

PREPARATIONS

The inauguration ceremony in Belgrade, scheduled for 15 May 1989, was just over a month away, and I tried to use this time to prepare myself for office. It was really very strange. How should I prepare myself to perform the function of head of state in one month? I was given an office in the Slovene Presidency, and I started to work there. Nobody gave me any particular help in my work, but then it was hard to advise me how to be head of state, since there was nobody around who had done the job. I had particular problems assembling the bureau of staff I was supposed to have in Belgrade. I found out that Bulc, my main rival for office, already had a bureau ready for Belgrade – but given the way things were done at that time, this was quite normal. It had never happened before that a candidate supported by the League of Communists had not been elected. And I had never had to deal with such matters before. In the election campaign I stood alone, and I simply considered the questions that were put to me. I consulted with my colleagues and friends on an entirely amateur basis. So whom should I now take with me to Belgrade? Earlier it had not even occurred to me that I would need anybody else.

The Secretary-General of the Yugoslav Presidency, Dr Ljubiša Korač, travelled up from Belgrade. He wanted to meet me. He was clearly intrigued to know who I was, what I was and what would happen now with us presiding over the country. He impressed upon me most the need for me to have a bureau chief, and to assemble my team. There was already a permanent bureau for the President of the Yugoslav Presidency in Belgrade, but these were more technical and routine personnel, handling protocol, diplomatic affairs, the armed forces and the information office. From the Slovene leadership I was offered some staff, chiefly older, experienced diplomats, but I did not know them. How was I supposed to take on a bureau chief whom I did not even know? This would have to be a person I could trust implicitly. And since I had no particularly close or warm relations within the existing political structure in Slovenia, I felt no great enthusiasm for the candidates I was offered. The thought occurred to me that these were probably people through whom attempts would be made to control my work or influence it. After some hard thinking I decided to take my then colleague, Silva Bauman-Čenčič, whom I persuaded to accept the job of chief of bureau. Silva had a wide range of experience, and in the previous two years we had worked together in the Yugoslav federal parliament. However, she had just resigned her seat in parliament over the events in Kosovo. She resigned following the session of the federal parliament that was intended to confirm the emergency measures that the Yugoslav Presidency had implemented in Kosovo. She was the only one who had protested against this by resigning. At that time I was no longer working in the federal parliament, since my final activities there had already been concluded before the elections. It was not an easy job to persuade Silva to accept the post and come with me to Belgrade. We made an agreement for one year, the duration of my leadership of the Presidency. Silva had resigned her membership of the federal parliament without consulting the Slovene leadership. This managed to arouse some displeasure. I knew her and could trust her; if she accepted the job, she would not be working for anyone else, I could depend on that. I selected two other members of my bureau on similar criteria. I already knew Marjan Kramar and Janez Sirše from my home Zasavje region. I was with Sirše at grammar school in Trbovlje and then at university, although we then had no contact for a long time. He was an economist and at that

time it was economic issues that were uppermost in my mind. This might not have been the best plan, since I was already very well versed in economics, and perhaps I could have used someone with other skills. The other member of the bureau, Marjan Kramar, was a younger economist with whom I had worked at the bank in Trbovlje. With him I was certain that he had no hidden loyalties, and that he was explicitly apolitical. Silva Bauman-Čenčič went with me to Belgrade, while the other two were mostly in Ljubljana and maintained the connection between Ljubljana and the bureau in Belgrade.

Before taking office I went to Belgrade twice. I met the then President of the Presidency, Raif Dizdarević, and Stane Dolanc, the Slovene member of the Presidency whom I was due to replace. I talked to Dizdarević for some three hours, although little of any particular use came of this. I met him in his office, which was due to be mine in two weeks. It was an enormous office, the biggest I had ever seen. It gave me some very strange feelings. This was where I was supposed to come and work. This was the office of the former Presidents of the Presidency, including Tito. Dizdarević was very proper and pleasant, although to some extent reserved. In the end he did not tell me anything new or surprising. He gave me no special words of wisdom that an outgoing President might give to the incoming one. He talked to me a lot about the Non-Aligned Conference, and about how I should have a meeting with the bureau for the conference, which as President of the Presidency I should head before the conference started. This did not seem particularly important to me. I asked him about European integration, on the activities to date of the Presidency, and on coming closer to Europe. He spoke about some of his meetings, although it was clear that this was not a subject of any great interest to him. I remember that he particularly impressed upon me something that I should, on behalf of the outgoing Presidency, see through in the new Presidency. This was the promotion of Col-General Veljko Kadijević, who was federal defence minister, to the title of General of the Armed Forces, which was the highest possible rank. I met Dolanc then for the first time, although he too was from my home region, from the nearby town of Hrastnik. He often came back to his home region, but these local politicians kept very much to themselves, and I was never invited to meet him. Dolanc told me a great deal about life in Belgrade, practical things about how I should organise my stay

there, but he failed to hand me down any kind of special political inheritance as his successor. It was clear that he had very good relations with Kučan, and that he was in constant touch with him. Judging from our conversation, Dolanc expected me to do the same. This seemed excessive to me, since Kučan was at that time president of the Slovene communists, and there was no direct formal link between the member of the Presidency and the head of the Party in Slovenia. But such was the practice at the time. Dolanc did, however, confide to me something special. He told me that even during Tito's time the Yugoslav National Army wanted to develop nuclear weapons. He told me that for a long time they had been pursuing some project to develop nuclear mortar rounds. However, at the beginning of the eighties the Presidency halted the project. Reading between the lines, I could not be altogether certain that the Army had truly stopped the project. But he did say that at the very highest level the Slovene leadership was acquainted with this project. Later I tried to probe here and there, but I could never gain any clear indications about the project. Dolanc also spoke to me about Ante Marković, whom the Presidency had earlier proposed as the new federal prime minister. He was believed to have the makings of a very capable federal prime minister, although he was so full of himself that he managed to get on everyone's nerves. I also received an invitation to attend, together with the other new members of the Presidency and the outgoing members, a meeting of the high command of the armed forces. Clearly the Army wanted to get to know the new members of the Presidency. I went to the meeting in Belgrade with very unsettled feelings, since this was precisely the area of activity and the very structure with which I was least familiar. This was when I met the generals, having my first encounter with Veljko Kadijević, Stevan Mirković, Blagoje Adžić and others. I also met the other members of the Presidency, including most of the outgoing ones as well as the newly elected members. I was quite taciturn; this was more an occasion for us to observe each other. Ante Marković was also there, and as usual, he was very voluble. I remember at lunch sitting at the same table as him and General Kadijević. We ate army-issue bean stew. Kadijević then actually surprised me with some of his remarks, which as far as the economy was concerned, were more liberal than I had expected. The long-awaited 15 May 1989, the day I was due to become President of

the Presidency of Yugoslavia, drew close. I spent my final day before that at home in Izlake. I played tennis, and met my friends and relatives. I had the feeling that it was the last day of this kind of life, and that I was now entering into something completely unknown, new, and entirely open. I worked on my opening speech for the joint session of the new and old Presidencies, which was scheduled for 12 o'clock on that fateful Monday. Prior to that there was due to be a special session and confirmation in the Yugoslav federal parliament in Belgrade. For the first time I started racking my brains about what kind of speech I should write – and in what language. In Slovenia the issue of the Slovene language had aroused considerable passion, and the federal representatives from Slovenia had been frequently criticised at home for speaking in Belgrade in Serbo-Croat. I decided that my opening speech, which would be broadcast on all the TV stations in Yugoslavia, would be in Slovene. On the Monday morning I flew to Belgrade in a special plane, along with several Slovene officials who were travelling to attend the federal parliament session. Normally a plane takes just under an hour to get to Belgrade, but this was a propeller-driven aircraft, and took an hour and a half. No one had told me earlier. I still do not know today whether this was just coincidence or done deliberately. The fact was, that I arrived late at the federal parliament, and without any entourage, since I was not yet formally the head of state. I was accompanied only by my chief of bureau, Silva Bauman. So at the very last moment, in fact already a few minutes late, I walked directly into the solemnities. After all my mixed feelings about the affair, I ended up being late for my own presidential career. This was probably just one of the many little things sent to undermine me.

We completed the solemnities in the federal parliament, and then immediately went off to the joint session of both Presidencies. I was very tense, but I held up. My speech in Slovene was broadcast without comment - at least nothing was said to me. In content, my speech drew from my earlier policy programme and from the speech when I was elected. The whole thing was quite cool. The old and the new Presidencies offered each other a rather stiff greeting, and then we had a joint lunch in the White Mansion in Dedinje. This is a fine house, very tastefully furnished, which the Presidency used for protocol events such as state receptions. The lunch was a real strain for me, and I

could hardly wait for it to finish. At the end I had to offer a toast together with outgoing President Dizdarević. Here I learned about what was for me quite an unpleasant duty: at the end of official lunches or dinners a toast is given, often turning into a lengthy speech. But finally this, too, came to an end, and I had become President of the Presidency of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

From my conversations with former members of the Presidency, I was often to recall the words of Lazar Mojsov: "When I became President, I would come into that enormous office and see that chair, and I always thought that it was an electric chair."