

TRIP TO SPAIN AND PORTUGAL

El Independiente, Madrid 22 April 1990:

"President Drnovšek, last year you were elected from among three candidates as the representative of Slovenia in the Federal Yugoslav Presidency. Now you are the head of this collective body and President of Yugoslavia. In performing your duties at home and abroad, have you been helped by your democratic legitimacy, given that you are the first head of state from among the communist countries to have been elected absolutely freely?"

Dr Janez Drnovšek: "Certainly this democratic legitimacy has been very important for me in performing the duties of President. During my term in office I have been committed to the fulfilment of the basic goals of my original policies, above all to resolving the economic crisis as well as the political crisis in my country. During my term in office we have halted inflation and announced the convertibility of the dinar, and we are also introducing a multiparty system with free parliamentary elections. A particularly important point for me is increasing the protection of human rights, and in this connection I have lodged a special appeal with the

Yugoslav parliament that criminal legislation be updated. At the same time I am committed to a democratic solution to the ethnic dispute in Kosovo, in the certainty that it is only through constructive dialogue that we can establish mutual trust between nations and in this way guarantee co-existence in Kosovo."

After all the non-aligned foreign policy activity, it was now time to bring back some balance to foreign affairs. So I went on a visit to Spain and Portugal. The working visit to Spain started on 20 April 1990. This was a very pleasant trip, with interesting talks. First I met the Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez. We had quite a long conversation in Spanish, as I had with all the people I met subsequently. The Spanish politicians could not get over my speaking in Spanish, and I think it was really worth something, because the Spanish ascribe a great deal to their nationality and their language. The story of my Spanish is in fact quite intriguing, since I learnt it as a hobby. I started learning it when I was already in my thirties, just from records and a book at home. One summer I put together enough of my savings, took a month's leave and went off to Spain, to the ancient University of Salamanca. I attended an intensive summer course in Spanish, and at the end I took an exam in active knowledge of Spanish. At that time and later I often asked myself, as I kept up and even extended my knowledge of Spanish through reading books and magazines, what good this Spanish would do me, since there was not much I could do with it in Yugoslavia. But now, in these presidential duties, it was very useful – in my talks with Latin American presidents, especially in meetings of the UN General Assembly, at the Non-Aligned Conference and now in Spain. Following my talks with Gonzalez in the Moncloe Palace in Madrid, we went together to Zarzuela, the court of Spanish King Juan Carlos, who awaited us in front of the Palace with his wife, Queen Sophia. Firstly the four of us conversed for a time in the drawing room, of course in Spanish. In the afternoon we had a joint lunch in the royal palace. The conversation was pleasant and informal, and the King and Queen were both extremely agreeable companions. Over coffee, a large youth burst into the room, and the King introduced him to me as the crown prince, whom I read about a great deal subsequently in the court and social pages, attending various protocol events in Spain and elsewhere. This was all very charming, and just like a visit to any normal family, when

you are talking to the parents and in rushes the lad of the house, who is introduced and then left to rush off to whatever he is doing. The people I met in Spain expressed great support and understanding for my policies. I spent quite a lot of time with foreign minister Ordóñez. In addition to the official meetings, together we took in some of the Madrid night-life and various nightspots, and even got to see some flamenco dancing. He was a likeable, urbane and very popular man and I was saddened when he died two years later of cancer. In Madrid I was staying in the august and highly luxurious Hotel Ritz Carlton. It stands beside the Prado museum and the Retiro park. These were all places that I had read about in the text books when I was learning Spanish. If someone had said then, seven or eight years ago, that I would end up using my Spanish in this way, I really would not have believed them. I had an intriguing meeting in my suite at the Ritz Carlton with one of the leaders of the Albanian opposition in Kosovo, Vetoj Suroj. When I gave a press conference, Suroj was there, too, among the journalists. He asked my bureau chief for a personal meeting with me. I agreed and we met alone. He told me about the situation in Kosovo, and about the alternative political forces there. Later I wondered what the Serbs or the federal media, plus Jović and all the others, would have done if they had found out about this secret meeting. They would probably have branded it high treason. The meeting was perfectly normal, and constructive. Vetoj Suroj was one of those who believed in dialogue, or rather who demanded an equal measure of dialogue for the Albanians, and a democratic system in Kosovo. All this concurred with my own picture of things.

From Spain I travelled on to Portugal. When our plane crossed into Portuguese airspace, four Portuguese fighters joined us. On either side two jets accompanied us, so close that we could clearly distinguish the faces of the pilots. They accompanied us to our touchdown in Lisbon. This was just the opening scene of the Portuguese protocol, which was extremely polished and splendid. At the airport we were awaited by a huge throng of people, by President Mario Soares, journalists and politicians. They accommodated me in a beautiful period mansion on the outskirts of Lisbon. Of all the protocol ceremonies I witnessed in those two days, there were none as fine as I saw here. Every time I came to this mansion, I reviewed a special guard of honour. The same procedure was

followed on my departures. Wherever I went, I reviewed a guard of honour, listened to national anthems and participated in the entire range of presidential ceremonies. I was accompanied at all times by a large number of motorcycle outriders. In the city itself there was a series of solemnities, one particularly beautiful moment being the central ceremony when I laid a wreath at the grave of Portuguese poet Luis de Camoes in front of the Jeronimes palace. I was accompanied by a large number of horsemen, and more guards of honour. Then followed the granting of honorary citizenship of Lisbon in the City Hall. I met all the eminent politicians of Portugal, including, for the first time, the Portuguese Prime Minister Cavaco Silva. We have maintained excellent relations to this day. I remember the meeting with the president of the Portuguese communist party – it was he who wanted the meeting. In contrast to the others, who strongly supported me whenever I spoke of introducing the market system in Yugoslavia, of democratisation and participation in European integration, he was very reserved and seemed to be trying to caution me against these processes. The Portuguese president gave a grand official dinner in my honour. The dinner was in a fine palace, where President Soares and I received almost all the eminent and distinguished figures in Portugal. It was attended by some two hundred people, with four former presidents in attendance, along with all the representatives of the government. The introductions alone took an age, with the dinner itself starting at eight and ending at midnight.

The thing that was so arduous about such events, and which made me so nervous, was reading the toasts at the end. At midnight, when we had finished dessert, microphones were brought into the hall, cameramen suddenly appeared and President Soares and I had to give the toasts. These were usually long, written salutations, virtually speeches, which set out our policy towards the host country and towards major international issues. Both of us spoke for twenty minutes, and that after midnight, when I had already had a terribly long day with a whole range of events, talks and protocol ceremonies. To make matters worse, the Belgrade protocol service had drafted the speech in Serbo-Croat, and in a style that was very stodgy, official and in every way impossible for me. So I did myself a favour during the long toast in Lisbon, and held before me the Serbo-Croat text, which I translated sentence by sentence into

Slovene, at the same time correcting it. In this way I gave the toast in Slovene, to the surprise and shock of all my entourage – except for my bureau chief – since they were all Serbo-Croat speakers. The Portuguese did not quite know what was going on, but later I explained it to President Soares.

President Soares and I also exchanged the highest distinctions. Along with the highest Portuguese decoration, I received six bottles of port from the year of my birth. This is a tradition on state visits to Portugal. It seemed a pity that I was not a bit older. In the evening I returned again to my mansion, which looked like it was straight out of some medieval tale. In the morning, when I went running around the mansion, behind every tree there was a policeman with a dog. It seemed that jogging was a dangerous business. In fact security on all the more important visits was truly extraordinary. I thought about how people really do not know the half of it; everyone talks about these enjoyable trips and visits, but they do not know how such visits are arranged, how much excruciating protocol there is, how there is never any opportunity for privacy or for some experience outside the prearranged protocol. When I took up an invitation one evening to visit a typical Lisbon hostelry after midnight and hear some of the local *fado* music, after everything that I had gone through that day, I nearly fell asleep. But in spite of all this, the trips to Spain and Portugal were both interesting and pleasant.

In both Spain and Portugal I talked to the people I met about how the only possible solution for Yugoslavia was to join the European integration. Serbian nationalism was then on the march, and in response other forms of nationalism had been aroused. As the end of my term in office approached, it seemed to me that we were at a kind of crossroads. Would this train of events continue and lead to the break-up of the country, with the possibility of civil war, or would we together, at the last moment, halt this process and find a reasonable solution, prevent bloodshed and adopt such a system as would provide for the peaceful existence of all nations, without threat to each other? I saw Europe as the way out of this, and this was my reply at the time to European leaders when I was asked what would happen in Yugoslavia – would the country fall apart or not? If we pursued our path to European integration, democracy and a market economy, then we might possibly prevent an

uncontrolled collapse. If not, the path was entirely unclear, and could lead to catastrophe.

I adopted a similar tone in the interviews I gave for the Spanish and Portuguese papers and TV. I made clear my European goals: membership of the Council of Europe by the end of the year, immediate associate membership of the European Community and later full membership.

ELECTIONS AND THE JNA

"The armed forces of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia have the task of defending the constitutional order of the state and I can inform you that they are able and prepared to carry out that task. In performing this constitutional role, the armed forces cannot and will not allow themselves to be outmanoeuvred in any way." (Veljko Kadijević, defence minister, at a session of the Yugoslav Presidency, 3 April 1990.)

The first multiparty elections in Slovenia and Croatia were called in April 1990. In Slovenia the newly-formed parties, including the reformed League of Communists, were making intensive preparations. A pre-election battle, an election campaign, was under way. I was in Belgrade ensuring that the elections would indeed go ahead and that there would be no last-minute countermeasure, no repression, the old system preserving itself; it was not entirely out of the question. It has to be remembered that in the other republics at that time they were not yet prepared for a multiparty system. The party elites were still in power. The JNA in particular remained a bastion of dogmatic socialism, of Titoism.

Not much had changed in the JNA over the last few years. They were still teaching the traditional values of AVNOJ Yugoslavia, worker self-management, self-managing socialism, and singing the praises of Tito and his doctrine. To introduce a multiparty system in a situation where the Party was playing a decisive role in the Army was therefore still a risk. It was unpredictable. And I also had specific cause for concern. The Army top brass had submitted for discussion by the Presidency an analysis of the political situation in Yugoslavia, with special emphasis on the introduction of a multiparty system. It analysed all possible events in quite logical fashion and predicted that multiparty elections would be won by parties with national independence programmes, which would lead to the break-up of Yugoslavia and civil war. While the analysis did not conclude with any direct proposals for measures to be taken, it did make clear that the JNA expected the Presidency to make the relevant decisions based on this analysis, to guarantee the functioning of the federation and hence to fulfil its constitutional role. If the Presidency were to accept the analysis it would have to ban the elections in Slovenia and Croatia. The Council for the Protection of the Constitutional Order of Yugoslavia, then headed by Borisav Jović, had already discussed the issues revolving around a multiparty system. Representatives of the JNA and other services warned strongly of the various dangers of such a development, highlighting in particular the foreign factor meddling in the internal affairs of Yugoslavia.

I could see clearly all aspects of this debate, as well as the fact that we were perhaps nearing the key moment when it would be revealed whether we were to go forwards or backwards. There could be a reaction by the "old guard" before the elections took place. I delayed calling a session of the Presidency for a while, but Kadijević insisted, and on 3 April 1990 the Presidency met in session. Prime Minister Marković and four high-ranking generals, in addition to General Kadijević, also attended. The discussion was fairly tense but I had decided in advance to use delaying tactics. This was something I did often. The President had only one vote in the Presidency and could easily be outvoted. But he did have the option of introducing procedural complications: the President could postpone or halt a session, he could postpone debates and use other tactical measures. I often made use of this; it was one of my weapons. But on this occasion the delaying tactics

had a fixed time frame – the elections in Slovenia were set to take place on 8 April.

Kadijević took a very tough line. He set out the wider framework of events taking place in Europe and the world as a whole. He spoke of the collapse of the Eastern bloc. His theory, and the well-known Yugoslav doctrine, was that the existence of Yugoslavia was guaranteed by the equilibrium between the blocs. Now that the Eastern bloc was collapsing, Western pressure on Yugoslavia was mounting. He also claimed that the "external factor" was playing a significant role in the processes currently taking place. He warned against what foreign embassies and foreign intelligence services were up to, highlighting in particular the activities of the USA, and also of Germany, Austria and Italy. The West was alleged to be intentionally playing on nationalist and separatist sympathies in its battle against communism and socialism. He talked about our unique history, which the West did not understand, just as it did not understand the danger of anti-communist revenge, of a civil war. "Given the historical development of our country, the revolution, which had to confront strong counter-revolutionary and collaborationist forces, that today are awakening and desiring revenge, a victory for the right-wing forces of revenge in Yugoslavia would lead not merely to the break-up of the Yugoslav state but to a break-up through civil war, which would leave room for armed intervention, which the American Congress is discussing, and then several of our neighbours would also come looking for their share, an option they are always prepared for. Therefore we believe that such a development must not be allowed at any price...The extensive involvement of the foreign factor in our constitutional system via the opposition parties is an expression of their assessment that the decisive moment has arrived for the final blow to be dealt in the smashing of our existing constitutional system and for the take-over of power by one of the opposition parties." Kadijević went on to say: "Individually and collectively, all these negative factors which we have mentioned, and others too, will undoubtedly call into question the existence of Yugoslavia not only as a federal state but as a state at all. They will lead to a break-up which, in Yugoslavia, especially in certain parts – in Croatia, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and in Serbia – could not be carried through without civil war, with unimaginable internal and international implications."

(Excerpts from the transcript of the session of the Presidency held on 3 April 1990 - presentation by General Veljko Kadijević.)

In view of what was to transpire later in Yugoslavia, some of the points Kadijević made that day seem almost prophetic. But what disturbed me greatly, then and later, about his otherwise logical analysis was what I saw as an over-emphasising of the role of the "foreign factor". It was reminiscent of the outdated dogmatism of the former system, which constantly feared the "foreign factor" and tended towards an insularity within the country; it wanted to protect its citizens from outside information, it wanted to protect them against this "foreign factor". To now equate the current democratic changes, which I supported and promoted both at home and abroad, with the role and influence of this foreign factor seemed to me rather hard to swallow. Another problem was Kadijević's emphasising of respect for the existing Constitution, the existing system, which by then was already quite unviable and unacceptable. Jović, too, often played on this theme. Kadijević believed that we should persist with a strict application of the existing Constitution and the existing laws until we agreed on a new constitutional order. That all sounded fine and legal; in reality, though, it would mean having to stop the democratic and market processes that were already intensively under way. Under the existing Constitution, to bring about a constitutional amendment was such a complex affair that in practical terms it was unfeasible in the new conditions. There would have to be unanimous agreement on the amendment, and a lengthy constitutional procedure would have to be conducted. Only then could a new Constitution finally be enacted. Nevertheless, the Presidency took the matter in hand. In January we submitted a formal proposal for a new Constitution to the Yugoslav parliament. Everything proceeded formally but it was completely unrealistic to expect constitutional amendments to be agreed upon in time under the procedures foreseen. In any case, events would overtake us. The Constitution had been written in the previous system for the previous system. It was written with the assumption that Tito would play the key role and a leading role would be played by the League of Communists. Even given these assumptions it would still have been possible to amend it. But when such a central authority no longer existed, with circumstances as they were in

Yugoslavia – the tensions between the republics and growing conceptual differences – it was impossible now to expect in such a charged atmosphere that we could agree on anything in the foreseeable future in the former "Party" method of coordination. Yet this was exactly what Kadijević resolutely insisted on. What it actually meant was that the multiparty elections in Slovenia and Croatia would have to be stopped immediately. Similar questions were raised later, too, when we were dealing with the status of the individual republics within the framework of the existing federation. The status quo continued. It was impossible to tackle it under the existing Constitution, which was wholly out of touch with reality. Yet the Army constantly stood behind this legal position. There were times when it was necessary to insist on legality, and I supported that too – but only insofar as it corresponded with reality. Obviously all this led to the most varied interpretations, pressures, tensions and the constant threat of the system collapsing. It was impossible to adopt a strictly legal line, since the new political and economic reality was entirely different from the former self-managing, socialist, single-party state. On the other hand, the idea that none of the laws were valid any longer, that nothing was valid any more, was equally unacceptable, as that would mean utter chaos and clearly provide room for violence of one form or another. It was, therefore, an extremely delicate and often complicated endeavour to find the right balance and lead matters peacefully in the direction of genuine political and economic change.

In my presentation to the session, which was at the same time a reply to Kadijević, I stuck to my views on the implementation and amendment of the Constitution, whilst pointing out that political and economic changes were under way and that they had gone so far that as Federal President I had already presented them to the Yugoslav parliament. I stressed the need to look to the future, to carry out these processes as rapidly as possible and obviously to have them sanctioned by the Constitution and the law. I said that we could not suspend them for as long as it took to agree on everything and adopt a new Constitution, only then permitting further democratisation and market processes. I concluded the debate without a vote, suggesting that it would be good to hear the opinion of the federal government before passing any resolutions. So I proposed that the federal government discuss the

analysis and then send it back to the Presidency with their opinions. But there was no new debate in the Presidency for quite a while. Marković and I arranged for the federal government to take their time over the report. We had gained some breathing space, and in this time the elections were held.

It is interesting to consider what exactly the Army leadership had intended with this analysis and the debate that took place in the Presidency. With it the Army leaders absolved themselves of responsibility. They could say they had warned the Presidency how events might unfold should multiparty elections go ahead. If the Presidency had accepted this analysis and the guidelines it contained, of course the Army would have acted with the greatest enthusiasm, but under the banner of the Presidency. It would not have been a coup, nor a putsch, but lawful action by the Army; repression which would be supported by the Yugoslav Presidency in accordance with its constitutional obligations. But because the Presidency did not support it, the Army had no legal framework, no basis on which to operate. It would first have to proceed against the Federal Presidency, which would mean a military coup, and that, obviously, was against the law. Neither then nor later did the Army dare to do that, although they certainly gave it much discussion and consideration. There were moments when the Army leadership was very close to intervening on its own, without the Presidency. Such expectations were very common even among the general public. In the northwest of the country it was something we feared, while in the southeast they were openly calling for the Army to take action.

As the Presidency had not reacted to the warning from the Army this time, Kadijević and the Army leaders tried one or two scare tactics. The Army carried out special manoeuvres in Slovenia and Croatia. General Kadijević and a powerful delegation visited Slovenia and Croatia just before the multiparty elections. In Slovenia this was seen as a threat, sabre-rattling. My reaction was to come to Slovenia on the day of the elections – a similar demonstrative move to that when the constitutional amendments were adopted – to cast my vote. On that Sunday I visited a number of polling stations and made one or two statements for the local and foreign media. If the President of the Yugoslav Presidency showed up at an election, then he was giving it his direct support. It had the

effect of neutralising the Army's sabre-rattling and all the talk about the unlawfulness of the elections. The elections in Slovenia and then in Croatia were a success. New parliaments were elected. With this an important step in the democratisation of Yugoslavia was achieved during my term as President.

The Army, however, was still unable to come to terms with it. Even after the elections similar warnings continued to appear, and there was always the temptation for the JNA to act and put a stop to it. In June the Presidency again received a report from the JNA, which made clear their wish for the elections in Slovenia and Croatia to be annulled. I strongly opposed this attempt and once again the Presidency did not react. That was at the session on 28 June 1990. Many times I was asked later, when Yugoslavia had begun to break up and the war had started, whether it had been impossible to prevent. When I spoke at a meeting of the Foreign Policy Council in New York a year later, they put the question to me directly: you were the President of the Presidency of Yugoslavia, could you not have prevented events developing as they did? The JNA offered precisely that. In its analysis it correctly assessed how events would unfold and offered to stop it. My reply to the audience in New York was this: what should the President of the Presidency and the Presidency itself have done? We could have adopted the report and taken the line proposed by the generals – that would have meant stopping the multiparty elections by means of repression. In that case we would have had to introduce a state of emergency in Slovenia and Croatia. And if we had done that then I as President of the Presidency and indeed the Presidency as a whole would have been castigated in the West as undemocratic. And then everyone would have tried their best to bring us down, from outside and from within. We would be like Ceausescu in Romania, or any of the others who resisted democratic change. Where, then, does the responsibility lie for the way things developed, for the civil war? At the time I warned the Western politicians that a catastrophe would occur if rapid action was not taken. And what sort of rapid action? Political and economic aid, swift incorporation into the processes of European integration, and correspondingly rapid results which would overtake the chaos. Of course there is still the question of whether even that would have helped. But there were no other options. At least no democratic ones.