

MARCH SESSIONS OF THE PRESIDENCY IN THE JNA HQ

Following January's failed or postponed attempt to get the JNA involved in solving the Yugoslav crisis, conditions continued to deteriorate after 25 January. In Croatia clashes occurred between the Croatian police and armed Serbs in regions where Serbs and Croats lived side by side. In such instances the JNA tried to present itself as neutral, and at meetings of the Presidency JNA representatives would say that the Army would prevent ethnic conflict and that this was its only task. That could have been logical and justified, but it was extremely suspicious that the Serbian bloc in the Presidency were aggressively advocating this role for the JNA. It became increasingly clear, though, what was going on: in the face of the nascent Croatian Army and the implementation of Croatian independence, the JNA was supposed to take on the role of protector of the Serbian population in Croatia. A role which would see the JNA establishing and then defending the borders of a Greater Serbia. The Presidency sessions were painful and tense. Jović wanted to secure special powers for the Army and for himself as the commander-in-chief, since the Presidency, he believed, would be unable to make quick decisions. He used a variety of procedural tricks. He called the sessions

at increasingly short notice; they were evening and night sessions. But this time Mesić and I were not alone in opposing the pressures from Jović. Tupurkovski, Bogičević and Sapundžija gradually joined us, no longer taken in by the emotive words on the protection of the constitutional order, the integrity of Yugoslavia and the prevention of ethnic conflict; all that with the aid of the JNA. During this time Slovenia was attacked in the Presidency mostly for its decision to stop sending Slovene soldiers to do military service in the JNA. Slovenia was alone on this point, being the only one to have taken such a decision. I tried to explain the Slovene position in various ways and to delay the debate on it, so that the Presidency would not pass some decision that could put Slovenia in direct conflict with the JNA. For the Army leaders the "recruit question" was very important because, as they explained bluntly at the sessions, there would be a chain reaction and that would obviously mean the collapse of the JNA. I reported back regularly to the Slovene leadership on all these sessions, and with increasing frequency I was saying that the situation within the Presidency was becoming unbearable and that I was considering resigning. They thought I should persevere. On 9 March, a Saturday, major demonstrations took place in Belgrade. The opposition seriously alarmed the Serbian regime. That evening I was having a meal with friends in Domžale, a small town near Ljubljana, when I received a telephone call from the Presidency in Belgrade. They wanted my vote on using the Army against the demonstrators. I replied immediately that I would not give my consent. I rang Mesić and warned him about it. He, too, voted against. The others they managed to get, or take by surprise. They voted in favour and that evening the Army moved out onto the streets of Belgrade.

The following day I went to Rogla, a holiday resort in eastern Slovenia, where a weekend tennis tournament was being held. Some of the foreign ambassadors had come up from Belgrade to take part, including American ambassador Zimmerman, and Austrian ambassador Leifer. We were having lunch when there was another phone call from Belgrade, saying that Jović was calling an immediate session of the Presidency to deal with the events in Belgrade and to confirm our telephone votes from the previous evening. I said I wasn't going to Belgrade and that I was reconfirming my "no" vote. It was interesting that Zimmerman was very

well informed about what was going on and that the Americans attributed great significance to the demonstrations. Because of this he cut short his stay in Rogla and left immediately after lunch for Belgrade. Around midday on Tuesday I received a message that Jovic was calling a session of the Presidency together with the general staff. The session was scheduled to take place in two hours' time and we were supposed to meet in front of the federation building, from where we would be taken by bus to the "command point". Everything was organised in great haste and it was all rather unusual. Given the tension of the situation, the possibility of a military coup could not be excluded. I conferred quickly with the Slovene Presidency and they agreed with my decision not to go to Belgrade. I made a public statement and sent it to the Presidency in Belgrade. I said that I was not prepared to participate in the work of the Presidency under such conditions and that Jović was issuing a dictate. I spoke by telephone with Mesić, who said first of all that he, too, was not going to Belgrade, but then he changed his mind. He was probably ordered to by Tudjman. I said that at any rate, in my absence my vote was against – that was the way the Presidency operated. There was no way I would sanction whatever Jović and the JNA proposed, so I might just as well vote against from Ljubljana. And if they really were going to carry out a military coup, then it was better for me to be in Ljubljana and to try to organise the necessary activities here together with the Slovene leadership.

In the evening I spoke by phone with Tupurkovski and Bogičević. They said that the military had demanded a mobilisation and the disarming of the paramilitary units, but they failed to get majority support. They said that the session was going to continue on the same subject and that it would be good if I came to Belgrade because it would be difficult to hold on without me. On that same evening, 13 March, I met with the Slovene leadership. Present at the meeting were the presidents of the parliamentary parties and the heads of the parliamentary groups, speaker of parliament Bučar, Prime Minister Peterle, and Zlobec and Oman from the presidency (Kučan was on a visit to Austria). We agreed that the following day I should go to Belgrade, although it was perfectly clear that no one envied me the task. Even Oman, who had otherwise supported me resigning from the Federal Presidency, agreed that I should go this time.

The following day at around noon I flew to Belgrade. I was beset by mixed feelings. I did not want to go with the group bus and demanded that they tell me the location of the meeting. I would go there in my own car and with my bodyguard who had accompanied me from Slovenia. I learned that the meeting would be held at the command location in Dedinje, where there were underground bunkers from where we were supposed to operate in time of war. I arrived a few minutes late; the meeting had already started. I noticed that there were cameras in the session hall, which surprised me. This was the first time a session of the Presidency had been filmed. And it was especially strange because this was a joint session with the general staff. A number of generals and officers were sat around. The atmosphere was ice cold and extremely tense. The session revolved around the same problem. The Army demanded authorisation from the Presidency for intervention. The military had actually proposed a new variation, which differed little in essence from the proposals at the first session. I spoke calmly, and carefully followed what was going on. I said that this resolution would lead to conflict, in Slovenia at any rate. I proposed the continuation of political talks. General Kadijević soon got me involved in a provocative discussion about recruits, whom Slovenia was no longer sending to the JNA. It became clear that the debate had two aims: to achieve a resolution in the Presidency on JNA intervention, or to acquire enough film footage to show how some of the members of the Presidency opposed it and thus "betrayed" Yugoslavia. When Belgrade Television showed the film later, I noticed that it was me who had been edited out most of all. It was better that their audience did not get to hear my arguments. Mesić and I categorically opposed the Army's proposals. Three members of the Presidency were evidently in something of a quandary, especially Sapundžija and Bogičević, but it became clear that they would not support the radical points in the proposal. Realising this, Jović tried to conclude the session relatively early. He indicated he would resign. So too did Bučin and Kostić. The outlines of the scenario were taking shape:

the majority in the Presidency reject the generals' proposals for intervention by the JNA, President Jović and two members resign, thus creating a vacuum, and then the JNA takes things into its own hands. Some of the arguments were pushing the generals in this direction. I dragged the debate forward. I picked up on Kadijević's statement that if

the decision of the Presidency was negative, the general staff would inform the Presidency and the public of their decision. Did that not imply denial of the Presidency as the commander-in-chief? Kadijević pulled back. The session dragged on and we did not finish it. It was set to continue on the following day, Friday 15 March. Mesić and I left as quickly as we could for the airport to fly immediately back to Zagreb and Ljubljana. The Slovene leadership met late in the evening. I told them what had taken place and we tried to guess what would happen now. Obviously a third session on the same subject was a problem. Again the question was asked what the generals had at the back of their minds; particularly given the way the Presidency session had unfolded.

I decided to return to Belgrade. Before the 15 March session there was a lunch. I attended simply because I was interested what the atmosphere would be like. There were a lot of generals and they served traditional Army bean stew (*pasulj*). Everyone was very serious. There was absolutely no joking.

The session was presided over very aggressively by Jović, and I could see that he had no intention of hanging around with the debate; he wanted to get to the voting as soon as possible. The result was the same as at the previous session - five against three. The session ended with some rather menacing words from Veljko Kadijević. He even hinted at treason, that documents from these sessions were being leaked to the public – from the sealed supreme command installation – and the Army, he said, would draw a lesson from this. He ended with these words: "The staff of the supreme command has the right and the duty to assess the situation immediately after the session and to make the necessary moves." We all dispersed quickly and again Mesić and I shot off to Zagreb and Ljubljana, while there was still time. That evening came the news that Jović had resigned. In a statement he accused those members of the Presidency who were against of being traitors. There was all sorts of commotion. Calls coming from all sides. Mesić rang to say that the Croatian leadership thought he, as the Vice-President, should fly straight away to Belgrade to take over the leadership of the Presidency. He suggested we fly to Belgrade and take power without Jović. I was somewhat sceptical as to how the two of us could take power in Belgrade.

I found it hard to believe that Jović and his crew would just go ahead and resign. He had even put pressure on Marković, saying that the situation was so tense that we could not permit anarchy. We all thought that a vacuum had been artificially created to allow the JNA to enter the fray. So, in spite of everything, on the following day I went to the session. It was presided over by Mesić. If I had not come, the Presidency would not have been able to meet. And I did not want to be responsible for my absence allowing the military to take over, although given the threats of the previous day, going to Belgrade did seem to me somewhat intrepid. Nevertheless, we met in Belgrade. Five members of the Presidency. The session was short, with Jović forwarding his opinion in advance that a session was irregular unless he called it, even though he had resigned. But in a public statement we managed to create the appearance that the institution was still functioning. In the meantime, Milošević had made a highly dramatic statement on Belgrade Television, in which he claimed that the Presidency was not legitimate and indirectly called on the JNA to do something. Kadijević had disappeared. I tried in vain to reach him by telephone. Marković, too, had lost contact with the military. They said they were at their command post and that they were out of reach. Obviously the general staff had shut themselves up somewhere and were pondering the situation. During the sinister wait I wondered how they had filmed the session of the Presidency. For them that was supposed to be evidence which subsequently, after the coup, they could put before the people. The way Jović acted when he resigned only confirmed that hypothesis. The terrible waiting lasted up until Monday afternoon, when a session of the Serbian Assembly rejected Jović's resignation. Also at this session the Serbian Assembly summarily replaced the Kosovo representative, Sapundžija. By voting against he had ultimately lost his position in the Presidency, without anyone asking the Albanians in Kosovo what they thought. But Jović's resignation not being accepted in Serbia at the same time meant that the whole plot had failed and that the Army could not decide to go ahead with a military coup.

We can only guess as to the reasons. Clearly Kadijević was again unable to take the decision. International politics probably played a part, too. There was definitely pressure coming from the USA. And they probably

consulted with the Soviet military leadership in the meantime as well. Marković mentioned to me later that Kadijević was said to have been in Moscow during these days meeting General Yazov. The Serbs returned Jović to the Presidency, and with the illegal replacement of Sapundžija a four-against-four situation was established, which was to drag on until the end. The replacement was Bajrami, who operated entirely as a puppet of the Serbian regime. I felt sorry for Sapundžija. He was a gentleman, a peaceful person who was honest and decent to everyone. He persistently defended the interests of the Albanians, although there was nothing spectacular about his performance. He told me that he often received telephone threats. At the time both his sons were serving in the Army, which made his decision even more difficult. But despite this he didn't support the Army proposal. Bogić Bogičević also told me he had been threatened several times that his family would be killed (he had two daughters). His vote, his refusal to support the Serbs and the JNA, was that much more significant and difficult because he was a Bosnian Serb. Ever since, the Serbs have treated him as a traitor. It was harder for him than it was for us.

And another interesting detail. During this period Jeffrey Sachs was visiting Slovenia. Just as he had helped with Yugoslavia's anti-inflation programme at my invitation in 1989, he later helped with the establishment of a monetary system in Slovenia. I met with him on the Saturday, 16 March, following Friday's session of the Presidency. In the morning I went to Brdo pri Kranju. I went jogging and thought about what to do. Should I go to Belgrade or not? Then I met with Jeff and we discussed some economic issues. Of course he was up to date with the whole dramatic situation. Later, he often recalled what I said to him at the time: "I'm going to Belgrade now. There might be a military coup." That was one of those situations when I really didn't know if I'd be coming back home.

The film from the March sessions of the Yugoslav Presidency in the JNA headquarters was shown on Belgrade Television. In October 1991 – when the three-month moratorium on Slovenia's declaration of independence expired and Slovenia formally became an independent state – Zastava Film presented it under the title "Who Betrayed Yugoslavia?". A close-up showed "the five of them", who were guilty for the fact that Yugoslavia no longer existed.

Some excerpts from the transcript of the 12 March 1991 session of the Yugoslav Presidency.

Kadijević: "The moment has come to look squarely in the eyes of the citizens and peoples of Yugoslavia. Talks on the political future of the country have reached deadlock. A refined and fully elaborated concept for the destruction of Yugoslavia is at work. Its mainstay is the hope that a policy of *faits accomplis* will block the basic functions of the federal state: that the dismantling of the federation will be paralleled by the destruction of its armed forces, preventing them from carrying out their constitutional role; that by provoking a civil war the conditions will be established for outside intervention and the setting up of puppet regimes on the territory of Yugoslavia."

"The brutal truth is that our armed forces are effectively confronted with the same enemy as in 1941. The foreign factors are already announcing their presence in a big way. And there are also domestic quisling forces at large: fascist, Ustasha, Chetnik, White Guard, Balisti Albanian, Bulgarophile. Once again we are confronted with them in the struggle for Yugoslavia. Based on the constitutional role and obligation of the armed forces to guarantee the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and constitutional order of Yugoslavia, in the name of the armed forces and the staff of the supreme command, I propose:

1. The immediate adoption of a decree establishing a state of emergency across the entire territory of the SFR Yugoslavia and the suspension of all normative acts which are in violation of the SFRY Constitution and federal laws.
2. The adoption of a decree to put the armed forces on combat readiness, including the mobilisation of some of the units – up to a level deemed necessary by the staff of the supreme command and which will enable the prevention of civil war, the successful countering of any attempt at foreign military intervention and the ensuring of the conditions for a peaceful and democratic outcome to the Yugoslav crisis based on the SFRY Constitution and the law.
3. The rapid re-establishment of the ruined defence system of the country within a constitutional framework. The disarming and disbanding of illegal armed units in accordance with the Yugoslav Presidency decree of 9 January: the full implementation of the policies and decisions of the

Yugoslav Presidency on the commanding of the Territorial Defence and the establishment of a system of military service within the competence of the armed forces.

4. The rapid continuation of political talks on the future arrangement of Yugoslavia, on those republics whose leaders have opted for secession, the organisation of a referendum at which all people will be given the opportunity to express their personal opinion directly and freely, without dictate or outvoting by majority of any kind.

5. To take account of the will of the people as expressed at the referendum. As soon as possible, at the latest within six months, to adopt a constitution for the Yugoslav state; to organise multiparty elections and constitute new organs of power. To build the next Yugoslav state as a parliamentary, multiparty democracy, without ideologies or monopolies of any kind."

Jović: "Our session today must place before the supreme command its historical obligation. What it will or what it will not do. Our goal must be to carry out our constitutional and legal obligations – using measures and actions that are within our constitutional jurisdiction and are appropriate to the moment. I think we have to consider very seriously the proposals put forward by the staff of the supreme command of the armed forces." Mesić: "I see no reason for this drama. The situation is not such that we need to have a state of emergency at any price. Particularly not with respect to Croatia... I believe that the implementation of a state of emergency would actually prevent any possibility of reaching agreement... I also think that it wouldn't be out of place to turn the whole situation back, and see how the film developed. Those who most strongly attacked the federation and the 1974 Constitution are most to blame for the fact that the federation does not function. Now they are the biggest protectors of the federation and the biggest defenders of the Constitution. I find that absurd. As I see it, if the rallies won the right of citizenship, if a number of leaderships obtained their legitimacy through rallies, later confirmed in elections, how is it that the rallies don't suit them any more. All of a sudden rallies aren't appropriate for the prime movers behind the rallies."

Tupurkovski: "There is no time for grand speeches. In the style of what the federal secretary had to say, briefly and clearly, I will say my piece. As far as I'm concerned there is no alternative to solving the political

crisis through political means – absolutely no alternative. The option of emergency measures is unacceptable to me, from a political, a civilisational and a patriotic point of view; and it won't work. Not in the way we want: further democratisation, respect for human and national rights and the solving of the political crisis confronting us." Bogićević: "I repeat that we cannot call into question either the integrity and unity of our country nor the right of a people to self-determination, to secession. This must be done in a constitutional and lawful manner. At this moment I think such a decision [the introduction of a state of emergency] would not be a good one." Sapundžija: "Political means for a way out of the crisis can never be entirely exhausted. In this sense the use of the valid Constitution is essential. If we emphasise that, if we say that, through today's session, to all of those charged with solving the problems of this country, then I do not believe that the proposed measures could provide better results... Today – perhaps I'm mistaken – I will stick to trying a warning, not the introduction of emergency measures." Bučin: "I agree with Veljko's assessment. If I were to embark on an analysis, then my assessment would probably be even more bleak... Even at the price of not being entirely clear, although I hope that I will be. It seems to me that we have just one possibility: we have to recognise that as the Presidency we are not capable of leading this country. Every other possibility, even independent action to prevent the worst outcome – civil war – which this Presidency would not propose, would not be to our historical credit."

General Adžić: "...I think we must be more energetic. The time has definitely arrived, if of course we wish to save Yugoslavia, for us to take specific decisions which will lead to that. And that is what we have proposed." Kostić: "I agree."

Borisav Jović: "It follows from this that the Presidency of Yugoslavia was not able to pass the decree proposed by the staff of the supreme command. Which means that the armed forces of Yugoslavia under our command cannot guarantee that for which they are charged by the Constitution. Therefore – and I am speaking on my own behalf – with this decision, by taking this position, the Yugoslav Presidency is closing its eyes to the situation and has assumed all responsibility for such a

decision. I personally believe that the fate of our country will not depend on this. I conclude the session."

Session of the Yugoslav Presidency, 14 March 1991. Borisav Jović. "Two days ago we held a session at which we were unable to reach agreement on the decree proposed by the staff of the supreme command. After this session I held discussions with the Federal Secretary for People's Defence and other members of the staff who had taken part in the session. They warned me that the armed forces of Yugoslavia were unable to carry out their constitutionally envisaged function – preserving the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country and protecting its constitutional order – without a decision from the Yugoslav Presidency, i.e. the supreme commander of the armed forces. Therefore I judged it necessary and indeed right that we meet again."

Janez Drnovšek: "I will try to be brief and say only what is essential because I don't think it's necessary to repeat everything that we have already said several times. I am speaking mainly from the perspective of the Republic of Slovenia about what these measures would mean as far as Slovenia is concerned. There is a very big possibility that the practical adoption and implementation of these measures would lead to conflict in Slovenia. That would also mean completely breaking off those relations that still exist. Those are facts. How and why we have reached this point is another story, which we don't have to go into now. That is the situation today. So it is my judgement that such measures would provoke conflict on Slovene territory and at the same time be responsible for a complete break in relations with the rest of the country..."

"I would also add one or two more points:

The situation in Slovenia is peaceful and there is no danger whatsoever of ethnic or any other kind of conflict. As I said, we in Slovenia have already taken certain decisions. There is the plebiscite, and there are the decisions of the Assembly concerning relations with the JNA and defence issues. At any rate, there are serious and unresolved issues here - there are differences, conflicts. These are questions relating to the Territorial Defence and, of course, also to military service and all the other issues. The fact is that the Slovene Assembly passed certain

decisions unilaterally, without simultaneous or prior arrangement with the federation. The main reason for this is probably that in Slovenia there was no faith in the possibility of an agreed solution at this time, in the context of our mutual relations. It is a fact that the federal authorities were unapproachable and often inflexible. So that during these months every approach, every attempt at finding an agreed solution, has been treated as unrealistic. That's how my attempts have been labelled, as entirely unrealistic, and on the whole they have not been given consideration.

"Now we are in a situation where these proposed measures are supposed to include Slovenia as well. What would that mean? That the Slovene Territorial Defence would be disarmed; that the decision by the Slovene Assembly would be overturned; that the federation would establish its system and its laws in Slovenia - that would be tackling the problems through the path of conflict.

"On the other hand, all the major decisions were adopted democratically. There's the plebiscite, there are the public opinion polls. It is quite certain that this is the majority opinion and position of Slovenia. If it had to be confirmed by another referendum, it is very clear what the result would be. This is the situation, and it is the result of many years of crisis: socio-economic, a crisis in mutual relations, the crisis of Yugoslavia. Everyone has a share in this. It is the result of a situation which began a long time before we arrived on the scene but in which we have ultimately found ourselves.

"What other possible solution is there? I understand the position of the general staff, that from the perspective of their Yugoslav Army system the situation is difficult and that for them it is unacceptable that the practice which has established itself in one of the republics be spread to all the others. In reality, that means the collapse of the system. And an uncontrolled collapse, which is dangerous. We all agree with that.

"Therefore, a possible approach is through conflict. But there is also the possibility of a solution through dialogue. I am ready to talk. Not just ready, I see it as urgent, urgent that the Presidency begin the dialogue – with

the general staff and the JNA – as to how these issues should be regulated with Slovenia in a peaceful manner. This is possible in a transitional period, which in fact has already begun. In a number of things, Slovenia has already, de facto and de jure, detached itself from the federal system. That is the bare truth. We need to begin substantive talks on how to go forward with the JNA on Slovene territory; how, during this transitional period until we agree on this or that final decision, to regulate relations between the JNA and Slovenia; in what form, in what time frames. All these specific questions must be put on the table in a completely civilised, peaceful and rational manner, and solutions sought which avoid this or that chaotic situation, chaotic collapse. I am sure that if, from this side, at least a minimum willingness to solve these problems was shown, then in Slovenia there would be a response and a readiness to tackle these questions by agreement.

"This is the only way in which I see a solution. The need to begin specific discussions. Openly and without – I don't think it's necessary any longer – playing tactical games or whatever... Today's proposals would not offer any constructive results with regard to Slovenia but would lead deeper into conflict. We are trying to stop things here at least, and tackle the problem of mutual relations by agreement and in a civilised manner."

Borisav Jović: "Good. We've heard everyone. I would just like to say that my position is the same as it was at the previous session... On the basis of what has happened so far I can say that there are big gaps between the positions of the staff of the supreme command of the armed forces and the Presidency of Yugoslavia. Whereas the staff as a responsible military and professional body is united in the need for the proposed decisions, the Presidency has remained divided and unable to adopt them... Therefore I request that it be taken as understood that I can no longer participate in the work of the supreme command while it takes such an attitude towards the country's armed forces and is so divided and two-faced. Likewise, I can no longer as President of the Presidency call sessions of the supreme command in such circumstances, nor participate in them, until the circumstances change. I can understand why Mesić and Drnovšek said that they would do the same if the decision was

different. But everyone has their own way. The fact is that the two of them would not wish to participate if the decision were to go the other way; and it is also a fact that I don't want to take part if the decision, the decree, is not adopted. So it's clear where things stand. Given the statement by Nenad Bučin at the last session that he too does not wish to take part in the work of the supreme command in such circumstances, and Jugoslav Kostić, who reconfirmed as much to me today, and because for certain decisions by the Presidency as the supreme command, as we know, a qualified majority of six members is required, I announce that the supreme command is formally no longer able to carry out the function of the supreme organ: leading and commanding the armed forces of Yugoslavia. We ask the military leadership to take that into consideration. They can no longer rely on me. Thank you. I conclude the session."

Tupurkovski: "But the session can't just end like that." Janez Drnovšek:

"The session can't end like that." Borisav Jović: "Who wants to speak?"

Janez Drnovšek: "You can't just do that with your statement; that's a new decision. You can offer your resignation like anyone else, but you cannot state by yourself that the Presidency is no longer functioning." Borisav Jović: "I just counted and made a statement and gave my position."

Janez Drnovšek: "Just because we didn't adopt one proposal doesn't mean that no other proposal can be adopted. We simply judged that in this situation the adoption of the proposed decisions would mean a greater risk of civil war breaking out than some other decision. That is what I stated, at least for Slovenia. Therefore some of us are in favour of trying to sort the situation out politically and as fast as possible. I cannot accept your statement. Now you yourself are dissolving either the Presidency or the supreme command. You can only offer your resignation. It is quite possible that others will do so too. I wanted to do it myself yesterday, but I came to this session nevertheless to assess from it what I should do. I propose that we continue the dialogue and try to find a political way out of the situation."

Later on:

Borisav Jović: "But Janez, we know where we stand. You believe that this

decision [the decree] will lead to conflict and civil war – as far as Slovenia is concerned. I, on the other hand, think that this decision is constitutional and legal. Your decisions, the ones that you have adopted, are unconstitutional and illegal. They, in fact, are leading to civil war and to conflict... In your opinion and in my opinion, we are on the road to civil war, so we cannot work together here and take decisions together. That much is clear. We are paralysed because we cannot think in the same way. We can debate for a hundred years and we'll still end up with the same thing. If this decision is adopted, then you'll go; if it's not adopted, I'll go. That is the consequence. Because we clearly cannot remain together in this manner."

Janez Drnovšek: "Boro, you all recognise the right of self-determination and secession. In Slovenia that has in reality already happened. And in Slovenia we are sure it is in a legitimate and legal manner. In substance that is accurate. Now I ask you all a question:

"Should, because someone thinks that the procedure is not right – although the content is fully clear to everyone – since it isn't defined anywhere in the current regulations, should we head towards a confrontation because of this, towards a civil war, into confrontation with the individual republic, the people? I don't think that's right. There are conflicts, formal and legal conflicts, but the content is quite clear. I am trying, and I see my only purpose here in trying to find a way out of this situation in the most peaceful, rational and agreed manner." Veljko Kadijević: "I'll be very pragmatic. If it is right what Janez says, that the plebiscite is an actual decision already, and that it is even a formal one, why then not finish the procedure, in 15 days or a month and get the thing over and done with. Don't torture the rest of the country. Why are you torturing the rest of the country? Following this model everything falls to pieces."

Janez Drnovšek: "I'm not torturing anyone. I want to find a sensible way out, so that we don't mistreat each other. I have already said that I don't want the whole system to break up and that because of that we plunge into a chaotic collapse of the system. I agree: we can have a procedure. We could agree in 15 days, but rationally and openly – if you think the same way on your side too. But not with a procedure being insisted upon which would force us to quarrel for the next 50 years about how we should leave and function normally."

Veljko Kadijević: "For example, the prime minister said to me today that you simply could not leave. And now you tell me that you can; but the fait accompli policy has shattered the Army, shattered everything. And where are we now?" Janez Drnovšek: "Which prime minister?" Veljko Kadijević: "Marković." Borisav Jović: "Leave Marković out of it..." Janez Drnovšek: "The Presidency has adopted various proposals and decisions proposed by the Secretariat for People's Defence. In certain cases I haven't agreed with them, when it has involved Slovenia. The problem is therefore not that decisions are not adopted in this body. Clearly it lies elsewhere. The problem began a long time ago. That is probably clear to all of you. We didn't start this. We arrived at its concluding phase. These relations, AVNOJ and all the others, were destroyed a long time ago, well before we arrived. There have been serious attempts to rescue what could be rescued – a federation of one sort or another, more modern, to move to a market economy, European integration, and so on. But the processes of the crisis have overtaken us. They were faster, and obviously more deeply rooted and begun a long time ago... Although decisions in this body have been adopted in the way that they were proposed. On many occasions I have said to you, when Slovenia was at issue, that it is better to reach some sort of compromise rather than insist on demands one hundred per cent. Because of such absolute solutions that have been proposed and reported, in Slovenia the differences have grown. A resistance has taken hold and instead of us being left with at least something, we have come so far that there is nothing left for us."

The session was adjourned and then continued on 15 March 1991. Jović: "I would like to inform the members of the Presidency and the supreme command what our analysis in the Republic of Serbia is after all this. If the Army has its hands tied and is unable to carry out its constitutional role, that is to prevent ethnic conflict and civil war, then the position of the Serbian people given their dispersion in other republics, their lack of organisation and their lack of arms, is extremely precarious. Serbia relied on the pledges of the Yugoslav Presidency and the armed forces that they would protect all nationalities, all nations and all citizens against the danger of ethnic conflict. This, with the current

position, would not be guaranteed. We believe that in this situation there will be mass calls for weapons and for the formation of a Serbian army for the purpose of defence. We will not prevent this... The Serbian leadership cannot act on behalf of any side other than that of the Serbian people, and it must ensure their defence if the Army is going to be unable to defend them."

Janez Drnovšek: "Last night and this morning I consulted with the Slovene political leadership, and I can tell you their views, which correspond with the positions I took yesterday.

"We see the way out of this situation through intensifying the political dialogue to the maximum. We have to take a time-out; all the republic leaderships must agree to stop attacking and accusing each other. We must try to discuss all the issues openly, including where and how to carry out referendums if we cannot find a different solution. At the same time, all the republics must ensure all the citizens on their territory that no one will cause them any harm or threaten them in any way.

"Yesterday I was saying that Slovenia had made its decision: meaning the plebiscite, the decision of the Assembly and the constitutional amendments. On the basis of these decisions, which have already established certain specific solutions, Slovenia is prepared to settle all unresolved issues together with others, and in a way which causes harm to no one, i.e. by agreement, by considering the interests of everyone. Nevertheless, it is clear that Slovenia cannot step back from some of its positions and decisions, since the people have overwhelmingly declared themselves in favour of them. But obviously it is prepared to discuss on this basis the possible forms of relations with the other republics and nationalities. As far as the proposed measures are concerned, again today I am unable to agree with them. Though their aim may be to prevent civil war, civil war is precisely where they are leading us. It is merely a matter of how it will begin. We are convinced that the Yugoslav crisis cannot be solved by force, by the Army, or with whatever similar measures, but only politically. Irrespective of who that is, which nation or republic. If the JNA starts to take military measures within a Yugoslav framework, we are convinced that it would be the worst solution and that it would end in the worst possible manner.

"I assume, and I hope, that after recent events and our sessions we have all begun to realise that we are at the brink, that this is the end of the gamesmanship and that we have to try to retrieve the situation by agreement. If we now take certain measures against someone, then that someone will respond. And once the conflict has begun, that will spell the end of the political negotiations. The consequences will be catastrophic. But until it begins, we still have the chance to settle the conflict politically."

Borisav Jović: "Are you in favour of laying down an ultimatum? Within two days all this has to be done – something like that. We lay down an ultimatum, or else in two days the Army will step in. They should return their weapons themselves, they should disband their defence forces themselves, they should overturn their laws relating to recruits themselves, and the normal financing of the Army should be reinstated within two days. Can we adopt a decree on an ultimatum? This decree comes into force in two days. We pass it today and it becomes valid in two days."

Stipe Mesić: "Any use of force to settle this problem in Croatia will lead to a general mobilisation there. There will be a general rebellion against the JNA. I wish to prevent that. I want to state that the Army is every bit as much Croatian as it is Serbian."

Janez Drnovšek: "In my opening words I tried to be very constructive. I think after that, certain people's behaviour was not entirely proper and did not help to sort out our problems. The whole question can be put in another way. We have tried to avoid such an interpretation, but we could interpret President Jović's arguments in this way: that these proposals are actually meant to solve the Serbian national question." Veljko Kadijević: "Let me ask you - how can we exist as a Yugoslav Army when the Slovenes are no longer coming to the Army? Are they specially privileged? Why?"

Janez Drnovšek: "That was the decision of the Assembly." Veljko Kadijević: "Good, then let all the other assemblies adopt the same decision. Then there will be no more Army, no more Yugoslavia. Evidently that is what it wants."

Janez Drnovšek: "Slovenia is prepared to regulate its relations with the federation in all fields." Veljko Kadijević: "Let it regulate, but not through the Army. Go ahead"

and regulate, please do, but not through the Army!" Janez Drnovšek: "That includes relations with the Army." Borisav Jović. "Let's end and conclude with the statement: the Presidency has not adopted the proposal for a decree prepared by the staff of the supreme command on the introduction of measures on the readiness of the armed forces of Yugoslavia and the taking of measures to re-establish the ruined defence system of the country within the constitutionally determined framework... But the interest of the country is wholly threatened and in my opinion with this we are heading into an uncontrolled civil war from which there will be no escape. Therefore I must deal with the consequences – for myself – that result from this. But each individual has to accept responsibility for himself, as he chooses." Janez Drnovšek: "I would like to say that your interpretations of our positions and decisions are inaccurate. The majority in the Presidency believe that the Yugoslav crisis must be solved in a peaceful manner, not by means of war, and our majority decision has to be understood in this sense. We have also made a series of specific proposals about how that should be done. I think any other interpretation is highly improper and inaccurate, and it could be said that in this case in the background there are certainly negative intentions, different interpretations." Veljko Kadijević: "You have made your decision... Our proposals were made at a decisive moment for this country... I inform you that the staff of the supreme command has the right and the duty to assess the situation immediately after this decision of yours and to deal with the consequences resulting from it. Thank you."

Session of the Yugoslav Presidency, 16 March 1991

The session was presided over by Vice-President Mesić. President Jović, who had tendered his resignation the previous evening after the session of the Presidency, was not present. Nenad Bučin and Jugoslav Kostić also handed in their resignations.

Tupurkovski: "I think we have to assess the explanation which President of the Yugoslav Presidency Jović gave in a statement on television in which he explained his personal decision. I would distance myself totally from his explanation of the situation within the Presidency, with which he wants to demonstrate the inescapable break-up of the country as a consequence of the action of the Presidency..."

Stipe Mesić: "Ante, have the ambassadors been in touch?"

Ante Marković: "In touch, why should they get in touch? You know they're all interested in how the movie ends."

Stipe Mesić: "You won't believe it, me too." [General laughter.]

Sapundžija: "All movies have a happy ending."

Stipe Mesić: "And all wars end in peace..."

Janez Drnovšek: "I too would distance myself from what Jović said in his resignation statement... That happened after an attempt at a quite dictatorial style of conducting the Presidency, particularly recently. And the second thing is that I have to say how easily they are resigning from the Yugoslav federation now. And the quickest to resign are those who spoke most in favour of it; evidently only as far as it benefited them or served their interests. They are incapable of recognising that within this federation are the varying interests of the republics, different peoples, and that all these interests have to be respected, and one's own sometimes foregone."