

THE WARM-UP

The first month was fairly quiet, with nothing very special going on. I tried to get to know people – members of the Presidency and others with whom I would have to keep in contact. General Veljko Kadijević, the defence minister, always behaved with absolute propriety but he was very reserved. I tried on many occasions to talk to him but we never managed to overcome the barrier of certain things that were more or less tacitly understood. General Graćanin, the interior minister, was always very amiable, but he was rather basic in his style of communicating, and in discussions with him I never learned anything surprising. Foreign minister Budimir Lončar spoke a great deal about non-alignment, and about the Non-Aligned Conference, but after these talks I was never any the wiser as to what my role should be as chairman of the Non-Aligned Conference. He showed no great enthusiasm for a European foreign-policy line. These three ministers usually attended sessions of the Presidency. I soon began to recognise one of the more unpleasant aspects of the job: accepting credentials and receiving ambassadors. This involved formal ceremonies with prepared speeches. The ceremonies were supposed to

be very solemn affairs, and I often wondered why there was no one here who actually enjoyed them. I sometimes had five or six ceremonies a day, which was a real struggle. My mind kept wandering to other, more substantial, issues.

The first session of the Presidency was held on 18 May 1989. We discussed the work we should carry out. The others treated this as a mere formality, but I immediately went onto the offensive. I demanded that the subjects of participation in European integration and protection of human rights be made top priority in the workings of the Presidency. The Serbian member of the Presidency, Borisav Jović, was initially opposed, as was Dragutin Zelenović, the representative of Vojvodina. Jović said this would be an "inappropriate" area of debate for the Presidency. Nevertheless, I persisted and my proposals were accepted. But this was just the warm-up. At the first session I raised the issue of lifting the emergency measures that were in place in Kosovo, as I had said I would. At the following session of the Presidency, on 24 May 1989, the first counter-attack came. Jović denounced my interview for the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, an interview I had given before my inauguration but which was published to coincide with the new Presidency being proclaimed. Jović questioned whether as members of the Presidency we should be able to state our own personal position in public or whether we should present only the coordinated position of the Presidency. He was immediately supported by Zelenović and Nenad Bućin, the representative of Montenegro, while I was given backing from Stipe Šušteršič, the Croatian representative. It was quite blatantly an attempt to constrain or to "discipline" the President of the Presidency, and it all ended with no decisions being made. But the contours of our relationship had been made that much clearer. Why was the *Spiegel* interview such a problem? The questions were very provocative. My replies were in line with the election promises I had made but with a certain degree of diplomatic restraint. The orientation towards a market economy and democracy was clear, as was the initiative for the lifting of the state of emergency in Kosovo; I called for reason and dialogue, for tolerance. What was it exactly that had piqued Jović and his cohorts? Jović himself was not specific. It seems my ideas made them uncomfortable. There was nothing extreme about them. They were highly consistent and the Serbs found it difficult to

raise any justifiable objection; particularly from a position of violent, emotive, historical nationalism.

Excerpts from the interview for *Der Spiegel*, 22 May 1989:

"Yugoslavia can only exist as a stable country in a system in which different solutions are recognised and in which there exists the possibility that after a certain time we can decide again whether the solutions are still acceptable to all."

And further on:

"As an independent nation Slovenia believes that it must always have the right of self-determination and that it did not lose this right by joining a federation, as some have argued. I am convinced that the majority of Slovenes wish to be part of a Yugoslav state, but on condition that it is a democratic and modern state with a successful economy - not just any kind of state."

At the 24 May session of the Presidency we held a thorough debate on the issue of the emergency measures in Kosovo. Some of the measures were lifted; I called for the remaining measures to be evaluated and a further easing to be implemented. I stressed the need for the workings of the state bodies to be beyond reproach. I also highlighted the question of "isolation" (internment of Albanian political suspects) and demanded its abolition. I tried to conduct it all in the most constructive manner, with reasoned argument. At this session the question of public statements was raised. Jović did not want them to refer to the points I had raised. On this and many other subsequent occasions the public statements were a compromise, the result of a balance of powers. Sometimes the Presidency would spend longer coordinating the public statement than it would on the debate itself.

I invited Ante Marković to represent the federal government in a session at which I called a debate on the economic programme. In a systematic way I pushed for all my ideas and encouraged the Presidency to debate and pass resolutions.