

AUTUMN MANOEUVRES

The media war and the war between the political elites in Yugoslavia continued. In October the outcry over the Slovene amendments calmed down somewhat. I continued to work for a gradual lifting of the existing emergency measures in Kosovo and the release of political prisoners. In the Presidency we were coming close to a four-four split on this issue, and I wanted to secure the five votes necessary for a majority, since that was the only way of achieving some kind of resolution from the Presidency. Publicly I avoided expressing opinions that would favour one or other of the political elites in Yugoslavia. I usually spoke of common sense, a relaxation of tensions, constructive dialogue, respect of individual human rights, dialogue between the Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, European integration and the need to bring down inflation. The effort to secure the release of the remaining political prisoners in Yugoslavia, mainly Albanians, was a kind of federal campaign, an ongoing concern over an extended period, together with the initiative to abolish Articles 113 and 133 of the Yugoslav penal code. In October I discussed this with Prince Schwarzenberg, the president of the Helsinki Confederation for the Protection of Human Rights, who had

turned to me for assistance in overcoming the obstacles preventing a delegation of his from visiting Kosovo. I obliged. I received Prince Schwarzenberg on 27 October, despite the opposition of political advisers and the foreign minister. It was a rather defiant act, since the Helsinki Confederation was severely critical of the violation of human rights in Kosovo. The Serbian regime in particular was very uncomfortable about it. Prince Schwarzenberg was rather surprised, since I fully supported his position and assisted him in his struggle with the Yugoslav diplomatic and police authorities so that his delegation could do its work. He thanked me for lifting the "isolations" in Kosovo. We went through it all again in March 1990 when Prince Schwarzenberg visited Yugoslavia for a second time. On that occasion I received him in the beautiful setting of Beli Dvor in Dedinje. As we were discussing the abuse of human rights I told him half-jokingly that I would support him in everything, if he promised to defend me and speak up for me in return if I were turfed out of office as Federal President and needed protection of my own rights. He understood what I meant. In the circumstances it was hard to believe in view of my official position, but altogether possible given the fraught situation in the country and the great uncertainty about the future.

In October I also came under intense pressure from Lončar and the foreign ministry. They wanted me to receive Ceausescu, then still President of Romania. Until then this had been a traditional annual meeting, first with Tito, then with the Presidents of the Yugoslav Presidency. On this occasion it was Yugoslavia's turn, so it was up to me to invite the Romanian President. However, I did not want to. I was stubborn and nothing was going to persuade me. The Romanians and our people were willing to accept any arrangement, a meeting in Belgrade, on the border or in Bucharest. I said no to everything. As far as the Yugoslav diplomatic establishment was concerned this was unthinkable, since the meeting, like non-alignment, was a constant of Yugoslav policy. But I felt a strong dislike towards Ceausescu. All the things I had heard and read about him in the previous years had accumulated within me to the extent that I was simply not prepared to compromise even slightly. Through party channels the Romanians had even mooted some kind of ideological alliance against democratic reform in Eastern Europe. Interestingly, when the revolution took place in Romania and Ceausescu was deposed and

shot, Lončar asked me in astonishment how I could have known in advance and remarked how right I had been not to meet him. In September and October the question of Romanian refugees also arose. Some crossed the border into Yugoslavia, but the police sent most of them back. This seems to have been some kind of concession to the Romanian regime. I turned my attention to this issue, and with some success; we passed a resolution to improve material conditions in the refugee camps and for the Yugoslav authorities to stop sending refugees back to Romania.

On 3 November Miklos Nemeth, the Hungarian prime minister, arrived on a visit. Following very positive contact with foreign minister Horn (who attended the Non-Aligned Conference as an observer), this represented a continuation of our very close relations with the Hungarians. We were discussing the establishment of four-way cooperation between Yugoslavia, Hungary, Italy and Austria. Two western "capitalist" countries would assist two prospective countries in transition. This linkage has since been joined by other countries in transition and operates today as the Central European Initiative. Nemeth and I compared our experiences of democratic reform and the introduction of a market economy. At that time the Hungarians were starting to take big strides. We shared very similar views, although I was in a rather more bitter frame of mind than usual. The day before at a session of the Presidency we had again clashed over the reaction of Jović and the Council for the Protection of the Constitutional Order. Nevertheless I still spoke with optimism of the introduction of political pluralism. At the same time I warned that in Yugoslavia, unlike Hungary, there could be complications because of ethnic tensions and rising nationalism.

On 8 November the Yugoslav Presidency met in session together with the presidents of all the republics and provinces. I chaired the session, at which we discussed foreign relations. These were extremely strained. Various views and stances were expressed in the debate. I tried to persuade and to pacify. I called for reason. I myself was embarking on a fresh attempt, a fresh round of talks, negotiations and activities aimed at easing the situation and steering it towards dialogue and a democratic search for a way out of the stalemate that Yugoslavia found itself in. To this end, I visited Serbia on 9 November, the day after the Presidency

session. I first met Milošević, then the entire Serbian leadership, with whom I had discussions on all the thorny issues concerning the federation and Serbia itself. The main topics were naturally the ethnic tensions, Kosovo, curbing inflation, amnesty, the political prisoners and the new Constitution. I continued to try to get Serbia and the Serbian leadership to agree to democratic dialogue, not only in Kosovo but in Yugoslavia generally. The new Constitution was to redefine relations between the republics and provinces and to determine the nature of the federation or confederation. Of course, I could only coax and offer constructive words. That was my sole weapon. I could not shout them down, either in the Presidency or in public. As an individual I had no instruments that I could use in confronting them. The media were not under my control, whereas the Serbian leadership controlled practically all the important media in Serbia. Yet I felt duty-bound to prevent what was in some sense already in the air, namely the possibility of a further escalation of tensions and civil war. After an official discussion at the Serbian Presidency I visited Borovo and Majdanpek - large copper and gold mines respectively. I spoke to the local managers, gave a press conference and in the evening returned to Belgrade for an official dinner with the entire Serbian leadership. The talks were on the whole civil. I did not delude myself that they had abandoned their designs on Kosovo. The Greater Serbia idea was taking an increasingly firm hold, although in my discussions with them I myself offered rational arguments and alternative solutions. Perhaps it was naive to expect that they might be talked round. They were probably entertaining a number of additional options at that time. One of them was doubtless to keep playing the game and stay on civil terms with me in view of the fact that it was still not fully clear what would happen in the future, what role the Yugoslav Presidency would have and what role I myself might play in particular critical situations. We had never fallen out so violently that we could no longer communicate in the normal way. We had never descended into hatred, even though we had clashed frequently at Presidency sessions and on other occasions, even though they had waged a media campaign and even staged rallies against me. Yet a basic, even respectful relationship had always existed between us. It was the same with the generals. Right until the end, until the collapse of Yugoslavia, when this relationship made possible the necessary communication that led to

certain events of crucial significance for Slovenia. In any event, the Serbs under the leadership of Milošević were very capable politicians and strong opponents.

On 14 and 15 October I visited Sarajevo in Bosnia, where I met the entire leadership of Bosnia-Herzegovina and discussed the same subjects with them. In Bosnia I encountered fear of what might happen. They were working very hard to quell the ethnic antagonisms. They sensed that Bosnia would draw the shortest straw in the event of Yugoslavia's collapse. With hindsight I can say that the mood on that occasion, the very sincere efforts by the Sarajevans to greet and support me, suggested that they saw in me one of the last chances, one of the last hopes, for a halt to the crisis and the slide towards disintegration and war. This attitude was perceptible everywhere, at a dinner with the Bosnian leadership and on a tour of parts of Sarajevo, including a mosque, an Orthodox church and a Catholic church, the old part of Sarajevo and coffee-houses where I met well-known Bosnian artists. I was accompanied by Bogić Bogićević, the Bosnian representative in the Presidency, who personified all these fears and also hopes in his attitude towards me. On that occasion he told me that Sarajevo was so ethnically mixed that if shooting broke out in Bosnia-Herzegovina, neighbours in the city would fire at each other from one door to the next. He felt genuine fear, a grim foreboding of what was to come. I remember that Bogićević and I also visited a police station at the edge of the city where dogs were trained. Bogićević is a great dog-lover and left his dog there when he went to Belgrade. I often thought of those parts of Sarajevo later when the shooting was in progress there. On the evening of 15 November I flew in a special plane from Sarajevo to Zagreb. I was received at Zagreb airport by the President of the Croatian Presidency, Ivo Latin, by the Army command, a whole row of generals and a guard of honour. The following day I was due to attend military manoeuvres somewhere near Bjelovar. This was the first and last time that I took part in any kind of military exercise. As President of the Presidency I was the commander-in-chief of the JNA. We had agreed in the Presidency that each member would attend one exercise that year. When I had reviewed the guard of honour, we went off to the presidential palace, where there was the official residence for guests. I met President Latin for dinner. Later in the evening I went for a swim in

a nearby pool. When I got back to the palace, a military uniform had been brought for me; this was a special presidential uniform with the insignia of the commander-in-chief. This was the first and last time in my life that I wore a uniform. As President of the Presidency I had my own adjutant, a colonel whom in fact I never needed. On the various trips and protocol occasions I did not normally bring him along. My adjutant showed me the uniform and how to salute, or rather return a salute. Since I was the highest ranking officer - the commander-in-chief - all the others had to report to me, including defence minister General Kadijević. And with every report I was naturally obliged to return their salute. So before my departure I managed to complete a crash course in military protocol. The following morning I set off extremely early, in my uniform, to the command of the military region in Zagreb, which also covered Slovenia. I was awaited there by all the generals, with Kadijević at their head. Col-General Koljšek, the commander of this region, was also in attendance. First we sat down and they explained to me the plan of the exercise. I tried throughout to present a serious countenance, nodding meaningfully, although I felt my skin crawling, and for the entire day I was simply waiting for this extravaganza to be over. From Zagreb we were taken by helicopter to the location of the exercise. An Army force was encamped in some forest. I was flanked by Croatian President Latin, some other representatives of the local political leadership, a host of generals and a mass of uniforms. I continued to maintain my composure and keep a look out for when I had to salute or return a salute. In some tent they briefed me once again on the plans. Then Kadijević and I were taken in a jeep to the location of the exercise. It was dreadfully cold for the time of year, with the temperature below freezing and an icy wind blowing. We spent the whole day in the jeep traipsing from one place to another. In the meantime, another big tent was set up, in which I sat with the generals and watched the tanks and planes through binoculars. There were reports coming in the whole time. The generals appeared very content with the exercise, although they made no special impression on me, nor did they enlighten me in any particular way. Throughout the exercise I struggled to get through the day and maintain the impression of a commander-in-chief, without making any protocol gaffes. According to protocol one of my duties was to go up to a tank, greet the soldiers and ask them how they were doing, all of which was filmed for Army TV.

This was then broadcast for the Army and published in their own magazines. When the whole thing finally came to an end in the evening, and the helicopters took us back to Zagreb, I was really pleased. And the most interesting bit of all was flying at night in a helicopter. From Zagreb I returned late in the evening to Ljubljana. Behind me was a whole series of arduous days, from the expanded session of the Yugoslav Presidency to the tour of Serbia and Sarajevo, then Zagreb and the manoeuvres. But a new crisis was already looming. We were approaching 1 December, the date set for the so-called Meeting of Truth in Ljubljana.