how do you experience the European identity? When, if so, did you start seeing yourself as a European and thinking about the fate of Europe, but also about the transition between different systems: in short, when and how did you discover Europeanism?

Pirjevec: Certainly! I consider Europe to be my homeland. When I see the European flag, hear the European anthem and so on. Because I am one of the real Europeans. I speak or read five, six European languages, I know the Balkans, Central Europe, Scandinavia, Russia - for me, Europe does not stop in the Urals, but extends to all of Siberia, because it is Europe in its culture and way of life. So no one can tell me that I am not a perfect example of a European. And I think that there is a great future ahead for Europe - that there must be one, but I do resent Europe for not being able to express its potentials as it should. Europe should become a great force. Not in order to threaten or dominate anyone, but to be on an equal footing with the other great forces now emerging as a veto. It should withdraw from the American "tutelage", it should get rid of NATO - for me, NATO is a complete disaster, it is basically a tool of American foreign policy for us to "hold the border", if you get my meaning, while we should be independent and create our own foreign policy.

I was supposed to hold a lecture on Europe at SAZU on 12th March. It was going to be a symposium for young people on the idea of Europe. I developed the idea by starting with the kidnapping of Europe. I tried to show how the idea of how far Europe reaches has changed, over the centuries and millennia, and I emphasised many positive aspects of Europe, but I also said that Europe was based on two foundations, two pillars: on the one hand, the ideal momentum of the concept of a European federation, and on the other hand, the fear - because Europe, the Europe we have here now, arose out of the fear of Russia, of communism, of the Soviet Union. Now that this fear is gone, it seems to be falling apart. I emphasised, in this short note of mine, that ERASMUS [the ERASMUS exchange programme] is one of the great achievements of Europe. It is a huge achievement that millions of young people have travelled around the world, gotten to know other European nations, and everyone is richer for it. And these are the people who will build a new Europe, not those who stay at home - because they do not understand it. But we who travel the world understand - we know what Europe is and why Europe is necessary. I arrived at this hope, but I wasn't totally optimistic. But now, today, I am much more optimistic due to the recent economic policies of Macron and Merkel, which have given a fundamental injection of life to Europe. If this doesn't help Europe pick itself up, it never will.

Gabrijelčić: Fantastic. I enjoyed this conversation very much.