

## **CONFISCATION OF TERRITORIAL DEFENCE WEAPONS**

"The question could be asked why we didn't inform you [the Presidency] before we took this decision. This is a regular, routine activity in the armed forces. We have dozens, hundreds of such activities and others that are more complicated still, and where would we be if we were to inform you of all of them?"

(Colonel Blagoje Adžić, chief of the general staff of the JNA, at a session of the Yugoslav Presidency on 29 May 1990.)

Just because the Army did not achieve sufficient success with their warnings in the Presidency did not mean that they had abandoned all their activities. The military leaders themselves were preparing for further developments. Obviously they could not count on the newly-elected leaderships in Slovenia and Croatia, in other words the Army did not trust them. Even before, relations had been very bad, at least with the Slovene political leadership. And now the Army was leaning even further towards the Serbian leadership. The Serbs, in public at least, gave support to the federation and to the preservation of Yugoslavia. They were attempting to transform the federation so that their influence would

be decisive. Despite being aware of the dangers of going down the Greater Serbia road, between two bad options Kadijević chose the lesser of two evils – to rely on the Serbian leadership, although not unconditionally. He was opposed by the western republics and the newly-elected multiparty leaderships, with their increasingly nationally-oriented and pro-independence policies, which were to a large extent in response to the aggressive Greater Serbia nationalism. In collaboration with the Serbian leadership, the Army prepared to disarm the Territorial Defence in the individual republics. I presume that Jović, at least, had been informed beforehand, and perhaps Zelenović and Bučin as well. The move had already been prepared a month earlier and had been timed to go ahead immediately after my presidential term concluded, on 17 May 1990. The Army gathered up the weapons from the Territorial Defence in all the republics. In Slovenia it was only partly successful because the Territorial Defence stopped the handover of weapons to the Army. I was only informed of the weapons collection when it was already under way. The information came from Slovenia. I demanded a session of the Federal Presidency. In Slovenia the response was furious. It was thought that the JNA wanted to disarm the republics in anticipation of what might happen in the future, including a declaration of independence. And in any future events the only armed force would therefore be the JNA, which would thus be able to dictate the development of events or even prevent them by force.

Elsewhere in Yugoslavia, including Croatia, the confiscation of weapons from the Territorial Defence was a success. It was also criticised in Croatia, but not as much as it was in Slovenia. In all the other republics, except to a small extent in Bosnia-Herzegovina, they welcomed this move by the JNA. This in itself is indicative of the varying attitudes towards the Yugoslav National Army around the country. In the other republics, especially in Serbia and Montenegro, they looked upon the JNA as their own. They were sure of their prevailing interest in the Army. And so they were certain, too, that the JNA would defend them if it came to that. It seemed to them that with the JNA as the only force bearing arms, they would gain an automatic advantage over Slovenia and Croatia, whom they could pressurise yet further, using force if need be. The fact that many of the Territorial Defence units in Slovenia took it

upon themselves, quite spontaneously, to stop the handover of weapons to the JNA, despite the surprise and the fact that this was in effect a lawful move being taken by the JNA, proved later to be an extremely important factor in the concluding phase of Slovenia's drive for independence. The Territorial Defence of Slovenia was an armed force that, together with the Slovene police, was able to stand up to the Yugoslav Army when independence was declared. Given the force of the reaction in Slovenia, I demanded an immediate explanation from the Yugoslav Army. First there was a meeting with Jović. Kadijević was there as well, and another two Slovene representatives in addition to me. Kadijević explained that it was a routine action intended only to improve the security of the weapons. In his view, the increasingly tense relations in Yugoslavia meant a growing danger of the weapons being seized by extremists. Jović defended the JNA action to the hilt. The session of the Presidency which I had demanded then followed. General Kadijević did not attend but General Blagoje Adžić did: he was usually very hardline and made no attempt to hide his displeasure over events in Slovenia and Croatia. He, too, explained the whole thing as a routine action. When I asked him why the action was carried out without the knowledge of the Presidency of Yugoslavia he replied that it did not require the approval of the Presidency as it was a routine activity undertaken by the armed forces. He said that the intention of the action was merely to improve the storage and protection of weapons, adding that if the appropriate conditions were met then the weapons could be returned to the Territorial Defence. Later on in the session I called on him to make a clear statement that the weapons would be returned and that they would remain at the disposal of the Territorial Defence. No one else in the Presidency showed any particular inclination to explain the matter differently, to take a less benign view of the JNA's intentions. Quite the opposite, they supported this action by the Army, which Adžić estimated involved around a million pieces of weaponry across the country. In places the Territorial Defence also had heavy weaponry, such as tanks. As an example, General Adžić mentioned that seven sabotaged and damaged tanks had been discovered in a Territorial Defence store in Bor. This was supposed to be an example of how poorly the Territorial Defence protected these weapons. That was his argument for taking such action. Obviously this

was a somewhat far-fetched explanation. Bor is in Serbia and there was no earthly reason why tanks would be sabotaged there. Far more probable is that they organised the "sabotage" themselves in order to demonstrate that the Territorial Defence was not looking after the weapons properly. Another quote from that session to illustrate Adžić's reasoning:

"If anyone thinks that this disarming is some sort of introduction to something which might happen later, I think that is entirely beyond the bounds of common sense. If anyone thinks that the Army is going to take action, I can tell them that the Army is not going to take action with firearms. Anywhere in the world, if the Army carries out a coup d'etat and takes power, it never does so with firearms but with tanks and heavy weaponry, which the people cannot have at their disposal." The entire action was concluded. In Slovenia a significant portion of the weapons remained with the Territorial Defence. My performance in the Presidency, combined with the political noise being made in Slovenia, had at least neutralised any further pressure for the disarming of the Slovene Territorial Defence to be completed. Obviously I was not able through my intervention in the Presidency to put things back completely as they were. There was no possibility that I would get majority support. But what I did in the Presidency, along with the good reflexes of the people in the Slovene Territorial Defence, at least helped to stop the JNA going any further at that time. Quite the opposite in fact – we managed to clarify things and the way was now open either for the weapons to be returned to the Territorial Defence or for the Territorial Defence to retain or supplement what they had, providing suitable conditions for protection and storage were ensured. When this was stated in the Yugoslav Presidency, the JNA lost the basis on which it could repeat such an action.

## KOSOVO SINKING

Things did not stop with Jović's hardline and belligerent tone upon taking office and in his address to the Yugoslav parliament. The situation really began to deteriorate rapidly, with conditions worsening considerably, especially in Kosovo. There was no more illusion about dialogue, about a democratic solution to the Kosovo problem. Serbia began to "pacify" the situation in Kosovo with an increasingly heavy hand. The opposition forces in Kosovo responded with increasingly clear demands for the separation of Kosovo from Serbia, but still within a federal Yugoslav framework. At a session of the Presidency Jović spoke of growing evidence of preparations for the separation and independence of Kosovo. One day the Kosovo delegates were not allowed into the Kosovo Assembly, clearly under Serbian orders from Belgrade. The Kosovo delegates then, right on the street, adopted and proclaimed a declaration of the Republic of Kosovo. This was cause for Jović and Milošević to demand a session of the Federal Presidency. The Presidency met on 11 July to discuss the latest situation in Kosovo. Milošević, of course, demanded that the Presidency condemn this action by the "Kosovo separatists" and that it pass a resolution, as a "preventive" measure, authorising the use

of the Army in Kosovo. In practice this would have meant the Yugoslav Presidency giving *carte blanche* to the Army and the Serbian leadership to intervene in Kosovo, thus virtually eliminating itself from the game. The session was quite heated. We clashed vehemently. Even Milošević didn't escape attack. Šuvar and I strongly opposed the Serbian bloc. And the other three members of the Presidency, Bogićević, Tupurkovski and Sapundžija, did not accept Milošević's proposals for military intervention either.

At one moment in the debate Milošević said: "I want to pose just one question here. Is it really possible that around this table a question can be raised that runs something like this: Does Serbia have the right to protect its territorial integrity and its constitutional order? We simply cannot discuss this question. It is quite the reverse. I believe Yugoslavia has a duty to help Serbia protect its territorial integrity and its constitutional order. That is one of the reasons it exists. But here the complete opposite is being proposed." I called for the Presidency to propose that the Constitutional Court rule on the constitutionality of the Serbian decision for the Serbian Assembly to dissolve the Kosovo Assembly. With this act, in practical terms, Serbia had suspended the status of Kosovo as an autonomous province. That, in any case, was in violation of the Yugoslav Constitution, and in the debate the other members of the Presidency, apart from the Serbian troika and, of course, Milošević, veered towards that position. After a long argument, Jović had delayed the debate and any decision so long that he managed to get a postponement; the issue was put off until later, when I would no longer be present because I had to attend an international conference in Madrid. Then the remainder of the Presidency agreed on a watered-down public statement which said nothing. Although the Serbian leadership failed to get the backing they wanted from the Yugoslav Presidency, they continued putting pressure on Kosovo. In addition to dissolving the Assembly, they shut down the Albanian-language press and put pressure on the schools; there was a general deterioration in the situation. This was continuing in September when the Presidency again debated the Kosovo issue. At the session held on 21 September 1990 we again faced a rapid worsening of conditions in Kosovo. The repression continued and there was no dialogue. The Kosovo delegates had illegally adopted a Constitution of the Republic of

Kosovo. This was new cause for angry reactions from Serbia and a demand for a condemnation from the Presidency. Various incidents had taken place in the meantime: for example, the Serbian authorities had expelled from Kosovo a delegation from the Helsinki Confederation for Human Rights. I intervened, demanding that the expulsion be withdrawn, which eventually it was. Nineteen countries initiated proceedings against Yugoslavia within the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe for violation of human rights in Kosovo. Everything I had tried to build while I was President was being completely demolished. When the Yugoslav Presidency passed on 21 September 1990 a Serbian-proposed declaration condemning the so-called Kačanica constitution as unconstitutional, I gave a separate opinion and said publicly what I thought. Again, it was a session racked by conflict.

On 2 September the Ljubljana newspaper *Delo* wrote:

"Dr Janez Drnovšek, the member of the Yugoslav Presidency representing Slovenia, took a stand against the one-sided condemnation of the actions of the Albanian delegates. He pointed out that while this was indeed an illegal act in formal terms, the Serbian abolition of Kosovo's autonomy, which was what led to this action, was also unconstitutional. At the same time Dr Janez Drnovšek condemned Serbian policy in Kosovo, which is causing growing tension and a polarisation among the people of the province. He spoke in favour of dialogue and a democratic solution to the problem, adding that he did not wish to participate in sessions of the Presidency that were called merely to rubber-stamp Serbian policy, while the collective head of state is, in truth, unable to influence the way in which conditions are regulated in Kosovo because Serbia has entirely taken this matter into its own hands. He also warned that while there was no stable solution [in Kosovo] – for the Serbs and Montenegrins as well as the Albanians – he saw no solution for Yugoslavia either; for it is the Kosovo question that is increasing the international isolation of Yugoslavia as a whole. It is therefore difficult to believe that all the other republics will be prepared to pay the price for Serbia's ill-guided policy." At that time I was making several public appearances connected with this issue. And in a statement for Slovene Television I announced the possibility of my resignation if such processes were to continue.

In an interview for the Sarajevo newspaper *Oslobodjenje* on 30 September 1990 I said:

"When the question of the protection of human rights is raised, for example of individuals in Kosovo, then they immediately treat it as meddling in political relations in Serbia, ignoring the basic nature of the protection of an individual's human rights."

And later on:

"I find it unfortunate that part of the Yugoslav press, particularly the Serbian press, is conducting a campaign against me as their enemy, using untruths and half-truths, not reporting my statements, or at least not completely, so that the people there are probably getting the impression that I am acting against them, whereas the truth is quite the opposite. Even during the biggest altercations between Serbia and Slovenia I have tried to improve relations, to normalise them. If a political campaign is built mainly on nationalisms, then approaches which are founded on a calming of tensions between the peoples of Yugoslavia, on real facts and a rational approach, are rejected and there are even attempts to discredit them."

On 2 October 1990 the Zagreb political magazine *Danas* even published a lengthy analysis of the work I had done in an article reflecting on my possible resignation from the Yugoslav Presidency. The article mentioned the statement that I had given some time before to the newspaper *Nova Makedonija*, in which I said that it was "difficult to speak about greater integration and a stronger federation with raving nationalists who do not recognise the logic of reason and do not follow the civilisational movements taking place in the world."

## TENSION MOUNTS

The collapse of a moderate line in Kosovo, and the Serbian regime carrying through to the full its aggressive nationalist policy in the province, was obviously very important for the development of all other relations in the country at the time. During my year as President we had tried to implement a constructive policy aimed at preserving the country and at least some semblance of order. We combined a variety of measures to maintain an essential order with the establishment of a dialogue between the different nationalities in Kosovo, with strict respect for human rights, amnesty for political detainees and punishment of anyone who abused the instruments of the state (in the police and the Army). This concept was one which could lead to a consolidation of the situation on the basis of equal rights and democratisation. It would also give others in the country some prospect, some possibility for a peaceful solution to the situation in the country as a whole, on new and democratic foundations. All the various democratic forces could then be brought into play on this basis. But no. The Serbian regime was in no mood for compromise. There was no longer any possibility for dialogue in Kosovo. The policy and concept of a Greater Serbia became

increasingly explicit. Serbia was heavy-handedly consolidating its own republic while behaving threateningly towards the others. It was during this time, in the summer of 1990, that the first clashes in Croatia were occurring, involving Serbs who had settled in Croatia, particularly in the area known as Krajina, in and around the town of Knin. It is true that the new Croatian authorities had not been particularly sensitive in their initial moves and had not done enough to calm the fears of the Croatian Serbs. Yet the Serbs, inside and outside Serbia proper, were encouraging and fanning these anxieties. Tensions between the Serbs and Croats in Krajina were growing ever more serious. The Yugoslav Presidency was forced to begin dealing with these kinds of incidents, which came to characterise the subsequent period as a whole. The Kosovo story was reaching a conclusion. The tensions were now transferred to Croatia, to Krajina.

At the same time tensions in relations with Slovenia were growing, with the JNA in the forefront. The Army reacted sharply to each move by Slovenia. The conflict had begun with the trial of the Four the previous year and had escalated with the disarming of the Territorial Defence. Slovenia then replaced the commander of its Territorial Defence, which the JNA was unwilling to accept. We had a heated debate over this in the Presidency. Slovenia wished to reduce the number of recruits it sent to do their national service in other parts of the country and proposed that more of them remain in Slovenia. The JNA sharply rejected any such demand. Slovenia then passed certain legislative and constitutional amendments strengthening Slovene sovereignty in the area of defence. The Army leadership again reacted strongly and proposed that the Presidency adopt a firm anti-Slovene stance, even including the possibility of intervention in Slovenia. On this point we clashed fiercely at the session of the Presidency on 2 October 1990. I denounced the JNA leadership for destroying any chance of agreement or dialogue with Slovenia through its blind, inflexible aggravation, and said that this could only lead us into conflict. If they would show more understanding, more willingness to negotiate, to communicate, rather than simply rejecting out of hand any Slovene initiative, then agreement could still be possible and we could find a way to rescue some form of common state. Otherwise this possibility would be gone. At the same time, while countering their demands and proposals, I demonstrated the absolute

absurdity of the situation when Serbia had adopted constitutional amendments, related to an individual republic encroaching on military areas, that were every bit as radical. Through its presidency and its Assembly, Serbia had virtually taken over the complete function of the Yugoslav Presidency in time of war. But the Yugoslav Army was not bothered by this. They never made any proposals to the Presidency for a condemnation of Serbian resolutions or Serbian decisions. It was only ever against Slovenia. This was confirmation of the theory that the Serbs and Montenegrins had a prevailing influence within the Army, which they used to make unilateral decisions; or that the federal part of the Army leadership, headed by Kadijević, was aware of the danger of aggressive Serbian nationalism but judged it to be the lesser evil compared to what they saw as "extreme right-wing" forces in Slovenia and Croatia, encouraged in particular by the USA, Germany and Austria. At this session I managed to block their demands, but it was clear that the story would continue.

Excerpts from the session of 2 October 1990:

Janez Drnovšek: "I think that in truth the problem lies in the fact that we do not have the same criteria for all these cases in Yugoslavia, and that each of us deals with them differently depending on what side they take place, putting ourselves in the position of defending the Constitution and the law when it suits us, and closing our eyes to everything when it doesn't. I am always against this kind of selective approach to the upholding of the Constitution and the law. If something happens in Kosovo, that's one question; if something happens to the Serbs in Croatia, that is an entirely different question; if it happens in Slovenia then it's a third set of criteria. In Slovenia this [the measures proposed by the JNA] would virtually bring in some sort of martial administration. But no one is wandering around with weapons, no one is forming any sort of army, yet here it is made out to be something dreadful. But where there really are people wandering around with weapons, where armed activity is taking place, where the roads are controlled, where traffic is being stopped and access refused, this doesn't bother anyone as far as the Constitution and the law is concerned. [This was what the Serbs had begun to do in Krajina.] Unfortunately, those are the facts. I feel sorry for the people there. They are undoubtedly scared. In a situation like this of course they

can't feel safe. They are the subject of various political manipulations taking place in Yugoslavia today in which everyone is playing their own game, everyone has their own agenda. I think it would be a good thing if we slowly, at least at this level, put our cards on the table; if we say who wants what, that Serbia says what it wants, what it really wants, so that we can hear and see how relations with Croatia can be sorted out and then these matters can be settled. And I ask if it is really necessary that all this be done through fomenting such conflicts, through playing with people, with possible and almost certain casualties, or whether we can avoid this and say directly what we truly want so that we can try to agree on it. Are all these schemes and all these games really necessary? We're just putting up a pretence, statements of one sort or another, we're playing a game but we all know where the problem really lies, yet we're not tackling it. It seems we are going to play this game today as well, each playing his role, each performing his task. But I don't think this is really being honest to all these people. We must do more."

In reply, Borisav Jović did not accept the proposal that we discuss things openly and truthfully. He intervened sharply:

"I think I have to intervene because you [Janez Drnovšek] have gravely offended the entire Serbian people in Croatia by saying that they are playthings in someone else's hands... that there is some kind of game being played here between Croatia and Serbia over the division of territory and that we only have to agree on matters concerning this problem, that people are dying for nothing, and so on... I really think it is irresponsible and absolutely unacceptable to talk like that in the Yugoslav Presidency. Absolutely unacceptable." Then the games with Krajina started up again. The Serbs tried to push through the Yugoslav Presidency statements that would be to their advantage and support the Serbs in Krajina against Croatia. But how could they answer the question of why the Serbs in Croatia have the right of self-determination, but not the Albanians in Kosovo?

## **FEDERATION OR CONFEDERATION**

In the Yugoslav Presidency we discussed the future political arrangement of the state, in informal talks as well as at sessions and meetings of the Presidency. As early as January we put forward a proposal for a new Constitution, but it left open the question of the future arrangement of relations between the republics. Given the way in which events were unfolding, this question was obviously becoming increasingly urgent. I believed we had to accelerate the political dialogue between the republics in order to find a solution, since the continuing incidents, increasing conflicts and growing tensions were leading to an escalating danger of chaotic collapse, civil war or perhaps a military coup. I discussed this with Serbia's highest representatives as early as August. In informal discussions in August 1990 Jović and Milošević had nothing against Slovene independence. Quite the opposite in fact, the Slovenes should put it to a referendum and decide for themselves. As for the possibility of a Croatian referendum on independence-, though, they demanded even then that the Serbs in Croatia be given the chance to opt either to remain in Croatia or to be part of the remainder of Yugoslavia, in other words part of a Greater Serbia. Also in August I held long and

informal talks with General Kadijević, the defence minister, at a meeting in Kupari near Dubrovnik, in which we explored the various possibilities for an outcome to the Yugoslav crisis. I was somewhat surprised on this occasion that Kadijević, who had taken such a strong and uncompromising attitude towards Slovenia at all the sessions of the Presidency, was already informally anticipating a future decision by the Slovenes to leave Yugoslavia and become independent. And he asked me a question which I find quite prophetic. He said that the Slovenes had not done so badly out of Yugoslavia; were we not afraid that after independence Italy would once again get designs on Primorje – the western region of Slovenia including the coast. Just see what sort of problems you will have with Italy, he said to me. A meeting of the Yugoslav Presidency was called on 10 October 1990 to debate, together with the presidents of all the republics and provinces, a concept for the future political arrangement of Yugoslavia. In addition to the members of the Presidency, the meeting was attended by all the major players in the republics: the presidents of Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia - Kučan, Tudjman and Milošević. Although the other presidents were "legal presidents", in the other republics at that time they were still preparing for new, multiparty elections, which were scheduled to be held by the end of the year; even in Serbia, although Milošević's position was solid and it was evident that he would win comfortably, whereas especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia a change of leadership was expected.

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Typical of the moment was the question I posed when I addressed the session:

"The question is whether to remain together or not to remain together. The differences today are so great, with continual conflict, that it often seems senseless to remain together, because we are holding each other back, preventing one another from achieving faster development, we are squandering a great deal of energy. Given this situation, the question can rightly be asked whether we really need this when we may well be able to develop better and more quickly as independent countries." In the debate the following position took shape: Slovenia and Croatia put forward the concept of confederation, in which the republics would be sovereign and independent but certain common functions would remain

in a jointly agreed-upon federation. It was a concept based on the entirely justified fears of these republics that they could be outvoted when it came to certain vital issues. For this reason, in recognition of the great complexity of a disintegration, they agreed that we should retain certain common functions, particularly a single economic area along the lines of the European Community, but that the political sovereignty of the republics must be unambiguous. Quite simply, these two republics wanted a clear-cut guarantee and security against the current phenomena and threats, particularly the aggressive Serbian nationalism and the prospect of being voted down by the Serbs. At this time even common defence functions were being considered, with the possibility of a joint contingent in addition to the armies of the republics, perhaps along the lines of NATO, and also common functions in foreign policy, while there were varying concepts regarding a common currency. These anxieties could be justified given the experience of Yugoslavia up to this point, with the south-eastern republics in particular having a quite different stance on monetary issues and economic policy to that in Slovenia and Croatia.

The concept of a confederation was also an attempt to find a peaceful way out of the Yugoslav crisis and to bring about a compromise which would of course mean the republics obtaining fundamental guarantees preserving the basic mechanisms that would allow people to live in safety and peace. This would obviously be accompanied by an insistence on the principles of political democracy, a market economy and a further incorporation into European integration. This could have offered a suitable transitional solution, in the expectation of more solid European integration in the future. I warned many times of the urgency of this, not only because of the danger of further incidents and conflicts but also because the range of economic reforms being undertaken in the federal government was running out. It was quite clear to me that the economic programme could not be maintained in such political circumstances and that sooner or later there would be a complete economic collapse given the strained relations.

Yet this debate was further evidence that Serbia wanted all or nothing. Milošević and Jović categorically rejected any proposals for a confederation. And they were joined not only by Montenegro but also by Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia, where they were still to hold new

elections. So among the republics it was four against two, and if both provinces in Serbia were also included in a formal vote in the Presidency then the result would be six against two in favour of the federalists. Milošević substantiated his concept of a firm, strong, "modern" federation with the argument that concepts of confederation were outdated elsewhere in the world, there weren't any, that the world was in a process of integration and that Yugoslavia, too, must strengthen its internal links. This all sounded fine, but in the prevailing circumstances it was unfeasible, at least by peaceful means. The measures taken by Serbia had intimidated all the others, rendered Yugoslav integration practically impossible, yet at the same time it offered up a concept of more solid internal links within Yugoslavia in which the republics would forego even that level of autonomy which they had enjoyed under the former constitutional system. It must have been clear to everyone that in the circumstances Slovenia and Croatia would never be able to agree to such a proposal. Thrusting a federal stance actually achieved quite the opposite - it compelled Slovenia and Croatia to leave the federation and opt for independence. In this way Serbia would retain succession to the former state and create a "Greater Serbia". At this joint meeting with the presidents of the republic presidencies we all put forward our own positions without a conclusion. Then the Yugoslav Presidency continued without the republic presidents, with the Serbs demanding that the Presidency adopt a united position and submit this to the Yugoslav Assembly. They forced the Presidency to take a stance in favour of a solid federation, to expose Slovenia and Croatia and force them to take countermeasures.

On this point there was a strong altercation at the session of the Presidency on 16 October 1990. Jović wanted to address the parliament with this federal concept. The draft of the speech he proposed was based on all the elements over which we had already clashed. On the one hand an insistence on the existing Constitution, which was outdated and which Serbia in particular had overstepped, although never admitting it, while condemning all sorts of separatist movements and unconstitutional activities in which all the others were supposed to be involved, especially Slovenia, Croatia and Kosovo, and repeating the warning against the role of the foreign factor, and so on. Again he prepared an extremely hardline speech which gave a clear signal to everyone else in

Yugoslavia that it was simply impossible to reach an agreement with Jović and the Serbs, and that there was nothing else for us except to find a different way, to put the final nail in the coffin of the federation and break from it irrevocably. At the same time there were complications over the appointment of the new Croatian member of the Federal Presidency. Croatia replaced Stipe Šušvar and in his place sent Stipe Mesić as the new member and Vice-President of the Yugoslav Presidency. The Serbs were opposed because Mesić was a strong proponent of the new Croatian policy and they delayed his confirmation in the Yugoslav Assembly. I demanded that we appoint the new Croatian member because at the time Croatia did not have a representative since Stipe Šušvar had already been recalled. I demanded that the Federal Assembly first appoint the new Croatian representative and that until it did so I no longer wanted to participate in discussions in the Presidency because in such a situation it was losing its legitimacy. And not only its legitimacy but also its legality. I left the session and returned to Ljubljana. The following day the Yugoslav Presidency met alone to continue the debate. I was in telephone contact with Jović and I demanded the appointment of Stipe Mesić to the Presidency before I would return. If Jović was going to address the parliament with his federal concept I said he would also have to present the alternative proposal of a confederate concept. There was considerable tension, a lot of gamesmanship. Things were hotting up right across the country. On 18 October 1990 I held a press conference to address this issue, which received extensive coverage. In it I put forward my views both on the forcible imposition of the federation as well as our concept of a confederation. At the time there was once again a palpable fear of a military coup. It was one of the things I was asked about a lot.

On 17 October 1990 I spoke to Radio Ljubljana. During the interview I said: "I expect that we will continue to search for agreement and that the situation will remain under some sort of control and within a framework of democratic means. I am seriously trying to highlight all the outstanding problems, but I am trying also to keep the crisis within certain boundaries. In short, to stop it exceeding these boundaries so that real talks can continue with all the players in Yugoslavia, or that some talks can now begin." The next question asked if a military coup was possible. I replied: "I

don't think there is any basis for that. That would be beyond all the legal frameworks by which the Army fully swears. I think that at any rate we have yet to exhaust the political possibilities for solving the Yugoslav crisis and that such a hardline option would significantly worsen the situation as a whole. I think that would offer neither relief nor a solution to anyone, but would make life much more difficult even for those who carried out such an action."

All the tensions of these days, the powerful persuasion, it all ended in a compromise which meant little as far as an outcome to the crisis was concerned. The Serbs agreed that the Federal Assembly would first appoint Stipe Mesić as the new Croatian representative in the Yugoslav Presidency and that then Borisav Jović would deliver his speech. And his speech was indeed what had been anticipated: hardline, sharp, dogmatic, and of course I did not attend. I was ensuring that the public, at home and abroad, was sufficiently aware of what was happening and the dilemmas involved, and that this episode of the crisis would be concluded without violence, or a military coup. It was concluded with another unacceptable speech from Borisav Jović as the incumbent Yugoslav President and with a new round of tensions and negotiations being opened, in which it was becoming increasingly clear that it would be very difficult to reach a Yugoslavia-wide agreement or compromise. Now it was time to turn towards saving what could be saved. In my case that was, of course, Slovenia. Therefore it was no surprise after this outcome, after the attempts to move towards a confederation which Slovenia and Croatia had proposed and which had been brutally and uncompromisingly rejected, that both republics turned increasingly towards independence, a final separation. And so it is entirely understandable that activities were under way in Slovenia to prepare for a plebiscite on independence.

## **PRESIDENTS NEW AND OLD**

Multiparty elections were now also being held in the other republics. New presidents were taking office. In addition to Milan Kučan and Franjo Tuđman, there was Alija Izetbegović, Kiro Gligorov, Mojmir Bulatović in Montenegro and Slobodan Milošević in Serbia. Nenad Bučin, the Montenegrin member of the Presidency, was replaced by Branko Kostić. And from Vojvodina, Zelenović was replaced by Jugoslav Kostić. Within the Presidency a permanent balance of power between "the Serbs and the rest" took shape: four against four, so agreement on almost any matter was impossible. On all fundamental issues the Presidency was blocked. On the one side there was myself, Mesić from Croatia, Tupurkovski from Macedonia and Bogićević from Bosnia-Herzegovina; and sometimes Sapundžija from Kosovo would dare to oppose the Serbs, until they replaced him with Seid Bajrami, who was merely a Serbian puppet. On the other side we had Jović, the two Kostić's and later Bajrami. Jović would conduct the sessions in his own fashion, using various "short-cuts". He would call the more important sessions at very short notice, knowing that those of us who were representing other republics in the Presidency were spending more and more time in our own republics. He

tried to take advantage of the situation and work on his own with the Army leadership. But by this time I had considerable experience of the workings of the Presidency and many times I saw through Jović. Mesić was likeable but he had a somewhat different manner of working in the Presidency. At the beginning he said a lot, often in a media-friendly way so his comments would later appear in the press, particularly in Croatia. This was also the approach of some of the republic presidents. But Mesić was not at home with procedural tactics. After a debate and the procedural manoeuvrings, we had to either vote through a given matter or obstruct it. In this, Tupurkovski and Bogićević many times stood alongside me. Sometimes it was quite amusing. We would have joint sessions with the republic presidents. Some of them would turn up, say what they had to say, and then leave. Once back home they would call press conferences to tell their public everything they had to say at the session of the Presidency, which was not even finished yet. Meanwhile I would often be fighting my corner at the session late into the night. And the joint lunches or dinners we had with the members of the Presidency and the republic presidents following the joint sessions of the Presidency were intriguing. We would all sit around the same table: Milošević, Tudjman, Izetbegović, Marković, Jović, me, Mesić and the generals. While there would be a lot of needling, the serious debate continued too. In January 1991 the Belgrade newspaper *Borba* published a popularity poll of the politicians in Yugoslavia. Usually these polls were confined to a particular republic but this one was nationwide. Given the prevailing situation, in which the media in the various republics was highly "domestic" and nationally orientated, the results were very interesting. In Slovenia and Croatia I was in first place, and in Bosnia-Herzegovina I shared top spot with Izetbegović. In the south-eastern republics, though, it was a different story. In Serbia, Milošević reigned. I didn't even score positively. It just showed the influence of the firm control of the media and the "guiding" of public opinion.

## THE PLEBISCITE

In Slovenia the decision had been taken to prepare a plebiscite on independence. The plebiscite was called for the end of December 1990. I took part, together with the great mass of Slovenes, and the result was overwhelming. The vast majority of Slovenes had voted for the independence of Slovenia, an independence which was supposed to be put into effect six months after the plebiscite. As far as I was concerned the result was entirely expected, although it is interesting that certain Slovene politicians, who were strongly in favour of independence, had awaited the result with far more anxiety. Over these past months it had become clear to the Slovenes that it would no longer be possible to live in a common state with such divergent outlooks and concepts as were then emerging in the individual republics, particularly in Serbia. Fear was growing over what might happen in Yugoslavia. A general feeling had taken hold that it was better to leave while there was still time. The efforts I had made while I was President were starting to bear fruit, but it turned out that the opposing forces could hardly wait until I was replaced. Which was why the contrast was that much starker. Tensions between the nationalities were growing; an air of violence hung

increasingly heavy. Incidents were occurring between the Serbs and the Croats in Croatia. The question and the threat which loomed large was what the JNA would do. Would it intervene? Would there be a military coup? The JNA threatened Slovenia most of all. Conditions in Kosovo had worsened again, with the Serbian regime showing no willingness to seek a democratic solution. The idea of such a Yugoslavia transforming into a democratic, modern, free-market state with a European outlook had now become a fantasy. Which is why the result of the plebiscite was what it was. Perhaps a year earlier, when hope and a democratic, European outlook still existed, it would have been different. Following the plebiscite the Slovene parliament adopted a letter of intent in which it expressed its aim of coming to an agreement with the remainder of Yugoslavia on the departure of Slovenia. Again I was faced with the question of what I should do in the Yugoslav Federal Presidency. Should I resign now? In Slovenia they thought not. Clearly we had a very difficult task ahead of us: how to implement Slovene independence by agreement, and peacefully. Slovene politicians, especially the new ones, were inexperienced in the ways of Yugoslav politics, or they already had such bad relations with the rest of Yugoslavia or with the JNA that they could hardly be partners in the search for an agreed solution for the departure of Slovenia from Yugoslavia. But I didn't feel too comfortable over the decision to remain in the Yugoslav Presidency. What would be the outcome of the Yugoslav crisis? There was every chance that it would be violent and bloody. And representing the interests of Slovenia in Belgrade in such a tense situation meant putting your head on the chopping block. Immediately after New Year 1991 I had two interesting meetings in Belgrade. First I met with General Kadijević. We discussed the Slovene plebiscite, and the fact that the clear will of the people was for Slovenia to be independent. General Kadijević did not deny it. His position was that Slovenia could go, but first it must reach an agreement with the federation. He believed that the federation could live with the departure of Slovenia; Croatia, though, was a different matter. It was his opinion that independence for Croatia would mean civil war because of the Serbian minority in Croatia. And then Bosnia-Herzegovina would become a problem. **He** said the Yugoslav Army would not allow it to happen. It was fundamental that they prevent bloodshed and civil war.

His actual words were: "If this were to happen, then we [the JNA generals] should be hanged because we failed to prevent it." In the following days I met with Slobodan Milošević in his private office at the Serbian Presidency. Our discussion was very calm. Milošević did not attack the Slovene independence decision. He said it was a fact that the Slovenes had the right to take such a decision. But he repeated his view that it was a right also enjoyed by the Croats, and by the Croatian Serbs, who should determine their fate by themselves.