

## ELECTION CAMPAIGN

I started to think seriously about how to respond to the numerous questions awaiting me in interviews, in the papers and on the radio. Several face to face encounters were also scheduled for TV. Although at that time I still could not believe that I might win the election, I did seriously ask myself what if it really happened? What if I really did win? What would I do then? It would no longer simply be a matter of dealing with newspaper and TV questions - I would actually have to start doing something. It would seriously mean ending up in Belgrade. It would mean being in the most responsible position in a country falling into an ever deeper crisis. This was the country which had emerged after the First World War, seventy years ago, very much as an artificial creation. It had incorporated into itself the Slovenes and Croats, both a part of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, with its Catholic faith and primarily European tradition. It also incorporated Serbia, which had emerged from the First World War as a victorious country. Having endured the Ottoman yoke for 500 years, Serbia resumed its orthodox faith and tradition in the middle of the 19th century. Within this country the memory lived on of the one-time powerful, medieval, Serbian state. And within this

country lived a minority of two million Albanians, with their Islamic faith, in Kosovo, which had the status of an autonomous province. Serbia itself also contained the autonomous province of Vojvodina, with its sizeable Hungarian minority and long Austro-Hungarian tradition. The country contained the Republic of Macedonia, with its orthodox faith and continual argument with the Greeks and Bulgarians over whether the Macedonians were a separate nation or not. And here, in Yugoslavia, was the conglomerate of Bosnia-Herzegovina. A mixture of different nationalities, faiths, traditions and histories. This Yugoslav state survived the turbulent first 20 years of its existence between the two world wars. Then in the Second World War there was the most horrific slaughter. The country was carved up between the Germans and our neighbours, many people died in the struggle against the occupation, but many more died in the internecine strife, particularly between the Serbs and Croats. Then with the victory over the Hitlerite coalition, the Partisan authorities took control, with Tito at their head. Following the initial years of Stalinism in Yugoslavia, culminating in the break with Stalin in 1948, totalitarian pressure from the regime was less in evidence, and over the years it diminished. Even so, the state remained a one-party, politically centralised system. For 45 years after the Second World War this common state existed without any great turbulence. Whenever there were any serious attempts at change within individual republics, for example in Slovenia and Croatia at the beginning of the 70's, the League of Communists successfully manoeuvred their apparatus to efficiently thwart such change. Behind the Party apparatus stood the police and the JNA (the Yugoslav National Army) as the guardians of the state and the constitutional order. All this held until Tito's death in 1980. With Tito gone, speculation started as to whether Yugoslavia could continue to exist. There was no longer any central authority. The independence of the republic leaderships was growing. The economic crisis was deepening. The political system had already been formally decentralised to some extent. The republics were gaining increasing real independence, although the central mechanisms continued to function. Tension between the different peoples was growing continually. In the second half of the 80's Serbian nationalism spread significantly, and the idea of a Greater Serbia started to gain currency. The Serbs started to develop the theory that in the Yugoslavia Tito created from the Second World War,

they had been passed over and exploited, and that it was time to review the relations between the republics and nations of Yugoslavia, in which they should be accorded greater power and influence. The response of the Slovenes and Croats was a tendency towards greater independence for the republics and resistance to Serbian dominance, which was often identified in the prospect of Serbian domination of the central bodies of the state. For this reason resistance to Serbian super-nationalism grew, and along with it resistance to the federation itself. In Kosovo the Albanian and Serbian nationalists had been clashing. The Serbs wanted to take back from the Albanians the degree of autonomy that they already had, while the Albanians wanted more. Tension was rising sharply. With Milošević coming to power, relations changed - not simply in Serbia proper, but also in Kosovo and Vojvodina, and even in Montenegro. Everywhere there were *mitingi* rallies, blitzkrieg attacks on the then quite moderate regime. The "people's time had come". Milošević skilfully exploited the populace, the mass meetings and the great national demagoguery to consolidate his power in four federal units. The rest of us felt increasingly threatened by this. The economy was going downhill, and with the country having already plunged into a debt crisis in the 70's it was now being bled dry. There were no funds for new investments, inflation was growing and dissatisfaction along with it. In the League of Communists of Yugoslavia and in the Leagues of Communists around the republics there was much talk of the need for reform, particularly economic. In the end this was just so much talk, so many endless congresses and gatherings, which resulted in the general public feeling fed up, dissatisfied and increasingly restive.

The question on everyone's mind was whether the federal state would survive or collapse, and would this lead to civil war. Since Tito's death this had also been debated abroad. Ten years had passed, and the state was still functioning – in some aspects even quite normally. Numerous state bodies, from the Army to the police and even our diplomatic service, were running smoothly. Based on Tito's long years of diplomacy, the country enjoyed a strong reputation, particularly in the Third World, as one of the champions of the Non-Aligned Movement. Now there emerged the fear that something terrible could happen, and there was noticeably more insecurity. At the same time, however, there

was a universal belief that nothing bad would actually happen. After all, we had been inculcated over the years with the terrors of the Second World War, and with our fundamental credo of brotherhood and unity. And all these different peoples and nationalities had lived side by side for decades, and in some way all of us, whether we felt ourselves to be Slovenes, Croats or Serbs, identified with Yugoslavia. At the beginning of 1989, when I was running for the Presidency, there was no individual movement or platform with any explicit orientation towards secession. The biggest problems were Albanian separatism and Serbian nationalism, these being in open conflict with each other. The Slovene political leadership supported the Kosovo Albanians in their struggle against the Serbian regime. For this reason the role of a Slovene President of the Presidency of the Socialist Federal Republic (SFR) of Yugoslavia would be rendered even more sensitive. In March 1989 there was a famous meeting in Cankarjev Dom, Ljubljana, in support of the Kosovo Albanians. This was taken by the Serbs as a deadly insult. It was then that the Federal Presidency introduced a state of emergency in Kosovo. Those months were laden with gloom and threat. The situation was now going rapidly from bad to worse, in contrast to the earlier years of simply living from hand to mouth and gradually rising dissatisfaction. All the same, when there was an opinion poll held just before the elections for the Federal Presidency, and the question was asked what the Slovenes most wanted and most expected from the Slovene member of the Presidency, the answer was quite a surprise: they wanted the relations between all the peoples of Yugoslavia to be properly put in order. So they did not want independence; the average Slovene feared such turbulent developments and wanted more than anything for things to calm down, or at least the prevention of any further confrontation which could bring unimaginable consequences. At that time the democracy movements had started to gain momentum in the countries of the Eastern bloc, although at the beginning of 1989 the East was still standing firm. The Soviet Union still existed, and all the communist regimes remained in power. In Yugoslavia, while all the conflict between the different national groups had been brought into the League of Communists, this body still functioned, and was the main pillar of authority, both within the republics and on the federal level. Such were the circumstances surrounding my presidential candidature.

So I would have to find some answers to all this; and not just on paper – real answers had to be found. I had thought about all this entirely freely, and without any of those preconceptions that were prevalent in Slovene and Yugoslav politics at that time. I was completely uninvolved in the political machinations, and was occupied exclusively with economic issues. Yet this in its own way was the weakness of my candidature, since for every little political question I had to think for a while before answering, while of course the other candidates could respond with an ease born of routine. On the other hand, this was my great advantage. I had no obvious political ambition, I did not represent any political orientation and for this reason my thinking and responses quite probably coincided with the thoughts, feelings and expectations of the average Slovene. At that time current policies had not made any very positive impression on the Slovenes. Neither had the political regime, the leading elite or the League of Communists. We wanted change. Above all we wanted greater economic efficiency. The dissatisfaction in Slovenia stemmed to a large degree from the feeling that the more developed Slovenia was being exploited by the south of Yugoslavia and that Slovenia was paying too much for the underdeveloped republics. There was a pronounced feeling that if Slovenia were in some other kind of grouping, without these impediments, it would be advancing with much more speed. The Slovenes were constantly comparing themselves with neighbouring Italy and Austria, and believed that they could easily achieve for themselves such standards and economic performance as those countries. And it was true that at that time the Slovene political leadership, with strong support from the media, was channelling its dissatisfaction towards Belgrade, and in this way buoying up its own popularity.

I was still able to answer economic questions most easily, and I had considered what I should do in the economy if I was really elected. Yugoslavia was then already suffering from hyperinflation. I entitled my policy outline "The Road to a Convertible Dinar". I set out a plan to make the dinar convertible in five years, which from the perspective of that time sounded extraordinarily bold. In 45 years Yugoslavia had never had a convertible currency. This was one of the things that had always aggravated the Slovenes. I was sworn to financial strength, to consolidation of the banking system and in particular to the separation or

removal of politics from the economy. I paid particular attention to this, especially when I was responding to the various questions I was asked during the election campaign. As a former banker, it always got on my nerves whenever I found that the politicians were really meddling too much in the economy. Particularly when they directed investments via the banking system. This had given rise to numerous ill-advised investments, selected through political and not economic criteria. I supported a market economy – in other words, the running of the economy along Western lines.

It was much more difficult to address the internal political situation. What should be done with relations in the federation, what position should we take on the crisis in Kosovo, and on Serbian nationalism? How could I reconcile being representative of Slovenia and at the same time President of the Yugoslav federation, with Slovenia at that time being in open confrontation with the federation? Here I placed myself on a platform of common sense. On the one hand I said that with a strong economic policy we could improve relations within the country; we could reduce dissatisfaction and along with it political tension. I said that irresponsible politicians were exploiting the poor economic situation to ignite tension between the different peoples. I said that I was committed to dialogue, to sorting out differences amicably, especially those relating to nationality. But I marked out for myself a clear boundary: I would make every effort to settle the ethnic differences in this country, and to reduce conflict, but there was a line across which I was not prepared to step at any price: Slovenia could in no way be threatened. This is what I set out as my guiding principle, and about which I would brook no discussion. Whenever I considered what to do if Slovenia was threatened, I never faced any dilemma. I would commit myself to Slovenia and do for it whatever might be necessary. From that point on I endeavoured to be above reproach in my dealings with others that touched on settling relations between the republics and seeking a way out of the conflicts and crisis that had arisen. In other words, a constructive approach.

I devoted considerable attention to the issue of the relationship between the Party and the state and to development of the political system. I stood for political pluralism, or rather the multiparty system. I stood for a clear distinction between state and Party bodies. Previously everything

had been mixed up, and in reality it was the Party bodies that made decisions, with people shuffling from state to Party functions and vice versa.

"I am committed to the greatest possible competition, both in the economy and in political life. This means that I am not in favour of the monopolistic and perennially unassailable, predetermined position of the Communist Party. For this reason I believe that the introduction of a market economy must also be accompanied by appropriate political democracy, which would be based on competition." (*Primorske novice*, 28 March 1989.)

I wanted to pay special attention to the protection of human rights and to the development of a state based on the rule of law. In the preceding decade, when I had travelled around the world a great deal, I kept up with foreign writing in papers and magazines, and the issue of protecting human rights intrigued me. I set this as the fundamental guideline of my whole approach.

In the area of foreign policy it was quite hard to deal with certain questions. Like most Slovenes, I felt closest to a European orientation. The idea was for Yugoslavia to participate in European integration, not simply the Council of Europe, but also the European Community. In numerous responses and interviews I gave special emphasis to this European orientation. But how were we to coordinate this with the role of Yugoslavia in the Non-Aligned Movement? And it was that very year that Yugoslavia was in line to become the presiding country of the movement. If I won the election, in three months I would be presiding over the summit conference of the non-aligned countries in Belgrade and would become leader of the movement. Well, the way ahead here seemed to be that we would honour what we had inherited from others and from the past. I would be entirely above reproach in my dealings with all the other members of the Non-Aligned Movement while I presided over the conference. However, integration into Europe would become our basic orientation, the orientation of Slovenia and Yugoslavia. One was the past, the other the future. In the Non-Aligned Movement we were solving more the problems of others, of the Third World, while we should see and resolve our own national - and more than anything economic - interests in European integration.

I started responding to questions much more concisely. In the end this proved to be an advantage, since the other candidates were long-winded and turgid, which was precisely what ordinary people would no longer tolerate. My individualism, and the fact that I was not already implicated in these matters by some past connection, clearly lent my candidature a freshness and a 'novelty value' which the others lacked. I arrived at answers through my own process of thought, and this meant that on many issues I responded in a very different way to the others. In my appearances I was truly a free agent, and I thought: well, I wasn't expecting to win, in fact quite the opposite, the whole thing seemed absolutely impossible. For me the thing was simply to behave as honourably as possible while I was still in the running. In this way I even allowed myself occasionally to give answers I found entertaining, and which were obviously different, too. For instance, in my second face to face TV debate, with the other two remaining candidates, the question was asked, what needs to be done in the economy? I replied "We should send all the politicians off to some congress for five years, and in the meantime we economists can put the economy back in order without being bothered." There were in fact a large number of Party and other congresses going on at that time. The Slovene political leadership was then starting to talk about democratisation. For this reason they envisaged – and the Socialist Alliance was supposed to be implementing this too – that for the first time the election for the member of the Presidency of Yugoslavia would be a general election with several candidates. A first for post-war Yugoslavia; and a first for "socialist" Europe. It was stated that the candidates should have approximately the same opportunities, so three TV broadcasts were scheduled in advance, and the other media also made some effort to give time and space to all the candidates. The whole thing was quite new, although it was still not possible to deny the impression that in spite of this planned democratic system, no one really expected the "true" political candidate (from the Party), or at least one of the two, to lose this election contest. The first TV broadcast was quite early on, in January, with five candidates taking part, and not just the head of the Slovene government, Dušan Šinigoj. I turned up at this show with rather mixed feelings. I already had a little bit of experience in TV appearances, but really only a



little. In this first show I was very much in the background the whole time. The main candidate, Marko Bulc, was the most talkative, although the others also tried hard to get their oar in. I managed somehow to come across as an observer of these goings-on, only responding to the occasional question that was put to me directly. However, judging from the subsequent commentaries, this seemed to be the best approach for that generally confused broadcast. Following the show the counting of votes continued at the local primaries, and a clear pecking order was emerging, with Bulc at the top and myself second. One by one three other candidates dropped out. There were then just three of us, and we three appeared in the second TV broadcast. This one was better prepared, with the questions being more evenly distributed to the three of us. After these shows came the primary for the entire republic, which was intended to accumulate the voting from the previous local primaries from around Slovenia, and on this basis determine the final two candidates who would stand in the general election of 2 April. I thought very seriously about dropping out. Right up until the final day, the day when the main primary was scheduled, and even just before the start of the meeting, I wondered whether to pull out or not. Something held me back from pulling out; after all, it is disagreeable to drop out of things, and I had a feeling that I might not forgive myself later for giving up. I would always be asking myself: what would have happened if I hadn't dropped out? It was better to give it a go, and just see what came of it. Bulc was still the clear favourite, although even I started to get an inkling that I might actually win. At the main primary the Party stalking horse, Stanič, was dropped, leaving myself and Bulc, and now began the final round before the general election. There were more and more media appearances - a series of newspaper interviews, radio broadcasts and then, two days before the elections, the final TV show. Bulc still had a commanding lead, although in the opinion polls the gap was starting to close. In the TV broadcast, the anchorman tried right at the start to challenge me with several questions, apparently in an attempt to find my weak points. As usual, however, this had the entirely opposite effect on me. At the end of the show, following a stormy exchange of opinions, I responded to the anchorman's invitation to briefly sum up my message to the voters with the following: "I shall fight for democracy and a market economy. I shall endeavour to maintain

the most normal possible relations within the country, but I shall always defend Slovene sovereignty." The opposing candidate offered a rather Lukewarm response to the same invitation, and it seemed to me that he knew he was losing.