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"The question of all questions, and the question of the future of Yugoslavia, is whether we are going to allow the Ustashas and the Chetniks, not to mention any of the others, to take over. If these sort of people come to power in Yugoslavia, then everything we are talking about, reforms, Europe, will be no more than stories, illusions... All the talk about heading towards reform, towards Europe, which will bring these or those people to power tomorrow, it's an illusion. It is an illusion and it must not be allowed to happen." (General Veljko Kadijević at a session of the Yugoslav Presidency, 16 May 1990.)

Even upon his appointment as President of the Presidency, at the handover, Borisav Jović gave an introductory speech that set a hardline tone and was so much in contrast with my last speeches, particularly in the Council of Europe. The first session of the Presidency, with Borisav Jović presiding, was held on the very next day, 16 May 1990. Clearly Jović had been making intensive preparations for the takeover and he was immediately sharp and tough. One of the subjects he included on

the agenda was something we had discussed several times already over the past few months, particularly at the meeting of the Presidency on 3 April 1990, just before the Slovene elections. It was an assessment of the political situation in the country based on a preliminary debate and analysis by the Council for the Protection of the Constitutional Order of the SFRY. The material we received the day before contained formulations that took an even harder line than at the April session. In the debate we again spoke about the role of the foreign factor, about the role of foreign intelligence services. They attacked in particular the American ambassador, Warren Zimmerman, who was alleged to be directly heading and coordinating such activities. As well as Jović, defence minister General Kadijević and interior minister General Petar Gračanin also took part in the introductory address. Among other things, Gračanin said: "If we fail to bring our energies to bear in order to halt all these forces, which offer us historically defeated concepts under the mantle of democracy, and which are leading us into the whirlpool of civil war, we alone will be answerable before the nation and the future for all the consequences that will surely ensue." General Kadijević took a similar line to the one he had followed at the April session. Yet after this discussion it became clearer to me what it was in this democratic development, which on the one hand he accepted rationally and logically as necessary, that disturbed him. It was the ideological and historical aspect: fear of Ustasha and Chetnik vengeance. Both of them, Kadijević and Gračanin, had been Partisan generals, companions of Tito. In the Second World War they had fought against Chetniks and Ustashas. Kadijević spoke of a specific path to reform that was "ours", which was supposed to be different from that which the West was trying to force on us in various ways. But it was not entirely clear what that specific path should be in the new political and economic circumstances. Obviously there was a fear on the part of the old Partisans that they would once again be forced to confront those they had fought against during the Second World War. But General Kadijević, an intelligent and very well-informed man, can have had no doubt about which direction processes were leading elsewhere in the world and how they were developing in Yugoslavia. He looked for ways to stop it, to slow it down, to again find a specific Yugoslav solution in which "we" would remain in power and the "Chetniks" and "Ustasha" would not

take over. Again he spoke of the need to abide by the existing Constitution, that we had to first agree on new amendments and write them into the Constitution so that it would be acceptable to all, and only then begin to apply those changes. But it was becoming increasingly clear that the various nations of Yugoslavia would no longer agree amicably, and particularly not according to the prescribed constitutional procedure. So it was just a matter of delaying, and for the time being the old Constitution would remain valid. In practical terms that would mean at the very least a question mark over the legality of the multiparty elections that had been held, leaving the possibility open for intervention. The whole time I had the impression that the Yugoslav generals were waiting for events to unfold in the Soviet Union. If there were to be a turnaround there, a return of the "forces of socialism", of the military, then the external conditions would be created for a corresponding development in Yugoslavia. Jović's main points agreed entirely with what Kadijević had said. He, too, insisted on the application of the existing Constitution, and gave particular emphasis to the territorial integrity of the country. He, too, spoke of the foreign factors, saying that they could well be behind the changes in Slovenia and Croatia. Obviously new links had been forged between the military top brass, Kadijević and the Serbian regime. Although General Kadijević must have been aware of the dangers of Serbian nationalism, and had often demonstrated so in the past, he clearly judged that to be a lesser threat than the democratic processes taking place in Slovenia and Croatia, where a restoration of the old, extreme-right forces would supposedly come about, forces which he looked upon primarily from the perspective of history and especially the settling of scores during the Second World War. For him the Serbian regime, which had shown such extreme aggression towards the other nations of Yugoslavia and thus upset the balance that had existed in the country, was, despite everything, more acceptable, representing as it did a continuity with previous regimes. I objected emphatically to this approach. I stood by all the major reform points – political democratisation, market transformation and incorporation into Europe. I raised the matter of my presentation to the Federal Assembly, which the Yugoslav parliament had endorsed. I tried to make clear to them that we could not retain the existing Constitution,

not even temporarily; that the Yugoslav crisis had been going on for ten, twenty years; that, as in Eastern Europe, the system had clearly broken down; that it had failed to ensure the necessary efficiency and that the crisis in the country was therefore escalating. In short, that there was no way back, only forward. We had quite a long and heated debate, which was obviously meant as a foundation for Jović's presentation in the Federal Assembly. Although in the debate some of the other members of the Presidency also expressed reservations about some of the findings in the report from the Council for the Protection of the Constitutional Order, I was on my own when it came to the voting, which Jović somehow managed to force and achieve a mandate to prepare his address to the Federal Assembly along these lines. It all seemed a disaster to me. I warned that such a hard line would provoke a reaction in others, it would give rise to even greater mistrust, including among the new and democratically-elected leaders in Slovenia and Croatia; that it would directly impair relations within the country and merely exacerbate the situation. It really was a tragedy. After a whole year of effort to establish political and economic reform and an orientation towards Europe, with a string of successes, after I had been able to speak convincingly about all of this to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, when the wider Yugoslav public was increasingly coming to accept it, on the very first day after my term in office expired, such a counterblow was struck. It was a tragedy because so many people in Yugoslavia had begun to hope that we would go forward, that we would be part of the global trends taking place, transforming our country in a democratic manner and settling relations between our republics and peoples intelligently, through dialogue, on new and democratic foundations. Yet the new President of the Yugoslav Presidency was preparing to take an entirely different tone in his introductory speech to the Federal Assembly. It was clear what effect this would have on all those who had already opted for reform and were no longer prepared to turn back. It was clear that this would create new tensions between the republics. Slovenia and Croatia were on the road to democracy, yet Jović was going to take a tough, intimidatory line in the name of the federal state. The prospects for dialogue and agreement would dwindle, the prospects for conflict would increase. Although Jović and the generals claimed that by following the Constitution and consolidating the

federation they would prevent civil war, it was plain that such a step backwards would create much greater differences, greater tensions and greater possibility for conflict.

And that is what subsequently happened. The following week Jović addressed the Yugoslav parliament to give his anticipated account of the situation. It was very discouraging, especially in Slovenia and Croatia. In protest, I refused to participate in some of the Presidency sessions that followed. At the time I was thinking even more seriously about resigning. And more events were to follow, particularly significant being the confiscation of weapons from the Territorial Defence, which was clearly part of the new agreement between Serbia and the military, and the Serbs' abolition of the Kosovo Assembly. These were clear signals that we were no longer sailing in the direction which I had mapped out and consolidated during my year in office. The recognition that an agreement would not be possible, that there could be no discussions, no forging of a common democratic and tolerant country in the face of this aggressive Serbian nationalism, began to sink in. It was for this reason that from here onwards the aspirations for consolidating the independence of the republics, including full sovereignty, developed very quickly. It became clear to Slovenia that this country could not be transformed and that it was therefore better to withdraw from the Balkan cauldron as swiftly as possible, while there was still time, before it boiled over.

In this situation, while I remained in the Yugoslav Presidency as the representative of Slovenia despite constant doubts and reservations, I focused increasingly on defending Slovenia against plots of one sort or another, especially the possibility of military intervention, while on the other hand trying to make a constructive contribution to the disentanglement of the complex web of relations between the nationalities of Yugoslavia. And in so doing, my greatest concern was to ensure that the disentanglement be achieved in a peaceful manner and not by force or by war.